

Constant New Babylon



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Infinite Line
1958

Constant New Babylon

MUSEO NACIONAL
CENTRO DE ARTE
REINA SOFIA

 GEMEENTE
MUSEUM
DEN HAAG

Conceived and developed from 1956 to 1974, *New Babylon* is a transdisciplinary, multimedia project by which Dutch artist Constant Anton Nieuwenhuys sought to generate and shape a new urban environment that would lead to the “total occupation of social life.” The whole enterprise was based on the premise that, in the not-too-distant future, the increasing automation stemming from technological progress would allow citizens to devote themselves exclusively to satisfying their desire for play and to fully developing their creative potential.

This exhibition presents a wide selection of Constant’s works for this project in which he employed a wide range of expressive media (architectural models, watercolors, prints, collages, modified maps, films, slide shows . . .) to materialize his ideas. The project also involved intense theoretical activity in the form of texts and lectures, of which three representative examples are reprinted in this catalogue.

Constant’s interest in architecture and his desire to bring about a synthesis between architecture and the visual arts that would lead to the intensification of life in all its dimensions dates back to the early 1950s. But the seeds and trigger of *New Babylon*, as Constant himself said on many occasions, were the designs he drew up in late 1956 for a camp to house a group of Gypsy families who had settled on a site on the outskirts of the Italian city of Alba. During the months he spent working in Alba after participating in a congress of the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus (the exhibition sets aside a specific room for this event, which proved to be a milestone in Constant’s career), he produced the first works that form part of *New Babylon*, including some pieces that prefigure the explicitly architectural models that became the cornerstone of the project. More important, he began working with Guy Debord on the conceptual and formal development of unitary urbanism: the theoretical and methodological framework that situationism devised in an attempt to generate a model for a new kind of city that would not be dependent on the logic of production and consumption.

Organized in close collaboration with the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, which holds most of the legacy of *New Babylon*, the exhibition reveals that this project—in which the desire to build a new society or “a new and better world” takes the form of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or “total work of art”—not only captured the spirit of its age but is also an exercise in “mental provocation” that can help us to understand and rethink the present. Although the show revolves around *New Babylon*, it also includes a selection of works from other periods in Constant’s career—works in which the ideas he developed in his most influential project are substantially prefigured or persist—and also examines the artist’s relationship with Spain and with the symbolic imaginary of Gypsy culture. Through all these elements, the exhibition reveals the complexity and critical and poetic potential of Constant’s work, and at the same time contextualizes and sheds light on its multiple connections and derivations.

This text would not be complete without an expression of our appreciation to Benno Tempel, director of the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, for the generous contribution to the exhibition of sixty-five loans, as well as to the curators Laura Stamps and Doede Hardeman for their extraordinary research and documentation. We also gratefully acknowledge the collaboration of Foundation Constant and, especially, Trudy van der Horst, Constant's widow and a key figure in the conservation and dissemination of his work, who has been actively involved in organizing the show.

Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport

“Another City for Another Life” is one of the first texts written by Constant Anton Nieuwenhuys—a key figure in the situationist movement and cofounder of the group Cobra—to describe and explain his most ambitious and influential work, *New Babylon*, often considered the last great utopia of European art. The text is an excellent synthesis of the programmatic radicality of this project that began in 1956 and ended in 1974, generating an extensive, heterogeneous material and theoretical production (architectural models, drawings, collages, prints, modified maps, manifestos, lectures, public presentations . . .) through which the Dutch artist sought to plan and contribute to creating a new urban environment that would improve the living conditions of citizens and also stimulate their creative nature and meet their repressed need for play.

Constant wrote the text in 1959, before he had settled on a name for the project that had begun to emerge three years earlier following a congress organized by the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus—founded by his friend and former Cobra colleague Asger Jorn—in Alba, Italy. After the congress, the painters Giuseppe Pinot Gallizio and Piero Simondo invited Constant to participate in an experimental lab they had organized in this city in the Piedmont region, and during his time there he drew up the plans for a camp to house a group of Gypsy families who had settled in a site on the city outskirts. As Constant himself said on numerous occasions, this initiative was the seed of *New Babylon*, a project in which nomadism and the creative way of life of the Gypsies were a paradoxical anchor and a constant source of inspiration. In this sense, as Pedro G. Romero points out in an essay in the catalogue, we should bear in mind that the forms of socialization and expression of gypsies (understood here as a social class—the traveling urban lumpen—rather than an ethnic group or people), and their cultural and spatial practices, were not just a major influence for the situationists: they also permeated the imaginary of postmodern science fiction, a subgenre that we can link to 1950s and 1960s utopian projects that revolve around the metropolis of the future (Constant’s *New Babylon* and also Archigram’s *Plug-in City* and Yona Friedman’s *Spatial City*).

Constant did not start using the name *New Babylon* until 1960, at the suggestion of Guy Debord. After their stay at Alba, the two artists had started a close collaboration that led them to write “La déclaration d’Amsterdam,” a manifesto setting out the basic tenets of “unitary urbanism,” which the Situationist International hoped would trigger a true and decisive revolutionary process. This new approach involved shifting the focus of their thoughts and actions from economic production to symbolic creation and cultural mediation, based on a conviction that leisure and free time had become a key battleground as a result of the increasing automation of work stemming from technological progress. As such, the situationists sought to boost interaction between artistic/architectural practice, social research, and technological progress so as

to generate an endless diversity of what they called “environments” and “situations” that would “contribute to the realization of a richer and more fulfilled life.”

The notion of unitary urbanism is closely intertwined with three key situationist concepts—*dérive*, *détournement*, and psychogeography—and with the theories developed by Dutch philosopher and historian Johan Huizinga in his influential and visionary essay *Homo Ludens*, published in 1938. This book—which has strongly influenced art and activism in the last few decades, as the recent Museo Reina Sofía exhibition *Playgrounds: Reinventing the Square*, abundantly illustrates—played a crucial role in the realization and development of *New Babylon*, a project that could broadly be defined as a city designed by and for *homo ludens*. In 1966, Constant wrote that Huizinga’s greatest virtue was to recognize that a potential *homo ludens* lurks in every human being. The liberation of this potential for playfulness depends on social emancipation, which, as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels had already pointed out in *Deutsche Ideologie* in 1848, was to come about as the result of technical and scientific progress that would one day separate physical labor from production, thus freeing people from the need to work.

However, by 1969, in the aftermath of the events of May 1968 in France and as the Situationist International began to disband, Constant appears to have concluded that there was still a long way to go before attaining the social liberation required to implement the revolutionary program that was the goal of unitary urbanism. This meant that the project for a new city and a new form of organizing social life, which *New Babylon* imagined as a means to allow *homo faber* to finally evolve into *homo ludens*, was unfeasible. And Constant was not content to be only a utopian. He made this clear in texts such as “Another City for Another Life,” where he acknowledges that the project “risks being taken for a fantastic dream” but insists that it is not only “desirable from the human standpoint and indispensable from the social standpoint” but “feasible from the technical standpoint.”

So it comes as no surprise that he decided, that same year, to stop working on the architectural models that are the most emblematic expressions of the extensive, multifaceted, genuinely multimedia body of work generated by *New Babylon*. The earliest of these models, such as the seminal *Ambience de jeu*, created soon after he drew up the plans for the Gypsy camp in Alba, suggest clear links—which Constant himself did not always acknowledge—with the compositional schemes and ideas of Russian constructivism and with Piet Mondrian and other De Stijl artists. These works are also connected to the geometric bas-reliefs, somewhere between sculpture and architectural model, that Constant had produced in the 1950s in collaboration with the architect Aldo von Eyck. But not until 1958 did Constant start creating scale models that were unambiguously architectural (although, as Mark Wigley points out, he

never stopped lavishing attention on formal details) and attempted to embody the postulates of unitary urbanism and the ideas and reflections that he expounded in his theoretical texts, which include reasonably detailed descriptions of what he believed should be the structural, formal, and organizational characteristics of the future *homo ludens* city. In a sense, these characteristics anticipated the interconnected but extremely flexible and scalable multinode grid of cyberspace, a virtual world through which ever-changing life flows. Its elements are assembled and superimposed like the fluctuating architectural megastructures that Constant imagined in the physical world, contributing to a paradigmatic shift in the way we relate to one another.

As Laura Stamps (cocurator of the exhibition with Doede Hardeman) writes in her text for the catalogue, the *New Babylon* project is inextricably linked to its historical and artistic context, a time in which, “after the horrors of the Second World War, Europe had an urgent desire to build a new and better world on the ruins of the old one.” In this sense, we can see *New Babylon* as a series of suggestions, or perhaps as an initial instruction manual to help us to imagine and start building a completely new society through the invention of a new urbanism and a new architecture. The basic unit of Constant’s proposed new urbanism was “sectors”—open, communal spaces that would gradually interconnect to generate a vast, constantly mutating, rhizomatic urban system on a planetary scale—configured in a manner strongly influenced by the notion of the labyrinth, with all its metaphoric and philosophical connotations. In reality, the figure/notion of the labyrinth, which we can link to the situationist idea of the *dérive*, played a pivotal role in his entire oeuvre. As Jean Clarence Lambert wrote, the labyrinth is “Constant’s central schema, I could almost venture to say his guiding myth, and it seems to me that everything he has ever conceived, imagined and created is to be found there.”

In a brief text entitled “The Principle of Disorientation,” Constant went so far as to say that “the liberation of behaviour” requires replacing the guiding principle of urbanism—orientation—with its opposite, disorientation, thus allowing “a social space that is labyrinthine but at the same time constantly subject to modification,” with innumerable points of departure and arrival, through which citizens, having shed the logic of production, could endlessly wander. The labyrinth or labyrinthine logic continued to be present in many of the last works that Constant produced as part of *New Babylon*, as he began to gradually return to a more traditional pictorial activity and his discourse became increasingly gloomy and introspective (perhaps because every utopia inevitably has its dystopic flip side; or because in these latter pieces he recreates the necessary destructive period that precedes the advent of the new world he sought to contribute to shaping and urbanizing through his ideas and proposals).

Constant concluded the project in 1974 with an exhibition at the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag. The Museo Reina Sofia exhibition has been

organized in close collaboration with this museum in The Hague, which holds a large part of the influential legacy of *New Babylon*. The core of the exhibition revolves around this project that artists, architects, and curators have become increasingly interested in over the last few years, but it also includes a selection of works from other periods of Constant's artistic career that show that the ideas he developed in *New Babylon* were already present, if only incipiently, in many of his earlier works and that they never totally disappeared from the work he produced from 1974 until his death in 2005. The exhibition also includes a section specifically dedicated to exploring and illustrating the influence on Constant's work of a diffuse (Gypsy, flamenco, and lumpen) cultural imaginary that could be identified with Spanish culture.

Manuel Borja-Villel
Director, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía



Aart Klein, Constant playing guitar in his studio, seated high on a ladder, 1962.

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Constant's New Babylon

—Pushing the Zeitgeist to Its Limits¹

Laura Stamps

The only way to find out what's going on in the future is to look very closely at what is going on at the moment.²

—Richard Hamilton

John Lennon's "Imagine" (1971) could easily have been dismissed as naive, yet it became his greatest hit. The brilliant thing about the song is that it does not address hippies or anarchists but people outside these subcultures. These are the people Lennon calls upon to imagine a new, better world. "You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one." His timing was perfect. After the horrors of the Second World War, Europe had an urgent desire to build a new and better world on the ruins of the old one.³ This need was expressed with growing urgency in the political, social, and cultural domains of the 1950s and 1960s. Lennon's messianic call came just as the way had been paved for his message.

One of those who paved the way was artist Constant Nieuwenhuys (1920–2005), who, from roughly 1956 to 1974, worked ceaselessly on his *New Babylon*: a collection of suggestions for a new world in the form of models, drawings, paintings, photographs, collages, maps, "environments," articles, and lectures. The ideas on which Constant based *New Babylon* were, however, also reflected in the work of other artists working at the same time. The influence of some artists on Constant can be clearly traced, while others merely chose similar starting points for their work. I do not pretend to present a comprehensive account, but will merely focus on the most obvious examples, not only to place *New Babylon* in an art-historical context but to highlight what it was that allowed *New Babylon* to transcend this context.

New Babylon is a model for a new form of society that, Constant was convinced at the start of the project, could and must be achieved quickly. A society populated by a new type of person in which, thanks to technology, all "noncreative" acts (such as work, shopping, and cooking) would be fully automated. The *New Babylonian* would therefore be able to devote his life entirely to his own creative development. *Homo faber* ("man the maker") whose daily rhythm and place of residence was determined by his work, would be replaced by *Homo ludens* ("man the player"), who was not bound by time or place.⁴ Property would no longer exist, and everyone would be able to make free use of the land and the available goods. The *New Babylonian* would wander like a nomad through a completely artificially organized world. Traditional relationships would become irrelevant. *New Babylon* would be a radically different culture that would require a radically different architecture.

That architecture would be a global network of sectors supported by pillars, common open spaces in which life would be subject to constant change. Movable architectural components such as walls, floors, stairs, bridges, and ladders would allow the *New Babylonians* to continually build new environments and create new routes. Color, light, texture, temperature, and air quality could also be adapted to the mood of the moment. Individuality would be banished; the artist would no longer exist. "Atmosphere is to become

an ‘artistic medium’ with which to collectively reconstruct social space.”⁵ New Babylon would be society as *Gesamtkunstwerk*—an artwork that owes its existence to Constant’s encounters and collaborations with other artists.⁶

Asger Jorn (1914–1973)

One of the most essential encounters on Constant’s road to New Babylon was that with Danish artist Asger Jorn. By his twenties Jorn was already publishing articles about the link between art, urban planning, and architecture, an interest that had arisen in Paris, where, from 1936 to 1937, he had attended artist Fernand Léger’s Academie de l’art Contemporaine. Together they worked on the murals for Le Corbusier’s Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux at the 1937 World’s Fair. His exposure to Le Corbusier’s ideas was a highly formative experience for Jorn. Le Corbusier saw a house as “a machine for living in” and offices as “machines for working in.” His designs were built from standardized elements, so they could easily be mass-produced.⁷ Jorn slowly but surely developed an aversion to the functional division of a city and its buildings. He saw a house as a place where art and architecture can meld into “a machine of expression.”⁸

When Jorn and Constant met at a Paris gallery in 1946, they found they had much in common, including their interest in the drawings and paintings of children, the mentally ill, and “primitive” peoples. At that time Jorn, who was seven years Constant’s senior, was part of the Danish Experimental Group, many of whom were members of the Communist Party. They longed for a collective art: an art for and by the people. Their expressive, colorful paintings populated by all kinds of fantasy creatures were based on Scandinavian folk culture. Their example inspired Constant to set up an experimental group in the Netherlands in the summer of 1948, along with Karel Appel and Corneille. This group would be incorporated into the international Cobra group a short time later.⁹ This group of painters, poets, and writers would produce collective expressions of their art, such as *peintures-mots* (produced by painters and poets working in collaboration). They worked in a “playful” manner, with no predetermined plan and all materials to hand. As a group, they painted two entire interiors, with no regard for where the work of one ended and that of another began.¹⁰

After Cobra disintegrated in 1951, Jorn and Constant both began a quest— independent of each other—for a “synthesis of arts.”¹¹ Jorn continued to build on the “Cobra language,” producing exuberant paintings, ceramics, and apparently primitive sculptures. For him, an artwork was a direct act of expression. He went to live in Albisola in Italy, where he built a house in 1957, adorned with all kinds of paintings and mosaics that he and his artist friends had created. As a symbolic act, he mounted a urinal—the object that Marcel Duchamp had propelled into



Corneille, Karel Appel, and Constant, signature of the artists in a door at Eric Nyholm's house, near Silkeborg, Denmark, 1949.

Asger Jorn and Guy Debord, *Guide Psycheographique de Paris*, 1957.



the art gallery—beside the lavatory in his bathroom.¹² Art was to be returned to personal life, and where better than in the intimate environment of one's home? Jorn set an example by living in accordance with his own ideals: together with those who were nearest and dearest, each person could elevate his or her home to a temple of creativity.

Constant, on the other hand, broke radically with his Cobra past in 1952. He became interested in architecture and urban planning and wanted to contribute to the postwar reconstruction effort. Initially, figurative elements could still be discerned in his paintings, but he soon started producing completely abstract compositions. In collaboration with his friend, architect Aldo van Eyck, he developed “spatial colorism.”¹³ A little while later he started producing reliefs, and then in 1954 he made the transition to constructions. Constant also became interested in the potential of technology, using new materials such as Perspex (polymethyl methacrylate) in his “constructions.” Whereas Jorn lived by his ideal of a “synthesis of arts,” Constant's art expressed his own vision on the matter.¹⁴

Despite their differences Constant and Jorn resumed their collaboration in 1956 in the shared hope of developing a new form of architecture on the basis of the old Cobra ideas. That year saw the third conference of the *Mouvement International pour un Bauhaus Imaginiste*, which Jorn had established in 1953, a crucial event in the formation of the ideas behind New Babylon. In the lecture he delivered at the conference, “*Demain la poésie logera la vie*” (Tomorrow, life will reside in poetry), Constant called for a completely new art and architecture that would be “at once lyrical in its means and social in its very nature.”¹⁵ During the conference, he discovered that the Lettrist International had similar ideas about architecture. Their “unitary urbanism” inspired him to continue to build on his lecture.

Guy Debord—Marxist, writer, and filmmaker—was the leader of the Lettrist International, a movement that in 1957, along with Jorn's Imaginist Bauhaus, became the Situationist International. Debord had high expectations of unitary urbanism. He saw it as a way of life that “has the potential to spread across the entire planet, and then across all inhabitable planets.” But it would first take a radical change in culture. “Total participation” would have to take the place of “the old spectacle,” “the directly experienced” would replace “conserved art,” “an all-encompassing art” would take the place of “art categorised in boxes,” and “a collective, anonymous production” would replace “the artist as a solitary genius.”¹⁶ Not only had Constant argued the need for such changes in the Cobra manifesto, they were also the foundation of the New Babylonian way of life. After a while he joined the Situationist International and, like Jorn, would play an important role in the movement for several years.¹⁷

Debord proposed that Constant name his project New Babylon, a term “loaded with suggestions of human recklessness, non-Christian morals, unprecedented prosperity and fantastic forms of life, that tied in well with his project.”¹⁸ Constant had considered “ville couverte” or “dériville,” a name he had based on the word *dérive* (drift), a term the situationists used to refer to small groups of people intuitively wandering through the city. The purpose of this wandering was to map the “psychogeography” of the city, a way for the constantly changing urban ambience to influence human mood, and vice versa. Debord and Jorn subsequently produced psychogeographical maps. For example, for *Guide psychogeographique de Paris* (1958) they selected areas of “atmospheric intensity” on the map of Paris, cut them out, and reconnected them using arrows. This situational sketch of “what might be” was therefore derived from a real situation.¹⁹ Later, Constant would take street plans of European cities such as Seville, Barcelona, and The Hague and “overlay” sectors of New Babylon on them. He, too, was bound by the form of the old world in depicting his new one.

Nicolas Schöffer (1912–1991)

Alba was not only the place where the theoretical basis for New Babylon was finally laid; it was also where Constant produced a sketch for what would later become known as the first New Babylon model, *Ontwerp voor een zigeunerkamp* (*Design for a Gypsy Camp*) (1956–1957). In Alba he encountered the humiliating circumstances in which Gypsies—“symbols of a world without borders”—lived.²⁰ For them he devised a covered collective form of housing, consisting of elements that could be put together in different ways anywhere in the world. Any hope that the Alba city council would actually build the design soon evaporated. However, back in the Netherlands, Constant did use it as the basis for a model.²¹ While *Design for a Gypsy Camp* had been based on a proposed solution to a local problem, the models and constructions that followed went a step further. *Observatorium* (Observatory, 1956) and *Départ pour l'espace* (Departure to space, 1958) refer to space travel, and gradually Constant began to suggest what the architecture of the future might look like, as in *Ambiance d'une ville future* (Atmosphere of a future city, 1958).

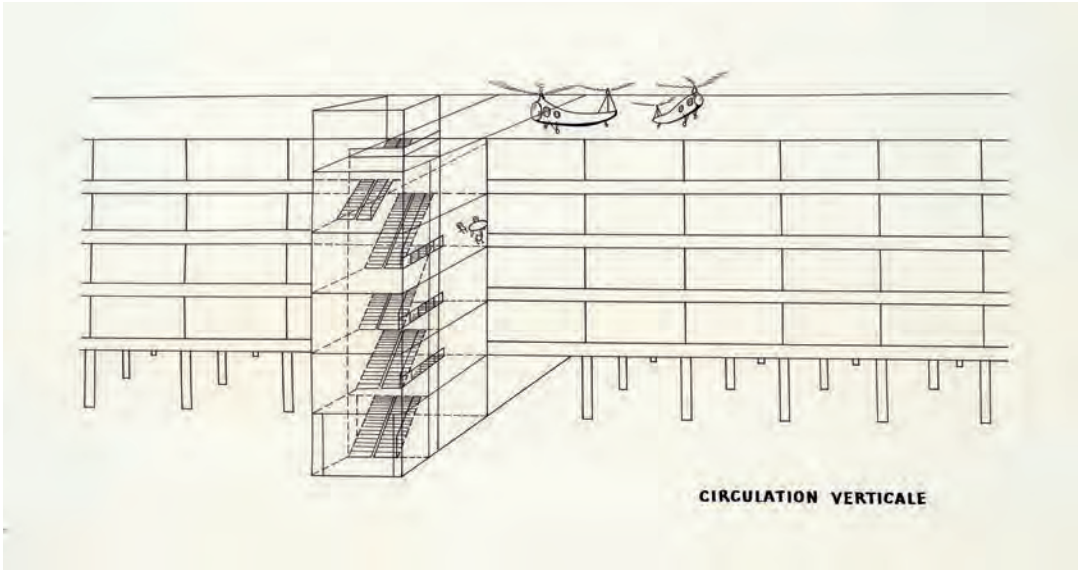
Meeting Hungarian-born French artist Nicolas Schöffer finally put Constant on the path that would lead to the constructions. Schöffer’s work can be seen as a further elaboration of the ideas of the Russian constructivists.²² After the Russian Revolution of 1917, they were keen to help build the Soviet Union by adopting a style that supported technological progress. Inspired by Kazimir Malevich (1879–1935), El Lissitzky (1890–1941), for example, developed his own form of abstract art dubbed “PROUN,” an acronym based on the Russian for “project for the affirmation of the new,” which for Lissitzky himself was “the

turning point from painting to architecture.”²³ Naum Gabo (1890–1977), Antoine Pevsner (1884–1962), and Vladimir Tatlin (1885–1953) drew their methods entirely from architecture, the perfect medium for building a new Communist society. Their work was not cast in bronze or modeled in clay; it took the form of “constructions” of steel, Perspex, and steel wire in which the structure could clearly be seen. In their “Realistic Manifesto” (1920) the constructivists announced that by using modern materials and the elements of “time and space” they would try to arrive at a form of “moving” sculpture. They never fully put this into practice in their work, however.²⁴

Schöffer took up the theme again a few years after the Second World War, when he began to seek a “spatio-dynamic” art form. The call for the creation of a new world was just as deafening as it had been after the First World War. Schöffer began making sculptures and reliefs: metal frames on which he mounted flat Perspex or metal elements that either suggested movement or could actually move. In 1952 he met architect Claude Parent, with whom he developed a spatio-dynamic architecture. Beneath long—Le Corbusier-like—residential units supported on piers, he created space for the dynamics of road and air traffic. Every family, couple, or single would occupy its own isolated “cell” in the unit. The flexible walls, lighting, and climate could be regulated using “cybernetic” techniques.²⁵ All this was designed to create a pleasant ambience for the residents. Lifts and escalators would take them to the ground, where they could get into their cars and drive to work. An automatic distribution center would supply their daily needs, and towers housing electronic regulatory systems would control all the required technology.²⁶

A few years later, Constant’s New Babylon would pick up where this spatio-dynamic city, or *Ville Cybernétique*, left off. Schöffer and Parent still based their designs on blocks of housing, whereas Constant presented a large, open system that would extend over the earth and was linked by sectors. Work would be replaced by endless play and discovery. People would no longer have a fixed abode, having become modern nomads. In New Babylon, “residing” would become “being.”²⁷ However, Constant had not yet reached this point when he met Schöffer in Paris in 1954. At that time he was still seeking the right way to integrate painting and architecture. Schöffer inspired him to produce constructions that initially resembled his own. But Constant would soon exchange the flat elements typical of Schöffer’s designs for curved forms made of Perspex, steel wire, and aluminum.

Although Constant, his friend Stephen Gilbert, and Schöffer established *néovision* that same year, a movement that sought a complete synthesis of arts, it soon became clear that they had other aims.²⁸ Schöffer began collaborating with Philips on *CYSP-1*, an artwork that could move independently with the aid of a computer.²⁹ He succeeded in making *CYSP-1* respond to color, light, and sound



Claude Parent, and Nicolas Schöffer,
Alpha d'habitat, 1954-1955.

Robert Descharnes, photograph of Nicolas Schöffer's cybernetic
sculpture on the roof of Le Corbusier's Cité Radieuse with dancers
of Maurice Béjart. Marseille, August 9, 1956.

intensity and featured it in a ballet performance to highlight how intertwined human and machine would become in the future. *CYSP-I* expressed his vision of how technology would function in the city and in the world.³⁰ Constant based his New Babylon project on a form of society that could exist only thanks to technological progress, though it would never be literally implemented anywhere.

Constant took existing street plans as a basis for his maps of New Babylon, and the model can also be regarded as a collage of existing art forms. The painting (the painted base) would be integrated with sculpture (a structure standing on the base) into the architectonic form of a model. Works with titles such as *Paysage artificiel* (Artificial Landscape), *Hangende Sector* (Hanging Sector, 1960), and *Industriële landschap* (Industrial Landscape), which lay at the heart of the New Babylon project, are examples of the surrounding architecture of New Babylon. Constant gave tips on how to live there in articles, drawings, and photo-collages. At the same time, he made full use of the technology of the age to present these impressions of an imaginary world, compiling slide shows of close-ups of his models, combined with recordings of music, background noise, and silence, which he would show to his audience after a lecture. This was his way of bringing the audience closer to the experience of New Babylon.³¹ Because the slides zoom in on details of the models, the models cannot be recognized as such. “Rather than viewing a small discrete object representing a huge project that may someday be built, we sense a complex, sensuous, built reality.”³²

Constant also worked with filmmakers and, in collaboration with architects—and entirely in keeping with the zeitgeist—would create “test spaces” that would today be labeled “environments.” He also frequently used photomontage, as had utopians such as László Moholy-Nagy and El Lissitzky. For instance, he “placed” his *Ruimtecircus* (Space Circus) on the Museumplein in Amsterdam. Constant suggested how New Babylon might look but—unlike Schöffer—he also left enough room for other interpretations of his work. Both Schöffer’s ideas and his techniques were progressive, but the technological implementation of them was overtaken by the technological potential of the age.

Matta (1911–2002)

Jorn was the link between Matta and Constant. At the World’s Fair in 1937 Matta was responsible for hanging Picasso’s *Guernica* (1937) in the Spanish Pavilion, while Jorn, like Léger, was responsible for a number of murals in the Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux. Léger took his students, including Jorn, to the Spanish Pavilion to discuss *Guernica*, and there Jorn first came into contact with Matta.³³ After studying architecture in Chile, Matta had left for Paris in 1933 to study with Le Corbusier, but with his playful personality he found that conforming to the disciplinary restrictions of architecture was difficult. An



Jan Versnel, photomontage of *Ruimtecircus* [Space Circus, 1956]
on Museumplein, Amsterdam



Matta
Being With (Être Avec), 1946.

An Exhibit, Richard Hamilton with Victor Pasmore and Lawrence Alloway,
Hatton Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne, 1957.

encounter with writer and surrealist André Breton prompted Matta to join the surrealists himself in 1938.³⁴

Not long afterward he published an article entitled “Mathématique sensible—Architecture du temps,” in which he rejects the modernist architecture of Le Corbusier. He argues instead for “an ‘empathetic’ architecture that is able to move people emotionally and at the same time was lamenting the loss of the safety of the ur-cave. Such architecture should, analogous to the womb, adapt to the individual human body; it should be able to react to constantly changing human needs.”³⁵ He saw the capricious Palais Idéal du Facteur Cheval as an alternative to the mass-produced, modernist-designed boxes stacked one upon the other.³⁶ Many of Matta’s ideas about form and architecture can be found in the writings of Jorn, including *Pour la forme* of 1958.³⁷

Immediately after *Pour la forme* was published, Constant attacked a number of Jorns’s principles in the journal of the Situationist International, *Internationale Situationniste*.³⁸ Constant and Matta’s ideas about form did not necessarily coincide, therefore. They may have met, since Matta was involved in the Mouvement International pour un Bauhaus Imaginiste from its inception. They never had close contact, however. This may have been a matter of irreconcilable personalities. Matta was always deeply interested in the mystical side of life, such as dream interpretation and fortune telling using tarot cards.³⁹ These were not matters of interest to Constant. Nevertheless, Matta’s paintings and the paintings Constant produced as part of New Babylon show some striking resemblances.

Since Matta was not able to build his ideal form of architecture, he started painting it. In the initial period he depicted inner landscapes, projections of the states of the psyche in his own form language, which he entitled “psychological morphology.” He drew and painted random, explosive, colorful forms that he sometimes placed in an architectural framework. In 1939, as war approached, Matta moved from Paris to New York. His paintings became more engaged, and he began to produce “social morphologies.” These are the paintings that most closely resemble the work of Constant. In *Being With (Être Avec)* of 1946 Matta shows a labyrinthine world from various perspectives. Technology appears to have changed the world in his paintings into one big machine into which human beings have been fully assimilated. Creatures that can best be described as “half man, half machine” lose themselves in sexual exhibitionism and violent games. Although the reference to the Second World War is only too clear, Matta’s message was not an unequivocal one. Like many surrealists he was a great admirer of the Marquis de Sade (1740–1814), whose books portray a world in which the greatest (sexual) pleasure can be achieved through pain. Matta’s painting *La question Djamila* (The Question of Djamila, 1958) centers on the Algerian girl Djamila Bouhired, who was tortured by French paratroopers, an

event that came to symbolize Algeria's struggle for independence. Red and yellow burst like a spring of vitality from the center of her otherwise gray, broken body. Destruction as a prerequisite for creation.⁴⁰

Though Constant produced the occasional painting from 1956 to 1968, painting did not play a big role in his work during this period. *Ode à l'Odéon* (1969) is thus crucial because after this point painting again became Constant's main activity. This move would precipitate another great change. Whereas previously Constant had depicted only an imaginary world, he now produced a painting in response to the student occupation of the Théâtre de l'Odéon in Paris—an actual event that he nevertheless staged in a New Babylonian setting.⁴¹ After *Ode à l'Odéon* a series of paintings followed in which he depicted all kinds of situations that appeared to be taking place in sectors of New Babylon. Except, New Babylon was no longer what it had been. Previously, Constant had maintained that in his new world people would have no need for aggression. In the paintings from 1969 onward, however, sexual abuse and abuse of power are key themes. *Le viol* (The Rape) and *Le massacre de My Lai* (The Massacre of My Lai, 1972) show rape and the violence of war, and *Erotic Space* (1971) features a woman (or part of a woman) who appears to have been tortured, while another person in the space looks at a pornographic image.⁴²

Constant seems to be overlaying New Babylon with de Sade's worldview of unlimited freedom and sadomasochism. Besides de Sade, Constant was also a great admirer of the work of Charles Baudelaire, saying of him, "even if the subjects are macabre or harsh, the form is one of great beauty and love."⁴³ The "real world" has invaded the imaginary world of New Babylon, not only in terms of the choice of subject (including the student protests of 1968 and the Vietnam War) but also in the choice of materials. Constant used many newspaper headlines and clippings in his later paintings. This prompted some to assert that Constant had lost his faith that the ideal world he had outlined could ever be achieved.

Richard Hamilton (1922–2011)

In late 1952 Constant traveled to London on a grant from the Arts Council of Great Britain. The impacts of the bombings carried out there in the Second World War were still visible. He visited artists such as Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore, Anthony Hill, Ben Nicholson, and Victor Pasmore. This was an important trip, because London was where Constant realized what an impact the environment has on people's lives.⁴⁴ He wrote to a friend, "The entire development of painting can be understood in terms of the development of a spatial sense. Do not be too flippant about this: it is the materialization of our entire spiritual existence, the projection of our autonomy as humans with

respect to the world.”⁴⁵ He saw the painter’s task as reflecting the spatial sensibility of the age and regarded Piet Mondrian and Henri Matisse—artists he had rejected during his Cobra years—as “pioneers of a new school who develop and exploit the power of the plane as color.”⁴⁶

Pasmore, with whom Constant would remain in contact after he returned from London, was his connection with Richard Hamilton, an artist who in the 1950s had made a number of exhibitions that can be compared to the “environments” Constant created as part of the New Babylon project. Hamilton was part of the Independent Group, young artists who, from 1952 to 1955, met at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London and were interested in the influence of technology and the mass media on art and architecture. In 1954 Alison Smithson and Peter Smithson—architects and good friends of Hamilton—joined the group. They envisaged a form of urban planning that would follow “patterns of human association” rather than the “zoned” grid planning of city centers dictated by Le Corbusier.⁴⁷

The “grid” played a key role in the fierce debate that raged in the 1950s between supporters and opponents of Le Corbusier. At the seventh Congrès Internationaux d’architecture Moderne (CIAM) in Bergamo in 1949, Le Corbusier and French design agency ASCORAL presented a design for a graphic classification system for laying out a city’s ground plan. “When one is face to face with an actual town planning problem, the mass of material is very complicated. One has to put this in order, and therefore one proceeds to construct a mental architecture amid the chaos. This is difficult.”⁴⁸ Le Corbusier’s “grid” would provide an answer, as would his modular system, the ideal model of architectural proportion that he had developed a year earlier.⁴⁹

Taking these symbols of Le Corbusier’s method as a starting point, Hamilton created several exhibitions at the ICA, including *Man, Machine and Motion* (1955) and *An Exhibit* (1957). The former consisted of a system he had designed himself with thirty open steel frames each measuring 1.3 x 2.4 meters, on which he had mounted 200 photographs on Formica boards. The photographs of people with machines that boosted their freedom of movement were divided into categories: water, earth, air, and cosmos. The rational order of the grid contrasted with the photographs, in which human beings used machines in all kinds of unexpected, sometimes bizarre ways. The contrast between the “grid” and life is also the key focus of *An Exhibit*, the exhibition Hamilton created with Pasmore and writer and critic Lawrence Alloway. Visually, the exhibition suggests a three-dimensional version of a late Mondrian. Hamilton designed both the “grid” and the thin Perspex sheets in transparent gray, black, white, and “Indian red.” Pasmore cut shapes from colored paper to mount on the panels, and Alloway wrote instructions for visitors. Here, the grid functioned not as an index but could be experienced differently by each visitor. The artists allowed

themselves the same freedom. To Hamilton, *An Exhibit* was a “pre-planned” game to be played, to Pasmore it was an artwork to be looked at, and to Alloway it was an environment to be inhabited.⁵⁰ A journalist from *Art News and Review* described the exhibition perfectly when he suggested that “[i]t is really a lesson in conditioned or unconditioned responses, a ‘Construct it yourself’ set.”⁵¹

Several “environments” that have the same kind of lessons in store for the visitor can also be regarded as part of New Babylon. The three-dimensional door labyrinth that was displayed at the exhibition in the Haags Gemeentemuseum in 1974 is a good example. Constant wanted to show, with his door labyrinth, that in New Babylon people would use space and time in a completely different way. In today’s world we try to get from A to B as efficiently as possible. Only one route will be efficient in our static space. When we enter a labyrinth, we therefore quickly have the sensation of being lost. “Losing the way” would no longer exist in New Babylon.⁵² “Today’s ‘straying off’ in such a labyrinth would no longer mean ‘getting lost,’ but simply finding new paths. For, Constant argues, the creative human has an active relationship with the world around him, he wants to intervene, change things, and rather than arranging the space in such a way that he can reach a predetermined destination as quickly as possible, he will make the space increasingly complex and multiply its utilization.”⁵³ As visitors entered the door labyrinth, Constant challenged them to experience the space differently than they might initially be inclined to. He appealed to the visitor’s imagination.⁵⁴ Though New Babylon would continue to echo in Constant’s paintings for some time to come, for him the 1974 exhibition marked the end of the New Babylon project. He warned that a long, restless period of destruction and “being lost” would follow before New Babylon could become a reality. But his faith in New Babylon as a potential way of living remained. In the catalogue to the 1974 exhibition he remarked, “At the moment, New Babylon cannot be anything more than a model, a model to think about and play with.”⁵⁵ New Babylon would have to be built (some time) by others. In that sense, it, too, is a “Construct It Yourself” set.

Considering Constant’s New Babylon amidst the work and ideas of Asger Jorn, Nicolas Schöffer, Roberto Matta, and Richard Hamilton makes clear that the project cannot be seen in isolation from its art-historical context. Constant himself once said that in New Babylon he was seeking an art form into which he could incorporate all the important social and cultural developments of his time.⁵⁶ The way he captured the zeitgeist in New Babylon makes the work unique, however. Like the situationists’ psychogeographical maps, New Babylon outlines “what could be,” based on carefully selected elements of what actually existed in the 1950s and 1960s. Constant wrote in the Cobra manifesto, “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



Le Corbusier, grid for the seventh Congrès Internationaux d'architecture Moderne in Bergamo in 1949.

Door labyrinth at the exhibition *New Babylon* in the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, 1974.

ideals of the first, while those of the second have yet to be achieved.”⁵⁷ While this appears to be a problem he was still wrestling with during the Cobra years, with New Babylon this paradox is precisely what makes the project relevant today. Constant did not have access to the materials with which a future world would be built. This not only forced him to take the reality of his era as his starting point; he also had to keep his vision of New Babylon open. Although he used a host of ways to suggest how New Babylon might look, sufficient room is left for interpretation of the work. With our current knowledge, we can for example see how the network structure and continually changing environment of New Babylon foreshadow the Internet.⁵⁸ New Babylon has developed into a “persistent provocation” to which each generation can respond in its own way.⁵⁹

1. Title inspired by a phrase in Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 132.
2. Richard Hamilton during a BBC Radio 3 broadcast on August 17, 1956. A transcript of the broadcast—a discussion program that also featured Peter Smithson, Colin St. John Wilson, William Turnbull, Anthony Hill, Theo Crosby, and David Piper—is kept in the Tate Gallery Archives, London.
3. Further reading (with an emphasis on the Netherlands) can be found in James Kennedy, *Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw: Nederland in de jaren zestig* (Amsterdam: Boom, 1995).
4. Constant took the term *Homo ludens* from the 1938 publication “*Homo Ludens, proeve eener bepaling van het spel-element der cultuur*” by Dutch sociologist Johan Huizinga. Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: Proeve eener bepaling van het spel-element der cultuur*, in *Verzamelde werken 5: Cultuurgeschiedenis 3*, ed. L. Brummel et al. (Haarlem: H. D. Tjeenk Willink en Zoon, 1950), 26–246.
5. Mark Wigley, *Constant’s New Babylon: The Hyper-architecture of Desire* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1998), 9.
6. See John Heintz, “New Babylon—A Persistent Provocation,” in *Exit Utopia: Architectural Provocations 1956–1976*, ed. Otakar Máčel and Martin van Schaik (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2005), 212–13.
7. For more information on Le Corbusier’s principles, see Tim Benton and Fondation Le Corbusier, *Le Corbusier: Le Grand* (London: Phaidon Press, 2008).
8. Ruth Baumeister, *L’Architecture Sauvage: Asger Jorn’s Critique and Concept of Architecture* (Rotterdam: NAI Boekverkopers, 2014), 28–43, 116.
9. On November 8 the Belgians Christian Dotremont and Joseph Noiret, Danes Jorn and Appel, and Constant and Corneille from the Netherlands met at the Café de l’Hôtel Notre-Dame in Paris, where they decided to establish a group that would encompass the experimental movements in the three countries they represented. Cobra is an acronym made up of the first letters of the capitals of the three countries: Copenhagen, Brussels, and Amsterdam. For more information and background on the foundation of Cobra, see Willemijn Stokvis, *Cobra: De weg naar spontaniteit* (Blaricum, The Netherlands: V+K Publishing, 2003).
10. These were the “Bregnerød Conference” and the interior of a farmhouse belonging to trout farmer and ceramicist Erik Nyholm. In Bregnerød (a village near Copenhagen) Cobra members painted the interior of a weekend house for architecture students in 1949. They stayed at the house with their wives and children, ate and drank together, and encouraged everyone to contribute to the creative process. Appel, Corneille, and Constant started work on the interior of Nyholm’s farmhouse in the same year. The work was completed after their departure by Jorn and Nyholm. For more information, see *ibid.*, 261–87.
11. Their friendship cooled in May 1949 when Asger and Constant’s wife, Matie van Domselaer, began an affair. See Trudy van der Horst, *Constant: De late periode* (Nijmegen, The Netherlands: BnM uitgevers, 2008), 52.
12. Baumeister, *L’Architecture Sauvage*.
13. Constant and Aldo van Eyck, *Spatiaal Colorisme* (Spatial Colorism, 1953, edition of 50). The portfolio was created in connection with *Een ruimte in kleur* (A Space in Color), the space van Eyck designed for the *Mens en huis* (Man and House) exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (November 21, 1952, to January 5, 1953).
14. Marcel Hummelinck, *Après nous la liberté: Constant en de artistieke avant-garde in de jaren 1946–1960* (Amsterdam, self-published, 2002), 219–30.
15. Constant, “Demain la poésie logera la vie” (1956), in *Documents relatifs à la fondation de l’internationale situationniste 1948–1957* (Paris: Allia, 1985), 595–97.
16. See “Manifeste” [17 May 1960], *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 4 (June

- 1960): 36–38. The issues of this journal that appeared from 1958 to 1969 were published in a single volume entitled *Internationale Situationniste 1958–1969* (Amsterdam: Van Genneep, 1970).
17. For more information, see R. J. Sanders, *Beweging tegen de schijn: De situationisten, een avant-garde* (Amsterdam: Huis aan de Drie Grachten, 1989).
18. J. L. Locher, *New Babylon* (The Hague: Haags Gemeentemuseum, 1974), 12.
19. Sadler, 69–95.
20. Vaida Voevod III, leader of the Communauté Mondiale Gitane (World Community of Gypsies), in an interview with Nico Rost, *Algemeen Handelsblad* (Amsterdam), 18 May 1963, quoted by Constant in Locher, *New Babylon*, 27.
21. Martin van Schaik, “Psycheogram: An Artist’s Utopia,” in *Exit Utopia*, ed. Máčel and van Schaik, 44–45.
22. Guy Habasque, “From Time to Space” in *Nicolas Schöffer* (Neuchâtel: Editions du Griffon, 1963), 10–11.
23. Udo Liebelt, *Proun und andere Werke* (Hanover: Landeshauptstadt Hannover, 1988).
24. The constructivists hung this manifesto, written by the brothers Gabo and Pevsner and published as a pamphlet, in the streets of Moscow. For further reading, see Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (London: Yale University Press, 1983).
25. Cybernetics: the science of automatic regulatory mechanisms, automatic communication mechanisms, and feedback in living creatures and computers.
26. Nicolas Schöffer, “Architecture and City Planning,” in *Nicolas Schöffer*, 122–31.
27. Constant, “New Babylon, Outline of a Culture,” in Locher, *New Babylon*.
28. Hummelinck, 181–99. Néovision aimed to integrate not only art and architecture but music and science.
29. CYSP is an acronym for “cybernetics and spatio-dynamism.”
30. *CYSP-1* was only the beginning. Schöffer went on to design large cybernetic towers that could be installed in the center of Paris.
31. See, for example, the announcement of the slide show in the manuscript of the lecture Constant gave at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London on November 7, 1963, which also appears in this publication.
32. Wigley, 11.
33. Baumeister, 27.
34. William Rubin, *Matta* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1957), 3.
35. Baumeister, *L’Architecture Sauvage*.
36. French postman Ferdinand Cheval, using stones he found on his daily rounds, spent thirty-three years building the Palais Idéal in Hauterives, France.
37. Baumeister, *L’Architecture Sauvage*, 27–28; and Asger Jorn, *Pour la Forme: Ebauche d’une méthodologie des arts* (1957; Paris: Edition Allia, 2001).
38. Constant, “Sur nos moyens et nos perspectives,” in *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 2 (December 1958): 23–27.
39. Rubin, 4.
40. Werner Hofman, “De jaren van het geweld,” in *Matta* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1964), n.p.
41. The student occupation of the theater was, moreover, an event Constant witnessed with his own eyes. For more, see Linda Boersma, “Constant,” *BOMB Magazine*, no. 91 (Spring 2005).
42. For more on these paintings, see Wigley, 69–71.
43. See Max Arian, “Constant in Opstand,” in *De Groene Amsterdammer*, January 17, 1996.
44. Hummelinck, 139.
45. *Ibid.*

46. Ibid.
47. Victoria Walsh, “Seahorses, Grids and Calypso: Richard Hamilton’s Exhibition-Making in the 1950s,” in *Hamilton*, ed. Mark Godfrey, Paul Schimmel, and Vicente Todoli (London: Tate Publishing, 2014), 66.
48. Le Corbusier, “Description of the CIAM Grid, Bergamo 1949,” in *CIAM 8, The Heart of the City: Toward the Humanisation of Urban Life*, ed. J. Tyrwhitt, J. L. Sert, and E. N. Rogers (London: Lund Humphries, 1952), 172.
49. For more information, see Le Corbusier, *Le Modulor* and *Modulor 2*, 2 vols. (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2000).
50. Anne Massey and Gregor Muir, *Institute of Contemporary Arts: 1946–1968* (London: ICA; Amsterdam: Roma Publications, 2014), 108–11, 120–26; and Walsh, “Seahorses, Grids and Calypso,” 68–72.
51. Massey and Muir, 124.
52. For further explanation, see Constant, “New Babylon, Outline of a Culture.”
53. G. Kruis, “De spraakverwarring van New Babylon,” *Nieuwe Leidsche Courant*, June 22, 1974, 19.
54. For more information, see Constant, “The Principle of Disorientation,” in Locher, *New Babylon*.
55. Locher, *New Babylon*, n.p.
56. “Constant, een kunstenaar van onze tijd,” *Openbaar kunstbezit*, broadcast July 12, 1965, by NTS.
57. Constant, “Manifest” (1948), in *Documents relatifs*, 20–34.
58. See the article by Mark Wigley in the present catalogue.
59. For more on New Babylon as a “persistent provocation,” see John Heintz, “New Babylon,” 212–18.

Constant's New Babylon and De Stijl

Willemijn Stokvis

It is perhaps not surprising that a Calvinist country like the Netherlands, with some forty Protestant denominations, produced two such principled and forthright men of ideas on modern art: Pieter Cornelis (Piet) Mondrian (1872–1944)—the most important theoretician of the De Stijl movement (1917–1930)—and Constant Anton Nieuwenhuys, known simply as Constant (1920–2005). Their utopian ideas about a future society and the plastic manifestation of that society had great international influence on both art and architecture.

In essence, their ideas were diametrically opposed, but they do come close in some respects. Almost literally, in fact, as Constant was inspired by Mondrian on more than one occasion.¹ And also in a more figurative sense, because their utopias, which were to be imposed on humanity as a kind of totalitarian model, had similar aims.²

Origins of Their Ideals

The ideas of these two artists can be seen as the extremes of two sets of ideas in twentieth-century art that broadly fanned out in two directions. These ideas can be categorized as “Apollonian” and “Dionysian.” The seeds of both had been sown in the late nineteenth century, perhaps even earlier.

These ideas were first proposed by two English thinkers who were active in the art world in the second half of the nineteenth century: theoretician and critic John Ruskin (1819–1900) and designer and activist William Morris (1834–1896). Their abhorrence of the soulless products of the industry that was emerging at the time led them to campaign for a return to craftsmanship. They took as their ideal the guild system of the medieval period. Their quest and Morris’s practical efforts led, around 1880, to the arts and crafts movement, whose influence would extend throughout the Western world and even beyond. Driven by socialist ideas and inspired by Karl Marx (1818–1883), Morris called upon people to return to working as simple craftsmen. His ideal was a community from which a kind of folk art would once more emerge.

A divergence of opinion arose when, in the early twentieth century, this school of thought embraced industry—first via the *Deutscher Werkbund* (Munich, 1907) and then via the Bauhaus (Weimar, 1919). This was prompted by the notion that mechanical production based on good design could provide the people with aesthetically sound products on a much larger scale than manual production ever could, handmade products being reserved for the better-off members of society. The primitivist ideal of “self-activity” also continued to follow its own path, appearing several times during the first half of twentieth-century: in the German expressionist movement *Die Brücke* (1905–1913)

around 1910, for example; in surrealism (ca. 1920–1940), which set great store by the idea of nineteenth-century French poet Lautréamont (1846–1870) that “La poésie doit être faite par tous, non par un” (Poetry must be made by all, not by one);³ and in the Cobra movement (1948–1951).

Mondrian and Constant: The Two Extremes

Mondrian and De Stijl

De Stijl was the Netherlands’ own entirely unique version of a new attitude to art that had spread from Russia and then from Germany—via the Bauhaus—an attitude that accepted the awe-inspiring developments in the science, technology, and industry of the West as something positive, a means by which a new world could be built. This influential new mentality—which, after the closure of the Bauhaus in 1933, evolved to a particularly high level in the United States—led to the emergence of “functionalism” in architecture. With its focus on good design, functionalism was also the springboard for what can be referred to as “twentieth-century style,” encompassing every aspect of daily life.

The zealous embrace of the West’s new technological achievements that had featured in the Italian futurists’ manifestos since 1909, the blind faith in human ingenuity that seemed gradually to be conquering nature, could be seen in Russia in the work of Kazimir Malevich (1879–1935), among others, and in the writings of Mondrian.

In March 1922, in his article “The Realization of Neoplasticism in the Distant Future and in Architecture Today,” Mondrian argued that in all areas of life the technical and practical would come to predominate and that the fact that “art . . . is in the process of progressive dissolution” might signify “the beginning of a new life—man’s eventual liberation.”⁴ While art still arises from “the tragic of life,” expressing our deeply rooted physical connection with nature, it also has the freedom to express harmony.

Mondrian himself followed this latter path to its extreme, reducing visual means to only the vertical and horizontal line and/or flat geometric shapes formed by such lines.

In the 1922 article he described his utopian vision of the future as follows: “the revolution of art consists in its achievement of a pure expression of harmony.” He referred to art as “expression and . . . means [of] the achievement of equilibrium between nature and nonnature—between what is in us and what is around us.” Once this equilibrium has been achieved, the task of art “will be fulfilled and harmony will be realised . . . The domination of the tragic in life

will be ended. Then the “artist” will be absorbed by the “fully human being.” Like him, the nonartist will be equally imbued with beauty.”⁵

The less mystical, more practically oriented and versatile artist Theo van Doesburg (1883–1931), who founded the De Stijl movement and its eponymous journal in 1917 and was one of its most active members, would reiterate this conviction in 1926 in an article, written in English and based on his own vision, titled “The End of Art”: “For the sake of progress we must destroy Art. . . . Let us rather create a new life-form which is adequate to the functioning of modern life.” Van Doesburg wanted to cast aside art in the form of a “high priest of aesthetics” and concentrate on the practicalities of life, on “the bathroom, the WC, the bathtub, the telescope, the bicycle, the auto, the subway, the flatiron.”⁶ This view of art was akin to an attitude that was gaining international influence at the time. Mondrian, however, was alone in his fanatical defense of a utopian vision of the future, regarding his own era as a transitional phase.

Mondrian, van Doesburg, and the entire De Stijl movement were part of a large group of artists who, overwhelmed by the scientific and technological progress achieved by human ingenuity in the early twentieth century, believed they were building a great future in which man would bring order to and rule over nature.

Constant and Cobra

This belief in the future and enthusiasm for human ingenuity was sharply undermined by the Second World War. During the Cold War period the Romantic desire for the primal sources of existence resurfaced. “Back to nature,” the cry uttered by French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) in the mid-eighteenth century, came to be expressed more vehemently than ever in paint, in words, in music, and it would not be silenced any time soon. In the search for an essentially human society and spontaneous, sincere artistic expression, the focus shifted to the art of primitive peoples, children, and the mentally ill, as it had in German expressionism. Nature, suppressed in the human subconscious, would be set free, something surrealism had attempted to do in the period between the wars. The collective subconscious became a great source of inspiration to the new international wave of primitivist expressionism; that is, abstract expressionism (1946–1960) in the United States; *abstraction lyrique* or *tachisme* (from 1947) and the work of the painter Jean Dubuffet (1901–1985) in Paris; and the Cobra movement. Many other artists were on the same wavelength. Collectively, their art was referred to as “*art informel*” or “*art autre*” (1945–1960).

Dutch painter Constant was a leading spokesman for the Cobra movement. At the time of the war, many of the ideas propounded by Cobra had already been

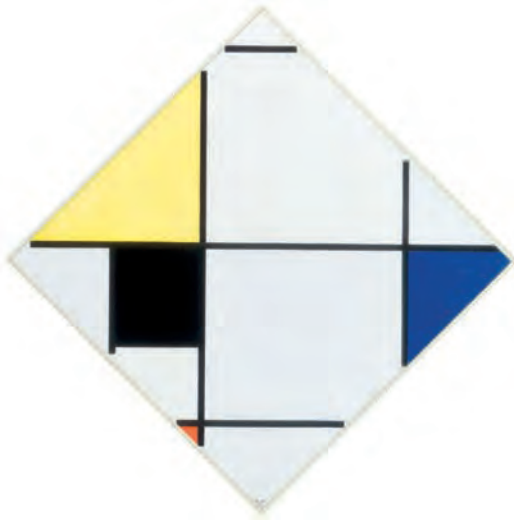
published in articles by Danish artists who associated themselves with the journal *Helhesten* (Hell-horse, 1941–1944). This group would become the Danish branch of the international Cobra movement. Danish painter and philosopher Asger Jorn (1914–1973) publicized these ideas and their practical application in painting from 1946, supplying the main inspirational force behind the Cobra movement. The entire complex of theories on art and society in the Cobra movement was, however, most clearly summarized by Constant in several articles and a lengthy manifesto published in September 1948 in the first edition of *Reflex*, the mouthpiece of the Dutch Experimental Group, which would merge into Cobra in November of that year.

His message was that, “In our society a conception of beauty [had] emerged that became a goal in itself and which, with the formalism that inevitably ensued, overran art as a direct means of expression.” (This “formalism,” so despised by Cobra, referred mainly to the geometric abstraction so popular in the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles in Paris from 1946.) “But this time,” Constant wrote, “we face an enemy that has revealed its weaknesses. . . . Abstract art demonstrates a clear sterility and its theoreticians (Mondrian et al.) admit that it heralds the end of ‘art.’ . . . and we will accelerate it further, so that art can finally perform its essential function, as a psychological instrument for all people.”⁷ In his fervent plea “C’est notre désir qui fait la révolution” (It is our desire that makes revolution), which he published in the fourth edition of the journal *Cobra* in November 1949, he exclaimed, “Allons remplir la toile vierge de Mondrian même si ce n’est qu’avec nos malheurs” (Come, let us fill the virgin canvas of Mondrian, even if it is only with our misfortunes).⁸

In these texts, Constant propounded Cobra’s belief that in the near future, when, as Marx had predicted, bread would be on everyone’s table, everyone would also be able to submit to their own creative impulses, allowing a new people’s art to emerge, as in past primitive societies.

Mondrian’s Influence on Constant

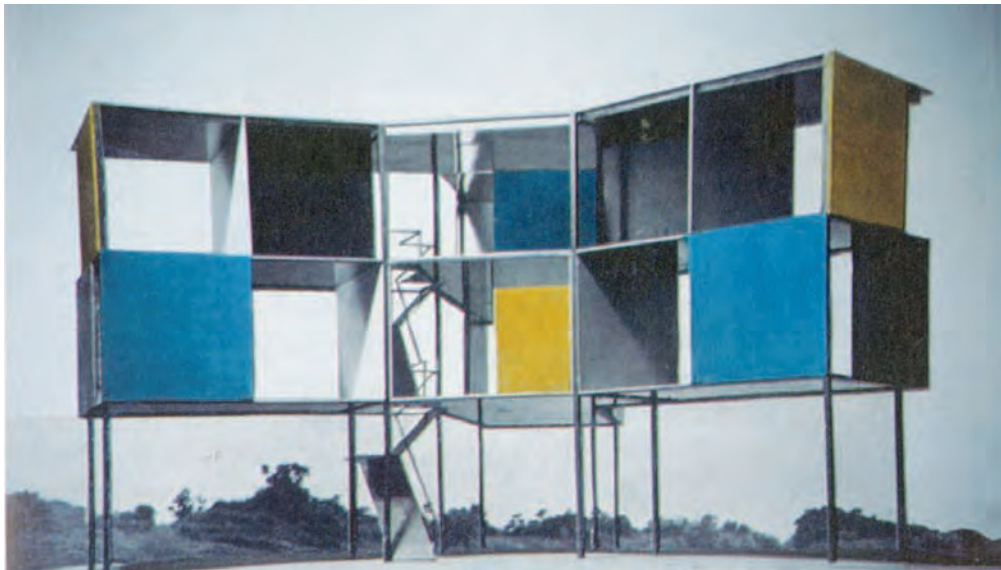
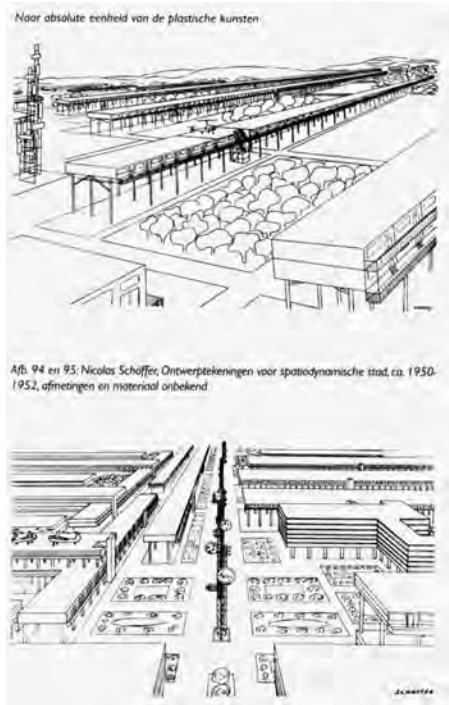
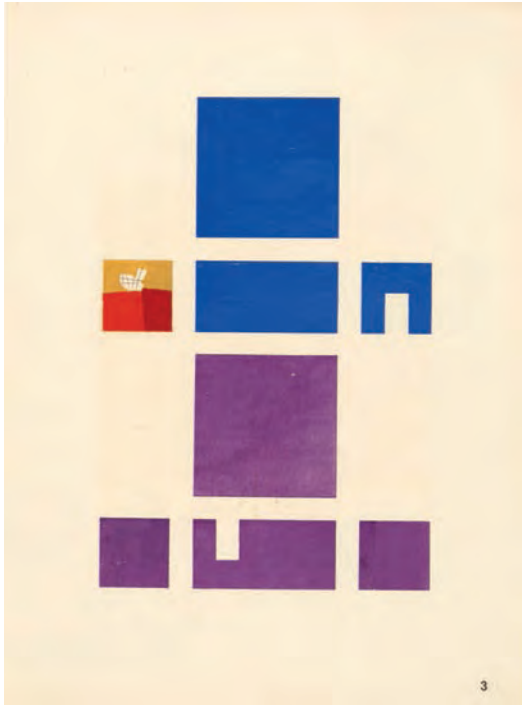
In the years following Cobra, Constant’s thinking and expression evolved more toward architecture.⁹ He began to apply larger areas of color in his paintings. A 1952 collaboration with architect Aldo van Eyck (1918–1999), who had also been involved in Cobra, on a spatial color experiment, convinced Constant that color was an essential element of architecture. At that time, he was in search of an objective, impersonal way of working, which even led him to use a paint sprayer to paint a series of rectangular metal plates in monochrome colors. Color was an essential element of architecture for Mondrian and van Doesburg too. Constant had come into direct contact with De Stijl and Mondrian during the Second World War, in Bergen (Noord-Holland), at the home of his father-in-law, composer



Piet Mondrian, *Lozenge Composition with Yellow, Black, Blue, Red, and Gray*, 1921.

Een ruimte in kleur [A Space in Color], built on the occasion of the exhibition *Mens en huis* [Man and House], in the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1952–1953.

Constant, *Reeks van zes gekleurde vlakken* [Series of Six Colored Planes], 1953.



Constant and Aldo van Eyck, print of the portfolio *Voor en spatiaal colorisme* [For a Spatial Colorism], 1953.

Nicolas Schöffer, project of cybernetic city, ca. 1950–1952.

Stephen Gilbert, photomontage with the model of Y House, 1955–1957.

Jakob van Domselaer (1890–1960). After meeting Mondrian in Paris in 1912, van Domselaer started writing compositions, under the artist's influence, in which he attempted to translate the basic principles of Mondrian's work into music.

Due in part to a profound confrontation with the ideas of De Stijl at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam's 1951 exhibition of the movement's work, which was accompanied by a comprehensive catalogue, Constant became convinced that he should work on a future living environment in which art and architecture would work in close partnership.¹⁰ He set out these ideas in a piece entitled "Spatial Colorism," published with van Eyck in a portfolio of the same name in 1953.¹¹ He corresponded at length on the subject with the English artist Stephen Gilbert (1910–2007), a friend and fellow Cobra member who had also become interested in architecture. They decided to join the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles, which Constant had previously despised.¹² Together, they visited one of the cofounders of the salon, Nelly van Doesburg, who administered her husband Theo van Doesburg's estate in Meudon, France. That same year they also came into contact with Hungarian artist Nicolas Schöffer (1912–1991), who was living in Paris. He had similar ideas about art and was some distance ahead of Constant and Gilbert, having been developing plans for a *Ville Cybernétique* since 1948.¹³

In the Netherlands Constant also called for collaboration between artists and architects in the artists' organization Liga Nieuw Beelden (League for New Representation, 1955–1969). In summer 1956 this resulted in a presentation of the "synthesis of arts" in the Dutch pavilion at the Venice Biennale, which had been designed by former De Stijl member Gerrit Rietveld (1888–1964). The pavilion displayed work by Constant, sculptor André Volten (1925–2002), and painter Bart van der Leek (1876–1958), also a former member of De Stijl.¹⁴

During these years Constant turned his attention more and more to the human living environment of the future. He designed a number of playgrounds and play sculptures, and also several models for a utopian city. He became involved in the Mouvement International pour un Bauhaus Imaginiste (MIBI), established by Jorn in 1953 as a protest against functionalism. During the war, Jorn had professed his belief in the human imagination, including in architectural matters.¹⁵ The first edition of the journal *Cobra*, published in Copenhagen in early 1949, also contained an article in which French architect Michel Colle called for a "Symbolic Architecture" in the form of drawings of buildings that resembled living sculptures.¹⁶

However, Constant's ideals concerned a new society with an entirely new collective form of art. The incredible potential offered by technological and industrial development could liberate architecture from functionalism. In September 1956 he addressed the third conference of the MIBI in Alba, Italy, delivering his lecture "Demain la poésie logera la vie" (Tomorrow life will reside

in poetry), in which he proclaimed, “voiles minces en béton armé, . . . qui seraient . . . au service d’une imagination libre et audacieuse” (thin veils in reinforced concrete . . . that will be . . . at the service of a free and audacious imagination).¹⁷

New Babylon

To Mondrian, and now also to Constant, the progressive technologization of society heralded the imminent achievement of an ideal living environment. Based on what Marx and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) had written in 1848, Constant even believed that in the future machines would entirely take over the work of human beings. This would allow human beings to become a creative, ludic species again, liberated from the alienation—as Marx and Engels saw it—that was the result of specialization into different professions.¹⁸ Constant based his use of the term *ludic* on the book *Homo Ludens* (1938) by the Dutch cultural philosopher Johan Huizinga (1872–1945), from which the French lettrists in Paris may have previously drawn inspiration.¹⁹ After the MIBI congress he met the leader of the lettrists, writer Guy Debord (1931–1994).

From 1958 Constant devoted all his energies to building models for his utopian city, which from 1960 he called “New Babylon,” a name suggested by Debord.²⁰ Constant and Debord set out eleven propositions encapsulating their ideas about a “unitary urbanism,” which would be the result of an entirely new kind of collective creativity, something that had been occupying the lettrists for some time. This collective creativity would be able to develop to its full potential in New Babylon. The propositions were published in December 1958 under the title “La déclaration d’Amsterdam,” which appeared in *Internationale Situationniste*, the bulletin of the Situationist International—the movement into which, led partly by Debord, the MIBI had been incorporated. Constant published an article in the same edition giving short shrift to the primitivist individualism of Cobra and hailing machines and industry as vital tools for the creators of the future. Like Mondrian, he believed that traditional arts such as painting and literature would die out in this new society.²¹

Rejection of Functionalism

In his New Babylon Constant built fantastic structures on tall stilts, making full use of modern materials. These structures, which according to Constant had to be flexible in order to enable the “great game of the future” to take place there,²² can be seen as one big statement decrying the functionalism that had spread throughout the world from its origins in the Bauhaus. But as Constant himself said, you could also attribute to them a new kind of functionalism in the

framework they were designed to serve.²³ The great game would be able to unfold in these structures, but only in accordance with Constant's strict plans.²⁴

Mondrian and Van Doesburg also rejected functionalism. Though van Doesburg was endlessly irritated by the expressionism he still found at the Bauhaus in 1921, he called this "the parody of the new plastic."²⁵ "[T]he culture of Jean Jacques . . ., with its hairy disciples Morris and Ruskin, is not quite a corpse yet," he said of this expressionism in 1919.²⁶ His lectures on neoplasticism in Weimar in 1921 and 1922 must have caused a crisis at the Bauhaus, prompting the movement that would be known among other things as "functionalism" to develop at the institute. But neither he nor Mondrian was in favor of a pragmatic functionalism. He argued vehemently against it in a number of articles in *De Stijl* in 1922 and 1923.²⁷ "The building of dwelling boxes or construction cells of a certain type or standard dimensions beside or on top of one another is not creative building."²⁸

In their view, painting was pointing in a new direction that architecture should also follow. The new architecture, Mondrian explained, must be seen not as "form-expression" but as "a multiplicity of planes." And to make these planes a "living reality," color was required. "The color is supported by the architecture or annihilates it, as required."²⁹ The Rietveld Schröderhuis, built by the architect in Utrecht in 1924, was the first realization of these ideas. Both the exterior and interior comprise straight lines and rectangular planes in black and white, as well as the primary colors red, yellow, and blue.

Conclusion

The messages Mondrian and Constant expressed about the future living environment concerned not only art. They believed that every aspect of life would change. In the near future people would live for art. In their architectonic conceptions of the future, art and life would become one, signaling the abolition of the old concept of "art."

1. In writing this article I drew on my earlier article “De Stijl en Cobra: Nederlands tegenstrijdige bijdrage aan de kunst van de twintigste eeuw—tegenstellingen, parallellen, overeenkomsten!” [*De Stijl* and Cobra: The Netherlands’ contradictory contribution to twentieth-century art—contrasts, parallels, similarities], in *Aspecten van het interbellum: Leids kunsthistorisch jaarboek, VII (1988)* (The Hague: Sdu, 1990), 183–213; and on Marcel Hummelink’s self-published PhD thesis, *Après nous la liberté: Constant en de artistieke avant-garde in de jaren 1946–1960* [*Après nous la liberté: Constant and the artistic avant-garde in the period 1946–1960*] (Amsterdam: self-published, 2002). Several other texts I consulted appear in Gérard Berreby, ed., *Documents relatifs à la fondation de l’Internationale Situationniste 1948–1957* (Paris: Editions ALLIA, 1985).
2. See also my article “Totalitair en revolutionair denken en de avant-garde in de kunst” [Totalitarian and revolutionary thought and the artistic avant-garde], *De gids* 150, no. 1 (January 1990): 3–17.
3. Lautréamont (Isidore Ducasse), *Oeuvres complètes: Les chants de Maldoror: Poésies II* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1963), 374; André Breton, *Manifestes du surréalisme* (1924; Paris: Gallimard, 1963), 28; and R. J. Sanders, *Beweging tegen de schijn de situationisten, een avant-garde* (Amsterdam: Huis aan de Drie Grachten, 1989), 87.
4. Piet Mondrian, “De realisering van het neoplasticisme in verre toekomst en in de huidige architectuur” [The realization of neoplasticism in the distant future and in architecture today] [part 1], *De Stijl* 5, no. 3 (March 1922): 41–47. Neoplasticism was Mondrian’s name for the new visual language, or vision of the world, he wanted to create. Mondrian based his ideas on theosophy. Theosophist Mathieu Hubertus Josephus Schoenmakers’s book on mathematics, *Beeldende wiskunde* (Bussum, The Netherlands: Van Dishoeck, 1916), had a particular influence on him.
5. Mondrian, “De realisering van het neoplasticisme,” 43.
6. Theo van Doesburg, “The End of Art,” *De Stijl* 7, no. 73/74 (1926): 29–30.
7. Constant, “Cultuur en contra cultuur” [Culture and counterculture], *Reflex*, no. 2 (February 1949): 41–42.
8. Constant, “C’est notre désir qui fait la révolution,” *Cobra*, no. 4 (November 1949), 3–4.
9. Hummelink, 123–74.
10. The catalogue, *De Stijl: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 6.7.51–25.9.1951* (Amsterdam: n.pub., 1951), includes a large number of pieces previously published in *De Stijl*. See also, Hummelink, 188.
11. Constant (screenprints and text) and Aldo van Eyck (text), *Voor een spatiaal colorisme* (Amsterdam, 1953); only fifty copies were produced. See also Constant, “Voor een spatiaal colorisme,” *Forum: Maandblad gewijd aan architectuur en gebonden kunsten* 8, no. 10 (October 1953): 360–61; and Berreby, 75–83.
12. See Jonneke Jobse, *De Stijl Continued: The Journal Structure (1958)—An Artist’s Debate* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2011).
13. Nicolas Schöffer, *La Ville Cybernétique* (Paris: Tchou, 1969). A joint exhibition by Constant, Gilder, and Schöffer at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, planned for 1955, did not go ahead. See also Hummelink, 182–83, 191–99; and the article by Laura Stamps in the present catalogue.
14. Hummelink, 207.
15. Willemijn Stokvis, *Cobra de weg naar spontaniteit* (Blaricum, The Netherlands: V+K Publishing, 2001), 128; and Ruth Baumeister, ed., *Fraternité avant tout: Asger Jorn’s Writings on Art and Architecture* (Rotterdam: 110 Publishers, 2011).
16. Michel Colle, “Vers une architecture symbolique,” *Cobra*, no. 1 (March 1949): 23.
17. Constant, “Demain la poésie logera la vie” (1956), in Berreby, 595–96.
18. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Deutsche Ideologie* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1960), 30–33, 412. After a historian brought this to my attention, on November 8, 1987, I talked to Constant about it. He confirmed that the *Deutsche Ideologie* had been an important source for him. He immediately drew a copy (1960) from his bookcase. The book fell open at the passage in question, which was thickly underlined in red. Insofar as I am aware, Constant mentions this book only once in his writings on New Babylon, though he does not quote the passage mentioned here. See Constant, *New Babylon*, with an introduction by Hans Locher (published by the author for an exhibition of New Babylon at the Haags Gemeentemuseum, 1974), 44.
19. Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens proeve eener bepaling van het spel-element der cultuur*, 5th ed. (Haarlem: H. D. Tjeenk Willink, 1958). The text was available in French translation by 1951: *Homo ludens: Essai sur la fonction sociale du jeu*, trans. Cécile Seresia (Paris: Gallimard, 1951). See also Sanders, 250n3.
20. Trudy van der Horst, “Biografie,” in *Constant grafiek*, by Philip Dagen with documentation and research by Trudy van der Horst (Zwolle, The Netherlands: Waanders; Paris: Cercle d’Art, 2004), 210n20.
21. Mondrian, “De realisering van het neoplasticisme” [part 1], 41; and Constant, “Sur nos

- moyens et nos perspectives,” *Internationale situationniste*, no. 2 (December 1958), 23–26.
22. Constant, “Le grand jeu à venir,” *Potlatch*, new series, 1, no. 30 (July 15, 1959), reprinted in Berreby, 255–57. See also Hummelink, 266.
23. Constant, “Une autre ville pour une autre vie,” *Internationale situationniste*, no. 3 (December 1959): 38; an English translation of this article appears in the present catalogue.
24. For Constant’s ideas on how the interior of his New Babylon would work, see the article by Laura Stamps and the texts by Constant himself in the present catalogue.
25. Editor [Theo van Doesburg], “Rondblik: Deutschland.—Ausstellung von Arbeiten der Gesellen und Lehrlinge im Staatlichen Bauhaus Weimar. April–Mai 1922,” *De Stijl* 5, no. 5 (May 1922): 72.
26. Theo van Doesburg, “Moderne wendingen in het kunstonderwijs” (III), *De Stijl* 2, no. 9 (July 1919), 103.
27. Mondrian, “De realiseering van het neoplasticisme” [part 1], 41–47; Piet Mondrian, “Moet de schilderkunst minderwaardig zijn aan de bouwkunst” [Is painting inferior to architecture?], *De Stijl* 6, no. 5 (1923): 62–64; and Theo van Doesburg, “Von neuen Ästhetik zur materiellen Verwirklichung,” *De Stijl* 6, no. 1 (1923): 10–14.
28. Van Doesburg, “Von neuen Ästhetik zur materiellen Verwirklichung,” 10.
29. Piet Mondrian, “De realiseering van het neoplasticisme, in verre toekomst en in de huidige architectuur” [part 2], *De Stijl* 5, no. 5 (May 1922): 68.



Het laddertje
[The Ladder]
1949

L'animal sorcier
[The Sorcerer Animal]
1949





La Guerre III
[War III]
1950



L'incendie
[Fire]
1950



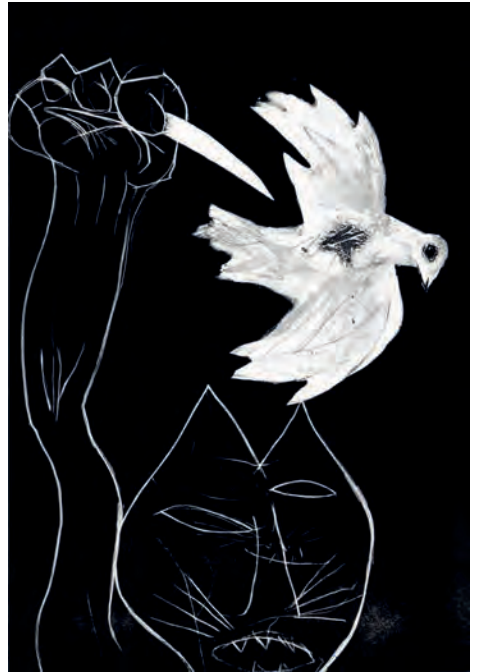


La Guerre II
[War II]
1950

De rode vuist
[Red Fist]
1952



8 x la Guerre
[8 x War]
1951





Adelaar
[Eagle]
1953

Ruimtelijk colorisme
[Spatial Colorism]
1952

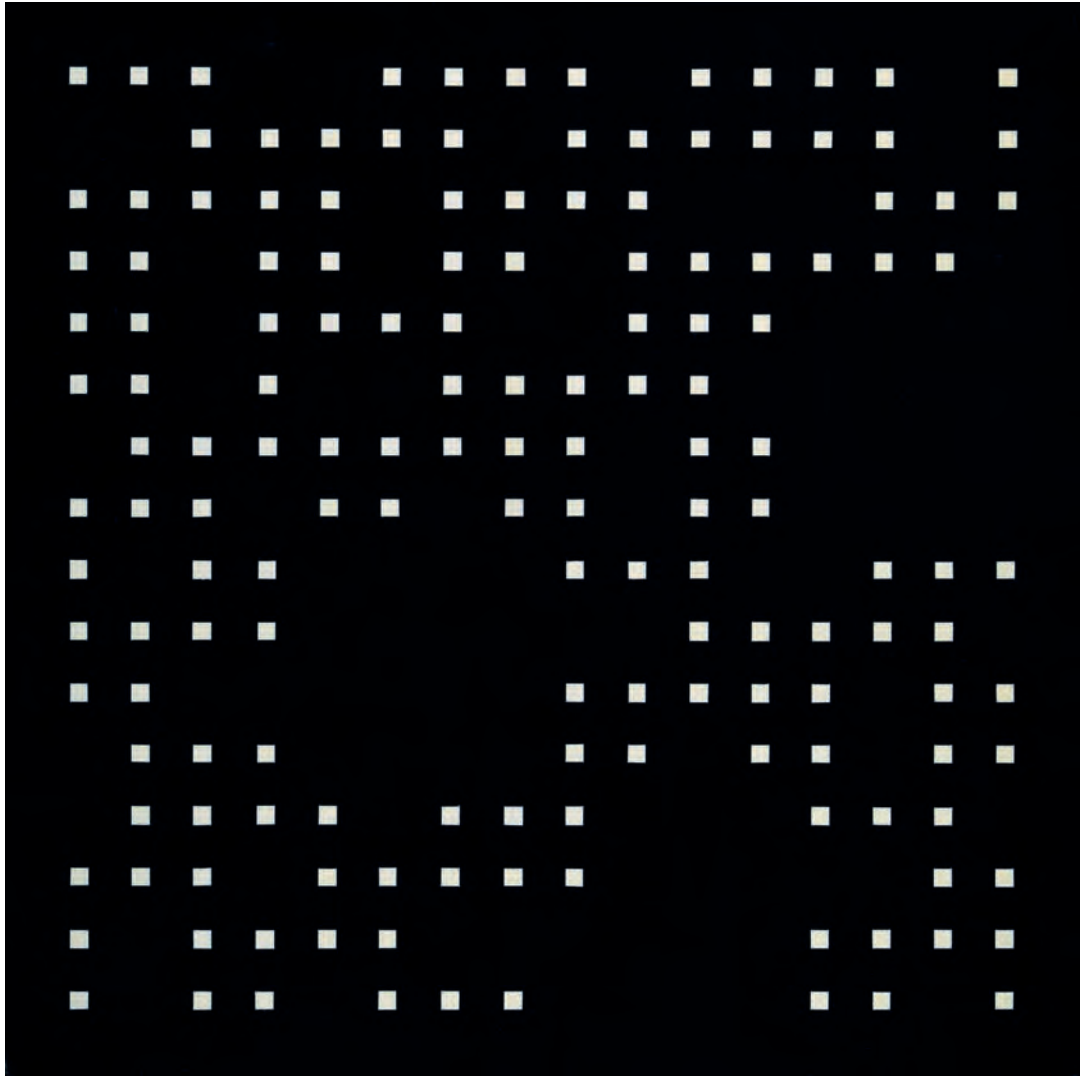




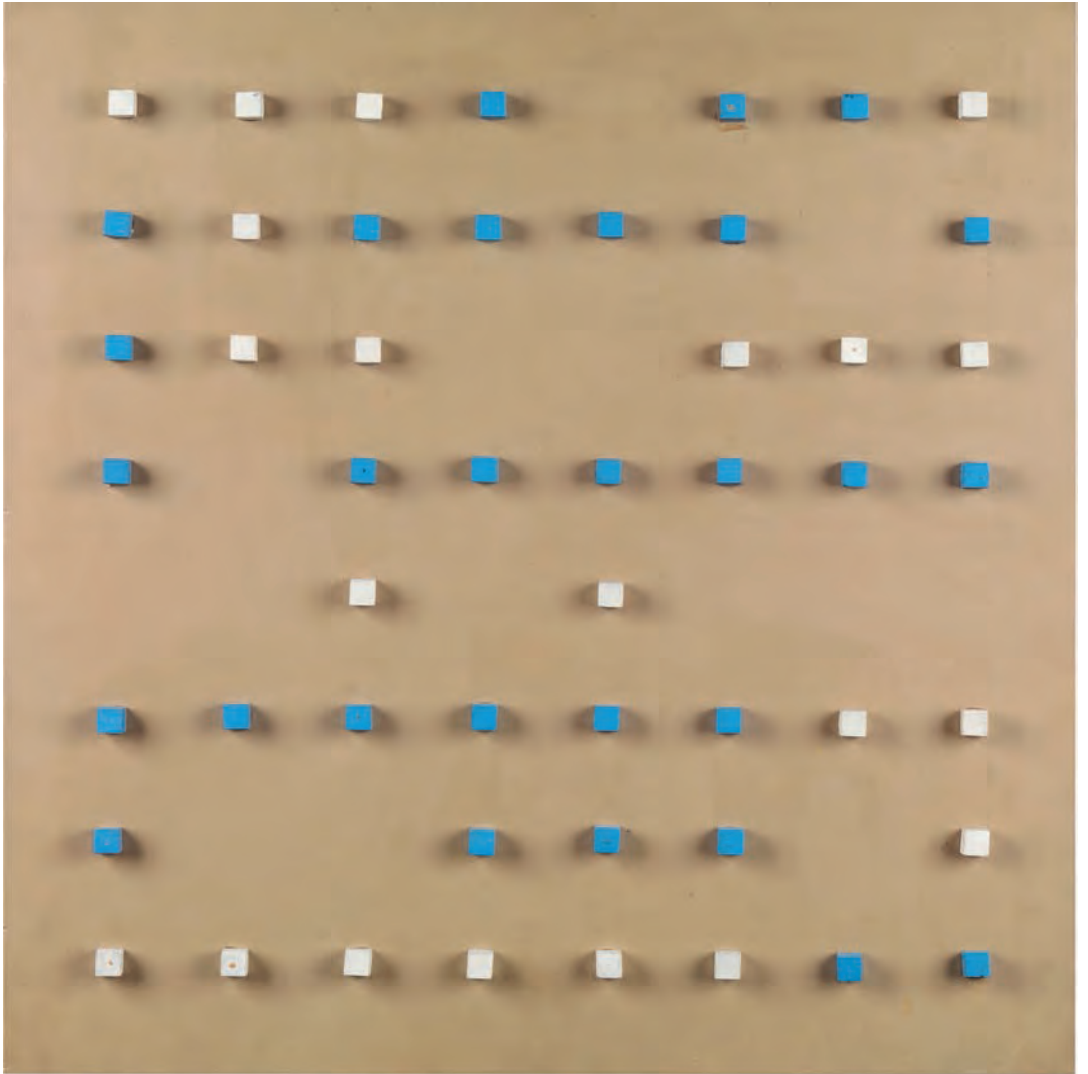
Compositie in zwart en wit
[Composition in Black and White]
1953



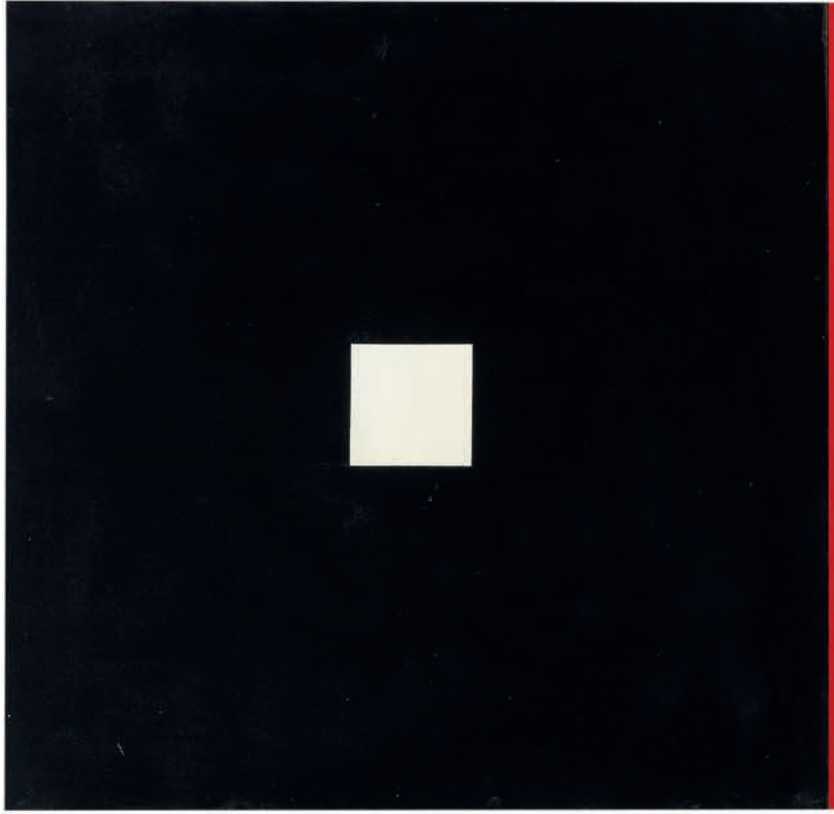
Kleurvlakken (Compositie met oranje driehoek)
[Colored Planes (Composition with Orange Triangle)]
1953



Compositie met 158 blokjes
[Composition with 158 Cubes]
1953



Compositie met blauwe en witte blokjes
[Composition with Blue and White Cubes]
1953



Zwart, rood, groen
[Black, Red, Green]
1953





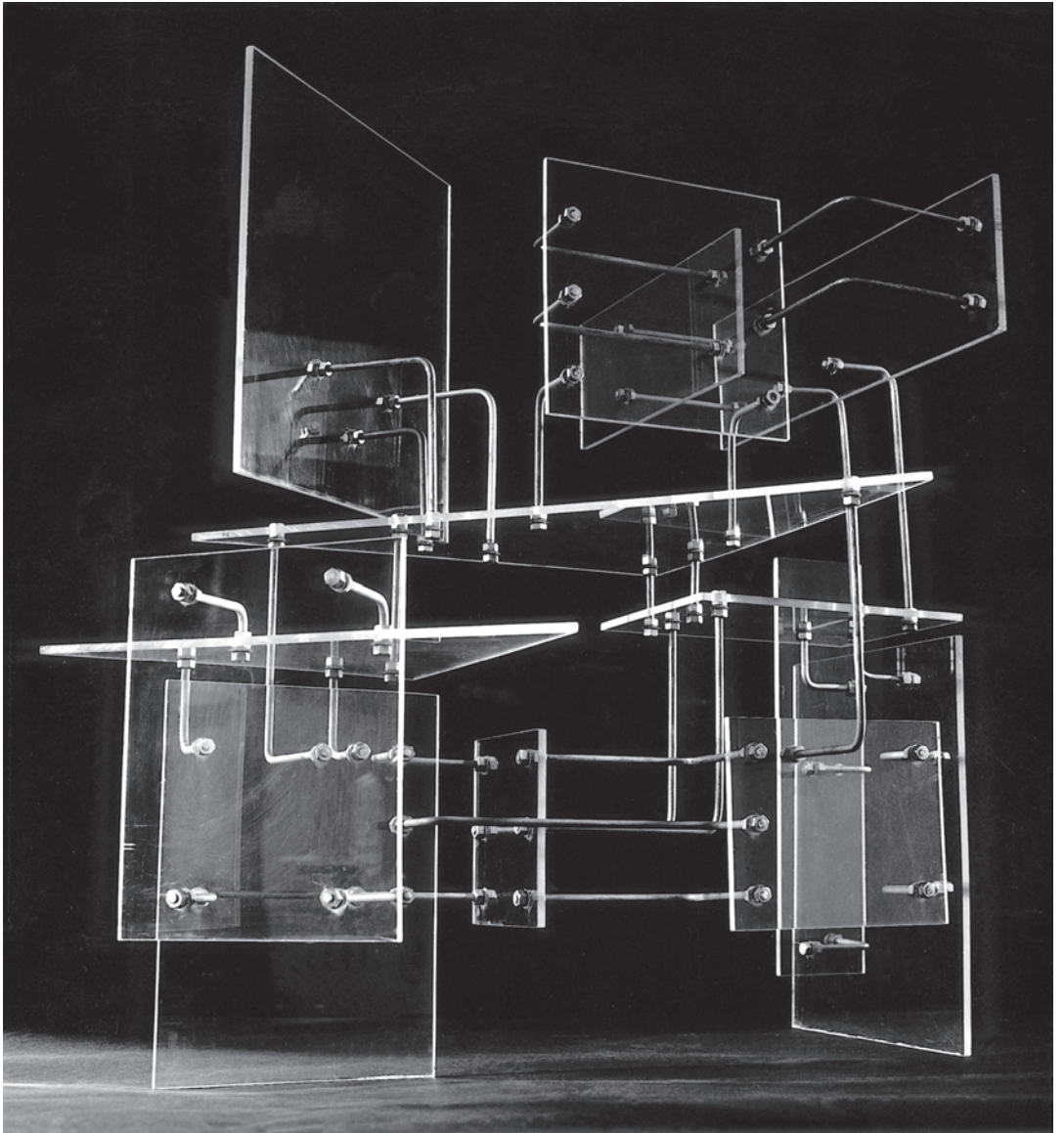
ZT/Landschap met sectoren
[Untitled / Landscape with Sectors]
1953



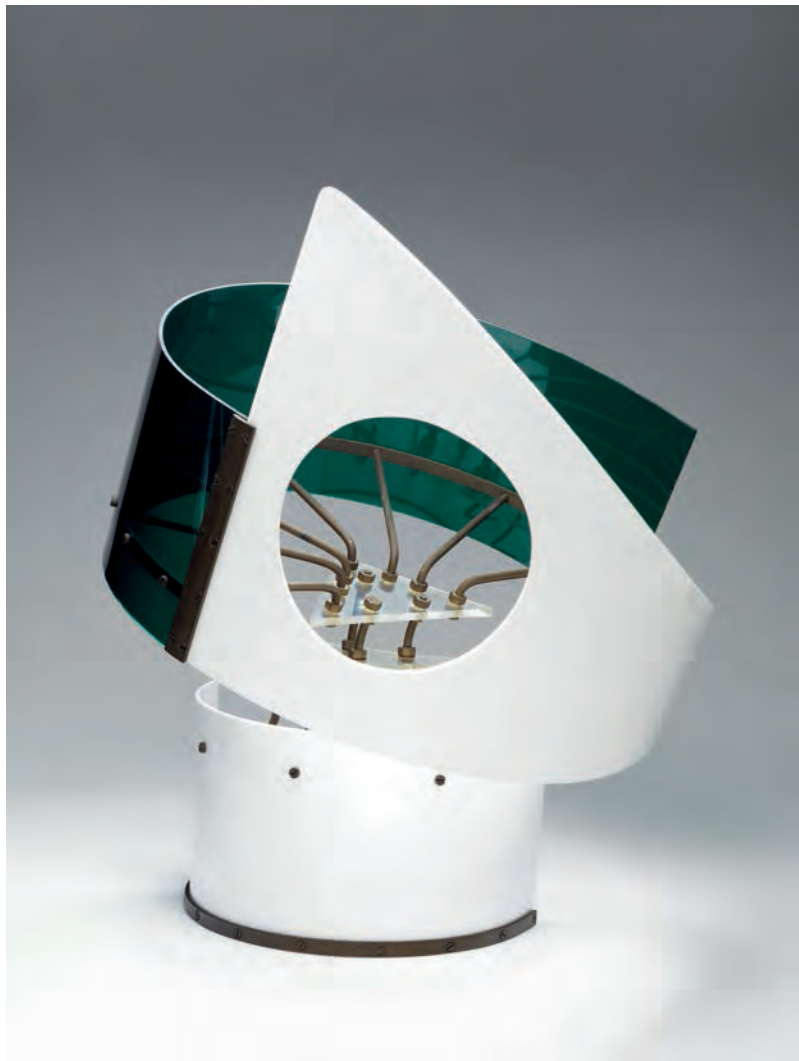
Paysage lunaire
[Lunar Landscape]
1956



Constructie met gekleurde vlakken
[Construction with Colored Planes]
1954



Constructie met doorzichtige vlakken
[Construction with Transparent Planes]
1954



Observatorium / Constructie in groen en wit
[Observatory / Construction in Green and White]
1955–1956



Ruimtefiguur / Constructie geel en wit
[Space Figure / Construction Yellow and White]
1956

Ambiance de jeu
[Environment of Play]
1956



The New Babylonians

Pedro G. Romero

Indeed, the collection of songs studied never mentions an inside of the house, with the exception of a bed in which to sleep, wake up, or die. In flamenco everything or almost everything happens in an outside, but an urban outside: a street, square, plaza, corner, bar, and so on.

—Valerio Báez and Matilde Moreno, *Hombre, gitano y dolor en la colección de cantes flamencos recogidos y anotados por Antonio Machado y Álvarez (Demófilo)*, 1983

And how many houses or streets does it take before a town begins to be a town? Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses.

—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen / Philosophical Investigations*, §18, 1953

Ungovernable. That was one of the conclusions of the police report. The house had been squatted for over five months. The rooftop was strewn with metal sheeting, cables, and roofing tiles that gave it both a futurist and an impoverished air: the future, taking refuge in dystopia. The verticality of the main tower had been used to externally connect the different parts of Wittgenstein House, including the basement. Ropes and pulleys hung vertically between the different floors. Some of the Gypsies clambered up and down the rigging with astonishing skill. There were stairs of different kinds and materials. Many were metal, woven out of steel wires and strong enough to bear huge loads, so that the system was also used to move the food, animals—hens, goats, and donkeys—and furniture. Since the occupation of Wittgenstein House, the Gypsies came and went as they pleased, to the stupefaction and indignation of the ever-watchful authorities. This part of Vienna had been subject to intense real estate market pressures since the 1980s, and new traffic routes coexisted with the old urban grid, generating situations that municipal experts described as “labyrinthine.” This gave the Gypsies an edge that they played with, as they did with the cultural myths that their mere presence evoked. A large, roughly circular cleared area on the terrace, for example, had taken on the yellowish color of the isolating paint that was exposed where the floor tiles had been pulled out. The police decided that it was a kind of airport. Some officers swore they had seen silent helicopters landing there, which explained the constant comings and goings of the Gypsies, the changing make-up of the inhabitants of the house. The terrace was painted by sectors in red, yellow, orange, with a western sector and an eastern sector; but what was the color of the eastern sector?¹

In the Slovakian city of Košice some kilometers east of Vienna, the Soviet-inspired borough Luník IX began to house Roma people who had been expelled from urban centers and surrounding towns. Luník IX now has the highest concentration of Roma in Central Europe. Following numerous fires in the eastern side, the borough’s buildings were officially abandoned. Some began to be used as dumping sites, and others were reoccupied by Gypsies and used as a base for illegal drug sales, becoming the largest supermarket of its kind in that part of Europe. The images are hellish. Many of the buildings have no facade, and their occupants are confined to interior spaces linked by staircases and gangways between floors. Some have to climb mountains of rubbish and rubble to reach their homes. Argentinean sculptor Gyula Kosice, founder of the MADÍ art movement, creator of *La ciudad hidroespacial* (Hydrospatial City), and evidently a native of Košice, pointed out the paradox between his hometown and the ultramodern Brazil—that is, the Brasília of Lucio Costa, Oscar Niemeyer, and Roberto Burle-Marx—that was being promoted by Brazilian president Juscelino Kubitschek, a man of Roma origins whose family came from

Tøeboò in the South Bohemian Region of the Czech Republic, or so Kubitschek believed. (To pinpoint a Roma family's specific place of origin is unusual. In most cases they are not only nomadic, their sedentary bases span territories of thousands of kilometers.)

Special police forces are sent to Košice, a city under a political state of emergency. Apparently, a Jewish agency has trained special forces from Hungary, Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Germany for this very purpose.² State control practices always give rise to some mystery, particularly when it comes to controlling Gypsies, who resist classification. What was the color of the eastern sector? The analytical goggles used by police surveillance systems detected what appeared to be a moiré effect, caused by the overlapping of lines of different thickness or direction.

Their reports were often sent to the university, which analyzed the cultural traits and other signs that the police were becoming increasingly adept at recognizing. Since the exotic nineteenth-century fashion of orientalism, which swept up artists, scientists, and explorers from around the globe, no other concept has been as useful to researchers as colonial studies, especially when dealing with a cultural body as slippery and complex as Gypsies. What was the color of the eastern sector? The question was asked anew by our police officers and university interns, some of whom had experience in contemporary art, as they observed the outside of the building, that strange pattern.

We owe everything we know about the city to a group of illiterate Kabyles, Guy Debord said. His claim should be taken for what it is. Contemptuous, yes, but also an explicit recognition of the work of some of the Algerians in the Lettrist International and, later, the Situationist International. They themselves sometimes played on their "barbarism" with a certain pride. This was the period of the Algerian War. The lettrist manifestos written by Mohamed Dahou, Cheik Ben Dhine, and Ait Diafer call for a universalist revolutionary consideration free from the nationalist cause. "We are revolutionaries because the police are the supreme force of this society." In his article "Captive Words," Tunisian situationist Mustapha Khayati warns of the banalization of revolutionary language, both in politics and in everyday life, and calls for "the real liberation of language" from its bureaucratization. Lastly, volume two of *Internationale Situationniste* includes Abdelhafid Khatib's "Essai de description psychogéographique des Halles" (Attempt at a psychogeographical description of Les Halles), which, as the editors note, is incomplete because the author was subject to police harassment and arrested several times.

Let us pause for a moment on one of Khatib's sentences: "Psychogeography, the study of the laws and precise effects of a consciously or unconsciously elaborated geographical environment acting directly on affective behavior, subsumes itself,



Algeria and Writing, photograph in the essay "All the King's Men,"
International Situationniste, no. 8, January 1963.

Spain in the Heart, photograph in the essay "I Must Admit That Everything
Continues," *International Situationniste*, no. 9, August 1964.

according to Asger Jorn's definition, as the science fiction of urbanism." The science fiction of urbanism. That is an obvious explanation for the police officers who observe the Gypsies squatting Wittgenstein House. Rather than looking for anthropological clues, the futuristic narrative can help them figure out what is going on there. Many of the forms in which the house is occupied are in line with that futuristic aesthetic, even though their prejudices lead the police to see the Gypsies as anachronistic, primitive, and wretched in all respects. This is a classic trope in postmodern science fiction: in films such as *Blade Runner*, *Mad Max*, and other apocalyptic works, the nomadic peddler who drifts through the city is always based on the model of the Gypsy, the junkman, the scrap dealer, the roving lumpen. Much has been made of the fact that Ralph Rumney and the London Psychogeographical Association (of which he was apparently president and sole member) coincided in time with the new wave of British science fiction, with writers such as Brian Aldiss, J. G. Ballard, and Michael Moorcock. Many academic studies, for instance, consider Ballard's *Concrete Island* to be a psychogeographic guide. And Robert Silverberg's *The Star of the Gypsies*—an American science fiction novel that is admittedly strongly influenced by these British writers—even takes all of the psychogeographic babble and presents it as an ethnography of its space Gypsies. Fredric Jameson argues that science fiction has the political capacity to meditate on, test, and imagine future utopias and dystopias. In his investigations he uses what he calls "cognitive mapping," a term borrowed from geographer Kevin Lynch. He argues that the preeminence of science fiction as a genre has to do with space.³ Time is, quite literally, anachronistic. Space is what needs to be invented anew. This is not just about architecture and urbanism; it is a political matter.

"During a stay in London in 1952–1953, Constant mainly devoted himself to exploring the city. His work became more austere and abstract. He occupied himself less with painting and to an increasing extent with spatial problems." H. van Haaren offers this simple description in his 1966 monograph on the Dutch artist. Constant had traveled to London at the invitation of the Arts Council of Great Britain, whose governing body included Henry Moore and Ben Nicholson, for example. Although Constant's encounter with Rumney in London might have been merely anecdotal, they do appear to have known each other from the days of Cobra and tachisme. Rumney had lived in Paris and northern Italy for years, so their meeting in London was not entirely coincidental. Asger Jorn apparently introduced them. We do not know much about those London excursions, not even whether they were *dérives*. One of the few things we do know is that they visited the Gypsy caravans of Latimer Road, the area that inspired Ballard's *Concrete Island*.

A mix of primitivism and futurism infused Constant's work during this period, a shift from the temporality of painting to the spatiality of architecture. Think of

the final paintings he produced in Paris on the subject of war. These are influenced by the Pablo Picasso of *Guernica* and the Joan Miró of *Aidez l'Espagne* (Help Spain), for example. Like Constant, Jorn, who had worked at the Pavilion of the Republic where *Guernica* was exhibited for the first time in 1937, was a member of the Communist Party and shared the ideology of Cobra. Jorn was almost certainly the one who introduced Constant to the lettrist group that included Guy Debord. In a monograph about Constant published by the Bibliothèque d'Alexandrie in Paris in 1959, the artist compares a Cobra painting dating from 1951, *Le monde en décomposition* (The Decaying World), with the *Monument de la reconstruction* (Monument of the Reconstruction) set up in Rotterdam in 1955 after Constant had created his playgrounds with Aldo van Eyck. The extensive New Babylon series of works was the integration of these two poles: expressionist and constructivist, phenomenological and productivist, primitivist and concrete, et cetera, et cetera.

The meetings between Constant and Debord in Paris took place against the backdrop of the Algerian Kabyles. Both “Théorie de la dérive” (Theory of the *dérive*) and “Deux comptes rendus de dérive” (Accounts of two *dérives*), two texts by Debord published in number 9 of *Les lèvres nues* in 1956 describe the whole thing. They also include a variant on Algerian nightlife. The bars and dives that the Spanish republican exiles ran in Paris were among the Lettrists’ favorite haunts. “They abandon the canal at a familiar lock directly north of the Pont du Landy, and arrive at 6.30 pm in a Spanish bar regularly referred to by the workers who frequent it as the “Tavern of the Revolvers.” In his experiences with the situationists, Juan Goytisolo, who was in contact with them in 1955, always acknowledged their fondness for working-class cafes and for the North African and Moroccan side of Paris.⁴ He also mentions several times the situationists’ penchant for the Spanish anarchism of the defeated republicans. But drunkenness prevails. We will never know the role cheap alcohol played in that heightened awareness. The situationists’ defense of the anarchists and the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (Workers’ Party of Marxist Unification, or POUM) against the communist repression in Barcelona in 1937, in the midst of the Spanish Civil War, is somewhat allegorical. Like the repression of the Paris Commune and, later, the repression of the African American riots in Watts, Los Angeles—another defeat—the defense of the anarchists became legendary, an individual myth with which to celebrate a political moment that was both exciting and pessimistic. Debord describes how the anarchists and POUM loved to celebrate, replete with alcohol, shouting soldiers’ songs, always in defeat: “There’s a valley in Spain called Jarama / It’s a place that we all know so well, / It is there that we wasted our manhood / and most of our old age as well.” Years later, in May 1968, Debord adapted “Ay Carmela!”—a popular Spanish song that refers to the 1937 anarchist defeat in Barcelona—as a

détournement (digression was a standard practice in flamenco and popular Spanish *coplas*). The song was eventually recorded by Vanessa Hachloun and Jacques Marchais. This was also the spirit of the declaration (strongly criticized, even by Debord) that Giuseppe Pinot Gallizio drafted at the Situationist Laboratory in Alba against Modest Cuixart, whom the situationists accused of having informed against the painters Antonio Saura and Antoni Tàpies to Francisco Franco's police.

Constant settled easily into that scene. He played flamenco guitar to a reasonable standard, an interest he shared with Jorn and Pinot Gallizio. The rowdiness that always goes with a good night of revelry, the Spanish bars, the sharing with women, the music, and the political defiance that go hand in hand with a particular lifestyle were the affective factors that bound him to Debord and his friends. The warmth of this involvement, the network of affects woven around the revelry, is important, because that bond held together aesthetic, artistic, and political positions that did not entirely coincide. I am not suggesting that the scenes were totally coincident, that they shared the exact moment. What I am suggesting is that they lived through, constructed themselves through, similar situations.

This amalgam of experience is also important to understanding the way certain affects worked, those that moved through the flamenco, Spanish, and Gypsy realms. Francisco de Goya, Picasso, Miró, the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (National Confederation of Labor) anarchists, the Popular Front Republic, Gypsies, Niño Ricardo—all operate as an extensive field, full of symbolic borrowings, with an ambiguity that is inherent to the thing that produces it. As Khayati suggested, words are to be distrusted, semiotics is mere trickery, or at least an illusion. Debord's companion Alice Becker-Ho captures this admirably in her works published in the 1990s on the jargon of Gypsies, whom she treats not as an ethnic group or even a people but as a class: the dangerous classes that Marx permanently discredited with the dubious label "lumpen proletariat." Her books *Les Princes du jargon*, *L'essence du jargon*, and *Du jargon, héritier en bastardie* are studies of the jargon created by the subaltern classes to evade control, to evade power. And to evade its main device, language, particularly official national languages. Her study goes from the *coquillard* gangs that François Villon lived among to the Gypsies who are members of gangs in Mexico and the United States, by way of flamenco, Spanish, and Andalusian Gypsies. Closer to our own time and within the Germanic sphere of influence, in the Netherlands, Germany, and Austria Gypsy survivors of the National Socialist terror are trying to replace the use of the term *Zigeuner* (Gypsy)—which has connotations of carouser, criminal, or swindler—with the name of particular ethnic or cultural groups, such as Roma and Sinti. In Spain, for a variety of reasons, the term *gitano*, which probably comes from *egipciano* (Egyptian) has



Hommage à el Niño Ricardo, 1980
[Tribute to Niño Ricardo]



Postcard from Constant to Pinot Gallizio with a dedication, 1957.

not taken on as many negative connotations. Or perhaps it has, because the controversy comes up every now and then, although without suggesting that the name “gitano” be changed. *Flamenco* is synonymous with *Gypsy* in the sense that it shares the negative characteristics of the word. People usually try to separate the music—not ethnicity in this case—as a good thing, relegating its other aspects to the past or to clichés. But the ambiguity of the term is crucial; it is the basis of the resistance of these subaltern classes to language itself. Giorgio Agamben describes this well in his critical review of the first of Becker-Ho’s books on jargon. The key issue emerges through the linking of the pair “Gypsy-argot,” which calls into question the naturalized identification of people and languages as the structural underpinning of the European political system. This characteristic of argot, or jargon, also applies to other categories; it has other semantic extensions. Applied to space, to architecture, or to urbanism, it becomes a tool that destabilizes spatial control systems, the strict regulations that determine how space is inhabited, and standard predefined housing arrangements. The Palais Idéal du Facteur Cheval, Constant’s New Babylon, and Jorn’s buildings in Albissola share this form of expression, argot, or jargon.

Constant recognized how his work for the Gypsy camp at Alba gave rise to the New Babylon project. His 1974 text *New Babylon*⁵ includes a quotation from Vaida Voevod III, president of the Communauté Mondiale Gitane (World Community of Gypsies): “We are the living symbols of a world without frontiers, a world of freedom, without weapons, where each may travel without let or hindrance from the steppes of Central Asia to the Atlantic Coast, from the high plateau of South Africa to the forests of Finland.”⁶ This is obviously science fiction. Just look at that world without frontiers on today’s geopolitical map. Tragic, indeed. The anachronistic world of Gypsies is used in fiction as a means to represent new worlds, impossible futures. And this is key to understanding the relationship between Constant (and also Pinot Gallizio, the host of the meeting) and the Gypsies of Alba. The original participants of the Experimental Laboratory organized in Alba in 1956 by the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus (which Jorn had founded in Switzerland) were Constant, Pinot Gallizio, Enrico Baj, and Piero Simondo, along with other Italian artists and a member of the Lettrist International, Gil J. Wolman. According to Constant’s account, the group visited the Gypsy camp after Debord’s arrival in December.

The futuristic atmosphere, with intimations of industrial painting and machinism, at the origins of the Gypsy camp is important. At first glance these might appear to be opposing worlds. The primitivism that the painters in the Cobra scene boasted of might seem to be rooted in Gypsy culture. Think of the first exhibition of futurist ceramics organized by the Imaginist Bauhaus in Alba, with works by Farfa and Fillia. Juxtaposing “futurism” and “ceramics” was



Pinot Gallizio, collage with photographs taken by Alban photographer Aldo Agnelli on his battle in favor of the gypsies, 1956.

Pinot Gallizio among a group of men in the gypsy camp, Alba, 1956.

Pinot Gallizio arguing with the gypsies leaders in Alba, 1956.

intended to emphasize the union of opposites that the Imaginist Bauhaus sought. The futurist group was inherently contradictory with regard to all things Spanish. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's own manifesto, his greeting or introduction to Spanish futurists, and his criticism of "pastism" and clichés about the new and the old in his extraordinary text *Spagna veloce e toro futurista*, take on complex forms. To say nothing of the attitude of more direct admirers such as Ramón Gómez de la Serna and Ernesto Giménez Caballero, who managed to offer a modernist reading of all the clichés of Spanish folklore in *Los toros, las castañuelas y la Virgen* (Bulls, castanets, and the Virgin Mary). And they were not far off the mark: chronologically, modern painting and flamenco share similar origins, for instance. And then there is Jameson, whose analysis of the reception of "modernity" and "modernism" in the Hispanic world is fundamental in this sense.⁷ At the end of the day we have returned to misunderstandings of language, jargon, dialect.

At some point, Constant addressed Pinot Gallizio as a "Gypsy prince." Pinot Gallizio also boasted of speaking the language of the Gypsies, and Debord and other situationists sent a postcard (in 1956) from the "Spanish" neighborhood of Aubervilliers to this same "Gypsy prince." Most Gypsies who passed through Alba came from the Camargue in the south of France, near the Catalan border, where they mixed up their French, Spanish, Andalusian, and Catalan origins. For instance, in the lists of Gypsies who passed through the concentration camp at Rivesaltes, in the Languedoc-Roussillon region—which was "open" during the Spanish Civil War, World War II, and the Algerian War—Spanish surnames outnumber French ones.

The gypsies in the camp at Alba were probably surprised by Constant's flamenco-playing skills. Constant even had some professional guitar experience. He was influenced by the ornate style of Sevillian guitarist Niño Ricardo, whose meticulous craftsmanship he admired. His teacher Pepe Romero, who would go on to enjoy particular success in the United States, had introduced him to that school of playing. Constant would later portray himself playing the guitar, often as an explicit tribute to Ricardo, who recorded his major record in 1955 in Paris, where he also held a great recital. Similarly, Constant does not shy away from using formal elements of the guitar—the rounded body, the neck, holes, frets, tuners—in many of his futuristic sculptures and spirals. He even emphasizes the assimilation of forms by photographing himself playing the guitar among them. The same goes for the wheel, which appears in so many of Constant's war paintings in a state of destruction, only to reappear, under construction, as a symbol of the Gypsies in the same dialectical comparison as above. In Alba, Constant presented a series of fabric patterns named after flamenco styles or *palos*: *Malagueña*, *Fandango*, *Saeta*. Later, when he visited Seville with Romero in the late 1960s and made one of his New Babylon maps, *New Babylon/Sevilla*



General view of the Experimental Laboratory, organized by the IMIB, Alba, 1956.

IMIB's Experimental Laboratory. Piero Simondo's work is in the wall. Above, Gil J. Wolman's writing on fabric, Alba, 1956.

Triana-Groep (New Babylon/Seville Triana-Group), he again wrote the name of flamenco *palos*—*Seguiriyas*, *Soleares*, *Tarantos*, and so on—around his futuristic designs. Constant's textile patterns were directly related to Pinot Gallizio's kilometers of canvas. While Pinot Gallizio's proposal to automatically paint huge rolls of canvas was a comment on the necessary industrialization of art, a kind of demographic democratization, the idea of selling pieces of it on the streets shows a familiarity with the practices of the Gypsies at the livestock market in Alba. All of the textiles produced by Pinot Gallizio or by him and others on a collective basis bear something of the Gypsy flea market about them. Many photographs show Pinot Gallizio offering the fabric for sale, mimicking the style of the Gypsies. The phrase "Toutes les toiles sont garanties *coton-pur*" ("All the fabrics are pure cotton") was written on Jorn's wall at the Politeama Corino, where an exhibition by the Imaginist Bauhaus Experimental Laboratory was held. Pinot Gallizio's involvement with the Gypsies triggered a small local conflict, which Constant's note on the origins of New Babylon eloquently explains. In Alba, where a debate on the acceptance of Gypsies was playing out in the local newspapers *Le nostre tòr* and *La famiglia Cristiana* (which went so far as to print a collage of Pinot Gallizio working with the Gypsies), the Italian painter took their side and began working with them on the construction of a "Gypsy city." An invitation was subsequently issued to Constant, who initially sent a drawing from Munich, a preliminary, "slum-like" sketch of a possible Gypsy House. Pinot Gallizio wanted to understand the production logic underlying the work, or nonwork, of the Gypsies. He invited them to participate in his work, although admittedly they viewed his paintings as something of a joke. The logic of play, of doing by playing, was illustrated in some of the fabrics dedicated to the Gypsies, such as "Gentlemen of Leisure." Both Constant and Debord were influenced by their reading of *Homo Ludens* by Dutch historian Johan Huizinga, whom Debord discovered while reading José Ortega y Gasset. On the back of one of Pinot Gallizio's industrial paintings, one of his endless canvases, Debord wrote the words *ABOLITION DU TRAVAIL ALIENÉ* (Abolition of alienated labor).

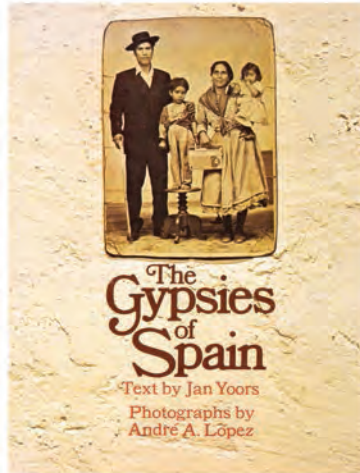
A section on Gypsies appears in another book Debord was particularly fond of, Huizinga's *The Waning of the Middle Ages*.⁸ This passage was later used by Becker-Ho in *Les princes du jargon* (The princes of jargon) (Gypsies are the "princes" of the title). Huizinga presents the Gypsies as a counterpoint to the sovereignty of princes, a kind of sovereignty subaltern to the Machiavellis and the Borgias who were to come, and Debord and the other situationists read him with great interest. Toward the end of his life Debord identified with the roaming of these defeated, subaltern princes who managed to maintain a vague sovereignty over their lives almost as if by magic. The name "New Babylon" almost certainly emerged from the conversations and close friendship that

sprung up between Constant and Debord in Alba. Curiously, Gypsies have never been included in the etymological lineage of the name. Something about *New Babylon* seems argot-like, just as its architecture and urbanism are reminiscent of jargon, of a dialectal variant—accepting the play on words that connects *dialect* and *dialectic*—of official built architecture and actual planned urbanism. Because of their magic origins, the Gypsies, “*egipcianos*” or “Egyptians,” were astrologers, erstwhile “Babylonians.” And these new Babylonians would—why not?—embody the ideals Constant mentions in his texts. The Tower of Babel, particularly the version painted by Pieter Brueghel the Elder, was one of the topoi that inspired New Babylon, through Debord. In the film *La société du spectacle* (*The Society of the Spectacle*), Brueghel’s tower appears at the end of a long diatribe on urbanism, the expulsion of the proletariat from their natural habitat, and revolution as a necessary means by which to create a new habitability. This is followed by a long scene from the film *Johnny Guitar* in which our hero, carrying a guitar rather than a gun, walks into an empty casino in the middle of the desert and orders a whiskey as he is invited to place a bet. “Who says that opposites never meet? Javanese, Sumatrans, Hindus, Chinese, Portuguese, Filipinos, Russians, Malaysians. . . . What a witch’s Sabbath! [. . .] The other place is like a kindergarten compared to this.” This dialogue from Josef von Sernberg’s *The Shanghai Gesture* ends the sequence. Yes, the world that is coming, the world of globalization, also has its subaltern princes. Debord’s reading of Spanish baroque literature, particularly Baltasar Gracián, also contributed to the origins of the term. From Lope de Vega he takes the idea of Seville as the “new Babylon,” a name that had previously been given to Rome and would later be given to the Paris of the Commune. Debord also uses some scenes from the 1929 film *Novyy Vavilon* (*The New Babylon*) by Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg from the Factory of the Eccentric Actor, based on Karl Marx’s texts on the Commune and Émile Zola’s novel *Au bonheur des dames* (*The Ladies’ Paradise*). The fabric store in Zola’s story—the New Babylon of the film—is described in architectural detail as a great tower of Babel. This overlapping of the baroque Babylon—Seville rich with American trade—and nineteenth-century Paris, with its industrial revolution and the colonial expositions, is an endless mine of digressions and *détournement* for Debord’s texts. In the autobiographical treatise *Panegyric* he writes, “I have resided in Italy and Spain, principally in Florence and Seville—in Babylon, as it was called in the Golden Age—but also in other cities that are still living, and even in the countryside.” This Spanish etymology of the New Babylon, although it may seem obvious, is rarely mentioned. Jameson probably missed the logic of resistance that also lay beneath the confusion between “modernity” and “modernism,” a dialectal means to dodge the Anglo-Saxon cultural steamroller. In his trip to Seville in the late 1960s, Constant returns to the same game. He adds a series of flamenco topoi to the New Babylon/*Sevilla Triana-Groep* map:



Jan Brueghel "the Elder," *Gypsy Gathering in a Wood*, 1612.

Film stills of *La société du spectacle*, Guy Debord, 1973.



Jan Yoors, covers of *The Gypsies*, 1967; and *The Gypsies of Spain*, 1971.

Film stills of *Camelamos naquelar*, Miguel Alcobendas and Mario Maya, 1976.

Film still of *Latcho drom*, Tony Gatlif, 1983.

Caña, Malagueña, Soleares, Alegría, Fandango, Sevillana, Seguiriyas, and Tarantos. In his only account of that journey, Romero writes about an insistence on wandering through Babylonian Seville, exploring the ruins of its past baroque splendor. Near the end of *Constant: Les trois espaces*, a long interview with Jean Clarence Lambert published in 1992, Constant, precisely after the section on the New Babylon, calls for silence, as if he had nothing left to say. Then he picks up a flamenco guitar and starts to sing an Andalusian *copla*, a *soleá de Triana*: “Se hundió la babilonia / porque le faltó el cimiento/ pero nuestro querer no se acaba / aunque falte el firmamento.”⁹ Oh, the language of the New Babylonians! “El día del terremoto grande llegó / el agüita hasta arriba / Pero no pudo llegar / donde llegó mi fatiga.”¹⁰ A language that is sung, because all true jargon is song, poem. “¡Puente de Triana! / se cayó la barandilla / y el coche que la llevaba.”¹¹

Even after Constant had left the Situationist International and clashed with Debord over the definition of unitary urbanism, their interest in Gypsies and Spanish and flamenco culture remained a curious thread that bound them to each other. One of the books that most influenced Debord and Becker-Ho was *The Gypsies*, published in 1965 by Jan Yoors, a Flemish artist who made tapestries and began to exhibit them in London in the 1950s.¹² His gouaches and tapestries depicting the persecution of Gypsies during World War II clearly echo Constant’s 1952 series of lithographs, *8 x La guerre*, also about the war. I do not know whether Constant and Debord ever met Yoors, but their reading of his work is present in both Constant’s paintings and in Debord’s texts and activities after the 1970s. Think of Constant’s paintings, in different styles, such as *The Gypsies* and *Nostalgia* (both from 1982), *Flamenco* (1997), and the long series of *Guitarists* and the *Orpheus* series begun in the 1970s. And think of Debord’s last collaboration with French-Algerian director Tony Gatlif, who started his career as a Romani filmmaker under the influence of the 1976 film *Camelamos naquerar* by Miguel Alcobendas and Gypsy dancer Mario Maya. Debord designed the political campaign that preceded the premiere of Gatlif’s 1983 feature film *Les princes* (The princes). Arguments about the uses of play, which were later reinforced by Yoors’s book, are at the root of the diatribe on unitary urbanism, a critique of the ideas endorsed by Le Corbusier, Siegfried Giedion, Josep Lluís Sert, and Walter Gropius in the Athens Charter, which became hegemonic in post-World War II architecture and urbanism. Constant was basically proposing the use of radical architectural practices and urbanism as a base from which to generate hypotheses for dwelling, circulation, and spatial relations. Meanwhile, Debord and the others who remained in the Situationist International proposed critically reusing existing spaces and politically and socially questioning the city and its habitability under capitalism and socialism, the two versions of the diffuse, integrated domain of the spectacle. Looking at

the film *The Society of the Spectacle* and the testamentary documentary *Debord, son art et son temps* (Debord: His art and his time), one does not have difficulty imagining the place the New Babylon models, photomontages, and collages would have had—their contribution to the spectacle, we might say. The conflict over the exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam offers us another insight into their opposing views on art institutions. Constant saw museums as a means of legitimization and an opportunity for reform and thought they could become radical institutions. But Debord and his followers believed that working closely with a museum could be described only as collaborationism—in the harsh sense of the term in postwar France—and that institutional collaboration was pointless unless the aim was to oust the institution itself. Documents from the time, particularly those related to the Situationist International, many of which are officially anonymous but were almost certainly written by Michele Bernstein, also reflect these discrepant attitudes to play. Debord was strict about the dangers of play becoming a kind of “brutist” defense of the world of children, the paradise of childhood. In keeping with his reading of Charles Fourier, he considered play to be a serious, adult activity, and was by no means amenable to the educational uses of entertainment that would make it productive. Play as such had to be unproductive. So the idea was to propose a tragic kind of play to go up against the more lighthearted approach of the playgrounds Constant had worked on with van Eyck. The Team X group that formed in 1953 at the ninth congress of CIAM and included van Eyck, Peter Smithson, and Allison Smithson—who were also part of the 1956 Independent Group, to which the Experimental Laboratory at Alba viewed itself as an alternative—promoted the idea of play in all areas as a diffuse reformer of the harshness of modern functionalism arising from capitalism. In their questioning, Provo members, including Roel van Duyn—who had undoubtedly been exposed to the influence of both Constant and van Eyck—also defended the tragic in the field of play, and not just its lighthearted, festive aspects. In *Joyful Cruelty* the French philosopher Clément Rosset, another great flamenco enthusiast, also addresses that element of resistance—even political resistance—that the tragic brings into the game of life, even in the case of the irresponsible mode in which to live is to play.¹³

This is as far as the Viennese police got in their reading to try to understand the changes that had taken place at Wittgenstein House. The Gypsies had been busy for a number of days with what appeared to be a party, although they were by no means distracted given that all of the authorities’ attempts to take advantage of the festive atmosphere and break into the building had been repelled without in any way diminishing the atmosphere of revelry.

The police returned the dossiers, many of them unread, to the different university departments—architecture, anthropology, the arts—thanking them

for their efforts. As for the university departments, they accepted what was returned to them (digital and print documents) with redoubled interest because of the notes, underlined sections, and comments left by the security experts who had examined them. A comment by Debord, probably apocryphal, had been energetically underlined: “capitalism permeates Gypsy life through and through in the most savage manner, without altering their way of life.” Some comments listed a whole series of “restraining devices” that Gypsies allegedly knew how to get around in order to continue to be “ungovernable”—the words in inverted commas and written in red. An annotation in one of the margins refers to institutionality, to the possibility of moving in and out of the institution without endorsing it, excluding the institution’s influence from their “way-of-life,” with the words separated by hyphens as if it were a philosophical concept. The phrase was probably also meant as a comment on the squatting of the building. By then, the Gypsies had been living in Wittgenstein House for seven months.

1. "The eastern part is divided vertically into two covered floors plus the part of the terracing for the aerodrome. By means of furniture acting as dividers, the floors are arranged into a great number of rooms—communicating horizontally as well as vertically, by means of stairs—whose varied ambiances are continually changed by Situationist teams, in conjunction with the technical services. Intellectual games, above all, are practiced there. The western part appears immediately more complicated. There are two labyrinth-houses, one large and one small (L and M), which take up and develop the ancient forces of architectural confusion: the water effects (G), the circus (H), the great ballroom (N), the white plaza (F) beneath which is suspended the green plaza, which enjoys a splendid view of the freeway traffic that passes below." Constant, "Description of the Yellow Zone," *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 4 (June 1960).

2. "Other canonical references of urban theory, touched on by OTRI [the Israeli Armed Forces Operation Theory Research Institute] are the Situationist practices of *dérive* (a method of drifting through the different ambiances of the city that the Situationists referred to as psychogeography) and *détournement* (the adaptation of buildings to new sets of uses or purposes, other than those they were designed to perform). These ideas were conceived by Guy Debord and other members of the Situationist International as part of a general approach that was intended to challenge the built hierarchy of the capitalist city. They aimed to break down distinctions between private and public, inside and outside, use and function, to replace private space with a fluid, volatile and 'borderless' public surface, through which movement would be unexpected." Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso, 2007).

3. "Then there is the question of what I call the 'spatial' realm. I think that there are simplistic ways of talking about this and I don't want to add to that, but in general terms we could say that major modern works, particularly in literature but even in painting, address the

question of time and memory. Or to be more precise, they address the question of why our sense of time, our sense of the past, has deteriorated. Somebody once told me—and I don't know if this is true, if it is, it's very interesting, but it's a good fable in any case—that there are more people alive on the face of the earth today than could ever have existed in the whole of history. In this sense, the present becomes more important than the past, and as our sense of historical time changes so does our sense of existential sense of time." Hugo Romero, Maggie Schmitt, Amador Fernández Savater, and Ramón del Castillo, "Posmodernidad y globalización: Entrevista e Frederick Jameson," *Archipiélago*, no. 63 (2004).

4. "My casual acquaintance, I don't know how or when, with a couple of very young intellectuals contributed to my timid, inexperienced detachment from the official clichés of Paris and its great names: Guy Debord and his companion at the time, Michèle Bernstein, lived in a hotel on the rue Racine adjacent to the Boulevard Saint-Michel and published a journal called *Potlatch*, organ of their tiny Situationist International. Bitter, implacable enemies of the whole literary establishment—enveloped in internecine quarrels and ferocious splits that at times humorously mimicked Breton's terrorist language and the Stalinist trials—they possessed an all-embracing curiosity and an acute, demystifying vision of things. Their admiration for the *Palais idéal*, *facteur Cheval* and delight in visiting places and settings as far as possible from the tourist routes and famous monuments and vistas matched my developing taste and provided an intellectual justification that it lacked. In their healthy, consistent contempt for everything bourgeois and well-off, Debord and his friend used to visit the Arabic cafés that were then located in the rue Mouffetard and the back streets of Maubert-Mutualité next to the Seine and one day they took me by bus from the Gare de l'Est to the proletarian suburb of Aubervilliers, a dive frequented by old Spanish republican exiles, whose walls and owner I think were filmed by Carné and Prévert in their beautiful film on the

poor children in the district.” Juan Goytisolo, *Forbidden Territory and Realms of Strife* (London: Verso, 2003).

5. “For many a year the Gypsies who stopped awhile in the little Piedmontese town of Alba were in the habit of camping beneath the roof that, once a week, on Saturday, housed the livestock market. There they lit their fires, hung their tents from the pillars to protect or isolate themselves, improvised shelters with the aid of boxes and planks left behind by the traders. The need to clean up the marketplace every time the Zingari passed through had led the town council to forbid them access. In compensation, they were assigned a bit of grassland on the banks of the Tamaro, the little river that goes through the town: the most miserable of patches! It’s here that in December 1956 I went to see them in the company of the painter Pinot Gallizio, the owner of this uneven, muddy, desolate terrain, who’d given it to them. In the space between the carts, fenced in with planks and oil cans, they had created an enclosure, a ‘gypsy town’. That was the day I conceived the scheme for a permanent encampment for the gypsies of Alba and that project is the origin of the series of maquettes of New Babylon. Of a New Babylon where, under one roof, with the aid of moveable elements, a shared residence is built; a temporary, constantly remodelled living area; a camp for nomads on a planetary scale.” Constant, *New Babylon: A Nomadic Town* (The Hague: Haags Gemeentemuseum, 1974), 27.

6. Ibid.

7. “It is not only the sudden reimmersion in history and its chilly waters that makes up the shock here; it is also the unexpected appearance of a new actor, a new lexical player: the epithet *modern*, *le moderne*, *die Moderne*. Once you remember to give this new term the self-sufficiency that it is due, the status of modernism itself abruptly changes: ‘limiting ourselves to the technical use of the term “modernism” in connection with American literature, we are obliged to observe that until 1960 or even 1970 it is exceedingly infrequent by comparison with its relative “modern”, which is, for its part, omnipresent.’ The point

can be reinforced by the strategic use of the word ‘modern’ in Le Corbusier’s CIAM (Congrès international de l’architecture moderne) in the early 1930s, or in the development of American poetry and its programmatisation by Allen Tate in the 1920s. Our tripartite scheme was made up of substantives in structural opposition to each other; the adjective now throws a monkey wrench into the machinery. (As for the first uses of the term ‘modernist’ in Swift and Rousseau, along with its various religious versions, these seem to have been largely reserved for invective.) Would it not then be possible, and even desirable, to separate out the various national traditions, and to identify a certain order and logic specific to each one? Thus, even if you decide to agree that Baudelaire’s inaugural concept of *modernité* simply means aesthetic modernism in the French tradition, there remains the scandal of Spanish usage. In fact, it is the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío who first disseminates the term *modernismo* in 1888, where it is clearly enough a synonym for a style elsewhere identified as *symbolism* or *Jugendstil*. Spanish thus marks some first break much more visibly than other languages, but finds itself constricted by its own historical precocity when it comes to identifying the ‘second’ break (associated variously with futurism, the revolutionary year 1913, the machine age, and so forth). A debate subsequently rages within Spanish criticism, which hesitates between the first, now archaic, and more strictly historicizing use of Darío, and an enlargement, by fiat, of the term’s meaning to include everything which, more modern, has come to seem essentially modern.” Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002).

8. “The familiar image of Fortune’s wheel from which kings are falling with their crowns and their sceptres took a living shape in the person of many an expelled prince, roaming from court to court, without means, but full of projects and still decked with the splendour of the marvellous East whence he had fled—the king of Armenia, the king of Cyprus, before long the emperor of Constantinople. It is not

surprising that the people of Paris should have believed in the tale of the Gypsies, who presented themselves in 1427, 'a duke and a count and ten men, all on horseback,' while others, to the number of 120, had to stay outside the town. They came from Egypt, they said; the pope had ordered them, by way of a penance for their apostasy, to wander around for seven years, without sleeping in a bed; there had been 1200 of them, but their king, their queen, and all the others had died on the way; as a mitigation the pope had ordered that every bishop and abbot was to give them ten pounds tournois. The people of Paris came in great numbers to see them, and have their fortunes told by women who eased them of their money 'by magic art or in other ways.'" Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (Amsterdam, 1927).

9. "Babylon collapsed / Because it was without foundations / But our love will never end / Even without the firmament."

10. "The day of the big earthquake / the water rose up high / But it could not rise / as high as my weariness."

11. "Triana Bridge! / the guardrail fell / and so did the car that carried it."

12. "The same afternoon, uncomprehending, I had watched Pulika playing with one of his small grandsons, Palko, the son of our Yojo. Pulika sat half crouching on an upturned bucket by the log fire. Little Palko stood between his knees, leaning with his elbows on Pulika's sturdy thighs. Occasionally the child pulled up his legs and swung nonchalantly or gravely observed his grandfather smoking. Pulika leaned over and loudly whispered in his ear, pointing at Tshaya who crouched nearby cleaning some vegetables. Half reluctantly, the child fairly shouted in baby talk something which to him was a bad or naughty word. Tshaya pretended at first to ignore him but Pulika encouraged the child to persist in teasing her. These words—like *kula* or *pulpa*—had no particular meaning except as a symbolic release of pent-up displeasure or of mockery, but when repeatedly directed at one person they were considered to be provocative. Tshaya looked up and threateningly shook her open

hand in a chopping motion. Still prodded by Pulika, little Palko repeated his words and Tshaya pretended increasing anger, till she took the trouble to get up and come over to hit the child and the grandfather both. The child turned to Pulika for protection, which he gave with mock exaggeration. The insult was repeated endlessly and as the child displayed less fear, Tshaya gradually became more violent. The boy received more of the mock slaps and thus, in playfulness, lost his fear of them. There were bouts of angry, protesting cries as Tshaya hit him harder than expected, but the 'lesson' was repeated until the child was able to continue insulting independently of his reasonable fear of immediate consequences. This entire mock battle was controlled by tacit understanding between the grown-ups and was never allowed to get out of control. The purpose of this game was to teach the child not to do or refrain from doing anything because of fear of physical pain, and to prevent him from developing a cowardly disposition. The only form of discipline the Lowara recognised ultimately was self-discipline based on understanding, or in other words a discipline of responsibility. To the Lowara, fear was the symbolic attribute of *Beng* or Evil, because it destroyed man's soul." Jan Yoors, *The Gypsies* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), ch. 10.

13. "In *Asterix in Spain*, some gypsies invite Asterix and Obelix to dance with them: 'Come around the campfire, let's celebrate! Let's have fun!' And the singer proceeds to sing a chorus that is neither happy nor fun: 'Oh, what misfortune to have been born! Mother, why have you done this to me?' The characters jump directly from an affirmation of life to a defense of death. The same—but in the opposite direction—can be said of Pierre Sandoz's last line in Émile Zola's *The Masterpiece* 'Let's go to work', in response to Claude Lantier's tragic statement a few lines earlier: 'It is all for nothing. . . [. . .] When the earth falls to dust in space like a withered walnut, our works won't even be a speck among the rest!' So Goscinnny and Uderzo, the authors of *Asterix in Spain* instinctively understood the deep bond between the joy of living and the

tragic sense of life in Spanish folklore, which is to say, in the deep roots of Spain. In this specific case they are talking about Andalusian folklore, about *flamenco* and *cante jondo*, but they could easily be referring to Spanish folklore as a whole, particularly to all things related to the Aragonese *jota*, which I believe expresses as powerfully if not more that mysterious, essential connection between true *joie de vivre* and an intimate, uninterrupted knowledge of death. The fact that the intensity of joy is directly proportional to the cruelty of knowledge is undoubtedly a general truth. I am nonetheless pleased to state here that in Spain this truth encounters an exceptional field of expression, and to confess that it was precisely in Spain that I had the opportunity, more than

forty years ago, to ascertain its depth and scope for the first time. If joy is never vulgar in Spain, as Roland-Manuel writes in his treatise on Manuel de Falla, this is precisely because it is always accompanied by the sparkle *to the contrary* given to it by the cruel sentiment of the absurdity of all existence, which protects it from all illusion, and from all complacency or commitment. Despite intensifying the joy of living, it does not forget that, as Bichat suggested, living will never be anything other than a miraculous resistance to death. Therein lies the secret of its power and of its elegance.” Clément Rosset, *Joyful Cruelty: Towards a Philosophy of the Real*, trans. David F. Bell (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1993).



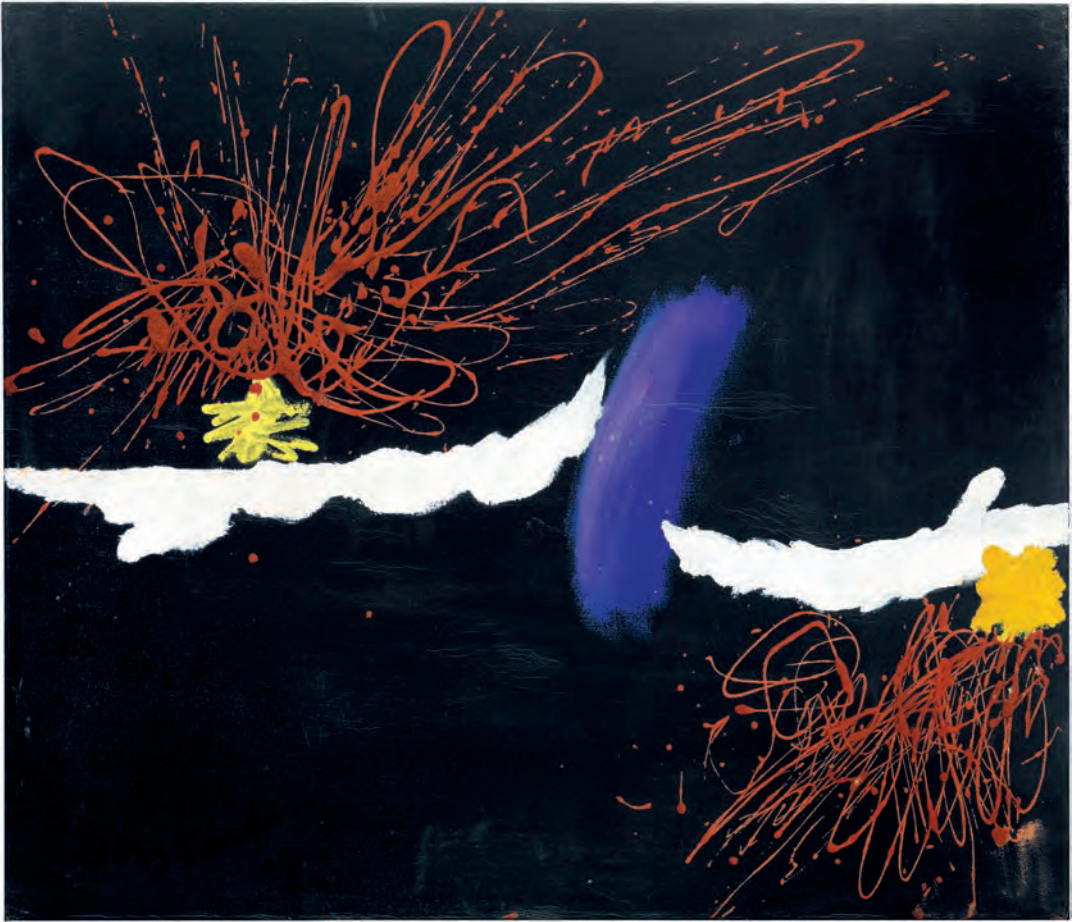
Fandango
1951

Man met gitaar
[Man with Guitar]
1951





Compositie I (Alba)
[Composition I (Alba)]
1956



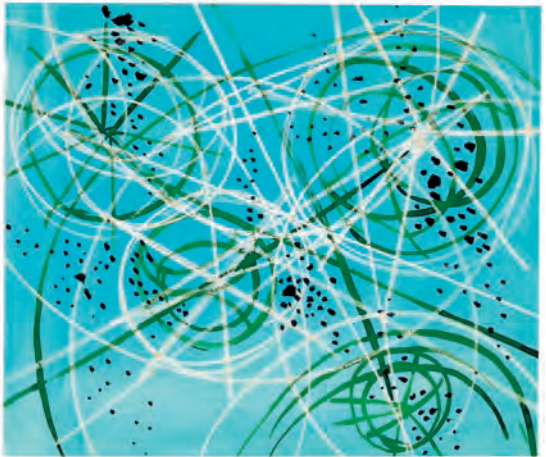
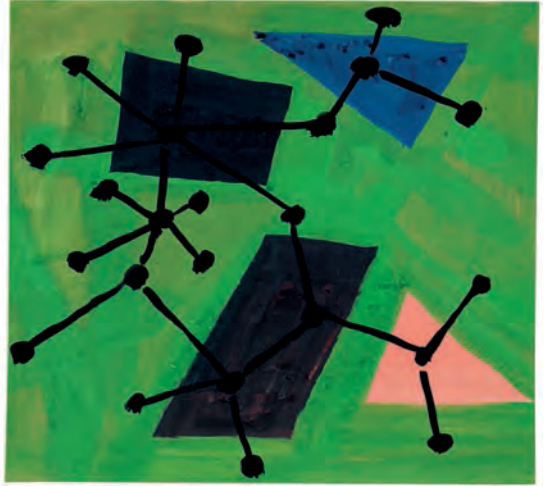
Compositie II (Alba)
[Composition II (Alba)]
1956

Untitled (Alba)
1956





De lansen (Souvenir d'Uccello)
[The Lances (Souvenir d'Uccello)]
1956



Stofontwerp Saeta
[Design for Cloth Saeta]
ca. 1956

Stofontwerp Fandango
[Design for Cloth Fandango]
ca. 1956

Stofontwerp Malagueña
[Design for Cloth Malagueña]
ca. 1956

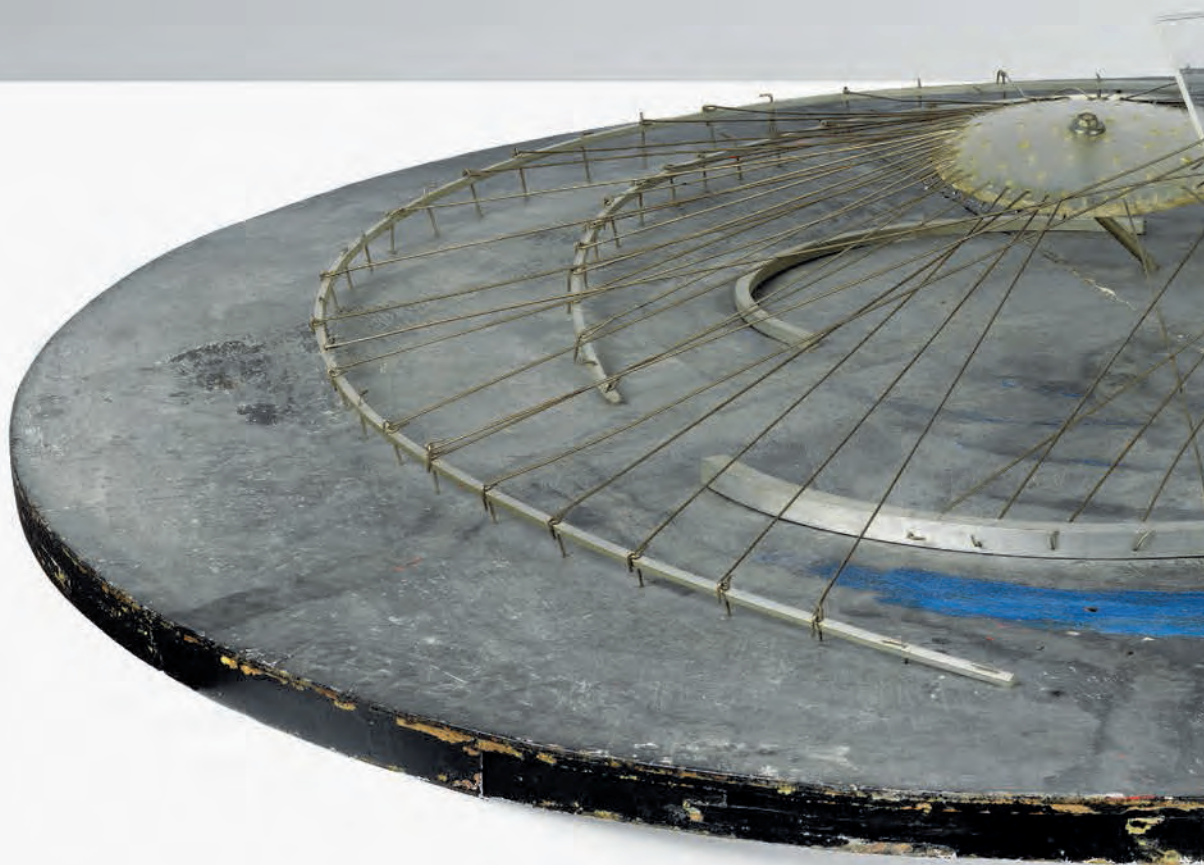


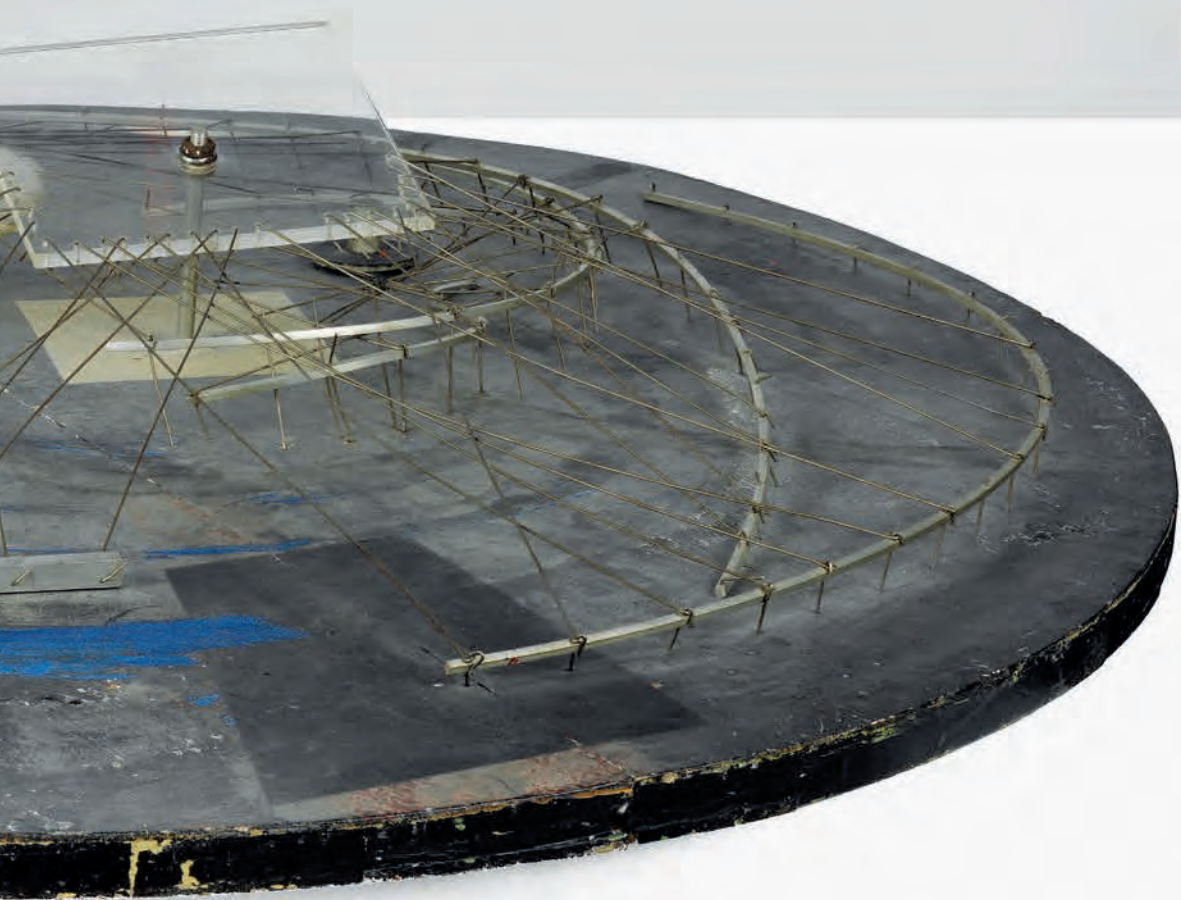
Stad (Alba)
[City (Alba)]
1956



De zoon
[The Sun]
1956

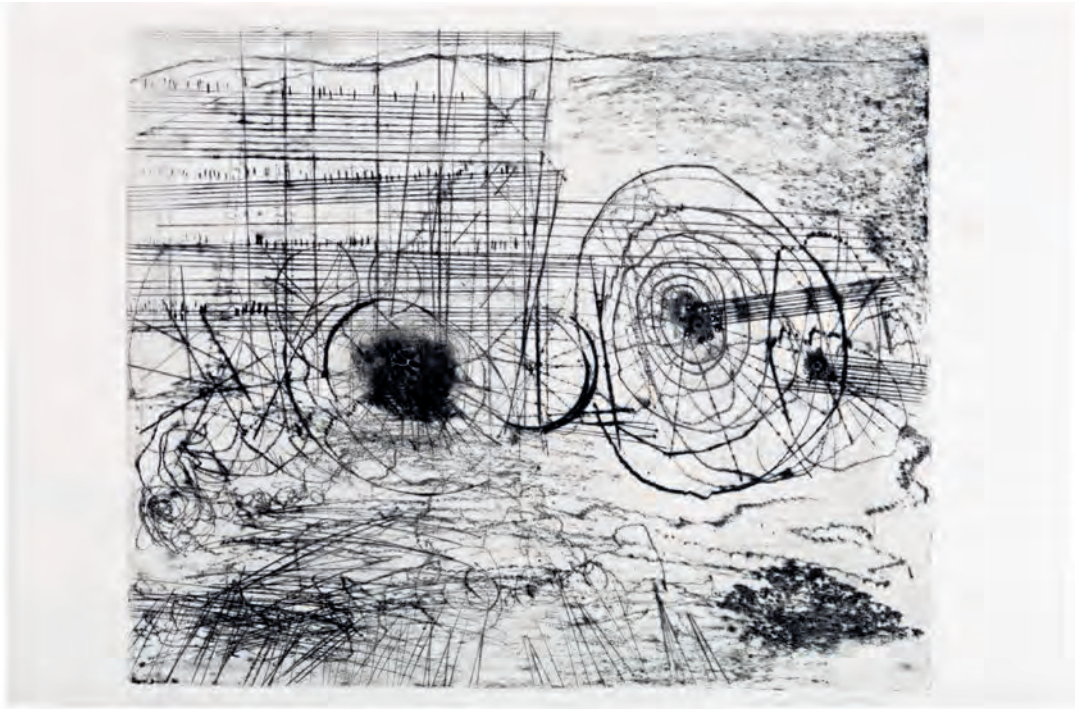
Ontwerp voor een zigeunerkamp
[Design for a Gypsy Camp]
1956



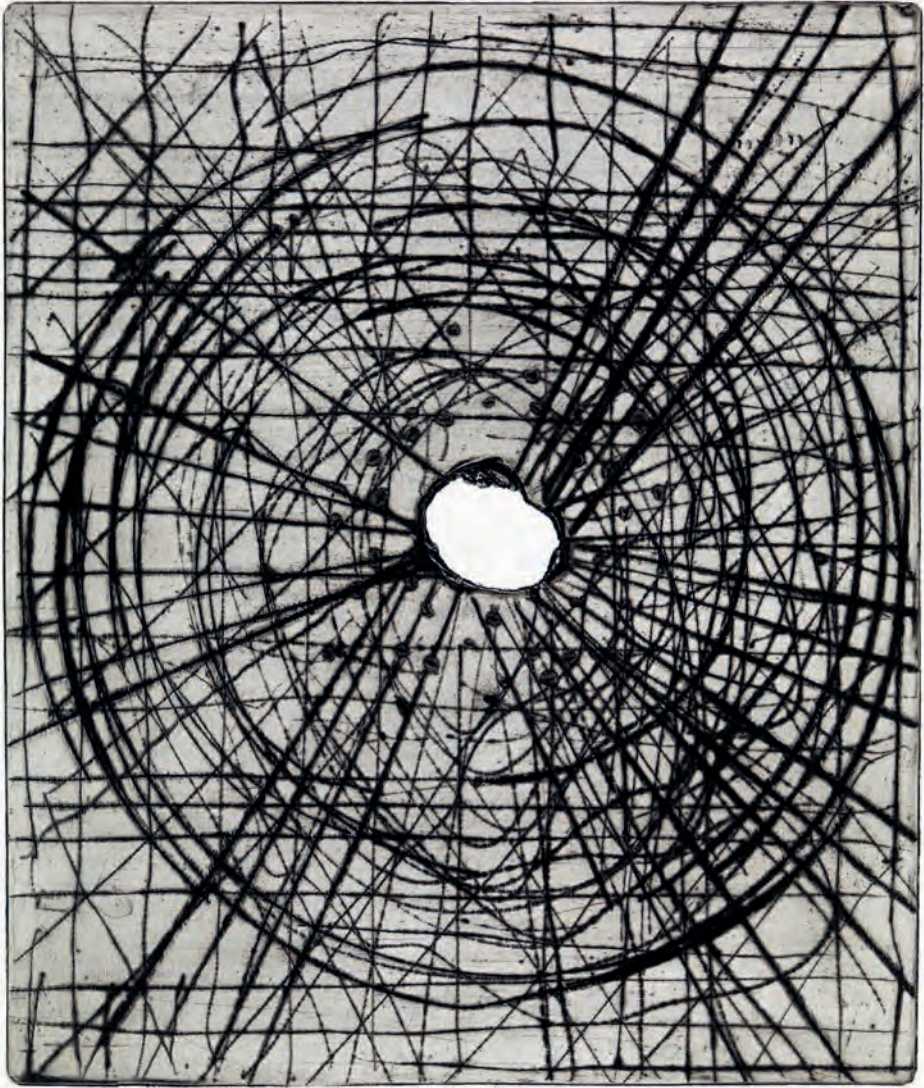


Ruimtecircus
[Space Circus]
1958

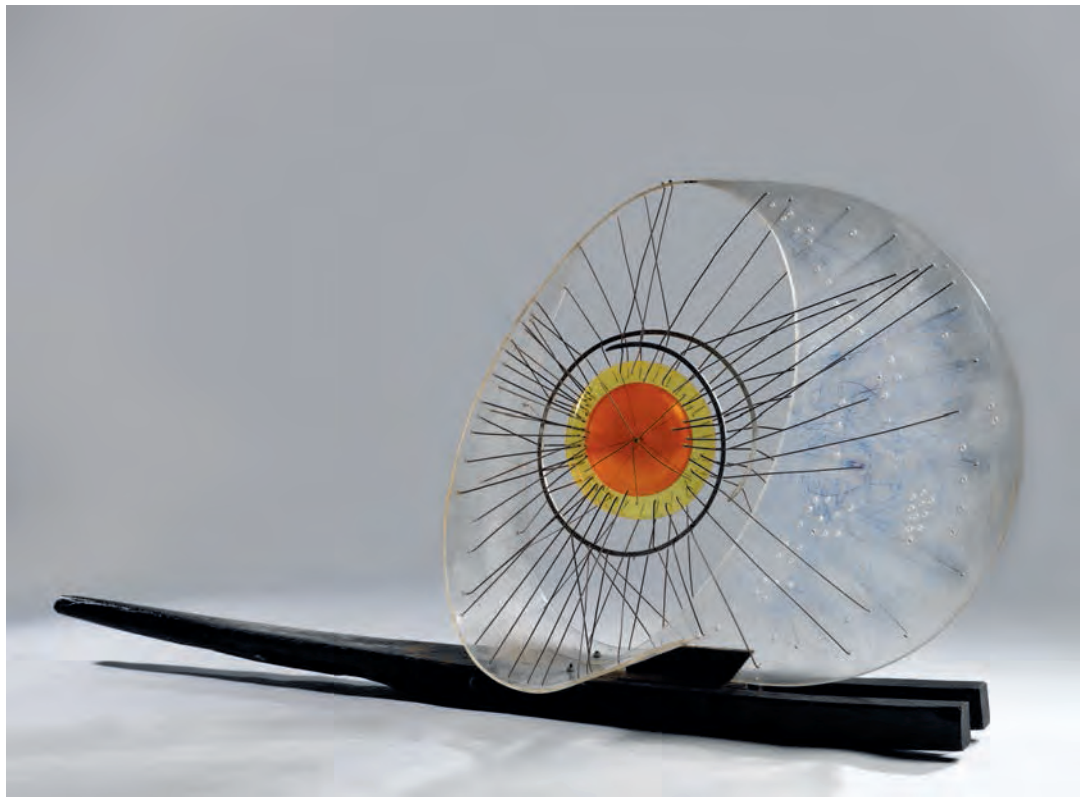




Kunstmatig landschap
[Artificial Landscape]
1961



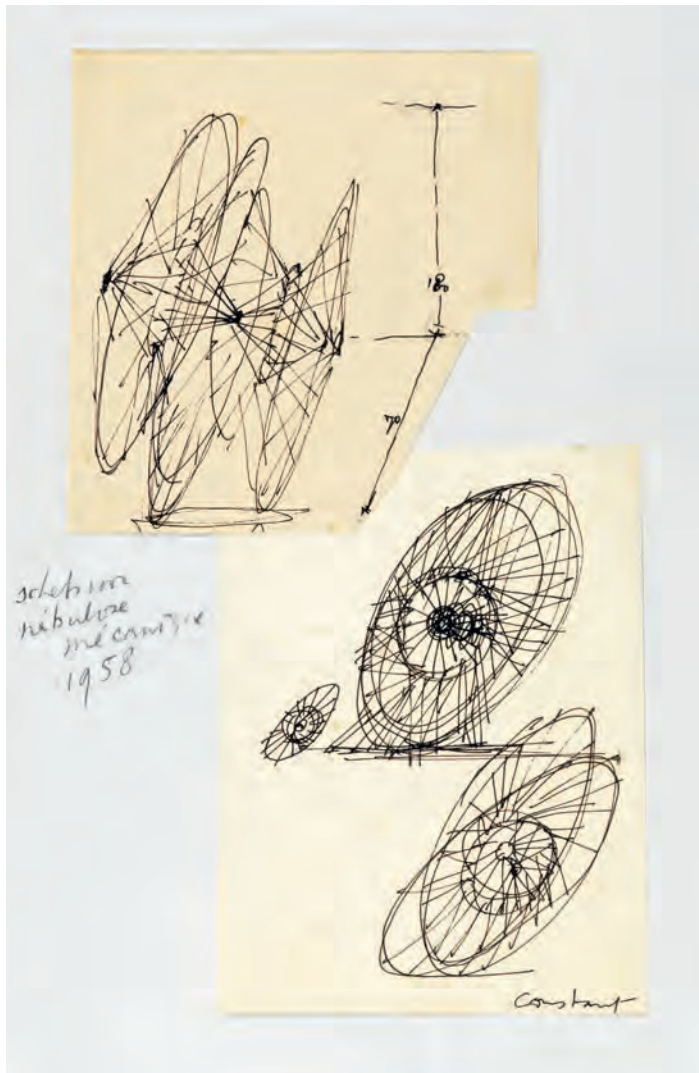
Divergerende stralen
[Divergent Rays]
1961



Het Zonneschip
[Sun Vessel]
1956

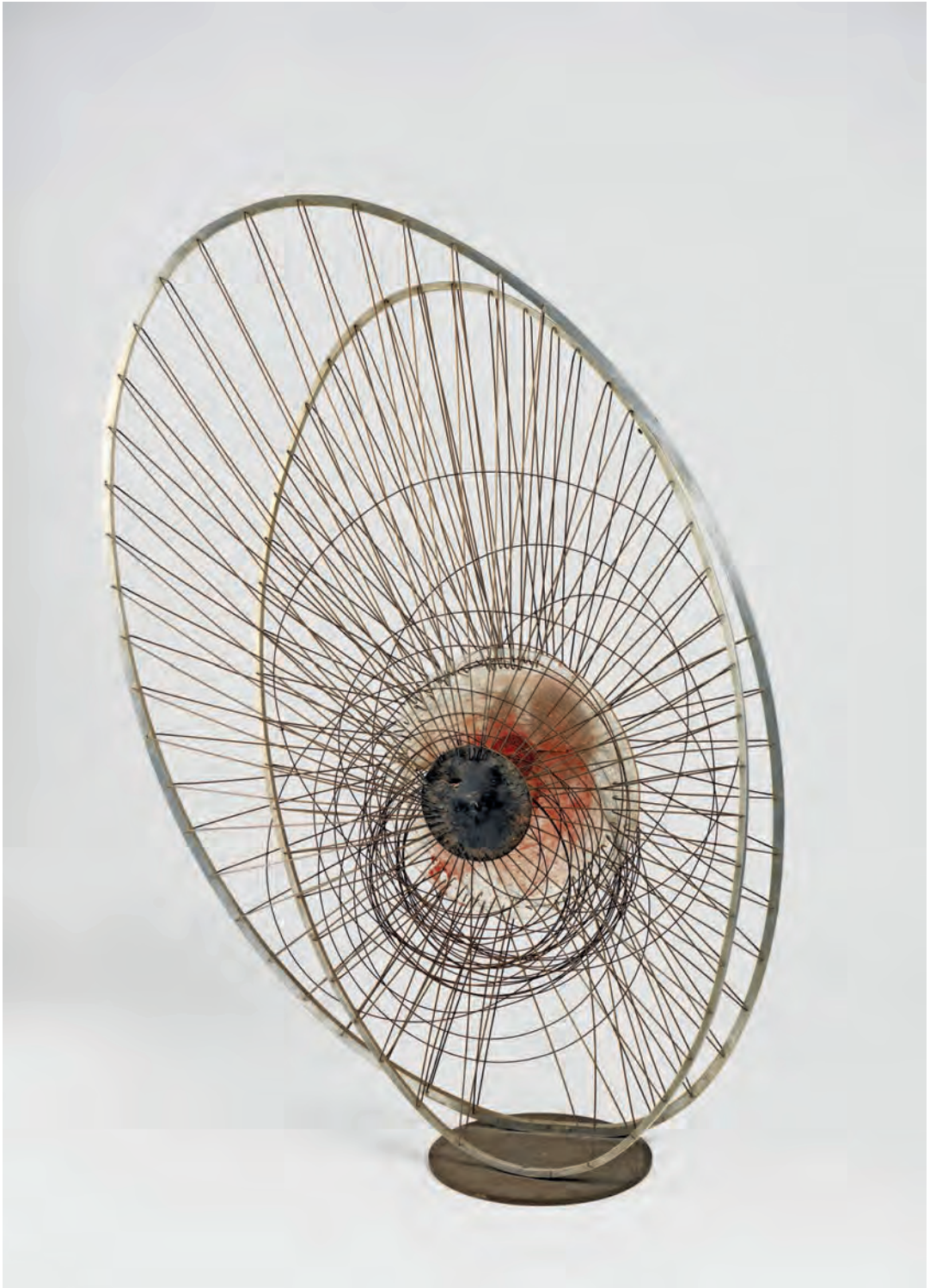


Nébulose mécanique
1958



Schets voor Nébuleuse mécanique
[Sketch for Nébuleuse mécanique]
1958

Nébuleuse mécanique
1958



Aart Klein, Constant playing guitar in his studio, seated high on a ladder, surrounded by his space sculptures, 1962.







Paysage artificiel
[Artificial Landscape]
1963



Fiesta gitana
[Gipsy Celebration]
1964



La fin de la fête
[The End of the Festival]
1977



Le concert champêtre
[The Country Concert]
1995



Los guerrilleros
[The Guerrilla Fighters]
1980



Nostalgia
1982

Extreme Hospitality

Mark Wigley

What is the architecture of hospitality? What kind of space offers shelter and opportunity to people without imposing itself on them? The simplest thought of architecture is the idea of offering a shelter that allows people to live together. This gesture is not one form of hospitality among many others. It is the very origin of hospitality. Architecture likes to think of itself as the first host, creating the space for social life, even the possibility of social life. It is an ethical act before it is a practical act. Hospitality is genuine openness to the stranger, embracing the risk of the other—of people, actions, and ideas that are different, unfamiliar, changing, confusing, or unknown. This risk of the other brings the possibility of companionship, discussion, play, pleasure, affection, friendship, education, sharing, and solidarity but also the possibility, even inevitability, of antagonism and violence. To invite the other in is to learn and love but also to be conflicted and hurt. This invited violence never simply comes from the outside; it happens on the inside where difference is faced and embraced in the hope that a greater violence is avoided elsewhere. Hospitality invites trouble but with an even wider generosity in mind. In a crucial sense, architecture can be generous only when it is troubled, vulnerable to what it invites—giving even the strongest-looking building, complex, or city an all-important tenderness and fragility.

This tenderness undercuts the force of architecture. Seemingly benign conventional buildings and neighborhoods sustain a violence through their systems of exclusions and hierarchies—the routine drawing and holding of lines. This can be a violence to those inside just as much as it is to those outside. A prison lies on both sides of every wall. Architecture aspires to hospitality but never strays too far from the idea of authority. The rhetoric of the typical designer is always one of inclusivity, as if the lives of anyone encountering the design in any way are enhanced, but what is really designed is a system of exclusions and stratifications. Designers are permanently suspended between gestures of authority and generosity, with generosity to one group being a form of authority over another. Real hospitality is a radical, even revolutionary, act—the invitation and embrace of the unknown guest that necessarily undermines the designer and even design itself.

Such a deep invitation is never simple, since architecture can never just offer itself to the human body, to social life, or to ideas as if they are independent external entities that could simply enter, occupy, and interact with a space. Buildings are not entered through a door. Architecture is already built into our understanding of body, life, and thought. We are simply unable to think of the body, for example, without thinking of the spaces of clothing, including buildings. Even the concept of nakedness already implies an absent architecture. Likewise, actions can only be actions in a constructed space. Specific ideas about space are involved in the very idea of a body, a person, a

relationship, a gesture, or a thought. Architecture is not a container with a clearly defined inside and outside. It operates more like an incubator or accelerator, a transitional zone that is inseparable from the emergence, growth, and actions of the things that appear to occupy it. The real generosity of the host is not to invite someone or something to occupy a space but is to invite a transformation of the space. The space itself has to make the invitation, allowing itself to be profoundly changed by the things that it hosts.

The architecture of hospitality therefore appears only in order to be undone or appears only through an undoing. It tries to undo its own authority, removing as many constraints as possible in order to offer the widest and deepest welcome but wants to be undone again and again by the people, actions, and ideas that it hosts. The architecture of hospitality is never simple or static: it is a relentless labor of deconstruction.

The New Babylon project of Constant Nieuwenhuys is the most extreme and invaluable example. The project extended the gesture of hospitality to our whole species. Constant imagined a genuinely popular architecture for a world in which no one would be considered either ordinary or strange. An architecture for the people. Nothing less.

An artist devoted himself for almost two decades to the largest architectural project in human history, describing a hovering structure that would spread itself around the globe like a viral organism until it formed a single building at the size of the planet to host the lives and dreams of everyone. Yet his unprecedented avalanche of models, drawings, maps, etchings, lithographs, paintings, photo-collages, slides, films, television programs, lectures, essays, brochures, books, catalogues, posters, and interviews on New Babylon done from 1956 to 1974 tried to dissolve this enormous structure. If the repressive authority of architecture comes from drawing and holding lines, Constant thinks of all the ways in which lines can be broken, blurred, dissolved, moved, or even internally occupied and subverted. All the representations are unambiguously architectural yet bear uncannily little trace of architecture as it is normally understood. We see no door, facade, window, ceiling, wall, room, material, detail, plumbing, switch, lighting, faucet, fitting, furniture, equipment, or storage. Constant represents the promise of architecture rather than its mechanics. The ultimate city of the near future is primarily defined by what it is not.

The whole structure is so vast and extends itself across such a wide terrain that no lines divide inside and outside, night and day, or private and public. The structure has no national border, property, family, institution, church, corporation, law, police, or state. No north and south, east and west, or center. Neither housing nor workplace—just an infinite interior without domesticity or

even the hint of comfort. The project is premised on the idea that all work will soon be done automatically by buried machines. In the hovering world of New Babylon, there is only play, and everyone hovers at the same level. With the exploitation of labor ended, all social hierarchies have gone. Boundless creativity is now the central resource, with everyone becoming a nomadic artist continually rebuilding their world in collaboration with those they encounter. This is art liberated from any frame, gallery, museum, market, or expertise—as if the whole planet has been transformed into a single collaborative artist’s studio in which art is a continuous social performance. This performance space is neither that of traditional streets or of buildings but an endless threshold, an infinite transit lounge, a playground at the size of the planet, releasing a childlike creativity unrestrained by work, economy, morality, contracts, debts, clocks, nature, habits, orientation, or routine. People drift in a labyrinthine landscape without signposts or visible signals—a world made possible by advanced technology in which technology itself is never seen.

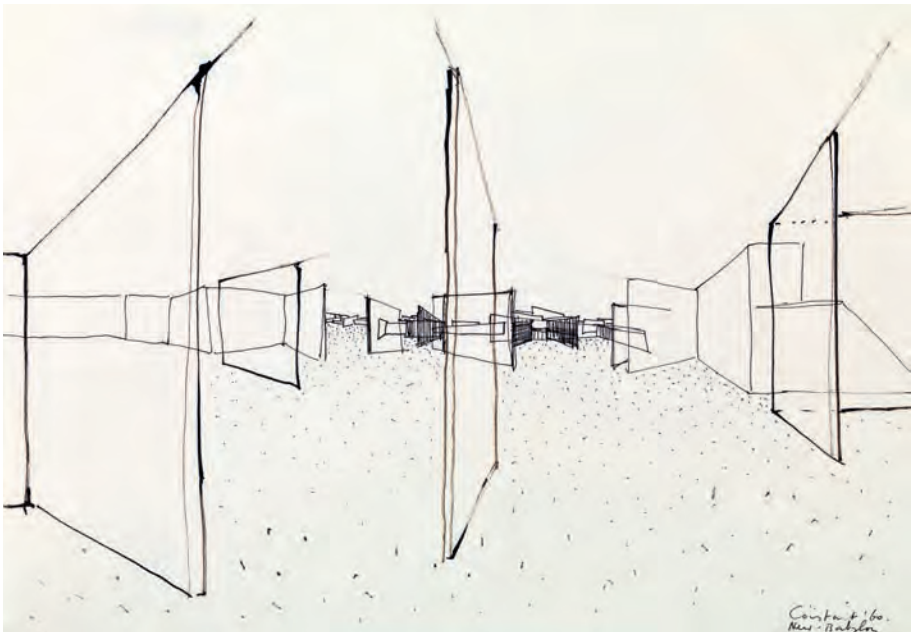
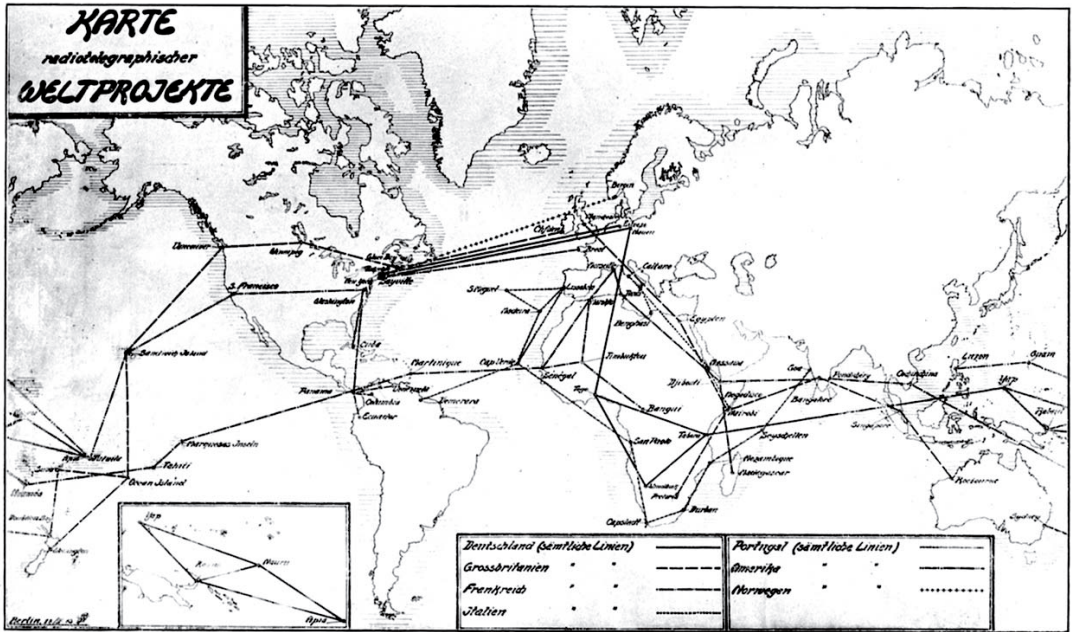
This “wide world web,” as Constant called it, is a physical image of interconnectivity in a flat world. New Babylon is suspended between documentary and science fiction. Already in the first decades of the twentieth century, the ability of the new technology of radio to transcend all physical borders and wrap the planet in a single web had produced intense debate in scientific, military, economic, and popular discourse about a new kind of interconnectivity. The first images of a world wide web—as in Telefunken’s 1913 map showing the new global network that could be formed by linking all the major radio networks together—were captivating documents suspended between what was already happening and what could happen. Halfway between map and plan, they portrayed an emergent architecture. Constant became part of a generation of post-Second World War designers who offered a palpable image of society as a self-organizing communication system by echoing these invisible systems. His project is suspended exactly halfway between the first images of global radio nets in the early twentieth century and the extreme reality of such nets in the early twenty-first century. New Babylon is uncannily prophetic of today’s sense of a horizontal world of digital nets linking a global population and sustaining new modes of social life, along with the twenty-four-hours-a-day confusion of work and play in which everyone is treated as an artist continuously reshaping their own identity and world.

Yet the radicality and genuinely transformative condition of today’s image of access, interactivity, crowds, creativity, and sharing is unable to disguise the whole new levels of constraint, surveillance, servitude, and exclusion that accompany it. Nomadism has become the norm, but caused more by lack of opportunity, brutality, or climate change producing the largest numbers of

refugees ever. Our supposedly horizontal world is actually defined by historically unprecedented peaks of concentrated wealth and opportunity for an extreme minority. Political life increasingly takes the narrow form of managing the optics of these spikes, an aesthetic struggle to either expose or conceal them, along with all their implications in terms of economic, ethical, and ecological justice. Social life, even when radicalized through action online and in the streets, becomes something else when private life and thought become extraordinarily comprehensive data sets mined by institutions, corporations, and the state. All this might make Constant's utopian image of the 1960s seem naively optimistic. Yet Constant was his own first and strongest critic, and the question of hospitality raised by his project remains urgent in a digital age. New Babylon's formulation of radical hospitality and its self-critique offer key insights into the present.

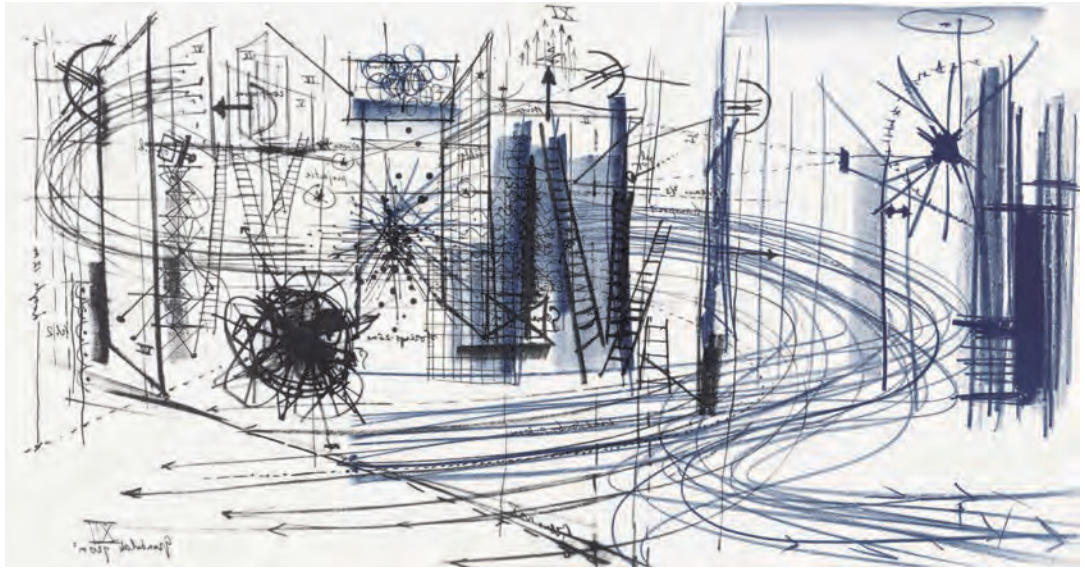
What is left after architecture has been stripped of authority? Just a horizontal net with a labyrinthine interior, some scaffolding, suspended floors, ladders, and floating planes, something akin to a stage set with a few theatrical props in which the actions of people immediately exceed those of the architect—a provisional scaffolding for a reality performance. The emphasis in the early models and drawings of 1957 and 1958 was on the massive scaffolding holding up the atmospheric zones of the new city. Then the images either zoomed out to the overall webbed network crossing the landscape or zoomed in to the finer weave of scaffolding within the sectors. The thin planes that first appeared in the drawings in 1960 as “mobile walls” have by 1962 become completely floating planes that form the surfaces defining the labyrinth. The huge size and complexity of New Babylon gives way to the lightest possible diagrammatic spaces. Constant is usually hesitant to draw a solid line yet keeps drawing planes that all have a distinct outline, thickness, and more or less the same size. These are the same abstract planes that were liberated from gravity in the early 1920s by Theo van Doesburg and his collaborators in the De Stijl group to define a new kind of four-dimensional space. Architecture became a kind of radiation outward of disconnected lightweight screens in the very years, 1921–1923, that radio evolved from secretive military infrastructure to public broadcasting, completely transforming the status of every object and space. Radio effectively gave a sense of mobility to every seemingly fixed location and a sense of location to everything that is seemingly mobile. Architects unconsciously responded by imagining that the space for human occupation would be porous, defined only by clusters of lightweight hovering planes. Inside and outside would flow through each other. Air itself became the most important building material.

New Babylon took this logic to the extreme. It is modern architecture on steroids. Like the occupants of New Babylon, the floating planes that form the



Map of global radiotelegraphic projects, in *Telefunken Zeitung*, June 1913.

Constant, *Mobile wänden* [Mobile Walls], 1960.



Constant, *Litho no. 9 uit de map New Babylon*
[Map of New Baylon, Lithograph no. 9], 1963.

labyrinthine space for new forms of creative life do not do any work. They carry no load. They move and can be assembled in diverse arrays but almost never touch one another. They do not combine to form a wall, let alone a room. Constant gives the planes no materiality or texture. They are sometimes opaque but usually transparent, as if to make them less confining. The aesthetic realm of forms, textures, colors, shapes, and rhythms are to be generated by people not by an external artist/architect. When one of the planes is colored, as in the center of the *Red Plane* drawing of 1962, it comes as a shock, a political flag, but once again we see through it to the snarled lines of action beyond.

Not by chance human figures started to appear in the images of New Babylon when Constant began to isolate these thin planes in 1962, even threading curving lines between them as trajectories of human movement or energy flows, as if to provide diagrams of the basic idea of life in the new space. But these figures appear only as mobile blotches. They bear no markings of age, race, or gender—just blurs that communicate difference without revealing what the difference is—a set of mobile question marks. The body itself is an artwork to be continually redesigned like any other aspect of the environment. No figure notices us or faces us. We never take the position of someone inside the labyrinth. We usually see through the planes and often through the floor. In all of Constant's images of New Babylon, we remain outside the space looking inward, whether from a distance across the landscape or closer in. Usually a single-point perspective gives depth and direction to the labyrinth. We are witnesses but not participants. We see more than the figures see, and yet we barely see anything. The main point is what cannot be seen, what is about to happen. Architecture is no longer the fixed answer to a dense set of questions. It, too, has become a huge question mark. The project is not a demonstration, set of instructions, judgment, or a celebration. Neither the architecture nor the social life is represented. Instead, Constant offers a kind of documentation of the point of contact between architecture and social life. We look into the site of possible interaction, the space of hospitality itself where architecture gives way to social life. The intersection of the indeterminate thin plane and the indeterminate blotchy body acts as the image of the self-induced end of architecture. Both the architecture and the people are present only as ghosts, hovering in a kind of mirage. The image is not just of the provisional scaffolding on which a new life can be suspended. The image itself is offered to us as a form of scaffolding for imagining the possibility of a genuinely popular architecture that could never be represented in advance.

Remarkably, Constant was able to keep all the images of the project permanently poised between construction and ruin. That was his whole point. New Babylon was launched against violence in the wake of violence. In 1948,

Constant had been a founding member of the Cobra group that argued that the catastrophic global violence of the Second World War had been caused by Western ideals of rationality. Cobra turned to the unconscious in order to construct the potential for a better society with paintings inspired by children, the insane, and criminals. The moment the group collapsed in 1951 is precisely when Constant became interested in architecture's possible role in liberating a new unconstrained life. As he recalled in 2003,

It must have been 1951. Frankfurt was bombed flat during the war. I had been in Essen, Bochum. . . . The Ruhr was not nearly as bad. Frankfurt was indescribable. I'd borrowed a studio from a painter who was himself in Paris. I was working there for an exhibition in the Zimmergalerie Franck, and every morning I took my son to school. The walk to the school was across an enormous bombsite. A great heap of rubble, with here and there some places that had been flattened so you could walk over them like paths. There were some outer walls of houses still standing. A doorway and some stretches of wall. It was a surreal landscape, and it inspired me enormously. If you walk through a town that lies in ruins, then the first thing you naturally think of is building. And then, as you rebuild such a town, you wonder whether life there will be just the same, or what will be different. Then you think about the influence of the surroundings.¹

The new city would not simply rise up and dispel the detritus of war. Constant's early 1950s paintings of the aftermath of destruction show twisted forms looking like scaffolding on the horizon of the wasteland, as if they had turned into the city of the future through minimal evolution. Two of these paintings—*The War* and *The World in Decomposition* (both, 1951)—appeared in the catalogue of Constant's first major exhibition of his models at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam in 1959 and alongside *New Babylon* in other catalogues.² Dismembered bodies lie on the ground in front of dismembered buildings that have been reduced to twisted frames. The ground always remains a wasteland in the images of *New Babylon*. The atmosphere is relentlessly melancholic. All the celebratory rhetoric of modern architecture applies to the new structure—open, supportive, flexible, responsive, interactive, light, playful, mobile—yet the scene broods with an ever-present sense of menace. The sun never shines, and the structures always appear unfinished, as if either coming apart or coming together in a confusion of destruction and construction.

The biggest building in history tries to undo the authority of the monument, an authority that is not about size or weight but the deadly force of the thinnest of lines. Georges Bataille began his "Dictionnaire Critique" in the May 1929 issue of *Documents* with an entry on "Architecture" that notes every

monument's ambition to control and the real effect of control and fear that the edifice produces: "In fact it is only the ideal soul of society, that which has the authority to command and prohibit, that is expressed in architectural composition properly. Thus great monuments are erected like dikes, opposing the logic and majesty of authority against all disturbing elements." But he immediately expands the point to include any sense of architectural composition beyond buildings: "Moreover, each time that *architectural composition* turns up somewhere other than in monuments, whether it is in physiognomy, costume, music or painting, one may infer a prevailing taste for divine or human *authority*."³ The simple gesture to give design to something, the lightest of drawings or plans, assumes a bloody force. Bataille's countermodel in many of his texts is the labyrinth, the confusion of lines and orientation that undoes any sense of a division between inside and outside.

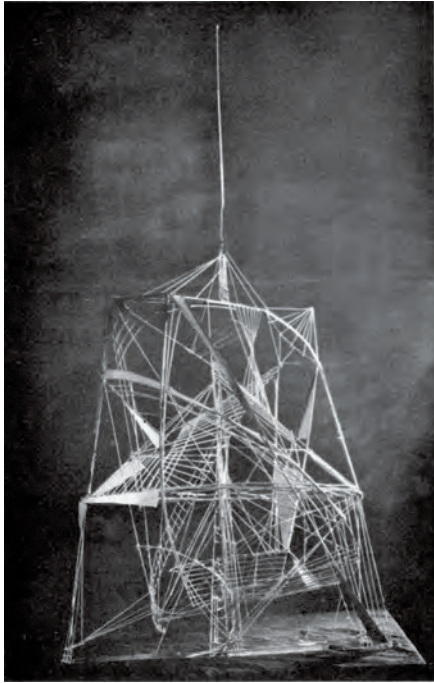
With a similar eye on the repressive authority of buildings and the official organization of cities, Guy Debord and Ivan Chtcheglov began their first *dérives* through Paris in 1953 and likewise embraced the revolutionary potential of the labyrinth. After their late-night drunken drifts investigating the unconscious of the city, Chtcheglov produced a new map of Paris with parts of Africa, India, Asia, the Arctic, the Caribbean, and Oceania superimposed on the generic map of the Metro system—as if the most distinct and exotic spaces were already embedded in the local fabric as a collage of completely different urban atmospheres interlinked by the underground train network. To move in the city is to immerse oneself in a succession of radically different situations. Chtcheglov adopted the pseudonym Gilles Ivain and developed a theory of "new urbanism" in a 1953 manifesto that calls for a new kind of city made only of dense zones of different atmospheres. The text would not be published until June 1958 in the first issue of the journal *Internationale Situationniste*. Architecture was to become "a means of experimenting with a thousand ways of modifying life" in a "continuous *dérive*."⁴ The collaged map of a newly hybridized Paris, likely done toward the end of 1953, may have been one of Chtcheglov's contributions to *66 métagraphies influentielles: Avant de guerre*, the June 1954 exhibition by the members of the Lettrist International group choreographed by Debord. The display of collages, assembled from cuttings of images and texts from the popular press, launched the concept of "psychogeography," in the words of a leaflet distributed on the day after the opening, as a "new science" associated with "the construction of cities and upheaval of the collective unconscious."⁵ The hubs of unconscious intensity that had been discovered in Paris were treated by Chtcheglov as "scattered islands" that could be closed off from the rest of the city and linked to newly invented hubs to form an archipelago.⁶

This critique of traditional urbanism would be the central mission of the Situationist International group when it formed in 1957—with Debord as the ringleader and Constant as a key founding member, along with his fellow Cobra veteran Asger Jorn. Constant had already started making models inspired by the concept in late 1956 and cosigned the manifesto distributed in Turin in favor of an “urbanisme unitaire” based on “the great modern adventure” of psychogeography immediately after meeting Debord for the first time that December in Alba.⁷ Debord worked with Jorn to produce a set of five new collaged maps to be shown in Brussels at the *Première exposition de psychogéographie* in February 1957. Debord was critical of Chtcheglov’s original map and cut up standard tourist maps to reveal the secret network of “hubs” of unconscious intensity hidden within the official order of the city and undermining its attempt to control people. The new maps were defined by what was cut out rather than what was added—urbanism by scissors. One of them documented the single trajectory of the first *dérive* with Chtcheglov, while others presented a whole network of possible trajectories through the secret city. Debord did not exhibit his maps in Brussels (withdrawing at the last moment after the announcements and invitations listing them had been published), but they became key documents for the Situationist International group that would be launched a few months later. “New Babylon,” as Debord would name Constant’s project in 1960, turned the analytical collage maps of the unconscious of the existing city into the description of a new city. The concentrated zones of atmosphere linked by red arrows in the maps were now directly interlinked to one another to produce a continuous playground. From 1963 on, Constant produced his own maps showing the web of the new city suspended over generic maps of old cities throughout Europe, as if New Babylon already existed.

These collage maps of New Babylon culminated in maps from 1967 and 1969 in which neighborhoods from different cities around the world are interlinked into a network. Differences and distances are compacted as in Chtcheglov’s map of 1953, which Constant is unlikely to have seen. In the same way that radio brings all distant others into intimate contact, New Babylon radically condenses the world, erasing any difference between local and foreign. Only the foreign remains. No one comes from the outside. Everyone is an outsider permanently on the move. No distinction is made between living and traveling. All are drifters. The gypsy is the norm rather than the exception. Hospitality becomes the very definition of the whole system. But this is no longer the hospitality of individual hosts embracing strangers. Instead, strangers embrace, constructing and reconstructing one another, then moving on. No home or home city is entered, disturbed, and enriched by the stranger. New Babylon is one city, everywhere strange and unstable.

This transformation from hidden transgressive spaces within an existing city like Paris to a new, vast space for experimental living, from a map of what is to a plan of what could be, was to be made possible by a technological leap of robots, computers, and radio. Social revolution was dependent on technological revolution. New forms of interaction and creativity would be liberated by unseen technologies that were part of the early situationist experiments. A month before Constant resigned from the group in June 1960, a crucial demonstration of psychogeography was supposed to take place in Amsterdam. A labyrinthine “circuit” with variable sound, light, temperature, and humidity designed by Constant, with advice from Debord and Jorn, was to be installed within two large rooms in the Stedelijk Museum. This space of “micro-*dérive*” would be in a dynamic relationship with three simultaneous “situationist teams” with walkie-talkies doing three-day-long *dérives* in the center of the city, in continuous contact with a roving “radio-truck” from within which Constant would direct scenarios and a “cartographic team.”⁸ Radio plays a crucial role in New Babylon. One of Constant’s first wire models of 1957, the first to be shaped as if it could be occupied, had even been called *Construction with Antenna*, with a tall mast for transmitting and receiving rising up out of its twisting metal net. The endless web of the final project hovers between a network of high-speed ground transportation and a network of air transport, with radio antennae located at every link to form the ultimate net, a “transmitting and receiving audiovisual network” that is “decentralized and public.” The very ability to move and play is dependent on electronics: “In a fluctuating community without a fixed base, contacts can only be maintained by intensive telecommunications [I]t does not only, or principally serve interests of a practical kind. It is at the service of ludic activity, it is a form of play.”⁹ The barely there quality of the floating planes of New Babylon is dependent on a huge density of hidden machinery, wiring, computation, and signals.

Not by chance does the turning point between Constant’s optimism and pessimism about radical hospitality—from views into labyrinthine spaces entitled *Love In* to views into identical spaces entitled *Massacre*—happen when some of the hidden wires start to appear in the images. In one of the “Labyrisms” lithographs of 1968, the vast megastructure no longer looks like a circuit diagram laid over the landscape; instead, the internal space has become a kind of circuit. The floating vertical and horizontal planes are interconnected by wires that also cluster into antenna-like flowers in a garden. An ominous plume of black smoke rises from what might be a bundle of wire or a person—or a wired person. In *Erotic Space* of 1971 the wire is unambiguously connected to a female body that is bleeding. Details of gender and age start to appear, and the ghostly quality of the figures moving through New Babylon begins to contrast with the realism of blood in a way that becomes emblematic as the spaces of



Constant, *Konstruktion mit Antenne*
[Construction with Antenna], 1957 (Destroyed).

Constant, *Labyrismen n° 6* (serie of 11 lithographs
with texts by Carlheinz Caspari), 1968.

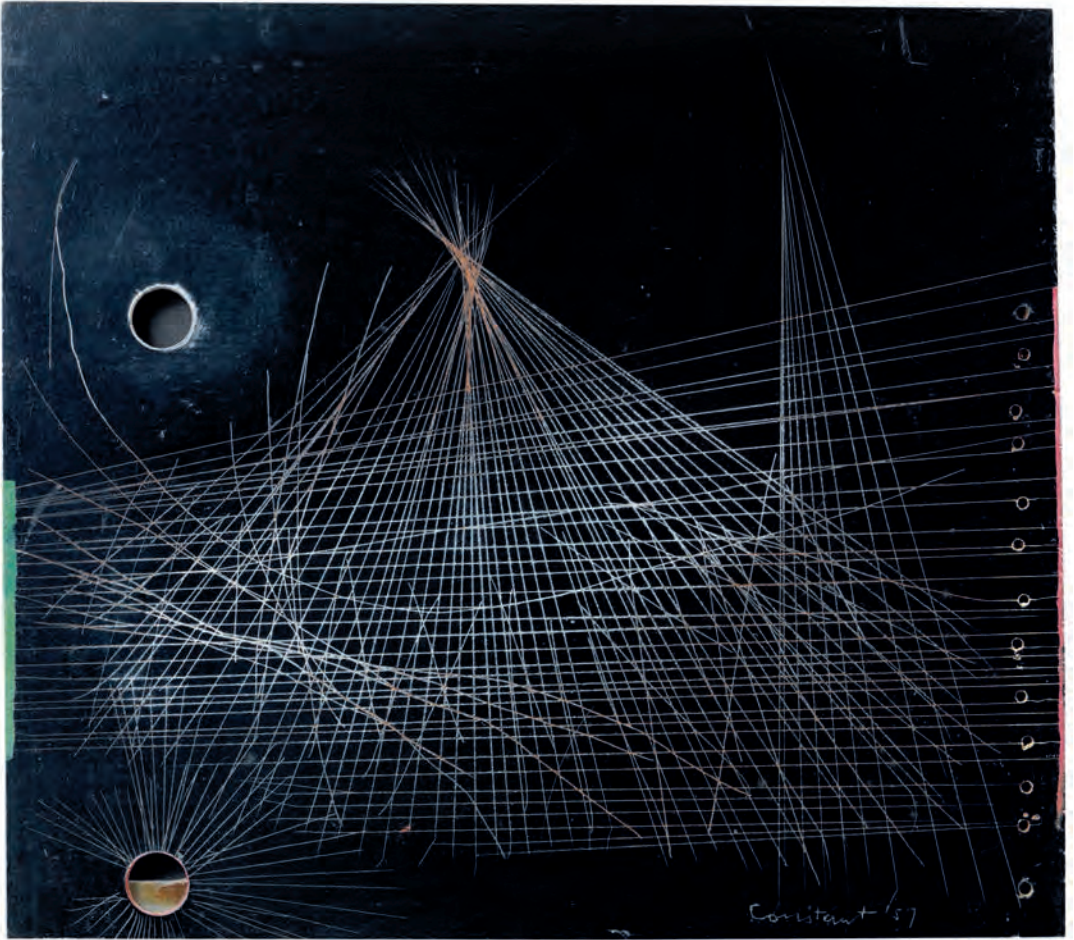
Constant, *Happening*, 1973.

New Babylon turn into crime scenes. The late emergence of the wires—as in *De stoel* (The Chair) of 1971, *Happening* of 1973, and the cover of a 1974 catalogue based on the painting *Le voyeur* of the same year—is somehow linked to the emergence of blood. The internal systems of building and body start leaking together. The wires are the only moments that the hidden computerized world of high technology and radio communication becomes visible within the space. But they do so only as Constant's vision of the future of his own project starts to look increasingly like the images of the wartime brutality that it tried to overcome. Technology moves from the hidden support for new forms of creativity to an accomplice in the oldest of crimes. The invitation to creativity has become an invitation to barbarism.

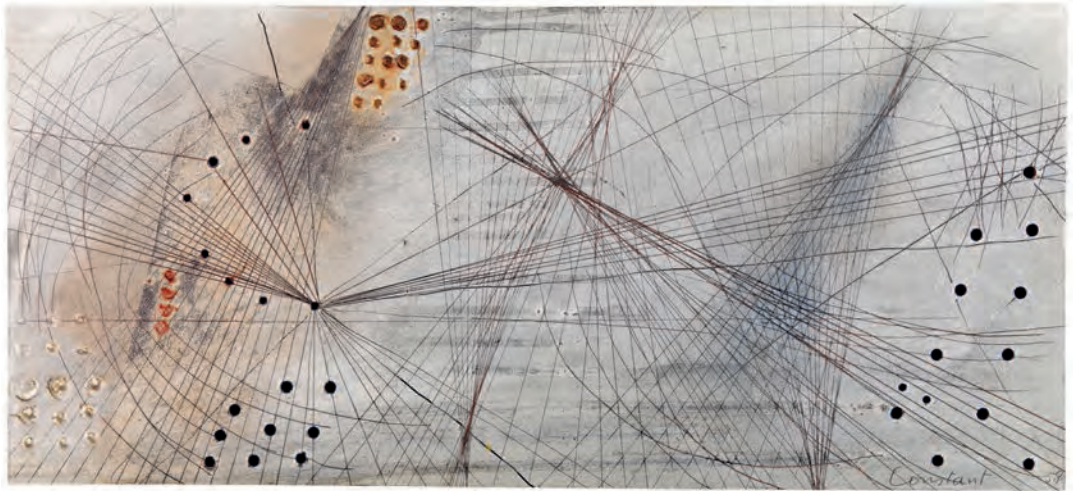
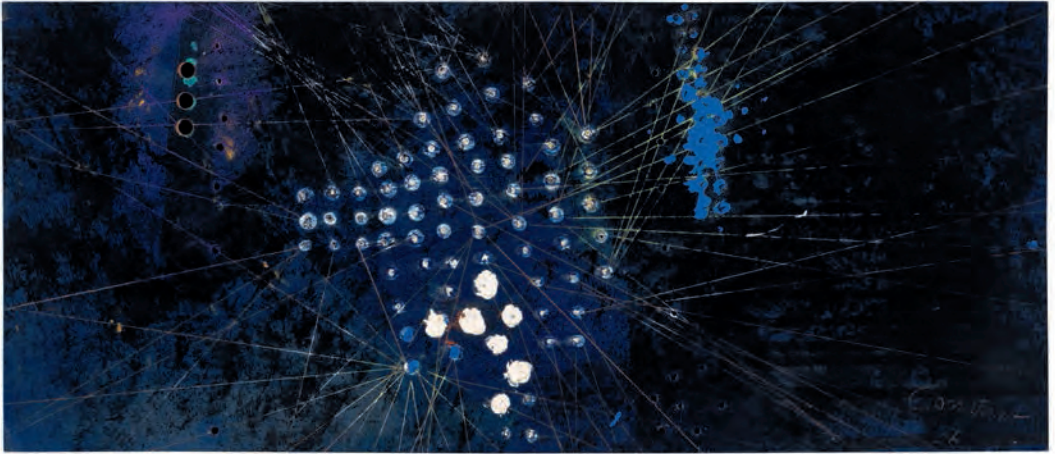
Constant's texts about New Babylon associate aggression with the propertied class and describe criminality as the frustrated attempt at creativity. Both were to be made redundant by a new form of extreme hospitality: "Every reason for aggressivity has been eliminated . . . activity becomes creation."¹⁰ New Babylon was the dream of an architecture after violence. But the images ended up portraying a succession of bloodied and violated bodies. A network architecture without walls turned out to be as dangerous as the walled architecture of authority. As networks have now become the very architecture of authority, the question as to what forms of radical hospitality can be incubated within such systems of seemingly horizontal connectivity remains urgent. Other strategies, or combinations of strategies, are needed. What task could be more important than finding ways to undo architecture's constraints in the name of the popular?

1. Linda Boersma, "Constant," *BOMB Magazine*, no. 91 (Spring 2005).
2. The two paintings are usually called *Burning Earth*, but they are entitled *The War* and *The World in Decomposition . . .* in the book associated with the 1959 Stedelijk exhibition, *Constant* (Paris: Bibliothèque d'Alexandrie, 1959). The same two paintings appear alongside New Babylon in the catalogue of *Constant—Amsterdam* (Bochum, West Germany: Städtische Kunstgalerie, 1961), with one of them again entitled *The War*.
3. Georges Bataille, "Dictionnaire Critique—Architecture," *Documents* 1, no. 2 (May 1929): 117.
4. Gilles Ivain (Ivan Chtcheglov), "Formulaire pour un Urbanisme Nouveau" (1953), in *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 1 (June 1958): 15.
5. Text distributed the day after the opening of the exhibition *66 métagraphies influentielles: Avant de guerre*, La Galerie du Passage, June 11, 1954.
6. Groupe de Recherche psychogéographique de l'Internationale lettriste, "Position du Continent Contrescarpe," *Les lèvres nues*, no. 9 (November 1956): 40.
7. Guy Debord, Constant, Jacques Fillon et al., *Manifestez en faveur de l'urbanisme unitaire*, December 1956.
8. "Die Welt als Labyrinth," *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 4 (January 1960).
9. Constant, "New-Babylon—Skizze zu einer Kultur" (unpub. ms., 1960–1965), trans. Mark Wigley, in Mark Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon: The Hyper-architecture of Desire*, (Rotterdam: Witte de With; 010 Publishers, 1998), 165.
10. *Ibid.*, 163.

Ruimtelandschap
[Space Landscape]
1957



Constant 57



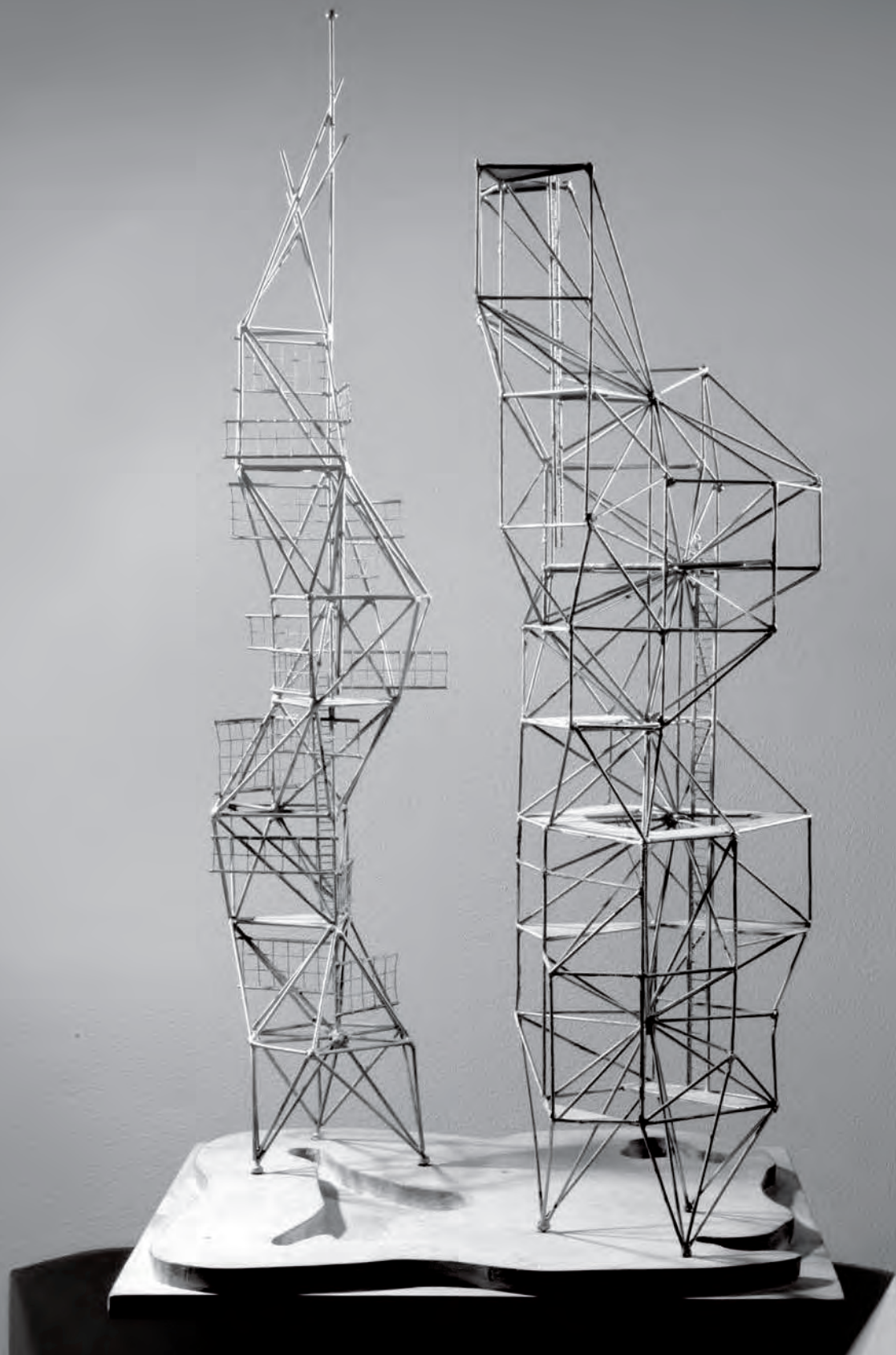
Kosmisch landschap
[Cosmic Landscape]
1956

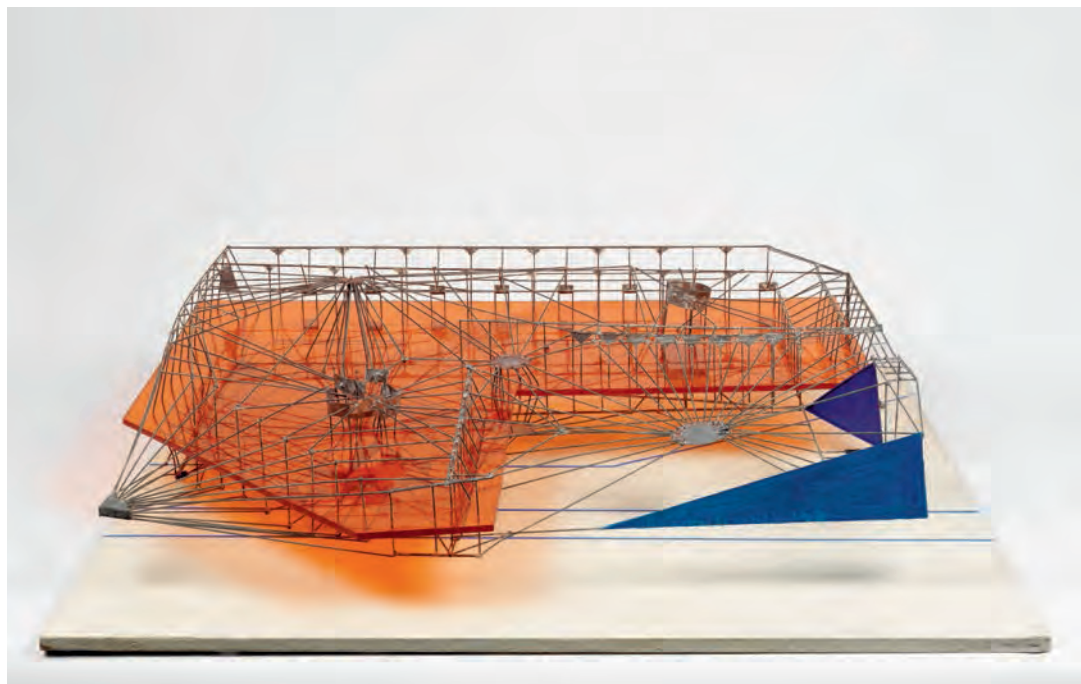
Structures dans l'espace
[Structures in Space]
1958



Construction dans un volume
[Wire Construction in Prism]
1957

Two Towers
1959



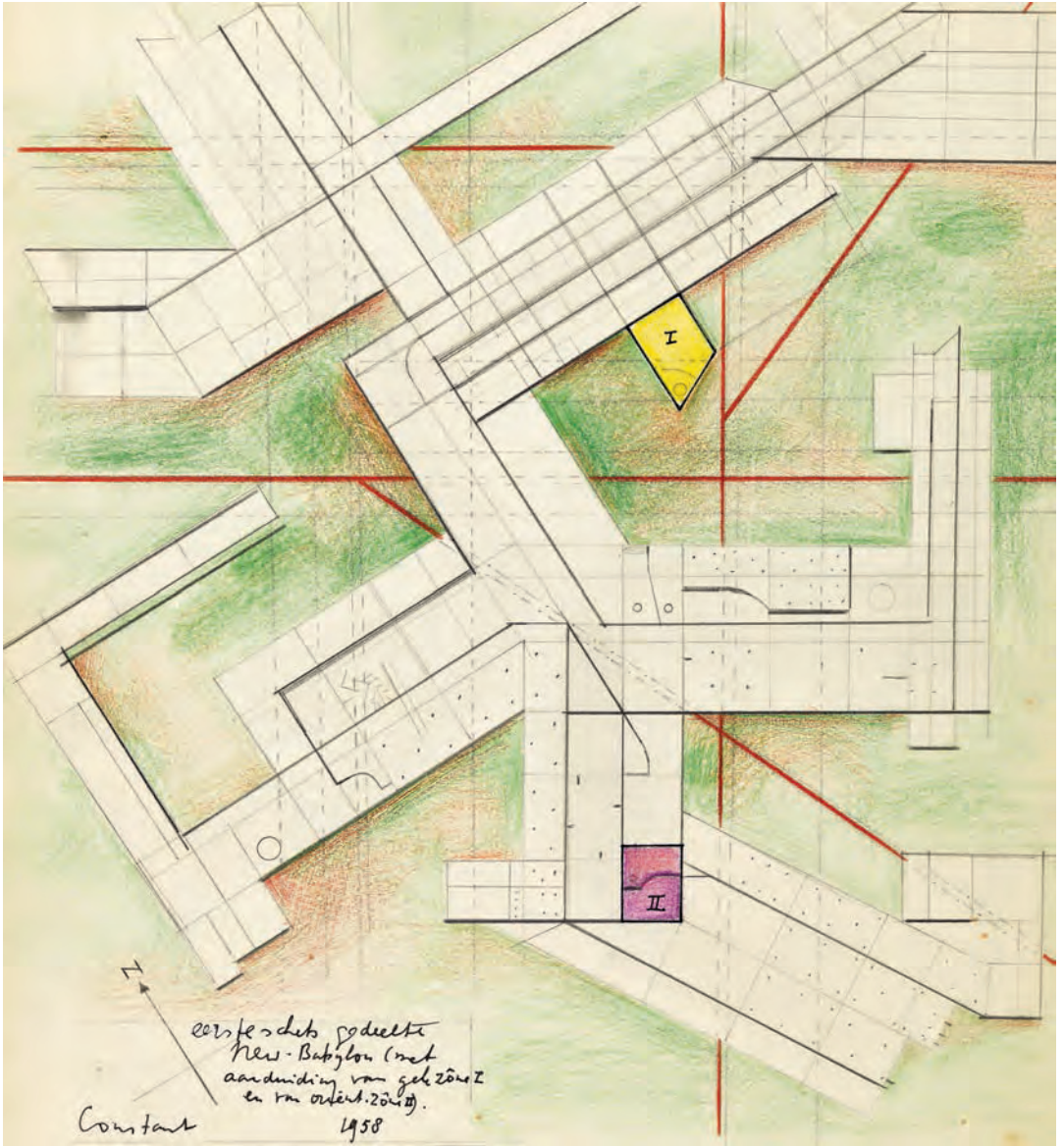


Constructie in oranje
[Construction in Orange]
1958



Klein Labyr
[Little Labyr]
1959

Eerste schets New Babylon
[First Sketch New Babylon]
1958



NEW BABYLON NORD

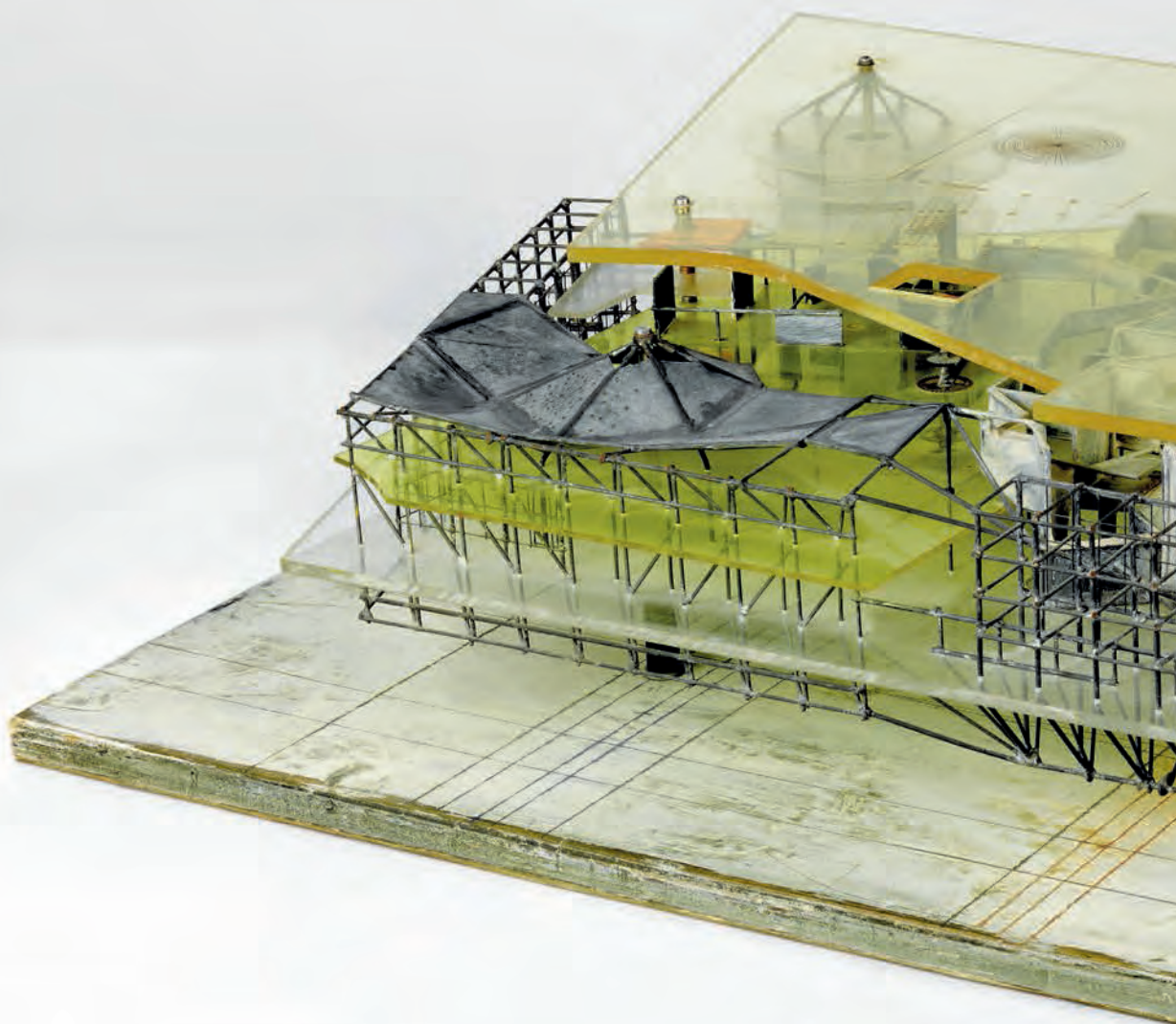
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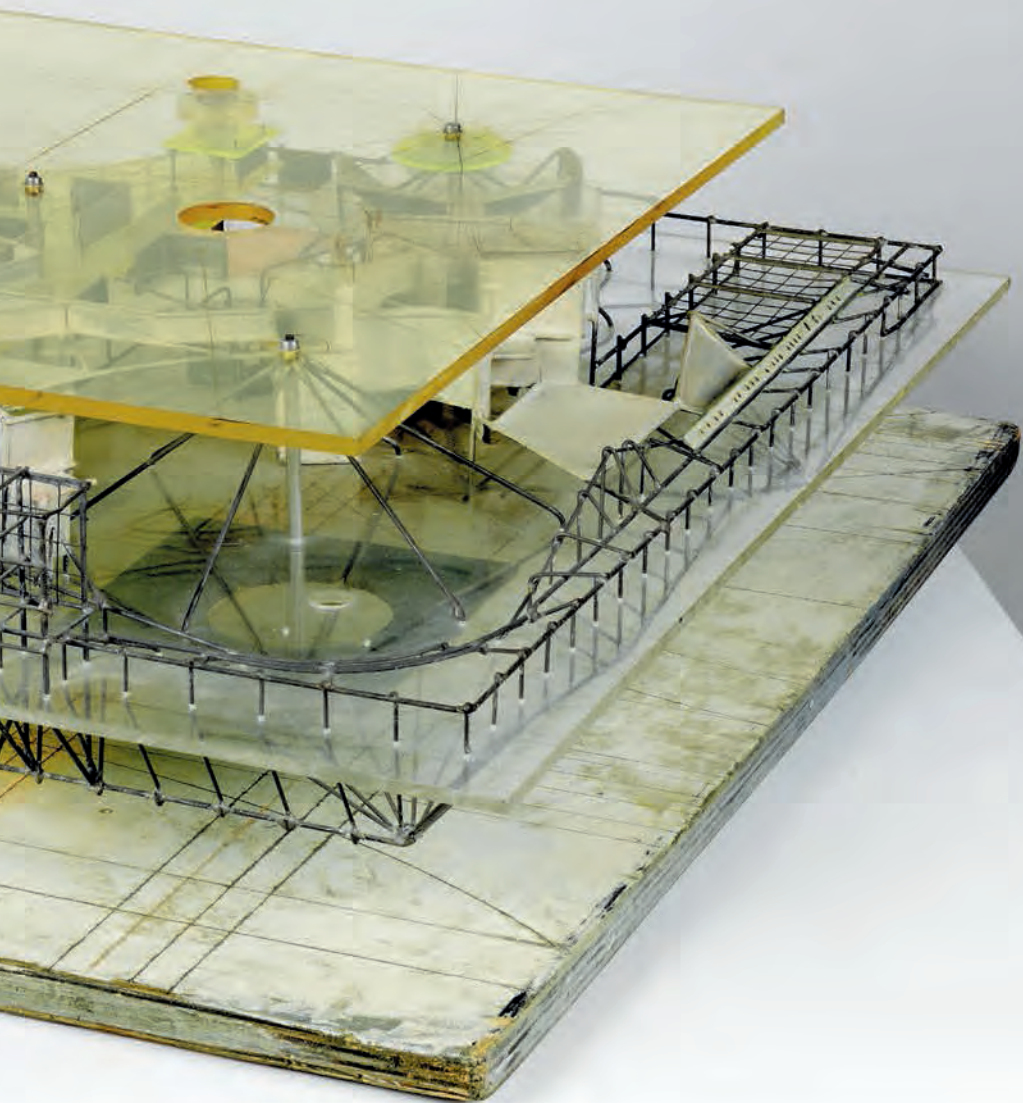




New Babylon Nord
[New Babylon North]
1958

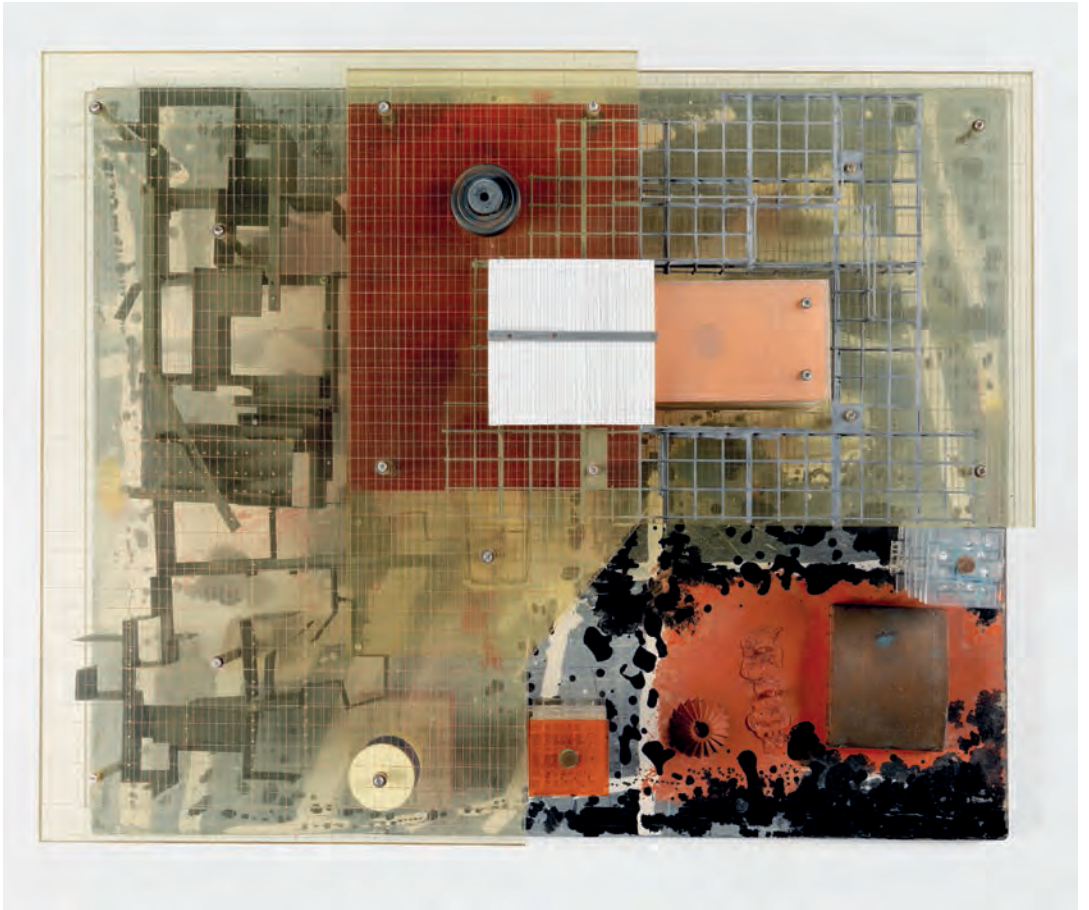
Gele sector
[Yellow Sector]
1958





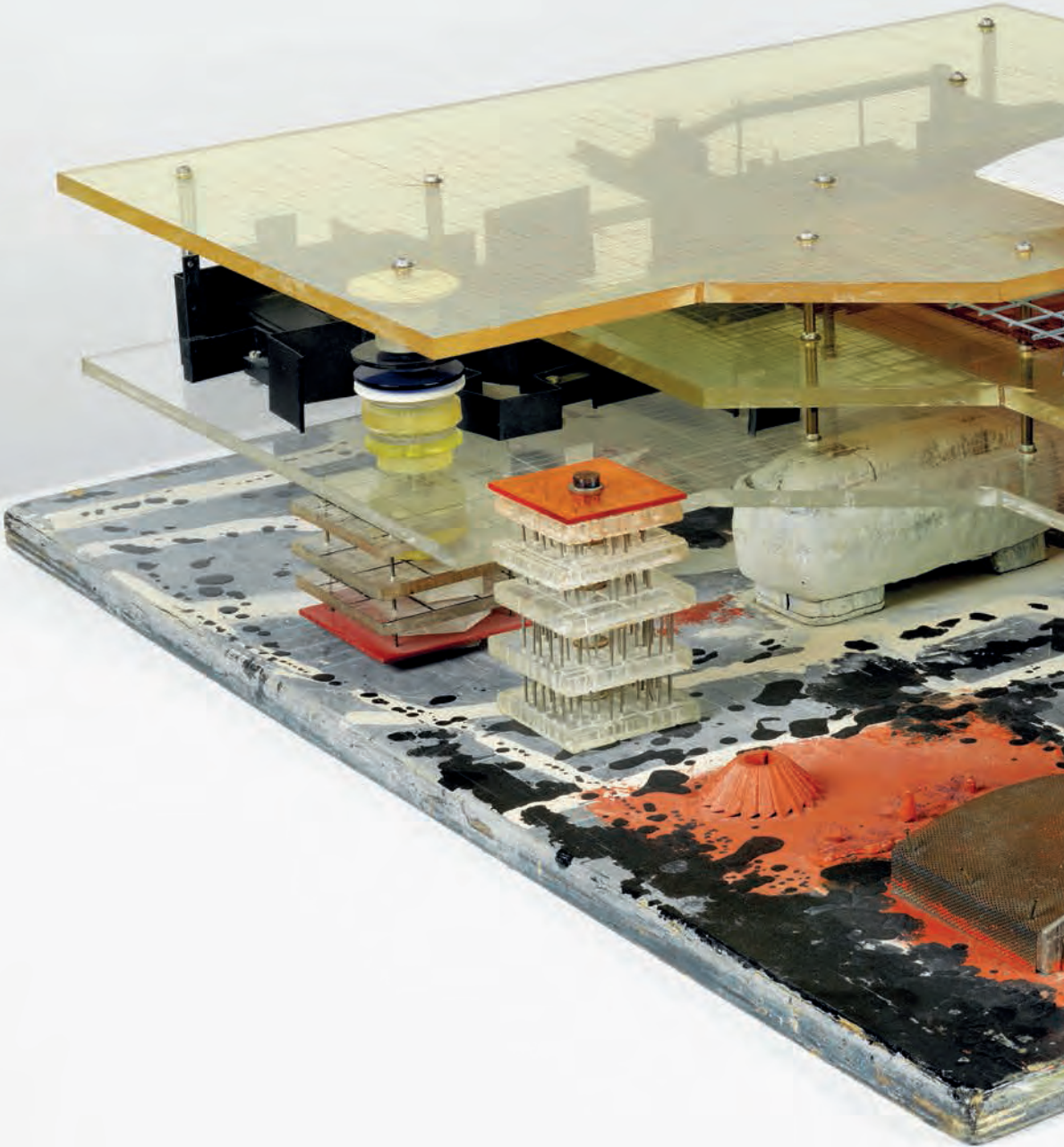


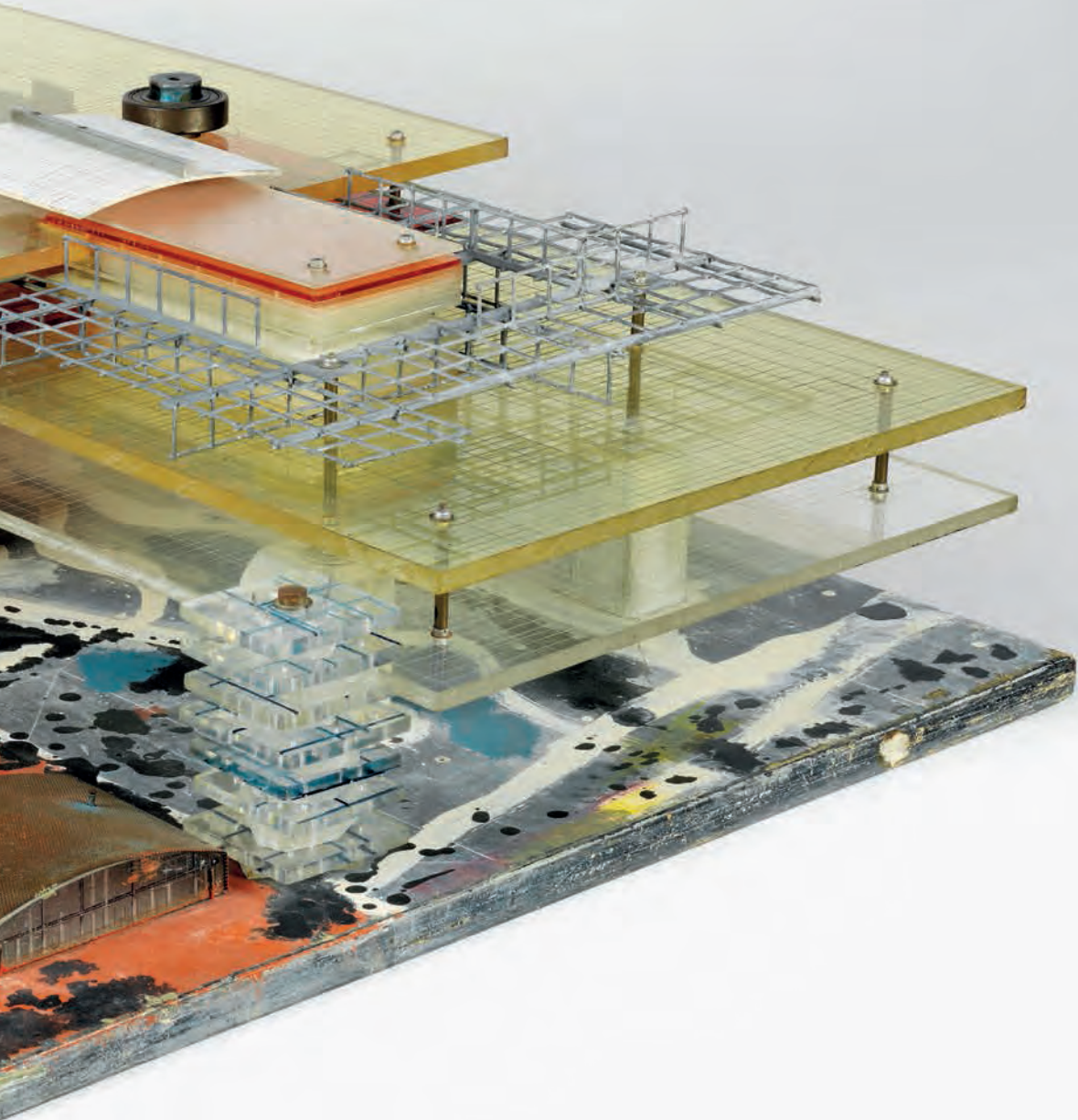
Gele sector
[Yellow Sector]
1958

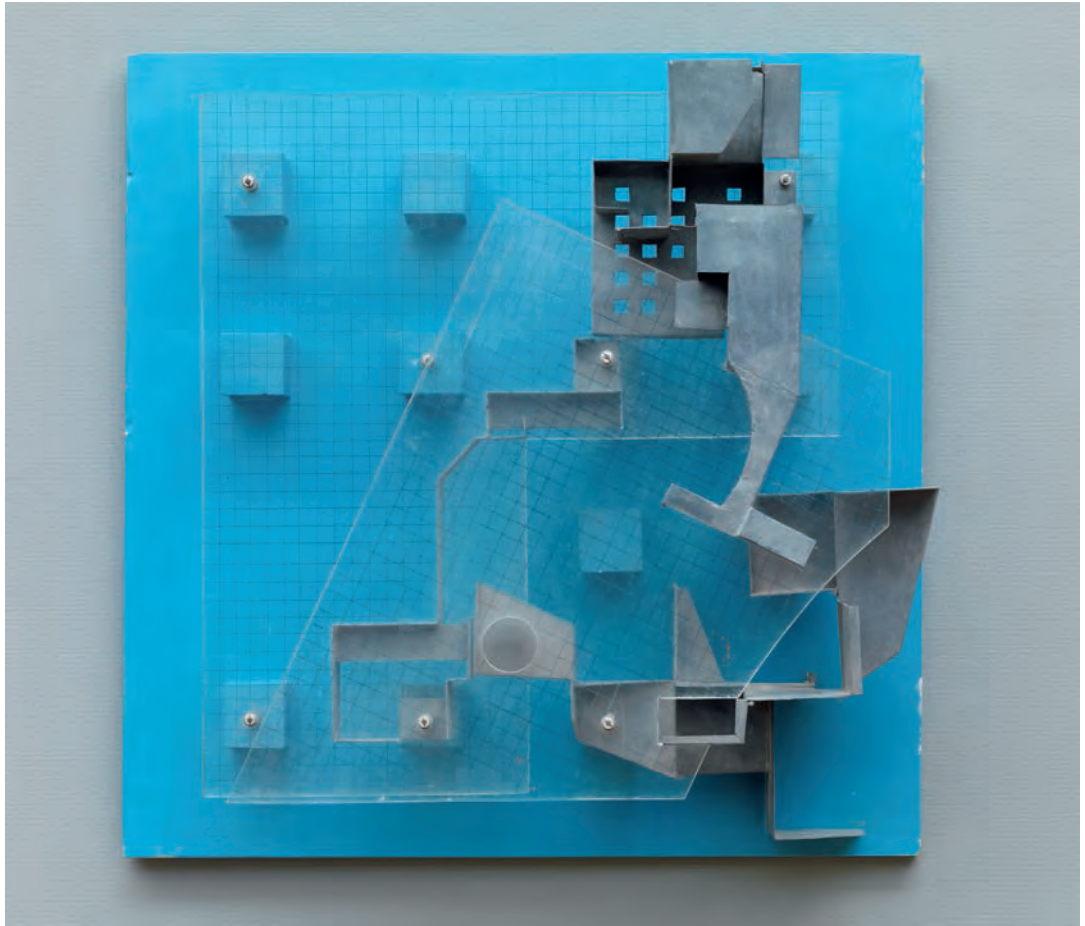


Rode sector
[Red Sector]
1958

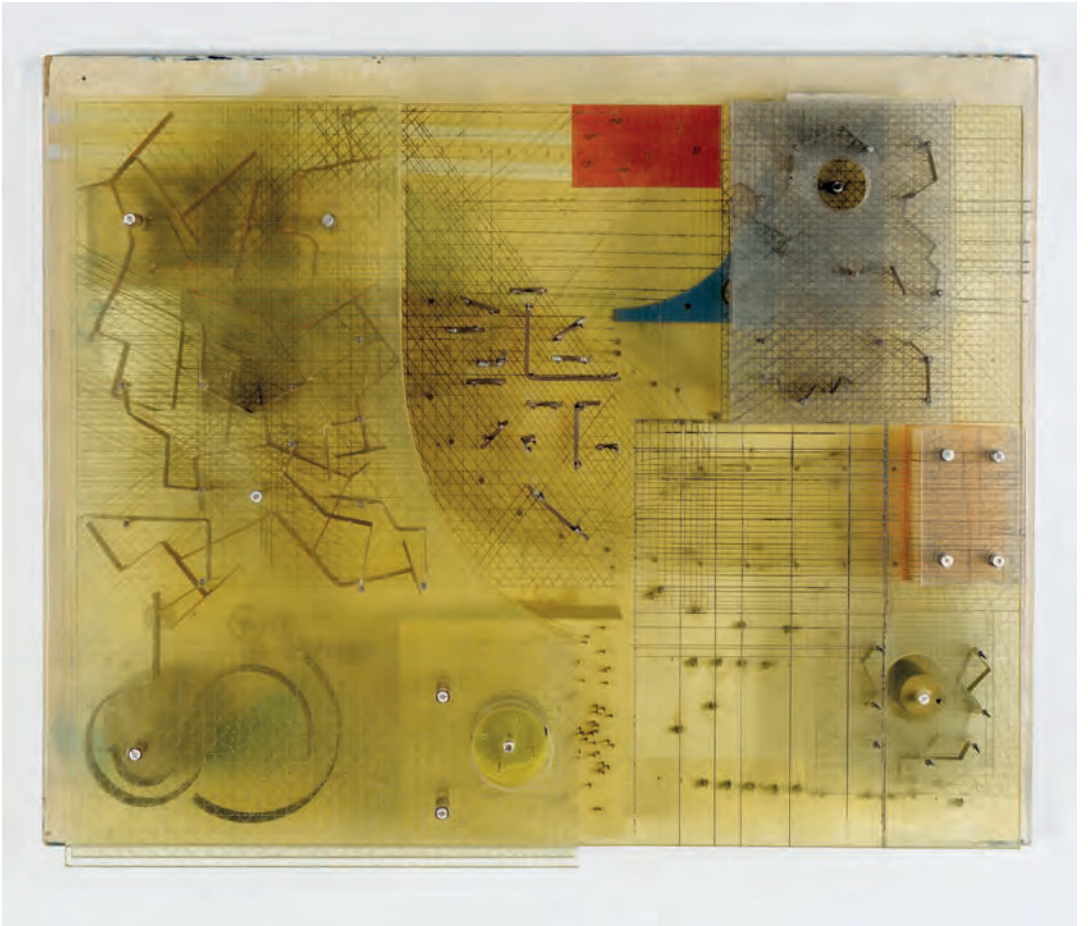
Rode sector
[Red Sector]
1958





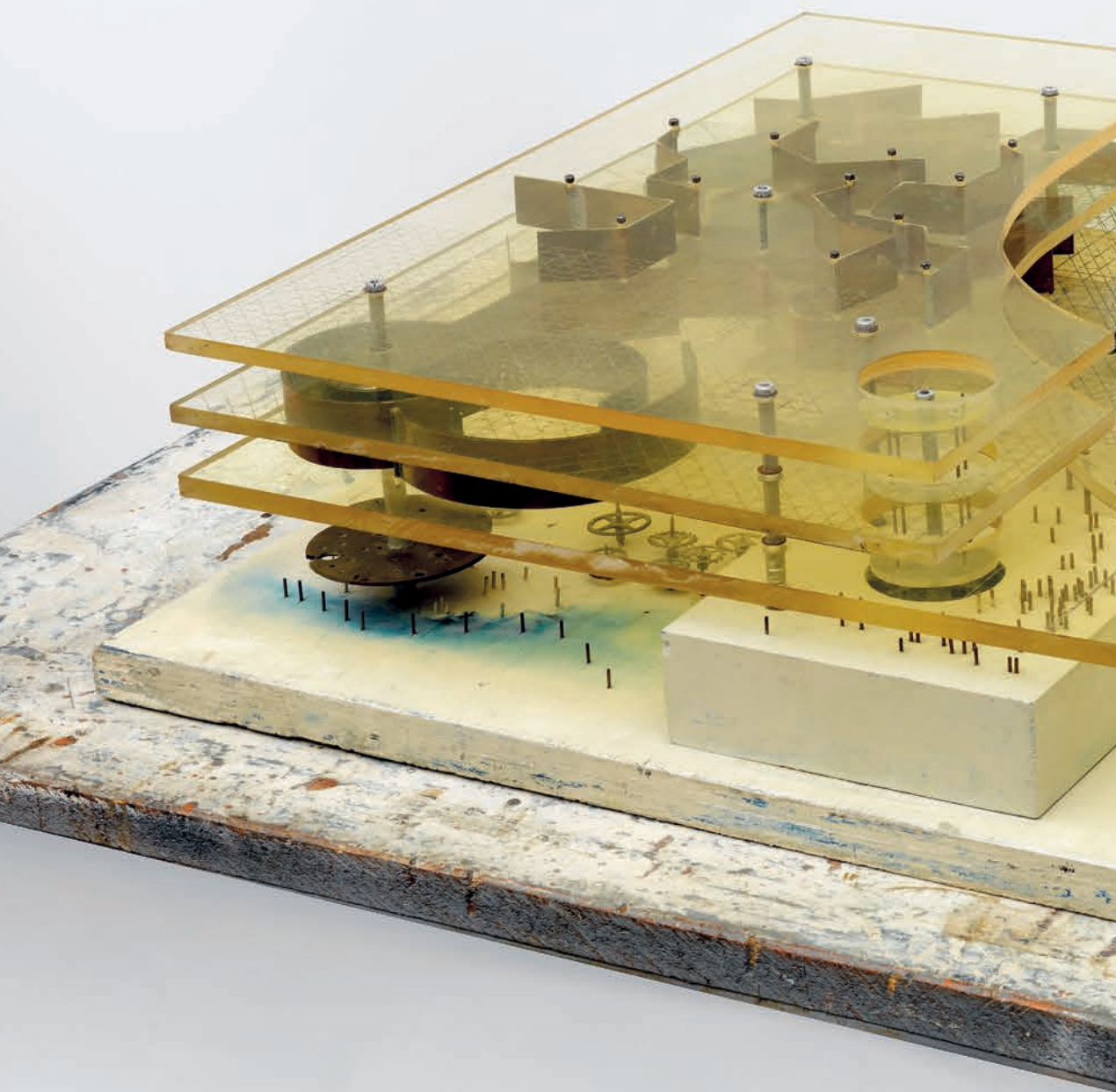


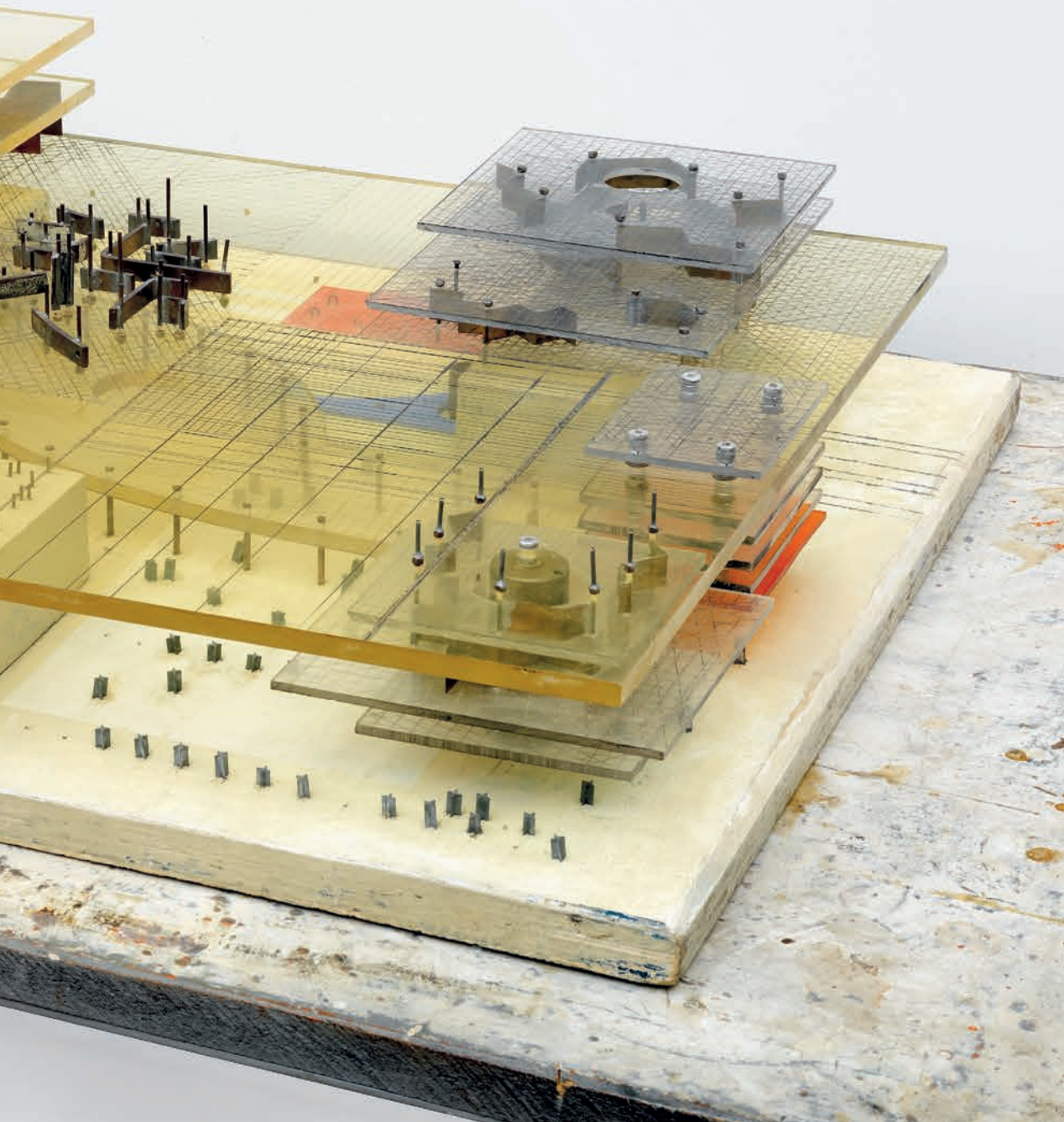
Sectorinterieur
[Sector Interior]
1959



Oriënt sector
[Oriental Sector]
1959

Oriënt sector
[Oriental Sector]
1959







Constructie in oranje
[Construction in Orange]
1958

Gele sector
[Yellow Sector]
1958

Rode sector
[Red Sector]
1958

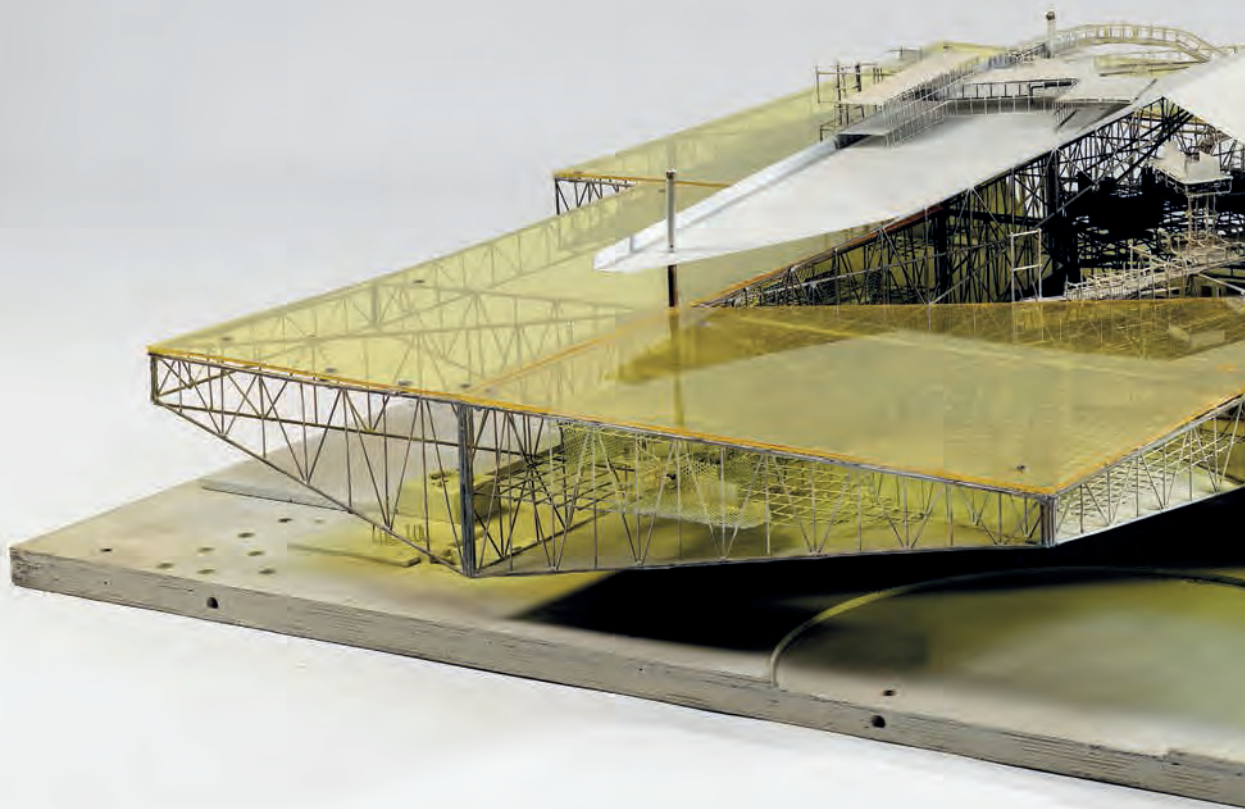


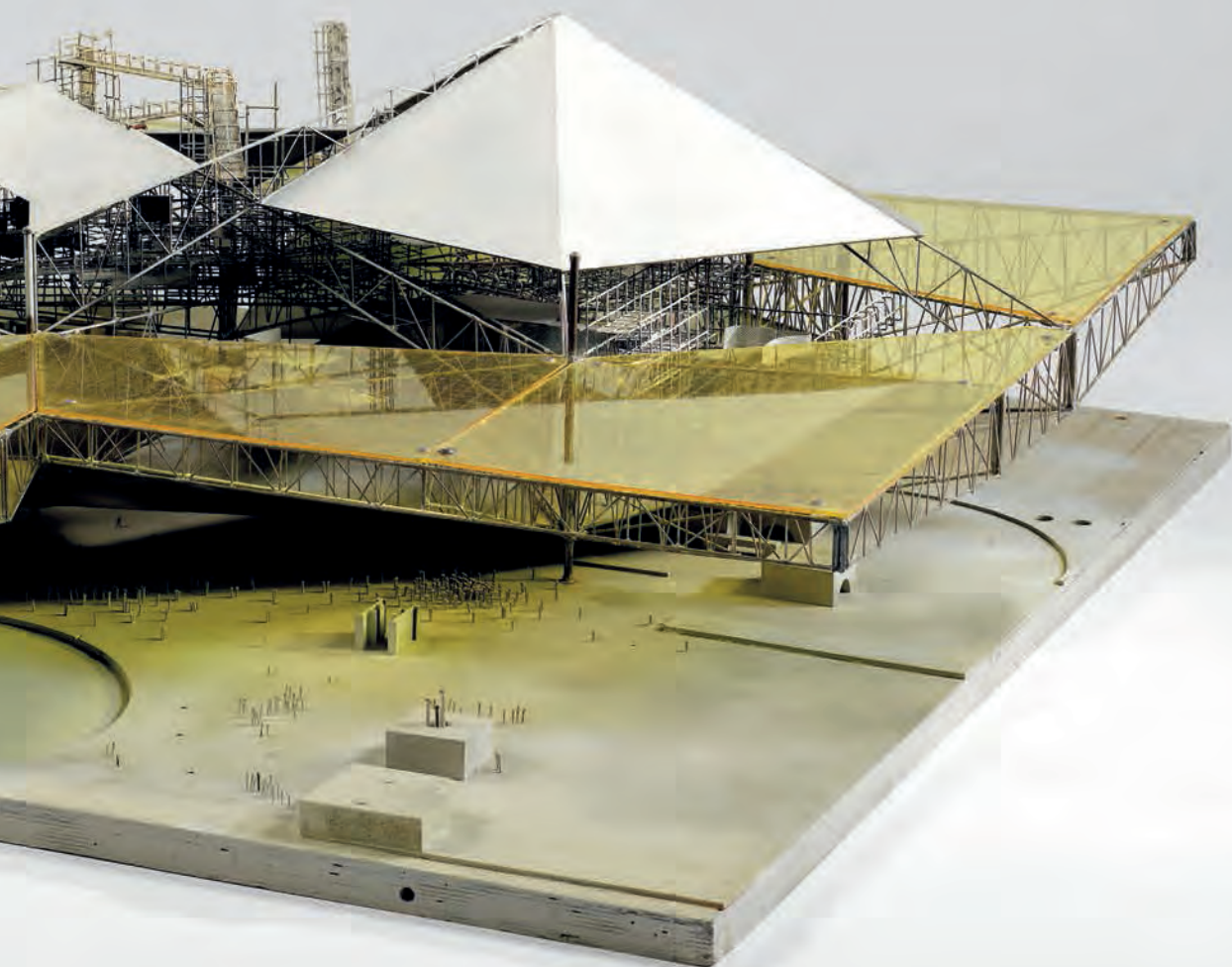
Sectorinterieur
[Sector Interior]
1959

Oriënt sector
[Oriental Sector]
1959

Grote gele sector
[Large Yellow Sector]
1967

Grote gele sector
[Large Yellow Sector]
1967





Another City for Another Life (1959)

Constant

Internationale Situationniste, no. 3 (December 1959)

Translated by Paul Hammond

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

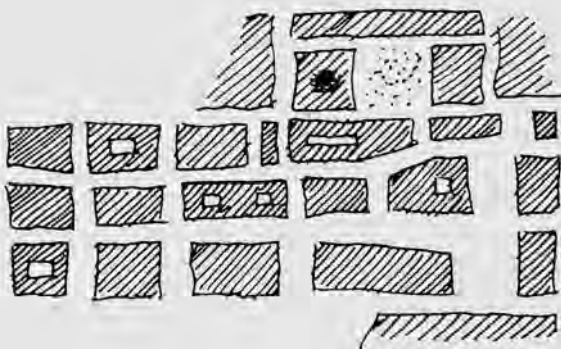
In the older neighborhoods, the streets have degenerated into freeways, leisure activities are commercialized and denatured by tourism. Social relations become impossible there. The newly constructed neighborhoods have but two motifs, which dominate everything: driving by car and comfort at home. They are the abject expression of bourgeois well-being, and all ludic preoccupations are absent from them.

A quasi-social space: the street. Logically built for traffic, the streets are only marginally used as a meeting place.

Faced with the necessity of building whole towns quickly, cemeteries of reinforced concrete—in which great masses of the population are condemned to die of boredom—are being constructed. So what use are the extraordinary technical inventions the world now has at its disposal, if the conditions are lacking to profit from them, if they add nothing to leisure, if imagination is wanting?

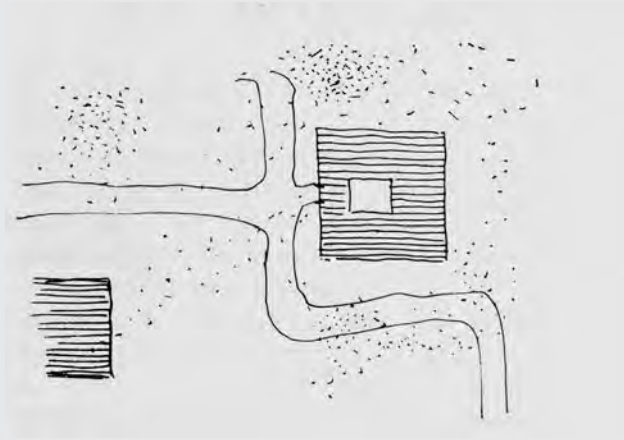
We crave adventure. Not finding it on earth, some men have gone to seek it on the moon. We prefer to wager on a change on earth. We propose creating situations, new situations, here. We count on infringing the laws that hinder the development of effective activities in life and in culture. We are at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

Neighbourhood in a traditional town
A quasi-social space: the street.
Logically built for traffic, the streets are only marginally used as a meeting place.



Our domain, then, is the urban nexus, the natural expression of collective creativity, capable of subsuming the creative energies that are liberated with the decline of the culture based on individualism. We are of the opinion that the traditional arts will not be able to play a role in the creation of the new ambiance in which we want to live.

Isolated housing units, maximum social space: meetings only occur by chance and individually, in corridors or in the park. Traffic dominates everything.

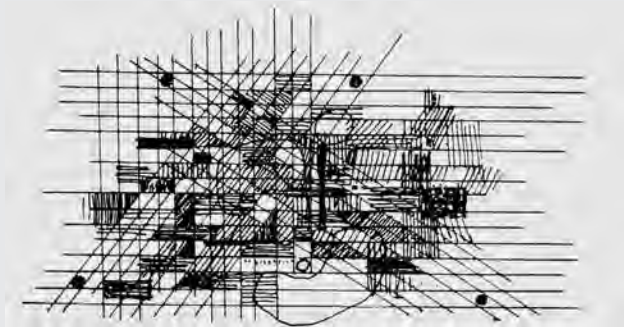


Green City

Isolated housing units. Minimum social space: meetings only occur by chance and individually. Circulation dominates everything.

We are in the process of inventing new techniques; we are examining the possibilities existing cities offer; we are making models and plans for future cities. We are conscious of the need to avail ourselves of all new inventions, and we know that the future constructions we envisage will need to be extremely supple in order to respond to a dynamic conception of life, which means creating our own surroundings in direct relation to incessantly changing ways of behavior.

Our conception of urbanism is therefore social. We are opposed to all the conceptions of a *ville verte*, a “green town” where well-spaced and isolated



Principle of a covered town

Spatial “plan.” Suspended collective housing: extended over the whole town and separated from traffic, which passes beneath or above.

skyscrapers must necessarily reduce the direct relations and common action of men. Conurbation is indispensable for the direct relation of surroundings and behavior to be produced. Those who think that the rapidity of our movements and the possibilities of telecommunications are going to erode the shared life of

the conurbations are ignorant of the real needs of man. To the idea of the *ville verte*, which most modern architects have adopted, we oppose the image of the covered town, in which the plan of roads and separate buildings has given way to a continuous spatial construction, disengaged from the ground, and included in which will be groups of dwellings as well as public spaces (permitting changes in use according to the needs of the moment). Since all traffic, in the functional sense of the term, will pass below or on the terraces above, the street is done away with. The large number of different traversable spaces of which the town is composed form a complex and enormous space. Far from a return to nature, to the idea of living in a park as individual aristocrats once did, we see in such immense constructions the possibility of overcoming nature and of submitting the climate, light, and sounds in these different spaces to our control.

Spatial “plan.” Suspended collective housing, extended over the whole town and separate from traffic, which passes beneath or above.

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

The future cities we envisage will offer an original variety of sensations in this domain, and unforeseen games will become possible through the inventive use of material conditions, like the conditioning of air, sound, and light. Urbanists are already studying the possibility of harmonizing the cacophony that reigns in contemporary cities. It will not take long to encounter there a new domain for creation, just as in many other problems that will present themselves. The space voyages that are being announced could influence this development, since the

Outskirts of the city



bases that will be established on other planets will immediately pose the problem of sheltered cities, and will perhaps provide the pattern for our study of a future urbanism.

Above all, however, the reduction in the work necessary for production, through extended automation, will create a need for leisure, a diversity of behavior and a change in the nature of the latter, which will of necessity lead to a new conception of the collective habitat with a maximum of space, contrary to the conception of a *ville verte* where social space is reduced to a minimum. The city of the future must be conceived as a continuous construction on pillars, or, rather, as an extended system of different structures from which are suspended premises for



Cross section of the covered city

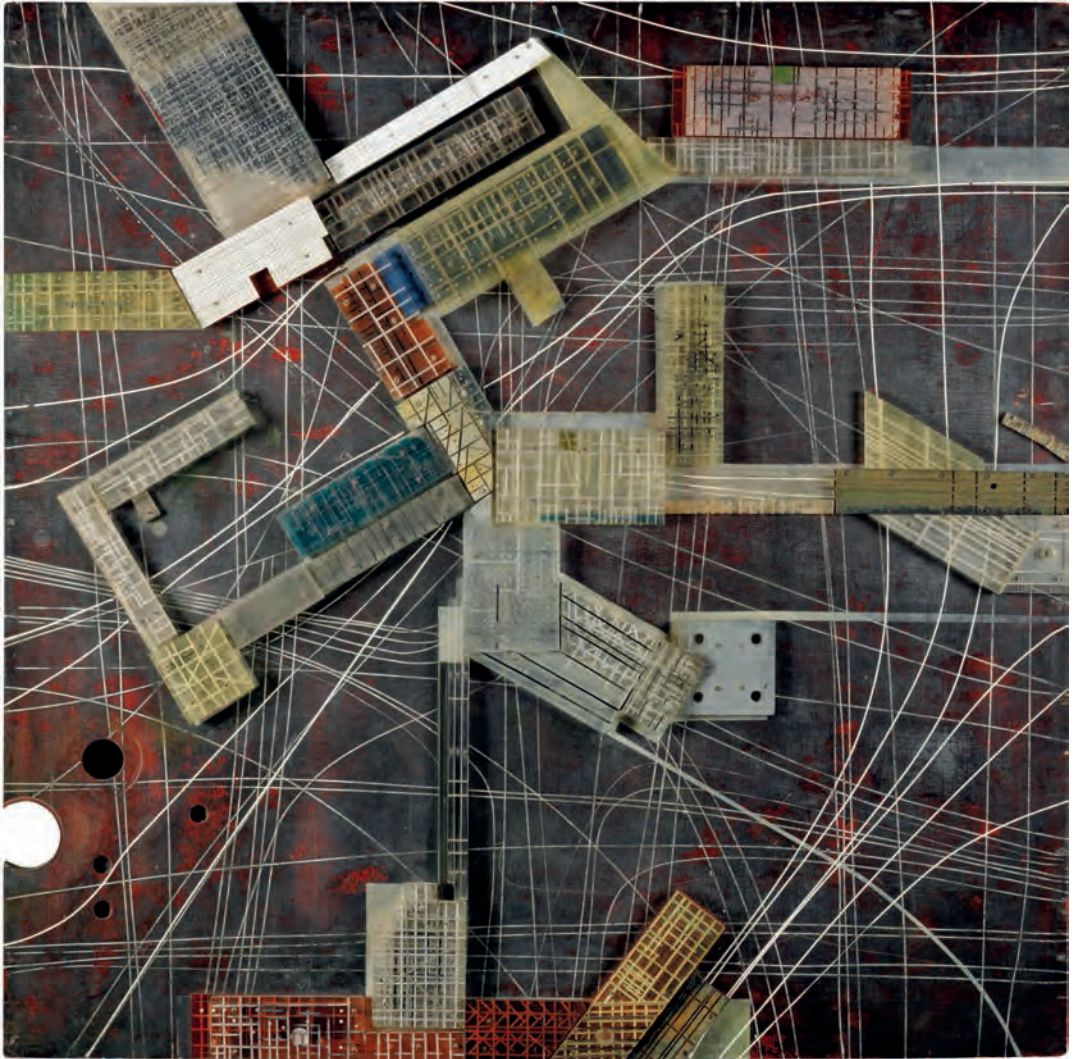
housing, amusement, etc., and premises destined for production and distribution, leaving the ground free for the circulation of traffic and for public messages. The use of ultra-light and insulating materials, which are being experimented with today, will permit the construction to be light and its supports well-spaced. In this way, one will be able to create a town on many levels: lower level, ground level, different floors, terraces, of a size that can vary between an actual neighborhood and a metropolis. It should be noted that in such a city the built surface will be 100 percent of that available, and the free surface will be 200 percent (parterre and terraces), while in traditional towns the figures are some 80 percent and 20 percent respectively; and that in the *ville verte* this relation can even be reversed. The terraces form an open-air terrain that extends over the whole surface of the city and which can be sports fields, airplane and helicopter landing-strips, and for the maintenance of vegetation. They will be accessible everywhere by stair and elevator. The different floors will be divided into neighboring and communicating spaces, artificially conditioned, which will offer the possibility of creating an infinite variety of ambiances, facilitating the *dérive* of the inhabitants and their frequent chance encounters. The ambiances will be regularly and consciously changed, with the aid of every technical means, by teams of specialized creators who, hence, will be professional situationists.

An in-depth study of the means of creating ambiances, and the latter's psychological influence, is one of the tasks we are currently undertaking. Studies

concerning the technical realization of the load-bearing structures and their aesthetic is the specific task of plastic artists and engineers. The contribution of the latter is an urgent necessity for making progress in the preparatory work we are undertaking.

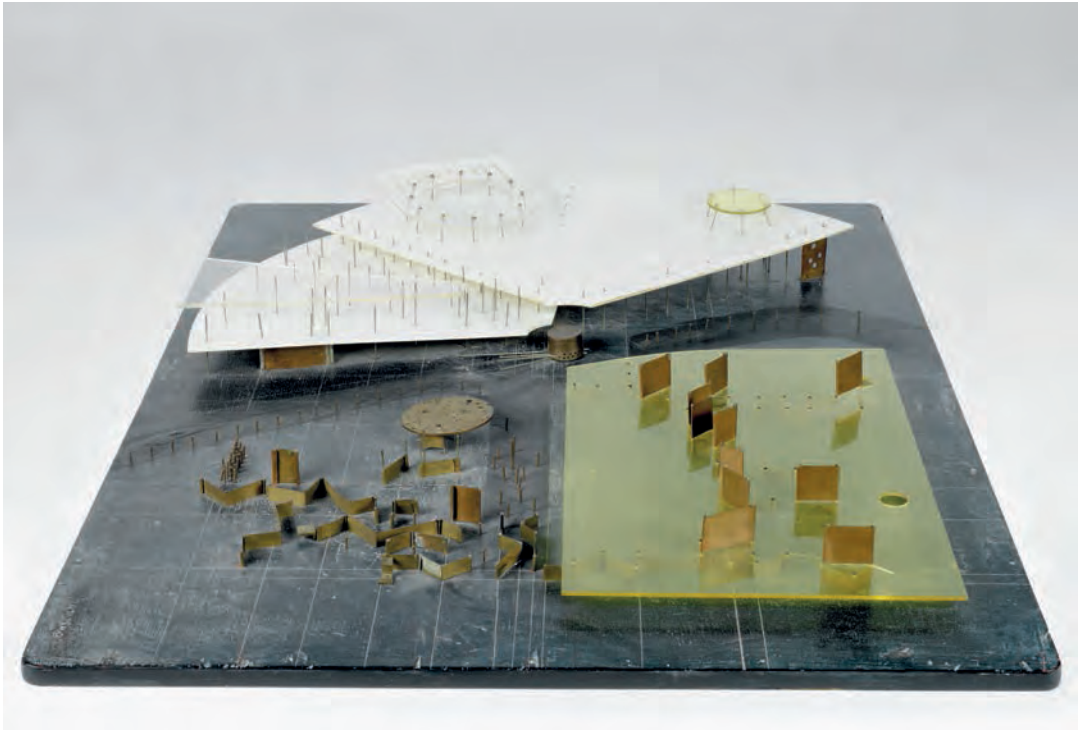
If the project we have just traced out in bold strokes risks being taken for a fantastic dream, we insist on the fact that it is feasible from the technical point of view and that it is desirable from the human point of view. The increasing dissatisfaction that dominates the whole of humanity will arrive at a point at which we will all be forced to execute projects whose means we possess, and which will contribute to the realization of a richer and more fulfilled life.

Groep sectoren
[Group of Sectors]
1959





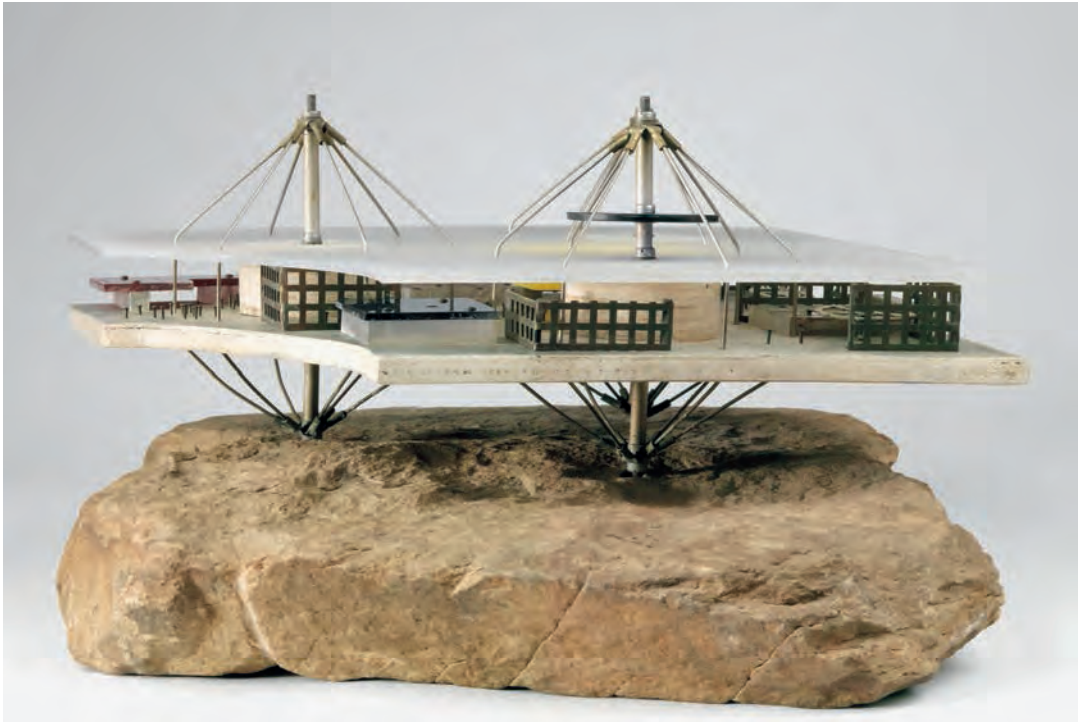
Industrieel landschap
[Industrial Landscape]
1959



Ambiance de départ
[Environment of Departure]
1959



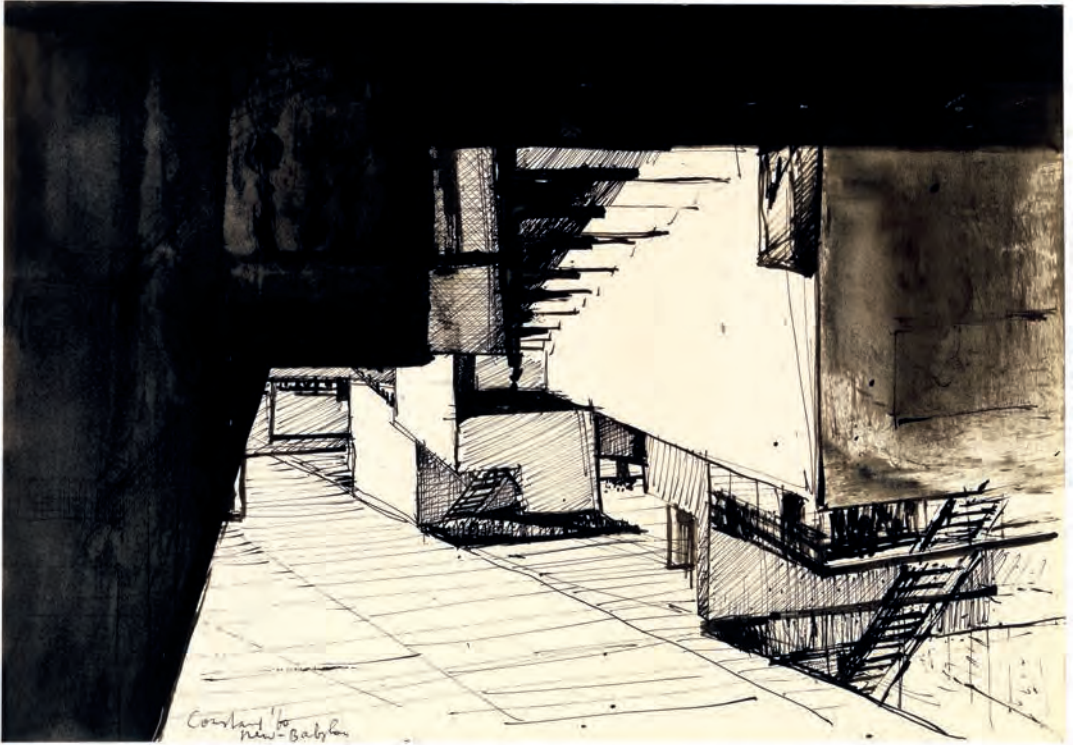
Spatiovore
1959



Hangende sector II
[Hanging Sector II]
1960



Labyrinthisch interieur
[Labyrinthine Interior]
1960



Trappen en ladders
[Stairs and Ladders]
1960

Construction with Ladders
1961





Adieu la P.
[Farewell Painting]
1962



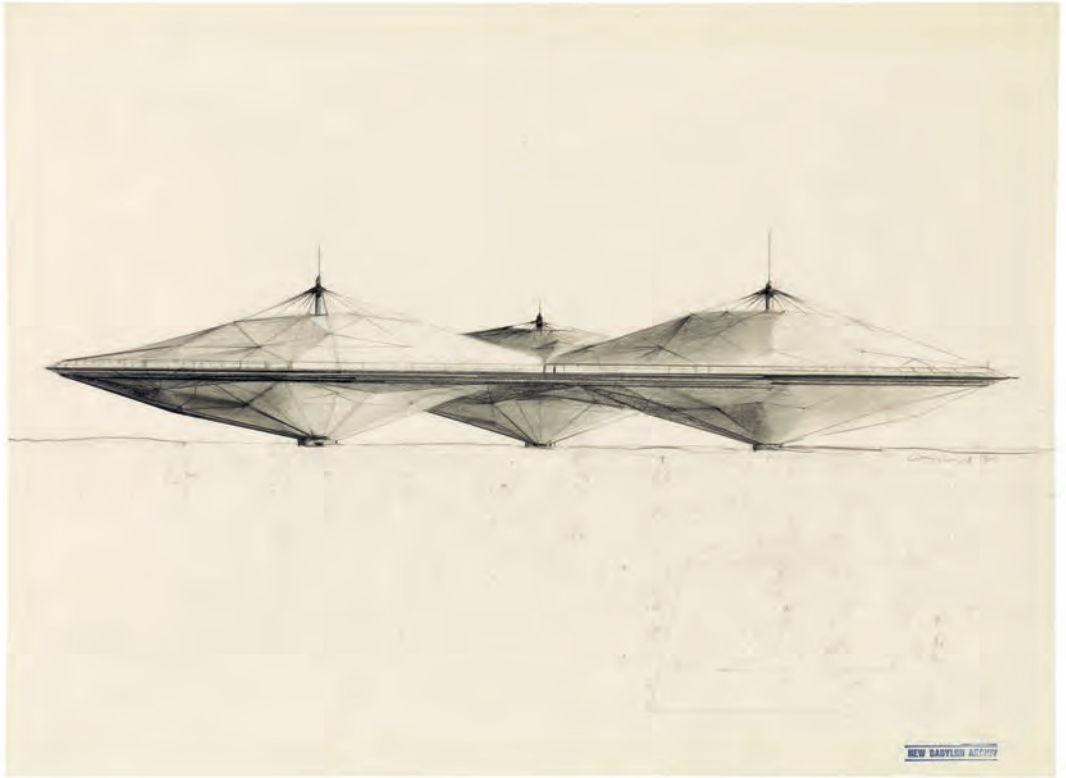
Diorama II
1962



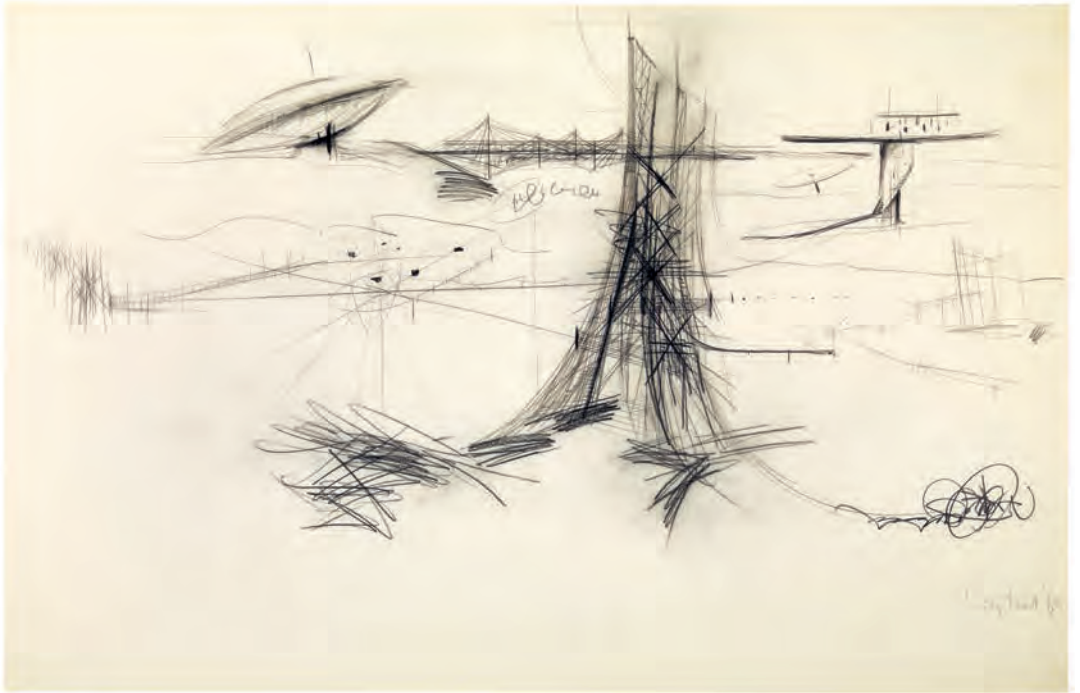
Diorama III
1962

Schets voor een plattegrond
[Sketch for a Map]
1963

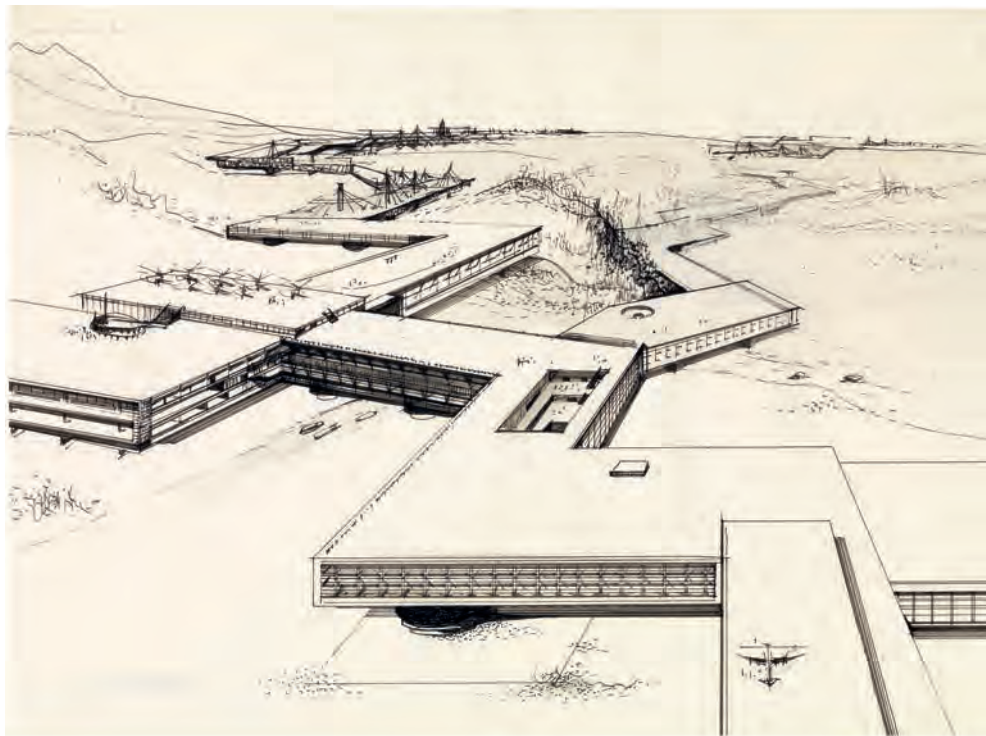




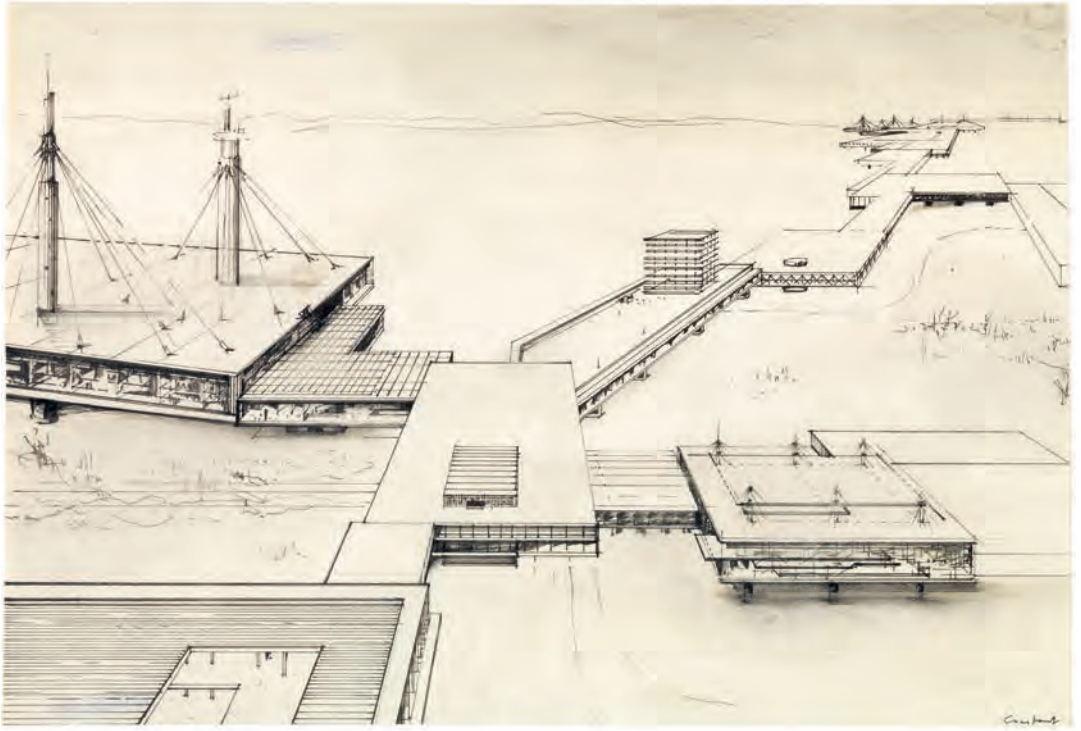
Schets voor een sector met een tentdak
[Sketch for a Sector with a Pyramid Roof]
1964



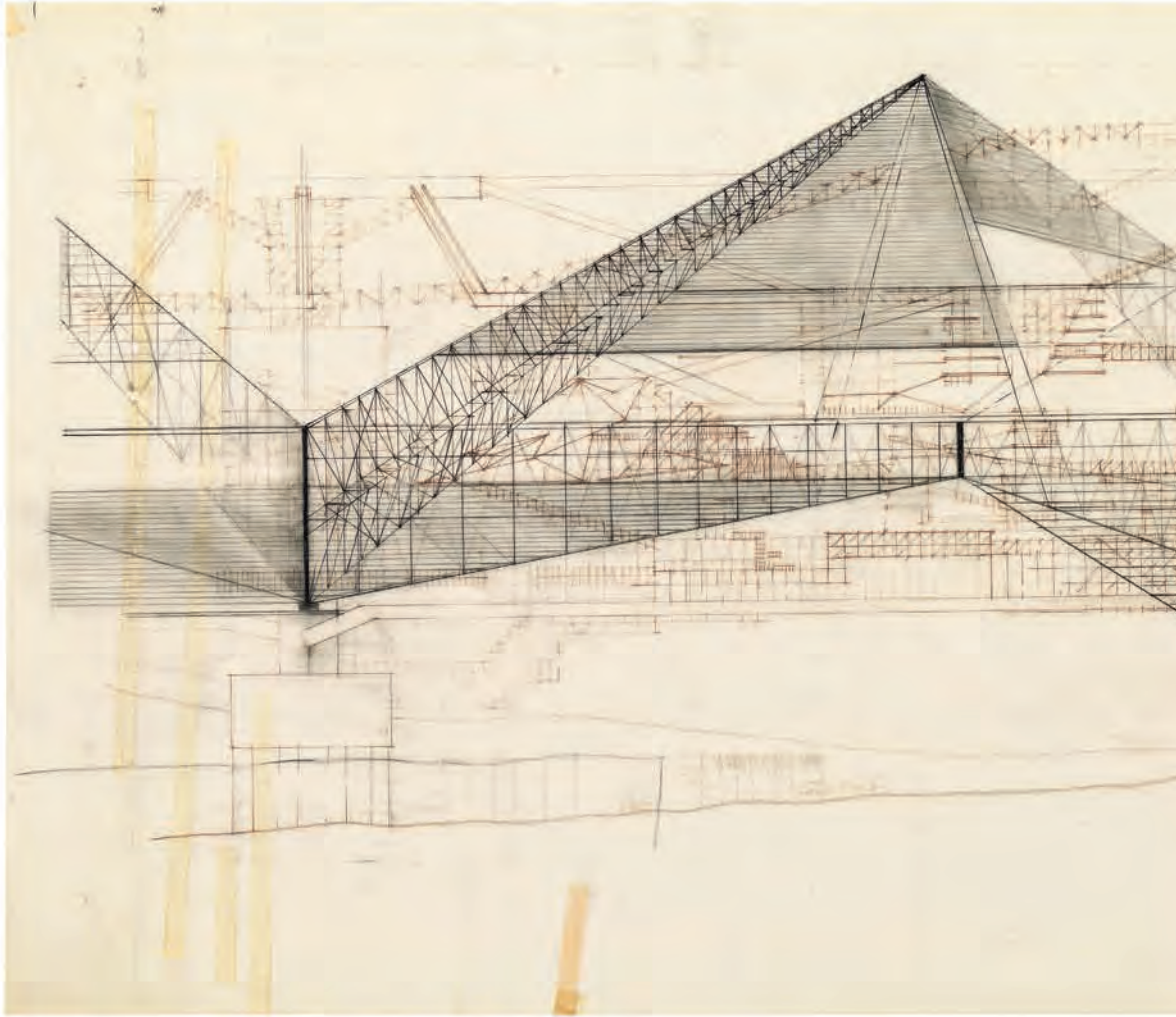
Landschap met Spatiovore
[Landscape with Spatiovore]
1964



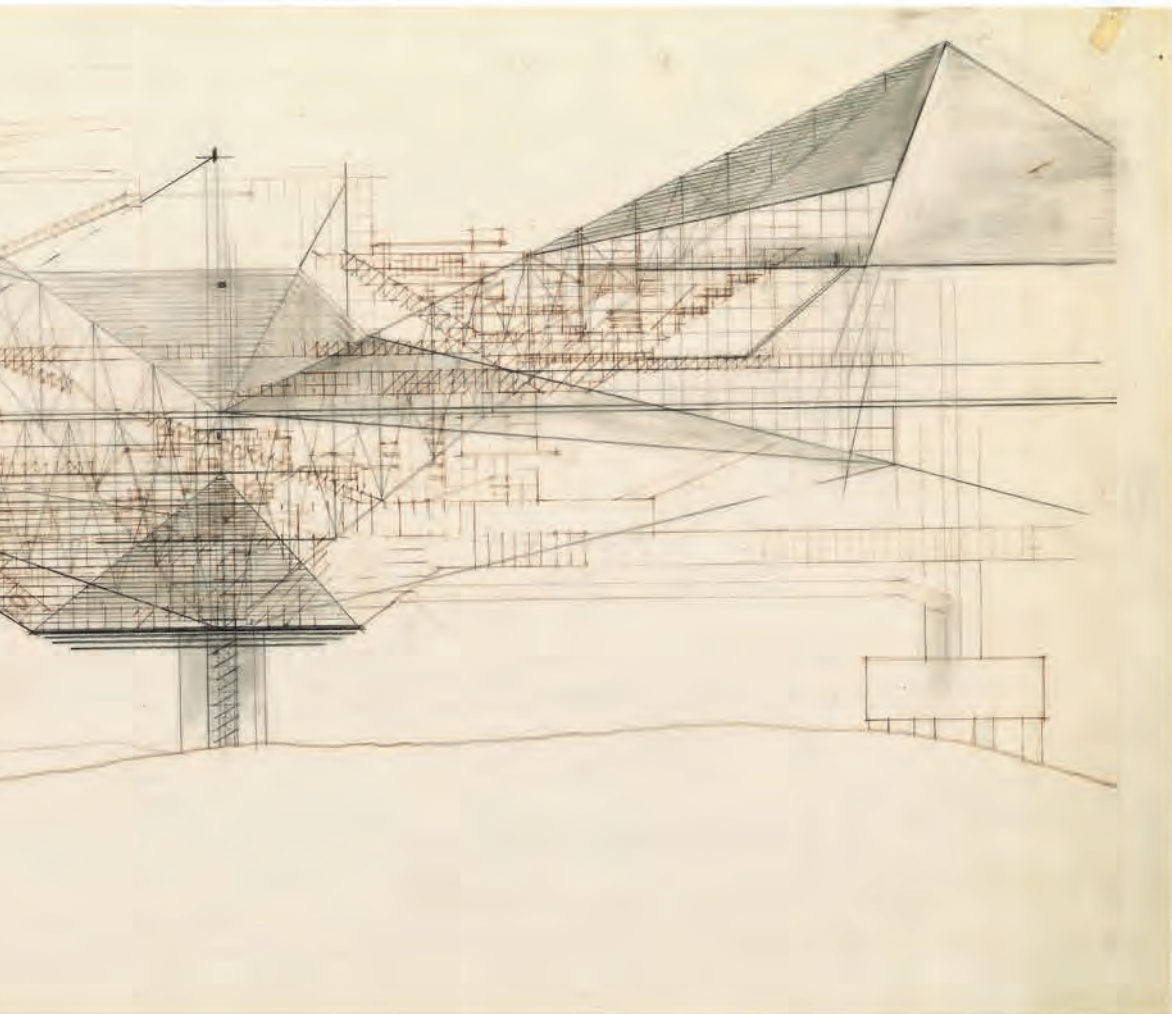
Vogelvlucht groep sectoren I
[Bird's-Eye Group of Sectors I]
1964



Vogelvlucht groep sectoren II
[Bird's-Eye Group of Sectors II]
1964



Doorsnede Grote gele sector
[Cross-section of Large Yellow Sector]
1967





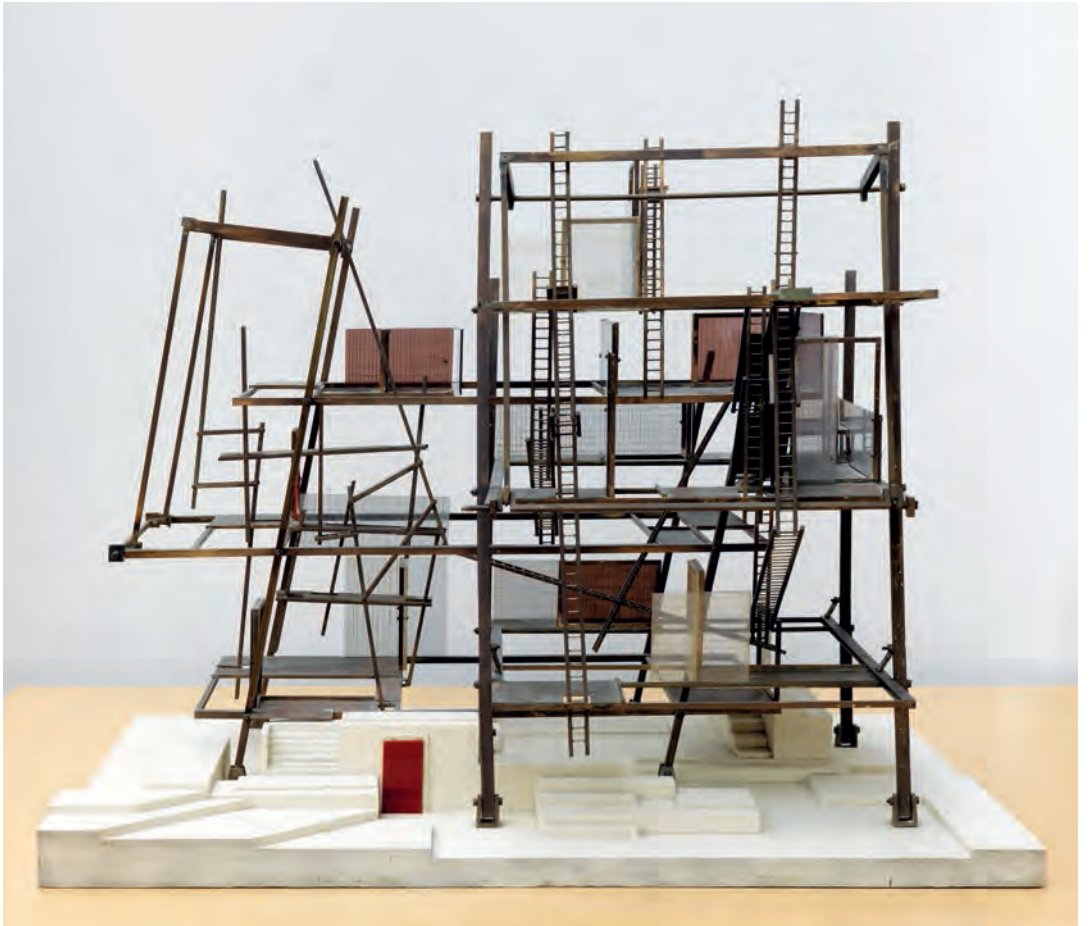
Homo Ludens
1966



Mobil Ladderlabyrinth
[Mobile Ladder Maze]
1967



Maquette voor E.S.R. (Experimentele Studio Rotterdam)
[Model for E.S.R. (Experiment Studio Rotterdam)]
ca. 1964



Mobiel Ladderlabyrinth
[Mobile Ladder Maze]
1967

Lecture at the ICA (1963)

Constant

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 "poesie 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 ruling class, though he depends on this class. We could say that he is hired by the social elite. 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 realisation 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 impossibly 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 can not 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.

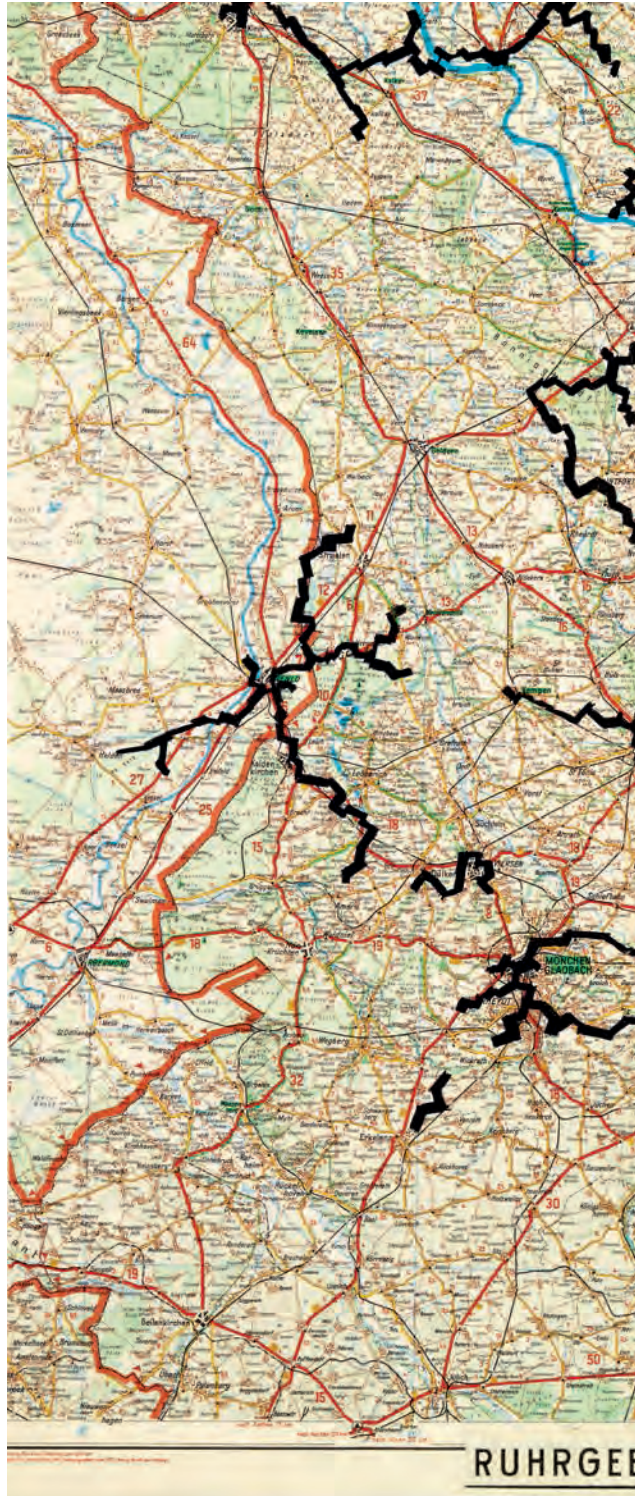
Every moment of life in New-Babylon can have the quality of a brainwashing in so far that the intensity of each moment destroys the memory that normally paralyses the creative imagination.

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.

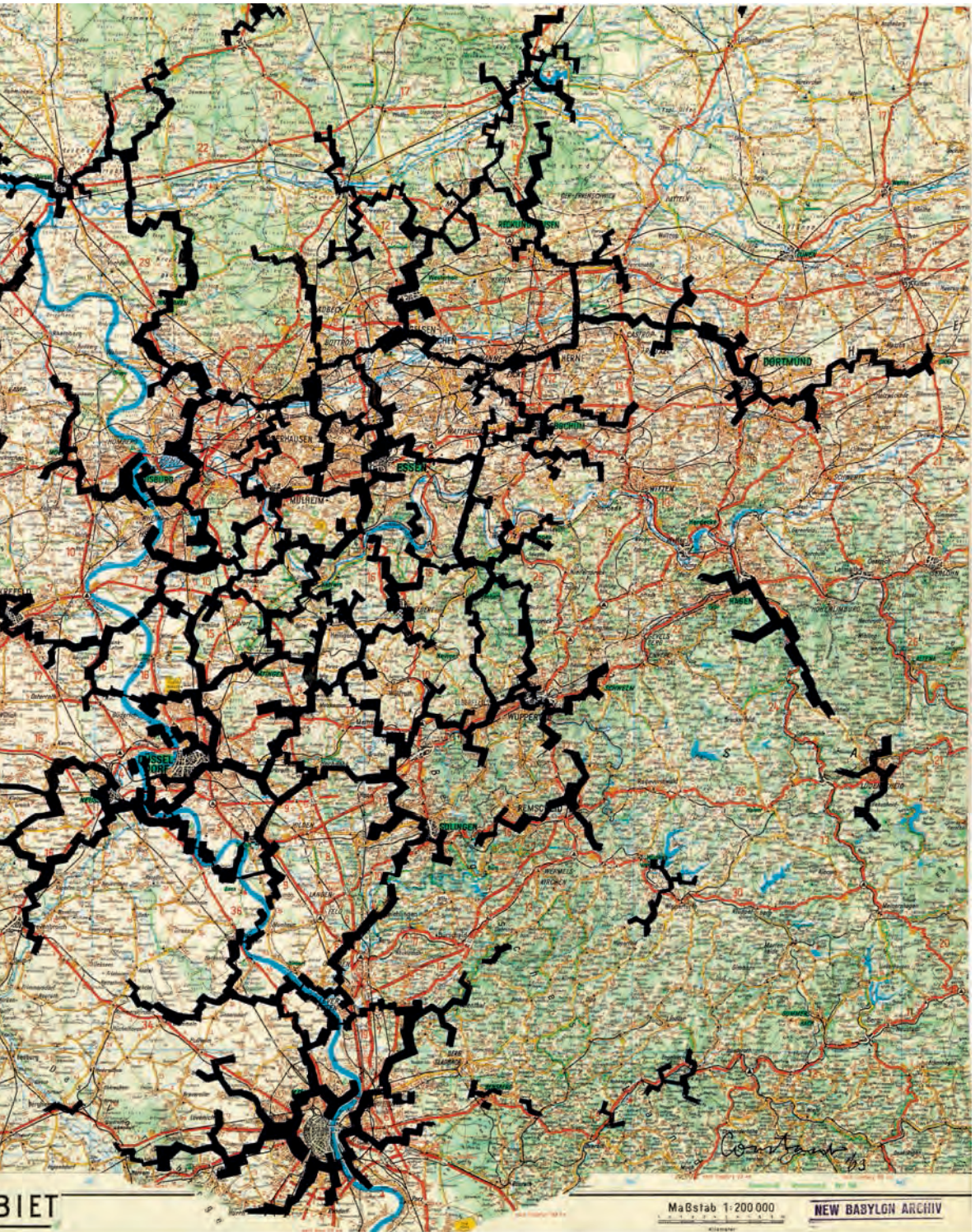
So the *homo ludens* of New-Babylon incessantly travels through the world he creates and recreates at any instant, and we could say that staying in New-Babylon for 24 hours may offer more experiences and more sensations than a long journey in any former period of history. Every square mile of New-Babylon's 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 notworking 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.



New Babylon—Ruhrgebiet
[New Babylon—Ruhr Valley]
1963



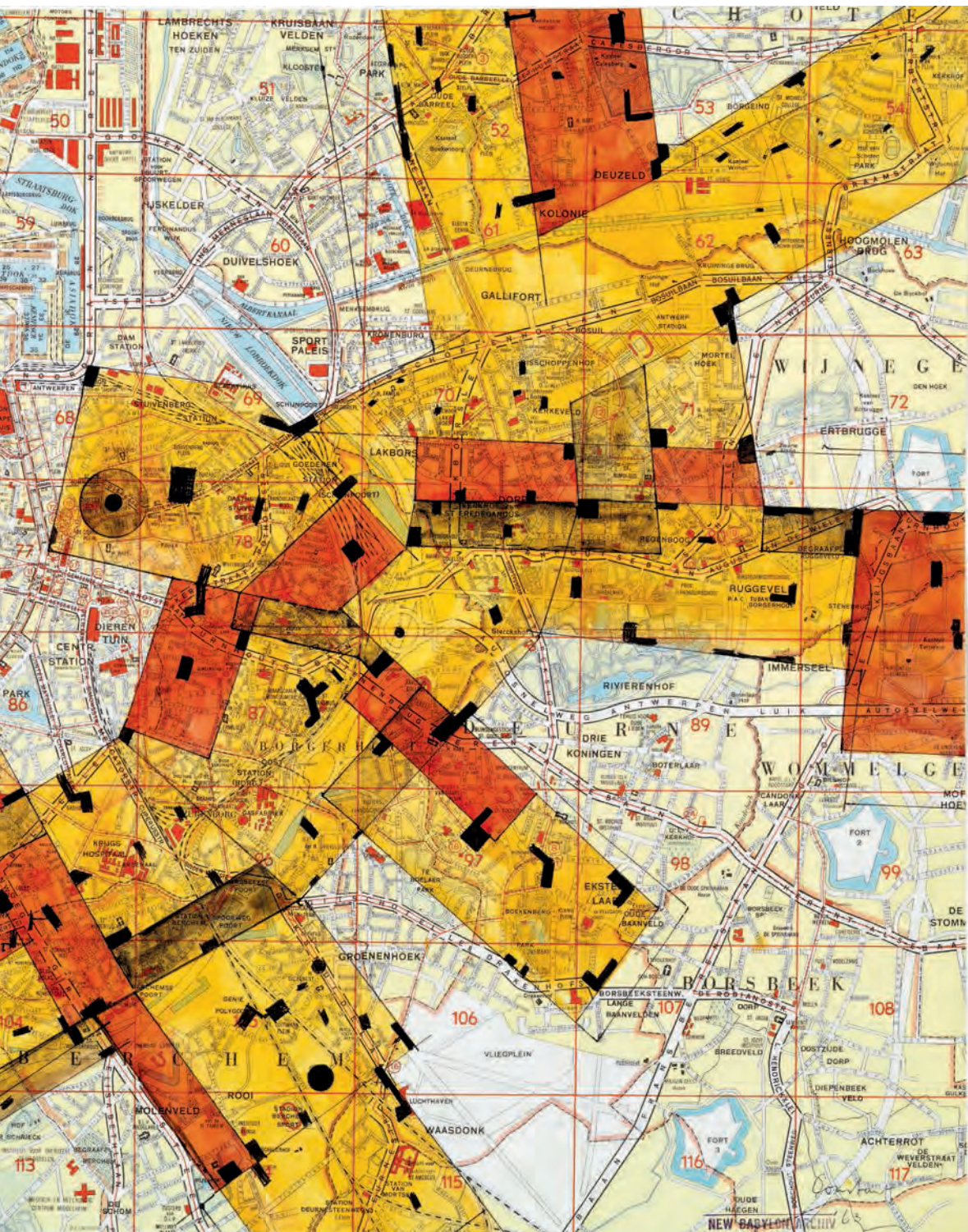
BIET

Maßstab 1:200 000

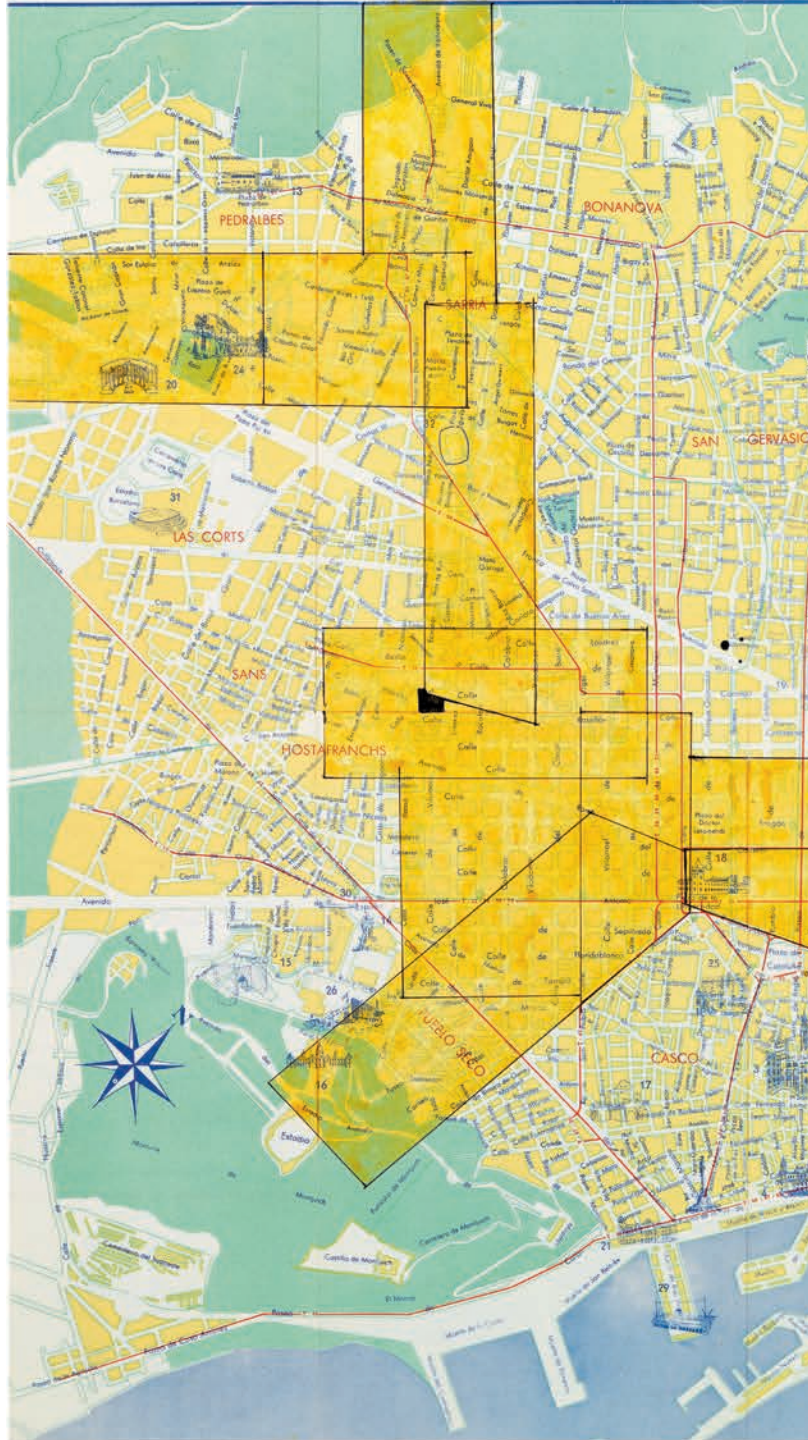
NEW BABYLON ARCHIV



New Babylon—Antwerpen
[New Babylon—Antwerp]
1963

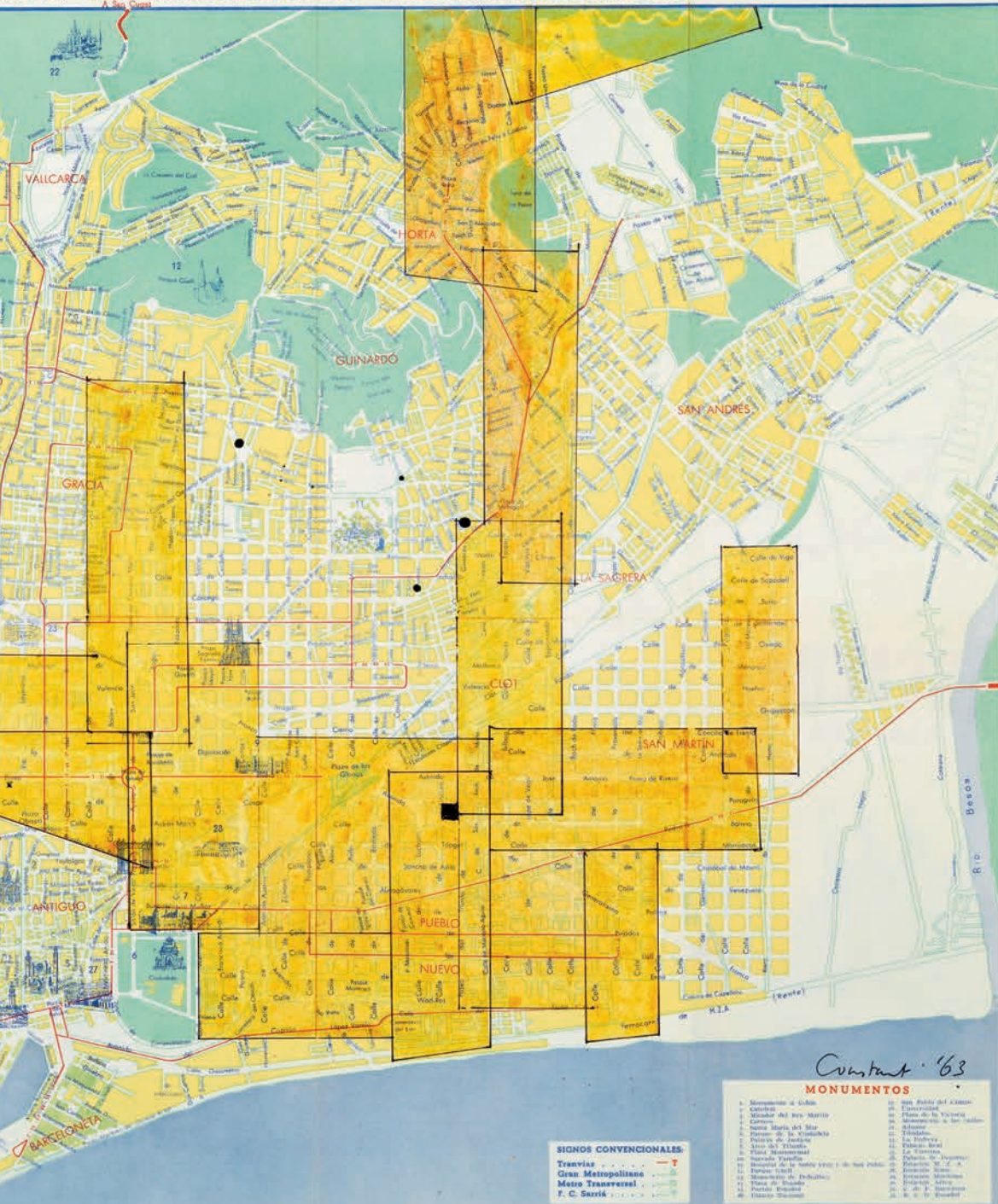


PLAN GÉNÉRAL DE BARCELONE



New Babylon—Barcelona
1963

AVEC SES MONUMENTS ET SES COMMUNICATIONS



Constant '63
MONUMENTOS

1. Monumento a Colón
2. Colón
3. Colón
4. Columna del Rey Martín
5. Columna del Rey Martín
6. Columna del Rey Martín
7. Columna del Rey Martín
8. Columna del Rey Martín
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28. Columna del Rey Martín

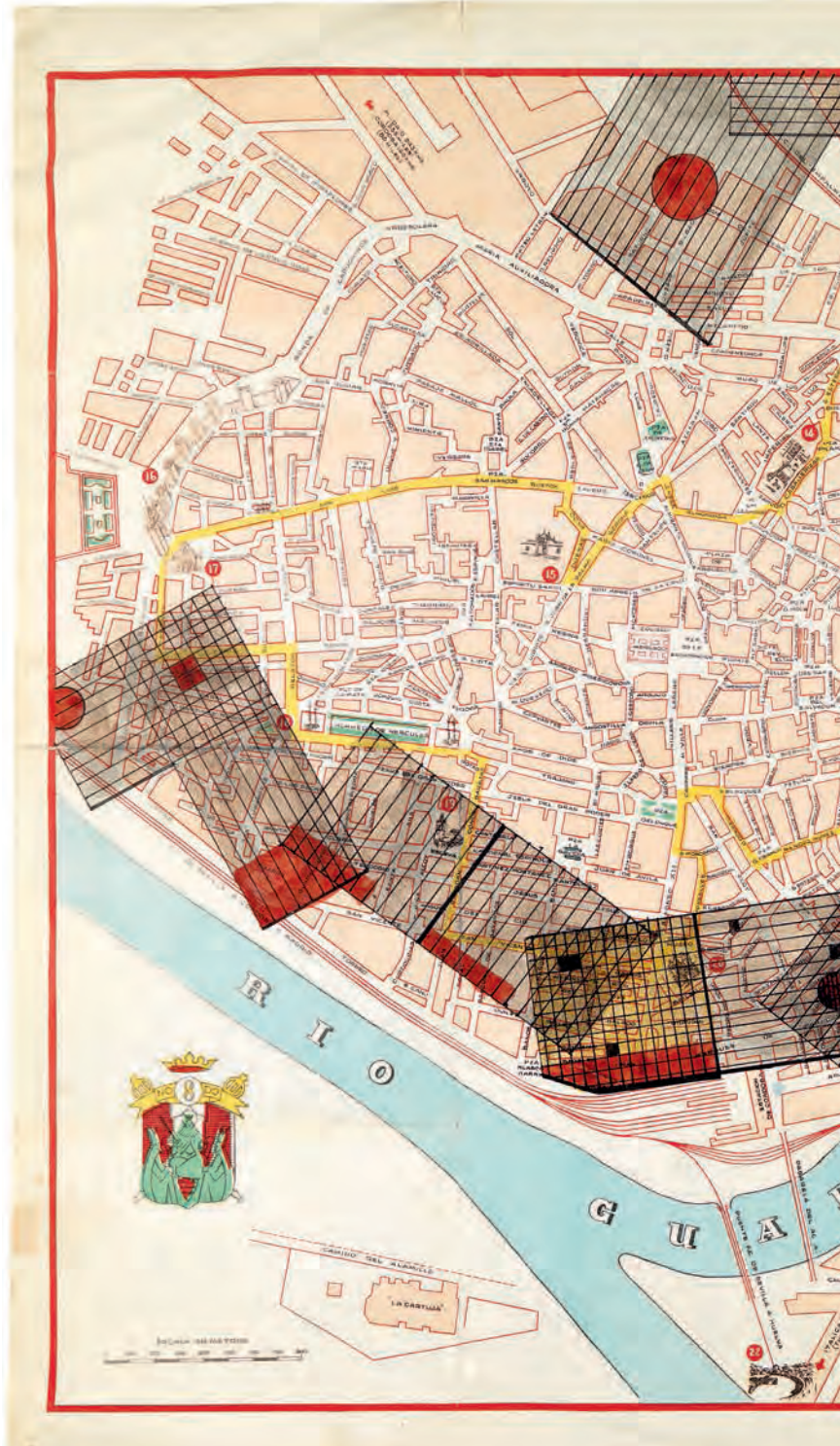
SIGNOS CONVENCIONALES:
 Tranvías — T —
 Gran Metropolitano — M —
 Metro Transversales — T —
 F. C. Sarrià — S —

NEW BABYLON ARCHIV

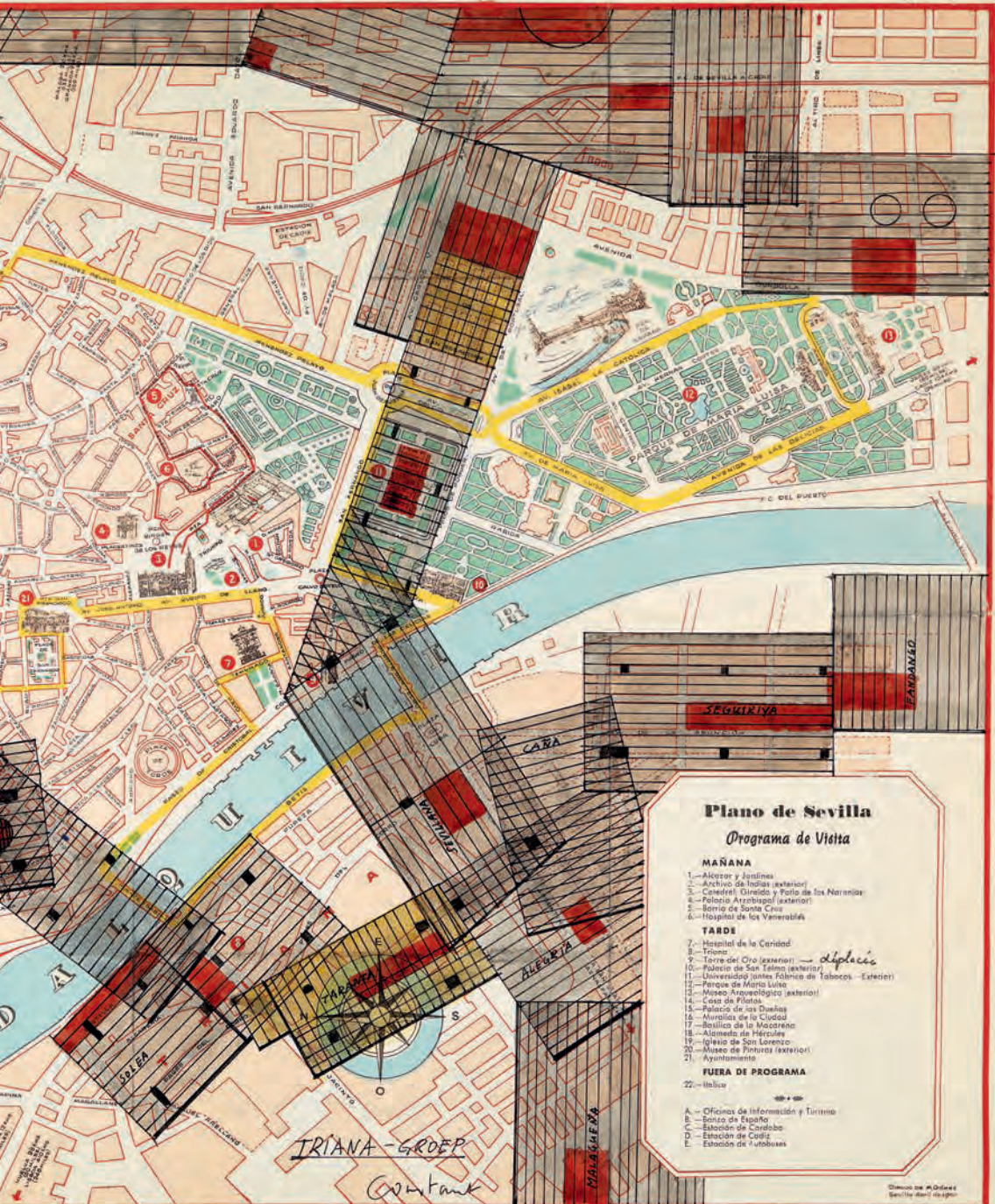
Gründriss New Babylon über
The Hague
[Ground Plan of New Babylon over
The Hague]
1964







New Babylon on Seville
TRIANA-GROUP
1965



Plano de Sevilla
Programa de Visita

MAÑANA

- 1.—Alcazar y Jardines
- 2.—Archivo de Indias (exterior)
- 3.—Catedral, Giralda y Torre de los Narraños
- 4.—Palacio Arzobispal (exterior)
- 5.—Barrio de Santa Cruz
- 6.—Hospital de los Venerables

TARDE

- 7.—Hospital de la Caridad
- 8.—Torreón
- 9.—Torre del Oro (exterior) *replacé*
- 10.—Palacio de San Telmo (exterior)
- 11.—Universidad (antes Palacio de Tabacos - Exterior)
- 12.—Parque de María Luisa
- 13.—Museo Arqueológico (exterior)
- 14.—Casa de Pilatos
- 15.—Palacio de las Dueñas
- 16.—Murallas de la Ciudad
- 17.—Iglesia de la Macarena
- 18.—Alameda de Hércules
- 19.—Iglesia de San Lorenzo
- 20.—Museo de Pinturas (exterior)
- 21.—Ayuntamiento

FUERA DE PROGRAMA

- 22.—Iglesia
- A.—Oficinas de Información y Turismo
- B.—Banca de España
- C.—Estación de Córdoba
- D.—Estación de Cádiz
- E.—Estación de Automóviles

Director de M. del P. de Sevilla

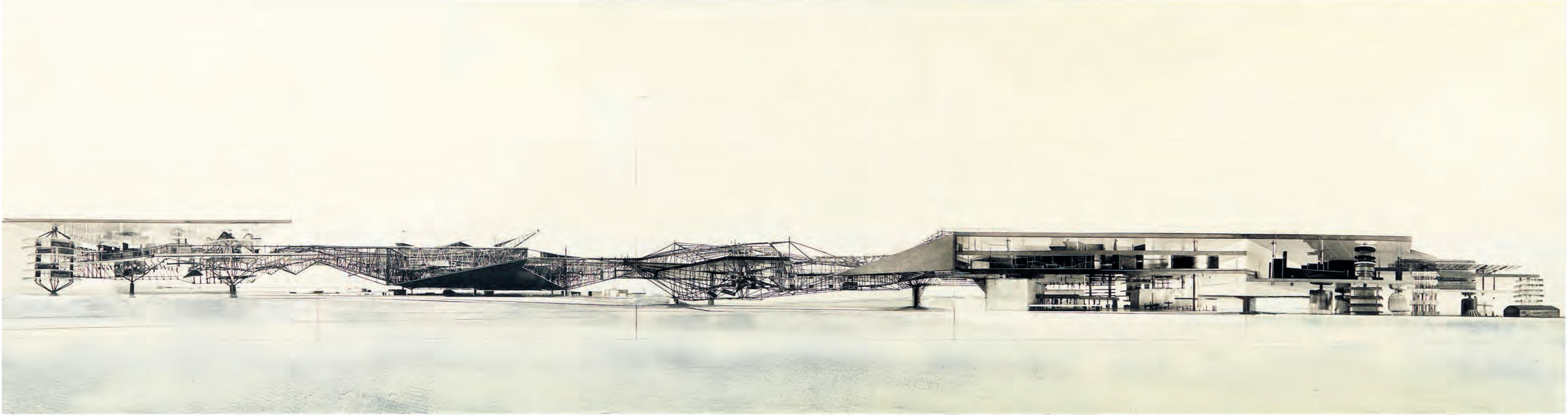


Symbolische voorstelling van New Babylon
[Symbolic Representation of New Babylon]
1969





Groep sectoren New Babylon
[Group of New Babylon Sectors]
1970



Collage of Sector Models
1969



Gezicht op New Babylonische sectoren [View of New Babylonian Sectors]
1971





Performing the Common City

On the Crossroads of Art, Politics, and Public Life*

Pascal Gielen

Certain kinds of disorder need to be increased in city life, so that men can pass into a full adulthood.

—Richard Sennett¹

Per-for-mance means a person who per-for-ates himself and his surroundings (it is simultaneously an analysis, a destruction and an honouring).

—Jan Fabre, New York, 1982

* (Text included on the book *Interrupting the city*, on press)

Two things block the road to adulthood: families and communities. That at least was Richard Sennett's conclusion in 1970 when he analyzed the problematics of urban life. According to the sociologist, human behavior mostly remains stuck in adolescence. Such preadults are afraid of the breathing space of possibilities created by the city air. Adolescents typically shut out chaos or disorder to safeguard their individuality. By maintaining pure beliefs and by strictly adhering to principles, the subject safeguards its pure identity. Adolescents live in permanent fear of the threats that may come from an outside world. Their desire not to project an ambiguous self-image drives them to a kind of hyperpuritan behavior and a rhetoric in which the self must be continually affirmed. "The degree, to which people feel urged to keep articulating who they are, what they want, and what they feel is almost an index of their fear about their inability to survive in social experiences with other men."² Therapeutic sessions with like-minded friends, family members, or care professionals perpetuate this tendency of self-articulation into adulthood. This is why the subject remains stuck in permanent adolescence. Today as well, many people engage in serious and prolonged discussions about their own feelings, qualities, likes, and dislikes, both with people they know and with people they hardly know, on the Internet or in other media. In short, even today our social environment encourages a continual self-articulation in which subjectivity is shaped by an affirmative expression of the ego. An introverted nuclear family life and relatively homogeneous communities also shield the adult individual from disruptive interruptions that may come from a problematic outside world. Thus the contemporary subject hangs onto an identity. Identity stems from the Latin *identitas*, which indeed means "sameness." Through their bonds, families and communities constantly confirm this sameness, in which the unique identity of "us" can be expressed only by opposing the Other or otherness (this of course does not contradict the exception that certain families and communities may have a very destabilizing effect on one's identity). Within the family or community the "I" cherishes its own self and its own being-right.

Sennett makes an important point by stating that ever since Georges-Eugène Haussmann, urban life has also been spatially arranged in the same manner. In Haussmann's view, large avenues drew strict boundaries between neighborhoods of different social origins. This rational urban plan not only generated a functional and efficient urban space but also resulted in segregating the urban multitude into socially relatively homogeneous neighborhoods of conflict-free communities. Simply put, Haussmann and his many acolytes made sure that city dwellers could retreat into a relative sameness, thereby excluding the daily confrontation with the all-too-radical Other as much as possible. The lack of real challenges, irritation, dissensus,

and conflict brought about by such a segregation also means that biologically adult city dwellers can continue to wallow in their adolescence. In other words, they can settle down purely and consistently in their own halted identity because no one in their immediate surroundings deals them a proverbial (or real) blow anymore. The social order in which these adolescents have been socialized is, after all, established and firmly protected and screened off by urban strategies that allow the “I” to remain in a safe comfort zone, together with its own kind.

Although over the past 150 years, architects, urbanists, social geographers, and sociologists have frequently contested Haussmann’s views, it is astonishing to see that most contemporary cities still follow the example of the Frenchman’s rational plans in some way or other. Even more so: young, enthusiastic architects and urban planners still dare to present fashionably looking plans with a strictly delineated creative urban zone, shopping zone, commercial hub, university campus and administrative zone, and, especially, a number of spatially well-cordoned-off residential areas (be they for middle-class families, single yuppies, or the elderly) in specific urban zones. Ambitious gentrification plans of the past few decades also demonstrate a strategy in which one homogeneous group—usually the lower social class—is carefully deported on behalf of another homogeneous group—especially the middle class or higher income groups.³

And even when such master plans are hard to implement fully because of a historically embedded urban layout, we can still observe how cities are segregated “organically,” often along ethnic lines. Jewish neighborhoods have historically entrenched themselves within the *eruv*, and in order to meet Chinese people or people with a Muslim background one needs to visit completely different urban zones. The higher autochthonous middle class will have settled in a recently renovated green neighborhood. If anything, this begs the question of whether urban planners have actually left Haussmann behind. In any case, we can see, with Sennett, that many cities even today still cultivate the adolescent within us by blocking any adult contact with the Other. The nonintentional, the contradictory, and the unknown are still smoothed away as much as possible through urban segregation and functional differentiation. The lack of confrontation in the rational organization of urban life also means that city dwellers only rarely need to defend their own existence or claim their own space, as this has already been taken care of on their behalf in a well-calculated plan, especially if these citizens belong to the middle class. As a result, city dwellers hardly need a truly public space in which to account for, argue for, and time and again legitimate their own individuality. Or, put another way: the segregated city dwellers hardly need to engage in everyday

politics any more. They no longer need to fight for or account for how they shape their own lives and their environment. When one's identity is no longer questioned or challenged, politics becomes a strictly private affair that, in a democracy, can be taken care of in the voting booth. In the functionally ordered city, politics are banished from the street. When the public space no longer provides a platform to confront the alien, the strange, people with different ideas or beliefs, it is automatically neutralized in a political sense. Or: when the public space allows us to not meet others and instead to ignore them or pass them by (as, for instance, with a simple click in the virtual space of the Internet), it simply ceases to exist. Politics then withdraws from daily life, and the public space becomes depoliticized.

But why should a peaceful, secluded, and apolitical existence within one's own family or community be a tragic thing? At first sight, it would seem to offer only advantages. However, the paradoxical consequence of living in conflict-free or at least confrontation-free zones, according to Sennett, is that it encourages explosions of violence. Those who anxiously hide in their adolescent, pure identity will quickly become violent when they are eventually interrupted in their routines by someone else. Because these adolescents, thanks to their permanent stay in the segregated community, are no longer obliged to express themselves constantly in conflictual situations, they no longer know how to relate to others in an agonistic way. Because of the strong social homogenization of delineated urban areas, the public space loses its function of expressing differences. In this segregated city, these encounters with the Other are suppressed in any case, which means there are no verbal confrontations either. Whether these places to meet the Other did exist in the past or how they specifically looked, Sennett does not clarify, but it is the reason why in *The Uses of Disorder* (1970) he argues for more anarchy in the city. Communities and homogeneous neighborhoods should be broken open, purely rational divisions be removed, especially to prevent random violent eruptions and solve them in an "adult" manner.

It is the mixing of diverse elements that provides the materials for the "otherness" of visibly different life styles in a city; these materials of otherness are exactly what men need to learn about in order to become adults. Unfortunately, now these diverse city groups are each drawn into themselves, nursing their anger against the others without forums of expression. By bringing them together, we will increase the conflicts expressed and decrease the possibility of an eventual explosion of violence.⁴

This statement also makes clear the primordial role of the public space in the city or, in a wider sense, modern society. It provides the possibility to express diversity, thereby banishing blind or random violence. A lively public space

that always allows for otherness thus has the important political function to convert antagonisms into agonisms. According to philosopher Chantal Mouffe, this is the basis of every democracy: “To revitalize democracy in our post-political societies, what is urgently needed is to foster the multiplication of agonistic public spaces where everything that the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate can be brought to light and challenged.”⁵ What role art and artists may have in this context now becomes clear. After all, artists are particularly good at “expression,” at shaping and articulating opinions, images, beliefs, ideas, et cetera. If they also succeed in projecting curious, unknown, and unexpected images and performances into the urban space, they will constantly pull the adolescent city dwellers out of their comfort zones. By making them see, smell, feel, and hear that everything that is can also always be different, artists can time and again *make* the public space anew. It is precisely in the interruption of the daily routine and of the regular social intercourse in the city that the public space originates and is charged politically.

Clearly, an artist’s “message” absolutely need not be political. Simply by the act of pushing the otherwise conceivable, by lending it a possible expression, the public and the political emerge. This “MESSAGE” can be formal, ethical, ecological, or political in nature. The point is that the artist introduces something singular, with the result that everything regarded as “normal” before suddenly no longer seems to be so evident. Or, as I have pointed out many times elsewhere: the artist introduces a “dismeasure” into the measure that is regarded as “normal” by an urban culture at a given moment in history.⁶ Precisely in this unforeseen “dismeasure” lies the political character and the force to generate the public space. At the same time, this means that not all art in the public space is truly public art, in the sense that it creates the space and therefore charges it politically. Art does not have to “interrupt.” On the contrary, the majority of art in the public space is anything but disruptive and so also anything but political. The interruptive character of artistic interventions happens to depend strongly on the contexts in which they are performed. Pictures, sculptures, performances, and other art in public spaces may both confirm or even fixate the place or neighborhood in which they are planted, as well as confront them, open them up. Michel de Certeau provided some insight into this complex interplay of art, urban publicness, and politics with the conceptual work he did in the 1980s. This theologian also paved the way for a more analytical look at Sennett’s urban problematic.

Planning and Use of the City

In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980), de Certeau unfolds an idiosyncratic sociology of everyday human intercourse by means of two binary oppositions,

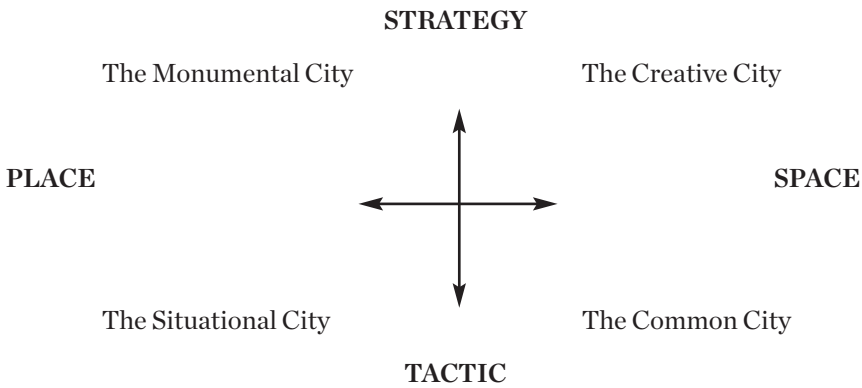
which will be presented here in a somewhat simplified form in order to describe the relationship between city, politics, and the public space.⁷

De Certeau defines *strategy* as an instrument of those in power. Simply put, policymakers and managers design strategies for controlling social phenomena or running their companies, respectively. Things are put on paper in black-and-white or, with regard to the city, are cast in urban development plans. Ideally, the urban fabric is studied beforehand, and the results are documented in reports. These reports then set the agenda for policy meetings that again produce written reports that in turn have an influence on recommendations, (urban) regulation, and possibly legislation, which is then, in more recent years, followed by processes of monitoring. Just like Haussmann's plans, a strategy's goal is to define social intercourse in the long term for a geographically clearly delineated area. Following a rational logic, places are given a permanent function via a "grid" that is superimposed from the top down upon the urban multitude. However, the users of the city develop their own *tactics* to deal with these ready-made plans. In doing so, they bend the predesigned strategy to their own will. As opposed to strategies, tactics are short-term reactions and actions that can pop up anywhere in urban life. For instance, a city tripper may deviate from the prescribed touristic route to explore a rundown but intriguing dark alley. This adventurer's voyeuristic curiosity leads him to other places in the city, places the city government, tour operators, and city marketeers would perhaps prefer not to be revealed.

In addition to the opposition of *strategy* and *tactics*, de Certeau posits a distinction between *lieu* (place) and *espace* (space). *Place* then represents individuality, stability. In particular, material or physical elements—such as a building, a road, or a statue—occupy a place and can be replaced only with something else if the place is ceded or taken. To this French thinker, a place is therefore a well-defined and strictly delineated domain. Think, for example, of the boundaries of a nation-state, but also the walls around a city or the *eruv* around a Jewish neighborhood. *Space*, by contrast, represents movement, temporality, and change. Literary scholar Koen Geldof calls space the result of many simultaneous, sometimes contradictory operations. Sociologist Rudi Laermans adds that space is being continuously created by utilizing place, by actively controlling it.⁸ Space includes a verb, a process of continuous "spatialization." In that process, place is made fluid, entering a state of permanent transmutation.

When we cross both oppositions, the result is an axial figure that enables us to map the relationship between art, politics, and the city in a more analytical manner. This gives us a typology, albeit an ideal-typical one, of urban models in which art, politics, and public space each display a specific topology. Related to

the art that such urban orderings produce, these are called the monumental, the situational, the creative, and the common city. And, although these urban ideal-types are presented here chronologically, all types may occur simultaneously. For example, today there are no longer purely monumental cities, but there may be several districts within one city that are more like a monumental city, whereas other parts are more like the creative or the common city. In short, the city is always in motion, and any typology trying to capture this is missing the complexity of real life, including the schematic structure below.



The Monumental City

The monumental city reflects Haussmann’s ideal image: an urban organization based on the strategically developed rational plan in which every place is ascribed a well-delineated function. Such undertakings can be found in Paris and post-Victorian London of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Such urban arrangements do not actually represent themselves but rather the nation-state. In a still-young representative liberal democracy, this nation-state is governed by statesmen who make up an elite group of (former) aristocrats, rising bourgeois, and liberals. Both literally and figuratively, these are Enlightened cities, in which rational bureaucracy has its Weberian heyday. The sociologist Luc Boltanski describes the political period during which this rational city was being prepared:

The period in question was marked both by an increase in the state’s ambition to control the populations residing on the territory where it

exercised its power, that is, its power over what in the first half of the nineteenth century was beginning to be called society, as a grouping largely identified with the boundaries of the nation-state, and by the development of approaches to governance inspired to varying degrees of liberal tradition. These approaches found support—as Michel Foucault showed (2007)—in new administrative techniques for totalization through the use of statistics or accounting, and in techniques for identifying individuals—i.e., citizens—through the use of identity papers or through the use of physical indications. . . . All these techniques were intended to address the problem of managing formally free individuals from a distance, either by making their aggregate behaviour globally calculable and predictable, or by making them individually controllable, that is by ensuring their traceability.⁹

The city of the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century is the outcome of this tendency toward rational calculation on the level of the nation-state from the first half of the nineteenth century. This is why the public *sphere* there to a large extent coincides with what is called the public *space*, a strictly defined place that is “made free” and organized by the state or city government.

The art found here is preferably a national monument, reminding the city of the grand momentum in which the nation and its people are rooted. This city is predictably interrupted by the art that resides in the semipublic spaces of equally monumental museums, theaters, and opera houses. Only strategically or calculatedly is it put on hold by regular parades, fun fairs, or carnivals. In the monumental city the artistic interruption is mainly of a ritual nature. This means that the artist may disrupt the everyday social order, but only to confirm it, as for instance in the symbolic inversion of carnivalesque artistic interventions.¹⁰ Such inversions serve mainly as social vents (or sublimations) to prevent truly violent eruptions.

A symbolic inversion indeed remains only symbolic and also well-defined in time and space. Or, in de Certeau’s words: the ritual interruption is assigned a permanent place in everyday urban life. The grandeur of the nation-state remains untouched by this kind of ritual art. Even more so: art primarily serves to socialize a population within the existing social order without questioning that order. Following de Certeau, artistic artifacts are assigned a permanent *place* in both the social hierarchy and in the urban zone where such art is allowed. The monumental city, in other words, is also the city of the class society in which monumental art defines the canon that must simulate a culture of national unity that glosses over persistent economic and social differences. Within such a context, art and education deliberately commit “symbolic violence,” in the words of Pierre Bourdieu, as they must make the members of a lower social class believe they, too, have one true culture; that is,

the national high culture that in fact legitimizes an equally high bourgeois lifestyle.¹¹

While art in the public space mainly confirms the social order during this period, the state controls the public space with the help of an army of sociologists and urbanists. Against this rigidly strategically structured city of equally rusty functional places, the first seeds of protest began to bud in the 1950s, seeds that would grow out to become mature countermovements in the decade to follow. And this brings us to another era with a different relationship between spatial planning and urban behavior, and therefore to another city.

The Situational City

Among those starting to eat away at the rigid urban grid in the late 1950s are the situationists. A strategically structured monumental city with fixed, assigned places slowly has to make way for other relations. The still permanent positions of hierarchical institutions, monuments, and canon are confronted by a multitude of artists and young activists who reclaim the city through practical interventions and “inappropriate” use of preordained urban zones and buildings. Revolution is frequently declared against both establishment and bureaucratic structures in volatile manifestos, pamphlets, and posters.

Until late in the 1970s and even in the early 1980s, murals and primitive graffiti, together with squatters movements, continued the reappropriation battle. The monumental city’s authority is undermined by all kinds of movements that finally transform urbanity into a situational event. As de Certeau would say: place is directly confronted with tactics here. It may be someone walking down the street naked or a crowd seriously reclaiming the street from King Car, only to disrupt it again with a playful happening. In other words, the situational city is the backdrop for unexpected events and encounters while that backdrop itself remains firmly in place. The police sometimes act forcefully to maintain the existing order.

While the powers that be—both political and educational authorities—cling to the traditional hierarchy, an orthodox art elite deploys reactionary strategies to safeguard its own position. The opposition between tactics and strategy, space and place, appears to coincide for a while with the distinction between progressive and conservative, between heterodoxy and orthodoxy, or between left and right, at this juncture.

The institutional critique within the art world can also be understood within this chain of dichotomies. Often singular artists attempt to dislodge the museum and its historical canon with event-based and therefore tactical

actions. At the same time, fellow artists break out of the institutional environment of white walls in order to create a new world in the streets and neighborhoods. In the situational city, art often borders on politics in actions in which private and public spaces are made public at the same time. Or: time and again, these performances make existing places public by dropping unforeseen voices and unexpected images in them, sometimes by presenting and making concrete completely different forms of living together.

Social and artistic struggle, workers and students, proletariat and intellectuals, political and sexual revolution, creative and hallucinogenic transgressions or destructions find each other for a moment in a tactical undermining of authority and the state. However, as we know, the solidarity between the working class and the student movement, just like the lucid distinction between left and right, would not last for more than two decades. The rebellious higher-middle-class individuals who were still in school in the 1960s would develop into a renewed specimen of the nineteenth-century progressive liberal over the next few decades. They did understand the message of the situationists, because they translated avant-garde art into design, politics into aesthetics, entrepreneurship into management, and ideology into lifestyle. In private-public collaborations they reached compromises with the state and municipal authorities to make the urban space truly fluid. Gentrification and real estate projects followed each other in rapid succession in a strategic “change management” that made the urban infrastructure increasingly flexible. Ever since the 1980s, the city has become increasingly fluid, exchanging place for space, and a planning approach made way for a spatial or project-like approach to the city. We now find ourselves in a new urban era.

The Creative City

In the 1970s, money is delinked from gold, leading in the 1980s and 1990s to the increasing separation of real and virtual economies. Money is becoming more and more liquid, while financial flows can hardly be stopped anymore at the borders of nation-states. Quite the contrary, governments are actively promoting the free transnational traffic of capital. But financial flows are quickly followed by streams of people—looking for fortune and happiness—and even by streams of companies, often in multinational conglomerates. Capital flow generates human flow, making the distinction between domestic and foreign policy more and more vague. Often, the nation-state can only watch all this traffic go by, seeing people come and go, companies settle and move, employment rise and vaporize.

Saskia Sassen is among those who say the metropolis is becoming the epicenter of all this global traffic.¹² The city now plays the leading role in political management, while the nation becomes increasingly sandwiched between local government and transnational organizations, between small creative companies and giant multinationals. While migrants, illegal aliens, and every now and then terrorists make the neatly delineated geopolitical place increasingly fluid from below, governments and capital join hands from the top in private-public collaborations that bring down the traditional spatial planning. In the 1990s, the city became a building site where real estate and project developers were sometimes given total freedom.

The so-called neoliberal city was born in the process that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari would call “deterritorialization.”¹³ Or, in their pathos: the war machines of migrants and illegals on the one hand and stateless multinationals on the other together “squat” the geopolitical territory. Or, returning to de Certeau: the fixed *place* indeed makes way for an urban *space*. This urban space increasingly becomes a turntable for money and human trafficking, a transit zone for poor illegals and highly educated and hard-working but often poorly paid creatives. The so-called third gentrification wave provided a place for this last group.

By the end of the 1990s, after the relocation of social classes in previous waves, the creative class gets all the attention. The work of Richard Florida and others provides the necessary semiscientific legitimization for these third-way politics.¹⁴ The creative city is born. While former socialists such as Tony Blair embrace entertainment and capital, civil servants and urban developers roll up their sleeves to design new creative zones. The industrial *lumpenproletariat* has to make way for a postindustrial creative precariat, the unionized laborer for the flexible freelancer, the artist for the cultural entrepreneur, the permanent job for the temporary contract, the welfare state for neoliberal power.

Here we immediately see the paradox of the creative city: while everything appears to become fluid and while mobility, flexibility, inventiveness, and creativity are being encouraged by the government, that same—now urban—government tries to forge an alliance with the new capital. The artificial design of urban creative zones, fashion districts, flexible workplaces, and lounge bars are all part of a truly political, urban strategy that desperately tries to tame the wild multitude of hip artists, hipsters, and other creatives by offering them a fixed *place* within a well-thought-out urban space.

From the Groninger Museum to the Guggenheim Bilbao, it is all part of a master plan to bring the city and its economy under control again. Once more, de Certeau: in the creative city, space confronts strategy. In this strategy, the

public space—where ideally “anything goes”—is carefully calculated. Although the square looks open, its use is organized by a tight time schedule. While the public space appears to be tolerant of some disorder, cameras meticulously register any possible real unrest.

Whereas mostly socialist, third-way politicians rule the day with this new fangled strategy until well into the 2000s, by the end of the first decade of the new century the torch is handed on to predominantly reactionary parties. In the process, the creative city becomes more and more a repressive city. Terrorist threats, in combination with the odd violent psychopathic case, help establish a new regime. Neoliberal and neonationalist forces join hands to build on the strategic methods of their political predecessors. This time not with hip rhetoric but with authoritarian vigor. More policing and zero tolerance instead of turning a blind eye to soft drugs.

And if suddenly a too heavily armed individual appears in the urban commotion, there is always that last, desperate resort: the military. It is rather symbolic that it is precisely this exclusive representation of the nation-state that is called upon now. Driven by nostalgic desire for the monumental city, reactionary politics now reestablish the notion of the nation in an attempt to control the uncontrollable multitude of city dwellers and other hybrids. Indeed, the city has become an impure place within a purely nationalist rhetoric, a dirty stain on the nation-state, the Other within the own body.

And what can artists do in this creative but repressive city? They had better become creative entrepreneurs, which also means not being recalcitrant or causing “trouble” but helping to solve problems by thinking along constructively. The new artist is not a revolutionary as in the situational city, but a “realist” and above all a pragmatist. Art in the public space then serves to mark the neighborhood, to fixate it again with an identity. Or, again in the words of de Certeau: public art is deployed as part of a strategy to force space to become place again. And, yes, in the creative-repressive city, too, artists are welcome guests in problem neighborhoods.

Community art is all the rage again. Both Third Way politicians and conservatives are only too happy to enlist inexpensive artists to solve the problems caused by their own neoliberal policies. Community centers, small schools, and medical facilities are dismantled under the guise of crisis and efficiency, and artists may now try to repair the holes in the social fabric.¹⁵ While doing so, well-meaning artistic people often use methods that reinforce the internal feeling of oneness of Sennett’s communities instead of promoting the open city that they themselves represent. In short, the only artists that are tolerated in the public space are those creatives who can cheer up a neighborhood a little, both physically and mentally.

Or, this commissioned artist fits within a wider, indeed *strategic* marketing plan that distinguishes this city from the other one via a more or less phallogocentric aesthetics. Grotesque museum architecture, megalomaniac light festivals, and spectacular circus acts are supposed to replace the cathedral of yesteryear. The creative-repressive city is indeed first and foremost a touristic city and its public space a consumer-friendly shopping center with tour operators disguised as artists, independent curators, and art programmers. At the same time, this well-marketed and orchestrated creative image serves to gloss over and hide the urban confusion of growing social inequality and ethnic and religious conflicts, while an insidious, repressive—also sometimes biopolitical—approach tries to suppress violent eruptions. Together with multicultural local residents, the community artist is happily singing the hymn of social cohesion, thereby actually—as we know from Sennett—charging the violent eruption. Neither creative nor repressive urban policy can then stop the riots and unrest in the *banlieues* of Paris or the suburbs of London, emulated on a smaller scale in the Brussels municipality of Molenbeek or in and around Antwerp's Turnhoutsebaan. Not a single artist—idealist or pragmatist—is capable of taming this “common” multitude or of predicting when it will erupt.

One would need a crystal ball to know for how much longer the creative-repressive city can control the spatialized urban fabric with this strategic tactic. Will it be able to permanently restrain the violent breed, and will the creative entrepreneur be able to continue cheering up the public space in the long run? Or will the day come when the creative but rationally calculated and besieged city loses all control? In any case, this speculative thought opens up the theoretical possibility of a completely different city.

The Common City

Dystopia meets utopia when the urban swarming of global flows breaks up the strategic policy. When the cameras that are monitoring the public space in the creative city are smashed, two possibilities present themselves. Either the shards of the smashed camera testify to the criminal hordes, emerging gangs, and other riffraff making urban intercourse unsafe, or they symbolize a desire for freedom, for a new social order that can deal with urban life without authoritarian, centralized control. The urban space, which is simultaneously made completely liquid by human flows from the bottom up and capital flows from the top down, opens up the field for a multitude of tactics. Just about anyone can try to appropriate space. When strategic control loses terrain, space and tactics are on equal footing. The city then belongs to everyone, and everyone attempts to appropriate parts of it. Perhaps this is the utopia Sennett dreamed of in 1970 when he argued for more anarchy. According to the

American thinker, the dystopia of criminal and especially irrational violence will, on the contrary, not occur when the city rejects the strategically enforced order.

The potential for “irrational crime,” for violence without object or provocation, is very great now. The reason it exists is that society has come to expect too much order, too much coherence in its communal life, thus bottling up the hostile aggressiveness men cannot help but feeling.

These new anarchic cities promise to provide an outlet for what men now fear to show directly. In so doing, the structure of the city community will take on a kind of stability, a mode of ongoing expression, that will be sustaining to men because it offers them expressive outlets. Anarchy in cities, pushing men to say what they think about each other in order to forge some mutual patterns of compatibility, is thus not a compromise between order and violence; it is a wholly different way of living, meaning that people will no longer be caught between these two polarities.¹⁶

The new urban communities that Sennett advocates are special in the sense that they no longer need a “we-feeling” toward the Other in order to emerge and survive. The constituting foundation for such communities therefore lies outside an identitary reflex. Not sameness, not coherence or consensus but otherness, internal contradictions, and dissensus form the ingredients of a new constituting force. Not “being” but a continuous “becoming” is the hallmark of the new social fabric.

As early as the 1970s, Sennett thus all but introduced the notion that is nowadays becoming all the rage again: the “common,” a concept that seems much more suitable than his notion of anarchy, by the way. Not the community but the common modulates the new urban fabric. Or, rather, it is the community of which this utopia dreams. The notion of the common has been expanded upon sufficiently elsewhere.¹⁷ In short, the common is a space or area that can be both physical and symbolic, both material and mental and may serve as a resource for all.

Philosophers such as Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt or Hans Achterhuis define this space historically as a place or source of raw material that is free for anyone to use but to which everyone also makes contributions—both private and public players.¹⁸ According to Negri and Hardt, this common is required not only to keep a culture and community simply alive but to keep it dynamic in the long run as well. This common, however, is not an anarchy in Sennett’s sense but still a space that is regulated in order to safeguard its free use. The common cannot exist without strict rules that protect this space from being occupied by either the state or the market.

However, these philosophers do not specify how this common is to be enforced, which is why their plans have often been dismissed as utopian. This does not preclude convincing reports about the domain outside the state and the market, where the constitution of the common lies. Even more so, historical evidence demonstrates that this space has always only emerged from the interaction *among* people; that is, in the social sphere. This may seem rather obvious, if it were not for the fact that this sphere is regarded here as a fully autonomous domain that regulates its own laws and social intercourse regardless of politics and economy. The common therefore originates in an autonomous social space that does not submit itself to the laws of either government or capital. Somewhat predictably, the empirical examples of such social constitutions are mostly tactical in nature. This means, along the lines of de Certeau's thinking, that they are mostly of a temporary nature and attempt to appropriate or control the strategically primed space in their own special manner. The common is time and again newly constituted in the interruption.

The plans of the Dutch artist-situationist Constant Nieuwenhuys come closest to such a common city. We may in any case assume that with his New Babylon project he also envisaged some sort of common, as the major part of the urban fabric in it was designated for "collective use" without any formal function. Besides, this Dutch visionary opposed Haussmann by presenting a disorienting urban space with a constantly transmuting, labyrinthine structure in which residents lead a nomadic existence and—while creating and roaming—constantly visit new parts of the city to stay there for shorter or longer periods of time. In other words, residents can always make tactical space, thus giving permanent shape to the urban fabric. Whereas Nieuwenhuys, paradoxically, still generated a somewhat Haussmannian global urban plan, today collectives such as *Recetas Urbanas* in Seville completely annihilate this illusion with their so-called temporary architecture.

Fifty years after Nieuwenhuys's wild schemes, we see a multitude of initiatives emerge to constitute such a common. Just like Creative Commons aims to strategically redistribute awarded copyrights and patents, Occupy and communal allotments temporarily reappropriate the preprogrammed urban space. Some attempts are more sustainable and of a more structural nature than others, but the important thing is that this "movement" has been gaining force for a while now. New initiatives pop up everywhere, anytime. From the occupation of the university building known as the *Maagdenhuis* in Amsterdam to *Teatro Villa Occupato* in Rome, from Tahrir Square in Cairo to *Recetas Urbanas* and *Yo Sí*, *Sanidad Universal* in Spain, each time the urban space is occupied tactically with more or less long-term effects. What counts is not the lifespan of any particular initiative but the continual popping up of new

movements. The common city is indeed only constituted in the continuous confusion of tactical maneuvers, in confrontations and dissensus.

Although the administrators of the creative-repressive city prefer to dismiss these occurrences as “meaningless,” “unguided,” or “hardly viable” because they are “unrealistic,” a growing army of philosophers, sociologists, economists, and other scholars regard them as the signs of new forms of administration, even of a new democracy. Political scientist Isabell Lorey, for example, speaks of a “presentist democracy” that, unlike the liberal representative democracy, takes place in the here and now.¹⁹ Whereas the latter form promises only a better or more democracy for the future, the former is realized in current and everyday action. More and more pragmatic thinkers, such as the political scientist David Held, also regard a future democracy as possible only when social, cultural, political, and economic forces continuously balance each other. Businesses, civilians, cooperatives, and governments organize themselves in what he calls a “democratic autonomy.”²⁰ Many forms of self-government align themselves in this and often also grate against each other. Although Held does not disavow the state, with his point of view he does come close to a political desire that the Italian Autonomia Movement already promoted in the late 1970s: “Political autonomy is the desire to allow differences to deepen at the base without trying to synthesize them from above, to stress similar attitudes without imposing a ‘general line,’ to allow parts to co-exist side by side, in their singularity.”²¹ The common city is precisely what forms the basis for such a democratic autonomy. Cities have always been a melting pot of religions, cultures, classes, political and social contradictions. Urban cultures take shape at the cross-section of trade capitalism, fine arts, and careless cosmopolitans as well as exploitation, prostitution, forced migration, and deportation. Tensions can be found everywhere in the city. In this urban setting, we can detect the foundations for a rather strange ordinary lived democracy. This democracy can be called “strange” because it does not fit with the rational organized liberal representative democracy we are used to in Europe and the United States.

The latter form of political organization is based on quantitative representation and votes; it is a political form constituted in a nation-state that claims to have built on the relatively homogeneous identity of its population, called “the people.” Big cities often contradict this myth of “the people” because of their daily reality of a “many,” a multitude of heterogeneous cultures.

Urban spaces with a high social density are at the same time the playground of many minorities who are not politically represented at all. Such cities are in that sense the Other, the stranger, or sometimes the black spot in the sameness

of the nation-state. This is probably one of the reasons why they say that “New York is not the United States,” “Amsterdam is not the Netherlands,” “Berlin is not the same as Germany,” or “Brussels does not equal Belgium”—a statement that is often made to indicate that the people who live in those cities, their interactions, or, in general, their culture, are not at all representative of the country in which those same cities are located.

These crowded spots in the world deliver the daily empirical proof that very different people can live relatively peacefully together without a homogeneous (national) identity. Of course there are sometimes clashes, and even very bloody conflicts, but, in general, urban populations practice every day learning to live with or next to each other without having to fight with each other, even when they never make any effort to understand each other. That is the reason why we can say these crowded spaces are the laboratories of a common city with a kind of daily lived—not peaceful but agonistic—democracy. Or, again with Lorey, “a presentist democracy.”

But who are the artists in this common city? Although they may still resemble their predecessors of the situational city, their social context is quite different. Whereas the artists of the 1960s and 1970s were fighting tactically against the rigidity of hierarchic structures and a superimposed, planned experience of the city, by contrast the artists in the common city navigate an extremely fluid domain in which movement and change are the rules. An important difference with the situationists is perhaps that in a fully liquid situation one cannot only criticize, confront, and shock, but at the same time one must build alternative platforms to stand on. Therefore, artists must be also partly “constructive.” They must constitute new real worlds, real social, political, and economic plateaus in the city, from where that same urban fabric can be constantly irritated.

Today, artists interrupt the city only by slowing down its flows and freezing them completely every once in a while. Artists do not perform in the public space but have to continually claim their place and in doing so *make* space public time and again. They must constantly place beacons to demarcate where an autonomous zone is claimed for a shorter or longer period of time or, rather, where places are made autonomous. Artists who cannot (or no longer) live off subsidies or off the state, yet also do not wish to offer their art on the free market, are left to rely on a social network to realize their art. Because the social is the basis of the common, artists will have to use the urban social fabric, sometimes even abuse it, to continue to make autonomous work. On the other hand, they will also be able to deploy their work tactically and generate (temporary) autonomous social spaces themselves.

Artists become the cofounders of both artistic and social constructs, and in this they may be different from the majority of their predecessors. Ever since the

nineteenth century, artists have been able to behave hyperindividualistically. In the monumental city, their individual existence was covered by a bourgeois morality. And although the artists in the situational city increasingly resisted bourgeois institutions, paradoxically these still provided them with the logistic and financial safeguards for this hyperindividualistic attitude. In the creative city, the free market supports the individualistic model of the artist-freelancer, whether in combination with indirect stimuli by various governments or not. This implies that in all these “cities” they can go on nestling themselves in adolescence: either the artists are embraced because of their pure, consistent ideas, as in the monumental city, or because of their independent entrepreneurship in the creative city, or they can give full rein to their adolescent stubbornness in the situational city.

The common city, however, calls for “growing up.” Here artists must adopt an attitude in and toward a world that is in continuous transmutation; a world that also asks them to continuously redefine their artistic position. They will have to invent other models in order to survive, artistically as well. And they will not only have to invent them but test them in the urban reality. Those who wish to make personal and original work outside of the state and market will be forced into a collective model in which artistic ideas are tested experimentally all the time. It is as if Nieuwenhuys is generating real experimental space in the city in order to effectively develop his New Babylon or at least empirically experiment with it. This experiment then no longer takes place in a secluded lab or studio but in everyday social life. Besides, apart from Nieuwenhuys, many other artists in the same city are ready to launch their own singular projects: simply a matter of keeping him away from any totalitarian or Haussmannian plans. Such experiments “in real life” are, however, always hybrid forms between artistic and social settings, with all the risks such undertakings may include. For example, artists may lose their purely artistic ideas in the social process, rendering their ideal plans opaque. This is a risk they will have to take if they wish to bring both their own artistic practices and the common city to life.

Within the new urban context artists can no longer hide in the well-protected theaters or museums of the monumental city, like their bourgeois predecessors, but neither can they build a solid identity anymore by storming these monuments, as in the situational city, nor can they safely retreat into the hip district of the creative city. Their performances will have meaning only when they perforate the city and allow the city to perforate them. This requires a sharp analysis by these artists of the urban social fabric, as well as the courage to destroy it if necessary and the generosity to recognize and honor the most diverse social relationships.

When everything is liquid, artists can work only by first laying new ground to stand on. They will have to constitute the foundation for this themselves, emphasizing the *com-* (“with, together”) of *commune*. In other words, they will have to generate new institutions that can guarantee some stability or relative security on a collective basis, so that their singular artistic work may flourish. These new institutions in the liquid urban space hardly show any resemblance anymore with the rigid and hierarchic institutions of yesteryear. The autonomous social spaces, independent of state and market, are best understood as circus big tops, erected only temporarily and then put up again somewhere else later. These institutions are mobile units that only sporadically set up a perimeter. The area within this perimeter is not of a purely physical nature; it is a social domain in which social interactions are also shaped in a different manner. This shaping is more than a deviation from Haussmann’s segregated city. Because of the actions of artists, homogeneous communities and neighborhoods are constantly challenged and stimulated by experimenting with other ways of living and by demonstrating their viability. These lifestyles, by which artists crank up the common city, will in any case be highly hybrid. Just as in circus life, they will integrate private life and work, family and professionals, friends and enemies, celebration and creative production, art and economy. This same “circus model” will break up Sennett’s traditional family life. Only when, unlike the traditional circus, this itinerant company breaks open its own community and reflectively shapes itself in dissensus—in short, when this neotribal crowd becomes political—will the common city become operational. Or when, like *Recetas Urbanas*—which perhaps not quite coincidentally was once constituted around a circus tent—it deliberately continuously balances on the tightrope between legality and illegality and therefore cannot operate purely artistically or architecturally but is always forced to also think and act politically. Only in such a hybrid, open autarky can artists develop sufficient sovereign power to create personal work and constitute new social figurations. In short, only when they manage to shape such constitutions—that are both artistic and social—will they feed urban life as grown-up artists in confrontation with other residents and passers-by. Within this fluid urban space, artists themselves are the performers of a common ground on which they can stand high and dry for a while, together with others. They, like Nieuwenhuys, not only invent New Babylon but bring it effectively to life in a New Babylon, a common city that is constantly in the process of becoming.

Although there are concrete examples such as *Recetas Urbanas*, it is difficult to predict exactly what tactics the artists of the common city will deploy. Anyway, trying to determine them now would undermine their tactical potential beforehand. This is why the common artist for now remains vague and

abstract. However, one thing can be said about their quest with relative certainty: it had better be both artistic *and* ecological *and* economic *and* political *and* social. Artists who play all these fields simultaneously certainly have a better chance of bringing the common to life. And only if time and again other artists project deviating images, ideas, visions, and sounds about and of the world into the urban space will they be able to outline the architectural common city, together with others. The common city exists only by the grace of the unpredictable performances in which a dissonant space of a multitude of voices and countervoices emerges. Artists build fora of expressions in which they themselves advance only one of those singular voices. Because the common city is only becoming common in ongoing, dissenting singular performances of the common.

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2. Ibid.
3. See Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991); and Chris Hamnett, "Gentrification and Residential Location Theory: A Review and Assessment," in *Geography and the Urban Environment: Progress in Research and Applications*, ed. D. T. Herbert and R. J. Johnson (London: John Wiley, 1984).
4. Sennett, 162.
5. Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political: Thinking in Action* (London: Routledge, 2011), 20.
6. See, for example, P. De Bruyne, and P. Gielen, *Community Art: The Politics of Trespassing* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2011); and P. Gielen and T. Lijster, "Culture: The Substructure for a European Common," in *No Culture, No Europe: On the Foundation of Politics*, ed. P. Gielen (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2015), 19–64.
7. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980), trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
8. Rudi Laermans and Koen Geldof, *Sluipwegen van het denken: Over Michel de Certeau* (Nijmegen, The Netherlands: SUN, 1996).
9. Luc Boltanski, *Mysteries and Conspiracies: Detective Stories, Spy Novels and the Making of Modern Societies* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2014), 65.
10. Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).
11. Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction: Critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1979).
12. Sassen, *The Global City*.
13. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *L'anti-Oedipe: Capitalisme et schizophrénie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1972).
14. Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class . . . and How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).
15. See also de Bruyne and Gielen, *Community Art*.
16. Sennett, 181.
17. See, for example, Gielen and Lijster, "Culture."
18. Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); and Hans Achterhuis, *De utopie van de vrije markt* (Rotterdam: Lemniscaat, 2010).
19. Isabell Lorey, "An Untimely Present in Europe," in *No Culture, No Europe: On the Foundations of Politics*, ed. P. Gielen (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2015), 183–95.
20. David Held, *Models of Democracy* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2006).
21. Sylvère Lotringer and Christian Marazzi, *Autonomia: Post-political Politics* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), 8.

The Topsy-Turvy as Utopian Architecture

Rem Koolhaas and Pascal Gielen discuss Constant Nieuwenhuys

PASCAL GIELEN: I read that the work of Constant Nieuwenhuys inspired your own ideas about architecture. What exactly was it about his work that you found inspiring?

REM KOOLHAAS: My encounter with Constant was actually something of a coincidence. It had little to do with my interest in architecture, at any rate. When I was working as a journalist for *De Haagse Post* in the mid-1960s I interviewed him, just after he had been selected for the Venice Biennale. To be honest, what he said at the time didn't make such an impression on me. It was not until I later became an architect myself that I really took a good look at his work. It was above all the aesthetic of his work that impressed me. It affected me much more than the narrative behind it. His aesthetic is a particularly well-executed hybrid of informality and formality, and that is a big issue in architecture. At certain times his aesthetic has been very important, either for what I wanted to achieve myself or for problems we encountered that he had already addressed. At the same time, however, there is a scale to Nieuwenhuys's work that is quite unrealistic in the current circumstances. You might call his underlying narrative an almost authoritarian dissemination of a kind of liberation ideology. So the aesthetic was relevant to me, but the underlying ideas were in fact totally irrelevant.

PG: So, if I understand you correctly, you are dismissing the political and ideological ideas behind the work of Nieuwenhuys?

RK: No, not entirely. But you can say that from the 1960s the utopian ideal and the architecture grew apart completely. Of course that is because of the domination of market economics, the sworn enemy of utopian ideas. That widens the gap between Constant and the present even further. It does not however diminish the importance of the political dimension, though it does make it less plausible. On the other hand though, you have the aesthetic, many aspects of which are still plausible. Even in relation to dilemmas that, strangely enough, are actually caused by market economics—that is, the impossibility of planning anything. In a certain sense Constant's aesthetic anticipates that. The chaos that is the final destination of market economics is beautifully expressed in some of Constant's projects.

You can put it even more primitively and say that market economics has turned everything on its head, made it topsy-turvy. As a critic of excessively large-scale planning and straight lines, Constant explored the architecture of the topsy-turvy—not as an element of market economics but as an element of informality.

PG: That is Nieuwenhuys the situationist. His projects appear to be a tactical attack on the planned city that Georges-Eugène Haussmann and his followers left behind. I call this the “monumental city” because it is not only functionally

and rationally organized, with large, straight avenues and the segregation of socially homogeneous districts, but also because, with all its national monuments, including national museums, the city does not in fact represent itself so much as the nation-state. The situationists took a tactical stance against the strategic, well-considered blueprint. They tried to take away rigidity and hierarchical institutions like government bureaucracies and universities. They tried to make the rigidity fluid. But if you flash forward to today, you could argue that the situationists were successful. The city, with its flows of money and migrants, has become fluid, albeit within a context that must be a nightmare for the situationists of the past: a neoliberal immunity.

RK: That is what I'm saying. Market economics, the absolute opposite of what they sought to achieve, has made the city just as informal as their alternative to the straight lines, planning, and organization of the city they criticized. The outcome has been accidentally successful, or you could see it as a victory for the situationists. But this also makes the political ambition less credible, because we know that a completely contrasting system leads to exactly the same result.

PS: So in fact you are saying that "capitalism" has incorporated that whole informality, that whole fluidity, and transformed it in its own way.

RK: That's right. You might also say that there are dreadful analogies between today's city marketing and situationism. An entire cult has grown up around the city and the multitude of approaches that a city makes possible, in all its formality and informality. In Amsterdam, for example, there is a neighborhood known as "the nine streets" that is the precise embodiment of the situationists' "short circuits" and secret paths with secret links. It is highly significant, wouldn't you say, that this ideal has become the essence of city marketing in the most touristy part of Amsterdam. And if you look on a global scale, you can find similar situations all over the place.

PG: Another of Nieuwenhuys's ideas is back today, albeit completely transformed, almost perversely so. Based on the idea of *Homo ludens*, his focus was on "man at play." With today's rhetoric about creativity, the creative industries, and creative cities, you could say that the idea of "man at play" has finally arrived. Only the play is no longer informal, and it is certainly not free. It has become pure business, or in fact simply "work." We produce as we play nowadays, and there is not a single city authority that doubts the economic advantage of having creative people frolicking about. Informalism has in fact become the formal standard nowadays. Creativity as "job-conformism."

RK: You do indeed see the same trend here. What was once launched as an authentic aspiration has now degenerated into a kitsch aesthetic performance. We have thousands of photographs of offices, of people at work, and of how a

workplace can be set up as “informally” as possible. People seem to have a complete phobia of work. But this is a kind of hideous discipline that denies that anyone is working. This, too, is a caricature of what Nieuwenhuys once envisaged. We’ve spent a lot of time in Silicon Valley, for instance, and you only meet “fun people” there. That’s *Homo ludens*, but at the same time it doesn’t mean that there aren’t any accountants counting the profits, and that is a pretty hideous process. What was once an authentic mission has reemerged as farce.

PG: But there is also a certain ambivalence in Nieuwenhuys’s work. While the New Babylon project does indeed embrace chaos, the constantly nomadic human at play, the model itself is a hard blueprint of a city, a universalist total plan just like Haussmann’s, only arranged differently. In Nieuwenhuys’s case, the situationist in fact remains above all a calculating modernist.

RK: But that is almost inevitable in architecture. You can’t turn everything on its head and claim at the same time that nothing can be fixed, and you don’t have any particular desires, or completely leave everything open to change. At the same time architecture also offers a fascinating lesson: over time, not a single one of an architect’s original intentions remains intact. Any building can later be used in completely and radically different ways. Rhetorically you can lay claim to such flexibility, but what emerges in practice will be a thousand times more flexible than what we in artistic terms could ever mean by flexibility.

PG: These days it is common currency among architects that a building, and certainly a city, will always be appropriated in different and unpredictable ways. But can you anticipate that as an architect? And if so, how?

RK: Rather than anticipating it, you can respond to it in a number of ways. You can say, “in that case I will try to be as precise as possible,” in the full knowledge that you are making a kind of freeze-frame in a continuous process of evolution. Perhaps it is a matter of, “the more precise I am now, the more precisely I design now, the greater the freedom to bowl it all over later.” That’s a different attitude to the one taken by Constant, or by architects who worked in the same way in the age of structuralism. They tried to anticipate change, but that just made their plans more authoritarian.

PG: When looking at Constant’s work, I kept thinking about a book that Richard Sennett wrote around the same time, *The Uses of Disorder*. To oversimplify somewhat, Sennett argues in the book for more anarchy in the city. He is vehemently opposed to the segregation of homogeneous social groups in districts as envisaged by Haussmann. In contrast, Sennett calls for social groups to be mixed, for the “heterogenization” of districts, precisely in order to prevent outbursts of violence. There is nothing so dangerous as people

who shut themselves away in their own community with their own identity, away from the rest of society, Sennett appears to be saying. Constant also seems to argue the case for a similar “dissonant” urban space. Inspired by Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens*, he describes a shared urban space in which people “frolic about,” in which they can—perhaps even must—be nomadic and where no one needs to work because all forms of production have been automated. My point is that both Sennett and Nieuwenhuys paint a kind of comprehensive picture of how a city should be arranged. But is that even possible anymore? I can imagine that you might still be able to produce a “total plan” for a single building, but for an entire city?

RK: Even the question of how to lay out the city is no longer relevant. And so, to be frank, it doesn’t concern me any more. I just look at the result of developments over the past thirty years and the effect on the city and on cities in general. But the whole idea of investing time in how it should be has simply evaporated.

PG: Nieuwenhuys didn’t actually build any real buildings. In that respect he remained much more an artist than an architect. He could therefore afford to have a blueprint or a “total plan.” It seems evident that an architect who builds real buildings will have more difficulty with that. But even if you build just one building, a speck in the urban fabric, don’t you picture how the structure will impact on its surroundings? Don’t you perform a kind of context analysis first?

RK: What is important for me these days is to invest in something meaningful. You do everything in your power to create something meaningful at a certain place with a certain history, in a certain economy, and in a specific culture that is probably different from the one you know. That doesn’t mean you have no ambition whatsoever to achieve some kind of “whole” or “ideal,” but it does mean that you can’t start entirely from scratch. It might simply be a question of quantities, in the sense that in Le Corbusier’s day there wasn’t as much urban substance. Back then you might have been able to consider designing an entire city. Now it’s all so overwhelming: the scale, the reality. You can’t make a *tabula rasa*. That idea, which still existed in the 1960s, simply does not exist today.

PG: Nevertheless, urban authorities still try to manage the city using a kind of Haussmannian strategy. Just think about the hype surrounding creative cities. Creative districts are planned and built for a carefully chosen location in the city, a green district will be located in another, a residential area for middle-class families at another well-defined spot, and a commercial hub at one particular location and no other. So people are still trying to pursue a policy of segregation.

RK: But again you see the paradox. Segregation was once a well-intended strategy, an element of planning. The segregation we see today is more a

response to coincidence, making the best of unavoidable circumstances. There is no intention behind segregation, so the result is never convincing. The paradox is therefore that any ambition you might have is undermined by the current circumstances. They are not conducive to actually achieving anything.

PG: I can see that. But at the same time you must ask yourself, “How should I respond to this?” If you are no longer working toward an ideal or, like Nieuwenhuys, a utopian plan, what image do you have in mind when you intervene in a city with some architectural plan or other? You were just talking about “meaning.” Has meaning replaced utopia? What in fact do you mean by “creating something meaningful”?

RK: Meaning has many, many layers, of course. You look at very subtle things: What colors work in a particular culture, for example? How much decoration do people want? Is it credible, offensive? Does it aid communication? Is it provocative? In short, meaning encompasses all kinds of semantic issues and anthropological and cultural aspects.

PG: Instead of producing a blueprint or a total plan, these days you will be more likely to generate a topology of meaning. Architects no longer put forward strategic plans. They are inclined to work tactically in a fluid urban fabric.

RK: I see architecture as a form of communication, as a medium. I think there is an element of that in situationism too. They caused a shift in the concept of a discipline. If you rearticulate architecture as a medium, other possibilities suddenly reveal themselves. This allows you to reshape existing contexts anywhere in the world. My aim is to enable fundamental communication between cultures, between different political systems. I have been to China, Doha, Moscow, and Milan in the past week. All those places have different cultures, different religions, different economies, and different political systems. And yet in all those places people have a similar interest in participation, in a need to encounter others. That is what drives me. I want to create narratives in these different settings. For me it’s no longer about building or about designing a square; it’s about telling a story.

PG: Of course Nieuwenhuys used a utopia to deliver a critique of society. Can you do that with this topology of meaning, by telling stories, and do you even want to?

RK: It’s almost obligatory to be critical in Western culture. Every medium has the potential for criticism, but it is much easier to write a critical book than to build a critical building. I wonder whether a building really can be critical. I as an individual can be critical, but the building itself . . . That doesn’t seem likely to me.

PG: Nieuwenhuys also remained first and foremost an artist, and that's not the same as a practicing architect. An architect always has to get his hands dirty, as it were. In every project he or she is caught up in a web of clients, financial flows, political, and private parties, et cetera.

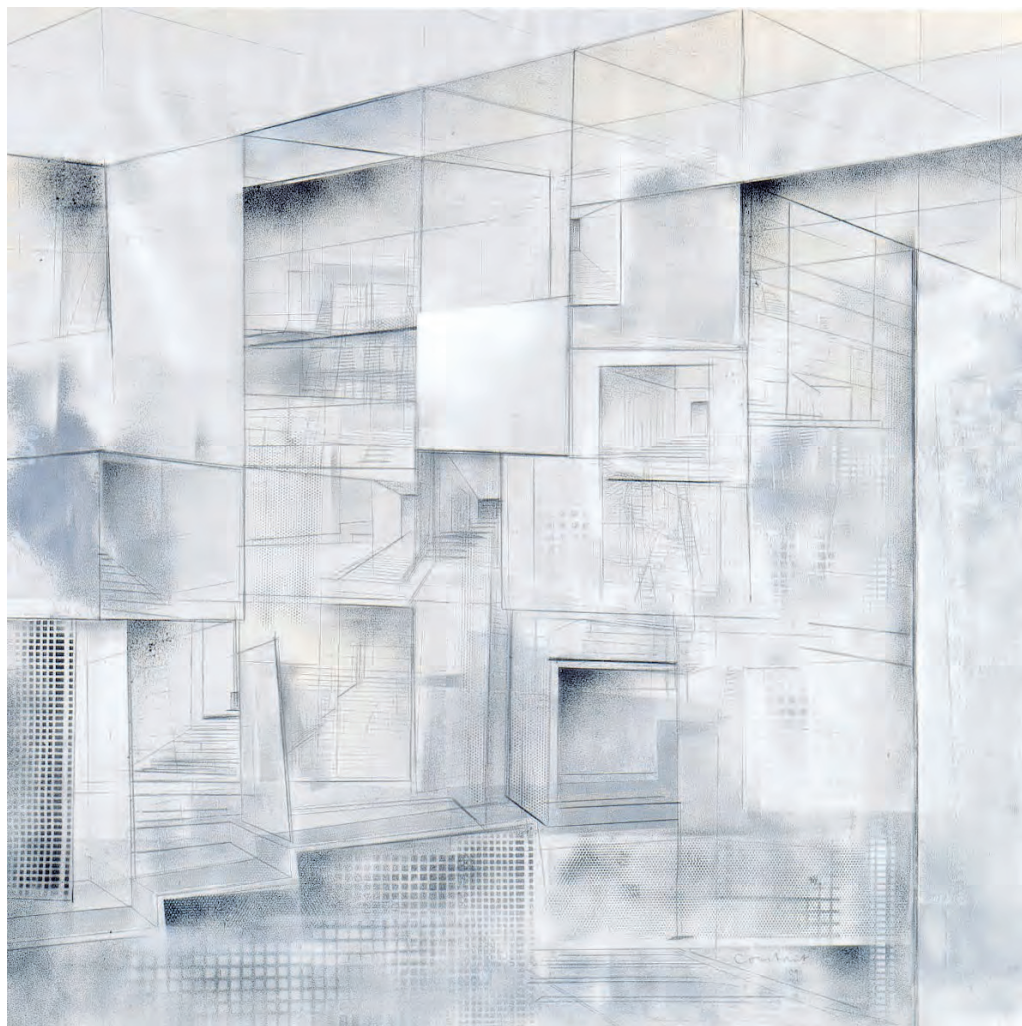
RK: Indeed, you have only limited power in such a context. You can connect things, though, and try to do something intelligent with that. In the past you used to work in a kind of mosaic, and you knew that what you did fitted into a greater whole. That's no longer the case, but it doesn't mean you can't be intelligent. And it might mean that you might even have more freedom because you no longer have to fit into a greater whole. But of course we are continually concerned with creating that, and you might say that we are a kind of strategy machine: we develop the things we ourselves want, and we develop strategies that enable us to achieve them within certain contexts. One of our strategies is "generic architecture." For fifteen years now I have felt that architecture is becoming more and more extravagant. That's incredibly embarrassing, and I don't really want to be a part of it. Hence this strategy of generic architecture. We want to deliberately make architecture more boring. Another strategy is preservation. Working on things that already exist and preventing them from being forgotten. In this way we try to avoid ending up in a cycle where you are expected to make one extravagant statement after another, try to buck the trend and generate other possibilities.

PG: That's clear. But it seems a practical matter to me, almost pragmatic at a tactical level. A kind of response to the opportunities that present themselves and which you then critically try to use for your own purposes. That's a kind of social criticism without some big underlying narrative, more like a chess move, while the rules of the game are not called into question, and cannot be questioned. Has architecture in the name of a utopia, as Nieuwenhuys once imagined it, become completely impossible nowadays?

RK: A lot has happened since the 1960s. Big utopian narratives and ideals have grown more and more removed from reality. The important narratives of that time have become a kind of caricature, though we still recognize them quite well as a form of ridicule. That is why I think there is a kind of "utopian duty." But it is better not to describe utopia as it was described fifty years ago. It continues to play an important role for me, though. I certainly do try to apply utopian ideas, just in other areas. Consider, for example, what we have done in China. There is a lot to criticize about the regime. After an analysis of Chinese building culture and history, we introduced something completely new there: a way of thinking about construction that has never existed there. Until recently every building in China was "solid" and had an aura of stability. People there have an absolute phobia of things that are unstable, and in that context we managed to make something that looks different from every side, a building

with a kind of unstable form and unstable identity. There is certainly a critical and utopian element to that.

PG: And it introduces some “disproportion” to the proportions of a traditional culture. The aesthetic of the topsy-turvy as a utopia made real.



Labyrinthische ruimte
[Labyrinthine Space]
1969



Ode à l'Odéon
[Tribute to the Odeon]
1969

Demonstratie
[Demonstration]
1970







Erotic Space
1971



Entrée du labyrinthe
[Entrance to the Labyrinth]
1972



Spiegelzaal
[Hall of Mirrors]
1972



Les touristes
[The Tourists]
1972

Terrain Vague II
[Wasteland II]
1973



...en bedreiging voor zijn bestaan inhoudt, tijdig, dus
 ...is bij de mens de bevrediging van zijn directe materiële
 ...agressiviteit te doen verdwijnen. In de hooggeïndustriali-
 ...sieve gedragingen alteminst af te nemen, ook en vooral
 ...schijnbare tegenstelling tussen materiële zekerheid en
 ...lumen verklaren moet men het bestaan van een andere
 ...drijving aannemen; we zouden deze drift willen aanduiden
 ...ze creatieve drift zou dan moeten worden beschouwd als
 ...sie ontstaat als de materiële omstandigheden zo gunstig wor-
 ...akter krijgt van ze manifestatie. De feitelijke onmogelijkheid
 ...in een maatschappij die gebaseerd is op de onderdrukking van
 ...atische maatschappij dus, terwijl de materiële voorwaarden daar-
 ...nt de verklaring voor de ont koppeling van agressiviteit en strijd om
 ...s in de hedendaagse maatschappij ook de bezittende klasse niet
 ...andiferteren. Begrijpelijkwijze is de frustratie bij de bezitters in deze
 ...bij de voor hun toekomstige vrijheid strijdende bezitlozen; ook de
 ...kreativiteit zijn, en wanneer ze de verandering van de bestaan-
 ...eft.

...aan van een ludieke maatschappij steunt de
 ...om zichzelf als scheppend
 ...en behoefte om primitievere driftvormen kan worden
 ...is die als sublimatie van de huidige stagnerende maatschappij, - waar
 ...achterblijft bij de potentiële reïl, - niet tot bevrediging k
 ...van het kind is erop gericht de creatieve drift te maatsch
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 ...technologische ontwikkeling van het nut dan nog dikwijls
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 ...len. Alleen door socialisatie kan een einde komen z
 ...ing in de weg staat. Het heeft geen zin om te praten
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 ...alternatieve praten over de mogelijkheden van d
 ...n het aardoppervlak, zonder dat uitg
 ...een socialisatie die alle landen omvat,

BYLON

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 ...en techn
 ...niet

...de mens is sociaal en niet
 ...tot dat hij moet weten en is
 ...toe. (Eenheid ontstaat in de
 ...necessiteits) Eerst toe is
 ...sidenarie personen en de meest mannelijke
 ...outman: de mens is een paus van de
 ...Met het verrijken van de menselijke
 ...niet de mensheid tot het slappen van
 ...rederecht wijzen

Autonoom en de arbeid → Eindhoven de stad
 New Babylon is geen stad
 maar een TRAJEKT
 Constant

Theorie collage New Babylon No. 2, 3, 5, 8
 [New Babylon Theory Collages No. 2, 3, 5, 8]
 1974



Mekong River / Pax Americana / La paix de Nixon
1970



Bommes op ziekenhuis [Bombs on Hospital]
1972

Golven terreuraanvallen [Waves of Terror Attacks]
1973



La Révolte
[Revolt]
1972



Le massacre de My Lai
[The Massacre of My Lai]
1972

New Babylon —Ten Years On (1980)

Constant

(Written in Dutch as “New Babylon—Na tien jaren” and presented as a lecture to the Faculty of Architecture, University of Technology, Delft, on May 23, 1980. Published as “New Babylon—Ten Years On,” trans. Robyn de Jong Dalziel, in *Constant's New Babylon: The Hyper-architecture of Desire*, ed. Mark Wigley [Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1998], 232–36.)

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

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

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

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

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

Unitary urbanism was described in the Declaration as “the complex, ongoing activity which consciously recreates man’s environment according to the most advanced conceptions in every domain.” In another point, unitary urbanism was referred to as “the fruit of an entirely new type of collective creativity.” These two quotations from the declaration are general enough for a broad interpretation and can still be used in connection with New Babylon. Not so

my third and final quotation: “La création d’ambiances favorables à ce développement est la tâche immédiate des créateurs d’aujourd’hui” [The creation of ambiances favorable to this development is the immediate task of today’s creators].

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

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

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

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

No, the creation of micro-ambiances would require a completely new type of development, one in which movement, not settlement, would be the main

issue. Taking this idea as my starting-point, I published two articles in *Internationale Situationniste*.

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

The second article was a description of the first model, then called *Zone jaune* (Yellow Zone), later *Gele sector* (Yellow Sector); in an editorial note at the end of this article, the name New Babylon appeared for the first time, cautiously introduced as “hypothese particuliere d’urbanisme unitaire” [particular hypothesis of unitary urbanism] (i.e., my personal opinion). The history of New Babylon had begun.

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

Six months after the aforementioned publication, in December 1960, this break was announced in the journal with the sour remark that I had given priority to the structural problems of urbanism while the others wanted to stress the content, the play, the “free creation of everyday life.”

This so-called content, incidentally, was hardly ever mentioned again in the journal and eventually disappeared altogether.

This brief description of the birth of the project seemed to me to be necessary for a proper understanding of what followed. The late 1950s were a time of cultural decline and the exhaustion of bourgeois society. A revolution seemed imminent, was eagerly awaited. The infrastructure seemed to be on the point of collapse and it was thought that before long it would be possible to realize new forms of life.

The Situationist International was regarded by some as the successor to Cobra: apart from myself, Asger Jorn also took part in situationist activities. An exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam was planned, consisting of a huge labyrinth, and accompanied by a happening, with the city providing the ideal backdrop for a “ludic” event.

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

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

a development was taking place in society that was to give New Babylon an important boost: the second industrial revolution based on automation.

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

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

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

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

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

the framework of the existing society. We all know examples of the phenomenon, from the creative police unit “creapol” to the “ludic shopping center.”

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

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

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

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

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

In a society without work, therefore, timekeeping will be seen in a very different light, also literally, and will be organized more in accordance with changing needs than a universal schedule: there will be no need to plan time collectively because there will be less need to coordinate the activities of different individuals. The intensity with which time is spent will take on a more continuous character.

Something analogous can be said about the place, the dwelling-place of each individual. Since the development of productive work, place has been largely dependent on the production process: the worker not only has a fixed place of work but is also obliged to remain in the vicinity of the workplace outside working hours. This is how the first settlements were planned and how, up to now, cities are planned.

If this necessity were to lapse along with work itself, sedentary life would lose its *raison d'être*. Human behavior during work-free periods—holidays—

provides sufficient proof of this. Without the restrictions imposed by work, moving around becomes more important than staying put: the dormitory town loses its function because residence can be temporary rather than permanent.

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

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

The hypothesis of a unitary urbanism had made way for an urban plan.

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

Let us begin with the latter.

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

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

After all, automation causes structural unemployment and so leads to a reduction in spending power, hence to so-called over-production. To counter this, new outlets—markets—have to be exploited and these exist only in non-industrialized countries which possess raw materials but lack the production facilities for processing them.

Imperialism's attempt to prevent or curb industrialization in the developing countries so as to keep them as market outlets for its own manufactures, dominates world politics. Organized and financed coups d'états, economic blockades and military interventions are among the arsenal of strategies deployed in this battle.

It is clear that automation results in a drastic change in the relations of production which in turn leads to changes in social structures. A revolutionary situation, in other words, which prompts speculative ideas about possible future forms of life and appropriate forms of living environment. In a society where structural unemployment takes on such a permanent character that large sections of the workforce no longer participate in the production process at all, in what is for many to all intents and purposes a dead-end situation, it is no longer possible to think about urban planning from the utilitarian perspective of the Athens Charter with its four work-based functions.

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

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

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

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

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

As far as the means of production are concerned, things are even clearer: the New Babylon project is based on the hypothesis of a society without human productive work, a society in which the production apparatus is optimally automated. Without this condition there would be no need to take account of

activities and lifestyles arising from the energy released by such a society and every notion of New Babylon would there be at an end.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Utopia is a world without aggression, without suffering, without doubt, without drama, but also, therefore, a world without change, without creativity, without play, without freedom.

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

The material preconditions for New Babylon exist, even if they cannot be adequately developed because they are irreconcilable with the pre-existing economic mechanism. One can state that since the collapse of the economy—

revolution—is the precondition for the emergence of a world similar to New Babylon, New Babylon is still a distant prospect, and may be preceded by a period of large-scale destruction.

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

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

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

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

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

The word was therefore always used in connection with the concept of “collective creativity” which refers to a cultural form that stands in contrast to individual creativity, which is a rare commodity in the working society. “Collective creativity” is thus a hypothetical concept that is closely connected with the idea of a non-working or “ludic” society. It goes without saying that a culture produced by collective creativity is on a higher level than a culture made by only a few and which the majority of people experience as mere spectacle or do not notice at all.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The model itself, when not seen from the perspective of an idea, strikes many people as a collection of aesthetic or even technical objects, devoid of intelligible content.

People look at it the way they look at African sculptures; without understanding anything of the magical significance, but nonetheless fascinated by the form which starts to lead a life of its own. This is all the stronger in this case because the New Babylon material was conceived more as illustration than as a basis for construction. Rather than stipulating building forms, as other speculative plans do, it suggests possibilities: “This is how it might look.”

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

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

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

The rigid dividing line that Engels drew between Utopia and science impoverishes thinking about the future.

If we recognize that the way the world looks is the product not of coincidences but of human activity, which is in turn determined by social processes, Utopia in the true sense of the word ceases to exist, for nothing is a priori unreal unless, like eternal life, it contravenes the laws of science.

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

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

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

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

This can be explained as proceeding from a profound uneasiness with society. Never before have criticism of and opposition to social reality been so symptomatic of art. It is understandable that many artists should have started

musings about the possibility of a different culture, one that does not rest on the achievements of one or two individuals, but on the collectivity. Without these musings, the New Babylon project would never have come into existence.

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

Biography of Constant

(Amsterdam, 1920 – Utrecht, 2005)

Trudy van der Horst¹

C'est notre désir qui fait la révolution

On November 8, 1948, at the Café le Notre Dame in Paris, six artists—Asger Jorn (Copenhagen), Christian Dotremont and Joseph Noiret (Brussels), and Constant Nieuwenhuys, Corneille, and Karel Appel (Amsterdam)—establish Cobra. The name is an acronym of the artists' home cities. On that November day the artists sign their manifesto, “La cause était entendue” (The matter was settled), their response to an earlier statement by the French Revolutionary Surrealists, “La cause est entendue” (The matter is settled). The six have just left “the Revolutionary Surrealists” conference because of a sense of dissension among the French delegates. For Constant, the main reason for breaking with them lies in the fact that the Belgian, Danish, and Dutch groups associate art with political conviction, while the French have declined to do so. The Cobra movement will repeatedly inspire its members to new collective and creative expressions of their art.

In autumn 1946 Constant meets Danish artist Asger Jorn at a Joan Miró exhibition at Pierre Loeb's gallery in Paris. He accompanies Jorn back to his hotel to see his paintings. Several hang in a dark room, pinned to the flowered wallpaper. Jorn's art has a profound impact on Constant, though he finds the colors harsh. This encounter with Jorn is the start of a close friendship and collaboration. Jorn introduces Constant to his movement of Danish experimentalists, Høst (which produced the magazine *Helhesten*). Together, Constant and Jorn start the theoretical preparations for a new, international avant-garde movement.

Like the Danes, Constant wants to establish an experimental group in Holland. Appel and Corneille visit Constant in late 1947.

The Dutch Experimental Group (De Experimentele Groep in Holland) is established at Constant's home on July 16, 1948. The group has now expanded to include Jan Nieuwenhuijs (Constant's brother), Anton Rooskens, and Theo Wolvecamp. Eugène Brands will join a month later, quickly followed by the Dutch poets Jan Elburg, Gerrit Kouwenaar, and Lucebert (pseudonym of Lubertus Jacobus Swaanswijk). The members of the group meet regularly at their studio, show their latest work, read their poems, and comment on one another's work. At these meetings they often dress up and play gramophone records or live music. Constant is a good singer and a talented guitarist with an extensive repertoire, including Spanish improvisations.

The first edition of the journal *Reflex* published by the Dutch Experimental Group appears in September 1948. It contains poems by Elburg and Corneille, a thorough account of what the group stands for written by Brands, and four original lithographs by Constant, Corneille, Appel, and Jan Nieuwenhuijs. The majority of this first edition is devoted to *Manifest*, the manifesto Constant

has written and which only he has signed; it argues the importance of artists developing a revolutionary attitude and that style and aesthetics be renounced. Artists must strive for collective art and an artistic method based on experiential (*expérience*) and experimental exploration. The second and final edition of *Reflex* is published in February 1949.

The first two issues of *Cobra* (from a total of ten) are published in March 1949. Issue 4, on the Dutch Experimental Group, serves as the catalogue for the major international exhibition of experimental art at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam that runs November 3–28, 1949. Constant writes one of his most beautiful and passionate pieces for the issue: “C’est notre désir qui fait la révolution” (It is our desire that makes revolution). The following quotation illustrates the beauty and passion of the piece: “Creation is always making what was not yet known, and the unknown frightens those who believe they have something to preserve. But we who have nothing to lose but our chains, we can risk this adventure. The only virginity we jeopardize is an abstraction. Let us fill Mondrian’s virginal canvas, if only with our own misery. Is misery not to be preferred above death, for the strong who can fight?”²

Architect Aldo van Eyck is asked to design the layout of the exhibition. He has been in contact with the Dutch Experimental Group for some time already. Van Eyck has a revolutionary way of looking at things: he regards the walls and floors of the halls as an empty canvas on which he will make a composition with the artworks. Three large paintings produced on site—by Constant (*Barricade*), Brands (*Neergeschreven drift*; Passion written down), and Appel (*Mens en dieren*; Man and animals)—will provide powerful accents.

For the Dutch poets, van Eyck provides a small room painted completely black with a large cage made of black slats in the center. The room is barely lit, giving the space a mysterious atmosphere. The exhibition is challenging and revolutionary. A riot breaks out on November 5, 1949, during an experimental literature recital. Dotremont is giving a long speech in French in which the word *Soviétique* occurs several times. Someone loudly points out that he is in Amsterdam not Paris. Aldo and Constant remove the heckler from the room. This sparks a tumultuous brawl, leading the poets Elburg, Kouwenaar, and Lucebert, along with the painters Brands, Rooskens, and Wolvecamp, to sign a communiqué stating that they do not endorse the tenor of Dotremont’s speech and that as a result of the incident they are leaving the Dutch Experimental Group. This is followed by a plethora of newspaper articles lambasting the exhibition and the policy pursued by Willem Sandberg (director of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam). The exhibition subsequently draws huge numbers of visitors.



The Dutch Experimental Group with their work on the stairs of Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam at the opening of the exhibition *International Experimental Art*, 3 November 1949; (from left) Constant, his son Victor, Brands, Tony Appel, Rooskens, Appel, Corneille, Doucet, Gerrit Kouwenaar, Wolvecamp, Lucebert, and Jan Elburg.

Constant, *Barricade*, 1949, at the entrance (hall 1) of the *International Experimental Art* exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.



The living space design produced by Gerrit Rietveld and Constant for the “Colour Harmony in Your Home” event at the Bijenkorf department store, Amsterdam, February 1954 (with attached image of Constant’s painting *Black, Red, Green*, 1953).

(From left) Ettore Sottsass, Gil J. Wolman, Elena Verona, Asger Jorn, and Constant at the restaurant Bruno during the IMIB conference in Alba, 1956.

A dramatic change occurs in Constant's private life in May 1949. During a stay at Bornholm, his wife Matie leaves with Jorn, taking their two daughters, Martha (b. 1946) and Olga (b. 1948), with her. She leaves their son, Victor (b. 1944), behind with Constant. His friendship with Jorn is badly damaged.

In September 1950 Constant and Victor depart for Paris with Corneille and Appel. They find a studio in rue Santeuil, which Constant deems unsuitable for his son because of the lack of sanitary facilities. Victor and Constant move into a *chambre de bonne* in rue Pigalle. Appel and Corneille want to make a name for themselves and sell their work as quickly as possible. They regard a child as an encumbrance. The three soon part ways. Constant regularly visits other artists and Cobra members living in Paris, including the English artist Stephen Gilbert and Japanese-American sculptor Shinkichi Tajiri.

In Paris Constant depicts his experiences of the war in a series of paintings, made all the more topical by the Korean War and a brief stay in Frankfurt, where an exhibition of his work opens at Zimmergalerie Franck on March 15, 1951. Walking Victor to school every day, Constant takes a path across the *Trümmerhaufen*—bare patches of land strewn with ruined gable ends, rubble, and stone. This desolate landscape will recur for many years in two series of paintings: *Terre Brulée* (Scorched Earth) and *Terrain vague* (Wasteland).

The Cobra movement finally disintegrates completely when Jorn and Dotremont are both admitted to a sanatorium with tuberculosis. The decision is taken to disband the movement, with a final international exhibition of experimental art at the Palais des Beaux Arts in Liège from October 6 to November 6, 1951. The final *Cobra* bulletin, number 10, is published in time for the exhibition. Seven of Constant's "war paintings" are shown, including *L'incendie* (Fire, 1950), and a painting of the birth of his daughter Eva entitled *Maternité* (Motherhood, 1951). Kouwenaar comments on the war paintings, "He paints war, he makes war—he makes real the war, which still resides in newspaper columns, and he warns us. He himself fights in the rubble and our head lies there like some laughable rutabaga."³

Breakthrough

The year 1953 is a turning point in Constant's artistic and intellectual development. Until then, Constant has shown little interest in architecture. Looking back in 1981, he says, "I just needed to jump the fence and potter around in that cold abstraction, because I realized that, while we had been busy with Cobra, all around us entire neighborhoods had been built that were part of that 'abstraction froide': straight lines, steel frames, huge concrete surfaces. I wanted to explore that terrain for myself, in an aesthetic sense. That eventually brought me to New Babylon."⁴

Though Paris is still the center of the art world, in November 1952 Constant decides to pay a working visit to London. There he visits the studios of Henry Moore, Anthony Hill, Kenneth Martin, and Alan Davie. He also travels to St. Ives (Cornwall) to visit Ben Nicholson and Barbara Hepworth, and meets Victor Pasmore and Roger Hilton. Constant experiences the “art climate” in London as highly receptive. In contrast to Paris, art is judged much more “objectively” in London.

Surrounded by the devastation of the Blitz in London, Constant begins to think about the city as the stage setting of everyday life, about the relationship between life’s activities and the living environment and about how he can contribute to the reconstruction of postwar Europe. He wonders how art might help to intensify all aspects of life. Back in Amsterdam, Constant studies the textbooks of his friend van Eyck. Constant starts to abstract now and makes paintings, collages, and reliefs featuring interlocking fields of color, as well as works such as *Composition with 158 Cubes* (1953), which is related to Russian constructivism. In 1953 he produces a relief, *Composition with Blue and White Cubes*, adding another dimension to the two-dimensional painting.

In 1999 Benjamin H. D. Buchloh interviews Constant at a symposium accompanying an exhibition of his work in New York. Buchloh identifies a similarity between Constant’s reliefs and Piet Mondrian’s *Victory Boogie Woogie*, but Constant vehemently rejects this notion. His reliefs are created with an entirely different purpose than Mondrian’s paintings. The reliefs illustrate his ideas about architecture and urbanism. He experiments with what he has learned from van Eyck’s books. Buchloh concludes that no other Cobra artist ever effected such a radical change in his work.⁵

Spatial Colorism: Toward a Colorful Architecture

In order to break with the political power structure and the monotony of postwar urban planning, Constant campaigns for a “synthesis of arts.” During this period he seeks out like-minded movements such as the Congrès Internationaux d’architecture Moderne; becomes an active member of the Liga Nieuw Beelden (League for New Representation), established on January 24, 1955; and collaborates with architects and artists.

In 1952 van Eyck gets Constant involved in an experiment for the exhibition *Mens en huis* (Man and House) at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.⁶ The walls, floors, and ceilings in the “space” are painted half purple, half blue. Constant creates a mural for one wall. On the opposite wall lines of poetry by Lucebert are applied in vermilion. The exhibition catalogue refers to the design of the “space in color” as an example of collaboration between architect, painter, and poet.

This clearly links the “experiment” to the debate on a potential “new synthesis.”⁷ Since color plays a passive role in modern architecture, Van Eyck and Constant call for a synthesis of color and form in architecture, to make it more interesting and suggestive and thus stimulate people’s creativity.

In June 1953 Van Eyck and Constant take their experiment a step further with a portfolio of color illustrations. Van Eyck writes the introduction, and on the final three pages there is a text by Constant about the importance of synthesizing form and color to create an entirely new plastic art. In order to achieve this, architecture and painting will not be merged, as in the baroque period. Instead, a synthesis of the two art forms will be created: a plastic reality organized at a higher level. In 1960 Van Eyck and Constant receive the Sikkens Prize for their manifesto *Voor een spatiaal colorisme* (For a Spatial Colorism) and the demonstration of their ideas at the exhibition.

In February 1954 Constant designs a model interior for the Bijenkorf department store in Amsterdam, together with architect Gerrit Rietveld. Martin Visser, head of De Bijenkorf’s furniture department, asks Rietveld to design a stand for the “Color Harmony in Your Home” event, showing how to make maximum use of minimum space. Rietveld invites Constant to “color” the space. Constant designs a color scheme for the interior consisting of several large color planes.

From 1951 to 1956 Constant and Gilbert collaborate closely on spatial experiments. The two artists engage in a profound theoretical debate. In 1954 they establish *Néovision*, together with Hungarian sculptor Nicolas Schöffer. Gilbert and Schöffer challenge Constant to create three-dimensional sculptures. This gives rise to *Construction aux plan transparents* (Construction with Transparent Planes, 1954), *Construction with Colored Planes* (1954), and the sixteen-meter-tall structure *Monument for Reconstruction* (1955), for the E55 exhibition (National Energy Manifestation) in Rotterdam, in which the rectangular forms of Schöffer and Gilbert can be discerned. Constant soon replaces them with curved forms. He becomes convinced that constructions based on “l’infinie des paraboles” (the infinity of the parabola) have a stronger impact on the surrounding space than structures based on the closed form of a box.⁸

Though the Liga Nieuw Beelden does not give Constant the synthesis of arts he seeks, it does provide an opportunity to exhibit his work and acquire commissions from public bodies. This includes designs for two concrete play sculptures and a mobile construction, a commission of the personnel of the Gemeentelijke Woningdienst, Amsterdam (the Municipal Housing Service of Amsterdam), on the occasion of its forty-year anniversary.⁹ The Dutch pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1956 features work by Constant, André Volten, and

Bart van der Leek. Contrary to the artists' wish for their art to be associated with their views on the synthesis of arts, it is instead referred to as "architectonically abstract."¹⁰

Constant's attempts to achieve a true synthesis of the plastic arts fail for lack of funding or due to a change of heart in those who previously espoused the same views.

Demain la poésie logera la vie: New Babylon Prelude

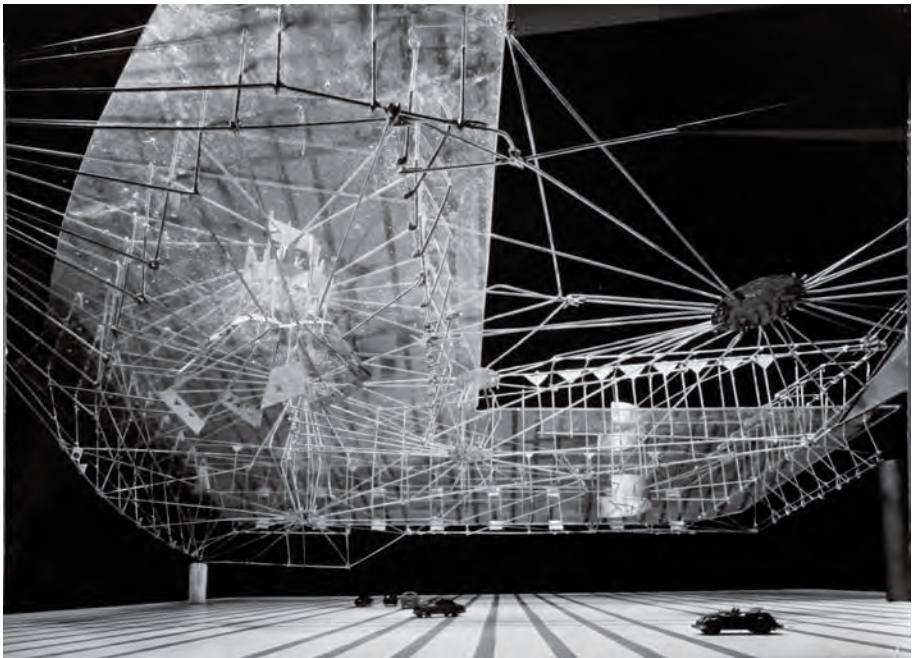
Constant and Jorn come together in their fight against functionalist architecture and design. Whereas Constant calls for art to fulfill a societal role in promoting a creative way of life, Jorn thinks art should be practiced in total freedom. Nevertheless, in July 1956 Constant decides to work with Jorn in the *Mouvement International pour un Bauhaus Imaginiste contre un Bauhaus Imaginaire*, established by Jorn in 1954. They will both become members of the Situationist International.

In the 1956 article "Le technicisme," Constant highlights the huge gap that has emerged between, on the one hand, the fine arts and, on the other hand, architecture and design because visual artists never consider the aesthetic potential of "modern" materials such as metal, concrete, Perspex, and plastic. As a result, most industrial products are poorly designed, and art is used only decoratively in the built environment. He argues for a new aesthetic that he calls *technicisme*. This is to be based on the constructive properties of the materials technological progress has given us, which are being used on a large scale in industry and in construction.¹¹

Jorn invites Constant to a conference on "Industry and Fine Arts" in Alba (Piedmont), September 2–10, 1956. Constant is to attend as a specialist on architecture. He writes a lecture, "Demain la poésie logera la vie" (Tomorrow, life will reside in poetry), in which he argues for the most complete art that will be "at once lyrical in its means and social in its very nature."¹²

The two painters Pinot Gallizio and Piero Simondo run the experimental laboratory in Alba. They offer Constant space to live and work there, allowing him to stay for a few months.

When he sees the desolate place where Gypsies camp on the banks of the Tanaro River, Constant designs a model for a permanent Gypsy camp in Alba, where collective lodgings will be built using movable elements under a shelter, a nomadic camp on a global scale. However the local council refuses to fund the development. This design becomes the first step toward the series of models for New Babylon. *Ambiance de jeu* (Ambience of Play, 1956) will follow soon after.



(From left) Walter Olmo, Piero Simondo, Guy Debord, Pinot Gallizio, and Constant in Alba, December 1956.

Constant, *Ambiance d'une ville future* [Atmosphere of a Future City], 1958.



Constant soldering a construction, with his construction *Observatorium* in the background.

Guy Debord—writer, filmmaker, and strategic activist, founder of the Lettrist International in 1952—visits Constant in Alba in December 1956. His group has been campaigning against functionalist architecture since its founding, in its newsletter *Potlatch*. From the moment he meets Constant, Debord wants to found a more radical group. They are both convinced that art and modern technology must be integrated into a new, “unitary” form of urban planning. In their eyes, the city is both the matrix for and the result of people’s feelings and behavior. The Situationist International comes into being in Cosio di Arroscia, Italy, in July 1957. The second edition of their bulletin, entitled *Internationale Situationniste*, clearly states their opposition to independent art and applied art. Art must be used to construct living environments. Nevertheless, Constant still has serious objections that prevent him from joining. The Situationist International is no different from the Cobra movement, since it mainly consists of painters in search of individual recognition. Constant regards painting as an outmoded individualistic form of art.

Not until June 1958 does Constant become an active member of the Situationist International. His objections have been laid to rest, as everyone in the movement has clearly expressed their support for the “unitary urbanism” that Constant and Debord define as the “ceaseless, complex activity that aims consciously to recreate man’s environment in accordance with the most progressive ideas in all areas.”¹³ An intense correspondence immediately commences between Debord and Constant and continues until Constant leaves the movement in August 1960. In explanation of his decision to leave, he says, “S.I. does not go far enough in extrapolating consequences and is still too much a grouping of painters.” During his time as a member, Constant writes many articles for *Internationale Situationniste*, and two of his models appear in the bulletin: *Ambiance d’une ville future* (Ambience of a Future City) and *Small Yellow Sector*.

His active participation in the Situationist International does not bring about the synthesis of arts that Constant hoped to see. Constant and Jorn leave the movement of their own accord. They are the only ones not to be excommunicated by Debord.

Space as a Playing Field

In 1957 the United States and the Soviet Union launch satellites and begin exploring space. Political tensions between East and West lead to a race to conquer space. Constant sees space as a new playing field.

In 1955 he makes two sculptures, *Observatory* and *Planetarium*, using modern materials such as Perspex, aluminum, and metal. In the years that follow, his constructions are given titles combining the words *space* and *play*, as in *Space*

Circus, *Infinite Line*, and *Sunvessel*. The various constructions titled *Nébulose mécanique* refer to heavenly bodies. *Départ pour l'espace* (Departure to Space) refers to the launching of *Sputnik 1* by the Soviets on October 4, 1957. Initially the model *Spatiovore* was called “Concert Hall for Electronic Music.”¹⁴ The platform in the construction, which resembles a lunar landscape, lends itself more to a name like *spatiovore*.

Constant ingeniously manages to combine the poetic unity of color and space he regards as so important with his preference for curves.

In 1958 Constant collaborates with the American experimental filmmaker and photographer Hy (Hyman) Hirsch on an abstract film, *Gyromorphosis*. His spatial constructions are featured dynamically and playfully interacting with the improvised sounds of jazz music in a fascinating performance of sound, space, and light.

I Am a Utopien: Design and Practice of New Babylon

Constant continues experimenting to visualize the idea of “unitary urbanism.” He is hugely productive, and publicly active, from 1960 to 1969, working on models, paintings, watercolors, gouaches, collages, drawings, and geographical maps. He writes numerous articles that can be regarded as works of cultural philosophy to provide a theoretical foundation for New Babylon. The major international interest in New Babylon takes him all around Europe. He presents his work at twenty-three exhibitions, presents lectures with slide shows, and gives interviews. He works with a range of artists and craftsmen on industrial and municipal commissions such as *De poort van Constant* (Constant’s Gate, 1963) in Amsterdam and, in 1969, a fountain in Leiden, as well as on film and television productions, portfolios of prints, four editions of the *New Babylon informatief* and, again in 1969, the publication of a collection of his lectures, *Opstand van de Homo Ludens* (Revolt of *Homo Ludens*). In 1968 he is commissioned to design a map, *New Babylon on Amsterdam*, for the Amsterdams Historisch Museum. This map is exhibited in the museum together with a model, *Ludieke Trap* (Playful Stairs), designed by Constant. He also has a brief exchange of ideas with the anarchists’ movement Provo.

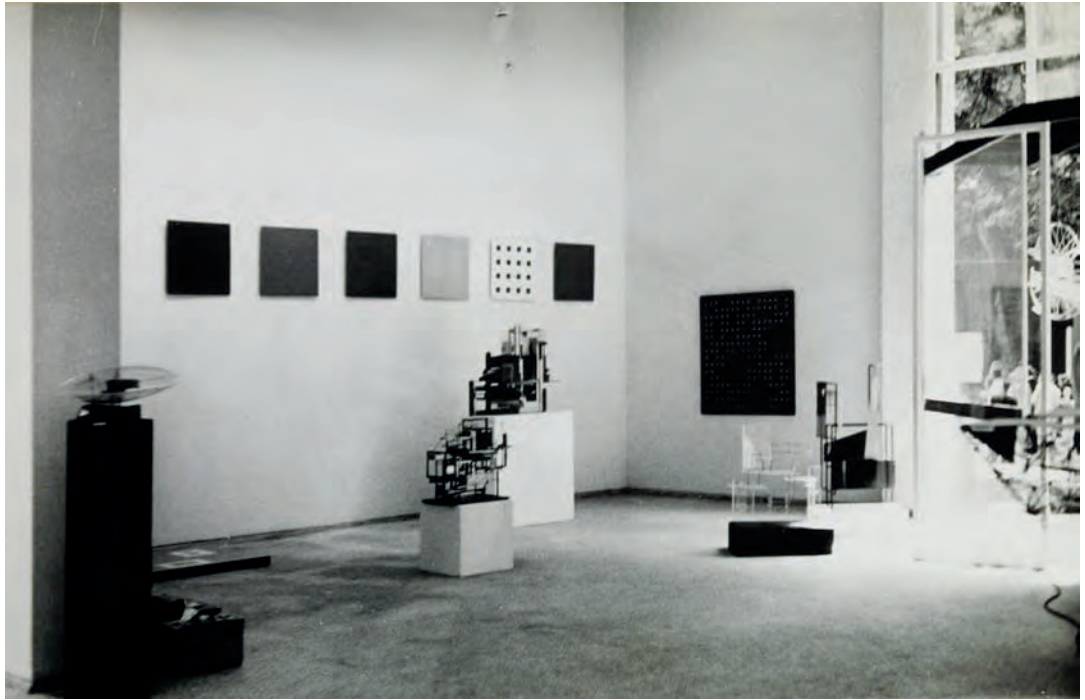
In 1966, in a joint project, he creates a “test space for a dynamic labyrinth” known as Experiment Studio Rotterdam, at the Bouwcentrum Rotterdam.¹⁵

Constant exhibits at the Dutch pavilion at the 33rd Venice Biennale in 1966, with a retrospective of work from the entire period spanning Cobra to New Babylon. An international edition of *De New Babylon informatief no 4*, is published in conjunction with the exhibition. Constant is awarded the Cardazzo Prize for his presentation at the biennale. As a result, Rem Koolhaas—at that



Fountain by Constant, at De Kooi in Leiden, 1969.

Ludieke Trap (Playful Stairs) at Amsterdam Historical Museum, 1968 (with the map *New Babylon—Amsterdam* in the background).



Venice Biennale—Dutch Pavilion 1966, (from left) *Spatiovore*, *Series of Six Colored Planes*, *Small Labyr*, *Large Labyr*, *Composition with 158 Cubes*, *Construction with Transparent Planes*, *Construction with Colored Planes*, *Construction with Half Circles* (hanging above the entrance).

time still a journalist and filmmaker—and Betty van Garrel interview him at his studio for the *Haagse Post* newspaper. Koolhaas starts studying architecture two years later.

Debord dubs Constant's designs for a new urban environment "New Babylon" in early 1960. Constant considers the name striking. To him, *Babylon* has connotations of human recklessness, un-Christian morals, unprecedented wealth, and fantastic ways of life that chime well with his project. And *new* is more appropriate than the Dutch *nieuw* because the project is universal.¹⁶ Debord has already recommended Johan Huizinga's book *Homo Ludens* to Constant.¹⁷ *Homo Ludens* will subsequently play an important role in Constant's New Babylon project. In 1966 Constant writes, "Huizinga correctly localized the 'homo ludens' figure in the social upper class, the nonworking ruling class, overlooking the working masses. Automation that frees production from human labor has opened the way for a massification of homo ludens. Huizinga's achievement was to recognize that in everyone there lies a potential homo ludens. Liberating a person's ludic potential requires social liberation, however."¹⁸

In 1964 Constant acquires a studio at Wittenburg in Amsterdam, where he has the space to make larger models. They grow progressively larger. He designs models of sectors and dynamic labyrinths in various landscapes that are part of an urban plan for ludic man.

Mark Wigley writes about the models, "The most obvious symptom is the models that form the centerpiece of the New Babylon project. They are unmistakably architectural, yet have the quality of refined artworks, employing materials and finishes rarely seen in architectural models of the time. The construction of the model itself was as radical as the space it proposed."¹⁹

The year 1969 marks the end of the Situationist International. Their final bulletin (number 12) is published in September 1969. The Paris student revolt they have inspired takes place in 1968 and, in hindsight, does nothing more than rouse expectations. Constant paints *Ode à l'Odéon* in 1969 in response to the protests.

That same year Constant stops working on the models. He explains why in an article. He states that although he can visualize unitary urbanism, the situation in which we live differs fundamentally from the social situation essential for the achievement of such a revolutionary program.²⁰ This means unitary urbanism is limited to isolated experiments and degenerates into a mere program. The creative process shifts from reality to a conception thereof. Culture becomes "utopian." The New Babylon plan has to be seen in this light. Constant wants to work on feasible projects. He does not want to become a *utopiste*, one who explores impossibilities. Henri Lefebvre calls him a *utopien*: one who releases possibilities.²¹

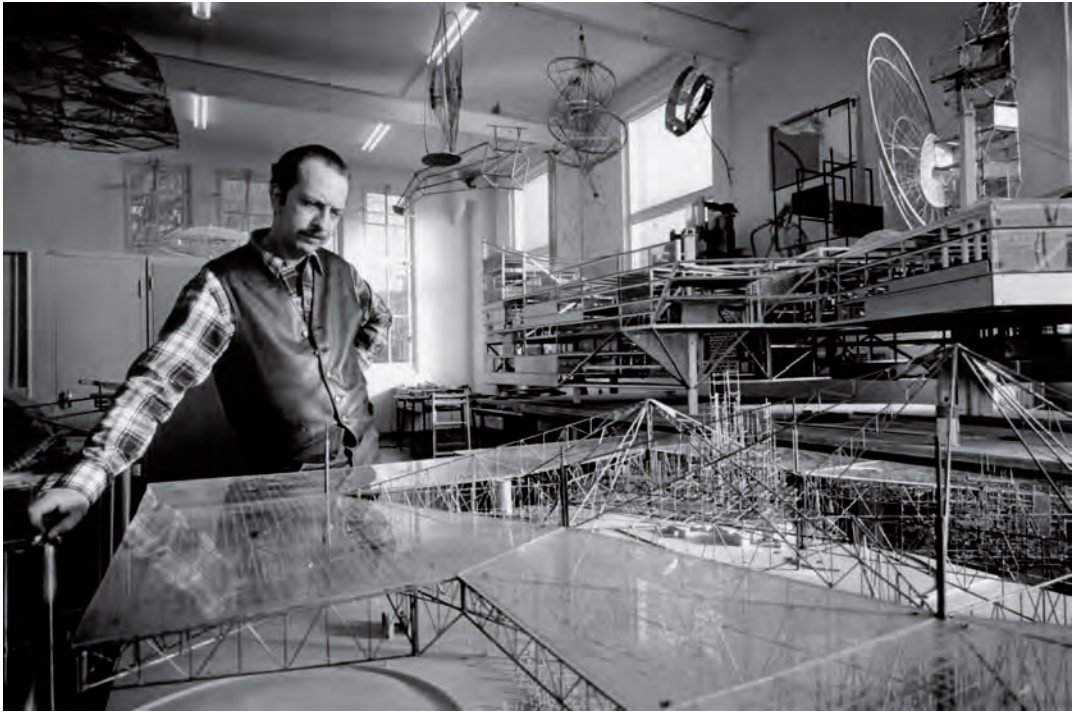
From 1969 to 1974 Constant devotes most of his time to oil and watercolor painting, drawing and etching. Traces of New Babylon will remain apparent in his work for a long time. In interviews, Constant states that he still believes in New Babylon. But it will take time to achieve it. A long destructive period will inevitably precede this new world, and he depicts this in the art he produces from 1969 to 1974. New Babylon finally comes to an end with an exhibition at the Haags Gemeentemuseum in 1974. Over the next decade the Gemeentemuseum will acquire a substantial part of the New Babylon project for its collection.

Officially, the New Babylon period lasts from 1956 to 1974, though it is not called “New Babylon” until 1960. Constant’s environment-oriented engagement places him in the modernist avant-garde tradition, particularly constructivism. However, for Constant form was not determined by ideology; it was discovered by experience and experiment.

Colorism

From 1974 to 2005 Constant continues his colorist experiments on a two-dimensional surface, following such great predecessors as Tiziano Vecellio, Eugène Delacroix, and Paul Cézanne. Until well into the 1980s Constant’s paintings combine architectural compositions with colorism. In 1978 he writes notes in response to a *Cézanne* exhibition in Paris.²² Constant takes Cézanne’s colorism further, creating space and depth without any line work at all, using only color.²³

1. Art historian, sociologist, and psychologist Trudy van der Horst was married to Constant.
2. Constant, "C'est notre désir qui fait la révolution," in *Documents relatifs à la fondation de l'internationale Situationniste 1948-1957* (Paris: Éditions Allia, 1985), 67-68.
3. Opening speech by Gerrit Kouwenaar at Constant's exhibition at Galerie Le Canard in Amsterdam on January 26, 1952.
4. Freddy de Vree, "Constant," *Kunstpocket*, ser. 2, no. 10 (1981): 33.
5. Catherine de Zegher and Mark Wigley, eds., *The Activist Drawing: Retracing Situationist Architectures from Constant's New Babylon to Beyond* (New York: The Drawing Center, 2001), 17-18.
6. From November 21, 1952, to January 5, 1953.
7. Marcel Hummelink, *Après nous la liberté: Constant en de artistieke avant-garde in de jaren 1946-1960* (Amsterdam: self-published, 2002), 130.
8. *Ibid.*, 188.
9. The mobile construction *Draaibare constructie* (Rotating Construction, 1956), currently part of the collection of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, has been severely damaged from being relocated several times. The possibility of making a reconstruction based on the scale model is being considered.
10. See André Volten and Charles Karsten, "Biënnale van Venetië 1956," *Liga Bulletin*, August 1956, 3-4.
11. Hummelink, 227.
12. Mark Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon: The Hyper-architecture of Desire* (Rotterdam: O10 Publishers, 1998), 78.
13. Constant and Guy Ernest Debord, "La déclaration d'Amsterdam," *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 2 (December 1958): 31.
14. In *Catalogo della XXXIII Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d'Arte Venezia* (1966), 193.
15. "The first plan for such a space came about as a result of an agreement between the Situationist International and the director of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam in 1959. The design was for galleries 36 and 37 at the museum, but it was never implemented." J. L. Locher and Constant, *Constant*, exh. cat. (The Hague: Haags Gemeentemuseum, 1974), 66.
16. *Ibid.*, 12.
17. A book on cultural theory published in 1938.
18. Locher and Constant, *Constant*, 29.
19. Wigley, 49.
20. Constant, "De dialektiek van het experiment," in *Constant*, exh. cat. (The Hague: Haags Gemeentemuseum, 1965).
21. Henri Lefebvre defines the difference between *utopiste* and *utopien*: "Il faut distinguer des utopiens, autrement dit l'utopie abstraite de l'utopie concrète. . . . La pensée utopiste explore l'impossible; la pensée utopienne dégage le possible." Quoted in Jean-Clarence Lambert, *Constant: Art et utopie* (Paris: Éditions Cercle d'Art, 1997), 7.
22. Constant, *À propos de Cézanne: Aantekeningen naar aanleiding van de tentoonstelling: "Cézanne: Les dernières années 1895-1906"* (Amsterdam: self-published, 1985).
23. Trudy van der Horst, *Constant: De late periode* (Nijmegen, The Netherlands: BnM Uitgevers, 2008), 240-50.



Leonard Freed, Constant in his studio in Wittenburg, Amsterdam, with a model of the New Babylon project, ca. 1966.

- Het laddertje**, 1949
[**The Ladder**]
Oil on canvas
87.8 x 75.3 cm
Gemeentemuseum Den Haag
p. 44
- L'animal sorcier**, 1949
[**The Sorcerer Animal**]
Oil on canvas
110 x 85 cm
Centre Pompidou, Paris
Musée national d'art moderne/Centre
de création industrielle
Achat en 1951, Fonds national d'art
contemporain; attribution au MNAM
en 1981, n° inv.: AM 1982-83
p. 45
- La Guerre II**, 1950
[**War II**]
Oil on canvas
99 x 69.3 cm
Collection Stedelijk Museum,
Amsterdam
p. 48
- La Guerre III**, 1950
[**War III**]
Oil on canvas
122.7 x 117 cm
Collection Van Abbemuseum,
Eindhoven
p. 46
- L'incendie**, 1950
[**Fire**]
Oil on canvas
50.2 x 64.5 cm
Collection Fondation Constant,
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
p. 47
- Fandango**, 1951
Gouache, chalk, and charcoal on paper
36.5 x 45.5 cm
Collection Stedelijk Museum,
Amsterdam
p. 92
- Man met gitaar**
[**Man with Guitar**], 1951
Chalk on paper
45.4 x 35.3 cm
Collection Stedelijk Museum,
Amsterdam
p. 93
- 8 x la Guerre**, 1951
[**8 x War**]
Portfolio of 8 lithographs
27/50
Various dimensions
Collection Fondation Constant,
Amsterdam
pp. 50–51
- De rode vuist**, 1952
[**Red Fist**]
Oil on canvas
190.1 x 172.9 cm
Collection Cobra Museum of Modern
Art, Amstelveen
p. 49
- La danseuse Espagnole**, 1952
[**The Spanish Dancer**]
Graphite on paper
100.1 x 64.5 cm
Collection Stedelijk Museum,
Amsterdam
- Ruimtelijk colorisme**, 1952
[**Spatial Colorism**]
Oil on canvas
125 x 97 cm
Stedelijk Museum Schiedam,
The Netherlands; long-term loan
Fondation Constant
p. 53
- Adelaar**, 1953
[**Eagle**]
Oil on canvas
63.8 x 66 cm
Collection Fondation Constant,
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
p. 52
- Kleurvlakken (Compositie
in zwart en wit)**, 1953
[**Colored Planes (Composition
in Black and White)**]
Oil on canvas
75.2 x 62 cm
Collection Fondation Constant,
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
p. 54
- Compositie met 158 blokjes**, 1953
[**Composition with 158 Cubes**]
Oil on panel
122.1 x 121 cm
Gemeentemuseum Den Haag
p. 56
- Compositie met blauwe en witte
blokjes**, 1953
[**Composition with Blue and White
Cubes**]
Wood and paint
60 x 59.8 cm
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo,
The Netherlands
p. 57

Compositie met oranje driehoek, 1953
[**Composition with Orange Triangle**]
Oil on canvas
99.7 x 90.2 cm
Gemeentemuseum Den Haag
p. 55

Voor een spatiaal colorisme, 1953
[**For a Spatial Colorism**]
Letterpress and silkscreen on paper
Edition of 50
Various dimensions
Gemeentemuseum Den Haag
p. 38 (top left)

ZT/Landschap met sectoren, 1953
[**Untitled/Landscape with Sectors**]
Oil on canvas
54 x 104 cm
Collection Fondation Constant,
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
p. 60

Zwart, rood, groen, 1953
[**Black, Red, Green**]
Oil on panel
61.5 x 148.5 cm
Stedelijk Museum Schiedam,
The Netherlands; long-term loan
Fondation Constant.

Constructie met doorzichtige vlakken, 1954
[**Construction with Transparent Planes**]
Plexiglas and aluminum
76 x 73 x 48 cm
Colección MACBA, Barcelona.
Fundación MACBA. Fundación Repsol
p. 63

Constructie met gekleurde vlakken, 1954
[**Construction with Colored Planes**]
Plexiglass and iron
119.5 x 62 x 57.2 cm
Stedelijk Museum Schiedam,
The Netherlands; long-term loan
Fondation Constant
p. 62

Ambiance de jeu, 1956
[**Environment of Play**]
Copper, wood, and oil paint
155 x 155 x 12 cm
Gemeentemuseum Den Haag;
long-term loan Fondation Constant,
Amsterdam
p. 67

Constant, Pinot Gallizio, Piero
Simondo, Jorn, Kotik, and Gallizio Jr.

Untitled, 1956
Mixed media on Masonite
155 x 75 cm
Courtesy Archivio Gallizio, Turin

Compositie I (Alba), 1956
[**Composition I (Alba)**]
Oil on canvas
60 x 69.5 cm
Private collection
p. 94

Compositie II (Alba), 1956
[**Composition II (Alba)**]
Oil on canvas
60 x 70 cm
Private collection
p. 95

De lansen (Souvenir d'Uccello), 1956
[**The Lances (Souvenir d'Uccello)**]
Oil on canvas
95 x 110 cm
Stedelijk Museum Schiedam,
The Netherlands; long-term loan
Fondation Constant.
p. 98

De zon, 1956
[**The Sun**]
Oil on canvas
110.5 x 95.2 cm
Collection Centraal Museum, Utrecht
p. 101

Het Zonneschip, 1956
[**Sun Vessel**]
Metal, Plexiglas, and wood
87 x 177 x 42 cm
Gemeentemuseum Den Haag; long-term
loan Fondation Constant, Amsterdam
p. 108

IJhorst tafeltje, 1954
[**IJhorst Table**]
Round iron rods, metal surface covered
with a silver-color paint and glass
45.5 x Ø 64.5 cm
Collection Fondation Constant,
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Stofontwerp Fandango, ca. 1956
[**Design for Cloth Fandango**]
Gouache on cloth
50 x 65.1 cm
Collection Fondation Constant,
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
p. 99

Stofontwerp Malagueña, ca. 1956
[**Design for Cloth Malagueña**]
Gouache on cloth

50.1 x 65 cm
Collection Fondation Constant,
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
p. 99

Stofontwerp Saeta, ca. 1956
[**Design for Cloth Saeta**]
Gouache on cloth
50 x 65.1 cm
Collection Fondation Constant,
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
p. 99

Kosmisch Landschap, 1956
[**Cosmic Landscape**]
Oil on hardboard
19.5 x 43.5 cm
Collection Fondation Constant,
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
p. 138 (top)

Observatorium/Constructie in groen en wit, 1955–1956
[**Observatory/Construction in Green and White**]
Perspex and brass
52 x Ø 48.5 cm
Collection Fondation Constant,
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
p. 64

Ontwerp voor een zigeunerkamp, 1956
[**Design for a Gypsy Camp**]
Stainless steel, aluminum, Plexiglas,
wood and oil paint
10.2 x Ø 125 cm
Gemeentemuseum Den Haag
pp. 102–103

Paysage lunaire, 1956
[**Lunar Landscape**]
Oil on canvas
118.8 x 98.9 cm
Rabo Art Collection, Utrecht,
The Netherlands
p. 61

Stad (Alba), 1956
[**City (Alba)**]
Oil on canvas
60.5 x 80.5 cm
Collection Fondation Constant,
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
p. 100

Untitled (Alba), 1956
Oil on canvas
98.8 x 120.4 cm
Collection Cobra Museum of Modern
Art, Amstelveen
p. 97

Construction dans un volume, 1957
[**Wire Construction in Prism**]
Iron sheet, iron connecting wires,
and paint
142 x 49.5 x 21.5 cm
Collection Fondation Constant,
Amsterdam; long-term loan Stedelijk
Museum Schiedam
p. 139

Ruimtelandschap, 1957
[**Space Landscape**]
Oil on hardboard
26.58 x 30.1 cm
Collection Fondation Constant,
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
p. 137

Voyage dans l'espace, 1957
[**Space Travel**]
Oil on hardboard
31 x 42 cm
Collection Fondation Constant,
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Constructie in oranje, 1958
[**Construction in Orange**]
Metal, Plexiglas, and wood
24.6 x 110.2 x 100.5 cm
Gemeentemuseum Den Haag
pp. 142, 158 (top)

Eerste schets New Babylon, 1958
[**First Sketch New Babylon**]
Colored pencil and pencil on paper
31 x 28.4 cm
Collection Fondation Constant,
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
p. 145

Gele sector, 1958
[**Yellow Sector**]
Iron, aluminum, copper, Plexiglas,
ink, and oil paint on wood
21 x 82.5 x 77.5 cm
Gemeentemuseum Den Haag
pp. 148–149, 150, 158 (middle)

Infinite Line, 1958
Perpex, paint, aluminum, brass wires,
and iron
145 x 70 x 70 cm
Cobra Museum of Modern Art,
Amstelveen, The Netherlands;
long-term loan Fondation Constant
p. 2

Nébulose mécanique, 1958
Perspex, brass, and brass wires
35 x 96 x 73 cm
Stedelijk Museum Schiedam,

The Netherlands; long-term loan
Fondation Constant
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Nébulose mécanique, 1958
Aluminum, brass, Perspex, and paint
129 x 92 x 30 cm
Stedelijk Museum Schiedam, The
Netherlands; long-term loan Fondation
Constant
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New Babylon Nord, 1958
[**New Babylon North**]
Ink and watercolor on paper
99.9 x 106.6 cm
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Rode sector, 1958
[**Red Sector**]
Iron, steel, aluminum, copper,
Plexiglas, ink, and oil paint on wood
27.1 x 96.5 x 77.5 cm
Gemeentemuseum Den Haag
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Ruimtecircus, 1958
[**Space Circus**]
Wire and copper
105 x 90 x 100 cm
Gemeentemuseum Den Haag
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Constructie geel en wit, 1956
[**Construction Yellow and White**]
Perspex and aluminum
83.5 x 78.4 x 71.5 cm
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; on loan
from the Cultural Heritage Agency of
the Netherlands
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Schets voor Nébulose mécanique, 1958
[**Sketch for Nébulose mécanique**]
Two drawings with ink on paper
33 x 21,3 cm
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Amsterdam, The Netherlands
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Structures dans l'espace, 1958
[**Structures in Space**]
Oil on hardboard
19.5 x 41 cm
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Amsterdam, The Netherlands
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Ambiance de départ, 1959
[**Environment of Departure**]

Metal, Plexiglas, and wood
11.5 x 99.9 x 75.6 cm
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[**Group of Sectors**]
Metal, Plexiglas, ink, and oil paint on
wood
4.5 x 98.9 x 99.7 cm
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Industrieel landschap, 1959
[**Industrial Landscape**]
Metal, Plexiglas, and wood
5.5 x 65.5 x 53.5 cm
Gemeentemuseum Den Haag
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Klein Labyr, 1959
[**Little Labyr**]
Metal, Plexiglas, wood, oil paint and
chalk
70 x 35 x 56 cm
Gemeentemuseum Den Haag
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Oriënt sector, 1959
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Metal, ink on Plexiglas and oil paint on
wood
19.4 x 77.5 x 60.7 cm
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[**Sector Interior**]
Zinc, Plexiglas and wood
19.7 x 59.9 x 60 cm
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Spatiovore, 1959
Plexiglas, metal, and painted wood
35 x 90 x 64 cm
Centre Pompidou, Paris
Musée national d'art moderne/Centre
de création industrielle
Compra 1999. N° inv.: AM 1999-2-92
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Two Towers , 1959
Iron wire coated with a silver paint
layer, and plywood
95 x 46 x 43.5 cm
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Amsterdam, The Netherlands
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[**Hanging Sector**]

Iron, steel, copper, aluminum,
and oil paint
75 x 130 x 99 cm
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Hangende sector II, 1960
[**Hanging Sector II**]

Perspex, brass, iron wire, oil on wood,
and stone
52 x 36.5 x 33 cm
Defares Collection
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42.2 x 51.1 cm
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Metal, Plexiglas, ink, and paint
on wood
64 x 105 x 155.1 cm
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Trappen en ladders, 1960
[**Stairs and Ladders**]

India ink on paper
32 x 46 cm
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146.5 x 112.2 cm
Private collection, Courtesy Galerie
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Divergerende stralen, 1961
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3/20
Drypoint
29.8 x 25 cm
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Drypoint
49.5 x 59.8 cm
Collection Fondation Constant,
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
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Ronde vorm met drie gaten, 1961
[**Round Shape with Three Holes**]

20/20
Drypoint

21.4 x 25 cm
Collection Fondation Constant,
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Ronde vorm, 1961
[**Round Shape**]

12/20
Drypoint
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Amsterdam, The Netherlands

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[**Sketch for a Construction**]

Ink on paper
43 x 63.9 cm
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Adieu la P., 1962
[**Farewell Painting**]

Oil on canvas
112.5 x 145.5 cm
Cobra Museum of Modern Art,
Amstelveen, The Netherlands;
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Diorama II, 1962

Wood, glass, and oil paint
63 x 63.1 x 17.4 cm
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Diorama III, 1962

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[**Labyratorium**]
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52.2 x 62.2 cm
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New Babylon—Antwerpen, 1963

[**New Babylon—Antwerp**]
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New Babylon—Barcelona, 1963

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Gemeentemuseum Den Haag
Cover

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[**New Babylon—Ruhr Valley**]

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Gemeentemuseum Den Haag
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Paysage artificiel, 1963
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Oil on linen
160 x 185 cm
Cobra Museum of Modern Art,
Amstelveen; long-term loan Karel van
Stuijvenberg, Caracas
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Landschap met Spatiovore, 1964
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Pencil on paper
88.8 x 138 cm
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87.3 x 130.7 cm
Gemeentemuseum Den Haag;
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(Experimentele Studio Rotterdam),

ca. 1964
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and paint
28 x 23.5 x 25 cm
Collection Fondation Constant,
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
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Fiesta gitana, 1964
[**Gipsy Celebration**]

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44.9 x 64.9 cm
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- Schets voor zelfdragende sectorconstructie, 1964**
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38 x 131 x 155 cm
Gemeentemuseum Den Haag
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[Mobile Ladder Maze]
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99 x 110 cm
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[Scalemodel for Playful Stairs]
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[Sectors in Mountain Landscape]
Plexiglas and oil paint on wood
7 x 63.5 x 86.3 cm
Gemeentemuseum Den Haag
- Collage of Sector Models, ca. 1969**
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Fold-out
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[Fragment of a Sector]
Metal, Plexiglas, and wood
62 x 144 x 162 cm
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Silver paint, black and white acrylic and graphite on vellum paper
121 x 121 cm
Centre Pompidou, Paris
Musée national d'art moderne/
Centre de création industrielle
Donación del artista, 1999. N° inv.: AM 1999-2-94
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121.5 x 133.2 cm
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119 x 131.5 cm
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Oil and lacquer on canvas
164.5 x 178.8 cm
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Gezicht op New Babylonische sectoren, 1971
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91 x 103 cm
Collection Fondation Constant, Amsterdam; long-term loan Stedelijk Museum Schiedam
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38.8 x 26.8 cm
Collection Fondation Constant, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

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165.1 x 175.2 cm
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[Peace – What Is That?]
Mixed media on paper
38.9 x 27 cm
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120 x 130 cm
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La Révolte, 1972
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70.6 x 90.4 cm
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Les touristes, 1972
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Oil on canvas
190 x 200 cm
Stedelijk Museum Schiedam, The Netherlands; long-term loan Fondation Constant
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38.9 x 26.8 cm
Collection Fondation Constant, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

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Collage and mixed media on paper
99 x 124 cm
Stedelijk Museum Schiedam, The Netherlands; long-term loan Fondation Constant

Verwenden Sie Ihre Langweile einmal für, 1972
[Use Your Boredom for Once]
Mixed media on paper
41.9 x 27.7 cm
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Watercolor and pencil on paper
122 x 133 cm
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Oil on canvas
189.5 x 200.4 cm
Gemeentemuseum Den Haag
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Collage and mixed media on paper
82 x 135 cm
Stedelijk Museum Schiedam, The Netherlands; long-term loan Fondation Constant
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Plan for Doorlabyrinth, 1974
Marker in red and black, graphite on paper, cardboard (red)
49.9 x 61.7 cm
Collection Fondation Constant, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Theorie collages New Babylon No. 1–No. 8, 1974
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49.6 x 59.5 cm each
Gemeentemuseum Den Haag
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Oil on canvas
190.7 x 200.5 cm
ABN AMRO Collection

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[Untitled/Guitar Player and Singer]
Pen and ink on paper
28.3 x 21.6 cm
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La fin de la fête, 1977
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71.5 x 90.5 cm
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Oil on canvas
148 x 198 cm

Stedelijk Museum Schiedam,
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Fondation Constant

Gitarist, ca. 1985
[Guitarist]

Watercolor on paper
53.5 x 33.5 cm
Private collection

Gitaarspeler, 1987
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55 x 36 cm
Collection ProWinko

Gitaarspeler/Orpheus, 1987
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44 x 42 cm
Private collection

Torero, 1991
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Watercolor on paper
45 x 37.5 cm
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Watercolor on paper
42 x 56.7 cm
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RECONSTRUCTIONS

Aldo Van Eyck, Constant and Lucebert
Een ruimte in kleur, 1952
[A Space in Color]

Originally made for the exhibition *Mens en Huis* [Man and House] at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1952.

Reconstruction of the exhibition in the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in 2015:

Research: Ludo van Halem (curator, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam) and Laura Stamps (curator, Gemeentemuseum Den Haag)

Reconstruction of the painting:
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Constant
Deurenlabyrinth, 1974
[Door Labyrinth]

[Reconstruction of a part of the labyrinth of the exhibition *New Babylon* in the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, 1974]

Research: Laura Stamps (curator, Gemeentemuseum Den Haag) with special thanks to Hans Locher, former director of the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag.

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New Babylon—Den Haag, 1964
[New Babylon—The Hague]

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p. 297 (top) - Fondation Constant, Victor E. Nieuwenhuijs

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