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Abstract

This dissertation offers a historical and theoretical reading of the composite artwork New Babylon, produced by the Dutch artist Constant Nieuwenhuys (hereafter Constant) between approximately 1956 and 1974. Its central argument is that New Babylon possesses an ontological indeterminacy that situates the work between genres and art historical movements, calling into question the way in which existing research has framed the work primarily as, on the one hand, a speculative architectural project and, on the other, the product of Constant’s brief association with the Situationist International. This ontological indeterminacy issues from the work's physical and textual multiplicity and variability, as well as from Constant's frequent equivocation regarding the nature of the work, particularly concerning its relationship to reality. Without producing a schema of historical determinism, the account of New Babylon offered in this thesis opens up possibilities for the work to be recontextualized historically. In particular, this thesis proposes that there are important affinities between New Babylon and contemporary participatory and socially engaged practices.