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“As Real As Any Work of Art”: An Ontological and Historical Reading of Constant’s *New Babylon*

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree, following minor corrections, on 14 October 2021.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.

Signed: Anthea Buys

Student number: 0317988G

For Conrad, my other constant.

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Note on Style

I have used the Modern Languages Association (MLA) 8th Edition citation style, according to which sources are acknowledged in the body of the text with the author's last name and the page number of the citation in parentheses. Where several works are cited by the same author, the author's last name as well as the title of the text, followed by the page number, are included in the parentheses. Throughout, I use double quotation marks to indicate citation, and single quotation marks to indicate a) citations within citations, and b) terms under scrutiny or with questionable common use. Titles of artworks and exhibitions are italicised. Regarding capitalisation of artwork and exhibition titles, I follow conventions established by the artist or curator (in the case of exhibitions) for each work. I have opted to use this convention, rather than establishing my own, on grounds that artists are often particular about their use of capitalisation in titles. Finally, where gendered pronouns are used to refer to unspecified or hypothetical artists, exhibition visitors or viewers, I use the female pronoun, in a bid to avoid the replication of conventions in which the generic subject is normatively male.

Introduction

On a June afternoon in 2016, the Gemeentemuseum in Den Haag, the Netherlands, thronged with visitors, both locals and summer tourists, who had made their way to the municipal museum to see the exhibition *Constant: New Babylon. To Us, Liberty.* This survey show brought together, for the first time since 1974, the entire *New Babylon oeuvre,* a vast collection of materially diverse but conceptually and thematically related artworks by the Dutch artist Constant Nieuwenhuys (hereafter "Constant"),[1] which had been produced between approximately 1956 and 1974. The chronological end of the *New Babylon* project coincided with a similarly scaled exhibition, also at the Gemeentemuseum, titled simply *Constant: New Babylon.* In a feat of historical reconstruction – which is also always necessarily a feat of revision and rewriting – the 2016 exhibition paid homage to the 1974 event, reiterating its somewhat orthodox representation of the *New Babylon* project according to a familiar, if simplistic, narrative. *New Babylon*, the narrative goes, was a utopian project rooted in the idea of a future earth-spanning city in which all labour would be automated and citizens would be free to live lives of leisure and creativity. Although *New Babylon* was conceived as an all-encompassing work of art, or a work of art as a way of life, and was therefore not realised in its totality in Constant's lifetime, it manifested in part as an iterative collection of sculptures, models, drawings, collages and paintings. Together these represent Constant's critical engagement with modernist architecture and urban planning.

[1] Early in his career, Constant established the convention of referring to him only by his first name.

This account is not, strictly speaking, incorrect, but it leaves out much of the complexity and richness of *New Babylon*, not to mention its problematics and shortcomings. What it also excludes is Constant's own vacillating, and often fraught, representations of the body of work, as conveyed in his often contradictory writings and interviews. This narrativising of *New Babylon* is an important constituent of the project, and yet it has not been scrutinised closely in any existing critical or academic engagement with the work. This thesis places substantial weight on the narrative of *New Babylon*, on its existence as a work of art not only made into physical objects but also conveyed textually and in the artist's spoken reflections. Embedded in my reading of the work is an appreciation of its plural existence as a collection of texts and a collection of objects. This plurality is the source of the work's ontological complexity, which is the chief subject of the research presented here.

This thesis offers an historical and philosophical reading of *New Babylon* which is grounded in a poststructuralist approach to ontology. Its central argument is that *New Babylon* possesses an ontological indeterminacy that challenges dominant accounts of the ontology of artworks in general, and presents us with new tools for understanding the semiotic, relational and existential qualities of plural artworks. *New Babylon*'s ontological indeterminacy issues from the work's physical and textual multiplicity and variability, as well as from Constant's frequent equivocation regarding the relationship of the work to 'reality'. Although Constant's understanding of 'reality' seems to change over time, he tends ultimately to associate it with that which is nominally 'outside' of the work, the world in counterpoint to which *New Babylon* is articulated. In contrast to the nature of this world, he sees *New Babylon* as a "fantastication of reality" (Constant, quoted in Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon* 67). I engage with the concept of reality specifically in relation to artworks, rather than exploring its broader metaphysical applications. First I map Constant's use of the term, and then I go on to investigate its relevance to questions of the ontology of art as they emerge in the Western analytic tradition, poststructuralist philosophy, and more recent writing in the intersecting fields of art theory and art history.[2]

The ontological reading of *New Babylon* offered in this study proposes an alternative to the way in which existing research has framed the work primarily as a speculative architectural project, on the one hand, and the product of Constant's brief association with the Situationist International (SI), on the other. Without producing an historically determinist schema, my account of *New Babylon* opens up possibilities for the work to be recontextualised historically, and in particular, I propose that there are important affinities between *New Babylon* and contemporary participatory art.

More Than a "Situationist City"[3]

The beginnings of *New Babylon* are imbricated with the history of the early SI, and much of Constant's theorising and imagining of *New Babylon* significantly influenced the SI's foundational ideas related to spatiality and urbanism. The connection between the SI and *New Babylon* is well documented, although in much of the existing literature, Situationist ideology is framed as antecedent to *New Babylon,* as though Constant's earliest *New Babylon* models had

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[2] My distinction between these areas of thought is purely to signal the relevance of my research in light of academic conventions, which tend to differentiate, customarily at least, between 'philosophy', 'theory' and 'history'. The orientation of my research across these disciplines is premised on the view that they dovetail and, in many ways, are contiguous with each other.

[3] The phrase "Situationist city" is borrowed from the title of Simon Sadler's book, *The Situationist City,* which examines the phenomenon of Situationist urbanism.

been intended merely as illustrations of Situationist concepts.[4] These works include the 1956 piece *Ontwerp voor een zigeunerkamp in Alba* ("Design for a 'gypsy' camp in Alba") (fig. 1), *Gele Sector* ("Yellow Sector") (1958) (fig. 2), and *Oriënt sector* ("Oriental sector") (1959), all of which were presented in the July 1960 edition of the SI's periodical *Internationale Situationniste* alongside presentations of key Situationist terminology and concepts. This view positions *New Babylon* as, in the words of Simon Sadler, a "Situationist city" (Sadler), obscuring Constant's role in developing Situationist concepts and terminology, as well as understating the project's scope beyond the parameters of the movement. Chapter One addresses the relationship between Constant's work and the SI, and argues for a more nuanced appreciation of their mutual influence. However, it is important also to acknowledge that Constant's investment in the *New Babylon* project far exceeded his involvement with the SI.

Until the exhibition *Constant: New Babylon. To Us, Liberty*, the range and significance of Constant's work on *New Babylon* in the years following his disassociation from the SI (1960 onwards) had been understated in critical and curatorial engagements with the project. This exhibition showcased the breadth of his work in the 1960s and early 1970s, demonstrating that the vast majority of the *New Babylon* pieces were produced outside of the context of the SI. It also foregrounded the importance of recurring visual motifs and themes in the *oeuvre,* most notably that of the labyrinth. Although Jean-Clerence Lambert's 1997 text *Constant: New Babylon : Art et utopie : textes situationnistes* ("New Babylon: Art and Utopia: Situationist Texts") touches on the occurrence of labyrinths in *New Babylon,* it positions this ten-

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[4] Many influential accounts of the SI claim *New Babylon* as a project that emerged under the auspices of the group. See for example Sadler's *The Situationist City* (1999), Sadie Plant's *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* (1992), Mark Wigley and Catherine de Zheger's *The Activist Drawing: Retracing Situationist Architectures from Constant's New Babylon to Beyond* (1999), Leslie Kavanagh's "Situating Situationism: Wandering around *New Babylon* with *Mille Plateaux*" (2008), and McKenzie Wark's *The Everyday Life and Glorious Times of the Situationist International* (2015).

dency in relation to the mysticist interests of the CoBrA group in which Constant played a major role from 1948 to 1951 (Constant and Lambert 17–21). Lambert argues that Constant's association with CoBrA segued into his involvement with the SI; in this respect he positions the New Babylonian labyrinth as a proto-Situationist construct. This interpretation affirms the Situationist-dominated narrative of *New Babylon.*

My research proceeds from the position that in order to account for the complexity of *New Babylon,* and indeed to achieve an understanding of the substantial breadth of the project, one must look beyond its connections to the SI. However, in order to do this, the Situationist legacy must be engaged with and put to rest (to the extent that any legacy can). As mentioned above, this is the chief objective of Chapter One, which reads the narrative of *New Babylon* as a Situationist project alongside a theoretical understanding of the inscription of history as a continual process of loss, tracing and projection. Integral to this discussion is a reading of Derrida's notion of "*différance*", "the non-full, non-simple, structured and differentiating origin of differences" (Derrida, "*Différance*" 11). This theoretical grounding forms the basis for the evolution of my argument, through Chapters Two and Three respectively, that the ontological structure of *New Babylon* challenges conventional understandings of the ontology of artworks in general, and that this complex ontology finds expression in the recurring visual, spatial and relational motif of the labyrinth.

Background

Contextually, my engagement with New Babylon follows a trail of contemporary interest in the project that began in 1997 with Lambert's text. This publication, like several that would follow it, includes a selection of Constant's own writings on *New Babylon* (translated into French, unless they had appeared in French in the original), in addition to Lambert's own interpretations of primary and anecdotal material. Lambert had become a personal friend of Constant, and much of his anecdotal material is drawn from personal archives and memory. Although it was never translated into English, and as a result has not featured strongly in English-language writing related to Constant's work, the Lambert text might be regarded as a sign of a zeitgeist shift in which researchers and curators working at the intersection of art and architecture turned their attention afresh to *New Babylon*. It is difficult to determine precisely what triggered or facilitated this flourishing of attention in the late 1990s, but the trend was set in motion in earnest in 1998 with the exhibition (and accompanying catalogue) *Constant's New Babylon: The Hyper-Architecture of Desire,* curated by Mark Wigley at the Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam (hereafter Witte de With).[5] [6] The exhibition catalogue, edited and partially authored by Wigley, is the most authoritative and comprehensive account of *New Babylon* to date, and is cited extensively in the literature subsequently produced on *New Babylon*.[7] This catalogue includes an anthology of Constant's own writings, which constitutes the first - and to date most extensive - consolidated archive of his reflections on *New Babylon*. Several of these texts are also published online in a section of the web 'journal' *Not Bored*, which is devoted to the Situationist International. Crucially, howev-

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[5] In 2020, following a lobby from the arts community to decolonise art institutions in the Netherlands, the name of Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art was changed to "Formerly Known as Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art. In 2021, the institution was renamed Kunstinstituut Melly.

[6] According to Wigley, Witte de With commissioned him to curate the exhibition and edit the catalogue. This was the origin of his engagement with the *New Babylon* project (Buys and Wigley n.p.).

[7] This publication features fairly heavily in this thesis as well, particularly in Chapter One. The anthology of translations of Constant's texts has been an invaluable resource in the execution of my research; these works are cited (in translation, as they appear in the publication, rather than in the original Dutch) throughout the thesis.

er, Wigley's compilation covers Constant's output in the decades following his short-lived involvement with the SI between 1957 and 1960.

The exhibition at Witte de With was followed by one at the Drawing Centre in New York in 1999, co-curated by Wigley and then-director of the Drawing Centre, Catherine de Zegher. Titled *The Activist Drawing: Retracing Situationist Architecture from Constant's New Babylon to Beyond,* this exhibition focused on Constant's drawings, positioning them as radical interventions in the context of architectural draughtsmanship. Also accompanied by a catalogue bearing the same title,[8] the exhibition read Constant's engagement with the discipline of architecture as a legacy of the socio-political ambitions of the SI - not uncontroversially, the exhibition and catalogue positioned these drawings as a form of 'activism'.[9]

Simon Sadler's 1998 publication *The Situationist City* likewise contextualises *New Babylon* as an SI project, emphasising the models and concepts developed during Constant's time with the SI at the expense of a more capacious portrayal of the project. By contrast, in curator Okwui Enwezor's 2002 edition of the recurring mega-exhibition Documenta (Documenta 11, *Platform 5*), *New Babylon* was presented with a far looser attachment to the SI, being framed instead alongside examples of contemporaneous utopian architectural projects. In particular, several *New Babylon* pieces were flanked by a mini-retrospective of the conceptual architect Yona Friedman's sketches towards a hypothetical, expressly utopian city of the future.

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8 Wigley considers his essay in this publication, titled "Paper, Scissors, Blur", to be a supplement to the ground covered in *Constant's New Babylon: The Hyper-Architecture of Desire* (see note 1 on "Paper, Scissors, Blur", p. 53).

9 It is questionable whether the Situationists, particularly at the early stage of their collaboration, considered themselves 'activists' in the sense in which the term is understood today. Still more dubious is whether their early work actually *was* activist in any respect. This disputable association turns on a concept of activism as a set of actions or messages delivered publicly with the intention of changing the behaviours and/or views of others.

A fifth publication, comprising an anthology of critical essays and a small selection of Constant's writings,[10] was released on the occasion of the exhibition *Constant. New Babylon: To Us, Liberty,* and bears the same title. The essays in this exhibition catalogue tend also to focus on *New Babylon's* intersection with architectural history and theory. Wigley's essay "Extreme Hospitality" argues that *New Babylon* instantiates an "architecture of hospitality"(Wigley, "Extreme Hospitality" 39), while a transcript of a conversation between architect Rem Koolhaas and art theorist Pascal Gielen reiterates the work's alignment with a tradition of utopian architectural thinking.[11]

It is rare to find secondary writing on *New Babylon* that does not rely to some extent (and sometimes very heavily) on at least one of these texts (Wigley is cited most frequently), reiterating many of their central claims about the nature of *New Babylon*.[12] Through this process, these positions become reified, at the expense of a wider field of interpretation for the work. Two important observations arise from the recognition of this process: first, despite a contemporary interest in *New Babylon,* researchers are possibly gaining distance from an exten-

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[10] The texts included are "Another City for Another Life" (1959, 206-209), "Lecture at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London" (1963, 210-215), and "New Babylon - Ten Years On" (1980, 216-225).

[11] My thesis does address the reception of *New Babylon* in architectural history, but focuses on the work's architectural character insofar as Constant imported architectural conventions in service of his approach to New Babylon as an artwork (rather than an architectural work), a distinction he made emphatically, if ambiguously. Constant's often loaded attempts to distinguish between architecture and art, which he seems to associate with reality and unreality respectively, are discussed in depth in Chapter Two. Notwithstanding this somewhat practical separation of contexts, my project will address the ways in which *New Babylon* problematised these disciplinary boundaries.

[12] Ali Dur and McKenzie Wark's "(Dur and Wark)" is heavily dependent on Wigley, for example, as are Hilde Heynen's chapter on *New Babylon* in (Heynen) and (Pinder).

sive account of the work, rather than moving closer to one;[13] and, second, the established narrative of the most important nodes in the history of *New Babylon* has occurred retrospectively, in line with existing narratives concerning the appropriate place of the work in twentieth century art history.

My research speaks to this body of knowledge in three ways. First, it proposes an alternative to the (art-)historical context in which *New Babylon* has repeatedly been located; second, it brings relevant theoretical perspectives to bear in the analysis of the work; and, third, it reframes the ontological status of *New Babylon*, while subtly shifting understandings of participatory art. My particular contention regarding the latter is that there has hitherto been no interrogation of *New Babylon*'s implications for questions of the ontology of artworks in general, even though, as I argue in Chapter Two, the theme of different levels and ways of being is central to Constant's own engagement with the work. My research emerges from a conviction that *New Babylon* demands a theory of art, as well as a theory of history, which is capable of accommodating plural modes of being and the traversal within a single artistic *oeuvre* of different temporalities, different inflections of 'reality', and different physical iterations. In particular, I argue that the engagement of *New Babylon* with the contested notion of 'reality' calls for the interrogation of the relationship between artworks and reality more generally, and, indeed, problematises the concept of reality in the first instance.

The philosophical orientation of my study - which is a phenomenological, post-structuralist approach to ontology - emerges from philosophical problems implicit in Constant's work it-

[13] Even if an exhaustive account is neither entirely possible nor necessarily desirable, historical research aims towards it. The act of archival research presupposes the value of accumulating as many apparently 'correct' interpretations as possible on a particular subject.

self and his discussions of it. These problems are most evident in (a) Constant's regular attempts to qualify *New Babylon*'s relationship to a notion of reality, (b) his attribution of singularity to the work despite its manifestation in several instances and in various media, and, (c) the non-object-bound qualities of the work, such as its ideological content and its social and relational dynamics (both those which are realised through participatory projects and those which are merely proposed or represented). My analysis of these problems takes place throughout the following chapters and draws initially on the resonance of these problems with pertinent concepts in philosophy. It then treats this philosophical investigation as a lens through which to contextualise *New Babylon* alongside other artworks and tendencies in art history which share comparable conceptual concerns. I acknowledge the affinity of *New Babylon*'s conceptual orientation with possible worlds' theory and key ideas in the study of the ontology of artworks in the analytic philosophical tradition. I then pursue central concepts in these bodies of thought through the treatment of the related notions of 'world', 'being', 'perception', 'ontology' and 'the artwork' primarily in the thought of Heidegger, Derrida and Merleau-Ponty. The phenomenological account of ontology that emerges through this reading serves as the basis for my argument in Chapter Three that *New Babylon* not only develops chronologically alongside burgeoning curatorial and artistic explorations of viewer participation, but also prefigures in important ways participatory practices in contemporary art. Jacques Rancière's notions of the "distribution of the sensible", the "emancipated spectator", and his related exposition of the relationship between aesthetics and politics are foundational concepts in my discussion of *New Babylon* as a work that is concerned in essential ways with the politics of viewership.

The informing argument is developed through three long and closely connected chapters, rather than a number of shorter chapters, a structure which is indebted to, and reflects, the sustained nature of Constant's engagement with *New Babylon*. This structure supports the thorough investigation of three main themes, one of which is taken up in each chapter. The first of these is *New Babylon*'s historical indeterminacy, expressed in the relationship of the project to the SI. The second is the ontological status of the work relative to established theories of the ontology of artworks. The third and final theme is the expression of the work's ontological complexity in labyrinthine form.

Scope

The scope of my engagement with *New Babylon* is focused through my key themes, and limited by certain necessities, both conceptual and practical. Rather than a comprehensive chronological account of the *New Babylon oeuvre*, which has been undertaken in both Wigley's *Constant's New Babylon* and in the catalogue of *New Babylon. To Us, Liberty,* I have chosen to examine a selection of works which together present a version and a vision of *New Babylon* that have been overlooked in existing accounts. At the same time, I try to give a sense of the range and complexity of the manifestations of the work by foregrounding certain key pieces. These begin with *Ontwerp voor een zigeunerkamp in Alba* ("Design for a 'gypsy' camp in Alba") (1956, fig. 1) and *Gele Sector* ("Yellow Sector") (1958, fig. 2), which is accompanied by a diagram (*Plattegrond van de gele sector* ("Diagram of the yellow sector"), 1959, fig. 3) and a written "description" of its envisaged parts (Constant, "Description of the Yellow Sector"). In Chapter Two I dwell on several three-dimensional works, including the *Diorama* series (*Diorama I, II* and *III*) (all 1962, figs. 4,5 and 6) and the 1959 sculpture *Klein*

Labyr ("Small Labyrinth") (fig. 7). Chapter Three returns briefly to *Gele Sector*, and goes on to survey several works on paper and paintings made mostly in the 1960s and early 1970s. This discussion takes place *en route* to a consideration of Constant's key participatory installations, *Experiment Studio Rotterdam (ESR)* (1965, fig. 8 and 9), *Ludieke trap* ("Playful stairs"), (1969, fig. 10), and *Deurenlabyrint* ("Door Labyrinth") (1974, fig. 11), which form the basis of my argument that, through the motif and structure of the labyrinth, *New Babylon* enacts a form of radical hospitality which problematises the categories of guest and host, and by extension, artist and participant.

Although my selection of works is relevant to my central arguments, I have not made this selection specifically in order to illustrate or 'prove' my arguments, or to manipulate *New Babylon* in the direction of a theoretical trajectory decided in advance. Rather I have attempted to read the work on its own terms,[14] so to speak, drawing previous oversights back into view and repopulating the terrain with *New Babylon*'s most perplexing, and oftentimes jarring, manifestations. This is done in order to challenge, through a circumspect act of historical retrieval, the structures and processes of historicisation and their role in cementing what is ultimately taken to be the truth about the past, the present and the future. In this particular context, I am interested in 'the truth' insofar as it is applicable to the nature of artworks. 'What is the *true* nature of *New Babylon*?' is a question which had some import in the early stages of this research, but which I found to be inherently unanswerable, or answerable only

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[14] The notion that a work can be read "on its own terms", that meaning can be discerned objectively merely by looking at the work, is problematic in that it presupposes the viewer's being in possession of the capacities firstly to apprehend unfailingly the work of art in all its complexity, and secondly to know that her interpretation of the work is 'correct'. Nonetheless, I attempt to read artworks and theoretical texts alongside each other, giving precedence, where possible, to the content, problems and narratives embedded in *New Babylon*.

via the aporia of the plural ontology of the artwork.[15] This is the central aporia around which I develop layers of theoretical reflection whose purpose is to attempt to ground Constant's sometimes unconsidered, often contradictory, musings about *New Babylon* in a philosophical terrain he often seems intuitively to circle but never finally to cross.

In Chapter Three my discussion shifts to an engagement with the history of participatory art, proposing links between *New Babylon*'s labyrinthine manifestations and recent theorising around art which is "focused on the sphere of inter-human relations" (Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* 28). I point to Clare Bishop's extensive history of participatory art, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (2012), as an important expository account of this field. Not wishing to replicate Bishop's work, I 'annotate' this history with an acknowledgment of the noteworthy role labyrinthine structures, both actual and metaphorical, played in the development of participatory practice in Constant's time.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter One offers the reader a critical history of *New Babylon'*s emergence alongside the SI's speculative methods of engagement with urban environments such as the *dérive,* psychogeography and the practice of *détournement.* The *dérive*, a process of aimless wandering in the city, was for the SI the primary means of practicing psychogeography, a method of geographic research inflected by the psychological effects supposedly produced by different urban settings. Related to psychogeography*, détournement* is the name given to a process of

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[15] Derrida's notion of the aporia as a conceptual impasse, a step (*pas*) that is also *not* (*pas*), is central to the development of my argument that *New Babylon* instantiates a plural and seemingly paradoxical ontology. See my discussion of the aporia in Chapter Two, pp. 194–199.

disorienting, de-contextualising and rearranging experiential, visual and spatial material. As a kind of performative 'collage', *détournement* could be imagined into urban environments as readily as it could be applied to image and text. In this chapter I propose a *détournement* of the historical narrative of *New Babylon* which destabilises the notion that the work was produced according to a premeditated trajectory beginning with the SI. Embedded in this argument is a critical reading of the process of historicisation itself, an endeavour which is grounded in Derrida's understanding of the archive as an encircling and an excision which artificially closes off meaning by operating as though to remove 'history' from the textual plenitude in which it is embedded. This chapter introduces some of the philosophical questions that will emerge more strongly in Chapters Two and Three through a discussion of the applicability of the Situationist concepts of psychogeography and the *dérive* to *New Babylon* and the introduction of a phenomenological reading of these practices.

Chapter Two pursues the phenomenological reading introduced in Chapter One, applying Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of perception to a discussion of the relation of *New Babylon* to concepts of 'reality', 'actuality', 'fantasy', the 'imaginary' and the 'possible'. Definitions of these concepts are broached with reference to possible worlds theory, modal logic, Heidegger's philosophy of art and Derrida's reading of it, as well as Heidegger's existentialism. In this chapter I draw on some of the language and formal conventions of philosophy, blending so-called analytic and Continental traditions in order to develop a framework for discussing *New Babylon*'s ontological plurality. A central challenge to developing this framework was posed by the inconsistencies informing Constant's own beliefs and intentions concerning the relationship of *New Babylon* to reality. Constant does not use the conventional terminology of ontology and metaphysics in his theorisation of and experiments with *New Babylon,* even though the issues he wrestles with unfold at the interstice of these two ‘genres’ of Western philosophy. What becomes clear as I examine *New Babylon* in the context of these bodies of thought is that traditional philosophical categories and their vocabularies are inadequate as tools for the analysis of artworks which exceed the classical model of the singular art object. In this chapter I lay out the argument that *New Babylon* demands a different way of thinking the ontology of the artwork. I propose that Derrida’s formulation of an aporia of the limit, which he presents with different inflections in *Aporias* and *The Truth in Painting,* offers us a model for an artwork-centred philosophy of art.

The problematics of the limit are substantially explored in *New Babylon* through the recurring formal motif of the labyrinth, an element that emerges repeatedly in *New Babylon* pieces from the time of the project’s inception until its final iteration in the 1974 exhibition at the Gemeentemuseum in Den Haag, *Constant: New Babylon.* Chapter Three looks at the significance of labyrinthine form in *New Babylon*, arguing that Constant’s use of the labyrinth is integral to the emergence of the viewer as the central figure, or protagonist, of the work. Constant’s reimagining of the viewer as a participant in and literal co-creator of the work is one of the earliest instances of this notion in Western art history, and it persists in the field of visual art - specifically in the form of contemporary participatory practice - to the present day. Despite the radicalism of Constant’s position for his time, and the extent to which he expanded the conceptual framework of the artwork to include viewer participation, New Babylon has not hitherto been included in historical accounts of the theme of viewer participation and ‘activation’ in Western art. Perhaps the most tangible contribution my research makes to art historical writing is the proposal that *New Babylon* be included in these historical accounts, that the history of participatory art be reconsidered in the light of the plural, and sometimes fraught, history (and future) of *New Babylon.* Contextualising *New Babylon* within this area of art history further complicates the sense in which the work engages with the concept of reality, as participatory art expressly breaks down the supposed threshold between art and the 'real world' beyond it.

Contribution to Knowledge

With these orientations and foci in mind, and before moving into the substantive sections of this thesis, the contribution my research undertakes to make in the fields of art history, the philosophy of art and critical theory bears summarising in clear terms.

1. I envisage that this examination of *New Babylon* will enrich and supplement existing accounts of Constant's work by demonstrating the work's ontological, conceptual and material richness. To date, scholarship on *New Babylon* has positioned the work primarily as an example of utopian architecture, understating the importance of its manifestation across a spectrum of artistic media, and altogether overlooking the challenge it poses to dominant positions on the ontology of art. While my focus falls on *New Babylon* insofar as it is an artwork, I problematise the discrimination between art and architectural works and show that embedded in this discrimination are assumptions about the nature of the relationship between art and 'reality'. Furthermore, I argue that *New Babylon* exemplifies an ontological model that is not represented in dominant Western accounts of the ontology of artworks.
2. My thesis furthermore argues that *New Babylon* offers a uniquely compelling example for the study of the ontology of artworks. Although *New Babylon* was envisaged by

the artist as a single work, it comprises many individual pieces, or ‘sub-works’. This plurality dislocates the question of ontological status from the individual art object, but, unlike conceptual art, does not locate the existence of the work in an idea alone. This central enquiry intersects with an investigation of how presentations of the work, and Constant’s texts and interviews, position this work in relation to perceived reality. Thus ontology is approached via phenomenology.

3. Finally, I hope that my thesis will contribute to the field of art history by proposing a thematic and conceptual relationship – though not one of causal antecedence - between *New Babylon* and contemporary participatory art. I draw on the recurring motif of the labyrinth in *New Babylon* to argue that the work shares important thematic concerns with contemporary artworks that interface with, or constitute an intervention in, the social. Recontextualising *New Babylon* historically in the light of this common ground not only emphasises a previously unexplored aspect of *New Babylon*, but also proposes an alternative historical lineage for contemporary participatory art.

Chapter One:

Deconstructing "*Dériville*": Revisiting *New Babylon*'s Relationship With the Situationist International

1.1 Introduction

It was in the 30th edition of the artist-produced circular *Potlatch*, published in July 1959, that *New Babylon* – although it had not yet been named – first came to be associated with the SI. *Potlatch* had been the busy publishing outlet for the Letterist International, a proto-Situationist artists' collective founded by Guy Debord in 1952.[16] Around 1957 to 1958 the Letterist International segued into the Situationist International,[17] a shift largely brought about by Debord's changing ideologies and interpersonal allegiances and schisms. With this transition, *Potlatch* became the venue in which the ideological framework of Situationism and its key characters began to emerge. The July 1959 issue of *Potlatch* was a watershed moment for *New Babylon.* Two months earlier, in May 1959, Constant had opened an exhibition of sculptures and "spatial structures" at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam (Denís, para.1). At this stage, the works were not yet referred to as *New Babylon,* nor were they even seen as part of

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[16] The Letterist International was formed by Debord as a breakaway group from the Letterists, a group founded in 1942 by Isidore Isou. These two groups are sometimes mistaken for a single group. (Trier 20–22)

[17] The Letterist International joined the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus, the London Psychogeographical Society, and a faction of CoBrA to form the SI (Trier 22).

a single *oeuvre.* The exhibition sparked little interest or engagement outside of Amsterdam. However, in July, *Potlatch*, which was based in Paris and had achieved some purchase in avant-garde circles, claimed these works as illustrations of the Situationist concept of "unitary urbanism" (Denís, para.1). In an article titled "Preliminary Models for a New Urbanism", an anonymous author (in all likelihood Debord) claims that Constant's sculptures not only "state the problem of unitary urbanism" (Denís, para.1), but also constitute an iconoclastic break with existing exhibition formats and artistic production. The author writes, "This exhibition could mark the turning point, in the modern world of art production, between self-sufficient merchandise-objects, meant solely to be looked at, and project-objects, whose more complex appreciation calls for some sort of action, an action on a higher level having to do with the totality of life" (Denís, para.1). This distinction underscored the SI's stated remit – nothing less than "the totality of life" – as well as their understanding of art as a catalyst for action, or a form of activism.

New Babylon emerged as a coherent project concurrently with Constant's association with the SI, and indeed the SI – and Debord in particular – were integral to this process. However, it is important to note that what became *New Babylon* had a life before, and certainly after, the SI. This chapter considers the formative period of the New Babylon project, retracing certain elements documented in existing literature (notably Wigley's *Constant's New Babylon* and Sadler's *The Situationist City*), and introducing considerations excluded from Situationist-oriented accounts of the work in order to describe the connection between *New Babylon* and the SI. Simultaneously, the chapter argues that embedded in the architecture of *New Babylon*'s historical narrative are several inconsistencies, many of them propagated by Constant himself, which threaten the integrity of a comprehensive and reliable history of the project.

As will emerge in this chapter and the next, many of these inconsistencies have to do not only with factual details but with central conceptual and philosophical positions as well. Their endurance in scholarship on Constant attests to a dilemma inherent in the act of reconstructing the history of a work, namely the selective construal of potentially diffuse or even divergent activities and pieces as a directly pursued line of artistic development over time. In existing historical accounts this has occurred in two main areas. Firstly, *New Babylon* has been over-associated with the SI at the expense of giving sufficient attention to steps in the project that precede or follow Constant's brief association with the group. Secondly, certain important manifestations of the project, such as the 1965 participatory installation *Experiment Studio Rotterdam (ESR)*,[18] or earlier, pre-Situationist models, are frequently excluded from analyses.

This chapter aims to clarify the nature of *New Babylon*'s legitimate association with the SI, focusing on the contribution Constant's practice made to the development of Situationist ideology. At the same time, however, it reflects on the inevitable historical loss that takes place when this (or any) narrowly framing orientation is used to position the work in history. The purpose of this reflection is not to treat my own historical citations straightforwardly as retrievals or corrections, or, to paraphrase Richard Rorty, to replace "an entrenched vocabulary which has become a nuisance" with "a half-formed new vocabulary which promises great things" (Rorty 9). Instead this chapter is intended to acknowledge the difficulty posed by history's "non-coincidence" with itself (Bennington 17), its necessary dislocation from truth as "at each moment in history, someone, somewhere, is telling the narratives which become dominant and shape the imagination" (Docherty 60). This process is richly allegorised in

[18] *Experiment Studio Rotterdam (ESR)* was a large constructed environment composed of eleven labyrinthine sections which could be explored by exhibition visitors. Made using industrial scaffolding, inexpensive wood composite, mirrors and timber, the work attempted to evoke the playful and disorienting atmosphere of *New Babylon.* This work is discussed in greater depth in Chapter Three, pp. 224–26.

Blanchot's short fiction *Awaiting Oblivion*, which opens with a nameless male protagonist attempting, and repeatedly failing, to transcribe the speech of a likewise unnamed woman. She is unable to recognise the resemblance between the transcribed words and her spoken words; "... everything before her eyes was spinning: she had lost the centre from which the events had radiated," writes Blanchot (*Awaiting Oblivion* 1). This chapter contends that the history of New Babylon is built around a lost centre, a void which is both a symptom of the inability of historical epistemology to overcome the variability of interpretive intervention, and also (and to a greater extent) a loss that has occurred through repeated factual inaccuracies, strategic interpretations of Constant's writings and works, and highly selective accounts of his *oeuvre.*

While Constant himself acknowledged the incipient SI movement, and Debord in particular, as a catalytic force in the development of his artistic exploration of urbanism, the *simultaneity* of Constant's first architectural models with the founding theories of Situationism is consistently understated in secondary literature, as is the influence of Constant's pre-Situationist exploration of urbanism and play on Situationist theory. As I argue in the first section of this chapter, Constant had developed an interest in urbanism and architecture several years prior to his first encounter with Debord. He had begun to study architecture informally between 1950 and 1951 under the guidance of a colleague, the architect Aldo Van Eyck.[19] This consideration will lend perspective to a later section in the chapter which assesses the resonances between New Babylon and the SI's published theories and activities.

[19] Constant dates his first serious enquiry into architecture with what seems like some uncertainty. In an interview with Linda Boersma for *Bomb Magazine* (Spring 2005), he states that this was in "the early 1950s", and in a subsequent sentence, states that "It must have been 1951" (Boersma 1).

The theoretical framework that is developed more fully in subsequent chapters begins here with a brief but circumspect survey of a number of historical terms in relation to which the historicisation of *New Babylon* has taken place, and to some extent must still do so. These include “modernism” and “modern art”, “postwar art”, and the “the avant-garde”. My concern in addressing these terms is not only to attempt working definitions for the sake of clarity of reference, but also to consider how the insertion of an account of *New Babylon* into an historical view of modern art that is embedded in a linear and progressive concept of temporality is at odds with the processes of revision and elision that characterise Constant’s own representation of the work over time. While I do not wish to give undue weight to the artist’s supposed intentions regarding the work, I do argue in this and the next chapter that Constant’s writings and interviews on *New Babylon* offer insights into important conceptual aspects of his production.

1.2 The Prehistory of New Babylon

Prior to 1956 Constant had been associated briefly with the CoBrA group, an amalgamation of regional collectives known as the Experimental Groups of Amsterdam, Copenhagen and Brussels. The name CoBrA is an acronym that represents the fusing of these groups through its use of the first letters, or first two letters, of the name of each city (Copenhagen, Brussels, Amsterdam). Together with fellow Dutch artists Theo Wolvencamp, Anton Rooksens, and Constant’s Brother, Jan Nieuwenhuys, Constant founded the Dutch Experimental Group in 1948. In the same year, the Belgian and Danish Experimental Groups were formed as well, and CoBrA was inaugurated as one of postwar Europe’s first international collectives of artists. Despite the fact that CoBrA lasted for only three years, officially disbanding in 1951, its historical recognition as a movement exceeds that of any of its individual members, except perhaps Constant. Willemijn Stokvis argues that CoBrA constituted the last "original" European avant-garde movement of the twentieth century, and proposes that CoBrA was an equivalent movement, with comparable interests, to Abstract Expressionism in America (Stokvis 24).[20] She makes this claim on the basis that CoBrA painting shared stylistic tendencies with some American postwar abstract painting, most obviously the early work of Jackson Pollock. Citing the critic Robert Rosenblum, Stokvis notes that the two schools of painting are characterised by the artists' desire "to abandon themselves in an almost religious fashion to the forces of nature" (Stokvis 13).

In pursuing a mystical connection with the "forces of nature", and often to this end approximating childlike pictorial forms, CoBrA artists in fact repeated characteristic methodological and stylistic elements of early modernist primitivism. However, rather than an inheritance of the latter, this repetition might more appropriately be read as an extension of the strong influence that pre-war Surrealism exerted on CoBrA, since Surrealism too had revived many of these primitivist ideals (Stokvis 154). CoBrA shared with Surrealism a tendency to romanticise supposedly non-rational systems of thought, the subconscious, and childlike, animal or primal impulses, as well as the spurious location of these manifestations in non-Western cultures (and particularly in those with which Europe had become acquainted through colonialism). As Amanda Stansell argues in her essay "Surrealist Racial Politics at the Borders of 'Reason'", this position was actually taken in opposition to the assimilation of early primi-

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[20] The prominence of the American art market after World War Two eased the reception of Abstract Expressionism in the critical media, and in turn Abstract Expressionism was formalised and canonised simultaneously with its occurrence. By contrast, CoBrA and the French experimental painting school Art Brut, did not feature in American scholarship and art criticism at the time. The affinities between European and American postwar painting were promulgated largely after the fact.

tivism into mainstream European aesthetic culture. She observes that *L'art nègre* ("black art") had become fashionable in Paris as early as the 1920s, and Surrealist texts such as the Surrealist Group in Paris's short essay "Murderous Humanitarianism" had been explicitly critical of the reductive manner in which artworks and musical styles from Africa and its diasporas were consumed in Europe (Stansell 119–120). Decrying the trivialisation of African or "Negro" forms of artistic expression, "Murderous Humanitarianism" offers the following polemic:

> Those Blacks who have merely been compelled to distort in terms of fashionable jazz the natural expression of their joy at finding themselves partners of a universe from which Western peoples have willfully withdrawn may consider themselves lucky to have suffered nothing worse than degradation. The eighteenth century derived nothing from China except a repertoire of frivolities to grace the alcove. In the same way the whole object of our romantic exoticism and modern travel lust is of use only in entertaining that class of blasé clients sly enough to see an interest in deflecting to his own advantage the torrent of those energies. (Surrealist Group 353)

Simultaneously, however, the Surrealists were attracted to certain primitivist principles and attempted to couch their use of them in progressive or redemptive terms.[21] This is clear in the preceding passage's association of black artists with torrential "energies" and the "natural expression of their joy", as opposed to the restrained and sophisticated expression supposedly native to Europe. That CoBrA held similar views on primitivism is never straightforwardly stated in any of the literature generated by the movement or in secondary analysis, although

[21] Stansell offers a full discussion of this complex process. See also Hal Foster's (Foster, "The' Primitive' Unconscious of Modern Art") in October no. 34 (1985).

the influence of Surrealism is acknowledged. However, a similar attempt to present a "redemptive" understanding of blackness is evident in an anecdote recorded by Stokvis. At the opening of the CoBrA exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam on November 3, 1949, the artists chose to play a recording of "African drumming" from a record belonging to Eugène Brands, who was a reputable a collector of "authentic ethnic music" (Stokvis 204). The implicit distinction between "authentic" and inauthentic representations of ethnicity suggests an attempt on the part of CoBrA to associate with the former rather than the latter. However, the generic ascription of the recording's provenance (the drumming is merely "African" and lacks any regional or stylistic specification) undermines CoBrA's attempt to distance the movement from a more popular, and more obviously problematic, form of primitivism.

The emergence of Surrealist primitivism, and by extension, of CoBrA's primitivism, was thus an inadvertently prejudiced consequence of an attempt by the movement's members to "step outside dominant Western culture" (Stansell 122). Their desire to search out an alternative to Western culture was grounded in a loosely Marxist social critique, which saw the acquisitive appropriation of the cultural production of Europe's so-called "others" as symptomatic of the expansion of the reach of capitalism. Several of the CoBrA artists shared the Surrealists' affinity with Marxism; two key CoBrA members, Christian Dortremont and Pierre Alechinsky, were members of the Belgian Communist Party until 1949 (Stokvis 201). Their somewhat sweeping Marxist allegiance appears to manifest in two areas of the group's theoretical foundations: on the one hand, emphasis is placed on the materiality of paint and the support, or ground, of a painting in a way that is analogous - according to Stokvis - to the Marxist notion that "the political and cultural history of man is derived from his economic – his 'material' – history" (Stokvis 194). Constant reiterates this in the second CoBrA periodical (*Cobra 2*, 1949), in which he states, "As far as we are concerned, the true source of art can only be found in matter. We are painters, and for us materialism is, first and foremost, a sensual experience: sensual experience of the world and sensual experience of paint" (cited in Stokvis 194). Ernst Kossmann explains this Marxist alliance as a form of communal distribution of creative processes that does away with the bourgeois association of artistic work with the upper classes. The effectiveness of a work, he writes, "arises spontaneously when the artist expresses himself with the material he uses – his canvas, his paint – when the viewer can share the creative process and interpret the end product in his own, creative manner. This, as opposed to ideas of the ruling, bourgeois vision, the avant-garde has explained as the representative of a form of materialism related to Marxism" (Kossman 20).

On the other hand, CoBrA's dabbling in primitivism as a potential avenue for the critique of capitalism is grounded, though misguidedly, in the group's interest in social change. In the citation above, Kossman proposes a link between the material and the social in CoBrA art, a link which is upheld by Constant. In the manifesto of the Dutch Experimental Group, which overlaps significantly with the CoBrA manifesto, Constant describes postwar infrastructural redevelopment in the Netherlands as "a social development that can only end in the total collapse of a social principle that is thousands of years old" (cited in Kossman 21). Artists working in this context ought to concern their work "with the birth of a system that will build its laws out of the urgent demands of human vitality," he asserts (cited in Kossman 21).[22]

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[22] These statements should be viewed in light of his assertion, cited above, that "the true source of art can only be found in matter" (cited in Kossman 21).

The "system" envisaged was premised on porous boundaries between creative disciplines and between the spheres of art and (non-art) life. Two collaborative projects which took place in 1949 experimented with the application of CoBrA principles in living environments. In the first of these, called the "Bregnerød Congress", a number of CoBrA artists led by Jorn, together with a group of Danish Architecture students from the town of Bregnerød outside of Copenhagen, spent a weekend altering a vacation house in which they all stayed and worked together.[23] Their intervention in the building consisted largely of collaborative mural painting on its interior and exterior walls, as well as painting and modification of the household furniture and ornamental objects. Subsequently, in November 1949, Constant, Corneille and Karel Appel were invited to conduct a similar project at the home of ceramicist Erik Nyholm in Jutland, Denmark. The artists covered part of the house's interior with paintings of fantastical creatures, and Constant executed a large mural on the interior walls and ceiling of the main living area.

Even at this early stage, the social concerns that would later become foundational for *New Babylon* were evident in these experiments in the integration of art and life, and in CoBrA's particular form of revolutionary rhetoric. However, it was not only the desire to amalgamate artistic practice and everyday life that led to CoBrA's two major domestic interventions, but also the perceived need to redefine the scope of artistic practice. According to Stokvis, Jorn had been interested in the potential for the "fusion of art and architecture" as early as 1943, and his interest had influenced Constant and other CoBrA artists to explore this intersection as well (cited in Stokvis 64). Following the disintegration of CoBrA between 1951 and 1952,

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[23] According to Karen Kurczynski's account of Bregnerød, Constant and the other Dutch members of the group were absent from the event because Constant was at that point engaged in an interpersonal conflict with Jorn, following the elopement of Jorn with Constant's wife at the time, Matie van Domselaer (Kurczynski 169).

Constant steadily moved away from the practice of painting and pursued connections with professional architects. In the early 1950s he became closely acquainted with the architect Aldo Van Eyck, who had been a peripheral participant in CoBrA activities in previous years. Van Eyck was a member of De 8, the Dutch limb of the conservative Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), a regulatory body founded in 1928 which oversaw the stylistic and conceptual development of architecture predominantly in Europe.[24] He also acted informally as Constant's tutor in architectural theory and practice. In an interview with Benjamin Buchloh in 1999, Constant mentions that Van Eyck taught him "the first principles of modern architecture" and lent him several foundational books on the subject (Buchloh 16).

Van Eyck also played an important role in cementing the centrality of play in Constant's discourse on New Babylon in later years. Van Eyck worked predominantly on social housing and design projects for the Amsterdam municipality, and seems to have had substantial influence in the redevelopment of the city after World War Two. Through his appointment in the Amsterdam Department of Public Works between 1947 and 1978, Van Eyck designed and built numerous playgrounds in the city (Lefaivre et al.). According to Wigley, he also helped Constant win a small number of commissions to design playground equipment (Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon* 29). In 1955 Constant produced a concrete climbing structure for use in a playground, and in 1956 he produced a design for a steel playground structure (which may not have been built). Additionally, during this period, Constant produced a number of sculptures in which certain key elements of the *New Babylon* models seem to be incipient. A piece entitled *Constructie met gebogen vlakken* ("Construction with curved planes") (1954, Fig.

[24] An overview of CIAM's founding and core principles appears in the first and second chapters of Eric Mumford's (Mumford)(2002). Towards the late 1950s CIAM had branches in the United States as well.

12), makes use of a complex grid, intercepted by steel pins and transparent planes, that appears repeatedly in the models typical of *New Babylon*. However, these pieces also strikingly resemble playground equipment. Were *Constructie met gebogen vlakken* to be expanded to a height of several metres, its proportion of horizontal to vertical beams and its non-obstructive dispersal of solid planes would facilitate its use as a climbing apparatus.[25] Similarly, in the 1956 work *Observatorium I* (fig. 13), dynamic, ring-like brass planes enclose a volume intersected by steel rods radiating outwards from the centre. The form resembles a playground merry-go-round, but also produces a similar effect of enclosed dynamism to the 1956 work *Ontwerp voor en zigeunerkamp in Alba* (fig. 1), the production of which immediately followed the First World Congress for Free Artists in Alba. The latter work is represented by many authors as the first *New Babylon* model.

The omission of a number of related pieces, such as those mentioned above, produced simultaneously with – and even after – *Ontwerp voor een zigeunerkamp in Alba*, demonstrates the selectiveness with which the history of *New Babylon* has been narrated. Images of *Ontwerp voor een zigeunerkamp in Alba* were publicised in the context of the SI, whereas *Constructie met gebogen vlakken*, *Ruimtefiguur* (1958), *Observatorium* and other pieces from the same period were not, nor did they coincide circumstantially with Constant's introduction to Guy Debord. It seems, therefore, that beyond the SI's demonstrable contribution to Constant's development of *New Babylon*, most historical representations of the work have relied too heavily on material published by and about the SI. Although this is a self-perpetuating state of affairs, the reasons for the historical dominance of the SI might include their visibility in Eu-

[25] The sculpture's dimensions are 88 x 79 x 45 cm.

rope after the May 1968 riots in Paris, and their drive to publish material relevant to the group's interests and aims.[26]

Until the mid-1950s Constant attended De 8 meetings together with Van Eyck, and through them became acquainted with future collaborators including architect and designer Gerrit Rietveld, and sculptors Steven Gilbert and Nicholas Schöffer.[27] In 1954 he collaborated with Rietveld on the design of a modular kitchen and eating space that was displayed in the luxury Amsterdam department store *De Bijenkorf*. Titled *Woonsuggestie* ("Suggestion for the home"), the display was reconstructed for the 2016 exhibition at the CoBrA Museum in Amstelveen, *Constant: Space + Colour.* According to Ludo van Halem and Laura Stamps' essay in the catalogue to *Constant: Space + Colour,* entitled "Space and Colour in Practice: On Reconstructions of Experimental Spaces", Rietveldt had originally designed the entire environment, but revised his plans and invited Constant to contribute to the environment with a colour scheme.[28] The objective of this collaboration, for both Rietveldt and Constant, was for Constant to put into practice the principles of "Spatial Colourism", a theory of architecture which held that the articulation of space was inseparable from the use of colour. Spatial Colourism responded to what Constant saw as the subordination of colour to form in modern architectural practice. According to Constant, modern architecture had neglected the powerful role of colour in the articulation of spatial environments, creating an artificial separation be-

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[26] As discussed on pp. 14–16 in the introduction, the dominance of the SI in the historical narrative of *New Babylon* may also be attributable to a revival of interest in the SI in the 1990s, which preceded, and almost certainly segued into, the wave of interest in *New Babylon* that emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

[27] The date of Constant's withdrawal from De 8 is not clear from the literature, but Wigley notes that he grew disillusioned with the group at the time of his early thinking on urbanism and city design (which would have been in the mid-1950s) (Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon* 22).

[28] Although this is likely to have been a minor project for Rietveld – who had been commissioned to redesign the Dutch Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1953 – for Constant the collaboration represented an unequivocal entry into mainstream architectural design.

tween architecture and painting (in which painting was the subordinate discipline).[29] On the contrary, Constant writes, "Color is nothing but the color of the form and form is nothing but the form of the color" (Constant, "Spatial Colorism" 74).

Like Constant, Gilbert and Schöffer were artists who were exploring architecture independently, and, as Wigley recounts, Gilbert had begun designing individual buildings and interior spaces. Schöffer was already much more prolific in this regard and had been designing "whole cities" (Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon* 25). From as early as 1948, Schöffer had been working on a theory of architecture that integrated the non-functional elements of sculptural work into the design of expansive living environments. He called this theory "Spatiodynamism", which he succinctly defined as "the constructive and dynamic integration of space in a plastic work" (Schöffer and Habasque cited in Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon* 22). More concretely, however, Spatiodynamism seems to have comprised the concurrence of a range of architectural motifs and distinctive aesthetic features, many of which prefigure the central features of *New Babylon*. For instance, like *New Babylon*, a Spatiodynamic city would have been constructed as a mutable network of inhabitable spaces, interconnected by a "a network of communicating arteries", raised above the earth on pilotis (Schöffer and Habasque cited in Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon* 22). According to Wigley, Schöffer invited Constant and Gilbert to his Paris studio in 1953 to collaborate with him on this project, and had, at the time of their meeting, "produced a series of open metal frames animated by movement, noise, light, music, projections and constantly changing angles of

[29] Later Constant would himself enter into very confused, and confusing, theoretical territory regarding the distinction between art and architecture, associating architecture with a vague notion of the real and art with the unreal, or fantasy. This is a key area of discussion in Chapter Two.

perception" (Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon* 22). Once again strongly prefiguring *New Babylon*, Schöffer described his envisaged Spatiodynamic city as "a giant sculpture for leisure" (cited in Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon* 22). Constant and Gilbert continued to work occasionally on Schöffer's project until 1955, when Schöffer shared a draft manifesto for Spatiodynamism. Gilbert and Constant proposed that the theory be renamed "Neo-Vision", to distance it from Schöffer's individual investment in the project, a proposal which Schöffer accepted. Subsequently Gilbert joined the team that Schöffer appointed to work collectively on the development of Neo-Vision, called Group Espace. Constant, however, drifted away from Schöffer, Gilbert, and Group Espace, as well as from other members of De 8, and was not affiliated with another group until the formation of the SI.[30]

This brief survey of Constant's activities prior to his joining the SI demonstrates that certain concepts central to New Babylon, such its emphasis on a social revolution brought forth by creative activity and play, emerged during a period characterised by Constant's simultaneous investment in painting and in projects adjacent to formal architecture. However, the application of these concepts to the context of urban planning was refined and consolidated through his involvement in developing the SI's foundational theories and activities. With the exception of Wigley's *Constant's New Babylon*, there is an overwhelming tendency in secondary writing on New Babylon to suggest that the work originated in 1956, the same year in which Constant met Guy Debord and spent some time living in proximity to a nomadic Roma community in the Italian town of Alba. Although this tendency overlooks Constant's preceding work and associations, by his own account it was his encounter with the Roma people that

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[30] Wigley gives a summary of Constant's involvement with this cohort in his introduction to *Constant's New Babylon* (22-23).

inspired the idea of a city constructed for a nomadic population. During his stay in Alba at the home of the Italian painter Giuseppe Pinot-Galizio, Constant attended the First World Congress for Free Artists, convened from September 2 to 8, 1956, by Pinot-Galizio and Asger Jorn. Jorn and Pinot-Galizio represented the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus, which proposed the formation of an international, interdisciplinary "institute for artistic experimentation and theory" (Jorn, para.10). Also in attendance at the conference was Gil Wolman, representing the Letterist International, the group in which Debord rose to prominence and whose emerging interest in urbanism and activism contributed to the SI's foundational principles.

On Wolman and Jorn's recommendation, Debord traveled to Alba later in 1956 to meet Constant. From this point, Debord and Constant began more or less collaboratively to develop a clearer set of terms and concepts through which they hoped to initiate a revolutionary system of thought concerning modern urbanism.[31] Prior to the dissolution of both the Letterist International and the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus, Debord in particular had started using terms that would come to be strongly associated with the SI. Debord first used the term "situationist", and explained the concept of the *dérive* (literally, "drift") in the text "Theory of the Dérive", which, contrary to the chronology recorded in several anthologies, was first published in 1956 in the journal *Les Lèvres Nues*, no. 9 (November 1956).[32] The First World Congress of Free Artists had a catalytic effect on both Constant's burgeoning

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[31] This endeavour is discussed in Wigley's *Constant's New Babylon* (14-16), but is also clear from Debord's ensuing correspondence with Constant, which occurred regularly from January 1957 (Guy Debord, *Correspondence: The Foundation of the Situationist International (June 1957-August 1960)* 231, 254, 269, 326).

[32] Although Andreotti and Costa (1996) and Ken Knabb (1995), the two main anthological sources from which references to "Theory of the Dérive" are cited, give the date of this text as 1958 , its appearance in *Internationale Situationniste* #2 in December 1958 was in fact a reprint of the text as it had appeared in *Les Lèvres Nues* #9 in 1956.

exploration of urban design and on the SI, since it was there that the first steps were taken towards the group's founding.

According to Constant, the impetus for his shift from making individual, unrelated sculptures to pieces that shared a reference to an imagined urban ideal came from the proximity of his meeting Debord to his encounter with the Roma community. Galizio owned a small piece of land near the Tanaro River, on which he allowed the Roma to stay when they passed through the area. They had been shunned by Alba's municipal administration and landed inhabitants, but provided that they occupied only Galizio's land the municipality of Alba permitted the Roma community to stay in the town during their sporadic visits (Careri et al. 82–86).[33] Constant was intrigued by how the Romas adapted their deliberately nomadic lifestyle to a fixed, relatively small geographic area. Their mobile homes, small living units whose positions could change easily within the makeshift village, represented a compelling example of an effective, highly flexible architectural agglomeration approximating a city. From this reading of the Roma community's arrangement of their communal space, Constant began to develop the concept of a technologically advanced city of mobility, flexibility and play. In order to facilitate these characteristics, Constant's hypothetical city would need to be built with easily movable structural parts, so that, like the Romas, the inhabitants would be able to alter at will the positions of their living spaces in relation to recreational and functional areas. In the second half of 1956, Constant produced *Ontwerp voor een zigeunerkamp* (fig. 1) as a maquette for a permanent nomadic encampment which would occupy a fixed area of land, while simulating the Romas' itinerant lifestyle through its structural capacity to be freely altered. The

[33] Careri's article is accompanied by a photo-essay documenting the Roma community still living on this same piece of land at the time of publication in 2005.

internal mutability of this design would produce, or at least imitate, a constantly varied environment.

At that time, and until at least 1959 – the period during which the foundational New Babylon models were produced – Constant took the so-called ‘gypsy’ camp as a foundational urban unit, the basis for subsequent plans for nomadic cities with more sophisticated infrastructures.[34] However, as with his drawings, his models aimed to give an impression of spatial experience rather than articulating a feasible structural plan for these urban units. This is clear in *Ontwerp voor een zigeunerkamp*, in which no inhabitable units are represented. The separate movable parts that ostensibly make up this spatial arrangement are not portrayed. Instead, Constant gives a sense of motion, or potential motion, through three interlocking circular arcs connected by spokes to a central, transparent perspex plane that suggests a minimalist overhead structure.

Despite his tenuous relationship with the SI, Constant’s affiliation to the movement and the legacy of this affiliation ensured that his design expanded beyond the scope of the ‘gypsy’ camp and became a plan for a malleable architectural network that, in the words of Vaida Voivod III, President of the World Community of Gypsies, would connect “the steppes of central Asia to the Atlantic Coast, … the high plateau of South Africa to the forests of Finland” (Constant, “New Babylon, a Nomadic Town” n.p.).[35] This hyperbolic statement is in keeping with the often impractical and hazily-defined character of the written descriptions

[34] Constant recounts his encounter with the Roma community and their living conditions in Alba in a text written for the catalogue for the exhibition *New Babylon* held at the Gemeentemuseum, Den Haag. An excerpt from this text, titled “New Babylon, A Nomadic Town” is reproduced alongside Careri’s article in *Domus.*

[35] Constant quotes Voivod in the epigraph of the same catalogue essay. The essay is reproduced in full on the online journal and archive of Situationist writings *NOT BORED!*.

that would accompany Constant's later three-dimensional works and drawings. Seemingly fantastical degrees of technological capability are attributed to elements of his proposed city, with scant attention paid to how this technology might be integrated with, or influence, the urban environment. The details of his plans extend to their sensory and conceptual effects, but not to their practical execution.

1.3 From *Dériville* to *New Babylon*

The title *New Babylon* was first used in the June 1960 edition of *Internationale Situationniste* with reference to reproductions of a selection of Constant's models, drawings and photographs related to the theme of urban planning. Prior to 1960, the incipient project had provisionally been called *Dériville*, a reference to the Situationist practice of aimless urban wandering known as the *dérive*.[36] *Dériville* was in fact Constant's proposal for the project's title; it was put forward only after Debord's "Theory of the Dérive" was published in *Internationale Situationniste* #2 in 1958. According to Constant, Debord had rejected the name *Dériville* because it was "too direct and too bound up with the notion of the city (ville)," whereas "[t]he dérive demolished the city" (Obrist 172). Likewise, the city Constant had begun to envision through his works was meant to recast radically the logic of the modern Western (Euro-American) city.[37] Debord therefore considered it inappropriate to invoke a familiar urban form (the "*ville*") in the title. In 1959, as an alternative to *Dériville*, Debord proposed the title *New Babylon* for the work. Constant attributes the use of an English name, when neither he nor Debord ordinarily spoke or wrote in English, to Debord's obsession with

[36]The dérive is discussed in detail later in this chapter, from pp. 99–110.

[37] Constant envisioned *New Babylon* as a global (rather than a Western) urban intervention, but his direct referential context – and indeed the subject of his critique – was primarily the modern European city.

American culture. According to Constant, “Debord was very interested in American culture. He was always reading comic books” (Obrist 172). In 1960, the project was presented as a conceptual illustration of the new urbanism which the Situationists hoped to introduce into existing cities through their exploratory actions.[38] As he recounts in his 1999 interview with Obrist, Constant took the reference to Babylon, the “evil city”, as a welcome provocation (172).[39]

Constant’s engagement with Debord and the SI was instrumental in constructing the idea of *New Babylon* as an earth-spanning city to be created on an inhabitable scale, a dimension of the project which had not been expressed in the physical artworks prior to their presentation in *Internationale Situationniste*. This thinking was possibly influenced by the Situationists’ ambition to create interventions in the actual urban environment, and ultimately to bring about dramatic social change. It was at this stage of the project that the title *New Babylon* acquired a double reference: *New Babylon* is the collective title of all the physical artworks created under the umbrella of this project, and it is also the name of an imagined city, an all-encompassing work of art-as-life whose realisation was projected into the future. The physical artworks *point to* the imagined city and represent it in different ways, but they are not its equivalent or substitute. The issues relating to the double reference of “*New Babylon*” offer a glimpse into the ontological and modal complexity which is the chief subject of Chapter Two.

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[38] This anecdote is recounted in Constant’s interview with Obrist (172). Simon Sadler misrepresents the naming of the work, suggesting instead that Constant used the name *New Babylon* with reference to his project “around 1958” (Sadler 122). However, it is clear from Constant’s conversation with Obrist that this is not the case.

[39] His understanding of Babylon as “the evil city” is probably derived from the association of Babylon with wickedness in the Christian *New Testament*. In “The Book of Revelation”, Babylon (sometimes spelled “Babalon” in English translation) is the name given to the prostitute who rides the beast that is to herald the end of days. The metaphorical association of the city of Babylon with the woman riding the beast casts the historical Babylon – a thriving commercial, cultural and educational centre in ancient Mesopotamia – as the epitome of worldly evil.

At this point it suffices to acknowledge that when Constant speaks about *New Babylon* he does so in two different ways, referring sometimes to the imagined city and sometimes to the project as it manifests itself in physical artworks and texts.

To complicate matters even further, Constant also refers sometimes to the imagined physical structure of the hypothetical city, describing its parts with a combination of sweeping generalisation and granular detail. In “New Babylon, A Nomadic Town” Constant outlines the basic physical structure of the city as “a mainly horizontal skeleton, extending over ten or twenty hectares at some 15-20 meters above the ground: the total height is somewhere between 30 and 60 meters” (n.p.). The interior space contains “the most important part of New Babylon” - “a social space with moveable articulations: the playground of Homo Ludens”. This space is “more independent of the external world than a construction built on a smaller scale. Daylight, for instance, only penetrates a few meters there, a large part of the interior being artificially lit. ... The climatic conditions (the intensity of lighting, temperature, the hygrometric state, ventilation) are all under technical control” (Constant, “New Babylon, a Nomadic Town” n.p.). The physical *New Babylon* artworks can be seen as sketches for this hypothetical environment, and in this respect they relate to the idea of *New Babylon* in much the same way as architectural models prefigure and evoke the idea of a completed building. These are grounds for their commonly being referred to as “models” rather than “sculptures” (even though this categorisation makes a host of possibly undue assumptions about the distinction between art and architecture).[40]

[40] This discussion is developed more fully later in this chapter (pp. 75–78) and in Chapter Two (pp. 132–38).

The heavily constructed and technology-dependent environment Constant describes here is intended to facilitate a "world of total freedom where the human being no longer struggles to maintain a certain level, but concentrates his activity on the permanent creation of his life" (Constant, "New Babylon, a Nomadic Town" n.p.). Having become entirely automated, labour ceases to influence the schedules and movements of individuals, and their environment becomes a space for exploration, leisure and the experimental pursuit of creative ideas. In this respect, Constant's proposed labyrinths are a marked departure from the convention in modern city planning of plotting the most efficient route possible for thoroughfares in order to minimise the unproductive use of time on travel between destinations. Mass-disorientation, therefore, represents the collapse of the modern functionalist city designed to maximise its citizens' productivity in a life centred around work.[41]

The exclusion of work from urban life gives rise to an entirely ludic society, Constant argues. However, he avoids the matter of who, if not the New Babylonians, would be responsible for the intensive labour required to construct *New Babylon*'s sectors and to implement and maintain its technological infrastructure. The closing line of the essay cited above states, "*New Babylon* is the work of the New Babylonians alone, the product of their culture" (Constant, "New Babylon, a Nomadic Town" n.p.). It seems then that his plan is undermined by a circu-

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41 Constant's critique of the modern post-industrial city is concerned primarily with its role in facilitating work. He neglects to acknowledge other potential priorities in the design of European urban spaces, such as Préfet Georges-Eugène Haussmann's redesign of Paris in the late nineteenth century at the behest of Napoleon III. Through the creation of open, highly visible boulevards that connected the Ile de la Cité to Paris's outer arrondissements, Haussmann sought to enable political and potentially military control of Paris's rapidly growing population. In certain parts of the city, these boulevards replaced convoluted and narrow networks of alleys that obstructed movement through the city, allowing politically deviant groups and slums to thrive in their inaccessibility to outside intervention (Wallech et al. 325–326). The boulevards also provided transport arteries into and out of central Paris, as well as connections to the city's train stations, which reduced the isolation of those living in the outer arrondissements from the central facilities of the city. Haussmann also laid out several recreational public parks and an extensive sewage system necessary for coping with the growing population. Wallech, Hohenberg and Lee offer a succinct discussion of Haussmann's reconstruction of Paris in the Second Empire in Chapter Nine of *The Making of Urban Europe: 1000 - 1990* . This chapter discusses Haussmann's work in greater depth from pp. 106–9.

larity that requires New Babylonian society already to exist in order to create New Babylon, and for the elaborate physical and technological structure to have been built by someone other than *New Babylon*'s post-labour citizenry. In this respect, the inception of *New Babylon* is mysterious, its process of practical establishment secondary to the ideas it represents.

While the absence of information on this process might legitimately be considered an omission on Constant's part, it differentiates his approach to architecture and urban planning from that of prominent modern planners who implemented reproducible urban interventions on the basis of formulaic total environments. For instance, Le Corbusier's *Unité d'Habitation* housing blocks, built in various locations in France in the late 1940s and 1950s, were designed to address the need for large-scale housing in cities with growing economies after the Second World War. In addition to hundreds of private residential units, the *Unités* housed multiple communal facilities and easy access within the building to shopping, exercise, and entertainment (this was the case at least for the Marseille prototype of the *Unité, Cité Radieuse*). These elements were contained in a monumental shell of prefabricated bare concrete, which stood above ground level on concrete pilotis. The compression of the *Unité*'s various facilities into a single building shares with *New Babylon* the figure of a residential environment as a self-contained, expansive urban unit. However, in Le Corbusier's case, the building unit was carefully and inflexibly compartmented into sections which enabled its various functions. It was customisable only to the extent that property investors and the architect saw fit to change certain elements for different contexts. Subsequent applications of the *Unité* model, particularly in Briey-en-Fôret and Firminy, suffered cuts to communal amenities and room sizes in private apartments, producing "depressing consequences" and the devaluation of individual apartments in the buildings (Sherwood 125). The reproducibility and cost-effectiveness of the *Unité* resulted in its replication in countless postwar urban contexts, both within and outside of Europe, but the *Unité* model effectively trapped its inhabitants in a distant architectural vision of a maximally functional urban lifestyle.

Although Le Corbusier's buildings were a popular touchstone for critical architectural practitioners after the Second World War, Constant's rejection of the homogeneity characteristic of prefabricated residential units is likely also to have drawn on the much earlier ubiquity of prefabricated concrete buildings in the Netherlands. In the early 1920s, Amsterdam experienced a significant housing shortage, in response to which Housing Agency Director Arie Keppler (1915-1937) organized a competition for the design of prefabricated low-rise concrete housing units. Collectively, the few winning designs made use of eight or eleven (there is discrepant information on the exact number) different techniques of prefabrication, which were implemented in the experimental construction of a suburb called Betondorp (literally, "concrete town") in the Watergraafsmeer area on the outskirts of Amsterdam.[42] The Betondorp model offered a relatively inexpensive solution to the Netherlands' housing shortage, as building units made of precast concrete were less costly to assemble than buildings made of brick and wood, and required fewer skilled labourers to build. The apparent effectiveness of the prefabrication rollout after the First World War resulted in a similar approach to urban reconstruction in the Netherlands after the Second World War (Thijssen 254). Additionally, according to Bergdoll et al., this model inspired the construction of prefabricated housing in East Germany during the Cold War era. This was known as the *plattenbau* system, which was

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[42] Groenendijk, Vollaard and Rook claim that eight different methods were used (Groenendijk et al. 80), whereas Misa and Hård write that there were eleven different methods (Hård et al. 82).

subsequently rolled out in other communist cities in the 1950s and 1960s as well (Bergdoll et al. 122).

New Babylon departed dramatically from these prevalent systems of twentieth century residential architecture, proposing that the inhabitants of a constructed environment should enjoy the authorship of its various functions and aesthetic qualities.[43] Constant describes the scope of *New Babylon*'s customisability in the following way:

> In *New Babylon*, each person can at any moment, in any place, alter the ambiance by adjusting the sound volume, the brightness of the light, the olfactive ambiance or the temperature. Should a small group enter a space, then the ordering of that space can become something else. By articulating many small spaces, one can create a space of more ample dimensions, or vice versa. One can also change the form of a space with new entrances, or by blocking the old ones; by adding or removing stairs, bridges, ladders, ramps, etc. With a minimum of effort, one can arrive at any desired modification. Moreover, one has at hand a varied range of partitions of different materials, textures and colors; different too in their thermo-acoustic qualities. The stairs, bridges and pipes are themselves of varied construction and form. Through the combination of irregular, barely practicable surfaces, of smooth ramps, narrow passages, acute angles, etc., certain spaces become selective. This would be the case with those one gets to by a rope ladder or pole, and which will be the favorite places of children and young people. The marginal sectors, which perch on the side of a mountain or along the coastline and

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[43] This authorship was, however, necessarily partial, since the parameters within which New Babylon was customisable were largely determined by the range of variability accommodated in Constant's design.

> which are, given their situation, less frequented, will be the preferred choice of retired or sick people. (Constant, "New Babylon, a Nomadic Town" n.p.)

The urban layout Constant envisages here is irreconcilable with the uniformity and external control that characterised the ubiquitous prefabricated housing developments. Most significantly, the system Constant describes redirects spatial control away from the god-like architect or urban planner and relocates it in the citizen. The empowerment of the citizen as architect of his or her own environment is the end to which the majority of *New Babylon*'s characteristic formal features are employed. In this light, the name "*New Babylon"* takes on greater mythic significance: its intrinsic rejection of centralised spatial control is an especially potent contrast to the punitive disorientation caused in the Biblical myth of Babel.

By the time the title "*New Babylon*" was publicly disseminated in the June 1960 edition of *Internationale Situationniste*, Constant had acrimoniously parted ways with the SI.[44] Immediately following the work's appearance across the pages of *Internationale Situationniste*, accompanied by atmospheric photographs of several models which Debord had commissioned, neither *New Babylon* nor Constant was ever to be mentioned in Situationist literature or correspondence again.

The relatively late naming of the work means that Constant's earliest "*New Babylon*" models strictly speaking precede *New Babylon.* This contradicts the incorporation of these works into an historical trajectory of *New Babylon* as a forward-directed and steadily evolving project

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[44] Constant resigned from the SI citing Debord's excommunication of two other Dutch members. See reference to Constant's prior correspondence with Debord in the letter from Debord to Constant, dated 2 June 1960 (Guy Debord, *Correspondence: The Foundation of the Situationist International (June 1957-August 1960)* 355).

with a stable identity. An example of this is *Ontwerp voor een zigeunerkamp*, which is frequently cited as the first New Babylon model, as is the case in Sadler's *The Situationist City* (122-3) and Careri's "Constant and *New Babylon*'s Roots". Similarly, *Ontwerp voor een zigeunerkamp* appears as the first illustration in the section titled "*New Babylon*" in which Wigley provides a semi-chronological survey of images of the work in *Constant's New Babylon* (80-82). This is not to suggest that Wigley commits strictly to the notion that *New Babylon* is directed by a thoroughgoing coherence, but merely demonstrates the prevalence of the idea that the *New Babylon* project originated with this work. Constant himself identifies *Ontwerp voor een zigeunerkamp* as the "origin" of New Babylon, stating, "that project is the origin of the series of maquettes of 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" (quoted in Careri et al. 106). However, the notion that this work represents the epiphanic origin of *New Babylon*, or even that it constitutes Constant's first forays into architectural modelling, is undermined by the appearance in earlier sculptures of forms and structural references that might just as easily be associated with a germinal version of *New Babylon*. Furthermore, the fact that the project only came to be named, and collated as a body of work, four years after Constant began work on *Ontwerp voor een zigeunerkamp* suggests that he and Debord had strategically promoted elements of his practice that bolstered the critical position the Situationists sought to present in the June 1960 issue of *Internationale Situationniste*. Similarly, even after Constant's departure from the SI, one sees several notably selective attempts in written texts and transcriptions of lectures to construct a narrative progression for *New Babylon* in order, perhaps, to create an impression of coherence in the work.

While the date of the titling of the project is of little significance in itself, recalling this chronology does show Constant's early work on urbanism to be more tentatively planned and interconnected than is suggested in both secondary literature and his own analyses, which tend to construe the development of *New Babylon* as largely premeditated. This approach potentially introduces a valuable interpretive alternative to the notion that Constant mapped out the *New Babylon* project in advance, producing the singular qualities of individual maquettes, drawings and photographs according to a pre-existing grand vision. Indeed, Constant's representation of *New Babylon*'s chronology and coherence justifies a thread in this dissertation in which *New Babylon* is read as a composite artwork, rather than merely a series of thematically related pieces. At the same time, to subscribe exclusively to this interpretation of the work would exclude the possibility that the individual *New Babylon* pieces might have significance beyond their illustration of a concept. *New Babylon* demands a theory of art, as well as a theory of history, that is capable of accommodating both versions of the work's ontology simultaneously.

1.4 The Becoming-Space of History

Making visible in this way the selective gathering of circumstantial threads in the construction of *New Babylon*'s history serves to foreground the limitations of the process of historicisation itself. The construction of *New Babylon* as an historical and narrative phenomenon is a process of archival construction that proceeds by way of writings and re-writings, but also by way of exclusions and excisions. In *Archive Fever*, a text that begins by questioning the transformation of Freud's home and its contents into a museum, Derrida uses the figure of circumcision to describe the process by which an archive is brought into being through inscription, hermeneutic encircling and separation. As a symbol of a covenant between the Jewish people and God, and as a signifier of the circumcised individual's belonging to the Jewish people, circumcision leaves a trace, "right on the skin", of "so many sedimented archives" (Derrida, *Archive Fever* 19). Circumcision, Derrida writes, "[maintains] a reference to the graphic mark and to repetition, indeed to printing of the typical sort. Recurrent and iterable, it carries literal singularity into figurality. … A very singular monument, it is also the document of an archive" (Derrida, *Archive Fever* 19). In the first chapters of *Archive Fever*, Derrida's recognition of circumcision as a wound that inaugurates the circumcised individual's participation in an historicised system of meaning is extrapolated to reflect on the designation of archival contents. Circumcision is a "private inscription" that inaugurates an archival community, inserting each member into a shared, possibly even public, historical narrative, in much the same way as Freud's personal possessions, spaces and correspondence are included in his now-public house-museum (19). For Derrida, the association of the cut with the graphic mark aligns the metaphor of circumcision with his notion that in the act of inscription or utterance, language 'cuts' itself out of a plenitude of signifying possibilities which remain buried beneath or behind the letter. Applied to the construction of the archive, which is as much an act of exclusion as of inclusion, the analogy of the incision is important because it foregrounds the necessary cutting away of certain material, as well as the finality of this cut. Once the limits of the archive are set in place, care is taken to maintain them precisely as limits, so that the archive may retain its integrity. The roundness of the incision suggests this encircling, which marks the archive's hermeneutic closure, just as the round cut of circumcision symbolically encloses one within a people.

The discursive history of *New Babylon* is not unlike the Freud Museum in London or the Constant Archive housed at the *RKD – Nederlands Instituut voor Kunstgeschiedenis* ("Netherlands Institute for Art History") in Den Haag. However, because it is not a physically contained archive, closure is effected by the limited circulation of Constant's primary texts, but also by the perpetual selectiveness with which certain aspects of his work have been foregrounded, often legitimately, by historians. Inevitably, this thesis must engage in the same problematic procedure of encircling and cutting away. However, although the circumcising cut represents severance and induction, it also carries another metaphor, that of the wound, an opening and a breach of the threshold of the skin. "Each layer here seems to gape slightly, as the lips of a wound, permitting glimpses of the abyssal possibility of another depth destined for archaeological excavation", Derrida writes (Derrida, *Archive Fever* 19). In the context of Derrida's philosophy of language, circumcision is also "an incision in the body of language", a wound that, in closing off meaning, cannot but rend it open as well (Derrida, *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan* 63). This cut is an opening into a flesh of writing, a condition of plenitude which Derrida compares with bodily tissue, as well as with layers of fabric, in order to describe the multiply connected and divisible nature of text. In *Dissemination* he writes of text as "a copious veil, a vast and supple fabric spread out before us, but also being regularly stitched down. In the play of this tacking, there is nothing but text; the histological operation treats a tissue with the point of a sewing instrument that at once pierces and joins…" (Derrida, *Dissemination* 249). The shaping and presentation of Constant's archive through this thesis, and through other texts and exhibitions that have attempted to follow this course, is like the act of "stitch[ing] down" a "vast and supple fabric" for which there were, and still are, potentially countless other ways in which it might have been stitched. However, Derrida employs these metaphors of the wound, tissue and a fabric precisely to suggest that in curtailing content in the way in which the construction of a text, discourse, or archive necessitates, uncontrollable, and potentially entropic, sites of meaning open and come ultimately to take part in the shaping of the same archive or text.

The process by which *New Babylon* has accumulated historical narrative based on a selection of Constant's writings, works and anecdotes (not to mention some interventions by his Situationist colleagues) echoes the process of archivisation that Derrida calls into question in *Archive Fever* and elaborates through the introduction of these metaphors. What is at stake for the archive – or the history – of *New Babylon*, and what is desired in the construction of archives more generally, is the appearance of comprehensiveness, which in turn is intended to facilitate more extensive and deeper knowledge of a subject. The goal towards which the archivist and the historian both strive is faithfulness to the truth, an accurate representation of the subject: in other words, not only not to mislead (through deliberate misrepresentation), but to minimise error as well. But what is one to make of a subject who introduces errors, misrepresentations, and more ambiguous inconsistencies into his or her own archive, as Constant often does in connection with some of the seemingly fundamental characteristics of *New Babylon* (such as whether the work is intended as a 'real-life' architectural project or a conceptual proposal)? How is one to be faithful to a history which, in good faith, seems to betray itself? Read through the lens of *Archive Fever*, the historical ambivalences that Constant introduces into his account simply make explicit a margin of inconsistency that exists in all historical constructions. This is exacerbated in Constant's case by what seems to be a lack of caution in his treatment of factual and conceptual elements of *New Babylon*. Furthermore, in keeping with the metaphor of the encircling wound, the contradictions and gaps that appear as the elements of *New Babylon*'s history are gathered ought themselves to be regarded as contents of this history. What remains to be done in light of the limitations, but also the generative wounds, of archival and historical construction, is in Derrida's words "to proceed as if a true story were possible on the subject of the history of this fabrication"(Derrida, "History of the Lie: Prolegomena" 29).

As with the difficulty of completing or closing the historical archive, certain terminology – such as the word "modern" and its cognate forms ("modernity", "modernist", "modernism") – carries within its history of use a variability that compromises its ability to represent a definite concept, time period or set of qualities. This is particularly the case in the discipline of art history, in which it is increasingly acknowledged that 'modernisms' have occurred in different geographical and economic contexts at different times and with different characteristics. In the words of Bruno Latour, "Modernity comes in as many versions as there are thinkers or journalists" (Latour 10). *New Babylon* inherits some of the confusion carried by this term through the project's association with the SI, which many critics and historians position as a late avant-garde modernist movement. Although the notion of modernism in art, or modernist art, is not central to my discussion of *New Babylon*, these terms do emerge in texts and arguments that I cite, particularly in this chapter. For this reason, it will be helpful to substitute for a working definition of the term (since it is dubious that positive definition is possible) a set of exclusions setting out at least what is not claimed by the term in its use here.

In the work of several writers on the subject,[45] modernism in art is treated as a loose set of stylistic and ideological tendencies that have in common a time period, extending from as

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[45] These would include early influential critics such Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg, as well as a subsequent generation of writers such as Rosalind Krauss, Edward Said, Frederic Jameson, Michael Fried, and Kwame Anthony Appiah (whose work has focused on postcolonial modernity and postmodernity).

early as the late nineteenth century until as late as the 1960s. Richard Sheppard explicitly makes the claim implicitly supported by a number historians of modern art that there are common aesthetic and ideological currents constituting modernism; these include aesthetic formalism, expressions of angst or despair at a loss of socio-economic stability, different explorations of the notion of the primitive, the emergence of the city as a subject, and the reflexive and critical activities of various avant-garde movements (most notably Dada) (Sheppard 11–17, 71–88). Sheppard maintains that these characteristics of modernism can be accounted for as responses to "modernity", an even looser categorisation of social, economic, political and ideological characteristics that coincides with the industrialization of European cities; the emergence of urbanism, capitalism and humanist philosophy and politics; and the two World Wars.[46] He understands modernism as a set of aesthetic manifestations "dialectically related with modernity", which he distinguishes from modernism as the social, political and philosophical climate of early twentieth century Western Europe (6). This construction recalls Marxist dialectics, and the related materialist mode of historical analysis, in which "the economic structure of society" constitutes "the real foundation" (or "base") from which ideological transformations arise (the latter is Marx's "superstructure") (Marx and Carver 59).[47] In this schema, ideology is manifested in political concepts and their application, social mores, and all forms of cultural production, including architecture, art, music and literature. Economic factors – or "economic facts" (Wood 63) – constitute the materialist base on which this ideologically contrived superstructure is contingent.

[46] See Sheppard's introduction to *Modernism - Dada – Postmodernism*.

[47] Sheppard's use of the dialectic seems, however, to be analogical, because Marx would have associated politics, ideology and other social factors with the superstructure that Sheppard aligns with art.

This simplification of Marx's application of dialectical materialism to the reading of history is intended not to expedite the use of the dialectic model (which, as Althusser maintains, was in fact largely reconceived by Marx himself in his later works)[48] for the benefit of this argument, but rather to acknowledge the philosophical origins of what Hal Foster sees as a pervasive historicism in the theorising of modernist art (Foster, *Return of the Real* 9–11, 28). This historicism consists in the linear construction of the temporality of history, through which a set of circumstances give rise in some causal sense to a product, whether the latter be an art movement (such as Dada or the SI) or an artwork (such as *New Babylon*). The symptomatic or causal model, in which art is tacitly construed as an effect of its context, is shared by several of the authors cited in the chapters that follow. As is the case with Sheppard, an implicit causal relationship between external socio-political circumstances and the production of works that constitute responses to them is often taken for granted. More problematically, the effects which issue from these causally charged circumstances are often deemed to constitute traits of modernism, to speak for it as a typology,[49] as is the case with Sheppard,[50] Habermas, and, to a lesser degree, Rosalind Krauss. This tendency excludes not only the possibility of aberrant contexts or responses (in other words, there is a degree of predictability projected into these readings), but also the value of historical study itself, since the linearity of the relationship between context and art must be apparent (at the very least to the artists who respond to their contexts) at the time of the artwork's inception. In other words, retrospection has

[48] Althusser's formulation of Ideology sets out a compelling alternative to the early dialectical model in that it is structured non-chronologically and non-causally, being contingent on the psychic experience of subjects (who are in turn constituted as subjects by ideology) in relation to their perceived circumstances. In Althusser's own words, "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser, *"Lenin and Philosophy" and Other Essays* 71).

[49] The term 'typology' is used here to refer to a range or a set of types.

[50] This is evidenced, for example, in Sheppard's second chapter, in which he sets out to itemize the various characteristics of modernism.

nothing to add to the plotting of a history which is predestined by its circumstantial causes. Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, which is itself considered an important theoretical revision of the theorising of the relationship between modernity and avant-garde art, succumbs to precisely this weakness, failing to see the value in the neo-avant-garde movements of the 1950s and 1960s (of which the SI is one) as anything other than a repetition of the 'original' responses put forth by the early avant-gardes (Bürger).[51]

In "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?", Kwame Anthony Appiah demonstrates that the assumption of the causal connectedness between modernity and modernism (and subsequently postmodernity and postmodernism) is further fractured by an embedded premise that modernity is foremost a European phenomenon. For Appiah, postmodernities are heralded by the fracturing of this and other claims to exclusivity and closure, thus inaugurating a necessary plurality with which the dialectical model assumed by Sheppard and others is incompatible. While Appiah acknowledges "a rough consensus about the structure of the modern/postmodern dichotomy in the many domains – from architecture to poetry to philosophy to rock music to the movies – in which it has been invoked", he questions the ascription of the term "postmodernism" to the recurring rejection of "an antecedent practice that [lays] claim to a certain exclusivity of insight" (Appiah 342). He continues: "That this will not do as a definition of postmodernism follows from the fact that in each domain this rejection of exclusivity assumes a particular shape, one that reflects the specificities of its setting. To understand the various postmodernisms this way is to leave open the question of how their theories of contemporary social, cultural, and economic life relate to the actual practices

[51] Foster's contestation of this aspect of Bürger's argument is the entry-point to his argument in *Return of the Real* that "even as the avant-garde recedes into the past, it also returns from the future"(Foster, *Return of the Real* x).

that constitute that life" (342). Although Appiah's critique is focused on the theorising of postmodernism, his argument offers an illuminating analogy for the problematic inference of a traceable relationship between modern artworks and their contexts; indeed, what is at stake in both instances is a cautious epistemology of the content and meaning of artworks.

In place of the closed circuit of meaning and causality embedded in a dialectical model of the relationship between postmodernism and postmodernity (which is like the causal relationship assumed to exist between modernity and modernism in Sheppard's reading), Appiah proposes an open model in which the nature of these relationships cannot be taken for granted. Appiah's formulation allows for the possibility not only of provisional, mutually influential relationships between cultural production and the conditions which in Sheppard's account are supposed to give rise to it, but also a possible disruption of the conventionally linear chronology of these relationships. By analogy, we might conceive of the relationship between modernity and its contemporaneous acts of cultural production as more complex, such that in addition to the causal links that may exist between context and artwork (but do not exist necessarily), the validity of other kinds of relationships – such as poetic connections, historical fabrication, chance, the influence of personalities, medium-specificity, and intra-disciplinary changes – becomes plausible as well. In other words, though the model of a dialectical relationship between artwork and context may have explanatory power in some cases, this method is by no means sufficient to account for the significance or the signifying potentialities of a work of art. Appiah's text furthermore disrupts the assumption that the terms "postmodernism" and "modernism", as well as "postmodern" and "modern", refer to concepts about which there is universal, or at least extensive, assent. His use of the plural "postmodernisms" underscores this scepticism, reminding the reader of the selectiveness with which lines of historical antecedence are constructed in art historical narratives.

Bound up with the dialectical model of politico-economic cause and cultural effect, and iteration and revision, is the implication of a temporality that is not only linear but progressive; one event or movement follows from its predecessors – whether these are basal circumstances according to the Marxist model, or artworks and other cultural products – in such a way that it improves or evolves. According to Foster's reading of *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, this linearity is sometimes construed in terms of decline as well, as is the case in Bürger's representation of the mid-twentieth century neo-avant-garde as a derivative of (and therefore a regression from) the 'original' avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century. According to both Latour and Habermas and Ben-Habib, the time-consciousness of which this linearity is a manifestation is embedded in the concept of what Habermas and Ben-Habib call "aesthetic modernity" (Habermas and Ben-Habib 5). For Latour, the many disparate definitions of modernity all point to "a registering of the passage of time" (Latour 10). He continues, "The adjective 'modern' designates a new regime, an acceleration, a rupture, a revolution in time" (Latour 10). Although the induction of a new regime – which is precisely what Constant envisioned as the central concern of *New Babylon* – need not proceed in the vein of linear development and counter-development, the "registering of a passage of time", which Latour associates with modernity, implies the postulation of a temporality in which passage (in this case, the passing, or progress, of time) can in fact be registered, if not merely by the individual subject, by the cultural products she makes. Habermas and Ben-Habib further align the passage of time with subjectivity, asserting that modernism "is characterized by attitudes which find a common focus in a charged consciousness of time" (Habermas and Ben-Habib 5). This consciousness, one must infer, is attributed collectively to cultural producers, as it "expresses itself through metaphors of the vanguard and the avant-garde. The avant-garde understands itself as invading unknown territory, exposing itself to the dangers of sudden, of shocking encounters, conquering an as yet unoccupied future" (Habermas and Ben-Habib 5). Habermas and Ben-Habib seem to make two assumptions here. The first is that an external consciousness (that of the artist or the collective of cultural producers) is "expressed" in the cultural products of this consciousness, in this case taking the form of a certain tendency in modernist art to identify with the avant-garde. The second, which introduces a problematic circularity into their explanation, is that the avant-garde is itself a form of consciousness (since it "understands itself" in a certain way), and, specifically, is a form of time-consciousness, since it understands itself as future-directed.

These accounts not only bolster the notion that the history of modernism can be mapped sequentially, but also suggest the personification of this historical narrative. In *The Return of the Real*, Foster argues that the conception of the directed, linear temporality of modernism is explained by the modelling of modernist history, "secretly or otherwise … on … the individual subject, indeed as a subject" (Foster, *Return of the Real* 28). This biological modelling accounts for its narration in terms of "evolution or progression…, or conversely in terms of devolution or regression" (Foster, *Return of the Real* 28).[52] Proceeding from this model, Foster introduces the psychoanalytic trope of the return of the repressed to reveal the fault-lines embedded in the retroactive historical construction at play when, as is the approach of Bürger and several other historians of modernism, revisitations of earlier modernist movements such

[52] This recalls Althusser's notion of "interpellation", in which ideology calls individuals into subjecthood, or "hails individuals as subjects", at the moment when "the category of the 'subject' is constitutive of ideology" (Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* 190).

as Dada and Surrealism are plotted as revivals of an originary impulse.[53] Instead, Foster argues, the historical significance of a work arrives from the future. He suggests that modernist works of art are future-oriented, not merely in that they regularly anticipate their own future or that of society by attempting to innovate within a medium or by invoking utopian sensibilities, but also in that their importance and much of their meaning is constructed retroactively.

New Babylon exemplifies this process in an unusual way, since Constant himself constructs its narrative retroactively (which is not to say that this construction is ever consummately achieved). The properties, objectives and philosophical positions of the work are in many instances plotted by Constant in retrospect or alongside the process of making, rather than laid out entirely in advance of his production. By analogy, if the history of *New Babylon* is to be compared with a model of subjectivity, the former would be more complex than that which simply evolves or devolves, enclosing within itself potential future states of interpretation and value, as well as the potential for loss and change (through the circulation and reception of the work). One might object that Constant's early *New Babylon* experiments were precisely attempts at illustrating an idea mapped out ahead of the work, and this is perhaps not altogether untrue since the early models followed his desire to design a nomadic, future-oriented urban environment. However, like so many major works in the history of art, several of *New Babylon*'s characteristic recurring features, such as Constant's use of labyrinths to signify the importance of disorientation or placelessness, were developed through processes of revision. Thus, the paths that seem to connect *Gele Sector* (1959), for example, to *Ontwerp voor een zigeunerkamp* as the intentional, or directed, development of an earlier (lesser) version are in

[53] It is worth noting that the model of subjectivity is not in itself problematic, but rather the kind of subjectivity implied, namely a self-present entity that moves closer to, or further from, a desired endpoint in relation to which evolution and devolution can be plotted.

fact historical selections which exclude examples that less effectively demonstrate a line of progress. In many cases, Constant himself makes these selections, and the act of reading any logic and coherence whatsoever into the work demands that the historian make similar choices. What is useful in this observation, however, is the premise that the clear forward-directedness of a work (or a body of work) is, in important respects, spurious; the model of temporality at play in our reading and reception of an artwork (particularly when it is as multivocal as *New Babylon*) entails a complex process of reflection and relay between the work's future and its past. Foster identifies a similar process of retrieval and retroactive definition with Freud's notion of deferred action, or *Nachträglichkeit*.[54] Foster writes:

> historical and neo-avant-gardes are constituted … as a continual process of *protension and retension*, a complex relay of anticipated futures and reconstituted pasts – in short, a deferred action that throws over any simple scheme of before and after, cause and effect, origin and repetition. (Foster, *Return of the Real* 29)

Freud introduces the concept of *Nachträglichkeit* in the well-known "Wolf Man" case study. In this text, Freud describes the experience of an adult patient suffering psychological and physical symptoms which he posits as connected to a childhood dream in which the patient sees through his open bedroom window three wolves sitting in a tree.[55] Freud maintains that the enduring trauma of this dream, expressed in the patient's long-standing phobia of wolves, his religious obsessions and his digestive difficulties, connects the dream to an early childhood trauma which lacks expression in the patient's adult consciousness. For Freud this

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[54] A literal translation of *Nachträglichkeit* would approximate "belatedness", a condition of coming after, or being "late" of conceptual necessity, of being unable to be anything other than endlessly late for that which never simply happens in the present.

[55] This case is recounted in the case study "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis" (1914), which appears in Volume 17 of the *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (1-124).*

foundational trauma is the child's having witnessed or fantasised a "primal scene" of parental intercourse at a time before he had the cognitive capacity fully to understand what he had seen (Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* 64). The memory remains latent in the psyche, and ruptures into the patient's adult consciousness through his symptoms. Although post-Freudian psychoanalysts have proposed that the deferred recovery of traumatic episodes can be resolved or "re-elaborated" later in life through a process of what Laplanche and Pontalis call "*aprés-coup*" (a translation of Freud's *Nachträglichkeit*), Freud's position asserts the uncertainty of *Nachträglichkeit* and the unlikelihood of its resolution (Laplanche and Pontalis 111–114). While the past surfaces in some sense in his patient's experience, it is not brought fully to light. Moreover, Freud questions the psychic status of the initiating trauma as origin, suggesting that rather than a scene actually witnessed, the primal scene may have been constructed as a complex, psychically layered fantasy. This problematises still further the notions of original event and subsequent retrieval.

For Derrida, *Nachträglichkeit* resonates with the idea of *différance* as a deferral without origin, thus establishing Derrida's discussion of the temporality of *différance*. The present, Derrida writes, is "that which we necessarily misconstrue, and which exceeds the alternative of presence and absence" (Derrida, "*Différance*" 20). He continues:

> The structure of delay (*Nachträglichkeit*) in effect forbids that one make of temporalisation (temporisation) a simple dialectical complication of the living present as an originary and unceasing synthesis … of retentional traces and protentional openings. The alterity of the "unconscious" makes us concerned not with horizons of modified – past or future – presents, but with a "past" that has never been present, and which will

> never be, whose future to come will never be a production or a reproduction in the form of presence. (21)

Derrida's adoption of the figure of *Nachträglichkeit* is useful in the context of a reading that departs from the psychoanalytic origins of the term, or uses these psychoanalytic roots to develop an argument by analogy, as Foster's does. As Harold Bloom observes, Derrida elides certain important aspects of Freud's conception of the function of repression in relation to the Id and the Superego. This is exemplified in "Freud and the Scene of Writing", in which Derrida uses an excerpt from Freud's "The Problem of Anxiety", to suggest that writing is, in Bloom's words, "as primal as coitus" (Bloom 50). Bloom argues that Derrida misrepresents Freud's construction of writing and speech in relation to the Id and the Superego in order to construe writing as that which is in conflict with the Superego, while Freud's text suggests rather that writing is potentially in conflict with the Id[56]. Derrida's reference to *Nachträglichkeit* in "*Différance*" is in the service of an analysis of the "process of scission and division" which produces difference, at first in language and thereafter in the philosophical principles that are intertwined with a Western linguistic tradition (such as presence, being and truth) (Derrida, "*Différance*" 9). Although he does not commit himself in this essay to the notion that subjective perceptual experience succumbs to the same processes of differing and deferral, he does problematise the notion of the conscious synthesis of experience (of presence in the present) and of consciousness *per se*. In this respect, Derrida's detachment of the concept of *Nachträglichkeit* from its native theoretical domain might justifiably be interpreted as an expedient misreading. However, just as Foster imports the concept of *Nachträglichkeit* as a metaphor for an historical approach without following through the

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[56] Bloom's discussion of this point in *A Map of Misreadings* (48-50) is helpful for contextualising the background of Derrida's apparent misrepresentation of Freud.

Freudian version of the concept in other respects, so Derrida identifies the resonance between *Nachträglichkeit* and the process of *différance* at an analogical level.

The connections between this nest of metaphors and the historicising of *New Babylon* become clear when, as I show in Chapter Two, Constant's several revisions of the narrative of *New Babylon*, (particularly regarding its conceptual qualities and its relationship to other artists and historical movements), come to shape the perceived significance (or lack thereof) and reception of the work in the present day. This is exemplified in Constant's tendency to disavow the work's roots in fine art media in his recent interviews, instead emphasising its alignment with architectural media. In his 1999 interview with Benjamin Buchloh at the Drawing Centre, his distinction between sculpture, which he emphatically maintains *New Babylon* is not, and architectural maquettes, of which the *New Babylon* models are a type, is a revision of an earlier position that mapped *New Babylon* as a progression of the revolutionary inclination of CoBrA painting. Constant's attendance at The First World Congress of Free Artists in 1956 coincided with his temporary rejection of the discipline of painting in favour of an interdisciplinary practice focused on architecture and urban planning. This self-distancing from the sphere of fine art had significant implications for *New Babylon*, since the omission of references to other artworks or artists in his lectures between 1960, when he left the SI, and 1970, when he returned almost exclusively to painting, establish the grounds for his stronger association with the canon of architectural history than with art history. After Constant's return to painting in 1970, about which little is written other than Lambert's monograph on the paintings made both before and after *New Babylon*, the fate of *New Babylon* as a piece of architectural history seemed to have been sealed. Constant's subsequent revisions of the 'facts' of the work pertain mostly to clarifying its relation to reality.[57]

To appraise this narrative approach in a Derridean vein, it is as if in place of a history of the work which can be consistently pieced together, Constant writes over an "immemorial past", a "past that has never been present" and which is never fully recuperated in the future (Derrida, *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony* 51).[58] With the line of historical time broken in this way, it becomes impossible to posit anything of the present or the future without building similar edifices to those that are useful in speaking about the past. The temporal stations of present and future are subject to the same species of displacement and deferral as is the past. The present is fragmented at a metaphysical level, and the future of this present and its banished past is what Derrida often calls the future "to come" (*à-venir*), which is a future always-still-to-come, a future endlessly deferred. This temporality of an irretrievable past and a deferred future asserts and inserts itself in the construction of history, as for Derrida it does in the construction of any text, in a way that is analogous to the working of *Nachträglichkeit* in the Freudian subject.[59] The apparent loss of the historical *New Babylon* in the artist's later narratives of the work suggests an irretrievability of the past that places the future of the work in

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57 See Chapter Two, pp. 128–37 for further discussion.

58 This phrase first appears in Maurice Blanchot's *The Writing of the Disaster* (17) and is appropriated by Derrida in *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony* (51).

59 Though useful for the psychoanalytic analogies it introduces into this discussion, the metaphor of subjectivity ought not to be extended unreservedly in the analysis of artworks (or at least those that do not explicitly call for such comparison or address the notion of subjectivity itself). This is especially clear in the case of *New Babylon*, where the analogy fails to represent adequately the field of exchange in which the work manifests itself and is read. As with a subjective psyche, there may be a strand of continuity in the work, although even this assumption is contested in some philosophical and psychological theories. Moreover, psychoanalysis provides the subjective metaphor of *Nachträglichkeit*. Nonetheless, these comparisons merely serve an articulation of a complex historical operation, which deviates from the model of a subject in significant ways as well. Derrida's reference to *Nachträglichkeit* in "*Différance*", an essay whose principal thesis ostensibly challenges certain philosophical constructs, demonstrates how a partial commitment to a metaphor and the pursuit of its allusive strands is an essential function of any "text", be it historical, philosophical, literary, or artistic.

question. Indeed, Constant's own positioning of the work in a future entirely discordant with the present suggests that perhaps, rather than a negligent manipulation of the boundaries and purpose of *New Babylon*, Constant's varying positions on the work begin to articulate its place in a complex temporality disjointed from a simple conception of the present and present 'reality'. The question of *New Babylon*'s realisation must therefore acknowledge that the work inaugurates a different temporality, that "what will happen will have opened another time, … a time out of joint" (Derrida, *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony* 61).

This deconstructive time is pertinent to the reading of *New Babylon* proposed here not only because Constant positions the work in an ambiguous future setting, but also because of the necessary connection between the displacement of time and that of space. Constant's lofty plans for *New Babylon* echo Debord's vision for an urbanism of the future, in which "the changing of landscapes from one hour to the next" would "result in complete disorientation" (Guy Debord, "Definitions" 4). This disorientation is not only a state of being displaced within space, but within time as well. Constant's proposed control of all environmental lighting and other controllable signifiers of the passage of time ensured that the Principle of Disorientation would be applied in time as in space. Derrida's understanding of the connectedness of space and time through the processes of displacement and deferral resonates with Constant's interest in disorientation as an objective for urban planning. When, writing in the context of *différance*, Derrida discusses the displacement and deferral of temporal states, such as the present, he introduces a spatial metaphor into the schema of time, in which an "interval" which "separate[s] the present from what it is not in order for the present to be itself", takes effect as a spacing that affects "everything that is thought on the basis of the present" ("*Différance*", 13). Derrida further clarifies the significance of this comment:

> In constituting itself, in dividing itself dynamically, this interval is what might be called spacing, the becoming-space of time or the becoming-time of space (temporization). And it is this constitution of the present, as an "originary" and irreducibly nonsimple (and therefore, stricto sensu nonoriginary) synthesis of marks, or traces of retentions and protentions … that I propose to call archi-writing, archi-trace, or *différance*. Which (is) (simultaneously) spacing (and) temporization. (13)

The Situationist concepts of psychogeography and the *dérive*, both of which were envisioned to find their apotheosis in *New Babylon*, entail an approach to spatiality and temporality akin to Derrida's construal of these qualities at play in the text. While Derrida insists on the textuality of *différance,* or rather that the operation of *différance* gives our experience and knowledge of the world a proto-textual inflection, he does not suggest that *différance* plays out only in literal texts. Rather, *différance* involves the production of a textual modality which infiltrates everything and problematises the assumed transparency of experience and knowledge. In what follows I hope to show how the figures of temporisation and spacing are embedded, via the Situationist notions of psychogeography and the *dérive,* in Constant's understanding and proposed revision of modernist urban planning.[60]

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[60] While Constant's commitment to *New Babylon* outlasted his participation in the SI, the concurrence of the formalisation of *New Babylon* with the development of Situationist theory and practices is an important node in the trajectory of the project. As much as Constant played an integral role in the formation of early Situationist discourse, this discourse in turn influenced considerably the notions of spatiality, spatial experience and urban society which Constant continued to apply and develop throughout the lifespan of the project.

1.5 Spacing and temporization in the urban context: Between architecture and art

Several of *New Babylon*'s foundational spatial principles are expressed through the Situationist concepts of psychogeography and the *dérive*, and the related notion of Unitary Urbanism (an idea Constant was instrumental in developing). This justifies the refraction of some of the tropes and philosophical implications of these concepts and their practical application onto an analysis of *New Babylon*. Thus, what might come across as a contradictory re-location of *New Babylon* within Situationist ideology (if the objective of the previous section has been to loosen the grip of this context) is intended not merely to show how the SI's agendas informed Constant's vision, but also to show how his development of *New Babylon* simultaneously influenced the Situationists' conception of radical urbanism. At the core of this mutual influence was a discursive ambivalence regarding the relationship between art and architecture, one which treated architecture and urban space not only as potential subjects of artistic critique, but also as *artistic* media in their own right. Constant's engagement with Situationist principles such as psychogeography and the *dérive* cannot be viewed in isolation from his fluid, and sometimes fraught, understanding of the relationship between art and architecture. Therefore, before moving into a discussion of the *dérive* and psychogeography, it is necessary first to examine Constant's changing perspective on this relationship.

Despite his accommodation of a certain porousness between so-called artistic and architectural modes in his work, Constant does occasionally attempt to distinguish art - even art that adopts architectural forms - from a kind of 'proper' architecture, a discipline concerned with producing 'real' buildings. This distinction seems to be posited on the basis of an alignment of architecture with ‘reality’ and art with ‘fantasy’ – a burdensome and recurring motif in Constant’s own analyses of New Babylon, and, as will be discussed in Chapter Two, one which is unsustainable, whether logically or practically. This endeavour to distinguish between the two disciplines is evident, for example, in a letter to Anthony Hill dated 25 December 1966, in which Constant writes, “The particular task of the artist has always been – and still is – the fantastication of reality … In so far I could say New Babylon is still a work of art” (cited in Wigley, *Constant’s New Babylon* 67). More strongly, as late as his interview with Obrist in 1999, Constant denies that New Babylon was an architectural project at all: “I don't consider New Babylon to be an architectural project – not in the slightest. In my eyes, it is an illustration done by an artist – a painter or a sculptor – the illustration of an idea” (Obrist 168). In other instances, Constant seems to elide the distinction, suggesting instead that architects are a species of artist. In 1962, he writes that “the case of the architect doesn’t much differ from that of *other* artists” (Constant, “Discipline or Invention?” 142 italics mine). Similarly, in the 2005 interview with Boersma, he seems to claim that by learning architectural skills and conventions in the early 1950s, he was merely increasing the content and scope of a natively artistic language, rather than switching disciplines. Instead of suggesting that he left art for architecture, he writes, more tentatively, “For the *New Babylon* project, I naturally needed some architectural knowledge” (Boersma n.p.). In the same interview he states emphatically, referring to the presentation of *New Babylon* at *Documenta 11* (2002), “I’m not an architect, I’m a painter. I’ve always tried to hammer that home; you can’t stifle my whole painting career just like that” (Boersma n.p.). According to this interview, *Documenta 11*’s curator, Okwui Enwezor, was initially less interested in showing a number of Constant’s *New Babylon* paintings than in displaying models and photographs; it was at the artist’s insistence that some of his paintings were ultimately included in the exhibition.

However, as Wigley argues in his introduction to *The Activist Drawing*, the relationship between art and architecture in Constant's work is still more complex. While the adoption of the architectural techniques of drawing and model-making was not an attempt to situate himself fully in the discipline of architecture, neither was it simply to claim architectural methods for a graphically-oriented artistic practice. Instead, his relationship with the art and architecture establishments seems to look for an open passage between the two, a mode of working that could simultaneously draw on and be situated in both disciplines at once. Discussing Constant's 1959 drawing *Groep sectoren* ("Group sector") (fig. 14) – a drawing of a model with the same name – Wigley argues that, rather than representing New Babylon as an architectural project, the drawing

> locates the model [of *Groep Sectoren*] in a wider field;… in the field of architectural culture. Or, rather, it locates the project somewhere between art and architecture …. Constant's plans have the look of architectural drawings yet in the end disturb mainstream architectural culture… turning architectural techniques against architecture by exaggerating their typical characteristics. (de Zegher and Wigley 32)

The drawing is a partial transcription of the model which predates it (fig. 15); this constitutes an inversion of the conventional process of speculative architecture, in which drawings occur at the preliminary stages of a project, typically before models are made. Wigley represents Constant's iconoclastic use of these architectural forms and conventions as a critical practice which, instead of merely citing the aesthetics of architectural production, challenges "architectural culture", a term Wigley uses to evoke architectural discourse and history (rather than architectural practice). Such a critical treatment of architecture draws out its political and social effects. In the drawing *Principle of a Covered City: Spatial 'Plan'* (1959, fig. 16),[61] for example, Constant approximates the language of architectural presentation to complicate, rather than to clarify, the representation of spatial experience. In this piece Constant draws what seems to be an aerial view of a "covered city" using strong, ruled pen lines to give the "plan" its basic longitudinal structure. He then cuts into these lines with two grids, one which intersects them perpendicularly and another which intersects at a diagonal. The depth of these striations relative to one another is not legible from the drawing, and the spectrum of geometric windows which is created from the intersection of this double grid provides the ground for a number of small planes shaded in varying densities. These interlocked parts give the impression neither of a representation of a three-dimensional structure nor of a two-dimensional diagram of a structure. Instead, the drawing suggests an almost impenetrably dense surface of indeterminate depth. In this respect, the drawing is closer to a De Stijl abstraction of an urban environment, such as Piet Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (1942-3) (fig. 17) – a sparsely abstract impression of an aerial view of Manhattan's theatre district in the mid-twentieth-century – than an architectural design. The distinction here occurs on the grounds that architectural drawings are conventionally made in such a way that, at the same time as attempting to express a spatial atmosphere, they also strive to elucidate the structure of a building, to make its relation to negative space, its surroundings and its occupants visible. Constant's avoidance of this convention is just as apparent in the 1961 drawing *Torens* ("Towers") (fig. 18), in which he gives a sense of the volume of a tall, spiraling tower without any attempt at rendering a plausible structure. The scaffolding from which the tower seems to be made intersects only occasionally and tenuously, and a central cluster of beams

[61] The only instance of this image I have been able to find is a very small reproduction alongside the text "Another City for Another Life", as published in the web journal *Situationist International Online.* The image was originally published alongside this text in *Internationale Situationniste #3* (December 1959).

that seems to constitute the spine of the tower is, in fact, loosely arranged so that in many places there is no continuity between the lower and upper levels of this shaft. In short, the structure of the tower is unintelligible. While the drawing gives an impression of bewildering complexity, with many different surfaces and spaces, it is impossible to see which areas are solid and which are empty, which lines are ornamental and which are structurally essential to the envisaged building.

Constant's application of architectural motifs to unsettle architecture in this way is echoed at the level of the inhabited city in the Situationist practice of the urban drift, or the *dérive*, a practice of urban wandering described by Debord in his short essay "Theory of the *Dérive*" as "a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiences" (Knabb, "Preliminary Problems in Constructing a Situation" 62).[62] The *dérive* acquired the status of serious study for the Situationists. Gaston Bachelard's philosophy of spatial poetics informed their sense that through frequent *dérives* one could refine and train the senses to read the city in such a way that the mundane aspects of perceived reality would be subverted by the construction of a kind of virtual spatiality inflected by memory, the subjectivity of sensory experience and fantasy. The similarities between Bachelard's poetic analysis of architectural elements, particularly the house, and the Situationist principle that through seemingly mundane urban activities (such as walking in familiar places) one is able to activate a sensitivity to the resonances of internal and external phenomena, is exemplified in the following passage from Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, in which he describes how housework can "be made into a creative activity" (Bachelard 67):

62 Such throwaway definitions were quite typical of Debord, whose affected style of discourse often apes a strictly regimented, even bureaucratic tone.

> The minute we apply a glimmer of consciousness to a mechanical gesture, or practise phenomenology while polishing an old piece of furniture, we sense new impressions come into being beneath this familiar domestic duty. For consciousness rejuvenates everything, giving a quality of beginning to the most everyday actions. It even dominates memory. How wonderful it is to really become once more the inventor of a mechanical action! (Bachelard 62)

For the Situationists, inhabiting urban space in a particular way and paying attention to the psychological forces induced by different spaces could lead to an experience of reality akin to daydreaming (another recurring subject in Bachelard's work). In this case, reality and its spectral other are presumed to be discernible from one another, leading to the seemingly circular notion that different levels of perceptual reality exist and are perceivable. Or, put differently, this view would hold that one is able to discern perceptually different perceptions of reality. Constant makes similar assumptions in relation to *New Babylon*, often positing a dichotomy between reality and various kinds of unreality that are, for the most part, ill-defined. This subject is taken up at length in Chapter Two, but at this stage it is necessary to signal the importance of a naïve conception of the opposition between reality and unreality for the related concepts of unitary urbanism, psychogeography and the *dérive*. Such notions served as the basis for the Situationists' practical investigations into the nature of this opposition.

1.6 Psychogeography

In an approach comparable to Constant's critical investment in "architectural culture" through a style of drawing that unsettled architectural conventions, Situationist practice sought to re-script the architectural narratives of urban spaces through critically inflected methods of inhabiting and navigating these spaces. These methods are encompassed by the term "psychogeography", a form of study of the psychological resonances and effects of place. In Debord's words, "psychogeography sets for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals" (Guy Debord, "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography," para.2). The practice of psychogeography entailed the navigation of the urban environment in response to intuitive impulses and the apparent forces of attraction or revulsion Debord identifies as contingent on conventional geography. Psychogeographers took for granted the self-evidence of these forces and their communion with intuition, believing in the availability of arcane, but ultimately universal, systems of meaning in the substance of the city. In "Theory of the *Dérive*" Debord explains that "…cities have psychogeographical contours, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes that strongly enter into or exit from certain zones" (Knabb, "Preliminary Problems in Constructing a Situation" 62). Though highly contingent on the subjective variability of experience, Debord maintains that the perception of these "psychogeographical contours" is potentially accessible to anyone (though he also insists on the importance, or indeed the necessity, of cultivating a receptivity to them).[63]

Importantly, psychogeography is understood as a practice-driven form of research, or put differently, a type of research that unfolds simultaneously with the researcher's interventions in

[63] Debord saw the Situationists as particularly sensitised to psychogeographical contours by virtue of their frequent practice of the *dérive.*

the field of study.[64] However, the data, or 'findings', generated from this research confound the logic of so-called useful knowledge, offering no moorings from which to understand or taxonomise Situationist activity, nor indeed the urban environments in which it took place. Debord's notion of the "precise laws" and "specific effects" of space on the individual are never actually articulated in Situationist writings, although reports of psychogeographic activities were written in an attempt to document the relationship between the materiality of the city and the wanderer's phenomenological apprehension of the urban environment.[65] One of the few published attempts to transcribe this causal process is Michèle Bernstein's 1955 analysis of a *dérive* that passed through the Square des Missions Etrangères in Paris; here she describes the arrangement of the square and the buildings surrounding it with a marked lack of embellishment. A small folly, possibly a monument, enclosing part of the square is quirkily described as "an exceptionally dignified kiosk, highly reminiscent of a station platform" (Bernstein, para.6). An excerpt from her report, quoted below, shows that the extraction of psychogeographic observation from perceptual data lacks a clear causal grounding. More fundamentally, the nature of psychogeographic information, as distinct from perceptual information, is obscure. She writes:

> On the border between the 6th and 7th Arrondissements, this small garden, squeezed in between the nearby rue de Babylone and boulevard Raspail, is not easily reached and is normally deserted. It is fairly extensive, as Parisian public gardens go. There is almost no vegetation. From inside, its forked shape becomes apparent. Its shorter leg

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64 In this respect, psychogeography prefigures current pedagogical discourses about specifically artistic research (as opposed to research *about* artistic work). For an overview of these debates and their origins, see Ute Meta Bauer and Thomas Trummer's *AR: Artistic Research* (2013) and Danny Butt's *Artistic Research in the Future Academy* (2017), particularly Chapter Three, "Artistic Research: Defining the Field" (pp. 69–92).

65 Though a resonance with phenomenology is not immediately apparent in Debord's exacting discourse, this link becomes more apparent when one examines, as I do in the next section, the fundamental connection between psychogeography and the construction of situations.

> is enclosed between blackened walls over ten metres high and the backs of some large buildings. On this side, a private courtyard makes it difficult to make out the garden's edge. The other leg is overhung on one side by the same stone walls and bordered on the other side by the attractive facade of rue Commaille, a very quiet street. The end of this leg abuts on rue Bac, a street with a great deal more activity. (Bernstein, paras. 1–3)

These banal descriptions are punctuated in the end by a poetic leap. In her closing sentence, Bernstein offers suggestions for the potential psychogeographic use of the square: "Square des Missions Étrangères may be used for receiving visitors, for being stormed by night and for other psychogeographical purposes" (Bernstein, para.7).

Though "charmingly vague", by Debord's own admission, the concept of psychogeography, and indeed its application as a practice, were essential to the Situationists' ambition to develop a body of experiential knowledge of urban spaces and to attend to the "neglected" phenomena of the city (Debord, "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography," para. 12) Debord appears to have been aware of the methodological limitations of psychogeography, if not its epistemological limitations. In his "Report on the Construction of Situations", he identifies the contingency of its success on "the statistical extension of its methods of observation, but above all on experimentation by means of concrete interventions in urbanism" (39). Without the consistent accomplishment of the extension of existing psychogeographic findings and "concrete interventions in urbanism", the Situationists could not, according to Debord, "be certain of the objective truth of the initial psychogeographical findings" (Guy Debord, "Report on the Construction of Situations" 39). In other words, Debord expected there to be a regularity or predictability in psychogeographic findings that would confirm the "objective truth" of earlier discoveries. He attempts to qualify this expectation, seemingly protecting the Situationists against the failure of their idealistic empiricism, by suggesting rhetorically that "even if these findings should turn out to be false, they would still be false solutions to what is nevertheless a real problem", as though a "false" solution were nonetheless acceptable as a solution (Guy Debord, "Report on the Construction of Situations" 39).

The notion that psychogeography would reveal a level of semiotic consistency in the urban environment suggests that, for the Situaitonists, psychogeographic activity resembled reading in a language perhaps only partially understood, where the city exists as a system of meaning much like a text. In *Writings on Cities* Henri Lefebvre – who was closely acquainted with the SI but remained aloof from group – describes the city's "objectiality", or it's character as a composite entity, as a "language" formed and in constant development by human activity (Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities* 102). In the same text, he uses the metaphor of an *oeuvre* or a work of art to explain the constructed, semiotically resonant character of cities as entities shaped by societies. Here Lefebvre acknowledges, like the Situationists, that there may be a level of interpretive consistency possible for different people 'reading' the same city, since the metaphors of *oeuvre* and language imply a reasonably coherent, intra-referential system of meaning. However, Lefebvre cautions that readings of the city will vary because of the reader's mediation. He writes:

> If I compare the city to a book, to a writing (a semiological system), I do not have the right to forget the aspect of mediation. I can separate it neither from what it contains nor from what contains it. ... On this book, with this writing, are projected mental and social forms and structures. (Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities* 102)

Debord acknowledges, and even values, the interference of subjective mental and social projections in psychogeographic interpretations of the city, even though this appears to contradict his wish to deduce a precise, empirical system of psychogeographic interpretation. In "Preliminary Problems in Constructing a Situation", the author[66] describes psychogeography as a "situationist-oriented psychoanalysis" (Knabb, "Preliminary Problems in Constructing a Situation" 49), in which the city not only reveals one's subconscious desires but also has the potential "to fulfill them" (32).[67] Debord never expresses allegiance to a particular school of psychoanalytic thought, but seems to adhere to a rudimentary notion of psychoanalysis probably informed by his interest in Surrealism.

Debord was drawn to the Surrealists' partial appropriation of Freudian psychoanalytic theory, which was integral to their pursuit of a visual and performative language that would antagonise the dominant rational and moral mores of society. However he felt that the revolutionary orientation of early surrealism was sacrificed when the movement gained a presence in mainstream art institutions in Europe (Guy Debord, "Report on the Construction of Situations" 39). Debord envisaged that the Situationists, learning from the failings of the Surrealists, would pick up from the point at which Surrealism ceased to be relevant to revolutionary

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[66] The author of the text is not acknowledged in the publication, but it is in all likelihood Debord.

[67] The implicit sexual narrative embedded in Debord's description of psychogeography is reiterated in a psychogeographic map produced by Debord and Jorn for Debord's 1959 publication *Mémoires*, in which images of semi-nude female bodies gleaned from commercial pornographic images are dismembered and interspersed with areas of red ink.

causes, and would work out the deviant potential of Surrealism through their own artistic language. [68]

1.7 The phenomenology of the situation

The significance of psychogeography is figured in terms of two seemingly contradictory positions: on the one hand, psychogeography is represented as an empirically oriented research activity, a ‘science’ which, in spite of uncertain premises, generates fairly reliable and repeatable outcomes. On the other hand, psychogeography is a deeply subjective exercise (rooted in a theoretical terrain inspired by psychoanalysis) in which nothing is predictable, or rather, which has value precisely because of its potential to deviate from and contradict the reliable and repeatable operations of society.

These paradoxical impulses find their apotheosis in the construct of the “situation”, the elusive phenomenon on the basis of which the SI articulated its identity as a movement. The unattributed text titled “Preliminary Problems in Constructing a Situation”, published in *Internationale Situationniste* in 1958, describes the situation as “an integrated ensemble of behaviour in time”, a collectively authored, improvisatory experiment in which actions are arranged in a “transitory decor” (Knabb, “Preliminary Problems in Constructing a Situation”

[68] An important aesthetic tendency which both the Surrealists and the Situationists shared, and which was influenced to some extent by Surrealism, was the projection of the fantastical or discordant onto familiar environments. In Chtcheglov’s “Formulary for a New Urbanism”, which preceded the formation of the Situationist International by three years, the author cites the paintings of Georgio De Chirico and Edgar Allen Poe’s short story “The Domain of Arnheim” (1850) (in which the protagonist, Mr Ellison, devotes himself to the construction of new landscapes) as evidence that the desire to create alternative spatial experiences had an historical precedent in the arts (Chtcheglov 5). Both Poe’s story and De Chirico’s paintings “incite” one to drift, Chtcheglov writes, even if this drifting involves a projection of imaginary space onto a two-dimensional painting or into the spatiality of text. In “Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography”, Debord writes that the reconstruction of “disquieting neighbourhoods of arcades could one day carry on and fulfill the allure” of de Chirico’s paintings (Chtcheglov 8).

49). Reinforcing the Situationists' already noted interest in psychoanalysis, this "decor" follows lines of desire: "each person must seek what he loves, what attracts him" (Knabb, "Preliminary Problems in Constructing a Situation" 49). However, the author is careful to point out that "what is important to us is neither our individual psychological structures nor the explanation of their formation, but their possible application in the construction of situations" (Knabb, "Preliminary Problems in Constructing a Situation" 49).

In a related passage from his "Report on the Construction of Situations", Debord describes the situation as "the concrete construction of momentary ambiances of life and their transformation into a superior passional quality" (38). This elevation of life's ambiences to the realm of the "passional" summarises the SI's philosophy of the quotidian, and states in simple terms the ultimate objective of psychogeographic research: what we might call, to borrow a phrase from Arthur C. Danto, "the transfiguration of the commonplace".[69]

The so-called "concrete[ness]" of the situation, its emergence as an 'actual' phenomenon, is determined by "two components in perpetual interaction: the material environment of life and the behaviors which it gives rise to and which radically transform it" (Guy Debord, "Report on the Construction of Situations" 38).[70] Debord thus understands the situation as a deliberate intervention in a conglomeration of material aspects, behaviours and, ultimately, processes of

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[69] "The Transfiguration of the Commonplace" is the title of an essay (1974) and a book (1980) by Danto in which he lays out a philosophy of art that attempts to account for the existence of artworks which cannot be distinguished from 'ordinary', non-art objects. I engage with this text in Chapter Three, pp. 258–60.

[70] My reading of Debord's "Report on the Construction of Situations" interprets his use of the term "concrete" as a way of ascribing actuality, or a high level of 'reality', to a state of affairs. To put it simplistically, using the word "concrete" to describe a situation insists on its reality, as opposed to its existence as a figment of the imagination. As I argue in Chapter Two, this language is fraught with ontological implications, many of which is inherited by Constant, shaping his own assumptions about different levels of reality in *New Babylon.*

signification (which make possible the radical transformation of the "material environment of life").

In a short (also unattributed) essay titled "The Theory of Moments and the Construction of Situations", the Situationists cite Lefebvre's notion of the "moment", which he introduces in his untranslated autobiography *La Somme et le Reste* (1959)*,* as an important reference point for the concept of the situation (Guy Debord, "The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Art and Politics" n.p.). Lefebvre understands the moment as an arrival or emergence, a temporal, intellectual or sensory marker that interrupts the regular ensemble of the quotidian. Crucial to the conception of the moment is his understanding of this ensemble as an *oeuvre*, a collection of places, spaces and surfaces shaped by the activities and interpretive positions which occur within them. For Lefebvre, any city is replete with signifying positions and creative gestures that interface with and disrupt imposed ideologies. In *Writing on Cities,* he proposes that "urban life suggests meanings, the confrontation of difference, reciprocal knowledge and acknowledgement (including ideological and political confrontation) ways of living, 'patterns' which coexist in the city" (Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities* 75). Within this *oeuvre,* moments occur, spontaneously, as epiphanic eruptions, sudden awarenesses or apprehensions of (human) "presence" (Guy Debord, "The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Art and Politics"). Lefebvre's theory of the moment is indebted to his humanism, to his insistence on the self-evidence of presence as a relief from the alienating aspects of everyday life.[71] The Situationists minimise this ideological position and emphasise instead the formal aspects of interruption, its function as a break in an epistemic order.

[71] Without any reference to Lefebvre, Derrida problematises this conception of simple, self-evident presence in "*Différance*", proposing that the present, as a manifestation of presence, is deferred (to a future yet-to-come) and replaced by the trace (Derrida, "*Différance*" 21).

Like Lefebvre, Debord seems to understand the production of the *oeuvre* of the city as an indivisible cooperation between impulses in the subject and external phenomena. The Situation becomes a way of controlling, or at least triggering, the experience of this cooperation, which remains nonetheless fleeting. In contradiction of his ostensibly systematic approach to psychogeography, he acknowledges that these aims are "essentially transitory. Our situations will be ephemeral, without a future. Passageways" (Guy Debord, "Report on the Construction of Situations" 38).

The term "situation" emerges with resonant implications in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception.* Here, Merleau-Ponty uses it with reference to a phenomenological event in which the physical reflexes of a subject, as responses to phenomena, invest stimuli with meaning "which they do not possess taken singly as psychological agents" (Merleau-Ponty, "The Phenomenology of Perception" 85). Discussing seemingly automatic subjective responses to stimuli, such as physical reflexes in a medical context, Merleau-Ponty argues that what might look or feel like an immediate causal relationship between an apparently external phenomenon and a self-contained subject are in fact the function of a "pre-objective" disposition in the subject that informs the reaction (Merleau-Ponty, "The Phenomenology of Perception" 85). Merleau-Ponty challenges the supposition that reflexes are merely responses to external stimuli by introducing an example of the phantom limb. It is fairly common, he observes, that for an undetermined period of time after a patient suffers the amputation of a limb, he or she experiences sensations as though the limb were still attached to the body. In such cases, these sensations are not caused by external phenomena, but are located in the body of the patient. From this, Merleau-Ponty argues, it is clear that one's disposition towards “being in the world” corporeally contributes to sensory experience at least as much as the occurrence of external phenomena. It is worth quoting Merleau-Ponty at some length in the interest of developing this concept:

> In fact the reflexes themselves are never blind processes: they adjust themselves to a ‘direction’ of the situation, and express our orientation towards a ‘behavioural setting’ just as much as the action of the ‘geographical setting’ upon us. …The reflex does not arise from objective stimuli, but moves back towards them, and invests them with a meaning which they do not possess taken singly as psychological agents, but only when taken as a situation. It causes them to exist as a situation, it stands in a ‘cognitive’ relation to them, which means that it shows them up as that which it is destined to confront. The reflex, in so far as it opens itself to the meaning of a situation, and perception; in so far as it does not first of all posit an object of knowledge and is an intention of our whole being, are modalities of a pre-objective view which is what we call being-in-the-world. Prior to stimuli and sensory contents, we must recognize a kind of inner diaphragm which determines, infinitely more than they do, what our reflexes and perceptions will be able to aim at in the world, the area of our possible operations, the scope of our life. (Merleau-Ponty, “Selections from *The Phenomenology of Perception*” 91–92)

Inverting the structure Debord appears to put forward, in which external phenomena impress upon a subject a certain sensory experience, which in turn leads to certain behavioural impulses, Merleau-Ponty conceives of the body as predisposed to “aim” at stimuli in the world, a condition which is prior even to sensory experience. He expresses this predisposition as “a kind of inner diaphragm," a pre-experiential state of potential, or an innate preparedness, "which determines… what our reflexes and perceptions will be able to aim at in the world". The occurrence of a physical reflex thus expresses "our orientation" towards not only the range of potential stimuli in the world, but also towards specific stimuli as they are experienced. Merleau-Ponty suggests that this disposition is in fact more strongly determinant than are stimuli in shaping the contents and experience of perception.

In "The Visible and the Invisible: The Intertwining – The Chiasm"[72] Merleau-Ponty develops the concept of "being-in-the-world" introduced in *Phenomenology of Perception* in order to account for the interleaving of the perceiving subject and the perceived object in the moment of perception. He reconceptualises the body as "chiasm", or a site of crossing-over between the thing perceived and the perceiving entity, or between the object as perceived and the subject as perceiver. In the chiasm both the perceived and the perceiver are constituted in the act of perception, but these roles intersect and overlap such that the perceived also, in a sense, perceives (Merleau-Ponty, "The Visible and the Invisible: The Intertwining – The Chiasm" 247). This extends and reframes Merleau-Ponty's argument for perception as a kind of meeting of a perception-ready subject and a stimulus in his *Phenomenology of Perception*, in which the perceiving subject and the stimulus do not exist as such prior to their intertwining in the act of perception. He writes:

> What there is then are not things first identical with themselves, which would then offer themselves to the seer, nor is there a seer who is first empty and who, afterward, would open himself to them - but something to which we could not be closer

[72] Throughout I have used an anthologised excerpt of the full text, edited and translated by Thomas Baldwin.

> than by palpating it with our look, things we could not dream of seeing "all naked" because the gaze itself envelops them, clothes them with its own flesh. ("The Visible and the Invisible: The Intertwining – The Chiasm" 249)

Because the thing seen is enveloped in the gaze, and "clothe[d]...with its own flesh", the epistemic distance presupposed to exist between the perceiver and the perceived (in language, when names are given to things, and in science, with the generation of empirical data) is contradicted. "The look", rather than functioning as a passive process of receiving or responding to stimuli, "envelops, palpates, espouses the visible things ... as though it knew them before knowing them" (Merleau-Ponty, "The Visible and the Invisible: The Intertwining – The Chiasm" 251). Acknowledging the counterintuitive implications of this claim, Merleau-Ponty writes that instead of seeing "chaos", as one might expect given this inextricable intertwining of the seen and the seer, one experiences the look as looking "at things - so that finally one cannot say if it is the look or if it is the things that command" ("The Visible and the Invisible: The Intertwining – The Chiasm" 250–251)

Merleau-Ponty explains this process by using a second example, that of a hand touching an object or another hand. The hand feels the thing it touches and appears to come to know the thing as tangible and having certain tactile qualities, but at the same time the hand brings to the experience of touching its own movements, substance, volume, textures and sensory faculties. "Through this crisscrossing within [the hand] of the touching and the tangible, its own movements incorporate themselves into the universe they interrogate, are recorded on the same map as it," Merleau-Ponty writes (Merleau-Ponty, "The Visible and the Invisible: The Intertwining – The Chiasm" 251). These "two systems" are interdependent and mutually constitutive. They are “applied upon one another, as the two halves of an orange” (Merleau-Ponty, “The Visible and the Invisible: The Intertwining – The Chiasm” 251). This is because “the thickness of the body ... is ... the sole means I have to go unto the heart of the things, by making myself a world and by making them flesh” (Merleau-Ponty, “The Visible and the Invisible: The Intertwining – The Chiasm” 253). This is a clear development of Merleau-Ponty’s earlier representation of the phenomenological process, in which perception is possible because of the perceiver’s “being-in-the-world” (Merleau-Ponty, “The Visible and the Invisible: The Intertwining – The Chiasm” 247). In his later conceptualisation of perception through sight or touch, the perceiving subject is not merely *in* the world, but *becomes* “a world”, or is incorporated into the surrounding world of stimuli (which in their turn incortporate the perceiver). At the same time the thing is incorporated into the perceiving ground, whether the flesh or the look.

The Situationist understanding of the situation is in many ways simplistic when compared with Merleau-Ponty’s; however it does seem to rely on a related concept of a fleeting phenomenological interaction between subject and environment. In trying to schematise this understanding and make it applicable through a set of rules, Debord’s construal of psychogeography loses what in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology shifts the notion of subjectivity away from the self-contained individual, isolated from the world in her experiences, to one of a subject ‘destined’ to the world. Despite his desire for a social revolution based on modes of experiencing urban environments, Debord seems unable fully to remove his theory fully from a Cartesian schema of perception in which “the whole system of experience – world, own body and empirical self – are subordinated to a universal thinker” (Merleau-Ponty, “Selections from *The Phenomenology of Perception*" 128), the modern individual who is the object of the Situationists' most strident criticisms.

Constant explored the possible nuances of the definitions and theory relating to psychogeography and the situation through a series of models and related texts produced during his association with the SI. In the 1959 document entitled "First Proclamation of the Dutch Section of the SI", Constant expresses the need for members of society, and especially artists, to adopt "a new attitude" characterised by "acceptance of the transitory", the willingness to "[renounce] fixed form" and to engage in "uninterrupted invention …: invention as a way of life" (Constant, "First Proclamation of the Dutch Section of the SI," para.13). Constant envisaged New Babylon as an environment both inclined to facilitate this "new attitude" and sustained by it, in a relationship between subject and environment comparable to Merleau-Ponty's "situation", in which "the sentient and the sensible do not stand in relation to each other as two mutually external terms, and sensation is not an invasion of the sentient by the sensible" (Merleau-Ponty, "Selections from *The Phenomenology of Perception*" 128–129).

In a written description of an envisaged environment represented by the model *Gele sector*, Constant introduces a range of spaces intended both to respond to, and to encourage, the New Babylonian citizen's disposition towards experiential receptiveness. An excerpt from this highly embellished description shows the potential for environmental variability that Constant hoped to be able to produce through New Babylon, as well as the extent to which he wished this variability might take the citizen by surprise:

> The two labyrinth-houses are formed by a great number of irregularly-shaped chambers, spiral staircases, distant corners, wastelands, cul-de-sacs. One goes through them

> adventurously. One can find oneself in a quiet room, clad in insulating material; the loud room with its vivid colors and ear-splitting sounds; the room of echoes (radio-phonic speaker games); the room of images (cinematic games); the room for reflection (games of psychological resonance); the room for rest; the room for erotic games; the room of coincidences, etc. An extended stay in these houses has the tonic effect of a brainwashing and is frequently undertaken to erase the effects of habits. (Constant, "Description of the Yellow Sector" 122)

Instead of being directed and restricted by the architecture of *Gele sector*, one would "find oneself", as if by chance, in one of a variety of rooms, each of them providing a striking and immersive sensory experience. According to Constant, the effect of these alternating experiences would be like "brainwashing", a kind of purging of bad sensory habits imported from the modern city. Constant's reference to brainwashing perhaps unwittingly associates his intentions for *New Babylon* with the sort of spatial control which the SI saw as characteristic of popular modern urban planning. It conveys a sensibility that is at odds with an otherwise consistent effort to align *New Babylon* with the ideas of freedom and independence. It is likely that Constant in fact means that the disorienting effect of the labyrinths would allow the New Babylonians to experience unbridled immersion in the stimuli provided by *Gele sector.* Through this immersion one would be unable to "possess… in thought" the form and limits of the labyrinthine spaces (Merleau-Ponty, "The Phenomenology of Perception, Part II: The World as Perceived" 128). The full passage in *The Phenomenology of Perception* from which Merleau-Ponty's phrase is cited expresses, rather more elegantly than Constant's purgatory "brainwashing", the state in which this immersion might take place: "As I contemplate the blue of the sky I am not set over against it as an acosmic subject; I do not possess it in thought, or spread out towards it some idea of blue as might reveal the secret of it, I abandon myself to it and plunge into this mystery, it 'thinks itself within me'" (Merleau-Ponty, "Selections from *The Phenomenology of Perception*" 129).

In contrast to Debord's hypothesis that a subject's responses to environmental elements could be systematized and eventually controlled, Constant proposes a spatial arrangement in which the systematic elements of his structural intervention are obscured by the disorienting qualities of his labyrinths. The subject, even a subject versed in the methods of psychogeography (as Debord envisaged many would eventually be), ought not to be able to anticipate her responses to the different environmental stimuli incorporated into the structure, since these perpetually take her by surprise. Because one does not habituate to the architecture of *Gele Sectoren* - rather, it cleanses one of habituated responses to stimuli - the relationships between structures and behaviours cannot be regulated or incorporated into a set of principles, as Debord wished to achieve through the systematic implementation of psychogeography.

For Constant the unpredictability of the New Babylonian's passage through the environment is inextricably linked to the demise of external economic and spatial control over urban environments. With citizens no longer obliged to work within a modern, post-industrial economy, cities would become playgrounds to be used freely by their inhabitants. Therefore, the reference to games in Constant's description of *Gele sector* represents both the consequences of a dramatic sociopolitical shift and the conditions necessary to maintain this position. Crucially for the development of New Babylon and for the Situationists' subsequent elaboration of theories which claim a foundational connection between artistic and political activity, Constant maintains that the playful environments which constituted *New Babylon* will facilitate creative activity in their inhabitants. In fact, Constant suggests that play and creative activity are intertwined. In a 1959 essay entitled "The Great Game to Come", he argues that a "lack of alternatives involving play in the organization of social life prevents urbanism from attaining the level of creation" (Constant, "The Great Game to Come" 111).

Constant's assertion of the interconnection between play and creativity is derived from the Dutch sociologist Johan Huizinga's influential 1944 text *Homo Ludens*, in which he claims that there is a 'natural' interconnectedness between "*Homo Faber* (man the maker)" and "*Homo Ludens* (man the player)" (Huizinga 3–5). Constant maintains that these qualities had been separated from each other through the widespread implementation of labour in service of the production of marketable goods; he envisages the situation as a means of temporarily reconnecting *Homo Faber* and *Homo Ludens*. *New Babylon* imagines a world in which this reconnection is sustained. The official Situationist line supported Constant's position, and Debord is unequivocal in stating the importance of play in the construction of situations. In his 1957 tract "Definitions", he describes the situation as a "moment of life concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organization of a unitary ambience and a game of events" (Guy Debord, "Definitions" 51). Debord distinguishes between "idiotic" games and their toys, of which the automobile is considered an example, and intellectually edifying games – spontaneous events which allow for the expression of what he, like Constant, takes to be an innate tendency towards play in all humankind. Functionalist societies eliminate play from ordinary life, he contends; the spontaneous, recreational and responsively playful nature of the *dérive* is intended to reactivate this lost quality through the construction of situations.

Particularly in the SI's foundational years, the group conceived of social revolution as a benign shift from what was perceived to be a depressed, production-intensive imposition on human freedoms to a social condition in which people would be free, and would, once again 'naturally', use their freedom to engage in playful and creative activity. In the 1960s, however, the Situationist agenda lost much of this orientation and became increasingly concerned with antagonistic political activism. In Debord's words, the SI of the 1960s aimed "ultimately ... to destroy [the] entire artistic framework" in which the practice of art was distinguished from life and through which artworks existed as commodities in the "present society" of "isolation and noncommunication" (Guy Debord, "The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Art and Politics," para.7). In the same text, published in 1963, Debord praises several revolutionary groups around Europe who had carried out armed attacks and bombings of cultural orgnisations, including an art gallery in France and a tourism business in Spain. Debord envisioned Situationist activity from that point onwards as a "revolutionary project, which can in no case produce an aesthetics because it is already entirely beyond the domain of aesthetics" (Guy Debord, "For a Revolutionary Judgement of Art," para.3). Although Debord stops short of entirely rejecting the idea of art, he criticises the endurance of art as an "aesthetic" practice. He disavows the potential of the plastic arts and cinema to have any political potency because they ostensibly participate in a system of spectacle and commodification. This distinction establishes a false binary between the aesthetic and the political, denying the possibility that the political may coexist with, or manifest itself through, the aesthetic in ways that are conceptually and ethically compelling.[73] In June 1960, on the basis of Debord's emergent exclusionary stance, which quickly became incompatible with Constant's produc-

[73] Rancière, for instance, argues in *The Politics of Aesthetics* that the political is structured by a "primary aesthetics" that distributes or "parcel[s] out" "the visible and the invisible" (Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* 13,19). The political and the aesthetic are intertwined because both are concerned with the literal as well as the metaphoric visibility and audibility of subjects, that is their aptness to participate in regimes of "the sayable and the visible" (Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* 16).

tion of models and drawings, the latter resigned from the SI.[74] He did, however, continue to develop *New Babylon* in accordance with the concepts he had begun to explore through his association with the Situationists.

1.8 Mapping the *dérive*

The concepts of psychogeography, the *dérive* and unitary urbanism (which is discussed in the next section of this chapter, 1.9) were developed alongside one another, although with scant exposition in early Situationist publications. In retrospect, with a range of primary and secondary texts available at the same time, it is easy to see that the *dérive* was the method of practising psychogeography by allowing oneself to 'drift', or to walk aimlessly, through the city, guided by its "psychogeographical contours" (Knabb, "Preliminary Problems in Constructing a Situation" 62) In addition to the Situationists' attempted written reports of psychogeography, they produced several two-dimensional paper maps, particularly in the early years of the movement, and published these in *Potlatch* and *Internationale Situationniste* as proposals for, or 'guides' to, psychogeographic outings. Two seminal examples are Jorn and Debord's *Guide psychogéographique de Paris: discours sur les passions de l'amour: pentes psychogéographiques de la dérive et localisation d'unités d'ambiance* ("Psychogeographic Guide of Paris. Discourse on the Passions of Love. Psychogeographic Descents of Drifting and Localisation of Ambient Unities") (1957, fig. 19) and *The Naked City: illustration de*

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[74] In a letter dated 6 May 1960, Debord writes to Pinot-Galizio alluding to a "Dutch betrayal", in which two members of the Dutch arm of the SI other than Constant, are expelled for building a church (Guy Debord, *Correspondence: The Foundation of the Situationist International (June 1957-August 1960)* 351). In this letter Debord also speaks of the necessity of conducting "purges" of the various SI groups that had emerged across Europe Constant is briefly mistakenly accused of involvement in this project. This is perhaps symptomatic of a growing rift between Debord and Constant. In a letter dated 2 June 1960, Debord acknowledges receipt of Constant's letter of resignation from the SI, in which he responds to Constant's accusation that the Dutch architects have been 'placed outside the SI' (Guy Debord, *Correspondence: The Foundation of the Situationist International (June 1957-August 1960)* 351).

l'hypothése des plaques tournantes en psychogéographique ("The Naked City: illustration of the hub hypothesis in psychogeography") (1957, fig.20). In both, fragments of an aerial map of Paris have been collaged, with drawn arrows suggesting several highly inefficient, obviously aimless routes through the city; recorded geography is displaced by a plan that connects different regions on the basis of arcane or ad hoc relationships. As the titles of both maps suggest, these works are not records of psychogeographic activity, but proposals for it; they exist as discursive agents, hypotheses.

New Babylon is rendered in this medium as well, its hypothetical nature made all the more apparent since its maps do not propose any action – as the arrows on Jorn and Debord's maps do – but rather illustrate Constant's proposed layout of *New Babylon*'s structures in relation to pre-existing cities (see fig. 21, *New Babylon-Amsterdam [I]*, 1963). In his essay "Mapping: Situationists and/or Conceptualists", Peter Wollen suggests that in Constant's maps, as well as in Jorn and Debord's, a "double context" emerges: "that of a pessimistic critique of contemporary society… and, at the same time, that of an optimistic futurology…" (Wollen 35). While this analysis is perhaps hyperbolic ("critique" is too strongly associated with pessimism) and also more applicable to Debord and Jorn's psychogeographic maps than to Constant's, Wollen misses a third context, namely that of action. The arrows in *Guide Psychogeographique* and *The Naked City* do more than connect disparate parts of the city by suggesting an ideal alternative: they are gestural and indicate that the proposed connections between these fragments are to be wrought through movement.

The *dérive* is precisely the action to which the arrows refer. If psychogeography is an attitudinal state oriented towards "a new mode of behaviour", then the *dérive* is the action that correlates with that state: “the practice of a passional journey out of the ordinary through a rapid changing of ambiences, as well as a means of study of psychogeography” (Guy Debord, “Report on the Construction of Situations” 40). The rapidly changing ambiences are indicated in Jorn and Debord’s maps by the connection of sections of Paris which are actually separated by areas of less interest to the Situationists than those represented. The arrows indicate a subject’s traversal of space, directed not by the logic of urban planning but by an elusive, ill-defined urban “ambience”. The discovery of these desirable ambiences ostensibly occurs by chance as one wanders without motive. Debord to some degree clarifies this perspective in “The Theory of the *Dérive*”, in which he explains that “[i]n a *dérive* one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there” (Knabb, “Preliminary Problems in Constructing a Situation” 62).

Importantly, the *dérive* was seen as a pedestrian activity. It sought to ‘reclaim’ European cities,[75] whose outdoor environments had become increasingly populated by automobiles, and consequently, whose citizens spent more time than the Situationists thought desirable in “isolated sky-scrapers” (Constant, “Another City for Another Life (I)” 115). The *dérive* was an activity conceptually and pragmatically applicable to any urban environment; indeed, this was necessary to Situationists’ vision of a revolution in the uses of urban space. However, the *dérive*’s political and cultural foundations are, as Debord and Jorn’s maps suggest, in the city

[75] The rhetoric of spatial ‘reclamation’ is potentially problematic, as it negates in a single stroke those constituencies which already exist in or occupy an environment, potentially erasing or rendering invisible vulnerable communities and practices. It also suggests, or even takes for granted, a certain entitlement to an environment (the city is *re*-claimed, as though it had belonged to the reclaimer in the first place), without any exposition of this entitlement. I introduce the notion of reclamation in relation to the Situationists because their envisaged occupations of the city are bound up with the idea of restoring the urban environment (particularly Paris) to a kind of ‘prelapsarian’ condition, an ideal from which, thanks to modern urban planning, the city has fallen.

of Paris, where the introduction of automated transport was seen as a significant threat to historical quarters of the city which had previously been unnavigable by car. For the Situationists, modern urban changes in Paris became symbolic of the destructive effects of a specifically capitalist approach to urban planning in European cities, through which the prioritization of individualistic wealth and economic privatization marginalised all those citizens who were unwilling or unable to participate in mercantile society.

The notion of pedestrian reclamation of Paris and other cities is prefigured in the literary figure of the *flâneur*, a roaming inhabitant of the modern city, who wanders the streets driven not by purpose but by interest. Walter Benjamin formulated the first acknowledgment of the *flâneur* as a character type in *The Arcades Project* (written between 1927 and Benjamin's death in 1940), in which he observes *flâneur* characters and narrators in the prose and poetry of Baudelaire and Poe.

In Benjamin's portrayal of the act of *flânerie*, the *flâneur* wanders the streets, projecting himself into other roles and environments as he moves along in an act of imaginative sublimation of the self into the faces and surfaces of the city.[76] Benjamin writes:

> The street conducts the *flâneur* into a vanished time. For him, every street is precipitous. It leads downwards … to a past that can be all the more spellbinding because it is not his own. … In the asphalt over which he passes his steps awaken a surprising resonance. The gaslight that streams down on the paving stones throws an equivocal light on this double ground (Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* 416).

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[76] Benjamin's *flâneur,* like the default protagonists, narrators and subjects of so much literature of his time, was a male subject, a man of the modern city whose relationship to all he observed was simultaneously immersive and aloof. This gender-normativity is challenged in the essay collection *The Invisible Flâneuse? Gender, Public Space, and Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris,* which, through an examination of literature and art of the period, seeks to render 'visible' women in public space in early modern Paris.

As the *flâneur* wanders the streets, the quite ordinary environmental phenomena of light, weather, material surfaces and the anonymous faces of surrounding crowds are enrolled in an imaginative act in which the ordinary is transformed into the extra-ordinary. Benjamin's allusion in the final phrases of this extract to an "equivocal" or mysterious process of doubling, in which the "double ground" represents this transformation, suggests comparison with Sigmund Freud's notion of the uncanny, in which the motif of 'the double' plays a central role. Freud's double is exemplified in moments in which one experiences the occurrence of unlikely repetitions, coincidences and likenesses, but the 'uncanniness' of these instances of doubling inheres in the fact that they seem to transform that which would otherwise be ordinary into something which is disconcertingly aberrant and potentially frightening (Freud, *The "Uncanny"* 8–9).Though not necessarily overtly frightening, instances of the uncanny involve a subtle slippage between the commonplace and the disconcerting, or the unveiling of the *unheimlich* (uncanny/unfamiliar) in the *heimlich* (familiar). Of particular relevance to Benjamin's description of the transformative processes at work in *flânerie* is Freud's suggestion that "an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality" (Freud, *The "Uncanny"* 14).[77]

Benjamin writes that it is within the crowd that the *flâneur* is best able to activate this slippage or transformation: "The *flâneur* seeks refuge in the crowd … The crowd is the veil through which the familiar city is transformed for the flâneur into phantasmagoria ... in which the city appears now as a landscape, now as a room" (Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* 421).

[77] A recurring challenge in this thesis is navigating between the two seemingly opposed terms of the real and the imaginary. This opposition plagued Constant throughout the duration of his engagement with the *New Babylon* project, and his frequent equivocation regarding the relationship of *New Babylon* to 'reality' (and, indeed, the nature of this reality) is the dominant theme in his theorising of the project.

The crowd, paradoxically, affords the *flâneur* the greatest possible anonymity and invisibility as he moves through the city. At the same time, according to Benjamin, the crowd offers the *flâneur* aesthetic material for his imaginative projections: a multitude of unfamiliar faces invites him to invent the characters who wear them and thereby to embark on a fantastical detour catalyzed by the ordinary. Benjamin's observations of the role of the crowd in the *flâneur*'s construction of a "phantasmagoria" issue quite clearly from his reading of Charles Baudelaire's prose-poem "The Crowd" (from *Paris Spleen: Little poems in Prose*) in which Baudelaire writes:

> enjoying the crowd is an art, and only he can gain a stroke of vitality from it … whose good fairy at his cradle bequeathed a taste for travesty and masque, along with a hatred of home and passion for travel. …
>
> Multitude, solitude: equal and convertible terms for the active and productive poet. …
>
> Who walks alone with his thoughts draws a singular intoxication from this universal communion. Whoever readily commingles with the crowd knows feverish pleasures eternally denied to the egoist, locked in a strongbox, or the sloth, confined like the snail. (Baudelaire 22)

In this excerpt, written in 1869, Baudelaire introduces several ideas which later emerge in Benjamin's discourse on *flânerie*, in particular the association of the *flâneur*'s re-imagining of the city with the writer's, the alignment of the enjoyment of crowds with "travesty and masque", and the notion that the appreciation of crowds is a cultivated taste. Further elaborating on Baudelaire's association of the *flâneur* with the poet, Benjamin writes that Baudelaire "sees" with "the gaze of the *flâneur*" (Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* 21). For Benjamin, this occurs because Baudelaire reads Paris allegorically, a process by which the 'actual' strata of the city are transformed into literary matter.

The literary and political history of the figure of the *flâneur* is pertinent to the Situationist *dérive* in that it locates the *dérive* as an action that is at once inherently political and transdisciplinary in its construction as one element in a far-reaching artistic process. While their appropriation of this canonical activity should not be interpreted as a specific allegiance to literature, it does demonstrate the formal and cultural plurality at the heart of the Situationist project. Certainly, the Situationists' approach to art as a process of intervention in 'real life' circumstances was contingent on their free adoption and traversal of an unlimited array of cultural forms which had not traditionally been regarded as at the disposal of artists. In addition to his withdrawal from the economic life of Paris, the *flâneur* sought to undermine the increasingly systematic control of the city through anonymous disappearances into the crowds and the imaginative projection of past or alternative versions of the city onto the 'actual' urban environment.[78]

Although reference to the *flâneur* never appears in Situationist writings or in Constant's texts, similarities between the *dérive* and the wanderings of the *flâneur* have been noted by Sadler in *The Situationist City*, Tom McDonough in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International*, Hal Foster in *Design and Crime*, Raymond Lucas in his essay "'Taking a line for a walk': Walking as an Aesthetic Practice", Sadie Plant in *The Most Radical Gesture*, among

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[78] The distinction between the imagined and actual city is especially problematic in the case of the *flâneur*, a figure who actively sought to erase the perceptible boundary between fantastical and real urban environments. The use of narcotic drugs to facilitate this erasure was common amongst *flâneurs* (and, later, amongst Situationist drifters). Though literal intoxication was not a necessary condition for *flânerie*, Benjamin describes the *flâneur*'s aimless and compulsive drift through the city as an "anamnestic intoxication" (Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* 417).

several other scholars of the Situationist International.[79] However, before reading history of *flânerie* into the *dérive,* it is worthwhile to consider some of the features of Paris's urban history in relation to which the Situationists and the *flâneur* shared a critical stance.

The industrialisation of Paris in the mid-to late 1800s (the period during which *flâneur* culture emerged in the city) was characterised by significant changes to the urban environment under Baron George-Eugène Haussmann, the Prefect of the Seine region under Napoléon III from 1853-1882 (Panerai et al. 2–4). Haussmann's urban restructuring of Paris constituted the partial execution of a city plan devised by Napoléon III, which was geared towards maintaining political control and economic growth in the city. Most notably, this plan involved the destruction of the small enclaves and narrow streets that had become characteristic of many Parisian districts in order to make way for a network of *percées*, wide, piercing boulevards which cut across the city, connecting newly-built monumental buildings and public squares (Panerai et al. 12–).[80] Panerai et al. note that this restructuring had a triple aim: "to enhance the monuments by isolating them and making visual connections between them … to do away with unhealthy and degrading living conditions, and [to] establish modernity everywhere: space and light and easy connections between stations and districts" (Panerai et al.). Though ostensibly inspired by Classical aesthetics, which for Haussman encapsulated "the Beautiful, the Good, and all things great", his execution of Napoléon's plans for what was

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[79] The works cited here are considered key texts in scholarship either on the Situationist International or on the practice of walking in the context of art.

[80] The urban restructuring of Paris in the nineteenth century is attributed to Haussmann, and even referred to as the "Hassmannisation" of Paris as early as 1892, even though Haussmann was ostensibly merely carrying out Napoléon III's designs. Priscilla Ferguson suggests that this is because Napoléon had released Haussmann's predecessor, Berger, from the Prefecture of the Seine on the grounds that he had failed to execute the designs. When Haussmann took up the project, he did so with vigour and proposed enhancements to Napoléon's original designs that were further to facilitate the control and uniformity that Napoléon had hoped to establish (Ferguson 118-120).

widely referred to as “the new Paris” was bound up with his political and economic aims for the city (“*Confessions d’un lion devenu vieux*” quoted in Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* 11).

Samuels writes that Haussmann, prioritizing the development of Paris’s banking industry, courted financial investment for the urban renovation from the growing bourgeoisie, a class whose expansion in the mid-nineteenth century corresponded to that of the banking industry (Panerai et al. 2–3). In a section of the *The Arcades Project* in which Benjamin connects the emergence of the Parisian *flâneur* with Haussmann’s renovation of Paris, he writes that “the institutions of the bourgeoisie’s worldly and spiritual dominance were to find their apotheosis within the framework of the boulevards” (Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* 11). Aesthetically and socially, the boulevards “functioned like masks, hiding differences in social status, in districts, in activities” (Panerai et al. 8). They were “of a rigorous, almost monotonous, formal conformity: they overshadow[ed] the identity of the districts (the centre, the working-class east, the residential west) to the benefit of the global signifier of Paris, the capital city” (Panerai et al. 8). Additionally, as France succumbed to Prussia in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71), the boulevards became of strategic political importance to Haussmann, who saw the easy cross-city military access they facilitated as an essential defence against potential civil war.

Although, according to Benjamin, Haussmann detested “the rootless urban population” - the city’s street-drifters, the frequenters of its cafes and opium houses - his destruction of several of the urban residential *quartiers* resulted in the expansion of a placeless community (Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* 23). During the Paris Commune of 1871, those who had been displaced to the periphery of the city by Haussmann’s urban renovations were quick to align themselves with the Marxist and Anarchist groups which assumed control over Paris for a two month period (March 28 to May 28, 1871) following a workers' uprising at the end of the Franco-Prussian War (Shafer 46). The National Guard, the citizens' militia which established the Paris Commune, wanted political autonomy for the city, and aimed to protect several *quartiers* against occupation by French or Prussian armies by building large barricades across Haussmann's boulevards. This was in direct contravention of his political and military motives for constructing the boulevards as cross-city routes for access and visibility.

There is a clear affinity between the urbanist revolutionary sentiments which gave impetus to the Paris Commune and the Situationists' own revolutionary attitudes. Indeed, the Paris Commune is an important reference point for Debord, who maintains that it represents "the only implementation of a revolutionary urbanism to date – attacking on the spot the petrified signs of the dominant organization of life, understanding social space in political terms …" (Debord et al. 399). In the same document, he further suggests that the Commune represents a sound example of a revolutionary "experiment", from which the Situationists, but potentially also society at large, could draw inspiration. He writes: "It is time that we examine the Commune not just as an outmoded example of revolutionary primitivism, all of whose mistakes can be easily overcome, but as a positive experiment whose whole truth has yet to be rediscovered and fulfilled." (338). In a 1955 tract entitled "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography", Debord condemns Haussmann's Paris as "a city built by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing" (Guy Debord, "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography" 9).[81] With scorn, he describes the apparent triviality of contemporary urban concerns, identifying "present-day urbanism's main problem" as merely "ensuring the smooth circula-

[81] This is an appropriation of the words of Macbeth in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (V.v.26–28). Debord's comparison of Haussmann's Paris with Macbeth's "tale" of life, which is "told by an idiot…", is meant to suggest that Haussmann's reorientation of Paris ignorantly imposed an order on the city which sought to overwrite the significatory possibilities of the city's psychogeographic contours (Shakespeare 94).

tion of a rapidly increasing number of motor vehicles" (Guy Debord, "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography" 9). As an alternative to this utilitarian model of urban planning, he proposes that an ideal urbanism of the future would "undoubtedly apply itself to no less utilitarian projects, but in the rather different context of psychogeographical possibilities" (Guy Debord, "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography" 9). Debord envisions a city that at once benefits from the creative, emotional and sensory dimensions of urban experience (what he calls "psychogeographical possibilities") activated by the dérive, and constitutes an environment of social freedoms and utility without the potential spatial limitations imposed by a social infrastructure that prioritises productivity (Debord, "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography" 9).

The Situationists were unequivocal about the potential of the *dérive* as a route to socio-political transformation, even if the processes of the *dérive* were poorly accounted for. However, by the early 1960s the SI had abandoned the notion that fantastical scenarios, such as fictional environments in art and literature, had any place in their revolutionary project. Although Situationist literature does not make any direct references to comparative processes of imaginative sublimation in art and literature, the Situationists entertained a nostalgia for the social freedom exemplified in the act of *flânerie*, as well as for the 'lost' pedestrian Paris inhabited by the *flâneur*. More importantly, through the *dérive* the Situationist drifter would deliberately become disoriented, much like the *flâneur* would transform the city into phantasmagoria.

This hitherto aimless wandering acquires a sense of meaning and direction in the context of *New Babylon*: Constant's street drifter, unlike Baudelaire's or Benjamin's *flâneur*, seeks out and even values encounters with other individuals. For Constant, immersion in crowds is bound up with his aim in *New Babylon* that space should be used communally and that its isolating private uses should be abolished. He writes:

> Historically, the street was more than a mere traffic artery. Its additional function, which may have been more important than its role as a thoroughfare, was as a collective living space where all the public events … took place, as well as encounters and contacts between smaller numbers of individuals, in short, all of those activities that do not belong to the more intimate private domain. (Constant, "Unitary Urbanism" 233)

New Babylon sought to incorporate this model of the street throughout its different environments. This would be accomplished by the clear removal of traffic arteries from spaces for living and encountering others, and thus the removal of a significant reason for the avoidance, in conventional cities, of outdoor urban spaces during busy periods. With traffic excluded from the inhabited spaces of the city, there would be no distinction between a 'street' and the spaces in which one seeks refuge from it. Crucially, with the rearrangement of major urban elements such as transport conduits, work-spaces (and work) and private spaces, Constant proposes not only a conception of spatial arrangement drastically different from that which appears to be required in many existing urban centres, but also, as an inseparable consequence of this new arrangement, a different treatment of time. The illustration of this consequence is simple when, for example, one considers that in *New Babylon* there would be no period dedicated to labour, and, consequently, no differentiation of private and work-spaces on the basis of the time when one leaves and returns home. The concept of a fixed, private space that would serve as home would be replaced by a more public and transient mode of inhabiting space, in which New Babylonians would modify their immediate environment so as to facilitate rest or temporary privacy.

Constant further suggests that the variable light, temperature, sound, and other environmental qualities of *New Babylon* would disintegrate the sense of time to which we have become accustomed in existing cities. These changes in space and time affect each other, with extensions in space manifesting as extensions in time, and vice versa. Constant explains this as follows: "The introduction of the factor 'time' gives rise to a new dimension: because it is constantly changing, space - measured in terms of time - gets relatively larger; conversely, time - measured in terms of the experience of space - gets relatively longer" (Constant, "The Principle of Disorientation" 225). To return to an earlier instance of this motif, Constant's sense of *New Babylon*'s mutually flexing space and time is an application of Derrida's "temporization", "the becoming-space of time or the becoming-time of space", in an architectural sphere (Derrida, "Ousia and Grammē: Note on a Note from Being and Time" 13). In this respect, *New Babylon* shows its design elements and its resistance to restrictive urban conventions to be not only conducive to the *dérive*, but informed in large part by this practice, as if, as though (drawing on Constant's first suggested title for the project) *New Babylon* were made to reflect the activity and effects of the *dérive*. Through its disregard for the functional, and thus also the temporally determined, rules of a city, the *dérive* emphatically restated the co-extension of space and time as a discernible connection, available to experience.

1.9 Unitary Urbanism

This attempt to bring together space and time, as well as Constant's and the Situationists' shared goal of creating communal urban environments, is expressed in the final of the Situationists' three key principles, unitary urbanism. The concept was first publicly introduced in Jorn's address to the First World Congress in June 1956. However, the phrase "unitary urbanism" had been in circulation prior to the First World Congress, and indeed owes much in its subsequent expression to Ivan Chtcheglov's 1953 text "Formulary for a New Urbanism". Here Chtcheglov anticipates "a new architecture" based on "- A new conception of space …. - A new conception of time (counting from zero, various modes of temporal development). - A new conception of behaviours (moral, sociological, political, legal; economy is only a part of the laws of behaviour accepted by a civilisation)" (Chtcheglov, 3) . According to Wigley's account of the formation of the SI in his introduction to *Constant's New Babylon,* the First World Congress was the context in which the concept of unitary urbanism, and indeed the term itself, was solidified. Delegates from the Letterist International and the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus, amongst others,[82] cite unitary urbanism as the basis on which their groups would henceforth form a united movement henceforth, an alliance which would become the Situationist International (Knabb, "The Alba Platform" 21).

Constant's role in the SI's development of the concept and application of unitary urbanism is emphatically stated in a 1959 text by Debord titled "Constant and the Path of Unitary Urbanism". Originally intended as an introduction to a monograph on Constant's plexiglass

[82] According to the Letterist International's record of The First World Congress, "The Alba Platform", "representatives of avant-garde groups from eight countries (Algeria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, France, Great Britain, Holland, Italy)" were in attendance (Knabb, "The Alba Platform" 21).

models,[83] the text describes these works as “scattered elements on the path toward a future construction of ambiences, a unitary urbanism” (Guy Debord, “Constant and the Path of Unitary Urbanism,” para.3). This notion, and its articulation through Constant’s models, is seen as “a turning point in the history of social practice” (Guy Debord, “Constant and the Path of Unitary Urbanism” 6).[84] Debord thus regards the models as harbingers of change at a societal level, rather than merely as illustrations of an idea. This is in keeping with Constant’s conception of *New Babylon* as “the creation of a new way of life”, spanning objects, actions, relations and social structures (Constant, “New Urbanism” 169). Well into the 1960s Constant employs the concept of unitary urbanism, though without reference to the SI, to describe the ambit of *New Babylon* and its underlying principles.

In his short article “Situationist Theses on Traffic”, published in December 1959, Debord writes that “unitary urbanism acknowledges no boundaries; it aims to form an integrated human milieu in which separations such as work/leisure or public/private will finally be dissolved. … The minimum action of unitary urbanism is to extend the terrain of play to all desirable constructions” (G. Debord 69). Unitary urbanism was put forward as both a critique of and an alternative to postwar urban planning and reconstruction throughout Central and Western Europe, but it aimed beyond the immediate urban context of Situationist artists as well. Unitary urbanism was intended to be globally applicable (just as the envisaged reach of New Babylon was global). Through revolutionising societal consciousness of urban spatiality, it would eventually change the individualistic and acquisitive “habits of thought and be-

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83 See Debord’s letter to Constant, Monday 26 January, 1959, n.1 (translator’s note).

84 The resonance of *New Babylon* with contemporary forms of art as “social practice” is discussed in Chapter Three, pp. 251–58.

haviour" endemic to modern capitalist cities (Guy Debord, "Constant and the Path of Unitary Urbanism," para.1).

Constant's polemic "Another City for Another Life", also published in *Internationale Situationniste* No. 3, was important in establishing some of the foundational principles of unitary urbanism and justifying its implementation in response to the perception of a "worsening" "crisis in urbanism" (Constant, "Another City for Another Life (I)" 115). In this piece, Constant writes that unitary urbanism is a social "conception of urbanism" (Constant, "Another City for Another Life (I)" 115), whose proponents must be "opposed to the conception of a *ville verte*, a 'greened town' where well-spaced and isolated skyscrapers must necessarily reduce the direct relations and common action of men" (Constant, "Another City for Another Life (I)" 115). The Situationist spatial ideal accordingly prioritised the communal possession and occupation of urban spaces. Individualism, whether creative, spatial or otherwise, was viewed as a condition to be stamped out, a social product of capitalism that was antithetical to the movement's goal of a revolution in the uses of space. Such a revolution would inevitably require the demise, or at least the questioning, of boundaries between public and private space, a critical position that emerges strongly in *New Babylon*, in which temporary environments for rest or intimate engagement would replace fixed, private spaces. In a self-interview published in *Opus International* in 1971, Constant explains the allocation of these sorts of temporary environments as an alternative to designated private spaces. Here he responds to the anticipated claim that "from time to time everyone feels the need to be alone: to isolate themselves, to make love, rest, or in the case of illness" (Constant, "On Traveling" 212), as follows:

> It is present day society which really obliges us to isolate ourselves. It imposes solitude on us through the lack of communication. But communication is the first requirement of creativity. … Of course in New Babylon an individual can easily manage to retreat temporarily, just in any other system of urbanization. (Constant, "On Traveling" 212)

In a speech given at the opening of Amsterdam's Schipol Airport in 1966, Constant went so far as to suggest that humankind was engaged in such a process of evolution that the need to rest would no longer occur for those who lived in cities. In his words, "Sedentary man is dying out: we are becoming nomads once more, wandering over the earth, not looking for rest but for dynamic motion" (Constant, "On Traveling" 200). Within a short period following his first pronouncements on unitary urbanism, Constant altogether rejected divisions in the uses of urban space, insisting that such divisions unnecessarily restricted the range of possible ways of inhabiting space. In the short text "New Urbanism," published in the journal *Provo* in May 1966, he articulated a critique of modernist architecture which had been implicit in his own practice and in Situationist urban theory since the movement's inception: "Town planners and architects still tend to think in terms of the four functions of the city as defined by Le Corbusier in 1933: living, working, traffic and recreation," he writes (Constant, "New Urbanism" 168). "This over-simplification reflects opportunism rather than insight into and appreciation of what people actually want today, with the result that the city is becoming obsolete" (Constant, "New Urbanism" 168). In Paul Hammond's translation of the text on which "New Urbanism" is possibly based, "Another City for Another Life",[85]Constant reminds his critics that "once the functions [of New Babylon] are established, play will succeed them" (Constant, "Another City for Another Life (I)" 115). In other words, although a basic operational structure would need to be established, the mechanical self-maintenance of New Babylon would ensure that thereafter this structure would not impose limitations on citizens. These texts ("New Urbanism" and "On Traveling") and Constant's "Autodalogue" of course appeared later than the articulation of the concept of unitary urbanism for the Situationists. What their citation here shows, however, is the consistency with which Constant pursued the ideal of a communal, dynamic urban space, long after its inception during the time of his association with the SI.

In response to the privatisation of space in contemporary cities, the application of unitary urbanism was intended as corrective, a remedy to existing urban planning, with its isolating "cemeteries of reinforced concrete" (Constant, "Another City for Another Life" (I) 115). These "cemeteries" obstructed not only communalism, but also pleasure, "interest" and intellectual stimulation in the urban environment (Constant, "Another City for Another Life" (I) 115). The Situationists especially saw the tendency of modern urban planning to encourage the private use of space, in particular, as a type of insidious mass-control of the movement

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[85] An example of the subtly distinct attitudes in Knabb's and Hammond's translations of Constant's "Another City of Another Life" is evident in the following versions of the same sentence:

1. (Knabb) "The newly built neighbourhoods have only two all-pervasive themes: automobile traffic and household comfort – an impoverished expression of bourgeoisie contentment, lacking any sense of play" ((Constant, "Another City for Another Life" (II) 71).
2. (Hammond) "The newly-constructed neighbourhoods have but two motifs which dominate everything: driving by car and comfort at home. They are the abject expression of bourgeoisie well-being, and all ludic preoccupations are absent from them" (Constant, "Another City for Another Life" (I) 116).

Hammond's translation treats the "all-pervasive themes" of Knabb's translation merely as motifs, or observed tendencies, which are "dominant", but not necessarily "all-pervasive". His description of bourgeois well-being as "abject" (as opposed to Knabb's "impoverished") probably better expresses the repugnance which this cultural orientation incited in the Situationists.

and aesthetic experiences of people living in cities. In a tract published in *Internationale Situationniste* in 1961, Attila Kotányi and Raoul Vaneigem, who together with Constant (prior to his resignation from the movement) sat on the "Bureau for Unitary Urbanism",[86] wrote that city planning constitutes "a blackmail of utility" by dissuading any critical or expressive engagement of the public with urban architecture on the basis that it fulfils certain essential functions (Kotányi and Vaneigem, para.3). The city plan is the ultimate social hegemony, they continue: "The development of the urban milieu … represents the choice of one particular materialization, to the exclusion of other possibilities" (Kotányi and Vaneigem, para. 2). This document, in which Debord had an editorial hand, preempted his own critique of urban capitalism in *Society of the Spectacle*, in which he contends, like Kotányi and Vaneigem in the first item of the "Basic Program", that "modern capitalism" reduces "all social life to a spectacle" (Kotányi and Vaneigem, para. 1). *Society of the Spectacle* locates the "spectacle" as an existential distancing of oneself from a state of 'lived reality',[87] or "a world vision which has become objectified", replacing reality with the representation of reality (Guy Debord, *Society Of The Spectacle*, sec. 5).[88] This idea prefigures Jean Baudrillard's concept of the "hyperreal", which he defines in *Simulacrum and Simulation* as "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality" (Baudrillard 1). This simulated 'reality' experientially precedes what one might be inclined to call 'genuine reality'; however, through this primary displacement, the possibility of '*genuine'* (i.e. not simulated) 'reality' is fundamentally under-

[86] The Bureau of Unitary Urbanism was founded in 1959 and based in Amsterdam.

[87] As has been suggested, the Situationists' and Constant's rather vague reference to a concept of "reality" requires interrogation. Though no attempt is made in their own texts to clarify their use of the terms "real" or "reality", the poor definition of these concepts introduces a philosophical problem right into the heart of New Babylon's conceptual content, which hinges on the nature of the work's status as both imaginary (in some sense) and "real", or with manifestations that seem at least to be plainly perceivable alongside other objects.

[88] Although *Society of the Spectacle* was published only in 1967, its central ideas were in formation already at the inception of the SI.

mined. For the Situationists, an essential consequence of this displacement of reality by its imitation is the displacement on interpersonal relations. As Debord writes, “The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images” (Guy Debord, *Society Of The Spectacle* 4). Crucial to both *Society of the Spectacle* and Kotànyi and Vaneigem’s “Basic Programme" is the contention that what they perceived to be the controlling and aesthetically impoverishing effects of modern city planning instigated a relational dynamic of alienation, rather than community, amongst urban citizens.

Without reasonable grounds, the Situationists tend to associate individualism and capitalism with a compromised state of reality – the “spectacle” – and collective activity. The invocation of the concepts of reality and unreality in this instance is misleading, since their use here is aimed at justifying the ascription of contrasting moral values to capitalist- and Marxist-derived social arrangements; Constant treats such concepts differently in relation to New Babylon’s ontological nature. As if in a hasty adoption of utilitarian reasoning, *Society of the Spectacle* aligns proximity to ‘reality’ with that which ought to be the case, inflecting the notion of correlation to reality with a moral tone. Accordingly, the distance taken from reality – or the misleading imitation of reality – through the spectacle, becomes undesirable because of the moral value spuriously loaded onto the word “reality”. Therefore, for the Situationists, the question of reality in relation to their work as artist-activists is not truthfully a question of metaphysics or ontology – as it is for Constant regarding *New Babylon* – but a misappropriation of an issue of significant philosophical consequence for normative moral ends.

What is in fact in play in the Situationists’ abuse of the concept of reality is an effect of the embedded Marxist ideology, or what Derrida calls a Marxist “critical inheritance”, in their position regarding a dominant, capitalist culture and the privatization of space and possessions (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 68). The grounding of Situationist ideology in a critique of a social and philosophical system in terms of its dominance of other subordinatedsystems, positions it as "a form of critical analysis inherited from Marxism" (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 68). With this inherited voice, "one may… speak of a dominant discourse and dominant representations and ideas, and refer in this way to a hierarchized and conflictual field without necessarily subscribing to the concept of social class by means of which Marx so often determined … the forces that are fighting for control of the hegemony" (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 69). In addition to their stated discursive position in relation to this "conflictual field", the Situationists enacted their opposition to 'dominant culture' through the *détournement* – or appropriation, modification and repurposing – of textual and visual material already in circulation. This is exemplified by Debord and Jorn's collaged psychogeographic maps, which represent the desire eventually to '*détourn*' entire urban environments. MacKenzie Wark and Ali Dur, in their essay "New New Babylon", published in *October* no.138 (Fall 2011), write that *détournement* establishes the Marxist resonance of Situationist ideology since it

> treats all of culture as common property to begin with, and openly declares its rights. Moreover, it treats media not as a "creative commons," not as the wealth of networks, not as free culture or remix culture. Rather, media is an active place of challenge, agency, strategy, and conflict. Détournement dissolves the rituals of knowledge in an active remembering that calls collective being into existence. If all property is theft, then intellectual property finds itself reappropriated in turn via détournement. (Dur and Wark 40)

As a development of this principle, *New Babylon*, they argue, is a *détournement* "of modern architecture and town planning" since "[r]ather than demolish the old world to build a radiant city, Constant cantilevers new spaces up above" (41). This is not an altogether accurate reflection of how Constant envisaged the relationship between *New Babylon* and the cities that predate it. Although *New Babylon* was proposed as a network of structures that would be constructed above preexisting cities, rather than replacing them at ground level, Constant did not seek to appropriate and change existing urban forms, as the Situationists explicitly did with their *détourned* material, but rather to invent an entirely new urban form.[89] Thus, though critically-informed in ways comparable to the Situationists' use of detournement, *New Babylon* represents an attempt on Constant's part to distance himself from the dialectics of opposition through which the Situationists perpetually adopted the mantle of the avant-garde, placing their activities always in opposition to an established, unsatisfactory aesthetic and political order.

While the Situationists lacked a "[suspicion] of the simple opposition of dominant and dominated, … or even, more radically, of the idea that force is always stronger than weakness…" (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 68), Constant progressively distanced himself from this activist stance, removing from his discursive development of New Babylon any suggestion of an oppressor, or a dominant force presiding in such a way that a 'dominated' victim is created. Instead, Constant's sense of the revolutionary regarding *New Babylon* increasingly posited the possibility that new aesthetic forms and opportunities for creative activity could be interleaved, in a mutually productive way, with the development of new ideas. This would

[89] This was Constant's intention, as repeatedly stated in texts and presentations related to New Babylon. That his 'new' urban forms do not derive from material already in circulation, particularly amongst other twentieth-century architects who had been developing projects on imaginary and futuristic cities, is a claim that would be difficult to support.

eventually lead to new ways of social being. To distinguish his own position from both politically devout and critically aggressive Marxist orientations, Constant referred to himself as a "Marxian", rather than a Marxist (Obrist 170). Though it comes years after the Situationists' tacit appeal to Marxist principles, Constant's differentiation of his own "Marxianism" is helpful in introducing the possibility of positions (such as the Situationists' and his own) that echo the most salient tenets of Marxism without explicitly engaging with that ideology in detail. Though perhaps historically remiss, Constant's percolated version of Marxism had support from the Situationists' contemporaries in the intellectual field, most notably Lefebvre, who introduces the term "Marxian" into *The Sociology of Marx* (1968). According to Lefebvre, the term signals "'a new reading of Marx'…, not another 'interpretation', but first and foremost an attempt to reconstruct Marx's original thought" in view of "the divergences and contradictions that have marked the development of 'Marxist' thought in our time" (Lefebvre, *The Sociology of Marx* 3).

Constant's insistence on this differentiation orients his approach to Marxist ideas as one which relies on the percolation of these ideas into culture, rather than on their 'original' or doctrinal manifestations. His position within a Marxist "critical inheritance" should therefore be seen as distinct from the Situationists' proprietary use of material in circulation and their invocation of a dialectic between the dominant and the dominated, since for Constant this political orientation is generative rather than merely subversive.

1.10 Conclusion

Constant's professed Marxianism, his complicated entanglement with the SI, and his often recursive construction of the narrative of *New Babylon* represent a sometimes unwitting engagement with the structures and ideological formalism of the modern avant-garde. However, these same tendencies undermine efforts firmly to locate *New Babylon* historically, whether as an outworking of the Situationists' artistic avant-gardism or as a revolutionary architectural project.

Other authors, most notably Sadler, McDonough and Plant, tell this history from the perspective of the Situationists, a position strongly informed by Debord's writing and personal views. Though the Situationist narrative, and indeed Debord's words and personality, are inescapable in the writing of *New Babylon*'s history, this chapter has proposed a critical revision of the relationship between *New Babylon* and the SI. In particular, the chapter has sought out trails of conceptual and thematic commonality between foundational principles of the SI – the *dérive*, psychogeography and unitary urbanism – and the chronological foundations of *New Babylon,* in order to underscore a complex system of mutual influence. This account replaces the more established narrative of Situationist dominance, in which *New Babylon* is purported merely to illustrate these concepts.

The association of *New Babylon* with the Situationist International is not meant to entrench any suggestion that *New Babylon* merely illustrates Situationist ideas, or that the history of the SI has any proprietary claim to *New Babylon*. On the contrary, as I have argued in this chapter, the relationship between the SI and *New Babylon* is one of momentary, albeit formative, affinity, which hinges on shared philosophical and ideological resonances, rather than on historical entitlement.

Chapter Two

Really impossible: the question of reality in *New Babylon*

2.1 Introduction

Constant's perspective on the feasibility of *New Babylon* as what one might call a 'real' architectural undertaking vacillated over the years during which he dedicated himself to the project. His retrospective, and perhaps ultimate, view on the matter, which he expressed in the 1999 interview with Obrist, was that this endeavour was never intended to be realised at the level of urban restructuring. He maintained instead that throughout the phases of his exploration of the project, it was meant as an hypothesis for a model of urban planning potentially to be practised in the future (Obrist 165). While this contradicts very early claims, which seem to advocate for the practical viability of *New Babylon,* it also foregrounds the need to address the complexity of *New Babylon* as a work made to interface with actual states of affairs and objects while retaining an ontological status somehow distinct from them. For even if Constant acknowledged that *New Babylon* could not be built on an inhabitable scale and that it would not replace existing cities with rhizomatic and malleable urban networks, he clearly intended the work to have some import for, and influence on, “the world in which we live” (Constant, “New Babylon – Ten Years On” 232). In other words, he distinguishes the work from existing urban environments – that which he elsewhere calls “existing reality” – in some respects and not in others (Constant, “New Babylon – Ten Years On” 236). In turn, the terms in which these distinctions are presented are, in turn, themselves only poorly defined, when they are defined at all, in Constant’s discursive writings. For instance, in “New Babylon – Ten Years On” (1980), he uses the word “reality” to refer to a material, perceivable state of affairs, indeed “the world in which we live”. However, in “Unitary Urbanism” (1960), his use of the same word refers to an ideal condition that has become disconnected from the material sphere, such that the actual, or that which appears to constitute “the world in which we live”, falls short of the real (Constant, “Unitary Urbanism” 132).

These ambiguities warrant scrutiny of the concepts of reality, actuality, unreality, possibility, impossibility and the imaginary, as they are used with reference to *New Babylon.* Constant’s pronouncement of the impracticability of the work raises several important questions about the nature of its apparent impossibility, the relationship of the work to some conception of actuality and the temporality of the ‘future’ in which its realisation is placed. This chapter explores *New Babylon*’s relation to reality through a discussion of positions that seem to be explored in, or could be read into, the work, as well as existing philosophical approaches to the modality of possibility (and impossibility), and to modal interpretations of works of the imagination, such as fiction and artworks. After examining the concepts of actuality, possibility and impossibility as they are implied in Constant’s discussions and presentations of New Babylon at different periods of the project, the chapter goes on to consider several pertinent theoretical accounts of possibility and impossibility as a route towards a clearer understanding of the complex and sometimes contradictory ontological structure of *New Babylon.*

Central to this discussion is the well-known philosophical model of possible worlds, a construct used in philosophy to analyse the modality of various propositions and scenarios in relation to a pre-established conception of reality or actuality.[90] Constant's representation of New Babylon as a spatial *milieu* fabricated in contrast to a particular world system, or a state of affairs assumed to be held in common by the subjects who inhabit it, suggests an affinity between his understanding of *New Babylon* as a world system and the possible worlds discourse native to the discipline of philosophy. Pursuing this affinity, this chapter looks at the motif of possible worlds, and then at more complex accounts of possibility and impossibility as presented by Heidegger and Derrida, so as to illuminate the relationship of *New Babylon* to selected notions of the real. *New Babylon* at once invites and confounds comparison with "possible worlds" constructs, challenging both the tendency to distinguish clearly between the possible, the impossible and the actual, and the identification of discretely contained worlds. This chapter will argue that *New Babylon* instantiates a complex state of possibility-as-impossibility, which in some ways makes sense of Constant's sporadic oscillation between contradictory claims for the possibility and impossibility of *New Babylon*. This "aporetic" modality "puts to test a *passage,* both an impossible and a necessary passage", that carves a space in modal discourse for that which presents an impasse to conceptualisation (and an im-

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[90] As I will argue in this chapter, reality and actuality are not interchangeable concepts, as the notion of actuality – a perceived state of affairs – does not entail that of reality. In other words, that which one perceives to be actual, or to exist materially, may not in fact be 'real', or may not in fact exist materially. Different theses of reality would exclude material existence as a quantifier of reality. Although Constant does not define his use of these concepts, it is clear from the two contradictory uses of the word "reality" cited above that he associates the term varyingly with a physical state of affairs and with an ideal. At this stage it should suffice to note the terms "real" and "actual" are not interchangeable.

passe of translation from experience to conceptualisation) (Derrida, *Aporias* 17). Though re-current in Derrida's writing, this paradoxical modality is foregrounded in the text *Aporias,* which I will discuss in relation to New Babylon later in this chapter.

Additionally, this chapter will develop the discussion of historicity introduced in Chapter One, examining the relationship between the patently philosophical question outlined above and the historicisation of *New Babylon* as a modernist work – that is, a work that participates in modern art's defining methodology of reviewing and re-visioning its political, social and aesthetic circumstances. I will discuss this aspect through Rosalind Krauss's critique of Minimalist art as contradictorily pursuant of imagined alternatives to the capitalist labourer-subject and complicit in capitalist modes of production. As a work that preempts Minimalism's investment in architectural spatiality and materials, *New Babylon* shares with the Minimalist works which Krauss discusses a conflicted attempt to propose an imaginative and ideological alternative to those material circumstances in which an artwork is thoroughly imbricated. In this case, Constant's distinction between the ideological and the material, and the implosion of this distinction, benefits from comparison with Althusser's development of Marxist materialism in his "Essays on Ideology". In the latter, Althusser understands "ideology" as the subject's imagined relationship to a real world of material circumstances. Constant's thinking is characterised by an analogue of this construct, in which he distinguishes between present-day circumstances (here the equivalent of materialist reality), and a radically different, even fantastical, alternative to these, which is represented in *New Babylon*. The historical grounding of this ontological problem echoes Heidegger's argument in *Being and Time* that it is inevitable that "inquiry into Being … is itself characterized by historicity" (Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings* 64). The temporal complexities suggested in Althusser and Derrida's treatments of Marxist philosophy, which are introduced in this section, are developed later in the chapter through Heidegger's understanding of the necessarily temporal nature of Dasein. According to the latter, "*the central range of problems of all ontology is rooted in the phenomenon of time correctly viewed and correctly explained*" (Martin Heidegger*, Basic Writings* 61, italics in the original*)*. Despite the difficulty of accurately viewing and explaining time, an acknowledgement of the temporal embedding of ontological questions is important in reading the shifts in Constant's understanding of the nature of *New Babylon.*

2.2 Constant and the future of *New Babylon*'s history

A chronological sample of Constant's utterances on the ontological nature of *New Babylon*, (see pp. 132–36) demonstrates that his position on *New Babylon*'s feasibility and relation to reality modulates over time. In using the term "ontological" to specify the sense in which the nature of *New Babylon* posed a dilemma for Constant, I refer to his recurring difficulty in defining the type of entity *New Babylon* is, or could potentially be. This follows the widely-held understanding in philosophy that ontology is the study of what exists or 'is' (rather than addressing the qualities certain existing things possess).[91] The question of how *New Babylon* would manifest itself, if at all, and the boundaries of *New Babylon as a work* emerge as unresolved problems throughout Constant's writings, both published and unpublished. It is precisely through the persistence of this problem that *New Babylon* presents a compelling coun-

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[91] In the first chapter of *Ontology, Identity, and Modality: Essays in Metaphysics,* Peter van Inwagen argues that existence and being are identical concepts, and that they are, interchangeably, the chief subject of ontological enquiry (13–15). That the concerns of ontological enquiry are more complicated than van Inwagen seems to suggest is clear in Heidegger's more cautious definition of ontology, in *Ontology – The Hermeneutics of Facticity,* ontology*,* he states, "refer[s] to a questioning and defining which is directed to being as such. Which sort of being (Sein) is to be questioned after and defined and how this is to be done remain utterly indefinite" (Heidegger, *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity* 1).

terpoint not only to historically dominant philosophical conceptions of the artwork, but also to the construction of art historical narratives as logical sequences of premeditated successes. Although Derrida's concept of *différance* informs, and is elaborated more fully in, other sections of this thesis, it is worthwhile to recall at this point that the essay *"Différance*" is acutely concerned with the consequences of the process of *différance* for 'beingness'. Derrida writes, "It is the domination of beings that *différance* everywhere comes to solicit, in the sense that *solicitaire,* in the old Latin, means to shake as a whole, to make tremble in entirety" (21). *Différance* does not dispose of ontological questions, or simply displace them in favour of questions of linguistic meaning,[92] but rather "shakes" ontology, and destabilises the notion of being through an opening, or invitation (solicitation), to that which the concept excludes.

As this chapter attempts to negotiate how concepts of reality and unreality are employed in Constant's written and artistic works, it will be necessary to establish terms of reference that are relevant to the particularities of how these concepts are addressed in his production. Specifically, the representation of *New Babylon's* relationship to reality both modulates over time and is characterised by a temporal orientation, in that Constant often suggests that the work could be 'real', or rather, realised, in the future. Therefore, this discussion must attempt to approach a concept of reality which accommodates temporality. This would exclude, for example, a definition of reality based on propositional logic, or analytic *a priori* truths (such as the common philosophical illustration that the tautology "All bachelors are unmarried men" is true because the concept of an unmarried man is entailed in that of a bachelor).

[92] The use of "*Différance"* predominantly in literary theory has contributed to a widely held misconception that the reach of the concept is exhausted with its effects on linguistic meaning. While language is the subject of important passages in the essay, Derrida, like Heidegger, takes the analysis of language to be inextricably connected with that of ontology.

Rather, Constant seems to be attributing to *New Babylon* the potential to exist in a way other than it already appears to exist, as a series of artworks. He suggests that in becoming 'real', *New Babylon* would graduate from having been an idea represented in models and drawings to being an entity that exists not merely ideally, or as an imaginary thing, but as a physical entity. Thus, for him, the concept of reality seems to entail that of existence and that of physicality.

Outside the realms of purely mathematical and propositional logic - where the conditions and definitions of metaphysical truth take precedence - the concept of reality often interfaces with theories of existence. The subject matter of ontology is precisely the question of what it means for something to be, or to exist. Thus, even when the boundaries between philosophical genres are upheld, ontology and metaphysics overlap at the point at which both must articulate the parameters according to which things exist or fail to exist. Constant's most thoroughgoing enquiry in his theorisation of and experiments with *New Babylon* is focused on this interstice, even if the language of philosophy is not used by the artist himself. Through *New Babylon* Constant tests the philosophical boundaries and consequences of several of the most prominent motifs in the canon of European modernist urbanism and art: utopianism, the relationship between materiality and event, the manifestation of the political in cultural expressions, and the reinvention of societies. As was argued in Chapter One, the ascription of the designation "modernist" is useful insofar as it, on the one hand, refers to a category of artworks and artists about which there is at least some assent, and on the other, reveals a concern with temporality that introduces the possibility of complex temporal structures in relation to history and experience. The latter, as well as the motifs just mentioned, are underscored by the philosophical question of the nature of the relationship between art and reality, or more specifically, the question of art's perceived or intentional participation in or deviation from that which is nominated as 'reality'. This question, in turn, refracts into the shared territory of Western metaphysics and ontology.

While several respected analytic philosophers have attempted explicitly to provide an account of the relationship between art and reality, the most notable of whom include Nicholas Wolterstorff, Arthur C. Danto and Nelson Goodman (following Immanuel Kant's foundational work in this area in the *Critique of Judgement*), there has been little room for consideration in Western philosophy of artworks from the second half of the twentieth century, as these tend to find resonance rather with so-called Continental philosophy, post-structuralist theory, and contemporary writings in the Continental tradition. In the context of critical enquiries into twentieth century art, many of which directly engage themes, assumptions and methods important in both the analytic and the Continental traditions, the boundaries between these philosophical orientations are largely artificial. And yet seldom, even in writing on art, are these discursive territories allowed to overlap or "contaminat[e]" each other (Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy" 149).[93] The selection of citations below, all of which are taken from the most widely disseminated of Constant's published texts, shows Constant's preoccupation with the relationship between art and reality. Fundamental to my engagement with this focus is a philosophical approach that draws on explorations of art and reality in both the analytic and the Continental traditions.

93 Derrida uses the term "contamination" to describe the incursion of poetry into philosophy through the appearance of supposedly impure metaphorical language in the supposedly pure discourse of philosophy. In "Plato's Pharmacy", he writes that, "Metaphoricity is the logic of contamination and the contamination of logic" (149).

In his 1959 introduction to *New Babylon* (before a title had been given to the project) Constant provides a simple account of the practical feasibility of a city of leisure and absolute flexibility, and then declares, “If the project we have just traced out in bold strokes risks being taken for a fantastic dream, we insist on the fact that it is feasible from the technical point of view, that it is desirable from the human point of view, that it will become indispensable from the social point of view” (Constant, “Another City for Another Life (I)” 116). In his presentation of a report on the founding of the Bureau for Unitary Urbanism in December 1959, Constant indicates that the Bureau’s aim is to devise “real proposals” for “the propagation of Unitary Urbanism” (Constant, “Inaugural Report to the Munich Conference” 101). More equivocally, in a December 1960 lecture on Unitary Urbanism at the Stedelijk Museum, Constant states:

> As I was under no obligation to adapt my city to given socio-economic conditions, an obligation that has wrecked the plans of modern urbanists, I have reversed the roles and painted my city against the background of a society based on freedom. … I have excluded everything that prevents a city from becoming a work of art. Nonetheless New Babylon is as real as any work of art. In essence it is the realization of an old dream, a dream that figures in all tendencies, all movements, all endeavours in the history of art this century, and which, in its simplest form, one could refer to by its Wagnerian name: das Gesamtkunstwerk, the total work of art. (Constant, “Unitary Urbanism” 135)

According to this statement, which seems to maintain that art and reality are conceptually distinct and perhaps mutually exclusive terms, Constant suggests that approaching *New Babylon* as an artwork, rather than an architectural project, may provide the impetus for a radical societal shift. His ambiguous claim that he has “excluded” from his design “everything that prevents a city from becoming a work of art”, while unclear about precisely what elements are excluded, implies, firstly, the prevailing distinction in Constant’s thinking between art and an actual state of affairs, and, secondly, a belief in the capacity of art to bring about a definitive detour from that state of affairs. His subsequent claim that *New Babylon* is “as real as any work of art” seems to contradict his position on the ordinary separation of art from everyday life. However, read in the context of the sentence which follows, Constant’s assertion is probably meant to align *New Babylon* with the canon of modern art, which he perceives as preoccupied with the “dream” of a universal or ‘total’ work of art. This idea is reiterated in his association of *New Babylon* with the Wagnerian notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk.* For Wagner, the term had very particular connotations in the context of operatic and orchestral performances, in which the combination of diverse musical and visual elements would present the viewer with a totally encompassing sensory experience.

Such an experience would be grounded in a semiotic, extra-intellectual language of the senses; in this regard, Wagner considered it the ultimate and universalising objective of the arts (Weiner 23–24). Wagner thus envisaged the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as achieving a future-oriented trajectory of art, since the universality of the “orchestral language” of the Gesamtkunstwerk would create a unity of sensation calculated to bring about a revolution of shared consciousness. (Weiner 21–22). This aspect of Wagner’s ideology resonated with the utopian and universalist ideas informing the work of a number of important modern architects. Frank Lloyd Wright and Antonio Gaudi both admired Wagner’s concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and imported the concept in comparative explanations of their own approaches to architecture;[94] hence, Constant's appropriation of the Wagnerian comparison is not without precedent.

At the time of Constant's December 1960 lecture at the Stedelijk, he had not yet abandoned the notion of *New Babylon*'s practical feasibility, despite his increasingly tentative and equivocal position. However, by 1964, he had solidified his formerly ambivalent construal of *New Babylon* as a work of art. In a lecture given at the Royal Academy of Copenhagen in 1964, he resolutely asserted the fantastical nature of the content of artworks, a quality that he opposed to a notion of 'the real' supposedly held in common. In this lecture he states: "New Babylon, in its present form, is, still like a work of art, nothing but a suggestion" (quoted in Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon* 67). The following year, he reiterates this point in a letter to the English artist Anthony Hill, stating that *New Babylon* is a work of art insofar as it represents "the fantastication of reality" (quoted in Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon* 67). In both statements Constant implicitly retracts his earlier belief in *New Babylon*'s purchase in reality, replacing it with an implicit claim for *New Babylon's* analogical relation to a potential future city. His identification of *New Babylon* with a work of art on the basis that it is "a fantastication of re-

[94] Lloyd Wright would design homes in their totality, including interior furnishings, envisaging them as comprehensive psychological portraits of his clients. The term "gesamtkunstwerk" is often used to describe Lloyd Wright's holistic considerations in home design (Alofsin 33). Similarly, Gaudi's building design extended to interiors and furniture. While both Lloyd Wright and Gaudi conceived of their designs as materially and physically exhaustive, in that no functional physical elements of their projects were left un-designed, their visions of total design did not extend to the expanded sensory, social, and philosophical dimensions that New Babylon takes into account. A similarly totalising approach to architecture was pursued by Le Corbusier, whose prototype *Unité d'Habitation,* built in Marseille between 1947 and 1952 (and named *Cité Radieuse*), attempted to contain all social and lifestyle operations within a single building. This model for a contained lifestyle and housing unit was subsequently applied to several French cities in need of urban regeneration after the Second World War. Le Corbusier's *Unité* concept was vulnerable to criticism from several quarters in view of its containment and isolation of functions that would previously have required the use or traversal of public spaces. For example, open shopping boulevards were replaced by a contained mall, enclosed by interior boulevards and residential apartments (Sherwood, 109). The *Unité* was frequently cited by the SI, and, before them, the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus and CoBrA, as one of the twentieth century's great urban travesties (Sadler, 50 and Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon*, 35). In a 1954 edition of *Potlatch*, Le Corbusier's work is dismissed as "nothing more than a regression *en masse* to the old, not properly interred world of Christianity" (Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon* 35).

ality" suggests that for him the notion of fantasy entails a complex relation to the real. His statement implies that in the case of the work of art, fantasy at once deviates from and exceeds reality, as well as feeding on it in the construction of a representation of an apparently unreal state of affairs. Fantasy combines and moves between metaphysical modalities. In a similar way, according to Brian McHale, "In a fantastic text, metaphoric tropes can become literal and can go back again to a metaphoric function. This mixes the ontologies" (McHale 135).

In the 1980 lecture "New Babylon – Ten Years On" Constant clearly reiterates his distancing from concerns with *New Babylon*'s practical feasibility. He states that since it is "difficult to populate this world with people who live so very differently from ourselves … we can only invoke our fantasy and switch from science to art" (Constant, "New Babylon – Ten Years On" 236). He continues, "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" (236). Though perhaps unscrutinised, his shift in medium, following the shift in his position regarding *New Babylon*'s feasibility, concurs with his earlier associations of architecture with manifestations in what he takes to be the real world, and of art with that which is not real. What is curious, however, is that his shift to painting and drawing on this basis implicitly exalts these media as the most effective conduits for the "fantastication of reality" which art effects.

Finally in 1999, Constant denies unequivocally that New Babylon was ever intended to be realised, stating:

> I've never done things in order to carry them out.[95] My interest in urban planning - initially architecture, followed by urban planning – was as an artist. (Obrist 167–168)

> I don't consider New Babylon to be an architectural project - not in the slightest. In my eyes, it is an illustration done by an artist – a painter or a sculptor – the illustration of an idea. (Obrist 169)

In response to Obrist's question, "Do you still think that *New Babylon* is an inapplicable model?", Constant says, "Yes. I always said that *New Babylon* would be created by 'New Babylonians'. … How is one supposed to imagine an architectural project adapted to a way of life that is yet to be invented?" (169).[96]

In these late statements Constant, once again, distinguishes between architecture and art as disciplines seemingly concerned with reality and fantasy respectively. However, by this stage he appears no longer to prioritise the utilitarian and practical potential of the work. Rather, he foregrounds its imaginative and conceptual aspects. In spite of his unjustified assumption that painting and drawing are the most appropriate means by which to investigate these aspects of the work, this shift suggests that his interest in the relationship between art and social change is no longer heavily dependent on interventions in the spheres of contemporary politics and urban planning. It does, however, show an entrenchment and ossification of his earli-

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[95] It is likely that in this context "done things" refers to Constant's production of architectural maquettes, design- or proposal-stage sketches and maps.

[96] Interestingly, in his past work on *New Babylon,* Constant had done just this.

er distinctions between art and architecture, rather than an increased capacity for working between and across these areas, as he did in his work on *New Babylon* in the 1950s and 1960s.

This period of fluidity regarding disciplinarity is exemplified in two sets of works from 1959 and 1962 respectively, *Klein Labyr* and *Diorama I, II* and *III* (figs. 7, 4, 5 and 6 respectively). These works show a departure from the architectural maquette-like construction of earlier sculptural renderings of *New Babylon,* such as *Gele Sector* (fig. 2). Here utilitarian urban features such as constructed paths, piazzas and sheltered spaces are suggested by the orderly and enclosing arrangement of metal grids, precise striations on the base, suggesting paths, terraced horizontal plexiglass planes and geometric elements employed in the arrangement of loose labyrinths. By contrast, *Klein Labyr*, while using many of the geometric elements which characterise Constant's early maquettes, breaks with the grid structure into which *Gele Sector* and the other sector works, *Oriënt Sector* (1959) and *Rode Sector* (1958), are inserted.[97] *Klein Labyr* is composed vertically, with interlocking quadrangular frames which intersect one another mid-edge at right angles, as though a prior grid structure had been twisted. Coloured flat surfaces slice into this twisted grid, further complicating its legibility as a proposal for a habitable space.

In the *Diorama* works the deconstruction of the grid pattern continues, as clusters of cubes and rectangles in relief define convoluted, cave-like spaces and tunnels in "Diorama II". In "Diorama III" mirrors at oblique angles reflect their solid framing elements and one another, creating the illusion of an internal three-dimensional space of unknowable depth in a solid

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97 Chapter Three engages in depth with the ways in which the New Babylonian labyrinth breaks with conventions of the grid as established in modernist art and architecture. See pp. 211–17.

encasing structure which is mere centimetres deep. This illusionist space and its concomitance with actual three-dimensional projections foregrounds the recurring dialectic in Constant's thinking between real and imagined or "fantasy" space. However, in this work, visual perception is presented as the ground on which this dilemma plays out. While the mirrors present an illusion of solid, voluminous surfaces and deeply receding spaces, it is "vision in act", or a seeing that proceeds from the cohabitation of the body and objects in space, that allows the eyes to distinguish between 'real' and 'illusionist' three-dimensional space in a projection of corporeal experience (Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind" 307). Merleau-Ponty's discussion of mirrors and vision in the essay "Eye and Mind" issues from his observation, on the one hand, of the frequent inclusion of mirrors in the subject matter of Renaissance paintings, and, on the other, of the likeness between the specular image presented by the mirror and that of realist painting.

This initial likeness provides the premise for an extension to non-realist, and non-figurative works of art as well, with *New Babylon*, and particularly "Diorama III", serving as compelling examples. As Merleau-Ponty writes, "The mirror's ghost lies outside my body, and by the same token my body's 'invisibility' can invest the other bodies I see. Hence my body can assume segments derived from the body of another, just as my substance passes into them; man is a mirror for man" (Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind" 300). The perception of one's reflection in a mirror is analogous to the act of relating one person to another,[98] an act which according to both Merleau-Ponty's and Constant's views is inherently spatial. Merleau-Ponty describes the "actual body" through which we relate as "an intertwining of vision and move-

[98]Indeed, in Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, the recognition of oneself in a mirror signals the individual's ability to distinguish between self and other. This stage, which Lacan calls "The Mirror Stage", in turn forms the foundation for more complex systems of interpersonal relating and the acquisition of language (Lacan 75–81).

ment" (Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind" 294), both of which, he proposes, are operations bound to the body's complicity in the perception of space. According to this account, a new social order, such as the unprecedented order of relating for which Constant strives, would essentially be connected to the "intertwining of vision and movement" and at base a sensory unfolding in space. In this light, the visual distortions in "Diorama III", much like the proposed chambers devoted to olfactory and tactile senses, erotic play and temperature variation in works such as *Gele Sector* and *Experiment Studio Rotterdam,* are central to Constant's conception of *New Babylon* as a work which traverses the supposedly external world of physical phenomena and the internal world of experiencing these phenomena.[99]

The mirror's capacity to reflect not only the body, but spatial volumes surrounding the body, at once tethers spatiality to corporeal experience and positions our conception of space at the transitory interface between sense and thought. The perception of spatial volumes is not exhausted in a pure tactile experience, but occurs in a matrix of corporeal awareness, tactile sense, optical projection, and speculation. In the space reflected in a mirror, as in a pictorial artwork, "we do not need a 'muscular sense' in order to possess the voluminosity of the world. This voracious vision, reaching beyond the 'visual givens', opens upon a texture of Being of which the discrete sensorial messages are only the punctuations or the caesurae. The eye lives in this texture as man lives in his house" (Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind" 298). This understanding suggests that the mirror, like the picture, is a site of speculation, imaging, and, therefore, imagining, since for Merleau-Ponty the imaginary follows from our perceptual experience of the image. He argues in "Eye and Mind" that an image produced by an artist,

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99 This dichotomy is somewhat misleading because it is precisely the rigorous distinction between 'external' and 'internal' phenomenal worlds which Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology sets out to challenge.

such as a drawing, is not “a second thing” or a mere copy of something prior. However, neither does an artist’s rendering have a more authentic quality of what Merleau-Ponty calls “the in-itself” than a mental image (Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind” 315). Both pictures and mental images relate to the objects they may represent, or to which they refer, as “the inside of the outside and the outside of the inside, which the duplicity of sensing (*le sentir*) makes possible and without which we would never understand the quasi-presence and imminent visibility which make up the whole problem of the imaginary” (Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind” 296). For Merleau-Ponty, the relationship between the real and the imaginary, as explored through the examples of drawings, reflections in a mirror and mental images, is more complex than the simple analogy between the real world and the “world” of the image. Instead, he writes, the imaginary is both “much nearer to and much farther away from the actual” (Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind” 296). Its distance from the actual is posited on the basis that an image exceeds a representation of the actual and inaugurates a discrete sensory experience. Its nearness to the actual is its participation, together with those things it would represent, in the optical world, in which “the mind goes out through the eyes to wander among objects” (Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind” 298).

In Constant’s *Diorama III* the use of mirrors to create an illusion of the extension of three-dimensional space, which at the same time entails an endless fragmentation and reproduction of itself as an image, establishes this work as philosophically significant for the *oeuvre* of New Babylon. It also locates New Babylon within a narrative of fragmentation or scattering which, it may be argued, characterises the twentieth century’s avant-garde movements as a force of disruption in high modernism’s pursuit of ideological and aesthetic wholeness. One of *Diorama III*’s most significant philosophical consequences is the refutation of the artwork's singular "presence in time and space," in the words of Walter Benjamin "its unique existence in the place where it happens to be" (Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" 220). Benjamin calls the supposed uniqueness and perceivable presence of the work its "aura", which, he maintains, "withers in the age of mechanical reproduction" (Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" 221). The work's aura is contingent on its hermetic completeness and its ostensible independence of other objects or contexts. *New Babylon,* and indeed much twentieth century art both before and after Benjamin's time, is concerned precisely with this withering, a process by which art is intentionally scattered from its attributed origin in a concept of wholeness. For several avant-garde groups in post-industrial societies in Europe and America, this scattering took the form of rendering the work functionally indistinguishable from various constituents of everyday life: ordinary objects, political action, architecture, advertising, and other effects traditionally outside the sphere of the artwork.[100] For Benjamin, the multiple, or the technologically reproducible and reproduced image, is responsible for the withering of aura in that it makes the notion of an original irrelevant, particularly in the case of photographs and other prints conceived as 'originally' multiple. In *Diorama III* the splitting of the unique object is built into its material character through its ability to refract multi-directionally whatever is reflected in the mirrored surface.

It would follow from Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the visible that the visually-oriented artwork is susceptible to a foundational ontological "dehiscence", or an opening or rupture in the "Being" of the work (Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind" 318–319). Dehiscence introduces

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[100] Dada, Russian Constructivism and Futurism are well-documented examples of these tendencies during the first half of the twentieth century, while Pop Art, the SI and Minimalism continued these allegiances after World War II.

into the artwork an invisible surplus which insinuates itself in the very act of perceiving the work. Merleau-Ponty explains:

> Every visual something, as individual as it is, functions also as a dimension, because it gives itself as the result of a dehiscence of Being. What this ultimately means is that the proper [*le propre*] essence of the visible is to have a layer [*doublure*] of invisibility in the strict sense, which it makes present as a certain absence. … There is that which reaches the eye directly [*de face*], the frontal properties of the visible; but there is also that which reaches it from below – the profound postural latency where the body raises itself to see – and that which reaches vision from above like the phenomena of flight, of swimming, of movement, where it participates no longer in the heaviness of origins but in free accomplishments. (Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind" 318–319)

In addition to the optical perception of a primarily visual work, for example, there is simultaneously a subtler mode of perception which occurs corporeally or posturally, and a further simultaneous current of perception which is still less tangible and draws on "free accomplishments". The latter, abandoning "the heaviness of origins", suggests the sphere of mental images and ideas, which participate in acts of perception as nodes in a loosely connective matrix. However, Merleau-Ponty's claim is stronger still than the contention that something secret in the visual unveils itself subliminally. His claim for a fundamental dehiscence in the visual extending beyond the operation of signification to the "Being" of the visual resonates with Derrida's notion that with *différance* there is more at stake than the deferral and differing of meaning. Both cases suggest an ontological shift that dislocates the "being" of that which signifies or is open to perception.

This shift in the thing's conditions of being calls for a conceptual separation of the visible from the notion of a thing (in) itself. In "The Intertwining – The Chiasm", from *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty develops his discussion of visuality and visibility, suggesting that being can be understood as a "momentary crystallisation" between differences (Merleau-Ponty, "The Visible and the Invisible: The Intertwining – The Chiasm" 250). This momentary crystallisation is not simply the thing frozen in time, but a "latency", or a "possibility" (Merleau-Ponty, "The Visible and the Invisible: The Intertwining – The Chiasm" 250):

> In general a visible, is not a chunk of absolutely hard, indivisible being, offered all naked to a vision which could be only total or null, but is rather a sort of straits between exterior horizons and interior horizons ever gaping open, something that comes to touch lightly and makes diverse regions of the colored or visible world resound at the distances, a certain differentiation, an ephemeral modulation of this world - less a color or a thing, therefore, than a difference between things and colors, a momentary crystallisation of colored being or of visibility. Between the alleged colors and visibles, we would find anew the tissue that lines them, sustains them, nourishes them, and which for its part is not a thing, but a possibility, a latency, and a *flesh* of things. (Merleau-Ponty, "The Visible and the Invisible: The Intertwining – The Chiasm" 250)

The notion of latent being is especially relevant to *Diorama II* and *III* since the content or substance of this work occurs specularly, between reflections of its own planes and surfaces. Where the mirror planes reflect others like themselves, the viewer witnesses a limitless recursion of the work's visual content, which aptly serves as a metaphor for the latency and deferral (to return to a Derridean vocabulary) of the 'being' of the work. Here the thing itself, metaphorised as both the origin and the telos of the reflection, is, even as a visual phenomenon, endlessly deferred. Although they have not featured in scholarly engagements with *New Babylon* to date, the *Diorama* works are conceptually revealing steps in its genealogy. They clearly introduce to our reception of the work the themes of "dehiscence" and self-differing, confirming an interleaving of the visual, the conceptual, the specular and the physical. By opening onto this terrain, they intimate the complexity of the tension between notions of the imaginary and the real, a recurring dichotomy in Constant's writing.

2.3 A Marxian inheritance: material reality and ideas

Although this level of subtlety is evident in Constant's works, his *professed* position regarding the relationship of *New Babylon* to notions of the imaginary and the real is more fraught and wavering, characterised by shifts and lapses in consistency. These shifts are functions of his retrospective construction of the narrative of the work, several years after the inception of the project (and sometimes much later still) . Chapter One discussed the inevitability of the act of invention or construction in the process of historicisation, both conceptually and in the subtle shifts in Constant's representation of *New Babylon* over time. His most equivocal and revisionary statements about the work's future-orientation and its function as an imagined environment both conducive to, and contingent on, an unprecedented method of modern living, take place in his 1980 lecture "New Babylon – Ten Years On" and in interviews with Benjamin Buchloh and Hans Ulrich Obrist, both in 1999. As considered in the Introduction, Constant's interviews with Buchloh and Obrist, as well as Wigley's publication of *Constant's*

New Babylon in 1999, represent a revival not necessarily of the work itself,[101] but of its historical narrative which had, until this moment of its revisiting, been located on the periphery of the history of the SI.

Constant's gestures of historical redefinition of the work are echoed philosophically in the counterpoint he establishes between "reality", or the "real", and various versions of a contradiction of, or alternative to, the real. His names for this antithetical term are variously "a fantastication of reality" (Constant, *Letter to Anthony Hill* n.p.), the "imaginary" (Constant, "Unitary Urbanism" 132), and "architectural science fiction" (Constant, "The Great Game to Come" 111). Constant's position on the relationship of *New Babylon* to existing circumstances of urban planning becomes increasingly evasive as the project develops over time, and his references to the potential for manifesting or realising *New Babylon* at the level of urban planning diminish in favour of references to the impossible nature of New Babylonian society. As these shifts suggest, constructions of the 'real', the 'actual', and the 'unreal' as they pertain to my analysis of the ontological nature of the work (and indeed my argument that *New Babylon* is ontologically compelling as a consequence of its plural relation to 'reality') are themselves contingent on the historical contexts of the work and of Constant's thought. Importantly, these contexts also extend to the economic and industrial circumstances which brought about Constant's use of media associated with industry and mass-production,

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101 Okwui Enwezor's inclusion of New Babylon in Documenta 11 (2001), by contrast, could be seen as an attempt to revive the work itself, or to respond to its apparent revival in academic circles with a material representation.

such as plexiglass and aluminium. They extend as well to the urban spatial control applied to modern cities as a function of capitalist economic growth.[102]

Rosalind Krauss identifies a similar process of contrapuntal differentiation and appropriation in the works and ethos of Minimalist artists of the 1960s and 1970s, including Robert Morris, Donald Judd and Dan Flavin. In "The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum" (1990), Krauss describes contradictory forces in Minimalism which at once draw on the technology and materials made possible by capitalist industry and postulate the phenomenological subject – a subject constituted in the act of perception – as an alternative to the commodified labourer-subject of capitalist modernity. *New Babylon* is founded on the same paradoxical relationship to industry. The technology native to industrial and market-related productivity would eventually, Constant claimed, make possible *New Babylon*'s underground machine labour force, while humans living above ground would no longer arrange their lives according to the work that they were compelled to do. Although Krauss does not mention *New Babylon,* she addresses a comparable desire ubiquitous in postwar art to reject the economic and political structures which regulated the relationship between subjects, objects and spatial environments according to productivity and consumption. For Krauss, Minimalism represents a distillation of this desire, which is congruent with several Minimalist artists' expressed interest in phenomenology – which entailed for them a new way of thinking about subjectivity – and with their attempts to repurpose materials associated with industry in the construction of transcendent encounters for the viewer. However, she argues, the dependence of Minimalist aesthetics on industrial processes results in the re-articulation of precisely those political

[102] My aim in this chapter is not to isolate pure and conclusive definitions of the terms 'real', 'unreal' and 'actual', so as to make them useful in saying what the work is or is not. Rather, I undertake to work through the references of these terms as they appear, or seem to appear, in representations of *New Babylon,* and from this foundation to examine the philosophical questions that arise in their use.

forms, aesthetic conventions and materials that are products of the social models they set out to critique. She represents this motif as a confounded gesture of simultaneous differentiation and recapitulation:

> While the artist might be creating a Utopian alternative to, or compensation for, a certain nightmare induced by industrialization or commodification, he is at the very same time projecting an imaginary space which, if it is shaped somehow by the structural features of that same nightmare, works to produce the possibility for its receiver fictively to occupy the territory of what will be a next, more advanced level of capital. Indeed, it is the theory of cultural revolution that the imaginary space projected by the artist will not only emerge from the formal conditions of the contradictions of a given moment of capital, but will prepare its subjects… to occupy a future real world which the work of art has already brought them to imagine, a world restructured not through the present but through the next moment in the history of capital. (Krauss, "The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum" 11)

The materialist leaning of Krauss's critique is clear, and shares with Constant's professed "Marxian"[103] orientation in his theorising of *New Babylon* the assumption that a direct relationship exists between material circumstances – such as an encounter with a work or the availability of technology to produce new kinds of objects, spaces or activities – and mental and phenomenological events. Thus, prior even to a specifically economic critique (that is, a critique of the implication of art in capitalist culture), Krauss assert's the close connection between the production of artworks and the work of "ideology" in the Althusserian sense. Art

103 As has been mentioned earlier in this thesis, Constant cites Lefebvre's use of the term "Marxian" to describe his own critical position in relation to Marxism. In his interview with Obrist, he is careful to distinguish "Marxianism" from Marxism (although he does not explain this distinction). In *Specters of Marx* Derrida uses the same term to refer to an inherited and potentially hybridised Marxist critical tradition.

"projects" (Krauss, 11) an "imaginary… 'world outlook'" (Althusser, *Essays on Ideology* 36), to which Althusser in his introduction to the concept of interpellation in *Essays on Ideology* gives the name "ideology" (Althusser, *Essays on Ideology* 36). He proceeds to clarify the definition of ideology as that which "represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (36). Although the imaginary "do[es] not correspond to reality" – the precise nature of which remains undefined in this text – it does "make allusion to reality" in such a way that it is possible to infer the real circumstances in relation to which a subject forms a perception of her circumstances (Althusser, *Essays on Ideology* 36). Althusser maintains that as soon as an individual translates a received impression of reality in such a way that it makes sense, or has meaning, this impression is mediated by the ideology of language or *"Logos*" (Althusser, *Essays on Ideology* 45–47). Later in the essay, Althusser makes explicit a suggestion embedded in this claim, namely that the mediation of reality by ideology happens necessarily, and that an individual cannot possibly apprehend reality itself. This is because the subject practises, applies, or makes use of ideology in the act of interpretation or representation – even when this process is internal and solitary. Ideology is imbricated with perception because, as Althusser understands it, meaning is intertwined with linguistic capacities.

Given that for Althusser interpretation and language are fundamentally ideological, it follows that self-interpretation and self-identification are ideological processes as well. Thus subjectivity, which Althusser understands as the inauguration of an individual into a system of recognition, is an ideological function as well. Althusser describes the process by which ideology confers subjectivity - or participation in an ideological system - on individuals as "interpellation", a calling-into-being or "hailing" (Althusser, *Essays on Ideology* 48). He explains the nature of this process by analogy with a scenario in which someone addresses another person in the street by shouting, “Hey, you there!” (48). The addressee’s recognition of this address affirms his and the addressor’s mutual participation in a system of reference and communication. Beyond this example, interpellation is simply the induction of participants into an ideological system – whether the system is merely linguistic, moral, cultural, or philosophical, for example – so that they become subjects of that system. According to Althusser, this process occurs prior to our ability to choose the allegiance of our subjectivity (since doing so would require that we were already subjects of language and of an ideology through which we valued our ability to choose). To illustrate this analysis, he uses another quotidian example: a baby is born into social and familial circumstances which determine, ahead of his[104] existence, the fact that he will participate in various ideologies - those of the family and of naming, for example - as a particular kind of individual: an infant, or a son. Althusser concludes his discussion of interpellation with the assertion that, “You and I are *always-already* subjects, and as such constantly practice the rituals of ideological recognition” (Althusser, *Essays on Ideology* 46).

Because Althusser distinguishes ideology, as an imaginary function, from the material, it follows that he associates the “real” with a materiality that exists objectively, or with what *really is there*.[105] He does not, however, claim that objective reality is discernible to us as distinct from ideology, because the perception of what is real is involuntarily mediated by one’s relational disposition towards it. As Terry Eagleton clarifies, Althusser’s notion of ideology “al-

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[104] Althusser uses the male possessive pronoun to refer to the subject in this example.

[105] This phrasing is not intended to take for granted Althusser’s assumption about the material nature of reality, but to suggest that for him reality is not matter perceived, but matter that is in fact present prior to perception.

ludes in the main to our affective, unconscious relations with the world, to the ways in which we are pre-reflectively bound up in social reality" (Eagleton 18). However, the contingency of ideology on this pre-reflective relationship to reality means that reality can still be traced in ideology; or rather, it leaves legible traces in our mediated experience of reality. This leaving of traces enables us, for example, to speak in a normative or quotidian sense about the relative reality or unreality of things and circumstances.[106]

Analogously, Krauss understands artistic alternatives to established cultural, economic and aesthetic regimes as fatally contingent on the structure and content of these regimes.[107] Echoing Althusser's construction, Krauss introduces artistic critique as a kind of super-ideology that draws on a preceding system of ideas, practices and matter in the same way as ideology draws on material reality in Althusser's theory. Although Althusser would align these regimes with ideology, they function in Krauss's argument as an analogue for materiality. Artworks ostensibly introduce a further imaginary extrapolation which, Krauss argues, is itself contingent on the conditions of such pre-existing regimes. Furthermore, because of their contingency on a seemingly inescapable system of global capitalism, these artistic visions actually create a route for "[their] subjects" into the future of capital. The "structural features" and the "formal conditions and contradictions of a given moment in capital" to which Krauss refers are comparable with Althusser's "real conditions of existence" about and around which ideology forms. Just as, for Althusser, ideology hails us as subjects *per se*, for Krauss utopian (or

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106 For example, our apprehension of the traces of reality enables us to distinguish between lizards, as real creatures that exist objectively, and dragons, as imaginary creatures which do not exist objectively. That is not to say, however, that we perceive lizards in the fullness of their objective reality; merely through consensus that they do exist, we accept that they are real in a way that a dragon is not.

107 Importantly, though, Krauss is not concerned with the metaphysical distinction between these alternatives and the contexts on which they are contingent.

simply future-oriented) artworks which are concerned with bringing about alternative experiences of the world, interpellate us as subjects of these alternative experiences. In the case of Minimalism, she argues, art delivers us into “the next moment in the history of capital” (Krauss, “The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum” 11)

Minimalism’s success in this delivery is exemplified for Krauss in the emergence of a preoccupation with spectacular spatial scale in museums at the end of the twentieth century. The emphasis on the space of display in Minimalism – which displaced a prior emphasis on the art object – contributed to the institutionalisation of the viewer’s experience as a desirable ‘product’ of a work or exhibition. Krauss illustrates this claim through an account of a visit to an exhibition of the Panza Collection of Minimalist art at the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in July 1990, during which curator Suzanne Pagé showed her a view through the newly-renovated museum which she felt encapsulated the exhibition. However, Krauss recalls, the view was devoid of any artworks, seeming rather to highlight the museum’s grand architecture with the atmospheric fluorescent glow of two Dan Flavin works emanating from rooms adjacent to the thoroughfare and hidden from her line of sight (Krauss, “The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum” 4). Although scarcely still radical in 1990, the display of Minimalist works in such a way that the viewer’s spatial experience is foregrounded “announce[s] a kind of space-beyond which we are not yet in, but for which the light functions as the intelligible sign” (Krauss, “The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum” 4). This simulation of a space-beyond invokes, as Krauss’s use of the temporal qualifier “not yet” suggests, the notion that we could possibly, in the future, inhabit it. According to Krauss then, the future-orientation of Minimalist works is owed not only to the movement’s avant-garde intention to make a radical break with the present and the past, but also to the conceptual device according to which works exist as spaces-beyond, which the viewer aspires to inhabit, physically, perceptually and intellectually. In this sense, such works are not only "[t]urned toward the future, going toward it", but they also "[come] from it, [proceed] *from [provient de]* the future" (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* xix).

This formulation, drawn from Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, is not developed as an element of Krauss's discussion, although it is potentially of greater value in considering the future-orientation of Minimalism, and, in this thesis, of *New Babylon.* Krauss's claim that Minimalism provided a segue for its subjects into "the next moment of capital" depends on her post-factum identification of this segue's having taken place. In other words, Krauss presupposes this historical conclusion in her interpretation of the cultural and ideological effects of Minimalist sculpture. Subtly embedded in her argument is the structure of reverse-narration, or retroactive historicisation, the equivalent of which Hal Foster identifies in the historicisation of the early modern avant-garde by the neo-avant-garde movements of the mid-twentieth century. Foster writes: "*[R]ather than cancel the historical avant-garde, the neo-avant-garde enacts its project for the first time – a first time that… is theoretically endless*" (Foster, *Return of the Real* 20).[108] Crucially, Foster claims that the neo-avant-garde does not simply repeat the styles and activities of an original avant-garde, but in fact validates that which is identified as its historical precedent. Thus, the neo-avant-garde discursively precedes the avant-garde in the sense that its identification as a repetition confers the appearance of coherence and originality on what is thereafter considered to be the proto-avant-garde.

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[108] See Chapter 1, pp. 68–70.

According to this recursive structure, the future and the past are no longer linearly joined via the present but produce each other in such a way that they create a temporal disturbance in the light of which it becomes problematic to speak of the present, and thus of presence. The effects of this mode of disruption become clear when, for example, a contemporary viewer's reception of early *New Babylon* works is shaped – by virtue of the compression of time that occurs through archiving and historical study – by later developments in the work. Derrida opens *Specters of Marx* by noting that the first noun in Marx's *Communist Manifesto* is the word "specter" (2). Derrida then undertakes a discussion of the figure of the ghost as that which unsettles the notions of power, history, subjectivity and value, introducing this figure's destabilising force by commenting that Marx paradoxically anticipates the rise of communism as a future event through his recognition of its ghost. As Derrida proposes, "haunting is historical" (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 3); a ghost is commonly understood to be the spirit or some other non-physical (immaterial) manifestation of the deceased. He cites a similar invocation of a ghost in the first act and scene of Shakespeare's *Hamlet,* in which the watchmen Bernado and Marcellus and Prince Hamlet's friend Horatio see the silent ghost of Hamlet's father. Hamlet then undertakes to wait for the ghost, while entertaining some scepticism about his coming to see it. Derrida observes that in *Hamlet,* as in Marx's *Manifesto*, "everything begins with the anticipation of a specter. More precisely by the *waiting* for this apparition. … Still more precisely, everything begins with the imminence of a *re*-apparition" (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 2–3) At the beginning of the play, the ghost of Prince Hamlet's father, the King, "comes back, so to speak, for the first time" (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 3).

According to Krauss, the artistic projection of future-oriented, imaginary or ideologically complex spaces in post-war twentieth century art is complicit in the material and cultural progression of capitalism. For her, this is a defining contradiction inherent in those late modern works which adopted a critical position in relation to capitalist culture and industry, attempting to articulate this position through materiality, or, more specifically, through reinvesting the subject with complexity and value on the basis of an encounter with material objects and a fabricated environment. In the case of Minimalism, specifically, the industrial reproducibility of many works seemed instantly to undermine their purported critical potency.[109]

For Krauss, the "internal contradiction" in Minimalism lies in its simultaneous use of materials and processes associated with architectural construction and industrial production in order to make objects that are easily reproducible by industrial means and its "phenomenological ambitions" (Krauss, "The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum" 8). The latter, Krauss writes, are "the side of Minimalism that denies that the work of art is an encounter between two previously fixed and complete entities: on the one hand, the work as a repository of known forms - the cube or the prism, for example… and on the other, the viewer as an integral, biographically elaborated subject … who cognitively grasps these forms because he or she knows them in advance" (8). Instead, the viewer and the work are formed in the moment of their encounter along a "perceptual knife-edge", where the work is not simply recognised as whole and complete object, but "happen[s]" at the "interface between the work and its beholder" (8). Krauss cites Merleau-Ponty in describing describes the nature of this encounter: "'But the system of experience is not arrayed before me as if I were God, it is lived by me from a certain point of view; I am not a spectator, I am involved, and it is my involve-

109 Many works by Morris, Judd and other key Minimalist artists were fabricated by factories using plans drawn up by the artists. According to Krauss, these plans carried conceptual importance, but also led to the unregulated reproduction of works by collectors and, less controversially, by the artists themselves.

ment in a point of view which makes possible both the finiteness of my perception and its opening out upon the complete world as a horizon of every perception'" (cited in Krauss, "The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum" 9). She illustrates the emergent nature of the work and the viewing subject by proposing that Morris's *L-Beams* (1965-7) – an installation comprising three identical three-dimensional fiberglass L-shaped forms – are "three different insertions within the viewer's perceptual field such that each new disposition of the form, sets up an encounter between the viewer and the object which redefines the shape" (cited in Krauss, "The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum" 8). The viewer's perceptual disposition therefore co-forms the work together with the environmental and material conditions of the objects perceived. At the same time the viewer is constituted continuously, and provisionally, in the act of perception.[110]

Minimalism thus proposes a revision of assumptions that dominated collecting and display practices in modern art, namely that the art object and its author determine the relations between the viewer and the work, and that the terms of these relations are somehow intrinsically scripted in the work.[111] In his four-part essay series *Notes on Sculpture* (1966-1967), Morris, following Roland Barthes' central thesis in "The Death of the Author", locates the source of these relations in the person viewing the work, who, in the act of doing so, becomes a viewing subject, just as in that moment fabricated objects become a work (Morris). The subject of this encounter is liberated from obligations to follow her perception of the work with action or enlightenment, with moral or aesthetic progress as a self-contained subject. More

[110] In other words, the viewing subject is constituted by the act of perception as a continuous, temporal process, in which subjectivity is interleaved with the contingent presence of the objects viewed.

[111] This assumes a universal viewer, one who will behave in certain ways and who will already have been constituted as a certain kind of subject.

importantly, the subject-in-perception has no role in industrial productivity, the market or labour. Her legitimacy as a subject, though necessarily provisional, evades the implication of individuals in systems of wealth-generation and progress; in this light Minimalism subtly sets out a “Utopian alternative” to postwar capitalist society in Europe and North America (cited in Krauss, “The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum” 11). Krauss associates this Utopian alternative with the future, suggesting that a work such as *L-beams* invites the viewer to imagine the emergence of an alternative, preferable regime that would replace a flawed present. She terms this “a next, more advanced level of capital”, suggesting its continuity with “the history of capital” (11). However, she also claims that art is primarily concerned with enabling the viewer “fictively to occupy [this] territory” (11). That this fictive occupation ultimately collapses into a “future real world” is a function of the intimacy between the artworks that facilitate the imagining of alternative states and the “structural features” of the system from which these works propose an escape (11).

In summary, Minimalism (as represented by Krauss) is concerned with the projection of alternatives to an unsatisfactory existing state of affairs, and yet it is inextricably bound up with this state of affairs. There is a clear similarity between this position and Constant’s efforts, through *New Babylon*, to represent an as-yet imaginary environment using the aesthetic tools and materials of the present. Additionally, *New Babylon* and Minimalism share a critical difficulty that issues from what appears at face value to be a temporal and an ontological disjuncture. The problematic nature of Minimalism’s critical position regarding the relationship between artwork and viewer consists for Krauss in the movement’s simultaneous effort to replace commodifiable art objects – such as paintings and self-contained sculptures – with (ostensibly non-commodifiable) experiences of objects in space, and by so doing to undermine the conventional responses to the production processes and materials used to fabricate commodities. Notably, it is not only the material associations of these works with industry that draws them into this tension, but also their frequent production through industrial processes. For example, in the mid-1960s Morris and Donald Judd, amongst others, began outsourcing the production of their sculptures to factories that were otherwise engaged in the production of motorcars and other mechanical and consumer products.[112] In the first fabrication of Morris's *L-Beams*, the piece was produced only in part, with the assurance that the remaining elements of the work could be produced by any similar factory, according to specifications drawn up in advance by the artist.[113] As James Meyer notes, Morris had originally intended to produce nine identical L-Beam structures (only three of which were actually produced) from a single technical diagram supplied to the factory which made the 'original' version of the piece (Meyer 82). In circumstances similar to those under which Judd and Carl Andre sold fabrication plans for several of their works to collector Count Giuseppe Panza, the collector fabricated works without the permission or supervision of the artist (cited in Krauss, "The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum" 12).[114] Krauss argues that this relocation of the production of the artwork to an industrial context erases the distinction between original and copy, so that the work becomes inherently simulacral. It thus participates in an economy of fabrication and consumption which is at odds with its ostensible aim to provide an alternative to a culture of serial reproducibility.

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112 See Meyer, pp. 82–84 (image captions) for references to the production and reproduction of works by Morris and Judd by industrial means.

113 See Meyer, 82.

114 Subsequently, despite Judd's strong opposition to what he perceived as a breach of the agreement between Panza and himself, the Guggenheim Museum in New York acquired these allegedly illegitimate works as a bequest to the museum after Panza's death in 2010 (Karol para. 1–2)

New Babylon shares Minimalism's dependence on technological processes and on the potential of post-war industry, even though the *New Babylon* models are exclusively handmade. For Constant, technology is essential to the concept of *New Babylon,* rather than to its representation. This is clear when, in the essay "*New Babylon*: An Outline of a Culture", he writes that "[t]echnology is the indispensable tool" to realise not only the structural elements of *New Babylon,* but a New Babylonian lifestyle as well (Constant, "New Babylon: Outline of a Culture" 165). The "complete automation of non-creative activities" is essential to producing the *New Babylonian* "economy" , which is "exclusively aimed at the satisfaction of our needs, in the widest sense of the term" (Constant, "New Babylon: Outline of a Culture" 161). This automation would be enabled by "large electric or nuclear power stations", which would be located as far as possible from the inhabited sectors ((Constant, "New Babylon: Outline of a Culture" 165). It is therefore clear that technology plays an essential functional role in *New Babylon*, much as the production of Minimalist works such as Morris's *L-Beams,* Richard Serra's steel sculptures and Flavin's fluorescent works all rely on technological production at a purely functional level. However, like these works once again, technology plays an important role in the aesthetics of *New Babylon.* Constant writes that "each sector will be provided with the latest equipment, accessible to everyone, whose use, we should note, is never strictly functional" (Constant, "New Babylon: Outline of a Culture" 165). This "equipment" would enable all New Babylonians to vary the kinds of experiences possible in their environments, to "alter the ambience by adjusting the sound volume, the brightness of the light, the olfactive ambience or the temperature" and to "change the form of the space with new entrances, or by blocking the old ones; by adding or removing stairs, bridges, ladders, ramps, etc." (Constant, "New Babylon: Outline of a Culture" 165)

In several of the models and drawings of *New Babylon,* Constant alludes to some of the qualities of these technologies, even though they do not yet exist. For example, the very lowest levels of *Gele Sector* and *Oriënt Sector*, both made of painted wood, are striated with sheaths of parallel lines that traverse the ground, and at various points bend and deviate from one another in clusters. These striations represent the highways that Constant envisaged as connecting New Babylonian sectors as they began to emerge in isolated clusters above or in place of existing cities. These transport conduits would enable the briefest possible crossings between sectors in order to maximise citizens' mobility throughout *New Babylon.* Though merely drawn and etched into the wooden ground, these striations have been rendered with a uniformity and simplicity suggesting that they represent a functional element of the design. They also resemble the high-capacity automobile highways that became ubiquitous in Europe during and after the Second World War, following the opening of the Autobahn in Germany in 1930. It is clear from his rendering of these New Babylonian highways that Constant avoids preempting any of the specific characteristics of the construction materials and techniques that will be used to build them. Rather, he attempts to evoke their function in relation to the social, interactive and aesthetic characteristics he puts forward for *New Babylon.* It seems clear, therefore, that the media Constant uses to represent *New Babylon* stand in for more complex structures. They are, perhaps, surrogate media, implying not only the potential qualities of the medium and material that might eventually be used to build *New Babylon*, but also the experiential qualities of the New Babylonian environment.

This distinguishes Constant's use of industrial materials from Judd's or Morris's, for example, since for these artists the architectural and industrial qualities of their media were regarded as integral to the creation of a sculpture's "*gestalt*" or "sense of the whole" (Morris

226).[115] This candid use of media is what Michael Fried pejoratively describes as the "literalism" of Minimalist art in his 1967 essay "Art and Objecthood" (Fried 153).The smooth, industrially neat finishes, as well as the hard, geometric edges and planes that were made possible through the use of industrial materials and production processes, allowed artists such as Morris to create pieces that were, ostensibly, pure shapes, and which prevented "specific, sensuous material or impressively high finishes" from disrupting the *gestalt* of the work as an object in space (Morris 232). This implied assumption of the neutrality of industrial materials further supports Krauss's argument for the imbrication of Minimalist sculpture and capitalist industrial products. In this respect, *New Babylon* may pose a counter-example to what Krauss presents as post-war art's ineluctable implication in the economic and social circumstances it set out to critique. Constant is explicit in his assertions that *New Babylon* would be built by a future society that would not only be socially prepared to inhabit it, but technologically prepared as well. His models, like his photographs of them, were thus meant to give an *impression* of the materials and technologies the New Babylonians might use to build *New Babylon,* rather than to represent the materials themselves. This is fairly obvious even at face value, since the plexiglass, brittle wire, aluminium and soldered joints of the three-dimensional *New Babylon* pieces would not sustain being scaled up to an inhabitable size. One might argue that for Constant the plexiglass and steel used to build the models, while certainly associated with the culture of industrial fabrication he sought to critique, were merely metaphorical media. They enabled him to create an "illustration of an idea" (Obrist 169), and were perhaps not intended to be scrutinised as media in their own right.

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115 In "Notes on Sculpture I", Morris maintains that the establishment of "a strong gestalt" (226), or a sense of singular objecthood, is of primary importance in making sculptural work.

This introduces an additional elision in Constant's conceptual description of *New Babylon*, namely an apparently contradictory position on the significance of materiality in the work. Although *New Babylon* is contingent on the emergence of a society of New Babylonians*,* it seems that the purpose of the extensive representations of *New Babylon* was to inspire the formation of such a society. From this perspective, the work as it exists in the present day seems expressly, if in an overly literal way, to be concerned with "hailing" *New Babylonian* subjects (in the Althusserian sense). At the same time, however, the realisation of *New Babylon* itself – the idea Constant set out to illustrate – specifically comes after the collective organisation of New Babylonian subjects. In identifying the perplexing relationship in *New Babylon* between material and ideas, and the notions of reality and the imaginary, in *New Babylon,* one is led ultimately to ask, "What exactly *is* the artwork *New Babylon?*". Do the tangible manifestations, which are collectively and individually exhibited as *New Babylon* pieces, constitute the work exhaustively? Does the artwork rather subsist in the *idea* of *New Babylon,* so that the pieces associated with it are in fact merely its representations? In order to pursue these questions, it is necessary to examine Constant's own references to the concept of reality and its alternatives in his theoretical writings, as well as in the pieces that either represent or constitute *New Babylon.*

2.4 "Existing reality": worlds, thresholds and possibility

The question of the relationship between reality and unreality in the context of *New Babylon* gains more importance as the nature of this work is probed more deeply. Repeatedly, Constant affirms a distinction between the real and the non-real, positioning *New Babylon*, and at times artworks in general,[116] in relation to this distinction in varying and often obscure ways. It seems clear from his own discussion of *New Babylon* that his sense of its reality or non-reality cannot be accounted for categorically, nor perhaps can a thoroughgoing ontological account of reality be presented that would be relevant to *New Babylon.*[117] However, it seems just as clear that this is not needed. Instead, I want to suggest that the relationship between *New Babylon*, a state of affairs Constant refers to as reality, and the notion that future circumstances could be conducive to the realisation of *New Babylon*, might be better portrayed by analogy with the philosophical concept of interlocking 'possible worlds' or 'world systems', each of which represents a discrete set of relationships among events, temporality, materiality and experience.[118]

In the lecture entitled "Unitary Urbanism", presented at the Stedelijk Museum in 1960, Constant makes the peculiar argument that *New Babylon* is at once "imaginary", since it is entirely contingent on a future social condition irreconcilable with the present, and possible in the real world, given the advances in technology and construction techniques that he speculates will be achieved during the twentieth century. He states that *New Babylon*

> is an imaginary project; it anticipates history; it is based on a desirable course of history and is therefore also in a sense a utopian project. Nonetheless, I prefer to

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116 Constant often slides from discussion about *New Babylon* in particular to discussion of artworks in general, and vice versa. In so doing, he assumes the existence of a category of things called "artworks", which exemplify certain traits making them immediately recognisable as artworks. However, these traits are never rendered explicit, and Constant does not refer to any specifically, other than to suggest that artworks exemplify a degree of unreality relative to architectural works (or the common-sense notion of reality).

117 Although there are often slippages between Constant's claims concerning the relative reality or unreality of *New Babylon* and that of art in general, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to argue for or against his claims regarding art in general. Instead, I focus only on the way in which Constant lays the groundwork for a theoretical schema specific to *New Babylon*.

118 These "systems" are necessarily porous and flexible.

> call it a realistic project because it distances itself from the present condition which has lost touch with reality, and because it is founded on what is technically feasible, on what is desirable from a human viewpoint, on what is inevitable from a social viewpoint. (Constant, “Unitary Urbanism” 132)

This short excerpt from the lecture manuscript reveals the vague, and even contradictory, ways in which Constant uses the terms “real” and “imaginary” and figures the concept of possibility. For him reality refers at once to the way things are and, seemingly, to an ideal or essential condition that represents the way things ought to be. He assumes in his readers and listeners an immediate grasp of what he means by the term “reality”, as well as his implication in this passage, and in previously discussed critiques of his urban context, that reality is different from the artifice represented by “garden [cities]” (Constant, “Another City for Another Life (II)” 36), skyscrapers, enforced individualism and other effects of modern European urbanism. The ‘real’, therefore, seems to represent some kind of authentic present, next to which other versions of the present, such as the banalities of everyday life, for example, are impoverished.

Constant’s assertion that *New Babylon*’s reality is premised on its *dis*connection from “the present condition” suggests that for him the concept of the real is not equivalent simply to the world as perceived, or the present as experienced unreflectively. His distinction separates the notion of the real from a quotidian state of affairs, so that in many of his statements (and in the one cited above) the word “real” (or “reality”, or “realistic”) refers to a metaphysical quality, whereas “the present condition” seems to refer to a normative state. His use of the word “realistic” in addressing the potential of *New Babylon* to be made manifest confers on it the status of the possible. However, when in the lecture “*New Babylon* – Ten Years On” Constant speaks critically of “the existing reality” (or, in “Unitary Urbanism”, of “the present condition”), he is quite clearly referring not to a metaphysical quality but to a normative one (Constant, “New Babylon - Ten Years On” 256). Constant’s “existing reality”, the quotidian aspects of life which he sought to revolutionise, might best be understood as what Henri Lefebvre called “the everyday”. In his *Critique of Everyday Life II,* he associates the everyday with the anecdotal, the trivial aspects of modern life, the unexceptional things and events that are the antithesis of “the epic and the tragic” (Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday* 21). It is not the metaphysical reality of these phenomena that Constant opposes, but their assimilation into a normative sense of how the world appears and operates. Lefebvre’s closeness to key members of the SI, particularly in the late 1950s and early 1960s, was based largely on their shared criticism of an apparent absence of social and philosophical alternatives to the banalities of the everyday.

Constant’s distinction of a superior kind of reality from that which merely seems to be real, or that to which we have merely become accustomed, also bears a striking resemblance to the scene described in Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave” in the *Republic.* Plato’s “Allegory” is grounded in the context of his theory of forms, the highest of which is the form of “the Good”, represented here and in an earlier passage in the *Republic,* “The Metaphor of the Sun”, by the sun. The scene in the “Allegory of the Cave” is well-known, but it is worth transcribing in part:

> “Imagine people living in a cavernous cell down under the ground; at the far end of the cave, a long way off, there’s an entrance open to the outside world. They’ve been there since childhood, with their legs and necks tied up in a way which keeps them in one place and allows them to look only straight ahead, but not to turn their heads.

> There's firelight burning a long way further up the cave behind them, and up the slope between the fire and the prisoners there's a road, beside which you should imagine a low wall has been built - like the partition which conjurors place between themselves and their audience and above which they show their tricks. … Imagine also that there are people on the other side of this wall who are carrying all sorts of artefacts. These artefacts, human statuettes, and animal models carved in stone and wood and all kinds of materials stick out over the wall; … [d]o you think [the prisoners would] see anything of themselves and one another except the shadows cast by the fire onto the cave wall directly opposite them?"
>
> "Of course not," he said.
>
> … "All in all, then," I said, "the shadows and artefacts would constitute the only reality people in this situation would recognise." (Plato 240–241, § 514a, b)

Constant's notion of "existing reality" is comparable with the shadows thrown on the wall of the cave, which the prisoners, by virtue of their having a limited view of their environment and themselves, understandably take to be the extent of the real world. Later in the allegory, one prisoner escapes and manages to see not only the mechanism by which the shadows are projected, but also the physical objects which correlate to the shadows. He also sees the fire, and later the sun, and the role these play in casting the shadows. He realises that the shadows take the form of the things that cast them, but only partially. Therefore, as indices of reality, the shadows are inferior to the things themselves. The escaped prisoner is enlightened; armed with more extensive and reliable information, he is better able to grasp reality than he was before his liberation. He is also aware that the 'reality' of which his fellow prisoners are still apprised is not in fact 'real', and that they are mistaken in their current understanding. It is also suggested in Plato's text that the real things perceived are more pleasurable or desirable to look at, once the prisoner's eyes have adjusted to the light, and that returning to the limited view offered in the cave would be undesirable. Aesthetic value – which figures more important rational and ethical values – seems to be attached to this elevated range of perception, such that the ability to apprehend forms supersedes the ability merely to recognise their derivative manifestations. Recalling the "Allegory of the Cave", Constant appears to differentiate between existing reality and a superior, 'more real' state of affairs to which the majority are blind. However, there are more consequential similarities between Constant's distinction and Plato's. Most notably, Plato's "Allegory" attaches value to the liberated prisoner's apprehension of reality outside of the cave, particularly once his eyes have become accustomed to the outside light and he is able to look at the sun. In the "Allegory", as in the "Metaphor of the Sun", the sun represents the form of the good, an irreducible form from which the plenitude of things bearing the quality of goodness issue. Thus the liberated prisoner is able to perceive pure form and to distinguish between it and its derivatives.

As a poetic device, the correspondence between the real forms and their shadows – which are not imitations of the forms but merely allude to them as inferior copies – recalls Althusser's distinction between material reality and the mediating operation of ideology. Unlike Plato, however, Althusser does not commit to the idea that material reality can eventually be grasped. Furthermore, for Plato the form is not a material entity, but a pure abstraction on which material entities are imperfectly modelled. Thus, the similarity between Plato's formulation and Althusser's occurs only in the context of Plato's use of metaphor to convey this concept. What emerges from this observation, offered in view of the preceding discussion of Constant's use of media, is that he engages two very different, possibly even contradictory, uses of the notion of material reality. On the one hand, he clearly states that the material entities existing in the world in which we live have become disconnected from a reality proper (although this remains undefined), and that they therefore mislead us as to the nature of reality. Constant hence seems to uphold a notion of reality that is comparable to Plato's notion of the form. He sees the replacement of a labour-oriented arrangement of urban space with one that facilitates leisure and creativity, accordingly thwarting efficiency, as a means of bringing New Babylonians closer to an experience of a kind of urban ideal. Similarly, for the Situationists, the practice of the *dérive* is perhaps comparable to the prisoner's liberation into the sunlight; Debord and the Situationists conceived of the *dérive* as a means by which one could discover the hidden truths of the city, or its 'real' character.[119]

For Constant the discord between reality proper and contemporary material existence is undesirable; through *New Babylon* he strives to make the material entities of the future correspond to this true reality of which the present falls short. The process of bringing material existence closer to reality occurs through a long, perhaps interminable, process of social enlightenment, through which apprises individuals of the prevailing disparity, as happens with Plato's liberated prisoner. On the other hand, Constant uses surrogate media to make the works that represent *New Babylon,* seemingly suggesting that our access as viewers to the possibility of *New Babylon* as an existing, or material, entity is necessarily limited. The necessary nature of this limitation is suggested by his not attempting to move closer to the material reality of the future by updating his materials and use of technology as developments occur in these fields during the lifespan of the project. Instead, his modes of representation of

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[119] This notion is problematically esoteric, particularly since the Situationists unduly praise historical urban conditions, as through what had come before were more authentic than their contemporary experience.

New Babylon become increasingly allegorical and materially simple. In the 1960s, Constant produced a number of sketch-like drawings in which the form of *New Babylon,* as well as any sense of its material constitution, seem to disintegrate in favour of representations of its experiential qualities (such as constant movement, disorientation, variable sensory qualities, and communal inhabitation).

In addition to this explicit attempt to distinguish between different kinds of reality, or to privilege one over the other (as 'more real'), many of Constant's texts present conflicting positions on the nature of reality, which is in most of these cases negatively identified as that from which the not-real is differentiated. This is apparent when, for example, Constant associates *New Babylon* with the "fantastication of reality" (Constant, *Letter to Anthony Hill*), and suggests that, unlike an architectural project - which presumably results in a real building - *New Babylon* is merely "an illustration of an idea" (Obrist 169). Here, contradicting the more Platonic notion of reality adopted earlier, Constant seems to mean by the term "real" a state of affairs which, by *consensus*, obtains in the external world and is commonly referred to and understood to be reality.[120] This orientation resembles J.L. Austin's understanding of reality in *Sense and Sensibilia,* in which he argues for the linguistic and common-sense validity of the term "real" on the basis of the term's customary use in "ordinary language" (62). Stating that the word "real" is "already firmly established in, and very frequently used in, the ordinary language we all use", Austin suggests that the various ways in which the term "real" is applied presupposes that several people share antecedent assumptions enabling them to distinguish the sense in which the word is intended (Austin 62). He observes that the term "real"

[120] Thus "reality" would include that which Constant calls "existing reality" and Lefebvre calls "the everyday", but the latter would not exhaust the concept of reality.

is used variously to qualify whether or not something exists (as in distinctions between perceptions of "real" objects and hallucinations); whether or not something is an authentic version of what it appears to be rather than an imitation (Austin uses the example of distinguishing between a real diamond and a fake one); or to qualify the extent to which authenticity, plausibility or value can be attributed to something (an early example in Austin's essay is the notion of "real progress" [62]). As these different instances of the term "real" have no single positive or substantive meaning in common, Austin maintains that "the function of 'real' is not to contribute positively to the characterisation of anything in itself, but to exclude possible ways of being *not* real" (Austin 70). This explanation of using the notion of reality seems to accord with Constant's treatment of the term, which is more meaningful in terms of its distinction from what Constant takes to be not-real, than in terms of any positive content attached to the term "real". In other words, the term has significance insofar as Constant uses it to distinguish between make-believe and non-make-believe states of affairs.[121]

In the interest of clarity, there is an additional term that needs to be introduced at this point, and that is "the actual". Although Constant does not often use this notion, it is a term that will be helpful throughout the rest of this chapter in distinguishing possibility from reality. In Constant's interview with Obrist, his distinctions between what he calls "fantasy" and the "real" are paralleled by metaphysical distinctions between the merely possible or impossible, and the actual. While the word "actual" has an intuitive resonance with the word "real", and the two might easily be taken for synonyms, not all things that are real are necessarily also

[121] It is worthwhile to note at this stage that an idea of a common-sensical reality, or an external world almost universally held in common, pervaded art discourse of the time. For example, one of the central critical projects of Minimalism was, ostensibly, to mine the seemingly contradictory interface of material reality (an objective, external, universally apprehensible sphere) and subjective, interior experience.

actual. For example, the possibility of Queen Elizabeth's coming for tea is, until she arrives, merely a possibility. Though not actual, this possibility is "real" as a possibility. In this sense, the concept of reality is connected to logical validity or metaphysical legitimacy. It seems, therefore, that the inverse is not true, and that all things that are actual must also be real. Michael Loux defines the actual as "a state of affairs", which is "something different from the physical universe" (Loux 178).[122]

A state of affairs, according to Loux, is merely the condition of something's obtaining, or "being", and therefore cannot "fail to exist" (178). Loux thus defines the actual analytically, equating it with existence, such that the term "actual" could be exchanged with the phrase "that which exists", or, more precisely, "that which does not fail to exist". Loux does not necessarily associate the actual with the physical world, leaving the definition of existence unspecified. Thus, according to this rather open-ended definition, the actual might be illustrated with the following example:

A sees a yellow dog. Responding as he usually infers the existence of things from his perceptions, *A* infers that the dog is real. *B,* standing next to *A*, also sees the dog and they concur that the dog exists.

The next day, while intoxicated by hallucinogens, *A* sees a yellow dog identical to the one he saw while sober. However, knowing that he is likely to hallucinate under these circumstances, *A* doubts the dog's existence, even though it appears to have the same physical qualities as

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[122] The notion of "being" is itself open to scrutiny, and for this reason, the actual cannot simply be equated with the physical universe.

the dog he saw previously. However, *B,* who is once again alongside *A,* does not see the dog; thus *A* and *B* deduce that the dog *A* sees does not in fact exist. They conclude that the second dog seen is not an actual dog, whereas the first dog was an actual dog.

This example illustrates the role of consensus and perception in ascribing actuality to states of affairs. However, there are other conditions under which perception and consensus might not play a role in the ascription of actuality. For example, *A* might believe, for no evidential reason, that there are invisible dogs roaming the earth. Regardless of *B's* position on the matter, these invisible dogs either exist or they do not exist. If they exist, they are actual. If they do not exist, they are not actual. The outcome of this example seems trivial, but it serves to show the difference between an analytic and a synthetic definition of actuality. According to the former, the definition of existence is logically entailed in that of actuality which may be determined through purely mental analysis of these concepts. According to the latter, external means of deduction – such as perception and consensus, in this case – are used to arrive at the concept of the actual.

It seems reasonable to suggest that the definition most aptly applicable to Constant's notion of "existing reality" is the synthetic, in which consensus and perceptual deduction contribute to the identification of that which is actual. These definitions are, however, equivocal and the brief overview presented above is intended merely as groundwork from which to scrutinise Constant's construction of similar notions more closely. Like Austin's "common language", in the context of which we are able to speak rationally about the real without positively attributing qualities to it, the definitions above serve only to establish an intuitive, or common-sense, logic for framing these complex concepts. As is almost immediately apparent and will become all the clearer in due course, this frame is inadequate for its contents, and, indeed, as Derrida argues in *The Truth in Painting,* the device of the frame as a limiting and containing power is fraught with philosophical problems of its own.

Before discussing a plural systemic structure of worlds as an alternative to discriminating between different states of affairs on the basis of their degrees of correspondence to reality, it may be helpful to revisit two positions on reality held respectively by Austin and Merleau-Ponty, respectively. It has been noted above that Austin avoids the task of positive attribution of the term "real", arguing instead that the concept is useful insofar as it excludes that which is not real. It is implied in his argument that the unreal is easier to identify than the real.[123] Following Austin's argument, the use of the terms "real" and "non-real" or "unreal" to distinguish between scenarios is therefore a gesture of grouping, or delineating, situational systems, and not a description of a relation to an absolute, positively articulated reality.

Similarly, without directly addressing the question of the relative reality or unreality of the artwork, Merleau-Ponty writes that a work of art both brings into being and exists amidst "matrices of ideas, … [installing] us in a world we do not have the key to" (Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind" 293). The metaphor of matrices suggests that the world, or worlds, into which the artwork might install us are figured in terms of overlapping, interconnected systems of meaning and reference. Whether these 'worlds' are an imagined space, a subliminal, bodily, extra-linguistic perceptual ability, or a spatial metaphor for thought between and

123 Importantly, a further logical distinction could be made between the unreal and the non-real. In this case, the non-real would be the negation of the term "real". In other words, the concept of the non-real could include everything that is not the real. By contrast, the unreal is an independent concept, derived from the concept of the real, but not a direct contradiction of it. The concept of the unreal would relate to specific states of affairs that are deemed to be unreal (such as fictional and virtual states of affairs); that is, the term "unreal", would have a positive definition.

around work and subject, they suggest the fluid, but nonetheless systemic, coherence of a particular set of circumstances.[124] However, this coherence is not absolute or impermeable. Merleau-Ponty's sense of the extra-linguistic 'world' which the artwork opens up entails not purity, but merely localised connectedness. To return to his first metaphor, like a matrix of layers and units, the 'imaginary' and 'real' worlds alluded to or induced by an artwork may interlock with each other.

The concept of discrete 'worlds' or 'world systems' has been widely explored in philosophy and economics, but does not have a convention of use in art theory or art history.[125] However, the accepted meaning of the phrase in philosophical language has an affinity with the descriptive, representational or fictitious 'worlds' manifested in and by works of art, literary fiction and theatre. This affinity is especially clear in the case of Constant's construal of New Babylon as a non-actual systemic entity closely related to an 'actual' system or state of affairs (Constant's common language 'real world'). In philosophy, the term "possible worlds" was first used by Saul Kripke to speak about hypothetical, circumscribed systems in which certain places, events, persons, truths and objects appear to hold together (Kripke 16). Kripke distinguishes between 'the actual world', or the way things appear to be, and possible worlds, or ways in which certain things might have been, but are not. These hypothetical possible worlds are introduced into philosophical discussion as world-constructs which abide by the

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124 There may be multiple systems connected to a given scenario, and, though individually coherent, these systems may overlap. Moreover, it is not necessary that all systems are linguistically articulable.

125 Of less relevance to this discussion is the use of the notion of 'world systems' in economics. The exact term "world systems" is directly associated with the work of economic historian Immanuel Wallerstein, whose "world systems theory" advocates the "total" or "global" analysis of economic policies, particularly those of developed regions, and particularly insofar as they affected economically under-developed regions. While Wallerstein's concerns may resonate with Constant's revolutionary social politics, it is his systemic notion of "world" which is informative here, if only for the purposes of distinguishing and contextualising my own use of the phrase "world systems" (Wallerstein 8–10).

logic of the perceived actual world and, as such, are able to test the logical status of counter-factual claims. However, as I will argue in this section, a more interesting implication of possible worlds discourse is that this engagement with non-actual states of affairs potentially lays the groundwork for the discussion of more complex and hybrid notions of actuality and non-actuality, as well as possibility and impossibility.

As Loux's explains, the use of the possible worlds model involves the expedient application of certain "formal constraints" in order to facilitate "modal inference", that is, the distinction between propositions that have different truth values (Loux 182). According to the analytic convention, some propositions may be logically true under all circumstances (in which case they are necessarily true), while others may be true only under some circumstances (these are contingently true).[126] Modality, or modal logic, is concerned with possibility and necessity regarding propositions or ideas as well as the conditions under which things exemplify certain properties, necessarily or contingently. It must be acknowledged that this is a grave simplification of a complex area of philosophy; although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss modal logic in detail, it is necessary at least to signal the connection between modal logic and possible world illustrations and metaphors.

To clarify the preceding explanation of possible worlds and modality, the following simple example demonstrates the sorts of thought exercises that employ possible worlds constructs. I am familiar with a state of affairs in which gold and uranium have been mined in Johannesburg; in possible worlds jargon, this state of affairs is a feature of "this world". However, I

126 The corollaries of these claims also hold: for example, some things are necessarily untrue, and some are contingently untrue.

can imagine a state of affairs – or a possible world – in which titanium was mined in Johannesburg, and another in which nothing was mined at all. In philosophy the differential status of worlds is assigned in order to differentiate between the status of truths as either necessary or contingent, or to ascribe to them different potentialities for logical possibility. In other words, the construction of make-believe possible worlds provides philosophers with exemplary scenarios that facilitate the recognition of different modalities. In my simple example, it is clearly not true for all possible worlds that uranium and gold were mined in Johannesburg, because I can imagine worlds in which this is not the case. Therefore, it is contingently and not necessarily true that gold and uranium were mined in Johannesburg. However, certain logical truths, such as mathematical propositions, are assumed, according to this convention, to be true in all possible worlds. For example, it is difficult to imagine a world in which it is true that 2 + 2 = 3 and false that 2+2=4. According to this model, then, 2+2=4 would be true in all possible worlds, therefore being necessarily true.[127]

It is worth noting that the modal status of a possible world is differentiated always with reference to the system of logic exemplified in a circumscribed "actual state of affairs".[128] The notion of actuality applied by Kripke and several others accords, at face value at least, with Constant's common-sense understanding of reality as a state of affairs that is perceived to exist. As proposed above, this corresponds with the concept of reality as a subject of common

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[127] The use of the equation 2+2= 4 is a common illustration of logical necessity, especially in possible worlds talk. For the sake of adequately representing Loux's discussion, it is worth noting that he explains analytic modality regarding states of affairs in the following way:

> Some states of affairs (like that consisting in two plus two's equaling four) *obtain necessarily*; others (like that consisting in nine's being a prime number) are *necessarily such that they fail to obtain*; still others (like Clinton's being a slow runner) *obtain, but do so only contingently*; and, finally some states of affairs are such that they *contingently fail to obtain*. (Loux 145)

[128] Loux presents a concise overview of the history of modal metaphysics in chapter five of his reader *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction* (pp 153 – 186).

assent and "ordinary language". As Ruth Ronen observes in *Possible Worlds in Literary Theory,* "The various [philosophical] positions on possible worlds are in fact various views on the degree of *realism* to be ascribed to possible worlds" (Ronen 21). In referring to and extrapolating from the logical principles applicable in the 'actual world', they ultimately affirm these principles and their association with the actual. The significance of the assumption that actuality is a *perceived* state is understated in Austin's text. Processes of perception and 'visualisation' (or imagined perception) of different states of affairs assume a degree of importance in possible worlds discourse that goes largely unacknowledged. However, it is largely through acts of perception and visualisation that possible worlds are tethered to 'the actual' (at least in the case of contingent facts). At the same time, paradoxically, perception allows possible worlds to drift from the actual, just as visualisations, hallucinations and misperceptions compromise the causal link between perception and the apprehension of the actual.[129]

The prevailing discourse of possible worlds theory, though developed for the most part in the twentieth century, has its origins in the writings of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, who devised the model to account for the ontological status and causes of those things that appear to exist in the physical world. According to Leibniz, the actual world is merely one of an infinite number of metaphysically possible and conceivable alternative worlds. The notions of possibility, impossibility, necessity and contingency reflect the ontological status of different states of affairs. For Leibniz, the fact that "this world" appears to have obtained (or come into being) rather than any other, suggests that it is the "best of all possible worlds", as stipulated by

[129] See my discussion of Goodman's position on pp. 179–80.

an omniscient and benevolent Deity (Leibniz 228). In this schema, the world that obtains, as well as all those possible worlds that do not, are merely ideas in the mind of a supreme being.

Revivals of the possible worlds motif lack Liebniz's theistic priorities, and, for the most part, ascribe less importance than Liebniz does to possible but non-actual worlds. For instance, in *Naming and Necessity* Kripke describes possible worlds as abstract, stipulated states which are "tightly controlled", unlike Leibniz's sprawling totality of possible worlds; such worlds are merely "useful in making certain concepts clear" (18). For Kripke, possible worlds – or "counterfactual situations", as he prefers to call them – ought not to be employed in such a way as to create additional meaning or to complicate our intuitive appreciation of the actual: "practical description of the extent to which the 'counterfactual situation' differs in the relevant way from the actual facts is sufficient" (18).[130] Kripke's strong actualist position is concerned with simplifying and clarifying our intuitions about actual and hypothetical situations, while his priority is to reinforce an intuitive distinction between the actual and the non-actual.

Two logically close, but seemingly antithetical, positions reduce the metaphysical disparity between actual and possible worlds, and are therefore closer to Leibniz's thesis. In (Lewis) David Lewis asserts that the 'actual world' and 'possible worlds' are equally real, and that the designation "actual world" is purely indexical .[131] In other words, the subjects of a discrete world system will refer to the system which they inhabit as "the actual world", while all other systems are called "possible worlds". The consequence of this position is that Lewis must

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[130] Kripke presupposes that the actual is an intuitively graspable phenomenon. According to his view, only those counterfactual examples that affirm this intuition should be considered valid. The fallacy in this argument consists in Kripke immunising his notion of the actual against falsifiability. Kripke's examples are tested against the intuitive notion of actuality through a process of intuition; this seems to beg the question.

[131] See also Ronen, 22.

qualify the terms in which he construes the existence of other worlds, since, of necessity, we do not have empirical access to these worlds; if we did have, such worlds would be enclosed in our 'actual world'.

Asserting an opposing view to Lewis's, Nelson Goodman maintains a strong anti-realist position, claiming that it is inappropriate to attribute actuality to one world system rather than another, since this takes for granted our ability to recognise the actual reliably and comprehensively. According to Goodman's position, "there is no way to qualify the reality of *the actual* or *the real* in relation to which other worlds present a variety of alternate possibilities" (Ronen 23 italics in the original). The explanatory power of possible worlds constructs is therefore lost. "We are confined to describing what is described. Our universe, so to speak, consists of these ways, rather than a world or worlds", Goodman writes (Goodman 3). It is interesting, from this perspective, that Goodman considers the applicability of the possible worlds model to theories of art.[132] His assertion that the differentiation of worlds is merely a way of "describing what is described" brings the concept of "world" compellingly close to his description of artworks and fictional writing, as "versions" and "visions" of "worlds already on hand" (Goodman 3, 6). Although these worlds are constructed from worlds already themselves constructed, all worlds are irreducible; none can be traced to a "something stolid underneath" (Goodman 6). Accordingly, Goodman does not distinguish between the values of scientific versions of a world and painterly ones. He writes, "Works of fiction in literature and their counterparts in other arts obviously play a prominent role in worldmaking; our

132 Like many other philosophers of aesthetics, Goodman's discussion of the relationship between art and possible worlds draws examples primarily from literary fiction and figurative painting. Goodman does, however, begin to explore the application of his ideas to abstract painting in *Ways of Worldmaking.* He might not have anticipated, or been familiar with, the increasingly disparate manifestations of art, but his views are still valuable to this discussion.

worlds are no more a heritage from scientists, biographers and historians than from novelists, playwrights and painters" (Goodman 3). In this light, the relationship of these worlds to an absolute reality becomes superfluous to the meaning-value they possess simply as self-consistent systems. It must also be the case, in consequence of the derivative quality of Goodman's worlds, that these sets are approximate but not absolute – they are coherent enough to be identifiable as sets, but porous enough to accommodate unanticipated elements, close neighbouring sets and changes. This model resonates with Merleau-Ponty's metaphor of matrices for speaking about the way in which artworks induce worlds of ideas. It also resonates structurally with *New Babylon*, insofar as *New Babylon*, as a "way of life" resembling and manifesting as a "world", is at once systemic and open to alteration at structural, functional and conceptual levels.

One consequence of Goodman's position is that it becomes unclear how artworks and works of fiction are to be distinguished from objects and texts that are not artworks or works of fiction. The dominant assumption amongst philosophers and possible world theorists who have addressed art and fiction is that there must be some grounds for distinction between these qualities of types of 'things' since the qualities which characterise art *per se* must be evident (even if only after scrutiny). Several philosophers have explored the possibility that works of fiction and art may induce a unique modal quality that is distinct from simply 'actual' or 'non-actual', possible states.[133] According to Wolterstorff, "Any theory as to the nature of the worlds of works of art must take account of the fact that most of them are merely possibilities, some even impossibilities – very few in their entirety are actualities" (Wolterstorff 107).

[133] See Rosen, "Modal Fictionalism" and "A Problem for Fictionalism about Possible Worlds"; Brock, "Modal Fictionalism: A Response to Rosen"; Divers and Hagen, "The modal fictionalist predicament"; and Thomasson, *Fiction and Metaphysics*.

Although artworks are not themselves worlds, they construct, contain or allude to worlds. Art and literature are taken to induce worlds in the same sort of way, and in Wolterstorff's discussion both are embraced by the phrase "works of fiction". The unique modality of such works, Wolterstorff and others argue, is based on a tacit clause accepted by the reader or viewer that the worlds presented in a work of fiction are fabricated, that they are not 'actual' in the same sense that aspects of 'the real world' outside of the text are actual (once again, the boundary between the actual and the non-actual is taken for granted). Similarly, the fabricated nature of the content of pictorial artworks is thought to be evident to anyone who is able to distinguish between the picture and that which is excluded from it.[134] According to Wolterstorff, fictionality is not a quality particular to texts; artworks take up a fictional mode as soon as they represent, deviate from or supplement 'reality'.[135]

Wolterstorff anticipates the objection that fictional worlds differ in no substantive way from elaborate possible worlds scenarios by asserting an approximation of reality for fictional characters and world-elements. One argument for the distinctive modality of works of fiction holds that certain fictional characters who appear in several different fictional works (and therefore several different fictional worlds) retain certain qualities across the different worlds in which they appear. For example, the character Anna Blume appears in two novels by Paul Auster, *In the Country of Last Things* and *Travels in the Scriptorium.* Anna Blume is also the

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[134] In *The Truth in Painting,* Derrida argues that this distinction is far more problematic, metaphysically speaking, than it intuitively appears to be. This is corroborated in the history of European modern art: an overwhelming number of artists since the avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century, including Constant, sought to test the boundary between art as a discrete category and life (potentially anything not conventionally designated as art). A survey of this tendency in art is provided in the anthology *The Everyday,* edited by Stephen Johnstone, which is part of the Whitechapel Gallery's *Documents of Contemporary Art* series.

[135] Despite Wolterstorff's efforts to render the distinction between the possible and the actual with greater subtlety than his philosophical predecessors, he ultimately reinforces the boundary, drawn on the basis of intuition, between the real and the non-real.

fictitious love object of Kurt Schwitters' 1919 poem "*Anna Blume"* ("To Eve Blossom"). The significance of Blume's character in the Auster novels relies, to a degree, on one's knowledge of her first appearance in the Schwitters poem. In the latter, Anna Blume is no one in particular, a receptacle for a lover's empty clichés. The Anna Blumes of *In the Country of Last Things* and *Travels in the Scriptorium* draw on the enigma of Schwitters' Anna Blume. Even though the world of the latter is only a confused and partial construction, it is drawn upon in Auster's construction of a world for his Blume. According to Wolterstorff, this would demonstrate a compounding of world systems that attributes at least a pragmatic level of actuality to the character Anna Blume and her history of participation in different worlds. Although in the first instance Anna Blume was a completely fabricated person, Auster deploys the collective knowledge of an existing fictitious character in his construction of the secondary fictional character Anna Blume. The accessibility of this knowledge gives the first Anna Blume a semblance of actuality *as* a fictional character.

McHale notes in *Postmodernist Fiction* that the application of possible worlds theory to fiction faces the challenge of accounting for multiple simultaneous worlds or relations to reality (or to the fictional 'real world' of the text) which may be embedded in a single work. The Anna Blume example illustrates this point, in addition to the persistence of single characters and worlds across several works. The same would hold for artworks and other kinds of works that involve fabrication and allusion in order to create world-like systems or situations, which, in Wolterstorff's words, are worlds projected in a "fiction-like mode" (107). For him, variances in medium or discursive framing and reception have little bearing on their participation in a game of make-believe, however complex this may be.

2.5 Medium, multiplicity and the problem of the limit

Constant's one time description of *New Babylon* as a "science fiction" (Constant, "The Great Game to Come" 111), and his repeated assertion of the fantastical or make-believe nature of the work, particularly later in the project, bolster the notion that artworks can behave like works of fictional literature when it comes to questions of modality.[136] Like the character of Anna Blume, *New Babylon* is an entity cumulatively constructed over many instances of works that are *about New Babylon*. However, unlike Anna Blume, *New Babylon* is also an entire world-like thing, which, though represented and described by physical objects and texts, is dependent on an (unattainable) concept of wholeness that exceeds its physical manifestations. Although we may refer to Constant's maquettes, paintings, drawings, collages and texts collectively as "*New Babylon*", because of an enduring convention of associating artworks with physical objects, this is technically incorrect. Despite many inconsistencies in other aspects of the work, Constant maintains that *New Babylon* is the urban totality which his texts, sculptures and pictures prefigure, predict or evoke. At the same time, however, when one wants to access or see evidence of *New Babylon*, one looks at Constant's sculptures, drawings, paintings and texts, as has been done in this thesis. These objects have been preserved, exhibited and written about as artworks; if one cannot call these objects 'works' that are at least 'part' of *New Babylon* (if not *New Babylon* itself), then what exactly are they? In this essential respect, *New Babylon* presents a complicated case for the discourse of possibility and necessity, since it seems to mix ontological timbres. The work *New Babylon* seems both to exist in a straightforward, common-sensical way, in an array of physical and textual

[136] Artworks can simultaneously 'behave' in other ways as well, so as to suggest here that they can behave in at least one respect like fictional works is not to exclude their other ways of being.

manifestations, and not to exist, or, more accurately in keeping with Constant's thought, not *yet* to exist.

McHale argues for a similarly mixed and contradictory ontological quality in works of fiction, attributing the logical inconsistencies that seem to emerge from a fictional object or character's simultaneously existing and not-existing to its straddling of different "ontological levels" (McHale 119). According to McHale, the "nesting" of a narrative element from one ontology in the narrative of another ontology may produce what appear to be logical contradictions but are not; simultaneous, mutually exclusive facts may be true at the same time and in the same space because they belong to different worlds with different ontological levels (McHale 119). By way of comparison, one could argue, in Constant's favour, that the contradictions in his representations of *New Babylon* regarding reality and unreality issue from his attempt to account for *New Babylon*'s complex ontology as something which both manifests in the 'real world' and does not, having an ostensible beginning (and therefore a history) and being consigned to an impossible future. McHale's notion of nesting worlds is attractive at face value for the way in which it seems to explain the complexities of fictional reality. However, what his argument takes for granted, and what a conceptually oriented artwork such as *New Babylon* calls into question, is whether the most appropriate way of imagining ontological plurality is through the metaphor of coinciding, distinct layers or levels of truth and untruth. This is essentially no different from a strong actualist possible worlds theory, in which different possible world constructs are used to clarify apparently contradictory propositions and situations that seem to occur in a benchmark 'real' world.

In spite of its flawed assumptions, McHale's position on the modality of fiction introduces an important third perspective into this discussion, that of the reader. The conventions of fiction, McHale writes, both depend on and call on the reader to accept the simultaneous truth and untruth of what is presented in the text. Fictional texts are "suspended between belief and disbelief" (30), and rather than evaluating the truth-value of sentences in a fictional text according to facts and logic in the "actual world", readers "abandon the actual world and adopt (temporarily) the *ontological perspective* of the literary work" (McHale 30 italics in the original). The emphasis in McHale's discussion in this instance is on the reader's participation in an arrangement with the author through which both agree to prioritise the ontological terms of the text. Importantly, the reader has a role in constructing the world(s) of the text, the acknowledgement of which has long been established in poststructuralist philosophies of language, even though the idea has barely entered possible worlds philosophy. In Barthes' seminal essay "The Death of the Author", he discusses the way in which language "acts" to expand and multiply meaning once a text enters circulation (Barthes 143). The text does not originate with the author, who is in fact merely a "scriptor", but with the reader, or rather, the multitude of readers who receive a text from and into an existing linguistic system which "ceaselessly calls into question all origins" (Barthes 145,146). This process Barthes calls the "birth of the reader" (Barthes 148).[137]

By importing a plenitude of texts and 'readings' into her encounter with the work of fiction, the reader introduces uncertainty to its ostensibly stable and discernable ontological levels. The consequence of this uncertainty is that it is impossible to account for all the potential

137 Barthes' "Death of the Author" reappears in this thesis in Chapter Three (pp. 239–40), in the context of my discussion of the emergence of the viewer as an authorial co-creator of the work.

layers of reality embedded in the literary work. While there are no grounds for simply inferring ontological premises about non-literary artworks from the fiction-based examples cited above, what does seem consistent across different kinds of artworks (including both works of fiction and primarily visual works) is the layering of levels of reality within the ontological structure of the work. In other words, an artwork is able to *be* in different ways simultaneously. For example, a work of fiction can exist as both a simple physical object (a book) and as a disembodied narrative, a product of the imagination. Likewise, a sculpture exists as, and can be described purely in terms of, its physical properties, while it is, at the same time, a site of metaphoric dissimulation, where extended systems of meaning begin their articulation. This simultaneous occupation of different ontologies is particularly apparent in *New Babylon,* which very clearly resists having ascribed to it a single quality of or relation to 'reality'. It is a hybrid phenomenon, part object, part concept and part social intervention. Its origin and authorship, while attached to Constant in the same way as crafted objects are uncontroversially held to originate with a craftsman, are also contingent on an unborn, and possibly impossible (or possible *as* impossible), multitude, the New Babylonians, the citizens of *New Babylon*'s new social order. My discussion of *New Babylon* alongside the possible worlds motif - a philosophical manoeuvre geared to clarify and to identify the levels of reality of different entities – makes plain the difficulties of placing the work in a discrete ontological category, of calling it a work of art or a work of architecture, even of knowing what precisely this 'it' is, and where it begins and ends.

The same dilemma occupies Derrida in *The Truth in Painting,* albeit under different circumstances. Derrida responds to Meyer Schapiro's reading of Heidegger's analysis of Vincent van Gogh's 1886 painting *A Pair of Shoes* in the essay "The Origin of the Work of

Art" (1935).[138] Heidegger fabricates a background narrative for the painting which is grounded neither in obvious pictorial clues nor in archival evidence. In an excerpt from this narrative, he writes the following:

> From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth. In the stiffly rugged heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind. On the leather lie the dampness and richness of the soil. Under the soles slides the loneliness of the field-path as evening falls. (159)

He goes on to imagine the daily routine of the woman who wears these shoes, as she rises early to begin her work in the fields and returns home late, each day removing the shoes only for sleep. In his 1968 essay "The Still Life as a Personal Object: A Note on Heidegger and van Gogh", Schapiro strongly criticises Heidegger for these assumptions, arguing from archival evidence that the shoes are more likely to have been Van Gogh's own. For Schapiro, Heidegger's narrative projection, and his repeated referral to a single painting of a pair of shoes,[139] discredit the key philosophical points of his argument. Schapiro seems to understate Heidegger's distinction between the shoes as "equipment" (Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" 159) – objects that may be put to use – and the painting as an object that has the capacity to represent other objects.

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[138] In "The Origin of the Work of Art" Heidegger acknowledges that Van Gogh painted several pictures of shoes (158), but still refers to a single painting in his discussion of this example. Schapiro and Derrida take this painting to be *A Pair of Shoes* (1886).

[139] Schapiro, erroneously, interprets Heidegger's discussion of "Van Gogh's painting" as evidence that Heidegger assumes that only one painting of shoes exists. As noted above, however, Heidegger does acknowledge that Van Gogh produced several paintings of shoes.

Derrida offers a rejoinder to Schapiro that problematises his reliance on conventional historical discourse and his own assumptions about precisely what the picture refers to or represents. Derrida asks, "[H]ow are they [works of art] to be recognised? … At each step, at each example, … there is a trembling of the limit between the 'there is' and the 'there is not' [a] 'work of art', between a 'thing' and a 'work', a 'work' in general and a 'work of art'" (Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* 28–29). This question, which appears early in *The Truth in Painting,* introduces the reader to the central aporia in Derrida's text: the limit between the work and that which is external to it. Derrida pursues this enquiry through Schapiro's main contention, Heidegger's apparent misreading of the painting as a representation of a pair of peasant's shoes. Derrida contests Schapiro's concentration on the relationship between the real shoes on which the painting is based and the shoes in the picture, arguing instead that if we accept that Van Gogh's shoes have been painted "within the limits of a picture", these limits "have to be thought in laces" (Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* 304).

The metaphor of laces follows from the painting's depiction of boots whose laces have been unravelled and lie loosely in the area surrounding the shoes. This metaphor is closely connected to another Derrida takes up, that of the frame. Derrida's use of the motif of the frame is based on Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, in which he identifies the frame as ornamentation, superfluous to the content of a painting and surrounding it, "at the limit between work and absence of work" (Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* 64). "The whole analytic of aesthetic judgement forever assumes that one can distinguish rigorously between the intrinsic and the extrinsic," Derrida writes (Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* 64). The same assumption is at play when one attempts to distinguish between the world of a work of art and the world(s) from which it would be distinguished, or between 'possible' and 'real' worlds.

This is precisely Constant's difficulty in representing New Babylon, and he seems drawn at different times to express the relation of New Babylon to reality – whether its participation in or deviation from reality – as though a suitable explanation were required of him in order to legitimise the work. However, as Derrida argues, the frame – or, in Kant's words, the *par-ergon,* – "makes a work of supplementary *désouevrement.* It cuts out but also sews back together. By an invisible lace which pierces the canvas (as the *pointure* 'pierces the paper'), passes into it then out of it in order to sew it back onto its milieu, onto its internal and external worlds" (Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* 304). In other words, although the frame constitutes the boundary between the work's "internal and external worlds", it also attaches the work to both these worlds. It therefore activates the world of the work, but by puncturing it and interlacing it with those things that are ostensibly exterior to it: worlds and objects perceived as real, everyday banalities, theory, history, and any number of other things and states in relation to which we might differentiate the work.

Schapiro's analysis of "The Origin of the Work of Art" undertakes at one point to distinguish between the different modes of objecthood in the face of which Van Gogh's painting of shoes has apparently confused Heidegger. Derrida notes that Schapiro distinguishes between "three modes of things": the "naked, pure and simple thing", "the product", and the work of art (Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* 298–299). We might infer from these different categories that Schapiro's distinctions record the level of productive intervention that takes place in each instance. The "naked, pure and simple thing," unlike a product, does not require fabrication in order to come into being. It just '*is*'. One level away from the "naked, pure and simple thing", "the product" is fabricated and has use-value. In the case of Van Gogh's painting, the shoes on which the painting is based are a product. These ‘first-instance’ shoes are then represented in Van Gogh’s painting, which appears as a shoe-picture. Like the product, the painting is fabricated. However, unlike the product, it has no use-value. It represents fabrication to no particular end, supplementing the order of useful objects. In this instance, the word ‘fabrication’ refers both to the crafted nature of the painting – it has been made by Van Gogh – and its ‘unreal’ or make-believe qualities. The shoes in the painting are not real shoes, even though they may represent ‘real’ shoes: they are, in some sense, ‘made up’, fabricated in the sense that a lie or a piece of fiction is fabricated.

Derrida contests these categories and defends Heidegger’s reading of the painting on the basis that the different qualities of thingness are not as easily differentiable as Schapiro assumes. In particular, Derrida’s criticism emphasises the difficulty of placing the work of art within its own, identifiable modal and ontological order. He challenges the assertion of limits between the work of art and objects which have functions, are not fabricated or are simply assumed to be closer to ‘reality’ than artworks are. He writes:

> Like a lace, each “thing”, each mode of being of the thing, passes inside then outside the other. From right to left, from left to right. …passing and repassing through the eyelet of the thing, from outside to inside, from inside to outside, *on* the external surface and *under* the internal surface… . (Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* 299)

Here Derrida alludes to the functionality of ‘real’ laces, which are pictured in Van Gogh’s painting as spilling out of the main forms of the shoes. As these laces, or things, pass inside and outside the eyelets, do they “emerge from the other side of the leather or the other side of the canvas?” Derrida asks (304). “The two textures of invisibility” represented by the ‘real’ shoes and the painted shoes, are pierced “with a single *pointure*” (304): in other words, the supposedly real object and the artwork are perforated by the same philosophical difficulty, the vulnerability of the limits that distinguish them from each other, and in themselves, as real and unreal. The different relations to reality at work in Van Gogh's painting of shoes and Heidegger's reading of the painting are entwined in each other in such a way that distinguishing between them becomes exceedingly difficult, if not impossible. This notion brings to mind Wolterstorff and McHale's attempts to account for the different "ontological layers" that characterise works of fiction and art, keeping them separate from more legitimately 'real' modes of being.

2.6 Impossible Worlds

Many of the difficulties Constant encounters in representing New Babylon's relationship to the real, to everyday life and to the unknown (the aspect of the work for which he ultimately forsakes model-making and contextualising the work in the formal languages of architecture), suggest an affinity between his concerns and Derrida's in *The Truth in Painting.* Constant's perplexities might have been clarified by propounding a plural ontological structure for the work, but perhaps lacked the appropriate reception for this during his career. Prior to 1999, his lectures on New Babylon almost invariably contextualise it as a work of architecture, bound in certain respects to a discipline-specific understanding of 'actual' and realised projects as those which result in purpose-specified buildings. However, as has been argued in this chapter, the question of New Babylon's possibility, or even its impossibility, is in fact a crucial conceptual aspect of the work, offering insight not only into our placement of the work in relation to the history of twentieth-century art, but also into philosophical enquiries concerning the ontology of artworks and the metaphysics of possibility. *The Truth in Painting* resolves a problem encountered when the work is considered alongside possible worlds discourse, namely the difficulty of encircling and distinguishing worlds from each other.

With Derrida's reference to the "internal and external worlds" of a work of art (Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* 304), we are reminded of the ubiquity of the metaphor of world in both art and philosophical discourse. Furthermore, *The Truth in Painting* implicitly reiterates a conclusion that emerged earlier in this chapter, the necessary incompleteness of world constructs used to speak about modality. Taking the incompleteness of possible worlds into consideration, and in view of the difficulty of asserting the limits between worlds, we might identify an alternative world modality (alternative to "possible worlds", "the actual world" and "this world") which better represents *New Babylon*'s relation to reality. In accordance with Derrida and Heidegger's positions, we might refer to such world-constructs as impossible worlds, or *possible-as-impossible* worlds.

In *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* Heidegger addresses the notion of "world" as the totality towards which philosophy strives, with the ultimate goal of explicating it. "World", he writes, is the desirable state of being "*within the whole",* and the character of wholeness is itself "world" (Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* 5). The desire and inclination of philosophy to incorporate or 'make a home of' discourses that are alien to it, he describes as "homesickness", or an urge "to be at home everywhere" (Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* 5). According to Heidegger, "to be at home everywhere means to be at once and at all times within the whole" (Heidegger, *ThThe Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* 5). Heidegger does not, however, grant that the wholeness of "world" can be attained, and suggests instead that philosophy's "homesickness", its desire to incorporate and make familiar all that is unfamiliar to it (or even "unhomely" [*unheimlich*] or uncanny), will not be alleviated. He acknowledges that much as philosophy is driven towards "world", it is also "torn back" from it (Martin Heidegger, *ThThe Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* 5–6), retreating always at its own discursive limits. The extent to which texts, experience and phenomena conventionally foreign to philosophy allow for the contradictory, the aporetic and the unknown (and an artwork such as *New Babylon* exemplifies this problematic), prevents the totalisation into "world". Unlike the limited possible and actual worlds of analytic philosophy and certain structuralist literary criticism, Heidegger presents us with a notion of "world" which is fundamentally *im*possible, or rather, which occurs (and is therefore 'possible') only as impossibility. For Derrida, this curious modality of possibility-as-impossibility is represented by the aporia, an impassable and impossible limit which prevents passage in virtue of its own dissolution as limit.

As I have argued thus far, *New Babylon* calls for a rethinking of the terms (which is also a rethinking of the terminology) of the ontology of the artwork. In particular, this challenge to the conventions of philosophy takes place through the engagement of the work with various iterations of and references to a limit between the 'real' and the non-real. The significance of this limit is dramatised in Constant's later discourse on *New Babylon,* in which he professes an increasing interest in "the unknown" (Constant, "New Babylon - Ten Years On" 232) ("New Babylon - Ten Years On", 232). He associates this unknown with a zone beyond the scope of the everyday, the actual, or the 'real' in ordinary language: "a world… so fundamentally different from the world in which we live or the worlds we know from history" (Constant, "New Babylon - Ten Years On" 232). Constant reframes the *New Babylon* pieces as "depict[ions]" of this unknown, a contradictory notion – since to depict something is to render it ‘knowable’ in at least some respects – but one which signals the importance of the unbridgeable threshold as a constitutive figure in Constant’s thinking about the work (Constant, “New Babylon - Ten Years On” 232). The notion that *New Babylon* “depict[s] the unknown” foregrounds an intractable quality of the work that is at once vital to its existence and fundamentally prohibitive of that existence (Constant, “New Babylon - Ten Years On” 232). Because *New Babylon* depends on an invocation of the unknown, it seems, necessarily, destined not to be realised. The paradox of the work is that it is laboured towards and yearned for but with no legitimate hope of its appearance in its totality.

For Derrida, the intractability of this pursuit of what refuses to be revealed or resolved is synonymous with the aporia. Paradoxically, this intractability invites pursuit, a thinking “according to the aporia”, going along with it, rather than a retreat from or halt before a perceived impasse (Derrida, *Aporias* 13). Derrida identifies three modulations of the aporetic which explain this (non-)phenomenon as a ‘step’ (in French, *pas*)[140] of non-passage in relation to limit-borders that are untraversable because they are impermeable, too porous or altogether absent. These permutations do not oppose one anther but “[install] the haunting of one in the other” (Derrida, *Aporias* 20). Derrida writes that

> [i]n one case the nonpassage resembles an impermeability; it would stem from the opaque existence of an uncrossable border: a door that does not open, or that only opens according to an unlocatable condition, according to an inaccessible secret of some shibboleth. (Derrida, *Aporias* 20)

[140] The French word *pas* denotes the noun “passage”, or “step”, but is also a verbal qualifier which is used in a sentence to assert the negative of a verb. Derrida’s play on the word *pas* here implies a gesture of action as negation or subtraction, and enacts the work of the aporia as both constitutive and obstructive.

New Babylon is separated absolutely from its realisation because there is no foreseeable passage from the present social milieu, as perceived by Constant, and the "unlocatable" and "secret" milieu that would facilitate the production of *New Babylon* at the level of the metropolis. This unforeseeable future state is the condition according to which we gain access to *New Babylon,* yet its impossible distance from an actual state of affairs institutes an "uncrossable border" between the two. At the same time, however, *New Babylon* is premised on the transgression, and even the dissolution, of all spatial borders; this radical permeability establishes an impasse in that there can be no articulation of a path. Continuing, Derrida writes:

> In another case, the nonpassage, the impasse or aporia, stems from the fact that there is no limit. There is not yet or there is no longer a border to cross, no opposition between two sides: the limit is too porous, permeable, and indeterminate… .(Derrida, *Aporias* 20)

In its dissolution of all fixed borders between private and public spaces, communal spaces for different functions and the very distinction between functional and non-functional spaces, *New Babylon*'s structure is by nature deconstructive. Constant reiterates this understanding in response to a question posed by Obrist concerning the relationship between *New Babylon*'s constructed parts and undeveloped spaces surrounding these parts, when he states that "*New Babylon* is not a construction because it is at the same time a deconstruction: one builds and destroys at the same time" (Obrist 171). By extension, it precludes even its own articulation as a break with a prevailing system, because such a break would require delimiting, an ultimate boundary, a hermetic limit which encircles (but remains unaffected by) the absolute dissolution of all hermetic limits. *New Babylon,* therefore, is aporetic insofar as it is necessarily incapable of asserting its own spatial boundary. In other words, it would amount to a logical contradiction to suggest that *New Babylon* is 'here' and not 'there'.[141]

Derrida closes his description of the aporia with a paraphrased reiteration of the previously considered trait of temporal discontinuity, followed by an assertion that the aporia undercuts even the possibility of a path or ground against which it can be posited. He writes:

> Finally, the third type of aporia, the impossible, the antinomy, or the contradiction, is a nonpassage because its elementary milieu does not allow for something that could be called passage, step, walk, gait, displacement, or replacement, kinesis in general. There is no more path. … The impasse itself would be impossible. The coming or the future advent of the event would have no relation to the passage of what happens or comes to pass. … There would not even be any space for aporia because of a lack of topographical conditions or, more radically, because of a lack of the topographical condition itself. (Derrida, *Aporias* 21)

In this extract, the metaphor of motion, walking particularly, is associated with a ground or "topograph[y]" along which motion and the ultimate impasse are staged. This topography is partly temporal; since "the coming or the future advent of the event" has "no relation to the passage of what happens or comes to pass," there can be no temporal ground against which the aporia seems to 'take place' or have its effect. Derrida's seems here also to claim a spatial discontinuity, in which the path, as the condition for the impasse, is inarticulable. Similar-

141 Constant's maps of *New Babylon* seem quite clearly to demarcate the area of *New Babylon* in relation to sections of the particular city on which *New Babylon* would be superimposed. However, these maps also demonstrate how *New Babylon* would spread over the existing city in a potentially infinite lattice, unbound by any spatial restrictions. The demarcated areas of *New Babylon* and their ambulatory tracings of ambiences were meant to suggest the traversal of the city grid and not the reinstatement of an alternative inflexible rubric.

ly, *New Babylon* is premised on a topography of discontinuity and "disorientation" (Constant, "The Principle of Disorientation"). Continuous disorientation is a foundational principle of New Babylonian urban design. In his essay entitled "The Principle of Disorientation", Constant writes that "orientation is only relevant in the context of a regular life pattern that gives rise to constantly recurring points of recognition" (Constant, "The Principle of Disorientation" 225). By contrast, *New Babylon* is a "dynamic labyrinth" in which "disorientation is actively sought" (Constant, "The Principle of Disorientation" 225).[142] What this somewhat paradoxically implies, however, is that without any circumstances allowing for orientation, there can be no possibility of following a path and, therefore, no possibility of impasse.

Each of these presentations of the aporia as impasse leads to a formulation which asserts the simultaneous, and co-dependent, impossibility and possibility of the aporia, an ontological condition which is not equivalent to simple impossibility. Derrida explains the substantive nature of the formulation possible-as-impossible in a passage towards the end of *Aporias* in which he asserts, in a reading of Heidegger, that death is "the most proper possibility of *Dasein*" and "its proper impossibility" (Derrida, *Aporias* 71). This follows from Heidegger's central claim in his discourse on death in *Being and Time,* that death is that event in which "*Dasein*'s character as possibility lets itself be revealed most precisely" (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 293). Citing Heidegger, Derrida explains the possible-as-impossible as follows:

> "The more unveiledly this possibility gets understood … the more purely … does the understanding penetrate into it … as the possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all [underlined by Heidegger: *als die der Unmoglichkeit der Existenz uberhaupt*].

[142] The significance of labyrinthine form in *New Babylon* is the subject of Chapter Three.

> … the possibility is both unveiled and penetrated *as* impossibility. It is not only the paradoxical possibility of a possibility of impossibility; it is possibility *as* impossibility. (Derrida, *Aporias* 70)

This passage is perhaps better understood through a revisiting of Heidegger's understanding of possibility. Heidegger identifies two kinds of possibility that concern *Dasein*'s future-orientation. He writes, "As being-possible [*Möglichsein*] … *Dasein* is existentially that which, in its ability-to-be [*Seinkönnen*], it is not yet" (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 185–186). The second type of possibility, *Seinkönnen,* is perhaps easier to understand than the first as it has more in common with the way in which we use the word "possible" in ordinary language (to recall Austin's theory of the real). *Seinkönnen,* which would translate literally as "being-can", concerns capability, or capacity, not only or necessarily for *doing* such-and-such, but also for *being* in some or other way. The first type of possibility, *Möglichsein*, is translated as being-possible, which we might take as a state of being in which the future-orientation of possibility is inherent in being. Heidegger's notion of *Dasein*, from which the aporia of possibility-as-impossibility unfurls, is characterised by *Dasein*'s futuricity, its inclination towards that which is not yet. The metaphor of inclination bears an important resonance for this futuricity, which is not simply an understanding that there are future days in which things will happen (this is closer to *Seinkönnen*), but a postural sensibility that directs the essence of Dasein toward the future. In other words, *Dasein*'s being is precisely a condition of future-orientation or "standing before" (Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* 293), which is not the same as a feeling of anticipation regarding the future or a desire to be able to do certain things in the future. It is simply a sensibility that being is contingent on the possibility of continued being.

In other words, my being, or the condition that I call "I", not only has the "ability-to-be", but will have been, rather than suggesting that I am simply, presently being.[143]

Iain Thomson notes that Heidegger identifies three modal qualities of possibility, two of which are discussed above. *Seinkönnen,* the quality of possibility relating to capability or capacity, Thomson calls categorical possibility. *Möglichsein* is closer to what Thomson, citing Heidegger, calls existential possibility, a condition of possibility as potentiality or orientation. The third category, which bears less importance in this discussion but proves dominant in philosophical possible worlds discourse, is logical possibility. Here Thomson and Derrida part ways: with no substantive justification, Thomson reads Heidegger's analysis of death as centred on *Seinkönnen*, and takes for granted, in the light of his own position, that Derrida is misguided when he writes that "if being-possible [*Möglichsein*] is the being proper to Dasein, then the existential analysis of the death of Dasein will have to make of this possibility its theme" (Thomson 32) (Derrida, *Aporias* 6). Thomson wrongly attributes to Derrida the modal fallacy that death represents the impossible, and then proceeds to a modal fallacy of his own. He claims that for Heidegger death is "possibly impossible" (32), which is simply to say that it is potentially impossible (much as, for example, my going swimming tomorrow may be impossible, if the possibility of my going swimming is contingent on certain conditions beyond my control, such as someone else's draining the swimming pool). Thomson may not intend so simplistic a reduction, but in collapsing the categorical and existential modalities of possibility, which he inadvertently does through his modal fallacy, he eliminates the

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143 The subjectivity implied in *Dasein*'s specificity is potentially problematic. However, for Heidegger, it is crucial that *Dasein* is particular rather than general; this follows from Heidegger's emphatic claim that "[b]y its very essence, death is in every case mine" (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 240).

complexity of both Heidegger and Derrida's renderings of the interleaving of possibility and impossibility.

Derrida is careful to represent death as *Dasein*'s "possibility *as* impossibility" (Derrida, *Aporias* 70), which is faithful to Heidegger's description of death as "The uttermost 'not-yet'", which "has the character of something *towards which* Dasein *comports* itself." (Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* 294)(*Being and Time* 294). Therefore, death, as the "possibility of no-longer-being-able-to-be-there" is that towards which Dasein comports itself in its being-possible (Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* 294). It might be argued that the alignment of death with the notion of possibility is insufficient to show that death confers on *Dasein* an individuated status, or any special quality of being. By way of clarification, Heidegger emphasises the nature of death as Death as the ineluctable destiny of each and every human being: "By its very essence, death is in every case mine, insofar as it 'is' at all" (cited in Derrida, *Aporias* 26). The possibility of death is essential to *Dasein* precisely in that death always belongs to a particular being. This is why Heidegger writes that it is impossible truly to die for another, or to 'replace' another's death with one's own. In other words, the horizon of *Dasein*'s death, which signals the end of *Dasien*'s ability-to-be (thus, its impossibility), is precisely what gives *Dasein*'s ability-to-be its specificity to *Dasein*. Elaborating this argument, Heidegger writes:

> With death, *Dasein* stands before itself in its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. This is a possibility in which the issue is nothing less than *Dasein*'s Being-in-the-world. Its death is the possibility of no-longer-being-able-to-be-there. If *Dasein* stands before itself as this possibility, it has been *fully* assigned to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being… . (Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* 294)

Thomson suggests that Derrida makes too much of the apparent subjecthood or Ego implied in *Dasein*'s death when he asks, "Is my death possible?" (cited in Derrida, *Aporias* 21); in so doing Thompson anticipates an important conclusion for *Dasein*. As Derrida shows in *Aporias,* self-present subjecthood does not follow from Heidegger's assertion of the ownmost-ness of death. On the contrary, as Heidegger writes, "Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of *Dasein*," so that this horizon of possibility-as-impossibility renders the being of *Dasein* aporetic (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 294). Moreover, the absolute futurity with which *Dasien's* being-possible (as impossibility) is figured severs *Dasein* from a constitution of the present around which a subject could gather itself as self-present. *Dasein will have been*, rather than *Dasein is*. *Aporias* turns on this apparent paradox, while Derrida's subtle exegesis of *Dasein*'s possibility-as-impossibility forms the foundation not only for his deconstruction of the limit, but also for his identification of a complex modality unacknowledged in mainstream modal philosophy. Contrasting the possible-as-impossible with the limited modal alternatives available within established possible worlds discourse one finds a rich conceptual terrain for the analysis of the kinds of reality at play and at stake in ontologically complex artworks.[144]

2.7 Conclusion

New Babylon's particular complexity, which issues from its plural and contradictory relationship to a concept of reality, challenges and expands the ways in which the ontology of the artwork can be thought. Derrida's philosophy of the artwork, as presented in *The Truth in*

[144] Indeed, I propose that *all* artworks are ontologically complex, although they are not all complex in identical ways.

Painting, provides a vocabulary for this expansion, while contextualising it within the terrain of metaphors that more generally give body to a deconstructive ontology. The problem of the aporia can be considered the ‘ground zero’ of this ontology since it is concerned precisely with the question of the limit as a condition of being.

The central aim of this chapter has been to show how *New Babylon* instantiates this complex relation to being, and thereby problematises not only its own conceptual relationship to ‘the real’ but also the relationship between the artwork and the concept of ‘the real’ more generally. Through explorations both of Constant’s wavering views on the nature of ‘reality’ and their relevance to *New Babylon*, and of the limited nature of dominant discourses of modality in the philosophy of art, I have suggested that an alternative approach to the ontology of art is needed to account for the ontological structure of *New Babylon.* Derrida’s reading of Heidegger’s “The Origin of the Work of Art” draws our attention to the problematics of the limit of the work, while his engagement with the concept of *Dasein* articulates this limit in terms of its impossible possibility. Imagining *New Babylon,* and potentially other artworks as well, as entities which are possible-as-impossible goes some way towards accommodating the complex and often contradictory relationship (whether perceived or purported) of the work to notions of ‘the real’.

This chapter’s discussion of the relationship between the artwork and ‘reality’ lays the groundwork for the third and final chapter, which is structured around a consideration of the recurring motif of the labyrinth in *New Babylon.* The figure of the labyrinth offers a formal and metaphorical armature for an examination of New Babylonian authorship, viewership and participation; the problematics of the limit will also be further explored.

Chapter Three

The New Babylonian labyrinth: emancipation, participation and hospitality

3.1 Introduction

During the 1960s and 1970s, a period during which several artists and groups in Europe were turning their attention to possible intersections between art, architecture and the social, a number of unrelated exhibitions were devised which took the form of participatory labyrinths.[145] From the Situationists' scuppered efforts to turn Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum into an environment for an indoor *dérive* (*Die Welt Als Labyrint,* 1960*)* to the collabora-

[145] Not all of the exhibitions planned in this vein were actually realised. One of the most important examples of labyrinthine exhibition design was the unrealised project *Die Welt Als Labyrint* ("The World as a Labyrinth") (1960), which I discuss at length later in the chapter.

tively designed, immersive Fluxus installation *Flux-Labyrinth* (1976),[146] these interventions sought to bring about profound sensory experiences in their viewers, and in so doing to transform the viewer from a 'passive' consumer of culture into an agent in the production of the artwork. From this position of heightened consciousness, subjects would be equipped with a different awareness *vis á vis* society, life, or the everyday: the variously called and ambiguously defined 'outside' of art.[147]

New Babylon anticipated this prevalence of the labyrinth motif: already in Constant's early models, such as *Orient Sector* (1959) and *Gele Sector* (1959, fig. 2), labyrinthine environments are represented as convoluted passages and enclosures occupying large sections of the models. After his withdrawal from the SI in July 1960, Constant explored labyrinthine form more comprehensively, creating the participatory labyrinthine installations *Experiment Studio Rotterdam (ESR)* (fig. 8) and *T-T √2* (fig. 28) in 1965, *Ludieke Trap* (fig. 10) in 1969, and finally *Deuren Labyrint* in 1974. For Constant, the labyrinth was an integral structural element of *New Babylon*, essential to the facilitation of a state of productive "disorientation" in New Babylonian society. In the short 1974 text "The Principle of Disorientation'", Constant writes that "In the labyrinth, disorientation is actively sought. … Straying no longer has the negative sense of 'getting lost,' but the more positive sense of discovering new paths" (Con-

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146 The *Flux-Labyrinth*, designed by George Maciunas and Larry Miller, was staged at the Akademie der Künsten in Berlin from 5 September until 17 October, 1976. According to Miller, the installation, which spanned approximately 100 square metres, was an "extensive maze of puzzling and obstacle-laden corridors" in which walls and doors had been altered to make them difficult to traverse (Miller, para.1). The *Flux-Labyrinth* was reconstructed at the Walker Art Centre in 1993 for the exhibition *Spirit of Fluxus,* and then again in 2015 in New York City as part of the Frieze New York art fair. I do not discuss this project further since it took place after the chronological end of *New Babylon,* and therefore lacks direct relevance to my research. However, I signal its existence here in order to give an overview of the extent to which the labyrinth was prevalent as an organising principle in exhibitions in the mid-twentieth century.

147 See pp. 191–94 for my discussion of the problematics of the separation between the artwork and its 'outside', or what Derrida refers to as the artwork's "internal and external worlds" (Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* 304).

stant, “The Principle of Disorientation” 225).

This chapter looks at the significance of labyrinthine form in *New Babylon*, arguing that the labyrinth is integral to the emergence of the viewer as the central figure in the *New Babylon* project. Constant’s reimagining of the viewer as a participant in and literal co-creator of the work is one of the earliest instances of this notion in Western art history, which persists in the field of visual art – specifically in the form of participatory practice – to the present day. Despite the radicalism of Constant’s position for his time, and the extent to which he expanded the conceptual framework of the artwork to include viewer participation, *New Babylon* has not hitherto been included in historical accounts of the theme of viewer participation and ‘activation’ in Western art. I believe this oversight has occurred because Constant’s understanding of the notion of the viewer has not been interrogated in any depth in the existing literature, and because insufficient attention has been paid to the significance of the labyrinth in Constant’s conception of *New Babylon*.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part begins by addressing the centrality of representations of labyrinths in Constant’s two-dimensional works and models, arguing that from these representations we are able to extrapolate a theory of spatiality that privileges the act of walking. The chapter then goes on to put these observations into motion, looking at how Constant’s life-sized labyrinth constructions solicit participation from the viewer, interrogating the nature and expression of this participation. Constant’s creation of participatory labyrinthine environments is paralleled in close proximity by several efforts by other artists and curators – Constant’s contemporaries – to re-envision the role of the viewer via explorations of labyrinthine form. I contextualise Constant’s participatory labyrinths within this milieu, proposing, through a reading of Jacques Rancière's theory of the "emancipated spectator", that they "challenge the opposition between viewing and acting" (Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* 13).

The second part of this chapter specifically addresses the phenomenon of participation in art, contextualising it within contemporary discourse. Expanding on the poststructuralist approach to ontology developed in Chapters One and Two, the chapter explores the theoretical and ontological implications of the plural authorship that arises in participatory art. The chapter culminates with a reading of *New Babylon* through Derrida's notion of radical hospitality, and argues, alongside Mark Wigley, that *New Babylon* enacts an "architecture of hospitality" (Wigley, "Extreme Hospitality" 39).

Part One: Rat mazes, exhibitions and emancipation

3. 2 From the laboratory to the situation

Constant's exploration of the motif of the labyrinth developed simultaneously with – and can be read as perhaps an unintentional response to – what Eric C. H. de Bruyn calls a "behavioural turn" in the social sciences (de Bruyn 58). According to de Bruyn's 2019 essay "Constructed Situations, Dynamic Labyrinths and Learning Mazes: Behavioral Topologies of the Cold War", the 1950s and 1960s saw a resurgence, across a range of disciplines, of interest in topics that had preoccupied American and British behavioural researchers at the turn of the century. In particular, neo-behaviourist researchers revived the premise that human behaviour could be determined, predicted, and ultimately even controlled by phenomena external to the body and mind. Behaviourism emphasised and sought to understand "the environmental determinants of human conduct rather than … the internal processes of the (un)conscious mind" (de Bruyn 57).

The experimental typology at the heart of this vein of research – particularly in its earlier incarnation – was the rodent maze, a construct in which laboratory rats or mice would be set loose in mazes and observed as they learned to navigate them successfully by responding to certain stimuli. The earliest documented rodent maze was designed by Willard S. Small in 1900 and was based on the baroque hedge labyrinth at Hampton Court Palace, dating from approximately 1690. According to de Bruyn's reconstruction of this history, Small believed that the convoluted passages of this particular maze would simulate a rat's natural habitat (de Bruyn 57–58). In Small's view, the complexity of the maze played an important role in this simulation, even if it limited the functionality of the maze for scientific processes by introducing too many variables. The objective of this and similar rodent mazes was to create a scenario in which the rat was obliged to learn its way through the maze to the exit or to a hidden morsel of food. The putative scientific value of these processes was underwritten by the belief that human learning conformed to the same processes as rat learning. This early incarnation of behaviourism posited a clear analogical relationship between the behaviour of rodents in a hermetic laboratory environment and that of human subjects in a situation similarly controlled.[148]

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[148] A hardline behaviourist would uphold the physicalist view that consciousness supervenes on physical substance and structures, thus being exhaustively and objectively explained by these structures. According to such a view, the fact that rats and humans (very) broadly share certain physiological features, such as brains and central nervous systems, suggests that they would share certain behavioural patterns as well. Thomas Nagel, in the 1974 paper "What is it like to be a bat?", rejects physicalist claims to objectivity, and argues that the subjective specificity of conscious experience precludes the possibility that cognition and experience can be mapped from one type of creature to another (Nagel 165–180).

One of the foundational texts informing this position was John Watson's 1913 "behavourist manifesto", an article titled "Psychology as the Behaviorist Sees It", which was published in the most important venue for psychosocial research of the time, the *Psychological Review.* For Watson, the difference between the behavioural processes of rodents and humans is negligible. Citing Watson's article, de Bruyn observes, "for scientific purposes there exists 'no dividing line between man and brute'" (de Bruyn 48). Just as the lab rat learns to solve the maze through trial and error, so too does Watson's human subject come to form predictable behavioural patterns through situational learning. Crucially, the determinants of this behaviour are understood to be external stimuli, so that, theoretically, with the appropriate manipulation of these stimuli, one could control the subject's behavioural outcomes. Watson rejects the notion that the subject's emotional and mental life play a role in directing his or her behaviour, maintaining instead that an objective explanatory basis for behaviour lies in externally observable phenomena. In its Cold War-era return, behaviourist-inflected social theory was slower to dismiss the influence of internal psychological processes on the human subject's actions, eschewing the outlandish view that rodent behaviour is a perfect analogue for human behaviour. Authors such as Clark Hull and Noam Chomsky espoused a more moderate position, acknowledging the limited applicability of findings in animal-centred experiments to scenarios involving human subjects.[149] The rodent maze, too, had evolved in the decades between the field's first flourishing and the postwar behavioural turn. The convoluted labyrinths used by the likes of Small gave way to simpler models which presented the rat with binary choices (either left or right) rather than multiple options.

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[149] See Hull's *Principles of Behavior: An Introduction to Behavior Theory* (1943), and Chomsky's "Review of *Verbal Behavior* by B. F. Skinner" (1959). In *Verbal Behavior* (1957) Skinner espouses the radical view that even verbal behaviour can be mapped from one species to another.

The enduring presence of the rodent mazes in laboratory settings represents a far-reaching preoccupation with human behaviour as the determinant of the structures and conventions of society. Rather than an abandonment of this experimental device, the shift towards the use of simpler mazes in the laboratory is a function of the expansion of the concept of experimentality. According to the collectively authored *How Reason Almost Lost Its Mind: The Strange Career of Cold War Rationality* (2013), describing the *mise-en-scène* of the experiment rather than its range of possible outcomes, took centre-stage in postwar behavioural research; the concept of 'the situation' also became the object of behaviour-oriented experimentation (Erickson et al.). As Erickson et al. note, the notion of the situation was subject to "an array of definitions and usages" in experimental contexts (113). It could refer variously to the problem the experiment set out to solve, to the "real-life" or analogous circumstances to which the experiment was relevant, or even to the laboratory setting itself (113).[150] "A situation was a place of uncertainty," write Erickson et al., "a problem – that could be resolved into harmony through proper understanding and experiment. The situation designated a container that holds important events and behaviours for study" (112-113). The authors continue: "What was important was that this was defined as a privileged, experimental space – one that was not exactly a laboratory and not exactly the real world" (114).

Behavioural researchers and subsequent authors have not been alone in their struggle to describe and define 'the situation'. The Situationists, too, toiled at rendering substantial, if not

150 The relationship between the laboratory setting and the external world echoes the fraught separation between art and 'real life' discussed throughout Chapter Two. In the 'experimental' ventures of the Situationists the tensions between the laboratory and 'real life' are refracted through their theory that the physical elements of the built environment actually produce distinct psychological experiences in subjects (see my discussion of psychogeography, pp. 81–86).

lucid, their accounts of constructed situations. In his “Report on the Construction of Situations”, Debord defines the situation as “the concrete construction of momentary ambiances of life and their transformation into a superior passional quality” (Debord, “Report on the Construction of Situations” 38). This construction and transformation is undertaken as a form of “experimental proceeding” that is based on the “critique of existing conditions and the deliberate supersession of them” (Guy Debord, “Report on the Construction of Situations” 38). In the Situationists’ account of the situation, we see a formal echo of the neo-behaviourists’: the situation designates a discrete space and time carved out of everyday life for experimental purposes.

The Situationist *dérive* was an attempt to realise the “privileged, experimental [space]” of the situation as a social and spatial intervention (Erickson et al. 114). This was to be accomplished by superimposing a labyrinthine basis for navigation on the existing layout of the city, using the nebulous interpretation of ambiences as a means of establishing geographic bearings. Although the Situationists’ experimentation with labyrinthine spatiality should not be collapsed into the goal-oriented mazes of the behaviourist laboratory, it is possible to read the legacy of the laboratory maze in the Situationist rendering of an experimental approach to spatiality. In both cases the situation came to be used and imagined in a continuum with the labyrinth.

In Constant’s writing, the term “situation” vanishes with his departure from the SI, but the structure of the situation, as an interruption and aberration within the sphere of the everyday, remains. In the 1974 text “The Principle of Disorientation”, Constant writes, “For the investigation of the variable factors in human behaviour it is vital that ‘normal’ behaviour patterns be interrupted, that a short circuit should occur between 'daily habits' and … a disorienting environment" (226). Constant thus separates the space and time of experimentation from those of a supposedly self-evident construct, everyday life. This echoes the neo-behaviourist view of the situation as a discrete set of conditions marked by their separation and insulation from the variables of daily life.[151] If Constant and the Situationists appropriated, whether consciously or not, the tropes of the behaviourist laboratory, it was to quite particular ends. Whereas the scientific maze, and later the situation, was concerned with observing solution-oriented behaviour (in the rodent or human subject) in order to render this behaviour clearer and more predictable, the objective of the Situationist situation and the New Babylonian labyrinth was, at face value, to create complexity and unpredictability. While the purpose of the scientific maze was to observe how the rodent learns to orientate itself, the artistic maze attempted to produce disorientation.[152] Through inducing a state of disorientation in the subject - in this case the viewer - Constant's labyrinths sought to complicate and overdetermine the 'experiment', rendering it and its outcomes irreducibly complex.

3.3 The New Babylonian labyrinth and the grid

From the earliest iterations of *New Babylon*, labyrinthine form is central not only to the proposed physical layout of the city, but to its social structure as well. Rather than a society organised around clear vectors of relation, in which routes between home and work define the movement of bodies, New Babylonian society is organised, or rather dis-organised, around

[151] At the same time, the laboratory situation is a simplified analogue of everyday life, aimed at clarifying quotidian behavioural processes.

[152] Here, unlike the laboratory situation, the aim of the Situationist intervention is not to clarify the quotidian but to instigate a deviation from it.

unconstrained movement between nodes of ambience. These nodes were understood by the Situationists, and subsequently by Constant independently of the Situationists, as locations charged with emotional and psychological resonance. Though the subjectivity of experiencing emotional and psychological resonance undermines the use of ambiences as a way of generating knowledge about an urban environment, both Constant and the Situationists appealed unquestioningly to the perception of ambience.[153] The representations of the urban footprint that result from navigation by ambience show the city spreading out rhizomatically, in convoluted clusters and intricate webs. In Constant's aerial maps of *New Babylon* we see the city as a network of paths that intersect and circle back on one another in such a manner that even the most adept navigator would be likely to get lost in that space. Constant expresses this contrast in terms of an opposition between orientation and disorientation. He writes:

> Orientation is only relevant in the context of a regular life pattern that gives rise to constantly recurring points of recognition, a lifestyle in other words where there is very little change. In the opposite case, where there is no question of regularity and the pattern is continually changing, the case thus of someone who lives 'creatively', the need for orientation decreases as the possibility of intervening in and actually creating that environment increases. (Constant, "The Principle of Disorientation" 226)

Constant thus characterises the New Babylonian way of life as one of continual disorientation, in which being 'lost' is a constructive condition bringing about "enormous social freedom that is lacking in the present situation" (Constant, "The Principle of Disorientation" 226). The emphasis Constant places on constructive disorientation, which he aligns with

[153] The use and interpretation of ambience forms a robust part of early Situationist discourse and is frequently invoked. Constant's early writing (from the time of his association with the SI) refers explicitly to ambiences (see especially "Another City for Another Life"), although in his later texts the term falls away.

"creativity", distinguishes his investigation of the labyrinthine from the behaviourist's maze or situation - both of which are constructed in order ultimately to be decoded; he thus extends the position latent in the Situationist situation, so that the production of disorientation leads to social transformation.

Despite the often vague terms in which Constant describes New Babylonian disorientation, his representation of disorienting structures and mechanisms – labyrinths in particular – is frequently characterised by a surprising methodological rigour. This is perhaps most evident in his diagrammatic representation of *Gele Sector* (*Plattegrond van de gele sector,* fig. 3)*,* in which an aerial plan of the model is cross-referenced with the short text entitled "Description of the Yellow Sector", published in the June 1960 edition of *Internationale Situationniste*. The text discusses sections of the model labeled A through N, identifying an arrivals hall - "a metal construction covered in sheet-aluminium of an extremely free form" – two residential structures, and two "labyrinth houses", all of which are connected by a cluster of rooms "communicating horizontally as well as vertically by means of stairs – whose ambiences are continually changed by situationist teams" (Constant, "Description of the Yellow Sector" 122) The labyrinth houses "take up and develop the ancient forces of architectural confusion",[154] and consist of a network of "irregularly shaped chambers" and passages partitioned by angular walls (Constant, "Description of the Yellow Sector" 122). These chambers include a quiet and a loud room, a cinema-like space for looking at images, rooms for rest and reflection, a room for "erotic games", and finally a room for "coincidences" (Constant, "Description of the Yellow Sector" 122).

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[154] Here Constant is presumably alluding to the ancient mythological Cretan labyrinth, a multicursal maze which the architect Daedalus is said to have built in order to trap the man-eating Minotaur. See further discussion of the Cretan labyrinth on p. 275.

The quasi-scientific nature of Constant's exercise in annotation reiterates the affinity between Situationist and behaviourist thinking, and their overlapping experiment-centred vocabularies. Constant's methodical diagramming can be seen as a product of the Situationist ambition to have psychogeography installed as a legitimate tool for social and spatial research. Indeed, at this stage of the project *New Babylon* was regarded – by the Situationists and by Constant himself – as an illustration of Situationist principles. However, in many works produced independently of the group, details of the envisaged labyrinthine environments of *New Babylon* remain consistent with those represented in "Description of the Yellow Sector". For example, the clusters of rooms connected by stairs, exemplified in the vertically stacked layout of *Klein Labyr* (fig. 7),[155] reappear, in a two-dimensional rendering, in the 1962 drawings *Labyr* ("Labyrinth", fig. 22) and *Interieur met trappen en deuren* ("Interior with stairs and doors", fig. 23). In *Labyr* three box-like spaces inhabited by figures are intersected by rectangular planes stacked diagonally, suggesting both a receding linear perspective and a stuttering, staggered architectural composition. In each of these boxes, a platform connects to a staircase or a ladder, leading from the foreground further into the picture plane. This use of perspective gives the impression of environmental continuity, as though the small rooms in the picture are just three of many, an effect emphasised by the proliferation of diagonal planes spreading out on either side of the central composition. *Interieure met trappen en deuren* gives a strong sense of the labyrinthine quality of the New Babylonian environment. This composition presents the viewer with seven doorways leading onto staircases or passages that are intercepted by staircases. Once again, diagonally stacked rectangular planes give the impression of receding perspective, but in this piece, instead of a single perspectival vanishing point,

[155] *Klein Labyr* is also discussed briefly in Chapter Two, p. 137.

multiple points of convergence are suggested, as though the viewer were able to look in several directions simultaneously. This multiplicity and simultaneity is further emphasised by the deflection of the compositional emphasis away from the centre of the picture plane. A large, nearly empty rectangle occupies the centre of the picture, while flanking it are detailed recessions leading into distant passages. This creates multiple points of focus that simultaneously command the attention of the eye.

The scheme of clustered rooms connected by stairs or ladders appears again in several drawings from the mid-1960s, including the pencil on paper work *Homo Ludens* (1966), in which the presence of silhouetted figures gives a sense of the convolution and closeness of the labyrinth environment. Also from this period, the 1966 work *Mobiel labyrinth E.S.R. New Babylon* ("Mobile labyrinth E.S.R New Babylon", fig.24) presents a cluster of spaces and stairways empty of figures, but rich in perspectival detail, intimating something of the grand scale of the New Babylonian labyrinth.[156] The 1969 painting *Labyrintische ruimte* ("Labyrinthine space", fig. 25) flattens the endlessly receding perspective of *Schets voor het ESR,* and clears the pictorial field of figures, presenting a schematic vision of the labyrinth as a complex system contained within a rigid grid. Different in tone and style as this work is from *Interieur met trappen en deuren* and *Labyr,* it shares with these pieces the visual motif of rectangular planes connected by stairs and ladders.

If the recurrence and consistency of these image fragments represents a certain self-referential rigour, this is underpinned by Constant's complicated but enduring allegiance to the mod-

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[156] As the title suggests, *Schets voor het ESR* is a preparatory sketch for the collaboratively produced installation work *Experiment Studio Rotterdam (ESR)* (1965), made by Constant, Nic. Tummers and Bram Wisman. *Experiment Studio Rotterdam (ESR)* is discussed on pp. x–x below.

ernist grid. He never engages discursively with the grid, which is a notable omission given the prevalence of that form in the modernist architectural design and urban planning to which *New Babylon* responds. However, grids in various states of torsion or dissolution are ubiquitously present throughout the visual representations of *New Babylon*. A three-dimensional grid that resembles construction scaffolding runs along the perimeter of *Gele Sector,* while grid fragments interspersed throughout the piece function as a kind of backdrop or implied support structure for the different parts of the labyrinth houses. In the drawings discussed above, the honeycomb-like partitioning of chambers through the recurrent squares-and-stairs motif recalls the vertical grid of a high-rise apartment building, but confounds this logic, rendering the grid obscure and unnavigable. Constant's deployment of the grid signals *New Babylon*'s engagement with a modernist tradition deeply embedded in the visual culture of Holland, his immediate geographic and cultural context, and in Europe more generally. The rigid grid of Mondrian's geometric abstraction,[157] rendered in primary colours and black and white, is clearly evoked in the intersecting coloured planes of *Klein Labyr.* The symbolic value of this reference to Mondrian is that it situates New Babylon along a perceived continuum with pre-war modernist abstraction and addresses the attendant values of universalism and aesthetic purity which Mondrian's work set out to convey. As Rosalind Krauss writes, "The relationships in the aesthetic field are shown by the grid to be in a world apart, and with respect to natural objects, to be both prior and final. The grid declares the space of art to be at once autonomous and autotelic" (Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* 9–10). If, as Krauss claims, the grid "states the autonomy of the realm of art," then the *détourned,* or manipulated and 'remixed' grid of *Klein Labyr* asserts the opposite, that art is imbricated with history and the world, that it is complexly 'impure', and non-

[157] See, for example, Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie-Woogie,* fig. 17.

telic (Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* 9).

In *New Babylon* the labyrinth is constituted by a calculated detour from the grid. Neither a random abrogation of the grid's form nor an invocation of its perceived purity, the labyrinth produces meaning – to evoke Derrida's concept of *différance* – through differings and deferrals that at once echo the proliferation and outward extension of the grid while deviating from its strictures. In an urban context, as in an art historical one, the grid represents a regime of space and time premised on the notions of totality and simultaneity. As Krauss notes, "the grid extends, in all directions, to infinity" (Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* 18). In keeping with this extension, it facilitates a certain panoptic surveillance in which all parts are visible at once. The fantasy of the grid-maker is the same as that of the panoptic "reader" in Michel de Certeau's "Walking in the City", who gazes down at the grid of Manhattan from atop the World Trade Centre: "to be lifted out of the city's grasp", to "no longer [be] clasped by the streets that turn and return it according to an anonymous law" (de Certeau 92).

While this surveillance presupposes its own powers, another force is at play in the streets. De Certeau contrasts the fantasy of totalising sight with the experience of inhabiting the city as a pedestrian, "below the thresholds at which visibility begins" (de Certeau 93). The pedestrian's body "follow[s] the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' [she] write[s] without being able to read it" (de Certeau 93). This writerly activity proliferates routes through the city that "elude legibility," and thereby reorganise the way in which the city is able, on the one hand, to generate meaning, and, on the other, to articulate a politics of resistance to "the reach of panoptic power" (93). The act of walking is central to an "enunciative" process in which the pedestrian “appropriat[es] … the topographical system (just as the speaker appropriates and takes on language)” (93). This leads to a multitudinous corruption of the “strategic discourses” that are produced through the rationalising surveillance of the city seen as a grid (de Certeau 95). “The long poem of walking manipulates [these] spatial organisations,” de Certeau writes, “no matter how panoptic they may be: it is neither foreign to them (it can take place only within them) nor in conformity with them (it does not receive its identity from them). It creates shadows and ambiguities within them” (101).

3.4 The long poem of walking

The New Babylonian subversion of the grid’s rigidity, predictability and perceived simultaneity is premised on the central role of walking in Constant’s plans for and speculative representations of *New Babylon*. Its sectors, passages, and labyrinths are designed for pedestrian navigation. This is evident from the ubiquity in Constant’s designs of stairs and ladders, which would be navigable only on foot, and also in the separation of the sectors from highways dedicated to vehicular transportation. In the *Sector* models, these highways are represented by parallel streaks drawn on or etched into the ground level of the models, far below the space where the built environment of the city begins. In the 1963 drawing *Labyratoire* (fig. 26),[158] similar streaks appear, emerging from gridded planes and encircling a pentagonal vortex in the centre of the composition. These lines evoke a system of movement adjacent to and simultaneous with a more ambiguous motion suggested by the convoluted, zig-zagged lines in the foreground of the picture, which are labelled “obstacles atmospheriques” (“atmospheric obstacles”). In this work, too, we find ladders juxtaposed with diagonally stacked

[158] The title *Labyratoire* is a play on the French words for “labyrinth” (*“labyrinthe”*) and “laboratory” (*“laboratoire”*).

planes, but in this instance the ladders seem to lead nowhere. They simply float in the middle-ground of the picture, suggesting a spatial fluidity that contradicts the forceful directionality of the encircling lines mentioned above. Mathematical formulae and symbols interspersed throughout the picture imitate the annotation of a scientific diagram, which, along with the play on words in the title, evokes the theme of scientific experimentation. These references to the experimental setting of the laboratory make a case for Constant's awareness of and engagement with the phenomenon of the laboratory maze. *Labyratoire* evokes this context in order to signal an association with experimental processes, but suggests an expansion of these processes beyond the horizons of the laboratory, and beyond the experience of the rodent. The subject of Constant's experiment is the pedestrian, whose wandering navigation of the various obstacles, vortices and ladders defies the rush of the superimposed or parallel system of transport.

The presence of the pedestrian is underscored in the many drawings and paintings of *New Babylon,* particularly those produced from 1965 onwards, in which figures are depicted within or at the entrance to labyrinthine environments. For instance, the 1965 ink drawing *Babylon-Domazlice (resisschets)* ("Travel Sketch") (fig. 27) depicts a cross-section of a four-level interior space punctuated by a number of ladders, in which scattered figures (as opposed to a crowd) recede from the foreground into the background of the picture. These figures are depicted on foot, climbing ladders or walking along the floors. A sense of their movement is suggested by the distortions of their silhouettes. The proliferation of ladders, which clearly defies and exceeds any practical need, suggests a multiplicity of potential routes through this environment.

The relationship between the grid and the emergence of labyrinthine pedestrian space in *New Babylon* is perhaps most succinctly revealed in Constant's several aerial map interventions produced between 1963 and 1969. In these works, a representation of New Babylon as viewed from above is drawn onto maps of existing cities, which include Amsterdam, Paris, The Hague, Rotterdam and Barcelona. We see New Babylon overlapping with the existing city grid, spreading out rhizomatically above it and creating an alternative urban footprint. In *New Babylon – Amsterdam [I]* (1963, fig. 21), *New Babylon* is depicted in red ink, hovering over the outwardly expanding city in a lattice of interconnected ring-like sections. The integrity of Amsterdam's old city, itself labyrinthine and relatively inhospitable to cars, is preserved; the *New Babylon* superimposition begins at its boundaries, from which Amsterdam expanded prolifically after World War Two. This superimposed network sprawls over the map, creating an intricate form in which no particular node, pattern or region is privileged. The grid is at once the armature that supports and provides a context for the lateral spread of *New Babylon* and the homogenising, regulating system from which *New Babylon* deviates. *New Babylon – Amsterdam* thus represents a tension between two spatial modalities, the static and concrete form of the given city and the speculative, fluid form of the city to come. This necessary tension creates the context for the secret, embodied legibility of the city to come, which can be discovered only through the act of walking.[159]

The rhizomatic extension of *New Babylon* recalls the endless extendibility of the grid, but proposes instead a mutable spatial unfolding, a continuous forming and dissolving, that problematises the grid's logic and finitude. Deleuze and Guattari identify a comparable process of forming and dissolving with a fluid back and forth passage between what they call "smooth"

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[159]This recalls the centrality of the *dérive* to the Situationist project, as discussed on pp. 99–110.

and “striated” space (Deleuze and Guattari 474). They establish a “*de juro*” or conceptual opposition between two types of space, or rather two types of spatial operation, which they acknowledge are in constant “*de facto*” exchange (474). To illustrate the difference between these spatial modalities they cite a number of examples in the contexts of mathematics, music, craft, art and the navigation of the ocean. Perhaps the richest of these illustrations is their example of the contrast between a woven fabric and a felt. The woven fabric is a delimited space created by movements of threads between uniform points: a grid. A felt, on the other hand, is “a solid product that proceeds altogether differently, as an anti-fabric. It implies no separation of threads, no intertwining, only an entanglement of fibres obtained by … rolling the block of fibres back and forth” (475). Unlike a weave, the surface of a felt is heterogenous. If the fibres act as lines drawn between points in a woven fabric, in a felt the lines are dispersed and impacted randomly, without points. This “smooth-directional” line has “open intervals” and distributes itself “in an open space, according to frequencies and in the course of one’s crossings” (481). By contrast, the “striated-directional” line of the weave “closes off a surface and ‘allocates’ it according to determinate intervals” (481).

Returning the analogy to the scale of inhabitable space, Deleuze and Guattari compare these contrasting topologies with an opposition between *nomos,* the “nondelimited, unpartitioned” space that is the domain of the (pedestrian) nomad, and the *polis,* or the city (481). The construction of this conceptual opposition perhaps suggests a form of binaristic thinking that undermines the heterogeneity of the felt and entrenches the order of the weave. However, somewhat equivocally, Deleuze and Guattari qualify their discussion with the observation that “the two spaces in fact [*de facto*] exist only in mixture: smooth space is constantly being translated, transversed into a striated space; striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space. In the first case, one organizes, even in the desert; in the second, the desert gains and grows; and the two can happen simultaneously" (474-475). The emergence of the striated within the smooth renders the smooth intelligible by foregrounding its corruption of the grid. In this translation between spatial modalities, the striated – with the law, homogeneity, and exclusion it represents – is modulated and loses some of its strict integrity. This creates an interstitial spatiality in which, to adapt Homi K. Bhabha's understanding of the interstice, the rigours of the grid are modulated by "the overlap and displacement of domains of difference" (Bhabha 2). The transgression of the grid produces a hybridisation that relies on, and reinforces, a continuous movement between the smooth and the striated. This interchange produces a heterogenous and fluid spatiality which, in *New Babylon*, is accommodated by labyrinthine form.

3.5 Constant's "Test Chambers"

Constant's explorations of labyrinthine form found important expression in a series of life-size labyrinths he created between 1965 and 1974. Referred to in the 2016 exhibition *Constant: New Babylon. To Us, Liberty* as "test chambers", these moderately-scaled, interactive labyrinths were designed to be to be explored and manipulated by the viewer (Stamps 121). Given their transient nature, and what may have been their marginal status in the contexts in which they manifested themselves,[160] these works are relatively poorly represented in Con-

160 A striking absence of documentation of the test chambers in the press of the day suggests that these projects were not generally regarded as significant artistic interventions; they were probably not foregrounded by their host institutions as such. Despite a fair amount of press coverage for *New Babylon* in 1965 and 1966, particularly following Constant's representation of Holland at the 33rd Venice Biennale in 1966, only one article in 1966, specifically mentions *Experiment Studio Rotterdam (ESR)* (Eckhardt). Wigley presents a comprehensive bibliography of New Babylon, including all press articles (*Constant's New Babylon* 238–253).

stant's *oeuvre* and have been largely ignored in scholarship on *New Babylon*.[161] Nonetheless, the test chambers are compelling instances of Constant's exploration of labyrinthine form, presenting an opportunity for the investigation of an expanded concept of the viewer.

The earliest of the test chambers, *T-T √2* (fig. 28), was created for the 1965 exhibition *Nieuw Beelden* at the Stedelijk Museum in collaboration with sculptor Nic. Tummers. This environment, located at the entrance to the exhibition, was designed for exhibition visitors to climb on and explore. Constructed largely out of scaffolding and plywood, it is described on the website of the Stichting Constant (Constant Foundation) as "a play apparatus designed to constantly surprise its user with drop-offs, a springboard and ringing telephones" ("Nieuw Beelden" n.p.). In keeping with the recurring presence of scaffolding-like structures in Constant's models and drawings, the scaffolding in this work takes the form of a cube-shaped grid into which ladders and wooden platforms are slotted at seemingly random intervals. The visual motif of stacked quadrangular volumes and planes interspersed with ladders, so prevalent in Constant's drawings, returns in this work in three-dimensional form, demonstrating a clear aesthetic continuity across these media. Photographic documentation of the work shows several people occupying the environment at different levels simultaneously, resulting in a somewhat crowded spatial arrangement. The modest scale of the work relative to the human body, and the clear lines of sight through the scaffolding grid, negate the possibility of its functioning as a disorienting environment. Not quite a labyrinth itself, it cites Constant's distinctive labyrinth motif, thereby signalling a stake in the conceptual territory opened up by

[161] Although the exhibition catalogue for *Constant: New Babylon. To Us, Liberty* devotes two brief sections to photographic documentation and reproductions of sketches of the test chambers, these works are not discussed in any of the essay contributions to the catalogue. In Wigley's *Constant's New Babylon,* only one of the test chambers, *ESR,* is cursorily mentioned (51).

the exploration of labyrinthine spatiality.

Also made in 1965, the collaborative environment *Experiment Studio Rotterdam (ESR)* (fig. 8) continues the material exploration begun in *T-T* √*2*, allowing the latter's flirtation with the labyrinth to progress into an actual labyrinthine construction. Created collaboratively by Constant, Nic. Tummers, Bram Wisman and Dick Kerkhoven, and hosted by the Bouwcentrum (Building Centre) in Rotterdam, *ESR* consisted of eleven connected installations, which included a mirror labyrinth, a narrow enclosed tunnel, convoluted staircases bridging sections of the structure, and more of the scaffolding climbing frames seen in *T-T* √*2*. According to the planning sketches created by Constant and his collaborators, the environment in its entirety took the form of a unidirectional labyrinth punctuated by these installations, several of which were themselves labyrinthine. As in *T-T* √*2*, visitors were invited, and indeed expected, to explore the *ESR* environments, to playfully climb its armature and crawl through its tunnels.

The photographic documentation of *ESR* gives the impression of a work that has struck a chord with its audience. In one image we see a woman crawling on her hands and knees through a tunnel made of a material resembling MDF and smiling just past the photographer. Behind her, an older man smiles directly and knowingly at the camera. He holds in his hand the printed booklet that served as a guide to the exhibition, in which Constant and his collaborators explain to the reader that the environment is intended for exploration. These are not viewers who have been caught off-guard. They are, the image tells us, willingly performing according to a script established by the artists, aware of the necessity of this documentary moment for the afterlife of the project.

Although this labyrinth may have delivered surprises to the first-time visitor, it in fact leaves nothing to chance. The viewer's encounter with the work is meticulously choreographed. The potential disorientation the viewer experiences is likewise straightforward and relatively short-lived - she might experience a temporary loss of bearings. At the labyrinth's exit the experience of disorientation is resolved into re-orientation with the world outside the work. The unidirectionality of the labyrinth strictly manages the movement of the viewer, literalising a symbolic relationship between the viewer and the artists. Just as the exhibition visitors pictured are corralled in the fabricated tunnel, their engagement with the work, and by extension with the artists, is regulated on the latter's terms. The dramatisation of this engagement is central to *ESR*, which is, above all, premised on and structured to facilitate the participation of the viewer. The work prizes the viewer's activity, a quality attached in simplistic terms to physical action, while the narrative arc of the work concerns the viewer's "overcom[ing] the gulf separating activity from passivity" (Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* 8). *ESR*'s manipulation of the viewer's experience is conceived as a social intervention, rather than merely as an exploration of interactivity. This is evidenced in an early-stage planning sketch (also from 1965), which carries the title of the project as "Experimental socio-structure Rotterdam (ESSR)". The thematic association of the work with the social is a continuation of *New Babylon*'s foundational interest in social change, demonstrating the conceptual and thematic continuity of *ESR* (and *T-T* √*2*) with the discursive component of *New Babylon*.

Constant's later test chambers, *Ludieke Trap* (1969) and *Deuren Labyrint* (1974), extend the participatory model established in *ESR* and *T-T* √*2* by building interactivity into the core structural and conceptual elements of the work. These works are structurally and conceptually contingent upon visitor participation; in this we see evidence of more careful thinking about the politics of participation and social intervention.

Ludieke Trap, reproduced in 2016 for the exhibition *Constant*: *New Babylon. To Us, Liberty* at the Gemeentemuseum, Den Haag, was originally constructed for the exhibition *Weg Wezen* at the Amsterdam Historical Museum in 1969. This installation consists of two interlocking suspended staircases that are connected to each other and to the ceiling by chains. The work distils the labyrinth motif that is explored in three dimensions in *ESR* and *T-T √2,* reducing it to its most elemental structure, minimalistic sets of stairs stripped of bannisters or other bracing supports. Made from small wooden platforms suspended sequentially and progressively alongside each other, the stairs do not lead to different levels or rooms but come to an abrupt end at the ceiling of the exhibition space. Rendering complex the facilitating function which flights of stairs perform in more conventional architectural settings, these stairs create a liminal space which resists resolution into fixed points.

Exhibition visitors are invited to climb this vertical labyrinth, though doing so causes the entire structure to wobble and swing uncontrollably. When more than one person is on the work at the same time, the climbers disturb the motion of the stairs for one another, so that together visitors create a mutually destabilising and destabilised physical environment. Navigating *Ludieke Trap* is complicated by the range of alterations possible in the physical environment, and the viewer is tasked with choosing between routes that will either maximise or minimise the work's instability. However, it is not immediately clear which route will create which effect, while this unpredictability is exacerbated by the presence of other viewers. The labyrinthine quality of the work is thus instantiated by the complex spatiality of the environment and the unpredictability of its effects and outcomes. Just as one might become disoriented in a more conventional labyrinth, the variable instability of *Ludieke Trap* precludes the possibility of knowing at the outset which route to take through the environment.

Also reproduced for *Constant: New Babylon. To Us, Liberty*, the installation *Deuren Labyrint* develops the structural fluidity explored in *Ludieke Trap*, creating a responsive architectural environment based on the repeated opening and closing of doors. This work consists of an environment partially enclosed and partitioned by hinged doors that are designed to open through an arc of 270 degrees (see *Floorplan of Deurenlabyrint,* fig. 11). In order to chart a course through the labyrinth, one has to open certain doors and close others. These doors constitute walls and thresholds within the labyrinth, articulating variable paths and producing dead-ends and thoroughfares as they are opened and closed. As one door is pushed open to create a passage, it closes off another route, potentially scuppering the movement of a person who might have been navigating that route. This process of simultaneous opening and closing continues for as long as there are two or more people moving through the labyrinth.[162] The interior space changes constantly and the actions of one person directly affect the experiences of others in real time. This simple device generates a participatory environment that is co-produced by the user within architectural parentheses created by the artist. The negotiation of space that emerges through this work is a metaphorical proposal for the unfolding of a social dynamic in *New Babylon*, in which the right to inhabit a certain space in a certain way is con-

162 When only one person passes through *Deuren Labyrint* the disorienting effect is still compelling. However, the work is designed for simultaneous use by more than one person.

stantly contested.

3.6 The Labyrinth and Changing Exhibition Form

The interactivity and immersiveness of Constant's participatory labyrinths constituted a break with prevailing exhibition conventions, but one that was not out of step with an emergent experimental approach to exhibition design and curatorship in Europe in the 1960s. Traditional museological practices, which privileged the art object or artefact, determined that exhibition design up until the mid-twentieth century tended to centre on the display of objects accompanied by contextual information. The customs of viewing that this brought about were likewise object-focused, directed by the curatorial choreography of the exhibition experience around serial object displays. As Tominga Hope O'Donnell notes in her PhD thesis *Space as Curatorial Practice: the exhibition as a spatial construct* (2016), a new approach to curating emerged in Europe in the 1960s according to which "the curator was, to some extent, released from traditional, academic Art History" and aligned more closely with the artist (O'Donnell 8). Within the framework of this "new curating", the exhibition space became the curator's authorial domain, a site in which artworks could be imagined, commissioned, juxtaposed, and even created in-situ (O'Donnell 9). The spatiality of the exhibition was thus discovered as a medium in its own right. A form of 'meaning' attributable to the exhibition itself (rather than to the works it contained) came to be seen as a relational vector, developed scenographically through the placement of works in proximity to one another.[163]

[163] O'Donnel offers a germane summary of this period in exhibition history in Chapter One of her thesis (especially pp. 43–49).

A trace of this reimagining of the spatiality of the exhibition can be seen in the emergence of the labyrinth as a formal device or organising principle in several exhibitions realised (or merely planned) during this period. The New Babylonian labyrinth is flanked historically by several examples of artistic labyrinths which, like Constant's test chambers, set out to produce immersive participatory environments that challenged traditional exhibition form. Constant was party to the earliest of these endeavours, which ultimately failed to materialise. In 1959, the SI entered into a collaboration with Willem Sandberg, the director of the Stedelijk Museum at the time, to produce an exhibition that took the dual form of a labyrinth inside the museum accompanied by a three day "systematic *dérive*" in the streets of Amsterdam (Hammond para. 1). Titled *Die Welt Als Labyrinth*, borrowing from Gustav René Hocke's 1957 publication by the same name, this project drew on Constant's existing work on *New Babylon*, and set out to test the application of some of its features and principles in an institutional context. Constant was responsible for the plans for the interior labyrinth and was the envisaged "director" of the outdoor *dérive* (Hammond para. 9). An unattributed text also titled "Die Welt Als Labyrinth", published in *Internationale Situationniste #4* (June 1960), conveys a summary of the SI's plans for the exhibition, as well as the exchanges through which the project disintegrated. Though brief, this text is the most comprehensive existing source of information on *Die Welt Als Labyrinth*. It describes, though with scant detail, how the proposed labyrinth would disorient the visitor through the manipulation of different aspects of the interior environment, and would create the conditions necessary for a "micro-*dérive*" within the museum (Hammond para. 9). In one section, there would be juxtaposed interior furnishings with *detourned* (decontextualised and modified) outdoor urban elements, and in another, a tunnel of Pinot-Gallizio's 'industrial paintings'.[164] Artificial rain, fog and wind, "adapted thermal and luminous zones", and unilateral doors (doors that can be opened from only one side) would "[increase] the occasions for getting lost" (Hammond para. 9). The three-day outdoor *dérive*, a private, research-oriented undertaking, would be conducted by two Situationist teams consisting of three people each. Constant, as the director of the *dérive,* would "prepare experiments" and "secretly arranged events" along the routes (Hammond para. 7).

In March 1960, the Situationists cancelled the exhibition, citing two impediments, one bureaucratic, one financial. According to the text "Die Welt Als Labyrinth", the museum required the Amsterdam Fire Brigade to approve "certain potentially dangerous aspects of the labyrinth" (para. 2). This the SI saw as an abdication of artistic responsibility on the part of Sandberg, who could not guarantee that the work would be constructed as planned. Still more troublesome was the fact that the museum expected the SI to approach a third party, the Prince Bernhard Foundation, to help cover the exorbitant expense of the proposed construction. This was inconceivable to the Situationists, who, in addition to having expected the production costs to be covered in full, requested a "salary" of 50 Florins per day of *dérive* for each participant (Hammond para. 8). Janna Schoenberger, in her essay "Ludic Exhibitions at the Stedelijk Museum: *Die Welt Als Labyrinth, Bewogen Beweging*, and *Dylaby*", speculates that the Situationists may never have intended to realise the exhibition at all. The proposed inclusion in the labyrinth of artificial rain, fog and wind was without practical or technical basis; as Schoenberger notes, this suggests that *Die Welt Als Labyrinth* had always been en-

[164] Pinot-Gallizio's industrial paintings are extremely long rolls of canvas on which paintings have been created collaboratively (with non-artists) and with the support of machines.

visaged primarily as a provocation (Burleigh 3).

Not long after *Die Welt Als Labyrinth* was abandoned, Sandberg commissioned two exhibitions which seemed to draw on Constant's plans for the Situationist labyrinth. These were *Bewogen Beweging* (*Moving movement)* (1961), an experimental exhibition curated by Pontus Hultén, featuring room upon room of disorienting kinetic sculptures and op-art, and *Dylaby* (1962) – a portmanteau of "dynamic labyrinth" – a collaborative group exhibition that took the form of a participatory labyrinth within the museum.[165] Of these, *Dylaby* most closely resembled the envisaged outcome of *Die Welt Als Labyrinth.* It reflected the Situationists' premise that the labyrinth should bring about a state of profound disorientation in the visitor, and also allegedly borrowed directly from their plans, appropriating details such as lowered ceilings, narrow passages, and confounding doors.[166] The affinity between the plans for *Die Welt Als Labyrinth* and *Dylaby* was so pronounced that it led Jacqueline de Jong (the editor of the *Situationist Times* (1962-1967) to imply in the fourth number (1963) that *Die Welt Als Labyrinth* had been plagiarised.[167]

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[165] Both exhibitions emerged out of Sandberg's close dialogue with Daniel Spoerri and Jean Tinguely. Spoerri was instrumental in the realisation in Amsterdam of *Bewogen Beweging*, before the exhibition travelled to the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, where Hultén was director. The exhibition featured a large proportion of works by Tinguely, who was, like Spoerri, influential in its conception. As Schoenberger recounts, while *Bewogen Beweging* was on at the Moderna Museet*,* Sandberg approached Tinguely to help him create an exhibition that more clearly realised his 'dream' of staging a constructed labyrinth inside the Stedelijk (Schoenberger 7).

[166] The influence of *Die Welt Als Labyrinth* on the eventual execution of *Dylaby* is noted by Schoenberger and by Paula Burleigh in the essay (Burleigh). Additionally, the Situationist Times #4 (1963), which was dedicated to labyrinths, included a reproduction of the floorplan of *Dylaby,* flanked by a barbed comment implying that *Dylaby* was merely a derivative of *Die Welt Als Labyrinth.*

[167] The circumstances influencing de Jong's loyalties are complicated. Between 1959 and 1960, while working at the Stedelijk Museum, she joined the SI, only to be expelled by Debord in 1962. Her rejoinder to the expulsion was to create the experimental publication the *Situationist Times*, which despite its name had nothing officially to do with the SI. De Jong seemed nonetheless to continue to consider herself a Situationist, refusing to acknowledge Debord's authority to cast her out – at least until 1967, when the last volume of the *Situationist Times* was published.

Although *Dylaby* was officially curated by Stedelijk curator Ad Petersen, under Sandberg's oversight, its impetus was given by Tinguely, who had already been instrumental in the production of *Bewogen Beweging.* Tinguely not only drove the project curatorially and contributed his own work to the show, but also 'helped' the other participating artists - Per Olof Ultvedt, Robert Rauschenberg, Martial Raysse, Niki de Saint Phalle, and Spoerri – with practical aspects of realising their works. The exhibition is well-documented photographically and textually. An 11-minute-long 16mm film by Ed van der Elsken gives an impression of what it might have been like to move through *Dylaby'*s various rooms and passages. The film shows visitors feeling their way through narrow, dark passages lined with a soft rubber foam, and dancing in Raysse's installation *Raysse Beach*, which contained an inflatable swimming pool, mannequins dressed in beachwear, and a jukebox. The most popular room in the labyrinth was clearly de Saint Phalle's shooting gallery, a participatory installation in which visitors were invited to shoot at paint-filled balloons with pellet guns. When the balloons burst, they splattered paint all over fantastical creatures de Saint Phalle had sculpted out of plaster (van der Elsken).

Thanks in part to its comprehensive documentation, *Dylaby* has been historicised as a landmark moment in the history of exhibitions in Europe,[168] as an example of an empowering loosening of the constraints of museum conventions in favour of artistic practice. *Dylaby* signals not only a changing attitude towards the exhibition format and curatorial authorship, but also, crucially, a reimagining of the role of the viewer in relation to the work. The deliberate

168 This is not to underestimate the combined power of Sandberg and Tinguely: their influence in the European art scene at the time meant that the canonisation of *Dylaby* was practically a foregone conclusion.

choreography of the exhibition around the ideal viewer's navigation of the exhibition environment represents an acknowledgement of the vicissitudes and narrative possibilities of the viewing experience. This constitutes a detour from American art critic Clement Greenberg's espousal of a dominant critical position of the time, which held that the purpose of modern art (exemplified by non-illusionistic, abstract painting) was to affirm its own optical purity and its independence of the viewing experience.[169] The exploration of interactivity that was central to op art and kinetic art of the 1950s[170] - and which was the subject of *Bewogen Beweging* - had in *Dylaby* evolved into an interest in a more substantive form of viewer participation in which the viewer ultimately came to co-produce the work together with the artist. De Saint Phalle's *Shooting Gallery* is an embryonic example of this notion in action. As the viewer shoots the balloons, splattering paint on the sculptures below, she emulates the archetypal artistic activity by 'painting' into the blankness represented by the white of de Saint Phalle's forms.[171] Thus, in an axiomatic sense, the viewer participates in the making of the work, and the latter is therefore 'participatory' in nature.

The conceptual integrity of the participatory artwork depends on the viewer's fulfilment of the artist's call to action, rather than a spontaneous intervention in the work. This recalls the

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[169] See Greenberg's "Modernist Painting", in the anthology *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969* (85-93).

[170] The Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark curated a retrospective of op art and kinetic art in 2016 titled *Eye Attack: Op Art and Kinetic Art, 1950-1970.* This exhibition offered a survey of these closely related movements, underscoring how integral interactivity was to both.

[171] This aspect of the work is a mocking reference to the American abstract expressionist Jackson Pollock's so-called 'drip paintings', in which the artist would drip paint onto a canvas placed horizontally on the floor. Pollock's work had risen to prominence in America in the 1940s and 1950s (and especially after his death in 1956); it was lauded by Greenberg as an exemplar of modernist painting's self-referential flatness. By the early 1960s Pollock's work had become highly visible in Europe as well and was an important touchstone in the discourse of neo-avant-garde painting (Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* 146–152).

approach to participation embodied in Constant's early test chambers, in which the nature of the viewer's involvement in the work is predetermined and inscribed into the very form of the work. Furthermore, the specificity of the participatory conceit is undergirded by a notion that the viewer is inherently 'passive' and needs to be rendered 'active' through an encounter with the work. This passive-active binary formed the backbone of a series of interventions staged by the collective *Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel* (GRAV) in Paris in the 1960s, the most relevant of which is their 1963 work *Labyrinth,* created for the third Paris Biennale. The work consisted of a series of seven "successive cells" or environments that were not strictly speaking labyrinthine, but that offered the viewer novel sensory experiences (Hohlfeldt para. 6). These cells included interactive light installations, darkened passages, and a lenticular wall relief, all of which solicited different kinds of action from the viewer (le Parc). At the entrance to this exhibition, GRAV members circulated a tract entitled *Assez des Mystifications* ("Enough Mystifications") that outlined the group's strident ambitions for the piece, which sought nothing less than "the elimination of the difference existing between the spectator and the work" (Hohlfeldt para. 2). In this tract, which is quoted and translated by Bishop in *Artificial Hells,* the group asserts a belief that viewer participation can be effectively, and unproblematically, coerced:

> If there is a social preoccupation in today's art, then it must take into account this very social reality: the viewer.
>
> To the best of our abilities we want to free the viewer from his apathetic dependence that makes him passively accept, not only what one imposes on him as art, but a whole system of life…

> We want to interest the viewer, to reduce his inhibitions, to relax him.
>
> We want *to make him participate. (Bishop, Artificial Hells 89)*

For GRAV the objective of the work is to transform the audience member from a viewer into a participant (these terms are mutually opposed). The viewer is to be "relaxed" and seduced into participation through the whittling away of inhibitions. He or she is supposedly carried away in a sensory experience, either as the hero of an epiphanic conversion or the victim of an artistic attack on the senses (and it mattered little to GRAV which was the outcome). GRAV's strategies for manipulating and transforming the viewer take for granted a certain specular homogeneity in their audience. As Bishop notes, "the ideal viewer of GRAV's installation was conceived in universalist terms, as a classless (male) subject capable of returning to perception with an 'innocent eye'" (Bishop, *Artificial Hells* 89). *Labyrinth*'s viewer is assumed to arrive at the aesthetic experience in a state of apathy, always 'passive' in relation not only to the artwork but to "a whole system of life" as well (Bishop, *Artificial Hells* 89). Crucially, what GRAV seeks is not a viewer able independently to articulate a position in relation to the work, but one willing to act in a specified way to corroborate the idea that the artwork is redemptive, that it remedies the social malady of passivity. 'Activity' is correlated with physical action, while looking, thinking and waiting are positioned as 'passive'. Caught in tension between these terms, the viewer thus becomes integral to the narrative of the artwork, simultaneously as the locus where the drama of the work unfolds and as its addressee.

3.7 Towards Emancipation

The set of relations between the work, the artist, and the viewer that GRAV's manifesto presupposes echoes a trope which Rancière sees as vital to the critique of theatre throughout its history, namely "the paradox of the spectator" (Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* 2). According to this paradox, "There is no theatre without a spectator…. But… being a spectator is [seen as] a bad thing for two reasons. First, viewing is the opposite of knowing: the spectator is held before an appearance in a state of ignorance about the process of production of this appearance and about the reality it conceals. Second, it is the opposite of acting: the spectator remains immobile in her seat, passive. To be a spectator is to be separated both from the capacity to know and the power to act" (2). Wishing to address the "bad" aspect of spectatorship, "reformers of theatre" assign themselves "the mission of reversing [theatre's] effects and expiating its sins by restoring to spectators ownership of their consciousness and their activity" (5, 7). Through the invention and appropriation of methods that solicit action, expression, or other kinds of intervention from the audience, this kind of work supposedly "draws them out of their passive attitude and transforms them into active participants in a shared world" (11). What results is the creation of performances that "intend to teach their spectators ways of ceasing to be spectators and becoming agents of a collective practice" (8).

In *The Emancipated Spectator* Rancière's critique of the theory of theatre and performance extends from a critique of pedagogy. First presented in the *The Ignorant Schoolmaster,* and précised in *The Emancipated Spectator,* this critique takes issue with the preservation and reiteration of a spectral gap between the knowledge of the pedagogue and that of the "ignoramus" (Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* 1). Through the medium of "ordered, progressive teaching", the schoolmaster above all teaches the pupil that she is ignorant, that not only is her knowledge deficient, but so is her capacity for knowing (Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* 9). This affirms and entrenches the pedagogue's perceived authority, and, crucially, the presupposition of unequal intelligence. *The Emancipated Spectator* draws an analogy between this relationship and that between the performing artist and the audience, arguing that through efforts to "activate" members of the audience, to coax or provoke them out of their passivity, the artist entrenches the notion of the audience's incapacity and inferiority. As Bishop explains, "The binary of active/passive is reductive and unproductive, because it serves only as an allegory of inequality. … To argue … that social participation [in art] is particularly suited to the task of social inclusion risks not only assuming that participants are already in a position of impotence, it even reinforces this argument" (Bishop, *Artificial Hells* 38).

GRAV's choreography of the audience's movement through *Labyrinth* and their accompanying manifesto represent a further translation of the paradox of the spectator from the theatre to the exhibition. In the place of performers whose action on the stage attempts to draw spectators out of their 'passivity', GRAV's *Labyrinth* leads viewers into a narrative of participation in which they in fact have little agency. Though 'active' physically by virtue of moving through the labyrinth, the viewer remains 'passive' in other respects, responding to a call to transport the body in a certain way, while being denied the capacity to intervene in the work more substantively. This applies as well to *Dylaby,* which circumscribes the scope of the viewer's 'activity', determining fixed ways in which she is able to contribute to the work (such as participating in de Saint Phalle's *Shooting Gallery*). In this regime of activity and passivity, the viewer's duty is to satisfy the artist's (or curator's) desire for participation, to do certain things in certain ways in order to fulfil their vision of how a given work should unfold. In Lefebvre's words, this kind of participation "enables us to have the acquiescence of interested and concerned people at a small price. After a more or less elaborate pretence at information and social activity, they return to their tranquil passivity and retirement" (Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities* 145). In this scenario, the viewer is above all a narrative resource for the artist, a 'medium' with which the work is made, much like paint for the painter. Lefebvre goes on to identify another kind of participation, which - reiterating the artificial opposition between activity and passivity - he not unproblematically calls "real and active" (145).[172] Lefebvre's invocation of this binary distracts from a key point in his distinction between different kinds of participation, which is that, as an alternative to the artist's arbitration of the viewer's level of activity or passivity, participation can unfold through the viewer's "*self-management*" (145, italics in original). In this model, the viewer asserts her capacity as an agent rather than a medium,[173] a self-governing and unpredictable force which contributes to the direction of the work, whether in dialogue or in conflict with the artist and other participants.

It is necessary at this point to recall Chapter Two's discussion of the involvement of the viewer in the imaginative and perceptual construction of the worlds of the artwork (pp. 185–86). The viewer is the locus at which the work unfolds and iterates its meaning, much like Barthes' reader in "The Death of the Author", who is "the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost" (Barthes 148). For

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[172] Lefebvre's association of the real with activity suggests that he understands the passive as somehow 'unreal' or invalid. Here 'real' seems to suggest 'actual' and 'genuine' (not simulated), as opposed to an "elaborate pretence".

[173] This notion is enriched by comparison with Donna Haraway's understanding of the "world" - as the object of scientific study - as an "an actor and agent, not a screen or a ground or a resource, never finally as slave to the master that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and authorship …" (Haraway 37–38). For Haraway, this view of the world is a function of situated knowledge, an epistemological approach through which the knowing subject acknowledges, firstly, their embodiment (and the consequently embodied nature of their knowledge) and, secondly, their necessary partiality. The acknowledgement of one's partiality, and the attendant privileges and susceptibilities, erases the possibility of simple objectivity, which amounts to an "appropriationist logic of domination" through which the knower subjugates the object of knowledge as passive and as a resource (Haraway 37). There is an analogical relationship between the appropriationist model of knowledge and a mode of participation that primarily serves to satisfy the artist's desire for viewer engagement.

Barthes, the reader, rather than the "Author", is the source not only of the possible meanings of a text but also of "the total existence of writing" (148). This is illustrated by an analogy that seems to prefigure Rancière's own meditation on the spectator: the audience of a Greek tragedy, Barthes writes, is privy to the double language, the irony, the missteps, and "the very deafness of the characters speaking in front of [them]" that together constitute the tragic, while the characters on stage are not conscious of these aspects (148). Barthes therefore implies that the spectator is the true 'stage' of the tragedy, the locus at which the tragic unfolds. By analogy, the reader is "that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted" (148). As proposed in Chapter Two, this logic can be extended to the viewer's relationship to the work of art as well, since for Barthes the "text" is not limited to verbal texts but includes all forms of semiotic expression. Drawing on this logic, and considering Rancière's notion of emancipation, the viewer can be construed as the proper destination of the work of art. To be a viewer (to view) is to invite the unfolding of a rich aesthetic experience that is constituted by the traces that are gathered together between viewer and work.[174]

The potential of the viewer to determine the substance of the work is an integral part of the conceptualisation of *New Babylon*. However, Constant recasts the viewer as a different kind of agent, one who does not so much respond or add to an iteration produced by an artist as use a set of fairly flexible conditions to make the work herself. At the time of Constant's association with the SI, the relationship of this figure to the work is framed in Situationist terms, via the concepts of the *dérive* and psychogeography (as discussed in Chapter One).

[174] Once again, as discussed in Chapter Two, the act of viewing introduces to the work a plurality of modalities, which problematise any attempt to ascribe to *New Babylon* a fixed relation to the 'real'.

Through these practices, the division between the concept of the artist and that of the viewer is challenged, so that in place of both artist and viewer, the Situationists envision a kind of urban researcher involved in “a new type of collective creativity” (Constant and Debord 87). Later, after Constant had separated from the group and began to write about *New Babylon* in his own terms, this character takes shape more clearly. In place of a viewer articulated in terms of an opposition between activity and passivity, Constant poses the New Babylonian, a subject who acts and is acted upon, who is susceptible to the fluctuations of the work and instrumental in its ongoing transformations.

With her continuing intervention in the New Babylonian environment, the New Babylonian subject has an affinity with de Certeau’s urban “user”, a figure introduced in *The Practice of Everyday Life.* The user is a subject who makes and does things with the conditions – social, material and spatial – which surround her and which articulate the dominant culture. Acts of making and doing (both of which are entailed in the French verb “*faire”*) coalesce in the concept of “making-do”, an “artistic trick” that appropriates spatial and temporal forms, or “syntaxes”, to produce new conditions (de Certeau 29). “Commonly assumed to be passive and guided by established rules”, the user’s capacity for making and doing is obscured by the euphemistic notion that she is merely, on the one hand, a consumer, and on the other, a medium acted upon and shaped by society (de Certeau xi).[175] Though often dominated in society, the user is not necessarily “passive or docile” (de Certeau xii). Rather, “users make (*bricolent*) innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules” (de Certeau xiii). In this respect

175 Here de Certeau invokes the passive-active binary, but calls it into question, challenging the assumption that the user merely consumes or receives input from society. On the contrary, the user is intimately involved in producing and subtly transforming society.

the user precisely *uses* her material and immaterial conditions to make new systems of relating and new cultural articulations, as well as to "infiltrate" dominant structures (de Certeau 34). According to de Certeau, "Although they use as their *material* the *vocabularies* of established languages (those of television, newspapers, the supermarket or city planning), although they remain within the framework of prescribed *syntaxes* (the temporal modes of schedules, paradigmatic organisations of places, etc.), these 'traverses' remain heterogenous to the systems they infiltrate and in which they sketch out the guileful ruses of *different* interests and desires" (de Certeau 34). De Certeau's notion of "making-do" is indebted to Claude Levi Strauss's concept of *bricolage*, which describes a process of "tak[ing] to pieces and reconstruct[ing] sets of events (on a psychical, socio-historical or technical plane) and us[ing] them as so many indestructible pieces for structural patterns…" (Levi-Strauss 33). *Bricolage* is the bringing together of material - whether conceptual or physical - from disparate sources in order to generate a hybrid product which is not necessarily visible within dominant culture, but which simultaneously haunts and corrupts this culture through its own expression.

Envisioned as a user, the New Babylonian is not merely an imagined citizen of a utopian city, but an involved agent whose uncounted acts of looking, thinking, and manipulating will play a role in the formation of New Babylonian spatiality. This user's envisaged creative intervention extends beyond the physical manipulation of the New Babylonian environment to include ways of perceiving and appreciating the work as well. In Constant's words, "The quality of the environment and its ambience no longer depends on material factors alone, but on the manner in which they will have been perceived, appreciated and used, on the 'new way of looking' at them" (Constant, "New Babylon: Outline of a Culture" 165). The New Babylonian labyrinth is therefore not a product of artistic authorship alone, but an ongoing mediation of space by the New Babylonian user. The labyrinths represented in the various *New Babylon* pieces discussed in this chapter in fact stand in for an unrepresentable labyrinthine spatiality and temporality, which is produced through acts of thinking, looking, making, manipulating and relating. These processes are intermingled to the extent that it becomes impossible to distinguish between viewer and artist, actor and material.

Rancière construes this transformation of the concept of the viewer as a form of "emancipation", a release from a "distribution of positions" and powers that assert the viewer's incapacity (Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* 13). In other words, through the reconceptualisation of the act of viewing Rancière's spectator, and by extension the viewer of any artwork, is emancipated from the myth of her passivity. Rancière writes:

> Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting; when we understand that the self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection. It begins when we understand that viewing is also an action that confirms or transforms this distribution of positions. … This is a crucial point: spectators see, feel and understand something in as much as they compose their own poem, as, in their way, do actors, or playwrights, directors, dancers or performers. (Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* 13)

Rancière thus strongly associates seeing, feeling and understanding with creative productivity, suggesting that the spectator's "own poem" is coextensive with that of the actor, playwright, director or performer (or, as the case may be, the visual artist). This accords with Constant's notion that the process of producing *New Babylon* is a social act that "escapes one person's control" (Constant, "New Babylon: Outline of a Culture" 162).

This approach implies that the notion of participation needs to be expanded to include unanticipated and potentially invisible forms of participation, even if these carry the content or 'meaning' of the artwork off in directions unanticipated by the artist (or by other viewers). This necessitates an acknowledgement that the viewer, at least as much as the artist, in fact decides the terms of participation. In keeping with this reasoning, it may be argued that any artwork can be considered participatory, so that there is no *essential* difference between works which overtly solicit certain behaviours from the viewer and those which do not.[176] Rancière's understanding of emancipation seems to commit him to this position. Accordingly, the viewer also has the capacity to choose not to participate in the work at all. This entails that an artwork which claims to be participatory can fail to bring about participation, whether through certain prescribed actions or through acts of viewing, being rendered insubstantial by the viewer's refusal to engage with it. This leads to the same conclusion, namely that there is no such thing as a specifically participatory artwork.

What, then, is to be made of artworks such as Constant's test chambers, in which a certain performative choreography of the viewer's body is implied in the physical and narrative structures of the work? Following Rancière's notion of emancipation, such works indeed wait on the viewer for their iteration, bringing to mind an often uninterrogated notion circulated in contemporary art discourse that the viewer 'completes' the artwork.[177] However, for Ran-

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[176] One could argue that there is a difference in the degree of participation invoked. Constant's labyrinths may remain inert if nobody enters them. Likewise, a painting or sculpture may remain inert if given only a cursory glance – or ignored – but the consequence is not evident in the same way.

[177] The saying "the viewer completes the work" is apocryphally attributed to Marcel Duchamp. This is possibly an indirect paraphrase of Duchamp's more tentative statement on the relationship between the artist and the viewer: "All in all, the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act" (Duchamp 140).

cière, as for Constant, the possibility of completion is excluded by the plenitude of iterations possible through uncounted acts of viewing. The work is thus overflowed by the supplementarity of the act of viewing, and becomes a text in the Derridean sense, an unfolding of the "trace of what exceeds the truth of Being" (Derrida, "*Différance*" 23). This is "[t]he trace (of that) which can never be presented, the trace which itself can never be presented: that is, appear and manifest itself, as such, in its phenomenon. … Always differing and deferring, the trace is never as it is in the presentation of itself" (Derrida, "*Différance*" 23). The work-as-text thus proliferates through a potentially limitless process of substitutions and exchanges, which mirror the spatial convolution of the New Babylonian labyrinth. To borrow from Derrida's conceptualisation of the endless substitutions of metaphor in his essay "White Mythology", the substance of the work becomes like "the adventure of a long, implicit sentence, a secret narrative which nothing assures us will lead us back to the proper name" (Derrida, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy" 243). The work is thus modulated, and even prior to that, constituted, by a "playing movement that 'produces' – by means of something that is not simply an activity – these differences, these effects of difference." (Derrida, "*Différance*" 11). The work is thus conceived as a trembling collection of effects without an originary cause, challenging the widely held belief that the artist is the cause and origin of the work of art.[178] The dissimulation of the artwork through this labyrinthine process of tracing unseats the notion that the artist creates a 'complete' work that is subsequently consumed by the viewer. It also controverts the possibility that the viewer brings the work to completion. Instead, viewer and artist are entangled in a supplementary process, the simulta-

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[178] The significance of this proliferation extends beyond the demand for a radical reconceptualising of the nature of the artwork. The multiple iterability of the artwork, which arises from the potentiality of the expansive act of viewing, calls for a recasting of what can be thought, expressed and contested in a more general context as well.

neous production and circulation of a work whose completion is endlessly deferred.

Because of the volatility of this encounter – the unanticipatable alchemy between viewer and work – this unfolding of aesthetic experience constitutes an aberration in what Rancière calls the "distribution of the sensible". The latter is a "certain sensory fabric" by which "human beings are tied together" (Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* 56), and which "reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed" (Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* 12).[179] The "distribution of the sensible" thus regulates, through unspoken customs and political potencies, the relationship of individuals to society, space and time, and can be seen as the invisible infrastructure of what Henri Lefebvre calls "everyday life" (Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life. Vol. 1, Introduction*). According to Kristin Ross's reading of Lefebvre, everyday life is a '"social construction of space and time" that "remains when all specialized activities have been eliminated" (Ross 10–11, 9). It is the 'default setting' of society, partly a function of experiential knowledge and partly a set of circumstances (architectural, economic, geographical) which are formed collectively in the production of society. For Constant, Lefebvre's "everyday" would resonate with what Constant understands to be the 'reality' beyond the limits of the artwork. However, Lefebvre's formulation of the everyday positions the category of the 'real' as one term in an ongoing mediation, or crossing over, between poles.

[179] The notion of a common "sensory fabric" recalls, at face value, Merleau-Ponty's notion of the chiasm as a crossing over of, or inter-relation between, the sensing subject and the sensed object (for my exposition of the chiasm see Chapter One, pp. 91–94. Both Merleau-Ponty and Rancière seem to posit the possibility of inter-subjective communion on the basis of sensory potentialities; however, unlike Merleau-Ponty, Rancière's approach to the concept of "sense" is not contingent on the notion of "flesh", or specifically a "flesh of things" (Merleau-Ponty, "The Visible and the Invisible: The Intertwining – The Chiasm" 250). Merleau-Ponty's concept of immersion in a common sensorium entails embodiment, whereas Rancière's is closer to a poststructuralist view that 'sense' is fundamentally mediated by language; this resonates with Austin's notion of "ordinary language" (as discussed on pp. 168–69)

Lefebvre understands the everyday specifically as a process of reciprocal critique: “of the ‘real’ by the ‘imaginary’, of the ‘lived’ by its transpositions”, and a “confrontation between private life (seeing the individual as distinct from the social, but without separating him from society) and public life (the life of the citizen, historical man, social groups and the political state)” (Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday* 70). The everyday is the interstice at which the notions of the real and the imaginary, the private and the public, the objective and the subjective meet and modulate one another. The everyday is therefore not simply a synonym for a notion of ‘reality’ against which the artwork is distinguished as an anomaly, as an emblem of the ‘imaginary’. It is an interstitial modality in which these categories separate from one another conceptually, and from which their reciprocal critique proceeds. The everyday is thus the possibility of a thinking between the real and the imaginary, and the lived and its transpositions; the conceptual separation of these categories merely serves to foreground this betweenness. This interpretation is in keeping with Homi K. Bhabha’s understanding of the interstice as “the overlap and displacement of domains of difference” from which “the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated” (Bhabha 2). It is in the interstice, according to Bhabha, that “borderline engagements of cultural difference” can take place between individuals, potentially realigning customary boundaries between zones of difference: “the private and the public”, “high and low”, and “development and progress” (Bhabha 2). For Bhabha the interstitial is a relational betweenness, rather than a theoretical one, which is played out through performative encounters.

Rancière’s concept of the distribution of the sensible, though somewhat more elusive than that of the everyday or the interstitial, emerges in relation to both those concepts as a kind of foundational sensory fabric. It constitutes “a certain combination of sense data: forms, words, spaces, rhythms and so on” that enable us to draw on, and make sense of, the everyday through significatory processes (Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* 57).[180] The notion of the distribution of the sensible entails a sharing and a “parcelling out”, or separation, “of the visible and the invisible” (Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* 19). These two concepts are inherent in the original French word from which “distribution” is translated, “*partage”.* This is closely related to Nancy’s concept of “*partage”* as a “sharing out” (Armstrong 85), or the “contemporaneous and continual sharing and dividing … of singular beings” (Colton, para. 5). The artwork constitutes an intervention in the distribution of the sensible, and thus in the everyday, by “wresting percepts and affects from the perceptions and affectations that make up the fabric of ordinary experience” (Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* 56). This intervention creates a “new fabric”, a redistribution of the sensible through which new forms of “common expression” arise (Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* 56). Importantly, for Rancière, this is a capacity inherent in all artworks - indeed in aesthetic productions in general - rather than only in artworks that specifically or thematically take up the task of social intervention. Rancière implicitly distinguishes between the artwork and the aesthetic by constructing the aesthetic as an epistemic and phenomenological category or modality. The aesthetic, he writes, is a “delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and stakes of politics as a form of experience” (Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* 13). The artwork is a specific event or object that both draws on and enriches the aesthetic modality and is articulated as an intervention in space and time, and the visible and the invisible. Furthermore, the artwork facilitates aesthet-

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180 Rancière does not explicitly associate the distribution of the sensible with signification, but insofar as it has to do with “sense data”, language and perception, it is always already inscribed in processes of signification.

ic *experience,* which Rancière describes as “a multiplicity of folds and gaps in the fabric of common experience that change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible” (Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* 72).

Although aesthetic experience “wrest[s] percepts and affects” from the sensory constitution of ordinary experience, its effectiveness as an intervention is not dependent on the avant-garde moment of shock or disruption. If this were the case, a redistribution of the sensible would be the effect of a causal relationship between a certain cognitive violence and a new form of community. Rancière opposes this idea, arguing that “any direct relationship between cause and effect is suspended in aesthetic experience” (Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* 73). In practice, this means that a work that does not explicitly take up the theme of social change has the capacity to bring about a redistribution of the sensible through a process and effect of “dis-identification” (Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* 73). Or, it is precisely the deviation of aesthetic experience from the common sensorium (rather than an aggressive insertion within this sensorium) that produces the “folds and gaps” that bring about a new distribution of the sensible (Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* 72).

The notion that the viewer’s encounter with the artwork can institute a change in the fabric of the perceptible recalls Merleau-Ponty’s “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence”, in which painting is constructed as a mode of expression that emerges with and makes visible “a tacit and implicit accumulation” of meaning (Merleau-Ponty, “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence” 76). Painting “always says something”, but “the voices of painting are the voices of silence” (Merleau-Ponty, *Signs* 56, 81). These voices ‘speak’ the plenitude of the “matrices of ideas” in which the act of painting is entangled, and which exist “at the edge of signs" (Merleau-Ponty, "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence" 77, 41). By virtue of both its capacity for extra-linguistic signification and the situated nature of perception (the perceiver is always already immersed in the content of perception), painting signifies beyond language. Out of this superlative significatory richness comes the opportunity for the viewer to see and understand the world anew: "Precisely because it dwells and makes us dwell in a world we do not have the key to, the work of art teaches us to see and ultimately gives us something to think about as no analytical work can" (Merleau-Ponty, "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence" 77). Tano Posteraro, recalling Rancière and drawing on Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible*, figures this revelatory function in terms of visibility: "By making visible the in-visible— what is in the visible, obscured by its overtness—painting is able to disrupt ordinary vision" (Posteraro 1).

Part Two: Participatory art and labyrinthine ontology

Thus far this chapter has posited a link between visual and physical representations of the New Babylonian labyrinth and the emergence of a spatiality that calls for the expansion of the concept of viewership in relation to the act of artistic production. I have argued that the employment of labyrinthine forms and structures in artworks and art environments introduces complexity to the relationship between artist and viewer, and that the transformation of this relationship can be figured in terms of the viewer's "emancipation" from prescriptive modes of engagement with artworks. The second part of the chapter builds on these assumptions by investigating the ontological implications of labyrinthine spatiotemporality for the participatory artwork. Although my discussion from this point onwards primarily addresses the theoretical horizons of plural authorship, the discussion circles back to *New Babylon*, and in particular to the work *Deuren Labyrint,* which I will argue foregrounds a form of radical hospitality demanding an expansion of the concept of the artwork. Drawing on Derrida's notion of hospitality as saying "yes *to who or what turns up*" (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 70, italics in original), the chapter ends with an examination of Constant's concept of the "dynamic labyrinth" as an iterative process of artistic negotiation that brings about a spatiotemporal condition that is "forever other" (Constant, "New Babylon: Outline of a Culture" 161, 165).

3.8 Participation and authorship

The participatory imperative of the New Babylonian labyrinth prefigures in significant ways a tendency in contemporary art which places viewer participation at the centre of the artwork's narrative and conceptual arcs. For Bishop, whose study *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* has defined much of this discursive terrain, the term "participatory art" is useful for identifying a genre of artistic practice that manifests primarily through the collective activity of several viewers - or users - at once. "Participatory art," she writes, "connotes the involvement of many people (as opposed to the one-to-one relationship of interactivity) and avoids the ambiguities of 'social engagement'" (Bishop, *Artificial Hells* 1). For Bishop, the notion of the participatory signals a connection with the theme of social engagement – and indeed social intervention is a feature of many of the artworks she cites – but it neither exhausts nor is exhausted by this concept. Participatory art, according to Bishop, specifically involves the 'input' of the viewer, in tandem with that of other viewers, the artist, and other possible constituencies. This recalls the formulation of the plural participation of Rancière's emancipated spectator, as discussed above, but for Bishop participation always correlates with a certain level of overt activity as well as with the viewer's compliance with prescribed behaviours. In other words, the participant, according to Bishop's schema, participates on the artist's terms; acts of dissensual or invisible participation, or the refusal to participate, are not considered as valid participatory interventions.

In *Artificial Hells* Bishop identifies British artist Jeremy Deller's multidimensional work *The Battle of Orgreave* as an exemplar of the issues and processes that are characteristic of participatory art, describing it as "the epitome of participatory art" (30). In this work, staged in 2001, Deller orchestrated a reenactment of a working class uprising which took place in the Yorkshire town of Orgreave in 1984, and which was violently suppressed by riot police. According to Bishop's retelling of the event, "nearly 8000 riot police clashed with around 5000 striking miners", in one of "several violent confrontations prompted by Margaret Thatcher's assault on the mining industry" (Bishop, *Artificial Hells* 30). In *The Battle of Orgreave* Deller reconstructed the event with the assistance of historical re-enactment societies, local Orgreave residents, and former miners who had been involved in the clashes in 1984. These non-artist participants were invited to play the roles of either civilians or policemen in a restaging of the event as a public performance at the site of the original conflict. This public event was supplemented by conditions reminiscent of a "village fête" (Bishop, *Artificial Hells* 32): local producers manned market stalls and a brass band performed in the background while children played. According to Bishop, the event "hover[ed] uneasily between menacing violence and family entertainment", though any antagonism that occurred was staged rather than spontaneous (Bishop, *Artificial Hells* 32). For Bishop, *The Battle of Orgreave* represents a cathartic eruption in society, an opportunity to engage with a past that remains unresolved for those it affected. She recounts how, in filmic footage shot during the reenactment, testimonies of the former mine workers are spiked with bitterness and irresolution. However, the simultaneous framing of the work as a spectacle, as “entertainment”, introduces an ideological ambiguity that undercuts the narrative of catharsis and points to the easy co-option of violence by contemporary capitalism.

According to Bishop, this ambiguity underscores “why participation is important as a project”: “[I]t rehumanises a society rendered numb and fragmented by the repressive instrumentality of capitalist production” (Bishop, *Artificial Hells* 11). Implicitly reconstructing Nicolas Bourriaud’s advocacy of what he calls “relational art” (Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* 44), Bishop notes that “[g]iven the market’s near total saturation of our image repertoire, ... artistic practice can no longer revolve around the construction of objects to be consumed by a passive bystander. Instead there must be an art of action, interfacing with reality, taking steps – however small – to repair the social bond.” (Bishop, *Artificial Hells* 11).

The objective of participatory art, according to this logic, is to “channel art’s symbolic capital towards constructive social change” (Bishop, *Artificial Hells* 12–13). This recalls Bourriaud’s notion that relational art is “focused on the sphere of inter-human relations” which, through encounters between the artist and the viewer, realise “micro-utopias” that bring about social change on a small scale (Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* 28). For Bourriaud, writing in the late 1990s, the contemporary artist’s sights are “more and more clearly [set] on the relations that his work will create among his public, and on the invention of models of sociability” (Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* 28). Bourriaud proposes that art has the capacity to be “like an angelic programme, a set of tasks carried out beside or beneath the real economic system, so as to patiently re-stitch the relational fabric” (Bourriaud, 36).

Bishop is skeptical of this view, as it places art in the service of a vision of an ideal society that is supposedly universally desirable, inherently good, and achievable through self-evident means. It minimises the role that art does play in the mainstream (what Bourriaud sees as "real") economy as a highly valuable commodity. Furthermore, this view reinforces the separation between art and 'reality', proposing that participatory artistic interventions are always incursions into the real from its outside. According to this division, art must adopt the forms of the social to have 'real' efficacy. This takes for granted, and reinforces, the notion that "concrete, material or real – that is social – spaces are proper objects of political struggle; metaphorical, discursive or unreal – that is non-social – spaces divert attention from politics" (Deutsche 172). This collapsing of the social, the political and the real is a common theme in artworks that expressly take the form of social intervention, precisely because such works are articulated on the basis of a departure from, or privation of, the "metaphorical, discursive or unreal". In order to produce a literal intervention, the artist attempts to set aside the metaphor-rich vocabulary of art – what Kant understands as its ornamentality – adopting the vernacular of the social milieu in which the intervention is desired. This is a form of camouflage in which art comes to resemble, and even becomes indistinguishable from, social development, outreach, charity work, or the hospitality industry. This type of art has roots in the expansion of exhibition form through initiatives such as Constant's test chambers, and *Dylaby* and *Labyrinth,* as discussed above. However, the adoption of the forms and language of social outreach is particular to more recent manifestations. In the 2004 essay "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics", Bishop argues that so-called relational art responds to global economic shifts, and in particular a shift from goods-based to service-based economies (54). It echoes the emergence of social capital by foregrounding the "social interstice" as the substance of the work and as a context in which "new 'life possibilities' appear to be possible" (Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* 44).

New Babylon relates to and reflects a very different economic and political moment, one in which a particular concept of capitalist labour, epitomised by the factory production line, was the object of emerging critique from the left. However, the notion that art can intervene in the social, specifically through participatory processes, creates a bridge between *New Babylon* and contemporary participatory and relational art. In *New Babylon,* the use of labyrinthine form is essential not only to the narrativising of the work as a socially oriented project but also to the actual participatory interventions Constant undertook in the form of his test chambers. Crucially for Constant, the participatory structure of the test chambers (*Ludieke Trap* and *Deuren Labyrint* in particular) is a sketch – or a 'test' – for the creation of a far more extensive labyrinth that is *collectively* constructed and manipulated.

The introduction of this concept of collective authorship to the New Babylonian labyrinth emerges with Constant's notion of the "dynamic labyrinth", a term that first appears in the text "New Babylon: Outline of a Culture", written between 1960 and 1965, but only published in 1974 (165). Here Constant distinguishes between two kinds of labyrinth, the static labyrinth - a fixed maze characterised by predetermined routes and solutions - and the "dynamic labyrinth",[181] an artistic production that changes in response to unscripted interven-

[181] Constant does not make any reference to *Dylaby* in connection with his own use of the term 'dynamic labyrinth', but in a 1996 interview in *De groene Amsterdammer* claims that it first emerged in Situationist publications (during the time of Constant's involvement with the group) and was appropriated by Tinguely et al. (Arian n.p. cited in de Bruyn 78 n. 3). While there is no way to corroborate this claim, it is clear that Constant subsequently elaborated and theorised the concept while Tinguely et al. did not. There is no discussion of the concept of the dynamic labyrinth in the published material related to *Dylaby.*

tions by an unlimited number of users. The dynamic labyrinth is a collective iteration in space and time that evolves in ways that are necessarily out of the artist's control. *Deuren Labyrint* abbreviates the operation of the dynamic labyrinth in that its structure changes over time at the hands of its users. In "New Babylon: Outline of a Culture" Constant explains his envisaged application of the dynamic labyrinth in "space in its entirety":

> In a social space where the number of individuals is ceaselessly changing, along with the relations between them, each and every person is prompted to change his personal ambience. All these impulses, brought together, represent a force that manifestly acts on the ordering of space, and in *New Babylon*, where space is public, it acts continuously. Space in its entirety will thus submit to the most unexpected influences, and one can imagine that a similar process unfolds simultaneously in infinitely diverse ways in a multitude of spaces, whose number is as variable as the links created between them. One arrives, then, at the image of an immense social space that is forever other: a dynamic labyrinth in the widest sense of the term. (Constant, "New Babylon: Outline of a Culture" 165)

Constant distinguishes *New Babylon* from traditional artistic media on the basis that in *New Babylon* it is impossible to extricate oneself from the collectivity of artistic production. In his view, a painter, by contrast, creates a work in isolation and the work produces any possible social interactions only once it is disseminated beyond the studio. In the same essay, Constant proposes not only that a work of art can be produced in a collective context, but also that the authorship of the work produced in this way is necessarily distributed and decentralised:

> Just like the painter, who with a mere handful of colours creates an infinite variety of forms, contrasts and styles, the New Babylonians can endlessly vary their environment, renew and vary it [sic] by using their technical implements. The comparison reveals a fundamental difference between the two ways of creating. The painter is a solitary creator who is only confronted by another person's reactions once the creative act is over. Among the New Babylonians, on the other hand, the creative act is also a social act: as a direct intervention in the social world it elicits an immediate response…. At any given moment in his creative activity, the New Babylonian is himself in direct contact with his peers. Each one of his acts is public, each one acts on a milieu that is also that of the others and elicits spontaneous reactions. All action, then, loses its individual character. On the other hand, each reaction can provoke others in turn. … The process escapes one person's control, but it matters little knowing who set it off and by whom it will be inflected in turn. (Constant, "New Babylon: Outline of a Culture" 162)

New Babylon not only emerges from and is produced in shared space, but its authorship is shared as well. Constant goes so far as to suggest that the artist's authorship is so diluted that New Babylon is ultimately produced anonymously. "The creative act is also a social act" in which artistic authorship, as well as the specific actions of New Babylonians, "[lose their] individual character", he writes. His rejection of the notion of traditional authorship places his own authorship of New Babylon "under erasure", both validated and denied, an ascription subject to a paradoxical and bottomless dissemination by way of negation (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 65). The attribution of New Babylon's authorship to Constant can therefore be seen as a provisional, pragmatic designation "used for that X which becomes so different from what has always been called" authorship (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 65).

This is a proposal for which there is no precedent in Western modern art (although anonymously produced works have been and still are created in many other modernities). *New Babylon* represents a problem for the market and the canon because it instigates a "bottomless collapse" of the guarantee of singular attribution which has always ensured the monetary and cognitive value of an artwork (Derrida, *On the Name* 55). It becomes difficult to know for certain whether something is an artwork at all if it lacks obvious artistic authorship. Arthur C. Danto illustrates this difficulty through the example of Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* (1946), a sculpture comprising a stack of Brillo boxes which is identical in all respects to a shop display of Brillo boxes except that it is nominally an artwork. Since it is impossible to distinguish visually between *Brillo Boxes* and Brillo boxes, "[t]o settle the matter of their differentiation… we must go outside the objects and into the atmosphere of their ontological status, and seek criteria underdetermined by retinal indiscrimination" (Danto 140).

Danto claims that a more robust criterion for discerning artwork status is the eligibility of the work for a title: "Mere things, in contrast with artworks, are unentitled to titles, even such churlish ones as 'Untitled'" (Danto 139). The name of the work can be used *in lieu* of the work itself in such a way that one knows the thing cited is an artwork, that it occupies a special ontological 'place'. Prior to this usage though, or in order to establish the eligibility of a work for this special name, we look to the work for a direct link to its origin – the artist. The presence of the artist's signature is conventionally regarded as a guarantee that something is an original artwork.[182] This understanding is demonstrated in the currently accepted techniques for establishing the authenticity of rare historical paintings that emerge at auctions. Where imitation is suspected, or at least possible, the authenticity of the artist's signature becomes the object of scrutiny, standing in for the authenticity of the work itself.[183] The title of the work defers to the name of the artist, which in turn merely defers the question of the artwork's status to the artist's authority.

The artist's name, perhaps even more than the artist herself, is effectively treated as a work's originary location. This is demonstrated in the endurance of the power of an artist's name after her death. The name functions as the origin, or the home – the rightful place – of the work just as effectively when the artist is no longer living and making work as when she is. The work still comes from the artist and is repeatedly traced back to her. In the case of *Brillo Boxes,* it is Warhol's *implicit* signature – invoked by his established participation in the artworld and his status as a progenitor of other works – that differentiates this stack of Brillo boxes from any other. In other words, the *Brillo Boxes* come from Warhol, whereas Brillo boxes come from a factory. The signature 'on', or in relation to, an artwork does not name the work but rather the singular artist from whom the work ostensibly comes.

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[182] In many contemporary instances it is not possible to sign the work literally or in the traditional sense, either because the work does not manifest as a physical object or because its physical manifestation is exceeded by other aspects of the work. Deller's *The Battle of Orgreave* is a case in point. It is not possible to sign this work because it manifested primarily as an event. In this and similar cases, an artist typically issues a 'certificate of authenticity' (which is itself often signed), guaranteeing the status of the object, event, or collection of objects and/or events as a genuine artwork.

[183] This occurs also in a non-literal way: recurring stylistic features in the works of a single artist's *oeuvre* are often said to be 'signature' traits.

New Babylon presents a counterexample to this uninterrogated custom of the artworld through breaking the ostensibly natural or necessary connection between the artist's signature and an artwork. It matters little who disseminates the work, according to Constant, and yet it is still very much a work. This demonstrates that once the singularity of the artist's name is no longer taken for granted as an antecedent of the work, once it is subjected to a potentially infinite and certainly ungovernable division and deferral, its insufficiency becomes apparent. When absent from the work, whether by omission or deliberate obfuscation, the signature operates as a form of "apophasis" or a conjuring through absence or denial, in the same way, according to Derrida, as the profession of atheism invokes the name of God (Derrida, *On the Name* 35). The conspicuous absence of the signature attaches it to the work not simply by custom, as Danto suggests, but through an invisible inscription or an uttering of the name with a "voiceless voice" (Derrida, *On the Name* 35). The name is sublimated through a "desertification of language", the creation of an undifferentiated, shifting topos that occupies the name provisionally and with a propensity to alter (Derrida, *On the Name* 55). The signature becomes a location in which that which is secret "play[s] out", a place constituted by displacement in which "all our onto-topological prejudices" are disorganised (Derrida, *On the Name* 55). Circularity gives way to a limitless recursion and proliferation, a labyrinthine spatialising of the name, which invokes a potential multiplicity by way of negation. The apophatic voice "multiplies itself dividing within itself: it says one thing and its contrary, God that is without being or God that (is) beyond being" (Derrida, *On the Name* 55). This involute multiplication produces "some khora (body without body, absent body but unique body and place of everything, in the place of everything, interval, place, spacing)," a polyphonic multiplicity that disrupts the hegemony of the singular authorial voice and signals the "end of monologism" (Derrida, *On the Name* 55).

3.9 The end of monologism

Multiplied and diffused, author and signature are replaced by an "equivocal community" which is constituted by a "multiplicity of voices" (Derrida, *On the Name* 38). This multivocality expresses itself in a play of iterations, gestures and meanings that occur between artist and viewer, replacing the monologism of singular authorship with an exchange that more closely resembles a conversation. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic, Grant Kester argues that "the work of art can be viewed as a kind of conversation – a locus of differing meanings, interpretations and points of view" (Kester 10). Importantly, Kester maintains that to see the work as a conversation calls for a different concept of the ontology of the artwork. He proposes that we shift our understanding of the nature of the artwork to the polylogue that emerges in relation to an object or gesture, rather than concentrating on the object or gesture itself. He posits that artworks that merely invite (or demand) the participation of non-artist others, or that entail an inter-human encounter as a central aspect of the work, should be differentiated from works that seek a "collaborative, rather than speculative, relationship with the viewer" (11). Rather than the site of the fulfillment of the artist's choreography, such works can become "a locus of discursive exchange and negotiation" (12).[184] This perspective is exemplified in the "direct contact" between New Babylonians in the production of *New Babylon* (Constant, "*New Babylon*: Outline of a Culture" 163). Constant sees *New Babylon* as an unpredictable sequence of creative acts, each of which is also "a social

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[184] Kester argues for the ethical merit of what he identifies as dialogical artworks, at the same time as he attempts to provide an art historical and critical frame for these works. At points in the text he seems to abandon the rigorous tone of the greater part of the book in favour of describing, as if self-evidently meritorious, convivial social situations arising from artworks. Bishop interprets this as an "aversion to disruption" and criticises Kester for advocating "an over-solicitousness that judges in advance what [viewers] are capable of coping with" (*Artificial Hells* 26).

act", a "direct intervention in the social world" which "elicits an immediate response" (Constant, "*New Babylon*: Outline of a Culture" 163). Although New Babylon is formed through ongoing physical, performative interventions rather than through verbal dialogue, the model of collaboration follows the logic of a conversation.

Kester's understanding of the artwork as a conversation draws on Bakhtin's formulation of heteroglossia as an "inter-orientation" between language systems, a "[representation] of the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form" (Bakhtin 279, 291). The locus of this inter-orientation is the work of art, or in Bakhtin's case, the novel. For Bakhtin "the dialogic nature of language" is expressed in the novel in the relationship between author and character (Bakhtin 273). This is an important foundation for Kester's appropriation of the concept of the dialogical in the context of the artwork, even though he does not specifically discuss Bakhtin at length in *Conversation Pieces.*

To explain this dialogical relationship, it is worth citing Bakhtin's essay "Discourse in the Novel":

> Heteroglossia, once incorporated into the novel (whatever the forms for its incorporation), is another's speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of double-voiced discourse. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. In such discourse there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions.

> And all the while these two voices are dialogically interrelated, they – as it were – know about each other (just as two exchanges in a dialogue know of each other and are structured in this mutual knowledge of each other); it is as if they actually hold a conversation with each other. Double-voiced discourse is always internally dialogized. (Bakhtin 324).

Bakhtin observes two discursive levels within the novel, that of the characters who express their intentions within the narrative world of the novel, and that of the author who has her own intentions with respect to the characters and narrative. The character thus becomes the site of double-voicedness, a form of utterance in which direct and refracted intentions are expressed in a single stroke. These two voices "know about each other" structurally, even if within the fiction the character does not explicitly know about the author's shaping role (Bakhtin 324). Their mutual knowledge constitutes a structural dialogue according to which it is as though author and character "actually hold a conversation with each other" (Bakhtin 324).

Although the author no doubt has intentions regarding the literary work, these intentions cannot be inferred directly from the narrative. This is because the authorial voice is itself a narrative projection. To assume the author's intentions from a reading of the work is known in literary criticism as the intentional fallacy. In contemporary visual art, critical alertness to the intentional fallacy is generally somewhat muted; recourse is often made to the artist's intentions in constructing and reading the meaning of the work. This tendency has its roots in George Dickie's influential "institutional theory of art", which holds that a work of art is precisely that which the artist designates and presents to the world as a work of art, or, in other words, that which the artist *intends* as a work of art.[185] In a strikingly circular construction, Dickie understands the artist as anyone who participates "with understanding" in the creation of a work of art (Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* 92). It would follow that, in the context of participatory art, all those who participate "with understanding" in the creation of the work are artists. What Dickie does not address, however, is the nature and extent of understanding required to qualify someone as an artist. Arguably, different kinds and magnitudes of understanding exist amongst the participants in Deller's *The Battle of Orgreave,* with Deller being the participant with ostensibly the greatest understanding. One of the difficulties with this view is that it fails to designate the arbiter of understanding. It cannot be the audience, since without the work's announcing itself as a work (via the artist's intentionality, which presupposes the designation of the role of artist) there is nothing in respect of which to judge understanding. For the same reason, it cannot be the participants themselves. By a process of elimination, it seems that this role is taken up by the artist as well. This leaves us with an insolubly circular argument: since Deller is the artist, his understanding of the work is greatest. However, we know that Deller is the artist because he has the greatest understanding of the work.

Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic does not solve the problem of the institutional theory of art and its relationship to the intentional fallacy, but it does offer a way of reformulating the roles of and relationships among pertinent subjects in terms of their use of "voice". Kester's understanding of the dialogical with respect to artworks seems to be premised on an analogical derivation from Bakhtin's notion of the dialogical in literature. Although there is not a straight-

185 See Dickie's *Art and the Aesthetic*, especially pp. 92-94. Dickie revisits the institutional theory of art in 1984 with a paper titled "The New Institutional Theory of Art". This paper narrows the definition of the artwork, arguing that an artwork is any object created with the intention of presenting it to the artworld. In this respect, Dickie draws heavily on Danto's notion of the artworld.

forward analogy between a fictional character in a novel and a participant in a participatory artwork, these figures occupy a similar relationship to the author. Just as the character exists in the world of the fiction, the participant inhabits the artwork through the act of participation. The novel's author grants the character agency, but within the world of the fiction the character speaks and acts independently. Likewise, the artist, in producing a participatory work, creates participants who, within the narrative structure of the work, speak and act independently as well. In a non-coercive participatory work,[186] the participant ostensibly expresses her own intentions, or speaks with her own voice to use Bakhtin's metaphor, while simultaneously refracting the artist's intentions through the act of participation. The artist's and participant's "voices" are "dialogically interrelated", so that the artwork produces a "double-voiced discourse" (Bakhtin 324). Crucially for Kester, not all artworks are organised around this "double-voiced discourse", and this is the implicit basis on which he differentiates dialogical artworks from other artworks.

For Kester, the basis of this type of conversation, or the condition of its possibility, is first the sharing of basic cognition as a foundation from which communication is possible. The conversation between artist and participant is possible only if their communication proceeds from the same foundational disposition towards the world, here expressed as a common cognitive ability. Kester further proposes that the nature of the ensuing dialogue is specifically aesthetic, rather than logical, via a reading of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* which proposes that aesthetic experience in particular apprises us of the universality of cognition. Recon-

[186] Coercion, like understanding, is difficult to quantify, particularly because participants might not realise that they are being coerced to participate until they are in fact participating. This is because it may be impossible to gain an understanding of the work in which one participates without first participating in it. If the viewer were to decide, having participated in the work and thereby understood it, that she did not want to participate, it would already be too late.

structing Kant's argument, Kester writes:

> Kant contends that in aesthetic experience our 'cognitive powers are in free play'. When we are no longer required to perform the onerous labor of testing each perception against an existing conceptual repertoire, we experience a unique liberatory pleasure. Further, in the very act of enjoying the unconstrained and harmonious operation of our mental faculties we recognize their implicit universality; we realize that everyone must experience the world through the same basic cognitive process. Here is the foundation of aesthetic 'common sense': literally a sense of the commonness of cognition itself. (Kester 107–108)

While Kester does not hold that dialogical practices are predicated on a belief in the universality of certain kinds of knowledge (a claim that could mistakenly be read into Kant's argument), he does follow Kant's position that certain modes of cognitive experience – notably the capacity for aesthetic experience – are held in common. This is the case even if the qualities of aesthetic experience differ relative to the particularity of an individual's circumstances. Kester and Kant part ways on the nature of the subject of cognition. While Kant's subject is a "transcendent cipher" without the specificity of a particular human being, Kester maintains that the subject exists only within a "specific social and material context" (Kester 109). In this respect, Kester's view of subjectivity is close to Haraway's notion that the subject is constituted by her situational specificity (Haraway 37–38). There is no abstract or universal subject for Kester. Nonetheless, the possibility of aesthetic experience can serve as grounds for a common bond between subjects. Kester's insistence on the specificity of the subject is an attempt to avoid the assignment of values and ethics in terms of allegedly universal qualities and principles. According to this position, constructing the subject abstractly is merely a way of excising information and experiences that are at odds with a desired universal character. To abstract the subject is to homogenise, to eschew difference in the pursuit of essence. Instead, Kester's specific subject interfaces with other specific subjects in a non-essentialising process that acknowledges difference and situatedness. For Kester, aesthetic experience facilitates this interface, and in this respect the metaphor of conversation aptly represents the conditions produced by the artwork. Kester's view is stronger though: he claims that the *conditions produced*, rather than the object, performance or text that produces them, are themselves the artwork.[187] The work subsists in the ongoing interplay between situated subjects which takes place in consequence of these factors.

Similarly, Constant understands *New Babylon* as a set of conditions, or a "way of life", arising out of the physical, circumstantial and technological phenomena that are often referred to as the substance of *New Babylon*. Although these are important facets of the work, they do not exhaustively comprise it or sufficiently represent it. The dialogical model offers insight into the relationship between Constant, as the author of *New Babylon*, and the New Babylonians, who, though produced as users through the creation of the work, think and act independently within the work, co-forming it in an ongoing way. In this respect *New Babylon* is comparable to a conversation between Constant and the New Babylonians, and among the New Babylonians themselves:

> Each one of [the New Babylonians'] acts is public, each one acts on a milieu that is also that of the others and elicits spontaneous reactions… [E]ach reaction can provoke others

[187] For Kester the traditional art object is (somewhat paradoxically) of secondary importance compared to the conditions it produces.

> in turn. In this way interventions form chain reactions that only come to an end when a situation that has become critical 'explodes' and is transformed into another situation. … In this sense, the critical moment (the climax) is an authentic collective creation. (Constant, "New Babylon: Outline of a Culture" 163)

One critical implication of the dialogical model, however, is that it minimises the particularity of the medium in which the work of art manifests itself physically or temporally – in addition to the conversation that supervenes on this medium – potentially denying it altogether. If, ontologically speaking, the work is the conversation that arises from certain actions and phenomena, and not these actions and phenomena themselves, we are left with a surplus of content that remains unaccounted for. In the case of *New Babylon*, for instance, to propose that the work is equivalent to the conversation produced among New Babylonians, and between Constant and the New Babylonians, is to exclude from the concept of the work the models, drawings, sculptures and paintings that are commonly understood to 'be' *New Babylon*. This seems an unsatisfactory representation of the work, as it would suggest that these physical pieces are superfluous to it; similarly, it would be unsatisfactory to suggest that *New Babylon* amounts exhaustively to its physical manifestations.

Kester therefore goes too far in claiming that the dialogical work of art *exists as* a conversation, or at least fails to accommodate in his theory the other ways in which the work exists *as well.* The dialogical model entails a logical slippage: according to Kester, it enables the audience to feed information directly to the artist, which may in turn lead the artist to modify the work. However, it also posits that the work becomes identical to this process of communication. If this is the case, it is not possible for the artist to modify the work any more than it is possible for the audience to modify the work. This once again minimises the importance of physical or performative manifestations of the work. It also implies a teleology in the relationship between the work as conversation and the physical or performative elements that are taken to facilitate this conversation, since the physical or performative is accorded priority over and precedence to the conversation. Rather than separating the physical and performative from the conversational construct, I propose that the work be understood as the labyrinthine entangling of these elements, as a certain continuity between the physical, performative and conversational. The implication of this intra-referential model is that at least some aspect of the work remains plausibly authored, or at least initiated, by the artist, no matter how much this aspect changes through the process of conversation. In *New Babylon*, for instance, the physical model *Gele Sector* remains attributable to Constant even though a "Yellow Sector" that may eventually be created at an inhabitable scale would be co-authored by the New Babylonians together with Constant, according to the logic of a conversation.

Kester's conversational model is susceptible to a further, tangentially related criticism that pertains to the supposed universality of cognitive experience. The possibility of the work's existing as a conversation is premised, according to Kester, on the notion that certain determinable cognitive processes are shared by all people. A further assumption is that only humans are capable of entering into conversation with one another, potentially excluding forms of inter-being conversation that are unanticipatable and obscure, but that may nonetheless be valid as exchanges modeled on conversation.[188] It is beyond the scope of this thesis to address this topic, but it bears noting that a posthumanist position would reject the notion of

[188] Following the logic of Merleau-Ponty's "chiasm", as discussed in Chapter One (pp. 91–94), the view that perception proceeds unidirectionally from a (human) perceiving subject to the perceived object overlooks the possibility, latent in Merleau-Ponty's schema, that the (non-human) object returns the subject's gaze (whether metaphorically or actually).

shared cognition as a basis for conversation-like exchange. Even without invoking the possibility of inter-species exchange, Kester's assumption of shared cognition takes for granted that humans think, or otherwise process stimuli, in the same ways, negating the participation in conversation of subjects who do so differently by virtue, for example, of different mental capacities and stages of development.

Furthermore, and perhaps as a more immediate problem, Kester's understanding of cognition and communication assumes of potential interlocutors the will to collaborate with one another, and at least some level of consensus. This negates the importance, or even the possibility, of the subject who refuses to collaborate or who engages with another antagonistically. Kester's conversational model hence has no way of accommodating dissenting, antagonistic or instrumentalising communications, and his reframing of the participant as the interlocutor attempts to minimise, or to overwrite, an inescapable power differential between the artist and her addressee.

3.10 *New Babylon*'s Radical Hospitality

There is a clear analogy between this limiting form of invitation and subsequent incorporation and what Derrida calls "traditional hospitality", a gesture that apparently welcomes the other but in fact colludes with established power (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 55). The host – the one who is in a position to grant or deny hospitality to a stranger – has sovereignty over his domain, at least to the extent that the stranger respects the boundaries excluding him or her from it. "No hospitality, in the classic sense, without sovereignty of oneself over one's home”, Derrida writes in *Of Hospitality* (55). In other words, in order to be a host, to bestow or deny access, one has to have staked out a territory of jurisdiction that designates some as desirable guests and others as “parasite[s]” or “enem[ies]” (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 61, 45).

For Derrida, hospitality is inevitably concerned with a relation to foreignness, but for foreignness to fall within the logic of the host-guest relation it must be attributable to a subject. Hospitality is granted as a “right” to “the foreigner remaining foreign”, as a “pact” between “contracting parties” such as a “familial or ethnic group” (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 23). In order for this right to be conferred, Derrida notes, each party must “be equipped with nameable identities, and proper names” (23). They must be implicated in the ethos of a name, a community, a common law, which regulates their alienation from one another. From within the limits of this ethos, one can offer hospitality to a foreigner without any threat to one’s territory or self-sameness. As an “epigraph” to his discussion, Derrida draws on the literary example of *Oedipus at Colonus*, citing the scene of Oedipus’s arrival with his daughters at an unfamiliar site, where he is forbidden by one of the men of the chorus to linger because the land must “‘not be sat on or dwelt on. It belongs to the goddesses of fear’”, the Furies (or the “Eumenides”) (37). In this place where he is not allowed to rest, to make himself at home, he addresses the citizen as a stranger, thereby signalling his own foreignness. They have come to Colonus, as he has told Antigone, to ‘“learn from the natives and do what they say”’, to comply with the law that would make them acceptable guests (35). He requests asylum for himself and his daughters, pleading with the chorus to recognise his innocence of the crimes of incest and parricide: he “begs that, even though he is a phantom, he not be taken for an ‘outlaw’ (anomon)” (37). In drawing this distinction, Oedipus also acknowledges the law that establishes the possibility of hospitality and positions himself within the logic of that law.

Later in the play and in a later citation in *Of Hospitality*, there is an equivocal shift in Oedipus's relation to the law. He and his daughters have been allowed to stay at Colonus; realising he is close to death, he wishes to choose a burial place. He takes Theseus with him to the place he has chosen and then binds him to secrecy so that his "last dwelling place" will not be known to the townspeople or even to his daughters (97). In his alliance with Athens against his sons, Oedipus has also acted "as though he had no daughters" (99). He has rejected the law of the family, the ethos of his family name, and at the same time the circumstances of his sanctuary in Colonus change. After death he continues as a guest in Colonus through his burial there. However, he now reciprocates Theseus's hospitality by giving the city protection through the blessing conferred by keeping his grave-site secret. From beyond death, as a kind of ghost, he is both a guest and a host of sorts. This paradoxical double role takes the question of hospitality into uncertain territory, where the guest acquires, or rather reveals, power through a departure from the law (through becoming an outlaw).

Derrida's retelling of *Oedipus at Colonus* articulates a shifting relationship between host and guest that is analogous to that of the artist and viewer (or interlocutor, or user, as the case may be) in the examples of participatory art discussed in this chapter. In particular, the construction of highly codified environments into which viewers are invited, such as GRAV's *Labyrinth*, dramatises and underscores the artist's role as host and the distribution of power that is reinforced through this role. In more openly structured participatory artworks, such as *The Battle of Orgreave,* the viewer is invited into an ostensibly authorial role, alongside the artist, seemingly challenging the unequal distribution of power between host and guest. However, this invitation is conditional, and depends on the viewer's abiding by certain 'laws' that exist in the form of the artist's prescription of the nature of the work. Contrary to "the law of absolute, unconditional, hyperbolic hospitality" that unquestioningly says "yes to who or what turns up" (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 75, 77), these laws are the "conditions, the norms, the rights and the duties that are imposed on hosts and hostesses, on the men or women who give a welcome as well as the men or women who receive it" (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 77).

The practice of hospitality, Derrida argues, proceeds by way of an aporia, "at the frontier between two regimes of law", where the absolute openness to the other of unconditional hospitality is moderated by the necessity of choosing to grant access (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 77). Without the act of choice, this constitutive excision and exclusion, the law "wouldn't be effectively unconditional", for it would not "have to become effective, concrete, determined. … It would risk being abstract, utopian, illusory, and so turning over into its opposite" (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 79). Martin Hägglund's reading of Derrida supports the converse too, that the laws are necessarily perverted by the law of unconditional hospitality, since there is no hospitality without "the risk of an evil visitation" (Hägglund 104). Hägglund continues: "Hospitality can never be reduced to the invitation of an other who is good…. Even the other who is welcomed peacefully may turn out to be an instigator of war, since the other may always change" (104).

Constant engages with this form of radical hospitality, which risks welcoming a threatening or antagonistic other, in three paintings all from the early 1970s, *Erotic Space* (1971, (Stamps 198), *Entrée du Labyrinth* ("Entrance to the Labyrinth") (1972, fig. 30), and *Le Massacre de My Lai* ("The Massacre of My Lai") (1972, fig. 31). In each of these works, the New Babylonian environment is suggested by the recurring motif of rectangular planes staggered at perspectival diagonals. However, they deviate from Constant's earlier New Babylon paintings and drawings in that, firstly, greater emphasis is placed on figuration in the foreground, and secondly, in each painting the aftermath of a violent act is suggested by the representation of sprawled bodies and/or blood. The most obvious reference to violence is given in the title of *Le Massacre de My Lai,* which refers to the My Lai Massacre of 1968, in which American troops fighting in the Vietnam War killed hundreds of unarmed Vietnamese civilians. The act was widely condemned as a mass murder. In Constant's painting mangled naked bodies lie in the foreground, extending out of the picture plane. We see a representation of *New Babylon* looming in the top right corner of the painting, locating the massacre adjacent to, but not specifically inside *New Babylon*. In *Erotic Space,* an act of violence is similarly represented by a naked female body sprawled in the foreground of the painting, extending, as in *Le Massacre de My Lai,* beyond the picture plane. Electrical wires run from a wall socket to the body, simultaneously suggesting that she might have been electrocuted and literally (and figuratively) connecting her body to the architecture of the environment. Blood is spilled on the ground to the left of the body; Constant's signature appears in this red area, as if to emphasise the brutality of the scene.

The spatial representation of *Erotic Space* differs from that of *Le Massacre de My Lai* in that the body is clearly located within a New Babylonian labyrinthine interior. Looming in the middle-ground diagonally and to the left of the body is a sinister figure resembling the silhouette of a satyr-like creature. This reference to the mythical half-man, half-goat alludes to another hybrid creature that is strongly associated with the labyrinth, the Minotaur. In Greek mythology, Asterion the savage Minotaur, who is half-man and half-bull, is banished to the centre of a labyrinth made by the artist and architect Daedalus. The labyrinth is so complex that it imprisons the Minotaur, who is unable to navigate his way out of it. With the Minotaur permanently installed in the labyrinth, King Minos of Crete – in retribution for the killing of his son Androgeus – demands that every seven years seven Athenian young men and seven young women be thrown into the labyrinth for the Minotaur to devour. Eventually, Theseus volunteers to save Athens from this scourge by killing the Minotaur, so he enters the labyrinth. He succeeds, but must rely on a ball of red thread, given to him by Ariadne, to create a trail that will take him back to the entrance of the labyrinth.[189]

Like the mythical Minotaur, the looming satyr figure in *Erotic Space* presides over the labyrinth, standing erect in contrast to the prone female body. The allusion to the myth of the Minotaur suggests that the satyr-like figure might be responsible for the violence against the female figure, or that, more opportunistically, it might be waiting to devour her. The presence of this figure and the gory scene before it symbolically suggest that a possible consequence of the hospitality exercised in New Babylon – the absolute openness to an other who might be evil – is the occurrence of acts of antagonism and violence. *Erotic Space* follows the ethics of radical hospitality to the extreme, accommodating an ambiguity which recognises, as Hägglund argues, that even a peaceful other might transform and become threatening. Like *Erotic Space,* which clearly locates the potential for violence within a New Babylonian interior, *En-*

[189] See Robert Graves' retelling of this story in *The Greek Myths, Volume 1,* Section 98, "Theseus in Crete" (Graves n.p.).

trée du Labyrinth places marks suggestive of splattered blood squarely within the labyrinthine environment. These marks overlap with and eventually morph into figures staggered along two perspectival trajectories in the left and right thirds of the picture. This coalescence of forms further emphasises the ambiguity of an antagonistic presence within *New Babylon*, suggesting that such a presence might ultimately be indistinguishable from the non-threatening, 'ordinary' citizen.

Of crucial importance is the location of these ominous presences and scenes of violence in relation to the formal motifs that characterise the New Babylonian labyrinth. In *Entrée du Labyrinth,* as the title suggests, the most prominent blood splatters are situated at the entrance of the labyrinth, occupying the threshold that metaphorically separates the interior world of the labyrinth from its outside. Emphasising this liminal placement, the figures in *Le Massacre de My Lai* and *Erotic Space* appear to traverse the threshold between the inside and the outside of the painting, complicating the simple separation of these worlds. Recalling Derrida's commentary on Van Gogh's *A Pair of Shoes,* discussed in Chapter Two (pp. 186–88), the trope of the figure's traversal of the edge of the painting goes between the paintings' interior and exterior worlds, metaphorically lacing them into each other.

The threshold is crucial to Derrida's construction of the spatiality of hospitality; throughout *Of Hospitality* we find examples of thresholds that articulate the (often porous) boundaries of domains. One is invited by or invites another *across* a threshold and *into* a domain, whether physical or figurative. The unfolding of this relationship in Derrida's text is clearly exemplified in the compromising of the domain of the home by its thresholds, doors and windows. If, as Derrida maintains, the house is symbolic of the enclosed domain of conditional hospitality, its doors and windows are the frontiers that incontrovertibly open it to the unknown, to the outside, to potentially threatening guests. Derrida writes: "in order to constitute the space of a habitable house and a home, you also need an opening, a door and windows, you have to give up passage to the outside world [*l'etranger*]" (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 61). As an extension of the perforations created by doors and windows, telephone lines, email and the internet enable private exchanges to "cross public space and become available there", violating the "inviolable immunity" of the home which is the "condition of hospitality" (51). This violation constitutes a paradoxical tension since, as Derrida claims, the telephone line and one's access to the internet become extensions of the home. These extensions are not secreted from the public domain, yet, at the same time, they are not fully public either. They represent extended thresholds, ruptures in the private sphere of the home and sites of contestation of the right to gain access.

Derrida foregrounds the threshold as a site of potential transgression that is at once necessary to the enclosed domain of the home and compromises its enclosure. In *New Babylon* the threshold is further problematized, once again literally, by the absence of enclosure and the privation of home. Because movable walls allow for a continual negotiation between inside and outside, the enclosed space of the city is only ever articulated provisionally and temporarily. Instead of doors and windows that perforate an enclosing structure and allow the passage between the home and its outside, *New Babylon*'s entire skin is a threshold that is traversed as it is constituted. *Deuren Labyrint* is a provisional illustration of the application of this concept, demonstrating how *New Babylon* is not envisaged as "a container with a clearly defined inside and outside" but as an extended "transitional zone that is inseparable from the emergence, growth, and actions of the things that appear to occupy it" (Wigley, "Extreme Hospitality" 39).

This continuous dissimulation of space subverts the possibility of the '"sovereignty of oneself over one's home", so that hospitality must be figured according to a concept of motile and changeable spatiality (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 55). For Derrida, the domain of hospitality is crossed, perforated, and porous, but it remains conceptually constituted *as* domain. The occupation of that domain remains a matter of negotiation between host and guest. *Deuren Labyrint* extends this notion in that the door is not a necessary aberration in a nominally coherent limit, but the changeable locus of that limit. In *Deuren Labyrint*, through a repeated process of choice – that which gives hospitality its determination, according to Derrida – the domain loses and reconstitutes integrity so that the roles of guest and host are constantly shifting and exchanging without vanishing into the "abstract" or the "illusory" (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 55). For Derrida, the sovereignty of the domain is unsettled by the promise of an (im)possible absolute hospitality. In *Deuren Labyrint* the domain is in a continuous process of forming and disintegrating. The absolute hospitality of a lawless, constantly changing space antagonises, and is antagonised by, the momentarily constituting law. The limit and the perforation co-form and dissolve in a single motion, and this motion is the enactment of the work. For Wigley this exemplifies an "architecture of hospitality", which "appears only in order to be undone or appears only through an undoing" (Wigley, "Extreme Hospitality" 39). This architecture "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 labour of deconstruction" (Wigley, "Extreme Hospitality" 39).

3.11 Towards Labyrinthine Temporality

The deconstruction of the threshold that is exemplified in the New Babylonian labyrinth further problematises the distinction between artist and viewer, which is paralleled in Derrida's formulation by the elusive relationship between host and guest. In this light, the viewer's participation can be seen as a generative, multivalent intervention that intersects the worlds of the work – from the objects, images and environments that manifest themselves as the physical expressions of *New Babylon* to the future-oriented narrative construction of the work-to-come. Occurring across modalities, this intervention silently influences and troubles the life of the work in art history, its formation, circulation, reception, and ultimate canonisation. This troubling entails a vital slippage between the futuricity of *New Babylon* and its relatability in a seemingly simple present and past, via its physical iterations. *New Babylon* is therefore caught in, and between, two temporalities, the emblematic present – coextensive with the past – of a supposedly static art object (the temporality of art history) and that of the future which remains, and always must remain, in deferral.

This tension highlights that the spatial articulation of the New Babylonian labyrinth has a temporal analogue. Indeed, following the logic of *différance,* spatial differing – the co-incidence in space of heterogeneous points and forms – always entails a deferral or a displacement in time. This is because, as Derrida (following Heidegger) argues in "Ousia and Gramme", the conceptual separation of space and time is spurious: "Now, as Hegel and Heidegger remind us, one cannot treat space *and* time as two concepts or as two themes. We speak naively each time we give ourselves space and time as two possibilities to be compared and related. And especially each time we believe, in doing this, that we know what space or time *is*, or in general what the *essence* is, within whose horizon we believe we can ask the question of space and time" (Derrida, "Ousia and Grammē: Note on a Note from Being and Time" 55–56). Derrida proposes that instead of attempting to think the essence of space or time through the separation and analysis of these concepts, we should treat the concept of essence, in all its evasiveness, as the "formal horizon of this question" (Derrida, "Ousia and Grammē: Note on a Note from Being and Time" 55). Space and time, rather than absolute and abstract notions, are articulated via the emergence of "essence", that is, of the (impossible) possibility of self-sameness. The inverse holds as well: the question of the nature of essence – or the capacity of something to be itself – is an expression of space and time. These concepts are intertwined and they present themselves, though in fragments, via the aporia of "nonpassage", the impossible-possibility of the spatiotemporal event of the step (Derrida, *Aporias* 12). The step is that which both constitutes and breaches a threshold which is necessarily spatial and temporal. It is also a unit of the passage of time, an event in which time is experienced, or "lived", no matter how compromised that experience will have been (West-Pavlov 48).

If the labyrinth, as a spatial arrangement, is ultimately an expression of the aporetic – as we find in *Deuren Labyrint* – its aporia extends to, or is rather expressed in, time as well. We might, therefore, think of the labyrinth as a temporal intervention which abandons the possibility of progressive points according to which both distance and time can be measured. The labyrinth problematises the notion of progression in that it complicates the teleology of progressing from beginning to end. Its superfluous detours and dead-ends do not serve a purpose along this trajectory other than to produce disorientation, effectively distracting and derailing the user from the goal of their traversal. The New Babylonian dynamic labyrinth, succinctly exemplified in *Deuren Labyrint,* exaggerates the disorienting effects of the labyrinthine environment by extending the possibilities for "delay", "detour", and "adventure" (Constant, "The Principle of Disorientation" 225).

3.12 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the importance of labyrinthine form throughout the *New Babylon oeuvre* through two interlocking discussions. The first addressed the historical relationship between labyrinths in artistic practice and the emergence of the viewer as a protagonist of the artwork. This section drew links between Rancière's concept of the "distribution of the sensible", Lefebvre's "everyday" and the notions of 'reality' explored in Chapters One and Two. It went on to introduce the reader to Constant's participatory test chambers, contextualising them within a broader prevalence of labyrinthine form in exhibition-making at the time. The second part of this chapter focused on a possible theoretical framework for participatory art which ultimately reframes the artwork as a site of radical hospitality. Together these analyses position *New Babylon* as an important node along the historical trajectory of participatory art, making a case for the inclusion of the work in this emergent canon. However, recalling Chapter One's critique of the processes of historicisation, this chapter has proposed that the application of the labyrinth as a conceptual device troubles the temporality of the work, not only undercutting its placement within a linear historical trajectory, but also challenging any notion of its presence in a simple present.

With this in mind, and returning to the metaphor of the aporia as discussed in Chapter Two, I reiterated the idea that *New Babylon* instigates an ontology of the possible-as-impossible.

Conclusion: Delay, detour and adventure

Constant's provocative claim that *New Babylon* is "as real as any work of art" appears to take for granted the self-evidence of the concepts of the "real" and the "work of art". However, upon a close reading – one which takes into account not only the changes in Constant's representations of *New Babylon* but also the shifting manifestations of this work – it becomes clear that a more complicated notion of the relationship between art and reality is in fact at play. It has been the objective of this thesis to account for the complexity that arises from the bringing together of these concepts in the crucible of *New Babylon.* I have examined *New Babylon* as a work, a collection of individual works, a concept, a proposal, a relational strategy, and an act of hospitality. Through this examination, I have identified a theoretical framework for engaging with *New Babylon* which accommodates this multiplicity, and which is potentially applicable to other artworks that exist in multiple states as well.

I have also proposed an historical re-reading of *New Babylon,* which has hitherto evaded canonisation in some ways while, simultaneously, having been manipulated into histories that primarily serve adjacent projects and artists other than Constant. The research presented here proposes an alternative trajectory for the reading of *New Babylon,* both historically and in the present. However, this trajectory is itself implicitly troubled by the aporetic temporality which *New Babylon* engages precisely through its different kinds of plurality: *New Babylon* is plural in that it exists simultaneously in several states, as described above, and because it occupies contradictory positions in relation to the concepts of reality, possibility and actuality. In addition, its realised and implied participatory qualities open *New Babylon* to a circulation that radically challenges the singular authorship of the artist, calling for an understanding of the ontology of the artwork as substantially contingent on the experience of the viewer.

Chapter One offered the reader an historical recontextualisation of *New Babylon* via a reading of the project's indebtedness to, and impact upon, the early SI. At the same time, this chapter established a critical view of the process of historicisation itself, observing through the Derridean construct of *différance* that the text of history is subject to a limitless differing and deferral. This observation recasts Constant's equivocation regarding the relevance of the work to the disciplines of art and architecture, suggesting that his shifting understanding of such a dynamic is symptomatic of a more urgent uncertainty: the relationship of the work to the concept of reality.

The latter is the chief subject of Chapter Two, which sought to contextualise Constant's wavering views regarding the reality of *New Babylon* within a further-reaching discussion of the relationship of the artwork (more generally) to the concepts of reality, possibility and actuality. The chapter drew on dominant theories of the ontology of art, as well as possible worlds theory, to posit, following Derrida's reading of Heidegger's ontology of art (as presented in *The Truth In Painting*), that the limit of the artwork needs to be thought "in laces" (Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* 304). Chapter Two concluded with a proposal that this limit be understood through the aporia of the possible-as-impossible, a construct which interfaces compellingly with modal philosophy's engagement with the concept of simple possibility. The modality of the possible-as-impossible specifically offers an alternative to conventional associations of the 'real' with the 'actual', the material, the visible, and even the 'everyday'. Such an alternative reflects *New Babylon's* seemingly paradoxical modality: the work is possible –

that is, has the capacity to be presented (made present) – only insofar as it remains impossible. In other words, *New Babylon's* identity as an artwork is dependent on its impossibility as an artwork. Acknowledging the viability of this aporetic modality constitutes an opportunity to imagine being beyond the imperatives of self-identity and simple presence.

Continuing in the spirit of the aporia as a step (*pas*) that is *not* (*pas*), Chapter Three investigated the significance of labyrinthine form in *New Babylon*, considering representations of labyrinths in several of Constant's two-dimensional artworks and models, as well as Constant's life-size labyrinths created for viewer participation. My discussion of these works aimed to rectify what I perceive to be an oversight in established historical narratives of *New Babylon*, which give them scant attention. Moreover, this discussion recontextualised *New Babylon* in relation to two important bodies of thought: the theory of participatory art, underpinned here by Rancière's notions of the emancipated spectator and the distribution of the sensible, and Derrida's notion of radical hospitality as a gesture of saying "yes to who or what turns up" (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 77).

As I have argued across these chapters, *New Babylon* is conceived as an intervention in everyday life, both in Constant's time and in a future in abeyance. The temporality of this future is marked by its disjunction from any simple presence in the present. It is, in Derrida's words, a "future to come" (Derrida, *Aporias* 14), a future always still to come, even a future premised on the impossibility of its own arriving. Constant thus imagines *New Babylon* as a disruption of what can be conceived as possible in the present, as presence, and as any simple conception of the future as that which is continuous with the present. In this respect, *New Babylon* both elicits (from an impossible future) and provokes a redistribution of the sensible, a rearrangement of the possibilities for sharing what is visible and sayable. In view of this complex relationship to the present and the future, presence and self-presence, and that which is shared between or distributed amongst individuals, *New Babylon* exemplifies a plural ontology, calling on us to revisit and question dominant concepts of the ontology of the artwork. Beyond this, however, my account of *New Babylon* demonstrates the need to develop an alternative conceptual infrastructure for the ontology of the artwork, one which can accommodate the temporal, material and authorial plurality characteristic of countless artworks produced in the past and in contemporary times. I have proposed in Chapter Two that this conceptual infrastructure may be thought through the modality of the possible-as-impossible. In Chapter Three this proposal culminates in the idea that the artwork can be conceived as a site of radical hospitality, in which the authorship of the artist is opened up by, and to, the potentialities of the viewer's agency. Re-imagining the ontology of the artwork in this way offers a framework for art historical enquiry that engages with the richness and urgency of artistic practice today.

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Appendix A: Images

Fig. 1: Constant, *Ontwerp voor een zigeunerkamp in Alba* (“Design for a gypsy camp in Alba”), 1956, 13,7cm x 125,0cm x 125,0cm, aluminium, oil paint, plexiglass, steel, wood.

Fig. 2: Constant, *Gele sector* (“Yellow sector”), 1958, 21,0cm x 87,3cm x 77,5cm, blotting paper, copper, ink, iron, lead, metal, oil paint, plexiglass,wood.

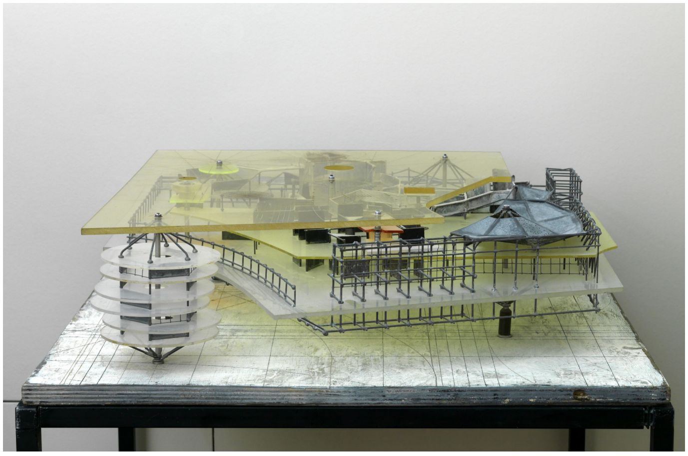


Fig. 3: Constant, *Plattegrond van de gele sector* (“Floorplan of the yellow sector”), 1959, 43,5cm x 49,6cm, ink, paper, pencil.

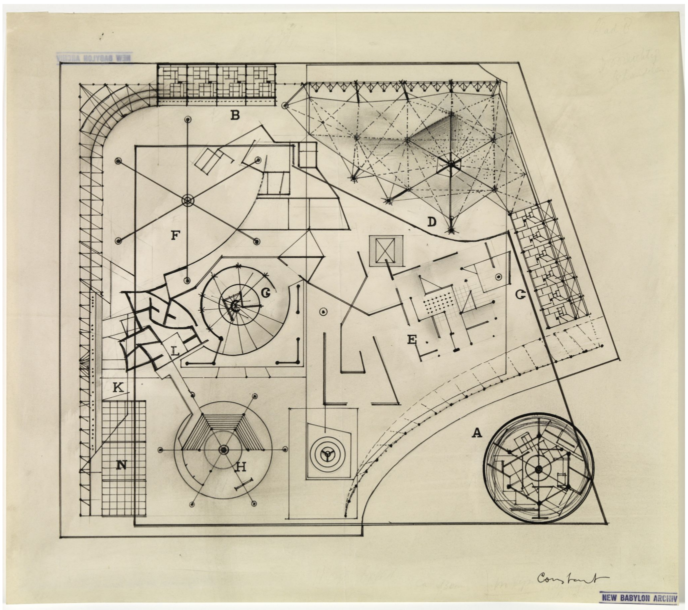
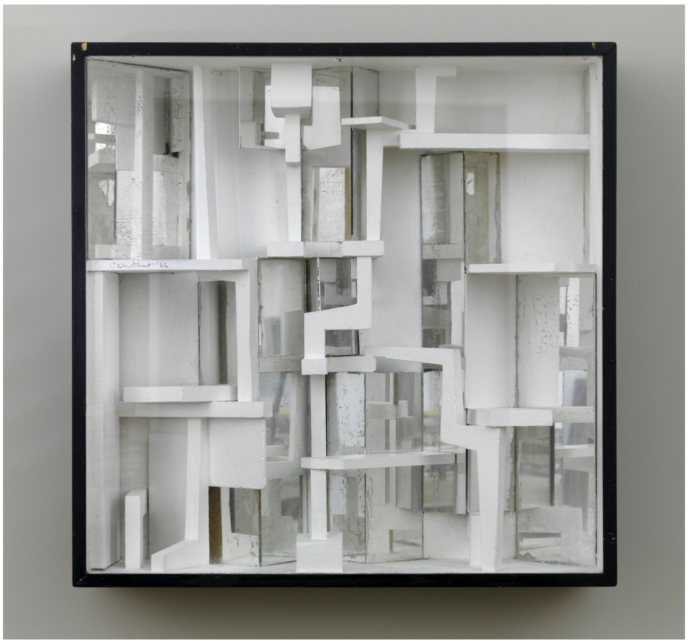


Fig. 4: Constant, *Diorama I*, 1962, 43.0cm x 17.5cm x 43.0cm, glass, wood.	
Fig. 5: Constant, *Diorama II*, 1962, 63.0cm x 63.0cm x 17.5cm, glass, oil paint, wood.	

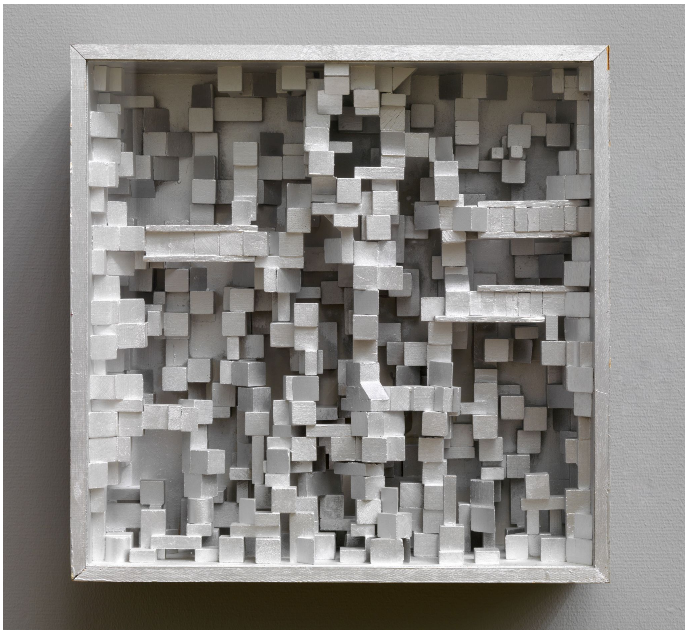


Fig. 6: Constant, *Diorama III*, 1962, 53.5cm x 53.5cm x 17.5cm, oil paint, wood.

Fig. 7: Constant, *Klein labyr* (“Small labyrinth”), 1959, 70.0cm x 35.0cm x 56.0cm, crayon, metal, oil paint, plexiglass, wood.

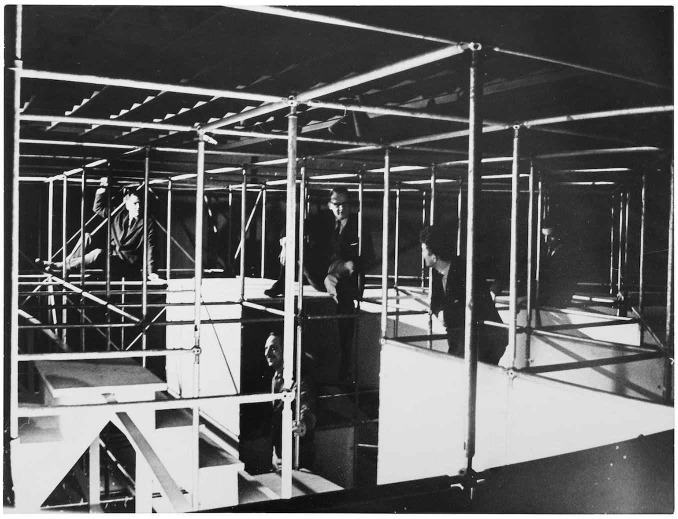


Fig 8: Constant and exhibition visitors exploring *Experiment Studio Rotterdam (ESR),* 1965.

Fig. 9: Constant, *Floorplan of Experiment Studio Rotterdam,* 1965, drawing on paper.

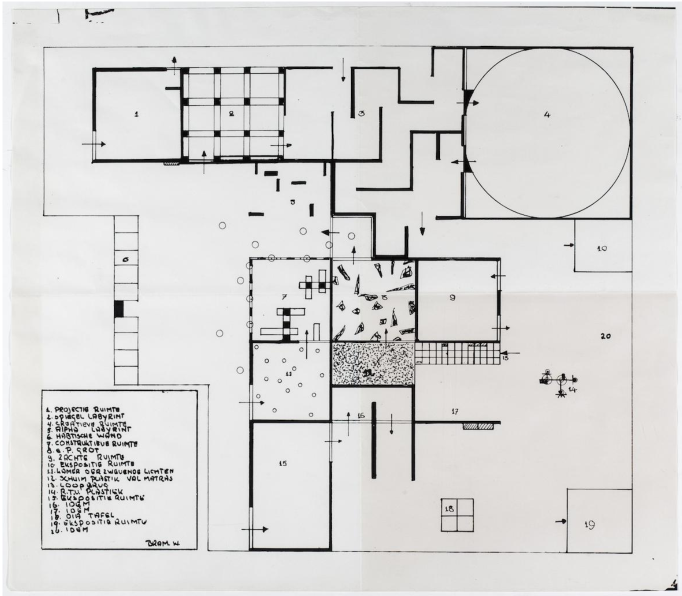


Fig. 10: Reconstruction of Constant, *Ludieke trap* ("Ludic stairs") (1969) for the exhibition *Constant: New Babylon. To Us, Liberty,* 2016.

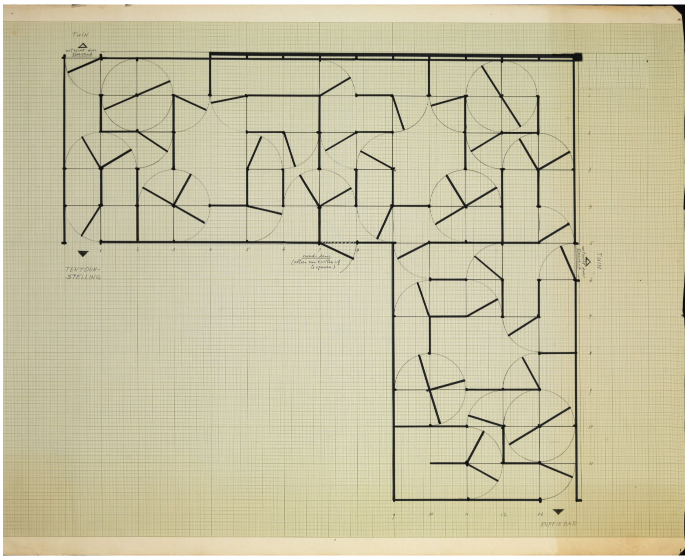


Fig. 11: Constant, *Floor plan of Deuren-labyrint*, 1974, 49.9cm x 61.7cm, gouache, ink, paper.

Fig. 12: Constant, *Constructie met gebogen vlakken* (“Construction with curved planes”), 1954, 79.0cm x 88.0cm x 45.0cm, brass, plexiglass, steel.

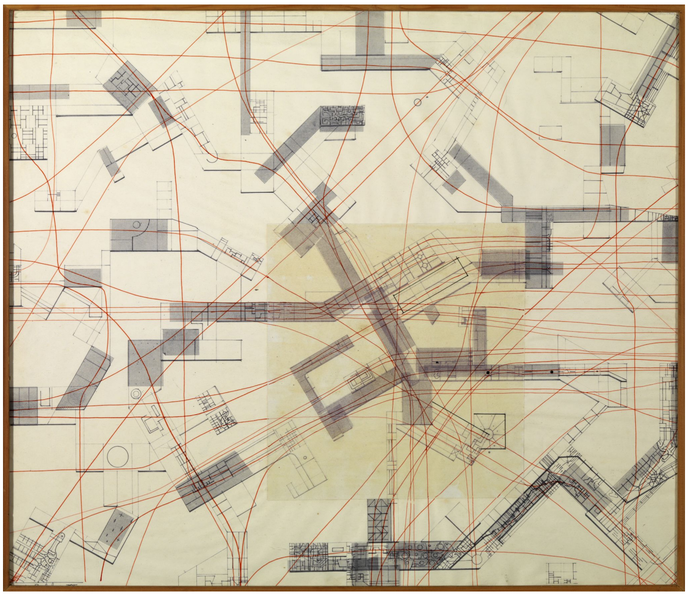
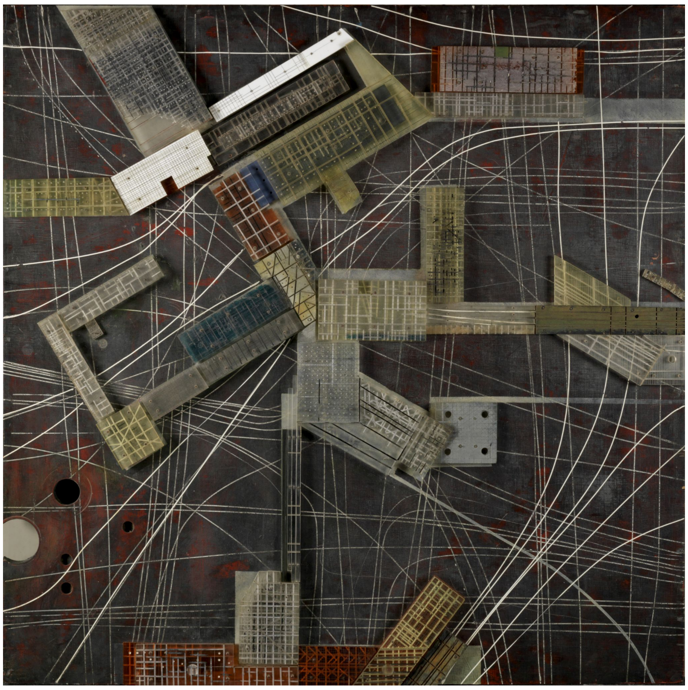
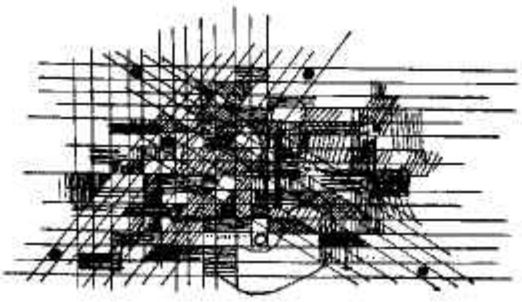
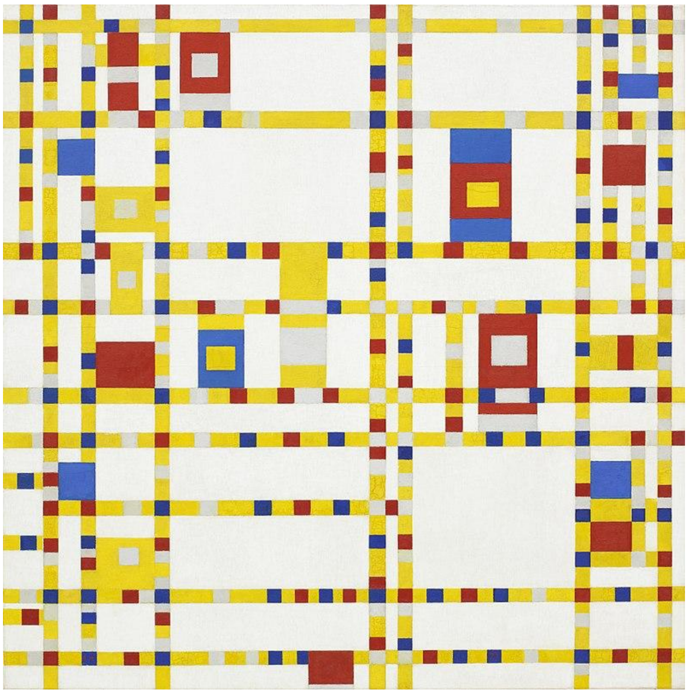
Fig. 13: Constant, *Observatorium I*, 1955, 40.0cm x 48.0cm x 40.0cm, brass, copper, plexiglass.	
Fig. 14: Constant, *Groep sectoren* ("Group sector"), 1959, 56.9cm x 66.5cm, ink, paper.	

Fig. 15: Constant, *Groep sectoren* ("Group sector"), 1959, 5.9cm x 98.9cm x 99.7cm, ink, metal, oil paint, plexiglass, wood.	
Fig. 16: Constant, *Principle for a Covered City: Spatial "Plan",* 1959, no dimensions given.	
Fig. 17: Piet Mondrian, *Broadway Boogie Woogie,* 1942-1943, 127cm x 127cm, oil on canvas.	

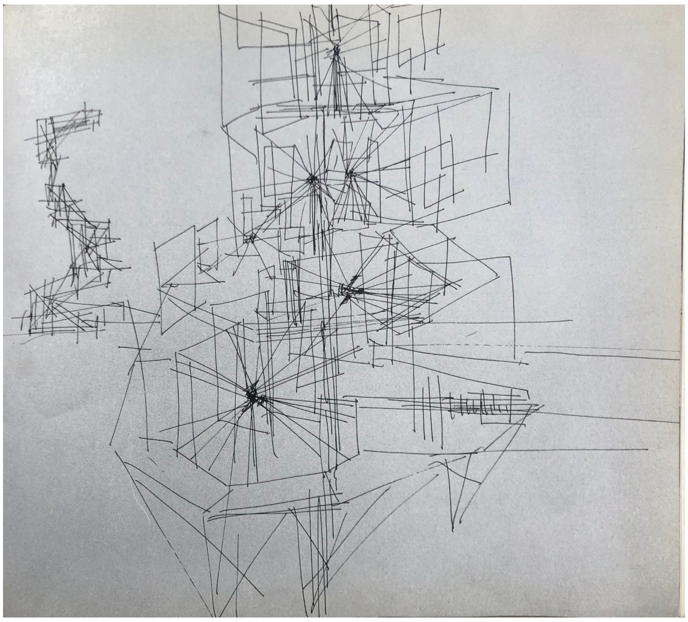


Fig. 18: Constant, *Torens* (“Towers”), 1961, 45.1cm x 65.1cm, ink on paper.

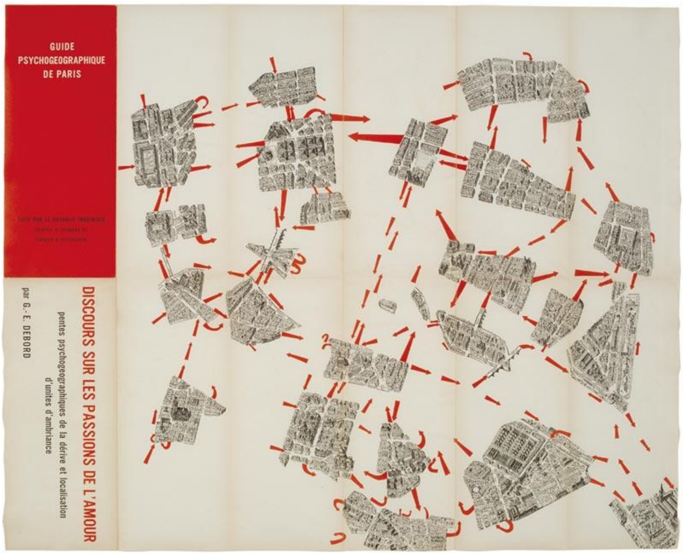


Fig. 19: Guy Debord, *Guide psychogéographique de Paris: discours sur les passions de l'amour: pentes psychogéographiques de la dérive et localisation d'unités d'ambiance* (“Psychogeographic Guide of Paris. Discourse on the Passions of Love. Psychogeographic Descents of Drifting and Localisation of Ambient Unities”), 1957, 59.5cm x 73.5cm, lithographic print on paper.

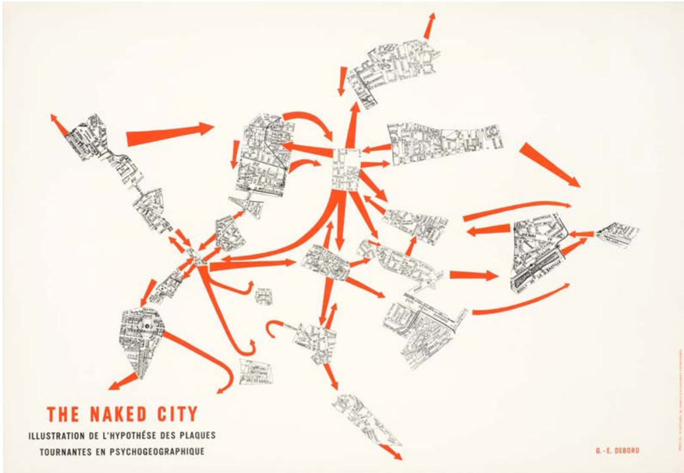


Fig. 20: Guy Debord, *The Naked City, Illustration de l'hypothèse des plaques tournantes en psychogéographique* ("The Naked City: illustration of the hub hypothesis in psychogeography"), 1957, 33.3cm x 48.3cm, lithographic print on paper.

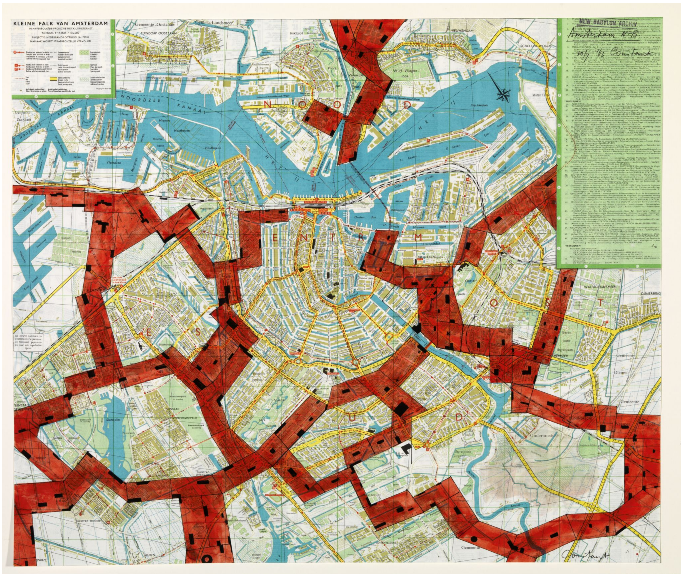


Fig. 21: Constant, *New Babylon-Amsterdam [I]*, 1963, 52.2cm x 62.2cm, geographical map, ink.

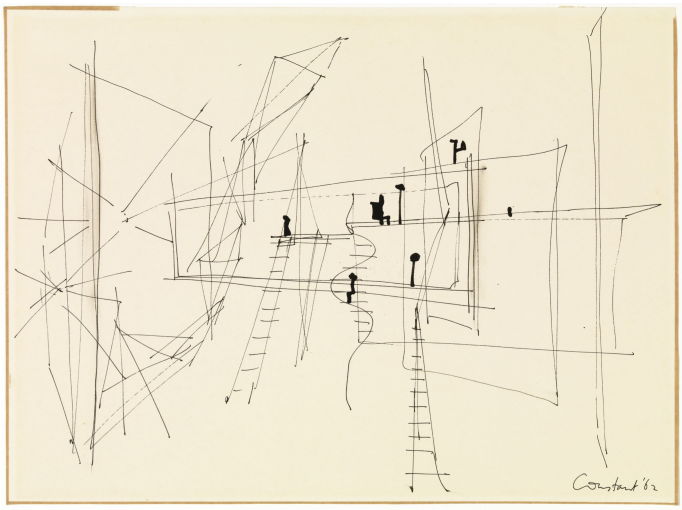
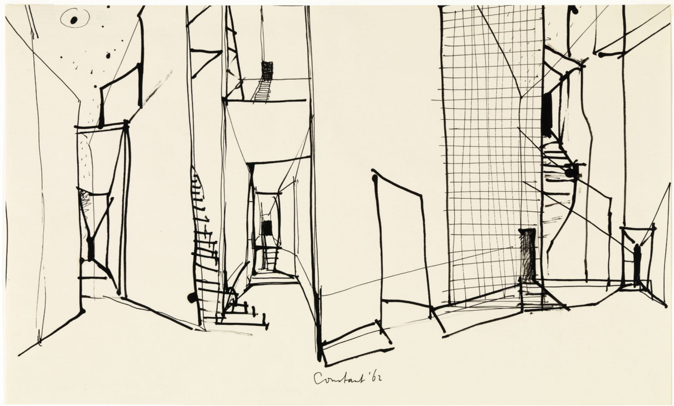
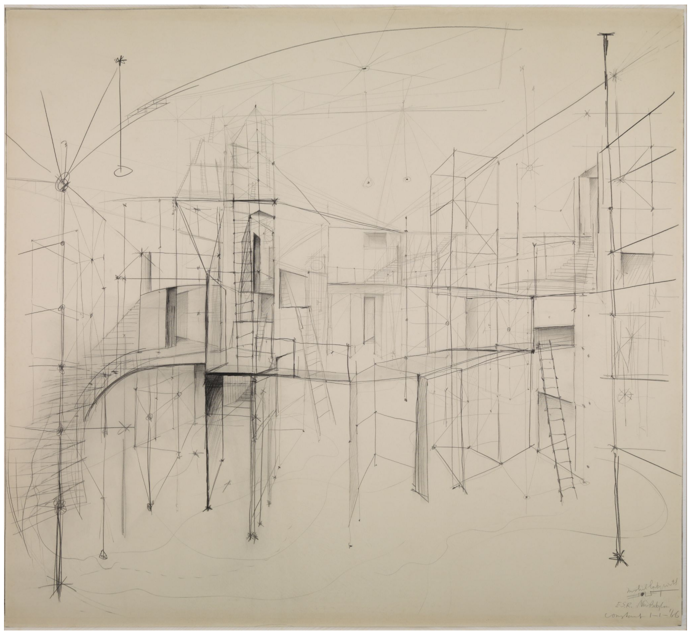
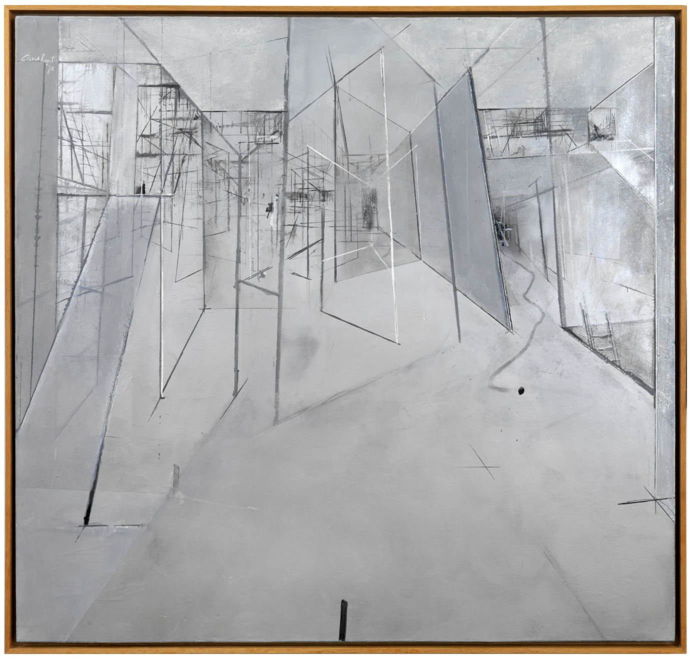


Fig. 22: Constant, *Labyr*, 1962, 29.9cm x 46.8cm, ink on paper.

Fig. 23: Constant, *In-terieur met trappen en deuren* (“Interior with stairs and doors”), 1962, 27.5cm x 45.7cm, ink on paper,	
Fig. 24: Constant, *Mo-biel labyrinth E.S.R. New Babylon* (“Mobile labyrinth E.S.R New Babylon”) , 1966, 128.2cm x 140.3cm, pencil on paper.	
Fig. 25: Constant, *Labyrintische ruimte* ("Labyrinthine space"), 1973, 165.0cm x 175.0cm, oil on linen.	

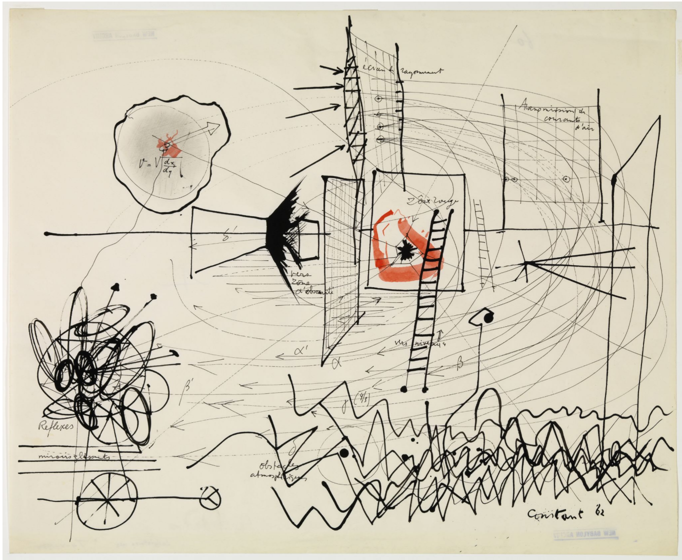


Fig. 26: Constant, *Labyratoire* (“Labyratorium”), 1962, 48.3cm x 69.0cm, ink on paper.

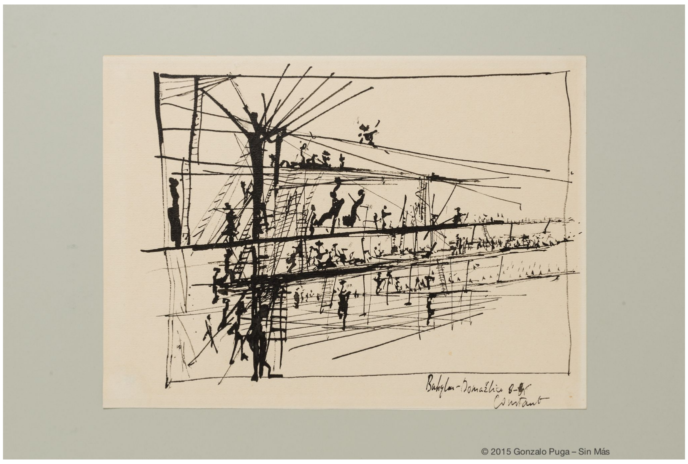


Fig. 27: Constant, *Babylon-Domazlice (resisschets)* (“Travel Sketch”), 1965, 30.0cm x 41.0cm, ink on paper.

Fig. 28: Constant, *T-T √2* (installation view), 1965, installation environment. Photographer unknown.

Fig. 29: Constant, *Erotic Space*, 1971, 165 x 175 cm, oil paint on linen.	
Fig. 30: Constant, *Entrée du Labyrinthe*, 1972, 165 x 175 cm, oil paint on linen.	

Fig. 31: Constant, *Le massacre de My Lai* ("The massacre of My Lai"), 1972, 120,5 x 130,3 cm, oil paint on linen.