



# The Activist Drawing: Retracing Situationist Architectures from Constant's New Babylon to Beyond

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Dutch artist Constant Nieuwenhuys (b. 1920) developed his visionary architectural project New Babylon between 1956 and 1974. Emerging out of the remarkable activist group the Situationist International, the project was concerned with issues of "unitary urbanism" and the future of art in a technocratic society. It has had a major impact on subsequent generations of artists, architects, and urbanists. Exploring the intersection of drawing, utopianism, and activism in a multimedia era, *The Activist Drawing* not only traces this historical moment but reveals surprisingly contemporary issues about the relationship between a fully automated environment and human creativity.

Several decades before the current debate about architecture in the supposedly placeless electronic age, Constant conceived an urban and architectural model that literally envisaged the World Wide Web. The inhabitants of his New Babylon drift through huge labyrinthine interiors, perpetually reconstructing every aspect of the environment according to their latest desires. Walls, floors, lighting, sound, color, texture, and smell keep changing. This network of vast "sectors" can be seen as a physical embodiment of the Internet, where people configure their individual Web sites and wander from site to site without limits. With its parallels to our virtual world, New Babylon seems as radical today as when it was created.

The essays explore the relevance of Constant's utopian work to that of his peers in the Situationist International and experimental architectural movements of the 1960s, as well as later generations of architects and artists. They use Constant's revolutionary project as a springboard to reconsider the role of drawing in an electronic age.

Copublished with the Drawing Center, New York City.

### Contributors:

Benjamin Buchloh, Constant Nieuwenhuys, Rosalyn Deutsche, Catherine de Zegher, Elizabeth Diller, Tom McDonough, Martha Rosler, Bernard Tschumi,

Anthony Vidler, Mark Wigley.

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### Editorial Review

#### From Library Journal

Constant Anton Nieuwenhuys, born in 1920 in Amsterdam and known simply as Constant, is a printmaker, painter, and writer. After World War II, he turned his attention to futuristic environments and in the 1950s and 1960s developed a series of drawings for a utopian city. This was "New Babylon," in which mechanization allows for liberation from work and a new "situation," with room for the universal expression of creativity. This volume consists of three sections comprising ten essays with black-and-white illustrations, separated by high-quality plates of the drawings. Following an interview with the artist, a highly theoretical and original essay by Wigley (The Architecture of Deconstruction) comments on the nature of architectural drawing and its relation to the architectural process and its expression. In addition, Anthony Vidler's brief but insightful essay on spatial diagrams and their relation to utopian visions adds an important dimension to the book, and Bernard Tschumi's essay, although a mere two and a half pages, is a fascinating taxonomy of drawing types. For advanced architecture or drawing students and large architecture or fine arts collections.

Paul Glassman, New York Sch. of Interior Design Lib.

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#### About the Author

Catherine de Zegher was Director of The Drawing Center in New York from 1999 to 2006. She is the editor of *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of Twentieth Century Art in, of, and from the Feminine* (MIT Press, 1996).

Mark Wigley is Professor of Architecture at Columbia University.

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**Clark Palumbo:**

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