

The Path to Unitary Urbanism, 1960

This is the only known text by Constant that establishes a link to the Situationist International. Constant was associated with this movement from 1958 to 1960.

The texts Constant wrote during the course of the 1950s are an outstanding record of how his conception of space developed into a notion of a complete urban habitat – ‘unitary urbanism’ – and the social space necessary for the development of human creativity. Constant derived the concept of unitary urbanism from Gilles Ivain, the pseudonym of Ivan Chtcheglov, who wrote about it in 1953. When Gil Wolman, a member of the Lettrist International, gave a lecture on this in Alba in 1956, Constant was instantly inspired. Constant elaborated on unitary urbanism with Guy Debord and later used it in his *New Babylon* project.

The Path to Unitary Urbanism

This does not involve art.

Our life is a game.

The world around us is constantly changing.

Should we remain on the fringes and leave it to scientists, engineers and politicians to decide the shape of our lives and the world in which we live?

There are marvellous inventions with countless opportunities and yet what is lacking is playfulness; we cannot do anything with it.

All attempts this century to initiate cultural reforms have failed because they took the individual as their starting point. The collective imagination was not taken into account, was misunderstood or despised. Nevertheless, the face of our world today is largely the result of collective effort.

The artist thinks he has to choose between the lack of imagination of industrial functionalism and the impotent scream from the ivory tower. He has become a regressive element in society's development; the transformations around him occur without his participation.

Our new cities and districts are as boring as the life that unfolds inside them.

For the time being the problem can only be tackled at the macro level: completely new situations are required.

Automation will increasingly give rise to economic conditions and will, while restricting the workload of each individual, favour the playful side of our life. The cultural contribution of each of us will thus flourish. Culture does not exclusively mean the artificial; a strict distinction between the different fields of human action is not possible when we talk of culture. Boundaries dividing science, technology and art will be blurred constantly. The changes in the world align to the big picture, to a unitary attitude. The need for eternity as championed by mystic Absolutism has lost its appeal. We can identify the dynamic principle of our existence in the transient, in the mutable. There is no beauty independent of the influences of everyday life. The individual artwork relies on wrong premises; it no longer suffices. Our artistic activity should be related to life in its entirety.

To live is to act creatively.

We must incessantly recreate the world around us and change it, if only by our way of living.

Our goal is dynamic variation and thus the intensification of the social atmosphere. There is no longer an audience, and it will no longer be possible to have a passive stance on art. Art arises solely

from a general creative activity, once this ceases, art, too, disappears. Neither art nor the artwork, but the activity that produces the artwork, should be permanent. That is the essence of our life and its realization.

We will live at an ever greater distance from nature. I have proposed a new city that corresponds to a new and different way of life. It will consist of a single, huge building whose countless rooms merge. In here, light, colour, shape, sound and movement will combine to create a constantly changing interplay with the environment, moving from one room to the other and in harmony with the creative game of life that we seek to establish.

We leave behind us the old idea of a *Gesamtkunst* that simply called for the aggregation of the existing arts. A *Gesamtkunstwerk* today is bound up with life in its entirety. In such a Unitary society, urban life in the current meaning of the term will no longer exist. Urbanism will mean life forms that are complex in all respects.

Solutions to practical issues such as traffic, housing, etc. can of course only be found in this collective spirit, compliant with the outlook of society in its entirety as described above.

What should such a city look like? Which artistic requirements can we expect to see? We should not limit ourselves to some aesthetic principles. We can only intuit what technological developments the future may bring.

Needless to say, the future will forgo the primitive spatial projects of current architecture. Space travel and chemistry will decisively influence the engineers of tomorrow. Our present experimental work merely seeks to create sketchy outlines. We play with the opportunities and the fantastic proposals. Our game creates the science fiction of social life and urban planning.

Realizing this will perhaps be the task of future generations.

'Der Weg zum unitären Urbanismus', published in: *Constant, Konstruktionen und Modelle*, exh. cat. Essen (Galerie van de Loo), 1960.