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Debord, Constant, and the Politics of Situationist Urbanism

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Debord, Constant, and the politics of situationist urbanism

Urbanism and Politics

What follows offers a critical evaluation of the model of urban practice that stood at the centre of the inaugural phase of the French artistic/political collective the Situationist International (SI) between 1957 and 1960. This model was theoretically articulated under the title ‘unitary urbanism’ and arose principally out of collaboration between the leading figure of the SI, Guy Debord, and the Dutch artist and architect Constant Nieuwenhuys, known simply as Constant. Constant’s efforts both during and after his involvement with the SI centred on his *New Babylon*, a project for a new form of urban life that envisioned the replacement of utilitarian urban planning by a new mobile urbanism of play. As will be shown in detail, the situationist critique of urbanism and architecture turns on the substantive political question of *genuine popular participation under the conditions of advanced urbanization*. In a contemporary context in which the majority of the world’s population are now living in an urban environment,ⁱ the question raised by the situationist critique is more rather than less urgent. Though it may appear at first glance that this critique has little relevance to the contemporary debate, I argue in what follows that the basic practices and ideas of situationist urbanism offer indispensable tools for constructing a progressive political response to contemporary urban management. This significance derives in large part from the fact that the SI did not primarily offer a theory of the urban but rather *models and forms of critical urban practice*. For ultimately urban politics is about who has the right to appear in public space and which activities are deemed legitimate within it. In order to appreciate the place of the situationist

contribution within the broader context of urban theory and practice it is necessary to have at the outset a general sense of some salient historical developments.

In *The Urban Revolution* from 1970 the social theorist Henri Lefebvreⁱⁱ grasps the urban street according to a dialectical tension of emancipation and control:

The street is a place to play and learn. The street is disorder. All the elements of urban life, which are fixed and redundant elsewhere, are free to fill the streets and through the streets flow to the centers, where they meet and interact, torn from their fixed abode. This order is alive. It informs. It surprises [...] The street, a series of displays, an exhibition of objects for sale, illustrates how the logic of merchandise is accompanied by a form of (passive) contemplation that assumes the appearance and significance of an aesthetics and an ethics [...] In this sense we can speak of a *colonization* of the urban space, which takes place in the street through the image, through publicity, through the spectacle of objects – a “system of objects” that has become symbol and spectacle.ⁱⁱⁱ

For Lefebvre the urban street is *the* locus of political confrontation. As a consequence the field of knowledge and practice that goes by the innocuous and banal sounding name of ‘urban planning’ should be recognized as vital for any emancipatory political project that seeks to be materially effective. In general terms, since the seminal programme of urban renewal carried out by Haussmann as Prefect of Paris in the 1850s and 60s, urbanism has predominantly taken the form of state and municipal intervention aiming at the suppression of civil unrest and broader regimentation of public life. While today urban renewal programmes often strive to elicit community input into the devising and realizing of plans, in most cases it is highly questionable whether such efforts constitute genuine

popular participation. According to Lefebvre's terse formulation the urban is "a place where conflicts are *expressed*",^{iv} and within this place of conflict urbanism represents essentially the effort of the state to maintain its citizenry within the bounds of advanced commodity capitalism:

urbanism is a mask and a tool: a mask for the state and political action, a tool of interests that are dissimulated within a strategy and a socio-logic. Urbanism does not try to model space as a work of art. It does not even try to do so in keeping with its technological imperatives, as it claims. The space it creates is political.^v

This thoroughgoing suspicion and scepticism with respect to the political mission of state-based urbanism comes in the immediate wake of the events of civil dissent that culminated in Paris with the short-lived alliance between students and millions of workers in 1968. In the ensuing forty years, and particularly over the last decade, state and municipal programmes of urban renewal have been pitched according to a logic of consensus-building between variously identified 'stakeholders'. Such a logic stands in stark opposition to the conflictual model of urbanism propounded by Lefebvre, being regulated at the most basic level by a drive towards convergence and the effective elimination of difference between interested parties. It is important to note, however, that the ostensive concern of Lefebvre and contemporary urbanism is the same: how to organize effective public participation. In a recent article Tim Richardson and Stephen Connelly show how the present consensus model of participation within urbanism is part of a broader shift within party political thinking, a shift theoretically articulated by the sociologist Anthony Giddens in the form of 'Third Way' politics and adopted in the UK

by New Labour in the mid-1990s.^{vi} Richardson and Connelly further show how this move towards a consensus model in political discourse and practice is intimately connected to an adoption of the notion of ‘communicative rationality’ as articulated in the social discourse theory of Habermas elaborated in the 1980s and 90s.^{vii} They point out that, as with Third Way politics, Habermasian communicative rationality turns on reducing out instances of confrontation and conflict through the identification of common ground upon which consensus can be built. While endorsing a more modest model of what they call ‘pragmatic consensus’, Richardson and Connelly make clear that the influential Habermasian notion of discursive consensus remains largely blind to the machinations of pre-existent power structures and positions within any communicative situation. They remark:

It is thus necessary to draw a clear distinction between *ideal consensus* and what happens in practice, and to examine in detail the inevitable processes of exclusion that result from the myriad conscious and unconscious decisions through which a public involvement process is steered towards what one might term *pragmatic consensus*.^{viii}

It is questionable, however, whether adopting a regulating principle of consensus even in this more modest, ‘pragmatic’ form is either workable or desirable. In recent years influential political theorists within the radical tradition have cogently argued that the consensus model does not offer a credible way of resolving political conflict but rather denies the very core of political life as such, namely confrontation between qualitatively different interests. According to this perspective the putative neutrality of the consensus model is in actual fact merely a rhetorical mask for what in practice amounts to a

capitulation to dominant power structures and vested interests. To regulate political life by means of a consensus principle is basically to decide in advance that entrenched differences of material and symbolic capital will go unchallenged. Genuine political action, by contrast, brings conflict over differences of power to manifest, public expression. Two examples of contemporary anti-consensualist political theory suffice to give an indication. In the first case Chantal Mouffe offers the following general remark:

I contend that the belief in the possibility of a universal rational consensus has put democratic thinking on the wrong track. Instead of trying to design the institutions which, through supposed ‘impartial’ procedures, would reconcile all conflicting interests and values, the task for democratic theorists and politicians should be to envisage the creation of a vibrant ‘agonistic’ public sphere of contestation where different hegemonic political projects can be confronted.^{ix}

Secondly, Jacques Rancière offers a similar account of the nature of the political that takes consensus theory to task and grasps genuine political agency as arising out of the public expression of grievance on the part of the oppressed:

Parties do not exist prior to the conflict they name and in which they are counted as parties. The “discussion” of wrong is not an exchange – not even a violent one – between constituent partners. It concerns the speech situation itself and its performers. Politics does not exist because men, through the privilege of speech, place their interests in common. Politics exists because those who have no right to be counted as speaking beings make themselves of some account, setting up a community by the fact of placing

in common a wrong that is more than this very confrontation, the contradiction of two worlds in a single world ...^x

The common position taken by Mouffe and Rancière has obvious affinities with Lefebvre's radical critique of urbanism, insofar as it takes confrontation to be a basic, irreducible feature of genuine democratic politics rather than a threat or deficiency to be reduced out through consensus formation. But Lefebvre's account adds something crucial to the conflictual models articulated by Mouffe and Rancière, namely a positive principle of collective desire that can potentially overcome the social separation engendered by advanced commodity capitalism. Lefebvre states:

We could therefore define the urban as a place where conflicts are *expressed*, reversing the separation of places where expression disappears, where silence reigns, where the signs of separation are established. The urban could also be defined as the place of *desire*, where desire emerges from need, where it is concentrated because it is recognized, where Eros and Logos can (possibly) be found side by side.^{xi}

Such a principle of desire lies at the heart of the early situationist critique of urbanism, with its call for the establishment of an urban geography of passion, the creation of 'state-of-mind' urban sectors, and more generally in its broad assault on the instrumentalized rationality of modernist urbanism. In the central sections of this discussion the situationist contribution to urban theory and practice is examined with a view to its constructing credible material practices of political dissent and confrontation. Although this contribution is found to be caught up in various theoretical aporias, it is nevertheless

contended that the situationist approach has much to offer contemporary struggles of urban resistance.

Modernist urbanism and the situationist critique

If, as I contend, the underlying initial concern of the SI relates to the conditions of genuine social participation in the context of advanced urbanization, an important prerequisite for appreciating the situationist contribution involves positioning it within a broader contemporary reaction against the paradigm of architectural modernism. This paradigm is arguably most clearly exemplified by the theory and practice of the modernist architect Le Corbusier. Through a series of texts and architectural projects in the 1920s Le Corbusier became an eloquent and consistent advocate of a kind of elementarism in the arts, a position first given theoretical formulation in 1920 in the co-authored article 'Purism'.^{xii} Operating according to a kind of aesthetic and architectural atomism, Le Corbusier attempted to reformulate the underlying principles of construction, beginning with the elementary unit of the individual dwelling and progressing to his sketch for 'a city of three million inhabitants'. Ironically for someone who prides himself on a thoroughly rational approach, the power of Le Corbusier's early texts derives in great measure from a sustained rhetorical appeal to the need for a 'new spirit' to dispel the perceived cultural decadance of the nineteenth-century obsession with architectural styles. More significantly for present purposes, in the context of the immediate aftermath of the Russian Revolution and the end of World War One this rhetoric crucially turns on the notion that a radical renewal in architectural practice is necessary to avoid widespread social and political change. As the sententious tone of Le

Corbusier's 1923 architectural manifesto, *Towards a New Architecture*, affirms: "*The various classes of workers in society to-day no longer have dwellings adapted to their needs; neither the artisan not the intellectual. It is a question of building which is at the root of the social unrest of to-day; architecture or revolution*".^{xiii} While this is not the place to offer a detailed account of Le Corbusier's early urbanism, it is important to note that it possesses an overtly social and political character. In the face of widespread political turbulence across continental Europe and an attendant fear that the internationalist mission of early Soviet communism would bear fruit, Le Corbusier advocates an explicitly counter-revolutionary urbanism. As such it represents one instance of a broader contemporary 'recall to order' within liberal democratic politics and culture. Over the succeeding decades the appeal of Le Corbusier's urbanism proved sufficient to raise it to the status of the dominant paradigm.

By the late 1950s, however, the social ordering brought about by this paradigm was increasingly viewed as a prime cause rather than cure of the decay of urban life. From around this time a powerful critique arose that attacked a key tenet of modernist urbanism, namely that allowing the logic of advanced capitalist production unfettered sway in shaping the urban environment would necessarily bring with it the best overall social conditions. For this critique, by contrast, *the legacy of a generation of modernist urbanism was the effective dissolution of local urban community*. Jane Jacobs in her celebrated 1961 study, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, offers the following characterization:

Le Corbusier was planning not only a physical environment. He was planning for social Utopia too. Le Corbusier's Utopia was a condition of what he called maximum individual

liberty, by which he seems to have meant not liberty to do anything much, but liberty from ordinary responsibility. In his Radiant City nobody, presumably, was going to be his brother's keeper any more. Nobody was going to have to struggle with plans of his own. Nobody was going to be tied down.^{xiv}

As with Lefebvre, Jacobs underscores the functional subordination of the urban street according to Le Corbusier's urbanism: "... he kept the pedestrians off the streets and in the parks. His city was like a wonderful mechanical toy"^{xv}. The overall affect of modernist urbanism for critics such as Jacobs and Lefebvre is one of widespread social passivity engendered by lack of genuine public space. More precisely, such public space as is afforded by Le Corbusier's schemes – typically the interstitial spaces of the 'garden city' model - produces places suited predominantly to highly individualized and depoliticized activities. For Le Corbusier's critics such space is unworthy of the title 'public' for the simple reason that it prohibits rather than elicits opportunities for manifest popular agency and practices of contestation. Marshall Berman, in his extensive critical history of modernity and modernism, sums up the logic of separation and passivity that regulates Le Corbusier's urbanism simply and effectively: "modernist architecture and planning created a modernized version of pastoral: a spatially and socially segmented world – people here, traffic there; work here, homes there; rich here, poor there; barriers of grass and concrete in between ..."^{xvi}.

If the basic result ascribed to modernist urbanism by its critics is social separation and mass passivity but shaping the urban environment is still taken to carry crucial political significance, then the problem of legitimate constructive agency with respect to this environment becomes a central concern. Le Corbusier's architectural code is

essentially characterized by a vertical hierarchy of constructive legitimacy. Simply put, the few construct the material environment for the many. A basic question arises here: is the only radical alternative to centralized architectural control a model of urban construction according to which all inhabitants of urban space collectively produce and reproduce their own material environment? An obvious consequence of such a model would be the elimination of socially exclusive architectural agency, and thus the end of architecture in any traditionally recognizable form.

Having sketched some salient features of the historical context I now turn to an examination of the situationist formulation of the critique of modernist urbanism. For the early SI any genuinely popular project of social emancipation would have to begin and end with radical practices of urban construction and transformation. For the protagonists of the SI urbanism as it had been practiced simply organized the material environment according to the dictates of mass passivity and consumption. In other words, modernist urbanism's basic task was to give physical expression to the alienation and separation engendered by the ideology of consumer capitalism, thereby consolidating that condition as a social fact across the industrialized world. In the situationist text 'Critique of Urbanism' from 1961 the basic diagnosis of the total subordination of material space to commodity capitalism is understood as indicating that any future programme of political resistance will have to be of an equally total nature:

Henceforth the crisis of urbanism is all the more concretely a social and political one, even though today no force born of traditional politics is any longer capable of dealing with it ... the bureaucratic consumer society *is here and there beginning to shape its own environment*. This society, with its new towns, is building the sites that accurately represent

it, combining the conditions most suitable for its proper functioning, while at the same time translating into spatial terms, in the clear language of the organization of everyday life, its fundamental principle of alienation and constraint.^{xvii}

If for the SI modern urbanism is “the final decadence of the Great Architect” that has the result of making “alienation tangible”,^{xviii} any political resistance to urbanism must begin by contesting the idea of intellectual superiority with which the image of architectural agency is traditionally invested. As indicated in relation to Le Corbusier, this supposition of superiority leads to a social model according to which a small minority within a community are rendered active and productive of social conditions whereas the vast majority are placed in a situation of passive acquiescence. While the initial programme of the SI demonstrates an acute awareness that challenging the modernist model must involve practices of contestation on a local scale, it recognizes at the same time that the eventual goal of such acts must be coextensive with modernist urbanism itself.

Adequate understanding of the ‘crisis of urbanism’ addressed by the SI further involves recognizing that the retreat from utopia in modernist architecture stemmed primarily from economic and political factors. According to the analysis offered by Manfredo Tafuri in his text *Architecture and Utopia*,^{xix} for example, developments in the late 1920s and early 1930s showed that the utopian projections of modernist architecture ultimately failed not primarily because they offered intrinsically unattractive social models but rather due to a lack of suitable economic and political preconditions. For Tafuri political reactions to the economic turbulence of the 1920s lead either to an erosion of the architectural avant-garde in favour of centralized bureaucratic pragmatism or to the transformation of modernist utopian impulses into the nostalgic reactionary

politics of fascism. According to Tafuri, faced with a situation in which its utopian impulse was to be subordinated to bureaucratic and statist expediency, the artistic and architectural avant-garde had degenerated into a generalized 'ideology of form' by the mid-1930s. Thus the failure of utopianism in modern architecture is taken as symptomatic of broader historical conditions under which the whole cultural avant-garde is effectively neutralized as a progressive social-political force. If Tafuri's analysis is correct, from the late 1920s on the utopian projects of twentieth-century western art and architecture lacked sufficient social efficacy to counter the consolidation of power within technocratic state bureaucracies.

The early SI fully agreed with Tafuri's contention that the artistic avant-garde was no longer equal to its original task of radical social transformation. In a typical assessment from 1958 they assert: "For revolutionaries there can be no turning back. The world of artistic expression, whatever its content, has already lapsed. It repeats itself scandalously in order to keep going as long as the dominant society succeeds in preserving the privation and scarcity that are the anachronistic conditions of its reign".^{xx} Offering a clarification of the situationist relationship to the artistic avant-garde, the philosopher and social theorist Giorgio Agamben speaks of an attempt to reach a "point of indifference" between art and life. For Agamben the basic SI task of the 'construction of situations' is accordingly grasped as a shift from the modernist urge to construct a radically new urban order to an effort to transform collective life through practices of contestation operating within the *actual material conditions of urban existence*:

Nothing would be more misleading ... than to think the situation as a privileged or exceptional moment in the sense of aestheticism. The situation is neither the becoming-

art of life nor the becoming-life of art. We can comprehend its true nature only if we locate it historically in its proper place: that is, *after* the end and self-destruction of art [...] The Situationists counteract capitalism ... with a concrete, although opposite, project. Their utopia is, once again, perfectly topical because it locates itself in the taking-place of what it wants to overthrow.^{xxi}

The sense of this “topical utopia” is a form of praxis that attempts to subvert prevalent social conditions not through appeal to a radically different material-social situation, but rather through a subversive use of the very mechanisms of consumer capitalism itself. In the situationist practice of ‘subversion’ (*détournement*), for example, the clichéd and manipulative use of images within advertising is appropriated in order to sharpen rather than dull critical consciousness. More directly relevant to the present focus on modern architecture and urbanism, the other key situationist practice of urban drifting or *dérive* sets out to counteract the conditioning of subjects by the utilitarian logic of urban planning. In both situationist modes of praxis the goal is the engendering of a shared critical rapport with the physical environment of commodity capitalism, the first in relation to visual culture and the second in relation to the built environment. To the extent that such practices may be legitimately considered utopian in nature, it must be acknowledged from the outset that they seek to establish socially transformative potential *from within* rather than beyond actual material-social conditions.

The *dérive* and the programme of unitary urbanism

In the most renowned situationist text, *The Society of the Spectacle* from 1967, Guy Debord remarks:

Just as the accumulation of commodities mass-produced for the abstract space of the market inevitably shattered all regional and legal barriers ... so too it was bound to dissipate the independence and quality of *places*. The power to homogenize is the heavy artillery that has battered down all Chinese walls.^{xxii}

This remark opens a section of the text devoted to the question of urban planning and as such expresses a basic antagonism towards urbanism characteristic of the SI from its inception a decade earlier. Although the critique of urbanism is vividly set out in the 1967 text, only a faint echo of the SI's early counter-practices is to be found towards the end of the section in question. Debord comments:

The proletarian revolution is that *critique of human geography* whereby individuals and communities must construct places and events commensurate with the appropriation, no longer just of their labour, but of their total history. By virtue of the resulting mobile space of play, and by virtue of freely chosen variations in the rules of the game, the independence of places will be rediscovered without any new exclusive tie to the soil, and thus too the authentic *journey* will be restored to us, along with authentic life understood as a journey containing its whole meaning within itself.^{xxiii}

The counter-urbanist practice productive of a “mobile space of play” originally took the form of drifting or *dérive* and was initially a feature of the pre-situationist Lettrist group from around 1953 onwards. Already as a Lettrist activity the *dérive* was consciously taken over from the early surrealists’ habit of wandering the less conspicuous and fashionable streets of Paris in search of uncanny sites and chance encounters. In a text originally published in 1956 and later included in the second issue of the SI journal in 1958 Debord sets out the basic sense of urban drifting:

One of the basic situationist practices is the *dérive*, a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. *Dérives* involve playful-constructive behaviour and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll. In 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. Chance is a less important factor in this activity than one might think: from a *dérive* point of view cities have psychogeographical contours, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes that strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones.^{xxiv}

A keyword in this description of the *dérive* is the composite adjective ‘playful-constructive’. As a social practice situationist drifting is understood to involve two basic aspects. First, a conscious break with habitual and purely utilitarian urban itineraries is made that allows the pedestrian a non-instrumental, more spontaneous rapport towards the material environment. Secondly, the *construction* of a new sense of place is arrived at through collective experience of the psychological-emotional traits of different sites. This second feature or result of the *dérive* has as a broader goal the production of so-called

‘psychogeographical’ mappings of the urban environment, that is, graphic representations that indicate affective intensities experienced at a particular locale.

A conspicuous feature of situationist counter-urbanist practice is a manifest tension between its playful or ‘ludic’ dimension on the one hand and its observational, quasi-scientific character on the other. Debord demonstrates an awareness of this tension in his text on the *dérive* cited above:

The spatial field of a *dérive* may be precisely delimited or vague, depending on whether the goal is to study a terrain or to emotionally disorient oneself. It should not be forgotten that these two aspects of *dérives* overlap in so many ways that it is impossible to isolate one of them in a pure state [...] In every case the spatial field depends first of all on the point of departure – the residence of the solo *dériveur* or the meeting place selected by a group. The maximum area of this spatial field does not extend beyond the entirety of a large city and its suburbs. At its minimum it can be limited to a small self-contained ambience: a single neighborhood or even a single block of houses if it’s interesting enough (the extreme case being a static-*dérive* of an entire day within the Saint-Lazare train station).^{xxv}

Given the opposition to modernist urbanism present within the SI from the outset ^{xxvi} it is surprising that initially the situationists pursued a programme of what they called ‘unitary urbanism’. In light of the tension within the early SI between an experimental-scientific and a playful-artistic rapport with the urban environment, unitary urbanism represents the former term. As such it gave rise to the prospective science of ‘psychogeography’ that was to record and graphically represent the affective-psychological influence of the built environment on ‘drifting’ subjects.^{xxvii} The programme of unitary urbanism came about largely through the collaboration between Guy Debord and the Dutch artist/architect

Constant. Constant was a key figure within the post-WWII group of primitivist painters known as CoBrA (derived from the locations of the contributors: Copenhagen, Brussels, Amsterdam).^{xxviii} With the dissolution of the CoBrA group in 1951 Constant moved away from painting towards experimental architectural drawing. In 1957, the year prior to the inaugural declaration of the Amsterdam branch of the SI of which Constant was a founding and influential member, Debord set out the basic situationist task in the following way:

Our central purpose is the construction of situations, that is, the concrete construction of temporary settings of life and their transformation into a higher, passionate nature. We must develop an intervention directed by the complicated factors of two great components in perpetual interaction: the material setting of life and the behaviours that it incites and that overturn it. Our prospects for action on the environment lead, in their latest development, to the idea of unitary urbanism. Unitary urbanism first becomes clear in the use of the whole of arts and techniques as means cooperating in an integral composition of the environment.^{xxix}

This notion of the “construction of situations” is reformulated a year later by the collective statement of the Amsterdam SI in the following manner: “Only urbanism will be able to become that unitary art that responds to the exigencies of dynamic creativity, the creativity of life”^{xxx}. At play here in the idea of unitary urbanism are two basic concerns. First, such urbanism involves appropriating the task of the western avant-garde especially since Dada, namely an overcoming of art as a limited, ‘abstract’ (in a Hegelian sense) sphere of praxis in the context of modern material production. According to this task, art is to break free from its abstract particularity and become unitary in the sense of comprehensive or total. Secondly, art is to become truly dialectical in the sense of

consciously producing or co-producing the human environment for the purpose of realizing the potential richness in varieties of human forms of life. According to this second basic task unitary urbanism would work to counteract the homogenizing of space by advanced commodity capitalism as proclaimed by Debord in *The Society of the Spectacle*.

In the period that spans the original announcement of the programme of unitary urbanism in 1957 and Constant's departure from the group in 1960 tensions with regard to both basic tasks identified above surface. First, largely under Debord's direction, the SI become less inclined to see itself as any kind of continuation of the artistic avant-garde. This means, among other things, that it must stand not just against urbanism in its functionalist mode but against urbanism *tout court*. Accordingly, in line with Lefebvre's stance in 1970, urbanism as such must be contested. With regard to the further initial concern with the 'construction of situations', the core of the SI appears to retreat from the initial utopian project of envisaging and realizing a richer field of collective urban experience. Thus, as Constant continues for produce sketches and models of an alternative architectural utopia, Debord and others in the SI begin to suspect a capitulation to the very logic of instrumentalized urbanism they seek to overthrow.

In a key text that predates his withdrawal from the group, 'A Different City for a Different Life' (from the third issue of the SI journal from 1959),^{xxxi} Constant characterizes unitary urbanism as an urbanism of pleasure. In this, as in his work throughout the 1960s, Constant envisages a redirection of the social results of modern material technologies away from the bureaucratic atomism of modernist urbanism towards genuine forms of mass participation. In more specific architectural or urbanist

terms, Constant's approach opposes the modernist urban programmes of zoned, radiant or garden cities and insists on the need for agglomeration, thereby arguing that unitary urbanism is above all the attempt to overcome separation and individualism through the construction of an environment built for collective play:

Instead of the idea of a garden city, which most modern architects have adopted, we set up the image of the covered city, where the layout of thoroughfares and isolated buildings has given way to a continuous spatial construction, elevated above the ground, and which will include groups of dwellings as well as public spaces (permitting modifications of purpose depending on the needs of the moment). Since all traffic, in the functional sense, will pass underneath or on overhead terraces, streets can be done away with. The great number of traversable spaces of which a city is composed form a vast and complex social space. Far from a return to nature – the notion of living in a park, as solitary aristocrats once did – we see in such immense constructions the possibility of overcoming nature and regulating at will the atmosphere, lighting, and sounds in these various spaces. ^{xxxii}

What is immediately striking about Constant's vision of the future city, despite its polemical tone, is its obvious affinity within modernist urbanism. For instance, the raising up of dwelling space away from ground level and the construction of distinct raised or underground levels devoted to uninhibited traffic circulation are readily recognizable features of Le Corbusier's urban projections from the early 1920s on. ^{xxxiii} In fact Constant's urbanism appears to absolutize the separation of architectural construction and natural environment (form and materiality) in a manner that would have appeared neither desirable nor tenable for early modernist architecture. Furthermore, in

characterizing the basic task of unitary urbanism as an “overcoming of nature” Constant runs the risk of collapsing the dialectical understanding of artistic practice (that is, artistic agency and material environment in a relation of mutual determination) proclaimed by Debord within his account of the construction of situations. Within the specific context of urbanism this amounts to rejecting the necessity of engaging within actual cities as the given environments produced by capitalist production and instead projecting entirely new cities of the future. As indicated, the *dérive* as a critical urban practice resists this tendency towards formal utopianism, insofar as it seeks to realize possibilities of playful group behaviour *within the very materialized contexts of capitalist control and separation*. In seemingly stark contrast to this, Constant posits an architectural *tabula rasa* far more radical than anything put forward by Le Corbusier in the 1920s. In this sense, for Constant there is simply no city other than the city of the future.

Progressive urbanism and political praxis

Both Constant’s affinity with architectural modernism and his tendency towards formal utopianism led to tensions with Debord that precipitated his withdrawal from the SI in the spring of 1960. The article ‘Critique of Urbanism’ from 1961 (cited above) contains the harshest denunciation by the SI of their former member, accusing Constant of dealing in “public relations for the integration of the masses into capitalist technological civilization”.^{xxxiv} However, the more general reflections on architecture and urbanism offered by this article merely succeed in underscoring rather than clarifying the unresolved tensions with Constant. For Constant is in agreement with the key contentions that unitary urbanism must address the social milieu in total and that urbanism as it is

actually practiced is invariably partial and socially repressive in its actions and aspirations. Beyond the personal invective, however, what appears to be more genuinely at stake is the ability of *any possible manner of urbanism* to address what is taken to be the increasingly radical ‘colonization of everyday life’ by capitalist commodity production. At the centre of the article lies the contention that the situationist idea of unitary urbanism is not proposed as another variant or species of traditional urbanism, but is in fact a radical critique of all existing forms of urban planning in the name of another, essentially distinct practical-productive relation to the urban environment.

The position outlined by the ‘Critique of Urbanism’ raises the crucial question of whether it makes any sense to view situationist unitary urbanism as anything other than *the negation of any possible determinate urbanism*. My aim here is to emphasize the positive and productive outcome the situationists envisaged as emerging out of this negation. According to this approach, the absence of urbanism asserted in the article is to be understood as the point of departure for the contestatory practices of *détournement* and *dérive* described earlier. As the article states:

If unitary urbanism designates, as we would like it to, a useful hypothesis that would allow present humanity to construct life freely, beginning with its urban environment, it is absolutely pointless to enter into discussion with those who would ask us to what extent it is feasible, concrete, practical, or carved in stone. For the simple reason that nowhere does there exist any theory or practice concerning the creation of cities, or the kind of behavior that relates to it. No one “does urbanism,” in the sense of constructing the milieu required by this doctrine [...] And all the discourses on urbanism are lies, just as obviously as the space organized by urbanism is the very space of the social lie and of fortified exploitation. Those

who discourse on the powers of urbanism seek to make people forget that all they are creating is the urbanism of power.^{xxxv}

The basic issue at stake between Constant and the SI after 1960 can be expressed as follows: *Can architectural/urbanist utopianism be effective in countering the social alienation produced by the mechanisms of advanced commodity capitalism?* A further crucial question that arises here is whether the early situationist programme of unitary urbanism can be seen to have credible potential as transformative praxis in the absence of any attempt to build upon the efforts of earlier urbanism. In light of this question, the dispute with Constant is subject to a paradoxical twist. For whereas Constant's sketches and models implicitly appropriate many technical features of earlier urbanism, his explicitly expressed position proclaims an absolute break with all previous urbanism. As indicated, this can be understood – and presumably was so understood by other members of the SI at the time – as an absolutizing of the 'Great Architect' rather than a demythologization of modern architecture and urbanism. By contrast, the situationist practices of *dérive* and *détournement* – the latter being perhaps most fully realized in Debord's use of cinematic montage^{xxxvi} – represent an attempt to radicalize modernist modes of practice by finally giving them the scope and power to contest the social conditions of advanced commodity capitalism. In this light the dispute with Constant within the early SI centres on the following question: *must a revolutionary urban praxis build upon or definitely break with the 'ruins' of modernist architecture and urbanism?*

What separates Constant from the remaining members of the SI after 1960 can be schematically expressed through an opposition of formal and material utopianism. Though there are obvious inadequacies to this schematization I believe it does offer a

conceptual framework in which to articulate what is at stake in the dispute. The first thing to say is that each side of the dispute contains elements of *both* formal and material utopianism. Constant for his part asserts a basic split between technology and nature (undialectical/formal), but practically assimilates aspects of earlier phases of modernist urbanism (dialectical/material). On the other hand, Debord and other members of the SI beyond 1960 insist on an absolute separation from previous practices of modern art (undialectical/formal), while in practice assimilating a certain number of those very practices (dialectical/material). At the same time it is important to underscore that there is agreement on two key points: first, the need to resist any mythologizing nostalgia for pre-industrial society; and secondly, the necessity to dissolve art as a separate sphere of praxis so that its transformative and emancipatory social potential can be realized. This second point of common ground between Constant and the SI beyond 1960 involves an explicit rejection of the socially transformative pretensions of the artistic avant-garde in its modernist formulation. The critique of Constant, however, seems to turn on ascribing to him an attenuated reaffirmation of precisely these pretensions. This critique also entails a rejection of the specific means of urban planning or any other recognized sphere of artistic-technical production. As the editorial notes of a 1963 issue of the SI journal insist:

We see that when we comply with the requests of those who urge us to exhibit usable and convincing detailed plans – why should we have to convince them? – they either turn against us at once as proof of our utopianism, or else favor a watered-down version for the moment. The truth is that you can ask for detailed plans from almost all the others ... but certainly *not from us*; it is our thesis that there can be no fundamental cultural renewal in details, but only *in toto*.^{xxxvii}

In my view this rhetorical opposition of part and whole is particularly unsuited to the task of formulating practices of urban contestation. As such the SI's retreat from unitary urbanism after 1960 placed a desire for purity of intention over the need for specific material means of oppositional praxis. Detailed examination of the various strands of modernist urbanism demonstrates, I believe, that it possesses genuinely emancipatory potential. While any attempt to ground this claim by recourse to the history of modern architecture is obviously beyond the scope of the present article, further examination of Constant's urban utopia yields important indications for the any possible radical appropriation of modernist urbanism. Accordingly, in the final sections of this article I wish to argue that in fact Constant's efforts to project in detail possible future configurations of an emancipated social-material environment *do* possess genuine transformative potential. By implication the retreat of the SI from its initial programme of unitary urbanism represents an important lost opportunity. In order to consider this in more concrete detail I turn to the main focus of Constant's efforts both during his time as a member of the SI and beyond, namely his *New Babylon* project. Through an examination of this project I aim to reach some preliminary conclusions on the positive potential of the "construction of situations" as a credible practice of political contestation.

Constant's New Babylon project and architectural utopianism

After his withdrawal from the SI Constant intensified his work on an architectural utopia

in the form of his *New Babylon* project: a vision for an ideal built environment elaborated largely through sketches and models over the following decade and a half.^{xxxviii} Begun around 1959, an exhibition of his work on this project was held in Amsterdam in 1974. A catalogue accompanying the exhibition offers a theoretical sketch that rests upon the familiar dichotomy of instrumental and playful practice:

If we situate all known forms of society under a single common denominator, 'utilitarianism,' the model to be invented will be that of a 'ludic' society – this term designating *the activities* that, relieved of all utility as well as all function, are pure products of the creative imagination. Now, it is as a creator, and only as a creator, that humanity can fulfil and attain its highest existential level. In imagining a society in which each is free to create her life, to give it shape according to her deepest aspirations, we will not have recourse to the forms and images of this long period of history in which humanity has had to sacrifice the greater part of its creative energy in an unceasing struggle for existence. *Our social model* will be, indeed, fundamentally different from preceding models; it will also be qualitatively superior.^{xxxix}

Inspired by the Dutch cultural theorist Johan Huizinga and his notion of *homo ludens*, Constant's radical urbanism has clear affinities with the artistic and ideological legacy of romanticism centred on the notion of autonomous imaginative agency. Through the crucial mediation of architectural modernism, however, Constant's approach is quite distinct from traditional romanticism in virtue of its positive appropriation of modern technological means for creative ends. The *New Babylon* project balances such means and ends through an economy of global control and local spontaneous agency. This balance is to occur against the backdrop of a general shift from static inhabitation to a

generalized nomadic mode of life:

In our case, the urban must respond to social mobility, which implies, in relation to the stable town, a more rigorous organization on the macro level, and at the same time a greater flexibility at the micro level, which is that of an infinite complexity. Freedom of creation demands in any case that we depend as little as possible on material contingency. It presupposes, then, a vast network of collective services, more necessary to the population in movement than to the stable population of functional towns. On the other hand, automation leads to a massive concentration of production in gigantic centers, situated outside the space of daily life.^{x1}

The two elements of the nomadic city outlined here by Constant – facilitated mobility and separation between zones of production and consumption – again bear a close resemblance to innovations that stand at the centre of Le Corbusier's early urbanism. At the same time it is clear that Constant's overarching aim is to envisage a credible solution to the problem of social participation identified earlier as the central concern of the early SI. Constant's response to this issue is to propose a radical urbanism conceived as the realization of a truly conscious dialectical mode of life, that is, one where agents collectively shape their material environment while being shaped by it. Accordingly, in *New Babylon* the built environment is constructed not according to the dictates of maximized efficiency as proposed by the protagonists of architectural modernism, but rather for the purpose of facilitating the richest variety of collective experience and interventions on the part of the 'users'.

These interventions are concretely grasped by Constant – in line with the early psychogeographical idea of creating zones with distinct emotional ambiances – as a

matter of spontaneously producing and altering affective environments. With these basic needs of general mobility and local malleability in mind Constant sets out in more concrete detail the material environment he thinks will realize the envisaged life of play:

It is 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 [...] A volume with the span of a New Babylon sector 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 accumulation of solar heat and the loss of heat in cold weather occur so slowly that the changes in ambient temperature barely influence the temperature inside. The climatic conditions (the intensity of lighting, temperature, the hygrometric state, ventilation) are all under technical control. Inside, a variable range of climates can be created and modified at will [...] The audiovisual media will be used in the same spirit. The fluctuating world of the sectors calls on facilities (a transmitting and receiving network) that are both decentralized and public. Given the participation of a large number of people in the transmission and reception of images and sounds, perfected telecommunications become an important factor in ludic social behaviour.

When attempting to appreciate in an adequate manner Constant's architectural utopia it is important to bear in mind that it is in fact his drawings, models and other plastic representations – rather than any theoretical account – that primarily carry the burden of communicating his vision of a society of play. Once this is recognized it is striking how powerful his graphic representations can be to a viewer otherwise unmoved by the theoretically questionable dichotomy of work and play. The validity of this point is of course by no means restricted to Constant: the writings of Le Corbusier are similarly

structured according to conceptual oppositions and suppositions readily amenable to analytical charges of theoretical inadequacy or to deconstructive unravelling. In a recently published collection of essays on Constant's *New Babylon* project the architectural theorist Anthony Vidler remarks: "It would be a truism to say that all utopias are, of necessity, diagrammatic. The various spatial relations that embody the ideal society have often literally been described in this way"^{xli}. In this light, Vidler begins his article by addressing the impact of Constant's various graphic representations of a landscape of desire: "Registering the extraordinary historical and polemical effect of this unique collection of drawings, what first strikes me is the unaccountable *veracity* of Constant's project for the New Babylon – its sense of potential realizability, or even its sense of having been already constructed"^{xlii}. Another analysis within the same collection offered by Tom McDonough directly challenges Vidler's affirmation of the positive utopian power of the diagram or visual image and identifies the role of the image in Constant as integral to his construction of a politically regressive "architecture of presence". McDonough speaks of a "lingering inconsistency between Constant's aims and the actual images he created, between New Babylon's theoretical critique of urbanism and an uncritical use of his media"^{xliii}. In common with my own analysis McDonough notes how Constant appropriates many of Le Corbusier's technical means in an unfiltered manner, while at the same time imagining a "world of absolute modernity" and refusing to incorporate elements of the given urban environment. Indeed, he goes a step further and, repeating the central charge levelled by other members of the SI, sees in the *New Babylon* project a capitulation to the forces of capitalist instrumental rationality. Rather than a radical vision of social emancipation McDonough credits Constant with

anticipating a future stage in the eradication of qualitatively singular shared space. As such, *New Babylon* offers an uncanny image of the present material environment:

In attempting to design a utopia, a no-place, Constant inadvertently prefigured our contemporary non-places: the airports, auto routes, shopping centers, and generally that whole pseudo-architecture which has come increasingly to define our everyday lives at the end of the century [...] We might say that these drawings, even at their most powerful, remain mired in contradictory language rather than embodying the language of contradiction.^{xliv}

McDonough elaborates on his distinction between contradictory language and the language of contradiction by asserting that the latter could be developed in the form of a genuine “situationist architecture” through a certain extension of the practice of subversive montage or *détournement*:

... it was this potential for an architecturally based montage practice that best expressed the situationist goal of restoring to human activity that fluid state that spectacular culture had congealed into its reified, frozen form. Significantly, this was no longer seen as a literal project of architectural flexibility, but as a political project of struggle over socially produced meaning in the city. The urban fabric was to be neither embraced nor rejected, but would become the site of contestation; if the spectacle had destroyed the “independence and quality of *places*,” *détournement* would occupy their ruins, first as a powerful propaganda tool, later as a melancholic contemplation of reification.^{xlv}

For McDonough Constant’s *New Babylon* compromises the situationist politics of

contestation by making too many concessions to architectural modernism. While there is much to be said in favour of this analysis, it crucially fails to recognize the degree to which the early programme of the SI as a whole involves a largely positive appropriation of modernist aesthetic practice. For the very idea of developing urban practices that allow alternative, counter-habitual experiences of the city constitutes an original and central concern of the modernist aesthetic.

Situationist urbanism and the politics of contestation

In my view, the fundamental challenge issued to the modernist regime by situationist practice lies at the deeper level of what Rancière calls the “distribution of the sensible”^{xlvi}. According to this idea, what are usually categorized as art-historical movements or periods – such as ‘modernism’ in the present context – are more accurately grasped as historically specific regimes of power or allocations of symbolic and material capital. To return to the case of Le Corbusier’s version of modernist urbanism, in this light what is articulated is a systematic mode of defining legitimate appearance and agency within the public sphere. Thus, shorn of its contingent trappings of quasi-mystical, rationalist humanism, Le Corbusier’s urbanism offers a hierarchical structuring of the public sphere justified by appeal to the intellect superiority of the artist-architect. For Rancière it is the intellectualist schema of legitimate state organization set out in Plato’s *Republic* that provides the predominant archetype for all subsequent western configurations of the social. In this light Le Corbusier’s urbanism might be called Platonism for the modern urban community. According to Rancière the work performed by any distribution of the sensible is first and foremost a determination of the common

and legitimate community:

The distribution of the sensible 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. Having a particular ‘occupation’ thereby determines the ability and inability to take charge of what is common to the community; it defines what is visible or not in a common space, endowed with a common language, etc. There is thus an ‘aesthetics’ at the core of politics ...^{xlvii}

Following this radically politicized understanding of the aesthetic regime, what kind of determination of the common is offered by the *New Babylon* project and more generally by situationist urbanism? Earlier, when introducing the situationist practice of urban drifting, I mentioned that it stemmed from a properly dialectical understanding of the urban environment. By this I meant that the early SI attempted to modify the collective experience of this environment while acknowledging that this environment has in an important sense already shaped those that operate within it. The practice of the *dérive* does not have the goal of literally constructing a different urban setting – as does urbanism proper – but rather of modifying and expanding the habitual practices that typically take place within it. Constant’s project *reverses* this process by attempting to design what is taken to be a universally liberating urban environment and projecting the altered collective practices that would follow. In this he follows a key idea of modernist urbanism, namely that of shaping the place in order to facilitate prescribed activities. While it is tempting to dismiss this tendency as simply another case of architectural paternalism, it is important to recognize that the construction of highly predetermined

public space has remained a key task for contemporary urbanism. To reject such an approach out of hand would be tantamount to rejecting the whole notion of ‘user-friendly’ design. Nevertheless, in an important sense the *New Babylon* project does offer in graphic form a reconfiguration of the urban environment at odds with a notion of public space as the place of contestation. In this sense Constant’s utopia is essentially *post-political* in nature. As such it can legitimately be seen, as McDonough contends, as a prefiguration of the advanced depoliticization of public space that has arguably taken place in post-industrial societies over the last forty years.

In my view, however, ultimately the distance that came to separate Constant from other members of the SI is more profoundly indicative of the twofold nature of any comprehensive progressive urban politics. For while it is true that political contestation is essentially a collective *practice*, such practice is only possible through the existence and maintenance of an effective space of public appearance. While practices of insurrection and protest may occur instantaneously and be of short duration, properly popular community requires the prolonged construction and consolidation of public space. As the urban sociologist David Harvey has recently remarked:

Distinctive communities are painstakingly built by social practices including the exercise of authoritarian powers and conformist restrictions. They are not just imagined (however important the imaginary of them may be). It is useful, therefore, to view an achieved ‘community’ as an enclosed space (irrespective of scale or even frontier definitions) within which a certain well-defined system of rules prevails. To enter into that space is to enter into a space of rules which one acknowledges, respects, and obeys (either voluntarily or through some sort of compulsion). The construction of ‘community’ entails

the production of such a space.^{xlviii}

While acknowledging that genuine communities take the form of relatively stable rule-governed social spaces, Harvey insists that this in no way precludes ample opportunity for rule-breaking on the part of what he calls the ‘insurgent architect’. In relation to such insurgent action he contends: “the re-making and re-imagining of ‘community’ will work in progressive directions only if it is connected *en route* to a more generalized radical insurgent politics”.^{xlix}

For such insurgent politics to be effective and credible *radical urban practices* are necessary, practices in which collective public contestation becomes a social reality. If the specific situationist practices of *dérive* and *détournement* are to assume genuine significance for contemporary urban communities, this must take place along with recognition of the fact that in the last forty and particularly the last twenty years cities have been subject to a significant intensification of state and municipal control. As Don Mitchell has recently remarked with respect to changes in the management of public space in New York over the decades leading up to the September 11 attack: “New strictures on behavior had become not only commonplace but also expected (and always indicated by prominent signs) in the city’s streets. Surveillance cameras had become an everyday part of the landscape. Whole public spaces had been closed off for much of the day, locked tight against unwanted users”¹ The overall result of such urban management – now evident as a global phenomenon – is to stigmatize public space and its ‘undesirable’ occupants and effectively close it down as a site of popular political agency and manifestation. This can be seen as *the realization of an extreme version of the consensus*

model of politics within the urban environment. As such, it precludes or at best strongly militates against the formation and maintenance of any genuine urban community.

It is in light of such contemporary urban conditions that I remarked at the beginning of this article that the situationist critique of traditional urbanism is more urgent than ever. Contemporary urban management has long operated according to a pragmatic, technical model that in principle rejects the possibility of radical reorganizations of the urban order. A large factor in this pragmatism, as Harvey shows, is the increasingly close symbiosis between public and private agencies and funding in the development of ostensive ‘public’ space.^{li} Increasingly, state agencies are placing restrictions on the public use of supposedly public space in the name of security and private business interests determine who and what can appear in such space. Against this backdrop the non-violent urban practices of contestation developed by the situationist movement offer crucial resources for reclaiming cities as genuine sites of popular agency. The ongoing reclamation of the texts and works of the SI promises more than just another instance of academic recuperation. Far more significantly, it offers the chance of contesting the current hegemony of state-controlled consensus politics by relocating radical democratic politics to its original place of action – the urban street.

Notes

ⁱ For a series of incisive essays on the geopolitical dimension of advanced global urbanization, an issue that goes beyond the scope of what can be discussed here cf. R. Scholar (ed.), *Divided Cities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

ⁱⁱ Lefebvre enjoyed a close relationship to Debord and other members of the situationist group in its early years, to such an extent that he may be described as their principal collaborator within the sphere of academic theory at that time. As with many other figures, however, this collaboration quickly gave way to a more critical stance and withdrawal on the part of the situationists. Nevertheless, Lefebvre's work from the 1960s and 70s – including his magnum opus *The Production of Space* – still represents the most detailed theoretical articulation of the situationist approach to architecture and urbanism. For a general account of Lefebvre's activities within and beyond the SI cf. A. Jappe, *Guy Debord* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 72-81.

ⁱⁱⁱ H. Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2003), pp. 18-21.

^{iv} *Ibid.*, p. 175.

^v *Ibid.*, p. 180.

^{vi} T. Richardson and S. Connelly, 'Reinventing public participation: planning in the age of consensus', in P. Blundell Jones, D. Petrescu, J. Hill (eds.), *Architecture and Participation* (Spon Press, 2005) pp. 77-104, p. 79.

^{vii} *Ibid.*, p. 83.

^{viii} *Ibid.*, p. 88.

^{ix} C. Mouffe, *On the Political* (New York/London: Routledge, 2005), p. 3.

^x J. Rancière, *Disagreement* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 27.

^{xi} *Ibid.*, p. 176.

^{xii} Cf. Le Corbusier and A. Ozenfant, 'Purism', in R. Herbert (ed.), *Modern Artists on Art* (New York: Dover, 2000), pp. 53-65.

^{xiii} Le Corbusier, *Towards and New Architecture* (New York: Dover, 1986), p. 269.

^{xiv} J. Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Modern Library, 1993), p. 30.

^{xv} *Ibid.*, p. 31.

^{xvi} M. Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York/London: Verso, 1983), p. 168.

^{xvii} ‘Critique of Urbanism’, in: T. McDonoughn (ed.), *Guy Debord and the Situationist International* (Cambridge, MA; MIT Press, 2002) (henceforth GDS), pp. 103-114, p. 108.

^{xviii} R. Vaneigem, ‘Comments against Urbanism’, in GDS, pp. 119-128, pp. 126, 123.

^{xix} M. Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976), pp. 125-149.

^{xx} ‘The Meaning of Decay in Art’, in: GDS, pp. 85-93, p. 90.

^{xxi} G. Agamben, *Means without End: Notes on Politics* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2000), pp. 78-9.

^{xxii} G. Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. D. Nicholson Smith (New York: Zone, 1995), p. 120.

^{xxiii} *Ibid.*, p. 126.

^{xxiv} Guy Debord, ‘Theory of the Dérive’; available at: <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/theory.html> (accessed 3 June 2008).

^{xxv} *Ibid.*

^{xxvi} It is also possible to make a credible case for viewing the early SI as in fact ultra modernist, insofar as their critique of the ‘heroic’ modernism of the 1920s and 30s derives from its being unequal to political challenges posed by inchoate post-industrial society. Jappe argues in this vein when he remarks: “To begin with, the Situationists strove to champion a radical modernism holding all existing artistic forms in contempt on the grounds that they did not come to terms with the new situation created by advances in humanity’s domination of nature” (*Guy Debord*, p. 68).

^{xxvii} For an accessible overview of this field of study with a particular emphasis on the literary history of London cf. M. Coverley, *Psychogeography* (Harpenden: Pocket Essentials, 2006).

^{xxviii} For a general art-historical account of this group cf. P. Shield, *Cobra. Copenhagen, Brussels, Amsterdam* (London: Hayward Gallery, 2003).

^{xxix} G. Debord, 'Report on the Construction of Situations and on the Terms of Organization and Action of the Situationist International Tendency, in GDS, pp. 29-50, p. 44.

^{xxx} Constant and G. Debord, 'The Amsterdam Declaration'; available at: <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/amsterdam.html> (accessed 3 June 2008)

^{xxxi} Cf. GDS, pp. 95-101.

^{xxxii} GDS, p. 96.

^{xxxiii} The section entitled 'A Contemporary City' in Le Corbusier's publication *The City of Tomorrow and Its Planning* (New York: Dover, 1987, pp. 163-178) is illustrative of many of these specific points of affinity.

^{xxxiv} GDS, p. 104.

^{xxxv} GDS, p. 113.

^{xxxvi} For an extensive analysis of Debord's films cf. T. Levin, 'Dismantling the Spectacle: The Cinema of Guy Debord', in GDS, pp. 321-453.

^{xxxvii} 'The Avant-Garde of Presence', in GDS, pp. 137-151, p. 148.

^{xxxviii} An excellent text, arising out of the exhibition *Another City for Another Life: Constant's New Babylon* held in New York in December 1999, offers both a theoretical reappraisal and material reproduction of Constant's project: *The Activist Drawing: Retracing Situationist Architectures from Constant's New Babylon and Beyond*, C. de Zegher and M. Wigley (eds.) (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).

^{xxxix} Constant, *New Babylon: A Nomadic Town*; available at: <http://www.notbored.org/new-babylon.html> (accessed 5 July 2008).

^{xi} Ibid.

^{xli} A. Vidler, 'Diagrams of Utopia', in *The Activist Drawing*, pp. 83-91, p. 85.

^{xliii} Ibid., 83.

^{xliiii} T. McDonough, 'Fluid Spaces: Constant and the Situationist Critique of Architecture', in *The Activist Drawing*, pp. 93-104, p. 99.

^{xliv} Ibid., p. 100.

^{xlv} Ibid., p. 101.

^{xlvi} Cf. J. Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (New York/London: Continuum, 2004) pp. 12-41.

^{xlvii} Ibid., pp. 12-13

^{xlviii} D. Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley: California University Press, 2000), p. 239.

^{xlix} Ibid., p. 240.

¹ D. Mitchell, *The Right to the City* (New York: Guildford Press, 2003), pp. 1-2.

ⁱⁱ Cf. Harvey's account of recent urban development of the city of Baltimore in *Spaces of Hope*, (pp. 133-156). Later sections of the same chapter offer a cogent critique of the predominant model of community urbanism, the New Urbanism movement that arose in the 1980s. Following Harvey's lead I believe it would be possible to show that New Urbanism propounds an urban ideology that closely corresponds to consensus theory within the spheres of sociology and politics.