The great game to come

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1

The need to build a large number of cities quickly, a need brought about as a result of the industrialization of underdeveloped countries and the acute housing shortage after the war, has made urbanism into one of today's key cultural problems. We would even go so far as to consider that no cultural development is possible without new conditions in our everyday surroundings. It must first be pointed out that the initial experiments undertaken by teams of architects and sociologists were thwarted by a lack of collective imagination, which accounts for the arbitrary and limited approach followed in those experiments. Urbanism, as it is understood by today's professional planners, is reduced to the practical study of housing and traffic as isolated problems. The total lack of alternatives involving play in the organization of social life prevents urbanism from attaining the level of creation, and the gloomy and sterile appearance of most modern neighborhoods is a shameful reminder of this.

2

The Situationists, explorers specializing in play and recreation, understand that the appearance of cities is of importance only as regards the psychological effects that it can produce, which should be taken into account along with all of the other factors. Our conception of urbanism is not limited to construction and its functions, but rather takes in all of the uses that can be found, or even imagined, for it. It is obvious that these uses must change along with the underlying social conditions and that our conception of urbanism is therefore first and foremost a dynamic one. We also reject the placement of buildings in static surroundings -- which passes at present for new architecture. On the contrary, we believe that all static, unchanging elements must be avoided and that the variable or changing character of architectural elements is the precondition for a flexible relationship with the events that will take place within them.

3

Bearing in mind the extent to which future recreational pursuits and the new situations that we are beginning to build must profoundly affect the basic idea of any urbanistic study, we can already expand our understanding of the problem through experimentation with certain phenomena linked to the urban environment: activity in a certain street, the psychological effect of different surfaces and constructions, the rapidly changing appearance of space produced by ephemeral elements, the speed with which ambiance changes and the potential

variations in the overall ambiance of different neighborhoods. The derive, as practiced by the Situationists, is an effective means of studying this phenomena in existing cities and arriving at preliminary conclusions. The psychogeographical notions gathered in this way have already led to the creation of plans and models of a highly imaginative sort that could be called architectural science fiction.

4

The technical inventions that humanity has at its disposal today will play a major role in the construction of the ambiance-cities of the future. It is worth noting that significantly, to date, these inventions have in no way contributed to existing cultural activities and that creative artists have not known what to do with them. The potential offered by cinema, television, radio and high-speed travel and communication has not been exploited, and their effect on cultural life has been deplorable. The investigation of technology and its exploitation for recreational ends on a higher plane is one of the most pressing tasks required to facilitate creation of a unitary urbanism on the scale demanded by the society of the future.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE

Constant, 'Le grand jeu à venir', in *Potlatch. Informations intérieures de l'Internationale situationniste*, nouv. série, #1 [=30] (15 July 1959) pp. 3-5. Translated in English as 'The Great Game to Come' and published in *Constant's New Babylon. The Hyper-Architecture of Desire* (Rotterdam 1998) p. 111; online on [NotBored](#).