New Babylon

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A nomadic town

We are the living symbols of a world without frontiers, a world of freedom, without weapons, where each may travel without let or hindrance from the steppes of central Asia to the Atlantic Coast, from the high plateau of South Africa to the forests of Finland.
-- Vaida Voivod III, President of the World Community of Gypsies (quoted from an interview published by *Algemeen Handelsblad,* Amsterdam, 18 May 1963.

For many a year the gypsies who stopped awhile in the little Piedmontese town of Alba were in the habit of camping beneath the roof that, once a week, on Saturday, housed the livestock market. There they lit their fires, hung their tents from the pillars to protect or isolate themselves, improvised shelters with the aid of boxes and planks left behind by the traders. The need to clean up the market place every time the Zingari passed through had led the town council to forbid them access. In compensation, they were assigned a bit of grassland on the banks of the Tamaro, the little river that goes through the town: the most miserable of patches! It's there that in December 1956 I went to see them in the company of the painter Guiseppe Pinot Gallizio, the owner of this uneven, muddy, desolate terrain, who'd given it to them. They'd closed off the space between some caravans with planks and petrol cans, they'd made an enclosure, a 'Gypsy Town.'

That was the day I conceived the scheme for a permanent encampment for the gypsies of Alba and that project is the origin of the series of maquettes of New Babylon. Of a New Babylon where, under one roof, with the aid of moveable elements, a shared residence is built; a temporary, constantly remodeled living area; a camp for nomads on a planetary scale.

Definitions

Utilitarian society

The term designates all known forms of society, including the modern capitalist and socialist State. It asserts a fundamental reality, the same for all these forms of community life, old and new, namely the exploitation of the human being's capacity for work. 'Utility' is the principle criterion in appreciating man and his activity. The creative man, Homo Ludens, can only claim his rights on rare occasions.

The opposite of utilitarian society is ludic society, where the human being, freed by automation from productive work, is at least in a position to develop his creativity. The terms 'class society' or 'classless society' do not express, or imperfectly so, this conflict. But it is clear that a ludic society can only be a classless society. Social justice is no guarantee of freedom, or creativity, which is the realization of freedom. Freedom depends not only on the social structure, but also on productivity; and the increase in productivity depends on technology. 'Ludic society' is in this sense a new concept.

Homo Ludens

Term used for the first time by Johann Huizinga in a book of that title, subtitled: 'A Study of the Element of Play in Culture.' In his foreword, Huizinga speaks of the man who plays in still-measured terms: 'In the course of time we have come to realize that, after all, we are not as reasonable as the eighteenth century, with its worship of reason and its naive optimism, assumed; hence, modern fashion inclines to designate our species as *Homo Farber:* Man the Maker. But though *faber* may not be quite so dubious as *sapiens,* it is, as a name specific to the human being, even less appropriate, seeing that many animals, too, are makers. There is a third function, however, applicable to both human and animal life, and just as important as reasoning and making -- namely, playing. It seems to me that next to *Homo Faber,* and perhaps on the same level as *Homo Sapiens, Homo Ludens,* Man the Player, deserves a place in our nomenclature.'

This discretion in the use of the term can perhaps be explained by the slight importance utilitarian society gives to play. *Homo Ludens* has only ever been a rarely manifested modality of *Homo Sapiens,* a condition that, unlike [the condition of] *Homo Faber,* largely goes unnoticed. Huizinga, for whom playing is a flight from 'real' life, does not distance himself in his interpretation from the norms of utilitarian society. And, in his historical analysis of the theme, he quite rightly situates *Homo Ludens* in the upper echelons of society, more precisely within the propertied leisure class, and not in the laboring masses. However, by separating capacity for work and production, automation has opened the way to a massive increase in the number of *Homo Ludens.* Huizinga nevertheless had the merit of pointing to the *Homo Ludens* dormant within each of us. The liberation of man's ludic potential is directly linked to his liberation as a social being.

Social space

Sociologists extend this concept to the aggregate of social relations and ties that define man's freedom of movement in society, and also, and above all, its limits. This symbolic interpretation of space is not one we share. For us, social space is truly the concrete space of meetings, of the contacts between beings. Spatiality is social.

In New Babylon, social space is social spatiality. Space as a psychic dimension (abstract space) cannot be separated from the space of action (concrete space). Their divorce is only justified in a utilitarian society with arrested social relations, where concrete space necessarily has an anti-social character.

New Babylon: Outline of a culture

The social model

The question of knowing how one would live in a society that knows neither famine nor exploitation nor work, in a society in which, without exception, anyone could give free rein to his creativity -- this troubling, fundamental question awakens in us the image of an environment radically different from any that has hitherto been known, from any that has been realized in the field of architecture or urbanism. The history of humanity has no precedent to offer as an example, because the masses have never been free, that is, freely creative. As for creativity, what has it ever meant but the output of a human being?

Yet let us suppose that all nonproductive work can be completely automated; that productivity increases until the world no longer knows scarcity; that the land and the means of production are socialized and as a result global production rationalized; that, as a consequence of this, the minority ceases to exercise its power over the majority; let us suppose, in other words, that the Marxist kingdom of freedom is realizable. Were it to be, we could no longer ask the same question without instantly attempting to reply to it and to imagine, albeit in the most schematic manner, a social model in which the idea of freedom would become the real practice of freedom -- *of a 'freedom'* that for us is not the choice between many alternatives but the optimum development of the creative faculties of every human being; because there cannot be true freedom without creativity.

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 the human being can fulfill and attain his highest existential level.

In imagining a society in which each man is free to create his life, to give it shape according to his deepest aspirations, we will not have recourse to the forms and images of this long period of history in which man has had to sacrifice the greater part of his 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.

Let us begin with some basics:

--*Automation* of all 'useful,' repetitive activities frees, at the mass level, an energy that can henceforth be directed towards other activities.

--*Collective ownership of the land* and the means of production, and rationalization of the production of consumer goods, facilitates the transformation of this energy into creative activity.

--With productive work disappearing, collective timekeeping has no more rasion d'etre; the masses will, on the other hand, have a considerable amount of *free time.*

The network

It is obvious that a person free to use his time for the whole of his life, free to go where he wants, when he wants, cannot make the greatest use of his freedom in a world ruled by the clock and the imperative of a fixed abode. As a way of life Homo Ludens will demand, firstly, that he responds to his need *for playing, for adventure, for mobility,* as well as all the conditions that facilitate the free creation of his own life. Until then, the principle activity of man had been the exploration of his natural surroundings. Homo Ludens himself will seek to transform, to recreate, those surroundings, that world, according to his new needs. The exploration and creation of the environment will them happen to coincide because, in creating his domain to explore, Homo Ludens will apply himself to exploring his own creation. Thus we will be present at *an uninterrupted process of creation and re-creation,* sustained by a generalized creativity that is manifested in all domains of activity.

Starting from this freedom in time and space, we would arrive at a new kind of urbanization. Mobility, the incessant fluctuation of the population -- a logical consequence of this new freedom -- creates a different relation between town and settlement. With no timetable to respect, with no fixed abode, the human being will of necessity become acquainted with a nomadic way of life in an artificial, wholly 'constructed' environment. Let us call this environment New Babylon and add that it has nothing, or almost nothing, about it of a 'town,' in the traditional sense of the term. The town is a form of urbanization characteristic of utilitarian society: a fortified place for protection against a hostile external world, it becomes, as a mercantile center, an 'open town,'; then, with the advent of mechanization, a center of production -- and at all these different stages it is the place where a stable population resides, rooted there by a particular way of life. There are, of course, exceptions to the rule: certain relations between towns enable a small number of individuals to change their place of residence, and in so doing trigger a process of acculturation in which the town acquires, aside from its utilitarian function, the function of a cultural center. But this phenomenon is relatively infrequent and the number of individuals involved is not great.

The culture of New Babylon does not result from isolated activities, from exceptional situations, but from the global activity of the whole world population, every human being

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being engaged in a dynamic relation with his surroundings. There are no *a priori* links between anyone. The frequency of each man's movements and the distances he will cover depend on decisions he will make spontaneously, and which he will be able to renounce just as simultaneously. Under these conditions social mobility suggests the image of a kaleidoscopic whole, accentuating sudden unexpected changes -- an image that no longer bears any similarity to the structures of a community life ruled by the principle of utility, whose models of behavior are always the same. 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.

The centers of production outside this space and the collective facilities inside it determine the general lines of the macro-structure in which, under the influence of indeterminate movements, there will be defined a more differentiated and necessarily more flexible micro-structure.

From these two preconditions -- the optimum organization of material conditions and the maximum development of each person's sense of initiative -- we can deduce the essentials of a structure that is no longer composed of nuclei, as in the traditional settlement, but is organized according to the individual and collective covering of distance, of errancy: a network of units, linked one to the other, and so forming chains that can develop, be extended in every direction. Within these chains are found the services and everything pertaining to the organization of social life, in the "links" of the network, the entirely automated units of production, from which man is absent.

The basic elements of the network, the SECTORS, are autonomous units of construction, which nevertheless intercommunicate. The sector network is perceived from within as a continuous space.

New Babylon ends nowhere (since the earth is round); it knows no frontiers (since there are no more national economies) or collectivities (since humanity is fluctuating). Every place is accessible to one and all. The whole earth becomes home to its owners. Life is an endless journey across a world that is changing so rapidly that it seems forever other.

Realization

The building of New Babylon can only begin once the economy is exclusively aimed at the satisfaction of our needs, in the widest sense of the term. Only such an economy permits

the complete automation of non-creative activities, and consequently the free development of creativity.

The implementation of New Babylon is a slow process of growth of a sectorial world that progressively replaces pre-existing urban structures. At first one sees, in among the conglomerates, isolated sectors appear that become poles of attraction for the former to the extent that, with the time consumed in work diminishing, the settlement becomes disorganized. During this time, the sectors are meeting places, socio-cultural centers of a kind; then, as their number is augmented and the links that unite them increased, activity within the sectors becomes specialized and increasingly autonomous in relation to the residential areas.

A New Babylonian way of life then begins to be defined, which takes off when the regrouped sectors make up a network: a structure that can compete with the settlement structures, whose significance is progressively downgraded as man ceases to take part in the production process. The same phenomenon being produced in many places, one will see many sectors group together, unite and form a whole. From then on, fluctuation will increase.

In the first phase, the distance between sectors and groups of sectors increases the demand for rapid means of locomotion. Crossing residential areas from one sector to another must be as brief as possible. Later, when the sectorial world is unified and fluctuation intensifies, there is no longer need to move quickly to change milieu. The flexibility of internal space in the sectors admits of multiple variations in environment and ambiance across relatively constrained surfaces. As to the means of transport, they will not be so indispensible to movement. A new function emerges to enlarge their original function: from being a tool for work they become tools for play.

Topography

Given the scale of social space in the sectorial network, and its continuity, the space of rapid movement no longer coincides with the New Babylonian way of life. The later is traversed by a slow and continuous flux, displacement being but one of the forms of activity within the sectors. But undoubtedly one would still seek to move rapidly from time to time, by land for shorter distances, or by air. For air transport one can imagine, on the terrace roofs, airplane runways and heliports. As to rapid circulation on the ground, we have to imagine a road network as independent as possible from the sector network. A multi-level lay-out would guarantee the autonomy of networks and thoroughfares. The best solution for decongesting the ground consists in raising the sectors on pilotis, spaced as widely apart as possible. One advantage of this construction is that it permits the arrangement of an unbroken sequence of terrace roofs. In this way, a second open-air level is created, a second artificial landscape above the natural landscape.

Given their huge size, the sector interiors depend on the system of distribution of energy needed for lighting, ventilation and air conditioning, but this 'dependency' implies a certain freedom: freedom from the monotonous alteration of day and night, which humanity has sought since the dawn of time.

Taken as a whole, New Babylon presents itself as a network of huge links, the greater part of which are raised above the ground. On the ground, a second network, traffic. The 'links' are areas generally devoid of building, though with the exception of centers of production and the installations that have no place in the sector social space, like, for instance, transmitter antennae, and perhaps drilling rigs, historic monuments, observatories and other facilities for scientific research. Part of these vacant areas is given over to different working of the ground itself and to rearing livestock; another part to nature reserves, wooded parks. The network structure facilitates acess to these, the intervening distances being each time relatively small.

The topographical surveying of New Babylon poses problems that cannot be resolved by using the tradition means of cartography. Given, on the one hand, its organization on many levels (ground, inside the sectorial volume, terrace roofs), the connections between levels, the nature of communications and the solutions of continuity created between the levels can only emerge in maquette form. On the other hand, the structures are anything but permanent. In effect it is more a question of a micro-structure in continuous transformation, in which the time factor, the fourth dimension, plays a considerable part. Consequently, any three-dimensional representation would, in itself, only have the value of a snapshot, since even admitting that the model of each sector may be reduced to several planes and sections of the different levels, and that one manages thereby to constitute a sort of detailed atlas of the sectors, it would still be necessary, from one instant to the next, to record, using symbolic notations as in a ship's log, all the topographical modifications that are produced. Recourse to a computer will doubtless be necessary to resolve such a complex problem.

The sector

The sector is the smallest element, the basic unit of the New Babylonian network, one of the 'links' in the chains that make it up. As one might expect, its dimensions are markedly greater than the dimensions of the elements (buildings) that make up the towns, such as they are known. The scale of these elements depends on the system of social relations. In rural communities where human relations and family ties are tightly enmeshed, the basic element is the independent family residence. In industrial towns, given the social character of production work, relationships are established at school, in the place of work or leisure, in political and other meetings -- which supplement family ties. Thus each member of a family creates personal ties outside of it. Under these conditions, larger residential units are seen

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to appear, blocks for many families, sometimes equipped with communal services. But there, as in rural communities, one is dealing with a sedentary population, a regular way of life.

When the family group disintegrates and the division of time and space is no longer socially determined by productive work, when one can decide the place and duration of one's stay, the utlimate ties are broken. For all that, the more or less lasting relations between people will not have disappeared, but restrictive social relations will have been replaced by more varied and changing emotional ties. More so than in stable communities, the fluctuating society favors fortuitous contacts and encounters.

The sector is a basic construction (macro-structure) in which an environment is constructed. *Qua* support, the macro-structure must allow the greatest freedom in the permanent construction (micro-structure) of the interior space. In its simplest form, the sector incorporates a number of superimposed horizontal spaces linked to each other and to the ground by vertical elements, and one or more fixed nuclei for services. This space could be taken up by a more complex structure resulting from the articulation of variable smaller spaces. As an alternative to the support structure, one can also imagine a 'floating' structure, a suspended sector secured to one or more masts. Another possible alternative, the self-bearing structure, requires a limited number of points of support, which is an advantage, but, since the module and the dimensions of the micro-structure depend more directly on the macro-structure, the organization of interior space is no longer as free. The choice of one or the other solution -- a sector on pilotis, or a suspended or self-bearing sector -- also depends in certain measure on the geographical position.

The macro-structure, then, houses a moveable interior structure. Since the dimensions of the sector are important, any demolition or transformation of the basic structure is of necessity an ambitious undertaking. However, the ludic life of the inhabitants of New Babylon presupposes frequent transformation of the interior of the sectors. For this to take place without problems, the containing structure would have to be as neutral as possible, and, from the construction point of view, the variable contained structure [would have to be] completely independent of the former.

The variable structure grows out of the moveable assembly systems (walls, floors, terminals, bridges, etc.) light and therefore easy to transport, which can be as easily mounted as dismounted, thus [making them] re-usable. Any assembly project requires both the normalization of the module and the standardization of production. The dimensions of the macro-structure are determined by the module of standard elements. But this does not mean, of course, limiting the possible combinations or simplifying the forms, since a great number of standard assembly types and systems can be combined in a multiplicity of ways.

With these few data, a schematic idea of the sector can be arrived at. 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. Inside, one or more fixed nuclei contain a technical center and a service center that is also a hotel reception center with individual rooms. Some of the sectors are provided with sanitary and teaching facilities, warehousing and distribution facilities for articles of everyday use. Others, with libraries, scientific research centers and anything else that may be necessary. The nuclei occupy a part of the sector; the rest, the most important part of New Babylon, is a social space with moveable articulations: the playground of *Homo Ludens.*

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, ventiliation) are all under technical control. Inside, a variable range of climates can be created and modified at will. Climate becomes an important element in the play of ambiance, all the more so since the technical apparatus is accessible to everybody and the decentralization (of distribution) encourages a certain autonomy of the sector or group of sectors. Smaller centers are preferred to a single center, which facilitates reproducing the most diverse climates and, why not, inventing new ones as a contrast, changing the seasons, transforming them according to an infinitely varied synchronization accorded to the metamorphosis of space.

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 behavior.

The New babylonians

Creativity and agrressivity

They wander through the sectors of New Babylon seeking new experiences, as yet unknown ambiances. Without the passivity of tourists, but fully aware of the power they have to act upon the world, to transform it, recreate it. They dispose of a whole arsenal of technical implements for doing this, thanks to which they can make the desired changes without delay. Just like the painter, who with a mere handful of colors creates an infinite variety of forms, contrasts and styles, the New Babylonians can endlessly vary their environment, renew and vary it by using their technical implements. This comparison reveals a fundamental difference between the two ways of creating. The painter is a solitary creator who is only

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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. The artist's individual creation seems, to other's eyes, to escape all constraint and ripen in isolation. And it is only much later, when the work acquires an undeniable reality, that it will have to confront society. 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 which 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. 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. 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. In this sense the critical moment (the climax) is an authentic collective creation. The yardstick, the space-time framework, of the New Babylonian world is the rhythm in which each moment suceeds the last.

From *Homo Faber's* point of view, New Babylon is an uncertain universe in which the 'normal' man is at the mercy of every possible destructive force, every kind of aggression. But let us note that 'normality' is a concept linked to a certain historical practice; its content is therefore variable. As for 'aggressivity,' psychoanlaysis has granted it considerable importance, going so far as to define an 'instinct' of aggression. The area of study thus found itself reduced to the man who struggles for his existence, to the human being engaged in that immemorial combat he, like other species, is still engaged in.

The image of a free man who does not have to struggle for his existence is without historical basis. The instinct of self-defense has also been postulated as the primordial instinct of the human being, and of all that lives. And it is to that instinct that all the others are related.

Aggressivity is a manifestation of the will to power, which is the attribute of a highly developed being (man) capable of foresight and who, in a world in where his existence is threatened, can organize in time, that is to say, according to a plan, a safe place for himself. For that reason, man's aggressivity does not disappear with the satisfaction of his immediate needs. It is, apparently, in the most industrialized, 'rich' countries that aggressive behavior regresses the least, above all among the propertied class. To shed light on this apparent contradiction between material security and the persistence of aggressivity, it would perhaps be necessary to admit the existence of an 'instinct' other than that of self-defense: the creative instinct, which appears with the sublimation of primordial instinct whenever material conditions are sufficiently favorable for self-defense to be transformed into open spontaneity.

The objective impossibility of realizing a creative life within utilitarian society, based on the suppression of creativity but nevertheless containing all the conditions favorable to its development, permits us to understand why aggressivity finds itself apart from the struggle for existence. In contemporary society, the propertied class itself cannot act in a creative manner, and it is easy to understand that it feels more frustrated than the masses, who own nothing yet struggle for their future freedom. The goal of these struggles being the transformation of existing society, conflict itself is creation.

The creative instinct

In speculating on the possible advent of a ludic society, one presupposes from the beginning that every human being feels the latent need to manifest his creativity, and that it appears in the sublimation of primary instinctual forms. This need is not satisfied in our static society, where its accomplishment through creation can only be potential. All education that prepares the future adult for the 'useful' role he will play in society tends to repress the creative instinct. However, it often comes about that 'utility' disappears with the development of technology, even before the child arrives at the end of his studies. Under these conditions 'education' can only play a negative role in the repression of all spontaneous creativity. If this were not the case, the adult would be more creative than the child, while in reality the opposite is true.

But can one conceive of an education aiming at the development of creativity? It is permissible to doubt it and to ask oneself if all education, or what is designated by that term, is not extremely limited, if its principle function is not to restrain freedom, which is the fundamental condition of creativity. The only education favorable to creation is that which unfetters the development of creativity. But *Homo Ludens* dispenses with education. He learns by playing.

Those who cannot adapt to the structures of utilitarian society condemn themselves to isolation. These are the 'asocial' types, a term often synonymous with 'criminal.' 'Criminality' presupposes transgression of constituted social relations, which explains the different interpretations of which it has been the object. Crime, 'the criminal act,' disturbs the order of these reations and society reacts by eliminating the guilty person. When, from a totally different perspective, 'the criminal act' is considered as an expression of a frustrated will to power, and in admitting that, sublimated, the will to power is transformed into creativity, the 'crime' becomes no more than an abortive attempt at creation. The attitude of the criminal vis-avis reality is no more passive than the artist's, since he too intervenes in a given situation. But while the creative act brings together destruction and construction, lending them balance, the criminal privileges destruction. Yet the artist's intervention displays, at least as regards utilitarian society, an 'asocial' attitude whose effect is barely distinguishable from that of the crime.

In New Babylon, where no 'order' is respected, community life takes shape within the dynamic of permanently changing situations. This dynamic activates forces that in utilitarian are repressed or at best tolerated. That is why it is unthinkable that a life like that in New babylon could be imposed on contemporary society, even for the briefest length of time. When social conventions are no longer respected, as during carnival, it is not creativity that increases but aggressivity: an aggressivity directly proportional to the pressure exerted on creativity by the society.

Every reason for aggressivity has been eliminated in New Babylon. The conditions of life favor sublimation, and activity becomes creation. This superior form of existence is only possible in 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, which he directs toward an even higher level.

The New Babylonian

The struggle for subsistence has divided humanity into interest groups that are often competing but always opposed to the idea of joining together in large groups, harder to defend. The prolonged division into races, tribes, nations, social classes is also explained by the historical conditions of this struggle. In a society that no longer knows the struggle for subsistence, competition disappears at both the individual and group level. Barriers and frontiers also disappear. The way is open to the intermxing of populations, which results in both the disappearance of racial differences and the fusion of populations into a new race, the world-wide race of New babylonians.

The New Babylonian disposes of a complete freedom of action, but this liberty is only actualized in relations of reciprocity with *all* of his peers. A ludic society based on the community of interests of all human beings knows none of the individual or collective conflicts that characterize utilitarian society. Conflict of interest, competition and exploitation are, in this context, notions devoid of content. The New Babylonian community comprises the totality of the inhabitants of New Babylon, and it is their simultaneous activity that creates the new collective culture.

Even when he covers enormous distances, *Homo Faber* moves in a social space limited by the obligations to return to a fixed abode. He is 'tied to the land.' His social relations define his social space, which includes his home, place of work, the home of his family and of his friends. The New Babylonian escapes these constraining ties. His social space is unlimited. Because he is no longer 'rooted' he can circulate freely: much more freely since the space he traverses endlessly changes space and atmosphere with the result that it is constantly renewed. Mobility, and the disorientation it produces, facilitates contacts between people. Ties are made and unmade without any difficulty, endowing social relations with a perfect openness.

On some elements of New Babylonian culture

The essence of New Babylonian culture is playing with the elements that make up the environment. Such play is possible due to the integral technical control of all those elements, which thus become a conscious creation of the environment.

The components of the environment are numerous and of different kinds. In order to imagine them in all their diversity, it would be necessary to begin by distinguishing several groups, proceeding from two separate criteria: an objective criterion and a subjective criterion.

A. Elements of spatial construction, which determine its appearance and are the object of prior planning. They can be grouped within the category of 'architectural elements.' (Examples: the form and dimensions of space, the building materials, their structure, their colors);
B. Elements defining the quality of space. Being more malleable, they cannot be planned to the same extent. These are the 'climatic conditions' (temperature, humidity, atmosphere, etc.);
C. Elements that, without deciding the quality of space, influence the perception of space. Their utilization is aleatory and their effect of brief duration. These are 'psychological elements.' (Examples: movement, eating and drinking, the use of verbal or other communication, etc.).

Another classification, using more subjective criteria, distributes the environmental elements according to the influence they exert on us. Here one discerns visual, sonorous, tactile, olfactory and gustatory elements.

But whatever the criteria, it is difficult to isolate an element, to separate it from the rest. And a great number of important elements can form part of many different categories. Thus, among the elements chosen according to the first criterion, the structure of space is linked to climatic conditions as well as to movements in space. The pleasure taken in eating and drinking is not the same in every space, whatever the climate. As to the second criterion, it enables us to discover even more complex associations. A structure, for instance, can be perceived by the sight and by the touch; language is addressed equally to the hearing and to sight. Food and drink to taste, but also to smell, to sight, to the touch. To these elements others are added, acting one on the other in close interdependence. Dissociative analysis is only justified from the viewpoint of technical control. Being sensitive to an environment, to an atmosphere, one does not imagine distinguishing between the elements that make it up, just as when looking at a painting one does not separate out the different materials used by the painter.

Forms of behavior

It is well known that behavior is strongly influenced by environmental elements. In psychiatry the manipulation of these elements is called 'brain-washing.' In New Babylon, where each person can freely use the technical apparatus and actively participate in the collective organization of space, these elements cannot be chosen according to a pre-established goal. Any initiative in one direction or another can, at any moment, be detourned by different, even opposed initiatives.

If the New Babylonian can transform the environment and the ambiance by using the available technical material, if in so doing he can temporarily influence the behavior of others, he in turn undergoes their influence. In any event, the effect of his intervention does not last long, since being a provocation each intervention cannot remain without response.

An objection could be raised, creativity not being the same for all, that the influence of the most active and gifted will be stronger than that of the less energetic and inventive. This objection, however, is characteristic of a utilitarian mentality, which sees in the superiority of intelligence and energy the surest means of acceding to power. In a collective culture, the individual act intermingles with general social activity. It cannot be isolated and the result bears no trace of this. Collective culture is a composite culture, a product of the close and organic interdependence of all creative activity. It is the contrary of the competitive culture we know, which takes the absolute superiority of the strongest, of 'genius,' as the unit by which to measure all activity -- which results in an unparalleled waste of creative energies.

Let's imagine, then, that at a given moment X number of individuals find themselves inside one of the sectors. That the sector is divided into many spaces of different size, form and atmosphere. That each of these spaces is at the point of being transformed: being built, destroyed, mounted, dismounted. . . . That all the individuals present actively participate in this incessant activity. That each person can circulate freely from one space to another. That the sector is being crossed incessantly from one part to another by new people and by those who, after having stayed there awhile, leave. Such mobile complexity of both the spatial conditions and the composition of the 'population' determines New Babylonian culture.

The sectors constantly change form and atmosphere according to the activities that are taking place there. Nobody can return to what was before, rediscover the place as he left it, the image he'd retained in his memory. Nobody now falls into the trap of habit.

Habits, the totality of which constitute a social 'model of behavior,' are what, in utilitarian society, privilege a static way of life: they re so many automatisms. However, the dynamism of a life of permanent creation excludes all automatism. Just as an artist cannot and does not want to repeat one of his works, so the New Babylonian who creates his life cannot exhibit repetitive behavior.

The dynamic labyrinth

While in utilitarian society one strives by every means towards an optimal orientation in space, the guarantee of temporal efficiency and economy, in New Babylon the disorientation that furthers adventure, play and creative change is privileged. The space of New Babylon has all the characteristics of a labyrinthine space, within which movement no longer submits to the constraints of given spatial or temporal organization. The labyrinthine form of New Babylonian social space is the direct expression of social independence.

The ambiance of an environment possessing certain specific plastic and acoustic characteristics depends on the individuals who find themselves there. A single individual can passively submit to this ambiance or change it according to his mood at the time. But with the entrance of a second person, a new presence is felt and the interaction of the two presences excludes any passivity. The quality of the environment and its ambiance 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. And when a third or fourth person comes to take his place alongside the others, the situation -- being more complex -- escapes the control of any of the people present. As the number of visitors gradually increases and the composition of the group alters, complexity also increases, while the individual control of space decreases.

The collective use of space entails qualitative change since it tends to reduce passivity. The activity of the occupants of a space is an integral part of the ambiance that, being static, becomes dynamic. 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 ambiance. 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.

Technology

Technology is the indispensable tool for realizing an experimental collectivism. To seek to dominate nature without the help of technique is pure fiction. As is collective creation without the appropriate means of communication. A renewed, reinvented audiovisual media is an indispensable aid. In a fluctuating community, without a fixed base, contacts can only be maintained by intensive telecommunications. Each sector will be provided with the latest equipment, accessible to everyone, whose use, we should note, is never strictly functional. In New Babylon air conditioning does not only serve to recreate, as in utilitarian society, an

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'ideal' climate, but to vary ambiance to the greatest possible degree. As for telecommunications, it does not only, or principally, serve interests of a practical kind. It is at the service of ludic activity, it is a form of play.

In order to grasp this, let us take the example of a local cafe, a very quiet cafe whose atmosphere would suddenly become animated when some new arrival puts money in the jukebox. 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 olfative 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 which are, given their situation, less frequented, will be the preferred choice of retired or sick people.

The sectors must be as independent as possible from the viewpoint of their construction and their technical facilities. This is important, since any sector must be able to be reconstructed without damage to the neighboring sectors to which it is linked by mobile bridges. The large electric or nuclear power stations that supply the sectors are sited, of course, as far as possible from the network.

The intensification of space

In New Babylon, where the nature and structure of space changes frequently, one will make much more intensive use of global space. The volume of social space and of social activity in space has two consequences: the space available for individual use is greater than in a society with a sedentary population; yet there is no more empty space, space unused even for a brief time, and, as one makes creative use of it, its aspect changes so much and so often that a relatively small surface offers as many variations as a trip around the world. Distance covered, speed, are no longer the yardsticks of movement; and space, lived more intensely, seem to dilate. But this intensification of space is only possible due to the creative use of technical means -- a use that we, who live in a society where use has a finality, can hardly imagine.

To succeed in life is to create and re-create it incessantly. Man can only have a life worthy of himself if he himself creates. When the struggle for existence is no more than a memory, he will be able, for the first time in history, to freely dispose of the whole of his life. He will be able, in complete freedom, to give his existence the form of his desires. Far from remaining passive toward a world in which he is content to adapt himself, for better or worse, to external circumstances, he would aspire to creating another one in which his liberty is realized. In order that he may create his life, it is incumbent on him to create that world. And that creation, like the other, entails the same uninterrupted succession of re-creations.

New Babylon is the work of the New Babylonians alone, the product of their culture. For us, it is only a model of reflection and play.

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