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# **Revisiting *New Babylon*: The Making and Unmaking of a Nomadic Myth**

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PhD by Research, History of Art  
The University of Edinburgh  
2011

# Declaration

I have composed this thesis. The work is my own and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

J r mie Michael McGowan

## Abstract

This thesis revisits Constant's *New Babylon* (about 1956-1974). Turning to theories of primitivism and, in particular, Christopher L. Miller's critical reading of 'the nomad' found in Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), I use previously published and unconsidered archival materials alike to demonstrate the importance of Romani to Constant's original work and thinking on *New Babylon*. Positioning these materials against a selection of dominant claims, reference points and images now circulating in established *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship, I argue that Constant's daily life and artistic practice, together with key moments in the development and public display of his project, are framed by references to, yearnings for and personal dealings with Romani, both real and imagined. Questioning contemporary theorisations of nomadism through a consideration of who travels and why, I advocate for a greater awareness of and sensitivity to the historical conditions that produce particular forms of movement. *New Babylon* and Romani are inextricably intertwined: to forget the one is to misunderstand, and misrepresent, the other.



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# Illustrations

## 1.1

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Source: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 414.

## 1.2

5 pages from *New-Babylon, een ontwerp voor een cultuur*.

Source: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 414.

## 1.3

*De Zon*, Constant, 1956 (Centraal Museum Utrecht)

Source: Zweifel, Stefan, Juri Steiner, and Heinz Stahlhut, eds. 2006. *In Girum Imus Nocte Et Consumimur Igni - The Situationist International (1957-1972)*. Zurich: JRP/Ringier: Figure 017.

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## 1.7

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Source: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 400.

### 3.1

Front cover of *Nomades et vagabonds*

Source: Berque, Jacques, Paul Virilio, Jean Ziegler, Annie Guedez, Jean-Pierre Corbeau, Constant Nieuwenhuys, and Jean Duvignaud. 1975. *Nomades et vagabonds*. Vol. 1975/2, *Cause commune*. Paris: 10/18, Union Générale d'Éditions.

### 3.2

Jérémie McGowan, Footnotes of *New Babylon*: 'Joy Riding'

[Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant]

### 4.1

Residency documents for Constant and Nellie Riemens, Dated Alba, 13 November 1956, granting permission to reside in Italy from 09 November 1956 until 09 February 1957

Source: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 1.

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Source: Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea (GAM), Torino, Archivio Gallizio.

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The *Primo congresso*, Alba 1956

Source: Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea (GAM), Torino, Archivio Gallizio.

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The *Primo congresso*, Alba 1956

Source: Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea (GAM), Torino, Archivio Gallizio.

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Alba, December 1956

Source: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 60.

### 4.5

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Source: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 303.

### 4.6

Constant, *Ontwerp voor zigeunerkamp*, 1956-1957 (Haags Gemeentemuseum)

Source: Andreotti, Libero, and Xavier Costa, eds. 1996. *Situacionistas: Arte, Política, Urbanismo / Situationists: Art, Politics, Urbanism*. Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, ACTAR.

**4.7a**

Gallizio with Romani in Alba, about 1957

Source: Bertolino, Giorgina, Francesca Comisso, and Maria Teresa Roberto, eds. 2005. *Pinot Gallizio: il laboratorio della scrittura / Pinot Gallizio: The Laboratory of Writing*. Milano: Edizioni Charta: 227.

**4.7b**

Gallizio with Romani in Alba, about 1957

Source: Isnardi, Cristiano, Francesco Careri, and Francesca Comisso, eds. 2005. *Pinot Gallizio: Il pittore e la città nomade*. Mondovi: Città di Mondovi: 22.

**4.7c**

Gallizio with Romani in Alba, about 1957

Source: Roberto, Maria Teresa, Giorgina Bertolino, and Francesca Comisso. 2000. *Pinot Gallizio: L'uomo, l'artista e la città, 1902-1964*. Milano: Mazzotta.

**4.8a**

Gallizio with Romani in Alba, about 1957

Source: Bertolino, Giorgina, Francesca Comisso, and Maria Teresa Roberto, eds. 2005. *Pinot Gallizio: il laboratorio della scrittura / Pinot Gallizio: The Laboratory of Writing*. Milano: Edizioni Charta: 230.

**4.8b**

Gallizio with Romani in Alba, about 1957

Source: Isnardi, Cristiano, Francesco Careri, and Francesca Comisso, eds. 2005. *Pinot Gallizio: Il pittore e la città nomade*. Mondovi: Città di Mondovi: 25.

**4.9a**

Gallizio with Romani in Alba, about 1957

Source: Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea (GAM), Torino, Archivio Gallizio.

**4.9b**

Gallizio with Romani in Alba, about 1957

Source: Bertolino, Giorgina, Francesca Comisso, and Maria Teresa Roberto, eds. 2005. *Pinot Gallizio: il laboratorio della scrittura / Pinot Gallizio: The Laboratory of Writing*. Milano: Edizioni Charta: 231.

**4.10**

Gallizio with Romani in Alba, about 1957

Source: Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea (GAM), Torino, Archivio Gallizio.

**4.11**

Romani in Alba, about 1957

Source: Isnardi, Cristiano, Francesco Careri, and Francesca Comisso, eds. 2005. *Pinot Gallizio: Il pittore e la città nomade*. Mondovi: Città di Mondovi: 23.

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‘L’uomo è sempre l’uomo’, about 1957

Source: Galleria Civica d’Arte Moderna e Contemporanea (GAM), Torino, Archivio Gallizio.

#### **4.13**

Gallizio, about 1957

Source: Roberto, Maria Teresa, Giorgina Bertolino, and Francesca Comisso. 2000. *Pinot Gallizio: L'uomo, l'artista e la città, 1902-1964*. Milano: Mazzotta.

#### **4.14a**

‘Frontispiece’ to *Pinot Gallizio* (Michèle Bernstein and Asger Jorn, Paris: Bibliothèque d’Alexandrie, 1960)

Source: Galleria Civica d’Arte Moderna e Contemporanea (GAM), Torino, Archivio Gallizio.

#### **4.14b**

Two-page spread from *Pinot Gallizio* (Michèle Bernstein and Asger Jorn, Paris: Bibliothèque d’Alexandrie, 1960)

Source: Galleria Civica d’Arte Moderna e Contemporanea (GAM), Torino, Archivio Gallizio.

#### **4.15**

Gallizio in the Experimental Laboratory, Agricultural Institute, Alba, late 1940s

Source: Galleria Civica d’Arte Moderna e Contemporanea (GAM), Torino, Archivio Gallizio.

#### **5.1**

Two-page spread from *Internationale situationniste* no. 4 (June 1960)

Source: Galleria Civica d’Arte Moderna e Contemporanea (GAM), Torino, Archivio Gallizio.

#### **5.2a**

Third SI Congress, Munich 1959

Source: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 313.

#### **5.2b**

Third SI Congress, Munich 1959

Source: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 313.

#### **5.3**

Typescript of Constant’s opening address to the Munich Congress

Source: Galleria Civica d’Arte Moderna e Contemporanea (GAM), Torino, Archivio Gallizio.

#### 5.4

‘Casa degli zingari’, Har Oudejans, 20 April 1959  
Source: Bertolino, Giorgina, Francesca Comisso, and Maria Teresa Roberto, eds. 2005. *Pinot Gallizio: il laboratorio della scrittura / Pinot Gallizio: The Laboratory of Writing*. Milano: Edizioni Charta: 233.

#### 5.5

Letter from Constant to Gallizio, postmarked Amsterdam 1961 and Cuneo / Alba 13 July 1961  
Source: Galleria Civica d’Arte Moderna e Contemporanea (GAM), Torino, Archivio Gallizio, inv.nr. 9.a.

#### 6.1

‘Toekomst-Bouwer Constant’  
Source: Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Den Haag, Special Collections, van Garrel, Betty, and Rem Koolhaas. 1966. Toekomst-bouwer Constant / De stad van de toekomst: HP gesprek met Constant over New Babylon. *Haagse Post* vol. 53, no. 2694 (6 August 1966): 1.

#### 6.2

Jérémie McGowan, Footnotes of *New Babylon*: ‘Nomadism’  
[Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant]

#### 7.1

Ionel Rotaru (Vaida Voevod III)  
Source: Acton, Thomas, ed. 2000. *Scholarship and the Gypsy Struggle: Commitment in Romani Studies. A collection of papers and poems to celebrate Donald Kenrick's seventieth year*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press: 96.

#### 7.2

Front cover of Nico Rost’s *Goethe im Dachau*  
Source: Rost, Nico. 1948. *Goethe in Dachau: Literatur und Wirklichkeit*. Translated by E. Rost-Blumberg. Munich: Willi Weismann Verlag.

#### 7.3

‘Het oudste volk’  
Source: Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Den Haag, Special Collections, Rost, Nico. 1963. Het oudste volk. *Algemeen Handelsblad* vol. 136, no. 44186 (Supplement, 18 May 1963): 1.

#### 7.4

Letter from Constant to CMG dated Amsterdam 08 July 1963  
Source: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 44.

### **7.5**

Letter from Vanko Rouda to Constant dated Paris 30 July 1963

Source: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 44.

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Source: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 44.

### **7.7**

*Fiesta Gitana*, Constant, 1964 (Centraal Museum Utrecht)

[Online catalogue]

### **7.8**

Letter from Dora E. Yates to Constant dated 11 July 1963

Source: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 227.

### **7.9**

Letter from Constant to Dora E. Yates dated 19 August 1963

Source: Gypsy Lore Society Collections (GLS), Special Collections and Archives, Sydney Jones Library, The University of Liverpool, inv.nr. XLVI, 320.

### **7.10**

Two postcards from Dora E. Yates to Constant, dated 19 August and 01 September 1963

Source: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 227.

### **7.11**

Cover and two-page spread from Black's *Gypsy Bibliography*

Source: Black, George F. 1914. *A Gypsy Bibliography*. London: Bernard Quaritch, Gypsy Lore Society.

### **7.12a**

Ed Wingen's article for *De Telegraaf*, 29 June 1974

Source: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 390.

### **7.12b**

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Source: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 390.

### **7.12c**

Ada van Benthem Jutting's article for *Het Parool*, 28 November 1974

Source: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 386.

### **7.13a**

Jan Juffermans's article for *De Nieuwe Linie*, 12 June 1974

Source: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 390.

### **7.13b**

Fanny Kelk's article for *Elsevier*, 06 July 1974

Source: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 390.

### **7.14**

Stills from the documentary film *Constant, avant le départ*

Source: Schmidt, Maarten, and Thomas Doebele. 2006. *Constant, avant le départ*. The Netherlands: VPRO.

### **7.15a**

GEAM Congress in Amsterdam, 1962

Source: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 335.

### **7.15b**

Constant in his studio, about 1965

Source: Wigley, Mark. 1998. *Constant's New Babylon: The Hyper-Architecture of Desire*. Rotterdam: Witte de With, center for contemporary art; 010 Publishers: 72.

### **7.16a**

Constant in his studio, 1957

Source: Wigley, Mark. 1998. *Constant's New Babylon: The Hyper-Architecture of Desire*. Rotterdam: Witte de With, center for contemporary art; 010 Publishers: 13.

### **7.16b**

Constant in his studio, 1961

Source: de Zegher, Catherine M., and Mark Wigley, eds. 2001. *The Activist Drawing: Retracing Situationist Architectures from Constant's New Babylon to Beyond*. New York, Cambridge, Mass. and London: Drawing Center, MIT Press: 9.

### **7.16c**

Constant in his studio, 1967

Source: de Zegher, Catherine M., and Mark Wigley, eds. 2001. *The Activist Drawing: Retracing Situationist Architectures from Constant's New Babylon to Beyond*. New York, Cambridge, Mass. and London: Drawing Center, MIT Press: 22.



**7.17a**

Constant and Karel Appel, 1949

Source: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 287.

**7.17b**

Constant, 1949

Source: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 287.

**7.18a**

*Primo congresso*, Alba 1956

Source: Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea (GAM), Torino, Archivio Gallizio.

**7.18b**

Constant, about 1960

Source: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 313.

**7.19a**

Front cover and photograph from *Goed wonen* no. 6, 1964

Source: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 455.

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Front cover of Rotterdam exhibition catalogue, 1965

Source: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 373.

**7.20**

Front cover and frontispiece of Haags Gemeentemuseum catalogue, 1965

Source: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 374.

**7.21**

Front cover and photograph from Fanny Kelk's March 1978 article for *Kunstbeeld*

Source: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 393.

**7.22a**

Stills from the documentary film *Constant, avant le départ*

Source: Schmidt, Maarten, and Thomas Doebele. 2006. *Constant, avant le départ*. The Netherlands: VPRO.

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Stills from the documentary film *Constant, avant le départ*

Source: Schmidt, Maarten, and Thomas Doebele. 2006. *Constant, avant le départ*. The Netherlands: VPRO.

### **7.23a**

*De cymbalist*, Constant, 14 April 1972 (Paul Hermans)

Source: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 387.

### **7.23b**

Front cover of Stedelijk Museum catalogue, 1980

Source: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 393.

### **7.23c**

*Homage à el Niña Ricardo*, Constant, 30 May 1980

Source: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 399.

## **8.1**

Amilcare Debar

Source: Kenrick, Donald, ed. 1999. *The Gypsies during the Second World War, Volume 2: In the Shadow of the Swastika*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, Centre de recherches tsiganes: 29, 30.

## **8.2a**

Foundation meeting of the Gypsy Council, England, 1966

Source: Acton, Thomas, ed. 2000. *Scholarship and the Gypsy Struggle: Commitment in Romani Studies. A collection of papers and poems to celebrate Donald Kenrick's seventieth year*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press: 99.

## **8.2b**

First CIT delegation to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, 1969

Source: Acton, Thomas, ed. 2000. *Scholarship and the Gypsy Struggle: Commitment in Romani Studies. A collection of papers and poems to celebrate Donald Kenrick's seventieth year*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press: 102.

## **8.3a**

First World Romani Congress in London (Vanko Rouda first from left), 1971

Source: Acton, Thomas, ed. 2000. *Scholarship and the Gypsy Struggle: Commitment in Romani Studies. A collection of papers and poems to celebrate Donald Kenrick's seventieth year*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press: 106.

### **8.3b**

Second World Romani Congress in Geneva, 1978

Source: Acton, Thomas, ed. 2000. *Scholarship and the Gypsy Struggle: Commitment in Romani Studies. A collection of papers and poems to celebrate Donald Kenrick's seventieth year*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press: xxviii.

### **8.4a**

Tent burning ceremony during the First World Romani Congress, 1971 (Vanko Rouda in middle, second row)

Source: Acton, Thomas, ed. 2000. *Scholarship and the Gypsy Struggle: Commitment in Romani Studies. A collection of papers and poems to celebrate Donald Kenrick's seventieth year*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press: 112.

### **8.4b**

Leulea Rouda (centre), joint General Secretary of the World Romani Congress, about 1971

Source: Acton, Thomas, ed. 2000. *Scholarship and the Gypsy Struggle: Commitment in Romani Studies. A collection of papers and poems to celebrate Donald Kenrick's seventieth year*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press: 35.

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## **Author's note**

I use the word Romani throughout this thesis. The word Gypsy and its equivalents (zigeuner, zingari, gitan, tsigan, etc.) are used only when quoting from the work of other authors or referring intentionally to the fictional image of 'Gypsies', as fabricated by the majority and its institutions, when relevant to my argument.

References in the text to GAM, GLS and RKD appear at the end of the bibliography.

## Introduction

In December 1956 the Dutch artist Constant Anton Nieuwenhuys (1920-2005) visited a Romani encampment on the outskirts of Alba, a small town in the Italian piedmont. While he later described that experience as the origin of *New Babylon*, little trace of that encounter remains in the current historiography of the artist and his project. To date, no sustained thought has been given to the meaning or intention of Constant's claim that Romani mark the genesis of *New Babylon*, or to the possible implications of that claim for our understanding of his project in the present. Yet Constant, in what was always intended to be his definitive work on *New Babylon*, foregrounds Romani culture in a poignant, first-person narrative that is both unique within his oeuvre and, moreover, noticeably at odds with an established body of scholarship. This apparent disconnect, together with the wider problems of history writing, interpretation, curation, representation and recuperation it suggests, is the underlying focus of my thesis. This is not to say that Constant's engagement with Romani culture is never mentioned in the existing literature on *New Babylon*; it is, but always in passing. His visit to a Romani encampment in Alba in 1956 is now commonly cited in historiographies of both the Situationist International and *New Babylon*, yet never in a way that suggests it might be more than a minor anecdote or side story of limited consequence (Appendix 1). This was, I argue, never the case; Romani are central to the development of *New Babylon*, with Constant's relationship to Romani both predating and extending beyond this single instance of culture contact in Alba.

How does a focus on Romani impact our understanding of *New Babylon* and its legacies today? What relationship exists between Romani and the vision of nomadism that is so centrally inscribed in Constant's project? Does an understanding of the historical experience of Romani in the post-war period from which *New*

*Babylon* originates complicate the usefulness, or appropriateness, of that project as a reference point for thinking about architecture, urbanism and the alleged mobility of the human condition today? What is the relationship, in turn, between contemporary theorisations of nomadism and the lives of real and actual ‘nomads’, like Romani? Revisiting Constant’s work in response to these overarching questions, I understand *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship to be an important object for analysis and criticism in its own right.

Turning to notions of ‘primitivism’ and, in particular, Christopher L. Miller’s (1993; 1998a) critical reading of Gilles Deleuze’s and Félix Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*, I draw on a range of previously published and unconsidered archival materials alike to demonstrate the importance of Romani to Constant’s original work and thinking on *New Babylon*. Positioning these materials against a selection of key claims and images now circulating in established *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship, I argue that we can, following Miller’s critique of Deleuze’s and Guattari’s nomad philosophy, similarly reread Constant’s project as ‘an anthropology’. Fundamentally bound up in the representation of culture, *New Babylon* takes a real, physical encounter with Romani as its point of origin and goes on to involve extensive thinking about society and human behaviour in its subsequent, if largely overlooked, textual development. Arguing that the imaginary nomads of *New Babylon* are in no way separable from the real and actual lives of Romani – who ultimately act as the anthropological paradigm for Constant’s New Babylonians – I question why and to what ends Romani have, by contrast, been so unanimously marginalised in contemporary scholarship.

Working within and against the established historiography of *New Babylon* and the Situationist International, I take up an intentionally oppositional stance to some of the dominant strains of thought currently driving this field of study. I find that the ‘hero worship’ (Williams 2009) centred on Guy Debord, for example, often results in the dismissal of Giuseppe Gallizio – an intriguing character who was a key figure in the early history of *New Babylon* and the Situationist International. The somewhat one-dimensional image of Constant now circulating in contemporary scholarship,

and in architectural studies in particular, is similarly problematic. The figure of the militant urbanist or ‘hyper architect’, as Wigley (1998) has termed it, is matched – if not exceeded – throughout Constant’s lifetime by another, as yet unacknowledged character: that of the Gypsy musician.<sup>1</sup> The tendency to read Constant’s work in relationship to Deleuze’s and Guattari’s nomadology (e.g. Kavanaugh 2008; Novak 1998; Pinder 2005), thus connecting *New Babylon* to contemporary theories of mobility, flow, cyberspace and the world wide web also needs to be reconsidered.

While focused primarily on *New Babylon* and its attendant body of scholarship, my revisionist study of this material contributes to wider discussions in art and architectural research, as well as current themes in humanities discourse generally. One obvious area of overlap is the broader field of radical – variously termed visionary, utopian, experimental, avant-garde, counter-cultural, etc. – art and architectural practices of the post-war period. Alongside some other scholars writing in this field, I advocate for more nuanced and precise approaches to this historical material. We must move beyond blanket terminology like radical architecture and look to differentiate more accurately between the ‘greatest hits’ and ‘cover-child’ works of the era (van Schaik 2005a: 9; Lang and Menking 2003: 12). Comparisons between a number of projects of 1960s radical architecture and Constant’s work on *New Babylon* are now commonplace and, although some studies are carried out with a more heightened awareness of historical-critical differences than others (e.g. Heynen 2005; Lotringer 2004; Sadler 2005; van der Ley and Richter 2008b), there is a need to push such analyses further. If nomadic projects are gradually starting to be set apart from other experimental tendencies in 1960s architectural culture, alongside differentiations like megastructure (van der Ley and Richter 2008a), techno-utopia (Scott 2001; 2007b) and inflatables (Dessauce 1999), for example, much tighter distinctions still need to be made within this comparatively more nuanced terrain. While certain similarities might be drawn between *New Babylon* and the work of (some members of) Archigram, Superstudio and Ant Farm, nomadism and the nomad did not necessarily mean the same thing for these standout nomadists of the decade.



There are also other incarnations of the nomad, sometimes only tangentially related to 1960s architectural culture, that need to be considered if we are to situate *New Babylon* in a broader cultural context – for example the drop-out, DIY counter-culture of later-1960s and early-1970s America, including such phenomena as: the *Domebooks* (Kahn 1971; Kahn et al. 1970; Prenis 1973; Yarnall 1978), the *Whole Earth Catalog*, *Shelter* publications (Kahn 1978; 2000 [1973]) and *Survival Scrapbooks* (Szczelkun 1972a; 1972b; 1973; Williams and Munro 1973). There are other possibilities to follow also, including: the art and in particular ‘birth mythology’ of Joseph Beuys (Buchloh 1980); the sci-fi literature of writers like J. G. Ballard, especially the disturbing vision of tribal life he developed in *High Rise* (Ballard 2006 [1975]); 1950s and 1960s outlaw biker films like *The Wild One*, *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Easy Rider*; and, also, dystopian critiques of nomadism including public performances by Kim Jones, the ‘Mudman’ (Firmin and Joyce 2007), Walter Pichler’s ‘TV Helmet’ and Martin Pawley’s ‘Time House’.

At the same time, we must be careful not to privilege or refer exclusively to the radical cultural and socio-political phenomena of the 1960s. Radical architecture, as with avant-garde cultural production generally, occurs in broader social, political and economic contexts which cannot be overlooked. The notion that the avant-garde operates somehow apart from or ahead of other people, times and places needs to be interrogated and challenged (cf. Borden 2001: 133). Radical architecture and radical politics are by no means synonymous; nor does one necessarily support the other – least of all in the 1960s. A currently en vogue decade of moonwalk, The Beatles, flower power, rock-and-roll, Woodstock and all-out sexual revolution, The Sixties were also long, hard years of civil rights, military conflict and the start of still-ongoing processes of decolonisation. The legacies of the era, to which *New Babylon* belongs, are complex, mixed and varied; any historical-critical account of the decade should recognise and seek to come to terms with such marked polarity.<sup>2</sup>

Another topic I explore through my revisionist study of *New Babylon* is the current understanding of primitivism in architectural history, theory and criticism. While there are of course traces of a critical colonial and post-colonial discourse in

architectural studies (Oxman et al. 2002; Blundell Jones 2008; Celik 1992) – particularly well developed in some of Mark Crinson’s (1996; 2003; 2008) writings, for example – there is a sense that the disciplinary relationship to the primitive remains, overall, somewhat out of step with other areas of humanities scholarship. With leading scholars like Adrian Forty (2006) recently arguing that architecture has an anomalous, subject-specific relationship to the primitive – one that is noticeably unproblematic and hands clean – it seems uncertain whether architecture as a whole is willing or able to take the critical frameworks first formulated by writers like Edward W. Said (1993; 2003 [1978]) and Homi K. Bhabha (1994) seriously. Routine acknowledgements of this necessary and important body of critical theory are easy enough to come by (Odgers et al. 2006), but Forty’s defence of architecture’s apparent disciplinary immunity seems to be the one gaining more ground.<sup>3</sup> Remaining sceptical of the different relationship Forty and his followers imagine architecture has with the primitive, I contend that it is architecture’s relationship to other disciplines – and, more importantly, to itself – that really marks it out as exceptional.

Adam Kuper’s (1988b; 2005) work on anthropology’s specific disciplinary relationship to ‘the myth of primitive society’ serves as an important critical marker here. Kuper convincingly demonstrated, now over two decades ago, how ‘the idea of primitive society was never the exclusive preserve of social anthropology’, but rather a ‘deplorable’ illusion that ‘infused the political and historical consciousness of several generations’. He further suggested that ‘similar accounts could be given of many other intellectual traditions’, even those ‘who are otherwise content to remain quite ignorant of anthropology’. The implications of Kuper’s comments for architectural scholarship are clear enough; architecture has certainly not been detached from anthropology since the ‘crystallisation’ of the modern discipline in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Thus, rather than persisting with the ‘disciplinary myth’ that architecture’s relationship to the primitive really is unique from everyone else’s, I think we need to consider, instead, ‘the ways in which we delude ourselves’ (Kuper 1988b: 14).

Although not necessarily related, the primitivism of what is perceived to be the ‘most radical’ avant-garde is often similarly exempted from scholarly criticism – a phenomenon noticeable in contemporary writings on Georges Bataille, for example. Bataille developed something of an obsession with the pre-Columbian societies of ‘Extinct America’, which he turned to in order to generate a visceral and often shocking language of blood, human sacrifice, filth, waste and excrement (Bataille 1986 [1939]; 1986 [1928]). Yet, for all this, including his tendency to move freely and casually between references to Aztecs and other primitive groups, ‘many contemporary discussions of Bataille tend to overlook the content of his writings, focusing with admiration on their abstract meanings instead’ (Torgovnick 1990: 273). Although Bataille is a very complex figure, whose specific and often distasteful usage of the primitive was bound up in economic issues of both expenditure and waste, there is a sense that his extreme radicalism sets him apart from the crowd (Hollier 1992; Stoekl 1985; Crimp et al. 1986). The same seems to apply to the Situationist International, who can roughly be set in the same ‘French tradition’ as Bataille. The Situationists also turned to the primitive – notably, to ideas of *potlatch* and ‘the blacks’ of 1960s America (SI 2006 [1966]) – to generate radical critiques of society, the family, the state, capitalism, consumerism and the spectacle. As with Bataille, these more problematic aspects of the Situationist International and its legacies are generally left untouched in current scholarship. Even the primitivist art produced by many members of the group, including Constant, receives little recognition, much less critical commentary (Home and Rumney 1989). In the broader contexts of otherness and difference, this becomes even more apparent (cf. Pinder 2005: 158). A cursory look through Situationist imagery suggests the group’s relationship to and understanding of gender and sexuality was, at best, fraught (Baum 2008; Sadler 1998: 80-81). More attention could be given, also, to the celebrated practice of *dérive*, which was often sited in the peripheral zones of the city – such as the ethnic ghettos, slums and immigrant neighbourhoods of post-war Paris (Mension 2002; Rumney 2002). It is worth noting, also, the small number of women who took part in the Situationist International and, more importantly, their notable marginalisation in the group’s historiography today (Home and Rumney 1989; Williams 2009).

*New Babylon* emerges as an intriguing case study in these contexts, positioned at something of a crossroads between these two apparent areas of ‘immunity’. The lack of thinking around primitivism that may be noted in *New Babylon* scholarship at present – as well as writings on the likes of Archigram, Ant Farm and Superstudio (where I think the primitive may again be found, similarly beneath the surface) – indicates there may be a need to broaden the critical gaze of architectural scholarship so as to encompass less obvious material. In the self-confessedly ‘all-too introvert discipline of architecture’ (Odgers et al. 2006: xviii), there seems to be little impetus today to move beyond the parameters of the classic discussion of ‘the primitive hut’ first traced out – now forty years ago – by Joseph Rykwert (1981 [1972]). Despite the fact Rykwert’s study occurs in a historical moment just before questions of representation and difference became politicised by writers like Said, it remains a clear reference point in contemporary architectural scholarship. The two most substantial studies of the primitive in architecture to be published since Rykwert focus notably on the general terrain he covered in 1972 (Odgers et al. 2006; Sabatino 2008a). Felicity Scott and Hilde Heynen have both written on the primitive and its relationship to Modern architecture, focusing on Bernard Rudofsky (Scott 1998; 1999; 2000; 2007a) and Sibyl Moholy-Nagy (Heynen 2008) respectively. When these authors turn away from the vernacular, however, and focus instead on questions of 1960s radical practice, the primitive – though surely present here, also – seems to go missing (Heynen 1996; 1999; 2005; Scott 2001; 2006; 2007c; 2007b). Beyond the specific contexts of 1960s architectural thought and practice, in which there has been only a very limited acknowledgment of the primitive to date (Deamer 1997), there is a need to heighten architectural awareness of the postmodernist, postcolonial and feminist critiques of otherness and difference generally (Agrest et al. 1996).

At the same time, some scholars – working well outside the field of architectural history, theory and criticism – are beginning to advocate new frameworks and methodologies that might revise the now-engrained cultural studies approach that has seen the seminal work of writers like Said and Torgovnick rather straightforwardly

transferred to the analysis of other materials: for example, in art history, from the 19th-century Orientalists of history, literature and linguistics (Said 2003 [1978]) to the corresponding 19th-century Orientalists of painting (Nochlin 1989). In writing about *New Babylon*, there is a further opportunity to explore how a revisionist account of Constant's project might respond to recent debates about the uses and limitations of Orientalizing discourses like primitivism as interpretive frameworks for arts criticism (Clifford 1988; Gewertz and Errington 1991). With some ethnographic fieldworkers growing tired of hearing about how we use, misuse and get them wrong in the process, there are suggestions that current understandings of otherness and difference need to be rethought (Pratt 2008; Scheper-Hughes 1995). Pointing only to the ways we interact with them arguably does little to help us understand the other – much less ourselves – any better than before. The pure textual analysis of Said's work, like the pure visual analysis that followed, is no longer thought adequate.<sup>4</sup> While not always possible, it is an important and necessary task to try and reveal the other as more than just a construct of Western imaginations. They are real, sometimes even identifiable individuals – as is the case with Romani caught up in Constant's work on *New Babylon* – living out complex lives beyond our limited representations of them in texts and images. Acknowledging their identities makes it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, for other scholars to continue to take them for granted.

Within broader discussions of the primitive in contemporary arts scholarship, there are some authors who suggest the work of the French post-structuralist school – including the likes of Deleuze, Derrida, Kristeva and Lyotard, for example – might offer a loophole or way out of the centuries-old problems of identity and difference. Proponents of hybridity theory contend that all boundaries previously existing between us and them have eroded, leaving behind a complex, postmodern mix of multiple, constantly shifting realities. I focus on the relevance and appropriateness of Deleuzian nomadology in these contexts. Beyond being a major reference point in contemporary humanities scholarship, the nomad philosophy offered by Deleuze's and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* is especially topical given the rough historical overlap with *New Babylon* and, more importantly, the tendency to use their work to

read and rethink all sorts of things today, including Constant's project. With opinion split over whether post-structuralist theory helps or hinders our understanding of the other (Bogue 2004; Lionnet and Scharfman 1993a; 1993b; Mays 1993; Noyes 2004; Plant 1993; Stivale 1991), I side with criticisms of nomad philosophy that find the uneasy conflation of peripatetic Western academics and Third World urban homeless to be one step too far (Bhabha 1994; Cresswell 1997; Lattas 1991; Miller 1993; 1998c; Pratt 2008; Spivak 1981; Spivak and Grosz 1990; Wuthnow 2002).

Using materials gathered from the Archief Constant Anton Nieuwenhuys at the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie in The Hague (RKD), the Archivio Giuseppe Gallizio at the Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea in Turin (GAM) and the Archive of The Gypsy Lore Society at the University of Liverpool (GLS), I present a revisionist study of Constant's work that seeks to complicate and extend current scholarship by injecting a range of previously unconsidered texts, images and frames of reference into the field of *New Babylon* and Situationist International research. Resisting the temptation to theorise or unleash the New Babylonian nomad as an 'agent of disruption, interruption and potential' (Cairns 2006: 87) in a presumably 'post-identitarian' (Miller 1993; 1998a) present, I work back through Constant's project, tracing out a sustained period of engagement with Romani people and culture from the time of his earliest collaborations with members of the Situationist International (1956-1960), through to his subsequent solo work on *New Babylon* (1960-1974) and, finally, his post-*New Babylon* period (1975-2005). Evidenced in photographs, drawings, paintings, letters, newspaper clippings, interviews, lectures, texts, unpublished manuscripts, television broadcasts and documentary films, Constant's sustained relationship with Romani culture, as well as his first hand encounters and personal correspondence with Romani individuals, emerge as some of the most enduring, yet repeatedly disregarded aspects of the artist's life and work. Developing a revisionist account of *New Babylon* and its attendant historiography, I reveal how Constant's daily life and artistic practice, together with some of the key moments in the growth and public display of his project, are framed by references to, yearnings for and personal dealings with Romani – both real and imagined.

If *New Babylon* was, at its most basic level, a way for Constant to test drive theories about architecture, urbanism and society, then his project is now, in turn, a way for me to explore a number of interlocking themes in contemporary arts scholarship. Beyond giving new insights that seek to challenge the established historiography of *New Babylon* and the Situationist International, I have a general, overarching interest in what Preziosi (1998) terms ‘the art of art history’. If Constant’s work on *New Babylon* proves a particularly relevant case study for exploring questions of primitivism, radicalism and discourse, both within and beyond art and architectural scholarship, then it is well suited, also, to raising fundamental questions about the ways we think about, write about and actually go about doing arts research today. What do we choose to acknowledge, include or overlook in our studies and why? What is and is not thought to be of historical importance? What are the limits of the art and architectural ‘object’ and the extent of their relationship to society and history at large? What is the relationship between critical theory, primary research and creative practice, or the place of each in scholarship today?

Presenting as a theoretical and creative project of massive proportions that is also, and simultaneously, an archive of letters, photographs, unfinished texts, newspaper clippings, scraps of paper, and assorted personal ephemera, *New Babylon* is an engaging and provocative object of study. Questioning the apparent selection, editing and curation of texts and imagery that I see informing the work of other scholars to have written on *New Babylon* and the Situationist International, I understand my study of Constant’s project to be similarly caught up in complex processes of identity construction. Using disciplinary specific understandings of ‘rites of passage’ to explore potential affinities between ethnographic fieldwork and art historical archival work (McGowan 2010; Scott 2010), I advocate for a type of art history that acknowledges its authorship and engages with the underlying unruliness, rather than the sanitised authority, of the archive (Kaplan 1990). Like Constant, who worked with the objects, texts and imagery kept in his archive to produce shifting visions of both his project and his identity as an artist, I now revisit that material to generate my version of *New Babylon* and, in turn, a particular sense of self.

## Chapter 1: Outline of a culture

Between about 1960 and 1966 Constant worked on a major book project. Although the result of this undertaking – a German language manuscript titled *New-Babylon, Skizze zu einer Kultur* – was never published, Constant always considered this to be his definitive work on *New Babylon*. Only one copy of the typescript exists, together with a Dutch version, *New-Babylon, een ontwerp voor een cultuur*, which Constant produced simultaneously. Translating as ‘Outline of a Culture’,\* both copies of Constant’s book project are held in the Archief Constant at the RKD in The Hague (RKD 414[a]; RKD 414[b]). Editorial notes accompanying one interview from 1966 describe ‘the New Babylon manuscript’ – which Constant was just completing and actively promoting at the time – as capturing ‘the crowning years of work on this ambitious visionary project’, declaring it to be ‘his lifetime achievement’ (van Garrel and Koolhaas 1966: 15; 2005 [1966]: 11). These were points Constant often repeated in letters and newspaper interviews throughout the 1960s (e.g. RKD 87[b]), consistently stressing the fact that *Skizze zu einer Kultur* was to be his final word on *New Babylon*. Even though Constant placed great importance on his book project, it receives little to no recognition in *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship today. To date, Martin van Schaik is the only other author to pay it any attention at all, making a similar case for *Skizze zu einer Kultur*’s importance to our understanding of *New Babylon* (van Schaik 2005b: 104-122). The book combines together Constant’s diverse thinking about art, architecture, society, culture, urban design, the avant-garde, economics, aesthetics, history, human behaviour and morality, reaching ‘a theoretical density unparalleled by any other writing the artist produced previously or subsequently’ (van Schaik 2005b: 106). Juxtaposing

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\* ‘Skizze’ and ‘ontwerp’ are not necessarily equivalent terms, and do not translate exclusively as ‘outline’. ‘Skizze’ can also mean sketch, while ‘ontwerp’ may be translated variously as ‘design’ or ‘plan’, etc.



descriptions of the technical, mechanical and architectural apparatus of *New Babylon* against Marxist-driven analyses of history and contemporary society, Constant's work on *Skizze zu einer Kultur* is bound up in the representation of culture. It is in this sense that *New Babylon* begins to materialise as an experiment in anthropology. As Constant often argued, 'New Babylon is not a town-planning project, but rather a way of thinking' (RKD 332[b]: 1).

*New Babylon*'s relationship to anthropology is, on the surface, tentative. There is a reference to Malinowski, who Constant turns to for a definition of culture, on the first page of a surviving lecture typescript from 1964 (RKD 332[d]: 1).<sup>5</sup> There is also a Dutch journalist's description of Constant's home library in 1974 which apparently contained academic reference works in sociology, economics, art history and anthropology (RKD 390[a]: 3). Regardless of the depth of the linkage, ethnography has long relied on written descriptions of things like social structures, economics, world view, language, relationships to environment and group behaviour – many of which appear in Constant's written work on *New Babylon* – to generate accounts of other peoples, times and places. Whether consciously or not, there is a sense Constant turns to these methods, also, in his project. Taking on the role of a fictional ethnographer, he attempts to give – through patient observation of the New Babylonian way of life and the environment they inhabit – as detailed an outline as possible of a strange and unfamiliar culture.

My suggestion is that *New Babylon* links, if indirectly, to lesser-known traditions of 'fictive fieldwork' in anthropology. While 'ethnographic fiction', the end result of such writing practices, is often dismissed by anthropologists as 'inappropriate for consideration as ethnography' (Robben and Sluka 2007: 493), Kirin Narayan has nonetheless traced out 'a hidden lineage' – stretching back at least as far as the late 1800s – of anthropologists leading double lives as novelists and fiction writers (Narayan 1999). One influential example of this type of work is Carlos Castaneda's *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (1968). Describing in detail how he came to be initiated into a shamanistic understanding of the universe that was completely different to his own, Castaneda's writings had a notable impact upon

later 20th-century popular culture, including some of the counter-cultural movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The foreword to one early edition of *The Teachings of Don Juan* defends the value of Castaneda's ethnographic work, fictional or not. It suggests ways in which we might begin thinking about *New Babylon* beyond Constant's obvious engagement with questions of architecture and urbanism:

The book is both ethnography and allegory. Carlos Castaneda, under the tutelage of Don Juan, takes us [...] into a world not merely other than our own, but of an entirely different order of reality [...] The central importance of entering into worlds other than our own – and hence of anthropology itself – lies in the fact that the experience leads us to understand that our own world is also a cultural construct. By experiencing other worlds, then, we see our own for what it is [...] Hence the allegory, as well as the ethnography [...] In this work he demonstrates the essential skill of good ethnography – the capacity to enter into an alien world

(Goldschmidt 1968: vii-viii)

Nigel Whiteley terms Reyner Banham (1922-1988), who was almost exactly Constant's contemporary, the 'historian of the immediate future', a title which is meant to capture Banham's ability to distil the essence of his time (Whiteley 2002). Banham had uniquely clear vision, and was particularly able to work with and grasp the importance of 'the everyday' to architecture and design. Often operating in a journalistic capacity during his prolific career as 'the founding father of design studies' (Naylor 1997; Whiteley 1995), Banham distinguished himself from his contemporaries by being a part of – while simultaneously chronicling and theorising – history in the making. He both documented and produced history, that is, as and when it was unfolding around him. While Banham and Constant are by no means equivalent, Constant may have done something similar in his work on *New Babylon*. If Banham was the historian of the immediate future, then Constant – in a far more fictional sense – was attempting to be its ethnographer. He did not necessarily possess the capacity and specific skill set, however, to enter – as Castaneda did – convincingly into an alien world.

In marked contrast to the multiple sculptures, scale models, photographs, maps and other graphic works Constant produced during his work on *New Babylon*, the

surviving German and Dutch typescripts for *Skizze zu einer Kultur* are decidedly un-aesthetic objects; almost unanimously overlooked by scholars for their content, it is notable these texts have no place, visually, in the world of major international exhibitions, richly illustrated catalogues and high-end book publications to which Constant's project now invariably belongs. Even van Schaik, who delivers a comprehensive overview and discussion of *Skizze zu einer Kultur*, gives us no glimpse of these crucial artefacts. He keeps them at a distance, confined to the RKD's archives in The Hague, preferring to illustrate his account of *New Babylon* with a set of images that can be found in most other publications on Constant and the Situationist International: models and graphic works (primarily from the collection of the Haags Gemeentemuseum), photographs from Situationist congresses, other projects of 1960s radical architecture, etc.

Together with the other yellowing papers and newspaper clippings kept in Constant's archive, his *Skizze zu einer Kultur* typescripts hold a strange appeal for me. It is here, rather than in the wide range of exhibit-able art works, that Constant's work continues to exist as an engagingly unfinished project of massive proportions. In the forgotten stacks of messy, work-in-progress typescripts and other obscure ephemera, *New Babylon* reveals its true identity: it is an overly ambitious, out of control experiment belonging to a distinct historical moment. The materiality, alone, of Constant's *Skizze zu einer Kultur* manuscripts remind us that *New Babylon* is not of today's world; their type-written, hand-corrected pages belie the space age aesthetic of his models, especially, revealing the artist's visionary project to be a relic of the past.

The first part of *Skizze zu einer Kultur*, somewhat un-inspiringly titled 'three introductory themes', is split – predictably enough – into three sections: a sociology of the artist; the song of labour; and, the functional Zion. These three sections are further sub-divided into a total of forty headings, covering a range of sequential topics: stagnation, mass culture, the downfall of capitalism, the task of the proletariat and future-architecture, for example. This sweeping, systematic coverage of art and aesthetic theory, Marxist social theory and urban theory (and their linkages), both

past and present, sets up part two of *Skizze zu einer Kultur*, which takes the book's title as its own. Relying absolutely on the varied theoretical ground covered in part one for its validity, the second part of the *New Babylon* book sets out to describe Constant's alternative social vision. It, too, comes in three sections, neatly paralleling the first: unitary urbanism; the new babylonian; and, the new babylonian culture. These, again, are broken into thirty-four sub-sections (thirty-three in the Dutch version), addressing issues as diverse as topography, communication and sexual freedom. The third part of *Skizze zu einer Kultur*, following an appendix and epilogue, was to be an illustrated Atlas of *New Babylon*. While no images are included in either of the typescripts, a series of maps charting the rise of New Babylonian culture throughout the Netherlands and Western Europe – which Constant was actively producing at the time – gives us an indication of his intentions. Overlaying existing maps with pencil, ink, watercolour and collage, Constant imaginatively chronicled the birth and growth of a new race of nomads.

### ***A narrative of encounter and omission***

Omitted from the existing historiography of *New Babylon* and the Situationist International, the surviving *Skizze zu einer Kultur* typescripts – two stacks of meticulously ordered pages marked throughout with multiple hand-scribbled comments, amendments and notes-to-self – establish the central role Romani played in Constant's work and thinking (RKD 414[a]; RKD 414[b]). Perforated along the left hand margin, their key sections flagged by coloured paper tabs, these German and Dutch book drafts simultaneously call into question the work of *New Babylon's* scholars, whose accounts of the artist and his work primarily mark the presence of Romani, like the manuscripts themselves, by way of absence. In the first five pages of *Skizze zu einer Kultur*, Constant's major work on *New Babylon*, Romani dominate the project, in terms of both layout and content (Figure 1.1, Figure 1.2).

The front cover of the German typescript contains the expected: author name and book title in standard typewriter script. In addition to this comes the unexpected, a four-line Spanish *copla* – an improvised verse of satire, love or piety, which can

occur in varying forms, rhythmic and syllabic patterns and is commonly employed within flamenco musical traditions:

Se hundiò la Babilonia  
porqué le faltó el cimientó  
nuestro querer no se acaba  
aunque falte el firmamento

(Babylon sank  
because it lacked a strong foundation  
our love does not end  
although it lacks a sky)\*

This anonymous Spanish folk verse, which directly links Constant's work, through flamenco music, to Romani culture, is the first thing you read when you open *the* book on *New Babylon*. Conjuring up images of the ancient city of Babylon – a place, both mythical and real, that has haunted European imaginations for nearly two thousand years (Finkel and Seymour 2008) – the *copla* establishes Constant's *New Babylon*, from the outset, as an exotic place of intermingling languages and cultures; a world of music, dance, passion, spontaneity and improvisation. For German and Dutch readers fluent in Spanish, it is a sign of the multilingual challenge that follows. For others, it is a hint – a mysterious and exotic opening stanza whose key word, 'Babilonia' is decipherable, or at least suggestive, to most. A table of contents, spread across two pages, follows (Figure 1.1).

The first few pages of the Dutch typescript for *Skizze zu einer Kultur* differ slightly from the German. Its cover, featuring Constant's official 'New Babylon Archiv' stamp, hand-written author name and book title (apparently still being worked out), does not have the *copla*. Next comes the table of contents (again two pages, as in the German version), followed by a typed title page. This title page replicates the German typescript's cover page, with the *copla* appearing, here, on the fourth rather than the first page. Its function is the same, however: it is again a threshold, signalling our point of entry into the alternate universe of *New Babylon* (Figure 1.2).

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\* Translation Karlina Fierro Nordgreen

If an anonymous flamenco verse seems a strange doorway into the sprawling sectors, high-speed transport arteries, fully-automated agricultural zones and global communication networks of *New Babylon*, then what follows is all the more intriguing for it. The fourth and fifth pages of the German typescript (fifth page only in the Dutch version) contain the Foreword to *Skizze zu einer Kultur*, which begins with a newspaper extract attributed to, in the Dutch version, ‘Vaida Voevod III, président de la communauté mondiale gitane’. A footnote at the bottom of the page (added by hand in the Dutch version), cites an interview by Nico Rost published in *Algemeen Handelsblad*, an Amsterdam newspaper, on 18 May 1963:

Nous sommes les symboles d’un monde sans frontières, d’un monde libre, où les armes seront bannies, où chacun pourra se rendre, sans contrainte, des steppes de l’Asie centrale aux rives de l’Atlantique, des hauts plateaux sud-africains aux forêts finlandaises

(RKD 414[b]: 5)\*

(We are the symbols of a world without frontiers, of a free world, where weapons will be banned, where anyone can roam, without constraint, from the steppes of central Asia to the shores of the Atlantic, from the high plateaux of south-Africa to the forests of Finland)

This poetic vision of a world without frontiers, wherein Romani act as archetypes of universal peace, wanderlust and ultimate human freedom, opens on to an emotionally-tinged, first person narrative of Constant’s December 1956 visit to a temporary Romani encampment in Alba. Judging by the text, this experience seems to have left its mark on Constant, as is evidenced by the vivid way in which he recalls the memory and sets the scene for us sometime later.<sup>6</sup> Still a work-in-progress in both the Dutch and German typescripts, Constant’s narrative merges together two seemingly incongruous elements. Muddy earth, planks and petrol cans – harsh realities for a people long persecuted within Europe for pursuing a different way of life – become the platform from which Constant goes on to develop his *New Babylon*

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\* Constant makes some minor transcription errors when reproducing this extract from the original article in *Algemeen Handelsblad* (Rost 1963: 2), where it appears in French: L’Asie Centrale to l’Asie centrale; au to aux; Hautes Plateaux to hauts plateaux. None of these errors affect the meaning of the passage, and the translation found in the German typescript for *Skizze zu einer Kultur* remains faithful to the original.

manifesto. Taking a makeshift Romani encampment in Alba as his point of departure, Constant proclaims the rise of (or return to) global nomadism:

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 Tanaro, 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 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 remodelled living area; a camp for nomads on a planetary scale\*

Originally planned as the first page(s) of full text in *Skizze zu einer Kultur*, Constant's narrative of his December 1956 encounter with Romani in Alba was, originally, the first thing we were meant to read about *New Babylon*. Strategically set up by the *copla* and newspaper extract that immediately prefaces it, Constant's introductory narrative intended to give us a privileged insight into his way of thinking. The text seeks to bring us closer to the artist, his memories and personal experiences. Just as they originally were for Constant, Romani are intentionally presented to us as our way into the alternative, nomadic universe of *New Babylon*; their music (implied in the flamenco *copla*), lifestyle, hardships and 'symbolic role' in society act as our reference points, helping us to navigate, inhabit and relate to the strange urban landscapes and wildly alternative vision of culture that follow. The

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\* This is the translation by John Hammond – with the river name corrected to Tanaro (from 'Tamaro') – included in Andreotti and Costa's *Theory of the Dérive* (Nieuwenhuys 1996 [1974]: 154). The source is Locher's 1974 exhibition catalogue, not the original *Skizze zu einer Kultur* typescripts. The German typescript pictured here uses 'Nomadenstadt', meaning 'nomad city' or 'city of/for nomads' (Figure 1.1). 'Camp for nomads', as it appears in this English translation, replicates the Dutch manuscript's use of 'nomadenkamp', as pictured (Figure 1.2).

image of a destitute Romani encampment in mid-1950s Italy deliberately confronts us, from what is in practice the first page of *Skizze zu einer Kultur*, with the very real existence of an alternative, nomadic lifestyle that appeared to be completely different – then, as now – from the settled norm. Grounding his *New Babylon* book in this particular form of otherness and his personal experience of it, Constant's firsthand encounter with Romani serves to validate fundamentally everything that follows. It gives an anthropological basis to his fictional outline of culture. No matter how curious or out of step Constant's introductory narrative to *Skizze zu einer Kultur* may appear in relationship to the style, tone and content of the rest of the artist's writings, this narrative – together with the *copla* and quote that precede it – was originally conceived as the key to his project. It is more than just a starting point; the move to deliberately include Romani signals an attempt to give life to *New Babylon* and make the nomadic lifestyle it prophesised real.

Unlike the remainder of the texts comprising *Skizze zu einer Kultur*, which circulate in various lecture transcripts, exhibition catalogues, self-published pamphlets, information bulletins and newsletters produced by Constant throughout the 1960s, the *copla*, newspaper extract and narrative making up the first five pages of the original Dutch and German typescripts appear to have been developed explicitly for the purposes of the book project. Positioned in a place of primary importance in *Skizze zu einer Kultur*, the introductory narrative is particularly unique, amongst Constant's many writings – including his texts for the Experimentele Groep, COBRA and the Situationist International – for its open and reflective style, use of first person point of view and incorporation of lived experience and personal memory. Remarkably, none of these materials have been recognised in *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship to date, and certainly not in the way Constant intended.

Occasionally alluded to, paraphrased, selectively quoted and even reprinted in full, Constant's introductory narrative to *Skizze zu einer Kultur*, together with its accompanying *copla* and newspaper extract, has received no historical or critical commentary. The narrative has never been acknowledged, at a most basic level, as



the Foreword to *Skizze zu einer Kultur*. The positioning of the text immediately at the start of Constant's crucial, albeit unpublished, book project has never been made explicit.

Although rare enough in the existing literature, references to and reprints of Constant's opening narrative to *Skizze zu einer Kultur* are only ever linked to its publication, in Dutch, in a 1974 exhibition catalogue edited by Hans Locher for a major retrospective exhibition of *New Babylon* held at the Haags Gemeentemuseum from 15 June to 01 September that year (RKD 443: 27). While Locher's catalogue perhaps comes the closest to realising Constant's original ambitions for *Skizze zu einer Kultur* out of any publication to date, his opening narrative is stripped of its original potency and meaning. Instead of appearing immediately at the start of the catalogue, it follows a lengthy, fifteen-page essay by Locher – that introduces, explains and interprets Constant's work – a further few pages of colour illustrations and, then, another two-page editorial commentary (none of which discuss or refer to the narrative itself). Displaced from its broader contexts, Constant's intended Foreword to *Skizze zu einer Kultur* becomes one piece of writing amongst many, a text buried ambiguously in the pages of an edited exhibition catalogue prepared and presented by someone else. Not only do we lose all sense of the narrative's intended placement in *Skizze zu einer Kultur* – and, by extension, its obvious importance to Constant's personal understanding of his project – we quickly lose sight of Romani and their impact upon the artist's work and thinking. Locher's catalogue, which never mentions or alludes to Romani, goes on to include only a fraction of the texts that would have appeared in *Skizze zu einer Kultur*.

Following Constant's narrative, the surviving typescripts for *Skizze zu einer Kultur* present a set of key definitions and the book's three major sections. Locher's catalogue, by contrast, gives us the definitions and an abridged, modified version of the book's second section only. Titled 'New Babylon, een schets voor een cultuur' (RKD 443: 49-63), Locher's shortened 1974 rendition of Constant's book, slotted in amongst a number of other texts written by Constant throughout his career, is at best a 'free adaptation' – his words – of the original.<sup>7</sup> With the first and third sections of

the original *Skizze zu einer Kultur* project left out entirely, the remaining, edited snippet of section two contained in Locher's catalogue is, moreover, cut off from the book's original Foreword and Definitions by about twenty pages. The *copla*, in turn, is similarly separated from the Foreword by fourteen pages (RKD 443: 3, 27, 29-30). While Locher quite rightly gives us Constant's narrative of his December 1956 visit to a Romani encampment in Alba, he does not allow that experience to genuinely impact Constant's work on *New Babylon*, or our understanding of the artist and his project. Indeed, these materials remain outside his professional, scholarly commentary on Constant's project.

It has been the same ever since. Four lines from an anonymous Spanish folk song, a newspaper extract quoting an individual named Vaida Voevod III and Constant's narrative of his December 1956 encounter with Romani in Alba have never been, as they were meant to have been, our first points of entry into *New Babylon*. Even van Schaik, in his otherwise detailed description of the *Skizze zu einer Kultur* manuscripts, leaves out the Romani material entirely. His analysis of the typescript (and argument for the importance of the book to our understanding of Constant's work today) begins, instead, with the four Definitions – utilitarian society, homo ludens, play and social space – that follow the *copla*, newspaper extract and narrative. In marked contrast to what I have argued here, he establishes these terms as the key moment in Constant's project (van Schaik 2005b: 106).

The only pieces of *Skizze zu einer Kultur* existing in print today are translations of texts that were first adapted, rearranged and freely interpreted by Locher in 1974. Thus, our understanding of *New Babylon* has repeatedly hinged on an edited part of a much larger whole. Presenting a modified and incomplete version of Constant's work on *Skizze zu einer Kultur*, Locher's catalogue has nonetheless served as a key location of primary source material for subsequent publications on *New Babylon*. Influential books and exhibition catalogues by Libero Andreotti and Xavier Costa (1996b), Jean-Clarence Lambert (1997) and Mark Wigley (1998), for example, all include materials (in Spanish, French and English translation) from Locher's streamlined, 1974 version of *Skizze zu einer Kultur*. Collectively, these authors make

no attempt to get back to Constant's original book manuscripts (cf. Nieuwenhuys 1975: 202-230; 1996 [1974]: 154-169; 1997 [1975]: 49-99; 1998 [1974]: 160-165). Using Locher as their starting point, errors and slippages quickly occur, taking us even further away from Constant's original work on *New Babylon*.

Andreotti and Costa (1996b), for example, date the partial, 1974 Dutch version of *Skizze zu einer Kultur*, which they translate into English and Spanish, to the publication of Locher's exhibition catalogue, only. Failing to acknowledge the original 1960-1966 typescripts on which Locher's work was based, they rename the text 'New Babylon' and somewhat incorrectly label it a 'post-SI' document.<sup>8</sup> Although they keep the heading 'Definitions', they notably drop 'Foreword' from their reprint of Constant's opening narrative (Nieuwenhuys 1996 [1974]: 154). Wigley similarly relies on Locher's catalogue for the partial reprint of *Skizze zu einer Kultur* found in his seminal 1998 monograph; although he does recognise the existence of a previous, unpublished book manuscript in his editorial notes, it appears he – like Andreotti and Costa – never looked back to the original for comparison (Wigley 1998: 160). Already presented piecemeal by Locher in 1974, the English translation provided by Wigley further fractures the original layout of *Skizze zu einer Kultur*. With Romani having first been dislocated from their primary position in Constant's work by Locher, Wigley leaves out the Foreword to *Skizze zu einer Kultur* completely. From their prominent and revealing placement within the first five pages of Constant's original 1960s typescripts, Romani vanish without a trace (Nieuwenhuys 1998 [1974]) from Wigley's work on *New Babylon*, self-styled – on the back cover of his 1998 monograph – as 'the first complete record of the project'.<sup>9</sup>

By my count, Constant's introductory narrative to *Skizze zu einer Kultur* has been reprinted or quoted in full nine times after first appearing in Locher's 1974 exhibition catalogue (RKD 443: 27). In every reprint to date, the text is never acknowledged as the Foreword to *Skizze zu einer Kultur* and there is no further commentary – editorial, historical, critical or otherwise – on the actual contents of the narrative. While Romani thus appear sporadically in some publications on *New*

*Babylon* and the Situationist International, the potential relationship between Romani and Constant's work – beyond the recurring acknowledgment that he visited a Romani encampment in Alba – is never discussed (Appendix 1). In addition, the extract from Nico Rost's 1963 article, first published in *Algemeen Handelsblad*, is sometimes kept separate from Constant's introductory narrative or, alternatively, omitted altogether. The flamenco *copla*, for its part, has yet to be included in publications on *New Babylon* and the Situationist International; the sole exceptions being Locher's 1974 catalogue (RKD 443: 3) and a very brief text by Franco Torriani written – in Italian – for a mid-1980s exhibition catalogue on the work of Giuseppe Gallizio (Torriani 1984: 101). Locher, however, denies the proximity of the *copla* to the Foreword, as originally planned by Constant, keeping these two important references to Romani separated by fourteen pages in his catalogue (RKD 443: 3, 27). Torriani, whose source is Locher's catalogue, includes the *copla* and only a snippet of the Foreword, which he blends into his own writing.

After Locher's 1974 exhibition catalogue, the first reprint of Constant's introductory narrative to *Skizze zu einer Kultur* was a French translation by Irina Paslariu (Paslariu-Lambert) published one year later in a book titled *Nomades et vagabonds* (Nieuwenhuys 1975: 202-203). Her translation has since recycled twice, in Jean-Clarence Lambert's *Constant: Les trois espaces* and *New Babylon* (Nieuwenhuys 1992 [1975]; 1997 [1975]). In all instances, Paslariu misspells the name of the river running through Alba. The first reprint of Constant's introductory narrative in English (and Spanish) is a 1996 translation by John Hammond featured in *Theory of the Dérive*, an influential collection of Situationist texts edited by Andreotti and Costa (Nieuwenhuys 1996 [1974]: 154). Like Paslariu, they too misspell the name of the river – an error that has been repeated by others (e.g. Hailey 2008: 76-77, Appendix 1). Following Locher's lead, these reprints do keep Constant's opening narrative together with the newspaper extract from *Algemeen Handelsblad*, however.

When Lambert's 1997 book acts in turn as a reference point for Careri's *New Babylon, una città nomade* of 2001, Constant's narrative – now translated into Italian and embedded as a quotation within Careri's own writing – is kept separate from the

newspaper extract by 19 pages (Careri 2001: 5, 24-26). Careri repeats the move the following year in his influential book *Walkscapes*; the extract is again separated from the narrative and the order in which they originally appeared in Constant's work is reversed (Careri 2002: 112, 114). Although he corrects the name of the river in most of his writings (not Careri 2002), Careri omits the newspaper extract altogether from his later work, leaving it out of both his 2005 contribution to *Domus* and a co-authored text for a catalogue on Gallizio (Careri 2005: 106-107; Careri and Comisso 2005: 22-24). Andreotti and Costa do the inverse in their 1996 exhibition catalogue, *Situationists: Art, Politics, Urbanism* (Andreotti and Costa 1996a). Omitting Constant's opening narrative from this catalogue, to which their *Theory of the Dérive* (which does include it) acts as a companion volume (Andreotti and Costa 1996b), Andreotti and Costa present the extract from Nico Rost's 1963 article for *Algemeen Handelsblad* as a 'text object' in Spanish and English translation. Taken out of its original contexts, it is recreated as a piece of graphic design in its own right, floating independently on an otherwise blank page (Andreotti and Costa 1996a: 147). It has no obvious meaning in the contexts of their catalogue and is not utilised, referred to or commented upon by any of the contributors to the volume. In the catalogue published for one of the most recent exhibitions on the Situationist International, *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*, held in 2006-2007, Constant's introductory narrative and parts of his *New Babylon* text feature once again – this time in an alphabetical list of Situationist terms and ideas compiled by Stefan Zweifel. His curated selection of 'Titles and Taunts', as Zweifel calls them, takes us ever further from Constant's original work, however, with *Skizze zu einer Kultur* and *Romani* drifting progressively into oblivion (Zweifel 2006: 197).

Throughout these reprints of Constant's work, which are all based directly or indirectly on Locher's 1974 catalogue, there is a telling pattern of minor errors in translation and transcription: as with the river, the Tanaro, being misspelled 'Tamaro'. This is particularly true, and revealing, in the case of the *Algemeen Handelsblad* newspaper extract, which Constant originally selected, transcribed (with some minor errors of his own) and deliberately positioned at the very start of his Dutch and German *Skizze zu einer Kultur* typescripts. From the time of Paslariu's

translation – first published, only a year after Locher’s catalogue, in 1975 – the original, prominent placement of the newspaper extract in Constant’s original book project has not only been ignored, its content has been consistently flawed (Appendix 2). Within the multiple modifications that may be detected, the most striking change is from ‘les symboles’ to ‘les symboles vivants’ – the symbols, to the living symbols (los símbolos vivientes, i simboli viventi, los símbolos vivos).<sup>10</sup> The name of the Romani organisation led by Vaida Voevod III, to whom the extract is ultimately attributed, is similarly affected: ‘Communauté Mondiale Gitane’, as it correctly appears in the Dutch version of Constant’s original *Skizze zu einer Kultur* typescript, becomes – in a number of languages – ‘Communauté Mondiale des Gitans’ (Appendix 2).

Human error is of course unavoidable, and some may think it overly zealous to point to these minor mistakes in the work of other scholars. Yet these slippages, if unintended, are not entirely innocuous: they reveal, I argue, an underlying problem with current *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship. These basic inaccuracies are symptomatic of the way Constant’s relationship to Romani has been left ambiguous and un-investigated in contemporary scholarship. If these observations appear banal, they raise serious questions about the ways in which scholarship has been conducted, to date, in this particular field of study. Who is Nico Rost? Who is Vaida Voevod III? What is the Communauté Mondiale Gitane? Does getting the name of this organisation wrong matter? What else has been left out, intentionally or not, of the established historiography of Constant and his project?

### ***A literature of consensus***

Typically positioned as the second phase of a three-part career (Lambert 1992) that spanned more than sixty-five years, Constant’s *New Babylon* arrived at the centre of avant-garde architectural discourse in the mid-to-late 1990s (Heynen 1996; Sadler 1998; Wigley 1998). First circulating in studies of the Situationist International and its legacies, which began already with key edited volumes and exhibition catalogues in the 1980s (Knabb 2006 [1981]; Blazwick 1989; Sussman 1989), Constant’s

project is now firmly established as a key reference point in contemporary scholarship, addressed by a number of distinguished writers including Hilde Heynen, Thomas Levin, Tom McDonough, Simon Sadler and Mark Wigley. While there was some limited historical, theoretical and critical writing on *New Babylon* during the time of Constant's original work on the project (Banham 1976; Nicoletti 1971; Ragon 1972; RKD 441; RKD 443; RKD 471), the current popularity of *New Babylon* occurs in the contexts of a renewed scholarly interest in the broader history and legacies of the Situationist International – in particular, the work and thinking of Guy Debord. Constant's project has been called a number of things in recent years – an 'indeterminate utopia' (Sadler 2001), the 'antinomies of utopia' (Heynen 1996), a 'persistent provocation' (Heintz 2005), an 'architectural provocation' (van Schaik and Mácel 2005), a 'provocation rather than a city' (Wigley 1998: 71), 'activist drawing' (de Zegher and Wigley 2001) and 'hyper-architecture' (Wigley 1998) – but the lasting labels for *New Babylon* appear to be those which explicitly link the project to the Situationist International: 'Situationist architecture' (Andreotti 2000: 51), 'Situationist city' (Sadler 1998; Spiller 2006: 44); and, for Constant, 'Situationist architect' (Wigley 1998: 12).

The prominence of Constant's *New Babylon* within art and architectural scholarship, as in Situationist International research generally, is testified by an ever-growing bibliography of publications; these, in turn, increasingly impact on fields as diverse as geography (Pinder 2001; 2005), media studies and war (Mirzoeff 2005), anthropology and virtual reality (Malaby 2008) and development studies (Jorna 2006). Often linked temporally, conceptually and aesthetically to the work of other radical architects of the 1960s, *New Babylon* arguably stands at the forefront of that now-celebrated canon of post-war experimental practice. The editors of *Exit Utopia: Architectural Provocations, 1956-76*, for example, position Constant's work as 'the yardstick' and 'utopian conscience' (van Schaik 2005a: 9) by which to measure and interrogate related megastructural proposals by Yona Friedman, Archigram, Superstudio, Archizoom, Rem Koolhaas/OMA and Léon Krier. Jane Alison, editor of *Future City: Experiment and Utopia in Architecture*, an exhibition held at the Barbican in London in 2006, similarly describes Constant's work as the project from which that show 'takes its cue' (Alison 2007: 7); for Kate Bush, Constant's 'now-

legendary' project is, again, 'the starting point' from which to judge all other works of visionary architecture, both present and future (Bush 2007: 5). In the book produced to accompany the recent Situationist International exhibition, *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*, Constant is once more singled out, in the company of Buckminster Fuller, Peter Cook, Ron Heron and other leading 20th-century radicals, as 'the foremost visionary' (Sloterdijk 2006: 97) of our time.

Although *New Babylon* now has an extensive bibliography, the established historiography of Constant's project is, arguably, somewhat one-dimensional. Focused primarily on relationships between Constant and the Situationist International in about 1956 to 1962, a time period dubbed 'the heroic phase' by Home (1991), the literature currently available on *New Babylon* exhibits a notable degree of consensus. While scholars bring varying degrees of historical and theoretical nuance to their readings of *New Babylon*, none offer very divergent or opposing perspectives on Constant and his work. There are of course some points of contention, but not nearly as many as might be expected.

Van Schaik has briefly challenged Wigley for popularising and depoliticising Constant's work. He calls into question the way Wigley 'successfully re-canonised *New Babylon* for an architectural audience' by connecting it 'to fashionable talk about "research", "discourse" and "polemic", thereby assuring its appeal'. Van Schaik sees Wigley problematically 'Killing the visionary and utopian in Constant' in order to render 'the artist's decidedly Marxist project more palatable' to both its contemporary 'audience' and 'the historian addressing it' (van Schaik 2005b: 233). Alongside van Schaik, John Heintz has criticised Heynen for her apparently 'moralistic' (his term) reading of *New Babylon*. Developing an argument similar to van Schaik's, Heintz attacks both Heynen and Wigley for their claims of 'dystopia', arguing that their analyses of *New Babylon* are ultimately manifestations of their 'own conventional ideas of the good life'. For him, these seminal readings of Constant's work are too bound up in their own subjectivity, and thus fail to understand *New Babylon* on its own terms: 'It matters not', he counters, 'if we find a particular utopia not to our taste' (Heintz 2005: 214, 217-218).



On the one hand, I agree with this ‘second generation’ scholarship to the extent that it advocates, on at least some level, for renewed perspectives on Constant and his work. I too think there are problems with the manner in which *New Babylon* has, as van Schaik puts it, been ‘warmly embraced by an American academic elite’ (van Schaik 2005a: 8). I remain particularly wary of the way Constant’s work circulates in leading avant-garde publications such as *Grey Room* and *October* as a somewhat a-cultural and a-historical form of Situationist practice. Indeed, the special 1997 issue of *October* dedicated exclusively to the theme of ‘Guy Debord and the Internationale situationniste’, edited by Tom McDonough (1997), includes translations of letters and texts by Constant that are wrongfully credited to Constant Burniaux (1892-1975), who was in fact a Belgian art historian (Nieuwenhuys 1997 [1958]; 1997 [1959]).<sup>11</sup> Notably stripped of its post-war, European and specifically Dutch identity, *New Babylon* is – beyond this glaring case of misattribution – most often offered up for consumption today as an aesthetic object in English translation. The project’s political and historical contexts, like its massive textual component, are typically kept to one side. There has been a tendency to dismiss Constant’s writings, in particular – a trend that perhaps explains the absence of *Skizze zu einer Kultur* (and thus to some extent *Romani*, also) from publications on *New Babylon* and the Situationists. Constant’s texts have been described as ‘charmingly naive’, for example; ‘nice stories’ that ‘simply fall short’ and ‘do not make for very solid theory’ (Heynen et al. 1999: 23-24).<sup>12</sup> Other scholars have taken a stronger view still, with Wigley apparently declaring that ‘There is nothing interesting about New Babylon except the drawings’ (Wigley in Heintz 2005: 212, 219).

Like van Schaik, then, I also suspect some previous scholars of *New Babylon* – Wigley in particular – of having ‘done everything’ possible ‘to turn Constant’s project into something it is not’ (van Schaik 2005b: 233). At the same time, he and Heintz do much the same, in turn, in their own work. It is disappointing, for example, that van Schaik – being Dutch and thus potentially in a position to inject some local insight into what has progressively become a global, primarily English-language and dominantly American field of study – keeps his probing commentary contained to a

few speculative, concluding paragraphs. With his criticisms of Wigley's work positioned at the very end of his extended essay on *New Babylon*, van Schaik's analysis otherwise covers very little new ground. He casually mentions things such as Constant's occasional 'Dutch interviews', which remain virtually unknown 'on the international scene', but it is unclear which interviews van Schaik is referring to or what correctives and insights these might offer us in particular (van Schaik 2005b: 233). In fact, the Dutch interview he does translate and include in his book (van Garrel and Koolhaas 2005 [1966]) is, notably, one that had already been discussed by Bart Lootsma (1999; 2001; 2007), was published in a separate English translation only one year later (van Garrel and Koolhaas 2006 [1966]) and has subsequently been canonised – in my view problematically so – as *the* interview on *New Babylon*.<sup>13</sup>

Taking Lambert's 1992 text as a starting point for studies in art and architectural history, there has now been sustained, subject-specific scholarship on *New Babylon* and the Situationist International for about twenty years. If we consider Knabb's early anthology of Situationist texts as an alternative starting point, then the history of *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship can be seen stretching back nearly thirty years (Knabb 2006 [1981]). The catalogues published for key retrospective exhibitions on Constant and Gallizio, hosted by leading European art institutions as early as 1974, take us back further still (Bandini 1974; RKD 443). Given the time span – now over 35 years, from the last perspective offered – that the Situationist International, including Constant's work on *New Babylon*, has been a focus for major exhibitions and serious scholarly study alike, the level of consensus in the field is rather remarkable. The writings of Mirella Bandini, editor of the 1974 exhibition catalogue on Gallizio and the Situationists, are a case in point. While Bandini has been something of a mainstay in Situationist International discourse, writing initially as a historian partly bound up in the events unfolding around her in Italy, she has incorporated very little new ideas or insights into her original analysis. Her work nonetheless continues to impact contemporary scholarship on the Situationist International, both in English and Italian. Spanning at least two decades from 1974 to 1996, Bandini's scholarship is an obvious example of how little has

changed in the course of nearly 40 years of research (Bandini 1974; 1984; 1989; 1996). Peter Wollen's writings on the Situationist International have similarly recycled through a number of iterations while incorporating only minor changes (Wollen 1989a; 1989b; 1993).<sup>14</sup> Like Bandini's work, Wollen's texts appear symptomatic of Situationist International and *New Babylon* scholarship in general: this field of study seems to be driven by an increasingly hermetic, self-referential discourse that continues to grow in length without ever really changing in content, either.

It is not only the consistency in the critical, theoretical and historical interpretation of Constant's project and the wider Situationist programme that concerns me, however. I am equally intrigued by the limited stock of reference points, images and archival materials that now circulate, often with marked frequency, in contemporary scholarship. There is a sense, particularly when we look at the imagery incorporated into most publications today, that everything of value has already been found, situated and analysed. On closer inspection it seems many authors writing on *New Babylon* and the Situationist International at present have not, however, consulted the relevant archives. Neither have they ventured far beyond their field of study, typically linking to and drawing upon closely related sources within the discipline. Indeed, most writers now rely on a rather fixed body of published material, which they often have ownership over already (in the form of translated texts and documents, for example). Together with those authors who depend on their work to act in turn as a primary source in its own right, they continuously turn over this material without shifting or expanding their underlying focus. McDonough's multiple writings on Guy Debord and the Situationists' thinking about aesthetics and urbanism, including his analyses of *New Babylon*, provide evidence of this. Five separate texts published between 1994 and 2009 – during which time McDonough also issued three influential, edited collections of Situationist materials in English translation (McDonough 1997; 2002a; 2009) – repeat the same basic sequence of images. His selection of illustrations is often presented in the same order:

1. Debord's *The Naked City* map of 1957 (McDonough 1994: 59; 2001: 96; 2002b: 242; 2009: 89);

2. Madeleine de Scudéry's *Carte de Tendre* of 1653 (McDonough 1994: 61; 2002b: 244; 2009: 93);
3. a map of the 5th arrondissement from the *Plan de Paris* (McDonough 1994: 63; 2002b: 247);
4. a map of the residential units of the Wattignies district of the 12th arrondissement of Paris from Chombart de Lauwe's *Paris et l'agglomération parisienne* of 1952 (McDonough 1994: 67; 2002b: 251; 2009: 83);
5. an aerial photograph of Paris, dated 1950, also from de Lauwe's work (McDonough 1994: 71; 2002b: 256; 2009: 15);
6. a further diagram from de Lauwe's book, showing the routes taken during one year by a girl living in the 16th arrondissement of Paris (McDonough 1996: 61; 2001: 95; 2009: 83);
7. and, a page with the title 'Nouveau théâtre d'opérations dans la culture' (new theatre of operation for culture) from the first issue of *Internationale situationniste* (McDonough 1994: 72; 2002b: 258; 2009: 13)

Many of these images are also used by other scholars. Debord's *Naked City*, de Scudéry's *Carte de Tendre* and the image of the 'new theatre of operations' from the Situationists' journal for example are included in Andreotti's 2000 contribution to *October*, which in turn recycles in McDonough's edited volume of 2002 (Andreotti 2000: 37, 46, 48). This limited frame of reference, of which McDonough's (and Andreotti's) repeating choice of imagery is but one example, seems symptomatic of *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship: there is a growing sense, today, that a recycling collection of standard statements, texts and images now saturates this field of study.

One example of this pattern of 'historification' (Home and Rumney 1989) is the notion, still frequently circulating in scholarship today, that Constant's so-called 'turn from painting' following the dissolution of COBRA in 1951 was absolute. While this was never the case, Catherine de Zegher is one writer who has persisted with the claim. In the introduction to her influential edited volume *The Activist Drawing*, de Zegher flatly states that 'painting was relegated to oblivion, literally given up by Constant in 1953 because he doubted its transforming potential' (de Zegher 2001: 10). In the 'Chronology' that ends the book, Wigley – de Zegher's co-editor for the project – reiterates the point: 'On his return to Amsterdam [in 1953], Constant rejects painting and starts making three-dimensional constructions' (Wigley 2001a: 141). The existence of brightly coloured, expressive oil paintings such as *De Zon* of 1956 (Figure 1.3) and *Adieu la p.* of 1962 (Figure 1.4) clearly complicate the

premise.<sup>15</sup> A 2003 discussion between Constant and Linda Boersma – in which they talk explicitly about a 1999 symposium and exhibition on *New Babylon* held in New York (for which de Zegher and Wigley were responsible) – offers a less absolute, and more plausible, account of history:

LB: During the symposium all the attention was focused on New Babylon and the architecture, and at the Drawing Center only works on paper that were related to New Babylon were exhibited. There were no paintings by you to be seen in New York. Didn't that give a distorted view of your oeuvre? In Europe you're known as a painter first and foremost [...] But for the Americans you'll always be the conceptual architect of New Babylon, a project that you were finished with decades ago.

C: Well, I did work on New Babylon for many years, of course, certainly 15 years, 10 of which I hardly painted at all [...] But I've also painted within the framework of the New Babylon project, and these have never been shown in the United States either. That should be rectified, I think. Because I'm a painter, of course. And I always have been, right from when I was young  
(Boersma 2005)

The veracity of other ideas, like that of the supposed connection between the Situationist International and the riots of May 1968 in Paris, is more open to debate. If I remain a confessed sceptic here, many authors appear to have no reservations about linking the two. More often than not the claim is delivered by way of climax in the final sentence of many essays on *New Babylon* and the Situationists:

The affiliation of MIBI, propelled by Jorn, Pinot-Gallizio, and Constant's desire to theorize and create a new, active role for the artist in society [...] with Debord's LI [...] formed the first revolutionary nucleus [the Situationist International] of the inexorable chain reaction that, in a series of detonating events, would eventually explode for the most part in May of 1968 in France  
(Bandini 1989: 71)

[...] another direction lay open for the extension of play-tactics into highly politicized behavior, as seen in the urban poetry of the graffiti, the wild architecture of the barricades, and the *détournement* of entire city streets in May '68  
(Andreotti 2000: 56-57)<sup>16</sup>

The revolution may have gained ground in [...] the art world, but it now had to be reactivated in the streets. In a few years, the events of May 1968 would offer that opportunity  
(Pezolet 2010: 85)

Spanning 21 years in these three examples alone, the continuity of this idea and the particular way in which it is often offered up as an ‘end point’ for Situationist history is rarely challenged within the field of *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship. Rather, an accompanying body of imagery only consolidates, and engrains, the claim: photographs of overturned, burned-out cars and dug-up street pavements on the Rue Gay Lussac, for example, are often deployed by authors who seem to suggest that this, in fact, is the closest we have ever come to ‘the situationist city’ (Andreotti 2000: 56-57; van Schaik and Mácel 2005: 177-178; Obrist 2009). A notable exception to this particular trend is Stewart Home. Asked in an interview of 1994 whether he thought that avant-garde movements such as the Situationist International ‘tend to assume a greater importance for themselves than is actually due’, Home responds that in his opinion this is most certainly the case:

Yes, they do in a lot of ways. It’s like the whole absurd notion that the Situationist International had any influence on May ’68... they just didn’t! At that time, virtually no-one had heard of them, but now a lot of people will try to tell you it was the S.I. that were behind May ’68... a lot of what happened was far more spontaneous, it certainly wasn’t the Situationists that caused it  
(Home 1994)

My intention is not to side, either way, in such debates – extant or not – about ‘the end of painting’ and ‘the riots of May 1968’. These claims exist in the available scholarship regardless, and it is their potential function therein, rather than their relative historical accuracy, that captures my attention. Has the conflation of these two ideas – particularly when combined together with the tendency to discount or overlook Constant’s textual production in his work on *New Babylon* – conditioned our understanding of Constant’s project at the expense of Romani? To what extent does a focus on questions of architecture and the city – especially urban insurrection – serve to limit, or write out entirely, the presence of Romani in historiographies of *New Babylon* and the Situationist International?

In the introduction to his most recent publication in the field, McDonough touches upon the problematic of ‘consensus’ in Situationist International scholarship (McDonough 2009: 1-3). Although he is, in his own way, perhaps fully implicated in this condition, McDonough points to a ‘bias’ within the ‘disciplinary subspeciality’

of ‘architectural history’ that ‘has devoted itself to the rediscovery of that rather brief moment of 1957-62, what we might call the group’s “architectural interlude”’.

Arguing that most art and architectural research on the Situationist International has followed far too singular a trajectory, McDonough describes how his work aims to trace out an ‘alternate history’ to the one that has long ‘been at the center of earlier scholarship’. He then advocates for the need to reveal those narratives that have *resisted* (his emphasis) incorporation into mainstream history writing on the Situationist International (McDonough 2009: 2). While I share this conviction, and see my work responding directly to that task, my version of ‘what *cannot* be assimilated’ into contemporary scholarship on *New Babylon* and the Situationist International seems far removed from his own. As McDonough looks to bring previously overlooked notions of ‘what we might call a Hegelian urbanism’ into our contemporary understanding of the Situationists’ post-war theorisations of the city (McDonough 2009: 3), I find him burying – amongst other things – the Romani subtext of *New Babylon* beneath ever more layers of fashionable, neo-avant-garde rhetoric.

### ***A denial of primitivism***

When writers like Andreotti present *New Babylon* as ‘This single attempt to work out the technical, structural and sociopolitical outlines of a Situationist architecture’ (Andreotti 2000: 51), they have typically accepted, already, the premise that the Situationist International is – to refer to Sadie Plant’s position – the most radical gesture of the postmodern age (Plant 1992). In these contexts, it seems Constant’s alleged dismissal of painting serves a particular purpose: to sever the connection, which otherwise surely exists, between the Situationists and COBRA. The existing literature typically begins after COBRA and then looks forward, only: to May 1968, to cyberspace, virtual reality and the Internet, for example. *New Babylon* is then firmly positioned, as McDonough puts it, ‘as a harbinger of our present’ (McDonough 2001: 102). Some of Constant’s writings – notably, from his period of collaboration with the Situationists – are routinely called into service to substantiate this notion, with ‘The Great Game to Come’ and ‘Another City for Another Life’ in

particular providing the necessary evidence (best illustrated by photographs of Constant's *Spatiovore*): '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' (Nieuwenhuys 1998 [1959]-c: 111); and, 'We crave adventure. Not finding it on earth, some men have gone to seek it on the moon' (Nieuwenhuys 1998 [1959]-a: 115). Referring to such texts, which appear to be favourites for reprints in English translation, writers like Sadler go on to reiterate the point, explaining how *New Babylon* 'even looked forward to being sited in outer space' (Sadler 1998: 155).

On the surface, there is an obvious impetus within architectural scholarship, especially, to focus the attention on questions of architecture and urbanism. Thus, we repeatedly find statements like this one from Wigley stressing the radical change in Constant's primary field of activity:

After the breakup of the COBRA group [in 1951...] Constant moves to London and is increasingly fascinated by the intricacies and fluidities of urban form. He becomes convinced that the city itself realizes the dreams of avant-garde artists better than does their work

(Wigley 2001a: 141)

Indeed, scholars typically preclude the question of primitivism from discussions of *New Babylon* and the Situationist International without first considering its potential relevance. Constant's obsession with the machine and technology is seen to be justification enough for this move, although from my point of view the primitive and the high-tech are by no means exclusive. Sadler for example, whose influential 1998 book is one of the few sources to even include the term, fleetingly mentions primitivism by way of dismissal only, positioning *New Babylon* as the opposite of COBRA: 'The swing away from the essential "primitivism" and expressionist individualism of COBRA to an embrace of the machine [...] industrial culture and its technologies' (Sadler 1998: 151).

At the same time, I wonder to what degree the repeating emphasis on the space age qualities and high tech materiality of Constant's work hints at a scholarly uneasiness, acknowledged or not, about the full lineage of his *New Babylon* project. Does



proclaiming Constant's *New Babylon* texts undeveloped and unsophisticated, for example, allow writers to bypass the task of addressing their content? Van Schaik for example uses the presence of steel and plexiglass in Constant's models to demonstrate 'the high-tech character of New Babylon, reminding us that Constant is emphatically not preaching a return to human prehistory' (van Schaik 2005b: 112). Andreotti similarly focuses on *New Babylon*'s 'tensile system of cables and steel elements' (Andreotti 2002: 229). Wigley likewise draws attention to 'the latest and imagined technologies', including 'state-of-the-art lightweight titanium and nylon' (Wigley 1998: 13, 17), as does Sadler – who almost identically explains how 'suppleness would be achieved through the use of lightweight products that were coming out of materials science' at the time, such as 'titanium floors and nylon pavements and partitions' (Sadler 1998: 132). Heynen, too, writes of the 'atmosphere of an airport or a space station' (Heynen 1999: 164). Time and again, we read how *New Babylon* is science fiction architecture – an intensely futuristic and strictly forward-looking project that even borders on the extra-terrestrial. Constant's work clearly has nothing to do with COBRA which despite being separated from the start of *New Babylon* in Alba by five short years is often no more than a footnote for most writers today.<sup>17</sup>

The template for such a divide is certainly provided by Lambert, whose work is often cited by other scholars for anything to do with Constant's oeuvre outside of *New Babylon*. Lambert repeatedly splits Constant's work into three distinct stages: COBRA, *New Babylon* and the final return to painting (Lambert 1992; 1996; 1997; Lambert and Nieuwenhuys 2001). His approach is epitomised by a statement made in an interview with Constant published in *Architectural Design* in 2001: 'nothing can be more anti-COBRA than New Babylon; nothing more anti-New Babylon than your current work' (Lambert and Nieuwenhuys 2001: 24).

On the surface, the various media and techniques Constant used throughout his life sometimes appear to be at odds: what could the intentionally childlike, emotional renderings in oil on canvas of the artist's COBRA paintings possibly have in common with the elaborate, technological constructions in metal, wood and plastics

of the architect's *New Babylon* models? Yet some of the imagery remains consistent enough with the instinctive markings and vibrant colours of Constant's COBRA pieces finding clear corollaries in many of the graphic works, as well as some of the textural effects applied to the models, produced for *New Babylon*. But it is the continuity in the underlying motive of the work that is truly striking. The Marxist utopia first envisaged by Constant and his COBRA colleagues, a world where all people would, like 'primitives', be artists and life itself would be art, needs very little work to become *New Babylon*. Simply insert the words architects and architecture into the original COBRA formulation – best captured in Constant's 1948 'Manifesto' (RKD 272[a]; Nieuwenhuys 1996 [1948])<sup>18</sup> published in the first issue of *Reflex* in 1948 (Figure 1.5) – and you almost have it. As Stokvis, whose expertise lies with COBRA rather than the Situationists, briefly states – with *New Babylon* 'Constant was, in fact, following up on the Cobra ideals' (Stokvis 2004: 270).

Constant's *Skizze zu einer Kultur* – which surfaces, as if in miniature, in some of his surviving lecture typescripts from 1963 to 1966 – notably sees the return of the 1948 COBRA manifesto. Its main ideas effectively make up, in modified form, the core of the introduction to his book on *New Babylon*. As in *Skizze zu einer Kultur*, Constant's point of departure for lectures given in London in November 1963 (RKD 332[b]) and Copenhagen in March 1964 (RKD 341), for example, is the same as the one found in his COBRA polemic: the stagnation of Western culture and the failure of art to fulfil a revolutionary role in society. Following the narrative of his December 1956 visit to a Romani encampment in Alba, the opening eight lines of the first chapter to Constant's unpublished book manuscript take up a theme that was the backdrop against which COBRA first positioned their attempts to realise 'de opbloei van een allen omvattende volkskunst' (RKD 272[a]: 1) or, the revival of an all encompassing folk art:

Die Zeit, in der wir leben, ist eine Zeit der Stagnation. Solch simple Feststellung könnte als banal abgetan werden, wäre sie für uns, Künstler, nicht so deprimierend. Stagnation heisst, dass Ideen und Wunschbilder unrealisierbar bleiben. Stagnation bedeutet, dass es uns, schöpferischen Menschen, fast unmöglich ist, unsere potentiellen Fähigkeiten in Tatkraft umzusetzen. Unsere Hauptbeschäftigung ist das Warten geworden, wir warten, wir erwarten tatenlos unsere Leben

(The time, in which we live, is a time of stagnation. Such a simple statement could be dismissed as banal, were it not so depressing for us, artists. Stagnation means that ideas and ideals remain unrealisable. Stagnation means, that it is nearly impossible for us, creative people, to convert our potential ability into energy. Our primary occupation has become waiting, we wait, we idly await our lives)

COBRA was an all-out attack on Western notions of art, beauty, culture, society, economics and aesthetics. As the group's prime theoretician, Constant championed the imminent rise of a fantastically new 'people's art'\* and accompanying form of human behaviour that would be impulsive, visceral and ugly. Creative expression, like life itself, was to be instinctive and child-like, driven by primeval urges, age-old desires and an almost animal-like intuition: like *New Babylon*, Constant's COBRA work looked to shock European society from its state of slumber, apathy and boredom and make the viewer an active participant: 'The viewer whose role in our culture was until now a passive one, will from now on be drawn into the creative process' (RKD 272[a]: 5). Seventeen years after Constant described COBRA as 'a powerful stimulating influence' (RKD 272[a]: 5) on society, he scripted *New Babylon* in precisely the same terms: 'New Babylon is like a strip-tease: it stimulates action and therefore it is real' (RKD 323[a]: 5).

Beyond the obvious 'primitivist' aesthetic of the work, COBRA's frame of reference was unabashedly 'the other' of the West, of Modernity. In their search for total newness, Constant and his colleagues intentionally turned to the art of children and the insane, of medieval and prehistoric Europe and of so-called primitives – non-Western, tribal peoples, including 'the Africans' that had only recently inspired the likes of Picasso, Matisse and Braque. Corneille, whose drawing serves as the cover image for Constant's 1948 manifesto, has described the group's working method as a process of using, taking and celebrating just about anything that was 'other': 'We

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\* Writing in Dutch, Constant repeatedly uses the term *volkskunst* throughout his manifesto, which may be translated as folk art, popular art, people's art, art of the masses, art of the people, etc. Other 'collective' terms used in the text include the likes of *het genie van het volk* (the genius of the people) and *gemeengoed* (common property, which is also attached to ideas of creativity and artistic genius).

used everything and loved everything. We took from children's drawings, folklore, drawings by the insane, negro masks...' (COBRA Museum voor Moderne Kunst). Constant gives us much the same on the sixth page of his 1948 manifesto, illustrating his text with one of his paintings from the time, a lithograph by Anton Rooskens and an assemblage by Eugène Brands:

A living art makes no distinction between beautiful and ugly because it sets no aesthetic norms [...] If we observe forms of expression that include every stage of human life, for example that of a child (who has yet to be socially integrated), then we no longer find this distinction. The child knows of no law other than its spontaneous sensation of life and feels no need to express anything else. The same is true of primitive cultures, which is why they are so attractive to today's human beings, forced to live in a morbid atmosphere of unreality, lies and infertility. A new freedom is coming into being which will enable human beings to express themselves in accordance with their instincts [...] freedom becomes the possession of all

(RKD 272[a]: 6; Nieuwenhuys 1996 [1948]: 207)

The primitive was something of a catchall phrase for COBRA, fluidly encompassing and casually joining together a number of disconnected peoples, times and places: Viking-era rune stones in their own back yards and contemporary African masks from 'elsewhere', for example. At the same time, COBRA's bid to 'rediscover the starting-point of every creative activity' seems to have had a physical, if perhaps unconsciously formulated, destination. In their search to regain the 'vital feelings', 'vital force' and 'hidden basis of creativity' (RKD 272[a]: 1) that had presumably been lost to the West and Modernity, Constant and his colleagues arrived at the geographical origins of the human species. Their experimentations were a self-conscious invocation of the call to the wild, in which romantic notions of back to Africa and anthropological theories of out of Africa were sometimes collapsed into one.

Corneille's 1949 painting *Vision d'Afrique* certainly suggests such an overlap. He later 'took long trips through the interior of Africa' – as did Rooskens – and actively collected African art (Stokvis 2004: 278-280, 282). Constant's *Maskertjes ongehoorzaamheid* (Disobedience Masks) of 1948 might also link to notions of Africa – for example, as the 'source' or 'spring' (to draw on the specific language of his manifesto) of magic, witchcraft and animism (Figure 1.6). Brands, in his text 'To

the point' – which directly follows Constant's manifesto in *Reflex*, appearing on the issue's back cover – draws on Africa as well, declaring how Constant's ideas would, like the art works that illustrated his polemic, 'strike' society 'as the dynamic sound of an African jungle drum' (RKD 272[b]). Brands, who was apparently an avid collector of 'the music and ritual artefacts of primitive peoples', was able to play out this fantasy the following year. During the launch of COBRA's 1949 exhibition in Amsterdam on 03 November, Christian Dotremont delivered a brief opening statement to a soundtrack of 'rolling African drums' that had been gathered from Brands's 'record collection of authentic ethnic music'. In his *Victory Borfimah* painting of 1949, Brands further attempted 'to summon up the magical power supposedly contained in a medicine pouch (*borfimah*) used by some African tribes' (Stokvis 2004: 204, 283-284).

In a discussion with Constant held at The Drawing Center in New York in 1999, Benjamin Buchloh questions Constant about his relationship to the primitive, referring to COBRA – and Corneille's cover image for Constant's 1948 manifesto in particular – 'as one example of that unfathomable relapse into an atavistic expressionist primitivism':

Buchloh: [...] in the immediate postwar period, what seems to have been the primary model that all of you, all the members of Copenhagen, Brussels, Amsterdam, returned to was the various primitivisms of the earlier part of the twentieth century: the child, art brut, the non-Western imaginary.

Constant: Not exactly the child. Not only the child, but going back to the origins of creation – of artistic creativity. We cannot think of COBRA without thinking of the situations we were in after the war, the situation of complete emptiness [...] in Holland it was nearly nothing for these young artists, so that we turned to what was the only thing that looked at the least like creation, like spontaneous expression of humanity  
(Buchloh and Nieuwenhuys 2001: 15)

In retrospect, Constant rationalises his turn to non-Western models of creativity as a way of dealing with the trauma of war, wartime occupation and the horror of the Holocaust. Yet the condition of 'complete emptiness' he offered Buchloh in 1999 was not a new insight; this was an idea he had formulated, as 'cultural void', already in his 1948 manifesto (RKD 272[a]: 7). Three years later – the time many writers on

*New Babylon* and the Situationist International would have us witnessing his seamless transformation, in London, from artist to architect – Constant produced a portfolio of eight disturbing ‘war images’ (Figure 1.7). The series of lithographs, titled *8 fois la guerre*, testify to the acute ways in which Constant experienced the historical reality of World War II and its aftermath, suggesting his personal struggle to come to terms with war, as well as the vacuum left behind, was a difficult one. 1950-1951 oil paintings bearing revealing titles such as ‘Camp de Concentration’, ‘La Guerre’ and ‘Terre Brûlée reiterate the point (Lambert 1992: 45-53).

Constant’s experience of this nightmarish chapter in history remained a reference point in the years to come, surfacing during his period of collaboration with the Situationists and, again, his later solo work on *New Babylon*. A co-authored text released by Constant and the Dutch Section of the Situationist International in 1959, for example, refers to ‘memories of the misery of the war’ and, in a repetition of the language used a decade earlier for COBRA, ‘an absolute cultural void’ (Alberts et al. 1959). A 1966 letter to the young British architect Sean Wellesley-Miller, written at a time when Constant was again feeling the deadening weight of stagnation in society, fills out the account given in his 1999 discussion with Buchloh. It also calls into question the work of scholars who only seem to look forward in their writings about *New Babylon*, preferring to link Constant’s work to today rather than consider its place in history. Sadler provides one particularly alarming example of this a-historical impulse: ‘Indeed, at present a burgeoning club culture represents the best analogue (and, arguably, a partial vindication of Constant’s precepts)’ (Sadler 1998: 151). Unsurprisingly, Constant’s own analogue has nothing to do with, as Sadler suggests, ‘the most restless consumer of the drug Ecstasy’:

May 1945, Liberation and peace, the entire population of Amsterdam feasting in the streets [...] In these first months after the war, I used to go through the city, every night to take part in the general activity, looking at the performances that were organized by the inhabitants of many streets and quarters, dancing with any girl that pleased me on the asphalt [sic] or simply looking at the other dancers. There was music all over the town, everybody seemed gay, an unreal atmosphere. The streets were for the people, there were no cars in these years, one did not see policemen, everybody was poor but happy and social life could be called anarchistic as it was, spontaneous,

unorganized, improvised. The city belonged to the people, and the people that ment [sic] everybody, all of us

(RKD 234: 1)

Having experienced this moment of euphoria in the streets of Amsterdam in 1945, its loss was, arguably, all the more poignant – serving to heighten, rather than diminish, the feeling of emptiness Constant describes to Buchloh some fifty years later. Is Constant's description of May 1945 not in fact COBRA's vision incarnate? Is this not also *New Babylon*? With the moment lost and locked in the past, Constant's letter descends into pessimism: 'there are cars, there is police [...] the menace of a new war [...] new genocides [...] There is no unity, no happiness now [...] no freedom is possible' (RKD 234: 1).

Buchloh's conversation with Constant is a useful marker. Stressing that it 'is important to recognize' the link between COBRA and 'the actual historical political conditions that artists were facing after the Second World War and after the Holocaust', Buchloh suggests our efforts to understand primitivism must be taken further, still: it 'is a link that has to be addressed in terms of why the first phase of the return to cultural practice defines itself as a return to a universal model of creativity, outside of history, outside of language, outside of conventions'. At the same time, Buchloh confines his comments to Constant's COBRA work, only, and does not really consider the ways in which 'this demand to go to the Paleolithic condition of human existence' as he terms it might also continue to operate within *New Babylon* (Buchloh and Nieuwenhuys 2001: 16). Leaving COBRA and primitivism behind Buchloh moves on – invariably, predictably, it seems – to talk of Constant's relationship with Debord, theories of unitary urbanism, psychogeography and connections between the surrealist *flânerie* and the situationist *dérive* (Buchloh and Nieuwenhuys 2001: 24).

Given the clear primitivism of COBRA, it would seem Constant's 1956 meeting with Romani in Alba – which becomes, in time, the Foreword to *Skizze zu einer Kultur* – should not be taken for granted. Occurring just five years after the dissolution of COBRA in 1951, during a time when the recent trauma of war and its aftermath continued to haunt him, had Constant's powerful primitivist tendencies really ceased

to matter? Do plexiglass and steel wire, alongside references to science fiction and outer space, rule out that possibility? Does an artist who had theorised his desire to get back to ‘the birth of art’ (RKD 272[a]: 4) suddenly change his approach entirely? Having looked explicitly to non-Western peoples in an attempt to regain ‘the natural urge for creativity’, ‘the spontaneous feel for life’, ‘the expression of a will to live’, ‘this most primary need of life’ and ‘this state of unbound freedom’ (RKD 272[a]: 6-7) – all things he found lacking in his culture at the time – does Constant suddenly look away, or elsewhere, for inspiration?

### ***Toward a revisionist historiography of New Babylon***

Most writers on *New Babylon* and the Situationist International today link the dominant theme of nomadism in Constant’s project to anything but the artist’s relationship to Romani culture. While some Romani still pursue nomadic lifestyles at present, always in complex interaction with dominant political, legal, social and economic systems, the key reference points for contemporary scholarship are, rather: Situationist theories of *urbanisme unitaire*, *dérive*, *détournement* and their precedents, such as *flânerie* and surrealist journeys of chance; the work of Constant’s 1960s architectural contemporaries, particularly the megastructuralists and nomadists of the European avant-garde; the post-structuralist nomadology of Deleuze and Guattari; emergent theories of internet space and wireless technologies; and, even, rock festival, urban clubbing and on-line gaming sub-cultures. Against such interpretations of *New Babylon*, which generally substantiate a de-anthropologized and de-identitized understanding of the project, I argue that Romani drive Constant’s work and thinking. Conceiving *New Babylon* as an ‘outline of a culture’, Constant relies on his varied experiences and modes of contact with Romani peoples for validity. His turn to Romani culture links, in turn, to a distinctly anthropological concern: that of humankind’s common ancestry as nomadic hunters and gatherers.

In a series of lectures, texts and interviews dating from 1963 to 1974, Constant postulates a primordial and egalitarian society of roaming hunters and gatherers at the core of his *New Babylon* project. Conceived as tribes of limitless and unchecked



creative ability, these New Babylonian nomads are said to be fully in touch with their carnal urges and creative abilities alike. Seeking to regain this wandering state of instinctive creativity, Constant looks explicitly to the traditional migratory lifestyles of Romani to legitimise his hypothesis. Following currents in primitivist thought that have, throughout history, similarly turned to non-Western, tribal peoples as images of rebirth, reinvention and revolution, Romani prove exemplary models for Constant's purposes. Like the New Babylonians he prophesises, Romani are – in his eyes – already nomadic; a readymade tribal society of wandering artists (notably, musicians) that are seen to occupy an alternative time and space to the rest of humanity. Scripted as an old authentically nomadic people of the past, the continued presence of Romani in post-war Europe becomes tangible evidence of humankind's genuine – if long lost – existential condition. Deployed as living links to a Stone Age, creative-nomadic past, Romani spearhead Constant's prediction of the imminent rise of New Babylonian culture. Dispensing with notions of family, private property and work, these revolutionary nomads of the future obliterate the State entirely.

Approaching *New Babylon* through its primary emphasis on culture, I focus on this 'back to the future' (Prince and Riches 1999) logic driving Constant's work. Much like Romani, Constant's regular references to prehistory, the Stone Age and the Neolithic remain noticeably unexamined in current *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship. This is, however, a recognisable pattern in the work of other Marxist thinkers, who have – like Constant – turned to present day nomads, particularly hunters and gatherers, as evidence of humankind's original 'communism' (Barnard 1993; Overing 1993). To deny or overlook this aspect of Constant's work is, I argue, to fundamentally misread *New Babylon*; it is also, perhaps, to engage in forms of history writing that hold problematic relationships to basic questions of otherness and difference. Although Constant typically keeps direct references to Romani out of his work on *New Babylon*, his relationship to this cultural other – of the West, of Modernity – is arguably not as fraught as that of his historians. Constant does foreground Romani in what was to be his major book on *New Babylon*, and speaks openly about his lifelong attraction and admiration for

Gypsy people (particularly music) in a series of interviews dating from the end of his project in 1974. Constant's historians, by contrast, appear to have unanimously written Romani out of his life, work and – importantly – their accounts of *New Babylon*. If the criticisms of MoMA's 1984 exhibition of 'Primitivism' were directed more at the institution and its curator William Rubin than the artists whose works were on display, then my criticisms are aimed more at the existing scholarship on *New Babylon* and the Situationist International than at Constant himself. This is not to say Constant's relationship to Romani is unproblematic; it is simply to acknowledge that the removal and marginalisation of Romani in the established historiography of *New Babylon* and the Situationist International is not, necessarily, Constant's doing. If scholars had asked Constant about Romani before his death in 2005, as and beyond the ways Betty van Garrel and Ada van Benthem Jutting did already in 1974 (RKD 386; RKD 390[e]), we might be in a position to better understand and critique his relationship to Romani today.

Stemming from an original, physical encounter with Romani, Constant's work holds an ambivalent relationship to its stated anthropological source. On the one hand, Constant is found to interact and associate with Romani throughout his life; a pattern of sustained engagement that is documentable from the start of his work on *New Babylon* in 1956 to his death in 2005. Constant actively seeks out information on Romani culture during the peak of his work on *New Babylon* in the 1960s. He also immerses himself in Gypsy music throughout his life – that is, before, during and after *New Babylon*. On the other hand, Constant appears drawn to an exoticised version of Romani culture, chasing a romantic, Marxist-driven mirage that has little to do with the history, culture and everyday reality of that people's contemporary lifestyles and identities. As 'gypsies', Romani act as a primitivist source of non-Western creative potential and counter-cultural resistance for Constant, becoming the driving force behind his critique of Modern society, architecture and urbanism. While Constant's artistic practice may shift somewhat from painting to architecture in the 1950s, suggesting a rupture between his COBRA and *New Babylon* years, his clear attraction to non-Western models of creative expression remains a key characteristic of his oeuvre.

Rooted in the new social and technological realities of the post-war era, such as rapid changes to the transport, construction and communications industries that began already in the 1950s, Constant's *New Babylon* is in one sense symptomatic of the broader intellectual climate of 'futures orientation' (McHale 1967) characteristic of the 1960s, and can certainly be viewed as belonging to that historical moment. In these contexts, *New Babylon* is but one of many nomadic, space age proposals of the 1960s. As such Constant's project readily links to the work and thinking of Reyner Banham, Buckminster Fuller, Archigram, Superstudio, Antfarm, Utopie, Yves Klein, Kisho Kurokawa, Alison and Peter Smithson and, even, Frank Lloyd Wright – all of whom imagined, in varying degrees, the dawning of a new age of unrestricted individual mobility. At the same time Constant's personal, real world encounter with Romani fundamentally separates *New Babylon* from the work and thinking of these other nomadists.

*New Babylon* intersects with a period of mounting Romani activism and political self-representation in post-war Europe. Developing concurrent visions of a global, nomadic lifestyle unregulated by national borders, citizenship and immigration laws, Constant's project draws upon – if unknowingly – the utopian, nationalist concept of *Romanestan* put forward by Ionel Rotaru (also known as Vaida Voevod), a leading Romani activist of the post-war period. A provocative if largely symbolic political tool used by Rotaru and other activists such as Ronald Lee and Koka Petalo to force a response from national governments, the Council of Europe and the United Nations to difficult questions of Nazi war crime reparations and basic human rights, the utopian vision of *Romanestan* becomes the official motto for *New Babylon*. Consciously or not, Constant's project is thus bound up in Romani struggles for cultural recognition. Alongside the political advocacy of Romani intellectuals *Skizze zu einer Kultur* openly references, Constant's work may be understood as a response to the cataclysmic events of the 1940s. Joined, in part, by their shared identities as survivors of World War II, the vision of a global nomadic society developed simultaneously by Constant and Rotaru reads, also, as a concerted attempt to make sense of and counteract recent events in history. While Constant's COBRA years

have come to be understood as a partial response to war and its aftermath, it would appear his work on *New Babylon* continues that earlier pattern of rehabilitation.

Pitted against the increasingly consumerist, materialist and capitalist lifestyles of mainstream western-European societies, fictive versions of Romani are unleashed in *New Babylon* as both a seductive alternative and dangerous threat to the restrictive norms and values of Modernity. The term nomad and its derivatives thus circulate as elusive, catchall phrases in Constant's work on *New Babylon*. Finding its anthropological origins in Romani, Constant's particular conception of nomadism eventually comes to stand in for counter culture writ large. A form of primitivist critique, the New Babylonian nomad grows to encompass the marginalised and stigmatised populations of post-war European society. Taking a physical encounter with Romani as its starting point, in a time and place where they were (as now) subjected to the most extreme forms of prejudice imaginable, *New Babylon* emerges as an alternative, inverse world wherein the nomads of normative society – Romani, other ethnic minorities, prostitutes, criminals, artists and revolutionaries – reign, run rampant and prosper. If *New Babylon* is seen to become increasingly dystopian across nearly two decades of incessant visual and textual development, then it is in this sense, especially, relevant to us now.

In direct opposition to established *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship, which often tends to recuperate *New Babylon* as a type of 'happy nomadology' (Miller 1998a: 205) for the present, I read Constant's work through its linkages to histories of human tragedy. The nomad of *New Babylon* is not so much a symbol of personal liberty, but a reminder of lost freedoms. Through *New Babylon*, Constant gathers together and contains the horrors of the later twentieth century. Over time, his work becomes the site of World War, the Holocaust, Vietnam and refugee camps, home to migrant workers, the homeless, war orphans and the otherwise displaced portions of humanity. As Constant put it in a discussion with Fanny Kelk in the late 1970s, 'in spite of myself, more or less unconsciously all sorts of elements crept in which I have always seen as events or happenings that belong to the world of New Babylon' (in Wigley 1998: 71). Paintings from the early 1970s

attest to this fact, having telling titles such as *Mekong River* (1970) and *Le Massacre de My Lai* (1972) (van Schaik 2005b: 231, 233). Mark Rappolt records the back story to another later painting titled *Les Enfants Perdus*, with Constant describing how he had been deeply touched and troubled by ‘the sense of fear, anger and pity’ aroused in him by an image of ‘children in Romania, gangs of children seated together’ he had seen on television (Rappolt 2001: 22). Whether these children, like the seemingly endless line of lonely people pictured in *Les Expulsés* of 1999 (Lambert and Nieuwenhuys 2001: 36) are, in fact, Romani remains unknown.

Approaching *New Babylon* through Constant’s interactions with Romani enacts, then, an overarching re-conceptualisation of Constant’s work that seeks to recover, and make problematic, the anthropological basis of his project. My revisionist study leads, also, to a reappraisal of Constant’s well-groomed architectural persona. As Romani take centre stage in my research, Constant’s carefully managed image – both his own work and the work of his historians – undergoes a similar course of rehabilitation. The image of the futuristic, militant urbanist reveals as a wilful disciplinary fiction. While my revisionist study does not move to directly overturn the work of other scholars, it does make a concerted attempt to complicate, extend and challenge the apparent state of consensus reached by so many of *New Babylon*’s and the Situationist International’s leading critics and historians. I think we can, and should, look again at what Tom McDonough labels ‘a world of absolute modernity’ (McDonough 2001: 100), for example; or, at what Barry Curtis describes as a project ‘firmly rooted in futuristic conceptualisation’ (Curtis 2001: 79).

## Chapter 2: Going Primitive and Beyond

How can you feel compassion for a people you don't know? We are an abstraction, to be discussed in our absence and, worse, even in our presence, as though we don't really exist, with no thought for our feelings or our dignity.

(Hancock 2001)

Since the 1950s and the start of processes of decolonisation, the word primitive has proven an increasingly difficult term. This is particularly true of art history and anthropology, where disciplinary relationships to the primitive have undergone significant transformations. In art history, for example, and especially in the wake of critical outbursts provoked by the '*Primitivism*' show held at MoMA in New York (Rubin 1984), the word has come to be framed by a range of problematic political, historical and ideological associations (Clifford 1985a; 1987; Flam and Deutch 2003; Foster 1985). When we use the word primitive in art history or anthropology today, we are primarily talking about an Orientalizing discourse, meaning the ways in which non-Western peoples are conceived of and represented as wholly unknowable others. This usage of the primitive refers to a progressively internalised and fictionalised version of non-Western peoples, conceived of in essentialized form as something 'absolutely different [...] from the West' (Said 2003 [1978]: 96).

As an Orientalizing discourse, primitivism is understood to constrain and dictate the ways in which Westerners can think about and represent non-Western peoples, particularly those societies that have been variously labelled native, indigenous, aboriginal, traditional, tribal, exotic, third world, developing, etc. throughout history. This is a process that is seen to occur across centuries of exploration and colonisation, during which time Western imaginaries developed a stock language of primitive tropes (meaning images, words and ideas) that could be drawn upon, as and when needed, to reinforce a Western sense of self. The progressive concretization of

these tropes eventually limited the diversity and vitality of non-Western peoples and, subsequently, backed up evolutionary claims about the West's moral, religious and intellectual superiority. Despite first hand encounters with non-Western societies and the gathering of substantial ethnographic evidence to the contrary, Western understandings and representations of 'the other' gradually came to have no basis in fact; we only see what we want and need to see in those societies we deem primitive.

Historically, there have been two distinct framings of the primitive. On the one hand is the docile, benign native. This version of the primitive is met with painful nostalgia and embraced or salvaged as a symbol of something the West or modernity has lost or forgotten (Clifford 1987). On the other hand we find the marauding, headhunting savage. This manifestation of the primitive is found to be repulsive and rejected as the West's inhuman nightmare. Seduction and horror, in other words, always coexist (cf. Torgovnick 1990: 3; Miner 1972: 93). From Fascist notions of folk and blood conjured up by the Right in the 1920s and 1930s to Hippie ideas of free, communal living in the 1960s, right up to contemporary Green movements and the anarchist, anti-capitalist literature of the radical Left, the role of the primitive remains rather constant for the West. Time and again, it acts as a foil – a silent, bottomless reservoir of creative and critical potential that is knowingly positioned in opposition to the present. Uninterested in genuinely engaging with the reality of otherness, Western artists, academics, anthropologists, politicians and media invent imaginary versions of the primitive that subvert or revitalise Western identity. Torn from their original cultural and historical contexts, the lifestyles, beliefs, traditions, material cultures and social structures of non-Western peoples become both paradigm and antithesis of everything the West is, or is not. In critiques of materialism and consumerism, the primitive becomes an egalitarian pre-capitalist utopia, for example, while for proponents of sexual liberation the primitive acts as a model of bodily freedom and natural self-expression.

Primitivism, or primitivist discourse thus describes a fictional and unilateral Western construct that is patronizing, racist and essentialist by nature. It has validated Western colonial programmes, legitimised the appropriation of non-Western lands

and further underwritten disastrous histories of exploitation, subjugation and genocide. A constantly shifting and ambivalent intellectual terrain, the primitive often sees otherwise conflicting political ideologies reversed, collapsed together and rendered altogether meaningless. Left-right, liberal-conservative, socialism-capitalism, communism-consumerism – all are jettisoned in the malleable, constantly changing world of Western primitivist discourse. The pleasant dream of the ‘noble savage’ and the nightmare of the ‘cannibal’, in other words, are manifestations of the same fantasy. Often, the same non-Western peoples play both roles to perfection; sometimes, even, in the same time and place. Rousseau and Montaigne, often cited as the classic poles of Western primitivist discourse, both looked explicitly to the natives of the New World to find examples of social structures and cultural customs which they found to be in radical opposition to those sanctioned by European society. Despite outward appearances, their versions of the primitive are not so different in the end. If Montaigne’s man-eating ‘Tupinamba Indians’ of 16th-century Brazil had, ‘no acquaintance with writing, no numbers’ and, ‘no words for treachery, lying, cheating’ (de Montaigne 2004 [1578]: 84), then Rousseau’s gentle ‘Caribs’ of the Enlightenment similarly ‘knew neither vanity, nor consideration, nor esteem, nor contempt; since they had not the slightest notion of thine and mine, or any genuine idea of justice’ (Rousseau 1997 [1755]: 154). Each, in turn, uses the primitive to question and subvert European claims to civilisation, a pattern that has been repeated by countless others in the interim. Longstanding notions of non-Western peoples as the primitive thus hold a central and problematic place in Western understandings of self and difference.

### ***Going primitive with Marianna Torgovnick***

‘The primitive is everywhere present in modernity and postmodernity’, concludes Marianna Torgovnick (1990: 246) in her seminal book *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives*. Extending her reading of Western cultural production to encompass material as diverse as Bronislaw Malinowski’s ethnographic fieldwork in the Trobriands, Georges Bataille’s radical writings on sacrifice in pre-Columbian Mexico, Joseph Conrad’s 1902 novel *Heart of Darkness* and Edgar Rice Burroughs’s



early twentieth-century *Tarzan* series, Torgovnick's research demonstrates how the primitive endlessly enthralls Western imaginations. Not necessarily those non-Western cultures that have historically been labelled primitive, but rather the fictive primitives who have occupied a prominent place in Western thought for centuries – Homer's Lotus Eaters and Cyclops of antiquity, Lévi-Strauss's (1955) Nambikwara Indians of Brazil and Elizalde's (1971) 'Stone Age' Tasaday of the Philippines are all, in varying degrees, fictional constructs of Western imaginations.

Probing the mechanics, pitfalls and consequences of the West's deep seeded relationships with the primitive, Torgovnick's critical analysis of the 'male-centered, canonical line of Western primitivism' (1990: 248) finds writers, artists, art historians, exhibition curators and anthropologists alike to be equally licentious in their appropriation and misuse of the primitive. No one, it seems, is exempt from Torgovnick's watchful eye. Margaret Mead, Roger Fry, Michael Leiris, D. H. Lawrence, Sigmund Freud, Henry M. Stanley – each, while separated by time, place, discipline and circumstance, do much the same in her final analysis. They all deny the diversity of non-Western cultures; write out the complexity existing within such societies; subscribe to and propagate the myth of undiscovered, pure primitives, somehow lost or living in the past and as yet untouched by contact with other peoples (primitive or civilised); fail to acknowledge that non-Western peoples have dynamic and migrating histories of their own; and, allow no space for non-Western peoples to represent or speak for themselves on their own terms. Whether manifest in ethnographic accounts of fieldwork, creative or academic projects, intellectual theories or exhibitions of art and artefacts, primitivism cannot be separated from the problematic and ongoing legacies of exploration, colonialism and decolonisation that operated directly over top of such flawed, ethnocentric misconceptions.

To speak of misreading primitive societies [...] is to exist in a textual universe in which interpretations can be right or wrong but have consequences only within the relatively confined sphere of intellectual life. But ideas about primitive societies [...] have made things happen in the political world [...] the partition of Africa, the invasion of Ethiopia, the Nazi "final solution" for Gypsies and Jews

(Torgovnick 1990: 13)

Torgovnick is adamant on this point. She insists that creative and intellectual interactions with the primitive – no matter how far removed they may be from the original point of contact – must be held to account for the parts they have played in histories of suppression, injustice and, even, genocide (1990: 12-13, 40-41). Ethnographic, scientific, academic and creative practices, in other words, are anything but hands-clean in their relationships to the primitive. University curricula, museum exhibitions, library catalogues and filing systems, bookstore inventories and media are similarly culpable. In different ways, each reinforces and legitimises stereotypical representations of non-Western peoples, often with disastrous consequences. All that matters is the Western conception of the primitive; the true nature, history and lived reality of non-Western societies are always subservient, if not wholly irrelevant, to the West's primitive fantasies.

It is a bleak conclusion to reach. Torgovnick's work exposes the problems that result from touching the primitive lightly, indirectly or abstractly. She also highlights the ways ideas about 'the primitive' impact upon other, linked categories of difference. Of particular importance for Torgovnick are issues of gender and sexuality, which remain overlooked in the work of her contemporaries (Said 2003 [1978]; Miller 1985; Clifford 1988). By contrast, Torgovnick's critique of primitivism is fully bound up in a critique of Western masculinity. She rightly takes issue with the way 'those familiar tropes for primitives become the tropes conventionally used for women' (Torgovnick 1990: 17), and further extends her critical analysis of Western cultural production to note how similar substitutions often encompass the rural and inner city poor, the working class, Romani, Jews, African Americans, homosexuals, the mentally ill and other subordinated groups within Western societies. 'These Others are processed, like primitives, through a variety of tropes which see them as a threatening horde, a faceless mass, promiscuous, breeding, inferior – at the farthest edge, exterminatable' (1990: 18).

While Torgovnick's study, by no means unique today for Western arts criticism, remains a key point of reference for my work on *New Babylon*, there are some limitations to acknowledge also. Impressive in its sweeping, multi-disciplinary

approach, Torgovnick's research at times lacks specificity. This is not to say her central argument is under question; it essentially reiterates – and usefully updates, particularly through its focus on gender – Stanley Diamond's (1974) earlier conviction that Western culture can only imagine itself and think about itself critically with reference to fictive versions of the primitive. Other models of critical enquiry nonetheless augment the best of Torgovnick's findings. Although writers like Adam Kuper, Hayden White and Alan Barnard essentially support the core of Torgovnick's conclusions, their work challenges and extends her multi-disciplinary theorisation of the primitive through focusing on unique disciplinary frameworks (Kuper 1988b; cf. 2005), precise historical moments (Dudley and Novak 1972; White 1972) and the individual identities of the diverse non-Western peoples that have been caught up in the long running game of Western primitivist discourse (Barnard 1999; 2004; 2007).

### ***Romani scholarship***

In the somewhat hidden academic sub-discipline of contemporary Romani studies, a number of authors (many of whom double as activists) have recently taken up notions of Orientalist or Primitivist discourse, as developed by writers like Said and Torgovnick, and applied it in the specific contexts of Romani. In *Gypsy Identities 1500-2000*, for example, David Mayall (2004) details the shifting ways in which Romani have been defined and represented in Britain, in particular, from the time of their documented arrival in England in the early 16th Century:

Alongside the familiar bewitching and alluring Gypsy maiden, with fiery eyes and a passionate spirit, sits the fortune telling hag. For some the nomadic Gypsy lifestyle evokes the romance of the open road and an *al fresco* life free from the restrictions and inhibitions of settled society. For others, Gypsies, itinerancy and itinerants go hand in hand with criminality, parasitism and deceit, with the nomadic Gypsy appearing as a threat and danger to health, property and person

(Mayall 2004: 1)

We recognise in Mayall's opening passage the same tropes, fears and desires that structure Western perceptions of the primitive generally. On the one hand is the image of a 'romantic, free-living and free-loving' people who follow an orderly and

harmonious, ‘rural way of life in communion with Nature’. Their lifestyles remain traditional, meaning ‘unchanged over time’. In their ‘proper place’ in the countryside, living in horse-drawn, bow-topped caravans parked by creek sides in ‘secluded woodlands’ and ‘dingly dells’, ‘the Gypsy’ is ‘a welcome anomaly and anachronism in modern society’. They call into question the relative benefits and evils of industrialisation, for example, and beckon us to return to the simpler, rural lifestyles we have left behind. Alongside this ‘positive’ image of Romani there is the opposed, ‘negative’ vision of ‘Rickety vans’ and ‘ragged dirty canvas tents pitched on rubbish-strewn wasteland, lacking any water or sanitary facilities’. These people are unwelcome ‘outcasts’ from society; they are amoral, criminal and ‘filthy’, a ‘threat, nuisance, danger’ and ‘parasite’ (2004: 1-2).

Discussing such polarised representations of Romani in British literature, art, law, scholarship and politics, Mayall’s analysis goes on to reveal a remarkable continuity of these tropes in written and visual sources across centuries, demonstrating how these ‘different faces of the Gypsy’ exist, time and again, as fictional constructs in British – and, by extension, Western – imaginations. ‘Outsiders have thus constructed the group by imposing boundaries and affixing character more according to contemporary concerns and needs than to objective or empirical evidence, despite claims to the contrary’ (2004: 277).

Like Jean-Pierre Liégeois’s (2007) *Roma in Europe*, Nicholas Saul’s and Susan Tebbutt’s (2004) *The Role of the Romanies* reveals more of the same in a wider European context, covering a range of topics, times and places from the origins of ‘anti-gypsyism’ in Western Europe in the 15th Century (Kenrick 2004) to the construction of modern Romani identity in Eastern Europe (Kapralski 2004). In Thomas Acton’s (1997) edited volume *Gypsy Politics and Traveller Identity*, authors grapple with similar issues, including the theorisation of ‘anti-nomadism’ (McVeigh 1997) and the conflicted identity of the Romani intellectual in contemporary politics (Gheorghe 1997). It is necessary to stress a point, however, regarding representations of Romani in Western cultural discourse. While Gypsy tropes have historically reinscribed the long-standing primitive duality of the noble savage and the cannibal,

the lasting and most influential stereotypes have been the negative framing of Romani as a stigma, disease, plague and parasite – a pattern labelled ‘the pariah syndrome’ by Ian Hancock (1987b).

### ***Problems with discourse and difference***

While primitivism has become a mainstay in contemporary humanities research over the past few decades, there is a growing sense that the wide-ranging, multi-disciplinary approach it often entails may smooth over important differences between time, place and circumstance. Torgovnick, for example, potentially misses a crucial point in her unyielding drive to expose ‘Our culture’s generalized notion of the primitive’ (1990: 22): she arguably does little more than the authors of the works she criticises to help us better understand the real identities and lifestyles of the various non-Western peoples Western imaginations have, over time, routinely constructed and appropriated.

Denis Dutton, an American academic émigré to New Zealand with fieldwork experience in the Sepik region of New Guinea, roundly dismisses Torgovnick’s work as a ‘wilful misreading’ of her subject (1995: 41; cf. Dutton 1991; 1996). For Dutton, Torgovnick’s post-modernist, feminist-driven analysis of the primitive in Western cultural thought is a badly written novel. Taking particular issue with ‘Torgovnick’s throwing together novelists, art critics and anthropologists’ (1996: 94), he reads her work as a loose collection of wild speculations and digressions into fantasy, notable only for its recourse to ‘spurious evidence’ (cf. Kasfir 1996) and consistent bad taste: ‘Torgovnick is less concerned about finding out about her subject than [...] merely inventing it’; ‘For her these authors are well and truly dead, and can therefore be typecast into the roles required of them’ (Dutton 1995: 41). Dutton categorically upends Torgovnick’s findings, arguing that it is she who homogenises and limits Western perceptions of difference; she who misrepresents and silences non-Western peoples; and, again, she who ultimately ‘encourages ethnocentrism’ (1995: 41). The irony is clear enough: Torgovnick exposes the primitive as a fictional Western construct, only to be accused by Dutton of some licentious creativity of her own.

The problems of revealing a dominant discourse within Western cultural thought and, once exposed, allowing for difference within that theoretical framework, are not unique to Torgovnick's work on primitivism. Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* (2003 [1978]), a mainstay within cultural studies since its first publication in 1978, has proven a charged intellectual terrain. Like many other writers today, Torgovnick owes a significant debt to Said, who drew in turn on Michel Foucault (1972; 1977; 1980). Finding its intellectual lineage in the radical, anti-colonial critiques of the early 1950s, Said's work is inseparable from that historical context, theorised at the time by Michael Leiris as a crucial moment in Western relationships with difference when the longstanding objects of observation would start writing back against their oppressors (Clifford 1988; cf. Hancock 1981). Taking *Orientalism* as his focus, Said transforms a word typically associated with a somewhat old-fashioned academic discipline into a discourse characterised by tyranny and subjugation. Through critical readings of selected texts, Said reveals how *Orientalism* operates as a by-word for colonialism, racism and suppression.

One of Said's most vociferous, and recent, critics is Robert Irwin – perhaps unsurprisingly, a British Orientalist of the old school. In *For Lust of Knowing* Irwin (2006) denounces Said's findings as an artfully written collection of quiet exclusions, intentional distortions of the truth and all sorts of extraneous material. To read Said is, he claims, a waste of time. For him *Orientalism* remains a world of comparative philology, the cataloguing of obscure artefacts and the illumination of minute historical details, whereas *Orientalism*, now a canonical text within colonial and postcolonial discourse studies, is a collection of 'wilful misrepresentations' and 'errors of fact and interpretation' (2006: 4, 3). Containing most of his bold indictment to his ninth chapter, 'An Enquiry into the Nature of a Certain Twentieth-Century Polemic', Irwin concludes his strident dismissal of Said's work by writing that, 'the good qualities of *Orientalism* are those of a good novel. It is exciting, it is packed with lots of sinister villains, as well as an outnumbered band of goodies, and the picture that it presents of the world is richly imagined, but essentially fictional' (2006: 309).

While I do not share all of their opinions, conservative-reactionary advocates of pure scholarship like Irwin and Dutton have a point (cf. Miller et al. 1996). A key issue with discourse theories is their tendency to operate monologically. When based solely on textual analysis (and then, only texts of Western origin), there is a real danger such conceptual frameworks become as damaging to our understanding of difference as the hegemonic hierarchies of Western power and knowledge they rightfully seek to contest. Both Torgovnick and Said, for example, lump together the work of poets, painters, novelists, colonial proconsuls, ethnographers and explorers as equivalent. While I understand the operative logic behind such a move, I remain wary of its usefulness. How does it help us to better understand the full complexity of identity politics? More importantly, how does it get us any closer to better understanding them? As James Clifford asks in his critique of Said's canonical work, *Orientalism*, 'How [...] is an oppositional critique of Orientalism to avoid falling into "Occidentalism"?'; 'Are such discourses ultimately condemned to redundancy, the prisoners of their own authoritative images and linguistic protocols' (1988: 259, 260)? Deborah Gewertz and Frederick Errington pose a similar challenge to Torgovnick's theorisation of the primitive, questioning whether her 'textual focus on Orientalizing, like Orientalizing itself [...] may well foster another kind of distortion, that of Occidentalism' (Gewertz and Errington 1991: 81). Do writers like Said and Torgovnick, in their unflagging attempts to expose the hegemonic and destructive power of Western cultural discourse, ultimately overlook and, even, negate the capacity of the Other, whether Eastern, non-Western or primitive, to represent itself?

Sometimes, the answer appears to be yes. If Western artists, writers and anthropologists, together with imperial administrators, modern day tourists and just about everyone else, are found to be incapable of discovering anything but confirmation of their own ethnocentric preconceptions – always seeing what they want to see in the other, regardless of ethnographic evidence or first hand experience to the contrary – then critics like Torgovnick and Said may be similarly blind to genuine variations in the field. Are they then trapped in theoretical straightjackets of their own devising? Is primitivism, alongside Orientalism, simply another

‘hermeneutical short circuit in which the critic discovers in his topic what he has already put there’ (Clifford 1988: 260)? We must be wary that a critique of the political problems of representation does not unnecessarily exclude alternative perspectives or evidence to the contrary. As Spivak warns, the ‘persistent dredging operation’ now characteristic of colonial and postcolonial discourse studies renders itself ‘counterproductive when it becomes a constant and self-righteous shaming’ (Spivak 1999: 1).

Despite his criticisms of *Orientalism*, Clifford (1980b; 1988) remains both supportive and sympathetic to Said’s work. Acknowledging that Said’s critique of Western cultural discourse ‘frequently relapses into the essentializing modes it attacks and is ambivalently enmeshed in the totalizing habits of Western humanism’, Clifford nonetheless upholds Said’s ‘restless and mordant’ scholarship as a worthy exercise in ‘oppositional analysis’ (Clifford 1988: 271, 258, 266). He is particularly receptive to the way *Orientalism*, despite its flaws, calls into question anthropology’s concept of culture. Like Said, Clifford – a historian with a particular interest in anthropological thought and practice – views culture as a European invention (Clifford 1988: 273), and thus finds the lasting value of *Orientalism* to be the way Said’s textual experiments in counter-knowledge render notions of the West and the Occident as problematic as their supposed opposites (Clifford 1988: 256, 271-274). Said’s work reminds us, in other words, that we might be best served by approaching ‘all dichotomizing concepts’ – such as West-rest, First World-Third World, developed-underdeveloped, modern-premodern, etc. – with mistrust (Clifford 1988: 273). Clifford’s scepticism of anthropology’s concept of culture finds its most thorough development in his numerous writings on ethnographic authority (cf. 1980a; 1981; 1983a; 1983b; 1985b); his seminal work in this area becomes, in turn, a key point of departure for Torgovnick’s theorisation of primitivism.

### ***Ethnographic Authority***

The primitive and ethnography are, as Kuper’s (1988b; 2005) critical historiography of cultural anthropology’s origins in ‘the myth of primitive society’ reveals,



completely interrelated. One of the most direct, intensive and problematic sites of interaction between Western and non-Western peoples since the start of the twentieth century has been anthropological fieldwork through participant observation, as pioneered by Boas, Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown and their first generation of students. From the 1970s onwards, ethnographic fieldwork and writing practices have come under increased scrutiny from a number of scholars, both internal and external to the discipline. Anthropology's sharpest critics contend that ethnographies represent partial and personally biased accounts of reality, and should therefore be viewed as fiction writing instead of contributions to science. Clifford has been at the centre of such debates, arguing that all 'ethnography is, from beginning to end, enmeshed in writing' (1988: 25) and thus open to the same modes of reading, reception and critique as any other textual production. While the fieldwork methods of cultural anthropology's founding fathers 'successfully established the scientific validity of participant observation', Clifford contends that influential writers like Boas, Duvignaud and Lévi-Strauss were most 'concerned with the rhetorical problem of convincing' their readers that the material they put 'before them were objectively acquired' facts rather than purely 'subjective creations' (Clifford 1988: 29; cf. Stocking 1983; Clifford and Marcus 1986). Rendering ethnographic 'claims to the authority of experience' (Clifford 1988: 54) meaningless, postmodern critiques of fieldwork now look to do away with 'the omniscient "I know because I was there" voice of the post-Malinowskian participant observer' altogether (Brettell 1993: 2).

Using Clifford's work as a springboard for her theorisation of the primitive, Torgovnick finds ethnographic texts incapable of representing non-Western peoples neutrally and authentically (1990: 20). Taking issue with academic claims to truth, reality and objectivity in general, Torgovnick questions outright the notion that anthropological methods of participant observation have a professional, analytic and scientific basis; are therefore able to transcend personal emotions, biases and preconceptions; can genuinely and dispassionately, 'grasp the native's point of view' (Malinowski 1984 [1922]: 25); and, finally, accurately relay this back, at some later stage, through writing. Like Clifford, she finds anthropology's scientific framework 'is often readily surrendered' to the same desires, fears and fantasies about the

primitive that haunt Western imaginations generally (1990: 23). Alongside other Western representations of the primitive, ethnographies are collections of inherited tropes and rhetorical conventions that have little to do with the lived reality of the non-Western societies they claim to detail. Everything is narrative, all scholarship story telling.

On the one hand, I share in the belief, as promoted by writers like Said and Torgovnick, that pure scholarship, something divorced from all personal subjectivity and socio-political relevance, does not exist. Yet, while clearly imperfect, anthropological fieldwork remains in my view one of the most sensitive and nuanced approaches to the difficult task of cross-cultural representation. There is now extensive literature, written from within the discipline, addressing the problems with anthropological thought and practice unearthed by writers like Clifford and Torgovnick. The work of Amit (2000), Barfield (1997), Berger (1993), Harrison (1991), Strathern (1995) and Wolcott (2005), for example, reveals the extent to which anthropology has self-consciously taken postmodernist, postcolonial and feminist criticisms of ethnographic fieldwork and its multiple, conflicted relationships to difference and otherness into account. Writers like Kate Altork (1995) now address head on previously thorny subjects such as sex and eroticism in anthropology, while others tackle the long-standing taboo of 'going native' in the field (e.g. Dalby 1983; Ewing 1994; Good 1991; Gronewald 1972; Tedlock 1991; Turner 1999a). Still, as Barfield notes: 'Some anthropologists have found traditional anthropological fieldwork so problematic that they advocate cultural history approaches' instead (1997: 190).

While recognising that ethnographies are subjectively flawed by nature, I believe they contain valuable and engaging versions of truth; they present partial and fleeting glimpses of reality that speak, often positively, to the complex and shifting identities of both ethnographers and the peoples they seek to represent. Clifford makes this point when discussing Marcel Griaule's fieldwork in the Dogon and the various criticisms levelled at it:

It is simplistic to tax Griaule with projecting onto the Dogon a subjective vision [...] Even if it is true that key informants became “Griaulized”, that Griaule himself was “Dogonized” [...] even if other priorities and methods would certainly have produced a different ethnography, it does not follow that Griaule’s version of the Dogon is false

(Clifford 1988: 59-60; cf. 1983b)

Arguing that Griaule’s work ultimately expresses ‘a Dogon truth’, meaning one amongst many possible truths, Clifford suggests that it is the task of the historian to uncover precisely ‘*what kind*’ of reality and subjectivity is produced by a given ethnography; and then, in relationship to which ‘dialogical’, ‘political’ and ‘historical’ circumstances, exactly (Clifford 1988: 60). Concluding his critical historiography of anthropology’s long-standing engagement with Bushmen societies in southern Africa, Alan Barnard (2007: 146) makes a similar point, extending an invitation to non-specialists (like myself) to freely explore the substantial ethnographic literature available on Bushmen, ‘either systematically or just by dipping into it, but always in the knowledge that diversities of all kinds exist and that no Bushmen is any more real than any other’. Refusing to do away with his disciplinary-specific concept of culture altogether, as Clifford sometimes advocates, Barnard looks to uphold and update it completely:

Diversities exist through time, across ethnic boundaries, between individuals with the same ethnic group, and even within the thoughts and statements of the very same individuals. Such a notion of culture is not quite the kind of thing pioneers of modern anthropology like Franz Boas and Bronislaw Malinowski taught us about.

(Barnard 2007: 146)

### ***Ethnographic Compassion***

What is at stake, then, if we follow Torgovnick’s lead – or not – when writing about the exchanges, both real and imagined, that occur between Western and non-Western peoples? In the specific contexts of *New Babylon*, how does a critique of the primitive help us to better understand the nature and dynamics of the relationship between Constant and Romani that, I argue, is so important to his project?

In clarifying her basic decision to keep historical and ethnographic evidence from her study of the primitive, Torgovnick explains that she ‘would not [...] deny the reality and multiplicity of the societies we have tended to call primitive, but would deny that such societies have been, or could be, represented and conceived with disinterested objectivity and accuracy’. Drawing on the historical and ethnographic information available on ‘documented peoples’ such as ‘the Dogon or the Bushmen, or the Gikuyu’ would thus, in her view, ‘often miss the point’ (Torgovnick 1990: 20, 22). I am of a different opinion; for me, focusing exclusively on the West’s constructed versions of the primitive, and the ways in which such fictionalised ideas have circulated in academic, artistic and popular discourses is no longer adequate. In focusing on the generic primitive only, as Torgovnick does, we run the risk of omitting the actual identities and lived experiences of non-Western peoples who certainly do exist in the real world, leading complex lives beyond our representations of them in texts and images. Writing on travel literature and imperialism, Mary Louise Pratt (2008) lobbies for a similar shift in understandings of otherness and difference, arguing that ‘If one studies only what the Europeans saw and said, one reproduces the monopoly on knowledge and interpretation that the imperial enterprise sought’. Labelling this monologic approach a distortion, Pratt urges us to consider, also, the dynamics of what she terms transculturation; that is, the ways in which ‘People on the receiving end of European imperialism did their own knowing and interpreting, sometimes [...] using the Europeans’ own tools’ (Pratt 2008: 7).

Taking up a similar point, Deborah Gewertz and Frederick Errington – both ethnographers – defend the ongoing importance of anthropological fieldwork, advocating a return, of sorts, to ethnographic authority. Responding to postmodern, postcolonial and feminist critiques of ethnographic practices, in particular Torgovnick’s, Gewertz and Errington argue that it is time to move beyond the stage of ‘epistemological hypochondria’ and continue ‘as best we can’ to attempt to convey the ‘complexities of life that both differ from and articulate with our own’ (Gewertz and Errington 1991: 89). In their view textual analysis, as practiced by writers like Said and Torgovnick, is only and always incomplete; placing continued stress on the way ‘our renderings of them determine their existence for us’ has the

potentially disastrous end result of further constructing non-Western peoples ‘as products of our imaginations’. In pointing only to the ways in which we use and misuse images and ideas of the primitive, we may well keep ‘their lives’ forever ‘disconnected from our own’; ‘We live in the world’ that is, while ‘they live in our imagination’ (Gewertz and Errington 1991: 81).

Echoing this sentiment, as is increasingly voiced by anthropologists today, Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1995) admits to having grown tired of hearing about how we continually get them wrong:

I am weary of these postmodernist critiques, and, given the perilous times in which we and our subjects live, I am inclined toward compromise, the practice of a “good enough” ethnography [...] Seeing, listening, touching, recording can be, if done with care and sensitivity, acts of solidarity. Above all, they are the work of recognition. Not to look, not to touch, not to record can be the hostile act, an act of indifference and of turning away  
(Scheper-Hughes 1995: 418)

A problem with discourse theories such as primitivism is, then, precisely the turning away – the not looking, not touching and indifference toward the other – condemned by Scheper-Hughes. Although working well outside their field, I consciously align myself with this recent response to postmodern criticisms of otherness and difference, as may now be found in some contemporary anthropological theory. Like Gewertz, Errington, Scheper-Hughes and other proponents of the ‘compassionate turn’ (Robben and Sluka 2007: 23) in ethnographic fieldwork, I too worry that the human element behind problematic concepts like the primitive is too easily forgotten within the rhetoric of exclusion, omission, subjugation and hegemony that is now commonplace in humanities scholarship. At what point do postmodern, postcolonial and feminist critiques of primitivism begin to preclude, counteract or even negate the capacity of the primitive to emerge in some recognisable form, much less to represent and speak for itself?

## ***Beyond primitivism?***

Acknowledging that it may be impossible for ‘the subaltern to speak’ through research such as my own (Spivak 1993), I nonetheless think it crucial we try our best to represent other peoples ‘carefully and with empathy and compassion’ (Scheper-Hughes 1995: 418), even if we sometimes get them wrong in the process. As Gewertz and Errington (1991: 81) argue, a purely ‘*textual focus* [...] has the *political implication* of rendering virtually irrelevant to us the lives that *actual* – non-generic – “others” *in fact* lead’. Demonstrating that the West creates fictions of the other for its own purposes is a straightforward enough exercise. The more crucial task, today, is revealing ways in which the other is not, or not only, a fictional construct of the Western imaginary, but a real human life, ‘in complex interaction with our own’:

“they” are related to “us” in ways other than through the texts we have written about them. Their lives and our lives have significance for, and influence on, them *and* us in ways that are not exhausted by regarding them as constructs reflecting our fears and hopes [...] it is useful but it is not sufficient to demonstrate that we create the “other” for our own purposes  
(Gewertz and Errington 1991: 81)

Pushing beyond theorisations of the primitive that point to the silencing, appropriation and misuse of non-Western peoples only, I argue that we must attempt to engage with the other, drawing attention insofar as is possible to their diverse histories, life stories, identities and experiences. It is not good enough to only document and criticise the ways in which non-Western peoples have historically existed as available others for a particular Western gaze. We must also, and more importantly, strive to bring such peoples into our contemporary understandings of identity, time and place. The life stories and lived experiences of those people who have been cast in the role of the primitive are important as and of themselves, regardless of how they have been caught up in or left out of Western cultural discourse.

Instead of pointing to Constant’s encounters with Romani in his work on *New Babylon* and reflecting on the subsequent importance of such encounters for Constant’s work *only*, I attempt to follow the overlapping Romani stories presented by such moments of intersection. When possible, I look to draw attention to Romani

as very real actors in the political, social and cultural history of the post-war period. Romani are not simply avant-garde constructs of change, difference and subversion; they are individuals with intriguing and multiple identities, languages and ways of life. Romani do not come into being, or suddenly start to be of importance, only when or because they became objects of interest for Constant, the Situationist International and *New Babylon* – they exist, in their own right, regardless. While I do not claim to speak for, or give voice to Romani as a group or as individuals, I do think it more problematic to forego the challenge of ethnographic and historical representation altogether. By ignoring the human element that is always bound up in theoretical critiques of otherness and difference, we risk further exoticising, suppressing and misrepresenting the identities of those peoples, like Romani, that have for too long been stigmatised and marginalised by the damaging processes of Orientalisation. There is a catch, of course. As Miller points out, ‘depending on someone else’s ethnography [...] is an insecure business’; yet the risks presented by the ‘pitfalls of this dependency’ are, I think, worth taking (Miller 1998a: 190).

If my own work does not succeed in countering the fictions of Romani produced by primitivism, it attempts to give as accurate an account as possible of Romani claims to political voice and self-representation in the post-war period. Choosing to engage with these real Romani stories ultimately has implications, also, for our understanding of radicalism and the post-war European avant-garde. Inhabiting the same historical frame as *New Babylon* and the Situationist International, the Romani rights movements of the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s also challenged the authority of the State and the status quo, often raising questions that intersect with – and perhaps eclipse – those posed by Constant and the Situationists. Yet, with the exception of the work of a minority group of Romani authors, political activists and niche-academics, these are compelling stories of subversion and resistance that remain all but unwritten; that is, outside history. Romani stories are certainly, at present, far removed from art and architectural scholarship on *New Babylon* and the Situationist International. The act of recognising Romani histories, narratives and identities – especially those that intertwine and intermesh with a particular focus of study like Constant’s *New Babylon* – challenges us to think seriously about our

understanding of radical cultural and socio-political practices. What are the limits, and usefulness, of terms like radical and counter-cultural art and architecture when the specific Romani histories *New Babylon* and the Situationist International fleetingly intersect with point to remarkably long-standing forms of resistance of a more pressingly human and politicised nature?

Jake Bowers (Bowers-Burbridge), a Romani advocate of political activism who publishes articles occasionally in *The Guardian* (Bowers 2000; 2002; Bowers-Burbridge 2000), provides the necessary counterpoint. While I run the risk of offering him up for consumption as the ultimate other of contemporary society, and thus replicating primitivism myself, Bowers's insightful, provocative comments about his life in Britain, today, set the stage for ways in which we might rethink – wholesale – our basic understanding of what really constitutes radical cultural practice. At the same time, Bowers's writing introduces a crucial word of caution for anyone wishing to freely theorise nomadism at present without first taking stock of what it in fact means to be a nomad in the real world today (Bowers-Burbridge 2000):

The right to travel is not an issue [...] It's the right to stop that is the problem. Most of the old stopping places are gone. Those that haven't had a ditch put through them by local councils have been grabbed by farmers extending their fences or disappeared under the developers' tide of concrete. The commons we once used are gone, the verges made smaller by the widening roads.

Travelling in Britain is only possible nowadays with an extremely intimate knowledge of the countryside and a willingness to trespass in defence of the right to live as our ancestors did. We face a stark choice – settle, or engage in daily law breaking. This ongoing struggle has got to be one of the longest running and least recognised campaigns of civil disobedience this country has ever known.





### Chapter 3: Footnotes, Footsteps and Rites of Passage

In response to the problems raised in the previous chapter and to better meet the task of interpretation I think Constant's project and attendant historiography demand I draw on two particular revisionist approaches: the close reading tactics developed by Christopher L. Miller in his critical account of Deleuze's and Guattari's nomad philosophy and the second generation fieldwork strategies used by Derek Freeman in his corrective analysis of Margaret Mead's ethnographic work in Samoa. In Miller's and Freeman's work I locate concepts of footnotes and footsteps that inform my critique of *New Babylon* and its accompanying body of scholarship and direct my use, understanding of and relationship to Constant's often-overlooked archive at the RKD in The Hague.

The anthropological framework I turn to in this thesis is useful for underscoring the premise central to my argument: namely, that Constant's work on *New Babylon* is inherently ethnographic – in the sense that it relies on a real, physical experience of encounter with Romani for its origins and, also, involves extensive thinking and writing about culture in its subsequent, largely textual development. Focusing on the ethnographic dimensions, both real and imagined, of Constant's project draws immediate attention to the human element originally underwriting his work. This, I argue, is too often marginalised in contemporary scholarship: Romani do, and should, matter to our understanding of *New Babylon*, the Situationist International and their legacies, both past and present. Anthropological frameworks also help me to contextualise and understand my research, particularly the ways in which I make use of and relate to archival materials and the existing historiography surrounding Constant, *New Babylon* and the Situationist International today. Taking the reflexive turn in contemporary anthropological fieldwork as my final point of reference, I link

art historical archival work to anthropological fieldwork via disciplinary-specific notions of rites of passage, suggesting ways in which I might script my archival research as a form of revisionist fieldwork in its own right. Crucial to this move is an underlying acknowledgment of the archive as a site of performance, not authority. Presenting my archival work as a subjective and creative process that is bound up in complex issues of identity construction, I use Constant's archive to construct a personal vision of *New Babylon* that is intentionally opposed to consensus in the field. Lobbying for a form of art history as art practice that acknowledges, critiques and works with the performativity of scholarship, I pattern my use of Constant's archive after his own. Loose ends, scraps of paper, photographs and newspaper clippings collage together to produce an image – my image – of *New Babylon*.

### **Footnotes**

In a 1993 essay for *Diacritics*, later published as the final chapter of his 1998 book *Nationalists and Nomads*, Miller critically examines the footnotes of Deleuze's and Guattari's nomadology (Miller 1993; 1998a). His close reading of *A Thousand Plateaus* (2007 [1980]-b) pays particular attention to the varied and conflicted relationships he finds existing within that seminal work between its authors' suggestive theorisation of the nomad and its various subtexts of anthropology and authority. Finding evidence of primitivism, Orientalism and colonialism – 'the most territorializing and antinomadic project of all' (1998a: 192) – Miller also probes the widespread influence of nomad thought in cultural studies today. Working against the grain of contemporary critical theory, Miller questions the ways in which the hybrid, post-identitarian version of the nomad offered by *A Thousand Plateaus* has 'taken root and become almost a dogma' (1998b: 5) in a wider body of humanities scholarship, 'mostly in a vein of homage' (1998a: 174). Challenging other scholars to think carefully about the continued politics of representation, otherness and difference, Miller asks whether Deleuze's and Guattari's theorisation of nomadism is not, instead, an elaborate 'form of exoticism'; 'a masquerade invented expressly for white male majoritarian humans to play' (1998a: 192). The Deleuzian nomad may

well be a powerful tool for contemporary humanities scholarship, but there is a danger it might be ‘orientalist, historicist, or evolutionist’ also (1998a: 205).

Miller’s work on *A Thousand Plateaus* is a useful and relevant model for my revisionist approach to *New Babylon*. He poses searching questions about Deleuze’s and Guattari’s original project and takes a critical view, also, of the scholarly discourse that now surrounds it. What Miller thinks particularly worrying is the way Deleuze’s and Guattari’s vision of the nomad is continuously unleashed in the present, often without second thought. He finds writers in a range of disciplines dogmatically following the ‘lines of flight’ first traced out in *A Thousand Plateaus*, uncritically and incorrectly believing their work to be ‘liberated’; absolutely free, that is, ‘from the ethical burden of representing real, actual nomads, who might eventually have something to say in response’ (1998a: 178).

Although there are some obvious differences in the scope and nature of *A Thousand Plateaus* and *New Babylon*, the shared ground between these two projects is strong enough. Indeed, one of the key sources for *A Thousand Plateaus* is, according to Miller, an obscure publication from 1975 titled *Nomades et vagabonds* (Berque et al. 1975). Containing texts by Paul Virilio, Jean Dauvignaud and others, the book – carrying an image of what looks to be an Assyrian or Persian horseman armed with a hunting bow – also features Irina Paslariu’s early translation, into French, of Locher’s edited, 1974 version of *Skizze zu einer Kultur* (Figure 3.1). The overlap is certainly suggestive. While work on *New Babylon* begins rather earlier than *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze first published on ideas of nomadism and, with Guattari, on capitalism and schizophrenia, already in the early 1970s when Constant was still at work on his project (Deleuze and Guattari 1983 [1972]). Deleuze’s influential essay ‘Pensée nomade’ or ‘Nomad thought’, for example, was published a year before Constant’s first major retrospective at the Haags Gemeentemuseum in 1974 (Deleuze 1977 [1973]). *A Thousand Plateaus* may be more academic, overall, but *New Babylon* – particularly the unpublished *Skizze zu einer Kultur* manuscripts – is not an entirely un-academic body of work either. Like many of Constant’s texts, *Skizze zu einer Kultur* carefully and accurately cites a range of sources. Deleuze’s

and Guattari's writing, and the obvious pleasure they take from textual production is not, in turn, at all separable from creative practice. *New Babylon* and *A Thousand Plateaus* both find their intellectual inheritance in Marxist thought and are intentionally conceived as counter-cultural polemics opposed to the homogenising, 'territorializing' mechanisms of consumerism, capitalism, materialism and the State.

Another comparison, one I project back onto both works from my point of view today, is their position in contemporary scholarship. If Deleuze and Guattari have, in Miller's terms, become 'Like the Bible' – '*A Thousand Plateaus* can be used to support almost anything' (1998a: 208) – then *New Babylon* appears similarly prolific in the narrower academic terrain of avant-garde art and architectural research. While the current popularity of *A Thousand Plateaus* and *New Babylon* is obviously external to the original contents of both works, the newfound recognition they share – often and notably in English translation – is a commonality that only serves to underline many of the other affinities I point to. The privileged status of both projects in humanities research today, and the ways they often circulate as a-historical, a-cultural frames of reference requires further investigation. A final parallel, and my primary concern here, is the way these projects draw on identifiable anthropological models and, in turn, constitute an anthropology of their own.

### ***Nomadological immunity***

Finding *A Thousand Plateaus* to present 'an intellectual nomadism and a nomadism for intellectuals' (1998a: 177) based on a licentious use of non-Western sources, Miller's reading of Deleuze and Guattari compliments the work of some other critics of the French post-structuralist school of thought to which nomad philosophy can be said to belong (e.g. Derrida 1974; Kristeva 1977; Lyotard 1984). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, for example, similarly views the post-structuralists' 'occasional interest in touching the *other* of the West', in 'reaching out to all that is not the West' to be an 'obsessively self-centered' act (Spivak 1981: 157-158). In a conversation with Spivak in 1984, Elizabeth Grosz reiterates this point, describing the type of theory developed by post-structuralist writers as 'esoteric, elitist and self-preoccupied, in which case, it may be hard to see their relevance in tackling the

questions of exploitation and oppression' (Spivak and Grosz 1990: 7). Like Spivak, who sees problems with the ways 'class- and race-privileged literary' critics turn to non-Western others 'to summon timeless "truths"' (Spivak 1981: 158) in the service of radical contemporary thought, Homi K. Bhabha asks 'whether the 'new' languages of theoretical critique' are 'merely another power ploy of the culturally privileged Western elite' (Bhabha 1994: 20-21). Bhabha, too, discovers the critical theory of writers like Deleuze and Guattari to be 'mistakenly labelled 'pure theory''. Bound up in 'the vagaries of the depoliticized Eurocentric critic', 'the invention of an originary counter-myth of radical purity' like nomadology is, for him, fully implicated in 'the historical exigencies and tragedies of the wretched of the earth'. Too often left 'untheorized and unargued', the 'implacable oppositionality' of critical-theoretical frameworks such as the nomad of *A Thousand Plateaus* 'is definitely the Other'; in Bhabha's final analysis, it even runs the risk of espousing 'a neo-imperialist disregard for the independence and autonomy of peoples and places in the Third World' (Bhabha 1994: 19-20).

Although I find his approach less useful for my work than Miller's, Andrew Lattas (1991) – alongside Tim Cresswell (1997) – has also written on primitivism in *A Thousand Plateaus*, raising some of the same problems as Spivak and Bhabha in the process: 'Their philosophy co-exists with a global capitalism', it 'likewise capitalises itself by swallowing and regurgitating other cultures into digestible philosophical forms. Within its interstices, those cultures lose their alterity' (Lattas 1991: 99-100). Miller similarly frames the underlying problem of post-structuralist theory – to which Spivak, Bhabha and Lattas all point – in terms of an alarming gulf between 'haves' and 'have nots'. These writers remain wary of the presumably 'more sophisticated academic stance' (Miller 1998b: 4) of hybrid theory, which 'strongly privileges notions of mobility, movement and becoming over conceptions of being, essence or stable subjectivity' (Wuthnow 2002: 184). Clifford terms this impulse, now recognisable in many fields of study at present, 'prescriptive antiessentialism' (Clifford 1997: 267). Yet lurking behind the claim that there are now no 'sides at all' is the worrying realisation that the producers of theory – of academic concepts like mobility, multiplicity, flux, flow and displacement – remain very much in the pole

position of ‘those who divide the world’, while the non-Western peoples they often reference and represent in their work continue to be ‘those who don’t’ (Miller 1998b: 6).

Granted the nomad ‘has become a common figure for intellectual opposition’ that ‘has found widespread resonance in critical and postcolonial theory’ (Noyes 2004: 163) – turned to by Said, even, who celebrates Paul Virilio (1976) and Deleuze and Guattari (2007 [1980]-a) explicitly in his later work (Said 1993: 395, 401-402) – its capacity to contest the restrictive, binary power of Orientalizing discourses remains debatable. Said does not, of course, turn his back on the political problems of otherness completely, and he too argues that ‘the bravura performances of the intellectual’ and ‘the miseries of the displaced person or refugee’ are certainly not the same (1993: 403). John Noyes reiterates this point, arguing that we must think seriously about the asymmetry present in ‘these two conceptualizations of resistance’; for him ‘there can be no easy analogy between the articulation of social displacement through homelessness and refugee flight on the one hand and the expression of a critical agenda on the other’ (Noyes 2004: 167).

Julie Wuthnow (2002) addresses these issues in the specific contexts of indigenous rights, convincingly arguing that the lack of accountability to the ‘politics of location’, denial of ‘experience’ and dismissal of ‘local knowledge’ implicit in the nomadic thought of *A Thousand Plateaus* problematically hinders, or even negates, the emergence of successful forms of indigenous politics. Like Miller, she critically addresses Deleuze’s and Guattari’s work and, also, the ways in which later feminist and postcolonial theorists have taken up and elaborated their original ideas.

Describing nomadology and its subsequent trajectories as ‘cautionary examples’ of the uneasy disconnect between the academic production of critical theory and actual ‘questions of social justice within the ‘real’ world’, Wuthnow makes the case that ‘Deleuzian thinking, both in its original renditions and subsequent deployments, strongly lends itself to the perpetuation of colonizing discourses in ways that work to undermine the possibility of effective indigenous politics’ (2002: 185).

Sharing Wuthnow's conviction that critical theory cannot be divorced from social reality, I find the allegedly 'de-anthropologized and de-identitized' (Jardine 1984: 52) version of nomadism now circulating within postmodern, postcolonial and feminist theory struggling to dissolve or renegotiate in any meaningful way the centuries-old problems of identity and difference. I am not sure, as Said drawing directly on Virilio seems to be, that 'migrant workers, refugees [...] Blacks, immigrants, urban squatters, students, popular insurrections, et cetera' truly 'constitute a real alternative to the authority of the state' (Said 1993: 395; Virilio 1976: 88). Neither would I include students, or at least not all students, in that sweeping list of 'counter-habitation': meaning people who 'live as migrants do in habitually uninhabited but nevertheless public spaces' and display common 'attributes of a nomadic practice whose power [...] is not aggressive, but transgressive' (Said 1993: 402; Virilio 1976: 84).

Similarly unsettled by Said's suggestion that "'the binary oppositions dear to nationalist and imperialist enterprise" are gone' (Miller 1998a: 172; Said 1993: xxviii), Miller's specific contribution to such debates is to pose a rather basic question to *A Thousand Plateaus*. It is the same question I ask of *New Babylon*: 'What, if anything, does this project of nomadology have to do with real *and* "actual" nomads' (Miller 1998a: 177)? If the first line of response in the case of *A Thousand Plateaus* is 'Nothing', 'the only nomads to deal with' are 'Deleuze and Guattari themselves and their intellectual fellow travelers' (1998a: 177), then the answer contained in most *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship today appears similarly brief and dismissive. Nothing, beyond Constant, Debord and drifting Situationists; we need look no further than them, the *dérive* and their fellow intellectual *flâneurs*. Like Miller, I am not convinced this is the case.

### ***Return of the real***

Miller looks to the footnotes of *A Thousand Plateaus* to answer his question, and uncovers much evidence to the contrary. Focusing on the relationship between nomadology and real life nomads, Miller positions himself in direct opposition to the underlying claim driving the work of Deleuze, Guattari and their apologists. For



proponents of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuzian nomadology is understood to be a non-representational and non-anthropological experiment in philosophy. Declaring itself to be detached from the existence of any real nomads, Deleuze's and Guattari's nomadic mode of thought assumes it has nothing to do with anthropology. Its authors, together with 'those who wish to use' their work 'as a guidebook for cultural critique', can then claim to 'stand outside the suspect domains of manipulation and representation' to which ethnography, by contrast, belongs (1998a: 178). This reading of *A Thousand Plateaus* – as a hands-free form of pure intellectualism – has been championed by a number of writers, including Paul Patton (1984; 1988), Stephen Muecke (1984), Rosi Braidotti (1994) and Ronald Bogue (1993; 2004). Although Bogue, in his recent 'Apology for Nomadology', argues that Miller 'misconstrues the nature of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of nomadism' (2004: 170), I align myself with Miller's and Wuthnow's work: like them, I too find the notion of 'nomadological immunity' to be decidedly problematic (Miller 1998a: 191). When Bogue moves to return nomadology to the supposedly 'pure realms' of Bergsonian thought, scholastic legal theory, the philosophy of natural law and, notably, Deleuze's and Guattari's own esoteric philosophical language, I think he misses the point (Bogue 2004: 172-173): his is an hermetic, self-referential defence that looks to recuperate nomadology as an unassailable orthodoxy, 'precisely what it is *not* supposed to be' (Miller 1998a: 175).

Refusing to take Deleuze's and Guattari's nomad philosophy at face value and read it only on its own terms, Miller shifts his emphasis to what is not present in *A Thousand Plateaus*; or more precisely, to what 'according to nomadologists', is 'not supposed to be there' in their work:

What I aim to do here is to read a dimension that should not exist – to read the referential within a universe that is supposed to be purely *virtual*. One of the inflections that I see within that referential dimension is [...] traces of humanism and even anthropocentrism [...] the human has not disappeared at all but lingers in a highly problematic form

(Miller 1998a: 175)

This crucial move, which transforms the purely virtual, non-representational and non-referential version of the nomad into the real and the anthropological, is central

to my revisionist reading of *New Babylon* where I find ‘the human’ lingering in a similarly central and problematic form. Systematically uncovering ‘the genealogy’ (1998a: 177) of Deleuze’s and Guattari’s project, Miller argues that ‘we can identify’ in *A Thousand Plateaus* ‘an intellectual project of massive proportions, requiring ethnographic authority’ (1998a: 182). Following Miller’s lead, I contend that Constant’s project also finds itself in the necessary ‘position of an anthropology’ (1998a: 176). Like *A Thousand Plateaus*, *New Babylon* leads ‘back into the realm of the actual’, constituting a form of ethnography in the underlying sense that it is ‘explicitly concerned with real nomads’ (1998a: 198, 178). Like Deleuze and Guattari, Constant needs ‘ethnographic and anthropological information’ to substantiate and validate his vision of *New Babylon* (1998a: 189). Yet, while Deleuze’s and Guattari’s ‘theory of nomadism [...] covers the entire world from the ancient Hyksos and Mongols to modern-day North Africans’ (1998a: 178), Constant’s project appears more locally grounded, finding its genealogy in the Romani of post-war Europe.

To substantiate his critical reading of *A Thousand Plateaus* as an anthropology, Miller analytically excavates the intellectual foundations of Deleuze’s and Guattari’s project. Rooting about in the ‘vast network of footnotes’ and “‘rhizomorphic” catacombs’ of their work, Miller looks for ethnographic references to nomads in indirect, twice-removed and out of the way places (1998a: 176). Occupying himself almost exclusively with what appears ‘underneath (in the original French edition) and behind (in the American translation)’ Deleuze’s and Guattari’s work, Miller’s close reading of the ‘substructure of *A Thousand Plateaus*’ reveals a project that is not only ‘full of anthropological sources’, but generative of ‘an anthropological discourse of its own’ (1998a: 176, 182). Some of the most frequently cited ethnographic sources in *A Thousand Plateaus* are predictable enough – Claude Lévi-Strauss, Georges Dumézil, Georges Balandier and Marcel Griaule; all French anthropologists from whom Deleuze and Guattari borrow their anthropological authority. Going on to write with confidence on a range of non-Western societies (who are not always nomadic) including the Crow and Hopi, Deleuze and Guattari place ‘great faith in the anthropologists they quote’. While they know nothing of

these peoples ‘first hand’, they end up ‘speaking as if they [...] themselves, were either in control of Hopi thought or were Hopi themselves. Through the power of anthropological borrowing, the authors have achieved a mind-meld with an alien people’ (1998a: 189). This problem is only compounded by the fact that many of the authors Deleuze and Guattari draw upon to generate their authority – particularly true in the case of Lévi-Strauss – had already ‘piggybacked on someone else’s field work in order to make more general observations’ of their own (1998a: 188). The nomad of *A Thousand Plateaus* is thus anything but ‘free-floating, *prescriptive*, *virtual*, and *nonreferential*’ (1998a: 177); Deleuze’s and Guattari’s ‘pure idea’ is always and inextricably ‘mixed with [the] “actual”’ (1998a: 198):

The notes to *A Thousand Plateaus* vitiate “free” nomadology. They and the remarks to which they are tied in the text reveal substantial roots in the anthropology of real and actual nomads, in ethnographic texts that describe the societies and cultures of nomadic peoples from various points in history and far-flung corners of the globe

(Miller 1998a: 179-180)

In revealing the underlying, often primitivist substructure of Deleuze’s and Guattari’s project (1998a: 206), Miller’s focus on the ‘quirky use of anthropological materials and footnotes’ (1998a: 187) in *A Thousand Plateaus* presents a useful roadmap for my revisionist approach to *New Babylon*. Yet the anthropological roots of Constant’s work are arguably harder to trace than Deleuze’s and Guattari’s.

Miller can focus his attention uniquely on *A Thousand Plateaus*. Deleuze’s and Guattari’s book, as published and easily purchasable in a number of editions and languages today, provides him with ample evidence for his argument. Granted the notes to *A Thousand Plateaus* are ‘vastly heterogeneous’, taking up ‘sixty-eight pages’ (57 in my edition), covering a range of subject areas including psychoanalysis, music theory, botany, economics, literature, history and, of course, anthropology (1998a: 176), these notes are nonetheless contained and bounded. They are identifiable and describable as footnotes (or endnotes); they are also fixed, locatable and finite. Miller can deal in precise page numbers and unchanging passages of text; he can refer to these in making his arguments, and other scholars can look to them in turn. Taking a published book as his focus, Miller’s work is an

exercise in critical textual analysis. His close reading of Deleuze's and Guattari's nomad philosophy keeps a strict frame of reference, staying within the front and back covers of his French and English editions of *A Thousand Plateaus*. For all its claims to radical eclecticism, Deleuze's and Guattari's book is – in this sense, at least – a rather clean and tidy object. *A Thousand Plateaus* is conventionally academic in form, at the very least. For Miller, its content is conventional also: it is 'a work of European "high" counterculture' that 'reflects no more and no less than what can be learned in the libraries and bookstores of Paris, France: a tremendous but not "boundless" amount' (1998a: 177). While not everyone will agree with Miller's analysis of the intellectual territory covered by *A Thousand Plateaus*, the book is certainly not a sprawling, unruly or 'rhizomatic' object in its own right.

The same cannot be said of *New Babylon*. Revisiting Constant's work in the manner suggested by Miller's approach to *A Thousand Plateaus* presents a range of different challenges. Constant's unpublished *Skizze zu einer Kultur* book manuscripts represent the most obvious parallel to Deleuze's and Guattari's work; yet, although it was conceived as a book, contains a good deal of footnotes throughout and, even, an appendix at the back, it remains incomplete. Even though it was intended as his major work on *New Babylon*, *Skizze zu einer Kultur* captures only certain facets of Constant's multi-media output. On the other hand, the way *Skizze zu einer Kultur* remains unfinished makes it a particularly engaging object of study. Caught in a state of becoming, to refer back to Deleuzian thought, Constant's *Skizze zu einer Kultur* is a messy work-in-progress. It retains the marks, scribbles, strike-throughs, amendments and notes-to-self of its author. It is open ended, still needing, waiting to be figured out.

Compared to *A Thousand Plateaus*, the range of references underpinning *New Babylon* is not exactly vast and heterogeneous. Constant's intellectual wanderings are diverse enough, however. A cursory look through his work-in-progress reveals borrowings from Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Johan Huizinga, Chombart de Lauwe, Henri Lefebvre, Norbert Wiener, Françoise Rabelais, William Morris, Lewis Mumford, De Stijl and Team X. There are further references to Sigfried Giedion's

1955 *Architektur und Gemeinschaft*, David Riesman's 1958 *The Lonely Crowd*, Le Corbusier's work in Chandigarh, the new 'Kasbah Style' architecture, Colin Buchanan's 1963 report on 'Traffic in Towns' and, of course, Nico Rost's 1963 article for *Algemeen Handelsblad*. Constant also seems to have kept a close eye on current events; 'happenings' staged by some younger generation Dutch artists like the Amsterdam-based designer Jan Jacobs of Atelier '63, for example, find their way into his work on *New Babylon*. Here, there is a traceable relationship between *Skizze zu einer Kultur* and other materials contained in Constant's archive. Piecing these connections back together makes for an interesting diagram, giving a feeling for the way in which Constant's archive may have developed, and functioned, in relationship to his creative practice (Figure 3.2).

Photographs, a technical design drawing and a number of deteriorating newspaper clippings filed together under inventory number 326 document the development and public staging of a performance involving a fantastic contraption called the 'Autosaurus'. Designed and constructed by Jacobs, who assisted Constant in his *New Babylon* work throughout the 1960s, the Autosaurus for 4, capable of speeds up to 5km/hr (as detailed on the technical drawing), descended upon Haarlem, in the Netherlands, in mid-September, 1966. Living up to its name, visually, the 'Autosaurus' was driven about by Jacobs with Constant's son, Victor, along for the ride. It appears to have made a stir, and was widely reported in the press. Jacobs's prowling, mechanical creature appears at least three more times in Constant's archive. The 46th chapter of *Skizze zu einer Kultur*, titled 'History of New Babylon', ends with the suggestion that transportation – previously confined to a functional and utilitarian role in life – would eventually be transformed into a medium for collective experimentation and play. A footnote, which may be just a note to self at this stage, refers to a drawing called 'joy-riding' which 'would fit well here' (RKD 414[a]: 46.3). A drawing with that name, dated 1966 and depicting what certainly looks to be Jacobs's 'Autosaurus' traversing a typical New Babylonian landscape, appears in the catalogue of an exhibition, titled *Constant, Arbeiten auf Papier 1948-1985*, held at the Bielefelder Kunstverein (RKD 402). The first issue of Constant's self-produced *New Babylon Bulletin*, released January 1967, devotes its last two pages (out of

twelve) to the theme of ‘joy riding’ and the ‘joy rider’. Edited by Constant, the issue ends with a reference to the autosaurus, and a copy of Jacobs’s technical drawing is included (RKD 424). Constant’s archive is rarely so self-referential and contained, however.

While Constant is diligent and conventional with citations when he uses them, he does not always reference his sources of information; *Skizze zu einer Kultur* is academic, but only to a point. In this limited sense, only, Constant’s never-realised book may represent a more liberated form of nomadic thought than *A Thousand Plateaus*; its ‘virtuality’, in other words, is perhaps not as ‘compromised by the weight of referential exemplification’ (Miller 1998a: 209). Of course, Deleuze’s and Guattari’s use of footnotes ‘may be merely “for laughs,” part of an elaborate game’ designed to give the ‘appearance of grounding’. While the same might be said of *Skizze zu einer Kultur*, also, there is a feeling – in both cases – that radical thought is kept in check by the act of ‘using footnotes at all’ (1998a: 206).

It seems only certain parts of Constant’s *New Babylon* manifesto required – in his mind – the authority of external sources. One obvious example is Norbert Wiener’s work on cybernetics, to which Constant turns frequently throughout *Skizze zu einer Kultur* and other texts from the time period. Wigley has similarly noted Constant’s obsession with keeping track of scientific and technological information: ‘He was absolutely scrupulous in keeping every reference any time he read something with the word computer or artificial intelligence in it. Every one of the different texts by Norbert Wiener he kept and studied’ (Heynen et al. 1999: 28). We find the opposite in Constant’s sweeping statements about history, society and culture. Although the validation, when given, is often Marx or Engels, we frequently need to read between the lines – and speculate – if we are to have any chance of arriving at a probable source.

A typical page from *Skizze zu einer Kultur* brings together two of Constant’s key reference points – cybernetics and Marxism – in a pair of footnotes. Like the body text they compliment, these are marked and overlaid by hand written corrections.

The first footnote points to an article called ‘The cybernated generation’ published in the American magazine *Time* on 02 April 1965, from which Constant extracts a quote describing the effects that automation would have on industry if technology were applied to the extent then possible. The second footnote pays homage to Engels – particularly his 1892 book *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific* (Engels 1892) – describing the transformation from State ownership to the public ownership of goods. Functioning discursively in relation to the main text, both footnotes provide clear reference points for the ideas Constant develops throughout this section of *Skizze zu einer Kultur*, which presents a Marxist-driven account of the end of labour through automation, the subsequent decline of capitalism and the ensuing, revolutionary task of the proletariat. These footnotes also reveal something about Constant’s working method. With *Skizze zu einer Kultur* generally dated between about 1960 to 1966, the incorporation of the *Time* article suggests Constant was continuously collecting information of potential value to his project, which he would then incorporate back into his text, as and when he found it (RKD 414[a]: 18.1).

When Constant turns his attention to North American Indians confined to their Reservations (RKD 414[a]: 31.3) for example, or to the nomadic hunters and gatherers of the Stone Age (RKD 414[a]: 51.1), no source is acknowledged. Again caught in varying stages of development, these pages from *Skizze zu einer Kultur* have been corrected and re-corrected over time with successive layers of black, blue and red ink, but the anthropological, ethnographic or archaeological detail Constant’s claims would appear to require is missing. The references may have come later, of course, had Constant continued working on the book – but, as it stands, there is no trail to follow. We see this beginning to happen elsewhere in the *Skizze zu einer Kultur* typescript. At the bottom of a page featuring a partially re-written passage discussing transformations in sexual behaviour (RKD 414[a]: 61.1), for example, there is a hand-scrawled footnote in black ink. Extending the argument of the main text, this addition would presumably have been picked up and added in later.

In its unfinished state *Skizze zu einer Kultur* represents only a fraction of Constant’s work on *New Babylon*, often raising as many questions as it answers. If ‘The notes to

*A Thousand Plateaus* are the archive of nomad thought' (Miller 1998a: 176), then we have to look elsewhere to locate a comparable anthropological subtext for Constant's work on *New Babylon*. Indeed, the topic of greatest interest to my thesis – Constant's relationship to Romani – is noticeably absent from all but the very start of the book manuscript. This does not mean Romani are absent from *New Babylon*, however. Linkages exist, only not within the unfinished pages of *Skizze zu einer Kultur*. The anthropological footnotes of Constant's project are not footnotes in the conventional sense, as may be easily found throughout – underneath or behind, to use Miller's terms – *A Thousand Plateaus*. *New Babylon*'s footnotes exist in more out of the way and indirect places, and there is no easy way to describe their relationship in spatial terms, as Miller does. It is in letters, lecture typescripts, interviews and newspaper articles – not all of which are held in Constant's archive – that we find further references to Romani.

There is a final, practical lesson to be learned from Miller's critical re-reading of Deleuze's and Guattari's work, crucial to my revisionist project. At a purely methodological level, Miller's focus on the footnotes of *A Thousand Plateaus* advocates for the practice of close reading generally; beyond his valuable insights into Deleuze's and Guattari's work, Miller's emphasis on subtext becomes a powerful revisionist technique for uncovering material and ideas that might otherwise remain hidden, obscured and altogether kept out of scholarly discourse. Footnotes signals an overall commitment to attentiveness in my study, outlining a basic approach that is useful for analysing Constant's original work on *New Babylon* and, equally, that of his historians. In my critical analysis of *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship, the concept of footnotes proves to be – just as it does for Miller – a justification for drawing attention to what otherwise look to be minor mistakes or, even, innocent scholarly slippages, in the work of other writers.

In his reading of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Miller draws our attention to potential mistakes in Deleuze's and Guattari's text, such as a disconnect between a passage about Africa and an accompanying footnote about New Guinea (which is certainly not in Africa). Finding this slip-up to be 'understandable but serious', Miller does not



simply point to Deleuze's and Guattari's mistakes, however. Rather, he takes this as a starting point from which to explore the relationship between 'factual' errors and a 'virtual' argument (1998a: 191). What does it mean, then, to omit or get the 'minor' details – names, dates, etc. – a bit wrong? Does it matter? While Deleuze and Guattari themselves suggest that 'any factual mistake should be overlooked', Miller asks whether minor slippages might, alternatively, reveal 'a certain cosmopolitan arrogance'. Apparently innocent mistakes – such as the one that confuses or fails to recognise the difference between Guinea and New Guinea, for example – might signify a 'literal *indifference*' to the various non-Western peoples *A Thousand Plateaus* turns to for support (1998a: 191). The same question may be asked of *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship. Do minor mistakes, such as the failure to transcribe correctly in French the name of what was, in reality, a key organisation in the post-war Romani rights movement, indicate the workings of a cosmopolitan indifference here, also?

### **Footsteps**

Derek Freeman's critical analysis of Margaret Mead's pioneering fieldwork in Samoa is the second methodological reference point for my revisionist account of Constant's *New Babylon*. Freeman's work, which retraces Mead's footsteps in Samoa during her short period of fieldwork there, in the islands of Manu'a in 1925-1926, is particularly instrumental in helping me to articulate my relationship to the substantial body of scholarship now surrounding *New Babylon* and the Situationist International. Like Miller, Freeman necessarily and intentionally sets himself at odds with a prevailing and dominant 'orthodoxy' – namely, Mead's 'Mother Goddess' status in American anthropology (Freeman 1999: 208). It is this basic heretical position, which refuses to accept established facts and the conclusions reached by others, that I look to adopt in my work. Yet, while Freeman becomes obsessed with demonstrating 'the unscientific nature of Mead's Samoan research' (1999: 211) and establishing his own work, in contrast, as a 'patient and protracted' study resulting in 'the truth' (1996: xiv), I make no such claims to fact and authenticity in my

revisionist analysis of *New Babylon*. I choose, instead, to embrace and work with the subjective and creative processes of scholarship.

In his controversial book, *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth*, first published in 1983, Freeman (1984) sets out to demonstrate how Mead's classic ethnography, *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1973 [1928]) – 'the best-selling of all anthropological books', a work which 'has influenced the thinking of millions of people throughout the world' – results from a number of fateful errors. According to Freeman, Mead's work, still one of the most canonical texts in cultural anthropology today, is a myth. For him, *Coming of Age* is a tragic misrepresentation of Samoan culture that is bound up in Mead's own subjectivity and blinded by the nature of her academic formation in the early 1920s. Thus, in Freeman's view, Mead's groundbreaking study of Samoan adolescent sexuality, which she consistently described and defended throughout her lifetime as 'a scientific classic', has little if nothing to do with the reality of life in Samoa in the mid 1920s (1984: xii-xiii). Based on intermittent periods of ethnographic fieldwork and archival research stretching from 1940 to 1981, Freeman's original findings have since been reissued in a number of updated editions, with the changed title of a more recent release, *Margaret Mead and the Heretic* (1996), radically foregrounding Freeman's contentious position in contemporary anthropological discourse.

Freeman has also published a subsequent historical analysis of Mead's Samoan fieldwork, *The Fateful Hoaxing of Margaret Mead* (1999), which compliments his earlier work by drawing on previously unavailable archival materials and unpublished correspondence between Mead, her academic mentor Franz Boas and her Samoan friends, amongst others. The key impetus driving this later study is, however, 'a series of dramatic and quite unforeseen events' that occurred shortly after the publication of his original corrective: notably, the surprise emergence in November 1987 of Fa'apua'a Fa'amu, 'Mead's foremost Samoan friend of 1926' who wished, personally, to 'set the record straight' (1999: 2-3; cf. 1996: vii-ix). In this limited sense, only, Freeman's later work – which takes Fa'apua'a's account as its point of departure and underlying frame of reference – emerges as a piece of

‘testimonio’ or ‘counter-ethnography’; it highlights, if indirectly, the capacity of ‘the other’ to ‘talk back’ (cf. Sluka 2007; Brettell 1993). It brings the primitive sharply into focus, revealing an individual with a name, complex identity and life story of her own who simply cannot be contained, much less accurately represented, by the limiting, anonymizing label ‘Samoa’.

Mead’s original 1928 text details, in her terms, a ‘startling discovery’. It presents the Pacific archipelago of Samoa as an island paradise of adolescent free love, where promiscuous premarital sex was the norm in the mid 1920s. In anthropological terms Samoa constituted a ‘negative instance’ or ‘counterexample’; Mead’s chosen fieldwork site provided her with evidence of an existing cultural reality that was the exact opposite of adolescent sexual experience in Europe and the United States at the time. Mead’s discoveries weighed in substantially on then-current debates between biological and cultural determinism; for ‘believers in the sovereignty of culture’, her ‘negative instance appeared to be a triumphant outcome’ in the nature-versus-nurture controversy (1984: xi-xii). Freeman’s work, together with the work of other anthropologists and, importantly, the opinions of many Samoans, suggests this was never the case. In marked contrast to the libertarian island paradise described by Mead, they give us small, close-knit communities of rather ‘devout Christians’ (1996: ix). The back cover of my Penguin edition of *Margaret Mead and Samoa* cuts to the chase, sensationally describing Freeman’s fieldwork as ‘one of the most exciting detective stories in the history of science’. Freeman’s results are presented as the exact antithesis of Mead’s short-lived, fast-and-loose ethnography: ‘Over years of research, he found the Samoan people [...] were intensely competitive, with high rates of rape and murder, prizing virginity and deeply intolerant of pre-marital sex’ (Freeman 1984).

On the morning of Friday, 13 November 1987, Fa’apua’a – according to Freeman, a virgin until her Christian marriage at 29-30 years of age in 1930 – explained how she had become aware of the fact, much later in life, that ‘what Margaret Mead had written about premarital promiscuity in Samoa’ some sixty years earlier had originated in a ‘prank’. Uncomfortable with Mead’s prying questions about Samoan

sexual mores, Fa'apua'a and her friend, Fofoa, had knowingly 'joked' and 'fibbed' about their nightly exploits, not realizing how their stories 'had had the unintended consequence of totally misleading a great many people about Samoa' (1999: 3-8). Freeman's findings, together with Fa'apua'a's testimony, remain controversial: following the publication of the results of Freeman's original field and archival work in 1983, Mead and her account of Samoa became 'an anthropological cause célèbre' – defended and upheld, particularly in America, as an unassailable classic in the field (1999: 12-13, 207-211).

Outside of anthropology, Mead's *Coming of Age* proved an influential work in other academic disciplines that categorically accepted her descriptions of Samoan culture as valid and accurate, and then relied explicitly upon her ethnographic authority to draw conclusions of their own. Her original myth of Samoa, in other words, led to the making of countless other myths about Samoans elsewhere. Her flawed portrayal of Samoan culture also played a central role in Western culture at large, at least partly underwriting the sexual liberation movements of the 1960s. This, ultimately, is the real issue with Mead's work – making mistakes, as Freeman himself argues, 'is commonplace in science' (1984: xix). It is not, or not only, Mead's 'blunders' that Freeman finds particularly problematic, but 'the extraordinary influence that *Coming of Age in Samoa* [...] has had on anthropology and the zeitgeist of the twentieth century' (1999: 15). In refuting Mead's work, Freeman takes great care to make his oppositional stance explicit: his concern is with 'the scientific import' of Mead's research and its wider implications for the nature, understanding and validity of disciplinary-specific models of scientific enquiry; 'not with Margaret Mead personally' (1984: xiii).

If Mead's work was, in essence, a case study in 'nature versus nurture', then Freeman's work is a case study of 'scientific knowledge' within anthropology; an investigation into the ways in which disciplinary and sub-disciplinary facts are produced, recycled and consumed. The issue is not necessarily with the flaws in Mead's ethnography, but rather with 'the anthropological paradigm' and broader intellectual climate 'of which *Coming of Age in Samoa* was a part' (1984: xv).

Rather than simply correcting Mead's 'scientific errors', Freeman's work poses searching questions about the legitimacy of social science and the overly relativistic worldview driving academic scholarship 'in centres of higher learning throughout the western world' (1996: xiii). Mead's hoaxing in Samoa was perhaps unavoidable. She discovered precisely what she had been trained and sent there to see: a 'cultural pattern' of free adolescent sexuality that was 'an ideal solution' to the problem her mentor, Franz Boas, 'had imposed upon her' (1996: xii). If it was inevitable that Mead would produce the type of anthropological knowledge she did at the time, the fact that 'Mead's conclusions of 1928 came to be quite generally accepted by other anthropologists' (1999: 15) and 'the intelligentsia at large' (1996: xiii), was similarly unavoidable.

### ***Coming of age in New Babylon***

Beyond his heretical identity, it is in these contexts that Freeman's work is most useful to my revisionist study of *New Babylon*. To be clear: I am not interested, necessarily, in the type of 'knowledge' (about Romani, about nomadism) originally produced by Constant while working on his project, but rather with the ways in which his work has been consistently read by art and architectural historians and then recycled in humanities scholarship generally. Freeman's work highlights important issues of academic training and intellectual fashion, revealing the ways in which the production of knowledge in a given discipline are often tightly structured by prevailing assumptions and predilections in the academy. In Mead's case, as for Freeman's own anthropological education in the late 1930s, this was Boasian cultural determinism. Freeman writes openly and engagingly in his later work about his university education and the conflicted relationship he initially had with Mead. Describing himself, at twenty-two years of age, as 'already a keen admirer' of Mead's accomplishments; 'determined [...] to travel to the islands of Samoa to extend [...] her research there' (1999: 203). Freeman recognises in retrospect the long period of transition it took him to eventually work his way out of an engrained way of seeing, thinking and behaving in the field:

So complete was my acceptance of Dr. Mead's Samoan writings on my arrival in Upolu that in my early inquiries, I dismissed or ignored all evidence that ran counter to her findings. Indeed, it was not until after I had become fluent in the Samoan language, had been adopted into a Samoan family, and, having been given a *mānaia* title, had begun attending chiefly courts, or *fono mānu*, that I became fully aware of the extent of the discordance between Mead's account and the realities that I was regularly witnessing

(Freeman 1999: 204)

After first identifying himself as 'an enthusiastic proponent of cultural determinism', who actively sought to echo Franz Boas and Margaret Mead in his earliest published work (1999: 203), Freeman's later, second generation 'attack' (van Beek et al. 1991: 158) on Mead becomes all the more compelling.

There is a similar dynamic at play in my research. As Miller's critique of hybridity in contemporary cultural studies suggests, we can point to clear affinities for certain theoretical paradigms in avant-garde art and architectural scholarship today.

Personally, I am aware of the strong attraction I have to my subject and the ways in which I have at times identified, or wished to identify, with the counter-cultural strategies developed by Constant and the Situationists. As a proponent of radical, independent thought and oppositional analysis generally, it is no surprise, perhaps, that I have ended up self-consciously adopting a heretical stance in my research. My original route into this material was, similarly, the work of other authors, which pre-programmed me to look for and privilege certain texts, images and theories in my writing. Archival work, like Freeman's fieldwork, helped me to become aware of the extent to which my personal feelings about *New Babylon* ran counter to the findings of previous scholars – who had effectively taught me, without me knowing it, to overlook Romani. Even then it took time and effort to get past seeing what the work of others had already shown me, consider the value of other texts and images and finally, think and write about *New Babylon* differently.

There are of course obvious differences between my study and Freeman's work that do not need much elaboration. Quite clearly, I am not dealing, when compared with the massive impact of Mead's work on popular culture and humanities scholarship alike, 'with one of the most remarkable events in the intellectual history of the

twentieth century' (Freeman 1996: xiii). At the same time, some writers today certainly think of the Situationist International in these terms. While perhaps smaller in scale, the ways in which Romani are consistently omitted and misrepresented in histories of *New Babylon* and the Situationist International are no less serious in principle than Mead's flawed account of Samoa. If Samoan culture as it appeared in Mead's writings of 1928 came to underwrite 'free love' in the 1960s, then Romani appear to circulate with similar ease, when they do appear in *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship, today. Stripped of their own history and life experiences, Romani are 'in effect, sanitized', caught up in the neo-avant-garde's myth of 'happy nomadology' (Miller 1998a: 205).

Freeman's latest account of the history of Mead's ethnographic work in Samoa describes, with knowing irreverence, how her 'scientific classic' was never revised during her lifetime: 'Instead, even the typographical errors that had crept into the text of 1928 were repeated in edition after edition after edition' (1999: 201). I have noticed a related condition in the texts I study. In *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship, certain 'stories' are told time and time again: whether they are factual or not does not seem to matter, it is their selection and selective retelling that counts, and which eventually consecrates them as history. The same can be said of the stock imagery, texts and quotations that repeatedly appear in print today – there is a sense that the defining moments of *New Babylon* and the Situationist International, like the photographs that we now associate with them, have become famous primarily, if not expressly, through scholarship. A look at the expansive literature now available reveals a repeating role call of events that primarily revolve around Debord and, in the specific instance of *New Babylon*, Constant's relationship with him – in which case Debord's role in the project is typically privileged. The resulting storyline and its accompanying body of imagery, now almost ubiquitous in scholarship, is typically conceived as: the *Primo congresso* held in Alba in September 1956; the subsequent meeting of Debord and Constant in Alba in December that year; the resulting period of intense correspondence between the two; the drunken revelry of the Munich Congress of April 1959 that marks the apex of

their relationship; and, finally, the downward spiral that followed – ultimately resulting in Constant’s departure from the Situationist International in June 1960.

In probing and challenging the uses and limits of this established timeline, I also look to synthesise Miller’s concept of footnotes with the more literal and physical act of footsteps entailed in Freeman’s work. *A Thousand Plateaus*, Mead’s Samoa and *New Babylon* are all, in a sense, fields – these are spaces that can be explored both physically (in a tactile and visual sense, for example) and intellectually. Indeed, Miller’s close reading of *A Thousand Plateaus* turns explicitly to notions of footsteps, with Deleuze’s and Guattari’s footnotes becoming ‘the footprints in the sand of their nomadic intellectual wanderings, enabling readers to follow their steps’ (Miller 1998a: 176). Yet as we have seen in Freeman’s work, there is a necessary and crucial element of deviance implied here. Following the footnotes of *New Babylon* is no straightforward task – we cannot simply follow Constant’s lead or the lead of other scholars who have written on his project, and trace out their footsteps only. It is the directions in which Constant’s work points, and the possible trajectories and endpoints his work leads to (if sometimes unknowingly), that I find the most interesting. When Miller speaks of ‘wandering along’ the footsteps of *A Thousand Plateaus*, he too recognises the need to pursue ‘routes that Deleuze and Guattari began but did not complete’ (1998a: 176). Indeed, Miller finds that the most intriguing sources for Deleuze’s and Guattari’s work are often the most obscure. It is the same in my revisionist approach to Constant’s work – the most compelling pathways I discover and wander along in my restudy are similarly those ‘whose roots are more twisted and whose projects sometimes lead away from the declared intentions’ (1998a: 182) of Constant, the Situationist International and *New Babylon*. Arriving at new vantage points from which to rethink and re-imagine Constant and his work, I also find myself in intellectual territories – namely, Romani political activism – far removed from the now well-trodden terrain of *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship.



## ***Rites of Passage***

In the remainder of this chapter I extend the anthropological frame of reference established by my use of Miller's and Freeman's writings. Scripting my archival work as a form of 'revisionist fieldwork' in its own right, I sketch out a performative, narrative mode of research that is, nonetheless, still firmly grounded in the reality – my reality – of the archive. Turning to notions of fieldwork, fieldnotes and reflexive post-fieldwork writing, I consider how the use of archival materials in art and architectural scholarship – particularly in the contexts of an irreverent, second generation study like my own – might relate to the recent, reflexive turn in contemporary anthropological fieldwork. Building on ethnographic writings about the importance of self and identity in the field, I outline a speculative approach to archival work that advocates for a blurring of boundaries between history, theory and creative practice (cf. Scott 2010). Drawing on my personal, tactile and emotive responses to my research material, I attempt to acknowledge the ways I have constructed and curated a personal vision of Constant and *New Babylon* – one that synthesises together the notes of my original archival experiences, my shifting memories of that experience and my ongoing post-archival reflections.

In 1990, long before his death in 2005, Constant transferred his personal archive to the RKD in The Hague, where it was neatly inventoried, indexed and packaged into an ordered hierarchy of crisp envelopes and box files. Containing many of the original documents and publications associated with COBRA, the Situationist International and *New Babylon*, as well as a wealth of alphabetised correspondence (many letters with original envelopes still intact), it is a dream come true for historians of Europe's post-war avant-garde. But this is only half the story. There is another aspect to Constant's archive that runs counter to its setting in one of Europe's premier centres for art historical research. Constant's archive is not, or not only, a depository of neatly catalogued documents. Alphabetised, re-ordered and assigned 487 discrete inventory numbers (some numbers apply to a single, immaculately-kept postcard, while others cover piles of assorted ephemera), the materials making up Constant's archive remain – in places – *New Babylon* in the raw. Individual newspaper clippings, for example, are not just records of past events

to do with Constant and his work. Sometimes, they are traces of *New Babylon* in the making. For all its order and cleanliness today, Constant's archive retains traces of the dynamic processes that generated his *New Babylon* project over a period of almost two decades. An elaborate collage of images and texts still locked in the process of becoming, Constant's archive is, at times, an unruly collection of volatile loose ends, incomplete sentences and unfinished ideas. While it has surely been sanitised and sterilised, in varying degrees, by the RKD's archivists, Constant's collection of 'stuff' has not completely lost its original, generative potential.

The Archief Constant, or 'New Babylon Archiv', as it was originally developed and maintained by Constant up until 1990, was deliberately invented during his work on *New Babylon*, complete with an official stamp to mark certain objects and items for safe keeping. Finding corollaries in the work of other avant-garde artists and architects of the 20th Century (cf. Burt and Vanpée 1990; Foster 1996; 2002; 2004; Gilman 1997; Kaplan 1990; Spieker 2008), Constant's archive can be thought of as a knowing exercise in identity construction and self-preservation. Although I will not explore these here, parallels with Buckminster Fuller's multi-volume 'scrapbook', called the *Chronofile* – and the particular role this played in constructing Fuller's public persona – seem particularly relevant (Krausse and Lichtenstein 1999; Lorance 2009). There is almost certainly a paradox at play here. What drives individuals like Fuller and Constant – arguably the twentieth century's most celebrated prophets of 'nomadism' and 'ephemeralisation' – to preserve and, eventually, institutionalise their lives?

Constant's archive gives us a certain perspective on the artist and his work that is always, and only, incomplete. It is in one sense very limited, as it contains only things that Constant kept in his archive. It is not the contents of his studio or home library, for example, which might aid us in the task of revealing the sources – about Romani and anthropology – that remain largely untraceable in his project at present. Other items which we might expect to find in Constant's archive, such as Nico Rost's 1963 article for *Algemeen Handelsblad*, are absent. Although it often presents what is perhaps a controlled and tightly edited image of Constant and his work, at

other times the contents of Constant's archive are fantastically disarming. I am still haunted, captivated and in some ways horrified by the personal details that can still be found there: for example, emotional letters exchanged with friends regarding the break up with his first wife, who left him – heartbroken – for his good friend and COBRA colleague Asger Jorn. What does it mean to work with this material today? How am I to make use of Constant's archive, and which parts of it specifically, in my work? Do I present my findings as facts, fully disconnected from my personal experience of the archive, or do I acknowledge my uncertainties about my material and personal anxieties and desires about my project?

### ***Telling stories***

Writing in the specific disciplinary contexts of literary studies, Alice Kaplan (1990) raises similar issues, questioning some prevailing conventions, or taboos, about how we go about, think about and write about archival work in contemporary humanities scholarship. Kaplan finds archival work, while ineluctably driven by 'passion' and 'private story-telling', to be kept in check by longstanding rules of scholarly etiquette; 'conventional academic discourse' demands of the researcher that they 'eradicate all personal stories' from their work (1990: 103). Setting provocative notions of redemptive detective fictions, dime novels and adolescent adventure stories against traditional approaches to archival work in humanities scholarship, Kaplan moves to 'recover some of the stories that get deleted in the final scholarly form' and to re-focus our attention 'on the person who is digging' (1990: 103-104, 107). She examines this basic conflict, questioning why private desires and emotions – while crucial to scholarly work – are generally thought to be unfit for a public audience. Personal subjectivity, in other words, has no official place in the 'dry archival report' that the researcher is expected to produce:

Were the story of how you got the story really to be told inside the book, it would interrupt or complicate the narrative so much that no results could be understood or even perceived. Every story of success in the archives is emotionally charged, for only the most extreme emotions can drive people to the drudgery, to the discomfort, of sitting and sifting through dog-eared documents, manuscripts, microfilms. To reveal those emotions would not only gum up the narrative, it would threaten its credibility, by showing on

what thin strands of coincidence, accident, or on what unfair forms of friendship, ownership, geographical proximity, the discoveries were based  
(Kaplan 1990: 104)

The reflexive turn in contemporary anthropological writing appears to distinguish itself from current arts scholarship in this respect. In an opposite scenario to the one described by Kaplan, many anthropologists today readily incorporate personal reflections, anecdotal accounts – and even sexually charged dreams (Altork 1995) – into their published ethnographic texts. Michael Herzfeld describes this almost obsessive introspectiveness as ‘an anthropology that makes an ethnographic problem of itself’ (Herzfeld 1987: x). Rather than disavowing or shying away from the unruly, messy terrain of their personal subjectivity, many ethnographers chose to embrace the ‘artistic flaws’ that are always present in their work. Empirical ‘fuzziness’ is then redeployed as a disciplinary strength or potential. Championing the idea of anthropology as an art practice in and of itself, Harry Wolcott argues that the most ‘crucial aspect of fieldwork lies in recognising when to be unmethodical’ (Wolcott 2005: 5). While it is now standard practice for anthropologists to reflect on their fieldwork experiences – using their published academic work as a forum through which to openly discuss their fears, prejudices, desires, changing emotional states, moral dilemmas and personal, bodily hang-ups in the field – rarely do art and architectural historians admit to, much less lay bare, the biases, motives and predilections driving their work. Georges Didi-Huberman is something of an exception. Although he does not engage with issues of personal subjectivity nearly to the degree found in contemporary anthropological theory, he does at least question the ‘*tone of certainty*’ typical of art historical writing generally. Against the image of the art or architectural historian as ‘a medical specialist’ who approaches his subject matter with the ‘statutory authority’ of someone who is ‘*supposed to know everything*’, Didi-Huberman gives us the unruly figure of the ‘*fictor*’:

The historian is, in every sense of the word, only the *fictor*, which is to say the modeler, the artisan, the author, the inventor of whatever past he offers us [...] What can we ever know [...] save by *guessing*, and without ever grasping [...] completely?

(Didi-Huberman 2005 [1990]: 2)

## ***Art history as art practice***

Cultural anthropology variously understands ethnographic fieldwork to be ‘one of the fundamental or “paradigmatic” elements of anthropology’ (Robben and Sluka 2007: 4); its ‘central activity’ (Howell 1990: 4); ‘the ritual initiation experience’ (Berger 1993: 174) or ‘rite of passage’ (Freilich 1970: 16; Johnson 1984; Rosaldo 1989: 30); and, ‘the source of anthropology’s strength’ (Keesing and Strathern 1998: 7) as a discipline. Art historical archival work is not, in a strict disciplinary sense, entirely different from ethnographic fieldwork in this respect. In art history, working in archives – handling objects – is often similarly conceived as a rite of passage or ritual initiation experience for aspiring art historians; this is thought to be a necessary part of the research process that can be drawn upon later to confer authority on scholarly work. I find the inward-looking gaze and open acknowledgment of performativity characteristic of much ethnographic writing today to be particularly rich and relevant in these contexts.

Acknowledging the powerful part played by ‘self’ in ethnographic practices, Amanda Coffey describes deep-seeded processes of ‘personal, emotional and identity *work*’. She argues that, ‘The construction and production of self and identity occurs both during and after fieldwork. In writing, remembering and representing our fieldwork experiences we are involved in processes of self presentation’ (Coffey 1999: 1). Developing a concept of perpetual rereading he terms ‘post-fieldwork fieldwork’, anthropologist Anthony Cohen writes, similarly, about the ways in which relationships between fieldwork and sense of self continue to impact upon scholarship well beyond the original experience of the field: ‘We bring to the analysis of our fieldnotes continuously accumulating experience extraneous to the circumstances in which they were written’ (Cohen 1992a: 345). Championing the idea of a ‘self conscious anthropology’, Cohen (1992b) embraces the ways in which an ethnographer’s relationships to a particular fieldwork site, like the on-site data they collect ‘out there’ and then later reprocess ‘back home’, is continuously negotiated, disrupted and second-guessed.

I have found my own experiences of archival work, which drive the bulk of this study, to be similarly conflicted; following writers such as Coffey and Cohen, I understand my research to be bound up in complex issues of identity construction. Like their writings about fieldwork, my attempts to represent, interpret and write about *New Babylon* have proven complicated – this work is as much about me as it is about my research material. Far from an objective task of gathering data and reporting back my findings, the development and eventual transcription of this study has been a process shot through with personal anxieties, fleeting memories and constantly shifting perceptions. Retrospect has me neutrally looking for, while secretly and passionately *hoping* to find, material evidence that would substantiate and confirm my preconceived hunch about the importance of Romani to *New Babylon* – and by extension help me to question and extend the work of other scholars. In both respects I was surprised and elated, even, by the quality and number of my discoveries. I can still remember for example the thrill of not only finding Constant's narrative of his December 1956 encounter with Romani in Alba; but of finding it – on essentially the first page of *Skizze zu einer Kultur* – to present far stronger proof of my premise than I had ever allowed myself to imagine.

At a basic level archives helped to get me closer to and more in touch with my subject; they confirmed for me that Romani did matter, and still do matter, to Constant and *New Babylon*. On the other hand, there is no doubt that working in archives presented me with an opportunity to play out my own prejudices about my subject and its current state of scholarship. While there are of course clear differences between my experiences of archival work and the ethnographic fieldwork practices of anthropologists, the anthropological frame of reference I have established for my study reminds us – at a basic level – of the performative, human element that is always contained in scholarship. For my part, I remain haunted by questions of a personal nature when it comes to my project. What was it that drew me to my subject? What was my intention in visiting the archives? Had I come to overthrow existing scholarship and set the record straight on Constant, the Situationist International and *New Babylon*? Was my ambition to write the definitive record on this topic? Was I, alternatively, hoping to find a way to resurrect and

reinstate *New Babylon* as a model of radical experimental thought and practice in the present? Or was I simply playing out a need to recover or reaffirm my sense of self as an artist rather than an art historian; that is, as someone who ultimately identifies with Constant and yearns, similarly, to return to a 'simple life' in the studio? In viewing and handling various manuscripts, typescripts, photographs, books, exhibition catalogues, scraps of paper, postcards, letters, press clippings, official documents, assorted memorabilia and other personal ephemera once belonging to Constant and his numerous personal and professional contacts, I have also been retracing the same ground as some – but certainly not all – previous scholars of *New Babylon* and the Situationist International. Beyond focusing my attention on the varied, sometime problematic relationships I hold to my subject matter, thinking about my research as a type of performative, reflexive fieldwork thus has consequences, too, for my criticisms of *New Babylon*'s established historiography. In openly acknowledging my actions as a subjective individual in the field, I inherently pose questions about the ways previous writers on *New Babylon* and the Situationist International may have similarly modelled, crafted and wilfully invented their versions of history.

## Chapter 4. Revisiting ‘Alba 1956’

The *Primo congresso degli artisti liberi* lasted for a week, from 02 to 09 September 1956. Held in Alba, it principally brought together members of the Movimento Internazionale per una Bauhaus Immaginata (MIBI), led by Asger Jorn and Gallizio, and the Lettrist International, led by Debord, and ended in a council resolution in favour of the latter’s concept of *urbanisme unitaire*. First outlined in 1953 in a manifesto titled ‘Formulary for a New Urbanism’, unitary urbanism sought, in a direct critique of leading Modernist doctrines, to realise dynamic, ever-shifting and holistic urban environments. Writing under the name of Gilles Ivain, the young Lettrist Ivan Chthcheglov positioned himself in strict opposition to the ‘inanimate’ and ‘storyless’ architecture of Le Corbusier, CIAM and their followers. He alternatively imagined the urban realm as a ‘total creation’ that would be ‘intimately associated with [...] play’ (Chthcheglov 2006 [1953]: 2, 4). Adopted by the Lettrists in the early 1950s, Chthcheglov’s vision of a responsive and flexible urban environment arrived in Alba by way of Gil Wolman, the group’s appointed delegate to the Congress. By all accounts, unitary urbanism took the *Primo congresso* by storm (Wolman 1956; 1985 [1956]). It quickly became the centrepiece of ‘La Plate-Forme d’Alba’, or Alba Platform, first issued at the conclusion of the event (GAM 2.e.) and subsequently published in the Lettrist International’s journal, *Potlach*, two months later (LI 2006 [1956]). The Lettrists’ search for a new urbanism continued to occupy the Situationist International, particularly Constant, over the next few years, with the term unitary urbanism featuring prominently in a number of texts from the time period.

One of the first documents associated with the Situationist International, the Alba Platform decried the failings of the bourgeoisie and other avant-garde groups alike, embracing protests throughout Eastern Europe and the USSR, the Algerian



revolution and major strikes in Spain as promising signs of things to come (LI 2006 [1956]: 22). It also announced the appointment of Gil Wolman to the editorial board of the MIBI's short-lived journal *Eristica* and the concurrent acceptance of Asger Jorn onto the Lettrist International's board of directors. These personnel crossovers soon snowballed into a full-fledged merger. On 28 July 1957, just under eleven months since the start of the *Primo congresso* in Alba, Jorn and Gallizio's MIBI officially joined forces with Debord's Lettrist International in the founding conference of the Situationist International.

If Alba seems an out-of-the-way, peculiarly rural place to stage the ambitiously titled First World Congress of Free Artists, the official establishment of the Situationist International occurs even farther off the map in Cosio d'Arroscia, a small Alpine village located in Liguria about 100km southwest of Genoa, some twenty-odd kilometres from Italy's border with France. These decidedly small-town, backwoods origins for the Situationist International and *New Babylon* seem somehow out of step with our current understanding of the group and Constant's project today; we typically associate the Situationists' work and thinking with the urban centres of Europe, not sleepy Piedmont and Alpine villages in Italy. Indeed, Paris is the place most often captured in photographs now published in accounts of the Situationist International. Pictures of the 'Rive Gauche' and 'Rue Gay-Lussac' (van Schaik 2005b: 44; Andreotti 2000: 39, 57; cf. Branzi 2005: 177-178), almost invariably linked to texts about *dérive*, psychogeographical mapping and, ultimately, the now-canonised riots of May 1968, are particularly prominent at present. Challenging the dominance of such imagery, I argue that the Italian countryside plays a fundamental role here, also; the connection between 'the rural' (Cloke 2003; Cloke and Little 1997; Hillyard 2007; Neal and Agyeman 2006) and the radical, counter-cultural urban ideas developed by the Situationists in the mid to late 1950s needs to be explored in greater detail. In order to re-conceive the city entirely, was it first necessary to leave the urban behind and reconnect, in some primal, instinctive way, with the land? To what extent do Romani, so often associated with the countryside – where they are seen to belong, existing timelessly and in harmony with nature – act as a counter-image to the Modern city (from which Romani are banned) in

Situationist thinking? Does the association, valid or not, between Romani and the rural somehow remove them, perhaps even by default, from *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship today?<sup>19</sup>

After first getting a taste for Alba during the weeklong *Primo congresso* of September 1956, Constant took up residency in the town for a few months during the autumn and winter of 1956-1957. Having spent most of his life previously in the contrastingly urban environments of Amsterdam, Paris and London, he deliberately chose to return to Italy's rural, primarily agrarian Piedmont region – a place best known, still today, for its wine, white truffles and 'slow food movement'. According to surviving residency documents, Constant arrived back in Alba on 09 November 1956; with him was Nellie Riemens, his wife at the time (Figure 4.1). Four days later, on 13 November 1956, they were granted permission to reside in Italy until 09 February 1957 – Constant for work (RKD 1[a]), Riemens for family (RKD 1[b]). During the following months, Constant took part in the activities of Gallizio's experimental laboratory in Alba, producing collective works with Jorn, Gallizio and other members of their 'Imagist Bauhaus' (Figure 4.2). Sometime in December 1956, roughly a month after his return to Alba, Constant visited a group of Romani camping on a plot of land owned by Gallizio, as described in the foreword to his unpublished *Skizze zu einer Kultur* book manuscripts.

Constant's relationship with Gallizio appears to have been rather close at this time, certainly much closer than current scholarship allows. The residency documents issued by the Mayor's office in Alba list Gallizio's home, on Via XX Settembre, as Constant's 'luogo di dimora in Italia', or official 'place of dwelling in Italy'. A minor difference between the German and Dutch forewords to *Skizze zu einer Kultur* reinforces the point. When Gallizio does make the odd appearance in *New Babylon* literature – which is by no means for certain – he is typically presented as little more than the owner of the land on which a group of Romani were camping. By contrast, the Dutch typescript to Constant's *New Babylon* book reads 'mijn vriend ~~Pinot~~ Gallizio' (RKD 414[b]) – my friend Gallizio. As this particular page of the *Skizze zu einer Kultur* manuscript would have been typed and hand-corrected in May 1963 at

the earliest, we witness Constant recalling an experience shared with someone he still considered a friend at least six and a half years later. We are typically given the opposite impression in contemporary scholarship, however, with Gallizio and Constant emerging as feuding factions in the core constituency of the early Situationist International.

The account most often presented in current writings on *New Babylon* and the Situationist International is of Constant becoming increasingly frustrated with Debord's continued support of the painterly, or so-called 'right wing' (van Schaik 2005b: 46, 48, 51) activities of Jorn and Gallizio. With pressure mounting, and Debord keen to keep Constant happy and committed to the group, Gallizio is summarily dismissed (cf. Wigley 1998: 37-38). In a critical review of a recently published volume of Debord's correspondence – the first in a multi-volume, English translation project (Debord 2009) – Sam Williams captures this dominant view precisely:

Notorious among the many casualties of the Debordist purges in 1960 was Giuseppe Pinot Gallizio – 'Carissimo Pinot' – the 'grande e nobile amico' [...] was seemingly shunted aside in the event of a spat with the architect, Constant Nieuwenhuys. Pinot seems to have been given the axe in the hope of placating Constant. It didn't work, and Constant resigned the following day  
(Williams 2009)

If the foreword to the Dutch typescript of *Skizze zu einer Kultur* establishes a friendship between Constant and Gallizio that has since gone missing in scholarship, then the German typescript points in yet another direction. While Constant gives himself all of the credit in the foreword to his Dutch manuscript – 'Op die dag onstond mijn plan voor een permanent zigeunerkamp' (RKD 414[b]), On that day my plan emerged for a permanent gypsy camp – Gallizio plays a more influential, if still understated, role in the German rendition: 'Auf Vorschlag von Gallizio entstand an diesem Tag mein Plan zu einer permanenten Zigeunerlager' (RKD 414[a]), At Gallizio's suggestion my plan for a permanent gypsy camp originated that day. The difference in language between the two typescripts may be subtle, yet Gallizio's suggestion was crucial to the start of Constant's project. His involvement further

reveals that the origins of *New Babylon* were more politically charged than Constant ever acknowledged.

It is not that Constant and Gallizio did not have their differences. Correspondence with Debord between 1957-1960 certainly reveals Constant's growing frustrations with the strong influence of painters, particularly Gallizio and Jorn, in the early years of the Situationist International (cf. Wigley 1998: 37-38). This is a point Constant would reiterate much later in life also:

[...] there were actually too many painters in this situationist movement. Really! I always opposed it. How can you work on urbanism when you are surrounded only by painters? [...] I decided to quit, and the exact moment was, I believe, an exhibition of Gallizio in the museum of Amsterdam  
(Buchloh and Nieuwenhuys 2001: 23)<sup>20</sup>

Artistic differences do not mean Constant had nothing to do with Gallizio, however. Surviving correspondence indicates the two maintained their friendship after cutting ties completely with Debord and the Situationists in the summer of 1960. Their amicable, 'post-SI' exchanges by post reveal a motive other than friendship, however: they shared a specific interest in the nomadic lifestyle and traditional culture of Romani.

### ***The cult of Guy Debord***

Wigley's and van Schaik's writings on the heroic phase of the Situationist International and *New Babylon* – including their rather similar selection of imagery – are illustrative of the larger body of scholarship now dedicated to Constant's project in art and architectural studies. Both authors focus almost uniquely on the interaction between Constant and Guy Debord in 1957-1960, with Gallizio noticeably falling by the wayside – most often as an object of scorn and derision. One of Wigley's rare mentions of Gallizio, for example, is only to point out how Constant's 'correspondence with Debord' was typically 'punctuated by sarcastic gibes' directed towards him (Wigley 1998: 37). With Gallizio effectively slandered by Constant's own hand, and no counter evidence given to balance out such commentary, Alba acts as little more than a curious, rural backdrop – an insignificant, almost anonymous

place only fleetingly associated with the beginnings of *New Babylon* and the Situationist International. By contrast, I question the stress that has been placed on the ‘genius’ of Debord – glowingly described by Wigley as ‘the brilliant poet, filmmaker, and strategic activist’ (Wigley 1998: 14) – in the established historiography of *New Babylon* and instead explore the potential impact Gallizio, a far less fashionable character in scholarship today, had on Constant’s work and thinking.

Two of the first five images appearing in Wigley’s 1998 monograph, *Constant’s New Babylon: The Hyper-Architecture of Desire*, are black and white photographs from Alba. The first is from the *Primo congresso* of September 1956, the second from December that year. The photograph of the Alba Congress shows five of the conference’s delegates gathered around a varnished rectangular table in Alba’s Town Hall, littered with ashtrays, books, a desk lamp, wine bottle and microphone (Figure 4.3a). The Lettrist Gil Wolman, sitting between Gallizio and Asger Jorn, reads from a paper on the table in front of him, with Constant – cigarette hanging from his mouth – and Ettore Sottsass, sitting opposite, listening on intently. Wigley assigns great importance to this photograph in his text, presenting it as the moment in September 1956 when ‘Constant first heard about unitary urbanism’ (Wigley 1998: 14). His caption reinforces the point: ‘Gil Wolman reading the lettrist statement at the *Primo congresso*’ (Wigley 1998: 15) effectively canonises the image, making it an indispensable event in the history of *New Babylon*. Whether or not Wolman is, in fact, speaking about *urbanisme unitaire* in this photograph, Wigley’s text quickly moves on to describe Wolman as little more than Debord’s messenger, sent to the conference in Alba at Debord’s bidding to read out a previously ‘prepared statement’, take stock of proceedings and report back to Debord in Paris with his findings. This neatly sets up the next photograph featured in Wigley’s monograph (Figure 4.4). It is necessary to quote at length from Wigley’s text now, paying particular attention to the way this otherwise nondescript photograph emerges, like the previous image, as a monumental moment in the history of *New Babylon*:

Hearing favorable reports from [...] Wolman, Debord tried to make contact with Constant. In December 1956, he traveled from his mother’s house in

Cannes to Alba. Having stayed on in Gallizio's house after the congress, Constant was already working on models inspired by the concept of unitary urbanism which would gradually evolve into New Babylon. They got along well, discussing the possible futures of urban life. At the end of his stay, Debord suggested that they memorialize their solidarity. Everyone staying in the house posed in front of a local photographer's painted backdrop: a gang in matching winter coats looks confidently into the camera; the new ringleader stands in the center with the modelmaker to one side. When Constant returned to Amsterdam, Debord wrote to him about the imminent formation of an even more radical group that would, as they both demanded, abandon the suspect terrain of fine art to concentrate on architecture

(Wigley 1998: 14-15)

While the meeting between Constant and Debord in Alba certainly plays a part in the history of *New Babylon* and the Situationist International, I remain unconvinced it deserves the epic description it receives. What is more worrying, however, is the way in which this photograph – and Wigley's accompanying narrative – stands in for almost everything else happening in Alba at the time. Wigley omits the activities of Gallizio's experimental laboratory in Alba, for example, with which Constant was fully involved during his stay there; we also get no idea that Gallizio was making substantial contributions of his own to the concept of unitary urbanism at the time (Stracey 2006). December 1956 was also, as testified by Constant's foreword to *Skizze zu einer Kultur*, the time of Constant's encounter with Romani – an event Wigley's selection of imagery, not to mention his text, overwrites entirely.

In Wigley's analysis, Alba becomes no more than a meeting place for Debord and Constant – beyond that, it ceases to exist in its own right; it is as if everything we need to know about Alba can be collapsed together into this photograph. The language used by Wigley to narrate the image is the most revealing point, however. In Wigley's text, Debord seems to be, just as he is in the picture, the centre of attention: it is he who travels to Alba, he who makes contact with Constant and, again, he who decides a photograph should be taken. Moving on from the December 1956 photograph, Wigley continues in this fashion, progressively increasing Debord's stock in the early years of *New Babylon*. Alba, Gallizio and the very real contexts of rural Italy in the 1950s immediately fade into the background. With the Situationist programme firmly reinstated to its proper urban contexts of Paris and Amsterdam, Debord's importance to Constant's project only grows in stature:

A close friendship and collaboration quickly developed. Debord and Constant stayed in each other's apartments and maintained intense correspondence while collaborating on *dérives*, journals, congresses, leaflets, manifestos, exhibitions, manifestations, and diverse experiments. In 1958, Constant completed the first fully detailed models of his project, and, in early 1959, Debord wrote an essay about them for the May exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum [...] The strategic importance of the project escalated at the end of the year when Debord used two images of another of Constant's models as the only illustration of the analysis of the relationship between revolutionary politics and art that opens the third issue of *Internationale Situationniste* [...] The project had quickly gone from being considered 'pre-situationist' to what Debord would soon describe as 'the most advanced' manifestation of the group's efforts

(Wigley 1998: 15-16)

The climax has yet to come, however, with Wigley still to deliver the ending to his story. Keeping the December 1956 photograph firmly in the background, Wigley makes *New Babylon* reliant on Debord, almost suggesting the project never would have happened had Constant ('the modelmaker') not had the good fortune to meet Debord ('the ringleader') in the first place. I would not deny that Debord is an important figure in the earliest development of Constant's project, but I do worry that Wigley overstates his case. With the photograph from December 1956 as his starting point, he too easily casts Constant in the role of 'technician', with the Rijksakademie trained, internationally established artist suddenly taking instructions in composition from his Situationist comrade in Paris:

Debord was deeply invested in the project, having been the one who commissioned the two photographs he used, precisely specifying the angle they should be taken from. He even invented the name 'New Babylon' in response to Constant's initial proposal of 'Dériville'

(Wigley 1998: 16)

Wigley takes up this final point, about naming, later in his text, again giving Debord a sense of ownership over Constant's work. In an otherwise densely annotated text, Wigley provides no reference for this particular anecdote, however:

One evening at the end of 1959, while looking at Constant's latest construction in Gilbert's apartment in Paris, Debord came up with the name 'New Babylon' and suggested that the description of the latest model, which would appear in the fourth issue of *Internationale Situationniste*, take the form of an itinerary through the sector [...] Similar itineraries through the

other sectors could then be collected together into a publication, *Promenades à New Babylone*, that would act as a 'descriptive guide', like a tourist guidebook to an already existing city. It would be as if the situationist dream-world was built, mapped, and simply waiting to be explored

(Wigley 1998: 31)

In 'Beneath the Idol, the Bureaucrat', Sam Williams touches on criticisms of the Situationist International that dismiss the group as little more than 'a Debordian personality cult' (Williams 2009). Although Wigley's writing may not exactly qualify as a 'paean' to Debord, at times his account of Constant's relationship with the Situationists' 'ringleader' arguably borders on hero-worship. From the moment of Constant's meeting with Debord in Alba in December 1956 to their infamous falling out in June 1960, Wigley's historiography of *New Babylon* is punctuated with praise for Debord. Always positioned in the forefront, Debord continuously persuades, reassures, suggests, proposes and encourages Constant in his work (Wigley 1998: 36-37), while Constant, by contrast, takes Situationist ideas 'to heart' (Wigley 1998: 18). At almost every juncture up to Constant's eventual departure from the group in 1960, Debord is seen to lead the way not only theoretically, but aesthetically as well. The map and book projects Debord produces together with Jorn in 1957, particularly *Guide Psychogéographique de Paris*, *The Naked City* and *Mémoires*, for example, are said to be 'very influential on the development of New Babylon, which precisely takes the form of a psychogeographic map'. If we believe Wigley, Debord's 'psychogeographic arrows' are simply aped by Constant at a later date, becoming the 'lines of traffic circulation' in *New Babylon* (Wigley 1998: 18).

Other authors place similar stress on Debord's central role in the development of Constant's work, particularly with regard to his naming of *New Babylon*. Andreotti (2000: 51), McDonough (2001: 103) and van Schaik, for example, all take care to credit Debord explicitly for this:

Encouraged by Debord [...] Constant begins work on the first designs for a truly new situationist architecture, visualizing and making concrete the idea of Unitary Urbanism on a world scale: a city designed for endless *dérive* and the situationist play. What Constant originally refers to as his "covered city" or "Dériville" is New Babylon taking shape, the final title eventually suggested to him by Debord

(van Schaik 2005b: 47)



If the Situationist International can be, as Williams suggests, equated to a ‘fan club’ set up around Debord, then there are grounds for thinking about contemporary scholarship in such terms also. As François Letailleur puts it, ‘The Situationist International became a legend with a single hero, Guy Debord. His final taking of power is apparent’ (Letailleur 2006: 46).

Van Schaik’s account of the earliest years of *New Babylon*, which comprises the first section of a three-part contribution to his 2005 book *Exit Utopia*, is remarkably similar to Wigley’s work in this regard – as in the passage transcribed above, Debord is again in control. It is notable, also, how similar images appear in van Schaik’s *Exit Utopia*. The photograph used by Wigley of ‘a gang in matching winter coats’ features already on the book’s table of contents page (van Schaik and Mácel 2005: 5). Later into *Exit Utopia*, a related photograph of conference proceedings in Alba’s Town Hall (Figure 4.3b) is used as an illustration for a contribution by Ettore Sottsass (2005: 55) recalling his personal experience of the *Primo congresso*. As in Wigley’s monograph, these images reinforce a conventional timeline of events, providing a streamlined visual chronology of the defining moments in the early history of *New Babylon* and the Situationist International.

For van Schaik the Alba Congress ‘is nearly legendary [...] Though a tiny affair, from the perspective of Constant it was crucial’ (van Schaik 2005b: 43). As in Wigley’s text, the implication is that the experience of hearing Gil Wolman read out the Lettrist’s statement at the Alba Congress in September 1956 was a life changing moment for Constant. It is worth noting how Constant’s version of events contrasts with this prevailing account. A text co-authored by Ton Alberts, Armando, Constant and Har Oudejans – the Dutch Section of the Situationist International in 1959 – clearly has it the other way around, with the Lettrists noticeably following in Constant’s footsteps:

The people from whom the Lettrists expected something began to arrive after 1956. The International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus, founded by Jorn and Gallizio to oppose the functionalist Bauhaus in Ulm, organized a

congress in Alba. Constant's intervention showed us the way [...] And the Lettrists' delegate [Gil Wolman] formulated that Congress's conclusion  
(Alberts et al. 1959)

Van Schaik nonetheless gives us almost the same account as Wigley, following up the story of Constant's initial, all-important exposure to unitary urbanism in September 1956 with a similar tale of the even more crucial meeting with Debord a few months later:

Not surprisingly perhaps, the Lettrist dream strikes a chord with Constant, and it is this radical legacy [...] which he quickly begins to lap up and digest. A few months after the conference, he returns to the Piedmont town [...] In December 1956 Constant finally meets Guy Debord, who is on a little detour from his mother's home in Cannes. They hit it off immediately  
(van Schaik 2005b: 44)

Though generally more balanced than Wigley's account, Debord again 'takes the reins' in van Schaik's historiography of the early years of *New Babylon*, with 'Paris rather than Alba running the show'. As in Wigley's text, Constant is at times cast in a subservient role; if he is presented as an eager 'lap dog' in the passage above, then elsewhere he hopes to find avant-garde rigour 'under the wings of Debord' (van Schaik 2005b: 44-46). We also get a rerun of the visual analysis found in Wigley's monograph, which has Constant playing copycat to Debord: 'Effectively, he spatially elaborates the schematic "Guide psychogéographique de Paris" and "The Naked city" maps by Debord'. Once more relegated to the role of 'model maker' for the Situationist International – this being an exact repetition of the terminology used by Wigley<sup>21</sup> – Constant is again seen to be reliant on Debord, who provides the theoretical framework for his *New Babylon* project: 'As early as 1959, Constant's constructions and models are put on display at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam [...] and Debord is more than happy to legitimize them ideologically'. At other times, Debord edits, adds to and reshuffles Constant's writing, in order to get it ready for publication (van Schaik 2005b: 47).

Although van Schaik concedes the fact that 'Constant had clearly been invigorated and inspired by his stay in Italy' (van Schaik 2005b: 45) – and even gives more time than most authors do to Constant's encounter with Romani there (Appendix 1) – his

primary concern is, again, everything that happens after and outside of Alba. Indeed, Wigley's and van Schaik's historiographies of *New Babylon*'s origins are based almost exclusively on the same selection of primary materials: 'The inevitable pile of correspondence [that] soon builds up between Constant and his new Parisian pen friend' (van Schaik 2005b: 45). While there is certainly a great deal of material to work with here – of all the personal correspondence held by the RKD, a substantial bulk is made up of letters sent to and from Debord between 1957 and 1960<sup>22</sup> – Constant's well documented 'pen pal' relationship with Debord reveals only part of a fuller picture.

Granted a comparable body of primary material does not exist for Constant's personal, creative and intellectual exchanges with Gallizio, I contend this relationship was as important to the development of *New Babylon* as his interactions with Debord. After all, it can be argued that stacks of letters – the defining feature of Constant's dealings with Debord – are no substitute for months spent living together, as Gallizio and Constant did, in Alba. While it is impossible given the absence of documentary evidence to reconstruct the precise nature of Constant's relationship with Gallizio at the time (now almost sixty years past, with both men deceased), there are some traces left behind that give us important insights into the time they spent in each other's company. We can certainly leave behind the role typically played by Gallizio in the existing historiography of the Situationist International and *New Babylon*. A noticeable component of van Schaik's coverage of the 'short but intense relationship between Debord and Constant' (van Schaik 2005b: 51), for example – alternatively described by Wigley as 'An intense and productive collaboration' (Wigley 1998: 38) – is Gallizio's fleeting presence as a partly comic, partly tragic foil to the celebrated genius of Debord. In contrast to Debord's film projects, artistic collaborations with Jorn and countless polemical texts published in *Internationale situationniste*, we are given a Gallizio trading in 'purportedly situationist practices' (van Schaik 2005b: 46); that is, someone who was not legitimately part of the Situationist programme and, therefore, of little interest to us at present. With Gallizio barely making an appearance in Wigley's text, an essay by

Andreotti on the ‘play tactics’ of the Situationist International further reinforces the point:

The first attempt actually to construct a situation was Pinot Gallizio’s *Cavern of Anti-Matter*. Made entirely of Gallizio’s so-called Industrial Paintings – long rolls of painted cloth made collectively with the help of rudimentary “painting machines” and sold by the meter on the market square – this complete micro-environment was designed in close collaboration with Debord, who played a much greater role than is generally assumed (in fact, the event was orchestrated by Debord with Gallizio a sometimes uncomprehending bystander)

(Andreotti 2000: 47)

Providing no evidence for his insight, Andreotti’s text stands as rather clear evidence of the hero worship I see engulfing much Situationist International scholarship at present. Selima Niggel, for example, similarly labels Gallizio ‘an “out-of-control fantasist who was incapable of sticking to programs” and was therefore the opposite of Debord’s keen intellectuality’ (Niggel 2006: 242). The convenient image of ‘The boisterous and charming Pinot Gallizio’, best known for his ‘reactionary buffoonery’ (van Schaik 2005b: 47-48), does not stand up to scrutiny, however.

Ralph Rumney, the sole member of the London Psychogeographic Society – often credited as a founding partner of the Situationist International – has taken some useful steps toward countering such portrayals. While the terminology Rumney employs is peculiar, he clearly sees Gallizio as a key figure in the history of the Situationist International. Describing him as a ‘primitive’, Rumney champions Gallizio precisely on account of his actions rather than his words:

Gallizio was a total primitive [...] an intellectual primitive [...] it’s amazing. There’s this primitive reality about Gallizio. I think the splits within the movement were due to it containing both intellectuals and these rather marvellous primitives. I’m not convinced that the intellectuals necessarily made the greatest contribution to the group. It was what was actually done that was important, far more important than the theory. Theories are evanescent. Situationist theory was intentionally inspissated, to make it difficult to understand and extremely difficult to criticise

(Home and Rumney 1989)

## **Giuseppe ‘Pinot’ Gallizio (1902-1964)**

Gallizio appears to have been, in the few glimpses we do get of him in the existing literature, quite a character. He is most often captured in photographs laughing, smoking cigarettes and gesturing expressively, almost invariably coming across – with his suit, tie, hat and moustache – as a free and jovial spirit of limitless good intentions. Often referred to, incorrectly, as Giuseppe Pinot Gallizio or Pinot-Gallizio (‘Pinot’ is in fact derived from his first name, Giuseppe, and is a nickname common to the Alba area), Gallizio was of a different generation and background to Jorn, Debord, Constant and the other Situationists. Born in Alba in 1902 (making him almost twenty years older than Constant and twenty-nine years older than Debord, for example), Gallizio began his artistic career only in about 1953-1954, just ten years before his death in 1964. In marked contrast to all other artists in the group, he was a self-taught painter who did not receive official artistic tuition during his lifetime.

Prior to his brief moment of fame, which culminated with the offer of a solo exhibition space in 1964 – the year of his death – at the Venice Biennale, Gallizio was a pharmacist and ‘professor’ of chemistry. He ran his own local pharmacy shop, Farmacia Gallizio on via Cavour in Alba, and held courses on obscure things such as ‘herbs and oenological aromas’ at the town’s Agricultural Institute in the mid-1940s (Bertolino et al. 2005: 123). In Situationist International scholarship Gallizio remains best known for his experiments in *Pittura industriale* – mass produced works of abstract painting that he sold by the meter, first in markets in Turin and Alba and, eventually, in prestigious galleries throughout Europe. Working together with his son Giorgio Gallizio, who went by the Situationist name of Giors Melanotte, Gallizio’s industrial painting presented a knowing attack on the art world. His experiments, carried out in his *Laboratorio Sperimentale* or Experimental Laboratory in Alba solicited indignant responses:

What cynics have long predicted finally came to pass: abstract art was on sale not by the painting but by the yard. In Munich’s fashionable van de Loo Gallery, Italian Painter Pinot Gallizio, 57, did a booming business by snipping his 10- and 20-yard canvasses into appropriate lengths. Customers were free to choose according to their needs and pocketbooks; “normal

quality” sold for \$25 per yd., “more profound quality” for \$60 per yd. Leftovers went at a discount [...] “You won’t get modern art any cheaper and certainly not any better”

(*Times* 1959: 81)

The Situationists, by contrast, praised Gallizio’s achievements. Industrial painting is hailed as a ‘first success’ in Jorn’s 1958 book *Pour la forme*, for example, while a eulogy to Gallizio written by Bernstein in 1958 declares his ‘extraordinarily inventive spirit’ to be ‘in the forefront’ of everything the Situationists were doing at the time (GAM 5.d.: 135; Bernstein 1997 [1960]: 93, 95). Although Gallizio only turned to art late in life, a host of diaries dating from at least the 1940s bear testimony to the lifelong workings of a restless and creative imagination. These diaries, filled with snippets of sometimes incoherent, occasionally poetic and often rambling text, point to a fascinating and complex character that is markedly out of step with the limited portrayal of Gallizio circulating in *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship today.

I rely on a range of archival materials held at the RKD in The Hague and GAM in Turin to make my case, as well as the writings of a handful of Italian scholars who have focused almost solely on the work and legacy of Gallizio.<sup>23</sup> Like Romani, Gallizio has remained peripheral to *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship, particularly Anglo-American work.<sup>24</sup> Italian scholars have begun the project of setting the record straight, as they see it, by reinstating Gallizio at the heart of the history of Europe’s post-war avant-garde. Often concerned with putting Gallizio and Alba back on the map, most of these publications are exhibition catalogues written only in Italian; they tend not to critically frame or discuss the material they present, and have yet to make any impact on broader, international scholarship. Indeed, most of these works engage only superficially with the substantial literature making up the contemporary English-language discourse, which in turn ignores this Italian school. Just as Gallizio is kept peripheral to accounts of *New Babylon* and the Situationist International, Constant and his work are generally a supporting act here. The archives associated with Gallizio have, additionally, never been brought into dialogue with Constant’s archive at the RKD and Romani, for their part, are again consigned to the margins.<sup>25</sup>

Alongside his professional work as a chemist and pharmacist, Gallizio was an amateur archaeologist with a particular interest in the prehistory of the Cuneo and Liguria regions of Italy. He conducted digs at Neolithic settlements around Alba in the 1940s, even publishing articles in journals of local history on his findings (see Bertolino et al. 2005: 35-44). This interest in prehistory was something Gallizio drew on explicitly in his opening address to the *Primo congresso* on 02 September 1956:

Dear friends of the 1st Congress of free artists, I bring you greetings from my beloved city [...] this region of Ligurians, and the birthplace of which was the dark caves, which still testify to human observation and experimentation – we are keeping alive that spirit of human solidarity that allowed this race to survive the beasts [...] the sense of magic that radiates from those times cannot be forgotten

(Bertolino et al. 2005: 130)

Notes for Gallizio's closing speech for the same event, delivered on 08 September 1956 continue to draw connections between the distant past and the present, including mysterious references to 'accelerating geological times', 'a new Ice Age' and 'prehistory' (Bertolino et al. 2005: 132). In addition to being an avid part-time archaeologist, Gallizio is sometimes described as an amateur 'ethnographer' or 'anthropologist' with a particular specialisation in 'nomadism'. There is little concrete evidence to back this claim; while certainly appealing, it seems to originate more with the writings of Bandini than the material itself.<sup>26</sup>

Gallizio was involved in the Italian underground resistance movement during World War II, however, a hands on experience with armed revolution that perhaps does the most – in addition to his date of birth, rural origins and self-taught approach to painting – to separate him from other Situationists. Like his amateur archaeological work, Gallizio's participation in the Italian resistance was a clear reference point for his opening speech to the *Primo congresso*:

Mr. Mayor, you who were anti-Fascist and now govern this gold medal City for its resistance during the war – I bring the respects of these artists who continue the great ideas of the Bauhaus of Weimar and Dessau, which Hitler blindly destroyed. – However, ideas cannot be killed – they die by themselves when they are no longer needed – now Bauhaus is more alive than ever and is

about to germinate in a city that, due to centuries-old struggles, knows what sacrifices for freedom mean

(Bertolino et al. 2005: 130)

Closing his pharmacy in Alba in February 1944 to join the Divisione Alpi of the Italian Partisans, Gallizio was a member of the anti-fascist Langhe area group of the Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale (CLN, 'National Liberation Committee'). After liberation he joined the municipal council of Alba in May 1945 on a CLN ticket; the following year he was elected to the position on an independent ticket linked to Democrazia Cristiana (DC, a Catholic party). Soon finding himself at odds with colleagues in the majority, Gallizio resigned as a town councillor in February 1947. He returned to local politics in 1951, however. For the next decade, he served as an independent town councillor linked to various left-wing platforms until finally concluding his political career in September 1960 (cf. Horn 2007: 5). Gallizio's participation in the resistance movement seems to have left its mark, as he remained particularly attentive to the revolutionary struggles of other peoples throughout the remainder of his lifetime. Under Gallizio's leadership, the Italian Section of the Situationist International often expressed solidarity for revolutionary causes around the globe. A flyer released on 04 July 1958, for example, cries out 'Difendete la liberta ovunque' (Bertolino et al. 2005: 117) – Defend freedom everywhere. In September that year Gallizio takes up the theme again, this time drawing explicitly on his personal experience as a partisan during World War II to declare, 'Long live the Algerian people – Long live freedom in the name of the Italian chapter'. The relevant page from Gallizio's diary, dated 23 September 1958, states that 'the experimental laboratory of the SI has recognized the free Algerian government a logical step by its members – which in their time as Italian partisans had recognized [...] the exiled government of De Gaulle' (Bertolino et al. 2005: 118).

Given Gallizio's work as a town councillor and personal commitment to 'defend freedom everywhere', Constant's visit to a Romani encampment on the outskirts of Alba in December 1956 was politically motivated. The question of Romani rights in post-war Italy was a consistent concern of Gallizio's throughout his tenure as a local politician in Alba. This is particularly true of the time period, of about 1956-1957,



overlapping with the formative years of both *New Babylon* and the Situationist International, including the months Constant spent living in Gallizio's home in Alba.

Minutes from a Town Council meeting held on 30 December 1956 – the same month of Constant's and Gallizio's visit to the temporary Romani encampment set up on Gallizio's land – record Gallizio and the Mayor of Alba locked in debate over the town's apparent 'gypsy problem'. This was not the first time Gallizio had raised the subject.<sup>27</sup> On this occasion, Gallizio takes issue with Alba's local newspaper, *Le nostre tôr*, and its anti-Romani reportage. Positioning himself counter to the paper's views, which seem to have routinely stigmatised Romani at the time, Gallizio argues in favour of Romani, defending their nomadic way of life as a basic human freedom. Turning to a newspaper article published by the Catholic weekly *La Famiglia Cristiana* about eighteen months earlier,<sup>28</sup> Gallizio argues that Alba must engage with the issues raised by its recurring interactions with Romani seriously. He finds the opinions promoted by *Le nostre tôr* – which seems to have traded in stereotypical images of considerable bias (particularly criminality and dirtiness)<sup>29</sup> – to be deplorable, and demands the Town Council consider the issue objectively:

It is a problem that should be studied and solved not just with a few lines of reproach and a couple of photographs that reproduce some of the scenes on the streets and on the outskirts of the city where gypsies are relegated to places that have no running water or shelter.

Instead of forbidding gypsies to set up camp in our city, we should give them shelter, a covering with a fountain of drinking water that would make their situation less difficult. It is a pity Famija Albeisa [a social club in Alba] couldn't find anything better to put in their paper.

(Bertolino et al. 2005: 228-229)

The Mayor's response is not exactly supportive. While he concedes that *La Famiglia Cristiana* does seem to treat Romani with a more 'humane point of view' than *Le nostre tôr*, he leaves little question about Alba's official policy in the matter. He rebukes Gallizio's request that the issue be thoroughly studied, revealing an anti-Romani bias of his own:

As far as the question of Gypsies is concerned [...] it is advisable to remember some facts and observations the friends of Famija Albeisa no doubt based their article on.

The Municipality is bombarded with complaints, especially from citizens who live in the places where the gypsies camp, regarding the repeated looting of hay, chickens, etc.

We have to admit that the Municipality receives no benefit from these gypsies, but only damage.

This doesn't mean they have to be treated like stray dogs, but there is no need to build a special shelter with facilities for them as this would lead to a sharp rise in the already significant number of gypsies who set up camp in our town, thereby increasing the cases of looting and complaints from our citizens.

(Bertolino et al. 2005: 229)

### ***Ontwerp voor zigeunerkamp, 1957***

It is in these contexts that Constant begins his work on *New Babylon*. On 27 January 1957, less than a month after Gallizio formally raises the issue in a Town Council meeting, Constant promptly delivers a design proposal for a special shelter with facilities for Romani to the Mayor of Alba, Osvaldo Cagnasso.<sup>30</sup> It is unclear exactly how long Constant stayed on in Gallizio's household in the winter of 1956-1957. Having been granted official permission to stay in Italy until early February 1957, he had certainly made his way back to the Netherlands by 08 March that year, when Mayor Cagnasso wrote a delayed response to Constant, whom he had probably met in person already during the *Primo congresso* of September 1956.<sup>31</sup> Cagnasso's reply, sent to the artist's home address, Henri Polaklaan 25 in Amsterdam, on the town's official stationary, further reveals the political, real-world contexts of Constant's earliest work on *New Babylon* (Figure 4.5):

En relation de votre lettre 27 janvier 1957 je vous remercie beaucoup du projet que vous m'avez envoyé.

Du projet meme j'ai intéressé la Surintenden ce des Monuments pour le Piemont et j'attend la réponse.

Ensuite, je vous informerai pour les accords necessaires.

Récévez, monsieur Nieuwenhuys, aujourd'hui, l'expression de mes sentiments distingués.

Le Maire

[Osvaldo Cagnasso]

(RKD 303)

(In relation to your letter of 27 January 1957, thank you very much for the project you sent me.

Concerning the project itself, I mentioned it to the Department of Monuments for the Piedmont, and await their response.

Then, I will inform you of the necessary permissions.  
Receive, Mr. Nieuwenhuys, today, the expression of my distinguished  
sentiments.  
The Mayor  
[Osvaldo Cagnasso])

A handwritten note on the back of Cagnasso's letter confirms the project in question was Constant's 1956-1957 *Ontwerp voor zigeunerkamp* (Figure 4.6).<sup>32</sup> Although it is unclear what, exactly, Constant sent to Cagnasso in late January 1957, the tone and content of the return letter suggest the artist's scheme was dismissed. While Gallizio and Cagnasso would have grown up together in Alba, and later fought (perhaps even alongside one another – and, indeed, Romani) in the underground resistance movement during World War II, Gallizio's subsequent political leanings – particularly his championing of Romani rights in post-war Italy – clearly separated him from the majority of Alba's citizenry, who seem to have wanted little to do with Romani. Despite local opposition, Constant's and Gallizio's enthusiasm for the project hardly diminishes, however, with their proposed 'casa della Zingari' becoming an increasingly contentious issue in Alba during the course of 1957. On at least one occasion it is reported upon, quite negatively, by *Le nostre tôr*.<sup>33</sup> While the newspaper's condemnation of the project – and further anti-Romani sentiment – is perhaps predictable enough, the article also reveals that *Ontwerp voor zigeunerkamp* may have been a collective project, occupying the interests of not only Constant and Gallizio, but the rest of their Imaginist Bauhaus colleagues at the time:

To our fellow citizen Dr. Gallizio we owe the honor of the first mention of our newspaper in an official venue. Concerning the matter of the so-called "GYPSIES" (who are actually nothing but our very own nomads) Dr. Gallizio totally dissents from our point of view: we would like the parking of caravans on the outskirts of our city to be banned, while he is in favor, moreover he would like to give the nomads a roof, with annexed facilities, at the Municipality's expense. It is a charitable and bold plan that should, in our opinion, be followed through by a further, even more challenging initiative: that of re-educating the beneficiaries to cohabit in a civil manner who, as well as paying for the house themselves, would automatically become providers for their co-inhabitants thanks to their various crops and valued livestock. Allow us to make three proposals, if Dr. Gallizio's idea should find favor: that a house for gypsies should be built simultaneously in every Municipality in Italy so as to avoid their concentration in Alba; that the law regarding the protection of property should be temporarily lifted; that the houses should not be built by the Imaginist Bauhaus architects (gypsies prefer carts)

In December 1957, approximately a full year after the visit to a Romani encampment that marks the start of Constant's work on *New Babylon*, Gallizio again raises the issue of Romani rights in a Town Council meeting. While Gallizio's focus twelve months earlier was the anti-Romani reportage of Alba's local newspaper, *Le nostre tôte*, the Minutes of a meeting held on 09 December 1957 record Gallizio confronting his colleagues on the Town Council with issues of Italian constitutional law:

Referring to article 16 of the Constitution "Every citizen may freely circulate and settle in any part of the national territory, etc.," he protests violently that Gypsies, though they are Italian citizens, no longer have the right to settle anywhere and this contradicts the Constitution itself.

The stories of the children who died of exposure to the cold and of mothers forced to travel from one town to the next to give birth to their babies have recently been in the newspapers...

It is a serious matter that needs to be resolved by civil men. Gypsies have duties, but also rights, including that of moving when and how they like, and stopping when and how they like, anywhere in Italy

(Bertolino et al. 2005: 229-230)

The legal problem of nomadism raised by Gallizio was not unique to Italy in the post-war period – the same would have applied to most of the rest of Europe at the time. Indeed, the question of Romani (and other nomadic population's) rights remains highly problematic in many countries at present. Still today, nomadism is not simply a legal grey area; it is often considered an intrinsically anti-social and counter-cultural – if not officially illegal – mode of existence.

It is thus unsurprising to find Gallizio arguing the minority point of view in December 1957. The Minutes of the 09 December meeting record another Councillor, named Coppa, rejecting Gallizio's position in much the same way Mayor Cagnasso had done almost one year earlier: 'At this point councillor Coppa intervenes to point out that duties include work. Article 1 of the aforementioned Constitution indeed says that Italy is a republic founded on Work' (Bertolino et al. 2005: 230). Gallizio, with Constant at least partly in tow, appears to have been fighting a lost cause. By the time of the December 1957 Town Council meeting, signs had already been posted throughout Alba, officially turning the town and its surrounding countryside into a no-go zone for Romani.<sup>34</sup> Constant and Gallizio

nonetheless continue to discuss their ‘casa della Zingari’ project for at least four more years. It noticeably shifts in orientation, however, after the pair’s initial attempts to realise an actual shelter in Alba fail. Originating in response to practical issues like the provision of drinking water and sanitary facilities, Constant’s and Gallizio’s ‘casa della Zingari’ is progressively billed as the flagship project of unitary urbanism.

### ***Representing Romani***

Sometime during the 1950s, and most likely in the summer of 1957, Gallizio was photographed interacting with Romani in and around Alba. I have found thirteen black and white photographs to date (Figures 4.7 – 4.11). Eight of these are collaged together with some hand written captions into a further, fourteenth image – a homemade looking ‘poster’ carrying the slogan ‘L’uomo è sempre l’uomo’ – Man is Always Man (Figure 4.12). The poster’s subheading, similarly scrawled on by hand in bold block lettering, announces ‘è iniziata la grande battaglia per la sosta degli zingari’ – the start of the great battle for the [right] of gypsies to stopover [in Alba]. Three additional captions provide a bit more detail. A photograph of Gallizio standing at a lectern reading from a paper is described as Gallizio recently declaring he will bring the ‘burning issue’ of Romani rights before the Town Council. One of the four photographs making up the central section of the poster is said to be Gallizio ‘speaking with some tribal leaders about the problem of stopping’. The final caption, accompanying the photograph found in the bottom right corner of the poster, proclaims Gallizio will ‘probably be elected grand chief of more than 1.2 million gypsies’.

As with Constant’s *Ontwerp voor zigeunerkamp*, the original context of this poster, as well as the larger series of photographs partly comprising it, was political. The two can almost be understood as part of the same project: like *Ontwerp voor zigeunerkamp* and Gallizio’s outspoken defence of Romani in Town Council meetings, this poster appears to be a form of basic political agitation, a way of lobbying local government and raising general awareness. While it is unknown what

Gallizio's and Constant's intentions were for *Ontwerp voor zigeunerkamp*, the decision to formally submit a proposal to the Mayor of Alba in late January 1957 certainly kept the issue of Romani rights out in the open. Unfortunately, little is known about this series of images; even the current location of the majority of these photographs remains confusing.<sup>35</sup> Three of the photographs, including the poster, are held as prints in the Archivio Gallizio at GAM in Turin (Figures 4.9a, 4.10, 4.12); the remaining images, including two of the three I found at GAM, are scattered throughout the secondary literature and exhibition catalogues that have been published on Gallizio – and, to a far lesser extent, *New Babylon* – over the past five decades (GAM 5.i.; Corgnati 1960; Bandini 1974; Roberto et al. 2000; Roberto et al. 2001; Careri 2001; Bertolino et al. 2005; Careri 2005; Isnardi et al. 2005; van Schaik and Mácel 2005). The photographer, or photographers, of the series remains unidentified, and individual pictures (sometimes the same one) have dates ranging from anywhere between 1954 and 1957. The close relationship between some of these photographs seems to indicate that most if not all of these images were produced at the same time, however. A short time lapse, detectable in the movement of a figure through space is sometimes the only thing distinguishing one picture from another (Figure 4.8a, Figure 4.8b).

We are able to quickly identify Gallizio, who does not appear in all of the images, finely dressed in his suit, tie and hat. By attribute of his attire alone, he appears different from the people with whom he is pictured; at times his body language seems to further separate him from his surroundings. In other photographs he is absolutely involved, however, speaking intensely with men and women or, alternatively, laughing and playing with children. Apparently documenting Gallizio's interactions with the members of one Romani group or family, the photographs have an overall sense of ongoing action – even spontaneity – about them. Some images appear planned, however, reading rather peculiarly like family portraits. Two photographs show Gallizio in a grass field with women and children standing and seated around him (Figure 4.7a, Figure 4.7b), while another shows Gallizio standing at the head of a row of women and children with caravans, houses and a street in the background (Figure 4.7c). Although the rest of the photographs seem less staged,

there appears to be a marked gender division within the series. Nine of the photographs show women and children; three of the images are of men (and one boy). While Gallizio is the only person identifiable in these scenes today,<sup>36</sup> we develop a sense of familiarity with at least some of the other people pictured. There is the child with dark tousled hair, wearing suspenders, for example, and the young woman dressed in a white blouse, long-sleeved shirt and ankle-length skirt. There is also the short man with a faint moustache and light-coloured, striped shirt tucked into faintly striped trousers, or the older woman holding a baby – all of these figures remain nameless, yet still recognisable to us by account of their repeat appearance in the series.

Gallizio is clearly the focus of this set of photographs, however – it is his interactions with these people, not their lives, which are being documented. The role of the Romani pictured is, by contrast, more difficult to gauge. In two of the ‘family portrait’ scenes (Figure 4.7a, Figure 4.7b), some of the people pictured seem to be unaware that they are being photographed: the child standing to Gallizio’s right, for example, and the woman holding a baby with her back turned to the camera. By contrast the young woman standing next to Gallizio, the woman with a baby sitting in front of her, the small child with bright blonde hair positioned furthest into the foreground and the two children pictured to the left, stare straight into the camera. If the children seem generally captivated by curiosity, the expressions of the adults are harder to read. Are these looks of reluctance or defiance? Are they perhaps uncomfortable being pictured here, amongst the detritus of old tyres and metal buckets, which they – but not Gallizio, whose measured stance and gaze seems to disengage him ever so slightly from his surroundings – seemingly call home?

Other photographs in the series appear similarly conflicted, particular those set in what looks to be the town’s piazza, or market place (Figure 4.9a, Figure 4.9b) – an area that should normally, we sense, be teeming with the daily hustle and bustle of small-town life. In one of these images, Gallizio and another man appear to be actively debating an issue. While they seem generally oblivious to the presence of a photographer, three of the other people pictured in this scene – two men and one boy

– all look directly at the camera. The man standing behind Gallizio locks eyes with the viewer, his expression caught somewhere between mistrust and defiance. The young man to the far right of the picture holds his cigarette and stares forward – left hand in pocket, dark hair tousled, shirt two-thirds unbuttoned – with marked intensity. If the boy in the stained jumper, whose father (?) seems involved in a conversation beyond our view, looks at the photographer quizzically, the other two men, by contrast, seem to call this photograph into question. Of the three photographs in which Gallizio is not pictured, one – an image that also falls into the category of planned compositions – shows a group of young women and children gathered together by a donkey and a small, partly covered wagon; a row of evenly spaced trees fills out the scene behind them (Figure 4.11). Another image, forming part of the poster, captures a single child standing near some pots and pans, with what looks like the donkey, wagon and group of figures from the last photograph in the background. A final photograph, also part of the poster, depicts a young woman and a group of children sitting and standing in a half circle around what might be the pots and pans from the preceding image; we again catch glimpses of the donkey, small covered wagon and row of trees in the background.

The nature of the interaction between Gallizio and the people pictured in these photographs is left undefined by the photographs, alone. Did Gallizio visit – if this is in fact a visit, as described in Constant’s foreword to *Skizze zu einer Kultur* – this particular group or family of Romani rarely, sometimes or often, and why? Is this Gallizio the pharmacist, experimental painter, amateur archaeologist, ‘ethnographer’, Situationist or local councilman at work? What of the Romani? What say have they had, or not, in the making of these pictures?

The co-editors of *Pinot Gallizio: il laboratorio della scrittura*, Giorgina Bertolino, Francesca Comisso and Maria Teresa Roberto, reprint three of these images in their 2005 publication (Figures 4.7a, 4.8a, 4.9b). They provide only a cursory explanation in their brief editorial notes, however, quickly referring in the introduction to their book’s final section on ‘Gypsies’ to ‘photographs which the artist posts on the streets as an act of political claim and self-publicity’ (Bertolino et al. 2005: 225). In his



2005 contribution to the Italian architectural periodical *Domus*, which includes two images from this series (Figure 4.11, Figure 4.12), Francesco Careri offers only a minor elaboration:

Pinot Gallizio, after having often defended the gypsies at the city council, put up posters on the Alba walls entitled *Man is always man* and announced the beginning of his battle to defend the gypsy encampment. This manifesto shows pictures of Gallizio with the gypsies in the livestock market and on the banks of the Tanaro. With this original and effective aesthetic and political performance, Gallizio took on the role of public artist

(Careri 2005: 107)

With Careri being overly ambitious, perhaps, in his use of terms like manifesto, aesthetic performance and public artist – all of which remain unqualified in his text – Bertolino and her co-editors further claim this group of images document the December 1956 visit made by both Constant and Gallizio to a Romani encampment in Alba (Bertolino et al. 2005: 225). This seems unlikely, though, as Constant does not appear in any of the photographs (and is not credited as the photographer). An image of various newspaper clippings from *Le nostre tôr* – included in the same section of their edited book on Gallizio (Bertolino et al. 2005: 228) – contrastingly dates the poster to July 1957, however, as does an anonymous hand-written note found on the back of the print held by GAM.<sup>37</sup> The clothing worn by Gallizio and the other people pictured in these photographs certainly seems, like the foliage on the trees, more like summer than winter (when Romani, particularly children, often struggled to survive). The photograph of ‘a gang in matching winter coats’ serves as a useful marker here also (Figure 4.4).

Although I am fairly certain these photographs were taken sometime before or after Constant’s 1956-1957 sojourn in Alba, I still see them as linking to the introductory narrative he later wrote for his *Skizze zu einer Kultur* manuscripts. They can almost be seen as illustrations for that text – while these may not be the exact people Constant encountered during his December 1956 visit to a Romani encampment in Alba, the scene he experienced that day is no doubt captured accurately enough in this series. The livestock market in the town square, which Constant refers to in his foreword to *Skizze zu einer Kultur* as the site where Romani traditionally set up

camp, is clearly visible in the background of at least one photograph (Figure 4.9a), while the setting for the remainder of the photographs is almost certainly Gallizio's plot of land on the outskirts of town. There is, however, no makeshift construction of wagons, planks and petrol cans visible in these photographs that is at all comparable to Constant's description, as given in the foreword to his *Skizze zu einer Kultur* manuscripts, of an improvised 'Zigeunerstadt', 'zigeunerstad' or 'gypsy town'. Regardless, these photographs certainly give us a different vision of the origins of his project than the one found in *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship today. They make the omission of Romani from the history of *New Babylon* and the Situationist International impossible. Alongside photographs showing Wolman's presentation to the *Primo congresso* of September 1956 or Debord's subsequent, December 1956 visit to Alba, we have a remarkably different narrative of culture contact.

Gallizio's political involvement in Alba was not lost on his fellow Situationists. If Constant was the group's sole architect, 'regarded with a certain admiration by the other SI members' (van Schaik 2005b: 47), then Gallizio must stand out from the crowd also. Almost certainly the only 55-years-plus, ex-pharmacist, ex-World War II freedom fighter, amateur archaeologist and 'peintre autodidacte' (Sandberg 1974: 41) to have been counted amongst the ranks of the Situationist International, Gallizio is unique also for his transparent and ultimately very human commitment to the causes in which he believed. The opening five lines of a poem written by Willem Sandberg, director of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and an ally of both COBRA and the early Situationist International, pay tribute to this enduring aspect of Gallizio's character (Sandberg 1974: 41):

force de la nature  
et de l'esprit  
plein de chaleur humaine –  
tout ce qu'il entreprend  
est imbu d'une rare sincerité

(force of nature  
and of the spirit  
full of human warmth –  
all that he does

is imbued with a rare sincerity)

Cynics, Situationist hard-liners and dedicated, ‘pro-Situ’ aficionados might dismiss Gallizio’s political involvement in Alba as evidence of his complicity with the state and, therefore, his unsuitability for membership in the group. Yet leading Situationists at the time, including Jorn, Debord and Bernstein, seem to have considered Gallizio’s political activity in Alba – particularly his role as self-appointed spokesman for Romani – an important part of his identity as a Situationist. There are signs Gallizio’s relationship to Romani was a key component, also, in the collective, group identity of the early Situationist International.

### ***‘King of the Gypsies’***

There is a final photograph of Gallizio, which may or may not belong to the series discussed above, showing him dressed in his customary coat, white collared shirt and hat (Figure 4.13). Gallizio’s hat is different to the one found in the other photographs, however, and his tie is missing. His shirt is also unbuttoned and, in place of the tie, he wears a pair of pendant earrings. According to the caption provided by Careri, who dates the image to Alba, 1956, this photograph shows Gallizio ‘wearing earrings in king of the gypsies style’ (Careri 2005: 106). We get similar descriptions from three other Italian publications, released between 2000 and 2005, which also feature this photograph.<sup>38</sup> It is included on both the back cover and as the first image in *Pinot Gallizio: Il pittore e la città nomade*, the catalogue of an exhibition held in Mondovi in 2005. As in Careri’s article for *Domus*, the editors of this catalogue – one of which is Careri – supply an image caption only: ‘Pinot Gallizio, che amava definirsi “re degli zingari”, indossa con fierezza in questa fotografia i tradizionali orecchini a pendente’; Pinot Gallizio, who liked to call himself ‘king of the gypsies’, proudly wearing in this photograph the traditional pendant earrings (Isnardi et al. 2005: 7). If anything can be inferred from such a brief explanation, the earrings are presumably traditional to Romani culture, while the ‘king of the gypsies’ title originates at least partly with Gallizio.

The editors of *Pinot Gallizio: L'uomo, l'artista e la città, 1902-1964* (Roberto et al. 2000), the catalogue of an exhibition held in Alba in 2000, give a slightly alternate description of the photograph in their 'Album Gallizio'. Also noting the 'proud way' in which Gallizio wears 'the traditional pendant earrings' in this image, they have it evidencing his involvement in issues of Romani rights in post-war Italy. Citing Gallizio's continuous defence of Romani in Town Council meetings in Alba throughout the 1950s, as well as the 'numerous photographs' showing him engaged in 'oral arguments representing Romani on the outskirts of town', they present this photograph as a fitting testimony to the human compassion and personal attentiveness he showed a persecuted people. For them, Gallizio's wearing of 'gypsy earrings' becomes an act of solidarity, a symbolic and physical expression of his support for the 'dignity of nomadic life' (Bertolino et al. 2000).<sup>39</sup>

While the caption provided for the photograph in *Pinot Gallizio: Catalogo generale delle opere 1953-1964*, a comprehensive overview of Gallizio's artistic oeuvre published in 2001, is simply 'Pinot Gallizio "re degli zingari"' (Roberto et al. 2001: 22) – Pinot Gallizio 'king of the gypsies' – the particular narrative Maria Teresa Roberto attaches to it presents the most detailed, but not necessarily accurate, account available. Following her work from 2000, Roberto again positions the photograph in relationship to Gallizio's ongoing defence of Romani in Alba. This time, she links the image specifically to Gallizio's decision to give his plot of land to Romani after the municipal authorities had banned the parking of caravans from Alba and the surrounding countryside. In these contexts, Roberto has the photograph formally 'sealing the alliance' between Gallizio and Romani. The photograph of Gallizio wearing a 'pair of gypsy earrings' becomes an image of 'investiture' – that is, a photograph documenting a ceremony or ritual in which the honour or rank of 'chief of the gypsies' was bestowed upon Gallizio by Romani. In exchange for gifting his land in Alba to Romani, to use freely as their home whenever passing through the region, Gallizio takes on the role, or 'identity', of 'gypsy king' (Roberto 2001: 29).<sup>40</sup>

None of these authors qualify the claims forwarded in their texts regarding this photograph, however. As with the larger series of images documenting Gallizio's interactions with Romani in Alba, the photographer is unknown and the dates given are either contradictory or ambiguous. No reference is offered to explain what is meant by 'traditional earrings', 'gypsy earrings' or the 'king of the gypsies style' in which these are said to be worn; there is a similar lack of evidence regarding what the title 'king', 'prince' or 'grand chief of gypsies' might mean in reality. Although such statements present, on the surface, as miniature 'ethnographies' of Romani culture, my own reading of the specialist literature has taught me to treat all notions of 'gypsy kings', 'princes' and 'chiefs' sceptically. The fact that Gallizio's fellow Situationists referred to him as a prince or king of the gypsies, like the claim that Gallizio was fond of these titles personally, ultimately says very little about his actual relationship with Romani:

There have been Romani spokesmen for our people from the very beginning who have interacted with the non-Romani establishment and who have translated such Romani words as *Baro*, *Xulaj*, *Serengro* as 'King', 'Earl', 'Duke' and so on. 'Gypsy Kings and Queens' still make good copy for pop journalists, although Romani society is not monarchical, and the equivalents of those words (*thagar*, *thagarni*, *amperato*, etc.) never occur as self-designations within *Rromanipen*

(Hancock 2002: 113)

The Gypsy Council is not a 'real' council; the Gypsy kings were not 'real' kings; but the concepts are useful in dealing with Gaujos [non-Romani] who will respect kings and councils, but will not listen to ordinary people

(Acton 1974: 102)

Surviving correspondence indicates Gallizio's Situationist colleagues in France, Germany and the Netherlands were aware of his ongoing activities in Italy – particularly his dealings with Romani – during the early years of the Situationist International. Some even made a show of highlighting this in letters and postcards sent to Gallizio in Alba. A 1957 postcard from Debord, Mohamed Dahou and Abdelhafid Khatib, for example, is addressed to 'Pinot, situazionista albese e principe zingaro' (GAM 10.d.48) – Pinot, situationist of Alba and prince of the gypsies. Mention of Gallizio's alleged status amongst Romani appears again in

Willem Sandberg's poetic ode to the artist, first published in 1974 (Sandberg 1974: 41):

acteur, marin, archéologue  
partisan  
docteur en chimie, inventeur  
professeur de viticulture  
membre du conseil municipal  
grand chef des tziganes  
et avant tout: artiste fougueux

(actor, sailor, archaeologist  
partisan  
doctor of chemistry, inventor  
professor of viticulture  
member of the municipal council  
grand chief of gypsies  
and above all: spirited artist)

The catalogue of Gallizio's work published by the Situationist International's Bibliothèque d'Alexandrie publishing house in July 1960 (which also released a monograph on Constant's work in May 1959) further highlights Gallizio's interactions with Romani in Alba (GAM 5.i.). As with Constant's unpublished *Skizze zu einer Kultur* manuscripts, it is instructive to take stock of the original layout of this catalogue and, also, its relationship to English-translation reprints in recent Situationist International scholarship. Edited by the Situationists Michèle Bernstein (to whom Debord was married from 1954 to 1972) and Asger Jorn, the original Bibliothèque d'Alexandrie monograph, simply titled *Pinot Gallizio*, begins with a two-page 'Éloge de Pinot-Gallizio' or 'Eulogy to Pinot Gallizio'. Written by Bernstein in Turin two years earlier, this 1958 text has been republished twice in English translation, on both occasions in edited works by Tom McDonough (Bernstein 1997 [1960]; 2002 [1960]).

The first image appearing in the original publication released by the Situationist International in 1960 is one from the series of black and white photographs documenting Gallizio's interactions with Romani in Alba.<sup>41</sup> Prominently featured opposite the second page of Bernstein's eulogy on only the third page of the entire catalogue, it shows Gallizio, cigarette in hand, speaking to two Romani women

(Figure 4.14a). A child, their head near Gallizio's bent elbow, looks on; a cloth-covered, wooden spoke-wheeled wagon dominates the background. The caption provided is the simplest possible: 'Pinot-Gallizio', the implication perhaps being that this photograph captures the essence of Gallizio (as a person, artist and Situationist) better than any other. Further into the *Bibliothèque d'Alexandrie* monograph, another two-page spread features the poster documenting Gallizio's so-called 'battle' for Romani rights, positioned opposite a detail of one of his paintings (Figure 4.14b). While Bernstein's opening text, like the rest of the catalogue, gives us no further information about these images, the caption provided by Jorn and Bernstein for the poster (which includes the photograph already printed on the third page of the monograph) does confirm its context for us: 'Pinot-Gallizio intervient en faveur des gitans d'Italie' – Gallizio intervenes in favour of the gypsies of Italy.

At the time, Jorn and Bernstein may have thought little other information needed to be provided about these photographs. The original readership of most Situationist materials was fairly limited, and a certain percentage of the monograph's audience may well have been familiar, already, with the background of these photographs. As a publication of the Situationist International edited by two of its leading members, the selection and distribution of text and image in this catalogue would not, in any case, have been arbitrary (Baum 2008: 24-25). Bernstein and Jorn clearly considered Gallizio's political engagement with Romani in Alba to be of importance to his identity as a Situationist and, also, fitting testimony to the group's broader counter-cultural sensibilities. Both were personally familiar with the local contexts in which Gallizio lived and worked and the Situationist International originated.

Bernstein attended the group's founding conference in Cosio d'Arroscia in 1957, for example, and later wrote her celebration of Gallizio and *Pittura industriale* in Turin; she may have visited this area of Italy at other times, also. Jorn lived in Albisola, another small town in Italy, about 100km directly southeast of Alba on the Mediterranean coast, and made frequent trips to Alba throughout the 1950s. A letter from Gallizio to Jorn dated 06 November 1957 makes explicit mention of Gallizio's ongoing representation of Romani – 'Italian newspapers continue to mention my

name with regard to gypsies' (Bertolino et al. 2005: 137) – suggesting this may have been a frequent topic of conversation at the time. The opening photograph of Gallizio Jorn and Bernstein selected for the 1960 monograph most likely had personal associations for them beyond the specific image of Gallizio and the Situationist International they wished to publicly convey at the time. The photograph is, at the very least, a scene of rural, small-town, mid-1950s Italy – again reminding us that the earliest years of *New Babylon* and the Situationist International are inseparable from these contexts. It also captures something of Gallizio's hybrid, multi-dimensional persona, testifies to his standing as 'prince' or 'chief of the gypsies' amongst other Situationists at the time and, furthermore, makes explicit the local, Romani contexts in which much of the earliest Situationist thinking about mobility, architecture, urbanism, festivity, play, spectacle, abundance and counter-cultural lifestyles originated.

When preparing his edited collections of Situationist texts and documents in English translation – first for a special issue of *October* and then a book for The MIT Press, both of which have had a substantial impact on subsequent scholarship – Tom McDonough seems to have taken a different view entirely (McDonough 1997; 2002a). In his version of Bernstein's 1958 eulogy to Gallizio (translated by John Shepley), McDonough not only omits the photograph of Gallizio speaking with two Romani women in Alba, he replaces this with an image of Bernstein, first, followed by a very different version of Gallizio, neither of which appear in the original (Bernstein 1997 [1960]: 94, 95; 2002 [1960]: 71, 73).<sup>42</sup> Although McDonough lists the 1960 *Bibliothèque d'Alexandrie* monograph as his source (Bernstein 1997 [1960]: 93; 2002 [1960]: 72), these substitute images – replete with cryptic captions attributed to Bossuet and Fontenelle – were in fact published in the second issue of *Internationale situationniste* in December 1958. Instead of Gallizio, 'prince of the gypsies', standing outdoors smoking and conversing on an earthy patch of ground, strewn with hay, a horse standing immediately behind him, we get Gallizio 'professor of chemistry' – a technician or inventor dressed in a white lab coat, working intently and completely indoors, surrounded by a cloud of white smoke, various bottles, test tubes, decanters, beakers and other scientific equipment (Figure



4.15). No hint of Romani – or Alba, or the rural – remains in McDonough’s edited collection of Situationist texts and documents; the mud and dirt of the Romani encampment are replaced by the pristine and sterile confines of the scientific laboratory. While the decision may not have been deliberate, it certainly erases the contexts in which Gallizio lived and worked and the Situationist International was founded; it also overwrites the image Jorn and Bernstein sought to project about Gallizio and the Situationist International at the time. Translations and reprints of historical documents need not copy or simulate an original, but such modifications – particularly when they are not explained or qualified by an editorial note – do have an impact upon our contemporary understanding of the Situationists and their time.

In the limited English-language scholarship now available on Gallizio, we get much the same: publications by Nicola Pezolet in *Grey Room* (2010) and Frances Stracey in *Oxford Art Journal* and *October* (2005; 2006) make no reference to his involvement with Romani in Alba or, even, to his longstanding work as a town councillor.<sup>43</sup> Delivering a de-politicised version of Gallizio, both authors notably include the image of Gallizio working in a laboratory setting (Stracey 2005: 398; Pezolet 2010: 76), further promoting the version of Gallizio tacitly sanctioned by McDonough before them. In marked contrast to the photograph of Gallizio appearing in the second issue of *Internationale situationniste*, to which Pezolet and Stracey both attach much historical significance, the images of Gallizio interacting with Romani in Alba are not included in their analyses. Despite being so prominently displayed in Jorn’s and Bernstein’s *Bibliothèque d’Alexandrie* catalogue, Romani disappear completely from current scholarship. For these authors, a photograph of Gallizio in a white lab coat that in fact dates from the 1940s, and thus some years before his eventual involvement with the Situationists, seems to be a more appropriate or desirable illustration.

Stracey, for her part, draws explicitly on Jorn’s and Debord’s 1960 monograph in her work. Her claims about a ‘collapse of the division of labour between artist and scientist’ and Gallizio’s ‘refusal to be presented as either a chemist or an artist, but rather as an experimental amalgam of both’, for example, are based completely on

the ‘notice biographique’, or biographical notes, published on the final page of Jorn’s and Bernstein’s 1960 monograph (Stracey 2005: 397). Stracey consistently references their monograph throughout the rest of her essay, turning to similarly minor details in the original, such as image captions, to advance her narrative (Stracey 2005: 396). She relies particularly on Bernstein’s eulogy (alongside which the photograph of Gallizio speaking with two Romani women is impossible to miss), and even takes the trouble to develop her own translations of this, despite the 1958 text having already been published twice, in English, by McDonough (Stracey 2005: 395, 401). This is not then the work of a scholar who has skipped quickly through her material.

Why, then, the absence of not just Romani from Stracey’s writings, but of the entire political aspect of Gallizio’s persona? What is it about Romani, or Gallizio’s relationship to Romani, that is apparently incompatible with Situationist scholarship today? How can one photograph of Gallizio be given so much importance in the history of the Situationist International while another photograph of Gallizio – used in very similar circumstances – be ignored entirely? While I do not think the photograph originally appearing opposite the second page of Bernstein’s 1958 eulogy is a necessarily more truthful depiction of Gallizio, it certainly deserves to be considered alongside the image of ‘a man with a well-trimmed mustache in a white lab coat surrounded by dozens of bottles, vials, test tubes, and other scientific paraphernalia [...] working in a clean, well-lighted laboratory’ (Pezolet 2010: 77) consistently given to us by Pezolet, Stracey, McDonough and others. After all, if we follow the lead of these writers, an image of Gallizio is not, or not only, an image of Gallizio, but a visual manifestation of Situationist theory and practice.

The pairing together of the poster documenting Gallizio’s defence of Romani in Alba and a detail of one of his canvases presented by Jorn and Bernstein in their 1960 monograph certainly suggests, to borrow from Stracey, a fusing or blurring of social roles – an experimental persona or experimental amalgam – comprised of both painter and political activist. This is surely the intention, also, with the image that so decisively starts off the 1960 *Bibliothèque d’Alexandrie* monograph. Jorn and

Bernstein do not begin their tribute to Gallizio, as we might expect, with a picture of ‘the artist’ (of which many were available), but rather of Gallizio appearing at home and in tune with Romani; that is, someone who was either one of them or could speak their language fluently. While neither is true, the image implies a certain affinity, or proximity, between Romani and the Situationists; it suggests a camaraderie or solidarity, even, implicating Romani as key participants (‘comrades in arms’) in the Situationists’ revolutionary fight against capitalist and consumerist society. What better way to reinforce the final paragraph of Bernstein’s eulogy – which celebrates the Situationists’ collective struggle to combat ‘the values of the old world [...] Whether these values be ideological, artistic, or even financial’ (Bernstein 1997 [1960]: 95) – than to associate the group, through a rather straightforward pairing of text and image, with ‘gypsies’, renowned outcasts *par excellence* of the civilised Western world?

## Chapter 5. Revisiting ‘Munich 1959’

In April 1959 the core members of the Situationist International, including Constant and Gallizio, gathered together in Munich for the group’s third official Congress. In the two and a half years since his 1956-1957 sojourn in Alba, when he had witnessed first hand the difficulties of Romani life and invested personally in a local ‘battle’ for their rights, Constant had worked to orient the Situationist International’s focus increasingly toward issues of architecture and urbanism. To this end, he set up a study centre dedicated to *urbanisme unitaire*; its basic intention, never realised, was to begin the project of physically constructing ‘the framework of new activities’ that was ‘to prepare the path’ toward ‘the ever variable, ever alive, ever actual, ever creative activity of the man of tomorrow’ (Alberts et al. 1959). Established in Amsterdam in early 1959, Constant’s *Bureau de Recherches pour un Urbanisme Unitaire* or ‘Research Bureau for Unitary Urbanism’ had three other members: Anton Alberts, often referred to as Ton Alberts (1927-1999), Har Oudejans (1928-1992) and Herman Dirk van Dodeweerd, or ‘Armando’ (1929–). Alberts and Oudejans were formally trained architects, recently set up in their own practice, while Armando was a multi-disciplinary artist, cultural editor of the Dutch newspaper *Haagse Post* and a leading member in the ‘Nulbeweging’ or ‘Nul’ movement; he has additionally been described – intriguingly – as ‘a boxer who played the violin in gypsy bands’ (Lootsma 1999: 157).

For a number of reasons, Constant’s Bureau never really got off the ground. It promised much but failed to deliver, producing little more than a short, co-authored proclamation that reiterated Constant’s premise that the ‘collective arts’ were, in the aftermath of two world wars, the only possible ways forward for a valid avant-garde (Alberts et al. 1959). In current *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship, Constant’s Bureau is best known for having published a church design

in the August 1959 issue of *Forum*, a leading Dutch architectural journal, and failing to pull together a Situationist group exhibition planned to open at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam on 30 May 1960. Taken together, these two events effectively signal the end of Constant's collaboration with the Situationist International.

The Munich Congress was held from 17 April to 20 April 1959 in 'the back room of a Bavarian hotel' (van Schaik 2005b: 48). Constant delivered the opening speech of the event at the start of the first 'work session' on 18 April 1959 (SI 1959c). His paper, originally titled 'Nos activites et nos perspectives pour l'urbanisme unitaire', was subsequently published as 'Rapport inaugural de la conférence de Munich' in the third issue of *Internationale situationniste*, released December that year (GAM 5.m.; Nieuwenhuys 1998 [1959]-b).<sup>44</sup> Written in Amsterdam only two days ahead of his arrival in Munich, Constant's opening address announced the establishment of his new study centre and lobbied the Situationists to focus on questions of contemporary architecture and urbanism. Constant also demands that the Situationists begin working, collectively, on the practical development and real-world application of their developing urban theories.

Since its adoption in Alba, the concept of unitary urbanism had been further elaborated by Constant and Debord in 'The Amsterdam Declaration' of 10 November 1958 (Nieuwenhuys and Debord 1998 [1958]), but the group's commitment to the concept had not been taken as seriously as Constant would have liked. The Situationists had been moving in rather the opposite direction, in fact, with the latest addition to their ranks being SPUR, a group of young German painters that were 'fiercely anti-technological and individualistic to the extreme' (van Schaik 2005b: 48). In these contexts, Constant's opening speech for the Munich Congress attempts to steer the Situationist International toward questions of architecture and urbanism. Advocating a collective rather than individual approach, Constant's primary concern was the shift from theory to practice – in his view, an absolutely necessary step if the Situationist International was to live up to its promise:

cela ne veut pas dire que nous voulons nous limiter à des prédictions et des prophéties. Cette attitude idéaliste est le plus grand danger que nous courons à ce moment et qui nous fait risquer de manquer le passage à la pratique, indispensable pour avancer

(GAM 5.m.)

(this does not mean that we want to limit ourselves to predictions and prophecies. This idealistic attitude is the biggest danger we face at this moment and we risk not making the transition to practice, indispensable if we are to advance)

For Constant, the task of constructing an actual environment of unitary urbanism was the most pressing issue confronting the Situationists in Munich. Since the *Primo congresso*, now over two and a half years past, the various national branches of the Situationist International had engaged in much painterly and literary activity, but, with the minor exception of ‘planned drifts’ in Paris and Amsterdam, there had been no concrete explorations of architecture and urbanism. The Lettrist International had pioneered such tactics already in the mid-1950s and, while their initial reports seemed promising (Debord 1956), little progress had been made in the interim. From Constant’s point of view, this went directly against the aims of the ‘Amsterdam Declaration’ – signed off by himself and Debord some months earlier – as well as the Alba Platform preceding it. Now was the time for practical experiments that would test-drive the basic concepts of play, micro-ambiances and constructed situations that were to be the fundamental building blocks of the Situationist city:

Donc, selon la déclaration d’Amsterdam, nous devons considérer le programme situationniste comme manqué [...]

Un praxis situationniste dans la perspective d’un urbanisme unitaire doit être notre première tâche, et le but principal de notre réunion actuelle. Nous ne devons pas nous quitter sans avoir examiné en commun les possibilités qui existent déjà pour des expériences pratiques [...]

A ce but nous nous sommes mis d’accord sur la fondation, à Amsterdam, d’un centre d’études pour un urbanisme unitaire [...]

Le centre d’études pour un urbanisme unitaire, devra venir, comme première étape, à des projets élaborés, pris dans la réalité, qui, tout en illustrant nos idées, devront en même temps constituer des micro-éléments de ce qui va constituer l’urbanisme unitaire

(GAM 5.m.: 1, 3)

(So, according to ‘The Amsterdam Declaration’, we should therefore consider the Situationist programme as failed [...])

A Situationist praxis with regard to unitary urbanism must be our primary target, and the principal goal of our current meeting. We must not part company without examining together the possibilities that already exist for practical experiments [...]

For this purpose we have agreed to found, in Amsterdam, a study centre for unitary urbanism [...]

The study centre for unitary urbanism, must come, as a first step, toward elaborated projects, grounded in reality, which, while illustrating our ideas, will at the same time constitute the micro-elements of what will become unitary urbanism)

Following Constant's opening speech, unitary urbanism was back on the Situationist International's agenda. Constant's ideas were discussed during the rest of the first work session on 18 April, with 'The Amsterdam Declaration' being a topic of debate the following day (SI 1959a). Having been 'presented to the conference as a proposal for a minimum program of the SI', the Declaration was eventually 'unanimously adopted by the participants' after minor amendments to the original (SI 1959c). The last official word in Munich was, in fact, similar to the first – with Gallizio's son Giorgio, as the Situationist 'Giors Melanotte', underscoring the importance of unitary urbanism to the Situationist programme: 'None of what we do is situationist. Only unitary urbanism, when it is realized, will start to be situationist' (SI 1959c).

### ***The SI's Stedelijk Museum exhibition (Scandal 1)***

In the months immediately following their third gathering in Munich, the Situationists formed plans to mount a major exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam that was to be the group's first manifestation of unitary urbanism (SI 1959b); everything seemed to be falling into place for Constant, with his newly established Bureau taking charge of preparations. There were grand ambitions voiced at the outset, including schemes to cordon off a section of Amsterdam's city centre. The resulting 'micro-environment' was even meant to support a large-scale *dérive*. Situationists supplied with mobile radio transmitters would roam about streets and alleyways, as well as the Stedelijk Museum's galleries, with Constant charting their progress in a control room positioned at the centre of operations (SI 1960a).

Intending to give the public a taster of the Situationist city of the future, the group's attempt to 'concretize' their theory of unitary urbanism ended in failure.

The story leading up to and including this fiasco, aptly called a 'circus' and 'soap opera' by van Schaik (2005b: 50), has been covered in detail by a number of writers. Available accounts chart a varying tale of procrastination, internal disagreements concerning ideological issues, external disputes over funding and fire safety requirements, a general lack of effort and organisation and, finally, the Situationists' overall unwillingness to cooperate – either amongst themselves or with the Stedelijk Museum. Originally scheduled to launch on 30 May 1960, the exhibition was cancelled only a few weeks before it was meant to open. The Situationists blamed the museum, particularly its director Willem Sandberg, for the failure, citing the imposition of practical constraints that would have compromised their avant-garde agenda. Their account, as well as a description of their vision for the unrealised exhibit (replete with a 'Structural plan of the unbuilt labyrinth' drawn up by Oudejans), featured almost immediately in the pages of *International situationniste*, appearing under the title 'Die Welt als Labyrinth' in the editorial notes section of the June 1960 issue (SI 1960a).<sup>45</sup> Sandberg had initially planned to stage a solo exhibition of Gallizio's work before being talked into the idea of a group exhibition by Jorn. With the Situationists proving incapable of mounting a collective showing of their work, he reverted back to plan. At short notice, Gallizio stepped into the breach, as if the Situationists' group exhibition had never been scheduled in the first place. Filling the gap left in the Stedelijk's calendar, Gallizio was promptly excommunicated (Wigley 1998: 34-36; van Schaik 2005b: 50-52).

If one dominant feature of the available scholarship on the 'heroic phase' of *New Babylon* and the Situationist International is the crucial December 1956 meeting between Constant and Debord in Alba and the all-important period of collaboration that followed, then the other is the downward spiral of events that marks the end of their correspondence. While culminating in the failed Stedelijk exhibition, for which Constant and his Bureau colleagues were primarily responsible, the demise of Constant's and Debord's relationship is further bound up in the 'church incident' or



‘*Forum* episode’ of August 1959. Termed ‘The Scandal of Architecture’ (Wigley 1998) and the ‘break up’ (van Schaik 2005b) by some writers on *New Babylon*, this combined sequence of events leads, in addition to Gallizio’s, Alberts’s and Oudejans’s expulsions from the Situationist International, to the departures of Jorn and Constant from the group. From the moment Constant announces the establishment of his Bureau during the April 1959 Congress in Munich, the so-called ‘architectural interlude’ (McDonough 2009) of the Situationist International can be seen steadily drawing to a close.

### ***The SI’s special issue of Forum (Scandal 2)***

As with plans for the Stedelijk exhibition, everything began promisingly. Before the Alba Congress of 1956, Constant had been partially involved in the Liga Nieuw Beelden, or League of New Plasticism (van Schaik 2005b: 42). While committing most of his energy to the Situationist International in the interim, Constant had continued to keep in touch with the Liga, exchanging ideas and news about his latest work and even publishing in their bulletin (Wigley 1998: 31). When setting up his Bureau in Amsterdam in 1959, he turned to the Liga for suitable recruits, plucking Oudejans – who had started an architectural practice together with Alberts – from their ranks (van Schaik 2005b: 48). Soon afterwards, the Liga was invited to guest edit a special issue of the Dutch architectural periodical *Forum*, and Constant’s newly formed Bureau looked to capitalise on this opportunity. Constant and his Bureau colleagues quickly manoeuvred themselves onto the Liga’s editorial board for the *Forum* issue, which they subsequently dominated – not as Liga members, but as Situationists.

In theory, this had all the makings of a spectacular success for the Situationist International. This was an opportunity to launch Situationist ideas on *Forum*’s considerable international readership, and would be a test for the group also – marking the first time Situationist theories would be officially formulated outside the safety net of their own publishing media. While Constant and Debord focused on generating polemical texts for the *Forum* issue (Nieuwenhuys 1959), Oudejans and

Alberts took over responsibility for the layout, creating collages comprised of newspaper clippings and Situationist quotes juxtaposed against images ranging from crowds, Brigitte Bardot and jets to highways, gallows and various feats of science, technology and engineering (Wigley 1998: 32; van Schaik 2005b: 49). Mixed in amongst Constant's and Debord's statements on unitary urbanism and one-line definitions of terms like 'situationist' and 'constructed situation', however, were two small photographs of a design for a church: the Mariakerk in Volendam (1957-1962), Oudejans's and Alberts's first major commission as architects.

Their design was both anathema and embarrassment to the group: the building type most despised by the Situationists, not to mention the Lettrists before them (LI 1954), was now purporting to be a piece of Situationist architecture. Although Debord was incensed, and at an absolute loss to understand how two people calling themselves Situationists could possibly collude with the Roman Catholic Church, Oudejans and Alberts were not immediately expelled from the group. Kept on through the fiasco of the Stedelijk Museum exhibition, in which they are again implicated nine months later, Oudejans and Alberts were then promptly cut loose (Wigley 1998: 31-36; van Schaik 2005b: 49-51). The official announcement was made in June 1960, featuring in the fourth issue of *Internationale situationniste* opposite an ominous, birds-eye-view photograph of a bomber devastating a section of city (Figure 5.1):

The architects Alberts and Oudejans placed themselves immediately and beyond any possible discussion outside the SI when they agreed to build a church in Volendam.

Our Dutch section made suitable arrangements to make their opinion of this indivisible event known

(SI 1960c)

Constant was exempted from blame on both accounts, but his relationship with Debord and the Situationist International had become increasingly untenable. Although the repeat failures of his Amsterdam-based Bureau certainly played a part,<sup>46</sup> there had been deeper ideological issues separating Constant from Debord and the Situationists all along. From the time of the Munich Congress onwards, underlying differences of opinion concerning basic questions of 'style, attitude and

outlook' (van Schaik 2005b: 51) progressively came to the surface and could no longer be overlooked in the name of the collective. As Wigley puts it: 'What is surprising is not the break, but the level of agreement that lasted for three and a half years' (Wigley 1998: 38). Following the ejection of Alberts and Oudejans from the group, Constant resigned the same month. In the next issue of *Internationale situationniste*, published six months later, the end of his Bureau is officially announced. This would be the first of many attempts over the next few years to slander Constant's work and minimise his previous importance to the group (SI 1960b). The end of Constant's Bureau marks the end of an era, opening on to Constant's solo work, began in the moment he visited a Romani encampment in Alba, on *New Babylon*.

### **Break up**

In the established historiography of the Situationist International and *New Babylon*, Munich 1959 emerges as the opposite of Alba 1956. Beginning with the immediate aftermath of the Situationists' third Congress in Germany, scholars typically present a narrative of treason, in-fighting and general negativity; this year of endless bickering and repeat disaster plays counterpoint to the energy, enthusiasm and overall euphoria characterising the two and a half years before Munich. Within this basic narrative structure, the three-to-four days spent in the Bavarian capital are scripted as a surreal interlude: a moment of calm before the storm marked by a final show of camaraderie, good will and drunken brotherhood. The coverage given to Constant's Bureau is symptomatic of this overall trend; first announced in Munich amidst much festivity, it becomes known rather exclusively for the double failure of the *Forum* issue and Stedelijk exhibition. As with the narrative provided for the time period lasting from Alba 1956 to Munich 1959, the existing scholarship for Munich 1959 to June 1960 again presents as a uniform account, backed up by a recycled range of imagery. Instead of celebrating Constant's relationship with Debord, as was the case previously, scholars now lament its tragic demise. Constant's surviving correspondence with Debord again acts as the dominant point of reference, however, with Debord remaining a central figure in the early history of *New Babylon*. As

before, Gallizio has no part to play – besides being a key reason for Constant’s escalating disputes with Debord. Romani, already marginalised or missing in scholarly accounts of the earliest days of *New Babylon* and the Situationist International, certainly do not feature in this later stage of the established historiography (Appendix 1). Wigley’s and van Schaik’s writings on *New Babylon*, as well as their similar use of imagery, are again representative.

Three images illustrate Wigley’s account, included in his 1998 monograph on *New Babylon*, of ‘the scandal’ resulting in Constant’s eventual resignation from the Situationist International. The first, chronologically, is a black and white photograph taken during the Munich Congress (Figure 5.2a). It shows Oudejans, Constant, Debord and Armando sitting around a wooden table in Munich’s Hofbräuhaus, beer steins in hand. The four men are clearly enjoying themselves, and this looks every bit the start of a new and successful phase for the Situationist International. Constant’s recent recruits (Ton Alberts did not come to Munich) appear dedicated to the Situationists’ cause and genuinely proud to be taking part in proceedings, while Constant and Debord seem like the best of friends. For Wigley, this was very much the case:

the architects became involved in all the discussions. They created a strong impression. In fact, Debord was so taken with idea [sic] of topology raised by Oudejans that he later went so far as to suggest that it might displace psychogeography as the central concern of the collective. A photo of him raising his tankard with Constant and the two architects in a Munich beer hall was used to illustrate the announcement of the Bureau’s formation in *Potlatch*

(Wigley 1998: 34)

Van Schaik, who features the same picture on the table of contents page of his edited volume *Exit Utopia* (van Schaik and Mácel 2005: 5), deploys a related black and white photograph in his three-part essay on *New Babylon* (van Schaik 2005b: 50). It is a similarly jolly scene, showing Constant, Gallizio and Jorn having what looks to be a raucous enough time (Figure 5.2b). Gallizio, up out of his seat, gestures expressively in Constant’s direction while Constant, clearly laughing, possibly shares a joke with Jorn. Under the heading ‘Men who love only once’, a literary device that

reinforces the foreshadowing effect of the image, van Schaik's description of the Munich Congress is even more buoyant than Wigley's:

Oudejans – equipped with a camera and feeling like a kid in a candy shop – takes numerous snapshots of the participants, and the evidence shows that a fair amount of time was spent exploring local beer halls. The conference is topped off by a merry get-together [...] Despite all the apparent and underlying tensions between the now reinforced right and left wing, the conference is one of the high points in the history of the SI, bringing together all the early members of the movement in what appears an intense but happy little social gathering: Munich was simply great fun

(van Schaik 2005b: 48)

For Wigley and van Schaik, these photographs tell us everything we need to know about Munich – it was a good time, but the beginning of the end for Constant and the Situationist International. There is no seminal moment to be found in Munich, like Wolman's address to the *Primo congresso* in Alba in September 1956 or Constant's first meeting with Debord there three months later. Constant's opening speech is mentioned, as well as the simmering tensions between 'painters' and 'architects' lurking in the background, but overall we are given an account of friendly drunken revelry. The Situationists' own coverage of the event, as published in the third issue of *Internationale situationniste*, is similar enough: 'As soon as speeches by Pinot-Gallizio, Jorn, Constant and Oudejans mark the end of the Conference, an experimental alcohol made especially for the occasion by Pinot-Gallizio is distributed around the room. It is well into the night before it is succeeded by more classical drinks' (SI 1959c).

If coverage of the event in Munich is generally short and sweet, focusing on the good times had there by all, the ensuing account of 'tragic denouement' (van Schaik 2005b: 49) and 'betrayal' (Wigley 1998: 34) that follows is contrastingly thorough, amounting to nine pages in Wigley's text and five in van Schaik's, for example. Their selection of imagery streamlines the narrative provided – again, in both cases, based primarily on Constant's and Debord's correspondence with each other. Wigley's monograph features a photograph of Alberts's and Oudejans's church design and a page from the August 1959 issue of *Forum* (Wigley 1998: 32-33). Van Schaik does much the same, opting for an alternate image of the church model and

Oudejans's floor plan for the Stedelijk exhibition (van Schaik 2005b: 50-51). Published in the fourth issue of *Internationale situationniste*, Oudejans's drawing was originally accompanied by a description of potential ceiling heights and suggestions for various environmental effects that might be employed within the labyrinth, including artificial rain, wind and fog (SI 1960a). The visual chronology constructed by this imagery is clear enough: Munich Congress, followed by the *Forum* disaster, followed by the Stedelijk fiasco equals the end of Constant's involvement with the Situationist International. While van Schaik's text is perhaps the more remorseful, expressing personal regret for the break down in Constant's relationship with Debord – 'Henceforth, sadly, it is a downward spiral' (van Schaik 2005b: 48) – he notably ends up in the same place as Wigley. Both authors suggest that it is now, beginning with his break from the Situationist International, that Constant's work on *New Babylon* really gets going:

So at the end of June 1960 – after less than two rather tumultuous years as a member – Constant, the last Unitary Urbanist, resigns from the SI. "Unitary Urbanism will historically belong to those who have made something of it" he warns Debord. Turning his back on compromised collective action, Constant decides to continue on his own. The stage is now set for the grand synthesis of the work and experiences of the previous dozen years: poetry made by all. Enter New Babylon

(van Schaik 2005b: 53)

Wigley's approach is subtler, but delivers much the same. He draws attention to the fact that the name, *New Babylon*, 'did not appear until June 1960', for example, stressing that 'it was precisely in that month that Constant resigned from the collective' (Wigley 1998: 16).

Again, it is not that Wigley's and van Schaik's historiographies of the time period stretching from Munich 1959 to the end of Constant's relationship with Debord just over one year later are inaccurate. It is more the case, as with their coverage of Alba 1956-1957, that their version of events is incomplete – perhaps strategically so. Munich is not, or not only, about Bavarian beer halls and simmering tensions between painters and architects. Constant's research Bureau colleagues, particularly Oudejans, do more than just 'betray' their Situationist colleagues with a church design. The Stedelijk fiasco is not, in turn, the only attempt to 'concretize' the idea of

unitary urbanism and Gallizio, for his part, is again a more dynamic and important character than the marginal figure we are presented. There is, again, an alternative story – one markedly devoid of deepening intrigues, increasingly frequent arguments and mounting tensions – that weaves in and out of, and often sits at odds with, the well-documented sequence of internal disputes that currently comprises the final year of Constant's involvement with the Situationist International. If Wigley is correct to point out how the Situationists 'thrived on their scandals' (Wigley 1998: 38), then we might question to what extent scholars of the group have, in turn, revelled in their documentation.

### ***'il villaggio dei nomadi'***

In the Archivio Gallizio at GAM in Turin there is an original typescript of the opening address Constant delivered at the Situationist International's third Congress in Munich. It is a lecture in the rough: three pieces of thin, partly translucent, worn paper marked by the imprint of a rusting paper clip, replete with typos and amendments, dated 'Amsterdam le 15 Avril 1959, Constant' at the end of the last page. Bold red letters hand written across the top of the first page read 'Congresso relazione Constant' (Congress report Constant), with the place, 'd' Monaco' (Munich) and the date, 1959, appearing below. A rough sketch, in blue ink, appears in the top-right corner of the third page; on the reverse, and upside down, there are two hand-written notes in Italian – judging by the language and the writing style, all added by Gallizio (Figure 5.3).

Although we can never know for certain how or when the transcript of Constant's speech ended up in Gallizio's possession, or when he sketched and wrote on it, it seems Gallizio had a special interest in the issues Constant raised in Munich. On the official, front side of the third page to Constant's April 1959 typescript, we find him – after stridently criticising his fellow Situationists, over the preceding two pages, for their failure to engage more fully with questions of architecture and urbanism – announcing the establishment of his new Bureau in Amsterdam. In conclusion, he again stresses, as he had throughout his speech, that the primary aim of his Bureau

was ‘to carry out teamwork and study practical solutions’.\* The paper ends in a final paragraph declaring that the success of the Bureau would be judged by its ability to attract like-minded individuals to its cause and, more importantly, to engage in the task of implementing actual projects:

L’activité du centre pourra réussir dans la mesure où l’on saura attirer des collaborateurs qualifiés qui comprennent l’esprit de nos recherches et dans la mesure où l’on saura réaliser des projets qui seront le critère de l’efficacité de notre démarche

(GAM 5.m.: 3)

(The centre’s activities will be successful insofar as it will attract qualified collaborators who understand the spirit of our research and to the extent that it will realise projects that will test the effectiveness of our approach)

On the unofficial, reverse side of this page, we find Gallizio responding precisely to the challenges put forward by Constant’s typescript; he even directs Constant’s polemic back at him. With Constant demanding that the Situationists begin working on actual proposals to back up their theories and ideas, talk of a Romani encampment in Alba suddenly resurfaces. The original idea first submitted by Constant to the Mayor of Alba in January 1957 is not simply reinitiated, however – it becomes more ambitious than before. Not only does the project change in scale, it also takes on a broader cultural agenda.

*Ontwerp voor zigeunherkamp*, the design first developed by Constant in Alba in 1956-1957 was primarily a practical architectural solution. It was concerned, at a local level, with real world issues such as how best to provide basic shelter, drinking water and sanitary facilities to Romani passing through the region. Two years later, Alba’s ‘casa della Zingari’ is linked directly to Constant’s call for a shift from theory to practice. Something else happens here also. The renewed, 1959 version of Alba’s ‘casa della Zingari’ becomes – at least in Gallizio’s mind – a strategy of cultural preservation or, to borrow from James Clifford, ‘salvaging’. Clifford uses the term ‘Salvage Paradigm’ to describe an impulse within Western cultural practice that sees artists, intellectuals and anthropologists turning toward non-Western peoples in a bid ‘to rescue “authenticity” out of destructive historical change’. He focuses his critique

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\* ‘la réalisation du travail d’équipe, et et l’étude de solutions pratiques’



on the contemporary display of ethnographic art and artefacts, in particular, using the idea of salvaging to:

recall early 20th-century anthropology, the “salvage ethnography” of Franz Boas’s generation – A. L. Kroeber and his Berkeley colleagues recording the languages and lore of “disappearing” California Indians, or Bronislaw Malinowski suggesting that authentic Trobriand Island culture (saved in his texts) was not long for this earth

(Clifford 1987: 112)

In April 1959 the Situationists’ ideas about architecture and urbanism are not – or not only – focused toward a hypothetical type of ‘future man’, or *homo ludens*. Rather, unitary urbanism gets bound up in the project of documenting, sustaining and cultivating the supposedly endangered, authentic lifestyles of Romani (GAM 5.m.: 3) – and it is this, like the ‘high-tech’ *dérive* planned for Amsterdam, that was to be the first Situationist environment:

1) proposta a Constant  
per costruzione come  
primo ambiente  
il villaggio dei nomadi  
per non perdere le  
tradizioni di questi  
viaggiatori della  
cultura

2) Costruzione Veneziana

1) proposal to Constant  
for the construction of  
the first environment  
the village of nomads  
so as not to lose  
the traditions of these  
travellers of  
culture

2) Venetian Construction

Although we can never know for certain when Gallizio wrote these lines on the back of Constant’s April 1959 typescript or whether they discussed Gallizio’s ideas in person, it seems likely that such an exchange would have occurred at some point during the Munich Congress. Whether or not Constant was involved, Gallizio surely

talked about his vision for ‘the first environment’ (of unitary urbanism, of the Situationist city) with Oudejans – who was, of course, one of Constant’s new recruits to the Situationist International and a core member of his newly founded study centre in Amsterdam.

In two recent Italian publications on Gallizio there is an image – with little to no accompanying commentary – of a page from one of Gallizio’s 1959 diaries (Bertolino et al. 2005: 233; Isnardi 2005: 50).<sup>47</sup> The diary page, pre-printed with a grid of varying density, frames an ink drawing on plain paper signed by Oudejans and dated 20 April 1959 – the last day of the Situationist International’s third Congress in Munich (Figure 5.4). Cut and pasted into Gallizio’s diary, where it was subsequently framed by some energetic markings, Oudejans’s sketch suggests a multi-celled, single-storey, flat-roofed building of varying materials and textures; although the sketch is ambiguous, the building potentially accommodates caravans within its façade. Beneath Oudejans’s drawing are a few lines added by Gallizio:

Casa degli zingari  
progetto  
eseguito al Congresso di Monaco  
aprile 59  
Har Oudejans architetto

(Home of the gypsies  
project  
done at the Congress of Munich  
April 59  
Har Oudejans architect)

While Wigley’s brief coverage of the Munich Congress has Debord eager to engage with Constant’s newly-recruited Bureau colleagues from Amsterdam – Debord ‘agreed that Armando and Oudejans could come [...] saying that he looked forward to participating in discussions of architecture with them’ (Wigley 1998: 34) – it seems Gallizio, too, was wanting to collaborate with the Dutch architects. In Oudejans, at the very least, he finds someone with whom to revive the question of Alba’s ‘gypsy problem’. Although we can only speculate as to whether or not other Situationists were involved in their discussions, the evidence of Oudejans’s sketch pasted into Gallizio’s diary brings new meaning to the ‘feel good’ photographs of

drunken revelry we typically associate with the Munich Congress. It also counters, as so much other material does, the negative depictions of Gallizio currently circulating in architectural scholarship on *New Babylon*. Van Schaik, for example, writes how Constant had repeatedly stressed to Debord ‘the need’ to ‘attract the right people to collaborate’ with the Situationists on actual projects of unitary urbanism, which he qualifies as ‘engineers, architects, *real* scientists (meaning not of Pinot Gallizio’s brand)’ (van Schaik 2005b: 105).

After having lost, together with Constant, the local debate over Romani rights in Alba during the course of 1956-1957, Gallizio had clearly not given up on the idea of constructing a permanent Romani encampment there. It appears the dream stayed alive with Constant, also. With the second of three bullet points comprising the core of Constant’s opening speech to the Munich Congress stating that ‘We must realise works of collective creativity by forming teams and proposing real projects’,\* there is a sense that the design and construction of a Romani encampment in Alba was earmarked in April 1959 as an inaugural or flagship project for Constant’s Bureau in Amsterdam. Yet it is not Oudejans’s work on the ‘casa della Zingari’, but rather his church model published in *Forum* and floor plan for the Stedelijk exhibition labyrinth that take centre stage in established historiographies of *New Babylon* and the Situationist International. As a consequence, the ongoing Romani narrative underpinning Constant’s work on *New Babylon* again drifts into obscurity. It picks up again, however, a full year after the end of the ‘downward spiral’ that sees Gallizio and Constant both cut ties with the Situationist International in June 1960.

On or around 13 July 1961,<sup>48</sup> Gallizio received a letter from Constant at his home address in Alba (Figure 5.5). The envelope is addressed to ‘L’uomo di Alba’ or, ‘The Man of Alba’ – most likely a reference to Gallizio’s deep-seeded interest in the geological and archaeological prehistory of his home town and surrounding countryside (cf. Bertolino et al. 2005: 35). Sent from Amsterdam, the letter reveals that the idea of a permanent Romani encampment in Alba continued to be a topic of

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\* ‘Nous devons réaliser un travail créatif collectif en formant des équipes et en proposant des projets réels (GAM 5.m.: 2).

discussion between Constant and Gallizio, with the sketch produced by Oudejans in Munich serving as a further marker of this continuity. Despite their individual breaks with the Situationist International a year earlier, Gallizio and Constant remain dedicated to realising the ‘first ever’ project of unitary urbanism. In his July 1961 letter, Constant thanks Gallizio for a ‘biography’ he had sent, making special mention of the images it contained. Constant then addresses the ongoing idea of a project concerning Romani in Alba. Now five and a half years since his December 1956 visit to Gallizio’s plot of land in Alba, Constant still shows great enthusiasm and a strong desire to be involved in Gallizio’s ongoing efforts there (GAM 9.a):

Mon cher Pinot,  
Merci bien pour la biographie  
qui contient de bien belles illustrations!  
Puisque tu y parles de la “Città  
degli Zingari” il faudra bien envisager  
les possibilités de réalisation de ce  
projet, qui serait une première réalisation  
de l’urbanisme unitaire.  
On m’a dit que ty exposes bientôt  
à Essen chez van de Loo. Si tu y iras,  
je voudrais te recontrer à le vernissage,  
et on parlera ensemble.  
Mes amitiés pour Madame et  
pour Giorgio.  
Amicalement,  
Constant

(My dear Pinot,  
Thank you very much for the biography that contains such lovely  
illustrations!  
Since you speak of the “City of Gypsies” it might be a good idea to envisage  
the possibilities for realising this project, which would be the first  
manifestation of unitary urbanism.  
I have been told that you will soon be exhibiting in Essen at van de Loo’s. If  
you are there, I would love to meet you at the preview, to talk together.  
My best wishes to your wife and Giorgio.  
With friendship,  
Constant)

While I have interpreted the opening lines of Constant’s letter as a reference to the *Bibliothèque d’Alexandrie* monograph published by the Situationist International in July 1960, discussed previously, there is little to speculate about regarding the rest of

this correspondence. Constant's letter reads as a response to the notes Gallizio scribbled on the back of the typescript for his speech delivered in Munich two years earlier. As then, the original idea of 1956-1957 has again grown in scale. In Munich, Gallizio's and Constant's earliest vision of a basic shelter providing water and sanitary facilities had become a village for 'salvaging' the nomadic traditions of Romani; now, two years on from April 1959, that village becomes a city.

If the *Forum* and Stedelijk 'scandals' (Wigley 1998) quickly led to a comprehensive severing of ties between Constant, Gallizio and the Situationist International, there was clearly no damage done to the relationship between Constant and Gallizio. While the Situationists set about the project of ridiculing Constant and his work, Constant and Gallizio remained good friends and continued to correspond amicably with each other. Seemingly unconcerned with the vitriol aimed at him by Debord and the Situationists, Constant enthusiastically pursued the task of designing an alternative living environment based, at least in part, on the principles of unitary urbanism. While the idea of converting a section of Amsterdam into a labyrinth for planned *dérives* ends with Constant's departure from the Situationist International, a Romani encampment in Alba remains a very real possibility for making the leap from theory to practice Constant had been advocating all along. In July 1961, plans dating back to December 1956 continue to be at the forefront of Constant's and Gallizio's thinking. Subsequent correspondence between Constant and Gallizio's son, Giorgio – who had of course played a part in the early history of the Situationist International himself – reinforces the point; presenting yet more evidence, also, of the lasting friendship existing between the two men.<sup>49</sup> Contacting Constant in 1974, then ten years after his father's death, Giorgio expresses an interest in Constant's memories of their earlier plans for a permanent Romani encampment in Alba: 'Comme il a passé beaucoup de temps, je ne rappelle pas trop bien si tu as fait quelques projets pour la "maison des Tzigans" dont Pinot parlait toujours' (RKD 71[a]) – Since it was a long time ago, I do not remember very well if you have done projects about the "home of the Gypsies" that Pinot was always talking about. If his son is correct, and the Romani of Alba were always on Gallizio's mind, then they were never far from Constant's thoughts either.

## Chapter 6. 'Afterlife' 1: Revisiting Nomadism

HP: How do you imagine government in New Babylon?

Constant: As the motto for my book on New Babylon I used a statement by a gypsy, who calls himself the chairman of the World Community of Gypsies.

This man said:

“We have a useful task in this world, because we are the symbols of a free world, a world without borders, in which you can travel freely, from the plains of South Africa to the forests of Finland, from the Atlantic coasts to the Siberian steppes!”

So the notion of “state” has withered away, because the state is a product of the struggle for survival, of the competition between one group and another, of the protection of property. When the world economy comes into being, and that will inevitably occur, the state will automatically be eliminated

(van Garrel and Koolhaas 2005 [1966]: 12)

In marked contrast to the brief period of overlap between *New Babylon* and the ‘heroic phase’ (Home 1991) or ‘architectural interlude’ (McDonough 2009) of the Situationist International, the so-called ‘post-SI’ years of Constant’s project have, despite covering more than triple the amount of time, received comparatively little scholarly attention. There are some exceptions. Wigley has addressed this period, of about 1960 to 1974, paying particular attention to the ways in which *New Babylon* interacts with, drives and responds to post-war architectural culture in Europe and beyond. Although he terms it ‘The Afterlife’, this is seen to be a crucial phase in the development of Constant’s project; it witnesses – in his terms – ‘The Birth of Hyper-Architecture’ and, especially, the emergence of Constant’s ‘architectural persona’, that of ‘the hyper-architect’ (Wigley 1998: 39-71). Van Schaik also considers the post-Situationist years of *New Babylon*, particularly the early- to mid-1960s, to be some of the most important, arguing that this is ‘in fact the central phase’ in the development of Constant’s project (van Schaik 2005b: 104). While Wigley focuses primarily on the overlap between *New Babylon* and 1960s avant-garde architectural discourse and the impact Constant’s work had on ‘a whole chain of experimental

architectural practices' (Wigley 1998: 63), van Schaik traces out the influence of Carlheinz Caspari on Constant's project – 'who, in a matter of months' takes 'the place of Debord as Constant's main sparring partner' (van Schaik 2005b: 105).

There is a general sense, however, that most if not all of the underlying theory and rationale for *New Babylon* is established and worked out during Constant's collaboration with Debord and the Situationist International between about 1956 and 1960, with the next fourteen years being more or less a period of visual development – during which time Constant became increasingly disillusioned with society and his work. Constant is seen to explore new media and representational techniques and establish *New Babylon* internationally, but nothing new in the way of ideas is really brought to his project. Simon Sadler captures this overall view precisely: 'Constant continued to address the problems of play, flexibility and nomadism in New Babylon, but as the project advanced the mass of models and illustrations became more expansive rather than more detailed' (Sadler 1998: 123). This is not entirely accurate. Understanding *New Babylon* as a 'specific response' to the 'manifesto' of unitary urbanism (Heynen 1999: 153), a type of 'Situationist architecture' (Andreotti 2000: 51) or 'designs for a future situationist city' (McDonough 2001: 93) does not in fact account for the emergence of nomadism as a key term in Constant's work, or explain the meaning of that term to his project.

Following his break with Debord and the Situationists, a fundamental change occurs in Constant's work and thinking: from about November 1963 onwards, the terms nomad, nomadic and nomadism begin to surface in Constant's texts and lecture manuscripts (RKD 332[b]; RKD 332[d]; RKD 332[e]; RKD 341); from 1965, these words start to feature in interviews and articles about *New Babylon* (RKD 477; van Garrel and Koolhaas 2005 [1966]); and, by the time Constant stops working on *Skizze zu einer Kultur* in about 1965-1966, 'Nomadism' had become a separate chapter in both his Dutch and German book manuscripts (RKD 414[a]; RKD 414[b]). It was never there before. Writers like David Pinder correctly recognise that there are two defining characteristics of *New Babylon* – namely, the *ludic* and the *nomadic* (Pinder 2005: 203) – but do not acknowledge that nomadism first emerges

only after Constant's departure from the Situationist International. Although Situationist theory and practice, particularly psychogeography, *urbanisme unitaire* and *dérive*, often implies notions of movement, flexibility and dynamism, these ideas are not necessarily related to, much less synonymous with, nomadism.

During Constant's period of involvement with the Situationist International, no member of the group used the term nomad; nor was it used by COBRA, the Lettrists or, for that matter, the Surrealists before them.<sup>50</sup> The only exception was Gallizio; in addition to his hand-written notes on the back of Constant's typescript for the opening speech of the Munich Congress of April 1959 (GAM 5.m.), Gallizio's 'Manifesto of Industrial Painting', as published in the third issue of *Internationale situationniste* seven months later, uses the word nomad twice. As with many of Gallizio's writings, this manifesto is chaotic, poetic and mostly impenetrable: a running stream of consciousness that points in numerous, equally fantastic directions. Yet, despite the garbled language, it resonates powerfully with the work and thinking of COBRA and, moreover, presents many of the ideas central to *New Babylon*. Of particular importance here, alongside his mention of 'true nomadism' and 'gypsy caravans', are Gallizio's references to 'the Neolithic', 'Paleolithic hunters' and 'prehistory'. Although overlooked – like Gallizio, like Romani – in *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship today, these are defining characteristics of Constant's project as well:

[...] Men without memories will be created; men in a continual violent ecstasy, forever starting at ground zero; a "critical ignorance" will come into being with extensive roots in the long prehistory of savage man, the magus of the caves.

The new magic will have the more recent spice of the sparks of the conflagration of the library of Alexandria which was the synthesis of the Neolithic revolution and which continues in our own times to burn the residue of the urban society of the Sumerians and the nomadism of the Phoenicians, flavoring like a narcotic incense the hopes of man

[...] New proprieties are required; true nomadism requires scenes for camping, for gypsy caravans, for the weekends.



The return to nature with modern instrumentation will allow man, after thousands of centuries, to return to the places where Paleolithic hunters overcame great fear [...]

(Gallizio 1959)

While nomadism – particularly ‘Neolithic nomadism’ – becomes a key component of *New Babylon* within about four years after Constant’s resignation from the group, the term appears only fleetingly in later Situationist International and post-Situationist International texts: for example, the fifth chapter, on ‘Time and History’, of Debord’s *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967); and, Raoul Vaneigem’s ‘Notes to the Civilized Concerning Generalized Self-Management’ (2006 [1969]) and *From Wildcat Strike to Total Self-Management* (1974).

The ‘ludic’ in *New Babylon* is a term with a clear lineage, traceable back to Huizinga’s *homo ludens*. This is an identifiable area of overlap between Constant’s and the Lettrists-come-Situationists’ thinking in the 1950s and early-1960s. The word play even receives a working definition in the first issue of *Internationale situationniste* (SI 1958). Nomadism, by contrast, emerges suddenly and – on the surface, at least – without any clear point of reference in Constant’s post-Situationist International work only. It is not a Lettrist or Situationist term and remains foreign to the Situationist programme. Debord may be credited with inventing the name ‘New Babylon’, but the development of nomadism in *New Babylon* appears to be Constant’s work (and perhaps Gallizio’s), alone. Huizinga’s *homo ludens* is not originally nomadic and the two ideas are by no means interchangeable; this is something Constant brings explicitly to the concept of ‘playing man’. Constant’s turn to nomadism further signals a development – following his encounter with Romani in Alba – from his COBRA manifesto; otherwise, the vision of an all encompassing people’s art first outlined in 1948 remains rather intact. The distinction, and chronology, is important. After nomadism appears in Constant’s work in 1963-1964, it becomes an increasingly anthropological and ideological concept across the next two-to-three years, taking on specific historical, cultural, socio-political and economic meaning. This happens, notably, in a period when Constant’s interest in Romani – building on his previous engagement with Romani in Alba between 1956 and 1961 – can be seen to intensify.

On 08 July 1963, almost two years to the day since last writing to Gallizio about ‘la Città degli Zingari’, Constant sent two letters from his home address in Amsterdam: one to the Communauté Mondiale Gitane in Paris, the other to The Gypsy Lore Society in Liverpool. The letters, which have been overlooked in *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship except for a fleeting mention by David Pinder (2005: 206), reveal Constant’s interest in Romani had intensified since his December 1956 visit, now six and a half years past, to a temporary Romani encampment on the outskirts of Alba. Having taken his leave of the Situationists three years prior, Constant now actively pursues information about Romani. An article published in the Dutch newspaper *Algemeen Handelsblad* several weeks earlier appears to have been something of a lightning rod; it is the explicit reason for Constant’s letter to Paris and, in time, becomes a key source in his work on *New Babylon*. A six-line extract taken from the article eventually sets up the foreword to *Skizze zu einer Kultur* and, in a 1966 interview with another Dutch newspaper, *Haagse Post*, Constant confirms this – in response to a question about government – as the motto (transcribed at the start of this chapter) for *New Babylon* (Figure 6.1).

Nomadism becomes an increasingly central concept in Constant’s work, that is, as and when he begins to locate and ground the term with specific reference to Romani. While Romani do not feature in the rest of Constant’s writings on *New Babylon*, they can be located within a running list of other ‘outcasts’ from sedentary, utilitarian society – whom Constant cultivates, directly through his work on *Skizze zu einer Kultur* in the early-to-mid 1960s, as the ‘pre-image’ of the New Babylonian. Later interviews linked to the major *New Babylon* retrospective held at the Haags Gemeentemuseum in June-September 1974 and, also, Constant’s receipt of the David Röell drawing prize in November that year, reveal how Romani were always his anthropological model of otherness *par excellence* (RKD 386; RKD 390[e]). Critiquing the ways Romani typically exist in Western literary narratives as ‘a people without history’, Katie Trumpener notes how Romani have often ‘become rallying figures for many disenfranchised groups simultaneously’. Her analysis reveals a tendency, recognisable amongst artists, intellectuals and mass culture alike, to

‘identify’ with Romani when attempting to stake a claim to ‘notions of political defiance and utopian strivings for freedom’ (Trumpener 1992: 875). *New Babylon* and Constant, himself, certainly fit the pattern. In his work, Constant groups together all the others of Modernity around the figure of the Gypsy. He then adopts this persona himself, performing publicly – as a Gypsy musician – during key moments in the display of his *New Babylon* project.

### ***Lettrist and Situationist texts***

Constant’s classic Situationist-era texts, as published in *Potlatch* and *Internationale situationniste* – ‘The Great Game to Come’, ‘Another City for Another Life’ and ‘Description of the Yellow Sector’ – are all primarily concerned with *urbanisme unitaire*. While advocating for an urban environment that would be flexible, playful and dynamic, unitary urbanism was not, or not directly, connected with notions of nomadism. In his original 1953 manifesto, Chtcheglov writes about the need ‘to invent new, changeable decors’, arguing that ‘Architectural complexes’ should ‘be modifiable. Their appearance will change totally or partially in accordance with the will of their inhabitants’. He speaks of ‘the EXPERIMENTAL aspect of the next civilization’ in vague terms, only, hinting ‘that it will be more flexible, more “playful”’. The closest we get to the actual movement of people, much less as a total lifestyle, is one oblique reference to ‘this mobile civilization’ and a claim that ‘The main activity of the inhabitants will be CONTINUOUS DRIFTING’, by which he means *dérive* (Knabb 2006 [1981]: 479). Other than that, there is a fleeting vision of ‘The mobile house’ that ‘turns with the sun [...] Mounted on tracks, it can go down to the sea in the morning and return to the forest in the evening’ (Chtcheglov 2006 [1953]: 2-7). This is not nomadism. Taking such ideas as his starting point, Constant’s ‘The Great Game to Come’ and ‘Another City for Another Life’ of 1959 focus similarly on concepts of play and recreation; like Chtcheglov’s manifesto, the texts develop an idea of architecture and urbanism that is by no means static but, again, never explicitly nomadic either (Nieuwenhuys 1998 [1959]-c: 111; 1998 [1959]-a: 115).

Although there are references to *dérive*, this key Situationist concept was, in turn, never described, conceived or practiced as a form of nomadism per se. Following Debord's classic Lettrist-era texts on *dérive* – 'Theory of the Dérive' and 'Two Accounts of the Dérive' (Debord 2006 [1956]; 1956) – the official definition given in the first issue of *Internationale situationniste* is, rather: 'A mode of experimental behavior linked to the conditions of urban society; a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. The term also designates a specific uninterrupted period of *dériving*' (SI 2006 [1958]: 52). The same can be said of all other Lettrist-Situationist texts and theories developed before, during and after Constant's involvement with the group, including his own.<sup>51</sup> Nomadism has nothing to do with 'The Amsterdam Declaration', Constant's 'Inaugural Report to the Munich Congress' or the 'First Proclamation' of his Amsterdam-based Research Bureau, for example, all of which focus largely on ideas of collaboration, or collective creativity (Nieuwenhuys and Debord 1998 [1958]; Nieuwenhuys 1998 [1959]-b; Alberts et al. 1959). There is little in these texts to indicate an interest in movement, and certainly not the movement of people – which is, in any case, not necessarily equivalent with nomadism. Constant's Situationist-era work is, moreover, generally unconcerned with people – all talk of 'the society of the future', 'the coming way of life', 'a new era' and 'a happier life' that he does engage in at the time is perceptibly dehumanised. There is no New Babylonian, as yet, in the earliest years of *New Babylon*. It is, once more, only in his post-Situationist work on *New Babylon* that Constant begins the process of ethnographically detailing, or locating, the inhabitants of his future world.

### ***Post-Situationist texts and lectures***

The nomad appears for the first time six months after Constant parts ways with the Situationists. During a lecture given at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, on 20 December 1960 (RKD 330) – only his second presentation on *New Babylon* since leaving the Situationist International in June that year<sup>52</sup> – Constant latches on to the burgeoning space age euphoria of the time period. Like many futurologists of the 1950s and 1960s (e.g. Clarke 2000 [1962]), he argues that, due to recent

developments in transportation, communication and, in particular, space travel, the potential for individual movement was far greater than it had ever been before (Nieuwenhuys 1998 [1960]: 133). As it appears here, Constant's reference to nomadism still has nothing to do with *New Babylon*, however. This is a one-off, perhaps even careless, usage of the term that occurs in the contexts of a lengthy 'preamble' criticising current thinking about architecture and urbanism and its failure to meet changing social needs in the present. At this stage, the word 'nomadic' reads simply as an adjective intended to convey general ideas about movement and mobility – it is not, as it will be in Constant's later work, an attempt to ethnographically detail a specific type of society. While Constant's ensuing description of *New Babylon* presents a vision of a future world that is surely different from our own, the New Babylonians are not yet, themselves, nomadic (Nieuwenhuys 1998 [1960]: 135).

Constant's first documented and intentional use of nomadism in the specific contexts of *New Babylon* comes almost three years later in a seminal 'illustrated talk' given at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London (RKD 332[b]; RKD 332[c]). A heavily abridged, but internationally influential version of Constant's ICA paper was picked up and published by *Architectural Design* in June the following year (Nieuwenhuys 1964; 2001 [1964]).<sup>53</sup> Constant makes two crucial moves in his ICA talk of 07 November 1963. The first is to separate his version of *homo ludens* from Huizinga's. This is done by making 'playing man' equivalent to 'everyman' and, notably, by defining mobility in almost purely economic terms – people are liberated from place, that is, when work no longer demands they be settled. Although not yet fully formulated, the New Babylonian begins to manifest in London as a nomad – meaning someone who does not only move from place to place but, also and more importantly, does not participate in a dominant economic system of 'production-labour' – for the first time (RKD 332[b]: 2). Constant updates and extends the brief description of New Babylonian culture previously delivered in Amsterdam. Marking a distinct development in his project, life in *New Babylon* is intentionally described, if still hesitantly, as nomadic.<sup>54</sup> While used only very tentatively at this stage, the word nomadic is not, as it was at the Stedelijk three years earlier, a generic adjective

used with reference to an upward trend in personal mobility. Now, nomadic is embedded within Constant's emergent description of New Babylonian culture (RKD 332[b]: 4-5).

In the three years between his Amsterdam and London papers, Constant's language becomes increasingly specific; in addition to collective creativity and play, which had been key concepts since his COBRA manifesto of 1948, he begins to consciously theorise nomadism as a defining characteristic of *New Babylon*. Over the next few years he brings progressively precise historical, political, social, economic and ideological reference points to his understanding and usage of the word. While it is impossible to present an exact chronology, Constant's tightening definition of nomadism – like his *New Babylon* manifesto generally – certainly becomes longer,<sup>55</sup> denser and increasingly refined between 1964 and 1966. Finding its origins in his first, hesitant use of the word nomadic at the ICA in London, Constant's 51st chapter for *Skizze zu einer Kultur* – explicitly titled 'Nomadentum' ('nomadendom' in Dutch) – eventually stretches across four typed pages (RKD 414[a]: 51.1-4).

A number of things occur, side by side, in Constant's development of nomadism as a central concept in *New Babylon*. First, the word is increasingly understood in social, political and economic terms: for Constant, nomadism comes to describe an entire socio-economic system opposed to labour and productive activity, in which land, goods and services are collectively owned and managed. This non-utilitarian social model is deliberately positioned against existing cultural norms and, also, explicitly located in the distant past. As Constant continues to develop his project, nomadism is dated, with increasing precision, to the Neolithic period of hunting and gathering that – in his Marxist-informed understanding of history – precedes the invention of the State. *New Babylon* becomes part of a historical continuum, the future re-projection of a time before humankind was tied to agricultural work, forced to settle and ruled by governments. The end of nomadism at some point in the later Stone Age is understood to be a traumatic change in human lifestyle that signalled the loss, also, of humankind's innate creative abilities. Finally, Constant looks for, and discovers, vestiges of this original 'nomadism' – meaning, beyond ideas of pure movement, a

non-working, non-conformist, tribal and authentic human lifestyle – in the present. Stemming from his first hand encounter with Romani in Alba, nomad becomes a catchall phrase in *New Babylon*, a term used to refer to the outcasts and others of Modernity, of which Romani are the paradigm.

Some aspects of Constant's developing theorisation of nomadism have a clear enough lineage. The idea of 'social outcasts', for example, finds its origins at least partly in the work of the pioneering French 'urban sociologist' Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe (1913-1988). Chombart de Lauwe's (1952) writings on Paris were already an important reference point for the Lettrists, as has consistently been demonstrated by McDonough. Pinder records Debord giving Constant a copy of *Paris et l'agglomération parisienne* in the later 1950s, who draws upon it, in turn, in his development of *New Babylon* (Pinder 2005: 193). Constant's reading of Chombart de Lauwe's work led in other directions, however, to those taken by Debord. Of particular interest to Constant was the concept of 'acculturation zones' – a term, like nomadism, that never really finds its way into the Lettrist-Situationist lexicon. Although Pinder (2005: 193) notes that quotations from Chombart de Lauwe's book appear already in the *Constant* monograph released by the Situationist International's Bibliothèque d'Alexandrie publishing house in 1959 (GAM 5.f.), Constant only begins explicitly referencing and making use of the term acculturation zones – and, importantly, combining this idea together with his own, developing conception of nomadism – in the mid-1960s. As with nomadism, there is no mention of acculturation zones in Constant's Situationist-era work, or his early 'post-SI' texts and lectures of 1960 and 1961 (RKD 330; RKD 332[a]); neither does the idea accompany Constant's first tentative use of 'nomadic', in London, in late 1963 (RKD 332[b]). The two ideas surface – entangled together and clearly in support of each other – only from about early 1964 onwards. Although the concepts of acculturation zones and nomadism are kept somewhat separate in the final layout of *Skizze zu einer Kultur*, identifiable as chapters 37 and 51, they are brought together – almost always in this order – in at least five other texts and lectures produced between 1964 and 1966.

On 12 March 1964 Constant delivered a talk on *New Babylon*, in English, to The Students' Association at The Royal Academy of Copenhagen; he had previously been in the Danish capital sixteen years earlier as a leading member of COBRA. On the tenth out of fourteen pages making up his Copenhagen typescript, Constant introduces the idea of acculturation zones into his work on *New Babylon* for the first time. While he does not directly credit Chombart de Lauwe on this occasion, the primitivist reflex that so obviously drove his COBRA work begins to take hold once again:

The sector-space could be compared to what sociologists call the acculturation zone of a city. The prefiguration of New-Babylon can be found in these areas of the historical cities, where the outcasts of the utilitarian society stick together, these poor quarters where racial minorities, artists, students, prostitutes and intellectuals are living together and that represent the fulminating centres that are giving birth to any cultural activity since the mechanization marked the existing cities as organization-mediums of commercial production.

New-Babylon can indeed be looked on as one uninterrupted immense acculturation zone, where the conditions for acculturating contacts and activities however exceed enormously the poor and unfavourable conditions of the slum-like acculturation areas in the present big cities. New-Babylon is made to be acculturating, while the functional cities are principally hostile to it, and may offer at best some cheap and dismal back-quarter where liberty is merely tolerated because it can not be used any longer for something better  
(RKD 341: 10)

Establishing urban slum areas as the 'pre-image' of *New Babylon* – and, by extension, the list of 'outcasts' that inhabit such places as the pre-image of New Babylonians – Constant then updates and extends his existing, English-version description of *New Babylon*. Much of the 1963 ICA paper, delivered in London only a few months earlier, remains intact. The idea of nomadism is now deployed with far more conviction: from the hesitant, one-off statement 'we could call life in New-Babylon in a way nomadic' (RKD 332[b]: 4) Constant now speaks confidently to his Danish audience about 'the needs of a nomadic living humanity' and 'The New-Babylonian nomad' (RKD 341: 12). In marked contrast to his work between 1956 and 1963, nomadism has suddenly become a core component of Constant's *New Babylon* manifesto.



The key is an entirely new passage, hand-corrected with red pencil, added into the twelfth page of the Copenhagen typescript. In Copenhagen, Constant begins to establish a historical account, or economic definition of nomadism for the first time. As with his new writing on acculturation zones, there is a dual dynamic at play. If Constant's city of the future takes the slum areas of historical cities as its reference point, then his lifestyle of the future similarly links to a distinct historical model. The difference is in degree. If Constant's pursuit of acculturation zones takes him as far back as the *ghetto* and *mellah* of medieval Europe and North Africa – and, importantly, the survival of such 'asocial' neighbourhoods in the present – then his search for nomadism becomes a far more speculative journey into pre-history. A link with Gallizio's thinking, as outlined in his 1959 manifesto for industrial painting, seems apparent:

Man has become sedentary only at the very moment that he had to produce his consumption-goods himself instead of finding them ready-made in nature. He was only forced to settle for agricultural reasons, and he will stop being bound to the soil when he stops to be the producer of his consumption-goods. The productive role of the machine will enable humanity not only to regain the freedom of a nomadic life, but to enlarge this freedom to the point where it can be assimilated in the whole of his creative activity

(RKD 341: 12)

Two slide lectures delivered in German, first in October 1964 at the Galerie Diogenes in Berlin and then, over one year later, in November 1965 at the Volkshochschule in Cologne, continue to develop Constant's burgeoning, interconnected ideas about nomadism and acculturation zones. The Berlin paper – which reverses the sequence (typically acculturation zone followed by nomadism) found in the rest of Constant's writings – increases the tension between the past and the present/future already contained in the Copenhagen typescript. The sense of nostalgia and longing is heightened – and will continue to be in Constant's subsequent development of *New Babylon*. In a clear throwback to COBRA, nomadism now becomes a primal urge, or basic human instinct, that must be satisfied in the present:

Das moderne Nomadentum des Weekend- und Ferientourismus ist ein deutliches Symptom für das Wiederaufleben eines verdrängten Wandertriebs. Dieser Wandertrieb wird in einem arbeitsfreien Zeitalter zur vollen

Entfaltung kommen können. Der New-Babylonische Mensch wird darum die Züge eines Nomaden haben

(RKD 332[d]: 4)

(The modern nomadism of weekend- and holiday-tourism is a clear symptom of the revival of a repressed urge to wander. This wanderlust will be able to come to its full development in an age without work. The New Babylonian will therefore have the characteristics of a nomad.)

Although Constant had equated ‘The New-Babylonian nomad’ with ‘the tourist in our day’ already seven months earlier in Copenhagen (RKD 341: 12), in Berlin he develops his working concept of nomadism substantially by appending on to it a nascent theorisation of travel. After first positing weekend- and holiday-tourism as an expression of a suppressed desire to roam freely, Constant then links his ideas of acculturation zones and nomadism through the figure of the contemporary tourist-traveller. As humankind’s urge to wander returns, the tourist is drawn precisely to those zones of otherness in which the last traces of the ancient nomadic drive have survived, intact, for centuries. At the same time, it is these marginal places and the stigmatised peoples who inhabit them, that are increasingly threatened – in a society governed by ‘anti-nomadic’ concepts such as utility, function, duty and work – with permanent extinction:

Das Ziel der Reise ist das Suchen oder Aufsuchen anderer Lebensformen. Der Reisende versucht neue und unbekannte Ambiente zu finden, in denen er sich von den Normen befreien kann, die sein Alltagsleben prägen. Die Reise verwischt eingeprägte Gewohnheiten und Denkweisen und befreit uns von Hemmungen. Die Reise, so sagt man, erweitert den Blick und erneuert den Mensch. Der Reisende der Gegenwart aber, der Tourist, bedauert vor allem ein verlorenes Abenteuer: er findet immer weniger Unterschiede in den aufgesuchten Orten. Die Nivellierung raubt seinen Untersuchungen den ursprünglichen und eigentlichen Sinn. Das Abenteuer besteht zwar noch, doch fristet es ein kümmerliches Dasein auf den Flohmärkten, in den verbliebenen Resten einer Altstadt, in obskuren Kneipen, oder notfalls in den Spielhallen und Eisdieleen, Orte, wo die aus der arbeitenden Gesellschaft herausgesperrten Bevölkerungsgruppen sich zusammentreffen

(RKD 332[d]: 5)

(The goal of travelling is to search for or visit different ways of life. The traveller tries to find new and unknown ambiances, in which they can free themselves from the norms that shape their everyday life. Travel blurs imprinted habits and ways of thinking and frees us from inhibitions. Travel, it is said, broadens the perspective and renews man. The traveller of the present

however, the tourist, regrets above all else the loss of adventure: they find less and less differences in places to visit. This homogenisation robs the original and real sense of their investigations. Adventure still exists, but it scrapes a miserable existence in flea markets, in the surviving remnants of old towns, in shady bars or by necessity in arcades and ice-cream parlours – places, where the population groups cut off from working society meet.)

Immediately following this theorisation of travel, Constant returns to the task of ethnographically detailing his project. As the types of spaces making up *New Babylon* progressively come into focus, so too do the specific life patterns and individual identities of its inhabitants. In his earliest post-Situationist presentations, such as his December 1960 lecture at the Stedelijk in Amsterdam, Constant begins connecting his work and ideas about *New Babylon* to dissident, revolutionary or criminalised subsections of society in post-war Western Europe and North America. One such readymade asocial phenomenon was ‘youth culture’. There is again, just as there is with Constant’s overall development of nomadism, a period of transition. While Constant is certainly aware of youth culture in December 1960, he only uses this, to begin with, as a generic point of reference for *New Babylon*. Together with his first, fleeting and perhaps unintentional use of the word nomadic, youth culture makes up part of Constant’s overall preamble to *New Babylon*; it does not yet act as direct evidence in support of his project.

By the time of Constant’s presentation at the Galerie Diogenes in Berlin almost four years later, the passing acknowledgement of disaffected juveniles ‘unable to assert themselves adequately in today’s urban environment’ (Nieuwenhuys 1998 [1960]: 131) initially presented in Amsterdam changes dramatically. In October 1964, Constant inserts rebellious youths, as a clear anthropological model for the New Babylonian, into the very heart of his project. ‘Halbstarke’,<sup>56</sup> in particular, are singled out in Berlin – a city where this particular reference would not have gone unnoticed – as a precursor to the New Babylonian; they serve to link together Constant’s developing ideas about nomadism and acculturation zones. Chombart de Lauwe is referenced and, in the switch from English to German that occurs between his Copenhagen and Berlin typescripts, Constant’s working list of asocial outcasts doubles. The others of Modernity are now, without doubt, the true builders of *New Babylon*:

Der Halbstarke ist der Prototyp jenes Massemenschen, der durch die Arbeit nicht mehr voll in Anspruch genommen ist und der sich in der Umgebung seiner funktionellen Stadt langweilt, da er seine jetzt überschüssige Energie in dieser Umgebung nicht anwenden kann. Wenn wir uns seine Stadt des freien ludischen Menschen vorstellen wollen, dann ziehen wir vielleicht am besten den Vergleich zu den a-sozialen Zonen gegenwärtiger Grossstädte heran. Der Soziologe Chombart de Lauwe bezeichnet solche Zonen mit dem Terminus "Akkulturationszonen". Ihre Bewohner gehören vorwiegend jenem Bevölkerungsteil an, der nicht oder nur zeitweilig in den Produktionsprozess eingespannt ist, der also die utilitaristische Lebenshaltung der anderen Gruppen nicht teilt. In dieser Zonen sammeln sich alle diejenigen die sich von der übrigen Gesellschaft absondern oder von ihr abgewiesen werden: Bohemiens und Studenten, Menschen von abweichende Hautfarbe und Rasse, Künstler und Prostituierte, Einzelgänger, Verfolgte und Revolutionäre

(RKD 332[d]: 5)

(The Halbstarke is the prototype of mass-culture, no longer fully occupied by work and bored in the environment of the functional city, because it cannot now use its surplus energy. If we want to talk about a city of freely ludic people, then it is perhaps best if we draw a comparison with the asocial zones of present day cities. The sociologist Chombart de Lauwe designates such zones with the term 'Acculturation zones'. Their inhabitants predominantly belong to that segment of the population that is not or only occasionally fixed to the production process, and therefore does not share the utilitarian standard of living of other groups. All of those who are separate from or rejected by the rest of society gather themselves together in these zones: Bohemians and students, people of differing skin colour and races, artists and prostitutes, loners, political persecutees and revolutionaries.)

Much like the English version of *New Babylon*, which witnesses a clear development in Constant's theorisation of nomadism during the four months separating the London and Copenhagen lectures of November 1963 and March 1964, his German version of the project, as documented by the surviving typescripts of the Berlin and Cologne lectures of October 1964 and November 1965, reveals further progressions still. There is again one standout change. While large sections of the fifth page of the 1964 Berlin talk and the twelfth page of the 1965 Cologne lecture are more or less identical, Constant's writing on travel now follows – rather than sets up – his running list of nomads, or asocial outcasts (which appears to have been left out at first). Immediately after a hand-made amendment in red pencil, which reinserts these

others of modernity into the heart of *New Babylon*,\* Constant's November 1965 typescript opens onto an entirely new passage. This addition serves to clarify and reinforce the existing link between Constant's ideas about acculturation zones, tourist-travellers and nomadism. It then delivers an updated definition of the latter. Although it is implied already in the English text of the Copenhagen lecture nomadism is now explicitly located in pre-history as humankind's original – that is authentic – way of life:

Geradedieser [sic] nicht-funktionellen Sozialraum wird von den Soziologen aufgefasst als ein Gärungsreservoir kreativer Triebe, als eine Domäne in der Zufall oder Berechnung zu Kontakten, Beziehungen und Begegnungen führen. In den heutigen Grossstädten wirken diese Akkulturationsgebiete wie Magneten auf alle Vergnügungssuchenden, Touristen, auf den Menschen der Freizeit. Der Tourismus ist die erste und meist hervorragende Begleiterscheinung der sich ausdehnenden Freizeit. Schaut man die Siedlung an als städtebauliche Ausdruck einer von der Arbeit hervorgerufenen Utilitarismus, so ist die Wanderung verbunden mit einer arbeitsfreien Lebensweise. Der Mensch war ursprünglich ein Wanderer, ein Nomade. Erst im Neolithikum, als er zum ersten Mal anfängt seine Lebensbedürfnisse zu produzieren – mit dem Entstehen von Ackerbau und Viehzucht also – wird der Mensch sesshaft. Wenn wir bedenken dass gerade der Umstand der den Menschen gezwungen hat sesshaft zu werden jetzt mit der Auflösung der Produktionsarbeit beseitigt wird, dann findet man vielleicht die Erklärung für das Aufkommen eines massenhaften Nomadentums in unserer Zeit

(RKD 332[e]: 12)

(This non-functional space is understood by sociologists as a fermentation reservoir of creative impulses, as a domain leading by chance or calculation to contacts, relationships and encounters. In today's cities these acculturation areas act like magnets for all pleasure-seekers, tourists and people of leisure. Tourism is the first and most striking side effect of this expanding leisure time. If the suburban housing development is considered as an urban expression of a utilitarianism caused by work, then migration is connected with a way of life free from work. Man was originally a wanderer, a nomad. Only in the Neolithic age, as soon as men began to produce their living goods – with the emergence of agriculture and the breeding of livestock – they settled down. If we consider that the very reason people were forced to settle down is now eliminated with the dissolution of production-labour, then

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\* It is the same as in the Berlin paper: 'Bohemiens und Studenten, Menschen von abweichende Hautfarbe und Rasse, Künstler und Prostituierte, Einzelgänger, Verfolgte und Revolutionäre' – bohemians and students, people of different skin colour and race, artists and prostitutes, loners, political persecutees and revolutionaries.

perhaps we find the explanation for the emergence of mass nomadism in our time.)

### ***The 51st Chapter***

Clearly, Constant's thinking about nomadism was anything but static in the first half of the 1960s; neither was it formulated, already, during his period of interaction with the Situationists. From his first and quite likely arbitrary use of the word nomadic in Amsterdam in December 1960 through to his November 1965 lecture in Cologne – which combines together, in the space of a single page, interlocking notions about social outcasts, acculturation zones, Neolithic nomads and contemporary tourist-travellers – Constant's conception of nomadism becomes increasingly anthropological. It is now, also, absolutely central to his project. Although the text on nomadism appearing in *Skizze zu einer Kultur* does not, necessarily, come after the London, Copenhagen, Berlin and Cologne lectures of 1963-1965, this was most likely the case: pieces of all these texts appear here, updated and re-sequenced. Mapping these developments results in a complex, multi-lingual field of yellowing papers in various stages of completion (Figure 6.2).

Located within the second part of Constant's unrealised book project, where it is positioned in between chapters presenting technical information on the 'Sector Interiors' and 'Permanent Facilities' of *New Babylon*, the chapter on 'Nomadism' found in *Skizze zu einer Kultur* is Constant's most historically and anthropologically developed to date. (It does not feature in Locher's edited, 1974 version of *Skizze zu einer Kultur*, and remains – as with most of the material presented in this chapter – notably outside the remit of current scholarship.) His terminology is more refined, and the journey into prehistory – suggestively begun in Copenhagen in early 1964 and continued in Cologne almost two years later – intensifies. The tension between futurism and primitivism, already present in his earlier work, is likewise heightened. Placed in a seemingly impossible space between descriptions of rooftop landing strips for helicopters and aircraft (the end of the preceding chapter)<sup>57</sup> and technical apparatuses servicing personal hygiene and nutritional needs (the beginning of the next),<sup>58</sup> humankind's primal, nomadic origins come sharply into focus:

Der Bindung des Menschen am bestimmte Wohngebiete, seine Ortsgebundenheit und Sesshaftigkeit, sind die Folge von Produktionsvorgängen. Eigentlich sesshaft wird der Mensch erst im Neolithikum, wenn seine Vermehrung ihn zwingt, das Jägerdasein aufzugeben und die Nahrung im Ackerbau und in der Viehzucht selbst zu produzieren. Die feste Besiedlung ist also die Folge des Aufkommen der Agrarwirtschaft. Mit der Ausbreitung der besiedelten Agrargebiete werden die Jagdgründe der Nomaden mehr und mehr eingeschränkt. Die organisierte Produktion der Nahrungsmittel bedeutet den Untergang des wilden Tieren und des Jägers

(RKD 414[a]: 51.1-2)

(The binding of man to determined living areas, his fixed and sedentary existence, is the consequence of production processes. Man first settled only in the Neolithic era, when an increase in the production of food through agriculture and the breeding of livestock forced him to give up his hunting way of life. The permanent settlement is thus the result of the rise of an agricultural economy. With the spread of settled agricultural areas, the hunting grounds of the nomad became increasingly restricted. The organised production of food meant the decline of wild animals and hunters.)

While the 51st chapter of *Skizze zu einer Kultur* unfolds across the space of four typewritten pages, Constant's theorisation of nomadism has not simply become longer. In addition to the introduction of the hunter (in strict anthropological terms, this is entirely different from the nomad), there is a new sense of conflict established between the economic systems of nomadism and sedentarism. *New Babylon* is now situated at the end point of an economic history that has seen the emergence, gradual spread and eventual rise to dominance of an agrarian production society dedicated to work.<sup>59</sup> After relinquishing the natural and leisurely, nomadic way of life, this settled, labour-oriented civilisation encroached upon, progressively subjugated and all but extinguished its non-working, nomadic counterpart. *New Babylon* thus offers something of a return, or corrective, to that past. Constant's project presents us with a future world that sees humankind recover its true identity as nomadic hunters, reclaim the earth as a communal hunting ground and reinstate the collective right to roam freely across it once again.

Next comes a modified, extended version of Constant's ideas about modern weekend- and holiday-tourism as a manifestation of a repressed urge to wander. While there are, as ever, a number of minor changes to his text, the specific nuances

enacted here potentially do more to impact Constant's argument. The statement, 'Ist der Mensch von der Beteiligung an der Produktion entbunden', first delivered in Berlin in October 1964, is rephrased, suggesting a connection between settlement and (psychological) imprisonment: 'Wird der Mensch aber vom Zwang zur Produktion entbunden'.<sup>\*</sup> Adjectives are similarly appended onto the idea of wanderlust, increasing the sense of loss and desire: 'Wandertrieb' (wanderlust) becomes 'latent vorhandene Wandertrieb' – latent existing wanderlust. Deploying the word Neolithic once again, Constant further connects the distant past with his vision of the future:

Mit zunehmender Mechanisierung und besonders mit der Automatisierung der Industrie aber wird die Maschine autonomer und erstmals seit dem Neolithikum erleben wir einen Menschentypus, der sich allmählich, vom Zwang zur Produktion lösen kann

(RKD 414[a]: 51.2)

(However, with increasing mechanization and particularly the automation of industry the machine becomes autonomous and for the first time since the Neolithic age we experience a type of man who, gradually, can separate himself from the constraint of production.)

The final passages of Constant's 51st chapter on nomadism move in an entirely new direction. Although he does not use the word, Constant outlines a condition of pure anarchy – not lawlessness in the sense of rebelling against an established system, but a situation where there is in fact no pre-existing social order (much as he experienced, perhaps, in Amsterdam during the first days of Liberation in 1945).

Constant argues that in a continuously fluctuating population, no lasting communities or behavioural constraints will develop. In his opinion, social groups form, together with restrictive norms and taboos, as the result of shared economic interests. Like sedentarianism, the group is an unnatural phenomenon belonging to utilitarian society. Arising out of the shift from hunting to farming that occurred in the New Stone Age, the group is incompatible with the natural *Spieltrieb* or 'play instinct' of humans. In a nomadic, non-working society like *New Babylon*, in which

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<sup>\*</sup> 'If man is released from participation in production', as compared with 'If man is released from the compulsion to produce'.



everyone's innate creative desires are allowed to manifest freely, nobody has a need for permanent relationships or group membership. Constant continues his argument in a footnote, stressing that his vision of the future does not, however, constitute a world of loners: it is rather in the fixed communities of the present that the isolated individual is a real social problem (RKD 414[a]: 51.3-51.4).

In *Skizze zu einer Kultur*, multiple chapters separate the ideas Constant commonly links together in his lecture typescripts of 1963-1965. Nomadism and acculturation zones, for example – and, crucially, their asocial, non-working inhabitants – are spaced apart by thirteen chapters in his book manuscripts.<sup>60</sup> Youth culture is similarly distanced from Constant's standalone, 51st chapter on nomadism, appearing in the 56th chapter on 'Aggressivität und Kreativität', or 'Aggression and Creativity' that opens the section on 'New Babylonians'.<sup>61</sup> Linkages remain between these overlapping themes, however, and it is important to continue making these connections if we are to come closer to an understanding of Constant's conception of nomadism and the specific way he deploys the idea in his project. There are two points, in particular, that need to be pursued further: one is the association between *Wandertrieb* and *Spieltrieb* (wanderlust and play instinct); the other is the relationship between the individual and the group.

In the same year as his Berlin lecture of 03 October 1964, in which Constant introduced the figure of the Halbstarke as a prototype of New Babylonian culture for the first time, he also published an essay titled 'Opkomst en ondergang van de avant-garde' or, 'The Rise and Fall of the Avant-garde' (RKD 421). The essay positions the Halbstarke within a larger, internationalised list of rebellious youth phenomena. Like weekend- and holiday-tourism, which he understands as the modern expression of an age-old desire to wander, Constant sees the behaviour of disaffected youths throughout Western Europe and North America as a materialisation of humankind's latent creative ability. Alongside nomadism, the need for creative self-expression has also been systematically repressed since the rise to power of agrarian, labour-oriented societies in the Neolithic period. The primal urge to create, or play, thus resurfaces in the present for the same reason as wanderlust: the increase in leisure

time brought about by the technological automation of labour. An English translation of the concluding paragraphs of ‘Opkomst en ondergang van de Avant-garde’ was released in 1966 under the revised title ‘The revolution of creative man’ as part of Constant’s *de New Babylon informatief no. 4*:

The international phenomenon of young people who refuse to accept the existing order – the “hipsters”, “teddy-boys”, “rockers”, “mods”, “halbstarken”, “blousons noirs”, “beatniks”, “nozems”, “stilyagi” or whatever they may be called [...] are moved by an urge [...] that can be contained no longer [...] Until the moment when the sublimation of this creative urge, “the urge to play” will have become possible, it will express itself as aggressiveness and turn against everything thwarting its gratification [...] The revolt of creative man against the moral and institutions of the utilitarian society will not come to an end before the playful society has been established. The great non-stop happening which we can expect once the creative potency of entire mankind has come to action will change the face of the earth as drastically as did the organisation of industrial labour since the neolithic age. The era of homo ludens lies ahead of us

(RKD 423: 7; cf. RKD 421: 35)

The ‘back to the future’ (Prince and Riches 1999) reflex underlying Constant’s futures-oriented thinking is perhaps more apparent in the version of this text appearing in the 37th chapter of *Skizze zu einer Kultur*, where he uses the phrase ‘His creativity, his creative capacity that has long lain barren, will finally come to flourish’.<sup>62</sup> The highly abridged version of *Skizze zu einer Kultur* eventually published by the Haags Gemeentemuseum in 1974 (RKD 443) similarly reveals the atavistic logic at work here. Although youth culture no longer features as an anthropological reference point, this later text makes explicit the connection between creativity and nomadism central to Constant’s thinking on *New Babylon*: ‘every human being feels the latent need to manifest his creativity’, but ‘This need is not satisfied in our static society’ which ‘tends to repress the creative instinct’ (Nieuwenhuys 1998 [1974]: 163).

The economic shift from a nomadic life of hunting to a settled life of farming is responsible for one further loss in Constant’s work on *New Babylon*: that of the collective. The closing passages of Constant’s 51st chapter on nomadism open up a discussion of the group, which Constant understands as a by-product of the sedentary, utilitarian societies that rose to power at the expense of humankind’s

natural, hunting lifestyle in the later Stone Age. The 61st chapter of *Skizze zu einer Kultur*, titled ‘Rassenbarrieren’ or ‘Racial barriers’, clarifies this point: Constant is not actually opposed to the group, but to ‘groups’ – that is, to the fracturing of the original, universal whole, or world-wide tribal collective, into multiple subdivisions with competing economic interests. The return to a nomadic lifestyle brought about by the technological automation of labour not only signals the recovery of humankind’s natural creative ability – it also witnesses the rebirth of a tribal, collective totality:

Der Kampf ums Dasein hat den Menschen veranlasst, sich in Gruppen zusammenschliessen, um Bedrohungen der Aussenwelt gewachsen zu sein, gegen die der einzelne machtlos ist [...] wie der Lebenskampf abnimmt, wird das Individuum freier und von seiner Gruppe unabhängiger. Die Gemeinschaften und Nationen zerfallen, lösen sich ineinander auf; mit dem Verschwinden der Gegensätze und der Konkurrenz entfällt die Notwendigkeit, Grenzen und Barrieren aufrecht zu erhalten. Als letzte Schranke wird schliesslich die Rassentrennung aufgehoben werden [...] Vor dem Hintergrund einer vollmechanisierten Weltproduktion werden alle Gruppeninteressen gegenstandslos, denn in diesem Augenblick sind die Möglichkeiten zur Ausbeutung einer Gruppe durch irgendeine Andere Gruppe beseitigt. Die Beseitigung der Rassenbarrieren wird unweigerlich zu einer Vermischung aller Rassen führen und damit wird sich eine Weltrasse bilden können, die Rasse des Newbabyloners

(RKD 414[a]: 61.2)

(The struggle for existence has caused people to join together in groups, in order to counter the threats of the outside world, against which the individual is powerless [...] as the struggle for life diminishes, the individual becomes freer and more independent from his group. Communities and nations disintegrate, dissolve into each other; with the disappearance of opposition and competition, it is no longer necessary to maintain borders and barriers. The last barrier, racial segregation, will be abolished [...] Against the background of a fully-mechanised world production all group interests become irrelevant, because at this moment, the possibilities for one group to exploit any other group are removed. The elimination of racial barriers will lead inevitably to a mingling of all races and thus a world race can be formed, the race of New Babylonians.)<sup>63</sup>

Although Constant’s standalone chapter on ‘Racial barriers’ disappears, together with ‘Nomadism’, from the abridged version of *Skizze zu einer Kultur* later published under Hans Locher’s editorship in 1974, the same theme is taken up under the heading ‘The New Babylonian’ (RKD 443). This later version of Constant’s text

repeats the vision of a total world society, presenting a future in which people intermingle freely and without prejudice to produce a single, mass-humanity.<sup>64</sup> It also clarifies Constant's intent, revealing a notion of tribal living that resonates strongly with classic ideas about 'egalitarian primitive societies', as for example hypothesised by Rousseau:

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 [...] 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

(Nieuwenhuys 1998 [1974]: 164)

### **'Over het reizen'**

There is one standout lecture from 1966 that takes Constant's theorisation of nomadism beyond the point reached in his other texts and lectures, including in some ways the *Skizze zu einer Kultur* typescript. This is particularly true of the tension, between futures-orientation and primitivism that can be seen progressively developing in Constant's work between about 1963 and 1965. On 12 November 1966, now almost six years since his early, post-Situationist International talk at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, Constant delivered a lecture to members of the Bond van Nederlandse Architecten (BNA, Royal Institute of Dutch Architects). Titled 'Over het reizen' or 'On Travelling', the speech originally marked the completion of new terminal buildings at Schiphol Airport (RKD 342; Nieuwenhuys 1998 [1966]). Responding to the occasion, Constant adjusted his standard *New Babylon* polemic and, rather remarkably, did not talk directly about his project. Instead, he takes the airport – and, by association, other terminal buildings concerned uniquely with the transit of passengers – as his central focus. Describing rail stations, harbours and airports as structures 'having an atmosphere of their own which

deviates from that of the rest of the city [...] they represent an intrusion on the principle of the city' (Nieuwenhuys 1998 [1966]: 200), Constant develops rich ideas about urban space, globalisation and Modernity that resonate with what Michel Foucault would term, only a few months later in Paris, other spaces, heterotopias or 'des espaces autres' (Foucault 1986 [1967]). Although the link with Foucault, not to mention anthropologist Marc Augé's later theorisation of 'non-place' and 'supermodernity' has yet to be made (Augé 1995),<sup>65</sup> Constant's 'On Travelling' has previously caught the attention of Wigley (1998: 66)<sup>66</sup> and in particular McDonough, who argues that 'The historical stakes of New Babylon were perhaps nowhere more clearly articulated' than this paper (McDonough 2001: 96).

Drawing on his longstanding interest in the Situationists, McDonough discusses 'On Travelling' – as well as Constant's *New Babylon* project generally – solely in terms of the 'early program of the Situationist international [...] their varied practices of urban wandering (the *dérive*), of montage aesthetics (*détournement*), and of the construction of situations' (McDonough 2001: 93). In these contexts, he concludes that 'On Travelling' 'again highlighted the central role that immediacy or presence played in situationist thought'. Like other scholars, McDonough focuses exclusively on the futurism or prescience of Constant's work, theorising *New Babylon* as an architectural expression of 'spatial mobility' or 'in Hegelian terms, as a "restless becoming in the progression of time"' (McDonough 2001: 97). In foregrounding only 'the promise of a new, nomadic lifestyle' (McDonough 2001: 96), he notably overlooks the primitivist subtext that is also at play here. Neither does he acknowledge the six years now separating Constant's work from that of the Situationist International. McDonough also, like other writers, seems to take for granted that the word nomadism in fact belongs in the Situationist lexicon. Casually substituting and interchanging words like mobile, drifting and immediate with nomadic, McDonough does not locate 'On Travelling' within Constant's developing – and quite independent – post-Situationist work.

By contrast, I think 'On Travelling' is best understood as an end point, in some ways beyond the material presented in the 51st, and other chapters of *Skizze zu einer*

*Kultur*, for the overlapping themes of acculturation zones, contemporary tourist travel, youth culture, Neolithic nomads and repressed wanderlust Constant had been progressively developing from about the time of his November 1963 lecture at the ICA in London. My reading of the Copenhagen, Berlin and Cologne typescripts detects an increasing sense of loss and trauma in Constant's *New Babylon* work. Constant writes consistently in these lecture drafts about the desire 'to *regain* the freedom of a nomadic life' (Copenhagen 1964), understanding 'modern nomadism' to be 'a clear symptom of the *revival* of a *repressed* urge to wander' (Berlin 1964). Taking as his starting point the idea that 'Man was *originally* a wanderer, a nomad' (Cologne 1965), Constant repeatedly stresses how humanity 'was only *forced* to settle for agricultural reasons' (Copenhagen 1964); '*forced* to settle down' (Cologne 1965) and, again, '*forced* ... to give up his hunting way of life' (*Skizze zu einer Kultur*). Constant's November 1966 lecture 'On Travelling' continues this pattern.

The November 1966 talk begins, as do many of Constant's writings on *New Babylon*, with a critique of Le Corbusier and 'the functional city' structured around the 'four functions of [...] living, working, recreation, and traffic to and from work' (Nieuwenhuys 1998 [1966]: 200). Embedded within this assault on CIAM's basic town-planning principles is a distinct nostalgia for a long-lost nomadic way of life, which Constant sets against the concepts of function, utility, productivity and maximum efficiency he sees driving contemporary society:

Everything in these functional cities is aimed at *utility*, everything has to be efficient. The functional city is the most highly developed form of the settlement, with the highest productivity since Neolithic man started to produce his own goods and to build the first villages. Since man was forced to give up his nomadic way of life, the earth has been covered by an increasingly dense blanket of constructions. Natural vegetation has had to make way for the living-layer of stone which has become the new home of the sedentary, working, human being. The city is – and has been since its invention – specifically a place to *stay*.

That is why the buildings that have to do with departures, with traveling, are buildings with a special atmosphere, with a divergent function. Traveling signifies a break in the pattern of everyday life. The traveler abandons his settlement. He goes to other places, where he is not at home, where he is not sedentary, not a resident. He resumes, perhaps, the nomadic existence he led before he was obliged to settle in one fixed place. Travel is increasing in direct proportion to the diminution of work. With the increase in leisure time,

the action-radius of every individual is expanding. As people become less tied down geographically by their work, so they give up their sedentary way of life, the old urge to wander resurfaces

(Nieuwenhuys 1998 [1966]: 200)\*

The language Constant first begins using in his Copenhagen, Berlin and Cologne lectures is repeated and reinforced in these introductory passages: ‘man was *forced* to *give up* his nomadic way of life’; ‘He *resumes* [...] the nomadic existence he led *before* he was *obliged* to settle’; ‘the *old* urge to wander *resurfaces*’. There is a difference, however, between ‘On Travelling’ and Constant’s earlier lectures of 1964-1965: while sentiments of loss and desire are expressed in the earlier papers, these ideas now permeate his thinking. Following his introductory critique of Le Corbusier and ‘the functional city’, Constant looks backwards once again, setting up an historical relationship between airports and the ‘annual fairs’ (perhaps Gypsy fairs?) of pre-industrial times.<sup>67</sup> There is also a heightened feeling of conflict between nomads – meaning the non-working, non-utilitarian outcasts of Modernity – and the authorities who seek to repress them. In ‘On Travelling’, Constant presents modern nomadism as a threat to the very foundations of functional society:

airports play the part of ‘social space’ in a way that has become impossible in the functional city of today. Once it was the annual fair that people could meet, the place where contacts were made: the social space for the citizens of the world, the ‘acculturation zone’ where the dissemination of culture took place. Later, the railway stations became the centers of social intercourse. Even now metropolitan railway stations are meeting places for those who stand outside the urban community. The so-called ‘guest workers’ meet and make contact with each other in railway stations by preference; this has induced the authorities [...] to decree the hall of the central station out of bounds for non-travelers. Perhaps [they...] will eventually [...] rule Schiphol area forbidden territory for anyone who is not leaving or arriving. But the airport is becoming an international meeting place, a social space not only for travelers but also for citizens of all kinds, where everyone will sense that special atmosphere, that taste of nomadic life, for which we have been nostalgic ever since we turned to a sedentary way of life

(Nieuwenhuys 1998 [1966]: 200-201)

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\* When McDonough introduces Constant’s lecture ‘On Travelling’ to his discussion of ‘the Situationist Critique of Architecture’, he inserts a number of quotes from this passage into his essay. It is instructive to note what McDonough selects and, more importantly, leaves out (McDonough 2001: 96).

The atavistic reflex is hard to miss, as is the introduction of yet another social other – the immigrant, migrant workers imported into the Netherlands ‘to take over the menial chores that the Dutch refuse to touch’ (van Garrel and Koolhaas 2005 [1966]: 10).<sup>68</sup> Following a discussion of ‘internationalisation’, Constant takes up the theme of nomadism a final time. Again, his futures-oriented thinking is conditioned by a backwards-looking impulse. As in Constant’s earlier lectures of 1964-1965, a future lifestyle of nomadism is caught up in notions of an older, authentic way of life:

Sedentary man is dying out; we are becoming nomads once more, wandering over the earth, not looking for rest but for dynamic motion. The traveler is regarded with envy and when he comes home he finds it difficult to reconcile himself to his old routine. Places of departure and arrival – especially airports – are places of adventure and nostalgia. So the airport is not just a utility building for the efficient entry and exit of passengers, but also a romantic décor for the potential nomad that we all are – it offers an escape from the settlement

(Nieuwenhuys 1998 [1966]: 201)

### ***Primitive communism***

While the specific sources for Constant’s thinking on nomadism remain unspecified, his progressive development of New Babylonian culture certainly connects to currents in Marxist thought that have routinely cast non-Western, tribal peoples – particularly hunters and gatherers – in the role of ‘original communists’ (Barnard 1993; Overing 1993). Although it is often difficult to know what else Constant was reading when working on *New Babylon*, his reliance on the works of Marx and Engels is certainly not in question.

Regardless of his Marxist leanings, Constant’s basic understanding of the place of nomadism in the broader contexts of human history was not incorrect. When he writes of ‘the potential nomad that we all are’, claiming that we all yearn for a return to the nomadic way of life, Constant was not entirely off the mark. Although everyone may not desire a hunting-gathering lifestyle, this is almost certainly our common inheritance (Lee and Daly 1999: 1). Constant’s account of the switch from hunting to farming in the New Stone Age is similarly validated by anthropological thinking, as is his understanding of the progressive subjugation of nomadic peoples



by settled, agrarian societies (Lee and DeVore 1968: 3-5; Murdock 1968: 13). Many of the traits Constant assigns to his future worldwide race of New Babylonian nomads are more or less locatable in anthropological studies of hunters and gatherers. Based on varying degrees of ethnographic evidence, such societies are often understood to be fluid and flexible in their social relationships; they are described, overall, as being loose and non-corporate, or not bound together by the necessity of maintaining property; typically, no individual or group possesses exclusive rights to resources and life is thought to be generally egalitarian, unfolding independent of the institutions of property, of clan organization, of government, and of the state (Lee and DeVore 1968: 7-12; Lee and Daly 1999: 1).

Taken together, the confluence of these ideas – in which we recognise the essential characteristics of New Babylonian culture – comprises a version, infused with Constant's personal desires as an artist, of 'primitive communism': namely, 'the view that past primitive peoples lived in a state to which future communism will, in a fashion, return' (Erickson and Murphy 2008: 44; cf. Leacock 1983; Scott and Marshall 2009). While often associated with Karl Marx, the idea finds its fullest development in the writings of Friedrich Engels, particularly his *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Engels 1972 [1884]). In developing the concept of primitive communism, Marx and Engels drew heavily from the work of the American ethnologist and cultural evolutionist Lewis Henry Morgan, specifically his *Ancient Society* (1877) and *Houses and house-life of the American Aborigines* (1965 [1881]).

Although Morgan relied to a great extent on George Grote's work on Ancient Greece to formulate his theories, he also conducted some fieldwork amongst Iroquois. While living in Rochester, New York where he practiced law from 1844, Morgan collected ethnographic information from a nearby reservation (Kuper 1988a: 47); he further represented Iroquois politically in some early cases dealing with land rights. In addition to his own fieldwork and ethnographic surveys Morgan also looked to the journals of men like Columbus, Sir Walter Raleigh, Cortes, Lewis and Clark and Captain John Smith (Lee 1988: 256) to conceptualise and document what he called

‘communism in living’ in certain indigenous peoples of the Americas. There was a difference, however, between Morgan’s understanding of communism in living and the ways in which his anthropological evidence was eventually put to use by Marx and Engels (Ingold 1999: 400).<sup>69</sup> Constant, an avid reader of both Marx and Engels, was undoubtedly well versed in the concept: ‘if it could be shown that human beings had once before in their evolution lived in conditions of ‘primitive communism’, then it might become more difficult to dismiss the prospect of a communist future for industrial societies as mere Utopian fantasy’ (Hann 1993: 3).

Kuper has traced out the ‘legacy of Morgan’ – in his view, ‘the most influential of those who developed the anthropological idea of primitive society’ – as ‘a revered authority in the broader tradition of Marxist theory’ (Kuper 1988a: 42, 72). It is not so much Morgan, however, but ‘Morgan as defined by Engels who became crucial for the Marxist tradition’. As Engels himself would concede in *The Origin of the Family*, ‘he had ‘moved a considerable distance’ from Morgan’ in developing his own ideas about primitive peoples and the ‘prehistoric origins’ of communism; thus, ‘the Morgan who took his place in the Marxist tradition was already at several removes from the historical Morgan’ (Kuper 1988a: 73-74).<sup>70</sup> Marx became interested in the ‘new anthropology’ later in his life and wrote comprehensive notes on the work of Morgan, Maine, Lubbock and others (Krader 1972). Engels then used Marx’s notes on Morgan’s writings, not necessarily Morgan’s original texts, as a starting point for *The Origins of the Family*. It is this intellectual inheritance of primitive communism – a lineage of Morgan annotated by Marx and subsequently transformed by Engels – to which Constant’s thinking about nomadism in *New Babylon* ultimately belongs. It is thus an essentially primitivist project: ‘Primitive communalism’, as Joanna Overing terms it, is a Western construct ‘about imaginary others’ that is ‘much more telling of Western evaluations and political desires than of the understandings and practice of peoples to whom’ it has ‘been applied’ (Overing 1993: 43). Alan Barnard (1993) has argued a similar point with specific regard to Bushmen, revealing how ‘starkly opposed positions’ within Western debates ‘between socialism (collectivism) and capitalism (individualism)’ have claimed

‘support from the investigation of one and the same primitive people’ (Hann 1993: 3).

Writers like Wigley (1998: 29-30) have previously drawn attention to the ways in which the Lettrists and Constant – who is typically understood to have followed the Lettrists’ lead – attacked the ‘defunct institution’ of ‘the family’, imagining a future society in which the family would cease to exist (Nieuwenhuys 1998 [1960]; Wolman 1956). They have yet to recognise however the clear link with the specific intellectual legacy of primitive communism that almost certainly drives this premise. Overlooking the precise confluence of Constant’s personal interest in Romani, as and when combined with the discrete idea of primitive communism found within the Marxist intellectual tradition, scholars take Constant’s ideas about nomadism and the demise of the family for granted, recycling them – without understanding their frame of reference – back into ‘space age’ descriptions of his project:

The science-fiction theme implied here is best seen in the series of oyster-like space-units called *Spatiovore*, which vividly express the uprooted and nomadic life of the “New-Babylonians,” free to roam and alter their surroundings at will. Liberated from work, no longer tied to fixed places of habitation, relieved of the oppressions of the family structure, the citizens of this new community would be free to abandon themselves to the *dérive* and the play-spirit

(Andreotti 2000: 56)

Engels’s primary use of Morgan’s ethno-historical writings on ‘Aboriginal Americans’ was to develop his own account of the development of the family, which he regarded as an unnatural institution resulting from historical processes. In the Marxist critique of capitalist society, the family is understood to be a way of organizing private property and exercising control over others. Pre-capitalist societies had, by contrast, been based upon egalitarian forms of ‘kinship’. Drawing on the work of Morgan, and other later nineteenth-century ethnographers, Marx and Engels understood ‘kinship’ to be the antithesis of the ‘capitalist family’:

In the same way, therefore, as they had turned to primitives for finding the opposite of capitalist relations of production, they turned to them for a form of family which was the opposite of the capitalist family. They thus found particularly congenial the work of those anthropologists such as Bachofen,

and again Morgan, who saw primitive kinship as almost a total reversal of the family as they knew it. They therefore accepted views of early kinship [...] where sex was unrestricted, and where the privacy and isolation of the group formed by parents and children was replaced by the commonality of a much larger undivided group

(Bloch 2004 [1983]: 13)

Engels further linked the family to the state, arguing that it, too, emerged only as a consequence of private property and would therefore dissolve – together with the family – when production was (re)organised on the basis of equality amongst the producers (Kuper 1988a: 73-74). Engels effectively used Morgan to show ‘how the institution of private property had originated and how, when it was abolished, the world would return, at least figuratively, to the communism with which humanity began’ (Erickson and Murphy 2008: 51). Certain Native American peoples thus became crucial to Engels’s hypothesis with Iroquois in particular emerging as a paradigm of the communist lifestyle and social structure that had, to his mind, once been common to all people:

That was the whole public constitution under which the Iroquois lived for over 400 years and are still living today. I have described it fully following Morgan, because here we have the opportunity of studying the organization of society which still has no *state* [...] And a wonderful constitution it is, this gentile constitution, in all its childlike simplicity! No soldiers, no gendarmes or police, no nobles, kings, regents, prefects, or judges, no prisons, or lawsuits – and everything takes its orderly course. All quarrels and disputes are settled by the whole of the community [...] There cannot be any poor or needy [...] All are equal and free [...] That is what men and society were before the division into classes. And when we compare their position with that of the overwhelming majority of civilized men today, an enormous gulf separates the present-day proletarian and small peasant from the free members of the old gentile society

(Engels 1972 [1884]: 158-160)

If we return to the way in which Constant formulates, in 1966, ‘the motto’ of *New Babylon* – as transcribed at the start of this chapter – we realise Romani perform an almost identical function in Constant’s work on *New Babylon*, where they act as living proof that all people were originally nomadic. Like the Iroquois for Engels, Romani signal the end of the state – or a return, rather, to a pre-state condition. They become the missing link between Constant’s New Babylonians of the future and the egalitarian communists of prehistory – a surviving remnant of humanity in its

original, purest form. In an epic return to the footloose freedom enjoyed by humankind's roaming, nomadic ancestors, the future inhabitants of *New Babylon* would once again enjoy a life without labour. With Romani – who had continued living authentically, as nomads, on the margins of sedentary, utilitarian society – as his evidence, Constant's New Babylonians transform from myth into reality.

## Chapter 7. 'Afterlife' 2: Revisiting Romani

Constant: The romanticised gypsy as the one that lives in our fantasy and nostalgia, even though it is not the actual truth, is the pre-image of the New Babylonian. The gypsy is closer to the New Babylonian than other people. He does not work, he does not dwell, he knows freedom from time and place  
(RKD 390[e]: 35)

In May 1963, Nico Rost (1896-1967) – a Dutch writer, journalist, anti-fascist and member of the Dutch Communist Party – travelled to Paris to interview a man named Ionel Rotaru (c. 191?-1982).<sup>71</sup> A Ukrainian-born, Romanian Romani writer, amateur artist, political activist and 'ultra-nationalist' (Acton 1974: 230), Rotaru arrived in France sometime in the later 1950s.<sup>72</sup> In 1959, he 'was elected to the title Voevod by members of the Romanian Ursari tribe' (Kenrick 2007: 286)<sup>73</sup> and, in May that year, had himself crowned 'Supreme Chief of the Romani People' near the racetrack at Enghien-les-Bains, a northern suburb of Paris (Liégeois 1986: 146). Renaming himself 'Vaida Voevod III',<sup>74</sup> Rotaru founded the Communauté Mondiale Gitane (CMG) or 'World Romani Community' in Paris the following year (Kenrick 2007: xxviii, 286).<sup>75</sup> Together with the civil rights activist Vanko Rouda, also known as Jacques Dauvergne (c. 1936?-),<sup>76</sup> a Hungarian Lovari Rom who studied law intermittently in Morocco, Algeria and France,<sup>77</sup> Rotaru worked tirelessly in the aftermath of World War II to raise awareness of the mistreatment of Romani in Europe before, during and after the horrors of the Holocaust – referred to as *Porrajmos* by some Romani and Romani scholars today (Huttenbach 1991b; Hancock 1996; 2001; 2004a; 2007a). Located in Montreuil, an 'impoverished' suburb of Paris, the CMG 'had a nucleus of followers among French Kalderash and Yugoslav Roma living in the bidonvilles of the capital' (Puxon 2000: 95),<sup>78</sup> many of whom Rotaru helped to find work in France in the post-war period (Klímová-Alexander 2007: 628). Although he would declare to Rost in 1963 that he was recognised 'by several million Romani' as their 'Vaida, as their King' (Rost 1963:

1), this was probably – like many of the highly symbolic press statements Rotaru issued throughout the 1960s and 1970s – a knowing exaggeration. Nonetheless, Grattan Puxon, writing as recently as ten years ago, confirms he ‘is still remembered, if more dimly now, even among the elderly of Kosovo Mitrovica’ (Puxon 2000: 96). Playing off of long-standing myths about ‘Gypsy Kings’, which date back to the very arrival of Romani in Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Acton 1974: 97-100), Rotaru created ‘a persona for himself’ (Hancock 1991b: 260) with which to gain leverage in the media and a degree of political audience both in France and abroad (Figure 7.1).

Presenting himself publicly as either ‘His Highness’, ‘President of the CMG’ or both, Rotaru – now Voevod III – campaigned strenuously against past and present injustices suffered by Romani throughout the 1960s and 1970s. He fought for the repeal of continuing anti-Romani laws in France and Europe, challenged persisting ‘gypsy’ stereotypes and promoted the development of Romani-language education and literature. He further advocated for the provision of camping sites and mobile schools, founded a short-lived Romani Cultural Centre in Brussels and, far more contentiously, called for block compensation from the German government for wrongs inflicted against Romani during World War II. The demand for Nazi war crimes reparations was, in turn, bound up in another agenda – that of an autonomous Romani state, or ‘homeland’, called *Romanestan*. Over time, Rotaru’s vision of *Romanestan* – an idea that finds its origins in the ambitions of the ‘Kwiek dynasty’ of ‘Gypsy Kings’ who emerged in Poland during the interwar years (Acton 1974; Hancock 1991b; Klímová-Alexander 2005; Liégeois 1986) – developed into an elaborate utopia replete with a detailed plan for government including a cabinet, appointed ministers and deputies. Rotaru even issued passports for the future Romani state and, at times, demanded land from both the French government and the United Nations to realise his vision. As a Romani political project, *Romanestan* (for which there are other advocates besides Rotaru) suggests ways in which we might think differently – or more cautiously – about our understanding of *New Babylon* and its relationship to notions of utopia (or dystopia). *Romanestan* was and in many ways still is (Bowers-Burbridge 2000) a utopia with an all-too real purpose: it seeks to

bring Romani ‘to the attention of the gadze [non-Romani]’ society and force ‘governments to take a stand’ (Liégeois 1986: 150):

Utopianism would appear to be a transitory stage in a people’s process of self-discovery. Even if it represents only the first faltering steps towards political organisation, it is nonetheless a political fact. Utopianism and its impact should not be underestimated: firstly, it serves, through the mass media, to focus attention on Gypsy issues and to arouse public interest; secondly, it is within this fantasy world that other, more pragmatic movements have taken shape; and thirdly, utopianism is an expression of the deepest concerns of the people involved

(Liégeois 2007: 208)

As an outspoken champion of Romani rights in the post-war period, Rotaru was considered increasingly problematic by the French authorities; ‘His utopian ideals’, especially, ‘proved to be a threat’ (Hancock 1991b: 261). With Charles de Gaulle’s government said to be embarrassed and irritated (Kenrick and Puxon 1972: 207) by his calls for justice and, in particular, financial compensation, the French Interior Ministry declared the CMG illegal in 1965 on the grounds that Rotaru was a non-citizen. Having voiced his opinions during a period of political rapprochement with West Germany (Acton 1974: 236), Rotaru’s CMG was officially accused ‘of plotting against the security of the state’; he and other members of the organisation ‘were placed under police surveillance’ and its office in Montreuil closed (Klímová-Alexander 2007: 630). Rotaru was effectively forced to leave France and, after a sojourn in London, then Ireland, he ended up in Vienna (which had doubled as CMG headquarters for at least a couple of years already). Unfazed by his victimisation in France, Rotaru continued to promote his views publicly. On 24 April 1971, for example – just two days before beginning a hunger strike while in police custody in France – he declared to a French journalist, ‘that dissolution is different from prohibition and does not have to mean the end of activism’ (Klímová-Alexander 2007: 653). In a post-war society that continued to stigmatise and persecute Romani, *Romanestan* became increasingly foremost on his agenda.

Meanwhile, Vanko Rouda – who had previously operated under a number of titles including ‘Secretary General’ and ‘cultural attaché’ of the CMG<sup>79</sup> – successfully established a new association, still based in Paris, called the Comité International



Tzigane (CIT). Under Rouda's leadership the CIT adopted a comparatively moderate stance, putting tasks such as documenting individual war crime indemnification cases and forging alliances with Romani groups in other countries ahead of the more controversial issues of block repayments, Romani passports and Rotaru's utopian plans for *Romanestan*. Even so, Rouda and other members of the CIT – including his brother, Leulua – were routinely 'questioned by the police as suspects of clandestine anti-state activities' (Klímová-Alexander 2007: 631). Despite continual harassment, the CIT played a leading role in the international Romani rights movement, which – following Rotaru's and Rouda's pioneering work with the CMG in the first half of the 1960s – gained increasing momentum in the later 1960s and early 1970s. Between 1965 and 1968, the CIT issued a self-produced periodical, *La Voix Mondiale Tzigane*, which advanced its key policies.

As with the CMG, a basic demand underpinning much of the group's work was for self-representation in public, political and social arenas – particularly in those cases where 'various associations talked about us, even spoke in our name, without having a single Gypsy member' (Liégeois 1986: 150-151). In 1971, the Roudas renamed the CIT, this time in both French and Romani, as Comité International Rom (CIR) and Komitia Lumiaki Romani, respectively.<sup>80</sup> That same year, the CIR was instrumental in organising the First World Romani Congress, held in London. By 1972, they had helped link together multiple Romani organisations in over twenty countries from Canada, across Western and Eastern Europe, to Australia (cf. Hancock 1991b; Liégeois 2007; Mayall 2004; Toninato 2009; COE).

Alongside Rotaru and Rouda, Nico Rost is an equally intriguing character. Shortly after Hitler seized power in Germany in 1933, he was held in the Oranienburg camp north of Berlin, the city where he had been living and working as a translator, Dutch newspaper correspondent and journalist since 1923. Following his release a few weeks later, Rost eventually ended up in Spain, where he fought in the Spanish Civil War – against Franco – in the later 1930s. During the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands he was first interned in a prison camp in Scheveningen (part of The Hague) in 1942, before being transferred to Hertogenbosch, or 'Kamp Vught' (the

only official SS-concentration camp in occupied North-West Europe). Because of his contacts with the Dutch resistance movement, Rost was later deported to Dachau in 1944, where he survived until liberation in 1945. The following year he published the diary he had secretly kept while imprisoned there (Rost 1946). Titled *Goethe in Dachau*, Rost's book was soon translated into German (Rost 1948) and Czech, and became well known, particularly in Germany, in the post-war years (Figure 7.2).

In 1955 Rost returned to Dachau to find history rapidly being erased: the labour and death camp – which had become a new residential settlement for over 2,000 ethnic German refugees from Eastern Europe – now contained a kindergarten in what had been the infirmary, a tannery in the gas chamber (renamed the 'shower building'), a butcher shop in 'Block 3 ... Dr. Rascher's empire', where brutal, sadistic experiments had been carried out on living prisoners (Rost in *KZ-Gedenkstätte*: 22), food storage in what had been the morgue and a restaurant in the former delousing building. Local officials were planning to demolish the crematorium and, instead of signs or documents explaining the site's recent, horrifying history, there were well-tended grassy lawns and flowerbeds in abundance (Rost in *KZ-Gedenkstätte*: 30). Rost published a strong critique of the situation – 'Ik was weer in Dachau' or 'I was back in Dachau' (Rost 1956) – which he personally sent to prominent persons in West Germany. Soon after Rost's 'return visit' to the scene of his imprisonment only ten years earlier, the Comité International de Dachau (CID) was established in Brussels. Rost played a central role in the group, which aimed to create a museum and memorial site – as well as a more accurate record of history – out of what was by then left of the former concentration camp. Rost was head of the CID's library committee from 1957 (his personal collection of books eventually constituted the core of the memorial site's library), spoke publicly throughout Europe about the memorial project and assisted in the design of a documentary exhibition at Dachau (opened in 1960), for which he wrote a guidebook (cf. Marcuse 2001; 2005). Remaining a staunch anti-fascist and committed proponent of human rights, Rost also worked to bring recognition to the suffering and genocide of Romani during World War II. When he travelled to Paris in 1963 it was with the explicit intention of

writing about the mass murder of Romani that had occurred, throughout Europe, only about two decades earlier.

### ***‘Het oudste volk’***

Rost’s account of his meeting with both Rotaru and Rouda was published in the Netherlands on 18 May 1963. Written mostly in Dutch, with some quotations transcribed directly in French, it features on the cover and second page of ‘Supplement’, the weekend ‘magazine insert’ of the Dutch newspaper *Algemeen Handelsblad* (Rost 1963). Much like its title, ‘Het oudste volk’ meaning ‘The oldest people’, the cover image setting up Rost’s article – an idyllic, timeless scene showing three horse-drawn *vardo* passing into the distance under the light of a full moon – is misleading: it belies, as do the miniature red wagon ‘section dividers’ appearing throughout the text, the politically charged and frankly disturbing contents of the piece (Figure 7.3).

Rost had been exchanging letters with Rotaru for some time already, but this was their first meeting in person. The article unfolds in two directions. While Rost seems primarily focused on acquiring information about the fate of Romani during World War II, Rotaru and Rouda take the opportunity to draw attention, also, to their current work concerning the cultural, political and legal recognition of Romani in Europe – as well as the more divisive issues of war crime reparations and a Romani homeland. As a conversation between survivors of Nazi atrocities – we learn that Rotaru’s father and mother, three brothers and two sisters were all murdered during the war (Rost 1963: 1) – Rost’s article makes for difficult reading: it is gripping, horrifying and tragic, yet hopeful and defiant all at the same time.

Throughout his piece, Rost poses challenging questions to both himself and his reader; unfortunately, most of the points he raises remain all too pertinent today. There is the issue of ‘statistics’, for example, with the Romani death toll Rotaru and Rouda were compiling at the time proving almost incomprehensible. There is also the overall problem of recognition, with the West German government (and others)

denying the Romani experience of the Holocaust, dismissing clear evidence of systematic racial genocide and refusing to treat seriously Romani demands for reparations and equal access to basic human rights (Sandner 2006; Wippermann 2006). These problems continue in the present, mostly unchecked, in media, popular culture and scholarship alike (Hancock 1994; 1996; 2001; 2004a; 2007a).

Rost's writing appears to have struck a chord with Constant. Locating in the text what would pass for an address – the article ends with Rost describing, in almost his last sentence, his exit from 'the stone, unlit staircase of the dilapidated house at Rue Victor Hugo 75 II in Montreuil' – Constant wrote a short letter to the CMG in Paris about seven weeks later (Figure 7.4):

After reading the interview with H. H.\* Vaida Voevod III published in "Algemeen Handelsblad" on 18 May 1963, I am deeply interested in the objectives that are expressed.

Since H. H. calls upon artists and writers, I would be very obliged if you could send me the documentation that is mentioned in the article of Mr. Rost, and in which I hope to find the data that I wish to know about the organisation of the gypsy people

(RKD 44[a])

Although brief, Constant's letter reveals he had read Rost's article closely and in full. Compared against the text printed in *Algemeen Handelsblad*, Constant's otherwise ambiguous references to 'the objectives that are expressed', Rotaru's 'call to artists and writers' and 'the documentation that is mentioned', all come sharply into focus. This is something Pinder – who writes simply, and in connection with 'nomadology', that Constant requested publications from the World Community of Gypsies in Paris – misses (Pinder 2005: 206). The passage of text appearing immediately after the third 'section divider' printed on the first page of Rost's article results in an uneasy and jarring juxtaposition between the romance of 'gypsy life' such imagery intends to convey and the nightmare of the very recent history it frames. The documents Constant enquires about in his letter to the CMG do not concern 'spatial

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\* In Constant's original, written in French and drawing on the specific terminology used by Rost in his article for *Algemeen Handelsblad*, it is 'S. A.', meaning 'Son Altesse' or 'His Highness'

understandings within gypsy communities', as Pinder would have it (Pinder 2005: 206). The only information on offer in Rost's article for *Algemeen Handelsblad* is, rather, hard evidence of the recent Romani genocide:

I now ask the question, that I wanted an answer to here in Montreuil: "How many gypsies were killed by the Germans in the last World War? Gassed, shot, tortured? How many of your brothers and sisters did they intentionally starve and deliberately leave to die?"

"About 3.5 million"<sup>81</sup> – is the answer and the cultural attaché hands me a detailed document with the number of victims in each of the Nazi-occupied territories. The number of gypsies living in these countries before 1939, the number that were killed and the number still living. The heaviest losses were in the Soviet Union, Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia, but also in Yugoslavia and Greece and of course especially in Germany. Against so much suffering, I hardly dare sound hesitant:

"Wouldn't it be possible," I nonetheless ask a few moments later, "that your numbers are too high? Your numbers seem so incredibly high to me".

"We have" – answers His Highness – "needed several years to work, together with all the countries where the Nazis ruled, to create the most accurate statistics of our losses. Don't forget that the Germans did everything to keep their crimes secret. And especially: that hundreds of thousands of us were nowhere, not in a single country, registered. Our statistics date from 1938, (from the occupation of Czechoslovakia) to the end of 1946. We have the relevant documents in our possession – kept in a safe place – and I readily declare to you that we are willing to give historians and publicists, who honestly believe in our cause, access to them. We would only do our sacred cause harm if these numbers were wrong..."

For a moment I stay silent and dare not doubt the accuracy of these statistics any further

(Rost 1963: 1)

Drawing on his work as a leading figure in the Dachau museum and memorial project, Rost counters his original misgivings by recalling a conversation he had had two years earlier with a man named Dr. Kazimir Smolen. Like Rost, Smolen – the director of a similar project then ongoing in Auschwitz – had at first also struggled to come to terms with the mass murder of Romani. Learning of the slaughter of Jews was trauma enough for European society in the immediate aftermath of World War II; for many, coping with the similar fate of the 'other victims' of the Nazi's systematic extermination policies – the so-called *vergesene Verfolgte*, or 'forgotten

persecutees', including Romani, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, prostitutes and the physically and mentally disabled (Marcuse 2001: 353-355) – had proven almost impossible. “The massacre of 6 million of our fellow Jewish citizens,” he admitted to me, “was so incomprehensible, that the majority of us could not cope with this other crime – the one against gypsies – in the beginning” (Rost 1963: 1).

Over time the work of Smolen and his staff in Auschwitz – who were too few in number and had to rely primarily on the Nazi's own records, as most could not speak the several Romani languages required to gather information from the survivors themselves – had nonetheless uncovered certain proof, in the remaining German documents they had been able to locate, of the nature and scale of the appalling crimes that had been perpetrated against Romani: “it is evident that in November 1942 Minister Thierack ordered Bormann to liquidate, immediately and without further proceedings, all gypsies in all the German-occupied territories” (Rost 1963: 1).<sup>82</sup> A frightening memory unfolds of Romani arriving at the death camp – Auschwitz in fact had ‘a special Gypsy quarter, the so-called Gypsy “Family Camp”’ (Huttenbach 1991b: 381) – many with violins still in hand. They played their music ‘the entire day’ until their SS captors, increasingly angered by their songs, forcibly took their instruments from them, ‘perhaps because the melancholy music reminded them of the last remnants of their humanity’ (1963: 1). They were then beaten and driven into the gas chambers by the hundreds for mass execution. The scarring image – as relayed to Rost by Smolen in 1961 – originates with Jerzy Adam Brandhuber (1897-1981), a Polish artist and survivor of Auschwitz who remained living in the camp after liberation, despite having been imprisoned there for many years.<sup>83</sup>

When Rost's article returns to the present, Rouda confronts him with more hard facts from recent history: a passage from Hans Globke's legal commentary on the Nuremberg Laws (‘Actually that was already our death sentence’); and the work of Eva Justin (‘which demands the sterilisation of all Romani’). From here, Rouda moves on to the issue of *Wiedergutmachung* – war crimes reparations – and the disturbing truth that, to date, Romani had received almost no restitution: “Virtually nothing. Only a few German Romani received a small payment. Otherwise no one”

(Rost 1963: 1). More alarmingly, there had been – as has continued to be the case – little to no recognition of the crimes that actually were committed, at a truly massive scale, against Romani: “Unfortunately we have no one who defends our rights in Bonn. Public opinion does not stand up for us either” (Rost 1963: 1).<sup>84</sup> Rost, who was aware of the problem and actively working to raise awareness of it, is shown further documents at this stage – ‘official letters from German government agencies with all kinds of clever excuses and no admission of wrong doing’ (Rost 1963: 1). While Rotaru’s and Rouda’s ‘statistics’ might be disputed by some scholars today, the veracity of their account of history from the rise to power of the Third Reich through to the end of World War II, as well as their understanding of the current situation of Romani people in post-war Europe, was frighteningly accurate.

It is against the backdrop of such horrors and injustices – some of which were still being enacted against Romani living throughout Europe in 1963 (and would continue to be in years to come) – that Rotaru eventually formulates the ‘objectives’ in which Constant wrote he was ‘deeply interested’ in July that year. With the first page of Rost’s article delivering an increasingly harrowing account of tragedy and deep human suffering, the small box of text that completes the piece overleaf sounds a strong note of defiance. From the CMG’s headquarters – described by Rost as ‘a sombre miserably-furnished backroom’ in Montreuil with no view to speak of – Rotaru issues his most basic demand for justice: “We “Roms”, because that is what we call ourselves, wish to be accepted as people” (Rost 1963: 2). Condemning the ways in which Romani ‘are being suppressed almost everywhere’ in the world, both past and present, Rotaru goes on to read out an extract from the ‘official request for recognition’ he had recently sent to both the UN and UNESCO. It is a plea for cultural and legal acknowledgement and the right to political self-representation:

It is therefore on behalf of the Romani people (more than 12 million subjects, dispersed throughout the world), that His Highness Vaida Voevod III, President of the CMG, requests a legal status of existence. Because, the Romani people consider themselves as a single people, despite the dispersion of its groups and the lack of uniformity of its customs.

His Highness Vaida Voevod III appeals to all members of the UN and its General Secretary, that they address the problems of his people, who are

among the underdeveloped people of the world. His Highness asks also that the headquarters of the CMG in Paris and in Vienna (Austria) be recognised with full diplomatic status, nationally and internationally

(Rost 1963: 2)

Rost's account of his discussion with Rotaru and Rouda continues, with Rotaru outlining his desire to plant the Romani flag somewhere – anywhere, 'even on a small deserted island' ('Maybe you know of something for us in your country? To buy or rent?') – and create a small museum with a music hall where Romani could give violin concerts: 'If only to prove to the world' that 'We, Romani, are still here, we are a people, in the end 12 million Romani are still spread all over the world, they haven't killed us all. And especially to prove: that we also have a culture and something to offer the world' (Rost 1963: 2). The title of Rost's article emerges in these contexts, as does the eventual motto for *New Babylon*:

A strange experience: A king of the gypsies asks a Dutch journalist whether it might be possible to rent an uninhabited island in his country.

Then: "We are probably the oldest people in the world. Our culture must not disappear, cannot go under. We also have a humanistic mission: We are the symbols of a world without frontiers, of a free world, where weapons will be banned, where anyone can roam, without constraint, from the steppes of central Asia to the shores of the Atlantic, from the high plateaux of south-Africa to the forests of Finland."

Moments later: "It is therefore not our intention to be foiled by the Germans" ...\*

For a moment it appears as if he is not speaking to his visitor, but to the Germans [...]

[...] "Do not forget my friend" he continues, when he sees that I am noting down his words, "that if we as 'the Romani people' were to disappear, something would then be missing from the world"

(1963: 2)

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\* Rost uses a Dutch idiom: 'Wij zijn dan ook niet van plan om ons door de Duitse heren *met een kluitje in het riet te laten sturen*' (Rost 1963: 2, emphasis added) – literally 'to send someone into the reeds to find something that is not there'; meaning, 'to fool someone'. With Mark Aussem's help, my translation attempts to reflect the contexts of the discussion then taking place.



Rost's conclusion follows, delivering the 'call to artists and writers' Constant openly references in his letter to the CMG seven weeks later. It is in fact Rost and then, finally, Rouda – not 'His Highness Voevod', as Constant has it – who launch the appeal in the original *Algemeen Handelsblad* article. Unsurprisingly, it is a plea to help bring recognition and justice to the current, ongoing plight of Romani throughout the world. Pulling together the difficult themes raised in the course of his discussion with Rouda and Rotaru, Rost inserts a reflective piece of prose into the end of his text. Asking searching questions of us all his writing is, regrettably, as topical today as it was in 1963:

Thousands of books have been written on every aspect of the persecution of the Jews, about the concentration camps and the resistance. That is good and justified, but does it not stand as testimony to a frightening lack of human concern for another part of our fellow citizens, that there is hardly a single publication on the liquidation of hundreds of thousands of gypsies? Does no one among the politicians, who speak daily about social justice, care about this appalling wrong? Is it not in fact shameful that most of us, despite press, radio and television, hardly know anything about this gigantic murder, in comparison with which the number of victims in 'The Massacre of the Innocents', 'St. Bartholomew's night' and the French Revolution is almost nothing? That some among us maybe even have the tendency to view this crime as something of a minor issue alongside the even larger murder of Jews? Would the murder of hundreds of thousands of gypsies, alone, of a significant part of this gifted and freedom-loving people, not be sufficient to brand German National Socialism for all time?

Is our own nonchalant view of this event not also a sharp condemnation of all our notions about human dignity and of the value that we pretend to give to human life? Do gypsies not have any right to Human Rights?

And if all others are found lacking, then is it not the duty of the poets and artists – who also dream the gypsies' dream of freedom and try to visualise it in their art – to collectively and in all countries initiate this act of simple justice?

(Rost 1963: 2)

Beneath a final and by now alarmingly quaint 'icon' – the repeating 'stamp' of a traditional Romani wagon in profile – Rost leaves us with a parting image. Exiting the CMG's headquarters in the old, rundown apartment building from which Rotaru and Rouda worked tirelessly in defence of their people, Rost looks back to glimpse 'His Highness' returning to his 'shabby desk' in the decrepit third floor flat in Montreuil – the green and blue Romani flag and a giant copy of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights hanging on the wall behind him. It is a poignant

juxtaposition: fifteen years after the first global expression of human rights had been adopted by the General Assembly of the UN – in the same city where Rotaru and Rouda now laboured to be heard – ‘equal rights’ still meant very little, in practice, to Romani. Within two years of Rost’s visit to the CMG’s dingy headquarters in Paris – with its ‘yellowed almost unreadable business card’ and ‘no doorbell’ – the organisation would be officially outlawed.

Rouda accompanies Rost to the metro and, as they walk together down the ‘desolate’ Rue Victor Hugo, the young, well-spoken ‘cultural attaché’ of the CMG issues his own challenge to artists and writers everywhere: “‘If only Hugo was still alive,’ my new friend says [...] “He would have made a strong indictment against all our enemies, just as he denounced Napoleon III. He would have alerted the world””. With Rouda rather nonchalantly referencing either *Napoléon le Petit*, *Histoire d’un crime* or both, Rost’s ending plays clear counterpoint to his introductory passages, which appear to express surprise at his ‘first impression’ of Rotaru (‘Someone, who could be a doctor or a lawyer’, ‘Extremely sophisticated’) and Rouda (‘This gypsy is also extraordinarily well cultured and no different in his appearance from a diplomat of some South American state’). As Constant, like all of Rost’s readers would learn in 1963, the CMG’s ‘President’ and ‘Secretary General’ certainly did not – and still do not – conform to longstanding, popular stereotypes about ‘gypsies’ (Rost 1963: 2).<sup>85</sup>

After sending his letter of enquiry to the CMG on 08 July 1963, Constant received a quick enough response from ‘The Cabinet of His Highness Vaida Voevod III’, typed out on the CMG’s official letterhead. Assuming the role of ‘Secretary General’, Rouda politely apologises for the time it had taken him to answer Constant’s enquiry, before asking Constant to clarify his request further. It seems Constant had asked for information from the CMG without realising that his brief note would not be self-explanatory. This appears to have been an issue of language, with the actual contents of Rost’s article – written primarily in Dutch – proving inaccessible to Rotaru and Rouda at the time (Figure 7.5):

Sir,

We apologise for the long delay in replying to your letter of 8 July 1963. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts for the interest you show in our people. The article with the interview of H. H. Vaïda Voëvod III, written by Mr. Nico Rost, published in “Algemeen Handelsblad”, on 18 May 1963, is not yet translated into French. That’s why we ask you to kindly give us details regarding the documentation you want to have.

While awaiting your response, please accept, Sir, our most brotherly greetings.

The Secretary General  
Vanko Rouda

(RKD 44[b])

While there is no trace in the RKD’s archives of Constant’s subsequent reply to the CMG – or of the response (and potential materials) he then presumably received in turn – there is evidence that Constant continued to have dealings with Rotaru and Rouda for a number of years after. Over five years later, on 21 September 1968, Rouda wrote to Constant for entirely new reasons. Again playing the role of ‘Secretary General’ for the CMG, Rouda – by this time also the President of the CIT – turns to Constant for assistance regarding a series of lectures being developed by Rotaru at the time (Figure 7.6). Constant is formally addressed as a great ally of the CMG, although it is unclear what this might have meant in practice. Apparently, a large number of ‘VIPs’, including ‘princes, academics, ambassadors and generals [...] were all referred to as “friends”’ (Klímová-Alexander 2007: 652) by Rotaru and Rouda throughout the 1960s:

Dearest friend,

Please excuse us for addressing you this way. But, know that we count you among our closest friends. That’s why we want you to know about our major projects.

H. H. Vaïda Voëvod III is preparing a series of lectures to give in your country.

These lectures will take place in two ways:

– public lecture: “The Romani people, their culture, their judicial and social status in all the countries they inhabit”.

– lecture in private circles, very limited, in absolute secrecy, without any publicity: “The Initiation Rite of the Romani, esotericism, magic, etc., etc...”

Could you help us in this task? Could you even form such a circle around yourself? First can you see the possibility of giving such lectures in your city?

We ask you, at the same time, to give us some addresses of youth clubs, societies or associations dealing with youth, esoteric societies, etc., etc...

Entrusting you with our brotherly friendship, we thank you in advance for your help and assistance.

Truly yours

The Secretary General of the CMG

Vanko Rouda

(RKD 44[c])

Although I am unable to establish the eventual outcome, if any, of this letter, it certainly raises interesting questions about the relationship that may have developed between Constant and these leading Romani activists of the post-war period. Politics and activism aside, there are other avenues to follow as well.

From Rost's introductory description of Rotaru published in *Algemeen Handelsblad* in May 1963, we learn he was 'a talented amateur' painter who was, at that very moment, 'having an exhibition of his oeuvre in Toulouse' (Rost 1963: 1). While Rost goes on to give a brief description of one of Rotaru's works – a painting of a 'dangerous and unstructured landscape' that was hanging above the mantel (and a bust of the Pope) in the CMG's Paris headquarters – he was perhaps unaware of the ends to which such artworks, alongside those of other artists, were often being put. Klímová-Alexander – who uses the acronym WGC ('World Gypsy Community') in place of CMG in her writing – fills in the necessary details, revealing how Rotaru often took part 'in painting auctions in the Charpentier and Lagrange (Marseilles) Galleries and later even organized' such events himself:

This way he allegedly befriended many important people such as Baroness Rothschild and Alfred Hitchcock. Rotaru's goal was to collect funds for building of [sic] a Romani Cultural Centre in Geneva. In 1965 and 1966, he approached many famous artists and asked them to donate their works so that they could be sold with the profit going to the social and cultural work of the WGC (a new body—the Cultural Association of Friends of the Gypsy People was established for this purpose). The auction took place in June 1967 in the Motte Gallery in Geneva (although originally advertised for the Sotheby Gallery in London or one of New York's galleries). Reportedly, numerous artists from 12 different countries (including, for example, Marc Petit, Picasso and Mathieu) donated their works

(Klímová-Alexander 2007: 631; cf. Liégeois 1986: 147)

We get some similar information from Rost, who was informed by Rouda in May 1963, "That Jean Cocteau, Marcel Achard and François Mauriac were not so long

ago present at our cultural gala-evening, where His Highness gave a speech” (Rost 1963: 1). With the CMG clearly capable of attracting influential supporters to their cause – particularly prominent individuals in cultural, literary and artistic circles – there is a real possibility Constant may have been involved in a similar capacity. There are additional possibilities to explore, also, within the broader milieu of post-war Romani activism in Europe.

Klímová-Alexander briefly traces out the work of a Lovari Romani leader named Koka Petalo, who was based in the Netherlands and was a prominent figure there in the 1960s. According to her, Petalo ‘gained fame in journalistic rather than diplomatic circles’. He ‘made several speeches on radio’ in the early- to mid-1960s, during which time he even ‘addressed the government in The Hague’. Although he was officially a ‘competitor’ of the CMG, Petalo advocated for many of the same things as Rotaru and Rouda: ‘he argued that the time had come for someone to speak on behalf of all Roma’ and ‘intended to make an official request for recognition to the Dutch as well as other governments’. Like Rotaru, one of his primary aims was the establishment of ‘a Romani nation’ and ‘international Romani passports’ – for which he similarly planned to petition the UN. In relationship to Constant’s work on *New Babylon*, one of Petalo’s actions stands out in particular: ‘In 1964 he organized a huge engagement party in Holland to which he invited Roma “from all of Europe and South America” as well as journalists’ (Klímová-Alexander 2007: 648-649).

Is it possible that this event informed or inspired Constant’s 1964<sup>86</sup> painting *Fiesta Gitana* (Figure 7.7)? Was Constant perhaps invited to the party? It is not an entirely unlikely conclusion to reach considering the chronological overlap and Constant’s high profile standing in Dutch society at the time. Given the fact Constant took the initiative to make contact with the CMG in Paris in 1963, it is probable that he may have also kept track of similar events closer to home. It certainly adds a layer of potentiality to the purely formal descriptions of the work that currently circulate in scholarship (Heynen 1999: 168-169; Lambert 1996: 104). Although some writers may have taken this for granted, the translation of the title has never been made explicit. Easily recognisable across all the romance languages (i.e., French ‘fête

gitana’, Italian ‘festa gitana’ and Portuguese ‘festa cigana’), ‘fiesta gitana’ in fact means ‘gypsy party’ in Spanish.<sup>87</sup> Whether or not Constant’s 1964 painting is linked to the actual engagement party organised by Petalo in the Netherlands that year, it would seem the title is not arbitrary: it must stand, at the very least, as testimony to Constant’s ongoing attraction to Romani – now eight years since the start of his project – throughout his work on *New Babylon*.

### ***Romani Rai***

The other letter Constant wrote on 08 July 1963 went to an entirely different sort of ‘gypsy organisation’. Now based in the United States, the Gypsy Lore Society (GLS) is the ‘oldest society for the study of Gypsies’ – by non-Romani – in the world (Kenrick 2007: 105). Founded by David MacRitchie of Edinburgh in 1888 (but with a halt in activity between 1892 and 1907), it originally brought together a collection of ‘wealthy amateurs like the Archduke Jozsef of Austria, artists and writers like Arthur Symons and Theodore Watts-Dunton, and academic librarians like John Sampson, Eric Otto Winstedt and George F. Black’. They published a regular periodical, *The Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, focused primarily on topics such as ‘Romani folklore, anthropology and linguistics’ (Lundgren 2004: 136; cf. Sampson 2004). In the specialist literature, the early members of the Society, in particular, are most often referred to as ‘Gypsyloists’ and ‘Romany Rais’. Viewed in the main as individuals of ‘a ‘gentlemanly’ or respectable background, with a scholarly, personal and long-lasting interest in the Gypsies and their way of life’, the Rais constituted themselves as ‘an association of Gypsy lovers’ – with most of them believing, or hoping, that they were ‘as rare, peculiar and misunderstood as the group they studied’ (Mayall 2004: 167). They were mostly men of leisure and wealth who engaged in friendly competition with each other – rather literally ‘hunting out Gypsies’ in their spare time to photograph them, collect folk stories, family histories and lists of new and unknown, ‘authentic’ Romani words (that is, as close to ‘original’ *Sanskrit* as possible). They would then eagerly share and debate their ‘findings’ with each other through personal letters and the pages of the Society’s

*Journal*. Kenrick gives this general definition for ‘Gypsylorist’, of which the early members of the Gypsy Lore Society are by far the most renowned:

A term used for non-Gypsy amateur scholars in the 19th and early 20th centuries who saw the Gypsy life as romantic, at least for short periods in the summer. They used to travel in horse-drawn wagons and make campfires around which they sang their own translations into Romani of popular songs  
(Kenrick 2007: 106)

Although certainly enthusiastic about their subject, and generally positive toward Romani themselves, there were also clear problems with the overall approach adopted by the Rais. As Kenrick adds, ‘They have been criticized for ignoring the harassment suffered by the Romanies they studied’. The language commonly employed by the Rais – about Romani and their dealings with them – is typically riddled with sexual imagery and references to the stimulation, passion and thrill that came from studying the ‘romantic, mysterious and adventurous’ members of what they considered to be a ‘primitive eastern race’ (Mayall 2004: 167). They thought of the Romani as a dying and disappearing breed and lamented the loss of the ‘pure’ and ‘true Gypsy’, who was in their opinion becoming increasingly rare in the English countryside. Directed at least in part by the Victorian, race-based thinking of their time, they perpetuated a vision of Romani that ultimately said more about themselves and their own desires than the various Romani families with whom they interacted in person, and – although some genuine friendships may have developed along the way – somewhat licentiously extracted their ‘finds’:

Their image of the Gypsies was [...] created out of attributes which they shared as a group and reinforced in each other: their love of freedom and nature, their bohemianism and romanticism, and their marginal position in society as academics, scholars and vicars, removed from urban industrial life  
(Mayall 2004: 179)

When the GLS was revived in 1907 after a fifteen-year hiatus it became virtually synonymous with Dora E. Yates. Yates was of Jewish background and worked at Liverpool University Library, where the GLS was based, until her retirement in 1945. From 1907 she assisted with the editing and production of the Society’s *Journal*. In 1935 she took the position of Honorary Secretary of the GLS and began carrying the bulk of the editorial work for the group’s periodical. She remained in

that position until her death in 1974, further acting in the official capacity of editor for the *Journal* from 1955 onwards (Hooper 2004: 23). Although Yates considered herself, like most of the Rais and Gypsyloists, to be a compassionate, sympathetic and supportive ‘friend of the Gypsies’, she shared the overall view and fictional image of Romani that was actively cultivated by many of the Society’s members during her lifetime. Yates herself was certainly aware of this romanticism, but – as revealed in her 1953 autobiography – largely unfazed by it:

I know full well in writing these *Recollections* in my own fashion I shall be accused of using the ‘romantic approach’ in describing my Gypsies. But my reply is that the Gypsies *are* romantic: ‘the last romance’, as Arthur Symons said, ‘left in the world’

(Yates 1953: 181)

Taking a possessive and at least mildly patronising view of ‘*her* Gypsies’ that was common of the work of the Rais generally, Yates was attracted to the way Romani ‘lived in the open, dressed as they liked, ate what they pleased, earned a living from traditional crafts and called no man their master’. Her texts and lectures, like those of her colleagues in the Society at the time, were thus commonly ‘littered with references to the gay and dissolute nature of the group, to their recklessness and frivolity, and to their piquant and striking ways’ (Mayall 2004: 169).

Despite being one of the earliest voices to draw attention to the crimes that had been committed against Romani during World War II,<sup>88</sup> Yates and the GLS were in many ways the opposite of Rotaru, Rouda and the CMG. According to Hancock, Yates in fact ‘scorned the idea of Romani nationalism’: “‘Except in a fairy tale’ she asked, “‘could any hope ever have been more fantastic?’” In 1975, one year after Yates’s death, Brian Vesey-Fitzgerald – a former sub-editor of the Society’s *Journal* – further derided the idea of ‘Romani unity’ as ‘romantic twaddle’ (Hancock 1991b: 225; cf. Hancock 1981). This was a view shared, if less blatantly expressed, by most members of the Society, who clung to their romantic ideals of ‘true gypsies’ and acted as if politicised individuals like Rotaru and Rouda – who faced very real and acute problems during their lifetimes precisely because they were Romani – did not actually exist. As Acton (in Hancock 1981) puts it, ‘Gypsyloists remain the arcane



priests of an oriental mystery quite removed from the thinking of educated Rom who are dismissed almost as a contradiction in terms' (cf. Gheorghe 1997).

This denial of the complexity of Romani life and identity, as well as the real historical experience of Romani, becomes increasingly untenable against the backdrop of World War II, the Holocaust and beyond. As Susan Lepselter noted in her critical survey of the topics covered by the Society's *Journal* during a ten-year period (1937-1947) leading up to and including the *Porrajmos*, the 'lorists' remained strikingly apolitical. Pretending as if their 'subjects' were unaffected by current events unfolding in the real world, they focused instead on quaint topics such as 'Welsh and New York Gypsy life, Hungarian Gypsy fiddlers, linguistic work on the Spanish Gypsy dialect and Polish Romani vocabulary': 'Scholars of Romani culture did not [...] protest the fate of those they studied and befriended. They did not engage in political critique which might have led to action' (Lepselter 1996: 15).

Constant's first letter to the GLS is most likely lost to history, as it does not appear in the GLS Archive in Liverpool. Dora Yates's reply of 11 July 1963 is rather thorough, however, and appears to give us a fairly accurate indication of the nature of Constant's original enquiry. Although it is unclear how Constant heard about the GLS or acquired their address, it is obvious that he had done a degree of background research before making contact (Figure 7.8):

Dear Mr. Nieuwenhuys,  
Very many thanks for your letter of July 8th, which reached me this morning. In reply to your enquiry we can supply you with a copy of Black's Gypsy Bibliography at 15 shillings, but I am sorry to report that Macalister's Romani Versions is now out of print. Most of the numbers of the Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society Third Series are still in stock, except Vols. 1 and 2, 23 and 24. They cost (fifteen) 15 shillings each. But as they are only available to Members of the Society, I enclose one of our prospectuses, with detachable form of membership, and hope you will join the Society, by sending me your subscription for 1963. You will then receive our Journal (post free) regularly at your address. We can however supply a copy of the Gypsy Bibliography to you (on receipt of your international money order for fifteen shillings) whether you join the Society or not.  
Yours sincerely  
D. E. Yates

Over a month later, Constant contacted Yates again (Figure 7.9). Having received her reply, he had placed an almost immediate order for ‘Black’s Gypsy Bibliography’, which had yet to arrive at his home in Amsterdam. Although it is primarily a business letter following up his order, and giving details of a bank note that had apparently gone missing in the interim, the short message reveals Constant was eager to receive this material: ‘I am very sorry about all the trouble I am causing you. But I very much want to have this book which might be very usefull [sic] for me’ (GLS XLVI, 320). After returning to Liverpool having ‘been away in the country’ – presumably off looking for Romani, as the lorists tended to do during the summer months – Yates clears things up through two further postcards (Figure 7.10). By early September at the latest, Constant was in possession of the book he was apparently so keen to purchase from her (RKD 227[b]; RKD 227[c]).

The GLS published George Fraser Black’s *A Gypsy Bibliography* in 1914, having originally released a provisional issue five years earlier (Figure 7.11). It lists, across over 200 pages, details of materials up to and including the earliest years of the twentieth century – books, plays, poems, paintings, etchings, etc. – dealing in one way or another with ‘gypsies’. Hancock, who has carried out something of an inventory of its contents, lists ‘133 ballads, 199 plays, 351 novels and 262 poems about or including Gypsies, written by non-Gypsies, exclusive of scientific treatments or collections of actual Romani oral literature’ (Hancock 1976). This is ‘in the English literary tradition alone’. The *Bibliography* also gives details for a range of materials in many other European languages, revealing a seemingly endless supply of sources – all, or most of which present Romani in limited and stereotyped ways. Black’s *Bibliography* thus catalogues and in turn reproduces the deeply rooted, fictional images of Romani in essentialised form: ‘as liar and thief either of property or (especially) of non-Gypsy children; the Gypsy as witch or caster of spells; and the Gypsy as romantic figure’ (Hancock 1987a: 47). Minor commentaries and value judgments are appended onto many of the entries in Black’s book. We are told that ‘Gypsies occupy a prominent place’ in Ainsworth’s ‘Rookwood: A Romance’,

published by Chapman and Hall in London in 1851, for example, ‘which also contains songs in the cant language’. By contrast, Albrays’s ‘Handzia la Gitane’ of 1877-1878, published in the ‘Journal des dames et des demoiselles’ out of Brussels, is dismissed as a ‘Fiction of no value’; a useful ‘illustration of a Gypsy camp’ is nonetheless found on ‘Page 81’, however (Black 1914: 2). Organised alphabetically, every entry is further assigned a number, and by the end of the volume, the total number of works recorded and annotated reaches well above 4,500. For a multi-lingual enthusiast such as Constant, Black’s *Bibliography* would have presented a potential reading list stretching across lifetimes. Although certainly a treasure trove for ‘Gypsyloists’ and ‘Romany Rais’ – and we might consider placing Constant in that group – as a resource for learning anything about actual Romani people, particularly at any point after 1914, Black’s *Bibliography* was severely limited.

Had Constant also been able to purchase Sir Donald Macalister’s *Romani Versions* (1928) from Yates, he would have been treated to even more ‘gypsy romance’. Like the majority of works presented by Black’s *Bibliography*, Macalister’s *Versions* are entirely disconnected from the real world inhabited and experienced by Romani. The *Versions* are in fact Old Scots and Old English ballads, as well as the works of various English and Scottish writers and poets, translated into Romani by Macalister for the pleasure of other Rais. Thus, we find the likes of Robert Louis Stevenson’s ‘The Vagabond’, an English ballad called ‘The Raggle-Taggle Gypsies, O’, Sir Walter Scott’s ‘The Lochmaben Harper’ (featuring a horse thief) and two pieces by Rudyard Kipling – ‘A Smuggler’s Song’ (also featuring a horse thief) and ‘Gypsy Vans’. The latter poem, comprised of nine stanzas, gives a taste of the overall type of material on offer here as well as in Black’s *Bibliography* generally. A repeating line starting off a number of the stanzas – ‘Unless you come of the gypsy stock’ – is followed by various fanciful descriptions of what it means to be Romani: ‘That steals by night and day’; ‘That takes and never spares’; ‘That see but seldom weep’; and, ‘That counts all time the same’ (Kipling in Macalister 1928: 48-50).

## ***Gypsy musician***

Although Constant had come face to face with the hardships of Romani life in Italy in the mid-1950s, read Rost's account of the Romani experience of the Holocaust in 1963 and further corresponded with Rotaru and Rouda, two leading activists in the post-war Romani rights movement, it seems the traditions of the 'Gypsylorists' and 'Romani Rais' ultimately gained the upper hand. The extent to which Constant's work on *New Babylon* ends up playing out their brand of nostalgic 'gypsy romance', is revealed in a series of newspaper articles and interviews published in the Netherlands in 1974. Between 12 June and 28 November that year, Jan Juffermans, Hans Redekker, Ed Wingen, Fanny Kelk, Betty van Garrel and Ada van Benthem Jutting – writing for six different Dutch papers – all address Constant's relationship to Romani, revealing Constant's deep-seeded attraction to a fictional version of 'the gypsy way of life'. This desire, which ends up underpinning his work on *New Babylon*, plays out through a long-standing personal connection, originating in Constant's earliest youth, with Gypsy music.

Ed Wingen's article for *De Telegraaf* leaves little to the imagination (Figure 7.12a). Beneath a photograph of Constant surrounded by some *New Babylon* models with a large beer mug in hand, is the bold caption 'Zigeuners stonden model' – Gypsies were models. Underneath this there is a brief description of how *New Babylon* began in 1956 during Constant's stay in Italy following the *Primo congresso* in Alba (RKD 390[c]: 25). The more revealing piece, by far, is an interview by Betty van Garrel published in the *Haagse Post* on 27 July 1974 (Figure 7.12b). Although her title is less transparent than Wingen's – 'Wie niet in een betere wereld gelooft kan niets in Nieuw Babylon zien' (Who does not believe in a better world can not see New Babylon) – van Garrel reveals how Romani, or rather a fictional notion of 'gypsies', were always central to Constant's project. Not unlike Dora Yates of the GLS, Constant's relationship to 'his gypsies' is knowingly and unashamedly romantic. Aware of a history of persecution, revealing he had done at least some further reading in this area, Constant elects to cast this knowledge aside and, instead, allow his desires and imagination to play out freely.

[Constant] Should I make blocks of houses? No. If there is no labour then people will not live in one place. The family is not there either. Those are all structures that coincide with labour. Completely new social structures will arise...

[van Garrel] The lifestyle of the gypsies inspired you with this?

[Constant] I think especially the exceptional position of the gypsies. They have never integrated into society. They have always stayed outcasts. Symbols of a freer world. Maybe falsely so, because they also lived as slaves in the Balkans, especially in Romania. But in the imagination of the non-gypsy they have remained symbols of a freedom that others are only longing for. Maybe we were forced to give up our nomadic existence when we invented agriculture in the New Stone Age. I am interested in the symbolic meaning of the gypsy because the actual reality of their existence is mostly very sad.

[van Garrel] And the attitude of the gypsy with respect to another's possessions?

[Constant] When a gypsy is hungry he catches a bird but for a farmer he is a chicken thief. That is a whole different mentality. Ownership is typically something that belongs to the settled. My land, my house. The one who is on the move, says: the whole world is mine. There is his wagon and the fact that it is on somebody else's land means nothing to him. That is something that attracts me very much. There is a lot of romance in it but that does not bother me. You do not necessarily have to think of an actual gypsy but about the image that the homo faber has about the gypsy.

[van Garrel] Is the New Babylonian also a sort of gypsy?

[Constant] The romanticised gypsy as the one that lives in our fantasy and nostalgia, even though it is not the actual truth, is the pre-image of the New Babylonian. The gypsy is closer to the New Babylonian than other people. He does not work, he does not dwell, he knows freedom from time and place. Why does a working person create a romanticised gypsy in his imagination? He wants to see that himself. It is a projection of his own wish, his wish-dream.

[van Garrel] How old were you when you first heard about gypsies?

[Constant] Already very young. Now you have jukeboxes, but in the earlier years you had a lot of gypsy orchestras. I have always played gypsy music, guitar, also violin. Now I play cimbalom. It has always triggered my imagination

(RKD 390[e]: 35)

Four months later, a mixed article-interview by Ada van Benthem Jutting for *Het Parool* takes up where van Garrel leaves off, further revealing Constant's attraction to the supposed otherness of Romani (Figure 7.12c). The clear conflict between fact and fiction remains, with Constant once again choosing to privilege romance over reality. Like van Garrel, van Benthem Jutting sets the scene for us, describing how Constant had come into contact with a group of Romani in Alba almost twenty years ago – an experience that had given him, in her words, 'an extra push to *New Babylon*':

[Constant] Gypsies are the only people who have always been on the move. I have always been interested in gypsy culture, in their music. I play guitar and cimbalom, and I had lessons from a Hungarian. Earlier on, when I was a boy, I played violin. Also always even then gypsy music.

[van Benthem Jutting] What attracts you to gypsies?

[Constant] The otherness. The fact that they are symbols of another world. It is not a free life at all, it is a life of misery. But they have a symbolic value: longing for freedom, roaming, today here, tomorrow to be there. All of those things that completely make up the social life in *New Babylon*

(RKD 386: 13)

As in his interview with van Garrel a few months earlier, music is again the key. With van Benthem Jutting taking note of the multiple instruments hanging on the walls and laying in the bookshelves of Constant's home and studio – a Turkish stringed instrument, a medieval lute and five guitars, for example – he reiterates the connection: 'Since my earliest youth I have been a lover of gypsy music'. The attraction to Romani is clearly romantic, with Constant appearing to associate himself with Romani – or more precisely, a fictionalised version of Romani – through his identity as a musician. At the same time, he is painfully aware of the difference between himself and this consciously constructed other. Van Benthem Jutting's article for *Het Parool* makes this conflict clear through its title, alone. While the main heading of the article, 'Constant en de zigeuners' (Constant and the gypsies), suggests a proximity or relationship between Constant and Romani, the subheading acts as something of a corrective: 'Schepper van vrij-leven-ideaal 'New Babylon' vindt zich zelf 'er niet geschikt voor'' – Creator of free-life-ideal 'New Babylon' finds himself 'not fit for it'. If the photograph included with the article –

showing Constant sitting rather dejectedly on a couch in his home – does not say it all already, the introduction and conclusion to van Benthem Jutting’s text deliver the truth for us. The lifestyle Constant projects onto Romani, and then equates almost directly to life in *New Babylon*, is absolutely foreign to him personally: ‘I myself do not live according to that idea. Least of all. Incredibly regular, fixed to one place. But New Babylon is not for the people of today’; and later, ‘I never go out in the evenings [...] I live just very regularly. We are not suited for New Babylon. You must be born for it’ (RKD 386: 13). This was a point Constant had made already eight years earlier, in another interview with Betty van Garrel: “‘It is a question of upbringing, of mentality. And I do not believe the mentality of a person above the age of twenty can still be changed much’” (van Garrel and Koolhaas 2005 [1966]: 10). For Constant, Romani are thus the true, and only, inheritors of *New Babylon*; unlike him, they are born for it.

The fact that van Garrel and van Benthem Jutting both ask Constant directly about his attraction to Romani in 1974 is not surprising. On 15 June that year, Constant’s major *New Babylon* retrospective exhibition, curated by Hans Locher, opened at the Haags Gemeentemuseum, where it was on display until 01 September. Beyond receiving extensive coverage in the Dutch press at the time, the opening of the *New Babylon* exhibition was also the launch party for the nation-wide ‘Holland Festival 1974’. Constant played a major role in this event, held on the evening of 15 June 1974, as Hans Redekker reported for *NRC Handelsblad* that day:

Tonight and until late into the night more than 3,000 invited guests for the opening fest of the Holland Festival will find themselves in the very special environment that was thought out for them by the Haags Gemeentemuseum, where it is taking place ... And Constant himself will be there to play the cimbalom in the orchestra of his friends, the gypsies, for whom he not so long ago designed a gypsy camp in Italy according to his New Babylon ideas  
(RKD 390[b]: 6)

While Redekker goes on to describe Constant as ‘this friend of the gypsies’ in his short article for *NRC Handelsblad*, it is unclear what should be made of this. That Constant was playing Gypsy music at the opening of the most comprehensive exhibition of his *New Babylon* project to date is not in question. Further evidence is

needed, however, to establish whether these musicians actually were the individuals Constant met in Alba eighteen years earlier. Given the treatment of Romani in post-war Europe and the heavy restrictions placed upon their mobility, I remain sceptical. In June-July 1974, the ‘gypsy roots’ of *New Babylon* were being consistently reported in the Dutch press, with Constant repeatedly acknowledging that his project originated in his first hand experience of a Romani encampment in Italy in the 1950s. Given that this information was generally available in the public realm at the time, Redekker may have exercised some of his own imagination in linking the two together.

Only three days earlier, for example, Jan Juffermans had published a piece on Constant and *New Babylon* in another Dutch newspaper, *De Nieuwe Linie* (Figure 7.13a). Just as van Garrel and van Benthem Jutting would after him, Juffermans confirms the Romani origins of *New Babylon*. He also directs his reader’s attention to Constant’s prized ‘collection of musical instruments that he frequently and gladly plays’.<sup>89</sup> On this occasion we get a slightly different story of *New Babylon*’s origins in Alba, however. While Constant does not appear to repeat this claim elsewhere, in his discussion with Juffermans published on 12 June 1974 Romani are said to be the inspiration behind not just *New Babylon*, but Situationist theory generally:

[Juffermans] How did you arrive at the New Babylon theories?

[Constant] In the fifties I was with a friend in Italy for a while; on a piece of land that was his a group of gypsies was camping. With the most amazing rubbish they built a whole “city”, a very bizarre whole. I got the idea that I also wanted to make something like that, a structure that was as flexible as possible. A short while after that we published a manifesto in *Internationale situationniste* in which the ideas that had been awakened by that gypsy city were sharply formulated

(RKD 390[a]: 3)

A final article from the summer of 1974 – which again acknowledges that the origins of *New Babylon* are to be found in Constant’s visit to a Romani encampment in Alba in 1956 – gives a bit more information about Constant’s relationship to music. Writing for *Elsevier* in a text published 06 July that year, Fanny Kelk gives a description of Constant’s studio at the time. It ends, like the account found in



Juffermans's article, with Constant's impressive collection of stringed instruments (Figure 7.13b). We learn that Constant in fact has two cimbaloms – one at his home and one in his studio – as well as a cello, multiple violins and guitars. He tells Kelk that he 'needs music', and explains how he plays 'without reading'; like all 'soloists' (and, notably, traditional Romani musicians), once he hears something a few times, he can then play it back 'by ear' almost immediately. Having noted in her introduction that Constant devotes some time to playing music every day, Kelk adds that he often does this in order to think and work out his creative ideas (RKD 390[d]: 54). An interview by Linda Boersma – who visited Constant at his studio in Amsterdam in the summer of 2003, just two years before his death – covers similar territory, usefully reiterating the point many years later: "I've played guitar all my life, from when I was 12 until today. I still play the cymbals [sic] every day too" (Boersma 2005).

As and when Constant produced the numerous graphic, sculptural and theoretical works making up his *New Babylon* project, he was playing Gypsy music daily in his studio. This was an active and integral part of his creative process, becoming the veritable sound track of *New Babylon*. The importance of the flamenco *copla* that begins Constant's German and Dutch *Skizze zu einer Kultur* manuscripts returns, with renewed relevance. Positioned against Constant's long-standing association with Gypsy music, the anonymous Spanish verse appearing at the start of his major book project no longer seems so enigmatic a gateway into the alternative universe of *New Babylon*. In a 1966 interview with Betty van Garrel for *Haagse Post* (the same interview in which he establishes Rotaru's words as the motto for *New Babylon*) Constant turns deliberately to music – more precisely, to flamenco – in an attempt to explain the concept of collective creativity that is integral to his project. While flamenco is not always or necessarily connected to Romani people and culture, it is important to note that Romani – particularly in Spain – are considered by many to be its 'prime performers' (Kenrick 2007: 89).

In marked contrast to existing, 'bourgeois' notions of art 'as expressions of the exceptional individual', which Constant qualifies in 1966 as 'Painting, poetry, the

novel, the musical composition' and links to the wealthy patronage of 'an idle upper crust, like the aristocracy in the middle ages or the wealthy merchant classes later in the Renaissance', flamenco is presented as a genuine expression of human creativity. For Constant it is an authentic, truly vital art form belonging to the people; a social expression of group creativity that occurs outside of and in opposition to the dominant power of the ruling classes. Described as 'a traditional folk art', flamenco is understood by Constant to be organic, spontaneous and improvised – a timeless expression of human desire and emotion unaffected by the fluctuating style and fashion trends of the elite. It is a collective form of creative expression, unfolding notably without a script in which all may participate and none are excluded. Flamenco is thus the collective creativity of *New Babylon* – or, at the very least, the model upon which it is founded: 'It is meant to be a spontaneous interaction among different individuals, in which the actions of one person trigger the reaction of the other [...] total freedom of expression among people' (van Garrel and Koolhaas 2005 [1966]: 10-11).

Playing music was not, however, a simple pastime or hobby for Constant. Neither was it confined to the private spaces of his home and studio. As Redekker's brief article announcing the opening night of his 1974 *New Babylon* retrospective at the Haags Gemeentemuseum reveals, music – Gypsy music – played a key role in the public identity of Constant and his project. Constant's live musical performance in the Haags Gemeentemuseum for the opening of his major *New Babylon* exhibition can be understood, I think, as an active demonstration of the collective creativity that was to permeate every element of life in the future world of *New Babylon*.

Constant's choice of instrument for that particular occasion should not be overlooked either. Though not exclusively associated with Romani, the cimbalom – which is thought to have been brought to Europe by Romani, perhaps even all the way from India – is an archetypal Romani instrument (Kenrick 2007: 43). This was, moreover, not the first or only time Constant presented himself and his work in this manner.

Archival footage from 1968 included in the recent documentary film *Constant, avant le départ* (Schmidt and Doebele 2006) shows Constant and a group of musicians

playing Gypsy music together with at least one of Constant's *New Babylon* models – the *Spatiovore* of 1959 – in the background (Figure 7.14). Constant, wearing a dark, decorated tunic that looks to be of 'non-Western' origin, plays a guitar – by appearances, not a modern instrument – in a six-piece Gypsy orchestra comprised of violin, cello, double bass, cimbalom and one other guitar. The clip was originally broadcast on German television as part of the programme 'Constant, Oder der Weg nach New Babylon', produced and directed by Carl-Heinz Caspari (1968) who was, between about 1961 and 1965, a key figure in Constant's developing work on *New Babylon*, particularly his *Skizze zu einer Kultur* book project. As with his choice to play cimbalom at the Haags Gemeentemuseum in 1974, in 1968 he plays guitar in what is clearly the Gypsy style.

The images of Constant that are typically included in *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship today present us with someone who appears to be a 'militant urbanist'; more often than not, we get images of Constant as a serious architect dressed in a suit, shirt and tie – either working on his technical, space age constructions in metal and plexiglass, sitting in his studio surrounded by these, giving lectures to architects, taking part in architectural congresses or issuing polemical statements about urbanism in the media (Figures 7.15 – 7.16). They all attest to and uphold – intentionally or not – Wigley's highly influential theorisation of Constant as the hyper-architect of *New Babylon*:

Constant's radical adoption of the architect's persona was much more decisive than his work on practical designs or appearance in architectural journals and exhibitions. Indeed, he took on and exaggerated so many traits of the architect's typical behavior that he became a hyper-architect – more like an architect than any architect

(Wigley 1998: 49)

Constant cultivated an entirely different persona throughout his life, however, one that precedes and outlives 'the architect' or 'urbanist' by quite some time. For over fifty years up to and including 2005, the year of his death, there is a steady stream of images in which Constant emerges – as in the 1968 television footage and, presumably, the opening night of the 1974 *New Babylon* retrospective – as nothing less than a Gypsy musician. The earliest photographs I have found date from 1949

(Figure 7.17a, Figure 7.17b). They show Constant, not quite thirty years old, playing music with Karel Appel; at the time, his close friend and COBRA colleague. With a cigarette hanging precariously from his mouth and a classic jazz-style archtop guitar in hand, Constant looks as if he has deliberately fashioned himself after the then-famous Romani jazz guitarist Django Reinhardt (1910-1953), who was roughly Constant's contemporary. Music apparently played a part seven years later during the *Primo congresso* in Alba (Figure 7.18a). A surviving photograph in the Archivio Gallizio in Turin – showing Constant playing guitar in the flamenco style and Asger Jorn on violin – stands as counterpoint, in addition to the photographs of Gallizio with Romani, to the well known images of the *Primo congresso* currently circulating in *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship. Instead of reading out a Lettrist manifesto on unitary urbanism, Gil Wolman sits and listens at a table strewn with wine bottles and glasses. In about 1960, the year Constant would take his leave of the Situationist International, there is a further photograph of Constant playing violin, accompanied by a bassist and guitarist – with what may be one of his models appearing in the upper left corner of the frame (Figure 7.18b).

Although these early images may never have circulated publicly, the figure of the Gypsy musician was certainly put to intentional use in 1964. In that year, Constant's *New Babylon* work featured in the Dutch architectural periodical *Goed Wonen*. An image of Constant's *Spatiovore* appears on the cover of the magazine, while inside Constant is pictured, surrounded by some of his swirling steel wire models, playing guitar in the flamenco style (Figure 7.19a). The image caption provided drives home the message: 'Eerste Nieuw Babyioniër: Constant Nieuwenhuys' – First New Babylonian: Constant Nieuwenhuys). The following year, 1965, a similar photograph of Constant appeared on the cover of an exhibition catalogue for a show, *Constant 1945-1965*, held in Rotterdam (Figure 7.19b). Later that year, the first major exhibition of *New Babylon* was held at the Haags Gemeentemuseum, bringing widespread acclaim to Constant's experimental architectural project for the first time in the Netherlands. Building on the success of this exhibit, Constant went on – in 1966 – to exhibit in a solo exhibition at the Dutch Pavilion in the 33rd Venice Biennale. The frontispiece for the 1965 Haags Gemeentemuseum catalogue again

presents Constant as a Gypsy musician, wearing a bandana around his neck with three stringed instruments – a guitar and what are perhaps a mandolin and another guitar – hanging in the background (Figure 7.20). This was a significant choice of imagery for a crucial exhibition. Calling it ‘the first great exhibition’ of *New Babylon*, van Schaik describes how the 1965 Haags Gemeentemuseum exhibition generated ‘the publicity that finally put Constant on the map for a wider audience’, turning him into ‘a household name’ in the Netherlands for the first time (van Schaik 2005b: 122, 220).

Thirteen years later, with *New Babylon* having been put to rest in 1974, the very same character appears in full colour, minus the hat, on the cover of the March 1978 issue of *Kunstbeeld*. The feature article by Fanny Kelk, ‘Constant en de eenzaamheid van de schilder’ (Constant and the loneliness of the painter), includes a prominently positioned photograph of Constant playing cimbalom in his studio (Figure 7.21). As with the imagery found in *Goed Wonen* in 1964 and the cover and frontispiece of the Rotterdam and Haags Gemeentemuseum exhibition catalogues of 1965, the implication here is that Constant’s artistic practice and music are inseparable – just as Kelk had reported in 1974. In 2005, the year of Constant’s death, we get the same again – this time in film rather than still photographs. In producing their documentary *Constant, avant le départ*, Maarten Schmidt and Thomas Doebele (2006) shot two sequences of Constant playing music. The first records Constant by himself, playing cimbalom in his studio (Figure 7.22a). The second clip captures Constant in his home playing guitar – dressed in his pyjamas – with the ‘Zigeunermuziek-ensemble Kabani’ (Figure 7.22b), a long-standing and highly regarded group led by Nello Mirando, a member of the well-known Weiss family of Romani musicians who use the stage name ‘Mirando’ (Kenrick 2007: 170).

This was apparently a recurring theme in Constant’s lifetime: although he does not do anything with this insider knowledge, Lambert recalls that Constant, ‘invited the Gypsies to play with him’ in 1970, ‘for his 50th birthday party in his studio’, and also ‘regularly organised music evenings at his home’ (Lambert 1992: 10-11).<sup>90</sup> Careri makes equally brief and ambiguous mention of ‘gypsy parties at Constant’s

house' in Amsterdam 'where he improvised music with his friend Jan Kalkman and the Kabani orchestra' (Careri 2005: 107). Tellingly, the relationship between Constant's art practice and Gypsy music has even outlived Constant. According to a press release from the Stedelijk Museum Schiedam, 'the legendary Nello Mirando, an old friend of Constant', played 'Constant's much-loved gypsy music' during the opening of the 2008-2009 exhibition *Constant. In het atelier. Tegen de stroom in naar essentie* held there on the afternoon of 13 December 2008 (Stedelijk Museum Schiedam 2008).

In addition to the 1964 painting *Fiesta Gitana*, Constant matched his Gypsy musician persona with a series of artworks dating from at least the early 1970s onwards. In November 1974, following the major retrospective held at the Haags Gemeentemuseum earlier that year, an exhibition of Constant's drawings was mounted at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. A 1972 ink drawing titled 'De cymbalist' – showing a violinist and a cimbalom player rendered in a style reminiscent of the often illegible figures found in much of Constant's work on *New Babylon* – is included in the catalogue (Figure 7.23a). Dated 14 April 1972, the dedication on the drawing reads 'voor Paul' (for Paul). The catalogue attributes the work to the private collection of Paul Hermans – the cimbalom player Schmidt and Doebele filmed in Constant's home, 33 years later, in 2005. (A younger Paul Hermans is perhaps also recognisable as the cimbalom player in the archival footage from Caspari's 1968 television broadcast.) The front cover of a 1978 exhibition catalogue, again held at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam – the same year Constant was pictured in *Kunstbeeld* playing the cimbalom in his studio – features a drawing of a flamenco guitarist and dancer; the rendering style of hastily executed lines, scribbles and ink splotches again recalls many of the graphic works previously produced for *New Babylon* (Figure 7.23b). In 1980, the year Constant delivered his 'last word' on *New Babylon* at the architectural school in Delft (RKD 349; Nieuwenhuys 1998 [1980]), yet another exhibition catalogue – for a show of drawings and watercolours held at the Galerie Nouvelles Images in The Hague – includes an image, dated 30 May 1980, of a flamenco guitarist (Figure 7.23c). Here too, the ink drops and splatters used throughout Constant's work on *New Babylon*

continue. The figure of the flamenco guitarist – who can almost certainly be seen as a projection of Constant’s self-image into his art work – features in a number of drawings and oil paintings produced across the next two decades: *Nostalgia* of 1982; *Orphée* of 1982; *Orphée II* of 1983; *Le joueur de guitare* of 1986; another *Orphée* of 1988-1989; and, *Flamenco* of 1997.<sup>91</sup>

## Conclusion. Thinking through *New Babylon*

when the coercive sterilization of Romani women is being reported in the 1990s, when Germany can deport its unwanted Romanies to neighboring countries [...] we must ask ourselves how far we have come since the days of Hitler. When we watch the present-day rise of neo-Nazi activity [...] and stand impotently by as Romanies are beaten and murdered in Europe, sometimes by the very police meant to protect them, we must face the fact that the writing is clearly on the wall. If the situation is not regarded seriously [...] the world will have another *porrajmos*, another massive devouring of Romani lives, to account for

(Hancock 1997)

From his childhood in the Netherlands in the 1920s and 1930s, when he first encountered Romani orchestras, through to his death in 2005, when he still played the cimbalom daily, Constant had a clear fascination for Romani people and culture. Romani sit at the start of his *New Babylon* project in 1956, and continue to inform his work across the next two decades, with Gypsy music emerging as the sound track for Constant's work at the opening of the major *New Babylon* retrospective held at the Haags Gemeentemuseum in 1974. Romani, or fantasies about them, played a central role in Constant's life and work. *New Babylon* begins in 1956 with an architectural proposal for a permanent shelter in Alba, which was formally submitted to the town's Mayor in early 1957. Although never realised, plans for a Romani encampment there continued to occupy Constant across the next few years, until at least the summer of 1961.

After taking his leave of the Situationist International in June 1960, Constant progressively developed the theme of nomadism in *New Babylon*, which is best understood as a form of 'primitive communism' linking together – through Romani, who act as a paradigm for both authentic humanity and, by extension, the asocial outcasts of Modernity – the New Babylonian of the future with Stone Age hunters and gatherers. Constant actively pursued information about Romani, corresponding



with both the Communauté Mondiale Gitane in Paris and the Gypsy Lore Society in Liverpool. When developing his *Skizze zu einer Kultur* manuscripts during this same time period, he elected to deliberately foreground Romani culture in the opening five pages of his *New Babylon* book through a flamenco *copla*, an extract from Nico Rost's 1963 interview of Ionel Rotaru and Vanko Rouda and a first person narrative of his December 1956 visit to a Romani encampment in Alba. Constant played Gypsy music throughout his lifetime, learning by ear a repertoire and the specific playing style for violin, guitar and – most of all – cimbalom. Before, during and after his work on *New Babylon*, Gypsy music was an integral part of Constant's overall artistic practice, inseparable from the physical spaces (both home and studio) in which he worked and realised his ideas daily. From 1964 at the latest, Constant's long-standing relationship with Gypsy music spilled over directly into his work on *New Babylon*, with the figure of the Gypsy musician appearing publicly across the next forty years in journals, exhibition catalogues, documentary films, exhibition openings and, increasingly, Constant's post-*New Babylon* drawings and paintings. Just as he marked important moments in the public display of his work, Constant also used Gypsy music to commemorate events in his private life.

Constant's relationship to Romani culture proves a fraught and confused one, caught between personal dealings with Romani individuals and a generic, romantic attraction to fictional ideas about Gypsies. Although there is some evidence that he was invested, at least in spirit, in their struggle for basic human rights and cultural recognition in the aftermath of two World Wars, it seems he did little to engage with the very real problems faced by Romani – of which he was certainly aware – during his lifetime. On the one hand he may, potentially, be credited with celebrating Romani people and culture through the positive way he embraced Gypsy musical traditions and incorporated this music – through public performances and a series of images – into the overall display, experience and reception of his work. Yet when given the opportunity as a prominent public figure in post-war European society, to raise even some awareness of the hardships and injustices faced by Romani, Constant remained largely silent – as did the Gypsyloists and Romani Rais. His fleeting acknowledgments of slavery, misery, poverty and ongoing persecution in his

revealing, 1974 interviews with Betty van Garrel and Ada van Benthem Jutting are matched and eclipsed by a self-indulgent romanticism that removes real Romani from our consciousness and immediately inserts mirages about Gypsies – as chicken thieves, wagon-dwelling nomads and musicians, who do not know the meaning of time and place – in their stead.

While Constant's relationship to Romani appears problematic and conflicted, the treatment of Romani by his historians is, arguably, even more so. It is to this issue that I turn now, in conclusion. In discussing the position of Romani in contemporary scholarship on *New Babylon* and the Situationist International, which is typically one of marginalisation and absence, my primary concern is with the way this specific field of study seems to understand, represent and reproduce ideas about mobility – with or without direct reference to Romani. There is an overall tendency in writings on Constant, the Situationists and their continuing legacies in the present to take Romani, alongside other alleged social outcasts and nomads, almost entirely for granted. Using Constant's project as a starting point, writers go on – whether they acknowledge the Romani origins of *New Babylon* or not – to produce theories about movement, flow, drift, homeless-ness, placeless-ness, cyber-space, network-space and flux that are, often, alarmingly disconnected from the lives that Romani actually do lead in the real world:

The recent explosion of technologies for the creation and distribution of images has placed us in a privileged moment of knowledge and relations. Relations to matter and to others, existing and dissolving in the virtuality of places which combine the now-here with the nowhere. The nomadism of the gypsies inspired the initial formulations of *New Babylon*; today, the new geography of human groups displays surprising continuations of this nomadism, making us citizens of a fluid world composed of fluctuating notions of place, origin, and context

(Marí 1998: 6)

Once we stop reading *New Babylon* literally, we see that it is already well under construction as *Soft Babylon* [...] the psychogeography experienced by any truly wired person at the turn of the millennium, in which contacts and acquaintances made electronically lead to a frenzy of world travel. The wired traveller and transmodern, transcosmopolitan citizen is a nomadic figure who encounters the megastructures of freeways leading to airports, only to go from the ambience of a favourite neighbourhood on one continent to the

ambience of another favourite neighbourhood on another continent, gradually building a mental map of the city of his or her situational experiences, a city which is all cities and none

(Novak 1998: 23)

This type of theorisation of transience, fluidity, digital technologies and instantaneity, now commonplace in writings on *New Babylon* and the Situationists appears to be lacking in sensitivity – or requiring, perhaps, a greater degree of historical and critical awareness. Theorising ‘our’ modern and post-modern relationships to conditions of non-place, impermanence and ephemerality, or to flows of technology, capital, media and information, assumes a common experience of the past and equal outlook for the future, neither of which exist in the real world at present. This is precisely the point raised by Miller, in his critique of Deleuze’s and Guattari’s nomad philosophy, when he argues that we must attend with precision, awareness, humility and compassion to the human contexts over top of which theories of movement, mobility and nomadism ultimately operate. We need to increase, rather than cast aside, our sensitivity to difference and question our ability to come to terms with the disparities in the human condition that still define our world today. We must work much harder than we have been I think if we wish to use *New Babylon* – like Deleuzian nomadology – to talk about life in the twenty-first century. We must strive to ‘enable ourselves to think through borders without simply pretending that they don’t exist’ (Miller 1998a: 209) or, as Pratt puts it, ‘learn to think through mobility’ (Pratt 2008: 238).

### ***Making Myths***

Given the wealth of scholarship published on *New Babylon* and the Situationist International, particularly since the 1990s, the repeat omission of Romani from our understanding of Constant’s work today is remarkable. This is especially true if we consider the wide-ranging impact colonial and post-colonial studies, particularly critical frameworks such as Orientalism and Primitivism, have had on contemporary arts research. In many texts on *New Babylon* and the Situationist International there is, however, still no mention of Romani. When Romani do feature, they typically present as ‘gypsies’ – intended or not, already a strong marker of indifference toward

them as individuals and a people. As ‘gypsies’, Romani appear between one and a few times, at most, in current scholarship and then only in hurried, one-off and sometimes ambiguous references to Constant’s 1956 model *Ontwerp voor zigeunerkamp* (Appendix 1). Even then, this work is often left unnamed, undated or incorrectly dated and the local, political contexts in which the project originated are typically cast aside in favour of formal analyses celebrating its space age aesthetic. Wigley’s description of the model, as delivered in his seminal 1998 monograph on *New Babylon*, illustrates the point. It usefully demonstrates, also, the ways in which Romani – who are never mentioned in Wigley’s writings on *New Babylon* and the Situationist International – are casually (if not deliberately) edited out of Constant’s project and, by extension, history:

Immediately after Constant returned to Amsterdam from Alba, his floating forms return to planet earth – not to solid ground, but to the zone just above the ground, which he endows with the fluid qualities he explored in outer space. In the *Ontwerp voor zigeunerkamp* (Design for a Gypsy Camp) model, the distinctive spirals of metal [...] are lodged sideways in the earth like a crashed spaceship. But the plexiglass panels are still in the air, defining a space within which moveable partitions are envisioned to accommodate the nomadic community that would use the structure as a base. The architecture is meant to float in an indeterminate space, open to the unpredictable desires of its occupants

(Wigley 1998: 50)

The few token lines we are given about ‘gypsies’ by other writers on *New Babylon* and the Situationist International are invariably buried deep within the journal articles, exhibition catalogues, book chapters and entire monographs on Constant and his project in which they appear. This further suggests Romani are of little consequence to our overall understanding of this material today.

The standard sentence or short paragraph about Romani circulating in the literature today essentially repeats a template – in terms of content, length and positioning – that first appeared in the second half of the 1960s at the latest. As *New Babylon* toured through the galleries of Northern and Western Europe in the 1960s and 1970s, exhibition catalogues were often produced for each occasion: Kunstnernes Hus in Oslo, Norway in 1967; Lunds Konsthall in Sweden in 1968; Galerie Daniel Gervis in Paris in 1972; and, Århus Kunstbygning in Denmark in 1976, for example. Like

some journal articles and other publications on Constant and *New Babylon* from this time period, many of these catalogues include a brief artist biography. Typically positioned at the back of the catalogue, the biography presents a short, chronological overview of Constant's life and work from his birth in 1920 through to his break with the Situationist International and solo work on *New Babylon*. Whether written in English, French, Swedish, Norwegian or Danish, they all read more or less the same – most likely taking the timeline included in van Haaren's short book of 1966, titled simply *Constant*, as a common point of origin:

1956 (winter) Took part in a congress of the *Mouvement International pour un Bauhaus Imaginiste* in Alba (Italy) organised by Asger Jorn. Constant met the painter Pinot Gallizio, at whose instigation he designed a plan for a permanent gypsy camp. This design was the first step for the series of scale-models for New Babylon, the Nomads city

(RKD 441: 16)

Over the next decade, we get the same, if not identical entry in a number of other sources (Appendix 3). The consistency and frequency with which this template has since been repeated in more recent writings on *New Babylon* suggests that the information about Constant's relationship with Romani now available in an ever-growing body of scholarship is both inherited and formulaic – based on knowledge that was acquired second or third-hand, at best, and repeated without much critical afterthought (Appendix 1). It is telling, if not symptomatic, that most writers on *New Babylon* today do not even provide a reference for their accounts of Constant's December 1956 visit to a Romani encampment in Alba. They do not interrogate that interaction and certainly do not look elsewhere, beyond the 1956 meeting in Alba, for anything to do with Romani. Minor changes occur in style, at most, creating a generic sequence of facts that seems to have acquired the status of common knowledge. While sometimes appearing to contain information about Romani – limited to Constant's interactions with Romani in Alba, only – *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship has largely descended into the realm of fiction. For the most part, scholars present various stereotypes about Gypsies – as freedom-loving, carefree, mystical, nomadic, musical, etc. – that are far removed from the reality of Romani. To be clear: they are not pointing to or commenting upon the ways Constant did this, but producing such myths all on their own. The ways in

which Romani may have actually experienced life (and continue to experience the world today) in the post-war period that saw the emergence of *New Babylon* are never considered.

The end result is a discourse, as writers like Said and Torgovnick would term it, which effectively silences Romani in the history of twentieth-century European society, art, politics and culture; or, just as frequently, removes them from it entirely. One of the most recent chronologies for Constant's work on *New Babylon*, developed by Wigley in 2001, is a clear case in point of the latter reflex. Unlike the standard chronology provided for *New Babylon* throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the entry for 1956 in Wigley's timeline – while seemingly more detailed and complete – has no place for Romani:

May: Guy Debord writes of the need to construct cities “made for” unconscious drifting.

September: Constant attends the First World Congress of Free Artists in the provincial Italian town of Alba, organized by Asger Jorn and Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio. As an “ex-artist,” Constant presents a statement on the need for a new kind of experimental architecture, and Gil Wolman presents a Lettrist International statement on the need for “unitary urbanism.” The ten attendees sign the “Alba Platform” on the necessity [sic] of a new kind of radical urbanism.

October: Constant stays on in Alba and starts making models of huge spaces that can be infinitely rearranged by the people who occupy them.

December: Debord travels to Alba to meet Constant for the first time. Over the course of several days, they exchange views on the politics of urbanism. (Wigley 2001a: 142)

When it is not erasing their presence altogether, this discourse overwrites the presence of real Romani by generating various fictions about them. Scholars of *New Babylon* and the Situationist International habitually project their own desires and fantasies onto Constant's meeting with Romani in Alba, for example, constructing increasingly confused stories about that event without pausing to double check, much less locate evidence for, their varied claims. With no point of reference to substantiate his work, Andreotti has Constant studying ‘the social organization of gypsy life in a community that visited Alba each year’ and, on top of that, actually

befriending ‘a gypsy community during a stay in Northern Italy’ (Andreotti 1996: 24; 2000: 51). Perhaps his work becomes, in turn, the unacknowledged source for Pinder’s later writings on *New Babylon*, who similarly claims that Constant, ‘Following his discussions in 1956 with the gypsies at Alba [...] continued to study spatial understandings within gypsy communities’ (Pinder 2005: 206). Repeated, recycled and casually embellished in this manner, Constant’s 1956 visit to a Romani encampment in Alba gradually becomes something else entirely: a prolonged period of serious anthropological or sociological study, the establishment of a genuine friendship between Constant and a group of Romani, etc.

Other scholars exhibit an equally carefree approach to basic issues of history, place and circumstance. Without evidence, Kavanaugh informs us that Constant interacted with ‘the gypsy communities of Southern Europe’, producing multiple design proposals for ‘gypsy camps’ throughout his early years of work on *New Babylon* (Kavanaugh 2008: 256). Mirzoeff describes *New Babylon* as opening up ‘a space for them [gypsies] to play as they chose without having to become settle to do so’ – almost as if Romani were school children in need of a sandbox (Mirzoeff 2005: 64). Okoye proclaims Gallizio to be ‘an actual scholar of nomadism (in the anthropological sense)’, a statement he rapidly eclipses by labelling Constant ‘a political activist who came to represent European Roma, Gypsies’ (Okoye 2004: 185). According to him, Constant ‘designed an encampment posing Roma as clientele transiting through this ‘hotel’ in their travels across European space’ (Appendix 1).

Against this backdrop of speculation, Constant’s relationship with Romani is left ambiguous and un-investigated. The 1956 encounter in Alba further functions as a catchall, the assumption being that there is nothing else to say, or know, about Constant’s interactions with Romani – never mind them. Thus, a people that have long been excluded from the cultural, historical, legal and social histories of the majority populations with whom they have coexisted and interacted for centuries end up inhabiting the marginalia of Situationist International and *New Babylon* history writing. This is not surprising. Commenting on the treatment of Romani and Romani

issues within scholarship generally, David Mayall sums up the sentiments of many specialists working in the field of Romani studies today:

In some quarters, including parts of the academic community, the study of Gypsies, unlike that of other minority groups, is still seen as somehow disreputable and the group as being unworthy of serious attention [...] the history of the group has mostly been written from an alarmingly ahistorical perspective. Too frequently the group is seen in splendid isolation, removed from the society, politics and the wider context of the time. The impression gained from many works is that the Gypsies existed in some kind of historical, geographical, temporal and social vacuum [...] the Gypsies have remained largely marginal [...] relegated to footnotes [...] or ignored altogether

(Mayall 2004: 26)

Thomas Acton has similarly highlighted, and advocated for an end to, ‘the marginalisation of Romani Studies in the world of knowledge’ (Acton in Mayall 2004: 23). Henry Huttenbach seconds these observations, describing Romani as ‘a people seen but little known’:

European art has effectively absorbed their presence; yet they remain remote. Though their number increases, government policies have tended to keep Gypsies on the fringe of society. Scholars are aware of their presence but most assign the study of Gypsies a low priority. To date, Gypsy studies are fragmented and sporadic, and far from integrated into the broader framework of the multiethnic societies and nations among whom they reside

(Huttenbach 1991a: v)

Given this overall tendency in academia, art and social policy alike to ignore, assimilate or minimise the presence of Romani – whether in history, the world we inhabit at present or, even, cultural discourse studies (Trumpener 1992: 848) – it is perhaps inevitable that they are most noticeable in *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship by way of their marginalisation and absence. When they do appear, as ‘gypsies’, Romani tend to circulate as overlooked, nameless and undifferentiated others. There is a danger, particularly in these contexts, with images like the series of photographs showing Gallizio interacting with Romani in Alba in the 1950s. Although such photographs can serve to highlight the historical, and very human contexts in which Constant’s work on *New Babylon* originated, they might also convey limiting, stereotypical ideas about Romani. As Hancock noted in 1981,



in a critique of ‘the entry *gypsy*’ then appearing in the most recent edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

“members of a wandering race [who] make a living by basket-making, horse dealing, fortunetelling...” This clearly excludes as Rom such prominent individuals as Vanko Rouda, Django Reinhardt, Vanya de Gila, Matéo Maximoff, Jan Cibula, Saip Jusuf and thousands of others

(Hancock 1981)

### ***Misrepresenting Romani***

Something similar happens, perhaps, when van Schaik includes two photographs of Gallizio interacting with Romani in Alba in his writings on *New Babylon* (van Schaik 2005b: 43, 56). Simply appended on to his account of the origins of the Situationist International in the *Primo congresso* organised by Jorn and Gallizio, the individuals pictured cease to exist as people, becoming instead representative or paradigmatic of all Romani. The captions provided seem to suggest this is the case, setting Gallizio – who is named – against a backdrop of anonymous individuals whose anonymity is only heightened by van Schaik’s failure to respect their ethnicity: ‘Gallizio (wearing a hat) with gypsies in Alba, 1956’; and, ‘Pinot Gallizio with gypsies on the marketplace of Alba’. Although it has been acknowledged in Britain since at least 1832, when ‘James Crabb observed [...] “that they do not like to be called *gipsies*”’, van Schaik – like most other writers on the Situationists and *New Babylon* – persists with this designation almost 175 years later. It is a serious issue for Hancock, who argues that the use of a lower case ‘g’ directly reinforces ‘the common idea that we are a people defined by behaviour rather than by ethnicity’ (Hancock 2002: xviii-xxi). This certainly seems to be the case in Kas Oosterhuis’s rather confused description of *New Babylon*, which appears to paraphrase Constant’s own writings while – like the work of other scholars – collapsing ‘gypsy’ and ‘nomad’ into one:

In *New Babylon* virtuality has penetrated the material, the sectors are data-driven and programmable, the structures and atmospheres react to the nomadic users. If the gypsy user were ever to return to the same spot, the environment would have changed completely [...] *New Babylon* is actually the temporally condensed version of our society [...] realized in the infrastructure of the global internet

Van Schaik appears to have included photographs of Gallizio and Romani into his work as a curiosity or afterthought; they are never described, discussed or referred to directly in his text. Beyond presenting his own version of the standard story of Constant's meeting with Romani in Alba – which he embellishes by drawing on long-standing, exoticising stereotypes about 'their song and dance and *savoir-vivre*' – van Schaik has no further interest in them and their place in history (van Schaik 2005b: 44; Appendix 1). The only references we find to 'gypsies' in the rest of his extended essay on *New Babylon* are statements that say nothing factual about Romani but do reveal much about the nature of his own assumptions and fantasies. When van Schaik writes about 'the romance of gypsy life that kick-started the project' and 'the nomadic freedom of the gypsies' (van Schaik 2005b: 115, 122), photographs originally documenting Romani persecution in post-war Italy threaten to become images of 'gypsy' *joie de vivre* – that is, parodies of real Romani life. Yet romance and nomadic freedom play no part in the lives of actual Romani, least of all in post-war Europe:

Given our image as carefree, happy-go-lucky Gypsies it comes as a surprise to some that there is a great deal of suppressed anger in our people. Romanies are bitter and angry at the indignities that racism brings; angry at the advantages your children seem to have in their schooling and expectations from life. There is anger at the *gadzo* academics [...] anger at the things the *gadzo* experts have written about us in their books and articles for all to see  
(Hancock 2002: 97-98)

Similar problems occur when Careri deploys photographs of Romani in his writings on *New Babylon*. One of his texts makes for a particularly relevant case study. Working for the leading architectural periodical *Domus*, Careri undertook a brief 'field trip', in August 2005, to the dedicated Romani campsite now in use in Alba. According to the account he published in *Domus* two months later, his primary aim was 'to reconstruct the origins of architecture's first nomadic utopia' – namely, Constant's *New Babylon* (Careri 2005: 101). His obsession, on the ground, was in fact to find the 'original' plot of land Constant had visited, 49 years earlier, in Alba.

Photographs from both the 1950s and 2005 illustrate the narrative, presented like entries in a diary, resulting from Careri's trip. Although his selection of imagery is different to van Schaik's, his captions are essentially the same (Careri 2005: 106): 'Pinot Gallizio meets the gypsy community, Alba, 1956'; and, 'Gypsies [capitalised because it starts the clause] in Alba on the bank of River Tanaro, 1956' [sic]. Adopting the same carefree approach to his material, Careri's treatment of Romani in the present is even more problematic. The individuals he met in Alba in 2005, some of whom were photographed and published in *Domus*, are left just as anonymous: an image of a women sitting in a chair, for example, is simply 'August 2005, the gypsy encampment in Alba' (Careri 2005: 109). Again, Romani are secondary, if not inconsequential, to Careri's primary interest in the history and legacies of Constant, *New Babylon* and the Situationist International.

Without perhaps understanding the parameters and full consequences of his actions, Careri engages in some licentious, pseudo-ethnographic 'fieldwork' – a term he in fact uses in the introduction to his text (Careri 2005: 103). Proving marginally useful to Careri as informants, individual Romani remain – in 2005 as in the 1950s – an unknowable, homogeneous whole. He repeats much of the mistakes of colonial ethnography:

After a quick walking tour of the camp we sit on a porch drinking coffee. Armin takes pictures while Francesco and Luca show the pictures of Pinot Gallizio with the gypsies to see if anyone recognises them. Among all the confusion, a grandmother is identified in the photos along with some distant cousins but, at times, the gypsies even take Gallizio him self for one of their relatives [...] Some of them believe that Pinot was an important ancestor [...] we explained to them how they have become the most famous nomadic community in the history of the avant-garde

(Careri 2005: 107, 110)

Careri continues to deal almost exclusively in these ambiguous plurals – they, them, their, the gypsies, the nomads – throughout the remainder of his somewhat patronising text. Basic details such as the names, genders and ages of the individuals he represents back to the readers of *Domus* are routinely omitted as Careri works toward his conclusion: a personal day dream about realising Situationist theories of urbanism in the present; taking up, in other words, were Constant, Gallizio and

Debord apparently left off in about 1956-1957 (Careri 2005: 111). Within this confusing exercise in ‘architectural fieldwork’, Careri does reveal the name of one Romani individual. Although he does not realise it himself, and does nothing to pursue it further in his text, his casual reference to a man known as ‘Taro’ offers some redemption:

The gypsies talk to us about Amilcare de Bar, referred to as ‘Taro’, a distant relative of theirs who fled from Auschwitz. He became an important public figure in Alba and represented the Piedmontese gypsies in Geneva. He was Pinot’s contact and today he lives in Cuneo

(Careri 2005: 110)

The passing mention of Amilcare Debar, as the name is spelled elsewhere (Boursier 1999), reveals the limitations and pitfalls of focusing on ‘the’ Romani of Alba. The danger is that photographs of Gallizio interacting with Romani in Alba in the 1950s – people whose names and individual histories we may never know for certain – have the potential to stand in for all Romani, regardless of time, place and circumstance. If we become fixated on photographs of Alba 1956, only, then we fail to acknowledge the other ways Gallizio and Constant may have interacted with Romani in the post-war period. More importantly, we run the very real risk of limiting the true diversity of Romani and – like the Gypsylorists – grossly overlooking their increasingly politicised presence in the post-war period.

It seems symptomatic that the few images of Romani that have appeared in the available scholarship are precisely those that corresponded to and further reproduce the longstanding tropes about wandering nomads living romantic, untrammelled lives cut off from the rest of society. Photographs of Debar, featured in the second volume of an important three-part study of the treatment of Romani throughout Europe during World War II (Fings et al. 1997; Kenrick 1999; 2006) shatter the fantasy. In her harrowing account of the treatment of Romani under Fascism in Italy, Giovanna Boursier reproduces two photographs from Debar’s private archive, both of which show him during his time as an anti-Fascist freedom-fighter of the 48th Garibaldi Brigade (Figure 8.1). Having been captured by the Fascists, Debar ‘escaped to the mountains’ where, according to Boursier, he stayed ‘with the partisans until the end of the war’, acting as ‘a dispatch-rider in the area around Cuneo’ (Boursier 1999: 29-

30). His relationship with Gallizio, then, may well have been a complex one. Armed with a high-powered machine gun and a belt of ammunition, the photograph of Debar and a fellow Partisan fighter stationed on a hill top somewhere in the vicinity of Cuneo suggests Careri's easy understanding of 'the most famous' Romani 'in the history of the avant-garde' is well off the mark.<sup>92</sup> An edited volume by Acton (2000), *Scholarship and the Gypsy Struggle*, includes photographs of Vanko and Leulea Rouda – as well as other Romani activists and intellectuals – that similarly and crucially act as counterpoint to Careri's notion of 'the famous' Romani in Alba.

If the established historiography of the Situationist International celebrates – often through photographs, alone – events such as the *Primo congresso* of September 1956, the founding meeting in Cosio d'Arroscia the following summer, the Munich Congress of April 1959 and the riots of May 1968, for example, then it is worth taking stock of some parallel developments in 'The Romani Movement'. Puxon recalls the foundation of the Gypsy Council, in England, in December 1966 (Puxon 2000: 99-100). Held in a pub, the Bull's Head in St Paul's Cray, where the words 'No Gypsies' were painted on the wall, forty Romani – including Vanko and Leulea Rouda – arrived and held their meeting, despite the licensee's best efforts to turn them away (Figure 8.2a). Three years later, the Roudas – accompanied this time by Vanko's wife, Maisa – appeared in Strasbourg as part of the first CIT delegation to the Council of Europe, where they were filmed holding the blue and green Romani flag outside the Council's main entrance (Figure 8.2b). The purpose of their visit was to deliver firsthand accounts of the harassment of Romani throughout Europe, particularly in the area around Birmingham, England – where 'A boy of six lost an eye and a hand in an explosion' during a major police operation to evict Romani families from Brownhills. In Walsall 'three children were burned to death', while in Kent 'three petrol bombs were lobbed at a lone caravan. A woman and child were badly burned'. The CIT delegates, armed with '200 pages of documents and a reel of television film' spent an entire morning recording their testimony. That afternoon, 'a group of parliamentarians [...] assembled to view the film material' and 'were visibly shaken by the scenes of brutality in which British police and security men set about women and children' (Puxon 2000: 102-103).

Vanko Rouda was later a key figure during the First and Second World Romani Congresses, held in London in 1971 and Geneva in 1978 (Figure 8.3a, Figure 8.3b). A powerful image of a ‘Tent burning ceremony’ (Puxon 2000: 112), carried out during the time of the First Congress shows Vanko Rouda and other Romani holding up a placard declaring their political presence to the world (Figure 8.4a). This type of activism was increasingly utilised by Romani. Klímova-Alexander, for example, describes how Leulea Rouda (Figure 8.4b) – who ran the German branch of the CMG, headquartered in Frankfurt, ‘led a Romani demonstration during the wreath-laying ceremony by the West German ambassador at the Arc de Triomphe’ in Paris. He had done extensive work preparing and submitting documentation in support of over 4,000 war crimes indemnification cases, and was protesting against the fact that only a few hundred Romani individuals, at best, had received small sums in return (Klímová-Alexander 2007: 628, 632, 653).

### ***Reproducing gypsies***

A people with dynamic and complex histories, identities and voices of their own, Romani are too easily and uncritically glossed over in *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship. Reduced, at best, to fictional constructs, their potential relationships to Constant’s work and thinking on *New Babylon*, or to the broader aesthetic, theoretical and political projects of the Situationist International, are left wholly unacknowledged. Time and again, Romani either function as the scenic, rural backdrop to scholarly accounts of the Situationists’ radical urban politics, or are kept out of such discussions completely. In all writings on *New Babylon* and the Situationist International to date, the presence, agency, group and individual identities of Romani are at most restricted to short asides embedded deep within body text or, alternatively, hidden away in footnotes, endnotes, appendixes, artist biographies and image captions. While played out in arenas that appear far removed from such scholarship, the real world parallels – and eventual consequences – of this failure to acknowledge the presence of actual Romani must be taken seriously:

After the war, the fate of the Gypsies as victims of a concerted effort to exterminate them was subsumed in the overall charges of “crimes against humanity” [...] The Gypsies’s victimization [...] became a mere footnote of the Nuremberg Trials

(Huttenbach 1991b: 390)

In the many books written describing the Nazi period and the persecution of the Jews, Gypsies usually appear as a footnote or an appendix

(Kenrick 2007: xli)

After nearly two decades of sustained research on the Situationist International, McDonough – whose earliest publications on Debord and the Situationists date back to at least 1994 – has only now begun posing speculative questions about the historical contexts to which Constant’s work might belong and the part Romani might play here (McDonough 2008a; 2008b). Using the words Roma and Romany instead of ‘gypsies’, McDonough exhibits at least some awareness for the political problems of representation. At the same time, he gives us no more than the standard story about Constant’s encounter with Romani in Alba (McDonough 2008a: 87; Appendix 1). Leaving this story unreferenced, McDonough looks for no further material – archival or otherwise – to bring into his discussion. Although he acknowledges World War II and the Holocaust as events occurring ‘only eleven short years’ (McDonough 2008a: 89) before the start of *New Babylon*, McDonough takes these important historical contexts somewhat for granted in his final analysis. Instead, he expounds freely on Lefebvre’s concept of ‘experimental utopia’ and – deliberately or not – denies Romani the possibility of existing on their own terms; that is, in ways other than and outside of their availability for Constant, the Situationist International and, indeed, his own academic pursuits. Romani prove useful to McDonough only to the extent to which they are caught up in his production of avant-garde theory:

the nomadic Romany people became in this case emblematic of a broader condition of populations trapped in a paradoxical topological position, at once outside and interior to a dominant social order. The Roma were distinguished precisely by their radical exteriority, by their pariah status that rendered them akin to the classical figure of the *homo sacer* [...] denied a “right to the city,” they would find an appropriate setting in Constant’s (never realized) project. His *Gypsy Camp* [...] sought metaphorically to transform the conditions of physical deprivation imposed upon the Romany people into a kind of sensorial richness, using advanced industrial materials to re-create

the itinerant campground as space-age center of coordination, sheltering yet open, permanent yet flexible

(McDonough 2008a: 88)

McDonough continues in this vein, revealing his preference for ‘the figure of the pariah’, as opposed to actual Romani, throughout the remainder of his text. While he generates some seductive theory in the process, the political consequences of his writing – which do not even consider the possibility of primitivism in Constant’s work, much less his own – seem problematic, at best: ‘the urbanistic challenge of the pariah entailed a radical refusal of any spatial interiority, of any fixed “home,” in favor of a volatilized mobility’ (McDonough 2008a: 90). This may sound exciting, but it fails to account for very real issues of basic human rights, including mobility, still faced by most Romani today.

Other scholars of the Situationist International and *New Babylon* do much the same, writing with feigned authority on a people they seem to know very little about.

Hailey, for example, attempts to stake a claim to ethnographic accuracy by using the term ‘The Zingari Gypsies’ (Hailey 2008: 76-77; Appendix 1). Perhaps intending to be politically correct, he reveals a lack of basic knowledge. If Hailey had checked, he would have discovered that: ‘zingari’ is the Italian equivalent of ‘gypsy’; that many Romani consider it to be a damaging and pejorative term; and, that the combination of the two is, most likely, doubly insulting – from an etymological perspective, it amounts to ‘Heathen Egyptians’ (Kenrick 2007: xxxvii). We get something similar, again, from Careri (2005: 103; Appendix 1) who uses the pejorative ‘gypsy’ together with the recognised term Sinti – a word that is used for purposes of self-designation by at least some Romani today (Kenrick 2007: 247).

Lambert casually refers to Romani in his work as ‘les Gitans, peuple de la musique’ and ‘ces nomades musiciens’ (Lambert 1992: 10, 88) – the Gypsies, people of music; and, those nomad musicians. Noting that the assumption of ‘an inborn musical ability’ is one of the persisting stereotypes attributed to Romani, Hancock reminds us that, although musicianship is ‘found among Gypsies to be sure’, it is just the same ‘among all human groups’ (Hancock 1976). Lambert’s easy allusion to nomadism is also mistaken: ‘Remember that there is no ‘genetic’ disposition to travel; it is solely



the result of circumstance' (Hancock 2002: 101). Liégeois similarly argues that 'The spontaneous practices and cultural expression' of nomadism is 'directly affected by practices imposed from without' (Liégeois 2007: 38). Lambert is not content with just these two stereotypes, however; in a later text on *New Babylon*, he proclaims that Romani are 'incorrigible drifters' who prefer play over work and, moreover, inhabit a time and space absolutely removed from the rest of humanity:

Dans notre monde de la fixité et du travail, les Gitans incarnent la mobilité (si ce n'est la liberté tout court) ainsi que les activités ludiques ou artistiques (musique et danse, prédiction de l'avenir, etc.) préférées au travail et à la production de richesses. Comme échappant au temps de l'Histoire, ils vivent dans un espace non prescrit, un *non lieu*: mais n'est-ce pas le sens même du mot *utopie*? En outre, "dériveurs" incorrigibles...

(Lambert 1997: 19)

(In our world of immobility and work, the Gypsies incarnate mobility (if not just plain freedom) as well as ludic or artistic activities (music and dance, fortune telling, etc.), which they prefer to work and the production of wealth. As if they were not dwelling in Historical time, they live in a non-prescribed space, a *non place*: but is this not the very meaning of the word *utopia*? Besides, incorrigible "drifters"...)

Careri writes with a similarly mistaken confidence about Romani, using his August 2005 visit to Alba to generate various 'anthropological' fantasies about Romani as a people. These include authoritative commentary on complex subjects such as family, social structure and attitudes toward property. Although his firsthand experience of Romani culture was limited to a single visit to a particular encampment that lasted no more than a few hours,<sup>93</sup> Careri nonchalantly assumes a position of ethnographic privilege when presenting his observations about 'all' Romani:

Gypsy families are large and extended and everyone is related to everyone else, therefore the borders of their public and private areas are absolutely fluid. Objects are everywhere and they don't seem to belong to anyone because they actually belong to everyone. These objects include: sinks, barbecues, swings, rocking chairs and ladders. The gypsy city is a village-home and a home-village, a true open-space living area surrounded by multifunctional roofs which cover kitchens, porches, trailers, trucks, cars, machines and storage areas. Everything is contained under and we're thrilled at seeing a living and tangible New Babylon

(Careri 2005: 107)

In the image captions provided for a few of the photographs taken during his August 2005 ‘fieldwork’, these half-truths, fictions and notably, personal architectural desires, are repeated and reiterated: ‘In the nomadic encampment the boundaries between public and private are blurred’; ‘Objects are everywhere. They belong to everyone: sinks, barbecues, swings, ladders...’; and, ‘The encampment has a large central piazza and path which crosses the thresholds home’ [sic] (Careri 2005: 109, 111).

There is not a single text on Romani, reputable or otherwise, informing any of this work. When McDonough generates engaging theory about ‘the pariah’, he does so freely – and without noticing that ‘the pariah syndrome’ was, already 21 years earlier, the sole subject of a seminal study by Hancock (1987b). A leading Romani scholar and activist, Hancock has spent the past forty years, or more, challenging the work of non-Romani who trade carelessly in damaging stereotypes about his people (Hancock 1976; 1981; 1987a; 2004b; 2007b). McDonough does not confront the idea of ‘the pariah’ in his text, but gladly and intentionally feeds off it. Uninterested in the reasons ‘why the image of the gypsy as (unwelcome) nomad is the longest established of all definitions and representations of the group’ (Mayall 2004: 267), he enters problematic terrain: ‘The images often associated with the negative representation’ of Romani ‘employ ideas of infestation, with the gypsies being seen as animals or sub-humans, and even likened to rats and pests’. In replacing actual Romani with the figure of the pariah, McDonough ‘not only permits such descriptions and associations but, arguably, does much to promote them’ in turn (Mayall 2004: 268).

Lambert also indulges in propagating stereotypes about ‘gypsies’ without reference to a single text about Romani. Conjuring up ideas about Tarot cards, palm reading and crystal balls, he problematically overwrites difficult and pressing issues – such as contemporary neo-Nazi racism and the forced sterilisation of Romani women, for example – by suggesting Romani live a leisurely, utopian existence full of music and other ludic activities. Careri’s work similarly lacks grounding. There is an overall sense these authors have not even considered the possibility that such a thing as

‘Romani studies’ might exist. Quoting Constant’s daughter, Martha Nieuwenhuys, who told Careri that Constant had “‘always been a sort of gypsy’”, Careri goes on to recount how ‘Constant had told him that nomad blood ran in his veins through a maternal ancestor who had married a French ‘Manu’ girl’. He then puts forth some spurious evidence to back this claim: ‘Martha, then shows us a fantastic photo of Johannes Theodorus Petrus Cornelissen, Constant’s maternal grandfather who looks just like Gallizio wearing earrings in king of the gypsies style’ (Careri 2005: 107). This says nothing about Romani, but does suggest Constant fits into that category of ‘devotees’, ‘hippies and fanatics’ ‘attracted to Gypsies’ labelled ‘fantasy correspondents’ by Hancock – just two years, in fact, after Constant put *New Babylon* to rest in The Hague in 1974 (Hancock 1976).

Rather than acknowledge the existence of actual Romani people, scholars of *New Babylon* and the Situationist International unanimously overwrite them with fictional versions of ‘gypsies’. It is a pattern recognisable in Western cultural production generally, including Constant’s 1974 statements (RKD 386; RKD 390[e]) about his romantic attraction to Romani:

The further away the nomad is, the better. When Gypsies are so far away that they verge on myth, they suddenly become alluring: handsome, artistic, living untrammelled lives, symbols of freedom. They are accepted provided they are confined to designated areas and to folklore: music and dance, the circus, caravans in approved sites. The only good Gypsy is the mythical one – the one who does not exist

(Liégeois 1986: 141)

Hancock spares no words in damning the work of academics that participate, knowingly or not, in this ongoing process of mythification. He argues that scholars – equipped with the tools necessary to reflect, think and write critically about the political consequences of representation – must acknowledge the impact their work has on others. Published writings become sources of information and authority, turned to by colleagues, students, the media and members of the wider public alike, who often go on to repeat the information they are given. The steadily expanding bibliography of works now available on Constant, *New Babylon* and the Situationist

International seems to suggest this material is currently being read – and thus reproduced – by a rather large audience:

It is difficult to know which group is the most damaging, those gadje [non-Romani] who cling to the golden earrings stereotype, or those who know enough to acknowledge its falseness, but who nevertheless belittle or ignore what is happening outside of their own narrow, self applied academic confines

(Hancock 1981)

### ***Real Romani***

A cursory look at Romani experiences of the post-war period in Europe, no matter how fleeting, is a depressing – and absolutely necessary – exercise. Liégeois gives an unsettling account of multiple abuses committed against Romani in France, alone, where caravans and camping sites were routinely burned down and bulldozed in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, often resulting in the deaths of Romani men, women and children alike (Liégeois 1986: 113-125). The situation appears no different today, with Romani being targeted in 2010 for mass deportation (BBC 2010). Acton gives a similar overview for England. In 1964 the Labour leader of Birmingham Council ‘called for ‘the extermination of the impossibles’’ while, in 1967, a Councillor in Hitchin ‘called for concentration camps’ to be established (Acton 1974: 175-178). Similar opinions were voiced, again in an official capacity, in 1984, with one circular declaring: ‘there is no solution to the Gypsy problem short of mass murder’. One year later, ‘Apartheid laws’ were introduced in Bradford, ‘making it illegal for Gypsies to come within city limits without a permit’ (Hancock 1991a: 406-407). In his writings on *New Babylon*, Barry Curtis turns to the Caravan Sites Act of 1968 – but only as reported in the ‘Cosmorama’ section of *Architectural Design* (AD 1968/12: 561) – to validate his claim that ‘a nomadic lifestyle seemed a logical response to new technological capabilities’ in the 1960s (Curtis 2001: 79). What he fails to realise – unsurprisingly given his limited frame of reference – is that this legislation was directly aimed at Romani. Appearing to grant new rights and freedoms to ‘people of nomadic habit’ it was in fact ‘assimilationist’ (Liégeois 1986: 131). Problems continue throughout Britain today between Romani and the state (Hawes and Perez 1996), receiving occasional coverage in the media (Bowers 2000;

2002; Bowers-Burbridge 2000; Casciani 2004a; 2004b; 2004c; Hall 2004; McDonald 2009; Stone 2009; Turner 1999b).

It is the same, all over again, everywhere else in Europe. In the former Czechoslovakia ‘Law 74 of 1958’ banned nomadism with immediate effect and ‘was applied with considerable brutality’. Police there instituted an almost instantaneous reign of terror, indiscriminately killing horses owned by Romani and stripping wheels off their wagons. By the late 1970s things had only gotten worse, with human rights watchdogs ‘charging that children had been taken from their families’ and forcefully institutionalised. The sterilisation of Romani women – an official government programme which began in 1972 (Hancock et al. 1998: 98) – had ‘become a common practice’ (Liégeois 1986: 110-113). As in Czechoslovakia, nomadism was legally banned in Bulgaria in 1958, with segregated schools being set up there eleven years later (Kenrick 2007: xxviii-xxix).

Germany was no better, despite the deplorable treatment of Romani during World War II. The ‘Central Office for Combating the Gypsy Menace’, for example, originally established in 1898, ‘continued to function under that name until 1970’ (Trumpener 1992: 856). The following year, in 1971 the Bonn Government of West Germany – where the Württemberg Ministry of Interior had declared, in 1950, ‘that judges hearing restitution claims should bear in mind that “Gypsies were persecuted under the National Socialist regime *not* for any racial reasons, but because of an asocial and criminal record’ – further freed ‘itself from its responsibility to Gypsies by claiming that their disposition was strictly on the grounds of security’. Nine years on, in 1980, a government spokesman ridiculed ‘Romani demands for war crime reparations’ as “unreasonable” and “slander[ous]”. Later in the decade, Romani requests to participate in commemoration ceremonies at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp were repeatedly denied, with Romani being accused in 1985 of insulting ‘the memory of the Holocaust by wishing to be associated with it’. This is a sentiment that has been echoed in other parts of the world. In 1984 the Chairman of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council dismissed ‘Gypsy demands for representation’ in that organisation as “cockamamie” (Hancock 1991a: 406-407).

Although President Reagan made the first, and solitary, Romani appointment to that Council three years later, the Bush administration repealed the position in 2002 – once again denying Romani ‘recognition of their history of the Holocaust’ (Hancock 2002: 50). Before, during and after World War II we find similar, seemingly endless lists of shocking, often racially motivated crimes against Romani in almost every country in the world (Fings et al. 1997; Kenrick 1999; 2006).

While Constant and Rotaru – whose words now circulate in *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship (Appendix 2), as strange testimony of his anonymity – were more or less contemporaries, their experiences of life cannot be collapsed together or made equivalent. This is not to say Rotaru was a victim, only, of history and circumstance while Constant lived a charmed life free from all hardship – it is simply to acknowledge that mobility has not historically been an equal human right, and is by no means guaranteed today. In the particular case of Romani, access to mobility and modes of mobility are conditioned and often severely restricted by both official legislature and popular prejudices that target them, specifically, as a people. The ‘free-roaming’ nomads are, in reality, frequently and uniquely singled out for the most severe forms of government control.

In 1912, eight years before Constant was born in the Netherlands, anti-nomadic laws were introduced in France, replete with special identity cards called *carnet anthropométrique*. These cards were required exclusively of ‘nomads’ (in practice, Romani) and used to systematically control, track and oppress them as a people. Supplementary legislation introduced in 1913 itemised the specific data required for each card:

marital status, height, chest circumference, breadth of shoulders, length and circumference of head, bizygomatic index (span from cheekbone to cheekbone), length of right ear, length of middle and little fingers of left hand, length from elbow to fingertips of left arm, eye colour, fingerprints, and two photographs (full face and profile) of the holder

(Hubert 1999: 62)

Retained well into the post-war period – when Rotaru lived in France and fought stridently for their abolishment – these *carnet anthropométrique* had to be produced

on demand to police and local authorities alike. Stamps, often for a fee, were required for stopping in individual towns and communes, both at arrival and departure – and then only during the opening hours of local offices. Checks were often carried out daily – sometimes multiple times a day – and punishments were in place for anyone who did not have their papers with them when stopped and questioned. Constant, meanwhile, travelled freely around Northern and Western Europe in the immediate aftermath of World War II, receiving funding from the British Arts Council to spend time in London in the early 1950s.

When Constant began working on ‘the famous design for a gypsy camp in Alba’ (Zweifel et al. 2006: 10) in 1956, the latest edition of *Encyclopedia Britannica*, released that year, stated ‘that “the mental age of an average adult Gypsy” was “about that of a child of ten”’ (Hancock 2002: 98). That same year, a decision taken by ‘the West German Supreme Court’ declared ‘the Sinti Gypsies to be a criminal organization rather than an ethnic minority’ (Trumpener 1992: 856). Nine years on, when the Haags Gemeentemuseum mounted a major exhibition of Constant’s work in 1965 – and Constant posed as a Gypsy musician for the frontispiece appearing in the catalogue – Rotaru’s CMG was outlawed by De Gaulle’s government in France, in what was most likely a direct attempt to silence mounting Romani claims for Nazi war crime reparations. Six years later, as Constant exhibited in Germany and Denmark, lectured in France, published in *Opus International* and appeared on Dutch television (Wigley 1998: 249), Rotaru was again at odds with the French authorities.

In early 1971 a group of Lovari Romani from Poland were detained in Brittany while attempting to travel through France using *Romanestan* passports that had previously been issued to them by Rotaru.<sup>94</sup> In April that year, Rotaru appeared – adopting his public persona of Vaida Voevod III, ‘King of the Romani’ – in the commune of Vannes, demanding their immediate release. Acting ‘in defence of “his subjects”’, he confidently proclaimed to both the media and French government that his passports ‘were recognized by 45 nations’. After being ‘placed under juridical control’ for his actions, Rotaru began a hunger strike in protest. Remaining in police custody, he was

eventually transferred to hospital for care. Three days later ‘the case was referred to the passport headquarters in Paris’, with Rotaru being released soon after (Klímová-Alexander 2007: 630; cf. Liégeois 1976: 138-144).

In 1973, one year before the Haags Gemeentemuseum staged its major retrospective of Constant’s *New Babylon* work – with Constant, himself, playing cimbalom in a Gypsy orchestra on the opening night of the exhibition – a Romani gave this account of the current situation in France, originally published in the Romani periodical

*Monde gitan*:

These days we’re checked three times every hundred kilometres or so: papers, files, three hours at a time. Even our trailers and the lorries are searched. They open the doors to see if we’re carrying alcohol [...] One day a doctor told us not to leave with sick kids. Even though the landowner agreed to let us stay, the guards drove us out. It’s like we were Indians in America in the 1880s or something [...] The local authorities throw us out, and five or six gendarmes come along with vans. We were in Belfort for half a day when they showed up with machine-guns

(Liégeois 1986: 120)

### **‘Operazioni black out’**

In his later study of *Culture and Imperialism*, Said warns us that ‘There is a great difference’ between ‘the optimistic mobility, the intellectual liveliness, and ‘the logic of daring’’ contained in the work of many contemporary artists, academics and theoreticians, ‘and the massive dislocations, waste, misery, and horrors endured in our century’s migrations and mutilated lives’. There is a darker side to mobility, in other words – including very real instances of ‘mass deportation, imprisonment, population transfer, collective dispossession, and forced migration’ – which must not be forgotten (Said 1993: 403). Miller makes a case for much the same, arguing that the post-modern theorisation of nomadism – epitomised though not exclusive to Deleuze’s and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* – often slips into problematic terrain:

if our dream of smooth space, flow and negotiated assemblage remains based on fantasies of the non-Western world as a realm beyond representation and division (the “Orient of rhizomes and immanence” that Deleuze and Guattari continue to invest in), then it will inevitably replicate primitivism

(Miller 1998a: 209)



The primitivism that operates throughout Constant's project appears to reproduce itself in similar – if not increasingly problematic – ways in contemporary *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship. There is a pattern of indifference toward important questions of otherness that remains largely unchecked, at present, in this field of study. The result is a continuing theorisation of nomadism that appears to take 'the nomad' almost entirely for granted. The work of three separate writers – McDonough, de Zegher and Kavanaugh – illustrates the point. In each case, the Romani origins of *New Babylon* have been either cast aside or ignored, only for Constant's project to then act as a platform from which to produce *new* theories about movement, flow and flux. These writers seem to assume that their concepts, developed within a limited – and privileged – academic frame of reference, are transferable across time, place and circumstance. Kavanaugh, whose writings comparing Constant's work against Deleuzian nomadology (in an entirely different way than I have done) are some of the most recent contributions to *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship, raises the stakes of this replicated primitivism considerably. Taking her assumptions a step further than writers like McDonough and de Zegher (who unknowingly evokes 'primitive communism'), she makes jarring, uneasy comparisons between 'us' and – now, in place of Romani – 'the homeless':

New Babylon imagined a world [...] that hypostatized half of the Baudelairean equation – it was defined solely by the fleeting, the ephemeral, and the contingent. Hence its uncanny familiarity to present-day viewers: in attempting to design a utopia, a no-place, Constant inadvertently prefigured our contemporary nonplaces, the airports, auto routes, shopping centres, and generally that whole pseudo-architecture which has come increasingly to define our everyday lives at the end of the [twentieth] century  
(McDonough 2001: 100)

Prefiguring the current debate about architecture in the often placeless age of electronics, Constant seems to have conceived of an urban model that literally envisaged the World Wide Web. In the network of sectors in *New Babylon*, one configures his or her own space and can wander in an unobstructed way from site to site, without limits. In this respect, Constant's project represents a spatialization of a virtual world, where people can move, meet, and interact anytime, anywhere. As an unlimited communication system, the work is as radical as ever – an outstandingly visualized concept that dispenses with

established ideas of everyday life, community, and domesticity and challenges the very notion of architecture in the era of electronic space  
(de Zegher 2001: 10)

Although the vast urban spaces proposed by Constant in *New Babylon* have not been built, the nomadic existence in contemporary society has led to a real and marked impact on our physical environment [...] In living a nomadic existence [...] we in fact carry our habitat around with us as we move [...] Consequently, a worker's Palmtop or mobile phone establishes his or her determination in space through GPS [...] In extreme – but by no means unusual cases – the homeless live out of cars or shopping carts containing all their worldly possessions, yet those of us with more space live in a mobile environment where we come back to the place where we store all our possessions. That place is known as home. However, we have little more rootedness to this place than the homeless person who must fight for a choice place on the street every night. In the end, paradoxically, one of the most profound problems with the possibility of a nomadic life is namely: *what to do with your stuff?*

(Kavanaugh 2008: 266-267)

Though certainly something to which we might aspire, the fantasy that we (all) already live lives of pure, unrestricted movement must be second-guessed.

McDonough, de Zegher and Kavanaugh are not, of course, alone in their celebrations of mobility. Scholars writing in fields ranging from social theory, cultural studies and geography to literary criticism, art and architecture appear to be equally enthralled at present by metaphors of movement. Cresswell has critiqued this apparent academic fashion trend, usefully questioning 'the postmodern embrace of all things' nomadic 'through a consideration of who travels and why' (Cresswell 1997: 360). He finds metaphors of the nomad to be produced by metropolitan writers who readily assume their daily reference points – 'academics attending conferences' – to be universally valid; an error in judgement that negates 'the very real differences which exist between the mobile citizens of the postmodern world and the marginalized inhabitants of other times and places'. Thus, the urban homeless and the hyper-privileged, refugees, stowaways and Western intellectuals passing leisurely through duty free shops in JFK and Heathrow are facilely collapsed into one, 'All linked [...] by their expression of nomadic desire' (Cresswell 1997: 377).

Pratt has taken a similarly critical view, expressing her concern for the ways in which we 'are often invited to imagine' movement – a term applied to people,

money, information and raw materials alike – in terms of ‘flow’. Pratt sounds a note of caution, pointing out that flow is a dangerously ‘horizontal’ metaphor that proves ‘to be perverse’ when considered against the extreme ‘verticality’ of the human condition: the mass movements of migrant workers from Latin and South America to the United States, for example, or the thousands of captive female sex slaves trafficked into Western Europe from ‘elsewhere’ (Pratt 2008: 239-242). Aligning myself with these authors, I think it necessary to counter the increasing dominance of ‘the nomadic in the postmodern lexicon’ and resist forms of scholarship in which ‘no or little attention is paid to the historical conditions which produce specific forms of movement’ (Cresswell 1997: 377).

There is an obvious disparity between the lives of many Romani, now as in the past, and the dream of nomadism developed by Constant in *New Babylon*. That disparity arguably intensifies when Constant’s nomadic desires, originating in a time and place when Romani had very recently been targets for complete annihilation, are reproduced today – often irrespective of context, either then or now. When McDonough argues that Constant’s work ‘prefigures [...] our everyday lives at the end of the [twentieth] century’, ‘Hence its uncanny familiarity to present-day viewers’, I wonder how far his understanding of ‘our lives’ extends? Does it reach beyond the world experienced by his fellow academics, for example, and other similarly privileged, metropolitan visitors to the leading galleries and museums *New Babylon* calls home?

In 1976, just two years after Constant’s project was purchased, almost in full, by the Haags Gemeentemuseum, Hancock warned against appropriating the nomad as a symbol of freedom and vitality. His criticisms of non-Romani attitudes toward his people (which must be read against Constant’s easy references to ‘chicken thieves’ and ‘music’ only two years earlier) are just as relevant today:

The attitude of the non-Gypsy to the Gypsy has much in common with the attitude which conquering or socially dominant groups display toward their victims [...] admired for their style, music and so on, and yet despised as thieves, rapists and the like [...] It is a peculiar though recurrent pattern of behaviour which causes the ascendant group to accuse its victims of precisely

the same crimes which have been used to subjugate them; nevertheless the despised groups are looked to as a source of vitality and romance, and as having lifestyles of uninhibited and carefree expressiveness

(Hancock 1976)

In revealing and discussing the important Romani subtext of Constant's work my intention has not been to strip *New Babylon* of its potential for provocation. Nor do I wish to curtail its usefulness as a model for future modes of experimental practice. I think it is important, however, to keep the historical contexts to which *New Babylon* responded, and to which we respond now, firmly in perspective. Theorising the nomad invariably points back to real people – often with acute consequences for Romani (nomadic or not) and other, similarly marginalised peoples. While Western European and North American tourists, university students and peripatetic academics of a certain class and citizenship have, since the 1960s, perhaps been presented with more opportunities for individual mobility, Romani have by contrast found it increasingly difficult to lead lives of their own choosing, much less move about *or* settle freely in the ways they would like. This is, also, the experience of many indigenous, nomadic and hunting-gathering peoples around the globe. From about the time Constant first began working on *New Babylon*, many of these peoples have been engaged in long and difficult struggles for cultural recognition and basic human rights, still ongoing at present.

In these contexts, especially, I find contemporary notions of urban, digital, cyber and techno nomadism, to which Constant's work is often linked, to be contentious. We are not, today, nomads. We are not, today, New Babylonians. To pretend otherwise is to replicate the primitivism that initially drove Constant's project – if only, I fear, in more problematic, insensitive and increasingly severe ways.

As writers like van Schaik desire to 'release New Babylon from its Post-Modernist shackles and reinstate it as a utopian and political project for a post-political world' (van Schaik 2005a: 8), I wonder whether we can really risk the consequences of forgetting the ways in which Constant's project is also earthbound. *New Babylon* still seems fixed, in many ways, to a place that is geographically locatable near the banks of the Tanaro, a 276 kilometre-long river running a winding course from Liguria to

Bassignana through the rural countryside of North-western Italy. A Romani encampment in Alba, the original catalyst behind Constant's vision of global nomadism, remains as counterpoint to one of the twentieth century's most daring experimental projects.

Located just north of the town centre, Alba's present day 'Campo Nomadi' – now captured by satellite imagery and logged by new technologies such as Google Maps – is a site surrounded (and contained) by industry. Cut off from Alba by the E74 highway, a European Route running from Nice, in France, to Alessandria in Italy, this is perhaps *New Babylon's* one truly lasting legacy. In 2008, three years after Constant's death, Alba's dedicated Romani encampment was the scene of 'L'operazione Black Out', a sting operation launched by Cuneo's police force in 2008. Replete with troopers, 80 police dogs and a helicopter, it apparently sought to put an end to years of alleged pirate energy consumption – calculated to be over 700,000 Euros from 1994-2008 – by the camp's inhabitants (Cronaca 2008). A ghetto of resolute 'gypsy otherness', Alba's Romani enclave emerges from its grave in current *New Babylon* and Situationist International scholarship as a potent reminder that the real-life stories unfolding behind avant-garde history are all too easily forgotten. Yet *New Babylon* and Romani are inextricably intertwined: to forget the one is to misunderstand and misrepresent the other.

## Appendix 1

### **Libero Andreotti (1996, 2000, 2002)**

Through Gallizio, in the village of Alba in Northern Italy, Constant was also given an opportunity to study the social organization of gypsy life in a community that visited Alba each year and whom Gallizio represented on the town council. It was this encounter, in fact, that inspired Constant to build a *Model for a Gypsy Camp* (1958)

(Andreotti 1996: 24-25)

[...] Constant's first practical application in *Nomadic Encampment* (1958) [...] a flexible shelter whose lightweight and transportable elements were supposed to serve a gypsy community that Constant befriended during a stay in Northern Italy

(Andreotti 2000: 51; see also Andreotti 2002: 229)

### **Mirella Bandini (1974, 1989)**

Durante un lungo soggiorno ad Alba (autunno-inverno 1956) [...] progetta quindi (e realizza in maquette al suo ritorno ad Amsterdam) la prima architettura mobile dell'*Urbanisme Unitaire*: un Accampamento per gli Zingari, che con un sistema di pareti divisorie mobili sotto un'unica copertura, può continuamente modificare la sua sistemazione interna e adattarsi al numero degli abitanti

(Bandini 1974: 14, see also 47)

After the First World Congress of Free Artists, Constant [...] spent six months in Alba at Pinot-Gallizio's house [...] This period also saw the emergence of the first mobile architecture of *urbanisme unitaire*, which Constant realized in maquette form upon his return to Amsterdam: the *Accampamento degli Zingari* (Gypsy camp) with a system of mobile dividing walls adaptable to different numbers of inhabitants

(Bandini 1989: 71)

### **Francesco Careri (2001, 2002, 2005)**

Visiting a camp of nomads on land owned by Pinot Gallizio, Constant found an entire conceptual apparatus with which he felt it possible to refute the sedentary bases of functionalist architecture. He began working on a project for the gypsies of Alba and soon was able to imagine a city designed for a new nomadic society

(Careri 2002: 110; see also Careri 2001)

In 1956, he participated in the "Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus", which was organised in Alba (Italy) by Asger Jorn and Pinot Gallizio. It was there that he became acquainted with the *Theory of the Dérive* thanks to contact with the avant-garde Parisian Lettrists. He visited the gypsy camp of the Sinti people, welcomed by Gallizio to stay on his land. This was the beginning of New Babylon, Constant's open-ended creation of urban surroundings (to be made by their itinerant inhabitants) and the first time in the history of architecture that a vision based on nomadic culture had been designed. After returning to Amsterdam, Constant constructed [...] the model of the gypsy camp for the itinerant inhabitants of Alba. This is how he started the series of sculptures that describe the atmosphere of New Babylon

(Careri 2005: 103; see also Careri and Comisso 2005: 20-22; Isnardi 2005: 49-50)

### **Barry Curtis (2001)**

The New Babylon project originated in a plan for providing resources for itinerant gypsies

(Curtis 2001: 79)

### **Simon Ford (2005)**

After attending the First World Congress of Free Artists in 1956 Constant stayed on at Alba to work on a series of models of environments and buildings designed to be infinitely re-arrangeable. Through Pinot-Gallizio he had made contact with local gypsies, and proposed to build them a camp

**Charlie Hailey (2008)**

In 1958, Constant produced the Model for a Gypsy Camp, which became the basis for his subsequent models of New Babylon [...] Pinot-Gallizio had worked as an advocate and political representative of the Gypsy population that visited the town of Alba [...] And then in December 1956, Constant visited a Gypsy camp on Pinot-Gallizio's property along the Tamaro [sic] River. The Zingari Gypsies had been banished to the site after camping under the roof of the town's livestock market [...] The town council had determined that the Gypsies did not clean up sufficiently and had banned them from Alba's public spaces. In the encampment along the Tamaro [sic], Constant discovered the Gypsy town [...] The Gypsy Camp included movable dividing walls that could be manipulated by the nomadic inhabitants, and its overall design resembled a tentlike circular tensegrity structure. Lefebvre's "ephemeral city" had been realized as an architectural scheme

(Hailey 2008: 76-77)

**John Heintz (2005)**

The pre-history of Constant's every-shifting 'city' begins with a model of a gypsy camp. Constant was inspired by their nomadic life

(Heintz 2005: 212)

**Hilde Heynen (1996, 1999)**

In the initial years of work on his project, Constant also made ample models in a variety of forms. The first related to New Babylon dates from 1956 and was meant as a design proposal for a gypsy encampment in Alba. An umbrella-shaped transparent construction partially covers a space in which one can vaguely discern a spiral shape. With the use of screens and palings the gypsies were invited to create their own site

(Heynen 1996: 29; see also Heynen 1999: 161)

**Stewart Home (1991)**

After the congress, Constant stayed on in Alba, where he worked on plans for the first mobile architecture of unitary urbanism. This would be for the use of gypsies who camped on a plot of land owned by Gallizio. It was to use a system of dividing walls placed under a single roof so that it could be continually modified to suit the needs of its inhabitants

(Home 1991: 28)

**Leslie Kavanaugh (2008)**

For Constant, the gypsy communities of Southern Europe provided insight into a free, yet cooperative way of organizing community and communal space. Some of his initial projects were in fact for gypsy camps

(Kavanaugh 2008: 256)

**Jean-Clarence Lambert (1992, 1997)**

À Alba en 1956, son projet d'un camp permanent pour les Gitans est une première étape vers New Babylon, scénographie urbaine de l'esprit nomade [...] À Alba, Gallizio avait demandé à Constant d'imaginer un camp permanent pour les Gitans

(Lambert 1992: 10; see also Lambert 1997: 19)

**Thomas Levin (1996)**

Constant's concern with leisure [...] requires an equally undetermined, dynamic and flexible space, a structure conducive to nomadism along the lines Constant had already begun to explore in his 1956 model of a permanent yet highly fluid camp site for gypsies in Alba, Italy

(Levin 1996: 126-127)

**Sylvere Lotringer (2004)**

In 1956, paying a visit to Gallizio in Alba, Italy, he had been struck by a gypsy's temporary encampment made with cases and boards left over by merchants and decided to build for them a permanent site

**Tom McDonough (2008, 2009)**

Constant's work on New Babylon was presaged by an earlier project, which set in place the terms of the particular relation to nomadism articulated in the later work. In Alba, in the Italian Piedmont, he visited the artist Pinot Gallizio, who had welcomed onto his lands Romany people who had been driven off the surrounding countryside. For them, Constant invented the *Project for a Gypsy Camp* (1956–1958, Gemeentemuseum, The Hague), which became the point of departure for New Babylon [...] its system of mobile dividing walls allowing for adaptation to the ever-varying number of inhabitants

(McDonough 2008a: 87; see also McDonough 2008b)

[...] the initial spur for New Babylon lay in Constant's never-realized design for a Gypsy camp, begun in 1956 at the behest of Italian artist and fellow Situationist Pinot Gallizio, who had welcomed onto his lands in the Piedmont Romany people driven off the surrounding countryside

(McDonough 2009: 20)

**Nicholas Mirzoeff (2005)**

In fact, Constant's first work of this kind was an imaginary camp for gypsies, which he had designed in 1958 [...] New Babylon opened a space for them to play as they chose without having to become settled to do so

(Mirzoeff 2005: 63-64)

**Ikem Stanley Okoye (2004)**

Pinot-Gallizio, a member of the group, was, among other things, an actual scholar of nomadism (in the anthropological sense) and the political representative of Gypsies, who had visited Alba (Italy) ... Moreover, Constant Nieuwenhuys had, after all (thought apparently on Pinot-Gallizio's urging) produced a design and built the model for a gypsy encampment, anticipating the project for *New Babylon* – the Situationists' imagination of a future mode of living in a post-revolutionary society.

Nieuwenhuys, a political activist who came to represent European Roma, Gypsies who as much in the Netherlands as in Italy sought to gain rights normally enjoyed by other citizens, designed an encampment posing Roma as clientele transiting through this 'hotel' in their travels across European space

(Okoye 2004: 185)

**David Pinder (2005)**

A significant turn came when he stayed on at Alba after the congress there in 1956 and was introduced by Gallizio to a group of gypsies who regularly travelled through the town. Gallizio was a member of the municipal council and was defending the interests of the gypsies, having lent them grassland by the river Tanaro to camp on after they had been banned from their usual practice of staying underneath the roof of the once-weekly livestock market. Visiting their temporary enclosure inspired Constant to design a scheme for a more permanent but flexible encampment

(Pinder 2005: 194-195)

**Sadie Plant (1992)**

[...] unitary urbanism was intended to broaden architectural concerns to the whole atmosphere of space and the possibilities of living in it. This perspective was promoted by Constant, who stayed on in Alba after the 1956 congress to design a sort of mobile city for some gypsies camped on Pinot-Gallizio's land

(Plant 1992: 57)

**Michel Ragon (1974)**

En 1956, un séjour en Italie, dans la petite ville d'Alba, devait lui ouvrir d'autres horizons. Le peintre Pino [sic] Gallizio, qui'il rencontre, possédait un terrain sur lequel campait des gitans. Sur la proposition de Gallizio, Constant étudie un projet d'aménagement d'une cite



permanente pour ces gitans. Il imagine de couvrir la petite cité par une seule toiture sous laquelle les gitans pourront aménager leur espace à leur gré par un jeu de cloisons mobiles. Ce qui le conduira ensuite à étudier l'aménagement d'une plus vaste ville, sur les mêmes principes, qui'il nomme *New Babylon* / In 1956, a sojourn in Italy, in the little city of Alba, was to open other horizons to him. He encountered the painter Pino [sic] Gallizio, who owned a little piece of land upon which Gypsies camped. At Gallizio's suggestion, Constant worked out a project for the creation of a permanent installation for these Gypsies. He had the idea of covering the little "city" with one big roof under which the gypsies could rearrange their space as they pleased by changing the position of moveable partitions. This led him later to the working out of a vaster city, along the same lines, which he called *New Babylon*

(RKD 471: 37)

**Simon Sadler (1998)**

Pinot-Gallizio, who was a local left-wing councilor, owned a piece of land in Alba where Gypsies made camp, and in 1956 he invited Constant to design a permanent encampment, a system of movable partitions within a common shelter

(Sadler 1998: 37)

**H. van Haaren (1966)**

In Alba already the first beginning for a realisation of his concepts about the connection between way of life and environment was made. At the request of the painter Gallizio he made a design for a permanent gypsy-camp in which space could be freely arranged through movable walls, according to the number and the requirements of the inhabitants. This design was the introduction to the series of scale-models of *New Babylon*, the plan for a way of life for man in an automated world

(RKD 441: 9)

**Martin van Schaik (2005)**

But Alba would leave yet another indelible mark on the artist. During his stay, he is confronted with the harsh conditions under which the local gypsy community tries to subsist. Chased from the town centre where they were used to put up camp, the gypsies had been offered a plot of land bordering the river by Pinot Gallizio. On his first visit to the site, Constant is overwhelmed by the people (their song and dance and *savoir-vivre*) but is shocked to see they live in total squalor. He then promptly decides to make a plan for a "permanent encampment"

(van Schaik 2005b: 44)

**Mark Wigley (1998)**

In the *Ontwerp voor zigeunerkamp* (Design for a Gypsy Camp) model ... moveable partitions are envisioned to accommodate the nomadic community that would use the structure as a base

(Wigley 1998: 50)

**Peter Wollen (1989, 1993, 2001)**

Constant had been inspired by Pinot-Gallizio, who had become the political representative of the gypsies who visited Alba, to build a model for a nomadic encampment. From this he developed to building architectural models of a visionary city (*New Babylon*) designed for nomadic inhabitants

(Wollen 1993: 149; see also Wollen 1989a: 15-16; cf. Wollen 1989b; and, Wollen 2001: 124)

**Stefan Zweifel, Juri Steiner and Heinz Stahlhut (2006)**

A few sculptural constructions by Constant are dated 1954, but the famous design for a gypsy camp in Alba is generally regarded as the model with which Constant's series of proposals for a city of the future began – *New Babylon*

(Zweifel et al. 2006: 10)

## Appendix 2

### **Nico Rost (1963)**

Nous sommes les symboles d'un monde sans frontières, d'un monde libre, où les armes seront bannies où chacun pourra se rendre, sans contrainte, des steppes de L'Asie Centrale au rives de l'Atlantique, des Hautes Plateaux sud-africains aux forêts finlandaises  
[Rotaru / Vaida Voevod III, Communauté Mondiale Gitane]

(Rost 1963: 2)

### **Constant Nieuwenhuys (c. 1963-1966)**

Nous sommes les symboles d'un monde sans frontières, d'un monde libre, où les armes seront bannies, où chacun pourra se rendre, sans contrainte, des steppes de l'Asie centrale aux rives de l'Atlantique, des hauts plateaux sud-africains aux forêts finlandaises  
– Vaida Voevod III, président de la communauté mondiale gitane

(RKD 414[b]: 5)

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### **Libero Andreotti and Xavier Costa (1996)**

Somos los símbolos vivientes de un mundo sin fronteras, de un mundo libre, sin armas, en el que cada cual puede viajar sin limitaciones desde las estepas de Asia central a las costas atlánticas, desde las altas mesetas de África del Sur a la taiga finlandesa / We are the living symbols of a world without frontiers, of a world of freedom, free of weapons, where each one can travel without constraints from the plains of central Asia to the Atlantic coast, from the high plateaus of South Africa to the Finnish forests  
– Vaïda Voivod III, Presidente de la Comunidad mundial de gitanes / President of the World Communittee of Gypsies

(Andreotti and Costa 1996a: 147)

We are the living symbols of a world without frontiers, of a world of freedom, without weapons, where each man may travel without let or hindrance from the steppes of central Asia to the Atlantic coast, from the high plateaux of South Africa to the forests of Finland  
– Vaïda Voivod III, President of the World Community of Gypsies

(Nieuwenhuys 1996 [1974]: 154)

### **Francesco Careri (2001, 2002)**

Siamo i simboli viventi di un mondo senza frontiere, di un mondo libero, senza armi, nel quale chiunque può viaggiare senza limitazioni dalle steppe dell'Asia centrale alle cote atlantiche, dalle alte pianure dell'Africa del Sud alle foreste finlandesi  
– Vaida Voivod III, presidente della Comunità Mondiale dei Gitani

(Careri 2001: 5)

Somos los simbolos vivos de un mundo sin fronteras, de un mundo de libertad, sin armas, donde cualquiera puede viajar sin trabas desde las estapas de Asia Central hast alas costas atlánticas, desde los altiplanos de África del Sur has los bosques finlandeses / We are the living symbols of a world without frontiers, or a world of freedom, free of weapons, where each one can travel without constraints from the plains of central Asia to the Atlantic coast, from the high plateaus of South Africa to the Finnish forests  
– Vaida Voivod III, Presidente de la comunidad mundial de los gitanos / President of the World Community of Gypsies

(Careri 2002: 114)

### **Jean-Clarence Lambert / Irina Paslariu (1975, 1992, 1997)**

Nous sommes les symboles vivants d'un monde sans frontières, d'un monde de liberté, sans armes, où chacun peut voyager sans contrainte des steppes d'Asie centrale aux côtes atlantiques, des hauts plateaux d'Afrique du Sud à la forêt finlandaise

– Vaida Voivod III, Président de la Communauté mondiale des gitans  
(Nieuwenhuys 1975: 202; see also Nieuwenhuys 1992 [1975]: 196; and, Nieuwenhuys 1997  
[1975]: 49)

**Franco Torriani (1984)**

Noi siamo i simboli di un mondo senza frontiere, di un mondo libero, dove le armi saranno  
scomunicate e dove tutti si muoveranno a loro piacimento, dalle steppe dell'Asia Centrale  
alle coste dell'Oceano Atlantico, dagli altopiani sudafricani alle foreste finniche

– Vaida Voivod III, presidente della comunità mondiale degli zingari  
(Torriani 1984: 101)

**Stefan Zweifel (2006)**

We are the living symbols of a world without frontiers, a world of freedom, without  
weapons, where each may travel without letup 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, Preseident of the world community of gypsies  
(Zweifel 2006: 197)

## Appendix 3

### 1966

1956 (winter) Took part in a congress of the *Mouvement International pour un Bauhaus Imaginiste* in Alba (Italy) organised by Asger Jorn. Constant met the painter Pinot Gallizio, at whose instigation he designed a plan for a permanent gypsy camp. This design was the first step for the series of scale-models for New Babylon, the Nomads city

(RKD 441: 16)

### 1967

1956 Deltar i en kongress om “Mouvement International pour un Bauhaus Imaginiste” i Alba i Italia, organisert av Asger Jorn. Constant møter maleren Pinot Gallizio, som inspirerer ham til å planlegge en permanent sigøynerleir. Dette utkast er den første begynnelse på serien skala-modeller for New Babylon

(RKD 381[a]: Biografiske Data)

### 1968

1956 Deltar i en kongress om “Mouvement International pour un Bauhaus Imaginiste” i Alba i Italien, organiserad av Asger Jorn. Constant sammanträffar där med målaren Pinot Gallizio, som inspirerar honom till att planlägga ett permanent zigenarläger. Detta utkast är första början till serien skala-modeller för Nya Babylon

(RKD 381[b]: Biografi)

### 1972

Pendant l’hiver 1956, Constant séjourne dans la petite cité d’Alba, en Italie. Il y rencontre le peintre Pinot Gallizio, qui y possède un petit terrain. Sur ce terrain quelques familles de gitans campent dans des conditions très primitives. Sur la proposition de Gallizio, Constant ébauche un projet de camp permanent de gitans qui, par un système de cloisons mobiles sous une seule toiture, peut toujours modifier son aménagement intérieur et s’adapter au nombre d’habitants. Cela le conduit à une série de maquettes de New Babylon, la cité des nomades

(RKD 385: np)

### 1976

1956 Deltager i en kongres om “Mouvement International pour un Bauhaus Imaginiste” i Alba i Italien, arrangeret af Asger Jorn. Maleren Pinot Gallizio inspirerer ham til Ny-Babylon

(RKD 392: Biografi)



## Notes

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### Introduction

<sup>1</sup> Van Schaik makes one fleeting reference to ‘the two sides of the man: the rational, Apollonian planner – the square in the grey flannel suit – and the cheerful poet in a gypsy outfit passionately strumming a Flamenco guitar’ (van Schaik 2005b: 122). He does not develop the idea further and the images of Constant included in his work support ‘the square’, only.

<sup>2</sup> Sixties scholarship has proven an increasingly charged terrain in recent years (Bloom 2001; Bloom and Breines 2003; Burner 1996; Cavallo 1999; Collier and Horowitz 1989; DeGroot 2008; Dickstein 1992; Ehrenreich 1992; Farber 1994; Gitlin 1993; Rowbotham 2001; Tischler 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Forty’s work seems to have been established as a key reference point for contemporary architectural scholarship, cited as a source of authority rather than a voice to be challenged (e.g. Sabatino 2008b: 355; Heynen 2008: 482).

<sup>4</sup> In an endnote qualifying her work, Nochlin writes: ‘The insights offered by Said’s *Orientalism* [...] are central to the arguments developed in this study. However, Said’s book does not deal with the visual arts at all’ (Nochlin 1989: 57). While she is correct that Said did not consider ‘the visual arts’, Nochlin did not engage, in turn, with emergent criticisms of Said; her frame of reference otherwise remains art historical (Nochlin 1989: 57-59).

### Chapter 1

<sup>5</sup> ‘Kultur ist – wie der Ethnologe Malinowski schon aufgemerkt hat – die Frucht der Sklaverei und Ausbeutung’.

<sup>6</sup> I am unable to date the narrative separately from the overall book project, meaning it could have been written anytime during Constant’s work on *Skizze zu einer Kultur* between about 1960 and 1966 (if not earlier). The pages of Constant’s German and Dutch typescripts reproduced here, which include the extract from Nico Rost’s article for *Algemeen Handelsblad*, obviously date from 18 May 1963 at the earliest.

<sup>7</sup> The table of contents to Locher’s catalogue (RKD 443: 2) declares it to be a: ‘vrije bewerking van een tussen 1960 en 1965 ontstaan manuscript (vertaald uit het Duits)’ – free/loose adaptation of a manuscript originating between 1960 and 1965 (translated from German).

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<sup>8</sup> In their terms, this means a text written after 1972 and the dissolution of the Situationist International – not a text written after Constant’s 1960 break with the Situationists. The Situationist International officially disbanded in 1972, while *Skizze zu einer Kultur* was completed in 1966 at the latest (meaning it was written during the time of the Situationist International).

<sup>9</sup> Wigley also leaves out the Definitions section that originally follows the Foreword in Constant’s original. These parts of the original *Skizze zu einer Kultur* typescript are kept together, as in Locher’s 1974 catalogue, by Andreotti and Costa in 1996, as well as Irina Paslariu (Paslariu-Lambert) in 1975 and Jean-Clarence Lambert in 1992 and 1997. At the same time, these authors appear to have no knowledge of the contents and layout of Constant’s original *Skizze zu einer Kultur* typescripts (RKD 443: 27, 29-30, 49-63; Nieuwenhuys 1975; 1996 [1974]; 1992 [1975]; 1997 [1975]; 1998 [1974]). They further create a false sense of continuity between the texts they reprint, directly linking the Foreword and Definitions to a highly abridged version of Part 2 of *Skizze zu einer Kultur*, only, without acknowledging the absence of the rather substantial Part 1 of Constant’s original book project.

<sup>10</sup> The only reprint that does not reflect this change is Torriani’s translation into Italian of 1984, which – like Paslariu, Lambert and almost all the rest – cites Locher’s 1974 catalogue as its source (Torriani 1984: 101).

<sup>11</sup> The mistaken authorship is corrected in McDonough’s later work (2002a) *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents* (Nieuwenhuys 2002 [1958]; 2002 [1959]).

<sup>12</sup> The comments are Hilde Heynen’s and Thomas Levin’s. Heynen reiterates her position elsewhere: ‘The drawings and paintings indeed seem to convey a much more in-depth understanding of the human condition than the texts’ (Heynen 1999: 173).

<sup>13</sup> Rumney and Williams have made separate cases for the ways in which women have been overlooked or edited out of the history of the Situationist International (Home and Rumney 1989; Williams 2009). The scholarship that has grown up around this specific interview, originally conducted by Betty van Garrel and Rem Koolhaas for the Dutch newspaper *Haagse Post* in 1966 (van Garrel and Koolhaas 1966), reveals an alarming continuation of that pattern. Although van Garrel was an incisive art critic – who in fact interviewed Constant again, in 1974 (RKD 390[e]), in what is one of the most revealing texts published on *New Babylon* to date – she has effectively been dropped from current scholarship. The 1966 interview, clearly of interest to scholars because Koolhaas is seen to play a part, has been repeatedly presented – and celebrated – as Koolhaas’s work, only. Lootsma arguably begins the trend (Lootsma 1999: 171-172), with other writers following suit (De Cauter and Heynen 2005: 269; Mozas 2004: 9; van der Ley and Richter 2008b: 31; Wigley 1998: 66).

<sup>14</sup> The same can be said of Heynen’s writings on *New Babylon* (Heynen 1996; 1999; 2005), as well as Wigley’s work (1998; 1999; 2001a; 2001b; 2001c; 2003; de Zegher and Wigley 2001).

<sup>15</sup> Both paintings have an exhibition history dating back to at least 1980, when they were included in an exhibition titled *Constant, schilderijen 1940-1980* held at the Haags Gemeentemuseum that year (RKD 398: no. 69, no. 71). *De Zon* has recently

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been included (as *Zon*) in the book resulting from a recent exhibition on the Situationist International (Zweifel et al. 2006: Figure 017).

<sup>16</sup> Andreotti, who briefly acknowledges that the role of the Situationists in these events is still open to debate, makes his statements in conclusion, a few paragraphs before the end to his essay. The quotations from Bandini and Pezolet (who do not question the link) are the final words of their texts.

<sup>17</sup> Wigley has discussed COBRA in the contexts of Constant's drawings, but in a very scripted manner – focusing on the child, only, he notably leaves aside the group's clear interest in non-Western peoples (Wigley 2001b).

<sup>18</sup> While published in the September-October 1948 issue of *Reflex*, Constant's manifesto had been written well before the establishment of even the Experimentele Groep Nederland, which preceded COBRA, in 1947. Stokvis describes the text as having 'formulated the concepts that were to become essential to the movement far more clearly than was ever to happen again during the existence of Cobra' (Stokvis 2004: 170).

## Chapter 4

<sup>19</sup> Heynen writes that the Situationist International 'was officially established in London in 1957' (Heynen 1999: 151).

<sup>20</sup> Constant gives a very similar account in another late interview: 'In the International Situationist movement, paradoxically, I found that there were too many painters around Debord! That hindered me in the development of my project, New Babylon. I didn't want to continue to work in those conditions' (Lambert and Nieuwenhuys 2001: 26)

<sup>21</sup> The heading for this section of van Schaik's text is 'The Bureau and the model maker' (van Schaik 2005b: 47).

<sup>22</sup> Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Den Haag, archief Constant, inv.nr. 304.

<sup>23</sup> In addition to Bandini's writings (1974; 1984), which have incorporated minor contributions by other writers (e.g. Guasco 1974; Merz 1984; Sandberg 1974; Torriani 1984), a new wave of Italian scholarship includes the work of Vescovo (1994) and, since 2000, a surge of publications, mostly exhibition catalogues, all resulting from various collaborations between Roberto, Bertolino, Comisso, Isnardi and Careri (Bertolino et al. 2005; Careri and Comisso 2005; Isnardi 2005; Isnardi et al. 2005; Roberto et al. 2000; Roberto et al. 2001; Roberto 2001).

<sup>24</sup> Stracey and Pezolet have published on Gallizio (Pezolet 2010; Stracey 2005; 2006); beyond this, a one-page contribution by Selima Niggel, translated from German, to the 2006 exhibition catalogue *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* (Niggel 2006), marks the extent of English-language scholarship on Gallizio.

<sup>25</sup> While the section specifically dedicated to *Zingari* ('Gypsies') in *Pinot Gallizio: il laboratorio della scrittura* presents a number of primary documents, this is relegated to the book's last pages. The one-page editorial introduction provided does little to explain, much less critically analyse, the material that follows: three photographs of Gallizio and Romani, a newspaper article extract, extracts from the Minutes of two separate Town Council meetings, an image of three 'newspaper clippings' (which are unfortunately illegible and also overlapped), some of Gallizio's notes and one letter



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from Constant (Bertolino et al. 2005: 225-233). The book focuses solely on Gallizio and there is no real discussion of Constant and *New Babylon*.

<sup>26</sup> In her contribution to Sussman's 1989 exhibition catalogue, Bandini casually refers to Gallizio as: 'a scholar of popular culture, nomadism, and medicinal botany, as well as an archaeologist and painter' (Bandini 1989: 68). This is a partial repetition, in English, of a line featured in the introduction to her 1974 catalogue: 'Studio di botanica officinale [...] di cultura popolare, di nomadismo; archeologo' (Bandini 1974: 11). In the 'Notizie bio-bibliografiche' (biographical notes) section of that same catalogue, Bandini similarly has Gallizio beginning studies in anthropology, particularly nomadism, in 1951. She never makes it clear what this really means, however, or on what evidence the claim is based (Bandini 1974: 44): 'Studio di antropologia e in particolare del nomadismo (Alba è un luogo di transito delle carovane degli Zingari).

<sup>27</sup> 'This isn't the first time he [Gallizio] has spoken out in favor of the Gypsies' (Bertolino et al. 2005: 228).

<sup>28</sup> The Minutes of the 30 December 1956 meeting refer to an 'article by Giovanni Barra published in the Catholic weekly *La Famiglia Cristiana* dated July 15 of last year [1955]' (Bertolino et al. 2005: 228). Based on what can be inferred from the Minutes, this newspaper article seems to have documented the charitable work of the Catholic Church amongst travelling Romani communities throughout Italy in the 1950s and, also, presented Romani in a more positive light than Alba's local paper, *Le nostre tôr*.

<sup>29</sup> Bertolino, Comisso and Roberto include an image of three newspaper clippings from *Le nostre tôr* in their edited volume on Gallizio. Unfortunately, these clippings are primarily illegible. Apart from the photographs and key headlines, they remain undated and are not transcribed either. The newspaper's stance is still clear enough. One headline reads, 'I Fatti', followed by the subheading, 'Si busca due coltellate in una lite con gli zingari': The Facts, Stabbed twice in a fight with gypsies (Bertolino et al. 2005: 228).

<sup>30</sup> The English transcription of a letter reproduced in Bertolino, Comisso and Roberto's book (2005: 138) lists Osvaldo Cagnasso as the Mayor of Alba; the signature on the letter pictured matches the one found on the 08 March 1957 letter to Constant. The web pages of the Beppe Fenoglio study centre in Alba also include a short biography on Cagnasso – elected Town Mayor 29 June 1956, re-elected in May 1960, resigned 17 February 1963, meaning he was the Mayor during the *Primo congresso* as well as Constant's subsequent sojourn in Alba:

[http://www.centrostudibeppefenoglio.it/Personaggi/personaggi\\_scheda.php?ID=17](http://www.centrostudibeppefenoglio.it/Personaggi/personaggi_scheda.php?ID=17) [Accessed 22 June 2010].

<sup>31</sup> A photograph of Gallizio delivering his closing speech at the *Primo congresso* printed in Bertolino, Comisso and Roberto's book shows Gallizio standing behind a long table with four men seated to his right (Bertolino et al. 2005: 133). Asger Jorn is recognisable immediately to his right; the next figure is identifiable as Cagnasso:

[http://www.centrostudibeppefenoglio.it/Personaggi/personaggi\\_scheda.php?ID=17](http://www.centrostudibeppefenoglio.it/Personaggi/personaggi_scheda.php?ID=17) [Accessed 22 June 2010].

<sup>32</sup> The back of the letter reads, 'betreft: ontwerp voor een zigeunerkamp, 1956' – subject: design for a gypsy camp, 1956.

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<sup>33</sup> Bertolino, Comisso and Roberto, whose English translation I rely on here, do not date this article from *Le nostre tôr*, giving a reference of 1957 only.

<sup>34</sup> This seems to be the reason behind Gallizio's intervention: 'He asks the mayor who was responsible for ordering the posting of signs that forbid the parking of gypsies anywhere in the Municipality' (Bertolino et al. 2005: 230).

<sup>35</sup> The secondary literature always lists Archivio Gallizio as the source, yet my search of the Archive at GAM in Turin only revealed three photographs.

<sup>36</sup> In a pseudo-ethnographic trip to Alba in 2005, Careri apparently showed some of these pictures to Romani then living in the town's dedicated campsite (Careri 2005: 107). For a critique of his resulting piece in *Domus*, see my Conclusion.

<sup>37</sup> In the newspaper clipping pictured in *Pinot Gallizio: il laboratorio della scrittura*, the heading featured above the poster reads, 'ALBA, nel caldo luglio 1957' – Alba, the hot July of 1957 (Bertolino et al. 2005: 228). The back of the print held at GAM reads, 'le "battaglio" per la sosta degli Zingari Alba luglio 1957' – the "battle" for the stopping of the Gypsies Alba July 1957.

<sup>38</sup> This photograph of Gallizio is also used on the page preceding Bandini's contribution to Sussman's 1989 catalogue, but no caption is provided (Bandini 1989: 67). Bandini does not discuss or refer to the photograph, although her essay describes Gallizio as 'a scholar of popular culture, nomadism, and medicinal botany, as well as an archaeologist and painter' (Bandini 1989: 68). In the introductory text to Bandini's 1974 catalogue, written by Aldo Passoni, Gallizio is referred to as 're degli zingari' (Passoni 1974: 7). Twenty years later, Vescovo also refers to Gallizio as 're degli zingari' but, like Passoni, does not offer an explanation (Vescovo 1994: 11); the photograph of Gallizio wearing pendant earrings does not feature in either case.

<sup>39</sup> 'In più occasioni, in qualità di consigliere comunale, interviene in favore del diritto degli zingari a circolare e soggiornare liberamente nel territorio albese. Numerose fotografie lo ritraggono nel loro accampamento ai margini della città, impegnato in arringhe in difesa dei loro diritti, testimone attento e personalmente coinvolto della dignità della vita nomade, come attesta lo scatto in cui indossa con fierezza i tradizionali orecchini a pendente' (Bertolino et al. 2000).

<sup>40</sup> 'Mosso dall'interesse per il tema del nomadismo, e dopo accese discussioni in seno al Consiglio Comunale di cui è membro attivo e in ogni senso indipendente, Gallizio offre agli zingari un suo terreno in riva al Tanaro per impiantarvi l'accampamento negato dall'amministrazione civica. A sigillare l'alleanza, l'artista si fa fotografare con un paio di orecchini gitani, adottando come in un'investitura l'identità di capo degli zingari' (Roberto 2001: 29).

<sup>41</sup> Before this, there is a 'thumbnail' image of an abstract painting, most likely a detail of an industrial painting canvas, on the book's title page.

<sup>42</sup> The picture of Gallizio used by McDonough does appear elsewhere in the 1960 catalogue, however (Bertolino et al. 2005: 123).

<sup>43</sup> Pezolet parenthetically references Gallizio's involvement with the partisan movement and 'political career as a Communist activist' in his introduction, but does not make explicit the tenure or nature of Gallizio's post-war political activities in Alba (2010: 65).

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## Chapter 5

<sup>44</sup> Other authors seem unaware of the paper's original title. Wigley and van Schaik, for example, both refer to it only as 'Rapport inaugural de la conférence de Munich', as it appeared in *Internationale Situationniste* no. 3 (December 1959): 25-27 (cf. Wigley 1998: 34, 101; van Schaik 2005b: 54, fn79).

<sup>45</sup> Roberto Ohrt has countered the 'official' version of events. He argues that Jorn, who had personally convinced Sandberg and the Stedelijk to accept a Situationist group exhibition in place of their original plans for a solo showing of Gallizio's work, finally had enough of the constant in-fighting between the group's varying factions, and called off the exhibit in an attempt to avert further embarrassment (Ohrt 1990: 219-221).

<sup>46</sup> Van Schaik adds a third failure: 'the intended and long-awaited resurrection of *Potlatch* [...] which Constant had agreed to take charge of as editor-in-chief – completely fails: only one issue makes it to the presses in the summer of 1959. Not only is it the last edition of the former Lettrist publication ever to appear, but the failure to revamp it and turn it into an organ of the SI's "left wing" is also an opportunity missed' (van Schaik 2005b: 50; see also Debord 1959).

<sup>47</sup> In the half-page introduction to the final, 'gypsy' section of their edited book on Gallizio, Bertolino, Comisso and Roberto offer us one brief sentence, only: 'During the SI Congress in Munich in 1959 Gallizio revives the idea of the "nomad village" for which a sketch by the architect Oudejans remains' (Bertolino et al. 2005: 225). Isnardi provides only a caption: 'Monaco, 1959. La "casa degli zingari" in un disegno dell'architetto Oudejans' (Isnardi 2005: 50).

<sup>48</sup> I have used the 'incoming' postmark on the back of the envelope as my reference point as the letter is undated. While the outgoing postmark on the front of the envelope clearly reads 'Amsterdam' and '1961', the numbers in the centre of the stamp do not give a clear date.

<sup>49</sup> Giorgio Gallizio's letter ends with a personal note: 'Je te souviens toujours et, avec Augusta, je te salue affectueusement' – I remember you always and, with Augusta, greet you affectionately (RKD 71[a]).

## Chapter 6

<sup>50</sup> Chtcheglov's 1953 manifesto, 'Formulary for a New Urbanism' includes a reference, in conclusion, to a 'forthcoming book' by Henry de Béarn titled *The New Nomadism*. De Béarn was a friend of Chtcheglov's and a fringe member of the Lettrist International; while the title of his book suggests 'nomadism' may have been a term used by at least one member of the group, I have been unable to find anything more about this text (Chtcheglov 2006 [1953]: 7).

<sup>51</sup> Like *dérive*, psychogeography is concerned with 'sensorial experience' and defined as, 'The study of the specific effects of the geographical environment (whether consciously organized or not) on the emotions and behavior of individuals' (SI 2006 [1958]: 52). Of all the various attempts to define unitary urbanism, at no point do the Situationists suggest nomadism as a paradigm; it is, similarly, 'The theory of the combined use of arts and techniques as means contributing to the

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construction of a unified milieu in dynamic relation with experiments in behavior' (SI 2006 [1958]: 52).

<sup>52</sup> Constant's first post-Situationist International lecture was given in Aachen on 18 July 1960 (RKD 331).

<sup>53</sup> 13 years after Constant's talk at the ICA, Reyner Banham wrote about *New Babylon* in his 1976 book *Megastructure*. Banham testifies to the impact of both Constant's original lecture and its subsequent publication in *AD*: 'the lecture may have earlier versions, but the text read in London early in 1964 [sic] is the one which achieved the permanence of print and an English translation and was the most widely noticed at the time' (Banham 1976: 81). Kenneth Frampton, *AD*'s technical editor at the time, laboured over Constant's original typescript, reducing his paper from five pages of text, only, down to two pages, including images, for its eventual publication in *AD* (RKD 65[a]; RKD 65[b]).

<sup>54</sup> Kenneth Frampton's editing of Constant's original typescript results in a more convincing and committed statement about nomadism: 'The unfunctional and fantastic way of living would demand the rapid passage from one place to another, from sector to sector, and life in New Babylon would be essentially nomadic' (Nieuwenhuys 1964: 305).

<sup>55</sup> By way of comparison: the ICA talk of November 1963 filled five pages, total; by March the following year, Constant's 'standard' *New Babylon* slide show presentation had tripled in length, numbering 14 pages for example in the 1964 lecture delivered in Copenhagen (RKD 341).

<sup>56</sup> 'Halbstarke' was a term coined in 1950s Germany, Austria and Switzerland to refer to a post-war youth subculture – primarily male and typically of working class parentage – that appeared in public in what was often an aggressive and provocative manner. Sporting quiffs, jeans, checked shirts and leather jackets, Halbstarke rode Mopeds and motorbikes, congregated in 'gangs', listened to rock 'n' roll music and generally identified with, or patterned themselves after, the 'outlaw bikers' portrayed by the likes of Marlon Brando and James Dean in 1950s films such as *The Wild One* and *Rebel Without a Cause*. Besides minor acts of vandalism, loitering about in public and causing a general sense of unease in the older generations (who looked on disapprovingly), Halbstarke were involved in a number of large-scale riots between about 1956 and 1958. Their apparently unprovoked use of violence and unexplainably destructive behaviour prompted serious discussions in media and politics at the time (see Maase 2001; Poiger 2000).

<sup>57</sup> 'Auf dem Grundniveau befinden sich die Parkplätze des Bodenverkehrs, auf dem Dachterrassen liegen die Landeplätze für den Luftverkehr' – On the ground level are found the parking places for ground traffic, landing strips for air traffic lie on the rooftop terraces.

<sup>58</sup> 'Neben den Wohnelementen gibt es noch andere permanente Einrichtungen im Sektor. Um gut funktionieren zu können, braucht er eine komplette technische Apparatur, sowie Versorgungsanlagen zur Hygiene, Ernährung, Distribution der Gebrauchsgüter, Unterrichtsräume, Bibliotheken, Kindergärten, usw' – In addition to the residential elements, there are also other permanent facilities in the sector. To function well, it needs a complete technical apparatus, as well as supply systems for hygiene, nutrition, the distribution of commodities, classrooms, libraries, kindergartens, etc.

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<sup>59</sup> The point is set up already in the opening line of the 46th chapter of *Skizze zu einer Kultur*, ‘Geschichte von New-Babylon’ (History of New Babylon): ‘Die Geschichte von New-Babylon beginnt mit der Gründung einer neuen Oekonomie’ – The history of New Babylon begins with the establishment of a new economy.

<sup>60</sup> The 37th chapter of *Skizze zu einer Kultur*, titled ‘Tourismus und Akkulturation’ (RKD 414[a]: 37.1), closely parallels the text of the Berlin paper of 03 October 1964: ‘The adventure still exists, but it withers away in the flea markets, in shady bars or, in the worst case, in arcade halls and ice cream parlours. (...) Its inhabitants mostly belong to that part of the population that is not engaged in the production process, or only part-time, and that therefore does not share the utilitarian attitude to life of other social groups’. This translation is van Schaik’s (2005b: 109, 124).

<sup>61</sup> The second page of Constant’s 56th chapter, ‘Agressivität und Kreativität’, includes a reference to ‘das internationale Phänomen des massierten Auftretens von “Halbstarken”, “teddy-boys”, “blousons-noirs”, “stiljagi” usw.’ (RKD 414[a]: 56.2) – the international phenomenon of the mass appearance of ‘Halbstarken’, ‘teddy-boys’, ‘blousons-noirs’, ‘stiljagi’, etc.

<sup>62</sup> The translation is van Schaik’s, from the 40th chapter, ‘Utopie und Anti-Utopie’, of *Skizze zu einer Kultur* (van Schaik 2005b: 110, 124). The passage continues, corresponding closely with the 1964 text first published in *Randstad*: ‘The release of the enormous creative potential of the masses will change the face of the earth in the same far-reaching manner as the organization of labour has since Neolithic times. The age of the HOMO LUDENS is about to begin’ (RKD 414[a]: 40; cf. RKD 421: 35).

<sup>63</sup> Parts of this passage also caught van Schaik’s attention in his work with *Skizze zu einer Kultur*; our selection from the original and translation of this material vary (van Schaik 2005b: 120).

<sup>64</sup> ‘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 know the struggle for subsistence, competition disappears at both the individual and group level. Barriers and frontiers also disappear. The way is open to the intermixing 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’ (Nieuwenhuys 1998 [1974]: 163-164).

<sup>65</sup> McDonough cites Augé in an essay that also includes a discussion of ‘On Travelling’, but does not make a connection between the two. He also incorrectly labels Augé a sociologist (McDonough 2001: 99-100).

<sup>66</sup> Although ‘On Travelling’ features in the catalogue of texts appearing in Wigley’s monograph, he makes little use of the paper in his extended essay on *New Babylon*. A brief reference to it occurs in his discussion of ‘The Electronic Legacy’: ‘Constant lectured to the Society of Dutch Architects at the opening of the new buildings at the Schiphol Airport near Amsterdam, proclaiming that the transitory spaces of airports were a precursor of the nomadic society of the near future’ (Wigley 1998: 66). Again, the ‘nomadic’ is taken for granted.

<sup>67</sup> Elsewhere, as in the abridged version of *Skizze zu einer Kultur* published by the Haags Gemeentemuseum in 1974, Constant turns to the image of the carnival: ‘In

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New Babylon, where no ‘order’ is respected, community life takes shape within the dynamic of permanently changing situations [...] social conventions are no longer respected, as during carnival’ (Nieuwenhuys 1998 [1974]: 163).

<sup>68</sup> The issue of ‘guest workers’ from Spain, Turkey, Italy, Greece, Morocco and Portugal is taken up briefly in an interview published in the Dutch periodical *Haagse Post* on 06 August 1966, just over three months before Constant delivered his talk ‘On Travelling’.

<sup>69</sup> Morgan’s idea of ‘communism in living’ basically ‘meant the pooling of effort and sharing of produce that were the natural concomitants of living under one roof’; Marx’s and Engels’s ‘notion of communism, removed from the context of domesticity and harnessed to support a project of social engineering for large-scale, industrialized states with populations of millions, eventually came to mean something quite different’ (Ingold 1999: 400).

<sup>70</sup> It is a classic case of primitivism: Morgan’s ‘ethno-historical’ data about Native American peoples ‘could be used by Engels as an argument for communism, and by Morgan himself in defence of American capitalism and democracy’ (Kuper 1988a: 75).

## Chapter 7

<sup>71</sup> Also spelled Lionel Rotaru. Rost’s article describes Rotaru as ‘Waarschijnlijk midden veertig’ (Probably mid forties), while the author of a French newspaper article of 23 May 1965 quoted by Liégeois, who dates his death to ‘early 1982’, opts for ‘about fifty’ (Liégeois 1986: 146-147).

<sup>72</sup> Rotaru tells Rost he was born in the Ukraine (‘Op mijn vraag waar hij geboren werd, antwoordde hij: “In de Oekraïne”’); Klímová-Alexander (2007: 628) says he was ‘born and raised in Bessarabia’ – a territory that belonged to Russia between 1812 and 1917, Romania from 1917 to 1945, and then the Soviet Union, divided between the Moldavian and Ukrainian republics.

<sup>73</sup> ‘Ursari’, derived from the Romanian word ‘urs’, refers to ‘Bear trainers’; it is both the name of several Romani clans ‘who traditionally trained bears and of at least two distinct dialects of Romani’ (Kenrick 2007: 285).

<sup>74</sup> I use the spelling ‘Vaida Voevod’ in my text, as found in Kenrick’s (2007) second and most recent edition of the *Historical Dictionary of the Gypsies (Romanies)*; I have seen it variously spelled as Vaida Voivod, Vaida Voevode, Vaïda Voëvod, Vaida Vojvod, Vajda Voïvod and Vajda Voïvode.

<sup>75</sup> Other sources date the founding of the CMG to 1959 and/or use the name ‘World Gypsy Community’ (sometimes with the accompanying acronym, WGC) in English translation. I follow Hancock’s (2002) lead by using ‘Romani’ in the title (instead of Gitane or Gypsy, for example). Rotaru also established another group, Organisation Nationale Gitane (ONG), variously referred to as ‘The National Romani Organisation’ or ‘National Gypsy Organization’. By all accounts, this group never really got off the ground (Hancock 2002: 119; Klímová-Alexander 2007: 628; Liégeois 1986: 147).

<sup>76</sup> Puxon puts Rouda at twenty-nine in late 1965 (Puxon 2000: 97).

<sup>77</sup> Rouda’s background in law is given to Rost by Voevod (1963: 1). The entry for Rouda in Kenrick’s *Historical Dictionary* reads: ‘Algeria. Contemporary civil rights

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activist', briefly describing how 'he read a newspaper report of a speech by Voevod in 'the early 1950s, while living in North Africa', prompting him to move to Paris and join the cause (Kenrick 2007: 231). A similar account is given in Kenrick's and Puxon's early and influential work *The Destiny of Europe's Gypsies*, only this time for Vanko's brother, Leulea (Kenrick and Puxon 1972: 206).

<sup>78</sup> Liégeois describes the CMG's constituency somewhat differently, as including 'Rom, Manus and Kalé from France' (Liégeois 1986: 147).

<sup>79</sup> Also 'chief lieutenant' (Puxon 2000: 96), 'Minister of Culture' and 'Director of Publication' (Klímová-Alexander 2007: 628).

<sup>80</sup> This is the name given by Hancock (2002: 120), who lists it elsewhere as 'Komita Lumiaki Romani' (Hancock 1991b: 261); online materials from the Council of Europe alternatively have it as 'Komiteto Lumniako Romano' (COE).

<sup>81</sup> Huttenbach discusses the politically charged question of Romani Holocaust victims in contemporary Holocaust scholarship, listing a range 'from a conservative 250,000' to 'An astronomical figure of four million' – most with an ideology attached (Huttenbach 1991b: 389).

<sup>82</sup> Contemporary scholarship confirms the early conclusions reached by Smolen and his staff (Huttenbach 1991b: 382, 387).

<sup>83</sup> Although Rost's article does not elaborate, Brandhuber – referred to simply as 'a drawer', who was 'drawing and painting what he had lived through' – produced numerous art works about his experiences as a prisoner in Auschwitz (he was interned for helping Jews), including an early series of haunting drawings from 1946 titled *Vergessene Erde*, or 'Forgotten Earth'. He also produced the first documented design for a memorial site in Auschwitz (Aloszko 2008), and further worked as a historian for the museum and memorial site project until his death in 1981.

<sup>84</sup> There were some lone voices. Hancock records the French 'medical genealogist Professor Montandon' critically observing, in 1950, 'that "everyone despises Gypsies, so why exercise restraint? Who will avenge them? Who will complain? Who will bear witness?"' (Hancock 1991a: 406).

<sup>85</sup> Rost had used a similar strategy in deciding to publish *Goethe in Dachau*. Marcuse says his aim was to prove 'that upstanding people had been imprisoned in the camp, not barbaric criminals' (Marcuse 2001: 245).

<sup>86</sup> Heynen dates the painting to 1958, commenting only on its 'fiery and colorful splashes of paint [that] dominate like explosions of joy' (Heynen 1999). In an image caption, Lambert also dates *Fiesta Gitana* to 1958, but a reference to the painting in his text uses 1964 (Lambert 1992: 75, 10). The painting itself reads 'Constant '64'.

<sup>87</sup> Van Schaik co-opts the title of Constant's painting with no explanation, using it as a title for the section of his text covering events leading up to and including the *Primo congresso* (van Schaik 2005b: 42-44).

<sup>88</sup> Writing in the Society's *Journal* in 1949, Yates declared: "It is more than time that civilized men and women were aware of the Nazi crime against the Romanies as well as the Jews. Both bear witness to the fantastic dynamic of the 20th century racial fanaticism, for these two people shared the horror of martyrdom at the hands of the Nazis for no other reason than that they were – they existed. The Romanies, like the Jews, stand alone" (Hancock 1996).

<sup>89</sup> This is a feature of interviews and articles written about Constant and *New Babylon* dating back to at least 1966. In an earlier interview with Betty van Garrel

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for *Haagse Post*, for example, editorial notes refer to instruments as diverse as a harp, violin, dulcimer, balalaika and guitar, adding that Constant liked to play these in his spare time (van Garrel and Koolhaas 2005 [1966]: 11). Without second-guessing his own assumptions, or pausing to keep in check his scholarly desires, Lootsma goes to great lengths to cleverly dismiss this list of instruments as arbitrary, extraneous details – or recover them as sarcastic attacks on Constant – in his writings on the now-famous ‘Koolhaas & Constant interview’ (Lootsma 1999).

<sup>90</sup> ‘En 1970, pour la fête de ses cinquante ans dans son atelier, il avait invité des Gitans à jouer avec lui’; ‘Ainsi ai-je la faveur d’un recital impromptu; et je sais que Constant organise régulièrement chez lui des soirées musicales’ (Lambert 1992: 10-11).

<sup>91</sup> *Nostalgia* (1982), *Orphée* (1982), *Orphée II* (1983); *Le joueur de guitare* (1986) and *Orphée* (1988-1989) are pictured in Lambert’s book *Constant: Les trois espaces* (1992). *Flamenco* (1997) is on long-term loan at the Stedelijk Museum Schiedam.

## Conclusion

<sup>92</sup> I have been unable to find much more information about Debar, beyond a short interview – in Italian – published on the blog *Romano Lil*. It includes a photograph of Debar from 2006 (Romano Lil 2006).

<sup>93</sup> According to the text published in *Domus*, from 8.10pm to around midnight on 29 August 2005 and from 7.50am to no later than 12.30pm on 30 August 2005 – thus, a maximum of about eight hours.

<sup>94</sup> Rotaru’s passports, which he printed in Belgium and apparently sold for a high price, listed the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights in place of a country; there are reports of some Romani successfully crossing borders with these (Klímová-Alexander 2007: 630).





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