

**“TO LOSE ONE’S WAY” (FOR SNAILS AND NOMADS):
THE RADICAL LABYRINTHS OF CONSTANT AND ARAKAWA AND GINS**

The city is the realization of the ancient dream of humanity, the labyrinth.

(Walter Benjamin *Arcades Project*, M6a, 4: 429)

Hermann Kern concludes *Through the Labyrinth*, his magisterial study and exhaustive cataloguing of that genre, with a short chapter on the “labyrinth revival.” Since 1982, Kern contends, “a renewed interest in labyrinths has swept the globe” (311). Although his catalogue is daunting, neither the contributions of Constant, nor those of Arakawa and Gins are given consideration. This paper attempts to contextualize Constant’s New Babylon (Nieuw Babylon) project as well as the labyrinth elements in Arakawa and Gins’s truly post-ontological procedural architecture. In both congruent and dissimilar ways these contemporary projects modify, but in some aspects also perpetuate, this 5,000 year old architectural obsession.

The labyrinth in its original sense is a walled unicursal path designed to control the pattern of movement to a central point. The perimeter of the structure has a single opening that serves as dual entry and exit points. The path consists of seven circuits, the form of which suggests a vital anthropological connection. “The path does not move in a straight line but rather in the rhythm of systole and diastole. Hence, much like a chest expanding to inhale [...]” (Kern 24). The origin of the seven-circuit labyrinth is shrouded in mythology and mystery. Kern speculates a neolithic source, possibly in celestial observation rituals or in initiation rites, and in both possibilities there is an intimate relation to dance. There is also a strong likelihood that the labyrinth developed out of cave cults in which winding, natural caverns symbolized the bowels of the earth or the uterus of the Earth Mother. The path marked as an inner, then outward circuitry with a central point to be reached and then departed from, affords obvious comparison to the path through life to death to rebirth. Indeed, in the Christian appropriation of the labyrinth it is Christ who replaces Theseus as the protagonist in an Easter ritual of rebirth. The “*computus*” labyrinth is the medieval contribution to the history of this design used as “a symbol of the astronomical determination of the date of Easter” (Massini, qtd. in Kern 110).

It is also worth noting the morphological affinities between the classical labyrinth and early Greek writing practice. Early Greek poetry was written in *boustrophedon*, with lines alternating direction from left to right and right to left, in imitation of the turn of the ox in ploughing. All writing in early Greece took the form of *scriptio continua*, a practice of undifferentiated writing without capitalization or word breaks.¹ Both

¹ The phenomenon is noted by Jeffrey Masten, Peter Stallybrass and Nancy J. Vickers in their Introduction to *Language Machines. Technologies of Literary and Cultural Production*. Full discussions of *scriptio continua* can be found in Saenger; Parkes; and McCaffery.

phenomena occasion a cancellation of space (respectively, the empty retinal movement back across a page and the meaningful differentiation between verbal units) and together bear a remarkable affinity to the unicursal labyrinth design. It might be said that the labyrinth precipitates a “baroque” embellishment upon an architectural *boustrophedon*.

No doubt the labyrinth remarks an architecture incapable of avoiding a centrifugal pull into metaphorical contaminants: the labyrinth of life, of love, of existence. As well “[i]t suffices for a short time to follow the trace, the repeated course of words, in order to perceive, in a sort of vision, the labyrinthine constitution of being” (83-4). This passage, taken from Bataille’s *Inner Experience* and so insistent on the profound link of the labyrinth to writing, should not be dismissed as a mere metaphorical application of an architectural term. Indeed, in the case of Bataille, as Dennis Hollier argues, the question that insists itself is the following: What precedence should be given to the labyrinth of words? Is such textuality the ur-space which the classical labyrinth subsequently concretises in architectural space? Hollier describes this textual condition: The “labyrinth is basically the space where oppositions disintegrate and grow complicated, where diacritical couples are unbalanced and perverted, etc., where the system on which linguistic function is based disintegrates, but somehow disintegrates by itself, having jammed its own works” (58). Petitioned here is an inoperative, auto-destructive writing in constant errancy through an undecidable space. “[N]either the category of subjectivity nor the category of objectivity can exist in this space, which, having made them unsound, nevertheless has no replacement to offer. [...] In this sense one is never either inside or outside the labyrinth” (58).

The story so far...

This myth is a famous one. Once upon a time a sea god, Poseidon, sends a white bull to the court of Minos at Knossos for ritual slaughter. Minos declines to kill the animal and in revenge Poseidon engenders in Pasiphae, the queen of Minos, an uncontrollable lust for the bull. The outcome of her sexual gratification is a monstrous hybrid, half-man, half-beast. The ever-ingenious Minos hires the architect Daedalus to construct a private space in which to house the savage beast, which cruel Minos feeds on captured victims. Death now turns to a love-story. The captured Theseus, fully expecting to become the Minotaur’s snack, discovers to his felicitous surprise that Ariadne, one of the King’s daughters, has fallen in love with him. Ariadne supplies Theseus with a thread of gold by which he can retrace his course through the winding structure. Brave Theseus enters the labyrinth, slays the Minotaur, retraces his steps back along the thread, sets the palace on fire and escapes with Ariadne to Naxos where he deserts her. The rest is architecture and speculation.

Choreography, allegory, architecture and celestial computer, the labyrinth is a complex notion, often misunderstood and misapplied in its multifarious resonances.² The prototypical classic, Minoan, or Cretan

² It remains uncertain whether the labyrinth has an architectural, mythic, or diagrammatic origin. No remains were found at Knossos, and neither Diodorus (ca. 50BCE) nor Pliny the Elder (23-79CE) report them.

labyrinth (from which all early labyrinths derive) functions equally as a kennel, the prototype of our contemporary zoo, and an architectural death-trap. Both a home and a feeding tract, it is a wrapped model that includes a labyrinth inside a labyrinth: the Daedalian construct *per se* plus the curvilinear anfractuosités called the minotaur's intestines. And the demonic rite of passage demands the move through one into the other (I will return to this intertwining theme of architecture and death later in this paper).³ The classic labyrinth cannot be mapped by its occupants; interior movement is entirely local, provisional and motivated by the binding purpose of arriving at a central destination. As such, labyrinths initiate serpentines, not trajectories. As an occupied site, or situation, a labyrinth might be best considered as a continuously cursive movement constructed on the rhetorical model of an extended periphrasis. As Pierre Rosenstiehl correctly discerns, "[I]t is the traveller and his myopia who makes the labyrinth, not the architect and his perspectives" (qtd. in Damsch 31). In other words, a labyrinth is only a labyrinth to unwitting users. How convenient it would be, then, for the dweller not to think and react emotionally. For without thought and feeling, the body of the person would be processed mechanically into and out of the structure.⁴

There is a popular terminological confusion between maze and labyrinth, although the former did not emerge until the late Renaissance. The maze and the labyrinth are topological invariants involving two vastly different logics of passage. In the latter, passage occurs along and around the convolution of a single path; the architectural subject is never lost in a labyrinth. Linear, deterministic and with zero requirements of choice from its perambulator, Eco likens this topology to a skein which on unwinding "one obtains a continuous line. In this kind of labyrinth the Ariadne thread is useless, since one *cannot* get lost: the labyrinth itself is the Ariadne thread" (80). The maze, or *Irrweg*, gains in complexity presenting choices among alternative routes of which some are deliberate dead-ends.⁵

Bernard Tschumi appropriates the figure of the labyrinth as one term in an architectural binary, opposing it—as intransigently non-conceptual and a pure, immediate ontological experience—to the Pyramid, understood as "a dematerialization of architecture in its ontological form" (43). Together these terms articu-

³ Most labyrinth-scholars, e.g. Mayer, Kretschmer, Spiegelberg, Picard, Palmer, Galini, and Frisk, concur that the structure takes its name from "labrys" the two-bladed or Janusian axe that was the symbol of the Cretan king Minos. This, however, is disputed by Hermann Kern: "All we can be certain of is that the suffix '-inthos' was usually employed in place names in a language that the Greeks encountered upon migration (ca. 2000 BCE). At the very least, this suffix could be an indication of how long the word has been in use. An analysis of the rest of the word leads one to assume, with some reservations, that it is associated, somewhat mysteriously, with 'stone'" (Kern 2 and 43-45).

⁴ The classical labyrinth, inverted and complicated as we shall see by Arakawa and Gins, petitions an additional, *emotional* landing site to the three they outline (Imaging, Perceptual and Architectural). Karen Mac Cormack makes such a proposal in discussing their work. See her "Innovation's Inventory" on-line at *The North American Centre for Interdisciplinary Poetics* <www.poetics.yorku.ca>. Mac Cormack has discussed this matter by phone and e-mail with Madeline Gins.

⁵ The desire to connect *Irrweg* to Joyce's Earwicker is an obvious desire and offers a guiding bar into a new reading of *Finnegans Wake*: Finnegans *Irrweg* a wake in the maze of language.

late the ruling paradox of architecture: the impossibility to conceptualize and experience space at the same time. Tschumi likens the labyrinth to “the dark corners of experience [...] where all sensations, all feelings are enhanced, but where no overview is present to provide a clue about how to get out. Occasional consciousness is of little help, for perception in the Labyrinth presupposes immediacy” (42). A labyrinth of this kind offers, first and foremost, a disorientation of architectural time; the required itinerary is one of local decisions and indeterminate windings and returns in which erroneous decisions and unproductive itineraries are impossible. Again, one cannot get lost in a labyrinth, nor even make a mistake. (In this respect Bernard Tschumi’s claim that “there may be no way out of a labyrinth” [43] is architecturally incorrect). One can and does, however, experience an illusion of being lost in the windowless, unicursal.⁶ Indeed, the classical labyrinth is prototypical of what Germano Celant calls “deprived space” in which “participants’ can only find themselves as the subject, aware only of their own fantasies and pulsations, able only to react to the low-density signals of their own bodies” (qtd. in Tschumi 43).

Background: the refusal of architectural functionalism

Before proceeding to a more detailed discussion of the labyrinth in both Situationist and Arakawa/Gins’s procedural architecture, a brief historical background is necessary to explain the grounds for a shared common *telos*: the uncompromising repudiation of the planetary malfeasance named functionalism.⁷ The date 1933 is marked in the history of western architecture by the ratification of the Athens Charter that outlined and endorsed the nature of “the future city,” encoding the Corbusian style and principles of the modern “functionalist” city predicated on the twin linked paradigms of utility and efficiency. As Rayner Banham elucidates:

The persuasive generality which gave this Charter its air of universal applicability concealed a very narrow conception of both architecture and town planning and committed the CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne) unequivocally: (a) a rigid functional zoning of city plans, with green belts between the areas reserved to the different functions and (b) a single type of urban housing, expressed in the words of the Charter as “high, widely-spaced apartment blocks wherever the necessity of housing high densities of population exists.” (qtd. in Sadler 22)

The anaesthetic safety of suburban housing and apartment blocks, so stifling to spontaneity and freedom, marked the brutal actualization of an architecture of alienation and constraint, which in its turn bolstered the claustrophobic tranquillity of bourgeois life. It is the settled, juxtaposed immobility of this officially

⁶ Eco adds to the maze and labyrinth, a third labyrinth type: the net or rhizome. See Eco 80-82.

⁷ This summary section is profoundly indebted to Simon Sadler’s detailed and provocative history of Situationist architecture, *The Situationist City*.

sanctioned "A"rchitecture that Constant and Gins and Arakawa confront with an unmatched vehemence and determination.

However, the justifiable diatribes against pacifying functionality in architecture do not originate with Constant. Prior to New Babylon, in the 1920s, Czech cubist architecture launched a direct attack on stability, aspiring to a disorder built into permanence. Robert Harbison's colourful description effectively conveys the psychological and emotional impact of this architecture.

In its exciting moments hardly an inch of the fabric holds still. We have entered a world, like some fairground prank with mirrors, without a truly flat surface anywhere. So the entrance of Josef Chochol's flats on Neklanova in Prague with its appended prismatic porch induces something akin to paranoia. For us there can be no rest or relaxation but a kind of mental circling like that of a bird looking unsuccessfully for a perch. Finally of course this design raises the doubt brought on by any building which tries to enshrine a moment of crisis: will one's identity continue susceptible under its methodical attack, or will one begin to find its terrible uncertainty diverting? (Harbison 172-73)

The affinities with, and inspirations on, Situationist unitary urbanism are found in numerous architectural projects from the mid-1950s on. Aldo van Eyck calls for cities of "labyrinthine clarity" that offer individual users and dwellers "a relative freedom of choice in the use and discovery of its spaces and places;" such clarity is the desideratum in his 1955 design for the Amsterdam Children's Home which facilitates playful interaction and chance encounters among its child residents (Sadler 30). Contrasting yet sympathetic to New Babylon is Rayner Banham's approach to urban core planning—seen in his proposal for a "City as Scrambled Egg"—an approach Sadler estimates to be a liberal appropriation of Situationist unitary urbanism stripped of its politics. "The core of Banham's Scrambled Egg City would be a labyrinth negotiated by pedestrians in ways that confound the logic of rationalist planning" (Sadler 30). Banham's "Other Architecture" launched in 1955 as an "alternative to rationalist orderliness" with a governing proposition "that inhabitants define their own environments by a fluid and playful selection of objects, services, and technologies, rather than submit to a monumental architecture imposed by the architect" instantly confesses to its Situationist affinities (Sadler 38).

A broad pessimism about the positive function of the architect in capitalist society characterised the radical architecture of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Michel Colle bemoaned the "cadaverous rigidity" of Corbusian architecture, with its "[a]rchitectural rigor mortis brought on less by its choice of materials, than the intransigent and uncompromising rationalism that spawned its angular regulative grids which culminate in the concept of the functional machine for living in" (qtd. in Sadler 7). *Potlatch* (the magazine of the Situationist International, subsequently referred to as S.I.) called the machinic aesthetic of Corbusian rationalism both a "scab" and a "neo-cubist crust" (Sadler 10). The Situationists located the flaw of Functionalism in a fatal choice of priorities: that of collective over individual interests, and in response, both the S.I. and the British Independent Group (IG) turned to a non-Cartesian "cluster model" of the city that provided a mega-structural model for emphasizing and preserving individual habitation and individual inhabitants. In its somber reassessment of rational functionalism the S.I. pitted an expressionist will (seen as inherent in Bauhaus) against the technocratic rationalism of its later practitioners. Asger Jorn, in his debate with Swiss sculptor

Max Bill, accuses him of converting Bauhaus from artistic inspiration to a dead doctrine without inspiration. The S.I. further detected a causal link between planned functionalism and alienation and offered an extreme antidote in the form of disequilibrium and dysfunction.

Capitalising on the recent sociological studies of Henri Lefebvre (*Critique of Everyday Life*, 1946) and Pierre-Henri Chaubart de Lauwe (*Paris and the Parisian Agglomeration*, 1952) that cogently exposed the non-unitary nature of cities as fragile yet dynamic micro-sociologies, the Situationists located authenticated life at a hypo-spectacular level beneath the dense lamination of images and commodities spawned by official urban capitalism.⁸ The S.I. advanced theories for participatory, spontaneous urbanism in lives not prearranged by transportation, work hours and techno-functional facilities that fostered habit, convenience, passivity and consequent ontological alienation. This anti-technological proclivity arose from a conviction that technological spin-offs in the domestic arena and the workplace are servo-mechanical and totalitarian in their mass organizational effects. It was thought that specular urbanism amounted to nothingness and it drew acrimonious comments from Raoul Vaneigem, for instance, who compared it “to the advertising propagated around Coca-Cola—pure spectacular ideology” (qtd. in Sadler 16). For Vaneigem both information and urbanism function to “organize silence,” and in liberal democracies and totalitarian regimes alike the urban ideal portrayed is nothing but “the projection in space of a social hierarchy without conflict” (qtd. in Sadler 16, 18).

Constant and Guy Debord supplied a terse theoretical model for such “ideal” urbanism: *unitary urbanism*, defined by them as “[t]he Theory of the combined use of arts and techniques for the integral construction of a milieu in dynamic relation with experiments in behavior” (qtd. in Knabb 45). No boundaries are acknowledged in such a construction, and the separations of private and public, work and leisure spheres will be abolished. Conceived as a complex and protean activity, it was deliberately designed to intervene in the workings of everyday life and aimed at establishing a harmony between human living and human needs that itself open up to new possibilities “that will in turn transform those needs” (qtd. in Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon* 132). Debord, for instance, proposed a radical alternative to the Athens Charter's functional zoning plans that would link traffic flows to the key function of housing, work and recreation by simply rethinking the function of the automobile as an adjunct not to work but to pleasure. In contrast to the CIAM, which argued for the home as the shelter of the family and the nucleus of town planning, unitary urbanists insisted on the necessary transformation of architecture “to accord with the whole development of society, criticizing [...] condemned forms of social relationships in the first rank of which is the family” (Sadler 27).

Where Arakawa and Gins offer an “architectural body,” the Situationists proposed a “psychogeographical body” redolent with Mallarméan impersonality whose every-day mandate is the practice of *dérive*, defined by the S.I. as a “mode of experimental behavior linked to the conditions of urban society: a technique of transient passage through varied ambiances” (qtd. in Knabb 45). Vincent Kaufmann describes this

⁸ By contrast, the avant gardist *Independent Group* in England voiced a more conciliatory relation to image and mass consumerism.

practice as a "walking purged of autobiographical representation, [...] requiring the enunciatory and ambulatory disappearance of the walker" (Kaufmann 61). It is precisely the repudiation of any flâneuristic self-consciousness and the embrace of spontaneous and non-habitual movement that connects the *dérive* to labyrinthine circuitry. Debord remarks the intimate connection between the *dérive* to architectural labyrinthine construction. "Within architecture itself, the task for *dériving* tends to promote all sorts of new forms of labyrinths made possible by modern techniques of construction" (qtd. in Knabb 53). Returning to the classic model of the labyrinth one might say the *dérive* provides the Ariadne thread that is itself the labyrinth. The radical break with the classical model lies however in the variant desires of the labyrinth-dweller. The classical model is one of entry and sure return, one guaranteed by the unicursal structure of the building; the *dérive*, as a paralogic of action whose architectural form is determined entirely by human desire, consecrates and celebrates irreversibility.

Kaufmann notes "the frequency of the figure of the labyrinth from which the Situationists have no intention of exiting, a kind of ultimate refuge from the society of the spectacle" (62). In their planned psychogeographic alteration of Les Halles (the famous Paris market complex), the S.I. proposed replacing the central pavilions of the market with a series of Situationist architectural complexes, erected in the vicinity of perpetually changing labyrinths. There is a link by strategy here, of labyrinthine complexity onto fundamental instability and morphological mobility. In this way, the labyrinth is refashioned as an evanescent and constantly mutating site fulfilling Bataille's own revisionist labyrinthine desire to always lose one's way.

Constant and New Babylon

New Babylon expanded from Constant's 1957 design for a permanent Gypsy Camp at Alba in Italy, and the name "New Babylon" was first used in 1960 at Guy Debord's suggestion (ill. Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon* 80-81). Its origins and initial development, however, lay in a specific cartographical disruption enacted during the years of 1957 and 1959. As part of their psychogeographic explorations Debord and Asger Jorn produced several cut-up tourist maps of Paris, discarding whole areas and reassembling only an axis of "psychogeographical" intensities that offered a would-be traveller drifting itineraries of desire. Psychogeographic maps such as "The Naked City" and "Psychogeographic Guide" (ill. Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon* 19) are conscious reactions to the Cartesian grid and return cartography to disorientation and multiple lines of flight, extending the practice beyond a mapping of physical terrains to that of intimate states of consciousness and feeling.⁹ Constant's New Babylon was envisioned to be the architectural realization of such a map as an inhabitable city.

⁹ Sadler sees these laboriously detailed maps as "examples of the general postwar mania for systems analysis" (88).

Like Arakawa, Constant came to architecture through painting, and New Babylon would not have been conceived without his prior involvement with visual art through the COBRA group during the late 1940s and 1950s.¹⁰ Founded in late 1948 by three young artists—Asger Jorn in Copenhagen, Constant (then Constant Nieuwenhuys) in Amsterdam, and Christian Dotremont in Brussels—COBRA embraced and developed an imaginative practice whose anti-aesthetic, anti-theoretical paradigms of spontaneity, decomposition, desire, and the complete psychological emancipation of the individual, set them apart from mainstream Surrealism.¹¹ One of their major retroactive sources of inspiration derived from the ontology and praxis of childhood. COBRA's brute anti-formalism, its unconditional embrace of spontaneity and its energetic immediacy all establish their model in the panoply of expressions, graphic and acoustic licence, and play of children. Both Breton and Bataille before him had caught upon the paradoxical quality of children's art: that its playfulness, innocence and spontaneity engendered subversion and restlessness. As Bataille noted in his reflections on *l'informe*, children indulge in formal distortion rather than formal construction. If Constant heard the call of brute desire emerging from the child and consecrated the latter as a counter-cultural hero-model during his COBRA years, he left the group with the anticipations of an even greater potential of the child to be a mobilizing architectural figure. There were at least two ready precedents that proved influential on the designs and vision of New Babylon: Aldo Van Eyck's sixty playgrounds in Amsterdam designed between 1947 and 1955, and Peter and Alison Smithson's 1952 Golden Lane Housing Project in London (ill. in Zegher and Wigley 46). The latter developed out of a close analysis of the movement patterns of children playing and took the form of a spreading network, approximating a maze rather than a labyrinth, in which solid organization disappears in favour of free mobility.

Constant's short essay from late 1959, "A Different City for a Different Life" offers a succinct description of New Babylon (there referred to as "the city of the future").¹²

The city of the future must be conceived of as a continuous construction on pillars, or else as an extended system of different constructions, in which premises for living, pleasure, etc., are suspended as well as those designed for production and distribution, leaving the ground free for circulation and public meetings. The use of ultra-light and insulating materials, now being tried experimentally, will allow for light construction and broadly based supports. In this way it will be possible to build a multilayered city: underground, ground level, stories, terraces, of an expanse that may vary from a neighbourhood to a metropolis. (111)

¹⁰ Constant's 1953 wooden reliefs mark the artifactual transition from painting through sculpture into architectural model. Developing out of Giacometti's work on ludic sites of the 1930s (illus. de Zegher 19), Constant's reliefs mark the first illustrations of his thoughts on architecture and urbanism.

¹¹ The name COBRA comes from the initial letters of the three cities where the founding members lived.

¹² The article first appeared in *Internationale situationniste* 3 (December 1959), 37-40, and is reprinted in *October* 79 (Winter 1997), 109-112.

In their collaborative *Mémoires* Debord and Jorn refer to the image of a "floating city," an image realized in Constant's megastructure, which was envisioned as suspended sixteen metres above the ground and representing "a sort of extension of the Earth's surface, a new skin that covers the earth and multiplies its living space" (qtd. in Sadler 129-30). The design took the form of a paratactic, cluster configuration of loosely interlocking sectors suspended above the terrain in which were housed a number of movable partitions the effects of which Constant summarizes as "a quite chaotic arrangement of small and bigger spaces that are constantly mounted and dismounted by means of standardised mobile construction elements, like walls, floors and staircases" (qtd. in Sadler 132). Unlike Arakawa and Gins's "ubiquitous site in a locally circumscribed area," New Babylon was planned to literally leech over cities and countries. Cartographic schemes for New Babylon were drawn up for several European cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Antwerp, Paris, The Hague, Cologne, Barcelona and a vast plan for the Ruhrgebiet).¹³

It is the *dérive* that supplies the link between Situationist architecture and agency. Indeed, New Babylon remains prototypical of an architecture of *dérive*. Its most important feature is the vast and unconditional participatory potential of its occupants. Constant referred to New Babylon as "a creative game with an imaginary environment" (qtd. in Sadler 123) and as late as 1964 admitted the plan was "nothing but a suggestion" (in Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon* 67). New Babylonians are presented with a multiplicity of control options: temperature, lighting, humidity, atmosphere, and walls, with the shape of the architectural space open to alteration at a mere push of a button. The broad sociological shift demanded by Constant's project is from worker to player, from *homo faber* to *homo ludens*. New Babylon, under the temporal rubric of ephemerality as well spontaneity among a plethora of individual creative options, attempts to replace controlled function (it comes as no surprise that it is the modern airport, predicated on transient passage rather than sedentary "dwelling," that offered Constant the vision of his future city). The intimate equation in this provisional, boundaryless anti-architecture *à pilotis* is that of mobility to creative freedom.¹⁴ The Situationist architect will be a new Daedalus of constructed situations whose aspirations manifest as the endless diversory traces of both visible and invisible labyrinths in a soft architecture of the *dérive*.¹⁵ Situations will

¹³ A curious feature of New Babylon is its uncustomary development and exhibition in the form of models and photographs as opposed to drawings and blue prints. Many of Constant's labyrinth designs were constructed after his return to painting in 1969.

¹⁴ Constant's vision of a spreading city suspended above a city is not in itself original. Leonardo da Vinci offered designs for a "City on two levels," while in the twentieth century Le Corbusier adopted the suspended deck structure in his own *Pilotis*. In 1958 Alison and Peter Smithson's designed a pedestrian net slung over the entire old street plan of Berlin, that proved influential to Constant's own design. One might even mention that suspended guerrilla architectural phenomenon of "lateral piercing" employed during the Paris Commune where elevated passages were created by breaking through the walls of adjoining houses. Here, as elsewhere, I am grateful to Simon Sadler (139). Leonardo's designs can be found in Ms. B fol. 3r and 3v, and fol. 36r, now housed in Paris at L'Institut de France but more readily available in Arasse (163).

¹⁵ For Heidegger contemporary scientific pursuit involves the "extinguishing of the situation" in the current life context. Heidegger tenders three characteristics of the situation: 1. a situation is "an 'event' [*ereignis*] not a 'process.'" 2. a situation is relatively closed [*Geschlossenheit*]. 3. in a situation the "I" is never "detached" or "disengaged" [*Unabgehoben-*

provide the germinal forces for architectural and environmental reconstruction, and discrete artistic practice (sculptures, paintings, poems) will be replaced by imaginative practices of everyday life.

Within this condition of structural impermanence and change, the labyrinth figured importantly as an architectural agent of disorientation, a psycho-somatic quality Constant valued as an instrument for lateral thinking and experience.¹⁶ In March 1955 the S.I. announced the first “do-it-yourself labyrinth” in the form of a New York Building,

[...] that showed the first signs of the applicability of the dérive to apartment interiors: “The rooms in the helicoidal house will be like slices of cake. They can be made larger or smaller at will by shifting partitions. [...] This system makes it possible to transform three four-room apartments into a single apartment with twelve or more rooms in six hours.” (qtd. in Kaufmann 63)¹⁷

In New Babylon (as will be noted soon in Arakawa and Gins’s Reversible Destiny sites), structure and metamorphosis are designed to have a direct impact on bodies. “New Babylon” wrote Constant, “is one immeasurable labyrinth. Every space is temporary, nothing is recognizable, everything is discovery, everything changes, nothing can serve as a landmark. Thus psychologically a space is created which is many times larger than the actual space” (qtd. in Sadler 143). The labyrinth and the city become one. Constant’s salient contribution to the history of the labyrinth lies in his fundamental repudiation of the static classical model while retaining its archaic force. In his Yellow Sector, Constant installed two labyrinth houses expressly designed to “take up and develop the ancient forces of architectural confusion” (in Wigley, *Constant’s New Babylon* 122, ill. 88-89).

New Babylon is to be a dynamic labyrinth, a collective assemblage (and disassemblage) designed to serve the whims of a ludic society in which explosive creativity, spontaneous and instinctual, is upheld as the paramount desire. What Constant finds attractive in the dynamic labyrinth is the polymorphic provisionalities of its structure and its power of inducing efficacious disorientations. The New Babylonian “takes an active stance vis-à-vis his surroundings: he seeks to intervene, to change things, he travels extensively and

heit—“The ‘I’ never needs to come into view, [for] it swims within the situation” (Heidegger 29). How does this compare to the S.I.’s notion of a situation? In “Definitions,” (included in the 1958 journal S.I., #1,) the S.I. does not include an entry on the situation *per se* but defines a “constructed situation” as “A moment of life concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organization of a unitary ambiance and a game of events” (in Knabb 45). For the Situationists the term had its immediate roots in Sartrean existentialism. “Sartre argued that life is a series of given situations which affect the individual’s consciousness and will, and which must in turn be negotiated by that individual” (qtd. in Sadler 45). Debord rethinks the “situation” as simply a given toward a willful construction of “collective ambiances, ensembles of impressions determining the quality of a moment” (Sadler 46).

¹⁶ As his prefatory motto for “The New Babylonian Culture,” Constant chose Rimbaud’s famous sentence “It is a matter of achieving the unknown by a derangement of the senses” (*le dérèglement de tous les sens*).

¹⁷ The uncanny apposition of commodity logic’s built-in obsolescence and the S.I.’s impermanent architectures might prove to be a permanent and irreconcilable irony.

wherever he goes he leaves traces of his ludic activities. Space for him is a toy for exploration, adventure, and play" (Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon* 225). Constant envisions a "Zone of Play" containing "'labyrinth houses' consisting of a large number of rooms of irregular form, stairs at angles, lost corners, open spaces, culs-de-sac" (Vidler 213) and the constant possibility to realize *dérive*.¹⁸

As late as 1974, Constant, reflecting on the problematic nature of such a highly processual "construction," frankly admits to an ideological, political and economic impasse:

A dynamic labyrinth cannot be designed, it cannot originate in the mind of a single individual. It arises in the first instance as a non-stop process that can be initiated and maintained by the simultaneous activity of a great many individuals. And this implies a social freedom and, concomitantly, a massive creative potential, that are inconceivable in the utilitarian society. ("The Principle of Disorientation" 225)

The situational and collective nature of the dynamic labyrinth presupposes play and creative leisure as the governing ideological paradigm and life-style. In light of this, Constant is aware of the compromise formation that any limited laboratory form of experimental space will offer:

The essential precondition for a dynamic labyrinth, namely the simultaneous creative activity of a large number of individuals, resulting in a collectively generated situation, cannot, of course, be realized in the context of an experimental space. The experimental space is no more than an (imperfect) object of study. (225)

Despite an unqualified commitment to spontaneity and emancipation, Constant, like Arakawa and Gins, elevates the heuristic to an architectural imperative. This agenda becomes clear in his exhilarating 1962-63 hybrid *Labyratorium* (*Labyratoire*), designed to incorporate the playful meanderings and disorientations of labyrinthine space with the scientific and hermeneutic experiments of a laboratory condition (ill. in McDonough 99). The design and technology that make up the *Labyratorium*, complete with atmospheric obstacles and transformations in temperature, and the transformation of visual space by means of sliding mirrors, precipitate a gamut of sensory defamiliarization and novel experiences induced from impediments. Thus, it would be misleading to paint an image of New Babylon as a constant creative mutation. Constant's Rotterdam labyrinth (1966) as well as containing "rooms that exposed their occupants to sounds, colors, and smells" also contained rooms that compressed occupants into cramped, small areas in which they had to crawl their way through (Sadler 149). And at least one aspect of the project back-fired: Constant's plan of wiring the labyrinth with a telephonic update of the Ariadne thread so that the occupants could phone out with their reactions actually helped keep their behaviour conditioned and rational.

Constant's designs have some surprising morphological evocations and premonitions. The L-shaped labyrinths (found in some Reversible Destiny designs) are evident in the Orient Sector, the 1959 plan of the

¹⁸ One inspiration for Constant were the ludic models outlined in Huizanga's 1944 book *Homo Ludens. A Study of the Play Element in culture*. Perhaps the true heir of this presidential spirit of play is Fluxus. On the relationship of Fluxus to architecture see *Fantastic Architecture*, edited by Dick Higgins and Wolf Vostell. New York: Something Else Press, 1969.

Yellow Sector, and in the lesser known *Architectural Maquette* of 1958 (ill. *October* 79 107), which structurally anticipates Arakawa and Gins's *Antimortality Fractal Zipper City* whose contours all derive from abutting twin L-shaped labyrinths (ill. *Reversible Destiny* 252-53).¹⁹ A 1968 coloured sketch shows a mobile labyrinth of open, intersecting cubic spaces forming a multilevel construction connected by ladders, instantly evoking a Piranesi open plan, with the *carceri* deprived of their solidity but not of their spatial illogic.²⁰ The catena of evocations does not end here. Constant peoples his labyrinth with cyclists riding up the ladders, suspended monocycles and a more complex wheeled vehicle (an intended allusion to both Marcel Duchamp and Jarry's *Père Ubu* in this staffage is not inconceivable). Freely drawn circles undercut the angularity of the structure with hints of dynamic cyclic action (ill. in Zegher and Wigley 116). But perhaps the most surprising morphological evocation is that of the simple wooden, multilevel fishing platforms found around Stanleyville in the Belgian Congo and in Vieste, Italy.²¹ The startling apposition may be chance but the link of dynamic labyrinthine form to cultural conditions vastly different from the urban complexities of Paris is worth noting, as too is the return of the labyrinth to function.²² Piranesi's spatial illogicalities and the consequent architectural dangers are once more picked up in a 1969 colour crayon drawing of a "Labyrinth space" but here synthesized with the flat modularity of modernist space (ill. in Zegher and Wigley 117).

With its perpetual motion, dynamic change and consequent labyrinthine architectural insecurity, it is not fanciful to claim that New Babylon approximates a Baroque atmospherics. Omar Calabrese claims the labyrinth to be a "profoundly baroque" figure, most frequently drawing critical and creative attention "during 'baroque' periods" (131-32). At the same time New Babylon elicits a different consideration through various Deleuzian topics. Deleuze's impact on contemporary architectural thought is considerable, notably through a single publication: *The Fold*. Evidence of this narrow importation of Deleuze's concepts can be gathered from the contents page of *Folding in Architecture*, edited by Greg Lynn and published in 1993: "Architectural Curvilinearity" (Greg Lynn), "Folding in Time" (Peter Eisenman), "Unfolding Architecture" (Chuck Hoberman), "Out of the Fold" (John Rachman), and "The Material Fold" (Claire Robinson).

Notwithstanding the architectural usefulness of folding, there are two more of Deleuze's concepts that seem strikingly appositional with Constant's project. One agenda of *The Fold* is to rehabilitate the Baroque as a trans-historic phenomenon of folding and the book is redolent with architectural suggestions (pre-eminently the Baroque or Leibnizian monad conceived as a two-story windowless building). Early in the

¹⁹ See McCaffery, fig. a (*Antimort_City.jpg*).

²⁰ John Wilton-Ely suggests certain influences on Piranesi's vortical constructions. These include a stage design for a prison now in the Albertina, Vienna, by Ferdinando Bibiena, & Jean-Louis sado-carceral architectural Fantasies. See Wilton-Ely 89.

²¹ Images of both appeared in Bernard Rudofsky's 1964 MoMA exhibition catalogue *Architecture without Architects: A Short Introduction to Non-Pedigreed Architecture*, illus. 107-08.

²² I will have occasion to speak of Rudofsky's book again in relation to Arakawa and Gins.

book Deleuze introduces the *objectile*, a technological concept newly formulated by the French architect, Bernard Cache. The *objectile* refers to

[...] *our current state of things*, where fluctuation of the norm replaces the permanence of a law; *where the object assumes a place in a continuum by variation [...]. The new status of the object no longer refers its condition to a spatial mould—in other words, to a relation of form-matter—but to a temporal modulation that implies as much the beginnings of a continuous variation of matter as a continuous development of form. (19 my emphases)*

This describes New Babylon in a nutshell, where form, solidity and consistency give way to "temporal modulation" and continuous, unpredictable variation of architectural matter. Moreover, if we theorize the inhabitants of such *objectile* architecture as *subjectiles*, that is, theorize the dweller as free agent of *objectility*, we approximate the entire *desiderata* of Constant's project.

Cache's *objectile* immediately conjures up Deleuze's similar notion of *becoming*. For Deleuze, becoming is a profoundly a-historic move to "create something new" (*Negotiations* 171). "Becomings" he avers, "belong to geography, they are orientations, directions, entries and exits. [...] There is no terminus from which you set out, none which you arrive at or which you ought to arrive at." Becomings "are acts which can only be contained in a life and expressed in a style. Styles are not constructions, any more than are modes of life" (Deleuze and Parnet 2-3). Given this Deleuzian inflection "becoming" accurately describes both the structure and occupation of New Babylon as dynamic labyrinth.

A Deleuzian architecture figured as a constant becoming? Mark Wigley specifies the presiding paradox in New Babylon. Within (and in this instance what is it to be within?) a multimedia megastructure that is ever changing at the wills and creative intervention of its users how can such a structure be presented? "Since the basic principle of New Babylon was constant change, any one representation of it or anyone medium of representation, was clearly suspect" ("Paper, Scissors, Blur" 33). Thomas McDonough similarly ruminates on the irresolvable paradox that was to be New Babylon: "The basis of this utopian city lay, after all, in the conviction that the need of a truly free society would be so complex, so changeable, that any attempt by a single architect to anticipate them would lead to inevitably repressive results" (97).

Let's recall here Tschumi's comments on the dark spaces of experience, where sensory enhancement collides with the absence, the impossible presence, of an overview. The unavoidable architectural aporia locates the utter triumph of provisionality in a constantly changing labyrinth whose architects (constructively and destructively) are the New Babylonians themselves. The sociological consequence of this paradoxical anti-architecture is an increase of unprecedented enormity in the powers by which inhabitants determine their own architectural surrounds and vectors. Constant himself was aware of the paradoxical nature of his project: "the structures are anything but permanent. It is effectively a matter of a microstructure in continuous transformation, in which the time factor—the fourth dimension—plays a considerable role" (qtd. in McDo-

nough 97).²³ We still remain however in a version of Celantian deprived space albeit one significantly transposed from the individual to the collective level.

Marc Wigley concludes that “Constant dedicated himself to drawing a mirage” (“Paper, Scissors, Blur” 52), and it is indeed difficult to rescue New Babylon from the detritus and misprisions of historical contingency. Constant too was aware of the practical unrealizability of New Babylon in the economic climate of the 1960s. His entire project, and the S.I. movement as a whole, was predicated on the validity of a general theory of leisure conceived in a state of post-capitalist abundance. Both mistakenly assumed a future characterized by the total automatization of production, collective ownership of land, and a potential lifestyle of unbounded leisure. In the nascent stages of the twenty-first century we are closer to actualizing the former but moving further and further from the latter. Moreover, the celebration of ephemerality and change carried a more ominous burden of its own kinetics of impermanence: a Heraclitan urbanism whose potential to violence is the omnipresent norm. The Situationist Ivan Chtcheglov (pseudonym of Gilles Ivain) warned against the “explosion, dissolution, dissociation, disintegration” that threatens the continual drifter (qtd. in Sadler 145). Given its embrace of anarchic freedom New Babylon remains a constantly uncertain, *unheimlich* locale, where the “space of desire is finally understood as a place of conflict” (Wigley, *Constant’s New Babylon* 69). Constant himself had already noted this sinister return of the Minotaur to the labyrinth admitting

New Babylon is an uncertain universe where the “normal” man is at the mercy of every possible destructive force, every kind of aggression. [...] The image of a free man who does not have to struggle for his existence is without historical basis [...] man’s aggressivity does not disappear with the satisfaction of his immediate material needs. (qtd. in Wigley, Constant’s New Babylon 69)

“To really appreciate architecture” Bernard Tschumi comments, “you may even have to commit murder” (100).²⁴

We might be justified then in writing off New Babylon as an inevitably failed utopia, yet some of its prophecies may in fact have been realized. Constant’s vision waxed and waned under the conceptual guidance and apothegmic challenge of Walter Benjamin’s belief that the labyrinth ranks as the ancient dream of humanity and that the city is its realization. But perhaps the actualization transcends the civic dimension and takes an immaterial, hyperspatial form. Both prophetic and reflective, New Babylon finds its realization in the technologically inspired mobile cities of Archigram and, as Marcos Novak insists, in the electronic circuitries of the web (20-27). The fifth point in Constant and Debord’s 1958 Amsterdam Declaration defined

²³ As long ago as 1921 Kasimir Malevich claimed that human being was already in a new fourth dimension of motion.

²⁴ Tschumi embraces violence as a necessary component of architecture: “Architecture is defined by the actions it witnesses as much as by the enclosure of its walls. Murder in the Street differs from Murder in the Cathedral in the same way as love in the street differs from the Street of Love. Radically” (100). For a full discussion see “Violence of Architecture” in Tschumi 121-34.

unitary urbanism as "the complex, ongoing activity which consciously recreates man's environment *according to the most advanced conceptions in every domain*" (qtd. in Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon* 87, emphasis mine). Constant readily embraced contemporary technology; the computer was central to New Babylon and, in spirit at least, his visionary project augured the realm of virtual and cyber-architectonics. Catherine de Zegher endorses this prophetic, labyrinthine, technological dimension of New Babylon:

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. (Zegher and Wigley 10)

In his "Theory of the Dérive," Debord seized on the fecund analogy of ocean and city likening the "psychogeographical relief [of cities to] constant currents, fixed point and vortexes which strongly discourage entry into or from certain zones" (qtd. in Knabb 5). This link of city to ocean served as a formative analogy in New Babylon and is currently intransigently installed as the governing metaphor of the Web (itself a metaphor). The *dérive* returns in the activity of surfing, set against the more protentive act of "navigating." Moreover, it resuscitates the ancestral phenotype of the New Babylonian in the Baudelarian flâneur, with streets, crowds, cafés and peregrination updated to a solitary, seated manual connection to a world of web sites and links.

It is beyond dispute that the web and internet have successfully incorporated many of the features of New Babylon and have realized certain of Constant's aspirations: de-centeredness, user control, multiple choice and variations, sensory euphoria. But questions linger beneath superficial comparisons. What, for instance, is the fate of collective lived experience, so central to New Babylon, in an age of Digital Immaterialism? The triumph of machinic interactivity is indisputable when considering the fate of inter-subjective communication. As Lev Manovich elucidates, when surfing, a human user addresses a machine, with communication "centered on the physical channel and the very act of connection between addresser and addressee" (206). Web sites, computer games and virtual worlds are governed by a specific temporal dynamic that Manovich describes as "constant, repetitive oscillation between an illusion and its suspense" (205). Historically, the emergence of the World Wide Web is not a parallel birth to that of post-industrial capitalism but rather a consequence of it. In our contemporary global, techno-political condition, it is sobering to reflect on the fact that New Babylon drew criticism from the S.I. for its attempt to integrate mass living into a totally technological environment, thus constituting an extension, not rejection, of capitalist ideology.

The labyrinth in procedural architecture: Arakawa and Gins, *Reversible Destiny*

A map of the world without utopia on it is not worth looking at, because it excludes the only country where mankind is constantly landing.

(Oscar Wilde, qtd. in Bray and Simonot 186)

Any discussion of Arakawa and Gins's position in the history of the labyrinth must take into account the labyrinth's function within their wider, revolutionary project, *Reversible Destiny*, whose own urgent context seems accurately formulated in the following statement by British architect Neil Spiller:

"The architectural subject" is changing (by "subject" both the body and practice is meant). Traditional notions of architectural enclosure are unable to respond to the growing range and virtuosity of the body and this is an escalating problem. Architectural theory has been slow, if not frighteningly inert, in understanding and facilitating the metamorphosis of its own subject, both spatially and biologically. (104)

At the outset I must admit that I find one aspect of their self-historicizing problematic. The sub-title of their book *Architecture Sites of Reversible Destiny*, reads "Architectural Experiments after Auschwitz-Hiroshima." To grammatically link two vastly discrete events, both horrendous and genocidal but so contextually different, strikes me as ethically—because historically—irresponsible. It is a ghastly irony that Heidegger commits the almost identical conflation in his notoriously minimal break with taciturnity around the matter of the Nazi extermination of the Jews (and others) in his 1949 second Bremen Lecture: "Agriculture is now a mechanized food industry, in essence the same as the manufacture of corpses in the gas chambers and extermination camps, the same as the blockade and starvation of the countryside, the same as the production of the hydrogen bombs" (qtd. in Lang 16). Leaving aside whatever these comments reveal about Heidegger, their substance should warn against grasping at essences, reveal the danger of analogy and the irresponsibility of false copulas.

I will need to touch on the historic trauma named "Auschwitz" towards the end of this paper where I consider *Reversible Destiny* (with its slogan "We have decided not to die") against certain bio-political assertions of Giorgio Agamben. Ironically, it is a Situationist, Raoul Vaneigem, who briefly alludes to these two event-atrocities in relation to urban planning, writing in his 1961 notes with bitter sarcasm, "[i]f the Nazis had known contemporary urbanists, they would have transformed concentration camps into low-income housing" and later in the same article "to destroy one's adversary with H-bombs is to condemn oneself to die in more protracted suffering" (123, 126).

A different, more practical problem that I face is my limited exposure to *Reversible Destiny* sites. Rather than any in-hand-on-foot exploration of the *Multilevel labyrinth* or the *Site of Reversible Destiny—Yoro*

in Japan (ill. Arakawa and Gins, *Reversible Destiny* 194-213),²⁵ my knowledge of their work is restricted to computer-generated images and texts in books and magazines, as well as personal discussions with Ms. Gins on the odd occasion. Strictly speaking, at this point in time, we should discriminate between two Reversible Destinies: the texts, images and models, i.e. the sum of its representations, and the growing number of realized constructions. We must additionally and constantly stay alert to the fact that Reversible Destiny is *not* a paper or computer architecture but one intended for construction and habitation. Unlike Constant, Arakawa and Gins have brought some of their visionary architecture to reality, and as more sites of Reversible Destiny are built and utilized, more pragmatic answers will be forthcoming to the questions their project raises. These answers will be supplied by the users, the dwellers, the "Reversed Destinarians" of Reversible Destiny.

If Lebbeus Woods offers a "radical architecture" then what do Arakawa and Gins propose? This is an urgent and timely question that should occupy the thinking of all contemporary architects whose work has any ethical inflection; it is also a question that should not be answered too readily. Their work as procedural architects finds itself in a complicated situation among and between the three major discourses of ethics, philosophy and history. Mark Taylor situates it intellectually in a post-Kantian idealism, a phenomenology of perception that "falls between Hegel's phenomenology of spirit and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception" (128). Yet the greater proximity to the latter is clearly evident in the following comments on Merleau-Ponty by Ignasi de Solà-Morales that illustrate cogently the undeniable affinity of Reversible Destiny to post-war phenomenological aspirations:

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's Phénoménologie de la perception of 1945 offers a synthetic summary of a body of research based on studies of both the structure of behavior and the primacy of perception. This research displaced the merely visual, replacing it with the idea that our experience of the world around us comes from the body in its totality: spatio-temporal, sexual, mobile, and expressive. The visual-tactile dichotomy posited by Alois Riegl in the early years of the [20th] century in order to analyze the various different orders of aesthetic experience was converted by the phenomenologists into a much more general, more basic theory. Even the aesthetic was thus to be understood as that which was connected not with artistic perception but, in a much wider sense, with interactions of every kind between the self and the world. (22)

Heidegger's and Merleau-Ponty's separate contributions to architectural theory (albeit indirectly) rest in a common depreciation of the optical paradigm and the recovery of the essential relation of body to labyrinth in the radical proposal that a being's relationship to space is quintessentially one of movement.²⁶

"In fact, unless one is in some way enclosed in one [body], one is nothing; but if, on the other hand, one is perfectly truthful, bodies do not exist." (St. Augustine, *De vera religione*, qtd. in Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy* 264). Augustine inscribes here a Christian dogma that Reversible Destiny refutes. An architectural

²⁵ See McCaffery, fig. b (Terrain_Model.jpg).

²⁶ The survival of the classical labyrinth in schematizations that present it as a miniaturized pattern experienced solely visually from above, annuls its primarily tactile and kinetic experience.

body will succeed Augustine's aporial body and be installed in the initiatory premise of procedural architecture as its basic presupposition.²⁷ It equally eschews Bataille's 1929 definition of architecture as the violent imposition of social order via a calculated monumentality whose productions were seen by him to be "the real masters of the world, grouping servile multitudes in their shadows" (qtd. in Hollier 53). For Arakawa and Gins "[a]rchitecture, in anyone's definition of it, exists primarily to be at the service of the body" (*Architectural Body* xi). Bataille, of course, did not endorse his own definition. Thinking back to Haussmann and anticipating Albert Speer, he remains alert to the violence at the heart of any monumental aspiration. In the direct lineage of Vitruvian architectural thinking, Bataille connects human to architectural form via a system of projected proportions. To his mind, however, this anthropomorphism results in the petrification of all human activity. Both Constant and Arakawa and Gins are attracted to the benefits of architectural disequilibrium whereas what fascinates Bataille is a latent anti-architecture brought about in the purposeful disfiguration of the human form in certain expressionist painting, and in children's drawings.

For Arakawa and Gins and non-procedural architects like Robin Evans, who alike see architecture as the construction of the preconditions that govern the way bodies occupy and negotiate space, the question of architectural form and architectural thinking is one of architecture's relation to the scale and matter of human freedom.²⁸ Arakawa and Gins's singular insight, however, derives from the basic premise that the body is a place not an identity. Body is local and geographic before it is cognitive and subjective; it is *dasein* understood as a being "there" in an architectural surround. Moreover, it should be made clear from the outset that their concern with the human body is uncontaminated by intrusive, historical aesthetics. Indeed, their work involves a seminal repudiation not only of Modernist functionality but architecture's enduring anthropomorphic paradigm.

In "It and I: Bodies as Objects, Bodies as Subjects," Karen A. Franck offers the useful distinction between designs *for* the body and designs *from* the body; i.e. embodied from transcendental architecting. Designs *from* the body led to the anthropomorphic paradigm that governed architecture from Vitruvius to Modernism, precipitating a litany of humanist theories on the relation of human bodily proportions to extrinsic and enveloping dwellings. Liane Lefaivre traces the emergence of the anthropomorphic metaphor (so central to humanist architectural thinking) through three dominant counter-strategies to the patristic conception of buildings as "dangerous bodies." The first, developing in the tenth-century, reconfigures the body as the "marvelous body," a repository or magnet attracting a panoply of glittering appurtenances: jewels, clothes, etc. Further developing in the twelfth-century is the "divine" body, linked to incorporeality, divine luminescence, and geometric proportion and relation. Finally, the "desired" body, conceived as a vital attractor and

²⁷ Arakawa and Gins' use of the term "architectural body" should not be confused with Liane Lefaivre's use of it in her 1997 book *Leon Battista Alberti's Hypnerotomachia Poliphili: Re-cognizing the Architectural Body in the Early Italian Renaissance*.

²⁸ See "Towards Anarchitecture" which opens Robin Evans' *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays* 11-34.

target of ardour and passionate forces, emerges with Alberti in the fifteenth-century.²⁹ The anthropomorphic episteme governing the canons of proportion remained pandemic precisely because the measure of man was taken to be the measure of God. This isomorphism of *anthropos* and *theos* granted divine sanction to numerous aberrant architectural feats such as the howling face at Bomarzo "behind which is a room entered by the mouth lit by the eyes" (Harbison 49).³⁰

As well as a *carte blanche* rejection of anthropomorphism, Modernist architecture also deserted the body as living, projective and permeable embodiment, losing sight of the fact that bodies inhabit and negotiate space as their primary architecture. This latter fact, quintessential to Arakawa and Gins's procedural praxis, is the legacy of phenomenology from Heidegger through Merleau-Ponty up to Karen A. Franck, and equally of that "other" tradition of Modernism that includes Frank Lloyd Wright, Alvar Aalto, and Eric Mendelsohn noted by Colin St. John.³¹

Juhani Pallasmaa comments on the dominating optical paradigm which governed Modernist architecture's obsessive focus on the visible and effected the mental separation of buildings from human bodies. "Modernist design has housed the intellect and the eyes, but it has left the body and other senses, as well as our memories and dreams, homeless" (10). This retinal privileging is exacerbated in Postmodern building with its definitive lamination of semiotics onto visual form in order to render architecture "readable" as contrasting codes. It thus seems a curious irony in *Reversible Destiny* that the concern for an architectural body is to a large extent arrived at and disseminated through sophisticated computer generation and cyber-technology and most readily available through illustrations and documentation in books and magazines. Indeed, at the present stage, Arakawa and Gins's work largely exists in what would have been Constant's dream: the disembodied immateriality of computer-generated virtual architecture. Karen Franck comments on the physical, servo-mechanistic consequences of a computer screen: Engaged in three-dimensional models and interactive computer programs "[t]he architect's body can remain nearly immobile: there is no need for physical manipulation of materials and tools" (Franck 18).

With the additional elimination of tactile and olfactory sensations virtual architecting signals the triumph of the visual in a techno-transcendental space of simulacra. Franck's comments can be extended to the dwellers and users of cybernetic spaces where, for designers and users alike, embodiment in a multi-

²⁹ These fascinating mutations and developments are ably traced in Lefaivre 200-51.

³⁰ This history is not without other maverick disfigurements. In *Figueras*, for instance, Salvador Dali offered a reconstructed face of Mae West into which museum visitors walked in at a surprising entry point. "[W]e cross the chin (a short flight of steps), sit down on the lips (a sofa), where we can admire the eyes (pictures on the wall) or look out through the hair (curtains framing the whole interior)" (Harbison 49-50).

³¹ For practical examples of moves towards this other tradition I refer the reader to the sensory exercises described in Franck and implemented by Galen Cranz at Berkeley, Nadi Alhasani at the University of Pennsylvania, Kim Tanzer, (Florida) and Karen Franck (New Jersey Institute of Technology).

sensory engagement ultimately gives way to the simulacral gaze. Notwithstanding this irony, Franck's heroic defence of the subjective body is one shared by Arakawa and Gins as well as by Juhanni Pallasmaa in his architecture designed for sensory stimulation and addressed directly to the body's own systems of orientation (see Pallasmaa). Arakawa and Gins clearly share Pallasmaa's credo that "basic architectural experiences have a verb form rather than being nouns" (44-45) and open up architecture in its verbal form as active "architecting" for lived, experimental experience; to adopt Franck's useful distinction, their focus falls on *how* not *what* the body is (16).

Robert A. Morgan tenders a candid, negative assessment of Reversible Destiny:

What is significant about these cybergenerated projects, in spite of their totally fragmented impracticality, is how they represent the current cultural crisis to the extreme. [...] The illusory aspect of the work related to its computer programming. It functions as a digital system, yet has limited applications in terms of actual mind-body involvement. The seduction of virtual time-space gives a convincing display of a virtual environment, but one that is highly self-conscious reflecting a type of narcissistic indulgence. (78)

Morgan's assessment, however, is inaccurate, because it conflates means with ends and fails to credit the project of Reversible Destiny as trenchantly set against the cyberspatial consecration of ek-stasis and virtual disembodiment. Indeed, Reversible Destiny *cannot be experienced* merely within texts, images, and cybertechnic representations, and only if the ratio of simulacra and representation to actual construction widens in favour of the former will Morgan's claims gain in validity.

Constant's decisive shift in emphasis from formal to ambient constructions marks a significant moment in architectural revision. In his "Inaugural Report on the Munich Conference" (1959), he states clearly what he considers to be the architectural issue of the day: "What makes contemporary architecture so boring is its principally formal preoccupations. [...] Even as he uses existing forms and creates new ones, the architect's principle concern has got to become *the effect that it is going to have on the dweller's behavior and existence*" (qtd. in Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon* 101, emphasis mine). Such a credo, conceived in the last years of the 1950s, lies at the heart of Arakawa and Gins's Reversible Destiny project. The lexicon of form is replaced in their work by a detailed constellation of new concepts and initially daunting formulations: bioscleave, landing sites, critical holders, engaging and guiding bars (this latter term has a Kantian antecedent), all designed to explain primary architectural and perceptual effects on the body and senses of the dweller.³² Rather than repeat the definitions of these important concepts I will refer the reader to published sources, especially the recent *Architectural Body*.³³

³² Kant speaks of *leitfäden* (guiding threads) in the third *Critique* when discussing the gesture of aesthetic subreption as a grasping of one of such threads. For details see Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* 183.

³³ They share this terminological fecundity with Deleuze and Guattari who situate the production of new concepts at the heart of the philosophical enterprise: "Simply, the time has come for us to ask what philosophy is. We have never stopped asking this question, and we already had the answer, which has not changed: philosophy is the art of forming, inventing,

Like Richard Serra's *Clara Clara*, *Reversible Destiny* focuses on the broad issue of spatial tolerance, and the more specific matter of proximity with contact and implicit convergences; it seems concordant too with what Manfredo Tafuri calls a "*self-disalienation* launched by negative design" (143). Its confrontational challenge is to the ultimate efficacy of behaviorally normative environments.³⁴ Arakawa and Gins are not isolated in this proclivity to practical disequilibrium. Indeed, their work in part fits into a broad contemporary artistic and architectural inclination. A comparable purposeful disequilibrium is obtained in Robert Gober's "pitched" cribs and playpens, where the normally vertical rectangular structures are pitched at a 45° angle and thus rendered non-utilitarian. Gober's work has been compared to Duchamp's readymades and "corrected readymades" but the intended inoperability, when assessed according to the functional paradigm, is clearly a feature shared with some *Reversible Destiny* houses.³⁵ One need only compare Gober's pitched furniture with the tilted floors of Arakawa and Gins's *Infancy House* and *Transitional House* where a tilt converts floors into terrains (ill. *Reversible Destiny* 266-69).³⁶

For his part, Gerrit Rietveld offers stick chairs which question the nature and function of chairs, inducing a condition in which "the leg meeting the chair isn't two but four entities negotiating a settlement" (Harbison 42). Harbison's own conclusion emphasizes the same qualities of tentativeness and uncertainty that are the defining features of *Reversible Destiny*: "[U]nderlying [the principle of the stick chair] is a sense that nothing is safe or certain [...], one can't take even chairs for granted" (Harbison 42). *Reversible Destiny* has also been compared to the strategic "dislocations" advanced by Bernard Tschumi and Rem Koolhaas.³⁷ Peter Eisenman evinces a similar desire in his plan for the Parc de la Villette where visitors "should sense something else and feel dislocated. That is the important thing—the dislocation from the ordinary expectation of what is a garden" (Eisenman and Derrida 70). But perhaps the most compellingly comparable works to those of *Reversible Destiny* are the domestic subversions of Günther Feuerstein.

Repudiating in 1960 the serial facilities of functional design, Feuerstein, in his plan for "impractical flats," advocated a radical estrangement of the familiar domicile, introducing noisy doors, useless locks and tortuous passages (Sadler 7). Sadler describes the ontological consequences:

[A dweller's home] would no longer protect him from the environment nor the sensations of his own body: ripping out his air conditioning and throwing open his windows, he could swelter, shiver and struggle to hear

and fabricating concepts" (Deleuze and Guattari 2). If we lend credence to this terse assertion, then part of Arakawa and Gins' *Reversible Destiny* project is truly philosophical.

³⁴ For a concise description of Serra's project see Harbison 14.

³⁵ See, for example, Masheck 109-12.

³⁶ See McCaffery, fig. c (*Infancy House.jpg*).

³⁷ See "Four Architects on *Reversible Destiny*" in *Reversible Destiny* 215-21.

himself think above the roar of the city; later he might bump and hurt himself against one of the myriad sharp corners in his flat, and sit at his wobbly table and on his uncomfortable sofa. (8)

It is as if the abandoned structures and ruined buildings rendered famous in Gordon Matta-Clark's photographic installations are suddenly designed that way for occupation.

All of the above examples (and to them we add New Babylon and Reversible Destiny) are the consanguineous heirs to the Russian Formalist principle of *ostranenie* (de-familiarization or "making strange"). Coined by Viktor Sklovskij as a counter strategy to urban and aesthetic automatism, the principle demands a rejection of the desensitizing effects of habit. Sklovskij writes (and its content perhaps deliberately evokes Rimbaud's famous phrase "too bad for the violin"): "We are like a violinist who has stopped feeling his bow and strings" (qtd. in Steiner 49).

Like Constant before them, Arakawa and Gins are attracted to labyrinths as architectural spaces for inducing disequilibrium and imbalance: "It is desirable" they counsel, "to keep the body in a state of imbalance for as long as possible. The actions, the range of actions, possible to the body for righting itself and regaining its balance will both define and reveal the body's essential nature" (*Architecture* 18). The break with the classic model is unmistakable; imbalance is impossible in the unicursal classical labyrinth where only cognitive uncertainty pertains and nothing is revealed about the body's essential nature (other than its inevitable death). In another way, however, New Babylon and the labyrinths of Arakawa and Gins accord with the central feature of the labyrinth, a feature Wittgenstein attributes to language when asserting "language is a labyrinth of paths" (*Philosophical Investigations* 203). Wittgenstein comes close here to specifying the true nature of the labyrinth as a pathway rather than an architecture. Labyrinths, in fact, relate less to architecture *per se* than to orchestrated passage and choreographies; it is the complications and impediments to normative movement of bodies in space that mark the essence of labyrinthine experience.

Labyrinths and labyrinthine elements populate Reversible Destiny sites. Arakawa and Gins have constructed two single-level labyrinths out of rubber and other materials (*Reversible Destiny* 147); their 1985 *Terrain Study Model No. 2* is redolent in labyrinthine effects induced by the dweller's inability to hold a general and complete plan (*Reversible Destiny* 225).³⁸ In *Antimortality Fractal Zipper City* labyrinth effects find themselves complemented by mirror opposites. "All contours of the city" Arakawa and Gins explain, "have their basis in twin L-shaped labyrinths that abut. Areas selected to be enclosed in one twin remain open public spaces in the other, making two halves of the city complementary opposites in regard to function" (*Reversible Destiny* 252-53). The *Inflected Arcade House* (ill. *Reversible Destiny* 264-65) combines labyrinthine perplexity with inflection.³⁹ One structure especially recaptures the architectural intimacy and tactility of the classical labyrinth and fuses it with the Situationist vision of an architecture to promulgate desire. As Arakawa and Gins describe it, "[t]he Trench House accommodates and embodies the body's

³⁸ See McCaffery, fig. b (Terrain_Model.jpg).

³⁹ See McCaffery, fig. e (inflected_arcade.jpg).

endless desire to draw close to and be in rapport with virtually everything. Trenches cut through surfaces, carving out circular labyrinths. What would normally not be within the body's reach comes to be so. A mould of the paths of desire" (*Architecture* 105).

All Reversible Destiny houses are constructed as "counter dwellings" and like all procedural architecture are designed to foreground landing site activity. Arakawa and Gins describe their important *Critical Resemblances House* as a "reworked labyrinth" utilizing labyrinth-derived patterns in a binary operation of rectilinear and curvilinear groupings (ill. *Reversible Destiny* 258-61).⁴⁰ In its three-level plan it clearly anticipates the multilevel labyrinth, offering a comparably torturous negotiation of interior spaces:

[T]he body is invited to move through composite passageways—rectilinear above, curvilinear below—often in two opposing ways at once. It could take several hours to go from the living room to the kitchen. Parts of the kitchen or the living room reappear in the bedroom or bathroom. It might take several days to find everywhere in the house that the dining room turns up. (Reversible Destiny 258)

Moreover, by featuring "the underside of things," Arakawa and Gins succeed in transposing an imaging landing site into a perceptual one. Although similarities to Feuerstein's "impractical flats" with their non-functioning facilities and deliberate delapidations seem undeniable, those similarities are superficial. A radical defamiliarization of dwelling is obviously common to both, but the unsettling of the temporal-protentive dimension, complicating any projected move through time, is distinct to the *Critical Resemblances House*. It expands and maximizes the temporal dimension of the classical labyrinth, complicating the periphrastic trope of the classical meander with an additional architectural catachresis. *The Ubiquitous Site House* (*Reversible Destiny* 300-01) extends the labyrinth into a chaos to be occupied; it is the closest Reversible Destiny design to fully capture the spirit of New Babylon as a dweller-determined architecture:

Shape precludes entry, but entry can occur when a resident forcibly inserts herself into the pliant, half-structured muddle. Room size is proportional to energy expended. [...] [G]enerally each area pushed open constitutes an architectural surround whose every feature lies within touching distance. (Reversible Destiny 301)

Arakawa and Gins's *multilevel labyrinth* is the subject of Chapter 8 of their *Architectural Body* and computer-generated images of it form part of the section on Landing Sites in *Architecture: Sites of Reversible Destiny*. It is proffered as "a prime example of a critical holder" providing its user "with an activating field set up to coordinate and track landing-site dispersal and to depict and augment a person's coordinating skills" (82). Like Constant, they confuse the classical labyrinth with the later maze, attributing to the former "secret passages" and a mandate to puzzle one's way out (*Architectural Body* 84).⁴¹ Like its classical ances-

⁴⁰ See McCaffery, fig. d (Rubber_Labyrinth.jpg) and fig. f (critical_house_plan.jpg).

⁴¹ They are not alone in this misprision, Derrida too makes the same mistake: "I have a very ambiguous relationship with the labyrinth. I like it, of course, but I think it is too close to the desire to find the exit door from the reappropriation. It's too classical; it's a topos" (Eisenman and Derrida 48). As I have argued the classical labyrinth is less a topos than an orchestrated itinerary along a pathway.

tor the multilevel labyrinth, both simple and ingenious, is not difficult to construct. Indeed, the recipe provided reads like a Situationist *détourne* of a child's toy:

Start with a six-inch-thick hula-hoop at hip level. Add enough hula hoops, all at hip level, to glue together a six-inch plane of them throughout the room. Cut into these fifty or so glued together hula hoops to make a labyrinth-layer, bending the hoops to vary the curves and occasionally straightening them to make a more direct path. Make two or three distinctly different labyrinth-layers out of the hula hoop plane. Stacking the labyrinth-layers with one-foot-wide rows of blankness between them, a bit wider proportionately than the blanks accompanying these lines, fill the room with them. (Architectural Body 89)

The efficacy of the multilevel labyrinth derives from its blocking rather than facilitating of passage (in this respect it is a radical reversal of the classical model): "How convenient that this labyrinth stops the body proper in its tracks. Within it people will be able to keep track of near and far components of their architectural bodies" (84). This blocking and tracking ability derives from the transparent nature of the labyrinth, envisioned here not as a winding warren of stone wall but as an open "lattice for praxis" (84). Transparency and openness. The multilevel labyrinth shares these two characteristics with several of Constant's multilevel labyrinths. In Constant's envisioned constructions, however, transparency articulates onto the reflective and mirror distortion, and though levels connect they do not share the intimacy of simultaneous negotiation. Constant's ladder labyrinth resembles an updated hybrid of Piranesi's *carceri* and a 3-D version of the game of Snakes and Ladders. Unlike Arakawa and Gins's model, there is little suggestion of a function other than that of play.

In the multilevel labyrinth there is a calculated trade-off for this tracking and blocking ability: the physical disequilibrium precipitated by the forced contortions of the human body through non-parallel but simultaneous passages poses a severe threat to any unified sense of identity. It is here, in the lattice of the multilevel labyrinth, that the contestation between "person" and "architectural body" arises in a veritable corporealization of schizopoetics:

Bodily inserting every last finger of herself into the multilevel labyrinth, she propels and squeezes her body through it [...]; she elbows and shoulders and elbows, and pushes and pulls, and otherwise insinuates bone and flesh to gain, ever again, traction so as to inch and cram, wedge, and, in full flesh, secrete herself through a lattice that by impinging on her trajectory as a person gives her the many trajectories of an architectural body. (Architectural Body 90-91)

I refer to a *corporealization* of schizopoetics deliberately, for the consequence desired from the imbalance are not lines of flight but enhanced landing site configurative comportment. For Arakawa and Gins it is within the multilevel labyrinth, with its multiple demands for contradictory but simultaneous trajectories that "the linking of the body proper to an architectural body begins in earnest [...]." (*Architectural Body* 84).

Immortality suite

The Situationists dreamed of an elevation beyond eschatology into the sort of immortality that angels enjoy. "Angels never age, being beautiful children who never become corpses" (Kaufman 65). Kaufman captures the Situationist's attitude to death

According to the Situationist ideal, even death's ward will be made for life—for living in peace: "Ward off death, not for dying but for living there in peace" (I, 19). At its worst, Situationist death is a kind of unjustly slandered mishap, but it comes across more often as a form of serenity. In any event, it never really occurs because there is never any lack of time in the Situationist world. (65)

New Babylon forgot the body, or at best assumed it as a package for a child's eternal spirit, in a constantly creative flux in which even the dead must move on: "There is no place for tombs in the Situationist city. Consequently, the dead themselves must move about, becoming if not angels then at least phantoms [...]" (Kaufman 65).

For Theseus the labyrinth was a matter of life and death and we have not deserted that theme. The primary purpose of the multilevel labyrinth—as a physical obstacle—is to urge a radical rethinking of the destiny of the human species. For Arakawa and Gins procedural architecture is an emergent response to what they consider a primary human need: a crisis ethics, and their vision embraces nothing less than an architectural and optional reversal of the fate of our species. WE HAVE DECIDED NOT TO DIE. This too was the decision of Theseus in that moment before slaying the man-bull hybrid, but for these Theseans Death itself is the Minotaur. AN ARCHITECTURE TO HELP KILL DEATH DEAD? Arakawa and Gins believe death is unfashionable and undesirable; their urban call is for "cities without graveyards."⁴² Their Yoro Park in Japan offers a taste of the heightened perceptual awareness architectural imbalance induces. Through such architecture, they hypothesize, human destiny can be reversed, and immortality, rather than a wished-for theological beyond, will be an atheistic matter of individual choice. The design of the Park is apt, with its tilts and curvatures it brings to mind an almost identical terrain: the ancient cemetery on Okinawa.⁴³ George Lakoff is one of several supporters of Arakawa and Gins's architectural inventions that balk at this post-ontological prospect, ending his sympathetic article "Testing the Limits of Brain Plasticity Or, Why is there a Wall Down the Middle of the Tub?" with an imaginary, tongue-in-cheek Woody Allen scenario (*Reversible Destiny* 121-22).

⁴² But death still has its say. Ironically, the aim of *Reversible Destiny* is to bring about in life one effect of death viz. the removal of commonplace experience.

⁴³ It is hard not to conjecture that the New York based Arakawa and Gins were familiar with this image, readily available in Bernard Rudofsky's *Architecture without Architecture* (6), an illustrative catalogue of non-pedigreed architecture prepared for a show at the Museum of Modern Art, Nov. 9, 1964 to Feb. 7, 1965. Rudofsky cites the source of this image as "From *Nihon Chiri Fuzuoku*, 1936."

Bataille considered death the ultimate human luxury, and since the 1980s science has been telling us that both the terms *life* and *death* are otiose and meaningless, that we have already passed beyond death as a useful concept.⁴⁴ Yet death, as human life's ineluctable destiny, as the ultimate and irreversible negativity of human being, still occupies the heart of Western philosophy. Arakawa and Gins have shown a courageous disdain for philosophy, and perhaps rightly so, yet their procedural architecture occupies a pivotal moment in ontology, arguably the threshold of its end. In a bold negation of the negation Reversible Destiny refuses to embrace the fundamental negativity that has formed the ground of Western metaphysics. Refusing to subscribe to (at least part of) the binding Heideggerian tenet of a doubly negative constitution of human being as both a being-towards-language and being-towards-death, Arakawa and Gins aspire beyond the ontological project of philosophy to voluntary immortal being. Such a post-ontological destiny would mark the end of being as we understand it and the beginning of a life of endless becoming, in other words the dream of Constant Nieuwenhuys come true.

Assuming that Reversible Destiny can be realized, that eventually human death can be overcome, at least two thorny issues remain. To speak of immortality alone is to ignore the issue of the quality of life. Where does pleasure, love, recreation, even evil figure in this vision? Moreover, given our planetary limitations, "to not to die" might register on the level of the most selfish project imaginable. As it stands—and never forget that Reversible Destiny is an ongoing project—the architectural body, as innovative a concept as it is, remains perilously close to the order of that which Giorgio Agamben terms "naked life." Current juridico-medical ideology embraces this notion as paramount to its efficient operation and at the cost of ignoring the essential forms and qualities of life. Indeed, since Foucault's analyses, we have the evidence to prove the epistemic shift from politics to bio-politics in which bare life is what should be saved at all costs. Agamben unmasks the insidious force that lies behind all obvious systems of current power:

Biological life, which is the secularized form of naked life and which shares its unutterability and impenetrability, thus constitutes the real forms of life literally as forms of survival: biological life remains inviolate in such forms as that obscure threat that can suddenly actualize itself in violence, in extraneousness, in illnesses, in accidents. (Means without End 8)

It is in the name of bare, naked life that biopolitics exercises its power. Agamben notes a double trajectory: the preservation of bare life at all costs, and the reduction of forms of life to nakedness in the structure and paralegality of the camp. In the history of Germany—the camp did not originate in Germany, nor was it created by the Nazis—such spaces as Dachau, Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and Sachsenhausen gained legitimacy via a suspension of law in certain states of exception (*ausnahmezustanden*) which then became the law outside the Law. Agamben elucidates the paradoxical nature of the camp in which the exception is "taken outside, included through its own exclusion" (*Homo Sacer* 170) and offers an image of imbalance and unclarity that will require a comparison to the spatial periplications of the labyrinth in its classic and Situationist manifestations. "Whoever entered the camp moved in a zone of indistinction between outside and inside,

⁴⁴ See, for instance, Peter and Jean Medawar 66-67.

exception and rule, licit and illicit, in which the very concepts of subjective right and juridical protection no longer make any sense" (170). For Agamben, these comments are not merely historical. Far from it. As the inaugural site of modernity the camp is now firmly entrenched as an instrument of biopolitical power: Kosovo, Kabul, Guantanamo Bay, and Agamben is alert to the architectural and urban consequences of this power.

This principle [birth] is now adrift: it has entered a process of dislocation in which its functioning is becoming patently impossible and in which we can expect not only new camps but also always new and more delirious normative definitions of the inscription of life in the city. The camp, which is now firmly settled inside it, is the new biopolitical nomos of the planet. (Means without End 45)

An eschatological residue still remains. For human beings die twice, ultimately into non-existence but first into language. The Situationist child emerges from an infant corpse still warm outside, at the limit of the debt of life to living toward language. Already belated, this infant is there as a not-yet-something. And infancy has no survivors precisely because infancy is the non-ground of language withholding the secret of language that "language" can never recover. Of course, this scenario, constituting a primal scene, is the happening of a non-event, an impossible event because the infant occupies the space of the imaginary. The phrase an "infant is being killed" is of the order of a phantasmatic designation of a passage in which one infant dies and another survives. A recurrent theme in Rilke's poetry is the disinherited child suspended between two worlds "to whom no longer what's been, and not yet what's coming, belongs" (Agamben, *Infancy and History* 43). This remarks the interstitial space of infancy, a brief epoch condemned from the start to a death.

Lyotard both defines and defends the infantile as "whatever does not permit itself to be written, in writing" (qtd. in Harvey and Schehr 25) and perhaps the least visionary and utopian, yet most realizable agenda possible for Arakawa and Gins is to prevent the death of the infant by sustaining the form of an inhabitable infancy of architecture. The seeds of this are already nascent in the multilevel labyrinth where the human body is reversed to the uncoordinated movements of an infant. Indeed, imbalance is a necessary condition of the infant body, the body without writing. There are four full-colour pages, presented without text or captions, which describe this body without words in *Reversible Destiny* (179-81). In response to a letter from their friend, and great theoretician of infancy, Jean-François Lyotard (in *Reversible Destiny* 11), Arakawa and Gins propose a new hybrid to replace the Minotaur: the less savage concept of the "infant-adult." But in his letter Lyotard speaks of the child and Arakawa and Gins respond with the infant.⁴⁵ The infant not the child. Because it was the child that fuelled the architectural hopes of Constant and the S.I., New Babylon could never have attained that infancy of architecture we find and experience in *Reversible Destiny* sites like the *Infancy House*. And does not this prelinguistic state, this human life before language return us to the labyrinthine state that Hollier notes in Bataille's anti-architecture of writing; the state "where oppositions di-

⁴⁵ Lyotard asks "Would the possibilities reserved for childhood remain open in every circumstance? Might they even multiply? Could the body be younger at sixty years of age than at fifteen?"

sintegrate and grow complicated [...], where the system on which linguistic function is based disintegrates, but somehow disintegrates by itself, having jammed its own works" (58).

Whatever else it confronts, Reversible Destiny must face the infant's entry into the labyrinthine condition that is language. That said, perhaps a lasting (if not *the* lasting) contribution of Reversible Destiny is to have returned infancy to the scene of architectural praxis. Moreover, one should be cautious if one concludes that Reversible Destiny is an incomplete project whose grand *telos* appears currently impractical. One should not dismiss the project outright for perhaps, PERHAPS, like the voyage through the labyrinth, the point is the journey not the destination.

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