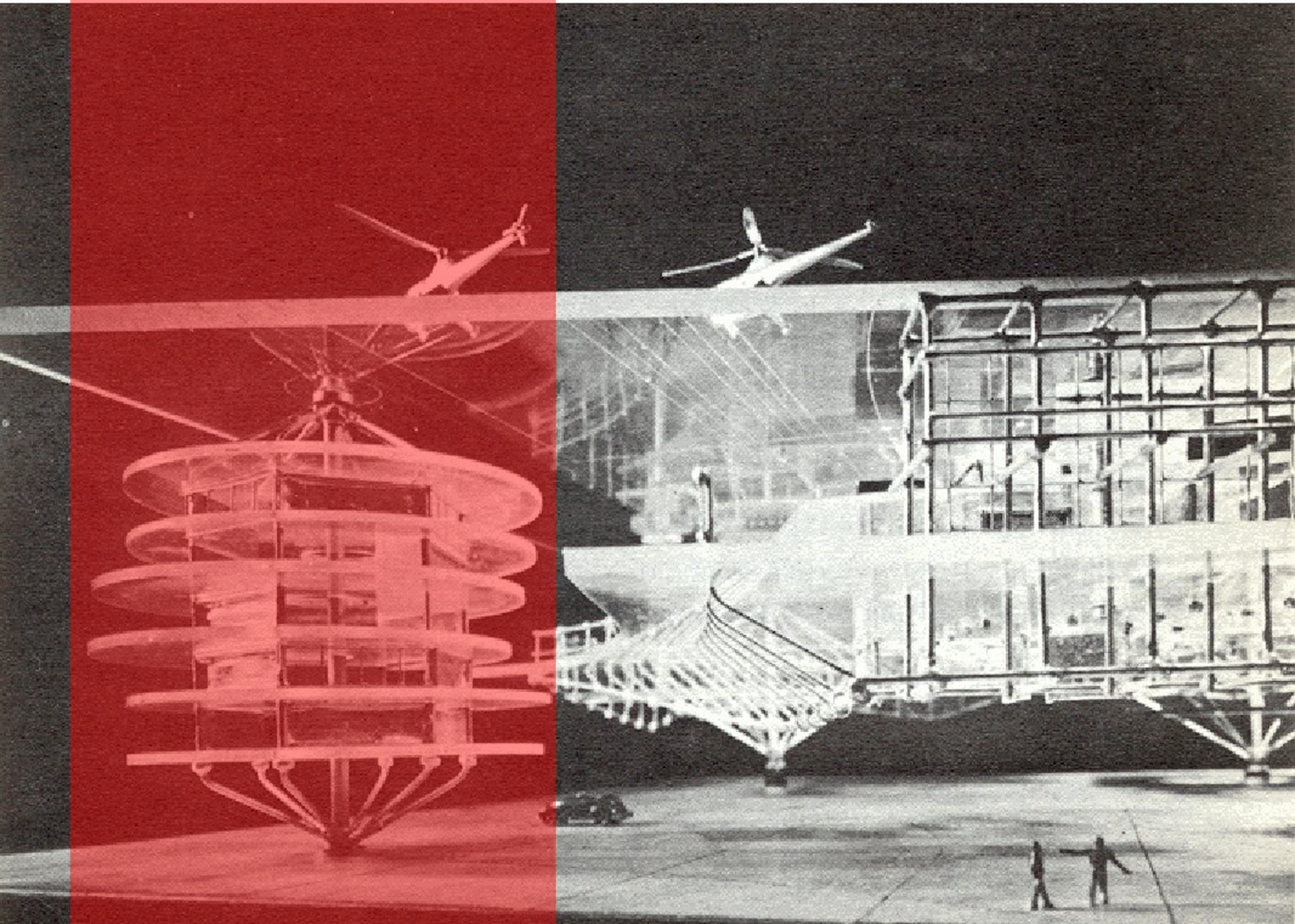


# Architecture in Film:

## The Lost Utopias of Late Modernism Revived



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### **Abstract**

This thesis investigates the reasons for the reappearance of late modernist utopian architectural projects in recent artist films. Three films by three different artists (Martha Rosler, Dorit Margreiter and Patrick Keiller) have been selected for their critical use of post-war architecture in film or video and the way they look specifically at suggestions of revolutionary social changes to the concept of the house. In each chapter one film or video is examined in relation to the architectural project(s) it discusses, specifically with regards to the intentions of the architect. Rosler, Margreiter and Keiller show three ways of reflecting upon the way we think about late modernist housing, a type of housing that was extremely ambitious in attempting to change the way we think about shelter and social communities, and is, at least stylistically, still of great influence to the architectural projects that are built today. All three artists have a distinct political awareness that appears in the way they discuss architecture. Consisting of structures that consolidate ideology, architecture is fascinating for the profound influence it has on our everyday life. I argue that the return of modernist utopias in the collective cultural imagination shows a need for a cautiously hopeful attitude towards a future that moves beyond the so-called end of history. These three artists look towards futures that were suggested in the recent past, futures that have been long since dismissed, and try to find elements that may be salvaged from their way of looking towards structural social change that might be of use for us today in combating the effects of neo-liberal influence on everyday life. Because of its contingent, disembodied and fragmented nature, film proves to be the ideal medium for investigation and can be seen as creating its own version of radically subjective utopia in each case study.

Image on Cover: a photograph of Constant's model of New Babylon (source: <http://static.digischool.nl/ckv1/studiew/destad/constant/babylon.htm>)

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## Introduction

There seems to be a renewed surge of interest for the aesthetics of modernism in contemporary culture. Disparagingly calling it "Ikea-modernism,"<sup>1</sup> journalist Owen Hatherley has pointed out how certain minimalist midcentury design in furniture has become so popular, even Ikea has started to design mass-produced pieces in this style. Not only in furniture design do we see the resurgence of an interest in modernism. Filmmakers such as Wes Anderson, Michel Gondry or Miranda July use a distinct retro midcentury style in their films to provoke a nostalgic sentimentality related to a more innocently perceived moment in time. On the other hand, artists such as Florian Pumhösl, Thomas Houseago or Julian Opie are clearly influenced by modernist painting and sculpture and reflect critically upon modernism's formal qualities as well as its inherent contradictions.

This thesis explores contemporary artists that have looked critically at specifically late modernist architecture and used it in their artist film or video. The reason for this selection is that I believe there is a similar drive behind the creation of physical, utopian environments and the creation of a critical as well as imaginary space in film. What connects both is a desire for the production of a space that might allow for an alternative to the dominant socio-political structures that seem profoundly embedded in our everyday life. It is a renewed urge that has been blossoming in the various cultural expressions since the financial crisis of 2008, although I argue it was present in a minor form before, as can be seen in the artist films that I have selected.

Although not artists that I will discuss further in this thesis, Pierre Huyghe, Cyprien Gaillard and Tacita Dean, have produced work that has been similarly fascinating with respect to modernist architecture. All are looking towards a lost moment when architecture dared to think towards the future; the post-war period of unbridled technological optimism that was also thoroughly embedded with cold-war fears. I shall argue that the interest of contemporary artists in this period of modernist architecture goes beyond style and very much involves their original political intentions.

I believe the urge for renewed faith in art has a great deal to do with a resistance against what Mark Fisher has called capitalist realism. Described as a kind of exhaustion or "cultural and political sterility,"<sup>2</sup> capitalist realism is the moment where we turned from belief to aesthetics, to an "Ikea modernism," if you will. Supposedly functioning as a protection from totalitarianism but effectively enabling modernism's absorption into the structures of commodity capitalism, what capitalist realism has effectively created is a world where depression has become pervasive. It is very much connected to a decrease of power in the Left, which according to Fisher "has become more attached to its impossibility than to its potential."<sup>3</sup> What the contemporary renewal of interest in modernist architectural projects shows is a profound need for hope, especially in the shape of "the futures that popular modernism trained us to expect, but

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<sup>1</sup> Owen Hatherley, *Militant Modernism*. (Winchester: Zero Books, 2008), p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*. (London: Zero Books, 2009), p. 7

<sup>3</sup> Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*. (London: Zero Books, 2014), p. 23

which never materialised."<sup>4</sup> For this reason I believe it is vital to attach political significance to projects that re-examine the utopian hopes of the past, especially those of the recent modernist past that to some extent are still relevant to our world that is dealing with the continuing pressures of modernity.

There is no one who wrote more clearly about these pressures than Walter Benjamin. Although writing nearly a hundred years ago, his concerns with modernity and his view of the medium of film as providing a relief as well as critical engagement with the changes caused by modernity can prove to be significant even now. This is why I use his theories, especially his writing on the *Arcades Project* because it specifically investigates the function of architecture, as a leading red thread throughout this thesis. His early writing on the modernist glass house and its ability to erase domestic traces will be essential in consideration of the architecture I will discuss in the first chapter. Similarly, his views on film and its ability to sedate as well as awaken critical ability in the spectator will be important in my analysis of the second chapter. Furthermore, I will apply his concept of the street, embodied by the Parisian arcades, as a place of historical memory in the final chapter.

Before continuing I need to first specify my use of the term modernism in relation to architecture. Modernist architecture was part of an extremely diverse movement that intended to respond to modernity and all its changes. It can be recognised by its focus on simplicity, clarity of form and functionality. Although modernist architecture arose at the beginning of the 20th century in response to the growing technological possibilities, I will mainly discuss modernist architecture created after the Second World War in the form of the projects that are discussed in the various case studies. In this period of late modernism, architecture had begun to respond to modernist projects of the past to become intensely self-reflective. It had started to incorporate many of the criticisms that had been thrown at early modernism and is therefore most interesting to discuss in relation to architectural theory.

Starting from Le Corbusier's *Unité d'Habitation* I shall connect my analysis of post-war modernist architecture to functionalism. I will continue my analysis with the Sheats-Goldstein residence, which is commonly considered to be part of the organic architecture movement that originated with Frank Lloyd Wright. I will relate this to the experimental utopian project of *New Babylon* by Constant Nieuwenhuys, which was an appropriation of functionalism as well as a critique of it. My final chapter will discuss various projects of experimental architecture such as those by Cedric Price, Archigram<sup>5</sup>, Charles and Ray Eames, Richard Buckminster Fuller and Alison and Peter Smithson. Influenced by pop art sensibilities, space age ideas and the developments of aviation and automobile technologies, all these architects created designs that looked towards the future unlike most residential architecture constructed today. In my

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<sup>4</sup> Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*. (London: Zero Books, 2014), p. 27

<sup>5</sup> Archigram was an avant-garde architectural group formed in London in the 1960s that had been strongly influenced by Buckminster-Fuller and the futurist Antonio Sant'Elia and is therefore often described as neo-futurist, especially because of the group's insistence on a high-tech infra-structural approach to its architectural projects.

definition of modernism I will include Brutalism<sup>6</sup>, of which Alison and Peter Smithson were a major proponent.

I see the developments in architecture as a highly heterogeneous terrain of related as well as conflicting practices, rather than a straightforward linear development. Various architects that will be discussed were ahead of their time and some were for a long time not even considered as architects but rather as designers (like the Eameses) or engineers (like Buckminster Fuller). The field of modernist architecture is not clearly marked and often greatly contested by the various architecture historians, theorists and critics. What is clear is that many were influenced by each other and because they were working at more or less the same period in time, ranging from the late 1950s to the early 1970s, all were exposed to the same developments of technology, the same social shifts and political changes. I shall present a highly selective history of architecture to analyse the architectural works that appear in the artists films here presented, as well as some works that provide a relevant context. However, in no way do I mean to present a comprehensive history of architecture with this thesis. Benjamin, as a theorist from the early days of modernism, might seem as an anachronous choice to analyse this architecture and its use by contemporary artists, yet his writing proves to be extremely relevant to the sensibilities these architects were developing, as I will show in this thesis.

For my first chapter I've chosen a work by Martha Rosler, who as a distinctly postmodern artist from the generation of the Situationists might seem like an odd choice. However, her work *How do we know what home looks like?*, while fitting well in the line of questioning shown in her other work about living space<sup>7</sup>, does appear to set out the first hint of hope for utopian architecture in artist film, while remaining extremely critical. With her work from 1993 she was one of the first to revive the interest in modernist architecture and her reference to Le Corbusier seems a fitting start to my own questioning of this post-war architectural moment. Dorit Margreiter might be a much more comfortable choice as a case study, especially because of her overt interest in the architectural utopias of the past. Her work *10104 Angelo View Drive*, however, does deliver some poignant questions about the re-appropriation of modernist architecture in contemporary culture. Patrick Keiller's *Dilapidated Dwelling* is the only work not referencing one particular architectural project but rather a series of experimental projects and their potential for offering a reconsideration of contemporary architecture. His work is for this reason a perfect concluding analysis of the need to revive modernist architecture and broadens the outlook from particular dwellings to a larger movement in history.

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<sup>6</sup> Brutalism, a term that derived its name from the *béton brut* or raw concrete used by Le Corbusier, was a movement in architecture that began in the late 1950s and continued well into the 1970s. Striving for honesty in materials stricter than other modernist architecture, the constructions of Brutalism were more fortress-like, with an emphasis on strong graphic forms that eschewed the lightness of early modernism.

<sup>7</sup> Such as *Housing is a Human Right* (1989) created at Times Square in New York or *If You Lived Here...* (1989) at the Dia Art Foundation in New York, continued in 2009 as the *If You Lived Here Still...* archive project at E-Flux in New York.

The first chapter will discuss a well-known icon of modernism, the last of Le Corbusier's *Unité d'Habitations* that was built in Firminy-Vert in France (see Appendix A). Rosler focuses on its current use by its inhabitants who have taken this project, which intended in some way influence behaviour according to Le Corbusier's thoughts, and instead made it their own. The chapter opens the door to some of the earliest debates of modernism and its creation of the glass house as a means to shake bourgeois domesticity in the form of kitsch. Here I will question, along with Rosler's film, the place of domesticity in modernist architecture. The glass house and its supposed destruction of traditional values in the form of kitsch evokes the fragile future of the *Unité* and the modernist intentions. There is a particular significance to the building's potential demolition, which its inhabitants desperately try to resist. It is the threat of its destruction that reveals how the building is part of a history that should not be undone, despite its many flaws. I mean to show that with her focus on humanity and tactility Rosler attempts to reassert sympathy for the often-hated icons of modernist architecture and show their value as living works of art.

The second chapter will analyse Margreiter's interest in the Sheats-Goldstein residence. Her film looks at the moving elements of its design that reflect the utopian vision of mobility and flexibility that arose at the time. One of the most significant of these utopian concepts was Constant's *New Babylon* (see Appendix B), which with its moving elements attempted to create a place of permanent revolution. In her reassessment of the modernist architectural project, Margreiter shows its connection to masculinity and sexuality as asserted by Hollywood film. The house enacts the role of Hollywood itself as it projects its utopian aspirations on the house's windows to the view of the Los Angeles landscape. The way the modernist house has been portrayed by Hollywood has strongly influenced the way we perceive its suggestions of a flexible utopia. What can we learn from the house and the transformation of its role in our collective imagination from the time of its construction to now? I will show how the Sheats-Goldstein residence acts as both an exhibitionist glass house and a protective cave, revealing the power structures that are involved in the projects of modernist architecture.

The third and final chapter will look at various different attempts at experimental housing and their potential for us now as proposed by Keiller's film. The film takes the Situationists' activity of the *dérive* and the Benjaminian *flâneur* and enacts them via a fictional narrator. By adding elements of fiction to the familiar techniques of psychogeography, Keiller has created a personal investigation into historical memory and enhanced it with elements of uncertainty and unreliability. The film recalls the surrealist trope of the dream as a way to connect to the layered constructs of history as embedded in urban space. What can a reconnection to the dream of the recent past offer us in our contemporary concepts of housing? I propose that this experience reconnects us to historical memory and provides us with the tools to question post-Fordist<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The term post-Fordism is used to describe a system of economic production and consumption that is defined by new information technologies that has moved away from mass factory production to specialized manufacturing characterized by flexibility.

socio-political structures and the architectural projects it creates or fails to create.

With my thesis I hope to answer the question as to how contemporary artists have addressed the revival of modernist utopian architecture and how this relates to early modernist theory about the potential for film to provoke a new revolutionary moment. As part of the tendency to address the possibility for a renewed faith in art, these works reference not just the style of the post-war modernist moment in architecture, but also rekindle some of the hope for a potential alternative to capitalist forces that was originally embedded in these projects. With their overt connection to history, these artist films once more allow a serious consideration of this post-war moment that might finally offer the possibility of delivering a tremor to what once seemed to be the unshakable foundations of neo-liberal<sup>9</sup> ideology.

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<sup>9</sup> Neo-liberalism is used in this context to describe an ideology favouring free trade, privatization and minimal government intervention.



## Chapter 1

### Martha Rosler and the Unité d'Habitation: Domesticity in Modernist Architecture

*We have long forgotten the ritual by which the house of our life was erected. But when it is under assault and enemy bombs are already taking their toll, what enervated, perverse antiquities do they not lay bare in the foundations. What things were interred and sacrificed amid magic incantations, what horrible cabinet of curiosities lies there below, where the deepest shafts are reserved for what is most commonplace. - Walter Benjamin<sup>10</sup>*

*How do we know what home looks like?* is a video by Martha Rosler made in 1993. It was created for Project Unité. For this project a group of artists, including Philippe Parreno and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, were asked to reflect on the (at that point) long-abandoned North wing of the Unité d'Habitation housing project at Firminy-Vert. Building started in 1965, the year of Le Corbusier's death, and it would be the last of Le Corbusier's Unités to be built. Rosler's video records the state of disrepair as she roams through the abandoned apartments and hallways, filming the various wallpapers, stickers, toys and other decorative elements that the tenants had left behind. Intercut with these images are interviews with the tenants of other blocks that are still occupied. The people interviewed reflect on their, sometimes fraught, experience of living in the flats while also vehemently defending the buildings against their proposed demolition.

Interestingly, the building would get its protected status in the same year the video was made, in effect creating the much-questioned gentrifying influence of artist involvement that has been a point of contention for Rosler since. In her writing Rosler has brought up Richard Florida's theories about the artist as a gentrifying influence for troubled areas of the city, a theory that would be used by city councils as a reason for stimulating artists projects. Seemingly a good thing, especially for artists, Rosler has criticized the effect of expelling 'unwanted' elements from city areas and creating anaesthetized city experiences. As Gilda Williams wrote in 2010 about Rosler's work and its aftermath: "At the time, Le Corbusier's twelve-storey social experiment stood half-empty; now it boasts a thriving community of modernist aficionados."<sup>11</sup> The working-class families and pirate radio station broadcasters Rosler interviewed in her video no longer remain.

In the opening quotation Walter Benjamin describes a certain unconscious presence in the "house of our life". The concept of this house can describe the construction of our lives as such, but also reflects some of his thoughts on architecture. As someone strongly influenced by surrealism, Benjamin places great importance on the subconscious and its revolutionary potential. What comes back time and again is the explosion as an allegory for waking up from the dream-state that has been created by commodity capitalism,

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<sup>10</sup> Walter Benjamin, "One-Way Street" in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1979), p. 46.

<sup>11</sup> Gilda Williams, "It Was What It Was: Modern Ruins" in Dillon, Brian (ed.), *Ruins*. (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2011), p. 95.

exemplified in architecture by the arcades. Through montage and other cinematic techniques, film would be the medium best equipped to explode our furnished rooms "with its dynamite of its tenth of a second."<sup>12</sup> Besides arguing against these furnishings and decorations, the trappings of bourgeois life that Benjamin has described as kitsch, I will claim that Benjamin also argues in support of it, a dialectical position that is taken up by Rosler. In a way she asks in her video: is there still a place for domesticity in modernist architecture? I will argue that the allegorical destruction of domesticity in the form of the glass house as well as the actual explosion of housing projects is important in the consideration of Rosler's video, which can be seen as a criticism of the intentions present in the architectural projects of Le Corbusier.

Le Corbusier, a pseudonym for Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris, was the main proponent of what became the functionalist movement in architecture. Politically dubious, with links to the Vichy regime, fascist Italy and the right-wing syndicalism of Hubert Lagardelle, his affiliation remains uncertain. His most famous book is *Vers Une Architecture* from 1923, translated as *Towards a New Architecture*, which has been of great influence to modernist theories of architecture. Le Corbusier is also known for his elaborate theories on urbanism and related utopian proposals for rational city structures, such as the *Ville Contemporaine* from 1922 and the *Ville Radieuse* from 1935. Based on these theories are his constructions of the Unités (the housing block units of the *Ville Radieuse*), of which the most famous one is the Unité d'Habitation in Marseille, which was finished in 1952.

One of the moments more surprising in Rosler's video was a sudden cut in the cinéma vérité style of the work to what I assumed was found footage of a collapsing building. The building is never identified. However, the image cannot help but provoke the memory of the collapse of another well-know icon of modernism: the Pruitt-Igoe estate (see Appendix C). An example famously used by Charles Jencks in his 1977 book *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* to proclaim the death of modernism at the exact time of 3:32 p.m. on 15 July 1972. This destruction would at later moments in time be connected to another famous collapse, that of the World Trade Centre in 2001, a building created by the same architect, Minoru Yamasaki. As an architect who believed buildings could change people's behaviour for the better, like Le Corbusier, Yamasaki's design has been criticized heavily since its heydays of the 1960s. For Pruitt-Igoe it was the functionalist principles of rationalization that would be blamed for its downfall, for the World Trade Center critics went as far as to blame flaws in the structure's design for its overly rapid collapse.

Best-known for his criticism of functionalism, Reyner Banham has regarded a disconnect between form and meaning as functionalism's main problem. Reacting against the movement that was hailed by his teachers, amongst whom Sigfried Giedion, as the future of architecture, he instead wrote how functionalism was "poverty stricken symbolically."<sup>13</sup> According to Banham, the functionalists did not take part in the theoretical exchanges that took place at

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<sup>12</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. (London: Penguin Books, 2008 [1982]), p. 29.

<sup>13</sup> Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970 [1960]), p. 320.

the beginning of modernism in the 1920s and therefore cut themselves off from their historical inception. In his book *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* Banham also supports Richard Buckminster Fuller's criticism of functionalism. Buckminster Fuller claimed that functionalism only pursued a superficial simplification, without the essential knowledge of the scientific fundamentals of the structures and the processes involved in the buildings they were building.

Not insignificantly, the Situationists also had a great deal of scorn for Le Corbusier and the functionalist movement, and created New Babylon in response, a subject I will discuss in the proceeding chapters. Also in the cinema we can find further criticism of functionalism, such as in the underlying seriousness of the comedies by Jacques Tati. See, for instance, monsieur Hulot's repeated fights with a modern fountain in *Mon Oncle* (1958) or the same character getting lost in the labyrinthine structure of offices in *Play Time* (1967). More examples of films criticising modernism are Michelangelo Antonioni's *La Notte* (1960) and Jean Luc Godard's *2 Ou 3 Choses Que Je Sais d'Elle* (1967), where female characters wander through cold modern cities in frustration and confusion.

Like the characters in any of these films who are desperately trying to connect to their architectural environment, Rosler wanders through the Unité. But where all these characters demonstrate their difficulty in finding a solid ground for domestic life, Rosler means to point out that a reinterpretation of modernist architecture can in fact take place by means of our interaction with it. For despite its homogenizing intentions, impractical design and ruinous state, in Rosler's video, the Unité is staunchly defended by its inhabitants.

### **Kitsch**

As a term often seen in a negative context (Rosler would probably not use it for this reason), kitsch is heavily loaded with a long history of debate. In the early 19th century the term would have still be seen in its original German meaning of gaudy low-brow culture. Regarded as the rearguard of art (as opposed to the avant-garde), debased simulacra of real culture, kitsch can supposedly be enjoyed without effort or time. Greenberg famously went as far as to write in his 1939 essay *Avant-Garde and Kitsch* that kitsch was effectively used as propaganda by totalitarian regimes. With the rise of Pop Art in the 1960s this attitude to kitsch would increasingly be seen as condescending and patronising towards a large majority of the population. Rosler would have been on the side of Susan Sontag's 1964 essay *Notes on "Camp"*, which, although discussing camp, a more knowledgeable ironic version of kitsch, covers similar ground to the postmodernist argument in defence of camp culture. I will continue to use the word kitsch, as I believe the dialectical attitude of Benjamin towards kitsch serves Rosler's approach in her video.

Pointing her camera at the domestic interventions created by previous tenants Rosler highlights the desire to personalise the mass-produced and universalized interior of the modernist house as imagined by Le Corbusier. The flowery and decorative wallpaper would have been seen as a pure horror to the modernist eye and the complete opposite of the architect's intentions. For "never

do we find any trace of "domesticity" as traditionally understood,"<sup>14</sup> Beatriz Colomina explained in her analysis of the inhabitants' experience of a Le Corbusier house. An experience she described as transforming the inhabitant into "only a visitor."<sup>15</sup> In fact, the domestic traces Rosler spots inevitably remind one of Walter Benjamin's descriptions of the consequences of private inhabitation. In his *Arcades Project* he identifies how "the interior is not just the universe but also the étui of the private individual. To dwell means to leave traces."<sup>16</sup>

Bertold Brecht's 1926 provocation to "erase the traces", was repeated in 1933 by Walter Benjamin in *Experience and Poverty*, who would use the example of Le Corbusier as an architect supremely equipped to avoid the traces of bourgeois life in his architectural creations. Benjamin advocates for a "poverty of experience", a place in which we are "freed from experience", from the claim of property as well as the need to "create habits". When describing housing in Bolshevik Russia, Benjamin speaks of the true revolutionary life in which no petty bourgeois form of decoration or homeliness can exist, rooms in which "nothing human can flourish."<sup>17</sup> In *Experience and Poverty* he specifically mentions the smooth glass interiors of modernist architecture, a material "on which nothing can be fixed". The material of glass is seen as the enemy of possession and of secrets and that "to live in a glass house is a revolutionary virtue par excellence."<sup>18</sup>

However, Benjamin's praise can be seen as dialectical. Collecting the detritus of a life long gone is an obsession that Benjamin is trying to persist as well as resist, with the explicit purpose of exploding the historical continuum. In his essay *Dream Kitsch* Benjamin describes kitsch as revealing an essential truth, a good that lies within, like the "sentimentality of our parents."<sup>19</sup> In the way the Surrealists saw dreams as a puzzle that would reveal the unconscious, Benjamin sees kitsch as a type of revealing intoxication similar to dreams. Kitsch "is the last mask of the banal, the one with which we adorn ourselves, in dream and conversation, so as to take in the energies of an outlived world of things."<sup>20</sup> According to Benjamin kitsch reveals our baggage of a time passed, but is not necessarily a useless load. He describes the man carrying history with him as the "furnished man", a concept earlier used by him to describe someone who is furnished with dreams or with (scientific) knowledge. Someone equipped with

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<sup>14</sup> Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), p. 327.

<sup>15</sup> *ibidem*, p. 326.

<sup>16</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999 [1982]), p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Moscow" in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1979), p. 188.

<sup>18</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism" in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1979), p. 228.

<sup>19</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Dream Kitsch" in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 237.

<sup>20</sup> *ibidem*, p. 238.

the knowledge of history that can be applied to break apart habits and systems of thought.

In the *Arcades Project* there is a mention of kitsch in relation to art that could prove useful in analysing Rosler's collection of domestic traces:

Precisely within the consecrated forms of expression, therefore, kitsch and art stand irreconcilably opposed. But for developing living forms, what matters is that they have within them something stirring, useful, ultimately heartening - that they take kitsch dialectically up into themselves, and hence bring themselves near to the masses while yet surmounting the kitsch. Today, perhaps, film alone is equal to this task - or, at any rate, more ready for it than any other art form.<sup>21</sup>

Here we have a perfect example of Benjamin's utopian intentions for the medium of film, well known from his Artwork essay. Film would, according to Benjamin, be the perfect tool for bringing itself "near to the masses" by incorporating elements of kitsch. By foregrounding the supremely kitsch wallpapers and other decorative elements so loathed by Le Corbusier, Rosler takes this element of modernist thought as provoked by Benjamin to claim social significance for the architecture through the means of its use by "the masses".

### **The Human Form**

There is a specific moment early on in the video that defines the use of architecture by its inhabitants as the focus of the work. It seems to have specific significance because it is placed at the beginning of the film, just after the title and because it consists of still images, which contrasts greatly with the cinéma vérité style of the rest of the film. We see a sequence of four still images: first we have the Unité as seen through the trees that surround the building; secondly we see a drawing of a figure with its arm upraised; third, another drawing of this kind; and fourth, graffiti on the wall of the Unité saying "*nous aimons vivre au Corbu*". The figure of the man with a hole in its belly and its left arm upraised is the Modulor, a famous device designed by Le Corbusier in the tradition of the Vitruvian man, created to measure space by means of the human form. The Modulor comes back in multiple shapes and forms during the video, in particular as a relief in the side of the Unité itself. Defined by Le Corbusier in his booklet of the same name, the Modulor is "a measuring tool based on the human body and on mathematics."<sup>22</sup> Le Corbusier was hoping it would one-day function as "the means of unification for manufactured articles in all countries"<sup>23</sup> and saw the figure of the Modulor as a unifying symbol that would return man to the universal measurements of his own body. A connection he deemed lost by the

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<sup>21</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999 [1982]), p. 395.

<sup>22</sup> Le Corbusier, *The Modulor: A Harmonious Measure to the Human Scale Universally applicable to Architecture and Mechanics*. (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2000[1954]), p. 55.

<sup>23</sup> *ibidem*, p. 56.

conversion to the metric system, which "might well be found to be responsible for the dislocation and perversion of architecture."<sup>24</sup>

Rosler's interest in the Modulator is clearly located in the arbitrary nature of these measurements and the figure of the Modulator as a stand-in for the experience of living in the Unité. At one point in the video one of the inhabitants complains about the lack of ceiling height in the apartments and reaches for the ceiling with his left arm. As a gesture clearly mimicking the Modulator, it shows how Le Corbusier's measurements perhaps weren't as universally suitable as intended. Another clear concern for Rosler would have surely been its design as a man, supposed to universally reflect the size of all men and women, although this concern is never explicitly referenced in the video. In her practice as a feminist artist, Rosler has specifically focussed on critically addressing the role of women in the household, best represented by her most famous work: *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975).

At one point in his book *The Modulator* Le Corbusier briefly speaks of manufactured objects existing as either "*containers* of man or *extensions* of man."<sup>25</sup> As it is well known that Marshall McLuhan researched Le Corbusier's theories of space<sup>26</sup>, a special significance in the connection between Le Corbusier and McLuhan cannot be disregarded. The concept of mass production by means of comprehensive measurements would have clearly appealed to McLuhan in his quest for a universal language of images that could be interpreted by "the global village". Rosler is extremely suspicious of this holistic and oversimplifying approach to art<sup>27</sup>.

Disregarding dialectics by creating a world without depth, without conflicting elements, the Modulator could be considered as the ultimate tool of reduction and mystification. Rosler acknowledges the desire of artists to find a unifying feature, but insists on the impotence of the power supposedly gained by tracing the effects of the mass media to biology instead of social forces. This has created a mystification of the real forces at play.

Rosler would argue that it is Le Corbusier's focus on human biology in the Modulator and through it a theory of the experience of architecture by means of the body, which has clouded our vision and avoided us from seeing the real social conditions underneath. As Le Corbusier insists: "architecture is judged by eyes that see, by the head that turns, and the legs that walk."<sup>28</sup> Anthony Vidler has commented how Le Corbusier was an isolated exception in the tradition of bodily reference that has been abandoned with modernism. He describes how a

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<sup>24</sup> Le Corbusier, *The Modulator: A Harmonious Measure to the Human Scale Universally applicable to Architecture and Mechanics*. (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2000[1954]), p. 20.

<sup>25</sup> *ibidem*, p. 60.

<sup>26</sup> Specified by Richard Cavell in *McLuhan in Space* as a particular interest in "the notion of the object-world as comprising an extension of the body." (p. 114)

<sup>27</sup> Martha Rosler, "Video: Shedding the Utopian Moment" in *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings, 1975-2001*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004), p. 78.

<sup>28</sup> Le Corbusier, *The Modulator: A Harmonious Measure to the Human Scale Universally applicable to Architecture and Mechanics*. (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2000[1954]), p. 73.

more recent turn of architects to the body has taken place and how its interest now "lies no longer in the model of unity but in the intimation of the fragmentary."<sup>29</sup> Critical of this development, Vidler speaks of "a decided sense of loss that seems to accompany the move away from the archaic, almost tactile projection of the body in all of its biological force."<sup>30</sup> A statement that acquires new meaning in relation to my proceeding discussion of the tactility of film.

### **Tactility of Film**

Using Benjamin's theory of film regarding the optical unconscious provides the key to analysing the relationship that exists between the architectural projects of Le Corbusier, epitomised in its social aspirations by his Unités, and the utopian intentions for the medium of film as identified by the early modernists, amongst whom Walter Benjamin. It brings to the fore exactly those social forces that Rosler believes are concealed under Le Corbusier's homogenizing needs. The dialectical incorporation of kitsch, using kitsch to bring the work to the masses and yet surmounting it, through the medium of film is one way film can create the utopian space Benjamin envisioned; as space that creates spectators who would become aware of the capitalist structure that enslaves them. Another sign of modernist architecture's critical functioning has been set out by Colomina in her book *Privacy and Publicity*, an analysis of how modernity exists in modernist architecture precisely through its engagement with the mass media, in this case specifically through the medium of film.

Colomina sees the estrangement of the inhabitant of Le Corbusier housing as "perhaps not dissimilar to that experienced by the movie actor before the mechanism of the cinematographic camera."<sup>31</sup> By making this comparison she directly refers to Benjamin's analysis of the film actor's experience in the Artwork essay, clearly a fascination that Benjamin had inherited from Brecht. In the context of Rosler's video, we now see the inhabitants interviewed by Rosler as these "movie actors" performing their estrangement in relationship to the architecture in front of the camera, through their response to the presence of the camera. In fact, this behaviour might be seen as identical to Le Corbusier's vision, who, according to Colomina, believed that "to inhabit" meant "to inhabit the camera."<sup>32</sup>

By identifying Le Corbusier's architecture as necessarily perceived through the lens of a camera, we must specify Le Corbusier's relationship to film somewhat more. Described by Giedion as the architect perfectly embodying modernity by creating "construction in space-time,"<sup>33</sup> projects that are impossible to behold from just one point in space, Le Corbusier is an architect whose work must be seen in cinematic terms. Film aesthetics were described by Le Corbusier as embodying "the spirit of truth", an opinion that many architects

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<sup>29</sup> Anthony Vidler, "Architecture Dismembered" in Dillon, Brian (ed.), *Ruins*, Whitechapel Gallery (2011), London, p. 55.

<sup>30</sup> *ibidem*, p. 61.

<sup>31</sup> Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), p. 327.

<sup>32</sup> *ibidem*, p. 323.

<sup>33</sup> Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: The growth of a new tradition*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977[1941]), p. 529.

shared with him in the 1920s.<sup>34</sup> There is one moment in Rosler's video that could be seen as contradicting the interpretation of any 'real' truth about the Unité. One of the tenants is caught on camera saying how film or photography never truly captures the building the way it really is, how only drawing can do this. We are shown simple architectural sketches of the building and Rosler comments on their beauty.

It is important to realize that in the video we are not presented with mere images of the building; we are shown how Rosler interacts with it and with its inhabitants. In our identification with the person behind the camera recording the images, we are given a truly tactile experience of the building. One that could be considered in the light of Benjamin's interpretation of architectural experience: "Buildings are received twofold: through how they are used and how they are perceived. Or to put it a better way: in a tactile fashion and in an optical fashion."<sup>35</sup>

Optical and tactile perception are experiences that might remain divided in our consideration of other arts, when viewing film, similar to our everyday experience of the architecture of our surroundings, they are combined and acquire the qualities of an art that is received collectively and in a state of distraction. And as Colomina has described it so clearly, the "distracting element" in film is "primarily tactile."<sup>36</sup> So if we follow this line of reasoning we might be led to believe that an important element of the optical unconscious, as experienced by a distracted spectator, is foremost tactile in nature. In her definitive analysis of Benjamin's Arcades project, Susan Buck-Morss identified Benjamin's belief in the filmic mimetic potential as primarily "a means of reconstructing the capacity for experience"<sup>37</sup>, a capacity that was shattered by the process of industrialization. The optical unconscious as created by film would be one of these mimetic potentials, and would be considered by Benjamin as an aid to reconnect with our capacity for experience. By means of the tactile elements of the image we could be reconnected to an embodied experience that "hits the spectator like a bullet"<sup>38</sup> rather than becoming an auratic object of contemplation.

## **Explosion**

With its insistence on a type of allegorical violence, Benjamin connects the elements of war, destruction and explosion, to our capacity for experience, a theme of his essay *Poverty and Experience*. Reasoning like Benjamin we can link Le Corbusier's Unité to the experience of explosion, by his insistence on the connection between the propagation of the phalanstery of Fourier and

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<sup>34</sup> Anthony Vidler, "Explosion of Space: Architecture and the Filmic Imaginary", *Assemblage 21*. (August 1993), p. 46.

<sup>35</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. (London: Penguin Books, 2008 [1936]), p. 34.

<sup>36</sup> Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), p. 72.

<sup>37</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), p. 268.

<sup>38</sup> Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), p. 72.



explosion.<sup>39</sup> Fourier's utopian phalanstery was famously a great inspiration for Le Corbusier's *Ville Radieuse*, and in itself inspired by the Parisian arcades, in this way connecting Benjamin's *Arcades Project* more directly to Le Corbusier. Benjamin sees the arcades as a site of dreams, with its covered walkways, effecting the fusion of city and open air, of street and house.<sup>40</sup>

This dream-like experience might have some connections to what Le Corbusier called 'ineffable space' (*l'espace indicible*). Described by Vidler as a "transcendent space", the "discovery of modernity" and a "sense of dreamlike half-reality,"<sup>41</sup> it was first mentioned by Le Corbusier in relation to his visit to the Parthenon. "Here, the purest witness to the physiology of sensation,"<sup>42</sup> he says of the Parthenon in *Towards a New Architecture*, and proclaims the need for architecture to provide "a pure creation of the mind."<sup>43</sup> This almost evangelical claim to the creation of poetic emotion in space seems thoroughly reminiscent of the filmic imaginary, yet goes against any tactile experience that Rosler brings to the fore in her video. However, it is clear that the concept of explosion is important for the imaginary construct of the Unité that Rosler tries to develop.

Following through, when considering Le Corbusier's ideas about the ineffable space of the Parthenon, it would also be important to mention his thoughts on the *promenade architecturale*. A sequence of images that unfolds before the eye of the observer, the *promenade architecturale* is literally a construction of space in time and is therefore eminently comparable to the construction of space in film<sup>44</sup>. Sergei Eisenstein famously used the same examples of the Acropolis only a few years after Le Corbusier<sup>45</sup> for describing his theory of montage in space: "it is hard to imagine a montage sequence for an architectural ensemble more subtly composed, shot by shot, than the one that our legs create by walking among the buildings of the Acropolis."<sup>46</sup>

What is most interesting in relation to Benjamin's ideas about the mimetic potential of film, however, is the concept of ineffable space as a type of explosion. For as Le Corbusier describes it in *A New World of Space*:

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<sup>39</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999 [1982]), p. 625.

<sup>40</sup> *ibidem*, p. 518.

<sup>41</sup> Anthony Vidler, *Warped Space: Art, Architecture and Anxiety in Modern Culture*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), p. 56.

<sup>42</sup> Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*. (New York: Dover Publications, 1986 [1931]), p. 220.

<sup>43</sup> *ibidem*, p. 214.

<sup>44</sup> Also interesting to compare is the way Le Corbusier presents his sketches, grouped so as to represent the movement of the eye through space, which for Colomina closely resembled the storyboard for a film. See: *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, p. 312.

<sup>45</sup> The two men had shared similar ideas around architectural promenade and quite possibly influenced each other after having met on the 26th of October in 1928, as has been claimed by Graham Cairns in *The Architecture of the Screen*, p. 232.

<sup>46</sup> Sergei M. Eisenstein, "Montage and Architecture (CA. 1938)", *Assemblage 10*. (December 1989), p. 113.

Action of the work (architecture, statue or picture) on its surroundings: vibrations, cries or shouts (such as originate from the Parthenon on the Acropolis in Athens), arrows darting away like rays, as if springing from an explosion; the near or distant site is shaken by them, touched, wounded, dominated or caressed.<sup>47</sup>

Le Corbusier effectively outlines a similar destruction of our concept of space as Benjamin does in his Artwork essay, while reviving the memory of the well-known gunpowder explosion of 1687 that greatly damaged the Parthenon. Vidler sees Le Corbusier's statement as a "virtual replay of the explosion that demolished the Parthenon."<sup>48</sup> As an experience of architecture, the explosion is a deconstruction of our preconceptions and awakens what was previously a passive and uncritical spectator to the potentiality of virtual space. By opening the inside to the outside through the means of open aerated space, the outside has become "simply framed in order to testify its visual existence,"<sup>49</sup> a concept that is repeated by the placement of large landscape windows in a Le Corbusier house, that, instead of the traditional portrait windows, function particularly well in mimicking the cinematic screen<sup>50</sup>.

At this point we might also compare the early modernist concept of the glass house to the concept of an explosion. Detlef Mertins describes Benjamin's excitement after reading about Le Corbusier in Sigfried Giedion's 1928 book *Building in France: Building in Iron, Building in Concrete* and his surprising fascination for reinforced concrete, as someone who generally known for his interest in steel constructions<sup>51</sup>. Especially Giedion's writing on Le Corbusier's Dom-ino house as the "eternally open house" fascinated Benjamin in its possibility for new forms of living. "Profane illumination"<sup>52</sup> as he calls it, would create an open form of life, which would establish new connections with the proletarian masses. A radical theory of freedom described by Mertins as possessing a "chemically explosive quality."<sup>53</sup>

With this concept in mind, we can return once more to Benjamin's Arcades Project in which he stated how "only film can detonate the explosive stuff which the nineteenth century has accumulated in that strange and perhaps formerly unknown material which is kitsch."<sup>54</sup> The kitsch that is the focus of

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<sup>47</sup> Le Corbusier, *A New World of Space*. (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1948), p. 8.

<sup>48</sup> Anthony Vidler, *Warped Space: Art, Architecture and Anxiety in Modern Culture*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), p. 54.

<sup>49</sup> *ibidem*, p. 54.

<sup>50</sup> See also Graham Cairns's analysis of the Villa Savoye in *The Architecture of the Screen*, p. 231.

<sup>51</sup> Detlef Mertins, "The Enticing and Threatening Face of Prehistory: Walter Benjamin and the Utopia of Glass", *Assemblage 29* (April 1996), p. 7.

<sup>52</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism" in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1979), p. 227.

<sup>53</sup> Detlef Mertins, "The Enticing and Threatening Face of Prehistory: Walter Benjamin and the Utopia of Glass", *Assemblage 29*. (April 1996), p. 10.

<sup>54</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999 [1982]), p. 396.

Rosler's video becomes the explosion to detonate the Unité, echoed in the images of the collapsing building (as a potential future for the Unité), creating the properties of a critical artwork as Benjamin envisioned by means of the activation of our optical unconscious. In this way, film could, unlike architecture, with its shock-effect awaken the distracted spectator and move beyond the tactile element into an optical experience that is truly 'shocking'. With this in mind we can look at what Henri Lefebvre proclaimed in his *Production of Space*:

Architecture produces living bodies, each with its own distinctive traits. The animating principle of such a body, its presence, is neither visible nor legible as such, nor is it the object of any discourse, for it reproduces itself within those who *use* the space in question, within their lived experience. Of that experience the tourist, the passive spectator, can grasp but a pale shadow.<sup>55</sup>

And this is what Rosler has created with her video, a way for us to critically observe a building that is, especially by us as visitors, observed passively albeit in a distracted state. So, it is only through the dream-like space-time of film and its tactile incorporation of kitsch that we gain the dialectics needed for our critical yet involved stance.

Interesting in this context is a statement Rosler made in relation to the Situationists' focus on the visual in modern capitalism:

Perhaps it is the primacy of the spatial register, with its emphasis on visuality, but also its turn to virtuality, to representation, that also accounts for architecture's return to prominence in the imaginary of the arts, displacing not only music but architecture's spectral double, the cinema.<sup>56</sup>

What does it mean for architecture to displace cinema in the imaginary of the arts, if this is what is truly occurring? Rosler brings it up just after referencing the Unité's similarity to a walled city, or even a carceral city, as opined by the Situationists. Any mention of prisons in this way surely brings to mind the Foucauldian power relations as created by structures of discipline. By citing Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* in her text, we must interpret Rosler's interest in architecture, and specifically Le Corbusier's Unité, in relation to its creation of the social relations of capitalism. These would be the social relations that Rosler would suppose to be obscured by a focus on a universalized theory of the media (amongst which architecture, if we would follow Colomina) á la McLuhan.

By incorporating tactility and the attractive easygoing entertainment of kitsch, Rosler opposes this turn to virtuality, returning the cinema, or at least film, to its status of prominence in the imaginary of the arts. In this status film, and specifically Rosler's video, can again revive the utopian theories of modernism that Rayner Banham deemed to have been lost in functionalist

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<sup>55</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991 [1974]), p. 137.

<sup>56</sup> Martha Rosler, "Part 1: Art and Urbanism" in *Culture Class*. (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), p. 81.

architecture. Without becoming an ode to the Unité by keeping a strong focus on the problematic homogenising element of the Modulor, an ambivalent attitude to domesticity and the carceral power structures embedded in the architecture, Rosler has created a work that revives some of the utopian hopes that originated in modernist thought and seemed to have been lost in our contemporary postmodern cynicism. In her work we can find the seeds for a Benjaminian theory of awakening from the neo-liberal dream. The video provides a vision of a literal and allegorical explosion to highlight the social forces that have been at play in the construction of modernist architecture, and in its subsequent inhabitation.

## Chapter 2

### **Dorit Margreiter and the Sheats-Goldstein Residence: An Adjustable House for a Transient Utopia**

*Film: unfolding <result> of all the forms of perception, the tempos and rhythms, which lie preformed in today's machines, such that all problems of contemporary art find their definitive formulation only in the context of film. - Walter Benjamin<sup>57</sup>*

The 2004 film *10104 Angelo View Drive*<sup>58</sup> by Dorit Margreiter was filmed at the one of the most famous modernist domestic architectural projects of Los Angeles; the John Lautner designed Sheats-Goldstein residence (see Appendix D). Significantly, the film starts and ends by showing us the Los Angeles skyline, at first during the daytime while the glass walls move to open to our view of it and finally at the very end as blinking lights hover over the pool in the distance. It proceeds by calmly demonstrating the various moving elements of the house in static shots, often in relation to the plants and water features near it. These formal scenes are interspersed with very short inserts showing ensembles of women in dollar-store costumes performing strange activities inside the house. As it turns out, the women are part of a queer performance group called Toxic Titties who, on Margreiter's request, restaged their performances in the Sheats-Goldstein residence, effectively undermining the masculinity so often associated with the house, as I will explain in this chapter.

Margreiter, who had moved to Los Angeles for a residency at the MAK center for art and architecture in 2001, had by 2004 completed several projects about Los Angeles architectural projects, one of which was based on Pierre Koenig's Case Study House nr. 22 from 1960 (see Appendix E).<sup>59</sup> She continued her interest in domestic modernist architecture with a film about the Sheats-Goldstein residence. Lautner, an apprentice of Frank Lloyd Wright, is an architect best known for his revolutionary projects created in the Los Angeles area. His designs use progressive techniques and are often recognised for their space-age features. Fitting best in this category is the Leonard J. Malin Residence, also called the chemosphere (see Appendix F). Completed in 1960, this octagonal house was built on one large concrete pillar to solve the problem of its location on a very steep slope. Like many other Lautner houses, the chemosphere has often been used in Hollywood films because of its striking design. The same is true for the Sheats-Goldstein Residence.

The house was designed to resemble a cave, conceived from the inside out, opening up to the view and blending in with the surrounding hillside location. It was completed for Helen and Paul Sheats and their three children in 1963, but had been remodelled by Lautner in collaboration with the subsequent

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<sup>57</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999 [1982]), p. 394.

<sup>58</sup> The 16 mm film has no sound, is in colour and 6 minutes and 57 seconds long.

<sup>59</sup> The Case Study Houses were experimental projects of domestic architecture that had been commissioned by the Arts & Architecture Magazine in the U.S. between 1945 and 1966. 36 Designs were created, of which 27 were actually constructed, mostly in the Los Angeles area.

owner James Goldstein from 1972 until the architect's death in 1994. Like many others, Margreiter first came across the house in a movie, namely *The Big Lebowski* (1998), where it was the house of porn producer Jackie Treehorn. The Sheats-Goldstein residence also featured in the film *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle* (2003) as well as the adult movies *Unleashed* (1996) and *Possession* (1997).

In Thom Andersen's film *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (2003), which discusses the role of Los Angeles architecture in Hollywood movies, the filmmaker points out how Los Angeles' heritage of modernist housing has been "systematically denigrated"<sup>60</sup> by Hollywood films. In the voiceover of his film he proclaims how, more than any other, "the architect Hollywood most loves to hate is John Lautner."<sup>61</sup> For *10104 Angelo View Drive* Margreiter also asked herself why a house like Lautner's would feature so heavily in its relation with movie villainy. As Hollywood sees it, the house's sliding doors, walls and floors cannot possibly allow traditional family life or firm moral values. The glass walls reveal all and arguably promote an exhibitionist or even promiscuous lifestyle. Margreiter understood and critiques this association of modernist architecture with vice in her film, as I will discuss further on in this chapter. In a lecture Margreiter gave about the ideal home at the Liverpool Biennial of 2014, she relates 1970s movie villains to a house where things can move at the push of a button, as is the case with the Sheats-Goldstein residence. More than allowing her to confront modernist's architecture's relationship to masculinity, she emphasized that an important reason for her to make a film in the Sheats-Goldstein residence was that "the house itself is a film, it moves."<sup>62</sup>

When first built, the house had no glass walls and was completely open to the outside. The interior decoration, furniture and appliances were all designed by Lautner to match the complete design of the house. After 1972 glass walls were inserted that could be electronically operated, which was already the case for some of the appliances previously installed, such as the television that could rise out of a concrete surface. In her film, Margreiter has lovingly shot many of these moving elements of the house. We see the floor slide away to reveal a pool, the glass roof open up to the sky and glass walls slowly move sideways to show us Los Angeles. It is clear that the moving elements of the house are of great importance to Margreiter, especially in relation to the medium of film. In the above-mentioned lecture she indicated how important her work's mediality is to its interpretation. I will suggest that the work's expression on film can therefore be related to the moving elements of the house as a performance and the house's windows functioning as a cinematic screen projecting the city of Los Angeles.

As Barbara Clausen stressed in her essay on the works of Margreiter, at the core of Margreiter's practice is "the concurrent disappearance and glorification of modernism's former utopias."<sup>63</sup> Fascinated by the original intentions of the architect and the transformation that has taken place in the role

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<sup>60</sup> At 00:42:04 of *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (2003).

<sup>61</sup> *ibidem*, at 00:46:12

<sup>62</sup> "Drinks with... Dorit Margreiter," presentation by Dorit Margreiter at the Liverpool Biennial 2014, accessed on 05-06-2015 at <https://vimeo.com/112911702>.

<sup>63</sup> Barbara Clausen, "Dorit Margreiter" in Dillon, Brian (ed.), *Ruins*. (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2011), p. 82.

of the modernist house, Lautner's Sheats-Goldstein residence is a prime example of a utopian project that, in its re-invention through capitalist exchange, now exists as a multi-million dollar celebrity mansion. Of the architect's original intentions, none seem to be remembered and instead only surface remains in the various advertisements and films that are recorded there. It is "modernism's contingent relationship to politics,"<sup>64</sup> that is perfectly embodied by the Sheats-Goldstein residence.

In this chapter I shall describe some of the concepts of the adjustable and the movable house that existed around the time of the construction of the Sheats-Goldstein residence, especially in relation to Constant Nieuwenhuys's *New Babylon*. *New Babylon* shows clearly the ideology that was essential for the concept of an ever-changing environment, which to some extent is incorporated in the Sheats-Goldstein residence. The moving elements are important to showing modernism's relation to politics and an explanation of its interpretation in the past also shows how much the concepts behind the design of the house have changed in the more recent use of the house in contemporary cultural expression. From this I will show how the Sheats-Goldstein Residence, along with other post-war domestic architecture such as Alison and Peter Smithson's *House of the Future*, became associated with ideas of vice and aberrant sexuality, an association that Margreiter re-establishes but also tries to critique in her film. To conclude I will specify the importance of the utopian aspects that Margreiter attempts to bring to the fore with *10104 Angelo View Drive*, especially in relation to the medium of film.

### **The House Made for Film**

To begin this investigation into the utopian origins that Margreiter evokes with her film of the Sheats-Goldstein residence, we need to return once more to the modernist trope of the Glass House. In his previously discussed essay *Experience and Poverty* Benjamin evokes the writing of Paul Scheerbart, who described a new type of humans that would be transformed by rockets, telescopes and airplanes into "new, lovable, and interesting creatures" who "talk in a completely new language" of "arbitrary constructed nature" to reject "humanlikeness."<sup>65</sup>

In his famous book *Glasarchitektur* from 1914 Scheerbart described how it was of great importance to have housing that fits this new human nature, with "mobile and sliding glass partitions" and many other new characteristics.<sup>66</sup> Although Scheerbart was famously associated with architect Bruno Taut, Benjamin describes the houses built by Le Corbusier as prime examples of this new type of architecture. A house for the new man that would also embody the spirit of the time should be seen in the context of space-time.<sup>67</sup> Sigfried Giedion

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<sup>64</sup> Barbara Clausen, "Dorit Margreiter" in Dillon, Brian (ed.), *Ruins*. (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2011), p. 83.

<sup>65</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Experience and Poverty" in *Selected Writings Volume 2: 1927-1934*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 733.

<sup>66</sup> Paul Scheerbart, "Glass Architecture" in Scheerbart, Paul and Taut, Bruno, *Glass Architecture and Alpine Architecture*. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), p. 54.

<sup>67</sup> Space-time for Giedion was a revision of the concept taken from physics, now seen in the context of a new type of architecture, architecture that can be

described how especially Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye (see Appendix G) couldn't be understood from one point in space alone, the house could therefore be seen as quite literally embodying space-time.<sup>68</sup>

Graham Cairns pointed out how the Villa Savoye was a perfect example of Le Corbusier's architectural promenade and was inherently connected to film. As he pointed out, the building could not only be described in cinematic terms, "it was a building recorded as a cinematic sequence as early as 1929."<sup>69</sup> More than being perfect for film, and therefore for the machine-age, Le Corbusier's houses were changing something essential. Instead of merely enacting a sequence, the house was a multiplication of viewpoints, existing at the same time in space. The modernist trope of the Glass House could therefore be seen in terms of a multifaceted crystal. In his *Arcades Project* Benjamin wrote in admiration how "Le Corbusier's work seems to stand at the terminus of the mythological figuration "house,"<sup>70</sup> in essence becoming something beyond a house itself and moving into the imaginary. Analyzed by Colomina, Benjamin's fascination for Le Corbusier was especially located in his vision of the house as inhabiting "a space that is neither inside nor outside, public nor private."<sup>71</sup>

Here we can extend this comparison to Lautner's Sheats-Goldstein residence, which could be seen as a space "that is not made of walls but of images."<sup>72</sup> Originally, the house was completely open to the elements, but even with its glass walls, it is more located in the realm of fantasy than of reality. The Sheats-Goldstein residence can therefore be seen in light of Anthony Vidler's consideration of modern architectural projects "that increasingly seem caught in the hallucinatory realm of a filmic or screened imaginary."<sup>73</sup> This development can be seen as part of a general movement towards immateriality that has taken place in all the arts with the rise of digital technology and post-Fordism. The Sheats-Goldstein residence is essentially a space "unconsciously interwoven" with fantasy and the ideology of capitalism, in the way Benjamin saw the Parisian arcades.<sup>74</sup>

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considered from multiple viewpoints simultaneously, existing in a complex yet fluid continuum.

<sup>68</sup> Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: The growth of a new tradition*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977 [1941]), p. 529.

<sup>69</sup> Graham Cairns, *The Architecture of the Screen*. (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), p. 231 The film he mentions is *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* (1929), co-written by Le Corbusier, it is part of a series of three short films showcasing the work of four architects of the time: The Perret Brothers, Robert Mallet Stevens, Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret.

<sup>70</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999 [1982]), p. 407.

<sup>71</sup> Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), p. 6.

<sup>72</sup> *ibidem*, p. 6.

<sup>73</sup> Anthony Vidler, "Explosion of Space: Architecture and the Filmic Imaginary", *Assemblage 21* (August 1993), p. 46.

<sup>74</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), p. 267.



The move of architecture towards the imaginary is a development that Colomina saw as essential to modernism. Her focus is on the disconnect between straightforward perspectival vision and that of the camera (as seen in relation to the time-based medium it produces), "it is precisely in this slippage that modern architecture becomes modern."<sup>75</sup> Purely mediated through film, the architecture exists with an added or enhanced unconscious element, made visible in the context of its re-appropriation by the entertainment industry. It is the unconscious element that Margreiter wants to bring into the light, creating once more a glass house that reveals instead of conceals. With its ability to reveal the unconscious elements embedded in our preconceptions, a film about this house can therefore show us something that the house perhaps cannot show us in its physical reality. It is the revelation of the Sheats-Goldstein residence's unconscious associations, and modernist utopian architectural projects in general, that Margreiter attempts to explore in her film.

### **The Adjustable and Mobile House**

Created around the same time as the Sheats-Goldstein Residence, New Babylon (1956-1974) was a project started by Constant when he was a member of the Situationist International, which he joined in 1958. He worked closely with Guy Debord, with whom he wrote several texts about architecture and urbanism, such as the influential Amsterdam Declaration of 1958. In this manifesto they declared the Situationist intentions for Unitary Urbanism, a theory of urbanism for the creation of complete environments.<sup>76</sup> Created within the parameters of Unitary Urbanism, New Babylon is a design for a city of the future that would be the home for the *homo ludens*, the man of play, first set out by Johan Huizinga in his eponymous book. As described by the Situationists, this man would exist in the near future, when all labour had been taken over by machines and man would be able to dedicate all his time to play.<sup>77</sup> Constant saw his New Babylon as a synthesis of all the arts, where the architect could be considered as a "builder of complete ambiances,"<sup>78</sup> much like Lautner who saw his architecture as "total design" or a "total idea" for a "living work of art."<sup>79</sup>

Constant's vision of the New Babylonian was completely opposed to that of the *homo faber*, who could be seen as an inhabitant of functionalist architecture. With its focus on the traditional family structure and working hours, this ostensibly restrictive type of architecture would create an inhabitant

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<sup>75</sup> Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), p. 335.

<sup>76</sup> Constant and Guy Debord, "The Amsterdam Declaration" in McDonough, Tom (ed.), *The Situationists and the City*. (London: Verso, 2009), p. 103-104.

<sup>77</sup> Constant, "Unitary Urbanism" in McDonough, Tom (ed.), *The Situationists and the City*. (London: Verso, 2009), p. 115.

<sup>78</sup> Constant, "Inaugural Report to the Munich Conference" in McDonough, Tom (ed.), *The Situationists and the City*. (London: Verso, 2009), p. 108.

<sup>79</sup> From interview with John Lautner in January 1976 at Southern California Institute of Architecture, accessed on 09-06-2015 at [http://sma.sciarc.edu/subclip/los-angeles-twelve-clip\\_6274](http://sma.sciarc.edu/subclip/los-angeles-twelve-clip_6274).

that is "tied to the land."<sup>80</sup> Instead, with free use of his time, the *homo ludens* had no use for a fixed abode; his need would be for mobility.<sup>81</sup> This need for constant change and movement would be performed by the architecture itself, as Constant describes: "the New Babylonians can vary their environment, renew and vary it by using their technical implements."<sup>82</sup> Seen as a social act, a means to create interaction with bystanders, the physical change in their environment would make sure that "nobody now falls into the trap of habit."<sup>83</sup> Habit, the most reviled of all human behaviour, was seen by the Situationists as a form of reification considered to be the direct effect of the capitalist structure of society and the cause of our inability to change it. In New Babylon the "people were free to engage in creative work" and "its flexible structure would provide a suitable environment for these types of inhabitant who might collectively elaborate the mobile elements of its interior."<sup>84</sup>

The Sheats-Goldstein residence has many moving elements, similar to New Babylon, as is shown in Margreiter's film. In its ability to change form and ambience, the house itself is like a movie set, and is used in this way for the various photo- and film shoots that take place in the house. As Margreiter emphasizes by opening and ending with a shot of Los Angeles, the house becomes the embodiment of the city and its inherent connection to the entertainment industry of Hollywood. Even Banham, who wrote extensively about modernist architecture and lectured at the Southern California Institute of Architecture, declared in his ode to Los Angeles how "there's a sense of impermanence about the place."<sup>85</sup> Margreiter has confessed a fascination for this desire to live in a house where one constantly needs to leave when another shoot takes place, only to find one's house in a mess when returning once again. The family itself cannot acquire permanence in such a situation, a price they are willing to pay to be able to live in a so-called celebrity house.

And yet, in this very impermanence we can find a certain uprootedness Constant saw as essential for a new form of life, a culture "based on the ephemeral, on the transience of an experience, and the contrast between this and new experiences."<sup>86</sup> A value admired by the Situationists, this "dynamic conception of form,"<sup>87</sup> as interpreted by Asger Jorn, would normally be avoided in traditional concepts of space because of the anarchy associated with change. However, it is the change that occurs when a space is being lived in that provides

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<sup>80</sup> Constant, "New Babylon: Outline of a Culture" in Wigley, Mark, *Constant's New Babylon: The Hyper-architecture of Desire*. (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1998), p. 164.

<sup>81</sup> *ibidem*, p. 160.

<sup>82</sup> *ibidem*, p. 162.

<sup>83</sup> *ibidem*, p. 164.

<sup>84</sup> Tom McDonough (ed.), *The Situationists and the City*. (London: Verso, 2009), p. 17.

<sup>85</sup> In his documentary *Reyner Banham Loves Los Angeles* from 1972.

<sup>86</sup> Constant, "Unitary Urbanism" in Situationist International, "Unitary Urbanism at the End of the 1950s" in McDonough, Tom (ed.), *The Situationists and the City*. (London: Verso, 2009), p. 121.

<sup>87</sup> Asger Jorn, "Excerpts from *Image and Form*" in McDonough, Tom (ed.), *The Situationists and the City*. (London: Verso, 2009), p. 55.

the building with the "the quality of history,"<sup>88</sup> an essential knowledge for reconnecting to the revolutionary potential of the past. In acquiring various changes and additions over the years, the Sheats-Goldstein residence has been subject to constant alteration, under supervision of the architect. Not only could the building be changed temporarily by moving the walls, roof or floor, the building has also been altered in more permanent ways over the years and in this way acquired a layered quality similar to that of history.

The impermanence in the Sheats-Goldstein residence could be seen as directly resulting from the spectacle of cinema, conflicting with the ideas of the Situationists. It is here that we can involve Benjamin's consideration of the re-enchantment of the social world in the light of capitalism. The spectacle can be found in the ever-changing urban-industrial environment, which, although creating awareness, is still very much subjected to the capitalist influences the Situationists were attempting to escape. This is where Margreiter's use of the space becomes important. Her film acts as a means to undermine the passive admiration of the changing environment and makes it more problematic by adding a subversive performance. The film does not merely admire the design; it questions its appropriation in contemporary culture. By adding these layers, the film becomes much more powerful than the house itself could be.

As forward-thinking architects similarly critical of functionalism and working in the same time-period as the Situationists,<sup>89</sup> Alison and Peter Smithson professed an interest in the reconfiguration of the function of rooms within a house in their concept of the appliance house.<sup>90</sup> In this appliance house, instead of changing single elements such as furniture inside a room, a re-distribution of the whole house was suggested, made possible by the mobility of new appliances. It was their intention to free us from our "room fixation" and allow a freer concept of space. Similarly, they suggested appliances that would be hidden away inside cabinets or other structures, allowing a new application of the room. Like the television that moves in and out of a concrete table in the Sheats-Goldstein residence, filmed by Margreiter in *10104 Angelo View Drive*, the Smithsons developed a design where appliances would be incorporated into the structure of the house itself.

In their House of the Future (see Appendix H), developed in 1956, the Smithsons combined sliding walls with the latest appliances, and designed the house with a fluidity of form that was inspired by new development in plastics. In her essay about this house Colomina described the influence of automobile design on their project, emphasizing a mobility that characterized the period.<sup>91</sup> The caravan is mentioned by the Smithsons as an inspiration for the appliance house, which, like the car, "represents a new freedom." In their design for the House of the Future and its association with mobility, they were looking for "something of the powerful, safe, transient, free-from-responsibility feeling one

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<sup>88</sup> Günther Feuerstein, "Theses on Unpremeditated Architecture" in McDonough, Tom (ed.), *The Situationists and the City*. (London: Verso, 2009), p. 130.

<sup>89</sup> Having appropriated elements of New Babylon in their Robin Hood Gardens housing estate, which they designed in the late 1960s.

<sup>90</sup> Alison Smithson, *Team 10 Primer*. (London: Studio Vista, 1968), p. 98.

<sup>91</sup> Beatriz Colomina, "Unbreathed Air 1956", *Grey Room 15* (Spring 2004), p. 34.

gets driving in a car."<sup>92</sup> An association Colomina connects to the fascination that arose with the popularity of the Citroën DS, which had been famously referenced by Roland Barthes in his essay *The New Citroën* from 1957. In the essay he described the car as the new Gothic cathedrals, worshipping the goddess (the D.S. or *déesse* in French) of the new metropolis.<sup>93</sup>

The connection between travel and architecture is not only found in the design of cars. In 1966 Constant gave a lecture about travel in relation to architecture, describing airports as the "city of tomorrow."<sup>94</sup> In the developments of travel and increasing mobility, a space of the future should not be searched for in fixed or stationary places. Instead, we should look towards places with a "temporary population,"<sup>95</sup> like airports, stations or harbours. These spaces of constant change, with unfamiliar languages and circumstances, would facilitate contact between people and function as a new social space. Constant defined this situation as the gradual disappearance of the sedentary man; instead "we are becoming nomads once more, not looking for rest but for dynamic motion."<sup>96</sup> Elements of the house for this dynamic motion can be found in Lautner's design, emphasized by Margreiter. The Sheats-Goldstein residence is essentially performing the role of a house for passing through.

Although a private house, it has changed form and inhabitants many times, the Sheats-Goldstein residence has been treated precisely in the way Colomina described the House of the Future. According to Colomina, "the house itself becomes expendable, a throwaway object" by presuming "in its program the mobility of its occupants."<sup>97</sup> Despite its multi-million dollar price tag the house is expendable. It has taken the role of a possession performing the sign of the owner's affluence and taste. The house itself is no longer a house, since it is not really lived in. Instead it is effectively playing a part, just like the city of Los Angeles, as Andersen claims in his film *Los Angeles Plays Itself*.

As pointed out by Colomina, the House of the Future was supposedly made of plastic, but in reality it was a construction of plywood, pretending to be plastic. The house was make-belief and could therefore be considered as performing a temporary fantasy, much like the movies. As Colomina claims, it was the Smithsons' intention to create "a taste for the permanent" by facilitating the enjoyable consumption of the transient.<sup>98</sup> The transient in this case was the proposal for utopia, a stage for fantasy as a preparation for reality. In relation to the Sheats-Goldstein residence, there is a similar sense of utopia in its design. By being a house that is effectively unlivable, Lautner's design could be taken as a defense for uprootedness, for a life without permanence, much like Constant's New Babylon. By setting up temporary situations and insisting on their

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<sup>92</sup> Alison Smithson, *Team 10 Primer*. (London: Studio Vista, 1968), p. 99.

<sup>93</sup> Roland Barthes, "The New Citroën" in *Mythologies*. (London: Vintage Books, 2009[1957]), pp. 101-103.

<sup>94</sup> Constant, "On Travelling" in Wigley, Mark, *Constant's New Babylon: The Hyper-architecture of Desire*. (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1998), p. 201.

<sup>95</sup> *ibidem*, p. 200.

<sup>96</sup> *ibidem*, p. 201.

<sup>97</sup> Beatriz Colomina, "Unbreathed Air 1956", *Grey Room 15* (Spring 2004), p. 37.

<sup>98</sup> *ibidem*, p. 32.

temporality through the medium of film, Margreiter has created an ode to impermanence in relation to the original utopian intentions of the architecture.

In a lecture given at the Venice Biennial of 2011, Tom McDonough described Constant's interest in nomadic life as stemming from his stay with Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio, who had offered his land as a haven for the Roma community.<sup>99</sup> In his *Design for a Gypsy Camp* (1956-1958) Constant, as proposed by McDonough, "sought metaphorically to transform the conditions of physical deprivation imposed upon the Romany people into a kind of sensory richness."<sup>100</sup> Although less engaged with nomadic life exactly, Lautner's design could be seen as trying to access a similar kind of sensory richness created by openness to the elements and a connection with nature that is inspired by a more ancient lifestyle. In Margreiter's film there are various scenes showing the parts of the house where the structure meets the surrounding nature, such as the garden or the water features that have been incorporated in the design. By featuring scenes of the contact between nature and human structures, Margreiter insists on the utopian elements of the design dealing with its relationship to nature essential to the movement of organic architecture<sup>101</sup> that Lautner was part of. It is the sensory richness that arises from this interaction that was an interest of Lautner, and is re-assessed in Margreiter's film. By creating a film of the building, merging architecture and film, Margreiter has reclaimed some of the aspects of the building that might have been lost. Specifically, in the utopian nature of the original design, which can be found in her focus on movement.

Vidler has emphasized that in many films about architecture a type of ideal architecture can be encountered in which cinema would provide the social play necessary for developing cohesion and harmony. He uses Jacques Élie Faure's writing on cineplastics in 1922 as some of the earliest theorizing this relationship: "The hitherto unknown plastic pleasures thereby discovered would, finally, create a new kind of architectural space, akin to that imaginary space within the walls of the brain."<sup>102</sup> This new architecture, modernist architecture, would have a strong presence in the imaginary and film would aid this move into fantasy. Insisting that "architecture should cease to be an art of immobility,"<sup>103</sup> Élie Faure described the development of design in airplanes and cars as beginning to explore the possibilities of form in movement. As Mitchell Schwarzer characterized Élie Faure's vision of architecture through film: "the largest and most immobile works of art can become flexible and abstract

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<sup>99</sup> Tom McDonough for the exhibition "Call the Witness: Roma Pavilion" at the Venice Biennial 2011, accessed on 10-06-2015 at <http://www.callthewitness.net/Testimonies/CampoNomadi>.

<sup>100</sup> Tom McDonough, "Metastructure: Experimental Utopia and Traumatic Memory in Constant's New Babylon", *Grey Room* 33 (Fall 2008), p. 88.

<sup>101</sup> Organic architecture is a term coined by Frank Lloyd Wright, who sought to create a design in architecture that both functioned as a unified organism and merged with its environment.

<sup>102</sup> Anthony Vidler, "Explosion of Space: Architecture and the Filmic Imaginary", *Assemblage* 21 (August 1993), p. 46.

<sup>103</sup> Mitchell Schwarzer, *Zoomscape: Architecture in Motion and Media*. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004), p. 214.

elements of artistic composition."<sup>104</sup> In this sense we might be able to see an association with nomadic life arise in Lautner's design through the medium of film: in the ever-moving frames of a film the house can finally become truly flexible.

As Colomina has emphasized, it is modern architecture's relation to film that makes modern architecture modern, and modern in this case in the sense of mobile and flexible. Colomina stresses: "The point of view of modern architecture is never fixed (...) but always in motion, as in film or in the city."<sup>105</sup> In film the house can move and change to become many things, as it has already shown in the various movies that it has performed. What Margreiter wants to assert are the ideological aspects of the design that have been forgotten in the many roles the house has played, the ideological elements that were part of the original design and the spirit of the time when it was originally built. However, it is also important to realize that a re-interpretation has taken place, of modernist architecture as such and the Sheats-Goldstein residence in particular as I will show in the next part of this chapter.

### **The Voyeuristic House or the Protective Cave**

In *Los Angeles Plays Itself* Anderson quotes a critic of the Los Angeles Times who wrote about the role a particular modernist house (in this case the Lovell House by Richard Neutra) played in the film *L.A. Confidential* (1997):

The house's slick meticulous form seems the perfect frame for that kind of power, Neutra's glass walls open up to expose the dark side of our lives. They suggest the erotic, the broken, the psychologically impure.<sup>106</sup>

To which Anderson, by means of his narrator Encke King, sarcastically replies:

So now we know. As the movies have shown, these pure modern machines for better living are dens of vice.

The Sheats-Goldstein house has a similar association with the erotic, creating a new balance of power by erasing domesticity and using the architecture's openness in relation to voyeurism. The house was after all the dwelling of a porn producer in the *Big Lebowski*, the location for two actual porn films and the set for the sexually motivated Snoop Dogg music video *Let's Get Blown* (2005).

According to Clausen its "quasi-bachelor pad ethos"<sup>107</sup> and identification with masculinity is a power relationship Margreiter explicitly wants to question. In *10104 Angelo View Drive* Margreiter restaged performances with the exact purpose of disrupting "the fantasy of male domination."<sup>108</sup> More than male

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<sup>104</sup> Mitchell Schwarzer, *Zoomscape: Architecture in Motion and Media*. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004), p. 215.

<sup>105</sup> Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), p. 6.

<sup>106</sup> At 00:44:25 of *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (2003).

<sup>107</sup> Barbara Clausen, "Dorit Margreiter" in Dillon, Brian (ed.), *Ruins*. (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2011), p. 81.

<sup>108</sup> *ibidem*, p. 82.

domination, I believe it is the actual association between sex and modernist housing that Margreiter wants to question. The connection between modernist design and sexuality has a long history; even Banham spoke about its seemingly obvious connection in relation to the black leather upholstery of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona chair.<sup>109</sup> In architecture Colomina has brought up the association by using the example of Adolf Loos' proposal of a house for Josephine Baker (see Appendix I). The house would have various windows placed in the exterior walls that were created for looking at the famous dweller inside. As a house made for the voyeuristic exposure of its inhabitant with sexually curved walls and furniture, Colomina describes the Smithson's House of the Future in similar terms. "Both a house on exhibit and an exhibitionist house,"<sup>110</sup> Colomina claims of the Smithson's design.

With its glass walls the Sheats-Goldstein residence has similar voyeuristic potential, though perhaps not by being as publicly on display as the House of the Future was. Describing the openings that were cut into the walls of the house as akin to movie or TV screens, Colomina analyses the House of the Future as a "media machine"<sup>111</sup> and therefore a "mechanism of escape."<sup>112</sup> In Lautner's design we can similarly see the glass walls as movie screens, showing us the landscape of Los Angeles, the city most used in film. The windows of a house as cinematic displays, is a comparison also made in relation to Le Corbusier's houses. Colomina has proposed this connection in her essay about the House of the Future, but highlights that where Le Corbusier's windows point horizontally, the House of the Future provided a vertical landscape,<sup>113</sup> eventually pointing to outer space. Like in the Smithson's house, the inhabitants of the Sheats-Goldstein house are projecting themselves outside, escaping into the imaginary, following the design from the inside to the outside.

In her essay Colomina asserts that of inspiration for the Smithson's house were the caves of Les Baux de Provence. It is also a cave with which the Sheats-Goldstein residence is most commonly compared. The cave acts as a hideout from danger, which could be an impulse inspired by the post-war atomic fears, which existed alongside its utopian optimism. Although seemingly a paradox, the Sheats-Goldstein residence proves that a glass house can also be a cave, partly revealing, partly concealing. It is in this way that we can return once more to Constant's design for New Babylon, which McDonough also saw in relation to fears of war and disaster. McDonough describes the project in terms of "nostalgia for disaster."<sup>114</sup> On the one hand he sees it as influenced by the Second World War in relation to the widespread displacement of people, and other hand as a result of the increasing fear for nuclear disaster, and the relating need for a new

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<sup>109</sup> Briefly mentioned during the lecture given at the Southern California Institute of Architecture in March 1976, accessed on 09-06-2015 at <http://sma.sciarc.edu/video/reynier-banham-myths-meanings-and-forms-of-twentieth-century-architecture-part-one>.

<sup>110</sup> Beatriz Colomina, "Unbreathed Air 1956", *Grey Room 15* (Spring 2004), p. 41.

<sup>111</sup> *ibidem*, p. 46.

<sup>112</sup> *ibidem*, p. 47.

<sup>113</sup> *ibidem*, p. 52.

<sup>114</sup> Tom McDonough, "Metastructure: Experimental Utopia and Traumatic Memory in Constant's New Babylon", *Grey Room 33* (Fall 2008), p. 86.

way of housing. The attraction Constant sees in "physical deprivation" might therefore have a lot to do with the earlier discussion of the glass house and its connection to explosion. It is this element of danger that relates to Constant's concept of New Babylon and its permanent revolution as a place of profound violence.

When looking at Margreiter's *10104 Angelo View Drive* we see an interest in the utopian aspects of the architecture in the focus on the moving elements of the design in combination with glimpses of strange and potentially subversive scenes. These scenes confirm our belief, as created by Hollywood film, that there is something inherently suspicious about this type of architecture, by showing us what appears to be the aftermath of an orgy, shady medical experiments and a suggestion of a world take-over in the style of 1960s spy movies. By having these scenes performed by women, the traditional gender roles are reversed and our concerns are placed on insecure terrain. As Clausen suggest, Margreiter's film takes the initial utopian impulse of the house, adds the re-interpretation of mainstream film and creates a new proposal: that modernism could exist once more as a piece of art, a film in this case. Its social relevance is made significant once more, especially by perpetuating "modernity's ongoing relationship with the moving image."<sup>115</sup>

It is our contemporary moment's proximity to disaster, in the form of climate change, market crashes and a potential new cold war, that has revived our interest in the modernist utopias of the past, especially those that were spawned by war and destruction. Our desire to find an alternative to contemporary structures of society has made us look for moments that created extreme proposals for new ways of living. The post-war moment seem to have been the last moment when utopian projects were seriously considered and actually constructed, in some way or another. As a proposal filled with doubts and insecurities with a focus on the ephemeral and transient, film can exist as an antidote to the strong ideologies of modernism and yet still propose some value to that moment. Margreiter's *10104 Angelo View Drive* has reclaimed some of Benjamin's vision for the potential of film to make us view and cope with modernity, even if it is a modernity of the past.

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<sup>115</sup> Barbara Clausen, "Dorit Margreiter" in Dillon, Brian (ed.), *Ruins*. (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2011), p. 83



## Chapter 3

### Patrick Keiller and The Situationist International: Returning the Daydream to Architecture

*The street conducts the flâneur into a vanished time. For him, every street is precipitous. It leads downward - if not to the mythical Mothers, then into a past that can be all the more spellbinding because it is not his own, not private. Nevertheless, it always remains the time of a childhood.* - Walter Benjamin<sup>116</sup>

As a film not referring to a specific architectural project, Patrick Keiller's *Dilapidated Dwelling* (2000) might seem like the odd one out in my discussion of three artist films reliving modernist architecture. Yet from all the films mentioned in this thesis, Keiller's film is the most comprehensive in addressing the issues with modernist housing as seen from a contemporary perspective. *Dilapidated Dwelling* is perhaps one of Keiller's lesser-known works, and in his oeuvre the one that most seems to resemble a "straight" documentary film. The film was originally made for TV but never made it to the screen because of its liberal use of archival footage and accompanying copyright issues. It has, however, been screened in a gallery context.<sup>117</sup> The film tells the fictional story of a researcher voiced by the actress Tilda Swinton, who has recently returned to England and reflects upon the status of its dilapidated housing stock and the country's conservative views on housing and construction methods. The film applies traditional documentary techniques such as interviews and inserts of archival footage, but intersperses it with elements of fiction surrounding the character of the narrator.

Keiller is best known for his trilogy of the films *London* (1994), *Robinson in Space* (1997) and *Robinson in Ruins* (2010), in which he used the fictional character of Robinson to wander around and reflect upon the landscapes, histories and buildings of London and England. Often quoting former Situationist members such as Raoul Vaneigem or Constant, Keiller uses the Situationist theories of psychogeography<sup>118</sup> to reflect upon the world around him. He enacts the *dérive*<sup>119</sup>, or drift, through his character of Robinson and makes him roam as if through a dream, applying a surrealist approach to the landscape envisioned by Benjamin's flâneur. As an artist who was originally trained as an architect, the subject of *Dilapidated Dwelling* seems to be of particular personal interest to

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<sup>116</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999 [1982]), p. 416.

<sup>117</sup> For instance at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London from 24 Nov 2013 - 1 Dec 2013.

<sup>118</sup> Psychogeography, as described by the SI, is an approach to geography that emphasizes playfulness and has the intention of creating a new awareness of the urban landscape. Will Self named Keiller a doyenne of psychogeography in his essay on urban wandering, accessed on 23-05-2015 at <http://blog.barbican.org.uk/2013/09/will-self-on-urban-wandering>.

<sup>119</sup> The *dérive* is a technique of psychogeography, whereby an individual or group deliberately drift through unfamiliar areas to create situations that spark an active and authentic relationship to new surroundings or people.

Keiller. In the way *Robinson in Space* reflects upon "the problem of England," *Dilapidated Dwelling* specifically mentions in its opening scenes its interest in "the predicament of the house in the United Kingdom" and the narrator's intention of creating "a project to anticipate the future," in this way voicing what are essentially Keiller's thoughts.

In this chapter I aim to research the *dérivist* as a character in Keiller's film in relation to the filmmaker's own conflicted relationship to psychogeography. I will locate the origins of Keiller's interest in Benjamin's writing on the *flâneur* and the role of the street, and the root of both the Situationists' and Benjamin's concepts in a fascination with surrealism. After looking at what role the street and the act of the *dérive* plays in creating a connection with historical memory, I shall point out how the city can be seen as a palimpsest of its history. Although a direct application of Situationist techniques to our contemporary moment would be anachronistic in nature, I will show how Keiller insists that the psychogeographical approach to the urban environment, and to housing specifically, can still be of value to us today, especially by means of its reapplication through film. In film we can play a game with our everyday surroundings to create a dreamlike experience that will help us relive the past that is embedded in the buildings and the landscapes that we so often fail to notice. The practice of the daydream is essential in this rediscovery.

### **The *flâneur*, the *dérivist*, the wanderer**

At the start of *Dilapidated Dwelling*, the unnamed narrator arrives in England by boat from Gothenburg. We are shown footage of what we can only suppose is a ferry slowly arriving at the break of day, followed by another static shot of people disembarking at a bleak pier. One of the first activities the narrator describes herself doing is wandering around all day. She describes the city as if from the perspective of a stranger, having apparently spent nearly twenty years in a small arctic community. However, because she was able to keep in touch via the electronic media, she managed to keep informed about everything that was happening. Her stance, for this reason, is distanced yet knowledgeable. The way she interacts with the city, like a curious, well-informed outsider who is keen to relate, seems very similar to that of the *dérivist*.

Exemplifying the Situationist's central interest in "the construction of situations,"<sup>120</sup> the *dérive* was an essential technique to create a reengagement with our everyday surroundings. As described by Guy Debord, the *dérive* consists of "locomotion without goal,"<sup>121</sup> or more specifically, "a technique of swift passage through varied environments" to achieve "a ludic-constructive comportment."<sup>122</sup> The Situationists saw the *dérive* as a way to play with architecture, to appropriate its realities of everyday life and to subvert them. Often mentioned in the same breath as *flânerie*, it is important to realize that the *dérive* is not exactly the same the former. It has similar elements (such as the

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<sup>120</sup> Guy Debord, "Towards a Situationist International" in McDonough, Tom (ed.), *The Situationists and the City*. (London: Verso, 2009), p. 94

<sup>121</sup> Guy Debord and Jacques Fillon, "Summary 1954" in McDonough, Tom (ed.), *The Situationists and the City*. (London: Verso, 2009), p. 46

<sup>122</sup> Guy Debord, "Theory of the *Dérive*" in McDonough, Tom (ed.), *The Situationists and the City*. (London: Verso, 2009), p. 78

privilege and ambivalence of the flâneur), but, as analysed by McDonough, the Situationist's technique of *dérive* involved more than just an individual's response to the urban environment. In their eyes the cities could be seen as "profoundly historical landscapes" that were shaped by the "successive events that time has buried."<sup>123</sup> It was their intention to reconnect to this history and the revolutionary legacy within.

Similarly Geraldine Pratt and Rose Marie San Juan have argued that the essential difference between *flânerie* and the *dérive* was located in its disregard of the city's official organisation, "especially in relation to modern consumerism,"<sup>124</sup> which would contrast with Benjamin's connection between the flâneur and the Parisian Arcades. Benjamin's flâneur is completely embedded and thoroughly complicit in consumer culture, although subversion is also taking place in perhaps less obvious ways. As analyzed by Susan Buck-Morss, to be a flâneur required a specific set of skills. He was not a person of leisure but a type of salaried employee who would need to loiter for his profession.<sup>125</sup> This again, is where the *dérivist* would differ from the flâneur. In its complicity with consumer culture and employment, the flâneur could never be part of the Situationist way of thinking, the same Situationists who famously used the graffitied phrase "*Ne Travaillez Jamais*" as their motto. Pratt and San Juan described the activity of the *dérive* as "perplexing rather than engaging", to drift is to be "never compliant in urban space", where the goal is "not to master the street, but rather to activate one of its many possibilities."<sup>126</sup> These possibilities would be encountered in the new situations that would arise, which would escape the habitual patterns that are normally formed when travelling in the city.

Returning to Keiller, we can find similar interests in his work and his writing to those of the Situationists. Keiller has mentioned psychogeography as a great influence but has nuanced his use of the term. In an interview he described how he "tried to avoid the word" of psychogeography as he believes it belongs to a different time. Especially the creation of a real revolutionary space, such as Constant's New Babylon, is not directly the intention anymore in contemporary *dérives*, such as those created in his films<sup>127</sup>. However, he also points out that the fictional perambulations in his films are made with the intention of "bringing about the collapse of what used to be called neo-liberalism."<sup>128</sup> According to Keiller "the journey culminated in a striking rediscovery, and inspires something

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<sup>123</sup> Tom McDonough, *The Situationists and the City*. (London: Verso, 2009), p. 11

<sup>124</sup> Geraldine Pratt and Rose Marie San Juan, *Film and Urban Space: Critical Possibilities*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 82

<sup>125</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), p. 306.

<sup>126</sup> Geraldine Pratt and Rose Marie San Juan, *Film and Urban Space: Critical Possibilities*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 82.

<sup>127</sup> For more information about Constant's New Babylon, consult Mark Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon: The Hyper-architecture of Desire*. (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1998)

<sup>128</sup> From an interview with Patrick Keiller in 3 AM magazine, accessed on 26-05-2015 at <http://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/the-future-of-landscape-patrick-keiller>. The quote refers to his narrator Robinson who reflects upon our present as his or her past, and therefore uses the phrase "used to be called."

that sounds a little like New Babylon, though this is not seen realised in the film."<sup>129</sup> Although Keiller claims his rediscovery is not realised, I will argue that it is present in his argument as a whole, which functions as a critical reawakening as might have been imagined by Walter Benjamin or the Situationists.

Keiller has described his technique of combining moving images with interior monologue as a "more-or-less comic attempt to represent consciousness, or perhaps artificial consciousness – the inner experience of an alienated and rather unreliable artificial flâneur."<sup>130</sup> By provoking the image of the flâneur, Keiller has opened the door to an interpretation of his work in relation to that of Benjamin, despite its differences with the activity of *dérive*. The flâneur as described by Benjamin, is a wandering figure first encountered in relation to the modern perception of the contemporary metropolis in the works of Charles Baudelaire. Benjamin has also described the flâneur as containing elements of the detective.<sup>131</sup> As a researcher and questioner of his environment, the *dérivist* would have similar intentions. Like the *dérivist*, the flâneur's "object of inquiry is modernity itself."<sup>132</sup>

Perhaps more of a *dérivist*, who shares certain characteristics with the flâneur, the wanderer in *Dilapidated Dwelling* questions modernity in relation to its technological development. Keiller quotes, for instance, Archigram in *Dilapidated Dwelling*: "automation affect our ways of thinking." Keiller describes the paradox of domestic life; electronic means have created a people that do everything from their homes, yet the purchase and maintenance of the house has become increasingly impossible. Keiller doesn't question modernity to find a way to counter its alienating effects, as was the case with the Situationists, effects that now are so ingrained in our way of life that they would seem unshakeable. Rather, he attempts to create an awareness of the state of everyday life as we live in it today. It is an awareness that has more to do with a direct experience of contemporaneity in relation to historical memory. As Benjamin described: "The city is the realization of that ancient dream of humanity, the labyrinth. It is this reality to which the flâneur, without knowing it, devotes himself."<sup>133</sup>

Without knowing it, the wanderer of Keiller's films, is subjected to modernity as if through a dream. With its elements of fiction and seemingly random associations Keiller's films certainly seem to follow a type of hypnagogic wandering. Exemplary of the dreamlike jumping from one subject to the next is a juxtaposition early on in the film of a static shot of the outside of a music shop where the narrator supposedly buys a Fender Stratocaster, quickly followed by

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<sup>129</sup> From an interview with Patrick Keiller in 3 AM magazine (see previous footnote).

<sup>130</sup> Patrick Keiller, "Architectural Cinematography" in Kester Rattenbury (ed.), *This Is Not Architecture*, (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 41.

<sup>131</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999 [1982]), p. 442.

<sup>132</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), p. 304.

<sup>133</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999 [1982]), p. 429.

the shot of a twee interior of a typical British private house.<sup>134</sup> With the voiceover we are made aware of the "predicament of the house in the United Kingdom," most likely because the latter displays extremely conservative taste compared to the former, but the connection remains opaque. As in a dream Keiller's associations are metaphorical and metonymical, constantly surprising the spectator, just like the *dérive* intended to do. At the beginning of the film the narrator even mentions that she "fell asleep on the bus," introducing the idea that all her meandering thoughts during the film might actually be propelled by the logic of a dream.

By assuming the rationale of a documentary on the surface and an unconscious dream-like behaviour underneath, the film takes on the pattern of re-enchantment that is analysed by Benjamin in connection to modernity.<sup>135</sup> As criticized by Benjamin, the surrealists failed because they became stuck in the dream they were so desperately trying to evoke and did not attempt the equally important awakening from this dream. They missed what he saw as essential: the creation of a connection between perception and action that was needed to regain the capacity for authentic experience. In his dialectical point of view, Benjamin saw a connection of modernity to the dream as both representative of the sedative experience of capitalism and as a possibility to connect to our time of childhood and historic memory. But as Beatriz Colomina has described, it is the essential transience of the contemporary experience, the city in which it is experienced and the transient nature of its observer (in the form of the *flâneur*) that "cannot be separated from new forms of representation."<sup>136</sup> This new form of representation for Benjamin is film.

In his *Arcades Project* Benjamin wondered about the possibility of making a film from the structure of the city:

Couldn't an exciting film be made from the map of Paris? From the unfolding of its various aspects in temporal succession? From the compression of a centuries-long movement of streets, boulevards, arcades, and squares into the space of half an hour? And does the *flâneur* do anything different?<sup>137</sup>

The narrator of Keiller embodies, in part, the *flâneur* of film that Benjamin describes here, but is enhanced by Keiller with the unreliability of his fictional additions. As Patrik Sjöberg indicated, to use just the concept of the *flâneur* "would here be to miss out on a lot of the sensibilities developed"<sup>138</sup> in Keiller's

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<sup>134</sup> A short scene reminiscent of Martin Parr and Nicholas Barker's documentary *Signs of the Times: A Portrait of the Nation's Tastes* (1992), which portrayed the domestic tastes of Britain.

<sup>135</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), p. 254.

<sup>136</sup> Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), p. 12.

<sup>137</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999 [1982]), p. 83.

<sup>138</sup> Patrik Sjöberg, "I Am Here, or, The Art of Getting Lost: Patrick Keiller and the New City Symphony" in Penz, Francois and Lu, Andong (eds.), *Urban Cinematics*:

films. Instead we need to look at the change that has taken place in Keiller's wanderer. By adding a layer of fiction Keiller has created a narrator with an element of deception. Keiller prevents the suggestion of one clear solution to "the problem" he wants to address, instead he indicates that in the post-Fordist structure of capitalism nothing can be seen clearly, every activity is implicated in the workings of the free market. There can be no revolution in the Marxist sense and no reason for the destruction of architectural structures like those of modernism since it wouldn't change anything about our current circumstances. Instead, our means of resistance should be found in more unstable and unpredictable places, like those of film. As an element of the culture industry most cinema is now fully implicated in neo-liberalism, by emphasizing individuality and lifestyles that are consolidating post-Fordist structures. However, when fully using its abilities for performing its uncertainty and instability as a time-based medium, film might very well bring us a mythical utopian vision with a kernel of truth.

### **Radicalism of Forms**

Also in the context of his relation to Britain's modernist architecture, Keiller's wanderer seems to be more like the *dérivist* than the *flâneur*. Owen Hatherley described how the labyrinthine structures of Brutalist housing estates are perfect for the *dérive*, yet make *flânerie* impossible<sup>139</sup>. The wanderer is able to get lost but is not able to lose himself because of the danger these estates often represent. As "places of crime and intrigue"<sup>140</sup> they provoke an adrenaline induced active interaction with the surroundings, and in this sense they exactly enact the violence and danger the Situationists romanticized and envisioned to be intimately connected to the activity of the *dérive*.

In *Dilapidated Dwelling* Keiller describes a renewed interest in public housing from the 1960s, exemplified by the complete renovation and rehabilitation of Ernő Goldfinger's Brutalist Trellick Tower (see Appendix J).<sup>141</sup> He describes how architects used to have more influence on the design of these projects, as opposed to the housing projects that are created now. The ostensible control of architecture on behaviour has now shifted its power from the architect to the direct influence of the free-market dynamics of neo-liberalism. As architectural projects are more and more subjugated to the forces of capitalism and architects lose any influence they might have once had, contemporary housing has become more and more like the spectacle that Debord once imagined. As a tool of market-driven development and a reification of capitalist structures of society, housing, especially in Britain, has become a commodity that is intensely conservative and permanently kept in its outdated but familiar forms. Keiller gloomily suggests in *Dilapidated Dwelling*, while driving through a squalid shopping street that is so common to all British cities, that the space

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*Understanding Urban Phenomena through the Moving Image*. (Bristol: Intellect (2011), p. 50.

<sup>139</sup> Owen Hatherley, *Militant Modernism*. (Winchester: Zero Books, 2008), p. 11.

<sup>140</sup> *ibidem*, p. 42.

<sup>141</sup> Goldfinger, a life-long Marxist and social thinker, was despised by many for his extremely austere and aggressive designs as well as his short temper, which was the reason for Ian Fleming to name his best-known villain after him.

created by our contemporary global economy is no longer reflected by airports and office buildings, but by the worn-out chain shops of the high street and by the horrible state of our dilapidated dwellings. As Keiller proclaims: "it's very difficult to develop better housing in a market economy." The design ethic of modernism has disappeared and instead many are made to believe that the Thatcherite concept of home-ownership is the only available option for social progress.

Architect Reinier de Graaf has placed the demolition of Pruitt-Igoe in relation to the fall of the Berlin Wall, which according to him could be explained as the death of social architecture and the victory of neo-liberalism. In his provocatively titled essay *Architecture is now a tool of capital, complicit in a purpose antithetical to its social mission*,<sup>142</sup> he placed the loss of modernist utopia in the context of the change Thomas Piketty speaks of in his enormously influential book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*.<sup>143</sup> In a world where capital is valued over everything, housing becomes a capital investment first and a human right later. We find ourselves far removed from the world in which John Lautner described housing as "a basic human need."<sup>144</sup> Instead we see housing in places like London become a speculative vehicle of investment that does not need to be lived in, despite enormous housing shortages in the city. As de Graaf, and Banham before him, has described, style is the only thing that remains. Stripped of its original social meaning as a monument for the masses, a housing estate like the Trellick Tower has now become immensely desirable and apartments are being sold off for hundreds of thousands of pounds, which in no way relates to the original project once built with great social-utopian intentions<sup>145</sup>.

Anthony Vidler asks in his introduction to *Architecture: Between Spectacle and Use* whether Debord would have considered all architecture to be a spectacle or if only a particular category of spectacular architecture would fit the bill. He explains, citing Debord:

His indictment of the architects of capital was based on his perception that capitalist production has unified space, a process that, far from constructing spectacular monuments, was more that of extensive and intensive *banalization*. In his assessment, the practice of modern urbanism was a totalizing remaking, the totality of space as its *own décor*. Safeguarding the power of the ruling classes, urbanism finally suppressed the street, the scene of riot and revolution, in favor of a zoning

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<sup>142</sup> Reinier de Graaf, "Architecture is now a tool of capital, complicit in a purpose antithetical to its social mission," (24 April 2015), accessed on 15-07-2015 at <http://www.architectural-review.com/8681564.article>, see also Reinier de Graaf, "Building Capital," *The Architectural Review* 1419 (June 2015), pp. 36-45.

<sup>143</sup> Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2014).

<sup>144</sup> Frank Escher, *John Lautner, Architect*. (London: Artemis, 1994), p. 284

<sup>145</sup> Such as those represented by its communitarian streets-in-the sky, a typical element of Brutalism also used in the architectural projects of Alison and Peter Smithson, such as their Robin Hood Gardens.

that isolated the population in separate groupings, supported by an ideology of dominant images of pseudo-collectivity.<sup>146</sup>

Extremely dismissive of the architecture of capitalism and functionalism in particular, Debord was profoundly critical of any architectural project of his time. His critique could therefore be seen as too condemning, not allowing any real possibility for resistance in any temporarily fixed form. In *Dilapidated Dwelling* Keiller still allows potential for many of the more experimental housing projects that were suggested in the 1960s.

By using examples of innovative housing projects such as Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion House, The Case Study House Nr. 8 by Charles and Ray Eames and the utopian project of New Babylon, Keiller focuses in *Dilapidated Dwelling* on a time when there was a great deal of belief in the potential of new materials and techniques. A "radicalism of forms"<sup>147</sup> as described by Asger Jorn, provoked by developments in, for instance, aviation, could provide a renewal of belief in the potential of architecture, keeping alive the more liberatory aspects of "the heritage of functionalism."<sup>148</sup> Especially the reference to aviation brings to mind the early projects created by Buckminster Fuller, who was known for his use of techniques that had been developed for the construction of airplanes.

Another architect Keiller foregrounds in *Dilapidated Dwelling* is Cedric Price. During an interview in the film his statement: "be prepared to remove everything that your produce," is given particular importance. As a great influence on Archigram along with Buckminster Fuller, Price was a forerunner of temporary constructions and space-age architecture. Especially his Fun Palace project of 1961 (see Appendix K), described by Price as a "short-life conglomerate of disparate, free-choice, free-time, voluntary activities,"<sup>149</sup> could be seen as embodying many of the ideas that were important to the Situationists, especially that of the *fête*, or festival.

Seen as one of the purest historical forms of the festival,<sup>150</sup> the Paris Commune of 1871 was an important influence for the Situationists. The Commune was seen as a great uprising of the people, a seemingly reckless act that, according to them, should be taken up as an example. Henri Lefebvre, whose work was a great inspiration for the Situationist International,<sup>151</sup> writes in admiration about the commune:

A fundamental will, to change the world and life as it is, and things as they are, a spontaneity pregnant with the highest thought, a total

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<sup>146</sup> Anthony Vidler (ed.), *Architecture: Between Spectacle and Use*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. x-xi.

<sup>147</sup> Asger Jorn, "Excerpts from *Image and Form*" in McDonough, Tom (ed.), *The Situationists and the City*. (London: Verso, 2009), p. 56.

<sup>148</sup> *ibidem*, p. 53.

<sup>149</sup> Cedric Price, "Talks at the AA", *AA Files 19* (Spring 1990), p. 32.

<sup>150</sup> In the *Internationale Situationniste* #10 (March 1966) they proclaimed that "the Commune was the greatest festival of the 19th Century"

<sup>151</sup> Lefebvre befriended many of the Situationists, but, like many others, was eventually excommunicated, at which point Debord began to criticize many of his texts, despite being very much indebted to them for his own theories.



revolutionary project. A delirious and general all or nothing. A vital and absolute wager on the possible and the impossible...<sup>152</sup>

It is the utopian potential of civil uprising that was of interest to the Situationists, a "realization of a revolutionary urbanism, that would knock down "the petrified signs of the dominant organisation of life", but most importantly, recognise "social space in political terms."<sup>153</sup> For the Situationists, but also for Benjamin and Keiller, this social space is embedded in the very material of the city.

### **The City as Palimpsest**

In *Dilapidated Dwelling* Keiller quotes Lefebvre: "to change life we must first change space." As an attempt to bring about the collapse of post-Fordist structures, specifically its fleetingness and its lack of historical depth, Keiller's wanderings through urban space and the activation of its multiplicity of history, everyday life and imagination, seems very closely related to what the Situationists originally intended with psychogeography. As they proclaimed: "One must construct uninhabitable ambiances, construct the streets of real life, the scenery of daydreams."<sup>154</sup> Keiller's daydream has moved beyond the surrealist concept of being merely an opposition to the capitalist forces of rationalism. Instead it has become a tool to connect the past to the present in a highly subjective setting and allow for more than one interpretation of history.

Graham Cairns has described Lefebvre's view on *détournement* as applying a different set of behaviours on a location than would normally be the case.<sup>155</sup> In this sense the *dérive* would be just as much a creation of a "utopian alternative" as the actual creation of a new architectural project. We can find Keiller's interest in the reactivation of the material of the city in his psychogeographic wanderings. In all the architectural projects that Keiller admires in *Dilapidated Dwelling*, ranging from the Dymaxion House from 1933 to the Trellick Tower from 1972, we can find the theme of a period of modernist architecture that had great hopes for the future. It is Keiller's intention to reclaim these lost futures. As Lefebvre is quoted in *Dilapidated Dwelling*: "the idea of a new life is at once realistic and illusory and hence neither true nor false." We should look at the city as a whole as a space that exists in multiple simultaneous moments of history that can be revisited or even revived. As Benjamin already foresaw, through the process of wandering the street can become a place that leads the wanderer "into a vanished time."<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Henri Lefebvre, "Excerpts from *the Proclamation of the Commune*" in McDonough, Tom (ed.), *The Situationists and the City*. (London: Verso, 2009), p. 174.

<sup>153</sup> Guy Debord, "On the Commune" in McDonough, Tom (ed.), *The Situationists and the City*. (London: Verso, 2009), p. 170.

<sup>154</sup> Situationist International, "Unitary Urbanism at the End of the 1950s" in Debord, Guy, "Towards a Situationist International" in McDonough, Tom (ed.), *The Situationists and the City*. (London: Verso, 2009), p. 100.

<sup>155</sup> Graham Cairns, *The Architecture of the Screen*. (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), p. 103.

<sup>156</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999 [1982]), p. 416.

In Keiller's films we get a view of the city as an incredibly complex system constantly subjected to changes in physical structure, social composition, economic and financial forces. All these changes have to be seen in reference to the historical foundation of the city, in its physical history but also in its fictional groundwork, in the form of books, films and music. By becoming aware of these constant changes in our way of thinking about the city, we realize that what we are seeing is a network of viewpoints that can only be considered by means of an anachronistic wandering perspective, that of the *dérivist*. When applying this context to Keiller's work Sjöberg states:

The film makes theoretical detours, and comes back, gets lost in a detail only to return to a panoramic understanding of a site, involving the historical, mythical, and the fictional aspects of a place as they palimpsestuously intermingle.<sup>157</sup>

In this sense Keiller's film, with its meandering interests and multiple detours, reflects the unstable and complex nature of the city and allows for the only way it can truly be understood. One moment in the film where a detour of this type occurs, is when the narrator suggests the modern narrative of *Tristram Shandy*<sup>158</sup> and its kitchen setting as the inspiration for a sudden interest in domesticity and settling down. This scene is quickly followed by a shot of a Tesco's supermarket and the narrator's description of meeting an old friend, falling in love and eloping to the West-Cumbrian coast. Seemingly autobiographical, but also mixing in the fiction of *Tristram Shandy* and its meandering nature with the narrator's personal life, this side-step seems curiously irrelevant to the argument of dilapidated houses in the United Kingdom. However, this is precisely the unexpected input a psychogeographical wandering would supply; it reflects the working of our own memory and how it's constantly subjected to different influences of a personal, fictional, historical or factual nature.

In the interpretation of the spaces of the city as palimpsest, we find the notion of a multiplicity in history. It is a vision of urban space described by Ivan Chitchevlov,<sup>159</sup> whose *Formulaire pour un Urbanisme Nouveau* (1953) was of great importance to the Situationist International. He wrote: "All cities are

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<sup>157</sup> Patrik Sjöberg, "I Am Here, or, The Art of Getting Lost: Patrick Keiller and the New City Symphony" in Penz, Francois and Lu, Andong (eds.), *Urban Cinematics: Understanding Urban Phenomena through the Moving Image*. (Bristol: Intellect, 2011), p. 48.

<sup>158</sup> This novel by Laurence Sterne, published between 1759 and 1767, also called *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, is a humorous novel narrated by the character of Tristram Shandy about his own life, and is particularly known for its style of digression and amplification.

<sup>159</sup> Published under the pseudonym of Gilles Ivain by the Situationists in 1958, this Russian refugee communicated frequently with the Situationists until he was arrested for attempting to blow up the Eiffel Tower and committed to a mental hospital. His concept of "the hacienda" from *Formulaire for a New Urbanism* was re-applied to the club scene of 1980s Manchester.

geological and three steps cannot be taken without encountering ghosts."<sup>160</sup> In Keiller's films we see this layering of the city, referred to by Lefebvre as "architectures,"<sup>161</sup> coming back in the very structure of the film, where "each fragment suggests an alternative present."<sup>162</sup> In this sense the city would work rather like a network, where each location represented a node, which could only be analyzed by its context and surroundings. Chtcheglov also emphasized that the view of the "geological" landscapes of the city would always be fragmented and for this reason vision "must be sought in the magical locales of folkloric tales and surrealist writing,"<sup>163</sup> which Keiller effectively does by means of his detours.

In this way we can also see Keiller's encounter with ghosts of the past in all the locations he visits in the context of hauntology. As described by Mark Fisher, hauntology seeks to reconnect with the lost futures of modernity that have slowly been cancelled after the supposed end of history<sup>164</sup>. In an essay on the work of Keiller, Fisher analyses London as the "capital of the first capitalist country" where capitalism "saturates everything."<sup>165</sup> Apart from being Keiller's (and Fisher's) city of residence, London's status as a place perfectly exemplifying the influence of post-Fordist capitalism is also the reason for Keiller's interest in the city. As the camera surveys the endless cityscape of red brick Victorian housing, the narrator asks: "What does it mean to live in a culture that finds it so difficult to produce new domestic architecture?" Later on in the film Keiller describes how the amount of money people in Britain spend to repair their dilapidated houses far exceeds the money spend on constructing new ones. The houses they insist on living in were designed when people were far less affluent, "but no one seems to think they're inferior to new homes." The housing market and the financial institutions supporting this system have everything to win by keeping supply of houses low and the demand and prices high. We can see the crumbling houses that *Dilapidated Dwelling* so strongly reacts against as the "new ruins of a neoliberal culture that has not yet accepted its own demise."<sup>166</sup>

Because "there is nothing intrinsically resistant to capital's drive to commoditization,"<sup>167</sup> Keiller's films do not have the intention of reaching a destination, of establishing a definite state that can be incorporated into a culture of post-Fordism, taking the shape of just another documentary's futile complains about the housing market. Instead, like the *dérivist*, Keiller's interest

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<sup>160</sup> Gilles Ivain, "Formulary for a New Urbanism" in McDonough, Tom (ed.), *The Situationists and the City*. (London: Verso, 2009), p. 33.

<sup>161</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991 [1974]), p. 118.

<sup>162</sup> Patrik Sjöberg, "I Am Here, or, The Art of Getting Lost: Patrick Keiller and the New City Symphony" in Penz, Francois and Lu, Andong (eds.), *Urban Cinematics: Understanding Urban Phenomena through the Moving Image*. (Bristol: Intellect, 2011), p. 49.

<sup>163</sup> Gilles Ivain, "Formulary for a New Urbanism" in McDonough, Tom (ed.), *The Situationists and the City*. (London: Verso, 2009), p. 35.

<sup>164</sup> Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*. (Winchester: Zero Books, 2013).

<sup>165</sup> *ibidem*, p. 226.

<sup>166</sup> *ibidem*, p. 227.

<sup>167</sup> *ibidem*, p. 228.

lies with the "amnesias, frustrations and diversions of the city."<sup>168</sup> Although the city might suffer from amnesia, history is inscribed on its space and cannot be completely erased.<sup>169</sup> Our experience of the city cannot be seen separate from a consideration of its "archi-textures." Therefore, in Keiller's film, we experience our everyday interaction with the city and its architecture as "the simultaneous strangeness and familiarity of the past", which creates a responsibility for the viewer "to remember at different times."<sup>170</sup> According to Pratt and San Juan, this experience revives a sense of possibility, resists our routine response to urban space and instead acts to "provoke aspirations for a different future."<sup>171</sup> These are the lost futures that Fisher describes, which might not be as lost to us as has previously been imagined.

Responding to a text by Lefebvre in which he claims the hopes of a new life can be prohibited by the overwhelming presence of history, Keiller wonders if this condition "is sometimes suspended within the spaces of a film, and if so, whether this might explain some of the attraction, and the seemingly utopian quality, of so much film space."<sup>172</sup> It is interesting to see that Lefebvre wrote specifically about the "*realized* [my emphasis] preconditions of another life,"<sup>173</sup> which would prevent the rise of alternatives to present structures. It is possible that in film they are perhaps not realized enough to hinder the real possibility for utopia: the "dead weight"<sup>174</sup> of reality that would prevent imagination from taking flight having disappeared in film. Perhaps the Situationist intentions for architecture with regard to its ability to "engender dreams"<sup>175</sup> can only truly be enacted in film.

The experience of an experimental utopia as opposed to an abstract one, in the way New Babylon was originally conceived,<sup>176</sup> could again be presented as a possibility through the medium of film. It was, for instance, suggested by Constant himself, who always wanted to make a film from the models he had built for New Babylon.<sup>177</sup> McDonough has proposed the concept of experimental utopia, originally described by Lefebvre, as "imaginary variations on themes and

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<sup>168</sup> Patrik Sjöberg, "I Am Here, or, The Art of Getting Lost: Patrick Keiller and the New City Symphony" in Penz, Francois and Lu, Andong (eds.), *Urban Cinematics: Understanding Urban Phenomena through the Moving Image*. (Bristol: Intellect, 2011), p. 49.

<sup>169</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991 [1974]), p. 37.

<sup>170</sup> Geraldine Pratt and Rose Marie San Juan, *Film and Urban Space: Critical Possibilities*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 105.

<sup>171</sup> *ibidem*, p. 106.

<sup>172</sup> Patrick Keiller, "Imaging" in Dillon, Brian (ed.), *Ruins*. (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2011), p. 148.

<sup>173</sup> *ibidem*, p. 148.

<sup>174</sup> *ibidem*, p. 148.

<sup>175</sup> Gilles Ivain, "Formulary for a New Urbanism" in McDonough, Tom (ed.), *The Situationists and the City*. (London: Verso, 2009), p. 36.

<sup>176</sup> See also Tom McDonough's analysis of Constant's New Babylon in *The Situationists and the City*. (London: Verso, 2009), p. 20.

<sup>177</sup> See also an interview conducted with Constant in 2005 for Bomb Magazine, accessed on 17-08-2015 at <http://bombmagazine.org/article/2713/constant>.

exigencies defined by the real as understood in the broadest sense: by the problems posed by reality and by the virtualities held within it."<sup>178</sup> As a "virtual object"<sup>179</sup> Keiller's film creates its own form of an experimental utopia that has a firm connection to the real, strongly criticizing and referencing its original problematic but also providing escape from these issues and creating a constructive way to analyse the potential for a brighter future.

Keiller highlights his doubts about psychogeography's relevance now, because of its origin in a different time, a time when a revolutionary praxis still seemed a possibility. However, he also suggests that after the financial crisis of 2008, when doubt arose about the truth of neo-liberal doctrine, "it began to seem possible that this period might be giving way to another."<sup>180</sup> In the realization that something might have profoundly changed in our mindset since the crisis, despite the fact that financial institutions once again stubbornly continued down the same path as before, Keiller suggest there might be a reason to renew our consideration of former utopian models. Another aspect that could be significant for allowing new possibilities is the importance of "exceptional moments".<sup>181</sup> Keiller mentions the festival as described by Lefebvre as this time of moment where traditional power structures were briefly suspended and suggests that the financial crash of 2008 might have provided such an "exceptional moment."

As Keiller suggests: "film offers a kind of permanence to subjectivity."<sup>182</sup> Interestingly he proposes this in an essay that starts with the surrealist Louis Aragon's intention "to endow with poetic value that which does not yet possess it."<sup>183</sup> His suggestion seems to follow Vaneigem's 1967 proposal of a "radical subjectivity,"<sup>184</sup> which intended to bind the individual to the social by means of "poetic experience."<sup>185</sup> Where other Situationists, such as Constant, were looking for a removal of subjectivity to achieve a radical de-conditioning, Keiller seems to follow Vaneigem in this matter. He proposes that film can offer something to architecture that it cannot supply itself, a radical subjectivity that offers a bridge between imagination and reality. As Keiller sees it, film a "medium which offers a heightened awareness of architecture (...) might be thought at least as compelling as an actually existing architecture of heightened awareness."<sup>186</sup> With his films he creates an imaginary spectator who can truly experience history and is able to create with this knowledge a highly subjective utopia able to withstand the forces of neo-liberalism.

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<sup>178</sup> Tom McDonough, "Metastructure: Experimental Utopia and Traumatic Memory in Constant's New Babylon", *Grey Room 33* (Fall 2008), p. 85.

<sup>179</sup> *ibidem*, p. 86.

<sup>180</sup> Patrick Keiller, "Imaging" in Dillon, Brian (ed.), *Ruins*. (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2011), p. 149.

<sup>181</sup> *ibidem*, p. 148.

<sup>182</sup> Patrick Keiller, "Architectural Cinematography" in Kester Rattenbury (ed.), *This Is Not Architecture*. (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 43.

<sup>183</sup> *ibidem*, p. 37.

<sup>184</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*. (London: Rebel Press, 2001[1967]), p. 196.

<sup>185</sup> *ibidem*, p. 203.

<sup>186</sup> Patrick Keiller, "Architectural Cinematography" in Kester Rattenbury (ed.), *This Is Not Architecture*. (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 43.

By means of film the ghosts of the past can create awareness in the living and provide us with a daydream that presents real possibilities for the future. In *Dilapidated Dwelling* Keiller asks what the future for housing can be if it remains trapped in concepts that have remained unchanged for hundreds of years, such as ideas of permanence in housing and the outdated concept of the traditional nuclear family. In his film Keiller claims that we are still nomads, even if our wanderings merely "consists of flipping through the television channels," and we desire houses that can change along with the changing landscape of our culture, our politics and our economic systems. The revival of past utopian models is a real possibility if it is provided with radical subjectivity, as Keiller does in his film with his seemingly random detours, adding myth, history and fiction to the world that we know. Until we take the risk of allowing a revision of the concept of housing to exist in our imagination, we will remain trapped in the poorly kept prison that is housing subjected to neo-liberal market logic, and be forced to live with its overwhelming dominance over the very structures of our lives.

## Conclusion

I have tried to shed light on some of the many ways architecture in artist film can revive elements of its original utopian vision. Martha Rosler, Dorit Margreiter and Patrick Keiller are attempting to create a very tangible yet fragile way for the spectator to see an architectural utopian project from the past anew by presenting it on film or video. We can see their work as fine examples of a renewed commitment to the possibility of change by re-connecting to history. Without ever actually creating a physical utopia and acknowledging that this would be impossible, all three artists provide us with deliberately fragmented dreams that endeavour to analyse the real attempts at social utopia and in the process create a radically subjective experimental utopia of their own.<sup>187</sup>

The personal becomes political in Rosler's video because it is part of a collective struggle against restrictive and totalizing forces. The Unité has allowed people to express their personalities in frivolous decorations, however conservative in taste they might be, despite the restrictive intentions its architect tried to enforce. It is the fact that these intentions failed that provides the project with its critical force. Rosler's insistence on the importance of the domesticity of the inhabitants resisting the totalizing forces created by Le Corbusier and persisted by post-Fordist influences later on, gives significance to the inhabitants' appropriation of functionalist architecture. Their act of appropriation might be considered naïve due to their lack of knowledge of architecture, but also informed because of their years of practical experience living in the building. The inhabitants are subverting Le Corbusier's intentions, yet by creating their own utopia, which is haunted by the spectre of imminent destruction, the inhabitants are just as much fighting against a stultifying concept of architecture as Le Corbusier was. His *Ville Radieuse* was a revolutionary concept, though it failed, fortunately, in achieving the unliveable social hygiene he proposed. Rosler seems to suggest that radical architectural theory can create a real liveable but fragile utopia when converted into a living and communal work of art, with modulations created by its inhabitants.

New Babylon wanted to change the world we live into an endlessly changing place preventing any permanent form to take shape. In our post-Fordist world of flexible workplaces and temporary contracts, the idea of changeable and mobile housing could seem as the last thing we need. Yet what Constant's, and Lautner's, project suggest is a necessary change in thought about the house as a fixed and stable structure in the way it stultifies the ideology of a bourgeois domesticity. However it is also important to realise that so-called flexibilisation in housing has been co-opted by post-Fordism to maximize profits on temporary empty houses, effectively undermining house-renters rights in exchange for lower rents.<sup>188</sup> As a symptom of an overly pressured housing

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<sup>187</sup> Creating the "metastructure" McDonough refers to in his essay "Metastructure: Experimental Utopia and Traumatic Memory in Constant's New Babylon", *Grey Room* 33 (Fall 2008)

<sup>188</sup> See Jesse Frederik, "Alles flex: Hoe flexibele huurcontracten tot permanente onzekerheid kunnen leiden" in *De Correspondent*, accessed on 21-07-2015 at <https://decorrespondent.nl/3101/Alles-flex-hoe-flexibele-huurcontracten-tot-permanente-onzekerheid-kunnen-leiden/236178696908-f922f743>.

market, temporary rental contracts do not offer a solution but only provide another way to abuse those who do not have the capital to purchase a home for themselves.

No matter how attractive the idea of flexible housing might seem as an easy solution to housing shortage, there can be no simple idealized subversion of the concept of fixed housing structures like the type practiced in the 1960s. We are living in a world where the culture industry, including architecture, is complicit in the creation of individualism and the consumer patterns of post-Fordism. Any statement in opposition can only be made with full acknowledgment of its seemingly inevitable future co-optation by post-Fordism. Yet quietism and passive affirmation cannot be the answer either. The depression of Fisher's "capitalist realism" can only be prevented if there is some belief in a mythological place of resistance. Because of its instable and impermanent nature film is the ideal site for this resistance, it does not have the dead weight of the physical real and can allow imagination to prosper. However, it is important to realize that film can be used to spread conservatism as much as resistance, a point brought up by Margreiter.

Margreiter's film has shown how the perceived implication of the design of a house can change greatly with its representation. Based on fear of revolutionary architecture and left-wing creative thinkers, Hollywood cinema has promulgated the idea that modernist housing is deviant and attracts inhabitants that are equally deviant. Hollywood has painted a picture of modernist architecture as elitist, creating inhabitants that are remote and disconnected from family life. This might seem surprising as Hollywood itself is a rationalist, Fordist system, yet the taint of aberrant revolutionary thinking still seems to stick to how Hollywood depicts the supposed problem of modernism. Conversely, the Situationists have vilified the modernist architecture of Le Corbusier for its rationalism, especially its prison-like structures and inability to connect to the people it was made for. Unable to provide freedom, instead the architecture was perceived as forcing its own construct of an unliveable world upon its inhabitants. On the one hand too revolutionary and on the other not revolutionary enough, both Hollywood and the Situationists seem to have condemned modernist architecture.

It is the idea of the end of history as posited by Francis Fukuyama in 1989<sup>189</sup>, in which history is thought to have reached its perfect end-point in the form of Western liberal democracy, which needs to be challenged once again. As Keiller has also suggested, the 2008 financial crash has begun to generate critical resistance against the functioning of neo-liberal ideology. All the works that are discussed in this thesis were made before the crash, yet I would suggest they marked an interest in alternatives to post-Fordism that was already developing and is now intensifying. Despite the return to power of the very same financial institutions and economic systems, something has changed in the mindset of many individuals. We can see that the postmodern opposition to the presentation of grand narratives and the concept of utopia is gradually diminishing. A seed of doubt is sown that is not hampered but perhaps even quickened by the return to power of the very same structures of post-Fordism.

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<sup>189</sup> Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History," *The National Interest* (Summer 1989), pp. 3-18



Artists are looking for tools to create potential alternatives to these post-Fordist structures by returning to and reflecting upon the critical arguments of recent history. Modernism has proven to be fruitful in this regard as it too, at least initially, was strongly propelled by a spirit of resistance. Walter Benjamin has proven to be particularly useful in a contemporary context because of his ambivalent attitude towards the developments in his own age. It all seems to come down to a hesitant belief in the powers of technology to change the world for the better. For if there cannot be a future to hold on to, even a mythical unrealistic one, the only thing that remains is to lose faith in any resistance and settle into the defeatism of capitalist realism.

It could be argued that modernism contained no more than the promise of utopia, not the realisation, as contained in the search for aesthetic origin, such as Kazimir Malevich's Black Square. The essential modernist artwork can hold the dialectical presence of both disaster and utopia; both the desert in which "everything we loved was lost"<sup>190</sup> and the promise for a better future. In a similar way Lautner's Sheats-Goldstein residence is both a glass house and a cave, it offers hope and fear at the same time. As Rosler has shown, the Unité is a structure forever connected to explosion, whether in relation to modernism's attempts at the destruction of domesticity, other versions that were actually demolished, or the threat of its own destruction due to becoming unfashionable. Surveying the rubble of the First World War, Benjamin and other modernists posited that beyond destruction lays the possibility of renewal. Though complete renewal is perhaps not an option anymore, a metaphorical explosion of fixed beliefs might still be available to us. This is what these artists are trying to achieve with their films. As Rosler has shown, the demolition of the Pruitt-Igoe estate and the simultaneous alleged death of modernism has proven to be a crucial moment in retrospect that needs to be contemplated.

In his famous and controversial statement "*Architecture ou Révolution*,"<sup>191</sup> Le Corbusier seems to have remarked on the ability of architecture to prevent civil unrest. However, in a contemporary context we could see his statement in relation to neo-liberal dominance and the workings of post-Fordism. When the Marxist idea of revolution is unavailable, perhaps the way to resist is with the creation of (imaginary) utopian architecture. Similarly, we cannot allow the physical attempts at social utopia that remain to us be destroyed and forgotten. The cause is urgent, for example since 2012 there is a proposal on the table to demolish London's Robin Hood Gardens (see Appendix L), the revolutionary Brutalist housing project designed by Alison and Peter Smithson. Their "streets-in-the-sky" are of vital necessity in contemplating the current disappearance of social space. As the memory of this moment of great social change is wiped out, post-Fordism's short-term memory takes over and the possibility for alternatives becomes fainter every day.

All three artists are, in their own way, performing archaeological research on the architectural constructions of modernism. However, it is the connection to a genealogy of resistance in the form of models of social utopia that appear in

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<sup>190</sup> Kazimir Malevich, *The Non-Objective World: The Manifesto of Suprematism*. (New York, Dover Publications 2003 [1926]), p. 68

<sup>191</sup> Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*. (New York: Dover Publications, 1986 [1931]), p. 267

these films that offer real possibilities for us in the present. By experiencing these models through the unstable form of the moving image, these films allow a flame of defiance to rise again from the moments that were once declared dead and gone. The films create critical spectators, providing them with the imaginary instruments of change that allow resistance against the all-encompassing depression of capitalist realism, which has caused a quietism only affirming post-Fordist dynamics. Where the Situationists were fighting against Fordist and disciplinary structures, our current predicament lays in the struggle against market-driven forces that have overtaken any kind of modernist design ethic that might have once allowed for ulterior motive than the creation of profit. It is in housing where this struggle becomes most apparent.

What Rosler, Margreiter and Keiller found in the architectural projects they discuss is a kind of hopefulness that might seem alien to the world we live in. Now that everything becomes assimilated in the processes of commodity capitalism, any form of hope seems immediately naïve. However, in its historical context these projects really did offer breath of fresh air in the, until that point, unchanging concepts of housing. Where Pruitt-Igoe was discussed in the post-modern debate as a clear example of the failure of modernism to achieve the social change it intended, in its historical context we can find it actually offered a much-needed refuge from the slums it replaced. It is too easy to dismiss these utopian proposals as failed, for there might be many changes they brought that did actually make a difference for their inhabitants, as is slowly being discovered with documentaries like *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth* (2012).

As the Situationists and Benjamin before them recognised, there is a need to restore a certain childlike naïveté when it comes to interaction with our environment. This is the only way we can truly recreate our capacity for experience in a society that is increasingly disinterested in the social, economic and political currents that take place underneath everyday life. Film can create an experience of the past that, more than texts alone, can make us understand what it is that we might have lost. The lost futures that Fisher speaks of are essential to understand in order that we can connect to an experience of hope that is so greatly needed in the mire of post-Fordist cynicism.

It is easy to dismiss the current omnipresence of modernist style as just another fad. We could consider the revival as merely the "longing for form"<sup>192</sup> that Fisher describes in response to Fredric Jameson's analysis of consumer society in postmodernism. It is the reconnection to historicity that separates the films of Rosler, Margreiter and Keiller from this "longing for form", a nostalgia that is merely a symptom of the temporal pathology resulting from our simultaneous exhaustion and overstimulation caused by the current moment. The artists are not attempting to produce affect of the familiar by recreating the time they are examining; there is no real formal interest in the period. An exception could be perhaps found in Margreiter's use of 16 mm footage. However, in this film the nostalgic formal qualities of the medium are undone by the clearly contemporary performance of Toxic Titties that is depicted. These artists are not trying to recreate form, they are trying to revive a historical moment with all the pressures of its becoming.

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<sup>192</sup> Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*. (Zero Books: Winchester, 2013), p. 13

The houses Rosler, Margreiter and Keiller examine have seized to be the structures they were originally intended to be and in this way become modernist form without its substance. If we were to become aware of their original context, the houses would seize to be the quaint structures of the past that have monetary value because of their unusual form and instead function as the propositions for social utopia that they were meant to be. Instead of transforming a house to correspond to the perceived norm of domestic life like the later changes to Lautner's Sheats-Goldstein residence<sup>193</sup>, perhaps we need to look at the change in lifestyle that they intended to encourage with their revolutionary structures, before they were adjusted or dismissed as impossible. Somewhere along the line we seem to have forgotten that modernist architecture also intended to renew focus on the creation of social connections that are increasingly lost with modernity, a social unity that is needed if structural change can ever be created. As Keiller describes, somewhere we still remain the nomads Constant once saw, social unity and the realization of change can only be achieved by constant modulation, especially in the mind.

There are still many elements of this debate that have remained untouched by this thesis. The discussion on obsolescence that has taken place in the writings of the Surrealists and Walter Benjamin could prove interesting to provide another perspective on the use of an outdated medium such as the 16 mm film used by Margreiter, especially in relation to hauntology. This might be a new path to pursue in future research, for instance with regard to the work of Tacita Dean and Rosalind Nashashibi and their use of modernist architecture in film. The whole section of Soviet modernist architecture has remained unmentioned, even though many artists have used these projects in their films, such as Cyprien Gaillard or Jane and Louise Wilson. This could provide a perspective on the failed utopias of communism that arose from a very different ideology and encountered very different predicaments. Also the debate of a renewed interest in authenticity could be of relevance to research about the rise of utopian thought in art.

Clearly my thesis could not address all of these issues and does not make the pretence of creating a complete picture or of explaining everything that is taking place in the re-appearance of modernist utopias in artist film. At the moment of writing many changes are still very much in development and only time will tell what the "exceptional moment" of the financial crash of 2008 has really created. However, what is clear is that utopian thought seems to be at the vanguard of artistic debate again, a situation that would have been unthinkable ten years ago.

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<sup>193</sup> It has been implied that the architect's willingness to participate with Goldstein's adjustment of his project might have had something to do with his troubled financial status and dismissal by the architectural community at that time in the early 1970s. See also an interview from 2013 with James Goldstein by *Treats! Magazine*, accessed on 21-07-2015 at <https://vimeo.com/30456390>.

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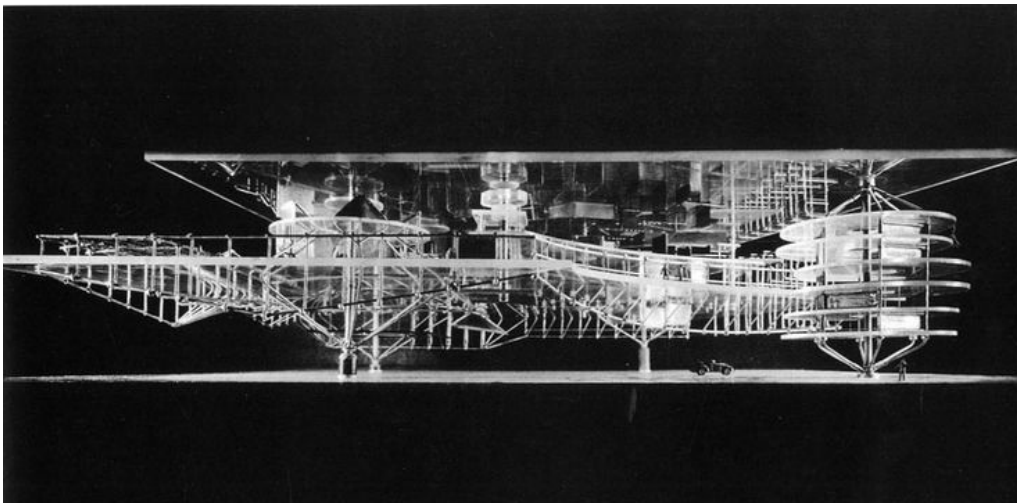
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## Appendix

### A. Unité d'Habitation in Firminy-Vert (source: Archiseek)



### B. model of New Babylon (source: Wigley, Mark, *Constant's New Babylon: The Hyper-architecture of Desire*. (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1998)



### C. Pruitt-Igoe in St Louis (source: <http://99percentinvisible.org/episode/episode-44-the-pruitt-igoe-myth/>)



D. Sheats-Goldstein residence in Los Angeles (source: <http://www.jamesfgoldstein.com/residence.php>)



E. Pierre Koenig Case Study House nr. 22 in Los Angeles (source: Julius Shulman)



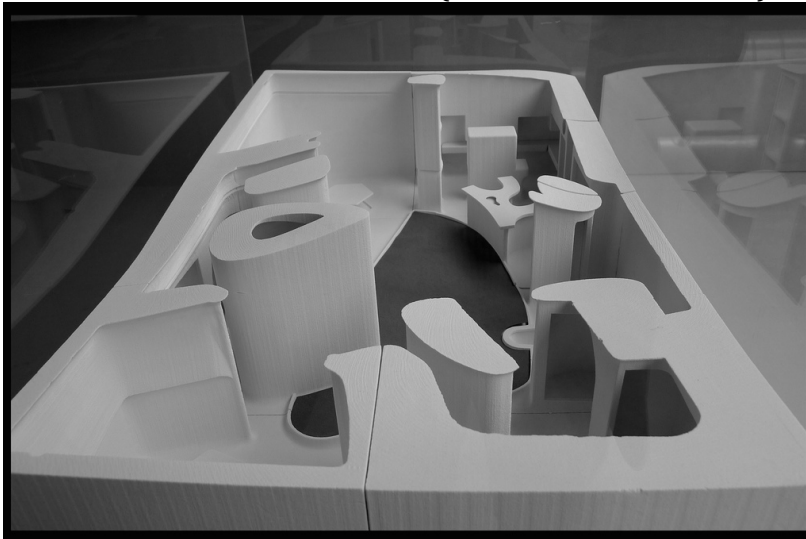
F. Leonard J. Malin Residence or Chemosphere in Los Angeles (source: <http://dh101.humanities.ucla.edu/DH101Fall12Lab2/items/show/69>)



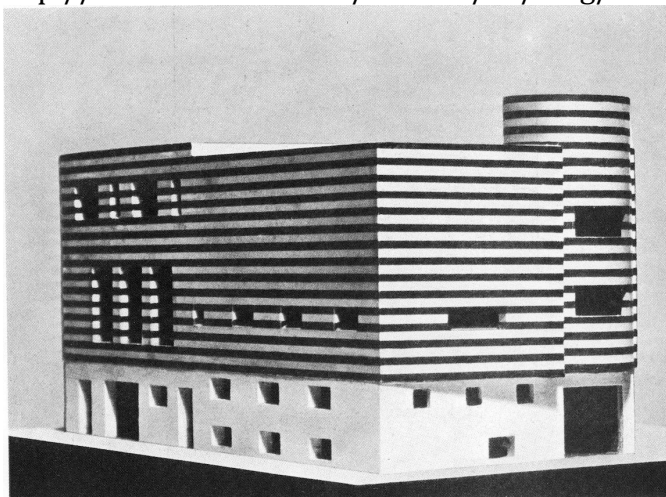
G. Villa Savoye in Poissy (source:  
<http://blogs.qu.edu.qa/bach2017/modernist/villa-savoye/>)



H. model of House of the Future (source: Klaas Vermaas)



I. model of Josephine Baker house (source:  
<http://www.metalocus.es/content/en/blog/a-house-black-venus>)

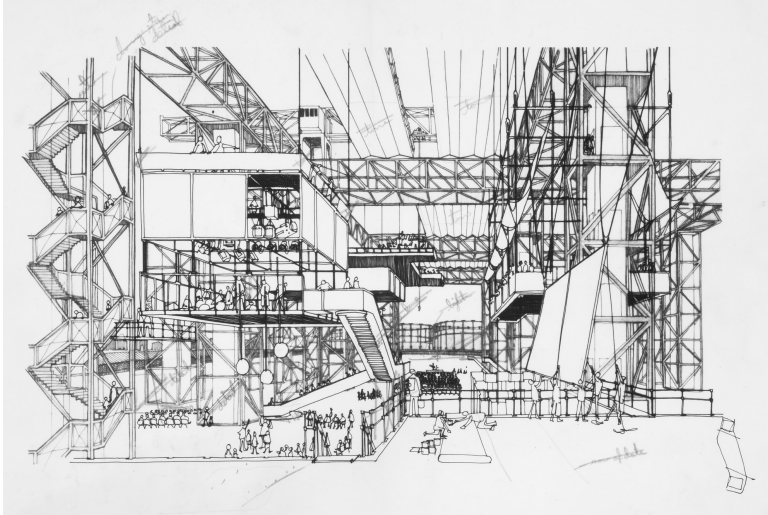




J. Trelick Tower in London (source: James O. Davies/English Heritage)



K. drawing of Fun Palace (source: <https://folio.brighton.ac.uk/user/km226/exemplary-project-cedric-price>)



L. Robin Hood Gardens in London (source: Sandra Lousada)

