

Analysis of the Artwork *The Playground*

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doi: 10.56397/AS.2022.10.05

Abstract

This article introduces and analyses the art installation *The Playground* and explores the observations and reflections that the installation brings to the viewer, by using earlier similar artworks as reference points in the process, taking into account their historical context and the author's observations and providing an in-depth analysis of their social significance and cultural reflections.

Keywords: Coachella, architecture, installation artwork, New Babylon, Situationist International, geographical psychology

In this article I will introduce and analyze the art installation *The Playground* and explore the observations and reflections that the installation brings to the viewer, using earlier similar artworks as reference points in the process, and analyzing its social significance and cultural reflections in depth in relation to its historical context and the author's observations.

One of the biggest music events in the country and the world, the Coachella Music and Art Festival, returns on April 15, 2022, after a two-year hiatus due to the epidemic. And has inspired countless music and art lovers, and it is not just the music that makes Coachella "crazy" for the crowds but the art installations that fill the venue. Since 2009, Coachella has commissioned artists and architects to create exclusive works of art for the event. One of this year's art installations, *The Playground*, brings the festival to life after its two-year hiatus. It is the latest installation explicitly created for the festival by Architensions, a design and research office co-led by Alessandro Orsini and Nick Roseboro (Fabioruolo, n.d.). This architectural studio focuses on architecture as a language of ongoing dialogue with political and social contexts, aiming to create new possibilities for the contemporary city (Fabioruolo, n.d.). The 21,168 sq ft (1,966 sq m) installation, called *The Playground*, connects four 13–17-meter pylons with a steel frame structure, with a total height of 42 ft and 56 ft, respectively (Niland, 2022). The color in the installation is magenta and yellow for the vertical grid and cyan for the plaza. The designer has also used dichroic color film, mirror film, and polycarbonate panels to create the animated color film that covers the installation (Niland, 2022). The color film appears to be digitally rendered in the sunlight. As the sunlight passes through the color films, they blend in with their surroundings, while others encourage interaction with them by mirroring them. The combination of the polycarbonate cladding and the steel frame gives *The Playground* a semi-constructed appearance (Niland, 2022). It does not offer climbing to visitors; Coachella is already a sensory-impacting environment, so *The Playground* installation encourages rest rather than finding another way to overload participants' senses.

When introducing the installation, the Architensions team mentioned that it was inspired by the work New Babylon from Constant Nieuwenhuys, which represents a metropolis of chance and opportunity as a replacement for the cost of production (Niland, 2022). Based on the dimension of people thinking about the creative, pleasurable, and shared nature of everyday life, the contextual spatial constructions Constant works on in New Babylon open a new perspective on the study of urban space (Malaby, 2009). *The Playground* draws on this in its structure. It is designed as an extensive, multi-layered, sheltered network of buildings supported entirely by

columns and trusses, each level providing different functional needs. The core meaning of *The Playground* is also in line with Constant's idea that the opportunities for human interaction and the essence of urban spatial construction is touch in everyday life. So, in order to create more contextual spaces. The New Babylon is a vast network of spaces that can be extended or contracted without limits. The buildings are movable, combinable, and can grow infinitely, and any situation can happen in this space (Malaby, 2009). Furthermore, New Babylon draws on concepts related to play and creativity, i.e., productive play, and poses similar governance and authority dilemmas. The proposed city (which could theoretically cover the globe) aims to prompt all people to express their creativity through constantly reconfiguring their open and malleable living spaces (Malaby, 2009).

The structure of *The Playground* mimics certain features of the city, such as squares and flyovers. The footbridge defines the interstitial space, and the ground-level benches connect the towers, creating areas of 'plaza' that evoke the familiar cityscape and thus build a three-dimensional city-like art installation. In essence, *The Playground* provides its audience with a space to rebalance their spirits and rediscover leisure in a way that is unrelated to business or digital interpolation. In an age where technology is replacing real-life experiences with mediated visuals, the project creates a tangible environment that is both dynamic and inclusive, and which people may use as a space to engage with each other in the real world. It also presents the concept of a vertical city, where the inhabitants of the place where this festival is held have maintained a flat horizontal sprawl for decades, which defines a particular type of recreational and detached suburban growth (Niland, 2022). This installation aims to enhance our surroundings by encouraging physical engagement and collectivity. *The Playground* presents the tower as a location of pleasure and a framework for stimulating collaboration and freedom of mobility, in contrast to its current function as a prototype of the metropolitan metropolis. In the same way as Constant's New Babylon and Cedric Price's fun palace, they both seek to use design and technology to solve a seemingly contradictory problem: to create a space for entirely free and autonomous action (Glynn, 2005).

The Playground also pays homage to Constant's design in its choice of colors. In order to create the mood, Constant designed the qualities of each space to be different and used a playful approach to control the surroundings, adjusting the light, color, temperature and volume to the mood and wishes of the people, with everything in the maze being determined by the maze user (Linder, 2000). Similarly, the dichroic, mirrored, and polycarbonate panels used in *The Playground* allow the colors to change in response to the refraction of sunlight and the different angles of the audience, making it more flexible (Niland, 2022). The New Babylon is not a town planning project, or a work of art designed from a traditional perspective, nor is it an example of architectural design (Linder, 2000). It is designed as a creative, playful fictional environment. The 'uncertainty' brought about in this fictional environment is the most characteristic feature of the Situationist International, which denies the solidity of urban life, especially in terms of architectural layout and spatial planning, and seeks to allow people to perceive their natural desires in the playful urban living space and public space, freeing themselves from the confusion and distraction of the false landscape of consumer society (Linder, 2000). *The Playground* is an attempt to liberate people from the confusion and distraction of the false landscape of consumer society. However, I think that *The Playground* is more neutral than the idea. It is more about encouraging people to step out of their normal life patterns and engage in collective interaction and cooperation. It is somewhat more similar to the core meaning of Cedric Price's Fun Palace in that they both seek to create a development space that opposes the isolation and homogenization of technology-driven play experiences. In this way, *The Playground* appears to be the same as the psychogeography of Situated Internationalism in creating new environments and ways of doing things. However, the psychogeography proposed by the Situationist International emphasizes the psychological impact of architecture on the people who live in it, and it is a new vision of the beauty of cities and urban planning, fighting to overturn the dogmas imposed by the capitalist and his unconditional arrangements for people's productive lives (Geronta, n.d.). The Situationists' concept of psychogeography is designed to establish a link between the city and its history and reassess them through a value—allowing for the emergence of diversity and the notion of utopia (O'Rourke, 2021). Indeed, people are not born with inherent ideas but cognitively process information through the cognitive acts of perception, memory, thought, attention, and language, gradually generating the perception of first information from experience (Geronta, n.d.). Architecture has a huge psychological impact on the people who live in it. I think this idea has implications for creating *The Playground*, as it also seeks to change the participants' perceptions of vertical cities and flat community development.

I think that the emergence of the 'New Babylon', and even the so-called Situationist International, was an artistic movement based on the developments of the time. Even the emergence of psychogeography was based on the infiltration of capitalist culture, which led artists to believe that we should focus on forgotten, abandoned, or marginalized aspects of the urban environment. This problem exists now currently as well. Will Self describes this phenomenon as a detachment from the 'physical reality of our cities', a concept that has social and political implications (Talks at Google, 2007). *The Playground* comes at a critical point when covid-19, which lasted for

two years and made the world socially inaccessible, almost ended. *The Playground* provided a playground concept to create an opportunity and a context to help people relax and participate in the community after the epidemic. It seems to echo the historical contextual city segment, where humans have struggled to escape the encroachment of information technology and consumerism and have continued to use various means to find freedom and enhance collectivity. Art is the best medium for this. Whether it is New Babylon or *The Playground*, I think the artists are creating interesting works from unique perspectives to show their observations and reflections on society and the environment. At the same time, they are using their work as a language to communicate to visitors that there is an alternative way of life available to us when under the pressure of production and information pile-up and to represent a vision of freedom of movement and collective interaction.

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