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The perpetuation of site-specific installation artworks in museums
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Chapter 6: *Drifting Producers*: the perpetuation of an installation artwork emerging from a site-specific project

“Those who admire the western Alexandrian tradition – the magicians of Surrealism, the sorcerers of illegible language – have been constructing general images of the dream. But we need to redefine the notion of the dream in a completely different context, as a space where reality returns.” Jeon Yongseok.

*Drifting Producers* (2004) is an installation artwork built around three large urban models representing a utopian city (Fig. 6.1). The installation is created by a group of South-Korean artists, designers and curators who call themselves Flying City. The installation is part of a larger project which the artists carried out in an old neighbourhood in Seoul. The project and the installation of *Drifting Producers* (they bear the same title) are interconnected, although the project lasted many years (2003-2009) and took many different forms, such as art-and-community workshops, performances, publications and yet another installation artwork (no longer existent).

With this project, the artists aimed at raising awareness for a network of metal craftsmen and traders who had brought relative prosperity to the neighbourhood and were threatened to be expelled from the district due to urban renovation. Flying City saw it as their mission to preserve the ideas behind this network and to pay tribute to the skills of the metal craftsmen: the models they created for the installation were spatial representations of the labyrinthian structure of workplaces of the metal craftsmen; in the drawings, photographs and other images references were made to the tools made by the metal craftsmen and to design objects created by the artists. Furthermore, the models were accompanied by documentation about the history of the neighbourhood and the protests against the impending demolition of the district in the early 2000s. This conglomerate of heterogeneous elements constitutes the installation artwork *Drifting Producers*, which has been in the collection of Van Abbemuseum since 2006.

The site-specificity of *Drifting Producers* is determined by both the socio-geographical context of the project and the urban structure and production practices of its inhabitants, which the artists tried to ‘preserve’. The artists were inspired by the history of the neighbourhood and engaged with the local community which is an analogy with some of the case examples mentioned in Chapter 3 in relation to socio-geographical site-specificity. For

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example, in Phil Collins’s *they shoot horses*, the young dancers in Ramallah participated in the project by filming themselves; later on, Phil Collins and the technicians of Tate (the owner of the piece) turned the raw footage of the dance marathon into an installation artwork. Although there are major differences between both installations, a similarity can be observed in the process of transformation: from a socio-geographical project into a ‘permanent’ installation artwork in a museum collection. As this chapter will show, when the artwork is subjected to the mechanisms of musealization and presentation, the spatiotemporal coordinates of the museum environment often determine the final stage of such a site-specific project.

The questions of this case study address this transition process and its consequences for the installation’s network of spatial functions. Is there a breach at the moment of acquisition and what happens at subsequent stages of the work? What is the impact of the conservation measures and display strategies followed by the hosting institution, on its content and form? What is left of the connection between the work and the site-specific project, after the project ends in 2009?

The questions are researched with the help of the conceptual model proposed in this dissertation. Firstly, I will look into the relationship between the spatial design of the artwork and the various sites of its presentation, in terms of the Triad of Spatiality between the physical space and representational space. Secondly, the study focuses on the social spaces of production since the function of social networks is very much present in *Drifting Producers*, in various ways. During the project *Drifting Producers* the artists activated the local network of craftsmen and other participants in the art-and-community workshops. Furthermore, the artists formed their own network – the collective Flying City – and lastly, the group was involved in an international network of art curators and artists, in which also the current director of Van Abbemuseum, Charles Esche, participated. This chapter will show that both this mutual bond and the overlapping networks played an important role in the realization and perpetuation of the installation *Drifting Producers*.

*Drifting Producers* is intertwined with an activist approach toward the socio-geographical circumstances of a specific place (the neighbourhood in Seoul), as it was the artists’ intent to introduce the artwork in the international artworld and to establish an ongoing relationship with the museum ‘site’. Besides, the custodians had their own ambition with the acquisition and they had the intention to stay involved with the project. To understand this interrelatedness of various (and at times contradictory) intents and the perpetuation of the work, the notion of the script is beneficial, because this enables us to analyse the conglomerate of underlying motives (of the artists to produce the installation and of the custodians to keep it alive) and to recognize the steering factors that caused shifts in the spatial network when the installation was relocated from one context to another.
This chapter starts with a brief introduction on the artists and the early work of the collective Flying City in their role as ‘urban researchers’. This stage coincided with the international workshops held in Asia, where a professional relationship was established between Jeon Yongseok and Charles Esche. The chapter continues with a description of the project Drifting Producers and the art-and-community workshops, organized by the artists in the neighbourhood in Seoul.

Employing the conceptual model, I examine the first exhibition of the installation Drifting Producers in terms of the functions of the spatial network, including the various spaces of production and the social networks involved. For a better understanding of on the one hand the site-specificity of Drifting Producers, and on the other hand the trajectory of the installation artwork across the international art world, I will go back to the international network. During cross-cultural workshops, organized by Charles Esche among others, the artists became acquainted with the New Babylon project (1956-1974) by Dutch artist Constant Nieuwenhuys. The urban models created by Constant and his utopian vision on city life inspired the Korean artists, who tried to establish an international connection and welcomed the idea of Drifting Producers being recognized by the European art world.

The next sections of this chapter are dedicated to a relocation of the installation to international art venues and the acquisition by Van Abbemuseum. The analysis continues by scrutinizing various scenarios – developed both by the artists and the custodians – for the perpetuation of Drifting Producers in Van Abbemuseum (with an emphasis on the social space of perpetuation and care). This helps to understand the modification of the spatial design to a museum environment and gives insight into the custodians’ stance towards the socio-geographical and representational function of the artwork.

The chapter ends with a discussion of the New Babylon project and its two retrospective exhibitions (both in 2016), one in Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia (Madrid) and one in the Municipal Museum (The Hague). This comparison illustrates two different exhibition strategies regarding Constant’s urban models and their role in communicating his socio-geographical project to a contemporary public.

Flying City

Flying City is a collective formed by artists, designers, and curators, who live and work in Seoul, South Korea. In 2001, Jeon Yongseok, Jang Jongkwan and Kim Gisu established the collective and until 2009 Flying City

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347 The artists write the name of their collective as flyingCity, but in literature it is often referred to as Flying City. Unless spelled differently in a quote, I will use the spelling Flying City.
348 The English rendition of Korean names is not standardized. I will follow the Asian order of putting family names first, followed by a given name, and employ spelling of names as preferred in the literature.
participated in national and international exhibitions, in various constellations. The founding members of the group belong to a first generation of artists who experienced the effects of globalization on the South Korean lifestyle in the 1990s. They responded to the societal changes and urban renewal of the metropolis Seoul with a wide variety of artistic expressions: performances in public space, films, photographs, as well as art-and-community projects, carried out with a sense of humor and imagination. As art critic Mark Kremer observed in 2003:

These artists are driven by the desire to depict the consequences of these changes: what Seoul looks like now but also what has been forgotten and suppressed in the process. These artists show Seoul as it is, but also as it could be imagined.

Jeon Yongseok (Gwanju, 1968), whose works have been exhibited at venues worldwide, is the leading artist of the group. He is also product designer and teaches at the Gwangmyong Lifetime Education Center. In one of the remaining traditional wooden houses of the city, Jeon educates children about the history and cultural heritage of Seoul (Fig. 6.2). During an interview I conducted with the artist in 2011, Jeon explained that the idea for the urban research project Drifting Producers was inspired by the socio-economic and urban changes starting in the 1980s, when Seoul went through period of radical change. The urban structure was deeply affected by globalization and modernization, especially when the city hosted the Olympic Games in 1988 and old neighborhoods gave way to business centers, apartment buildings and highways. As a consequence, residents had to move and many of Seoul’s old shanty towns were demolished. More than a decade later a documentary film about a famous revolt against those developments was the incentive for establishing the Flying City collective.

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349 One of the last group exhibitions in which Flying City participated is ‘Weak Signals, Wild Cards’, curatorial programme of De Appel, Tolhuistuin Amsterdam, 27 June – 27 July, 2009.
351 Over the last ten years, Jeon participated, for example, in the Jakarta Biennial of 2015; ‘Public Commotions: 1998-2012’ at Art Space Pool, Seoul, in 2013; and ‘Weak Signals, Wild Cards’ at Tolhuistuin Amsterdam, in 2009.
352 The organization is run by the city government and aims to provide opportunities of self-development for low income citizens.
353 Bearing the motto “Learn to reinterpret urban reality,” Jeon Yongseok organizes workshops for children and adults. Jeon is also the theorist and legacy keeper of the project Drifting Producers.
354 Shanty towns are temporary dwellings built from materials at hand, comparable to slums or favelas in other countries.
355 Flying City took its name from a famous watchtower, built by citizens of a shanty town to keep an eye on the police charges. Jeon: “The tower stood there weirdly among the demolished houses, like a spaceship landed among ruins. It was an aesthetic picture, but earthy at the same time. The name flyingCity directly came into my head, and it became our name.” Mark Kremer, “See Seoul,
At the beginning, the work of Flying City was experimental since the artists were still looking for a visual language that could shape the project. One of the earliest actions was visiting the workshops of the metal workers in the Cheonggyecheon district, in Seoul’s city center. This area along the banks of the rivulet Cheonggye hosted numerous craftsmen workshops and had developed into a flourishing trade area, with economic networks that functioned mainly on barter. In the early 2000s, the mayor issued a decree to move the workshops to a remote location so the neighbourhood could be further developed into an economic and touristic center (Fig. 6.3). The decree posed a serious threat to the well-functioning system of the Cheonggyecheon. For the artists, however, this situation offered an interesting starting point for the project.

One of their favorite strategies was to 'spy around' in the workplaces of the metal craftsmen: to observe them at work (Fig. 6.4, 6.5) and to capture the spatial structure of the workplaces in photographs and drawings, eventually leading to a large composite photograph: *Power of Cheonggyecheon* (358 x 80 cm) (Fig. 6.6). In exhibitions and installations we often see Flying City artworks from earlier periods reappear. For example, the composite photograph – one of the key elements of the installation *Drifting Producers* – was also shown as an independent artwork in another exhibition. Likewise, the art-and-community workshops, organized from 2001 onwards, continued until 2009 and became part of the project *Drifting Producers*.

**International workshops and cross-cultural dialogue**

Apart from the above depicted social networks in their hometown, Flying City participated in international workshops, organized at the heydays of globalization. Around the turn of the 21st century, curators Hou Hanru and Charles Esche (now director of Van Abbemuseum) organized this series of workshops in Asia with the aim to stimulate a cross-cultural dialogue among artists, curators and theorists, focusing mainly on institutional frameworks in various countries. They recognized a general interest in exploring the

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356 The photograph *Power of Cheonggyecheon* was shown at “The Postman is a Genius. Experience and Imagination in Seoul,” Amsterdam: De Appel, Foam, Canvas International Art and the Netherlands Media Art Institute, 29 August – 18 October, 2003; and at “Seoul-Asia Art Now, Modernization & Urbanization,” Seoul: Marronnier Art Center, 26 September – 19 October, 2003. Both exhibitions were co-curated by Mark Kremer and Beck Jee-sook, and resulted from a collaboration between The Netherlands Media Art Institute and the Marronnier Art Center (MAC) of the Korean Culture and Arts Foundation.

357 Jeon Yongseok kindly provided me with the information on the *Drifting Producers* project and its forerunners during the interview I conducted with the artist on 20 March, 2011.

358 Han Hanru co-created with Hans-Ulrich Obrist the travelling exhibition ‘Cities on the Move’ (1997-1998), bringing together various perspectives on modernization of city life and globalization,
activist potential of art in relation to urban structures, both in Asia and Europe; and, as Esche put it, there was a shared desire among the participants to create “conditions where a particular community at particular places in the world can become activated.”

Among the participants were Jeon Yongseok and other artists from the Flying City collective, and the discussions inspired them to investigate the socio-geography of the Cheonggyecheon district. Simultaneously, Flying City was introduced to the international art scene and participated, for example, in the 4th Gwangju Biennial (2002) and showed its work at exhibitions organized by Mark Kremer and Beck Jee-Sook, as part of an exchange programme between South-Korea and The Netherlands (2003). A close professional relationship was established between the Korean artists and curators in The Netherlands, including the curator who was to become director of Van Abbemuseum.

6.1 The project and installation Drifting Producers

The incentive for Drifting Producers was the situation of the craftsmen and traders of Cheonggyecheon, who were threatened by the demolition of the metal workshops and the disappearance of the economic and social structure of the neighborhood. Underlying their artistic approach was the desire to image an alternative city, a dream space “where reality returns”, as Jeon stated (see the quote at the beginning of this chapter). The artists organized a series of art-and-community workshops for children, students and citizens, who made drawings and architectural models for an ‘ideal’ urban structure, using simple materials like cardboard and plywood (Fig. 6.7). Jeon Yongseok:

At first, the drawings were rather like abstract expression, but as the projects went on, they revealed the character of an architectural

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with a general focus on cities in the Asian hemisphere. At the time, Charles Esche was director of Rooseum Center for Contemporary Art in Malmö.


360 Both Charles Esche and Jeon Yongseok noted the significance of the meetings for the project Drifting Producers during the respective interviews I conducted in 2010 and 2011.

361 As part of the exchange programme, Flying City participated in the exhibitions ‘The Postman is a Genius. Experience and Imagination in Seoul’ in Amsterdam and ‘Seoul-Asia Art Now, Modernization & Urbanization’ in Seoul. See footnote 11.

362 The workshops took place from 2001 to 2003 and were called ‘Mental Maps and Urban Planning Play’.
structure and site planning. As a result, a sort of utopic urban planning was developed through this project.363

Parallel to the workshops, Flying City organized live performances and tours in the Cheonggyecheon district, and exhibited their own art and design products in empty spaces in the neighborhood. When the project Drifting Producers started, the earlier initiatives were partly continued and some of the elements were reused, such as the workshops, performances, the composite photograph Power of Cheonggyecheon, and some of the drawings and urban models of the workplaces reappeared in the installation.

In 2004, Flying City created the installation artwork Drifting Producers for the Hermes Korea Contest for Contemporary Art, which took place in the Artsonje Center in Seoul.364 The main part of the installation consisted of three large urban models, designed and made by the artists themselves. In the Artsonje Center, the models were suspended from the ceiling of the gallery space and surrounded by an open framework made of wood (Fig 6.8). Various components were attached to the frame, such as posters explaining the project with the help of statistics of manufacturing and trade in the Cheonggyecheon district, drawings of design products, and banners created by the artists (Fig. 6.9). In addition two monitors were part of the installation: one showing a powerpoint of (imaginary) tools and industrial design products, the other showing a videotape of a protest meeting organized by the street vendors (Fig. 6.10).

The display of this installation at the contest marked a new stage in the biography of Drifting Producers, since the installation was not produced by participants in one of the workshops, but by the artists themselves. They built the models as an ‘echo’ of the architectural structure of the Cheonggyecheon workplaces, using wood, plywood, string and pieces of Styrofoam – shaping their own vision of a utopian city, instead of the more ‘intuitive’ models made in the art-and-community workshops. Visitors could explore the interior spaces of the installation and from various angles they could look at the labyrinthian network of the models’ spaces, passageways and corridors, in which tiny figurines were placed.

The installation Drifting Producers was selected as one of the three finalists of the contest and was praised for its artistic qualities and its representation of craftsmanship, which reflected the skills of the metal

363 Statement by Jeon published at their website, http://flyingcity.kr/project-eng/pro1_mental_map.htm. When writing this chapter, much information about the work of Flying City was collected from the website of flyingCity, offering a rich source of information about events, thoughts and anecdotes, as well as images. Unfortunately, this website no longer exists, but Van Abbemuseum has captured and stored its content. I furthermore refer to Kremer, “Invitation to Drift” and the Wikipedia page “Public art in South Korea,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_art_in_South_Korea (visited on 18 October, 2019).
364 The Hermes Korea Award for Contemporary Art was organized by the Hermes Foundation Missulsang and took place in the Artsonje Center, Seoul, 23 October - 5 December 2004.
workers of Cheonggyecheon. It was called a “playful elaboration of ethnographic research.”

6.2 The spatial network of the initial exhibition at The Art Sonje Center

Following the conceptual model of this dissertation, I argue that for the exhibition of Drifting Producers in the Artsonje Center all three spatial functions can be identified (see Diagram 12). Firstly, the spatial design of the models follows the ‘conceived mode’, in Lefebvrian terms, in the way its spatial structure represents the metal workplaces of the Cheonggyecheon district. Inspired by the economic network of craftsmanship and trade, the artists designed an imaginary city plan and shaped their installation according to the spatial structures of the neighborhood.

Secondly, the first exhibition of Drifting Producers was still closely connected to the social space of production, since the Artsonje Centre is located in the immediate vicinity of the Cheonggyecheon. The local communities that had participated in the project were among the visitors of the exhibition, together with the artists, the general audience and representatives of the international art scene. Besides, the occasion provided the artists with the opportunity to present the ‘power of Cheonggyecheon’ to the public and the praise for Drifting Producers implied a recognition of the spatial production practices of the craftsmen and traders. In that sense, the exhibition of Drifting Producers was truly a site-specific event, bringing together the producers (both the craftsmen and the artists) and the recipients. Therewith interconnecting the social space of production with the space of the visitors’ experience.

Thirdly, the function of representational space was activated by the exhibition in the Artsonje Center. The selection as one of the finalists of the contest was more or less a guarantee for Drifting Producers to be presented at other venues as well and, possibly, to be collected for a museum collection in the future. Although the installation was not originally created as a permanent artwork, the contest opened up the vista of Drifting Producers being distributed to other regions and cultural contexts. Also, from the moment the installation was shown in a prominent art gallery, Drifting Producers had the status of an artwork appreciated for its aesthetics.

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In conclusion, a well-balanced division of site-specific functions can be observed during the initial performance of *Drifting Producers*, presented as an artwork in the Artsonje Center. In the following paragraphs, I will briefly return to the workshops organized by the curators and examine more closely the impact globalization has had on their work.

**Diagram 12** *Drifting Producers* - The first staging 2004 and second staging 2005

At the **first staging** in the Arts Sonje Center, there is balance between the spatial design (the models resembling the spatial construction of the workshops in Cheonggyecheon); the social space (interconnecting the social networks of the artists, craftsmen, and international art public); and representational space (the contest and the gallery space of the Art Sonje Center introducing *Drifting Producers* to the international art scene. At the **second staging** during the Istanbul Biennial, the artists adjusted the spatial design to the exhibition site. Compared to the White Cube of the Art Sonje Center, the former Tobacco Factory created a more direct context for the visitors’ experience of the production spaces of Cheonggyecheon. The audience consisted merely of art public, so that the interconnection between various social networks did no longer take place.
6.3 Intercultural exchange in the production and reception of Drifting Producers

In the interviews I conducted with both Jeon Yongseok and Charles Esche, they refer to the intercultural workshops, organized by Esche and Hanru, as a breeding ground for Drifting Producers. Both mention the influence of the European avant-garde of the 1960s and 70s on the art of Flying City. During those workshops, special attention was paid to the Situationist International, an activist movement of the 1950s and 60s. This group focused primarily on modernist urban structures and the role of art in society. Among its leading figures were Guy Debord (1931-1994), a French Marxist theorist, activist and film maker, and artist Constant Nieuwenhuys (1920 - 2012). In 1957, Debord founded the Situationist Movement in Paris, a booming city after the World-War Reconstruction period. The movement took a critical stance toward mass consumerism, city planning and, for example, Le Corbusier’s modernist architecture.

The Situationists responded to these new trends with politically engaged art and a certain humor in their films, photography and happenings. A typical Situationist method was to explore the urban environment in a playful manner, by ‘drifting’ around and exploring the ‘psychogeography’ of the city. Debord describes psychogeography as follows:

 [...] the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals. The charmingly vague adjective psychogeographical can be applied to the findings arrived by this type of investigation, to their influence on human feelings, and more generally to any situation or conduct that seems to reflect the same spirit of discovery.

It can be readily understood why the social criticism and methods of the Situationist International were attractive to Flying City, who in their turn opposed modernization of the city and were ‘spying around’ in the urban environment.

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368 These notions are elaborated in Guy Debord’s Theory of the Dérive (1958), in essence an instruction manual for the method of ‘psychogeography’ performed through ‘the act of dériving’ (French for ‘to drift’).

environment of Cheonggyecheon. They adopted the method of psychogeography by creating mental maps during the art-and-community workshops.

Apart from being influenced by the Situationist Movement, or being part of it, Constant’s New Babylon was a major source of inspiration for Drifting Producers. Constant joined the Situationist International in 1957, but left a few years later, in 1960, after a fundamental difference of opinion with Guy Debord. He shared the ideals of the movement in a plea for “a liberated architecture that stimulates a creative way of life instead of impeding it”, but distanced himself from the radical stance to unleash a revolution “in which the boundaries between art and life are totally dissolved”. In his urban research project New Babylon (1956-1974), Constant envisioned the utopian city as an urban fabric that would embrace pleasure and “intensify the experience of the people moving through it.” In diverse artistic media and art forms, as well as in writing, his proposition of “unitary urbanism” (a combination of collectivity and play) took shape: sketches, architectural drawings, graphic design, photo collages, manifestos, essays, lectures, and films were all expressions of New Babylon. Next to a series of paintings, which made Constant a famous artist, numerous urban models were produced by the artist during the project (Fig. 6.11).

As shown above, a similar heterogeneity of forms and multiplicity of manifestations is present in the project Drifting Producers. The project resembles New Babylon in several respects. For example, in the playful approach of drawing the tools and the banners, and even more so in the skills applied to the models and the choice of commonly used materials (plywood in the case of Drifting Producers, Plexiglass in the case of New Babylon). At a conceptual level, similarities can be discerned in the utopian vision the artists pursued in their art and writing; in their aspirations to bring about change in the urban environments of their own times. This is also the reason why the head of collections of Van Abbemuseum, Christiane Berndes, emphasizes the importance of Drifting Producers as an urban research project: “As long as...”

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370 Jeon explains that the title ‘Drifting Producers’ refers to the hybrid production system of the craftsman in Cheonggyecheon, which could not be determined in an ‘a priori’ way: “they had to drift to survive in the era of mass production.” Jeon Yongseok, “Drifting Producers,” 370. Another reference is to ‘dérive’ as introduced by Guy Debord.


374 Idem.
they were engaged with the project, they really considered themselves urban developers, perhaps even more than presenting themselves as artists.”

Interlacing art with real life situations was in accord with the philosophy of the international workshops organized by Esche and Hanru. For the museum, it was an extra stimulus to stay involved with the project after the acquisition of the installation *Drifting Producers*. It was a major impetus to stay in touch with the artists and try to keep ‘alive’ the relationship between the installation artwork in the museum and the socio-geographical context from which it emerged.

Later on in this chapter, I will return to the comparison with *New Babylon*, but first I will spend a few more words on the reception of *Drifting Producers* in a global context.

**Intercultural exchange in the reception of Drifting Producers**

According to art historian Deborah Cherry, *Drifting Producers* is of significance for the international art world because of its investigation of “contemporary pressures of globalisation and modernisation on the urban environment.” Simultaneously, the work is rooted in the site-specificity of the Cheonggyecheon district, as the statistics and other documentary material clearly communicate. The socio-geographical content of the work is thus represented in a dual sense: the local signifying as global, and vice versa. As Cherry argues, *Drifting Producers* juxtaposes conceptions of art and reality, of designed spaces and actual ‘sites’, and signifies differently to different audiences, since the appreciation depends on the “skills, family and cultural traditions” of the recipient. Deborah Cherry:

> [...] the installation puts forward the concept that space is actual and imaginary, historical and of the present and the future. That space is produced, imagined, created by bringing together physical and mental geographies, materials and images. Thinking in this way suggests the kinds of knowledge produced by the object itself, as well as in the framing of its curation.

Extrapolating this view to the exhibition at the Artsonje Center and the overlapping social networks, as suggested above, one could argue that *Drifting Producers* ‘performed’ intercultural exchange in optima forma during this first exhibition since the artists, local communities and international art public were present. At the same time, not everyone appreciated the

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375 Interview with Christiane Berndes conducted on 3 March, 2010.
377 Idem.
378 Idem.
transformation of the art-and-community project into an art object, put on show in an international art context and, according to Jeon, some even thought that the metal workers had been exploited by the artists.\(^{379}\)

It can be argued that with the production of the installation *Drifting Producers*, the artists envisioned a scenario of ongoing participation in the international art world, eventually leading to the acquisition of the work by a European museum. I will return to this point later on in the chapter, when juxtaposing this ‘script’ to the aspirations of the custodians during the acquisition process and display of the installation. Firstly, however, I will follow the trajectory of the installation through the international art world on its way to the next stage of its biography.

6.4 The trajectory of *Drifting Producers* through the international art world

After the show in the Artsonje Center, the installation *Drifting Producers* traveled to Europe and was shown at the exhibition ‘Kollektive Kreativität / Collective Creativity’ (2005) in the Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel.\(^{380}\) For a second term in the same year, the installation was shown at the 9th International Istanbul Biennial, curated by Charles Esche and Vasif Kortun.\(^{381}\) These successive moments of display marked a new biographical stage, in which the installation caught the attention of the art public, but had not taken root in a museum collection as yet. In particular the second show is of interest to the discussion, as the curators of the Istanbul Biennial tried to reactivate the initial site-specificity of the work by choosing a former Tabacco Factory as exhibition site. According to Charles Esche, the industrial environment was comparable to the production site of Cheonggyecheon and the “narrative of the installation” could be well-performed in this environment. Instead of copying the installation of the Art Sonje Center, where the three parts of the models were suspended in space, the models were shown on large, wooden workbenches, as a reference to the spatial production practice in the metal workshops (Fig. 6.12).\(^{382}\) This way, the audience could observe the creativity and craftsmanship that had gone into the models and could experience the feeling of a workplace. The head of collections states that in comparison to similar projects presented at the Istanbul Biennial, *Drifting Producers* conveyed, with simple means, a balance between the visual experience and the content of the project. Berndes:

> What struck me was that the models were built from small pieces of plywood, giving them a direct energy, but also a natural simplicity. It

\(^{379}\) Interview conducted with Jeon Yongseok on 20 March, 2011.

\(^{380}\) The exhibition ‘Kollektive Kreativität / Collective Creativity’ was curated by What, How, and for Whom?, Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel, 1 May – 17 July, 2005.

\(^{381}\) The 9th International Istanbul Biennial took place from 16 September to 30 October, 2005.

\(^{382}\) Interview conducted with Charles Esche on 24 March, 2010.
wasn’t slick, not made with contemporary production methods. It matched perfectly with the project, especially with the spontaneity it resembles.\textsuperscript{383}

According to the curators, the urban models were the main agents for presenting the project to the public and it was considered important, by both the artist and the curators, to adjust the spatial design to the new site. Esche made the following statement on the Istanbul Biennial:

I am interested in geography in terms of the specific conditions of a given place and the differences that are established between places. As a cultural intervention, an international biennial can reflect on these specificities, it can raise changes or consider them critically.\textsuperscript{384}

In brief, drawing on the models as representations of the practices and spatial configuration of the metal workshops and considering the location of the factory as determinant, the artists and curators together developed a scenario for reinvigorating the installation’s socio-geographical site-specificity in agreement with the new exhibition site. The former Tobacco Factory created a different – perhaps more direct – context for the visitors to experience the spatial production practices of the Cheonggyecheon workplaces, enhanced by the industrial 'look and feel' of the space and by the models being displayed on the workbenches (see Diagram 12).

After the Istanbul Biennial, Flying City donated \textit{Drifting Producers} to Van Abbemuseum, as a compensation for the production costs and the costs of transporting the artwork from Istanbul to Eindhoven.

\textbf{6.5 Site-specificity of Drifting Producers in Van Abbemuseum}

Both the Flying City artists and the custodians of Van Abbemuseum welcomed a relocation of \textit{Drifting Producers} to The Netherlands, not least because the migration would establish an art historical connection with the artworks of Constant’s \textit{New Babylon} project. Constant’s models are “just around the corner”, noted Charles Esche in the interview conducted for this case study. To Flying City is was a sign of recognition that the installation would be preserved in the Van Abbemuseum, next to other artworks of the avantgarde.\textsuperscript{385} Apart from those considerations, Esche and Berndes appreciated \textit{Drifting Producers} for its aesthetic qualities and for the opportunity it offered to stay involved with the urban research project of

\textsuperscript{383} Interview conducted with Christiane Berndes on 3 March, 2010.
\textsuperscript{384} Vergara, “Interview with Charles Esche,” 32.
\textsuperscript{385} Interviews conducted with Charles Esche on 24 March, 2010, and with Jeon Yongseok on 20 March, 2011.
Flying City. The general idea was that the existing relationship between the artists and the director/curator of Van Abbemuseum would turn into a long-term partnership by the acquisition would turn.

At soon as the installation Drifting Producers arrived at Van Abbemuseum, it entered a regime of conservation and care. Following the usual musealization process, the models and other elements were preserved according to conservation ethics and museum standard practices, including extensive documentation and taking appropriate measures for storage and transport. This is the standard approach for each new acquisition, but in the case of Drifting Producers there were a few complicating factors. The models arrived at the museum in a rather poor state since they had been transported in a normal truck (not equipped for the transportation of art objects). The head of technique, Louis Baltussen, recalls: “It was just a mess when they arrived.” The artists had not provided any instructions how to assemble individual parts of the three large models (some consisted of multiple parts), nor was there any additional information accompanying other elements of the installation. Although it was acknowledged that Drifting Producers was not a ‘standard’ work, the staff decided to carry out preventive conservation measures, just as they would normally do: all individual elements were photographed and registered in the museum information system, and an extensive condition survey was carried out; the technicians and head of collections made their own assessment of how the models fitted together, and for each model a wooden base and a tailor-made crate were made to ensure proper storage (Fig. 6.13). After some time, Flying City sent the files of the digital components to Van Abbemuseum. The files were stored at the server of the municipality, since the museum server had insufficient space for such large amounts of data (among which the extensive collection of photographs used for the condition survey). The staff was assured that all necessary preventive conservation measures – documentation, registration, storage and transport – were taken and that Drifting Producers was, in that sense, prepared for a long lasting life in a museum environment.

**Scenarios for the perpetuation of Drifting Producers**

The acquisition marked a turning point in the biography of Drifting Producers, since it ‘transformed’ the installation into a musealized artwork. Within the current context of my research, the decision-making regarding the

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386 Christiane Berndes: “We follow how the project evolves. We safeguard the objects, but perhaps more important is the continuation of the project.” Interview conducted with Christiane Berndes on 3 March, 2010.
387 Interview with Louis Baltussen, conducted on 13 January, 2010.
388 Idem. Louis Baltussen describes in detail the actions taken by staff members after Drifting Producers arrived at the museum.
perpetuation of the artwork is highly relevant, which touches upon the notion of the ‘script’.

In Chapter 3, I elaborated on the ‘script’ from the perspective of conservation theory, where ‘script’ or ‘score’ is often conceived as a set of instructions defining the artwork and its intended manifestation, thereby facilitating its proper reinstallation. Another notion, introduced by Madeleine Akrich and Bruno Latour, is that of script referring to an implicit set of instructions on the future ‘use’ of the object, which is inscribed by the designer. In Ernesto Neto’s Célula Nave, for example, the latter conception of script can be discerned in Neto’s choice of the haptic, polyamide fabric and construction of the artwork, inciting the visitors’ bodily interaction. In the case of Drifting Producers I would rather use the term ‘scenario’ (instead of script) in reference to the imagined course of action.\(^{389}\) Within this context, scenario applies to the deliberations and series of actions intended by the artists and the custodians, resulting in a performance of Drifting Producers as a site-specific installation.

I indicated above that the Flying City artists welcomed the hosting of the installation by Van Abbemuseum because it was a guarantee for the perpetuation of Drifting Producers, and that in the vicinity of Constant’s works of art. Moreover, the acquisition would fulfil their wish to communicate to an international art public the narrative of craftsmanship and the spatial network of Cheonggyecheon. Furthermore, a connection would be re-established between the artists and the (director of the) museum, in continuation of the international workshops from the past. In brief, during the successive stages of production and acquisition, the artists imagined a scenario in which a connection would be established between the geographical site of Cheonggyecheon, the installation artwork resulting from Flying City’s collaboration with the craftsmen and traders, and the international site of the Van Abbemuseum.

Looking at an imagined scenario from the viewpoint of the custodians, they too envisioned a continuation of the intercultural exchange and a reactivation of the original site-specificity of Drifting Producers in a different geographical region. Firstly by hosting the artwork, and secondly by staying involved in the ongoing project and continuing their relationship with the artists. As we shall see hereafter, part of this scenario was to invite the artists to come over to Eindhoven for a programme of discussions about urban planning and local craftsmanship, connected to the exhibited Drifting Producers installation.

Although the respective scenarios appear to be largely congruent, in reality dilemmas and frictions occurred that were not foreseen at the moment of the agreement to transport the installation to the museum. On the other

\(^{389}\) Miriam-Webster Online defines ‘scenario’ next to “a plot outline of a play”, as “an account or synopsis of a possible course of action or events”. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/scenario (visited on 18 October, 2019).
hand, an unexpected positive exchange did take place, which contributed to
the significance of *Drifting Producers* for the hosting institution. This was the
need for restoration of the models, which had suffered from the journey from
Istanbul to Eindhoven.

**Restoration of the models and intercultural exchange**

Although preventive measures had been taken with the three large models,
including consolidation, some elements had suffered so much damage that
they needed restoration treatment. According to Christiane Berndes,
normally a conservator would be called upon to perform this task and it
would probably be considered the best option “to make invisible repairs to
the broken junctions of the structure of the models and replace them where
necessary, in order to restore the aesthetic appearance.”\(^{390}\) However, in this
case, the approach was attuned to the methods employed by Flying City and
to their views on conveying the spatial structures of the workplaces and
practices of the Cheonggyecheon district to the public. The artists were
invited to come over to Van Abbemuseum and perform the restoration
treatment themselves. In contrast to what a museum conservator would do,
the artists tied broken parts together with visible pieces of rope. In addition,
they strutted the most vulnerable parts with extra pieces of plywood, leaving
even more visible traces of repair.

According to Christiane Berndes, the result of this scenario was, on the
one hand, a heated discussion among the staff members, as it caused frictions
regarding the ethics of conservation. On the other hand, this was exactly the
kind of discussion the director and curator had in mind when they accepted
the offer of the acquisition, i.e. to stimulate intercultural exchange, which in
this case revolved around different conservation paradigms: the Western
paradigm of conserving art objects – striving for invisible, minimal treatment
and reversibility – and restoration practices applied to architectural
structures in the poorer areas of South-East Asia (such as Cheonggyecheon) –
leaving visible traces of the intervention and thus transferring craftsmanship
from one generation to another.\(^{391}\)

When staff members put questions about the durability of the
treatment and about future conservation, the artists reassured them that the
material authenticity of the models did not need to be a constraint and that a
similar treatment could be executed by staff members in the future. In which
case the idea of craftsmanship would be strengthened and the spatial practice
of the Cheonggyecheon would find its way into the technical department of
the museum. The museum regards this as a feasible scenario in case a future
restoration of *Drifting Producers* might be needed.\(^{392}\) On the other hand, a

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\(^{390}\) Interview with Christiane Berndes conducted on 3 March, 2010.
\(^{391}\) Idem.
\(^{392}\) Idem.
more conventional scenario was followed by applying preventive conservation measures.

Apart from the consolidation of the models and the crates built for storage and transportation, all digital files are regularly updated to current standards and information about the history and context of the project has been widely collected by the museum registrar, Margo van de Wiel. Part of this is a complete download of the Flying City website, which is no longer accessible, but has been documented for the museum’s archive in this way. This archival material offers valuable information for research, which means that not only the physical work is preserved for posterity, but also the underlying philosophy and contextual references of both the project and the installation.

I would like to add that it is not uncommon in museum practices to combine diverse strategies, like for example in collections of art and culture obtained from indigenous peoples or other cultural communities. From the beginning of the 21st Century, museum professionals have re-examined conservation principles from a similar perspective as the custodians of Van Abbemuseum and many conservators aim for a continued engagement with the objects' creators and legacy keepers. To the case of Drifting Producers, I would like to add that the approach followed by the artists and Van Abbemuseum in relocating the artwork to a different region, was a 'guarantee' for its continued existence whereas it would otherwise have been destroyed after the Istanbul Biennial. It proved to be an effective strategy for its 'permanency', but, on the other hand, the scenarios imagined by the artists and the custodians were not very specific and did not stipulate how exactly the artwork should perform in a museum context.

Staging Drifting Producers in 2006

In the previous section I elucidated how the artists and the custodians drew up a scenario for the perpetuation of Drifting Producers in terms of an ongoing dialogue between the site of origin and the hosting site. From a more practical perspective, during its staging for the ‘PlugIn #7’ exhibition (2006-

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393 The download includes, among other things, descriptions of the project and essays by Jeon Yongseok and Mark Kremer, images, and lists of exhibitions and events of the Drifting Producers project and its forerunners.
394 Please read for more information on the collaboration of conservators with indigenous peoples and other cultural communities, among other authors: Erica Avrami, Randall Mason, and Marta de la Torre, Values and Heritage Conservation: Research Report (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 2000); Miriam Clavir, Preserving What is Valued. Museums, Conservation, and First Nations (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2002); Glenn Wharton, The Painted King: Art, Activism, & Authenticity in Hawaii (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2011). Likewise, in contemporary art conservation it is a common strategy to collaborate with artists or their representatives, although the artists are seldom invited to execute conservation treatment themselves.
395 Interview with Charles Esche conducted on 24 March, 2010.
2007), there was no 'set of instructions' available for assembling the installation.³⁹⁶ The technical staff did most of the preparatory work. The spatial design of Drifting Producers at 'PlugIn #7' more or less followed the arrangement of the initial iteration at the Artsonje Center and included the same elements. The center of the installation consisted of the three urban models suspended from the ceiling; the composite photograph Power of Cheonggyecheon, the study drawings and a photograph of the street vendors' protest were displayed along the walls; attached to the frame were statistics of Cheonggyecheon, drawings and banners of the urban research project, as well as two screens (one being a powerpoint presentation of design products, the other one a video of the street vendors' interviews) (Fig. 6.14). Important for the discussion below is the fact that a wooden frame was constructed by the technical staff, on the basis of a technical drawing provided by the artists.³⁹⁷ The artists themselves were not present during the installation process, but at some point Jeon Yongseok came over and authorized the installation.

The display of Drifting Producers in 2006 was an actualization of the artwork’s site-specificity. Following Lefebvre’s statement that representations of space are “certainly abstract, but play also a part a in social and political practice” and are therefore “relative and in the process of change,” the frame could be considered an element that accommodates the installation to the new site of display.³⁹⁸ Whereas the artists had provided the codes for a spatial arrangement of the installation, the technicians adjusted the design to the dimensions of the room, enabling a presentation of the individual elements and leaving enough space for visitors to ‘drift’ around the models and see them in detail.

One of the staff members recalls her first encounter with the artwork: “It had such an unfinished look, you had to bend your knees in order to look at the figurines. All those tiny details were impressive and yet it had this charming spontaneity.”³⁹⁹ I would argue that, regarding the site-specificity of Drifting Producers, the frame is the main actor for the spatial demarcation of the installation: its dimensions are geared to the exhibition room and this reconstruction of the original is recorded in technical drawings, photographs and a scale model that can be used for future occasions (the frame is destroyed, but can be refabricated in exactly the same way). This brings into focus that, whereas the spatial arrangement of the installation was still flexible at previous displays (in Seoul, Kassel and Istanbul), it got a ‘fixed’ status in Van Abbemuseum due to these recordings and the scale model; it is

³⁹⁶ Interview with Louis Baltussen conducted on 13 January, 2010. The exhibition ‘PlugIn #7 was curated by Charles Esche and Christiane Berndes, Van Abbemuseum, 8 April, 2006 to 20 May, 2007.
³⁹⁷ Interview conducted with Louis Baltussen on 13 January, 2010.
³⁹⁸ Lefebvre, Production of Space, 41.
³⁹⁹ Interview with Margo van de Wiel, conducted on 13 July, 2010.
likely they will serve as prescriptive agents for the spatial design in future displays.

Moreover, one of the effects of *Drifting Producers*'s musealization is the representational space of the gallery becoming the actual space for communicating the project to the audience. Like with many site-specific artworks, there is an inherent contradiction in the perpetuation of this installation artwork within a museum context: the initial temporary bond between the artwork and the site (as shown in the variation of its display at previous venues) has been replaced by a more ‘permanent’ spatial design defined by the wooden frame: a ‘fixation’ of the installation which is geared to the representational function of the museum of showing art objects in a ‘finite state’. On the other hand, that the dialogue would be continued by means of a cultural programme organized alongside the exhibition was part of an imagined scenario. According to Jeon, the installation *Drifting Producers* could render its meaning independently from the geographical coordinates in which it is presented, but in order to realize ‘a performance’ in the intended way, he believed that an exchange with local audiences should be organized. The artists suggested to come over and discuss the project with the public. The custodians of Van Abbemuseum welcomed this idea and even went one step further by suggesting that some kind of ‘local network’ should be established around the *Drifting Producers* project in Eindhoven. A series of events could be organized, with discussions on the topics of city planning and craftsmanship, in which the artist and architectural students, product designers, curators and general museum public could participate. The proximity of the Philips Factory and the Design Academy in Eindhoven, and the Master’s Programme Architecture, Building and Planning at the Technical University were considered relevant ‘substitutes’ for the local communities of the Cheonggyecheon. And last but not least, such a programme would serve as a follow-up to the previous relationship between the two main actors in this enterprise – Jeon Yongsok and Charles Esche – and whereby continue the intended cross-cultural dialogue.400

6.6 The social production space of *Drifting Producers*

Examining the function of social space, it is interesting to take a closer look at the production process of *Drifting Producers* and the network of actors involved. At first, the artists observed the practices of the metal craftsmen and took their inspiration from the spatial structures of the workplaces to create their own ‘utopian city’. Participants of the workshops contributed to the project with their imagination, giving shape to the preliminary models. During the next stage, the artists were the main actors in the process of creating the installation *Drifting Producers* and submitting the artwork to the

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400 Interview with Charles Esche conducted on 24 March, 2010.
international contest in the Art Sonje Center. Subsequently, when the artwork entered the museum collection, the museum staff and the artists acted in relation to the conservation of the work by discussing alternative approaches for restoration of the models and by inviting the artists to execute the treatment. This way, the social production space of Cheonggyecheon was at least shared with the museum’s staff members.

Following the imagined scenarios that production practices and social networks of the Cheonggyecheon would be communicated to a wider audience (therewith expanding the social space of the project), the museum had the intention to organize a cross-cultural programme, linked to the display of Drifting Producers. However, the artwork has been installed only once in Van Abbemuseum, at ‘PlugIn #7’. And although the display was accompanied with the earlier mentioned lecture by Deborah Cherry, one can hardly speak of a continuation of the social production space of Drifting Producers in The Netherlands. Yet, in its own way, the museum did contribute to greater awareness of the project by including an extensive article on Drifting Producers, written by Jeon Yongseok in 2004, into the publication Art and Social Change, edited by Will Bradley and Charles Esche.401

The Flying City collective continued with the project until 2009, by organizing workshops and performances at various spaces, including the Cheonggyecheon district.402 Apart from that, they created a second version of the installation Drifting Producers. The location was the Central Tourist Hotel, in the vicinity of the workshops of Cheonggyecheon (Fig. 6.15). This version of the installation was created in commission of Seoul’s city council and, in terms of its site-specificity, it was physically connected to the socio-geographical context of the project. Some of the elements of the initial version, such as the composite photograph Power of Cheonggyecheon, reappeared in the installation. The urban models, however, took a different shape and the constructions were a combination of plywood and multi-coloured lamps. Furthermore, objects made of recycled materials derived from the metal workshops were additional elements to the installation. Another addition was a series of photographs featuring the metal workers in conversation with the artists, therewith emphasizing their mutual relationship and socio-geographical site-specificity of the work.

Unfortunately, the artwork suffered from neglect by the city council (who is


the owner of the work) and the artists were not allowed to carry out repairs
themselves. So, a few years after the project ended, the second version of
*Drifting Producers* was dismantled.\(^{403}\) This means that, although the project
stays alive in written form, the installation *Drifting Producers*, hosted by Van
Abbemuseum, is the only materialized form that has survived.

In order to better understand what happened to the social spaces of
production and the artwork’s perpetuation in a museum context, it is relevant
to examine what the expectations were at the moment of the acquisition and
how the transition to a musealized artwork took place. During the interview I
conducted with the director of Van Abbemuseum in 2010, he stated that he
still wished to follow the dynamics of the project. *Drifting Producers* was
regarded an “open-ended artwork” and new elements, resulting from Flying
City’s production practices and ongoing projects, could be added. Charles
Esche:

> We are very open to the idea of following their project, but we just
> haven’t done it yet. If we were in Seoul I am sure we would have been
> much more engaged. The intention has always been that we collect
> more.\(^{404}\)

The director acknowledged that the geographical distance had caused a
barrier to the ongoing relationship with Jeon Yongseok and his engagement
with the installation. Esche is clear in his statement that there is always a
‘finiteness’ to such collaborative processes, and this ultimately transformed
*Drifting Producers* into an autonomous work of art. In fact, a process similar
to what happened to Constant’s *New Babylon* project:

> I like to see it in the same way as Constant’s *New Babylon*. There is a
> very direct correlation between them. But [Drifting Producers] is
> made in a particular region. The problem is that art history always
tells us to isolate the artist from his social environment, his living. I
> would like to change that, but probably eventually *Drifting Producers*
> will become an aesthetic object too, instead of something that can talk
> about a particular social moment.\(^ {405}\)

Given the current dormant state of the artwork, one could argue that the
social production space has come to an end. Furthermore, as a result of the
completion of the project *Drifting Producers*, a rupture has emerged in the

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\(^{403}\) This information about the decay and end of the installation *Drifting Producers* in the Central
Tourist Hotel comes from Jeon. Interview with Jeon Yongseok conducted on 20 March, 2011.

\(^{404}\) Interview with Charles Esche conducted on 24 March, 2010. Jeon confided to me that he had
discussed with the director the option of adding elements of the metal version of *Drifting Producers*
to the installation in Van Abbemuseum; “but then he forgot.” Interview with Jeon Yongseok
conducted 20 March, 2011.

\(^{405}\) Interview with Charles Esche conducted on 24 March, 2010.
cross-cultural dialogue after the artwork entered the museum — although the restoration project reactivated the ‘social space’ in the museum’s technical department. A final observation in this respect is that it seems inevitable that *Drifting Producers* turned into a *site-generic* artwork, because one of its vital spatial functions — the social production space — is no longer activated. The bigger the time gap, the less likely it is that a cross-cultural exchange on spatial production practices and craftsmanship will take place.

Charles Esche mentions the geographical distance as one of the main reasons for the museum’s inability to reactivate this site-specific function. Based on the conceptual model, I would like to make another suggestion, given the artwork’s networked relationship with the representational space. Lefebvre’s notion that any representational space (including the museum) is a “lived space”, clarifies that prevailing value systems of a given space have a profound effect on the spatial production, in this case the meaning production of a site-specific installation in a museum context. Museums adjust their acquisition and display strategies to the actuality of socio-cultural circumstances and their own internal policies.

From this perspective, the lack of interest in *Drifting Producers* could also be explained as a sign of a changed curatorial programme, which shifted its attention from the museum’s engagement with cross-cultural dialogue on spatial production practices, to collaborative projects in a European context, exemplified by the programme *L’Internationale*.\(^{406}\) At present Van Abbemuseum follows a different strategy in their acquisition and exhibition policy. In case *Drifting Producers* would be put on show again, the social space of perpetuation and care would likely replace the initial interest in a lively exchange on social spaces of production. And in this respect, I would like to rephrase Charles Esche’s statement about the ‘aestheticized object’ as an actualization of the representational space of *Drifting Producers* — geared to current museum values and including the ‘fixation’ of the spatial design by means of the wooden frame — at the expense of the social space of production (see Diagram 13).

\(^{406}\) At the website of Van Abbemuseum the project is explained as follows: “L’Internationale is a collaborative venture between four museums and two artists’ archives in six European countries. It connects these collections in a series of exhibitions that demonstrate how the recent cultural heritage can be independent of national boundaries. The ultimate aim is to create a ‘European Collection’, or even a ‘Global Collection’. The participating organisations will not amalgamate into an abstract unified entity, but instead gradually create a sense of interconnectedness between, in the first instance, Antwerp, Barcelona, Eindhoven and Ljubljana.”

With the exhibition at ‘Plugin #7’ in 2006, *Drifting Producers* was accommodated to the spatial dimensions of the gallery space and the installation was fixated by the wooden frame. The function of representational space increased with the acquisition and relocation to a museum context, and the social space of perpetuation and care was activated. The artists had influence on the restoration of the models, which keeps the social space of production more or less in place. In the future, two spatial functions would gain influence: the social space of perpetuation and care and the representational space of the museum context. The initial social production processes and the site-specificity of the Cheonggyecheon district would have less influence on the spatial network.
If we were to put the installation on display again, the artwork itself would take a central position, but we would see it as a vehicle to connect to the actuality of today, for example the disappearance of craftsmanship worldwide or how the work connects to different groups of present-day society. The museum is in transition. We invite artists to critically reflect on existing structures inside and outside the museum and to collaborate with academia. By focusing only on the biography of *Drifting Producers* we would run the risk of an inward view, instead of employing its potential for investigating the issues at stake.\(^{407}\)

Berndes indicates that a reinvigoration of *Drifting Producers* within the context of current museum practices could still be accompanied with a programme of events, dedicated to “the issues at stake.” The focus would no longer (or not primarily) be on the site-specificity of the *Drifting Producers* project, but on the museum site itself (being a place for critical reflection); the artwork would fulfil the function of evoking discussion and debate – which is not entirely different from the cross-cultural dialogue instigated by the director in the past – focusing on the role of art in society. Furthermore, Berndes remarked that it would not be a primary concern to involve the Flying City artists; in fact, their role as urban researchers could be delegated to others (see Diagram 13).\(^{408}\)

Those insights made me aware that different modes may co-exist for reinvigorating the site-specificity of a socio-geographical art project. One mode might consist of referring back to the origin of the artwork and the context in which the work was created (bringing the genesis of the artwork to the fore), while another mode might focus on ‘using’ the artwork for discussions that are considered topical and typical for the museum’s position in society. In other words, the artwork could turn into a site-generic art object, appreciated for its aesthetics, and at the same time ‘perform’ as a site-specific work through its connection with the museum’s representational space, i.e. by means of evoking the site-specific functions of the past and/or establishing a meaningful connection with the present. This paves the way to regard the curatorial programme as a means of reinvigorating the artwork’s site-specificity, like we have seen before with the example of Richard Serra’s *Waxing Arches* in Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen (discussed in Chapter 3).

*Drifting Producers* has not been staged again after the exhibition ‘PlugIn #7’, in 2005-2006. Hence, the arguments discussed above cannot be tested against

\(^{407}\) Interview with Christiane Berndes conducted on 2 February, 2017. Today, Van Abbemuseum features a wide range of public programmes, both inside and outside the museum, and has an event manager as permanent staff member.

\(^{408}\) Idem.
a realized scenario for this artwork’s reinstallation. What I will do instead – given the affinity of Flying City with the urban research project of Constant – is examine the approaches applied to two different exhibitions of Constant’s *New Babylon*. Both exhibitions took place at the occasion of a retrospective organized by the Municipal Museum (The Hague) and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia (Madrid), in 2016.

### 6.7 Comparative case example: Constant’s *New Babylon* Project

Constant Nieuwenhuys was part of the post-World War II generation and apart from being a member of the COBRA Movement he also was co-founder of the International Situationist Movement. For almost 20 years, he worked on the *New Babylon* project (1956-1974) with the aim of connecting art with a new vision on spatial design and urban lifestyle. Constant imagined that the automation of production would free people from daily work and give them time to devote to creativity and play. During a lecture in Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (1960) Constant describes his project as follows:

> New Babylon is to be a covered city, suspended high above the ground on huge columns. All automobile traffic is isolated on the ground plane, with the trains and fully automated factories buried beneath. Enormous multileveled structures, five to ten hectares in area, are strung together in a chain that spreads across the landscape. This ‘endless expanse’ of interior space is artificially lit and air-conditioned. Its inhabitants are given access to ‘powerful, ambience-creating resources’ to construct their own spaces whenever and wherever they desire. The qualities of each space can be adjusted. Light, acoustics, color, ventilation, texture, temperature, and moisture are infinitely variable. Movable floors, partitions, ramps, ladders, bridges, and stairs are used to construct ‘veritable labyrinths of the most heterogeneous forms’ in which desires continuously interact.

In a series of models Constant created labyrinthian structures of overlapping living spaces, platforms and terraces raising above the ground. The ‘sectors’ for which he used Plexiglass were literally ‘floating’ above the ground, disconnecting the ‘ideal world’ from everyday traffic and city noise. Apart from the models, *New Babylon* encompassed a wide range of other artworks created by Constant, including drawings, photographs, oil paintings, water colours and, in addition, documentary films, pamphlets, manifestos and interviews. In 1974, Hans Locher, then director of the Municipal Museum in

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410 For an extensive reading on Constant’s *New Babylon* project I refer to Wigley, *New Babylon*, 1998.
The Hague, organized an exhibition for New Babylon and acquired a number of models directly from the artist. When the curatorial interest declined, the models were stored in the museum’s basement and their condition deteriorated, until the situation changed again in 1991. The museum’s curator of modern art, Hans Janssen, ‘rediscovered’ the models and became interested in the ideas of the New Babylon project. On his initiative, conservation treatment was carried out. In the meantime, Hans Janssen and Constant – by now a famous painter – built up a close relationship.

In the following years, New Babylon gained great popularity with curators, architects, urban planners and wider audiences. The models were, for example, shown at New Babylon exhibitions in the Municipal Museum (1997) and at Documenta 11 (Kassel, 2002). In 2016, Laura Stamps and Doede Hardeman co-curated two major exhibitions bearing the same title ‘Constant – New Babylon’: one in Centro de Arte Reina Sofia and the other one in the Municipal Museum. The two exhibitions are central to the following discussion and elucidate two different viewpoints regarding the perpetuation of the project and the spatial display of the models. I was able to visit both exhibits in 2016 and the permanent exhibition of New Babylon in the Municipal Museum, so that the following analysis is partly informed by my own observation.

Staging the models of New Babylon in the Municipal Museum The Hague

For Constant the New Babylon exhibition of 1974, organized by Hans Locher, marked the end of the project. A number of models were acquired for the museum collection in exchange for a monthly compensation, which enabled the artist to continue his creation of paintings and other work. After the period of neglect and then the rediscovery by Hans Janssen, the New Babylon models were put on display in the museum galleries in various ways, but the version I would like to discuss is a ‘permanent’ display (which I saw in 2012) (Fig. 6.16).

Some of the models were put on workbenches which had been acquired in the past, directly from the artist, who had used them in his studio for creating the models. Hans Janssen explained why the models were to be placed on those tables rather than on pedestals, because of the authenticity of the working practice they resembled:

Constant had made those tables himself or comparable ones came from the construction market. This was a sign that he did not address the models as sculptures. At the time it was a radical gesture, but

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411 Interview with Hans Janssen conducted on 24 November, 2010.
413 See footnote 66 of this chapter.
today we are experiencing the models no different from a sculpture, the aesthetic experience is really strong. Otherwise it would have no right to survive in the museum.\textsuperscript{414}

Janssen’s observation echoes statements by Charles Esche and Christiane Berndes in relation to the \textit{Drifting Producers} models: if it was not for their aesthetic quality, there would have been no reason to purchase them for a museum collection. In terms of the conceptual model, these statements can be read as a reference to the aesthetic experience in the representational space of the museum. Simultaneously, however, it seemed important to the curator to display traces of the production process, as an indication that these models were not only art objects, but also part of a larger project on spatial production practices at the crossroads of art production, city planning and architectural design. In that respect, the function of social space was emphasized by displaying the models on the workbenches (comparable to the display of the \textit{Drifting Producers} models on the workbenches in the Tobacco Factory). According to Hans Janssen, this approach was in accord with the artist’s intent and it has been a guiding principle for future displays, tying the workbenches to the models (see Diagram 14).

The permanent display, in a relatively small gallery space, showed a few sketches and paintings from \textit{New Babylon} next to the models. No additional information was provided about the history of the \textit{New Babylon} project, nor was there any reference to Constant’s activism or his underlying philosophy for the project. According to the curator, the exhibition design was prepared in close collaboration with the artist: the focus was on the \textit{artist} Constant and the creative power of his autonomous works of art. As Janssen explains, visitors could retrieve the information and documentation about the \textit{New Babylon Project} from the museum website and other publications.\textsuperscript{415}

For the retrospective of \textit{New Babylon} in the Municipal Museum in 2016, more or less the same strategy was followed (Fig. 6.17). The models and paintings, sketches and drawings put Constant’s artistic work in the spotlights in the representational space of the museum gallery, while only one example of documentary material was presented – a filmed conversation, in which Constant explains his vision on \textit{New Babylon}; the shooting of the film in the crowded streets of Amsterdam sheds light on the connection between his project and the actual, socio-geographical context of the city.\textsuperscript{416}

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\textsuperscript{414} Idem.
\textsuperscript{416} ‘New Babylon, Constant in conversation with writer Simon Vinkenoog’ (1962). The film is recorded partly in the artist’s studio and partly in the crowded streets of Amsterdam, to which Constant refers as a paradigmatic “automated city.”
Diagram 14 Two retrospectives of Constant’s New Babylon Project in 2016 - Staging New Babylon in Municipal Museum and Reina Sofia

In the Municipal Museum The Hague the spatial design of the exhibition highlighted the artistic work of Constant, in agreement with the artist’s intent during later stages of his career. Emphasis was put on the aesthetic experience paying less attention on the activism of Constant and the socio-geographical content of the project. The models and other artworks have entered the social space of perpetuation and care. The modernist philosophy of Municipal Museum is reflected in the White Cube display format, emphasizing the representational function of the New Babylon artworks for the collection. The workbenches are the only reference made to the social space of production.

In Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid (a former hospital) the gallery spaces are much wider and the models were exhibited according to a labyrinthian design. Coloured lights contributed to a theatrical effect, stressing the spatial constructions of individual models in a different way and immersing the viewer in a ‘total experience’. The exhibition paid tribute to the biographies of both Constant and the project by means of documentaries, photographs, etc. This way, the social space of production was highlighted, while the function of the exhibit was less connected to the representational space of the collection or the museum building.
In summary of the above, I would argue that the exhibitions in the Municipal Museum are manifestations of a curatorial strategy that highlights the significance of Constant’s art production for the representational function of the museum space – coded as a universal and timeless White Cube – and, at the same time, refers to the artist’s studio by presenting the models on the same workbenches Constant had used for their production. In Chapter 4, I referred to Julia Noordegraaf’s observation that in the course of the 1980s, museum spaces became a substitute for the artist’s studio, a place where visitors could witness the moment of creation. This goes too, partly, for the exhibition scenario followed by the Municipal Museum, due to the cross reference made to the production practice in the artist’s studio. However, in terms of the conceptual model for site-specific installation artworks, I would argue that the social space of the production has become subordinate to the outcomes of the process, because the significance of Constant’s artworks is primarily conceived as an aesthetic experience and in terms of the representational function of the models for the museum context.

**Staging the models of New Babylon in Reina Sofia Madrid**

For a number of reasons, the exhibition ‘Constant - New Babylon’ in Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia was different from the one in The Hague. Compared to the relatively small rooms of the Municipal Museum, the architecture of this former hospital in Madrid offered a spacious environment, covering several rooms that were interconnected in the form of a crucifix. The models were on display on a labyrinthian spatial arrangement of tables and workbenches (some were the same as the ones used in the Municipal Museum, some were newly made). Some models were illuminated with coloured spots. Constant had conceptualized this idea, but it has seldom been applied in previous exhibitions. The coloured lights contributed to a theatrical effect, immersing the viewer in a ‘total experience’.

A striking difference was the abundance of references to the Situationist Movement and the socio-political context of the *New Babylon* project. In addition to fragments of historical films and archival material, various personal anecdotes were shared with the public in texts and screened interviews, and the social networks in which Constant participated were emphasized. A number of Constant’s larger, interactive spatial structures were refabricated and a collaborative project between the architect Aldo van Eyck and Constant – ‘Ruimte in kleur / Multi-coloured Space’ – was

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417 Unfortunately, I was not allowed to make pictures and the catalogue does not provide installation shots of the exhibition.

418 Constant’s preference for coloured illumination of the models was mentioned by Hans Janssen. Interview conducted on 24 November, 2010.
reconstructed (Fig. 6.18). Since Constant had passed away in 2005, his widow and other ‘legacy keepers’ (including Hans Janssen) were closely involved with the exhibition scenario.

The reconstructions and documentaries presented at this show highlighted the biography of both the artist and the project, adding multi-layered connotations and explanations regarding the underlying concepts. They drew attention to new approaches developed by Constant in reference to the socio-geographical contexts of his project. The spatial design in Reina Sofia enabled visitors to wander around the ‘labyrinth’, reinvigorating the social space of the visitors’ experience in a way that was rather different from the staging in the Municipal Museum, not least due to both an interactive experience with the spatial reconstructions, and the alternation of artworks and documentaries. In terms of the conceptual model, I am of the opinion that the exhibition reactivated the social spaces of production and of the visitors’ experience, and yet paid tribute to the spatial design of the artworks by means of the exhibition’s spatial arrangement (see Diagram 14).

The differences in manifestation mentioned above are the result of exhibition scenarios developed by the curators, but I would also like to note the influence of the buildings, as the respective gallery spaces were totally different from one another, both in seize and representational function. This diversity once more signals the applicability of Lefebvre’s notion that representational space is alive and that manifestations are site-specific, especially when space and site are part of the meaning of the artworks on display.

6.8 Conclusion of the case study

This chapter was dedicated to an analysis of the musealization process of an installation artwork originating from a socio-geographical project. During the project, several manifestations were realized, varying from temporary events (such as art-and-community workshops and performances) to installation artworks and publications. The installation artwork Drifting Producers is the only physical remainder of the project.

One of my conclusions is that – apart from the passage of time and a disconnection from the initial context – the site-specificity of Drifting Producers was subject to change, due to demands of a museum collection. The ‘flexible’ spatial design of previous stages of the artwork was accommodated to the dimensions of the gallery space by means of the wooden frame;

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419 Ruimte in kleur / Multi-coloured Space was a source of inspiration for Constant to write his famous manifesto ‘Voor een spatiaal colorisme’ (A space in colour’). The room was exhibited in Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1952.

420 In 2012, Constant’s widow Trudy Nieuwenhuys-Van der Horst gave new impetus to the ‘Fondation Constant’. Its main goals are preserving and promoting the art collection and intellectual legacy of the artist. Trudy Nieuwenhuys-Van der Horst had a strong voice in the realization of the two New Babylon-exhibitions discussed in this chapter.
therewith establishing a new site-specificity, tied to the museum’s gallery space. The transition of a site-specific project to an installation artwork and its subsequent transformation into an aesthetic art object with ‘fixed dimensions’, is not unusual in a museum context and signals the predominance of representational space over the initial (variable) site-specificity of the spatial design at earlier biographical stages. In one important respect, however, a deviation from common museum practices occurred. In the period following the acquisition, the discussion on the restoration of *Drifting Producers* brought new insights regarding the social space of perpetuation and care, as the restoration technique proposed by the artists (such as leaving visible traces of the restoration treatment) familiarized the professional staff with a conservation practice applied to architectural structures in the Cheonggyecheon, and the artists themselves executed the restoration.

The purpose of the acquisition was to safeguard the artwork and expand its lifespan in a museum context, in order to communicate to a wider art audience the content of the production networks and craftsmanship of Cheonggyecheon. In the exhibition of the installation at ‘PlugIn #7’ the focus was on the artwork itself (apart from one accompanying lecture), although the museum imagined an exhibition scenario in which a programme of cultural events would be organized: the Flying City artists would share their insights and experiences gained from the Cheonggyecheon district with urban planners, designers, architects and general publics in Eindhoven, thus perpetuating the social space of production. From a historical perspective, this intercultural exchange would echo the cross-cultural dialogue, which had started in the international workshops attended by both the artists and the current director of Van Abbemuseum.

In the course of time, the personal relationship between the artists and the museum director deteriorated and the representational space – the ‘lived space’, according to Lefebvre – changed over time. This also implied that the museum’s initial focus on the social space of production shifted towards a more general interest in the meaning production of art and craftsmanship in a global context. According to the statements of the director and the head of collections, an imagined scenario for future staging would mainly focus on *Drifting Producers* as an aesthetic art object; moreover, its representational function would sooner evoke a discussion on the disappearance of craftsmanship worldwide than refer back to the original site-specificity of the Cheonggyecheon district.

The comparative case example of *New Babylon* showed a variation in exhibition scenarios. The Municipal Museum foregrounded the merits of the artist Constant and the aesthetics of the models (focusing on the function of their spatial design). An additional element was the presentation of the urban models on the workbenches – a reference to their production in the artist’s studio. On the other hand, the exhibition in Reina Sofia communicated the socio-geographical content and the philosophy of the project, emphasizing the social space of production. The wide gallery spaces offered sufficient
room to include – apart from the collection of models and other artworks on display – information panels, photographs and screens conveying information about the project to a contemporary audience. Moreover, the visitor’s space of experience was activated by means of the rebuilt spatial constructions and the illumination of the models with coloured light. To summarize, I argued that the exhibition in Reina Sofia came close to reinvigorating the ‘lived’ urban structures of Constant’s *New Babylon* project, although the artworks were incorporated into the ‘universal world’ of the White Cube gallery space in the Municipal Museum.

My final conclusion to this chapter is that artworks that are rooted in a socio-geographical project often transform into aesthetic art objects and get ‘enveloped’ by the museum system. However, this is not to say that by definition these installations would lose all site-specific functions. Site-specific installation artworks can incorporate the specifics of the hosting site, sometimes precisely through the accommodation of their spatial dimensions to the gallery space. Furthermore, curatorial scenarios can reinvigorate the ‘liveliness’ of the initial project by additional means, such as documentaries, discussions, and other ways of engaging the audience with the project’s history.