The Dying Dreamer

Architecture of Parallel Realities

Malin Zimm

Licentiate thesis 2003

School of Architecture

Royal Institute of Technology

The Dying Dreamer - Architecture of Parallel Realities

Malin Zimm

Research advisor:

Dr. Katja Grillner

Assistant advisor:

Prof. Jerker Lundequist

Cover: Malin Zimm

Copyright © 2003 by Malin Zimm

Licentiate thesis

xakt – Critical Theory in Architecture

School of Architecture, Royal Institute of Technology

Akademisk avhandling för licentiatsgrad

xakt – Arkitekturkritisk teori

Arkitekturskolan, KTH

Kungliga Tekniska Högskolan

S-100 44 Stockholm

TRITA-ARK-Forskningspublikationer 2003:7

ISSN 1402-7453

ISRN KTH/ARK/FP--03:7--SE

ISBN 91-7283-431-5

Abstract

The objective of the licentiate thesis is to investigate architectural experience and creation in virtual space and its representational problems. The thesis comprises three articles published during the years 2001-2003, and a website, featuring interactive illustrations and dramatized dialogues. The articles investigate architecture as a transgressive state between the virtual worlds of imagination and the domestic interior, introducing “obsessive dreambuilding” as a method of negotiating material fictions in real space. This type of architecture is studied through a selection of highly individual projects, each driven by their creator’s subjective desire verging on obsession, towards particular levels of architectural experience, both physical and virtual. The investigation leads into elaborate experiments in physical space, employing and developing artificiality and virtuality, as the creative mind pursues the desire for parallel realities. The main representative of this kind of architectural activity (the fictional character Baron des Esseintes in Joris-Karl Huysmans’ novel *À Rebours* from 1884) appears in all three articles. The first article, “The Dying Dreamer - Looking into Huysmans’ Virtual Worlds”, is an analysis of the virtual architecture of the narrative space in Huysmans’ novel, investigating the relation between the spatial inventions in the narrative virtual reality of the novel and the conditions and terms associated with digital virtual reality. The second article, “The Operative Fields of the Artificial”, focuses on the negotiation of artificiality through the layers of fiction in des Esseintes’ projects and the transitional character of his space, operating as an interface between his physical environment and his imagined virtual worlds. The third article, “The Obsessive Builder of Dreams”, places the Baron in the company of three additional examples of obsessive dreambuilding, who share and develop the theme of the extreme individual project, and the particular eccentricity of the architectural imagination at work in the mind of the obsessive dreambuilder. This last article presents the architectural transformations created by Sir John Soane, Kurt Schwitters and Gregor Schneider. The architects of parallel realities are challenging our basic understanding of architectural organisation, aesthetics and methods by driving architectural space into different ontological states, providing a field for observation of perceptual and representational problems.

Referat

Syftet med denna licentiatsavhandling är att undersöka den arkitektoniska upplevelsen och skapandet av det virtuella rummet, samt dess representationsproblematik. Avhandlingen sammanför tre artiklar publicerade under perioden 2001-2003, samt en hemsida där projektet illustreras och dramatiseras interaktivt. Artiklarna undersöker arkitekturens gränsöverskridande tillstånd, ett arbete mellan fantasins virtuella världar och den privata interiören. Här introduceras begreppet *obsessive dreambuilding* (besatt drömbyggande) som en metod att hantera materiell fiktion i verklighetens rum. Denna typ av arkitektur studeras genom ett urval högst individuella projekt, drivna av rumsskaparens begär och drömmar, vilka resulterar i speciella arkitekturupplevelser, verkliga såväl som virtuella. Undersökningen inbegriper framskridna experiment i det fysiska rummet, projekt som utnyttjar och utvecklar virtualitet och artificialitet, för att tillfredsställa idén om en parallell verklighet, en alternativ arkitektur. Huvudrepresentanten för denna aktivitet (den fiktive karaktären Baron Des Esseintes i Joris-Karl Huysmans' roman *À Rebours* från 1884) förekommer i alla tre artiklarna. Den första artikeln "The Dying Dreamer - Looking into Huysmans' Virtual Worlds", är en analys av den virtuella arkitekturen i Huysmans text, en undersökning av den narrativa virtuella verkligheten och de termer och tillstånd som associerar till det digitala virtuella rummet. Den andra artikeln, "The Operative Fields of the Artificial", fokuserar på det artificiella i des Esseintes rumsprojekt, samt arkitekturens betydelse som gränssnitt mellan baronens fysiska omgivning och hans imaginära världar. Den tredje artikeln, "The Obsessive Builder of Dreams", placerar baronen i sällskap med ytterligare tre exempel av *obsessive dreambuilders*, som tillsammans fördjupar problematiken i det extrema individuella projektet, drömbyggandet. Den sista artikeln introducerar de rumsliga transformationerna hos Sir John Soane, Kurt Schwitters och Gregor Schneider. Som skapare av parallella verkligheter utmanar de vår uppfattning om arkitekturprojektets struktur, estetik och metod genom att pröva rummets ontologiska tillstånd, och genom att använda arkitekturen som experimentfält för perception och representation.

I wish to thank my advisor Dr. Katja Grillner for generously supporting this work with ideas and criticism, and for being such a brilliant source of both knowledge and energy.

I am very thankful to Dr. Rolf Gullström-Hughes for insightful reading of this text, and to Dr. Jane Rendell for valuable comments on earlier versions of the text. I am grateful to Prof. Jerker Lundequist for encouraging me to start this PhD research project.

A heartfelt thanks to my colleagues at the Architecture school, KTH, especially to all members of the xakt research group, providing a creative atmosphere and a vibrant discussion forum.

To my parents, my sister and Gustav, for their confidence, and for reminding me how nice it is to come home.

Abstracts	
Acknowledgements	
Contents	7
Introduction	9
Dreamguides	10
Website and Project Design	13
The Craftsmanship of Other Dimensions	16
Scope of the Thesis	19
The Dandy – Inventing the Individual	25
The Doppelgänger – Dividing the Indivisible in Architectural Fiction	29
The Dying Dreamer – Behind the Title	33
Theoretical Framework	35
I The Dying Dreamer – Looking into Huysmans’ Virtual Worlds	44
Interlude i Five Objects/Subjects to Represent the year 1884	66
II The Operative Fields of the Artificial	76
Interlude ii Fleurs d’Artifices	90
III The Obsessive Builder of Dreams	96
Bibliography	107
Summaries	114

In the transitional state between wakefulness and sleep, in the architecture of an interzone between imagination and reality, a dialogue unfolds between the dreamer and the dreamguide of choice. The dreamer is a visitor to the project website and the selection of guides are the subjects of study in this research project.¹ The logic and logistics of the virtual dream world are mimetically reproduced in this digital virtual format. The dream is a prison of freedom. In the dream, the mind is free to associate and combine any knowledge, authorize any meeting, follow every impulse, access any place and try every idea. Allowed these endless possibilities, we need to leave only one pledge. The creation of the narrative self is at the expense of the loss of the body. The dream is the virtual reality of the mind; spaceless architecture for the bodyless human. In the oneiric worlds, the subject is split into a (or returned to an original) duplicated existence: the body is left behind as we slip into the dream,² and the temporary avatar of the dreamer body, is free to adapt and invent new ways of moving and navigating. Yet the muscle activity of the body is inhibited during the dreaming stages of the sleep cycle. The dreamer is arrested in a world where all elements and actors are the products of her own mind. Furthermore the dream structure is transformative, the space and its inhabitants are metamorphous and discontinuous. This complete fluidity is presented to us by the same mind that, during the waking hours, incessantly renders the physical world with order and contingency.

- You may have asked yourself what stuff your dreams are made of. In this space you will encounter those who have worked out how to turn our dreams into stuff. You are as prepared as anyone to enter this space, in here we are all dreamers inside someone's dreams. I will be your guide.

- Each one of us dreamguides are pursuers of obsessive architectural activities, we are all haunted by transitive dreams. Together we will investigate the processes of turning dreams into physical space.

I suppose you might wonder

¹ <http://www.arch.kth.se/~zimm/menustart.htm> (Start page pictured overleaf: Fig. 1)

[REPLY]

*Four examples of extraordinary creators and collectors of space live here, each one a pursuer of obsessive architectural activities: Baron Des Esseintes, Joris-Karl Huysmans' fictional character in the novel *À Rebours* (Against Nature) from 1884; Kurt Schwitters, the dadaist painter and constructor of the Merzbau created in Hannover between 1919 and 1937; Sir John Soane, the architect and collector who arranged his home as a Museum from 1790 until 1837; and the German artist Gregor Schneider, whose home in Rheydt since 1985 is slowly folding in on itself under the name Haus Ur.*

Whereas Des Esseintes is a fictional builder of dreams in physical form; Schwitters, Soane and Schneider are real builders of dreams in physical form - the author Huysmans is a real builder of dreams in fictional form. The maintenance and creation of imagined worlds need a protective climate, as ephemeral fragments of imagination land heavily in physical space. Ideas need a transitory environment with certain qualities to break the fall into reality.

This licentiate thesis comprises three articles written during the first period of my PhD-studies, spanning 2001 to 2003. All three articles are printed here as published, including original image material. They are not placed in chronological order by date of publication, instead they follow the order of investigation. The research project is also developed as a website in correspondence with the text material.³ The website is an experimental field for dynamic transformation of linear text into hypertext, animated illustrations and dramatised meetings between the visitor and the subjects of research. The introduction aims at circumscribing the key concepts of this study, and to delineate the theoretical framework of the research project.

The first article, "The Dying Dreamer - Looking into Huysmans' Virtual Worlds", was published first in *Nordic Journal of Architectural Research* (the version printed in this thesis)⁴ and later as a shortened version in *Reflexive Architecture*, a

² *Sleep*: from Latin *labi* to slide, slip

³ <http://www.arch.kth.se/~zimm>

⁴ *Nordic Journal of Architectural Research* (*Nordisk Arkitekturforskning*), no 3, 2001, pp. 41-53

theme issue of AD (*Architectural Design*), in May 2002.⁵ The second article, “The Operative Fields of the Artificial”, was published in *Nordic Journal of Architectural Research* in May 2003.⁶ This article was reworked from a longer paper, “The Interfaces of the Chimaera”, presented at a PhD-seminar at KTH School of Architecture in January 2002.⁷ The third article, “The Obsessive Builder of Dreams”, is based on a paper presented at the fourth international research conference *Consciousness Reframed* in Perth, August 2002, and on the research symposium *Opposites Attract: Research by Design* at the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, in October 2002. The article was published in the conference proceedings in 2002. The version printed in this thesis was published as an article in the British journal *Technoethic Arts* in 2003.⁸

While the articles can be read independently, they share and progressively deepen the recurrent theme of the extreme individual project, and the particular eccentricity of the architectural imagination at work in the mind of the obsessive dreambuilder. The investigation leads into elaborate experiments in physical space, employing and developing artificiality and virtuality, as the creative mind pursues the desire for parallel realities. The main representative of this kind of architectural activity appears in all three articles, the fictional character Baron des Esseintes in Joris-Karl Huysmans’ novel *À Rebours* (*Against Nature*) from 1884.

The first article is an investigation of the relation between the spatial inventions in this narrative virtual reality and the conditions and terms associated with digital virtual reality. As the study progresses, the second article focuses on the negotiation of artificiality through the layers of fiction in Des Esseintes’ projects and the transitional character of his space, operating as an interface between his physical environment and his imagined virtual worlds. The third article places the Baron in the company of three additional examples of obsessive dreambuilding, introducing the architect Sir John Soane’s *Museum*, the dadaist Kurt Schwitters’ *Merzbau* and the

⁵ *AD Architectural Design: Reflexive Architecture*, ed. Neil Spiller, London: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, Vol. 72, no 3, May 2002, pp. 14-19

⁶ *Nordic Journal of Architectural Research* (*Nordisk Arkitekturforskning*), 1/2003, pp. 47-53

⁷ “Interfaces of the Chimaera - Artificial Creation in Huysmans’ *Against Nature*” (and “Five Objects to represent the year 1884”), paper presented at a higher seminar at KTH School of Architecture 2002-01-24, opponent Dr Jane Rendell, Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London

⁸ *Technoethic Arts*, editor: Roy Ascott, vol. 1, no 1/2003, Bristol: Intellect Press, pp. 61-68

contemporary German artist Gregor Schneider's *Haus Ur*. The first and second article are separated by a short interlude, "Five Objects/Subjects to Represent the year 1884", a lateral and combinatorial overview of the technological, sociocultural and literary vicinity of the decadent Huysmans at the time of the publication of *À Rebours*, the year 1884. The second interlude is a short essay, "Fleurs d'Artifices", featuring the False Flower as a transgressive artefact between the natural and the artificial, borrowing the form of the *calligramme*.⁹

Website and Project Design

The project website is an experimental field for dynamic transformation of linear text into hypertext, but also a dramatised collection of atmospherical images and "voices", a way of reviving and dramatising the studied environments on a platform that is sporadically subject to transformation. The website is divided into two navigationally different parts, relating to the different research stages, along with directly accessible material such as papers and published articles. The index page leads into two different levels of the website. The "book" image is the entrance into a series of sixteen interactive illustrations, one for each chapter in *Against Nature*, an interpretational diagram of the time-spaces of the novel, and other texts concerning the first stage of the project including the first article in this thesis, "The Dying Dreamer – Looking into Huysmans' Virtual Worlds". The illustrations are "built" as digital collages, mixing elements of photography and reproductions of artwork, biographical and historical material. The other entrance is a figure behind a curtain, this is the "dreamguide" that leads to a hypertext version of the third article in this thesis, "The Obsessive Builder of Dreams". This part of the research project is presented through the interface of a hypertextual field of navigation: the digital dreamscape. The article was transformed into an interactive dialogue with a dreamguide, a transformative character who takes the selected role of any one of the artists and architects who

⁹ Calligramme: term combining the terms *calligraphie* and *idéogramme*, invented by Guillaume Apollinaire for his graphically congruent poems published in *Calligrammes* 1918

introduce their respective projects of obsessive dreambuilding. This transgressive realm brings the architectural experience into virtual space, while it illustrates its own perceptual and representational problems, passing from straight paperwork into non-linear explorative form.

- Willkommen aus der Kathedrale des Erotischen Elends!

For a split second I want to warn him that a pile of boards is falling onto him but the impulse fades away as I realise that the shapes are fixed to the ceiling. He jumps off the stool he was standing on and looks at me questioningly but friendly.

- Ah, English. Perhaps you would prefer to call zis the

Cathedral of Erotic Misery

. I have a lot of work to do so look around but please do not touch anything. I will be with you in a second.

Kurt leaves the room and I hear the rustle of a steel bucket and the racket of a pile of boards being shuffled about.

In the narrative hypertext play, the visitor becomes the digital dreamer, who in turn assumes a role in the narrative depending on who the dreamguide is. In the assigned role character, the dreamer has access to all knowledge about the space that is connected to his or her assigned character. The guide may also offer some help if the dreamer gets lost or confused.

I am walking down a staircase. I hear laughter and excited voices from some floor below. I try to navigate towards the sound but it is easier said than done. Finally, after turning many corners and turning completely around a couple of times, I find the group. Seven people, men and women, are gathered around a large bathtub. A man wearing white gloves looks up at me and smiles, so does the little group. Sir John Soane regains the attention of the group.

- You are just in time, I understand you got a little tour of your own there, that is the trick my dear friends, there are none and yet only shortcuts in these parlours, easy to get both lost and found. It is precisely the intention with this architecture of mine you see, in fact you could describe my home as a

portfolio

. Not to worry! Now we are all gathered. I could not keep myself from bringing you all down here immediately to show my latest acquisition. Where were we? Oh, yes, this particular dynasty of Seti the first produced the most exquisite pieces of stonework. Just look at the engravings... wonderful... remarkable...

The group examines the object closely, guided by the glove-clad hand of Sir John who is half improvising, half translating 'the Book of the Dead' into English while following the inscriptions on what I now realise is a sarcophagus.

The hypertext as a “container” of the paper does not change the substance of the text, but its organisation. The site is constructed without the usual hyperlinks, manifested in the text by underlined words or parts of the text, but with drop-down menus providing the navigational options. The menu navigation system makes it difficult to retrace your steps and unwind the narrative. The digital dreamer – the visitor – does not leave visible traces. In this way, navigation is complicated to such an extent that it resembles the disruptive orientation in the time-space of a dream. The visitor is urged forward by the dialogue form, without losing the narrative thread that ties the dreamer to the plot.

He looks quite young. He wears worker’s pants stained with plaster, his hair is sprinkled with saw-dust, the trainers he is wearing have almost entirely lost their original colour and shape. He holds a cordless powerdrill in one hand and holds the other one out to me. I shake his hand.

- Gregor, Gregor Schneider. Hello. Sorry I haven’t had time to change but you know, it’s really no idea to get out of the work clothes...

We laugh. Ice is broken. I put my hands in my pockets and look around with appreciation.

- So this is your place? I have read a lot about it. I have even been "here" before, I hear myself say casually. He smiles and suggests we go into the coffee-room to do the interview. He walks ahead and asks things like "trouble getting here?" and "tea or coffee?" and, when we reach the room and sit down he asks:

- What’s the angle for your article? I always want to know what preconceptions or impressions people have about my project before I talk about it. You don’t mind, do you?

- Not at all. I was thinking while driving here, that your art is like

chinese boxes

The hypertextual dreamscape is a mediation tool, placing the digital dreamer in the different environments of the obsessive dreambuilders, a meeting rendered in the narrative form of dialogues. The environment of the main case study, the novel *À Rebours*, is in this dreamscape transformed into interactive scenes. The page is unrestrictedly accessible but contains a very limited amount of external links: in this respect the website is a “dead end”. The website is a performative complement to the printed texts. The website present a “parallel architecture”, another way of reading, a different field to navigate, and not merely double as an online archive.

An old servant in a black waistcoat and thick felt slippers is leading me through a narrow hall. I wonder if I have turned deaf. The walls, as well as the ceiling and floor, are heavily padded. At the end of the muffled corridor, the servant pushes open a padded door, and sweeps aside a heavy curtain of orange paisley brocade on indigo dyed velvet. I enter an extravagantly lit room where exclusive materials glimmer in the same colours of the curtain. A man is standing with his back to us, inspecting some volumes in a section of a bookshelf. He turns around with a look on his face that is both sinister and polite. The servant announces my arrival to Baron Des Esseintes. Before I can deliver my excuses for my sudden appearance he speaks.

- Oh, delightful, I have so anticipated this delivery. Do come in. In fact, I was beginning to think you had misplaced my order.

I want to inform him that there must be a mistake and that I had in fact brought nothing, when the servant takes something from under my arm. To my surprise I had been carrying a rather large parcel, which is now placed on the desk.

The Baron unwraps the contents and holds up a .

The Craftsmanship of Other Dimensions

By the aid of the appointed guides, the hypertext adaptation explores the other-dimensional craftsmanship, the architecture of parallel realities. The investigation leads from the concept of spatial dreaming as a faculty of imagination, to the process of materialising imagination by negotiating the dreamed space and the available means of artificial production, using both material and virtual methods.

According to Freud, the dream is the fulfilment of a wish.¹⁰ The symbolic action in a dream is the virtual response to a conscious or unconscious desire that could, unrelieved, become an obsession. The dream is thus the interface between the products of the unconscious and the conscious mind. The use of the term *obsession* for this kind of activity is controversial, but not forced. Without suggesting that the creators are suffering from a pathological disorder of obsessive-compulsive character, the term obsession denotes the persistence of an idea - in this case the more or less controllable fixation with the architectural transformations of the domestic interior - and its subsequent unceasing activity:

¹⁰ Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams* (3rd Eng. ed. 1931 of *Die Traumdeutung*, 1900) London: Penguin Books 1991. See for example pp. 200-213, pp. 701-727

the construction of a physical space approximating imaginary or dreamed spaces, by means of constructing a fantasmagorical scenery or mind-expanding machinery. The three creators are chosen mainly because of the obsessive character of their projects, in that they have all consecrated half their lives to the realisation of their respective spatial ideas. They all represent projects where imagination is directly at work in physical space. The projects are distributed over a period of nearly two centuries, still they occupy sliding positions on the scale between writing, fine art, and architecture, defying cultural definitions no matter what period they appear in. It is not only the physical result of the building project that is of interest for this thesis, but all the mediums and methods employed in the process of externalising ideas of the mind.

The dream and its operative system – imagination – are key concepts to be investigated in relation to this project. The non-physical but phenomenological space of imagination and dreams are referred to as virtual worlds. Virtual reality is today most often associated with the digital environments created for games and simulations. The virtual reality of a computer game has the interactive response built, that is, coded into the environment, awaiting the correct behaviour of the player in order to release a new set of spatial possibilities to reach the next level. The virtual worlds of computer and video games were initially designed for interaction with one instance of imaginative interpretation, that is, responding to the desires and aims of a single operator, in a game environment designed towards its own conclusion, which coincides with the goal of the player. In this thesis I distinguish between narrative virtual space and digital virtual space, yet the definitions are often effectively combined, for example in MUDs and other types of online communities.¹¹ These text-based virtual environments are network platforms that contain written characters and spaces in social interaction with one another, with the collective goal to maintain and grow a sustainable complexity of the virtual world, in contrast to the goal-oriented non-networked computer game player. VR technology aims at enhancing the illusion of “being there” by improving the weak point of translation, the interface. The entertainment

¹¹ MUD: Multi-User Dungeons or Domains see for example Murray, Janet H. *Hamlet on the Holodeck- the Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT press 2000

industry, until recently occupied with non-interactive narrative media such as films, is redefining itself as a faculty of the “experience industry”, where the individual is constructed by the consumption of tourism, education, media, music, art, design and architecture. The interface is where the transmission takes place, where the audience/visitor/student/user/player/maker experience takes place. The project aims at exploring the nature of the *interface* between the desire or dream and architectural space, the metaphysical membrane that joins and separates virtual worlds from physical reality and what architectural possibilities it holds. The dreambuilder’s project is a hybrid structure, a bridge spanning different ontological modes, a combinatorial project of heterogeneous composition. In progressive fields of technology, biology and genetics, the *hybrid* and concepts of hybridization embodies the idea of innovative fusion of known technology (and the space in which it operates) with other elements of technology or, most importantly, with the *user* (as organic body and/or as inorganic representation or avatar). Our capacity and status as individual *users* of space, both physical and virtual, has been terminologically established during the last three decades of personal computer use, but its foundation lies in the project of externalization of the individual in the first half of the 19th century that led to the development of psychology as a discipline separate from philosophy and physiology at the end of the century.¹²

The contemporary “user” – the individual taking part in or controlling a virtual environment – is a crossbreed of the modern subject, the individual consumer, and the machine operator of the first industrial era. The contemporary obsession with the personal experience can be traced back to the development of the event industry, the invention to commercialise emotion itself, aroused by the desire for the exotic and unfamiliar, the original and the new, both mediated by the latest technique or encountered in genuine originality as grand exhibitions. The event is the next level from the artificial: the added value is integrated in the experience of the refined product and its realisation lies in the moment of consumption. A curious recognition of the similar attitude towards technology in

¹² Eriksson, Gunnar. *Västerlandets Idéhistoria 1800-1950*. Stockholm: Gidlunds 1983, p. 200

both the Victorian society and in today's technological culture, is the occurrence of a subgenre of "cyberpunk" literature, sometimes called "steam punk" or "steam clash", where the analogue Victorian era and the digital postmodern society meet and hybridise. In these tech-fi novels or comics, often staged in an everlasting British empire setting, a neo-Victorian culture and style has been revived or has persisted into a far future of nanotechnology and other post-digital science, and the strict bourgeois society is often parallel to a cyberpunk subculture.¹³ The dream of the future is founded upon the reality of the past. This study deals with the construction, perception, control and interpretation of virtual (dreamed, artificial, fictive) space, where architecture plays an active part of the fiction, or where fiction actively plays with architecture.

Scope of the Thesis

In Joris-Karl Huysmans' novel *Against Nature*, imagination is actively transforming virtual narrative space.¹⁴ The dreamed, poetic and material architecture of this key text, is experienced by "the creative work of reading"¹⁵, while my personal experience of the space of the non-fictional case studies varies. I have visited Sir John Soane's *Museum* on several occasions and have a good first hand experience of the space. I have entered exhibited parts of Schneider's *Haus Ur -Totes Haus Ur-* in the Royal Academy exhibition *Apocalypse*¹⁶ and also taken part of video work filmed by the artist in the *Haus Ur*, which has been helpful for the understanding of the character of the space. Kurt Schwitters' original *Merzbau* in Hannover exists only as historical documentation.¹⁷ The limited photographic

¹³ See for example Stephenson, Neal: *Diamond Age*, New York: Bantam Spectra 1995

¹⁴ Joris-Karl Huysmans (1848-1907), symbolist French author of Flemish origin, started his writing career as a devoted naturalist in the entourage of Zola. His most important writing was *À Rebours*, called the "breviary of decadence", followed by *La-Bas*, an autobiographical experiment in satanism. Huysmans ended his days as a catholic monk.

¹⁵ Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press 1994 (1958), p 21

¹⁶ *Apocalypse - Beauty and horror in contemporary art*, exposition 2000-09-23 until 2000-12-15 *Royal Academy of the Arts*, London, UK

¹⁷ The Hannover *Merzbau*, developed 1923-37, was destroyed in an allied bombing raid in 1943, and the work was restarted in exile in Norway 1938-40. The last version is called *Merzbarn* is the

material and biographical accounts makes the work available through representations, offering a mythological aura to its fictive state of existence.

The thesis is at this stage influenced by both historical and fictional figures as examples of obsessive dreambuilders. Huysmans' fictional character, Baron des Esseintes, is the most closely analysed creator, first as an antecedent of the problems related to the creation of digital virtual space (first chapter), then as a major negotiator of artificiality, finally presented in the company of Sir John Soane, Kurt Schwitters and Gregor Schneider (third chapter). This study does however not attempt to present these projects in biographical or historical detail. As creators of an extreme kind of space, the subjects help to identify the questions of individual architectural projects fuelled by spatial imagination. Soane, Schwitters and Schneider are not given the same space as the fictive character of des Esseintes.

One of the central interests of the late 19th century was the powerful possibilities of the artificial. Synthetic materials and natural imitations were introduced, machines and automatic devices facilitated everyday life. The second article in this thesis, "The Operative Fields of the Artificial", explores the concept of the artificial in Huysmans' *Against Nature*. Des Esseintes' interiors are fitted with artificial creations that make up the interface of the mansion. These artefacts are discussed along with the theory of Herbert A. Simon, author of *The Sciences of the Artificial*.¹⁸ In this text, I try to bring together the artificial creations in Huysmans, the principles of the artificial of Simon and the structural hermeneutic models of Paul Ricoeur. There is an interesting likeness of terms between Ricoeur's and Simon's theories. Both depend on general concepts of hierarchy, memory, expectation and imitation. Most importantly, both Ricoeur and Simon deal with the "internal configuration of a work" related to the "external refiguration of a life", to use Ricoeur's words. Simon's descriptions of the artificial are discussed together with scenes from *Against Nature* in order to cross-fertilize the terminology and ideas in both texts. According to Simon, the artificial

only preserved Merzbau project, built 1947-48, located originally in Ambleside, Lake District, UK, moved in 1965 to the grounds of Hatton Gallery, Newcastle, UK

¹⁸ Simon, Herbert A. *The Sciences of the Artificial*, (2nd edition 1969), Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1981

is the interface between an inner and outer environment governed by their respective aims, but the artificial is also the *interface* between man and nature.

The artificial was first separated from the natural in Greek philosophy: by employing technical knowledge (techné), the idea of purposefulness (agathós), and the beautiful (kalós), an artificial, manmade product (poiesis) is created. A general definition of the term “artificial” in today’s material existence, as “anything that is not an unrefined product of nature” is not helpful. Architecture is by definition a discipline producing artifice. The dream is a pure artefact: an environment created entirely in the mind of a single individual. Creative imagination and dreams are realised in the shape of artificial products. Desire is a consequence of imagination rather than reason. The artifice responds to a desire more than to a rational necessity. In the 19th century, the role of the artificial was more integrated in society: craftsmen as differentiated as the industrial worker and the artist were involved in the same process of negotiating nature. In this thesis, the most important notion of artificial creation is the creation of mediating devices, the artificial object or scene, linking the world of ideas and the world of sensory experience. The highest form of artifice is from the point of view of this thesis, a means of sensorial enhancement, amplifier of imagination. An artificial environment does not contrast “real” life, on the contrary it overlaps or links parallel realities, it may for example be entirely contained in the artifice called the computer, a device which might in turn be placed in a room decorated as a grotto. One of the most interesting aspects of artifice is its role as interface, as a device connecting desire and deed. The user is as artificial as the artefacts refined through her intervention, because the user is part of the artificial system: we construct our own lives to some extent. The main purpose of bringing Simon’s theory into the study is to explore the idea of the mansion (the artificial environment and its artefacts) as an interface between the baron and the world.

The Sciences of the Artificial was published in 1969, the same year as Marshall McLuhan’s *Gutenberg Galaxy*. While McLuhan focused on the social impact of the introduction of a new system of information technology, Simon focused on the instrumental organisation of the same system, in an effort to popularise complex information processing. Even though Simon’s theory applies to economic and

social systems as well as any other complex system, the reference has expired itself. As computer technology developed interfaces following Simon's theories, the knowledge of how the system works made itself redundant as the interface allowed purposeful interaction for the user with no interest in the system behind the operative task. Meanwhile the notion of purposeful communication and the need for meaningful content remained intact. Simon used the term "artificial" to denote a system that, in design and behaviour, is adapted to an environment for a goal-oriented purpose. This instrumental theory is, in the second article, applied to the architecture created by the Baron: the mansion becomes the system designed for the purpose of projecting its user (the inhabitant) into imaginative spaces (dreams, reveries, illusions) by means of distributed interfaces (instruments, mechanisms, artefacts). The hermeneutic instances further complexify this system by distributing it to the next level of interaction where the text itself becomes the artificial, or the system, adapted to the situation of reading, with the purpose of placing the reader in the system.

The pursuit and pathos of artificial worlds inevitably evoke the discussion of drug-induced reality. Lord Byron's *The Dream* provides three laws of artistic dreaming: First, the dream reveals reality. Second, the dream can form and affect waking life. Third, the dream process is parallel in structure to the processes of poetic creation.¹⁹ In order to gain access to this important mode of inspiration, some poets experimented with opiates and haschisch that stimulate oneiric activity. Opium-induced dreams would give instant access to the deepest intuition and open the floodgates of poetic inspiration. However, both Baudelaire and Poe, as reliable witnesses, maintain that there are no shortcuts to artistic creation. In *Les Paradis Artificiels*, Baudelaire uses the metaphor of the mirror: the drugs are like a mirror that enlarges but never distorts, by which he denies that drugs would bring new ideas to the dreamer, since they operate only on what thoughts are already in the mind of the creator.

The search entry "artificial worlds" returns almost exclusively hits related to different types of simulation research, often so called GAs, or genetic algorithms: a model world is set up and a population of discrete data is introduced in order to

observe and quantify aggregate behaviors and macroeconomic phenomena in the dynamic system.²⁰ This virtual environment can host artificial intelligence as simple as feeding and procreating 8-bit creatures, or simulate complex observable data used for storm forecasts or stock market analysis. These types of artificial worlds fall outside this study, but not due to their seemingly limited architectural interest. On the contrary, the study of genetic algorithms as generators of space and as test ground for complex structures and of three-dimensional dynamic flows, is of great interest to architecture but constitute an entirely different research approach. The general term “virtual reality” is commonly synonymous with the encoded space of computer games, and even more generalised to encompass the world wide web of the internet. To this study, virtual reality include the mentioned faculties of digital space, along with all non-physical, imaginative or narrative instances of space, a parallel reality fully immersive in mind, less by the body. The thesis project does not yet include a closer study of a digital virtual world, networked or separate, or any uniquely digital representational worlds, except for the webpage that is constructed in parallel to the text. While the GA’s are evolutionary algorithms that simulate synthetic populations of more or less intelligent particles, MUDs and similar gaming environments and online communities serve as parallel worlds, permanent and permutable just like any living society, virtual in form but real in communication. These environments are graphically limited for the sake of economic transfer rate, and the citizen (player/actor) lives a textbased life as an avatar. The thesis has not engaged in this conversational type of virtual reality and concentrates on the private hallucinatory utopias on the threshold of materialisation.

Some of the emerging building types of early modernity, for instance the diorama, the tivoli and later cinemas, the rise of tourism and the subsequent interest in the department store and the great exhibitions, all respond to the desire of a first-hand experience, aiming directly at exciting the senses and stimulating imagination, an ambition shared by the “dreambuildings” in this thesis. Their

¹⁹ *The Dream* (1816), Lord Byron. *Selected Poems*. Boston, Massachusetts: Elibron Classics 2000

²⁰ See for example: Mitchell, Melanie. *An Introduction to Genetic Algorithms*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press 1996

relevance to this thesis is limited to a few appearances as “Five Objects to Represent the Year 1884”, since the dreambuilders’ projects presented here have little to do with the collective experience and the social scene.

Another formal justification is necessary to avoid confusion about this type of building activity. This research project is not a study of what is called outsider art or *art brut*, where many obsessive builders can be found. The dreambuilders in this thesis are a representative few of many fictive, real or historical creators of fictive, real or historical architecture. The only example from the array of famous *art brut* building projects that is included in this text is Mary Winchester’s house in California (presented briefly as one “Subject to Represent the Year 1884” in the first interlude). As the term implies, the outsider artist is judged and documented from the point of view of an academic, institutional discourse. Where documented, the evaluation of these artists is either marked by the effort to reconstitute the artist as a natural (in the sense of unspoiled) creative genius, and/or reduce the artist’s project to a freak demonstration of kitch. Whatever instigation or psychological inclinations the individual may have to begin a committed building or decorating project, the activity is separated from the immediate needs (survival or comfort) of the builder, the building process is just something that the person feels obliged to engage in. However interesting these projects may be, either to an art critic, a psychoanalyst or an architect, the projects are often presented as the product of an unstable mind, fuelling the myth of the unspoiled, infantile creativity of the outsider artist. The cultural connotations of madness or insanity have marked these projects with a stigma of irredeemable “otherness” from an academic point of view, a discussion that intercepts the study of these artists and objects. The outsider artist’s method could in many ways be similar to the artists described in this text. The chosen examples differ from outsider artists in being part of the cultural establishment of their own time. Thus an obsessive building project does not qualify automatically for this study. However, an unconfirmed quote by facteur Ferdinand Cheval should be mentioned, as he is said to have answered a journalist asking him about the main purpose of his ever-growing one-man construction project *le Palais Idéal*, that he was mainly building the palace in order to have somewhere to keep the tools used while working on it.

The Dandy - Inventing the Individual

At the core of these projects lies an exceptional form of individuality. The space in question is often an interior, a private utopia created to please one mind only, in contrast to architecture as a collective dream. A private utopia is a contradiction in terms. Utopia is, like the dreambuilder's project, a construct of imagination, a parallel world, but instead of supporting eccentricity and individuality, it is saturated with idealistic plans and dreams of homogenous social structures. This paradox illustrates the difference between the dreambuilder's project and a utopian vision: more often than not, utopia is a totalitarian community suppressing individual expressions by introducing uniformed complacency to a strictly regulated existence. For the dandy, the individual exclusivity replaces the utopian community. Since, in the words of Elisabeth Grosz, "there are no utopian spaces except in the imagination", imagination itself has to materialise to achieve architectural perfection.²¹ The individual project relies, of course, on the invention of individuality. The modern concept of individualism can be traced back to romanticism, when focus shifted from the neo-classicist idealism to the emotional personality. With the individual at the central motif of art and fiction, with the individual project of Napoléon Bonaparte as a personification of power and politics, the powerful inner experience - imagination, inspiration and intuition-dominated the romantic self.²² All faculties and accounts of individual emotions were popular - romantic love, dreams, desire- down the entire scale into the dark side of romanticism - morbid obsessions, nightmares, insanity, monsters, as in the gothic novel. In the era of the artistic declaration of independence and devotion to itself, *l'art pour l'art* peaked with the individual project of making existence itself a work of art.²³ Baudelaire identified this as the invention of *lifestyle*: the individual

²¹ Grosz, Elisabeth. *Architecture from the Outside - Essays on Virtual and Real Space*. Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England: MIT Press 2001, p. 20

²² See for example Richardson, Joanna: *La vie Parisienne*, New York: Viking Press, 1971

²³ Coined by the French philosopher Victor Cousin, 1818: "Il faut de la religion pour la religion, de la morale pour la morale, de l'art pour l'art." The independence of art was first declared by early Romantics, and revived in the movement of aestheticism toward the end of the 19th century.

materialises his dream with fashion, attributes, decoration but he also builds an identity by designing his habits and manners, and form an identity marked by originality and finesse. Edmond de Goncourt published *La Maison d'un artiste* in 1881, thus preceding *À Rebours* with the idea of writing an entire novel about architectural space framing a lifestyle. The descriptions of the interior style, textures, colours and objects correspond to a style catalogue, presenting the home-owner/artist indirectly, via the portrait of his domestic surroundings.²⁴ In contrast with social appearance as an artform, was the idea of artistic isolation, symbolised by the ivory tower: living in artistic seclusion instead of living as a work of art. Consumption was, in the wake of the first industrialisation, differentiated into mass consumption and elite consumption.²⁵ The individual manifests himself by consumption, although in the case of the aesthetic project of the dandy, by an elitist consumption, independently from what is dictated by the popular or by fashion.²⁶ Des Esseintes' character embodies this resentment of banality. He demands total control of his artificial world, why he escapes from a dissolving urbanity of commercialism, profit and collectivism, into the spatial experiment of maximised artificiality. His project needs a place of its own, a world devoid of morality, independent of society, where he can enjoy his luxury in sublime exclusion. However, the instance of consumption and the interaction with his servants reveal the integration of support systems, the crack in the perfect shell. The individual elite consumer materialises himself in space, but in *Against Nature*, Des Esseintes pays for his independence by finally being consumed by space.

In the first half of the 19th century, the *bohème* epitomised the individual project, in his poetic exposure and expression. The *bohème* later transformed into the *dandy*, the representative of pure aesthetism, impersonated in men of arts and letters such as Oscar Wilde and Georges "Beau" Brummell, synthesising their art and their lives. Charles Baudelaire, Théophile Gautier and Barbey D'Aurevilly became

²⁴ Goncourt, Edmond de. *La maison d'un artiste*. Nouvelle éd. Paris: G. Charpentier 1881

²⁵ Williams, Rosalind H. *Dream Worlds – Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press 1982, pp. 58-106

²⁶ Ibid, pp. 107-153

the biographers of the embodied modernity of the dandy and the *l'art pour l'art* phenomena. The dandy is the self-chosen “other”, accomplishing his person under the eyes of an audience: in this sense confusing his gender, sharing the looks of other men with women, but confident in the judgement situation they have created. His being is without origin, and without the mythology of history. In his self-made and continuously self-inventing character he is mirroring and creating himself in the eye of beholder.

Fig. 2 Comte Robert de Montesquiou posing as John the Baptist's head on a plate. Photographer: Unknown. Location: château de Charnizay 1885. Reproduced from the exhibition catalogue *Robert de Montesquiou ou l'art de paraître* of the exhibition with the same name at Musée d'Orsay from October 1999 to January 2000. (Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1999)

One of the most outstanding individuals of *La Belle Époque*²⁷ was comte Robert de Montesquiou-Fezensac (1855-1921), the decadent aristocrat whose queer appearance inspired Marcel Proust (1871-1922) in his creation of Baron de Charlus in *À la recherche du temps perdu*.²⁸ Stéphane Mallarmé, friend of Proust and of Huysmans, encountered Montesquiou at a visit to Proust. He passed the word about his encounter with the extravagant style icon, poet, essayist and interior

²⁷ The period from the 1880's until the outbreak of the first world war

²⁸ Proust, Marcel. *À la recherche du temps perdu*. (1913-1922) 4 vols: Ed. Tadié, Jean-Yves. Paris: collection Pléiade, Gallimard, 1987-1989

decorator, to Huysmans who in turn secured an invitation to meet Montesquiou in person. This man did not pass unnoticed: dressed in a white velvet suit with violets at the neck instead of a cravate, or at times simply dressed to match the weather of the day in colour, he became a living legend of style whose influence spread to Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley in England.²⁹ The same themed aesthetics marked his artful interiors: his house *Palais Rose* in Neuilly featured a “snow room” complete with a sledge, a polar bear rug and crystal frost décor. A more traditional exotism inspired his Paris apartment, called the *Cave of Ali Baba*, with a bed designed as a black Chinese dragon.³⁰ Comte Montesquiou was a great admirer of the eccentric König Ludwig II of Bavaria, the “Dream King” who initiated some of the most extravagant building projects of the century in the form of three unfinished fantasy castles.³¹ Huysmans was in awe and modelled his character Baron des Esseintes after Montesquiou, much to the dislike of the count himself. It was too easy to guess from whom Huysmans got the idea of giving Des Esseintes a gilt tortoise as an ornamental pet, and the display cases of the count’s rainbow-arranged ties and socks was well renowned in high society.

When Roland Barthes declared *the death of the author* in the essay from 1977 with the same title, he traced the concept of the individual (the author as a person) to the notion of personal prestige originating in English empiricism and French rationalism, and culminating as an expression of capitalism. In modernism, the mediator (performative narrator) gave way to the author (originality and genius), creating a central subject, whose person is prior to the work, a concept that was reinforced by literary critics. Barthes identifies Mallarmé as the first French writer who consciously played down his role as an author in order to restore language as the narrative voice, a separation that was further complicated by Proust who blurred the boundaries between the author, the meta-authorship and their characters. (A later example is the surrealist automatic writing, where the text is an open source code operated on by multiple authors.)

²⁹ Aubrey Beardsley: British *fin de siècle* artist, graphic designer and draughtsman (1872-1898)

³⁰ Williams, Rosalind H. *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press 1982

³¹ Ludwig II (1845-1886), builder of the medieval fairy-tale styled *Neuschwanstein* castle, the rococo villa *Linderhof* and the Versailles copy in *Herrenchiemsee*.

Barthes inverts the common concept of the author as “the past of his own book”. He suggests that Proust “by a radical reversal” lives his life the way he wants his story to progress, not merely recording events in his life and making these a part of the narrative. Proust would essentially have modelled his life after his novel. In this scheme, Montesquiou, “in his anecdotal, historical reality” does not imitate Baron de Charlus but is, according to Barthes, as a fragment of Proust’s non-fictional life becoming the Charlus he is said to antecede. Montesquiou is reduced to the copy of his fictive counterpart.

Fig. 3 *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*
Francisco de Goya (1799), plate 43,
Los Caprichos (etching with aquatint)

The Doppelgänger – Dividing the Indivisible in Architectural Fiction

The word *individual* means literally *indivisible*: a unity, inseparable in its parts. A popular subject of the gothic novel was the phenomena of the *doppelgänger*, a figure that tragically contained two souls in one body, or one soul torn between two bodies. While dreaming, we can experience this duplication of the body - the

sleeper and the dreamer are one and the same person acting simultaneously in different spaces. A significant convergence of desire and the double occurs in a scene in *À Rebours* where the Baron enjoys the company of his ventriloquist mistress. By changing her voice and displace it to the other side of the door, she performs the role of the deceived husband. In this way she is able, not only to duplicate her character, but to transgress gender and relocate her multiple characters around the room.

The image of the double demonstrated the agency of the unconscious before it was defined as a psychological term. Living in desire without fulfilment creates monsters. The most acute manifestation of “creating the individual” coincides with the most extreme artificial creation: the human replica. With the creation of the individual came the responsibility for the creation. Lesson learned from darkest romanticism where the created, the artificial replica of man, consisting of multiple bodies, destroys its creator in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein (or, the modern Prometheus)*, 1818). The fear of the monster is only surpassed of the fear of becoming one. The Double in this case is no different from the Other: a mirror image distorted by fear. Space can become a doppelgänger too, or have a human double in the form of a manifested soul. In Victor Hugo’s novel *Notre Dame de Paris* (1831), the cathedral is embodied in Quasimodo, who considers the gargoyles on the roof as his family. The cathedral is not merely his home, he is indivisible from the monstrous building.

In the last article of this thesis, Gregor Schneider’s *Haus Ur*: an architectural doppelgänger project, is presented as a dreambuilding project doubling as exhibited art. The artist’s home is the original structure that is perpetually remodelled and severed of its parts, exhibited as *Totes Haus Ur*: dead (original) house. The “Ur” of *Haus Ur* can be read as prefix for “original”, or be short for the address of the work: Unterhaydener Strasse, Rheydt. Other suggestions are “Umbauter Raum” (rebuilt room) and “Unsichtbarer Raum” (invisible room). The artist claims that he has a lodger named Hannelore Reuen, who could be a virtual double of the artist himself. According to Schneider, Ms Reuen is an elderly woman who lives in the bottom floor apartment in *Haus Ur*, without a

telephone, receives no visitors. She walks around the house at night, listens to esoteric music and suffers from delusions of sexual persecution.³²

Sir Horace Walpole invented the *Gothic novel* when he fell asleep while obsessively reworking his Twickenham mansion *Strawberry Hill* in neo-gothic style.³³ The atmosphere of his hobby project entered into a nightmare, in which he saw a “*gigantic hand in armour*” on the banister of a great staircase.³⁴ His dream was replicated from the architecture, and the story of *The Castle of Otranto* was to grow from the dream, a hybrid of narration and building.

Following in the Gothic genre, Edgar Allan Poe expresses the crisis of the individual described through the decay of the house in *The Fall of the House of Usher*. The horror of the duplicated is combined with the architecture to an extreme: the individual fearing a permanent loss of the self is driven to a violent and permanent inscription in space. The story of the extremely isolated and sickly artist Roderick Usher include his identical twin sister. The uncanny house is the *Palace of Art* that consumes its inhabitants. The twins are imprisoned in an incestuous relationship, not just with each other but with the house itself, the inhabitants and the architecture is two materialisations of the same entity: they are of the same fabric, sharing a “physique of grey walls”. Roderick “suffered much from a morbid acuteness of the senses...”³⁵, a description that is nearly identical to Huysmans’ portrait of des Esseintes who becomes a literary twin brother, a victim of aestheticism, an anti-social eccentric. The last sigh of the inhabitant is externalised as a storm wind that shatters the last standing pieces of the building.

In Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), the story unfolds about the slow corruption of the protagonist, doubled into an ageing image replica and a forever young but morally decaying soul. The doppelgänger portrait is hidden in the attic, where, under a cloth, the traits of the once beautiful face of Dorian become twisted and vile for every sin the original commits. Wilde introduces

³² Exhibition catalogue: Gregor Schneider at MAM- Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 28 May -11 October 1998. Paris Musées MAMVP – ARC 1998

³³ Iddon, John. *Horace Walpole’s Strawberry Hill- a history and a guide*. Richmond: St.Mary’s University College press 1996

³⁴ Walpole, Horace (1717-1797). *The Castle of Otranto - A Gothic Story* (1764). Oxford University Press 1998

³⁵ Poe, E. A. *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings*. London: Penguin 1986, p. 143

Huysmans' *À Rebours* into the narrative: although the book remains unnamed in the novel, there is no doubt about the nature of the reading that the young Gray devours and soon outlives.³⁶ This story too is an example of symbolic destruction of the artifice and the creators involved: the painter of the portrait, the fictive inspirator (in the *gestalt* of Des Esseintes), and the monster himself, a suicidal convergence of replica and original, the synchronised annihilation of man and his avatar.

The romantics introduced the unknown, the supernatural and the exotic into their literature, themes that by the end of the 19th century converged and developed into science fiction. The late Victorian era showed great passion for eclecticism, freaks and abnormality, spiritualism, the fantastic and the sensational. The science fiction novel reflected the new industrial society, merging technology with the utopian dream as well as the nightmare. The *cyborg* appeared in science fiction, mankind artificially enhanced and merged with technology. The cybernetic organism, derived from the Greek *kybernan* (pilot, to steer), has embedded in its existence the problem of control. When our doubles become threatening in quantity or in quality, we exercise the inherent rights of the "original": we have to "recall" the double, as in *Bladerunner* where the existential energy of the doppelgänger turns out to be surprisingly strong, despite an inbuilt autotermination of the system.³⁷ Facing the double in the moment of his premature death, the doppelgänger says "if you could only see what I have seen with your eyes." The sublime experience itself becomes difficult to assign exclusively to the human soul. Science fiction split and combine the exterior, not to say extra-terrestrial, project of colonisation of space, and the implosive domain, probing the essence of humanity and splicing the flesh with technology, letting the doppelgänger and the hybrid sketch the manipulated boundaries of the human psyche and sensory body.³⁸

³⁶ Wilde, Oscar: *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (first ed. 1891) Penguin, London 1994, p. 145

³⁷ *Bladerunner*: dir. by Ridley Scott (1982), based on a Philip K. Dick novel: *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968)

³⁸ See for example: Haraway, Donna. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London Routledge 1991

The dreamer is an immobile prisoner in boundless in space and time. While dreaming, the body shuts down the nervous motor system so that the dreamer is safe in the parallel world of the dream, and do not attempt to act out the dream in the world where the body is asleep.³⁹ This control measure is necessary for the safety of the body as container, and for the preservation of the dream itself: to prevent any involuntary loss of the temporality of the parallel fiction by interrupting the necessary stage of the sleep cycle. The body is the event horizon or mediator between the “single-serving” world, accustomed to one individual only, and the shared experience of physical reality. When dreaming, we are duplicated into an active virtual avatar and a suppressed control system of a body sleeping. The dreamer produces an uncontrollable imagery, while the “operative system” of the sleeper is shutting down the body to prevent it from controlling the fictive imagery. While the monstrous body is paralysed, reason is fully capable, while sleeping, of being productive.

The Dying Dreamer - Behind the Title

The title of the thesis, “The Dying Dreamer - Architecture of Parallel Realities”, suggests a doomed subject engaged in, or possibly victimised by, some immersive activity in a virtual or imagined space. The frail character of the *dreamer* and the dramatic predetermination of *dying* demand an explanation. While representing the utmost individual space, unattainable for anyone outside the mind of the dreamer herself, the *dream* is one of the most analysed, mythologised and generalised virtual products of the human mind, regarded as a powerful source of knowledge of the self, of access to memory and of premonitions of the future. The dream is the first virtual world that mankind has access to, and it is designed and experienced uniquely by one individual.

When dreaming, we are all architects. But the spaces created in the dream can never be shared, they are the property of a single mind, their creator’s, like

³⁹ See for example: Hobson, Allan. *Dreaming: an Introduction to the Science of Sleep*. Oxford University Press 2002

the memory theatre or the chambers of thoughts. The dream is the main entrance to the unconscious, yet even Freud was banned at the door to this realm. A dream has to be clad in words or images to become visible. The dream is mediated in words by the patient to the psychoanalyst, who in turn has to base the decoding analysis on second-hand knowledge. The dream is fiction operated on by science.

Embedded in the title of this dissertation is the dreamer, suspended in the parallel reality of a dream. Also emphasised by the title is the transgressive character of the process. If dying simply means leaving one's body behind in one dimension while entering or pursuing a parallel existence in another, the dying dreamer in this case is either leaving the physical body behind in physical reality, or, while in the dream beginning the process of awakening, leaving the dream-body behind. The dream depends for its production on desire and for its interpretation on memory. The environment of the dreamer is sleep. The physical and mental condition of sleep is the foundation for the existence of the worlds of the dream. But there are also lucid dreams, in which a hybrid space enters the equation. Could we then say that sleep and consciousness could be regarded as spaces, not as states: an environment and not a condition? Could we reversely say that any parallel reality, for example digital virtual reality, is a condition and not an environment? If we are submerged, with all our senses, in a parallel reality, the awakening is the simultaneous process of leaving two worlds at the same time: leaving the environment of sleep, and leaving the auto-narrative of the dream. In terms of methodology, the dream is illustrating a transgressive problem: it presents an opportunity to bring information/imagery back from immaterial space, a transgressive point, a threshold. The dreamer is both spectator, director and author of the dream.

To Barthes, the death of the author is immanent in the modern project. How does this rhetorical death relate to the "dying dreamer" of this project? The dreamer dies the death of the space created in the dream. The dream architecture vanishes when the sleeper wakens, which is the moment of the death of the dreamer. The disappearance of the individual realm is permanent. The dreambuilder, on the other hand, is engaged in the eternal construction of temporal units. It differs from the sleeping dream in being physically performed

and in invading living space. The result may or may not represent the unconscious mind of the architect, nor need it be expressed in so many words as the structure itself. The materialised dream space is a performance of the codes of building, while seemingly defying all codes. The project has already lost its origin among the layers by which it is constructed. There is already a diluted authorship, no text is written, but a space is encoded while lived in. Des Esseintes is consumed by the space his own dreams produced. The dying dreamer wakes up to a decaying body. The custom-fitted imaginary space has only one subject, the dreamer, who is an author without reader. In this way the death of the dreamer is immanent.

The title “Dying Dreamer” is taken from a passage in Havelock Ellis’ introduction to Huysmans’ *À Rebours*. The dying dreamer in this text was neither Des Esseintes nor Huysmans, but Villiers de l’Isle-Adam, at whose death-bed Huysmans was assisting as a close friend. Ellis remarks that Huysmans had been more fortunate than Villiers de l’Isle-Adam, “who had wandered so far into the world of dreams that he lost touch with the external world and ceased to distinguish them clearly.”⁴⁰

Theoretical Framework

The thesis probes different fields of research in order to span the historical, poetic, metaphysical and methodological faculties of dreaming space and building from imagination. I am using theoretical tools from the phenomenology of Gaston Bachelard and the metaphysics of Henri Bergson to study the modes of interaction and translation between the platforms of imagination (located in the individual subject) and space (the *objective* reality). The problem of actualising imagination is in this way approached by trying to detect its translation points. Dreams are shaped by our transactions with space. Bergson describes the nature of these transactions by employing images of movement and time. Reflexively,

⁴⁰ Ellis, Havelock quoted from the essay “Affirmations”, published in 1891 by Walter Scott. A version of this essay was later used as an introduction to the 1922 English translation of Huysmans *À Rebours: Against the Grain*.

space configures our dreams and triggers our creative imagination. Bachelard's phenomenology of imagination investigates the nature of this flow by studying images created in poetry. The virtual could be a description of the image itself, or describe the activity of its creation. The hermeneutics of Ricoeur is employed in this thesis to study the system of interfaces between the mediative instances in the act of virtual creation in narrative form. Walter Benjamin proposed that the true method of actualising things in space is to imagine the thing in our space, not ourselves in their space.⁴¹ To Bergson, things are not in space, space is in things. Bachelard suggests generously that when we dream, we are phenomenologists without realising it.⁴²

Rather than studying the mental faculties of dreams and imagination, even obsession from the point of view of psychoanalysis, this study focus on the phenomenology of dreams in relation to matter, where the work of Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962) is influential. This French philosopher of science started a career as a mathematician and literature theorist, progressing into the field of phenomenology of imagination and literature, a field that encompasses about a third of his publications, starting in 1938. Bachelard manages in his systematic psychological studies, to relate psychoanalysis and aesthetics to the natural elements, accounted for in five volumes, concluding with *The Poetics of Space*. He introduces the term *topoanalysis* to the recollection of the oneiric architecture: the house is the topoanalytical instrument and the *rêverie* is its structural method: "I must show that the house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind. The binding principle in this integration is the daydream."⁴³ Bachelard provides a terminology and methodology of description of the abstract workings of imagination on physical reality. To Bachelard, poetics is a force of imagination that exercise direct influence on matter, which in turn provides stuff for dreaming. The chain of events begin with space calling for action, and before action, the imagination is at

⁴¹ Benjamin, Walter. *Paris 1800-talets huvudstad. Passagearbetet.*, 3 vol. Utgivare: Rolf Tiedemann, ed. Ulf Peter Hallberg. Stockholm/Stehag: Symposion Bokförlag 1990-1992, p. 194

⁴² Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press 1994 (1958), p. 103

⁴³ Ibid, p. 6

work.⁴⁴ Working his way through the elements, as manifested in poetry, Bachelard progressed from his vast scholarship of natural sciences to the phenomenology of imagination. Thanks to the poetic imagination, which draws on archetypes in the unconscious and from the archives of textures, scents, atmospheres, rhymes, rhythms stored in the dreaming mind, the written word is capable of reproducing images of matter, in the creative process of writing and reading. To Bachelard, the dreamer is the creator of an inner imagery, but he puts the dreamer under the influence of the dreamt images. The poetic image that he describes is not a final image but an image in constant making, a labour of imagination. In *Earth and Reveries of Will*, Bachelard finds examples of *material poetics* (B's italics) in a dry extraterrestrial landscape described in Huysmans' novel *En Rade*, a tormented scene further elaborated in the echoing of metallic textures exemplified by quotes from *À Rebours*.⁴⁵ Bachelard credits Huysmans for bringing his images to their utmost limits: the coldness of his constructions are greatly appreciated by Bachelard for their hard material poetics, what he calls a teratology of substances.⁴⁶ In relation to the analysis of Huysmans' texts, Bachelard differentiates between the senses and claim that each sense has its own dreams.⁴⁷ Bachelard suggests from his standpoint within a philosophy of literature and poetry, a hermeneutic approach to both architecture and text: we write a room, read a room or even read the house.⁴⁸

The individual project as understood through Bachelard, is the manipulation of matter guided by the dynamic imagination. On the actualisation of the dream – that is building the house – he offers a slight reservation: If the dreams are realised, they no longer belong in the domain of poetic studies, but in that of the psychology of projects.⁴⁹ In many ways, the “intoxication of inverting daydreams and reality”⁵⁰ applies perfectly to the existence of Des Esseintes who eventually has to choose between a life of the mind and the physical reality of his estranged

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 12

⁴⁵ Bachelard, Gaston. *Jorden och viljans drömmarier*. Lund: Skarabé (*La terre et les rêveries de la volonté*, 1947), p. 211

⁴⁶ Ibid, pp. 213-219

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 210

⁴⁸ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 14

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 61

body. Bachelard assigns to the particular image of the isolated house the status of an instrument with which to confront the cosmos.⁵¹ Similarly his words from the chapter on shells in *Poetics of Space* could well be used to describe the nature of obsession at work in the boundless projects of Schwitters' *Merzbau* and Schneider's *Haus Ur*, in which he recognizes the dreamer's inability to believe that the work is finished when the walls are built. For these dreams, he observes, the shell is alive.⁵² Bachelard claims that we must lose our earthly Paradise in order actually to live in it, to experience it in the reality of its images, suggesting that it is in the *pure memory*, a term borrowed from Henri Bergson, that dreams are best constructed using memory as matter.⁵³

The work of the French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941) include some of the most influential modern theories of the mind and virtuality in works like *Matter and Memory*, *The Creative Evolution* and his first major work, *Time and Free Will*. Bergson introduces intuition as a mode of reflection, a method of producing a dynamic knowledge of reality from the perception and experience of its constant flows. The intuitive thinking reveal reality flows as duration, where conceptual thinking tend to disrupt the pure duration which is real time, thus it transcends the limits imposed by realism and idealism. Bergson's thinking appeared as a "philosophie nouvelle" by the turn of the last century, anticipating many of the metaphysical questions, confirmed by Gilles Deleuze and others who maintain his reasoning under the term Bergsonisme.

Space, according to Bergson, does not precede reality. Reality, expressed as duration and extension, does not fill the gap of space. Space, he argues, does not belong to a privileged group of sensations but exists in relation to the individuated body as the point of perception of matter, which is the aggregate of images that the body may act upon.⁵⁴ Bergson holds that space is also a condition for our ability of abstraction. Memories and dreams are virtual images specific to the

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 34

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 47

⁵² Ibid, p. 115

⁵³ Ibid, p. 33

⁵⁴ Bergson, Henri. *Matter and Memory* (*Matière et Mémoire*, 1896). Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: MIT press 1999, p. 216

mental sphere. The virtual consists of itself and itself actualised, as a psychological existence of the mind. Bergson introduces into the philosophical context, at the turn of the last century, terms like fluctuation and intensity by dissolving dichotomies like quantity and quality, succession and simultaneity, duration and spatiality.

In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson investigates the virtual and the real and the position of the body among these images, rejecting both idealism and realism (mechanists and dynamists) in his observations of the external world. Matter, in Bergson's view, is an aggregate of "images". By "image" he means a certain existence which is more than that which the idealist calls a *representation*, but less than that which the realist calls a *thing*.⁵⁵ He shows how the virtual state is an instance of the memory that holds possibilities for actualisation. The progress by which the virtual image realizes itself can be explained thus: the memory can execute itself in action, that is, in movement of the body. This body has a privileged position in regard to surrounding objects, but it is neither image nor matter. The body is, according to Bergson, an image acting like other images, receiving and giving back movement, surrounded by external images in the aggregate of the material world, but images themselves cannot create images. The body, as an object destined to move other objects, is then a centre of action; and as such it cannot give birth to a representation.⁵⁶ The virtual image (memory) produces virtual sensations, which may order action from the body (motor reactions). Virtual sensations strive to become real, by preparing sensory centres for action, triggered from an image in the mind. The body in this order is a conductor, placed between the objects which act upon it and those which it influences, and in the order of images the mediating body is just another image, although occupying the centre, the point where the past expires and the future is suspended.⁵⁷ The opposition body – soul is in Bergson replaced by the opposite relation between the external world and the individual consciousness, in other words, between matter and memory. The body is the mediator, receptor of

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 9 (B's Italics)

⁵⁶ Ibid, pp. 19-20

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 77

stimulations and transmitter of action. Sensations are extensive from the body, sensory perception is suspended in a fine network of conducting lines where the threads are connecting the peripheral ends of the reality spectra, so precisely connected that the order of space-time and the sense of reality would collapse if they slacked. Bergson remarks in relation to this observation that dreams and insanity appear to be at the verge of collapse of reality.⁵⁸ Bergson suggests that the mind travels constantly between its two extreme limits, the plane of action and the plane of dream.⁵⁹ The virtual is stored action from the past, represented by “pure memories”, virtual objects that tend to bring about all the corresponding sensations, urging the body to act upon their intentions.⁶⁰ In Bergson’s virtuality, “space is no more without us than within us”.⁶¹

Following on from the theories of Bachelard and Bergson, I will very briefly introduce the central concepts of the *dream* and the *individual subject* in relation to the theoretical framework of Walter Benjamin, who connects Bergson’s theory in *Matter and Memory*, about perception as a function of time, with the mind of the collector and also with the dreamer. The pace of the dream-time differs from the pace of perception, so that what is perceived in the dream *concerns* us. The things surrounding the collector and the space that the dreamer is submerged into, are environments that affects lived time, the difference in rhythm brings perception to a level of engagement. In order to understand the architecture (of the *passages*), he suggests that they be submerged in the deepest levels of dreams, so that they will concern us.⁶² The domestic interior is to Benjamin where the individual expresses himself in art, in style, in the collection: the native of the interior is the collector, whose assemblage forms a utopian irreality.

The dreamer subject is in Benjamin the slow motion of the *flâneur* as a part of his *milieu*, the street or the passage, but also the dreamer of the collective, in contrast to Huysmans’ dreamer who is an inert dweller of the interior, with a wandering mind. To Benjamin, dwelling is an active form of dealing with the

⁵⁸ Ibid, pp. 173-174

⁵⁹ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 172

⁶⁰ Ibid, pp. 130-131

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 216

⁶² Benjamin, *Passagearbeit*, pp. 193-194, p. 708

world. The individual fantasmagorical interior of Des Esseintes is a fine specimen of the dweller who demands the interior to keep his illusions vital.⁶³

The “obsessive dreambuilding” in this thesis illustrates a cycle of dynamic dreaming, desire and partial fulfilment by materialisation, resulting in an “eternal” project where one half-externalised desire is overlapping the next. The resulting congregation of matter could actually be a physical diagram of the concept of desire. The dreambuilders’ spaces are the architectural and material response to aesthetic needs, collages of dreams, overlapping plans, intersecting ideas, one accomplishment covered by one uncompleted. Benjamin’s *Arcades Project* is in itself an example of perpetual cataloguing and three-dimensional arrangement of reflections, a passionate construction, a spherical cross-referenced account of the 19th century filtered through its decaying phenomena. Benjamin frequently uses the dream as a trope, but also suggests the dream as method. He claims that we are becoming dispossessed of threshold experiences, such as a *rite de passage*, or even the actual experience of the “dreamgates” leading into the *passages*. Benjamin states that the only remaining threshold experience to us is the threshold of sleep, and, he adds, subsequently the threshold of awakening.⁶⁴ Benjamin’s awakening is closely related to memory, the awakening is the “Copernican shift” of memory, trying to build the experience from the dream. The irrational realm of the chimaeras is in the moment of waking the fleeting firmament from which the dreamer is trying to approach his physical existence. Benjamin applies the dream cycle to the course of history itself: just as the dream carries in itself the awakening, every era carries within itself its own ending. The process of awakening becomes the writing of history from dream-memory. The sleeper surrender himself temporarily to death, suspended in the parallel reality of the dream, waiting to re-enter reality.⁶⁵

*“The dream is that you have awakened.”*⁶⁶

⁶³ Ibid, p. 47

⁶⁴ Benjamin, *Passagearbetet*, p. 421

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 316

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 321

The first question you ask yourself when waking up from a dream is a verification of your position- interior or exterior to the self, subjective or objective reality, artificial, virtual or real: Where am I?

- You may have asked yourself what stuff your dreams are made of. In this space you will encounter those who have worked out how to turn our dreams into stuff. You are as prepared as anyone to enter this space, in here we are all dreamers inside someone's dreams. I will be your guide.
 - Each one of us dreamguides are pursuers of obsessive architectural activities, we are all haunted by transitive dreams. Together we will investigate the processes of turning dreams into physical space.

I suppose you might wonder .

[REPLY]

In order to investigate the dreambuilders' projects, you have to acknowledge the critical point of entry, where imagination can take as small a step as possible to make the giant leap into architectural space. You are on that threshold right now. The construction of a dream is a time- and space-consuming project. Such projects never get finished. The architectural activities turn into a lifestyle, tending toward obsession. This is a dreamatic journey, allowing you to investigate the processes of turning dreams into physical space. You are inside a comparative analysis of structures of realised imagination.

Opposite: Fig. 4 *In the Architecture of Parallel Realities*

Opening page to the project website <http://www.arch.kth.se/~zimm> Illustration by the author.
 Details interpreted from Antoine Wiertz: *The Reader of Novels*, 1953, Wiertz Museum, Brussels.

The Dying Dreamer website is a visual presentation of research work in progress. The site features active illustrations that allow for interpretation in a spatial context. These illustrations, in making and as presentation, are analytical collages, some created from a model of the mansion as described in the novel then distorted as the narrative take leaps in space and time.

www.arch.kth.se/~zimm

I

The Dying Dreamer

Looking into Huysmans' Virtual Worlds

In 1884, the novel *À Rebours*, translated into English as *Against Nature*, appeared as a complete map of morbid desires, written by Joris-Karl Huysmans at the peak of decadence in literature. Huysmans delivers a study of a monstrous psyche in a dandy outfit- the depraved Baron Des Esseintes. The novel is a parallel description of the isolated mansion and the deteriorating mind of the hyperaesthetic protagonist. Neurotically represented in detail, we are invited to experience the architectural creation of a man whose inquisitive senses and restless imagination has led him to taste every forbidden fruit and whose wealth and health are slowly consumed by experimental spatial excesses on the verge of sensory overload.

Nature, according to Des Esseintes, is overrated as “there is not a single one of her inventions, deemed so subtle and sublime, that human ingenuity cannot manufacture”.¹ The Baron, a character essentially modelled after Huysmans himself, develops an advanced taste for artificiality, since his “overfatigued senses” are ill-fitted for reality.² When he cannot find the like of his aesthetic ideas in the world, he sets off to artificially manufacture it. Nature proves to be surprisingly supple in the hand of this architectural alchemist.

By fully embracing the powers of artifice, Huysmans created essentially the most hardcore decadent novel ever written. Huysmans credo is that imagination is

¹ Huysmans, Joris-Karl: *Against Nature* (*À Rebours*, first ed. 1884) Penguin, London 1959 (*Against the Grain* is a variation of English translation of the title) pp. 36-37

the key to the evolution of man. He puts imagination into practice through manipulation of perception itself. Throughout the novel, Huysmans spares no effort to advocate the idea of augmented sensory input. The author presents numerous mindbending artefacts and, through the descriptions of Des Esseintes' interaction with these, provides a manual for living in hyperaesthetic space.

*"It was a novel without a plot, and with only one character, being, indeed, simply a psychological study of a certain young Parisian, who spent his life trying to realise in the nineteenth century all the passions and modes of thought that belonged to every century except his own..."*³

It may well have been without a plot, but not without indications of a new kind of existence: the integration of the body in an immersive virtuality, a dreamer-friendly interface packed with soft- and hardware to relieve everyday spleen in any century. We enjoy today the affordable tools, buzzing on every office desk, soon humming in every pocket, to become Des Esseintes' disciples and join him in the refuge of alternative reality.

Against Nature provides an inventory of various aspects of virtuality. The research presented in this article and on the Dying Dreamer website aims at analysing the coherence between Huysmans' description of the Baron's mansion and the general conditions of virtual space. In the narrative space of the novel *Against Nature* as well as in digital space, we are located in a user-oriented egocentric universe, where artificiality offers superior pleasure to nature, but to the expenditure of the human body and life as we physically know it. This project is exploring the idea that Huysmans is in fact creating a virtual world, a hyperspatial sanctuary. In a way, he describes the ultimate immersive computer game and its addicted player: the Dying Dreamer.

In the quest of total immersion in alternative reality, Des Esseintes needs to modify his senses by customising his environment and exclude all social

² Ibid, p. 23

³ Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). Penguin: London 1994, p. 145. At the end of chapter 10, Mr. Gray is handed a yellow book which will execute a great influence on him. Although never mentioned by name, the book in question is J-K Huysmans' *Against Nature*.

interaction. In order to escape the world that he perceives as fatally boring, he needs icons to click himself away. The mansion is for that purpose filled with carefully selected art and literature, mechanical installations and architectural innovations. These modifications are in many aspects similar to the practise of interface design and aligns with contemporary theories of virtual reality. The idea of travelling in inertia, numerous examples of sensory augmenting installations, the oppression of physical needs are all features that are generally assigned to virtuality. There is also the recognition of the "limitations of the tool" as in a digital process. The Baron eventually suffers a disastrous "crash", just like any rugged PC user does sooner or later.

*"There were in it metaphors as monstrous as orchids, and as subtle in colour. The life of the senses was described in the terms of mystical philosophy. One hardly knew at times whether one was reading the spiritual ecstasies of some medieval saint or the morbid confessions of a modern sinner. It was a poisonous book."*⁴

Aesthetic Alienation

Duc Jean Floressas Des Esseintes is born into a family of shadowy and inbred characters, and brought up in Château de Lourps by a mother suffering from various nervous conditions and an estranged father. His lonely and alienated childhood is somewhat relieved when he is sent to the Jesuit school, where the fathers are both impressed by his intelligence and puzzled by his individual persistence, as he refuses to follow the established line of studies and excels only in subjects of his own choice. The restlessness and eccentricity grows with age and when entering adulthood he finds most social activities abominably boring and his contempt for humanity escalates. He indulges in a self-destructive lifestyle of erotic and culinary excesses in Paris but finally, due to ill health, makes the decision to spend what is left of family fortune to buy himself the isolation he is craving for; a secluded mansion in Fontenay-aux-Roses outside Paris. This is

⁴ Ibid, p. 146

where the grand projects of domestic adaptations and transformations will take place, interrupted by excursions into memories and associations triggered by Des Esseintes' collections of artwork and artefacts. In response to his childhood deprivation, he recreates his existence in a home perfected in detail and lives as an outcast character.

*"I tried living in the real world
Instead of a shell
But I was bored before I even began
I was bored before I even began"*⁵

The idea of complete immersion is an essential quality that the narrative space in *Against Nature* shares with virtuality. Des Esseintes leaves his residence at Fontenay only in most acute situations and not willingly, even more reluctantly are visitors welcomed to the estate and the domestic people are carefully separated from the Baron's routines and serve him via padded corridors so as not to disturb. The physical isolation is performed with a monasterial discipline that stands in sharp contrast to the Baron's earlier days of carnal pleasures. Des Esseintes social life is strictly restrained to avatars, characters from literature and art, and people recalled from memory of time passed in urban exuberance. This voluntary imprisonment shares the seclusion of virtual reality.

In *Against Nature*, Huysmans positions Des Esseintes at a safe distance from the urban environment which has caused him so much distress. The city, much favoured by the decadents, is in fact even more romanticised in its absence, the distance rendering the temptations of Paris even more vividly. Des Esseintes is off-line in his monasterial existence, isolated from all social interaction. In the first chapter, Huysmans describes the basic setup for the retreat, a kind of manual of the operating system for the Baron's new home. The mansion is the hard-drive on which the Baron continuously installs software for his sensory installations as he plots new aesthetic configurations. The rooms are fitted with architectural

⁵ Morrissey, Patrick: *Shoplifters of the world unite* from the LP *Louder than Bombs*, The Smiths. Original Release 1987

inventions, for example the ship-cabin that is plugged into the dining room to provide the complete illusion of being on a cross-atlantic journey.

Since moving to Fontenay, Des Esseintes avoids society except to get some plug-ins, that is, occasionally turning to civilisation for upgrading his tools. He orders items and have them delivered to his home as he dreams up new installations. The narrative defines the space of the mansion as the user-oriented interface of Des Esseintes. The user himself is the only one who can log in for full access to all the daydream shortcuts that he has created around him. The user's integration with space, the extensions of himself with mechanical devices, the ignorance of bodily functions, all add up to support the idea that Huysmans is introducing a level of virtual life that would only begin to be realised more than a century later. In one aspect only, the novel fails to match our conception of virtual space. The glorified aspects of global communication and extension of social life over the internet is absent in *Against Nature*, since the Baron shows no interest in expanding his social life or take part in any community. The type of virtual space described by Huysmans relates rather to the idea of a cave⁶ or the less refined "goggles and glove" version of virtual navigation, where human-to-human interaction is of less importance than human-to-space interaction (at least in contemporary standards of digital space technology). Des Esseintes' physical and psychological immersion in his home is so complete he can hardly be separated from space itself, and without him, no sensory programs would be accessible.

*"Je suis l'espace où je suis."*⁷

(I am the space where I am.)

⁶ Cave: a small multimedia- fitted room, often a cube (3 x 3 x 3 m), where all surfaces are projection screens for real-time orientation in virtual space. This immersive technology requires stereoscopic eyeware (HMD - head mounted displays) for 3D-effect and a CPU-connected sensor gloves as navigation control device and manipulation of virtual objects. Variations of the cubic cave is a quarter or half-sphere where the virtual room is projected. The 3D-illusion is mainly limited by computational power as the surround projection is extremely memory-consuming and the sensory feedback has to be instant for full effect.

⁷ Arnaud, Noël. *L'état d'ébauche*. Paris: Le Messager Boîteaux 1950

Digital Decadence

The decadents could not have entered the cultural scene at any other time.⁸ In classicism, the order of the world imposed an aesthetic ideal in the individual, who was no more than a vessel for divine ideals and restrained emotions. Romanticism freed the individual, by describing the human ego as a creative and operative energy, independent from God for better and for worse. The egocentric universe intensified the interest in human sensory experience, perception and psychology, but with the power of the individual came loneliness, the flip side of a godless inner life. In the shift between romanticism and symbolism, the human ego took a turn from the limitless inner universe to the more complex confluence of mind and space. As Jean Clair puts it:

*“The Romantics considered the landscape to be a state of mind, a place to stop and rest. The Symbolists, however, reversed this idea: the state of mind actually became the landscape, but it was an empty, deserted, unlimited, boundless world in the middle of nowhere.”*⁹

The romantics’ pit-stop for the soul was abandoned for the symbolists’ perpetual journey in the wasteland of the mind. Somewhere in between these movements lies decadence, mainly rendered as “word-paintings” of artificiality and aestheticism: the tools with which the individual could create a liveable space, lonely but lovely, poetic though putrid.

More than a tantalising alliteration, digital decadence illustrates the idiosyncrasy of the culture of artifice at the turn of two succeeding centuries. Note the less than coincidental definition of the “in the middle of nowhere” and the endless grid of a computer modellers’ worktable: there is nothing until you start messing about

⁸ Decadents: authors of French and English literature of the end of the 19th century: Baudelaire, Verlaine, Wilde, Huysmans, whose main expression is the artificial and the obsessively refined, often obscure and mystical.

⁹ Clair, Jean. “Symbolism or the Irredeemable Ego”, preface to *Lost Paradise- Symbolist Europe*, Beaux-Arts magazine, exhibition catalogue. Montreal: Museum of Fine Arts 1995

with the object creation tools. If the decadents had had access to the computer standards of today, they would rather have used high-end 3D design applications than Microsoft Word to describe their visionary worlds. Or they would have been the first community to leave their bodies behind and wallow in infinite luxury as forever-young avatars in a perpetual masquerade in any projected environment of choice.

The notion of parallel realities in *Against Nature* matches the general description of virtual reality as “any of various forms of computer-generated 3D-environments, the more interactive and immersive, the better” and the processes of the making of these environments.¹⁰ It also relates to the basic “everyday” interactions with computer-space via software interface, that is, the graphic appearance of any office package. No matter what level of digital immersion or complexity of programming you choose to compare the space in *Against Nature* with, Huysmans’ description of the architecture and artefacts as a navigational interface is still unsurpassed. With few exceptions, architects engaging in issues of virtual reality are expressing theories side by side with fresh or experienced theoreticians in hard covers, but that is all talk and no moonwalk. It seems the boundless universe of virtual reality could be half-wallpapered already with pages of anthologies on the new era of informative space. The more refreshing to find that a neurotic author more than a century ago envisioned spatial possibilities and sensory-augmenting equipment that would make MIT media lab seem like a potter’s workshop.

As an effort to stretch language to fit our excitement about sensory augmented space, the entire terminology around information technology and virtual reality is filled with prefixes such as “hyper-”, “super-“ and “multi-“, not to mention “cyber-“, forming neologisms that may illustrate the potential of digital tools and electronic communication. The semantic efforts to handle virtual reality seem to draw all energy from the actual assignment of content to the space in question. In an article written in 1901, V.V. Rozanov assigns the prefix “ultra-“ to approach the artistic movement:

*“It is precisely this element of ultra- the result of ultra manifested in life itself, in its mores, ideas, proclivities, and aspirations- that has wormed into literature and remained there ever since, expressing itself, finally, in such a hideous phenomenon as Decadence and Symbolism. The ultra without its referent, exaggeration without the exaggerated object, preciousity of form conjoined with total disappearance of content, and “poetry” devoid of rhyme, meter, and sense- that is what constitutes Decadence.”*¹¹

The search for definition and lack of content marks the contemporary discussion about Virtual Reality. What are we going to make of this electronic celebration of the ego?

Decay follows subsequently after the maturity of a discipline, driving aesthetics to an extreme point of complexity. Some examples are given by Havelock Ellis in his introduction to the 1884 original edition of *Against Nature*, where he lists dichotomies in order to illustrate the oppositions of classic and decadent style in different disciplines. Architecture is exemplified by Roman architecture as classic, and Byzantine developments as completely decadent. Architectural decadence is the result of decomposition and corruption of geometrical systems, and may finally be the dissolving of physical boundaries and constructional laws in a process of unlimited hyperaesthetic creation in virtual space.

Hyperaesthetics and Synesthesia

The physical space that the Baron possesses is programmed for escape into an inward reality. Des Esseintes lives inside a custom-made interface where any object acts like a phicon that, when interacted with, propels him into other

¹⁰ Weishar, Peter. *Digital Space- Designing Virtual Environments*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998, p. 241

¹¹ Rozanov, V.V. “On Symbolists and Decadents”. St. Petersburg: *Religiia i kul'tura* 1901. Trans. by Joel Stern: available on <http://www.oberlin.edu/~tscholl/Rozanov.html>

dimensions.¹² The hyperaesthetic quality of objects suggests that the idea of the thing is more desirable than the thing itself: the Baron do not decorate or collect to impress others, only to project himself into his dreams. Huysmans takes this idea further by assigning navigational functions to smell and taste and also renders objects with proprioceptive, tactile and haptic qualities beside the ordinary visual and auditive icons of computer space. A rare condition that corresponds to this multisensory interface is synesthesia, a perceptual phenomenon of sensory fusion that was central to the symbolists in art and literature around the turn of the last century and had a great influence on Huysmans.¹³

The neurological condition of synesthesia may be described as one of the most extreme manifestations of the mind, where two or more senses simultaneously engage in the experience of another sense. Between 1860 and 1930, there was a peak of interest for this rare condition. Synesthesia attracted serious attention in art, music, literature, linguistics, natural philosophy, and theosophy. Most accounts emphasised coloured hearing, the most common form of synesthesia. The symbolist movement launched the idea of the *gesamtkunstwerke* engaged the audience in multi-modal concerts of music and light, sometimes even odour. Special synesthetic instruments were invented, for example the *clavecin oculaire*, an instrument that played sound and light simultaneously. Other polysensory artworks have their place in history, such as the *odorama*, *smellavision*, *son-et-lumiere* and *theremins*. After decades of scientific neglect, a revival of inquiry is under way. The synesthetic corruption of the senses is an important issue in digital media, especially in the computer game industry and in interface development where cognitive engagement is commercially viable. Our minds will be stimulated and simulated to experience sensory effects beyond the normal.

¹² Phicon: “physical icon”, introduced by interface researchers who experiment on physical objects for computer environment navigation

¹³ Synesthesia: from Greek, syn - together, and aesthesis - perception. Denotes involuntary physical experience in which the stimulation of one sense modality causes an additional perception in a different sense or senses. This additional perception is regarded by the synesthete as a real and vivid experience, often outside the body, instead of imagined in the minds’ eye. It is an immediate kind of experience, not an intellectualised concept pregnant with meaning.

*“Art is more sensitive than anything else to the future; it discloses more clearly than anything else the innermost workings of our soul.”*¹⁴

Huysmans assigns the condition of synesthesia to Des Esseintes who even builds his own synesthetic hardware: the mouth-organ. This apparel is in fact a drink bar organised as a musical instrument where the Baron creates liquid symphonies and potable tunes by pulling levers and pressing stops. He restores the grammar of perfumery, creating semantic spaces and entire landscapes, classical gardens as well as industrial areas by mixing scents in his olfactory bar. There are numerous examples of multi-modal experience and descriptions of synesthetic qualities of certain works of literature and art in the novel.

The interaction with artefacts in his collections – books, perfumes, drinks, artwork, textures, bonbons, plants – sets the Baron’s mind in motion and he enters the parallel reality of a dream or a memory. This structure enables Des Esseintes to travel without leaving the comforts of his home. Travelling is, surprisingly enough, a favoured pass-time for Des Esseintes. He does not need to move any further than to the dining room for example. Here he performs virtual tourism, studying timetables of steamers, tampering with compasses and instruments for navigation, and breathing in fake odours of salt seas. He is inside a “room inside the room”: a ship’s cabin, complete with arched beams and tarred wainscoting. Through a porthole placed in front of the real window with a fishtank placed between the two windows, he contemplates on the “marine life”, mechanical fish and artificial seaweed, the remains of daylight filtering through the water. No need to change rooms even, when an illustrated book and a glass of irish whisky brings grassy plains into the library. The Baron has perfected the skills of travelling in inertia, an undisputable aspect of virtual space.¹⁵

¹⁴ Rozanov, V.V. *On Symbolists and Decadents*

¹⁵ Paul Virilio: “Consigned to inertia, interactive beings transfer their natural capacity of movement and travel into probes, into detectors that inform their users immediately about distant realities, but to the detriment of their own sensory faculties of reality.”

“The main thing is to know how to set about it, to be able to concentrate your attention on a single detail, to forget yourself sufficiently to bring about the desired hallucination and so substitute the vision of a reality for the reality itself.”¹⁶

body <Enter>; bad file format

– The Dyspeptic Demiurge

Des Esseintes was fully prepared to enter the virtual world. He had bid his farewell and decided once and for all to live a manipulated life in an environment as artificial as possible. On leaving Paris, he throws a dinner party to bid farewell to the city as well as his virility. The dinner is extravagantly themed in black: black food served by *negresses* in a black room on black china. Upon entering the virtual world, no physical potency is needed. He will thrive on memories only and leave the body behind in his dreams. He will encounter old mistresses in the virtual reality of his dreams, some lucid, some nightmarish, where no shortcomings of his manhood have any relevance. Etymologically, the term *virtual* shares the root of *virile*, from the latin “vir” for man.¹⁷

Des Esseintes’ relation to women is complicated if not resentful. Among his favourite female avatars is Salome, as rendered by Gustave Moreau in various

¹⁶ Huysmans, J-K: *Against Nature*, p. 36

¹⁷ At the time of the publication of the novel, the term “*virtual*” had been present in scholastic latin since Mediaeval Ages. Derived from prehistoric language, the etymological root of the word is “*wiros*” meaning man. The term was transformed in primitive latin to “*vir*” (man, hero, husband, warrior), from where the word *virilis* (“a thing proper of man”, virility, magistrate) developed. Saint Augustin, mentioned by Huysmans in the latin writers’ Hall of Fame chapter in *Against Nature*, launches in *De Magistro* a significance of *virtualis* that approaches the contemporary meaning of the word: “he who has in himself the power to do, to make something”. Saint Augustine assigned the meaning “potentiality” and “free will” to the latin *virtus*, the right use of freedom of choice. In a later work by Saint Augustine, *On Faith in Invisible Realities*, issues of catholic faith is discussed along the terms given by the title. Thomas ab Aquino simply transformed to “power” - later assimilated by Foucault who related power to information. The translation in our days of *virtualis* into “absence” and “parallel reality” from the initial meaning “man”, is a semantic mutation. The root of “*vir*” may even seem contradictory in its variations: “*virtual*” meaning “in effect, though not in fact, almost, nearly”, parodically next to “*virtuous*” for “morally good, blameless” and “*virtuality*” signifying “essential nature”. Ethymology from Dimas de Melo Pimenta, Emanuel: *Virtual Architecture*, Transformers (webmagazine available at: www.asa-art.com)

motifs.¹⁸ Her glowing flesh animated by gems and her swaying dance is vividly imprinted in Des Esseintes, he is equally attracted and horrified at her physical appearance and her evil aim. Among his former mistresses who return to memory when the Baron eats a purple aphrodisiac bonbon, are Urania, a circus contortionist who initially spellbound him but turned out to be as intellectually boring as she was physically supple, and the Ventriloquist whom the Baron had to cite his favourite poem in a voice displaced in the room during their erotic encounters. In his complex relation to women, Huysmans shares the same view as Baudelaire and Barbey D'Aurevilly: that woman and the Devil are one. If woman is nature, an important motif in symbolist art, and man is artifice, then the satanic woman comprise all demonisation of nature and the uncontrollable. Odilon Redon is one of the artists that adorn Des Esseintes' walls, his images of the hybrid grinning spider with a human face and cactus-head in a pot represent the freaks of Nature that the Baron thrives among. The perversion of nature and the hybrid beings are exemplified in a nightmare induced by the scents of the exotic and carnivorous plants Des Esseintes has filled his vestibule with. A female figure metamorphoses out of a plant, a horrifying vision of flesh in the shape of a plant:

*"A sudden intuition came to him, and he told himself that this must be the Flower. His reasoning mania persisted even in this nightmare; and as in the daytime, it switched from vegetation to the Virus."*¹⁹

Any threat to his virtual retreat is of female nature. The body, as being inseparable from nature, is the only apparatus that fails him in this clockwork dream-studio. Des Esseintes expresses his neurotic anxiety about Virus, the invasive power of organic reproduction that would upset any contemporary computer user or cause fatal catastrophe to a body immersed in computer space, as described in so many tech-fi novels.

¹⁸ Gustave Moreau (Paris 1826-1898). French painter and teacher, often referred to as one of the first Symbolists; *Salome Dancing before Herod* (1876) Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris.

¹⁹ Huysmans, J-K: *Against Nature*, p. 105

As a result of his various acts of perverting of Nature, Des Esseintes finally gets a *memento mori*: you can turn your back on God but you cannot turn your back on your own back. His bodily conditions take a turn to the worse. Due to the Barons dyspepsia, food and drink has to be carefully distributed. Culinary adventures are apparently the only artform that Des Esseintes does not engage in. The oppression of physical needs is one of the most problematic aspects of virtuality. The Baron has directed a structure for the intake of food, that enables him to be served without interacting with the servants who robotically bring the meals according to a clockwork schedule, moving in felt slippers through a padded corridor that separates the kitchen from the dining room. All precautions are taken not to emit any sounds that may disturb the Baron in his mind journeys. As the symptoms of the Dyspeptic Demiurge escalate, the baron orders a patent digester, a “precious instrument” that transforms all food to brown liquid, and when that does not work, the Baron’s whole metabolism is reversed in a quite explicit physical way to Des Esseintes’ relief and secret amusement:

*“...congratulating himself on this experience which was, so to speak, the crowning achievement of the life he had planned for himself; his taste for the artificial had now, without even the slightest effort on his part, attained its supreme fulfilment. No one, he thought, would ever go any further; taking nourishment in this way was undoubtedly the ultimate deviation from the norm.”*²⁰

The original French title, *À Rebours*, is given yet another dimension, directly related to this inverted metabolism, that the English title cannot match. The automatised feeding is a reminder of the defects of the Baron’s otherwise nearly perfected virtual life. The body just cannot follow.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 208

The Nature of Artifice

Des Esseintes consistently sings the praise of artificiality as he claims that nature “has had her day” and that “the time has surely come for artifice to take her place whenever possible.”²¹ The Baron is very creative and proactive in satisfying his desires for artificiality by designing machinery and installations. His feeble apparition and moral weakness is, in a way, balanced by his energy as a craftsman and determination as an artist and inventor. In chapter eight, Des Esseintes enters into close combat with Nature when taking on botanical collection. The exotic plants selected for his hothouse all respond to the aesthetics of artifice: the more unnatural apparition of the organic object, the more reason to bring it in. Huysmans employs metaphors of the human body to describe the Baron’s response to the sensory impressions aroused by the plants. The metaphor is folded twice: first in resembling the colour and texture of the plants with refined manmade materials, then the nightmarish transformation of the same plants into eroticized bodies. Artificiality strikes back, so to say, as the soothing hobby of gardening turn out to be hazardous, evoking the very suppressed cravings the Baron seeks to distract himself from. There are numerous examples of this preference for the manmade, a disposition that is sometimes spiralling into contempt for the natural. His fascination for technical novelty is displayed in a passage where he suggests that even some of his works of Latin literature might be

*“...turned out by an ingenious mechanic who takes good care of his machine, keeps its component parts well oiled, and if need be can invent new parts which are both intricate and useless.”*²²

The Dreamer is thrilled by the idea of himself as a “reading mill”, comparing his mind’s workings to industrial process as he examines his contemporary lay works:

²¹ Ibid, p. 37

²² Ibid, p. 48

*“...passing them through the critical apparatus of his mind, just as a metal worker passes strips of metal through a steel drawing machine, from which they emerge thin and light, reduced to almost invisible threads...”*²³

Huysmans excels in his metaphorical description of the most beautiful machinery existing: the two modern locomotives of the Northern Railway, described as two women, a stringent metaphor illustrating the charms and seductive powers of these two female creatures of steel and chrome.

The more sensational Des Esseintes' home becomes, the greater kicks he needs, like a drug addict increasing the dose in order to achieve the same effect. As the artificial becomes domesticized by Des Esseintes, the mansion itself turns into a kind of nature, an alternative nature that is the hybrid of concretisation of dreams and the dreamer himself.

The strive for spatial perfection is a central theme of *Against Nature*. In the first chapter, Des Esseintes is reflecting on the choice of colour for the most important room, his study. He is restricted to ends of the spectra that respond most favourably to artificial light. Des Esseintes rejects all colours except indigo blue and orange, some regretfully as he knows some favourite nuances would be stunning in ordinary candlelight. Since his life is exclusively nocturnal, the electric light is a modern convenience he celebrates. Computer-generation of space is always a process of careful selection of textures, colour and lighting in order to achieve, if not pleasing, then at least convincing environments. Des Esseintes do not depend uniquely on mechanical devices to realise his spatial ideas. When contemplating the colours of his carpet, he gets the idea of animating its texture by adding something that moves around on it. He buys a turtle and has its goldglazed shell encrusted with carefully chosen gemstones, and the creature is placed in the room to interact with the colours as intended. After a while, the turtle lies immobile in a corner, poisoned by its artificially augmented beauty.

The aesthetic alienation of Des Esseintes is described by his contempt of the taste of the common man. Anything that the general public gets access to and

takes pleasure in, is rejected by the Baron as it has become irreversibly vulgarised. Stylish excellence is forcibly an act of selection. The same skill is applied to efficient retrieval of information. The character most adapted to life in an environment saturated with information is the Selector. The ability to distinguish and identify useful entities of information is the characteristics of the hyperaesthetic hacker. Des Esseintes shares his aesthetic and selective abilities with experienced 3D-modelers, production designers and special effects artists: he knows where to add and what, he is aware of the effects of lighting and shadows, he kills some darlings and reinvent others, all for the perfection of his visions.

*“For the delectation of his mind and the delight of his eyes, he had decided to seek out evocative works which would transport him to some unfamiliar world, point the way to new possibilities, and shake up his nervous system by means of erudite fancies, complicated nightmares, suave and sinister visions.”*²⁴

Virtual Reality could not replace physical space, but may temporarily surround us for some useful purpose or for entertainment, by mediating equipment ranging from a Gameboy via a PC to a fully equipped immersive cave. Huysmans mediates many useful ideas about navigational functions embedded in objects, but he is also introducing a daring, spatially spastic way of navigating through the narrative space itself. My reading of the novel is encoded into three generations of space. Each chapter is, page by page, filtered into any of the three categories revived space, present space and evoked space. Present space is the origin point, the physical space where the Baron is living his life in real-time. Revived space denotes any site revisited in memory, rooms restored to consciousness by the act of remembrance, which in turn is triggered by direct interaction with a physical object, a work of art or a text. Evoked space signifies imaginative places, conjured up from an object or a phenomena, such as a painting or a scent. A rhythmic pattern can be distinguished from the text encoding. The actual present space is statistically dominated by revived and evoked space. Huysmans readily applies a

²³ Ibid, p. 49

²⁴ Ibid, p. 63

hypertextual structure, merges time and descriptions in non-chronological order, and breaks the axiom of space-time into an elaborate mix of physical chambers, halls of memory and gardens of dreams.

Awakening from Virtual Sleep

The user-oriented universe of Des Esseintes offers two options. One is the awakening in the world of basic needs ruled by the body. The other is the consequence of the untamed process of synthetic extravagance and sensory alchemy. The Baron has in his virtual reality caught a virus that is slowly corrupting the files on his harddrive. He must have caught it when he downloaded that elusive dream. The virus was attached to his artificial lifestyle. The dreamer must die.

*"The senses should be used economically in order to be functional. To excite them gratuitously with sounds, colours and scents, as the Symbolists do, is to invite morbid exhaustion."*²⁵

Des Esseintes is forced to leave the mansion at Fontenay and go back to Paris, where he can get medical attention and possibly be restored to a normal social life. The return to the city is thus understood as a remedy to his condition. Urbanity and regular injections of social contacts will erase all alienated perversion. Or will it?

The dreamer is so intensely connected to the crafted hyperaesthetic environment, where artefacts have become a part of space and where space has become a part of the dream, that, when they pull the plugs to detach Des Esseintes' from these rooms, the dream fades away and all the codes with it.

The destiny of the protagonist of *Against Nature* brings another mythical space and its explorers to mind. In *Stalker*, a writer and a scientist takes on a

perilous journey led by a stalker into a deserted “Zone”, supposedly contaminated by mystical powers that governs the time and space of the Zone in a surreal metaphysical choreography.²⁶ It is said that there is a room inside a derelict building inside the Zone, a room that may fulfil your innermost wish. When the three characters arrive to the room, they start arguing. They realise they cannot enter the room without risking to be proven wrong about what they thought was their innermost wish. When facing the option of stepping across the threshold that separates them from the magic space and lose their dream, or return to civilisation and let life in the real world govern their will and wishes, they chose the latter. The completion of the journey is the return to civilisation. Life is still there when you wake up because it was never gone, even after that journey into mystery, even after virtual life.

*“...if I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say: the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace.”*²⁷

²⁵ Nordau, Max. *Degeneration* (1892). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1993

²⁶ Strugatskij, Boris & Arkadij: screenplay to *Stalker* (based on the novel *Roadside Picnic*), filmed by Andrei Tarkovskij, 1979

²⁷ Bachelard, Gaston: *The Poetics of Space* (first ed. 1958) Beacon Press, Boston 1994, p. 6

Fig. 5 *The Decorated Tortoise & the Mouth Organ*

Scene from chapter IV in Huysmans' *Against Nature*: interactive collage from the Dying Dreamer website. Illustration by the author. Details interpreted from Antoine Wiertz: *The Reader of Novels*, 1953, Wiertz Museum, Brussels.

Fig. 6 *The Chimaera & the Sphinx*

Scene from chapter IX in Huysmans' *Against Nature*, interactive collage from the Dying Dreamer website. The Baron projects himself into memories of his love affairs by the aid of scented bonbons. Among his former mistresses is the ventriloquist who would recite Flaubert's poem *The Chimaera and the Sphinx* in voices displaced around the room. The triple body of the Chimaera mirrors the triple existence of the baron who lives in the present space of the mansion, in space revived from memory and in imaginary spaces evoked by objects. Illustration by the author.

Fig. 7 *Salome dancing before the Baron*

Scene from chapter XIV in Huysmans' *Against Nature*, from the Dying Dreamer website. Obsessed with the femme fatale motif, Des Esseintes projects himself into his Moreau painting where Salome is dancing before Herod. His visions mix with the intense smells of his exotic hothouse, where the baron falls asleep and dreams nightmares where he is devoured by hybrid female flowers. Illustration by the author. Details from Moreau's *Salomé* (1876) Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris.

Five objects/subjects to represent the year 1884 is an attempt to present the world of the time of the publication of Joris-Karl Huysmans' novel *À Rebours*. The 5 x 5 short portraits of events, technological breakthroughs, publications and inventions can be rearranged in various combinations, related by time alone or connected across national and cultural boundaries, read as isolated events or expressions of a *zeitgeist*.

The Greenwich Meridian
 The Telephoto
 The Skyscraper
 The Statue of Liberty
 The Thrill Ride

The Greenwich Meridian- when time became Mean

In October 1884, 41 delegates from 25 nations met in Washington, DC for the International Meridian Conference. The conference called upon the imperative of an international time standard in response to the expansion of the railway and other emerging communication networks. The so-called *Resolution 2* resulted in the definition of the Prime Meridian at Greenwich, London. Longitude 0° was established by a vote of 22 nations to 1- Santo Domingo voted against and France and Belize abstained. The Greenwich meridian was already calculated in 1851 by the 7th Astronomer Royal, Sir George Airy, who defined the virtual line by means of the position of the large *Transit Circle* telescope in the Royal Observatory's Meridian Building. The reference line extends virtually beyond the observatory court, dividing the globe into the East and West Hemispheres. Sir Airy's observations was used for the drawing of sea-charts, upon which more than half of the global trade traffic depended at the time. According to *Resolution 2*, all countries adopted a universal day, a *Mean Solar Day*, beginning at the *Mean Midnight* at Greenwich and counted on a 24 hour clock, defining nautical and astronomical days around the world.

The world before 1884 was a world of numerous meridians, where every major city or region kept its own local time. No international conventions governed the measuring of time, when the day begun or ended or indeed how long an hour would be. The official establishment of unified time is a direct response to the needs of a world in motion and its infrastructural advances. In the United States, the Greenwich Meridian east of London was already in 1883 chosen as the basis for the national time zones, when railroad traffic companies standardized train schedules across the continent. The passenger train traffic was a collective experience of speed. That pace of travelling was previously experienced from a horseback or other individual non-mechanical perceptions of speed. The rail around which world time turns was laid down as a brass line, springing from the foundations of the observatory building in the town outside London, extending into a virtual axis from which all longitude would be calculated east and west up to 180 degrees. The dawn of the *Universal Day* was reflected on this line, directed from the cross-hairs of Airy's Transit Instrument and effectively multiplied into the web of communication and its cursor cross-hairs.

This abstract linearity defined the world, and was completed in 1884 with the mean unified time for the reliability of communication. At a large scale, this was the dawn of the modern collective experience. The City became to some extent a "destination", and smaller towns became brief "stops" on the way. Space was hierarchically laid out along the lines of communication. The constructed grid of longitudes and latitudes on the map were crossed by the railways, the most optimised straightness of all manmade lines, and in essence different from the borders of the countries: the lines of communication had substance, the railway lines were drawn in steel, governed by the brass monorail of time.

Nietzsche: *Also Sprach Zarathustra*
 Zola: *Au Bonheur des Dames*
 Abbott: *Flatland*
 Villiers de l'Isle Adam: *Tomorrow's Eve*
 Mary Winchester's *Mystery House*

Thus Spake the Insomniac

In the years 1883 until 1885, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) wrote *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. The book was created in a furious burst of frustrated energy, haunted by the first signs of mental disease, the thrill ride of Nietzsche's mind is reflected in the valleys and highs forming the backdrop for Zarathustra's insights. The alpine landscape settings are strangely familiar. But what resounds is not the sound of music, it is Zarathustra unlearning silence, in fact he is constantly speaking and wandering. The most beautiful elegy to Sleep must be written by an insomniac. "*Respect and modesty in presence of sleep! That is the first thing!*" What Nietzsche is waiting for is a mercy-robbery: "*Verily, on soft soles doth it come to me, the dearest of thieves, and stealeth from me my thoughts: stupid do I then stand, like this academic chair. To all those belauded sages of the academic chairs, wisdom was sleep without dreams: they knew no higher significance of life.*"

Nietzsche had invented the most terrifying nightmare, one that he did not even dare to fall asleep into, or, for that matter, to wake up from. His fixation with the Greek idea of eternal repetition kept him awake. What dose of poison makes a good dream and how much is enough for a pleasant death? "*All life had I renounced, so I dreamed. Night-watchman and grave-guardian had I become, aloft, in the lone mountain-fortress of Death*" Things like that went over in his head. The next day Nietzsche wrote his own prescription and stuck it on the fridge:

"*No small art is it to sleep: it is necessary for that purpose to keep awake all day. Ten times a day must thou overcome thyself; that causeth wholesome weariness, and is poppy to the soul. Ten times must thou reconcile again with thyself; for overcoming is bitterness, and badly sleep the unreconciled. Ten truths must thou find during the day; otherwise wilt thou seek truth during the night, and thy soul will have been hungry. Ten times must thou laugh during the day, and be cheerful; otherwise thy stomach, the father of affliction, will disturb thee in the night.*"

FIVE OBJECTS TO REPRESENT THE YEAR 1884

FIVE SUBJECTS TO REPRESENT THE YEAR 1884

The Greenwich Meridian
 The Telephote
 The Skyscraper
 The Statue of Liberty
 The Thrill Ride

The Telephote – Lay down the lines, then cut the wires

A net of global linkage emerged from GMT synchronisation, as much as the other way around, not only of means of displacement but also of communication without displacement. Synchronised time reinforced the notion of simultaneity and the possibility of object and subject sharing an event albeit geographically separated. The wired telegraph was replaced by the wireless induction telegraph, patented by Edison in 1885. This led the way towards our real-time standard of discourse from that unimaginable point in time when no non-binary communication over distance was possible without significant delay. By the year 1884, people could make long distance phone calls. The construction of national identity was one of the most important building projects at the time. The near instant access to all corners of the nation and the complete government of the geographic domain, played a key role in defining the modern states, combined with the effective manufacturing of affordable receptor technology for every household. By this one-way communication, passive in one end and highly active and centralised in the other, propaganda machinery was reinvented with the slogan *"a radio in every house"*. The initial ambitions for television were more democratic and paradoxically unregimented by the passifying qualities we attribute to it today. The original conception of TV was a point to point simultaneous visual connection, bearing more ideological resemblance with the telephone than with film or radio technique. In the year 1884, *the Practical Dictionary of Mechanics* published by Edward H. Knight, supplemented its edition with the definition for the telephote: *"an instrument or apparatus for conveying messages or images by transmission of light."* The telephote was successfully demonstrated to an audience of telegraphic engineers and electricians in the Palais des Champs-Élysées. Henri de Parville described the event in *Electricité et ses applications*: *"A person is placed in front of the apparatus, a telegraphic wire join this apparatus with a receiving instrument placed at the other end of the Palace, and the curious see, to their great astonishment, the image of this person traced in the receiving apparatus- in short, here, you place yourself as in front of a photographic lens, there, the portrait makes itself."* The telephote in this sense, a "videophone" that joins subject and object in space and time, was envisioned by Jules Verne in the 1885 novel *In the Year 2889*, commissioned by the legendary owner of the New York Herald, James Gordon Bennett Jr. In this unusual novel, the short story unfolds about a media mogul whose global newspaper imperium extends into science laboratories, engineering and astronomy faculties as well as editorial offices for the publishing of all sorts of media, all under the same roof: the unfathomable building of the *Earth Chronicle*. As we follow him during one day in the life of the future, we encounter innumerable marvels of technology, but the one invention he values the most is the apparatus that allow him to survey his wife's whereabouts: *"The telephote! Here is another great triumph of modern science. The transmission of speech is an old story; the transmission of images by means of sensitive mirrors connected by wires is a thing but of yesterday. A valuable invention indeed; Mr. Smith this morning is full of blessings for the inventor, when by its aid he is able distinctly to see his wife despite her great distance."*

Nietzsche: Also Sprach Zarathustra
 Zola: Au Bonheur des Dames
 Abbott: Flatland
 Villiers de l'Isle Adam: Tomorrow's Eve
 Mary Winchester's Mystery House

Au Bonheur des Dames – Desire in Public

Huysmans' fiction had developed from an early dedication to the naturalism of Émile Zola (1840-1902), but took a sharp turn from his master to achieve the most decadent and introspective perspective in the novel *À Rebours*. Zola's novel *Au Bonheur des Dames* is an initiation novel, where the heroine finds a career opportunity in paradise, that is, as an assistant in the most extravagant department store in Paris, the name of which is the title of the novel. While Des Esseintes, the isolated hyperaesthete in *À Rebours*, stays at home decorating, Zola's héroïne Denise goes to work in the temple of female vanity and flare. Her workplace in the department store is where she experiences power, temptation and ambition, in the light of the bustling young and modern space. Her passage rite takes her right to the core of progress, and to the heart of the city. She assists in building the female subject, who is created in public commerce, not to say, in the world, as the department store is decorated so as to encompass all exotic and fantasmagoric thrills of illusory travelling under one roof. The Baron's individual project takes place in his mansion, carefully separated from all social life. Denise travels between the old and the new world: her inert family dwell in the old world of the small business of the boutique, in respect for tradition.

Published in the same year, the two novels represent two extreme ends of the social spectrum; Huysmans dedicates the whole novel to the exclusive asocial lifestyle of the Baron, while Zola describes the lively sensuality of "La temple de la femme", a panteon for all religions: capitalism, progress, shopping and flirtation. A social shift takes place in the two novels: the public space finds its natural inhabitants in female *mass consumers*, externalising and habitually measuring status in fashion codes, while the domestic interior becomes the space of the *elitist consumer*, or rather, the private man becomes the *owner*: he does not make his choice between mass produced items, but invents and collects unique objects for his own particular pleasure. Women become individuals by virtue of their power as consumers. The female desire is exposed and willing to follow common fashion ideals, the male desire is fulfilled in the interior, striving for originality.

FIVE OBJECTS TO REPRESENT THE YEAR 1884

FIVE SUBJECTS TO REPRESENT THE YEAR 1884

The Greenwich Meridian
 The Telephoto
 The Skyscraper
 The Statue of Liberty
 The Thrill Ride

The Skyscraper

The word *skyscraper* was originally used in the 18th century for a high-flying flag on a ship's mast, or signifying a person or a horse of impressive height. It was not used to describe buildings until the 1880s, when the first tall office buildings were built in Chicago and New York. A growing world seeks its limits in height. In 1884, the world's first skyscraper begins to be erected in Chicago at the northeast corner of LaSalle and Adams streets: the ten-story *Home Insurance Building*, designed by Major William LeBaron Jenney (1832-1907), manifesting the first load-carrying structural frame. Jenney's construction consisted of a steel frame supporting the weight of the walls instead of the walls carrying the weight of the building. This load distribution developed into the "Chicago Skeleton" method which was to be prevalent some thirty years later when the modern steel-frame skyscrapers rose potently by the dozen in American metropoli. The eye that formerly reached for the towers of the cathedral now turned up towards the contours of economic power. A directional and symbolical manifestation of this kind is a step towards the "sky is not even the limit"-design of the digital era. But curiously enough the idiom of the "sky limit" lingers around computer-generated space, a background against which we can still build the impossible. Countless are the image renderings where the same default cumulus texture forms the backdrop of various building designs. Millions of bored Microsoft consumers simultaneously watch the high-flying kite flapping against the "Windows 2000" sky, while waiting for the invisible start-up process to chew its way from off mode to the dawn of a new work session. There are fluffy clouds in this artificial sky to reinforce the symbolism rigidly framed by the monitor's edge. The artificial clouds now form the background for the tool, the operative system, not producing rain but a global neutral backdrop for the Microsoft imperium. Can any other backdrop convey such neutrality and coordination of perception and attitude, precisely, the harmless sky we all have equal rights to observe, master as well as slave? But the skyscraping activity above all horizons of information is a relocation from the "sky above" to the "sky in front" of you, and it will stay on without any meteorological changes as your desk-top pattern until the work day is over. But there is no structure obscuring the view of the synthetic sky, only folders and shortcuts, no cathedral or office building of any frame construction and height, as was previously the main focus of this view. Where the sky was the limit for the artificial frameworks, the frame is now limiting the artificial sky.

Nietzsche: Also Sprach Zarathustra
 Zola: Au Bonheur des Dames
 Abbott: Flatland
 Villiers de l'Isle Adam: Tomorrow's Eve
 Mary Winchester's Mystery House

Flatland

The clockwork universe has never been so perfect as Newton left it to us: everything explained and in its proper places. In 1784, Etienne-Louis Boullée proposes a huge spherical *Cenotaph* as a memorial of Newton who died in 1697. Einstein's work was based on Newton's principles and other empirical facts, but rather than seeking static and absolute laws, he postulated that all is relative. The first theory of relativity explain how gravity of bodies affect their relations and also time. This binds together space and time as a 4-dimensional unity: Space-time, also known as *the Field*.

In spatial terms, the awareness of multiple dimensions, at least mathematically possible space, was made inhabitable by Edwin A. Abbott in the novel *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions*, published in 1884. The two-dimensional flatlander A. Square meets a representative from the three-dimensional world, the Sphere. Mediated by these geometrical figures, Abbott explains the life, culture and geometrical conditions of these universes. Flatland is a strictly hierarchic and sexist society where the amount of sides determines the class of the citizen. Women are the simplest beings shaped as straight lines, the faceted shapes are high noblesse while a circle is a priest of the highest rank. As a visitor from three-dimensional space, the Sphere is pedagogically guided through the mathematical problems of this simple geometry. The Square is then lifted into Spaceland by the Sphere, where the Square realises that the known universe, his home, is but a subspace of a larger four-dimensional universe. The final chapter of the novel venture into the unfathomable worlds of multiple dimensions and beyond. Although Abbott wrote Flatland as a parody of Victorian speculations about the universe, he has managed to anticipate fragments of the string theory.

FIVE OBJECTS TO REPRESENT THE YEAR 1884

FIVE SUBJECTS TO REPRESENT THE YEAR 1884

The Greenwich Meridian
 The Telephote
 The Skyscraper
 The Statue of Liberty
 The Thrill Ride

The Statue of Liberty

The gift from the old world to the new was a female effigy of skyscraping format. She too was a colossus to be observed against the sky. The sculptor Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi and the structural engineer Gustave Eiffel begun work on the “Liberty Enlightening the World” statue in 1875 and completed it in Paris in June in due time to be presented to America by the people of France on July 4, 1884.

Her size is carefully presented by measuring statistics: The approximate amount of “fabric” in Liberty’s copper dress is 4000 square yards and her sandals are size 879 based on standard american formula of women’s shoe size. The woman requires a whole island to herself, Bedloe’s Island was renamed Liberty Island to host the new symbol for America’s freedom. She is isolated from, yet incorporated with, the silhouette of Manhattan. She too is a skyscraper, a high-rise building in a dress, a miracle of formless design and engineering technique. Every day visitors are swallowed by the statue, and swarm like micro-organisms in her petrified intestines. They travel up her spine to dine inside her head and look out through her eyes. Visitors come out, reborn from the womb of Liberty, filled with awe of sheer size and foetus-like incorporation. The undulating masses of metal form abstract surfaces of incomparable measure are best perceived from inside the statue. The Mother superior consumes the vision just like the Motherboard swallows the actor and his perception in digital space.

Nietzsche: Also Sprach Zarathustra
 Zola: Au Bonheur des Dames
 Abbott: Flatland
 Villiers de l’Isle Adam: Tomorrow’s Eve
 Mary Winchester’s Mystery House

The Origin of Pieces

In 1884, Philippe Villiers de l’Isle-Adam (1838-1889) wrote *l’Ève Future* as a tribute to Thomas Alva Edison. He devoted the novel to “tous les rêveurs” (all dreamers) and the critic Remy de Gourmont called him an “exorciste du réel”. The idealist movement come to an extreme futurist and surreal expression in this novel where the dream of idealised love is manifested as the great inventor and genius, in a metaphysical revolt, creates the ideal woman in his Menlo park estate. Art is not only capable of imitating life, but of improving it. The talented engineer succeeds in keeping all the virtues of woman but getting rid of some unwanted characteristics in the female robot, *l’Andréide*, like uninteresting conversation topics and hysterical tendencies. The magic mechanic does not only express the genius of Thomas Edison, but incorporate some of the prevailing ideas and ideals of the time, like the mechanistic view of the system of the body, described by the physiologist Claude Bernard.

The ultimate artificial creation - the design and manufacturing of an artificial being - is a dangerous sacrilege, no matter what good intentions man may have. Even the speculation as to how we became what we are, has been provocative. In 1831 by Mary Shelley challenged the divine monopoly of creation in the dark Romantic *Frankenstein*, a composite being with no other origin than pieces. A few decades later, in 1859, the world saw the delayed publication of *The Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin. Artificial Human machines, cyborgs or automata may still be science fiction, but the idea has been around for a long time. The fascination of artificial beings reached obsession in the 18th century, when the famous automata of the chess-playing Turk and the Musical Lady were famous diversions in the salons. The seduction of clockwork motion was in this automaton combined with exoticism, and it disappointed nobody, until it was revealed that artificial intelligence had little to do with it, rather the human ability to fit into a small space.

Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s novel is stylistically nearly unreadable, sugared by uncritical devotion and over-exalted stylistic ornaments. “Fan fiction” is the phenomenon of devoted fans appropriating fictive characters, transposing them into stories that satisfy their projected ideas of their idols. Villiers de l’Isle-Adam projects all his dreams of artificial life on Edison, turning the novel *l’Ève Future* into the first *science fan fiction* novel of the modern era. In Adam’s creation of the perfect Eve, he has Edison to complain of “How late I arrive into Humanity!”.

FIVE OBJECTS TO REPRESENT THE YEAR 1884

FIVE SUBJECTS TO REPRESENT THE YEAR 1884

The Greenwich Meridian
 The Telephoto
 The Skyscraper
 The Statue of Liberty
 The Thrill Ride

The Thrill Ride

Monstrous visual thrills of size and eerie perception of speed come together in the ride to nowhere, where the only purpose for displacement is the thrills of gravity. Rollercoasters date back to the 15th century, where icy hillsides in Russia were refined with stairs to walk up after the slide down. The climate requirements were overcome as a wheeled sled was constructed to run down any hill without the ice. This attraction was brought to France during the 18th century, and was popularly named *Les Montagnes Russes*. The rides downhill could be pulled uphill by humans or horses, or cabled up. The more than thrilling downhill race was made slightly safer as tracks were invented. Various efforts to improve the ride ended in 1840 - when a looped coaster crashed badly.

The Russian Mountains never rose big in America, but the *Mauch Chunk Railway* in Pennsylvania made use of a coal transportation system where several cars were linked together to ride the 18-mile track. In 1884, the founder of Coney Island's Luna Park in New York introduced the latest attraction: the world's first modern roller coaster called *the Switchback Railway*. LeMarcus Adna Thompson had modified the design from the Russian Mountain and the Mauch Chunk Railway into a construction that paid his investments after one week of operation, charging five cents per ride on the undulating course of gravity. This was the thrill ride that all succeeding ones had to measure up to. Improvements of the idea began immediately after by competing inventors, but "the father of the roller coaster" did not stay off track for long. Some years later Thompson invented *the Scenic Railway*, one of the first to go around in a complete circuit, and completed with visual effects along the ride. The coaster was a great success and was exported to Europe after some security improvements. The Thrill Ride defies time and space, and produce abnormal adrenaline levels, in short all you wish for in a society that has got the first taste for speed and multimedia. To an extreme, the laws of Newton could now be comprehensively ridden in a safe system, just before the Jewish patent clerk would tell us not to trust gravity, speed or any laws of mechanics that claimed to tame these forces.

Nietzsche: Also Sprach Zarathustra
 Zola: Au Bonheur des Dames
 Abbott: Flatland
 Villiers de l'Isle Adam: Tomorrow's Eve
 Mary Winchester's Mystery House

The Mystery House

In 1884, a wealthy widow named Sarah Winchester began the construction project in the Victorian mansion that would become known as the *Winchester Mystery House*, in San José, California. She began construction in the year 1884, adding rooms until her death in 1922. The obsessive building project that would become the most disorienting tourist attraction of San José grew from guilt and fear. The Winchester rifle heiress feared that the vast numbers of native Americans killed by the fortune bringer would take revenge as spirits. She consulted a spiritist who told her to begin the building project that would lead the ghost victims astray in the labyrinthine architecture.

The thirty-eight years of constant construction resulted in a hundred and sixty rooms, fitted with comforts like modern heating, sewer systems, gas lights and three elevators. While many oddities in the house, like stairs leading into the ceiling, standard windows in the floor, inaccessible rooms and doors opening into thin air, other anomalies prove to be purely functional design details. The out-of-scale footsteps of some stairs are due to the ageing builder's bad legs. Every night, Sarah retreated to her seance room and consulted the spirits who gave her building instructions.

This article investigates the composite phenomena of the artificial in examples from literature and science, exploring the interrelations of narrative and spatial creation. It introduces the sciences of the artificial to the narrative architecture of fictional space and applies the terminology to the structure of the narrative form itself.

II

The Operative Fields of the Artificial

The late 19th Century symbolists and decadents in art and literature shared a particular interest in the artificial. The artefact plays the role of merchandise or fetish: the object is negotiated against a background of pure desire. The artificial may imitate nature in form or function, deceive the eye, or even attempt to upstage the natural model, negotiating any productive means or materials for this purpose. The French author Joris-Karl Huysmans provides a narrative space where the artificial ingenuity and creativity of Baron Des Esseintes is described. The novel *À Rebours* (*Against Nature*) was published in 1884, and represents the essence of the symbolist infatuation for the artificial. The Baron is in voluntary exile from the excesses of Parisian urban and social life. His new geographically isolated existence is stripped from everything except artificial pleasures. Huysmans describes an architecture entirely created for escape into imagination by the aid of artificial and mechanical arrangements. This type of complex systems, whether they be digital, social, political or economic organisations, is the central object of research in Herbert A. Simon, professor of computer science and psychology at Carnegie Mellon Institute. Simon, who published *The Sciences of the Artificial* in 1969, was awarded the 1978 Nobel Prize in economics. His descriptions of the artificial will be discussed together with scenes from *Against Nature*, as the conceptual meeting of the “science of Simon” and the “artifice of Huysmans”. The French hermeneutic philosopher Paul Ricoeur investigates the text as an artefact, while identifying the different form and threshold conditions this particular form of

object, the narrative, can take. His philosophy can be considered part of the hermeneutic tradition, dealing with theories of metaphors and the problem of the narrative, in analysis and writing. His identification of different representational strata of a text, is compared to the terminological system of Simon.

The Maker of All Things

The axiom “Art imitates Nature” may help us to determine the nature of the artificial. In Aristotle’s *Physics*, animals, plants and the elements exist *by nature*, i.e. they have a nature by form and matter and behave “according to nature”. A property of nature’s subjects is the inherent principle of motion and change. An artificial product, according to Aristotle, has not “in itself the source of its own production”. If a bed would be planted as a seed it would not grow a bed, but may sprout a plant, which would only potentially become a bed in the hands of an artist. If it does not have the form of a bed, it can not be called a work of art: the wood has by nature, in its matter, the potential to become an artefact but the form which would determine its nature as a bed is not there without artificial production. Since matter and form in natural objects are given, artefacts are always made from matter with an intention, a form. Nature acts towards her ends in the same way as the artist works towards a desired function: Art imitates Nature.¹

Socrates asserts that there is only one Creator, “the maker of all the works of other workmen” and his creation of every object exists only as one. The artificer is only making a particular object, a semblance of the one Idea that only the true Creator can define the essence of. This creator only makes one essential object of every idea, and not a multitude of particular ones. That is the work of imitators of the second degree, craftsmen. When speaking of painters and poets, they are confined to represent only the image of the already once imitated object, why they necessarily take the position of third degree imitators. All art is mimesis in the

¹ Aristotle. *Physics* (www.non-contradiction.com/ac_works_b7.asp), book II, chapter 1 and 2

sense that even the most original object must have an essential one correspondent in the realm of ideas, our own or a supreme creator's.²

In the Christian tradition, St. Augustine explains in his *Confessions* that the first act of creation cannot have been similar to the process of a human craftsman since nothing existed before God, the "Maker of all things".³ The divine creative process must then have been the utterance of the Word. The human artificer, whose body and mind is a creation of God, is provided by God with material from which the goods is made, and the intelligence by which he masters his art. God provided the craftsman with the senses "which are the channels through which his mental picture of the thing he is making is transmitted to the material" that allow the artificer to determine the quality of the product.⁴ Men make all sorts of objects, useful or not, as fruits of their imagination, but most of these things surpass the simple requirements and pose a temptation to the eye in being luxurious. St. Augustine asks God to forgive the craftsman who does not see that the beauty which "flows through men's minds into their skilful hands" really has its origin in God.

The creation of the artificial is an act of balance between man and nature. The symbolist movement sought in its extreme aestheticism not only to restore the artificial from the "classic" contempt of the imperfection of anything manmade in comparison to the Great Creation, but to surpass the natural. Against this background of the relations between the creator and the created, the concept of art imitating nature is further complexified by Huysmans.

False Flowers

The examples of the artificial in *Against Nature* serve as the constitutional parts that make up the interface of the mansion, rendered as physical objects and articulated arguments in Huysmans' campaign against the vulgarity of naturalness. Des

² Plato. *The Republic* (<http://plato.evansville.edu/texts/jowett/republic39.htm>), 596 a - 601 d

³ St. Augustine. *Confessions*. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd 1961, p. 240

⁴ Ibid, p. 257

Esseintes considers the artificial to be "the distinctive mark of human genius" and claims that artificiality should finally replace nature, "to take her place whenever possible".⁵ Among the immersive spaces, whose purpose is to augment illusory perception and aesthetic stimulation, are the dining room designed as a ship's cabin and the study, aesthetically and functionally adapted for nocturnal living. Instruments such as the mouth-organ are used in combination with sensory-inducing works of literature and art. As Huysmans shows in the novel *Against Nature*, no engagement in artificial creation is without hazard. Des Esseintes' exclusive excesses has a prize, and it is a mounting sum that will eventually be paid to nature.

The most striking example of transcendence between the natural and the artificial in *Against Nature* is the Baron's collection of real plants that appear to be fake.

*"This admirable artistry had long enthralled him, but now he dreamt of collecting another kind of flora: tired of artificial flowers aping real ones, he wanted some natural flowers that would look like fakes."*⁶

Des Esseintes converts his vestibule to accommodate the exotic plants that fit this description, and at the same time rids himself of the laborious work of imitation. Having raged at nature's "monotonous store of meadows and trees" and her "commonplace display of mountains and seas"⁷, he is trapped in fascination for the horrific and splendid variations of his tropical plants, and marvel at the wonders of mutilation. A conscious act of aesthetic selection results in a collection where every natural item is a *representation* of something artificial. Huysmans employs analogies from crafted or non-organic materials - plaster, lead, zinc, punched metal, oil-paint, calico, iron - in the descriptions of the texture and appearance of these bizarre plants. In some plants he sees swords, spears and other weaponry, paddles and oars, windmills, clogs and religious sacraments like bishop's croziers: Des Esseintes

⁵ Huysmans, Joris-Karl: *Against Nature* (*À Rebours*, first ed. 1884) Penguin, London 1959, pp. 36-37

⁶ Ibid, p. 97

⁷ Ibid, p. 36

holds that some "demented draughtsman" must have devised the contours of these unnatural shapes.⁸

The Hermeneutics of Ricoeur

As we tread from the dimension of fiction to that of science, Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic philosophy is helpful. The hermeneutical project of reading involves the roles of the author, the text and the reader. The author is operating with (contextually imposed) intentions, the text is mediating the intention while being independent of the author, but dependent of the reader whose (imaginative) interpretation is, in turn, contextually determined. These roles expand into circular dynamic systems of understanding and questioning, which is not limited to the text, but expands to all social and cultural phenomena. As Ricoeur argues, the theories of imagination and fiction are not just informing the narratively mediated culture, but informing science by enrichment of its conceptual models.

Ricoeur mediates between the world of the text and the scientific model of the artificial. In "the Function of Fiction in Shaping Reality" from *Man and World* (1979), he determines fiction as a productive function of imagination, capable of making and remaking worlds. Ricoeur argues that imagination is crucial in the production of both poetic and epistemologic work. The concept of fiction, in his argument, extends from the direct application in language (text) and plastic arts (image), to encompass conceptual scientific tools such as the metaphor and the model.⁹ Ricoeur identifies images as derived from perception, either as replicas (with a fixed referent) or fictions (suspended/productive reference). Images, produced by perception or language, is what imagination operates on in order to produce heuristic interpretations. Huysmans applies the narrative method to produce a new world, and he has provided it with a congenial creator of artificial worlds (the baron), constantly arguing for the power of imagination assisted by a

⁸ Ibid, p. 99

⁹ Ricoeur, Paul. "The Function of Fiction in Shaping Reality" in *Man and World*, no 12, 1979, pp. 123-141

carefully designed environment and congenial artefacts. Ricoeur is the link between this fictional example and the sciences of the artificial, having already established that science, claiming to re-describe reality, need to employ imagination and fiction for its epistemological production.

The Artificial as an Interface

The science of the artificial is virtually the science of design, Herbert Simon argues in his *Sciences of the Artificial*. Artefacts do not take an opposed position to nature: they obey natural laws, they change and evolve according to what we want from them. Evolution is under the influence of synthetic and prescriptive engineering, in a process parallel to natural phenomena under natural laws. The science of the man-made as goal-oriented phenomena must complement natural science: nature and the artificial have always coexisted in civilisation. Artefacts and design likewise, can be characterized in terms of functions, goals, or adaptation. The artefact is contingent to the goal and purpose of the designer. A science of the artificial needs to encompass both human intentions, natural laws and study different disciplines where complex systems and their users interface.¹⁰

The artefact can be approached in a simple symmetrical model, as an *interface* between *inner* and *outer* environment. This allows us to observe and analyse the performance of the artefact by natural law: when inner environment (its internal construction) is appropriate to the outer environment (where it is placed), meaning internal mechanisms correspond with the conditions for goal attainment, the artefact will reflect its intended idea. "Fulfilment of purpose or adaptation to a goal involves a relation among three terms: the *purpose* or goal, the *character* of the artefact, and the *environment* in which the artefact performs." In terms of adaptation, of the artefact's congruence with different environments, the true nature of the artefact is in fact an interface, and should thus be the focus of a science of the artificial.

¹⁰ Simon, Herbert A. *The Sciences of the Artificial* (1969). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1981

For the definition of artefacts, Simon offers four criteria. First, artefacts are synthesised by man. Second, they may imitate the appearance of natural things. Third definition gives that artefacts may be characterised in terms of functions, goals and adaptation. Finally, artefacts are often described in both imperative and descriptive terms, especially in the design process.¹¹

The behaviour of systems, in relation to the task environment, will rarely be optimised but most often approximated. Goal-directed behaviour simply reflects the shape of the environment. Simon proposes that the thinking man can be observed to behave as an artefact: “A man viewed as a behaving system, is quite simple. The apparent complexity of his behaviour over time is largely a reflection of the complexity of the environment in which he finds himself.”¹² There is a constant negotiation between the simplicity of the system that allow agents to be more complex and the complexity of the environment that allow agents to be simpler. In an overall perspective, the simplicity or transparency of environments is the main goal for any complex system.

Where there is an artefact, there is a user. Inner and outer environment are united in the interface. The interface between inner and outer environment is a sliding door between aim and action. There is an interesting likeness of terms between Ricoeur’s and Simon’s theories. Both disciplines depend on general concepts of hierarchy, memory, expectation and imitation. Most importantly, both Ricoeur and Simon deal with the “internal configuration of a work” related to the “external refiguration of a life”, to use Ricoeur’s words. With the previous knowledge about the interdependence of the artefact and its environments (as anything that is adapted to some situation), the optimal function of an artefact in relation to its inner and outer environments as well as its own capacity for adaptation, would be achieved if it would fulfil the same set of criteria for mediation that Ricoeur uses to describe a text: “It is a mediation between man and the world (reference), between man and man (communication) and between man and himself (self-understanding).”¹³

¹¹ Ibid, p. 8

¹² Ibid, p. 65

¹³ Ricoeur, Paul. “Life: A Story in Search of a Narrator”. *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*. Valdés, Mario, ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1991, pp. 431-432

The dynamics of transfiguration between the terminology applied in Ricoeur's hermeneutic investigations and the terminology of Simon's studies in artificial creation can be summoned thus:

The central term for their respective studies is the *artefact/interface* in Simon and the *fiction/text* in Ricoeur, the operative systems of these instances could be the *synthesis* (Simon), and the *plot* (Ricoeur). The corresponding acts of understanding the relations between the different parts of the processes would be *simulation* (Simon) and *interpretation* (Ricoeur). From the perspective of *environment*, we can be *readers* of a *text*, as we can be *users* of an *artefact*.

Science of Simon and Artifice of Huysmans

This model may allow us to simultaneously contemplate the different environments. In relation to each of the selected quotes from Simon's *the Sciences of the Artificial*, I will discuss a passage from Huysmans' *Against Nature* involving a description of artificial creation. The creations of Des Esseintes will find their way into the terminology of *the Sciences of the Artificial*, and in the other direction, from the perspective of Simon, we can approach the agents and methods involved in the Baron's artificial constructions.

Simon: Artefact as an Interface

An artefact can be thought of as a meeting point - an interface - between an "inner" environment, the substance and organisation of the artefact itself, and an "outer" environment, the surroundings in which it operates.¹⁴

Huysmans: The Fishtank Window

An illustration of this argument is provided in the description of the arrangements of Des Esseintes' dining room, a room inside a room, a ship's cabin inserted within the original plan, like a japanese box. A port-hole window from the inserted

room looks into an aquarium that "renders useless" the original window. This fishtank filters the natural light through the water, that may also be tinted by colourings according to the season and weather. In this box-in-box room, separated from the outside view by the fish-tank, the Baron imagines himself "between-decks in a brig" gazing "inquisitively at some ingenious mechanical fishes driven by clockwork, which moved backwards and forwards behind the port-hole window and got entangled in artificial seaweed" This artificial window, turned into a space in itself, has two interfaces and separates two sets of inner and outer environment. the meeting-point that is optimised to the Baron, the view outside the mansion is of no interest to him, whereas the fishtank substitutes his imagination as the outer environment of the sea combined with the inner environment of his ship. The system of "boxes" provide "almost simultaneously, all the sensations of a long sea-voyage, without ever leaving home." The system is a weave of insides and outsides, both real, represented and imagined, from every inside or outside, meaning is changes at every surface. The architecture is multiplied into a set of programmed representations of macro-events- it is a simulator.¹⁵

Simon: The Essence of Science

The central task of a natural science is to make
the wonderful commonplace. ¹⁶

Huysmans: The Trappist's Cell

The Baron leaves his former lifestyle and abandons his Paris home and its luxurious designs. As a consequence "the bedroom had to be turned into a facsimile of a monastery cell". Des Esseintes is however not prepared to give up the luxury of exquisite materials and exclusive textures. The detailed copy of the Trappist Cell is thus transformed into the most visual likeness but realised in

¹⁴ Simon, p. 36

¹⁵ Huysmans, pp. 33-35

¹⁶ Simon, p. 3

materials that guarantees intact comfort in the following way: "to imitate the yellow distemper beoved by church and state alike, he had the walls hung with saffron silk. /.../ The ceiling was similarly covered with white holland, which had the appearance of plaster /.../ as for the cold tiles of the floor, he managed to hit them off quite well, thanks to a carpet patterned in red squares, with the wood dyed white in places where sandals and boots could be supposed to have left their mark." This method, "to employ cheerful means to attain a drab end", marks the artificial creation that reverses the optical illusion of the stage: "where cheap finery plays the part of rich and costly fabrics". The wonderful is made commonplace when "magnificent materials give the impression of old rags." In Simon's sense, making the wonderful commonplace is to reveal the simplicity behind the mask of complexity. In Huysmans' scene, the simplicity of the commonplace is rendered with the wonderful complexity of luxury. Huysmans reverses the statement. The unmasking of the space is finding complexity in the artificial simplicity. A close tactile examination is required to call the bluff, vision is deceived.¹⁷

Simon: Simulation

It is typical of many kinds of design problems that the inner system consists of components whose fundamental laws of behaviour /.../ are well known. The difficulty of the design problem often resides in predicting how an assemblage of such components will behave.¹⁸

Huysmans: The Decorated Tortoise

Des Esseintes buys a tortoise and has its carapace glazed with gold and gemstones encrusted into its shell. The reason for this extravagancy was that the tortoise would liven up the dull colours of an Oriental carpet in the Baron's library. The animated design of the animal crawling around, glittering with the added stones, works according to the Baron's plan. After some time, the tortoise lies still, it has died from its artificially augmented beauty. Des Esseintes redesigned the animal

¹⁷ Huysmans, p. 75

¹⁸ Simon, p. 19

solely from the point of view of the “carpet” environment, which in itself would have been a satisfying outer environment for the tortoise. The system of his design relied on the fundamental laws of the behaviour of: a. the texture qualities of jewels and gold and that b. a slow movement would make jewels sparkle against the background colours and c. that tortoises move at sufficient speed to fulfil system criteria (b) and have a natural constitution for the type of decorations in (a). His knowledge of the new “tortoise-gold-jewels”-assemblage is insufficient to predict how its components will behave in relation to each other. This sad example points out the importance of simulation as a design stage to find out what correct premises may imply on the relationships within the system.¹⁹

Simon: Homeostasis

In one way or another the designer insulates the inner system from the environment, so that an invariant relation is maintained between inner system and goal.²⁰

Huysmans: The Padded Corridors

In order to maintain his isolated existence, Des Esseintes has padded and hermetically sealed the linking space between his rooms and the servants’ areas, letting through neither sound, nor smell. The designer has insulated the inner system from the environment, in order to create and maintain an invariant relation between the inner system and the goal. The mutually balanced relationship, which biologists call homeostasis, is a property of this type of adaptive system. The Baron depends on only a few characteristics of the outer environment, meals and household administration, to be able to achieve his goal: to engage his daydreaming projects without being disturbed. The Baron establish routines, codes, even masks, to communicate with the servants from within the inner system.²¹

¹⁹ Huysmans, pp. 53-54

²⁰ Simon, p. 12

²¹ Huysmans, pp. 32-33

Simon: Optimize or Satisfice

The decision maker has a choice between optimal decisions for an imaginary simplified world or decisions that are “good enough”, that satisfice, for a world approximating the complex real one more closely.²²

Huysmans: The Uncompleted Journey

This analogy is an artificial process rather than an artefact. Des Esseintes decides to go to London to experience the atmosphere of Dickens and Poe *in situ*. While waiting for the train in Paris, he visits some bookshops and looks at maps and guide-books, still early for the train he decides to dine in a bodega near the station. Looking around at people, the rain pouring down outside, savouring the food and the smell of damp wool and beer, and hearing foreign languages, the Baron decides that he has filled his senses already with exactly what he wanted. To complete the journey in this state would simply spoil the whole experience. He returns to his home, with the feeling that this had been an optimal journey. The concepts of optimizing and satisficing are fundamental in economic rationality. The economic man generally accepts “good enough”-alternatives because optimisation is practically never possible. In decision-making, the economically rational option has to be balanced against possible developments in the complex environment. The Baron makes the decision to go for the optimal in a simplified world, the intensive and imaginary world, in this trip, rather than a diluted “good enough”-experience in the real world.²³

²² Simon, p. 35

²³ Huysmans, pp. 132-142

Intervention into Nature

The seductive powers of the artificial appealed to the symbolists and the decadents in accordance with aestheticism and the *l'art pour l'art* ideal. Des Esseintes believes that the imperfection of nature can only be repaired by artefacts, in fact, the only *raison-d'être* of nature is to be improved upon by art. The idea of art, and thus the artificial, proposes a limitless operative field, with no dictated rules of moral or beauty, separated from nature and the ideals imposed on her. Des Esseintes has withdrawn from the corrupted nature, in a final attempt to create a complete, autonomous and artificial world within his fantasmagoric interiors. They include the narrative spaces embedded in his outer environment, equipped with an interactive layer of triggering artefacts and yet another interactive layer represented in his library as meta-narrative excursions. The reader of Huysmans is engaging in the artefact of the novel, where the main character splits his existence into various timespaces, that in turn depend on his interactions with symbolically charged objects. Simon's theory of the artificial is helpful in identifying how the system of artefacts mediates between the inner and outer environment of the user/designer.

As a concluding argument, you could, as Elisabeth Grosz, identify *the thing*, a philosophical problem of many names, as an "intervention into nature".²⁴ The thing becomes an agent provocateur of life itself: "The thing, matter already configured, generates invention, the assessment of means and ends, and thus enables practice."²⁵ The thing arises in both space and time the moment we distinguish them and perceive them to be ready to respond to our potential action. The operative field of the artificial is capable of all interconnections between fictional and real architectural intervention.

²⁴ Grosz Elisabeth, *Architecture from the Outside- Essays on Virtual and Real Space*. Cambridge, MA & London, UK: MIT Press 2001, p. 167

²⁵ Ibid, p. 169

Fleurs D'Artifice – from the French word for fireworks – *Feu d'Artifice*: an investigation of the nature of artificiality in the shape of the false flower, borrowing the form of the calligramme, combining the terms *calligraphie* and *idéogramme*, invented by Guillaume Apollinaire.

F l e u r s
d ' A r t i f i c e

The artificial has to
be preceded by a conceptual
impulse. The idea is the closest man will
ever get to eternity and perpetual existence.
Nothing artificial happens by itself, naturally, but
once constructed, the artefact does not easily leave
nature. It may cease to exist by destruction or it may
become hidden and forgotten, but it does not fulfil a cycle. The artificial flower
never dies, its colours may fade but it will not decay. The artificial pays this tribute
to nature, in the eternal preservation of the moment of exquisite bloom. At the same
time, the artificial flower is a wilful observation of the potential disappearance of beauty,
an artefact that goes against the rationality of decadence, the nourishing soil of a passing
culture from which new art will be born and new representations invented. The tragedy of
the artificial flower is that she will be lonely in nature and laughed at in reality. As Bergson
points out in *le Rire*, mechanized, distorted nature is a truly comic motif. We laugh at what is human,
or have human traits. The discrepancy between our image of nature, and a nature juxtaposed with
obvious human interventions, is comic. A false flower is only natural by form
since it is artificial by matter. The artefact would be able to blend with
real flowers in a flowerbed, but it will be the only flower to stand
the test of time. Its nature as unnatural would eventually be
revealed. The artificial flower is a monument, representing nature
in a chosen moment of the organic cycle. It has not grown according to
the natural cycle, its deceptive "realistic" appearance lies about its origin, and it will
not follow the cycle into decay, so it also lies about its destiny. Reality will, through the passing
of time, layer itself upon the artificial flower as dust, the microscopic remains of physical
space and particles from the bodies moving within it. This replica is a sarcophagus
of time. The Victorian infatuation with artificial flowers was the peak of a
tradition of artifice that dates back to antiquity. The world fairs and social parlors
of the era were generously decorated with these wonderworks of paper, crêpe, silk, and
wax. Exclusive false flowers were made of human hair, feathers, shells and fish
scales into composite beings, sometimes as pure fantasy creations but more often in
perfect mimicry of nature. The artificial beauty had a dark side of social reality.
Women and children were abused as labour in the factories and commerce
of false flowers, to such an extent that it threatened to undermine the
family life of the working classes.

The sacred sphere of the household was infiltrated by the cottage industry of flower-making. Artificial flowers were commonly used to frame the coffin in lit de parades, and were also part of the Victorian mourning ritual. Made from hair of family members, the flowers were worn in hats at the funeral ceremony and adrranged in adornment of the family crypts. The false flowers outlive nature and the reality of the artificer is hidden behind their artificial beauty. One of the most adept artificers of Victorian times is a fictional character, Baron Des Esseintes, in Huysmans' *Against Nature*. The Baron lives in an isolated mansion where he is constantly engaged in aesthetic projects, designing his existence in accordance with his contempt for naturalness. Having raged at nature's "monotonous store of meadows and trees" and her "commonplace display of mountains and seas", he is trapped in fascination for the horrific and splendid variations of tropical plants, and marvel at the wonders of mutilation. In the exotic garden he creates in the vestibule of his mansion, plants are chosen for their visual and textural qualities of appearing as non-organic material as metal and plaster, and arranged with regard to their anthropomorphic textures: wounds, flesh, genitalia. The Baron makes an artificial loop. He used to be fascinated by his fake flowers, but he imagines a way of reversing the creation of the artificial: *"This admirable artistry had long enthralled him, but now he dreamt of collecting another kind of flora: tired of artificial flowers aping real ones, he wanted some natural flowers that would look like fakes."* The wonderous "unrealness" of the plants suspends the disbelief of nature. His contempt for nature coincides with his absorbtion in her, he disregards her while focusing his gaze on her. In his contempt for nature, Des Esseintes expresses his credo: *"In fact, there is not a single one of her inventions, deemed so subtle and sublime, that human ingenuity cannot manufacture"*. The examples of the artificial in *Against Nature* serve as the constitutional parts that make up the interface of the mansion, rendered as physical objects and articulated arguments in Huysmans' campaign against the vulgarity of naturalness. Des Esseintes considers the artificial to be *"the distinctive mark of human genius"* and claims that artificiality should finally replace nature, *"to take her place whenever possible"*. In his former days in Paris, his taste for the artificial had led him to neglect the real flower for its copy, *"faithfully and almost miraculously executed in indiarubber and wire, calico, taffeta, paper and velvet following Nature step by step, repeating her processes, taking the flower from its birth..."*

*imitating it
even to its death."*

The most striking example
of transcendence between the
natural and the artificial in Against Nature
is the Baron's collection of real plants that appear to be fake. Des
Esseintes converts his vestibule in order to accommodate the exotic plants that fit this
description, and at the same time rids himself of the labourious work of imitation. A conscious
act of aesthetic selection results in a collection where every natural item is a representation of
something artificial. Huysmans employs analogies from crafted materials - plaster, lead, zinc,
punched metal, oil-paint, calico, iron - in the descriptions of the texture and appearance of
these bizarre plants. In some plants he sees swords, spears and other weaponry, paddles and
oars, windmills, clogs and religious sacraments like bishop's croziers: Des Esseintes holds that
some "demented draughtsman" must have devised the contours of these unnatural shapes.
To further complexify this loop of nature imitating artifice, the plants also demonstrate the
effects of nature imitating nature. Huysmans excels in metaphorical descriptions to explain
the anthropomorphic variations, all extraordinary displays of pathologic corruption:
amputated limbs, flesh-wounds, cancrs, ulcers, scars and scabs in different stages of
healing: *"covered with dressings of various sorts, coated with black mercurial lard,
plastered with green belladonna ointment, dusted over with the yellow flakes of
iodoform powder"*. It seems as though nature, having taken human form, is under the
acute treatment of a field physician. Some plants are rather zoomorphic, displaying
orangutang arms and fish slice forms, and they too end up on Huysmans' dissection table of metaphors. The collection is crowned by the vampyrous
insectivores, whose metabolism is curiously inverted for the consumption of
flies in a final reversal of all principles of nature. Stepping back to appraise the
organic bestiary, the Baron experiences a rare feeling of accomplishment.
*"Yes, his object had been achieved: not one of them looked real; it was
as if cloth, paper, porcelain, and metal had been lent by man to Nature
to enable her to create these monstrosities."* Exhausted from the
sensorama of his curious flowerbed, and slightly poisoned by the
composite sensations of smells, textures and fiery colours, Des
Esseintes falls asleep. The texture and matter of his flowery
artifice is now the stuff his dreams are made of, this
time uncontrollable in their sickening and enlarged
appearances. He is nearly raped by a pox-
stricken female flower, when
he wakes up
from
his
night
mares.

In a fusion of
semantic horizons, the world of text
is infiltrated by flowers. Rising above the object for this study - where the acts of collecting
and selecting signify the artificer and where the author outwits himself in creative metaphorical
representations - the concept of flowers and language interface in many constellations.
In its original sense, the word anthology was a collection of flowers, florilegium in Latin,
similar to the pick of writings, collected in a flower of short poems,
a bouquet of texts, looping back into poesie. The rhetorical flowers
of Huysmans leads him to meditations on a new twist on social
classification: *"It amused him to liken a horticulturist's shop to
a micro-cosm in which every social category and class was
represented..."* The Baron sees poor, vulgar slum-flowers
in milkbottles, pretentious roses in porcelain pots and
rare lilies in palaces of glass. Des Esseintes is
convinced that horticulture is the only true
artform left for us: by combinations,
cuttings and crossings, man can bend
her processes to fulfill his aims.
Religion, women and nature
are closely interrelated in
Huysmans. Des Esseintes
ponders upon Gustave
Moreau's paintings of
Salome. This femme
fatale motif has
haunted artists and
poets especially in the
nineteenth century,
and is an obsession
with the Baron.
The painting
w o u l d
t r a n s -
port him
to some
unfam-
i l i a r
world,
p o i n t
the way
to new
p o s s i -
bilities,
s h a k e

u p
 h i s n e r v o u s
 system, causing nightmares and
 "suave and sinister visions". In the heart of the incense-laden
 byzantine palace of Herod, embedded in Moreau's eclectic vision of
 architectonic mixtures, Salome dances in a delirium that builds up to the biblical
 passage where the woman, by using her seductive powers, causes the death of John the
 Baptist. Huysmans paints the picture of a Salome that subjugates the will of men with "*the
 charms of a great venereal flower, grown in a bed of sacrilege, reared in a hothouse of impiety.*"
 Suggesting that she had grown in a hothouse, an obsolete term for bordello, implies
 that she was not grown from nature but rather cultivated as an artifice in
 defiance of god. The traditional symbolic of innocence and purity,
 the chaste and shortlived bloom of a maiden, is
 contradicted by Huysmans who merges the flower and the
 savage courtesan Salome. The false flower, subsequently,
 symbolises the false woman. The hothouse in *Against Nature* becomes
 analogous to the whole existence of the Baron. Raised in the
 hothouse of his own imagination, grown from a rare seed,
 and watered by contempt for "nature's vulgarity", he will not be
 able to root in any space outside of his sheltered environment.
 An "imperfect flower" denotes, in botanical terms, one that is
 unable to reproduce itself by itself, meaning the sexual defect
 of having stamens or pistils, but not both.
 Analogous to this, the Baron's strive for perfection
 in the domestic interior, is the desire to create
 a realm optimised for self- i n v e n t i o n ,
 among artifice that assure constant
 reproduction of imagination. To go
 against nature is to impress the
 soul with the unbearable
 complexity of self-
 i n v e n t i o n .

In the following article I investigate the processes of turning dreams into physical space, exemplified by four extraordinary creators and collectors of space, each one a pursuer of obsessive architectural activities, all haunted by transitive dreams.

III

The Obsessive Builder of Dreams

We may have asked ourselves what stuff our dreams are made of, while others have worked out ways to find out how to turn our dreams into stuff. In order to investigate such projects, we have to acknowledge the critical point of entry, where imagination can take as small a step as possible to make the giant leap into architectural space. The construction of a dream is a time- and space-consuming project. Such projects never get finished. The architectural activities turn into a lifestyle, tending toward obsession. This article investigates the processes of turning dreams into physical space and performs a comparative analysis of structures of realised imagination. Four examples of extraordinary creators and collectors of space are introduced, each one a pursuer of obsessive architectural activities: Baron Des Esseintes, Joris-Karl Huysmans' fictional character in the novel *À Rebours* (*Against Nature*) from 1884; Kurt Schwitters, the dadaist painter and constructor of the *Merzbau* created in Hannover between 1919 and 1937; Sir John Soane, the architect and collector, who arranged his home as a *Museum* from 1790 until 1837; and the German artist Gregor Schneider, whose home in Rheydt since 1985 is slowly folding in on itself under the name *Haus Ur*. Whereas Des Esseintes is a fictional builder of dreams in physical form; Schwitters, Soane and Schneider are real builders of dreams in physical form – the author Huysmans is a real builder of dreams in fictional form.

The maintenance and creation of imagined worlds need a protective climate, as ephemeral fragments of imagination land heavily in physical space. Ideas need a

transitory environment with certain qualities to break the fall into reality. I will assign different kinds of sheltering structures to these four physical constructions in order to investigate the character of the space and the methods applied by the dreambuilders.

The Hothouse

Baron des Esseintes has lived an exuberant urban life in Paris but finds his final retreat in an isolated residence, where the grand projects of domestic adaptations and architectural transformations will take place. He surrounds himself with precious collections of artefacts, art and literature, designed for intricate interaction with his hyperaesthetic senses. *Against Nature* provides examples of mechanical innovations and synesthetic instruments, such as the *mouth organ* that plays drinkable symphonies, and the perfume bar for olfactory modelling of space. The mansion constitutes a new kind of *Palace of Art*, where the external physical world is subject to an inner world of imagination. The transitory mind of the Baron is constantly engaging in experimental spatial excesses on the verge of sensory overload.¹ He uses all possible means to maintain his isolated existence and limits the social interaction with his servants to a minimum. A careful separation of routines, coded communication, and “...a corridor which was padded and hermentically sealed...” guarantee his absolute seclusion.² The servants are merely robotic installations in this muffled infrastructure. The interior is entirely created for reveries and escapism by the aid of artificial arrangements that stimulate each of the senses to produce a new world from within. The artificial provide the means to transform ideas independently from the imperative of nature. In spite of his contempt of nature, the Baron takes on botanical collection. For his *hothouse*, he selects natural exotic plants that appear to be extravagantly

¹ The first part of the PhD project consists of an analysis of Huysmans' novel *Against Nature* as a premature description of the conditions and possibilities of digital virtual space, as we are able to describe and create it in our time. See chapter I, pp. 44-63: *The Dying Dreamer – Looking into Huysmans' Virtual Worlds*.

² Huysmans, Joris-Karl. *Against Nature* (*À Rebours*, 1884). London: Penguin 1959, p. 33

artificial. As the artificial becomes domesticised by Des Esseintes, the mansion turns into an alternative nature: the hybrid of concretisation of dreams and the dreamer himself. The hothouse becomes analogous to Des Esseintes' whole existence. Raised in the hothouse of his own imagination, he will not be able to root in any space outside of his sheltered environment.

The Incubator

Merzbau was described by the artist as a “*model of a monument to humanity*”³, essentially a universal project carried out as a distributed “merzing” of Kurt Schwitters' home. The construction sprouted into abstract folds of wood and plaster in stalactite and stalagmite forms and grew to an extruded immersive version of his assemblage paintings. Schwitters was a skilled publisher and promotor of his work and ideas, yet his main occupation was a secret instrument. The *Merzbau* project was worked on in seclusion for over thirteen years, its growth mirrored by the accelerating political climate of Germany: “*By 1936 the Merzbau had expanded so rapidly that it started to sprout through the outer shell of the house.*”⁴ It was destroyed in the bombing raids of 1943. While it is tempting to make an analogy to a built diagram of global tension, and thus regard it in terms of a measuring device, the *Merzbau* could also be seen as an incubator, a safe enclosure for life in a state of preparation (or regression).

An incubator provides a protective shell, allowing the organism inside to develop for an autonomous existence. *Merzbau* provided a micro-climate for the preservation of obscure, pure and premature thoughts, while gradually turning into an organic system in itself. *Merzbau* operated at the same time as a black box; a recorder and preservation unit where information about the external system is continuously transferred to the inside, but no communication is allowed in the reverse direction.

³ Burns Gamard, Elizabeth. *Merzbau - the Cathedral of Erotic Misery*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press 2000, p. 7

⁴ Ibid, p.7

Schwitters operated as an artist with the mind of a biologist. A description of the *Merzbau* construction could read as the dictionary entry for *cell*: “a unit-mass of living matter, whether walled or unwalled, by itself or associated with others in a higher unity, or: the unit of storage in computing...”⁵ He subtitled his work *The Cathedral of Erotic Misery*, an organic enterprise of accumulated space and time. This symbolism is reflected in Huysmans, where the hothouse, similar in function with the incubator, is the location for the Baron’s dreams of *erotic misery*.⁶ Intoxicated by the exotic scents, he falls asleep among the plants, and has nightmares about flowers morphing into promiscuous women. The incubator holds the possibility of a way to construct the world and coming to terms with existence in the larger system.

The Padded Cell

The dramatic visionary Sir John Soane used his home for PR, delighted to take clients around in the portfolio he had built around himself: a congenially accomplished profiling campaign. Soane embedded surprises and innovations all around the house, like the small *Picture Room*, where the wall area is multiplied by shutters that fold away to reveal hundreds of paintings, the jewel-like skylights, the sudden encounter with yourself in a mirror. The visual boundaries are softly blurred, almost no point of view offer a sense of absolute materiality of a wall. The activity of collecting governs this space. At the age of forty, in 1790, the inheritance of a property portfolio allowed for Soane to loot London auctions for glass and china, sculptures, paintings, frescoes, ritual artefacts and architectural models.⁷ The arrangement of the collections took another forty years, and the result is a residential *Museum* where the possessions can, in their multitude and general layout, be perceived as the insulation of the building.

The padded cell in an asylum separates the lunatic from society, a reversal of the incubator’s function of protecting what is inside from the outside. The

⁵ Merriam-webster online dictionary: www.m-w.com

⁶ Hothouse: also an obsolete term for bordello

⁷ See for example: Darley, Gillian. *John Soane- an Accidental Romantic*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press 1999

padding protects the lunatic from the walls of imprisonment, or could it be that they protect the walls from the attacks of the deranged? Soane's collection is the padding material of his existence. The abundant richness of his interior touches on the extreme state of sensory overload, which may produce precisely the same effects of altered perception as the sensory deprivation of the padded cell, or the Baron's muffled corridors. In the museum, the eye bounces against matter that evades depth perception. Mirrors, shadows, glass and light effects pushes the limits of the structure. The entire building exercises expansion of its perceptible architecture: the walls are soft, giving away for vision. Soane's invention was to create space that would force the walls to give in to the pressure of his inner world, and to use all possible effects to shield his illusion against the impact of reality. The interior silently absorbs the shock of time. Any space can become a world of its own, particularly a space where you are held captive by your imagination. Soane would never stop pushing the limits of his architecture. His lunacy was not the sociopath's, but a selling combination of the extrovert obsessive architect and the introvert compulsive dreambuilder.

The Glove Box

The original architecture is an exception in Gregor Schneider's *Haus Ur*. The initial configuration of walls and rooms has been added to, subtracted from, multiplied with and divided into an artificial structure that consumes subjective time and spatial perception. Its interior displays an array of uncanny spatial inventions, the coffee room floor rotates by a hidden mechanism so that the door travels around the room at imperceivable speed. A window, seemingly letting on the street, is jammed between a blind corridor and another chamber, the sunshine and the flutter of the curtain proves to be artificially produced by floodlight and a fan. There is the room lined with lead. There is the sound-absorbing chamber that efficiently blocks out all external stimuli. There is the basement Crypt, which the artist refers to as "the Brothel". The building is perpetually transformed into a monument of labyrinthic mass, in some spaces only navigable by crawling, voids

and seals, walls to walls, doors to nothing and openings exposing the meeting between two floors. The genealogy of presence is inscribed in the shifting construction, one state of “now” preserved in another subjective layer of the absolutely present. Huysmans’ inventions for the Des Esseintes’ mansion echo in the work of Schneider. To boost his poor appetite by imaginary sea travels, the Baron designs a ship’s cabin, complete with a fishtank window, to be inserted like a Chinese box inside the original dining room. Schneider consider himself to be the operator of nearly uncontrollable processes taking place in his own house, as he claims that “*no one can access the final layers, except if the house was destroyed*”.

Haus Ur is a glove box, a laboratory unit where the volatile substance of imagination is stirred with cement, plaster and metal into critical mixtures. The gloves allow the work to be carried out within the structure without violating the protective seal. As the operative and tactile presence of the body is mediated through the surface of the gloves, the extension of the body becomes an observable and indivisible surface of the interior of the box: the rubber-clad hands are part of the wall, although capable of discrete operations. Any exposure to conditions outside the box may cause uncontrolled transfigurations to the object of examination. The detached exhibition pieces of *Haus Ur* are called *Totes Haus Ur*, as, in the words of the artist, “*Exhibition is always a mortification of works*”.⁸ We are allowed to work our way through selected *quotes* of the building or follow in the footsteps of the creator in the videos shot in *Haus Ur*. In these representational versions of the space, the visitor’s presence is as false as the architecture itself. The gallery context and the monitor screen are like the rubber in the gloves, we may poke around in the box but we remain perceptually separated from the dissolving logic of the space.

⁸ Schneider in interview with Ulrich Loock. *Catalogue 81*. eds. Veit Loers, Brigitte Kölle, Adam Szymczyk, Ulrich Loock. Städtisches Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach; Galeria Foksal, Warsaw; Frankfurt am Main; 1997

The Order of Appearance

Our projects share the fact that they are or were both the living and working place of their creators. In correspondence with Huysmans' description of Des Esseintes' mansion, the built examples share the fact that they were or are *unfinished* or *unfinishable* projects, characterised by a creative labour mainly concerned with the *interior*. No *hierarchy* governs the space. No room is more important or more central than another. Each room has its own aesthetic configuration, as chinese boxes of material dreams, in reflexive flux with the ideas of their creators. There are no *plans* or drawings that keep up with the realisation of this kind of architecture, and if there is any documentation at all, it is mostly done in retrospect. The spaces seem to evade any complete two-dimensional representation. The need for drawings is replaced by a *direct link* between the matter at hand and imagination. Having no beginning or end, these spaces are capable of being worked and reworked repeatedly and can safely be declared perpetually unfinished.

These projects represent different *states of existence* and *public* status. Soane's legacy is fully preserved in its original state and welcomes visitors to the unique building, all according to the will of its creator. Schneider's work is in constant progress, and has a semi-context-bound, dual existence: while *Haus Ur* remains the private home of the artist, pieces of the building are dismantled and exhibited in portions or represented on video as *Totes Haus Ur*. Schwitters was forced to restart (rather than reconstruct) his *Merzbau* project in various locations in post-war Europe over a couple of decades in exile, since the destruction of the Hannover *Merzbau*, which is only preserved by photographs and witness reports. In contrast with Soane, Schwitters showed no intentions of making the work public. The *collection* in Soane manifested by architectural and cultural paraferalia, all objects have a real or fictional history as bearers of archaeological and affectional value. Schwitters de-historicizes and devalue his objects and materials into a new and general substance named *Merz*. Once "merzed", the artefacts and textures lose their original assets to form a unified whole. Schneider seems to collect space

itself, or more precisely, alterations of space, into a disorienting assemblage of layers. Furthermore, the spaces display three different relations to *the ornament*. Soane displays an augmented form of the decorative ideas of his time. Schwitters integrates artefacts, text fragments and images within the spatial diagram of surfaces in his *gesamtkunstwerk*. Schwitters' semi-ornamented construction is in Schneider transposed by surface. The furniture and fittings used in *Haus Ur* are in most places anonymous and minimised.

Space Consumption

The dreambuilders are working towards an illusive goal, always out of reach, never out of sight. They have to create a special relation to the *material* and to the *surface*. If life on the outside has succumbed to its inherent superficiality, then the inside becomes the site of *invention* of a new surface, not an *acceptance* of the inside as the opposite surface of outside. The process is not an investigation of what is beneath the surface, since the imagined is not to be found by digging deeper into material reality. As the built examples show, a limited building site can be expanded by *area maximisation* of the physical space. This surface economy is achieved in the brain by the folds of the cortex, or by the sound-absorbing wedges in an anechoic chamber.⁹ Soane's collections and spatial inventions, Schwitters' three-dimensional assemblage of *Merz* and Schneider's obsessive layering of walls are all means of multiplying the surface area and expand the limited space of the interior. The obsessive character of the work is characteristic to the nature of the task, it lies in the process of exteriorization of the mind. There is no sentimentalization of space. The neurotic room-makers do not necessarily fend themselves by statements of anti-materialism, but by staging materialism out of control, that is, putting matter under the command of imagination.

Three of our examples have outlived their creators, and not just in the way that most buildings and books attain extended lifespan as the legacy of their creators. No dreambuilder has ever successfully retired from his work. There are no

recovering dreambuilders. These creators are investigators of the phenomena that Gaston Bachelard describes as material dreams - a work of imagination that in an architectural or immersive scale teams up with matter, sometimes "*against*" and sometimes "*in*" matter.¹⁰ As matter work in reflexive with the dream, the dreamer becomes inseparable from the material environment. The creation of such spaces is a generative loop between the imagined and the real, between the creator and the matter of creation. This reflexive activity is stitching together the dreamer and the space, the dreamer is weaved into all its constitutive parts. The resulting configurations raise the question whether space is consumed by the creator, or if the creator is consumed by the space he is creating. If the process is of equal expenditure to both the imagined and the real, then consequently, the project would consume the dream builder, right at the moment of completion, which would put an end to the dream. In that sense, we are all dying dreamers.

⁹ Anechoic chamber: a space free from echoes and reverberations, insulated by absorbing wedges.

¹⁰ Bachelard, Gaston. *Jorden och drömmier om vila* (*The Earth and the Reveries of Rest*, 1948) Lund: Skarabé 1994, pp. 21-23

Bibliography

Abbott, Edwin A. *Flatland - A Romance of Many Dimensions* (1884). London: Penguin Books 1998

Ansell-Pearson, Keith, ed. *Philosophy and the adventure of the virtual: Bergson and the time of life*. London & New York: Routledge 2002

Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis- Verklighetsframställningen i den västerländska litteraturen* (1946). Stockholm: Bonniers Förlag 1999

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space* (*La Poétique de l'espace*, 1958). Boston: Beacon Press 1994

Bachelard, Gaston. *Jorden och viljans drömmier* (*La Terre et les rêveries de la volonté*, 1947). Lund: Skarabé 1992

Bachelard, Gaston. *Jorden och drömmier om vila*. (*La Terre et les rêveries du repos*, 1948) Lund: Skarabé 1994

Bachelard, Gaston. *Eldens psykonanalys*. (*La psychoanalyse du feu*, 1938) Lund: Skarabé 1993

Bachelard, Gaston. *Vattnet och Drömmarna – essä över den materiella fantasin*. (*L'Eau et les rêves*, 1942) Lund: Skarabé 1991

Barthes, Roland. *Writing Degree Zero* (1953). New York: Hill and Wang 1968

Barthes, Roland. "Death of the Author". *Image, Music, Text*. Ed. Stephen Heath. London: Fontana Press 1977

Baudelaire, Charles. *De artificiella paradisen* (*Les paradis artificiels*, 1860) Stockholm: Lind & co 2001

Baudelaire, Charles. *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1861) Paris: Librairie Générale Française 1972

Benjamin, Walter. *Paris 1800-talets huvudstad: Passagearbetet* (*Das Passagen-Werk*, 1927-29, *exposées* 1935-39). 3 vol. Eds. R. Tiedemann, U.P. Hallberg. Stockholm & Stehag: Symposion förlag 1990-92

Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. London: Fontana Press 1992

Benedikt, Michael, ed. *Introduction, Cyberspace: First Steps*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press 1991

- Bergson, Henri. *Introduktion till Metafysiken (Introduction à la métaphysique 1903)*. Lysekil: Pontes 1992
- Bergson, Henri. *Matter and Memory (Matière et Mémoire, 1896)*. Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: MIT Press 1999
- Bergson, Henri. *Tiden och den Fria Viljan – en undersökning av de omedelbara medvetenhetsfakta. (Essai sur les Données Immédiates de la Conscience, 1889)* Nora: Nya Doxa 1992
- Betsky, Aaron. *Queer Space – Architecture and Same Sex Desire*. New York: William Morrow & Company Inc. 1997
- Bloomer, Jennifer. *Architecture and the Text: the (S)cripts of Joyce and Piranesi*. London: Yale University Press 1993
- Borgmann, Albert. *Holding on to Reality*. London: University of Chicago Press 1999
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Konstens Regler – Det litterära fältets uppkomst och struktur (Les Règles de l'art – Genèse et structure du champ littéraire. Paris: Éditions du Seuil 1992)* Stockholm/Stehag: Brutus Östlings bokförlag Symposion 2000
- Bukatman, Scott. *Terminal Identity- the virtual subject in postmodern science fiction*. Durham & London: Duke University Press 1993
- Bukatman, Scott. Article: "Virtual Textuality". *Artforum* 32 no. 5 (Jan 1994), pp. 13-15
- Burns Gamard, Elizabeth. *Merzbau, the Cathedral of Erotic Misery*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press 2000
- Byron, Lord George Gordon. "The Dream" (1816). *Selected Poems*. Boston, Massachusetts: Elibron Classics 2000
- Cantz, Hatje, ed. *Gregor Schneider – Totes Haus Ur: La Biennale di Venezia 2001*. Köln: Hatje Cantz Verlag 2001
- Cariou, Marie. *Bergson et Bachelard*. Paris: PUF Série Questions 1995
- Crary, Jonathan. *Techniques of the Observer: on vision and modernity in the 19th century*. (1992) Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: MIT Press 1996
- Darley, Gillian. *John Soane – an Accidental Romantic*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press 1999
- Edelman, Gerald M. & Tononi, Giulio. *Consciousness – How Matter Becomes Imagination*. Middlesex: Penguin Press 2000

- Eriksson, Gunnar. *Västerlandets Idéhistoria 1800-1950*. Stockholm: Gidlunds 1983
- Freud, Sigmund. *Drömydning*. (*Die Traumdeutung*, 1900) Samlade skrifter av S. Freud, edited by András Pöstyén. Stockholm: Natur och Kultur 1996
- Goncourt, Remy de. *Book of Masks – French Symbolist & Decadent Writing of the 1880 's*. Documents of the Avant-garde/nr 2: French Symbolism. London: Atlas Press 1994
- Goncourt, Edmond de. *La maison d'un artiste*. Nouvelle éd. Paris: G. Charpentier 1881
- Grosz, Elizabeth. *Architecture from the Outside – Essays on Virtual and Real Space*. Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: MIT Press 2001
- Haraway, Donna. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: the Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Association 1991
- Harbison, Robert. *The Built, the Unbuilt and the Unbuildable – In Pursuit of Architectural Meaning*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press 1991
- Harbison, Robert. *Eccentric Spaces*. (1977) London: MIT Press 2000
- Hayles, Katherine N. *How we Became Posthuman*. London: University of Chicago Press 1999
- Hobson, Allan J. *Dreaming: An Introduction to the Science of Sleep*. Oxford University Press, 2002
- Huysmans, Joris-Karl. *Against Nature*. Trans. by Robert Baldick. (*À Rebours*, 1884) London: Penguin 1959
- Huysmans, Joris-Karl. *À Rebours*. (Paris: Charpentier 1884) Paris: Garnier-Flammarion 1978
- Huysmans, Joris-Karl. *Le roman de Durtal* (coll. *Là-Bas, En route, La cathédrale, L'Oblat*) Paris: Bartillat 1999
- Iddon, John. *Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill- a History and a Guide*. Richmond: St.Mary's University College Press 1996
- Jullian, Philippe. *Dreamers of Decadence – Symbolist Painters of the 1890 's*. London: Phaidon Press Ltd. 1974
- Kittler, Friedrich. *Maskinskrifter - Essäer om medier och litteratur*. Red. Otto Fischer & Thomas Götselius. Gråbo: Anthropos 2003

Kjellgren, Thomas. "Verkligheten är fantasins råmaterial". Artikel i *Särningar. (Art Brut/ Outsider Art)* på Malmö Konsthall 1991. Red. Thomas Kjellgren. Malmö Konsthalls katalog nr 143, 1991

Lefavre, Liane. *Leon Battista Alberti's Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: MIT Press 1997

Lethaby, William R. *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* (1891). Bath: Solos Press 1994

Linde, Peter. *Droger och Diktare*. Stockholm: Carlsson Bokförlag 1989

Lucie-Smith, Edward. *Symbolist Art*. London: Thames & Hudson 1972

Mitchell, William J. *City of Bits: Space, Place, and the Infobahn*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press 1995

Murray, Janet H. *Hamlet on the Holodeck – the Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press 2000

Mullarkey, John, ed. *The New Bergson*. Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press 1999

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Så talade Zarathustra (Also Sprach Zarathustra, 1883-1885)*. Stockholm: Forum 1982

Pile, Steve & Thrift, Nigel. *Mapping the Subject: Geographies of Cultural Transformation*. London & New York: Routledge 1995

Plant, Sadie. *Zeros + Ones*. London: Fourth Estate 1997

Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings*. London: Penguin Classics 1986

Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Imp of the Perverse" (1845) *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, Vol. III. Ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1978

Poe, Edgar Allan. *Upptäckter under hypnos – samlade essäer*. Lund: Ellerströms förlag 2001

Poole, Steven. *Trigger Happy – The Inner Life of Videogames*. London: Fourth Estate 2000

Proust, Marcel. *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-1922). 4 vols: Ed. Tadié, Jean-Yves. Paris: collection Pléiade, Gallimard 1987-1989

Rendell, Jane. *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Gender, Space and Architecture in Regency London*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press 2002

- Richardson, Joanna. *La vie Parisienne 1852-1870*. New York: Viking Press 1971
- Richardson, Margaret. *A New Description of Sir John Soane's Museum*. London: The Trustees 2001
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Freud and Philosophy: an essay in Interpretation*. New York: Yale University Press 1970
- Ricoeur, Paul. "The Function of Fiction in Shaping Reality", *Man and World* 12/1979, pp. 123-141
- Roussel, Raymond. *Locus Solus (1914)*. Stockholm: Författarförlaget Pilotserien 1989
- Rykwert, Joseph. *The Necessity of Artifice*. New York: Rizzoli Int. Publications 1982
- Schneider, Gregor. *Gregor Schneider at MAM- Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 28 May-11 October 1998*. Exhib. Catalogue: Paris Musées MAMVP – ARC Coédition Paris-Musées/Les Amis 1998
- Simon, Herbert A. *the Sciences of the Artificial*, (1969), Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1981
- Souville, Odile. L'Homme Imaginatif- de la philosophie esthétique de Bachelard cahiers de recherche sur l'imaginaire Circé 22-24. Ed. Jean Burgos. Série Topologie de l'imaginaire, Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1995
- Stableford, Brian. *Architects of Emortality*. New York: Tom Doherty Associates 1999
- Stephenson, Neil. *The Diamond Age*. London: Penguin Books Ltd. 1995
- Stewart, Susan. *Crimes of Writing- Problems in the Containment of Representation*. Durham & London: Duke University Press 1994
- Valdés, Mario, ed. *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1991
- Verne, Jules. "In the year 2889" ("In the 29th Century: The Day of an American Journalist in 2889") *Yesterday and Tomorrow*. London: Arco 1965, pp. 107-124
- Verne, Jules. *Paris au XXI^{ème} Siècle*. Paris: Hachette 1994
- Vidler, Anthony. *The Architectural Uncanny – Essays in the Modern Unhomely*. Cambridge: MIT Press 1992
- Villiers de l'Isle Adam. *L'Ève Future*. Paris: GF Flammarion 1992

Viollet-le-Duc, Eugène-Emmanuel. *The Architectural Theory of Viollet-le-Duc*: Ed., readings and commentary by M.F. Hearn. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press 1990

Walpole, Horace. *The Castle of Otranto – A Gothic Story* (1764). Oxford University Press, 1998

Wood, John, ed. *The Virtual Embodied*. London & New York: Routledge 1998

Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) London: Penguin Popular Classics 1994

Williams, Rosalind H. *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press 1982

Zola, Émile. *Au Bonheur des Dames* (1884). Paris: La bibliothèque Gallimard 2000

Ziolkowski, Theodore. *The View from the Tower*. Chichester, UK: Princeton University press 1998

Žižek, Slavoj. *The Plague of Fantasies*. London, New York: Verso 1997

Summaries

I

The Dying Dreamer – Looking into Huysmans' Virtual Worlds

This article analyses the novel *À Rebours* (*Against Nature*, 1884) written by Joris-Karl Huysmans, who delivers a study of an obsessive constructor of virtual worlds, the depraved baron Des Esseintes. His inquisitive senses and restless imagination has led him into a constant craving for artificiality, that combined with an addictive escapism develop into a project of fantastic architectural transformations into a custom-made interface where any object acts like the icon that, when interacted with, activate alternative dimensions. Des Esseintes' hyperaesthetic mind demands intense exaltation of the senses, often synesthetic, achieved through. The Baron's secluded mansion is architecturally and technically equipped with sensory augmenting devices and designs. There are qualities and features that the narrative space in *À Rebours* shares with virtuality. We are in the user-oriented universe, where artificiality offers superior pleasure to nature, but to the expenditure of the human body and to life as we physically know it.

Interlude i

Five Objects/Subjects to represent the year 1884

5 objects	5 subjects
The Greenwich Meridian	Nietzsche: Also Sprach Zarathustra
The Telephote	Zola: Au Bonheur des Dames
The Skyscraper	Abbott: Flatland
The Statue of Liberty	Villiers de l'Isle Adam: Tomorrow's Eve
The Thrill Ride	Mary Winchester's Mystery House

II

The Operative Fields of the Artificial

This article investigates the composite phenomena of the artificial in examples from literature and science, exploring the interrelations of narrative and spatial creation, especially with the main character Des Esseintes in the 1884 novel *À Rebours* by Joris-Karl Huysmans, who believes that the only *raison-d'être* of nature is to be improved upon by art. The late 19th century symbolists and decadents in art and literature shared a particular interest in the artificial. The artefact plays the role of merchandise or fetish: the object is negotiated against a background of pure desire. Art and the artificial propose a limitless operative field, with no dictated rules of moral or beauty, separated from nature and the ideals imposed on her. Des Esseintes has withdrawn from the corrupted nature, in a final attempt to create a complete, autonomous and artificial world within his fantasmagoric interiors. The artificial may imitate nature in form or function, deceive the eye, or even attempt to upstage the natural model, negotiating any productive means or materials for this purpose. Herbert Simon's theory of the artificial (*Sciences of the Artificial*, 1969) is applied to identify how the system of artefacts mediates between the inner and outer environment of the user and/or designer. The operative field of the artificial is capable of all interconnections between fictional and real architectural intervention.

Interlude ii

Fleurs D'Artifice

From the French word for fireworks: *Feu d'Artifice*. An investigation of the nature of artificiality in the shape of the false flower, borrowing the form of Apollinaire's *calligrammes*.

III

The Obsessive Builder of Dreams

Architectural experience and creation is studied through a selection of projects, each driven by an obsessive creator towards particular levels of architectural experience, both physical and virtual. The article investigates the processes of turning dreams into physical space, exemplified by four extraordinary creators and collectors of space, each one a pursuer of obsessive architectural activities, all haunted by transitive dreams: Baron des Esseintes, Joris-Karl Huysmans' fictional character in the novel *À Rebours* (*Against Nature*) from 1884, Kurt Schwitters, the dadaist painter and constructor of the Merzbau created in Hannover between 1919 and 1937, Sir John Soane, the architect and collector, who arranged his home as a Museum from 1790 until 1837, and the German artist Gregor Schneider, whose home in Rheydt since 1985 is slowly folding in on itself under the name Haus Ur. Three of the four selected projects introduce layers of hybrid existence into ordinary building shells, and one represents the virtual architecture of narrative space. Their creators are driving architectural space into different ontological states, providing a field of perceptual and representational problems. The architects of parallel realities are subsequently challenging our basic understanding of architectural organisation, aesthetics and methods. This erratic field of subjective and obsessive architecture serves my purposes of investigating architectural imagination as the main asset of virtual space.