

Cet article, à travers une analyse de "A la recherche du temps perdu" de Marcel Proust, traite du rôle de l'architecture comme intermédiaire entre le Moi et le Monde, et de la signification du rêve qui nous aide à comprendre la réalité dans laquelle nous avons choisi de vivre. En cinq parties sous les titres "Rêve," "Moi," "Chose," "Ville" et "Vie," le lecteur est entraîné à travers différents aspects de l'existence où l'objet devient un instrument par lequel ce crée le Moi et le Monde, tout deux pour un bref instant en complémentarité mutuelle. Le monde des rêves et de l'imagination est constamment pris en exemple comme modèle d'une réalité sans stabilité et sans cadre rigide mais où il est néanmoins possible de trouver un sens si le Moi accepte d'adopter un point de référence temporaire. Le moment du réveil est vu comme une zone transitionnelle où sont accomplis ces choix conscients de cadres rigides. Empruntant une expression du philosophe italien Gianni Vattimo, l'auteur explore la possibilité d'établir une "vérité faible" avec l'aide des particularités de chaque situation. Dans tout cela, l'architecte détient la responsabilité de communiquer ses interprétations du situationnel, peut-être même avec un soupçon d'universalité temporaire. Cet article est accompagné de citations provenant des textes de Marcel Proust et de photographies prises par l'auteur.

a door-sized patch of ancient yellowed wallpaper, flaky gold print, faded listening to thousands of words in the tiny space.

A white enamel stove, worn at the corners and edges to a soft black, looms into the centre of

## A LA RECHERCHE DU TEMPS PERDU - the lost moment and its trace

### Dream

In dreaming, the mind performs a free play with its memory, its stock of perceptions rooted in material substance. In this space, fragments of the past come up to the surface in a most unpredictable order, gaining new meanings through their fictional context. Often the dream cannot be retold, or in an ordinary sense remembered when its reality - the very specific framework set up where what happens and what is seen make sense - is gone. Still, there is sometimes a space and a moment with a thickness where these two worlds can meet; the time of the awakening. Here the realities merge, and slowly the disappearance of the world of the dream brings up the reality of the day. In this description a further complexity lies hidden, the multiplicity of the one reality, the absence of a common framework. The question of difference between dream and reality gains a new dimension when the distance is shrinking and in danger of collapsing. The fundamental question for architecture has long since ceased to be a bringing out and putting forward the order of the macrocosm, or even one of building the ideality of the real in search of making evident the objective truth. Yet the loss of the framework might not imply the loss of truth. It is possible that the truth has just been forced into a search for a redefinition of itself, for a truth that can be relative without losing its specific value. In this search, the reality of dreams can help, since it is here that the frameworks are always shifting while the space of the dream remains a space of meaning.

It is significant that Marcel Proust's literary search for time lost to the past begins with a view of the world from the angle of the self awakening in bed. In these first seven pages the reality of the narrator shifts between his childhood and his present, thus anticipating the story unfolding in the three thousand five hundred pages to come. Elegantly, Proust throws the reader into different moments contained in the narrator's memory, utilizing the text as its parallel, an inscription that brings up temporally incompatible realities to an even surface. Somewhere in that process, there is a self to be found. Probably, in Proust's understanding, the self still existed as one, even though it was a struggle to maintain it, a struggle aided by the sensation of time given through memory. Today, one might argue that the self is lost, but even so, there is only a limited multitude of stories of our selves that can be written through our memories. Similarly, there are many texts to be written of reality, 'true' fictions created from the memories of things manifested in physical traces. In the conscious choice of working within one reality, although aware of others, and in acting as an ethically responsible self, lies a possibility for actions and resulting material objects to communicate meaning in the gaining of a momentary universality of fictional truth.

Thus, the scope of this essay is contained in this first paragraph of the dream; Self, Thing, City and Life are all crucial parts of an argument here put forward to support the making of artifacts that are not silent, but active in an on-going process of re-evaluating our surroundings, the other as selves and the other as things. *A la recherche du temps perdu* will, confronted with our present state of perplexion, be the reference used throughout the text as an example of what can happen in the suspended space of awakening.

### Self

The search for the self of the narrator is the reason for the 'recherche' put forward by Proust. It is only through activating reality that the self can be constituted and reconstituted in relation to its surroundings. And it is only through a recognition of the self that man can act upon reality. Ethically responsible decisions cannot be taken without a play between a self and a perceived reality. In a time when there are a multitude of selves and realities, this play is not easy to perform. Conscious choices have to be made as to which point of view is to be put forward in a specific context, which reading is to be done, and what is, for the moment, the basis of decisions. Still, there are more appropriate interpretations than others, more justifiable actions in a given context, but these are always based on specifics and cannot be taken up to the level of universality, because it is precisely this level that has ceased to exist. From specific experience we have to build our own table on which a world and a self can meet, and where other selves can come to experience recognition and difference. Through specifics, an unstable surface is edified on which a momentary discourse can take place.

*"The reality that I had known no longer existed. It sufficed that Mme Swann did not appear, in the same attire and the same moment for the whole avenue to be altered. The places that we have known belong only to the little world of that space in which we situate them for our own convenience. None of them was ever more than a thin slice, held between the contiguous impressions that composed our life at that time; remembrance of a particular image is but regret for a particular moment; and houses, roads, avenues are as fugitive, alas, as the years."* (p 325)



*"...I lost all the sense of the place in which I had gone to sleep, and when I awoke at midnight, not knowing where I was, I could not be sure at first of who I was; I had only the most rudimentary sense of existence, such as may lurk and flicker in the depths of an animal's consciousness; I was more destitute of human qualities than the cave-dweller; but then the memory, not yet of the place in which I was, but of various other places where I had lived, and might now very possibly be, would come like a rope let down from heaven to draw me up out of the abyss of nothingness, from which I could never have escaped by myself: in a flash I would traverse and surmount centuries of civilisation, and through succeeding blurred glimpses of oil-lamps, followed by shirts with turned-down collars, I would gradually recompose the original traits of my self."* (p 5)

*"It is our attention that places things in a room, and habit that removes them and makes room for ourselves. Of room, there was none for me in my bedroom (mine in name only) at Balbec; it was full of things which did not know me, which flung back at the distrustful look that I had cast at them, and, without taking any heed of my existence, shewed that I was interrupting the course of theirs.... I kept raising my eyes - which the things in my room in Paris disturbed no more than did my eyelids themselves, for they were merely extensions of my organs, an enlargement of myself.... Having no world, no room, no body now that was not menaced by the enemies thronging round me, invaded to the very bones by fever, I was utterly alone; I longed to die."* (p 506-7)

Memory in Proust's work is evoked by perceptions of an object, a smell or a taste, which involuntarily brings the mind back to a time where this sensation was relevant. In the act of remembrance the mind is creating a new context for the old, where what was is brought up to what is; thus the temporal distance is at once erased and emphasized - erased in their meeting but emphasized in their incompatibility. Proust stresses the creative faculty of the mind that is required even in remembrance. In the movement back to the past is inscribed a parallel projection into the future. Memories, even if attached to the self, can be recomposed into new contexts and create fictions of the self, needed for decisions on unknown matters of the future. In dreams all kinds of possible realities are experienced, based on what we are, with memory and a free play of association at hand. The encounter of this imaginary space with the real, that which has limited time, a particular place and is experienced by the present body, is what can constitute ourselves and be the basis of our choices for specific actions.

In the 'little phrase' of Swann, a particular passage in a Sonata is played for him and he is brought to another invisible reality. The music, as played, takes on a spatial character that turns it into an object of memory. He likens it to a closed world of its own inhabited only by the piano and the violin, from where we can hear them sing as birds in a tree. The significance of this example, is that it emphasizes the relation between creator, work of art and self. It is not only our own memories that are recalled in objects, but also those of others, in the artifact and in the work of art. Through the fictional worlds made by others it is again possible to feel both recognition and difference. It is to this multitude of worlds that we direct our decisions, as makers of things that last. The reason that each individual can contribute is the uniqueness of the experience in one person, the reason that what is made can be understood is the overlap of similar experiences. The world where the work is made is the link between beings, and the work is the link between Being and world. The world, in this context, is no longer assumed to be the one true reality, but the only significant one in the particular context of the work.

### Thing

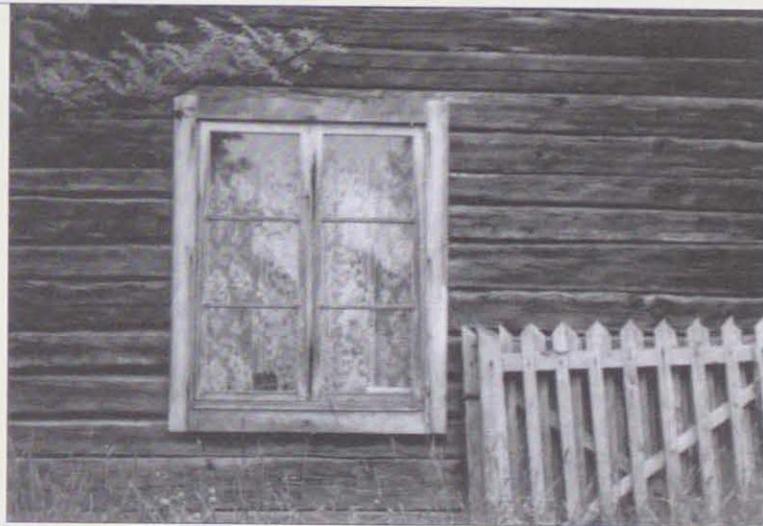
Things, as artifacts, are traces of human existence left as memories in a material world. In themselves they form a bank of fragments to be brought up and pieced together into fictions of the past obtained from the 'real.' On the other hand, the name of the thing has a reality of its own sometimes larger than the thing itself. In the last part in 'Swann's Way,' 'Nom de Pays: le nom' this relation between things or places and their names is exemplified through the narrator's fantasies of a journey that never takes place, but is solely based on the names of places and their indication of content. He has a dream of becoming a writer and tries very hard to find a language for his thoughts. Only in the conscious forgetting of his intent, and with the contemplation of nature and things, does he find the wish to express, and in realizing the active relations between these experiences in time, can he find the words that are composed into a narrative. The belief in things and in people, as he says, brings out the possibility of speech and comprehension.

Things are charged with meaning outside of their physical appearance, a meaning as part of our life or as strangers to it, a meaning evoked through associations and memories attached to the artifact. It is this nature of things that Proust is emphasizing by pointing out the inadequacy that sometimes occurs in the relation between a name and a place, a word and a thing. Sometimes when a thing is put down in front of us, its physical immediacy and measurability take away all those dreams and associations that were attached to it. The young boy, who lives more in his dreams than in the world, is frequently a victim for such disappointments. But the two worlds meet: in the bedroom when the dream is slowly replaced by the real, or in the evocation of memory bringing back the past hidden in things perceived in the present. In a place where nothing is familiar or ever experienced we are at loss with our selves, not finding any material connections to bring us out of the thin moment that lacks thickness, preventing us from projecting into the future taking off from the past.

Making, in this reality, means interpreting those things in a particular context, with relation to the present, to the self, and through the artifacts, to other worlds and selves. An interpretative act means always jumping between worlds, times and other selves. In the object made, a new understanding of its specific context can be contained, providing for others a projection into a possible future. It is never a matter anymore of saying, 'this is how it was, is or will be,' but rather what is proposed is a possibility, a fictional truth, to direct the living through a life. The narrator in Proust's novel might have an extraordinarily difficult time in relating to his self and the realities he encounters. Nevertheless, I would think that he is a most appropriate character for our time to consider when producing spaces to be inhabited. The uncertainty of the ground on which we walk and the multitude of impressions making their way into our minds only emphasizes a need for an architecture that carefully materializes interpretations of this complexity. But again, the space thus produced only marks an instant of the constant workings of interpretative imagination; when materialized it stands alone to become appropriated in a multitude of minds and a link to individual possible pasts.

the adjacent space. A high chair of bent birch wood and thin chrome steel along one side becomes a station for further conversation. A thick pall of words, tears, and fears fill the air. Waist-high wainscoting painted a light pea

*"I put my cup aside and turn towards my soul. It is for that to discover the truth. But how? What an abyss of uncertainty whenever the mind feels that some part of it has strayed beyond its own borders; when it, the seeker, is at once the dark region through which it must go seeking, where all its equipment will avail it to nothing. Seek? More than that: create. It is face to face with something which does not so far exist, to which it alone can give reality and substance, which it alone can bring into the light of day." (p 35)*



*"I feel that there is much to be said for the Celtic belief that the souls of those whom we have lost are held captive in some inferior being, in an animal, in a plant, in some inanimate object, and so effectively lost to us until the day... when we happen to pass by the tree or to obtain possession of the object which forms their prison. Then they start and tremble, they call us by our name, and as soon as we have recognized their voice the spell is broken. We have delivered them: they have overcome death and return to share our life. And so it is with our own past. It is a labour in vain to attempt to recapture it: all the efforts of our intellect must prove futile. The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) which we do not suspect. And as for that object, it depends on chance whether we come upon it or not before we ourselves must die." (p 34)*

*"I used to go forward in the church when we were making our way to our chairs as into a fairy-haunted valley ... the church ... a building which occupied, so to speak, four dimensions of space - the name of the fourth being Time - which had sailed the centuries with that old nave, where bay after bay, chapel after chapel, seemed stretch across and hold down and conquer not merely a few yards of soil, but each successive epoch from which the whole building had emerged triumphant, hiding the rugged barbarities of the eleventh century in the thickness of its walls... thrusting down with its crypt into the blackness of a Merovingian night..."(p 46-7)*

## City

Cities are living sites for archaeological excavations. Layer upon layer of things marked by specific instants in their history are firmly held together. Sometimes they appear transparent; time is lost to the instant presently busy leaving a new mark. Each layer has two aspects: one that testifies to the moment of its initiation and another that is part of the markings from a life lived. When the things are brought together, the surface of the present stretches over their past and unifies them in a common instant of life. Under this surface the differences appear, at moments clear and sharp, but mostly in a diffuse blur. As if seeing things through a pane of glass, the reflection makes it hard to tell what the depth might be. This is the experience of Proust's narrator in the cathedral of his summer town, Combray. In his imagination, the different elements of the church take on the character of their history, and he is led through the building by them. His self is recomposing the artifact into a living archaeology.

Montréal has the short history of two years, for me. This remark has two dimensions. First the evident, that the sensation of the history or past of a city is dependent on an understanding of its artifacts, related to personal experience and familiarity with the culture from which they originated. Second, there is another aspect, more difficult to grasp, which has to do with the balance between present and past in a material engagement in the use of the city and its transformations. The rhythm, in which this city transforms, has the nature of sudden unexpected outbreaks and long periods of silence. One building burns down, is left as a ruin, for a long time. Suddenly there is a frame for a new building, replacing the ruin, but still being left in this stage for a long time. One day a building will be standing there, new; for many by-passers it will appear as if it had always been there. There is a constant flux between clear marking and complete erasing. The streets seem collage-like; every part meaningful in itself, but an exchange of parts not always significant enough to make an impression on the whole. Within clear physical and legal boundaries, buildings grow and decay in their own cycles. Each individual contributes to the whole from their point of view with an understanding of what is on the other side. The pattern of the city is inferred from multiplicity to a homogeneity of fragments.

What seems to have happened here is that the layer of the living present works the past into itself to such a degree that it turns opaque, and differences in time become increasingly difficult to distinguish. Each new building blends into a larger pattern of fragments whose place in time is utterly ambiguous. Added to this collage is the cultural diversity of building traditions. To walk in specific areas brings forward sensations of displacement, being suddenly transported to other worlds. Being on the surface more constructed by life and present circumstances, than by conscious planning and visions of the future; by individual choices rather than by political decisions, Montréal fascinates me as an extreme contrast to the city of Stockholm, which for me has a history of hundreds of more years than my own experience of it permits. However, Stockholm instead seems to be stuck in a disturbing transparency of the present. The engagement in its history and the visions of its future turns life into a static construction of social engineering.

## Life

A fossil is a recording of geological time, a time to which we have no access. The trace of life is contained there with a precision that makes its death unbearably sharp. It is in wonder that we touch the rock, to affirm that the cast is just as much matter as its surroundings. The butterfly is born out of a cocoon. The cocoon was made by a larva. The larva was born from an egg. The egg was placed on a leaf. The cocoon is the container of the metamorphosis; what remains of the larvae are a few nerve-cells, the rest decay to nourish the growth of the new being. The butterfly is built from a process of destruction and death. The larva was brave when it went to sleep. When looking closely at our surroundings, a dimension of reality can be perceived that brings us into wonder in front of something that we are part of but yet cannot reach. Comprehension implies a distance from what is grasped. To understand life in our culture, it has to be dead. This paradox is manifest in museums, where the butterfly has the value of a stamp, displayed beside others for comparison and neutral structuring of knowledge. Behind the glass a ghost of nature is pinned down with a ruthless needle. Our body is part of both sides, in a certain way embodying both the difference itself and the framework through which we comprehend. From culture, nature is retracting, as mysterious today, as ever before, dependant as we are in our lives on its production.

Architecture doubtlessly is a cultural construct. Yet, in some part it houses both the fossil and the butterfly. A building, as a poetic work, carries intentionality, meaning that is rooted in the specific conditions of a chosen context. The intentional direction of human perception allows an interpretative act that can read the work as a framework from which to measure and bring forward that which is distant. As in the dream the frameworks change frequently, but for short moments there exists the important opportunity to discover relations between phenomena of the world. Art, in a certain way immobilizes nature, but only to let it be seen. But art in itself is also part of life and submitted to change. A society where art is fully merged into life necessarily aborts knowledge and understanding. If art is left alone, separated from change and evolution, knowledge becomes meaningless and dogmatic. Through remembrance and forgetfulness, attachment and departure, time can be allowed both its matter and its flow. The journey which Proust made through his work has its very significance in this, the pointing towards the constant work involved in the maintenance of a self and its relation to the world.

There is a zone of difference and interdependence that has been pointed to in this essay. This zone separates and keeps together all these elements; self to self, self to others, self to things, things to things, things to nature, nature to self. The differences are both temporal and spatial. In this zone the artifact is housed, being, through human imagination and interpretation, the material thickness through which waves can travel, providing momentary connections. The life of Proust's narrator is sad, but lived in this sensitive condition of being between dream and reality, always asking for reassurance that what was there before, still is. To dream forever might not be a wise solution, but in building as if in a dream, joining the impossible with the real, one might find an opening to the space of difference.

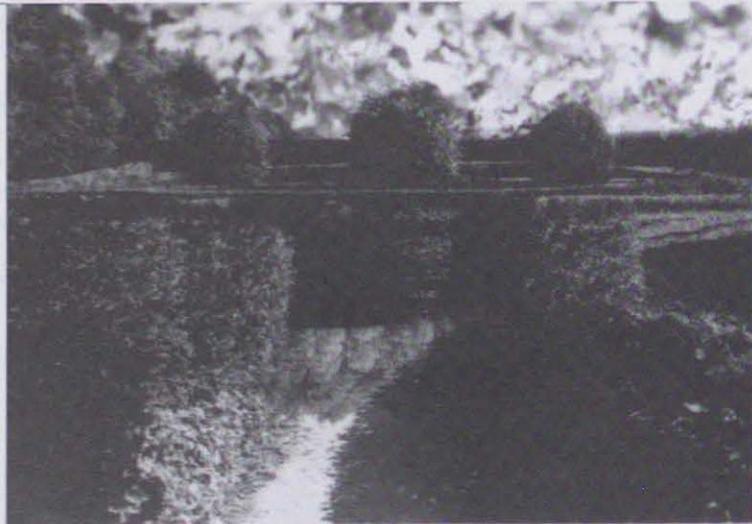
green over layers and layers of sound, soaked into the ancient oak. Two windows look out into a gray sky. Beneath one, a heavy workspace of deep sink, the ceramic name of its manufacturer fading blue-green into the translucent white. Beneath the other is a small table of white Formica, runnels of chrome run along the side, cool and expansive to a gentle touch. A lethargic black cat climbs a cube of plywood, layered with ragged old carpet, providing a quiet space in which he can be both part of the world around him, and quietly secluded from it. Above his little room, a stack of newspapers brings in the newest additions to the conversation.

A dank alcove hums with the mechanical life of a stocky refrigerator, chocolate brown shaded in the

*"The flowers which played then on the grass, the water which rippled past in the sunshine, the whole landscape which served as environment to their apparition lingers around the memory of them still with its unconscious or unheeding air; and, certainly, when they were slowly scrutinised by this humble passer-by, by this dreaming child ... that scrap of nature, that corner of a garden could never suppose that it would be thanks to him that they would be elected to survive in all their most ephemeral details; and yet the scent of hawthorn which strays*



*plundering along the hedge from which, in a little while, the dog-roses will have banished it, a sound of footsteps followed by no echo, upon a gravel path, a bubble formed at the side a waterplant by the current, and formed only to burst - my exaltation of mind has borne them with it, and has succeeded in making them traverse all these successive years, while all around them the one-trodden ways have vanished, while those who thronged those trodden ways, are dead. Sometimes the fragment of landscape thus transported into the present will detach itself in such isolation from all associations that it floats uncertainly upon my mind, like a flowering isle of Delos, and I am unable to say from what place, from what time - perhaps, quite simply, from which of my dreams - it comes. But it is pre-eminently as the deepest layer of my mental soil, as firm sites on which I still may build, that I regard the Méséglise and Guermantes 'ways.' It is because I used to think certain things, of certain people, while I was roaming along them, that the things, the people which they taught me to know, and these alone, I still take seriously, still give me joy. Whether it be that the faith which creates has ceased to exist in me, or that reality will take shape in the memory alone, the flowers that people shew me nowadays for the first time never seem to be true flowers." (p 141)*



Quotations from Montcrieff's 1924 translation, but adapted according to the French text in the 1954 Gallimard edition. Page numbers refers to the 1934 edition of 'Remembrance of Things Past - Volume one,' Random House, New York. Illustrations by the author.

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entry's orange darkness. Aching floorboards are bent from the pounding dampness of many winters' frozen precipitation. Walls close in around the open refrigerator which illuminates the space with the invitation of the fresh