

## Artifices/Artefacts, Christine Buci-Glucksmann, 2000

From the baroque to the virtual, artifice as the art of the multiple diversifying reality, reigns supreme. Between appearance and illusion, it occurs in the interplay of mirror and abyss, in search of effects imitating the scant reality of a false life. Real stucco and false marble, marble bodies, painted life of the horses and giants of the Palace of Te, trompe l'œil facades, the love of decor and anamorphosis - artifice leads everywhere to a reduction of vision. Anti-naturalistic, it is invented and exhausted in manners, the better to be staged. In these transparencies and fictional dimensions, its secret envelopes through the various deformations and disintegrations of being. Artifice proclaims that everything is unstable, fluid and ephemeral. Like Daphne after she has become laurel and vegetal, it is redolent of continual metamorphoses, the exploration of the infra and supra-human. It is a challenge to reason and a mad form of vision, whereby one captures one's own desire for the infinite.

But with digital art, the culture of artifice becomes that of artefacts. Seeing is to construct, to create fictional beings, and to call into question the Western philosophical distinction between nature and artifice, leading to a general hybridation linked to the supra-anthropological transformations of the present. Greenhouse effects, artificial plants, trees and landscapes, a vegetal baroque and floral chaos, volatile and volatalized materials - everywhere the art of effects brings about simulated images with no immediate referent. With all these illusions, the distinctions of beings and bodies disappear. For in the end, where does life begin and end? Everywhere there are only superimpositions, speed and compressed time, appropriate to an invasive counter-nature where artifice is increasingly controlled.

From this point on, to see is to see through, as in a greenhouse, a construction reminiscent of various kinds of modernist glass architecture. The world, reduced to a light prism, increases the artifice in artefact and the art of the false. Manipulating vision, the architectures of images creates a cold and indifferent space, where interior and exterior communicate - an envelope, a skin, a multifaceted crossing where the artefacts lead to a sort of imaginary digital garden, a real digital Arcadia in which the logic of artifice is extended to the point of creating gardens and theatres of synthetic water where everything is virtual.

But isn't every Arcadia actually as ambivalent as artifice? Already, in Poussin's *Bergers d'Arcadie*, nostalgia rivals the enigma of death: "Et in Arcadia ego" (in Arcadia I am) was the epitaph written on the tomb. Unless I am no longer, totally immersed and lost in the instantaneous pleasure and the sequence of images, to the extent that the simulations and pretences, so decried by Platonic philosophy, have replaced all "being" of things. Is not the culture of artefacts the cartography of our world and of all possible worlds, in an endless mechanical future?