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**THE REALITY OF THE *ARTIFICIAL* IN ENGLISH RENAISSANCE PROSE: THE
CASE OF THOMAS MORE'S *UTOPIA* AND PHILIP SIDNEY'S *NEW ARCADIA***

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Abstract

This thesis shows how, in seminal works of the English Renaissance, the “artificial” substitutes for the natural or, at times, creates it. I view the term “artificial” in two different ways. On the one hand, the artificial is any material object represented in Renaissance narrative; on the other, it is, metaphorically any artificial/fictitious representation of an “objective” external reality. My basic point is that the artificial in the English Renaissance assumes the dimension of a new kind of technological nature that transcends the “artifice-nature” dichotomy. I use as a model Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) and Philip Sidney's *New Arcadia* (1593) because they mark the beginning and the end of the sixteenth century in England.

In my analysis, I argue that the presence of artificial objects in More and Sidney undermines the representation of the human body and denaturalizes the self and personal identity. Furthermore, an artificial text—a self-consciously fictitious or historically “inaccurate” text—turns out to be a reliable/natural witness to the real; what is more, such a text often produces the real and the authentic. The island of Utopia becomes real in a retrospective way, that is, only after More has written his book. In the *New Arcadia*, material objects and prosthetic devices such as armors, miniatures or paintings, do not merely affect Renaissance subjectivity, but they also create new artificial subjects and identities overshadowing “purely” human identities. In short, the artificial in the sixteenth century exceeds its symbolic status, in the sense that it is so dominant in prose works as to be almost physically real and present.

I demonstrate cases in which the artificial becomes real and truthful in a retrospective and, rather, unconscious fashion. For instance, the citizens of Utopia gain, unknowingly, their interiority and nature from the outside. In a way, they are retrospectively assigned their own unconscious wishes. Likewise, desire in Sidney's book does not spring from the inside but from the outside. It emerges as a product of imitation: we desire because somebody else desires. In this way, artificial desire becomes retrospectively authentic and natural. I subscribe to the post-Freudian construal of the unconscious as already residing in language and the exterior, and I connect unconscious desire with the New Historicist notion of theatricality and

self-fashioning. However, my view of theatricality is more *poetic*, in a deconstructive way, in the sense that I focus on the “theatrical” as an unconscious rather than self-conscious, artificial activity. In chapter I, I provide the cultural circumstances under which the *Utopia* and the *Arcadia* were created, while in chapter II, I deal with the historical transition from *hearing* to *seeing*. Chapter III addresses the role of physical objects as depicted in Renaissance narrative. Finally, chapters IV and V analyze the importance of unconscious desire as an artificially generated emotional and psychological state.

This thesis deals with representations rather than presences, copies rather than originals; therefore my thinking revolves around signs and the reality that they may confer. The artificial in English Renaissance Prose as well as the English society itself proves indispensable both, to the representation and the constitution of reality. At the same time, Renaissance prosthetic devices not only enrich human nature, but also produce new natures and identities.