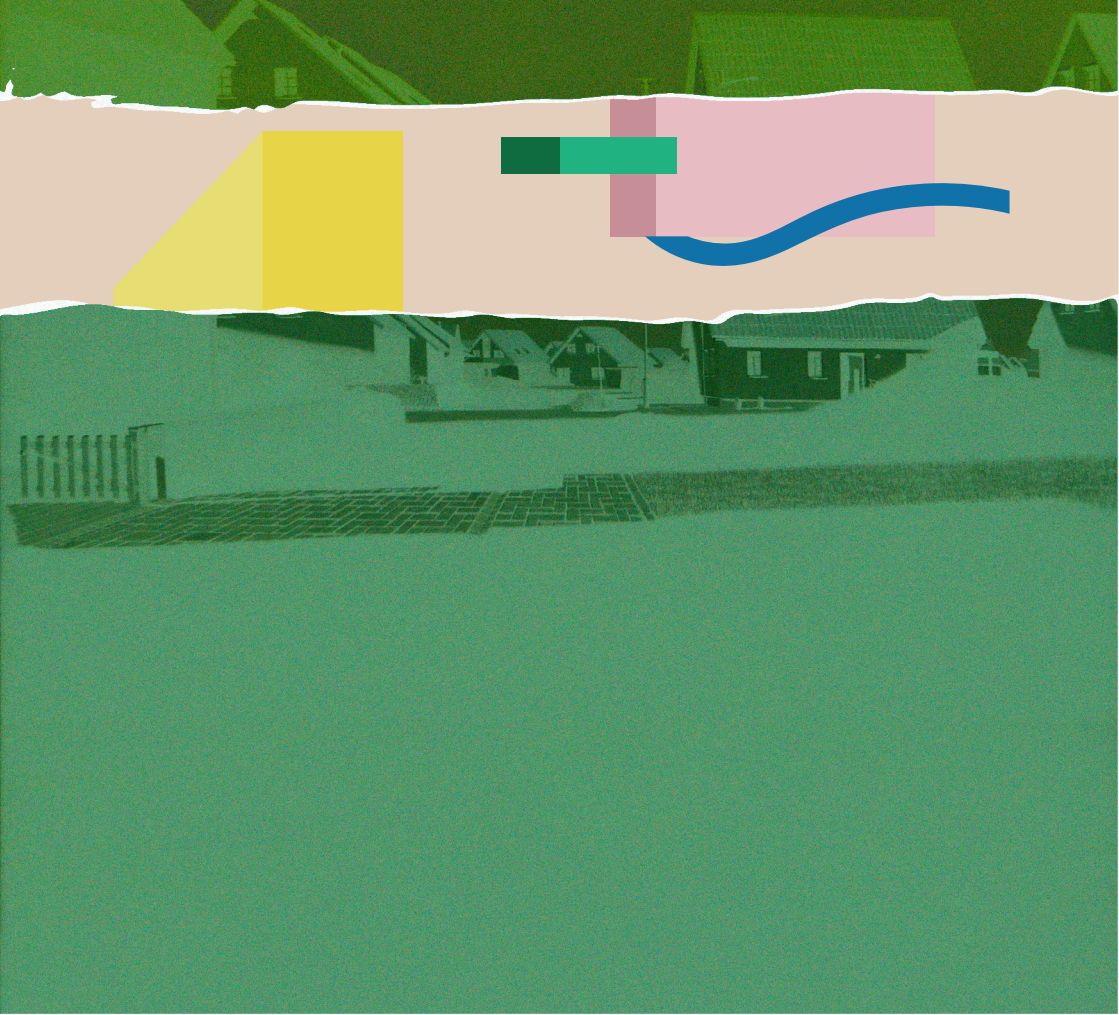


BANAL DREAMSCAPE

A Surreal Oasis Within Dutch
Suburbia



BANAL DREAMSCAPE

A Surreal Oasis Within Dutch
Suburbia

Research Plan

Sepehr Asadi
5786584

Explorelab 37

TU Delft Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment
November 2023

Coordinators

Ir. Elise van Dooren
Ir. Roel van de Pas
Ir. Mieke Vink

Mentors

Ir. Elise van Dooren
Dr. Ir. Jorge Mejia Hernandez

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

The Suburban Dilemma	05
Lynchian poetics of Suburbia	06
Research Question	08
Banal Dreamscape	09

Theoretical Background

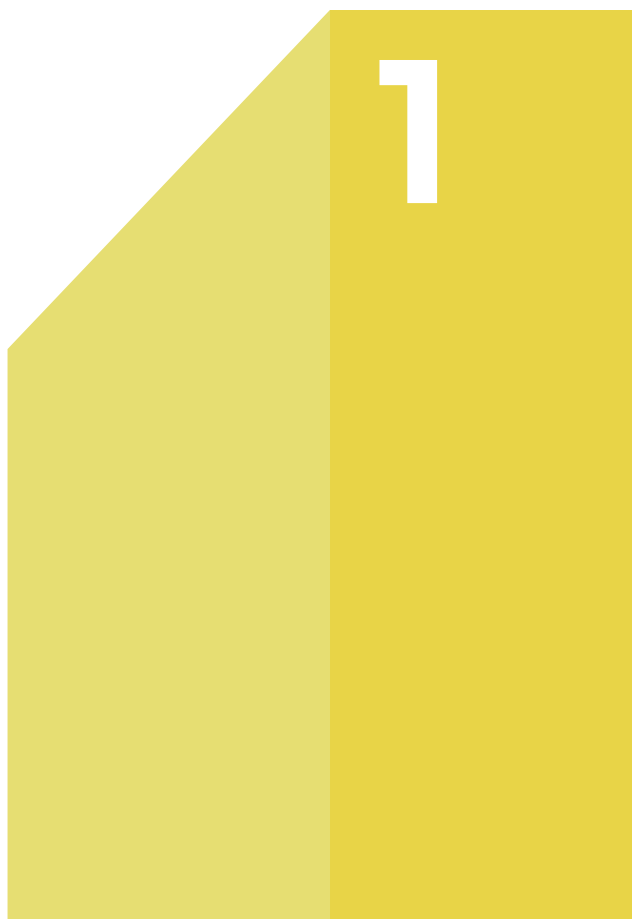
Mass-produced Objects of Art	12
Problematization of Vinex	14

Methodology

Scrutiny of Banal	18
Exploration of Surreal	20
Symbiosis of Surreal, Mundane	25

Afterword

Anticipation	28
Bibliography	30





INTRODUCTION

An Investigation of
Mass-produced Housing
Solutions



THE SUBURBAN DILEMMA

1

Nikolaus Pevsner,
An outline of
European architecture
(Harmondsworth,
Middlesex, Eng.:
Penguin Books
Harmondsworth,
Middlesex, Eng., 1942).

2

Gaston Bachelard,
M. Jolas, and John R.
Stilgoe, The poetics of
space, 1994 edition ed.
(Boston, Massachusetts:
Beacon Press Boston,
Massachusetts, 1994).

Over the course of a millennium, human cognition has been settled in dualities, navigating the realms of “good”, “beautiful”, and “evil”, or “ugly”. Contemporary thought urges us to scrutinize the motives and dynamics underlying the so-called “bad” phenomena and, more importantly, to emphasize a departure from binary categorizations toward an exploration of the spectrum. Within the spectrum of constructed edifices, there is an omnipresent academic tendency toward extreme ends. At one end lies; the glorious, monumental, or in general terms the “good architecture”. On the other end abandoned heritage is present. With a visible shift in aesthetic values and global awareness, now more than ever reusing ruins like industrial heritages are objects of study and intervention for architects. However, an assessment of the mundane has been left unattended for long.

In this scene of sublime, by classical definitions or under new aesthetics, the mundane and banal are left out. To the Architecture catalog, next to the Lincoln Cathedral, we have added the FRAC Dunkerque. Yet, a question arises: can we rightfully dismiss the examination of a seemingly commonplace bicycle shed, merely labeled as a building?¹

The bicycle shed, marked by its banality, dullness, and mass producibility, often finds itself relegated to a realm of disinterest among architects, becoming a subject more prone to criticism, aversion, and avoidance than scrutiny. Nonetheless, banal, and mundane architecture constitutes the majority of the inhabited and constructed space. What initially seems mundane, hosts most of the human memories, dreams, and desires.² Thus, the boredom, anxiety, and even frustration stemming from suburbia can be a byproduct of disregarding the mundane by architects.

Indeed, mass-produced houses, repetitive patterns, and ghostly qualities of working hours in suburbia and sprawls are frustrating. However, from unearthing meaning beneath the grey surface of the mundane; to domination and transformation of their spatial quality, architects and artists have outnumbered opportunities to study and respond to the suburban dilemma.

Figure.1

Uncanny of the
deserted suburbia, in
a painting by Markus
Matthias Krüger,
German painter and
artist.

LYNCHIAN POETICS OF SUBURBIA

Uncovering the sinister under the calm surface and introducing the extraordinary within everyday, mundane environments is often a topic in the filmography of American director and screenwriter, David Lynch. Lynch is a master at showing the audience persistent tension within the banal urban environments.³ The filmography of David Lynch is a coexistence of contradicting phenomena. On one hand, *Twin Peaks* and *Blue Velvet* intricately weave surreal and sinister elements through the fabric of small-town banality. On the other hand, *Lost Highway* presents a surreal dreamscape, a nonlinear narrative delving into the yearning for the mundanity within the inner world of a Hollywood Hills resident, successful professionally yet unsuccessful in preserving the intimacy of his household.

Lynch is the artist of empowering extraordinary within the banal face of everyday life, while simultaneously emphasizing the mundane within the extreme urban settings. He highlights the importance of both banal and surreal phenomena under the light of one another. Showing how they reinforce each other and give existence to the other. In Lynch's dreamscape contradicting phenomena seem inseparable. Lynch unravels that what we acknowledge as mundane can home extraordinary and host our collective and personal desires. Alternatively, shows us the dullness and mundanity rooted within the walls of conspicuous architecture.

3

Richard Martin, *The Architecture of David Lynch* (Tate, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2019).



Figure.3

American suburb, with its dullness is home to the sincere events happening behind the walls, out of neighbors' sight.

From *Twin Peaks, The Return* (2017) Tv Series by David Lynch.



Figure.2

The minimal, artsy, and yet strange house of Fred Madison in *Lost Highway* seems like a non-place.

from a scene in David Lynch's, *Lost Highway* (1997).

The same dullness that emanates from suburbia or any other form of swift development can be traced down and studied the way Lynch studies them in small towns, suburbs, and industrial wastelands. These seemingly banal and uninspiring neighborhoods offer opportunities for critical examination and transformation into vibrant, engaging, and perplexed environments.

However, a significant concern arises in avoiding the imposition of totalitarian approaches, such as utopian ideas advocating demolition and replacement. Rather than prescribing a universal pattern and response, the emphasis is on experimental interventions on a smaller scale. The objective is to initiate a Lynchian discourse within the realm of architectural possibilities in suburbs—a discourse that challenges users' perceptions of sprawl while simultaneously prompting architects to reevaluate its significance.

**How can a
blending of
surreal
assemblages
into mundane
everyday
environments
of Vinex
neighborhoods,
reinforce their
banality and
introduce
alternative forms
of interaction?**

RESEARCH
QUESTION

Oxford English
Dictionary, "Lynchian,
adj," in Oxford English
Dictionary (Oxford
University Press, 2023).

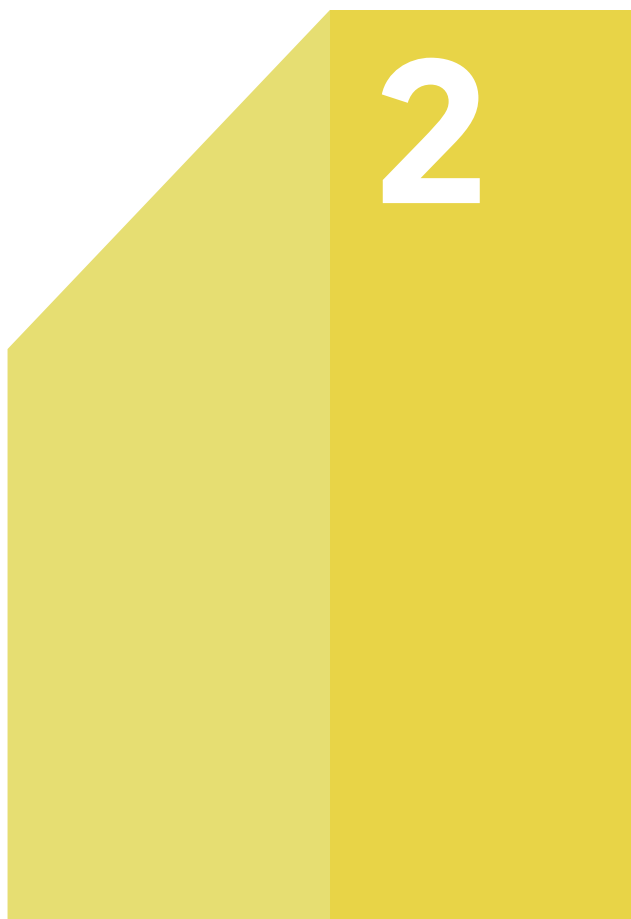
4

BANAL DREAMSCAPE

Definition of Lynchian in the Oxford English Dictionary suggests that: "Lynch is noted for juxtaposing surreal or sinister elements with mundane, everyday environments, and for using compelling visual images to emphasize a dream-like quality of mystery or menace".⁴ This research project is centered on the juxtaposition of surreal elements within the otherwise mundane backdrop of suburban neighborhoods, with Lynch's filmography serving as the primary reference. The deliberate coexistence of contradicting themes as surreal and mundane can introduce and reinforce the mystery in the neighborhood. By doing so it can be withdrawn from the dullness and mundanity that is a byproduct of the lack of character.

Unlike our assumption, suburbia is not a subtle form of urban development. It is not a blank page for citizens to build their dreams however they desire. It is often shaped by mass production and large-scale political plans. Suburbia's banal, unnoticeable characteristics act as an oasis of the perfect family neighborhood. It empowers the delusion that it is not influential in the psyche of its inhabitants. On the contrary, it is a prevailing architecture form, housing a substantial majority of citizens for the majority of their time.

However, the mundane organization of suburbia is a context for the introduction of the Lynchian phenomenon. Lynchian practice introduces the surreal not only by its visual capacities but also by a symbiosis of the contradicting phenomena that lead to a mystery. In this research's case, in the form of a mystery between the surreal and the mundane in the scale of a neighborhood.



The background features a large, light pink square. A darker pink vertical rectangle is positioned on the left side of the light pink square. A solid green horizontal rectangle overlaps the left edge of the light pink square. A thick, dark blue wavy line curves across the bottom of the light pink square, partially obscuring the text below.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A Reflection on The banality
of Vinex Neighborhoods

MASS-PRODUCED OBJECTS OF ART

Taxonomy of Moviegoers by Andrés Caicedo⁵ categorizes an Intellectual moviegoer as a person who observes a film and interprets the message behind it by generalizing and summarizing it. This observer disarms the film by framing it within their mental boundaries and their personal understanding of the world. By doing so, the use of techniques; and precise choices behind every scene in a film, each small detail in it, is disregarded. Nonetheless, the Professional moviegoer Observes, unravels, and unfolds film as a technical apparatus and artistic expression. Looking beyond the message of the film, this viewer analyses the intentions and precise choices behind each decision made in the production of a film.⁶

The introduction of extraordinary, surreal, or sinister events within the mundane environments in acclaimed films like *Caché* by Michael Haneke (2005), *Twin Peaks* by David Lynch (1990–2017), or *Nostalgia* by Andrei Tarkovsky (1983) is not arbitrary. Alongside their means and messages, what makes these films extremely memorable and thought-provoking is the production techniques and precision behind the use of the medium to deliver the message, or image in its desired way. What makes the analysis of film a significant topic of study or an approach for architects is thus this precision and exactitude.

The bubble-like, multifunctional, and detailed locations in the films of Lynch, are engineered atmospheres shaped as concentrated environments.⁷ Whether they are small towns depicted in *Blue Velvet*, *Straight Story*, *Twin Peaks*; or metropolitan cities in *The Elephant Man*, *Mulholland Drive*, and *Lost Highway*; or even Industrial lands for example in *Eraserhead*; they are all a result of Lynch's precision in creating atmospheres and architectural environments to host the dreams and desires of their inhabitants. Not only do these atmospheres host the events showcased in the cinema of David Lynch, but also as Lynch believes they are a deriving force behind the sincere events happening among them.⁸ The atmospheric expression of Lynch and the techniques that he uses make his films "Petri dishes for experiments in mood manipulation where

5

Colombian writer and movie critic (1951–1977).

6

Jorge Mejía Hernández, "Writing, Filming, Building: Using a Taxonomy of Moviegoers to Appraise Spatial Imagination in Architecture," (09/01 2020), <https://doi.org/10.7480/writingplace.4>.

7

Justus Nieland, David Lynch (University of Illinois Press, 2012). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/j.ctt2ttf6c>.

8

Chris Rodley and David Lynch, *Lynch on Lynch*, Revised edition ed. (New York: Faber and Faber New York, 2005).

conditions can be tweaked, variables changed, pressure heightened, and everyday assumptions tested to the limit.”⁹

Moreover, Caicedo talks about the average petit-bourgeois spectator who considers films a form of entertainment. For this audience, there is an ever-growing media or better to say a business behind what we see as cinema today. This is a result of the mass production of art that Walter Benjamin warned us about in his book “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”.

Benjamin believes in the age of mechanical reproduction, the display value overcomes the cultic value that art used to have. This displacement makes art a tool in the toolbox of politicians.¹⁰ In a shift from cultic to display value, the art lost its “melancholic or matchless beauty” and therefore lost its “aura”. The object of art used to be “an object in time and place” and related to the cultic values of the tradition that it was born in. However, with the ever-increasing technology, it has no more the virtue it used to have. Nowadays, movies are a form of entertainment, photographs are evidence for crime courts, and journal graphics are manipulative distortions of reality for the masses. In our case, the mass-produced architecture of suburbia, with its repetitive patterns signals an architecture that lost its cultic value and thus its aura. A home that used to be the expression and extension of the inhabitants, and a shelter for their dreams and desires, is now a product of the flow of the economy, or an object of politics. A case manifested in the VINEX neighborhoods within Dutch urban environments.

9

Martin, *The Architecture of David Lynch*.

10

Walter Benjamin, *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction* (Penguin, 2008).

PROBLEMATIZATION OF VINEX

VINEX is the abbreviated form of Vierde Nota Ruimtelijke Ordening Extra, which is a spatial planning memorandum issued by the Dutch Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning, and the Environment in 1991. This memorandum is a continuation of the 1988 Fourth Memorandum on Spatial Planning and lays down fundamental principles for the construction of new housing sites between 1995 and 2005. Although it suggested the direction in which new expansion could take place for several cities, it was the responsibility of provinces and cooperating municipalities to determine the actual locations. These locations on the outskirts of large cities where massive new constructions take place are commonly known as Vinex sites or Vinex neighborhoods.



Figure.4

Aerial image of mass-produced housing known as Vinex in Eschmarke neighborhood, Enschede in Overijssel province of the Netherlands.

To accommodate the continued population growth of the Netherlands, the VINEX document established a number of principles for the construction. The main principle was that new residential areas should be planned close to existing city centers. This was to contribute to the following goals:¹¹

- Strengthening existing shopping centers and facilities by increasing the potential customer base, etc.
- Limiting the emptying of medium-sized cities in the Netherlands
- Protect open areas in the Netherlands by concentrating urbanization around existing medium-sized cities.
- Limiting car mobility between living, working, and facilities.

The Vinex neighborhoods had to reduce the so-called “cheap skewness” in the housing market. That is, certain households live in housing that is ‘too cheap’, making it unavailable to lower-income households. People tried to solve the shortage of cheap housing by luring wealthier households into the more expensive housing in the Vinex neighborhoods. Although the national government indicated in implementation contracts with regional governments that a maximum of 30% social housing could be built in the Vinex districts, this was often interpreted by these regional governments and municipalities as meaning that exactly 30% cheaper housing should be built.

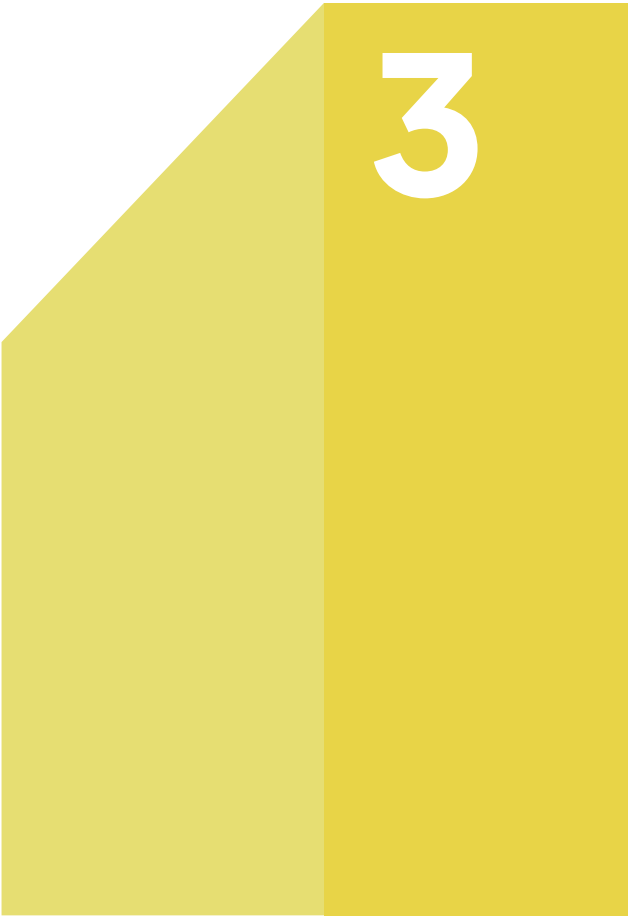
Although these Vinex neighborhoods show more elaborate urban design, and more feasible accessibility compared to notorious American suburbs. However, behind the clear plan and valid intention of the government to provide adequate dwellings for higher-middle-class families and subsequently lower-class; lies an ironic shortcoming. Namely the lack of design, character, and aura within this mass-produced housing solution with extremely repetitive patterns. Vinex neighborhoods with their barren taxonomy of houses and prototypes, have proven to be banal, dull, and soulless. Nonetheless, approximately 800,000 people are estimated to live in Vinex neighborhoods across the Netherlands.¹² Under the cloned shelters, made available through swift, ginormous urban plannings.

11

Evaluatie
Verstedelijking VINEX
1995 tot 2005 Short.

12

"Vinex-wijken zijn
relatief rijk en
kinderrijk," Central
Bureau voor de
Statistiek, 2016,
<https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2016/25/vinex-wijken-zijn-relatief-rijk-en-kinderrijk>.





METHODOLOGY

Speculation Of A Symbiosis
Between Surreal And Banal

A| SCRUTINY OF BANAL

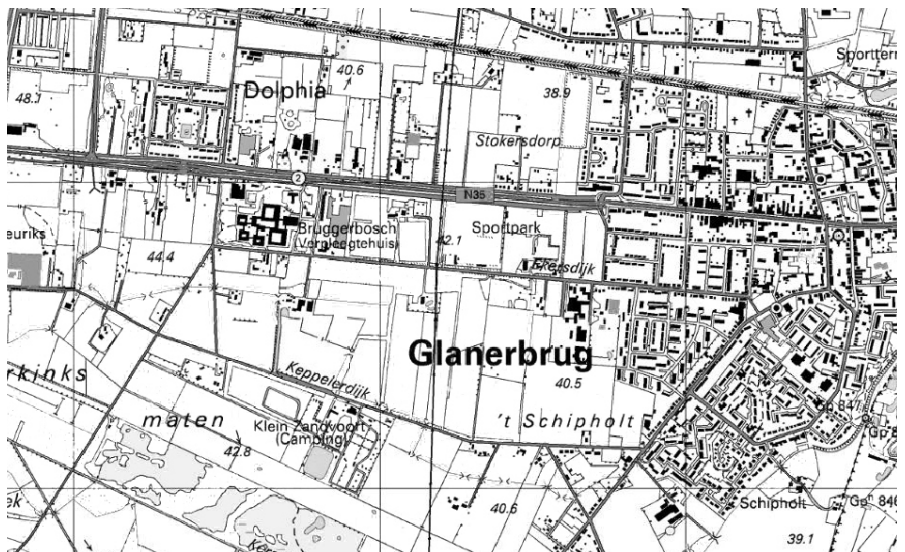
Investigation of the mundane is the groundwork for this paper. An analysis of what characterizes, weakens, or is the potential of the mass-produced architecture of Vinex neighborhoods. Comprehending cloned, repetitive housing solutions reinforces the research with a toolbox to understand the intentions behind the spatial organization and evolution of these notorious neighborhoods. Moreover, it helps to speculate mechanisms to introduce the surreal colors to these banal grey atmospheres. A taxonomy of the dwelling types, recurring events within these neighborhoods at different times of day, and spatial relations and agencies are the basis of this research.

A cartography of the neighborhood and taxonomy of its components is the initial step to comprehend the dilemma of the Vinex. By doing so, the clarity of the dilemma will assist a design strategy that aims not to solve the entirety of the problem, but to institute experimental approaches that challenge this banality with surreal assemblages. Furthermore, the study of the patterns of life during the day can reinforce the neighborhood with functions and events making it more lively and less ghostly, especially during daytime. Lastly, the spatial agencies and relations that the neighborhood is shaped with and functions through can help create alternative spatial relations that serve the purpose of introducing the surreal to the neighborhood.

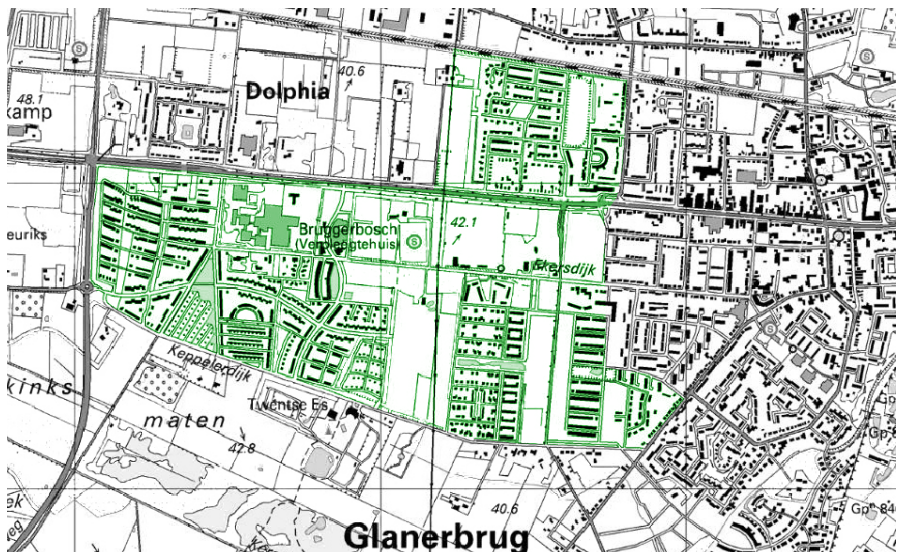
Having said that, the investigation of the banal is the initial step to taking a closer look at the Vinex neighborhood and its spatial arrangements and agencies.

Figure.5

Two maps of Eschmarke with a short gap in between show how rapidly Vinex neighborhoods grow. This leads to mass-produced architecture with a lack of "aura". Source: <https://www.topotijdreis.nl/>



2001



2005

B| EXPLORATION OF SURREAL

Lynch's approach toward suburbia and its inhabitants shapes the basis of this thesis. Therefore, the complementing approach is to explore Lynch's surreal methods and techniques that depict the surreal or sinister underlayer of mundane environments; by zooming in and introducing what was initially absent in the initial distant, perfect image.

This study is founded on first-hand observation and interaction with Lynch's filmography and his precise choices. The use of secondary resources and related literature is the support for the arguments. Finally, the aim is to unfold, explain, and translate Lynch's techniques into architectural prototypes.

Lynchian is the co-existence of the contradictions. This dominant co-existence in Lynch's filmography is visible in a wide range from the environments and atmospheres to the characters and their inner and outside worlds. Finally, this quality is noticeable in objects that he employs in the service of delivering his message. All three criteria of atmospheres, characters, and objects are similarly objects of study for architects. Thus, an investigation and breakdown of Lynch's approach toward them can ease finding a methodology to introduce the surreal to the banality of Vinex neighborhoods.

The Lynchian environments for instance have dual lives based on their existence in the dream or the reality. Sometimes the same spaces exist in different realities under alternative functions, locations, and purposes. Although many Lynchian spaces are dreamscapes and atmospheric utopias or dystopias, many others are realized, everyday spaces. Thus, Lynchian atmospheres are complex multilayered, and contradicting.

Moreover, Lynchian characters are complex personages. They get introduced to the viewer with a distorted persona or shown by how they desire themselves instead of the reality of their selves, like what Freud describes as the emergence of a person in a physique of a different character in our dreams. Often, in the mask of a person with

opposite qualities to the person we are dealing with in the dream. For instance, in Mulholland Drive, each character appears in a variety of personas which creates a complex relation cartography of characters.

Finally, the objects also are involved in this contradicting dual life. Lynch is extremely decisive with objects and elements that reinforce a certain message. Objects and their appearance, emergence, their position, and function all have a crucial role in the Lynchian dreamscape. Some act as clues toward solving the mystery and act as apparatus that help the viewer-detective to solve the mystery. The precision of Lynchian objects is due to their importance as connections between separate but inseparable dots and clues of the mystery.

13

Sigmund Freud and Joyce Crick, *The interpretation of dreams, Oxford world's classics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press Oxford, 1999).

The collection and translation of these criteria and clues act as the backbone for a method of creating architectural alternatives. Alternative ways of inhabiting the space, with the technique of bringing the surreal or sinister within the everyday, mundane environments of the Vinex neighborhood.

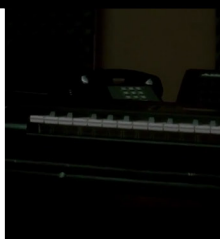
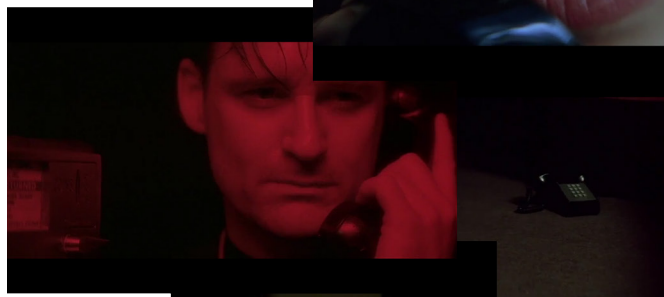
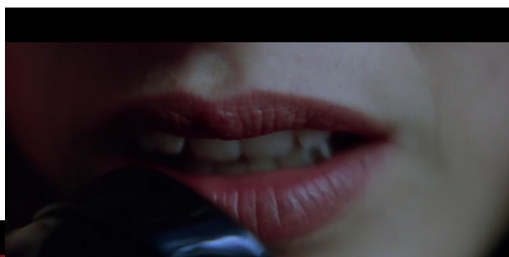
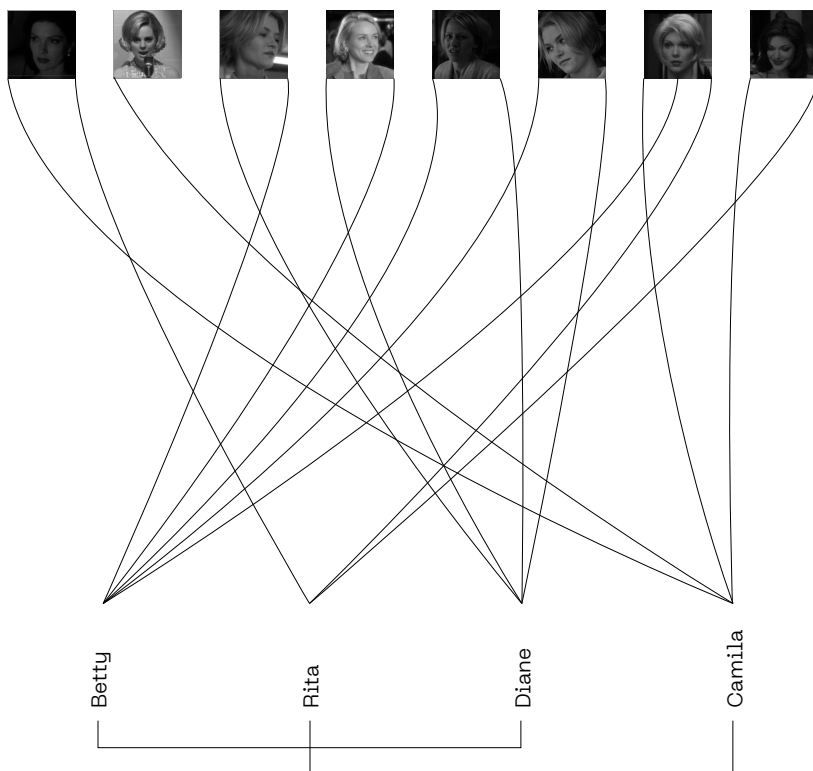


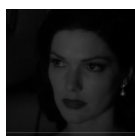


Figure.6

The use of objects in cinema of David Lynch is not arbitrary. Certain objects have certain values and guide the viewer in their way to unfold the mystery. Scenes from Mulholland Drive by David Lynch.



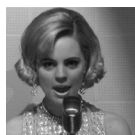
1



Rita



Betty

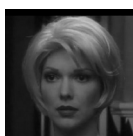


Camila

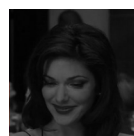


Diane

2



Rita



Camila



Diane



Betty

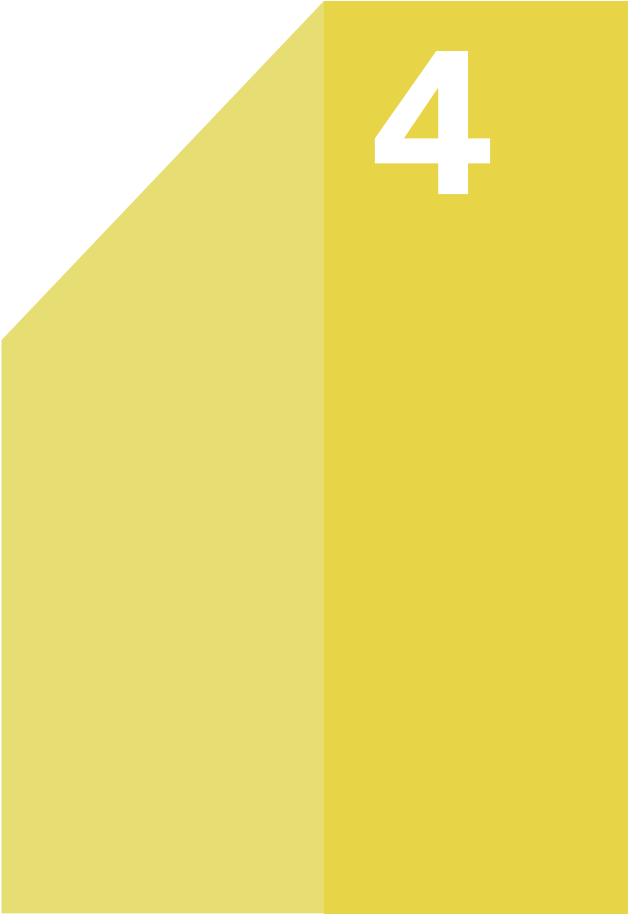
Figure.7

Diagram of characters in Mulholland Drive (2001) a film by David Lynch. Personage assigned to their name in the number 1 part are the characters we encounter first, which remain almost the same for the majority of the screen time. However, in the second part, the characters are introduced differently, as shown in part 2 in the figure. This is a diagram to show how two Lynchian characters are multiplied and reidentified during the narrative.

C| SYMBIOSIS OF SURREAL, MUNDANE

Based on the findings of the first two phases of the research, methodologies, assemblages, and mechanisms will be invented to create surreal atmospheres within the soulless setting of the Vinex neighborhood. In the third phase, the findings and methodologies will be examined through a dialectic process of making and analyzing. In the research-by-design approach, the methodologies will lead to the design of certain prototypes and experiments to examine how can the surreal reinforce the everyday life of suburbia.

Within the chosen Vinex neighborhood, these prototypes in different scales and by different scopes conclude the final chapter of this article. These prototypes lead to a synthesis of surreal within mundane environments that will be examined before the final design phase.





AFTERWORD

Alternative forms Of Interaction
With The Neighborhood

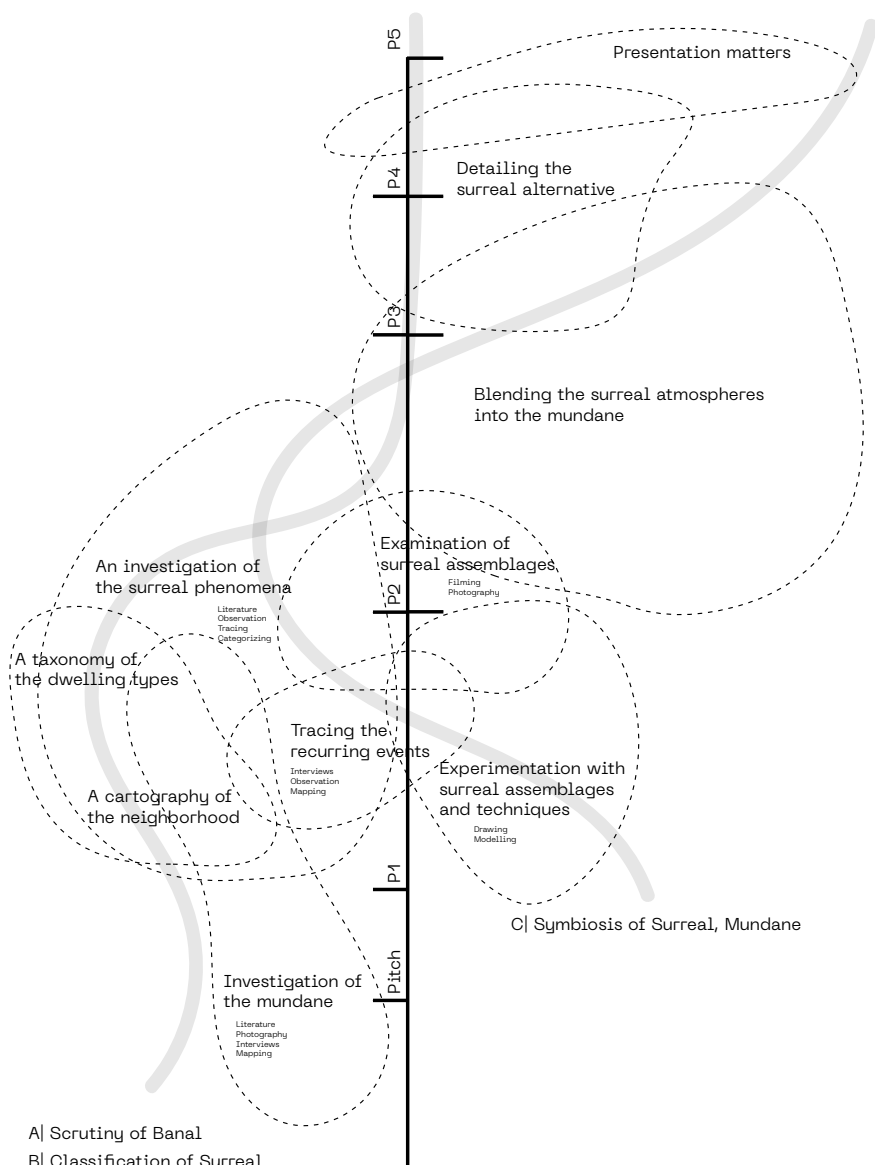
ANTICIPATION

The research output derived from the steps described in the previous chapter will be the starting point for the design project. Regarding the experiments, findings, and conclusions made especially in the third phase of the research, the surreal elements, atmospheres, and spaces will be designed in the chosen context and specific location. The experimental practices examined in the research phase can help design a Lynchian alternative for the mundane environment of Vinex neighborhoods. This is envisioned in the form of an urban experiment with an eye on the three criteria that empower Lynch's artwork: the environment, character, and objects.

Alternative atmospheres introduce a new aesthetic, function, and virtue. Characters or neighbors that play an interactive role within the urban environment they live in. Finally, objects of architecture or personal belongings play a role in solving the mystery of the neighborhood. Each of these unfamiliar elements and alternative functions aims to reinforce the daily life of the inhabitants of the suburb and influence their daydreams. The ambition is to finally make the neighborhood, where the everyday happens, a place for interaction, dreaming, and wonder.

Figure.8

Graduation Plan. A list of estimated research plans and expected outcomes.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bachelard, Gaston, M. Jolas, and John R. Stilgoe. *The Poetics of Space*. 1994 edition ed. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press Boston, Massachusetts, 1994.

Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Penguin, 2008.

Oxford English Dictionary. Oxford University Press, 2023.

Evaluatie Verstedelijking Vinex 1995 Tot 2005 The Netherlands: Ministerie van VROM, 2005.

Freud, Sigmund, and Joyce Crick. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford University Press Oxford, 1999.

Martin, Richard. *The Architecture of David Lynch*. Tate, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2019.

Mejía Hernández, Jorge. "Writing, Filming, Building: Using a Taxonomy of Moviegoers to Appraise Spatial Imagination in Architecture." (09/01 2020). <https://doi.org/10.7480/writingplace.4>.

Nieland, Justus. *David Lynch*. University of Illinois Press, 2012. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/j.ctt2ttf6c>.

Pevsner, Nikolaus. *An Outline of European Architecture*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Eng.: Penguin Books Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Eng., 1942.

Rodley, Chris, and David Lynch. *Lynch on Lynch*. Revised edition ed. New York: Faber and Faber New York, 2005.

"Vinex-Wijken Zijn Relatief Rijk En Kinderrijk." Central Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2016, <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2016/25/vinex-wijken-zijn-relatief-rijk-en-kinderrijk>.

Nov
2023

Sepehr
Asadi