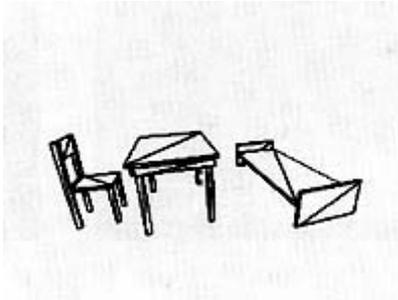


spatial locations, version III

HERMEN MAAT/RON MILTENBURG

"Tout le malheur des hommes vient d'une seule chose, qui est ne savoir pas demeurer en repos, dans une chambre."

Blaise Pascal, "Pensées"





58
CYBER ART

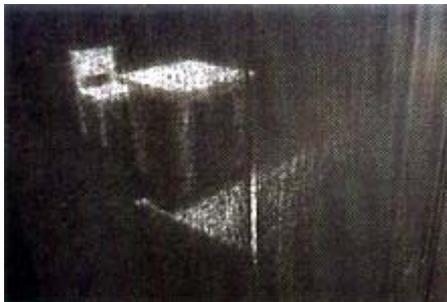
ROCK AND ROLL. until the fifties the privilege of the elderly and disabled, gained full swing as the chair gave up its categorical functions in the sixties. Present youth and fitness culture have the old rocking chair and wheelchair to thank for its overwhelming success.

HOWEVER, ITS STRICT IMPARTIAL ROLE IN TABLE TENNIS, OR ITS TONGUE-IN-CHEEK INDIFFERENCE TOWARDS POOLROOM HUSTLERS FOR THAT MATTER, IS REMINISCENT OF ITS HIGH AS A MERE OBJECT.

HERMEN WHO?

CUT IT OUT! THIS IS AN ART

THE CHAIR MOST LIVELY OF ALL, OF COURSE, IS THE ELECTRIC CHAIR, IRONICALLY DESIGNED TO END LIFE. EQUALLY PARADOXICAL IS THE COMFORT PROVIDED BY THIS PIECE OF FURNITURE. THE ROUND TABLE ACTUALLY VOICES THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUALITY. TODAY IN ROUND TABLE CONFERENCES, AS IN HISTORY AT THE COURT OF KING ARTHUR, HIS TABLE IS SURELY THE BEST KNOWN IN LITERATURE. IN BETWEEN, WE ARE FREE TO PURCHASE ANY BED THAT MATTERS TO US. SHOW ME YOUR BED AND I WILL SHOW YOU MINE. WE HAVE NO WAY OF KNOWING WHETHER THIS ROUND TABLE REALLY EXISTED. WHO YOU ARE. THIS CATALOGUE OFFERS YOU A WIDE





You've got nobody but yourself to blame, punk. Now, sit down or we'll make you. **BOY, AM I GLAD TO SEE YOU!** MY KINGI SIRE, WELCOME TO THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF THE BED EX. PLEASE TRY THIS ONE F

We're all set to go Warden. Just say when, and we'll fly the sucker. **REJOICE LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, WE'VE BRING** BLE. A SECOND OPINION IS IN ORDER, WOULDN'T YOU SAY, GIVEN THE COM

YESSIRREAL! THERE YOU ARE CUDNEVER, LOVELY AND INNOCENT A... YOU ARE INNOCENT, AREN'T YOU? A PARTY O

Miss, you're not gonna [what are you? Please, lie down. It'll be over in a jiffy. **WHAT THE BEEB IS THE MATTER WITH YOU?!** A 18015, AS THE FRENCH WOULD SAY, HOW CAN I BE OF SERVICE TO **BORING, BORING, BO**

By the book, ladies and gentlemen. This room is off limits to the press. Owt! **YOU, THE LAST ONE TO ENTER!** AS FOR YOU OTHER C

WE ARE AMONGST ARISTOCRATS. YOU HAVE NO BUSINESS HERE. PLEASE HELP YOURSELF TO A CUP OF COFFEE IN THE OF-

60
CYBER ART



You'll sit this one out. **OUT, goitit? Sitting it OUT...** ARTHA, MY MAN, THAT TABLE ISITFE, AINT EXACTLY ESCALEBURE! FEEL THIS. NOW THIS, SIR, IS WHAT WE CALL A BED O

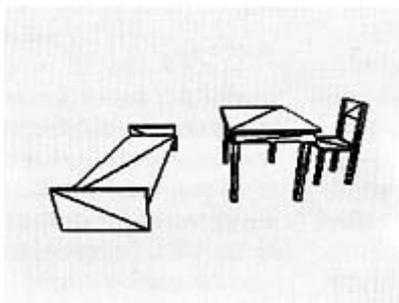
Do us the honors Warden, chair this session, as it were. **IS THAT A GUN IN YOUR POCKET?** DON'T DASH OFF AGAIN LANCY, MIND YOUR TABLE MANNERS. YOU*ALL WILL NEVER GET OUT OF THE **HOOKSTA**

And then we can all take a rest. In that bed-chair over there. **LET'S INVITE PARCIVAL. GWINNIF, YOU KNOW, TABLE RAPPING...** I*LL TUCK YOU*ALL IN. DON*

Chairman, chairlady, chairperson. What a world. Sod off! **TURNING TABLES, MULTIPLICATION TABLES, TABLE-HOPPING, YO!** BED TIME FOLKS, BED AND BOARD IN

62
CYBER ART

This work of art has been made possible by the FOUNDATION FOR VISUAL ARTS, DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE - AMSTERDAM. Computergraphics Hans Kerckhof - Expertise provided by Shaun O'Neil/ MenteVideo MediaLab



I. Imagine a world in which Europe hasn't a clue as to the direction in which it will develop. A world in which professors tell us that Islam is a religion to be respected, as good for Muslims as Christianity is for Christians. A world in which a baldhead with a beard is just as acceptable as a longhaired head with a clean-shaven chin. A world in which new technologies announce themselves and evoke dimensions yet to be thought of. A world in which the consequences of these developments for the constellation of states, taxes and moralities can

only be second-guessed. A world in which scientific data are as good as dogmatic teachings or the opinions in the streets. Man looks into the abyss of civilisation.

That world existed back at the beginning of the 17th century. It is the world of Blaise Pascal and his contemporaries. Imagine the horror generated by Montaigne a few decades before: *Que sais je?* What do I know? Nothing! This is more terrifying than an incessant stream of disinformation on TV, in magazines, or on Internet. And the blue sky, no longer a divine roof over their heads. Nothing but an optical illusion, evaporating, and disclosing a vertigo of universes, less tangible than cyberspace. A hideous array of maybes opens. At first, Pascal swings with the changing moods, modes and models of the *avantgardes avant la lettre* in mundane Paris. God knows what he swallowed, snorted or smoked, but one night he had a close encounter of the third kind and consequently became a zealous apologist for the Christianity he unwittingly had helped to undermine as a mathematician, physicist, philosopher and as a living being.

Pensée-writer Pascal sidestepped the challenge of Essay-writer Montaigne.

II. There are Essays and there are Pensées. The Essayist loosens his grip on the phenomena once apprehended. Together, the Essayist and the unleashed phenomena hurl themselves downhill towards the same hideous abyss from which the Pensée-writer shies away. En route some apprehensions evaporate, others come together or pick up new material or cause an avalanche. The Essayist might be snowed under or appear as the Horrible Snowman. In both cases we can only follow his traces and find the spot where his Essay threatened to turn Pensée.

III. In the first chapter of Genesis, God created heaven and earth, the elements, the flora, fauna and man. *Nomen est omen*, so he provided all his creations with names and meaning, and he saw that it was good. The seventh day he created reflective silence, and saw that it wasn't all that good. Here we enter the second chapter, and God tries it all over again. This time in the garden of virtues, in the reality of virtuality. Upon the end of the chapter he leads all animals on land and all birds in the sky to man, in order to see how man would name them: "Because, as man would name each living being, thus it would be said to be." And man indicated and said: "Parasite wasps, desert rat, dung beetle." And: "Milking cow, draughthorse, honeybee."

In the following chapter, of which I fail to understand the plot, God eventually dissolves the distinction between his first — real — world and his second — virtual — world. He retired into the heavens and said: "*Après moi le deluge.*" And so it came to pass - within two chapters! Man was made to build an ark to clearly defined specifications. Then, man embarked with his parasite wasp, desert rat, dung beetle, milking cow, draughthorse and honeybee - two of each.

By closely reading the Pensée Genesis, we know about the specific identity of the things surrounding man before he attempted to build the tower of Babel.

IV. *Il y a une table, es gibt ein Bett*, there is a chair. Not in the ark, there wasn't. Or maybe there was, Genesis doesn't show a record on that subject. (God named heaven and earth, the elements, the flora and man. Man named the animals on the land and the birds in the sky). The objects, apparently, had to speak for themselves. However, in the aftermath of Babel they got caught in the web of forty times forty syntaxes, and their voices have never been heard again. Of what Id are the entities table, bed and chair? What is their specific identity and how are

they in the world? Il y a, yes, but what he or it has the table; es gibt, okay, but what 'it' gives the bed; there is, sure, but what is the undifferentiated space articulated by the chair? Neither the French, nor the German, nor the English answer these questions as the objects themselves might. In order to find means to make the objects talk again, we have to loosen our grip: l'entendement, der Begriff, the apprehension.

When God threw the Book at man, the third time, he did so with chapter 11, foreclosing the free flow of speech, of essay. We might have to backtrack. We might even have to regress beyond the first time, when he tried to cover up discrepancies in this bookkeeping; we might have to re-install the distinction between the real and the virtual.

V. Whether God really exists or not, cannot be determined by reason. There is this fifty-fifty chance. Belief might win you eternal bliss ... if God exists. If he doesn't, you haven't lost anything. Like you wouldn't if you did believe but he didn't exist. On the other hand, if he does exist, and you didn't believe, you have lost. Forever.

This reasoning, known as Pascal's Wager, is characteristic of the Pensée-writer at large. Some 250 years ago Blaise Pascal bet man's spiritual welfare on the assumptions of Christianity. Some 5 years ago Alain Finkielkraut waged man's salvation on the assumptions of Culture. Both scholars of their times, they could not but discover unmarked slopes, yet condemned man to langlaufen. God, Pascal, Finkielkraut and all the other Pensée-writers, became zealous apologists for the preconceived ideas they once unwittingly had endangered by their essayistic nature. Somewhere between the rise and fall of the Pensée, somewhere between God's Genesis and Finkielkraut's Defaite, Pascal knew: "Les extrêmes se touchent."

VI. My name is Room, but I don't know what that means. I have roommates: a chair, a table and a bed. I don't know what that means, and neither do they. I've just told you five stories; I can only hope that I related them accurately. There are plenty more where they come from. Each and every fiber of ours is drenched in stories. For many a millennium have we heard them, but we don't know what they mean. So much we have gathered - we are the only remains of a huge floating device. It must have been critical times, back then, because we were hardly addressed or used. That all changed over the ages. When we get yet another visitor, sometimes we recognize the way he puts us to use. That becomes part of our identity, but we don't know what that means, unless that visitor is present. We like that. We like to tell our visitor what he made of us. If he stays long enough, we warm to the visitor, as long as he uses us. Otherwise we become ill tempered, but we don't know what that means. We have a question for you. A lot of visitors lament their existence and/or their identity. We hear them say: "If God had only created a room, nothing but a room, and allowed visitors to peep in and say 'Show me your furniture and I'll tell you what you are.' What does that mean?"