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*The Sense of Unity*, p.60, fig.81f, Chapter:  
'The Morphology of Concepts; Fire, Air,  
Water, and Earth'

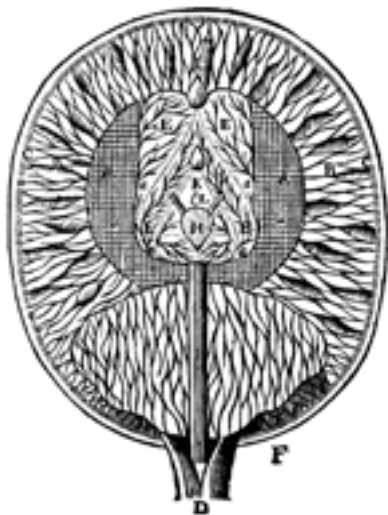
## II. From Defined to Unpredictable (or vice versa)

An important distinction must be noted between the concept of the intellect and that of reason. As complementary aspects of knowledge, reason deals with the sensible world, intellect with the metaphysical world. Reason in the traditional view is the outward manifestation of knowledge in the human domain; it should not therefore be viewed as an indecent faculty within man. In point of fact, were it be too consciously an independent faculty, it would have no power to reach the Universal Intellect which lies at its center. It would always remain peripheral to it. If, however, reason's complementary relation to intellect is realised, it can become the guide which ultimately leads man to the highest form of 'knowledge' possible.

*(The Sense of Unity, p.5, 'The Role of Intellect, Introduction')*

'All is number' or 'God is number' were the main dictates of the 6th century School of the Greek mathematician and philosopher Pythagoras. In all cultures and within man's own ability, there has forever been an urge to define such abstract terms as divine, infinite, perennial and mystical. Ancient philosophers tried to introduce methods and systems to that end through science, and specifically, with rules of geometry. Artists and architects followed this approach as well, basing their works on this branch of mathematics that is concerned with the properties and relationships of points, lines, surfaces, solids and higher dimensional analogues. In etymological terms 'geometry' originates from the Greek 'gē' meaning 'earth' and 'metria' translating to 'measure'. Measuring the earth entailed comprehending its elements, having a grip on them and in doing so, perhaps, attaining the idea of the Divine Creator, but in a way that is different from Stylites' own noteworthy solution.

In the world of geometry in relation to philosophy, one of the most intriguing and defining systems was introduced by Rene Descartes, the father of modern rationalism, during the 16th century: the Cartesian grid, being the three dimensional coordinate system based on the Euclidian plane, which contributed to many fields of knowledge. Its concept is significant for positioning the incomprehensible that excites the human intellect, and that also



A diagrammatic section of the human brain by Rene Descartes, probably before 1664

Opposite:  
*The Artist and the Nude*,  
Chalcography by Albrecht Dürer,  
1525



makes it insecure. The grid leads us to presume that ideally nothing would be unpredictable since everything would have a position, and hence capable of being subjected to coherent reasoning. It also throws a three-dimensional net over the world, enabling the location and positioning of elements in space. Although complex in its logic, the grid has been adopted visually by many disciplines, including the arts and architecture, as a basic tool to bring measurable units into a context (Descartes used the grid even in his later analytic drawings of a human brain). Somehow resembling a rather poetic attempt at embracing infinity under the physical vault of a dome, the grid endeavours in abstract terms to frame all that is out there.

Oushoorn's work often ventures into this field that rationalises three-dimensional space. In an attempt to define a vast landscape through the introduction of rigid geometry he is working on an installation conceived for Thorntonbank Off Shore Wind Farm, 30 km off the Belgian coast. Being the first off shore wind farm of Belgium and sixth biggest of the world, the farm counts 54 wind turbines placed with 500 m and 800 m from each other. They define a verticality in the extensive landscape of the Northern Sea and a horizontality with two grids covering surfaces of 13 km<sup>2</sup> and 8 km<sup>2</sup> respectively. Oushoorn's long-term project with the installation of a grid between the turbines originates from a visual fascination with a single moment the artist experienced when he was looking at the water he was using to clean a wheelbarrow: there was beauty in the small quantity of water volume that was elegantly swaying because of the object's movement. In order to capture, define and position it, he installed a metal grid into the water volume and filmed the water's movement that was creat-

ed by pushing the wheelbarrow, which also gave the work its title. With a third work related to rationally framing the unpredictable, the artist placed a metal grid in a drinking glass, in order to minimise the surface and capture that same movement of the wheelbarrow and potentially also that of the installation in Thornton Bank. This intervention with the grid in three different scales remotely brings to mind Albrecht Dürer's perspectograph: the painter invented this device in order to transpose a flawless, frozen rendition of reality onto a drawing. Different from Dürer's device and consequent to his own method, Oushoorn's instrument is an essential part of the final work. The unpredictability of the water, whether in quantities great or small, is confronted with the rigidity of what the human mind requires so that it can bring order to something it cannot possibly organise. It is precisely this conundrum that bestows an elegance upon the work. In this trilogy the unpredictable remains beyond the artist's control: the framework cannot override the ultimate perimeter, namely, nature, in order to realise it.

Perhaps it is out of this dilemma that Oushoorn attempted in another work to define both the perimeter and the unpredictable itself. The work is called *Stairs* and exists at the scale of a model. Made out of wood, the visual definition of a staircase unavoidably comes to mind, but if it would ever be built on a scale of one to one, it would be very hard to use, let alone step on it, like the narrow steps of the *Minaret*. Oushoorn makes the object to show what the stair becomes, in this case a hinge, created by a rope that keeps the triangular blocks together. The piece is photographed in a number of shapes: a curved bridge, lying like

a snake on the ground or curling like an ellipse around a wrist. The artist tries to escape the inflexibility of the material he works with and also the definition of a functional architectural element. By specifying the perimeter as a pliable given, he enables the function to transform and almost disappear into something dubious, which leaves the staircase behind, even if that name is ironically adopted as the title.

The ambiguity caused by such an attitude reappears in *Columns*, executed in a gallery context whereby Oushoorn alluded directly to the spatial elements of its interior. Prior to the intervention of the artist, a series of tube lights were hung parallel to the inner wall of the L-shaped space. The lamps caused a visual tension on the ceiling, since the geometrically dominating facade of the room does not run parallel to that wall. The decision to follow one structural element had already defined the gallery space in a strict way, to which Oushoorn reacted with his own spatial definition. He repeated the column in the room, following the direction of the tube lights and hence of the inner wall. The intervention adapted itself intriguingly into the space and defined a new order, despite momentary clashes. In their strict repetition, one column unavoidably got stuck in a partition and another stopped just short of the demarcating wall. Through Oushoorn's intervention, the rest of the space looked awkward; its logic appeared to be in the act of disappearing and in fact, the unpredictable effect was how normal it all seemed. A similar approach is also demonstrated in *Ceiling*, an installation shown in an exhibition context. Initially Oushoorn wanted to make a different work for which he bought standard wooden panels of 122 cm by 244 cm. These were coincidentally shrunk and distorted with moisture. To be able to use them as steady panels he began to divide them, but ended up with squarish tiles of forty by forty centimetres. The new plates weren't perpendicular because of the deformation of the original panels. Hence Oushoorn had to leave a five millimetre joint between the plates when he attached them to a grid that was applied to a suspended ceiling system. This caused a slight, perceptible difference compared to the standard, equal elements of a hung ceiling, familiar yet often overlooked. The piece was eventually hung vertically in the very high interior of the gallery space and obtained an unavoidable presence. The definition of the ceiling shifted to one of a suspended wall that strangely complements to the space, as if it had always been there.