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Introduction

The
Virtual
Condition

The
Virtual
Condition
is a

This figure is for placement
purposes only please use provided
artwork for finished layout

gamble
That
Always
Spins Off



The rules of cultural and political resistance have dramatically changed. The revolution in technology brought about by the rapid development of the computer and video has created a new geography of power relations in the first world that could only be imagined as little as twenty years ago: people are reduced to data, surveillance occurs on a global scale, minds are melded to screenal reality, and an authoritarian power emerges that thrives on absence. The new geography is a virtual geography, and the core of political and cultural resistance must assert itself in this electronic space.

The West has been preparing for this moment for 2,500 years. There has always been an idea of the virtual, whether it was grounded in mysticism, abstract analytical thinking, or romantic fantasy. All of these approaches have shaped and manipulated invisible worlds accessible only through the imagination, and in some cases these models have been given ontological privilege. What has made contemporary concepts and ideologies of the virtual possible is that these preexisting systems of thought have expanded out of the imagination, and manifested themselves in the development and understanding of technology. The following work, as condensed as it may be, extracts traces of the virtual from past historical and philosophical narratives. These traces show intertextual relationships between seemingly disparate systems of thought that have now been recombined into a working body of “knowledge” under the sign of technology.

I
385 B.C.

This artisan is able to make not only all kinds of furniture but also all plants that grow from the earth, all animals including himself and, besides, the earth and the heavens and the gods, all things in heaven and all things in Hades below the earth.

This program is able to make not only all kinds of furniture but also all plants that grow from the earth, all animals, itself, and, besides, the earth and the heavens and the gods, all things in heaven and all things in Hades below the earth.

II
60 B.C.

There is no visible object that consists of atoms of one kind only. Everything is composed of a mixture of elements. The more qualities and powers a thing possesses, the greater variety it attests in the forms of its component atoms.

There is no visible object that consists of pixels of one kind only. Everything is a recombinant mixture of representation. The more qualities and powers an image possesses, the greater variety it attests in the forms of its component pixels.

III

A.D. 250

Let us then, make a mental picture of our universe: each member shall remain what it is, distinctly apart; all is to form, as far as possible, a complete unity so that whatever comes into view, say the outer orb of the heavens, shall bring immediately with it the vision, on the one plane, of the sun and all of the stars with earth and sea and all living things as if exhibited upon a transparent globe.

Let us then, make a virtual representation of our universe: each member shall remain what it is, distinctly apart; all is to form, as far as possible, a complete unity so that whatever comes into view, say the outer orb of the heavens, shall bring immediately with it the vision, on the one plane, of the sun and all of the stars with earth and sea and all living things as if exhibited upon a transparent globe.

IV

A.D. 413

There are many reprobate mingled with the good, and both are gathered together by the gospel as in a dragnet; and in this world, as in a sea, both swim enclosed without distinction in the net.

There are many reprobate mingled with the good, and both are gathered together in the data base as in a dragnet; and in this world, as in a sea, both swim enclosed without distinction in the electronic net.

V
1259

There are two kinds of contact, that of quantity, and that of power. By the former a body can be touched only by a body; by the latter a body can be touched by an incorporeal reality, which moves that body.

There are two kinds of contact, that of surface, and that of power. By the former a body can be touched only by a body; by the latter a body can be touched by an incorporeal reality, which moves that body.

VI
1321

So here on earth, across a slant of light
that parts the air within the sheltering shade
man's arts and crafts contrive, our mortal sight

observes bright particles of matter ranging
up, down, aslant, darting or eddying;
longer and shorter; but forever changing.

So here on screen, across a slant of light
that parts the air within the sheltering shade
man's arts and crafts contrive, our mortal sight

observes bright particles of matter ranging
up, down, aslant, darting or eddying;
longer and shorter; but forever changing.