

things: four metabletic reflections

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**defining “evening”** : a simplicity in grandeur, it shrouds happiness or sorrow, provides peace for impetuous hearts, is the same descending scene of every battle of history, an imminent dusk that will settle at death, a consolation in man’s dissatisfaction, the affirmation of a momentary bliss

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You are right; I am not a poet – nor do I wish to be a poet. What I wish to do is introduce words like those above into science, which is so indigent in this matter. These would be words more carefully pondered, more serenely formulated and better considered. If events or things act on our emotions, or at least strike us, why should this aspect be so consistently passed over in silence? I protest against this distortion of reality, and this protest is embodied in my method.

–jh van den berg

# 1 dimensions

With the naked eye I could still ask whether the baluster there “still” or “of course” is just as long as the baluster here, but that doubt becomes meaningless now that I look through the binoculars. How long is that piece of wood in my perfect lens? I have no idea; I don’t even have any point of comparison. For the grass around the baluster has equally indefinable dimensions in my binoculars. Is the grass long? Or short? The questions lose their meaning here. The binoculars change everything and play havoc with the concept of dimension. The binoculars, I am told, magnify ten times, exactly ten times, but it could just as well be twenty or thirty times...To enlarge is to see outside the dimension which things have...The difference is just as evident when I look at the baluster through a simple magnifying glass. I then see details which I would never have been able to see with the naked eye. But this means that the magnifying glass forces the wood over the boundaries of its ordinary dimensions...When I use this instrument, it reveals a new structure, of a different nature.<sup>1</sup>

Factors are never absent...There are roads which show their true, their real length only when one groans and gasps.<sup>2</sup>

Let us limit ourselves again to dimension. At first the rule was: the measure of things changes in position. Now it is: only for those who are absent does the dimension of things remain constant. In practice this means that one who wishes to perceive with constant dimensions must absent himself. Since this is not possible – which implies that constant dimensions are impossible – the rule is that one who wishes to perceive with maximally constant dimensions must absent himself as much as possible...It is possible to absent oneself to a very high degree. One who succeeds in being absent ceases to be tired or rested, thirsty or slaked, hungry or filled; he also ceases to be a friend, enemy, spouse, father, mother, husband, or wife; he almost ceases to be a human being; but it is possible...It is even certain that in the past few centuries, and particularly in the past few decades, this removing of oneself from the scene has become something that can be pursued with increasing ease and therefore also with the corresponding degree of success.<sup>3</sup>

Height, depth, distance and nearness – they are the dimensions of our existence. So much happens to us every day within these dimensions.<sup>4</sup>

Every change in position modifies every object in all its properties, within the limits set by every object in all its properties, within the limits set by the object itself.<sup>5</sup>

**the question of  
the baluster**

**the walk to  
bellinzona with  
its unforgettable  
sign of 5  
kilometers**

**the medieval  
church tower of  
utrecht, “the  
dom”**

**the fallen  
weathervane**

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<sup>1</sup> P.9–12

<sup>2</sup> P.18–20

<sup>3</sup> P.20–21

<sup>4</sup> P.24

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<sup>5</sup> P.33

## 2 colors

I did not wish to describe any property separately from the totality in which it occurs...this kind of observation should lead to caution in the use of instrument in measuring the color of the sun...An instrument used in measuring the sun doesn't take the sun's position in the sky into account. It removes the time element from the event, and what is an event without time?...The instrument, which makes things stable and, by the same token, almost makes us forget how much they change and that they even change considerably...If one removes the element of the morning time and the evening time, then the two sums are equal. The instrument makes this important "reduction"; it removes the evening from evening and the morning from the morning...But the color of the two suns remains unequal.<sup>6</sup>

Colors are not stable; yet one at a time they remain consistent. The contradiction here is similar to the one concerned with dimensions...If colors changed arbitrarily, the world would be polychromatic chaos. A buttercup is yellow and remains yellow. A blue buttercup wouldn't be called a buttercup. But the buttercup has many variations of yellow here and there; that is, its yellow color in the garden differs from its color on the table, or in a well-arranged border as opposed to the yellow color in the city dump. It varies to such an extent that the artist may have to paint it blue in order to prove how yellow that buttercup has remained on this particular spot.<sup>7</sup>

Generally speaking, this second rule applies: the color of every object is consistent at every moment of the day and under every form of illumination. The first rule was that in principle every object has all colors. Formulated in his way, the rules contradict each other. But to the first rule a condition was attached, viz., within the limits of its own color, every object has, in principle, all colors. The green of grass may be blue, yellow, red or even, with the above-mentioned restriction, black, but it remains green, green as grass. This first rule is concerned with the changing of things; it is a rule of the moment. The second rule is a rule of duration. Things endure, as is manifest in their lasting properties, not the least of which is their lasting color. If things did not endure, then grass would indeed now be green, then blue, and at night really black...Time as tempo is the changing of things. Time as period, as duration, is the identity of each thing and of each human body.<sup>8</sup>

**totality of colors in a sunset**

**the question of the instrument**

**grass which is yellow, blue, red and yet remains to be green**

**the "blind" explanation of wavelength**

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<sup>6</sup> P.42-44

<sup>7</sup> P.48

<sup>8</sup> P.52

### 3 the shape of the earth & architecture

What is it that has been achieved here? The usual explanation is: an artful whole, based on an optical illusion. But an optical illusion normally and correctly means something else. One who in the forest things that a tree-stump is a pheasant is the victim of an optical illusion. One can recognize this illusion by clapping one's hands or by walking up to the stump and then seeing that it isn't a pheasant but a stump...An optical illusion is a mistake in perception; often it is a meaningful mistake...The perception of St. Peter's façade is an entirely different matter. First of all, everyone shares in it...Secondly...no matter how often one stands before the façade and observes that it is heavy and broad, one can also see, if standing back at the beginning of the round square, that it isn't too bad.<sup>9</sup>

Another illustration comes to my mind here, one on a smaller scale...Two lines of equal length are drawn on a piece of paper. Next, arrowheads are drawn at both ends of the two lines, with this difference that on the first line the arrows are open toward the ends of the line and on the second line they are open away from the ends. The first line now looks much shorter than the second, although they were of equal length and therefore will have remained equal in length...First of all, everyone, regardless of the conditions will always see two different lengths. Secondly, one doesn't become convinced when, using a ruler, one observes that the two lines are equal...boreness and emptiness are the conditions on which lines are equal, so that this equality is always artificial and forced. There is no equality anywhere in the things around us. Thus, is it justifiable to deny inequality with an appeal to that artificial and forced equality?<sup>10</sup>

What are the phases of man's historically always changing understanding of the shape of the space around the earth?...

a flat earth until 1000

1000, a curved and ever more earth  
1450, an earth so curved and so small that all places on it are not only in principle equal but have also become closer, so that seamen and explorers can reach them

1543, a larger and therefore less curved earth in a heliocentric space

1733, non-Euclidean space

1900, curved, finite space

1962, confirmation of this finite space in the launching of the first manned earth satellite...

Was the earth really round before the year 1000 or was it in all reality flat before that time?<sup>11</sup>

The earth is a globe when I travel. But what if I don't travel and don't use an instrument which leads me to the second structure and expresses the nomadic character of modern life? In that case the earth is flat, as flat as a nickel. In the everyday experience one has in his home and garden the earth is not a globe.<sup>12</sup>

**st. peter's and it's rectagular & round squares**

**optical illusion: the two lines**

**only on a sphere is every place equal to any other, so that in principle one can travel anywhere**

**the world is flat and spherical all at the same time**

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<sup>9</sup> 72-73

<sup>10</sup> P.74-76

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<sup>11</sup> P.94-96

<sup>12</sup> P.100

## 4 t i m e

If the content changes, time also changes. I cannot see which content enjoys any preference, for with respect to each and any content time is real.<sup>13</sup>

What is time without season? It is almost time without time. No one, at any rate, has ever experienced time outside an era, without season, without special colors and dimensions. Surely one cannot say that the road one walks in the winter has the same length as in the summer,..The hand on the clock moves too uniformly to express the time of such moments. The thing that goes round the dial is too abstract and its tempo isn't right. Besides, which tempo should I take? That of the second hand, the minute hand, or the hour hand? These questions are, no doubt, meaningless...A morning, afternoon and evening, that is something real.<sup>14</sup>

I have learned to divide the afternoon "from twelve o'clock till six o'clock" into six parts. Are six parts or pieces which are not equal adequate terms? The stretch from twelve to one has a different duration compared to that from five to six. The inequality becomes even more evident if I compare the afternoon with the morning...Time manifests itself in every motion. Any motion is a change, any change is a motion. When colors change, time manifests itself, as it does when dimensions change. When I saw the clouds move in the distance, I saw, most literally, the march of time. When I myself move, time realizes itself just as literally...Time as such cannot be measured or registered because time as such is not and cannot be seen. Time as such is not real. What is real is the changing of things, their dimensions and colors. In order to restrain the changing of things, to camouflage this changing as much as possible, the clock was given those tempos which disturb as little as possible.<sup>15</sup>

In harmony with these new needs and the new ways of doing things arising from them (globe as a sphere, accurate division of time, need to move faster over the earth, stage-coach, invention of the telegraph), the desire to deny the changing of things became prevalent in that century...One who denies the wondrous aspect of things – that is, their changeability – loses respect for them. Once this respect has suffered, one can handle things casually. One handles them in in this way when one passes them quickly. He who moves with speed though a landscape proves that he has little respect for the things in it.<sup>16</sup>

**stopping work extends time**

**again bellinoza: fast, short, fast**

**duration and tempo**

**each a time of his own (botanist or geologist? diptera or bumble bees?)**

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<sup>13</sup> P.104

<sup>14</sup> P.106-107

<sup>15</sup> P.108-113

<sup>16</sup> P.115-117

So, I must ask myself: what am I doing when I walk around on the earth in my daily life? Do I rightly view my world as not having barriers or have I been carefully trained to deny barriers? Am I free or only careless? Is the world I know uniform, everywhere, or different in many places and therefore multiform and not the same everywhere? Is the space around me full, equally occupied by points everywhere? Or is that space not full but broken, open, discontinuous? Does the world have pores, splits, holes? I wouldn't dare to answer in the negative.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> P.125