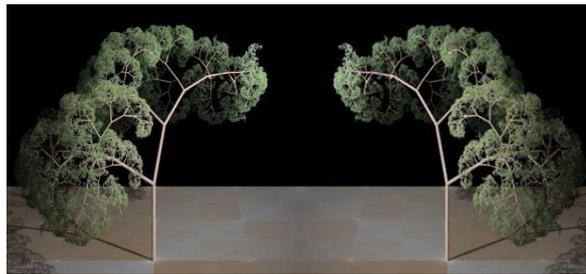


## La luce diafana dell'eternità

Nora Barón



### VII

In connection with the publication of the catalogue for the *exhibition Il est tombé de la sa place*<sup>1</sup> in October 1959, the critic and writer Eugène Pascal received an unusual request: he was asked to write about the work of an artist he did not know. Furthermore, the commission came with two conditions: the piece had to be written in the literary style of Frederick Kiesler, and it had to be signed by Theo van Doesburg.<sup>2</sup> The only documentation he received to assist him in his task was an excerpt from fragment 400-427 written by Blaise Pascal circa 1660<sup>3</sup>, an oval-shaped coral fossil, and a cheque for 25 francs. The sender's name on the package was the same as the signature on the cheque: Karl Gilles.

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<sup>1</sup> The exhibition was organised by Isabelle Morel and was held in the now defunct Galerie de Chaudun, Paris, from October to December 1959.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Kiesler, Theo van Doesburg and Eugène Pascal frequently swapped identities and often used *alternative theatrical devices*.

<sup>3</sup> Pascal never finished the great *Apology* he had planned to write, but he did leave notes and fragments (approximately 1,000 papers in 60 folders) that provided the basis for the publication in 1670 of a volume entitled *Pensées sur la religion et sur quelques autres sujets*.

## IX

The coral fossil was a greyish colour and oval-shaped, and its surface was composed of tiny irregular-looking cells. When Eugène Pascal received the package with the commission, he had no idea that he was about to open the most laborious copy ever created. Coral takes millions of years to fossilise, and because it is such a slow process not even the coral is aware of the fact that its molecules are gradually being replaced by others. The process behind this phenomenon is relatively simple. The coral becomes buried in the seabed, and the sediment gradually penetrates every nook and cranny. As time goes by and the temperature rises, the sediment compacts and adheres to the coral. This is followed by a long and gradual process of diagenesis and metamorphosis<sup>4</sup>, in which the original biological particles are transformed into mineral particles that inherit part of their nature from the particles they are trying to imitate.

## IV

*Man does not know in what rank to place himself. He has plainly gone astray and fallen from his true place without being able to find it again. He seeks it anxiously and unsuccessfully everywhere in impenetrable darkness.*<sup>5</sup>

## II

Fractals are objects whose form or structure is repeated or self-replicated on different scales, resulting in a space that is difficult to define. In his *Compendio de geometría aplicada*<sup>6</sup>, Abdul T. Malic explains that fractal behaviour can be found in numerous biological, social, economic, technological and political phenomena. For example, the survival instinct is all about the need to self-replicate through reproduction. Computer viruses behave in a similar way: the virus is copied to the hard drive of a computer and then transmitted via the internet to another computer where it self-replicates in the hard drive, and the same process is repeated again and again ad infinitum. This idea, developed by the mathematician John von Neumann and the biologist Silvie Bassin in 1940, was prefigured in Karel Čapek's earlier novel R.U.R.<sup>7-8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Taphonomy is the discipline that studies how these processes occur.

<sup>5</sup> Blaise Pascal, fr. 400-427, [1660]. Fragment included in the package received by Eugène Pascal in 1959.

<sup>6</sup> Abdul T. Malic, *Compendio de geometría aplicada*, trans. B. Zamora de las Heras, Monterrey, Mexico, Fundidora Monterrey, 1967.

<sup>7</sup> In 1909 Edward Morgan Forster wrote a short story entitled *The Machine Stops* that pointed out an error in Karel Čapek's work: Čapek had not foreseen how the machines responsible for repairing the broken ones would be repaired themselves.

<sup>8</sup> In their essay *Maniérisme et excroissance: études de biologie et de l'esthétique*, Charles F. Prey and Jules Lacroix examine the possibility of the phenomena described by Malic overflowing and spilling out of the fractal through inflammation, neurosis, mimesis and hyperthelia.



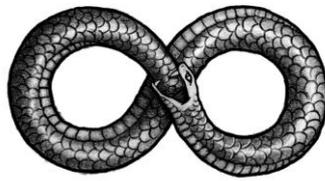
Angus Frederick Wilkinson  
library at the top of his

spent long hours in the  
maternal grandmother's

house. It was a small room lined with floor-to-ceiling beech shelves packed with books, family photos, porcelain figures and bizarre objects. Among these objects was a little mirror set in a carved wooden frame covered with a fine layer of gold leaf. Angus Frederick discovered the mirror wedged between two of his favourite books: an arithmetic manual for accountants and the first edition of a notebook by the Czech writer Perline Gismanek. On the opposite shelf, at precisely the same height, was another mirror of similar size. In this case, the looking glass was embedded in a volcanic stone that his grandmother had brought back from Naples. Observing the position of the two mirrors, it occurred to Angus Frederick that as they were directly opposite and at the same height, they would reflect each other and open up a crack to infinity, which he planned to explore one day. However, every time he tried to peer into the abyss, he experienced the same problem: his body obstructed the line of sight between the mirrors. For a while he thought it was going to prevent him from entering the crack.

The text written by Eugène Pascal<sup>9</sup> was like a snake that devours itself until nothing is left. Eugène began by speculating about the unknown work of an artist he had never heard of. He imagined<sup>10</sup> a text which, like a snake, would gobble itself up until no trace of it was left. The text would deal vaguely with the package he had received and the clues that could be deduced from it. In any case, Eugène thought that his piece should suffer the same fate as the snake, and he therefore devised a strategy in which the footnotes would be the teeth of a system capable of gobbling up the text and its author.<sup>11</sup>

text would not have about the abyss the work, about his it and the yearning



In this way, the to be about Blituri, waiting to engulf attempt to prevent that this

provoked.<sup>12</sup> It would be enough to write a text which, little by little, would cease to be for the precise purpose of disappearing and therefore continue to exist.<sup>13</sup> This process would go on for thousands of years, and instead of providing references, sources or additional information, the footnotes would direct the reader back to the text from which they came.<sup>14</sup> The writing process would be threatened by the footnotes because they would refer to places closer and closer to the place where they were written.<sup>15</sup> And just like the snake finally devours itself, the footnotes would eventually reach the text and ultimately gobble up the writer.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Chapter VII of this text. In connection with the publication of the catalogue for the exhibition *Il est tombé de la sa place*<sup>1</sup> in October 1959, the critic and writer was commissioned to write about the work of an artist he did not know.

<sup>10</sup> Chapter VII of this text, in which Angus Frederick Wilkinson has to come up with a solution to his quandary.

<sup>11</sup> Chapter XII. As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the text was written by Eugène Pascal.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. The yearning for the unknown work of an artist he had never heard of.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. In this way, the text did not need to be about Blituri.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Precisely to disappear and be able to continue existing.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. Places of the text ever closer.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. They finally gobbled up the writer.<sup>16</sup>