

SHIFT REGISTER



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workshop /

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basel /

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SHIFT



Shift Register is an ongoing research project investigation into how human technological and infrastructural activities have marked the earth. It is a Swiss National Fund artistic-research project conducted by researchers Jamie Allen, Martin Howse and Jonathan Kemp at the Critical Media Lab Basel.

PARACELSUS

THE PHILOSOPHY OF
THEOPHRASTUS CONCERNING
THE GENERATIONS OF THE
ELEMENTS.

Book the First /
Concerning the Element of Air.

TEXT I

In the beginning, Iliaster, which is nothing, was divided, thus giving and arranging the four elements. It was even as the seed from which springs the stem. What the seed gives forth it does not receive in the same form into itself again. But this Iliaster again attracts to itself the four elements. Thus, that is dissolved and becomes what it was before the four elements were produced, provided only one year of the world has elapsed.

The four elements are the growth produced from the Iliaster. And the seed does not give those very things from which the infant is produced after this year of the world; but the four elements are both mothers and daughters. Of this family nothing is found surviving after death; but its end is the same as its origin; and so whatever is in it perishes at the same time. Although another world follows after, which is the daughter of this one in name, still, it is not so in form, in essence, or the like. For this will not pass away, but will remain like the soul, which is indeed made and created but not mortal. Such is also the lot of this world.

TEXT II

Now, it is quite certain that the Eternal Father, who is not only the father of His own Son, but also of all things, mortal and immortal, permanent and transitory, blessed and damned together, created Domor, that is, heaven and earth, the firmament and the water, to which He also gave His own Divine will. We will not further discuss this subject here, but the same things can be read in the Paramira. He formed the natural from the nonnatural. From that which had never perceived any nature, He produced another nature, and following that nature He willed that yet another nature should be produced, whilst a year revolves, wherein His majesty Himself carries on the Divine rule, which man now moderates and possesses. Yet these primal natures differ, so that from the earth springs the pear-tree, from the sand the thistle, from the water cachimise, from the sky chaos, and from the fire snow.

But seeing how wonderful these things are, and how unlike they seem to the first source from which they sprang, we ought to make it a matter of knowledge and of philosophy, that the element of water is not water only, but a mineral as well; that the element of earth is not earth only, but a grape as well, and so with the rest. For that philosophy is vain which gives it out that the earth is an element, indeed, but not a nut, or that fire is an element, but not snow, So too, those who say that the four elements exist in all and everything, advance mere nonsense.

TEXT III

The earth is an element, and whatever is produced from it. So is the water and all produced therefrom. So then that is an element which produces. And an element is a mother, and there are four of them, air, fire, water, earth. From these four matrices everything in the whole world is produced. And the

speech is inconsiderate of those who assert that an element is simply endowed with a complexion, warm, dry, cold, moist, or a compound of these. All these things are in all these four elements. You can understand it thus. *the earth is cold and dry, cold and moist, warm and dry, warm and moist.*

This is how matters stand. Whatever thing which is warm and dry grows out of the earth, grows out of that which in the earth is warm and dry. Whatever is or is produced cold and moist, is produced from that in the earth which is of a similar nature. So also from fire four complexions proceed. Snow, for example, from that in the fire which is cold and dry; and lightning from that in the fire which is warm and dry. It is the same with the other two elements.

I would have you then, at this point, before all to be advised not to determine the elements according to their complexions, but according to their forms, that is, what are the four matrices which they have within them. The earth is material, clayey, conglutinous. Such it is whether it be warm, dry, cold, or moist. The water is humid, sensible, tangible, but not corporeally, not materially. And such is the element, whether it be cold or warm. The fire is a firmament, and is the element of fire, though it be in one place warm, in another cold. The air is a heaven which comprises all things, and is moist, warm, cold, or dry, as shall hereafter be set forth.

TEXT IV

Now, in order to advance towards the established principle with regard to the elements, understand this. The Iliaster was originally distributed into four parts – the air, which is a heaven embracing all things; fire, which is a firmament producing day and night, cold and heat; earth, which affords fruits of all kinds and a solid foundation for our feet; and water from whence are given forth all minerals and half the means of nutriment for living things.

These nutriments are twofold, one found in air and fire, the other in earth and water. The two former nourish us as if spiritually and invisibly; the two latter materially and corporeally. These four elements are divided into two classes. One is constituted of air and fire; the other of earth and water. The air sustains fire, the earth water. Air and fire hold water and earth; while these two hold air and fire. So then all things were created in due order, that the one might support, seek for, and nourish the other. Thus the liaster was divided into one domor of which there are two globules, an outer and an inner, each enclosed with two elements.

Beyond is nothing, so far as we know. Within is what we see, and touch, and what the light of nature suggests to as. He who created these things is not among us, but dwells without us. But He who was begotten of Him is amongst us. Still we must not philosophise further concerning the four elements than Nature teaches and points the way for us.

TEXT V

In the beginning the body of the four elements was founded with that form and amplitude in which the heaven lies extended; and it was made corruptible or perishable so far as the air surrounds it. There was the throne of God and the centre of His Kingdom from which centre the world was created, but so that it should be something mortal and perishable created by God. To rightly understand this you must know that from that centre the world arose and was made material. On this seat Christ hung from the cross; on this seat sat the prophets; it is the footstool of God. Here, therefore, material and corporeal things are made God, and His work, the centre of His Kingdom, and His throne.

It should be known, then, at the outset, and before the philosophy itself is unfolded, that God has made the centre of His heaven, and even Himself, perishable. For as corporeally He is

called the Son, so the world is His house. But although it be thus made and created, still we must believe that it will not perish as it was produced Of man the heart will endure. of the world the flower will be permanent.

TEXT VI

As to the manner in which God created the world, take the following account. He originally reduced it to one body, while the elements were developing. This body He made up of three ingredients, Mercury, Sulphur, and Salt, so that these three should constitute one body. Of these three are composed all the things which are, or are produced, in the four elements. These three have in themselves the force and the power of all perishable things. In them lie hidden the mineral, day, night, heat, cold, the stone, the fruit, and everything else, even while not yet formed. It is even as with wood which is thrown away and is only wood, yet in it are hidden all forms of animals, of plants, of instruments, which any one who can carve what else would be useless, invents and produces. So the body of Iliaster was a mere trunk, but in it lay hidden all herbs, waters, gems, minerals, stones, and chaos itself, which things the supreme Creator alone carved and fashioned most subtly, having removed and cast away all that was extraneous. First of all He produced and separated the air. This being formed, from the remainder issued forth the other three elements, fire, water, earth. From these He afterwards took away the fire, while the other two remained, and so on in due succession.

TEXT VII

The four fields, therefore, having been in this way set apart and separated, there remained also four storehouses for keeping the four elements, namely, the hot, the cold, the moist,

the dry. Each of these was far from being unimportant. First the air was arranged; afterwards the fire; then the earth; and, lastly, the water, in the following way. From the air proceeded chaos, the throne, the chain, the foundation. From the fire, night and day, the sun and the moon. From the earth, trees and herbs, grasses and fruits. From the water, minerals and stones. Of these the succession was so arranged that from the superfluity was continually produced something else. For instance, from the Iliaster of the earth beech wood was extracted and the wood of apples removed. Each was disposed in its own place; nothing being corrupted or intermixed. In water gold was separated from the rest of the metals, and afterwards the others also were removed in turn. In the fire, the cold withdrew from the heat, the light from the darkness. In the air, chaos was set in order for preserving all things, and for separating earth from heaven. These four Iliastri having been created and arranged according to elements, that is, according to the matrices of their fruits, the air was prepared before all else; then afterwards the fire. These two were linked together in union, Afterwards the earth, too, and the water, being separated from the two former, were joined in one. These are now conjoined Iliastri. The air is by itself, and the fire. In like manner, also, the earth and the water.

Thus it was that God made the material centre of His throne, and afterwards sundered it in three primal elements, from which constantly emerges everything that is born. Without these three, nothing in the four Iliastri can grow. But while they grow they are elements, and so, moreover, they lose their name of Iliastri and are called elements.

TEXT VIII

These four elements were sundered into their own places and seats, so that none of them should be mixed. All these were removed, just as a sculptor when making a statue throws away

what does not suit the intended image. So there are four elements, but only three primary ones; three in the air, three in the fire, three in the earth, and three in the water. Everywhere there is only a single triad of the primaries, that is, one Mercury in all, one Sulphur in all, one Salt in all. Yet they differ in their properties. Whatever is growing, herb, leaf, grass, or the like, was relegated to the earth. Whatever is mineral withdrew into the water. Whatever is warm, cold, day, night, betook itself to the fire. Whatever is air spread itself out over chaos. And all these three are one, each in itself. It is just as when a stone is divided into four parts, and out of one is made a statue, out of another a pitcher, out of a third some other kind of a vessel, and out of the fourth a milestone; yet all are stones, nay, all one stone, though divided into four portions.

Of these Iliastri there are four, and no more; these being sufficient. So God disposed the world in a quaternary. He was satisfied with this number, though He could have made eight parts. One portion of nutriment He conferred on the air, a second on the fire, a third on the earth, a fourth on the water. Nowhere was there any deficiency. And now it is further necessary that in the course of our philosophising we should go on to treat of these four under the name of elements, to tell of their possibilities and performances, and to state in what they excel. We will begin with the air, and conclude our philosophy with the water, adding such explanations as the nature of insensible things requires.

TEXT IX

The element of the air was appointed for no other purpose than to be the abode of the other three, each to be conserved, as it were, within its close in the following way. The air encloses in itself every mortal thing, and shuts it off from what is immortal as a wall divides a city from the fields. It strengthens the world and keeps it together, as a dam does a marsh. And

just as there is nothing in an egg to one who looks at it from without, or outside the egg, which agrees with what is inside, so the sky is a shell dividing heaven and earth, just as the egg-shell separates the egg, from what is outside it. The air, again, is like a skin in which is stored up a body, the whole world, to wit, and wherein the earth is contained and preserved. The air, then, is this sky, a skin, or egg-shell, or wall, or mound, beyond which nothing can burst through, and within which nothing can break in. Moreover the air is breath, from which all draw their life. This is truly air itself, and puts forth the air which nourishes the four elements, and at the same time sustains the life of man. Without it none could live – Without this no element could advance, no wind could blow, no rain or snow could fall, no sun could shine, no summer could flourish, no water could flow, no earth could sustain. All this force proceeds from the air, and is attracted by the four elements. For as the lungs every moment inhale air, so does the earth, while the water and the fire each do the very same thing. That is a palpable error which lays it down that winds are caused by the air. They burst in upon us like poison, not as a means of life. The first element brings air, but fire gives the winds.

TEXT X

From this same element, too, flows forth a power by which fire is joined to the air, so that it may not fall down. Thus it is like a chain which, without materiality or visibility, holds together and binds. This it does by means of its chaos, which it inserts between the pellicle and the earth. There is also a middle space extending from heaven to earth, in which are balanced the fire, the earth, and the water. And as the chicken is sustained in the Egg by its albumen without touching the shell, so chaos sustains the globe and prevents it from tottering. This chaos is invisible, though it appears of a slight green tint. It is an intangible albumen, having the power and prop-

erty of sustaining, so that the earth shall not fall from its position. As the chick in its albumen, so this globe of earth and water is balanced in the air. As a ship is borne up by the ocean, so is this globe by the air. It is one vast and marvellous albumen which invisibly supports the globe of earth and water. It bears up even the firmament itself, which is placed in it as the seed of the cucumber is placed in its mucilage. And as every morsel of flesh lies in its own liquid, or the generating seed in the sperm, so the stars lie in this albumen, and move therein like a bird in its flight. In no other way are they borne up than in what is clear from the illustrations which are named. There is at least only this difference • that the chaos is unlike the albumen or the sperm, in that it is impalpable and extremely subtle. Otherwise, in all its powers and energies it corresponds exactly to those things which have been enumerated.

TEXT XI

While discussing the powers of this element, it should, moreover, be pointed out that the air and its chaos and the sky exist in a round form which is inherent in them. No one can point out or distinguish what is above or what is below. Let us give an example. If it could be brought about that one should be shut up within an egg it would be impossible to know which part looked towards the sky and which towards the earth.

The rotundity prevents there being any "up" or "down." So we are prisoned within a shell, and do not know which is up and which is down. Walking over the whole world, we look up to the sky, and everywhere there is height, whilst at the same time everywhere there is depth. The cause lies in the rotundity of the globe and of the sky, and thus it is natural to every mortal body that all things grow in a threefold line, and not only man walks, but also trees, veins of metal, and springs take this course. As God created the circle of the globe and the sky, so he founded also the semicircle, the diameter and the

meridian — a threefold line — and other similar ones. For in heaven and earth, in fire and water, are found all lines and all circles. Here, too, are the true Geography, Cosmography, and Geometry.

By the elementary geography of the air are conserved the structures of the air, that is, the sun and moon, all the stars, the trees of the earth, and other things, as the minerals of the water and the rest. Here, too, beyond a doubt, is found the true basis of all geometry, where man stands like the straight line looking up to heaven. Of this geometry God alone is the artificer, the mason, the geometrician. From this line nothing falls away or emerges, be it water, fire, earth, tree, man, beast. All things tend towards this aerial geometry, which God made and graved as a mason does the statues on a tower.

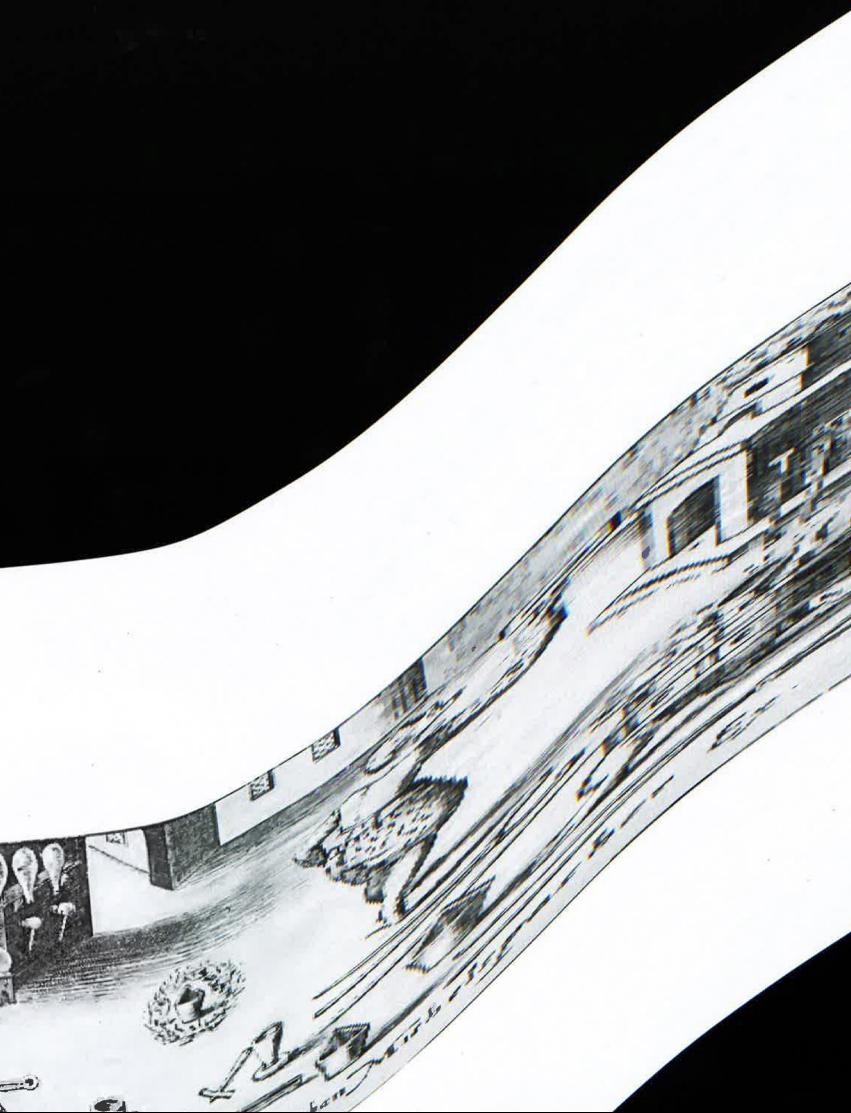
TEXT XII

Now, as to the philosophy of the three prime elements, it must be seen how these flourish in the element of air. Mercury, Sulphur, and Salt are so prepared as the element of air that they constitute the air, and make up that element. Originally the sky is nothing but white Sulphur coagulated with the spirit of Salt and clarified by Mercury, and the hardness of this element is in this pellicle and shell thus formed from it. Then, secondly, from the three primal parts it is changed into two — one part being air and the other chaos — in the following way. The Sulphur resolves itself by the spirit of Salt in the liquor of Mercury, which of itself is a liquid distributed from heaven to earth, and is the albumen of the heaven, and the mid space. It is clear, a chaos, subtle, and diaphanous. All density, dryness, and all its subtle nature, are resolved, nor is it any longer the same as it was before. Such is the air.

The third remnant of the three primals has passed into air, thus. If wood is burnt it passes into smoke. So this passes into air, remains in its air to the end of its elements, and becomes

Sulphur, Mercury, and Salt, which are substantially consumed and turned into air, just as the wood which becomes smoke. It is, in fact, nothing but the smoke of the three primal elements of the air. So, then, nothing further arises from the element of air beyond what has been mentioned.

Many of the ancients and later writers, nay, even some now living, ascribe wind to the air, making out its cause to be the mobility of the sky. That is all nothing. It never reaches the sky; and the air is by itself, coming forth from its element as smoke from wood. Whoever wishes to understand more clearly about it, and what its motion is, let him read about the properties of fire, where more is set down than can be here comprised.



PARACELSUS

**THE PHILOSOPHY ADDRESSED
TO THE ATHENIANS.**

BOOK THE THIRD

TEXT I

Everything in existence necessarily has a body. The mode and manner may be understood as being like a smoky spirit, which indeed has substance, but is not a body, nor is it tangible. But, though this be the case, still both bodies and substances can be produced from it. This may be understood from fuming arseni; since after the generation of a body, nothing more is seen of the fume of the spirit, just as if it had been all reduced to a body.

But this is not so. Something of a most subtle nature still remains in that place of generation. Thus by the process of separation there are produced something visible and something invisible. By this method and in this mode all things are propagated. Wood has still surviving the spirit from which it has been separated. So have stones, and so all things, without any exception. Their essence still survives just as it was separated from It. Man, in like manner, is nothing else than a relic and a survival from the separated fume.

But mark this, that a certain spirit existed, and from that man is made up, and is most subtle in spirit. This spirit is the index of a twofold eternity, one being the caleruthum, and the other the meritorium. The caleruthum is the indication in the first eternity. It seeks or makes for the other, that is, God. That is a natural cause because all things affect or tend towards that from which they proceeded, or those natures which have been

in contact with it; for whatever anything when building up used in the process, that the thing when it is built up desires after and pursues. And this should be understood, that a thing which has been built up does, by Nature, or by natural instinct, tend not towards its builder, but towards that from which it has proceeded. So the human body longs for the matter from which it has been separated, and not for God, since it was not taken out of Him. And that matter is the life and the habitation in which the eternal meritorium abides. So everything returns to its essence.

TEXT II

Since, then, everything has an appetency for its source, that is, for the mystery whence it sprang, it must now be further understood that this is eternal life, and that what comes forth from thence is mortal. None the less, however, there remains in the mortal something eternal, that is, the soul, as may be learnt elsewhere. And if a perishable thing is to return to its pristine condition, that can only be done by a conjunction of what is permanent; then at length there is a collocation and a union of things.

The form and substance, however, both of transitory and of non-transitory things, proceeds from that spirit of fume, just as hail or lightning emerges from a cloud. These are corporeal, and that matter from which they have proceeded remains invisible. So, then, it may be laid down that all things spring from the invisible, yet, without its suffering loss, for the matter has always the power of regenerating and recuperating that loss. Hence, also, it happens that the whole world will pass away like snow and return to the same essence of the spirit of smoke, and then will come together or coalesce apart from all tangible essence. In this way, it can be again re-born as at first.

Hence, also, it is known that no created thing exists which has

been born, but only as it has been built up or created. So, the chief good is constituted in the beginning of all things that anything shall thus proceed from the invisible and become corporeal, and then shall afterwards be separated again from its body, and once more become invisible. Then all things are again joined together and united and reduced to their primal matter.

And although, indeed, they may be united, yet still they involve some distinction and difference one from the other. One is the abode of the other; that other is the inmate of the abode. For that is the habitation of all things; sensible and insensible alike must all return to that condition and to that place. For, whether rational or irrational, nothing is free from this change, but will return to its habitation, from which it has been separated, and there appear.

TEXT III

So, too, every body, or every tangible substance, is nothing else but coagulated smoke. Hence it may be assumed that such coagulation is manifold. One kind refers to wood, another to stone, a third to metal. But the body itself is none other than smoke, breathing forth from the matter or the matrix in which it is present. What grows from the ground is a smoke brought forth from the liquid of Mercury, which is various, and emits a manifold smoke for herbs, trees, and the like. But that smoke, if it issues forth from its primal, or as soon as it expires from the matrix touches foreign air, is thereupon coagulated. So this smoke constantly and persistently evaporates. As long, therefore, as it is driven and disturbed, so long the thing grows, but when the ebullition ceases the smoking also ceases. This terminates, too, both the coagulation and the growth.

Wood is the smoke from Derses. Therein is latent a specific from which wood is produced. Nor is it only produced from this smoke; it may be produced also from other dersic matter.

In like manner, leffas is boiling matter, from the smoke of which all herbs are gendered. For the only predestination of herbs is leffa; there is no other. God is more wonderful in specifics than in all other natures. Stannar is the mother of metals, furnishing the first matter for metals by its fume. Metals, in fact, are nothing but the coagulated fume from stannar. Enur is the fume of stones. In fine, whatever is corporeal is nothing but coagulated smoke, in which there is latent a specific predestination.

All things, too, will ultimately be resolved like smoke; for the specific which coagulates has no power save for a definite time. The same may also be said of coagulation. All bodies will at last pass away and vanish in smoke, and will be terminated only in smoke. This is the consumption of everything corporeal, both living and dead.

TEXT IV

Man is coagulated smoke. Only from the boiling vapours and spermat-ic members of the body is the coagulation of spermat-ic matter produced. Man, too, will be resolved into a vapour of this kind; so that death may be like birth. Moreover, we see in ourselves nothing else than that man is coagulated smoke formed by human predestination. Whatsoever, too, is taken or given forth is merely the coagulated fume from liquids. And so whatever is injected is consumed by the life on the same principle, so that the coagulation may be again dissolved and liquefied, as ice is liquefied by the sun, that it may afterwards vanish into the air like smoke. Life consumes everything; for it is the spirit of consumption in all corporeities and substances.

Here, too, attention must be given to the preparation of the digested mystery; for if everything is due to return to that state from which it originated, and so anything is given forth, then it is consumed together with the life. This, however, happens only in those things which are not transmuted.

Transmutation is not driven back or repressed; and some transmutation is produced by means of life. Thus, then, is transmutation altered into the frailty of the body; but, nevertheless, it is again separated from the body. For in its putrefaction, transmutation has no further power, and in putrefaction the digested mystery ensues as a consequence. In the meantime, there are mutually separated all the properties which man had in himself from herbs and other things, each returning to its own essence. Separation is, in fact, like that process by which, if ten or twelve things are mixed they are again dissevered, so that each regains its own special essence.

Thus, eating is nothing else than a dissolution of bodies. Hence the materials of bodies are separated in vomitings and dejections from the bowels, which are simply foetid smoke mixed with good. Nature, indeed, seeks only the subtle, avoiding what is dense. Stones, metals, and earths — in a word, all things — are dissolved by life; nor is there any other dissolution of them by the body than that which is brought about by its life.

TEXT V

Moreover, it is equally necessary to understand the process by which each separate thing regains its own essence. This cannot be more fitly compared to anything than to fire, which is elicited from a hard flint, flaming and burning beyond all natural knowledge. For, as that hidden fire takes its origin and proceeds to work its effects, in the same form and appearance also is the essence led to its nature. And here reflect that in the beginning there existed only one thing, without any inclination or speciality, and from this afterwards all things issued forth.

This origin exactly resembles some well-tempered colour, purple for instance, having in itself no inclination to any other colour, but conspicuous in its just temperature Yet, notwith-

standing, in that colour all colours are existent. For the other colours cannot be separated from it — red, green, blue, clay colour, white, black. Each of these colours, again, brings forth other blind colours, while yet each one is by itself entirely and properly tinted. And although many and various colours are latent in them, still, nevertheless, they are all hidden under one colour. In the same manner, too, everything had its essence in the Great Mystery, which the Supreme Architect afterwards separated. The crystal emits fire, not from a fiery nature, but on account of its hardness and solidity. It also hides in itself other elements, not essentially, but materially, ardent fire, blowing air, moistening water, and earth which is black and dry.

Besides all these things it possesses in the composition of its qualities all colours, but hidden within itself, as the fire lies hid in the steel, betraying its presence neither by burning, nor by shining, nor by casting a colour. In this respect, all colours and all elements are present in everything. But how all things arrive at and penetrate to all other things, if anyone cares to know, let him believe that all these matters are brought about and cared for by Him alone, who is the Maker and Architect of all things.

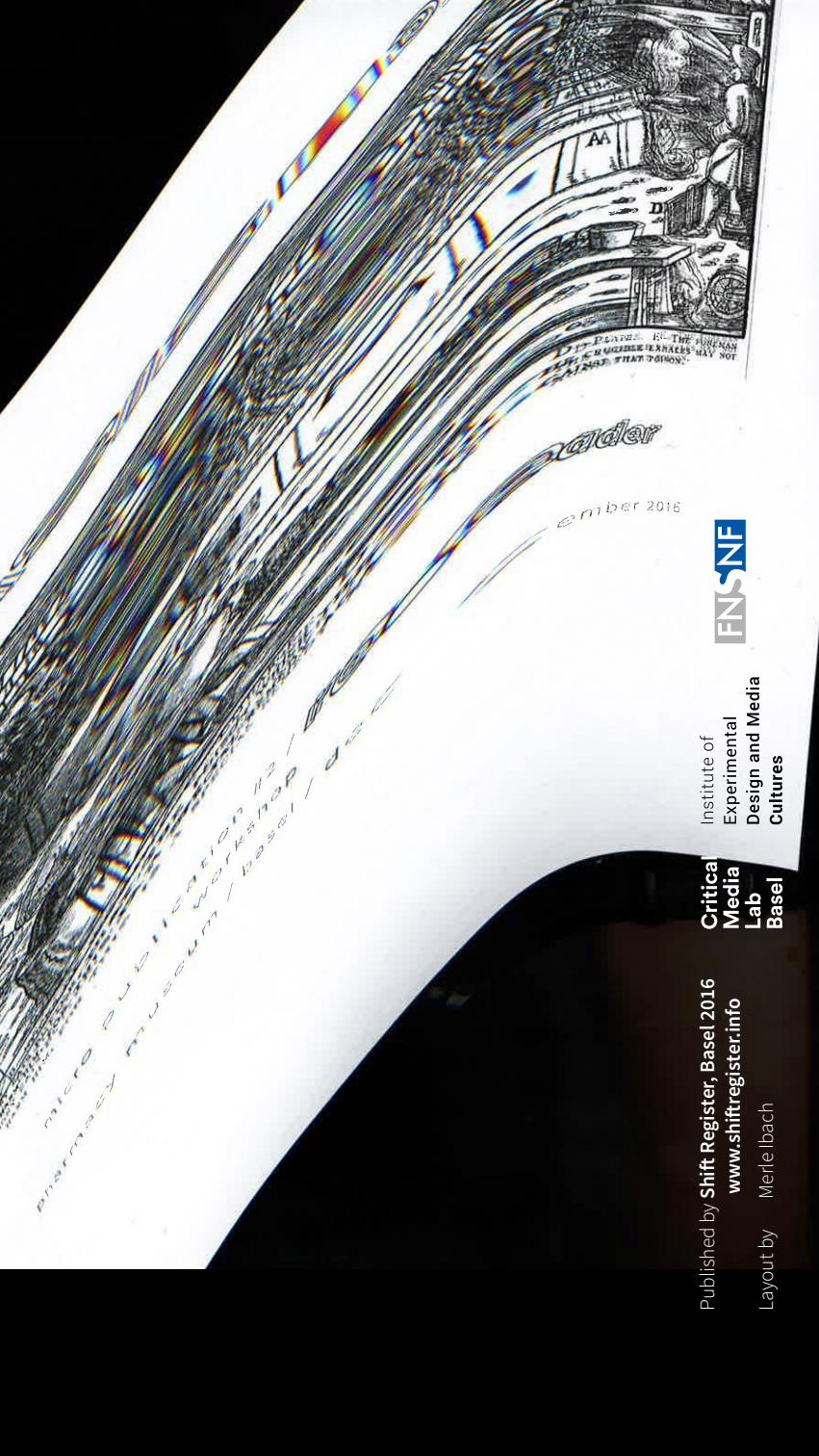
TEXT VI

Although, as has been said, Nature lies invisibly in bodies and in substances; nevertheless, that invisibility is led to visibility by means of those bodies themselves. According as the essence of each is situated, so is it seen visibly in its virtues and in its colours. Invisible bodies, however, have no other method than this corporeal one. So mark, then, that the invisibles contain within themselves all the elements, and operate in every element. They can send forth from themselves fire and the virtue of its element; and so, too, do they send forth air, as a man sends forth his breath, or water, as a man sends forth

urine. They are also of the nature of earth, and sprung from the earth.

Know this, too, that the liquid of the earth always boils, and sends forth on high, beyond itself, the subtle spirit which it contains in itself. From this are nourished the invisibles and the firmament itself, and this could not be done without vapour. Incorporeal as well as corporeal things need food and drink. For this reason stones come forth from the earth from a like spirit of their nature. Each one attracts its own to itself. , From the same source come spectres, fiery dragons, and the like. If, therefore, invisible as well as visible are each in its own essence, this is due to the nature of the Great Mystery, as wood acquires ignition from a light or a taper, though this suffers no loss. And though, indeed, it be not corporeal, still it needs something corporeal in order to escape death, which is produced by the wood.

In the same way, all invisibles need to be sustained, nourished, and increased by some visible thing. With these, indeed, they will at length perish and come to an end, still, however, having their activity in them without any waste or loss to other things, that is to say, to the corporeal and the visible, although this is brought about by the invisible, and apprehended by the visible.



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