

*the lake*



*...the ontological waste that we carry in ourselves, far exceeds the small mercy of our memories and our consciousness. . . this formless chaos of the forgotten that accompanies us like a silent golem is neither inert nor inefficacious.*  
Giorgio Agamben *The Assistants* <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Giorgio Agamben, 'The Assistants' in *Profanations*. (New York: Zone Books), 2007.

## *Colour*

Colour speaking. Still I maintain that I can give you a privileged insight while I virtually give you myself. I was at the lake too. My incantation like Michael Taussig's "polymorphous magical substance" is circling around this photograph and the woman is someone I know.<sup>2</sup> At that time things had not been easy. Still she is unwavering; casting off the intrusive take of the photograph, and of me or of anyone else. Colour is nothing if not about relationship and *durée* /duration /durability. There she is sunlit and brilliant. Behind the hedge, the pale flag is testament to many afternoon bright light intensives like this. But in this time we were there.

In mid-nineteenth century Germany, the search for standardised colours (*Die Farben*) led to the emergence of organic chemistry and to a kind of chemical industry—generated obfuscation of the legacy of sunlight. Sunlight that gives the forest that gives the coal and oil that gives artificial lights and many other products of our mimetic "second nature", and perhaps our truer true colours.<sup>3</sup>

## *Character*

I remember/imagine the spontaneous act and chaotic intrusion of an ink rundown into a well managed yet otherwise unengaging drawing. Just sometimes a deliberate move like this random colouring could make something happen. Other really strong and resonant art works have rather been almost frail in their genesis. Those works happen by patience and stealth; the stranger curiously advancing toward the proverbial unfamiliar, and the unfamiliar so heartened, coming back the other way. An approach may also be a simple recurrence; a pressing and unheralded return of the consequences of a photograph's colour relations finally taken up. In all three approaches there is a particular timing; a kind of liquid foresight whereby somehow the maker /writer /reader are distilled; in suspension until ready.

Photosensitive, she, the one in the photo, reminds me somewhat of the characters Giorgio Agamben calls "assistants" described variously as those:

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Taussig, 'polymorphous magical substance' in *What Colour is the Sacred?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 2007

<sup>3</sup> Michael Taussig, 'What colour is the sacred?' *Critical Inquiry*. (Autumn, 2006. 33:1). 30

messengers who do not know the content of the letters they must deliver, but . . . whose look, whose very posture "seems like a message". . . something about them, an inconclusive gesture, an unforeseen grace. . . a certain air of nimbleness in their limbs or words—all of these features indicate that they belong to a complementary world and allude to a lost citizenship or an inviolable elsewhere. In this sense they give us help, even though we can't tell what sort of help it is.<sup>4</sup>

### *Shade*

Limestone elevations Rigi to the north and Pilatus to the west are pale in themselves, but spill up to 434 metres of potential shadow before dusk draws in the gaps. At the hedge too there is already a cluster of dark directional smudges that underscore or darken, heighten and distort perspectives.

Philosopher of science, Alfred N. Whitehead writes of an "event of experimental success" that

[there] is no parting from your own shadow. . . know that detached details merely in order to be themselves demand that they should find themselves in a system of things; . . . [including] the harmony of logical rationality and the harmony of aesthetic achievement; to know that while the harmony of logic lies upon the universe as an iron necessity, the aesthetic harmony stands before it as a living ideal moulding the general flux in its broken progress towards finer, subtler issues.<sup>5</sup>

By not parting with our own shadow says Isabelle Stengers, Whitehead refers to not parting

. . . from what each faith requires in order to be fulfilled, and cannot provide by itself. In taking into account the passionate knower for whom what matters is the aesthetic achievement of having detached details become themselves—not some anonymous "knowing subject" there may be no conflation of knowledge and existence but a double dramatisation, of both the knower and the known.<sup>6</sup>

But for Whitehead to know is about closed facts, validations and definitions without perspective, whereas understanding based on the experience of transformative disclosure reconnects us to temporal perspectives and the mode of functioning that he

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<sup>4</sup> Giorgio Agamben, 'The Assistants' in *Profanations*. New York: Zone Books, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Isabelle Stengers, 'Whitehead's Account of the Sixth Day' in *Configurations*. 2005.13:1.33–35. John Hopkins University Press, Accessed Project Muse. 17/05/10 <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/configurations/>

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

calls the soul; this is to become a soul for Whitehead.<sup>7</sup>

### *Lap*

Nearby is the meeting place of Lucerne, Nidwalden, Uri, and Schwyz at the lake called the *Vierwaldstätter See* / the *Four Canton Lake*. Often in the morning I would walk around a lake of slighter proportions before going to work in my studio. *Rot See* /red lake, the long rowers' lake is at city edge. My passage would coincide with the appearance of intensely fit people, unfit tense people, dog /people and people that could run with superhuman élan on ice. Ice came eventually at the end of my stay and closed off the long unused diving platforms and then ducks crowded into ever-smaller swimming cycles before leaving.

Unlike the day of the photograph, it was usually this time in the afternoon that she stayed in her studio to work. She cast silicon prostheses for ears and eyes, sweet mercy for cancer survivors saving face. The facial addenda need sensitive matching of localised skin colour and she has quite the touch. She greets them easily; each strange troubled countenance and pained posturing such that many stayed a little longer than they should, trying not to notice the time.

I have written /spoken at water's edge: lapping. An approach to writing is intimated indirectly and implicitly. Perhaps it works toward the task of understanding the affective pull of another work of art simply by approaching it from the periphery at an entry point within the context of other coloured voices, personal reminiscence and forgetting.

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<sup>7</sup> ibid