

domenico de clario

journey from the surface of the earth (the idea of light and love)

the garden, domain house at the royal botanic gardens, Melbourne

When Elizabeth Presa invited me to participate in 'Journey to the Surface of the Earth', she sent me an email outlining its parameters. I was firstly intrigued and then moved when I read the following:

'Our explorations will encompass the microscopic to macro as we move from the surface of our skin, to the latitude of our backyards and beyond. Our task as explores is to negotiate and illuminate what is around us, to seek out what lies unnoticed or hidden from view, and to discover new vistas, terrains and ways of experiencing them.'

The various dynamics that bind micro to macro and visible to invisible continue to engage me in unexpectedly compelling ways. If the animating idea of Dr Presa's project is to journey to the surface of the earth in order to be able to more closely observe its micro-nature I wondered whether it would be possible to embark upon a return journey. That is, I wondered whether travelling away from the surface of the earth might return us to the inward journey's original beginning point. But where might that be? I have found that looking up at the night-sky and contemplating its reach always seems to provide simple answers to most questions.

I have been recently reading Giorgio Agamben's '*The Idea of Prose*', in which he discusses various seemingly simple notions mostly through the identification of what might *not* constitute the central core of each idea. Paradoxically this typically elegant Agambian strategy leads the reader each time to its very centre. The following two brief texts from '*The Idea of Prose*' seem to me to cogently address the relationships I referred to above; micro and macro, visible and invisible.

The Idea of Light

I turn on the light in a dark room; naturally the lit room is no longer the dark room; I have lost it forever. Yet isn't it the same room? Isn't the dark room the only content of the lit room? That which I can no longer have, that which infinitely flees backward, and likewise thrusts me forward is only a representation of language: the dark which light presupposes.

But if I give up the attempt to grasp this pre-supposition, if I turn my attention to the light itself, if I receive it - what the light gives me is then the same room, the non-hypothetical dark. That which is veiled, that which is closed within itself is the only content of the revelation - light is only the coming to itself of the dark.

The Idea of Love

To live in intimacy with a stranger, not in order to draw him closer, or to make him known, but rather to keep him strange, remote: unapparent – so unapparent that his name contains him entirely. And, even in discomfort, to be nothing else, day after day, than the ever open place, the unwaning light in which that one being, that thing, remains forever exposed and sealed off.

Perhaps as you sit or stand or walk around the Domain House gardens on a late-autumn Sunday evening you might reflect on these texts. Perhaps as you undertake the outward journey from the surface of the earth to that of the moon its increasingly intensifying light might render some transparency to your considerations. This may even illuminate in part the dynamic animating the relationship between visible and invisible, and between micro and macro.

As you move through a garden under moonlight you may hear the sound of piano keys being touched by blindfolded sitter. But there is no sitter; there is only the sound of piano keys being touched, of leaves rustling, of birds nesting and of moonlight intimately penetrating each and every thing, for ever exposed, yet sealed off. The blindfolded sitter touching the keys could be any one of us; each of us is able to transmute the seeming silence of the inaudible into its audible manifestation. All that is required to facilitate this is an abandonment of the idea that the phenomenological world consists simply of visible form when it is in fact an illusory manifestation of invisible content.

Inside this multi-dimensional space (*light is only the coming to itself in the dark*) the opportunity exists for each of us to journey from the surface of the earth to the surface of the moon.