

CLOSING / ESCAPE
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Urs Lüthi has been working for many long years on a novel (which people often recall only a few aphorisms from). Lüthi himself is the experienced and objectified content of this work. The novel—a social and philosophical history of transformation—is constantly growing thanks to the passages, phases and breakthroughs the main character goes through (the character always remaining the same in his endless development). The turning point of the chapters is not always obvious, the breaks are progressive. Here, however, *The Revenge* and *The Remains of Clarity* offer us an articulation of the narrative.

Following the 2001 Venice Biennale, the brilliant paintings that bring together rubbish and roses (*Trash & Roses*) are going to look like final reversals of *Placebos & Surrogates*, the series launched in 1996 with the final motto *Art is the better Life*. Such a saying, both willful and slyly optimistic, conceals of course the questions it raises about itself. Lüthi is far too aware of the ambiguous character of everything. In the simulacra of the art consumption circuit and the ready-made thinking that he portrays and critiques in *Trademarks* and *Therapies for Venezia*, for example, each parameter possesses both its poison and its antidote: the superficial (the truisms and the corniness of images that have been seen too often) plunges into the surface and is reborn as depth. This operation, however, does not come without risks. Potentially an overdetermination of images exists as much as an exhaustion of them—which the artist would soon radically withdraw from their empty appearance.

The images of *Thousand or more Images* (which these pages certainly offer an all-over approach to) compose an infinite mix of abyss and surface, their blind thickness made up of strata and reflections (as in Rilke's words, „jener große graue blinde Teich / der über seinem fernen Grunde hing / wie Regenhimmel über einer Landschaft”—that great gray blind pool, which hung above its distant bottom like rainy sky above a landscape). The eye finds itself confronting there the echoes of painting, the neutrality of lacquered furnishings, the inexhaustible perplexity that is generated by every gaze that remains fixed in time before the density and the transparency of reality. The sudden saturation of the image, the overlapping that Lüthi resorts to expresses at one and the same time its formidable gift and its inaccessibility, indifference and violent desire. What has closed there, inside the seeker of some shadow of truth, in him who is striving to see the „visible remainder”? „Every wall is a door,” as Emerson pointed out.

The work of art (keen consciousness and uncertainty, tragedy and comedy) is always an aporia and a rebound. Contrasting structures and games are the same as fugal constructions in music. Stretto occurs when the subject and the answer follow one another as the entries are drawn ever more closely together in an inseparable overlapping. The conclusion for Lüthi is to head off for the wide open spaces. To avoid the translucent weight of image-paintings, the artist turned to video (with this change of technique, the content of his work reveals a return to self-representation).

In 2001 and 2003, he recorded short (and exemplary) behavioral „sketches.“ In Lüthi’s oeuvre I am tempted to see these brief witty (and grave and ironic) spiritual exercises as *Minima moralia*—although they are not some illustration of Adorno for all that.

First (2001), the short man sporting a pair of black shorts, sneakers, athlete’s wristband and professorial spectacles lives in a renewed stylization of his small-time adventurer confronting household objects and actions that ordinary gravity and entropy nullify. Then, in the series that includes *The Revenge* (2003), clarification begins to take shape. „*Revenge*” itself, during which Lüthi wields a sledgehammer to demolish a small cupboard that „looked like it might allow one to put things in order to a certain extent,” probably attains the limit of the artist’s questioning of objects. A three-dimensional version of this scene sticks both the debris of the hated piece of furniture (its false promise of order) and the monumentalized winner of the battle in the pose of a dumbfounded (and skeptical) John Doe on the pedestal of *Better Art & Life*. This eminently concrete and illusionist sculpture „naturalizes” the recorded show and, through the very excess of its materiality, delivers a knock-out blow to its discourse, laying it out on the floor among the surplus and spoils of images. This sculpture is also headed for catastrophe in *Thousand or more images*. The real action, the real narrative is elsewhere, one realizes here, like an echo of Rimbaud.

With that the way is free. The artist can repeat his attempts to fly away, take wing, wrench himself from gravity (and fall back once again, embodying all the grace of the creatures sketched out by Rodolphe Toepffer). He can dance, look at the sky and study the distant horizon. Always with an extraordinary joy in the moodiness. To live and see what, when? Lüthi lets this new series of videos (which we will not see as such) play the part of a databank. He obtains small-format stills from them and displays them on a wall in the shape of watch faces. We are watching an unburdening take wing. The artist is moving from a concentration weighted with lead to an aerial deployment (the all-too-human dream of Icarus!) At this point, one is not unjustified in understanding that once images are thoroughly confused, made amorphous from now on, all that remains of clarity, which is constantly being sought, is a new lightness of distance and attention—the weightless expectation of another vision. Lüthi projects and animates his image in a circle around him like so many sighting marks, states of levitation and horizons, as if resorting to some Muybridge-like device, he were holding key moments in the slowing down and expansion of time. Urs Lüthi is dreaming no doubt „of placing man once again at the center of the universe and abstracting him for a second from his dissolving adventure” (Breton).