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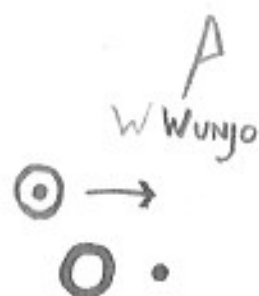
## LIMNING TIME

Lisa Robertson  
on the work of Jasper Griepink

For my own part, without having recourse to the assistance of a Spiritus Rector, an Acidum Vagum, or subtle elastic spirit, universal cause and fountain of all particular Spirits, whether in the mineral, vegetable or animal world – I say, without the interposition of any such intelligible influence, I can easily conceive how extraordinary cures may be performed by the mechanical effects of simple Water upon the human Body...

—Tobias Smollett, M.D., 'An Essay on the External Use of Water'

At times, I still leaf idly through cumbersome dictionaries. I was occupied this way one evening early last fall. I had not yet met Jasper Griepink. It was the night of the first fire of the season, a fire lit in part for its warmth, but particularly to make the change of season palpable in my study. It is a pleasure in autumn to read beside a hot stove, my dog close by, to look up and listen to the fire for a moment as I turn a crisp page. That evening, I found myself looking up the word medicine in the large, stained, two volume *Oxford English Dictionary* I have



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*Untitled (Sensing Ajna through Svadhisthana)*, 2012  
Documentation photo of *Sjassa B. Lovejoy Practice*,  
a three-day healing salon in Tidens Krav, Oslo

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treasured for nearly 30 years. I don't remember why I looked up medicine and I didn't transcribe the definition then; I was reading through the usage examples, and what I now remember having read among the intriguing catalogue of arcane sentences, was a statement saying that medicine and art show two different relationships of human culture to nature. Where art represents nature, medicine transforms it, is the bi-fold formulation I recall. The surprising coupling of practices I would never have thought to group in a single concept would soon send me to research the relationship of art and medicine in one of the great libraries, the one the art historian Aby Warburg formed in order to make a space for research on the question of the historical transmission and transformation of meaning in the image. But that is another story. Now, in late spring, doors open to the calls of frogs and cuckoos, my dog bathing in the sun just outside, I looked up the word medicine a second time. Now I was thinking about the work of the young shamanic artist Jasper Griepink, whose acquaintance I had recently made as his writing tutor; I was wondering about art and transformation and the body, which is a kind of nature. No, not *a kind of nature* – the body

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Left: *Untitled (Marlous after Treatment)*, 2012  
Documentation photo of *Papa-Yaya; Travelling Service Provider*, a three-day healing performance in an installation in public space during *Complimenta #1* in Ithaca (NY)

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is nature, which is not to deny or neutralize the potency of social and historical conditioning, but to insist that the cell and its permeable membrane is the basic unit of temporality. There's no time without a particular body and its communicating surface.

I wanted to revisit the elegant little sentence that had led to weeks of reading in London that winter, to see what it would say to me now, and to see who its author was. It is unsurprising, perhaps, to have next found that my sentence had changed over the winter, and now said something quite different: 'Art may be said either to imitate Nature, as in limning or pictures, or to help Nature, as in Medicine.' It was citing the natural philosopher John Wilkins' *Mathematical Magick*, a 1648 treatise about, I now learn, the wonders of what was called mechanical geometry: human flight, perpetual motion machines and perpetual lamps. So in the early era of experimental science, medicine was a category or one branch of art; representation or adornment – limning – was another branch. Art was the genus that included medicine and picturing as parallel species.

Now it is summer and Jasper Griepink is performing a public bathing action in the gallery. He has built a ritual bathhouse; there is water, mud, wood, perhaps embarrassment, discomfort, amusement, meditation, even a kind of shame. Perhaps this moist material and this affective experience will transform someone. Perhaps someone will be healed. What is certain is that change will be underway; mud will slowly harden on skin, limits



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will be explored, Jasper will oversee and participate in the bathing experiment, adding the ephemerality of language, food, plants and sound to the other materials. It is sure that participants will emerge from their muddy carapace altered, like amphibians, perhaps, from pond gunk at the first thaw. We can think of this mud bath as a limning as well as a medicine – it will darkly illuminate the skin, as ink does a vellum page. This material of interface, of inscription, of timeliness, the skin – it's the stuff through which we greet and help the world and each other; it's what we embellish with our outfits and potions; it's what we treat and caress and wash and lubricate and swathe, from sheer pleasure at times, but also often out of convention, reified compulsion, and the fear of change. In limning skin with mud, Jasper rewrites time, makes of it a gift to the bather's body.

The bathhouse makes me think that most fear is the fear of time. How can we go on; how can't we. Always, a cosmos is intuited by we sufferers and players to give time shapeliness or worth. Some call their cosmos 'the market' and some don't. For some of us the cosmos is a library. Other people's out-there cosmos intricately links to the juices and gristle and glands of the body and its hopes, through spectral nodes they call chakras. For some, the cosmos is erotic desire, for others, it is political resistance. Some people's cosmos is an elemental geometry: fire, water, air, earth. Or in pixels, atoms, webs, sound waves, cosmetically we bathe, submitting our skin to time, wishing to become perpetual lamps.