

Losing Photisms, Finding Visions: My Changing Synesthesia, Hypnagogic and Hypnopompic Perceptions

The diminishment of my synesthetic photisms was rarely dramatic. More often, it was gradual, a color less bright, a shape slower to appear, a motion hesitant where it once flowed effortlessly. At first, I questioned myself: Am I missing something I once experienced without effort? Over time the changes became undeniable. Some forms like my colored touch were most affected. Yet some forms such as my colored alphabet, remained relatively stable. At age seven, some letters were vividly colored – pink *As*, red *Es*, yellow *Rs* while others were faintly tinted or colorless. Yet years later, the color for elusive graphemes would suddenly appear as if revealed by an inner certainty.

These observations challenged the notion of permanence. Synesthesia, I realized, could change – forms could appear, fade, or vanish, sometimes temporarily, sometimes permanently. Conversations with other synesthetes confirmed this fluidity. Common factors emerged: medication, grief, puberty, aging, overstimulation, anxiety, fatigue, illness, stress, trauma.

I have seen these effects firsthand. With synesthesia, there was always a trigger, a reason. But with hypnagogic images, including hypnopompic visions, there was never a trigger, never a reason. One day I saw them and then 12 years later they disappeared, gradually, and now only on rare occasions can I see them. I was told why.

In my paper I will discuss what I've experienced over many, many years of observations, explore which of my visions have stayed the same, which have changed, what they looked like then, and if they have changed, what they look like now.