

# BLIND SPOT SYNDROME

## Notes on not knowing the limits of our own vision

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FOR STANISLAVA PINCHUK

When I first met You. Eleven years have passed. I was taught to pray. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive every other who sins against us. Since I last saw You. Three years have passed. I was only trying to stop the bleeding. Pooling at your feet. It used to be said. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. I thought there was an alternative for trespassing but it is a threat: trespassing. You, You, don't live on the same planet. Who cast You on another? Some lines furrow deeper, old universalist visions soothing so my sight can stop reconciling multiple visions of the same world, of regarding the same pain, your pain, visions of the others pain. It is clear I have sinned when all I wanted was to return. Drive me to my father's house, keys still in my pocket, water still not turned into wine. Who cast us?

Orpheus wept. He wept at the loss of the human hope for the resurrection of the dead. How odd I should have to comfort You, You still have some hope at least. Hope and wait or it will happen as You expected: He will turn his head, and she will whisper 'Who?'

A world in which there is no certain or tangible reality, only appearances and voids. Genet said, 'I did not expect to live in the realm of eternal mirrors,' but recent events have made it clear that language alone is not enough.

Putin says: 'Modern Ukraine was entirely created by Russia, more precisely, Bolshevik, communist Russia. This process began immediately after the revolution of 1917...' Sovereignty denied with a revisionist history and distorted consciousness.

Fifteen rescue workers killed in Gaza; their bodies buried in language riddled with contradictions, vague phrasing and selective details.

Tips, icebergs, melting as  
no one attempts to even engage with the truth.  
*Words are dead finished no fact checking or contextualisation can help them now.  
I hope they're ok I hope they're ok hope hopesign off byebyesign off hopehopelok*

Recently, I have found language to be repulsively sincere owing to its repetition. Of course, I understand that memory is repetition, but it is repetition with a difference.

We are not self-constituting beings.  
We cannot remake ourselves through memory.  
We are constituted through the vast movement of history, of which we are the largely quiescent effects. I overhear someone say: 'I can now face reality undisturbed by my own mortality.'

*I hope I'm ok, I hope I'm ok.*

We have never been more or less truthful. But we have become the

terrifying manipulators of signs. We are no longer afraid of the word 'occupation', says Smotrich. He is embraced. I can now face reality undisturbed by my own morality.

Was it better, one big lie, than the reality of a mixture of lies and truths? I've known You long enough to read your face. You were hoping to avoid such conflict and sidestep complications.

*I hope we're ok, I hope we're ok.*  
Il faut mentir pour être vrai.

Kafka said: 'It is not necessary to accept everything as true, you must only accept it as necessary.' From my POV, not all standpoints are equally true. It only matters that You get the impression that I am telling the truth, and besides, truthfulness is rarely ever on time, it often arrives in a room full of people, they speak or they don't, and something is lost or saved or only narrowly understood and something passes for truth that is a longing for certainty. Truthfulness anywhere means greater complexity everywhere. So why not begin with a lie?

Reality is not fiction. Language can be just words and identities just concepts. Reality is not representation. To focus on things that are symbolic is almost suicidal. It has nothing to do with how power is distributed. Disclaimer—I am lying, power never assumes a body but comes to us as images. A species of rhetoric. They reiterate, they simplify, they agitate. They supply no evidence, except to the militant, for whom identity is everything. For the militant, the image will always be a record or an interpretation—never both. For the public, the unreality first masks reality then becomes reality.

Images betray us. But these photographs speak truthfully (can only speak truthfully) of Russia's invasion of Ukraine through the vision of those oppressed by it. Each image is a return to the first memory—dim at first until it finds clarity, like a daguerreotype, entirely without context and suspended in mist. I am waiting for each apparition to arrive. To meet me as a promised sign. An encounter of such intimacy that I must wipe the dust from my eyes. To see You for who You are and You see me back.

I thought I was dead.

Memory is not all that powerful in our world. Nietzsche said: 'If something is to stay in the memory then it must be burned in: only that which never ceases to hurt stays in the memory.' Look, it is possible that these blurred images (no one can be identifiable) become memories that might supersede the facts of the past. She also speaks of being hurt. Of being responsible for these images. Of doing it on her own terms. I love each face as I have loved You. I cannot comfortably hold the pain of your appearance at a safe distance.

The image, he feared, would outpace communication. I can't stop people from saying what they want to say. I don't know how to stop repetitions like these. So that all of life is a form of waiting and hoping. Recognition here is about repetition —about making a face, once seen, available to be seen again, over and over. Each face committed to her memory. What is the point of forgetting if it's followed by dying?

Repetition is possible because meaning functions retroactively. It is only in death that your life can be understood. Kierkegaard said: 'Repetition and recollection are the same movement, except in opposite directions, for what is recollected has been, is repeated backward, whereas genuine repetition

is recollected forward.' Repetition does not mean representation. We all cast many shadows. Each resembling You. All of them equal. We must never weary of remembering. Of remembering that all life is a repetition.

For Orpheus, the image of Eurydice faded. She was a recitation of the past. He didn't understand that You can't return the dead to the here and now. He turns around to see the past. Eurydice says, Who? She exists in the present. He fails to understand how through the brilliance of her image the distant past resounds with echoes.

Am I restless? I am hopeful.

Am I hopeful? I am waiting.

A mirror image is impossible if one is undead, has died before dying.

Jalal Toufic remarks that the French word reconnaissance felicitously brings together recognition, reconnoitering and gratitude. The dead's reconnaissance in the realms of undeath fails because without an image of themselves they cannot feel a sense of recognition. A photograph is that which is long dead but unwilling to die. Or perhaps it is more like the smooth, solid mask that is coldly worn by Christiane in George Franju's *Eyes without a Face* to hide that large open wound where her face should be. In her father's laboratory, Christiane removes her mask to look into a mirror but she does not recognise herself—her mirror image. Christiane's father seeks to replace her disfigured face with the transplanted face of another—her future mirror image. Driven by guilt, egoism and privilege, he commits increasingly violent acts to keep his daughter alive.

*My face frightens me, my mask frightens me even more.*

Christiane died before dying. Another woman is buried under her name. Her image is only kept alive by her father's refusal to bury his dead. Her face, covered by a mask of his own desire, is consequently delicate and doomed as he confesses: I've done so much wrong to perform this miracle. Such delusion is present in the persistence of Russian expansionism: I've done so much wrong to perform this miracle. She can't stop repetitions like these. Another woman interred under Christiane's name. Such duplicity is present in the founding of Israel itself: I've done so much wrong to perform this miracle. She did not expect to live in the realm of eternal mirrors.

Russia and Israel: two vision of destroying a nation.

*No face, no case.*

For too long, the democratic 'West' has stood in front of the mirror reflecting only its own image while blocking the view of those it disfigures. Such atrocities committed cannot be justified. Neither before the bar of reason nor that of conscience. But this is precisely the point in our post-ideological age: who still believes in such truths? As Aimé Césaire warned of Europe in 1950, though tragically applicable to the Trumpian present: 'increasingly, it takes refuge in a hypocrisy which is all the more odious because it is less and less likely to deceive.' The passivity of Christiane and the denial of her father are echoed in the official condemnation and silent tolerance of the West. It is important to understand not what is the reality but what people conceive to be the reality. Now I am quietly waiting for the catastrophe of this moment to be shameful again, and unthinkable, and obsolete.

'Let me be dead for good', Christiane cries. Not out of compassion for her

victims but because her facelessness removes the possibility of hope.

*There is no human grace, I have a face laid waste.*

Do not mistake a mask for a face, for the face still provides the basis for an ethical encounter. The face, Levinas tells us, is the most vulnerable and expressive part of the other. To see a face is to create an obligation. I am symmetrically responsible to You. To mask a face is to rob a person of their selfhood. Christiane's heterographs repeatedly fail as her father cannot make the face do what it doesn't want to do. The face can never be possessed, held or fully known, and so it becomes the obligation of the living to create a valid portrait for the undead—the only image of myself I like, the only one in which I recognise myself.

*Surveillance as a kind of love turned sour.*

A prolonged acquaintance with history at its most extreme produces a kind of fatal clarity when it comes to the absurd. The daguerreotype was a poor image that only found lucidity through prolonged exposure. In this, there is an uncanny resonance with artificial intelligence and facial recognition technologies. Don't we all just want to be seen? In Ukraine, in the body of 582 Russian soldiers. Family photos, relationship histories, entire digital lives gleaned from a single face compared against Clearview's database of 20 billion faces from the public web. In Gaza, in the captured face of Mosab Abu Toha. This is not recognition—it is excavation. It is the image turned against the body. Machines reach backward as they scan the past for identities to classify. Military units operating by a gamified logic as the dead are turned into data that is used to message the living. It is no longer about being seen but being known too much and too late by algorithms that never stop looking.

There is a limit to what we should know. It's not that our capacity for information becomes overloaded but that we lack the cognitive architecture to render it meaningful. Moreover, some forms of mapping involve not knowing. Žižek had an example about how much we're actually not conscious of the person we are talking to. Like on some level of course we're aware. We know. But we aren't conscious of their details. We smooth out the edges, their specifics, in order to function as communicator. But when something hidden becomes seen this threatens the stability of our corporeality. What follows is disgust, horror, trauma. We are not left with clarity but with a hangover. A headache that arises from having too little perceptual space to hold the totality of the world.

To be a ghost *for* the machine might be to disrupt it entirely. Not by force but by inversion. Perhaps to become liquid is to pose a threat: to undo the fixity of image and dissolve what was meant to last. You spoke of giving reality the appearance of fiction, a strategic operation as both invert the expectations of the other. She spoke of the aesthetics of portraiture collapsing into the aesthetics of survival. In luminous silver, his blurred face can be all that remains of reality. An image of someone becoming everything he is and nothing he was supposed to be.

In binocular rivalry, there is no neutral position from which we can see both images simultaneously (When You see nationhood, You don't see selfhood). What occurs instead is an irregular and involuntary alternation—a gap—between two perspectives. This gap isn't a deficiency in perception (a failure to see the whole picture) but the very site of reality's emergence (it is the 'whole' picture). Any attempt to plug this gap overlooks that the 'whole' picture (the momentary gestalt of 'truth') is the impossibility of reconciling these alternating perspectives.

The demands of realism cannot be met by acquiring more information. Cognitive mapping always produces these blind spots—an unknowable face which can't be recognised. If you're searching for an eye, the face disappears. Their separation is structurally intrinsic. Each depends on the other but also negates the other. It's not that I can't see both images simultaneously, it's that the very act of seeing requires a miraculous alignment of inclusion and exclusion.

The current disjunction in vision isn't between too much or too little information. It's between information and meaning. Barthes said: 'Neutrality ends up functioning as the sign of neutrality.' When direct experience becomes mediated by layers of signification, we become used to images not actions. Reality becomes representation. The public forgets to ask: what is this image for? THEORY reappears, the machine that g/hosts it needs it back.

Do not reduce the image to a dull recitation of the past. Remember that the machine doesn't always know more than You do. Let these images be a reminder-forward that the past is always open, yet to be made, and the future is rubble we should have started reassembling long ago.