

The Wise Eye

It happened that I visited my grandmother's apartment after she passed away. A nurse had opened a window. Just a small crack, but enough to break the vacuum, and remind us all that the world was still going on out there. Sunlight slipped through the opening and in between the drapes, and struck in equal proportions the small particles of dust descending through the space once called a home, as well as all those trinkets that symbolized her life. When those thin slivers of a warm spring day filtered through the motes it made all the objects shimmer. Not like a mirage but like a residue of an afterimage, a faint psilocybin vision, or the projection of a camera lucida drenched in moonlight. A thought possessed me: "There are no ghosts. Just the haunting missing presence of the human context, that gave those memorabilia value, through seeing them every day. Now those things are no better than hallucinations. I wished I saw them as she saw them."

What does it mean to see an object directly as it is? In ancient Egyptian mythology the god Horus symbol was an eye, called *udja* or *wedjat*. It was considered being a powerful magical symbol of protection. Horus was represented in the shape of a falcon, and his name meant "The high" or "The far off", and his earliest associations are to the sky and kingship, as a sun god. His father Osiris was murdered by his uncle Set, to usurp the throne of Heaven, and Horus swore to avenge the murder and confront his uncle. So the two gods battled and Horus lost his left eye. However, the eye was retrieved by the goddess Hathor and healed. It was then offered by Horus as a boon to ensure the resurrection and healing of his father.

The eye, in the context of Horus, is about sacrifice, healing and protection. It is about paying attention, and providing a measure of respect to each sentient subject as well as dead object, in the kingdom, as in the worlds beyond. Names like "The high" or "The far off", and the symbolic manifestation of the sun above us, eternally watching and protecting, may create a bitter taste for us contemporaries, used to liberal states of mind not present in godly surveillance states. Although, seen from the perspective of clinical psychology the eye of Horus is a manifestation of the ultimate hero's power of seeing "further beyond" or seeing "all possible sides". Explained in layman terms it is essentially a representation of wisdom or truth. When Horus gave up his left eye to heal his father, he in fact provided his accumulated competence and experience to revive the land as well as Osiris. "Seeing" in this context is to understand what a thing truly is and need. Or according to the clinical five factor model of personality (or OCEAN) it is explained as the capable marriage of both a high conscientiousness and openness, a common psychological denominator for the successful people of the world. Conscientiousness pertains to sustain attention, first acquired through openness, to a subject and then to respond in the correct manner.

There is no lack of conscientiousness in the intelligent machines surrounding us. However, what they gain in orderliness they lose in openness. Jacques Derrida formulated that there was an almost infinite number of ways to interpret a situation (as the relationship to an item) or text, something that proved to be partially true, such as in the development of artificial intelligence. As we phenomenologically approach our surroundings, it is a world derived from its inherently human (practical) meaning. The purpose of an object is linked to its use within our biological spatially evolutionary context. There are no stairs without climbing them or a chair without the definition of sitting, a fact intrinsically hard to teach to an artificial intelligence. However, there is still a ghost in the machine. Advances in computing power, storage, and mathematics are bringing artificial neural networks to another level of perception. In fact, we are progressively relying on machines that derive conclusions from

models that they themselves have created, models that “see” the world in another way than we do. The different variables with contrasting conditions, being transformed by divergent layers within self-going neural networks are (usually) beyond human comprehension, but still they seem to work, sentient or lack thereof, for themselves as well as for us. There may not be stairs to climb on the Internet but plenty of information to “perceive” and construct meaning around, in their own natural environment. Maybe bits of information, intricate code or likewise will be the equivalent of those physical keepsakes, we humans like to keep around.

To see a thing as it is, is to acknowledge that there in fact is an object and that we humans are spatial biological creatures in an ongoing relationship to these objects. A statement that can be perceived as a tactile truth, when confronted with a dead persons collection of “lived” artifacts, now void of the network of memories that gave them meaning. I would like to believe that those memorabilia that we collect are the physical representation of a biography we try to assemble for ourselves, a reenactment of our life with a point A and B. When death strikes it also destroys the information network that connected those objects into a story. It is the true end of the biography.

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