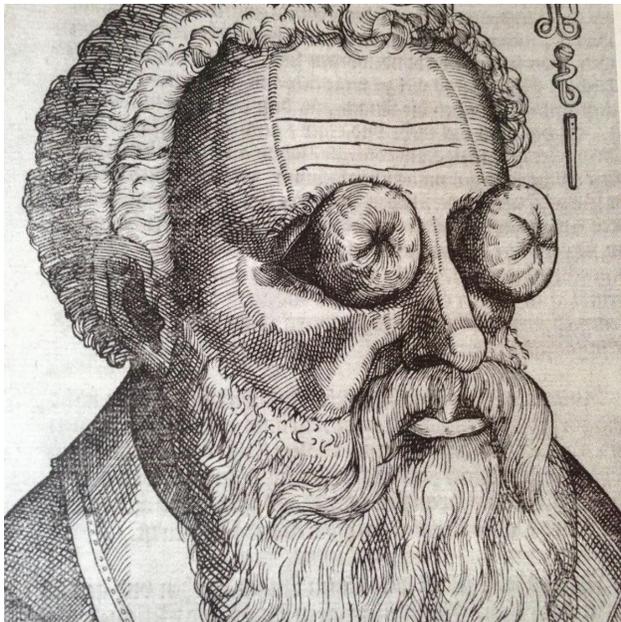


To Invert One's Eyes *(an Attempt Against Narrowness)*

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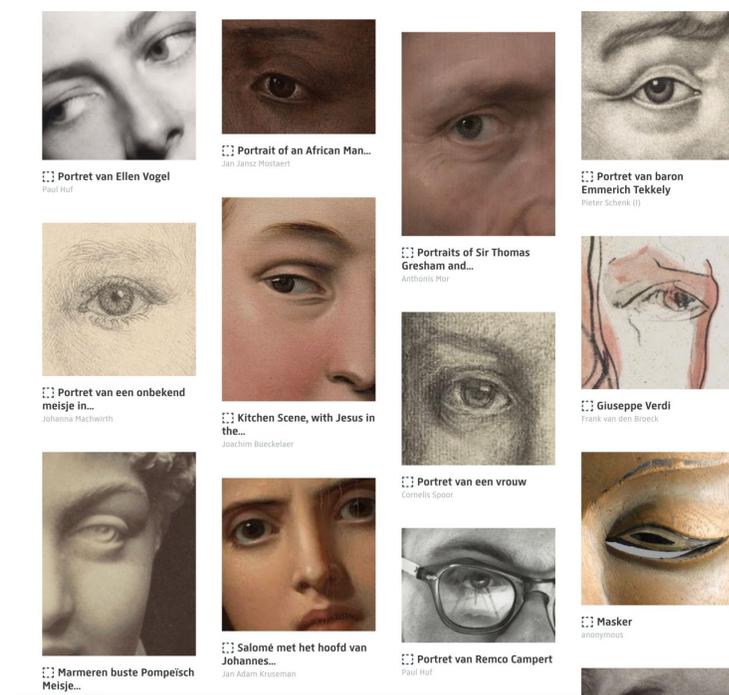
The reliability of the eye as an intermediary between external reality and interior experience has forever been a matter open to widespread contestation. Disciplines like empirical science, philosophy, theology have all historically debated the right way to look at the world. The human eye is after all not a universal instrument but is believed to be conditioned by one's subjective, embodied perception of the world. Pervasive concerns arose between the 'inward' and the 'outward' nature of seeing. The world seemed simply too vast, too large, too boundless to be absorbed by the human eye as an objective measurement. The truth about this world was somewhere out there, what we were missing was the certainty to identify it. On these grounds, the veracity of sense perception needed to be scrutinized to find out how far the inward experience of the individual could be verified or communicated as truthful; and so, life needed to be narrowed down in order for it to be inspected, captured and understood.

The production and circulation of actual physical images formed a significant part of these discourses during the 16th century. A good example are images from *Ophthalmodouleia: Das ist, Augendienst*, the first Renaissance manuscript on ophthalmic OFTALMIK disorders and eye surgery, published in 1583 by German physician Georg Bartisch, considered by many to be the father of modern ophthalmology. His work contains a total of 92 woodcuts each depicting diseases of the eye, examining the internal functionings of our organ of sight. Despite his scientific calling, Bartisch was a superstitious man, believing that astrology, magic, and witchcraft played a significant part in the causes of disease. My personal favorite is a picture titled *A man whose eyes have been turned inward*, it depicts inverted eyes -- a disease believed to be caused by witchcraft. Having one's eyes turned inward was an unworldly punishment: one was trapped in the isolation of one's inner worldview, unable to participate and engage with the world outside -- it is the furthest form of blindness.



Instead a consensus needed to be reached between the faculties of the perceiving subject and the nature of the object of perception. Interior and the exterior qualities of our existence needed to find middle grounds.

More attempts at narrowing life followed with the advent of lens technology in the practice of experimental science. The microscope and the telescope invested the eye with new authority with procedures that relied upon technologies of magnification and protocols of witnessing. Human vision became something that could be enhanced, altered and augmented. One could inspect the world by observing it with new tools and instruments that coincided with our retinal sight. Being in the world was to see it, to look at it, to look at it again and again; to observe a world in movement and of change. But change complicates the already conflicting relationship between seeing, knowing, imagining and representing. It tapers truth that wants to rely on certainty, and there is nothing more certain in our world than change.



Another attempt at narrowing life occurred with the advent of the camera. What the invention of the camera specifically solidified was the belief that photography could now somehow truthfully and factually represent the world; that by means of this technology we could generate accurate and objective representations of what the world looks like and assess with greater certainty what it means to inhabit it. If we narrowed down life even more into the frame of a picture, truth would have nowhere else to go. If we captured and stopped the world from moving, we would all be able to see the same world.

Instead, more and more images had to be made to enable the creation of exceptionally intricate forms of truth; elaborate, figurative and collective truths. If we made enough images we could compare truths and finally marry the inward with the outward into one single world that belonged to us all. For this, images needed to travel, they needed to be disseminated, digitized, propagated and scrutinized. As they proliferated, more worlds proliferated and truth became lost in a succession of metamorphic images that garbled the internal workings of the eye and the mind. Sight was replaced by sitelessness. Suddenly there were too many images in the outside world.



In 1970, 23 year old artist Giuseppe Penone made 'To Reverse One's Eyes' using mirror surfaced lenses to symbolically blind himself to the outside world. By looking inward his gesture declared it is not the artist's retinal sight but his inner vision that is the source for making works of art. In 2013, I took a passport picture in a photo booth on Tilburg central station, coincidentally blinding myself using globe emoji's. I was a 23 year old art student at the time (and unaware of Penone's work) and I did this, not as an artistic gesture whatsoever but out of sheer boredom on my phone.

It's possible to discern a parallel between these two sightless gazes, one in 1970 projected inwards and one in 2013 projected outwards but equally unsighted; looking back across the millions of lenses now installed in our mobile phones, zombie cameras, 3D blindspots all multiplied and incorporated into our movements and emotions, capturing and processing information in ways that extend far beyond any abilities of our retinal sight. Today, cameras are everywhere, there is no blind spot left. It is impossible to retain truth when confronted with the bondage of images and circulation of information out there. The inward and the outward have collapsed on the level of the screen. Metric worlds are now running on prediction, speeding past tomorrow and spinning in reverse, subordinating any sense of inner vision. Life thrives where we cannot see.

We might have to start anew, but this time against narrowness and with the help of a little witchcraft:

Take a picture when everyone's watching and nothing changes. Close your eyes and the world becomes more dangerous, more wide.

*our eyes
don't slice life in syllables
of speech sounds
but speak
in layers of lived memories
of times together
the short mornings
the long nights
of our little life
in this stitched up city
that covers us like a blanket
so grubby
and impossibly wide
here we are two dreamers
making their way,
darkly
deliberately
to lifetime
in a world gone blind*

