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Amblyopia

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The idea of the present monograph was born from a personal anecdote. One of my nephews was diagnosed with amblyopia, commonly known as 'lazy eye'. For those suffering from this condition, one of their eyes gets used to 'working less', thus leaving the other eye entirely in charge of sending all perceptive information to the brain. The tratment however is rather simple; a patch is placed on the heathly eye in order to forze the lazy one to work harder.

But like everything related to our vision, amblyopia is certainly complex term both to delimite and define. What does it exactly mean to 'see right'? At present, I am writing this text as I see it through my computer screen, which has a resolution way higher than that of the analogue television we used to watch during our childhood years. But higher resolution undoubtly involves more information that needs to be captured by our sight and later processed by our brains. Just like it happens when comparing old gravure printing techniques with high-end image printing processes from the present time, the reproduction of certain details in the image and the range of colorous and tones prensent in contemporary photographic prints are often wider than those which the human eye is able to perceive. But would have short-sighted people had the need to use spectacles two centuries ago? Or was the level of deail present in printed (and

painted) material vague enough to be perceived by a much larger scope of the population?

Let us now imagine a person living at an earlier moment of History. Can someone imagine what a peasant from the Seventienth Century would 'see' if he arrived now at any of our modern cities? It is rather questionable whether they would be able to process at all the large ammount of fluctuant information that their eyes would be capturing. According to Helmholtz's principle of the 'unconcious inference', this poor peasant would lack of the neccesary data in his memory to complete and process the information sent from his sight to the brain. We must, however, not feel that superior. Ourselfs, inhabitants of the age of visual culture, can also be blind (or rather blinded) at times, and there are multiple visual examples on the net that proof this fact.

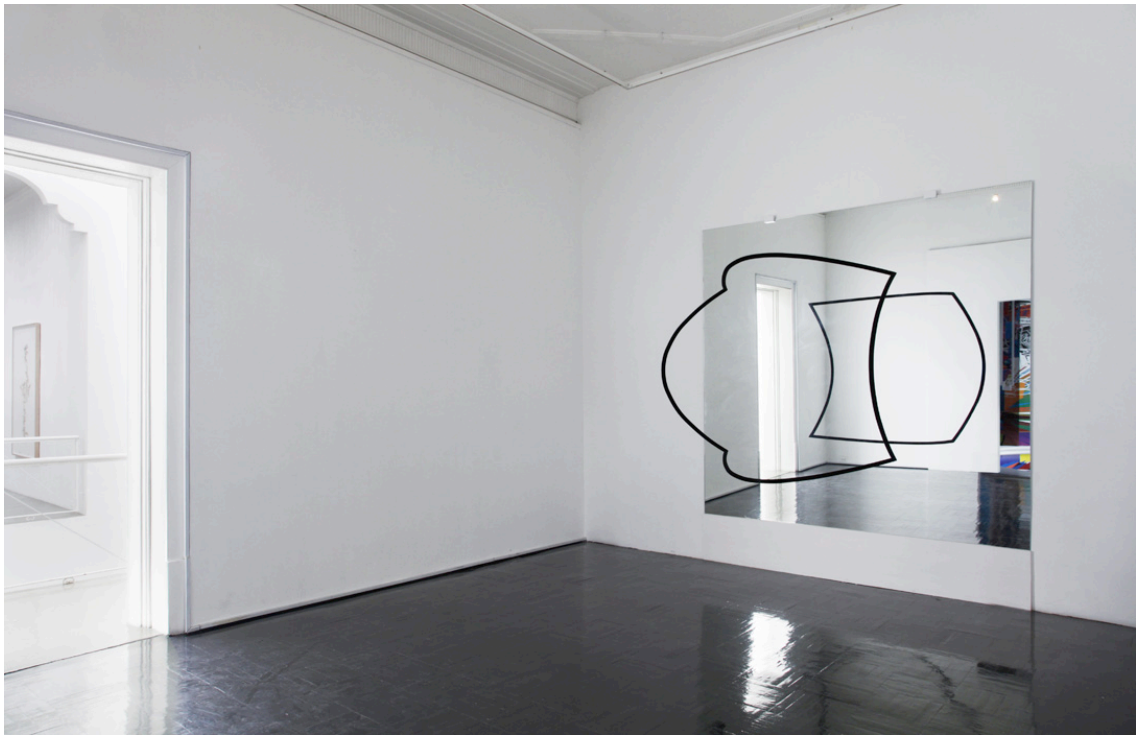
F1. An image from the Internet (unknown author)[1].

The reason behind such 'artificial blindness' is rather simple: camouflage. This commonly used technique is not only applied by soldiers and hunters but also by thousands of animal species which can scape from becaming a pray by shifting their visual appearance to that projected in their immediate enviroment. The

[1] On the right side of the image there is a giraffe.

functioning mecanism of this technique is as simple as difficulting the conextion between perceptive information and that memorized from past perceptive experiences. When placed in the middle of the woods for instance, it would be difficult for the modern man to unsderstand all natural forms, anticipate their changing shapes and associate those to our existant mental schemes.

But going now back to artistic production, the list of examples is infinite. From Wittgenstein's rabbit/duck and Hill's old/young lady, to Troika's collective *Squaring the circle* (2013), camuflage and art production share a long history.



F2. Troika: *Squaring the circle*. Beneded steel on plack fabric, 77.5 x 139 x 139 cm. Installation shot at 'The Far Side of Reason', Gallery OMR, Mexico 2013

All these examples take us back to the principle of 'unconscious inference', Gombrich's 'Theory of Schemes' and the role played by visual perspectives, not only as means of representation but as a cultural constructions in our way of perceiving the world. However, as Jonathan Crary suggests, the invention of photography, understood as a process that culminates geometric perspective, arrives at a monet in history in which the type of knowledge attached to this new medium had entered a profund crisis. These first experiences of 'new perception' had put under a delicate question one of the most robust foundations of

knowledge; that is, direct observation. While in the beguining the photographic camera worked as a duplicate of human vision, this was soon replaced by the notion of natural vision; that in which the eye (and not the machine) was the ultimate instrument of visual reference (Wade, 1998).

By the late Ninetienth Century, the superiority of 'eye vision' came to an end. Science then proofed a diferent reality to that we were convinced we already understood; a reality that went beyond that which was perceptible by the human eye. Art had then steped into the road of deconstruction, abandoning realism for the sake of truth. Merleau-Ponty maintains, 'Cezanne rejected "geometric" and "photographic" perspective precisely because it prevented him from expressing what his experience was like, or (as Merleau-Ponty put it in "Indirect Language and the Voices of Si-lence") because perspective succeeds in "coagulating" a series of "monocular views" within a single, fixed, and static view-point that renders the "living perceptual field" lifeless' (Smith, 2013: 106)

Painting then reacted to the change of the regime of vision during the late Ninetienth Century through the progresive rejection of perspective in favour of formalist principles. Photography, on the other hand, was absolutly caught into the use this geometric perspective that pictorial art kept fighting against. And this peculiarity of the photographic medium, undestood as an intrinsic carachteristic, was precisely what guided its development (or as expressed by Vilem Flusser, 'its program'). A program that rejected the long-awaited need of most photographers from the Ninetienth Century to be recognised and treated as artists rather than craftsmen or scientists. 'Leave the art for the artists and use the photographic medium to create images that can stand by themmselves thanks to their photographic qualities, without the need to use those attributed exclusevly to other arts' (Renger-Patzsch, 1989, p. 105). And although it did stay within the scope of perspective geometry, photography was still a valid instrument for certain discursive exercises, such as fragmentation, close-up perspectives, disclocated movement effects or the variations of light applied on paper through its coated chemical emulsion.

And we may now ask what is it exactly that is left from the golden age in which the camera was the most suitable instrument to describe the modern regime of vision? We might agree that the static photographic image has long been

replaced by the moving one in terms of its hability to provide an accurate testimony of our time, in the same way that painting was once replaced by photography for these same purposes. But while the pioneers of modernity saw in the surface of the photographic image a conextion with the real world based on scientific principles, we might see today a territory that is still to be radically transformed. Long time has passed since, what was once one the main objectives of the photographic medium (to construct a duplicate of our world), was succesfully achieved. And it thus now the time for photography, just like it ocurred with painting in the second half of the Ninetienth Century, to no longer explore such world, but photography itself.

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