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The Eye of Horus (or: flight from that which is real to reality)

He couldn't stand it anymore. He had a feeling that inside, in the room, where it was silent, far too silent for his liking, that he would go crazy there. He fled outside, to the streets.

It was curious that he should be struck by such a sense of emptiness – a horrible, claustrophobic emptiness – in his living room, he had after all just installed such a pleasant spectacle there. Using several computers he had transformed the walls of his room into panoramic views. Thus live feeds from different webcams were projected on two walls, while a third wall was largely covered by an enormous flatscreen television which by way of uncountable digital channels provided him with even more new and intriguing images. In this manner he whiled away his free hours in an exceptionally pleasant fashion. He surfed over a sea of images, lying on the couch or sometimes sitting behind his table – whatever suited the moment. Thus he saw what was happening in Times Square or on the Champs d'Elysées, he was in all the famous places he could possibly find. And when one spectacle started to bore him, he surfed to another just as easily. Because webcams were everywhere, no matter how wildly improbable the place, one could rest assured that a camera had been put there. One of his favourite cams was in Norway, and showed a landscape in which barely anything could be seen, but in which he could lose himself for hours. From the roof of the fisheries school in Honningsvåg all you could really see were clouds, above a vague horizon barely separating heaven and earth. He spent whole evenings zapping from one perspective to another. He wanted to see everything, be everywhere, not miss anything, and furthermore to have the feeling that he was not lacking anything.

But little by little something uncanny crept in through his fascination, he no longer felt so at home in his living space of images. And that unpleasant feeling became increasingly strong – however much he tried to comfort himself – and threatened to overwhelm him. Last night he had even dreamt it. He was a security guard, in charge of supervising surveillance cameras of the company for which he worked. A powerful job, because he saw everything, even though that often meant only empty corridors and bare walls. But sometimes he also saw people, like ghosts. They shuffled along the corridors, or by the gates, seeking the possibility of entering or making unseen clandestine transactions with people on the outside. This was part of the game, and he liked playing.

But now suddenly more monitors appeared in front of him and apparently the cameras were moving in all directions because the images started dancing until finally all the screens went black. He panicked – even more so, after he had started to see *himself* on all those monitors, sitting on his little chair in that little room. From every angle he was seen, he saw himself, and was increasingly being zoomed in on – to such an extent that the images of his body dissolved into vague and finally completely unrecognizable spots. He had a feeling that the gazes watching him though the cameras were piercing his skin on all sides and pulling him apart. At that moment he started awake, afraid, clammy and sweating.

Once on the street he looked around wildly. What in God's name was wrong with him? He walked to a bench and seated himself, with his head in his hands. What was he doing? He really wouldn't know; he couldn't even begin to give an explanation. All he could think of was what his friends told him, namely that he wanted too much. Maybe they were right, he thought. He wanted too much. He even wanted everything. Just like he wanted to see everything that could be seen in the world – but it was still not enough. His friends had laughed about this. “We knew it,” they joked, “one TV-screen would never have been enough.” One of them had fled his living space at the very first, overcome by the bombardment of images, paralyzed. He could barely move, he said later, he felt almost as if he had been accosted. David, since that was the name of the inhabitant of this uncanny space, felt that his friend was making a scene of himself. He himself enjoyed the firing line of images, he would take a seat for it, he would lie down for it and let it come over him, feeling caressed by the beams. It was really a physical experience when all those flashes bounced against your body. He liked it. But it was never intense enough. Certainly he could see even more, feel even more? – the idea of covering a fourth wall with a screen naturally had already occurred to him.

David raised his head. The twilight grew and the neon lighting of the shops contrasted beautifully with the dark. Yes, he thought, he always wanted more, he wanted the most extreme, the impossible. The shops were open, and people hastened from establishment to establishment, talking busily and gesticulating as they past him. “The impossible” he mumbled softly. Maybe he had now gotten what he wanted, the ultimate, but then with faded colours, in a completely different guise from the one he had expected. Especially the dream that night had opened his eyes. It was something monstrous. It wanted to tear him apart, to pull him into a thousand bits, by a thousand glances. His desire to be everywhere was apparently less innocent than he had thought. He had called into being something that he could no longer control that was starting to control him. Now he was seated here in the street, he wanted to put it back. The monster with a thousand eyes had to return to its cage. He wanted to be the boss again, the one who looked and not the one who was looked at from all sides. But apparently things were no longer so easy to control, nor could he escape without further ado. Because even here in the street the dream followed him. He felt he was being watched, shut in, anxious, the prisoner of the people around him.

David swore to himself. The street was supposed to save him, wasn't it? That was the feeling he had in any case had when he was leaving the house: he needed room, another space with other shapes. But how in God's name could the strangers in the street save him from himself? For the moment he only felt the threatening tension that permeated the street: he darted quick glances at the people around him and they did the same with him. The others were no more than objects, good to look at from a distance, distant. And thus for them he was little more than an object, a rather pathetic case on a bench. The glances struck at him back and forth; it hurt. Slowly he raised himself once again, he straightened his back. When he looked at something he felt his own gaze rebound just as hard. Apparently he couldn't elude the fear, which drove him out of himself. David almost begged for something which would bring him once more among the people, which would bridge the distance between them – that inimical void – even if only for a moment.

With a sense of purpose that he had not expected from himself he stood up on the bench.

He started speaking as he stood on his bench. First softly and insecure, but as soon as his story took a more definite shape, more strongly and with a louder voice. The words apparently went their own way. He followed them. And he told the legend of Isis and Osiris, mythological founders of the Egyptian world – a story that he probably had picked up from some television channel.

“Osiris, powerful ruler of the Egyptians, magically transformed the dry land into fertile fields and was torn apart by his jealous brother Seth, who governed over nothing but desolation.”

Most of the people just kept on walking and barely paid any attention to him. One said in passing: “Yeah and so what?”

David looked around. There were already quite a few people on the street. Most of the people were keeping up a pretty high pace, rushing from shop to shop. What a wonderfully light tread people have who drift through the street this way, he thought. David recalled the many evenings he had allowed himself to be carried off by the worlds which appeared on his LCD screens. Then he felt a similar illumination, a wonderful forgetfulness. But with those thoughts the fear that lately had gained such a hold on him surfaced again. Apparently that feeling had not been left behind in his home. He had to continue.

“Osiris”, he continued his story which now became more of a presentation with busy gestures, “Osiris was torn apart and spread over all of Egypt. But he was found again, reencountered, he found himself” emphasized David sharply pronouncing the words, “through his wife Isis. And as his last deed he gave her a son, Horus.”

Some of the passers by stopped and looked at him with surprise. Nonetheless he did not feel their gaze as a threat. He had found the words to defend himself, to catch their gaze instead of repelling it. The looking was softened by the power of the story, the people no longer only saw him, they also saw his heroes. David felt better. He told of the battle Horus fought with his uncle Seth, the murderer of his father who now also wanted to get rid of him in order to obtain the throne.

David could not remember that he had been so enamoured of this story. What was it in this story that interested him? And why should it interest others? But something happened through which he was sucked into his own stream of words and people kept standing, listening attentively, more and more people. David spoke at length about the climax of the battle between Seth and Horus, fought on the bottom of the Nile. He told how both changed themselves in hippopotami and swam towards the sea. He who came up for air before three months had passed would not have the throne. David saw a few people come closer in order to hear the denouement, and he spoke with even more fire about the fight in which Horus threatened to kill Seth, until his uncle plucked out one of Horus’ eyes. But Horus was healed by the moon god Thoth who replaced the eye. The people around David looked relieved, that was how much they were being carried along by the story, and even more so when he told how the battle finally ended in favour of Horus, the Healed.

And David also told about the meaning of the eye, for the Egyptians – but perhaps even more for himself: the eye of Horus, the symbol of recuperation, of healing. It gripped him, this story of the eye.

“The eye,” he expounded, “can start to lead its own life when it is separated from the body. Then it gets the ability to fly everywhere, no longer restricted by the limits of the body, capable of seeing everything and to terrorize the people. But when it is returned to the body of which it is a part, it is mostly a sign of healing. When we only see with our eyes, they are plucked out and they turn against us.”

The people looked at each other somewhat surprised. Afterwards they dribbled off, disappearing into the crowds of shoppers. David still stood on his bench, surprised by the curious inspiration which had fallen over him, but also cheered, as if looking at the world through a new window. That he had presented such a bizarre story and strange spectacle barely affected him. Carefully he stepped down from the bench.