

# **An Optician's Journal**

An attempt of observing observation

June 2021

## **The first encounter**

- Why are you here?

To see what's far.

To see what's close.

To see colors better.

To look at my laptop (for a long time).

- Do you have headaches?
- Do you see double?
- Do you have diseases? Diabetes? Blood pressure issues?

Does the patient have bloody eyes?

Does the patient have protruding eyes?

The last two questions are for me. The shape of the eyes, their consistency, usually means something about the patient's body, their nutrition, their genetics, their needs. "We must understand the eye as the window to the soul". The eyes are my entrance ticket to the body. It's the gate to the patient's routines, bad habits, and sometimes a bit more. How they see the world. How they place themselves.

- Do you have glasses? Have you ever used glasses in the past? Since when do you have glasses?
- How old were you when you started using glasses? Do you wear contact lenses? How often?
- Did you ever do surgery for your eye?
- Does your number (of the lenses/eyes) change a lot? (A lot: twice a year. Not a lot: once every two years)
- When was the last time you did an eye exam?

## **The things I like about my job**

- To sit in front of the patient, at the same height as them.
- To check someone's eyes with my own eyes.
- To ask yes and no questions.
- To give them options: what is better? 1, 2, or the same?
- One, two, or the same?
- To be very close to their faces, but never touch them.
- To find a frame that will make him feel attractive.
- To smile to her when she's right about the letters she says out loud.
- I like that they come again, I like to see them a year after when something is changed.

### **I also like:**

That they don't plan, they just come, she was on the way somewhere else, and we have a sale, and she's been meaning to check her eyes anyway, but she could never find the time, and today she took a different metro than usual since the number 3 is not working for some reason, she took the number 4, and she has to change to a bus, so she passed here on the way to the bus stop, and we have a sale, and she's carrying groceries.

"let's have a look," I say. I smile. I smile with my social smile. She asks if she must pay for the check if she doesn't buy anything. I say no, she's relaxed.

Have you ever had glasses before?

No, but something is bugging her lately. She's sure it's just allergies. But still... something is annoying. Like fog around her eyes, like there's always a small tear formulating its way down to the bottom of her sight. I wonder for how long she's been annoyed about these "allergies". The change from having a clear vision to

blurry is strange, it happens very slowly, it's a process that can take a year. Most people don't feel it. I want to show her the red and green board. I know it's misleading. I think she misses colors the most.

The green is not as vivid as it used to be. It seems so natural to search for an explanation. An explanation usually means a story. A narrative, a beginning, and an end.

## **What I make of the conversation**

Some things they will not say, I must notice on my own.

I need to know what I am looking for. I need to know the history, but not too much. I should not be distracted by too many details. By the end of the talk, before the physical check-up, I know where this exam is going.

Most of the questions are not so necessary. I can see a lot without the answers. I can see it in their eyes.

Sometimes, people don't know the alphabet. Or they have a different alphabet. Maybe they don't know the names of the letters. I give another option. Numbers. If they don't know numbers, we use images, to talk.

Small children don't know the names of the numbers.

So, I ask them to look at the letter **E**.

I call it a chair. They know what a chair is.

I ask: to what direction does the chair point? Show me with your hands. (they don't know what's left and what's right).

Is the chair faded in the edges?

## **My body during one moment in the shop**

I'm sitting in my chair, in front of me there's a desk.

When I turn my head to the left, I see the big vitrine, decorated with images of glasses, brand names, big drawings of lenses. Through the glass, I see the street.

People passing by. I'm leaning forward, resting my right cheek on my right palm. I see the people in the street through these caricature glasses.



## **Walking to work, the street outside the shop**

Walking in the same streets, again, making the same steps, different seasons. Walking with children in these streets. Children tend to take over the street, use it with no restrictions. He wants to run, so he runs. He wants to place his tiny foot only on one pavement every time, he wants to step only on the lines. He does what the game asks for. This child controls the street, not the other way around. The babysitter plays along. They chase the bus, they shout, they move.

This street feels "mine" because I walked in it so many times. I rarely come across someone I know here. This feels mine because I was here so many times. Because everything moved, but my path remained the same.

I like to walk. The ankles, the knees, the thighs, the calves, the hips, are all oily and moving easily, the more I walk. I enjoy the movement; my body enjoys it. The happier my body is, the better the view is. My lungs are open, and the chest is wide, the pace of my steps determines the pace of my thoughts.

## **How I walk, how my family walks**

When I walk, I remember how I walked with my family.

The first steps I took were with them. The movements they did radiate on my body.

My shoulders and my lower back absorbed the ways my mother move her tailbone. When I walk with her now, I can see we move the same, but in different body parts. Same shapes, different spots of the body. I try to object to this movement, I try to make my own walking style, one that flows, that's elevated. I don't want to feel the weight in my back.

My brother walks as if there's a metal piece in his stomach, and he has to circle it. His thighs make the shape of an eight when he walks, a bit like my mother. His shape, in general, is a round shape. When he sits, his back leans forward, his spine creates this question mark shape, and I think if he was rounder, he might have completed a full circle and connect to his legs.

Trapped inside himself forever, his eyes always facing inside.

My father walks with his shoulders. They're up, tensed, leading him somewhere he doesn't want to go. He looks up, forward, missing what's right in front of him. My mother looks down, and my brother as well. Not directly down, a bit further away, as if they check where the foot will be soon.

## **Fall**

I stand in the sun, the street is quiet. I lean my back to the glass of the vitrine; I smoke a cigarette. Pigeons come close to me. Sounds of someone talking on the phone.

A small boy touched my leg now, by accident. People look at me, they keep walking. I see the angles on the street, the lines that are created by the poles. Number 46 bus passing, my back is warm from the sun. How to catch the sun?

The sun moved now.

I can't see anything. I'm standing in the same spot, but I'm looking at a different corner. The cranes move up there. Someone runs, maybe to the metro.

Everything is connected, the lines of the road, the street, the shadows, the buildings. I see everything at the same time. A car passes by.

The buildings seem tied to each other; if one disappears, the whole city will fall.

I hear a soft sound of television through one of the open windows.

The window is open to the street, the television open to the world.

I hear the news. I know the apartment is lighted now by the television window to another place. For this moment, the doors and windows stopped defining the space, it's the news that define it.

The sun changed again. I'm looking at the night shop. It's a bit colder now. I'm uncomfortable.

I see the small street in front of me. The building of the north station. Piercing the skies. This day gets colder.

Cars slow down next to me. I look at the Christmas decorations. A plane is passing in the skies.

I move a bit, so I stand in the sun again, looking at the dark street, the one that's close to the theatre. The line of the lamps, the poles. Far in the street, some trees.

The street is dark, and the skies are very blue, light blue. My pencil is about to fail me. It's quiet again; I hear some birds and see them socializing.

## **10 minutes later**

I can't see very well. Bike passing by. I can see the small terraces of the building in the next corner.

I'm aware of the people looking at me. The corner where I stand is full of pigeons. There are a lot of small poles around me, in the front of my view. The small green ones, those that show the parking rules, the direction of the street. An attempt to exhaust a place by being in it and paying attention to it. I have this feeling, I want someone to look at me, but they all look. I want someone to look at me in that way. The specific way, this smile.

## **The view**

A street outside of the shop. Today, everything is grey.  
No one walks in. I see something, people walk slowly,  
it looks planned.

They follow a car. Two priests walking. In the back,  
two policemen.

A group of people, I see women with umbrellas,  
children, some men. There's fog. In the back, a bit  
higher, because the street is steep, the building ends,  
and there's some air, the skyline of another building  
creates a flat feeling, a drawing. This reminds me of a  
specific street in Saint Gilles I know.

I see them at the edge of the right corner of the vitrine.  
This moment is tilted.

## **20 minutes after**

I sit in the same chair, I look outside. Clouds. The sunset colors are breaking through the clouds. It's this specific light. The light breaks, like it's made of something firm.

Everything is leaning on an angle. Two men facing their backs to me.

Facing their backs.

They are in the right corner of my eye. Each building looks as if it's facing a different direction. Each building is in a different color.

I don't see the water of the canal, but I know it's there.



## 4.11

It's cold. The sun is not so strong anymore. I'm not outside of the weather, looking at it occurs. I am a part of it. The lines that create this view seem like they are about to meet each other. The reflection on the water is very clear. Crystal clear. Glass clear, lenses clear, camera clear, mirror clear.

Two cities are here, one in the water and one in the air. The building, the crane. These two cities flow in and out of each other, affect each other. Both are "outside". Cars parking on both sides of the canal. I see the bridge in the canal. The landscape is "open", nothing stops it. My eyes go far, but they stay inside their holes. Half of the skies are empty, and half are full.

Where does the city with no gates begin? When we leave it. When we return to it with the anxiety of "what changed" while I was gone. The city starts and ends with the movement towards it or movement away from it. Borders are being determined by our bodies.

## **The Tools**

The more elaborate the telescopes will be, the more stars will appear in the skies. This huge robot arm I look through, to know "your number".

The glasses create the landscape. The thing we look through determines the view. This "thing" could be an eye, a finger, a camera, a telescope, glasses, lenses, television. Do they create different images? I believe so. Similar, but crucially different. So, I think of what I make, my craft. I make glasses. The glasses are like what? Camera? Digital camera? Analog? Are they the film? The platform on which the light burns the image? And the machines in the shop – are they like the darkroom? This leads me nowhere.

A man passed by. It's so quiet here. I can hear the fabric of his pants moving. A woman sleeping on the floor. I imagine her slow breathing, but she's too far away. The quiet here makes me feel that the room is breathing. I'm looking for breathing sounds, in the people, in the walls, in the quiet ventilator sounds.

## **7.11**

The cranes are moving. Their movement is ignoring the street. I don't know what I'm looking at. I have no words. I try nevertheless: The city moves. Strange silence. Few windows.

Words explain and analyze the world. For that, I have to be apart from the world, one step away from it.

Words enforce distance.

## **8.11**

I am sitting in the shop. I can tell there's wind because the lamps that hanged outside are moving fast. I don't feel the wind.

## **15 minutes later**

I just saw a negotiation between a car and a prostitute. She didn't go in.

## **10.11**

I take for granted many things. I take for granted how my shoulders hold my arms. I take for granted my feet. How sure I am that when I move, nothing else moves. when I move forward in the space, I create a visual flow of all the things around me. When I walk to the back, towards the exam chair, all the glasses on the wall, the shelves, the tables, the cash, the mirrors, they move towards me, flow in my right and my left: Two big rivers of space, splitting and floating around me, on every side. My movement creates order in this space.

## **The Sun**

My job is not about fixing eyes, it's about correcting them (like there's something wrong with fogginess). Or blurry colors. Obscure is a feeling, more than anything. My job is to manipulate the light that hits the cornea, break it in the right way, or, break the light in the way that we think it's supposed to break. I'm playing with light and glass. They have a different consistency. The light is more important. I think this because of my sun-addiction. The sun has a place in my mind that's almost religious. Sun ritual, cult, adoration. This place the sun has in me, is in my skin. The sun is what my body craves, and what our eyes can't bear. If you look at the sunset and sunrise every day, you will go blind. Yet, all my knowledge, all my instruments, all the ways I must look at eyes and define them, are based on the light. I imitate the sun.

## **My body in summer and winter**

In the summer, I dress fast. Underwear, pants, shirt, c'est tout. I sweat a lot, and the water drifts down from my skin to the floor. Watching these water bubbles makes me feel light and I'm aware of the amount of water inside my body. The water that goes outside makes me aware of the inside. In the winter I dress slow, carefully, like a knight wearing his shield. Every part in my body demands a complete fit to the fabric that protects it. The feet in the socks, the chest in its triple-layer protection. In the winter I have to find the balance between my inner temperature and the different kinds of outside – outside of the bed, outside of the room, outside of the home, outside of the shop.

## **Ideas that are not mine**

- We use our eyes for seeing. Our field of vision reveals a limited space, something vaguely circular, left to right, and doesn't extend very far up or down. If we squint, we can manage to see the end of our nose. If we raise our eyes, we can see there is an up, if we lower them, we can see there's a down. If we turn our head in one direction, then in another, we don't even manage to see completely everything there is around us; we have to twist our bodies round to see properly what was behind us.
- If everyone in the world were blind, perhaps touching would be called seeing.
- Our gaze travels through space and gives us the illusion of distance. That is how we construct space, with an up and a down, a left, and a right, and in front and behind, a near and afar. When nothing arrests our gaze, it carries

a very long way. But if it meets with nothing, it sees only what it meets. Space is what arrests our gaze, what our sight stumbles over: the obstacle, bricks, an angle. Space has edges, it doesn't go off in all directions. It does all that needs to be done for railway lines to meet well short of infinity.

- Ever since we started opening not only the blinds but the television as well, the day itself changed.
- Inside our homes, we feel the right relations to our bodies. Everything is designed for us, to serve us, for our needs and our pleasures. Outside, we're not important.
- Brushing our teeth is a boring act. So boring, it takes us to a metaphysical moment of reflection. Brushing the teeth is the waiting room of eternity.



## **Cycling**

Sometimes I cycle to work. it is a different movement. I feel the street moves towards me, though I'm the one moving.

## **Sitting in the tram**

When I take public transport, I sit. I like to sit in a moving vehicle. I like this strange idea, I am sitting as still as I can, while a big metal monster is moving in the city, I'm moving forward in it, but nothing in my body moves.

## **Looking at faces**

I probably spent more time looking at faces than at any other body part. I can read a person's feelings and intentions. The face is a very special planet. I enjoy looking at faces, a unique kind of pleasure.

**What I like in faces:** the crooked lines of the cheeks and the eyebrows, the contrast between the white of the eye to the black of the pupil, sharp angles, the false symmetry, the mirroring between the left and right sides of the face, the movement inside a frame (the lips moving while talking).

"Loi du Cadre" of the face. The objects inside the frame were created together with the frame itself. Sometimes I try to create a facial expression that will allow me not to speak. I want my face to be used as a replacement for my voice. I try to create a silence that is full of content, and my face will create the x-ray feeling of looking into my soul.

## **Looking into the eyes**

Mutual gazing is a world within a world. Looking into someone's eyes, when that someone is looking back, is not similar to any other experience. It seems like I can sense their soul, monitoring it. My gaze moves from right to left, and she does the same, without even noticing. If she doesn't, I know she's not here. Each one of these fast, small transitions, by changing slightly my perspective, changes what I see. These tuning, refocusing movement, seems like a reflection of the soul's tiny movements from mode to mode. I'm drawn into the eyes, the lights and shadows contrast, the curves, the shine, the depths, the symmetry.

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