

Exercises for seeing everything at once

#1

Here's what I'm looking at:

- 1) two interlaced fingers
- 2) a forearm and breast
- 3) an armpit, a chin

I find myself drawn to the seams between things. There are cracks between planes of skin, recessed in space. They're typically darker, that's how we're taught to feel distance. For Colin, that distance collapses, or actually, perhaps it's stretched forward: the same line refracted at a different angle, rendered in a bright, blue-white glow. All light in your eyes is second-hand, you know, bouncing off his shorts, the shine in her hair. Available light is frequently difficult to work with.

Here's what I'm looking at:

What is naked skin in reverse
What is an example turned inside out
What is a camera that doesn't
What is abstraction that follows familiar lines
What is the cost to her body
What is the space of intimacy, what is the give of distance
What's that eye within yours that can see for you?
(An infinite regression, taking a step inwards, again, another time)

Maurice Merleau-Ponty said, "Vision is a palpitation with the look." Sight is necessarily movement, a quiet, frenetic choreography. (Saccadic masking: when your brain selectively adjusts what you perceive, so you cannot notice the inevitable blurs in your vision produced as your eyes move.) It's likely happening to you right now, a little dance. After a short video of a single green leaf swimming in mid-air, atmospheric forest sounds, there's a wiggle of the camera.

What bodies, what joints, what glances teach the best lessons?

#2

Focus your eyes on these words on the page. Without moving your eyes, how many words can you make out? When you move the page closer and further from your face, what changes? Ask a friend to wave a coloured piece of paper in your peripheral vision. Take a walk at that blue hour of dawn when shadows collapse and stretch. Close one eye and then the other; do you see shifts in

colour, maybe red and blue, does a blind spot self-adjust? What details do you notice right in front of you, dense patterned wallpaper, a plate or a tomato? What is in your field of vision, and what fills itself in? Do the contours of a triangle emerge in the negative space, is it inference? Close one eye, watch the X, tell me when the blank space dissolves away. You lack the panoramic look that holds everything together. Do you experience the difference? Available light is frequently difficult to work with... make the best of it—and bracket. Watch a video of some basketball players—count the number of times the ball gets passed. Do you notice anything strange? What's that eye within yours, the one that can see for you? Watch a man walk through this empty room, watch his height distort while the walls stay the same. Follow the lines on these café walls, a cat's body behind the pickets of a fence. There's an afterimage on your eyelids.

In general, you only see that to which you attend. [1]

XXXX XXX XXXX **thundered** XXXX XXX XXX XX X XXX
XXXX XXX XXXX **XXXXXXXed into the sky** XX X XXX

#3

After a point, scanning breaks down, I am unable to process. Here's a photography manual from the 1990s. On a page describing strategies for working with available light, there's an image of three members of the Klu Klux Klan, marching to the left with lit torches. The image will be entirely gone by the next printing.

What bodies make the best examples? Who gets to decide what's neutral, what's useful in training the eye? An omission: the caption beneath this image has been carefully excised. Part of me wishes to see it here, part of me desires an explanation. Yet I know there's no way this book would have provided the words I need, nor would they have truly explained this casual gesture of supremacy. It's a moment where easy viewing becomes disruptive, antagonistic, words and pictures don't communicate as smoothly as they should. An omission of an omission: Colin hasn't removed the caption entirely, it is translated across the apparatus of the exhibition to stand as the work's title[2]. Available light is frequently difficult to work with: then, something else remains unavailable in these regimes of sight. Other bodies, other politics, other difficulties.

Is seeing a form of owning? That's a classic one. It's remarkable how little you actually see when you look; how much is simply just inference, filling-in, trust. Looking at Colin's work means creating new space between seeing and understanding. It's perception made elastic, remaining in that space of trust without filling in all that's unknown. It's a blue hour at dawn.

Usually, seeing involves not letting yourself ask these kinds of questions. Her hands cover one eye; what is she refusing?

[1] Many of the examples in this paragraph were sourced from exercises and studies of human perception included in Alva Noë's book *Action in Perception* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004).

[2] *It takes a trained eye to recognize exciting relationships of form and light. Making dramatic photographs of this sort also requires technical skill and quick reflexes (available light #30), 2013/2017.*

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