

Counter-Insurgency of the Eye

The Anti-Ocular Conspiracy

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Introduction: The Definition of Ocularity

Ocularity is both a space and a practice, insofar as the space of ocularity must be maintained by a practice of force that maintains its boundaries, divisions, and maintains it as an enclosure for what is within the space or realm of ocularity. To be within the space of ocularity is to be sensed—that is, to be impressed upon by the forms embedded in ocular practice. The forms embedded in a practice of ocularity, in the construction, development, and maintenance of an ocular space, are forms of social recognition, they are the inscription of meanings that allow for identification, and actively attempt to prevent, expose, or to delimit in advance attempts at social, political, or cultural disruption. The disruption it attempts to avert or subvert is the disruption that can brew in the form of an insurgency, and the space in which an insurgency can brew is a space of non-ocularity, of escape from social forms of meaning that have not (yet, at least) been recuperated by social meaning and hence was recognized by the social-semiotic ‘eye’ of ocularity. This non-ocular space we call the ‘conspiratorial’. The conspiratorial is the womb of insurgency.

The ‘eye’ of ocularity is not a receptive eye, or at least, it benefits it to partake more in its object as that which falls within its space. The eye of ocularity sees and in seeing it projects force on to what it sees, and it remakes the object—to the best of its ability—in its own image, like a Kantian transcendental that encounters an affectation of its sense organs, it captures it only in a form pre-determined. Insofar as ocularity preserves itself via a monopoly on identity and socially-recognized meaning it does great violence upon its object in sensing it. It is a net of libidinally-enforced social axioms about the limits of identity and what a body can do. It is at work everywhere, in a sense the space of ocularity has one eye as its structural principle in the eye of power, but much like the eye as it occurs in nature, the creator was not quite ontologically parsimonious enough with its quantitative distribution. Insurrection must defeat the eye, power has too many eyes, *there are too many eyes in our world*.

The following text is an attempt; partially at theoretical fiction, partly at reverse-engineering from the standpoint of ocular practice itself. Its category of insurgency is not intended to invoke the violence of what is considered ‘insurgent’ by normal means, but by means of violence against concepts, against identity, it is violent in the same way that any alternative and truly autonomous self-consciousness would be.

Enucleate the State!

1. — The Fundamental Precondition of any Conspiratorial Analysis

The essence of the conspiracy is that its presence is always already withdrawing from the eyes of the investigator. The conspiracy withdraws from sight, and yet its withdrawal is a continuous process rather than an event. A good conspiracy understands the nature of the ocular, what it means to be seen, in order to trace those lines that run counter to the directions of visibility, be they lines occluded from the ocular scope, or that these lines can be bent and refracted over and around the body of the conspirator(s). At most, the presence of the conspiracy is something presupposed by the investigative, Yet, in a successful process of conspiracy, this presence is not captured by its seeking. The investigative eye, fundamentally opposed to the conspiracy, is always in a process of capturing that the conspiratorial aims to constantly withdraw from. The

conspiratorial is that which is always attempting its withdrawal from ocular reception as well as ocular comprehension; becoming incomprehensible—out of sight and out of mind. However, to have the conspiratorial body or bodies out of the space of the ocular is simply to leave the spectral imprint of its withdrawal and its absence. This is why a true conspiracy invites the terror of an ocular paranoia, through its own spectral capture of the eye that seeks to capture *it*.

An expedient conspiracy is one that births *insurgencies* by provoking martial-political overreactions—the *iron fists* of the paranoid state—that themselves often provoke the eruption of insurgent force and a corresponding popular support.¹ From the standpoint of counter-insurgency studies, this is not necessarily a bad tactic, given the ‘iron fist’ method of counter-insurgency has proven to be a notoriously hit-and-miss method.² As such, it is paramount for the security of any nation that faces the threat of insurgency that it understand its own *ocularity*, the ability to not merely see conspiratorial forces, but to *recognize* them, to place them under clearly defined and substantial schemas or identities through this recognition. In doing so, the intent is to *capture* these forces within a counter display of force such that this dispels them of their conspiratorial—and hence proto-insurgent—character. It is also the intention of the authors of this text that in understanding our current mechanisms of ocularity and ocular capture, we may better understand our own counter-conspiratorial—and hence counter-insurgent—limits. Particularly, when it comes to our schemas of recognizing, identifying, capturing, and finally—*dissolving* proto-insurgent conspiratorial units. As such, this text will attempt to lay out a brief outline of the practice and possibilities of ocularity as a concept of counter-conspiratorial counter-insurgency.

2.0 — The Mechanisms of Ocularity

2.1 — Ocularity as General Activity: ‘Sensing’, Ocular vs Conspiratorial Space, and Recognitive Categorization

Contemporary counter-insurgent thought takes as its theoretical basis a wide variety of conceptual tools for its analysis of ocularity as a social and political phenomenon. We understand that the essential function of mechanisms that practice and produce ocularity is to capture the sense or meaning of an individual or group of individuals, and to recognize them by placing them under a certain identity category. This is not simply a passive practice of recording the identities that are seen and ‘capturing’ them within tables of data, demographic distributions, or within the judicial bounds of legal or illegal identities. Rather, ocular is a practical and active social process of inscriptive force. The activity of ocularity is not only to record identities, but also socially mandate the thought of such identities as substantial, as fully real and non-contradictory, and to engineer compliance to the sense of this identity. The sense of such an identity can be something that is conformed to via social disciplinary mechanisms such as medical prescription, martial training, or education. However such ocular conformity can also be engendered by more subtle restrictions on the actions of those so-identified such as restrictions applied to social and private space i.e. educational spaces, cultural spaces, forms of employment, territorial-political boundaries and within a systematically limited transport infrastructure.

¹ U.S. Army Field Manual *FM3-24/MCWP 3-33.5: Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies*, (2014) Chapter 7 Section 7. <https://fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm3-24.pdf>

² C. Paul, C.P. Clarke, B. Grill, and M. Dunigan, *Paths to Victory*, (RAND, 2013), 173.

The *sense* of an identity is something that is constituted and impressed upon the bodies of those identified as such. Identification is a process of impressing the ocularity-prescribed social meaning onto the body of the recipient through the ‘forces’³ of the ocular, by which they are seen. Force imposes and holds onto the social meaning of a body when it becomes a subject enclosed in ocular space. Ocular apparatuses record people’s bodies under certain schemata at the same time that it writes these identifications upon them. Ocularity—by which we mean, *good* ocular practice—leaves nothing hidden to conspiracy, it aims to identify every enemy and occlude the possibility of the enemy escaping into an unidentified and unregulated novel form.

Ocularity must not be understood as a nomadic force external to the mechanisms of state and society, and hence as a counter-insurgency mechanism it cannot be seen as a machine of war such as in the formulations from the COIN department the French College of Post-Lacanian Anthropology.⁴ Ocularity does not ‘smooth out’ the space of the conspiracy. The conspiratorial space is always smooth, undifferentiated, at once everywhere and nowhere in space, counting down the days until its plan comes to fruition. Ocularity ‘striates’ space, regiments it, establishes clear lines and gradients of identity, practices of recognitive conformity, and exclusivity. This was the conclusion of our fellow COIN theorists from the *Tiqqun* think tank who concluded as part of their ‘civil war theory’ of proto-insurgent conspiratorialism that

“To be recognized is to be seized and positioned in relation to over social bodies and for this positioning to be striated and asserted as a *finality*.”⁵

Ocular recognition delimits the possibilities of identity in advance and applies a constant stream of force to maintain the senses of these identity-recognitive categories. This force must be maintained in order to consistently occlude the possibility of a smooth i.e. conspiratorial space.

What can be concluded from this is that ocular recognition is not simply an immediate cognitive act of receiving that which is seen by the ocular mechanisms. Rather, as the psychologist and recognitive-engineer G.W.F. Hegel has noted, sensing a body is never immediate nor purely receptive, it is always involved in the active process of mediating the data received under universal linguistic categories.⁶ The recognition conducted by ocularity is, of course, one undertaken as an expression of the forces and apparatuses of that society and state whose ocularity is being deployed, and hence the recognition, or sensing of individuals and groups by ocularity is itself the mediation of these individuals and groups such that each is forced into the linguistic categories that make up the language of that society in terms of its customs and norms, and hence ocularity is not simply a department of social management, an institution, but is entirely interwoven into the fabric of a society’s actual culture.⁷

Ocularity should therefore aim to be the practice of generating an ‘ocular culture’ that can preserve, manage, and proliferate patterns of recognition and identification that ‘always keep the lights on’ to avoid the conspiratorial. This culture maintains a language of identity and categorization that is constantly striating the space of society by impressing onto individuals and groups an identity which is promoted by societal and cultural institutions as substantial and authoritative. These ocular impressions must be taken by those within this culture as non-contradictory

³ G. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, (Athlone, 1983), 3–4.

⁴ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, (Bloomsbury, 2013), 421–422.

⁵ Tiqqun, *Introduction to Civil War*, (Semiotext(e), 2010), 205.

⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, (Oxford, 1977), Section 109.

⁷ *Ibid*, Section 490.

(although not non-intersectional), and this non-contradictory substantiality is what maintains the legitimacy of those social institutions and apparatuses that perpetuate the ocular culture by removing these mechanisms themselves from being represented as contradictory insubstantial. This is the essence of McGowan’s theory of ocular impression in liberal-democratic societies.⁸ Ocular societies and ocular cultures recognize individuals as being subjects impressed with substantiality by a substantial recognitive authority, whilst repressing the inherent contradictions in both sides. Wholly un-speculative, substantiality is given and taken as given.

In his phenomenological experiments regarding simulated ocularity, Hegel himself noted that the collapse of Robespierre’s regime during the French Revolution was tied to the very absence of ocularity that was inherent to the regime’s ideological language. Under this regime, the language of identification was entirely vague, purely universal, abstractly negative, non-intersectional, and yet actively anti-conspiratorial. The subject brought under ocularity was entirely absent apart from the undefined category of ‘the people’ and their entirely vague and un-identifiable ‘General Will’ adapted from Rousseau’s democratic theory. As such, Hegel notes that this level of ocularity was itself suicidal in its incompetence, and as such could not identify or comprehend its own ocular deficiencies as its greatest threat; leading Robespierre to be executed under the auspices of his own ocular dissolution mechanism—the guillotine wielded by the conspiratorial forces of the Thermidorian insurgency.⁹ They had no identity, they remained in the shadows of the eye that could only see the blur, and hence the ocular state stabbed in the darkness until its terror had created the regime’s own executioners. A vague ocularity widens the scope of those who fall under the cloak of the conspiratorial. If the single category of your ocularity is the notion ‘the people’ without sufficient regimentation, striation, or recognitive practice, then every person can—and eventually will—conspire against you.

2.2 — Ocularity and Difference

The conclusion that the field of ocular counter-insurgency has drawn from these cases of successful conspiratorialism—of which the Thermidor is taken to be an exceptionally salient paradigm case—is that the intensity of recognitive capture-power within in an ocular space is directly proportional to the multiplicity of ocular categories within said space. Put simply, the more cells in said space, the greater the number of potential insurgents can be situated within before they can follow their paths of escape into the smooth space of the conspiratorial. Robespierre’s low-intensity ocular practice recognized only two categories as exhibited in the practices of his government; ‘the people’ and ‘the counter-revolutionary’, and famously the vagueness and indeterminacy of these categories made identifying either an arbitrary and capricious practice through which concrete threats were left undetermined, and hence conspiratorial.

In contrast, a high-intensity practice of the ocular would embody in its cultural, legal, and political practice a well-defined set of recognitive categories. These categories aid the identification of potential insurgents and hence occlude their escape into the conspiratorial by re-situating their sense of themselves and how society sees them (and each seeing is actualised in their social activity) within the ocular field of vision, the striated spatial field of state power. A higher plurality of ocular categories is a lower flow of smoothness within and across the ocular space. The production of said categories—or in some cases, their discovery, where an ocular ‘cataract’ has

⁸ T. McGowan, *Emancipation After Hegel*, (Columbia, 2019), 135.

⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, (Oxford, 1977), Sections 589–595.

been removed by sufficient scientific advancement—has been aided significantly by the dawn of intersectionality. That is, insofar as ocularity maintains the intersection between a plurality of its own categories as itself a determinate section within that space.

This is not to say that contemporary developments in social justice movements from the late 20th century onwards have been beneficial to ocularity. Indeed, the production of new identities outside of ocular production harbour their own danger that researchers of our own as well as those of similar organizations have attempted to address.

3.0 — Plasticity, Ocularity, and Speculative Neurology: The Science of producing Recognitive-Conforming Affects in Social Reasoning

In our current era of technological and political acceleration—one exacerbated by plague, economic collapse, and geopolitical insecurity—the counter-insurgent science of ocularity has had to make its own leaps into new fields of scientific knowledge. The ultimate goal of ocular practice is not only to see into people’s heads, but to organise their heads into that which ocularity recognizes. Contemporary Spinozist turns in neurology have recently begun to make this possible. The revelatory promise of neuro-plasticity and its Spinozist deployments have now opened up new possibilities for an ocular understanding of how recognitive forms can be cognitively, *physically*, be implanted. This possibility is explored most notably in the work of neuro-technician C. Malabou when she invokes the Spinozist-neurology of Demasio to explain the indifferent coldness that occurs when a person’s identity is severely traumatised or destroyed, leaving them indifferent to the emotional or affective concerns when tackling social decisions around conflict and risk—the social decisions that are themselves crucial in any question of conspiratorial allegiance and practice.

The hypothesis deployed in Malabou’s analysis is Demasio’s conception of the “somatic markers” in the brain that give certain kinds of emotional weight to certain options in decision making.¹⁰ This weight-distribution is governed by the Spinozian-axis of ‘joys’ and ‘sorrows’, where the former expresses an expansion of an individual’s capacities and the latter expresses a dampening.¹¹ The capacities under such a regime of affective governance are that of high-level cognitive functions necessary for social life and decision making; memory, language, attentiveness, and reasoning.¹² Whilst we lack the current medical capacities to engineer ocularly-aligned somatic markers within the brain from birth or infancy, the dual function of the neuro-plastic is that which grounds our potential to ocularly re-mould and distribute these markers to fit ocular-compliant schemas of social language, self-identification, norms of rationality, and the affective pull that ocular culture has on the attention of individuals. The goal of ocular culture is to occlude the capacities of the individual post-birth within whatever ocular recognition-pattern they are sensed, and to shepherd the distribution of somatic markers towards an affective weight into ocularity-compliant distributions.

Above all, the attentiveness to one’s own plasticity must be avoided if ocularity is to be maintained. In extreme circumstances, the potential for ‘destructive’ plasticity must be deployed, in

¹⁰ C. Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident*, (Polity, 2012), 23.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹² *Ibid.*

the sense that the individual must be made indifferent to their possibility of being other than within an ocular schema—a totally negative deployment of a traumatic severing of those affective distributions that exceed the ocular schemata. There must be no outside of ocularity, that is the smooth space of the conspiratorial. The ocular subject must be prevented from distributing emotional weight towards any non-ocular affectivity at all costs. They must not even “lack lack” when it comes to their sense of themselves in ocularity,¹³ but must be wholly indifferent to the outside, to any escape from ocular space.

As such, we can conclude that an optimal situation the subjects of an ocular culture, would be that their indifference would be conditioned into them as a total absence of *imagination* when it comes to the outside. We understand that under certain clinical rubrics that these ocularity tactics may be recognised as the induction of trauma, and as such bear the possibility of counter-ocular healing (especially in such a highly speculative and experimental field that us and other counter-insurgency operators are working in). However, others in our field have made great strides in acting to prevent this psychological rejuvenation. The most notable of all these is the method of re-imposing ocularity when it comes to the identity of the psychologically alienated. Famously, Deleuze and Guattari identified and refined this method in its Freudian and Kleinian formulations in their theory of ‘oedipalization’, in which all attempts at understanding psychological trauma become confined in the familial triangle of Freud’s oedipal complex, everything is tied to one’s relation within the triangular identity of daddy-mommy-me, from the private to the public, to the personal to the political and ever more.¹⁴ The ocularity of oedipalization, if we are to draw upon the myth, is to prevent *oedipism*, or the removal of one’s eyes. Deleuze and Guattari hence leave us with a term for an anti-ocular practice that we shall develop further through an examination of recent trends in conspiratorialism.

If we are to take further examples of ocular practices in current use, the phenomenon of ‘Capitalist Realism’ identified by the hyperstitional entity known as ‘K-Punk’ shows itself as an imperfect ocularity that ocular science aims to improve on. Nonetheless, the CR-division of ocular science over in the UK has made substantial strides in developing ‘post-historical’ methods of shifting affective weight away from the notion of the outside in the form of an ‘alternative’ to capitalist economic systems [see the Affect-Distribution Module-‘TINA’ (There is No Alternative)]. This has been achieved through a collaboration of journalistic, educational, and entertainment-media apparatuses. Each has done their part in the generation of an affect of “reflexive impotence” by which individuals identify across a multiplicity of identity categories; all delimited within the recognition that alternative social relations—and hence social ways of life that would constitute identities outside of ocular culture and space—are *a priori* impossible.¹⁵ However, the reflexivity of this impotence itself has generated a self-consciousness of this lack, and as such has created a desire-formulation that whilst seemingly a ‘lack’, is actually a productive line, one that looks for an exit, and hence a line of flight with conspiratorial potential. We nonetheless remain confident in our abilities to effectively block the flows of conspiratorial desire when it comes to the contemporary information era—the self-conscious capitalist realists have only ever romanticised about an image of the possibility of an outside, they as yet lack the imagination to believe it can be possibly reached, and remain as effectively and affectively hopeless as before.

¹³ Ibid, 90.

¹⁴ G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, (Minnesota, 1983), 78–79.

¹⁵ K-Punk, *Capitalist Realism*, (0, 2009), 21.

The intersection of ocularity, psychology, and neurology is the awakening and management of the dormant forces of plasticity; both the creative in the sense of giving form to affective markers that determine social cognition, and the destructive plasticity required to accelerate the neurological deterioration of those affective capacities that resist ocular capture—that resist the eye.

Ocularity draws its self-differentiation from its own plasticity, where an eye can become a hand that writes on a bureaucrat's form, a tongue that proclaims with signifying authority the identity of its target, the ear that may expose the conspiratorial by hearing *over* the plotting of insurgent ways of escaping. The ocular eye is an organ, but it is an implanted code diffused across the bodies that comprise their own enclosure within ocular space. If conspiratorialism were to truly become eyeless, one would hardly be able to see if they had any organs at all.

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