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Retrieved on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2021 from [hermetic.com](http://hermetic.com)

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## Evil Eye

Hakim Bey

The Evil Eye – mal occhio – truly exists, & modern western culture has so deeply repressed all knowledge of it that its effects overwhelm us – & are mistaken for something else entirely. Thus it is free to operate unchecked, convulsing society in a paroxysm of Invidia. Invidious Envy – the active manifestation of passive resentment – projected outward thru the gaze (i.e. thru the whole language of gestures & physiognomy, to which most moderns are deaf, or rather which they are not aware of hearing).

It's especially when we're unconscious of such magic that it works best – moreover, it's known that the possessor of the Eye is nearly always unconscious – not a true black magician, but almost a victim – yes, but a victim who escapes malignity by passing it on, as if by reflex.

In more traditional worlds (worlds of the “symbolic order” as Benjamin puts it, as opposed to worlds of “history”), I've noticed that people remain much more attuned to the languages of gesture; where there's no TV & “nothing ever happens”, people watch people, people read people. Passersby in the street pick up your mood, & according to their temperament they clash with it or harmonize with it or manipulate it. I never knew this till I lived in Asia. Here

in America, people react to you most often on the basis of the idea you project – thru clothes, position (job), spoken language. In the East one is more often surprised to find the interlocutor reacting to an inner state; perhaps one was not even aware of this state, or perhaps the effect seems like “telepathy”. Most often, it is an effect of body language.

I’ve heard it said that the Mediterranean & Mideast worlds evolved a complex phenomenology of the mal occhio because they are more given to envy than we Notherners. But the Evil Eye is a universal concept, missing not in any space (such as the chill & rational North) but only in time – to be exact, in historical time, the time of cold Reason. Reason’s protection against magic is to disbelieve it, to believe it out of Reason’s universe of discourse. “Asia’s defense against magic is more magic – in this case, the blue stone (common from Lebanon to India, maybe even farther East) or else, in the Mediterranean (our own “Asia”), the downpointed bull-sign of the fingers, or the phallic amulet.

But Reason & Magic are both superstitions (“left-over beliefs”). I suggest that the mal occhio “works”; but my analysis is neither rational nor irrational. Who can explain the complex web of signs, symbols, forces & influences that flow & weave between such enigmatic monads as ourselves? We can’t explain how we communicate, much less what. If the “symbolic order” was replaced by “history”, & if History itself is somehow now in the process of “disappearing”, perhaps we may at last breathe free of the fogs of magic & the smogs of reason. Perhaps we can simply admit that “mysteries” such as the Eye – or even “telepathy” – somehow appear in our world, or seem to appear, which means simply that they appear to appear, & thus that they appear.

The proper organ for this kind of knowledge would be the body.

Now Envy is universal. But some societies attempt to keep it under control, while in others it is unleashed by being turned into a social principle. We have no defense against the Evil Eye because our entire social ethic is rooted in Envy. At least the benighted

itself, by including in it the names of the appropriate charms. But prose alone will never do the trick. There must occur enchantment, a singing that changes (our perception of) reality. Or better, the blue breath of the serene sky, or the hot moment of the thrusting cock.

Envy is an abstraction because it wants to “take away from.” The Evil Eye is its weapon in the psychic/physical world. Against it, then, must stand not another abstraction (such as morality) but the solidest of fleshy realities, the over-abundant power of birth, of fucking, of azure breezes. The amulet we fashion against an entire society of the Evil Eye can be no more & no less than our own life, adamant as stone & horn, soft as sky.

Asians have their amulets & prophylactic gestures. It was not Reason which banned these frail defenses, however. It was Christianity. “Verb. sap.,” as English schoolboys used to say.

The two post-Xtian ideologies – Capitalism & Communism – are both fueled by Envy. In both systems it is a survival trait – no, it is an economic trait. “Oeconomy” – an old word for the totality of all social arrangements. The “Eighties” was not the decade of greed (which at least has the dignity of an active force) but of envy. The minorities envied the majority, the poor the rich, the “addicted” the healthy, women men, blacks whites... yes, but the rich envied the poor (for their idleness), the healthy envied the “addicted” (for their pleasures), men envied women (as always), whites envied blacks (for their living culture, & for their suffering) & so on.

A crude anthropology (note the “anthro”) claims that “primitive mind” experiences Envy as a female principle – (hence the phallic defense against the Evil Eye). A very limited view. “Envy” may be yin when compared with the yang of “greed”, but the Evil Eye, as a prolongation of Invidia, is pointy & penetrative, like a dagger – a death-dealing phallus – to which one opposes the phallus of life, the penis itself. An Italian savant once told me of the most horrendous example of the mal occhio he’d ever encountered, in a withered & hairy-faced old woman. A healer, a charismatic Catholic mystic, undertook the cure of this miserable witch – & discovered that, unknown to her, she was in fact a man (the genitals had never descended).

A gender-analysis of the Eye will get us nowhere. The association of the Eye with women may arise from the tendency of women to be more sensitive to body language than men, & thus to hold on to certain “magics” even as they begin to vanish from those worlds which discover history (which, as everyone knows, is not, by-&-large, her story).

The Nuer belief that all accident, illness & death are caused by witchcraft. Most Nuer witches are unaware of themselves as witches. They suffer from envy. According to our tribal beliefs,

all accidents are accidental – no one is to “blame”. We suffer from envy, but we are “innocent”. Frankly I can’t believe either the Nuer witch-finders or the pundits of our own mechanistic worldview. Both belief-systems are “disappearing” anyway – why should I buy passage on their sinking ships? Things are so much more complex than either worldview can imagine that, in effect, things are much more simple than either of them would have us believe.

I mean: the effect of two human beings on each other occur on so many levels that flat concepts like witchcraft or accident can’t begin to do it justice. And yet, matters are not nearly as tangled & dark as the theory of witchcraft would have us believe, nor so brutal, so industrial, as the theory of the mechanistic universe. The body knows much without knowing, the imagination sees much that it does not need to understand. The body & the imagination overstand – they are above mere understanding & its clumsy abstractions.

Blue is the color of the sky & its happiness, air & light against the earth & shadow of Envy. But blue is also the color of death – as with the old Bedu woman who told Lawrence that his blue eyes reminded her of the sky seen thru the sockets of a bleached skull. The Yezidis, the “devil-worshippers” of Iraqi Kurdistan, refuse to wear blue beads or even clothes because it is the color of their Lord, Satan, the Peacock Angel, & to wear blue to ward him off would deeply offend him. So the blue bead is homeopathic – a bit of evil used to defend against evil – perhaps a fragment fallen from the Horned One himself, powerful in its goaty virility against the chthonic negative-Yin- like power of Envy. And yet the stone is also the serenity of azure, turquoise, infinity, the Feminine – a bit of mosaic from the matrix of the sky, or of water.

Similarly the bull-sign, when seen upright & face on, is undoubtedly a yang- ish sort of symbol – but pointed down & seen in reverse – as it is presented to the view of the Evil-Eye-suspect (al tho the gesture is made surreptitiously), the sign becomes a Stone age

woman-image, two legs & a vulva – so that potency against the Evil Eye comes from the “horns” which are stabbed down, the virile element –but within that symbol is embedded the power of the goddess as well.

Even the phallic amulet, which might at first appear all male, is not the penis of the animal-god, but of Priapus, a god of vegetation. It is the penis of fruit & flower – in some sense, a female penis.

The apotropaic complex is thus to be seen as neither male nor female nor even, properly speaking, androgynous. The symbols revolve not around gender but engendering, around life or energy itself as a value opposed to the negativity, the vacuum, the deathly cold of envy.

The opposite of the gaze of love is not the gaze of hate, but that of envy, passive, unliving in itself, vampirically attracted to the life in others. A barren woman sees a pretty newborn baby – she praises it to the skies, but her words mean the opposite of what they say; unknown even to her, her gaze pierces direct to the infant’s breath. Are we so certain that the language of gesture is weak, an evolutionary appendix soon to be bred out of the species? – do we not suspect that it is strong, powerful enough to attract love, or to make sick, even to kill?

Everywhere in our world this deadly gaze is directed at us, as in Bentham’s Panopticon. We are described to ourselves as victims, as patients, as passive focal points of misery – we are shown ourselves deprived of this or that commodity or “right” or quality which we most desire. The ones who tell us this – are they not the rich, the powerful, the politicians, the corporations? What could we still possess to awaken in them such invidia, & the endless assaults of their mal occhio?? Could it be that unknown to us or to them) we are alive & they are dead? The TV screen can be an ultimate Evil Eye – because it is already dead, & the dead (as Homer showed us) are the most envious of all beings. Everything mediated is dead, even this writing – & the dead yearn for life. I’ve tried to protect this text against being an Evil Eye, as well as against the Evil Eye