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The Void Between Us

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"You can't see anything with your metaphorical cataracts. Your blindness is your bliss."

Random chats with my Russian family over the phone, including Happy Birthday or Happy New Year talks, often detour into political area every time "When will we see you again?" is brought up because the answer is always the same and can't be apolitical. I smoothed it over those three-years-and-counting not to unnerve the relatives, not to hurt our relationships, the choice that many people I know made, while some preferred to stop communicating. At first, the answer to that question began with "when Putin dies"[1], then turned into "when the regime falls", then into "when the situation changes", and finally, but not ultimately into proverbial "as soon as I can", with no exact degree of soonness. They would probably be very upset by what I write and publish if they were to read it—the case unlikely. I smooth no angle here in regards of the war and my position, which is the main point of writing all that in the first place.

You'd be surprised but my parents do have a copy of "Deleted Scenes…", my mother asked me to send it to her so they have it at home, despite they can't read English, only, as she said "with Google translate."

I can't describe the dialogue we had about all that other than awkward, for I couldn't really say what the book is about other than "Russia," in fact, I don't even remember what I said, I've just made up the answer. I've never asked whether she read it, because I can't imagine a discussion about whether she enjoyed police-torturing-a-random-guy-chapter, but I reckon she hasn't, or maybe she has but hasn't told me about it due to exactly the same indescribable awkwardness, which isn't a lack of words or a difference in beliefs or a lack of a home book club and not even fear, but a shapeless void or quite shapeful wall that has formed and prevents the discussion from happening. The very feeling is odd[2]—it should feel nice and heartwarming knowing that my mother has my book and wants to read it so much that she has to use an online translator, but it doesn't, not because I often immune to praise of any kind and it's hard to distinguish between polite praise and genuine interest, but because I don't even know what she'd say.

The tragedy of the situation for me isn't in the circumstances, for there're far worse circumstances than mine—I've heard and read about many stories—but in the simple fact it's unsolvable, unexitable, hopeless, I can't just by a whiff of some wand change their minds and make them agree with me, nor can I do the opposite—I can't convert to Putinism, succumb to degenerate Dugin's philosophy, and yell "goida" on the streets[3], even if I lobotomise myself. We, my family and I, still have a lot in common and are still a family, and I wouldn't want to break that connection given just by doing so I won't prove anything to anyone, won't stop the war, and won't benefit anyhow, moreso, the

opposite is more probable. The only one benefiting from us not talking to each other would be the Russian government, for whom the schism in the society, the shapeless void, the shapeful wall, would mean success, weird and perverted success, but success nevertheless. When the Whole is torn apart, when its parts are pulled in the opposite directions, it is, perhaps, easier to control each part and do with it whatever you want. The less in common we have and the less we can communicate at all about anything but health and weather, the more difficult it becomes to find a solution or to imagine the future at all. The relationship thus doesn't end but erodes into an unrelationship, a waltz around an absent centre.

One could start doubting what is true and perhaps put personal over universal, comfort over Truth, and, perhaps, even switch sides, or ignore the sides and scarper into one's own solipsoid. This is too what the system would like to see—people ignoring the reality, for they can no more discern what is true, insofar they start doubting the entire notion of true, the very existence of it. It becomes strugglesome for an individual to establish a working model of reality if both sides of the said Whole tell you that nothing, or at least a half of the narrative, is true and can't be trusted. No critical thinking would help to figure that out, unless you drown in research and draw conclusions based on "indisputable facts" you yourself, or the others you trust, have witnessed directly. You just have to say that whatever you believe is true forsooth and waver not, which again leads you, with a certain degree of risk, to one of the echo chambers. Even philosophy, the unevenly

distributed postmodernism with its post-truth et al, isn't aimed to solve anything but to further amplify the chasm by deconstructing it. Systems[4] reach their ultimate form when they start gaining energy from attacks against them. That includes criticism, deconstruction, naming, be it giving something a name or giving a name its opposite. Mayhap, even by saying that "we live in post-truth" society, we condemn ourselves to never finding the Truth, abandoning the search, refusing to accept its absurdity. "Nothing is true" from a pattern becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Thus, the sides of the Whole drift further apart, each of them ensuring themselves that no contact is possible, the void is uncrossable, the wall is impenetrable, "they" would never understand "us"[5]. The system has become immune to critique, leaving everyone just nodding, acknowledging, expressing concern, of course, agreeing wholeheartedly that things are off as fuck, and yet do nothing, or do only something that reinforces the difference, shapes the shapeless void, if you will, instead of seeking dialogue. Satire thus becomes entertainment, for satire such modern type of satire isn't aimed at those satirised, it's aimed to self-entertain the satirisers. Those satirised won't even see the satire, because it would never appear in their sight, channel, scope, or shall we say, feed. Even if it breaches through somehow, the satirised would just shrug it off like an annoying fly. This is most vivid not in relation to the system, but in relation to its subjects to each other. The system, in fact, might still care of the flows of information, try to censor it, ban or burn the books, exile or imprison voices, and try to ensure the crack in the reality is still there.

I could say me and my parents live in different realities: in mine it's Russia that bombs Ukraine, in theirs it's the other way around, in mine they are fascists for supporting fascists[6], in theirs I'm a fascist for supporting fascists. In the end, everyone's a fascist, it's a matter of perspective, thank you very much! I could say they live in a different world, different realm, and, to an extent, they do, geographically it's the case. But reality? It's still the same reality, we do apparently share one. It is, of course, soothing and convenient to dismiss those who disagree with you as the ones who "live in a different reality", so let them think their filthy barbaric thoughts and do whatever. It is, of course, desirable to escape the ugly reality and resort to the beautiful one. As a civilisation, we've been too reckless about such fundamental words as "Reality" and "Truth" and the language about them, both in literal and metaphorical sense. I don't believe that the language shapes reality, no. Nothing shapes reality other than the reality itself, nature, or universe, and us humans, which are all part of the same Whole, but the language certainly shapes its perception, that can be and is manipulated, by others or ourselves, intentionally or not. The two, both reality and its perception, do, in fact, stem from one another, and any wishful thought of their separatedness, or a framework that instils such a worldview, are, if not a self-fulfilling prophecy, a dangerous, foolish, and cowardly path that has to be abandoned.

June 2025

Notes

1. Then I thought, mayhap it won't solve the issue. I've stopped wasting my rolls on any wishing-well occasion for the bastard, for the bastard seems to be immune to that, and there're at the very least—more likely millions—one person who'd wish the same. He isn't immortal, but whether his death will bring peace is the question. Mayhap he has to be sacrificed like a goat on an altar for the predicament to improve.
2. Other words in the semantic associative net include (but not limited to): weird, bizarre, eerie, nagging, paradoxical, empty, unrealised, sad, melancholic, even cosily so, etc.
3. "Goida" is an archaic Russian exclamation historically associated with Ivan the Terrible's personal police / death squads called *oprichniki*, also referenced in Vladimir Sorokin's dystopian novel "Day of the Oprichnik," now considered prophetic for depicting the regime's and police's brutality. The term was revived by one propagandist in 2022 during a Red Square rally celebrating Russia's annexation of Ukrainian territories, where he used it as a battle cry while declaring "holy war" against the West. However, the propaganda failed to popularise it as a pro-war slogan, it became an unsuccessful "forced meme" and is now used more often ironically to mock Russian war rhetoric. Unlike benign expressions meaning "let's go," historical usage, and its usage in "Day of the Oprichnik" suggests it was a call for violence and bloodshed.
4. Not a correct word, but semantically somewhere from: concept, construct, mechanism, paradigm, noöspheric entity, schema, ontology—not any of these, but something betwixt or beyond.
5. I could blame technology here, but again, it would be "the abuse of technology" by power rather than the technology itself. The drift, or the schism, or call polarisation, if you will, hasn't started with the internet, which undoubtedly makes it easy to personalise misery, but much earlier, mayhap, when people got two TVs in one house, or started reading different newspapers, or got access to a public library, or started spreading books with opposing ontologies, or whatever. See, it has become increasingly easy to put people into different boxes and serve them different beliefs and opinions, which is, by the way, not a bad thing by itself, don't get me wrong—on contrary, it's the most wonderful and necessary thing for us as civilisation; it's the fact that power, intentionally or not, abuses this difference, so the groups counter-turn; and it's the fact we've lost "the arena", a place where opinions could be challenged publicly and everyone was debating over the same "reality" rather than cowering into their own. I'm not sure it has ever existed, though, but now it doesn't

seem possible at all.

6. Russia is a fascist regime. It ticks all the boxes, or almost all, of the Umberto Eco's list in his essay "Ur-fascism" (1995).

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