

BETRAYING MIRRORS

The lights are out, twilight fills my apartment, it is still dark outside. I take one last look in the mirror before leaving the flat. As I leave, I put on a suitable mask. Down on the street, I join the faceless crowd. The morning follows its usual course, accompanied by a piece of the year 2025:

Was du siehst, es scheint real

Perspektive und Licht, doch nicht mein wahres Gesicht.^[1]

Crowds of anonymous masks cross my path. Smooth shells follow their paths, I follow mine. We have all become accustomed to hiding our true selves, because regardless of whether we belong to a minority, live a sexuality that differs from the norm, maintain unconventional forms of relationships, or have invisible illnesses that accompany our everyday lives: we have learned to hide. And in doing so, we have forgotten how to know our realities. I just think to myself: «Das ist nicht meine Welt, die sieht ganz anders aus.»^[2]

A few minutes away from our home, I board a train that will take me and many other people to work. The train window reflects what people think to be my face. I myself only catch a glimpse of my inner self before turning my attention back to the world around me, so as not to have to face myself too much: *Bin mir so fremd, unendlich allein / Um nicht anders zu sein*. My gaze wanders over all those people whose selves are as hidden just as mine. It is almost a little cynical to see that every person hides their true self from others – even though the norm they want to live up to is nothing more than a construct. The question whether anyone actually meets this norm lingers in my mind .

Norm, meaning: corresponding to the average of all or many. It is an intersection that arises from a multitude of variations around this median. The statistical mean, i.e. the norm, is therefore calculated from diversity, not from everyone being in step. *Ich kann mich dir niemals offenbaren*. So, the image of the people around us often corresponds to this average of many – we always compare the image we have of a potential counterpart with this mean. Depending on the deviation, we tend to classify someone as average, as normative. However, if the other person's life differs too greatly from what we assume to be the centre, many find it more difficult to accept this person or their way of life.

However, the fact is that all those who feel part of the Gothic community want to be fundamentally different from this supposed centre. But when you examine these differences, they melt away. Aesthetic differences are external characteristics that may initially enable assessment, but this is precisely where the play comes in:

Du hast dir ein Bild von mir gemacht

Ich bin darauf nicht zu erkennen.

The image we form of others differs from what is going on inside a person, their life story, their hurts, desires and hopes. In these matters, everyone is as individual as can be – regardless of whether they belong to a group that wants to be as different from others as the black scene, or whether they are part of mainstream everyday life. We can only guess at what is going on inside someone else. Some are better at this than others, their senses sharper than others', but their burden is the

perception of what lies beneath, to bear – to endure – what others hide behind their numerous masks. We sometimes approach people, make acquaintances, friendships, loves. But even to the closest circle of those we love, much remains hidden, regardless of our psychological and physical nakedness. Often we see in others only what we want to see. We do not often want to see scars, whatever their nature. That is why we hide them, and ourselves.

We create our counterparts, but we also create ourselves. We are often not unlike Pygmalion, having been betrayed, disappointed and hurt by others in the past. We then tend to create statues of the people around us that seem more perfect than they actually are. However, the thing about statues is that they only came to life in mythical times. Our sculptures remain lifeless and silent – and so do we: *Was du siehst, es scheint real / Perspektive und Licht, doch nicht mein wahres Gesicht*. People put themselves in perfect light, choose a perspective that flatters them – that's how we appear to be, but that's not who we really are. We remain puppets of ourselves.

One of the most central media of our time is therefore nothing more than a marble hall of perfection. We deceive each other with images that we want people to interpret as our true selves. We spread illusions just to belong to a crowd that, deep down, we don't really want to belong to. We post images of a single second, isolated and beautiful. When the camera shutter closes, the mask falls – we are back in our own existence. Then a nice filter, a correction. We stick a virtual sticker with '100%' and our avatar giving a thumbs up on our story, and for the next twenty-four hours, our illusion smiles kindly at those who mostly believe us. In secret, we cry. Others choose to expose our weaknesses and create a picture gallery of pain, but even here we remain in an illusion and demand only what we want to hear from the people on the other side of the screen. All this just not to be any different (*um nicht anders zu sein*). Unlike those whose attention we desire.

*Hinter falschem Glanz herrscht grosse Dissonanz,
zwischen dem, was ich denk' und was ich sag'.*

The despicable appearance is not a new phenomenon. It has always been the case that it was not just the Venetian masked ball that was a firework display of art, appearance and mirrors. Looking further back in human history, there has always been a need to hide oneself and one's existence. This did not and does not always happen out of a mere desire for recognition, but also as a protective mechanism. There have always been groups of people who had to hide, who had to fly under the radar. They were inconvenient, dangerous to those in power, they didn't fit in. The penalties were often severe, ostracism being the least of all possibilities. One person who knew this all too well was Oscar Wilde. He said: «A mask tells us more than a face.»^[3] Wilde, who faced imprisonment in 19th-century Ireland because of his homosexuality, had to constantly hide behind masks – a similar fate befell the American author Sylvia Plath, who married only to belong, even though her love was for women. The latter committed suicide. She let her mask slip, and depression and anxiety drove her to her death. So a mask does not always offer protection; it can also drive the wearer to despair.

A key aspect of staying healthy despite illusions is therefore not to betray yourself. This is how Dunkelsucht's song explains it: *Solange du weisst, wer du wirklich bist / Was klug wäre, und was richtig ist / Ist es nie zu spät [...]* When I see certain posts on social media or encounter many situations in the real world, I ask myself: Does the person I am interacting with still know who they really are? At what point is it too late? There have also been moments in my life when I was certain that I had lost my true self. I believe that everyone experiences such moments in their lives. But just as we renew our cells throughout our lives, we can also renew our image. The play encourages us to do just that: *[D]enk dein Leben neu*. We just mustn't miss the moment when we are still able to listen to our inner voice and find our true selves.

However, this is not so easy, because we often lose ourselves in the reflections of our fellow human beings and do not listen deeply enough to ourselves. We follow the flow of the masses and hope to stand out only in certain situations. It does not matter whether we belong to a group that is already widely accepted or are part of an underground movement whose sharpest weapons are its spirit and its otherness. Within our group, we will disappear, become part of a whole. But as long

as our identification with this group is also an identification with ourselves, we do not remain completely alien to ourselves. We can remove the mask from time to time, at least partially. In the right environment, we will then also encounter acceptance, no matter how much we may have feared the reaction to our supposed grimaces.

After a long day in the spotlight, I return home knowing that I don't need to hide from those at home. They know what I call my true self. As I walk past, I take off my mask and leave it in the cloakroom. The last light of the day illuminates the corridor and I call out, 'I'm home.'

^[1] If not stated otherwise, the following quotes are taken from: Dunkelsucht: «Trugbild». In: Alou Productions: *Unabated* (2025).

^[2] A song which is closely related to the song by Dunkelsucht, is: «(Das ist nicht) Meine Welt» by Oberer Totpunkt (published 2014 in the LP *Desiderat*). The conclusion there is with less of a compromise than by «Trugbild»: «Ich mache diese Maskerade nicht mehr mit,/lasse mich nicht über Erwartungshaltungen kontrollieren.» (I won't take this masquerade any more,/I will not be controlled by expectations.)

^[3] quoted according to [Medium.com](https://medium.com) [29.12.2025]