

We See You

For those who have no energy left for theories

The foundation of all governance is the body, the breath, the safety of a place to sleep.

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The Clouded Mirror · Reader's Guide

<https://bjorknennethholmstrom.org/syntheses/we-see-you>

This is not a paper about governance. This is a paper about you.

You who are tired. You who are hungry. You who are lying awake at night, listening to sounds outside the door, wondering if it is safe. You who are holding a child who is sick and cannot find a doctor. You who are old and alone, and no one has touched your hand in weeks. You who are working three jobs and still cannot pay the rent. You who are fleeing from bombs, or drought, or the men with guns who came at night. You who are reading this in a quiet moment between crises, or listening to someone read it to you because your eyes are too tired to focus, or hearing it in translation because the language of power is not your language.

This paper is for you.

It is not here to explain anything. It is not here to convince you of anything. It is here to say one thing, and to say it as simply as it can be said.

We see you.

The people who write papers about governance, who design institutions, who sit in meetings and discuss indicators and metrics and reform programmes—they do not always see you. Their dashboards track numbers, not faces. Their models predict averages, not the specific texture of your exhaustion, the particular ache in your back at the end of a shift, the exact weight of the worry you carry about your children's future. Their observation channels are too narrow to perceive you. That is not your fault. It is a failure of the architecture. And it is the failure that the work described in these papers is trying to correct.

But you did not come here for a theory of governance failure. You came here, if you came here at all, because you are tired and you need something real. So here is what is real.

The work of governance should begin here. It should begin with you. It should begin with whether you have eaten today. Whether you have somewhere safe to sleep tonight. Whether your child has medicine. Whether you are in pain, and whether that pain can be eased. Whether you are lonely, and whether someone is coming to sit with you. Whether you are afraid, and whether the danger is real, and whether there is somewhere you can go where the danger cannot follow.

If governance does not begin here, it does not begin. Everything else—the policies, the institutions, the grand strategies, the civilisational visions—is built on the assumption that the foundation is secure. But for you, the foundation is not secure. The foundation is what you are struggling to maintain, every day, against forces that do not see you and do not seem to care. That is not acceptable. It is not acceptable as a matter of justice. It is not acceptable as a matter of basic decency. And it is not acceptable as a matter of governance. A system that cannot ensure the safety and nourishment of its most vulnerable members is a system that is failing at its most fundamental function. Everything else it claims to do is noise.

The people who built the framework described in these papers believe that governance should be able to see you. Not as a statistic. Not as a case. Not as a beneficiary of a programme. But as a human being, with a body that needs rest and food and care, with a heart that needs connection and safety and hope. They believe that the observation channels of our institutions must be widened to include the dimensions that matter most—and the first dimension, the foundation beneath all others, is the dimension of your immediate physical and emotional wellbeing. If the system cannot perceive that, it cannot perceive anything that matters.

They are working on this. The work is slow. The work is incomplete. The work is being resisted by powerful interests that benefit from the current narrowness of the observation channel. But the work is real, and it is being done in your name, even if you never hear about it. The protected experimental spaces they are trying to build—the municipal laboratories, the community health networks, the local food systems, the mutual aid organisations, the shelters and clinics and care collectives—are attempts to create places where the observation channel is short enough, and clear enough, to see you. Not in the aggregate. Not in the average. You. Specifically. In your actual life, with your actual needs, in the place where you actually are.

These fragments exist. They are not enough. They need to be connected, protected, and scaled. But they are real. And they are there, in some places, for some people. If you can find them, use them. If you cannot find them, ask for them. If no one is building them where you are, then the work of building them begins with the people who are there, who share your situation, who understand your needs because they share them. The first step of governance reform is not a policy paper. It is neighbours helping neighbours. It is the sharing of food, the offering of shelter, the tending of the sick, the protection of the vulnerable. This is the oldest governance architecture on Earth, and it is the one that has never been improved upon. It is what humans did before there were states, and it is what humans will do after the states have forgotten them. It is what you are probably already doing, in whatever small way you can, for the people around you.

That is governance. The rest is commentary.

So this paper is not an argument. It is an acknowledgment. You are not a problem to be solved. You are not a case to be managed. You are not a data point in a dashboard. You are a human being, with a body that matters, with needs that are real, with a life that has dignity regardless of what any system says about it. The fact that the system cannot see that is the system's failure, not yours. And the work of correcting that failure begins with the simple, radical, revolutionary act of seeing you—of recognising that your wellbeing is the foundation of all legitimate governance, and that any architecture that does not begin from that recognition is an architecture that will eventually collapse under the weight of its own blindness.

We see you. We are working on the things that need to be built so that the systems that govern our collective life can see you too. The work is not done. It may not be done in your lifetime. But it has begun. And it will continue, in the protected spaces where the mirror is clear enough to reflect your face, until the day when no one has to read a paper like this to be told that they are seen.

For now, rest if you can. Eat if there is food. Hold onto whoever is there to hold. The work continues. You are not forgotten. The foundation is you. And the foundation will not be abandoned.

This is the first and last paper of the Governance as Engineering series. All the others are footnotes to this one.