

The world as imagined by those who have never seen

posted the May 12, 2011 by Jean-Marc Meyrat

Since the operations performed by the English surgeon Cheselden in 1728 on people with congenital cataracts, giving sight to the blind no longer holds the biblical miracle but science - and the extraordinary advances that medicine has made in this area invite to be optimistic for the future. However, most of the birth-blind people who live today know that this progress will be of greatest benefit to future generations and that for the majority of them they will leave this world without having seen it. However, to believe some, there is nothing to grieve: "I never regret not to see. I see differently and then I have never seen with the eyes, it can not miss me." Says Sophie Massieu (36, journalist).

The blind man from birth "does not know what he is losing," literally speaking, so he has no reason to sigh after a state he has never known. It is not, therefore, in his case, on the mode of lamentation or lyrical regret, that the word "never" is to be understood, as may be the case with the late blind, who are long haunted by their recollections of Seeing ... No, for the blind-born, this "never" works like a lever, a rift where his imagination rushes: what can this visible world that everyone around him can look like? ? How to represent properly visual notions, such as colors, horizon, perspective? All these questions could fit into one: how to conceive what sight is without seeing? Question that has its reciprocal for the seer: how to represent what it is not to see for anyone who has always seen? This is a challenge to the imagination, a challenge that is all the more difficult to meet, as the references to which each one will spontaneously tend to refer will be drawn from a perceptual universe radically different from the one we seek to represent, and that they are very likely to mislead us. It is not said that this perceptual gap can be crossed by the imagination - but like any ditch, this one calls gateways: analogies drawn from the other senses or from the language, efforts to get away from its automatism of thought - what Christine Cloux, blind by birth, calls a form of "mental flexibility" ... The stake, if it is vital for the blind, may seem minimal for the seer: what is it worth to imagine the world with one less meaning? It would be wrong to neglect the interest of such an intellectual approach, because to question the perception of the world of a blind man by birth is to put ours in perspective, to apprehend the relative nature, to measure how much our mental representations depend on our sensitive dispositions - finally, it is perhaps the means to become aware of the limits of our point of view and, for the time of an effort of imagination, to exceed them ...

Imagine the world as a child

The young seeing child believes that things cease to exist as soon as they leave his field of vision: a very brief moment, it is said, separates the time when he still believes his absent mother and the one where he already believes her dead . Imagine what it is for the blind child by birth ... "I was afraid to throw a balloon, because I thought it was going to disappear. My world stopped at a meter, beyond, for me, it was emptiness. Explains Natacha de Montmollin (38, computer scientist). How can we be sure that objects continue to exist when they are out of reach, especially when we do not find them where we left them? How to trust such a fickle world? A blind child by birth will necessarily need more time than a seeing child to find its bearings and to understand the world around it.

In the first years of his life, the blind man by birth is not aware of his disability ... In fact, if he did not live in a society of seers, he would spend his whole life without suspecting the existence of the world. visible. In the story of HG Wells, the land of the blind, the hero, seeing the landfall in a community of the blind who lives inward-looking, discovers to its cost that it treats those who claim to be endowed with the sight not as gods or kings, but as lunatics, as we treat those who claim to see angels - to put it another way: to the realm of the blind by birth, the one-eyed ones would be interned. It is only because he lives in a society organized by and for seers that the blind finally contracts, over time, the feeling of his difference. This discovery can be made in different ways: the parents can, when they consider their child mature enough, explain to him his infirmity; the child can also discover it by himself, in contact with other children. "It was never explained to me that I was blind, I became aware of it over time, explains Sophie Massieu. When I played hide and seek with other children, I did not understand why I was always the first flush ... Of course, I was always hidden under a table, with nothing around to protect me, I jumped a little in the eyes ... "

The young blind man by birth thus ends up understanding that there is a facet of the reality that others perceive but which remains inaccessible to him. At first, this "face of the world" must seem to him at least abstract and difficult to conceive. To get a glimpse of the imaginative effort that this requires, the seer should attempt to represent a fourth dimension of space that would encompass him without his being aware of it ...

It is inevitable that the blind man by birth will begin to make certain things an inaccurate representation: these "foolishnesses of the imagination" are indispensable steps in the elaboration of intelligence, whether

blind or not. In addition, they can have their poetry. A Russian psychologist (quoted by Pierre Villey in his book *The World of the Blind*) mentions the example of a young blind man by birth who represented absolutely all objects as moving, even the most motionless: "for him the stones jump colors play and laugh, trees fight, moan, cry. This representation may lead to smile, but after all, science and philosophy have not taught us that the immobility of the world was only an illusion of perception, resulting from the incompleteness of our point of view ? As such, the boy's imagination seemed to have spared him certain illusions that mankind had so much trouble getting rid of: for example, although he knew nothing of the movement of celestial bodies, it is said that when The question was asked: "Do the sun and the moon move? He answered in the affirmative, without any hesitation.

The blind man by birth can represent most objects by palpating them. When these are too big, models or reproductions can replace them. "I knew how the Eiffel Tower was screwed by having a key ring in my hands ..." recalls Sophie Massieu. As long as the object remains out of reach, out of the field of its experience, it is not uncommon for the blind person to make a fanciful image based on the sound of the word or associations of ideas. This defect is not peculiar to the blind, and "in each one, the imagination precedes the action of the senses", to use the expression of Pierre Villey. But this defect can have much more unfortunate consequences for the blind by birth, because if he is satisfied with these inaccurate representations and does not seek to correct them, he may misunderstand the world around him and isolate himself in a whimsical realm built according to the vagaries of his imagination. The blind man has no choice: he must strive to represent the world as faithfully as possible, otherwise he will live as a foreigner ...

Imagine the individuals

Very soon, the blind will find expedients to represent the world around him, starting with the people he meets. Their voice, to begin with, is for him a mine of valuable information: the blind person pays as much attention to what his interlocutor says as to the way he says it. The voice reveals a character, the tone a mood, the accent an origin ... "We can say what we want, but our voice speaks of us without our knowledge. Explains Christine Cloux (36, computer scientist). Some blind people consider that it is much more difficult to disguise the expressions of his voice than those of his face, and for them, it is the voice which is the mirror of the soul: "A blind world would have its Lavater [author of "The Art of Knowing Men by Physiognomy"]. A phonognomy would take place there

of our physiognomy. Pierre Villey writes in *The World of the Blind*. But to rely too much on the revealing character of a voice, the blind man sometimes exposes himself to cruel disillusionment ... Villey quotes the case of a young blind person who had fallen for an actress for the charm of his voice: "Having learned from the unsavory deportations of her idol, she cries in a naive outburst of despair:" If such a voice is capable of lying, what can we then trust? "

Many other clues can inform the blind man about his interlocutor: a handshake speaks volumes (Sophie Massieu claims to hate "handshakes not frank, soft ...", which she imagines comparable to a glance); the sound of an individual's footsteps can provide information on his corpulence and gait; the smells he gives can give valuable information about his way of life - as many clues that the seer often neglects, focusing mainly on the information that his sight provides him. As for the physical appearance in itself, the insight of the blind reaches here its limits: "There are things we know by touch but others escape us: we have the shape of the face, but we do not have the fineness of the features, explains Sophie Massieu. You can always ask girlfriends "hey, I like it, what does it look like?" Well, you have to have good girlfriends ... "Some blind people by birth are likely to be influenced by the tastes of the showy majority: Jane Hervé mentions the preference of a blind man for blue-eyed blondes: "I think blondes are beautiful. Maybe it's rare ... " "In general, I think that the way we imagine the things we can not perceive is very much due to the way we are told about it, explains Sophie Massieu. If the person who describes it is beautiful, you will find it beautiful, if it looks ugly, you will find it ugly ... ". From this point of view, the blind depends - literally - on the eyes of others: "My friends and my family verbalize a lot what they see, so they are sort of my talking mirror ..." says Christine Cloux.

Imagine the space

For a long time it was believed that extension was a concept impossible for the blind to conceive. Platner, a philosopher-doctor of the last century, had even come to the conclusion that, for the blind-born, time was to be used as space: "Distance and proximity mean for him only the time more or less, the more or less large number of intermediaries he needs to switch from one tactile sensation to another. ". This theory is very poetic - one starts to imagine, in a world of the blind-born, maps in relief where the place devolved to each territory would not be proportional to its real dimensions but to its accessibility, to the necessary time for the In fact, however, this theory tells us more about how the seers ima-

gine the world of the blind than the opposite. For if we must believe the main stakeholders, they have no particular difficulty in imagining space.

"Everything is in 3D in my head, explains Christine Cloux. If I'm at home, I know exactly how my apartment is composed: I can describe the lower floor without going, as if I had a model. Really a model, not a drawing or a photo. Likewise for the places I know or explore: railway stations, neighborhoods in the city, etc. The more I know, the more precise. The more I explore, the more I enlarge my models and I add details. The representation of the birth-blind space is well done in the form of spatial images, but these are not images-images: we should rather speak of image-forms, not visual, where the blind projects occasional tactile impressions. To describe this perception, Jane Hervé uses an expressive comparison: "the successive and multiple sensations constitute an impressionistic canvas - a screen of a thousand touches and sensations - suggesting the felt form, like the golden spots sparkling in the sea composing the Impression, sun in front of Claude Monet. "

At the time of the Enlightenment, some commentators, amazed by the powers of deduction of the blind, imagined that they were able to see with the tips of their fingers (they were deceived, it must be said, by some blind people who claimed to be able to recognize the colors of a garment simply by touching the fabric). But the blind by birth themselves are not immune to such misunderstandings: Jane Hervé cites the case of an 18-year-old girl - quite clever by the way - who thought the eyes of the seers could get around Obstacles - just like the hand can fully enclose a small object to know the shape. She also thought that the seers could see from front to back, that they were endowed with a panoramic vision: "She imagined the seers as Janus bifaces, masters of the eyes in all directions. ". The blind man of the Puisseaux, of whom Diderot speaks in his Letter on the Blind, not knowing what the word mirror meant, imagined a machine which elevates man out of himself. Each one imagines the perceptual world of the other from his own perceptive universe: the seer believes that the blind person sees with the fingers, the blind man that the seer feels with the eyes. As in the Hindu parable where individuals plunged into darkness try to deduce the shape of an elephant by relying solely on the part of the body they touched (so-and-so who touched the trunk claims that the elephant has the shape of a water pipe, another that touched the ear lends it the shape of a fan ...) - similarly human beings imagine a radical unknown from what they know, even though these landmarks prove unfit to represent it.

Among the spatial notions that are particularly difficult for the blind to grasp, there is the perspective - the fact that the apparent size of an ob-

ject decreases proportionally to its remoteness for the perceiving subject. "In theory I understand what the perspective is, but from there to achieving a drawing or to understand one is something else - it's also the only bad note I had in geometry says Christine Cloux. For example, I understand that two rails far end up forming only one line. But this is only an illusion, because in reality there are always two rails, and in my head too. Two rails, even very far, remain two rails, otherwise the train is going to have trouble to pass ... "Noëlle Roy, curator of the museum Valentin Haüy, remembers an elderly blind woman who, with her fingers touching a reproduction at the bottom -relief of the painting Angelus de Millet, was surprised that the two peasants in the foreground are taller than the bell tower whose silhouette is outlined on the horizon. When it was explained to him that it was under the laws of perspective, the characters in the foreground and the steeple far away in the depth of field, the lady was surprised that it was never explained to him that ... wondering how this lady would have reacted if, recovering the use of sight after a surgical operation, she had seen the tiny figure of an individual in the distance: would she have thought that this was her real size and that this individual, approaching her, would not be greater for all that? Jane Hervé quotes the testimony of a 62-year-old blind man who regained her sight following an operation: "Everything was distorted, there was no longer a straight line, everything was concave ... The walls imprisoned me, the roofs of houses seemed to collapse as after a bombing. What I saw oval, I felt round with my hands. What I could see from a distance, I felt it on me. I had permanent vertigo. One can imagine the nightmare of a perception of the world where vision and tactile sensation do not match, where the senses send signals to the brain that are impossible to reconcile ... Others blinded by birth, having recovered the use of the sight after an operation, seemed to have the impression that the objects touched their eyes: they needed several days to grasp the distance and several weeks to learn to evaluate it correctly. This reminds us that our three-dimensional vision of the world is not innate, that it results in learning and that there is a considerable amount of intellectual construction.

Imagine the colors

The thorny question of colors offers another example of the "perceptual gap" separating sighted and blinded by birth. The seers often imagine that it is enough for them to close their eyes to represent the perception of a blind person. In reality, it is not because we close our eyes that our eyes stop seeing: the black that appears to us is nothing but the color of our closed eyelids. It is quite different for most of the blind, and even

more so for the blind by birth. As it would be difficult for us to explain their perception of the world, as it is obvious to them, it is best to turn to someone who has seen before they do not see and who therefore has a point of comparison. Jean-Marc Meyrat, who became blind at the age of 8, recounts his passage from the world of the seers to that of the blind in these terms: "It was done very gradually. This almost impalpable slip materialized by moving my chair closer and closer to the TV screen. Towards the end of the process, I entered a kind of gray area that gradually darkened to turn black before disappearing. Then nothing. The persistence of the black color, sometimes interrupted by dazzling, can last more or less long. This is especially true if the blindness intervened brutally. After, nothing, I can not say better: nothing. This poses a serious problem for those who are fascinated by darkness and that the notion of nothing frightens. " It is the traditional image of the blind man wandering in the darkness that is here beaten down ... Some late blind people regret not having even the perception of the black: thus, the writer Jorge Luis Borges, become blind at During his life, he said that he missed black, especially when going to sleep, he who had become accustomed to falling asleep in the most complete darkness ...

What is it to see nothing? In reality, it is as difficult for a blind man to represent the colors as for a seer to imagine a perception absolutely devoid of colors, where one does not even find black and white, nor any intermediate shade: as much to try to imagine a desert without soil or sky, or that famous knife of which Lichtenberg speaks, without blade and which lacks the handle. "People imagine things compared to what they know, says Christine Cloux. We who hear, we mistakenly imagine that the deaf by birth are immersed in silence. Now, to know the silence we must know the noise, which is our case but not that of the deaf, who know no more noise than its absence. What they know is a world deprived of these notions. "

These considerations nevertheless pose several logical problems: how can a blind person imagine the spatial image of an object, considering that he does not even have two different colors at his disposal to distinguish the object from the bottom? ? It would suffice, however, to recall certain images that come to us in dreams or in thought: for example, we see the image of a woman, but we are unable to say what is the exact color or shape of her dress. The mental image of the seer rarely has the precision of a photographic image ... These floating colors, these uncertain forms, can undoubtedly give us a glimpse of the non-visual images of the blind.

If the colors are inaccessible to the senses of the blind, this does not

prevent him from trying to represent them. "It does not even prevent to have preferences, notes Sophie Massieu. I dress according to what I imagine of the color in question. For example, I never wear yellow. Go find out what he did to me poor yellow ... " "I created myself mental representations of colors, just as I imagine ideas or concepts that do not show, like an atom for example ..." explains Christine Cloux. But where do these mental representations come from exactly? For the most part, comments from the seers: "One day a girlfriend came up to me, exclaiming:" Wow! Red! That's fine with you! "Others have confirmed and since then I have been buying red more often. "Says Christine. Sometimes, the color can evoke to the blind of birth a precise memory: Sophie Massieu associates the blue Majorelle to an afternoon spent in the Majorelle garden in Marrakech. Some blind people will associate black with sadness if they wore black during a funeral, the white with gaiety, since they know that it is the color of brides and the communicants ... The color deposits its image in emotional memory and not in sensory memory; the word is imbued with emotion, like a blotter."It makes the feeling thicker. Explains Sophie.

In this eminently subjective field, "sensory shifts" are legion. It often happens that the blind of birth gives to the colors the tactile properties of the objects which are commonly associated with them: for example, if, by wallowing in the turf, the blind man has appreciated the softness and the softness, he will now attribute to the green its properties; in the same way, the red burns since it is the fire, the white is cold like the snow ... The blind man of birth never hesitates to draw on terms borrowed from the other senses to describe the image that he makes of colors. Christine Cloux will tell you that the white seems to him "very airy, light, like ice, very pure, perhaps sometimes too much", whereas black seems to him on the contrary "almost bulky, stuffy". In this little game, language is for the blind a breeding ground of metaphors and valuable verbal associations: do not they say a flashy glare, an aggressive or insolent hue, a bland pink? Do not writers and poets speak of "the depths of darkness", of "streams of light"? The tactile memory of the blind man is then able to provide him with landmarks, however abstract they may be. When she reads or hears the words "a dark forest", Christine Cloux imagines "that the forest is very dense, that it is chilly, even frankly cold because the sun does not pass ..." The radiation of the heat gives a very clear idea to the blind of what may be the radiation of light (we speak of a soft and penetrating light ...).

Sometimes the blind person's image of a color is simply based on the word that designates it. "Child, the yellow evoked me a clown playing the

trumpet, because I found the word fun and I knew it's a cheerful color, even screaming, says Christine Cloux. It's yellow, yellow, gelb ... or even giallo. These sounds participate in my representation of this color. ". In doing so, the blind behaves in a sort of "Cratylion" - the name of Cratyle, this interlocutor of Socrates who professed that the sound of words could tell us about the very nature of what they designate. A seer, however, knows that it is risky to try to establish a link between the name of a color and the color itself ... And yet, do not we act in a similar way when we imagine a city or a country we have never been to and do not know about, based on the sound of his name? Do not names such as Constantinople, Byzantium or Marrakesh already carry a stream of abstract images that are considerable only by their auditory properties, independently of the precise visual images that are attached to them?

Most of the blind of birth do not hesitate to draw on the auditory impressions to represent the colors: "I represent to myself the spectrum of the various colors a little like the scale of the sounds - the scale of the colors is simply bigger and more complex to imagine. Says Christine Cloux. The comparison is not foolish: colors and sounds have in common to be defined by a certain frequency (height for the sound, tint for the color), a certain purity (timbre for the sound, saturation for the color), some intensity (strength for sound, value or brightness for color) ... This may explain the frequent verbal associations between hearing and sight in everyday language: do not we speak of a loud red, of a range of colors, the tone of a fabric, a white voice? For Christine Cloux, if the colors emitted sound, "yellow, orange and red would break our ears while the blue for example would make a noise as strong but less strong, with green. "

This belief that there may be a direct correspondence between auditory sensation and visual sensation is not peculiar to the blind; it has long haunted the work of Symbolists and Romantics, and artists in general. Synesthesies of Baudelaire ("the perfumes, the colors and the sounds answer each other" in the poem *Correspondances*), to Rimbaud seeking to assign a color to each vowel ("A black, E white, I red" ...), or to this very serious concordance table between vowels, colors and instruments that tried to establish René Ghil, a disciple of Mallarmé, or to the visual artist Nicolas Schöffer who put sounds in color ... Although one feels that it enters of poetic reverie in this belief, one can not help imagining that, if the various sensory stimuli were only the different dialects of the same language, all sorts of translations would become possible ... s of the translator colors / sounds that would translate a painting of Van Gogh symphony!

Imagine art

The only thing that the blind of birth know about painters is what they have been kind enough to tell them - but language is obviously incapable of giving an account of what makes the specificity of this art. Here again, the blind must find analogies where he can: Christine Cloux imagines Impressionist painting on the basis of musical and literary impressionism, Cubist painting by thinking of Gertrude Stein's style - she imagines the characters painted by Picasso as "Bodies which one would" cut "the various parts to reconstruct them anyhow. But immediately adds, "I do not like disorder, it does not speak to me. ". When asked what he thinks about a work like Malevich's *White Square on a White Background*, it seems to him that "it must be beautiful, almost intangible and yet ... like a doorway." Natacha de Montmollin is more skeptical: "I do not see the interest. ". The painting is indifferent - Escher is the only draftsman she has forged a precise image: "his technique intrigues me". Strange, if you consider that Escher's drawings are based mostly on optical illusions, faked perspectives that, in essence, can only deceive a seer ...

What relationship do the blind of birth maintain with an art like poetry? Sophie Massieu admits that she is not very sensitive to it. "I do not know if it comes from my character or my blindness ... Maybe there is a part of the image that escapes me ..." Christine Cloux, for her part, does not consider that blindness is a hindrance to appreciate a poem: according to her, poetic images make as much - if not more - appeal to emotional memory than to sensory memory. "Maybe sometimes I see a metaphor a bit different than anyone else, but I think it's the case for all of us. We understand style figures with our world of reference. "

The relationship to the art of some people who are born blind sometimes seems to have a vital need: "It's a very rich experience that I can not do without, explains Christine Cloux. I may need art more than I do not have images "outside of me". If the blind man by birth demands more from art than the common sight, it is perhaps because he expects him to restore to him the beauties of nature, which blindness has deprived him of. Oscar Wilde, to explain to what extent the work of an artist could rub off on our vision of the world, said that it is not art that imitates nature but nature that imitates art. This sentence has particular relevance in the case of the born-blind, because everything he reads about nature, in poems or novels, intimately mixes in his imagination with the representation he it is in everyday life - and this representation probably has more to do with an artistic transfiguration, infinitely subjective, than with, for example, a rather fuzzy photographic reproduction ...

Imagine nature

In a general way, nature - at least its visible side - is for the blind of birth an inexhaustible source of curiosity. Certain phenomena to which the seers are accustomed remain for him a mystery - in particular the most unsubstantial, those he can not know by touch. "A gas ... we may not see it. On the other hand we see the steam, which is a bit strange since the water is transparent, and yet you still see it ... I understand it in theory but it's still weird. Says Christine Cloux. Transparency is one of the hardest concepts to understand when we do not know what visual opacity is - as evidenced by the fascination exercised by the fish on this young blind by birth, interviewed by Sophie Calle (in the catalog of the exhibition *Have you seen me?* "It is their evolution in the water that pleases me, the idea that they are attached to nothing. Sometimes, I take myself to stand for whole minutes in front of an aquarium, standing like a fool. ". Another (always quoted by Sophie Calle) tries to represent the shimmers of the sea: "It has been explained to me that it is blue, green, that the reflections with the sun hurt the eyes. It must be painful to watch. "

Some reproductions can give the blind man from birth a rough idea of certain insubstantial phenomena. A woman (interviewed by Jane Hervé) recalls a bas-relief from the Middle Ages: "He represented fire, with pointed flames like swords. Stone flames. I was dazzled. Streaks in all directions, ribs on a side of rock. I had no idea how to represent a flame. I did not know that we could touch fire. ". The blind of birth are none the less the first to recognize the insufficiency of these palliatives, which sometimes induce them to be more mistaken than they really tell them. "The stars, we've all drawn, so it encroaches on the imagination, says Christine Cloux. Except that real stars must have many other forms ... "

The difficulty of representing a properly visual phenomenon, when it does not stop a blind man, may instead spur one's curiosity. It seems that for some of them, as for many clairvoyants, the less accessible they are, the more it fascinates them. A notion like the horizon, for example, leaves Christine Cloux dreamy: "The horizon is where the view can not go further. This is the meaning of the phrase "as far as the eye can see", literally. It's a limit, poetic for me ... Instinctively it evokes the sea, the sun, the oceans. Space, almost infinity, freedom, escape. ". The sight of the plains stretching as far as the eye can see, mountains whose peaks are lost in the clouds or valleys falling into vertiginous gulfs, remains the prerogative of sight, but certain auditory impressions can give powerful equivalent to the blind. Facing the sea, the sound of the wave that

comes from far allows him to compose, from finite spatial images, "an indefinite vision that can give him the sensation of the infinite" (Pierre Villey). "On a shore, I concentrate on the sound of the waves to be dizzy, and I give myself entirely to the present moment." Says Sophie Massieu. In the mountains, light noises transported at great distances, whose echo reverberates for long seconds, broaden the "horizon" of the blind in all directions at once. The blind man is also freed from certain altitude-related hazards: "I do not think I can be dizzy, as it seems to me that this is a phenomenon related to the sight." Says Daniel Baud (66, retired). Christine Cloux even likes "the feeling of emptiness on the edge of a cliff.". Some blind people from birth especially like to confront the immensity of the great spaces: "The infinite spaces, I went in the desert just to immerse myself in it ..." affirms Sophie Massieu.

Without wishing to generalize excessively, it seems that the infinite is, for the blind of birth, less a source of fear than of curiosity. When, after having read Pascal's sentence, "The eternal silence of infinite spaces terrifies me. I ask them which of these terms inspires them the greatest fear, none of which mentions the infinite. For Sophie Massieu, it is eternity: "To say that nothing will change during a lifetime, it does not correspond at all to my character". For Daniel Baud, it is the eternal silence - and for good reason, an absolute silence would be, for the blind, like a total darkness for a seer. "Losing any landmark - more space-time, more sound, more space ... - actually it's scary, admits Christine Cloux. We need a place to be anchored, a point of reference to be able to say, "I'm here, I'm alive." "But his faith tempers his fears:" It's scary for us now, But when we will be eternal, we will no longer need these physical notions. "

The color of "never"

We said above that the blind man by birth could not regret the sight since it was a state he had never known ... But do they never manage to sigh after these wonders of nature which they hear about around them, thinking of those beauties they have never seen, and for the majority of them, will never see? Do not these thoughts color this "never" with a hint of bitterness? "I regret the sight as we can envy the gift of divination or the wings of the eagle," says a blind man born by Pierre Villey. When Christine Cloux imagines clairvoyant, she remains pensive: "Maybe instead of writing I would do watercolors ... and again, I think no. ". The view seems to inspire the blind of birth only vain dreams or abstract desires - even sometimes, a certain mistrust: "So many people who see are in fact unhappy, remark Christine Cloux. For sure, sight brings nei-

ther happiness nor anything. Or maybe it brings too much and you are overwhelmed by everything you have to watch. To believe it, blindness can even sometimes prove to be a beneficial filter: "I can avoid representing to myself what I do not want, like many images that you undergo to information: catastrophes, deaths ... I understand them, I integrate them, it touches me, but I do not see them precisely in my head. The emotional impact is more than enough and I am not a masochist. "

Ultimately, the relationship that the blind man has with sight is no doubt similar to that which we all have with respect to the unknown: a mixture of fear and desire, of attraction and distrust, as the testimony of Christine Cloux testifies, to whom we will leave the final word: "Yes, I sometimes regret not to see. I will never see the faces of people I love, flowers, stars, nature, little children, people who smile at me, colors, planets ... And if I could see, just one day, just one time, it would be so much fun for my family! It would be a real pleasure for them, I think, much more than for me, since I'm happy with my life anyway. But as I am curious, I would like to see everything, even if I do not understand anything: clouds, stars, people. I would like to see faces change when they feel emotions. I would like to look in a mirror to see what effect it is to be "face to oneself" literally. But if I really could, I think it would make me dizzy. It's because I know it's not going to happen that I think it might be fine. But see all the time ... not sure. It would be necessary to learn to see, then to look at, then to manage. And who can teach me how? "

THANKS

I want to thank the blind of birth who agreed to answer my questions: Christine Cloux, Sophie Massieu, Natasha Montmollin, Daniel Baud; as well as the blind people who helped me: Jean-Marc Meyrat, Aurélie Davin; Finally, I would also like to thank Noëlle Roy, curator of the Valentin Haüy museum and head of the Valentin Haüy heritage library, for his advice and kindness.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The world of the blind, by Pierre Villey

How blind people see the world, by Jane Hervé

Did you see me?, Catalog of Sophie Calle's exhibition