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"Blindness Gain" as "Worldmaking": audio description as a new "partage du sensible"

Marion Chottin and Hannah Thompson

Abstract:

Despite their attempts to improve access to art for disabled people, many French museums and galleries unwittingly perpetuate the hierarchical social structures that marginalise disabled people in favour of their non-disabled peers. This article explores how audio description co-created by a mixed group of blind, partially blind and non-blind participants offers a novel way of rethinking access accommodations in museums. Rather than perpetuating the traditional prioritisation of sight, our work offers a radically different "partage du sensible" (Rancière), which leads to a more inclusive and celebratory kind of "worldmaking."

Introduction

In this article we use our experiences of co-creating creative audio descriptions at the *Musée du quai Branly* in Paris to suggest that the worldmaking practices of challenge, collaboration, action, and dialogue offer a means to call into question the traditional ways of accessing museum and gallery content which still prevail in (French) society.[1] We define "disability's worldmaking" in the museum or art gallery as a two-part process. First, we challenge the "givenness" of the hierarchies, relationships and assumptions which govern visitor experience in the museum. Second, we offer an alternative model of visitor engagement where active and dialogic co-creation provide an inclusive alternative to ocularcentric museum experiences. Together, these acts of worldmaking promise an alternative mode of being in the museum which suggests a new politics of access. By going beyond current understandings of "inclusion," our project does not limit itself to giving disabled people a museum experience analogous to that of non-disabled people. Instead, it explores and celebrates alternative modes of engaging with art which do more than merely

echo normative museum experiences and which, more broadly, open up a new way of making society.

Our definition of worldmaking is a counterpoint to Jacques Rancière's concept of "le partage du sensible" and is informed by the concept of “blindness gain.” In Rancière's words, *le partage du sensible* is “ce système d’évidences sensibles qui donne à voir en même temps l’existence d’un commun et les découpages qui y définissent les places et les parts respectives.”[2] Elsewhere, he elaborates on this definition, describing it as “la façon dont les formes d'inclusion et d'exclusion qui définissent la participation à une vie commune sont d'abord configurées au sein même de l'expérience sensible de la vie.”[3] In other words, according to Rancière, the assignment of a place to each person in society is manifested through the sensory experience itself, and, for him, particularly in a division between visibility and invisibility; audibility and inaudibility: those who participate in public life are visible and audible, whilst those who do not are invisible and inaudible (kept hidden and silent within the private sphere). Given that, for Rancière, the realm of art is a privileged place of sensory experience, it is therefore also a privileged place for *le partage du sensible*, which expresses who has a place in society and who does not. We argue that, nowadays, it is in the museum or art gallery that the dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion are most starkly played out. But Rancière does not include disabled people among the categories of people – like women - who, according to him, are excluded from society by the very fact of their invisibility and inaudibility. Neither does he discuss how painting, an art considered supremely visual, produces invisibility, that is, the absence of blind or partially blind people from museums, nor does he consider how the other senses might play a role in reducing blind people’s exclusion from art and society. The reasons for these various silences are obvious: by ignoring the domain of disability, Rancière does not perceive its invisibility, and hence the

exclusion of disabled people; he thinks of *le partage du sensible* only in terms of visibility and invisibility, without thinking of moving beyond the presumed primacy of sight.

In our work, we ask how people who are blind or partially blind gain access to the politically and culturally charged space of the museum or art gallery, so that they too can participate in acts of multi-sensory worldmaking and thus end *le partage du sensible* between those who are invisible and inaudible because they are blind, and those who are visible and audible because they are sighted.

The theory of "blindness gain" is a re-imagining of the notion of "deaf gain" theorised by Bauman and Murray.[4] "Deaf gain" is a critical position and methodology showing how deaf people's "highly visual, spatial, and kinetic structures of thought and language may shed light into the blindspots of hearing ways of knowing" (239). Despite their ocularcentric use of the imagery of blindness in this definition, Bauman and Murray's approach encourages us to propose an analogous critical position for Blindness Studies. Rather than subscribing to dominant conceptions of blindness as a problem, deficit, or lack, we choose to position blindness as a solution, benefit, or "gain." In certain situations, blind and partially blind people can benefit from access to a multisensory way of being which celebrates inventiveness, imagination, and creativity. Our approach is also informed by Georgina Kleege's reflections on "gaining blindness" rather than "losing sight."[5] Like Kleege we celebrate the possibility that blindness is a valid and productive way of living in the world rather than a lack, deficit, or loss. Visual art seems at first to be the art form most resistant to the celebratory way of talking about blindness referred to as "blindness gain." Whilst it is easy to understand how a person's blindness does not prevent the appreciation of other arts, such as music or even film or theatre, the relationship between blind people and the visual arts is more complicated. In *Le Monde des aveugles* (1914), the blind thinker Pierre Villey declared that painting was necessarily inaccessible to people who could not see it.[6] In this

article we will demonstrate how the worldmaking practices of “blindness gain” allow blind and non-blind beholders to engage in an ekphrastic approach to art which challenges Villey’s assumption.[7]

The Ocularcentric *partage du sensible* in the Museum

Between the end of the eighteenth century, when the institutionalisation of art took place, and the end of the twentieth century, when new museum arrangements emerged, the Rancièrian division between “forms of inclusion and exclusion” allowing “participation” in "public life" was embodied in museums and art galleries: those deemed non-disabled had access, others did not.

In particular, almost without exception, museums are designed by and for sighted people and thus operate the systemic exclusion of blind and partially blind visitors and museum professionals. Museums and galleries position the sense of sight at their very heart by putting their artefacts on display for visitors to look at. Indeed, this privileging of the sense of sight is so pervasive and such a quintessential part of the museum experience, that it has remained largely unchallenged since modern museum culture developed in the nineteenth century. As Fiona Candlin points out: “Blind people are constituted as a marginalised group not because their blindness makes them so, but because the ocularcentricity of museums and galleries ensures that non-visual engagement with art and artefacts remains virtually inconceivable in all but the most innovative of institutions.”[8]

Around the turn of the last century, legislation such as the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the United Kingdom’s 1995 Disability Discrimination Act and the 2005 French Loi pour l'égalité des droits et des chances, la participation et la citoyenneté des personnes handicapées aimed to break with such a *partage du sensible*. As well as adding ramps for wheelchair users and induction loops for D/deaf people, museums and galleries have attempted to make their collections more inclusive of blind people by introducing a

range of accessible services such as tactile reproductions and live or recorded audio descriptions. It is this latter which will be the focus of what follows.

Although it remains restricted to a small number of works of art, access for blind people to art via audio description has developed significantly in France over the last few years: although their frequency varies considerably, most museums organise audio-described tours and some, such as the Louvre, the Grand Palais, the Centre Pompidou and the *Musées des Beaux-Arts* in Nantes and Lyon, even offer audio descriptions of certain works which can be downloaded via a mobile app.[9] Our partner, the *Musée du quai Branly* in Paris already offers blind visitors their own audio guide. But at the time of writing, this guide did not include any descriptions of paintings, only some of the museum's artefacts.[10]

Whilst the provision of audio descriptions undoubtedly improves some blind people's access to art, their existence is in danger of perpetuating the very inequalities of access which they were designed to remove. Firstly, there are several practical issues which prevent audio descriptions from being a truly inclusive tool. Audio descriptions of works of art, and audio-described visits to galleries, are usually created specifically for blind people and are often reserved for them. This special provision, which often needs to be sought out at an information desk or reserved in advance, positions blind people as a homogenous and marginalised group. In addition, when audio description is provided via a handheld device or document it is often cumbersome and difficult for a blind visitor to access without the help of a non-blind companion or guide. When it is given via a tour, there is the possibility that the historical and contextual information provided will prevent the blind visitor from having the kind of unmediated, aesthetic encounter with an artwork which non-blind visitors may take for granted. Secondly, these practical difficulties are compounded by the under-estimation of the audio description's aesthetic value. Where it exists, an audio description is almost always added after a work of art or exhibition has been completed. It is typically provided by an

access professional rather than a team including a curator or art historian and is therefore not taken seriously as an integrated part of an exhibition or an aesthetic response to the artwork. Where guidelines for the production of audio description exist, they generally recommend focusing on the more prosaic aspects of the painting such as its size, shape, title, artist, and medium and do not give suggestions about what the description itself might include. As Kleege points out, "guidelines for audio description seem founded on the most reductive notion of what blind people can conceptualize."[11]

Thus, far from breaking with *le partage du sensible* that has hitherto excluded blind people from museums and art galleries, these various access initiatives in fact seem to reinscribe this separation back into the museum: blind people now have their place in the museum, but this is a place that is separate from and inferior to that of non-blind visitors. After detailed analysis of her own experiences of audio descriptions and conversations with several blind artists, Kleege makes the following recommendations to counteract this new form of exclusion:

> […] abandon the pretext of objectivity. It is impossible and beside the point. The blind listener knows that there is some interpretation involved in even the most basic description, and often the systematic cataloguing of depicted objects is more information than anyone wants. Once the pretence of objectivity is abandoned, it could be replaced with descriptions of the artist's techniques, as well as the effect the work has on the viewer, recognising that this will differ from individual to individual. (121)

When considered as a whole, these aesthetic and practical limitations, together with Kleege's recommendations, suggest that museums and galleries do not appreciate the true value of audio description guides because they see them as a second-best solution for a minority audience: a way of "seeing" the works that will never reach the quality and intensity of the sense of sight. One explanation for this interpretation of the audio description is that

almost all audio descriptions are created by non-blind museum professionals, educators, or rehabilitation experts whose interest in art, education and cultural heritage leads to an ocularcentric over-investment in the power of sight and seeing. As Candlin shows: "[…] museums and galleries actively marginalise blind people. This exclusion is not an accidental oversight but a structural correlate to the way in which learning and pleasure are conceived of as visual" (107-8).

Traditional audio descriptions are created by non-blind people who, as evidenced by the largely visual dimension of most such descriptions, want above all to help blind people "see" by constructing an image of the artwork in their "mind's eye."[12] This non-blind obsession with helping blind people "see" can be understood as an extension of the charity and medical models of disability which conceive of blindness as a problem in need of a solution or a condition in need of a cure. Audio descriptions whose sole aim is to put a painting's visual elements into words therefore promote an over-investment in the visual. Rather than making museums more inclusive, the majority of contemporary audio descriptions thus in fact reinforce outdated notions of disability: instead of changing to meet the non-visual desires of blind people, museums and galleries ask blind and partially blind visitors to adapt to sighted modes of accessing art.

Whilst tactile devices, insofar as they are, for the most part, intended only for blind people (and sometimes also children), establish a *partage du sensible* in the sense of a "division of the senses into parts" (sight for non-blind people, touch for blind people), most audio devices give rise to a *partage du sensible* in the sense of a "gift of a part of the senses": Rancière's concept refers then, for us, to the obsession that non-blind people have with communicating to blind people the sense that they consider to be superior to all the others, that is, of course, the sense of sight.

Sally French's discussion of sighted people's obsessions with helping partially blind people to see with their residual vision offers one explanation for museums' and galleries' inability to move away from ocularcentric provision in their access policies and practices. In her account of her partially blind childhood, French describes how sighted adults would obsessively help her to access the aesthetically pleasing things (such as rainbows) that they enjoyed looking at:

> Some of my earliest memories are of anxious relatives trying to get me to see things. I did not understand why it was so important that I should do so, but was acutely aware of their intense anxiety if I could not. It was aesthetic things like rainbows that bothered them most. […] As far as I was concerned there was nothing there, but if I said as much their anxiety grew even more intense; […]. In the end, despite a near total lack of colour vision and a complete indifference to the rainbow's whereabouts, I would say I could see it. In that way I was able to release the mounting tension and escape to pursue more interesting tasks.[13]

French's description of this non-blind "anxiety" reveals a fundamental mismatch between what non-blind people think blind people should (want to) see, whether literally or figuratively, and how blind people in fact feel about looking at beautiful things. Whilst many blind people, particularly those who gain blindness in later life, are interested in knowing how a work of art looks to a non-blind person, many others share French's bafflement at this ocularcentric obsession with what things actually look like. Yet, no doubt because they are designed by non-blind people, museums' inclusion activities are almost entirely focused on finding ways to compensate for blind people's lack of sight. This means that non-visual sensory experiences in the museum are always secondary – they are almost never understood by curators or access professionals as a valid alternative to – much less as an improvement on – a non-blind visitor's primarily visual experience of the museum.

Thus far we have argued that traditional audio descriptions perpetuate the paradigm of the ocularcentric museum which in turn perpetuates the highly visual nature of Western society. Whilst apparently giving blind and partially blind people access to cultural heritage, these audio descriptions in fact ask blind and partially blind people to accept and emulate sighted ways of experiencing the world. In this case, a form of "inner vision," such as that which Jacques Lusseyran evokes in his texts.[14] This coercive kind of inclusion or *partage du sensible* in fact seeks to normalize blind people by positioning them as people whose lack of sight can be resolved by simply putting visual information into words. As such, these audio descriptions fail to take account of the "complete indifference" that blind people such as Sally French experience when asked to "see a rainbow".

Inclusive Audio Description: Towards a *partage du sensible* as "worldmaking"

Given the apparently inevitable visual content of audio descriptions, it is tempting to renounce attempts to create a properly inclusive museum experience and to simply accept Villey's assertion that visual art is necessarily inaccessible to blind people. However, our research suggests that when audio descriptions are co-created by a mixed group of blind and non-blind people, it is possible to move towards a more radical conception of audio description as a cultural genre in its own right, which does not seek to make people (whether blind or non-blind) see differently. These co-created audio descriptions provide all museum visitors with a properly inclusive appreciation of the multi-sensorial nature of the so-called "visual" arts" making it possible to break away from the kind of *partage du sensible* which discriminates against and renders inferior blind people, in favour of genuine "worldmaking."

In her call for inclusive access in the art gallery, Kleege demands a comprehensive re-thinking of access provision via "innovations that could elevate audio description to the status of a new literary and interpretive genre" (11). Indeed, recent research has decisively demonstrated that museums and galleries are wrong to neglect the transformative potential of

audio descriptions for all visitors. In their 2021 study, Hutchinson and Eardley demonstrate that non-blind visitors who listen to an audio descriptive guide intended for blind visitors have better long-term “attention, memorability and subsequent engagement” with the works they behold than those who either listen to a standard audio guide, or to no audio at all.[15] For Hutchinson and Eardley, this means that “the initial visual encounter with the photos was felt to be in some way insufficient when it was not supported by audio interpretation.” Although it is probable that the audio descriptions discussed by Hutchinson and Eardley include the kind of visual information which reinforces the importance of sight, their discovery nonetheless undermines museums’ and galleries’ insistence on the primacy and self-sufficiency of visual material for non-blind visitors. Like Jacques Derrida’s concept of the “supplement,” audio description both adds something to the original and always also becomes part of the work of art that it is thus completing by its very presence.[16] If we follow Derrida’s logic, we understand that the addition of AD to an artwork transforms the audio-described version of the work into the completed version by revealing that the pre-audio-described version is unfinished precisely because it lacks the audio description.[17]

Our research shows not only that audio description does not need to create images in the “mind’s eye” in order to be understood and enjoyed by blind people, but also, and importantly, that when blind people are included as active participants in the process of creating description, audio description gives rise to new ways of describing the "visual" arts which reinvigorate ekphrasis by expanding its boundaries. Above all, because our audio descriptions are not designed to help blind people “see” the artwork, they reject museums’ ocularcentric approaches and thus dismantle the binary hierarchy which continues to separate blind people from non-blind people. Instead, our audio descriptions are designed to help all museum visitors appreciate that far from being a purely “visual” art, painting is in fact a multi-sensorial aesthetic experience.[18]

This is what Diderot, a great master of ekphrasis, whose circle included many blind acquaintances, teaches us. In *Salon of 1763*, on the subject of Chardin's painting *Le Bocal d'olives* (1760), Diderot writes: “ [...] il n’y a qu’à prendre ces biscuits et les manger, cette bigarade l’ouvrir et la presser, ce verre de vin et le boire, ces fruits et les peler, ce pâté et y mettre le couteau.”[19] Whilst this text speaks of the talent with which Chardin can imitate nature to the point of creating the illusion of its presence, we read and feel all the sensations of which sight is ultimately only the medium: tactile sensations (the orange from which the juice is extracted, the fruit that is grasped), auditory sensations (the biscuits that break), olfactory sensations (the smell of all these dishes), and, of course, gustatory sensations. The reduction of painting to its visual art dimension is thus just another effect of ocularcentrism.

In the examples that follow, we show how our audio descriptions, from such a multi-sensorial conception of painting, enable a new kind of “worldmaking.” Not only do they give non-blind people the chance to rediscover the lost art of ekphrasis and thus experience more fulfilling aesthetic relationships with artworks, but also, and crucially, they invite and encourage us to describe and appreciate art in ways which are not traditionally accessed by sight alone.

One of the defining features of a non-blind person’s visit to an art gallery is their ability to stop on the threshold of a room or exhibition space and take in an ensemble of pictures from a distance before deciding which one(s) to contemplate in more detail. Traditional audio descriptions rarely take account of this aspect of the gallery visit and instead launch immediately into a detailed description, thus giving blind listeners no choice about which works to engage with. In an attempt to counteract this lack of freedom, we have created several "First Impressions" of contemporary indigenous Australian works. Mindful of the need to avoid the normalizing sighted gaze, we have instead privileged the partial blindness of

two members of our group by beginning our descriptive work with their impressions of the artworks.

This "First Impression" of *Barramundi Scales* (2012) by Lena Nyadbi was co-created by members of our group after an initial description by a partially blind participant:

> C'est un tableau plus haut que large, tout recouvert d'un petit motif blanc sur lequel joue la lumière, une myriade de mailles qui se répètent infiniment sur un fond noir. Cela donne l'illusion d'une matière qui semble moelleuse, accueillante, très souple. Cette toile ondule, comme si elle abritait quelque chose de vivant. De vivant et de fluide.[20]

Here we combine references to concepts familiar to blind people, such as the colour white and the mesh which might be that of a fishing net, with references to tangible senses like touch ("moelleuse"; "souple") and less tangible instincts ("accueillante"; "vivant").[21]

If a listener is intrigued by this first impression and wants to metaphorically approach the picture to experience it in more detail, we provide a longer description which combines sensory, kinesthetic, and creative description so that both blind and non-blind people experience the painting in a completely new, and multi-sensorial way.

In the tradition of Diderot's *Salons*, our sensory description uses the language of touch, smell, taste, hearing, and sight to create a description that speaks to our five key senses. In our description of *Rêve de la liane serpent* (n.d.) by Maggie Napangardi Watson, we used references to familiar smells, textures, and tastes such as *jaune miel*, *bleu lavande* and *rose bruyère* to express the multi-sensorial potential of the picture's colour scheme.[22] This description is also an example of creative description, which blurs the artist/beholder hierarchy by evoking an imagined creation: "Au moyen d'un pinceau imaginaire, plaçons, sur un fond rouge sombre, les formes qui se détachent le plus nettement.[…] Notre pinceau pointe par petites touches […]". The use of the first-person plural positions the listener as active

creator of the artwork whilst the use of verbs of movement such as "plaçons" reminds us that art is a process of interaction between body and canvas. In tests carried out in 2018, participants particularly enjoyed the way that this description of brush strokes led to a gradual cumulation of details. This corporeal element of artistic creation is further emphasized in our use of kinesthetic description, that is description that places the artist's creative processes at the centre and involves the mention of the body's relationship with the artwork. When we began our work on *Ninjinlki* (2006) by Sally Gabori, one of our partially blind participants stood in front of the work and described it to a blind participant. To convey a sense of the power and urgency of the brush strokes, the describer let her listener feel the sweep of her arm from one side of the canvas to the other, using her body to sketch the shape of the brush strokes, as if her movements were echoing the gestures that the artist might have made as she put paint onto canvas. In our co-creation of the finished description, we transformed these gestures into words: "Depuis le milieu du côté gauche du tableau, la peintre semble avoir effectué un grand mouvement circulaire vers la droite, fait d'une succession de coups de pinceaux."

This method is a completely new way of thinking about art: it translates the corporeal movements of visitors in the museum, and especially the genesis and multisensorial effects of the visual into language via the body. In so doing, it reminds us that the descriptive logic suggested by sight is not the only way to understand or appreciate a painting.

If we were to take this blind way of looking to its logical conclusion, we might go so far as to suggest that rather than looking at a painting whilst listening to a sensory, creative and/or kinesthetic description of it, non-blind beholders could even dispense with the sense of sight altogether. In our ocular-dependent world, it seems unlikely that sighted museum visitors will willingly relinquish their visual access to a painting. Yet when the *quai Branly* descriptions were tested with a pilot group of sighted volunteers without the visual

representations of the artworks, the group agreed that the descriptions offered a fulfilling and rewarding aesthetic experience in their own right, and that they did not want to see the painting after having experienced several inclusive, creative audio descriptions of it.[23] Although from a small sample group, this result allows us to tentatively suggest that our worldmaking methodology is capable of producing descriptions which are just as rewarding, aesthetically engaging and pleasing as visual engagement with a work of art.

Like Derrida, we invite beholders to “think of not seeing” because, according to him, every act of seeing also includes an act of not-seeing or unseeing within it.[24] For us, "to think of not seeing" means to put physical sight on hold in order to represent the painting being created little by little in a multisensorial imaginary. We thus defend the paradoxical possibility of anti-ocularcentric audio descriptions.

Conclusion

We started from the concept of *le partage du sensible* as understood by Rancière, as an opposition between the inclusion of some and the exclusion of others from public life, and indicated that from their inception, museums have, because of their inaccessibility to disabled people - first and foremost blind people - participated in such discrimination.

The accessibility measures that developed from the last years of the twentieth century onwards have worked towards the social inclusion of disabled people – especially blind people – who are now encouraged to enter museums. But these measures served only to renew *le partage du sensible* inside places dedicated to art: blind people are certainly invited to participate in the artistic life of society, but in a separate, limited, and diminished way. The cut-off point is no longer between the inside and outside of society: instead it is internal to society itself – blind people now have a place in society but this is separate from and inferior to that of sighted people. This marginalisation diminishes potential for worldmaking.

We then extended Rancière's concept, to emphasise that exclusion is not always played out in a break or separation: it also operates in sharing, understood in the sense of "giving a share of what one has." This is what audio descriptions do when they aim, expressly or otherwise, to give a share of sight, but only a share, to blind people: they become purely visual descriptions, intended to elicit "an inner vision" of painting, a pale reflection of visual perception.

Finally, we have endeavoured to defend another conception of audio description, which aims, on the contrary, to devisualize culture. This is the only way, in our opinion, to achieve genuine inclusion. In this framework, AD is not a device intended to compensate in any way for the absence of sight, but a cultural genre intended for all that is capable of reviving a definition of painting as a multisensory art, and, via the presence of the creative body, of apprehending it, in the manner of the artist, in its genesis.

Such a break with the traditional understanding of audio description amounts to a positive recharacterization of Rancière's concept whereby *le partage du sensible* becomes understood as a two-part sharing: on the one hand we have a mixing of the senses in which, instead of being separated, tactile, olfactory, auditory, and gustatory sensations are combined. On the other hand, we have a sharing of sense impressions between blind and non-blind people. It is in this sense that a sharing of senses becomes worldmaking.

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[1] Our research project "L'art aborigène au prisme de la cécité" is part of the French Agence nationale de la recherche (ANR) project "Inclusive Museum Guide" (IMG) (projet N° ANR-20-CE38-0007-03). Our project team is comprised of Marion Chottin, Patrick Crespel, Nadine Dutier, Catherine Grimaud, Maryse Jacob, Hamid Kohandel, Tatiana Lujic, Valerie Pasquet, Michelle Roux de Raspide, Célène Theillaumas and Hannah Thompson. We would like to

thank all the project participants for their time and contributions. However, the views expressed in this article are not necessarily shared by all.

[2] Jacques Rancière, *Le Partage du sensible. Esthétique et politique* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2000), 12.

[3] Jacques Rancière, dans Christine Palmiéri, "Compte rendu de [Jacques Rancière:"Le partage du sensible"] », *ETC*(59), 2002, 34.

[4] H-Dirksen L. Bauman and Joseph J. Murray, "Deaf Studies in the 21st Century: "Deaf-Gain" and the Future of Human Diversity", in Lennard J. Davis, ed., *The Disability Studies Reader* 4th ed. (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2013), 239-253.

[5] Georgina Kleege, "Blind Faith," *The Yale Review*, 98. 3 (2010), 61.

[6] Pierre Villey, *Le Monde des aveugles: essai de psychologie* (Paris : Flammarion, 1914), 265.

[7] We are using "ekphrasis" in the modern sense of description of an artwork rather than in the Classical sense of "hypotyposis" which refers to a vivid visual description of scenes or events and whose ocularcentrism we denounce.

[8] Fiona Candlin, "Blindness, Art and Exclusion in Museums and Galleries," *The International Journal of Art and Design Education*, 22.1 (2003), 101.

[9] For a survey of French museum accessibility provision, see Frédéric Reichhart et Aggée Lomo, "L'offre culturelle française à l'épreuve de la cécité" *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* 8.6 (2019) https://cjds.uwaterloo.ca/index.php/cjds/article/view/577/845

[10] The *Musée du quai Branly* has attracted much national and international criticism since it opened in 2006, and we remain alert to questions around its relationship with France's colonial history as well as its position on acquisition and repatriation. However, as Margaret Jolly argues, the museum's well-known "embrace of contemporary art from Indigenous Australia – an embrace much celebrated in the Australian media as a sign of both recognition of the Antipodes and a new French multiculturalism" has a less problematic status than some

of the museum's more Eurocentric approaches. See Margaret Jolly, "Becoming a 'New' Museum? Contesting Oceanic Visions at *Musée du Quai Branly*," *The Contemporary Pacific* 23.1 (2011), 118. Our working group is currently involved in the preparation of the exhibition "Gullari. Paysages de l'eau au nord de l'Australie", which, as far as the curators are concerned, respects both male/female and French/Aboriginal parity and has left the choice of the works exhibited and their presentation to Aboriginal artists and their descendants. https://www.quaibranly.fr/fr/expositions-evenements/au-musee/expositions/details-de-levenement/e/gularri-38925/. English translations of our descriptions for this exhibition can be found here : https://www.quaibranly.fr/en/useful-information/go-further/visitors-tools/discovering-painting-through-listening/

[11] Georgina Kleege, *More than Meets the Eye: What Blindness Brings to Art* (Oxford: OUP, 2018), 12. See also pp. 100-2 for Kleege's critique of the objective or neutral approach to audio description which is often seen as the industry standard, and pp. 109-117 for her detailed analysis of selected audio description tracks from MOMA's collections.

[12] The #culturecheznous operation launched by the French Ministry of Culture in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic is also indicative of such a desire: in addition to the fact that the ADs proposed are intended for blind people only, they aim to "porter un autre regard sur des oeuvres" and to create "une image mentale." https://www.culture.gouv.fr/Actualites/Cinq-ressources-en-ligne-qui-rendent-la-culture-accessible-aux-personnes-en-situation-de-handicap

[13] Sally French, "Can you see the rainbow: the roots of denial," in John Swain, et al., *Disabling Barriers, Enabling Environments* (New York: SAGE Publications, 2004), 92.

[14] Jacques Semelin, "Liberté intérieure et lumière de l'âme,"in M. Chottin, C. Roussel et Z. Weygand dir., *Jacques Lusseyran entre cécité et lumière* (Paris: Éditions rue d'Ulm, 2019) 135 : "[…] dire qu'un aveugle est voyant revient à lui attribuer une noblesse, une dignité qu'il

n’aurait pas sinon. Apparaît ainsi le présupposé négatif dissimulé derrière un tel usage mélioratif .”

[15] Rachel Hutchinson & Alison F. Eardley, “Inclusive museum audio guides: ‘guided looking’ through audio description enhances memorability of artworks for sighted audiences,” in *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 2021, 13

[16] Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris : Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967), 208.

[17] For an analysis of how this logic of the Derridean *supplement* works in film audio description, see Hannah Thompson, “Audio Description: Turning Access to Film into Cinema Art”, *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 38.3 (2018): https://dsq-sds.org/article/view/6487/5085

[18] Raoul Dutry and Brigitte de Patoul also promote such an idea. (Introduction in “La peinture dans le noir. Contributions à une théorie du partage des sensibles,” *Voir [barré]*, n° 34, 2007, 6). Contrary to what the title of this issue of the journal suggests, Rancière's concept is never mentioned.

[19] Denis Diderot, *Salon de 1763*, in *Œuvres*, ed. Laurent Versini, 5 vols. (Paris: Bouquins, 1994-1997), IV, 265.

[20] An audio recording of this description can be found on the *Musée du quai Branly* website as "Tableau 1: 1ère impression": https://www.quaibranly.fr/fr/informations-pratiques/aller-plus-loin/outils-de-visite/decouvrir-la-peinture-par-lecoute/. We do not include the painting’s title or artist in "First Impression" because we want to give blind visitors the freedom that non blind visitors have to discover painting in this way, without knowing anything about the painting beforehand.

[21] The question of whether audio descriptions should include reference to colours is often raised. Whilst some non-blind describers are reluctant to mention concepts that they think will mean nothing to congenitally totally blind visitors, we argue that anyone who lives in an ocularcentric society such as our own cannot avoid acquiring an understanding of colours. In

this we follow Kleege, who reminds us of how Helen Keller understood colours not only through analogy with smell and taste, but also by associating them with abstract concepts in a manner not dissimilar to the way that non-blind people think of them (Kleege 75).

[22] An audio recording of this description can be found on the *Musée du quai Branly* website as "Tableau 2: Descriptif": https://www.quaibranly.fr/fr/informations-pratiques/aller-plus-loin/outils-de-visite/decouvrir-la-peinture-par-lecoute/.

[23] PERCEVOIR/CapGemini, October 2020.

[24] Jacques Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir. Écrits sur les arts du visible 1979-2004* (Paris: Éditions de la Différence), 2013.