

Translations of Blind Perception in the Films *Monika* (2012) and *Antoine* (2008)

By Robert Stock and Beate Ochsner

I. Introduction

In their book *Cultural Locations of Disability*, David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder critically examine the Deaf-and-Blind-cycle made by Frederick Wiseman in the 1980s, and point out how the documentary filmmaker seeks to analyze the disciplinary techniques used in institutions for the blind, deaf and blind.¹ The authors conceive of Wiseman's observational "direct-cinema"-approach – that sometimes seems ambivalently voyeuristic – as a means of critique that aims at demonstrating how subjects are treated in these specific sites for the disabled and how such institutions "coerce acceptable behaviors and restrict bodily movements as their primary tactic."² Regarding the portrayal of the blind and deaf-blind within the institutional frame in these films, Mitchell and Snyder detect a hierarchy between the sighted and non-sighted that also surfaces in scenes addressing cane traveling. During the mobility training, individuals that have become blind are introduced to a dual discipline. For instance, a young woman "learns to maneuver a cane while also being subject to the evaluative oversight of the instructor."³ It is a practice of "learning to be blind" that viewers of the film witness while they simultaneously become a part of a hierarchical dichotomy (as they watch the instructor overseeing the blind person) denoting non-sighted individuals as deficient and in the need of learning how to cope with their situation. This particular configuration persists even after the mobility training has ended because blind – as well as sighted – individuals will "carry an internalized version of an evaluating gaze. [...] the technique of cane traveling comes with the initiation of a visually impaired individual into a panoptic scheme that follows her wherever she goes."⁴ Blindness, in this example, can thus be understood as an interactional practice creating a social difference and forcing the non-sighted to recognize it and to create a new identity. The non-sighted are obliged to either accept or reject this disability identity, to respond to the stigma and thus becoming a self/group based on their response.⁵

This use of the "panoptic scheme"⁶ can indeed be seen as part of everyday experience, academic research⁷ or diverse cinematic productions, like for instance the television ad "Sensuality that you can feel" by Palmers (2011). The camera shows a female model putting on her underwear. Viewers only know that the exposed woman is (supposedly) blind in the end of the ad as she is shown walking with a long cane.⁸ Furthermore, as specialized institutions for the blind and visually disabled continue to exist, it is important to take into account their impact in shaping particular sets of dis/abling behavior and mediatic strategies⁹ (which are often connected to discriminatory practices) contributing to "making up" dis/abled social identities.¹⁰ But besides analytical approaches mainly informed by Foucauldian ideas of disciplinary coercion¹¹ it seems also productive to explore cultural locations of disability from other perspectives. Regarding aspects of daily life, one could refer to "blind money practices" that emerge in complex configurations of human and non-human participants.¹² Or consider for example the ways in which non-sighted people negotiate the visual. Categories like appearance or the use of latest fashion are, as Mrazny observes, produced discursively and made relevant due to particular circumstances and social contexts by blind persons in interaction with sighted counterparts.¹³ In encounters where blind and sighted meet they might have to negotiate how to describe a route to a certain destination in urban settings, which can also become a complicated challenge.¹⁴ These examples not only reveal a productive dimension in the sense that they constitute settings where normal and dis-abled subjectivities emerge, but also show how social hierarchies are interdependently produced and temporarily stabilized.

Against the backdrop of these works, we propose an analysis of films with and about blind or visually disabled individuals that aims at exploring different modes of world perception. In our view, such an examination should not only discuss the question of “giving voice” and visibility to those who were formerly only represented in or by the media, or the fact that films belonging to what might be considered a “new disability documentary cinema”¹⁵ are dedicated to the experience of disability from the point of view of those who deal with it. Rather, we examine films that do not restrict their field of vision to institutional context as cultural productions. These films allow the viewer to get to know different practices of seeing in the daily life of both blind or visually disabled and sighted people. In approaching these productions, we are interested in focusing on how the audio-visual regimes produce and structure our visual experience, translate it into a filmic grammar and thus not only create filmic patterns of blind perception but, at the same time, the cinematographic aesthetic of a so-called normal sightedness.

Translating modes of (blind) perception into filmic practices

Blind perception of the world is often associated with a life in darkness.¹⁶ While such a preconception seems to be mainly shaped by a Western social context in which one can observe a “hegemony of vision,”¹⁷ accounts given by sociologists and medical experts¹⁸ reveal the importance of hearing and listening for spatial orientation of blind or visually disabled people. Still, the specific patterns of blind perception were characterized for a long time as mere compensation or lack of certain abilities and spatial awareness.¹⁹ Contrary to this, scholars are recently approaching blind perception of the world following the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, who stresses the importance of the body and the unity of the senses in perceptual experience.²⁰ Taking these and other philosophical reflections as a point of departure, Saerberg explores the way in which urban (and other) environments are structured.²¹ Note that spaces are shaped by specific sounds and noises that can indicate the presence of certain objects or persons, their position and direction of movement. Blind or visually disabled persons might use these complex networks of sounds as cues in order to move through these environments while simultaneously drawing on other sensory impressions like smelling or sensing particular movements of air.²²

Hence it is evident that space is not a given factor but is rather being constructed through subjective experience and social interaction.²³ This process of producing social hierarchies and conditions impacts how subjectivities are shaped. Consequently, when analyzing the production of perceptual patterns of (sighted/non-sighted) characters in audio-visual artifacts it is important and necessary to reflect upon the way in which film constructs its spaces through framing, certain camera perspectives, color, etc. to create conditions, possibilities, and limits that enable or disable the interaction of the characters.²⁴ Our purpose is therefore not to observe how film reflects a pre-fabricated phenomenon but rather to analyze the processes of “translations”²⁵ that in turn contribute to the production of a cinematic “problem body”²⁶ – especially the visually disabled body. In other words, the aim consists in examining selected films with their attempts to translate certain aspects of sensory perception into auditory and visual filmic patterns. Admittedly, these audio-visual events²⁷ often produce blindness in films as a different mode of perception that is simply marked as deviant and not recognized as part of the complex practices of seeing. Because, as Rodas puts it,

The range of blind experience, like the range of visual experience, is infinitely diverse. And most importantly, these sets of experiences are not divided from one another, each belonging to its own kind. Without recourse to metaphor, we are permitted to speak of blind sightedness and of sighted blindness, a medley of seeing and not seeing, indefinite, undisciplined, indivisible.²⁸

Within this context the auditory is also of particular importance. Cinematographic and documentary settings receive their appropriate atmosphere by furnishing them with a particular sound design²⁹ or extra-respectively intra-diegetic music.³⁰ As Elsaesser and Hagener write, “[...] a focus on the car and sound directly emphasizes the spatiality of the cinematic experience: we can hear around corners and through walls, in complete darkness and blinding brightness, even when we cannot see anything.”³¹ Michel Chion also stresses the omnidirectionality of hearing compared to partial or directional seeing.³² We cannot see what is behind us, but we can hear the room-filling and shaping sound. During the development of a child, the ear is the first active organ which already in the fetal state perceives its mother’s voice. Both aspects, the omnidirectionality as well as the experience of sound during early childhood are linked to the idea of immersion that, since the 1990s is a crucial subject in cinematographic theory.³³

Films are hence characterized not only by a field of vision that they elaborate but also through a mix of sounds and soundscapes.³⁴ Therefore, the progress of the film is stimulated both by the action that takes place onscreen or offscreen and by the sound design and the music soundtrack: “Sound is one of the most versatile signifiers, since it contributes to field, tenor, and mode as a powerful creator of meaning, mood and textuality.”³⁵

As we have shown above, not only the visual but also the auditory is of central importance regarding the production of (cinematographic) space. Now, we like to point out an example that demonstrates the specific relationship between environments, spatial perception and technology and helps furthermore to characterize the following case studies more distinguishably as well. Recently, efforts have been made to develop glasses designed for blind or visually disabled people. Within this complex interplay of humans and technical objects, a mini camera captures visual information about the surroundings. The visual data is then transmitted to a computer where a program translates the moving images into sound patterns.³⁶ While using the camera and hearing the sound patterns, blind individuals are enabled to perceive contrasts and therefore geometrical forms or even spatial structures through which they are moving. Television reports³⁷ and documentary films³⁸ addressing the use of this device frequently show the images of the mini cameras that provide the visual data to be converted into sound. These black-and-white shots are generally of low quality and often juxtaposed with the computer generated sound patterns that the ears of the sighted are not able to understand. There is no doubt that these impressions are digitally produced.³⁹ Still, there has been one scene in *The Science of the Senses: Sight* (CBS 2007) in which these images are operationalized in a particular way.⁴⁰ One sees Pat Fletcher riding a bike while wearing the computer-enhanced glasses.⁴¹ There is a feeling of suspense which is stressed by the introduction of a synthesizer, hence technologically produced sound. When the film then cuts to shaky digital images in black and white showing the small passage Fletcher should come through, it creates a perspective that aims at reproducing the perception of the protagonist. This produces a paradoxical effect: These images come very close to what is called point of view shot in film studies, a concept that we will be discussing below in more detail. But because of their obvious otherness one is not attempted to confound these computer-generated images with the representation of a physiological process of seeing. Rather, the scene could be conceived as a way of imagining transhuman perception.⁴²

Contrary to such productions, cinematographic practices that claim to access blind perception are frequent. They use the concept of the point of view shot in order to make this kind of non-sighted perception comprehensible and suggest that sighted viewers can share the point of view of non-sighted characters.⁴³ It is a technique that is widely used in film and does not only serve to produce disabled subjectivities.⁴⁴ The main difference regarding the aforementioned example of the computer-enhanced glasses is that in these films the camera work and hence the cinematographic translation of the situation is made invisible or transparent. Instead, the films propose that the viewer (i.e. the camera and the sighted spectator) can actually perceive

the non-sighted protagonist's perspective by looking through blind eyes or appropriating the non-sighted perception. One cannot deny the violence of this act because "representation, or more particularly the *act* of representing (and hence reducing) others, almost always involves violence of some sort to the *subject* of the representation."⁴⁵ Put differently, each mediatic positioning of the Other is either strategic and possessive. How these films attempt to provide "insights" into the various experiences connected to the phenomenon of blindness will be explored through the following to case studies.

II. *Monika* (2010)

The film *Monika* is about a German teenager who has strong myopia.⁴⁶ As this impedes her ability to get a driver's license, she has an operation in a private clinic abroad – against the will of her ophthalmologist. However, the medical treatment does not result in better vision but actually fails. Monika subsequently becomes visually disabled. The film takes Monika's loss of sight as a starting point for telling the story of how the young girl deals with that change in her life and makes her way. It uses a kind of conventional narrative quite often told nowadays: a story of successfully overcoming the obstacle of being disabled and getting re-integrated into a society that requires productive capacities and success.⁴⁷ Ironically, the protagonist's will to live independently is enhanced by the characterization of her mother who has an alcohol problem. Despite this, the character of the mother embodies the perspective of dis/abling society⁴⁸ as she is convinced that Monika is not able to do anything. Hence it is as much a story about the experience of visual disability as it is a film about coming of age where a new generation struggle against outdated conventions. Finally and within the context of the cinematographic "coming-of-age"-genre, which is "less about growing up than about the expectation, difficulty, and social organization of growing up,"⁴⁹ dis/ability appears as an in/capacity that has to be overcome in order to become a socially functional adult. Disability, then, is here but one distinctive narrative element of a filmic genre.

However, the question that we want to examine is not so much dedicated to a critique of the conventional narrative of overcoming the challenges of disability. Nor do we intend to query the film's authenticity because it does not rely on an actor that has effectively dealt with disability in his/her life.⁵⁰ It seems rather interesting to us to analyze the film regarding the cinematic strategies it uses in order to convey the idea of a particular field of vision or, more precisely, a "problematic body" creating therefore a phenomena "in need of explanation"⁵¹ which in turn presupposes that there is something different, something that cannot be understood without further explanation. The main question guiding the film's analysis will investigate the different levels and dimensions of how patterns of perception regarding seeing and hearing are translated into filmic strategies and produced as an audio-visual "event."⁵² Seeing and blindness are thus explored as a "set of practices"⁵³ that entail particular methods of visualization and specific ways of seeing.⁵⁴

A rather personalized and, therefore, emotionalized view is created by the so-called point-of-view shot, a technique frequently used to visualize the story of *Monika*. Thus, the film relies on her point of view in order to stress perceptual subjectivity and to turn the spotlight on the protagonist's individual experience. Simultaneously, this device further establishes *Monika*'s position at the center of the film, thus providing the viewers with a mediated impression of her perception. This process of mediation however addresses those "who see" and consequently defines "seeing" as an activity realized by those who are not blind. In fact, *Monika*'s subjectivity is not only created within the frame of a coming-of-age film but also through the translation of her perception into one that she cannot share. In doing so, the communicational barrier is visualized – and has to be overcome, naturally, by *Monika*.

The point-of-view in film as a particular strategy and narrative construction has been a central albeit debatable category. Basically, this specific concept of a glance implies the existence of an observer whose vision the viewers can share through filmic operations. These operations entail a number of elements (origin, vision, time, frame, object, mind)⁵⁵ that in combination construct a cinematographic impression suggesting a “view through the eyes” of one of the film’s characters. It is a strategy commonly used to create interactions between characters and objects or to design dialogue scenes. Ultimately, these interactions are mediated by translating camera eye – a process often neglected by the identification of camera view and protagonist’s view. In the case of *Monika*, the camera is not able to (or willing to) translate her visual field “directly” but marks its own (respectively Monika’s) in-ability to see – as different to “our” normal ways of seeing. A similar relational configuration can be observed in other cases of the p-o-v shot described by Edward Branigan. He was one of the first scholars to discuss this device more specifically.⁵⁶ The camera is also not able to access directly the perspectives of animals or non-living characters but in turn renders them visible through the application of certain visual effects.⁵⁷ Consequently, one has not to deal with a particular aesthetics of disability but rather with a cinematographic practice of translation that simultaneously marks normalcy and the deviant. The construction of “normal” and “abnormal” also extends to the production of injured characters,⁵⁸ drunkenness and stages of the mind like madness that are associated with techniques of visual modification: “Distortion of image becomes associated with an abnormal condition.”⁵⁹ In the case of the sight of a certain character, “[w]hat is revealed is not the object of a glance nor an internal state of the character, but a condition of sight itself.”⁶⁰ However such a sight might be characterized, Branigan questionably argues that the concept of point-of-view would not make sense if applied to a blind character:

A POV shot, therefore, requires the presence of a character but more than a “body” is necessary – the character must be “aware” and “looking” in a normal way. What is the status of a POV shot when the character is asleep, blindfolded, blind, or dead?⁶¹

Considering film productions of the last decades – some of them mentioned above – and recent scholarly work, it has to be acknowledged that Branigan’s argument has become indefensible. There are numerous example for films that employ the POV shot in relation to characters with visual disability thereby often creating deviant or non-normal ways of seeing. This is not to say, that his argument is worthless, on the contrary, the audiovisual translations of deviant or non-normal ways of seeing point directly at the question of disability. Authors as Johnson Cheu convincingly demonstrate the need to work with concepts such as the gaze in order to grasp the ways in which filmic operations process the relationship between sighted gaze and blind character’s gaze.⁶² Furthermore, it is important to take into account that the ‘normal’ is established in and through a practice of distinction. One has therefore to analyze how both – normal and other – ways of visual perception are produced within a filmic action, how they are marked in different manners, not to mention their interaction with other kinds of experiencing the world like the acoustic or the tactile senses.⁶³

From Myopia to visual disability

In the film *Monika*, the production of the way the protagonist perceives the world visually is linked to the medical office of an ophthalmologist. There, the consulting room becomes the main stage for constructing Monika’s view. It is a process that comprises mainly two steps: one before and one after the failed operation.

During the first visit to the ophthalmologist, Monika has to undergo a visual acuity test. As it turns out, she needs to do the test to prove her sight capacity in order to get permission for the driver’s license. The sequence does not start with an establishing shot but with a point-of-view that seemingly corresponds to Monika’s eyeline while looking through the measurement apparatus that tests her vision.⁶⁴ Besides the

numbers and letters that oscillate in and out of focus, and that are disrupted through the simulation of blinking, the eye of the doctor looking from the other side of the (analogue) measuring device is also rendered visible – a medical gaze that here “becomes the depositary and source of clarity [...] [and] opens the truth.”⁶⁵ Only after having nearly completed the test, Monika is shown in a medium close up sitting behind the device and appears when the doctor lifts it upwards. The following brief conversation between the ophthalmologist and Monika, framed by a medium shot, illustrates the protagonist’s non-agreement with the diagnosis.⁶⁶ Insisting on her need for the driver’s license, she asks for possible clinical treatment, but the doctor’s response points out the limitations of medicine in her case. Monika’s gesture of resistance reveals a reluctance to accept a social structure (visualized in the spatial configuration) dominated by control mechanisms that continuously intervene and selectively regulate processes of (self-)normalization on the basis of norms.⁶⁷ On the one hand, it is precisely Monika’s rejection to think of herself as a person considered as visually impaired that makes her feel the pressure exerted on her and, at last, accept her role as a blind person.⁶⁸ On the other hand this scene makes us understand that norms and normalization practices are not prior to the social field in which they are intervening, but that there is a constant feedback between their application and effects and the (re-)configuration of the social field. The scene hence produces the protagonist’s field of vision as one that is limited through myopia – a medical phenomenon that the major part of the audience will be acquainted with, even if perhaps not in such a strong form⁶⁹ – and alludes to the social and economic consequences related to it. As a result, normalcy and (a deviant) medical condition are negotiated within one single field and are not transferred to the margins of society, a process that is enabled through the implication of norms orientated on gradual differences.⁷⁰

A second visit to the ophthalmologist occurs after Monika secretly underwent an eye operation abroad. Here, the scene begins with a black screen. But as soon as a white undifferentiated cone of light nervously begins to shimmer, the images are juxtaposed with digital and abstract electronic sounds. One notices the doctor’s voice declaring that he is going to take away the bandage that covers the girl’s eyes. Once this is done, the image turns brighter and more colorful, but not sharper. It is a shot demonstrating blurred images, there are no recognizable silhouettes. There is no way of sharpening or focusing on an object or a person whatsoever in this situation. Through the soundtrack an alienating character is ascribed to this particular way of seeing: abstract electronic sounds continue to accompany the impressionistic and fuzzy material. The sounds here signal an internal focalization and point to the inner state of Monika, who seems to be emotionally confused – perceptual and emotional state are combined. The scene then proceeds by showing a close up of Monika’s face while the doctor checks her eye with a diagnostic penlight and ends with a conversation between Monika’s mother and the doctor who recommends that the family gets in contact with the *Deutscher Blinden- und Sehbehindertenverband e.V.* (German Association of the Blind and Visually Impaired).

Although the action of both of these scenes dealing with the visual field of Monika and its change takes place in the medical office, the emphasis is not so much on the diagnosis, that is, on the medical gaze or authority respectively the utilized measuring and control devices. The film rather seeks to translate the different ways of seeing that Monika embodies into audio-visual practice through different filmic operations such as the p-o-v shot and the introduction of a specific soundtrack that foregrounds the subjective dimension related to this kind of perception. This is also suggested by the order of appearance. Instead of establishing the ophthalmologist’s treatment room as a space where the doctor occupies the central position, it is the viewpoint of Monika from which the film begins both scenes. After all, it is her story that the film is about to tell. While doing this, the film frequently returns to her particular way of seeing that was introduced (to the viewers) from the outset. The p-o-v shot thus serves as a device that supports the characterization of the protagonists and her placement at the center of the film. But the filmic performance of a dis/abled point-of-view, in this particular case, is not restricted to enable a sharing of Monika’s experience. It also entails other aspects of the sensory repertory, mainly the acoustic dimension.

The shift from seeing to hearing

In order to understand the shift in perception from seeing to hearing accomplished by the film's protagonist it is necessary to examine one of the scenes crucial to this issue. It takes place in the middle of the film where Monika has got used to life in the school for the blind and visually impaired. At this point, she also knows more or less how to use the cane, even if she sometimes comes across obstacles she is unaware of. One can say that the relationship between Monika and her cane has different stages. While rejecting it at first she then acknowledges it as an instrument that gives her higher mobility. In this stage, the camera focuses on the cane as a tool that conditions Monika's sphere of action. Later in the film, this relation changes. After having experienced a series of challenges (running against a door, nearly being involved in a car crash) the camera shifts focus from the cane to the protagonist who moves through town or goes shopping, thus comprising a form of mobility not primarily determined by the cane but by her own juvenile interest.

In the analysis that follows, it will become clear how the film produces a multisensory portrait of the protagonist's perception that manages bodily orientation by re-adjusting the subject's capacity of listening to sounds even if they are embedded in noisy environments. The scene addresses mobility training in urban settings. Monika – accompanied by Tina, her trainee – is about to learn how to deal with certain obstacles that appear on the way, in this case a construction site. Although having some difficulties and engaging in a discussion with Tina about why she does not help her, Monika finally manages to pass the construction site, thus symbolically overcoming it. The film produces this situation of conflict in a way that highlights the subjective dimension of the protagonist, realized through the use of certain camera perspectives and sound effects.

First, the scene contains no establishing shot that would reveal at whom or what the protagonist is looking, or, more precisely in this case, how Monika tries to "look" in a certain direction. The possibility for a (visually supported) spatial orientation is not provided; there are no visual cues for the character's gaze.⁷¹ Hence it starts with a point-of-view shot matching Monika's eyeline. But the blurred images do not really give a hint of what Monika would be glancing at. Rather, they seem to be translations from a sighted perspective in order to visualize Monika's perception, but they in fact correspond to other perceptual practices. Unlike the blue screen chosen for Derek Jarmans *Blue*, this kind of rather violent translation creates a sense of lack in visual perception by producing images that do not allow for one to orientate oneself (in fact, without an establishing shot, one cannot situate the action!). Such a strategy does not only stress the otherness of Monika but might also "reinforce the dominant power that sight embodies."⁷² Hence, even if constructed in a different manner, one can trace in this scene the "panoptic scheme" that Mitchell and Snyder refer to in their analysis of the Wiseman films.⁷³

Besides the visual dimension of this shot, the soundtrack is decisive. It is the urban noise-mix that allows one to deduce the young girl's location somewhere in town. These noises are mixed with those of the cane that touches the site fence, the sidewalk and other objects. When the film then cuts to a medium shot, it shows both Monika and Tina from the perspective of the obstacle while also visualizing the fence. A following close-up focuses on Monika's cane that moves nervously around without being able to find the narrow passage left between the fence and the parked car. While Tina encourages Monika to concentrate on what she hears (this is shown in a repetitive medium shot), the following repetitive point-of-view shots do not indicate a specific auditory focus. Sound is as blurred and confusing as the images. Instead of another point-of-view shot, the camera then cuts (once again) to a close up of the cane; and something changes. Now, the cane does not only move slowly over the sidewalk from the side of the fence to side of the car, but also produces distinct sounds. This specific "acoustic texture"⁷⁴ is created by amplifying the volume and through the use of a reverb effect. Even when cutting back to a medium shot of Monika's figure this sound persists and is therefore

linked to the auditory perception of the protagonist.⁷⁵ When Monika finally passes the obstacle she does it by gripping the fence – in this case through the support of the tactile sense – and then leaves the scene. The scene marks a turning point of the film. From this moment on, Monika is able to hear in an enhanced way – a development that not only echoes with the idea of the “super crip”⁷⁶ but also medical scholarship, which discerns “supra-normal auditory abilities”⁷⁷ in blind persons. This is obvious in scenes that take place in locations with loud music (discotheque) or in a situation where Monika recognizes the steps of her mother who is following her daughter without addressing her verbally. One is made to observe here, though in a typically idealized manner, how sensorial perception and patterns of spatial orientation might change if alterations of the field of vision occur. Habits and patterns that developed in a certain period of life are subjected to a number of new conditions. And at some point, as Merleau-Ponty argues,

The blind man’s stick has ceased to be an object [...], and is no longer perceived for itself; its point has become an area of sensitivity, extending the scope and active radius of touch, and providing a parallel to sight. [...] To get used to [...] a stick is to be transplanted into them, or conversely, to incorporate them into the bulk of our own body. Habit expresses our power of dilating our being-in-the-world, or changing our existence by appropriating fresh instruments.⁷⁸

Consequently, the film proposes this process of incorporation and re-adjustment of the senses and the body in its being-in-the-world. It exemplifies this through the figure of Monika: her rehabilitation and subsequent re-integration are configured through a job education and her moving into an own flat – both stimulated by the institution that “cares” for her. While narrating an often-articulated story of normalization and overcoming the challenges of disability, the film does not solely rely on the tactile dimension but creates a subjective “sound perspective” and thus focuses on the ability of listening to the echoes caused by the extended body in its changing environments.⁷⁹ and thus focuses on the ability of listening to the echoes caused by the extended body in its changing environments.

III. *Antoine* (2008)⁸⁰

The film *Antoine* (2008) is an experimental docudrama. Its protagonist is Antoine Houang, a six year old blind Canadian-Vietnamese boy living in Montreal. The film is a collaboration between Argentinian filmmaker Laura Bari and Houang that lasted over two years. During the process of filming, Antoine was not only simply filmed by Bari but also participated in the film’s making. As a result, the film not only represents Antoine’s life and activities as a blind boy but also includes his individual perspective and fantasies of being the detective “Dec.” The detective genre serves as an important point for the shaping of the film’s story and audio-visual composition. Against this backdrop, this film obviously differs from the observational techniques⁸¹ that Frederick Wiseman used in films like *Blind* or *Deaf* (both 1986) since it emphasizes an interactive moment and proceeds in a reflexive mode⁸² that stimulated the making of the film and addresses the portrayed subjects as constitutive and creative force.

Blind Vision and authorship

The opening sequence embodies the interactive moment from which the film originates: the creative force of telling a story, not *about* Antoine as a blind boy but invented and experienced by Antoine himself as the story-telling and living detective Dec, and the fanciful editing that imaginatively engages with the protagonist’s fantasies, memories and life.

In the beginning of the film, there is an ear. It is framed in an underexposed close up and the head that belongs to it remains a silhouette. The shot, with its reduced visual expressiveness, makes the viewer focus on the acoustic. On the soundtrack, one hears what the ear seems to hear: heart beating, breathing, and a medical ventilator. In the following shot, the protagonist, obviously a little boy, is shown in a dimmed room. First he seems to have some difficulties raising the blinds, but finally daylight slowly illuminates his figure and he opens the window. All these actions are also juxtaposed with an omnidirectional voice-over that the boy's ear likely perceives. The scene appears to be unfathomable until the protagonist himself explains it. It is a possible demonstration of how his birth took place. This becomes clear when Antoine, still in the opening segment of the film, starts speaking about the beginning of his life. As the six-year old-boy outlines, he was born prematurely and spent three months in an incubator. Too much oxygen in the incubator caused a retinal detachment, and consequently, Antoine's blindness. Thus, the soundscape turns out to be subjective and is ascribed a biographical meaning. The auditory constructs an access to the invisible and distanced past⁸³

where Antoine could not see the incubator, but could hear it. Still, it is not clear if it was like that, because he does not exactly remember everything of the period he spent in the hospital. In fact, Antoine tells the viewer that he plans to compile two lists: one of "memories" and another one of "non-memories." He starts with the latter.

The machine Antoine uses for his lists and for writing "another page" of his biography is a manual braille writer. In the opening sequence, Antoine is captured with a close-up while writing on the braille and speaking into a clip-on microphone that he is equipped with. The items he uses symbolize his connection with the audio-visual medium: he creates the script and records the sound. His perception and interaction with the outer world is hence different and more complex than in his early life days that he remembers and where "My eyes ended up at my fingertips, my ears, my nose, and my mouth." In other words, in the past Antoine had not been connected to and equipped with these items that now allow him to express and articulate his thoughts and ideas. At the same time, however, the boy's perception is (re-)configured by the different technical devices. It is a pose that through its close-up framing not only conveys an idea of familiarity between the filmmaker and the protagonist, but also stages Antoine as the author of the story that the film will tell, thus alluding to the figure of the blind novelist.⁸⁴ It is an imagined solitude accompanied by the machine that presses creative thoughts into paper. The soundtrack equally supports this scene of life writing every time Antoine expressively pushes the keys. The scene produces the authorship of the film against an autobiographical stance and in complicity with the filmmaker.⁸⁵ This collaborative moment can also be found in the title of the film that appears after this scene. While the braille characters are inserted one after another on the screen, they are accompanied by the typewriter sound and furthermore subtitled with the characters of the Latin alphabet: "a n t o i n e". The composition hence proposes to reverse the hierarchical subordination that braille might be subjected to in other contexts. Consequently, the film accomplishes an enabling gesture as it embodies an interactive relationship between the filmmaker and Antoine and positions its blind protagonist as the driving authorial voice at the center of the documentary. It therefore trusts in the protagonist's acquaintance with technology and its ability to tell about his life and daily routines.⁸⁶

Point of View and auditory visibility

Several times during the film detective "Dec," Antoine's alias, travels by car. That this "really" happens is suggested by a cinematographic illusion put together through the use of elements belonging to the repertoire of a conventional cinematic car ride.⁸⁷ The first shots demonstrate how the detective gets into the car, starts the motor and turns the headlamps on. The latter already implies a view from inside the car that viewers supposedly share with a detective (who is actually blind). Then, the ride happens and street lights pass by. Hereby, the boy's perspective is highlighted and at some point the frame excludes the road and

focuses only the lights – a view that alludes to the way in which the child might look out of the car. However “unrealistic” or amusing these journeys might seem, they do provide an imaginative configuration of a disabled subject that lives his life (and fantasies) outside institutional frames and is equipped with a high degree of mobility.⁸⁸

During the ride, viewers hear a voicemail recording of a female voice with an east European accent and are introduced to the story of Madame Rouski, who has disappeared but managed to leave a message for Dec asking him for help. This lady is indeed one of the important triggers of the film’s more fictional moments. Furthermore, her story resembles one of the central themes in film history: the vanishing lady.⁸⁹ While the camera constructs a visual point-of-view by relying on the basis of mobility and subjective framing, the audio recording provides a complementary element of central importance, as it is the evidence for the existence of Madame Rouski. The vague circumstances of her disappearance and her subsequent role in the film produce an audiovisual ambiguity that provides her with a certain filmic physical resonance – a form of a noticeable absence. This effect is achieved although most of the time the character remains hors-champ (with one exception that we will come to in the next paragraph). From this kind of imaginary zone – everything that is outside the frame and constitutes the off-screen⁹⁰ – the figure of Rouski communicates in different ways (by using her voice) with the content the pictures show and therefore asserts her “visibility.”⁹¹ Gilles Deleuze, “Strata or Historical Formations: The Visible and the Articulable (Knowledge).” *Foucault* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 50] Hence, as a visualizing medium, film, to some extent, must be blind in order to represent. Through the dis/appearance of Madame Rouski, a story unfolds that the viewers would understand differently if presented only with a juxtaposition of the urban setting juxtaposed with a mysterious music reminiscent of b-movie soundtracks.

The auditory also proves to be relevant to the film’s protagonist. Besides the recordings of Antoine’s voice, which are frequently juxtaposed with images through the whole film, sounds and noises of his environment are also of significance. In one scene for instance, Antoine holds a microphone in the air and captures the sound of an airplane and affirms: “It’s a plane I’ll film it”. Once again, there emerges a relation to the hors-champ because the camera that joins him while walking through a wintry snowy park actually does not capture the plane. One is reminded of the sound technician Winter in *Lisbon Story* and the way he begins to record the sounds of the city (with closed eyes) which then will trigger the narrative of Wim Wenders’ film.⁹²

The vanishing lady appears

Dec/Antoine is not alone in his search for Madame Rouski. Together with his sighted schoolmates Maëlle and Julietta he tries to find the disappeared/dissolved woman. They visit various places, distribute a self-made facial composite of Rouski, and sometimes struggle with each other during their investigation. In one of the scenes where the trio does not agree on what they are “seeing,” the point-of-view of Antoine is once more decisive. On their travels, the three of them visit a bridge from where they can see and hear the river. As the camera shows ships passing by, Antoine suddenly claims that he saw Madame Rouski and causes an argument with one of his friends who does not see her. The camera, however, focuses on a red buoy on the river and indeed, there is a woman swimming nearby, therefore confirming the boy’s contention while the girls continue not to see her. The camera thus visualizes his fantasies and renders the things that Antoine does (not) see accessible for the viewers, so that they can participate and share the protagonist’s multiple experiences. In a certain way, the scene parallels Méliès’ *The Lady That Vanished* (1896) but instead of making a woman disappear, it gives her a fleeting visibility.⁹³ After hearing Madame Rouski’s recorded voice, this second cue gives evidence of a visual nature to the existence of the vanished lady. This scene subverts the idea of “documentary evidence”⁹⁴ and can be simultaneously associated with a common cinematic strategy that creates situations in which some characters see something that escapes the gaze of others.⁹⁵

Another scene that addresses and underscores Antoine's point-of-view happens in school. In this setting, the camera observes the various activities of the protagonist like writing, computer training, painting lessons or sports most of the time. But it is also present during the breaks where the pupils stay on the schoolyard. However, in this scene, Antoine is not with them but somewhere in the school building and "watching" outside from a room above the schoolyard. By shouting "Salut" he tries to begin a conversation with someone in the yard. When a teacher responds him, he repeats several times: "I see you!" or "I am looking at you!" The framing supports his affirmation: it is an over-shoulder-shot that focuses on the teacher down in the yard. Once more, the filmmaker is an accomplice to the actions of Antoine. Because one could suggest that (while hearing his teacher) Antoine is in fact "looking" at her through the eye of the camera. The camera however does not play this game along as it refuses to translate Antoine's gaze into a p-o-v shot, thus acting differently than the camera in *Monika* we analyzed above. As viewers are accustomed to this kind of shot as a part of scenes showing a communication between sighted subjects and therefore associating it with the gaze of a character,⁹⁶ one could think that this technique particularly neglects Antoine's blindness and the fact that he is only hearing but not seeing his teacher. In fact, it is a puzzling constellation that seems to undermine the "panoptic scheme" analyzed by Mitchell and Snyder by placing the blind subject in the position of the one that oversees a certain setting and relocating the instructor as the object of the gaze.⁹⁷ This is also stressed in other segments of the film that continue to playfully address the specific configuration of visual recording technologies and a blind point of view, and, for instance, frame Antoine holding a mini camera, filming his environment and thus acting like a filmmaker.⁹⁸

Movement in space

As indicated above, a high degree of mobility is being ascribed to Antoine by the film. Mostly, this happens in the car rides embedded in the story as real events, but seem to be imagined when one thinks of the film as a documentary. But it is also present in the sequences when he and his friends search for Madame Rouski. Although the film shows Antoine walking with a cane, there is no specific emphasis on the issue of cane travelling.⁹⁹

This form of moving around is rather subordinate to the narrative of the film and is thus only one of the possible options to arrive at a certain objective. The configuration of the blind boy's ability to make use of the space around him is particularly accentuated in one of the scenes at the beginning of the film. There is a wide shot showing Antoine running in the countryside with its yellow flowers and while lifting the cane upwards. The whole scene is exceptional in its framing and gains its visual quality also through Antoine's yellow jacket that makes him appear to be one of the flowers except that he is moving through the surroundings. It conveys – contrary to the struggle of Monika with the construction site – a situation that emphasizes Antoine's agency. In contrast to many other audio-visual operations, the filmic space created by this shot places the boy in an extensive environment where he is not at risk of colliding with someone or some obstacle that he might not perceive.

IV. Conclusion

The point of departure for this paper was the films of Frederick Wiseman and the discussion of a dichotomous hierarchy, in which non-sighted people are subordinated in a "panoptic scheme." We confronted this approach with some reflections regarding how the modes of perception of blind or visually disabled people might be structured. This led us to question the narrow focus on practices of seeing because they in fact interact with the auditory or other sensory dimensions in complex ways. The main question that we consequently pursued throughout the analysis of recent cinematographic productions was then how

perceptual patterns of non-sighted individuals are produced audio-visually and hence translated into a filmic grammar. The central aspects that were critically examined in this context are the production of filmic space, the use of the p-o-v shot and the creation of particular soundscapes.

The first film under analysis, *Monika*, a coming-of-age-film addresses the way in which the protagonist is obliged to deal with her loss of sight. It narrates a story of overcoming disability in order to live independently from both her mother and the institutional frame. Though emphasizing the subversive potential of the young woman and constructing a specific sound perspective, we argue that the film's cinematographic practice of creating a visually disabled gaze by the application of the p-o-v shot reinforces the dichotomy between sighted and non-sighted and therefore perpetuates an Othering of blindness. Turning to the second case study, one has to confirm that the approach of this highly self-reflective docudrama is quite unusual. *Antoine* sets out to tell a story that the protagonist and Laura Bari experienced together and that contains autobiographical elements as well as patterns of a detective story about the vanishing lady. Whether we take the diaries of memories or non-memories, the car rides or other moments of the film, they all seem to have an ephemeral and coincidental character. Their mixture with observations at Antoine's home and school undermine genre conventions and in effect figure as a *mise en abyme* of notions like real, documentary, fictitious or imagined. This is evident when considering the cinematographic strategies the film uses in order to configure the blind individual as author, filmmaker and a character able to move around in his environment.

In the end, we like to point out that one of the important aspects shown in the above analysis confirms what Wim Wenders once said about *Lisbon Story*: "The aim of this film [...] is to show how sound can help things to be seen differently."¹⁰⁰ When examining film, one has to be aware of both its field of vision as well as its soundscape. Because when approaching audio-visual practices in such a way, one can scrutinize how seeing and non-seeing are cinematographically translated by the medium film. These techniques demonstrate that film not only "illustrates" visual practices of sighted and non-sighted individuals but simultaneously addresses its own way of seeing and non-seeing with the support of practices like framing, perspective, montage, and so forth. By doing so, cinematographic productions also allude to the relativity and instability of these techniques and the processes of translation.

1. The authors focus in their analysis on the "multi-handicapped series" directed by Frederick Wiseman and consider particularly *Blind* (1987), *Adjustment and Work* (1986) and *Multi-handicapped* (1986). The series also includes *Deaf* (1986) which is not mentioned in detail by Mitchell's and Snyder's account. All films of the series visit specific institutions for people with visual and hearing disabilities and discuss their daily life practices framed by institutional contexts using a very slow pace and observing camera style without voice over dubbing. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, "After the Panopticon. Contemporary Institutions as Documentary Subject." *Cultural Locations of Disability* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 133-55, 138
2. Ibid., 145
3. Ibid., 145
4. Ibid., 146
5. Ian Hacking, "Making up people." *London Review of Books* 28.16 (2006), 23-26
6. Panopticism." *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1977)
7. When researching blind money practices, Schillmeier describes a situation of a privileged position where he observes a blind person entering a bus that does not see him. Michael Schillmeier, "Dis/Abling Practices: Rethinking Disability" *Human Affairs* 17.2 (2007), 201
8. *Sinnlichkeit, die man fühlt* (Directed by Palmers Textil AG; Austria 2011). See the spot here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hF3skOgLYa4> (accessed September 18, 2012).

9. Robert Scott, *The making of blind men: A study of adult socialization* (New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 1969)
10. Hacking,
11. Besides Mitchell and Snyder, Shelly Tremain also draws heavily on concepts by Foucault in order to analyze issues of disability. Shelley Tremain, *Foucault and the Government of Disability* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010)
12. Schillmeier argues that money is a perfect medium of social exchange. But the standardized materiality of money and related objects can simultaneously constitute possible “centres of disability” for people with visual impairment. Schillmeier, “Dis/Abling Practices,” 198. See also: Michael Schillmeier, “Othering blindness – on modern epistemological politics.” *Disability & Society* 21.5 (2006)
13. Sebastian Mraczny, “Blindheit und die kulturelle Produktion visuellen Sinns.” *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 37.2 (2012), 194
14. Siegfried Saerberg, “Just go straight ahead: How blind and sighted pedestrians negotiate space.” *The Senses and Society* 5.3 (2010)
15. “Unlike most of the body genres, the current disability documentary cinema constitutes an avant-garde in contemporary disability depictions. Here one encounters the privileging of disabled people’s voices and also the explicit foregrounding of a cultural perspective informed by, and within, the phenomenology of bodily difference.” Mitchell and Snyder, 170.
16. Julia Miele Rodas, “On blindness.” *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 3.2 (2009), 127
17. David Levin, *Modernity and the hegemony of vision* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Here, we refer to the hierarchy of the senses and the primacy of seeing since the 18th century. For the significance of sound, hearing and listening consult Michael Bull and Les Back, *The Auditory Culture Reader*(Oxford: Berg, 2006)
18. M. E. Doucet et al. “Blind subjects process auditory spectral cues more efficiently than sighted individuals.” *Experimental Brain Research* 160.2 (2005)
19. See the critical comment by Ruth E. Butler, “Geography and Vision-Impaired and Blind Populations.” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 19.3 (1994), 366
20. “The sight of sounds or the hearing of colours come about in the same way as the unity of the gaze through the two eyes: in so far as my body is, not a collection of adjacent organs, but a synergic system, all the functions of which are exercised and linked together in the general action of being in the world, in so far as it is the congealed face of existence.” Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of perception*(London: Routledge, 2005), 272
21. Regarding this topic, consider the project ‘Blind Spot’ that includes a series of short films about various blind persons and their way of living in different European cities. The site of the project also contains the videos: <http://blindspot.at/> (accessed September 17, 2012)
22. Siegfried Saerberg, “Konstitution des Raumes im blinden und sehenden Wahrnehmungsstil.” “*Geradeaus ist einfach immer geradeaus.*” *Eine lebensweltliche Ethnographie blinder Raumorientierung* (Konstanz: UVK, 2006). From a medical standpoint, Voss et. al. argue that in case of “sensory loss”, “adaptive mechanisms are at play in blind people which allow them to use their remaining senses in a more efficient, and sometimes supranormal, manner.” This also extends to performance of sound localization or the use of echolocation for spatial orientation. Patrice Voss et al., “Adaptation to Sensory Loss.” *Cognitive Science* 1.3 (2010), 311, 309
23. Saerberg, “Just go straight ahead.” Works that discuss the production of space more generally are Henri Lefèbvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Cambridge 1991); Jörg Dünne and Stephan Günzel, *Raumtheorie: Grundlagentexte aus Philosophie und Kulturwissenschaften* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 2006)
24. Jacques Aumont, *Aesthetics of film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 9-36
25. The term translation was developed by Michel Serres and Michel Callon in order to analyze structures or networks between things, ideas, human and non-human actors in which and through which

- translation processes take place. See Michel Callon, "Some elements of a sociology of translation: Domestication of the scallops and the fishermen of St. Brieuc Bay." *Power, action and belief: a new sociology of knowledge?* Ed. John Law (London: Routledge, 1986), 196-223
26. Sally Chivers, *The problem body: Projecting disability on film* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010)
 27. Mirzoeff uses the term "visual event", but he does not explicitly address the auditory when speaking about films. See Nicholas Mirzoeff, "The subject of visual culture." *The visual culture reader* (London: Routledge, 2002), 5-10
 28. Rodas, 119
 29. Michel Chion, *Audio-vision: Sound on screen* (Columbia University Press: New York, 1994); Barbara Flückiger, *Sound design: Die virtuelle Klangwelt des Films* (Marburg: Schüren, 2001)
 30. The significance of sound for the construction of space and perception of blind and visually disabled persons is discussed by Voss et al., 309-311. See also Emiliano Ricciardi, et al., "Space Representation in the Absence of Sight in the Human Brain." *Space in Language: Proceedings of the Pisa International Conference*. Eds. Marotta Giovanna, et al. (Firenze: 2010), 95-121
 31. Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, *Film theory: An introduction through the senses* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 131
 32. Michel Chion, "Das akusmatische Wesen: Magie und Kraft der Stimme im Kino." *Meteor. Texte zum Laufbild* 6 (1997)
 33. In filmic theory, the phenomenon of immersion is mainly connected to seeing or to the construction of the gaze: Gertrud Koch and Christiane Voss (Eds.), ... *kraft der Illusion*. (München: Fink, 2006); Robin Curtis and Christiane Voss, "Immersion." *montage AV. Zeitschrift für Theorie und Geschichte audiovisueller Kommunikation* 17.2 (2008); Robin Curtis, "Immersion und Einfühlung: Zwischen Repräsentationalität und Materialität bewegter Bilder." *montage AV. Zeitschrift für Theorie und Geschichte audiovisueller Kommunikation* 17.2 (2008); Vivian Sobchak, *The address of the eye: A phenomenology of film experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1992)
 34. This is evident in *Daredevil* (2003) by Mark Steven Johnson where the protagonist loses his sight but then gains heightened hearing abilities. The film produces his non-seeing through techniques like the zoom and juxtaposes them with special sound effects. Cf. Petra Kuppers, "Blindness and Affect: Daredevil's Site/Sight." *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 23.2 (2006), 94-95
 35. Helen Fulton, "Film narrative and visual cohesion." *Narrative and media* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 108-22, 108.
 36. Basic rules of this translating process operated by the program The vOICe are: Objects that appear on the top are voiced by a higher pitch than whatever is on the bottom, what is on the right respectively left side, is then heard on the right or left, bright objects sound louder than dark ones. See the homepage of the program: <http://www.seeingwithsound.com/> (accessed September, 03, 2012)
 37. Mit den Ohren sehen – die Hörbrille. URL: http://mediathek.daserste.de/sendungen_a-z/427262_wie-wissen/8826866_mit-den-ohren-sehen-die-hoerbrille (accessed September 04, 2012)
 38. You can see an excerpt of the documentary The science of the senses: Sight (CBS 2007) on this homepage: <http://www.seeingwithsound.com/cbc2008.html> (accessed September 04, 2012)
 39. Reports and films explicitly show how blind individuals use the glasses and headphones and demonstrate that they connect them to a laptop
 40. *Science of the Senses. Four part series: Hearing. Touch. Smell. Sight* (Produced for CBC by Merit Motion Pictures; Canada 2007)
 41. The scene was ultimately not used in the film but is available on this site: http://www.seeingwithsound.com/media/cbc2008pat_bike.aspx (accessed on September 03 2012). In this case, the shot is juxtaposed with noises of the bicycle and music aiming to create a realistic effect
 42. For an overview see Lotfi B. Merabet, "Building the bionic eye: An emerging reality and opportunity." *Enhancing performance for action and perception. Multisensory Integration, Neuroplasticity and Neuroprosthetics, Part II*. Eds. Green, Andrea, et al. (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2011)

43. *Blindness* (2008) by Fernando Mereilles contains a number of scenes that make use of this type of subjective camera shot. See also the short film *Planet of the Blind* (2006) by Sven Werner that is based on the same-titled book by Steven Kuusisto. The latter is available online: <http://www.cultureunplugged.com/documentary/watch-online/filmedia/play/3306/Planet-of-the-Blind> (accessed September 04, 2012)
44. Edward Branigan, *Point of view in the cinema: A theory of narration and subjectivity in classical film* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1982)
45. Edward W. Said and Gauri Viswanathan, *Power, Politics and Culture: Interviews with Edward W. Said*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), 40
46. *Monika* (Directed by Christian Werner; Germany 2011). Homepage of the film (in English): <http://www.monika-film.de/ehome.html> (accessed on August 2, 2012). More information can be found on the homepage of the film's sound engineer: <http://benjamin-gruber.de/2010/07/monika/?nggpage=2&show=slide> (accessed on August 2, 2012)
47. Regarding the topic of "overcoming", researchers in Disability Studies coined the term of the "super crip". See Paul Darke, "Eye Witness." *Framed: Interrogating Disability in the Media*. Eds. Pointon, Ann, Chris Davies and Paddy Masfield (London, England: British Film Institute, 1997), 37; Amit Kama, "Supercrips versus the pitiful handicapped: Reception of disabling images by disabled audience members." *Communications: The European Journal of Communication Research* 29.4 (2004); Russell Meeuf, "John Wayne as 'Supercrip': Disabled bodies and the construction of 'hard' masculinity in *The Wings of Eagles*." *Cinema Journal* 48.2 (2009)
48. Cf. Colin Barnes and Geof Mercer, *The social model of disability: Europe and the majority world* (Leeds: Disability Press, 2005). For a critical discussion of the social model see Tom Shakespeare and Nicholas Watson, "The social model of disability: an outdated ideology?" *Research in Social Science and Disability* 2 (2001); M. Miles, "The 'social model of disability': Met a narrative of (in)credulity. A review." *Disability, CBR and Inclusive Development* 22.1 (2011)
49. Catherine Driscoll, *Teen film: A critical introduction* (Oxford; New York: Berg), 66. See also Timothy Shary and Alexandra Seibel, *Youth culture in global cinema* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), especially Chapter 15-17
50. Thomas Couser, *Signifying bodies: Disability in contemporary life writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 19; Isabel Pedersen and Kristen Aspevig, "'My eyes ended up at my fingertips': Antoine, autobiographical documentary, and the cinematic depiction of a blind child subject." *Biography* 34.4 (2011), 648
51. Carolin Länger, *Im Spiegel von Blindheit: Eine Kultursoziologie des Sehinsnes* (Stuttgart: Lucius & Lucius, 2002), 6
52. "Visual Culture is concerned with visual events in which information, meaning or pleasure is sought by the consumer in an interface of technology." Nicholas Mirzoeff, "What is visual culture." *An introduction to Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999), 3
53. Länger, 6
54. Michael Lynch and Steve Woolgar, *Representation in scientific practice* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990); Mark M. Smith, "Seeing." *Sensing the past: Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching in history*(Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 19-40
55. Branigan, 110
56. For an overview see Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, *New vocabularies in film semiotics: Structuralism, post-structuralism and beyond* (London: Routledge, 1998), 85-88
57. Branigan, 207
58. An example mentioned by Bordwell and Thompson is the dizzy view of Max in *The Road Warrior* (known as *Mad Max II*) as he wakes up after a car crash. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, "Narrative as a formal system." *Film art: An introduction* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 93
59. Branigan, 156
60. *Ibid.*, 160

61. Ibid., 215
62. Johnson Cheu, "Seeing blindness on-screen: The blind, female Gaze." *The problem body: Projecting disability on film*. Eds. Chivers, Sally and Nicole Markotić (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010), 71. For the concept of the gaze see Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of looking: An introduction to visual culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). For a feminist approach see Laura Mulvey, "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema." In *Visual and other pleasures* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989)
63. Recently, more scholars are engaged in investigating the multiperspectivity and entanglement of the senses. For an introduction to this field see David Howes, *Empire of the senses: The sensual culture reader*(Oxford: Berg, 2005)
64. One understands this shot as her glance because (a) the film's title indicates her name in the beginning and (b) shows her in the initial scene in a subjective camera tracking that follows her while distributing newspaper advertising in a small town. That this scene also shows her wearing glasses is a further indication. On the basis of this information one concludes that the unidentified character with a female voice (talking to the doctor) associated with this point-of-view shot is Monika
65. Michel Foucault, *The birth of the clinic: An archaeology of medical perception* (London: Routledge, 2010), xiii
66. This non-agreement is further stressed through the composition of the scene as the conventional shot-reverse-shot is not used to design the dialogue between the doctor and the patient
67. Friedrich Balke, "Normalität." *Pflegetheoretische Grundbegriffe*. Ed. Ingrid Kollak (Bern: Huber, 1999), 96, 107; Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing normalcy: Disability, deafness, and the body* (London: Verso, 1995) 23-49; Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the societies of control." *October* 59.Winter (1992)
68. Cf. Scott, 73-74, 83
69. Rodas, 118
70. Georges Canguilhem et al., *The normal and the pathological* (New York: Zone Books, 1989); Jürgen Link, *Versuch über den Normalismus: Wie Normalität produziert wird* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1997)
71. Branigan, 159
72. Cheu, 71
73. Mitchell and Snyder, 146
74. David Bordwell, *Narration in the fiction film* (London: Routledge, 1995), 118
75. The emergence of Monika's sound perspective is prepared earlier in another scene of the film. Shortly after having arrived in the school for the blind and the visually impaired, the protagonist receives a white cane. Although rejecting it at first, she comes to experiment with it in her room at night and generates sounds with it by touching the carpet, a pair of shoes and wooden surfaces. Already here, the enhanced volume of the sound track creates a specific acoustic texture that is linked to Monika's perceptual subjectivity
76. Joseph P. Shapiro, *No pity: People with disabilities forging a new civil rights movement* (New York: Times Books, 1993), 16; Couser, 203. See also Footnote 47
77. Patrice Voss et al. "Early- and late-onset blind individuals show supra-normal auditory abilities in far-space." *Current biology* 14.19 (2004), 1734
78. Merleau-Ponty, 165
79. Bordwell, 119
80. The film is available online here: <http://www.linktv.org/programs/antoine> (accessed August 02, 2012)
81. Wiseman developed his approach since the 1960s. See Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz, "Social Observers: Robert Drew, Albert and David Maysles, Frederick Wiseman." *Observational cinema: Anthropology, film, and the exploration of social life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 24-26, 41-47

82. Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 69-75
83. Karin Bijsterveld and Jos van Dijck, "Introduction." *Sound souvenirs: Audio technologies, memory and cultural practices* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009)
84. One could think of novelists like Jorge Louis Borges, Jacques Lusseyran, John Milton or singer and TV newsman Tom Sullivan, whose autobiography *If you could see what I hear* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) served as a base for the same titled film (1982). However, as Norden notes, this comedy does not tell the story from Sullivan's point of view. See Martin F. Norden, *The cinema of isolation: A history of physical disability in the movies* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 291
85. Pedersen and Aspevig, 644-5
86. The trust in such abilities of young people is an important point of *Lisbon Story* (1994) where the sound engineer Winter searches for the filmmaker Friedrich in Lisbon and encounters some children that are familiar with recent technologies like portable video equipment. Ulrich Schönherr, "Als die Bilder hören lernten: Musik, Ton, Avantgardeästhetik und Geschlechterkonfiguration in Wim Wenders' *Lisbon Story*." *Monatshefte* 96.2 (2004), 239
87. For a discussion of different approaches that seek to explain how cinematic realism functions see Andrew Kania, "Realism." *The Routledge companion to philosophy and film*. Eds. Livingston, Paisley and Carl R. Plantinga (London: Routledge, 2008)
88. Consider for instance the sequence of *Handicapped Future* (1971) by Werner Herzog in which Adolf Ratzka, founder of the Institute of Independent Living and then student at UCLA, drives with his car on the highway of Los Angeles. See also Herzog's comment on the film in Werner Herzog and Paul Cronin, *Herzog on Herzog* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 72-73
89. See the films *Escamotage d'une Dame au Théâtre* (1896) by Georges Méliès and *The Vanishing Lady* (1938) by Alfred Hitchcock. Slavoj Žižek, "Hallucination as ideology in cinema." *Theory and Event* 6.1 (2002), 143; Patrice Petro, "Rematerializing the Vanishing 'Lady': Feminism, Hitchcock, and Interpretation." *A Hitchcock Reader*. Eds. Marshall Deutelbaum and Leland A. Poague (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); Matthew Solomon, *Disappearing Tricks: Silent Film, Houdini, and the New Magic of the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 34-35
90. The off-screen is often represented by sound or voices from other characters. For the distinction between onscreen and offscreen sound see Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 73-80
91. We hereby refer to the notion of the visible conceptualized by Deleuze following Foucault: "As statements are inseparable from systems, so visibilities are inseparable from machines. A machine does not have to be optical; but it is an assembly of organs and functions that makes something visible and conspicuous [...]"
92. Alexander Graf, "Even the sounds shine: On Wim Wender's *Lisbon Story*." *Text und Ton im Film*. Ed. Paul Goetsch (Tübingen: Narr, 1997), 229
93. On Méliès' film see Lucy Fischer, "The Lady vanishes: Women, magic and the movies." *Film Quarterly* 33.1 (1979); Neil Forsyth, "Shakespeare and Méliès: Magic, Dream and the Supernatural." *Études anglaises* 55.2 (2002), 168
94. Nichols, 107-133
95. In *Lisbon Story*, there is a scene when Winter is at the barber's and sees for a short moment a young mysterious boy standing at the door. But when he asks the kids that are with him who the boy is, he already disappeared so that the others do not see him
96. Ken Dancyger, *The technique of film and video editing: History, theory, and practice* (Burlington: Focal Press, 2007), 280
97. Mitchell and Snyder, 146
98. The method of photo-ethnography can emphasize the expertise of children regarding their experiences of architecture and other environments. It hence might enable communication about sensory experiences that children sometimes cannot articulate so easily. Jasmien Herssens and Ann

Heylighen, "Blind photographers: A quest into the spatial experiences of blind children." *Children, Youth and Environments* 22.1 (2012)

99. Mitchell and Snyder, 145

100. Quoted in Graf, 231