

Catastrophic Aftermath: The Loss of Sight as a Process of Becoming Posthuman in Contemporary Audiovisual Culture*

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Abstract:

In contemporary audiovisual production (mainly the Apple TV series *See*), the theme of the loss of sight due to (environmental) catastrophe becomes a symptom for the analysis of the disintegration and revival of a world that has deterritorialized due to the exploitative demands of postmodern capitalism, thus de facto marking the end of the so-called Anthropocene era. If Western philosophy traditionally defines man as an animal possessing reason and at the same time an animal in which the different senses are in balance, the loss of sight and the respective post-apocalyptic environment in which survivors exist without the possibility of seeing, on the one hand, outlines a process that could seemingly be considered degenerative or decadent: without sight, man is not man and approaches the animal. On the other hand, however, the loss of this sense also articulates the hints of the renewal of a world that will be a post-human world, in which the new norm and normative of life becomes life without sight as a new form of social, economic, habitual arrangement, in which sight is understood as something regressive, as something responsible for the almost complete destruction of humanity. This in itself brings about a transformation of the relationship between human and non-human actors, transformations in the flows of belief and desire, and ways of articulating life, which, following Deleuze, is actualized from virtual modulations and temporal variants of events. My perspective is therefore based on the philosophy of G. Deleuze and vitalism in general, and I intend to read the figure of the loss of sight as a kind of counter-actualization of the event: as an effort to negate the effects of catastrophe and at the same time to establish a new (life) form.

Keywords: Gilles Deleuze; posthuman; Herbert George Wells; philosophy of blindness; deterritorialization; affect; Baruch Spinoza; Jakob von Uexküll

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1. Introduction

In April 1904, a rather long story written by Herbert George Wells entitled “The Country of the Blind” appeared in *Strand Magazine*.¹ In it, Wells describes the phantasmatic existence of a valley that was inhabited by settlers several decades or hundreds of years ago, located in Ecuador. However, at the moment of their arrival, disaster struck – an earthquake cut off the settlers, except for one, from the outside world, essentially making the place inaccessible. But, the local, newly arriving population did not seem to mind; the valley was filled with everything one could wish for, from plenty of fresh water to an abundance of sustenance. Yet, after some time, a mysterious disease struck the settlement, causing everyone to lose their sight. Children began to be born blind, and even the settler who had seen the valley but had to turn back to escape the catastrophe became blind. Thanks to him, however, the legend of the country of the blind began to spread – a mythical place where people cannot see but one that otherwise meets all the criteria of a utopia.

Let’s move to (Wells’) present. The main character of the story Nunez arrives in the valley under tragic circumstances. During a mountain climb, he slipped and the subsequent long fall, which he miraculously survives, transports him directly to the country of the blind. After his first contact with the locals, he thinks he might become their king; after all, he is the only one with the ability to see. But, the situation becomes more complicated. First, the blind do not understand the vast majority of his words, for example “sky” is not a part of their vocabulary, and they consider birds to be spirits that constantly surround them but are of an immaterial nature. And to top it all off, they regard him as an inferior and underdeveloped human being (they call him “wild-man”) because he talks nonsense, moves excessively noisily, and generally behaves in a highly abnormal manner. Nunez is understandably frustrated and even tries to physically wrestle with them; eventually, however, he realizes that there is no escape from the valley and he therefore gives in. He is almost perfectly subjectivated, admitting that he was “crazy” but that he is already slowly coming to understand how the world works. This, however, is not the end of his peripeteia. As it commonly happens in literature, Nunez falls in love, and he does so with a girl whom others consider insufficiently beautiful while Nunez is convinced otherwise. The feelings between the two “outcasts” heat up, but the girl asks one thing of him: to submit himself to the care of a local doctor who can hopefully cure his madness.

1 Wells, H. G., The Country of the Blind. *Strand Magazine*, 27, 1904, No. 160, pp. 401–415.

The diagnosis is clear. Two strange, constantly moving and flickering objects in the middle of his head – his eyes – are responsible for the abnormal workings of Nunez’s mind. Nunez must make a decision. He can either plunge into the endless darkness, cease to see but stay with his beloved in the valley, or try to escape without his love but with his ability to see preserved. He makes his way to the foot of the mountain, where he slowly falls asleep and the story ends.

Of course, this is not an inventive narrative structure, and the plot of the story itself is essentially banal. It inversely presents a world in which traditional structures of experience are inverted, and in which blindness is the norm while seeing is considered a disease. Wells points to the cultural encoding of human nature, the artificiality of the senses, and inverts the basic assumption that, apart from the ability to speak, what makes a person human is primarily sight, from which the ability to abstract and taxonomize derives. On the contrary, he shows that when deprived of sight, man is able to adapt to his environment through what might be called haptic knowledge. To put it another way, Wells’ short story takes us to the theme of posthumanity, or to a situation in which ordinary perceptual and affective schemes become deterritorialized due to a radical transformation of the environment, in which the “new” human problematizes the traditional Western philosophical conception of what it means to be human. In our case, we are dealing with a man without sight, created at the moment when an event, a rupture, occurred and blindness became the new norm. It was therefore necessary to develop a new interpretation and understanding of the world in the dark, in which at some point the new posthuman began to navigate with certainty and without any problems.

2. The philosophy of blindness

It is peculiar that the history of philosophy has to some extent ignored the problem of blindness. Or rather, blindness has always been regarded (in Aristotelian terms) as *sterésis*, as deprivation, as the absence of the determination that one should (naturally) have.² This makes sense because, as

2 Josef Fulka, in his book *Deafness, Gesture and Sign Language in the 18th Century French Philosophy*, undertakes a philosophical examination of deafness, focusing among other sources on Wells’s short story. He shows precisely that blindness in Wells’s fictional world is not a sign of “deficiency”, but simply the norm. The second interesting moment in Fulka’s book is the outline of two types of paradigms: the paradigm of *sterésis* and the paradigm of difference, which is actually implied in the present text, although I focus on the theme of blindness. Fulka, J., *Když ruce mluví. Gesto a znakový jazyk v dějinách západního myšlení*. Prague, FF UK 2017, p. 110; 27.

Martin Jay describes, Western culture from the beginning has always been “ocularcentric” or “dominated by vision”.³ Mark Paterson made the highly accurate observation that although in the history of philosophy “the questions of blindness periodically bob and weave around”,⁴ they are rarely made the central theme of philosophical conceptions.

Even so, two lines around which reflections on blindness have constituted themselves and gained expression can be drawn. One is Molyneux’s letters (1688 and 1693) to John Locke.

Locke did not reply to the first of these, but after receiving the second, a long discussion developed between them, which Locke embraced in the second edition of his *Essay*. Molyneux’s query was seemingly simple (although its nature differs somewhat between the first and second letters): A blind man from birth has held in his hands a globe and a cube of the same size and material and has been instructed as to which of these objects is the globe and which is the cube so that he can distinguish them by touch. Suppose he suddenly acquires sight. Will he, Molyneux asks, be able to tell them apart by sight? Answering this question would keep philosophers busy for the next few centuries. Without going through the various solutions in detail, it is possible to schematize that they developed into two branches, reflecting two philosophical perspectives: the proponents of empiricism (one of whom is naturally Locke) were convinced that the answer to Molyneux’s query must be negative,⁵ as direct sensory experience is necessary for the distinction between objects to be discerned. Rationalists argued the opposite, as discernment depends on the faculties of the mind, and the senses are secondary in cognition, or they have a much greater tendency to deceive than clear and distinct cognition by the mind.

Other thinkers, such as Condillac and Diderot, split Molyneux’s question in two: What does the newly sighted man see, and would the mind be immediately able to name what it saw?⁶ Their answer (especially to the second question) was strictly negative because they were attacking the doctrine of innate ideas. Diderot, however, did not exhaust himself merely in answering

3 Jay, M., *The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*. Oakland, University of California Press 1994, p. 3. Or as Jay remarks: “The importance of sight is evident throughout Plato’s writings. In the *Timaeus*, for example, he distinguished between the creation of the sense of sight, which he grouped with the creation of human intelligence and the soul, and that of the other senses, which he placed with man’s material being.” *Ibid.*, p. 26.

4 Paterson, M., *Seeing with the Hands: Blindness, Vision and Touch After Descartes*. Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press 2016, p. 3.

5 Bruno, M. – Mandelbaum, E., Locke’s answer to Molyneux’s Thought Experiment. *Philosophy Quarterly*, 27, 2010, No. 2, pp. 165–180.

6 Jay, M., *Downcast Eyes*. Berkeley, University of California Press 2009, p. 101.

the problem posed, but himself questioned the blind man to get better understanding of what blind man “saw”.⁷ In his *Letter on the Blind for the Use of those who can see* from 1749, Diderot refutes Descartes’ notion of the primacy of sight: “If ever a philosopher, blind and deaf from his birth, were to construct a man after the fashion of Descartes, I can assure you, madam, that he would put the seat of the soul at the fingers’ ends, for thence the greater part of the sensations and all his knowledge are derived.”⁸

Experimental and philosophical research in this field has not ceased, and in the 20th century, with the advance of cognitive science and the improvement of computer technology, visualization apparatuses, and sensory substitution devices, theorists and scientists are now leaning towards the necessity of the interplay of sensation and thought, giving a more empirical answer.⁹

However, even though Molyneux’s inquiry has inspired philosophical investigations into the nature of human perception, it remains clear that blindness is understood here as an expression of abnormal development or a deviation from the normal functioning of human perception. The second branch, originating in antiquity,¹⁰ uses blindness as an analogy to the perceptual mechanism of orientation in the environment, and the emphasis on touch as a rhetorical and discursive tool for revealing the basic principles of human sensibility. I am thinking in particular of Descartes’ *Dioptrics*, which best illustrates this approach. For at one point, Descartes works with the example of a blind man who uses a cane (as an extension of the senses) and, of course, touch to orient himself in space, claiming that “one might almost say that [the blind] see with their hands”.¹¹ The point of Descartes’ example is that the information gained from one sense (be it sight or touch) is only one piece of the puzzle of sensory experience. And even in this case, blindness is mentioned only in passing, for as David Michael Levin points out, “for Descartes, darkness is a nightmare. There is nothing to be learned from entering its domain. He is a philosopher obsessed with clarity and light. If a discourse in which light, vision, and its metaphors are constitutive of its

7 Paterson, M., *Seeing with the Hands*, p. 1.

8 Mago, C. E., Blindness and the Age of Enlightenment. Diderot’s Letter on the Blind. *JAMA Ophthalmol.*, 131, 2013, No. 1, pp. 98–102; Diderot, D., Letter on the Blind for the Use of those who can see. In: Diderot, D., *Diderot’s Early Philosophical Work*. Trans. M. Jourdain. Chicago–London, The Open Court Publishing Company 1916, p. 87.

9 Ferretti, G. – Glenney, B. (eds.), *Molyneux’s Question and the History of Philosophy*. New York, Routledge 2021; Stawarska, B., Seeing Faces: Sartre and Imitation Studies. *Sartre Studies International*, 13, 2007, No. 2, pp. 27–46.

10 Aristotle, *De Anima*, 432a1. South Bend, St. Augustine’s Press 2020.

11 Descartes, R., *Dioptrika*. Trans. J. Fiala. Prague, Oikoymenh 2010, p. 71.

very logic may be called ocularcentric, then it would be difficult to deny that Descartes's philosophy exemplifies ocularcentrism".¹²

In other words, the topic of blindness was analyzed by philosophers who had the ability to see, with the aim of better understanding visual and tactile perception. Even Nietzsche, who struggled with partial blindness towards the end of his life, and therefore was dependent on various assistive technological devices, uses blindness in the traditional vein as a metaphor for the acquisition/inadequacy of knowledge, while on the other hand understanding this physical limitation as an affirmation of suffering and life.¹³ As Julia Rodas summarizes, "cultural reliance on blindness as metaphor thus metonymizes the blind man, recreating him as a figure of speech, the component of a joke, a poem".¹⁴

3. Postapocalyptic environments (transformation of human sensory capacity)

And yet Wells offers us a different perspective. He presents us, to some extent, with a utopian world that is free from danger to its inhabitants, and in which blindness is what defines a man. We might even say that Wells' story is essentially anti-ocularcentric, showing us a new human form that has arisen as a result of a natural disaster. Wells' man has altered the structure of language (as a conventional sign system that allows us to express the world, as Diderot, Condillac but also de Saussure, for example, point out), altered the way we orient ourselves in space (all movement in the environment is based on material/tactile orientators – signs), and created different mythic frameworks for interpreting the world.

The current audiovisual production follows Wells but translates the basic framework and setting into a post-apocalyptic environment. It is the post-apocalyptic setting that generally uses the human ability to adapt to changing living conditions in order to survive. Post-apocalyptic visions of the (future) world use several basic structural elements. That the world as we know it has ceased to exist is due either to nuclear war, which has wiped out about 90 % of humanity, experiments with dangerous viruses, or the emergence of a new disease for which no cure has been found. In all these cases, there has

12 Levin, D. M., Introduction. In: Levin, D. M. (ed.), *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*. Berkeley, University of California Press 1993, p. 9. For a more detailed analysis of Descartes's conception of sight: Judovitz, D., *Vision, Representation, and Technology in Descartes*. In: Levin, D. M. (ed.), *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, pp. 63–86.

13 Nietzsche, F., *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Trans. T. Common. New York, The Modern Library 1909, esp. Chapter XLII. Redemption.

14 Rodas, J., On Blindness. *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*, 3, 2009, No. 2, p. 117.

been a radical decline in the Earth's population, either a sudden or gradual degeneration of political, economic, and social infrastructures, the emergence of new (often mutated) life forms that have turned the environment into a space full of danger where death lurks at every turn, and thereby the emergence of a new type of habitation on the surface of the planet or underneath it. Hand in hand with this, the survivors are confronted with the daily and never-ending scarcity of resources: from food and fresh water to technology, building materials, and medicines. Social organization is returning to the level it was at a few hundred years ago; small enclaves are being formed from a few dozen, at most hundreds of inhabitants who are trying to be as self-sufficient as possible; trade ties (if they exist at all) are based on bartering (be it for ammunition, technology, energy resources, food, drinking water or medicine), essentially forming small communities that strive to defend themselves from external dangers embodied by raiders, gangs, mutants, and other dangerous organizations. It is logical, therefore, that authoritarian and hierarchical modes of governance emerge, that the norms and values of society are defined absolutely differently, that racism runs rampant, that intolerance, slavery, and violence are the generally accepted means of conflict resolution, that those who are physically or psychologically unfit to exist in society are persecuted and killed or excluded from communities, and that survivors tend to cling to either ancient forms of transcendence or new deities.¹⁵

In the Apple TV series *See*, we are confronted with a post-apocalyptic world set in this manner. A few centuries ago, a dangerous disease wiped out most of the population, and those lucky enough not to be touched by death lost their sight at the same time. Basic human nature is transformed, leading to the fetishization of blindness and the machines of the past that are still functional, though no one knows how to fix them and any malfunction is interpreted as the wrath of the gods.

The loss of sight in *See* follows a techno-pessimistic agenda based on humanity's ability to destroy itself. The newly born man without sight is also a form of posthuman being who has managed to adapt in new conditions to a world that, while partially transformed, remains much more of a backdrop to this narrative, the themes of which involve the age-old human propensity for violence, the subjugation of others, and the distrust of all who are different. From a certain point of view, it could be argued that the gradual, multi-generational adaptation to life without sight is a sign of humanity's ability

¹⁵ See Weart, S. R., *Nuclear Fear. A History of Images*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press 1988, p. 224.

to survive; on the other hand, this is a world full of conflict, where humanity may no longer have the potential to almost absolutely destroy the environment again, albeit human life plays out in an endless dialectic of war and peace.

The series also works with a scenario in which sight begins to return and harmony between the blind and the sighted is established in a post-apocalyptic world after an initial distrust of those who can see. Yet it seems to be the same and eternally repeating survival story, which is based on the idea that humanity has learned from its past and that there will be an acknowledgment of the differences between different life forms. It is much more likely that there will always be a group of marginalized people who will be forced to create mimicry so that pseudo-recognition can occur, thereby only reinforcing power inequalities.¹⁶

Contemporary philosophy, which thematizes posthuman landscapes, conditions, and territories, is based on the critique of the Anthropocene, emphasizing the necessity of reconceptualizing human existence and transforming the approach to all living and non-living things in terms of the interdependent relationships between organisms and the environment.¹⁷ One of the main themes of posthuman philosophy is the transformation of the posthuman being's sensory capacity, which radically ruptures the fabric through which Western philosophy has elaborated an all-encompassing interpretive grid of "what is human", especially with regard to the prediction of the coming catastrophes that project post-apocalyptic worlds. The environment disappears, replaced by a deterritorialized landscape in which there is a rearticulation of what it means to actually exist: It means that adaptive mechanisms for surviving after a radical event are always a matter of cultural mixing, perceptual and physiological mechanisms, from which a new posthuman being is born – in this case, a being that, although it has lost its sight, has acquired qualitatively different types of perceptions and affects that allow it to survive in a world that has lost its original structure.

4. Transforming territory

In the following section, I want to focus on an interpretation that would not interpret the loss of sight as a loss of humanity, or as a degenerative form of human existence in the world, but as an adaptive mechanism to a radical

16 Irigaray, L., *This sex which is not one*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press 1985.

17 Braidotti, R., *Posthuman Knowledge*. New York, Polity Press 2019; Braidotti, R., *The Posthuman*. New York, Polity Press 2013; Braidotti, R. – Hlavajova, M. (eds.), *Posthuman Glossary*. London, Bloomsbury Academics 2018.

event that transformed the entire environment. For this task, I am inclined to the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze (and Félix Guattari), particularly from two interrelated points of view: a) I draw on Deleuze's continuity with and via the interpretation of Jakob von Uexküll's biology; b) the notion of affects and the development of the organism as Deleuze (albeit with many variations) adopts it from Spinoza. The aim is therefore to outline a posthuman philosophy that would take into account the potentially catastrophic human situation in which everything is transformed and thereby the human capacity for survival in an inhospitable and dangerous world is restructured.

To begin with, the post-apocalyptic wasteland is the result of the deterritorialization of the previous territory – the human landscapes that it was able to inhabit and populate or territorialize. Deleuze and Guattari mention Jakob von Uexküll in particular in the creation of territory. Uexküll's biology, especially as presented in his later works, places a very specific emphasis on the problem of meaning and the process of signification. A short picture book written for children in 1934 outlines the starting point of what it means to understand nature, and how events within organic life can be understood at all. The answer is banally simple: take a walk in the meadow, sit down, and look around you.¹⁸ All living things, insects, ourselves, have a “soap bubble” around them, a very specific and proper world. In other words, Uexküll urges us to break away from our human understanding of the world and try to adopt an animal perspective, a perspective in which certain phenomena emerge in different meanings. If every animal has this “bubble” around it, we can say that there is not only one world, but a multiplicity of worlds, where animals are not seen as mere objects, but as subjects whose essence lies in perception and action. On the basis of perception and action, Uexküll speaks of a perceptual world (*Merkwelt*) and a world of action (*Wirkwelt*). These two worlds form the animal world, which is called *Umwelt*. Each animal therefore constructs its world on the basis of perceptions and actions that are subjective. According to Uexküll, there is no objective reality in the forms of objects or in the world as such; there is nothing outside the individual subjective experiences that constitute the *Umwelt* as meaningful. Initially, the animal perceives an object, a perceptual sign is produced, but since every animal is both perceptive and active, this perceived sign is replaced by the caused sign on the basis of which the animal acts.¹⁹ But this caused sign is ‘imprinted’ by the bearer of the meaning (the stem becomes a pathway for ants or a source of nutrients for another organism). Uexküll therefore

18 Uexküll, J. von, *A Foray Into the Worlds of Animals and Humans. With a Theory of Meaning*. Trans. J. D. O'Neil. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press 2010, p. 43.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 94.

speaks of a “functional circle that connects the bearer of meaning to the subject”.²⁰ Buchanan calls this perspective as biological ontology.²¹

According to Uexküll, each organ has its own specific “tone”, where the tones of the individual organs make up the “life tone of the whole animal”.²² The animal as an organism is the production of various rhythms or melodies that together form a symphony, and through this symphony the animal orients itself in space and responds to stimuli in space. At a higher level, we can speak of the harmony of organisms, which is applied in packs or colonies; however, at the highest level, this creates a coherent expression of the world, of nature as composition. Buchanan speaks of a “web of life” in which all organisms and inorganic elements coexist.²³

Deleuze and Guattari emphasize motif of the multiplicity of worlds and the process of the animal’s orientation in the territory. The Umwelt is certainly a territory where the animal’s movement is based on the process of recognition and the interpretation of signs (the perceived sign and the caused sign). But what happens to the multiplicity of organic worlds when the environment is deterritorialized due to a natural disaster or the action of an unknown virus, resulting in people losing their sight? Because humans adapt to a new environment over time in order to survive, it is necessary to repopulate the surface of the Earth, to territorialize it. As Deleuze and Guattari write, the human being “is a segmentary animal”.²⁴ However, all the bearers of meaning, the whole world of perception and action, is reshaped, all Umwelts are structured differently, and the life “tone” and rhythms of man are transformed, and the overall composition of the post-apocalyptic landscape takes on new forms.

Deleuze and Guattari argue that a territory is a territory because of its expressive quality. How does one arrive at this expressive quality? Through the act of marking, a territory becomes a territory the moment it is marked by specific types of signs. Deleuze and Guattari call these signs indexes; indexes are territorial signs.²⁵ To create a territory in the first place means to stratify

20 Uexküll, J. von, *Nauka o významu*. In: Kliková, A. – Kleisner, K. (ed.), *Umwelt. Koncepce žitého světa Jakoba von Uexkülla*. Červený Kostelec, Pavel Mervart 2006, p. 21; cf. Uexküll, J. von – Kriszat, G., *Streifzüge durch die Umwelten von Tieren und Menschen; Bedeutungslehre*. Munich, Rowohlt Taschenbuch 1956, pp. 103–159.

21 Buchanan, I., *Onto-ethologies: The Animal Environments of Uexkull, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Deleuze*. New York, State University of New York Press 2008, p. 13.

22 Uexküll, J. von, *Nauka o významu*, p. 30.

23 Buchanan, I., *Onto-ethologies*, p. 20.

24 Deleuze, G. – Guattari, F., *A Thousand Plateaus*. Trans. B. Massumi. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press 1987, p. 208.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 112.

the environment, to delimit it, to build a lair, a home, or a nest. This marking takes place through the reorganization of functions.

Once vision is lost, the visual landmarks that allow orientation in space cease to be important. One sense disappears while others are amplified (especially hearing and primarily touch). The bearers of meaning in *See* are identified primarily as objects and objects/organisms that imply tactile orientation; to move around in the environment, survivors use sticks, and to move from point A to point B in a familiar locale (villages and towns), metal ropes are deployed above head level with dividers and junctions leading to individual dwellings.

Human tones and rhythms are stratified differently because the newly created environment requires a specific type of segmentation. When Deleuze and Guattari speak of so-called “segmentary” primitive or savage societies (not in a negative sense), they emphasize in particular that several constitutive processes can be marked in their case: individuals do not belong to the *socius* as persons or individuals, but as organs attached to the body of the earth, and the *socius* is the marking of this connection, that is, it inscribes itself both on the body of the earth and on the body of the members of this social cast; next, there is the connection of voice and hearing – primitive societies are societies of orality, of grand narratives; and last but not least, Deleuze and Guattari mark the connection between the hand and the surfaces of inscription: inscription takes place on the body of the members of the society through tattooing or scarification.²⁶ And not only that: inscription also takes place on the body of the Earth through dances, rituals, and journeys. In *See*, all of these aspects are present; the grand mythic narrative holding the world in a tense (and often apparent) peace is a main motif of *See*. Sight is associated with the fact that it has enabled humans to produce the technology for the mass destruction of human life and the Earth itself, and its loss is interpreted as the gods punishing human pride and a return to the very essence of humanity; in other words, sight is seen as corrupted. The newly established human nature is the nature of a being lacking sight.

McLuhan writes that society is determined by the technology that prevails in a given period.²⁷ In the case of the television series *See*, the transmission of information takes place not only through speech (and a person without sight has invented specific expressions to interpret the world around him) but also through knots on strings that are read through touch.

26 Deleuze, G. – Guattari, F., *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. R. Hurley – M. Seem – H. R. Lane. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press 1983, pp. 145–153.

27 McLuhan, M., *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge, MIT Press 1994.

Of course, thanks to rudimentary technologies and techniques of message transmission, this is not a world that has frozen into untimely immobility, but a certain closeness to the levels of tribal communities is evident, even if they formally belong to one kingdom.

The result of the loss of sight is therefore, at first glance, the degeneration of society and a return to more backward forms of production and the creation of different types of social bonds. Living in the dark, however, offers possibilities for creating a new harmony in the multiplicity of Umwelt in the context of the overall attunement of Nature. Before the catastrophe, one Umwelt, the human anthropo-technological Umwelt, was absolutely outstanding because it was capable of destroying all other Umwelts. Now the situation is different – the human world is put on an equal footing with the other animal worlds, man is forced to be empathic towards his environment because, on the one hand, all his life resources come from it and, on the other, he is prey to some of the other animals. Although he has adapted to life without sight and is able to move confidently in his environment, an Anthropocene imbalance in the state of organic forces has been established.

To adapt to the new world without sight is, in Deleuzian terminology, to counter-actualize the event. We must not understand the event of sight loss as an unfortunate fate; instead we should accede to it, to affirm it, to be aware of our position in the event, to be aware of its aspects, not that the event itself is 'bad', but to be worthy of it by affirming it in its purity.²⁸ To be blind and yet to live on, to decide, to desire, to become one with the world around us through tactile experiences is to understand the intimate connection between the human being and the world that would not be fooled by sight.

5. The affective realm of becoming blind

Let us now turn to the interpretation of the posthuman without sight through the prism of Deleuze's philosophy. In other words, I will draw on his inspiration from Spinoza's conception of affect and ethology as a science of affects.

In *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, Deleuze writes that Spinoza's philosophy is in the spirit of a radical rejection of resentment and sad passions. It is no coincidence that these notions refer to Nietzsche, as Deleuze himself claims that Spinoza, even before Nietzsche, carried out similar analyses, analyzing life and its manifestations in terms of power and pleasure within a certain

28 Deleuze, G., *The Logic of Sense*. Trans. M. Lester. New York, Columbia University Press 1990, pp. 148–153.

plane of immanence. Spinoza's rejection of sorrowful passions goes hand in hand with a re-articulation of what the body actually is, as his main claim is that we often talk about the body without knowing what the body can do.²⁹ Moreover, this leads us to what is called parallelism in Spinoza, but it is not that the body has suddenly acquired ontological primacy; it is much more the case that the body transcends the knowledge we have of it, just as thinking transcends the knowledge we have of thinking. If Spinoza presents the body as a model, the implication is this: it does not "imply any devaluation of thought in relation to extension, but, importantly, a devaluation of consciousness in relation to thought: a discovery of the unconscious, of an unconscious of thought just as profound as the unknown of the body"³⁰ In Spinoza, the body is associated with the notions of affect, affection and effect.³¹ By effect, Spinoza describes the clash of different objects, or rather the actions and sufferings of bodies. This effect is also (necessarily) an affectation. The basic characteristic of affect is that it indicates the nature of a body undergoing some kind of suffering. Affections therefore express the state of our body, to which Deleuze adds that the state of our body is always part of our duration. But once we speak of the transformation of our duration, it is no longer an affect, but an affect as a passage that "lasts" between two states. If we understand the plane of immanence as the plane on which individual affects are distributed, there is a fundamental reconceptualization of the distinction between the plane of the artifice and the plane of the natural: "Artifice is fully a part of Nature, since each thing, on the immanent plane of Nature, is defined by the arrangements of motions and affects into which it enters, whether these arrangements are artificial or natural. Long after Spinoza, biologists [and here Deleuze explicitly refers to Uexküll] and naturalists will try to describe animal worlds defined by affects and capacities for affecting and being affected."³²

As Deleuze expounds in his lectures on Spinoza's thought, in this respect "the human genera, species or even race hasn't any importance, Spinoza will say, as long as you haven't made the list of affects of which someone is capable".³³ If we apply the whole interpretation to the problem of blindness, the loss of sight, it is obvious that the whole field of affectivity is different in

29 Deleuze, G., *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. Trans. R. Hurley. San Francisco, City Lights Books 1988, p. 18.

30 *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 48–51.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 124.

33 Available online at [www: https://www.gold.ac.uk/media/images-by-section/departments/research-centres-and-units/research-centres/centre-for-invention-and-social-process/deleuze_spinoza_affect.pdf](http://www.gold.ac.uk/media/images-by-section/departments/research-centres-and-units/research-centres/centre-for-invention-and-social-process/deleuze_spinoza_affect.pdf) [cit. 6. 7. 2023].

relation to the posthuman person from the one who lived before the catastrophic events. It is therefore not primarily a matter of evaluating whether a sighted person is “better” than a blind person. The blind man is “deprived of nothing” because he comes into contact with the world in such a way that he is absolutely perfect with respect to the affectations available to him. And Deleuze’s interpretation of Spinoza goes further: to say that a blind man is “deprived of sight” would be the same as saying that a “stone is deprived of sight”, which is absurd and nonsensical. A blind person fully experiences and exploits the affections he experiences.³⁴ And of course he amplifies other sensory impressions, especially tactile ones. And would we say that a sighted person is a “lesser” or “imperfect” person when, from the perspective of a blind person, he has imperfectly “developed” organs of hearing and touch? Even though the valley dwellers in Wells’ story and the characters in the *See* series do, this is a false dichotomy. The blind man exercises his power to the fullest extent possible through a combination of affects, and so comes to know his own body and realizes what the body is capable of; affects are a sign, an indication of the body.

In this respect, we must add how Deleuze understands the organism and the articulation of (organic) forms. Here, among other things, Deleuze draws inspiration from Simondon and his 1964 book *L’individu et sa genèse physico-biologique* (and, in fact, Deleuze already puts forward very similar theses in his first book on the philosophy of David Hume). Simondon was convinced that a precondition of individuation is the existence of metastable systems, and of a pre-individual transcendental field in which they develop.³⁵ In other words: if a catastrophic event radically transforms the environment and structures the multiplicity of Umwelt in other frameworks through a newly emerging combination of affects and affections, then the sightless human who “becomes” a subject in this environment is the resultant of a dynamic play of forces, not a preformism, resulting from the metastability of the system within which differentiations (distribution of singularities) are differentiated, while the modularity of the human/posthuman organism guarantees adaptation/territorialization.

Therefore, we can speak of the blind man who has lost his sight as being a “man” in the new conditions who has essentially lost nothing. This is also related to the fact pointed out by Deleuze that the development of the organism is not teleological but cascading; it takes place in leaps and not in stages, where each leap can be an absolute deterritorialization of the previous state.

34 Ibid.

35 Deleuze, G., On Gilbert Simondon. In: *Desert Islands and other Texts 1953–1974*. Trans. Ch. Bush – Ch. Stivale – M. McMahon – A. Hickox – T. Eich. Cambridge, MIT Press 2004, pp. 86–89.

Or A Life,³⁶ as a plane of immanence, is always articulated and differentiated differently depending on the events that occur. The point of the loss of sight, the spread of the virus in *See*, or the bursting of the Earth in Wells's short story, is the abruption of the subjectivated organism into the state of a Body without Organs³⁷ (Spinoza's Substance) as a limit, a zero state of composition from which a new type of human is subsequently assembled, and this happens through the influence of Exteriority that must exist within the new composition of the multiplicity of Umwelt. In this new configuration, sight does not exist, and therefore it makes no sense to speak of the new man as being deprived of sight.

6. Conclusion

This reconceptualization of what it means to be human depends on a radical transformation of the environment and shows that the essential definition of the human being lies not in its unchanging essence, but in a variable differentiation of differences in which the posthuman being can be conceived with respect to the affections available to and experienced by it. As soon as the perceptual and affective mechanisms are transformed, man becomes different, transcending the traditional features of humanity, but this does not mean that we must regard him as a deficient or degenerate being. On the contrary, it is Life's cascading ability to adapt to new conditions in which survival is possible. Perhaps in infinite darkness (as Descartes feared), but once a posthuman man comes into being, terms like darkness and light cease to make sense; they disappear from the lexicon and are replaced by a haptic knowledge that is much more attuned to the external environment, a piece in the puzzle of the larger, spatiotemporally bounded composition of the world.

36 Deleuze, G., *Literature and Life*. In: *Essays Critical and Clinical*. Trans. D. W. Smith – M. A. Greco. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press 1997, pp. 1–6.

37 Deleuze, G. – Guattari, F., *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 149–166.