PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF VISUAL ART EDUCATION FOR BLIND PERSONS

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Psychological aspects of art appreciation of blind persons

- How the blind persons appreciate the visual art?

Traditional view

- The gallery art is based on the eyesight and visual stimuli
- that would mean that it can only be fully comprehended through eyesight.
- A German historian Ernst Gombrich (1977) - economy of eyesight - eyesight is the first and only sense through which it is possible to perceive the visual arts.
- The French sociologist Pierre Bourdeau (1983) - the visual art is the sphere, which is more often reserved for specific elites and as such represents exclusivity.

arrives from passive exclusion

Traditional psychological and educational approaches

- **Degree of vision loss**
- **Art education of visually impaired children (not adults)**

Psychological view

- **Sensory processes**
- **Cognitive processes**

Sensory processes

-In the early 20th century:

-the first empirical studies and case studies

- **Marius Von Senden** (1930)

  - blind persons have not developed the concept of visual aesthetics and that the world of visual arts is therefore unknown to them.

  - no connection sight - touch

- **Geza Revesz** (1950):

  "The Psychology of Art of the Blind" (Longmans, Green and Company, 1950)

  - critics of Von Senden

  - theory of hapticity: connection sight - touch

  - sculpturing

  - no aesthetic assessment

Sensory processes

- **Richard L. Gregory** (60ies)

  Recovery from Early Blindness: *A case Study* (Cambridge: Heffers, 1963).

  - connection sight - touch =

    = cross-modal transfer: aesthetic assessment

Sensory processes

- **John.M. Kennedy** (70. – 90. leta):

  "Drawing & the Blind (Yale University Press, 1993)

  - tactile pictures

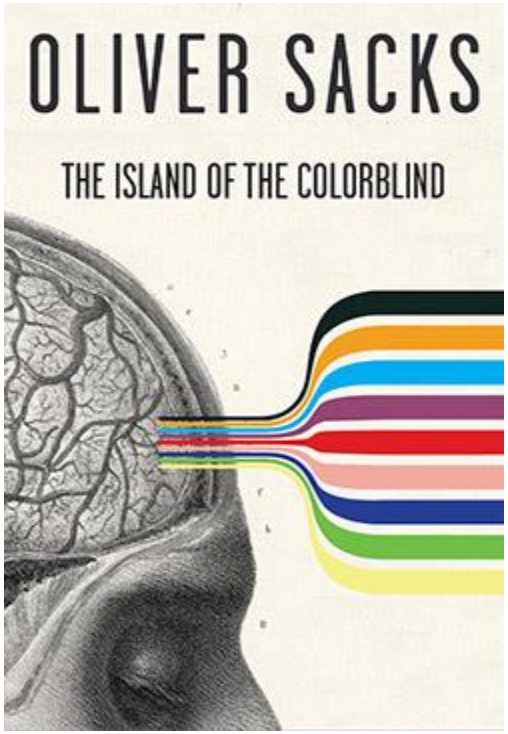
  - blind persons have the inherent ability to understand art.

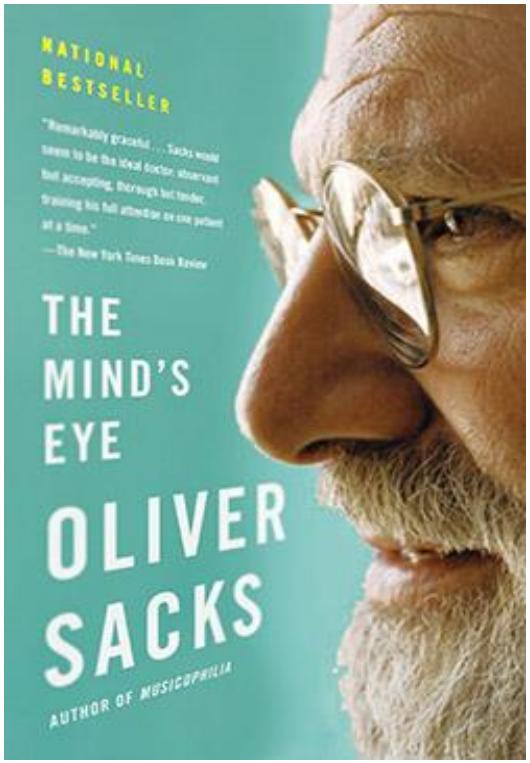
- new knowledge to practical work in art education for the blind persons

- further development of research on art and blindness in cognitive psychology.

Sensory processes

- **Oliver Sacks** (80., 90. leta)
  - social aspects





Research on the turning point of the new millenium

- **Charles Spence**

  - revolutionary insights in the field of experimental psychology

  - he has opened endless possibilities to explore the interaction between individual senses

  - he scientifically debunked numerous stereotypes and prejudices about the art appreciation in blind persons.

- **Simon Ungar**

  -new understanding in relation to tactile materials, particularly tactile maps.

Psychological view

- Sensory processes
- **Cognitive processes**

1. Vygotsky and psychology of art

- **Vygotsky, L. S. (1971). *The Psychology of Art*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.**

- As early as in 1925 a Russian psychologist Lev S. Vygotsky wrote a pioneering work on the psychology of art.
- It is a book 'Psychology of Art' (1971), which was first published 42 years later in the Russian language, and shortly after also translated into English.

1. Vygotsky and psychology of art

- Focused on architecture and sculpture and on the understanding of materials and forms of artistic work.
- He was not engaged in touch as an alternative sense to eyesight in blind persons, but rather interpreted the art from a completely different point of view.
- He interprets art through appreciation of the concept, which refers to the sensory image.
- He understood the appreciation of art as a process, where three main processes are intertwined:

  - sensory
  - intellectual
  - emotional

- Art is 'an exercise of mind'

1. Vygotsky and psychology of art

- Parallel reading of The Fundamentals of Defectology (1997)
- The development of appreciation of art in blind persons takes place in the right extend only in an environment which allows the active involvement of blind person in the art events and processes.

2. Neuropsychological research

- Today it is known that different brain centres are responsible for processing a variety of information:

  - the parietal lobe - movement, orientation and different types of recognition;

  - the temporal lobe - information of auditory stimuli

  - the occipital for the information of visual stimuli)

- All these centers work together and thereby enable an individual to comprehensively identify objects, sounds, and other information (Imamizu, 2010).

2. Neuropsychological research

- After 2000
  fMR: stimulation of visual cortex

Braille reading
Speech processing
Verbal memory

2. Neuropsychological research

- Reorganisation of brain functioning = **brain plasticity**
- Perception, cognition and action are interrelated and continuously influence each other (Imamizu,(2010):
- Sensorial deprived individuals show massive reorganization of function in cortical areas normally dedicated to vision (Merabet & Pascual-Leone (2010)
- Brain reorganizations are accompanied by behavioral enhancement (Voss et al. (2011)

The connection among various views

- Kennedy's finding on the innate ability of the blind persons for the perception of art,
- The importance of inclusive education according to Vygotsky
- Neuropsychological research findings,

then it is possible to conclude the following:

The connection among various views

- Blind persons have innate abilities to appreciate art, which means that in theory they all have the possibilities to activate these abilities
- All blind persons do not develop potential abilities to appreciate art
- Blind persons living in a stimulating inclusive environment which values artistic pursuit develop their potentials to appreciate art faster
- The ability of art appreciation is strengthened also by restructuring the neural pathways in the brain, which due to its plasticity enable reorganization of the activity in the brain centres responsible for vision

Inclusion in visual art education

Inclusion of blind in everyday art experiences has a strong impact on positive adaptation of brain functioning

= brain plasticity

children

Inclusion in visual art education

- Family

  - opportunities for a blind child to deal with a
experiences,

- Broader environment: culture
- School education

  - educational dose (Lubinski, 2010) = quality
diverse interventions, in which they blind students will learn about art in different ways, and to enable them such learning environment in which they will be able to develop their potential.

Conclusion

- Physical contact and physical environment of a gallery as an educational space
- The role of art education, in which through active discourse between a blind student and art educators a blind person develops a truly intimate emotional experience and relationship with art.
- Museums and galleries need to be opened and adapted to the individual needs of blind users.

Thank you!