**A transcript of content from *(Critical) Blindness Studies : Current Debates and Future Directions***

June 30 to July 5, 2023: Convened by Marion Chottin, Hannah Thompson, and Vanessa Warne

### Blindness, Deafness and Deaf Blindness: Histories, Methods, Perceptions

Chair: Louise Fryer

Moderator: Vanessa Warne

### Speakers: Marion Ink (INSERM-EHESS-CERM, France)

#### Soline Vennetier (EHESS-CRH, France)

**Louise Fryer:** 0:00

Thank you very much Vanessa. Before we start, my name is Louise Fryer. I am a non-blind White British woman with grey-blue eyes and short brown hair; it is even more in need of a cut than when I described myself earlier in the conference. I am in my late fifties and I’m wearing a black and white stripy top. I would also like to mention that I have impaired mobility, not that that is very obvious on Zoom, but some of people might notice that I only gesture with my right hand.

As Vanessa said, we have just two speakers on this panel. I am delighted to say that they are bot early career researchers. And we are going to hear first from Marion Ink, spelt I-N-K: I hope that is how you pronounce it, Marion. Marion is broadly interested in perception, not a thing of the individual, but of the group. She is interested in how people live together and develop social bonds, and what a visual or auditory impairment, to fall back on the medical model, can tell us about ordinary categories of perception, on the one hand, and on the other, about the organization of scientific work and social and professional relationships. Marion approaches her observations through the prism of her visual disability. For the past year she has been based at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris. Marion, you have five minutes, so I shall hand over to you.

Marion Ink: 1:54

Thank you very much. Can you hear me? Thank you very much and thank you for this presentation and for all of the organization of this conference which is really well organized and really very pleasant because everything is going very smoothly, and I hope that will be an example for other conferences to pay attention to all these details. So thank you. So yes, I’m Marion Ink. To describe myself, I am a white woman. I have brown hair and brown eyes. I’m wearing a black headset and a flowery top. And you won’t be able to see my background because I have blurred it with my camera. I’m non-sighted, I have a pathology on my retain which was discovered when I was ten, and it has progressed and so it obscures my central vision but keeps my peripheral vision. So what I have to say about perception first of all began on a methodological basis. I wrote my thesis on sociabilities and micropolitics of sociabilities and sociology and to do this I pursued observations at three universities in France, the US and Canada. And throughout my thesis and when I was defending my thesis, a number of researchers who supervised my thesis and published my work asked a lot of questions about my competency, how I could observe things and do ethnographic observations when I was visually impaired. And so I wrote a first article entitled ‘Observing the Proofs of Visual Deficiency in Spaces and Society’ in 2016 and so this examined methods and perceptions, and then in 2019 I had a doctoral position and then as a researcher at the INSERM I worked on researchers, I worked with researchers with visual and or auditory handicaps to see how their experiences could give us a better idea firstly of perception-related questions, ordinary perception, and the organization of scientific work of the institutions and with social and socio-professional relationships. And in the end, disability was an xxx resource for me to study processes and practices and phenomena relating to people with disabilities and also people who didn’t have disabilities, non-blind people or non-deaf people etc. And for this conference I offered a chapter of a book that will be published in the near future, but it has already been validated; this is the final version, called ‘A Practical Approach to Perception’ which looks at the experience of people with visual and or hearing disabilities and different categories of perception and I show how it is important to go beyond sensory understanding of perception, firstly because this makes a non-seeing, makes them static, they are defined in terms of not being able to see and the same thing for hearing impaired and deaf people it is always with respect to good hearing, and when we look at this we can understand that perception is a process. It is the result of a learning experience throughout our life, and that is the case for everybody – it is social, it is collective, it can be shared, and that is the case for everybody, however, the experiences of visual and hearing disabilities enables us to highlight things that are found everywhere, that everybody perceives and so I share this as well, in this chapter and in other things that I have written, and I begin to work with somebody working in neurosciences who is working on this issue of perception of non-sighted people from birth where all the zones of the brain are used contrary to what we might believe. It is just the way the visual information is processed, goes through other zones that are activated by auditory information, so there is not a lack of information, for example visual information goes straight to interpretation. And so what I suggest is to go back, going back to our understanding of what is sensitive and social and socialization of perception, and to understand that it is not a matter of seeing things but of what we, how we interpret what we see and we can’t distinguish the actual pure information, the noise that you hear and our brain immediately interprets it and that can lead to fear or other emotions for example. So that is an understanding that I suggest for perception which seems to me much more accurate or obvious when we look at the experiences of people who have a visual or auditory disability and there are a lot of presentations at this conference that have allowed us to see that. And that is really a summary of what I have to say.

Louise Fryer: 9:34

Thank you very much. I think it is really fascinating the idea that perception is about interpretation and we are being given a splendid example of interpretation at this conference. So you’re speaking, I heard it in English which is not your words but it is an interpretation of your words and other people are experiencing it through various types of sign language. So there is loads and loads of layers of interpretation. So, I just, I think it is kind of, for me it’s a huge step forward to think of perception as interpretation. It makes lots of sense to me and in my role as an audio describer I am constantly trying to say to people it will be an interpretation, I can’t give you an objective view of what’s happening because it is filtered by my sight which is filtered by my brain, which is filtered by my own experience. So I think there are lots and lots of fascinating overlaps with talk about blind culture. Anyway, thank you for that. I am going to move on to our second speaker, Soline Vennetier, who is based at the same School of High Studies of Social Sciences in Paris, but in the History department, which is the discipline of her PhD where she studied the history of cochlear implantation. And her fascination is with the contemporary history of Deaf Blindness and Deaf Blind people in France, the US and in various translational spaces. Soline is going to share her reflections on contemporary historical research on Deaf Blindness and Deaf Blind people. Soline. Five minutes for you.

Soline Vennetier: 11:26

Greetings everybody. My name is Soline Vennetier. I am excited to be part of this conference which is very important and stimulating. And like Marion I am very appreciative of this particular format. I am speaking to you from Toulouse in the South of France and so I am in a black top, I have short hair, and behind me I have a black background, just as you see with the sign-language interpreters because I have a folding screen which I use when I am videoconferencing particularly when I am talking with hearing-impaired people who rely on sign language because since I’m light skinned this gives better perception of gestures. And in this round table I’ll be using French, spoken French and another aspect that perhaps you can neither see or hear is that I am Deaf and Blind. So I am in the fourth year of a thesis at the higher institute of social studies. My initial research was in the study of deaf people and sign language, which means that recently I changed track slightly in terms of my research and this is why I am here today. I was not considering talking about it here but Marion talked about how she came to study blindness so perhaps I should say something about that, my own decision. I worked on the history of cochlear implants, comparing France and Swedish, practices in France and Sweden, but for various reasons, which is because I am becoming increasingly deaf and blind and therefore what you need to understand is the form of research, how to do data gathering and source analysis in differing, changing ways, is becoming more and more difficult for me to undertake this research and the timing of this learning experience was not necessarily compatible with doing a PhD research because of the limited time. In addition, during my research, I became interested in Deaf Blind individuals and therefore I decided to change the [recording in progress] my thesis. The history of Deaf Blindness and Deaf Blind individuals has been little studied, apart from the iconic figures, in particular Laura Bridgman, these figures from, Marie Heurtin, and Helen Keller, figures with regard to the education of Deaf Blind people but apart from these iconic figures, there is very little research on Deaf Blind individuals in general and my research began in the 60s, the 1960s because from that point I thought that there was a transnational community of Deaf Blind people, a scientific space and partly a political space, with experts, educators, activists, looking at the definition of Deaf Blindness and varying definitions that could be applied and co-ordinated attempts to have solutions catering for such individuals whether it be specialist institutions, administrative recognition or non-profit forums and I’m in particular interested in the social dimension of this world and also the measures, practices and representations that stakeholders have and the way that these stakeholders organize and take action together. In terms of methodology, I’m working both on the basis of written sources, non-profit archives, administrative documents and I also work on some interactive interviews with the people who write the history of Deaf Blindness. I think my five minutes if pretty much up so I’ll stop there so that we can start having a conversation together.

Louise Fryer 17:06

Thank you very much Soline. So again, there is a fascinating thread running through both these presentations about data collection, about being a researcher with so-called impairments but also how those so-called impairments can actually be so revelatory in terms of data research and how by studying different cultures so in Soine’s case Sweden and France, you are learning different ways that people have approached disability and finding different solutions for making their data accessible. So it seems to me that you two were made for each other in terms of research. Yesterday there was a feeling that blindness is a culture. I wonder what your thoughts are on this. Can I start with Marion?

Marion Ink 18:11

I’ve been thinking about this throughout our time at this conference and my concern is that researchers’ experience in France and the US of perceptible difficulties as a source of research and investigation but that is not really my research topic. I’m looking more at how their scientific work is organized so it is a little bit difficult for me to talk about culture as such. Is there a Deaf culture, a Deaf Blind culture? Other colleagues work on that topic but I’m not sure that I am qualified or able to talk in terms, I find it difficult to talk in terms of blind culture in fact.

Louise Fryer 19:30

Soline, do you have an opinion about whether or not there is such a thing as blind culture? I feel that Deaf Culture is very strongly established, Blind Culture less well so – I’m open to persuasion otherwise.

Soline Vennetier 19:50

I think there are a number of ways of answering this question and I’ll try and structure my answer. Deaf Studies, or whatever it is called in whichever language, are based on the assumption of the existence of a deaf culture because there is a shared language, sign language, even if this is a national sign language rather than international, and of shared cultural identity by the members of this linguistic community. Whereas in Deaf Studies there is some discussion about whether there is any uniqueness in deafness compared to other s0-called categories of handicap, disability whether it is field of vision impairment or whatever. So that is the response from a Deaf Studies perspective. Personally, like Marion, I find it difficult to take a position on blind culture because it is not really my research topic, but I could say a few words about Deaf Blind culture or Deaf Blind cultures, more accurately, and I think that they are probably quite similar to blind cultures, in the plural again, in other words, many different ways of self-perception of Deaf and Deaf Blind individuals and Blind individuals and the way that Deaf Blind individuals perceive themselves as a group may be different and sometimes they may be conflicting: some Deaf Blind people will adopt the medical model, others are in a more critical, take a more critical stance with respect to the medical model and another thing which it is important to bear in mind when we are looking at Deaf Blind culture is the existence in the US of the Pro-Tactile movement, I don’t know if some of you in this symposium may know about this movement which emerged in Seattle in the 2000s, in a Deaf Blind group who met in a service center for the Deaf Blind community who developed this language ‘Pro-Tactile which is accompanied by a specific culture and lifestyle and there is definitely an asserted specific culture which has not been defined by some academic but is definitely proactively asserted by the members of this community and those in the pro-tactile movement are from, have Deaf Blindness because of a specific syndrome and emerged out of their experience, and this community in the United States grew out of Usher syndrome, those suffering from Usher syndrome.

Marion Ink

As I was listening to Soline I remembered something which I don’t think I mentioned or heard to date, in this symposium or maybe I stepped out of the room and I missed it, but there is something which is common to virtually all disabilities but which is manifested in very different ways, I don’t know if, so, ‘crip time’, C-R-I-P, sorry, ‘Crip Time’, this has been borrowed from an activist movement in the US, initially for people with motor handicaps, to define a specific relationship with time, which is specific to disabled individuals, so, for example, aging, faster aging of the body, and relationship with early childhood, and people I interview who have visual or auditory deterioration, it, this is much more subtle, people tend to say something like I’m working on a ‘just-in-time’ basis, I need to anticipate, but I feel like I’m working on a ‘just-in-time’ basis all the time and this is a bit like another element of ‘crip time’ which is this different relationship to time because all activities will take more time, speech to text will mean we will have a different relationship with time, compared with somebody who simply reads straight off – or text-to-speech, sorry, yeah – takes more time. There is the implication of interpreters at a talk, if the talk, err if the conference does not have its own interpreters they need to go find some; visually handicapped researchers will need, and other individuals who are visually handicapped will need to be able to organize travel with somebody with them, read correspondence, adapt their time schedule to the person who is assisting them, in other words fit in with others’ availabilities, in other words, to others’ time, adapting to our own time frames there is also fatiguablility, in other words how quickly we tire is a shared concern, specific to each individual but of course a common factor in many forms of disability. And this concept has been particularly studied for motor handicapped but much less, or much less direct, much less focused on those with other types of disability. In any case, all I’m trying to bring out is this relationship with time which is a cultural feature of I think all forms of disability, all individual disabilities that I have interviewed.

Louise Fryer 28:03

Thank you very much for that point. I think earlier in the week or earlier at the start of the conference Vanessa was talking about time and our different relations to time, and you mentioned Soline that data gathering took more time for you – I wonder how, if any other methodologies have been influenced by time?

Soline Vennetier 28:30

I’ll answer and I want also to come back to what Marion has just said. So, two points to my answer. So firstly this issue of time and how it fits in with methodology, very partcially speaking and research if it was intensive sorting through hard-copy periodicals I don’t have a research assistant, never have had, so I had to do all this visually, I had to travel to archives, so a new venue so of course that has loads of issues about finding your way around and then photocopying all the documents I wanted to work on, and then processing them digitally on a computer with hundreds and hundreds of jpeg files and because I have a very small visual field, field of vision and I cannot simply scan a page visually as I could previously, so I either had to take more time, but I didn’t know how much time I would have exactly, or I would have to enlist the help of a research assistant with lots of questions about how that could happen, it would have been quite difficult for me, which would have meant changing my research topic, taking this difficulty into account, which is not really related to my access to the sources but more issues of time so in absolute terms it could have been done but institutionally in France a thesis should happen in 3 years generally, or like 5 or 6 but that is a maximum which meant that I spent more time than in my first thesis topic looking at how I was going to deal with my sources and data and in the contemporary history of Deaf Blindness and blindness where I am working quite a lot of resources are already digitized and can be exploited with text to speech software which you can do from a PDF which you can’t do from a jpeg file so then you can search using keywords. I still have some hard copy archive documents to deal with but far fewer than previously. And then there is also the issue of research interviews but that does not necessarily take up more time than it would for somebody with so-called deficiencies. And I just wanted to say, I haven’t forgotten Marion, I wanted to say something about what she was saying about crip time, with respect to Deaf Blindness, I was thinking of a paper by a linguistic anthropologist, Sarah Edwards, so abaondoning, giving up on politeness and she talks about socialization practices and politeness in a deaf-blind group at a restaurant which shows the change in social norms compared to traditional able-bodied individuals. So touching one another, moving the tables and moving around during the meal, which are perceived as very impolite by other patrons of the restaurant but are deemed to be a vital norm by this community and the relationship with prevailing social norms in terms of what is considered polite can possibly be the indicator of a specific culture.

Louise Fryer 34:15

Thank you Soline. I’m wondering, listening to you, whether or not there is a role of broadening the way in which we record our records of historical data. I mean they don’t have to be written, now there is so much access to other kinds of audio-visual information. What would you think would be more accessible, generally than having to trawl through written data which seems to limited?

Soline Vennetier 34:43

If I’ve understood the question it is how can we have access to historical, historical audio-visual information…

Louise Fryer

I think really what I’m trying to say is that for so long academia has been based on the written word and maybe it is time to broaden that kind of data into being the spoken word or the filmed response. I mean are there better ways of recording data to make it more accessible.

Marion Ink

So could I answer, Soline? Thank you. What I find to be really interesting in what Soline has just said is that of course accessibility to documents, paper documents, so digitizing them to make them accessible in different ways is important, and necessary, but the main difficulties are not really so much accessibility, it is accessibility but it is also in particular the time required in higher education and research and to have to respond to urgent deadlines, it is really difficult and causes a certain number of non-blind and non-deaf researchers without disabilities to be overworked and when I speak to researchers I find that people either give up their scientific career, I think about researchers who are in my panel of researchers to be questioned, to ask them why they gave up, or why they persevere, they manage to get a position and then they make choices and so for example they can’t do as much work in the field at the same time and publish and teach and go to conferences and at the same time apply for different funding etc so the question is what am I going to do and they focus their attention on tasks that they often enjoy the most, so the most important ones for them and then there is the problem of career changes and they can get research positions, as far as I know there have been very few researchers that have been promoted to research director, some of them have been research directors and then they have acquired a disability but often they have not because of time considerations which are seen in the access to data, conferences, classes etc, but that is exactly the article that I am writing at the moment: are researchers with disabilities blocked in their scientific work and there are time considerations that affect all researchers, the density, the competitiveness, is problematic for everybody but it makes the situation, as Soline says, with accessibility we can manage which can be seen in for example with touch language, touch sign language or somebody with read them or with voice synthesis we can find solutions which will sometimes take time to put into place but then arises the questions of the time considerations in higher education and research which makes slow science difficult.

Louise Fryer 39:28

Thank you. I’m interested Marion, that you chose to base your research in the social sciences, and I’m wondering what the techniques and the methodologies in the social sciences, how did they benefit your research?

Marion Ink

I’m not really sure that I’ve fully understood the question.

Louise Fryer

Let me try to rephrase it. I’m interested in what you think are the methodologies within the social sciences that make your research well-placed there, so that you chose to study in the social sciences rather than historical research or another area.

Marion Ink

So, my work is in sociology, so social sciences, however I’m not sure that I understand what you are really getting at. The researchers that I am studying are all science, work in all the different sciences, so astrophysicists, biologists, chemists, and for the question of social sciences I think that it was the reflective approach of social sciences that led me to get into social sciences with collaboration of course with what we call hard sciences.

Louse Fryer

Thank you. And Soline, what does bringing a historical perspective add to your research?

Soline Vennetier

The historical perspective, what it brings to my research, is I think or I would say a better understanding of what is present in the field of blindness for people who are blind because my research arose from what I observed in recent years in people involved in blind associations in France and the practices that I observed, what people said, how people defined deaf blindness and that is very varied even among these associations and the methods of organization are very different, and I wondered where these current practices came from, where we had inherited them from and that is why I set out on this research journey, this historical research journey. I think that what I would answer today is a better understanding of the present day and maybe too light that is shed on tools and organization methods and that is also why I am involved in the field of disability studies which is a part of my intellectual formation and that is paying attention to the impact of research for the people concerned, who are, so what research can bring to them, can provide them with.

Louise Fryer 43:22

Thank you. So that brings us very neatly to the key questions of the symposium. So I am going to put to our presenters in turn, Marion, starting with you, what definition or definitions of blindness does your research and lived experience lead you to adopt?

Marion Ink

A lot depends on the context and the situation. When I talk about this I like to talk about perceptive alteration or alterity to get away from the sensory dimension to get away from the idea of visual or auditory deficiency, deficit and all that implies when we talk about deficiency, when I talk with the people concerned I use their verbatims and when it comes to perception I usually talk about an alteration of perception because I realise that people have a full perception but which is a completely different. Everyone has a specific, a very specific perception, but a full perception, when I talk about the relationship of an organization or the organization of work or whatever I usually will talk about the question of disability to avoid minimizing things because if I just talk about perception that could minimize situations of discrimination, inequality, inaccessibility etc. So even it I am not really at ease with that, I will use the disability category for reasons of recognition, for adjusting a workstation for example but I think for some of that to happen, as was said yesterday, the distinction was made between, I think it was Heidi Lourens who we listened to yesterday afternoon, so when it is just the relationship with your self I talk about the alteration of perception but when there is discrimination or inequalities I will talk about visual disability.

Louise Fryer

That is a really fascinating idea, that it is relative depending on situation, who you are having a conversation with. Soline, how would you define blindness, especially when you add deafness into the mix?

Soline Vennetier 46:33

I have an answer and a positioning that is quite close to that of Marion. Maybe it is… I hesitate between the two, it is not really clear cut but as a researcher and a person who is concerned with this I am interested in a plurality of different definitions of blindness and of deaf-blindness, there is not just a single one, and these definitions are part of a list that people can draw from depending whether they are blind people, people with a sight defect, or with X or Y syndrome, depending on the situation, who you are talking to, for example you could mention the legal definition of deaf-blindness which isn’t the same as the medical definition of deaf-blindness, at least in France and it is not the same either as the different identity definitions given by people themselves. And so in my research I just, I would like to just pause and say something else, that in my research, I’ve taken a new direction recently so I’m at the beginning so I haven’t yet got to any hypotheses but I’m interested in these different definitions and how they are changing and how they reflect each other or bounce off each other and to define the subject of my research for deaf-blind people as a group I don’t have a single definition, I’m not just gong to look at the history of people who have a serious sight deficiency or hearing deficiency, I’m not just going to look at people who recognize themselves as being deaf-blind, or their own definitions, but what I wanted to do, the example I wanted to give of the importance of taking into account the plurality of definitions and I was thinking of some research that I contributed to as a person concerned where I was also living with my, the tools I had as a young researcher and looking to see (I think there is a problem maybe with the interpretation) but this is research that is important for deaf-blindness in France and this is sociological research on Usher syndrome and people who are concerned with this syndrome were conducted in a broader set of research with a medical strand, genetic, were looking at genetics too etc and this research, sociological research showed the definition that maybe deaf-blind people that or the people with Usher syndrome during this research we saw that they had a tendency to reject any medical definition of deaf-blindness, they weren’t interested in that, but on the other hand this medical definition is really important to have access to ad ministrative help such as compensation, care and recognition of the disability of deaf-blindness and these things could be a key factor for autonomy and social participation and so this research group started thinking about the medical definition of deaf-blindness and got these medical definitions to change, both in medical and administrative point of view. I don’t know whether you want me to talk about this a bit more but I just wanted to talk about this research which is important when you think about what the definition of blindness, deaf-blindness is and that shows the importance of taking into account the different definitions and to encompass them all in our analysis. There is another thing that I wanted to suggest, when we, if we take a step back and think about definitions of blindness and deaf-blindness and wonder whether we can think in terms of the relationship with the norm, so the experience of blindness, or the representations you can have of that or of deaf-blindness call on a different relationship with norms, of sighted norms and the audiovisual capabilities of an inverted commas ‘normal’ person, people who work in a certain way using their sight or hearing and deaf-blindness could come when that, when there’s a moving away from these norms.

Louise Fryer 52:58

Thank you. I think it is really very interesting that sighted people – non-blind people – are blind in many ways and we just choose to ignore it. So there are lots of waves of light that we can’t see – we can’t see gamma rays, we can’t see infrared. Personally, I have a certain kind of cultural blindness that I am aware of in lots of areas. So I might see an African tribal cloth, and I might be able to appreciate its pattern and its colour but it wouldn’t understand its cultural significance, I’d be blind to that particular experience so I think the concept of definitions of blindness being very tailored to different situations is very true and I think the fallacy of the medical model is that they think it explains blindness and it is so limiting, it makes me very frustrated. I think perhaps because my own studies were in psychology and you couldn’t get a paper published at all unless you categoried the blindness using the medical model of all your participants and I really reacted against that and tried to explain that everybody has a different type and it is not categorizable in that neat pigeonhole-y kind of way so I am interested too in whether you believe that critical blindness studies should be a separate room in the house of disability studies. Is there an advantage of studying blindness on its own? I mean it seems to me, Soline, that you can’t possibly want to study blindness on its own because of the influence of deafness and how that might change but perhaps I’m putting words in your mouth. So in the last five minutes, before we go over to questions, I would be interested to know your response to that, as to whether or not critical blindness studies has a role to play within disability studies. Should it be on its own or should it be part of disability studies?

Soline Vennetier

Marion, maybe I’ll let you start by answering that first. Or, yes, well I’ll go first and then you can follow on. Fair enough. [So Soline says] I will not come down on one side or the other of this question. I think this field extends to everybody who wishes to put themselves within it is perhaps how I would put things. And perhaps we shouldn’t put this question as a binary alternative, either or, I think there could be times and places where there would be closer dialogue between those working in more specific areas and other times when there could be broader dialogue between researchers working in apparently distant fields and we could adjust the focal length as it were in different ways. To tie in with my own trajectory through deaf studies there is a discussion going on about the place of deaf studies and how they relate to disability studies. I’ve never perceived the two fields – I know some colleagues disagree – but my personal view is that there is no clear difference between the two and fundamentally I think they have the same broad paradigms but some aspects would be more emphasized by researchers working in deaf studies and others by those working in disability studies but in any case it is important to take all of these aspects into account and not build watertight barriers between these fields.

Marion Ink

Well, I basically agree with what Soline has just said. It is important and this symposium is the demonstration of the fact that we need to have four days of discussion to update or have updates on all the research that is going on. This is very enriching because it allows us to see how another discipline approaches these issues so there is a cross-disciplinary aspect. In my case my practical sensory approach following this symposium will have new arguments, new things to think about in my work in perception. Just as Soline has said though, it is also important to work in a cross-disciplinary fashion – often in terms of nationalities, African Studies tend to be separated often and only work on issues relating to Africa whereas their research could be very very informative for people working in different areas in the same way as for us issues will emerge and lines of thinking that will emerge from this symposium and the conversations about blindness are actually key for other areas as well and I am interested in the sociology of science and all of these issues will be interesting to this field which has absolutely no concept of disability or blindness in particular which is why it is very important to have these times when we are gathered in our particular discipline but other times when we bring our questions to apply, to look at how they are applied in a completely different field of research because this process will throw up things that are of interest to every discipline.

Louise Fryer 1:01:18

Thank you. I think that is a great perspective and I’m really encouraged by the intelligence and enthusiasm and directions of our young researchers. I feel that critical blindness studies, whether or not they sit within disability studies or alongside have a fantastic future ahead. And I can see now that there are some hands raised and people have questions to ask so I am going to hand back to our moderator and I’m hoping that Vanessa is still here?

Vanessa Warne 1:01:51

I’m here Louise. Everybody, thank you Louise, Everybody, this is Vanessa Warne speaking and I would like to begin by acknowledging Louise Fryer for her wonderful work as chair and to thank Soline and Marion for a wonderful conversation as we transition now to questions. I will also take this opportunity to thank very much our translators and interpreters for the support they are providing to our conversation. We have three people waiting to speak, and I will acknowledge you in order. We will begin with a question from Bruon Liesen, then Mr Bertrand Verine we will turn to you and lastly we will turn to Zina Weygand and I too have a question if there is time. But we will start with Bruno please if you would like to unmute and ask your question, please go ahead.

Audience Member 1:02:56

Greetings. Thank you for this excellent panel debate. My question is a very pressing, current one. What is the impact of Covid-19 and health measures on the deaf community and have you already done anything in terms of deaf studies in this respect. Soline is suggesting she answers.

Vanessa Warne

Please, Soline, go ahead, yes.

Soline Vennetier

Of course there was has been a considerable impact of health measures and the pandemic on the deaf community and all those people who identify with the deaf community. I couldn’t summarize all of them but impacts include access to emergency services and health services, communication with hospital staff. If a deaf person is hospitalized and cannot communicate with hospital staff this can lead to great difficulties, access to preventive messages, social distancing and in particular face mask wearing is very difficult in terms of communication because the face mask means that you cannot lip read. Alternative face masks were suggested but they weren’t very effective either. In France in any case. Sign language interpreters were on the front foot during the pandemic, so very very often there was sign language interpreting in particular for government messaging which helped alleviate the impact in that respect. I think there was a second question but I can’t remember what it was.

Audience Member:

Has deaf studies already looked at this issue?

Soline Vennetier

I think that there has been some informal discussion and consideration in particular about in the form of blog posts, a couple of research papers, Acadeafic is an English-language blog and in international sign language which has a paper on that I believe.

Vanessa Warne

Thank you Bruno for the question. Marion would you like to speak to the question of the pandemic before I turn to Bertrand.

Marion Ink

No, no, I have nothing to add in particular.

Vanessa Warne

Thank you. I will say that Bruno took my question. He stole my question but I was specifically interested in the impact of your work as researchers. As many of you know, Hannah, Marion Chottin and I hoped to gather you all in person, and I am very interested in what the movement to distanced or online engagement has meant for community for access to resources, for your research process. But I will turn now to Bertrand Verine and ask him to kindly make his comment or share his question.

Audience Member

Thank you. I hope you can hear me.

Vanessa Warne

We hear you.

Bertrand Verine

OK. So firstly I want to congratulate the two speakers because yesterday evening we finished on a rather difficult moment emotionally and this afternoon it is a real delight to be here and that is very promising in terms of the future of research. I have two questions but also a comment which I believe has not come out enough yet. The significance and benefit of Marion’s concept of sensory practices because this is a way of breakin down barriers between disciplines and also between methods; breaking down barriers for no good reason can in fact drown the issues out but if we can make cautious generalizations and avoid stereotyping and naturalism and showing due respect for the plurality and relatedness of situations and this brings me to my two questions and I’ll put them both at the same time and then up to you how you address them. Two key words. The first question so the first keyword is holi-sensory or various and the second I’ll come back to is interculturality. So the first is holi-sensory experience – this is an approach that has been developed in cognitive psychology, more especially in a rather different field to ours which is sensory analysis of products, so people, so for example, marketing, advertising, design, tasting sessions that clearly demonstrates and research shows this, that all individuals whether or not they are aware of it, whether they believe they are visual or 99% visual actually have a wholly sensory perception, a holistic perception of situations which involve other types of perception other than visual and so I wanted to know whether you have encountered that and whether you, either of you use this concept of holi-sensory experience which I believe is important in our situations because without a dominant sense we have to make use of the dominated senses. And the other question is to do with interculturality. You have clearly brought out following, as have other speakers, the importance of historic construction, historical conscience, awareness, but if I had one thing to add is that we have had tiny windows of interculturality buth I think finding the right, if we could find the right speakers, interculturality could make a major contribution to this conversation. Quite by accident I came across a paper that Soline might know, otherwise I’ll let her know – about deaf-blind children in Uganda which shows that their sensory learning experience is very different from that of Western deaf-blind children because relations between adults and children and particularly between mothers and children are very different in Ugandan culture to those in Western culture. So I have rather been too long but I am interested in what you have to say about these two topics.

Vanessa Warne

Thank you, Bertrand. This is Vanessa again. I will just note that we have one more question waiting and only five minutes left so I will ask our speakers to be, if they can, brief. Marion, could we start with you, please.

Marion Ink

[speaks in French: no English translation until 1:15:08]

… perceives things with entire body that houses with their entire body, all of this is seen in things being sensitive, and intuition, inner events etc and then when we take a step towards having a polysensory approach, to my mind that doesn’t go far enough. I can’t really say more because we need to leave some time for the last question.

Vanessa Warne

Thank you, Marion. To you, Soline?

Soline Vennetier

So I haven’t yet come across the concept of holi-sensory experience or poly-sensory experience but I think that these are interesting and like Marion I am thinking in particular about the issue of fields of research, access to and it is impossible to move onto processes of access and to not just remain on sensory experience. I am answering very briefly but yes it makes me think a lot. And the question of intercultural experience, I would like to read this article that you talked about but thank you very much.

Marion Ink

And I would also like to read this article.

Vanessa Warne

Thank you to Marion and Soline for those excellent answers. We have just three minutes left and I would like to turn now to our final member of the audience with a question and that is Zina Weygand, Zina if you would like to go ahead? Sadly, Zina, it is Vanessa again, we cannot hear you. We apologize, perhaps we will be able to pass your question on in a moment. So given that we have a technical difficulty with Zina’s computer I will instead close the session as we are almost at time and I will thank again our wonderful speakers, I will thank Louise Fryer for her excellent work as chairwoman and I will again thank our translators and interpreters for their much-appreciated support. We look forward to joining you all again in 15 minutes. We have now a rest break. Thank you very much.