Analysis of Aesthetic Experience of the Visually Impaired Based on Fieldwork*

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This study aims to (1) analyze the way the body of the visually impaired is represented, (2) assess its significance as an aesthetic study, and (3) evaluate the range of contributions it can make to the real world. However, this study is not concerned with the *representation* of the body but with the *living body* of the visually impaired. Thus, this study conducted fieldwork with the visually impaired in addition to the orthodox method of aesthetic literature research[1]. The fieldwork comprised unstructured interviews by the author with 25 visually impaired people conducted from 2014 to 2016 (Table 1) and behavioral observations at workshops and other events[2].

The position of the visually impaired in conventional aesthetics is first clarified in Chapter 1. The visually impaired have been discussed in aesthetics in connection with the sense of touch. Moreover, the sense of touch has been considered to be a sense of direct knowledge unlike that of sight. Chapter 2 clarified that the sense of touch of the visually impaired is differently used from the sense of touch that has been assumed by aesthetics based on the fieldwork results. Chapter 3 shows that touch is not necessarily the dominant cognition method among the visually impaired based on the fieldwork results. Concerning the debate over the concept of disability in disability studies, the possible perspectives of a somatic approach to disability will be assessed in Chapter 4.

The actual conditions and characteristics of the visually impaired are diverse although the term *visually* impaired is generically used in this study. First, differences in the way of seeing (e.g., total blindness, low vision, and partial blindness) exist. Second, variations in visual experience (e.g., congenital or intermediate blindness) were noted even among the totally blind. Third, differences in the time of blindness (e.g., whether the blindness occurred in adulthood or at an early age) were noted even among intermediate blindness. Lastly, related differences exist in living environment and sex. The lives of visually impaired people greatly vary (although all

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[1] In the field of philosophy, the use of fieldwork as one of the methodologies is becoming accepted. For example, *clinical philosophy*, proposed by Kiyokazu Washida, is a philosophical discipline that uses detailed fieldwork in the field of care as its method.

[2] Some of the collected interviews are available in full text on the author's website: http://asaito.com/research/ (as of July 2021).

Except for certain interviewees, the full text is available under their real names. This was performed to avoid a one-way relationship between the researcher and the subject of the research and to promote the research as an open and equal dialogue. However, since the life story of each interviewee is not an issue in this study, the names are used anonymously according to academic conventions.

bodies are diverse in reality, regardless of disability) because of these many factors. Thus, this study aims to generalize the *theory of the body* to some extent but we should not forget the diversity of the visually impaired.

Table 1: List of interviewees (March 2014–December 2016)

1	SK	Totally blind; lost sight at a young age	Male	30s	Needle store management etc.
2	KM	Totally blind, lost sight in high school	Male	30s	Workshop design etc.
3	NS	Totally blind, lost sight at 39 years old	Male	40s	Medicinal herbs, acupuncture store management, etc.
4	HK	Totally blind, lost sight at 13 years old	Male	40s	Associate professor at a museum
5	YS	Weak eyesight beginning 22 years old	Male	50s	Tokyo Metropolitan Government employee and athletics
6	TM	Totally blind, lost sight in her 20s	Female	40s	Pianist etc.
7	UM	Totally blind, lost sight at 5 years old, and with no memory of seeing	Male	30s	City official
8	SY	Totally blind, lost sight at a young age	Male	30s	Workshop designer etc.
9	KT	Totally blind, lost sight at 7 years old	Male	30s	Blind soccer player
10	TA	Weak eyesight beginning 10 years old	Male	30s	Blind soccer player
11	OH	Totally blind, lost sight in his 30s	Male	50s	Acupuncturist
12	AM	Totally blind and deaf beginning 16 years old	Female	20s	Essayist, lecturer
13	IT	Weak eyesight beginning 26 years old	Male	30s	Japan National Low Vision Futsal Team
14	SJ	Totally blind, lost sight at 12 years old	Male	50s	Research scientist
15	KE	Partially blind since 4 years ago	Female	?	Former operating room nurse and elementary and junior high school teacher
16	HR	Totally blind, lost sight at 19 years old	Female	30s	Painting etc.
17	IK	Totally blind, lost sight at 6 years old	Male	40s	Infrastructure engineer
18	OJ	Totally blind, lost sight at 32 years old	Female	?	Singer, songwriter etc.
19	YB	Totally blind, lost sight in his 20s	Male	50s	Marathon
20	DR	Totally blind, lost sight in her 20s	Female	60s	Marathon
21	OH	Weak eyesight beginning around 10 years old	Male	30s	Blind soccer player
22	KK	Weak eyesight beginning 18 years old	Male	20s	Blind soccer player
23	KK	Totally blind, lost sight at 1 year old without memory of seeing	Male	20s	Swimmer
24	TC	Totally blind, lost sight at 18 years old	Female	30s	Track-and-field events
25	AA	Weak eyesight beginning 14 years old	Female	30s	Goal ball

1. The position of the visually impaired in conventional aesthetics

1.1. The visually impaired = the sense of touch

The Molyneux's problem is the first topic that comes to mind when the motif of the visually impaired appears in Western aesthetic thinking. A born visually impaired person has his sight restored by an operation. Can he immediately distinguish between a square object and a round

object with his eyes, whereas before he could distinguish between them by touch? This question, raised by Molyneux in a letter and taken up by Locke, became a major controversy involving almost all the major thinkers of the time with the rise of empiricism as a background.

One of the most representative essays is Denis Diderot's "Letter on the Blind for the Use of those who can see" (1749, hereinafter referred to as "Letter on the Blind"). In this letter, Diderot went to talk to a visually impaired person who lived in Le Puiseau and had studied botany at the Royal Botanic Gardens and based his argument on what he heard. Diderot did this type of fieldwork because the controversy over Molyneux's problem was based on often unreliable reports of surgical procedures and experiments that were the latest technology at the time. Certain researchers, such as Gina Vaughan, see a paradigm shift here in the social position of the visually impaired. "After Diderot, we have moved from an era of show-style experiments in which the visually impaired were treated as objects to an era of dialogue in which they are treated as subjects, as equal interlocutors with philosophers."[3]

However, the visually impaired were treated as thoroughly tied to the sense of touch. The relationship between knowing by seeing and knowing by touching was questioned in Molyneux's problem. Thus, very little treatment exists on other means of obtaining information that the visually impaired normally use, in addition to touch (e.g., hearing, smell, or words from others). Furthermore, Diderot's emphasis on the sense of touch was intended to cause a value inversion in the hierarchy of the senses, with sight as the highest, and turns the question of Molyneux's problem itself into a meaningless one. Diderot asked the man in Le Puiseau if he wanted to be able to see. He replied, "I would rather have longer arms than sight. I'd rather have longer arms than sight. (...) In the first place, it would be better to improve what we have than to receive an organ we do not have."[4] This emphasizes the possibility of a form of human perception in which the absence of sight is the perfect form.

This concept of the connection between the visually impaired and the sense of touch was inherited without criticism by Rousseau in *Emile* (1762) and Buffon in *Natural History*, Vol. 3 (1849), who was working on the Molyneux's problem. This connection affected the living environment of the visually impaired. The attention paid to the ability of the visually impaired to sense touch paved the way for the use of touch to educate the blind, leading to the establishment of schools for the blind and the invention of Braille by Louis Braille and others.

The equation *visually impaired = sense of touch* was accepted as the norm even in the 20th century. For example, in his Phenomenology of Perception (1945), Merleau-Ponty focused on the fusion of subject and object that is unique to the sense of touch and being touched and later developed his ideas about *flesh*. Here, too, for example, a reference to the visually impaired was noted in Part II, Chapter I. As is quite natural, *the visually impaired = those who recognize by touching* with their hands is incorporated again into the discussion context.

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[3] Zina Weygand, *Vivre sans voir-les aveugles dans la société française du Moyen Âge au siècle de Louis Braille*, Éditions Créaphis, 2003, p.80 The translations of the texts cited in this study were made by the author (the same as below).

[4] Denis Diderot, *Lettre sur les aveugles*, édition critique par Robert Niklaus, 3e édition, Librairie Minard, 1970, p. 9

1.2. Sense of touch = direct knowledge

Aesthetically, the visually impaired appear in the context of an oppositional discussion between sight and touch. The visually impaired have been positioned as skillful users of the sense of touch precisely because they do not have sight. Thus, the sense of touch is expected to play its role as a *counter* to the hierarchy of senses that places sight at the top. The sense of touch was believed to be a sense that could capture what sight could not.

Derrida reports that this concept of emphasizing the sense of touch, which is supposed to be a low-level sense, is the basis of Western metaphysics. According to Derrida, from Plotinus, who reduced the good to the sense of touch through Christian theology to phenomenology, this type of *haptocentrism* has been continuously inherited. Vision is linked to the virtual and the illusory while the sense of touch belongs to the side of action and the real and is associated with direct knowledge. "There is a natural tendency to believe that the sense of touch defies virtualization. And if touch-centered intuitionism --continuous and serialistic-- is indeed the dominant tradition (...), perhaps philosophy is itself, from its origins, subject to this belief itself"[5].

The directness of the sense of touch is emphasized in what Derrida calls *haptocentrism*, which is important in this tradition. No room for the virtuality of sight was noted because the sense of touch is a means of cognition that brings one's body into direct contact with an object. Thus, it has been considered as the sense that can directly touch the most fundamental self and truth. This idea of *sense of touch = direct knowledge*, along with *the visually impaired = sense of touch*, is a characteristic that should be remembered when understanding the position of the visually impaired in conventional aesthetics. Thus, what it means to live with a body without sight will be clarified in line with the experiences of the people concerned by comparing what these two equal signs represent and the results of the author's fieldwork.

2. Sense of touch in the visually impaired

The first thing to consider is the assumption that *sense of touch = direct knowledge*. It is true that an object is touched with the hands and perception of the object is gained from the contact surface. Similarly, visually impaired people have a sense of touch in this sense. However, behavioral observations and interviews reveal that what the visually impaired need to live their lives as visually impaired people is a different type of sense of touch; more specifically, what may be called *indirect knowledge*. Consequently, the characteristics of the sense of touch of the visually impaired will be clarified from the perspective of *sign* and *absence*.

2.1. Symbolism of the sense of touch

Mr. NS, who lost his sight in an accident at 39 years old, made the following statement at an event held in 2013[6], "At first, when I lost my sight, I wasn't used to touching things, and I thought I couldn't understand even if I touched them, but as I got used to it, I could understand the whole thing just by touching it a little. For example, when I touched a guide dog, at first I

[5] Jacques Derrida, *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*, Gallimard, 2000, p. 337

[6] "Night of the New Moon" 5th session, held at Dialogue in the Dark, June 9, 2013

couldn't tell where the head was and where the tail was, and thought it was just a lump of hair. Now, however, I can tell where on the body I am touching, and if it is a person's shoulder, I can feel the roundness of the entire shoulder, and even the arms and head connected to the shoulder. It's almost like seeing."

This statement by NS suggests two important things. The first is the existence of what may be called a *sense of touch unique to the visually impaired*. The sense of touch is not the same for the visually impaired as it is for sighted people. The statement that *it's almost like seeing* indicates that Mr. NS's sense of touch has come to substitute for the function of sight before the accident. It indicates that the expected role of the sense of touch is different before and after the accident. The sense of touch for the sighted is different from the sense of touch for the visually impaired in terms of its role and the way it processes information. Simply *having a sense of touch* is not enough to live as a visually impaired person. Furthermore, Mr. N was suddenly blinded in an accident. Thus, he lost his sight *with the body of a sighted person*. Through rehabilitation and daily life training, he was later able to acquire a *sense of touch unique to the visually impaired*, which made him feel less inconvenienced. This was simply a shift from the touch of sense of *touching while seeing the object* to *touching while not seeing the object*. This shows that the *sense of touch unique to the visually impaired* is not inborn but acquired and learned. In the context of aesthetics, it has often been reported that vision is probably a product of learning—recall, for example, Hal Foster's distinction between *vision* and *visionary*[7]—but the sense of touch, too, has aspects that can be learned.

The second suggestion is the *symbolic* nature of the visually impaired's sense of touch. Initially, Mr. NS's sense of touch was limited to the surface in contact with the object and only captured tactile information about it (the way he perceived the guide dog as a *clump of hair* shows this). However, by acquiring the *sense of touch unique to the visually impaired*, Mr. NS's cognition has changed to a more conceptual and symbolic one, including the parts that are not in contact with the object. This indicates that the type of directness traditionally assumed for the sense of touch does not necessarily mean true for the sense of touch unique to the visually impaired. These differences are attributed to practical necessity. The basic sequence of action in sighted people is to obtain a visual perception of what the object is and then reach for it. Therefore, what is grasped with their hands is information that cannot be visually grasped (e.g., texture, softness, and temperature of the material). However, the visually impaired reach for the object without understanding what it is. Therefore, identifying the object becomes the first task of the sense of touch.

This symbolic nature of the sense of touch unique to the visually impaired is utilized in Braille as a notation system. In an interview with the author, Mr. KM reported that the ability to read Braille is quite different from the ability to feel the texture of a towel. Braille is "made in such a way that the height of the raised dots and the distance between the dots are easy to read according to the rules," whereas "towels are not made in such a way that even we cannot feel or count the individual hairs." Thus, the act of reading Braille is a symbolic process of checking, which of the possible arrangements of dots known in advance corresponds to the one currently

[7] Hal Foster, "Preface," *Vision and Visuality*, The MIT Press, 1998, pp. ix-xiv

being touched. Moreover, the design is designed to make it easy to understand the pattern of the arrangement. On the other hand, towels have no such placement rules and no design devices to make them easier to read. The same act of touching something with one's hands has a completely different cognitive function.

This is evident when seeing a visually impaired person reading Braille. The hand that reads the Braille does not stay in one place or repeatedly touch the same spot. According to the indicators given by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan in 1995, the speed required for efficient learning of academic subjects is 450 squares/min. However, 600 squares/min is ideal, which indicates that a considerable speed of 7.5‑10 squares/s is required[8]. No room exists for the type of fusion of subject and object that Merleau-Ponty discussed concerning the sense of touch. The dots must be touched with fingertips, but the sensation of the contact surface is immediately replaced by the recognition of the arrangement pattern and the meaning of the corresponding letters, while the fingers probably barely detect the touch of the dots. This is similar to the approach that a sighted person does not perceive the shape of each letter when reading black ink. Therefore, assuming that the visually impaired have a good sense of touch just because they can read Braille is too early. What if such a stereotype is imposed without recognizing the difference between the *sense of touch of sighted people* and the *sense of touch unique to the visually impaired*? This embarrassment is often reported by them.

2.2. Tactile nature of symbols

The sense of touch unique to the visually impaired is different from the sense of touch of the sighted person because they are skilled in symbolic cognition. In this sense, the equation *sense of touch = direct knowledge* does not necessarily hold. The connection between touch and symbols works in the opposite direction. Thus, the sense of touch is probably involved in the understanding of symbols by the visually impaired.

For example, when Mr. KM, who is totally blind, was walking with the author down a slope in Ookayama, Tokyo, where the author works, he said, "Ookayama is a mountain, and I am going down the slope." Thus, what a sighted person would understand as *going down a slope*, Mr. KM described as "going down the slope of a mountain." In concrete terms, "going down the slope of a mountain" means taking a bird's-eye and three-dimensional view of the entire land, and imagining that they are going down the surface of the *mountain*, which is like a bowl turned upside down. The name of the place, *Ookayama*, evoked this image for Mr. KM, as the word *yama* means *mountain* combined with the information about the *slope of the ground under his feet* to create the above image.

This image interestingly suggests that Mr. KM sees the symbol *mountain* like a bird's eye view and three-dimensional topography. For sighted people, mountains tend to be imagined as flat although they know that they are 3D objects in reality as is evident when one thinks of *Mt. Fuji*. Thus, visual culture (e.g., painting and image) contributes to this flat understanding. However, for the visually impaired, especially those who lost their sight at an early age, a

[8] Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, *Guide to Braille Learning Instruction*, Nihon Bunkyo Shuppan Co.1995, p. 4

mountain is the *mountain* that they understood by touching a model. Their understanding of the symbol *mountain* is supported by the experience gained by their sense of touch. The same can be said for *the moon* and *the sun*. Although they are *round like a tray* to a sighted person, they are *spherical* to a visually impaired person.

2.3. Gradation between presence and absence

One more characteristic of the sense of touch unique to the visually impaired, which forces us to reconsider the understanding that *sense of touch = direct knowledge*, is its relation to *absence* in addition to *symbolism*. The sense of touch is generally understood to be the sensation of directly touching the physical presence of an object. However, the sense of touch is rather a sensation associated with absence for the visually impaired, and the presence and absence are indistinguishable.

At a workshop conducted by the author[9], a visually impaired man made commented on the difficulty of eating seafood bowls. His argument was as follows. “At first glance, seafood bowls seem to be easy to eat because various ingredients are placed on top of one bowl. In reality, however, this is not the case. When you think you want tuna, you put squid in your mouth, or when you think you are eating hamachi, you eat an egg, and you cannot feel the taste. When I eat sushi, I prefer to order one type of nigiri at a time instead of a bowl of seafood.” This man’s statement reports the *difficulty of anticipation* that lies at the base of the actions of the visually impaired. Vision allows the anticipation of an action (such as the taste of tuna) before actually doing it. However, in the case of the visually impaired, without olfactory or auditory information, they come into physical contact with the object without precise anticipation. This indicates that the sense of touch for the visually impaired includes more or less *unexpected* information.

This means that the visually impaired always act on the assumption that their expectations will be partially violated. They perceive the environment in an approach that incorporates the possibility of surprises because it is impossible to act as if one is surprised every time the expectation is wrong. In a dialogue with the author, Mr. NS, who is totally blind, uses the example of *a cup in front of him*. As long as there is a cup in front of him and he touches it with his hand, he knows that it is there. However, its existence becomes uncertain the moment he removes his hand from the cup. *The certainty of the cup's existence* will diminish with time. Someone may pull the cup away without asking or replace it with another cup without realizing it. *Exists* becomes *probably exists*, *will probably exist*, and *may exist*. Visually, *presence* and *absence* are two distinguishable states. However, the distinction between the two is blurred and gradated in the environment that the visually impaired perceive. Although the visually impaired use the sense of touch a lot for cognition, they do not always perceive the object as a solid presence but rather require a way of cognition in which presence and absence are loosely connected to live as visually impaired people.

[9] “Designing a Country without Sight,” held at Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, April 29, May 8 and June 4, 2016

3. Importance of cognitive means other than *touch*

The equation *sense of touch = direct knowledge* has been clarified to not necessarily hold for the sense of touch unique to the visually impaired. What follows is a discussion of the equation *visually impaired = sense of touch*. Visually impaired people indeed grasp things that sighted people grasp visually, such as the cup in front of them, by directly touching it with their hands. In this sense, the use of touch is relatively frequent. However, this does not immediately indicate that touch is the dominant means of cognition for all visually impaired people. It does not necessarily mean that *the visually impaired are touchers.*

3.1. Conformity to the visual world

The first thing to understand is that certain visually impaired people tend to consciously avoid touch, as Mr. SK said in an interview with the author. “For example, when I walked into this room, as a child I would walk around and touch everything, and figure out that there was a table and how large the room was. But when you become an adult, it becomes difficult to do that. You cannot walk around, and people do not want me to touch everything too much. That is not the custom of people who can see.” Thus, Mr. SK understands that the sense of touch is given a negative value, associated with ideas such as *filthiness* and *danger of destruction* in a society dominated by sighted people. In the process of becoming an adult, they have come to avoid excessive touching, at least in public.

Similar to Mr. SK, many visually impaired people try to refrain from using their sense of touch to conform to social norms. The previous section pointed out that one reason for this may be the development of the sense of touch, which allows them to *see the whole picture without touching everything*. This may be one reason why few adult visually impaired people want to touch everything. Thus, treating the visually impaired with a preconceived notion that *they have a keen sense of touch* may lead to ethical problems. For example, information support is provided to the visually impaired with the assumption that it is good for them to be able to touch everything. Thus, the visually impaired, who are trying to live in harmony with social norms, may end up pushed further into the frame of the disabled[10].

In addition to these codes of conduct reasons, another factor that has contributed to the decline in *touch opportunities* among the visually impaired is the decline in the Braille literacy rate. According to a survey conducted by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare in 2006, the Braille literacy rate among the visually impaired in Japan is only 12.6%[11]. In addition to the technical hurdle of the difficulty of learning braille only at a young age, the importance of braille in information gathering has declined relatively in recent years bcause of the Internet. Thus,

[10] A movement exists to claim the existence of a unique culture of the visually impaired based on the sense of touch.

See Kojiro Hirose, *An Invitation to Touching Culture: An Encouragement of the Study of the Hand as Seen through the Sense of Touch*, Sekai Shiso-sha, 2009.

[11] Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Social Affairs and Welfare Bureau, Planning Division, Department of Disability Health and Welfare, *Results of the 2006 Survey of Children and Persons with Physical Disabilities*, 2008, p. 24.

obtaining a variety of information phonetically through the Internet without tactilely reading Braille-translated books and magazines is now possible.

3.2. Emphasis on the sense of touch other than based solely on the palm of the hand

Thus, the preconceived notion that *visually impaired people = touchers* not only does not fit the actual situation but may even hurt the dignity of the people concerned. However, note that it is *touch* that they are trying to avoid and not *the sense of touch itself*. When touch is being thought of, the act of *touching* with the hands tended to be in mind. However, in reality, the sense of touch is distributed throughout the body. The visually impaired make great use of these nonpalm senses of touch.

For example, Ms. TM says that the first thing she feels when a train is coming when she gets on the subway is the wind on her cheek. "The wind is already blowing at the stairs to the station, so I know the train is coming. When I'm standing on the platform, the breeze comes first, before the sound. When I think, 'Oh, it's coming soon,' I hear a gurgling sound. After that, there is a strong wind." A definite *wind* exists in the case of a moving object (e.g., a train). However, many visually impaired people use a weak *flow of air* as a hint for spatial perception if no strong wind exists. For example, in a dialogue with the author, Mr. HK said, "I can feel that I am in an elevator hall or at a crossroad by the change in the air hitting my cheek." While a sense of touch such as *reaching out to touch an object* is considered intimidating, a passive sense of touch such as the wind or the flow of air against one's cheek would not be perceived negatively nor would it be noticed in the first place. Such a sense of touch is greatly utilized by the visually impaired.

Other tactile information transmitted through the soles of the feet is important: some people, such as Mr. HK, *feel the direction of the room from the grain of the tatami*, while many others understand the directions of the streets they pass every day using the slightest step on the road or the crack in the curb as a landmark. Hence, as Mr. IK says, "On days of heavy snowfall, I have trouble because there are no more steps under my feet." No psychological resistance exists to utilize the sense of touch on the soles of the feet because it is not negatively viewed and is not noticed by people around them. Note that both cheeks and soles are indirect senses of touch. The cheek perceives the movement of a train or the shape of a crossroad through the medium of air, and the sole perceives the shape of the floor or ground through the sole of a shoe or sock. This is the same structure as to how vision perceives objects through air and glass. The sense of touch does not work as direct knowledge in the sense that they perceive objects without physical contact.

3.3 Emphasis on cognitive methods other than touch

Furthermore, the sense of touch cannot be considered the most important sense organ for the visually impaired even if the sense of touch other than the palm is considered. The importance of each sense organ varies greatly from person to person, and using more than one sense organ in combination is common. Therefore, as an overall trend, information obtained through sound, i.e., auditory information, is considered to play a much more important role than information obtained through touch.

For example, if a voice is heard behind you, you know someone is there. If the sound of flushing on the other side of a wall is heard, you know that a toilet is next door. The sound of a

car driving can tell the direction of the road. As Mr. OH said, this driving sound information is very important when lost in a residential area where little information and few people exist.

Therefore, auditory perception is used as sound source localization. However, more important and often overlooked is that objects that do not themselves produce sound can be perceived. For example, Mr. IK says that he sometimes audibly perceives *fences* on the side of the road. If the fence is wide enough and at the level of ears, he can alternately hear and not hear the sound of the premises as he walks along the side of the fence. Mr. IK calls this an *acoustic striped pattern*. In other words, even if the object itself does not emit sound, such as a fence, an object can be recognized (or is not) because of its shielding effect against environmental noise. This is considered to be similar to what is called *presence*. The environment always has noise-like sounds (e.g., such as the motor noise of electrical appliances, the sound of air conditioning, and the rustling of leaves). These sounds become the medium for object recognition. Therefore, Mr. SJ says, “In an anechoic room, I don't feel any presence.” Moreover, cognition using environmental noise as a medium is not limited to large objects such as walls and fences. Mr. SJ says that he can feel the presence of a doll the size of a mug when it is placed behind his head. However, this perception is based on temporal changes in the sound of the environment. If you standing still next to a fence, the change will not be felt. Similarly, if the doll is present all the time, it will not be perceived. The movement of the subject or object is a necessary condition and is very different from the sound source localization of hearing or seeing.

In addition to hearing, the sense of smell is an important source of information. The smell of a bakery or a beauty parlor is an important mark for a visually impaired person walking around town. Moreover, the use of sensory organs is not the only way of cognition. For the visually impaired, verbal information provided by the people around them is an important recognition method. In addition to the intentional explanatory words of the caregiver, such as “There is tea in front of you,” visually impaired people obtain information from natural conversation. Even without words, the actions of sighted people, such as crouching, standing still, and observing closely, can be cues for the visually impaired to recognize the environment.

In this manner, the visually impaired perceive their environment and live in society through senses other than sight and communication with others. The visually impaired do not exist as normal people minus their sense of sight. Conversely, the way they use their sense of touch is completely different from that of normal people. In constructing a theory of the body of the visually impaired, taking a holistic view of the visually impaired as *existence without sight as the norm* rather than regarding them as *existence lacking sight* based on the normal person is necessary.

4. From the study of representations of the disabled to the theory of the body

By actually observing the behavior of the visually impaired and conducting interviews with them, numerous pieces of evidence can be reported that show how the equations *sense of touch = direct knowledge* and *visually impaired = sense of touch*, which have been assumed in aesthetics, are far from reality. A major reason for this divergence is that conventional aesthetics has treated the visually impaired only in the context of specific discussions and has understood

them ideologically. Of course, other aesthetic contexts exist in which the visually impaired are treated, in addition to Molyneux's problem dealt with in Chapter 1. For example, in the context of the value debate over *ugliness* and *abjection*, the representation of the disabled in general, including the visually impaired, is questioned. Some studies such as the work of Tobin Shivers, have achieved success in the field of disability studies[12]. As will be discussed later, its significance should be appreciated.

In any case, the *representation* of the visually impaired or the disabled in general is an issue and the actual bodies of the disabled tend to be left out. If only people with disabilities depicted in paintings or appearing in pop culture are the subject of analysis, such analysis itself may contribute to a disassociation from the real bodies of people with disabilities. If it is possible to study the *body* of the disabled rather than the *representation* of the disabled, what significance would this have in the real world? In this chapeter, separately from the context of aesthetics, while referring to the debate on disability, this study will discuss the range of theories of the disabled body based on the experiences of the people concerned.

4.1. Two concepts of *disability*

The first thing to remember is the historical evolution of the concept of *disability*. The concept of disability has been debated in various ways by people with disabilities, their families, and researchers. Some of these debates have taken the form of social movements that have had a significant impact on the welfare policies of national and local governments. In particular, the movement for the disabled that spread from the UK to other countries around 1980 is often mentioned as a turning point[13].

Disability had been exclusively understood in terms of the *individual model* until then. The *individual model* ascribes the disadvantages and difficulties suffered by people with disabilities to their physical, intellectual, and mental dysfunction. Thus, disadvantages are directly caused by the inability to move one's arms and legs and the inability to see. Disabilities are considered to be *inherent in the individual*. As long as this model is followed, no other way exists to deal with these dysfunctions than to *treat* them. Thus, the *individual model* is called the *medical model*.

However, the *social model* advocated by the disability movement places the cause of disability on the side of society. Michael Oliver, a leading proponent of this model, defines it as follows. "The 'social model' locates the problem of disability (...) broadly within society. It is not any type of personal constraint that causes the problem, but society's failure to provide adequate services and adequate guarantees that consider the requirements of people with disabilities in social arrangements"[14]. From the standpoint of this social model, the way to deal with the problem is not to medically intervene in the bodies of people with disabilities but to eliminate social barriers. This way of thinking was practically developed as a social movement and had certain effectiveness as a social change. The current legal definition of disability in Japan is based on this

[12] Tobin Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics*, The University of Michigan Press, 2010

[13] For the following concepts of disability, see Ryoji Hoshika, *What is Disability: Toward a Social Theory of Disability*, Seikatsu Shoin, 2007.

[14] Michael Oliver, *Understanding Disability: From Theory to Practice*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996, p.32.

social model which has given rise to a new field of study called *disability studies* in the academic world. The aforementioned critical research on the representation of disability in aesthetics contributes to disability improvement as a social model.

4.2. The scope of the theory of the disabled body

However, problems that cannot be solved still exist even if disability is viewed as a social problem. For example, Shinichiro Kumagaya mentions the problems of *aging* and *pain*[15]. Aging and pain are actual events that occur in the bodies of individuals. These are problems that do not disappear even if disability is viewed within a social model. To begin with, people who are considered disabled and able-bodied will have completely different experiences, even if they are guaranteed the freedom to perform the same actions. For example, going to the library from the train station is a completely different experience from going there by sight or with a white cane. A great possibility exists that erroneous welfare policies may be adopted because these differences, rooted in the physical conditions of the individual, are not understood.

While the social model of disability is important, complementing it with a perspective that approaches the body itself and the experiences of people with disabilities is essential. This is where the theory of the disabled body can contribute. Research fields such as medicine exist that focus on the bodies of people with disabilities such as medicine and physiology. However, they deal with organs and functions rather than the experiences of the body, and with parts rather than the whole, and are not holistic approaches that allow healthy people to take the perspective of the disabled. Moreover, a tendency is noted in welfare studies to directly connect with policy, which indicates that quantitative research using quantifiable data is common. However, qualitative research that approaches the experiences of people with disabilities is difficult to realize.

What should be recalled here is Diderot's gaze toward the visually impaired. The "Letter on the Blind" is not only a theory of the senses but also a theory of human intelligence. What Diderot was trying to understand was not the lack of sight but the *way of perceiving the world without sight*. Kantaro Ohashi summarizes Diderot's view of people with disabilities as follows. "If we define a certain kind of sensory unity as 'human,' then 'the blind' are not merely 'people from whom sight has been removed.' The difference between the sighted and the blind is reduced to a qualitative difference in organic unity. From this comes the image of the blind not as beings deprived of sight, or as lacking sight, but as others who embody a different perfection"[16]. Should not such a holistic gaze be directed at the bodies of the disabled without being bound to a particular context? This is where a possibility and a demand for writing about the theory of bodies of disabled people exist based on their experiences from the standpoint of aesthetics[17].

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[15] Shin'ichiro Kumagaya et al., *"Philosophy of Pain" for Not Suffering Alone*, Seidosha, 2013.

[16] Kantaro Ohashi, *Diderot's Materialism*, Hosei University Press, 2011, p. 89

[17] In the case of mental disabilities, *Tojisha-Kenkyu* exists in which the people themselves analyze their own experiences in recent years. However, the practice is still limited for physical disabilities.

Future tasks

This study discussed the possibility of a somatic theory of disability, taking up the specific disability of visual impairment. However, whether or not a similar approach is possible for other disabilities is an issue for future study. Moreover, writing a theory of the body about a specific body means leaving the generality that aesthetics has maintained when discussing the body. The question of how to construct a theory of the body that can be established as a science while staying close to the diversity of the real body and how to construct a theoretical framework that guarantees this are future tasks.