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Journal Item

How to cite:

Barker, Emma (2020). Envisioning Blindness in Eighteenth-Century Paris. Oxford Art Journal, 43(1) pp. 91–116.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

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Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1093/oxartj/kcaa003>

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Envisioning Blindness in Eighteenth-Century Paris

Long after the event, Jacques-Louis David vividly recalled the sudden revelation of the true principles of art that he experienced in Italy during the year 1779: 'I felt as if I had undergone an operation for cataract'.¹ This statement lays claim on David's behalf to one of 'the two great mythical experiences' taken by Foucault to exemplify the Enlightenment commitment to seeing the world afresh: 'the man born blind restored to light'.² This figure owed his prominence in eighteenth-century culture to Molyneux's Problem, that is, the question of whether or not a congenitally blind person cured by means of cataract surgery would recognise by sight objects already familiar to the touch, which was widely debated after Locke posed it in his *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1689). David's appropriation of the myth of sight regained needs, however, to be set against the concern with its loss or lack that scholars have discerned in the artist's work.³ Evident in the monumental canvas of the blinded Byzantine general Belisarius begging for alms (Fig. 1) that David exhibited at the Salon on his debut in 1781, the year after his return from Rome to Paris, such a concern resurfaces in the never completed composition depicting the blind bard Homer reciting his verses that he devised in 1794 while in prison after the fall of Robespierre. Given that the poet evidently stands in here for the artist himself, it would seem that, for David, the figure of the blind man had a dual significance, at once objective and subjective, raising issues both of sight and selfhood.

1. Jacques-Louis David, *Belisarius Begging for Alms*, 1781, oil on canvas, 288 x 312 cm. Palais des Beaux-Arts, Lille. Photo (C) RMN-Grand Palais / Philipp Bernard.

Rather than focusing on David, however, I want here to examine how the blind had been depicted by French artists over the previous century or so, with the aim of elucidating how these different aspects of blindness played out in their work. In taking a long view of the topic, I seek to challenge a tendency in recent scholarship too readily to align eighteenth-century images of the blind with a new, rational and humane attitude towards visual impairment said to have emerged during the early modern period. Moshe Barasch, for example, simply excludes post-1700 art from his history of the changing representation of blindness on the grounds that the Enlightenment brings about the disenchantment of a condition associated since antiquity with occult powers and divine punishment.⁴ Georgina Cole, by contrast, discusses paintings of the blind by two eighteenth-century artists, Jean-Siméon Chardin and Jean-Baptiste Greuze, but similarly argues that they manifest a thoughtful, sympathetic attitude typical of Enlightenment thought.⁵ Echoing other art historians who have touched on the question of blindness, Barasch and Cole both accord a central role to Diderot's *Lettre sur les aveugles* (1749), which takes Molyneux's Problem as its point of departure before moving on to explore the lived experience of the blind.⁶ On this basis, Diderot has been credited not only with inaugurating a new, humanitarian approach to blindness but also with anticipating the twentieth-

century critique of ocularcentrism.⁷ The problems with this kind of teleological reading have been highlighted by Kate Tunstall, who argues that, indebted as it is to both literary and philosophical tradition, the *Lettre* offers a more a more ambiguous account of blindness than is usually recognised.⁸

Likewise, this essay will argue that eighteenth-century French images of the blind were primarily shaped by iconographic convention and other established tropes of blindness, together with the professional and personal concerns of the artists involved. Undoubtedly, they owe something to Enlightenment thinking about the condition and, more specifically, to the reassessment of the role of the different senses in perception initiated by Locke. However, such images can also be connected to a longer tradition of optical research, most famously exemplified by a passage in Descartes's *La Dioptrique* (1637), in which the figure of the blind man wielding a stick is deployed for the purpose of comparing sight with touch. For artists, moreover, as the case of David indicates, blindness as an objective condition for philosophical investigation is inseparable from a subjective engagement with the blind figure as a metaphor for artistic selfhood. According to Derrida, indeed, any drawing of the blind can be understood as a kind of allegorical self-portrait, insofar as the act of depiction entails a moment of blindness when the draughtsman turns away from the object in order to delineate it on paper.⁹ Although the logic of Derrida's thesis extends much further than this, his central insight broadly accords with early modern art theory, in which the figure of the blind man was regularly invoked to support claims for the relative status and distinctive qualities of painting and sculpture. Accordingly, this essay does not focus only on painting, but considers the works by Chardin and Greuze already mentioned alongside one by the sculptor and draughtsman Edme Bouchardon.

The blind man was not merely a conceptual category, however, but also presented a familiar sight on the streets of Paris, especially in and around the rue St-Honoré on which the Hôpital des Quinze-Vingts was situated (Fig. 2). Founded in 1260 by Louis IX to house 300 (hence Quinze-Vingts) poor blind people, the institution required inmates to go out to beg for alms to fund it. As several images discussed here reveal, the fleur-de-lys badge that they wore on their coats distinguished this privileged group from other blind beggars, who, by contrast, were liable to arrest. In consequence, the (invariably male) blind beggar of the Quinze-Vingts became a quintessentially Parisian figure, the embodiment of the city's street life; as such, he exemplifies the celebrated dictum that 'the socially marginal is often symbolically central'.¹⁰ The constant presence of the inmates of the Quinze-Vingts on the streets of eighteenth-century Paris, their intimate knowledge of its rhythms and rituals, has been underlined by David Garrioch, for whom the blind beggar navigating a path through the streets encapsulates the sensory life of the city and, more specifically, testifies to the role of sound in the construction of urban identity and community.¹¹ Certainly, the highly refined sensory perception of the Quinze-Vingts was proverbial at the time.¹² The familiarity of this figure was also bound up with artistic identity, given that the hospital was located in the vicinity of the Louvre, in which the

Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture was housed. Images of the blind by academicians thus testify to a relationship of proximity, albeit one inevitably marked by tensions between the world of high art and the low life of the streets.

2. *Palais-Royal, Louvre et Tuileries, dessiné et gravé sous les ordres, de Michel-Etienne Turgot, prévôt des marchands, dit "Plan de Turgot"*. 1734-9. Saint-Denis, ateliers d'art des musées nationaux, moulage et chalcographie..Photo (C) RMN-Grand Palais / Gérard Blot

Pre-1700

Insofar as they focus on the figure of the beggar, eighteenth-century images of the blind represent continuity with rather than departure from the established iconography of blindness. Of course, the blind appear in other guises in earlier art, whether as Old Testament figures such as Isaac and Tobit or in depictions of the conversion of Paul. Most often shown, however, were the anonymous blind men miraculously healed by Christ, who were assumed to have been beggars. In Nicolas Poussin's painting of the subject, for example, the mendicant status of the two blind men is signalled by their skimpy garments, their sightlessness by their extended hands and by the stick that the first man still grasps as Christ performs the miracle; the second, awaiting his turn, has already cast aside his stick, which lies in the shaded area behind him (Fig. 3). Strong lighting and pure colour in and around the figure of Christ, by contrast, align light and sight with faith and redemption. The subject of a *conférence* at the Académie in 1667, Poussin's composition became a touchstone for subsequent generations of French artists; it was reportedly copied in 1760 by a twelve-year-old David.¹³ Many subsequent depictions of Christ healing the blind were painted to hang in ecclesiastical settings, such as the chapel of the Hôtel-Dieu in Rouen for which François-André Vincent was commissioned to paint an altarpiece of the subject in 1778.¹⁴ The blind beggar whose faith is rewarded with the gift of sight thus not only symbolises sinful humanity's hope of salvation but also represents the sick and deserving poor to whom such institutions catered.

3. Nicolas Poussin, *Christ Healing the Blind*, 1650, oil on canvas, 119 x 176 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo (C) RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Tony Querrec.

As such, the blind beggar as he is represented in high art of Christian inspiration stands in contrast to his counterpart in the secular tradition of popular imagery, largely in graphic form. Jacques Callot's series of etchings, *The Beggars*, for example, includes at least two figures who appear to be blind: one with lowered head, cup, stick and dog (Fig. 4) and another led by a companion. Although their characterisation is not obviously unsympathetic, the frontispiece to the series frames them as

members of an invading horde of rogues and swindlers.¹⁵ Moreover, this perception of the poor and outcast applied especially to those who were visually impaired. A comic stereotype whose origins have been traced back to a late thirteenth-century French farce, the blind beggar was not only a swindler (not really blind at all, in short) but also a drunkard and a brawler.¹⁶ This stereotype feeds into Jacques Bellange's etching of a beggars' brawl apparently instigated by a blind hurdy-gurdy player, as well as George de la Tour's painting of the same subject.¹⁷ Unlike their work, however, Callot's etchings achieved a wide and lasting renown, becoming synonymous with the grotesque; Diderot, for example, refers in passing to 'Callot's grotesques'.¹⁸ In the case of *The Beggars*, the term may be taken to refer not just to the figures' physical deformities and bodily distortions but also to their irregular contours and slippery identities. By contrast to the transfigured blind men of high art, Callot's sightless vagrants embody an obdurate materiality, the two types together exemplifying a Bakhtinian opposition between the classical and grotesque bodies.¹⁹

4. Jacques Callot, *Blind Beggar*, from *Les Gueux*, c.1622, etching, 14 x 8.8 cm. Wellcome Collection, London. CC BY.

In a Parisian context, however, such distinctions became blurred, thanks to the Hôpital des Quinze-Vingts, which endowed the blind beggar with a legitimate status and a determinate identity. No longer a troubling outsider, he was incorporated into the category of the itinerant trades, with the hawkers and pedlars who offered their wares and services through the city streets, as attested by his occasional presence in the graphic tradition of the *Cris de Paris*, which appeared from the sixteenth century onwards. The Protestant printmaker Abraham Bosse, for example, featured one in a series of twelve etchings dating from around 1640, each of which bears a caption purporting to record the distinctive cry of each figure (Fig. 5). The words put into the mouth of the blind beggar underline his physical vulnerability and deserving status: 'Must it not be admitted that I am very much to be pitied/Since I have the misfortune to live without seeing anything/and that in the dangers I am obliged to fear/My movement depends on a stick and a dog'. Bosse may have based the image on Callot's equivalent figure, given the closeness of such details as the tall hat, clasped hands and fluffy dog. Instead of wearing shapeless rags, however, this blind beggar is defined by the strong outlines of his neat uniform, to which is attached the badge that identifies him as an inmate of the Quinze-Vingts. Whereas Callot's figure is silhouetted against a blank backdrop, the quinze-vingt is shown in an identifiable setting, with the slender spire of the hospital chapel visible behind him.²⁰ Standing at a wooden barrier, he compels the beholder to pass close by him in order to move forward, as if encountering him in the street.

5. Abraham Bosse, *Blind Beggar*, from *Les Cris de Paris*, etching, 21.6 x 14.3 cm. Bibliothèque nationale, Paris. ©BnF.

For present purposes, Bosse's image is significant not only as an iconographic precedent for later images of the Quinze-Vingts but also because of the way that it constructs the blind beggar as an object of vision within urban space. The figure is framed by the posts and bars on either side, which form a grid structure that shapes our perception of the space within which he stands. With his upright bearing and long stick, which find an echo in the distant spire, he appears fully integrated into this rationalised space, unlike the sketchy figures who occupy the uneven terrain beyond. The image as a whole testifies to Bosse's preoccupation with perspective, which he taught at the Académie, and, by extension, to the rational approach that he advocated not only for artistic practice but also for human life more generally; it embodies his mathematically-informed vision of a well-ordered society.²¹ The blind beggar of the Quinze-Vingts is incorporated into this vision, as a worthy citizen within his humble condition, even if the Protestant printmaker would presumably not wholly have endorsed an institution founded by St Louis. The inclusion of this figure in Bosse's *Cris* may also be related to the optical concerns that inform his work on perspective; the blind beggar might, for example, serve as an object of vision for the three gentlemen whom he depicts in an illustration to a treatise he wrote with lines of sight extending from their eyes (or rather one eye) in a barely delineated setting that nevertheless reads as an urban space (Fig. 6). Some such explanation would help to account for Bosse's unprecedented inclusion of a quinze-vingt in the *Cris de Paris*.

6. Abraham Bosse, Plate 2 of *Manière universelle de M. Desargues pour pratiquer la perspective par petit pied*, 1647, etching, 13 x 8.5. Bibliothèque nationale, Paris. ©BnF.

Far-fetched as it may seem to suggest that Bosse's three gentlemen might direct their gaze at a blind beggar, just such a juxtaposition appears in a drawing book by a later printmaker, who also served as professor of perspective at the Académie. Sébastien Le Clerc's *Divers desseins de figures dédiés à M. Colbert d'Ormoy* (1679) consists of 29 tiny plates, each depicting a pair of figures, most in outline only, some with shadow added. The figures represent a range of social conditions; an eighteenth-century catalogue categorises them by such terms as 'worker', 'young lady', 'common woman' and 'bourgeois'.²² Ten plates include minimal settings that integrate the two figures into a rudimentary scene of everyday life; plate 10 shows a well-dressed male figure pausing to observe a blind beggar in the uniform of the Quinze-Vingts, who bows his head as he holds out his cup for alms (Fig. 7).²³ The only plate to depict cross-class interaction, this image suggests that an encounter with a quinze-vingt offered the Parisian elite an opportunity to engage with the city's street life in a sanctioned and unthreatening way. It is also worth bearing in mind the pedagogical function of the drawing book, which is dedicated to an illustrious pupil of Le Clerc's, the son of Louis XIV's finance minister. In copying the figures, the amateur draughtsman might recombine them so as to depict a different encounter with the blind beggar, or, if sufficiently skilled, elaborate the setting into a specific urban

location. According to an early commentator, every figure in the book made so vivid an effect that pleasure could be derived simply from examining and describing each one in detail.²⁴

7. Sébastien Le Clerc, *Gentleman and Blind Beggar*, from *Divers desseins de figures dédiés à M. Colbert d'Ormy*, 1679, etching, 16 x 21 cm. Bibliothèques-Médiathèques de Metz, collections patrimoniales.

Moreover, Le Clerc's apparent interest in the figure of the blind beggar has a direct bearing on his commitment to perspective and accompanying concern with optics. The same year, 1679, he also published a *Discours touchant le point de vue*, in which he sought to uphold the monocular model of vision on which single-point perspective depended by discrediting Descartes's binocular account. Demonstrating that each eye perceived the same object differently, Le Clerc argued that this disparity meant that the two images could not be unified in the brain as Descartes (in fact correctly) claimed.²⁵ He supported his argument with numerous illustrations, including a version of the celebrated image of a blind man 'seeing' with two sticks from *La Dioptrique* (Fig. 8). Like the original, Le Clerc's blind man is a bearded, barefoot figure in classical draperies, but seems altogether nobler, closer to Poussin than to Callot, not least because he lacks the little dog on a lead (Fig. 9). Rather than standing on an isolated patch of ground, he is set within a grand perspectival space and, instead of crossing his sticks for the purpose of what Descartes calls 'natural geometry', he presses them together against a column to demonstrate how each hand (like each eye) forms a different perception of a single object. Le Clerc thus transforms the blind man into an emblem of the perspectival system to which he adhered and, by extension, of the draughtsman's art as such. With time, the reference grew more personal; Le Clerc re-used the image in a later work, published in 1712, by which time he had suffered considerable problems with his own eyesight and feared losing it entirely.²⁶

8. Blind man from René Descartes, *La Dioptrique*, 1637. Bibliothèque nationale, Paris. ©BnF.

9. Sébastien Le Clerc, Blind Man of Descartes, in *Discours touchant le point de vue*, 1679.

Bibliothèque nationale, Paris. ©BnF.

Bouchardon

Although his defence of single-point perspective was bound up with debates within the Académie during its first few decades, Le Clerc's technical writings helped make him (in the words of Michael Baxandall) 'a curiously long-lasting underground force in eighteenth-century art'.²⁷ His continued authority was upheld by the collector and connoisseur Pierre-Jean Mariette, who declared: 'If there has ever been a printmaker who rendered himself famous in his profession, and who extended his capacities beyond ordinary limits, it is unquestionably Sébastien Le Clerc'.²⁸ In his capacity as official draughtsman to the Académie des inscriptions, Le Clerc figured as an illustrious predecessor to

Bouchardon, who was appointed to this coveted position in 1737. Around the same time, the latter was engaged in a large-scale project, which extended the range of his work to include low as well as high subjects in a manner comparable to that of Le Clerc. Executed in collaboration with the Comte de Caylus, for whom Bouchardon made the drawings that the latter etched for publication under the title, *Études prises dans le bas peuple, ou Les Cris de Paris*, the project can be associated with the surge of interest in the tradition of the *Cris* among artists and *amateurs* at the time.²⁹ However, it stands out as the first such print series to feature a blind beggar since that of Bosse; the inclusion of this figure could be attributed to the sheer extent of Bouchardon's series, but, given that the print appeared in the second of five sets of twelve, it was clearly not an afterthought.

Unlike the image by Bosse, the print after Bouchardon bears a caption identifying the blind beggar as a *quinze-vingt*, necessarily so since he faces away from the beholder, concealing the fleur-de-lys on his front (Fig. 10). Beneath appears the beggar's cry: 'Prayer of the blessed Saint Anthony; fury that it's cold'. In this respect, the image differs from others in the series, all of which bear a caption that either identifies the figure or gives them voice, but not both. At once invoking Christian piety and alluding to his own bodily discomfort, this utterance underlines the blind man's pitiful condition. What is striking about the actual image, however, is its abstracted quality, far removed from the life of the street; Bouchardon seems to have made the red-chalk drawings for the series on the basis of life drawing in the studio, sometimes using the same model for different trades (Fig. 11).³⁰ The figures are endowed with a strong sense of bodies moving in space in a way that vividly conveys the physical demands of performing certain actions, if not the brute reality of their trade. In this case, the way that the blind man turns away from us to address his cry for alms to thin air prompts our awareness that he cannot see us; we wait for the young guide who accompanies him to get him to turn around to face us. The image is one of very few in the series to include more than one figure, but the guide's face at the beggar's elbow seems, if anything, to reinforce the sense of the blind man's isolation.

10. Anne-Claude-Philippe de Tubières, comte de Caylus after Edme Bouchardon, *Blind Man of the Quinze-Vingts*, etching, 24.1 x 19cm. British Museum, London. Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum.

11. Edme Bouchardon, *Blind Man of the Quinze-Vingts*, c. 1737, red chalk. 23 x 18 cm. British Museum, London. Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum.

The inclusion of this figure in the series may have something to do with Bouchardon's identity as a sculptor. The draughtsmanship of the series is highly sculptural, with strong outlines and emphatic modelling; it is hardly a coincidence that the very first plate shows a stone cutter.³¹ For a sculptor, the

blind man might have held a particular resonance; blindness had been aligned with sculpture as opposed to painting in theoretical debates since the Renaissance on the grounds that the former could be appreciated and even practiced by the blind. Roger de Piles, for example, invoked the figure of the blind sculptor in developing the argument that drawing relates to touch, which is the sense proper to sculpture, whereas colour pertains to the visual art of painting, albeit with the aim of establishing the supremacy of the latter art form.³² Any academician would have been familiar with the case of the sculptor Jacques Buirette, whose portrait hung on the walls of their institution; reportedly an excellent judge of sculpture through touch alone after the loss of his sight, he ended his life in the Quinze-Vingts, with a royal pension (Fig. 12).³³ Bouchardon's blind beggar does not, however, use his sense of touch in a comparable fashion, but occupies a featureless void, with nothing to hand but his cup and stick. Whereas other figures in the series are shown in front of a building or on a paved surface, his setting consists merely of a rudimentary demarcation of ground and wall. Suggestive of the blind man's obliviousness to his visual environment, it makes of him a kind of living statue, immobilized under our gaze (at least until his guide prompts him to move).

12. Antoine Benoist *Portrait of Jacques Buirette*, 16, oil on canvas, 118 x 92 cm. Versailles, Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon. Photo (C)RMN-Grand Palais (Château de Versailles) / Gérard Blot

As such, Bouchardon's blind beggar might have brought to mind the debates around perception and cognition exemplified by Molyneux's Problem. A possible point of reference is the related thought experiment elaborated by Condillac in his *Traité des sensations* (1754), which involves imagining the separate acquisition of each of the five senses by an inanimate and insensate human being: a living statue, in short. For a beholder familiar with Condillac's much-discussed hypothesis, the image presents a comparable vision of a sculptural figure not (yet) endowed with the full range of sensory perception and, in consequence, lacking the developed awareness of both self and other that underpins human consciousness.³⁴ Equally, however, the blind beggar could be identified with Bouchardon himself; the figure's sense of frozen isolation tallies with contemporary reports of the sculptor's austere, anti-social character.³⁵ A further connection can be made to a (presumed) self-portrait drawing made in Rome around 1730, in which Bouchardon depicts himself with his fingers against his closed eye lids, as if refusing to look back at the beholder (Fig. 13).³⁶ He thereby pushes the instant of blindness that Derrida discerns in the act of self-portraiture into an apparent rejection of vision, perhaps thereby thematising the association of sculpture with touch. His body functioning as both the subject and object of touch, he appears here at once sculptor and sculpture, not least because the portrait was drawn in a notebook otherwise filled with sketches of portrait busts and

other monuments. For Bouchardon, the blind beggar would thus seem to have served as an emblem of his professional and personal identity as a man of stone.

13. Edme Bouchardon, *Self-Portrait*, c. 1730, Red chalk, 19.8 x 13.5 cm. The Morgan Library & Museum, New York.

Chardin

Bouchardon did not single the blind man of the *Quinze-Vingts* out from the *Cris de Paris*, however, unlike his academic colleague, Chardin, whose painting of such a figure probably also dates from the late 1730s (Fig. 14).³⁷ Unique among his works in its exterior setting, it too can be associated with contemporary interest in the tradition of the *Cris*, apparently indebted as it is to Bosse's print of a *quinze-vingt*. As well as having the same props (stick, cup and dog), Chardin's beggar shares the sideways pose that allows the fleur-de-lys badge to be seen on his front. Although the painting was simply entitled *A Blind Man* when it was exhibited at the Salon of 1753, critics readily identified the figure as a *quinze-vingt*. One commented: 'His pose, feeble appearance and the way he moves his stick are truly those of a blind man. His dress, both in its shape and in its grime, identifies him as a typical *quinze-vingt*'.³⁸ In other words, he represents a familiar social type, recognisable from the beholder's experience. He stands, moreover, in an appropriately generic setting, at a church door, the privileged location in which the blind of the *Quinze-Vingts* had enjoyed an exclusive right to beg since the hospital's foundation.³⁹ The chair behind him indicates that this is his habitual spot, where he waits in hope of alms from the faithful; he has presumably just got up, perhaps at the prompting of church bells or other aural cue that tells him that mass is either about to start or has just ended. The tilt of his head towards the dark door (its panels can be discerned near ground level), together with the shadow that his hat casts over his sightless eyes, vividly convey the blind man's reliance on his hearing, as well as the stick that he clutches, to negotiate his environment.

14. Jean-Siméon Chardin, *A Blind Man*, late 1630s (?), oil on canvas, 29.8 x 23 cm. Harvard University Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Bequest of Grenville L. Winthrop, 1943.217.

Photo: Imaging Department © President and Fellows of Harvard College

Chardin's painting would thus have prompted Parisian beholders to refer back to the *quinze-vingts* whom they encountered in the city streets. Coincidentally, in July 1753, shortly before the Salon opened, a couple of journalists mentioned a blind beggar who habitually stood near the entrance to the passage des Feuillants (so called after a convent on the rue St-Honoré), which led from the street to the Tuileries gardens (until it was swept away when the rue de Rivoli was created). Both reported that the poet Alexis Piron, who was in the habit of stopping to chat to the beggar, had now written a

poem for him: ‘Christian, in the name of the all-powerful, give me alms in passing. The unfortunate man who asks/Will not see who does so/but God, who sees everything, will see it/I pray that you will do so.’⁴⁰ The story is presumably apocryphal (no such poem appears in Piron’s collected works); its significance lies in the quasi-egalitarian relationship between the famous poet and the humble beggar that it presents, belying the social gulf between the Parisian poor and the urban elite. It is predicated on a physical resemblance between the two men, Piron himself being almost blind by this date; subsequent retellings of the story, notably a comedy of 1804, make the connection explicit.⁴¹ In the nineteenth century, the anecdote came to be attached to Chardin’s painting, presumably on the basis of a misreading of the door as a passage; it was now said to depict the blind beggar of the Feuillants or, alternatively, that of Saint Roch, a church on the other side of the rue Saint-Honoré.⁴²

As well as resonating with stories about individual blind beggars, *A Blind Man* would have fed into a growing body of local knowledge about this quintessentially Parisian figure. The blind inhabitants of the city were renowned for their ability to negotiate its streets better than any sighted person. In Montesquieu’s *Lettres persanes* (1721), for example, the Persian traveller, Rica, is shown the way to the Marais by a man whom he encounters in an unnamed charitable institution: ‘He was a wonderful guide, getting me out of every difficulty and skilfully preventing me being hit by coaches and carriages’. Only on arrival does he identify himself as a blind man.⁴³ Also pertinent is a passage in Louis-Sébastien Mercier’s *Tableau de Paris* (1782-3) on the subject of fog, which, he reports, is a frequent problem in Paris, on account of the river; so thick did it get one year that people hired quinze-vingts to guide them around their own neighbourhood at midday, ‘these blind men being better acquainted with the topography of Paris than those who have engraved and drawn maps’.⁴⁴ Mercier thus anticipates Michel de Certeau’s contention that the blind man embodies the ground-level experience of ‘ordinary practitioners of the city’, those who walk through it on a daily basis, as distinct from the bird’s-eye view of the mapmaker or city planner.⁴⁵ Chardin’s small-scale, close-up depiction of a quinze-vingt in his usual spot embodies the sensory life of eighteenth-century Paris, in opposition to the archetypal sweeping view of the city from a point above the Pont-Neuf, which instead highlights the way that successive monarchs had reshaped the urban fabric.⁴⁶

In this respect, *A Blind Man* offers points of connection with the sensationalist philosophy of the period. The figure of the blind man with a stick had of course originally been deployed by Descartes in order to explain how light reaches the eyes. Consider the stick, he wrote, ‘in those born blind, who have made use of it all their lives: with them you will find, it is so perfect and so exact that one might almost say that they see with their hands, or that their stick is the organ of some sixth sense given to them in place of sight.’⁴⁷ Certeau even contends that, in his (unpublished) *Regulae*, Descartes ‘had already made the blind man the guarantor of the knowledge of things and places against the illusions and deceptions of vision’.⁴⁸ On most accounts, however, the primacy of vision was only challenged

later, in the context of Lockean empiricism, most notably by Diderot who, in *Lettre sur les aveugles*, discusses how the blind use their other senses to gain knowledge of the world. For Cole, Chardin's painting reveals a comparable attentiveness to the sensory experience of the blind, most obviously by thematising the sense of touch: the hands, she observes, are not only brightly illuminated but also serve as 'the compositional hub and organising motif of the image'.⁴⁹ The cramped urban setting might be read in similar terms, with reference to Diderot's observation that a blind man of his acquaintance 'is so sensitive to the most minor changes in the atmosphere that he can tell a street from a cul-de-sac'.⁵⁰ Missing here is any acknowledgement of the role that hearing plays in enabling the blind to sense their environment, despite Diderot's having already mentioned his acquaintance's skill in locating sound.⁵¹ Elsewhere in the text, he tends to focus on touch, suggesting a continued reliance on the Cartesian paradigm of the man with a stick, which he cites and indeed illustrates.⁵²

Although *A Blind Man* probably predates the *Lettre* by around a decade, Chardin can be assumed to have had some awareness of the wider climate of sensationalist ideas at the time he painted it. As Baxandall has argued, his work attests to a self-consciousness about the act of perception that can broadly be defined as Lockean.⁵³ A mediating role may have been played by his friend, Charles-Nicolas Cochin, who certainly was familiar with these ideas; he later argued for the dependence of sight on touch and movement, with reference to the familiar case of a congenitally blind person seeing for the first time.⁵⁴ On this basis, it seems plausible to draw a connection between an account of vision in terms of touch and Chardin's idiosyncratic handling of paint, most apparent here in the head of the beggar, such that the painter's own touch is understood as in some sense blind. Indeed, Ewa Lajer-Burcharth has recently made such a case on the grounds of his intuitive working method, without underdrawing, as if feeling his way across the surface of the canvas, and that the resulting picture resists ready apprehension by the beholder, who must work out what any brushstroke represents.⁵⁵ Any such interpretation relies for support on the central role that the notion of touch played in the reception of Chardin's work almost from the start. In 1738, a Salon critic remarked: 'His taste in painting is unique; these are not finished marks, it is not a blended touch; on the contrary, his handling is crude and rough'.⁵⁶ For his admirers, the singularity of Chardin's touch was summed up in the artist's own dictum that 'one uses colour, but one paints with feeling [*sentiment*]', a word that carried connotations as much of sensation as of emotion.⁵⁷

When *A Blind Man* was exhibited at the Salon, however, discussion of Chardin's distinctive touch focused on the challenges that it presented for the beholder. One critic stated that his work 'only produces its full effect at a certain distance, up close the picture merely offers a kind of vapour that seems to envelope all the objects'; it reminded the writer of the grainy texture of a mezzotint ('*manière noire*'). Another claimed, of *The Good Education*, also exhibited that year: 'There reigns throughout a kind of fog, which does not dissipate either up close, or from afar, and I believe I am

right in seeing that as the result of too soft, too indecisive a touch'.⁵⁸ It is certainly tempting to read these comments as offering support for an equation between Chardin's painterly practice and a blind man's touch; the references to vapour and fog, in particular, resonate with Mercier's account of the quinze-vingts' ability to navigate a fog-bound Paris. The artist, however, would surely have been irritated by the writers' failure to understand and appreciate his work. As is well known, the academicians took great offence at the critical responses that their work started to elicit towards mid-century, particularly Etienne La Font de Saint-Yenne's scathing review of the Salon of 1746 (Bouchardon simply ceased to exhibit after this date).⁵⁹ Their resentment prompted a caricature of La Font as a quinze-vingt, which has been read as a pointed rejoinder to his condemnation of the vogue for having oneself portrayed in the lowly guise of (among others) a quinze-vingt as well as to the critic's disapproval of the crown's project for redeveloping the area around the Louvre, which would have included a rebuilding of the now dilapidated Hôpital des Quinze-Vingts (Fig. 15).⁶⁰

15. Caricature of La Font de Saint-Yenne as a Blind Beggar, c.1750. Bibliothèque nationale, Paris. ©BnF.

The academicians' awareness of and sensitivity to the nascent practice of art criticism provides a context for Chardin's decision to send *A Blind Man* to the Salon of 1753. His exhibits that year also included another work painted long before, under the title *A Philosopher Reading*, for which he received high praise from the critics, several of whom described it as being worthy of Rembrandt (Fig. 16).⁶¹ Chardin presumably hoped to ensure a positive reception by re-exhibiting one of his grandest compositions; the inclusion of *A Blind Man* could well have been intended to serve a similar purpose. Both paintings offered a contrast to the artist's usual domestic subject-matter, depicting as they did adult male embodiments of a certain picturesque otherness, even if the beggar's long patched coat seems drab by comparison with the philosopher's fur-trimmed attire. This costume must have helped to prompt the comparisons with Rembrandt, though such features as painterly handling, sombre tonality and chiaroscuro effects no doubt contributed. The blind man too could have been considered a Rembrandtesque figure, comparable to the numerous beggars and several blind men carefully described by the art dealer Edme-François Gersaint in his catalogue of the Dutch master's etchings, published in 1751.⁶² His shadowed face, together with the contrast between the bright wall behind him and dark area to the right, for example, bears comparison with *A Philosopher*. The much smaller scale and lowly subject-matter meant, however, that the critics praised *The Blind Man* in somewhat condescending terms, as a highly accomplished but essentially minor work.⁶³

16. Jean-Siméon Chardin, *A Philosopher Reading (or The Alchemist)*, 1634, Oil on canvas, 138 x 105cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo (C) RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / René-Gabriel Ojéda.

For the artists and *amateurs* whose admiration for Rembrandt's work, particularly the etchings, had become a veritable craze, however, the association of Chardin with the Dutch master went almost without saying. As Katie Scott has shown, the printmaker Antoine de Marcenay de Ghuy chose a composition by Chardin as the basis for his own experimentation with a Rembrandtesque style of etching precisely because the French painter's work lent itself to such an approach.⁶⁴ Chardin himself might have felt a sense of kinship with Rembrandt, not least because French art theorists censured the latter's work in terms similar to those that the critics applied to his own, with reference to the loose brushwork that made his paintings unintelligible when viewed close up.⁶⁵ If Chardin did identify his painterly practice with a blind man's touch, it is likely to have been as a kind of homage to Rembrandt and, moreover, in a bitter and ironic spirit, since it meant aligning himself with a lowly denizen of the streets in defiance of the high-minded strictures of the critics. Such a suggestion would tally with Cochin's characterisation of the painter as 'extremely sensitive', inordinately upset by petty troubles and increasingly embittered in his later years.⁶⁶ More positively, the figure of the blind beggar might have taken Chardin back to the beginnings of his career, when he too plied his trade in the street rather than at the Salon; he made his public debut in 1732 at Paris's oldest art exhibition, staged each year on the Feast of Corpus Christi in the Place Dauphine, which abutted onto the Pont Neuf, the heart of the city's street life.⁶⁷

Greuze

What is indubitable is that Chardin abandoned figure painting after the Salon of 1753, returning instead to his initial specialisation in still life. He thereby inadvertently handed on the baton (in the sense both of a painter's brush and a blind man's stick) to Greuze, who made his debut at the following Salon, in 1755. The latter not only staked a claim to the type of domestic subject that Chardin had made, but also included among his exhibits a composition featuring a blind man, a choice of subject surely made with reference to the picture exhibited by Chardin two years earlier. His painting differs, however, in placing the blind man for once in an interior setting. Entitled *The Blind Man Deceived*, it shows a young woman secretly meeting her lover under the nose of the title figure in a cramped, cluttered cottage (Fig. 17). By integrating the familiar figure of the blind man into a bawdy low-life scenario of the sort depicted by artists such as David Teniers and Adriaen Brouwer, Greuze demonstrated his own, distinctive take on the 'Flemish taste' of which Chardin had hitherto been the most renowned French exponent.⁶⁸ Greuze adopted a similar strategy in the two other subject pictures that he exhibited that year, presumably in a bid to ingratiate himself with the

amateurs whose tastes increasingly ran to painting in this vein. All three works were bought by Ange-Laurent de la Live de Jully, a collector who had shifted his focus from Dutch and Flemish pictures to the French school; his recent acquisitions included Chardin's *Good Education* and its pendant from the Salon of 1753.⁶⁹

17. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *The Blind Man Deceived*, 1755, oil on canvas, 66 x 54 cm. Pushkin Museum, Moscow. Photo: AKG Images.

In taking a blind man as subject, Greuze associated himself not only with Chardin but also with Rembrandt. Marcenay de Ghuy, mentioned earlier in connection with Chardin, etched a head of an old man in a fur hat, 'in the style of Rembrandt', by Greuze in 1754.⁷⁰ In August 1755, as the Salon opened, Marcenay published an etching after a painting attributed to Rembrandt depicting Tobit having his sight restored (Fig. 18). If Greuze had the opportunity to see the print before publication or to view the painting in the collection of the marquis de Voyer, the composition could have served as a prompt for his own decision to depict a blind man in a domestic interior.⁷¹ The vertical format of *The Blind Man Deceived*, its predominantly brown tonality and the contrast between brightly lit and shadowed areas might all serve to evoke Rembrandt. *Tobit Recovering his Sight* was not only of interest for its visual effects, however, as the announcement of Marcenay's print underlined: 'The singularity that often determined Rembrandt's pictorial ideas led him to depart here from the text of the Scriptures in order to turn the young Tobias into an oculist who, needle in hand, removes his father's cataract. He is very attentive to this delicate operation, and the old man is extremely sensitive to the pain he is suffering'.⁷² This observation attests to contemporary familiarity and even fascination with the operation, heightened perhaps by the announcement of a breakthrough in surgical practice by the ophthalmologist Jacques Daviel in 1753.⁷³

18. Antoine Marcenay de Guy after Rembrandt (circle of), *Tobit Recovering his Sight*, 1755, etching, plate: 29.6 × 23.2 cm, sheet: 35.6 × 28 cm. Gift of Junius S. Morgan, Class of 1888. Photo: Princeton University Art Museum.
19. Plate 24 of 'Chirurgie', in *Recueil de planches sur les sciences, les arts libéraux et les arts mécaniques, avec leur explication*, vol. 2, 1763. Bibliothèque nationale, Paris. ©BnF.

The prominence of cataract surgery in contemporary culture was of course bound up with Molyneux's Problem. Diderot's *Lettre sur les aveugles*, for example, opens by breaking the news to a female correspondent that she will not be permitted to be present when the bandages are removed from the eyes of a post-operative blind girl and will thus be deprived of the opportunity to address the problem. From the perspective of those who held that a congenitally blind person endowed with

vision would initially be incapable of seeing in three dimensions, the association of Rembrandt's work with cataract surgery had a certain logic; the play of light and shade offers a vision of the world as it might appear to a person dazzled and disorientated by the sight of an unfamiliar world.⁷⁴ Admittedly, the story of Tobit hardly offered a relevant case, concerned as it was with the restoration of sight to an old man who has only recently gone blind. Nevertheless, it seems possible that a Rembrandtesque style, one that featured bold contrasts and defied ready intelligibility, could have been conceived in such terms at the time. As Tunstall has shown, Diderot identifies a pair of literary models for the writing of the *Lettre*, one 'precious' and the other 'obscure'; they turn out to be Marivaux, of whom it had been said 'he writes like Chardin paints', and Tacitus, whom Diderot later described as 'the Rembrandt of literature, dark shadows and dazzling lights'.⁷⁵

Although Greuze apparently sought to identify himself with revered artists of earlier generations in addressing the theme of blindness, the bawdy scenario he devised for the purpose lacked any direct pictorial precedents. *The Blind Man Deceived* did not strike new ground so far as a Parisian audience was concerned, however, to judge from a sale catalogue of 1779 which identifies the subject as *L'Avengle clairvoyant* (The Clear-Sighted Blind Man).⁷⁶ The title derives from a comedy first performed in 1716, in which a wealthy naval officer pretends to have lost his sight while at sea in order to test the fidelity of the young widow, to whom he is betrothed, after hearing that she has fallen in love with his nephew. Since the play was regularly revived by the Comédie française, most recently in 1754, its plot could have informed the conception as well as the reception of *The Blind Man Deceived*.⁷⁷ The young woman with her left arm around her lover's neck and her right hand caught in the blind man's grasp recalls a farcical scene in which the widow makes a declaration of love in the presence of her fiancé while giving her hand to his nephew in the belief that she cannot be seen.⁷⁸ The play ends with the rich man (now 'cured') confessing that he was foolish to fall in love with the widow and consenting to her marriage to his nephew. Any such happy outcome is ruled out in the case of the painting if, as has generally been assumed, the young woman is married to the blind man.⁷⁹ However, one early commentator described the subject as 'an old blind man jealous of a young wife or daughter'; the composition was also referred to as *The Blind Father*.⁸⁰

In making the title figure a genuine rather than a pretend blind man, Greuze transforms the broad farce of the play into something much more ambiguous, even disturbing. The blind man seems at once pathetic and oppressive as he sits, hunched and impassive, eyes obscured by dark shadow, his tight grasp no match for the young couple's gestures and glances. One Salon critic rationalised his behaviour by describing him as 'an old blind man, in whom the years seem not to have diminished so natural a penchant, one reinforced by habit'. The lovers too are characterised in terms informed by the contemporary discourse of sensibility, in which sensation went hand in hand in sentiment, as 'his wife, perhaps a victim sacrificed by parents greedy for the gold they idolise' and 'a strapping youth',

for whom the wife has ‘feelings that her aged husband cannot inspire’; the latter is, moreover, so abashed by the old man’s presence that he spills the jug of beer they have taken from the cellar.⁸¹ Building on this account of *The Blind Man Deceived*, though ignoring its sentimental dimension, Cole contends that Greuze prioritises the senses of touch and hearing in such a way that what at first appears ‘a comic image that lampoons the blind’ serves instead to expose the limitations of vision, the real dupe being the young man who realises the error he has made in relying on this sense alone.⁸² In this respect, Cole concludes, the picture parallels contemporary debates about sensation. Such attentiveness to sensory perception might also be said to allegorise the pleasure, as much tactile as visual, that the *amateur* took in the pictures that he owned.⁸³

Although *The Blind Man Deceived* undoubtedly can be construed in a manner not unsympathetic to the title figure, it appears much less benign when considered in conjunction with the *Lettre sur les aveugles*. According to Cole, the painting ‘responds to Diderot’s speculations on the blind man’s moral code, his abhorrence of theft and adultery’, but the discussion of both topics in the *Lettre* is more equivocal, more comedic, than this statement suggests.⁸⁴ Thus, for example, the blind man’s touch is said to be so sensitive that he would never confuse his wife with another woman, ‘unless he stood to gain by it’; conversely, ‘it would be very easy for wives to deceive their husbands by using a sign they had agreed with their lovers’.⁸⁵ The *Lettre* also recasts the traditional stereotype of the selfish, amoral blind man in sensationalist terms: ‘Since of all of the external signs that evoke ideas of sympathy and pain in us, the blind are only affected by the sound of suffering, I suspect them, in general, of being inhumane’.⁸⁶ According to Jessica Riskin, this remark serves to reinforce Diderot’s contention that sensory deprivation inclined the blind towards abstract, mathematical thinking, with the further aim of denouncing the moral deficiencies of Cartesian rationalism. Riskin’s argument is somewhat problematic; for one thing, as the case of Le Clerc shows, not every ‘geometer’ was a Cartesian.⁸⁷ The basic point stands, however; given the central role that the spectacle of suffering humanity played within the sentimental morality of the period, the blind man could not help but be suspected of solipsism.

As well as resembling Diderot’s characterisation of the self-centred blind man, oblivious to the suffering of others, Greuze’s figure appears all the more morally stunted when compared with other elderly men in the artist’s early work. He can, for example, be contrasted with the aged paralytic in a composition first exhibited in sketch form in 1761; one commentator specifically noted that this figure’s disability does not make him any less grateful and affectionate to his family.⁸⁸ Instead, *The Blind Man Deceived* looks forward to later works by Greuze that, implicitly or explicitly, address the relationship between a young girl and a much older man in a highly ambiguous, quasi-incestuous fashion that never fully acknowledges the latter’s desire for the former.⁸⁹ In this case, by contrast, the presence of the young man serve to expose the illegitimacy of the blind man’s possession of the

young woman, whether as wife or daughter. Indeed, the scenario offers an inverted echo of ancient myths, like that of Oedipus, in which blindness is the punishment for sexual transgressions such as incest.⁹⁰ In his refusal to loosen his hold on the young woman, Greuze's figure contrasts with the blind beggar, who patiently accepts his loveless fate, a point underlined by the verse under Pierre-Louis Surugue's print after Chardin, which characterises the blind man as the antithesis of the lover.⁹¹ So too does the pairing of the picture with one by Fragonard of a young Savoyard street performer, whose smiling gaze is directed not towards her companion but out at the viewer.⁹²

Conclusion

Rather than lending themselves to a stereotypically 'Enlightenment' narrative of growing interest in and sympathy for the blind, the works of art considered above owe at least as much to traditional representations of blindness as to contemporary debates around the condition. Moreover, the figure of the blind man served as the focus for such widely varying concerns and interests that he could, on the one hand, become an emblem of a perspectival construction of space in three-dimensions, as with Bosse and Le Clerc, and, on the other, be associated with a painterly practice after the model of Rembrandt, as with Chardin and Greuze. For a sculptor, such as Bouchardon, the figure might serve as an emblem of his identification with the medium in which he worked. More generally, it seems likely that some artists were prompted to identify with the blind man because of problems with their own eyesight in later life, possibly caused by toxic substances in the materials of their trade. Besides Le Clerc, examples include Chardin, as attested by the late pastel self-portraits in which the painter depicts himself in spectacles and eyeshade.⁹³ Artists also identified with the blind man on account of his isolation and vulnerability, which made him a vehicle for expressing their growing sense of being a prey to critical opinion and market forces. Chardin is a likely case, but even more so is Greuze, who, in his impoverished old age, referred to his daughter his Antigone, thereby identifying himself with the outcast protagonist of *Oedipus at Colonus*.⁹⁴ For David in the aftermath of the Terror, the figure of Homer served an equivalent function.

However, the interest and appeal that the figure of the blind man held for artists was also bound up with the Parisian context in which they lived and worked. Typically, he appears in the guise of an inmate of the Quinze-Vingts, such as they would have encountered regularly in the streets around the Louvre. Only Greuze broke with iconographic convention by devising a domestic scenario that serves to dramatize the isolation that the blind man vainly resists. However, Chardin had already made his own break by depicting a quinze-vingt in the privileged medium of oil painting. Likewise, Bouchardon had transformed the tradition of the *Cris de Paris* by endowing the same figure with the monumentality of sculpture. In short, these works are united by an overarching tension between high art and low life, the Académie and the street, that each exploits. The same is true of David, who, in *Belisarius*, brings the revelatory impact of the great works he had seen in Italy to bear on the familiar

figure of the blind beggar, complete with stick, guide and begging bowl (in the form of an upturned helmet); the request for alms inscribed on the stone block beside Belisarius similarly recalls the blind beggar's cry. By the time that David exhibited his painting at the Salon of 1781, however, the blind of the Quinze-Vingts no longer enjoyed the same prominence; after the hospital was forced to relocate to the faubourg Saint-Antoine in 1779, its inmates were forbidden to beg.⁹⁵ Caught up in the transformation of Paris from royal capital into modern metropolis, they bore witness to the costs as well as the benefits of such large-scale projects of social amelioration.

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- ¹ Pierre-Maximilien Delafontaine, in D. and G. Wildenstein, *Documents complémentaires au catalogue de l'œuvre de Louis David* (Paris: Fondation Wildenstein, 1973), no. 58, p. 9
- ² Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003), p. 78. The other is 'the foreign spectator in an unknown country'.
- ³ Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980), p. 135, note 202; Régis Michel, *David e Roma* (Rome: De Luca, 1980) p. 117.
- ⁴ Moshe Barasch, *Blindness: The History of a Mental Image in Western Thought* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).
- ⁵ Georgina Cole, 'Rethinking Vision in Eighteenth-Century Paintings of the Blind', in Harald Klinke (ed.) *Art Theory as Visual Epistemology* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing), 2014, pp. 47-64.
- ⁶ See, for example, Nicholas Mirzoeff, *Bodyscape: Art, Modernity and the Ideal Figure* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 37-51.
- ⁷ Zina Weygand, *The Blind in French Society from the Middle Ages to the Century of Louis Braille* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp. 62-67; Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 101.
- ⁸ Kate Tunstall, *Blindness and Enlightenment: An Essay* (London: Continuum, 2011).
- ⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 2-3, 36-37. See also Matthew Ancell, 'Credo Ergo Sum: Faith, Blindness, and Pictorial Logic in Derrida's Memoirs of the Blind', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2014, pp.193-210.
- ¹⁰ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 20.
- ¹¹ David Garrioch, *The Making of Revolutionary Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) pp. 15-25; David Garrioch, 'Sounds of the City: the Soundscape of Early Modern European Towns', *Urban History* 30, no. 1 (2003), p. 14.
- ¹² See, for example, Pierre-François Desfontaines, *Le Pour et le Contre*, vol. 12, no. 148, 1746, pp. 135-36.
- ¹³ Jules David, *Le Peintre Louis David 1748-1825: Souvenirs & documents inédits* (Paris: Victor Havard, 1880), p. 651.
- ¹⁴ Jean-Pierre Cuzin, *François-André Vincent, 1746-1816: Entre Fragonard et David* (Paris: Arthena, 2013), pp. 105, 430-31 (P364).
- ¹⁵ Diane Wolfthal, 'Paupers', in Dena M. Woodall and Diane Wolfthal, eds. *Princes and Paupers: The Art of Jacques Callot* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), pp 27-28.
- ¹⁶ Kahren Jones Hellerstedt, 'The Blind Man and his Guide in Netherlandish Painting', *Simiolus*, Vol. 13, No. 3/4 (1983), pp. 163-181. See also Edward Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks Before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), pp. 90-128.
- ¹⁷ Philip Conisbee, (ed.), *Georges de la Tour and his World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 22-23, 52-54.

- ¹⁸ Frances K. Barasch, *The Grotesque: A Study in Meanings* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), pp. 78-81; Diderot, 'De la poésie dramatique', in Jacques Chouillet and Anne-Marie Chouillet (eds), *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 10: *Le Drame bourgeois* (Paris: Hermann, 1980), p. 244.
- ¹⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 24-30.
- ²⁰ Compare Meredith Cohen, *The Sainte Chapelle and the Construction of the Sacral Monarchy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 188, fig. 5.8. See also Vincent Milliot, *Les Cris de Paris ou le peuple travesti: Les représentations des petits métiers parisiens Xvi-Xviii siècles* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1995), pp. 238-40.
- ²¹ Sheila McTighe, 'Abraham Bosse and the Language of Artisans: Genre and Perspective in the Académie Royale de peinture et de sculpture, 1648-1670'. *Oxford Art Journal*, 21(1), 1998, pp. 3-26.
- ²² Charles-Antoine Jombert, *Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre de Sébastien Le Clerc* (Paris, 1774), vol. 1, pp. 251-56.
- ²³ Maxime Préaud, *Inventaire du fonds français, Graveurs du XVIIe siècle*, vol. 8, *Sébastien Leclerc*, vol. 1 (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1980), pp. 298-300 (no. 1096).
- ²⁴ Pierre Le Lorrain de Vallemont, *Eloge de Mr. Le Clerc* (Paris, 1715), p. 108. See also William McGregor, 'The uses of Sébastien Le Clerc's Livres d'Estampes: Acquiring Pictorial Knowledge in Early Modern France', PhD, University of California, Berkeley, 1996.
- ²⁵ *Discours touchant le point de vue, dans lequel il est prouvé que les choses qu'on voit distinctement ne sont vues que d'un œil* (Paris, 1679).
- ²⁶ *Système de la vision fondé sur de nouveaux principes* (Paris, 1712), p. 149. Also significant is the idiosyncratic inclusion of a (presumably blind) hurdy-gurdy player in Le Clerc's *Entrée d'Alexandre dans Babylone* (1704-6); see Maxime Préaud, 'Le vieilleux d'Alexandre le Grand', *Revue de la BNF*, n° 37, 2011, pp. 81- 87
- ²⁷ Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 92. See also Dominique Raynaud, *Studies on Binocular Vision: Optics, Vision and Perspective from the Thirteenth to the Seventeenth Centuries* (Switzerland: Springer, 2016), pp. 124-92
- ²⁸ Anatole de Montaiglon and Philippe de Chennevières (eds), *Abecedario de P. J. Mariette* (Paris: Dumoulin, 1851-60), vol. 3, p. 98.
- ²⁹ Edouard Kopp. , *The Learned Draftsman: Edme Bouchardon* (Los Angeles: Getty, 2017), p. 66.
- ³⁰ Katie Scott, 'Edme Bouchardon's "Cris de Paris": Crying Food in Early Modern Paris', *Word and Image*, vol.29, no.1 (2013), pp. 65-66.
- ³¹ Kopp, *Learned Draftsman*, pp. 79, 109.
- ³² Roger de Piles, *Cours de peinture par principes* (Paris, 1791), pp. 264-68. See also Jacqueline Lichtenstein, *The Blind Spot: An Essay on the Relations between Painting and Sculpture in the Modern Age*, trans. Chris Miller (Los Angeles: Getty, 2008), pp. 64-70; Thierry Drumm, 'Toucher et voir: Remarques sur le rôle de l'aveugle dans la théorie et la pratique artistiques à l'âge classique', in Marion Chottin (ed.), *L'Aveugle et le philosophe, ou comment la cécité donne à penser* (Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 200), pp. 27-42 ; Anne Betty Weinshenker, *A God or a Bench: Sculpture as a Problematic Art during the Ancien Régime* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008), pp. 170-71.
- ³³ Hannah Williams, *Académie Royale: A History in Portraits* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), p. 133; Mariette, *Abecedario*, vol. 1, p. 205.

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- ³⁴ On Condillac's use of this construct, see Jessica Riskin, *Science in the Age of Sensibility: The Sentimental Empiricists of the French Enlightenment* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2002), pp. 44-8.
- ³⁵ Anne-Lise Desmas et al, *Bouchardeau: Royal Artist of the Enlightenment* (Los Angeles: Getty, 2016), pp. 15-16; Weinshenker, *A God*, p. 211.
- ³⁶ Desmas, *Bouchardeau*, p. 62 (No.3).
- ³⁷ Marianne Roland-Michel, *Chardin* (New York: Harry Abrams 1996), p. 207-8; Pierre Rosenberg, 'The *Blind Man of the Quinze-Vingts* by Chardin and the *Young Girl with a Marmot* by Fragonard at the Fogg', in Cynthia P. Schneider et al (eds) *Shop Talk: Essays in Honour of Seymour Slive* (Cambridge, Harvard University Art Museums, 1995). 1995, p. 212.
- ³⁸ M.A. Laugier, *Jugement d'un amateur sur l'exposition des tableaux de l'an 1753* (Paris, 1753), pp. 43-44.
- ³⁹ Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks*, pp. 42-44.
- ⁴⁰ Jean Balcou, *Le Dossier Fréron: Correspondances et documents* (Geneva, Droz, 1975), p. 84 (letter 40, 28 July 1753); M. Grimm et al, *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique*, Maurice Tourneux (ed.) (Paris: Garnier, 1887-82), vol 2, p. 269 (1 August 1753).
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- ⁴² Rosenberg, 'Blind Man', p. 212; Emmanuel Bocher, *Les gravures françaises du XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Librairie des Bibliophiles, 1876), Part 3, pp. 9-10, 115.
- ⁴³ Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *Persian Letters* (London : Penguin, 1973), pp. 84-85 (letter 32).
- ⁴⁴ Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris* (Amsterdam, 1783), pp. 18-19.
- ⁴⁵ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley, 1984, pp. 92-93.
- ⁴⁶ Ulf Strohmeyer, 'Engineering Vision in Early Modern Paris', in Alexander Cowan and Jill Steward (eds), *The City and the Senses: Urban Culture since 1500* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011) pp. 75-92.
- ⁴⁷ *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, ed. John Cottingham et al (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), vol.1, p. 153.
- ⁴⁸ Certeau, *Practice*, p. 218, n.5. For the relevant passage, see Descartes, *Philosophical Writings*, vol. 1, p. 57.
- ⁴⁹ Cole, 'Rethinking Vision', p. 57.
- ⁵⁰ Diderot, *Letter on the Blind for the Use of Those who can see*, in Tunstall, *Blindness and Enlightenment*, p. 177.
- ⁵¹ See Barry Blesser and Linda-Ruth Salter, *Spaces Speak, Are You Listening?: Experiencing Aural Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), pp. 37-46. Diderot notes the role of hearing in sensing a circumscribed space in his later addition to the *Lettre*; see *Lettre sur les aveugles*, ed Marian Hobson and Simon Harvey, Paris: Garnier, 2000, pp. 78-9.
- ⁵² Diderot, *Letter*, pp. 173, 183. However, the illustration is taken from a recent edition depicting a blindfolded figure rather than a blind man
- ⁵³ Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, p. 77ff. See also Michael Baxandall, 'Attention, hand and brush: Condillac and Chardin', in Thomas Frangenberg and Robert Williams (eds), *The Beholder: The Experience of Art in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 183-94

- ⁵⁴ Charles-Nicholas Cochin, 'Du costume dans la peinture' [1765], *Recueil de quelques pièces concernant les arts, extraites de plusieurs Mercure de France* (Paris, 1771), vol. 2, p. 26.
- ⁵⁵ Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, *The Painter's Touch: Boucher, Chardin, Fragonard* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), p. 117.
- ⁵⁶ Jean-Florent-Joseph de Neufville de Brunabois-Montador, *Description raisonnée des tableaux exposés au Louvre Lettre à Madame la marquise de S.P. R.* (Paris, 1738), p. 8.
- ⁵⁷ See, for example, Charles-Nicolas Cochin, *Essai sur la vie de M. Chardin*, ed. Charles de Beaurepaire (Rouen: Boisset, 1876), p. 21. See also René Démoris, *Chardin, la chair et l'objet* (Paris : Olbia, 1999), pp. 165-69 ; Lajer-Burcharth, *Painter's Touch*, pp. 151-2.
- ⁵⁸ Jacques Lacombe, *Le Salon* (Paris, 1753), pp. 24 ; Garrigues de Froment, *Sentimens d'un amateur sur l'exposition des tableaux du Louvre et la critique qui en a été faite* (Paris, 1753), p. 35 See also Kate Tunstall, 'Diderot, Chardin et la matière sensible', *Dix-huitième siècle*, no 39, 2007, pp. 587-88.
- ⁵⁹ Kopp, *Learned Draftsman*, pp. 146-48.
- ⁶⁰ Ellen Munro, 'La Font de Saint-Yenne: a reassessment', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, vol.76, 1995, pp. 65-78. On the critic as blind, see also Lajer-Burcharth, *Painter's Touch*, p. 92
- ⁶¹ Comments quoted in Michel, *Chardin*, p. 118.
- ⁶² *Catalogue raisonné de toutes les pièces qui forment l'œuvre de Rembrandt* (Paris, 1751), pp. 29, 101, 119, 124-5, 129-46.
- ⁶³ Garrigues de Froment, *Sentimens d'un amateur*, p. 36; Elie Fréron, Letter 8, *Lettres sur quelques écrits de ce tems*, 1753, vol. 11, p. 188
- ⁶⁴ 'Chardin Multiplied', *Chardin* (London: Royal Academy, 2000) pp. 64-66. See also Perrin Stein et al, *Artists and Amateurs: Etching in 18th-century France* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013).
- ⁶⁵ Charlotte Guichard, *Les Amateurs d'art à Paris au XVIII siècle* (Paris: Champ Vallon, 2008), pp. 286-8.
- ⁶⁶ Cochin, *Essai sur la vie*, p. 21
- ⁶⁷ Thomas E. Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven and London: Yale, 1985), pp. 83-88.
- ⁶⁸ Compare a Teniers and a Brouwer now in the National Gallery (NG862 and NG6591). On the association of Chardin with the Flemish taste, see Michel, *Chardin*, pp. 118-21.
- ⁶⁹ Emma Barker, *Genre and the Painting of Sentiment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 22-29.
- ⁷⁰ Jean Cailleux, 'Les artistes français au dix-huitième et Rembrandt', *Études d'art français offertes à Charles Sterling*, ed Albert Châtelet and Nicole Reynaud (Paris : PUF, 1985), p. 298.
- ⁷¹ On Voyer, see Guichard, *Les Amateurs*, pp. 179-182.
- ⁷² 'Gravure', *Mercure de France*, August 1755, p. 211. See also Julius Held, *Rembrandt Studies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 128.
- ⁷³ Dora B Weiner, 'An Eighteenth-Century Battle for Priority: Jacques Daviel (1693—1762) and the Extraction of Cataracts', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, Volume 41, Issue 2, 1986, pp. 129—155. It was, however, the pre-Daviel method that featured in the plates of the *Encyclopédie* (Fig. 19)
- ⁷⁴ On contemporary discussion of the complexity of shadows, with reference to Rembrandt's *Tobit* in the Voyer collection, see Baxandall, *Shadows and Enlightenment* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 95.

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- ⁷⁵ Tunstall, *Blindness and Enlightenment*, pp. 22-23; Démoris, *Chardin*, p. 131
- ⁷⁶ *Vente d'estampes, montées et en feuilles qui se fera le 19 Juin 1779* (Paris, 1779), p. 2 (no. 13).
- ⁷⁷ *Annonces, affiches et avis divers*, 15 August 1754, p. 593
- ⁷⁸ Marc-Antoine Legrand, *L'Aveugle clairvoyant* (Paris, 1718), pp. 34-7 (scene 16).
- ⁷⁹ *Catalogue historique du cabinet de peinture et sculpture françoise de M. de La Live* (Paris, 1764), p. 51
- ⁸⁰ 'Estampes nouvelles', *Année littéraire*, 1758, vol. 1, p. 71 ; *Catalogue des livres de feu M. le marquis de Pelet, et de M. Imbert* (Lyon, 1775), p. 177 (no.2127).
- ⁸¹ *Lettre sur le Salon de 1755, adressée à ceux qui la liront* (Amsterdam, 1755), pp. 42-43.
- ⁸² Cole, 'Rethinking Vision', pp. 60-62.
- ⁸³ Guichard, *Les Amateurs*, pp. 178-79.
- ⁸⁴ Cole, 'Rethinking Vision', p. 61.
- ⁸⁵ Diderot, *Letter*, p. 177; Tunstall, *Blindness and Enlightenment*, pp. 73-7
- ⁸⁶ Diderot, *Letter*, p. 179
- ⁸⁷ Riskin, *Science*, pp. 53-62. See Tunstall, *Blindness and Enlightenment*, pp. 72-4.
- ⁸⁸ Barker, *Greuze*, p. 69.
- ⁸⁹ Barker, 'Reading the Greuze Girl: The Daughter's Seduction', *Representations*, no. 117, 2012, pp. 86–119.
- ⁹⁰ See Barasch, *Blindness*, pp. 21-28; Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks*, pp. 129-54.
- ⁹¹ Cited in Michel, *Chardin*, p. 281.
- ⁹² Rosenberg, 'Blind Man', pp. 212-3.
- ⁹³ See Lajer-Burcharth, *Painter's Touch*, pp. 165-74
- ⁹⁴ Caroline Tochon, comtesse de Valori, 'Notice sur Greuze et ses ouvrages', in *Greuze ou L'Accordée de village* (Paris: Fages, 1813), p. 28.
- ⁹⁵ Weygand, *Blind*, pp. 112-3.