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Number of words in the national language: 737

A GLANCING BLOW

If you can no longer see anything you would think that it must be dark. But that’s not true. At least, not for me.

For me, all colour disappeared. So, the dark did too. If you’d asked me three months ago, then I wouldn’t have known for sure whether dark was a colour at all. But I know now. Dark is a colour and dark has completely disappeared out of my life. The same as light and shadow and all the other things that turn out to be colours, even though I had never thought about it before.

In the beginning I still remembered everything. I could recall colours in my mind as if they were simply still there. But very soon I felt that they were starting to fade away. That my representations were becoming blurred. The same as might happen with someone suffering from absentmindedness. You know that it was once better but you cannot recover it. You no longer have an image; you may imagine a certain sort of representation but that might look very different from what the thing really looks like.

At first, I thought, there must be a prototype. I just have to think very intensively about that prototype and maybe I can recall it again. So, for days I would think about a particular colour. All day long I might think, for example, of red. I also thought about what was not red, to be able to compare my ‘red’ with my ‘not red’, hoping that the red I could vaguely remember would become increasingly more red. But I’ll have to give up now. Colours have stopped existing. You have to recognise when something is in vain. You have to stop in time because only a fool knows for sure that he is not crazy. There’s nothing I can do about it anymore. They are just slowly leaving me, the memories in colour. Everything is becoming the same colourless dullness.

And I’m frightened that it’s going to go the same way with shapes too. Now I can still imagine a tree, or a car, or a glass of wine, but many elements of these representations exist first of all in colour, and from that colour a shape reveals itself and, as I’m now losing the colours, I’m slowly starting to lose the shapes as well. And so, I began to learn braille. To save what could be saved.

This is difficult when you are losing shapes. Because letters are shapes and when I’m exploring braille, I now find it hard to imagine the letters and words that are connected with the dots underneath my fingertips.

And it’s only been a few months since it happened. Since my eyes suddenly didn’t work anymore.

How did it happen? It was an ordinary moment on an ordinary day in my ordinary life. My wife, whose hair colour (brown) and eyes (blue) I can no longer recall, slammed her foot on the brakes of our van (grey) because the driver ahead of us did the same.

As a result, the passenger-seat airbag blew up. But because of some production error, somewhere in a factory in France, a piece of the dashboard blew off with it and flew into the face of the passenger, and that passenger, that was me.

‘But you’ve still got your other senses,’ people say, ‘they’ll become stronger,’ they say.

You’ll smell more, taste more, hear things more sharply. Not me. Sound comes towards me in a gigantic mess. Smells and tastes too. Apparently, I need colour and shape to be able to categorise smell and taste. The only thing that gives me a certain sort of stability is my touch.

I can touch things, and then I feel their shape and their texture, and I often feel that I am then getting somewhere.

I feel the trunk of a tree, or the cloth of the car seat, or the cold of a glass of wine, and this calms me a little.

Touching, that’s what becomes stronger. That’s my only guiding principle. That’s why I’m learning braille, that’s why I’m learning to read with my hands. And it’s not easy, I can tell you! But I will continue until my fingers are bleeding and my head explodes from all the incoherent images that my fingertips feel as one huge mass.

Because without braille I’ll lose everything.