

- 1 The obsession with the idea of imbuing one's surroundings with the tinge of twilight is a unique English 18th century contribution in the evolution of the art museum. Nothing exemplifies this better than the Claude glass, a convex mirror the size of a largish powder compact. The earliest English tourists took it with them on their picturesque walks to add to the natural scenes the velvety heavy colour of twilight similar to the Italian landscape paintings by Claude Lorrain. They were not particularly fazed by the pointed remarks of their more cynical contemporaries, that when using this method of seeing the nature-lovers are compelled to turn their back on the real life scene. In counter argument to this it was said that the optical effect of the mirror heightens the sensation of distance between the object and its viewer, a method through which the landscapes seemed to acquire the aura of untouched primordial purity. Through the enjoyment of landscapes bathed in fake twilight, the tour became similar to an art gallery visit. Actually, there were no other "art museums" in England at the time.
- 2 In the summer of 1439, Aachen should have been overrun by pilgrims. Every seven years, four relics would be brought out from the Shrine of Saint Mary and displayed for ten days to believers gathered in front of the cathedral: Mary's birth cloak, the swaddling clothes of the child Jesus, the cloth in which the head of St John the Baptist had been wrapped, and the loincloth that Christ was wearing when crucified. There would have been so many people and the crowd so great that only the privileged few, or the persistent and tenacious, or the outright shameless would have had the chance to see the holy cloths with their own eyes. For others, those who could afford it, the young entrepreneur Johann Gutenberg and his business partners offered special metal mirrors for purchase. Affixed to the hat or held at the end of a long stick, they afforded the capture of the healing radiance of the relics at a distance, over the heads of the assembled throng. The income generated from this device would have provided funding for Gutenberg's secret Strasbourg project. However, either as a result of the spring floods or the threat of a renewed outbreak of the plague, the display of relics that year was cancelled, leaving the entrepreneur with a surfeit of unsaleable little mirrors.
- 3 It is interesting to note that optography, the notion that last image seen before death is retained on the retina of the deceased person, and which natural scientists began to research as early as the 17th century, became really popular only with the advent of photography. In criminology it gained currency after 1878, when the German physiologist Wilhelm Kühne proposed the first scientific explanation for the method. According to his theory, sight is essentially a chemical process which has an effect on the retina similar to that on a photo-sensitive plate. And the most certain way of fixing this, of course, is to photograph the eye of the deceased. The lack of sharpness and graininess of the images did not confound the experts. Kühne's first experience of working with the human retina rather than that of a laboratory animal was obtained when he had a chance to photograph the eyes of a criminal executed with guillotine. The abstract image clearly revealed that the last image seen by the victim before death was the darkness of the sack which had been placed over his head. The vague scratches and blots which could be seen in the images from the retinas of murder victims indicated that the killing had been done in swift movement and in a short space of "exposure" time. Optography became more commonly known in early 20th century popular culture, and murderers continued to slash the eyes of their victims long after the scientific method had been discredited and investigators no longer made use of it.
- 4 If you are prepared to eat just about anything, have the capacity for patience and when cooking are willing to follow the instructions of the recipe to the letter, you have good prospects of fulfilling the dream of becoming invisible. For example, sometime around 1680 the British intellectual John Aubrey left us with the following instruction: "Gather water from a fountain exactly at midnight, bring it to a boil, and drop in a live black cat. Let it simmer for twenty-four hours, fish out whatever remains, throw the meat over your left shoulder, then take the bones and, while looking in a mirror, place them one by one between the teeth on the left side of your mouth. You'll know you've turned invisible when you turn invisible." (*The New Yorker*, 13.04.2015)

- 5 Now it is known that stereopsis or the ability to perceive the depth and spatiality of the environment by the juxtaposition of two differently recorded visual images, one from each eye (binocular vision), is not only a characteristic of us primates and mammals with a frontal positioning of the eyes, but also for creatures with eyes located at the sides: birds, amphibians and even some invertebrates. It is assumed that in some evolutionary branches and under a variety of processes of natural selection stereovision may have developed at least four times. One of the most popular hypotheses is that stereopsis developed in competition with camouflage. In the physics and physiology of sight this assumption has opened up an enormous field of research which instantly became of interest to machine engineers and the military industrial complex. Charles Wheatstone, who provided an explanation for stereopsis, immediately also invented the first stereoscope: a device for obtaining a three-dimensional image from two slightly differing images. In the Victorian era, the public became obsessed with this latest object of entertainment. As at every successive stage in the development of visual culture, humankind immediately saw in the invention new possibilities for science, art, espionage, the arms race and pornography.
- 6 In one of his early works, *Letter on the Blind for the Use of Those who can See* (1749), Denis Diderot sought to find answers to the question of whether the blind person who through touch alone has become acquainted with the sphere and the cube would recognise the same by the outward appearance of these objects. What ideas and concepts “look like” in abstract thinking and should the visual aspect in this case take some kind of precedence – this he tried to find out from an eyewitness who is said to have been at the bedside of the dying mathematician Nicholas Saunderson. The account of the eyewitness is, of course, a fiction. The source of inspiration for the letter also – an eye operation conducted in Paris in 1749 which restored sight to a teenage girl who had been born with a cataract – was nothing more than a charlatan’s trick. Saunderson, on the other hand, was not. Although blind, he was a fellow of the Royal Society, a friend of Isaac Newton and had been awarded a doctorate by the University of Cambridge. He worked out mathematical calculations in his head, as a guide making use of a calculator that he had invented. It resembled a chess board with pegs. He elaborated the first systemic overview of differential calculations, adapted his calculator also for studies in geometry and lectured on optics, which included teaching about the nature of light and the colour spectrum. “If the body and soul are indeed separate entities, then Saunderson’s soul was located somewhere between his fingertips,” wrote Diderot.
- 7 Photo corners: can be used for affixing photographs, postcards and similar of any size onto any kind of base (album, display stand). Article number - 8282-E, manufacturer – Tartu training-manufacturing workshop of the Estonian SSR Society for the Blind, 1988.
- 8 Shortly after the war, a group of teachers from Riga Technical College went on a trade union organised visit to Kaliningrad. The programme of the excursion could be described as pure sightseeing: there was nothing to see in the town other than external views. The interiors had all been burnt out. A look through the empty window frames offered merely a glimpse of the sky. The Kant mausoleum erected against the side of the cathedral in the 1920s, with its strict rhythm of a colonnade, having survived RAF bombings now brought to mind the theory of the architect Speer, member of Hitler’s inner circle, about enduring ruins as the germinal of resurrection of civilisations that have perished: “When there is nothing else left over, it will be the monumental ruins of buildings which will permit the internal eye to see the mightiness of the past, an encouragement to achievement in the future.”