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Unlimited Communication:

People with Disability

Communication is the feature of any living creature. We share enormous amounts of information with others through our bodies, our knowledge or our beliefs. We all contain some fear of loosing the space of understanding and the tools of reasonably comprehensible communication at any stage of our lives. Limitedness scares us more than anything else, making or containing a mistake or an error, like default in our seen body or slow minds. Our minds, drained from post-modern fatigue in striving to become somebody we are not, worry about exclusion.

ELIMINATING THE MISTAKE

After the end of World War II, sociologists search for the answer to the pedantic perfectionism appearing in the form of a wish to create the perfect modern society. This would exist without illness, and would be based upon a rationale that maximizes preventive rules and minimizes oversight. Francis FUKUYAMA, in his new book *"Our Post-human Future"*, describes the other extreme of the new century: carrying the consequence of the biotechnological revolution.

Socially controlled prescribed drug remedies and genetic engineering are signs of individuals loosing the responsibility for their own actions and handing it into the hands of medical economy. Handicap demonstrated the factors that humans cannot control.

The Nazis and other regimes tried to eliminate the "mistake". They developed medications for changing moods and controlling feelings. The genetic management of the "mistake" in our days could be a tendency to ignore the "mistake" or to remove it without considering the consequences. Both tendencies share a similar driving principle: let's get rid of the "mistake".

EXPANDED POSSIBILITIES

And here I am, after reading long texts of sociological analysis, sitting with one of my friends at the airport. She lost her sight as a baby and Social services helps her to travel from home to school. Between flight announcements, she excitedly describes her recent visit to Spain.

She has not seen anything. She smelled eucalyptus trees, walked on hot stones, heard flamenco and tasted lobster. Her loss of sight encouraged her to making the other senses more exciting. Her descrip-

tions were real. Listening to her, my worries about how to ask about her trip were gone. All I could remember from my trip were images. Her story helped me to realize my unlimited opportunities to understand people and to answer them.

THEATRE OF LIMITED EXPRESSION

The Arts Council of Ireland initiated a theatre workshop for people with disabilities. Connor, the group leader, teaches the group to use and communicate feelings and ideas. They talk about things and concepts and try to express them.

One man in the group cannot move his body at all. The only movements his body allows him to manage is to shake his head in saying "yes" or "no" or move his eyes up and down. But he is an artist, so he had to say something ("say" means give a sign) to the audience.

The group worked for hours trying to find symbols that could be understood in a similar way both by the group members and by the spectators in the theatre hall. The man with restricted body movements found his role, too. I wondered what role he could take without just sitting on the stage as a decoration, explained CONNOR. In a dark scene the group fixed a bulb to his head and the man swung his head to the rhythm of the music. It was beautiful and mesmerizing, remembers CONNOR.

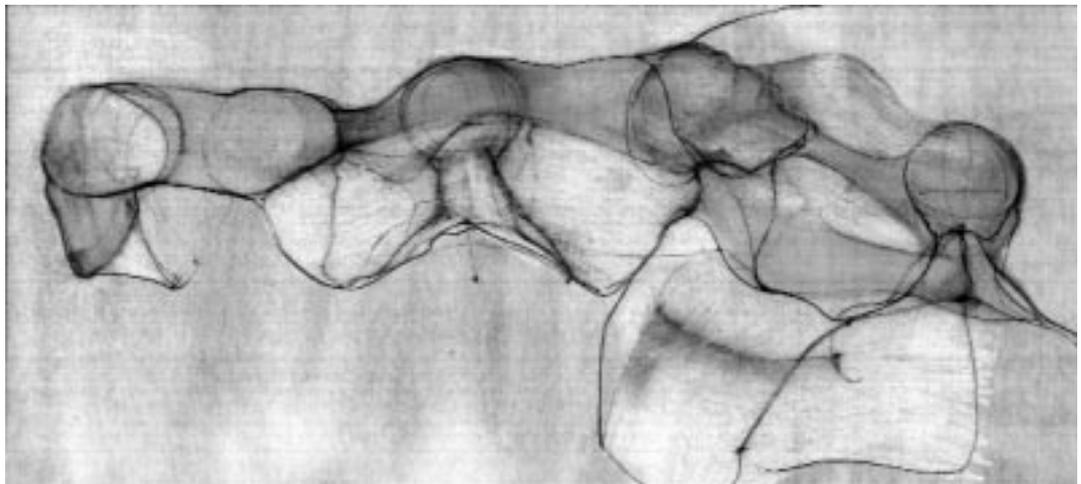
In the beginning the artists were uncertain whether the audience would understand it genuinely as art. The audience, memorised by the scene of the unique expression, created a dialogue between the performer and themselves through a long applause. This was enough to communicate joy.

"We can speak," the actors said.

"We can understand," replied the audience. There are no boundaries that communication can not overcome.

SUBJECTIVITY VERSUS TOTALIZATION

Philosopher Emmanuel Levinas called the Other as the most important landmark of the process of unifying individ-



uals. The realisation of the other reality, but not consuming or ignoring it created the opposite of the relationship of totalization. Limited means of transforming restricted possibilities into a theatre communicates a different reality.

The complete list of our full possibilities to communicate in speech, move, touch, colour, smell, sound and feeling, can be or is shorter for some of us. And it is by our given fate or just a nature of our character, tendency to use one or the other type of expression. LEVINAS says that the central violence to the other is that of the denial of the other's own autonomy. He calls this violence totalization. It occurs when someone assumes they know what another is about before the other has spoken.

Totalization is a denial of the other's difference. In other words, we forget about our many communicative potentials and instead focus on the lack of one particular aspect.

Subjectivity is the opposite of totalization. LEVINAS says that the proximity of the other is not simply special or familial, but the other draws closer insofar as I feel myself responsible for them. In responsibility for the others we are really ourselves. Responsibility for the other starts from describing the other.

HELP OF COMMUNICATION

Many who are different are troubled by the way they are described. Language, written or spoken, is the most developed tool of communication in the world. People have difficulties, but are not the disability themselves. We can be disabled by the environment, attitudes or stereotypes. There is no perfect or naturally complete person in this world.

Disability, as we take it, is a natural thing. It is not a mistake or an error. Organisations working with people who have a visual or a hidden handicap have created some help for those who want to learn to be sensitive and responsible while meeting people with certain difficulties. Some agencies refer to these tips as *The Ten Commandments of Etiquette for Communicating with People with Disabilities*. Here are some of them:

Do not ignore the person, while speaking to one's companion or interpreter.

If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen to or ask for instructions.

Never patronize people who use wheelchairs by patting them on the head or shoulder.

Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so. Instead, repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond. The response will clue you in and guide your understanding.

Do not be embarrassed if you happen to use accepted, common expressions such as "See you later" or "Did you hear about that?" that seems to relate to a person's disability.

Do not be afraid to ask questions when you are unsure of what to do.

Do not say "disabled person", but "person with a particular disability".

As we talk about disability, we exclude or include, harmonize our relationship or completely spoil it, or even hurt the other. This happens even if we are unaware. Equality is a complicated goal to achieve. Someone who is living abroad with a limited command of the local language might feel similar to a disabled persons. Some of the commandments above would fit their situation as well.

LIMITED NATURE

As people of the Gospel, we experience limitedness in our ability to communicate the Ultimate Truth. We live within the limits of our lives and our bodies. We try to make the possibility for improvement a reality.

We all might have a different world-view if we were asked to experience the world differently. Our brain selects one image and explains the world with the help of this image. Something missing would never constitute a mistake—I hope. We realise unlimited possibilities in touching the limitedness of the other's body or soul. One word can contain the universe as well as one touch can contain all the words.

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