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THE MAGAZINE
OF DEAFBLIND
INTERNATIONAL

Special issue • September 2007

Review



Aesthetics

No sound is wrong... music is communication

Birgit Kirkebaek and Cathrine Lerwig

The background for this article is an applied research project on the establishment of shared experiences through improvisation. The project was a co-operation between two resource centres: The resource centre for children and youth with multiple impairments (with the Danish acronym VIKOM) and the resource centre on congenital deafblindness (with the Danish acronym VCDBF). The project was concluded in late summer 2005.

The article argues that an aesthetic perspective based on Colwyn Trevarthen's and other researchers' recognition of the connection between music and communication may help many of the children with severe impairments. These are the children who are today treated with strategies inspired by behaviourism – or whom we work with strategies which are exclusively directed towards cognition. The argument for the reasoning chosen is that an aesthetic approach includes emotional aspects and combines emotion and cognition. This, however, requires that all expressions are noticed and taken seriously. The article is based on a case study on a young man, Jon, 16 years old. He is blind, but has residual hearing. The article is constructed in a way that it first provides a from-outside-perspective on the interaction between Cathrine and Jon, such as it has been presented through analyses of video recordings, and thereafter the artist's own experiences from an inside perspective, stating how the interaction

with Jon was experienced and the reflections which this made way for.

The "aesthetic" and the "bodily"

"The lived body" is an expression applied by the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty. It means that "the body is an expression, which cannot be separated from what it expresses". Meaning and participation are main concepts when we speak on the basis of an aesthetic paradigm. Merleau-Ponty's "perception of the lived body as our original and meaningful way of accessing the world" may also contribute to the understanding of what happens in the sequences of interaction which develop between Cathrine Lerwig and Jon when they improvise. They create a space – a lived space. "The lived space," in Merleau-Ponty's sense of the expression, comprehends both the physical, the bodily, the psycho-social and the musical space.

Merleau-Ponty's point is that "we are bodily present in any perception", and hence it is not possible to

take a distance from this even though the world seems different for those directly involved and those in the audience. Merleau-Ponty highlights the body as an experiencing subject – in other words as a silent witness. "The silent witness", which Merleau-Ponty speaks about is the lived body, which means not only the experienced body, but the present, social and meaning making body, as opposed to the purely biological body. The most fundamental condition for perception is our body, or, as Merleau-Ponty expresses it: Our body is not in the time, it inhabits space and time. So basically we are our body, but the body may also perceive itself, which is a prerequisite for the instrumental idea that we have a body", as the Danish researcher of music theory Svend Holgersen writes.

Merleau-Ponty describes the meaning making relationship between the child and its environment as intentional. He has a particular category for movement, which he calls locomotive intention. Intention has something to do with meaning making

through interaction. For Merleau-Ponty the body is the original unit for meaning making. The world is not in itself meaningful, but "it is meaningful to us due to our bodily existence and access to the world." Merleau-Ponty thinks that we see things in their entity and not only in their actually featured part. The lived body, for him, is doomed to make meaning – in other words, it just cannot be ignored.

When Cathrine Lervig and I myself have a focus of the innate rhythmic pulsation, of non-verbal communication and the child's effort to create meaningful coherence and flow, an aesthetic paradigm is its basis. A major point of this aesthetic is that the product is completed by the co-operation of the Other – in other words that nothing is fulfilled before it is seen and interpreted by an Other.

An outside perspective on Cathrine's interaction with Jon

When one analyses the video recorded interaction between Cathrine and Jon, a lot of questions emerge. What do the constantly occurring head movements which Jon makes mean to him? Which experiences do they give him, and which emotional expressions may we find in his behaviour – and in that of Cathrine? What happens between them? And how does the artist encounter the individual, with whom she is going to meet for the first time? The encounter had the following development (described in greater detail in the Danish book "No sound is wrong").

Jon sits in a wheelchair opposite Cathrine. He moves his head from side to side. Cathrine and Jon start by holding hands. Jon then lets go of Cathrine's hand and makes sign of taking off his shirt. Cathrine tries to join him by singing, in the rhythm of Jon's head movements. Here there is a break. Jon gets a grip of his own hand and briefly stops moving his head. He produces deep sounds, as well as a kind of spitting sounds. Cathrine imitates Jon's small sounds.



She continues with non-sense talk and sings again. Jon now dances with his fingers. He seems to obey to his own basic rhythm. Cathrine seems to be seeking and a bit insecure. Jon turns his head rhythmically and "dances" with his hands/fingers and produces small sounds. Cathrine awaits Jon's initiatives and tries to answer his sound productions, and she answers these and tries to take Jon's hand. Jon withdraws his hand, and Jon's teacher suggests that Cathrine touches Jon's arms and shoulders in stead. Cathrine follows up on this, and Jon accepts this way of touching. Cathrine

sings in the same rhythm as Jon moves his head. She adds something new to his movements; the sound of her voice. There is a break. Jon seems to be listening attentively. Cathrine lays her hands on his shoulders. Jon explores her hands briefly and then puts his fingers in his hands for a short while. Jon swings his head intensively and murmurs. Cathrine follows up with a very wavering voice or vibrato. Jon is indeed attentive – he is very participating and very

listening. There is a close head-to-head contact. Vibrato in a low pitch in accordance with Jon's proper sounds. There is harmony and shared experience through vibrating sounds. Then there is pause and consideration. Jon sits totally quiet without swinging his head. Cathrine starts to sing in a higher pitch tone, but still has the deep, "raw" sounds as her basic rhythm – the same rhythm as Jon's head movements. Jon straightens up, strokes his forehead and again swings his head from side to side. Cathrine's hand is on his shoulder. Now Jon begins to explore her hands, at first with his left and then with his

right hand. He briefly holds her hand with his right hand. Cathrine then approaches him with deep, strong and vibrating sounds. Jon listens again. Cathrine's initiative is dramatic. Jon still holds Cathrine's hand. Again he lifts up his shirt – several times. What does this mean? Jon puts his fingers in his mouth, listens, with his face towards Cathrine and again swings his hand. Cathrine puts her hand against his shoulder. There is an exchange of murmuring sounds. Jon has his fingers

intentionally. However, what struck me most was how Jon being deafblind confirms and reconfirms his communication with Cathrine. In the beginning Jon is in his own basic rhythm. As Cathrine adds a "leading part" to this basic rhythm with her voice, Jon becomes attentive and participating. It supports him that she touches his shoulder, but as he uses his hands and fingers partly for dancing and partly for exploring Cathrine, he does not want her to hold on to his hands. As I see it,

which Cathrine confirmed that at Jon independently explores her hands and wants to know who she is. If she is hot tempered and "dramatic", he will, by tearing off his shirt, manifest that he, too, is hot tempered and "dramatic".

The episode described and our interpretation of it is indeed what the Norwegian psychologist understands as an aesthetic paradigm. It has to do with moments of aesthesia, such as the Norwegian professor of musicology Jon-Roar Bjørkvold describes it. When Cathrine adds something new to Jon's expression, and when he responds to it and considers her suggestion, they co-create a new aesthetic expression, which contains something from them both.

What Jon uses in his communication are the head movements from side to side and his vocalisations: In my "from the outside" observations Jon's sounds and the use of the hands a major role, just as his unreserved acceptance of Cathrine must be highlighted as something special. But also the head movements, I think, are something much more than stereotypes and introvert activity.

The head movements have very different meaning and are used for different purposes:

- they set a rhythm of rest which has a sleep inducing character, he is relaxed and on his way to sleep.
- they are used as a personal flow, which make his world coherent.
- they are used as a rhythmical instrument, which sets both the rhythm



in his mouth. Harmonised murmuring sounds head by head. Jon yawns. "Have you had enough of this now?" Cathrine asks. Jon reaches his hand towards her. Again their heads are touching. Jon lets his head fall down on Cathrine's arm. For a long time they sit like this. Jon stretches out like after a good sleep. Thank you for the class!"

The things, which caught my attention, were partly the fact that Jon tries to take off his shirt and partly the effect Cathrine's vibration has on him. Finally I was very absorbed by Jon's use of his hand movements; they seemed to be used very

the dance of the hands is a way of sharing the experience with Cathrine. When she confirms him by adding something new (the sound of her voice) to his basic rhythm (his head movements), he then re-confirms her by adding the dance of his hands. Together they explore the "head-by-head" effect of the vibrations. They share the experience. Perhaps the attempts to take off his shirt are a way of expressing enthusiasm – an excitement – which may be compared to the reaction in a soccer player when he scores a goal. But it may also be considered as a re-confirmation of the dramatic expression with

and the tenderness or ferocity in the expression of the piece of music.

- they also set the pace and dynamics and are parts of the shared flow, which he co-creates with Cathrine.
- they are used to provide the particular sensory experience which it gives when you move the head from side to side according to a sound source with different rhythms – it is a kind of amplification of which he himself is in control.

When his head movements stop, he signals: I am responsive to the new things you will bring to me.

His hands also seem to be used for several different purposes:

- Jon calls on, accepts or rejects Cathrine's hands and thus signals both limits and an accommodating attitude.
- Jon explores Cathrine's hands and finds out how she is.
- Jon uses his hands and fingers as an instrument and plays on Cathrine's hands as if they were the keys of a piano.
- Jon uses his hands to communicate frustration: He presses his finger into Cathrine's hand, and he hits himself. He also protects himself or prevents himself from doing things by sitting on his hands.
- Jon uses his hands to pull up his shirt and thereby signals receptiveness – or he uses them to feel his stomach and signalise "this is me" – or to pull up his shirt and bite it, perhaps as a sign of insecurity or need for a break?

Jon's vocalisations are varied and manifold. If I close my eyes and listen to the sound track of the video recording, the pattern which Jon and Cathrine create together seems very melodic. They tune in to each other and harmonise their sounds. With the eyes open the sounds must be perceived together with the movements in Jon's head and hands underlining the emotional value of the interaction in general. Jon wishes to communicate in a musical way with Cathrine, but he also decides for how long and how he wants to participate.

The "from within" perspective – Cathrine's experience of the interaction with Jon

In the nature of free improvisation there is an attitude to the surrounding world, which is quite basic to me. There is an openness, a curiosity towards the other, an equality in the "togetherness", a way of communicating, a way of being oneself; a way of being oneself in the presence of others. Improvised music is co-created on the spot. The individual person's characteristic expression has its place within an entirety. When we who are improvising musicians play, we are on the lookout for opportunities for ourselves and for each other. We search for the presence in the particular moments, which develop among us.

We are all born with musical resources and have the ability develop those in an interaction with other people. Using improvisation

has proved to be fruitful in the attempts to work with persons who are born deafblind and have no spoken language.

In the research and development project mentioned I have given 10 solo classes to a total of 6 children with no spoken language (3 had congenital deafblindness, 3 had multiple impairments).

My very first impression of Jon is that he uses his voice in very varied ways and very expressively. During the first class with Jon we were going to learn to know each other and in a new way.

I met Jon without words, but with *my voice*, and even though Jon had never met anyone like me before, I noticed a readiness, a curiosity, an open mind and an ability to enter musical interaction with me. During our 10 solo classes moments of presence became more frequent and they lasted longer.

Jon expresses himself in very subtle ways with his voice. High pitch, opera like sequences, deep murmuring sounds, sequences where he uses his voice like in speech, with rhythm and tone as in speech, just there were no words. Jon expresses many aspects of himself with his voice. He has a wide scope of emotions, and he uses it, to express himself. He definitely has "two strings to his bow".

In the middle of the third lesson Jon listens intensively to a deep and quiet song which I am singing. Suddenly he sings some high shrieking sounds while his head moves from one side to the other. As I imitate the high pitch tones by altering between



a high and a dark voice, it becomes clear to me that he wants me to stop making the high-pitched sounds and only sing the deep sounds. It seems that the high pitch – introduced by him – surprises him and disturbs him; it “seizes” him – invades him.

I have met this before with other deafblind persons. And afterwards it seems that everything is forgotten – all the things we were doing. I am persistent and continue doing what I was doing before: with the rhythm, the body and with the song a kind of bridge is constructed across the disruption. This helps the person return to what we were doing, return to the present. With Jon this bridging works and we may continue our interaction.

If as a partner one does not try to maintain the shared interaction, it will be interrupted and one has to start again somewhere else. Here it is the uniting quality of music, the shared flow, which helps us through. By working with a person like

Jon over a longer period of time I have experienced that the disruptions coming from within have changed. It is as if the bridge – the fact that I hold on to what we share – sheds new light on the disruption and offers some kind of awareness which may help the person to learn to know and to control the disruptions.

Listening to Jon’s voice in his everyday life, he varies a lot in the ways he uses it. I interpret his leaps partly as emotional disruptions from within, and partly as Jon’s comments to the stream of impressions coming from outside. At the bottom of each expression there is an emotion. Thus we here talk about emotional leaps. From my proper work as an improvising singer without words, I know that these jumps are very emotionally requiring. The reason is that one tries to pay attention to everything which happens and to comment on it without being grounded. In this way one is swept around

in one’s own emotions. This is not purposeful.

I consider the basic flow in music, music’s ability to bridge gaps between different states of mind and create smooth transitions is an important tool for any human being. We practise a lot of this when we speak to each other. A person like Jon most certainly needs these skills, among other things because he has to be able to readjust all the time. He seems to be able to do this in musical improvisation.

This article has been printed in **Doevblinde Nyt**. The article is a short version of their book with the same title. Birgit and Cathrine have referenced this article and can be contacted on –
Birgit Kirkebaek:
Biki@get2net.dk
Cathrine Lervig:
kalapyk@mail.dk

Whoever you are... whatever you are... the STAGE IS YOURS!!!

This is an account of the Danish theatre project "Breaking the Silent Dark" which was developed for presentation in Slovakia this summer.

Grit Bethelsen sets the scene:

Be aware of the danger – who will get nervous? We are all aware of the risk of inviting ridicule, but we are attracted by the adrenalin buzz, the heat of the spotlight, the sense and "smell" of a large audience and, last but not least, the hilarity and exhaustion of success. Once the curtain rises, we feel at home on the stage, even in Slovakia it is a very new and different experience.

Who Are We?

We are the people behind the performance "Breaking the Silent Dark", which is the result of co-operation

between The Deafblind Centre, Årnborg and Limfjordsskolen, Løgstør. This co-operation started in 2003 with theoretical discussions concerning aesthetics, and one of the results was that we agreed to do some practical work!

The present theatre group was founded in spring 2004, and comprises 4 born deaf-blind persons, 4 staff members from The Deafblind Centre, functioning as supporters and interpreters, and my colleague and me from Limfjordsskolen. We have skills in instruction and light and sound, and have been offering art and theatre courses since 1989, primarily to disabled adults. We took the challenge even though

we didn't have any specific knowledge or experience with deafblind persons. We did not know sign language, but we were willing to communicate, to inspire and be inspired by the deafblind performers and be jointly creative and innovative.

The 4 performers took the challenge too, exceeded limits and accepted that working in the theatre demands concentration, discipline, timing and responsibility. They experienced being a part of a theatre group, where everyone is needed and indispensable. They dared to discover new horizons.

The first performance, "Humans in backlighting", which toured in Denmark





and the Netherlands, opened our eyes and gave us "inside information", that enhanced the possibility of formulating individual parts in the second performance.

The aim of the theatre group is to ensure that deafblind people become more visible and get the opportunity to contribute to society by generating experimental and symbolic theatre, where individual expression and natural movement form the basic elements. Each part of the play is the result of improvisation and mutual inspiration, during which, the process of production crystallises as "sublimates" of the individual's resources and abilities.

Although innovation and inspiration are indispensable, all performers must know their part by heart when the play is presented to the public.

Diary of a Theatre Production

The project started at the end of May, and we only had 8 full working days, including a final rehearsal. Normally we have at least 7 weeks to produce a play! We were lucky to know the actors in advance.

Day 1

The sound of 2 wheelchairs reaches us from the long corridor, which leads to the theatre room. The 4 performers are coming. They are energetic and eager to get started, in spite of a one hour tiring bus ride. For the sake of confidence and recognition, we have chosen to use the same backstage as in the previous play which turned out to be a good choice. Heavy eyed, like early risers, the 4 performers immediately start to take shoes and socks off. The "Barefoot Company" has sensed the

theatre. But the stage looks strange – a known backstage – an unknown stage, full of corrugated paper, silk scarves and bells! There is a call for the folding rule and we start with common drama exercises and explanation through the interpreters.

Day 2 ..then improvisations – what is going to happen?

This performance is intended for an international deafblind conference at Presov in Slovakia. Before this conference a presentation is planned in a village near Kosice, where a deafblind centre will open next year, but the village inhabitants have neither seen nor met a deafblind person! Having a lot of hard work ahead of us, we are under extreme time pressure, so, in order to preserve the group's confidence, it might be necessary to re-use, with slight changes, a number of scenes from our last



performance. Despite that, we continue experimenting and improvising. Once again we are reminded that theatre demands discipline. The rules are accepted and it shows very quickly that the “deafblind world” is not necessarily slow. The activity level is very high and everybody is in the right place at the right time. The aim this time is to create more scenes, where the deafblind actors are more independent of support – the ideal is no supporters at all.

On the 3rd day a draft manuscript is prepared. The sequences are structured and a preliminary description of the individual scenes is prepared. During the process, notes are revised according to new input/inspiration from the performers. The group is alert and aware of the challenge – even subtle hints are quickly caught. All possible types of communication are used – parallel acting, rolling on the floor, verbal sign instruction e.g. the folding

rule is still a wonder, what is he measuring? The two performers start to communicate and inspire each other. What can be measured?

In a production, where hopefully the performers’ capacity for expression is being respectfully expanded, the cumulative life experience of the individual performer determines pace and timing. Is it possible to be “incorrect” in personal expression or movement in connection with drama production?

Finally ...the light and sound

These two techniques enhance the look and expression of the performer and the atmosphere. However, light or sound should never overshadow or kill the sentiments expressed.

Our final rehearsal ... caused blushing cheeks and butterflies in the stomach, and all this nervousness flew along with us to Slovakia! All of a sudden it was Sunday, the day of our performance,

and the Priest in the village at Kosice announced our performance during the noon Mass. The theatre hall, an old post office, was crowded in the afternoon heat.

Our first public presentation

From now on is it up to the audience to “measure” – to judge the artistic experience and quality. The result... this audience was moved and touched to tears and all expectations were surpassed.

What are we measuring?

If one of the results of doing this work is frontier-exceeding acceptance and respect for a very fragile group of people in our society, this could be an extraordinary good reason for creating theatre, if not the only one.

The audience measured the performance, and they loved it!

Let the two minds work together!

Ove Vedel Andersen and Henriette Hermann Olesen, The Danish Centre for the Education of People with Congenital Deafblindness.

In this article Ove, a teacher of special education, and Henriette, a consultant for children with congenital deafblindness, ask "Is there a connection between aesthetics and communication?"

In August 2005 they presented their ideas to the European Conference on Deafblindness in Slovakia. For some years they have been working on writing a book about the aesthetics concerning interaction and communication with people with congenital deafblindness. They like to share and discuss this work, and the theory behind it, with professionals in Europe, and, as this is an ongoing process, the meeting with colleagues in Slovakia, and other places, are very important for them.

Through studying theories of aesthetics we feel that these theories, to some extent, match the theories that can be used to establish and create communication with people with congenital deafblindness. "Seeing and catching" the meaningfulness of the expressions developed or "invented" by the deafblind person themselves – vocally or bodily – has been the essence of our work so far, in order to make these expressions active in communication. With a little help from aesthetics we think we can improve our ability to "see and catch" and thereby legitimize these expressions, because aesthetics helps us to see the beauty of them.

In cooperation with various types of artists (a dancer, actor, sculptor, singer) we have seen examples

of magnification, clarification, differentiation and beautification of the types of expression used by deafblind people. These are expressions that we may not have noticed before, or we may even have thought they were unconventional. Maybe we even assumed them to be stereotypical or socially unacceptable behaviour. This made us more curious about aesthetics and how this could be important to our work concerning interaction and communication.

Looking back on our work, we could hear ourselves describing our ambitions of being "roomy" or spacious, being able to embrace the human being as a whole, but we could not define exactly what it takes to make this spaciousness present in our work on a daily basis – we had a feeling that we had experienced some limitations in relation to this spaciousness! Sometimes we also found ourselves feeling that everything in the interaction with the congenitally deafblind person worked fine, but we were not quite conscious of what had actually made this happen.

We had a good theoretical background for the daily work. Words like interaction and communication were, and are, keywords and we used them when we discussed our work. We understood the importance

of an individual's possibility to interact and communicate with other people, but often we had to question why we sometimes achieved success and sometimes we did not.

This feeling of success has been described by a number of theorists. Daniel Stern calls it "the present moment" as an expression describing mutual participation. Per Lorentzen uses the term "the aesthetic meeting". Birgith Kirkebak describes it as "a qualitative leap in the intersubjective exchange". A participant in the workshop in Slovakia had his own personal way of describing it, namely as "the flow".

In the workshop we presented a video clip that showed a successful interaction between a congenitally deafblind woman and her caretaker. The caretaker follows the expressive communication from the deafblind woman and suggests other expressions. They take turns and enjoy themselves. The interesting part was the caretaker's description of it – she excused herself to the person who was videotaping the sequence and said: "This has become more of play and joy, I'm afraid..." – she divided play and joy from real work, because she was expecting a "proper" linguistic dialogue and she didn't see this as an important

part of working with interaction and communication. This is good example of how we sometimes use our head and logic and think that if we are having fun, it isn't serious work.

For a number of years we have worked with various artists and they have contributed to showing us the beauty and the importance of play, joy and special personal expressive acts – however strange they might seem. Klaus mentioned the dancer Riccardo Morrison, who has worked as a contact-improvisation-dancer for many years, and showed us a beautiful dance with a woman. He carried her on his back, danced around and followed the movements of her arms. They ended up in a sculptural setting where he was standing on one leg and she was lying on his back, both stretching their arms into the air. It was a beautiful and very serious work.

We could see how he, and the other artists, worked very seriously with play and enjoyment, working both extrovertly (from the deafblind persons' expressive acts, through a theatre play or a sculpture) and introvertly (from the deafblind persons' expressions, producing aesthetic process and the feeling of being equal partners). It was this we found interesting in our daily work, as we saw how the artists magnified, and legitimized, the expressions from deafblind people and enjoyed working with them – they seemed to “sense” more than “logical thinking” in their work.

A German philosopher, Baumgarten, once said that aesthetics is: “The science of the sensation and the beauty in itself, as the experience of a total unit of contents, order and expressions.”

But what are we saying now? Is our goal to work as the artist does, by sensing our way into the interaction and communication?

No, it isn't! We are certain that that is not enough. Is our goal to be better logical thinkers? No, it isn't! We are certain, that that, too, it is not enough. Baumgarten helps us out here – he also said that we have two ways of thinking: the aesthetic mind, and the logical mind.

The aesthetic mind makes us think and see the beauty, it makes us sense, it makes us experience and acknowledge.

The logical mind makes us see the logic, makes us rational, conceptual and intellectual – looking for truth.

“Ove and Henriette like to share and discuss this work, and the theory behind it, with professionals in Europe”

So if the human being is blessed with two minds, maybe we should let these two minds work together in our work with the congenitally deafblind persons. How about acknowledging the rational in our work? How about seeing the beauty in the logic? How about experiencing and intellectualising? How about seeing the beauty and the truth? How about seeing the logical and the aesthetics?

So what we are saying now is that we think it is of great importance to know logically how theories describe the development of creating communicative acts, and what the disability deafblindness means for this development. In our presentation we used the model of Anne Nafstad and Inger Rodbroe: “To create communication with

deafblind persons”. We think it is important to know what various types of expressive acts mean. We need to understand whether they signify regulation of social interaction, proximity and distance, exploration, or emotions. Or is it being used as vocabulary?

At the same time we think it is very important that we aesthetically sense the deafblind person as an equal partner in the interaction and communication. If we can be a genuine partner in communication we think we will experience more success with our interactions.

So... if expressions end up being natural elements in the spontaneous daily communicative interaction of both partners – the professional and the deafblind person – the “circle is completed”. We can understand, and see, in the interaction, the “total unit of contents, order and expression”.

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Man is man's joy... An aesthetic approach to co-operation with congenitally deafblind persons.

In this first article of a series, Klaus Vilhelmsen, uses this old Viking expression "Man is man's joy" to introduce the exciting, but often not fully understood, concept of aesthetics. Over the years he has worked with colleagues at the Centre for Deafblind people in Denmark, in an interdisciplinary way, and involved practising artists with deafblind residents to develop an aesthetic approach. He also supports and values the cooperation of the Nordic Culture Network.

Introduction

Some years ago we went on a study trip. For a week we sailed a beautiful, old wooden ship. The deafblind students had many sensory experiences on that trip – the heat of the sun, the smell of the sea and the wooden ship, the wind and so on. Sonja, one of the students, kept us awake until two o'clock in the morning by using her voice in a very varied and beautiful way. We thought she expressed her mood based on the experiences she had had. Previously, we thought that she used her voice mostly in a self-stimulatory way, but on this trip we realised that she used her voice as a personal and creative way of expressing herself. We understood Sonja and the way she used her voice. We understood this from an aesthetic angle.

Aesthetics

But how can we describe aesthetics?

The concept goes back to Baumgarten in the

18th century. He wrote about aesthetics from a philosophical point of view. For him aesthetics was "knowledge about the beautiful and learning about this ...the learning about the substance of arts". Therefore, art and aesthetics were closely connected.

A Danish researcher, within the special pedagogical field, Søren Langager, says: "Aesthetics is about taste, experience and acknowledgement through the senses, with the expression of taste (the emotion) as its communicative form.

Originally aesthetics was described as "realising" through sensory experiences. However, I think it is in the wider understanding, and in Søren Langager's comments too, that we find most inspiration in our partnerships with deafblind people.

It is still common to connect aesthetics and art, but it has also become more common to regard aesthetics as beauty both in nature

and as a part of our daily life. As aesthetics take on a broader definition, as a part of existence itself, it does not depend on a concept connected solely to art, or indeed, the individual's ability to produce or understand art.

You can have an aesthetic experience in the natural world. For instance, let's look at the experience of taking a walk on the beach. You can feel the wind against your body, you can enjoy the sun and the light, you can hear the wind, and you can feel that it is pleasurable to use your body. An experience like this can create a feeling of beauty and meaningfulness. For a walk on the beach to be an aesthetic experience we have to be open and able to recognise it as such! In applying this wider understanding of aesthetic experience it becomes more important in our lives. It will include our feelings, soul, spirit and our unconscious mind.

The core of our new understanding is that an aesthetic recognition is all

about sensory perception, sensation and emotion in our relationships with other people and in our relationship to the physically world.

To describe sensory perception, sensations and emotions as important factors in our aesthetic recognition can perhaps help us to understand why we sometimes experience success and, other times, experience the opposite. To acknowledge this as a vital part of everyday experiences can lead us to an aesthetic view about being together with deafblind people.

Dorthe Jørgensen, a Danish researcher in this field, said that the kind of aesthetics which is about "life art" (i.e. how you create your life in an aesthetic way) is the most popular kind of aesthetics these days.

Pedagogical consequences

When we use the aesthetic perspective as part of the basis for co-operation with deafblind persons there will be at least two pedagogical consequences.

One consequence is that working together with deafblind persons is not just about compensating for functional disabilities. We have to look at the human being behind the handicap, and give this person the opportunity to grow and express herself.

Another consequence of choosing the aesthetic perspective, is that we have to give the deafblind person the opportunity to experience

sensation, refine this sensing process and refine this sensory expression. In this way other people can relate to the ideas of deafblind persons. In other words, communication can be established.

In giving the deafblind persons an opportunity to express their experiences in a non-linguistic way, the deafblind person can communicate to hearing-seeing people with their own expressions about their attitudes, feelings and existential experiences. In this way we can learn from them.

Cooperation with artists

Based upon this way of thinking we established cooperation between Sonja, the young lady from the boat, and a multi-artist, Cathrine Lervig. She is an educated singer. During the past 10 years she has worked with an alternative way of using her voice. For instance she sings without words.

Cathrine describes her first meeting and co-operation with Sonja in an article in the Danish magazine "Deafblind-News". She describes it like this:

"When Sonja arrived we touched each other as hello.

I waited. Sonja used her voice. We touched each other again. In the beginning it was just like improvising with another musician. In the beginning we got to know each other and suddenly we had established contact. Sonja turned her face directly to me in a big smile from deep inside of her. She felt it too – the contact, the joy and the surprise of this kind of contact.

Now that the contact was established, we were equal. For one hour we concentrated and spoke to each other. Sonja has a very expressive voice, voluminous and dynamic. We changed between talking and singing. Or to be more precise we were between singing and talking. The feeling was exactly like improvising with another musician".

After her meeting with Sonja, Cathrine said "I ask myself many questions. For instance – where is the boundary between music and linguistic communication? What kind of exchange takes place between musicians when they play? What is music? What would happen if Sonja got a musical reply to her splendid communication skills? What can Sonja teach us?"

“As human beings we only have two – and nothing but two – ways of organising our access to the world. The one is through understanding, and the other is through sensation.”

K.E. Løgstrup

Riccardo Morrison and Marianne Rusbjerg



So how should we respond?

We need to support deafblind persons' creativity. We can benefit from working with artists in many ways. I think they can,

- inspire new possibilities and nuances in the meeting between deafblind people and others,
- open up our senses for new expressions, both from deafblind people, and others,
- work by clarifying these expressions,
- help in creating solidarity,
- communicate on a non linguistic level.

Dancing!

During the last 20 years Riccardo Morrison has practiced contact improvisation dance. It is dance with and for people, who like to dance in a common forum and use the dance as a common language. People who move differently have inspired Riccardo. He says "We all have some strange, remarkable movements, which has become a habit for us. We must accept these movements, because they are a part of our nature and our body. In connection to our bodily expressions Riccardo

Morrison reminds us that we are all unique.

Riccardo has for several years worked together with disabled people. He wants to teach these people so they can encounter and feel their body, and to undo and dissolve their tensions. The purpose is to obtain self knowledge and personal development.

The technical basis for Riccardo's work is contact improvisation dance. This form of dance is based upon improvisation, dialogue through movement, weight and vigour. The form of dance talks about the living, intelligent and sensing body. In contact improvisation dance, there is in the principle that nothing is right or wrong. The dance form is based on techniques, which can be used by anybody – whatever their disability may be.

In November last year we arranged a workshop with Riccardo Morrison. We worked on the basis I have just described, and we worked with differences rather than homogeneous movements. All movements were understood as dance and we tried to catch all the smallest movements. There were no wrong movements. Riccardo says that everyone in a room contributes

something – they inspire each other!

Society and the digital world

But why this interest in aesthetics?

It has always been that support from society to disabled people has been based on the values, norms and ethical rules which characterise it in that period of history. Today old patterns have broken down, authorities are not what they used to be. The individual has to find his own way and values. Therefore the ongoing development of the society is more likely to pose a question about how the individual expresses him or herself, to make up his or her mind and take action. The development of digital technologies also pushes us in that direction. With all the possibilities the digital world creates, it will be essential for the individual to be able to find his or her way in this world. It will be essential to reveal themselves and make themselves "attractive" to other people so that they can take part in the developing dialogue. For the weakest citizens it will be hard to face this challenge.

Ole Thyssen, The Danish philosopher, says that we



“The aesthetic dimension contains many of the same qualities as “the time of our life” – the sensuous, the unique, the ambiguous”

need aesthetic competence now in this society, because “renewal requires people who are not afraid to trust their senses and feelings and give shape to experiences which may, or may not, become shared experiences”. One can say “that the aesthetic dimension contains many of the same qualities as “the time of our life” – the sensuous, the unique, the ambiguous”.

Today, the concept of aesthetics, as a philosophical and pedagogical concept, underlines the meaning of sensory perception and emotions. This occurs in the meeting between oneself and another and in our approach

to the world. Therefore, in our understanding, an aesthetic paradigm points out that it is through confidence and respect we foster individuality. Our own power over the way we live our lives can enrich not only the existential meeting but cultural solidarity too.

Equality

We would like deafblind people to have the opportunity to be truly equal members of society and have the possibility and expectation to contribute to that society as well. I think we have to help them to contribute in a way that other people find exciting

and worth while. The process and the joy of working with aesthetic expression is very important even if artefacts are not created. But, if the deafblind person wants his work to be a contribution to society and the common culture, then the product is important too, so other people find it exciting and worthwhile. In this way deafblind people can be visible and equal in the society.

Klaus Vilhelmsen

Small Corporate Members

AUSTRALIA

Celestine Hare
The Deafblind Association
Tel: +61 - 3 - 9882 7055
Fax: +61 - 3 - 9882 9210
Email: dba@internex.net.au
c.hare@dba.asn.au

Alan Baynham
Royal Institute for Deaf and
Blind Children

Tel: +61 - 2 - 9871 1233
Fax: +61 - 2 - 9871 12196
Email: alan.baynham@
ridbc.org.au

John Finch
Australian Deafblind Council
(ADBC)

Tel: +61 -04 - 2743 5243
Fax: +61 - 3 - 9882 9210
Email: dba@internex.net.au
jfinch2@vtown.com.au

Debbie Karasinski
Senses Foundation Inc
Tel: +61 - 8 - 9473 5400
Fax: +61 - 8 - 9473 5499
Email: db@sense-asn.au
admin@senses.asn.au

AUSTRIA

Christa Heinemann
Osterr. Hilfswerk für Taubblinde
Tel: +43 - 1 - 602 0812 0
Fax: +43 - 1 - 602 0812 17
Email: c.heinemann@
zentrale.oehfb.at

BELGIUM

Marlene Daelman
MPI Spermalie
Tel: +32 - 50 - 340 341
Fax: +32 - 50 - 337 306
Email: Marlene.daelman@mpi-
spermalie.be

CANADA

Roxana Spruyt-Rocks
Independent Living Residences
for the Deafblind in Ontario
Tel: +1 - 905 - 770 4948
Fax: +1 - 905 - 770 0598
Email: admin@ilrdbco.ca

Stan Munroe
Canadian Deafblind and
Rubella Association
Tel: +1 - 519 - 372 0887
Fax: +1 - 519 - 372 0312
Email: munroes@seaside.ns.ca

DENMARK

Birthe Lastrup
Videnscenter For Dovblindfodte
Tel: +45 - 98 - 155313
Fax: +45 - 98 - 155323
Email: vcdef.vcdef@nija.dk

Helle Bang
Nordic Staff Training Centre for
Deafblind Services
Tel: +45 - 96 - 47 16 00
Fax: +45 - 96 - 47 16 16
Email: helle.bang@nud.dk
nud@nud.dk

Preben Gundersen
Dovblindcentret
Tel: +45 - 99 - 31 89 00
Fax: +45 - 99 - 14 73 44
Email: dbc.dbc@nija.dk

Vibeke Faurholt
Danish Parents Association
Graeswangen 4
9330 Dronninglund
Tel: +45 -75 -139 537
Fax: +45 -75 -139 524
Email: enrico-lone@post.tele.dk

Ole Mortensen
Information Centre for
Acquired Deafblindness
Tel: +45-44-85 6030
Fax: +45-44-85 6099
Email: dbcent@dbcent.dk
oem@dbcenk.dk

FINLAND

Heikki Majava
The Finnish Deafblind
Association
Tel: +358 - 9 - 54 95 350
Fax: +358 - 9 - 54 95 35 17
Email: heikki.Majava@
kuurosokeat.fi

Eeva-Marja Loukola
The Service Foundation for
the Deaf
Tel: +358 - 9 - 58 031
Fax: +358 - 9 - 580 3657
Email: kuurojan.palvelusaatio
@deaf-serv.fi

GREECE

Taula Masta
Hellenic Association of Deafblind
Ragavi 27- Gyz, Athens 17
Kallithea 17573, Athens
Telefax: 30-210-6440689

IRELAND

Finola Loughney
The Anna Sullivan Centre
Tel: +353-1-289 8339
Fax: +353-1-289 8408
Email: annesullivancentre@
eircom.net

INDIA

Bhushan Punani
Blind People Association
Tel: +91 - 79 - 630 3346
Fax: +91 - 79 - 630 0106
Email: bilinabad1@sancharnet.in
Gopal Krishna Agrawal
Shikshit Yuva Sewa Samiti
Tel: +91-05542-242280
Email: syssbst@sify.com

KENYA

Geoffrey Atieli
Sense International
Tel: 254 - 722 - 245861
Fax: (00254)- 20 - 782597
Email: geoffrey@senseint-ea.org

NETHERLANDS

Bernard de Vries
Visio, LSSB
Tel: +31 - 55 - 5800695
Fax: +31 - 55 - 5800890
Email: info@visio.nl
bernard.devries@loerf.nl

Netherlands Knowledge Centre
for the Deafblind
Tel: +31-343-442744
Fax: +31-343-443232
Email: info@dooblind.nl

Marlies Raemaekers
Bartimeus
Tel: +31-343-526650
Fax: +31-343-526798
Email: m.raemaekers@
bartimeus.nl

Pieter Hermens
Kolorama
Tel: +3124 684 77 77
Fax: +31024 684 77 88
Email: p.hermens@kolorama.nl
info@kolorama.nl

NORWAY

Evabritt Andreassen
Regional Resource Centre for
Deafblind/VKS
Tel: 0047 - 55 - 92 34 85
Fax: 0047 - 55 - 92 34 91
Email: evabritt.
andreassen@statped.no

Tonhild Strand Hauge
Skadalen Resource Centre
Tel: +47 - 22 - 703 702
Fax: +47 - 22 - 703 715
Email: tonhild.s.hauge@statped.no

Knut Johansen
Andebu Dovblindesenter
Tel: +47 - 33 - 438700
Fax: +47 - 33 - 438720
Email: adb@signo.no
knut.johansen@signo.no

Anne Lise Hoydahl
AKS (Andebu Kompetanse &
Skolesenter)
Tel: +47 33438674
Email: anne.lise.hoydahl@signo.no

SINGAPORE

Koh Poh Kwang
Singapore School for the Visually
Handicapped
Tel: +65 - 2503755
Fax: +65 - 2505348
Email: kohpohkwang@
svh.edu.sg

SLOVENIA

Franc Planinc
Deaf and Hard of Hearing Clubs
Association of Slovenia
Tel: +386 1500 1500
Fax: +386 1500 1522
Email: zdgns@zeveza-gns.si
Stane Padeznik
Association of the Blind and
Partially sighted of Slovenia
Tel: +0038614700211
Fax: +0038614700220
Email: zdss@zeveza-slep.si

SOUTH AFRICA

Jill Wagner
South African National Council
for the Blind
Tel: +27-12-3461171
Fax: +27-12-34611177
Email: jwagner@sancb.org.za

SPAIN

Dolores Romero Chacon
APASCIIDE
Tel: +34 - 91 - 733 52 08
Tel/fax +34 - 91 - 733 40 17
Email: apascode@arrakis.es

SWEDEN

Sven Sjöberg
Association of the Swedish
Deafblind (FSDB)
Tel: +46 - 8 - 399000
Fax: +46 - 8 - 6595042
Email: sven@fsdb.org
fsdb@fsdb.org

Lena Hammarstedt
Nationellt Kunskapscenter for
dovblindfragar
Tel: +46 87535940,
+46738030808
Email: lena.hammarstedt@
mogard.se

Ms Anna Lena Steenson
Specialpedagogiska institutet
Tel: +46-15852300
Fax: +46-15852317
Email: annalena.steenson@sit.se

Egle Ohman
A Regional Team for
Rehabilitation for People with
Deafblindness
Tel: +4631999970
Fax: +4631999974
Email: dovblindteamet@vgregion.se
egle.ohman@vgregion.se

SWITZERLAND

Barbara Bettenman
Schweizerische Stiftung für
Taubblinde, Heim Tanne
Tel: +41 - 1 - 714 71 00
Fax: +41 - 1 - 714 71 10
Email: barbara.bettenmann
@tanne.ch

Catherine Woodtli
SZB Taubblinden- und
Hörsehbehinderten-Beratung
(Rehabilitation)
Tel: +41 (0) 41 228 62 23
Fax: +41 (0) 41 228 62 25
Email: szb.tbl-cw@zugernet.ch

UNITED KINGDOM

Kate Lockett
Sense East
Tel: 01778 - 344921
Fax: 01778 - 380078
Email: kate.lockett@sense.org.uk

Alan Avis
Sense South East
Tel: +44 208541 1147
Fax: +44 020 8541 1132
Email: alan.avis@sense.org.uk

VENEZUELA

Maria Luz Neri de Troconis
SOCIEVEN, Sordociegos de
Venezuela, Asociacion Civil
Tel: +58 212 9911037
Fax: +58 212 9911725
Email: socieven@socieven.org
maluzneri@socieven.org

Honorary Officers

President

William Green
Lega del Filo D'Oro
Via Montecerno 1
60027 Osimo (AN)
ITALY
Tel: +39 -071 - 72451
Fax: +39 - 071 - 717102
Email: green.lfo@usa.net

Vice-Presidents

Bernadette Kappen
Overbrook School for the Blind
6333 Malvern Avenue
Philadelphia
PA 19151
USA
Tel: +1 - 215 - 877 0313
Fax: +1 - 215 - 877 2466
Email: bmk@obs.org

Graciela Ferioli
Hilton Perkins
Independencia 376
Planta Baja Apto. 'D'
5000 Cordoba
ARGENTINA
Tel: +54 - 351 - 423 4741
Fax: +54 - 351 - 423 4741
perkins@ciudad.com.ar

Secretary

Richard Hawkes
Sense International
11 - 13 Clifton Terrace
Finsbury Park
London N4 3SR, UK
Tel: +44 - 20 - 7272 2881
Fax: +44 - 20 - 7272 6012
Email: richard.hawkes
@senseinternational.org.uk

Treasurer

Ton Visser
Viataal
Theerestraat 42
5271 GD Sint-Michielsgestel
The Netherlands
Tel: +31 - 73 - 55 88 280
Fax: +31 - 73 - 55 88 239
Email: A.Visser@viataal.nl

Finance Office:

Viataal

Information Officer:

Eileen Boothroyd, Sense
Email: eileen.boothroyd
@sense.org.uk

Large Corporate Members

FRANCE

Jean-Marc Cluet
French Deafblind Consortium
Tel: +33 - 1 - 4627 4810
Fax: +33 - 1 - 4627 5931
Email: a.n.p.s.a@wanadoo.fr

GERMANY

Wolfgang Angermann
German Deafblind Consortium
Tel: +49 - 511 - 510080
Fax: +49 - 511 - 5100857
Email: w.angermann@taubblin
denwerk.de

Silke Heilmann
Christoffel-Blindenmission
Tel: +49 - 6251 - 131 247
Fax: +49 - 6251 - 131 165
Email: silke.heilmann@cbm-i.org

ITALY

Rossano Bartoli
Lega del Filo d'Oro
Tel: +39 - 071 - 72451
Fax: +39 - 071 - 717102
Email: info@legadelfilodoro.it

NETHERLANDS

Ton Visser
Viataal
Tel: +31 - 73 - 55 88 111
Fax: +31 - 73 - 55 88 994
Email: A.Visser@viataal.nl

PORTUGAL

Antonio Rebelo
Casa Pia de Lisboa
Tel: +351 - 1 - 361 6650
Fax: +351 - 1 - 363 34 48
Email: rebelo.a@mail.telepac.pt

SCOTLAND

Gillian Morbey
Sense Scotland
Tel: +0141-564-2444
Fax: +0141-564-2443
Email: gmorbey@sensescotland.
org.uk

SPAIN

Daniel Alvarez Reyes
ONCE
Tel: +34 - 91-353 5637
Fax: +34 - 91-350 7972
Email: asesorci@once.es

SWEDEN

Sergei Sorokin
Resurcenter Mo Gard
Tel: +46 - 122 - 23600
Fax: +46 - 122 - 23690
Email: sergei.sorokin@mogard.se

UK

Tony Best
Sense
Tel: +44 - 20 - 7272 7774
Fax: +44 - 20 - 7272 6012
Email: tony.best@sense.org.uk

USA

Barbara Mason
Perkins School for the Blind
Tel: +1 - 617 - 972 7502
Fax: +1 - 617 - 972 7354
Email: Barbara.Mason@Perkins.
org

Bernadette Kappen
Overbrook School for the Blind
Tel: +1 - 215 - 877 0313
Fax: +1 - 215 - 877 2466
Email: bmk@obs.org

Networks

Acquired Deafblindness Network

c/o Ges Roulstone
Sense East Regional Centre
72, Church Street, Market
Deeping
Peterborough, Lincolnshire,
PE68AL
Tel: +01778-344-921
Fax: +01778-380-078
Email: ges.roulstone@sense.org.uk

CHARGE Network

C/o David Brown
California Deafblind Services
San Francisco State University
1600 Holloway Avenue
San Francisco, CA94132-4201,
USA
Tel: +1-415-239-8089
Fax: +1-415-239-0106
Email: davidb@sfsu.edu

Communication Network

c/o Jacques Souriau
CRESAM
La Rivardiere
82 rue de la Longerolle
86440 Migne-Auxelles
France
Tel: +33 - 5 - 49 43 80 50
Fax: +33 - 5 - 49 43 80 51
Email: Jacques.souriau@cresam.org
Centre.res@cresam.org

Congenital Deafblindness in Adults Network

c/o Dominique Spriet
30 Rue Barbes
F-93600 Aulnay/Bois
France
Tel: +33 - 1 - 48 69 68 64
Fax: +33 - 1 - 48 69 68 64
Email: spriet.dominique@
wanadoo.fr

EDbN

C/o Ricard Lopez
APSOCECAT & APASCIIDE
C/ Almeria, 31 ATIC
ESP-08014, Barcelona, Spain
Tel: +34-678-712-619
Fax: +34-678-782-600
Email: rlopez@sordocguera.com

Employment Network

C/o Seija Troyano
Email: seija.troyano@dnainternet.net

Interpreting Development Network

C/o Mirjam Leusink
Email: mirjam.leusink@planet.nl

Nordic Culture Network

C/o Lone Poggioni
Via G. Deledda, 19
06074 Ellera (PG)
Italy
Telefax: 0039 075 5179 413
Email: esbjerg@aliceposta.it

Multiply Disabled Visually Impaired European Network

c/o Kent Lundkvist
Ekeskolan Resource Centre
Box 9024, S-70009, Orebro
Sweden
Tel: +46 - 19 - 6762 151
Fax: +46 - 19 - 6762 210
Email: kent.lundkvist@sit.se

Tactile Communication Working Group

C/o Bernadette van den Tillart
15175 Prairie Road
South Solon
OH 43153
USA
Telefax: +1-740-426-6728
Email: bernadettevanden
tillaart@tiscalmail.nl

Siblings Network

Sabine Kersten
Koningsbeemdstraat 3
Lommel B 3920
Belgium
Tel/Fax: +32 11 53 35 93
Email: siblingsnetwork@gmx.net;
Sabine_Kersten@hotmail.com

Staff Development Network

C/O Pilar Gomez
ONCE
Email: asesorci@once.es

Usher Network

C/O Carol Brill Doran
11-13 Clifton Terrace,
Finsbury Park
London N43SR
Tel: 02072727774
Fax: 02072726012
Email: ushernetwork.kiercom.net

Usher Syndrome Study Group (USSG)

c/o Mary Guest
Sense
11 - 13 Clifton Terrace
London N4 3SR
UK
Tel: +44 - 20 - 7272 7774
Fax: +44 - 20 - 7272 6012
Email: mary.guest@sense.org.uk