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Communication and seduction

Bernard Mandeville, a Dutch doctor and philosopher who lived from 1670 to 1733, said: 'Man is an animal – and not just any animal, but a headstrong animal, the most stubborn of them all. This man-animal is so pigheaded that no amount of force will subdue him. You need a much more powerful weapon – the one we call 'flattery'.

1. Introduction

My name is George Kabel. Since birth I have only had partial hearing. As an adolescent, my sight slowly began to deteriorate and by the time I was thirty I was blind. All caused by Usher's Syndrome. I had studied electrical engineering and was working as a researcher for an electronics group. As my sight got worse I wasn't able to continue in the job. After rehabilitation – where I learnt braille and ADL skills and how to use along cane – I worked in a personnel department for a few years. But when the company underwent a radical reorganisation and rationalisation, I lost my job for good. When I wasn't able to find another job, I went in search of new and meaningful alternatives. xx

I decided to study philosophy. Six-and-a-bit years later I successfully completed my course. While I was studying I had been doing voluntary work with different associations and I carried this on after graduation. It was at this time that I also discovered sculpture, which became a really important thing to me.

I also had the opportunity to develop and look after philosophy courses for rehabilitation centres and adult education centres.

2. What is communication?

Man is a social animal. His fundamental need is to make contact with others and to do that he communicates with them.

What does communication mean? The word 'communication' derived from the Latin word 'communicare', means to inform someone about something or to make something common. This can occur at both the verbal level of the spoken or written word and at the non-verbal level of physical expression.

There are also other levels on which something can be made known. One example is art, which aims to appeal to the public's aesthetic sense.

Communication can also take place at the level of actions. Someone who has a role to play and takes action also communicates something to those around him. He shows what he is doing, what he is, and what he is capable of doing. He tells us, so to speak, something about himself through his actions.

Demonstrating capabilities and talents in an artistic way, and the responses they generate, is communication of a kind that raises a person above the daily routine.

### 3. Communication and handicap

People with limited sight and hearing are regarded by doctors, health care workers, family members and friends as seriously handicapped. This way of seeing can lead to a very one-sided form of communication. The deafblind person has a particular meaning or truth imposed on him, which he accepts more or less automatically. The risk with this 'truth' is that the handicap will be embedded as a feature of a person's identity.

Some people with a visual/auditory handicap seem to be captive to a pattern of restrictions, treatment, supervision, preconceptions and expectations that are all based on notions of handicap and incapacity. In extreme cases, this imposed, limited identity leaves them feeling no longer involved. They feel empty, have no self-image any more and no longer have control over their own lives. They are in a film in which they have no role. They have lost any sense of being able to shape their lives – their personal development, their education, their work, their recreation – according to their own convictions.

Michel Foucault, a French philosopher, would reject this kind of lop-sided identity. He calls on people not to limit themselves to a single identity set in concrete. There is nothing that says you *must* conform to all kinds of unwritten rules that attach to a fixed identity. Quite the opposite: you should continually frustrate the patterns of expectation that a particular identity implies.

People who will not or cannot accept an imposed identity go in search of themselves. And what they are ultimately looking for is what differentiates them from everyone else – that which is distinctly individual or unique. And at the same time they feel the desire to let others know about it too.

### 4. My way of communicating through activities

To escape a lop-sided identity imposed by the outside world, you will have to seek out your own unique qualities and orchestrate them. This is the beginning of mutual communication at a level beyond language.

It becomes mutual when you externalise something of yourself, in this case not by stringing words together but by doing.

My choice was the path of the philosophy of the art of living and of seduction. The art of living calls on you to make of your life a work of art. A life as a work of art has a seductive effect on others. A life that is beautiful and magnificent is seen, wins

admiration and draws attention. And that can be the beginning of sharing with others.

When I lost my job, I asked myself what I really wanted now, what I thought was important, what my capabilities and talents were, where the opportunities lay, and what I was going to do. I threw down the gauntlet to myself and decided to study again and to try out new, unfamiliar activities. The eventual result was a university course in philosophy and sculpture under my belt.

These activities only really turned into communication once I had the chance to teach philosophy courses and exhibit my sculptures. This is me flirting, as it were, with those around me. I try to get other people interested in what I believe is important. In these forms of expression I lay myself open and hope to be able to connect with other people in a meaningful way. And when that happens, I feel involved in the community.

## 5. Philosophy of the art of living in the care of deafblind people

Not everyone will be able, on their own, to reach the state of self-reflection and self-discovery required to be in a position to shape their life and identity. In that case, health care (or social) workers could encourage and inspire their clients to self-reflection. But I think this happens all too infrequently in practice.

Anyone who becomes disabled is usually involved with the medical system first. The business of then looking for, being measured up for and becoming skilled in the use of adaptations and aids generally comes under rehabilitation. In both cases, treatment and procedures are usually based on medical or ergonomic theory and practice. People try to find happiness again by minimising the symptoms and functional impairment at the sensory/physical level as far as possible and optimising the capacity they still have.

In parallel with this is the question of coming to terms psychologically and mentally with the handicap. Sometimes with the help of health care workers or psychologists and sometimes without, the handicapped person tries to deal with the functional impairment they now have, to go through a grieving process or emerge from a state of depression. Psychological practice and theory can help with this. People try to find happiness again by conquering everything that has come to stand in the way of a healthy mental life.

The kinds of questions about the meaning of life that a recently handicapped person now has fall outside the scope of medical, ergonomic and psychological practice or rehabilitation and health care.

These vital, life-and-death questions are in the realm of giving meaning to existence and the art of living. Here people try to find answers to questions about the meaning of life with a handicap, what constitutes happiness, personal identity, making decisions, new values and giving shape and direction to their lives again.

The search here is not based on particular insights or theories, as is usually the case in medical, ergonomic and psychological practice, but on looking for insights and theories – still possibly vague or obscure – that are more in keeping with a changed life and charting your own course.

People try to find happiness through contemplation and by actively designing an ethical/aesthetic approach to life. Broadening your perspective encourages creative

thinking and increases problem-solving capacity and therefore freedom as well.

At the moment, rehabilitation centres generally focus on the medical, ergonomic and psychological aspects of the handicapped person's rehabilitation process.

Experience shows that those who are in, or have gone through, rehabilitation also need help to reflect on their lives. A course in practical philosophy can fulfil this need.

## 6. Conclusion

I began this paper (presentaion) with a quotation from Mandeville about using flattery as a weapon. I, on the other hand, have opted for the path of seduction.

The person who wants to shape his life and identity himself – who tries to create something special, to make of his life a work of art – stands out in society. He attracts people's attention, arouses feelings – in short, he seduces in an open, honest way. And that is where healthy communication begins.