

Communication as Cure Communicative Agency in Persons with Congenital Deafblindness

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to expand on the notion of communication as cure, which relies on the other taking the position of an acknowledging and trusted partner within a symbolic, communicative 'Ego-Alter' relationship. The topic and perspective is inspired by publications and lectures on dialogism by Ivana Marková and Per Linell, in particular by the books *Dialogicality and Social Representations: The Dynamics of Mind* (Marková, 2003, 2005) and *Rethinking Language, Mind and World Dialogically* (Linell, 2009). The article focuses on the role of a communicative partner who takes up the position of a listener-follower of the other's utterance. This position can be contrasted with the monological position of the message-decoder and is not directly related to intersubjectivity but to supporting a person in expressing his/her subjectivity. The position can be likened to that taken by therapists in psychotherapy (e.g. Yalom, 2006). The article considers how the acknowledgement of the other's utterance by the listener-follower realizes the embodied and bodily symbolic expressivity as the proper voice of persons with congenital deafblindness. The article illustrates this point with reference to images of the symbolic expressivity of the body in paintings and sculptural art. Underlying the argument is the idea that it is more relevant to think about the proper voice and nature of communication with people with congenital deafblindness in terms of a manner of *being* rather than *having*, as understood by Merleau-Ponty (1962).

Keywords

Communication, dialogicality, intersubjectivity, agency, congenital deafblindness, voice, embodiment, gestures.

Introduction

The topic and perspective of this paper are inspired by a keynote lecture on dialogicality by Ivana Marková (2008), in which she starts out by reminding us that communication can be a cure: 'A human being can be a cure for another human being by offering a hand, attention, concern and communication' (Marková, 2008, p. 12). Marková continues by pointing to a possible problem in focusing one-sidedly on striving for mutual understanding (or striving for intersubjectivity). She argues that communication, from the point of view of dialogical theory, involves a tension between opposing tendencies. Striving towards mutual understanding is oriented in one direction, while striving towards agency moves in the opposite direction, with the subject striving towards a unique position and a search for recognition.

Marková creates a conceptual link between two fields: the field of communication intervention and the field of therapy (cure), from which emerges a new meaning potential: communication as cure. This new horizon of 'communication as cure' may allow for a specification of concepts that can be used to address the psychological level in planned communication intervention, for example, in the field of congenital deafblindness. The fundamental dialogical processes that characterize human communication may reveal their prototypical features in persons with congenital deafblindness better than in less problematic kinds of communication. Not surprisingly, the communicative processes of persons with congenital deafblindness are slow and concrete. The sociologist Thomas Luckmann has commented that the communication of persons with congenital deafblindness is interesting for the phenomenology of human communication because it is stripped of culture-specific communicative conventions. But we should add that at the same time it brings out dialogical characteristics that normally are not noticed in unproblematic communication.

This article pursues this phenomenological perspective. Its purpose is to start developing a theoretically informed conceptual perspective that can enhance clinical work with communication intervention, and at the same time can guide research to pave the way for empirical investigations in the form of analytical encounters with exemplary cases. The communicative practices that are co-created with persons with congenital deafblindness will presumably contribute to make dialogicality more transparent by focusing the other-directedness of the human mind.

Let us start with the assumption that some persons with congenital deafblindness (congenital deafblindness) can give us the impression that they feel able and free to express what they are thinking about, even if their skills in formal language are very weak (e.g. Ask Larsen, 2003; Vege, Bjartvik, & Nafstad, 2007; Nafstad and Rodbroe 2013). Persons with congenital deafblindness live with the risk that when speaking from their heart and mind through unique creative tactile gestures they may not, in general, be well understood. Let us

return to our focus on communication in accord with dialogical theory in terms of opposites of striving towards subjectivity and towards intersubjectivity. In relation to impressions of spontaneous expressiveness in some persons with congenital deafblindness it is meaningful to introduce the concept of resilience. This will enable us to move towards a new understanding of communicative agency.

'Resilience' implies the ability to encounter hardship with strength, and is thus a health-bringing (salutogenic) factor that is built up by stimulating inner resources (Borge, 2003). It makes sense to connect the salutogenic perspective and dialogical theory to address the following question: How is it possible that some persons with congenital deafblindness can demonstrate resilient communicative agency in spite of the hardships they encounter all the time with regard to shared understanding in communication? This issue will be developed further in this paper.

The Listening Other

Let us presuppose that communication is motivated by the tension between striving towards subjectivity and towards intersubjectivity (Marková, 2008; Marková, 2003, 2005). We can then conceptualize a sense of communicative agency as the participants' ability to endure this tension which moves them in different directions: towards the other and towards one's own self. Participants always communicate about something and therefore, from the point of view of dialogical theory, they and that 'something' are involved in a triadic relation the Ego-Alter-Object. This also means that when it comes to acquiring knowledge, the participants are engaged in co-authoring of shared knowledge (shared meaning) about the world (Markova 2003,2005). However, there will be no real shared meaning or shared knowledge co-created unless both participants move towards the other with their respective subjectivities. We may conceptualize subjectivities further through the notion of the individual 'voice'. According to Per Linell, Bertau (2007) conceptualizes an individual's voice as having three important dimensions: '(a) material and physical embodiment, (b) personal signature, and (c) perspectives on topics and issues' (Linell, 2009, p. 114). Linell (2009) further explains how 'embodiment' concerns language as lived; that is, as it lives in terms of the qualities of its material voice, and how 'signature' is related to 'addressivity' and 'authenticity'. 'Perspectives' concern the idea that a voice not only expresses the perspectives and positions of a particular person in the here-and-now, but also expresses the perspectives and positions of others, and of the self in other times and places. There can be tension and conflict between the different voices of the self in a certain moment, or a struggle for power between the participants in the dialogue, for example, when one participant takes all initiatives in the dialogue depriving the other one of this possibility (e.g. Rommetveit, 2007).

In terms of dialogical theory, a subject's sense of communicative agency cannot be reduced to a particular kind of communication skill observable in a specific situation, and particularly not to some kind of independence from other people. Communicative agency should rather be understood (Markova, 2003, 2005) as an interaction between possible and actual perspectives and positions taken in the Ego-Alter relationship. The tension between the present, past and possible future can be experienced as something missing and therefore as something being hoped for in the here-and-now. Hope is maintained as long as the subject perceives that there are more possibilities than what is actualized in a certain moment. Hope is at risk of collapsing when the perceived possibilities are reduced to momentary actualities.

Persons with congenital deafblindness are likely to 'live' through a lot of situations where they do not feel they are being listened to. However, they will still need to trust, believe and hope that the actual other will listen. Thus, at this point, the term 'cure' can point towards hope, trust and belief in communicative possibilities rather than towards predictable actualities. Accordingly, a person with congenital deafblindness will presumably perceive a communicative encounter as a conversational space with certain possibilities. On the psychological plane these possibilities can be understood as related to different self-other positions that may be actualized there and then. One possibility is that the person with congenital deafblindness might be given a position where he/she is listened to by the actually present other so that a sense of mental co-presence can build up in the here and now (Vege, 2009). Trusting that one is listened to by the other as a possibility is not the same as predicting it, and not the same as expecting the other person to engage with the self in a mutual striving towards shared understanding. Linell (2009) claims: 'It is in the context of discourse, interaction and intersubjectivity that trust comes alive' (Linell, 2009, p. 23).

Thus, we can conceive of the kind of trust which is activated in conversational relationships as an inner resource. Trust as an inner resource builds on the dialogical sense of self acquired through significant relationships with others but it does not mean that trust as an inner resource would require trust in every actual other.

Within a conversational sequence participants do not talk and/or listen all the time, they also engage in moments of thinking. Let us assume that a sense of freedom, in a very fundamental sense, is related to speaking one's mind: one can present oneself as a thinker and subsequently, one can take the position of a speaker. In certain moments, the communicative striving by two partners may clash. One partner may at a certain moment be striving towards orienting, clarifying and eventually formulating his/her own position for herself, and thereby engage in thinking. The other person may at the same time engage in striving towards shared understanding.

A person with congenital deafblindness may, for example, introduce a topic into a conversational space by taking the temporary dialogical position of a thinker. This position is indicated when the person does not direct her gestures to an actually present other but to

herself. This temporary directing of attention towards herself may indicate she is engaging in making sense of her circumstances and of her position and point of view within that position (Nafstad in progress; Nafstad & Rødbrøe, 2013). At that moment the partner needs to acknowledge, respect and trust the cognitive agency of the person with congenital deafblindness. 'Cognitive agency' means here the person's engagement in thinking, i.e. in making sense of, or positioning herself within the space of the here and now. In the following moment, the person with congenital deafblindness may want subsequently to make known to the actual other some aspects of what she is thinking about, her perspective and position. She may accordingly be ready to take the position of the speaker in an external dialogue, requiring the partner to shift to the position of the listener or follower in relation to her utterance. Moreover, a person with congenital deafblindness may need this partner to follow and listen as closely as possible in order to be able to co-author the utterance.

However, co-authoring is not possible if the partner engages in some kind of guesswork. This may occur if the partner is not able to sustain the position of the follower-listener long enough and if too much asymmetry develops in the relationship. In other words, the partner may drift into an overly asymmetrical role or take the position of a more competent language user, engaging in the guesswork of decoding what appear as vaguely expressed messages (Nafstad & Vonen, 2000). This positioning of the other in the role of decoder stands in contrast to that of a listener-follower. In terms of dialogical theory, the role of the message-decoder is a monological position (e.g. Linell, 2009). A partner who is a more competent language user might quite intuitively take this monological position and start to decode the message of the deafblind speaker, however opaque he/she perceives the cues to be. We can assume that this happens because the partner attempts to engage in a mutual striving towards shared understanding or intersubjectivity. The person with congenital deafblindness may resist by increasing the tension between her striving towards subjectivity and the partner's striving towards intersubjectivity.

If, in contrast, the partner recognizes the initial concern of the person with congenital deafblindness to think or make sense of the situation, the partner will be more prepared to take and maintain an open listening and following position. On this basis, the partner might progressively engage in the co-authorship of an utterance originating in the thinking of the person with congenital deafblindness and with his/her voice. In this case, the utterances originate in and communicate about a unique position, the person's own experiential perspective within his/her lived experience (for example, that of a self as a tactile explorer engaging with an object in the external world, such as a crab, see Vege et al., 2007 and further below). The acknowledging, active and open listening attitude that is required may, however, require a great deal of effort by a sighted and hearing partner. Thus, the urge to project a specific meaning onto the utterance must be carefully monitored by seeing and hearing partners.

The striving towards agency is understood here in general terms as an aspect of the subject's striving towards the sense of self. By studying videotaped interaction between a person with congenital deafblindness and a partner on the micro-level and in slow motion, the dialogical processes become apparent, as the person with congenital deafblindness can be seen to be active in regulating the distance to the actual other in a conversational space. The person with congenital deafblindness may take a position where she engages in clarifying and formulating the perspective occupying her temporary attention in relation to a third element, that is, an element in the world for herself, as indicated in addressing a gesture to herself. Accordingly, she may temporarily, and in a concrete manner using manual or bodily gestures, turn away from the other or push the other from a central position of speaking/co-speaking or listening into a more peripheral position of communicative availability.

The iconic gestural push or temporary turning away from the actual other indicates that the subject with congenital deafblindness is taking the temporary dialogical position of a thinker. Thus, such moments of pushing or turning away from the other within a conversational space are indications of communicative agency; the ability to act in accordance with the need to connect talking to thinking (Nafstad in progress). The gesture of pushing somebody away from oneself may be a very fundamental creative gesture by the person with congenital deafblindness (e.g. Ask Larsen & Nafstad, 2006), and rich with potential meaning. Partners should be aware that this gesture may express the need to create a space and a moment for oneself, in which one is free to think or make sense of one's situated circumstance for oneself at a certain moment, before continuing the external dialogue; talking and listening together.

Acknowledging the Subjectivity of the Other

At any moment, a dialogical participant might be primarily engaged in clarifying and formulating his/her own position and perspective, and this needs to be recognized by the actual other. In such a moment the subject will not strive towards mutual understanding. The sculpture of the angry little boy by Gustav Vigeland (Figure 1), 'Sinnataggen', may be Norway's most cherished one.

Figure 1: Sinnataggen, Sculpture by Gustav Vigeland.

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The sculpture 'Sinnataggen' can be considered to be a metaphor of the national sense of the self, understood as having the right to create a space for oneself; a space from which one can protest. A dialogical space, in the sense of an other-directed mind (Marková, 2003, 2005), is implicit in the sculptured utterance: a protest is other-directed and requires something or somebody to protest against, often against somebody else's intention.

The striving towards agency is understood as emerging from the experience of being able to create space for oneself within a dialogical space, sometimes with effort. Within that space-for-self, the subject may, in an undisturbed manner, strive towards an orientation within and formulation of his/her situated circumstances for his/ her own self. This space is required before one can move into a dialogical position that is oriented towards the actual other. In this position one may engage in the process of formulating a positioned and perspectival point of view that can be noted, heard, followed, recognized and hopefully respected. The search for intersubjectivity is understood as a mutual striving for reciprocity of positions and perspectives of temporary attention of both participants in relation to each other and their shared social world. To respect another person's point of view, attempting to listen and comprehend the other is not the same as sharing the same perspective.

Ivana Markova's critique of a biased focus on the striving towards mutual understanding in the field of communication intervention (Marková, 2008) makes sense in relation to current intervention practices within the field of congenital deafblindness. The metaphor of 'negotiation' occurs in several contemporary works within the field (Nafstad & Rødbrøe, 1999; Daelman, Nafstad, Rødbrøe, Souriau, & Visser, 1999; Nafstad & Vonen 2000; Rieber-Mohn, 2008). However, in social practices the metaphor of negotiation could be one-sided if it celebrates only a striving towards mutual understanding and intersubjectivity.

Just as in a peace negotiation process or a friendship, the result of negotiating a mutual understanding may not be valued equally by both sides, with the voice of the lived

perspective and position of one of the parties remaining unrecognized by the other, even suppressed, and at worst neglected. In summary, the concept of communicative agency needs to be developed further if planned communication interventions are to be in accordance with dialogical theory and its characteristic focus on the dynamic tension between opposing forces. Furthermore, it is essential to avoid a monological conception of agency, conceived as a form of independence from other subjects and other minds, and of communication as a process involving one subject decoding a coded message from the other.

Communicative Agency

I have earlier conceptualized communicative agency as the participants' ability to endure tension which moves them in different directions: towards the other and towards one's own self. I am developing the concept of communicative agency in order to apply it to the domain of communicative relationship that both participants experience; in other words it is fundamental to the psychology of communication. More specifically, the concept of communicative agency is developed here to emphasize the notion of 'dignity' in such communicative relationships. The dimension of dignity arises with the grounding of the concept of communicative agency in dialogical theory, because it advocates a sense of self as one worthy of being listened to by the other (generalized other). The dignifying attitude required of the partner can be likened to that in healing therapeutic conversations: the supportive attitude of the therapist is what patients tend to remember years after, rather than the details of the insights or the interpretations of the analyst (Yalom, 2006, p. 13). When applied to communicative relationships between a sighted and hearing partners and a person with congenital deafblindness, we may understand this as a central issue related to other-directedness. The listener-follower position taken by the sighted and hearing partner will in other words dignify the thinking and speaking positions taken by the person with congenital deafblindness.

It will be psychologically important for the person with congenital deafblindness to develop a resilient form of communicative agency. A resilient self emerges as the subject learns through experience that she can cope with barriers, opposition and resistance. A person with a resilient form of communicative agency will be able to maintain his/her engagement in actual dialogue in face-to-face situations despite having little language in terms of the prevalent cultural-linguistic practice and in spite of many and frequent misunderstandings. Communicative agency develops and is strengthened as the self endures and can sustain the tension that comes from perceived differences in mental focus between the self and other. Such characteristics of resilient communicative agency in persons with congenital deafblindness are supported by empirical analyses (Ask Larsen, 2003; Nafstad in progress).

Accordingly, a person with congenital deafblindness who is resilient may endure many failed attempts on the part of the other to coordinate mental focus. At the same time, a person's strife to achieve agency will not succeed if he/she does not perceive intention on the part of the partner to acknowledge the person's subjectivity. A basic prerequisite for the development of communicative agency is the self's perception of willingness of the other to take the position of a follower in relation to self. Another prerequisite is the experience that actual others do not always take this attitude but that the self is able to live through such hardship.

Trusting the Listening Attitude of the Other

A considerable degree of attentive other-directed listening will be required from partners across the whole spectrum of circumstances affected by congenital deafblindness. Marková (2008) asks how 'trust' can make sense in relation to communication and congenital deafblindness, and this leads us to consider how trust is related to the listening attitude of the other. Trust implies the belief that the other's listening attitude to the self will be sustained in spite of barriers created by different mental foci and unpredictability with regard to realized meaning.

In daily life, the person with congenital deafblindness will live with many others and may feel that they do not relate to him/her as someone who is worthy of being listened to. This would have a negative and often a depressing psychological effect. We can refer here to the notion of 'inner listening alter'. The notion of 'Inner Alter' is borrowed from Marková (2006) and is understood to refer to the different positions that the voices of an internal generalized other can take in inner dialogue and that thus affects the sense of self on the inner plane. It is thus psychologically significant that one of the positions of the voice of the Inner Alter be the dignifying voice of The Listening Other. The strife for communicative agency on the part of a person with congenital deafblindness will presumably guide the shared effort to achieve intersubjectivity. In other words, the person with congenital deafblindness is likely to be first and foremost interested in maintaining the listening attitude of the other to self, and this can entail a state of considerable tension.

Dignity and a Sense of Agency

As mentioned above, the concept of communicative agency developed here refers to a sense of self that is relationally charged with dignity. Dignity concerns embodied pride, that is, a feeling deeply entrenched in the dialogical experience of feeling oneself acknowledged by the other, as worthy of the attention of the other and being uplifted by it. Moreover, the feeling of embodied pride is also grounded in the experience of the tension that comes from

feeling differences in perspectives and points of view. A sense of agency will grow as a person learns to reduce such tension through experience, for example by moving the other's direction of attention to be in accord with that of the self. In the domain of basic psychological experience, the sense of a dignified relational self is grounded in the experience of reciprocal affection: the sense of self as lovable is a consequence of having embodied and deep traces of feeling lovable in the eyes of the other.

Figure 2. Sculpture by Gustav Vigeland.

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The transactions that matter are captured in a mother-child sculpture by Gustav Vigeland (Figure 2). This work of art can be interpreted as portraying how the concept of a dignified lovable self originates in a bodily emotional form of transactional experience. In the sculpture, the baby is positioned face-to-face, where he can see and feel himself reflected in the eyes of the (m)other, as one worthy of being held before her eyes, as well as being uplifted by her. The experience of feeling oneself reflected in the eye of the mother presumably uplifts the boy's feeling attention of his mother. This may explain why a person with congenital deafblindness who is a vulnerable communicator from a cultural-linguistic point of view may develop a resilient sense of communicative agency.

Listening as Following

To take a listening attitude means to communicate to the other that you are making a serious and sustained effort to follow the other's utterances to wherever he/she points within the landscape of the mind. The famous smile in Leonardo Da Vinci's painting of Mona Lisa may serve as an example (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Painting by Leonardo Da Vinci.

Copyright photo by Tommy A. Våge.



It is well known that Mona Lisa's smile is of the mysterious kind. We believe Mona Lisa is smiling about something that she is thinking about, but we do not know what it is. We may encounter a totally deafblind person smiling to herself in the same manner, in the sense that to 'whom' the smile is directed is not explicitly apparent to an observer of the situation (as in the painting). What the smile is about remains hidden to the observer, contained within the temporary psychological context of the smiling person.

Let us imagine that we are physically standing before the actual painting of Mona Lisa in the Louvre museum. The physical fact of being located in the Louvre may temporarily fade into the background as we attempt to imagine a scenario for ourselves which overlaps in certain respects with that of Mona Lisa. This transformation of what we see happens as we are drawn into the painting and find ourselves affected by her smile. The smile may direct our curious and imaginative attention further, into deeper layers beyond the painted scene, into Mona Lisa's subjective imaginative space. At that point the follower of her smile will wonder what she is thinking about, which of course is the secret of the painting. This is what captures our attention, transforming our role from an onlooker into a co-author of the possible temporary content of her inner landscape.

The fact that Da Vinci did not leave many clues creates a tension that captures the audience. The painter did, however, leave some clues. The background has been made to recede and the mysterious smile very much placed in the foreground, thereby 'scaffolding' the dialogical encounter with all future viewers. The encounter with Mona Lisa remains an unfinished story, the encounter between the viewer and the painting becomes a dialogical encounter as it creates tension, which in turn attracts the participation of the viewer in the co-

authorship of the full story. From our position as a viewer we are tempted to think about what she may be thinking about; that is, to imagine a potential mental object for Mona Lisa. It is in this manner that the communicative context becomes dialogical and triadic: the first position in the dialogical triad is occupied by the smiling Mona Lisa, who comes to life in the encounter with the viewer through his/her dialogical imaginative and projecting eyes. When affected by her smile, the viewer takes the position of the second person in the triad, that is, the imagined position of a partner to Mona Lisa within an imagined shared communicative space.

Within that space, the partner follows the direction of Mona Lisa's attention through the third component in the triad; the smile that crystallizes from the face and the background, which for the viewer becomes a sign pointing into her inner landscape. Through imaginative projection, the viewer tries to reciprocate the subjective position of Mona Lisa. Within that imaginative projected space, the partner participates in the co-creation of the mental object which is the subject of her smile; that is, the viewer engages in imagining what her smile is directed at and thus what it is about. What Mona Lisa might contemplate is an implied object, created by the dynamics of the triadic relationship. From a dialogical theoretical point of view, Da Vinci did not paint a certain secret meaning into Mona Lisa's smile which the onlooker is supposed to decipher like a code. The meaning of the smile is not already in the painting; it is co-created by each observer affected by Mona Lisa's smile. Most importantly, the unit that creates this knowledge about the smile is triangular. The knowledge or the meaning is not created by the artist or by the observer. In any particular situation the meaning of a work of art arises from a communicative encounter between the affected observer and the work of art in that specific situation.

As mentioned above, Marková (2008) emphasizes that from the point of view of dialogical theory it is the triangular relationship between Ego-Alter-Object that co-produces and co-creates knowledge about objects, and therefore co-creates objects as social realities. This activity, the communicative dialogical making of realities by the Ego-Alter-Object triangle (cf. Marková, 2003, 2005), does not require the physical presence of two actual subjects. One of the essential features of the dialogical mind is imagination. Therefore, Mona Lisa could come to life in the eyes of the viewer/perceiver through her smile. Thus the triad would be formed by the Ego (the viewer/perceiver)-Alter (the viewer/perceiver's imagination of the meaning of the smile; or we could say an inner conversation) -Object (Mona Lisa's smile). In the same manner an opaque gesture, a contour, a creative expression made by a person with congenital deafblindness comes to life as an other-directed and referential sign in the eyes of the partner/perceiver. Therefore, the partner/perceiver may interpret and relate to the gesture made by a person with congenital deafblindness as an other-directed referential sign, that is, as a voice of a person with deafblindness. The effect on the person with congenital deafblindness can be highly uplifting even if the participants do

not go on to co-author or negotiate the specific meaning of that gesture.

This perspective does not make Mona Lisa's smile or the gesture by the person with congenital deafblindness initially meaningless, as the smile and the gesture cannot simply take on any meaning. The smile and the gesture are not formless, and these forms constrain what can be meant. However, there is more openness, as more than one possible meaning can be co-created depending on the context. This is the kind of situation that has attracted some attention in deafblind intervention in recent years, with partners attempting to take and maintain the position of a follower of signs, signs that to begin with can be mysterious or opaque, like a fleeting version of Mona Lisa's smile, directed at no one in particular.

One may sometimes notice persons with congenital deafblindness smiling momentarily, sometimes this is barely noticeable, but it has been captured on video. This occurred when a woman with congenital deafblindness appeared to think about a scenario while on a pier engaging with a crab (in the video 'TRACES', Vege et al., 2007). A partner's perception of such a smile may trigger their curiosity to delve into the mental landscape of the smiling person. Taking the position of the 'follower' of such smiles implies the possibility of talking to persons with congenital deafblindness about the temporary foregrounded content of their inner landscapes; in other words, about what they are thinking about (cf. e.g. Vege et al., 2007). It is presumably the perception of another person's intention to delve further into this temporary inner landscape of the self that nourishes communicative agency of a person with congenital deafblindness.

A person with congenital deafblindness who is temporarily concerned with building up his/her sense of agency might, as mentioned above, tend to resist the efforts of their partner to engage in a mutual striving towards intersubjectivity in the here-and-now. The resistance that the person with congenital deafblindness puts up creates tension, which may take a bodily form. External motion may temporarily slow down or become frozen, the position of the thinking self may be sculptured bodily as relatively still. In other words, the bodily form may indicate a temporary thinking position, where attention is directed at the Inner Alter in an inner dialogue.

We may by contrast at other times recognize a certain conversational sequence of subsequent shifts between the temporary position of 'thinker' and that of 'speaker'. In the former case, attention is directed towards self. In the latter case, that is the position of 'speaker', tactile attention direction suggests that the person with congenital deafblindness is addressing the listening position of the other via a referential gesture or a sign, which indicates that it is the other- directed utterance what he/she was thinking about. Lastly we may recognize in bodily tactile dialogues that the person with congenital deafblindness takes a reciprocated listening position in relation to the speaking position of the other. The two people relate in tactile dialogues to each other in a mutually reciprocating manner that is mediated by the third element; a sign or a gesture which may be in the process of being

negotiated into a shared sign. The dynamic triadic shifts between attention directing positions in dialogue may come to a temporary rest in moments when intersubjectivity is achieved. When persons with Congenital Deafblindness engage in tactile dialogues with sighted and hearing partners, these triadic dialogical shifts are organized in space and the triadic dynamic structure is salient (Cf. e.g. Vege et al, 2007; Nafstad and Rødbroe 2013; Nafstad in progress).

Figure 4. Sculpture by Gustav Vigeland.

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An archetypal triangular connectedness characterizes the architecture of another sculpture by Vigeland (Figure 4). Here, the embedded triangular patterns (triangles within triangles) indicate reciprocated attention perspectives between the mother and father in relation to the child; the symbol of their loving relationship. The embedded triangular pattern onto which one may project intersubjectivity is sculptured by Vigeland as a bodily and embodied expression. The foreheads of the parents touch each other, while the face of each touches the head of the child, and at the same time they both bodily embrace it.

As an archetypal representation of the relationship between a person with congenital deafblindness and a seeing, hearing partner, the shared space of embrace of the child can be understood as the space of reciprocal conversational touch/hand positions. The touching foreheads and the physical connection of each face to the child may then be grasped as minds connected in a shared relationship to the sign. This in turn can be understood to refer to a reciprocated tactile conversational touch about the sign, with the object of the Alter-Ego-Object relationship being a material sign; that is, the symbol of their shared/sharable knowledge of the world.

Concluding Remarks

This article has used dialogical theory to develop a concept of communicative agency in relation to persons with congenital deafblindness. In terms of this theory, a person with congenital deafblindness may well develop a voice of his/her own, in terms of embodied material signatures of lived perspectives and 'positions taken', even if he/she does not possess many linguistic skills. It may even be the case that linguistic skills may suppress his/her proper voice. The notion of an antinomy between a striving towards subjectivity and a striving towards intersubjectivity seems relevant to communication intervention within the field of congenital deafblindness, and may also guide further research into fundamental dynamics of other-directedness in communication. The emphasis on agency brings to the fore the possibility that a person with congenital deafblindness may develop a dignified communicative self that makes him/her a robust and resilient participant in dialogue, even with little language in the cultural-linguistic sense, and even if the actual dialogues in his/her daily life have fragmented story lines and entail much misunderstanding.

The article took as its starting point a conceptual differentiation between being listened to and being understood, contrasting a monological with a dialogical view of language and communication. A focus on understanding and/or being understood can easily be recognized as a monological linguistic relationship, in terms of the concern of the partner to decode coded messages to the detriment of listening to the other. However, persons with congenital deafblindness tend to express what is on their mind at a certain moment in creative gestures that can be very difficult to understand. It is useful therefore to emphasize the psychological significance of a partner position that cultivates listening as following both for clinical and research purposes. We have been further inspired to explore the nature of this relationship by archetypal images of human connectedness in art.

To conclude, the notion of 'cure' has actual validity. Communication as viewed in terms of dialogical theory can help professional carers overcome the mainstream idea that it takes conventional linguistic skills to overcome the pain of the isolation that deafblindness brings about. The mainstream idea is related to our difficulty in recognizing and accepting plurality, variation and difference in relation to persons with handicaps, as Julia Kristeva (2003) reminds us in her little book written as a letter to the President of France. The notion of 'cure' might first and foremost apply to ourselves, and our own need to be more free from dominant voices within ourselves, in particular with regard to what counts as language and human communication. As professionals in the field of communication intervention and congenital deafblindness, we may well be reminded of Merleau-Ponty's (1962) idea that language concerns a manner of being rather than having.

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*An earlier version of this article in English can be found at the following link:
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