PERFORMING VISUAL EMPOWERMENT
NORWEGIAN YOUTH CULTURE, LANGUAGES AND CROSS-SENSE COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

This article highlights how deaf, hard of hearing and hearing in Norway have an ability for visual languaging, building new relations, making new social order handling the pressure of phonocentricity, establishing a peer group performing their visual identity in multiple ways. In a crossfield analysis of linguistics, medicine and anthropology, we explore how young people succeed and bridge the gap between users of spoken and signed languages. By multiple video layered recordings as part of the ethnography, we display the complexities in their languaging. Our findings point to their broad use of different knowledge fields established from an early age.

Key words: visual identity, signed and spoken languages, empowerment, multilingual and multimodal communication, peer group

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INTRODUCTION

> Not only are certain social phenomena particularly suitable for study by visual means (for example, how postures express emotions), but they are also extremely difficult to approach in any other way. Visual anthropology is therefore emerging as a different kind of anthropology, not a substitute for anthropological writing.
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> [David MacDougall 2006:268]

The youth club and research context

When we started this ethnographic-linguistic work in a youth club for deaf, hard of hearing and hearing youth in Norway, the young club participants were driving forces in a unique experiment in teaching and learning visual communicative skills. The youth clubs in Norway form an extensive system of leisure time activities for different age and interest groups of pupils from 9 – 17/18 years old, mixing social classes and sexual preferences in one group. The youth clubs offer membership to the youth where the club is located. They are to some extent different in content and leadership, depending upon the owner of the club, whether the municipality, the church or eventually an NGO, e.g. Norwegian Red Cross. Many clubs also include different youth groups with particular needs or preferences, either for activities or for leadership and some club leaders emphasize the integration of such groups with particular needs in common events for all. This particular club had one evening a week for deaf and hard of hearing youth, 15 – 22 years old, students and employees, headed by two club leaders who were both bilingual (signed and spoken languages) and well acquainted with hearing, deaf technology and politics due to personal experiences. The club was located in a suburb to a middle large city in Norway.

In our article we refer to three social spaces. The first social space is the youth club, where the youth are recording themselves. The second social space is the youth editing their movie in order to present their work for the local public community, recorded by the researchers. The third social space is the researchers looking at the recordings of the youth's editing work, recording themselves. The notion 'space' is mainly an activity, but of course also a location.

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When the location, the place, is important, we will comment on that.

In the schools for deaf and hard of hearing and for people with hearing aids or cochlear implants (CI), cleverness and being bright always have been connected to the ability to talk, read and write the spoken language in a nice and proper way. The majority of the teachers used to be hearing people, even if the first founder of the school for the deaf in Norway in 1825, Andreas Christian Møller, was a deaf man [Skjølberg 1992; Greftegreff, Handberg & Schröder 2015]. The oral tradition and phonocentricity in the teaching of the deaf pupils was strong in Norway from the 1850's until today. There was a change between 1970 and 2000, where the understanding of and enthusiasm for Norwegian Sign Language[1] was increasing in the schools for the deaf [Greftegreff, Handberg & Schröder 2015]. In the same period amongst hearing people, there was a growing acceptance for talking dialects in all contexts. Today, with the new hearing kits, medical doctors in addition stressing the importance of maximal hearing and sound-based communication and stimulation, and when deaf and hard of hearing pupils are attending their local schools being the only one not hearing, the acceptance and positive status of sign language and the visual identity is threatened. For many deaf and signing people, the hearing privilege is again hard to fight [Holmström 2016; Holmström & Schönström 2017].

On this background many signing people have asked: "Why using my cleverness as an oral speaker, reader and writer against me? That does not make me hear well". When hearing people treat deaf or hard of hearing as hearing people, not using sign language even when they know how to sign, they are performing their hearing privilege and phonocentricity, not respecting the visual identity [Bergmann 2015; Bauman 2004; Haualand 2008]. Today such behaviour towards deaf people is recognized as audism [Humphries 1975; Bauman 2004]. Audism is defined as: "The notion that one is superior based on one's ability to hear or behave

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in the manner of one who hears" [Humphries 1975:1]. Not signing made and makes hard of hearing and deaf people not knowing what they miss of communication and information in the family, together with friends, in schools, at work, meetings and in public places with information solely through sound from loudspeakers. Even speaking and adding signs to the spoken language and syntax, is seen as phonocentricity and audism [Bauman 2004].

The cleverness of orally speaking becomes an enemy of integration and communication for deaf and hard of hearing people. The cleverness of speaking when not hearing becomes the argument for hearing people not to use sign language or to decide for deaf people not to have interpreters for communication, information, discussions, learning and working. The lack of a visual sign language means a lack of communication, information, discussion, learning and working abilities for the deaf and hard of hearing people [Holmström 2016; Holmström & Schönström 2017]. It becomes harder to do an optimal exposure of competence in interaction with the majority, and harder to succeed as professionals and well-functioning citizens through the lifespan [Rydberg, Gellerstedt & Danermark 2011].

Thus if deaf people use their voices for helping hearing people to understand and for taking part in the communication, it may be a threat against the deaf person's own perception of the communication and participation in social life and as employee. Negative experiences, the lack of visual based information, are one of the reasons why the Norwegian Association of the Deaf from the beginning of the 20th century have argued for the necessity and importance of sign language as the main language in the schools for the deaf [Sander 1993]. They have been fighting for sign language research and education in and on sign language and for the importance of educated interpreters for further education and the access to work for deaf people. Education in sign language, practical and theoretical knowledge, and skilled interpreters are a precondition for deaf and hard of hearing people to reach the goal of equal

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citizenship with hearing people [Sander 1993].

This was the background for one of the dreams of the club leader in a youth club. He wanted to see deaf and hearing young people out together in their leisure time, in the schoolyards, in cafés or bars, chatting naturally with each other across language barriers.[2] The hearing club members thought it was so cool to speak Norwegian Sign Language that they asked the club leaders for a course in sign language. One of the club leaders expressed this as an excellent example of "reverse integration"[3]. Thus, the club applied to the municipality (of a middle large Norwegian city) for money to employ a sign language teacher. We, already working on a description of the youth culture in the city [Hydle 2013], encouraged the use of filming for documentation of what was going on, for the young people themselves, for the club leaders and for everybody who might be interested in looking into this experiment.

Teaching and learning sign language is a rather quiet business, seen from a hearing perspective, apart from everybody laughing a lot. The visualization, i.e. filming and a sign language course on CD-ROM [Statped.no] showed to be a success. Practically everybody took up the video camera and filmed various parts of the teaching-and-learning-sign-language-process. At the end, after three hours sessions from eight evenings, there were six hours of footage to edit. Not all from the sessions was filmed, and in addition they also filmed an interview with the city mayor on her perspectives on Youth culture, Youth clubs, deafness etc. The editing process took part during a weekend at the "deaf cabin" (Norwegian: *døvehytta*) in a beautiful forest outside the city. It was carried out by the youth. They were: one hard of hearing club leader and four young club members, two hard of hearing, one with hearing device and the other with cochlear implant (CI), one deaf dependent upon visual communication and one hearing who by then had learned some sign language.

Everybody involved in the process had different aims and goals. One of the goals was the club

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leaders' wish to include everybody, no matter if they were signing or orally speaking. The youth wanted to expose to others how fun it is to learn and teach another language, sign language. They detected and learned to use their visual power, not by listening, but through sight, by looking and seeing, by using body gestures, by a new way of languaging [Swain 2006]. This included in particular facial and hand gestures, increasing the visual awareness and refining of gestures more than sound language speaker is used to [Baker, Bogaerde, Pfau & Schermer 2016; Johnston & Schembri 2007; Sutton-Spence & Woll 1999]. The alphabet, the numbers, the grammar, the composite everyday expressions and the syntax in a visual language – all are different in an oral spoken language. The common task of the five young participants editing the videorecordings from the youth club, was to show the power of the visual. Their editing was registered with two stand-by cameras and participatory observation.

RESEARCHERS TOPIC

Our common cross-disciplinary aim is to investigate ethnographic and linguistic approaches, given a unique opportunity to study human communicative skills through skilled vision. An additional important basic anthropological approach to this event is the following: The visually speaking youth made the orally speaking youth discover, acknowledge and refine their visual awareness and consciousness. We ask: How did they succeed?

Given our multiple objectives of the article, there are some other and underlying questions: How do language users with varying degrees of hearing and different first language backgrounds solve the challenge of not having a common established language? How do they overcome the lack of words and signs in their own language production? How do they create a common understanding when the observer/receiver/communication partner does not perceive the words or signs they themselves use? What can be learned in general about languaging from this youth group that may be of use in interaction between deaf and hearing

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individuals across generations?

On a methodological level, the following questions emerge: How are linguists and anthropologists challenged in refining their vision and enhancing their understanding of the making sense of human senses in interaction? What kind of knowledge can emerge when "I" becomes a film? Filming offers a unique possibility to investigate creations of meaning in dialogue. Film is a basic tool for the sign language linguist. Without visualization, there is no source for understanding of visual language and communication. In this article, we explore the languaging, interaction and meaning construction of young people.

Lastly this project does not only include human interaction, but also the interaction between men, machines and artefacts (hearing aids, cochlear implants, cameras, projectors, a split screen, tables, paper and pencil, and particular files and annotation and transcription programs). This kind of interaction and communication is often underestimated, if not totally unseen, because it is taken for granted. It facilitates and determines a context for cognition, understanding and interpretation for all interlocutors, club leader, teenagers and researchers.

Thus, we saw the need for extending the data collection as well as the analysis of the original communication processes between the speaking and signing youth. Together we made a second analysis of the primary data, a convoluted exercise in anthropological-linguistic cross-field interpretation, testing new methodology and analyses (cf. Analysis).

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Today anthropological film may be seen as a recapturing of an anthropological approach to vision, look and gaze in more than one sense of the terms. Firstly, the observation, i.e. the gaze or the look, is one of the main tools in the collection, ordering, analysing and presenting of data, often taken for granted, i.e. doxic [Bourdieu 1998] for or black-boxed [Latour 2005,

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2012; Latour & Woolgar 2013] by anthropologists themselves. Vision is an instrument for information, development and dissemination of ideas, thoughts and practices. Secondly, vision and gaze are in use as active tools in the expression and development of critical anthropological self-understanding when informants turn in as co-researchers and co-producers, when they themselves are behind the camera [Holtedahl 2006; Waage 2007].

Nowadays, humanistic disciplines, i.e. anthropology, psychology, gestureology, and linguistics, call for a wider appreciation of multisensory perception across cultures. The issues of identity, security and belonging are increasingly associated with a practice-based phenomenology of the senses. A number of methodological issues arise when trying to render a visual representation of a sense, of person or place. Our visual approach proposes a research-based methodology that is well rooted in the history of visual anthropology to explore landscapes of skill and memory or *sense-scapes* [Grasseni 2007, 2009] *from* citizens' participation *to* the role of oral history or to the role of the anthropologist as a mediator of the many layers and phases of representation involved.

Thus the representation of a scene is linked both to past, present and future knowledge. Sarah Pink is bringing this perspective further, linking it to "living photography", i.e. video. Video productions are in need of the same interpretation as a single photography. Videos do not speak for themselves [Pink 2011:447]. In this article, our aim is to bring the issue of film interpretation explicitly to the fore, as a complex issue for anthropological and linguistic research.

Newer anthropological knowledge about the senses contributes to new perspectives upon vision, not "as an isolated given, but within its interplay with the other senses, and with the role of mutual gestuality. Moreover, it explores vision as a ductile, situated, contested and politically fraught means of situating oneself in a community of practice" [Grasseni 2007:1] – 8

or as David Howes expresses it, "Cross-talk between the Senses" [2004]. People and researchers use film as a strategy for the discovery of coherences in the world and for the dissemination of them. Film as disseminating tool for anthropological knowledge may undress anthropological "best knowledge" [Holtedahl 2006]. Films and the cognitive effect of the filming process may be a tool for education and change. Film creates a space between man and world or between partners in a dialogue. However, the space needs interpretation. If words do not work or are insufficient, gesture and vision may replace speech and hearing, in the epistemological process.

It is the space of human communication we explore in this article. We now continue the reflection on the use of the senses: vision and hearing, the bodily *eye* and *ear*. We focus on the fact that no language we know, neither in Norwegian nor English, German or French…, have a term, a concept or a word for *meeting sound* in the same way as we *meet light, with the look or the gaze* – when we watch, see, observe or view. [4] The gaze or look is what we cannot see ourselves, but what others can see and meet. The gaze or look is thus a dialogical term and tool in the sense that *I* am dependent upon *your* seeing for the registration of a gaze or a look. Is it accidental that the term vision both refers to a physical phenomenon and a mental – which are independent of each other [Hydle 2017]? As a part of mutual gestuality we will argue that the gaze and vision can be part of mutual identity [Levinas 1947; Derrida 1999; Bauman 2008B].

The idea of a stable, bound identity, "the real self", more or less seen as a psychological phenomenon or "a stable structure located primarily in the individual psyche or in fixed social categories" [Bucholtz & Hall 2005:586], represents the core in many theories of identity. This hegemonic view differs substantially from conceptions of identity as a fluid, malleable product that is discursively produced as people position themselves and get positioned in

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social interaction across a range of contexts and textual settings. Le Page, Christie, Jurdant, Weekes & Tabouret-Keller [1974] introduce the notion 'acts of identity' as an understanding of the language preferred, signalling identity and identification with a particular group of people. We see language and the languaging as an identity marker, flexible due to the context, the where, when, whom, what and why [Bagga-Gupta, Hansen & Feilberg 2017]. This latter view of identity is often referred to as a "social constructionist" perspective [Benwell & Stokoe 2006].

From a deaf point of view anthropologist Hilde Haualand, claims anthropology to be *phonocentric*, i.e. we take *sound* for given [2002, 2008]. Do we also take *light* for given? What about the living picture(s) and the ability and power of the look and the gaze (film, television, world wide web, picture telephones etc.) attracting and creating new forms of communication, new spaces and new places?

Our empirical focus is on the communication within a group of filming and film-editing deaf, hard of hearing and hearing Norwegian youth in a youth club. The theoretical focus on communication across senses is based upon *dialogism* as epistemology, with the Russian culture theorist Mikhail Bakhtin [1981] and the Swedish linguist Per Linell [2009] as guides. We will discuss how anthropological filming *skills the vision* - in a dialogical perspective. We also lean on a request for useful conceptions when post phenomenological studies emphasize the problems of perception in old and new media and in the relationship between them [Isernhagen & Bulkin 2011; Payne 2005].

From the early 20-centuries deaf writers used the notion "people of the eye", altering with expressions as "signing community" and "seeing people" [Bauman 2008A]. Such notions focus the positive abilities and the sensory and cognitive strength of deaf and hard of hearing people, profiling deaf gain and visual identity [Bauman 2008A; Haualand 2008; Bauman &

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Murray 2014].

The seeing communities around the world have developed a wide range of visual and tactile signals for establishing interaction. Standing or sitting close to each other people can touch each other's body on social accepted places as the shoulder, arm or knee. Being apart people can wave with their hands or blink with the light for visually to get the attention from their interlocutors. Sometimes people find it more convenient to make a loud sound, not all deaf people are completely deaf, in combination with tactile vibrations as knocking on the table, or trample on the floor. Knocking and trampling are multimodal signals: they can be seen, kinetically felt and heard. Such signals are a part of the visual repertoire following different local, cultural conventions. For more details of visual and tactile starters of a dialog, see Napier & Leeson [2016].

The seeing communities have developed different ways of optimal visual contact and information. People prefer to communicate arranged in circles, easy for all participants to follow the signing. Round tables are preferred, good light on the faces and not as visual noise behind the person signing. Everyone takes responsibility and gives information if anything happens behind, out of vision, of their interlocutors. The community has developed a visual architecture giving optimal visual information by using curved lines in walls and corridors. Corners are hard to see around, making people running into each other. In walls and doors windows or glass are preferred. For more details of visual architecture and places, see Bauman H. [2014] and Bauman & Murray [2014].

Thus, with this dialogical perspective between people and their senses in mind, our aim is to investigate the argument of the anthropologist Tim Ingold that "we see things before light, and hear sound before things" [2002:245]. He continues: "…sound, strictly speaking, is no more an object of hearing than light an object of vision".

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With this extended acknowledge and theoretical frame, a look at the visual identity work of the club members working in the editing process opens for interesting perspectives.

Three different researchers' points of view woven together in one text may be challenging both for the writers and the readers. Vision as a sense is the physiological ability for visual perception, languaging and acts of visual identity [Dye 2014]. Our vision, our interpretation or perception of the interaction between the youth is built on several years of practical knowledge and academic studies of human interaction, deaf culture and history and languaging. One phenomenon can be interpreted in different ways, that is why some phenomena will appear in different places in the analysis according to fulfil the complexity of vision. Some more theory will occur in the presentation of the findings, tiding theory and data together, as our wish.

MATERIAL

The empirical foundation for this article consists of video recordings from three social spaces.

Social space 1:
- participant observation and conversations and interviews with deaf, hard of hearing and hearing teenagers in the club, three hearing and hard of hearing club leaders as well as people in the administration of (youth) culture in the municipality, conversations and interviews with teenagers and teachers at a school close to the youth club where a few deaf pupils who are integrated in the ordinary classes[5] contribute to our data collection
- a video filmed and sign interpreted conversation with the sign language teacher in the youth club, who is herself deaf and a devoted representative for sign language among the students in the city
- video filmed interview with the mayor of the city, interviewed and filmed by two of the club-leaders

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Social space 2:

- the editing process itself videotaped. The shooting of this editing process was done by two stand-by cameras connected to a split screen, which makes it possible to see all participants in the video picture at once, and thereby facilitates the documentation of the simultaneity in the interaction

- the edited half hour film

- short written interviews concerning language background, preferred language, and schooling

- participant observation notes

Social space 3:

- extending the data collection as well as the analysis of the original communication processes in the youth club, filming our own (the researchers) conversations, interpretations and analysis when looking through the five hours original video recordings of the editing weekend

- notes from the researchers conversations, interpretations and analysis

The youth editing the film - social space 2

Four members of the youth club together with one of the club leaders spent a weekend editing their video film from the Norwegian Sign Language Course. We see this group as a pars pro toto - the group of five is a part representing the entire club. By analysing the smaller group, we emphasise we get to know the group they represent. This group of five rented a cottage in the forest owned by the local deaf club, and spent two days there together. The main focus of their stay in the cottage was the editing of the film, but they also had different social activities and made their own food, whilst they were there. Two of the researchers attended this weekend, observed and made video recordings of the editing process, which lasted for about 6 hours over two days:

Day 1:   Editing process 1: 0:53

                Editing process 2: 1:15

                Editing process 3: 2:23

Day 2:   Editing process 4: 1:30

The club members and their leader sat in a curved line (not a real semicircle) with the editing equipment on a table in front of them. The leader was placed in the middle, with two club members on each side. They had a common focus, the screen on the wall, in front of them, where the video was shown. The club leader administered the editing machine (PC) according to the requests of the club members, who decided where to cut. The five people were all placed in a visually oriented way [Bagga-Gupta 2004; Hansen 2005] able to see each other, the editing equipment and the screen in front of them (see Fig.1).

        Figure 1 about here

        Table 1 about here

None of the persons were coupled or had any sort of intimate affair with each other. The male leader was coupled with one of the female leaders of the youth club, not taking part in the editing weekend.

Two hearing researchers (R1 and R2), one of them a fluent signer, were also present in the room, observing, making notes and recording. A mixer (M) was placed in front of researcher 2. The researchers' video recordings were made with two digital cameras (C1and C2, Panasonic DVX 100), with separate table microphones (Audioteknika) and a mixer (M) (Tricaster Pro). The video-recordings showed on a split screen, made it possible afterwards to study the interaction between the five participating editors, their editing equipment and other

physical artefacts used in this process.

Languages used by the participants in the editing process were spoken Norwegian, "silent" Norwegian (mouthed Norwegian without sound), written Norwegian, signed Norwegian and Norwegian Sign Language. The editing crew had a wide variety in language backgrounds, in the use of senses and language modalities cf. Table 1. They did not have a common language code that everybody was in command of. In spite of this they made a common product, an edited film about learning a sign language, presenting their work and the club.

The researchers' analysis – social space 3

The next methodological step was the video recording of the three researchers (R1, R2, R3) when looking through, commenting and analysing the five hours' editing process (see Fig. 2).

Figure 3 about here

Here we pursued and recorded systematically our different gaze qualities, as we saw different things in different theoretical and experienced perspectives, when looking through the video recordings of the editing of the film (see Fig. 2). As a result of this procedure we have written this article together.

METHODS

We have used participant observation, interviews and video recordings.

ANALYSIS

We have worked within a qualitative analysis of the material, linguistic, anthropological and medical researchers' cross-field dialogue and writing.

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We recorded systematically our reflections, comments and discussions, a convoluted exercise in anthropological-linguistic cross-field interpretation. The shootings from the stand-by cameras were converted into avi-files[6] and we installed them in the annotation and transcription programme Elan [2017]. Elan is a program that allows annotation for both vocal and visual languaging by seeing the film and the annotation simultaneously on the screen. The researcher can easily adjust the annotation to the focus of any project. It is possible to create several rows or tiers below each other (similar to a conductor's music score) where simultaneous features can be analysed in relation to a common time indication. Elan is an analytical tool that several speech and sign language linguists find useful. We transformed the annotations to a Word-document and usual text format for further analyses.

FINDINGS

Here we present the hard-fact-findings. We will discuss the interpretation of the hard facts later on. The recordings show five participants editing a film presenting the youth club, themselves, who they are, what they do, how they are working, presenting their identity without a common language. We start with the room and their physical arrangement, continuing with the semiotic resources they activate.

The editing room

The room is quite small and with seven people, the screen, three tables and the mixing desk, it is filled up. Curtains cover the walls and windows, reducing visual noise and disturbance.

The physical arrangement

The youth sit strategically: the male club leader and technically most experienced in the middle, two females on each side, the two hard of hearing to the right, the deaf and the hearing to the left, as seen in Fig. 1. The tables make more of a gently curved line then a part of a circle. A more curved position would make the communication easier. However, in this

case the room in itself limited the possibility of sitting in a semicircle. The curved line stresses the main goal: watching the recordings on the screen, making decisions.

The tone in the group is relaxed. They know each other quite well and are comfortable with the task they work on. There is a good sense of humour and much laughter at the table and on the screen. This relaxed atmosphere with humour and creativity Hydle [2013] also reports from the ordinary evenings in their club.

The editing group is in interaction with the physical surrounding artefacts. The club leader is in touch with the computer, finding the clips shown on the screen on the wall. He uses pencil and paper to make notes of exact timecodes for the editing.

Siri (deaf) and Rita (hearing) sit on the front of their chairs, eager, open, straight backs and taking part in the editing process. Hege and Berit are also eagerly taking part in the editing process, but they have positioned themselves in another way. They change between being laid back in their chairs, or putting their head in their hands, with the elbows on the table. They have both hood-jackets, and keep their hoods on during most of the editing process.

Semiotic resources and communication

When they all have a common focus on the screen, looking at the recordings from the sign language course, they make an agreement, that the club members should knock on the table, when they find something interesting, worthy to be a part of the film. In that way, the tables become actors enacted by the human actors [Law 2009]. The knocking all deaf, hard of hearing and hearing could perform and perceive through the sight visually, and at the same time feeling the vibrations and/or hearing the sound.

Other strategies for initiating communication or a reply are waving their hands, touching each other, shouting and trampling the floor.

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The participants have two main and well-known communication systems at hand to which all of them have different access, orally as well as written: Norwegian as sound, as seen on the lips, as written or fingerspelt words, and Norwegian Sign Language. All these recourses are at play during the editing weekend. Spoken Norwegian is not for all to access. It is an option only for hearing participants in the communication and is as such a hearing privilege [Napier & Leeson 2016]. They all use pointing, direction of hands and eye gaze, gesticulation and depictions in different ways, forms and amount for a communicative purpose.

These are the facts, the hard-core data of our observations that we want to look into by a discussion, while looking for the answer of the question: How do they succeed?

DISCUSSION

We have structured our discussion along a path starting with the larger picture, the place, going to the arrangement of the editing process, via semiotic resources ending at some elements of the languaging through the lifespan. This is a zooming-in-process following a well established visual way for structuring information.

Visual locations of identity - The cabin with the deaf, «Døvehytta»

In a study of identity and languaging a reflection on the location, the physical place, the where, for communication is more or less compulsory. A *place* can be a signal of attitude and identity [Benwell & Stokoe 2006].

In Norway, the local associations of the deaf have built cottages or cabins several places in the countryside. These cottages have been popular places for deaf people to meet in the weekends and for their holidays. These cabins, located in the wood, in the mountain or at the coast, deaf people have built together physically, collecting money, doing the work themselves. These houses are a part of the deaf identity in Norway, being a symbol of cooperation, self-esteem, braveness, intellectual and physical empowerment, a place for sign language and visual

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culture, ruled by the deaf themselves. These cabins are places where people relying on more of their visual ability than their hearing, always are welcome for relaxing and having a good time for social and interesting talks and sports activities, meeting other visual relying people [Hansen 2011].

On such a symbolic loaded place the youth club members wanted to have their editing weekend. Here they wanted to make the film that presents themselves to their peers and for the "world". With this choice of location, they connect to a long and proud history saying: 'as a visual person you can succeed, you are a part of a strong, living community, taking care of each other on sunny and stormy days of life'. This choice of place we see as a part of their 'act of visual identity'.

The weekend became an assimilation of two worlds: the world of vision and the world of sounds, accepting diversity, fulfilling the dream of the club leader and the vision of equality.

Visual focus on a curved line - the arrangement of the editing room

The very arrangement of the editing room as seen on Figure 1, is familiar from a range of similar activities as teaching, acting, public arrangement etc. and are given by the activity itself. Still it is a very typical human way of organizing certain activities, it is also a very typical visually focused way organizing optimal communication, known from almost every school and classes with deaf and hard of hearing pupils. This way of arrangement even very ordinary and typical for the activity, is easy to miss as an 'act of visual identity'.

Identity of posture

When they were asked about hearing status they frankly presented themselves as deaf (1), hearing (1), and hard of hearing (3). The three hard of hearing participants wore hearing aid on both ears. One preferred not to use her hearing aid at all, and the other preferred to use just

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one of her two cochlear implants. They both preferred spoken Norwegian as their main language, but were familiar with signs and used signs, their visual ability, as a supplement to spoken Norwegian when they communicated with deaf signing people. The third hard of hearing person uses hearing aid on both ears.

When we spotlight understanding identity in terms of performance, as action [Bagga-Gupta, Hansen & Feilberg 2017], we might reflect on how the club members appeared in the editing process.

Siri (deaf) and Rita (hearing) sat on the front of their chairs, eager, open, straight backs and took part in the editing process. They were "on". Hege and Berit were also eagerly taking part in the editing process, but they had positioned themselves in another way. They changed between being laid back in their chairs, or putting their head in their hands, with the elbows on the table. They had both hood-jackets and kept their hoods on during most of the editing process. One might reflect whether it is better being labelled as deaf or hearing, instead of something in between: hard-of-hearing? Is the hood activity a part of the general youth culture? Or is it modifying the senses of the hearing or hearing aid making the sound more comfortable [Holmström 2016]? The data do not tell. But what the data demonstrate, is how the youth signed coherent with their surroundings.

Visual common focus - signing coherent with the environment

The participants signing coherent with their environment, is the next example of visual identity and the power of visuality. Sign languages use space as a part of the meaning construction [Liddell 2003]. The signing is not just coherent within the language itself, the signing can also be coherent with the environment of the signers. A signer, similar to any spoken language user, can point to an entity being present, instead of using the lexical sign for the entity.

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In the software for the movie making process, there is a time line running from left to right, often with windows for the first picture of each clip. This well-established visual timeline in western culture, following the sun in the northern hemisphere, is also a part of Norwegian Sign Language [Selvik 2006]. Signs can be performed in space according to invisible but conventionalized timelines. In sign language the signs performed can make coherency with directions of the physical environment, making clear references and avoiding ambiguities [Liddell 2003]. A sign representing a video clip, a stretch of pictures, can be performed with the left hand to the left in the space in front of the signer. Then the signer may use the right hand making an similar sign to the right representing the video clip to the right, constructing the meaning that the clip represented with the left hand shall be placed before the clip represented with the right hand. If the hands as a second suggestion are crossed, the right hand is moved to the left and the left hand to the right, means that in the movie, the clip represented with the right hand, now to the left, shall be placed before the clip represented with the left hand, now at the right side.

In the same way as the screen was integrated with the signing, the participants also used their paper and notes, directing signs towards the paper sometimes meaning the paper, sometimes meaning the content written on a particular place on the paper. These are different examples of signing coherent with the immediate surrounding space, the arrangement of the physical room.

The switch of the hands or the signs in place representing time, can be used by spoken language speakers as well, in communication with hearing people. The use of space in the meaning construction when languaging, is a visual, semiotic resource almost everyone understands by intuition and experiences, even when not explicitly learned. During the weekend of making the movie, the members of the group made their signing in coherence

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with the immediate environment, i.e. the film for edition, the screen, the paper and the notes on the paper. Here we could document what we have seen several deaf signers do when teaching, lecturing or just talking: making their signing coherent with the environment, demonstrating the power of visuality and visual identity in the languaging.

Talking about the artefacts used as part of languaging, we have started the discussion of semiotic resources.

The knocking on the tables - a multimodal signal - equal access for decision

Early in the first session of the editing work for choosing clips, the youth realised the need of a common signal and an equal possibility to announce when they found an interesting scene that they wanted to be a part of the movie. The club leader suggested that they could 'knock the table with a flat hand'. He explained what the signal meant in their setting: «I want this scene to be a part of the movie». The signal is a visual hand movement. It makes a distinct sound and good vibrations in the table as well as in the floor. The signal is multimodal: visual, auditive and tactile. In deaf society, this is an old signal of getting attention and the wish to start a conversation [Napier & Leeson 2016].

This signal is also a democratic signal, because everyone has the same access to make it and all will receive it at the same time. It is a strong and powerful signal, known from other settings as in the Parliament in London. The signal as such is neutral and can express positive or negative support. In this context, the club leader clarified the use as positive support.

To start with, they used the knocking in the intentional way. But after a while, they extended the positive value of the signal to mean 'that is funny', 'you are funny', 'you are clever' or 'that is great', 'you are great', 'well done'. The knocking signal became a pleasant way to tease each other, and a strategy of affiliation and politeness, often in combination with

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laughter [Benwell & Stokoe 2006; Knight 2010]. This extended meaning spontaneously emerged within the group, making it a part of their mutual communication, underlining the group democracy, and strengthening the group identity.

One interesting thing of observation is the leader's way of introducing and explaining the table-knocking signal. He does not make a point of using a conventionalized signal within the deaf community, but he introduces the knocking as a practical way for communicating towards their goal, making the film. Without knowing, the hearing and hard of hearing participants learn, use and get integrated the knocking as an 'act of identity', a typical deaf and visual way of behaving when starting a conversation.

Languaging in a multimodal environment

According to the youth's statements of their preferred languages, their hearing abilities, applied hearing aids etc., they based their communication preferences on different modalities as seen on the overview of the participants in Table 1. They could all see each other, but not all could hear each other, one was deaf, three were hard of hearing, and one was hearing. Their communication was focused towards a common goal, to edit the film. To fulfil this task they applied the communicative resources they found useful in each situation.

The club leader started by asking them to show consideration regarding the differences between their communication preferences. But as can be seen from the recorded process, the participants often became so eager in their work that spontaneity and impulsiveness came to the forth, while they forgot to communicate in a way all the members of the editing group could follow. They all had a positive attitude to the task they were to carry out, and when they forgot to include everyone in their communication, it seemed to be a result of joy and eagerness.

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The communication in the group can be described as bilingual and multimodal [Kress & van Leuwen 2001], but going beyond these concepts, one could say they were just *languaging,* activating the perception of the physical entities surrounding them and the localisation, the place for communication [Swain 1985, 2006; Gynne & Bagga-Gupta 2013]. They use multiple communicative resources and strategies to create meaning. In their meaning-making they establish a temporarily shared social reality [Rommetveit 1974] where they meet in a social commitment.

> In order to find out what is made known when something is read or heard we have therefore to inquire into what kind of contract has been established between the two participants in that particular act of communication. This implies, in turn, an exploration of which aspects of a multifaceted and pluralistic world constitute their temporarily shared social reality. [Rommetveit 1974:25]

The knocking became a part of their interaction and communication, their languaging and use of different semiotic strategies.

Visual focusing - a never ending reminder

The club leader reminds the youth over and over again to include each other in the discourse. In a group of five to seven participants, people sitting next to each other will naturally establish dialogues two by two. So also with the youth participating in this study. Such dialogues can serve as clarifications of the common discourse, or be separate discussions on the common topic or private ones. In the group, such dialogues went on in Norwegian Sign Language and/or in spoken Norwegian. The club leader kept an eye on these short intercessions. As clarifications, he let them pass. When they brought in new or private perspectives, he encouraged the participants to use both languages and to bring the topic into the common discourse of the movie-making or weekend planning.

Deaf people use to make short clarifying dialogues for understanding, a practice developed in

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school [Sandrud 2016]. Clarifications are important for the flow of the ongoing activity in a multilingual group of people. When they are brief in time and to the point in content, they maintain and support the main information flow and ongoing activity. Clarification dialogues, not halting the ongoing main activity, have an element of time saving or economy that is positive. Of course, it is possible to miss or make a gap in the main information flow during such clarifications. Such clarifications are a cooperation within the group, and do not seem to disturb the rest of the group members continuing their main activity. The clarifications are highly respected and seem to be a part of the common group responsibility, functioning as a respectful integration strategy, maintaining the equal status of the members of the group, and as such a strategy of democratic participation. From a hearing perspective, such clarifications can be seen as disturbances of the ongoing lecturing or main language activity. Within the visual perspective it might be the opposite.

The club leader had different strategies to establish and maintain the common discourse and focus in the group. He could briefly remind them to use both languages, or he said: 'at the moment it is very much voice speaking going on' or 'remember to include everyone'. He commented in a neutral way, as observations of the communication practices, not as judgment of them as behaving badly. These neutral comments and meta-communications about the communication, served as kind reminders keeping them on track to solve their task: choosing clips for the movie.

The club leader secured that everybody had an equal possibility to perceive what was going on, to express themselves and take part in the discussion. He made the democratic process possible by his reminders.

The importance of securing and making the information accessible for everyone in the group, is reported to be one of the clues for creating a good and reliable atmosphere at working

places for multilingual/bilingual employees [Stadshaug 2010]. We see the gentle coaching as an act of the visual identity including all the present people.

Auditively *speaking well* does *not* mean *hearing well*

Being a good oral speaker does not necessarily mean that the person hears well or hears anything at all. Many deaf and hard of hearing people are good speakers in terms of clear pronunciation, perfect morphology and syntax, fulfilling the norms of well-formulated orally spoken language sentences. Hearing people have no difficulties in understanding what they say. When a person in a conversation listens to a language, that the person knows, he or she will automatically answer in the same language as a natural response. However, being a good speaker does not automatically mean that the 'ears' catch all the sounds of a spoken language. Together with lip reading without auditive and visual noise and good light, the communication can go on quite well and without difficulties for a deaf or hard of hearing person speaking with a not-signing person. In another setting with noise and bad lighting conditions, it can be much harder for a person with no or reduced hearing to catch what people try to communicate in the spoken modality [Holmström 2016].

This happened in the youth club as well. Even sitting next to each other but with the visual focus on the screen, the hard of hearing did not catch or were not even aware that the hearing person was talking without signs. That happened several times during the weekend. A deaf or hard of hearing person has no ability to react or respond to information not being sensory aware of been given. Aware of other person's languaging, deaf and hard of hearing people do need highly skilled language knowledge from the phonetic level to the pragmatic level and the knowledge of genre and style, to keep on track and cope with the situation.

The recordings done by and of the youth club members, demonstrate the possibilities deaf and hard of hearing signing youngsters get with a broad bilingual approach from early childhood.
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Several highly educated people have said that deaf and hard of hearing and children with any kind of hearing aids, can learn sign language "if" or "when needed". We claim that "when needed" is too late. To learn a language is a long process, requiring a lifeworld of contexts and situations for its development and integration as a language for safe and sufficient communication. This acquisition of a language must start during the first 18 months of life, due to the brain developmental process [Hall, Lewin & Anderson 2017; Morgan 2014]. The language window of the brain closes at the same time for spoken and signed languages. The situation "when needed" is too late at a later age. According to our knowledge, some of the participants of the youth club document the ability of being successful when the learning of sign language is finished *before* "when needed". The deaf and hard of hearing youth who had learned sign language from birth or as early as possible, showed good abilities to interact with hearing persons in an auditive setting. They had the same confident and empowerment when teach hearing how to sign, getting them integrated in a visual environment.

Metaphors and idiomatic expressions

Metaphors and idiomatic expressions have cost people a lot of trouble but also a lot of fun and pleasure through history. The club leader in the middle at the editing desk, communicated to his right in spoken Norwegian, and to his left in Norwegian Sign Language. Sometimes he practiced the two languages in combination. The combination of two syntactic different languages may be difficult or impossible to understand [Bauman 2004]. Such combinations or language mixtures are possible because of the differences in modalities. Deaf people's experiences of such combinations are a fluent spoken auditive language and a use of randomly signs without coherency, a typical phonocentric and as such an audistic way of behaving [Bauman 2004]. One challenge of the combination of two languages as for translation, are idiomatic and metaphoric expressions, so within the youth club as well.

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The club leader underlined that they should choose clips he would 'sew together' later on. The expression 'sew together' from spoken Norwegian, but not a typical metaphor in Norwegian Sign Language even if it is easy to sign, represented challenges. He realised that the expression did not make sense to the hard of hearing participants because of their reaction or lack of reaction. He laughed, excusing himself using a metaphor from Norwegian spoken language, literally translated into Norwegian Sign Language. The metaphoric expression "sew" performed in Norwegian Sign Language can be performed very iconic and thereby concrete, not fitting with the digital files electronically combined. The two hard of hearing club-members found it funny and laughed, thinking of the practical sewing with a needle and thread applied on the digital video-clips. The club-leader also laughed, finding himself making the trouble that hearing people often unconsciously make with deaf people. Hearing people can use idiomatic expressions, not realising that a typical hearing or spoken language expression do not mean the same nor is possible as word-by-word translation to another language. This is a common experience for all deaf, hard of hearing and hearing from several occasions, creating misunderstandings, communicative disturbances and trouble, but also as in this example, a lot of fun, when living in contact with two or more languages. The leader in charge made a joke of himself when he failed, getting everyone back on track.

Empowered by the dynamic circle

When the leader becomes the follower of the people lead, everyone becomes a part of a dynamic circle [Hein 2013]. An understanding of the dynamics and thereby the energy and legacy of a hierarchy structure in the northern part of Europe, is that the person on top of the pyramid should be the servant of the others lower down in the pyramid structure [Wergeland 1831-1841]. The structure is turned, so the top becomes the bottom; the king or the queen, the regent, is the servant of the people [King Haakon VII 1905, 1940; Queen Elisabeth II 1947].

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When a leader manages to create good working conditions, the workers increase the quality and quantity of their work. The team becomes a dynamic circle, all having their positions and being a part of the dynamic work following the follower [Hein 2013].

The leader in the sign language club several times emphasized that he took part in the editing to do what the club members wanted him to do. He wanted to realize their decisions. Several times he reminded the participants of their responsibility for the movie and the trust given to them by the club members. He encouraged and supported them, offering pauses, food and good and social meals. Talking and acting as a servant, he still was the leader. He took part in the discussions, kept the totality and main goal in focus, taking care of the progression of the work – introducing the knocking on the table, reminding them to include each other in the languaging, he kept the 'act of visuality' in focus.

The leader's attitude resulted in the participants' involvement in the editing work in a positive way. All of them became engaged, took part in the discussions, made suggestions, and some of them took control of the editing table. It seems that leader and the participants had a positive influence on each other, encouraging each other. The energy within the group became more of a dynamic circle, than going in one direction. The pride of the result, the presentation of the film, we see as an act of the visual peer group work and mutual empowerment. We find this to be an example of what Bakhtin [1981] calls the third dimension, the new and more extended experience, not to be known before emerging through praxis, the dialog establishing a peer group.

Visual languaging - establishing a peer group of shared visual identity

In the literature and in real life, realities sometimes grow out of dreams. The American priest and civil rights advocate Martin Luther King's words: "I have a dream…" is one such example, and his grandchildren have new dreams [CNN 2018].

The club leader's vision and dream was to see deaf, hard of hearing and hearing young people out together in their leisure time, in the school yards, in cafés or bars, chatting naturally with each other across language barriers, a dream, making an invisible identity visible through the use of sign language.

Identity can be defined: as 'quality of being identical', from Latin *idem* 'same'[Oxford Dictionary 2017]. Identity is seen as having something in common, something two or more persons share, making them some sort of equal, connected, responsible for each other, making the individuals belonging to the same community or group of peers.

As we mentioned, Le Page, Christie, Jurdant, Weekes & Tabouret-Keller [1974] introduced the notion 'acts of identity', understanding the language preferred, as a signal of identity and identification with a particular group of people.

The explicit and precise articulated dream of the club leader, transformed to reality within the club and during the editing weekend, may be seen as an 'act of visual identity'. As a miniature world in the forest, the cabin turned to be a universe where deaf, hard of hearing and hearing people not having a common language unifying them, still used all their communicative skills and abilities, and made the dream of the leader come true. Their communication about their common task resulting in the film, is the evidence. They had a social and pleasant weekend, strengthening their multiple and in their everyday life more hidden visual identity. They could be themselves without pretending to understand, relaxing in the experiences of being seen and accepted, empowered by each other, the work and their peers in the club, trusting them to edit the film. They manifested the notion: 'the people of the eye' and 'the seeing people'.

Visuality changes the roles of minority and majority

Martha's Vineyard, where everyone knew the local sign language, is another dream of 'the seeing people' [Groce 1988]. In daily life discourses, speakers of sign languages usually find

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themselves being a minority. To be a part of a conversation with hearing people, the majority, an interpreter is often needed. The interpreter will have a shorter or longer time lag when interpreting. Even with two or more interpreters at work, deaf people do not have the same access to drop their comments on the right timing. The lack of a common language in use, hinders deaf and hard of hearing to influence discussions and the results of democratic processes. The relation turns to an asymmetric structure of power.

On the specific sign language course days in the youth club, sign language was the language everybody had equal access to in the visual environment. The social contract in the club these sign language course days, was to communicate visually. Even if their sign language skills were at very different levels, everyone knew how to signal that they wanted to take part in the discussion. In the editing group, the deaf participant at several times interpreted for the hearing one, when she did not understand the signing. Sometimes the hard of hearing persons had full control of the information flow, interpreting both ways to Norwegian Sign Language and spoken Norwegian.

In the club and during the editing weekend, the experience of minority – majority had changed for the participants. Being in the position of having control of the communication, and being the person able to make clarifications and interpret for the hearing persons, the traditional roles and hierarchy of power and position was shifted. Deaf and hard of hearing knowing sign language could take the perspective of them not knowing the visual code, teaching them, making them able to connect and be a part of the ongoing communication and activity. To manage responsibility and the position of being in charge, demand the needs of knowledge, know-how, and how to turn equality into practice. We consider the successful experiences in the club being based upon visual competences as sign language, sign language actions and sign language use learned in early childhood. These include the ability to take

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other people's perspectives and being emphatic [Schick, de Villiers, de Villiers & Hoffmeister 2007; Meristo, Hjelmquist & Morgan 2011; Morgan 2014]. The visual knowledge and know-how seem to be crucial for a positive and integrated identity for handling and managing all challenges of life as empowered adult deaf and hard of hearing signers [Hall 2017].

Visual interaction - learning for the life span

What we learn to do as children, we often do as adults. One of the researchers, not knowing any signed language, took part in several of the club evenings as a participant observer. Even if the researcher represented another generation, she reports that the enthusiasm and the fun they had together in the club when doing different activities, were obvious. The researcher as speaker of many foreign languages, found the teaching of the Norwegian Sign Language pedagogically very well organized, the tasks amusing and as a new approach for second language learning [Hydle 2013].

Watching the movie presenting the club and having observed the team going through all their recordings mainly from the ordinary club activities, we recognised some of the games they were playing as part of the sign language teaching as improvising exercises which they did learn in their drama classes in the school for the deaf. Previous pupils used the same games they learned when they now, several years later, taught Norwegian Sign Language to a group of hearing people. The drama games or exercises have a communicative element as part of visual languaging, even used for several years at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology when educating sign language interpreters. Creative drama improvisation not focusing right or wrong, but on fantasy and creativity, activates and develops visual experiences and visual consciousness [Spolin 1989]. Working in this non-evaluating, free and spontaneous way made the participants feel well. They got the experience of management, that they were good and clever. Surprisingly they found themselves being funny. These

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positive experiences encouraged laughter, learning and visual awareness.

Reflecting upon learning, we saw a not preplanned use of knowledge and skills learned at school being activated and used in new settings. The knowledge of improvising was important know-how for the deaf club members and a gain to have something to offer to other people representing the hearing majority. Visual experience, knowledge and strategy made them build a bridge of understanding with their hearing peers. This knowledge gave them the opportunity to cooperate with other people, made them confident with new people, giving them new relations, making them members of a new fellowship. An early acquired knowledge gave them new experiences, made them proud of their know-how: sign language, visual awareness and visual consciousness.

The sign language and the language games they performed become a part of their positive identity. Language and identity are closely connected [Benwell & Stokoe 2006; Bagga-Gupta, Hansen & Feilberg 2017]. The Youth Club, seems to confirm and reinforce visual identity. The deaf persons reversed the usual power balance between hearing and deaf people. In this case, the deaf persons had know-how to teach hearing youth visual communicative skills and awareness – thereby to promote visual gain [Bauman & Murray 2014]. This might be another example of capability and peer group member ship [Sen 2009].

Visual presentation – moviemaking

The club members knew technically how to make a video presentation or a film. The only way to preserve the «beautiful sign language» is on film [Padden & Humphries 1988:36, 57]. In school in the subject Norwegian Sign Language the pupils work with their language, recording themselves and looking at recordings from the teaching material.

The technique had been a part of their education and tasks learned at school. However, the

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content of that new film as part of the club activity was new to them. The context and all their decisions and choices are based on visual experience and knowledge, as far as we can see, and as such the last point on our list of 'acts of visuality', before glancing into our conclusion.

CONCLUSION

Researchers were invited to evaluate some of the youth clubs´ preventive actions in Norway. They found a club teaching sign language and initiated a video documentation of the club activities, done by the young club members themselves. In a convoluted analytical process by video upon video, sign upon sign, vision upon vision, the result demonstrates the power of the vision. The power of visuality refers to deaf as well as hard of hearing *and* hearing people, all dependent in a given context on visual communication. The film presenting the club to a new audience demonstrated the visual power in practice. The club members' languaging showed great complexity of human visual communication and languaging, almost without an auditive spoken language.

With this convoluted video analysis, we experienced the strength in video interpretation when three people watching the same movie, perceiving differently on the background of different personalities, experiences, scientific and educational points of view. By the cross field discussion and our common writing we as researchers have experienced the strengthening and enlarging of our own epistemology through focused visuality. The multidisciplinary approach gives us more answers we could ever have on our own. This we see as a correspondence to the third dimension explained by Bakhtin [1981]. The youth creating the film and the researchers cross-field article, may be seen as a result of the dialogical third dimension, e.g. an overarching common aesthetic-ethic dimension.

We as researchers across medicine, anthropology and sign language linguistics found the need for visualising this communication at several levels - and with complicated machinery,

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technologies, visual anthropological and sign language interdisciplinary methodologies. Again, this confirms the complexity of studying human communication and interaction.

Looking for our main aim of understanding more of human communication complexities, our common findings acknowledge the phonocentricity of social and human sciences. Once you remove the sense of hearing, the power of the visual comes to the fore.

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[1] All countries have their own national sign language. 'Sign Language' in this article refers to Norwegian Sign Language.

[2] The aim of this sign language course was described by one of the club leaders:

To create an opposite integration where hearing youth learn basic sign language, in addition to some facts about deaf peoples' culture, history and identity. This because they (the hearing) may be a natural part of deaf people's milieu. At the same time this may contribute to a larger network of friends and acquaintances for deaf youth in the city.

He described the project in the following terms: *Youth clubs in this municipality have at several occasions tried to integrate deaf/hard of hearing youth in the club without success. At the same time, most deaf youth are integrated in normal schools. Deaf people have to adjust to mainstream society on most arenas. Through our specific sign language club, they now have a safe arena where they can be on their own premises and communicate in sign language. Several youngsters who meet the deaf at school, in the club or at other arenas have expressed the wish to learn sign language, in order to communicate with the deaf* (our translation).

[3] "It's the hearing that now has to be integrated".

[4] Light is the absolute condition for human vision, look or gaze.

[5] In this school ten teachers, including the teachers' adviser, initiated a similar sign language course.

[6] Audio Video Interleave (also Audio Video Interleaved) (acronym AVI, is a multimedia container format made by Microsoft as part of its Video for Windows technology. AVI files can contain both audio and video data in a file container that allows synchronous audio-with-video playback. AVI files support multiple streaming audio and video, like the DVD video format.

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