

DIALOGUE IN SILENCE

An exhibition on non - verbal communication



The concept

Dialogue in Silence is an exhibition which invites into a completely different world, a world of silence. Other forms of expression are used here and language has to be visible in order to be understood. Deaf persons guide the visitors in small groups through the exhibition which is totally soundproof.

Since it has to be assumed that the visitors are not familiar with sign language, the exhibition has to be understood non-verbally. The various stations are dedicated to different aspects of non-verbal communication: facial expression, body language, gesture and signing. The last station is a bar, where the newly acquired skills will be used, supported by multi-medial learning programmes.

In **Dialogue in Silence** a reversion of roles is created: hearing people are torn out of social routine and familiar reception. They discover their repertoire of non-verbal expression in order to communicate creatively by mime, gesture and body language. Deaf people, who by virtue of their experience and ability to sign are more competent, support them and become ambassadors of a world without sound which is no way poorer – but different.

The background

The social exclusion of disabled people and the unequal chances in getting the same opportunities for education, career, transportation and leisure facilities are a major challenge. 610 million people worldwide are registered as disabled - the millions unregistered not even mentioned. 2/3 of them are living in the developing countries. Basically prejudices and determined patterns are responsible for this situation. The interaction between “abled” and “disabled” people is often hindered by stereotypes, fears, avoidance and prejudices. The levels of understanding, support and access to education, information, jobs, etc. vary from country to country. The prevailing opinion that disability is “less worth than normal” leads to discrimination and marginalization of disabled worldwide. The interaction with deaf, blind and other marginalized people is still dominated by pity and welfare and is focused mainly on the deficits of being disabled. There is a lack of understanding of the potential that might arise out of a handicap as well as for the fact that disabled “suffer” much more from the ignorance, information deficit, unequal rights and uncertainty of the “abled” than from their disability itself.

In order to stop these grievances and to give equal rights to the disadvantaged, Andreas Heinecke is following the conclusion of Martin Buber: "The only way of learning is by encounter." (I and Thou, Practicing Living Dialogue). Referring to the phenomenon of disabilities and their social consequences, this means that solutions have to be found for disabled and "abled" to interact: a forum to facilitate the open exchange between one another in order to reduce prejudices, clichés, stereotypes and simple avoidance. Out of this tension, **Dialogue in Silence** was born

Dialogue in Silence is not an installation simulating deafness. It is a platform where hearing and non-hearing people meet to overcome the barriers between "us" and "them" and re-define "disability" as "ability" and "otherness" as "likeness" .

The founders

Dialogue in Silence was created by **Dr. Andreas Heinecke**. He is the founder and CEO of "Dialogue in the Dark" (www.dialogue-in-dark.com), an installation where blind people lead sighted visitors through a totally dark space. This concept and the experience gained from it were widened to include the situation of deaf people. Andreas owns several social enterprises in Germany and abroad and won various awards. He is the first social entrepreneur in Western Europe, fellow of Ashoka and the Schwab-Foundation (www.ashoka.org) (www.schwabfound.org).

Orna Cohen is co-founder and director of **Dialogue in Silence**. She is curator and author of well known exhibitions. After benefiting from a broad and varied educational palette, Orna went on to exhibition design and implement interactive exhibition which immerse visitors in the exhibition experience and help enhance their understanding of the world around them. In 2004 she was given the award: "Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres" by the French government. (www.orna-co.com).

www.dialogue-in-silence.com