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Relocating Social Justice to the Axis of Citizenship—For a Deaf Mediation

Based on the tangible relationship of strangeness seen in the lines of communication between a deaf and a hearing individual, in which full comprehension of the (gestural) linguistic metaphors used among the deaf is not always assimilated, and vice versa, we will from the beginning put emphasis on the differences and ruptures between the fields of representation and communication. We will thereupon approach deafness as a relationship by deconstructing the view of disability, i.e. by granting privilege to the differences yet underscoring the equality of intelligence (the wise hearing individual versus the profane deaf). It is from this standpoint (the recognition of difference) that so-called profane knowledge gains visibility and importance in the upward climb to the expertise acquired by the deaf. Nevertheless, it is fundamental to know how to coordinate this recognition with the conquests of redistributive social justice. Finally, we explore the central role of the (deaf) mediator in the construction of meaning and citizenship, especially when dealing with the isolated deaf, with the objective of underpinning situations of marginality that, perhaps unintentionally, are shaped by the social project.

Keywords

Deafness, communication, citizenship, social justice, equality of intelligence, mediation

1 Strangeness in the Relationship is a Two-Way Road: Power and Communication

“(…) I confess to having difficulty in understanding how may hearing individuals provide an accurate representation of a car’s carburetor if they may not illustrate it linguistically in threedimensional space” (Correia 2010, 173). Thus runs a deaf’s speech. The deaf individual, member of a research group on French Sign Language (Langue des Signes Française [LSF]) headed by Cuxac (cited in Correia 2010), was describing the strangeness that took over him while trying to understand how could a hearing individual grasp the idea of a given object without having access to its representation. This strangeness, however, does not reflect the nonrecognition of the oral language (or its characteristics) but rather conveys its limitations—thus perceived by the deaf—in the

hopes of better understanding the idea communicated (indeed, communication of a given idea in oral language is subject to prior knowledge, from both sides, of the meaning of that idea, given the abstract nature of the word). As for the rest, the existence of “iconicity between sign and referent allows (...) the hearing observer, who is unfamiliar with any sort of sign language, to more or less successfully ‘guess’ the meaning of a gesture, or to find a connection—at least to some extent—between the object and the gesture, action, or event that it represents” (Silva 2010, 115).

The ‘representational’ potential of an object, expressed through gestural communication itself, seems to reflect the act of naming—in this case, gestural naming—and, simultaneously, of identification/acquaintance of the object itself, that is, “the possibility to simultaneously grasp the linguistic object and the speech about that object” (Correia 2010, 191). Still, it is central to distinguish between representation and communication, i.e. the representation as “the meaning that I wish to realize, to make material” (Kress 2010, 71) and the communication as “interest of the recipient of the sign. My sign needs to be shaped for the person or group for whom I have intended it to be a sign”, (...) which demands “for transparency in communication” (Kress 2010, 71). This transparency is all the more explicit because the subject, through the process of analogy, “translates interest [in communicating] and selects what is to be represented as the signified into apt means of representing it, the signifier”, thereby giving rise to the “sign, formed on the basis of the relation of analogy” (Kress 2010, 71).

If ‘object’ has been previously used to refer to ‘idea’, also in this case the gestural languages,

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contrary to common sense perception, “by adopting the visual image of a concrete object or activity” (Silva 2010, 121) to describe another, perhaps less to describe another, perhaps less evi-dent, potentiate the metaphorical sense of the iconic language. Indeed, “sign language, by nature an iconic language, will be naturally suitable to express, through metaphors, an idea for which there is yet no sign” (Correia 2010, 184). In this way, “students may understand the metaphor through analogical reasoning; they may not realize that language can be used metaphorically, but that has nothing to do with their capacity to actually use metaphors, which are a form of figurative language” (Correia 2010, 185). According to Van Leeuwen, “the essence of metaphor is the idea of ‘transference’, of transferring something from one place to another, on the basis of a perceived similarity between the two ‘places’” (2005, 30). In this perspective, there is nothing better in the context of sign language than making interpretative sense of the relationship between two ideas. According to the above-cited author, this means that the metaphor is built up “on the basis of our concrete experience: (...) new metaphors, and hence new ideas and new practices can be founded on the affordances of direct, concrete experience” (Van Leeuwen 2005, 33). Furthermore, Kress strengthens the concept according to which “all signs are metaphors, always newly made, resting on, materializing, and displaying the interest of the maker of the sign” (Kress 2005, 71).

Another question to be raised is whether the hearing individual, not being able to understand the sign language, is able to understand the metaphors used among the deaf “on the basis of our interactions with people in our culture, in terms of social, political, economic and religious institutions” (Van Leeuwen 2005, 33). This is the same as asking whether the deaf and the hearing individuals share a common culture when living in the same social context or, on the other hand, “at least some cultural differences can be bridged by tracing the metaphors back to their experiential basis” (Van Leeuwen 2005, 34). The apparent relationship of power that might be established between a linguistic mode representative of the majority (the oral communication) and a mode representative of the minority (the gestural communication) is not essentially number-based but rather is anchored in the communicational process itself; “the more powerful the maker of the sign, the more she or he can ignore the requirements of transparency—that is, attention to the communicational requirements of others” (Kress 2010, 72). In the end, this situation is frequently experienced by the deaf as those who “have to do the semiotic work that makes up for the neglect of the privileged” (Kress 2010, 72).

At the core the question raised here is not the impossibility of sign language being a learning channel whose contents could even be of abstract nature, in the assumption of being unable to communicate them. Rather, it suggests that sign language, by working in an operating mode other than those of oral languages, conflicts with an

orality-based education/learning model, which does not lend itself to the other learning modes. In other words, “neither sign language is like vocal language, nor the deaf individual is similar to the hearing is exactly the opposite: it is because the deaf and the hearing are alike that they can develop a language and a culture that take into account the vital and social singularities of the relationship between the man and the world” (Benvenuto 2010, 110). Ultimately, and assuming the different modes of assimilating information—both through vocal and gestural language—the principle of universality of the means of verification of learning, i.e. the evaluation procedures, tends to deny legitimacy to those singular, learning-effective modalities.

Here, we depart from standard practice of the means and modes of learning as well as of confirming and evaluating learning: if we consider the possibility of representation of the knowledge acquired by the deaf (“signs made in gesture are culturally shaped as are all signs in any [communicational] mode” [Kress 2010, 76]), the globalization of a rule representative of the majority tends to become standard gauge, a learning measure that denies intrinsic properties from the different modes of learning.

If “human universality relies on the ability of generating a set of rules, which allow the individual to singularize himself” (sic) (Benvenuto 2010, 110), the globalization of a rule issued by the majority (in this case, oralist) will constitute an obstacle to diversity and composite-interpretative sense, both associated with learning and a result of the different modes of building of meaning.

2 Deafness as Relationship and the Equality of Intelligence

By stating, “deafness is not an hearing disability, neither a one-person problem. It relies on the relationship between at least two persons”, Mottez (cited in Coelho 2010, 33) emphasizes the concept of “deafness as relationship”, invoking the communicative function of language and its inherence to both the symbolic nature of language and the social nature of the human species. After all, it is not about strictly “living with” but rather about sophisticatedly “living in the fullest sense with” (or better yet, the previously discussed distance between representation and communication), to which communication and its complexity provides an increasing range of equally complex possibilities. The debate around deafness, historically documented and working chronologically from oralism (“a discourse on a medico-pedagogical disability that focus on the impaired ear and the teaching of oral words” [Benvenuto 2010, 108]) to gesture (“a socio-anthropological discourse focusing on sign language and the deaf culture” [Benvenuto 2010, 108]), does not contend against the dominant learning model. Rather, it largely reflects the role of essentiality in the construction of meaning, the latter of which acquires a structuring relevance, for it is the language as the preferred communication medium

among social as well as cultural communities that herein we shall discuss. It is in this sense model might become problematic. "Humans have propensity to express themselves and communicate through signs" (Coelho 2010, 33). In the case of the deaf, this propensity is less of an accessory and more of a necessity, since signs are a central resource for those with total or partial hearing loss.

The relational dimension of deafness, according to Mottez, wraps up the concept of "relationship with the world", which is the result of a unique yet socially and culturally determined project. The deaf, as well as the hearing individuals, construct their own unique perception of the world. What actually counts "is what results of this relationship; deafness is shaped by singular life experiences lived in certain environmental circumstances and contexts" (Benvenuto 2010, 111). In this line, sign-mediated communication would reflect a perception of the world with which one interacts, whose characteristics would be determined by the framework of socially accepted opportunities rather than by the framework of resources that the individual is able to accumulate. The resistance that the deaf individual and the deaf in general have been upholding over the course of history in the face of the mainstreaming of deafness—initially as an atrocity, abnormality, or deviation, "calamity that should be repaired, no matter what" (Fusellier-Sousa & Coelho 2010, 120)—tends to be expressed by what Touraine (2005) defines as communitarianism or the result of a discrimination that, by bringing together the individuals who share that same singularity, grants them with an unusual force: "in fact, the ones who are excluded or neglected seek for a place outside the social scale where they are misplaced, and confront their opponents with a qualitative assessment of themselves" (Touraine 2005, 201). It put into question; it is the discussion that bridges the community's identities under the influence of some force or imperative that drives the advantage of the stronger over the weaker. "This occurs when the collective action is defined by being or having, and not in the light of an universal value; to establish the latter, the first condition is that the actor or the fighter recognizes in the other the universal in a sense—and this is a key issue—those who are at the receiving end of discrimination can better understand its effects than those who are at its origin. In failing to understand deafness as "a disease that can be treated and cured, (...) but yet adopting another point of view, which considers deafness as a state rather than a discriminating condition, it is possible to approach a universe in which the difference is valued otherwise" (Fusellier-Sousa & Coelho 2010, 120). The space for affirmation of the deaf and their relationship with the world involves "feeling that the construction of the subject is acting in the other the same way it is acting in themselves. This construction is governed by the establishment of universality from a particular social or cultural experience" (Touraine 2005, 176).

The notion of subject set in motion by Touraine in the sense of the singular, i.e. of the singular

experience ("the individual's willingness to be an actor in his own existence is what I typically call the subject" [Touraine 2005, 238]), is to an equal degree at the basis of the beginning of a new paradigm, the cultural paradigm, or the claim for cultural rights, which "always represent particular attributes, albeit universally" (Touraine 2005, 238). The affirmation of difference, whose axis is singular experience, actually distances us from a communitarianism view as something "put above citizenship, which would mean recognizing cultural heritage over national identity" (Touraine 2005, 201), remitting us to a universal not defined by the dominant rule—liable to confusion with universal rule—but by a meaning susceptible of being generalized; not through the imposing character of the rule, rather through the singular nature of meaning.

We refer to the principle of equality of intelligence proposed by Rancière (1987) as a "principle that implies the description of interactions, for this is the only means to think of emancipation, yet on the other hand it is unbearable in a regulatory system" (Verstraete 2010, 67). In the view of knowledge as a vehicle to social emancipation, we here refer to its learning processes. Namely, we refer to the learning modes of a regulatory system driven by individual success, not to be confused with the value of singular experience. Indeed, the principle that "the individual is accountable to no-one but himself or his merit" (Poulette 2010, 48) hides a reality, that of "a meritocracy that implies competition, comparison and, consequently, unequal distribution of performances and intelligences (Poulette 2010, 48). The regulatory principle of equality of opportunity, a key aspect of educational politics, grotesquely transforms inequality in legitimate equality: "each subject is, from the beginning, compromised to the individualization, founded in comparison and competition. Consequently, mirroring the other person is a form of relative construction of identity that refuses, from the start, the idea of a master individual, full of desire. It is structurally impossible to be the self without being modeled according to the others" (Poulette 2010, 49).

The idea of being modeled according to others, a principle that would ideally be based on an order of autonomy—one that would reclaim the value of singular experience at the expense of individual success—tends, nonetheless, to be externally determined (namely by the qualification market) and virtually inaccessible to the deaf individual. The appreciation of (one's) differences would, on the other side of the coin, create the necessary conditions for granting access to the sovereign right of equality of opportunity, hence obligatorily disrespecting the singular nature of meaning (for oneself).

Comparison- and competition-based individuality hardly enables one to understand that "the deaf use a novel and complex visual-gestural language, the sign language, which allows them to behave in any personal or social domain on a par with the other ones" (Fusellier-Sousa & Coelho 2010, 120).

It is this difference that founds diversity; it is the difference that best helps understanding human

universality, which enters in conflict with the generalization of the rule as (apparent) equality principle: “when we commit to real exchanges with the deaf, considering them as full interlocutors in a relationship of equality of intelligence, our feeling of frustration and failure to communication gradually makes room to surprise and wonder before everything that, step by step, we discover about ourselves, about oneself, and about human kind in general” (Fusellier-Souza & Coelho 2010, 120).

3 Citizenship Based on Wise and Profane Knowledge: How to Reconfigure Social Justice?

It is the distinctiveness of this deaf knowledge, accessible to the hearing individual as expertise (Charlot, 2002) but inseparable of a unique way of perceiving the world (as unique as the visual-gestural mode of perception), that calls for the principle of equality of intelligence as a way to respect experience-based knowledge: “some modes, gesture or moving image for instance, combine the logics of time and of space”, whereas “time and the sequence of elements in time supply the underlying ‘(semiotic) logic’ of speech [as well as] writing, [the latter of which is] not dominantly and finally organized by the logic of space” (Kress 2010, 81). The conception of intelligence, as highlighted by evaluation and assessment procedures, can hardly ensure through measure alone the comprehension inscribed in its growth and construction; in the case of deaf individuals, the difference concerns modes of representation and communication that, once not recognized, cannot have an expression in formal systems and, therefore, cannot grant the deaf person a recognition equal to that of the hearing individual. As an extreme situation where cognition may be misinterpreted, it highlights the importance of inscribing experience-based knowledge in any conception of equality and democracy. It is in a perspective parallel to this that Gorz (2008), reporting on ecology, speaks of a lived world as a world in which “the result of the activities social individuals see, understand, and dominate the result of their own acts” (Gorz 2008, 49). Here, experience is the result of everyday culture, the “set of intuitive knowledge, vernacular know-how (as understood by Ivan Illich), customs, rules, and learned conducts, due to which individuals can interpret, understand, and assume their reintegration into the surrounding world” (Gorz 2008, 49). We may generically subsume this knowledge under the designation of profane knowledge as opposed to expertise-based knowledge, “which hampers individuals from judging, and subjects them to an ‘illuminated’ power, which in turn is claimed based on superior interest of a cause that far surpasses their comprehension” (Gorz 2008, 48). This wise knowledge tends to deal with the ecological issue and associated bottlenecks “in the framework of industrialism and market logic, through extension of techno-bureaucratic power” (Gorz 2008, 47), playing down the political issue as “constantly renewed public mediation between the rights of the individual, based on his (sic) autonomy,

and the interests of society as a whole, which founds but similarly constraints those rights” (Gorz 2008, 48). In its opposition to the sacred, the profane represents the public sphere and, in this sense, the legitimacy of the sacred itself: “Reciprocity here is active: those who remain in the public place do not know what is transpiring in the temple, but those who have the right to go into the temple do not necessarily know what is being said and is happening outside in the public arena” (Battagay et al 2012: 20). Back to knowledge, and its opposition to the expertise, the profane knowledge is, as we have previously emphasized, knowledge from experience. The association Gorz establishes between knowledge and power concerns “models which brutally or gently and pragmatically deny the layperson any competence for participating in the production of the only valid knowledge: that which may be described as scientific” (Battagay et al. 2012, 18). To talk about knowledge from experience is to emphasize, then, “a model of coproduction of knowledge which tends to surmount limits by actively involving laypersons in elaborating knowledge that concerns them” (Battagay et al. 2012, 18).

Analogously, deaf ecause, by stooping over an approach for perceiving the world that nonetheless does not set aside the deaf’s world, it is subjected to regulatory and universal rules therefrom derived. Citizenship is, in this case, a profane exercise not because it is so understood by the deaf, but because whatever depends on experience-based knowledge (predominantly inscribed in space) is not recognized by socially accepted knowledge (predominantly inscribed in time) as wise knowledge. Interpreting deafness as disease contradicts the legitimacy of its knowledge; instead, interpreting deafness as difference acknowledges what is unlike, albeit not instantly legitimate.

The association between profane knowledge, on one side of the balance, and profane citizenship, on the other, opens the way for the political as regulator of the lived world and everyday culture(s). Simultaneously, it blocks the way for wise knowledge, which, by replacing this political by techno-bureaucracy, in its turn denies the principles of social justice, which govern the objectives of the former. In agreement with Touraine (2005), Fraser invokes “[this] new notoriety of culture over politics, hence over the prospects for social justice” (Fraser 2002, 8). According to the author, “another defining feature of globalization is the widespread politicization of culture, especially in struggles over identity and difference—or struggles for recognition¹, as hereinafter referred to—which have boomed in recent years” (Fraser 2002, 8). The above-mentioned contour defines redistribution, which denotes class politics, and is to a certain extent replaced by recognition, by the supremacy of statutory politics: “the hegemonic grammar of political contestation, the claims for economic equality are less evident today than during the Fordist heyday of the Keynesian welfare state” (Fraser 2002, 8). In this line, politics and its main interlocutors, the political parties, “once identified with projects of egalitarian redistribution,

now embrace an elusive 'third way', whose truly emancipatory contents, when existing, more closely relate to recognition than redistribution" (Fraser 2002, 9).

This wayward trend of political contestation, of redistribution for recognition, represents "a new understanding of social justice, (...) no longer restricted to questions of distribution, but now encompassing questions of representation, identity, and difference" (Fraser 2002, 9). It is in this sense that profane knowledge seems to acquire some visibility, although one does not recognize that "current struggles for recognition are contributing to complement and strengthen struggles for egalitarian redistribution" (Fraser 2002, 9), which is what the author identifies as the problem of displacement. Instead of reflecting the wayward trend of political contestation according to a bi-dimensional logic, the problem of displacement does so according to substitution logic. Under this threat, the temporality with which "the identity conflicts reached a paradigmatic status, [concurrent with] an aggressively globalizing capitalism led by the United States, radically exacerbating economic inequality" (Fraser 2002, 10) is not surprising. It is in this contemporaneity that one understands that "the turn to recognition perfectly colludes with an economic neoliberalism that wants nothing more than to repress the memory of socialist egalitarianism" (Fraser 2002, 10).

If the affirmation of recognition appears important in the upward climb of deaf knowledge to the status of legitimate knowledge, its conquest at the expense of the conquest of redistribution (as the conquest of redistribution at the expense of recognition previously did) results at the long term in a loss from the viewpoint of justice: "from the distributive perspective, injustice appears in the guise of class-like inequalities, rooted in the society's economic structure. (...) Maldistribution, in the broad sense, [involves] not only income inequalities but also exploitation, deprivation, and marginalization or exclusion from labor markets" (Fraser 2002, 11). The capital gains added to redistribution by recognition—"to encompass not only reforms aimed at promoting disrespected identities and the cultural products of discriminated groups but also efforts to recognize and valorize diversity" (Fraser 2002, 12)—would tend to be reflected, because of the exclusivity of recognition, in what Sen (2009) describes as the identification of individuals "as belonging to one social category to the exclusion of all the others. (...) Individual human beings with their various plural identities, multiple affiliations and diverse associations, are quintessentially social creatures with different types of societal interactions. Proposals to see a person merely as a member of one social group tend to be based on an inadequate understanding of the breadth and complexity of any society in the world" (Sen 2009, 247). Based on Marx's citation, the author still emphasizes, "What is to be avoided above all is the re-establishing of 'Society' as an abstraction vis-à-vis the individual" (Sen 2009, 245).

recognition and the renewed gains of (re)distribution, under the view of their outcomes around the legitimacy of deaf knowledge as well as deaf citizenship, that is, under the spotlights of social justice, seems better explained through the concept of capability proposed by Amartya Sen: "The capability approach focus on human life, and not just on some detached objects of convenience, such as incomes or commodities a person may possess, which are often taken, especially in economic analysis, to be the main criteria of human success. Indeed, it proposes a serious departure from concentrating on the means of living to the actual opportunities of living" (Sen 2009, 233). Contrary to Rawls (2001), whose equity justice policies lay on a concept of fair inequalities, emphasizing a compensation to unequal access to fundamental rights, rather than the suppression of such inequality (enhancing, thus, mainly the (re)distribution perspective), Sen's concept of capability, focusing on actual opportunities rather than simply means of living, undeniably enhances contexts where this living becomes possible, hence emphasizing also the recognition perspective. The landscape of recognition becomes rugged when it comes to the importance of recognition for identity politics. Indeed, "what requires recognition in globalization is not group-specific identity but the individual status of its members as full partners in social interaction" (Fraser 2002, 15), instead of facing it as a matter of social status, a model that "implies a politics aimed at overcoming subordination through establishment of the misrecognized party as an absolute member of society, capable of participating on a par with the other members" (Fraser 2002, 15).

4 By Way of Conclusion: For a Deaf Mediation

We have so far tried to emphasize the dual meaning of strangeness in deaf-hearing communication, but equally the other position of power based on which one deals with strangeness. We dissociate the construction of deafness as a disability to be overcome from deafness as privileged difference, a privilege that is justified only based on the presumption of the equality of intelligence. Finally, we distinguish between wise and profane knowledge in drawing-up a well-rounded agenda for social justice, the only reward for the full exercise of citizenship, while conciliating recognition and redistribution. We are left to discuss the affirmation modes of this citizenship with cases of isolation—not only geographic but also communicational. The isolated deaf, subject of empirical research within the scope of the PROFACITY² project, is symptomatic of what we translated above as "acknowledge [of] what is unlike, albeit not instantly legitimate". The isolated deaf, sometimes integrated in the urban context, lacks an official language—being the Portuguese language or the Portuguese sign language—and at best resorts to so-called emerging language, that is, "spontaneous linguistic systems in the process of training and organization in interaction with the environment" (Coelho 2010, 33). Regardless of the

importance of these emerging languages for the understanding of “how sign languages arise and develop” (Coelho 2010, 37), the convening of that situation was called for based on the creation of access to, and the establishment of communication with, these individuals, even in the absence of a common language. It is this experience that, in the context of figure of the deaf mediator. The deaf mediator, who complements the work of the interpreter in communicating with the isolated deaf, establishes, on the one hand, the accessibility to their world and that of an emerging language, by ensuring that the representation of the meaning, as defined by the isolated deaf individual, be converted to effective communication. On the other hand, the deaf mediator needs to understand the role of the researcher as well as the aim of the research study in order to be able to properly explain it to the isolated deaf individual. Without overshadowing the work of the interpreter—who centrally guarantees the conversion of one form of predominantly tempor-allogic communication to another, predominantly spatial-logic (and vice versa)—the mediator does not translate but rather builds meaning, and not between two languages based on distinct communication modalities—oral and gestural—but rather between languages (gestural and emerging) whose repertoires, from the point of view of building of meaning, are substantially different. Plus, it is the compliance with the principle of the equality of intelligence that allows both the accessibility and the comprehension of citizenship of the isolated deaf. rare opportunity for communication—that determines the repertoire of an emerging language, not the conditioning of profane knowledge, which comes face to face to the (apparent) wise knowledge of the researcher.

Insofar as the isolated deaf configures an extreme expression of deafness, it helps highlighting the concept of mediation as one that presupposes, on one hand, the recognition of a difference that must have a (comprehensible) social expression; on the other hand, the recognition of an equal in that difference as to favor social integration. Mediation is raised upon tensions in the social sphere to overcome misunderstandings that rely, in this case, on the absence of a communal language, thus on both a linguistic and a semiotic concern. In other cases, also approached within the scope of the PROFACITY project, a wider concept has been developed—the translation milieus’ concept—in order to overcome situations where either profane knowledge or profane citizenship were not recognized as legitimate appropriations: “Translating milieus are more like processes in which meaning is sought out and created, in which complexity is produced, in which objects are rendered visible, or in which perturbation takes place, and spaces in which narratives are constructed and invented. These processes produced paradoxes and contradictions, or allowed those paradoxes and contradictions to emerge...” (Battegay et al. 2012, 433). The PROFACITY project, less a comparative study and more one whose “aim was to explore cross-cutting aspects depending upon non-homogeneous situations approached with a view to

specific problems, raising issues of both the citizenship of non-citizens and the non-citizenship of citizens” (Battegay et al. 2012, 9), allowed the approach of this citizenship issue in such disparate situations as: the erased residence rights in Slovenia; the problematic citizenship of migrants in Europe; the cultural dimensions of citizenship, expressed by the kebab businesses in France and Holland; the biometric identity checks and the “citizenizing” of bodily marked citizens; the undocumented migrants and their rights; the refugee experience. It is not the purpose of this paper, of course, to render full expression to these studies—for that, the work of Battegay et al. should be considered—but rather to witness the process of building an analyzer category where the major issue of mediation inscribes itself, and also to fully explicit the approach under which mediation is here understood.

While still on the issue of the work of the deaf mediator and his centrality in the process of building mediator and his centrality in the process of building of a meaning, this work is defined, as suggested by Tricoire (2002), less of an answer and more of a question, less based on the principle of problem solving, and more based on the principle of problem finding: “there is no situation-independent answer, (...) the entire space of mediation is built around the uncertainty of the meeting, under the condition of becoming (the problem finding) (Tricoire 2002, 45). In this situation, the mediator, “trapped in a While still on the issue of the work of the deaf mediator and his centrality in the process of building permanent dilemma in which answers have to be delivered to the recipients, risks compromising what he actually ... does not know to open avenues to a virtually nonexistent possible prior to the encounter”, a task that the author identifies as (auto)-mediation, “which paradoxically requires preparation and training to state what we are unsure of” (Tricoire 2002, 45). In this perspective, it is the event of mediation that, somehow, builds the mediator: “if the event exceeds our capabilities by its contingency and impressive power, it requires our fidelity and perseverance, especially in the face of (and in relation to) what we fail to grab” (Tricoire 2002, 45).

The brief discussion here started around the figure of the deaf mediator somehow brings us back to the first lines of this reflection, that is, the strangeness that might exist between two languages, which, although developed in a common social and cultural context, are at odds because they are unknown to each other. The central issue of the development of the exercise of citizenship—notwithstanding the diversity of obstacles identified over the course of this reflection—far outweighs the problem of deafness per se when it comes to identify, in a shared social project, the power of generating situations of isolation. On top of discrimination (based on the language), these situations will add on marginalization (based on the lack of an official language). At this point, the problem does not end with the issue of deafness, but rather with the difficulties encountered by the social project in embracing the diversity that is the social project itself; the problem ends with

the fact that the social project is not able to cope with situations of marginalization that, perhaps unintentionally, are shaped by the social project itself.

The deaf mediation is certainly a possible universe, from the point of view of the understanding and improvement of quality of life of the isolated deaf, citizens with full rights who will not demand justice but nonetheless have the right to have rights.

The potential that the approach to deaf mediation entails as social intervention policy is far beyond the short example given here. More broadly, it refers to the context of “production of new sociabilities [that] allow the reactivation of a concept of citizenship inseparable of the production of the city itself, (...) a political-cognitive context in which the mediation devices are thought as construction devices, spaces for the exercise of warm and dense social relationships, where the mediator is the craftsman in the building of cities and the relationships that brings it life” (Correia & Caramelo 2010, 26).

To conclude, we would like to convey the urgency of relocating social justice in the axis of citizenship as it underlies the production process of a social project whose deeper democratic understanding, particularly perceived in the case of the deaf, and while stressing the importance of recognition—of the individualities and the individual—is obtained based on the idea of social link. Historically speaking, the social link is binding on novel concepts of distribution, which, as proposed by Amartya Sen, are not exclusively anchored to the means of experiencing, but to the effective opportunities of experiencing. The claim for singularities, which would be expressed through recognition, cannot make invisible the social links that tie the social project itself. On the other hand, if distribution was closer to this social link as it provided the individual a social inscription, it no longer renders a full expression of social diversity and does not suffice as a tool for social justice. It appears that the co-existence of these two processes and especially the tensions between their diverse natures should cope with a discussion that effectively deepens the subject of social justice. The testimony we brought here—the one concerning deaf people—sought precisely to highlight this perspective.

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Endnotes:

1 Emphasis added.

2 "PROFACITY" is the acronym for "Profane Citizenship in Europe", whose subheading is "Testing democratic ownership in hybrid situations". This project is funded by the Seventh Framework Program (FP7), area "8.5.1. Participation and Citizenship in Europe", topic "SSH-2007-5.1.1. Democratic 'ownership' and participation", coordinated by Professor Marc Derycke in collaboration with academic institutions from France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Slovenia, and Portugal.