

## **A PROPOSAL FOR WORK WITH Mr W.... being notes made after a meeting of some interested parties.**

### HOW THINGS ARE NOW.

W...., with friends, visited me at the University today so that we could introduce ourselves to each other and begin to explore useful things to do. It is clear that the major requirement is to provide some means of communication between W.... and his mother, Mrs T..... Mrs T.... is deaf-mute; before W....'s accident, they communicated by signing. Mrs T.... is acquainted with Australian Sign Language, but this is no longer useful, because Australian Sign Language depends on movements of the hands. W.... can still understand Mrs T....'s signs, but is restricted to replies which he can make by movements of his head - which usually means "yes" or "no".

W.... can talk and move his head, but nothing else. That's enough to let him drive an electric wheelchair. W.... saw promise in the Macintosh mouse. The idea of selecting positions on a screen with some such device struck him as worth pursuing.

W....'s ideal machine would translate his spoken words into Australian Sign Language displayed on a screen. Neither end of this proposal is easy, but the closer we can get to that result the better.

An immediate requirement is to give W.... some way of attracting his mother's attention when they are in their house. He can speak, but she can't hear. Possibilities are :

- Some sort of visual indicator in the rooms of the house, which W.... could operate from a computer on the lines of "environment control" equipment.
- A device described ( if my memory is reliable ) as a bracelet which responds to sound by vibrating against the skin. This would also perhaps be effective if the wearer was asleep. This, and other possibly useful items, are available from Electronics For Hearing, who are thought likely to be cooperative.

The Spinal Unit have some computing machinery which may be available for use. No one at the meeting was very sure just what sort of machinery it was, but it probably doesn't make much difference anyway.

### A FIRST SUGGESTION.

( NOTE : this isn't a firm proposal - it's put forward for discussion. All comments, suggestions, criticisms, corrections, or anything else are welcome, but they should come along as soon as possible. )

It seems to me at first glance that W.... would best be helped by a system with ( at least ) two functions : simple attention-grabbing ( which is probably comparatively easy ), and more general communication ( which is not ). We can think of the project in three parts - in order of increasing difficulty :

- The attention-grabber.
- The communicator display, relying for the time being on a fairly conventional scanning method for input.
- Speech input for the communicator.

It's unlikely that we'll get all that done in this project, but at least we can make a start. The scheme has the advantage that the first topic is something to do while thinking about the second, and so on.