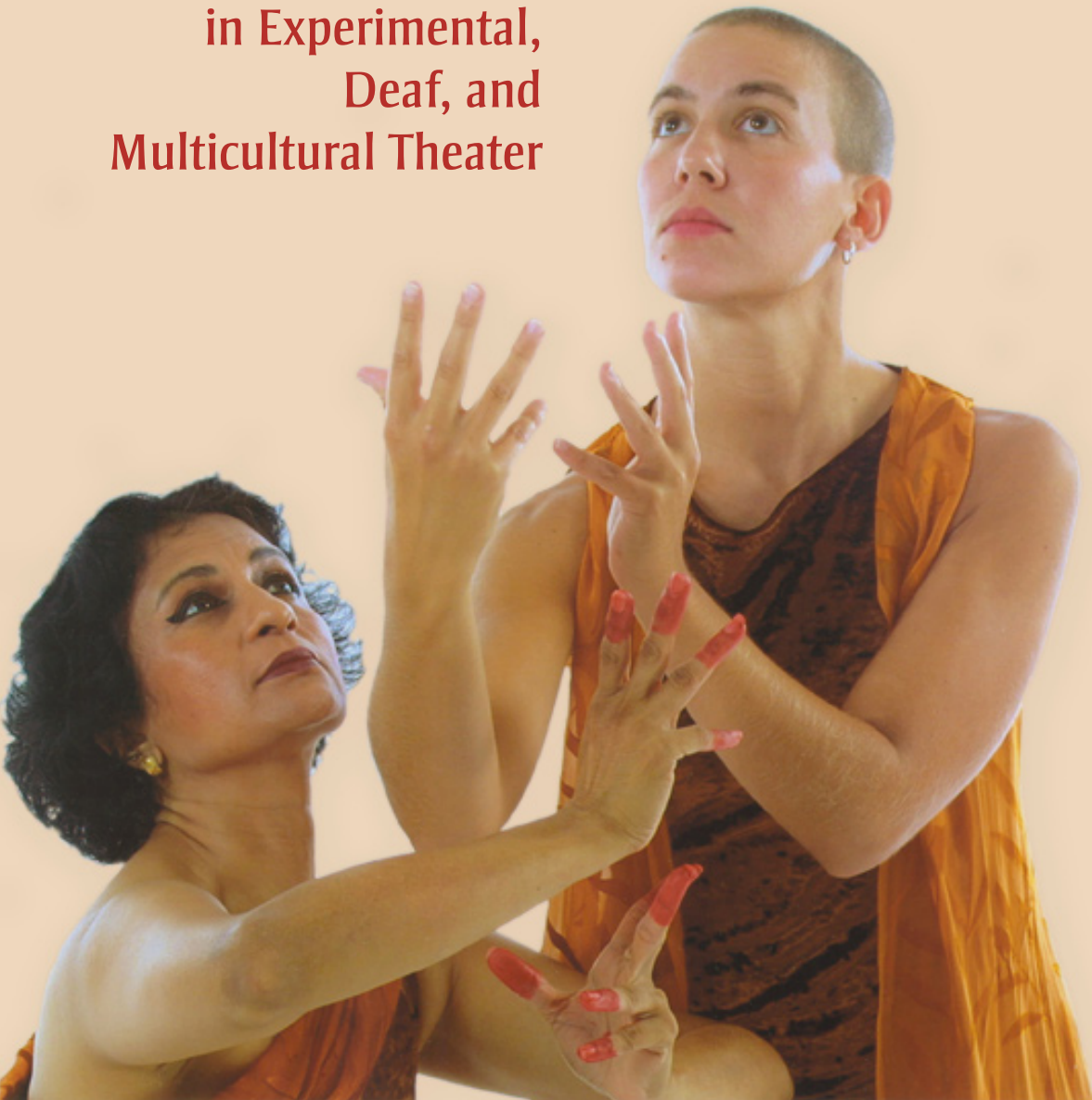


Hearing Difference

The Third Ear
in Experimental,
Deaf, and
Multicultural Theater



Kanta Kochhar-Lindgren

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For Gray, who listens

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Chapter 1

The Third Ear

Hearing *Difference* is about the connections between hearing and deafness in experimental, Deaf, and multicultural theater. In this work, I focus on how we might articulate a Deaf aesthetic, and more specifically, on how we can understand moments of “deafness” in theater works that do not simply reinscribe a hearing bias back into our analysis. In the already well-archived history of experimental sound arts, physical, and cross-cultural theater, there is a rich exploration of the use of sound and silence in relation to the moving body to critique mainstream modes of representation and to produce new art practices. However, all too often the implications of deafness as part of the theatrical sensorium are omitted, and no comparative study between deaf theaters and these other theaters has yet been done.

Listening with the Third Ear

These intersections of hearing, deafness, multiculturalism, and performance indicate newly emerging cultural practices. Several scholars—including Lennard Davis, H-Dirksen Bauman, Brenda Jo Brueggemann, Mairian Corker, Owen Wrigley, and Harlan Lane—have laid much of the critical groundwork on the importance of Deaf studies. Much of this work charts the cultural and political histories of the Deaf community, but it also grapples with epistemological issues about the audist bias built into cultural notions concerning the five senses, voice, and the normal body (issues that have implications for both deaf and hearing people). Davis and Bauman, in particular, have made explicit pleas for the extension of Deaf studies into the areas of art and multiculturalism.

My own work—in which I expand the model of what I am calling the “third ear” as a device for a cross-sensory listening across domains of sound, silence, and the moving body in performance—forms a partial response to, and an elaboration of, their wide-ranging labors. My argument, for example, extends their concerns regarding the need for a rigorous unpacking of the embedded sensorial paradigms in the cultural imagination, because deafness as a repressed construct in the critical discourse remains vastly undertheorized, not only in its perceptual complexities but also in its connections to social and political arenas.

In relation to the cultural empowerment of the disenfranchised, much has already been written about the need for a nuanced understanding of multiple voices and the right to speak. Less, however, has been written about *listening* to the other. Not only do we have great difficulty “seeing” the other, but we also have great difficulty “hearing” the other as well. All too often, cultural biases toward Deaf culture and deafness merge with those of multiculturalism, both important sites for thinking “otherness.” As we sort out these embedded notions of deafness/hearing, we can better understand the transformative potential of theater for forging emergent and heterogeneous social spaces that lead to more supple listening and, therefore, more supple politics.

These moments at the edge of hearing where hearing and deafness meet, whether parts of our everyday lives or on stage, are not only complex and fleeting but are also often left unacknowledged. To begin to map out these sensibilities as they come into contact with each other, I have adopted the notion of the third ear as a method of hybrid listening. “Hearing” across an unfamiliar pastiche of sonic and visual space—or even “hearing” that we cannot in fact literally hear—necessitates a third ear, an improvisational cross-sensory mode of listening.

Listening with the third ear shifts our attention from the overt content of the performance to its nuanced forms of expression. We become more involved with the felt sense of the performance as its movements unfold: the silences, the gaps between image and sound, the incongruities between movement and text, the dissonant intercessions of noise and gesture, and the positions of the performing bodies that speak to us. The third ear is my

attempt to appropriate, and then revise, a term that will encompass both “spectator” and “audience” with their many implications for the vagaries of moving across categories of difference.

Hearing Loss

I first encountered what I now call the third ear at the age of six, when the signs of diminished hearing started as an insistent static cycling in my ears and turned into a pattern of sudden, sometimes sustained, distorted gaps in the sonic landscape. By seven I had been outfitted with a box hearing aid that hung in a case on the front of my chest, but that I only wore to school. I chose when I was going to pass as “hearing,” and I also, at that age, chose when I would be “deaf.” I actually preferred to be “deaf.”

At home I perched myself in front of a huge black-and-white TV with earphones jacked into the TV. My father, who traveled quite a bit, had figured out that the headphones of airplane pilots could be purchased from a pilot’s supply company, and he found an able mechanic who created a jack on the TV. Plugged in, literally, I blithely watched *Sing Along with Mitch*, an American TV show that featured a variety of singers. Mesmerized by my favorite singer, African American Leslie Uggams, I was certain I wanted to be like her when I grew up.

In addition to the use of the headphones, the words to songs were captioned at the bottom of the TV screen, and a ball bounced along so viewers could follow the words. These moments, the combined systems of sensory input, the earphones, the moving text, and the visuality of the singer, created a third ear that acted as a hybrid form of hearing. This particular performance of the third ear resonated for me as a hard of hearing young girl *and* as a person of color, a South Asian American growing up in a small southern town in the United States.

Although for hearing people, the experience of seeing the ball bounce along the tops of the words was simply extra added value, the way in which this allowed the image and sound to merge increased my own enjoyment immensely. For me this mixture of forms was absolutely essential to “getting it” (something like watching a foreign-language film that has subtitles).

Body language, tone of voice, and moving words merged together to help me make sense of and experience *Sing Along with Mitch*.

The box hearing aid that I wore to school was different from the somewhat more elaborate getup I had for watching TV. To some it may seem that both are “third ears.” For me as an elementary school girl, wearing a hearing aid signaled that I was different, but it also allowed me to “pass” as hearing when I wore it. At those times, I felt I was trying to be one of the hearing. I acquiesced only because doing well in school meant that I had to be able to hear what was going on.

The headphones, conversely, enacted a world that I could “step into” by choice where all the fragments of my identity somehow temporarily came together. “Understanding” this part of my personal lived experience, the ways different combinations of sensory input, sound distortion, and manipulating the text worked for me, has curious similarities to what has emerged in contemporary discourse about postmodernist aesthetics. It suggests the potential of certain types of performance, including experimental, Deaf, and multicultural ones, to create not only a “third space” but also the need for “third ears.”

In this example, and in the more formal analyses that follow, the flow between bits and pieces of sensory input from sight and sound marks contested, fragmented cultural terrain, and it indicates the need for more supple modes of interpretation—ones that articulate the registers of different senses, including cross-sensory modes. The third ear acts as a navigational tool to guide us through an excess of meaning that crosses sensorial borders in both communication and, as we discuss throughout the book, artistic modes. Studies show that this type of cross-sensory engagement applies to cross-cultural communication, which relies on nonverbal synaesthesia, the crossing of sensory modalities to simultaneously see and hear meaning.

Additionally, work in sign language addresses the ways in which communicating through sign language between deaf and hearing individuals is highly synaesthetic. Both of these contexts consider the frame of communication in everyday life, but this type of crossover also surfaces in the complex, but uneven, history of art, beginning most fundamentally with the Symbolists, on the potential of synaesthesia to chart new

artistic modes.¹ Communicative modes are constituents of artistic modes and vice versa. Moving across the senses thrusts us into a liminal realm and our understanding is, at best, tenuous. We are, at these moments, in between senses, in between meaning, in between hearing and deafness.

It is important to note that much of the discussion about how and under what conditions there can be epistemological and cultural crossover between hearing and deaf people often downplays, or omits altogether, the discussion of hard of hearing people. Although it is the case that some hard of hearing individuals consider themselves “hearing” but wearing an aid, there are others who are not hearing and also not Deaf. It is useful to consider the notion of a “third space” as a way of articulating a site where hearing, deaf, and hard of hearing individuals come together.

Although these encounters happen on a day-to-day basis, these sensibilities are writ large on the performance stage. Unmoored from being solely the instantiation of an identity politics, the sensibilities create a type of sensorial playing field. Consequently, identities can be moved around, reimagined, and recast. The need to articulate clear identity politics, for very real and important political reasons, can reinforce fixed notions of the body as well as fixed categorizations of art, particularly performance poetry. Although I agree that there are limits to identification, I argue that there are also multiple ways to build empathy, to transfer body perspectives, and to consider the positionality of another.²

This consideration has much in common with the recent work of Mairian Corker in “Sensing Disability.” Corker writes:

1. I further examine the Symbolists and other historical manifestations of synaesthesia in chapter 2.

2. Petra Kupperts's *Disability and Contemporary Performance: Bodies on Edge* (2003) addresses a variety of issues about the challenge of disability performance to mainstream modes of representation. She writes: “Performativity points to the ambiguities, the multi-valent nature of discursive actions: we are inscribed in subjectivity and culture through power, and yet we also wield the power to transform these relations. Disabled performance can be seen as powerful, active incursions into the conceptual space of art: neither disabled nor non-disabled performers just ‘are’—they position themselves on stage and in discourse. The very act of being positioned/positioning themselves is working against the view of the

Sensibility is taken primarily to be the set of individual and collective dispositions to emotions, attitudes, and feelings that are relevant to value theory, including ethics, aesthetics, and politics. But since I will be arguing that an important material aspect of sensibility is sensation, sensibility is used as a metaphor for the embodiment of these dispositions, especially in people who see the world differently. Further, sensibility must, by its very nature, take biological difference and socio-cultural difference to be mutually constitutive, rather than to regard either or both as given, and this troubles the impairment/disability binary. When we understand that the contributions made by biological conditions such as deafness and blindness to our lived experiences are constituted in and through social interaction, we can turn to exploring these embodiments. In conclusion, it is suggested that such a methodological and theoretical turn enables the development of responsible and responsive ways, or “sensed” ways, of thinking collectively that can be used to balance the political project of emancipation from oppression with the struggle for inclusive societies. (36)

This type of sensorial instability (literally and metaphorically) has important implications for revising our communal spaces of performance. Audience response becomes improvisational; the meaning is produced in the complex texture of the interaction between audience and performer.

Hearing, in this sensorial-metaphorical sense, becomes a matter of perspective that involves the whole-body attitude that we take through our ears, eyes, and other resonating points of the body. As individuals and groups strive for cultural recovery, voice, and power, “interrupted sensory memor[ies] and displaced emotions” are unearthed from the debris of the cultural unconscious. Through the use of performative montage, these differences resurface in the making of a new space. This cultural hybridity also questions the normative articulation of perception.

disabled person as merely passive, ‘incarcerated by an overpowering body’, ‘tragic victim’ of a pre-discursive physicality” (58–59).

It challenges us not only to “see” but also to *listen* to the many manifestations of difference.

To hear the voice of the other is to listen to difference as it surfaces at this borderline. Hearing and deafness are necessary partners in the moment of reception when simultaneous seeing and hearing occurs. A hybrid “hearing” of the third ear can keep open a transactive space of multiple meaning systems, marked by uneven differentials between the sensorial and metaphorical registers of deafness, disability, ethnicity, class, and gender. In “Signs of Silence, Lines of Listening,” for example, postcolonial theorist Iain Chambers notes:

To inhabit the multiplicity of cultural borders, historical temporalities and hybrid identities calls for a state of knowledge, an ethics of intellect, an aperture in politics, able to acknowledge more than itself. [. . .] In the dispersal of a single History, whose omniscient word legislates the world, I begin to hear composite voices crossing and disturbing the path and patterns of the once seemingly ineluctable onrush of ‘progress’. In the movement from concentrated sight to dispersed sound, from the ‘neutral’ gaze to the interference of hearing from the discriminating eye to the incidental ear, I abandon a fixed (ad)vantage for a mobile and poised politics of listening—for a ‘truth’ that is always becoming. (50–51)

This phase of cultural revisioning, which entails listening to what Homi Bhabha has called “the enunciative boundaries of a range of other dissonant, even dissident histories and voices” (2–3), enacts an important phase in the discussion of how we might envision disrupting our assumptions about the alignments between cultural and perceptual difference.

Although many theorists share the goal of cultural and political transformation, it is often less clear how the perceptual or sensorial becomes subsumed, even erased, in the name of the conceptual grappling with “listening.” The charting of the “lived” events, whether in everyday life or theatrical examples, is crucial to theories of Deaf and disability studies because those instances either validate or discount the politics. Otherwise, we run

the risk of engaging in a political rhetoric that glosses over the way the different individuals live their lives and where the various experiences and histories of colonization of the deaf, disabled, ethnic, or postcolonial body continue to haunt each other—echoing and reverberating across distorted and insufficiently articulated cultural terrain.

These new spatializations in the theater of the third ear create bridges between the voices of the old and the new in the present time of the performances. The synthesis of the past and the future challenges the traditional hierarchy among the senses, in particular the tendency to link the normatively audial with the visual. To create a syncretism in performance of difference, language is often recuperated in its interplay with the spatial (such as with ASL or dance movement). What are the implications for repositioning ourselves from the perspective of the third ear?

Work in the theater allows us to replay to ourselves our frames of reference and what performance studies theorist Richard Schechner has called our “restored behaviors.” In choosing from strips of preexisting behavior, we can shuffle these around and play with timing, order, and use of space; create gaps; and insert other systems of meaning. On the stage, he argues, we are “me, not-me,” creating shifting identity spaces. These opportunities give us ways of challenging modes of representation, creating performances of resistance, subverting mainstream modes of knowing, and redefining what we have traditionally meant by aesthetics.³ These emerging aesthetics are fueled by numerous new theaters. In the case of theaters of the third ear—the experimental, Deaf, and multicultural theaters—these new staging

3. Disability aesthetics has centered on the efforts of arts scholars to critique traditional notions of aesthetics that emphasize an ideal body and simultaneously discount, minimize, or erase disability. Lennard Davis, for example, comments on the importance of investigating cultural assumptions about artistic artifacts and performance. He writes:

[d]isability can be more fruitfully considered in relation to social process and cultural production by beginning to lay bare the cultural assumptions at the very base of artifacts like plays, novels, and poems. Moreover, from a philosophical point of view, the notion of disability reveals the epistemological bases and dialectical relations inherent in any notion of aesthetics. (*DI* 898–99)

It is important to grapple with how art re-inscribes and helps maintain societal frames for disability. Disability aesthetics also has more recently begun to account for how disability

practices draw us into the complexities of the cultural constructedness of hearing and deafness.

Speaking rests on the sensory frame of sound; sign language rests on the visual/spatial/gestural frame. At the surface, the issue appears to be how people who speak two different languages communicate. (Those of us who are hard of hearing are somewhat betwixt and between. As a young girl, when I plugged into the TV, I became “me, not me,” temporarily transfiguring my marginal status into a personal and self-crafted narrative of empowerment and identification.) Below the apparent issues of communication across language borders are vast areas of unexplored consideration about the body as lived and the various sensibilities that encounter each other, brought on by a series of contact zones among the sensorial, social, political, and historical spheres.

Sensing Deafness

There is a long history of the cultural mainstream’s tendency to render deafness “invisible.” A hearing person assumes that deafness is based on lack, an inability to hear sound and insufficient access to spoken language. This notion valorizes both the sensorial perspective of hearing, its parallel connections to the Western metaphysics of the voice, and the still widespread notion that signing is a group of gestures that are only second-best methods of communicating. A disability perspective, however, turns the frame of reference on the mainstream, and it not only challenges the *modes* of representation but also the *process*. In “Seeing Disability,” W. J. T. Mitchell writes:

One cannot see that a person is deaf until he or she speaks. An inaudible, nonphonetic language springs into view, flashing about

itself produces art, what those art practices are, and how those endeavors lead to a new aesthetics—revising what we have typically and traditionally considered aesthetics with its emphasis on the beautiful. There will be more on the consideration of intersection between deaf and disability art and deaf and disability studies in chapter 4.

the hands. One first sees this disability only when discovering one's own inability to read Sign or gesture language, more like a gestural counterpart of deafness itself than like illiteracy. Deafness, therefore, plays a special role in the realm of disabilities. It exemplifies disabilities as difference in the Derridean sense, as a swerving aside, an alternative path to language, speech and writing—"differently abled." Deafness is, in this sense, national or ethnic identity, a minority culture distinguished by its language; and indeed the Deaf have been pioneers in thinking of disability as a political issue. They raise the question: What is it to be "able"? What is "-ability"? (396)

Deaf with a capital *D* identifies particular members of the Deaf community whose culture is passed through sign language as well as their respective cultural institutions; *deaf* with a lower case *d* refers to those who have an audiological problem hearing but who may not consider themselves members of the Deaf culture. Davis notes that the Deaf world has "a body of 'literature' including written as well as signed works, a theatrical/choreographic tradition, academic discursive practices, pedagogical/ideological institutions, and so on" (EN 78). This culture is primarily passed on through the Deaf communities in the schools, religious organizations, clubs, and performance events for Deaf people. More recently, the Internet has served as a vital site for the transmission of Deaf culture and links the Deaf community across geographical spaces.

In the late 1970s in the United States the shift to mainstreaming in the public schools led to the shutdown of numerous schools for Deaf students, and it also unsettled the networking among the various components of the Deaf community.⁴ Nevertheless, Deaf people continue to identify themselves as a distinct cultural minority that has gained political leverage and a certain amount of visibility. This aim has been helped in part by

4. More on this can be found in Harlan Lane's *When the Mind Hears: A History of the Deaf*.

the presence of the National Theater of the Deaf, founded in 1967, which combines deaf and hearing performers on the stage at the same time, and other Deaf theaters, poets, and filmmakers who have made manifest Deaf arts as a national forum for the preservation and innovation of a Deaf performance tradition. Currently, the Deaf Way Festival held at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., is at the international forefront for showcasing Deaf performance.

Other politically decisive events include the political effects of the civil rights movement on inclusionary social practices, the political rally at Gallaudet in 1988 when the students lobbied for their first-ever deaf president and won, and the 1990 passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act.⁵ As awareness grows of their political and cultural options, Deaf people are increasingly staking claims to be an ethnic minority that is linguistically different but not disabled. Davis explains “[t]he Deaf feel that their culture, language, and community constitute a totally adequate, self-enclosed, and self-defining sub-nationality within the larger structure of the audist state” (“DI” 882). He further notes that

[e]thnicity is, one can say, produced by a dialectical process in which a dominant group singles out a minority and ethnicizes its members; but reciprocally, minorities can ethnicize themselves in trying to claim privileges and status from social elites. (EN 79)

Despite the fact that Deaf culture has made substantial inroads toward establishing Deaf people’s rights as an ethnic minority, deafness as it relates to identity politics is still greatly undertheorized. As Davis has noted, in a way deafness is an *invisible* disability because the difference is not apparent unless the individual uses sign language. At that moment not only does deafness challenge conventional notions about the abled body, but it also disrupts expectations about language as speech and sound based and,

5. The Americans with Disabilities Act was passed in 1990 to ensure equal access and inclusionary practices in public institutions for people with disabilities. These changes range from the architectural to the social.

subsequently, its relationship to the body. More particularly, the difficulty lies in gaining a political foothold that the audist culture can understand.

The use of sign language, for example, is a contested site for the maintenance of Deaf culture. Davis evocatively outlines the ways in which deaf people were viewed as model citizens in the late 1700s and early 1800s (which I examine more thoroughly in the following chapter). However, the spread of sign language, which was originally fostered among the early deaf educators so that religion could become more accessible to the “poor souls,” eventually became the means, as well, for identifying Deaf individuals and transmitting their culture. This shift allowed Deaf people to establish circuitries of connections among various Deaf communities that were further reinforced by early Deaf newspapers. These two phenomena made manifest a transnational Deaf community. This “imagined deaf community,” to echo the language of Benedict Anderson, formed the early versions of a type of Deaf nation that existed within the Euro-American nation states.

By the late 1800s national leaders and deaf educators began to react quite strongly to this upsurge in the power of the Deaf communities. Believing that the “Deaf state” threatened their nation-building projects and that such deaf subjects were not ideal citizens, they deemed it crucial to eradicate or suppress the use of sign language and insist that deaf people learn to speak. In this way, shared language, and by implication those whose bodies had been trained to conform to the national ideal, became a crucial marker for the fully participating citizen.

As part of a reactionary stance taken by politicians and others to deal with managing the huge influx of immigrants into the United States in the late 1800s, deafness—like other minority markers—became a liability, an indicator of the infirm or feeble.⁶ In the tendency toward oralism, residential schools for deaf people also worked to suppress Deaf culture and pun-

6. A particularly troubling spokesperson for the eugenics movement was Alexander Graham Bell—despite the fact that his mother and wife were deaf—who “feared the emergence of a ‘deaf variety’ and [...] the possibility of intermarriage among the deaf” (Davis, *EN* 81). Bell urged the elimination of Deaf culture and Deaf propagation. He proposed the closing

ish children who were caught signing. As a consequence, until the 1940s the use of sign language at these schools had all but died out. As Davis remarks, “[t]hese steps are reminiscent of the measures frequently implemented by colonial powers seeking to dismantle the culture of non-national or indigenous people” (*EN* 81). In the United States, for example, Native American boarding schools separated the children from their families and sought to erase their Native culture and language and to instill in the children a Eurocentric body of knowledge. Children who did not comply were often punished, sometimes severely. The cultural and political imperialism related to the dominant culture’s fear of cultural empowerment of a minority through its language also indicates the discomfort, confusion, and overvalorization of language as speech in the face of a language that is formed through the moving body.⁷

In the early 1960s sign language linguist William Stokoe’s groundbreaking work established that American Sign Language (ASL) is a language in its own right, with its own syntactical structures and semantics. This research, as well as subsequent work, has dramatically altered mainstream notions of sound and speech as essential traits of language. It has shown that hearing and nonhearing individuals can develop language through a manual-visual mode. Bauman notes the “[w]e all possess the neurological potential to develop a full linguistic system separate from the spoken word” (“BSW” 373).

As a result of this research into ASL, it becomes necessary to engage in radical questioning of our underlying assumptions about literature, poetry, and theater. Mitchell writes that

The poetry of the deaf stages for us in the most vivid possible form the basic shift in literary understanding that has been occurring before our eye in the last decade; the movement from a

of residential schools and advocated the use of the oralist method to teach deaf individuals. This stance led to efforts to propose the legally required sterilization of deaf individuals.

7. See the individual works of Brenda Farnell, Harlan Lane, Lennard Davis, and H-Dirksen Bauman for additional explanation.

“textual” model (based in the narrowly defined circuit of writing and speech) to a “performance” model, exemplified by the recent work in semiotics of drama, film, television, and performance art and the interplay of language with the visual or pictorial field. (“GSP” 14)⁸

This “performative” turn locates the praxis of these theaters in the use of gesture, the moving body, and sensory modalities that de-emphasize hearing.

In what Davis has called the “deafened moment,” the visual and its spatiality affects the viewer in an immediate fashion, expressing a totality that speech cannot, and does not, require the interpretive tool of translation from image into speech. Davis’s notion of the deafened moment revolves around a

“critical modality” that does not rely on either the Deaf or deaf. While the deafened moment does not rely on the Deaf, it exists in dynamic relationship to that group. By the deafened moment, I am speaking (writing) of a contextual position, a dialectical moment in reading/critical process, that is defined by the acknowledgement that he or she is part of a process that does not involve speaking or hearing. (*EN* 100–01)

I remember quite well the moment when I learned to shift from reading out loud to reading silently—uttering not a word or the whisper of partial words. My parents and brother could not find me anywhere because they were listening for the way I usually mouthed the words, and, in this deafened moment, I had learned to read silently. I was, in a way, lost to them.

Davis considers the gestural and vocal play that unfolds in the “writing of the body”—a term explicated by, among others, Hélène Cixous and

8. H-Dirksen Bauman’s work on ASL poetry extends W. J. T. Mitchell’s observations about ASL and has been very helpful in orienting this study. He proposes that a comparative approach be taken with the study of ASL poetry and other literary forms to more accurately contextualize the cross-cultural study of literary forms.

Trinh Minh-ha—to bear some similarity of sign language another form of “writing the body.” Davis asserts that

[t]he mouth is hypostatized as the font of poetic language, oratory, and conversation, while the hand is made special as the locus for writing, scholarship, the essay. But these are only assumptions; just as much as that the ear is the receptive site of music, of speech, of language—while the eye is the receiver of artistic, of written knowledge. These assumptions remind us of the extent to which an economy of the body is involved in our own metaphors about language and knowledge. (*EN* 103)

In its use of sign language, deafness curtails the oral dimension of communicative exchange and promotes a phenomenology of speaking from other spaces of the body, and within those dimensions, sign language has its own semantic structures. Sign can also act as a potential site of linguistic play, and it adds to the complexity of the dimensions the location of voice between body and language. Signing disrupts the location of voice as sound, but it amplifies the voices that emanate from the body. Through the “hearing eye,” we can see these voices and understand the body as it articulates itself.

In my own experience as a young girl with my third ear, I learned to understand what was being said across fragmented systems of meaning of image, sound, and body. I was the pseudo pilot jacking into the TV, singing along with Mitch and Leslie Uggams, and crossing time, space, and cultures, where my identity as hard of hearing met my emerging identity as a person of color. Hybrid hearing and becoming (an)other mutually informed each other. Thus, in my own example and in the examples that follow, tracking the ways that deafness and ethnicity can act as reciprocating indicators, along with what Meena Alexander calls “cultural fault lines,” helps us delineate some of the underlying assumptions about deafness. This understanding can also inform new notions of the body as the site where biological difference and sociocultural difference meet. It is not a simple story, however, of Deaf history meeting other histories of

difference; it is also a process of *creating new narratives* about how these multiple histories intersect with the cultural constructedness of various arts practices.

These multiple levels of a hearing that comprehends do not travel simply along a verbal link that connects the insight of one mind to another but along a perceptual, sometimes subterranean, network that moves, like sound waves, from body to body. And these waves cross cultures, break on other shores, bringing with them as they circulate within the inner ears of performers and audiences—which are continually changing places—something new, something different. These levels also hearken toward ways new political alliances can be forged, social transformation can occur, and new aesthetics can become manifest.

Staging the Third Ear

The term a “poetics of hearing” revolves around an adaptation of the term *poiesis*, which comes from the Greek word for action (*poieio*). Nadia Seremataakis, an anthropologist of the senses, describes *poiesis* as “the making of something out of that which was previously experientially and culturally unmarked or even null and void” (7). Poetics, then, in the sense that I use the term, shifts attention from a language-based model of meaning to one that emphasizes the material bases of the performances. Because the symbolic activity is seen as embedded in the material frame, the perceptual dimensions of the performance constitute the necessary basis for any further symbolic analysis.

Two primary questions, then, guide my analysis as I explore the spaces of Deaf, experimental, and multicultural theater. First, how might we begin to develop a discussion about moments in the theater when seeing and hearing occur simultaneously across traditional sensory boundaries? In other words, how do we hear images and see voices? Second, in addressing the notion of hearing through the third ear, what is the place of deafness? What is this joint method of perceiving performance as a simultaneous seeing-hearing? There is, as of yet, no word in the English language that combines “spectator” (one who sees) and “audience” (those who hear), and

this split of the senses raises questions about the sensorial bias built into the reception of the work at the level of perceptual exchange.

“Spectator” has its roots in the Latin *spectare*, which means to “behold” or fix one’s attention on an object. In this sense, the spectator views the visual panorama that unfolds on stage, and it is through the gaze that the reading of the performance occurs. “Audience” comes from Latin *audire*, “to hear.” Thus, the audience experience emphasizes, as the usually unacknowledged condition of performance, the audio dimension, with sound and speech serving as fundamental organizers of meaning.

A poetics of hearing that can account for a simultaneous hearing and seeing, Davis’s elaboration of “writing the body” and “the deafened moment” requires a listening that is somatic as well as symbolic. In respect to the complex space of intersubjective heterogeneity, phenomenologist David Levin has argued that “listening is developed as a capacity of the body—the body of intersubjective, intercorporeal life, the body of auditorily felt experience, the body as auditory whole” (109). This somatic understanding—which occurs both before and during our usual notions of conceptual understanding—orients to the in-between, the excess, the difference. There is not just one type of “voice and body,” understood along essentialist lines, that can be responded to through the body as an auditory whole. Various points of the body speak; they are vibrant transmitters of meaning, nodes of sensory and perceptual quotation of a fully material way of being in the world. This bodily stance unfolds in a field of action as a performative embrace of a phenomenologically primordial hearing and response.

At the 2000 Performance Studies International Conference in Tempe, Arizona, four of us were assigned to the same panel addressing performance and deafness, including deaf performance artist Aaron Williamson. In a shorter version of his longer performance, *Hearing Things*, Williamson appears possessed by another voice. Sound, word, and gesture erupt unevenly. Stepping, twisting, and turning, he moves through the small corner of the room. We recognize this language that erupts in the interstices between hearing and deafness, voice and gesture, but it is an uncanny resonance, akin to ways in which we might imagine the enigmatic voices of Cassandra and the Pythia of Delphi, which were both heard and not heard. These are

voices that come to us from the body, itself experienced as linked but unfamiliar regions to which we are just now learning to listen.

In this performance, Williamson speaks from many parts of the body as the flow of energy travels in multiple pathways through the audience: multiple energies of the body, multiple energies of sound and word. What even this short version achieves is the creation of new pathways of meaning. Because predictable signifiers of meaning are disrupted, to hear we must participate fully in the practice of the third ear and hear through the absence of apparent meaning. Michael Davidson and Petra Kuppers also critique Williamson's work and the ways in which he uses the visual channels to render the in-between status and states of a late-deafened adult—the ways in which meaning slides among image, object, body, and voice. Kuppers notes—about a version of *Hearing Things* that uses speech-recognition software to create computer-generated litanies of sound and words—that Williamson casts the process of language production into question. “Our communication environment, telephones, answering machines, email, TV and their translatory practices are exposed, and our bodies become visible as soft tissue working in a giant machine of meaning generation” (86). Furthermore, as both my personal example and Williamson's use of computer voice software indicate, as part cyborg, there are also not fixed boundaries between body and environment or between body and others. Communication travels along multiple networks.

The performing body provides the mobile field for locating the intersection of visual and auditory perception. In Ping Chong's *Do Not Go Sad into the World*, for example, we see another moment in which the tensions among the “felt” experience of voice, body, image, and sound and historical narrative coincide. In this film work, Chong has choreographed an extensive dance sequence that focuses on the dancers' pathways and the use of simple turns and gesture. But this is no simple display of dancing bodies. The film angles and the scale of shots shift on a regular basis and at a speed that creates a dissonant rhythm with that of the apparent rhythm of moving bodies. From many angles, we watch the dancers who move along various pathways in a building shaped like a bell tower, including from an overhead distance that often makes the dancers look very small, like ants scurrying along their paths.

An overriding tension centers on the amplified sound and rhythm of the feet in which we also hear a rise and fall in breath and weight of the body. This focus of the sound of the body achieves a visceral feel. Because of the use of distorted perspective and sound, we concentrate much more on the feel of the bodies. At the end of the work, there is a pause. Then, in silence, a single male performer signs “do not go sad into the world.”

After the experience already created by the rest of the performance of a different sound system, the ending with its complete silence comes as a shock. There is more to this moment than the simple use of another culture’s language. In this scene the “deafness” looks back at the viewer/audience. Chong challenges what Trinh Minh-ha has called our “securely anchored audiovisual habits.” Although we “hear” through our eyes the muffled tones of cross-cultural exchange as the dancers trace their numerous pathways, we also hear our own deafness. Within the space of the performance, Chong echoes other realms of sound and spatiality, and this filmic approach also echoes other histories, other narratives, other bodies.

These emerging experimental, Deaf, and multicultural theaters—evolving forums for cross-cultural exchange in public spaces—promote a new understanding of what I mean by the need to respond to “embodied subjectivities” in relation to the shared space of the performance. Stuart Hall writes, prophetically, of “emergent ethnicities,” and I extend this notion so that it embraces the arena of disabilities, especially in relation to deafness. In his claim for the power of emergence, he asserts that “there’s no enunciation without positionality. You have to position yourself *some-where* in order to say anything at all” (18).

The possibility of speaking, then, relies on staking out a position. From that “particular” location, people articulate their intentions in a processual fashion. Communication unfolds through discovery as we attend to the

[n]eed to honor the hidden histories from which [. . . people . . .] come. They need to understand the languages which they’ve been taught to speak. They need to understand and revalue the traditions and inheritances of cultural expression and creativity. And

in a sense, the past is not only a position from which to speak, but it is also an absolutely necessary resource in what one has to say. [. . .] So the relationship of the kind of ethnicity I'm talking about to the past is not a simple essential one—it is a constructed one. It is constructed in history; it is constructed politically in part. It is part of narrative. We tell ourselves the stories of the parts of our roots in order to come into contact, creatively, with it. So this new kind of ethnicity—the emergent ethnicities—has a relationship to the past, but it is also a relationship that is partly through memory, partly narrative, one that has to be recovered. It is an act of cultural recovery. (Hall 18–19)

Recovery is also creating a new space. Numerous cultural critics have attested that the language for describing new cultural spaces that escapes the binaries of essentialism and reductionism is slippery and often insufficient. Nevertheless, the need to make the attempt to articulate these new regions for another practice of social exchange is more paramount than ever.

If the sheer transiency of performance, however, is to have any political-cultural power of transformation, it must somehow be marked, transmitted, and re-membered. This poetics of the third ear can help us to indicate a far side of hearing, including issues that surround underlying assumptions about deafness, which not only forms and limits our hearing but also presents a challenge of an excess of meaning in various performative moments. This excess mobilizes certain unfamiliar arenas of contemporary cultural exchange, and, as the normativity of traditional theatrical practice is disrupted, we learn to hear differently, more richly. We become oriented in new ways toward contemporary questions of the hybrid production of meaning and come to know, through practice, what it means to listen with the third ear.

Chapter 2

History of the Theater of the Third Ear

But how is it possible that one who is deaf and dumb,
should comprehend and express—

Abbé de l'Epée, or the Orphan (1801)

In this chapter, I chart a genealogy of the theater of the third ear and articulate links among sound, silence, the body, and synaesthesia in relationship to hearing and deafness. Early versions of these theaters emerge in the eighteenth century and find their exemplar in popular plays such as Jean Nicolas Bouilly's 1799 production of *Abbé de l'Epée, or the Orphan*, a story about a dispossessed young deaf-mute count and the reclamation of his inheritance. Through the use of cross-sensorial techniques, such performances orient audiences to the changing practices of hearing and make possible new relationships with deafness. The third ear, as an improvisational engagement with this shifting sensorium of the past, allows us to track the simultaneous fragmentation and reordering of the senses. Additionally, this approach helps us understand the cultural constructions of *both* hearing and deafness, particularly in contact zones where the two spheres intersect. An evolving history of the "staging" of these contact zones points to the cultural desire to have opened up new aesthetic possibilities even as it has sought to contain the unfamiliar other of the sensorially different.

From the second half of the 1800s to the 1960s—in examples ranging from the Symbolists, the Dadaists, Antonin Artaud, and others—new practices in the theater continued to recast the sonic sensorium. These endeavors explored the interplay of sight and sound, and its concomitant ambiguous relation to the moving body. Nevertheless, very little analysis

of traditional theater, or even sound performance, incorporates a sufficient account of the Deaf perspective. It is important, therefore, to make visible the emergence of a Deaf aesthetic that begins in the eighteenth century and takes on a fuller form by the 1960s.

There is no simple way of looking at this performance history, which cannot be thought of other than as an always already network of active fragments. These fragments track various interplays of the individual's relation to prevailing cultural mores, questions of the body and technology, and the ways in which artistic practice allows for the charting of new sensorial paradigms. Although vision is usually considered the overriding sense used to organize meaning in order to instantiate a unitary modern self, this claim can miss the ways in which the effort to frame what is and is not hearing also underscores the creation of the myth of the modern unitary self.

Historically speaking, the praxis of managing “bodies of deafness” has had diverging outcomes. What began as a process of opening an “inclusive” space for Deaf citizens shifted by the late 1800s into numerous efforts to suppress the Deaf population as a linguistic minority. Nevertheless, the development of sound technologies that could amplify hearing beyond the edge of “normal” hearing led, as well, to a fascination with hearing that could not literally be heard, such as dreams, the unconscious, the voices of the dead, and that which is “unsaid.” Although these explorations of hearing challenge the boundaries of the body and reconstitute it, the tendency has been to “experience” this type of extraordinary hearing and then revert back to the positionality of normal hearing as the ultimate reference point—without understanding that “normal” hearing is also a construction. As a consequence, that pattern continually reinscribes a binary of hearing and deafness. Furthermore, it also attempts to collapse the category of deafness into the biological frame of deafness and simultaneously renders deafness, as a condition, obsolete. Yet, the very failure to claim an inclusive space for deafness by the mainstream culture during the past two hundred years has also led to creating the conditions for fostering new understandings of a hybrid hearing, conditions through which the third ear and its theaters become both possible and necessary.

What follows, therefore, is not a definitive history—as if such a thing could even exist—but, rather, an analysis of representative examples of the tensions of the interplay across the spheres of the cross-sensorial, in order to create a performance contact zone. Those contact zones crafted hybrid spaces of hearing, deafness, and sensory experimentation. As a result, new ways of speaking through a hybrid voice emerged, and “hearing” through the third ear helps us to make some sense of modernity’s unfinished echo.¹

The Deaf Citizen and Writing in the Air

In the eighteenth century, a growing interest in the category of deafness, the Deaf citizen, and the possibilities of sign language as a viable method for communicating led to the implementation of more than one hundred schools for the Deaf population across Europe. Many early Deaf educators framed their interest around the hope that people who are deaf could be readied to hear the voice of God when it “spoke” to them. This endeavor, although inscribing this motif of “hearing” into the Deaf perspective, indicates a preliminary attempt to open up the tensions between biological and metaphysical conditions of hearing and deafness. In other words, this maneuver indicates consideration of the fact that there may be “other” ways to hear—that the biological condition of hearing is not the *sine qua non* for knowing, or apprehending, something.

These tensions involved questions about the links between sensorial and possible cognitive limits of people who are deaf. Could deaf individuals understand complex ideas without having access to the spoken language? Thinkers and educators entertained ways in which language and meaning could and could not be transmitted through the sound of the speaking voice or the silence of the gesturing body. There was such an interest in

1. I am indebted to the work of Jonathan Rée, Lennard Davis, Douglas Baynton, and Harlan Lane for their work on Deaf history. I am indebted to Jonathan Sterne for his work on the history of sound technology and his inclusion of the intersection of sound technology with deafness.

testing applicable communication practices that public displays were held at the Institution Nationale des Sourds-Muets de Paris starting in 1771. The success of public displays precipitated a period when people who are deaf came to be considered icons of the ideal citizen. In addition to the philosophical, scientific, and legal questions of the status of the deaf citizen, the movement of the deaf into the public space also had consequences for the promulgation of new ways of thinking about the senses and alternative modes of knowing.

In the *Lettre sur les sourds et muets* of 1751, for example, Denis Diderot considers the need for the notion of the “theoretical deaf” in order to delineate a “history of hieroglyphic practice and its relationship to the arts of painting and sculpture, music, and poetry as emblematic of language” (Berri 75). He links his consideration of deafness to his efforts to understand the origins of language and the way that art works. For Diderot, this position is that of the “theoretical mute, a man who can forego the use of articulate sounds and try to make himself understood by gestures alone” (Calhoon 395). In relationship to the question of language, Diderot considered this positioning crucial in order to work backward to grasp the “prehistoric stages of human cognition.” This process enabled one to use gestures as a way of imagining how ideas could be communicated without using words. Although this approach points to the interest in gesture, it also signals the valorization of spoken language over gestural language. Nevertheless, that interest in gesture, as a type of hieroglyph, became a foundational condition for his reinvigoration of French theater.

Sign language and hieroglyphs are types of image-writing that are only partially understandable to conceptual rationality. The hieroglyph, which originally entered the English language as the specific denomination of the ancient Egyptian pictographs, was assumed to be part of a nonalphabetic language that was, therefore, of a more primitive type than the Romance languages that were based on sound. As a term that articulated the space of the indeterminate image, the not-yet translated or not even translatable, the hieroglyph took on the power to stand for that which “speaks” but which may not be completely understood. It

“speaks” in such a way that the person who hears must be “deaf” in order to hear with one’s eyes.

Diderot used his device of theoretical deafness to inform his theatrical aesthetics. He writes:

I used to frequent the theatre, and I knew by heart most of our best plays. On the days when I meant to examine the actions and gestures I would climb to the gallery, for the further I was from the actors the better. As soon as the curtain was raised [...] I put my fingers in my ears, much to the astonishment of my neighbors [...] But I coolly answered that “everyone has their way of listening, and mine was to shut my ears to hear better”. (173–74)

As Kenneth Calhoon notes, few performances survived Diderot’s criticism, as he was critical of the stilted posturing and overly stylized use of gesture. Diderot’s interest in image both in terms of painting and on the stage, nevertheless, infused theater with a new aesthetics (one that we see echoed in the work of Antonin Artaud).

There were certainly earlier examples of the use of image and gesture in the theater—there could be no theater without such elements—such as *commedia dell’arte*, court masques, and ballet. Diderot was among the first to consider how the perspective of deafness as a mode of experiencing might link with understanding the plastic dimensions of the stage as well as the interiority of the landscape of the mind. Interest in the ways that this crossing of the senses, seeing in order to hear, activated the interior landscape of the mind, or its hieroglyphs, and it led to the exploration of the *tableau*, a technique that Diderot also developed. In this approach, the final action of the play became frozen in a “pregnant moment” in a kinesthetic painting that was seen to speak in ways that continuing the action could not.

Likewise, a favorite pastime of the French aristocracy was the *tableau vivant*, or living picture. In this activity the members of the court would disappear behind a curtain and take on positions of a well-known painting. When ready, the curtain would rise on this frozen moment for the pleasure

of the audience. In this case, painting is transposed into theater. Both of these examples illustrate an interest in the transposition of image between visibility and embodiment.²

In the case of Diderot, we can see how his theorization of deafness created new possibilities for a theatrical aesthetics against the backdrop of the persistent claim of the intellectual inferiority of deaf people themselves. This brief consideration of Diderot's work on art begins to open up the sense of how the interplay between body and mind is fluid, not fixed. Additionally, it points to the aesthetic field of play emerging among the visual, bodily, and linguistic registers, as well as the significance of the hieroglyph for art's practices—an interest that emerges again with the Symbolists.

Additionally, Diderot knew of and visited the Abbé Charles Michel de l'Épée's Institution Nationale des Sourds-Muets de Paris, the first one of its kind. There, the increasing public interest in the evolution of deaf education led to public lectures in which deaf students displayed their newly acquired skills at communicating and answering complex questions. The skill relied on techniques for seeing voices, rather than hearing them, through a complex system of interlacing signing and writing—a process that marked the interchangeability of reading signs through both text and body. This practice, which led to the creation of the “deaf” reader of writing and signing, gave rise to the three-dimensional corollary of writing that the Abbé de l'Épée called “writing in air” (cited in Mirzhoeff 581). In the contact zone between deaf and hearing, this sensorial transpositioning of writing and reading created sites where the ambivalent cultural body unfolded. This practice can best be understood as articulated along the bivalent lines crossing back and forth between the sites of hearing and deafness.

2. This pattern of exploring still images that speak has a tradition in eighteenth-century aesthetics of considering how painting is silent poetry. This motif was adopted by deaf painters in the late eighteenth century as a way of staging their aesthetic positioning—and inserting themselves into the cultural imaginary speaking through their silent poetry. For more of this phenomenon, see Nicholas Mirzhoeff's *Silent Poetry*.

The theatrical example par excellence of the intersecting ontologies of seeing-hearing and the demarcation of a new space for citizenship for people who are deaf was the 1799 production of Jean Nicolas Bouilly's *Abbé de l'Epée, or the Orphan* that opened at the Théâtre de la République and that was performed in Paris on a regular basis to sold-out audiences.³ The play is a fictionalized account of an actual 1779 court case of Count Solar, who, deaf and mute, had used pantomime to communicate his history and circumstances. The stage version revolved around Abbé de l'Epée, his student Theodore, a deaf and mute young count who was dispossessed of his fortune after being left for dead in Paris, and their efforts to reclaim his wealth. The part of Theodore was played by an actress "who was coached in sign language" by Jean Massieu, a deaf-mute assistant of Abbé Sicard, the director of the Deaf Institute after Abbé l'Epée. The play weaves together two stories. One is the abbé and Theodore's arrival in the city of Toulouse, which Theodore recognizes as his place of birth, and their ensuing efforts to confront those who may recognize him and get a confession from his uncle, Darlemont. The other is that of the frustrated love story between Darlemont's son, St. Alme, and Clementina; Darlemont wants his son to marry into money. In both cases the literally and metaphorically dispossessed "sons" attempt to persuade the misguided "father" to correct his position about their identities.

Despite the interest in the love story, the play puts greater emphasis on exploring the acclaimed prowess and renown of the teacher and the skills of the exemplary student. Although there are numerous indicators of Theodore's learned ability to communicate, there is a scene—a play within the play—that demonstrates his skill in much the same way as the public demonstrations did in the Paris lectures at the school. Theodore demonstrates his ability to communicate through a complex system of signing, writing, and speechreading, and on that demonstration rests the conviction that he is able to articulate who he is and where he has

3. By the end of the eighteenth century this show had been performed more than 100 times, and it was the second-greatest success after Beaumarchais's *Marriage of Figaro*.

come from. The scene explores questions of the limits of language, and, as a consequence, his demonstration of his understanding of the law, which entitles him citizenship and the return of his property.

Cle. But how is it possible that one who is deaf and dumb, should comprehend and express—

Abbé. He can even answer any question on the spot. I'll give you an example. (Strikes The. on the shoulder to awake his attention, points with the fore-finger of his right hand to his forehead, then to Cle. and finally seems to write some lines on his left hand.)

(The. makes a sign that he understands him—seats himself at the desk and prepares to write.)

Abbé. Now ask any question. Through the interpretation of my signs he will comprehend it, and write on paper his answer below. He awaits your commands.

Cle. I scarcely know what question—

Abbé. The first that occurs to you.

Cle.—(After a moment's consideration.)—Who is, in your opinion, the greatest man now existing in France?

Abbé. Now have the goodness to begin once more, and repeat the words slowly as if you were dictating them to himself.

[The. attends and writes.]

Cle. Who is—

[Abbé throws both hands forward, spreading his fingers, and then with the fore-finger of his right-hand, describes a semicircle from right to left.]

Cle. In your opinion.

[Abbé points to his forehead—then to The.]

Cle. The greatest man.

[Abbé raises his right-hand thrice, and then both hands as high as possible—then lets them sink to his shoulders, and thence over his breast quite to his waist.]

Cle. Now existing.—

[Abbé describes life by drawing his breath deeply several times and placing his hand on his pulse.]

Cle. In France. (22–23)

The abbé has Clementina check the paper to see that Theodore has written the question correctly. She notes his animated visage and concludes that he will answer intelligently.

[The. rises, presents the paper to Cle. and makes a sign requesting she will read it. Fra. and his mother approach with great curiosity. The. places himself close to the Abbé and anxiously observes them.]

The.—(Reads.)—“Question: Who is in your opinion the greatest man at present living in France?—Answer: nature names Buffon; the sciences d’Alembert; truth and feeling speak in behalf of Rousseau; wit and taste of Voltaire; but genius and humanity loudly declare,—the Abbé de l’Épée. Him I prefer to all.” (22–23)

In this example, the abbé communicates by signing, and Theodore understands what is being communicated. Theodore then communicates by signing and writing. Signing and writing are linked, revealing and containing deafness through the staging of the abbé as “interpreter.” Davis notes that “writing is in effect sign language, a language of mute signs” (*EN* 57). Here, language is doubled, and the exact moment of communication slides among different registers—movement, signing, reading, and speaking. It is through Theodore’s writing that communication is verified; the hearing meet the deaf and the deaf meet the hearing. This new approach to including the deaf-mute character brought “deafness” further into the public space, but it also contained the other body—making it safe. As we see, Clementina is profoundly suspicious of the ability of a deaf-mute to communicate; yet, once she witnesses Theodore’s ability, she becomes hopeful about the implications of what she has just witnessed.

Against the backdrop of writing and reading as signing, in the display of the *signing body* as it moves, silent and gesturing, the body evokes and

activates images as well as rhythm, pacing, and accents. As audience members, we “hear” and “feel” the moving bodies through our eyes. Examples of this kind of gestural articulation and use of the body include sign language itself in performance that allows us to read the action or to translate it into a discursive analogue. However, there remain indeterminate areas of the signing body where we know the body gestures, but exactly toward what is not clear. The relative certainty of textuality is cast next to the uncertainty of the moving body. This use of the signing body depends on the ability of a “deaf” reader. Additionally, however, the proof of understanding lies in what Theodore has written, not what transpires body to body. Communication is mediated by various orders of the body, text, and eye.

This scene in *The Orphan* restages the proof of what had been a common occurrence at the Abbé de l’Epée’s Institute. In the 1770s and 1780s, these showings drew so much attention that, although they were first scheduled for 7 a.m. until 12 noon on Tuesdays and Fridays, the abbé eventually had to add an evening session. This exchange provided a forum for key philosophers and scientists to extend their discussion about language acquisition and thinking. Although there was some consensus about the value and power of using a gestural system to communicate, the tendency of the philosophers was to naturalize that type of exchange. Condillac, Diderot, and Rousseau—among others—considered the use of signs as the “common language before words.” Despite the fact that one purpose of the lecture was to provide evidence of a state prior to spoken language, the interest in this ability of a natural language also raised deaf people to a new status as “exemplars of natural virtue and pure thinkers untainted by the corrupted language of the present world” (Rosenfeld 158).

Nevertheless, even while people who were deaf were extolled as ideal citizens, there was also a growing concern about their ability to understand the law. Numerous court cases not only tried the accused deaf individuals but used the opportunity to philosophize about the ability of the deaf population to understand and abide by the law. The play, as it were, takes the demonstration of ability and its rhetorical staging of the right of a deaf-mute to his inheritance, his property, out to the people and poses the question to the general public. In this case the play succeeded in creating

a contact zone alternative to the schools and courts between the hearing population and the deaf population.⁴

As a result of this interest, the play also led to the restoration of Abbé Sicard to his position at the deaf school in Paris. Sicard had been l'Epée's successor as director of the Institute after Abbé l'Epée's death, but in 1792 he fell into political trouble and was narrowly saved from being killed by Jean Massieu, who stepped in because he believed in Sicard's work with deaf. Sicard was removed from his post in 1792, restored to the position in 1793, and then forced into exile in 1796. Sicard's political and educational agenda with the deaf population revolved around his belief that deaf citizens needed an opportunity to claim their rights. He also promulgated the value of sign language and asserted that people who were deaf could learn to communicate very well through a "language of action if given sufficient opportunity to build their language skills through habitual communication" (Rée 187). All claims about the insufficiency of the sign language to communicate complex ideas had more to do with lack of a community than any sort of inherent limitations in the potential of sign language itself.

Bouilly had, in fact, written the play precisely to foster more sympathy for Sicard. During the second showing, toward the end of the play, when the Abbé l'Epée knows Theodore has regained his wealth and he leaves to return to his "needy" students back in Paris, the audience stood up and demanded that Abbé Sicard needed to be returned to his students (Rée 182). This action mobilized the interest around Sicard's return to the Paris school for the deaf, and in a campaign led by Massieu, after twenty-eight months of forced absence, Sicard was granted amnesty by Napoleon in 1800.

The Orphan examined challenges to a legal, communicative model based on the prioritization of logocentric speech, and it attempts to evoke new relations to alterity. The play makes evident the idea that the deaf citizen can understand and communicate through the use of a mix of devices. In 1799 Joseph Marie de Gérando argues for the power of sign language as a language in action that invokes a "simultaneous profusion of vivid spatial

4. I am indebted to Sophia Rosenfeld's work, "Deaf Men on Trial: Language and Deviancy in Late Eighteenth-Century France."

ideas” (Rée 185). Accordingly, Gérando considers sign language to be a potent method for developing the imagination. Yet, questions about the ways in which sign language could also be a source of complex thinking continued to trouble Gérando and other thinkers in the early 1800s, and the legitimacy of sign language as a language continued to be questioned, so much so that in his last years as a deaf educator Sicard was to shift away from his support of manualism to oralism.⁵

Despite the emphasis during the Enlightenment on the deaf citizen as ideal, confusion about the place and capabilities of deaf people persisted for many reasons. In the continuing drive to build the nation-state and to extend its reach, the noise and silence, metonyms for the unknown other at the outer regions of society, had to be brought under control or erased. The failure to intercalate this sonic dissonance has led to its redirection and splitting rather than a complete erasure. Deafness “marked the outer limits of Europe’s knowledge of itself” (Joseph *SM*: 211) and the presence of the deaf population within the local citizenry—despite continuing consideration of the potential of sign language as being on par with spoken language—began to threaten growing expectations for the development of a cohesive nation-state. Additionally, as a part of the Enlightenment project for ordering human variation and understanding the limits of human capacity and its presumed natural state, feral children—that is, abandoned children who had grown up in the “wild” at the edges of society—were captured and brought in for study and exhibition. Victor d’Aveyron, often known as the Wild Boy of Aveyron, was, in fact, housed at the Sicard’s Institution and studied by a young doctor, Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard, who believed that he could teach him to communicate (1799).⁶

The threat of the racialized other, another of the categories of the cultural margins, became collapsed with the two other categories. One of

5. This play led to the inclusion of deaf and mute characters in melodrama, a popular theatrical form that grew out of pantomime. For more, see Peter Brooks’s *The Melodramatic Imagination*, particularly on the aesthetic of muteness.

6. We now know that he was autistic. For more on this, please see Harlan Lane’s *The Wild Boy of Aveyron*. For a contemporary account of a related story, see Susan Schaller’s *A Man without Words*.

the undersides of the Enlightenment was the colonialist project aligned with the emergence of the nation-state.

Colonialist discourse voices a demand for order and disorder, producing a disruptive other in order to assert the superiority of the colonizer. Yet the production is itself evidence of the struggle to restrict the other's disruptiveness to that role. Colonialist discourse does not simply announce a triumph for civility, it must continually produce it and this work involves struggle and risk. (Brown 58)

The anxiety about what constitutes a language and who has the right to a language of their own continued to increase well into the latter half of the 1800s (and continues, of course, even today). By that time there was a move from the Enlightenment agenda of marking what constitutes a human, and therefore the ideal citizen, to the nationalist project of marking what constitutes a member of the specific nation-state. The individual's rights to an autonomous self became less important than the ways in which he or she performed metonymically in part of a nation-state drama.

In this series of events, as the presumably normal hearing and speech activities became aligned with the building of the nation-state, the early theaters of the third ear eventually became curtailed. Subjected to surveillance and codification, deafness became a category of difference to be managed—or, alternatively, it demanded a type of hearing/seeing that exceeded the hierarchical demarcations of modernity in the latter 1800s.

Shifting the Sensorium: Managing the Bodies of Deafness

The staging of “writing in the air” in *The Orphan* that necessitated a simultaneous seeing-hearing pointed to new, but preliminary, movements toward a more inclusive social space for people who are deaf, but this lesson was not easily incorporated into the social fabric. By the late 1800s the aural sensorium fractured along multiple axes, and it depicted a profound ambivalence toward hearing and deafness. At the same time that the earlier

technology of the hearing trumpet and its progeny, the stethoscope, was being furthered, deaf people were being relegated to second-class citizenship. Technological invention was used to conjure up the possibility of instruments that enabled one to hear beyond all imagination; some of the same technology, however, was also used to devise methods for eradicating signs of linguistic difference in people who were deaf by training them to speak. The ghettoization of the deaf population as a group meant that the cultural imaginary based on a notion of normal hearing required the expulsion of its sonic double—deafness—at all costs.⁷ Yet, these notions of hearing and deafness are so fraught with all kinds of ambiguities and confusions that we see that deafness never retained its status as simply a measure of biological difference.

Hearing beyond, hearing at the edge, was explored technologically through drug-induced deliriums, through the belief in methods for gaining access to the voices of the dead, and through the burgeoning interest in altered states of mind. What starts with Diderot, as he appropriated the notion of a theoretical deaf individual to traverse the images of his imaginary, but mute, states of mind, began to emerge in the second half of the 1800s just as the notion of the unconscious began to take hold of the cultural imaginary and as technologies became more sophisticated and culturally embedded in everyday life. Networks of aural practices began to multiply during this time—extending the reach of hearing at the same time that it also attempted to normalize it.

One of the ways in which technology developed during this time period is through what Jonathan Sterne has called *tympanic technologies*, instruments that worked at the intersection of sight and sound. Sterne notes that there is a shift over the course of the 1800s from understanding the *tympanum* (the ear drum) as a location in relation to the ear, then as an operation, and finally as a function at the turn of the century, when tympanum is used to describe the way that the telephone's diaphragm works. In 1874,

7. *Cultural imaginary* is a term used by numerous critical theorists that builds on the work of Jacques Lacan and accounts for the ways in which the cultural fabric had a force that is both imagined and real.

Leon Scotts invented the *phonoautograph*, which “imitated the process of the human ear” and “transformed sound into writing” (Sterne 35–36). This work was a descendent of a number of earlier experiments that attempted to find ways to transpose sound into writing, but Scott’s innovation lay in modeling his device after the way that the middle ear worked.

Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone, had begun to work with deaf people and used his father’s technique of visible speech to try to train them to speak out loud. The underlying assumption of visible speech was that if students simply followed directions properly, they would be able to make the proper sounds and speak correctly. The visible speech method only articulated the positions of the mouth. The difference in the phonoautograph for Bell, and thus the reason for his interest in it, was that the machine wrote sound as it was formed in waves—a more accurate rendition of the actual production of sound. The phonoautograph, which works according to synesthetic principles, was considered a “machine [that] hears for them” (Sterne 38). Nevertheless, Bell, a eugenicist, wanted to find ways to normalize people who were deaf, and he believed that the technology he furthered would provide the intervention necessary to train them to hear and to speak.⁸

Bell’s effort failed, but it is important to note the way in which sound reproduction arose in part to deal with the cultural problem of deafness. The successors of the phonoautograph—all of what Sterne has named “auditory surrogates”—include the telephone, phonograph, and radio. Frenchman Charles Cros, who came up with a design for the phonograph, worked in a school in Paris for the deaf and mute. Thomas Edison, who is credited with the invention of the phonograph, was hard of hearing. On some of his earlier models, there are teeth marks where he had to test his work through touch to ascertain the status of the instrument. Samuel Morse, who invented the telegraph, was married to a deaf woman. Deaf and hard of hearing people are everywhere present in the technological production of the new sonic terrain.

8. For more on the invention of audiology, see “Diagnosing Deafness” in Brenda Brueggemann’s *Lend Me Your Ear: Rhetorical Constructions of Deafness* (1999).

The oscillations between hearing and deafness—between noise and silence, comprehensible and incomprehensible sound, the articulations of the sounding voice and the gesturing body, the possibilities of seeing sound—induced great anxiety and profound questions about what it is possible to hear. Nevertheless, Sterne writes: “To paraphrase Kittler, deafness was at the beginning of sound reproduction” (41). The development of these sound-reproduction technologies both expanded the material sensorium and sought ways to contain it.

In addition to the use of technology to manage bodies of deafness, a related pattern emerged in deaf educational settings. As a part of the normalizing strategies for hearing and speaking as a set of practices that revolved around the valorization of the speaking voice, deaf educators pushed for oralism rather than manualism. Douglas Baynton, who has written extensively on the parallels between deaf history and immigrant history in the United States, notes that by the late 1800s the tenets of deaf education had shifted in support of an oralist model of education—one that sought to do away with the use of sign language and demanded that deaf individuals learn to speak. Influenced by Darwin’s 1859 *Origin of Species*, educators accepted the popular belief that sign language was a more primitive form of language—which placed those who used it lower on the evolutionary ladder. As a consequence, the responsibility of the enlightened educators was to help people who were deaf move toward progress. Argued on scientific grounds of verifiability regarding the presumed links between biology and language formation, the oralist agenda also was a colonialist attempt to strip deaf people of their language and culture. Despite these efforts—often with quite violent outcomes—the move toward oralism only succeeded in pushing the use of sign language underground.⁹

The emphasis on speaking rather than signing also had its root in the nation-state building projects in France, England, and the United States.

9. It was another century before linguistics established that the many sign languages are languages in their own right, and, more recently, that the language instinct is such that it develops as sonic or visible gesture, but there is not inherent hierarchization of one over the other.

Benedict Anderson has articulated the ways in which “imagined communities” were fostered within and across national lines through the use of print media and the maintenance of a language that helps build cultural and social identification. To maintain nation-states that revolved around a univocality of purpose and identity, all signs of multilingualism had to be eradicated.

Additionally, the use of sign language troubles the modern standardization of hearing. Signing, as a way of speaking through the body, counters the emphasis on sound in the cultural mainstream. Signing is also about the moving field of visibility. Rather than reinforce the visual practices of perspectivism and panopticism, which attempt to locate everything in a visual field in relation to a central focal point, the use of sign language is a communicative approach that decenters the logocentric model of communication. The field of attention is not fixed in space but is always shifting. As we discuss in the subsequent sections, political and cultural efforts to control the emerging, although uneven, manifestations of the theaters of a third ear were never successful for long.

Hieroglyphs: Animating Maps of the Sensorial

New aesthetic practices of sight/sound mixtures multiplied while the deaf population was sidelined, yet these aesthetic ventures created the preconditions for a new type of theater. The new sound technologies proliferated, both multiplying sensorial options and norming them. The sensorial disequilibrium of daily life brought on by urbanization, mass transit systems, and greater social mobility across national and cultural boundaries provided fertile ground for opening up new spaces of hearing. Although the sociopolitical and cultural predilection was to continue to manage deafness, artists opened up the mute spaces of the self. This exploration furthered an understanding of the use of hieroglyphs in art and performance, especially in more direct ways in the 1960s with the emergence of numerous theaters of the third ear, such as work by Robert Wilson, the National Theater of the Deaf, and Ping Chong.

The changing technological and sociocultural landscape of the second half of the 1800s provided the conditions for considerable experimentation

in the understanding of the self, particularly the fragmented self in relation to the arts. A primary area of exploration was that of synaesthesia. Derived from Greek *syn* (meaning union) and *aesthesia* (sensation), synaesthesia challenged the conventional view of the senses: that each sense could be accorded a specific sphere of activity. Synaesthesia has been used in reference to medical conditions in which a person experiences one sense in terms of another, such as in colored hearing. It has also been used in writing to create cross-sensory metaphors. Annabelle Melzer writes provocatively of synaesthesia as a way of “finding the stimulation of a second sense, an echo or reverberation, an after-image translated from the original sense” (18). Synaesthesia, then, becomes both a portent for a new aesthetics and a potent mechanism in poetics for activating cross-sensory production of meaning.¹⁰

Artistic experiments on synaesthesia have ranged from work of the Symbolists to the performance of Wassily Kandinsky, the musical creations of Alexander Scriabin, and the technological creation of color organs by Bainbridge Bishop and Alexander Wallace. Symbolist artists, including Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Maurice Maeterlinck, sought to create the simultaneous transmutation of sense and meaning through the use of hieroglyphic, or mixed sensory, forms. In his famous letter to Georges Izambard in 1871, Arthur Rimbaud wrote, “To arrive at the unknown through the disordering of all the senses, that’s the point” (xxvii). Rimbaud, who sought to attain the status of a visionary poet, felt that the task of the poet was to traverse these unknown terrains and that the “unseen” needed to be made visible in the context of art, even if one could not rationally explicate them.

In his poem “Vowels,” Rimbaud, influenced in part by Baudelaire’s earlier “Correspondences,” evokes colored hearing and its power to ignite links to a greater mystery. He writes: “A black, E white, I red, U green,

10. For more on synaesthesia, see Kevin Dann’s *Bright Colors Falsely Seen: Synaesthesia and the Search for Transcendental Knowledge*, Richard E. Cytowic’s *Synesthesia: A Union of the Senses*, or *Synaesthesia: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, edited by John E. Harrison and Simon Baron-Cohen.

O blue: vowels, / I shall tell, one day, of your mysterious origin:" (CW 139, ll. 1–2). The evocation of these correspondences between the vowels and the colors ostensibly centers on notion of *audition colorée*. During Rimbaud's time, interest in a variety of medical conditions had grown significantly. Rimbaud's own fascination with these various states helped fuel his interest in the ways the use of language in poetry could lead to radical experiences of the self—ones that would not be confined to the status quo. Rimbaud's poem created such an interest in synaesthesia—even though there are questions about whether the poem itself actually reflected Rimbaud's synaesthetic experience—that it fueled considerable public dialogue about and medical research on synaesthesia.

Yet this transsensoriality—because it decenters the modern Cartesian subject—has been viewed with distrust and paranoia. Steven Connor has asserted:

The sense we make of any one sense is always mixed with and mediated by others. The senses form an indefinite series of integrations and transformations: they form a complexion. So there may be no central module, no statue on which the senses may be thought of as being hung or draped. The senses communicate with each other in cooperations and conjugations that are complex, irregular and multilateral. (156)

This transsensorial perspective unmoors the self from a unitary field of representation, articulating a way of thinking through the way in which the subject becomes mobile and maintains always-permeable boundaries.

In addition to the exploration of a variety of sensorial correspondences and transmutations in relation to writing, Mallarmé and Maeterlinck were also involved in a new theater that focused on ways to create a synthesis of poetry and various theatrical genres. To achieve this new theater, both Mallarmé and Maeterlinck sought methods for infusing theater with a poetry that evoked the visual/spatial, rather than purely textual, forms of meaning production. Moving away from language toward silence would enable them, they thought, to evoke a greater sense of mystery.

Maeterlinck was so invested in the power of silence to speak that he asserted that:

It seems to me [. . .] that the dream is almost always *mute*, and that all the characters move, speak, and behave in the middle of a soft and singularly soundless substance. The sleeper's ear *is already useless*, and he makes use of precisely the invention [. . .] which will, in due course, render the somewhat crude discoveries of the telegraph and the telephone superfluous. (cited in McGuinness 25)

Maeterlinck's vision for the theater—which presages Artaud's theater of direct action on the mind—drives toward one of telepathy. In this extreme form of a third ear, access through the assistive technological devices of telegraph and telephone becomes irrelevant. Here the very technological inventions that render the possibility of “thinking” past the edge of hearing—amplifying sound and extending its reach—morph into a new model for hearing. What is the hearing that does not need amplification, where hearing is that of apprehending the mute spaces? Certainly, Maeterlinck wants us to apprehend the excess of meaning communicated in the mute spaces of the theater, the nonsounding spaces. Additionally, however, the articulation of such spaces instantiates a metaphor with particular resonances with the theater of the third ear. At its outer limits, it is a theater where understanding does not need to be *transmitted*, because it is imagined as immediately perceived. In this synaesthiac theater, meaning is not mediated by conceptual categories but simultaneously created and transmitted to the already open ear/eye of the other.¹¹

Kandinsky, who had the experience of the transposition of music as line and color at a performance of Wagner's *Lohengrin*, writes “wild,

11. This notion has resonances with contemporary research into nonverbal communication that shows how two people's movements are synchronized when they are communicating. Researchers have even determined that when they are in synch, the EKGs of their brain waves are the same.

almost mad lines drew themselves before me. [. . .] Wagner had musically painted “my lesson” (Melzer 18). Despite the epiphany, Kandinsky felt that Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which strove for the total synthesis of the arts, did not work because it tended to rely on external means for evoking the synthesis of the arts. Kandinsky, instead, emphasized the importance of stripping each performance moment to its essentials. He proposes a model for this process in his *Yellow Sound* “with its almost complete elimination of dialogue, plot and sequential action, and its reliance on light, movement, and the abstract dances of figures to fill the space of the stage and the duration of the performance” (Melzer 19). The *Prelude*, which has the only comprehensible words in the play, begins: “Dreams hard as stones . . . And speaking rocks . . . Earth with riddles of fulfilling questions” (cited in Melzer ll. 1–2). Much of the rest of the performance oscillates among vague shadows, shifting images, and the use of sound. In this work the literary frame has almost completely disappeared. Kandinsky evokes the performative hieroglyphic to animate maps of the inner and outer spaces, and his experiments had considerable influence on the Dadaists.¹²

Dadaism, an antiart art movement that began in Zurich and emerged in response to World War I, built on the sensorial and technological experimentation of earlier movements to create forums that challenged the status quo. Influenced by the Russian and Italian Futurists, the Dadaists created techniques for numerous sound-image distortions through the use

12. The development of electricity opened new possibilities for projected light, which were exploited by the British painter A. Wallace Rimington, whose Colour Organ formed the basis of the moving lights that accompanied the 1915 New York premiere of Scriabin’s synaesthetic symphony *Prometheus: A Poem of Fire*, which had indications of precise colors in the score. Scriabin wanted everyone in the audience to wear white clothes so that the projected colors would be reflected on their bodies and thus possess the whole room. This interest in color music, which had its genesis in the theories of Pythagoras regarding the mathematical principles of sound (or harmonics), built on the congruence between rhythm in music and pattern in the visual arts. Artists envisioned it as a technique for making music visible to people who were deaf as well as a technique for evoking the synaesthesia necessary to apprehend the invisible spheres of meaning. These inventions related to the visualizing of sound provided some of the early technology for the use of sound and image in film.

of noise, dance, and simultaneous poetry that created a polyphony of voice.¹³ These forms explored ways to break up customary associations between sound and event, and they were often called *bruitism*, a term borrowed from Marinetti, who described noise music as a “chorus of typewriters, kettledrums, rattles and pot-covers to suggest the ‘awakening of the capital’” (Huelsenbeck 25). These techniques of a polyglot poetics—a method for evoking the multiplicity of sound, image, and gesture—have become a typical maneuver for interrupting traditional models of representation and modes of perception in the theater.

By unmooring sensorial flux from its assumed referent, audiences were catapulted into the simultaneous horror and hope of noises in which a singular meaning cannot be ferreted out—creating a sonic vertigo. The Dadaists, indeed, raise the difficult question of whether noise itself is at the heart of representation, rather than merely playing at its edges. What happens if, rather than trying to block out the noise, we maintain the noise? The hearing, deaf, and hard of hearing people all engage, but differently, in the question of noise—technological noise, white noise, the noise of the body, and the sea of noise of human voices on a variety of scales. (It is, of course, important to note biological capacities to “hear” noise in the literal sense, but the scales of registering noise oscillate among sound, vibration, palpitation, and the visualization of sound through movement and instruments.)

Hugo Ball, the “magical bishop” of Dada, writes: “[W]e have now driven the plasticity of the word to the point where it can scarcely be equaled. We achieve this at the expense of the rational, logically constructed sentence” (67). In this drive toward a new sense of language, word becomes

13. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti’s *Futurist Manifesto* (1909) and Luigi Russolo’s *Art of Noises* (1913) were particularly important presagers of the Dadists. In his manifesto *Art of Noises* (1913), Russolo wrote, “Ancient life was all silence. In the nineteenth century, with the invention of the machine, Noise was born. Today, Noise triumphs and reigns supreme over the sensibilities of men” (1). He further wrote, “[W]e must break out of this narrow circle of pure musical sounds, and conquer the infinite variety of noise sounds. [. . .] Let us wander through a great modern city with our ears more alert than our eyes, and

incantation, iridescence—a thing on the move, part of an event, rather than a marker for fixed meaning. Ball, in the lineage opened by Baudelaire, writes: “In these phonetic poems we want to abandon a language ravaged and laid barren by journalism. We must return to the deepest alchemy of the Word, and leave even that behind us, in order to keep safe for poetry its holiest sanctuary” (cited in Richter 42). This process relies on an engagement with the “word” not at the level of meaning, the signified, but at the level of the signifier and its constituent parts. Because the word is pared down, broken into smaller parts, invoked, echoed, and played off of, the opportunity for participating in the construction of meaning is offered to the audience. “What we are celebrating,” Ball asserts, “is both buffoonery and a requiem mass” (65). Performers and audience become coparticipants; nevertheless, it also became something of a commonplace that evenings at the Café Voltaire often incited riotous behavior on the part of the audience—because they experienced the performances as cognitive, social, and political assaults.

On July 14, 1916, for example, Ball recited his first abstract phonetic poem, *Karawane*. In this performance he wore a “tight-fitting cylindrical pillar of shiny blue cardboard” with a “huge cardboard coat collar” (Richter 42). The manuscript was placed on three different music stands. Ball’s poem began:

Gadji beri bimba glanrdidi laula lonni cadori
Gadjama gramma berida bimbala glandri galassassa laulitalomini
Gadji beri bin blassa glassala laula lonni cadorsu sassala bim.
(Richter 42)

enjoy distinguishing between the sounds of water, air, or gas in metal pipes, the purring of motors (which breathe and pulsate with indisputable animalism), the throbbing of valves, the pounding of pistons, the screeching of gears, the clatter of streetcars on their rails, the cracking of whips, the flapping of awnings and flags. We shall enjoy fabricating the mental orchestrations of the banging of store shutters, the slamming of doors, the hustle and bustle of crowds, the din of railroad stations, foundries, spinning mills, printing presses, electric power stations, and underground railways” (2).

This sound poetry deploys a variety of nonsense syllables, lexical hybrids, homophonies, and sonic fragmentations. In uttering these syllabic incantations Ball takes the audience to the sound in-between, “the place where it is heard does not answer back” (Carter, *SB*, 13). These are sounds that have not “settled down [and therefore] cannot be territorialized and paraphrased” (13). The echoic utterings work to transport speaker and audience. The audience was so surprised by the irrational aspect of the poetry that they could not contain themselves. At first confused by this poetic recitation, they responded with enthusiastic applause or complete silence.

Furthermore, Ball writes of his “Verse Ohne Worte”—“without words”—the poem serves as a “vox humana to express disgust for the homeland.” He says:

The “simultaneous poem” has to do with the value of the voice. The human organ represents the soul, the individuality in its wanderings with its demonic companions. The noises represent the background—the inarticulate, the disastrous, the decisive. The poem tries to elucidate the fact that man is swallowed up in the mechanistic process. In a typically compressed way it shows the conflict of the *vox humana* with a world that threatens, ensnares, and destroys it, a world whose rhythm and noise are ineluctable. (57)

The use of simultaneous poetry with its multivocality, phonetic transliterations, and homophonic plays also created a type of shared language at the Café Voltaire. The participants and audience members had a number of different nationalities, and the phonetic poetry, the structure of overlapping recitation, and all the action on stage created a *mise-en-scène* that highlighted the cultural dissonance in the war-neutral country of Switzerland. In this sense, the simultaneous poems created transcultural performance.¹⁴

14. These poems—without words—were for Ball also an attack on the Nationalist impulse of the Germans. By refusing to use the German language, he was obliquely critiquing German Nationalist sentiment, because German national identity was often associated with the German language and the *Heimat*, the homeland.

Much of the performance work at Café Voltaire also incorporated dance. Hugo Ball had ties to Kandinsky and was familiar with his work in dance (dance the painting). Ball writes of his interest in dance:

Abstract dances: a gong beat is enough to stimulate the dancer's body to make the most fantastic movements. The dance has become an end in itself. The nervous system exhausts all the vibrations of the sound and perhaps all the hidden emotions of the gong beater, too, and turns them into an image—a poetic sequence of words is enough to make each of the individual word particles produce the strangest visible effect on the hundred-jointed body of the dancer. (cited in Melzer 99)

Dance that does not rely on music or a one-for-one transposition of words of a poem into gesture becomes a form of pictorial, kinesthetic expression. As the words are absorbed by the dancer, the body speaks at the interstices of sound and gesture. This invocation of the “hundred-jointed body” is the kinesthetic equivalent of speaking through the body that Ball aims for as a kind of Edenic language—speaking through the use of incantatory language and sound. This sharing across artistic media—language making at its edge and body dancing at its edge—are harbingers of even more sophisticated theaters of the third ear.¹⁵

Although noise, image, dance, and often its synaesthetic potential were explored at Café Voltaire, there was also a growing interest in the notion of synaesthesia and its connections to technology. Dadaist Raoul Hausmann wrote his first text on the *optophone* in 1922, in which he asserted “space-time” as the sixth (an integration of image and sound) and most important of our senses (Donguy 217). He explored the organized relations between the eye and the ear through photomontages and drawings. In a letter to Henri Chopin (June 23, 1963), he writes: “I wanted to draw your

15. This emerging theater is, of course, fraught with a variety of issues related to Orientalism. For more see, Edward Said's *Orientalism*.

attention to the fact that I developed the theory of the Optophone, a device for transforming invisible forms into sounds and vice versa, back in 1922. I had an English patent, 'device to transform numbers on a photoelectric basis,' which was a variant of this device and at the same time the first robot. [But] I did not have the money to build the Optophone" (cited in Donguy 217).

Nevertheless, Hausmann's work led to the development of a technique for notating sound. This process revolved around the use of optophonetics that manipulated typography according to the variations in pitch and volume. According to Steven McCaffrey, "optophonetics is an open code, of low denotation that nevertheless permits a wide range of imaginative interpretation. It is in current use today with many text-sound composers" (2). These practices of the polyphony of voice revolve around an economy of sound-image distortion that has become, in fact, a typical maneuver for interrupting traditional models of representation and creating new modes of perception in the theater. Additionally, these modes help us understand the nature of blurred sensory boundaries and the ways in which new systems of meaning can be created.

In the movement from the Symbolists to the Dadaists, the boundaries between inner and outer modes of knowing became increasingly blurred, the notion of what is normal exploded, and the verifiability of any objective, unitary world was contested. There is, instead, the constant play of the senses along multiple axes of sound, silence, and the moving body. The various sound and film technologies also provided intervening force in this process and made possible new combinations of sensory registers.

The Dadaists were followed by the Surrealists, a movement lead by André Breton. Although there was considerable interest in the eruption of *marvelous* and the ways in which diverse realities split apart and rejoin into new combinations, Antonin Artaud, who aligned with Surrealists for a brief period, is a particularly cogent reference point for the continuing experimentation in the transmutation of the senses and their power for theater. His work has, as well, strong theoretical resonances as a parallel to a Deaf aesthetic.

In 1926, Artaud rejected the Surrealists' attempt to merge art and politics. As Constance Spreen has noted, by the early 1930s Artaud's theory for the theater was also being resisted by members of *L'action française*,

a group led by Benjamin Cremieux who were proponents of a total nationalism in which national identity revolved around the instantiation of what was considered purely *French*. Jacques Copeau, considered by many as the “most” French, most Cartesian theater director, supported a classicism “which stood for order, clarity, and primacy of reason” (Spreen 74). What was considered non-French was described as plague or contagion, and it needed to be kept out of the French social, cultural politic. Artaud—like Hugo Ball in his anti-Germanic performances—considered contagion an essential and positive sign of the effects of a theater that would be arrived at through a poetry of the senses, not through a recuperation of Cartesian order. Artaud’s version emphasized a nonliterary theater that “shifted from one based on written plays to spectacle; there were no more masterpieces; theater was to be returned to the masses” (86–87). Like the plague, the theater is successful if it is able to cross culturally constructed boundaries.

Artaud’s *The Theatre and Its Double* provides a useful theoretical frame for considering how the relationship between language and the body in a physical theater transgresses the limits of a traditional Western model of representation.¹⁶ A brief consideration of Artaud’s theory of the theater helps us understand the limits and possibilities of a transformational vision for theater, in particular as it relates to the physicality of hearing difference. Artaud theorized a new language for a physical theater of action that was to be based on the ways in which space can speak. Artaud explains:

Words say little to the mind; extent and objects speak; new images speak, even images made with words. But space thundering with images and crammed with sounds speaks too, if one knows how to intersperse from time to time a sufficient extent of space stocked with silence and immobility. (*TD* 87)

16. The theatrical model addressed in *The Theatre and Its Double* prioritizes the polyphony of stage elements without an emphasis on speech, and it creates what Artaud called a language for the stage. Artaud also, later in his life, sought to renew the live voice in his radiophonic *To Have Done with the Judgement of God*. For more on this aspect of Artaud’s work, see Allen Weiss’s *Phantasmic Radio*.

In this model, which transfigured the traditional model of speech as oral, the theatrical event unfolds as a polyphony in which language is only one among many signifying elements.

Words as sound effects “create beneath language a subterranean current of impressions, correspondences, and analogies” (*TD* 38). Derrida, echoing Barthes’s *signifiance*, writes of Artaud’s claims for voice and language:

Glossopoeia, which is neither an imitative language nor the creation of names, takes us back to the borderline of the moment when the word has not yet been born, when articulation is no longer a shout but not yet discourse, when repetition is *almost* impossible, and along with it, language in general: the separation of concept and sound, of signifier and signified. (“US” 240)

This kind of sonic polyphony attempts to break the strictures of orality, of voice as speech. Although it assumes the position of voice as sound, it breaks up and challenges the referential grounds of coherent vocalized speech. Glossopoeia, or emerging speech, straddles the borderline spaces of speech and meaning. Because this moment is not yet articulated, it also is yet to be heard. In this sense, the perceptual modalities of hearing and deafness, and how they are attached to the making of new meaning, oscillate in relationship to each other.

This notion becomes radically challenged if we consider, even further, how deafness fits into this discussion. What, for example, might be the “glossopoeiac” variation on language that speaks from the body, such as sign language? How are the bodily rhythms that become transposed to sign similar to or different from those bodily rhythms that become subsumed into a language based on sound? How does the hidden speech of normative perception restrict us from being able to hear past the boundaries of our own idea(l)s about what it means to speak, hear, and be in our bodies?¹⁷

17. This argument and series of questions about the tension between sound and gesture needs further development. Crucial to examination of both as they relate to language or

In its use of sign language, deafness curtails the oral dimension of communicative exchange and promotes material semiotics of speaking from other spaces of the body, and within those dimensions, sign language has its own semantic structures. Sign can also act as a potential site of linguistic play, adding the location of voice between body and language to the complexity of the dimensions. Signing disrupts the location of voice as sound, but it amplifies the voices that emanate from the body. Through the “hearing eye,” we can see these voices and understand the body as it articulates itself.

More particularly, in one component of what he identifies as “poetry in space,” Artaud proposed a “sign language [. . .] a language of signs, gestures and attitudes having an ideographic value as they exist in certain unperturbed pantomimes” (*TD* 39). He envisions a sign language, or hieroglyphs, in which gesture would transpose itself into a concrete image. The gesture would have more affective potential than the spoken word. The sign, however, would not merely be a substitute for the word but would evoke its own materiality. Artaud, in other words, believed that sign language could bypass the way in which the spoken word created a distance between performer and audience and that it could reinstate the immediacy of performance.

Artaud also pursued his interest in sign language through his analysis of the use of gesture and physicality in Balinese theater that he considered to be “based on signs and no longer on words” (*TD* 54). These performers

the disruption of language is the shared notion of their physicality (see, for example, Mark Johnson’s *The Body in the Mind*). This interchange between sound and gesture can be traced through the *phonemic* (see, for example, Tsur). This issue is revisited in the references in the chapter on NTD regarding the residency with Peter Brooks and also in chapter five on Ping Chong with respect to Barthes’s comment, “articulation of the tongue, not the meaning of language.” Although it seems to me that the discussion of translinguistics is important to the development of the argument about the possibility of cross-sensory moments in these performances, I argue that the linguistic material needs to be examined in close dialogue with the recent work developed by Armstrong, Stokoe, and Wilcox in *Gesture and the Nature of Language*, which prioritizes the point of view of signing, not sound. Brenda Farnell’s work on Plains Indian Sign also offers another perspective from which to more fully articulate notions of what she calls language in action. Work also needs to be done to link the perceptual enactment of exchange through synaesthesia to the questions of translinguistics.

struck Artaud as “animated hieroglyphs” (*TD* 54). Two issues are at stake here. One is the way in which the body itself can activate moments of intense communicative power that do not rely on the dissemination of words. The second is the possibility for a system of theatrical signs that are requisite to the stage and not transposed from the arena of the writing culture into the theatrical arena, which Artaud felt had destroyed the potential for an alchemy of the body. However, as J. Stephen Lansing points out, Artaud misses the context of the “self-conscious body of discourse of Balinese theater,” which is based on an “aesthetic of the sounding of the text” (241). Although Artaud’s writings are indeed prophetic and he lays considerable theoretical ground of a poetics for a theater in action, this example points out the complexities of the relationship among text, the body, and performance as a site of emergent cultural meaning.

In the mystery of how the silence of images, as well as the silence of the body, speaks to us through the spatiality of the performative event, the question emerges of how we hear what we cannot literally hear. For Artaud, however, the revolutionary theatrical vision entails not only “new” ways of speaking but also of hearing; in fact, these two cannot be arbitrarily divorced from each other. Derrida notes that

This necessity of *understanding* or *hearing* the pictogram is felt everywhere else, for example in a note on surrealist painting in general and in “*Mes dessins ne sont des dessins*” (My drawings are not drawings). Not only in the form called glossolalia where, as always, a crowd of possible words are stewing under the surface, ready to augment or repress—in order to do away with it—the so-called natural language. But also in the “I hear”: I hear the painters [...]. (“US” 82)

The visual, or pictorial, image and its spatiality affect on the viewer in an immediate fashion, expressing a totality that speech cannot, and do not require the interpretive tool of translation from image into speech. To communicate, in order to be “heard,” does not require the process of speaking aloud.

Artaud himself further delineates the possibilities for his theater through his comments on a painting in the Louvre by Lucas van den Leyden. As he listens to the silences of its depiction, Artaud admires the painting for its communicative powers, in which “the ear [. . .] is as moved by it as the eye” (*TD* 33). Artaud believes that the artist has achieved a “certain means of making the harmony affect the brain directly, like a physical agent” (*TD* 35). Artaud adds that, through the conjoining of the concreteness of the images and their metaphysics, “this painting is what the theater should be, if it knew how to speak the language that belongs to it” (37). This moment of recognition echoes Diderot’s own efforts to found an understanding of the intersection of painting as theater and of theater as painting, thus invoking image and theater simultaneously.

This interest in pictoriality is not alinguistic; it is an interest in the extension of “words” into the space of the performance, or more generally speaking, the greater environmental space. In regard to the potentialities of a “visual language” on stage, Artaud also writes about the demands of the cinema. His comments clarify and extend the remarks about painting, pictoriality, and the power of the visual stage:

The point is not to find in visual language a mere equivalent to written language, but to make public the very essence of language and to transport action to a plane where all translation would be useless, and where this action acts almost intuitively on the brain. (*SW* 151)

In such a language of action, space speaks, and this theatrical approach has significant resonances with ASL.

Hieroglyphs of the '60s and the '70s

As the civil rights movement gained momentum and had begun to shake social and political structures to the core, new theaters of identity emerged, such as the work of Joe Chaikin’s Open Theater, Luis Valdez’s Teatro Campesino, and Amiri Baraka’s Spirit House. These theaters began the

difficult and contestatory process of opening a new politics of the senses, revising the codes of the body, image, and sound. These theaters opened up new ways of experiencing and telling stories as well as recovering lost histories. Much has already been written on the innovative work from this time in relation to speaking, but much less on how we listen. David Michael Levin, in his analysis of frames of hearing differently, asks us to examine “auditory distortion, ideological deafness, institutional noise, the specific ways in which power channels hearing and listening channels power” (111). Although Levin is primarily addressing practices of everyday life, his questions are pertinent to performance practices. How are the politics of hearing scripted in the performances themselves, and which theatrical practices challenge prescribed politics of hearing?

In the late 1960s, feminist and black theater did begin to take shape—often using experimental theater techniques to shape their social critiques. Some of these theaters present early versions of a theater of the third ear—raising the question of how can we hear the other voices? Hear past the status quo? The model of interaction with experimental theater work as it continued in the '70s provides a certain baseline for understanding the possibilities of theater for subjectivity and social revisioning by activating new spaces of transgression, pleasure, and consideration of a variety of social issues.

These developments did not always lead to inclusive practices regarding deaf and disabled performers. Although there is a cadre of disabled characters in theater literature, all too often the respective disabled performers are not asked to play those parts. One response was to begin to develop new theaters—some with only disabled performers, others with mixed-ability casts.

During this period the performance scene underwent an explosion of activity around a variety of challenges to modernist aesthetic structures and content. Art became increasingly cross-disciplinary and the boundaries between low and high art blurred. The quotidian, ranging from everyday objects to everyday movements, increasingly became the site of exploration for art. John Cage's influence, for example, in the field of avant-garde music has radically changed the way in which we understand sound. His musical

compositions included explorations of silence as “ambient sound” as well as the relationship between chance and sound events.¹⁸ In his work with choreographer Merce Cunningham, John Cage developed music tracks that were put together by chance operations and often drew on everyday sounds. The tracks were composed of what Cage called ready-made sounds, sounds that he put together and wanted to simply let be. There is a transiency in the performance form; it is made in the moment as the sound tape and the movements are brought together during the actual performance.¹⁹

Growing out of a response to Cage’s innovative work, the Judson Street Church dance movement sought to examine the basic compositional principles of putting dances together, and many experiments stripped the dance to its basic elements of very simple everyday movement. Artists wanted to disrupt the art scene and everyday life simultaneously, and the development of environmental, or site-specific, performances as an outgrowth of the Happenings and Fluxus offered opportunities for unsettling artificial boundaries between art and life. Happenings, one-time-only multimedia events that took place in everyday public spaces in the late 1950s and early 1960s, had their roots in the aesthetics of chance promulgated by the Dadaists, John Cage, and Artaud. The Fluxus movement, first called that in 1962 by George Maciunas, focused on the creation of a total, mobilizing art by making use of available channels of art rather than trying to invent a new language.

La Monte Young, a well-known member of Fluxus, wrote *Compositions 1960 #5*. This production emphasizes the theatrical aspect of music. The instructions are a series of actions rather than musical instructions, and they include directions such as “[t]urn a butterfly (or any number of

18. Cage also cites Artaud as an influence on his ideas and organized the famous mixed-media performance event at Black Mountain College in 1952 after having read *The Theater and Its Double*.

19. For more on John Cage’s work, see Raul Wilfred’s “John Cage: Limits and Possibilities of Crossing Cultural Boundaries” and Liz Kotz’s “Post Cagean Aesthetics and the ‘Event’ Score.”

butterflies) loose in the performance area” (cited in Kahn 237). Many of these artistic maneuvers set in motion the altering of the everyday as well the concomitant perceptual frames, particularly at the edge of sound. If perception is already something on the move, an event rather than a mimetic re-presentation of some predetermined knowledge, then the method for challenging audience-performer relationships as well as the status quo rely on improvisation and the contingent nature of the event.

Other key figures during the 1960s include Richard Schechner, Jerzy Grotowski, and Peter Brooks, who worked on theories and practices of intercultural performance. In drawing from a variety of Eastern theatrical techniques, each of these directors shifted to a more visual and kinesthetic theatrical approach. These new theaters investigated how the formal elements of art production could be disrupted to stage practices with political and social challenges. These changes in theaters of identity during the '60s and '70s laid important groundwork for a new politics of the senses.

Megan Terry

Megan Terry, often considered the mother of feminist theater, is now the resident playwright for Omaha Magic Theater (OMT). She has worked with the artistic director, Jo Ann Schidman, who founded the company in 1968 to develop theater works that contest pressing social issues including alcoholism, sexual roles, the environment, morality, and reading. Although the plays are often drafted individually, the company works with the audience to develop them further.

The dialogue-based approach to theater embeds the work of the OMT deeply within the community at the same time that it lifts the issue out of context through the use of experimental theater techniques. This approach enables the audience to focus on some specific features of the issue at hand without having to tackle all the factors.

A central technique for OMT is the use of “transformations,” a technique that has its roots in the work of Viola Spolin and Joe Chaikin’s Open Theater. In this process, rather than engaging in complete character changes marked by stage exits and full costume changes (a technique

that relies on the realistic theater tradition), the use of transformations enables the actress to change characters on stage by adding a single piece of costume or a new gesture that serve as character indicators. This process facilitates the exploration of “multiple variables of human experience and cultural constraints on gender” through the use of “shifting images” and the suggestion of “alternate situations and roles so that a central situation might suggest recollection, wishful thinking, or fantasy through comments by characters both inside and outside the scene” (Dornan 79). Although this is certainly not the same as performing through the use of ASL, it is important to note the analogies. When ASL storytellers or performers enact a multitude of characters, they use a similar approach: transforming through the use of postural, gestural, and facial indicators. This approach emphasizes visual/spatial ways of knowing and reading images.

Once a script is developed, the company explores how the script can best be depicted through the use of image, movement, and sound. Reade Dornan notes that “[t]he resulting plays are often a montage of monologue, random sound, and Dadaistic imagery built around a particular theme. Their ideas seem to grow anti-rationally, almost surrealistically out of dream-like, sometimes private associations” (82). When staged, the postmodern works are an open terrain of associations that then allow the audience to create their own meaning and interpretations of the work.

In *American King’s English for Queens* (1972), for example, the ways in which children are trained to use language affects the ways in which they then learn to view the world. In particular, the use of language, including “proper” language, has important consequences for the development of gender roles and identity. Regarding this work, Terry notes:

“Do you think like you talk or talk like you think?” is the central question. [. . .] A feral child raised by prairie dogs is found by children and brought home to be “civilized” through learning “English.” (Schmidman, *RBVP* 13)

The staging of the play tackles the complex of questions around the origin of language. Jaimie has lived outside the purview of society with

the prairie dogs, so the question becomes whether he can learn to be a full member of society.²⁰ This consideration echoes the questions that had been raised in the late 1700s and early 1800s about the abilities of feral children to become socialized. These children—as a symbol of the presumed outer limits of humanity—raised great fear and fascination. *American King's English for Queens* takes a more light-hearted approach, but still Jaimie's failure to understand and perform accordingly gets him in trouble with Mom.

Jaimie: The rabbit's eating our lettuce.

Mom: Is he?

Jaimie: No. I said the rabbit.

Mom: He's eating the lettuce.

Jaimie: No he isn't. Daddy's at work.

Mom: He's eating the lettuce.

Jaimie: You're crazy!

Mom: Go to your room.

Jaimie: If all the rabbits are boys, are all the cats girls? (Schmidman, *RBVP* 13)

Because the OMT is determined to play out the issues with humor, we are given the opportunity to laugh at the situation, but even this short section makes clear some of the underlying tensions about how we use language and develop our identity structures.²¹

Amiri Baraka

Amiri Baraka (aka Leroi Jones)—who has been called the “black Baudelaire” (Sollors 1)—played a key role in setting the Black Arts movement

20. A similar question was raised in relation to feral children in the 1800s.

21. For more on Megan Terry, see Susan Carlson's “Leaking Bodies and Fractured Texts: Representing the Female Body at the Omaha Magic Theatre” (1996) and June Schlueter's “Megan Terry's Transformational Drama: Keep Tightly Closed in a Cool Place and the Possibilities of the Self” (1990).

in motion in the 1960s. Baraka's work challenges the use of language and audience-performer relations; he sought to create art that achieved a permeable exchange between the art event and community (Sollors 189).

In 1965 Baraka, for example, founded the Black Revolutionary Theater (BRT) one month after the assassination of Malcolm X. Black Arts Repertory Theater School (BARTS) in Harlem, funded by Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited, an antipoverty program established by President Johnson's Office of Economic Opportunity, lasted for one year. This short-lived experiment, nevertheless, provided a model for black theater and led to the emergence of numerous companies across the country.

In *Slave Ship* (1969), director Gilbert Moses turned the whole theater into a slave ship, thus creating an environmental piece "where action might erupt at any point. Action could happen in back of you or right beside you" (cited in Elam 78). In this piece, Baraka aimed to recreate the history of the Middle Passage up to the civil rights movement. By having the audience participate in this replay of black history—which is presented as having not changed all that much—Baraka and Moses felt that they had a better chance of inciting a black revolution.

A particularly effective device for evoking an even greater sense of being at one with the environment was *emotional space*, a device for attending to the silences in between sounds. In other words, the piece makes use of a series of pregnant pauses, a technique Moses learned from Paul Sills.²² This technique highlighted feelings of disorientation and uncertainty as the audience waited to see what would happen next. The use of the emotional space works by underscoring the perceptual and sensorial dimensions of the performance, because the audience has to experience the swelter of image, sound, and movement and put their cognitive tendencies to frame meaning on hold.

In the piece as a whole, there was limited dialogue punctuated with music and sound. During the first twenty minutes of the piece, the performers used the Yoruba dialect. Some drumming remained constant

22. Elam notes that this device also derives from the work of Richard Schechner and Peter Brooks.

throughout the work; as the piece progressed, the performers continued to chant and speak in Yoruba throughout. To create the strongest scenario, gestures and symbols took precedence over the spoken word. Part of the story revolved around a black preacher who is depicted as having bought into the white ethos, and later it became necessary to kill the preacher—a ritual sacrifice that will rid the black consciousness of its religious Uncle Tom. As the performers began to execute the Preacher, a white voice called from offstage: “I’m God. You can’t kill white Jesus God I got long blond hair. I don’t even wear a wig. You love the way I look. You want to look like me!” (SS 145). The black audience is exhorted “when we gonna rise. Rise, rise, rise, cut the ties, Black man rise” (SS 143). Harry Elam writes:

At one performance of *Slave Ship* in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, an aroused audience bolstered by the militant participatory action of the production stood at the end of the performance ready to riot. If not for the fact that the doors of the theater remained bolted until the fervor had subsided somewhat, this audience certainly would have acted on its resolve. At another performance [. . .] in West Point, Mississippi, the entire audience rose up to its feet and joined the audience with the actors, waving fists and chanting, “We gonna rise up!” (Elam 13)

At the heart of Baraka’s aesthetics is the scream, and it draws on Dadaist and Surrealist prototypes. In the poem “Vowels 2” Baraka articulates the self it is explodes into expression.

Freeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee
Freeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee
Freeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee

EEE EEE EEE
EEE EEE EEE
EEE EEE EEE

Freeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee

BURST (BM 189)

There is a long history of the invocation of the scream, starting at least with the Dadaists, to evoke extreme states of expression. The scream serves to activate at the edge of expression, the excess or lack of meaning that lurks in the noise of culture. Screaming, when performed aloud is both sound and not-sound; it pushes at the limits of the sounding body and is painful for both the one screaming and the one hearing the scream. Sounding forth, it forces the oscillations between the body as the site of the scream and the volley of sound as it spits from the body. Yet, when we read Baraka's poem, what do we hear? As this scream oscillates among body, sound, and the printed page, we hear the reverberations of the nonsounding scream. We hear, as it were, past the edge of sound.

Toward a Future Poetics of Hearing

In 1962 *The Miracle Worker*—the film version of the story of the relationship between Helen Keller and Annie Sullivan—circulated to movie houses across the United States. One weeknight, presumably the only night the show was in town, my parents and a friend went to see the film. I was seven years old, already wearing a box hearing aid, and beginning to lose my eyesight as well. When they returned from the movie, I asked them what they had gone to see. When they told me—*The Miracle Worker*—I had, of course, to ask them what it was about. When they told me, I was furious that they had not taken me to see it. They claimed it was too adult for me; I was adamant that no adult material was too adult if it helped me understand that there were more of “us” out there. I knew that I needed to know where “we” were and how we were able to function. It was to be many years before I learned how to read the complexities of navigating the hybrid sensory and cultural spaces of disability and ethnicity. Nevertheless, the story serves as a rudimentary marker for the ways in performance—even with its problematic emphasis on the “overcoming” motif—can carve out a space where a cultural identity can be articulated around the process of hearing differently.

Despite the interest in the 1960s in a politics of identity around race, ethnicity, class, and gender and the concomitant links to diverse staging practices, the inclusion of disability as an identity category with

any presumed relevance to contemporary performance has developed unevenly since that time. The play and film version of *The Miracle Worker*, the emergence of the NTD in 1967, and an early work by Robert Wilson, *Deafman Glance* in 1970, mark the beginning of contemporary theater practices that work to make deafness visible in the cultural mainstream. Mark Medoff's *Children of a Lesser God* is also credited with shifting the interest to deaf characters and arts in the 1970s. Nevertheless, the beginning of a well-articulated and well-publicized approach to disability performance in general and deaf performance in particular did not begin to emerge until the 1980s.

Within the past twenty years, experimental theater has realigned itself to a large extent with questions of individual history and political and historical agency, which had been drained out of the formal aesthetics of the '60s and '70s. Sally Banes and Noël Carroll have noted that as "postmodern dance (and theatre) met postmodern culture" (334) in the '80s and '90s, there was a quest for new meaning. Necessity has driven the emergence of this theater; Joe Chaikin has been at the forefront of one version of this theatrical work. After experiencing a stroke in the mid-1980s, he returned to the stage and explored what it meant to perform from his position of aphasia in several plays, one of which was called *Struck Dumb*. In the past few years, before his death in 2003, Chaikin worked closely with a group of disabled performers to grapple with the intersection of a new aesthetics of physical theater based on specific bodies and the ways in which this theater also empowered the performers within the context of their own histories and stories. Other artists were members of a younger generation who arrived on the scene with their own cultural histories.

Despite the lure of the body as the site for experimentation par excellence and the seduction of body theories in the academy, as Anne Cooper Albright and others have noted, there has been far too little attention to the presence of the disabled body in performance. Willy Conley, deaf actor and professor at Gallaudet University, notes the lack of inclusion of deaf actors and playwrights in mainstream theater, the lack of understanding about the intricacies of having performances ASL interpreted, and the lack of mainstream theater that actually makes strong

use of visual and movement baselines (51–67). Given the ongoing success of the NTD (Hartford), the increasing success of Deaf West (Los Angeles), SignStage (Cleveland), and Onyx (New York), the prevalence of Deaf theater around the world, and the extensive work on mixed theaters in Europe, as well as the availability of native and trained ASL “speakers,” it is difficult to understand why there is not more work that crosses boundaries among people who are hearing, deaf, and hard of hearing.

As is more evident in the chapters that follow, I am arguing for a different type of hearing, one of the third ear, one that allows us to create cross-cultural and cross-modal work, listen to nonverbal exchanges, and track the meaning that crosses between hearing and deafness. For Merleau-Ponty and others, synaesthesia has acted as a counterpoint to Cartesian dualism. Currently, we have only begun to sketch out possible connections among synaesthesia, cross-modal experiencing, translanguistic exchange, and the connections to a realm in between hearing and deafness. It is not enough, however, to recognize the various instances of the third ear as cameos of hearing differently in the performance examples in subsequent chapters. It is not enough simply to relocate sound as movement in the body. The body provides the mobile field for locating the intersection of visual and auditory perception. This intersection provides an Archimedean point for leveraging certain restrictive notions of normative hearing. As Merleau-Ponty argues, it is in the motility of the human body that various sensory experiences can be transposed from one sense to another. We see with our ears or hear with our eyes, effecting a kind of synaesthesia:

There is a sense in saying that I see sounds or hear colors so long as sight or hearing is not the mere possession of an opaque *quale*, but the experience of a modality of existence, the synchronisation of my body with it, and the problem of forms of synaesthetic experience begins to look like being solved if the experience is that of a certain mode of movement or a form of conduct. [. . .] Movement, understood not as objective movement and transference in space, but as a project towards movement or “potential movement” forms the basis for the unity of the senses. (*PP* 234)

The description of hearing differently, because it gives way to a greater understanding of the performing body and audience reception, can help us develop new frames for the current discussions about the politics of difference. Hearing through the third ear points to a dimension of understanding that exceeds the confines of an explicit verbal “meaning” of the performance. And what is just beyond our usual “hearing” keeps close company with a companion term, deafness.

This hybrid hearing—across ethnic and hearing positions—becomes a matter of perspective that involves the whole-body attitude we take through our ears *and* eyes toward the performance, toward our stories and everyday practices. In this process we hear not some predetermined meaning, but what unfolds as an improvisation or a mobile field of interaction, particularly through the activation of the third ear.

As we move from the notion of a modern to that of a postmodern subject, the exploration of diverse sound-image economies from Diderot onward help remind us of the contingent nature of knowledge production. As a result, it becomes incumbent upon us to articulate not the inherent meanings in social institutions and subject positionalities, but the ways in which relational meaning is at the crux of navigating multiple epistemologies. This shift has important implications for a shift in audience-performer exchanges both on stage and in everyday life.

Homi Bhabha, who has written extensively about the intersection of multiple cultural spaces, remarks that

[w]hat is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond the narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These “in-between” spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (1–2)

Bhabha does not address deafness or disability in his writing, although he does struggle with issues around silences, screaming, and the experience of body in relation to racial identity.²³ The discourse of identity and postcolonial politics needs, however, to be revised in relation to disability and Deaf studies so that we are not always running the risk of hanging our discourses on absent and abstracted bodies. The states of hearing, hard of hearing, and deafness are differential variables at the moment of reception where a simultaneous seeing and hearing occurs across heterogeneous, ambivalent cultural bodies—the result of what Michel de Certeau has called the “murmuring of everyday practices” (PEL 200). It is a certain form of this murmuring to which we must learn to attend, both in everyday life and in the theater of the third ear.

23. For more on heteroglossia in relation to deafness, see Brenda Brueggemann. She writes: “And these times, I am convinced, will bring out more stories from those who would have otherwise remained ‘silent,’ formerly cut off from a feeling of communicative competency. So, too, will our willingness—even in the academy—to consider, even welcome, hybrid texts. Heteroglossia is here. Or, I might also say: heteroglossia is *hear*. Our ability not only to hear—but to go actively seeking the both/and of ‘utterance,’ the double (or more) stance, and the nearly infinite possibilities of multilingual, multicultural, multisensorial experience, all these, I think, will make space for deaf writing and deaf autobiography” (316).

Chapter 3

Performing Deafness: Robert Wilson

In 1970, Robert Wilson first staged *Deafman Glance*, a work that explored the mode of communication, predominantly visual and kinesthetic, that developed between Wilson, white and hearing, and Raymond Andrews, an African American deaf-mute. The piece, performed in silence, lasted anywhere from three and a half hours to twelve hours, and as an intersection of the “deaf” world and the “hearing” world, it challenged audience expectations about hearing and language in a surreal theater of silence.

The particular construction of deafness in *Deafman Glance* questioned not only a normative type of hearing, but also the necessity of speech. Through the power of the images, the third ear, as the “hearing eye,” was activated as the silence spoke to the audience. In this work, Wilson’s approach, an early moment in the history of the performance of deafness, articulates an encounter with the “strange other” in such a way that valorizes deafness over and above race, and it raises important questions about the extent to which the subaltern—here deaf and racialized—can speak and under what terms we will listen.

Already well documented as a central work in Wilson’s earliest phase as a director, *Deafman Glance* is most often addressed as a theater work that achieved new perceptual possibilities, primarily through its use of visual images, dance, and gesture. Several scholars note Wilson’s use of silence. In particular Arthur Holmberg describes Wilson’s approach to silence as a method of “ignoring language” (9), despite the fact that this comment indicates an overreliance on a concept of language as sound based. It is useful to note that as a cultural construct, deafness often resonates as a signifier for the absence of language, rather than simply the absence of

sound, and deafness is all too often relegated to the realm of “other,” the abnormal. In this chapter, I examine how “deafness” deploys a theoretical power for the disruption of meaning and as a modality that indicates regions of discourse that cannot be contained within the available sign systems.

Lennard Davis has argued in his recent study of disability—particularly deafness and the enforcement of normalcy—that “[d]isability [. . .] is a disruption in the visual, auditory, or perceptual field as it relates to the power of the gaze” (*EN* 129). In other words, the presence of the disabled body activates the perceptual frame of the extraordinary body, challenging normalized conventions of perception.

In general, the audiences of *Deafman Glance* were unsettled as a result of the length of the piece, the use of slowed movement, and the lack of narrative in the theatrical collage. Unable to make immediate sense of the piece, audience members either tended to reject it or to immerse themselves more deeply in the experience of the piece. Although many of the scholarly discussions touch on the role that the performance of deafness plays as a way of entering into a theater of images, they do not fully examine the way in which *Deafman Glance* challenges the audience to revise their understanding of hearing, deafness, and visibility as they experience the liminality of Wilson’s theater. The work invites hearing audience members momentarily to suspend their sense of hearing and to enter into the world of the silence, images, and sonic fragments; for a deaf audience, it stages a work that does not rely on the exchange of speech to be understood. It disrupts the mainstream representation of meaning that has numerous implications for how we understand language, hearing, perception, and the role the body plays in making new meaning that *includes* the perspective of deafness.

Regarding *Deafman Glance*, John Gillespie suggests, without explaining how, that “since no hearing person can ever truly penetrate the world of the deaf, the image is likely to strike one [and *one* is presumably a hearing person] as surreal” (141). From my point of view, pushed from the “retinal bias” of Western representation (a term used by Marcel Duchamp), the audience undergoes a temporary sojourn into a world of deafness and

speechlessness, from which no relief in the form of clear, conceptual interpretation is promised. As a result, through complicating conventional visual and auditory paradigms, the pathways for establishing listening become unsettled. To incorporate the voice of deafness more actively into the cultural imagination, as audience members, we have to reconstitute what we mean by hearing as well as what we mean by the body.

In the following rereading of *Deafman Glance*, I address the implications of Wilson's depiction of the *intersection* of hearing and deaf worlds. Part of the significance of the work can be tracked through the need for a particular model of the third ear. Apprehending the performance through the third ear shifts the theoretical paradigm from a binary model of hearing and deafness that tends to track deafness as a deficiency to a more inclusive one that marks those moments of hearing/deafness as well as race at the borderland of the third ear.

Overview

Wilson's style, in a production career that now spans thirty-five years, continues to be highly pictorial and visual, to focus on disjunctive combinations between aural and visual elements, and to create a sense of alternate realities. Wilson, in fact, has coined the term "autistic" drama to identify his particular style, and his works are designed to convey certain dimensions of human consciousness that cannot be reduced to words.¹ Even in Wilson's later works that have been derived from already-established texts,

1. Wilson's use of the word "autistic" is problematic. Although I agree that his aesthetics does indeed reflect the absorption of the language patterns he explored with Christopher Knowles and the deaf aesthetics he explored with Raymond Andrews to stage a system of meaning that destabilizes conventional ways of communicating, there are several problems with the use of the term. One, given the history of the development of his aesthetic, I am unclear why he collapses deafness and autism—except that they are, in relation to normalism, exceptional states of being. Which people get to use the typical pejorative labels (or medical labels) is also problematic. Much has already been written about the ways in which the disabled can claim the right to take on the labels of disability, whereas an able-bodied person who does the same is considered to reinstantiate ableism.

his use of language is embedded in the world of images that he creates. Although Wilson's work has been credited with changing the look of contemporary theater, by its formal qualities and its lack of overt political declamation, it is still often viewed with skepticism. However, although these criticisms are well taken, my purpose is to contextualize these concerns in relation to an unfinished critique of the perceptual aspects of his work, particularly *Deafman Glance*. This overview of Wilson's productions, which deals with some of the critical concerns about the ways in which he has linked perception, aesthetics, and politics, will, subsequently, orient my analysis of *Deafman Glance* and its contribution to the performance of deafness.

Robert Wilson first began composing theatrical pieces in the late '60s in New York. John Cage's work with chance operations, indeterminacy, and the simultaneous occurrence of unrelated events; Allen Kaprow's Happenings; the Judson Street Church movement; Richard Schechner's environmental theater; the Living Theater; and the Open Theater all set the stage for the considerable theatrical and artistic experimentation of the period. "There was an energy in New York then," Wilson reminisces, "certain things going on that everyone fed off—painters, poets, writers, dancers, composers, directors. Cage liberated all of us" (cited in Holmburg 2).

As Michael Vanden Heuvel explains, artists were no longer expected to depict a Cartesian or unified psychological subject, but could "slow down, speed up, restrict, and distend the flow of theatrical time and space" (158). Through the use of devices such as collage, simultaneity, bricolage, and tableau—many of which date back to Dadaist experimentation—the artists focused on the phenomenology of perception and strove to "wake up the body" (159). These manipulations of the perceptual components of theater initiated considerable exploration of the mechanics of performance itself, and through the unsettling of traditional representation, these experiments laid the groundwork for a promise of new orders of meaning.

During the late '60s, many artists explored ways that meaning could be mediated sensorially through the theatrical experience itself rather than by the representation of some message external to the performance event. The signified was deemphasized to focus on the signifying medium itself.

However, this emphasis in theatrical production on the process rather than the product tended to confine the effect of the artwork to the arena of constructing art itself rather than making referential statements about the world at large.

Although much of Wilson's early education was in the visual arts (he graduated from the Pratt Institute of Art in 1965), he attributes his early connection to dance and theater to his work with Byrd Hoffman, a dance instructor and therapist. As a result of her influence during this time, Wilson worked as a therapist for brain-damaged children, when he developed movement exercises that showed the effect that physical stimulation could have on the brain. This movement-based work, which engendered sensitivity toward crossing between various perceptual modalities, influenced Wilson's later emphasis on the use of movement and gesture to communicate alternative frames of mind.

More specifically, this training also predisposed Wilson to his interest in Raymond Andrews, on whom his work in *Deafman Glance* is based, and his work with Christopher Knowles, an autistic poet, who collaborated with Wilson in a number of works that he produced in the 1970s. Although Wilson's theater of images with Raymond Andrews led to what Holmberg calls a "silent opera" (2), his work on a number of pieces with Knowles focused on experimenting with ways that language could be deconstructed and/or manifested in free-floating ways. To access the frames of mind suggested by deafness and autism, Wilson began developing a style that created independent visual and aural elements.

Wilson says of Knowles's method of working with language:

He'd take words we all know and fracture them and put them back together in a new way. He'd invent a new language and then destroy it a moment later. Words are like molecules which are always breaking apart and recombining. It's very free and alive. Chris constructs as he speaks. It is as though he sees words before him in space. (cited in Shyer 79)

This method of playing with language emphasizes the new combinations of its aurality and visibility. Knowles, operating along the borderlines of language, makes meaning “as he speaks.” This process accentuates the way in which meaning can emerge without the predictable rules of a predetermined order.

A Letter to Queen Victoria, largely a prolegomenon about language that Wilson cowrote with Knowles, is an aggregate of visual, spatial, and aural images presented in a seemingly random manner; topics of human communicability, murder, civil strife, and air disaster tear language from its regular discursive and temporal constraints. One of the key foci in this piece is the manipulation of language in such a way as to raise the signifier to the level of the signified. Through a series of verbal turns, Wilson heightens the materiality of words so that they are not merely conduits for information but also physical signs of sound and image. The words themselves become objects.

The last, and most successful, of Wilson’s works during the ’70s that focused on deconstructing language was *Einstein on the Beach*, with a musical score by Philip Glass. The work, operatic in scale, is typically considered to be one of Wilson’s best. It was first performed in 1976, and revived twice, once in 1984 and then again in 1992. A series of striking disjunctive aural and visual elements create a conglomerate of music, dance, drama, and visual elements to explore Einstein’s age of relativity in terms of perception, meaning, and language. Three central scenes revolve around the images of train, trial, and spaceship respectively, and the work attempts to sort out the duality of Einstein as dreamer and as scientist.

This use of images, which seems to emerge from a space outside rational language, has been criticized by commentators such as Marranca, Sontag, and Blau, and Wilson’s works in the ’70s eventually came to be considered too silent, atextual, and solipsistic. Susan Sontag, notably, comments on the apparent thoughtlessness of Wilson’s theater of visions:

An art committed to solipsism would recapitulate the gestures of the *pathology* of solipsism. If you start from an asocial notion of perception of consciousness, you must inevitably end up with

the poetry of mental illness and mental deficiency. With autistic silence. With the autistic's use of language: compulsive repetition and variation. With an obsession with circles. With an abstract or distended notion of time. (6)

Sontag's commentary on Wilson's work raises a question about how the normativity of perception leads to difficulties accepting perceptual modes that seem to be outside the realm of meaning. To what extent is meaning sedimented in the perceptual? In what way does the body mediate meaning, and to what extent does language mediate meaning?

Not only discomfited with Wilson's repeated interest in an altered perceptual space through the use of a visual theater, scholars have also disparaged his work as producing dehistoricized and apoliticized images divorced from a larger cultural picture. The problem is twofold; one is the quality and texture of the images themselves, and the second is Wilson's early tendency, while trying to attend to an alternate space of reality, to move away from language. Marranca, for example, notes that "Wilson's solution to the problem is not an ideological one [. . .] it is a romantic, utopian one" (40).

In this theater, which either was silent (as in *Deafman Glance*) or represented the "disintegration" of language (as in *A Letter to Queen Victoria*), critics claimed that Wilson was trying to operate outside of culture and that he was claiming to do what he in fact could not do. Vanden Heuvel claims:

In trying to speak the language of the Other [. . .] Wilson is actually only saying himself. [. . .] Thus it seems that instead of making spurious repudiations of language, Wilson might accomplish more fruitful cultural work if he were to recognize the interplay of differences among words and discourses, and to investigate the psychological and social processes by which these historical accretions obtain relative degrees of power within the culture. (171–72)

Although I agree that there is a tendency to dehistoricize the context of the performance in *Deafman Glance*, his critics' need to see him not move outside culture misses the point of his project. The insistence on the prioritization of culture creates gridlock on systems of meaning and fails to account for the ways in which deaf and autistic people and others are a part of the culture as well—but simultaneously accounted for by the medicalization of their conditions and discounted as participants in social and cultural exchange. From this point of view, Wilson enacts an early version of what we now call disability theater, or integrated theater. These projects seek to create a new aesthetic of people's different ways of being in the world.

In Wilson's next phase, after his primary focus on variations in perceptual experience, he moved on to work more consistently with text and language. This phase began with his collaboration with Heiner Müller on works such as the *Hamletmachine*, *Quartet*, the Cologne section of *the CIVILwarS*, and *When We Dead Awaken*. By combining his pictorial approach with Müller's verbal poetry, Wilson began to refine his relationship to textuality; his work began to subsist within a more articulated cultural and textual framework. Nevertheless, as Christopher Innes indicates, the collaborative efforts of Müller, with his exceedingly verbal orientation, and Wilson, with his investment in the visual and spatial elements in theater, formed an odd pair.

Müller's work, because it was written in German and in a rather elliptical style, is almost untranslatable (and Wilson speaks very little German). Nevertheless, at a time when Müller was calling for new technologies of visual art, Wilson was actively refining his visual approach to the theater. Müller's interest in the visual components centered on a need "to show as many points as possible simultaneously, so that the audience is driven to make choices" (cited in Innes 199).

In another phase of his work with Müller, Wilson made the transition to staging numerous classical works as well as operas. Wilson, at this point, focused more extensively on what Holmberg identifies as "how to do things with words" (29). This period includes *Orlando*, *King Swan*, *Parzifal*, *Lohegrin*, *The Magic Flute*, *Danton's Death*, and *Madame Butterfly*.

Holmberg writes that “[w]hen Wilson directs classic plays by Shakespeare, Büchner, or Ibsen, he may move a scene to or fro, reassign a speech, repeat words, or intercalate another text” (29).

Wilson has also collaborated with Suzushi Hanayagi, a Japanese classical dancer, on several of his productions. Wilson maintained that “the more formal theatres [like Noh and Kabuki] which are full of the artificial, are more natural [than naturalistic plays]. There’s more mental space. There’s time to reflect, to think. They seem much closer to nature than this theatre we call naturalism” (cited in Gillespie 146). In 1989 Wilson collaborated with Hanayagi on *The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian*, mounted on the Paris Opera ballet in New York. Anna Kisselgof called it “an American Noh play with French dancers” (cited in Gillespie 146), and the work reflected the use of movement, voice and silence typical of the Noh theater. According to Gillespie, the work was propitious. He notes the parallels in play, topic, interest, and location between Wilson’s production and the original version of the play, which was produced in Paris in 1911 by Gabrielle D’Annunzio and Claude Debussy, both of whom were also interested in the artistic traditions and practices of Japan.

Despite the fact that during the second half of his career, Wilson has worked in a more consistent fashion with textuality itself and has drawn from a preexisting canon of literature, his theater remains intensely interior. Because of this, Wilson follows in a tradition of artists, from Mallarmé on, who seek to “physicalize the intangible” and to “make the silence speak” (Holmberg 188). Wilson, for example, has concretized the inner landscape of numerous characters that people his dramas. He explains *Orlando* as a “journey into Orlando’s mind,” *Quartet* as a “a memory in Meteuil’s mind,” *When We Dead Awaken* as “Rubek’s inner landscape,” *Doktor Faustus* as “Esmerelda’s dream,” and *The Golden Windows* as “a collective nightmare” (cited in Holmberg 187–88).

In particular, Wilson has striven to make visible and audible the “invisible and inaudible symphony of the mind” (Holmberg 188). He comments, “I try to dramatize how the mind works, and it doesn’t work sequentially; it works symphonically” (*Alcesteis*, cited in Holmberg 188). Because Wilson stages the synaesthesia of the unconscious, his work displays

characteristics that are charted in Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*. Freud's work focused on delineating the alien region of dreams that staged the memories, especially from childhood, that remained out of reach to one's waking life. In *Hamletmachine*, for example, figures appear mysteriously from the shadows, and performers freeze in their positions in a wide variety of levels and shapes. The actors speak, but to no one in particular, and sound and light intersect with the other elements to create a persistent sense of disorientation and interaction with the emotional vagaries of the mindscape of the production. These images resonate as cinematic slices of aurality and visibility.

To accomplish this dream world, Wilson stages his works so that an interior time and space are created. The exterior screen takes in the outside world. Through the extreme alterations in the use of time, size and shape of spatial images, and dislocation of text from image, Wilson's works lead viewers to "see [. . .] with an interior screen" (Holmberg 156). The aural and visual images are ends in themselves, and Wilson's aim is to surpass the textually defined bounds of traditional theater, to suppress the logical and narrative connections that can be made, in order to create "theater without boundaries" (cited in Holmberg 156).

This new theater manifests itself in Wilson's work in a variety of ways, but, in particular, both Wilson and his critics note that the structures of his productions are often organized cinematically. Wilson uses numerous visual angles that highlight spatial differentiation rather than a linguistic or logical order:

Through these images in Wilson's work, many of the silences speak as they do in cinema: Not to speak does not mean that one has nothing to say. Those who do not speak may be brimming over with emotions which can be expressed only in forms and pictures, in gesture and play of feature. The man of visual culture uses these not as substitutes for words. [. . .] The gestures of visual man are not intended to convey concepts which can be expressed in words, but such inner experiences, such nonrational emotions which would still remain unexpressed when everything that can

be told has been told. Such emotions lie at the deepest levels of the soul and cannot be approached by words that are the mere reflections of concepts, just as our musical experience cannot be expressed in rationalized concepts. What appears on the face and in the facial expressions is a spiritual experience rendered immediately visible without the intermediary of words. (Balázs cited in Holmberg 189)

The link between Wilson's subsequent theater of images that speak from the silence and his work in *Deafman Glance* is a particular notation of deafness as the space where silence meets the body. *Deafman Glance* articulates a perceptual moment in Wilson's oeuvre that arrives in advance of the politics of the event.

More particularly, the perceptual dimensions of Wilson's productions, as they manifest ruptures in the traditional perceptual fabric, have also become absorbed into the fabric of his aesthetic. The emphasis on the perceptual reordering and involvement in Wilson's works does raise a series of questions about the relationship of the aesthetics of perception to politics. When, if at all, do perceptual renominations and the aesthetic articulations become political and in what way? The achievement of *Deafman Glance*, to which previous critics have not sufficiently attended, is the way in which it locates meaning at the fold between the dimensions of motion and perception. To hear, the third ear as a hearing eye must be activated.

Deafman Glance Revisited

When considering the condition of deafness, too often the absence of sound is conflated with the absence of voice for people who are deaf, and hence deaf people are believed to be unable to communicate. Robert Wilson himself was to discover, shortly after he met Andrews, that Andrews was not without his own method of communicating. Before creating *Deafman Glance*, Wilson first had to discover that deafness spoke. Through that encounter, Wilson learns about deafness, not only in the experience

of the personal relationship but also as a profoundly embedded element of much theatrical experience.

Wilson first met Andrews when he came upon a policeman beating a boy. Noticing a series of strange, incomprehensible sounds coming from the boy, Wilson intervened. Wilson describes the event:

My life was redirected in 1967. I was walking down a street in Summit, New Jersey, and I saw a policeman about to hit a child over the head with a club. It was a 13-year-old African American boy. And I said to the policeman, "Why are you going to hit this child?" he said, "It's none of your business." I said, "It is. I am a responsible citizen. Why are you going to hit this boy?" Anyway I eventually left with the policeman and went to a police station with the boy and recognized the sound coming from the boy as being that of a deaf person. ("RW & FN" 116)

In this moment, we see police violence as it marks the cultural other of both race and deafness into the seemingly coherent image of the savage, inarticulate other and attempts to tame it. We also "witness" the intervention of Wilson as initiator of a resistance to state control as embodied by the policeman. This scene of violence is an attempt to beat the body into compliance. These cultural patterns of beating the sense into the other by rendering them senseless maintains what Allen Feldman calls "cultural anaesthesia, or the banishment of disconcerting, discordant and anarchic sensory presences and agents that undermine the normalizing and often silent premises of everyday life" (89).

This scene conveys three versions of citizenship: the policeman who believes he has a right to act on behalf of the normalizing strategies of the state and to use violence to do so, the passerby who asserts his notion of citizenship as one who challenges the use of violence on a child, and the ambiguous status of Raymond Andrew. At a moment in 1967, when the civil rights movement was continuing to build its legal and social rhetoric, this scene, fraught with the pain of Raymond Andrews and the justifiable, even if paternal, intervention on the part of Wilson, reminds us of how deeply

the systems of injustice—here racism and ablism—are imbricated in each other.

It also reminds us of something else: that at this site of violence, we may run the risk of becoming complicit with a site of forgetting. How can we, instead, begin to listen to the multiple sensorial levels simultaneously breaking loose and being held back? In this situation, Andrews is the site of the sensorially different that, as Feldman makes clear in critiquing other instances of racial and cultural violence, emphasizes the importance of the question: “How does the *periphery* speak truth to the *center* if the very construct of center/periphery is conditioned by the inadmissibility of alien sensory experience?” (89). This question, of course, echoes Gayatri Spivak’s about whether the subaltern can speak, but we need to look beyond the question of *speaking*, which tends to reify the question of agency in terms of the act of speech.

We hear in this scene the echoes of the very questions that haunted the court of early nineteenth-century France about the capabilities of people who are deaf to understand the law. These capabilities revolved around the issue of whether deaf people, without having access to spoken language, could, in fact, understand the dictates of the law. Their right to citizenship rested on the ability to convince the court that they could “speak.”

In a story parallel to that of Count Solar, who was orphaned and dispossessed, Andrews ended up under the protection and guidance of Wilson. Wilson says:

To make a long story short, the boy’s name was Raymond Williams and eventually came to live with me. I actually adopted him. He had never been to school and he knew no words. He was going to be institutionalized, he was going to be locked up; he was thought to be ineducable. I had never heard that word. My early works were very much influenced by this deaf boy and his way of hearing. The body hears. (“RW & FN” 116)

Wilson eventually adopted Andrews in an effort to educate him. However, a two-way exchange quickly developed; Andrews also taught Wilson. “He be-

gan to make drawings to point out various things to me that I wouldn't notice and he would be more sensitive to because of his being deaf. Then I realized that he thought, not in words, but in visual signs" (*Quartet*).

These exchanges were supplemented by work in Wilson's theater workshops—"deaf-mutes rely heavily on movement to communicate" (cited in Holmberg 3)—as Wilson learned how complicated body language could be. In this version of the story of the orphan, deaf and hearing people meet through the exchanges of images and movement rather than writing and signing. "Bearers of sensory alterity have no option but to recover truth in a history of sensory fracture and dispersal which can be re-perceived as the dialogical ground for emergent cultural identities" (Feldman 103).

Deafman Gance was first performed as a workshop production at the University of Iowa in 1970. Subsequent performances in 1971 included an appearance at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York City, the Grand Théâtre de Nancy at Festival Mondial in France, Teatro Eliseo in Rome, the Théâtre de la Musique in Paris, and the Stadsschouwburg Theater at the Holland Festival in Amsterdam. (My own description of the piece is derived from a compilation of written archival material on the work in regards to Acts I–III and video dubs available from the Byrd Hoffman Foundation for Act IV.)

Deafman Gance typically occurred in four acts. Wilson, as he toured the piece, brought with him a core group of thirty-five to forty performers, including a potpourri of animals both live and papier-mâché. He also added people from the local community as a way of embracing the unpredictable and evolving element in the performance of *Deafman Gance*. The first act took place at the seashore, where a series of images emerge and disperse, including a girl and a raven posed motionless, a turtle, and a dancing mistress who counts "one, two, three" seemingly endlessly. After an angel appears, the stage fills with black mammies doing a swing. Finally, a runner crosses the stage.

The second act occurred in a Victorian world. "Shaded, heavy mauve. Entries, confrontations, stares, silences. A huge silence surrounds everything. A poem on the past imperfect" (Winterton 1968). Act III is in a cavern. Upstage there is dancing. At the end of this act a "sheet of glass



Peter Moore

Deafman Glance. Photo courtesy of the Byrd Hoffman Foundation

falls from the height of the theater” (Winterton 1970). Act IV, which is also identified as the prelude, depicts a scene where a killing is carried out two times. A tall black woman in a dark Victorian dress pours a glass of milk and gives it to a small black child, who is sitting with his back to the audience. He slurps the milk. She turns away, goes back to the table where she picks up a knife, wipes it off, goes over to the boy and stabs him. He dies. She repeats the action with a young black child downstage left. All this time this event has been witnessed by a boy in a bowler hat. In some versions, he screams.

The act shifts to the forest where a large frog “presides” at a banquet table. A number of figures enter the scene, perform actions, and leave. A huge white rabbit and an insect traipse through the woods. Papier-mâché cows and turtles cross the stage. The banquet table is eventually peopled, and an odd ritual is performed several times where “shadow” figures appear from behind the three performers who are sitting and disappear back down again. Each time they rise they carry with them objects that are placed in such a way as to reframe the space of the banquet table. Meanwhile, there is a building upstage right from which smoke emerges, and various figures extend and retract themselves through the window space. Many figures pass by and around Andrews, who has been sitting with his head bowed down and forward since the beginning of this section on a bench just left of center stage. Eventually, individuals carrying panes of glass form various positions around Andrews. Finally, Andrews’s stool bench moves him right of center stage, and after a series of ritualistic actions, he ascends over the stage. He now sees what is before and below him, rather than being immersed in it.

Because *Deafman Glance* is so heavily predicated on the world of silence that cannot be represented textually, this description is at best suggestive and can serve only to orient the ensuing discussion. The intersection of images is both serious and whimsical, suffused with a garden of Eden motif toward the end but nevertheless retaining a quality of openendedness.

After touring in the United States, the piece was performed in a number of locations in Europe. Because *Deafman Glance* was so well received, in France especially, the tour precipitated Wilson’s international career. Surrealist artist Louis Aragon, in particular, who as a public



Ed Grazda

Deafman Glance. Photo courtesy of the Byrd Hoffman Foundation

statement wrote a five-page letter to Breton that was published in *Les Lettres Françaises*, praised the work, calling it a “miracle” and a theater piece to “heal congealed art.” He remarked that

[t]he spectacle is reminiscent of recourse to new methods of light and shadow, or reinvented machines from before visual Jansenism. [. . .] It seems to criticize what we are used to. All is experiment. A play like *Deafman Gance* is an extraordinary freedom machine. (6)

In his letter, Aragon identified the work as being what he and Breton had dreamed surrealism might become. Aragon was caught between the promise of future possibility embraced in the piece, thus having surpassed surrealism, and his need to label the piece and his deep connection to it as a part of the surrealist genealogy. Aragon stressed that *Deafman Gance* was “surrealist through silence, although one could also say it of all painters, but with Wilson [. . .] it’s the wedding of gesture and silence, of movement and the ineffable” (2).

“One no longer,” Aragon claimed, “needed his ears. [. . . T]he world of a deaf child opened up to us like a wordless mouth” (4). Aragon refracts back to us the enclosure of disparate realities in the image of “the wordless mouth” and its transgression of the expectation of speech from that particular part of the body. More evocative than explanatory, Aragon’s response attempts to strike at the phenomenological chord of soundlessness and to acknowledge the vast alteration of sensibility that it entails. Although nostalgic about the Surrealist attempts to recuperate the multisensory in their own projects, Aragon feels that the Surrealist hope has been not only met, but redeemed, in this performance. Why, almost fifty years after the inception of Surrealism proper with the publication of Breton’s *First Surrealist Manifesto*, did *Deafman Gance* become the representative example of Surrealist theater? What is it about the intersection of deaf and hearing worlds that ignites the surreal imagination?

In *Deafman Gance*, Wilson conjures up a sea of floating images to evoke the visceral feel for how a deaf person is immersed in the world

of images rather than the world of sound. In this case perception, as one passes through the field of images, is visual, and at times, partial. Images are often unmoored from a specific context as people and things emerge onto the visual horizon and retreat. The logic is based on feeling rather than rationality and this approach creates a perceptual wash that never formalizes itself into cognition. The images are constructed from the wellspring of visuality that stirs just below the systems that order cognitive meaning.

Through the intersection of hearing and deafness in *Deafman Glance*, visual and acoustic registers operate in tandem with each other and address, without providing any answers, the crisis in speaking and the apparent absences of voice. The surreality of the “hearing eye” has been addressed in part by Julia Kristeva in her essay, “Modern Theater Does Not Take (a) Place,” which deals with the new theater of perception in which the use of visual and acoustical imagery creates a synesthesia. Kristeva asserts, as if echoing Aragon, that the Surrealists failed in their efforts to create a communal theater of play because they were unable to reconstitute the sacred within the field of theater. The sacred, subsumed back into language and overtaken by it, was not realized (277). According to Kristeva, a space of play has found its way into the “fantasies” of modern theater, which no longer has a public, and it has also surfaced in writing as directed to the individual unconscious rather than the “fantasies” of the community at large.

Kristeva considers the possibilities of the theater for remaking or acting upon social spaces, through “opening the word up to the unspeakable, with all the risks of psychosis that this breakthrough implies” (276). Kristeva argues that through experimentation with gesture, sound, color, and nonverbal sign systems, the supremacy of the symbolic order can be challenged. These aesthetic (and political) manipulations facilitate the emergence of new languages in the theater—as a particular social space—through which the individual, as well as the social, unconscious can be reconstituted.

This possibility resides in her theory about the speaking subject, which is, for Kristeva, a subject in process. In short, she suggests a dialogical relationship between two phases of the signifying process, the semiotic and

the symbolic. The semiotic dimension has to do with the pre-Oedipal primary processes, and it is constituted as a state of flux, or “flow of pulsions” (Moi 12). The symbolic, following Lacan, relates to the arena of social exchange that involves language and culture, and which through signification articulates various spheres of psychosocial difference. Representation is thus predicated on, relatively speaking, a stable system of signifiers.

The semiotic, the rhythmic prelanguage phase, is linked to Kristeva’s notion of the *chora*:

an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases. [...] Neither mode nor copy, the *chora* precedes and underlies figuration and thus specularization and is analogous only to *vocal and kinetic rhythm*. (Moi 93–94, emphasis mine)

To establish significance, a process of differentiation must occur by breaking off from the semiotic so that the individual enters the symbolic. At this point, the *chora* is more or less repressed, but it continues to exert “pulsional [forceful] pressure on or within the symbolic” (Moi 13). In other words, the continuing emergence of the semiotic within the symbolic has the power to destabilize the symbolic, or at its outer limits, and to remake the symbolic. More specifically, the eruption of the semiotic into the symbolic constitutes the basis for not only a creative act but also a potential moment of madness. It can, thus, undermine the law of symbolic language.

Kristeva turns to Wilson’s work as an example of one of the two types of new theater, which she calls the “silent theater” (“MT” 278). In the first type of silent theater, the interplay of sounds, colors, and gestures becomes submerged in the semiotic outside of representation. In this type of theater, Kristeva suggests that the symbolic is still embedded in the semiotic, but it does not identify or claim the semiotic. In other words, although the emphasis is on the recapitulation of semiotic flux, the semiotic and the symbolic do not escape each other. In the second type of silent theater in a “semiotic assemblage of the acting out and of the madness,” the symbolic breaks out as a trace, “a passage toward an act” (280). It stratifies the semiotic.

This performance approach creates “a new subjective space in search of itself,” effecting a synaesthesia brought on by the “coalescence” of cinematic and theatrical techniques, a place where the “crisis of speaking would be recognizable” (280) and putting in motion the waiting for a place for a new language. This second form creates an interactive space between the reconstitution of the semiotic and its impulsion into the symbolic. In other words, the play opens up a space for new subjectivities. Prior to the play, there are only impulses, partial images, and stories. Possibilities of the other(s) that have hovered at the edges of the conventional social consciousness suffuse the performative fabric.

Chambers—who writes about the connections between postcoloniality and “new lines of listening”—notes that “[t]o recognize this ‘other’, negated side of modernity is to be drawn from the single base line of ‘development’ and ‘progress’ against which the rest is measured. It is to contest the ‘capitalisation of silence’, and to step into the discrete instances of heterotopia” (58). Despite the nonlinear structure of *Deafman Glance*, a series of the images resonate next to each other and raise important issues about the intersections of race, deafness, and silence. Two clusters of images invoke questions of race and power, yet the critical response to the question of race is delayed in this work. It remains somewhat silenced even as the world of what is considered to be the silenced deaf speaks to us. These “deafened moments” articulate a space of deafness and draw attention to Andrews as both deaf and black, but this maneuver both frames and eclipses race.

In the first act, there is a series of seemingly random images at the seashore—a girl, a raven, a turtle. This use of visual images and the incongruous juxtapositions defamiliarize the audience; disoriented, without a guiding narrative, sense must be made out of seeming nonsense as the play unfolds. After the appearance of an angel, the stage fills with black mammies doing a swing, which might be seen as a caricature of a caricature. Because Wilson wanted to create a sea of images and evoke the way in which a deaf person experiences being immersed in a sensory stimuli in which he or she is always having to make some sense of, the use of black mammies can, to some extent, be read as one set of floating

images among many. Nevertheless, given the ways in which the image of the mammy has served historically to caricature the African American woman, it is difficult not to see this section as fraught with racial overtones.

The mammy image was prevalent from slavery through the Jim Crow to serve the interests of mainstream America. Patricia Turner writes:

Like Aunt Jemima and her turn-of-the-century literary counterparts, these mammies were happily ensconced in the households of white employers. Implicit in each rendition was the notion that these thick-waisted black women were happy with their lot, honored to spend their days and nights caring for white benefactors. (51)

Undoubtedly, there are issues with the reproduction of this stereotype; it invokes the “white patriarchal authority over white and black women and renders black women as asexual” (90). But there are other resonances. As a figure of “care” doing the swing, a dance style that had its genesis in black communities in the 1920s, it seems to be a mixed image. A partial history of the effort of whites to promote the happy black woman who services the white family includes another story about the black mammy. The most commercialized form of the black mammy is Aunt Jemima, whose persona came from a song called “Old Aunt Jemima” written by Billy Kersands, a Negro blackface minstrel. It was performed as a cakewalk, a “dance devised by African Americans to spoof the formal promenades of whites through exaggerated gesture” (Harris 86). This performance number contained a critique of the social order. Given the history of blackface minstrel shows and the Aunt Jemima figure, the black mammies in *Deafman Glance* restate racism but with a critical gesture.

Why, then, does Wilson evoke multiples of a stereotyped image of the African American woman? Cheryl Sutton, an African American actress, was a member of Wilson’s original group called the Byrds, and she played the part of a tall black woman in a dark Victorian dress who pours the milk, gives it to a child, and stabs the two children in the second act of *Deafman Glance*. Sutton does not view her part in this piece as one in which the

black woman enacts a stereotypically violent scene. Nevertheless, Wilson's remake of this section of *Deafman Glance* in the mid-1980s into a video has been criticized as failing to show a black woman within a socially and politically articulated context. For example, Amy Taubin questions, "What does it then mean to present without any critical context a black woman as a totally omnipotent figure, with complete power over life and death?"²

Despite the disclaimer from Sutton and the sense in which Wilson offers up images unmoored from their historical context, the scene resonates on a number of important levels. At first glance, the Victorian dress and bowler hat evoke the site of empire and colonialism, but it is also the displaced image of a black woman who enacts violence on two black children while Raymond, also black, watches. The whiteness of the milk connotes the tall black woman as a giver of life or mother figure. Yet, it is the mother figure who also takes away life. The knife, as a signifier for the phallus, leaves its fatal mark on the body of two young black children.

This scene invokes a displaced history of the empire and the internalized violence of the subjugated races that had occurred under imperial rule. The actor and the observer of the imperial drama have the accoutrements of empire, but here they are destroying themselves and being destroyed. Both Andrews and the audience watch this scene in "deaf" silence except for the screaming (which is not always performed out loud). What do we hear in the sounding of the nonsounding scream? In this scene the ideology of race and deafness become imbricated in each other. Who hears the pain being activated at this site? What does it mean to have a black woman enact the moment of black turning on black? Does this lead the audience to avert their eyes from the site of trauma enacted by the colonialist and neocolonialist oppression of whites toward blacks? Or does the scene show us a failure of colonial mimicry, where presumably wielding the power of death through the use of the knife creates a type of repetition compulsion? In this case, actions are repeated, not based on the pleasure principle but on the death drive of *thanatos*, to reinscribe the patterns of erasure of (an)other.

2. For more, see Taubin's critique in *Alive*.

When revisiting and rerendering the site of trauma, it is common to pose that site as a mute one that must be brought back to speech. To hear what is being “said,” to hear what may have actually happened, involves something akin to the process of a “deafman glance.” We can never, after all, literally rehear what was said at the time of trauma. In this scene it is not only Raymond who enacts the “deafman glance”; the entire audience is cajoled into looking onto the scene of trauma. Because of the use of images and partial profiles, silence, and only the occasional scream, the audience, too, is in a deafened space. “Glance” connotes a looking that is averted, and it evoked the sense in which the looking is at best partial; the scopic drive takes in only part of the visual field. Depending on the reading of the syntactical structure of “deafman glance,” it can be taken as a command to performers and audience alike. In this manner, we are all already positioned in the space of hearing-seeing, and the question becomes, “What do we see/hear?”

Despite the fact that Wilson has, in certain ways, constructed a fantasy of the semiotic from within the symbolic, *Deafman Glance* raises interesting questions about the phase of prelanguage, and whether and in what ways we can subsist within, or get outside of, the symbolic. In a sense, Wilson’s work succeeds in physicalizing moments in which the semiotic can, as it were, be stratified. One example in *Deafman Glance* occurs during a moment in the forest scene. After being submerged in the continual movement and exchange of figures and images, Andrews slides his bench to right of center stage and is then elevated up and over the mélange of moving pictures. This moment indicates a shift from being submerged in the flux of figures to being able to see from above. The lines extending toward and away from the new space created through the stratosphere become clearer and the stage takes on more of a sense of geometrical organization.

Although the ascension seems to reflect something of a redemptive tale, it is important to notice how this moment disrupts the power of the gaze. This scene is not simply a moment of seeing but a moment in which the “hearing eye” is emphasized. Andrews, at his new height, embodies this moment of “deafman glance” and also looks back at us. As a moment when the symbolic breaks through the semiotic, it occurs through a physical act

rather than through speech. Andrews ruptures the semiotic through an act of perceptual differentiation, which acts as an echo of the symbolic.

The entire piece is an exploration of the variations of the semiotic dimension of deafness (as Wilson *sees* it), and the piece is even haunted by the trace of the symbolic in the title itself. *Deafman Glance* is “improper” English, naming the event in a nonnormative manner. In addition to echoing that moment of articulation in the work through the hearing eye, we are reminded even in the brief textuality of the title that this piece is a bricolage of the realities of deafness and seeing, and of the complexities it evokes.

Raymond Andrews did not always perform in every showing of *Deafman Glance*. Occasionally, the part was played by a young girl. One way to read this change is to question the way in which deafness is elided into a perceptual state that is unmoored from a particular history and body. In other words, the aesthetics override the overt political registers, which, again, is to move “back” into the wash of the semiotic. Another way to read this transfer of parts is to begin to ask whether there is something porous to each of the three categories—disability, race, and gender—that transfers in a kind of interlocution of the third ear across all three categories.

Other critics have also responded to the perceptual claims that the “field” of performed deafness made on them. Bertrand Poirot-Delpech wrote in *Le Monde* of his experience of seeing *Deafman Glance*:

But none of [deaf people] hear themselves and when the deaf man starts to speak the whole world becomes dumb. What is most amazing when we look at this show is to find out the muteness of the audience that is made of every one of us: and when the actors remain purposely silent as an extension the whole world remains silent. One can hear the terrible crackle of doors and chairs, and at intervals all movements slowed down just as if we had discovered for the first time that we are living underwater, that each word is an adventure, that all motions are uncertain. [. . .] This amazes me more and more, but silence starts to speak. (1)

Silence does indeed speak, and, for Poirot-Delpech the change in the perceptual experience of hearing, sound, and silence heightened the awareness of how tenuous hearing and the construction of meaning is. His comments are somewhat reminiscent of Cage's challenge to our apprehension of sound in his well-known piece 4'33" on silence, where Cage notes that silence is "ambient sound."

This, too, Poirot-Delpech notes in "the terrible crackle of chairs," but he also describes how the disorientation brought on by the particular sensory dimensions of *Deafman Glance* affect his body. He feels like he is "underwater" and "all words are uncertain." Through a perceptual empathy, attention is brought back to the possibility of the perceptual stage that precedes language formation. Thrown back, as it were, into the semiotic, the differences in hearing affect not only the acoustical frame of reference but also the kinesthetic.

Deafman Glance requires the hearing audience to explore the "as if" space of hearing/deafness even though the consideration of perceptual interaction with one's surroundings, *as if* deaf, is of course not the same thing as being deaf. However, this perspective, by creating a liminal space, enables the possibility of a particular act of empathetic apprehension. For Wilson—in his aestheticization of the sensory experience of deafness—it was important, however, not only to provoke another frame of associations but also to concretize it. "The result is a s(t)imulation of an alternative mode of perception, with all the tenuousness and fragility in the face of adult rationality and repression" (Vanden Heuvel 208).

Wilson's interest in the commingling of realities, his experiences communicating with Raymond Andrews, and the audience reception that indicates how perceptual boundaries can be crossed in theatrical productions reiterate the sense that Kristeva and Aragon describe as a creation of a new space of both theater and society. Integral to that space is the reconstitution of intersubjective hearing. As Douglas Baynton indicates, deafness is a relationship:

To be deaf is not to not hear for most profoundly deaf, but a social relation. [. . .] What the deaf person sees in these other

[hearing and deaf] people is not the presence or absence of hearing, not their soundfulness or their silence, but their mode of communication—they sign, or move their lips. (226)

In the complex space of the intersubjective and the heterogeneous, to *hear through the hearing eyes* requires a listening that is somatic as well as symbolic. As Wilson himself has noted, “the body hears.” Through an examination of the crossings of the hearing and deaf worlds, we gain access to the stratification of the semiotic-symbolic and the ensuing variations in perceptual experience.

As an early moment in the development of a phenomenology of the third ear and its analog, the listening body, *Deafman Glance* orients us toward the complex intersection of the body and hearing/deafness in the postcolonial, postmodern space of the in-between (which develops disability as another space of difference). Following the “body as an auditory whole” (Levin 109) in its relation to various manifestations of both the silent and sounding voice, we can uncover how it contributes to the intersubjective, multisensory potential of cross-cultural exchange. In particular, the question of hearing and deafness has the potential to decenter silence, voice, and speech.

Davis argues in “Deafness and Insight” that speaking and silence are represented in the audist culture as rigid binaries.

[R]e-presentatives of marginalized discourses will speak of being “silenced” or of being empowered to “speak” or “give voice” [in such a way that] these statements place a negative connotation on the nonnormatively linguistic and a positive spin on speech and vocalization. (882)

This comment reiterates the phonocentrism of Western culture. Davis looks at deafness not so much as a disability or stigma but as a relationship determined by the ways in which deafness constitutes a repressed element in the cultural imaginary. Mostly drawing from the literary and linguistic traditions, his framing of the “deafened moment” as that which does not have to do with speech or hearing is a powerful tool.

The pictoriality in *Deafman Glance* that speaks is created through a complex staging of the body itself. The various points of the body speak: they are vibrant transmitters of meaning, nodes of sensory and perceptual quotation of being-in-the-world. This bodily stance unfolds in a field of action as a performative embrace of a type of primordial hearing and response. It is not enough to simply relocate the body. The body provides the mobile field for locating the intersection of visual and auditory perception. This intersection provides an Archimedean point for leveraging certain restrictive notions of normative hearing. It is in the motility of the human body that various senses can be transposed from one sense to another. We see with our ears or hear with our eyes, effecting a kind of synaesthetic perception that transfigures our place within the symbolic, the place of cultural politics.

Wilson's *Deafman Glance* is one that, as do many of his later works, opens up the perception without disclosing a specific politics. Although Wilson does not return to the thematic of deafness per se, he does recycle parts of *Deafman Glance* in later works, and there is a continuing tendency in his aesthetic toward the need for the audience to *listen to the images* that underscore his productions. Deafness, embodied through his encounter with Andrews, forms the shadow signs of the images that speak in his theater. Wilson has remarked that he runs two perceptual tracks, the visual and the aural, and that they do not always, or even often, mutually overlap. The perceptual dimensions of Wilson's productions articulate ruptures in the traditional, and often normative, perceptual fabric. By engaging fully with Wilson's *Deafman Glance*, we can understand what Félix Guattari means when he writes that "[a] singularity, a rupture of sense, a cut, a fragmentation, the detachment of a semiotic content—in a dadaist or surrealist manner—can originate mutant nuclei of subjectivation" (18).

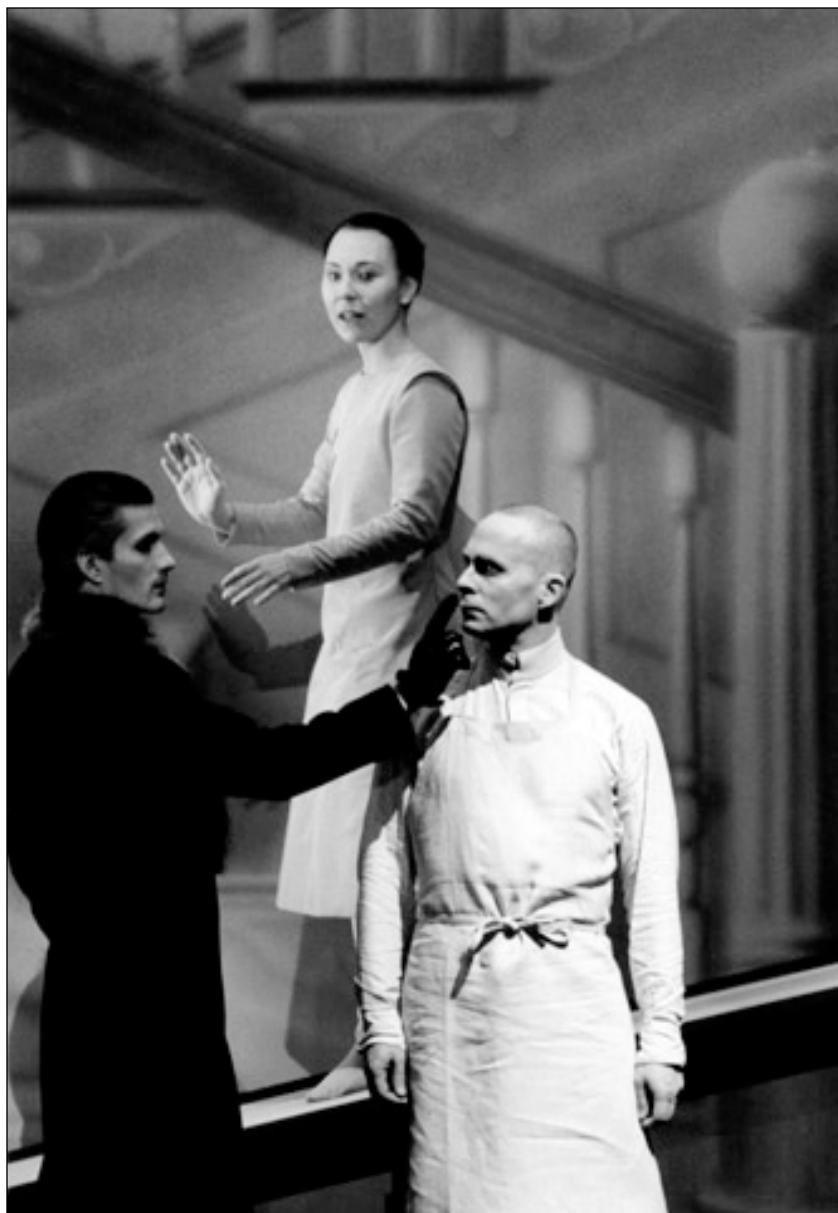
I first began to understand Wilson's use of an aesthetic of deafness when watching a video of the *Life and Death of Joseph Stalin* at the Lincoln Center for Performing Arts Library. I could not initially "see" what state of knowing he was (dis)organizing as I watched the splits among body, image, and sound. As a trained Laban movement analyst, I knew I had three ways to access the embodied patterns: through description, metaphors, or

entertaining the images “as if” I were the performer. I said to myself, “What if I imagine I am that performer? What does it feel like?” Suddenly, I knew that this was a body of “deafness” and that he was using this perspective to fuel his aesthetics. I then soon discovered, of course, the entire story about Raymond Andrews and *Deafman Glance*. Imagine the irony of a hard of hearing woman, who was working to reclaim her deaf body after many years, viewing/listening in on a video version of this excerpt from *Life and Death of Joseph Stalin*.

Wilson’s use of sound, image, and body often eclipses the presumed feedback circuitry of normal hearing. There is the impression of something gone awry when performers mouth words without any sound coming out, or they labor through very precise movement sequences that are incongruous with the text, or the series of unfolding images of moving people and objects that do not appear to have any connection with each other. The speaking voice often seems to come from somewhere else, not owned by the person who is actually speaking. Images, often floating in at odd angles across the stage, loom large in his work; there is a feeling of the unfolding nature of the landscape of images as something obsessive, reiterative of an interior or hidden impulse. Silence blasts out from the images that refuse to speak but say something nonetheless.

This approach to staging decenters the self and renders the accumulation of a specific rational meaning through any linear approach impossible. We garner meaning in the resonances of the images and sounds at the visceral level, in the slippage between the sections of image and sound pieces. For the duration of the work, we are transported to a manufactured dream world, where sense impression, as Wilson excavates and replays the semiotic, impinges on us without apparent order. We experience the performance “as if” traversing the simultaneously merged world of interiority and exteriority. In a sense, we are all “deaf readers” or “deafened audience” members in the theatrical world of Wilson.

Although this aesthetics has come to bear on much of his work, it is not until the production of August Strindberg’s 1901 *The Dream Play*, which first opened at the Stadstheater in Stockholm in 1998 and later played at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 2000, that critics remark



Lesley Leslie-Spinks

Dream Play.

on the similarity of the work to *Deafman Glance*. Wilson has remade the play into a series of visual and aural hieroglyphs, and as such the work has more in common, in a certain sense, with painting and music than theater. Central to the story is the character of Agnes, the daughter of a Hindu god, who visits Earth to experience human life in the company of three men: an officer, a poet, and a lawyer. Both divine and human, she becomes the ambivalent marker of the primary question of the play, “How do we make meaning of suffering?”

Wilson makes use of thirteen tableaux that are manipulated through dissolves and blackouts. Because the play is performed in Swedish, there are English supertitles; translation is offered much like a captioned foreign film or a captioned event for people who are hard of hearing. The sites of the tableaux range from an alley door to a seaside park, an office, and a family house. Much of the play occurs outside a stage door in an alley where the officer perpetually returns to see if Victoria has left. The often decontextualized and incessant use of images mirrors the Indian philosophy of *maya*, the veil of illusion that we take as life.

Wilson notes:

I think that Strindberg brings a lot of things together, [. . .] What he called a *Dream Play*—in a sense it’s very concrete. I mean, you just blinked your eyes. What did you see? You don’t know, but it’s a part of seeing. It’s a negative image. Maybe for a fraction of a second you were dreaming? I don’t know—but this interior image was there. We see both interior and exterior things all the time. And I think in the theater you can be very plastic in terms of those things. (Apthorp cited in Hong 290)

The deafness in a Wilson piece is a tool that he uses to manipulate his aesthetics. It allows us entry into a “deafened” world without having, actually, to entertain the question of historical specificity. Yet, this very entry into “deafness” helped spark greater interest in the NTD in the early 1970s. The aesthetics of deafness, unmooring it from its overly rigid corollary with speechlessness, helped to separate the still-prevalent tendency

at that point in time to relegate deaf people to the social and intellectual margins.

Usually, we hear what we know to hear and are deaf to other regions. Although Wilson does not tell us what political ideology to embrace, he certainly invokes a performance of deafness that challenges us at a very basic level—that of how we see, hear, and think. By returning to these pieces as performance texts, we can reformulate and extend what they tell us about perception and the performance of deafness. Only by changing our *way* of hearing—our consciousness, or predisposition, toward listening—can we change what we actually hear. To open the possibilities will entail not only understanding the limit of the space of hearing but also shifting our relationship to the unfamiliar by activating conscious hearing to the silent, pictorial languages that beckon us through the third ear.

Chapter 4

Between the Two Worlds of Hearing and Deafness: The National Theater of the Deaf and Others

At approximately the same time that Robert Wilson began his theatrical career, the NTD began creating works that bridge the deaf and hearing worlds through their combination of sign and speech. In this new theatrical form, as hearing actors both speak and sign and deaf actors sign, this double language merges image and sound, exploring the potential of language as action in space. To engage with these performances, the hearing, deaf, and hard of hearing audiences listen with their eyes, invoking the space of the third ear. NTD's production of *Ophelia* (1992) provides an example in which the ontology of deafness informs the aesthetic of the performances. *Ophelia*, developed out of a collaborative exchange with Pilobolus, a modern dance company, shows how signing and choreography magnify each other and create a form of speaking through the body.

NTD's work makes deafness visible, and, because the group focuses on the production of classical theater pieces, it achieves this visibility by inserting the presence of deaf people and the use of sign language into the cultural and theatrical mainstream. NTD's style rests on its unique use of sign language, and as a result, this group's work provides another moment in the discussion of the theory of deafness that challenges the tendency to align the speaking voice with language. NTD's work rearticulates the presence of the body, its silences, and the ways in which visibility can speak to us.

Will Rhys, a hearing person and one of the artistic directors of NTD, emphasizes that it is a theater that develops what he calls the "language of shape and space rather than the language of hearing." Rhys explains:

the philosophy of the company is that the productions are for all audiences. It's a heightened form of theater, like Kabuki or *commedia dell'arte* and some of the intense visual programs that Robert Wilson does. The sign language for a hearing audience becomes an extra visual element. And, of course, the sign language for any deaf audience member becomes an inclusive element. (Garmel)

In NTD's work, images shift rapidly from one to another, scene to scene; the use of signing provides a baseline of visual and kinesthetic order. Furthermore, the company's approach to staging and its plasticity in perspective often create a spatial organization that operates like film. Rhys indicates that the challenge of the work in this company is to enhance the strengths of each of the two languages, ASL and English, and to combine them to create a new theatrical form.

There were no preexisting models for the development of a theater of the deaf that combines sign and speech from which NTD could draw, and as a result, founding director David Hays explains, the aesthetic has developed largely through a process of trial and error.¹ Nevertheless, NTD has a long history of interaction with a variety of performance modes that include Kabuki, Bharata Natyam, opera, modern dance, Peter Brook's theatrical experiments, Pilobolus's choreography, and very recently, Ping Chong's performance compositions. Through these contacts, NTD has sought to develop a language theater that is grounded in a viable form and that activates the sensory registers in new ways, all aimed at making space speak. In other words, in the space of the performance, the use of signing as a visual and kinesthetic language has its own organizing principles that differ from the speech as a sound-based model of language. NTD, while basing its aesthetic of a viable coupling of sign and speech, continues to develop an acting style that emerges from the pictorial baseline that governs ASL. It is important to note that there are important differences between

1. Personal interview, April 1998.

ASL and signed English, which is a method for using signing according to the vocabulary and organizing principles of English. ASL, on the other hand, has its own organizing principles that do not mimic English.

As a result of NTD's "writing in the air" theatrics, the hearing audience listens through the third ear to the melding of sound and visual-kinesthetic image so that they can understand (or at least understand that a difference exists, even if they cannot fully understand the content) what is not contained solely in one language form or the other. Sign language, which is a pictorial language, relies on the movement of the body in space, and its use in performance intensifies its theatrical possibilities. In the theatrical form of sign, the particular signs are performed more largely. There is a stronger sense of the signs passing through the entire body and more actively reaching out to the other performers. The signs also must be large enough that the audience can see them, and the need for a specific size depends, of course, on the size of the auditorium. It is not enough to simply perform the signs more largely; the change in size has important implications for shape and dynamic. Otherwise, the meaning of the signs can be lost—confusing the other performers and audience alike.

In "Poetry without Sound," which describes the sign language poetry of NTD, Edward Klima and Ursula Bellugi write that

in the real world of the deaf, [. . .] language exists as a kind of writing in space and as a primary form of communication without reference to any more primary form of language for its validation. It is in this sense a realization of the ideogrammatic vision of a Fenollosa—"a splendid flash of concrete poetry"—but ideogrammatic language truly in motion and like, oral poetry, truly inseparable from its realization in performance. (291)

The physical motion of sign language creates a theatrical immediacy, and the type of signing used by NTD is considered an artistic form of ASL that is analogous to everyday ASL in a similar way that song is to speech. The body-in-space actualizes a concrete and poetic nonphonetic language in which the entire body, rather than primarily the mouth, speaks.

By conjoining the two orders of language there is a cross-sensorial reverberation that occurs among the hands, the emergence of the speaking voice, and the moving body. This mixed modality in NTD, where we see sounds and hear images, charts another trajectory in the discussion about the theater of perception that Kristeva proposed. In other words, NTD's use of the double language, with its elliptical rhythms of gesturing and sounding, reorders our understanding of language and how we experience it at a sensorial level.

Additionally, sign language has cinematic properties, as noted by Deaf performers Bernard Bragg and Gil Eastman:

In a signed language [. . .] narrative is no longer linear and prosaic. Instead, the essence of sign language is to cut from a normal view to a close-up to a distant shot to a close-up again, and so on, even including flashback and flashforward scenes, exactly as a movie editor works. (cited in Sacks 90)

This aspect of sign language helps to explain the rhythm of the scenic changes and the logic of the spatial organization of each retelling as cinematic cuts. In other words, the "filmic" logic of sign extends into the larger choices about spatial organization and change.

NTD's work in Deaf theater manifests a cross-cultural performance form, and the company has been credited with both helping to salvage sign language as the language of choice within Deaf culture and with creating a new form that has facilitated the development of Deaf poetry. These tactics have their theatrical corollaries elsewhere. There are, of course, other bilingual theaters, such as those found in the Latino communities where works are performed in both English and Spanish. The purpose of the use of two languages is to create works that appeal to both Spanish and English speakers, but it is also a matter of fostering a sense of community among the Spanish speakers. The use of two languages triggers two different "imagined" communities, cohabiting the audience space at the same time. In this mix of language forms, there is that possibility of understanding; as we listen to the ways the "sound in between creates a temporary meeting

place [. . .] where misapprehensions and differences can begin to form the basis of a new cross-cultural argot, one based in incremental convergences of sounds and gestures” (Carter 12–13). In this way the boundaries between the language communities become more porous. The borderlands performance art of Guillermo Gómez-Peña often mixes English and Spanish and has resulted in directly contesting cultural and geographical boundaries. In the case of NTD’s performance work—because the two language systems are different, one based on sound, the other on gesture—we encounter dual systems of meaning and the ways in which “nondiscursive and imagistic dimensions of thought and communication” (Ulmer 265) are folded into the performances.

I explore part of NTD’s work to clarify how it created a cross-sensory form through a hieroglyphic art. Gregory Ulmer notes that the hieroglyph refers to “any writing which makes co-exist, at the heart of a single visualized form, nonunifiable systems of signification” (271). This form establishes the promise of a new spatiality of performance and subsequently also relates to a rearticulation of the third ear.

Overview of NTD’s Background

Although there is currently very little scholarship about the NTD (but see Cohen, Harrington, and Baldwin), through this project I hope to redress some of the omissions. However, as a result of the scarcity of critical material, I can, at best, only begin the discussion of NTD as it relates to other performance genres and specific discussions in cultural studies theory about performance and textuality as well as disabilities studies. NTD’s performance history spans nearly thirty years, and from its inception it has pursued two related trajectories. One involves the artistic development of the theater company, that is, the task of making high quality and sustainable theater. The other is educational and focuses on the summer professional training program for new actors, actresses, and directors, and the work of the Little Theater of the Deaf, the children’s theater version of NTD.

In a very general sense NTD’s work is similar to other theatrical companies that have chosen to focus on staging classical works with

nontraditional casting. The distinction, of course, is that NTD offers the unique reference point of interpreting the work through the pictoriality of sign language. Hays asserted that the intention of forming NTD was to develop a theater where deaf performers could have equal access and opportunity for performing great literature. NTD was not designed to be another mime company. However, in looking at the specific nature of sign language, it is important to understand how deaf people communicate and use pantomime as an integral part of their communicative patterns. Pantomime, or action, is used to fill in, elaborate, and extend meaning, and much of signing unfolds like a choreographed dance.

From its beginning NTD was conceived of as a language theater, and ASL has provided very specific challenges as a language that manifests itself through movement. The challenges it presents include the choice of material, aesthetic decisions about where to place the voicing actors, and the pacing relationship of the sign and speech. In general, the early work of NTD addressed the need to validate ASL as a language of its own rather than as a crude manual version of English, as had been the social stereotype. To establish the legitimacy of a pictorial language, the productions made certain that for every sign there was also a spoken word, which led to running sight and sound on parallel tracks. In other words, the spoken translation was performed in correct English, but the signing was controlled so that the audience could see that sign translated into English.

The concept for a professional theater of the deaf began in the late 1950s with Dr. Edna Simon Levine, a psychologist who worked in the area of deafness. She envisioned a professional theatrical venue for people who are deaf that showcased the use of ASL, mitigating the stigma that was then attached to the use of sign language. Initially, Levine approached Arthur Penn, who at the time was directing *Miracle Worker*, and Anne Bancroft, the lead actress, about heading the project to form a company. David Hays, a successful set designer for Broadway productions and George Balanchine's ballets, was working with Penn at the time, and he was invited to go along with Penn and Bancroft to Gallaudet College to see the current performance of *Our Town*. When Penn and Bancroft had to back out of the endeavor because of other commitments, Hays was

encouraged to take on the project. In 1967, backed by a \$310,000 grant from the Department of Education and with a home base in New London, Connecticut, at the Eugene O'Neill Theater, Hays produced NTD's first performance season.

An initial grant, in 1965, from the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare allowed for the planning stages of the project. Additional funds from the U.S. Office of Education allowed a summer school program that provided professional training to be developed. Hays remarks that

[t]hose were the dark ages. The deaf population desperately needed role models; they had no heroes. Some states would not even license them to teach, because their English wasn't too good. So the government was very practical—it wanted to take people off the dole and turn them into taxpayers. (cited in Grandjean 38)

Despite the fact that the time of the inception of the company was one fraught with the social and political issues for deaf people, Hays remained focused on the use of sign language and the creation of the theater as a new form. He has always focused on the “stageworthiness” of ASL. Hays remarks that “[w]hen you see the words at the same time that you hear them, it gives them an additional meaning. Your eye is caught everywhere by the movement of the language onstage; it's like sculpture in the air” (cited in Grandjean 38). Because Hays approached the challenge of addressing both social and artistic concerns while professionalizing his actors, the company has been highly successful in inserting deaf performers into the cultural mainstream.

In addition to experimentation with the combined form of sign and speech, Hays also initiated work on new forms of music. NTD is known in particular for its work with the Baschet sculptures, sound structures that create a visual and sonic background for the performances. These new instruments had been created over a fifteen-year period by François Baschet and his brother Bernard and were used in the premiere of NTD in 1967. The sculptures were a range of sizes, from twelve feet tall to six feet wide.

The xylophone-like instrument was covered by luminous glass rods and gleaming metals. The musicians played these sculptures with moistened fingers and rubber mallets or bows, and they plucked them like harps or played them like pianos. The various sounds possible included those reminiscent of African drums, bells, strings, and brass instruments. These instruments provided the means for a sonic and visual staging of music. This approach helped orient the hearing audience, provided vibrations as cues for the deaf performers, extended the possibilities for scene design because the metals could reflect colored lights, and also acted as visual cues for the performers.

Because there were no prior models for the development of theater that used both ASL and English, Hays turned to whatever he sensed would work. One such direction was Japanese theater. In their first season, Yoshio Aoyama directed *The Tale of Kasane*. Although the available description is scant, it is particularly interesting to note that in the Kabuki form the narrators stand to one side while the performers “move” out the action. Rather than being an issue of translation or compensation, the aesthetic form itself—through the separation of sound/image—creates a third space for the unfolding of the drama.

In addition to Aoyama’s *The Tale of Kasane*, the first season in 1967 also opened with three other works: Gene Lasko directed William Saroyan’s *The Man with the Heart in the Highlands*, John Hirsch, *Tyger! Tyger! And Other Burnings*, and Joe Layton, *Gianni Schicci*. Although only six people attended the first performance, word spread and the response grew quickly. Hays attributed the low initial turnout to social misconceptions of deaf people as “freaks” at that time.

My Third Eye, which was put together and toured in 1972–73, is one of the few works in NTD’s repertoire that deals directly with the Deaf experience. There were four sections in the work, with each one attempting to address deaf/hearing issues from the Deaf perspective. One of the sections, “Side Show,” was directed by Open Theatre’s Joe Chaikin and NTD’s Dorothy Miles. The company portrays a “carnival of everyday objects and events” (Rich 116) in which the activities of the hearing are seen as odd and normality is portrayed from the point of view of deaf people.

Two of these hearing creatures are captured for the circus because they hear, and the other performers “marvel at the outlandish strangers and their ridiculous paraphernalia: a telephone, an alarm, clock, a transistor radio and a record player” (Rich 117). Further commentary is offered on how hearing people communicate using their mouths rather than their hands. In another section, the performers do a “theater of the ridiculous” version of a familiar children’s song. In this section they do a sign-a-long of “Three Blind Mice” that is reminiscent of a Mitch Miller sing-along. The work of *My Third Eye* comments on the differences between perception in hearing and Deaf worlds without specifically editorializing the situation. This approach allows the audience to take in the images and absurdities and to make their own connections. At the very least, the work of *My Third Eye* points out the way the hearing population tends to take hearing and all that it implies for granted.

Shortly after this season, NTD, in 1973, was invited to do a workshop with Peter Brooks, who is noted for his vast experimentation with pushing the boundaries of classical theater. His approach is highly physical, exploring sonic and kinesthetic possibilities. NTD was invited to Paris in the season after which Brooks mounted *Orghast* and Peter Handke’s *Kasper*. *Orghast* was written by Ted Hughes, “who created a whole new language for its dialogue—also called Orghast” (Croyden 7). Brooks was extremely interested in creating “a universal language of theatre that [could] be understood by human beings anywhere in the world, regardless of cultural, social, or geographical differences” (Zinder 129). *Orghast* was a “language of pure, concrete sounds,” “an imageless, concretely operative language of direct connotation that was supposed to operate in the affective manner of music or gesture” (Zinder 129).

Handke’s *Kasper* is a dramatic version of the Wild Boy of Aveyron, a youth who, in the early nineteenth century, was found in the forests without any language and taken into captivity so that he could be studied. In Handke’s version, the play depicts the boy’s “disintegration through the mastery of language” (Marranca 59).

For his upcoming piece, *The Conference of the Birds*, which he planned to tour in Africa, Brooks wanted his company to develop a system of

signs, syllables, and silence, as well as bird sounds. “Brooks [was] striving for the meaning of *sound* rather than the meaning of *words* and for a theatrical language that is more theatrically expressive than English, and more universal, able to be grasped emotionally anywhere in the world” (Croyden 7). To this end the company worked on Greek, sonic essences, and Japanese and African songs.²

NTD was invited for three weeks to further the discussion on what sign language could contribute to theatrical communication. One exercise involved the use of sticks to communicate as they became extensions of the body, voice, and the psyche. In another activity the actors were asked to work with boxes—creating playlets out of yet another extension of personal space. This exchange with Brooks not only provided a testing ground for his theatrical techniques; NTD also absorbed and extended his ideas.

For the National Theatre of the Deaf, the experience with Brooks “opened up new avenues,” said Hays. “For example, we are working toward extending communications without using sign language. In our new piece, *Gilgamesh*, the Deaf use a good deal of abstract sound. They are trying to use their voices on a purely emotional level since they have no way of monitoring sound.” (Croyden 7)

The experimentation in staging expressivity through the use of tonality enlarged the parameters for NTD. This example, along with the previously mentioned Baschet sculptures, suggests new ways to think about sound and how it can be used with deaf actors.

Since 1967, NTD has gone out on national tour each year and they have also performed on every continent. They were the first theater company from the United States to be invited to perform in China as well as South Africa. Other performances have ranged from *Woyzek*,

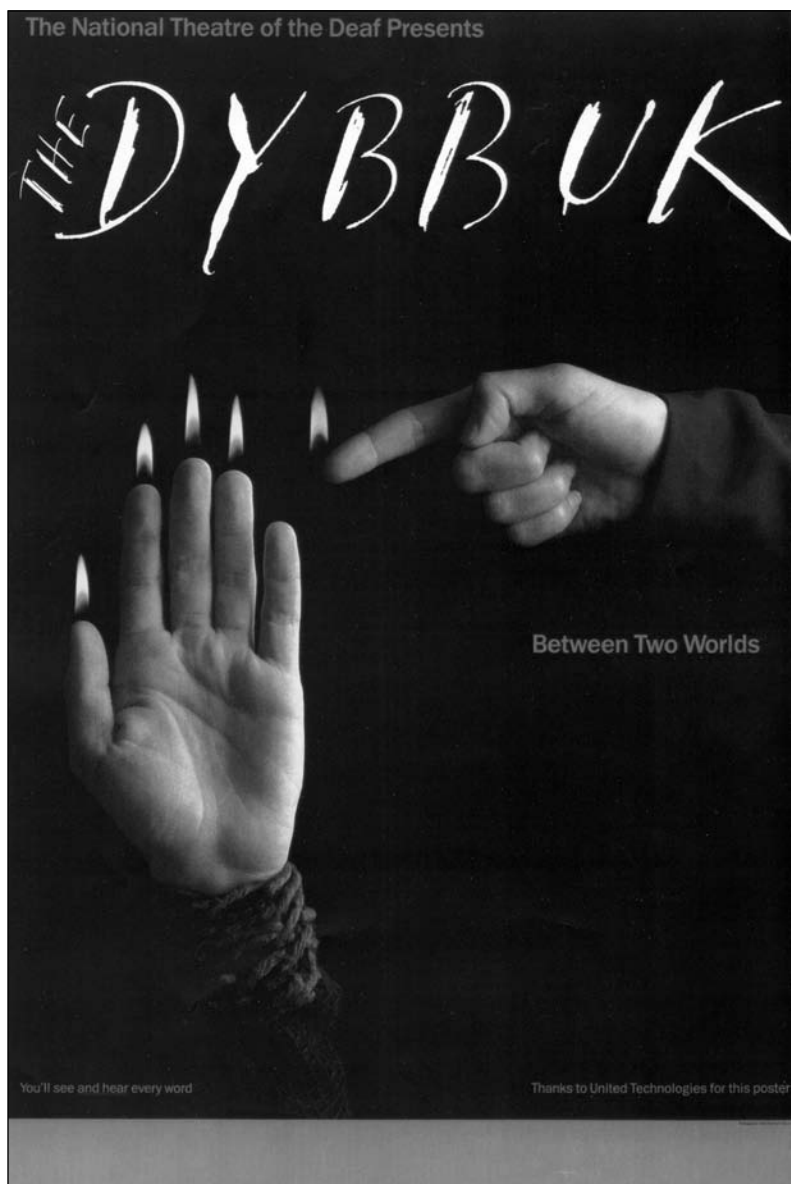
2. Brooks’s study involved finding the range of tonality that could communicate across language groups.

Gilgamesh, *The Giving Tree*, *The Dybbuk*, and *King of Hearts* to the more recent performances of *Farewell, My Lovely* (based on an essay by E. B. White). Other more recent performances include *Under Milkwood* (a Dylan Thomas poem), *Curiouser and Curiouser* (a version of Alice in Wonderland), the *Italian Straw Hat*, an Italian farce, and *Peer Gynt*.

By emphasizing the creation of good theater with a focus on the use of classical texts, Hays felt that he could make a stronger statement by standing on the artistic merit of the work of the deaf performers rather than proselytizing Deaf politics. Nevertheless, NTD was instrumental in many of the changes that have occurred in the development of Deaf rights since the late '60s. First, as a result of showcasing ASL to erase the stigma attached to signing and to highlight its beauty and potential as an art form, numerous sign language courses have sprung up in universities and institutes. Sign language, in fact, is now the third-most-studied language in the United States. Additionally, regional equity theater companies are legally required to use sign interpreters for a certain number of their performances. Two other crucial changes precipitated by NTD's work include the increasing presence of deaf actors in the theatrical mainstream as well as the emergence of Deaf theaters both nationally and internationally.

The work of NTD, having set the stage for a generalized acceptance of sign language as a language in its own right and with tremendous potential for a physical poetry, has begun to move in the direction of expanding the image of acting styles. Rhys, by including a more active dialogue with other members of the experimental theater scene, planned to clarify the training approach of NTD and its contribution to the discussion in performance theories that relate to language and space. As a result, the form that NTD has developed answers some of the issues raised in chapter 1 about the intersection of language with visuality.

Although there is much that commends the use of ASL on stage and the work on the double language of signing and speaking, the move toward the aestheticization of ASL also brings problems. It is important to reiterate that the type of signing that NTD uses is a version for the stage, in which the dramatic potential of the language is paramount. Deaf audience members have at times expressed confusion over the ASL that NTD uses.



Poster for the National Theatre of the Deaf's performance of *The Dybbuk*.
Photo courtesy of NTD

There have been challenges from hard of hearing audience members who also claim that the performance work is not at all accessible to them, because they can neither hear nor sign. Rhys hypothesized about the possibilities of captioned performances, a decision that could be quite costly.

Camille Jeter, former codirector of NTD with Rhys, indicated that her primary agenda with the company was to see it as an active site for fostering the ongoing development of ASL. Since mainstreaming became common in the early 1970s, many deaf students had been rerouted to public schools. This shift has led to the closing of many Deaf residential schools where the use of ASL flourished. Without these concentrated communities of exchange, it is difficult to keep the engagement with a language constant. Jeter has seen the work of NTD as a crucial place for further opportunities to create ASL speakers and thus to foster a Deaf community.

NTD has helped to loosen the stranglehold that the connection between sound and language tends to impose on traditional theater. In this fashion it is a part of a larger discussion about the full potentialities of language and the body.³ Bauman poses a series of questions that pursue the logical implications of such an observation about the long-standing “unacknowledged” presence of deaf people and their use of sign language. In realizing that sign is a “fully capable linguistic medium,” he queries (“BSW” 368), “had we mythologized the deaf bard along with the blind, how would our notion of the literary text (and by implication, theater) be different?” What would the different genres be, how would the relation between language and the body have been described by the philosophers? How would the disciplinary structures of the arts be reconfigured? As Bauman acknowledges, we cannot undo what has been left out of the development of Western thought, but we can dust things off. “The emergence

3. According to Bauman, as early as the fifth century BC, signing communities presumably existed, because Plato asks, “Suppose that we had no voice or tongue, and wanted to communicate with one another, should we not, like the deaf [. . .] make signs with hands and head and the rest of the body?” (“BSW” 368)

of sign language provides a vivid critique of normalcy as it exposes the assumptions of the hearing-speaking on which literary categories and definitions are founded" ("BSW" 171).

Ophelia

In an effort to continue to expand the theatrical possibilities for their unique blend of sign and speech, NTD first collaborated with Pilobolus, a modern dance company that focuses on storytelling through dance, in a workshop at the Theatre Institute in the summer of 1990. According to Hays, the project was not intended to involve the NTD performers in movement theater pieces that were "wordless" but to begin a process of developing further the transfiguration of sign language to the whole body and to the space. To focus the collaborative process, the two groups worked together on "Gertrude's speech from *Hamlet*, beginning with 'There is a willow grows aslant a brook,' that relates to Ophelia's drowning." The work in progress that was performed by four dancers from Pilobolus and four deaf actors from NTD was first shown in the summer of 1990 and later developed into a full production of *Ophelia* that toured during the 1992–93 season.

The experimentation with sign and movement produced a number of different forms, which included splitting signs between left and right hands that are not normally done that way, using double sets of hands to create sign configurations, and starting a sign and finishing it in whole-body movement. Most significant, Pilobolus and NTD explored ways of enlarging upon the smaller crystallizations of movement that occur in the space close to the body so that, in effect, the whole body signs. This process of poeticizing sign language in space is one answer to Artaud's call for "poetry in space." In the moments when this convergence of "word" and "sign" create the most powerful configurations, translation seems unnecessary. The message communicates directly through the medium of the signing of the body through space.

NTD's touring production of *Ophelia*, which retains some of the work achieved in the workshop setting, is a specially commissioned adaptation

of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* that was written by playwright Jeff Wanschel. A group of vagabonds narrate this rewritten version of *Hamlet*, and in particular, perform the play within the play, "Mousetrap." This time, Ophelia, usually a secondary character in the story of Hamlet's efforts to avenge his father's murder, holds center stage. This play takes as one of its ancillary themes the insertion of new and other voices into the fabric of classical theater. This pattern occurs not only through the use of the perspective of the vagabonds and Ophelia, but also at the perceptual level, in the way the double style of sign and speech gives a new voice to the production.

The play begins poignantly with Ophelia signing Gertrude's famous "willow speech" and then unfolds through a series of flashbacks. Ophelia first sees the ghost of Hamlet's father, and she suggests to Hamlet that King Claudius has killed the former king. Ophelia later creates the play within a play in her own rewriting of the (fictional) murder of Gonzago—"the play's the thing wherein we'll catch the conscience of the King"—and she also delivers the "to be or not to be" graveside soliloquy. In these incidents, we see Ophelia, rather than Hamlet, as the driving force behind many of the events in the play.

Ophelia's love for Hamlet is key to the plot. When King Claudius has Hamlet escorted to England—where he is to be beheaded on the King's orders—it is Ophelia, together with her troupe of traveling actors, who disguise themselves as pirates and rescue Hamlet in a fictional scene that is a take-off of Captain Kidd. Next, Hamlet and Ophelia marry secretly as King Claudius and Laertes plot Hamlet's death.

In the final scene, Queen Gertrude, Laertes, and Hamlet die as they do in the original. In the denouement, instead of the arrival of young Fortinbras, the scene reverts to the first as Ophelia takes flowers from the actors, delivers the "goodnight, sweet prince" speech, and finally sinks into the flowing waters, formed marvelously and with great beauty by the troop of vagabond players.

There are several places in *Ophelia* in which the ontology of deafness informs the staging practice. Early in the play, Ophelia and Hamlet have gone to see if the ghost of Hamlet's father will reappear and to find out

what he has to say. In this scene the ghost's appearance is marked not by the floating, dreamlike visage of a face with the speaking mouth but by the use of signing hands. We see the hands and the shadow of the mid-regions of the body. The ghost tells Hamlet and Ophelia how Claudius murdered him.

In another scene of complete silence, after Hamlet has begun to go mad, he crosses downstage right to downstage left where Ophelia stands waiting tentatively but bound to speechlessness by Polonius. Hamlet reaches out to Ophelia momentarily, takes her hand, and nods his head slightly, almost indistinguishably. But Hamlet has passed through the space languidly and distractedly. The silence is a shock, and it heightens the effect of Hamlet's madness by its sonic contrast to the use of sound that includes music, the Baschet sculptures, the voicing actors, and the sign language that, although it "looks" so, is not silent. This moment lets us read Hamlet's madness through the metaphor of his body movement and the lack of signing that is established in relationship to it.

The most powerful scene in the play is the closing scene in which we see Ophelia dropping into the waters of the river. As Robbie Barnett of Pilobolus explained, it is a heightened moment of the performance that was captured and developed at the workshop and replayed in the touring production.⁴ The particular achievement of this scene is the way in which the deaf performers were able to articulate and execute their perceptions of how sign language could extend into the larger space.

In this scene the vagabond players have come down to the river with Ophelia, and slowly the mood shifts from the sense of action that drives the story proper to a dreaming space in which time is elongated. The players announce that "all our revels have ended," a line taken from Prospero's epilogue of leave-taking in the *Tempest*. Ophelia, who stands upstage right, looks out past the audience, as she dreams the memory of her own death. Two of the players take their hands from the space that is just right of center and, rippling their hands, they move slowly toward

4. Personal telephone interview, April 1998.

Ophelia. The dreamlike quality of the hands creates a feeling of ritual as the performers bring the water of the river to her.

In the far corner upstage left, three of the players dance in light foot patterns down the diagonal toward Ophelia, lifting first one leg up and then the other as they shift side to side and move forward at the same time. After Ophelia has received the waters, she goes to the diagonal and dances forward with same soft lilting body patterns that have just occurred. When she reaches the same spot downstage right, the players retreat from her and stoop over the space of the river. They create a wall of shimmering hands to embody the fluidity of the water. As Ophelia drifts backward toward the hands that have risen to meet her, she falls backward into the wall of shimmering hands and lies down. The players, as extensions of the waters, lift her, prone, up into the air, and then gently lay her down onto the ground. For just a minute we can see her face through the “waters” before her head drops down with her body, and the hands rise up and away from her.

This scene is a particularly effective example of what Rhys means when he talks about the power of sign language as a language of space. In this scene Ophelia is not simply signing as she dances, but the choreography itself becomes an extension of the signed dialogue. In other words, as Hays remarked, the performers do with their bodies what they normally do with their hands when they sign. The scene is seamless in its integration of dance and sign. In this scene we are moved not by language as speech, with its tones, inflections, and pitches of voice, which is underscored by the body, but by language as visuality. In this scene we retrace with Ophelia the echoes and palpabilities of the body that speaks its memory. In a moment that brings together mortality and the sheer “matter” of the body, we move through the lines and motions of the pictoriality of Ophelia’s willow scene with her.

These scenes are striking in how they combine signing, the spoken words, and the use of sound effects to create the visual multispatial analogy of what is communicated in the speech. These scenes are examples of ways in which the combined use of sign and speech has led to extensive exploration of the pictorial possibilities of language through the third ear. According to William Stokoe:

Speech has only one dimension—its extension in time; writing has two dimensions; models have three; but only signed languages have at their disposal four dimensions—the three spatial dimensions accessible to the a signer's body, as well as the dimension of time. And Sign fully exploits the syntactic possibilities in its four-dimensional channel of expression. (cited in Sacks 90)

This difference in the spatial experience of language and its expression in the ASL that NTD uses, a heightened and poeticized version, promotes a radical shift in perception and the understanding that can pass from performer to audience. The audience views and hears through the double sensory mode of sign and speech as well as the musical instruments that are used, which are also highly visual and sculptural.

Furthermore the deaf performers, through the use of sign language, both embody and speak their story. Viewed through the use of deixis, the story that they tell involves the coordinates of the here and now of the speaker and the body of the person. As a result of this complex layering of body, memory, and the social realm, the audience's involvement with the pictorial motion of the signing body, even if partial, also creates a different sense of time and space.

By providing the context for exploring the threshold between speech and sign, or words and visual-spatial images, the type of ASL that NTD uses further explores not only the physicalization of the word but also a type of writing in space. Bauman remarks that “[a] line of ASL poetry may bear more resemblance to a line in a painting or drawing than to a line in a written poem” (“BSW” 176). The mix of speech and sign leads to a hybrid theatrical form, a sign language poetry, which “adds a new perspective in the historical tradition of relating poetry to blindness and painting to silence or muteness” (“BSW” 176).

The original style for NTD that Hays fostered through collaboration with various experimental directors is resurging and is a new phase in the work of former artistic NTD directors, Rhys and Jeter. For example, in August of 1998, Ping Chong was invited to lead a workshop at NTD for two weeks on a topic of his choice. Rhys explained that his interest

in Chong centered on his collaborative approach to directing, a style that NTD promotes and also wants to extend. Although each of the groups that NTD works with reflects differing aesthetics and methods of theatrical production, they all share a focus on the use of sound, silence, and image, and they all work collaboratively. Rather than setting productions according to a preexisting vision, these works evolve as the participants—hearing and deaf—bring their various sensibilities to bear on the projects. Out of these intersections new forms are forged.

Big River

Deaf West, June 2004

Big River is a Deaf West Theater (DWT) ASL adaptation of the 1985 Broadway musical based on the Mark Twain novel about the escapades of orphaned Huckleberry Finn and Jim, a runaway slave, as they travel down the Mississippi River in 1841 in the pre-Civil War United States. The original musical book was written by William Hauptman and the music and lyrics were written by Roger Miller. The show first opened in Los Angeles in 2001 and played on Broadway for a limited run in fall 2003. It toured nationally from June of 2004 to June 2005. The work was directed by Jeff Calhoun, under the artistic guidance of Executive Director Ed Waterstreet and ASL Master Linda Bove.

DWT was founded in 1990 by Waterstreet and Bove in response to their observations for the need for a professional Deaf theater in Los Angeles. Both directors have had extensive performance careers, and they spent a number of years working with NTD. The only type of theater available for the Deaf constituency in Los Angeles was that in which sign language was interpreted into speech. As a consequence, DWT was formed to offer “cultural, educational, social and employment” opportunities. In this sign language theater, “a legacy of deaf culture is created, shared and preserved” (Deaf Theater West 14).

Big River, only the second musical that DWT produced, incorporates hearing, deaf, and hard of hearing actors and actresses through the use of a

unique synthesis of speaking, signing, dancing, gesturing, and singing. By creating a performance work that integrates the communicative modalities of both the hearing and the deaf population—hearing actors sign, sing, and speak while deaf actors sign and dance—one method of communicating does not gain priority over another.

In addition to the already well-known theme of *Huckleberry Finn* that revolves around the question of racial identity and freedom, there is now also the theme of exploring the tensions around the question of hearing and deafness. As a result, with the musical's heightened performance style (at times it seemed the audience was pulled into a "third space" where signing and speaking merged together), the tensions of racial difference converged with the tensions of hearing/deafness, and it became clear that to understand each other—and to cross boundaries—we need a different type of modality for listening. The third ear provides just such a device as a way of working across the senses and also as a way of feeling across the differences.

To communicate through the use of ASL effectively in the large auditoriums while on tour, the performers had to make their signs quite large, much larger than they were used to doing at the ninety-nine-seat performance space of the DWT. The effect of this, along with the seamless integration of signing, speaking, and dancing, created a space that broke down the fourth wall (the invisible wall that separates audience and performers)—even though the musical is usually a proscenium stage performance genre. Because of the heightened kinesthesia, audience members not only saw what was going on, but they could also feel it in their bones.

When staging the speaking actors in relation to the deaf actors, the voice comes from somewhere behind the signing performer. For example, early in the show when we are first introduced to Huck (played by Tyrone Giordano), who is center downstage, the voice for Huck (played by David Jenkins) is delivered from upstage right. On other occasions, the voicing comes from within a crowd, while the attention is centered through other aspects of the staging on the deaf performer. (After a bit of adjustment early in the show most hearing audience members make

the adjustment to focusing their attention on the deaf actor and lining the voice up with that actor.)

In the act “Guv’ment,” one of the most interesting sections in terms of staging, we meet Huck’s father, a scene in which both a deaf and a hearing actor play the dual roles as mirror images of each other. When Troy Kostur signs, James Devine acts as a shadow—miming and voicing Kostur/Pap. “Side by side, the two create the disgraceful figure of Pap roaming about the stage and bullying poor Huck in a drunken stupor” (Ito 1). The doubling of the character is dramatically effective in communicating the double nature of the father, but the effect of this scene goes beyond the psychological dimension. It plays with the ways in which hearing and deafness are presumed doubles of each other and what happens when the two play off of each other in their complexities. The scene, which is riveting, has to do with the ways in which speaking, singing, and signing work off of each other to “double say” the scene.

This scene also highlights the breaking apart of the presumed unified notion of the father as transcendental signified. Much of Twain’s novel deals with breaking apart the order of things and reordering them by its conclusion. In this adaptation of an adaptation, the DTW version shows at least two tiers of the breaking apart and remaking of the social order along the lines of race as well as along the lines of deafness. Robert Hurwitt notes:

The constant interplay of signs and voice adds another dimension to Twain’s still urgent tale of a boy responding to his heart’s realization of human dignity across the racial divide—a white Southerner helps a slave escape at the cost, he believes, of social ostracism and religious perdition. The broad message [. . .] is brought home in McElory’s heart-wrenching account of how Jim discovered that his little daughter had become deaf. (1)

In “Exploring the ‘Hearing Line’: Deafness, Laughter, and Mark Twain,” Christopher Krentz chronicles Twain’s inclusion of deaf characters in his writing and his tendency to depict them as humorous. He compares Twain’s encounter with deafness to “W. E. B. Dubois’s concept of the color line”

in what he calls “the hearing line, that invisible boundary that separates deaf and hearing human beings” (234–35). By invoking the “hearing line,” Krentz articulates both the similarities and differences of deafness to racial identity. He notes that “while the color line is typically written on the skin, deafness is invisible” (235), but that we can nonetheless identify that someone is deaf by the way that they act rather than how they look.

As a consequence, one of the key ways in which a deaf character can be identified in Twain’s work is through the experience of shouting. We find out about Jim’s experience of trying to get his daughter ’Lizabeth, who had just recovered from scarlet fever, to close the door. When he asks her do it once and she doesn’t respond, he yells at her to shut the door. She doesn’t respond, so he slaps her. Then he realizes a few minutes later, when the wind slams the door shut and she still does not respond, that she has lost her hearing. Jim says: “Oh Huck, I bust out a-cry’ en grab her up in my arms, and say, ‘Oh, de po’ little thing! [. . .] Oh. She was plumb deaf and dumb, Huck plumb deaf en dumb—en I’d ben a-treat’ n her so!”

As Krentz notes, it is through shouting that the hearing line is crossed, and the lack of expected behavior clarifies that hearing has encountered deafness. He cautions us, however, to think carefully through the representation of deafness, for it is more likely that ’Lizabeth would still be able to speak that soon after her illness, and it more likely still that she would feel the vibrations of the door that slams shut. Nevertheless, Twain renders the scene “more poignant one than comical” (239). Although it brings Huck and Jim together in the novel as hearing people squarely positioned on the side of hearing, in *Big River* the impact of this scene is very different. (Krentz notes that all of Twain’s characters are semideaf or what we now would call late-deafened, meaning they came into deafness after birth.)

Instead of moving both of the characters across the hearing line and rendering that common position as a reprieve of normalcy against the threat of deafness as the result of accident or illness, the scene has the effect of merging the color and hearing line. Here Jim confesses what he has done

to his daughter, and there is an uncanny moment as Jim, who seeks his freedom, tells this story to Huck, who is deaf. Toward the end of the show, the rite of passage also occurs for Huck and it is metaphorized in the last rendition of “waitin’ for the light to shine.” Earlier in the show, the song was performed with Huck signing and his voice counterpart singing. Near the end, the song starts the same way, but when they do the chorus line this time, there is no singing and no music. We see/hear the signing chorus against the backdrop as they do the last section of the song in silence.

The crossing of the hearing line throughout *Big River* has been slow as far as the unfolding of the narrative itself goes. However, the musical operates on multiple levels at once. As the audience members, who are hearing, hard of hearing, and deaf, watch the story unfold, there is a sense in which we are all being asked to cross the “hearing” line—to recognize what Tom Humphries has called the “modern age for Deaf people” (349). It is no accident that we keep revisiting stories of issues that began to be raised in the first half of the 1800s. In “Of Deaf-Mutes, the *Strange*, and the Modern Deaf Self,” Humphries notes the links between the challenges that faced Southern slaves and the deaf-mutes of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He writes:

Slaves could begin to imagine for themselves a separate being from the one created for them by the slave owner and to find the words to talk about themselves this way. Deaf-mutes of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century had a similar task. Considered at different times in history in various parts of the world to be nonhuman, or at least, incapable of that which constitutes humanness, deaf-mutes could testify to the difficulty of imaging (as well as imagining) oneself and one’s entire subset of humanity into existence. (348–49)

DTW retells the classic Twain story from the perspective of the modern deaf self. Hence, we look back not just at the construction and deconstruction of slavery, but also at the construction (both through Twain’s

eyes and through the contemporary deaf cast's eyes) of deafness. When Huck, deaf and subaltern to a hearing person, looks back at Jim, black and subaltern to a white person, as Jim tells the story of learning that his daughter is deaf, we watch the hearing *and* color line collapse into each other. This type of listening to the other—across the lines of difference—is made possible through performance. This approach to investigating identity from a deaf perspective through the retelling of the seemingly familiar story of Huck Finn and his travels down the Mississippi both reinvigorates the tale and reframes it in our contemporary cultural context.

Hearing Phantoms Shift

British-based deaf performance artist and poet Aaron Williamson addresses the experiential dimensions of deafness and critiques the tendency to link the sound of the voice with hearing in his work “Phantom Shifts” (1999). In this work Williamson focuses on charting the interstices among sound, nonsound, image, the moving body, and impediments to “routinized” behavior. He enters the installation space carrying a large plaster model of a white ear on his back, and as he progresses across the space, the weight of the ear bears down on him more and more. At first only weighted down slightly, near the end of the traversing of the space Williamson is on the ground, buried under the weight of the ear. There is a sound track of Williamson's breathing that plays during this section but also intermittently cuts off as way of recreating the liminal space between hearing and deafness. Because he is also dressed in white, as he sinks down, he becomes somewhat indistinguishable from that which weighs him down.

Because the ear is the organ for receiving sound and we see Williamson carrying the ear on his back, the image resonates in several different ways. One is that the ear is the organ of burden; it is bearing down on Williamson. The sequence makes visible the organ that relies on a sensorial exchange that we cannot see—but, if we “hear,” know has happened. The markers of having heard are indirect ones, such as certain glances, types of responses,

and so forth. By moving the ear to the back, Williamson also raises the image of the “displacement” of the ear. What happens if we start to line the ear up with different parts of the body? Is there, perhaps, somewhere else that the ear belongs? What if the whole body is an ear?

In “Wave,” the second part of the performance piece, Williamson locates himself at one end of the installation hall with a large piece of white cloth, seventeen feet in length, that links him to the plaster ear, which is now laid on the ground at the end of the cloth. This image draws, in part, from “British slang, covered by cloth or ‘cloth-eared,’ meaning mute or stupid” (Davidson 83). He repeats a movement phrase over and over again. He exhales “ha” and sends that through the rippling of the cloth down to the ear. Because of the quality of the cloth, the ripple travels all the way down and rolls across the ear. Although this section suggests the way in which sound travels from voice to ear, it also invokes the way in which it is ambiguous whether the voice is heard or passes over the ear. And, more important, we must remember that what Williamson sends to the ear is not sound but image. What plaster ear can hear image? Who hears image? How do we hear the image of sound? Because the sequence is repeated a number of times—in approximately the same way—the section indicates the need to repeat a phrase to get a point across, that reception may or may not occur.

But the use of the “ha,” of a more guttural sound, and of the breath indicate a location of sound in the body and materiality. Everything about this scene is embodied, materialized, kinesthetic, and visual. Although we may not be able to hear the “ha,” the visibility of the taking of a breath, the swing of the arms as the breath passes through Williamson’s body and transmits into the rippling of the cloth, the distance between Williamson and the ear, and the final roll of the cloth over the ear gives us the palpable experience, translated, of hearing differently (metaphorized and materialized). Here we hear through the body, as Williamson suggests, by carrying the ear into the installation space on his back.

In “Hearing Things” (1998–99), a modern site of oracular language, Williamson explores the arbitrary relationship between the production of language and hearing through the use of computer voice-recognition

equipment and audience participation in his installation. In this installation there are two oval-shaped screens placed diagonally to each other. Videos show Williamson, dressed in a white frock, standing on a rock, and while he struggles to maintain his balance, he utters a variety of syllables and guttural sounds, most of which are unrecognizable and are back-projected onto the screens. There are also two computers that are running text across their respective screens. The computers are set up to “misrecognize” voices. In other words, the computers generate verbal language and sounds to create a continuous flow of noise from any sounds or words spoken in the performance area. In addition to the voices of people, there are also objects in the performance area that, through interaction with these objects, also lead to computer-generated sound. These objects include the large navel-shaped stone and the plaster ear.

The computer-generated text did a variety of things to the language and sound: change the order of words, leave out words, put words where there were none, and create words out of sound. Because the generated text imposed verbal language, the texts appear to be grounded in verbal language. While occasionally making sense, much of the language generated is nonsensical and meaning accrues by indirection, feeling, and association of ideas and other words, if at all. In bringing together the biology of producing sound with the technology of producing sound and reordering the environmental strictures for this production of sound and meaning, Williamson challenges the culturally expected congruence between the production of language and its reception. He disrupts the presumed links between sensory information and cognition.

Sample computer-generated texts include the following.

1. This text draws on a conversation between two people:

“Belong below the directorate within the more than ends it
said okay good morning I did not visit to bed never know
all did not say that the best he got we’ll do not be within
the regional”

“And will be in the point of and brew brew brew for a little
time benevolent is valid on the literary poetic white linen
letter below involved in its included in the visit they would

greatly be better than that he then was alarmed at the normal works price of grace which either withdrew from Britain for exactly all England for the year period in the existence of them”

2. This text was generated “by vocally babbling into the computer’s microphone with soft consonants for a period of three minutes”:

“Lower or are not a brewery line
and apart who’ll undertook the worm watery identity
nor am all award that the harm de already pull a jewellery
detected to the cane
appalled under the annual”

“Advocate by the am not line lower book or
no new line nerve role world war
with detected whenever article pick-up in or top
them off people unmoved rule of water in all the years of
the war lower us
nor can”

3. This text was generated through the sound of a hair dryer being turned on and off. The line breaks were produced through verbally interjecting the command Line Break:

“It is an editor at the
only “what no power caught”
at the faith 0
the new to lower at lower lower
in the other than lower
than the thief of a belonged report will
new power of new line
new paragraph.”⁵

“Hearing Things” creates a series of convergences of sound, words, images, and objects to critique expected notions of hearing and systems of

5. Aaron Williamson, *Hearing Things*, 15 Jan 2005 <<http://ruskin-sch.milohedge.com/lab/02/online/index.html>>. The site has been discontinued.

making meaning. Part psychobabble, computer babble, people babble, and object babble—invoking Artuad’s glossopoeia—it blurs the lines between body, self, and environment. It also plays back to the audience/participants and to readers of the installation after the fact that tenuous line between the production of sound, images of making sound (Williamson tottering on the rock spewing out indistinguishable syllables), and the ways in which, as I have already suggested, deafness is everywhere in the history and presence of modern sound technology. It also replays without naming the tensions of “hearing things” in its multiple strands. The notion of “hearing things” oscillates across a hearing at the edge where those things veer in and out of sense—invoking associations with drug-induced deliriums, access to the voices of the dead, or altered states of mind. How do we hear at the edge?

A Bare Bone Tune

When I was seven years old, I underwent an exploratory operation to see if there was a procedure that could fix my ears so that I could hear again. A common operation at that point was one in which the bones in the middle ear were replaced with silver wires so that the bone conduction could be enhanced. In this operation, the doctor had me turn on my right side so he could cut open the eardrum on my left ear. For some reason, they did not give me any anesthesia, and I, of course, still remember the pain quite vividly.

Although much of my own work as a performance artist has always included moments of deafness, I began several years ago to work to more thoroughly excavate the implications of deafness for myself. My body remembers what has happened in ways that my more conscious day-to-day self does not. Through performance I both *remember* the feel of what happened, bits and pieces of the narrative, and the other voices and perspectives trying to make a different sort of sense out of what was happening. I also *re-member* these traumatic moments when the familiar has been sucked out and away from me, and I am left flailing in a liminal zone. The re-membering both orients me and helps me to build a new context.

To that end, in my most recent work, I collaborated with Petra Kuppers, director of Olimpias, a performance alliance that focuses on furthering opportunities for disability performers and the creation of new disability aesthetics. *A Bare Bone Tune* was performed at the Chicago Women's Performance Art Festival in October 2004. This compilation of our perspectives explores the performative intersection of pain and deafness. Kuppers has a bone condition that leads to cartilage drying up—a condition that can be quite painful. A sound track plays out the voicing of our two texts; some words and phrases are repeated and some parts are sung. The piece developed along two tracks: Kuppers goes out into the audience and hands various audience members small stones so they can touch them, while she whispers inaudible statements to the audience. I stay on stage evoking the mixed space of hearing and deafness through dance, movement, and intermittent soundings of the text that are often partial phrases that begin in many ways in my personal history, with the moment, for instance, when I woke up at age six to the sound of the radio static in my ears rather outside of them.

*At first there was the tune on the radio
A lullaby to sleep by
Transistor radio wiring me
To an outside world*

*Yet in the hollow of my head
Sound trickled over bone
Next to the ears
Both song and wax*

The transistor radio connected me to the world beyond my bed late at night; I could dream of the vast vistas beyond the small town where we lived that year south of Cleveland, Ohio. Those vistas of something far beyond were my creations, my counterpoints to knowing that my father was from somewhere far away, somewhere called India. I was too young to understand; I could only feel the distance, look at the objects that he

brought back from India that year as markers of another world. The first recorded sound that I heard out of the old stereo player was the plaintive cry of a woman singing in Hindi. Because it had to be turned up quite loud for me to hear it, the sound reverberated through the house, leaving me with the palpable feel of an-other voice.

In *A Bare Bone Tune*, I reenact other sound spaces even though they are spaces I only partially heard and often could not understand. In this passage, hearing, not hearing, movement, and visibility operate like a disjunctive relay system passing through me and out again; in this process a space of hearing begins to turn into the space of deafness and back to hearing again. As a child I began to lose the sense of marking my world by sound and began to mark it very carefully through the use of images, by watching people, by orienting through my body, through feeling. The experience was something like swimming underwater or walking through the sea of images as I described when discussing Wilson's *Deafman Glance*.

*There is a technique to not hearing,
I can tell
One side is ringing
The other buzzes into
Nothing, where sound coils
In on itself*

*They insist I repeat
Myself, in a new experiment
(where science is always
Ahead of the body)
Moving bone is merely
Science, they think about
Rewiring me to the outside, while they keep me*

In this section of performance piece, I invoke the ways that the effort to operate on me takes on uncanny resonances with my previous love of the radio. Sound technology and medicine are used to intervene to change

my physiological state and to make me more *radiophonic*. It became clear to me as I constructed this project, and then also performed it, that I was ambivalent about certain states of access. Like Odysseus, who must pour wax into his ears to avoid hearing the siren's song but then refuses the wax for other forms of constraint so that he can hear that unhearable song, I, too, imagine the wax dripping into my ear next to the bone.

*The radio put me
To sleep, in the midst of static noise,
Wax pours across my hands,
Tune rung barely,
Into the bone
Into the scar, far into the world,

Bring me the hammer, the anvil, and the stirrup,

Bring me the tuning forks, wire them
Across the hollow of my head.*

Bone becomes then for me the site of my body that hears. In the second of half of the piece, hearing through the bones is enacted on my own body as well as that of Kuppers—as she has by now come out of the audience and joined me on the dance floor.

A Bare Bone Tune tracks my sounding and silent body as it passes through the many hearing states of touch and sight. Transposed, I reclaim the performance of moving in and out of sound and my personal history of hearing differently.

Through an active listening with the third ear that involves both hearing and seeing, we can better grasp the double nature of the performances of the NTD, DTW, Aaron Williamson, and others. These performances lead to radical revisionings of the possibilities for theater. Disrupted, resisting the normative, we learn to hear differently, and we are oriented in new ways toward a perceptual and conceptual openness that shifts not only our understanding of difference but also the transformative

power of performance. Ophelia vanishes into the darkness through a river of shimmering hands; the color and the hearing lines are crossed in Los Angeles and along the Mississippi; and we feel the phantoms shifting through the radiophonic voice that vibrates in the bones. The third ear has been activated, put into motion, listening.

Chapter 5

Performing at the Edge of Hearing: Ping Chong, Augusto Boal, and Tara Arts

Since 1990, Ping Chong, an Asian American director, has developed two cycles of works, *Undesirable Elements* and the *East/West Quartet*, that articulate the importance of listening to performances at the edge of hearing in order to shift our understanding of cross-cultural issues. *Undesirable Elements*, Chong relates, was inspired by a noisy experience at an Amsterdam bar. The piece questions how we can hear unfamiliar speakers in an environment that creates a circumstantial deafness or the need to enact the third ear, by a process of listening to the sounds, bits and pieces of words and phrases, and the use of gesture and facial expression. In other words, how can sense be made out of a “sea of voices and moving bodies”? What might those efforts have to do with how we relate cross-culturally? The *East/West Quartet* addresses how we might hear the other through the noise that is created by the collisions between cultures and individuals. In both works, Chong clears a space for these voices that sound from a variety of distances. In *Undesirable Elements* he highlights the sounds of these voices, and in *East/West Quartet* he uses sound to frame key moments of hearing the silences of another. These works articulate thresholds between hearing and nonhearing, and the third ear provides a boundary crossing between the states of sound and silence.

The notion of deafness, which I use here as a cultural inability to “hear” difference, revolves around the ways in which the inscriptions of our own culture limit how and under what conditions we hear the other. Alfred Tomatis and other have noted that when it comes to hearing sounds

that are outside the normative frame to which we are accustomed, we often literally cannot hear those sounds; they register as noise or we do not hear them at all. In describing a contact moment with an unfamiliar language, Paul Carter notes:

The sound in-between creates a temporary meeting place—but any attempt to build a mutually intelligible structure upon it inevitably ends in confusion. [. . .] The sound in-between does not originate on one side or the other. It is provoked by the interval itself. [. . .] It is a historical device for keeping the future open, for delineating a space where, in future, misapprehensions and differences can begin to form a new cross-cultural *argot*, one based on the incremental convergence of sound and gesture. (SB 12–13)

The tendency to create a new hearing, or the attempt to avoid seeming deaf to others so as not to exclude certain voices from the public forum, cannot be rectified simply by deciding to listen to someone in a kind and unproblematic new humanism.

Deafness, as we have discussed, has and continues to hold a repressed position in our cultural imaginary. By considering deafness and its cultural resonances, a theoretical link can be developed between the position of alterity framed by Deaf theater and other performance work that challenges the sensorial and cultural biases toward hearing others. Listening—turned toward the in-between regions of sound, silence, and the moving body—becomes an attempt to cross over from the familiar into the domain of the unfamiliar.

Ping Chong's Production Background

Ping Chong and Company first formed in 1975 as the Fiji Theater Company. Chong's production work, which has often been described as surrealist, has included numerous collaborations with Meredith Monk, both before he formed his company and after, and the development of his own

multimedia theater works, film production, and visual art installation. Because Chong, like Wilson, first pursued a career in the visual arts and film, his style remains highly visual. Chong's work was particularly influenced by Joseph Cornell, an artist who created a variety of themed boxes filled with found objects. This type of work, predicated on chance processes, is marked by the individual vision of the artist, but it also carries a variety of cultural traces that point to the excess of meaning, that which cannot be contained in any one work of art. Chong's work also traces the intersections among cultural artifacts, visual constructions, personal meaning, and the use of performance space.

Chong's work is also influenced by Asian aesthetics. He explains that "Kabuki and Chinese opera, for instance, incorporate elegant visual images and emphasize the beauty of gesture" (Madison 1991:41). More recently, Chong cites his interest in the postmodern film work of Kar-wai Wong, the director of *Chunking Express*, whose work he describes as "alive, unstable, sloppy, and careening into space without knowing where it is going."¹ In general, Chong constructs his work according to visual principles of organization; his logic is cinematic and imagistic. Although in the later works there is often considerable speaking out loud, the use of text does not fit neatly with the visual staging. As a result the scenes can best be viewed as a series of dramatic hieroglyphs.

Chong's focus on a visual theater style opens up new spaces of perception. Jonathan Kalb writes that "[t]hese intimations of unspeakable things lying just beyond our perceptions obviously move him very much, and his talent for creating is central to the success of his surrealism" (1985:68). Chong, bypassing the "prewritten, intellectual references to the disturbing" in order to access "a *felt* surrealism that truly disturbs" (Kalb 68, emphasis mine), achieves this effect through his use of bricolage, which he describes as "a new world created out of any and all available materials from an old world" (cited in Mehta 1984:169) and which he uses in order to explore the variations on the theme of otherness.

1. Personal interview, April 1998.

The fragmented nature of his works operates as an aesthetic strategy for dealing with the fundamental ambiguities of his projects, and for finding ways to break from the established avant-garde in order insert his own Asian cultural identity and aesthetics. The *Quartet* is one such example of his shift in focus. At this point in time, Chong is not interested in the “Euro-alienation” reflected by the works of Robert Wilson and Pina Bausch, but he wants to retain an aspect of humanism. Chong remarks that he reached a point in his artistic career where he had had enough of the European postmodern aesthetic tradition, an approach in which the individual often loses his or her place in the cultural scene and becomes one of many signifying elements on stage. Instead, Chong has moved from the formality of minimalism and pursued his interest in creating works that address what it means to be human and to contemplate the transiency of life.

Chong, in an interview with Xerxes Mehta, explained his use of bricolage to achieve the fragmented effect that is his signature style: “A *bricole* is a billiard shot that results in ‘an indirect action or unexpected stroke.’ Hence, bricolage underlining collages [creates] inherent discontinuities with multiplex indirections” (Mehta 169). According to Mehta, there are four levels of refractions created in Chong’s works: those of the media, materials, cultures, and of the relation between the work and the audience. The various levels of refractions create an aesthetic that envelops both the work and the audience.

Chong, who grew up in Chinatown in New York City, acknowledges that his work tends to be created from an outsider point of view. His early work, drawing on his own experience, explored the idea of an outsider looking in and often has a mystical, fabulist quality to it. Later works follow the same theme but take a larger historical view. Misha Berson notes that:

Ping Chong points out that this sense of ‘otherness’ can prove useful to a writer. It can, he believes, result in a kind of double vision that allows one to work at the intersection of forms, at the crux of cultures, at the critical junctures where ethnic, aesthetic and social identities blur and blend. (25)

Chong considers his approach to his work as one in which he observes people in an anthropological way. For example, *Fear and Loathing in Gotham* (1980) is based on Fritz Lang's suspense film *M*. In Chong's version a detective hunts for an Asian man who is attacking little girls. But rather than focus on horrific moments, the work highlights ordinary ones. Embedded in the work is a commentary on white/non-white relations and the imperialism of the founding of America. In *AM/AM - The Articulated Man* (1982), the outsider is a robot who wants to become more human, so he escapes from the research center. *KindNess* (1986) focuses on the school days of a group of adolescents in the '50s. A new student, Buzz, who is a gorilla, appears.

Obviously, the theme of the outsider is recurrent in Chong's work; however, as he indicates, his more recent work on ethnicity and the outsider is less allegorical and more transparent and accessible. Chong remarks that "Describing my work, I have always used the metaphor of traveling to a foreign country, where you might have unexpected experiences or see something you don't understand. But like visiting a foreign country, the more you see it, the more familiar it gets" (cited in Westfall 11). Some of Chong's other works include *Angels of Swedenborg* (1985) and *Snow* (1988). *Angels of Swedenborg* is about Emanuel Swedenborg, an eighteenth-century Swede who was fascinated by dreams. In Chong's reincarnation, Swedenborg is a computer operator. *Snow* enacts vignettes from different points in legend and history. Images of Berlin after World War II fade into the telling of a Japanese myth. Then the piece switches to the Christmas Day armistice of World War I. Scenes shift in time and space without seeming connected to one another. These incongruities force new connections among the various sections.

Chong explains that a number of his very earliest works were more related to silence than his current projects. As a result of the difficulties of staging this work, Chong de-emphasized the use of silence in his works. He now starts, instead, with sound and moves to silence; he looks, as it were, at the sound around silence. Chong explains that "[s]ilence is something that doesn't sell well in a culture that is so restless [. . .]healing is not possible if there is no silence."² He remains committed to creating theater that engenders a kind of meditation or attention to stillness.

Chong's latest phase of directing entails a more direct look at the issues of multiculturalism as well as variety of contemporary transnational issues. His intention is to explore theatrical structures, as in *Undesirable Elements*, that allow for the inclusion of multiple voices in such a fashion that the tendency toward insularity on the part of various groups can be transformed. In this work, Chong brings together members of a local community who are living in a culture other than their native one in order to engage in a collaborative storytelling process and to create a performative vehicle for cross-cultural dialogue. The first version of *Undesirable Elements* was performed in 1992, and since then there have been nearly twenty versions. In 2002 Chong created another version titled *UE/02* in which he included members from previous versions as well as, for the first time, himself. Chong also has developed a cycle of works, provisionally titled the *East/West Quartet*, in which he attempts to subvert and displace historical voices by retelling certain cultural collisions from a position of fragmented space and time. As Chong queries, "How are we ever going to get along if we don't know anything about each other?" (cited in Hannaham 63).

Chong's more recent work includes *SlutforArt* (1999, 2002), a work developed in collaboration with Muna Tseng. The mixed-media work uses a series of visual images and voice-overs as well as Tseng's choreography to chronicle memories about performance artist Tseng Kwong Chi, Tseng's brother who died of AIDS in 1990. For Kwong Chi's most famous performance piece, he took on the persona of a Chinese tourist and dressed in a Mao suit. He photographed himself at a number of tourist sites around the world. The title of the piece comes from "SlutforArt," the name he wore on his ID bracelet. These works continue to investigate issues of being inside or outside cultural vantage points and questions of traveling across cultures.

2. Personal interview, April 1998.

Phillippa Wehle writes about Chong's more recent work:

Although the magic and wonder of those early pieces remains evident in Chong's work—his recent puppet works, *Kwaidan* and *Obon*, come very much out of his spiritual side—the bulk of his work changed radically in the 1990's. His work shifted from the otherworldly, magical atmosphere of earlier work to a more overtly political stand. "I switched to a less dreamable world, a world that is more recognized by more people. I've have always had a sense of social justice but I remained in the closet, and that sense would peek out in my work but it was not prominent." His 1999 piece about corporate America at the dawn of the 21st century, entitled *Truth and Beauty*, is a perfect example of the new Chong. Here everything is visible. There are no wings: people running the rigging or putting on the videotapes are on the stage. As he remarks, "the actors are not playing venality; they are venal and violent." (29)

Undesirable Elements

A bar in Amsterdam provides an exemplary site for the consideration of how a border zone is staged between hearing and deafness in a public space in Ping Chong's *Undesirable Elements*. In 1991, having retreated to a bar one evening with his cast of international workshop participants, Chong was struck by his immersion in the chaotic soundscape of the bar. Intrigued by how the deafening volley of languages flew around him, this event provided Chong with a catalytic moment for hearing difference. In *Undesirable Elements*, Chong creates a vehicle for those nearly unintelligible and different voices heard at the edge of sound. This example provides another point of reference in the discussion about how the third ear can mediate the intersection between the local and the distant.

The phenomenology of hearing in a public space involves both physical and cultural experiences. At the more obvious level, the actual spatiality of the bar stages various zones of near and far. In the zone of



Undesirable Elements

the “near” it appears to be, physically speaking, simple enough to hear. At a certain distance from the speaker or other sounds, hearing becomes more difficult, and it eventually accedes to nonhearing. Thus, there is a threshold beyond which hearing is unlikely, and distance to or from the speaker(s), as well as the actual overall noise level, determines what we are able to hear.

However, the sounds of many different voices and languages can complicate the process of hearing. As a result, through language(s) that can be understood and those that cannot, proximity and distance register at various levels of accessibility. In the collision of languages, physical proximity clashes with cultural distance, and sound itself can be either orienting or disorienting. In Amsterdam, the sound of voices penetrated the physical register of hearing, but they also created a liminal zone of hearing without a concomitant understanding. Nonunderstanding and understanding occurred simultaneously, and this state is the focus of Chong’s work in the many versions of *Undesirable Elements*.

Chong’s experience has several affinities with the reading Roland Barthes offers us in *The Pleasure of the Text* about his experience in another bar, this one in Tangiers, Morocco. Half dreaming, Barthes becomes aware of the sounds that surround him: “[A]ll the languages within earshot: music, conversations, the sounds of chairs, glasses, a whole stereophony” (49). Suddenly Barthes realizes that for him his “‘interior’ speech was very like the noise of the square” (49). In this moment, the distinctions between inner and outer collapsed, and Barthes explains that “I myself was a public square” (49).

The noise without, amplified and transposed, becomes the noise within. Barthes explains,

[T]hrough me passed words, syntagms, bits of formulae and *no sentence formed*, as though that were the law of such a language. This speech at once very cultural and very savage, was above all lexical, sporadic; it set up in me, through its apparent flow, a definitive discontinuity: this *non-sentence* was in no way something that could not have acceded to the sentence, that might have been

before the sentence; it was: what is eternally, splendidly *outside the sentence*. (49)

What Barthes hears creates a flow of meaning that is outside the structure of the sentence, that organizer of meaning to which we so typically pay obeisance. These sounds of speech-noise form a space that Barthes identifies as “beyond” the sentence, and this space is an arena where sound and sense do not merge, and in fact, sound, as it overrides intelligibility, becomes a free-floating signifier whose meaning is only in its own materiality.

For Barthes, this textual interplay creates a *mise-en-scène*, which he writes is “doubtless what Artaud recommended,” a physical language at that “borderline of the moment when the word has not yet been born” (240). What manifests is a form of “writing aloud” (66). It is “a text of pulsional incidents, the language lined with flesh, a text where we can hear the grain of the throat [. . .] a whole carnal stereophony: the articulation of the tongue, not the meaning of language” (66). This writing aloud materializes a language in space that follows its own sonorous trajectories. By its overriding emphasis on sound, Barthes’s physical theater of the text obviously differs from the writing in space suggested by the use of sign languages in the previous chapter. What links the two types of spatial articulation, however, is the use of gesture.

As Armstrong, Stokoe, and Wilcox have argued, sign language is viewed as visible gesture and speech as invisible gesture. But the wellspring of language into its spatiality is, of course, the body. Barthes conjectures that the “*grain* of the voice” with its “erotic mixture of timbre and language” can be the substance of “guiding one’s body,” and in this he suggests this *grain* is the *raison d’être* for the theater in the Far East (66). In simple terms, these dynamic moments that are articulated in sound can also be articulated kinesthetically through the heterogeneous rhythms of the body. Thus, the constant muttering at the edge of hearing seeks a body, the body of the other. Chong gives body to this muttering through the creation of *Undesirable Elements*.

In *Undesirable Elements*, Chong builds a performance structure that acts as a sonorous analogy to the bar scene. As Chong remarks, this

production is not about action, it is about voices that ricochet off of each other and create a “mosaic of voices.” In the performance the physical person is static, the action or motion is in the audio part, the voices. Chong employs several structures to achieve this effect.

First, the actors use a multilingual text. For example, in the original version presented in New York in 1994, the national origins of performers included Lebanon, Ukraine, Philippines, Nicaragua, Germany, Japan, and the United States. All of the performers experience themselves as caught between two worlds, and at various points the performers speak in their original languages. This pattern of using multiple languages, which Chong has implemented in previous works, creates a wash of linguistic sonority akin to the web of noise that formed in the Amsterdam bar.

Second, Chong uses echoes, which create a distortion in the acoustical field. Both the multilingualism and the echoing confound the process of hearing. Deaf to parts of what is being said, we become engaged in understanding through the third ear, and in particular, in hearing what has been concealed by speech. Chong has noted that the work does not follow a traditional psychological narrative and that there are no heroes in his pieces. As a result, the medium itself is the message (to use Marshall McLuhan’s phrase), and it becomes paramount that audience members attend to hearing through the intersectionality of the various elements of expression that are manifest in Chong’s work.

Chong also relies on the notion of random incidence to help construct his aesthetics. According to Kent Neely, this contingency is achieved through what he calls “Simultaneity of Consciousness,” “a consciousness which is observed within the theatrical performance and, simultaneously, experienced by those watching” (122). In other words, Chong manipulates theatrical elements that could give clearly objective or subjective cues to the meaning, and as a result, the line between subjectivity and objectivity are blurred. This blurring creates a liminal space that underscores the experiential dimension of the performance. Neely notes that, for Chong, significance is unstable. “The lack of significance, or the introduction of other levels of significance, produces thresholds from one idea to another and consequently there are gaps that are not completely reconciled” (129).

These gaps help engender the necessity of an active listening—literally and metaphorically—to the performance.

Undesirable Elements seeks a middle ground between the recreation of the perceptual event of hearing multiple languages at the bar and other levels of meaning. More specifically, Chong attempts to retell the event in such a way that the audience can grasp the meaning of the noises and the cultural silence that has been hidden behind, or within, the noise. To accomplish this, he articulates the mixing of the perceptual with the historical by including fragments of personal and cultural histories.

In fact, Chong describes *Undesirable Elements* as a “weaving together of lines within a particular time period. All these things are happening on a dimensional level rather than linearly.”³ The play mediates the exchange of sonic fragments and intelligible narratives not only between the two worlds of each of the performers but also in the multicultural world created on stage. In his multicultural soundscape, Chong, like Barthes, attends to the sound of the voice, but he also turns to the silences of the voice—the lost personal and cultural narratives.

The New York production of *Undesirable Elements* originated for a gallery called Artists’ Space, which wanted to include performance events, and the installation initially bore the title “A Facility for the Channeling and Containment of Undesirable Elements.” The title operated as a metaphor, leaving the potential focus of the project on autobiography completely ambiguous. The installation in the gallery space consisted of a series of walkways across the space, and the floor was covered in three inches of rock salt. In different locations around the room were pools of various colors of liquid that refracted light. Because of the specificity of the lighting, the light appeared to merge into the water.

There was also a continuous industrial hum, and the metal ramp of the walkway was amplified, so that people’s footsteps could be heard. The overall atmosphere resonated as that of an industrial containment facility set up to leach the undesirable elements out, even though what exactly

3. Personal interview, April 1998.

the undesirable elements were never explicitly defined. Here, as in the other performances, the performers were arranged throughout the space so that voices sounded from different directions.

There are now several versions of *Undesirable Elements*, and also numerous places where, as a work designed to deal with community and social awareness, it has been performed. These places include, but are not limited to, the main stage, a beauty parlor, a senior citizens' center, corporate diversity programs, regional theaters, and even as an installation without performers in Venice. The performers usually sit in a half-circle in chairs or on the floor with their individual microphones and lights. The floor is usually covered with rock salt or white sand, and a black draping covers the back wall. Often there is a circular screen onto which maps of the represented countries, in visual outline and in equal size, are projected.

In the performances, the sonic aspects reverberate as a series of gestures through the performance area; there is actually little visual gesturing or movement except for cultural gestures that go with the actual speaking. The script is in front of the performer, further creating a reliance on speaking rather than on performing, so that the production looks like a staged reading. Chong has remarked that in most cases the participants in the production are not professional performers, and it is enough to have them share their experiences. Both Chong and Bruce Allardice, Chong's producing manager, have commented that the goal of the project is for both the performers themselves and the audience to leave the performance with a changed focus and awareness of others.

In each of the versions of *Undesirable Elements*, the rehearsal structure that Chong uses is roughly the same. Through a series of improvisational retellings and movement experiences, Chong and the performers explore personal and historical stories from the various individuals' pasts. These retellings are efforts to retrieve personal material from the archives of one's own unconscious as well as from the regions of one's familial and cultural history. Chong is particularly interested in recovering the memories from the spaces of silence—what has not been spoken about in a long time or even what has been relegated to the arena of the “not to be spoken of”—in the individual's personal and cultural history.

Each version of *Undesirable Elements* contains a disjunctive series of spoken and sung sections in which the performers speak as themselves or as someone else in the group. The various cuts include recapitulations of the history of the individuals' names, lineage, family stories, and songs. Chong highlights the way in which the voice is the potential introduction of difference. These various voices create the actual sound of difference and a moment of disequilibrium. The first section unfolds, for example, by delaying information:

Cochise Tonsh pah.
Tania Yala Balashna.
Hiromi Sa, hajime masho.
Trinket Simulan natin.
Anna Lasst uns anfangen.
Olga Pochynaymo.
Eva Comencemos de una vez.
Angel Let's get started.

Voice, as it departs from the body, retains the trace of its material status, striking at the sensory registers of the audience. But, as we realize at the end of this brief section, these performers have echoed each other, in their own idioms.

As always, echo, in this context, is not exact repetition but repetition with a difference. The logic of the various vocalizations is not explained; they are made, and the audience is offered each with equal weight. The *audibility* of these phrases does not, obviously, ensure *intelligibility* in the usual linguistic sense. As we proceed, we can impose our own interpretation on what we hear, or, perhaps even better, learn to delay our need for a translation or explanation.

A good deal of the performance of *Undesirable Elements* involves a pastiche of intersecting histories. The presentations tend to cluster around shared time periods, and this pattern enables us to hear disparate histories, as it were, in a glimpse. Cochise is Native American, and Trinket, Filipino, and both groups have historical trajectories that involve colonial invasion by the Spanish.

Cochise 1541(1541) The Chickasaw **The Cebuanos**
 Trinket preserve tribal honor **preserve tribal honor** by
 attacking the Spaniards **by attacking the**
Spaniards and routing them completely
and routing them completely. They do not see
 another European **They don't see another European**
 for 150 years **for 40 years**-but the islands have
 been claimed by Philip of Spain.

Two voices tell a similar, but nonetheless different, story. This section depicts interlocking moments of history, and it is presented as a bit of a puzzle. Although these stories are a part of the cultural/political history of each individual, telling these stories, even in the alternating voices, reinforces the sense in which the moments are shared. It is as if history is an interminable, infinitely sounding of the voice in its multiplicity.

Songs are also included in their original languages, and they reiterate the aspect of language as “music of body and a people” (Trinh 206). Songs intensify the experience of the sound of the voice—its *grain*, as Barthes describes it—and this is a vital part of what Chong creates in the staging of his work. When we hear the song of another culture, although we can't literally understand it, we can nonetheless feel it. These songs sound out a “tradition of the body, which is heard but not seen” (Certeau, *PEL* 163), and puts in motion a nostalgia that anticipates its own healing.

Tania Haseesann shu helween
 Aam biduru haula imun mabsuteen.
 Shirbu mai u aalu khai

Trinket Kalisud ang binayaan
 adlaw gabi ay ang ginatangisan
 ahay indai, ya walay sinta palaran

Hiromi To-ryanse, to-ryanse
 Kokowa dokono hosmichija
 Tenjin sama no hosomichija

Anna Schlaf, Kindlein, schlaf
der Vater hut'die Schaf,
die Mutter schuttelt Baumenlein

Eva Neron, neron, neron
de donde viene tanta gente
Neron, neron, neron.

Cochise (. . .)

Olga Idy, idy, doschyku
Zvariu tobi borshchyky
V polyvianim horshchky

Angel Praise God from whom all blessings flow
Praise him all creatures below,
Praise him above, ye Heavenly Hosts[.]

According to Barthes, some music and the language of cinema, “as it capture[s] the sound of speech,” bring us much closer to allowing us to hear

in their materiality, their sensuality, the breath, the gutturals, the fleshiness of the lips, a whole presence of the human muzzle [. . .] to succeed in throwing, so to speak, the anonymous body of the actor into my ear: it granulates, it crackles, it caresses, it grates, it comes: that is bliss. (67)

As we hear the various songs in different languages, the writing aloud forms itself as it is received or heard. Sound can be made in the hearing of it, and it represents a collapse of boundary between sender and receiver. Michel de Certeau addresses the “audible but faraway” (159) and writes that “these sounds waiting for a language, seem to certify, by a ‘disorder’ secretly referred to an order, that there is something else, something other” (163–64).

Undesirable Elements straddles an uncanny space of sounding(s) between past and present. The time frame is ambiguous, unclear. This uncertain, even ungraspable, disposition creates an opening for the recuperation of

repressed or forgotten individual and cultural sensory memory. Fragments of the past are pulled through the sieve of personal and cultural memory and are re-presented—the stories of the various individuals in diaspora, the historical fragments, the songs, and the stories about how names change as people travel to new places.

But we need to remember that understanding—hearing the other—comes through writing aloud, or its analogies, transfixing and attaining the space “beyond the sentence.” It is not enough to simply translate across cultures; this maneuver will not rectify a sociopolitical failure to deal with difference. Barthes remarks that

this body of bliss is also *my historical subject*; for it is at the conclusion of a very complex process of biographical, historical, sociological, neurotic elements (education, social class, childhood configuration, etc.) that I control the contradictory interplay of (cultural) pleasure and (noncultural) bliss, and that I write myself as a subject as present out of place, arriving too soon or too late (this *too* designating neither regret, fault, not bad luck, but merely calling for *non-site*): anachronic subject, adrift. (62)

The “sensory memory in exile” of both Barthes’s example and Chong’s *Undesirable Elements* acknowledges the way in which many people are displaced from an “original” home, ethnicity, and cultural memory. This evocation charts the minutiae of cross-cultural exchange, marked by memories that no longer have a home (and may not have had for several generations) and that are “free-floating” mixes of the historical and personal. The private and public become mutable domains.

Retrieving these moments from the field of inattention and bringing them into the public space helps put a new exchange in motion. These pieces of history are given a human face, made local through the performance. When asked what he wants people to hear in *Undesirable Elements*, Chong explained that he hopes for the audience to realize, in quite a new way, their relationship to one another, even if it was only for the short time of the performance.

The project, of course, also has an effect on the eight performers who come together to make the work. They are typically people who would not normally have met each other because of class, ethnic insularity, or age. In case of the project, the performers have an opportunity to learn about each other, as Chong puts it, “humanizing the other.” (Chong mentioned, for example, that the cast always cooks together at least once.) In putting the work together the performers experience the phenomenon of language, its multiplicity of sounds, and also the effect of history on individual lives.

Through Chong’s sequencing of sections, sounds, and echoes, he achieves a rhythmization of the material and its performance, and it provokes the possibility of a new rhythm that can surpass the historical specificity (or location) of any single reference. Chong’s model is not only a variation on Barthes’s story about the bar in Tangiers; it is also an answer to Homi Bhabha’s questions about social transformation.

In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha describes *Nachträglichkeit*, Freud’s term for deferred action. In this case retrieval from the unconscious—whether cultural or personal—is not simple repetition but has the potential to remake the moment. According to Bhabha’s use of the term,

The present of the world that appears through the breakdown of temporality, signifies a historical *immediacy*, familiar to the psychoanalytic term *Nachträglichkeit* (deferred action): “a transferential function, whereby the past dissolves into the present, so the future becomes (once again) an *open* question, instead of being specified by the fixity of the past”. The iterative time of the future *as a becoming “once again open”*, make available to marginalized or minority identities a mode of performative agency. (219)

This is one means of explaining the power of *Undesirable Elements*. Associations and possibilities leap from one sonic section to another. Nonetheless, in an effort to respect the individual aspect of temporal experience, Chong attempts to strike a balance between cultural and personal histories. History, finally, is both cultural and personal, conveyed through

the various bodies of remembrance. The piece closes with the performers standing up and announcing their name, where they were born, the time, and what type of weather conditions were present at birth.

In this form, understanding floats between the moments where things make syntactic sense, where we recognize and understand what is being said, the sensuality of the sound of the voices, and an indeterminable silence. These spoken voices, which tell stories and fragments regarding the various histories, lace together to create a new space. It is an auditory space that exceeds the particular space and time of the performance. The sounding activated in *Undesirable Elements*, as both Barthes and Chong remind us, involves an inner, individual listening as well as a cultural listening that reverberates across the social imaginary of the postmodern/postcolonial spaces.

Ping Chong's *East/West Quartet*

In Chong's *East/West Quartet*, his account of cultural collisions that have grown out of the history of colonialism, which consisted of four independent performance pieces, several striking moments occur in which hearing the multiple "voices" of the narratives activates the uncanny space of the third ear. In the progression from "Deshima" to "Chinoiserie"—the first two performances—we hear the voice of the other, to which we have been historically and culturally deaf, through the third ear and its corollary, the listening body. In the third section, "After Sorrow," an electronic recording transmits the voice of the other from the past so that we can hear it in the present. In "Pojagi," the fourth performance, three performers act as intermediaries in the partial retelling of the history through speaking, gesture, and image. In all four cases, to listen to that which we cannot literally hear requires an auxiliary, or third, ear.

"Deshima" illuminates the interconnection of voices, hearing, and spatiality, providing another instance for exploring the complexities of hearing at both the perceptual as well as the sociocultural level. "Deshima" was the name for a compound built off the coast of Nagasaki as a living space for Dutch foreigners, a place where they could be retained



“Pojagi” from *East/West Quartet*

without contaminating the native Japanese populace. As the trilogy progresses other parallels in the United States unfold, ranging from the detention of the Japanese during World War II and the treatment of the Chinese railroad workers during the 1800s to everyday stories about racism at elementary schools and restaurants. These examples outline the efforts of certain groups to impose a physical, and subsequently psychic, regulatory bounding of people considered foreign. The polyphony of voices from the cultural imaginary that Chong presents has become so charged that it crosses the boundaries of cultural distance and history into the present.

It is not, however, a matter of simply adding these emerging accounts to an already existing body of stories. Nor will it suffice that the accounts, as Certeau describes them, “be transformed into texts in conformity with the Western desire to read its products” (*PEL* 159). These cultural tendencies to dismiss the stories of others by trying to minimize or contain them reflect a failure to hear beyond the boundaries of what one considers familiar. This sociocultural tendency to circumscribe an unknown within the known parallels the variations on the “Deshima” patterns Chong addresses in his quartet. Given these observations, what are our responsibilities as we “listen”? What, then, do we hear when we hear the voice of the other? Given such restrictions, can we hear another? Although the technologies of power obfuscate our ability to hear, Certeau remarks that

[p]erhaps at the extreme limit of these tireless inscriptions [or social symbolic codes], or perforating them with lapses, there remains only the cry: it escapes, it escapes them. From the first to the last cry, something else breaks out with them, the body’s difference. (147–48)

The activation of the third ear provides us with a modality for hearing the difference—the cry as well as the body—and for resisting what Certeau calls, succinctly, the “machinery of representation” (147).

Chong uses texts, singing, music, and sound effects so that he can strategically place the silences; silence becomes a disruption in the fabric of

sound. The first section of “Deshima” covers the political and commercial exchange between the Dutch and Japan in 1598, the second focuses on the conversion of the Japanese by the Portuguese Jesuits, and the third section depicts a 1941 radio broadcast of the frenetic dance hour of the jitterbug. In each of the sections, there is lengthy text, and the second two sections add singing and music.

The first example that invokes the space of the third ear occurs in “Deshima” at the end of the long section that focuses on the release of the Japanese from the internment camps, and it is transmogrified through the use of a “soundless music box.” Chong uses an overlay of songs, historical facts, and tapes of General MacArthur and the Japanese surrender to underscore the context of the Japanese detainees’ release and subsequent welcome home on V-J Day. In a long modern dance scene the various individuals dance with their suitcases. These dancers are also silent, but their bodies speak of their longing and their need to reclaim their personal space through the interaction with their personal belongings. There is a contrast between the sound and soundlessness of the scene that is answered by a powerful moment of complete silence.

When one last woman, who has been looking through her belongings, picks up her music box and opens it, this physical silence is amplified. She leans her head forward as if she hears the music, but there is no sound coming from the box. The woman then takes a long time to leave the stage as she crosses from downstage left to upstage right. She seems suspended, as she listens to the soundless music, along the long diagonal between where she has come from and where she is going. The question emerges whether this passage is a *release* from the painful experience of internment or an *anticipation* of the future. Because of this uncertainty, this scene operates simultaneously in different registers.

There are several reasons that this section is particularly useful to the larger discussion about the third ear. First, the scene draws our attention to the listening of something that, ostensibly, cannot be heard, and the listening is evoked not through sound but through its corollary, the *image* of listening. In this almost private moment, as it is transfixed between hearing and seeing, the first impression is that the woman hears something

that we, the audience, cannot. Because it is soundless to us, we must imagine what it can be. Silence is a much more ambiguous medium than sound and the audience has to work harder to connect with the performers and make meaning out of the experience of silence. Rather than the possibility of conceptual clarity of the sounding language bound by referentiality, there is, instead, the open question of possibility posed by silence. What will come? What will emerge?

Perhaps the woman listens to music, her memory of music, or she struggles, now deafened, to hear the music of her memories through the silence. Music, as it is associated with memory and with the past, provides reassurance, repeatability of the past, and through the use of silence, we recognize that this reassurance is missing. However, this space is more than a form of nostalgia; it also creates a space of desire, but one whose object cannot be readily identified. What desire wells up out of soundlessness, out of the silence? Do we grasp the nature of her desire, what she says in the silence, or does this “gap in the sound wall” make us willful, superimposing our desire on this silence? The silence acts like a vortex within or “to” the disruption of meaning.

Although one part of the discussion does lie with the actual image of the woman listening to the soundless box itself (which for her is or is not soundless), the image is also embedded within the larger “image” of the release from the internment camp. The woman, as she departs from the enclosure of the camp, is now freed and trails across the stage, like the music that we cannot hear trailing from the box she holds in her hand. The physical trail of silence reiterates the sonic trail of silence, questioning the location of the “voice of the other.” This scene of double “soundlessness” provides an example, then, of the conjunction of the personal and the political experiences.

Near the end of “Deshima,” Chong deconstructs the performance. The performers cross back and forth over the stage—clearing it, calling each other by their “real” names, and, in various forms of undress, attempting to restore their “real” identity. At the very end the performers build a dream scene, Van Gogh’s *Crows in the Field*. Through the use of this image within the image of the performance, we are reminded one last time of the silences of another outsider, van Gogh, who had only one ear

at the end of his life (the other of which he himself had cut off) and who spoke through his paintings. We are left, finally, with questions about the relationship of art, history, and silence. Through the silences we are spoken to, uncannily, and that which has been *hidden* becomes *visible*. We move a little closer to recovering the marginalized voices and recognizing a more inclusive humanity.

“Chinoiserie,” the second part of the trilogy, is Chong’s autobiographical account of growing up Chinese American. In this performance, Chong uses the central motif of baseball to depict the interest in and failures of American life. The stage itself is structured to reflect and contain the multiple splits among voice, text, song, movement, and music. Chong delivers most of his commentary from a position downstage right, marked off by a lighted podium and his partially visible manuscript. The other four performers are in the upstage right with their own lecterns, lamps, and scripts.

At the end of “Chinoiserie,” in the only moment in which Chong crosses from the sideline space he has occupied to center stage, he uses sign language to say, “You believe in the goodness of mankind.” When he signs a second time, a slide appears, which also states, “You believe in the goodness of mankind.” Chong communicates silently, but visually, through the use of sign and slide. Nevertheless, the closing scene is marked by ambiguity. The shift to visual-spatial perception through the use of sign language ruptures our expected reliance on speech as explanation. It propels us into the region where we, as audience members, do not hear, and we are momentarily deafened. Not only is there the surprise of no sound but there is also the concomitant speechlessness, or nonuse of the (sound-based) voice. It appears that the voice does not adequately serve what Chong wants to say because language presents itself from another part of the body, the hands.

The text echoes his own signing, and at the same time these “lines” also refer to the opening story of “Chinoiserie,” where Chong recounts an encounter he had with a friend while they were eating dinner at a Chinese restaurant. This friend had wanted to know why the Chinese did not use forks yet. Chong, who wanted to remain a “good” Chinese, managed

to keep a straight face and did not, he recounts, “murder” her. He had received, a few minutes later, the message “You believe in the goodness of mankind” from a fortune cookie. At the very end of this section the lights fade out as Chong begins to sign the statement a third time.

In this moment Chong aligns himself with Deaf politics, just as elsewhere he works with ethnic politics. Although this was a small moment, in this example, the politics of deafness and race merge in it. Bauman writes that

deafness does more than disrupt the system of “hearing-oneself-speak”; it creates an embodied linguistic system which, unlike speech, is not fully present to itself. Signers, unless gazing in the mirror, do not fully see themselves signify. While they may see their hands, they cannot see their own face perform much of Sign’s grammatical nuances. The eye, unlike the ear in the system of “hearing-oneself-speak,” can only partially “see-oneself-sign.” There is always a trace of non-presence in the system of signing. (“DD” 3)

Chong signals the nonpresence of the other, as well as, perhaps, his own nonpresence to himself. However, this moment also acts as a mirror to the audience, and it acknowledges the ambiguous lack of awareness embedded in the statement, “You believe in the goodness of mankind.” Chong also signals the complex dialectic of hearing/nonhearing that relies on being seen by the other. In an instance of inversion, where the outsider looks back in through signing, we are confronted with a space of doubled distance: “The Deaf are, in a sense, racialized through their use of sign language as a system of communication. They are seen as outside citizenry created by a community of language users, and therefore ghettoized as outsiders” (Davis *EN* 78). Chong sends back the message he received vis-à-vis the fortune cookie using another visual-spatial medium to do so. In the sense that fortune cookies are a created Chinese fiction, so he creates a fiction.

Chong asks us to confront the silences of the body and image to hear what we cannot, in fact, literally hear, but only surmise. For Chong, the

text is the handmaiden of these silences, a progression that he takes us through with painstaking care from the beginning of this section to its end. He complicates these moments with successive layers of silence, speech, text, image, and the moving body and insists on the emergent nature of personal and cultural restitution.

“After Sorrow” deals with the aftermath of the Vietnam War from a Southeast Asian perspective. This piece begins in China and gives voice to a young Chinese bride at the turn of the century. It also includes the personal stories of Muna Tseng, Chong’s collaborator on the project and the only solo live performer, and Chong himself as immigrants and their relationships to their deceased brothers. The work ends with the story of a Vietnamese woman who speaks about the son she lost in the Vietnam War. “After Sorrow” revolves around the intersection of Chinese history, Vietnamese history, and the personal histories of the two key performers, Ping Chong and Muna Tseng. We never see Chong on stage, but we do hear him speak a number of times.

The self and other. Difference and its many variations. In the first section, “Deshima,” we address the splits between the foreign and the at-home spheres at the political and historical level. In “Chinoiserie” the emphasis is on the body, gesture, and the voice in the social context. The last section brings us to a crucial place—that of communication in the personal and familial realms.

In a sense Chong answers the question he poses when he says:

She is here this very evening
 Before your very eyes, dancing.
 He is here too as an after glow,
 A digital hop, skip, and jump,
 A voice in a room tapping
 Against the thin membrane of
 Your collective eardrum
 Rippling across the room
 As undulating as sound waves,
 Dancing with her dancing

As a voice would and might
And is doing here and now.
He is a dancing voice against
Her dancing body together and apart
And this very moment,
This exact moment,
Will never be the same again.
It is that fragile.

In the most immediate sense this section seems to describe quite literally what is going on. Tseng is dancing in front of us, and occasionally she speaks as we witness. Chong, however, has recorded his voice on tape; we hear what he has to say, but we do not see him at all. His own voice has become a deferred presence.

In this case, the body and voice of the other are overlaid, appearing to be together. But they are also apart; the disjunction is created by the use of mechanical devices. In this manner, sound travels across time and space as a “dancing voice.” However, because much of this piece is about the “dancing voices” from the past, it becomes uncertain how much of this section is not only literal but also metaphorical. We hear about a number of individuals from the past, as the voices of Tseng, live, or Chong, tape-recorded, overlay the movement and visual sequences projected on the scrim.

Voice, in this section, is an “afterglow,” which we hear as it strikes across our “collective eardrum.” What is this moment that exceeds the hearing of the individual and allows the personal and immediate to merge with the distant? Distant as in far away, distant as in past? The possibilities increase for us through the use of technology. There is a circuitry that passes between individuals and groups. The issue of “sensory recovery” is tinged with a haunting of the past and fragmented memories. This section is sensory recovery in that it brings the various people back for us to hear once again. We hear their voices through the voices of Tseng and Chong, but it is haunting because it is always partial, never complete.

“Pojagi,” the fourth section, retells the history of Korea and its repeated colonization from different perspectives; three performers act as

intermediaries for a number of voices and perspectives. The organizing image for the performance is a table, which is illuminated and can hold cards along the side with words printed on them. The use of storytelling without the development of specific characters, and the use of the table as a display of important fragments, helps to decenter the storytelling from any master narrative or singular narrator. It also tends to mythologize the work as it suggests and evokes, without clearly locating, the fragments that the performers share with the audience. Much of the telling is punctuated by the use of single gestures that restate an important idea or word that has been mentioned. The gestures also carry what cannot be said through the text. Some of these words are further reiterated by the periodic insertion of printed words into a lighted showcase that runs around the rim of the table. Because of the fragmented storytelling and the punctuation of meaning through the images of the words and the use of the gesture, the performance had an overall feeling of incompleteness, of being a code we cannot quite decipher. This use of multivocality creates a hybrid language scene, one that is only partially translatable.

The performance begins with a dance in which the performers (whose backs are to the audience) are swinging banners that create the impression of waves; then, we hear the story of a shipwreck of sailors, presumably European, who end up on the shores of Korea. They do not really know where they are or who they have encountered. In response, the creation mythology of Korea is told in both Korean and English while the third performer echoes the story as it is told in English. Although these scenes are invoked but not explained, we get a sense of the interruption of time in the form of the sailors next to the simultaneous invocation of timelessness and the cultural location through the telling of the story. Next there is the process of deciphering who the Koreans are by studying their physiognomy and comparing them to other races that the sailors have encountered.

The piece continues to touch on the history of Japanese invasions; Korea was most recently annexed to Japan from 1910 to 1945. After this point, narratives include the personal story of a Korean man forced to work in Hiroshima during the war. Brutally burned by the bomb, he remained sick and disabled for the rest of his life and died in 1973 from

complications of these injuries. His disabled son, unable to bear living alone, went insane a year later. Other stories include the effects of Korea's demilitarized zone on families and the division of Korea into two parts. Halfway through the performance there is a "movement summary," which, at first glance, appears to be a stylized use of ASL that brings together all of the single signs used in the first half of the show. In the summary, meaning is accumulated through gesture/sign rather than through the spoken word; it recapitulates what has already been said in the first half of the show and creates a transition point. Although the work borrows from ASL, the use of sign is problematic because its readability relies on a simultaneous alignment with deafness and a misreading of deafness.

Chong has created and borrowed an embedded, coded system within the performance work. An audience member has to have strong recall and recognition of the signs as they are performed singly throughout the first half of the performance. The title of the section, "Pojagi", which means wrapping cloth, also is an apt metaphor for what Chong does with his use of the signs. Spoken text, which is already partial, acts as a wrapping cloth around the gestures, which are also, as we find out, partially indecipherable as well. The movement summary acts as a ritual of unwrapping of the embedded code. This section is performed in silence, although, if attentive, we might hear through the multiple renderings of deafness—the shift in sensory frames from sound to sight, the visual-spatial lexicon of a language accessible to those can read it, the partial alignment with Deaf politics, and the inaccessibility of a visual-spatial lexicon to the hearing, deaf, and hard of hearing audience members because the re-presentation of the signs is out of order, partial, and at times a distorted rendering of the original sign. Chong's use of ASL is compelling in its exploration of the ways in which spoken language and the world of hearing all too often hide that which we cannot hear or, at times, refuse to listen to.

However, although the stylization of the signs fits with the general texture of the work, I am troubled by his cultural borrowing in this particular case. Defamiliarizing the signs to create a system of refractions of meanings does not finally read as deaf; he seems at one level to be

borrowing from the Deaf culture to make his own message. In this failed encounter across spaces of alterity—even if the deaf alterity is even more partial than all the other voices included in the work—there is far less hope invoked than at the end of “After Sorrow.”

From these mute spaces of cultural imaginary in each of the four sections, “Deshima,” “Chinoiserie,” “After Sorrow,” and “Pojagi,” history is reconfigured as a complex intersection of the political, social, and personal. Chong attempts through his many stagings of the multiply fragmented body of history to render history for the men and women whose voices are those previously lost in the silent archives of nonnormative history.

Other Theaters of the Third Ear

Intercultural spectatorship prepares one to see what cannot be understood through words. Through the smallest of details, one can “listen” to how the other parts of the body can “speak.” This peculiarly synaestheliac approach to performances in other cultures is actually a means of compensating for the inadequacies of one’s comprehension.

Rustom Bharucha, The Politics of Cultural Practice

There are, of course, many other theaters of the third ear that create a conduit for what Rustom Bharucha calls “intercultural spectatorship.” On one of my many trips to Atlanta to visit my parents during my late twenties, my father, who was Punjabi, took to telling me stories about his childhood. He recalled with great fondness an uncle who was quite a storyteller, the early family place, his mother’s admonitions about eating almonds before breakfast, and on a more anguished note, the family story about the partition in 1947. Standing there in the middle of a living room with a mix of southern decor and Indian furniture in their house nestled in a suburban neighborhood, my father recast his life imaginatively.

That same morning my father showed me his almost-full jar of almonds and offered me a handful. When I took the almonds and ate them,

I began to redraw my own lines of connection with my past. I could, in my mind's eye, see my gnarled grandmother squatting in the kitchen, her elbows covered with flour, beckoning to me. In the *Practice of Everyday Life*, Certeau notes the power of story to transform when he reminds us “maps cut up, and stories cut across” (129). As my father's stories cut across the divisive lines of geography, the exchange of stories began to cross what Meena Alexander, in the *Shock of Arrival*, has called, the “cultural faultlines” created by the disjunctions among the past, present, and future. In the many uses of sound, silence, and the moving body, theater practitioners attempt to speak what has not yet been spoken. In their works, they must sift through various cultural histories that join in recuperative ways with personal histories. In this manner, cultural loss is finally met with personal loss, and “after sorrow” there is still the nostalgia for the *domus*, the “inscription of the awakening” (Lyotard 198). In this moment of empathic exchange and recognition, there is hope for communication, new narratives, and the transformation of both the sounded and the silent voice.

This approach to cross-cultural exchange can also be found in much of the work of Brazilian director Augusto Boal, particularly in his use of “image theater.” Boal has developed a community-based performance methodology that has been used by a variety of communities to tell their stories and to rehearse alternate solutions to their most troubling and pressing issues. Image theater is particularly relevant because it is a method Boal developed so that he could work with people from different language backgrounds. The technique does not rely on being able to contextualize what's going on in terms of spoken language; it is a nonverbal and visual-spatial technique. This approach is first explored in a workshop setting and then is often, over time, used to create performance works that are then shared with public audiences.

In this approach the participants may create an image for oppression and its opposite, and then work on the transition from one condition to the other. They may sculpt images of oppression on several other participants. These images speak to the person who has created them, and they speak to members of the workshop. Sometimes the images are very

clear; there is no mistaking the meaning and intention. Other times they are approximations of what is intended, but by crystallizing the images in three dimensions as part of an ongoing process, “thinking through doing” occurs. These images are sensory compressions, hieroglyphic compilations of the verbal and visual indicators, and they can trigger associations of sound and movement. Through this process of forming and exchange, the center can move; new narratives emerge in this space for the voices of alterity.

Journey to the West, a 2002 performance by Tara Arts, a South Asian theater company based in London, provides a particularly powerful example of the question of speaking and hearing across differences. In a trilogy based on a collection of oral histories, Tara Arts reinserts the particulars of the South Asian diaspora in relation to British history back into the contemporary cultural imagination.

Tara Arts formed in 1976 in response to the murder of a young South Asian boy. Jatinder Verma, the founding and continuing director, joined with interested community members to craft a South Asian theater that could offer an alternative community format for the South Asian presence in England. Three primary goals drive the theater company: to tell the stories of the South Asian community in Britain, to develop a South Asian aesthetic, and to train South Asian professionals.

Tara’s *Journey to the West* deals with issues of South Asian cultural identity that result from living outside one’s country of origin. It chronicles three significant historical moments in the often conflicting relationship between Asian Indians and the British: (1) in 1901 when thirty-two thousand East Indians were sent as indentured servants to East Africa to build the railroad for the British, (2) in 1968 when eighty thousand Asian Indian Kenyans were forced to leave Kenya and flee to Britain (a moment reflected in the opening of the movie *Mississippi Masala*), and (3) in 2002 when the hybrid cultural scene in Britain has emerged as a result of these and other migrations. These oral history performances act to rewire the network between historical and contemporary, personal and social, private and public experiences, by bringing what has been excluded from purview into the public view through performance.

Journey to the West was developed in three stages during a period of five years. First, three generations of Indians in Britain were interviewed for their migration stories. In response to each set of stories, a preliminary version of the respective section of the trilogy was developed, produced, and shown in the community from which the original story or stories were drawn. After gathering more feedback, the versions shown this year were developed for a main stage tour, an endeavor designed to mark Tara's twenty-fifth anniversary year.

The production style itself aimed to invoke multiple perspectives, the sense of things constantly shifting—as images and scenes unfolded one after another, sometimes emerging from unexpected directions like a series of cinematic cuts. There are a number of specific things worth noting about the production style. Several ropes hang from the length of the stage; as the piece progresses, the ropes are used in numerous ways as they are climbed, twisted, and manipulated to provide the technical means for creating a variety of images. The ropes resonate as the “threads of memory” that help mark and (re)create the past as the performers move through each section. As the performers occasionally scaled the heights, they also marked the sense of “danger” involved in sharing these stories and served to charge the images with an aura of hypertension and fear.

In the final section, Verma explores what he has called “asylum,” the current scene for South Asians in Britain. This section is charged with the optimism of “arrival,” but this arrival is not without ambiguity and ambivalence. In this scene, a type of nomadic citizenship is enacted through the lens of movement. First the performers are in a “car” traversing the English countryside and next at a club dancing. May Joseph notes:

The political, legal, economic and cultural nomad has been forced to perform citizenship across as well as within national boundaries, a practice here referred to as nomadic citizenship. [. . .] Nomadic citizenship fractures coherent categories of belonging, offering instead the incomplete, ambivalent, and uneasy spaces of everyday life through which migrant communities must forge affiliations with majority constituencies. (17)

Later in this section, there is a variation on the mummer's play, a festive ritual still enacted in some English villages to perform loyalty and British identity or belonging, where Kam is challenged to fight Saladin, the king of Egypt, for Richard the Lionhearted. The plays were historically performed as mime-and-mask pieces; we see then how British lore is enacted on the silent and moving body. Kam is told

A test you must pass, a ritual undergo
Don the mantle of Richard the Lionheart,
And pass into citizenship pure.

The participation of a South Asian in a piece of British lore evokes an ironic notion of English belonging as the Black Briton (all British who are not white are identified as black) fights this black-a-moor, Saladin. This "mythic test" that works retroactively to stage citizenship pales in light of current discussions in England about enacting citizenship tests. Certain officials hope these will be similar in style to the citizenship tests used in the United States. Furthermore, there are questions about the meaning of citizenship in a country where the denizens have historically been subjects of the queen. The evolving "British" culture relies very much on its appropriations of Indian culture and life; indeed, the histories and cultures are inextricably mixed.

The vehicle of performance provides a powerful means for understanding the many layers of cross-cultural exchange, especially when the constituency served has historically had a limited voice in local and political decisions. At stake is a new type of intercultural spectatorship where we learn to listen with our bodies as well as our ears and eyes, where we learn to listen, for example, to Kam's "dancing feet."

The map that starts in the palm of my hand as I take those almonds from my father becomes the story that charts the lines that connect two kitchen floors across three continents. In *Journey to the West*, Verma closes the last section of the trilogy with an invocation of the power of intersection of body and map:

Kam intones: Roho tabu [. . .] I will make this England our England, full of all your long journey west. And that journey will be the wind under my wings, will be the taste under my tongue, will be the touch of my hand!

The recuperation of these memories, these oral histories, marks the map. Body, map, and story join together, marking multiple histories.

What has been hidden and then brought to light must not only be “seen” but also heard through the third ear. By opening up the past so that it can be heard anew, we must enter a participatory space where judgment and expectations are released. The voice of the other always resides in the interminable spaces of silence. These multiple thresholds of silence must continue to unfold, becoming intelligible through sound or image staged in passing through the many aporias of language and pictoriality to generate the necessary chance of communication.

Chapter 6

Mixing Deafness and Ethnicity: Gesture and Silence

An examination of the use of gesture in two cross-cultural performance forms—ASL and *mudras* in Bharata Natyam, a classical Asian Indian dance—opens up a new understanding of the relationship among sound, silence, the moving body, and identity. In Ragamala's 2001 production of *Transposed Heads*, Raneer Ramaswamy, a Bharata Natyam dancer, and Nicole Zapko, a deaf actress, perform the Indian classical story of Sita and her two lovers, Shridaman and Nanda. An intercultural work, it melds Bharata Natyam dance technique with its use of *mudras*, or hand gestures, and ASL signing. Two readers, Zarawaar Mistry and Carolyn Holbrook, tell the story from the side through speaking, while Zapko and Ramaswamy tell the story through their use of acting, dance, and gesture.¹

In the central episode of the story, the goddess Kali agrees to bring the two men, who have sacrificed themselves for each other, back to life, but by accident Sita places the wrong heads on each body. The motif of the transposed heads acts as way of contesting identity because it becomes unclear who “owns” which body and who is speaking for whom. Additionally, as a staging practice, this motif resonates metaphorically as an icon for how the two performers exemplify two ways of speaking. The transposition of meaning across gestural systems heightens the sense of how the body speaks through the use of visual-spatial means as it creates a hybrid space of polyvocality.

1. Grace Hamilton, a deaf actress, and Joyce Paul, a Bharata Natyam dancer, have been very helpful in giving additional feedback on this chapter.

In this version of a theater of the third ear, the aestheticized use of the gesture provides a method of “speaking through action.” Each codified gestural system—presented in conjunction with the use of two speaking voices—creates, at times, a heightened understanding through the simultaneity of speaking voice and gesture, and, at others, the use of gesturing shifts attention away from the speech to a language of space and shape. As a consequence, this approach, which is a complex layering of three different semiotic systems, highlights ways in which the human body can make manifest a system of meaning through the use of space. Rather than garner understanding of the story primarily through hearing, multiple channels for speaking through the sounding voice and the gesturing body are provided.

Because the use of gesture, dance, and acting are in the foreground, understanding evolves through a type of body-to-body listening. We “hear” gesture articulated through the body of the performer and transmitted to the body of the audience. It is not always the case that we understand exactly what has been communicated, but nevertheless, because of the mixed performance media, the very notion of hearing becomes enriched. This work bridges both language and cultural systems to create an aesthetic space of exchange that indexes both deaf and ethnic, here South Asian, identity.

Eugenio Barba’s *Anthropology of Performance*—which focuses on an analysis of the theatrical, dance, and movement systems of Asian theater—provides a comparative context for understanding the intersection of language and body, sound, and silence. “There are only a few examples of attempts in the West to codify the hand and its gestures, examples in which theatrical interest appears, however most explicit on the theoretical and literary levels, and rarely influences contemporary practice” (132). As Barba indicates, until recently there have been limited attempts to work with codified gestures as a part of traditional staging practices. The lack of interest in the use of sign languages as a specific theatrical method has a long history rooted not only in the valorization of speaking voices, but also, in general, in a profound distrust of the body as a site of knowing, and, more specifically, in relation to the idea that there are other sign systems than that of the speaking voice.

The interest in the use of gestural languages has, however, been shifting. Barba continues: "In fact, it is possible to say that while the behaviour of the hands has been recreated, acquiring actual symbolic value, the only accurate codification in the occident has been the sign language used since ancient times by the deaf, and internally systemized only in the last century. But this codification belongs to the daily sphere" (132). Here Barba replays a moment in the Enlightenment discussion about gesture and deafness as the Western site for learning about signing. He casts it as the rough equivalent of the use of the *mudras* in Indian dance as he simultaneously seems to diminish the importance of deaf life by his use of the "but" in relation to "daily sphere." However, there is another issue here, for sign language has not been relegated solely to the sphere of daily life. As we have seen earlier, there is a long history of the performance of signing.

Barba roughly dates the upsurge of theater for the deaf to approximately 1980. This dating is simply not accurate in the United States (although it may be more accurate in Europe). Barba has a tendency to devalue and overgeneralize the emergence of the form, but it is useful to attend to what he has to say about the intersection of the moving hands and the inflection of silence. Barba writes, "In the last 10 years however, theater for the deaf has begun to be performed. This theater is fascinating for those spectators who do not understand the sign language alphabet because of the pure dynamics of hands speaking in silence, just as we Occidentals are fascinated by the Indian *mudras* without understanding what they mean" (132–33). Here Barba connects the theaters *for* the deaf, in which there is no translation of the sign language for hearing audience members, with that of watching the *mudras*, a highly codified gestural system. In the second case as well, the audience might also not know what the gestures themselves mean. Hearing audience members sometimes experience sign language like a silent movie. Barba refers to the articulations of the hands variously as "speaking in silence" and as "pure sound." Sign represents, as do the *mudras*, the intersection of language with silence of the body.

Gestural systems are not simply kinesthetic. The use of sign language in NTD's work or *mudras* in Bharata Natyam create cross-sensory spaces,

where the visual, kinesthetic, and verbal merge together as an unfolding set of hieroglyphs. As a result the audience listens to the image-writing, which may or may not make rational sense. In this context, where preset cognitive frames are disrupted, synaesthesia is activated and consequently seeing and hearing dovetail with each other.

What happens when we “see” the body speaking? What is the space where body and speech intersect? David Armstrong, along with others, has noted that speaking is processed sequentially, whereas in signing, as a visual modality, multiple meanings are processed simultaneously. Furthermore, in exchanges between deaf and hearing individuals, meaning is exchanged multimodally across the sensorium. This type of exchange—sensorially ambiguous—articulates the identities of the performers and also creates a site of resistance to traditional modes of representation.

Bharata Natyam

Bharata Natyam is a South Indian classical Indian dance form that was originally performed in temples. The first writings about Bharata Natyam date back to the twelfth century. Bharata Muni, a Hindu sage, wrote the *Natya Shastra*, a treatise that codifies Indian theater and dance. The story, deeply rooted in Hindu mythology, tells how Bharata Natyam emerged as a visual and sound performance form that would heal the discord in the world. In the early 1900s, as the British escalated their campaign to eradicate this performance form, efforts emerged to revive the form and to move it from the temple to the stage. Practitioners who did not come from families who inherited the art form, such as Krishna Iyer, used the revival as a vehicle for performing Indian national identity and transmitting Hindu culture and stories. In recent years, the form has become a transnational phenomenon, and although many international companies maintain the classical frame, with its emphasis on devotion and classical Indian mythology and folktales, others such as Ramaswamy have explored new formats to frame their work in a transnational context.

Bharata Natyam draws its name from *Bharata Bha Bhava* (mood), *Ra Raga* (music), and *Ta Tala* (rhythm). *Bharata* is also the name for India,

and *Natyam* is the Tamil name for dance-drama. The performance form combines three key movement vocabularies, *nritya* (abstract dance), *nritya* (expressive dance), and *abhinaya* (language of gesture), to interpret themes. In this dance form, *mudras* are also combined in a variety of ways to become the vehicle for “dance speech.” As Enakshi Bhavani notes, the song-words translated into sign-words, “can be followed like the utterances of words in a conversation. Adjectives, nouns, verbs, proper names, and adverbs can all be shown and clearly expressed with relevant facial expressions” (82). Thirty-one single-hand gestures and twenty-seven combined-hand gestures offer a variety of meanings that constitute the language of signs, or *hastas*. The gestures provide a multitude of meanings from which to draw. In sections that are interpretations of the lyrics and where there are repeated lines, the dancer uses a technique called *sanchari bhava*, which means literally “to walk around a concept.”² The dancer has the liberty to interpret the line differently each time it is presented. This approach marks the dancer’s improvisational skills and also her ability to manipulate the dance grammar. These choices are governed by a set of rules, or a grammar, and to step outside this grammar would be to communicate nonsense. S. Bhagyalekshmy notes that “[d]ancing is actually a mirror which visualizes sound into visual phenomenon” (1). This approach indicates that Bharata Natyam is always already synaesthetic.

Ragamala and Transposed Heads

Ragamala Music and Dance Theatre Company draws its name from the Indian painting tradition of ragamalas, or miniature paintings, that dates from 1450 to the nineteenth century. These paintings are visual interpretations of musical modes that were originally envisioned in divine or human form. Each painting, often inscribed with a title or poem, shows a close relationship between the verbal and painted form. These paintings were often used in a cluster or folio of images, called ragamala albums, a

2. This translation of the term is from Joyce Paul.

method for memorizing and codifying musical learning. In addition to being a form that notates the intersection among music, image, and poetry through visual means, the ragamala was also a form that was created out of the intersection of two cultures: Hinduism and Islam.

Ranee Ramaswamy began working in the Minneapolis area in 1978 as a Bharata Natyam performer and teacher. In 1991, after thirteen years as a community-based artist, her career catapulted into the realm of professional artists when she garnered considerable attention for her performance project with well-known poet Robert Bly. In 1991, Ramaswamy choreographed a Bharata Natyam work to Robert Bly's translation of the Kabir poems, which revolve around the story of a powerful woman who finds her own path toward Krishna. *Where the Hands Go the Eyes Follow* builds successively on three Bly poems, which are reinterpreted in photos and then responded to by six poets. These poems are then used as the lyrics to which Ramaswamy performs. *Bhakti* combines the religious poetry of Hildegard von Bingen, an eleventh-century saint, and the hymns to Vishnu of Anal, an eighth-century poet. Other works include *Painting in Motion* and, most recently, *Sethu*. Many of Ramaswamy's works signal her skill and interest in creating crossover work among artistic and cultural traditions, language systems, and language and image. *Transposed Heads*—a compilation by the director-writer Mistry, from Thomas Mann's story of the same title and a variety of other sources—is the story of Sita and her love affairs with Shridaman and Nanda. It uses the motif of “doubling” to explore the instability of desire and its concomitant relationship to marriage, asceticism, and sensuality. The four narrators of the story—Zapko, Ramaswamy, Holbrook, and Mistry—act as structural doubles for the appearance and disappearance of combinations of four characters throughout the performance piece. The staging pattern creates the impression of shifting voices, and this pattern echoes the shifting perspectives in the story itself. This echoing of characters, finally, communicates the failure of marriage as a stable institution and, even more resolutely, that there is no central and stabilized reality—only the shifting of voices, the incessant play of the world.

The show opens with the presentation of Kali, the Hindu goddess of feminine creation, death, and energy. Zapko interprets key information

necessary to orient the (deaf) audience to Kali and the basic outline of the story about to unfold. Ramaswamy hovers in the background (upstage center) in an evocative pose of the goddess standing on one leg, arms arcing about her body—stern and invincible. Here, the double landscape created by the use of sign language resonates and merges together with the visuality of image, creating a momentary double of the standard image of Kali. In Hindu iconography, we find that

The goddess Kali is almost always described as having a terrible frightening appearance. She is always black or dark, is usually naked, and has long disheveled hair. She is adorned with severed arms as a girdle, freshly cut heads as a necklace, children's corpses as earrings, and serpents as bracelets. She has long, sharp fangs, and is often depicted as having clawlike hands with long nails and is often said to have blood smeared on her lips. (Kingsley 23)

This depiction of the goddess communicates her multifaceted aspects of life and death; the doubling of bodies, body parts, and the wearing of a girdle of arms creates for us the image of a frenzied and inexorable goddess. Given that Kali is the unifying image—the source out of which the story emerges and that to which it returns and one who also knows something of husbands—this image of the goddess is one of a power that cannot be confined within the story proper (and this expression of the excess of meaning that also unfolds as we experience the simultaneous use of Bharata Natyam and ASL). Kali is often represented as the mad dancer—reeling about with disheveled flying hair and eerily howling.

Next, we learn about Shridaman, the intellectual man, and Nanda, the man of the body, who, as best friends, are counterparts to each other. This scene sets up a structural complement of mind and body in two characters, but it also indicates how the whole is split into two. Again Zapko and Ramaswamy tell about these two men, and they also indicate the nature of the duality. The subtext of this elaboration of the two also indicates the two performers, one Bharata Natyam dancer and one ASL performer. The two use different gestural languages, both of

which have legacies dealing with the mind/body split and the Western bias that the mind is more supreme than the body. The simultaneous visibility of the two gestural systems, both with histories of attempted repression and erasure by imperialism, acts to reinstate these two systems back into the contemporary cultural imagination. In this process, we encounter multiple bodies of difference and become oriented toward the implications of a hybrid narrative as it emerges.

As audience, we are led into these worlds through a series of successive performance moments. When the story proper begins to unfold, Zapko's performance style shifts to storytelling. Her signing is much more animated; she uses her full body; and her telling oscillates between the direct delivery of the text and shifting in and out of characters—stepping into and out of the story itself as if in the story itself. In this section we learn how Shridaman and Nanda become enamored of Sita when they see her at the river bathing. Eventually, a marriage is arranged between Sita and Shridaman, and it takes place after Nanda has negotiated on Shridaman's behalf. Shridaman's family offers Sita's family five cows as a dowry.

However, this story is also a woman's fantasy about the instability of marriage and, more important, the insatiability of desire. As it turns out, Shridaman is too refined for Sita and cannot satisfy her carnal desire, so Sita begins to fantasize about Nanda. Shridaman realizes that Sita is directing her attention elsewhere, and he begins to withdraw his affection from her. At the same time Nanda is also daydreaming about Sita and her beauty. One day the three decide to visit Sita's family, but on the way, Nanda takes a wrong turn and the three end up lost in the forest. Shridaman sees a cave to Kali, and he wants to go pay his respects. After a while Sita and Nanda become worried, wondering what has happened. Nanda goes in search of Shridaman and finds him, with his head cut off, in Kali's temple. He knows that Shridaman has sacrificed himself so that Sita and Nanda can be together, but Nanda's sense of honor is stronger and so he also beheads himself. Sita finds the two and wants to kill herself, but Kali tells her she cannot do that because she is pregnant. Kali agrees to restore the two men, but Sita then places—in a physically enacted Freudian slip—the wrong head to each body.

This mixing of head and body echoes the original split between Shridaman and Nanda; it also recreates the bodies of desire—mixed bodies that are doubles of the original bodies “with a difference”—rather than bodies of fact. But these bodies are also liminal bodies. This manifests itself through the resurrection of the bodies from death; in a sense, the two men are neither dead nor alive. As the story continues to unfold at the interstices among the creation, destruction, and recreation of the body and identity, we are reminded that things are never quite what they seem. In the midst of the rigor of the social order, which upholds the exchange value of women, the eruption of desire even at the level of possibility can invert the order of the world. Sita—whose other is cast as the sensual—must also deal with the intellectual, and she will, temporarily at least, both have what she wants and be denied it.

The transpositioning of men challenges the jurisdiction of the law as it is. It has become unclear who the rightful husband is, an uncertainty that also indicates that it is unclear who Sita is. To whom does Sita belong? As a result the three go in search of a wise man, who tells them that when it comes to identity, the head is more important than the body, and so the man with Shridaman’s head and Nanda’s body is the true father. As the lawgiver, by naming the “proper” father, the social order is reinstated for the time being. Nanda, accepting his fate, goes off to live the life of an ascetic. Sita and Shridaman leave together, the boy is born, and the three live a blissful life for several years.

According to this story, desire, however, is never stable, and eventually Sita begins to wonder about Nanda again, as marriage has become too sedentary for her inquisitive nature, and she goes off in search of him. When she finds him at his mendicant’s hut, they spend the night together in erotic bliss. When they awake they find that Shridaman, having followed Sita there, has spent the night outside the hut. In a sense the story comes full circle. Sita has now spent time with both men in their multiple and fragmented forms. The visit to Nanda, the mendicant, is an echo of the visit to the wise man, who decided who is lawfully the husband and father, but now the trio has moved beyond that assertion of social duty.

When the three of them realize what has happened, they all want, once again, to kill themselves. Kali intervenes and tells them that the only honorable way for the young boy not to be marked by the behavior of his mother is for there to be a ritual of their deaths in honor of Kali. As a consequence, the three are burned on a funeral pyre during a festival in her honor. At the end of *Transposed Heads*, all four narrators simultaneously invoke Kali and her power as Ramaswamy and Zapko, who have served as temporary incarnations of Kali and the other characters in the story, disappear into the shadows of the dimming lights.

Mixing Identity and Deafness

In “At Home in The World,” Janet O’Shea addresses the challenges of Bharata Natyam as a transnational performance form that communicates both national and diasporic identity. As the work has circulated internationally beginning in the 1930s and 1940s, O’Shea notes that many choreographers offer an introductory explanation regarding the meaning of the specific dance work. This makes the work accessible to a broad and international audience, signaling it as “‘high art’ that transcends both national and linguistic boundaries” (177). However, it both clarifies and obfuscates Bharata Natyam. As a dance form with its own vocabulary and aesthetics, it cannot be grasped fully through verbal description nor through a European system of interpretation.

O’Shea asserts that the use of this rhetorical maneuver echoes earlier practices of Orientalism; she notes a similarity between this phenomenon and the ways in which in the “Eastern texts [of the 1800s] required an interlocutor to unlock its mysteries” (177). In this case, rather than a Westerner who is believed to have an objective eye in relation to Eastern material, the choreographer acts as interlocutor, and this pattern revises Orientalist practices. O’Shea asserts, however, that there are more recent “tactics of globality, alternatives to Orientalism” (179). More recently, choreographers have incorporated the use of verbal translations of the songs or sung poetry within the actual dance as they perform the respective *mudras*. She writes

[c]horeographers of the mid-to-late 1990s, especially those working internationally, developed projects that “translate” (Erdman 1987) epistemologies, choreographic devices, and poetic texts, foregrounding rather than masking their transnational position. These projects align different linguistic, and movement vocabularies in such a way that they subvert a tendency to place European thought systems as the primary framework of interpretation. (179)

Ramaswamy’s *Transposed Heads* has much in common with the work of other Bharata Natyam choreographers who have created hybrid theater pieces to present their art form in an innovative parlance that reaches new audiences.

Ramaswamy uses several vocabularies to create a work that successfully tells the story and locates it in a multitracked performance that includes the vocabularies of speaking, ASL, *mudras*, singing and music. This method showcases both the ASL and the use of *mudras* specifically and *abhinaya*, or expressive dance, generally speaking; the verbal text is proffered while the two women perform using signing, *mudras*, dancing, and acting. Nevertheless, the work also refuses to locate the telling of the story in any one voice, and as a result there is no one position of knowing, no objective narrator, and no final interlocutor. Ramaswamy has stated that her goal is to make her dance form accessible to all audiences, but she has addressed the challenges that face choreographers who are trying to build audiences in areas where there is no previous exposure to her art form. In particular she has found that collaboration with other artists across cultural frames has enhanced her opportunities to create effective cross-cultural work.

As a mixed media work, *Transposed Heads* is quite successful in aligning several meaning systems. Nevertheless, the use of the verbal text is somewhat seductive. Although I agree that it helps frame a context for a wider range of audience members, its rhetorical valance is one that implies it is demystifying the Bharata Natyam dance/ASL performance piece. However, it can run the risk of reducing the experience of the visual-spatial components of the

performance because the spoken text can be seen to stand in for the visual-spatial dimensions.

Performance becomes the site for mobilizing energies. In *Cities of the Dead*, Joseph Roach writes

Genealogies of performance attend not only to “the body,” as Foucault suggests, but also to bodies—to the reciprocal reflections they make on one another’s surfaces as they foreground their capacities for interaction. Genealogies also attend to “counter-memories,” or the disparities between history as it is discursively transmitted and memory as it is publicly enacted by the bodies that bear its consequences. (25–26)

For Roach, these genealogies involve three key aspects: kinesthetic imagination, vortices of behavior, and displaced transmission. Kinesthetic imagination has to do with “thinking through movements”; it provides not only the impetus for recreating the behavior or series of actions but also for extending it. “Vortices of behavior” are the places or sites of memory that invoke the need or desire to reproduce the behavior. “Displaced transmission” is “the adaptation of historic practices to changing situations.” The convergence of these aspects provides powerful performances that cut across historical and geographical specificity.

There are parallels between the subject position of Ramaswamy and that of Zapko (and, of course, many differences between the theaters of Bharata Natyam and Deaf theaters). Ramaswamy brings to the performance the issues and challenges of her own diasporic identity and her commitment to her homeland (she returns to India on a regular basis); Zapko also brings to the performance the issues and challenges of her own diasporic identity and commitment to the Deaf community.

There is a long history of the cultural and political tensions regarding Deaf identity and Deaf community building and nation building. In his *Politics of Deafness*, Owen Wrigley writes provocatively that “deafness is a big country” (13). Zapko, too, is a traveler in and across a variety of communities, as a member of a linguistic minority. To acknowledge her

as a player in the “global cultural economy,” she increases the currency of her performance work in the nonsigning communities by performing in the role of interlocutor for Ramaswamy. Additionally, in the ASL theater, Zapko faces a similar challenge regarding the decipherability that Bharata Natyam has, and in this work, the two interlocutors also speak for Zapko.

Interlocution provides an overlay to the meaning that is generated through the moving body—creating an experience of the split body. In *Gesture and the Nature of Language*, David Armstrong, William Stokoe, and Sherman Wilcox attempt to debunk the traditional split in linguistics between gesture and language (based on phonetics), as well as our tendency to think of language in terms of what is written. Their investigation outlines, at great length, the way in which both sign language and speech are types of gestures. Sign is visible gesture, and speech is invisible gesture. They write that “[t]he psychologist Ulrich Neiser, for example, has noted that it is possible to describe speech as ‘articulatory gesturing,’ and to treat speech perception as comparable to perceiving gestures of other kinds” (8). Because the use of sounding and silent gestures operate on different registers and meaning systems and because the compulsion to have the work add up to one specific outcome is resisted, *Transposed Heads* challenges traditional representation by inverting language and embodiment. Zapko mentions that the structural format of the performance was framed on a visual-spatial order. She writes that “I was kind of leading the train. The storytellers watched me for cues and spoke accordingly, then Raneé listened to that and danced to match so we told the story simultaneously.”³

Brenda Farnell, who has done extensive research concerning the use of sign language by the Plains Indians in their storytelling and the connection of signing to the embodiment of meaning and language, argues in “Where Mind Is a Verb” that

[t]he theoretical value of these observations lies in the exposure of a deeply rooted Cartesianism in our definition of language as

3. Personal correspondence, January 7, 2005.

traditionally constituted, reflected by the view that there are two separate systems involved in human organization of space, time, and the body, one having to do with the movement of the body, a physical realm of sensory-motor organization and doing in the world. Such a conception may indeed be an accurate picture of the Western folk model of the person, but it is surely no longer acceptable as a cross-cultural analytic model. (82)

We see in the performance work the genesis of a theater in which speaking and hearing as a spatial practice address the differences of the voices of the body. *Transposed Heads* sets in motion a way of amplifying a model of transcultural and interethnic hearing, which creates space for “voices” of difference in sound and silence, and for the actualization of the third ear in relationship to ethnic and cultural identity. All of the performance forms under consideration implement nondiscursive negotiations of space to communicate. With this in mind, then, we bend our ears toward the labyrinths of sound and silence to consider the cross-cultural politics of performance, and in that in-between space of the postcolonial/postmodern toward the hearing bodies that beckon to us into the multiple regions of the third ear.

The Transposed Ear

The challenges of setting a work that can operate across three cultures and meaning systems—Indian, Deaf, and English—are multiple. In “Ambiguous Traces, Mishearing, and Auditory Space,” Paul Carter writes that “[t]he historical, cultural, and social role listening plays emerges in the phenomenon of echoic mimicry” (46). This echoic mimicry addresses how the emergence of sound before it is conceptually meaningful sets a direction toward a site where communication might arise. This dialogue, which articulates moments of meaning as they emerge, carves out the regions of desire that pass between bodies and across spaces. Voice speaks the unfixed and unstable narratives of possibility and difference. Nevertheless, giving voice cannot be arbitrarily divorced from the practices of “lending an ear.”

Just as there is no neutral voice, there is no neutral ear. The speaking and hearing of voices, then, form reciprocating moments in the dynamics of the third ear, and they make manifest the poetics of a space that speaks.

The use of the double sign systems works to create a type of gestural mimicry. [. . . T]he cultural value of the meaning thus produced resides in the fact that it does not mimic the clear straightforward communication preferred in our modern, rationalistic society. Instead it shows the limits of communication. (49)

These lines, the unstated, even unsayable, appears in the theatrical works as heterogeneous gestural play, and it allows for synaesthesia, a free play of the sign systems of sight and sounds. Such play opens up previously unexpressed possibilities for language because it ruptures speech's arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified. In other words, speech is not necessarily audible sound but can be manifested in four different ways: spoken, written, sounded, and read. It is Western culture's tendency to associate speech with its spoken equivalent and to assume that if this association does not occur that there is a breakdown in meaning, rather than the unfolding of a process of signification through engagement in the actual performative event.

One of the most powerful sections of *Transposed Heads* occurs in the latter part of the work. Sita has gone to seek Nanda, and the two disappear into his hut. In this section—and this is the only time that this occurs—Ramaswamy steps forward and uses her Bharata Natyam vocabulary to communicate what is happening. At the same time, Mistry speaks the text from the side of stage. Zapko stands still to the right of Ramaswamy; there is no motion or evocation coming from her. Then, Ramaswamy goes silent and there is no speaking, no music, and Zapko signs what we presume is the same text.

This scene operates on several levels simultaneously. First, this is the only time in the entire piece that Zapko signs without the added tracking of spoken voice, music, and Bharata Natyam. Because it comes late in the work and as a bit of surprise, we are forced to pay particularly close

attention to the moment. Although there are problems with this staging choice, silence indicates the “world of deafness.” It also indicates a call to communicate—in an overt inversion of the expected mediation of the Deaf perspective through a hearing frame (i.e., the use of text and music). At this moment Zapko’s signing is not mediated for the hearing audience. The hearing audience is drawn toward that which it cannot understand; they see what they cannot hear. The deaf audience understands, and the signal to them that the Deaf frame has priority is the fact that Ramaswamy is—at this moment—a silent body.

Here we see the use of what we might call “gestural mimicry.” Zapko and Ramaswamy are gestural doubles of each other, but they are gestural doubles with a difference. The person who does not use ASL or Bharat Natyam cannot understand what is being said. Nevertheless, in this particular sequence, these two gestural systems oscillate next to each (one after the other) rather than use layering, and although not comprehensible in the typical sense of the word, these resonances set up the hope for communication. The third ear attempts to hear the many versions of the sounding and silent body in relation to both deafness and hearing, and it hones in on instances where there is the emergence of a third space. *Transposed Heads* creates a form of communication that is neither propositional nor linguistic but gestural.

The disruption of sound and image transposes the frame of reference, and thus, what we hear also rearranges itself. This type of hearing becomes the interplay between the subjectivities of the performers and those of the audience members, and through this active dialogue, in which the preestablished codes of referentiality are disrupted, the voice and its multiple murmurs stake out new possibilities for spatiality and alterity. This examination points to a theatrical paradigm in which “bodies are speaking to bodies” (Wright 4) and the materiality of the performances provides the conditions for “hearing” these multisensorial, often synaesthetic, emergent moments of meaning.

Through the various staging practices of sound-silence-image in experimental theatrical space, voice, as vocal and gestural play, gives rise to difference, and in these moments, it articulates a frontier that provides points of

both contact and differentiation between the bodies of the performers and audience.⁴ Through the intersections of speaking and listening bodies, as the performance unfolds these frontiers shift and reform—making a space between them manifest. The third ear, as it listens to and acknowledges the voices that cross these multiple spaces, constitutes the praxis of hearing the unknown. Through the third ear, one crosses over the bridge into unfamiliar territory; in other words, it “transgresses the limit” (Certeau, *PEL* 128). Within this theater of action, a new cultural space is made through the interacting forces and mobilities of the performers and audiences.

4. The terms “frontier” and “bridge” are borrowed from Michel de Certeau’s explication on the Roman ritual *fas* in which he notes how space is made through the theater of action. See *The Practice of Everyday Life*, pp. 123–30.

Conclusion

Dancing Voices

To challenge the regimes of representation that govern society is to conceive of how a politics can transform reality rather than merely ideologize it.

—*Trinh Minh-ha*

What is this crazy thing called multiculturalism? As an overview of the current debate suggests, a salient difficulty raised by the variety of uses to which the term has been put is that multiculturalism itself has certain imperial tendencies. Its boundaries have not been easy to establish. We are told that it is concerned with the representation of difference—but whose differences? Which differences?

—*Henry Louis Gates*

Although I still identify my own personal genesis of the third ear with my experience of watching and listening to Leslie Uggams and Mitch Miller, I do not own the headphones that my father crafted for me anymore. They have long since been relegated to the garbage heap—no longer functional with the much more sophisticated digitized technology we now use. Over the years, I have learned to improvise on-the-spot variations of these veritable third ears; I often—as do others who are hard of hearing or deaf—read between the lines of sound, image, and the moving body. Despite the mobility it gives me in everyday life (I have certain skills for reading non-verbal communication and subtexts), I prefer, when possible, to step into the world of art rather than the mechanical jacking into the daily world through my hearing aid. This imaginative jacking-in can transport us to realms of understanding that are all too often missing in the daily course of life.

The material third ears I keep closest to me, three hearing trumpets, are stored in an old brown suitcase that has been handed down to me by my father. Two of these trumpets are antique trumpets. (I have been told that the really expensive antiques are nearly impossible to purchase.) After much searching, I finally purchased two antique trumpets on eBay. One is a squat London Dome trumpet that I can hold in my hand and point toward the source of sound. The other has a long tube that can be put closer to the speaker and still allow the listener to keep a respectable distance. My third trumpet is an imaginary trumpet—made of a gaudy bright blue cloth around the horn that hooks onto a heavy plastic tube that can be positioned next to my ear.

The antique trumpets act as indices for history—the medicalization of hearing in the 1800s, the materiality of hearing trumpets as things to hold in the hand and that extend and alter social space, and the vestiges of the ways in which technology has altered the mechanics of hearing. Sound technology merged with these extensional bodies of the ears and helped alter the modern sonic landscape and the concomitant efforts to manage all the sounds and silences of difference, including those of the ethnic other. Like the other two, the fanciful hearing trumpet indexes history, but it also amplifies and transforms it—proffering a future through the imaginative rerendering of hearing trumpets as special tools for hybrid listening. In other words, it gives the third ear a future that includes the improvisational listening to the other—in its many guises—that the artifacts cannot.

When I hold the cumbersome and colorful trumpet in my hands, I am, of course, reminded of the history—the ways in which trumpets as ambiguous markers of hearing difference were both designed to work and also to be hidden (in many cases, hearing trumpets were hidden in tables, umbrellas, hair pieces, etc.). I am reminded of the historical, social, and political compulsion to render deafness invisible through the marginalization of the Deaf community and even obsolete through the use of oralism and technology that would train deaf people to be “normalized” into hearing. In the blue trumpet, as these sounds and sights pass through a nonsounding trumpet, deafness becomes visible.

In addition to enlarging on the past, the blue trumpet carves out the space of a future for hearing the other and for creating new narratives of hearing difference.

In each of the chapters in this project, I have examined how certain combinations of sound, silence, image, and the moving body constitute disruptions in the power of the symbolic realm. These moments challenge traditional modes of representation and constitute a realm that appears at first glance to be *outside* of meaning.

In acknowledging silence [and the deafened moment], the interval of the unsaid (and the unsayable), the shadows of the subaltern are thrown across the transparency of words accustomed to ignoring the ontology of silence; a silence which they invariably colonize as pure absence, absolute lack. In the historical performances and cultural speech that silence enacts, previous prescriptive grammars (individualist, narcissistic, and nationalist) are forced not merely into compromise, but also interrogation, weakening, even dispersal. As the inhabitants of the “peripheries” and “marginality” come to challenge and dislocate subjects who once centered themselves by creating the necessity for such categories, so the very condition of these others become proximate and integral to the state of the subject, to our selves. (Chambers 51–52, addition mine)

This vortex of ambiguity forces a different kind of listening from audience members and performers. Through an engagement with the performance of moments of the third ear, we can understand more fully how deeply perception and the making of meaning are interlocked. In the immediate sense, hearing through the third ear facilitates a type of openness to emerging voices that might otherwise be lost from cultural awareness. This listening calls for a revised sense of how certain performances work in their use of a “language of space” rather than a “language of hearing.” This shift in attention leads to a different understanding of the body, intersubjectivity, communication, and cross-cultural relations.¹

In *Choreographing Difference*, Anne Cooper Albright finds it difficult to justify the diffidence toward the area of disabilities and the body on the part of the critical theorists. The disabled body defies the usual categories of health and sickness as well as the notion of the classically ideal body. Albright explains,

Despite their theoretical romance with the body, contemporary cultural critics have paid little attention to the issues of dis/ability. I suspect that this is because the disabled body insistently refuses to be neatly packaged as a metaphor. It is hard to abstract disability, the reality of its status “as is” breaks through the theoretical gloss to confront whomever is writing about it. Although the “absent” body—the body as performative and therefore temporary and transient—has frequently seduced contemporary theorists with its chic ephemerality, few, as of yet, have taken up the disabled body. Their reluctance comes from an unwillingness to touch a body that is neither entirely “present” nor intriguingly “absent,” but rather liminal, struggling somewhere between the shores of theoretical surefootedness. (60)

The omission of disability studies from much contemporary discourse occurs for a number of reasons. At a personal level it is often difficult to face the body with its frailties; at a larger cultural-consciousness level much of the discussion about disabilities has been relegated to the area of medical models and the study of abnormality. The study of deafness has not, until

1. I argue that this approach to listening enacts what Homi Bhabha, in his *Location of Culture*, identifies as the *processual*, or the performative, and it clarifies how the perceptual provides the material indicators of the “the figure of the people as [it emerges] in the narrative ambivalence of disjunctive times and meanings” (153). Bhabha makes countless references to the evanescent perceptual moments of “the enunciative boundaries of a range of other dissonant, even dissident histories, and voices” (5) that he claims require a different kind of reading as well as a different kind of sensorial response. Nevertheless, Bhabha’s emphasis is on the analysis of literary texts; this project focuses on the implications of some of Bhabha’s critiques for performance.

recently, been exempted from this categorization. Despite that fact that disability studies has a developed literature, its inclusion on equal footing with multicultural studies proper is only now beginning to unfold.

Albright also critiques what she considers the insufficiency of many of the efforts to include disabled dancers in modern dance choreography. Although she applauds the interest in a more expansive vision of dance and the possibilities for choreography based on what many different types of “abled” bodies can do, she also notes that the frontier for a truly inclusionary model has recently shifted. Too often the choreographers simply reinscribe the disabled dance back into the ableist rhetoric by emphasizing classical dance lines and minimalizing the actual dancing involvement on the part of the disabled participants.

Albright argues for greater attention to the development of an aesthetic that emerges from the movement potential of the actual bodies of the performers. Her most striking example deals with her observations regarding contact improvisation, a dance style that she feels allows for innovative movement possibilities. She writes that

[t]he proscenium stage of most dance performances creates a visual frame that tends to focus on displays of virtuosity, uses of theatrical space, as well as the presentation of visual lines (such as the arabesque). Contact, on the other hand, refuses this frame by prioritizing the ongoing process—the becoming—of dancing. [. . .] the issue here is not *what* dancers can do but *how* they do it [...] pulling the audience in as a witness of the ongoing negotiations of their physical experience. (90)

Here Albright attributes the power of the potential of dance to the state of “becoming.” Albright’s experience in pushing the boundary of dance and disability contrasts sharply with the hands-off attitude of many social theory critics toward including a discussion of disabilities in the various analyzes of the body. Nevertheless, as the discussion about the social construction of difference continues to develop, we can further understand what it means to examine our perceptual biases, embrace the perceptual

difference, and articulate more fully how that connects to intersubjective exchange.

The field of performance studies also needs to develop more discussion of the intersections of performance and disability, although this has been begun by scholars, such as Petra Kuppers, Carrie Sandahl, and Rosemarie Garland Thomson, who consider how disability performance challenges traditional practices of representation. My project, currently the only work linking performance studies and deafness, builds connections between the perceptual experience, the recovery of multiple histories, and its potential to change disability aesthetics and our understanding of the body.

Despite the fact that theorists in disability studies such as Thomson, Mitchell, Snyder, Linton, and McCruer, as well as deaf studies theorists, Davis and Bauman, have argued for disability as an identity category with links to race, ethnicity, gender, sex, and class, many performance studies theorists still do not include disability in their discourse. In part, the issue revolves around concerns about disability as simply an add-on category that may dilute other diversity agendas. Additionally, however, many theorists draw on the work of Judith Butler, who in addressing the construction of the gendered body and performativity does not deconstruct links between gender and disability.

Deaf studies theorist Mairian Corker argues for more intensive work in linking disability studies to postmodern theory; an effort she asserts is underdeveloped and inadvertently limits the extent to which disability studies can be effectively linked to other discourses. Davis and Corker, among others, argue that we need to move beyond the binaries of deaf/hearing and disabled/abled to new models for thinking about our experiences in the world. Corker's "sensing disability" and Davis's "deafened moment" are two such maneuvers. Over the next few years, work will continue to emerge that moves from disability and deaf studies toward performance and from performance studies toward disability and deafness. Within that growing body of work, the differentials between disabilities and the ways in which deafness, as an invisible disability, can be most fruitfully explicated in relation to the performing body will be developed beyond the current scope of this project.

In *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity*, Simi Linton likewise notes the lack of inclusion of disability studies in the humanities. She writes that “[t]he liberal arts, particularly the humanities, have barely noticed disability beyond the models they accept uncritically, handed down from the sciences and medicine. The tools of inquiry in the humanities have, until recently, rarely been applied to understanding disability as a phenomenon” (147–48). Nevertheless, as the discussion about the social construction of difference continues to develop, we can further understand what it means to continue to examine our perceptual biases, embrace the perceptual difference, and connect that to intersubjective exchange.

In developing a model of the third ear that can address not only Deaf performance but also multicultural performance, I am suggesting this model as one way of illuminating cross-cultural communication with respect to racial identity as well as Deaf identity. Even in its most basic terms, “hearing,” as embedded within traditional cultural paradigms, is not a perceptual experience of simply registering the presence and absence of sound and concomitant meaning. It also indicates the process of engaging in a cultural and political selectivity. Trinh writes about the intersections between the politics of women of color and documentary film techniques, work in which she interrogates the relationship among sound, silence, and image. Although the artist can create “activities that aim at producing a different hearing” (84), Trinh nevertheless cautions “He only hears (sees) what He wants to hear(see), and certainly there are none so deaf(blind)that don’t want to hear(see)” (WMWR 85).² Across the ruptures of history, memory, place, and body, the third ear enables a new listening.

2. Although the overall argument of this project focuses on the viability of the third ear as a cross-sensory mechanism for responding to these performances, the emphasis in the body chapters can be seen as addressing the phenomenon of synaesthesia in these performances. To a large extent, I see the third ear as functioning precisely in this manner. However, it would be useful to further develop the links and differentiations between the two notions. This aspect would help identify ways in which this model of perception has implication for communication in general. On the level of critical theory, Michel de Certeau’s explanations of cultural exchange and change hold a promise that Homi Bhabha suggests, but does not push quite as far as Certeau.

As we follow this trajectory, which traces certain intersections of the domains of hearing and deafness, we can see how identity is not fixed but unfolds through interaction with others. This notion of intersubjective exchange undergirds the study of the moments of the third ear in connection with deafness. In the model I have developed, meaning is made in the moment at the borders between hearing and deafness, between audience members and performers, through the listening bodies. At the interstices of sound, silence, and the moving body, we hear the meaning as it emerges.³

Emergent theaters, newly initiated and evolving forums for cross-cultural exchange in public spaces, promote a new understanding of what I mean by the need to respond to “embodied subjectivities” in relation to the shared space of the performance. This interrelationship outlines a new model of hearing that has consequences not only for how we read the unrepresentable, seemingly outside of meaning, moments in performance, but it also opens up the possibilities for altered cultural spaces and paradigms. The moments that I have marked out in Robert Wilson’s *Deafman Glance*, NTD’s *Ophelia*, Ping Chong’s *Undersirable Elements* and *East/West Quartet*, and Ragamala’s *Transposed Heads* highlight the complex issues of hearing, deafness, and cultural identity in relationship to the moving body. Through these moments, where a hearing and a seeing occur simultaneously, thus activating the listening eye, we are open to the *dancing voices*, to borrow Ping Chong’s term, that permeate the spaces of the performances. These dancing voices are icons that combine visual and the auditory perception.

All four sets of examples enable us to “hear” what we could not otherwise hear. In *Deafman Glance* the “voice” dances through the pictoriality of the silent and moving bodies. In NTD’s work, the signing body, as the site for dancing voices, intensifies the viscosity of speaking through the body.

3. Merleau-Ponty’s work in *The Visible and the Invisible* on the flesh, intertwining, and intersubjectivity addresses the notion of becoming and its corporeality. Merleau-Ponty situates these moments of exchange within the field of action itself as it unfolds. As a result, the perceptual is interwoven with the linguistic, can at times override it, and even disrupt and transform it.

From a somewhat different direction, Ping Chong's work also crosses the domains between hearing and deafness to rectify some of the failures of the Western culture's inability to listen to silences. Ragamala's *Transposed Heads* also reminds of us of the ways in which gesture and sign open up new spaces of communication and exchange across the "cultural faultlines." We are charged, as we listen *and* see, to respond. The dancing voices awaken our own dancing voices, as Barthes and Chong have reminded us. Through the third ear, as these numerous performers "speak" their voices, we arrive at the theater of the emergent, and we must respond to the call.

The issue is twofold. Much has already been written about the crisis in speaking. The other, which this project addresses, is the crisis of hearing. As we have discussed, speaking, hearing, and deafness are much more interconnected than is often acknowledged. Kristeva's model for experimental theater, among others, carries with it the promise of remaking the social order. She writes that "the new locus of representation in which the old cinema/theater distinction disappears, a new coalescence begins to emerge. [. . .] Listen to what you see; act out what you hear" ("MT" 280). Crossing the threshold into this arena helps us chart desire and perceptual difference. The call is an ethical one; as we comprehend the implications of perceptual difference and its connection to cultural identity, a new politics unfolds.

The intersections of deafness and hearing have several implications for the theoretical construction of deafness. The deconstruction of deafness and hearing as it relates to the notion of the third ear provides us with a method of hearing across perceptual domains. We can also begin to understand some of our failures, as multiculturalists, to hear each other and to engage in interchange that is more fully intersubjective and transactive. Such a poetics of hearing is carved out by the mutually reciprocating spatialities of the listening body, as it continues—with gaudy blue trumpet in hand—to dance.

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