

The World of the Deaf

How deaf people in France create a community around deafness and
challenge conceptions of normality

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Abstract

This thesis is based on seven months of fieldwork in Paris and two other French cities in 2011. The objective of the study is to examine how deaf people create a community around their deafness and how they challenge what is often thought of as normal.

When a child is tested positive for deafness, doctors often advise the parents of the child that the child should be fitted with hearing aids or cochlear implants. Following this, the child learns to develop a capacity to speak through speech therapy. Many deaf people are opposed to this practice of normalization of deaf people to become as much like persons who can hear as possible. Instead, they seek to establish “deaf” as a positive identity and to be recognized as different, but equal.

Through creating spaces that are fully accessible regardless of the ability to hear sounds, deaf people erase the barrier that they often encounter in the majority hearing society. Such spaces can be visually oriented environments where sign language is the language of communication.

In this thesis I will focus on how these spaces are created and how deaf people challenge conceptions of what is normal. By establishing their visually oriented deaf world, they challenge the way that community is normally formed and the way people usually use their senses to relate to each other and interact with the environment. In addition, through their insistence on visual communication when they encounter people who hear, they challenge hearing people’s idea of what communication is.

In addition to being a brief ethnography of deaf people in France, the thesis is a contribution to the discussion of the normalization of people who are categorized as disabled.

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1 INTRODUCTION

According to an estimate by the World Health Organization (2012a) from 2004, more than 275 million people in the world live with moderate-to-profound hearing impairment.¹ Persons in low- and middle-income countries make up 80% of these. In spite of the prevalence of deafness, few ethnographic studies of deaf people have been conducted. Some of the studies that exist are Delaporte's study of the deaf community in France (2002), studies of the Norwegian deaf community by Breivik (2007) and Haualand (2002), and Nakamura's (2006) study of the Japanese deaf community. Haualand (2002) suggests that a reason for the number of ethnographic studies of the deaf community is limited, could be that it is not geographically delimited, its members have no visible difference, and deaf people's culture is little known outside the deaf community.

The French deaf community primarily consists of people who are deaf and who use sign language, but there are also hearing people who use sign language who are a part of this community. Analogous to Haualand's (2002) description of the Norwegian deaf community, the deaf community in France is an extended social network largely defined by the frequent use of sign language to communicate with others. Like in Norway, there are no clear boundaries of who take part in the deaf community and who doesn't, and it is difficult to estimate the number of members. Among deaf people in France, as well as in many other places, there is an attempt to move away from the characterization of deaf people as disabled and establish "deaf" as a positive identity. In this perspective, deaf have their difference recognized, but are nevertheless seen as equal to those who hear. In France, some of the deaf people who partake in the community speak French in addition to sign language and some use a code called LPC² when they speak. Besides the deaf persons who parttake in the deaf community, there are deaf people who have little contact with other deaf people and who seek to assimilate to the hearing majority and whose method of communication is oral French. A deaf person who has sign language as the main method of communication is called "signant" (signing), oral French "oraliste", and LPC with oral French as "LPCiste". While I met deaf people who fall into all of these camps, in my research I chose to focus

¹ The World Health Organization (2012a) uses the term hearing impairment to describe "both complete and partial loss of the ability to hear" and deafness as "the complete loss of hearing in one or both ears". As we will see later in the paper, people use different terms to describe a person who does not hear depending on the perspective they hold.

² LPC (Langage Parlé Completé) is a code that makes it possible to distinguish French words that look similar on the mouth when pronounced and used to facilitate lip-reading. LPC was developed based on its English equivalent *Cued speech*.

on deaf people who use sign language as their main method of communication. My reason for this was my interest in the controversy of deaf people as disabled and deaf people as a cultural and linguistic minority. Deaf people who choose to communicate in sign language are generally more opposed to the mainstream French view of deaf people as disabled.

In this thesis I will investigate the following: 1) How do people create a world around deafness? and 2) How do deaf people challenge conceptions of normality?

Why Paris and why deaf people?

My interest in studying deafness initially grew out of an interest in conceptions of disability. Having a sister who is mentally and physically disabled sparked my anthropological interest in how disability is defined and categorized. Though a part-time job in Norway as a social assistant for deaf people who are also mentally disabled, I was introduced to the lives of deaf people and learned some Norwegian sign language. A curiosity to know more about the lives of deaf people in a society where most people can hear, resulted in the decision to investigate the controversy around deaf people as disabled or as part of a cultural and linguistic group.

The choice of Paris as the context of my investigation was based on a combination of different factors. France, and Paris especially, has had an important position historically in the early education of deaf children. Abbé de l'Épée (1712-1789) opened the Paris school for the deaf³ and was the first person to teach sign language to large groups of deaf children. Since the time of Abbé de l'Épée, deaf people in France have experienced that sign language has been banned from and later reinstated in the education of deaf children.⁴ Today, the medical establishment is a powerful presence in deaf people's lives with developments such as cochlear implants⁵ and early screening for deafness in children. With its central role in the history of deaf education, Paris provided an interesting backdrop to my investigation of the lives of deaf people.

On a trip to Paris the year before starting my fieldwork, I discovered a café and a restaurant where the waiters serve the customers in sign language. Through research, I discovered a theatre with

³ Institut National des Jeunes Sourds (INJS)

⁴ Sign language was banned at the Milan congress of 1880

⁵ "A cochlear implant is a device that electronically stimulates the auditory nerve. Its outer part consists of a sound processor, a transmitter and a microphone placed behind the ear. Its inner part consists of electrodes surgically implanted inside the ear's cochlea. An implant can give the sensation of sounds, but it cannot restore hearing to normal levels." (Deafness research UK 2012)

performances in sign language and other cultural events taking place. In addition to this, being able to speak French before commencing fieldwork added to the feasibility of the project, as I would spend time in the field learning the local sign language. In France, the local sign language is Langue des Signes Française (French Sign Language, hereby LSF)⁶.

Method

Stoller writes that “anthropologists should open their senses to the worlds of their others” (1989:7). In my fieldwork, I did participant observation, meaning that I observed the people I met, as well as participated in what they did. Stoller stresses the importance of focusing on the senses in anthropological research and asks “If anthropologists are to produce knowledge, how can they ignore how their own sensual biases affect the information they produce?” (1989:7). In the same vein, Haualand (2008) calls attention to the bodily predispositions and biases the anthropologist brings to the field. She points out the role of the senses in participant observation and in understanding our surroundings: “observations are made possible through the sensory experiences of the body”(120). As deaf people have a sensory apparatus that functions differently from mine, I tried to be sensitive to the way that they navigated and experienced their environment with their senses. In addition, I strived to be conscious of my own use of the senses in understanding the people met and the place I was in.

I documented my findings by writing notes, taking photos and filming. I generally took notes after a conversation rather than during, as it was more practical when I was using my hands to speak sign language. In addition, writing notes would often interrupt the flow of the conversation. I was careful, however, to inform those I talked to that I was there to do research.

Arriving in Paris

I arrived in Paris in January 2011 and moved into an international student residence. Other young people who were also foreign to the city populated my living quarters, namely exchange students from my own and other European and African countries. The beginning of my time in the field was thus an immersion in a very international milieu. I did not have contact with deaf people or people associated with the deaf community immediately upon arrival, but through my conversations with

⁶ Deaf people in different countries speak different sign languages, and sometimes two or more sign languages exist in the same country. Similarly to spoken languages, sign languages sometimes share the same linguistic roots (World Federation of the Deaf 2012).

hearing people I paid attention to how they talked about deaf people. I also noticed how little is known about people who are deaf. Finding deaf people or someone associated with the deaf community would mean searching beyond my quarters. Although I would occasionally notice someone using sign language in the city, encountering people with no visible difference in a big city meant that I had to actively search for the right places. Most of my time was spent in Paris, but in July I went to the city of Reims for a few days to attend a cultural festival. I left Paris in July, but returned to France for ten days in August to attend a film festival in Brittany. In addition to this, I spent one week in Paris in February 2012.

Positioning

When I spoke French to hearing people, they usually asked where I was from. When I spoke sign language to deaf people, however, they thought I was a French person learning sign language. If the conversation amounted to more than a quick exchange, I would inform them that I was not French. This was done in order to be open about who I was and to avoid possible misunderstandings. I was always clear about my role as an anthropologist and the fact that I was studying deaf people. Not everyone I met was familiar with anthropology, but people reacted positively when I told them what I was studying. Many of my informants did not ask much about my research, but some deaf people wondered exactly what I had read and how I would go about conducting my research. I found myself in a situation similar to the one described by Fagerlid (2005), where the informants are educated in the same academic traditions as the anthropologist and where the anthropologist is sometimes “studying up” on literature the informants are already familiar with.

The fact that I can hear affected my relations with the deaf people I met. I was interested in communication between deaf and hearing people, and in many ways I functioned as my own informant when I had conversations with deaf people. I always used sign language to the best of my abilities when I interacted with deaf people. The reason for this was that it enabled me to communicate and because I wanted to make a good impression. In some cases, I experienced being put in roles that were out of my control by my deaf informants, in a similar way to that described by Briggs (1970) in “Kapluna Daughter”. Examples of this were situations where I suddenly found myself in the role of an interpreter for my deaf informants, in cases where they wanted to interact with hearing people unfamiliar with sign language. I also experienced that a deaf informant would say that I was just like Delaporte, a French anthropologist who has studied deaf people in France, when he introduced me to other people. I did not know how this shaped people’s impression of me.

If a deaf person introduced me to another deaf person, he or she would usually mention that I was hearing.

My role as student in my sign language classes affected my relation to the teachers and the other students. I got to know some of my deaf teachers, but the relationship was generally affected by our formal roles as teacher and student. The students were easier to get to know, and I developed close relationships with some of them. The sign language school where I took classes is also a theatre with plays and other events in sign language. It functions as a cultural centre for deaf people in France. I experienced that deaf people reacted positively when I said that I was a student at that particular school.

Being a young woman has affected the way my informants related to me. Most of my deaf informants are men and most of my hearing informants are women. In my sign language classes I discovered that most of the hearing people who learn sign language are women. I got to know my female informants mainly through sign language classes or through other female acquaintances. In sign language class we were in the same situation and it was easy to get to know each other. It was easier to get to know deaf men than women, as men more often initiated contact with me.

Arenas for data collection

In “Ethnography Through Thick & Thin” (1998), Marcus proposes “multi-sited fieldwork” as a way to tackle the challenges of a field characterized by fragmentation and constant change. Instead of staying in one place, the field is more dynamic and the anthropologist moves along with the phenomena and the informants. In my fieldwork, I chose to follow informants with certain characteristics (deaf people and others affiliated with the deaf community), rather than staying in one place. This led me to particular parts of Paris, as well as to festivals in the city of Reims and in Brittany. Breivik (2007) describes the deaf community as translocal and extending beyond national boundaries. While I discovered that my informants had many international connections, my limited time and finances did not make such an extended analysis possible.

In Paris, I was not associated with an organization or institution, but followed the people I met. Together we would spend time in the city, doing regular activities not related to deafness in any way, such as going to cafés, restaurants, the cinema, to the park, and to concerts. I also visited the homes of some of my informants, two schools for deaf children, the workplace of two deaf persons,

museums where there were guided tours in sign language, and conferences. In the outskirts of Paris I visited a speech therapy centre, and sat in on several speech therapy sessions with deaf children.

As Paris is a big city, it is not easy to meet people coincidentally, especially considering that deaf people are not visibly different and are spread all over the city. Moreover, the size of the city often makes getting from one place to another a time consuming process where much of the time is spent in the public transportation system. A way to get around this was searching for events for deaf people on the internet, such as conferences, plays and festivals. When I attended events and knew some sign language it turned out to be relatively easy to get in contact with people. The deaf community is relatively small, and many of the same people go to the events that exist in sign language. In the beginning, I would go to these events on my own. When I got to know some people, I would usually go with someone I knew.

In the beginning of my fieldwork, I spent a lot of time at my sign language school in Paris, which was also a theatre. I took intensive sign language courses over a period of eight weeks. This was both to learn the language in order to be able to communicate with deaf people, but I also used my classes as places to get to know informants. In addition to attending sign language classes, I went to see all of the plays and most of the other events that were arranged there. I gradually got to know people in my classes, and some of their friends. One of the people I got to know in my sign language classes was Eva, who has two deaf children. She lives in the outskirts of Paris with her husband, Franck. I stayed at their house for four days and participated in many of their daily activities.

In Paris, there is a café and a restaurant where deaf people are working and where they serve the customers in sign language. I visited these several times, both alone and with informants. I went to some informal deaf-hearing encounters where I met deaf persons who would turn out to be valuable informants.

In Reims, I went to a cultural festival for deaf and hearing people who use sign language. Most of the visitors at the festival were deaf. I also went to a film festival in Brittany, which was not originally created as a space for deaf people, but which has been made more accessible to deaf people in the last few years. The film festival has a focus on minorities, and several films about deafness were screened.

Language and access

In the beginning of my fieldwork, getting access to informants was a challenge. I had been given the contact information of a deaf man in Paris from a Norwegian anthropologist. Apart from this contact, I met many through my sign language courses. I got to know people by the snowball method. A challenge as far as getting to know and spending time with informants was concerned, was that people living in Paris live busy lives with work, other activities, and long commuting distances. This limited how often I was able to meet my informants.

In my case, language was closely tied to access. Language learning was important not just to be able to communicate, but to gain deaf people's acceptance. I took eight weeks of French sign language courses. My sign language classes started a bit less than a month after my arrival. I was hesitant to approach deaf people before I started learning the language, as I didn't know how they would react. Through what I had read and through my experience with deaf people in Norway, I learned that deaf people often experience that their communication with hearing people often takes place on hearing people's terms, which is the cause of some resentment towards hearing people.

When I started talking to deaf people after I had began sign language classes, they were usually very positive and interested in talking with me. I always tried the best I could to communicate in sign language. Occasionally, I would write to them and they would write to me. On one occasion, during an interview with an informant, I communicated through sign language interpreters.

In the beginning it was challenging to understand deaf people. It was difficult to understand hearing people speaking French in the first weeks, too. When I talked to deaf people, however, I experienced that it was easier to have a conversation even though my knowledge of the language was limited, as they often helped when I had difficulties expressing myself or to understand them. Deaf people would adapt their language to my level, while French hearing people did this to a smaller extent.

Informants

Most of my informants are from Paris or the outskirts of Paris. They are between twenty and fifty years old. As the boundaries of the deaf community are open-ended and unclear, and as deaf people live among the hearing majority, both deaf and hearing people are included among my informants. The persons listed here are those who I felt were the most important during my time in the field. My

field also included encounters with people who are not listed here, but who were nevertheless important for my introduction to the world of the deaf.

Alexandre is a deaf man in his fifties. He became deaf when he was 9 months after having encephalitis. He is the only deaf person in his family and he has two older brothers. Alexandre lives in Paris and works as a plumber. He usually communicates in sign language, but occasionally he speaks with his voice. He is a member of an association that works to make services and information more accessible to deaf people, and increase contact between deaf and hearing people. Once a week he attends a sign language lunch at a café in Paris where hearing and deaf can meet and speak sign language. I met Alexandre through a woman in my sign language classes.

Benoît is a deaf man in his thirties who lives in Paris. He was born deaf and has a deaf brother. His parents are hearing, but they know sign language. Benoît works as a teacher at a school for deaf children. He always communicates in sign language and never uses his voice. Like Alexandre, he is a member of the association mentioned above, and he usually attends the sign language lunch. I got to know Benoît at the sign language lunch.

Hugo is a deaf man in his forties. He works as an illustrator and lives in Paris. He is the only deaf person in his family, and has two sisters. He became deaf because his mother was sick when she was pregnant with him. He grew up learning to speak French, and did not learn sign language before he was in his twenties. He speaks with his voice and communicates in sign language, depending on the situation. I met Hugo at a guided tour in sign language at a museum in Paris.

Eva is a hearing woman in her thirties. She is married to Franck, and they have four children, two hearing and two deaf. Eva and Franck do not have any other deaf family members, but are both carriers of a recessive gene for deafness. Together they have a one in four chance of having a deaf child. Eva works as a teacher in the outskirts of Paris. She is learning sign language and LPC. I met Eva in sign language class.

Franck is a hearing man in his thirties. He is married to Eva. He works at a city hall in the outskirts of Paris. Like Eva, he is learning LSF and LPC. I met Franck in sign language class.

Mariam is a deaf woman in her thirties. She lives in Paris and works as a sign language teacher. She always communicates in sign language and never uses her voice. I got to know Mariam through Sofia. Mariam does slam-poetry in sign language.

Nadine is a deaf woman in her twenties. She lives in Paris. Nadine did not have a job when I met her. She usually communicates in sign language, and rarely uses her voice. I met Nadine at the film festival in Brittany, where Nadine and I worked together as volunteers.

Rileau is a deaf man in his thirties. He is the only deaf person in his family. He lives in Paris and works as a sign language teacher. He usually communicates in sign language and only rarely uses his voice. I met Rileau at a conference about sign language in Paris.

Théodore is a deaf man in his forties. He was born deaf, and is the only deaf person in his family. He lives in the outskirts of Paris. Théodore works as a sign language teacher at IVT, and I had him as an instructor for several weeks. He usually communicates in sign language, and only rarely uses his voice.

Augustin is a deaf man in his thirties. His entire family is deaf, and he has one brother. He lives in Paris and is a PhD student. He always communicates in sign language, and never uses his voice. I got to know Augustin through a fellow Norwegian acquaintance.

Sofia is a hearing woman in her twenties. She lives in Brittany where she works at a film festival. She is learning sign language to make the film festival more accessible to deaf people. I met Sofia in sign language class.

2 THEORETICAL ORIENTATIONS

Disability and normality

In all societies there are norms and common ways of interpreting what is acceptable behaviour, and breaking the norms is usually followed by sanctions. Normalization is about drawing boundaries, and those who don't fit into the reigning conception of normality are often put through certain processes to become more like the norm. The definition of normality and how the abnormal is dealt with, varies culturally and historically (Eriksen 2006). Ingstad and Whyte (1995) write that disability is a type of deviance, commonly thought of as lack or decrease in normal capacity to perform particular activities and enact social roles. This can be a consequence of dysfunction in the body or the mind. In contrast to sickness, which is temporary and can be cured, disability is chronic and cannot be cured, but it may be rehabilitated.

According to estimates by the World Health Organization (2011), more than 15% of the world's population, or about one billion people, lived with a disability in 2010. The World Health Organization (2012b) describes disability as an interaction between a person's physiology and societal factors: "Disabilities is an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations."

In medical anthropology, there is an interest in the study of disability. Ingstad and Whyte (1995) have made important contributions to the understanding of disability by demonstrating how the significance of a biological deficit is shaped by the cultural context which it is in. Deficits occur in all societies, but there are different ways of understanding and reacting to them. For instance, different cultural understandings of what it means to be a person affect which persons are seen as disabled. In some societies, being part of a family and having children is more important than one's capacity to work or one's appearance. If a person's value is tied to individual capacities and talents, impairment can have more severe consequences than if a person primarily is valued in accordance with his or her relations to other people. Moreover, in some cultures one cannot be disabled because no such category containing many different conditions exists. An example of this can be found in a study by Nicolaisen (1995). In her research among the Punan Bah in Indonesia, Nicolaisen discovered that one's position in the family and one's relations to other social groups are seen as

more important for one's identity than individual functioning. In contrast to in the West, people with physical or mental impairments are not put in the same category among the Punan Bah.

Ingstad and Whyte (1995) point out that the concepts *disability*, *handicap*, and *rehabilitation*, were put to use in Europe at a particular point in history. *Handicap* was originally a type of game or lottery, but later it came to signify a competition where efforts were made to compensate disadvantaged participants in order to make the contest more equal. *Disability* refers to a situation where a competency or qualification is lost or deprived from someone. It is different from the word *inability*, which refers to the inexistence of a power to perform a particular action. *Rehabilitation* is the response to disability, which involves a restoration of the previous condition that has been lost. Ingstad and Whyte write that linked to these terms is "an underlying ideal of equality lost and restored, and of the *right* to be able to participate equally."(8)

In his book "A History of Disability" (1999), Stiker writes about disability from a historical perspective. He shows how disability has been seen and dealt with differently through the ages. In the Middle, ages bodily abnormalities were grouped with other forms of suffering and poverty, and seen as part of God's creation. These people with bodily abnormalities were marginalized and supported through charity from individuals or institutions. When the Christian ethic was replaced with a medical perspective, the way the disabled were dealt with changed. The first institutions for disabled persons were established in the 1600s, a notable example being Hôtel des Invalides in Paris for wounded war veterans. The idea of instruction of disabled people spread in the 1700s. Some examples of institutions that existed in the 1800s were educational institutions for deaf and blind as well as orthopedic institutions to correct bodies. The large number of wounded men left after the first world war was decisive for the development of the modern discourse of rehabilitation. Another significant event for our contemporary age's relationship to disability, is the compensation to workers who suffered work-related accidents at the end of the nineteenth century. This kicked off the ideas of compensation, involvement of the state and normalization based on an average.

Stiker criticizes this perspective of rehabilitation, which postulates that any deviance from the norm can be erased by the use of prostheses, training, and medical interventions. He underlines that rehabilitation is an attempt to make people identical rather than equal. Instead of viewing bodily variance as something that is naturally occurring in a population, there is a tendency to think of the norm as what is natural. As a consequence, there is an attempt to change everything that does not fit into the norm, to make it fit. Disability came to mean a deficiency that should be eradicated, or a

lack to be filled. Implied in the idea of rehabilitation, is the return to an earlier situation. However, both congenital and adventitious cases are put on the path of rehabilitation. Disability is thus perceived as a temporary state to be effaced, regardless of whether the person was born that way or acquired the disability through the course of his or her life. “The disabled, henceforth of all kinds, are established as a category to be reintegrated and thus to be rehabilitated. Paradoxically, they are designated in order to be made disappear, they are spoken in order to be silenced.” (134)

Robert Murphy (1990) is an anthropologist who has written about disability in middle-class America. An injury to the spinal cord eventually left him quadriplegic. He shows how the American ideal of a perfect body affected how people met him when he was in a wheelchair. He experienced that people around him viewed him as weak and in need of help, dependent on others and less intelligent. In addition, his disability is avoided in conversation and made invisible. Murphy argues that disability is like the liminal stage in Turner’s ritual, where persons “are at once no longer classified and not yet classified” (Turner 1967:69). They have lost their old status and have not yet acquired a new one.

Oliver (1990) distinguishes between the individual and the social model of disability. The individual model of disability frames disability as a problem located in the individual, caused by functional limitations. “The personal tragedy theory of disability”(3) is an assumption in this model, where disability is thought to be caused by random unfortunate events, that struck some individuals by chance. In contrast, the social model of disability does not deny the existence of disability, but locates the problem within society. According to this model, it is the failure of society to adapt and provide services to everyone that is the cause of disability. Oliver argues against the medicalization of disability, as he sees it as a social state and should thus not be included in doctors’ interventions. He stresses the difference between disability and illness, where only the latter should be a matter of concern to the medical profession. Moreover, he writes that “The whole medical and rehabilitation enterprise is founded upon an ideology of normality and this has far reaching implications for treatment. It’s aim is to restore the disabled person to normality, whatever that may mean.”(4)

Moser (2006) writes about the normalization of disabled people, where they by the help of advanced technology are made to function as close to what is normal as possible, as a way to reinforce the differences between the normal and the deviant. Instead of making alternative models of disability, she suggests that a more fruitful way to proceed is to shift the focus from disability to what is thought of as normal and to “use disabilities as a lense or a sort of magnifying glass to get a

better idea of the conditions that produce ability and normality for what is otherwise too close and too naturalized.”⁷(161)

In my thesis, I will draw upon this literature of disability to shed light on the processes through which deaf people are normalized to become as much like those who can hear as possible. Deafness is often defined as a disability, and I will explore how deaf people respond to this and how they shape their own culture.

Deafness

Monaghan (2003) gives an historical overview of important historical events that have touched the lives of deaf people. The French priest Abbé de l'Épée was the first person to teach sign language to larger groups of deaf children. In the last part of the 18th century, he opened the first official school for deaf children in Paris. Abbé de l'Épée opened a total of 21 schools for deaf children. Germany was also early to establish schools for deaf children, but here children were taught to speak orally instead of using sign language. Schools modelled on the method of Abbé de l'Épée were created in many places outside France, including Madrid, St. Petersburg, Sweden, Connecticut, Brazil and the UK. In the first part of the 19th century, religious groups such as the Catholic Church played an important part in the schooling of deaf children. The deaf schools were often residential schools, where friendships and close communities of deaf people were created. At the Milan Congress of 1880, it was decided that deaf children should be taught to speak orally and that sign language should be banned from deaf schools. This oral philosophy spread to many countries, including France.

After the second world war, hearing aids became a more widespread method to “fix” deaf people. In the 1950s, a trend of mainstreaming in the education of deaf children started. This meant that deaf children were moved from residential schools to regular schools with hearing children. Mainstreaming is still common today, but in the last forty years there has been a revival in the use of sign language and deaf communities have become more politicized. However, the medical establishment and oralism continue to have a strong influence, and cochlear implants are often promoted as the new “cure” for deafness. Breivik (2006) points out that there are contrasting views on the technologies developed to make deaf people hear. From a medical perspective, this technology is viewed as something positive, but for many deaf people it has been seen as a form of

⁷ All translations are mine

“ethnic cleansing” (188), and an attempt to eradicate deaf people’s language and culture. Deaf people often do not see themselves as disabled, but as members of a linguistic minority with their own culture (Haualand 2002). According to Breivik (2006), deaf people represent a good example of the limitations of the idea of normalisation and integration of difference. He explains that when it comes to questions of hearing, sight and language, deaf and hearing people often have diverging ideas of what is normal. From the hearing majority’s point of view, hearing is considered normal. From deaf people’s point of view, on the other hand, visual communication and deaf cultural expression is valued.

Communities where both deaf and hearing people use sign language have existed and continue to exist in several places in the world. Groce (1985) writes about Martha’s Vineyard, an island on the east coast of the US, where such a situation existed. Circulation of a recessive gene for deafness, combined with an endogamous marriage pattern, produced a high proportion of deaf people for two hundred years. Groce describes a community where both deaf and hearing communicated in sign language. Here, deaf people were not singled out as deaf or as disabled, but were seen as unique individuals. In the article ”Deaf Utopias? Reviewing the Sociocultural Literature on the World’s ”Martha’s Vineyard Situations”” (2010), Kusters writes about current so-called ”shared signing communities”, where both deaf and hearing persons communicate in sign language. These communities exist in Mexico, Israel, Thailand, Jamaica, Brasil, Ghana and on Bali.

Biosociality and biological citizenship

More recently, anthropologists studying disability have pointed out that common experiences of illness or common search for therapy, can create new social relations. These associations and social relations that arise from medical categories are often called *biosociality*, derived from Foucault’s concept of *biopower*. For instance, Rapp (1999) writes about families who have children with Down syndrome, and the difficult decisions that parents have to make related to amniocentesis tests. This literature on biosociality has been useful for me in my thesis.

Simultaneously with the appearance of the modern state in Europe, a new type of power was established. Foucault calls this *biopower* (1990). In earlier periods, there was a tendency to govern by “*taking* life and *let* live” (1990: 138), and criminals were executed as a way to display power. *Biopower* refers to the administration and optimalisation of life, and the individual human body becomes an object of disciplining and of optimalisation of capacity. On the population level,

biopower is expressed through regulation of reproduction, health and life expectancy. Inspired by Foucault's ideas of biopower, Rabinow (1996) coined the term *biosociality*. This refers to new ways that people relate to one another and create communities on the basis of a similar biological condition.

Rose and Novas (2005) show how states tie conceptions of their citizens to their biological existence, a phenomenon they call *biological citizenship*. Biological citizens are created when authorities put them in categories such as *chronic ill, disabled, blind, deaf* or *psychopaths*. The medical diagnoses affect the way they see themselves, and lead them to use a biologically coloured language when they talk about themselves. Biological citizens actively demand protection and special resources, and it is expected that they take care of their own health. Rose and Novas point out that biological citizens often are engaged in biosociality, for instance when persons put in the same medical category assemble to fight the authority of doctors or scientists.

Michele Friedner (2010) argues that the deaf community can be understood as a biosociality. In literature about the deaf community, there is a difference between being deaf (with a minuscule) and Deaf (with a majuscule). Being deaf (with a minuscule) signifies that one has received the medical diagnosis of deafness. Deaf (with a majuscule) means that one identifies with the deaf community, in other words that one is culturally deaf⁸. This, Friedner writes, is deaf biosociality.

In my paper, I will use the concepts of biosociality and biological citizenship to look at how deaf people create a social community based on deafness and how deaf children are put through processes of normalization as a consequence of receiving the diagnosis of deafness.

The senses

There is an interest in the study of the senses in anthropology. In "The Hidden Dimension" (1982), Hall states that "people from different cultures not only speak different languages, but what is possibly more important, *inhabit different sensory worlds*. Selective screening of sensory data admits some things while filtering out others, so that *experience as it is perceived* through one set of culturally patterned sensory screens is quite different from experience perceived through another"(2,

⁸ Although the deaf/Deaf distinction is commonly used in the literature about deaf communities, I am not making this distinction in my thesis. This does not mean, however, that I don't recognize the difference between being given a diagnosis as deaf by a doctor, and speaking sign language and identifying with the deaf community.

emphasis in original). Not all sensory information is put to use or valued in the same way for everyone everywhere. Similarly, Synnott writes that “We are deaf to entire orders of reality which exist for other peoples, but not for us” (1993:153). There are different ways of using the senses, and if we don’t pay attention to how people make use of sensory information, this can limit our understanding of them. There are examples of anthropologists who have strived to understand how people use the senses in different ways to navigate their environment and to communicate with other people. In his book “Sound and Sentiment” (1982), Feld shows how sound is very important to the Kaluli living in a dense forest. When studying among the Songhay, Stoller (1984) was told that he had to learn how to *hear* properly in order to understand their ways. Lundberg (2006/2007) writes that while there is a growing interest in the study of the senses in anthropology, this has rarely been an object of research in anthropological studies “at home”, where there has been a tendency to choose a medical point of departure of disease/illness, lack and disability. In my thesis I will be attentive to how deaf people use their senses to relate to each other and interact with their environment.

3 NORMALIZATION

A man said that he used to work at a store next to a school for deaf-mutes. They would often come into the store and there was a lady working there who was able to communicate with them. “Was the lady deaf?”, I asked. “No, she was normal”, he said. (From the author’s field notes).

In France, like in many places, hearing and speaking with one’s voice is the method of communication considered to be “normal”. A deaf person, however, does not hear and usually does not acquire speech without special training. There are efforts to integrate deaf people into society through processes of rehabilitation: as children they are equipped with hearing aids or cochlear implants to enhance their ability to hear, and they attend sessions of speech therapy to develop the capacity for oral expression. Screening for deafness is done at an increasingly earlier age, down to 1-2 days after a child is born. The hope of doctors and often the hearing parents of deaf children is that deaf children will reach a functional level of hearing and speaking that is as close to “normal” as possible through means of technology and active therapy.

During my fieldwork in France, I often encountered people who did not know any deaf people, or much about them. As deaf people are what brought me to France, the topic would often come up in conversation. On numerous occasions, people would tell me about their impressions of deaf people, or an incident where they had witnessed or experienced involving deaf people. Deaf, or “deaf-mute” as many would say, was often talked about as something in contrast to “normal”, like in the excerpt above.

Deaf people tend to have a different perspective on the processes of integration that they experience during the course of their lives. While there are different opinions among deaf people on the value of technology to enhance hearing and of speech therapy, many are opposed to this, and the way that other people define their lives. As a consequence, active efforts are made to change the path that has been laid out for them. In this chapter, I will explain some of these processes by which deaf people are normalized according to the hearing majority’s idea of what is considered to be normal. Moreover, I will shed light on how many choose to distance themselves from social settings where communication takes place on hearing people’s terms.

Children in speech therapy

The speech therapist, a woman in her thirties, has taken a game down from the bookshelf in the therapy room. In this particular game one is supposed to use wooden blocks representing parts of a wall to construct a castle, where a prince and a princess can be united. The boy sitting next to the therapist is four years old and profoundly deaf. The therapist has demonstrated how to build the castle, and lets the boy try. When the boy speaks, his voice is unclear. There is a cochlear implant behind one of his ears. The therapist speaks to the boy in a loud voice, articulating her words carefully. The boy starts to put the blocks on top of each other. Sometimes he looks up at the therapist to get an indication of whether or not he is doing it correctly. The therapist seems to be well aware of what facial expressions she is making. If the boy makes a mistake, her facial expression is blank and she doesn't say anything. If he succeeds in building the castle and uniting the prince and the princess, she puts her thumb up and exclaims "very good!" in a loud and clear voice. She points at the castle and asks the boy "what is that?". Without waiting for the boy to answer, she answers her own question: "it's the princess' castle!", doing the sign for "castle" at the same time as she is saying it. The boy repeats, but instead of saying castle, "château", he says hat, "chapeau". The therapist says "no! chapeau?", and puts her hands on her head to make the boy understand that he has pronounced the word for hat. Realizing that he has made a mistake, the boy says "nooo". The therapist repeats "château!", doing a movement with her hand that represents the sound "t". In addition, she does the sign for "castle". This time the boy repeats "château". The therapist exclaims "yes!". (From the author's field notes).

When a child is born in France, it is more and more common to screen for deafness at an increasingly earlier age, down to one or two days after birth. While there are law proposals to make the test compulsory for all children, parents still have a choice of whether or not they want to screen their child. Doctors usually offer the test, as parents can lodge a complaint if it is not offered, and it is therefore in the doctor's interest to offer it. The process of testing and the actions that follow can be understood as an example of what Rose and Novas (2005) call biological citizenship. Biological citizens are being placed in a particular category by doctors, which puts certain expectations on the biological citizen of ways to improve one's health situation, and it also qualifies for certain rights. If

the child has a lower than normal hearing, a diagnosis is given corresponding to how many decibels the child hears. Each diagnosis is labeled on a scale ranging from *slightly deaf*, *moderately deaf*, *severely deaf*, and *profoundly deaf*. Doctors automatically prescribe hearing aids or cochlear implants, depending on the degree of deafness. Following this, the child attends sessions of speech therapy to develop his or her ability to speak French.

The excerpt of the interaction between the speech therapist and the child originates from a visit to a speech therapy centre in the outskirts of Paris. The speech therapy centre is for children between the ages two and twelve. At the centre, I observed speech therapy sessions with three different children. During the session the therapist and the child would usually sit at a table and do different oral exercises. In the therapy room there is a table with chairs, shelves with toys and posters and drawings on the walls. The children have their own sketchbook in which they do exercises during sessions. When I visited a session, the therapist told the child who I was and why I was there, and for the rest of the session I sat quietly observing and taking notes. Before and after the session I talked to the therapist about the child and the content of the session.

Sometimes a child is not screened until one has a suspicion that the child is deaf, which could be as late as at two to three years. Danielle, a speech therapist who has been working at the centre for thirty years, told me that deafness in a child is usually detected earlier today than some years ago. Now doctors pay attention to signs that can indicate that a child doesn't hear, such as a poorly developed language. People who work with children at school and in kindergarten are becoming more attentive too. Danielle expressed her concerns about testing the child as early as two days after birth, as the test is unreliable and there is a lack of counselling and advice for parents after the test. If the parents get the message "your child doesn't hear well" without further guidance, this can be hard on the parents and they can become lost. In some cases, the test gives wrong results, and the parents are told that their child is deaf when it's actually hearing. "One breaks a family like that", Danielle said.

When a child is screened and found to be profoundly deaf, the doctors almost automatically advise the parents to have the child set up with cochlear implants. However, if the child is severely deaf, the results might be just as good with hearing aids as with implants. Getting an implant is a comprehensive operation, so if one gets the same result with hearing aids, parents usually chose hearing aids as it is the less invasive treatment option. All of the children who come to the speech therapy centre are either severely or profoundly deaf, and all of them have either been fitted with

hearing aids or had cochlear implants operated into the ear. The youngest children come once a week, while the older children come three or four times per week. Each session lasts between forty-five minutes and one hour. In addition to the individual sessions, some children have group therapy sessions. Danielle tells me that the services they provide at the centre are of better quality than at many other centres, where there is sometimes only one speech therapist provides intervention for over fifty children, as opposed to six for thirty children at this centre.

Danielle said that sometimes when a child comes to the centre it can take a long time before he or she starts to speak, sometimes even between 1-3 years of speech therapy sessions. There are also cases where children never learn to speak, even though they don't have a difficult degree of deafness. Danielle recounts a boy who came to the centre who had limited hearing, but never was able to start speaking. Sometimes the children are not so easy to deal with in the beginning, so they won't speak. But "*after a while they understand that this is the way society is*", Danielle said.

Following Oliver's (1990) distinction between the social and the individual model of disability, the perspective of doctors and speech therapists on deafness correspond with the individual model of disability. From their perspective, deafness is a deviation from the norm of being able to hear, and is understood as a problem located in the deaf person. To overcome the disability of deafness, the deaf child undergoes rehabilitation and encouraged to participate in society. After the doctors have designated the child as deaf, the speech therapists teaching children to speak are central in the process of rehabilitation.

During a speech therapy session, the therapist either just speaks or speaks and signs at the same time.⁹ When the therapist speaks, she speaks in a loud clear voice¹⁰. Even though they are using signs, they are not really using French sign language, but signed French. Signed French means doing signs while following the syntax of French, rather than that of French sign language. The purpose of the signs is to get children to speak. The younger the child, the more signs the therapist uses. In addition to sign language, the therapists use LPC and the Borel method. LPC (Langage Parlé Completé) is a type of code that makes it easier for a deaf person to read lip-read another person who is speaking French. One hand is held close to the face when speaking, and particular movements of the hand are made simultaneously with the pronunciation of particular sounds in

⁹ According to the speech therapists, doing signs at the same time as they speak aids the children's comprehension

¹⁰ All of the speech therapists I met were women

order to be able to visually distinguish words that normally look the same on the mouth when pronounced. The Borel method is a way to visualize sound where a particular hand movement that represents a sound (a phoneme). An example of this can be seen in the excerpt where the boy is building a castle and the therapist is using the Borel method to highlight the sound “t” in the word “château” (castle). In addition to speaking and the ways of visualizing sounds with the hands, the therapist is using drawings, pictures, games, doing demonstrations (like cutting paper and jumping) and playing music. Sometimes the therapist and the child have part of the session in a room where there is a computer and speakers. In a session I observed, the child listened to the sound of different instruments, such as a trumpet, a guitar, a flute and drums, and was asked to identify the instrument on a photograph.

In addition to learning new vocabulary and how to pronounce it, the therapist and the child work on different aspects of the language, such as the difference between pronouns “I”/”you” and “he”/”she” and prepositions. The children who come to the centre go to a regular school where the deaf child is integrated into a class of hearing children. The therapist is in contact with the child’s teacher and sometimes prepares the child for topics he or she will cover in class. Sometimes the child also learns other things that will make it easier to cope in a class of hearing children. For instance, children learn what the names of the other children in the class are, as well as how to lip-read them, as this information that can easily escape the deaf child. In the following excerpt from a session, we see how the speech therapist uses signs, LPC and the Borel method to visualize sound for a deaf child and prepares her for something she will learn at school:

The therapist asks the girl if she has told me how old she is. The girl turns towards me and I look at her and shake my head. The girl says “four” and puts up four fingers. The girl has a hearing aid on her left ear and an implant on her right ear. The therapist tells me that the girl is severely deaf and that she got the implant she has on her right ear six months ago. She used to have a hearing aid on her right ear, but as her hearing has dropped spontaneously, her hearing aid is no longer appropriate and therefore requires a more invasive treatment option, such as cochlear implants. The therapist says she has been coming to this centre for two years, and before that she was going to another centre. The therapist starts going through the sketchbook with the girl, looking at what they have done during the last few sessions. The therapist speaks in a loud and clear voice and uses some signs simultaneously. The girl also uses some signs at the same time as she is speaking. Sometimes the therapist uses LPC when talking to the girl. The

therapist points at an image in the sketchbook and says “a little yellow cat”, using LPC when saying it. Shortly after, the therapist and the child continues to work on an exercise about spatial displacement that they started the previous session. The therapist says that they are working on this because the girl is about to cover it in school. They have glued photos of the girl positioned differently in relation to a blue coloured crash pad in a gymnasium onto the pages of the sketchbook. The therapist points at the different photographs and says “next to”, “on top of”, “behind”. The girl repeats the words. Then the therapist writes down the words next to the photos. (From the author’s field notes).

In the following excerpt of a session with a 10-year old girl, we see more examples of how the therapist uses signs and explains new concepts:

They start doing exercises in the sketchbook. Until this moment, the speech therapist has only been speaking, but now she uses a few signs as well. They talk about colours of pictures in the sketchbook. When the speech therapist says “do you remember?”, she uses the sign for “remember”. When she says “what’s that?” she uses the sign for “what”. The therapist tells me that some colours are more complicated, such as turquoise, sand and copper. The girl has long blonde hair with colourful hair clips and hearing aids behind her ears. The girl speaks well, but there is something a little different about her voice, like she has an accent. Afterwards they do an exercise about different feelings, the therapist names some feelings “anger”, “fear”, “love”, writes them down, and asks the girl to name the opposite feeling. The girl moves around on her chair, seems a bit restless, but pays attention to everything the speech therapist says. At one point, she removes her hearing aid, tells the therapist that her hair got stuck in it, and then puts it back on. When the session is over, the girl leaves the room to see her mom in the waiting area. The therapist tells me that she has severe and profound deafness; it differs between the two ears. She hears pretty well with her hearing aids, though. She has been coming to the centre for four years, and before that she was living in another city where she went to a different centre. The girl has a deaf older sister, but nobody else in her family is deaf. At home they only speak French, but sometimes the two deaf sisters take off their hearing aids and talk to each other in sign language. (From the author’s field notes).

Parents are coming in and out of the waiting area to drop off and pick up their children before and after therapy sessions. In the waiting area at the centre, there are tables, chairs, and a shelf with toys. On the wall, there is a board with posters and leaflets. Next to the reception desk, there are small photos of the children who come to speech therapy, with their names written below the photographs. A parent accompanies the youngest children to the session. After each session, the speech therapist offers the child a candy or a small cake in the waiting area on their way out.

As Stiker (1999) points out, people are rehabilitated - returned to a previous situation - even though their physical state has always been the same. In the case of deafness, while a person might be born deaf, the child is said to be rehabilitated to be able to hear. This rehabilitation is not to mimic an earlier state the person has lived, but to an idea of a “normal” physiological makeup that all people should have. The deaf child is rehabilitated to reach an ideal of normality, to become a person that hears and speaks. Murphy (1990) argues that disabled people are in a liminal stage, such as the one described by Turner (1967). The deafness is treated as something temporary that should be changed so that the person will hear. Once given a diagnosis as deaf by the doctor, a liminal stage of speech therapy is entered in order to in the end produce a child that is as much like one born with the ability to hear as possible.

Deaf children in a hearing family

Eva and her husband Franck are in their late thirties and live in the outskirts of Paris. They have four children: two deaf and two hearing. Eva and Franck are both hearing and neither of them have any other deaf family members. When Eva gave birth their first child, H el ene, who is deaf, they discovered that they are both carriers of a recessive gene for deafness which means that together they have a one in four chance of having a deaf child. Getting a deaf child came as a surprise, and neither Eva nor Franck knew much about deafness at the time. After giving birth to H el ene and two hearing sons, Herv e and Paul, they had another deaf child, Mathieu. H el ene, who is now ten years old, is moderately deaf, which means that she can hear sounds spoken in a raised voice one metre away.¹¹ She uses hearing aids and goes to speech therapy, and Eva and Franck has generally followed the advice given to them by doctors.

¹¹ According to the World Health Organization’s scale of grades of hearing impairment (World Health Organization 2012c).

Hélène is not in a special school or class with other deaf children, but goes to a regular school in a class where all of the other children are hearing. As she speaks well and her hearing aids are normally hidden underneath her long brown hair, it is easy to mistake her for being hearing. Eva told me that she doesn't always hear everything, and people often think that she is not paying attention if she doesn't pick up on something someone is saying to her. Even though she hears fairly well with her hearing aids, some sounds are more difficult to pick up than others. For instance, Eva tells me she doesn't hear much of the sounds coming from the TV. It is possible to attach a microphone to the TV so that the sound picked up by her hearing aids is louder. But Hélène doesn't want to use it, instead she prefers to read if there are subtitles. And the messages on loudspeakers in the train and at the train stations escape her, even with hearing aids. When Hélène is at school, the teacher uses a microphone, whose amplified sound is sent to a small receiver Hélène is wearing around her neck. She is the only deaf student in her class, and is doing well in comparison to the other children; but what is difficult for her is when she is with a big group of people and many persons are talking at the same time. At this point, Hélène is much more likely to misunderstand or misinterpret information. Sometimes when children are playing outside and shouting to each other, she doesn't hear everything. Other times she prefers to play on her own. In general, she gets along well with the other children at school and has friends. When she is interacting with only one other child, there is no problem, Eva said. Franck thought that Hélène might find it difficult when she is starting junior high school next year. Until now, she has been in a safe environment with good friends; but at the new school she will have to give the microphone to many new teachers. She doesn't like to stick out.

When Eva and Franck had their fourth child, Mathieu, who is four years old, the situation was a bit different than with Hélène. While Hélène is moderately deaf, Mathieu is severely to profoundly deaf, meaning that he cannot hear a shouted voice¹². Mathieu is “more” deaf than Hélène, and Eva and Franck don't know what is best to do with him yet, if it is best to put him in a special school or let him go to a regular school like his sister. The doctor has advised them that hearing aids and speech training is the best choice for Mathieu, and has not informed them about any other alternatives, such as sign language. When Eva and Franck asked the doctor if it is a good idea for them to learn sign language, the doctor said that it was not necessary, but that they could take an introductory course if they wanted to. Despite their doctor's recommendations, they are looking at what other options exist for their deaf son.

¹² According to the World Health Organization's scale of grades of hearing impairment (World Health Organization 2012c).

While Mathieu wears hearing aids and goes to speech therapy, Eva and Franck fear that letting him continue in a regular school like his sister might be too difficult for him. Although a law was passed in 2005 that gives parents the right to choose schooling in LSF for their deaf children in the area where they live, no such option is available where Franck and Eva live. There is a long way to travel to get to the nearest school that has sign language. Right now, Eva is a bit worried about Mathieu because it is difficult to know if he is doing well in school or not. At the moment he is in a regular school where all of the other children are hearing. The teacher says that Mathieu is doing well, but Eva doesn't know what the teacher means by "well", as Eva knows that he cannot possibly understand everything the teacher says in class. She has suggested that the teacher uses a few signs, for instance when they are singing songs or in other situations where it is possible to use a few simple signs simultaneously, which wouldn't be difficult for the teacher. But the teacher hasn't done it, and Eva is not in a position to command the teacher what to do. And the speech therapist her son goes to is supposed to give the teacher advice, which the speech therapist hasn't done. Eva said that there is a collection of people around her son who have their respective roles and that she has to juggle. Eva said she would like to know how he is really doing in school so that it is possible to find out what kind of schooling is best for him, if it is best to go to a special school or continue in the regular school. There are no special schools in the vicinity, the closest is one hour of transport each way. Eva is happy that the teacher Mathieu will have next year has started to learn sign language. Eva and Franck learn LPC and LSF, but they are using their vacation to learn LPC and gets time off work to learn LSF. They have to pay for the lessons themselves, which are expensive. They have applied to the state for reimbursement of part of the fee, but they are waiting for the response which will take a few months. Eva said it's not easy to be the parents of a deaf child, especially if you don't want to follow the system. If you want to learn sign language you have to be able to take time off work and the classes are expensive. Luckily she and her husband are doing well financially so that they are able to take sign language classes.

When Eva speaks to Mathieu she speaks in a loud, clear voice. Sometimes she does LPC at the same time as she is speaking, and sometimes she uses signs too. Mathieu is very active and impatient, and doesn't always look at her when she is speaking to him. Mathieu's voice is a bit unclear, so sometimes Eva has to tell me what he is saying. Franck said that it is sometimes difficult for him and Eva to understand what he is saying, too. Mathieu has noticed this and sometimes will do a sign to make his parents understand what he means. For instance, it is difficult for Eva and Franck to hear the difference when he says "quoi" (what) and "quatre" (four). Lately, Mathieu has started doing a particular sign with his hand when he means "quoi". She showed me his audiogram,

with diagrams showing how much he hears on his right and left ear with and without hearing aids. Eva said she's hoping that her son will be able to hear down to 25-30 dB if he gets more powerful hearing aids. She said that LSF is a beautiful language, while LPC is just a code used for speaking French. Eva and Franck currently use a combination of sign language, LPC, and speaking French; however, they plan to use LPC as their primary method of communication. She would like her son to learn LSF, but she thinks it is better if someone else teaches him, such as a deaf babysitter.

All of the children, including the two boys of six and eight years old who are hearing, have picked up some sign language from their parents. The first time I met Hervé, one of the hearing sons, and asked him in French how old he was, he responded "6 years" in sign language without using his voice. When I stayed at Eva and Franck's house, some sign language was often used at the dinner table:

At the table, Eva, Franck and the children for the most part speak French, but sometimes they use signs as well. Franck and Eva usually speak with loud and clear voices. Using his somewhat unclear voice and signs simultaneously, Mathieu tells Paul that Paul played with his friend, to which Paul responds with something in French that Mathieu doesn't pick up. Mathieu says "what?", and when Paul starts to answer him, Eva says that he should use signs when talking to Mathieu. Paul answers Mathieu using his voice and signs simultaneously. There is a sign Paul doesn't know, and he asks Eva for it, but she doesn't know either. A little later, H el ene gives us a word puzzle, speaking with her voice and sign language simultaneously: "what is a beverage in three letters that you drink for breakfast?" I spelled the word "t-h-e" (tea) on my hand using the alphabet of French sign language, Paul spelled "e-a-u" (water) on his hand. But it was a trick question, and H el ene had to give us the answer "k-k-o" (cacao). The children are talkative, and often there are several people speaking at the same time, using their voice. Eva looks at me and excuses herself, saying that here in the family everyone speaks at once. I said it's okay, it's probably normal when you have four children. Eva said yes, but it is too bad for H el ene and Mathieu, because when many are speaking at the same time they often don't register what people are saying. It's complicated at our house, she said. (From the author's field notes).

Eva says she rarely meets hearing parents who learn sign language to communicate with their deaf children. Most parents are only concerned with their child learning to speak, and are not so open to

trying different things. Then again, she said, parents don't receive much information from their doctors about other options such as sign language. She added that the doctor always focuses on repairing and restoring hearing and doesn't give any information about sign language.

According to Stiker (1990), the idea of rehabilitation is to make people identical rather than equal. While they seem more like hearing people than they would have done without speech training and hearing aids and implants, they are not effectively like hearing people. In the case of deafness, changing the individual through rehabilitation does not remove all barriers. In the case of H el ene, who is only moderately deaf, there are obstacles even though she is using hearing aids and going to speech therapy. While she speaks well, like a person who hears, and is able to follow the conversation if one person is speaking at a time, other situations can be more challenging. For instance, if there are several people speaking at the same time, it is difficult to make out what is being said. She doesn't pick up on announcements in trains or the sound on the TV.

In the case of H el ene and Mathieu, as biological citizens they are defined as moderately and severely to profoundly deaf, respectively, by doctors. This qualifies for particular rights, such as financial support for hearing aids and speech therapy. Unfortunately, there is little or no support for Eva and Franck to learn sign language. While a new law was passed in 2005 to ensure that deaf children will have the option of being educated in sign language at a school in the area where they live, this has not been followed in the area where Eva and Franck live.

In the article "Sound and belonging: What is a community?" (2008), Hualand asks why oral language is thought of as the normal form of communication and what role sound plays in creating relations and communities among hearing people. She writes that "Hearing people's quest for "integrating" or "including" Deaf people might be based in their auditive sense of belonging because this is their embodied way of making relations."(120). Since it is normal to relate to people through sound, the absence of sound is sometimes thought of as the absence of communication and relation, and this can be one of the reasons why it feels so important to help deaf people to hear.

Normalization from deaf people's point of view

After growing up using hearing aids and attending speech therapy, many deaf adults choose to change the course of their lives. At International Visual Theatre (IVT)¹³, a theatre in Paris run by deaf people, a play was put on that deals with the process of normalization from deaf people's point of view. The play is called *Inheritance* and tells the story of a deaf man, Julien, who grows up as the only deaf person in his family. The play is bilingual (in sign language and French) and accessible to both deaf people who sign and hearing people. Half of the actors on stage are deaf, communicating in sign language, and the other half are hearing and speaking French and some sign language. One hearing actress plays the role of a sign language interpreter, and she interprets the communication between the deaf actors and the other hearing actors. Many themes are dealt with that are or have been important in deaf people's lives, such as the banning of sign language from deaf schools, the ability to choose what language to communicate in, and how relations between deaf and hearing people can be difficult.

In the play, Julien returns to the house he grew up in after having cut contact with his family twenty-five years earlier, at the age of twenty. Having grown up as the only deaf person in his family, he chose to flee due to difficult relations with his family members. His father was one of the driving forces of oralism, the idea that deaf people should learn to speak rather than learn sign language. At the house, Julien meets his brother and sister who he has not seen or been in contact with since he left. Upon his return, Julien only expresses himself in sign language, even though his dad taught him how to speak growing up. He brings his wife, son and a sign language interpreter. The interpreter translates the conversations Julien, his wife, and son are having with Julien's brother and sister. Julien's sister has attained a basic level of sign language, while the brother seems to think that Julien can understand him well enough if he raises his voice. The play not only tells Julien's personal story, but also "the story of deaf people in general, especially the story of the congress of Milan which in 1880 banned sign language from the education of deaf children for almost a hundred years."¹⁴

Back in the house where he grew up, Julien looks through his father's old things and is reminded of the sufferings he experienced as a child. Julien tells the story of a father who never really saw Julien himself, only his deafness. Instead of accepting Julien as he was and letting him meet other deaf people and learn sign language, his father was determined to teach his son to speak orally and in

¹³ See Chapter 4 for more information about International Visual Theatre

¹⁴ Theatre booklet

this way “fix” his deafness. Without his father’s knowledge, Julien read Berthier’s book about l’Abbé de l’epée, one of the first to teach sign language to deaf children, and wished that he could be one of those children learning sign language. Julien shares painful memories of the hearing aids he had to use. He criticizes his brother and sister for not noticing the difficulties he lived through as a child. He recounts an event that took place in their home which is burned into Julien’s memory, but that his siblings have long forgotten: their father had invited people to their home to demonstrate that it is possible to teach deaf people how to speak and Julien was put on display. He had been dreading the day and had learned the sentences he had to pronounce by heart. By the look on the guests’ faces he understood that his voice was not like other people’s voices and he felt like he had the voice of a monster.

The historical events the play deals with, such as the Milan congress of 1880 where sign language was banned from deaf education, are events that most deaf but few hearing people know about. In addition, the play shows what it is like to be deaf today, using interpreters and often using a video camera to film various events. In the play, the adolescent boy is constantly filming, and his mother (Julien’s wife) explains to Julien’s brother that deaf people often make video diaries as sign language does not exist in written form. The play communicates that using sign language is the only way for deaf people to lead happy fulfilling lives and that speaking is for hearing people.

During conversations with informants, many talked about similar experiences from when they grew up. Théodore and Alexandre both felt isolated because their families didn’t know sign language. During conversations with deaf informants, I learned that they used hearing aids growing up but when they were old enough to make their own decisions, they stopped using them. Augustin used hearing aids until he was twelve or thirteen years old. He quit because they gave him a headache. Augustin spoke with his voice when he was little, until he turned eighteen. He explained that he stopped using his voice because it got too difficult and that all communication was on hearing people’s terms when he spoke French with his voice. In a conversation with Alexandre and Benoît, they said that they had both used hearing aids growing up but decided to stop. Alexandre said that when he was a child he had a hearing aid hanging around his neck with a cord linking it to the ear. Later he got a hearing aid that you place behind the ear. When he finished school when he was around twenty years old, he started using them less and less until he stopped completely. Benoît, who is younger than Alexandre, has never had a hearing aid hanging around his neck, but has had had hearing aids behind his ears.

Instead of viewing hearing aids as something positive that can increase one’s capacity to hear and by extension one’s capacity to interact with other people, many deaf people view hearing aids as a symbol of discrimination against them. Deaf artist Arnaud Balard (2009) writes about *audism*, the view of deaf as disabled people in need of repair, while deaf people want to be seen as different, but not less. According to Balard, deafness has caused isolation of deaf people and negation of their identity. In his artwork, ”Le Cri Sourd” (“The Deaf Scream”), clearly inspired by Edvard Munch’s painting “The Scream”, the face of the person screaming is covered with round, flat batteries of the kind used in hearing aids. Two larger batteries are covering the eyes. The mouth, the only part not covered in batteries, is open. The hands are covered, preventing the use of sign language. Like in the original there are two persons standing further back, only here they are dressed in white coats, like doctors. The river looks like a stream of batteries and the sky is full of lips.



Le Cri Sourd. From Balard, Arnaud “Le Surdisme” (2009). Reprinted with permission.

At a film festival I had a conversation with Jean-Luc, a deaf man in his forties. The main theme of the film festival was South Africa, and many films dealing with apartheid were shown¹⁵. Jean-Luc said that he doesn't like it when deaf people are called disabled and that he thinks that the treatment of deaf and disabled people can be compared to the oppression of black people by white people. He said that a lot of hearing people feel sorry for deaf people, thinking that it must be terrible to be deaf. And a lot of people think that the word "deaf" is something one should avoid saying, that it refers to something bad. They think it is better to use expressions like "hard of hearing" because it indicates that the person at least hears a little bit. Jean-Luc also said that he often reads that deaf people are described as "deaf mutes", "hard of hearing", "hearing deficient", "severely deaf", "profoundly deaf", but seldom just as "deaf". That irritates him. He doesn't understand why knowing exactly how much he hears is anyone's business. "It's like asking coloured people how many percent black they are", he said.

Early screening for deafness: a threat to the deaf community

Children are screened for deafness at an increasingly younger age, often 1-2 days after birth.

Doctors usually advise the parents that deaf children should be equipped with hearing aids or cochlear implants. Following this, the child attends speech therapy sessions and is put in a class with hearing children. There are proposals for a new law that will make it obligatory for deaf children to be screened right after birth. The short film *The End* is about a situation where the deaf community disappears as a consequence of the development of a cure for deafness. While no such cure for deafness exists, the film tackles the same issue as the one raised by early screening or deafness and the following actions that are taken. The film is made to look like a documentary and it won the award for best film at a large cultural festival for deaf people and others who use sign language.¹⁶ The film takes place in Britain and follows four deaf people from childhood to adulthood, over a period of sixty years. In the film, scientists have developed a cure for deafness and the number of deaf people is declining, until there is only one deaf person left in the country. It shows the impact of the cure on deaf people, leading to the eradication of their culture.

The film begins in 1987, when the children – Arron, Luke, Mohammed and Sophia – are nine years old. We see glimpses of them with large outdated hearing aids hanging around their necks in a school where they use both sign language and learn to speak.

¹⁵ See Chapter 5 for more information about the film festival

¹⁶ See Chapter 4 for more information about the festival Clin d'Oeil

The children are followed and interviewed in subsequent years. In 1995, a company has manufactured a cure for deafness, called “the treatment” based on stem cell regeneration. A representative of the company says in an interview on television that “our goal is to come up with solutions to problems. If I can improve the lives of someone, that’s great. It’s up to them if they want the treatment”. Mohammed has the treatment quickly, while Luke, Arron and Sophia don’t want it. As Arron says “I’m deaf, not disabled”. Luke is a lonely guy, an outsider with few friends. Arron is in a special school for deaf, which is slow compared to the regular school but at least he understands what’s going on since the instruction is in sign language. Sophia attends a regular school, but she finds it challenging to meet friends.

In 2008, we see the minister of health saying in an interview that she is encouraging deaf people to have the treatment, and that the state is offering deaf people a chance to make their lives better. By now, Aaron and Sophia are a couple. Aaron is demonstrating for deaf people’s rights to use sign language. Luke is unhappy and lonely and is thinking about getting the treatment. In 2031, Arron and Sophia have broken up. She wanted a better life and a better job and got the treatment. After the treatment, she got new colleagues and friends who were condescending to Arron. Arron, on the other hand, says he never wants to have the treatment. He says not one deaf baby has been born in 20 years. Luke got treated in 2009 because he it would make his life better. After the treatment, however, he has difficulties finding a job because he has problems expressing himself. After he finished his speech therapy he had all his benefits removed.

In 2046 we see company representatives visit Arron to see if he has changed his decision about having the treatment. They inform him that he is the last deaf person in Britain. Arron still has not changed his mind, and when he learns that he is the last deaf person in the country he says “It’s unreal and very sad.. (...).. I regret nothing in my life, but when I was younger I was a rebel and demonstrated a lot. There are more important things in life, like love and friendship...(.) Deaf people’s language is beautiful and I’m proud to be a part of deaf culture” (From the author’s field notes).

“The End” points to common sentiments among Deaf people, namely the wish for the continued existence of a community where sign language is spoken and the fear of the threats that are posed to this community. In November 2010, deaf people demonstrated in the centre of Paris against the law

that will make it obligatory to screen babies for deafness right after birth. Many people turned up. The law proposals have been rejected several times and come up again. In April 2011 there were new demonstrations in Paris, but this time fewer people showed up.

Augustin, who has been active in demonstrations against the early screening, argued like many others that screening for deafness right after the child is born damages the bond between hearing parents and the deaf child. This is a common argument among deaf people I talked to. Most parents of deaf children are hearing, who know little or nothing about deafness, and who react to the information that their child is deaf with surprise and a degree of disappointment and bewilderment. Some argue that if the test is conducted a few months after the child is born, the parents and the child will get a chance to know each other and bond, and there will be a smaller chance of rejection on the side of the parents if they learn that their child is deaf.

Another common objection that deaf people have to the test is that if the child is screened and found to be deaf, the doctors will automatically advise that the child should receive an implant. No information is given about the alternatives that exist to getting an implant and oral education. Deaf people feel that information about sign language and deaf culture are important. As Augustin said, *“new technology gives new solutions. Earlier hearing aids were the only technology for deaf people, but now one can use one’s cell phone to have a conversation in sign language, one can have an interpreter, etc. But many doctors don’t know what possibilities exist, they only know about hearing aids”*. Augustin said that it is best to wait a few months with the screening for deafness. He pointed out that he is not against implants, what he is against is the oppression of sign language. He wants sign language to be of equal status to French. Moreover, others complained of an absence of critical thinking among hearing parents who consult their doctor about their the deaf child. Filip, a deaf man in his twenties whose parents are hearing, said that hearing parents *“view the doctor as God”*.

Fontaine, a hearing lady who works at the Paris school for the deaf, echoed the concerns of deaf people regarding the test. According to Fontaine, screening for deafness as soon as two days after a baby is born is problematic. Firstly, the tests are not reliable until the child is about a year old. The medical establishment thinks that the sooner a child is tested, the better. But her personal opinion is that it would be best to wait about a year to test the child. She said that the psychologists say it is better to wait, if not the bond between parents and child can be damaged. When a baby is born, the parents usually talk to it, listen to music with it, dance with it. But if the parents get the information

that the baby is deaf, they might stop doing all those things. So if the parents get to know that their child is deaf two days after it is born, that might have a negative effect on the psychological development of the child. If the doctors propose the test to hearing parents to check if the child is deaf, of course they are going to say yes. If the doctor doesn't offer the test to the parents, the parents can lodge a complaint.

Franck said that he agrees with deaf people who argue that if the parents learn that their child is deaf very early, this can damage the bond between them. He gave his own situation as an example. When he and his wife discovered that their one and a half year old daughter was deaf, they were very surprised. They had never imagined that they would have a deaf child and didn't know anything about what it was like to be deaf. Everything was new to him and he had a lot of questions. He found out that he and his wife were carriers of a recessive gene for deafness, resulting in a one in four chance of giving birth to a deaf child. When their fourth child was born and they noticed that he didn't react when a door was shut right next to him, they took him to the doctor to screen him for deafness. By the time the doctor informed them that their son was deaf too, they knew so much about deafness already that they felt comfortable having a deaf child.

Moser (2006) writes that processes of normalization might empower disabled people in some ways, but at the same time they incapacitate at another level as they reproduce the idea of the normal and what falls outside the norm. Instead of normalizing everyone according to the same standard, it might be better to challenge the idea of what normal is that disabled people are rehabilitated to reach for, and create space for differences. While deaf people can reach varying levels of speaking and hearing, depending on the degree of deafness and use of technology for hearing and speech therapy, the barriers they meet in a society organized around sound such as France do not completely disappear. An alternative to normalization is to distribute information and open up for participation in other ways than through sound.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described the process of normalization that deaf people are put through. As being able to hear sounds and speak with one's voice are thought of as attributes of a "normal" human being, deaf people are expected to be rehabilitated to be able to do this. Deaf is thereby often thought of as a temporary state. By being put in the category of deaf by doctors and the state, the deaf child is expected to be integrated in hearing society by using hearing aids or cochlear implants

and learning to speak French through speech therapy. In addition, the deaf child qualifies for certain rights, such as having the costs of technology to hear and speech therapy covered. This process deaf children go through illustrates Rose and Novas' (2005) concept of the biological citizen who is defined by the state. The difference deaf people represent is viewed through the individual model of disability (Oliver 1990), where the problem is located in the individual who should be rehabilitated to be able to participate in society. This is done by using hearing aids, cochlear implants, and attending speech therapy. An alternative model to the individual model of disability, namely the social model of disability, locates the problem in the social environment rather than in the person. This approach looks to change the social environment, rather than the person, to create accessibility. Many deaf people are opposed to this practice of normalization, and would rather communicate in sign language. In the next chapter I will show what an alternative to normalization could be, namely the creation of spaces where sign language is the language of communication and information is accessible in format other than through sound.

4 CREATION OF A DEAF WORLD

“...we are Deaf, yes, but not disabled people” (Balard 2009: para. 2)

In the play *Inheritance* described in the previous chapter, the main character Julien fled his family as he felt that the pressure to learn to speak and use hearing aids became too much. Julien marries a deaf lady and has children who are also deaf and with whom he speaks sign language. Instead of trying to become like a person who can hear and assimilate to the hearing majority, many deaf adults choose to create their own spaces where being able to hear is not necessary for participation and communication with others. By speaking sign language instead of French, and by using visual and tactile channels to diffuse information, deaf people have created spaces that are fully accessible regardless of the ability to hear sounds. They challenge hearing people’s idea of normality by establishing “deaf” as a positive identity and as an alternative but not inferior way of being to “hearing”.

Eriksen (2010) points out that total cultural homogeneity is impossible even in societies that are ethnically homogeneous and that there will always be groups who demand their right to be “equal, but different” (178), such as religious groups or sexual minorities. With their aspirations to be “*other* but certainly not *less*” (Balard 2009:para. 3), deaf people are an example of these groups. Examples of the spaces that deaf people create for themselves are various groups and associations, sports clubs, deaf olympics, guided vacations and beauty pageants for deaf people. These are spaces where larger groups of deaf people gather and have the opportunity to cultivate their culture. In this chapter I describe two such spaces: a theatre in Paris and a festival in Reims, a city not far from Paris. These are both well known and important for deaf people in France. I will try to explain how the sociality formed around deafness can be best understood and I will show how the world of the deaf exists in close relation to the hearing world.

International Visual Theatre (IVT)

“Before IVT there wasn’t a theatre for deaf people, there was no deaf culture. IVT was the first to create that. When IVT was opened I lived in Dijon and everyone there were talking about IVT. Since I was living far away, I wasn’t able to go see what IVT was, but many people talked to me about it.” (Théodore. From the author’s field notes)

IVT is a theatre located in Paris and run by deaf people. It was opened in 1976 with a mission to “transmit and diffuse the culture of French Sign Language.” (International Visual Theatre 2008a). In addition to being a theatre, IVT also offers sign language classes¹⁷, instruction in pedagogy for deaf people who want to teach sign language, and it publishes books and films in or about sign language. In addition to plays, other events are sometimes held on the premises, such as philosophy cafés. There are both deaf and hearing people who work at the theatre, all of them fluent in sign language. According to the theatre website the venue is supposed to be a meeting place for deaf and hearing people.

When you enter IVT, you come into a reception area with some tables and chairs. During the day, this area fills up when the students in the sign language classes are on their break. Along one wall, there is a display case in class with copies of media coverage of the theatre. In addition, there are shelves with information about the theatre, including plays, sign language courses and other events, as well as information about events in sign language taking place elsewhere. There is a door leading into the theatre, a reception desk and a small bar. In the evening before and after a play, there are people standing here chatting and sipping on a glass of wine. A staircase is leading up to the second floor where there are offices, and course rooms for sign language courses. There is a couch, chairs and a vending machine on this floor. On the third floor there are also course rooms. The hallway of the second and third floor have boards with information about new books and various events coming up related to deafness and sign language. The fire alarms in the building are large red lamps on the wall of the rooms that light up in case of fire.

The artistic director of IVT, the actress Emmanuelle Laborit, is known among both deaf and hearing people in France after she was the first deaf person to win the prestigious *Prix Molière*¹⁸. Laborit is a proponent of deaf people’s right to express themselves in sign language. On the topic of deaf children learning to hear and speak, Laborit says “It is a fantasy of hearing people who want the deaf to hear” and “as if deafness were a handicap that should be cured.” (Riding 2007:para. 8).

¹⁷ See Chapter 5 for a description of the sign language classes

¹⁸ A theatre prize she received after her accomplishments in the play “Les enfants du silence” (“Children of a lesser God”)

Plays and philosophy cafés

A description of the theatre before and after a play:

The theatre, which seats about 150 people, is nearly full. It looks like everyone in the audience are speaking sign language. It is not totally quiet, though, as some people are still in the process of finding their seats and sitting down. In addition, some people are laughing and emitting sounds while signing. There aren't anyone speaking French in the audience; all of the conversations are held with rapidly moving hands. A deaf man who works at the theatre walks onto the stage to introduce the play. There is no interpreter translating what he is signing to French. He welcomes the audience and informs that food and smoking are prohibited inside the theatre. The play begins, all in sign language. When the play comes to an end, the audience puts their arms in the air and shakes their hands. I can hear the sound and feel the vibrations of feet tramping with intensity on the ground. (From the author's field notes)

The excerpt above is the hearing anthropologist's observations from a play put on in sign language, with no translation to French. Usually there is more of a mix of French and LSF speakers in the audience, and most of the plays put up at the theatre are accessible to both deaf and hearing people. This is either done by making the play bilingual, using both French and LSF, as in the case of *Inheritance*, or by using bodily expression only (miming, but no sign language), as in the case of the plays *The Old Bones* and *Snails and Ketchup*. *Inheritance* was the play put on while I was in Paris that received the most attention and praise, and both deaf and hearing people seemed to be touched by the play. A television station came to film and show the play on TV, and the play also went on a tour in theatres across France.

Most of the plays that were put up at the theatre were not about deaf people's lives, but about a wide variety of topics. What set them apart from plays at other theatres was the visual medium in which they were presented. An example of this is *Snails and Ketchup*, a one-man miming performance with no sign language or spoken language. Through miming and a stage set of ropes and trees, one man animates the story of a dysfunctional family. Another play put on was the product of an artistic workshop with IVT and the Norwegian and Swedish sign language theatres, with six deaf actors and actresses on stage including two French, two Norwegian, and two Swedish actors performed on stage.

Other events arranged a few times a year at IVT are discussion nights, called philosophy cafés. Here, different topics about art and culture are discussed in relation to deafness. The presenter is usually deaf, but there are always some hearing people in the audience and interpreters present to translate from LSF to French and vice versa. One night the theme was “*Is there deaf art?*” with a presentation by a deaf and partly blind artist, Arnaud Balard. In his book “*Le Surdisme*¹⁹”, Balard writes: “As a surdist artist, I denounce, with my work, the medical and audist thinking that only conceives of forced integration by exploiting auditory residues and speech training, but forgets sign language as a way of access to knowledge and communication.” (Balard 2009: para. 19). Excerpt from the discussion night:

Balard talks about the artistic movement he has developed, “surdisme”, in which a deaf perspective on the world is presented to society and in which one shows that the world of the deaf has value. The discussion that follows Balard’s presentation deals with the relationship between being deaf and art. A man in the audience who is an artist and deaf explains that he feels uneasy about his work being categorized as “deaf art”. He is first and foremost a human being, he says, and his expression is first and foremost as an artist. He points out that there are many differences among deaf people. There are deaf people who have never gone to school and never learned about art, and who are inspired by their surroundings and express themselves naturally. In contrast to this, there are deaf people who have learned the rules and the history of art. A deaf lady remarks that deaf art is often about suffering, and she asks if suffering can be said to be characteristic of deaf art. Another deaf lady supports the man’s opposition to the term “deaf art”, commenting that even though one should show what the world looks like from one’s own perspective, art is bigger than and surpasses the deaf/hearing distinction. (From the author’s field notes)

Relations with the local community and beyond

IVT is a place where many deaf people gather, and traces of this can be seen in the local community around the theatre. Sometimes the employees at the restaurants and bars around IVT try to communicate in sign language when deaf customers come in. If a deaf person says what he or she wants in sign language, sometimes the waiter or waitress will repeat the sign and ask what it means. And sometimes the staff knows a few signs that they use when they have deaf customers. When I

¹⁹ “Surdisme” is derived from “sourd” (“deaf”)

took sign language classes at IVT, we would often eat lunch in one of the restaurants in the area around IVT:

We were a group of twelve people at the restaurant one block away from IVT; ten hearing students and two deaf teachers. People were looking at the menu and discussing what to order in sign language. When the waiter came up to our table he was speaking French, but he saw that many in the group were speaking sign language and he asked how to sign the names of some of the dishes people in the group were ordering. When he came back to the table after everyone had finished eating and asked if anyone wanted dessert or coffee, he did the sign for coffee. Several persons ordered coffee by doing the sign rather than saying it in French. (From the author's field notes)

Sometimes deaf tourists come to visit IVT if they are in Paris. One day I was in sign language class, a big group of Norwegian students of sign language interpretation and their teachers turned up at IVT:

During the break around eleven in the morning, students usually go out of the classroom and into the space next to the reception area where there are couches, tables and chairs. Usually the space is quite empty during the day, filled only with students who are on break from their sign language classes. Today, however, the area next to the reception was packed with people. Philippe and Théodore, who have both been my sign language teachers, were standing in the middle of the crowd of people and waved me over. As I was approaching them they signed to me that a big group of people from Norway had arrived. And they signed "that's her, the one from Norway", to some of the other people standing there, whom I had never seen before. I started talking to a woman standing next to Théodore and Philippe. She was hearing and working as a sign language instructor in Norway. She had come to Paris with a group of twenty-four students of sign language interpretation and two other teachers who were deaf. Then the woman and Théodore talked for a bit, she was using Norwegian sign language and he was using French sign language. They seemed to understand each other well despite using different sign languages. Philippe asked the woman where they were going to sleep tonight, and the Norwegian lady answered by quickly spelling the name of a place on her hands. It went too fast for my to catch it, but Philippe nodded. (From the author's field notes)

IVT is well known among deaf people abroad as well as in France. The performances by deaf artists from other countries (such as the theatre workshop and the play *Snails and Ketchup*) demonstrates the international orientation of IVT, or International Visual Theatre. In the next section the international orientation of the Deaf community will become even more evident.

Festival Clin d’Oeil

According to its website, the festival is “a panorama of European Deaf culture” (CinéSourds 2011) where one can observe deaf people who express themselves through theatre, film, dance, painting, fashion design and sculpture. The festival is a three-day event and is in its fifth year of existence. The website also reflects the festival’s aim of attracting an international crowd of sign language users, as exemplified by information about the festival is diffused through videos in French Sign Language, British Sign Language, German Sign Language, Italian Sign Language and Spanish Sign Language. There is also written information in French, English, German, Italian and Spanish. The logo of the festival resembles an alien, and one of the festival organizers explains the choice of logo this way: “For three days, thousands of deaf people arrive in the city, speak another language... a little bit like aliens...” (Stroesser 2011). Between 1000 to 1500 people were present each of the three days of the festival²⁰. The festival is located in Reims, a forty-five minute ride by high-speed train from Paris. On the way to the festival, I already noticed that something was happening:

While I only rarely observe people speaking sign language around Paris, I saw several persons speaking sign language at the train station of my departure. While nobody sitting in the vicinity of me inside the train was signing, I noticed several when disembarking the train in Reims. When stopping by my hotel before heading to the festival, the receptionist told me that most of the guests staying there this weekend were deaf. As I was approaching the festival venue, a large building with several auditoriums and large open spaces, the amount of people speaking sign language grew rapidly.

(From the author’s field notes)

At the festival, I met with Sofia, Mariam and Rileau, all of whom I knew from Paris. After having been in Paris for nearly half a year, I had started to run into people I knew or was acquainted with

²⁰ According to the festival organizers

whenever I went to cultural events in sign language in Paris, and recognized even more faces²¹. Although people travelled from all over France and from other countries to attend the festival, I still recognized faces of people that I had seen at IVT or at other events in sign language in Paris.

Some of the plays and films at the festival had deafness as the theme, while others featured actors who speak sign language but dealt with other themes than being deaf. Most plays were only in French Sign Language or in International Sign Language²², except for one play, *Metroworld*, which was both in French and French Sign Language. An example of a play that was about deaf people was *Strio*, which tells the story of three generations of women who fear for the future of deaf people and wonder whether deaf people will eventually disappear. The bilingual play *Metroworld*, in contrast, was not about deaf people, but about a worldwide underground system where a train with passengers from different continents came to a sudden stop.

At one point during the festival, there was a short film competition with thirteen films participating. Among the films screened were *My Song* and *The End*, also described in Chapter 3. *My Song* was about a young deaf girl who grew up surrounded by hearing people with whom she communicated by lip-reading and speaking English. She learned to sign and took part in a singing competition in sign language. The film *The End* also takes place in England and is about the appearance of a treatment that can make deaf people into hearing, resulting in the gradual decline of deaf people and deaf culture²³. *The End* won the prize for best short film at the festival. When the prizes for best short film were handed out, the person accepting the prize would sometimes sign in International Sign Language, in which case there was a person on stage translating to French Sign Language. At certain points during some of the plays and films, powerful vibrations made the seats of the auditorium shake slightly, as an alternative to amplifying the sound. As the huge auditoriums filled with people before a show was about to start, the mass of people rapidly moving their hands grew bigger and bigger. At the end of a show, up to hundreds of people raised their arms and rapidly shook their hands in a “bravo”.

²¹ This illustrates the small size of the deaf community

²² International Sign Language functions as a lingua franca when deaf people from different countries speaking different sign languages interact

²³ See Chapter 3 for a description of the film *The End*



An auditorium at the festival (Photo by the author)



The area with stands at the festival (Photo by the author)

In a large open space inside the festival venue, there are stands where deaf people sell books and artwork, such as paintings, drawings, photographs and jewellery. There are also stands with information about various options and services for deaf people, such as information about a telephone relay service for deaf people,²⁴ and an institution of higher education that has made accommodations for deaf people.

While walking around the area with stands, I engaged in a conversation with some deaf people. In the case of French deaf people who spoke French Sign Language, the communication generally went well. Conversing with deaf people of other nationalities who spoke other sign languages was more complicated:

Rileau, a deaf guy I know from Paris, takes me around to look at the stands. We go up to the stand of a British photographer to look at his display of photographs. Rileau signs with him in International Sign Language. In this case, the British guy is not really moving his lips while signing, and I am not able to lip-read English words. As I know neither International Sign Language nor British Sign Language, Rileau takes on the role as my interpreter, translating the photographer's International Sign Language into French Sign Language for me, and the other way around when I say something to the photographer. The alphabet of British Sign Language is very different from that of French Sign Language, and the photographer teaches me how to spell my name in British Sign Language. (From the author's field notes)

The theme of this year's festival is America, and an American rock band called *Beethoven's nightmare* has been invited. The musicians in *Beethoven's nightmare* are deaf, and in their shows they incorporate mime, American Sign Language and dance. A documentary film about the band was also shown at the festival. An American stand-up comedian is also present at the festival, giving a performance in International Sign Language. Every night there was a "deaf party", with concerts often played by a mixed group of deaf and hearing. One night there was a show by deaf Finnish rapper *Signmark*, famous in the deaf world, at the "deaf party". At the "deaf party" on the first night of the festival, I talked to deaf artist Arnaud Balard, who I saw present at IVT a week earlier:

²⁴ If a deaf person needs to contact someone by telephone, he or she can write an email or sms, or transmit their message in sign language to someone by webcam, and the service makes the call for the deaf person

I am standing with Sofia and Carole²⁵. There are lots of people around us. Carole is talking to Arnaud Balard. When they are talking she is standing right in front of him and he is holding onto her hands as she is signing. I understand that his vision is reduced and that he is holding her hands to make sure they are in his field of vision. When they are finished talking, I introduce myself to him. He takes my hand just like he took Carole's hands, so that he sees what I am signing. I tell him that I thought his presentation about art was interesting. He seems like a calm and kind person and asks several questions about me and what I do. (From the author's field notes)

At a later point of the festival I visit his stand. Next to his stand, he has put up an installation. It is a large metal cage covered with black plastic, only leaving a small square in the middle free from plastic where one can look through the bars of the cage. On the black plastic strips of silver tape is attached to form the words “sh! audism”. Looking into the cage one can see the head and neck of a baby doll hanging upside down with its body covered in black plastic. The entire face of the doll, except for the doll's lips, is covered in small flat batteries, like the kind used in hearing aids. There are two larger batteries covering the eyes. On the stand he sells a book²⁶ with artworks and text. There are several images in the book of babies covered in batteries and with their hands covered, preventing the use of sign language.



Arnaud Balard's installation at the festival (Photos by the author)

²⁵ Carole is a deaf woman in her thirties

²⁶ Balard, Arnaud. "Le Surdisme" (2009)

A temporary deaf city

Some of the acts of the festival are brought out of the festival area and performed in the middle of the city centre. Here, there are lots of people passing by who are not attending the festival and who do not know any sign language. Among the shows in the city centre were short plays performed on a stage that was set up for the occasion. One play was presented using miming and posters with words written on them. In another play, two actors told a story in which both French and sign language were used. Yet another play had only one actor on stage miming and doing a few signs, but not speaking French. In addition to the plays, a group of young men gave passers-by a crash course in sign language.²⁷

At the hotel where I stayed during the festival in Reims, most other visitors were deaf. The receptionist was not used to having deaf guests at the hotel, but as more deaf guests checked in he had started to have a notepad ready to communicate in writing with deaf guests. Likewise, the city's restaurants had to adapt to welcome the huge amount of deaf visitors:

In the early evening on Friday, the first day of the festival, Mariam and I were walking around the city centre in search of a restaurant where we could eat dinner. Later we were going to the "deaf party" included in our festival pass. Reims is a fairly small city, and as many of the festival-goers had left the festival area for the city centre, we saw lots of people speaking sign language. It was warm outside, and Mariam and I sat down on the patio of a restaurant in one of the main squares. There were lots of other restaurants nearby with patios filled or half-filled with people eating and drinking. There were people talking in sign language at several of the other tables of the restaurant where we sat down, and shortly after more tables filled with people speaking sign language. The waiters did not know sign language, and were forced to adapt their communication to the patrons, either by making sure to point at things on the menu or pay attention to the patrons visual explanations. For instance, at a table close to ours, a group of deaf patrons were explaining to one of the waiters using their hands that one of the ladies at the table was pregnant and that she therefore wanted bottled water and not the tap water the waiter had brought to the table. The waiters seemed to be able to adapt, although they seemed somewhat stressed due to the restaurant being short on staff. (From the author's field notes)

²⁷ See Chapter 5 for a description of the crash course in sign language

A similar situation is described by Haualand (2007) in her article on the Deaf World Games in Rome: “There were Deaf people in the trams, piazzas, and streets, in all the different parts of the city where the sports arenas were located, and at all the cafés for which Rome is so famous.”(37). During the festival, Reims was transformed into a deaf village just like Rome was during the Deaf World Games. As both Haualand (2002) and Breivik (2007) point out, the deaf community is characterized by transnational connections. They write that the network of deaf people extend beyond national borders, and deaf people from different countries often feel like they can relate to deaf people from other countries than hearing people in their own country. Many of my informants referred to the Deaf community in France as a village and one described other deaf people as a “second family”. One of my informants said that news and information spread quickly and there is always someone who knows someone. For this reason, it can be good to have deaf friends in other countries. The deaf people I got to know were concerned with what was happening to deaf people in other countries. During my time in the field many Norwegian deaf schools were closing down, a piece of news that my deaf informants quickly picked up and asked me about. When there was a debate about sign language in Italy, Rileau and Mariam were worried about what the outcome would be. At the time of the tsunami and nuclear crisis in Japan, Augustin expressed his worries about deaf people there, if they would be trapped in the ruins without being able to call for help. Similarly, at the time of the Norwegian terrorist attacks, Augustin was interest in learning about deaf people’s experiences of the events that took place.

The deaf community

Friedner (2010) argues that the social community formed around deafness can be understood as an example of a biosociality. In the same vein, I argue that the sociality formed around sign language and other visual forms of communication at IVT and festival Clin d’Oeil are formed with deafness as its point of departure and can thus be called a biosociality. Doctors define people as deaf, and on the basis of this attribute, deaf people create their deaf community. While there are hearing people who partake in the deaf community, as Friedner also points out, the community is nevertheless based on deafness and its core deaf members.

While deaf people do not share a common geographical point of origin, which is an important factor of ethnicity, the deaf community in many ways resembles ethnic groups. According to Eriksen (2010), “ethnicity is essentially an aspect of a relationship, not a property of a group.”(16). This

relationship is between groups who are in contact with each other and who see themselves as culturally distinct from each other. Moreover, these groups are “in a sense *created* through that very contact. Group identities are always defined in relation to what they are not – in other words, in relation to non-members of the group.” (Eriksen 2010:14, emphasis in original). In addition, Eriksen writes that “Ethnic groups emerge and are made relevant through social situations and encounters, and through people’s ways of coping with the demands and challenges of life.” (2010:1-2). The deaf community can be said to be created through the contact with people who hear. As they feel excluded from the way people who hear sounds use these sounds to organize society and to structure interaction between deaf people, people who are deaf solve this by creating visually oriented spaces and practicing a visual language. As Harman (2010) writes, when deaf people can communicate in sign language the biological “limitation” is no longer relevant. When I asked some of my deaf informants “what is deaf culture?” some of their answers revealed that the difference between the deaf community and the hearing majority has root in the challenges of everyday life:

Me: “What is deaf culture?”

Rileau: “You don’t know? You know a little bit, don’t you? number one - at work it is important to have glass to see through, two – when people are seated around a table it is good that the table is round so that everyone can see each other, three – it’s important to have mirrors in the car so that you can look back”

Me: “What is deaf culture?”

Théodore: “It’s about a communal spirit, about meeting each other in deaf associations. It’s not an easy question to answer. It’s also a lifestyle; the deaf work all week and so meeting each other is very important for deaf people. Hearing people can easily chat with their colleagues at work, their neighbours, etc. Deaf people have a real need for a space where they can meet and chat.”

The answers point to different ways of reorganizing the environment or relating to people where sound is irrelevant. While Rileau focuses on practical ways of organizing the environment, Théodore emphasizes the need for a space where they can communicate in sign language.

In the deaf community, there exists a perception of itself as culturally different from the hearing majority. However, as hearing people often do not know much about the deaf community, even that

they are “hearing”, a term used by deaf people. As Mottez writes: “When someone says “I am hearing”, he or she says it in reference to an individual or group who doesn’t hear. Before meeting deaf people, nobody needs to state his or her identity as hearing” (2006:22).

Boundaries around the deaf world

Barth (1994) stresses that social interaction is central aspect of ethnicity and that an important concern for ethnic groups is the maintenance of boundaries between them. There are many different types of groups and ways of delimiting group membership. Eriksen writes, “The problem with any community is that everyone cannot take part: the community has to have external boundaries, and it is necessary to have a ticket of entrance”(1999:24). How are deaf people drawing boundaries around their community? I argue that the boundary is not drawn around deaf people separating them from hearing people, but around a sociality where sign language is the method of communication²⁸. Boundaries are drawn in relation to hearing people by not communicating with one’s voice even though one is able to, using only sign language and other visual means of communication. Deaf people are usually open to hearing people, as long as they make an effort to communicate with them and not just expect the deaf person to adapt.

At a philosophy café at IVT, one of the questions raised were: “*should we have special deaf shows?*” A deaf man commented that there should not be special deaf shows, but that deaf people should be open and make all shows accessible to hearing people. Another man echoed this and stressed the importance of exchange between deaf and hearing people. A lady commented that she grew up surrounded by hearing people, went to the theatre for hearing, among other things that were made for hearing people. When she discovered theatre in sign language it was like a whole new world opened up for her and for her identity. She thought it was very important to have a typically deaf theatre. Several others agreed that it was important to have special deaf shows, but that it is important to find a balance: to have deaf shows, but also be open and look beyond the world of the deaf.

²⁸ A limitation to this is that on a very few occasions some of my informants mentioned deaf people who do not want contact with hearing people, whether or not they know sign language. As this was hardly ever mentioned and as I did never meet any of these people myself, I take this to be a minor aspect.

At a film festival in Brittany²⁹, I was sitting at a table having coffee with Nadine and Jean-Luc, a deaf musician. Nadine and Jean-Luc did most of the talking:

Jean-Luc said that he doesn't like the expressions "hard of hearing", "hearing deficient", "hear less well", that many hearing people use. No, he was "deaf". He was looking at Nadine while he was talking and it seemed like he was giving her advice. She was listening to what he said with interest. He said that Nadine should never hide the way she is and accept that communication with hearing people always happens on their terms. "For instance", he said, "if I am at a bar and meet hearing people I always say hello in sign language. I don't just move my lips to make it appear as though I am saying "bonjour" with my voice. After a little while, maybe people get used to it and start saying "hello" back in sign language." (From the author's field notes)

Augustin never speaks with his voice, although he was taught to do so in speech therapy growing up. At a visit to a photography museum with Augustin, I noticed that one of the exhibitions inside the museum was entitled "Celui qui ne parle pas" (Those who don't speak):

I pointed at the wall where the title of the exhibition, "Celui qui ne parle pas", was written and signed "It's you" to Augustin, half-jokingly. He smiled and nodded, but then he signed "well, no, I do speak". "You speak, just without using your voice?", I said. "Yes, exactly", he answered. (From the author's field notes)

Augustin spoke with his voice when he was little, but stopped when he turned eighteen. He explained to me his two main reasons for doing this. First, when he talked to hearing people with his voice, they often forgot that he was deaf and that they have to look at him so that he can see their lips when they are talking. That made communication difficult. Second, when he talked none of the hearing people even tried to do a little bit of sign language, and instead all communication was on hearing people's terms. "Now it has been so long since I talked with my voice that it will be too hard to start again," he said. "I can laugh and shout, but if I am going to articulate sentences in French it will be too difficult," he continued. Many hearing people ask him if he can say something with his voice so that they can hear what it sounds like. But Augustin does not want to do that. "My voice is mine, it is intimate," he said. When I remarked that he cut his voice when laughing too and

²⁹ See Chapter 5 for more information about the film festival

that I had never heard him laugh, he said that if he does not cut his voice he notices that people around him give him looks. He knows a lot of deaf people who do not cut their voice when laughing, and many hearing people look at them in a strange way and think that they sound like goats. Augustin does not want people to think that he sounds like an animal, that is why he cuts his voice when laughing. He confessed that he is a bit embarrassed when his mom, who is also deaf, does not cut her voice when she laughs. When he is at home he does not always cut his voice, he said.

When I asked Augustin what deaf culture was, he answered in a different way than Rileau and Théodore:

Me: What is deaf culture?

Augustin: "That's a difficult question." (Thinking about the question for a few seconds). "There is no such thing as deaf culture."

Me: "There isn't?"

Augustin: "No, because that means that the culture has to do with not being able to hear. But there is a sign culture. Sign culture means that you use visual signs to communicate, and this affects your subjectivity, the way you think."

During a visit to the Paris school for the deaf³⁰, I was in the office of one of the school's directors after a guided tour on the school's premises. An American girl who was also on the tour went in to see the director to ask him some questions, and I followed her into his office. The girl was interested in learning about deaf people and asked him "*I would like to get to know some deaf people here in Paris. How can I do this?*" The director, who is deaf, responded that you have to be careful how you do it because deaf people can be suspicious of your motives. There are two signs for hearing people he said, and he showed us both of the signs. One was the regular sign that I had seen many times before, and the other was a more negative one. He said "*If you want to get to know deaf people you must not think that they are people who need your help or care, you must approach them as equals not as a social assistant. If you approach them as someone weaker than you who need your help and guidance you will not get to know them and gain their trust.*"

³⁰ Institut National des Jeunes Sourds

The situations described so far reveal that deaf people have a need for visually oriented spaces and interaction with people in sign language. By choosing not to use their voices when communicating with hearing people, they are not trying to put up barriers between themselves and people who hear, but to protect their ability to communicate in a medium that they have access to. In addition to this, deaf people want to be approached as equals, and not with pity for being deaf. While deaf people want to have their difference acknowledged, they still want to be recognized as French. This can be illustrated with a visit to a restaurant with Mariam, Rileau and Nadine:

We walked into the restaurant, a medium-sized place not even half-full with customers. A waitress in her early twenties welcomed us and Rileau asked her by gesturing with his hands if we could sit down at a table by the wall. The waitress smiled and nodded and showed us to the table. Nadine, Mariam, Rileau, and I sat down and used sign language among ourselves. The waitress gave us menus and left our table again. Just a moment after Rileau had opened his menu, he quickly closed it again and put it down on the table. He was obviously discontent with something. I asked him what the matter was, and he said that the waitress had given him a menu in English. "It happens all the time", he said. "People often take me as a foreigner when I come in and use sign language". (From the author's field notes).

Boundaries between deaf people

Among deaf people there is disagreement about how to relate to hearing people and how much one should adapt. As deaf persons are to some extent "matter out of place" (Douglas 2002) in the hearing world, there are some deaf people who are "matter out of place" in the deaf world. There is a complicated relation between deaf people who use sign language ("signants") and deaf people who speak French with their voices ("oralistes") or alternatively use LPC code while speaking French with their voices ("LPCistes"). In Douglas' words "all margins are dangerous" (150), and to the "signants", the "oralistes" and "LPCistes" can feel threatening to the visual community that the Deaf "signants" have built up in the face of pressure from the hearing world to make deaf people hear and speak. In trying to establish deaf as a positive identity and create an alternate space for themselves, those deaf people who are actively trying to assimilate into the hearing world represents an anomaly that threatens the space that they have established. These tensions between deaf people who use sign language and deaf people who speak with their voice can be illustrated in a conversation I had with Hugo:

Me: Do you know a lot of people who use LPC?

Hugo: Yes, I know deaf people who use LPC, and deaf people who use both LPC and sign language. There are many divisions among deaf people; some people only oralise³¹, some use LPC, some sign. And some people do several of these. My deaf friends who oralise respect that I sign.

Me: You have deaf friends that oralise who respect that you sign?

Hugo: Yes.

Me: Are there deaf people who oralise who don't respect that deaf people sign?

Hugo: Yes, there are.

Me: Why?

Hugo: They are close-minded. It is the same with hearing people. Some are open-minded, others are close-minded.

(From the author's field notes)

While Hugo adapts to the situation he is in, he generally speaks with his voice when he is with hearing people and uses sign language when he is with deaf people. However, many of the deaf persons I met did not speak with their voices, even though they might have learned to do so growing up.

One day I was having lunch with Alexandre and Benoît, at a weekly sign language lunch open for both deaf and hearing people who know sign language. Alexandre and Benoît expressed their unease about using one's voice:

While I was standing in line to order food, I noticed a lady in her sixties come and greet Alexandre and Benoît at their table. Then she got in line with me and said she had come for the sign language lunch. She explained that she had taken sign language classes a few years ago, and now she had just started to take more classes. I went back to the table where Alexandre and Benoît were sitting. Shortly after, the lady sat down with us too. As she was sitting down she remarked "you speak!?" to Alexandre, in both French and LSF, looking very surprised. Alexandre, who had been using his voice at the same time as he was signing because I was there, was looking a bit uncomfortable, and said

³¹ "Oralise" means to speak with one's voice

and signed “not often”. Benoît immediately signed “I never speak”. Alexandre said that he doesn’t usually speak when he meets hearing people, except for single words. He often writes messages to hearing people on a piece of paper. (From the author’s field notes)

Another time at sign language-lunch, we talked about LPC:

I asked Alexandre and Benoît if they know LPC. They both said “no”. Benoît said “LPC is for speaking”. Alexandre wrote two words down on a piece of paper: “chameau” and “chapeau”. When you say these words they look the same on the mouth. LPC shows the difference. (From the author’s field notes)

Théodore, my sign language teacher at IVT, was also opposed to LPC:

”I don’t even know how to say “hello” with LPC. I’ve never learned it, besides it’s not my thing. I am allergic to LPC. LPC isn’t natural.” (From the author’s field notes)

Boundaries are drawn between deaf sign language users and deaf people who speak orally or who speak orally and code LPC. At many conferences and on TV, there is a person who “codes” LPC for deaf people. The shows at IVT and Festival Clin d’Oeil were not adapted to deaf people who do not use sign language. At IVT there are no coders. Moreover, many people who use hearing aids hear better with the help of an induction loop. Again, there is no such thing at the theatre. An example from the play *Inheritance* at IVT shows this, both by its content and the presentation.³² It shows the mix of deaf and hearing people who are present, and that it is accessible to hearing people and people who know LSF:

People line up to enter the theatre. Inside, a deaf man looks at the ticket and points people in the direction of their seat. Some people are signing and some are speaking French. I hear a soft humming of voices around me, the sound of feet walking up the stairs in between the rows of seats and of coats coming off. A woman’s voice appears on the loudspeakers: “bienvenue...”. She welcomes people to the theatre. The woman speaking is not visible in the theatre, so the message is most likely recorded. At the

³² See Chapter 3 for a description of the play *Inheritance*

same time as the woman's voice appears, a deaf man who works at the theatre goes up on stage and gives people the same message in sign language. They are telling us to turn off our cell phones and informing us that taking photos during the play is prohibited. If there are people in the theatre using hearing aids that start to whistle³³, people in the vicinity are asked to make the person aware of this. I hear some people laugh at this last remark. The lights in the theatre are dimmed and for a moment it is pitch-black. (From the author's field notes)

As for the message communicated, the play tells us that hearing people want to teach deaf people to hear and speak, without understanding that this is not what deaf people want. Deaf people want to communicate in sign language. The play shows a specific way to be deaf, namely that being deaf is to communicate in sign language and not using one's voice.

Conclusion

There is an attempt by Deaf people to establish "Deaf" as a positive identity and be recognized by the hearing majority as different, but not less. As an alternative to assimilating to the hearing majority, Deaf people create spaces where being able to hear sounds is irrelevant to participation and interaction. Examples of such spaces are the theatre IVT in Paris and the festival Clin d'Oeil in Reims. Here, everything is organized around Deaf people's sensory apparatus, mainly by the use of visual information, although tactile information is also important. By using other sensory channels to distribute information, deaf people have effectively erased the barrier that makes things inaccessible to them in the hearing world.

The sociality formed around deafness, a diagnosis given to deaf people by doctors, can be understood as a biosociality. As we have seen, hearing people also partake in the deaf community. While hearing people are included in the community of sign language users, the community is still centered around deafness in that hearing people speak French with each other and generally only speak sign language in situations where deaf people are present. Moreover, the deaf and hearing worlds are not isolated entities but in constant interaction with each other and dependent on each other for their existence. The deaf world, as a response to a hearing world that is not accessible to them, and in order to recognize someone as "hearing", there has to be deaf people. The difference to

³³ Sometimes hearing aids make whistling sounds as a consequence of feedback (sometimes the sound the hearing aid amplifies goes back in the hearing aid and the circuit produces a whistling sound).

the hearing majority that the deaf experience is shared with deaf people from other countries. There is much exchange and many ties between deaf people of different nationalities. The deaf community, even in a large city such as Paris, is fairly small, where many people know of each other. This is also an incentive to look beyond national borders to meet people.

Theories about ethnic groups are useful to understand the the relationship between deaf and hearing. Although there are differences between the deaf community and what is usually thought of as an ethnic group, such as having a common geographical point of origin, the relationship between the deaf community and the hearing majority in many ways resembles relationships between ethnic groups.. There is still a sense in which deaf people feel that they are culturally different from those who can hear, and in this respect they can be understood as an ethnic group. While they want to be recognized as deaf, they are in their eyes no less French. This cultural difference is usually not recognized among hearing people, however. There are ways in which the deaf community draws boundaries around itself, and this boundary usually goes at the use of sign language, which is a ticket of entry into the deaf community, regardless of ability to hear or not. In establishing the deaf community as an alternative way of being from hearing people, there are some tensions between deaf people who choose sign language as their method of communication and deaf people who choose to speak French and assimilate to the hearing majority.

In the next chapter, we will see what happens when hearing people are introduced to the world of the deaf, using deaf people's sensory channels.

5 MIDDLE GROUND

As we were approaching the concert area, Rileau said he could feel the vibrations coming from the stage. A lot of people had gathered on the lawn in front of the stage and were eating, drinking and chatting while listening to the music. Rileau and I found a free spot where we sat down. "Can you feel the vibrations?", Rileau asked. The sound of the rock music being played on stage was loud and I could feel the ground vibrating with the music. I said "yes, but maybe not as strongly as you?". "That's normal", he said. "I have six senses". "Six?", I asked. He said "yes" and smiled. He explained that if he is tired, feeling the vibrations from music gives him new energy, they wake him up. At his parents' house growing up he got used to being around music and he has always liked it. (From the author's field notes)³⁴

So far we have seen how deaf people are normalized to fit with the hearing majority's idea of what is normal, and we have seen how deaf people create their own space where they can socialize and easily access information. In this chapter the focus will be on encounters between deaf and hearing in situations or spaces created by deaf people, as well as some of their hearing family members, friends or associates, with the goal of increasing the understanding of deaf people's lives and way of interacting with the world.

Deaf people often use their senses in a different way than hearing people to navigate their surroundings and relate to people. Other senses, with vision playing a principal role, tend to take over and compensate for the inaccessibility of audible information. In the article, "Upon the Formation of a Visual Variety of the Human Race", Bahn (2008) stresses the importance of visual information to deaf people, writing that they are "People of the eye" who "inhabit a highly visual world" (83). According to Larsen (2006/2007), in deaf children's language development vision takes over for hearing if the child is given access to a visually oriented social environment and a visually based language.

In her article "Beyond the words: the power of resonance", Wikan (1992) argues that focusing too much on the differences between people can obscure the similarities that actually exist. She uses the concept *resonance* to refer to the possibility of understanding each other by focusing on what

³⁴ At Fête de la Musique, a street music festival in Paris

people have in common: “Resonance demands something of both parties to communication . . . a willingness to *engage* with another world, life, or idea” (463, emphasis in original) and “for resonance to work, we need to shed the stifling conception that can be a stumbling block along the way: that others are essentially different from us, to be understood only by means of their “culture”; and that their worlds bespeak different life worlds.”(471). In France, there is an attempt to build bridges between deaf and hearing persons by creating spaces or situations where hearing people are introduced to deaf people’s way of experiencing the world through the visual and tactile senses. Wikan urges people not be too caught up in the specific meaning of the words themselves and that we have to “go beyond the words” in order to understand the meaning actually conveyed. In deaf-hearing encounters created by deaf people and their associates, there is an attempt to build understanding and reach a state of resonance by “going beyond sound”, and instead relate through the senses that deaf and hearing have in common. Hearing people are encouraged to “open their senses to the worlds of their others” (Stoller 1989:7). Examples of these spaces and situations are sign language classes, cafés and restaurants where sign language is spoken, a film festival and artistic performances. In this chapter, I will describe some of these spaces and situations and show how deaf people challenge the “normal” role of the senses in how people relate to one another.

Visual poetry and a crash course in sign language

During the festival Clin d’Oeil, described in Chapter 4, a group of four men in their early twenties did a stunt in the city centre. The group, which calls itself “Mains Diamant”³⁵, has both deaf and hearing members, and they work to “empower the deaf culture and deepen the interaction among deaf and hearing individuals” (Mains Diamant 2011:20). While Mains Diamant includes both deaf and hearing people, the men who did the stunt were not using their voices, and it was thus impossible to know if they were deaf or hearing. A lot of people who happened to pass by the square where Mains Diamant were standing, stopped to see what was going on:

To get people’s attention someone was playing drums and one of the men did a little dance. Another was holding a stack of white sheets of paper. He held up a sheet with the word “hello” written on it in French and walked up to some of the people who had gathered around them and asked, using sign language, what the word is in sign language. He walked around with the sheet to make sure everyone in the crowd could see what was written on it. He returned to his friends, still holding the sheet towards the

³⁵ “Mains Diamant” means “Diamond Hands”

audience. One of the other young men did the sign for “hello”, and then he pointed at random people in the crowd to have them repeat the sign. The persons who were pointed at repeated the sign, and the young man expressed his approval by putting two thumbs up. Many of the people who had stopped to see what was going on seemed to be hearing people who just happened to be walking in the city centre and not people who were in the city for the festival. They did the same with the sign for “how are you”. Next, they got out a sheet with “yes” written on it. This time they picked a person in the crowd, a girl in her twenties, to come up to sign the word written on the sheet. The girl put her thumb up. The young man put his thumb up and showed it to the audience, as if asking for their verdict of her response. A girl of about ten years old came up to the front and did the correct sign for “yes”: touching the thumb and index finger to form the letter “o” while holding the other fingers out straight. The young men put up their hands in the air and shook them, saying “bravo” in sign language. The young men continued with more words, such as “no”, “sorry”, “dancing”, and “festival”. Sometimes they got a person from the audience to try and sometimes they demonstrated the sign to the crowd themselves. The young men were not using their voices at all, only communicating with the audience using gestures and sign language.



(Photo by the author)

In another situation, a crowd of hearing people were suddenly confronted with expression in a medium they were not used to - a slam poetry soirée in Paris. In a bar in the neighbourhood Belleville there are slam poetry nights several nights a week. The building under construction next door, the colourful graffiti on the walls, and the plastic chairs and tables scattered on the patio, give the area an air of being less established and more in the making than many other Parisian neighbourhoods. Slam-poetry, according to Fagerlid (2008), is a poetry recital open to everyone who wants to participate, where everyone follows the same rules, and where there is space to express frustrations with the status quo. The poem should be critical and engaging, take no longer than three minutes to perform, and be judged by a jury made up from people in the audience. The bar in Belleville houses a diverse crowd of men and women of various ages and skin colours. Many of the young men performing are clearly inspired by rap, and give especially loud, fast-paced and angry-sounding performances. Mariam's silent performance is a striking contrast to those given by the other *slammeurs* and *slammeuses*³⁶:

Mariam goes up on the small stage situated in the corner of the bar. She is wearing grey baggy pants, a black top with beige stripes, and most of her small braids are collected in the back of her head. Standing up straight and facing her audience, all of whom are hearing and all of whom now have their eyes on her, she starts to move her hand and arms. She holds her hands out straight, then she starts moving them like the waves of the ocean. She puts her arms over her head, moving them quickly like a strong wind. Her arms come down again making more waves, then up again to make more wind. Suddenly she is holding both hands in front of her almost at the level of her face, her palms facing inwards. Her left hand moves away from the right, then back again slapping the right hand. It is a door slamming shut. Sometimes she is looking straight ahead and sometimes she is following her hands with her eyes. Her facial expression changes alongside some of the movements she does with her hands. The audience is silent throughout her performance. Mariam herself is not emitting a sound, except for the sound of one of her hands slapping the other as she is signing how a door is slamming shut. (From the author's field notes)

There was no interpreter present to translate Mariam's performance from sign language to French, and the other performances and instructions from the presenter into sign language for Mariam. The

³⁶ Men and women performing slam-poetry

nights' presenter, a man with dark brown fuzzy hair, informs the participants of the rules on stage, and in this case I end up acting as Mariam's interpreter. Mariam ends up earning a fair amount of points by her performance, enough to get the opportunity to perform another poem later the same night. During the break between rounds of performances and at the end of the night, I end up passing messages between Mariam and the presenter, and a man in the audience who wants me to tell Mariam that her performance was beautiful. A couple of weeks later, Mariam told me that she was preparing a poem for an upcoming slam championship. She told me that the presenter wanted her to send him the text of her poem to be displayed on a screen behind her while she was reciting her poem. Mariam told me that she thought it seemed unfair that she had to do that just because she was performing in sign language and not in French like the other performers. She explained that she preferred that people in the audience just watched her performance like it was, in sign language, even if they don't know sign language.³⁷

Visual immersion in Paris: sign language classes and cafés

There are spaces where hearing people are introduced to the world of the deaf that are more organized than the somewhat spontaneous exposition of sign language in the city centre of Reims and at the slam-poetry soirée in Paris. Examples of this are sign language courses, a café, restaurant and a weekly lunch, all taking place in Paris.

There are several schools where one can learn sign language in Paris, and among these IVT³⁸ is the most well known. Almost 900 persons learn sign language here every year (International Visual Theatre 2008b). My entry to the world of the deaf began with sign language classes at IVT³⁹. They were intensive classes of thirty hours per week and usually had ten to twelve students. Most of the students were hearing, and only in two cases did I experience having a deaf person in my class. One was a lady in her sixties who was deaf and who had learned to speak French but had never had the opportunity to learn sign language. The other was a girl in her twenties who recently experienced a gradual diminishing of her hearing. She did not hear anything without her hearing aids. I had several different teachers during my eight weeks of classes, all of whom were deaf. Some teachers

³⁷ That this was a special requirement for her turned out to be a misunderstanding. There were people from many different countries performing at the championship, and all of them had to send in the text of their poem so that it could be displayed on screen both in the original language and translated to French and English.

³⁸ IVT also has other functions, such as a theatre. See Chapter 4 for more information.

³⁹ The French world of the deaf, that is. I had already had a basic level of Norwegian sign language and knowledge of deaf people in Norway's lives.

would tell the students about their lives, and some I had the opportunity to talk to outside the classroom. Almost all of the students were women and most of the teachers were men.

Camille, who is hearing and went to sign language class at IVT, recounts her experience from the first time she came to IVT:

“8:50 am, cité Chaptal. Arriving timid at IVT. I am opening the gate of a new world. Here, things that hearing people take for granted disappear, our points of reference collapse. First stage: a simple hello. For those of us who are not used to it, it is destabilizing not knowing if you are addressing a deaf or a hearing person. What do you do? Say “hello”? Sign it? It might seem stupid but there is a little way to go before one can say: if in doubt, you sign “hello” in LSF to everyone.

Here, sign language is queen. It’s the language of expression, of communication, the “normal” language (showing that the notion of normality depends on context!). Here we are in the heart of deaf culture in France. Here, it is us who are hearing’s turn to adapt. For once.” (Camille 2011:4)

The students in the class had different motivations for learning sign language. Many work with deaf people, usually as speech therapists or in schools for deaf children or as psychologists. Some were there to make the services their workplace offer more accessible to deaf people, such as a lady from the RATP transport services⁴⁰ and a lady working at a film festival. In addition, some people were there because they wanted to work with deaf people in the future, as *interface de communication*⁴¹ or as interpreters. There was also a lady who had a deaf colleague at her workplace and a law student of law who wanted to be able to offer his future services as a lawyer to deaf people. There were several actors in the classes who wanted to work with deaf people, among these an actress who wanted to organize something at the theatre where she works in order to attract deaf people, such a theatre course for deaf children. Some of the students were there because they had deaf family members. Yet others were there because they were fascinated by sign language and had a desire to learn it.

⁴⁰ RATP manages the public transport system in Île-de-France, the region in France that includes the Paris metropolitan area.

⁴¹ An assistant who knows sign language and who is following the deaf person to the doctor or to do other things, but is different from an interpreter.

The first day of the first week of class, all of the students were given a name in sign language. Some of the students who were working with deaf people or who knew deaf people already had a name sign. Name signs are usually based on the person's physical characteristics, personality, interest or tied to the person's name. Often a person doesn't choose his or her name sign, but is given the sign by other people. In the classroom we were sitting in a circle and came up with three suggestions for a name sign, which we would later vote on. The teacher explained, however, that if we were not happy with the name sign we had been given we could always change it after the course was over. It was necessary to have a name sign for the instruction, as it was more practical than spelling the name on the hands. We learned how to spell the letters on the alphabet with our hands, but spelling the names of people on the hands is more time consuming than using name signs, especially for beginners of sign language. Names based on physical characteristics could be a movement with the hand next to the eye imitating long eyelashes or a movement next to the ear tracing the outline of an earring if the person in question was usually wearing earrings. My name sign, which I had already been given at my work in Norway, is "poking the cheek two times with the index finger" because I have beauty spots on my cheek. Although the beauty spots are on the left cheek, my teacher said it is better if I poke my right cheek as I am right handed. When using sign language, it is best to use one hand as the "leading" hand for the sake of clarity. If one is right handed it is best to use the right hand, and vice versa if one is left handed. Name signs based on personality could be doing the sign for "smile" if one is a cheerful person. Name signs based on interest could be using a variation of the sign for "dancing" as one's name sign if one likes to dance, or the sign for "biking" if one likes to bike. Name signs with variations of the sign for "dancing" were very common among women. A name sign tied to one's name could be the first letter of the name in some combination, or a play on the name if it had a particular meaning.

I learned that sometimes there are several different signs for the same thing. For instance, one can sign Paris by holding the left hand flat with the palm facing up, use the right hand to do the letter "p", and place it on top of the left hand. Alternatively, the sign for the Eiffel Tower can also mean Paris. To sign the Eiffel Tower one holds the index and middle fingers out on both hands, and move the hands towards each other imitating the shape of the tower from the bottom to the top. And sometimes different signs are used in different regions and cities. For instance, in Paris the sign for the city "Lille" is different from the sign that they use in Lille. Some signs are related to French words, such as the sign for Paris with the "p", the first letter of the word. Other signs imitate what things look like, such as the sign for the Eiffel Tower, which can also mean Paris. The signs that

imitate what things in the world look like can be easy to guess the meaning, or at least seem evident when you see the sign and is told what it means.

The teacher said that it is a bit problematic that there are so many different ways to sign the same thing among deaf people in France. He said that this was a consequence of LSF being banned for many years. It is only about 30 years ago they started using LSF again, and they are still working on the language. He said that LSF is becoming more and more homogeneous all over France because it is easier to travel between the regions, for instance with trains and TGV (high speed trains). And there are more possibilities of communication at a distance for deaf people.

We are encouraged to use facial expressions more than we are used to in order to be able to communicate the right meaning in sign language. And the placement of the hands and how much space one is using when doing signs affect the meaning of what is said as well. Sometimes during class we are filmed in order to be able to see ourselves speak sign language. When you speak with your voice you can hear yourself and adjust your voice, but it is a little different with sign language. According to deaf sign language teachers, being expressive in the face is one of the most difficult things to teach hearing people. Hearing people have grown up learning to be serious and composed. In a way, learning to communicate in sign language is a process of unlearning parts of one's habitus (Bourdieu 1977), or unconscious ways of using one's body, that one has acquired growing up primarily using sound to communicate. Rileau, who works as a sign language teacher at another school, would often tell me that the persons who take their first sign language class are very reserved and afraid to use their hands and it almost seems like they are afraid of him when he speaks sign language to them. When Rileau and I were talking, he would often comment on my facial expressions, saying that I was too stiff or too inexpressive.

As the classes increased in level, the students gradually got more skilled in expressing themselves in sign language and the pace at which the students were able to form the letters of the alphabet with their hands increased. In addition, we gradually got better at distinguishing the hand forms that our teachers and other people who were spelling things rapidly were making. When studying among the Songhay, Stoller (1984) was told that he had to learn how to hear properly in order to understand their ways. In sign language class, the students learned to see things we had not seen before, such as the rapid shifts in visual stimuli presented to us.

In class, we are encouraged to use sign language as much as possible and to refrain from communicating with the deaf teacher by means of writing if there is something we don't understand. If we don't know the sign we are told to mime or explain visually in some other way. We are told to forget how to form sentences in French, as LSF has a different sentence structure. Some expressions in LSF cannot be translated into French expressions. Some of the examples the teachers give to explain different expressions are also telling of their attitudes. For instance, there is a sign one does with both hands in the belly region that looks like one has something burning or smoldering inside, like a suppressed anger close to erupting. The example the teacher gave to explain in what situations the sign could be used was: *“A person talks to him about cochlear implants and about how fantastic they are. But since he is deaf, he doesn't think that implants are fantastic. The person continues to praise implants, and he gets more and more annoyed. And he uses the sign of having suppressed anger close to erupting.”*

One day in class, we learned how to communicate with deaf people in the dark. The teacher explained that if there is no light, deaf people sometimes communicate by writing on the other person's back. In pairs, we practiced writing words on each other's backs, one letter at a time. In addition, we learned how to communicate with people who are both deaf and blind. In pairs one person would spell words with his or her hand, one letter at a time, while the other person would keep the eyes closed and feel the other person's hands, that way “reading” one letter at a time.

In the sign language classes at IVT, hearing students get the opportunity to learn about deaf people's lives through their deaf teachers. Franck, who was in my sign language class, said *“It is easy to be afraid of something that you don't know, but if you just get to know the person you learn that he or she is just like us. For instance, the deaf people who work at IVT are doing well, they are living good lives, but people who don't know them don't know that, they think it's so different.”*

Another space where hearing people can learn some signs is at Sourdine, a small restaurant in the northern part of Paris. The owner of Sourdine is hearing and there are both deaf and hearing waiters working here. It is difficult to know if a waiter is deaf or hearing because they are consistently using sign language. As the restaurant is small, there is usually only one waiter working at a time. Inside the restaurant there is a TV hanging from the ceiling with a video playing on repeat. It shows a person (sometimes a man and sometimes a woman) who is demonstrating how to do different signs. The signs are useful for ordering food, such as the signs for “water”, “wine”, “fish”, “coffee”, and “the bill”. The corresponding word in French is shown on the bottom of the screen.

Some posters are hanging on the wall of the restaurant with information about various cultural events accessible to both deaf and hearing people, such as a musical that is both sung in French and performed in LSF simultaneously, and a poster from the play *Inheritance* at IVT. On two small blackboards, “*LSF spoken*” and “*Je signe, donc je suis*” (“*I sign, therefore I am*”) is written with chalk in different colours. On the tables there are coasters in paper with the hand alphabet. The menus have a letter written next to each dish, and if you do not know sign language, you can order by signing the letter with your hand. In order to know how to sign the letter, you can look at the coaster. When ready to order, you light a small flat lamp that the waiter puts on the table.

The customers at Sourdine are a mix of deaf and hearing. Sometimes hearing people who obviously do not know sign language try their best to communicate with the waiter by imitating the letters on the coaster or the signs demonstrated on the video playing on the TV, and sometimes there are deaf people sitting at the tables, conversing in sign language. In addition to signing to the waiter, sometimes one interacts with deaf customers too. The first time I was at the restaurant, before I knew any sign language at all, bumping into a deaf woman in the toilet was a new situation:

When I finished at the toilet and was going to wash my hands (the sink was outside the toilet stall), I noticed the woman I had seen sitting at a table speaking sign language coming down the stairs. I stepped aside in order for her to be able to enter the stall, but she just stood there. I looked at her, then she moved her hands like one does when one washes one’s hands. She was just going to wash her hands. I nodded, and she gave me a smile. (From the author’s field notes)

At a visit to the restaurant during my fourth week of learning sign language, I was struck by how a matter-of-fact the waiter used sign language and that he lacked surprise when I came into the restaurant speaking broken sign language. He showed no special interest or curiosity of who I was and why I was learning sign language. Here, it was as if a waiter and customer communicating in sign language in a restaurant was the most normal thing in the world. I went to the restaurant with a friend from Norway who is hearing and who does not know sign language. Realizing that we were early for French eating times, we nevertheless asked if it was possible to eat dinner at six thirty:

We got to Sourdine at six thirty in the evening. The restaurant was open, but empty. There was a man in his forties with short, dark hair, jeans and a white sweater working there. I signed “hello”, and he signed “hello” back. I asked him with my hands if we

could sit down. He looked at us questioningly and signed “do you want to eat?”, “drink?”. I signed “eat”. He looked around and seemed a bit confused, not quite knowing what to do. I signed “is it not possible?”. “Not now” he signed and that we had to come back after eight o’clock. I signed to the man that we would come back later to eat. He signed “ok”. (From the author’s field notes).

To him the unusual part of our exchange was our wish to eat at six thirty, not that we were using sign language. Later in the evening, I returned to Sourdine with my friend:

By the time we came back a couple in their fifties were seated at one of the tables. They were hearing and spoke French to each other, but sometimes they were trying to do some signs between the two of them. The waiter came over to our table and gave us menus, and returned shortly after. To order, my friend and I showed the letter from the hand alphabet corresponding to the dish we wanted. My friend wanted to order scallops with black spaghetti, and tried his best to form the letter “d” with his hand. I did the letter “g” to order a filet of salmon with mashed potatoes. The waiter nodded and did a sign I didn’t quite understand, but which looked like the sign for visiting someone. I repeated the sign he had done and looked at him questioningly. He repeated the sign and moved his lips too. Then he did the sign for “dessert”, which I understood and which made me realize that the first sign he had done was the sign “entrée” (starter), which can also mean visiting someone. A little later he asked if we wanted bread. I signed “yes, thank you”, and he came back with a basket with slices of bread. (From the author’s field notes)

There is also a café on the south side of the city, Café Signes, where the staff also uses sign language.⁴² It is situated on the corner of a calm street with residential buildings and some shops and bars on street level. From the outside, it looks like a regular Parisian café. It is not until you get inside that you notice what is unusual about it. Like Sourdine, Café Signes was started by a person who is hearing. Often there are both deaf and hearing people working here, and if the customer is hearing he or she can be served in French and if the customer is deaf he or she can be served in sign language. Sometimes, however, there are only deaf people among the staff.

⁴² In contrast to Sourdine, Café Signes is an adapted workplace where the deaf staff get some assistance to do their work for some reason, often due to a mental disability.

On each table of the café there is a little booklet with the title “Café Signes – a meeting place for deaf/hearing”. The booklet is written in French and describes different ways of communicating without using one’s voice: by miming, lip-reading, and sign language. And it describes different ways to catch the attention of a deaf person: waving the hand, touching the deaf person’s arm, or use the lamp above the table (there is a switch on the wall next to each of the tables, connected to a green lamp in the ceiling). There are also drawings of people doing some different signs for food, drink, and the hand alphabet, which the customers can use as an aide when ordering food. On the table there is a salt and pepper dispenser with the contents written in both French and the hand alphabet of LSF. On the wall of the café, there is a framed poster with the hand alphabet on it.



A page in the booklet at Café Signes (Photo by the author)

The place is popular at lunchtime, and it can be difficult to get a table. At other times during the day it is more calm and with fewer customers. Many hearing people come here to eat, and sometimes it looks like all of the tables are filled with hearing people speaking French. The first time I went to the café, not knowing any LSF, I said “bonjour” in French with my voice when entering. A lady who was hearing greeted me in French with “bonjour” and the rest of the communication took place in oral French. Another time I was there, when I had only learned a few signs, there were two deaf men working there and I had to communicate in sign language:

I searched the booklet on the table for the sign for coffee. When I found it I did the sign and looked at the waiter with a questioning look on my face to see if he understood. He repeated the sign to show that he got it. I wanted to order a coffee with milk, but as I found the drawing in the booklet of how to do the sign for milk confusing, I ended up saying “milk” in French, hoping that the waiter would be able to read my lips. He understood what I meant and showed me how to do the sign for milk. Then he asked me if I wanted a small or a large. The signs for small and large were easy to understand, and I repeated the sign for large. Then he did a sign I didn’t understand. The other waiter, who was standing close by, observed our conversation and came to help out. First he simply repeated the sign, which did not aid my comprehension. When he repeated the sign and moved his lips to form the word “crème”, however, I realized that he was asking me if I wanted a café crème. Not knowing how to sign “yes”, I nodded and said it in French. When I got my coffee, I did the sign for “thank you.” (From the author’s field notes).

In a conversation with a hearing waiter who works at the café, I learned that there are many deaf tourists who come there to eat. Mostly from Europe, but also some Americans, Japanese and Chinese. The waiter said that when people who speak another sign language come, they often exchange signs with the French working here. Some of the persons speaking different sign languages are easier to communicate with than others. Another day I went to Café Signes with Denise, I entered a conversation with a deaf lady from England. Denise is a girl I had met in sign language class. She is in her twenties and is learning sign language because she is gradually losing her hearing. She wears hearing aids, but without them she doesn’t hear anything:

Denise and I wanted to practice sign language, but since we were both beginners, our conversation was partly in LSF and partly in French. We tried to use sign language as much as we could, but when we didn’t know a sign for something we would say it in French. One time I was unsure of a sign, I signed it to the deaf waiter doing the mouth movement of the corresponding French word simultaneously to ask him if it was the right sign. He confirmed that I was doing the right sign by repeating both the sign and the mouth movement. After a little while I noticed that the three people sitting at the table next to us were looking with interest at the conversation Denise and I were having in part LSF and part French. It was a man in his fifties, and a man and woman in their thirties. I gave them a smile. The older man signed “hearing?” to us. I signed that I was

hearing and Denise signed that she was hearing, but that she would soon be deaf. The man asked us in sign language if we were learning sign language and what level we were on. He said that the two persons he was sitting with were from England. I looked at the lady and signed “England?”, she nodded and signed “England”. I asked her if she was on holiday here in Paris, using LSF. She didn’t seem to understand what I meant. The older man signed to us that the lady signs BSL (British Sign Language). The lady spelled “b-s-l” on her hand and said with her voice in English that she signs BSL. She explained some of the differences between BSL and LSF to me, and talked about sign language courses in England. She was deaf, but spoke English in addition to signing BSL, which enabled me to understand her. (From the author’s field notes)

One day I went to Café Signes with Alexandre, a deaf man in his fifties. Previous to our meeting, I had told him that I wanted to ask him some questions about his childhood and schooling. By now I knew enough sign language to communicate with the deaf staff at Café Signes without problem and to have a conversation. Alexandre and I had our entire conversation in sign language:

We entered Café Signes. A waiter signed “hello”, we signed “hello” back. Alexandre suggested that we could sit down at a table a little on the side so that it wouldn’t be possible for everyone to see what we were talking about. The guy who had greeted us at the door came over to the table to take our orders. Alexandre signed that he wanted a hot chocolate and I signed that I wanted a coffee. “Did I want a small coffee?”. “Yes”. The waiter left our table. Alexandre told me about some of the people working here, that he doesn’t know all of them, but he knows some a little bit. Alexandre and I started talking about what it was like when he grew up and what kind of schools he had gone to and what jobs he had had. While we were talking several deaf people entered the café, and some came over to our table to say hi to Alexandre. “Do you know everyone?”, I asked him. He said he has met some of them here and there, but that he doesn’t really know them. “For deaf people other deaf people are like a second family”, he said. “It’s like a village.” (From the author’s field notes)

At another café in Paris, an association that works to promote deaf people’s access to information as well as the understanding between deaf and hearing, organizes a sign language lunch once a week. The lunch is supposed to be an opportunity for deaf and hearing people to meet and learn about

each other. The participants buy their meal from the café, which sells different types of relatively inexpensive food. As LSF is spoken at the lunch, a basic level of LSF is needed to participate. Several hearing people come to the lunch practice sign language. Two of the organization's deaf members, Alexandre and Benoît, come to the lunch to chat with whoever shows up. Sometimes mostly hearing people show up, and sometimes there are more deaf than hearing people there. Apart from those who show up for the sign language lunch, there are other people sitting at the other tables who come to the café just to socialize or who are part of other types of organized events.

When Benoît and Alexandre talk about something just the two of them they sign very quickly. But when they sign with me or someone else who are learning sign language they sign a bit slower so that it is easier to understand. If Alexandre and Benoît signed something I did not understand, they did their best to explain it to me. Alexandre usually spelled the word on his hand or used his voice to say it in French. Benoît either spelled the word or on his hand or explained it in sign language. Sometimes when I did not understand Alexandre's explanation, Benoît would interrupt and explained in a different way, thinking that Alexandre was not giving a very clear explanation. Sometimes the signs Alexandre uses are a bit imprecise, he does not always do them in the same way as I have learned in my sign language classes. When Benoît signs something to me, he occasionally stops a little bit to see if I understand. If he does not think I understand, he starts to explain. To show that I understand I nod and sign "yes" or "I understand". Sometimes he spells something a bit too quickly for me to comprehend. I ask him to repeat, and he repeats. They are equally patient with the other people who come and who are learning sign language:

The lady who had come for the sign language lunch had a lower sign language level than me. She had problems understanding even when Benoît spelled things very slowly on his hand. She often looked very confused and sometimes I would ask her if she understood Alexandre and Benoît, and explain to her in French. Benoît and Alexandre were very patient with her. They spoke slowly to her, and explained the best they could if she didn't understand. At one point Benoît signed something in a slightly different way from what the lady had seen before, and Benoît explained that all deaf have some signs that are individual/unique, that everyone has his or her own way of signing that is very pi (typical of) that person. Hearing people have different voices and deaf people have slightly different ways of doing the signs. And deaf people living in different parts of France also use some different signs. (From the author's field notes)

Among the staff at the café, however, there are not anyone who know sign language. To order, deaf participants write down what they want on a piece of paper and hand it to the person who works there. Hearing people tell the person who works there what they want in French. When the people who work at the café approach the table with people communicating in sign language they do not adapt their communication:

Suddenly a guy who works at the café comes over to our table and asks “who is Benoît?” in French. I point Benoît out for the guy. The guy then asks me in French “has he already had his dessert?”. Benoît looks at me and asked me in LSF “what did he say?”. I translated what the guy said in French to sign language for Benoît. Benoît signed to me that he had not gotten his dessert yet, and I passed on the message in French to the guy. (From the author’s field notes)

A similar situation took place at another lunch:

A guy⁴³ who works at the café comes over to our table with a plate of pasta and says in French that it is for Alexandre. I point at Alexandre, and the guy puts the plate in front of him. Then the guy comes back with food for “Benoît”, and I have to point out Benoît for the guy. A little later a lady who works there comes to our table with two desserts and said in French that they were for “Alexandre and Fabrice”. Alexandre and Benoît saw that she was saying something, but didn’t understand what. I signed that the lady said that the desserts were for Alexandre and a person named “f-a-b-r-i-c-e” (I spelled the name on my hand). I told the lady who Alexandre was, and that there was no Fabrice here, but a Benoît. (From the author’s field notes)

This is a clear contrast to the way things work at Sourdine and Café Signes, where sign language is the “normal” language and where communication is not problematic for deaf people. In a conversation with Alexandre about deafness and disability, he said that many deaf people are against the use of the word “disabled” to describe deaf people. At places like Café Signes he can talk to others without any problems and he is not disabled here. But at another café or if he was the only deaf person among many hearing, he would have had difficulties communicating and he would have been disabled. He said that when he went to school he did not think of deafness as a disability.

⁴³ A different guy from the previous example.

It was not until later, when he started working, that he felt disabled because of the communication problems he encountered. A lot of the communication happened in writing. It is an “*invisible disability*”, he said.

A relevant question, according to Bauman (2005), is to ask *where* the disability takes place. The disability might be partially or completely in the social, physical and political environment. Most deaf people argue that disability is not relevant in surroundings where sign language is spoken, but becomes evident when communication problems occur: “..it is only within the contact zone between deaf and hearing worlds, between auditory and visual modalities, that the conditions of disability make themselves present” (Bauman 2005:313). From the descriptions of Sourdine, Café Signes and the café with the sign language lunch, we can clearly see that disability depends on the situation. For deaf people, a barrier often encountered is an invisible one of sound and people’s lack of adaption of their communication to a visual medium that they can access.

A tactile middle ground

So far the focus has been on building bridges between deaf and hearing through visual information. In addition to the situations and spaces of visual communication described so far, there are also situations in which hearing people are introduced to tactile experiences. We have already seen that the students in sign language class learned some tactile ways of communicating, such as writing letters on a person’s back or forming a letter with the hand that the other person can “read” by touching the hand and recognizing the letter its configuration represents. After a play at IVT, it is common for the audience tramp on the floor to produce vibrations on the floor that the actors can feel. At Festival Clin d’Oeil the seats in the auditorium would sometimes vibrate during parts of a film where the sound would otherwise be amplified. At some concerts I went to with deaf people, I was encouraged to pay attention to the vibrations of the music. Many deaf people I met in France, including Rileau described in the first paragraph of this chapter, like music because of how the vibrations feel on the body⁴⁴. At a concert by the band Fumuj, who are composed of hearing musicians but who has recently decided to make their music more accessible to deaf people, balloons were distributed to the people in the audience in order to intensify the tactile experience of the music.

⁴⁴ There are mixed opinions about music among deaf people, however. For instance, Augustin did not use to like music as he thought it was oppressive on the part of hearing people. Some deaf people enjoy listening to the sound of music through hearing aids.

Inside the concert venue, a lady is handing out white balloons. Once blown up, the balloon is long and thin, and one is meant to hold it in one's hand during the concert. On one side of the balloon the band's name, Fumuj, is written in French and on the other side the name is written in the hand alphabet of LSF. I notice several people speaking sign language just before the concert is about to begin. When the band starts to play, graphic patterns visualizing the rhythm are displayed on a screen behind the stage. There are four thin light poles on the stage and two thicker ones among the audience that blink according to the rhythm of the music. I am standing in the middle of a crowd in front of the stage, right next to a group of about ten to fifteen people who are speaking sign language and dancing. The singer does some signs at the same time as he is singing. Many people in the audience have balloons in their hands. Holding onto the balloon, I notice that the vibrations feel more intense than they do otherwise. (From the author's field notes)

The balloons were handed out to both deaf and hearing people at the concert. The balloons are both drawing attention to as well as maximizing (through the balloons ability to intensify the vibrations) a shared space where people can enjoy the music beyond sound. By accentuating this common experience, a tactile form of Wikan's concept of *resonance* was established between deaf and hearing people.

A middle ground in Brittany

In the town of Douarnenez, in the heartland of Brittany, a film festival is held every summer. The film festival focuses on minorities, and a large part of the films screened are documentaries. When I was doing fieldwork, the main theme of the festival was South Africa and its minorities. Other films were shown under the categories "Bretagne", "the world of the deaf", "the Arab world", etc. The festival has a minority-friendly profile, and all information is accessible in both French and Breton.⁴⁵ The last few years, there has been an attempt to make the festival more accessible to deaf people, and the number of deaf people attending the festival both as participants and as volunteers has increased during the last three or four years. This is done by making a part of the festival program accessible to deaf people, either by subtitling the films screened in French or by the

⁴⁵ While all of the (hearing) inhabitants of Douarnenez speak French, many people living in this area also speak Breton.

presence of an interpreter during the screening. Other measures taken were to hire interpreters, and to have some of the hearing volunteers who know LSF translate presentations and discussions that take place in the festival area. The festival lasts for ten days, and three of the are made more accessible to deaf people with more films subtitled and with more interpreters present. There is also a sign language café where different issues are discussed and where people can ask the deaf people in a panel questions they might have. There is a debate about artistic expression among deaf people and a deaf-themed night with deaf DJs, slam-poetry and a visual show. During the festival initiation courses are held for people who want to learn some Breton or LSF. Deaf people using sign language, especially during the three days the festival is more accessible to them, are visible around the festival area. Both LSF and Breton are quite visible around the festival area, in the form of signs in both languages⁴⁶ in addition to French (see photos):



Signs at the festival in French, Breton and LSF. The sign to the left indicates the entrance to the bookstore and the sign to the right indicates the festival restaurant. (Photos by the author)

⁴⁶ As LSF does not exist in written form (deaf people usually read French), the signs showing a person doing a sign are made to increase the visibility of sign language the festival as well as show people who don't know sign language how to do a particular sign.

At the festival opening, speeches are held in French, Breton, English and LSF. All of the speeches given in Breton and English, were also given in a French version. All of the speeches were translated to LSF by an interpreter on stage. One deaf lady who is volunteering at the festival, held a short speech in sign language about the presence of deaf people at the festival. The speech was later translated to French. The lady said that deaf people are often seen as disabled, but what is perceived as a disability is in fact a language barrier. Later, the festival president held a speech in French in which he mentioned that deaf people don't want to be seen as disabled but as a linguistic and cultural group.



The festival inauguration and opening speeches. (Photo by the author)

The activism for minority languages present at the festival was also reflected in the information handed out at the stands present at the festival area. At a stand there was information about a rally that would take place in the neighbouring city the following year to protect the regional languages in France - Basque, Breton, Catalan, Corse, Occitane, Alsacien, Peuples d'Oil, Peuples d'Outre mer - *“Because we want to obtain our cultural and linguistic rights. Because we want a democracy that respects its minorities.”* There was also a stand with information about the nearest deaf association and classes in sign language for those who wished to learn.

There are many teams of volunteers working at the festival. Several of the volunteers at the festival who are hearing know LSF, as they often have a double role of making the festival more accessible to deaf people in addition to other tasks. I was a part of the team that took the tickets of people entering the cinemas and counted the number of people who entering. For the most part I worked in a team with Nadine, a deaf girl from Paris. Occasionally there are some deaf people who come with questions about the film that is being showed, and the volunteers who know sign language explain to them. Even the president of the festival, who is hearing and does not speak sign language, made an effort to learn:

Nadine and I had taken people's tickets. After everyone had entered the auditorium where the film was to be screened, the president of the festival turned up and entered the auditorium to introduce the film. Nadine and I stayed outside the cinema to make sure nobody else entered. When the president had finished introducing the film and came out of the cinema, he signed "hello" to me on his way out. He had seen Nadine and I sign together outside the cinema before the film. I signed "hello" back and said with my voice in French simultaneously. He signed "how are you?", I signed and said "I'm well" back to him. (From the author's field notes)

At the main festival area located on a square in Douarnenez city centre, there is a stage with presentations, discussions and shows, and places to eat and drink. This is a place where people who have come to Douarnenez for the film festival usually gather when they are not watching films and lots of interaction between people, also between deaf and hearing take place here. Some hearing people at the festival never talked to a deaf person before or knew much about deaf people. Some them were surprised that people who are hearing speak sign language. Many hearing people were interested in talking to deaf people and vice versa. One night at the festival area, it started to rain heavily, and people flocked together under a tent covering part of the festival area:

I found myself at a table where I got into conversation with two hearing ladies and two deaf men. First I signed a bit with the deaf men. Then I talked to one of the ladies in French. She asked me "can you hear?". I said "yes". She said "but you have learned sign language?". "Yes". Then she said "do you hear just a little bit?", I said "I can hear like you". She said "but you are not deaf or hard of hearing?", I said no, "I hear like you". She seemed surprised that I spoke sign language and heard at the same time. Then I asked her if she could sign? She said "no, I can't". I had said it in LSF and

French simultaneously, and one of the deaf men standing at our table had noticed what I said to the lady. He told her “sure, you can sign”. He took out a cigarette and did a movement with his hand like one does when lighting a cigarette with a lighter. She did the same movement with her hand, and he signed “yes, there you go!”. The lady laughed. Then she told me that she thought sign language was very interesting, and even though she has never talked to deaf people before tonight, sometimes they (she and the deaf man) manage to understand each other. (From the author’s field notes).

A different night there was a party at the beach not far from the festival area, where lots of people had gathered around a bonfire. I was sitting with Heidi, a hearing volunteer who knows sign language and Mariam who is deaf and whom I know from Paris, and who also volunteered at the festival.

Sara, a girl who also volunteers at the festival, comes over to talk to Mariam. She doesn’t know much sign language, but she is very positive and seems very motivated to try her best to talk to Mariam. She uses the few signs that she knows, and sometimes she asks me or Heidi for help to translate a French word or expression to sign language. Mariam is patiently trying to understand Sara when she signs, and when Mariam signs something to Sara she does it very slowly in order for Sara to understand. After Sara and Mariam has ended their conversation, another hearing girl comes over to talk to Mariam. She doesn’t know sign language at all, and Heidi ends up translating their conversation. The girl is from Douarnenez and says she has worked with some deaf people and that she really wants to learn sign language herself. But since the courses are expensive and since she works a lot, it is difficult. She says she is ashamed that she doesn’t know sign language. Mariam says that she shouldn’t be ashamed, that she can still learn, little by little. (From the author’s field notes)

Some hearing people I talked to had a new perspective on deaf people during the festival.

Catherine, a hearing girl from Douarnenez, told me that she noticed a hearing person standing in the middle of a group of deaf people using sign language. The hearing person looked really lost, which made Catherine think about how the communication barrier can go both ways. A guy from South Africa who did not know sign language before coming to the festival, made efforts to learn from the deaf people who were there. Some deaf people he talked to would try to say something to him, and he tried his best to understand and respond. He gradually picked up some signs that he used to talk

to them, and he often asked me how to sign different words. He thought it was incredible how deaf people use sign language to communicate and said "*They were created without being able to hear and then they have made this language through which they can communicate*" and he felt that it was his "*obligation to learn their language and communicate with them.*"

One day I was having lunch with several volunteers, both deaf and hearing, at the festival area and it was one of the hearing volunteers' birthday. The persons who were hearing started singing the birthday song. One of the hearing people who sat there and who knew sign language did an improvised attempt of signing the song simultaneously in LSF in order to include those who were deaf. Many of the hearing volunteers who did not know sign language seemed very interested to learn. One time a volunteer I worked with who was hearing told me that she feels so stupid when deaf people come up to her and ask her something in sign language. She would like to learn sign language so that she could at least talk a little bit to them. Sometimes hearing volunteers who know sign language and deaf people correct those who do not know. A hearing volunteer said he was going to take the sign language intro course. He said "*I'm going to do the mute*" at the same time as he was moving his hands. Heidi said "*what did you say?*" He repeated what he had said. She said "*it's not called that, it's called sign language*". And "*deaf people are not mute, they make noise, they laugh, they don't have a voice but they still express themselves*". She was quite determined.

Deaf people are also interested in meeting hearing people. A deaf guy told me that he prefers this kind of festival with a mixture of deaf and hearing people, rather than the Festival Clin d'Oeil⁴⁷ where there are almost only deaf people. Yet other deaf people were happy that more deaf people started to come to the festival the last few years, but would add that "*it doesn't really matter if they are deaf or hearing, as long as they know sign language*":

I got into conversation with a deaf guy from Rennes who was working for a television station and had come to the festival to do a recording. He asked if I was deaf or hearing. When I answered that I was hearing, he was impressed that I had learned sign language quickly and that I had learned French Sign Language being from Norway. Shortly after he said he was sorry that he asked if I was deaf or hearing, because he has both deaf and hearing friends and doesn't really care if people are deaf or hearing.

⁴⁷ See Chapter 4 for a description of the Festival Clin d'Oeil

Several evenings of the festival there was a debate on stage about different topics related to the themes of the film festival. One night, there was a debate about the creation of art and deafness. Three deaf persons were on stage and shared their experiences as deaf artists. Interpreters translated. There were both deaf and hearing people in the audience, and sometimes there were comments from the audience. A deaf lady recounted an experience from her childhood. When she was a child her family had a piano and she always wanted to try to play, but she was always told that it was impossible because she was deaf. When she got older, she went to the US to study at Gallaudet University⁴⁸ and discovered that many deaf people there played the piano and that it was actually possible. Her whole life she had been told that she could not do it because she was deaf.

So far we have seen that there are different ways of relating to others than through the auditory channels that people who hear often use. Among deaf people, vision takes over many of the functions of hearing. We have seen that deaf people have a visual language that fulfills the needs of communication and reflection. There is an active effort to get hearing people to interact with deaf people on deaf people's terms. While groups such as Mains Diamant (described at the beginning of the chapter), works to promote "deaf culture" they also say that they want to promote it to deaf and hearing people.

Gísli Pálsson (2012) writes about humans as *biosocial*: "humans may usefully be regarded as fluid beings, with flexible, porous boundaries; they are necessarily embedded in relations which are neither purely biological nor social, relations that may be called "biosocial"; and their essence is best rendered as something constantly in the making and not as a fixed, context-independent species-being."(17). In Chapter 4, I argued that the Deaf community can be understood as a biosociality. While it is true that the Deaf community has deafness, or vision, as its point of departure, "the hearing community" uses hearing as its point of departure. Relating to other people through eyesight rather than the ear does not make a relationship more grounded in biology. There are no social relationships without the involvement of our biological senses and our bodies. We know the world through our senses and our relationships with other people are dependent on information we obtain in this way. What sensory information we use to relate to each other is not given. Humans are able to attach meaning to different sensory information, be it sounds or visual objects.

⁴⁸ Gallaudet University is located in the US and the language of instruction is American Sign Language.

Conclusion

As we have seen in this chapter, there is an active attempt to introduce and open up the world of the deaf to hearing people. Deaf people do not want to separate themselves from hearing people, they want to change the terms on which communication happens. Particular situations and spaces are created to facilitate what Wikan calls *resonance* between deaf and hearing, despite their different sensory points of departure. Hearing people are introduced to a new way of using and making sense of visual information in sign language classes and at cafés and a restaurant in Paris where LSF is spoken. Through making the film festival in Brittany more accessible to deaf people, more deaf people are attracted to the festival. This resulted in exchange between deaf people and hearing people who have never talked to deaf people before. There is an attempt to give hearing people a glimpse and understanding of deaf people's "normal" way of getting around in the world and to see that the use of sound is not the only way to organize and navigate one's environment and relate to other people. Sight is very important to deaf people, and visual stimuli is used in many situations where hearing people usually rely on sounds. Tactile information is used in various ways in communication and valued in a way that is unfamiliar to hearing people. An example of this is enjoying the vibrations of music rather than the sound. Encounters between deaf and hearing people make evident the flexible character of our senses and that there is not one single way to organize one's environment and relate to people.

6 CONCLUSION

In Chapter 3, we saw how deaf people in France are often thought of as something other than normal. Being able to hear sounds and speak with one's voice, are attributes that are thought to be part of a normal physiological makeup. Regardless of whether a person is born deaf or becomes deaf later in life, there is an idea that the deaf person should be rehabilitated to what is thought of as the normal physical makeup of a human being. When a child is born, doctors conduct a test to see if he or she can hear. This is often done only 1-2 days after birth. If the child is found to be deaf, the doctors will advise the parents that their child get cochlear implants or hearing aids, depending on the degree of deafness. Next, the child will attend sessions of speech therapy to develop the capacity to express him- or herself orally. Deafness is treated as a temporary state that will eventually be overcome. The origin of the communication barrier and the lack of accessibility deaf people experience, is located by doctors in the deaf individual's physical makeup, rather than in the way society is organized. Many different techniques are employed to teach the deaf child to speak, such as the use of signs from French Sign Language⁴⁹, LPC or the Borel method to visualize individual phonemes.

Deaf children are a good example of *biological citizens*, who are defined by the authorities, and expected to use technology to hear and go to speech therapy. When a child receives the diagnosis of deafness by the doctor, he or she will have the expenses of hearing aids, cochlear implants and speech therapy covered. While there is schooling offered in sign language in some areas in France, this was not the case in the area where my informants Franck and Eva lived. There is little or no support for hearing parents of deaf children who want to learn sign language to communicate with their deaf children. While hearing aids, cochlear implants, and speech therapy can increase the options available for a deaf person in a hearing society, they can also work against empowerment, as the conditions of normality are reproduced instead of opening up for different ways to live.

Many deaf adults are strongly opposed to the practices of normalization to make them appear as persons who can hear. A common way to express this opposition is through art, such as an informative play (*Inheritance*) and artwork (*The Deaf Scream*) about deaf people's experiences of oppression. Opposition is also expressed through demonstrations, such as the demonstrations against making early screening for deafness obligatory.

⁴⁹ The speech therapists use Signed French, meaning that they use some signs while following the sentence structure of French instead of that of French Sign Language

In Chapter 4, we saw how deaf people and their associates are creating a world where everything is accessible to them. In these spaces, sign language is the language of communication. This world is not closed off to hearing people, but one usually has to be able to speak sign language to participate. Deaf people seek to establish an identity as equal, but different. In setting up their space on their own terms, they also create some boundaries. By choosing not to communicate using their voices, even though they have learned to do so growing up, they are drawing boundaries around their visually oriented spaces. There are some disagreement between deaf people as to what methods of communication deaf people should use, such as sign language, LPC and oral French. Although some hearing people participate in the deaf community, the deaf community can be called *biosociality* as it is built around deaf people. The deaf world is internationally oriented, with many connections across national borders.

The descriptions of encounters between deaf and hearing in Chapter 5, show that there are attempts to build bridges between people who are deaf and people who are hearing. By creating middle grounds based on visual or tactile sensory information, deaf people and their associates seek to establish spaces that deaf and hearing can share on equal terms.

In the introduction I asked, “How do people create a world around deafness?” and “How do deaf people challenge conceptions of normality?”

A world is created around deafness by practicing a visual language and by establishing spaces that are accessible regardless of the ability to hear sounds. Examples of these spaces are IVT (the sign language theatre), festival Clin d’Oeil, Café Signes and Sourdine. Tactile information is used both to convey meaning (by tramping on the floor after a play or by writing something on another person’s back) and for enjoyment (by feeling the vibrations rather than the sound of music). Deaf people demonstrate the flexibility of the human senses, and that there are other ways to create meaningful contexts than through sound.

Deaf people challenge conceptions of normality by creating spaces that are accessible to them, “beyond sound”. In this way, they demonstrate the possibility of organizing one’s surroundings in other ways, and that access to sound is not always necessary to build relationships. A second way they challenge conceptions of normality is by exposing hearing people to these spaces and to situations where sound is irrelevant. While deaf people encounter communication barriers in the

spaces of the hearing majority (see Chapter 3), hearing people who do not know sign language experience communication barriers in the more visually oriented spaces that are described in Chapter 5. In visually oriented spaces such as the theatre and the festival described in Chapter 4, and the café and restaurant described in Chapter 5, the communication barriers that deaf people experience elsewhere are effectively erased. When the “normal” sound-based infrastructure that supports hearing people’s communication practices collapses, hearing people experience communication barriers. By inviting hearing people into their visually oriented spaces, deaf people demonstrate to hearing people the possibility of using their senses in a different way. In addition, choosing not to communicate with their voices when they meet hearing people is also a way of challenging “normal” ways of relating to each other for members of the hearing majority. As we have seen in the encounters between deaf and hearing in Chapter 5, deaf people go a long way to create resonance between deaf and hearing based on visual communication.

As a concluding remark, instead of assuming that the best solution for all humans is to conduct their lives in the same way, it is fruitful to investigate the particular contexts in which people live. This includes people in our own Western societies, such as deaf people. Deaf people demonstrate that sound is only one of many possible grounds on which to base community, participation and communication.

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