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“Through the Eyes”: Reading Deafened Gestures of
Look-Listening in Twentieth Century Narratives

A Dissertation Submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

by

Cara Lynne Cardinale

June 2010

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Katherine Kinney, Chairperson

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The Dissertation of Cara Lynne Cardinale is approved:

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

Acknowledgments

In “A Room of One’s Own” Virginia Woolf writes: “For masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of people so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice.” This revelation—forged in a twinned hammered steel bangle I wear around my wrist as a reminder—has made completing this dissertation possible. Five years, seven countries and one birth later I have found my voice depends on a larger body of support.

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Dedication

For Owen, my first and most important reader.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

“Through the Eyes”: Reading Deafened Gestures of
Look-Listening in Twentieth Century Narratives

by

Cara Lynne Cardinale

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in English
University of California, Riverside, June 2010
Dr. Katherine Kinney, Chairperson

Voicelessness is arguably the endemic trope of modernist literature. Writers began to push language out of shape; experiment with the visual and the aural; invoke the silent and the explosive—all in an effort to access a voice that could speak articulately above the din of modern violence and mechanization. “Through the Eyes” examines the ways in which women writers in particular attempted to address the failure of language to talk about trauma, illness, war and the body.

Borrowed from a moment of communicating “through the eyes” between Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield, I deploy the theoretical trope *look-listening* as a critical strategy engaging rather than censoring the body. As such, I utilize sign language—the literal and visual language of the Deaf—critically in order to evoke a reassessment of the fragmented paradigm of modern language and literature through a realignment of expressive and receptive modalities. Building on the burgeoning fields of Disability and Deafness

studies, Feminist discourses, Queer theory, and linguistic anthropology, I suggest a new narrative of vocalized bodies.

Beginning with an examination of William James' stream of consciousness alongside the cherology, or syntax, of signed languages this dissertation reveals the ways that sign's iconicity, movement, and multiplicity are ideal vehicles for sketching the life of the mind. Virginia Woolf's experimental novels, then, reveal "moments of being" as "moments of deafness." Carson McCullers' literal deployments of deafness underscore distinctions between hearing and listening, between speech and speaking, and the violent consequences for failed communication. Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*, a narrative in which "voice" has been obliterated by government mandate, is revealed as a traumatic narrative that can only be told through a language that doesn't involve telling. I conclude with Monique Truong's *Book of Salt*, a re-telling of modernism from an outsider's perspective, to show how the potential for *look-listening* works in a critical modality of deaf-blindness. Such a conclusion reconceptualizes the expressive and receptive modalities of the hands and tongue to offer a more active look-listening that serves as a counternarrative and a companion to seminal modernist narratives.

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INTRODUCTION:
RECONTEXTUALIZING MODERN VOICELESSNESS

The age demanded that we sing/and cut away our tongue.

—Ernest Hemingway, “The Age Demanded”

Crowds of people moved through the street with dream-like violence. As he looked at their broken hands and torn mouths he was overwhelmed by the desire to help them. . .

—Nathaniel West, *Miss Lonelyhearts*

She put her hand against his chest and pushed him, she looked frightened, she opened her mouth but no words came. He stepped back, he tried to speak, but they moved aside from each other saying nothing.

—Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*

Voicelessness is arguably the endemic trope of modernist literature. The narratives engaged in this dissertation are the progeny of an era afflicted with “broken hands and torn mouths,” and I read modernism as a struggle to find voice in what seemed an increasingly vacuous era. Personified in what Michael North has argued as “the most prominent, though not by any means the most popular, poem of the twentieth century” (ix), T.S. Eliot’s 1921 *The Waste Land* speaks for this fundamental “lack”¹ of modernism². The obvious place to begin a discussion of voicelessness, then, is with Eliot’s famous “heaps of broken images” and the narrative of Philomel which resonates throughout the poem. Philomel, after being raped by Tereus has had her tongue cut out so she can not reveal her attacker and ultimately is turned into a nightingale where she sings her garbled accusations. The poem’s refrain, the “jug jug” of the nightingale Philomel, echoes with “inviolable voice” to “withered stumps of time”³ (WL 2.100-04). This warble is the literal sound of singing without the tongue, the anthem, it seems of modernist alienation. Philomel’s voice now is “involable”—protected

only by the absence of cleft—and we are implicated as the listeners with “dirty ears.” Eliot’s Philomel is borrowed from Ovid’s “The Story of Tereus and Philomela” and tells the tale of Philomela whose threat of speech invokes Tereus’ wrath and fear: “Philomela gladly offered her throat to the stroke, filled with the eager hope of death. But he seized her tongue with pincers, as it protested against the outrage, calling ever on the name of her father and struggling to speak, and cut it off with his merciless blade” (Ovid 48). In Ovid’s tale she is left with “speechless lips” but is able to communicate her story to the queen by “skillfully weaving” her wrongs on a Thracian web which she gives to the queen by begging “with gestures” to her attendant. Her story is understood when “she made her hand serve for her voice” (49); violation, violence, and voicelessness are made visible through gesture and audible without speech. In the poem, a tapestry of Philomel hangs in the room of a husband and wife who cannot hear one another and have become voiceless to the other: “Speak to me. Speak!” demands the wife whose husband cannot hear her—he thinking of dead rats and corpses left from the battlefields of the war—and who does not speak himself.

For language in the modern age “had to stretch—had to say more than it had been able to say before; had to reveal more, embody more” (Malamud 1). As Paul Fussell reminds us in *The Great War and Modern Memory*, the changes in a modern age wrecked by world war and troubled by industrial advances caused a “collision [. . .] between events and the public language used for over a century to celebrate the idea of progress” (169-70). Writers found themselves drowned out by the modern screams of “the ever-expanding machinations of imperialist exploits, mass culture, global militarism, scientific incursions,

ideas of an infinite nature, the other world of spiritualism, communications technologies and the like” (Kahn 9)⁴. Indeed, from Philomela’s “jug jug” to the absence of the human voice in Charlie Chaplain’s *Modern Times*, access to a voice that could speak articulately above the din of modern violence and mechanization becomes one of modernism’s central anxieties. Such a “collision,” then, leaves a literal and a literary battlefield strewn with reminders of voicelessness, blank spaces and failures of speech; it is no wonder Roland Barthes called modernity a “crisis of voice”⁵.

“Through the Eyes” begins at this moment when writers began to push language out of shape; experiment with the visual and the aural; invoke the silent and the explosive. From visual tableaux such as Stein’s “Tender Buttons” that demand “the reader becom[e] a viewer who must forgo communication with a work of art that does not ask to be ‘understood’ but obtrudes its medium” (Norris 741); James Joyce’s “compendium of graphic metamorphoses” (Lerm Hayes 1) in *Ulysses* that reveal language as alarmingly re-presentable; to the “Blast” manifesto that violently declares the vortex as the unpredictable and paradoxical art for the new millennium, writers struggled precisely with how to vocalize the traumas of the twentieth century. Marked by moments such as the scandalous 1913 New York unveiling of Marchel Duchamp’s “Nude Descending a Staircase,” modern writers mirrored the cubist search for multiple perspectives. With William James’ 1892 exploration of “The Stream of Consciousness” and Sigmund Freud’s 1900 publication of *Interpretation of Dreams* writers likewise explored psychological and subjective states.

Importantly, while writers were striving to reshape language for the twentieth century, linguists were seeking the meaning of language itself. While twentieth century writers self-consciously distinguished themselves from their forefathers, linguists shifted from the nineteenth century's focus of the linguistic past to more synchronic study that considered particular languages at particular moments in time. Between 1880-1930 Ferdinand de Saussure in Europe and Leonard Bloomfield in the United States developed an "awareness of linguistic complexity" and furthered the rapid progress of scientific linguistics (McMahon 138). The start of structuralism and semiotics⁶ came from Saussure's lectures given in Geneva between 1907-11; namely, he established the premise that language is a system and a set of social conventions⁷. Languages, he argues, are systems of signs in two parts: the first linguistic part is the signifier, the word, utterance, text itself. He recognized that the signifier could be vocal or nonvocal, visible or audible. Importantly for Saussure, however, and for semiotics, signs are arbitrary⁸ and signifiers are not bound to specific utterances. Second, Saussure distinguished between *parole*, the observable, recordable instances of speech and writing, the word itself and *langue*, the more abstract system that derives from the linguistic environment of language. This relationship underscores that it takes a community to establish the relations between any particular sound image and any particular concept. Correspondingly, language is relational; it is a set of social conventions thereby, Jonathan Culler notes, reversing "the perspective which makes society the result of individual behavior and insist[ing] that behavior is made possible by collective social systems which individuals have assimilated, consciously or subconsciously" (Culler). This reflects the

larger modernist tension “between the awareness of complexity and the commitment to unity” (Faulkner 12 ctd in McMahaon 156). Linguists, then, began to view language as an organism that experiences decay, change and development.

This re-examination of language occurring at the turn of the century is a crucial starting point for considering the way bodies become vocalized in twentieth century narratives. In 1916 Walter Benjamin was considering the linguistic parameters of language and turned to visual poetics: the “language of sculpture, of painting, of poetry” (73). In these languages, he explains, “we find a translation of the language of things into an infinitely higher language, which may still be of the same sphere. We are concerned here with nameless, nonacoustic languages, languages issuing from matter” (73). Benjamin suggests that the visual and the silent transform the materials of our object world into a language which “is in no way metaphorical” (62). He explains that language is never only “language as such,” but also an incommensurable entity capable of representing the “noncommunicable” (64, 73). Further, “the whole of nature, too, is imbued with a nameless, unspoken language” that is “comparable to a secret password that each sentry passes to the next in his own language, but the meaning of the password is the sentry’s language itself” (74). Simply, the message itself becomes the meaning. Much of modernism’s literary project involves such a quest to produce a skeleton key that could access what was no longer expressible and surfaced only in fragments.

In 1924 when Virginia Woolf first read her essay “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” to students (the “Heretics” nonetheless) at Cambridge she set out a taunting call to fiction: “My

name is Brown. Catch me if you can.” Woolf urged the next generation of writers and readers to find the voice absent in novels—those moments “clumsy, verbose, and undramatic, so rich, elastic, and alive” (749)—yet present in nature. Woolf advised: “Tolerate the spasmodic, the obscure, the fragmentary, the failure” (“MBA” 757). In her essay “Modern Fiction” Woolf likewise concludes the “infinite possibilities” as yet explored:

There is no limit to the horizon, and that nothing—no “method,” no experiment, even of the wildest—is forbidden, but only falsity and pretence. “The proper stuff of fiction” does not exist; everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought; every quality of brain and spirit is drawn upon; no perception comes amiss. (“MF” 744)

All of this talk of fiction points to a pushing of linguistic boundaries and listening to the “nameless, nonacoustic” (Benjamin 73). Such a magnanimous task asks that we be patient and fearless; “And if we can imagine the art of fiction come alive and standing in our midst, she would undoubtedly bid us break her and bully her, as well as honor and love her, for so her youth is renewed and her sovereignty assured” (Woolf “MF” 744).

This personification of “the art of fiction” is not unlike how Woolf imagines Katherine Mansfield, whom she distinguishes as her only worthy female contemporary⁹—and rival¹⁰—in a dominantly masculine literary milieu. In her diary dated Saturday 5 June, 1920 Virginia Woolf confides the value of what she termed Katherine Mansfield’s “priceless talk”: “to no one else can I talk in the same disembodied way about writing; without altering my thought more than I alter it in writing here” (DVW2 45). In the same entry Woolf muses that “indeed there’s a sort of self command about her [Katherine] as if having

mastered something subterfuges were no longer necessary” (*DVW2* 45). In her literary biography of Virginia Woolf, Hermione Lee points to this passage as key to understanding the relationship between these female contemporaries: “This kind of talk, she [Woolf] feels, gets through self, consciousness, physical distaste or attraction, and illness, to an essence of intimacy and reality. It is very like what she thinks fiction should do” (*Woolf* 391). This “disembodied way” is a key preface to catching that elusive Brown. Moreover, this speaking without “subterfuges” allows Woolf to draw upon “every feeling, every thought; every quality of brain and spirit” (“MF” 744).

The language Woolf uses to define the essentialness of her connection with Mansfield, though, is particularly striking especially when taken with Woolf’s entry from Tuesday 16 January written three years later, a week after the death of Mansfield. “It is strange to trace the progress of one’s feelings,” Woolf writes as she follows waves of shock, relief, sorrow “then, gradually, blankness & disappointment” (*DVW2* 226). She summons Mansfield as “visual impressions kept coming & coming” replaying frame by frame, gesture by gesture specific moments (“the room at Portland villas. I go up. She gets up, very slowly from her writing table”). When Woolf pauses she returns to their “priceless talk”: “we looked very steadfastly at each other, as though we had reached some durable relationship, independent of the changes of the body, through the eyes” (*DVW2* 226). Indeed, despite waves of emotion as she vacillates between mourning friend or rival (both are equally important to her writing self), Woolf hones in on one constant: their shared language, “that kind of certainty, in the talk about books, or rather about our writings, which I [Woolf]

thought had something durable about it” (226). Mansfield herself may have been “inscrutable” (226) but like the goddess of Modern Fiction though she “bid us break her and bully her” we “honor and love her.” With Mansfield “no perception comes amiss”; Woolf always returns to this “priceless talk.” Her thoughts with Mansfield are un“alter”ed and “steadfast” despite “changes of the body.”

I underscore this private moment between these two writers to disinter the writing body. Contrary to critical readings that propose this “disembodied way” is a “leap *out* of female embodiment”¹¹, I argue that it is an embodiment that transcends language as opposed to a language that transcends the body; that is, when Virginia talks to Katherine she recasts traditional embodiment by communicating “through the eyes.” What is more, this is a looking “very steadfastly at each other” that engages a reciprocal gaze. The key to “priceless talk,” then, is not disembodiment as such, but a “disembodied way” that utilizes what I call *look-listening* to engage rather than censure —“subterfuges were no longer necessary”— the body as an expressive and receptive modality. This look-listening is a kind of skeleton key, a means to sing without a tongue. It is via look-listening I intend to re-read modern narratives of voicelessness.

Indeed, Woolf’s fictional Bernard from *The Waves*, the “maker of phrases” in her 1931 novel of pure consciousness, rhetorically asks Percival, “the absent center”¹² (TW 153): “If I shall never see you again and fix my eyes on that solidarity, what form will our communication take?” (Woolf TW 155). There is an implicit suggestion that Bernard, too, relies on look-listening. Without the bodily presence with which to “fix [his] eyes”

communication is incomplete. Bernard answers with silence; only silence will do, since “nothing that has been said meets our case. We sit [. . .] picking up fragments [. . .]. Hence the silence, the sublimity” (157). What Bernard offers instead is a silent means of communication in response to Eliot’s fragments littering *The Waste Land*. Bernard goes one further, though, and aptly defines this silence as “the perpetual solicitation of the eye” (157). This “new” form of communication is not silence as such, but a “perpetual solicitation” for something, with someone to whom he can communicate “through the eyes.”

Woolf, both in diary entries from 1920 and 1923 and in her fictional character from 1931, expresses a desire for the body to engage in ocular communication; a revised construction of the body’s capacity to communicate emerges, and she suggests a kind of recasting of the originary and receptive points of language. Moreover, when Woolf and Mansfield engage in “priceless talk” they are rejecting, not the body per se, but what disability theorist Lennard Davis has shown are the assumptions of the speaking body; these assumptions “remind us of the extent to which an economy of the body is involved in our own metaphors about language and knowledge” and which construct “a system of metaphors supporting the illusion of the ideal body” (103).

Through look-listening and in their shared sense of self as women writers, Woolf and Mansfield began to shape a language outside of the antagonistic dualisms of speech and the body. As Davis evinces: “When the tables are turned and conversation is received through the eye and generated by the hand, as is the case with sign language, most people assume we are no longer dealing with language as such” (103). Sign language, “created in

space with the signer's body and perceived visually have incredible potential for iconic expression of a broad range of basic conceptual structures (e.g. shapes, movements, locations, human actions), and this potential is fully realized" (Taub 3). A literal and visual language of the body, sign language speaks in silence. Further, as early researchers of sign language discovered: "sign language exploited the phenomenon of visible local simultaneity, and speech itself displayed the same features when observed by the eye rather than the ear" (Rée 305). That is, when words are received by looking rather than listening it has the expressive capacity for contingency. While I hardly suggest Woolf and Mansfield were literally using the language of the Deaf¹³ to communicate, I insist that they were engaged in deafened modalities of speech that allow for a "disembodied way" of communicating. I do suggest, then, that Woolf has a sense of language's potential that is "fully realized" in "signed languages." Further, sign language is potentially a language that remains "inviolable," making it especially appealing for writers who desired a language free from the rigors of oppressive syntax and logic associated with Victorianism, progress, patriarchy and the rhetoric of war.

Look, for example, in *On Being Ill*, Woolf's "experiment of image-making" (Lee "Introduction" xii). Here she insists language comes to us through our experience of embodiment:

All day, all night the body intervenes; blunts or sharpens, colours or discolours [. . .]. The creature within can only gaze through the pane—smudged or rosy; it cannot separate off from the body like the sheath of a knife or the pod of a pea for a single instant. (*OBI* 4)

Illness¹⁴, in its confinement, leaves us alone within our own body and reminds us the extent to which our experience of language is altered through the processes of the body. As such, Woolf argues, it requires a new language—one that is “more primitive, more sensual, more obscene” (*OBI* 7). This language is an echo of the very language needed to catch Brown: “spasmodic, obscure, fragmentary.” Moreover, illness provides a language whose cartography is uniquely within and without the symbolic; buried in the recesses of the regulated body, the sick body roams freely among the shadows of invisibility (and perhaps can even “hear” Eliot’s mermaids). Woolf explains:

in illness, with the police off duty, we creep beneath some obscure poems [. . .] and the words give off their scent and distil their flavour, and then, if at last we grasp the meaning, it is all the richer for having come to us sensually first, by way of the palate and the nostrils, like some queer odour. Foreigners, to whom the tongue is strange have us at a disadvantage. (22)

Without the “police,” those Lacanian mounties who regulate our experience of language, our perception is free to “creep”; we are intoxicated; we engorge. Lacan asserts that we enter language by rejecting the prelinguistic space of the mother and entering the symbolic realm of language, which is the name of the Father. Thus linguistics and psychoanalysis uphold the idea that speaking is masculine and not speaking is a kind of death, or rather it is an entrance into the embodied real. Woolf seemed to seek an alternative and wrestled with these binarisms in her experimental prose to find a way to write from the woman’s body without annihilation. The state of illness becomes a means, then, of thinking through the female body. Like Woolf’s “priceless talk,” the experience of language from within this body has little to do with “talk” in its normative, aural state. In illness, the “illusion of the ideal body”

is disrupted; sounds as traced from within the body have heft, texture, aroma; they take on meaning only when “the tongue is [e]strange[d].” Woolf implicitly ties the modern malaise of isolation and alienation to illness and disability; but “illness,” rather than being disabling, provides access to a language that the otherwise “well” cannot hear.

Further, when Woolf imagines her fictional novelist Mary Carmichael in *A Room of One's Own* she is precisely interested in how Carmichael “set to work to catch those unrecorded gestures, those unsaid or half-said words” (*AROO* 84) which can only be done “in the shortest of short-hand, in words that are hardly syllabled yet” (85). Woolf underscores not silence, per se, but attentiveness to listening to the unuttered and catching those gestures originating from the body. Carmichael must try to craft the feminine sentence, one Woolf imagines must be built like “arcades or domes” which women will knock “into shape for herself when she has the free use of her limbs” (*AROO* 77). This feminine sentence built with unencumbered “limbs” has to its advantage what sign language offers with “the body and space as articulators” (Taub 3). This language “lets us represent far more types of imagery iconically, and many more concepts have visual, spatial, or kinesthetic images associated with them than have auditory images” (Taub 230). In this same discussion Woolf even cites deafness explicitly when she distinguishes Jane Austen and Emily Bronte as female novelists who “alone were deaf to that persistent voice, now grumbling, now patronizing, now domineering, now grieved, now shocked, now angry, now avuncular, that voice that cannot let women alone, but must be at them” (*AROO* 75). That “voice,” that “straight dark bar, a shadow shaped something like the letter ‘I’” (*AROO* 99)

which Woolf must “dodge” to see the literary landscape of the masculine sentence is implicitly tied to utterance and the unbearable chatter¹⁵—not of women—of patriarchal critical men¹⁶. The only hope, she offers, is that a woman writer has is to be literally deaf to these critical harpies. This is a radical assertion, as Woolf implies that it is the speaking, male voice, and not the female body, that is a source of excess. In a bold reversal Woolf casts the patriarchal voice, and not women, as “language stealers” who “blab” and “cackle” so that we cannot even hear our own bodies think (Trinh).

By introducing sign language as a site of cultural and critical discussion it pushes modernist discussions of language beyond visual and textual anomalies that still have at their heart assumptions of text as part of system of speech—what Jacques Derrida terms Western discourse’s “phonocentrism”: the system of “hearing-oneself-speak.” However, even Derrida’s deconstructive “grammatology” fails to engage a potentially fruitful exchange between sign language and deconstruction¹⁷—one H. Dirksen Bauman suggests could “initiate a ‘Deaf philosophy’” (“Poetics” 316). Both the “father” of the science of language based on “signs,” Ferdinand de Saussure, and his poststructuralist counterpart fail to mention the deaf or their language of signs when they “might well consider a population that relies on non-phonetic means to signify and that bases its meaning production on visual rather than audible information” (Davidson 86). In fact, as early as 1751¹⁸ Diderot suggested that the “deaf and dumb” were protected from “the corrupting prejudices of syntax” and “the dull uniform trudge of modern science and philosophy” (Rée 135). Strikingly, while modern poets, artists, linguists and philosophers proclaimed the radical

potential of silent languages they notably overlooked the obvious language of signs. The radical potential of deafness is even more striking; Bauman's critical explanation is worth noting in detail:

If non-phonetic writing interrupts the primacy of the voice, deafness signifies the consummate moment of disruption. Deafness exiles the voice from the body, from meaning, from being; it sabotages its interiority from within, corrupting the system which has produced the 'hearing' idea of the world. [. . .] It creates an embodied linguistic system which, unlike speech, is not fully present to itself. [. . .] The eye, unlike the ear in the system of 'hearing-oneself-speak,' can only partially 'see-oneself-sign.' There is always a trace of nonpresence in the system of signing. (Bauman "Poetics" 317)

This kind of "nonpresence" may be precisely the link to a "disembodied way" particularly when taken novelistically with what Lennard Davis has usefully proffered as "the deafened moment": a critical modality which involves "the acknowledgement on the part of the reader/writer/critic that he or she is part of a process that does not involve speaking or hearing" (101-02). This disruption is why Davis suggests that deafness is "strategically" preferable to an alternate modality such as blindness: "Deafness has been more excluded precisely because it seems to be outside of meaning. Blind people are never considered outside of language, while deafness is conventionally seen as such" (Davis 105).

Correspondingly, consider the contrary philosophical histories of blindness and deafness: the former makes one wise, the latter makes one "dumb." While literal blindness offers "insight," he suggests, critical blindness implies lack of "insight"; the hegemonic form of language denotes blindness as distinctly distanced from a technology of writing, printing, and reading in a logocentric linguistic system. Insight, or a return from critical blindness,

would seem to indicate a reintegration into this system of symbolic production. Critical deafness, however, suggests something quite different and undermines the law of “normative linguistic modality” (103). The language of deafness moves the receptive point of language from the ear to the eye and the expressive from the mouth to the hand. A “critical moment of deafness” implies one in which the critic is severed from “the experiential, from the body” (104). A return from critical deafness—the site of a “deafened moment”—would be a “reconnection or a reconfiguration with the body, with immanence, with the contingent” (104). Unlike “insight,” the critical moment of deafness inaugurated by the “deafened moment” falls outside of the symbolic “law” of language. In addition, this “moment” underscores the indefinite temporality marked by experience or memory and pushes deafness and disability beyond particularized and often sentimentalized narratives, suggesting the “deafened moment” as a corporeal link to a larger process.

But the question remains how to write from within this body, let alone “write the body” especially if the woman’s body is a place of confinement. Woolf’s feminist descendants from Cixous to Butler have grappled with and challenged writing the female body. I suggest doing so by reading embodiment critically via a Deaf lens. In his discussion of “the deafened moment” Davis suggests (in a footnote) that the female writer is always already “allied with the deafened critic, who must reinscribe language on the body, in the materiality of the sign as it is embodied in the larynx or the hand” (179 n. 53). Trinh T. Minh-Ha in *Woman, Native, Other* illustrates how the mandate to “write the body” has been appropriated, misread and devalued by the symbolic order and dismissed as frivolous and

mimetic; the body, in turn, is a place of excess tied implicitly to the physicality (vocality, touch, texture) of language. Women then are cast as “language stealers” who must “blab,” “cackle,” or who are “dumb as fish.” Indeed the women writer and sign language have much in common, yet there has been a paucity of critical engagement¹⁹ that considers the ways in which “deafness has the potential to reassign the critic away from the cultural construction of system to a more transgressive role, toward the imperative of Cixous and Trinh to ‘write through the body’” (Davis 105). These connections between body and language suggest the role of disability and gender in hegemonic practices that precede linguistic expression. As feminist disability critic Rosemarie Garland Thomson reminds us: “Not only has the female body been represented as deviant, but historically the practices of femininity have configured female bodies in ways that duplicate the parameters of disability” (256). Similarly, the audist²⁰ biases of language cannot be separated from the phallogocentric order which aims to perpetuate hierarchies of mind and body binarisms. To tease out these connections between writing, body and voice I contend it is due time to jettison this footnote to the fore.

In *Threshold of the Visible World* psychoanalytic feminist Kaja Silverman discusses the need for ideality “to identify with bodies we would otherwise repudiate” (2); via synaesthesia she proposes “excoropreal” identification. Silverman suggests: “The body does not exist even as a tenuous unity prior to its constitution through image, posture, and touch. Indeed it cannot even be said to be ‘in pieces’ [Lacan’s *corps morcele*] since that implies that once assembled they could add up to a whole” (22). Indeed, Davis gestures towards this when he

urges his readers to consider: “all body contact is a form of talk, and everyone talks with everyone. The language Touch is itself a metalanguage, a language beyond language” (21). Sign language becomes radicalized when invested with feminist attention to signification that is alerted to the very process of signification. Trinh provides insight into such a language that is aware of its linguistic space:

In the passage from the heard, seen, smelled, tasted and touched to the told and the written, *language* has taken place. Yet in the articulation of language what is referred to, phenomenologically and philosophically, is no more important, than what is at work, linguistically, in the referring activity. (42)

Both Silverman and Trinh take Woolf's plea for fiction one greater and argue not that there is no boundary for the “stuff” of fiction but that there is no such quantifiable border for language. The body itself functions as a visual, kinesthetic *l'écriture féminine*.

Hélène Cixous likewise suggests: “censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time” (350); that is, the interpellative processes of language are tied to the constitutive processes of being. For that reason, Cixous' *l'écriture féminine* in “The Laugh of the Medusa” is both *about* writing the body and *is* the practice of writing the body. In this intimate and familiar, but repressed, space of the body, Cixous provides a link to the unconscious processes of writing and the uncanny. Woman, she insists, carries within her own body the key to the Lacanian “real”: that which is beyond language, that which bridges the gap between the signifier and the signified that is not subject to the alienating forces of the “symbolic.” For Cixous, the imaginary is locked in the woman's body and only by

writing out of this body, “the bodies we already have” (McWhorter 150), can the repressed be recovered.

This seems precisely where Davis is heading with the “deafened moment”—one that propels the reader towards a language of intimacy. And this language is already present in the deafened subject, one whose language succeeds in “nonlinguistic signifying” (Davis 123). If the language of the body offers access to the unspoken, beyond verbalization, then the deafened moment is that which hails the body, hovering on “the ineliminable residue of all articulation, the foreclosed element, which may be approached, but never grasped: the umbilical cord of the symbolic” (Lacan *Fundamental* 280).

Yet when Luce Irigaray urges women to “find our body’s language” in the climax of *This Sex Which is not One* she warns that without “invent[ing] a language” of “gestures” women will “remain paralyzed. Deprived of *our movements*” (Irigaray 88). The tenets of Irigaray’s imagined language: body, gesture, and movement mirror precisely the elements of signed languages, “created in space with the signer’s body” (Taub 3) via gesture and movement. Reading Irigaray with our Deaf lens takes us back to Bauman’s conclusion of the philosophical occlusion of sign language which seems particularly true in this search for a language of the body: “we see a search for a perfect language and a grasping toward language’s phantom limb—gesture” (“Disconstruction” 141). Bauman explains this historical and metaphysical lack—this need to “invent” what already exists—functions as a “phonocentric blind spot” (128): “the human capacity to sign has been there all along, yet

hidden from view. But once we shift our perspective away from the assumption that speech is the exclusive mode of language, this hidden dimension of the human language capacity comes into sight” (“Disconstruction” 128-29).

Woolf instinctually understood this—the “disembodied way” could be thought of as a way out of “the assumptions” (rather than the body itself) that surround language *and* women’s bodies. As his exemplar Bauman examines the speculation of sign language in Plato’s *Cratylus* and finds that indeed the language of the deaf is offered as a “model, a *way* for signs to bear a primary relation to the world” (134); however, this is ultimately met with dismissal as an imitative form and as such “Plato securely locks in place the tongue and mouth as the exclusive organs of language—the default mode of human being, thus casting the hands, head, and rest of the body into another nonlinguistic realm” (135). This analysis is useful for thinking of Woolf’s conundrum; it is this “default mode” she seemed to be trying to write her way out of: these “exclusive organs” were not cast as female.

The grammar of sign language both challenges our audist assumptions of language and astounds our perceptions of the body’s role in language. If we look more carefully at the question “what is a sign?” in terms of signed languages of the deaf we may be surprised by the answer. In *Language in Motion* Deafness Studies scholars Jerome D. Schein and David A. Stewart answer the question explicitly:

The basic semantic unit in speech is the word; the basic semantic unit in sign languages is the sign. Saying that the sign is the manual equivalent of the word, however, is not accurate. Signs may represent more general concepts, with the refined nature of the concept derived from context and nonmanual signals. The fact that investigators of sign language often treat signs as words

is their interpretation; it is not inherent in sign languages as there are no words in them. (29)

Schien and Stewart explicitly divorce signs from words and underscore the phonocentrism of language before moving on to explore the complex morphology involved with signs²¹. Signs, they emphasize, are not isolated “manual” equivalents to audible imprints. Similarly, Sign Linguist Scott K. Lidell’s *Grammar, Gesture and Meaning in American Sign Language* provides a comprehensive linguistic analysis which originated from his own studies of the unique spatial phenomena of signed languages. Lidell explains: “English words are produced by actions within the vocal tract that result in sounds perceived through audition. Signs—the words of a sign language—are produced by actions of the hands, arms, torso, face, and head that produce signals visually” (1). Schien and Stewart also emphasize the interplay between body and movement to convey meaning. A sign, they explain, “is made up of different handshapes in various locations relative to the signer’s body and cast into a wide assortment of movements. As each of these parameters changes, the meaning of the sign changes” (30). That is, the physical production of a sign accrues meaning with each each subtle facial expression or shift in body posture. This attention to the role of the body reminds us that sign language, then, is not simply a visual exhibition of oral or written language, but a language that “works by indicating a deferred bodily presence” using that body itself “as part of the signifying mechanism” (Davis 118).

It is not such a leap, then, to consider sign language textually as a visibly read and physically rendered language. Critically, alongside the space of the novel, sign language

occupies the interstice where space and silence come together; sign language is the locus where the body meets language. Like the novel, another mediator between two worlds, the language of the deaf mediates between speech and silence. However, the novel mediates by feint, by creating the illusion of materiality, by diegesis, the novel relies on naturalizing effects to make words seem to be things, characters, places, by appearing to point, to indicate direction and place. Sign language, however, is not a feint but a bodily presence. The materiality of the sign is there in the sense that it is made by using the body's gestural repertoire. But sign language is composed not of graphic traces, pictograms, [. . .] but of movement of the body through space. (Davis 117)

In "Modern Fiction" Woolf seems to be railing against the "feint" of linear narrative when she asks: "Is life like this? Must novels be like this?" ("MF" 741). Emphatically she answers in favor of the life of the "trivial, fantastic, evanescent" in this oft cited passage worth repeating here:

Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; but a luminous halo, a semi transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and circumscribed spirit, whatever aberration it may display [...]? (741)

Weary of the pointing and naturalizing effects of the realists who came before her Woolf desires instead a language that follows the asymmetrical wandering of "the body through space."

While there is a strategic praxis at work in considering the metaphoricity of disability, the critical deployment of deafness must not annihilate the body that predicates deafness. By arguing for sign language as a radical language of the body, I carefully consider feminism's own struggle to claim, reclaim, and disavow the female body while acknowledging the essentialist dangers of arguing for a "woman" herself²². Thus I find it

necessary throughout this dissertation to constantly re(de)fine what is implied by the “deafened gestures” in order to consider the subjective implications on the gendered, classed, sexualized and raced body who “speaks” with or attempts to “speak for” the “deaf voice.” My larger goal, by connecting deafness with textuality and sign language with text, is to reveal how writing and language take on a bodily presence. By disrupting the audist contiguity of speaking with presence and writing with absence this dissertation aims to evoke a reassessment of the fragmented paradigm of modern language and literature. Ultimately, if we look-listen twentieth century literature can be read as a stream of voiceless performances and viewed as narrative reels without sound.

By rereading the ways in which women writers in particular attempted to look-listen we see a new thread emerge and perhaps give credence to Michael H. Levenson’s advice that “it will prove better to be minimalist in our definitions of that conveniently flaccid term Modernist and maximalist in our accounts of the diverse *modernizing* works and movements, which are sometimes deeply congruent with one another, and just as often opposed or even contradictory” (3). The larger thread of this project unravels *how* these “modernizing works” address languages’ failure to talk about trauma, illness, war and the inability of language to speak of the body.

In Chapter One, “‘Visual Impressions’: Stream of Consciousness and Sign Language in Virginia Woolf,” I look-listen in a twofold gesture. First, I re-read James’ stream of consciousness alongside the cheroLOGY, or syntax, of signed languages to show how James’ discovery of our “succession of formations” has much in common with the way meaning is

expressed in sign language. Not only did James and Sign Language scholars struggle against linguistic biases, but I reveal that sign's iconicity, movement, and multiplicity are ideal vehicles for sketching the life of the mind. Building on this linguistic and psychological base, the second half of this chapter "reads" the gestures in *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Waves* as both "moments of being" and "moments of deafness."

From Woolf, I move to show how Carson McCullers' narratives are engaged with literal acts of look-listening. Chapter Two: " 'I Seem Strange to You': Carson McCullers' Deaf Gestures," begins with a theoretical examination of the role of the hand and gesture. I look at the body of McCullers' work to reveal narratives whose trajectory follow the linguistic evolution of gesture from hand gesticulation in her short stories "Sucker," "Wunderkind," and "Court in the West Eighties"; to sign language in *Heart is a Lonely Hunter*; and silence in *Reflections in a Golden Eye*. These narratives grapple with difficult distinctions between hearing and listening, between speech and speaking; they are particularly concerned with the violence surrounding language and sexuality and the consequences for failed communication. Hands and the body offer a potential for avoiding the nihilistic silences of futile deafness

In Chapter Three, "'You do not Speak or Write': The Tongueless Word in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*," I build on both the literal language of deafness and the literal deaf figure established in chapters two and three. In *Obasan* there is a return to the landscape in Eliot's *The Waste Land*. The novel's hesitant narrator Naomi Nakane, like the nightingale transformation of Philomela, seeks an "inviolable voice" to bring relief to the stone desert;

the “living word” she seeks and the tongueless word have much in common. Yet voicelessness is no longer the struggle to be heard above the din and machination of trench warfare and smokestacks, but is the literal unvoicing and erasure caused by the stillness of internment and betrayal. In particular, I read *Obasan* via Naomi’s relationship to the King bird—an (in)version of Philomel and Tereu who “cuts your tongue in half” (Kogawa 167) if you speak—and her fear and fascination with the Grand Inquisitor—the nightmarish figure who neither speaks nor hears. Naomi’s realization that “the avenues of speech are the avenues of silence” (Kogawa 274) comes with the “prying open” of her eyes as if to suggest a different modality for accessing language. I build on critical readings of silence to reveal the ways look-listening are crucial for accessing a “voice”; embodied and visual, this is not the “same” silence of “stone” that awakens the novel, but this is the silence of language that “speaks”—indeed, in a narrative in which “voice” has been obliterated by government mandate it is the only language that has “voice.” Ultimately, I argue that the only way that these traumatic narratives can be told is through a language that doesn’t involve telling.

Finally, I conclude with “Coda: Blindly Look-Listening,” to address the personal body as the fulcrum for a reading of the twenty-first century body. I juxtapose emerging post-structural and post-colonial critical discourses of disability and queerness to show the ways in which they are already in conversation with one another. Building on these theoretical queries I re-read Monique Truong’s *Book of Salt*, a re-telling of modernism from an outsider’s perspective, to show how the potential for look-listening works in a critical modality of deaf-blindness. Such a conclusion reconceptualizes the expressive and receptive

modalities of the hands and tongue to offer a more active look-listening that serves as a counternarrative and a companion to seminal modernist narratives.

CHAPTER ONE:
“VISUAL IMPRESSIONS”: STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS
AND SIGN LANGUAGE IN VIRGINIA WOOLF

It is all too easy to take language, one’s own language, for granted—one may need to encounter another language, or rather another mode of language, in order to be astonished, to be pushed into wonder, again.

—Oliver Sacks, *Seeing Voices*

Sentences liquid, rising not from the human voice but from the human body.

—Ruth Sidransky, *In Silence*

We in this period have not living in remembering, we have living in moving being.

—Gertrude Stein, “Portraits and Repetition”

In her novels, Virginia Woolf consistently reminds the reader that language must be saturated with the senses before making its appearance; in *The Waves* she assures us: “visual impressions often communicate thus briefly statements that we shall in time come to uncover and coax into words” (189). These “visual impressions” engage the reader in a narrative look-listening. To look-listen implies more than simply looking at a pantomime or reading a graphic mark; it demands an active translation of the visible modality via “uncovering” and “coaxing” meaning outside of the aural, linear plane of language. Woolf’s fiction put on paper William James’ assertion “that consciousness is a stream, rather than a succession of formations, and that underneath chronological memory is an intuitive apprehension of existence” (Ramazani et al 176-78). I read Woolf’s novels through James’ stream of consciousness via look-listening. Rather, I use a deafened lens in a twofold move through this chapter. The first half examines James’ stream of consciousness and signed languages to show how James’ discovery of our “succession of formations” has much in

common with the way meaning is expressed in sign language. I examine the foundations of sign language linguistics, revealing sign's iconicity, movement, and multiplicity as ideal vehicles for sketching the life of the mind. The second half of this chapter moves forward from this psychological and linguistic base to suggest a way to "read" the gestures in *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Waves* as both "moments of being" and "moments of deafness."

Much of what we mean when we provide a literary definition of "stream of consciousness comes from this oft cited passage in William James' 1890 treatise *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), Chapter IX "The Stream of Thought" and is worth repeating once again here:

Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as 'chain' or 'train' do not describe it fitly as it presents itself in the first instance. It is nothing jointed; it flows. A 'river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. *In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life.* (239)

Consciousness, James insists, works contrary to speech. Ferdinand de Saussure, in his *Cours de Linguistic Generale*, explains: "words are always confined to the line of time; their elements present themselves one by one; they form a chain" (Rée 321). Words can only be expressed sequentially as discrete units, wherein these chopped up "bits" of language chug forward following the clock line of time. Eighteenth century philosopher Étienne Bonnot de Condillac—who envisaged consciousness moving like music from a harpsichord—expressed a similar disjunction between speech and thought: "in spoken language, you could not portray a moment of mingled feelings [. . .] without separating them one by one in a

temporal sequence of words, even though the various ideas obviously do not come one after another in our minds” (qtd. Rée: 133)²³. Consciousness does not follow such a linear path, but eddies and flows, or “mingles,” unbroken. If our consciousness is a river, then our changing subjective states—the slow, contemplative reflection of the object of thought and the quick passage from that object to an associated thought—are akin to a bird in flight and perch. Following Jamesian logic:

The rhythm of language expresses this, where every thought is expressed in a sentence, and every sentence closed by a period. The resting-places are usually occupied by sensorial imaginations of some sort, whose peculiarity is that they can be held before the mind for an indefinite time, and contemplated without changing; the places of flight are filled with thoughts of relations, static or dynamic, that for the most part obtain between the matters contemplated in the periods of comparative rest. (James 243)

Consciousness is an “alternation of flights and perches”: the former movement is associative and defined as “transitive” while the latter “resting places,” held indefinitely and static, are labeled as “substantive.” Like tracing a bird’s path, observing the transitive parts are difficult to follow and as a result there is an “undue emphasizing of the more substantive parts of the stream” (244). Language, in other words, falls short mapping what occurs between periods—what moved the writer, or thinker from one sentence to the next. James marks the failure of tracing these flights as a failure intrinsic to language: “In either case the relations are numberless, and no existing language is capable of doing justice to all their shades” (245). Yearning for language to make visible these mellifluous flights, James continues: “We ought to say a feeling of *and*, a feeling of *if*, a feeling of *but*, and a feeling of *by*, quite as readily as we say a feeling of *blue* or a feeling of *cold*. Yet we do not: so inveterate has our habit become of

recognizing the existence of the substantive parts alone, that language almost refuses to lend itself to any other use” (245). Woolf too suggests this problem when she speaks of those “visual impressions” in *The Waves*; these flights or images flicker only “thus briefly” and as such we must hold them, must work to “uncover and coax” them into words.

Language, James contends, is intractable and “refuses” to veer off track. As a result, “[a]ll *dumb* or anonymous psychic states have, owing to this error, been coolly suppressed” (James 246). Worse still we are unable to register these flights outside what can be heard from the perches—a position so isolated it engulfs “delicate idiosyncrasies in its monotonous sound. Thus the greater and greater accentuation and isolation of the substantive parts have continually gone on” (James 246). The choice of words here is significant as they suggest a tyranny of sound: “dumb” or mute languages have been “suppressed” and “delicate idiosyncrasies” are muffled by “monotonous sound.”²⁴

Indeed, James is quite interested in the overlay between words and images and the possibility of meaning in the visual. “Take a train of words passing through the mind and leading to a certain conclusion on the one hand,” he supposes, “and on the other hand an almost wordless set of tactile, visual and other fancies leading to the same conclusion” (260). It is difficult to imagine words—or rather sonic phonemes—on the same “hand” as silent, visual ephemera but the possibility of these parallel trains arriving at the same station (even crossing tracks!) is the crux of this foray into thought. This reasoning continues with radical rhetorical questions: “Can the halo, fringe, or scheme in which we feel the words to lie be the same as that in which we feel the images to lie? Does not the discrepancy of terms

involve a discrepancy of felt relations among them?” (260). After much speculation James concludes that although words and images do not necessarily perform in the same way (e.g. images cannot rhyme with one another) they both produce the “mere feeling” which via association “run exactly parallel” (260). Further, borrowing an axiom of geometry he comes to the following conclusion: “Hence the sounds considered as signs will be conceived to have a connection analogous to that which subsisteth among the things signified” (261). While James does not make explicit what he means by these “signs” in this instance, a couple of pages later he introduces Mr. Ballard, a deaf man, to illustrate that “a deaf and dumb man can weave his tactile and visual images into a system of thought quite as effective and rational as that of a word-user. *The question whether thought is possible without language* has been a favorite topic of discussion among philosophers” (266). Of course images are *not* words so defined, and James distinguishes thought from language because language without sound is inconceivable, even in a stream. He does, however, give Mr. Ballard a first person narrative providing mute thoughts textual space. Despite Ballard’s deafness and the difference in “scenery,” we see “thinking goes on” (269). The insight accrued from this narrative is worth repeating here in length:

These feelings of relation, these psychic overtones, halos, suffusions, or fringes about the terms, may be the same in very different systems of imagery. [. . .] One gets to the conclusion by one line, another by another; one follows a course of English, another of German, verbal imagery. With one, visual images predominate; with another, tactile. Some trains are tinged with emotions, others not; some are very abridged, synthetic and rapid, others, hesitating and broken into many steps. But when the penultimate terms of all the trains, however differing *inter se*, finally shoot into the same conclusion, we say and rightly say, that all the thinkers have had substantially

the same thought. It would probably astound each of them beyond measure to be let into his neighbor's mind and to find how different the scenery there was from that in his own. (269-70)

And isn't this indeed Woolf's project? To follow these trains simultaneously, and be surprised at how different, how the same the scenery is? One day in June, on Bond Street, what thoughts result from the backfiring of a car? How at moments meaning comes visually, others tactilely? And more important, perhaps, is the following hierarchical swap between words and images suggesting, as Woolf does in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," that words without associative images are meaningless. Both imply the vacuosness of a narrative that ignores the interior flights:

Words are vacant sounds, ideas are blank forms, unless they symbolize images and sensations which are their values. Nevertheless it is rigorously true, and of the greatest importance, that analysts carry on very extensive operations with blank forms, never pausing to supply the symbols with values until the calculation is completed; and ordinary men, no less than philosophers, carry on long trains of thought without pausing to translate their ideas (words) into images. . . . (270)

While "analysts" think nothing of translating words into images, the underlying question remains: how does one translate the visual, the consciousness, the body to the written.

In Woolf's *Orlando* (1923) she suggests the poetic cannot be rendered textually and offers instead blankness as the only viable translation:

Our modern spirit can almost dispense with language; the commonest expressions do, since no expressions do; hence the most ordinary conversation is often the most poetic, and the most poetic is precisely that which cannot be written down. For which reasons we leave a great blank here, which must be taken to indicate that the space is filled to repletion. (Q 253)

Woolf's contemporary James Joyce in his use of stream of consciousness reveals language as not only representing but re-presenting; his style challenges the newspaper-nurtured eye that encourages "swallowing whole." *Ulysses* demands a look at language's "parts." It complicates our readerly investments in linearity and temporality with simultaneity and stream of consciousness. For example, in "Lestrygonians" Bloom's examination of an ad for ready-made trousers on a rowboat reveals the use and nature of "stream of consciousness" language (8.90 ff). Bloom thinks: "Good idea that. Wonder if he pays rent to the corporation. How can you own water really? It's always flowing in a stream, never the same, which in the stream of life we trace." James' description of his stream—we never step in the same river twice—is suggested here: language accrues meaning and each expression carries the weight of an earlier thought which sprung from another association and is tied to another meaning: Bloom picks up a line from an 1845 libretto "Maritana" that he recalled at the end of "Lotus Eaters" (which led him there to think about his naked body in water which led him to decide to take a bath). From here he thinks of places to post bills, public restrooms, the clap, Boyles' encounter with Molly, the unspeakable thought of Boyles' sexual indiscretion. Even written language changes its meaning as "POST NO BILLS" plastered has become: "POST 110 PILLS," reproducing the visual effacement of language. By playfully revealing the associative disintegration of language Joyce calls attention both to language's limitations and possibilities.

As editors of *Imagining a Language*, an anthology born out of "bizarre language practices" (xii), explain, "deviations from the linguistic norm by literary works render them

valuable, exceptional; yet, oddly, the transgression of prevailing standards” marks these literary anomalies “as ‘unreadable’ if not scandalous” (Rasula and McCaffery x). The philosophical impasse that prevented acknowledging sign language as a viable language was the difficulty of transcribing signs to text—the impossibility of lining up visual images in a chain—which made sign language seemingly “unreadable.” Sign language, a language that incorporates gestures and visual cues in its syntax, certainly emerged as a “bizarre language” and is even marked “deviant” as well as “scandalous”²⁵. Yet like linguistic experimentation the “stubbornness” of sign language seems to offer a way to push beyond “the language available” Fussell talks about in *Great War and Modern Memory*.

The first linguistic publication of sign language appeared as early as 1776 by the Abbé de l'Épée and in 1825 an analytical method for writing natural sign language was devised by the Parisian deaf-mute teacher Bébien. A “phonetic” equivalent model of sign language did not appear until William Stokoe’s 1960 “Sign Language Structure: An Outline of the Visual Communication Systems of the American Deaf”²⁶ followed by the first Sign Language Dictionary in 1976²⁷. In “The Curious Death of Sign Language Studies in the Nineteenth Century,” Douglas C. Baynton explores this intellectual vacuum and traces a shift in the meaning of sign language as a “natural” language. While modern linguists define Sign Language as a “natural” language they do so as a particularized language with a cultural and historical evolution while nineteenth century “manualist” teachers, on the other hand, used “natural” precisely to distinguish sign languages—thought to be a gestural universal system—from the arbitrariness of spoken languages (17). Thomas H. Gallaudet, pioneer of

deaf education in America, explained in 1848 that sign language was a “picture-like and symbolical language, calling up the objects and ideas which it is designed to denote in a portraying and suggestive way, which no oral, written, or printed language can do” (qtd. in Baynton: 18)²⁸. Gallaudet’s definition echoes James’ bemoaning of the limitations of language; similarly, instructor of the deaf Benjamin Talbot offers sign language as a language of consciousness when he explains that the order of signs “is not really the order of language but the order of thought” (qtd. in Baynton: 20)²⁹. However, the turn of the century brought a kind of “linguistic Darwinism” (Baynton 20), demoting “natural” and iconic languages—hence sign language—to inferior status (Baynton 25). Leonard Bloomfield wrote that sign languages are “merely developments of ordinary gestures,” asserting “any and all complicated or not immediately intelligible gestures are [. . .] derivative of (spoken) language” (144). The implication, of course, is that all indigenous signs are “immediately intelligible” because they are iconic.

As a result, early sign research worked to downplay the role of iconicity because of these linguistic claims rooted in Saussure’s proclamation that arbitrariness is a fundamental property of language. In *Sign Language and Linguistic Universals* linguists Wendy Sandler and Diane Lillo-Martin explain the futility of such a countermove: “At the level of lexical iconicity, at least, Saussure clearly had a point: spoken languages are rather poor in motivated [iconic] form.” Sign language, though, has “gestural origins and are perceived visually, both of which contribute to pervasive motivatedness in form at the level of the sign” (496). Despite its iconicity—rather, in conjunction with it—sign language is morphologically

complex and the principles that “constrain spoken language morphology are active”; for example, onomatopoeia, ideophones or mimetics and other expressive forms are not only more visible in sign language but are more apparent in language than previously expressed³⁰.

In the midst of linguistic change Woolf sought not an iconic universal language, but a complex modality that engaged the visual with the body. In stream of consciousness words are *not* a chain; rather, they act more like signs—a silent, visual and embodied language where the chain gives way to the river in linguistic expression. Although the scholarship is anachronistic to Woolf, Stokoe’s transcription in 1960 of “this hitherto unwritten language” (Armstrong 3) reveals both metaphoric and literal connections between the life of the mind and the linguistic life of the body. Writing against the genre of the novel, Woolf focused on the internal and subjective uses of languages in her novels which move fluidly from past to present and from memory to experience to emphasize multiplicity. Just as Woolf’s literary experimentation marked a rift from traditional novelistic forms—her prose is anti-epic, anti-marriage plot, anti-bildungsroman, anti-historical, anti-romance—so Stokoe sparked “a social as well as an intellectual revolution” (Armstrong 3).

Stokoe’s “revolution” worked threefold by revealing sign language to be linguistic; launching a “rethinking of what is fundamental about human language” and not least importantly “reenergiz[ing] the moribund field of language origin studies” (Armstrong 3). His essay, “Sign Language Structure,” developed the nascent field of “cherology”: “the structure, and its analysis, of the isolates or units of the phenomenon level of the sign language of the deaf” (Stokoe 33). To illustrate, Stokoe begins with the exemplar of “a

shoulder shrug” which might pass unnoticed by most speakers (or listeners); “but to the deaf person, the shrug is unaccompanied by anything perceptible except a predictable set of circumstances and responses; in short, it has a definite ‘meaning’ (3-4). That shrug used in the context of deaf communication “would become more pronounced, even exaggerated” as it reveals itself as significant as a communicative gesture. This shrug becomes linguistically significant as it attaches to other visual signifiers; movement is “uncovered and coaxed” “into words.” This shoulder shrug embarks a discussion of language which not only depends on the body to express meaning but enables the body to do more than speech alone³¹.

Signs, then, convey meaning and “the meanings expressed by signers exceed what a grammar is capable of encoding and that the language signal does more than encode symbolic grammatical elements” (Liddell *Grammar* 5). Sign Language, in this particular discussion: American Sign Language (ASL), is not simply a deviant of English but its own language. With cherology, sign language is invested with the syntactical equivalents of spoken language³². Stokoe illustrated the significance of the sign via a tripartite performance. Not only is the “sign” capable of functioning as the morpheme of sign language, but the process of its performance became significant. Stokoe explains:

The sign clearly is, as the morpheme, the smallest unit of the language to which meaning attaches. That is [. . .]the significance resides not in the configuration, the position, or the movement, but in the unique combination of all three. The sign-morpheme, however, unlike the word, is seen to be not sequentially but simultaneously produced. Analysis of the sign cannot be segmented in time order but must be aspectual. The aspects of the sign which appear to have the same order of priority and importance as the

segmental phonemes of speech are the aspects of configuration, position or location, and motion. (20)³³

What Stokoe immediately makes clear is why sign language fails Saussure's linguistic test—or why spoken language fails to account for sign language. Simply, signs are “nothing jointed”; they cannot be “chopped into bits.” Significance, or meaning, in sign language resides in the total locomotion of the body and its articulators on a three-dimensional plane³⁴. “Position may be signaled by proximity of the moving configuration to a part of the signer's body: a fist moved at the chin, the forehead, and the chest, makes not one, but three distinct signs—‘ice cream?; ‘Sweden; ‘sorry’” (Stokoe 20). Or as Scott K. Lidell in “Four Functions of a Locus” illustrates with the sign for ASK: “When ASK begins close to the signer and then moves toward the addressee [. . .] the meaning is ‘I ask you.’ When the movement is reversed, so is the meaning” (“Locus” 302). Like the stream of consciousness, the direction of flight is as important as the position of rest³⁵. Lidell's example illustrates how verbs in Sign Language utilize “directional instructions for making mental space mappings. This is what verbs in spoken languages are unable to do because of the tongue's inability both to produce words and to point simultaneously at mental space entities” (Liddell "Locus" 139). The shoulder shrug, then, becomes meaningful depending not simply on the movement of the shoulder but how the shoulder moves in space and whether or not it interacts with other loci of the body.

In Sign Language, narrative is not “confined to the line of time.” When told through the body moments can be simultaneously synchronic and diachronic. Put another way, the

body's location in space holds and extends time depending on the movement, pause, and return of "flight" and "perches" of the body. Moreover, Liddell reminds us that spoken language does in fact provide "directional clues" but in ASL these gestures are a "codified property of each individual indicating verb" ("Locus" 40). Sign language exploits "the phenomenon of visible local simultaneity, and speech itself display[s] the same features when observed by the eye rather than the ear" (Rée 305). This observation of speech through the eye, projected in a limitless space, using the vocabulary of the body is precisely what "look-listening infers.

Finally, I want to highlight the "kinesic" in Sign Language—the non-linguistic bodily movements such as gesture or facial expression—which "may have a more central function in a visual language" (20). Stokoe explains that this aspect "may actually be suprasegmental, or *metaspectral* in sign language" (20) and as such provides particular analytical difficulties. The non-speech aspects of language are nearly impossible to isolate in terms of discrete meaning. This is how "ice cream" could easily become "Sweden" or how moving forward may suggest the opposite of leaning backwards in signing.

William James insisted our thoughts, too, could not be so easily isolated. To illustrate this James pushes the words corresponding with ideas literally off the page. After several sketches of three dimensional graphing to "plot" the evolution of an idea and its corresponding speech utterances he concludes "that in all cases where the words are *understood*, the total idea may be and usually is present not only before and after the phrase has been spoken, but also whilst each separate word is uttered" (41); it is impossible

to isolate meaning within a single word. Moreover, “the overtone, halo, or fringe”—what James seems to imagine as the visual residue of our thoughts—“is never absent; no word in an understood sentence comes to consciousness as a mere noise. We feel its meaning as it passes; and although our object differs from one moment to another as to its verbal kernel or nucleus, yet it is *similar* throughout the entire segment of the stream” (281). This is James’ “unbroken stream”: although it is constantly churning you will never step in the same water twice; however, a single drop from this stream carries the entire meaning of the river. The discovery is this: “Annihilate a mind at any instant, cut its thought through whilst yet uncompleted, and examine the object present to the cross-section thus suddenly made; you will find, not the bald word in process of utterance, but that word suffused with the whole idea” (282). There is even the suggestion here that the very act of “utterance” is premature in that speaking can only be segmental and can only give us one “bald word” at a time. The true nature of thought, he concludes, is “metaspectual.”

A stream of consciousness narrative is akin to a signed narrative. Moving associatively, such a narrative is affected by touch, visible phenomena, and bodily movement. The comparison is especially fruitful if we consider Liddell’s invitation to watch sign language as a performance: : “One might imagine the space in front of the signer as a stage upon which ‘actors’ will occupy certain positions” (Liddell "Locus" 304). While I am not offering a transcription of Woolf into ASL—although that would be an interesting linguistic exercise—I am suggesting it is possible to read Woolf as an audience to a signed narrative. To consider Woolf’s narratives associatively, we need to look-listen rather than

ear- listen. If we read Woolf's fiction as an audience to a signed narrative we can trace recurring moments as if Woolf is establishing her narrative body in space—so Clarissa's hand as an offering is Septimus' hand above the tub is Mrs. Ramsay's hand holding her sonnet is Lily's hand holding her paintbrush is Mr. Ramsay's hand across the sea is Bernard's hand dropping his phrasebook; that hand is held in place indefinitely while this hand moves ahead in synchronic time only to pull us back to that hand intermittently, indefinitely.

“She Parted the Curtains; she Looked”: Clarissa Dalloway

“Isn't life,” she stammered, “isn't life—.” But what life was she couldn't explain. No matter. He quite understood.

—Katherine Mansfield, *The Garden Party*

Perhaps no novel serves as the “locus where the body meets language” more explicitly than *Mrs. Dalloway*, a novel enveloped by sound and its resonant movement: the leaden circles of Big Ben, the street-shattering backfire of the mysterious car, the aeroplane's skywriting, and the faraway sounds of dogs barking against the flapping blinds. Clarissa Dalloway imagines that these sounds—and all that share in them— are part of a “web,” a string of sound “as a single spider's thread after wavering here and there attaching itself to the point of a leaf” (*MD* 297). If we re-read with the description of the syntax of signed languages and embodied spaces we see this imaginary spider's web as a cache of cheremes—those meaningful markers of signs. For well before Stokoe early missionaries of the deaf observed that not only could several signs be executed instantaneously but “the use of space in sign language could be itself extended in time” and “meanings could be ‘placed’ in different locations [. . .] ready to be picked up again later”; hence the “significance of

subsequent signs would depend on their ‘localization’ in the space so defined” (Rée 305). What is this narrative spider doing other than “placing” meaning “in different locations” down Bond Street, in Regents park, to be “picked up” by Peter, Elizabeth, Lucretia, Septimus, Hugh?

This kind of marking space in sign language is a phenomenon noted by linguists as “role shift, “role switching” or “referential shift” and is described as a process whereby a signer “ ‘takes on a role’ of a character in discourse” (Sandler and Lillo-Martin 379). Liddell defines the components of this “role shifting” with more specificity by identifying the “locus”: the “point on the body or in signing space that serves an articulatory function” (“Locus” 302). In “body shifting” Lidell explains that “since the signer must conceptualize the location of the body parts of the referent imagined to be present, there is a sense in which an invisible body is present” (309). The signer then engaged in “body shifting” is performing a “process by which a signer shifts (rotates) the body, thereby adopting the role of another signer” (309). In doing so the signer “adopts the role” operating as if a “non present addressee were present” (309). This is equivalent to a direct discourse as the signer takes on the role of the body rather than providing an indirect discourse—being Peter Walsh rather than quoting Peter Walsh. So what might a narrative locus look like?

Two key aspects are of particular interest for our narrative—the movement of the body and the use of dialogue: “By shifting the body position and possibly changing aspects of the facial expression, the signer presents another’s words, thoughts or ‘point of view’” (379). By essentially “speaking” for another body—just as a narrator speaks for its

characters—sign language blurs the distinctions between direct and indirect speech. Consider the narrative devices deployed—rather, absent—in Woolf’s novel: there is no clear distinction between interior/exterior dialogue, no conventional quotation marks or chapter breaks, and even the conventional time markers serve as shifts into past memory. Just as this body shift in sign language “can be described as quoting the thoughts of another or simply representing a scene from the point of view of another” (Sandler and Lillo-Martin 380). Woolf’s narrative can be described similarly moving from one thought, one body, one perspective to another; unlike spoken languages the spatial modality of sign language allows for an unlimited number of references (Sandler and Lillo-Martin 482). The body in sign and in Woolf’s narrative is capable of limitless associations. In *Mrs. Dalloway* the string of sound—an aural thread we follow through visual loci. By following the web of sound (notably it is not a simple string—but a web, three dimensional rather than a chain) stream of consciousness works by providing us with an invisible body.

The question, now, is where to begin because all moments in the novel seem to collapse into one another; to read one moment is to recall another and move with the invisible body through text. Perhaps here, with Clarissa Dalloway: “She parted the curtains; she looked. Oh, but how surprising!—in the room opposite the old lady stared straight at her! She was going to bed” (*MD* 297). Upon reading this, however, if we were watching it as a signed narrative the signer would shift her body (leaving Clarissa at the curtains to hold the locus) to remind us of an earlier moment (and re-occupy that space):

How extraordinary it was, strange, yes, touching, to see the old lady [. . .] move away from the window, as if she were attached to that sound, that string. Gigantic as it was, it had something to do with her. Down, down, into the midst of ordinary things the finger fell marking the moment solemn. (MD 309)

The language used to mark this “moment” as sacred, as “solemn,” indicates a narrative body (or reader) gesturing; “the finger fell” suggests a linguistic move that is neither speech nor text. The latter, earlier moment articulates Clarissa’s existential dilemma: “here was one room; there another” and the key anxiety of modernism—how to bring everyone together when we are all in separate rooms. But the body moves back, to the former moment, and we see that something has shifted, in the body and in the narrative; Clarissa is no longer watching out the window but she is engaged in a look listening. Like Woolf’s “priceless talk” there is a reciprocal gaze. This woman whom she had earlier watched as she walked up the stairs was now “moving about, that old lady, crossing the room, coming to the window” (309). Clarissa pauses in this gaze and thinks: “It was fascinating, with people still laughing and shouting in the drawing room, to watch that old woman, quite quietly, going to bed. She pulled the blind now. The clock began striking” (362). The old woman embodies a kind of deafness, indifferent to the “laughing and shouting.” It is the body “suddenly shriveled, aged, breastless” (221). It is the body that feels “the terror, the overwhelming incapacity, one’s parents giving it to one’s hands, this life, to be lived to the end” (362). And life and death for Clarissa repeatedly comes back to this gesture of the hands, this “holding her life in her arms which, as she heard them, grew larger” (231-32). It is why she throws the party—so she can open her hands to give “an offering” (304). And her voice echoes

down the street, following Peter Walsh: “don’t forget to come to my party” attaching itself to Peter as an invisible body.

If Septimus’ death is a “defiance” and “an attempt to communicate” (361) because he preserves this “thing there was that mattered; a thing wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured” (361) then this moment outside the window offers another means of communicating, a means of connecting that is not “wreathed about” with sound. The body moves in silence, without “chatter,” and this moment ends when the blinds are closed, when she can no longer see. The moment ends when the string is snapped, cut by the cessation of looking. Then, and only then, does sound return and the clock begins its countdown. Big Ben, now, is no longer relevant for its “volubly, tremulously” (310) felt explosions but for the spaces between the sounds present as leaden circles. The blinds close and Clarissa thinks:

The young man had killed himself, but she did not pity him; with the clock striking the hour, one, two, three, she did not pity him, with all this going on. There! The old lady had put out her light! The whole house was dark now with this going on, she repeated, and the words came to her, Fear no more the heat of the sun. She must go back to them. But what an extraordinary night! (362)

The heat of the sun shifts our attention to the other hand, where the narrative body has been holding the echoing phrase Septimus utters before he descends: “Life was good. The sun hot” (329)³⁶. The echoing phrase “feel no more” has been felt in bodies across the pages, up and down Bond Street, in St. James’ Park, on this day in June.

The narrative body holds this and then shifts again to the scene of another moment when Clarissa is literal seamstress, gathering the folds of her aquiline party dress, preparing her offering: “Quiet descended on her, calm, content, as her needle, drawing the silk smoothly to its gentle pause, collected the green folds together and attached them [. . .] That is all, fear no more [. . .] And the body alone listens to the passing bee; the wave breaking; the dog barking, far away barking and barking” (228-29). The ritual pull of the needle through the silken fabric brings Clarissa’s mind and body to the shimmering sea whose tides wash over the body; it is a murmuring collective voice of peace, held by the pellucid sound of the bee. We are reminded that when “the body alone listens” it hears “words give off their scent and distil their flavor” (*OBI* 22). And then if we return to the moment at the window, shift the body back to this locus we find: “The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun. But she must go back. She must assemble” (362). The answer, the epiphany, comes to her where there is a pause. In the moment before the clock strikes again, in a literal removal from the noises of the party she retreats from her enflamed body and look-listens to see the voice of the aged body.

This moment at the window is indeed what Woolf had been defining as a moment of being— “that the individual in his daily life is cut off from ‘reality’ but at rare moments receives a shock” (Schulkind 17) of transcendent vision—the definition of which she added to throughout her writing life. In “Sketch of the Past” she explains her philosophy “that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we—I mean all human beings—are

connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art” (Woolf *MB72*) and it seems Septimus’ words as she continues: “But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself. And I see this when I have a shock” (72). The language Woolf uses to define her “moment” is explicitly Jamesian:

Does not a loud explosion rend the consciousness upon which it abruptly breaks, in twain? Does not every sudden shock, appearance of a new object, or change in a sensation, create a real interruption, sensibly felt as such, which cuts the conscious stream across at the moment at which it appears? Do not such interruptions smite us every hour of our lives, and have we the right, in their presence, still to call our consciousness a continuous stream? (James 239-240)

This “sudden shock” is indeed Woolf’s “moment of being.” This “real interruption” manifests itself as “shocks” of sound. James uses the example of “a thunder-clap” breaking silence which renders us “so stunned and confused” (241); nonetheless, these explosions are not breaks in thought but part of “consciousness.” Importantly, for Woolf and for James, these shocks “suffused” with sound are not pauses but pathways to invigorated consciousness—our thoughts continue but the course of the stream changes:

Into the awareness of the thunder itself the awareness of the previous silence creeps and continues; for what we hear when the thunder crashes is not thunder *pure*, but thunder-breaking-upon-silence-and-contrasting-with-it. Our feeling of the same objective thunder, coming in this way, is quite different from what it would be were the thunder a continuation of previous thunder. The thunder itself we believe to abolish and exclude the silence; but the *feeling* of the thunder is also a feeling of the silence as just gone [.] (241-42)

Our consciousness changes not because of the “shock” of “thunder” per se, but because of the “thunder-breaking-upon-silence-and-contrasting-with-it.” Note the use of dashes that

mark what language cannot: the entire moment wherein each word is “suffused” with this change. Such a move is necessary for “language works against our perception of the truth.” To put it simply, our consciousness is changed from this abrupt move in and out of silence. Is this not how the critical moment of deafness works—but rather “silence-breaking-upon-thunder”? And as we will see Woolf’s “moments of being” are precisely “shocks” precipitated by the staccato of sound and silence.

The Deafened moment, recall, is a textual and critical modality which involves “the acknowledgement on the part of the reader/writer/critic that he or she is part of a process that does not involve speaking or hearing” (101-02). As critical deafness undermines the law of “normative linguistic modality” (103) by moving the receptive point of language from the ear to the eye and the expressive from the mouth to the hand it creates a fissure from “the experiential, from the body” (104). A return from critical deafness—the site of a “deafened moment”—confers a “reconnection or a reconfiguration with the body, with immanence, with the contingent” (104). This moment falls outside of the symbolic “law” of language and slips into the “evanescent” language of look-listening.

I move in the second half of this chapter to more closely I re-read “moments of being” in *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* as deafened moments strung in the same thread, in a narrative that moves like the body in sign language so that if we look-listen, or engage in the process of reading and following the body we too will experience the “shock” of the moment, following the “invisible body” of Septimus, Mrs. Ramsay, Bernard.

“Listening With his Hand up”: Septimus

His fingers wake, and flutter; up the bed.

—Wilfred Owen, “Conscious”

I found in this language a way to absent myself, to grow remote and slip into private, imagined conversation. It was like a tangible cord that stretched from my fingers all the way back to the world I had left behind.

—Leah Hager Cohen, *Train Go Sorry*

Central to this web is Septimus Smith, a young war-wrecked soldier who in his madness epitomizes the modern malaise—the hollowness of language after war, what Hemingway would articulate as the obscenity of words in *Farewell to Arms*. Septimus, whose war wounds surface as a loss of feeling finds himself as “the creature within [who] can only gaze through the pane” looking at “beauty [from] behind a pane of glass” (MD 97). His search for feeling is a search for a new mode of expression, an access to a secret language. In this, Septimus seems to share the problem of the novel: the desire to make words seem to be things; Dr. Holmes observes: “He was attaching meanings to words of a symbolical kind. A serious symptom, to be noted on the card” (Woolf MD 280). Septimus’ increasingly anxious wife, Lucretia Warren Smith— “a little woman, with large eyes in a sallow pointed face; an Italian girl” (15)— witnesses his search for a new language:

He was singing behind the screen. She wrote it down just as he spoke it. Some things were very beautiful; others sheer nonsense. And he was always stopping in the middle, changing his mind; wanting to add to something; hearing something new; listening with his hand up. But she heard nothing.

Lucretia tries to map Septimus’ cacophony but she is literally deaf to his linguistic gestures.

Septimus’ madness³⁷ is diagnosed as a falling out of “proportion”(99): a going by the wayside of the boundaries of Englishness (“she was Sir William’s goddess”) or more

particularly the laws of English language. As such, like the female hysteric, Septimus cannot be cured; he can only be contained. Enter Sir William Bradshaw who “secluded her [England’s] lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalised despair” (283), and institutionalizes silencing; “He swooped; he devoured. He shut people up” (285). Bradshaw’s directive demands a silencing both of the body and the voice: Septimus must be out of sight—both visually and aurally. He must “shut up” and cease from opening his mouth and speaking (or “blabbing” or “cackling”) and in being “shut away” he must be kept “behind the pane,” or “behind the screen” so that his gestures of language cannot be seen.

It begins as a back-firing car—which is rumored to be the Prime Minister himself—“had left a slight ripple which flowed [. . .] on both sides of Bond Street. For thirty seconds all heads were inclined the same way—to the window” (208). The sound of the backfiring leads not to a listening, but a “profound” (209) looking. The sound of the car moves the narrative into the “sound of an aeroplane” that “bored ominously into the ears of the crowd.” The sound becomes “cotton wool,” hiding a pattern that connects everyone on Bond Street. “There it was coming over the trees, letting out white smoke from behind, which curled and twisted, actually writing something! Making letters in the sky! Everyone looked up” (211). Yet there is an uncertainty and a kind of anxiety that doubles the “surface agitation” (209) as the narrator asks: “But what letters? A C was it? an E, then an L? Only for a moment did they lie still; then they moved and melted and were rubbed out into the sky” (211). The problem is not one of listening, but of reading the moving, ephemeral

letters. A Mrs. Bretchley murmurs “‘Kreemo’ [. . .] like a sleepwalker” (211). Then there is a brief moment of unification; the “shock” is layered over with silence:

All down the Mall the people were standing and looking into the sky. As they looked the whole world became perfectly silent, and a flight of gulls crossed the sky, first one gull leading, then another, and in this extraordinary silence and peace, in this pallor, in this purity, bells struck eleven times, the sound fading up there among the gulls. (211)

This moment wraps the crowd in the sense of the extraordinary, “in a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope,” so that all are sharing both the individual sense of being distinguished, chosen as part of this royal procession, and this communal sense of awe and mystery at this magical language. As the aeroplane moves “like a skater,” “or a dancer” a Mr. Bowley murmurs “‘It’s toffee’” the car disappears with no notice.

What happens here is a communal reading that is “extraordinary” in its silence. The silence is brief, but it both defines the experience of look-listening and gives way to a burst of sound that explodes as a tactile experience, “all the richer for having come to us sensually first.” When the aeroplane disappears, the smoke fades, and again the narrator emphasizes the silence: “There was no sound” (211). And again “suddenly” the sound of the aeroplane came “boring into the ears of all people in the Mall” (212); the sound and the anxiety are repeated, this time the narrative lens turns to Lucrezia Warren Smith who entreats her husband: “Look, Look!” (212). This staccato effect of silence and sound not only reverberates the “shock” of the moment of being but heighten the awareness that there is a disconnect from language as such—these “shocks,” then, are also deafened moments. They

are narrative pauses in which the characters suffer from an “inability to follow the text’s sonic presence.” For Septimus, though, this disconnect is a respite from his terror:

So, thought Septimus, looking up, they are signaling to me. Not indeed in actual words; that is, he could not read the language yet; but it was plain enough, this beauty, this exquisite beauty, and tears filled his eyes as he looked at the smoke words languishing and melting in the sky and bestowing upon him in their inexhaustible charity and laughing goodness one shape after another of unimaginable beauty and signaling their intention to provide him, for nothing, for ever, for looking merely, with beauty! Tears ran down his cheeks. (212)

While the others on the street are confounded by the indecipherable words melting in the sky, Septimus, shut away under the “the veil” of madness, understands that this visual dance is a distinct language—one that cannot “yet” be read but can be deciphered. The communal spelling of TOFFEE attests to this visual language’s potential. “Together they began to spell t . . . o . . . f . . .” (212). Momentarily, at least, Septimus is grounded in pure pleasure afforded by the experience of reading, looking at language. As “one shape after another of imaginable beauty” appears the letters detach from the symbolism of syntax and become symbolic shapes instead. When the next series of letters appear these shapes suggest not only the hand shapes of language, but the gesture of a linguistic caress:

‘K . . . R . . .’ said the nursemaid, and Septimus heard her say “Kay Arr” close to his ear, deeply, softly, like a mellow organ, but with a roughness in her voice like a grasshopper’s, which rasped his spine deliciously and sent running into his brain waves of sound, which concussing, broke. (212)

This return from deafness, this “reconnection or a reconfiguration with the body, with immanence, with the contingent” (Davis 104) allows Septimus to “hear” “Kay Arr” not

simply as speech but as embodied rapture. The aural becomes tactile; the voice becomes touch.

Septimus continues “reading” through this experience of the deafened moment and moves from the skywriting to the sparrows and the tree to translate sounds beyond hearing: “Sounds made harmonies with premeditation; the spaces between them were as significant as the sounds” (213). He continues to read the “smoke words” long after they had “languish[ed] and melt[ed] in the sky”; he continues to be held in the silence. “As one color succeeding another is modified by the contrast,” James proffers, “silence sounds delicious after noise” (234). Septimus has suffered the “noise” of the war and the resulting language of the Holmeses and the Sir Bradshaws; the vaporous letters are a “delicious” departure. With such a contrast, though, James insists “we must admit that those portions of the brain that have just been maximally excited retain a kind of soreness which is a condition of our present consciousness, a codeterminant of how and what we now shall feel” (235). That is, our stream will never be the same. Septimus’ madness, then, could be read as a failure to recover from this “shock.” He continues searching for the “space between” sounds, for the physical manifestation, the visual projection of what pours into his ear, for the reverberation of language on his body. He does not return from this moment of deafness and continues to hold up his hand, saving a space for his own invisible body.

“Her own Eyes Meeting her own Eyes”: Mrs. Ramsay

Being inside the silence is like being under water. Only when she wants to surface, only then does she come to the top.

—Frances Itani, *Deafening*

In *To the Lighthouse* Woolf's narrative detaches from linear, diachronic notions of time and into a more synchronous modality, concluding with the revelation that “nothing was simply one thing.” The structure of the novel points to this in its asymmetrical trio: “The Window” encompasses a single afternoon and evening (moving via consciousness 20 years in time) and spans 124 textual pages, more than half the novel; “Time passes” compresses the events of 10 years into an elegiac 20 pages and only parenthetically notes “major events” (Mrs. Ramsay's death by Mr. Ramsay's empty arms, Prue's death in childbirth, Andrew's death in Paris with other soldiers during WWI) into the slow decay of the Ramsay house; and “To the Lighthouse” takes the last 70 pages of the single morning in which the Ramsays finally reach the lighthouse, Lily has her artistic vision, and Mr. Carmichael commemorates the “moment” with a silent benediction.

I want to look-listen, pause at this locus of the narrative body, to a moment of revelation when “quiet descended” (*MD* 228) in the Ramsay seaside home. For Mrs. Ramsay this silence is a key to her existence, a necessary respite: “She often felt she was nothing but a sponge sopped full of human emotions” (*TTL* 32). Mrs. Ramsay, who “never spoke. She was silent always” (29), describes her embodied silence as a “wedge of darkness” (Woolf *TTL* 63). On the surface she is visible, she knits, sits for Lily's portrait, assembles the cut shapes of lawnmowers and refrigerators for James, but “beneath it is all dark, it is all

spreading; it is unfathomably deep; but now and then we rise to the surface and that is what you see us by” (62). She slips into this solitude, this silent and dark space and attaches herself to the long, steady stroke of the lighthouse.

In “Virginia Woolf’s *Two Bodies*,” Molly Hite describes this moment as an experience of the visionary body—an encased, textually sealed moment of ecstasy³⁸; indeed the beams of the lighthouse are a safe phallic stroking of pleasure that does not violate the rigid norms for feminine heroines. Mrs. Ramsay too is conscious of her embodiment as “the creature within”; she clings to this “wedge-shaped core” (62)—shaped not unlike the “dome” of the feminine sentence—as an embodied invisibility. It is this moment, her encounter with the lighthouse beams, which is a moment with her own embodied self:

She looked up over her knitting and met the third stroke and it seemed to her like her own eyes meeting her own eyes, searching as she alone could search into her mind and her heart, purifying out of existence that lie, any lie. She praised herself in praising the light, without vanity, for she was stern, she was searching, she was beautiful like that light. (Woolf *TIL* 63)

Mrs. Ramsay sees herself as herself sees—and it is as if she and the lighthouse “looked very steadfastly at each other” only the reciprocal gaze is a mirrored one. Not only is this looking outside the self, a “meeting her own eyes” akin to Woolf and Mansfield’s gaze “without vanity” but Mrs. Ramsay’s look-listening to her own body—at least in this moment—is not phallically induced but masturbatory in that her pleasure comes from looking at her own body outside of her body. Mrs. Ramsay returns back to her body by reconnecting with sound “reluctantly by laying hold of some little odd or end, some sound, some sight. She listened, but it was all very still [. . .] there was only the sound of the sea” (64). She describes

this return, this re-looking as a transformation of sorts: “She saw the light again. With some irony in her interrogation, for when one woke at all, one’s relations changed” (64).

In other words, this experience of look-listening affords the “context” gained from a critical moment of deafness. Although “deafness and silence bar the individual from the body” the return from deafness connects one “back to the body.” In this sense, Davis explains, “silence is of the body. It is an imminent state of the body in which the body can be present, but verbal communication is absent” (Davis 111). Rather than an experience of “disembodiment” Mrs. Ramsay disconnects from the speaking self, not the body self via the experience of silence. By experiencing an embodiment that transcends language Mrs. Ramsay discovers:

she had known happiness, exquisite happiness, intense happiness, and it slivered the rough waves a little more brightly, as daylight faded and the blue went out of the sea and it rolled in waves of pure lemon which curved and swelled and broke upon the beach and the ecstasy burst in her eyes and waves of pure delight raced over the floor of her mind and she felt, It is enough! It is enough! (65)

The ecstasy is “pure lemon” and explodes “in her eyes” engaging her palate and her vision rather than the avenue of speech. Further, she has silenced the patriarchal voice, somehow managing to reach that feminine sentence through a deafened moment. Mr. Ramsay thinks: “But he could not speak to her. He could not interrupt her. He wanted urgently to speak to her [. . .] But he resolved, no; he would not interrupt her. She was aloof from him now in her beauty, in her sadness” (65). Her silence has become “inviolable.”

One of the key moments between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay are defined likewise by a deafened moment. Upon entering the study “she grew still like a tree which has been tossing and quivering and now, when the breeze falls, settles, leaf by leaf, into quiet” (118). Mrs. Ramsay engages her solitude again and utilizes not simply silence, but stillness: the body and sign’s version of silence. Mrs. Ramsay is in search of something:

—something I have come to get, and she fell deeper and deeper without knowing quite what it was, with her eyes closed, And she waited a little, knitting, wondering, and slowly those words they had said at dinner, ‘the China rose is all abloom and buzzing with the honey bee,’ began washing from side to side of her mind rhythmically, and as they washed, words, like little shaded lights, one red, one blue, one yellow, lit up in the dark of her mind, and seemed leaving their perches up there to fly across, or to cry out and be echoed: so she turned and felt on the table beside her for a book.
(119)

These words, these melodic illuminated hues, are not unlike Septimus’ “smoke words languishing and melting in the sky” and like his words, these change shape to become birds, crying to “be echoed”; so she moves, not to speak them, but to read. It is a going under, but rather than a “wedge of darkness” there is a descent into words themselves. The images and gestures are in her mind, the sound has been sealed out, and she reaches to make contact with the text via a book. Now immersed in an embodiment that transcends language as she makes her way through the sonnet “climbing backwards, upwards, shoving her way up under petals that curved over her, so that she only knew this is white, or this is red. She did not know at first what the words meant at all” (119). Again, she retreats into, not her body per se, but the body of language. She is literally “creeping beneath” the sonnet much like Septimus inhabits “the spaces between” the skywriting (*MD* 213). And like Septimus, who

could not “yet” read the language of images, she only “at first” does not understand this: the language inside the body of words. The body, then, is not the female, hysterical one but a textual one removed from speech. In other words, this moment is one of a connection to a language that does not rely on sound.

Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay look at one another and their desire to speak has passed. She continues reading “like a person in a light sleep,” as a bird, ascending until she holds this moment (the narrative body shifts momentarily back to Clarissa Dalloway’s offering in *Mrs. Dalloway*): “And then there it was, suddenly entire; she held it in her hands, beautiful and reasonable, clear and complete, the essence sucked out of life and held rounded here—the sonnet” (*TTL* 121). It is what can be seen from “beneath the pane” when “at last we grasp the meaning” of that “obscure poe[m].” This descent into the body of critical deafness is an echo of the earlier descent of the “wedge shaped core” but it is literalized by the actual contact with words outside of the auditory realm—confirmed both by her rejection of speech and engagement with look-listening. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Ramsay speak, but “she knew that he had turned his head as she turned; he was watching her. She knew that he was thinking, You are more beautiful than ever. And she felt herself very beautiful” (123). And Mrs. Ramsay responds by providing a reciprocal gaze:

Then, knowing that he was watching her, instead of saying anything she turned, holding her stocking, and looked at him. And as she looked at him she began to smile, for though she had not said a word, he knew, of course he knew, that she loved him. [. . .] For she had triumphed again. She had not said it: yet he knew. (124)

This exchange of turning and watching, choosing to look rather than to speak, leads to an assurance that indeed they “had reached some durable relationship.”

In “Time Passes” there is a move from Mrs. Ramsay’s silent discourse to verbal dialogue to the inaudible objects of the house (125). There is a distinct absence of the body—a stillness that is the silence, not of the speaking body but the signing body. The “center” of the novel is the narrative itself as a silent body.

Not only was furniture confounded; there was scarcely anything left of body or mind by which one could say, “This is he” or “This is she.” Sometimes a hand was raised as if to clutch something or ward off something, or somebody groaned, or somebody laughed aloud as if sharing a joke with nothingness.

Nothing stirred in the drawing-room or in the dining-room or on the staircase. Only through the rusty hinges and swollen sea-moistened woodwork certain airs, detached from the body of the wind (the house was ramshackle after all) crept round corners and ventured indoors. (126)

There is this sense, too, a challenge to her masculine contemporaries, Eliot in particular: “it seems impossible that their calm should ever return or that we should ever compose from their fragments a perfect whole or read in the littered pieces the clear words of truth” (128). Nature offers no solace, neither the waves nor the night. Mr. Ramsay’s arms remain empty, a still gesture, with Mrs. Ramsay’s death (128). In silence, the fragments cannot be made whole but they can be reordered. The chaos gives way to a “swaying mantle of silence” (129). Notably it is the ceasing of busy hands—“how once hands were busy with hooks and buttons” (129)—that parallels this “folding round” (130) of silence (silence is a veil that wreathes the home: “the falling cries of birds, ships hooting, the drone and hum of the fields, a dog’s bark, a man’s shout” (130) as if to protect, preserve the house) and it is Mrs.

McNab who comes “tearing the veil of silence with hands” (130). This action moves towards sign language in two ways: first, silence is no longer represented as contemporaneous with audition but with visuality; second, it is the body that breaks the silence with a gesture.

Following Prue’s death in childbirth— in brackets outside of the silence of the house, a presence which is marked as distinctly outside of the narrative—the house absorbs the shock as “some glass tinkled in the cupboard as if a giant voice had shrieked so loud in its agony that the tumblers stood inside an cupboard vibrated too” (133) but “Then again silence fell” (133). Here the “shriek” is loud, not in volume but in vibration—in the *feeling* of sound. This is the preface to the passing of the war which the novel marks as “the thud of something falling.” That “something” is the sound of the body fallen in war, the crash, the sound of violence: “[A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death, mercifully was instantaneous.]” (133).

Victory comes as the soporific silencing of the night, the end of an era, and the end of “Time Passes”:

And now as if the cleaning and the scrubbing and the scything and the mowing had drowned it there rose that half-heard melody, that intermittent music which the ear half catches but lets fall; a bark, a bleat; irregular, intermittent, yet somehow related; the hum of an insect, the tremor of cut grass, dis severed yet somehow belonging; the jar of a doorbeetle, the squeak of a wheel, loud, low, but mysteriously related; which the ear strains to bring together and is always on the verge of harmonising, but they are never quite heard, never fully harmonised, and at last , in the evening, one after another the sounds die out, and the harmony falters, and silence falls. With the sunset sharpness was lost, and like mist rising, quiet rose, quiet spread, the wind settled; loosely the world shook itself down to sleep [. . .] (141)

With this end comes the shift from brackets to parentheticals: “(Lily Briscoe had her bag carried up to the house late one evening in september.)” (141). It is the silent moment, the lull before the storm, the awakening, the transition from the throttling of war and the awakening murmurs of peace: “the voice of the beauty of the world came murmuring, too softly to hear exactly what it said” (142). What is important here is the sense of sound falling off, being sloughed off the body of the world to make room for peace.

Finally, “Into the Lighthouse” consummates Lily Briscoe’s artistic vision. Still pregnant with Mrs. Ramsay’s silence, Lily returns to the summer home years after Ramsay has died. Lily seeks clarity to finish her painting, and realizes in “the unreality of the early morning hour” (191) a startling sense of emergence:

One need not speak at all. One gilded, one shook one’s sails there was a good deal of movement in the bay, (boats were starting off) between things, beyond things. Empty it was not, but full to the brim. She seemed to e standing up to the lips of some substance, to move and float and sink in it, yes, for these waters were unfathomably deep. (192)

She finds among the “waifs and strays of things besides” that “some common feeling held the whole” (192). But she struggles to find “something that evaded her” (193); she is unable still to complete her painting. “Phrases came. Visions came. Beautiful pictures. Beautiful phrases,” but like Septimus, like Mrs. Ramsay, she searches for “the thing itself before it has been made anything” (193). This thing, then, must be seized, must be found before speaking language, outside of language. Lily too seems to be looking, not for the sound itself but the shapes of sound: “Let it come, she thought, if it will come. For there are moments

when one can neither think nor feel.” (193). The moment comes when Mr. Ramsay has stretched across and all seems blurred, like Septimus’ smoke words, and Lily realizes:

They had not needed to speak. They had been thinking the same things and he had answered her without her asking him anything. He stood there as if he were spreading his hands over all the weakness and suffering of mankind [. . .] Now he has crowned the occasion, she thought, when his hand slowly fell. (208)

She slips into a moment of pause, and her vision comes not with blindness—the steps are empty, the canvas blurred, but with an embrace of deafness, the gesturing hand; she has her vision and it is one of sign.

“A Shred of Chintz”: Bernard

With my own eye I could see silences that had assumed bodily shapes. Inappreciable instants became clearly visible: the fraction of a second during which an idea flashes into being and dies away; atoms of time that serve as the germs of infinite consequences lasting through psychological centuries—at last these appeared as beings, each surrounded with a palpable emptiness.

—Paul Valéry, on Mallarmé

He had to keep on talking but it wasn’t any use. He was too hoarse. His voice was a faint croak, he was so thirsty. They couldn’t hear him. He had to make them hear him. He was too weak. He was dropping spinning being sucked down into

—John Dos Passos, *The Big Money*

This chapter closes with a closer reading of those “visual impressions” in *The Waves*. Woolf’s 1931 apex of pure consciousness uses the metaphor of the waves to emphasize fluidity, and permeability in poetic interludes. There is a melting down, a pushing the limits of the novel as even objects lose their discrete boundaries: “Everything became softly amorphous, as if the china of the plate flowed and the steel of the knife were liquid.” The opening image of the novel, Bernard’s vision: “I see a ring...it quivers and hangs in a loop of

light” heralds the novel as moving beyond fragments to recover the alienated, separated identities of the six characters into a continuous “loop.” The poetic interludes of the rising and setting sun, the crashing and ceasing waves, the moving light (simultaneously the cycle of a day, a year, and a life) illustrate the inchoate separation of renewal. “Sharp stripes of shadow lay on the grass, and the dew dancing on the tips of the flowers and leaves made the garden *like* a mosaic of single sparks *not yet* formed into one whole.” The modifiers “like” and “not yet” insist the pieces will merge and illustrate the incipience of fragments to wholes.

Bernard’s desire to seek unity among his phrases and fragments and his failure of an individuated identity (there are many “rooms” and many Bernards) point to a cumulative model of selfhood. I suggest, however, Bernard functions as a signing body that holds his multiple selves as referents he returns to, indeed holds, in his embodied space which is capable of mapping an unlimited number of referents. He is an accumulation and accretion of Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda and Lewis and alternately fashions the personas of Byron, Shelley, and Dostoevsky. He thinks: “For this is not one life; nor do I always know if I am man or woman.” Particularly, he is fixed upon the absent Percival who serves as *the* “invisible body” of the novel—both literally and syntactically. As explained above, sign language utilizes “body shifting” to conceptualize an absent referent, performing a “process by which a signer shifts (rotates) the body, thereby adopting the role of another signer” (309). In this syntactical performance the signing body performs for the absent body; there is no clear boundary outside of conceptual space between the present and the invisible body.

Only when Bernard gathers up his referents, when all experiences converge into one self, does the novel end.

For the final Woolfian “moment” I want to carefully re-read the “summing up” at the end of the day, the end of a life. This moment is marked by a crisis: when Bernard gathers within himself all of his selves he finds his sense of language destroyed:

I waited. I listened. Nothing came, nothing. I cried then with a sudden conviction of complete desertion, Now there is nothing. No fin breaks the waste of this immeasurable sea. Life has destroyed me. No echo comes when I speak. No varied words. This is more truly death than the death of friends, than the death of youth. (284)

Bernard likens the moment to an eclipse in which he is emptied of gluttony and sharpness (284). He becomes aware through the lack of echo of a kind of deafness. But is Bernard unable to speak? The answer seems almost irrelevant. What he is most terrified by is that he is unable to hear himself speak. He has been banished from phonocentric discourse: the system of “hearing-oneself-speak.” He is all body; he is a body without reflection. “No sound broke the silence of the wintry landscape. No cock crowed; no smoke rose; no train moved. A man without a self, I said. A heavy body leaning on a gate. A dead man” (285). This moment in consciousness James describes in “The Stream of Thought” as syncope and chlorofomization. The absence of unprecedented experience is akin to “a certain stage of the anaesthetic process” in which “objects are still cognized whilst the thought of self is lost” (273). This “syncope”—a “loss of sounds from within a word”—mirrors the experience of the aphasiac. Critically speaking, syncope echoes the experience of the deafened moment. Bernard’s moment resonates in this explanation: “During the syncope there is absolute

psychic annihilation, the absence of all consciousness; then at the beginning of coming to, one has at a certain moment a vague, limitless, infinite feeling - a sense of *existence in general* without the least trace of distinction between the me and the not-me” (273). The experience of syncope is one in which there is no sense of past experience—“lines and waves were all”—and a complete disconnect described as “an undisturbed empty quiet everywhere” (273). The process of coming out of “chloroformization” is like the return from critical deafness, the site of the deafened moment. It is described by James’ patient, who speaks as an existential protagonist: “I only know that as it vanishes I seem to wake to a sense of my own existence as something additional to what had previously been there” (273). Indeed, after this moment the landscape returns to Bernard vapoiously in bleeds of color and he seems also to be recovering from blindness: “I saw but was not seen.” It is not his vision that is impaired, but like Lily Briscoe the stark lines soften and blur and he approaches understanding. Bernard articulates his longing as “some little language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words, like the shuffling of feet on the pavement” (238). Now that he has abandoned the self, reached this place with no words: “how to describe or say anything in articulate words again?—save that it fades, save that it undergoes a gradual transformation, becomes, even in the course of one short walk, habitual—this scene also” (287). Nothing changes, only nuances—language is too black and white to reflect these shades of meaning. Bernard longs for meaning from another lexicon, and intuits that “the rhythm of a lost word may be there without a sound to clothe it” (James 252).

This moment “high above the flow of the sea and the sounds of the woods” (287) brings Bernard finally to the possibility of one being. It is the possibility of gathering these body shifts, unifying the hands into one sign. He asks: “Am I all of them? Am I one and distinct? I do not know” (289). But the other selves are more than mere memory, they are experiences felt by his body:

Yet I cannot find any obstacle separating us. There is no division between me and them. As I talked I felt, ‘I am you.’ This difference we make so much of, this identity we so feverishly cherish, was overcome. Yes, ever since old Mrs. Constable lifted her sponge and pouring warm water over me covered me with flesh I have been sensitive, percipient. Her eon my brow is the blow I got when Percival fell. Her eon the nape of my neck is the kiss Jinny gave Louis. My eyes fill with Susan’s tears. I see far away, quivering like a gold thread, the pillar Rhoda saw, and feel the rush of the wind her flight when she leapt. (289)

The memories and sensations associated with each character become cathected on his own body as an embodied consciousness. Through return is a rejoining of sorts. Like Mrs. Dalloway, like Mrs. Ramsay, Bernard imagines his life in his hands: “when I come to shape here at this table between my hands the story of my life and set it before you as a complete thing, I have to recall things gone far, gone.”

His return to sound approaches that language:

But wait [. . .] I will record in words of one syllable how also under your gaze with that compulsion on me I begin to perceive this, that and the other. The clock ticks; the woman sneezes; the waiter comes—there is a gradual coming together, running into one, acceleration and unification. Listen, a whistle sounds, wheels rush, the door creaks on its hinges. (294)

Alone, he drops his phrasebook to the floor to be part of the litter of everyday life³⁹. Words are disconnected from speech. He trades his notebook for another modality. Released from words he seeks this “little language”:

I need a language such as lovers use, words of one syllable such as children speak when they come into the room and find their mother sewing and pick up some scrap of bright wool, a feather, or a shred of chintz. I need a howl; a cry. [. . .] I have done with phrases. (295)

And with this he is alone in silence with his coffee-cup “myself being myself” (295). From the unification emerges an “I, I, I” (296). But this is no longer that “voice” Woolf hears in *A Room of One’s Own*, that “straight dark bar, a shadow shaped something like the letter ‘I’” (99). The I has become part of “the eternal renewal, the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again” (297). This is the return from the deafened moment; it is the recovery of the aeroplane, the emergence from the sonnet, the looking at silence out the window; it is the pause, the change in body, the shift in consciousness that comes from look-listening.

CHAPTER TWO:
“I SEEM STRANGE TO YOU”: CARSON MCCULLERS’ DEAF GESTURES

*I was alone and lonely
I searched and could not find you
Among a crowd of anonymous faces
All was a blur and then your hands moved
In meaningful language—in Sign
And, as a squirrel scampers over a swath of snow
With its tracks extending till I could see no more,
The silence was suddenly broken.
Then and only then I knew it was you.*

—Lawrence Newman, “I Searched”

*I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul,
The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell are with me,
The first I graft and increase upon myself, the latter I translate into new tongue.*

—Walt Whitman, from “Song of Myself”

For the parallel function of a work of art is to be communicable. Of what value is the creation that cannot be shared? The vision that blazes in a madman’s eye is valueless to us. So when the artist finds a creation rejected there is the fear that his own mind has retreated to a solitary uncommunicable state.

—Carson McCullers, “The Vision Shared”

In “The Vision Shared,”⁴⁰ a nonfiction article written for *Theatre Arts* in 1950, Carson McCullers muses about the struggles of a creative writer whose solitary vision must, despite conventional rejection, communicate. The writer, McCullers explains, is always at risk when articulating a unique “vision.” Often inexpressible through conventional language or expressible only to be misunderstood, this “vision” often leaves the writer in a “solitary uncommunicable state.” The resulting isolation is not only a torment but a failure.

Importantly, however, McCullers suggests an antidote to writerly voicelessness:

If only traditional conventions are used an art will die, and the widening of an art form is bound to seem strange at first, and awkward. Any growing

thing must go through awkward stages. The creator who is misunderstood because of his breach of convention may say to himself, 'I seem strange to you, but anyway I am alive.' ("Vision" 264)

There is a distinct difference between an artist who fails to communicate and an artist who has communicated unconventionally. Muteness, then, seems to be a matter of perception: initially terrifying and strange, it is a necessary precursor for this "breach of convention."

This chapter begins by looking at McCullers' body and her fascination with the literal body of expression. As a theoretical base I offer a closer examination of the role of the hand and gesture in alternate expressive modalities that both challenge and alter Saussurian linguistics. From there, I look at the body of McCullers' work to reveal narratives whose trajectory follow the movement of gesture from hand gesticulation in her short stories "Sucker," "Wunderkind," and "Court in the West Eighties"; to sign language in *Heart is a Lonely Hunter*; and silence in *Reflections in a Golden Eye*. These narratives grapple with difficult distinctions between hearing and listening, between speech and speaking and are particularly concerned with the violence surrounding language and sexuality.

McCullers' early success was often tied to a "startling perception of humanity" at such a young age—evidenced by contemporary reviews such as: "Pretty Good for Twenty-Two"⁴¹. In the 1940 *Time* review for *Heart is a Lonely Hunter* McCullers' style is sharply denigrated: "As a writer of words, she is never distinguished, never in one glint verbally original" (Shapiro, Bryer and Field G11). Louis Rubin, in his critical essay, advises that McCullers fiction is suitable for those with "untutored emotions" and concludes that her work is not susceptible to critical analysis "because it comes at a stage at which the reader's

response is based upon intense emotional assent and identification rather than a mere selective discrimination” (114). Scholarship⁴² on McCullers did not emerge until the publication of the omnibus edition of *The Ballad of the Sad Café* in 1951⁴³. And until recently, criticism consisted mostly of technical examinations of novelistic structure and symbolism—whether mythical or allegorical—and the thematic paradox of the “essential loneliness of individuals in a world full of other individuals as lonely as themselves” (Evans *Ballad* 39)⁴⁴. In 1975 McCullers herself becomes solidified in the literary imagination with Virginia Spencer Carr’s *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers*⁴⁵. More recently, McCullers’ unfinished posthumous memoir *Illumination and Night Glare*⁴⁶ and *February House*⁴⁷ highlight the novelist as *wunderkind* as well as *enfant terrible* at the center of the New York intelligentsia between the wars.

While structural analysis is technically useful and anecdotal investigations magnify a fascinating life, they often foreclose more nuanced scholarship. As Nadine Gordimer wrote after the “frightening” “shock” of meeting McCullers for the first time: “But what she was like is of no importance, set against what she wrote ” (63). This chapter too is interested in McCullers as an artistic figure obsessed with the constant challenge to express herself “feelingly,”; focusing on “what she wrote” in terms of her textual body and its relationship to language and expression.

However, I don’t want to dismiss McCullers’ just yet. Her writing life was marked by persistent, periodical illnesses⁴⁸. At age 15 McCullers was given the diagnosis: “pneumonia with complications” and had weeks of bed rest as well as several weeks of rest at a

sanatorium. Here she experienced what Carr calls her “real awakening,” a period during which she identified with Eugene O’Neill and determined she must have tuberculosis instead; “she began to think about writing during her convalescence, but gave it up and studied Bach fugues instead while still in bed” although she began to suspect she didn’t have the physical stamina to be a concert pianist (28). In 1936 McCullers had to leave NY after she was actually diagnosed with tuberculosis—but this was a misdiagnosis (64-65). In February 1941—McCullers was not yet 24—while writing *The Ballad of the Sad Café* she suffered her first cerebral stroke: “her vision was suddenly impaired, and she was overcome by stabbing pains in the temples and blinding headaches. Terrified that she might be going blind, she feared that she might never again be able to write. She was afraid that her brain, too, had been affected” (139). In August 1947 McCullers suffers her second stroke and “she lost the lateral vision of her right eye, the whole right side of her face was numb, and the left side of her body was partially paralyzed” (291). Her third stroke came just months later, which caused major paralysis to the left side of body (292).

In *Illumination and Night Glare* McCullers explains the link between writing and her health which brought both illuminations: the inspirations for her books that “come after hours of searching and keeping my soul ready [. . .] they come in a flash, as a religious phenomenon” (32) and glare: the pain, the waiting to be well enough to write—writing this she is waiting for her leg to be amputated and has spent three years in bed—“the soul is flattened out, and one does not even dare to hope” (38) In a late interview, after McCullers had suffered the strokes that left her nearly paralyzed, the journalist for *Harper’s* recalls “how

painfully she spoke, gathering fractions of words in her throat, raising them through creakings to her soprano song, straining to woo and polish the sounds with her mouth" (McCullers and Dews xv). A frail shell of a woman, seemingly composed of ideas and words alone, her anthem was: "I seem strange to you, but anyway I am alive" (McCullers "Vision" 264).

McCullers writes from and of broken bodies desiring contact both in the act of writing and in the act of expression—which comes not from the failures of speech but the labor of the body. Her own body is tied up in her work as she writes from the immediately material space of her body (nursed by sherry in a thermos and at the end an amanuensis of sorts) and all of its malaises. Speaking becomes more and more of a struggle; her voice is literally garbled and often misunderstood. It is connection she desires, but not E.M. Forster's: "only connect"; rather, she yearns for a more Whitmanesque connection: she is "mad for it to be in contact"—the "it" enveloping everything from "the smoke of my own breath" to "a few light kisses" (29)⁴⁹. She desired the potential "contact" that writing offered her: pen on paper; fingers on keys; words on the body; the body caressed; the expressive form sung in its imperfections. Writing, McCullers insists, is survival. In her unfinished memoir she explains: "I want to be able to write whether in sickness or in health, for indeed, my health depends almost completely on my writing" (McCullers and Dews 38). That is, writing is essential to the expression and the sustenance of self—which for McCullers is one and the same.

It is the writer as artist that relies upon the hands to express the body, moving pen on paper, leaving ink-stained calloused hands. In Frank R. Wilson's "meditation" *The Hand*, he describes a musician who cannot work and echoes McCullers' commitment to writing:

Serious musicians are emotional about their work not simply because they are committed to it, nor because their work demands the public expression of emotion. The musicians' concern for their hands is a by-product of the intense striving through which they turn them into the essential physical instrument for realization of their own ideas of the communication of closely held feelings. The same is true of sculptors, woodcarvers, jewelers, jugglers, and surgeons when they are fully immersed in their work. It is more than simple satisfaction or contentedness: musicians, for example, love to work and are miserable when they cannot. (6)

Simply, to be unable to use the hands to work and create is unbearable—so intertwined is the physical act of creation and the expression itself. As with the musician, in McCullers hands resonate both literally and metaphorically.

As part of a larger body of work, McCullers is typically found in the literary canon alongside the southern gothics as a descendant of William Faulkner, Mark Twain, or Henry James—usually as one of a southern triad of women writers with Flannery O'Connor and Eudora Welty⁵⁰. Certainly the south haunted her: "I hardly let characters speak unless they are Southern" McCullers explained, "It is not only their speech and the foliage, but their entire culture which makes it a homeland within a homeland"; the southern writer, she avers, is "bound to this peculiar regionalism of language and voices and foliage and memory" (McCullers "Flowering Dream" 279). And she is kin to her fellow southerners' use of the "grotesques"—what Sherwood Anderson in "The Book of the Grotesque" suggests are those that have been "spiritually and psychologically warped by emotional and sexual

frustration” (Anderson and Meyers x). McCullers’ “grotesques”—from “freaks” such as the hunchback Cousin Lyman in *The Ballad of the Sad Café* to “queers” such as the repressed homosexual Captain Penderton in *Reflections in a Golden Eye*—serve as a reminder that the distinction between those that belong and those ostracized are separated by an often transparent line. Frankie, McCullers’ adolescent heroine in *Member of the Wedding*, perhaps speaks to this most directly when she reveals her secret terror of being unmasked: “She was afraid of all the Freaks, for it seemed to her that they had looked at her in a secret way and tried to connect their eyes with hers, as though to say: we know you” (McCullers *Member* 272). I am interested in how in McCullers’ fiction the bodies not unlike her own—queer, freakish, isolated—struggle to find voice. Along with the cavalcade of freaks emerges a particular obsession—the way in which hands and visual language force us confront these disfigured, even diseased bodies and render these bodies speechless.

Hands open up a radical rereading of McCullers by invoking linguistic anthropologists Armstrong, Stokoe and Wilcox who argue language itself emerged through the body. Syntax, the very way in which linguistic elements are put together in language, they explain “is metaphorically *embodied* in the direct actions, that is gestures, of our hands and other parts of our bodies” (Armstrong, Stokoe and Wilcox 235). And these trace gestures remain in language. Gesture, then, is “bodily movement to which human beings attach meaning” (Armstrong, Stokoe and Wilcox 3)⁵¹. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “gesture” in its noun form as a “movement of the body or limbs as an expression of feeling” encompassing movement, body and sense. As such, “gestures are perceived as emotional

signifiers”; moreover, “[g]esture within its multiple forms is the most primal and yet one of the most complex media for communicating ideas and emotions to others and the self.” Gestures, importantly, as defined by linguists are distinct from the movements of sign language; gestures, or gesticulations, work as emotional addendums to speech function whereas signs stand in for utterances⁵². McNeil underscores that “the important thing about gestures is that they are *not* fixed. They are free and reveal the idiosyncratic imagery of thought” (McNeill *Hand* 1). Gesture enables speech to move off the plane of linear time and enables “thinking that is instantaneous, imagistic and global—analog rather than digital” (McNeill *Hand* 11). Hands, in other words, dance with speech in gesture much like their solo performance in the more formalized role in sign language. As Susan Goldin-Meadow explains: “hand movements [. . .] can beat the tempo of speech, point out referents of speech, or exploit imagery to elaborate the contents of speech” (4). Gesture, importantly, is rooted in the pre-linguistic, pre-symbolic, and in this continuum pre-sexual. To illustrate this “evolution” between gesture and speech McNeil graphs what he calls *Kendon’s Continuum*⁵³ like so: “Gesticulation → Language-like Gestures → Pantomimes → Emblems → Sign Languages.” The continuum moves from left to right as “(1) the obligatory presence of speech declines, (2) the presence of language properties increases, and (3) idiosyncratic gestures are replaced by socially regulated signs” (McNeill *Hand* 37). What is particularly important here is that as you move through the spectrum speech becomes less and less present or important for meaning—in this definition “gestures (gesticulation) almost never occur in the absence of speech” whereas when you move to the right one movement

“speech is not obligatory” (37)⁵⁴. In the trajectory I am plotting, speech becomes not a matter of obligation but of impossibility.

The presence of the hand, though, is significant for its critical potential. In *Hand and Mind* David McNeil opens with an example of a person narrating a cartoon who raises her hand to illustrate “and he climbed up the rope.” He explains:

The hand and its movement are symbolic; they present thought in action. The hand represents something other than itself. The hand is not a hand, but the character; the movement is not the hand moving up, but this character climbing up; the space is not the speaker’s space, but a fictional space, a narrative space that exists only in the imaginary world of the discourse. (1)

The hand is both literal and symbolic. It is simultaneously a “stand in” for spoken language and an emotive appendage. Wilson similarly begins *Hand* with a question fundamental to this chapter and that eclipses sign language and communication: “But what do we mean by ‘the hand’? Should we define it on the basis of its visible physical boundaries?”. If this were the case, then, the hand’s ability to occupy and illustrate space would end at the fingertips. Wilson continues: “But under the skin this boundary is just an abstraction, a pencil line drawn by mapmakers, giving no clue as to what the hand is or how it actually works.” (8). He discusses the disuse of the hand as caused by brain injury and continues with his cartology:

Should those parts of the brain that regulate hand function be considered part of the hand? The perspective of *physiological* or *functional* anatomy suggests that the answer is yes. We need go no further than this to realize that a precise definition of the hand may be beyond us. Although we understand what is meant conventionally by the simple anatomic term, we can no longer say with certainty where the hand itself, or its control, or influence, begins or ends in the body. (9)

This interdependence between the body and the mind, the intertwining of movement and expression leads Wilson to conclude that the hand is more than metaphor. Further, the hand is “often the real-life focal point—the lever or the launching pad—of a successful and genuinely fulfilling life” (14). How then, given, our cultural imperative to relegate physical labor and creative arts “do we even begin to tolerate the modern world we live in?” (13). The question is Wilson’s, but it could just as easily be McCullers’ or any of her writing contemporaries and modern predecessors. For Wilson, it is a structured educational system that intercedes, causing pain and psychic injury; for McCullers, however, adult sexuality and language bar the body from expressive capability. It is no surprise, then, that McCullers’ central figure is a deaf man communicates with his hand via sign language and whose death comes when he no longer signs.

I begin at the left end of Kendon’s Continuum and where McCullers does. I re-read her “apprentice” stories to reveal an uncanny obsession with the hand. Her early fiction hones in on language at its most primitive, its originary phase, as hands labor in gesture, touch and music. We see in these short stories disembodied hands as signs of failed communication, but also hands as reverence and hope and potential. From there, I read the literal presence of deaf-mute John Singer in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* as a centering body of deafness, desirable because of his ability to sign and speak with his hands. This is the end of the continuum and the death of Singer leaves a vacuum of nihilistic deafness that devolves into complete aphasia in *Reflections in a Golden Eye*.

“The Phrases Shaped from her Fingers”: Carson McCullers’ Short Stories

The gesture, rooted in the body, acts as a way of interpellating silence into narration, of presenting a seemingly unmediated form of communication.

—Lennard Davis, “Deafness and Insight”

Carson McCullers’ short stories and non-fiction essays were first collected in *The Mortgaged Heart*, a posthumous anthology edited by her sister Margarita G. Smith in 1971. These works of shorter fiction, often categorized as “apprentice stories,” were hailed as an “embarrassment” and “undistinguished” upon publication; at best, they were “useful,” a key to the “creative process” (Clark and Friedman 6-7). As such, critical work is sparse⁵⁵. In one of the few readings of this collection, Robert Phillips analyzes McCullers’ stories to conclude: “Instead of mutes and dwarfs, what we generally encounter here are people isolated by circumstance rather than physical appearance or malady. Instead of freaks we find an inner freaking-out” (172-73). What these characters experience is consistent with McCullers’ vision of spiritual isolation as a kind of “personal dissociation—the feeling of being severed from society, disunited from others, lonely, separate, different, apart” (Phillips 173).

Yet I argue more explicitly that while these stories do not hinge on “physical appearance or malady” the body is definitely figured—or prefigured by the ominous and obsessive use of the hand. That is, I read McCullers’ short stories as narratives of the hand—the hand as extension of the body, the hand as disembodied limb, the hand as a

means to touch, the hand as an instrument of gesture, the hand as a tool to create and destroy.

“Sucker,” one of Carson McCullers’ earliest works of short fiction⁵⁶, establishes the first of many lonely triads—the title character “Sucker”; Pete, his adolescent cousin whom he admires; and Maybelle, the object of Pete’s crush. A narrative of adolescent desire, the story is most notable for the nascent exposition of McCullers’ recurring theme of unrequited love: “If a person admires you a lot you despise him and don’t care—and it is the person who doesn’t notice you that you are apt to admire” (“Sucker” 2). Unrequited desire, in other words, exists when one person does not “hear” the other’s desire. This thesis McCullers develops in both *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and in *The Ballad of the Sad Café* as the doomed relationship between the lover and the beloved⁵⁷. Always confounded, the longing the lover feels for the beloved and the sense of need the beloved feels from the lover leave both isolated and exacerbates their loneliness.

But what is particularly interesting is that as the “lover,” Pete’s desire for Maybelle is expressed through a fixation with her hands. Pete explains:

Her fingernails are pointed and manicured and painted shiny red [. . .]. All during class I used to watch Maybelle, nearly all the time except when I thought she was going to look my way or when the teacher called on me. I couldn’t keep my eyes off her hands, for one thing. They are little and white except for that red stuff, and when she would turn the pages of her book she always licked her thumb and held out her little finger and turned very slowly. It is impossible to describe Maybelle. (2-3)

Maybelle, the object of desire, here the “lover”, is metonymically represented through her hands. Pete insists, like T.S. Eliot’s J. Alfred Prufrock⁵⁸: “It is impossible to say just what I

mean.” And in McCullers’ universe—in which adolescence is always at its limbo—it seems impossible to escape the feeling of being “disunited from others, lonely, separate, different, apart” (Phillips 173); it seems impossible to say anything at all. “This feeling of being severed” (Phillips 173) surfaces literally like the cold “Arms that are braceleted and white and bare” in Eliot’s poem. Like Prufrock, who can only see discrete, disembodied⁵⁹ limbs—“Arms that lie along a table”—Pete is mesmerized by “little and white” fingers. And like Prufrock, Pete can only speak of the body discretely. Yet while Pete insists: “It is impossible to describe Maybelle” he subverts this impossibility through the metonym of Maybelle’s hands. And these hands are not the cold, marbleized hands that mock Prufrock. Maybelle’s decorated hands are the playful hands of adolescence, involved with touch as they caress both book and mouth in an erotic ritual of contact. Pete is reading her body through her hands—responding to her unresponsiveness by searching for meaning in gesture. Maybelle as the lover is a metonymic figure; her hands are the symbol for the expression of desire.

Hands also play a crucial metonymical function in “Court in the West Eighties.” They signal not only touch and gesture, but signify and create silence. Another early story of McCullers’, “Court” describes a small apartment courtyard through the eyes of a young student and the voyeuristic closeness and depressed tension as poverty creeps in⁶⁰: “when you can see people sleep and dress and eat you get to feel that you understand them—even if you don’t know their names” (13). The courtyard itself serves as a social space—a metonym for McCullers’ universe of dissociated souls. Hands suggest contact; they infer touch when despite nearness the tenants remain isolated.

You see all of us in the court saw each other sleep and dress and live out our hours away from work, but none of us ever spoke. We were near enough to throw our food into each others' windows, near enough so that a single machine gun could have killed us all together in a flash. And still we acted as strangers. (16)

Within this nearness nobody touches, nobody speaks. The narrator imagines a closeness that unites them in death, but there is no contact in life. There is no communication, even “sounds were muffled and far away” (11). Furthermore, the tenants themselves are as if they are deafened—hearing sounds as muffled, mumbled, garbled, and even, eventually, choked. The courtyard lends itself to both intimacy and fragmentation—a “hearing” of the body. As “haptic geographer” Paul S. Rodaway explains:

Whilst the ears provide continuous and complex combinations of sounds [. . .] the body offers a more limited and selective auditory experience, more intimate and fragmented, a world of vibrations—a kind of touch-hearing geography[. . .] and extremely difficult to associate spatially with particular sources and locations. (101)

In the courtyard tenants are literally listening through walls, constructing aurally through windows and cracks in blinds—piecing together “vibrations.”

Of particular fascination is “the red-headed man.” The narrator’s first description of him is indeed fragmented, and by her own description “incomplete”: “I can remember seeing only a few incomplete glimpses of this man living across from me—his red hair through the frosty window glass, his hand reaching out on the sill to bring in his food, a flash of his calm drowsy face as he looked out on the court” (11). His portrait is constructed of isolated body parts. But whereas in “Sucker” the reader is given an incomplete picture of the “beloved” because the language necessary is “impossible” for the “lover,” in “Court” the

“lover” herself is only given “incomplete glimpses.” That is, the narrator is confounded not only by expressive difficulties, but her receptive messages are unclear as well. Yet the hand alone remains in focus; the hair is seen behind frosted glass and the face does not reveal sharp features but is “drowsy” and only glimpsed in a “flash.” But the hand seems its own entity—“reaching out” as Maybelle’s hand reaches out to the biology book.

The focus of the story is the narrator’s fixation with a silent redheaded man⁶¹ whom she watches through her window in the courtyard. She imagines he has access to a different way of seeing the tenants: “I felt that this man across from me understood the cellist and everyone else on the court as well. I had a feeling that nothing would surprise him and that he understood more than most people. Maybe it was the secretive droop of his eyelids.”

(15). She explains:

He was standing just as I was, his hands on the window sill, looking out. The early sun shone straight in his face and I was surprised at his nearness to me and the clarity with which I could see him. His hair, bright in the sunlight, came up from his forehead red and coarse as a sponge. I saw that his mouth was blunt at the corners, his shoulders straight and muscular under his blue pajama jacket. His eyelids drooped slightly and for some reason this gave him a look of wisdom and deliberateness. As I watched him he went inside a moment and returned with a couple of potted plants and set them on the window sill in the sun. The distance between us was so little that I could plainly see his neat blunt hands as they fondled the plants, carefully touching the roots and the soil. He was humming three notes over and over—a little pattern that was more of an expression of well-being than a tune. Something about the man made me feel that I could stand there watching him all morning. (13)

Like Pete watching Maybelle, the hands are mesmerizing, soothing and erotic. The hands caress the plants, like the pages of the biology book. Here, however, they are accompanied

by an abstract humming implicitly tied to the motions of the hands. This motion, if we consider *Kendon's Continuum* is specifically “gesticulation” but the only “speech” here is this humming, closer to silence than speech; it is the only sound that resonates in the courtyard where not speaking is an unspoken rule.

Speech, in fact, proves itself as always already corrupted and meaningless save the gestures they suggest. For when trying to “hear” the red-headed man she is at a loss aurally: “I couldn’t hear the words, they were merged together in one low rising and falling sound.” Further, her failure to hear is more explicitly a failure to understand: “no matter how hard I listened I couldn’t understand any of it.” When words are spoken, audibly and unmistakably they seem to be a mockery, a violation of silence. The words that finally punctuate the darkness come as an empty plea making hearing futile. The narrative changes as McCullers brings to the fore the disjunction between hearing and listening, between speaking and communicating. Now the focus is a young man and his pregnant wife whose increasing desperation thickens the tense silence in the court:

Sometimes at night after everyone else was asleep you could hear the murmuring sound of his talking. Out of a late silence he would say *listen here* so loud that it was enough to wake all of us, and then his voice would drop and he would start a low, urgent monologue to his wife. She almost never said anything. Her face seemed to get smaller and sometimes she would sit on the bed for hours with her little mouth half open like a dreaming child’s.
(15)

The young man’s “talking” too is murmuring, but the clear words “listen here” underscore both the impossibility of such an act and the irony. Here speech both demands attention and yet reveals itself as failure—the urgent plea has as its echo a wordless mouth.

It must have been about two o'clock one night when I was waked up by a strange sound. It was dark and all the lights were out. The noise seemed to come from the court and as I listened to it I could hardly keep myself from trembling. It was not loud [. . .] but there was something animal-like about it—high and breathless, between a moan and an exclamation. It occurred to me that I had heard such a sound sometime in my life before, but it went too far back for me to remember. (18)

This uncanny sound— what is buried, hidden, known in the body—is neither loud nor quiet: “there was a choking sound.” Likewise, listening has failed as well. The most prominent feature of this conclusion is its ambiguity—the choking and implied strangling reveal a bizarre duality of failure speech and the victory of manual expression. The hands literally silence the courtyard and the narrator recalls: “Of course I knew then what the sound had been. He left off in the middle of the sentence and the court was quiet as death” (18). The only confirmed truth comes with the silence. This string of sounds: “low, urgent”; “strange”; “animal like”; “between a moan and an exclamation” and finally “choking” are all fragments, terrifying shards of sound, expressions from the body that only come together in silence. Sound, speech, and noise become hindrances to understanding and in the courtyard they are indecipherable distractions; silence seems to be the only violent truth. These hands that suffocate reveal the failure of speech and the disconnect between speech and body.

The failure of the hands is the central image in “Wunderkind” where hands become overtly associated with sexuality. Written around 1936, it unravels the story a young musician on one afternoon in her piano teacher Mister Bilderbach’s home. Frances, the young pianist, fails to play “feelingly.” Asked to play Beethoven, “the Variation Sonata. Opus 26” (67), Frances strains: “She wanted to start it with subdued viciousness and

progress to a feeling of deep, swollen sorrow. Her mind told her that. But her hands seemed to gum in the keys like limp macaroni and she could not imagine the music as it should be” (68). This failure to reach “subdued viciousness,” to play feelingly is the central concern of the story.

Frances is unable to imagine the music. She is unable to communicate without the words attached to the emotions, to make audible through her hands. And when Frances looks at her own fingers: “She could see her fingers sinking powerless into a blur of piano keys.” This disconnect Frances feels with near gothic horror, and the image is repeated so often that her hands with “the quivering tendons,” the hands that “seemed separate from the music that was in her” no longer just seem. As critic Margaret B. McDowell explains: “Her hands are enemies beyond her control [. . .]. As if the music she hears in her mind is the reality and what she actually hears is unreal because it is wrong, she looks intently at her fingers almost to reassure herself that they are part of her” (92). What she does see, however, is particularly telling. As Frances waits for Bilderbach to finish with his morning lesson: “Again she saw her hands—the quivering tendons that stretched down from her knuckles. The sore finger tip cupped with curled, dingy tape. The sight sharpened the fear that had begun to torment her for the past few months” (McCullers “Wunderkind” 58). The fear, unnamed, is coupled with an abject revulsion, a sense that the grotesque hand is her hand and yet not her hand. The isolation she feels is not a separation from herself and another person—but a disassociation of herself from her self.

This is the hand, the finger, and the part for the whole she fears; it is the part of herself that holds both desire and disgust. What Frances does hear, over and over, is the mocking, lonely phrase: “A *Wunderkind*—a *Wunderkind*.” Frances painfully recalls: “Heime was a *Wunderkind*. He and she, then” (63). Heime, Frances’ former musical peer is “he” the *wunderkind* still; Frances is “she” the *wunderkind* then. His presence weighs on Frances and she evokes him through a memory—but it is not an aural memory of music; it is a physical memory of his hands:

Half the time, too, his hands were dirty around the knuckles and the cuffs of his shirts peeped out dingily from the sleeves of his sweater. She always watched his hands when he played—thin only at the joints with the hard little blobs of flesh bulging over the short-cut nails and the babyish-looking crease that showed so plainly in his bowing wrist. (63)

The memory of his dirty, callused hands seems to overlay the image of her “sore finger cupped with curled, dingy tape.” Both are slightly exposed, worn down from wear, and curled from touch. Simultaneously enthralling and wretched, the “blobs of flesh bulging over” with the “babyish-looking crease” easily transform Heime into her hymen: the fold of flesh that partly encloses her sexuality. Frances wonders: “What had begun to happen to her four months ago? The notes began springing out with a glib, dead intonation. Adolescence, she thought” (66). It is a separation, a splitting off, making sexuality discrete and severing the body.

But more present than Heime’s phantom hand is Mister Bilderbach, a “chunky, guttural” (58) and “deep” (62) voice loosely connected to a mature, hyper-masculinized hand: “His deep voice sounded as though it had been straying inside her for a long time.

She wanted to reach out and touch his muscle-flexed finger that pointed out the phrases, wanted to feel the gleaming gold band ring and the strong hairy back of his hand” (62). The finger becomes both literal penis and symbolic phallus as Bilderbach is “inside her” signaling an incipient awakening tied to the voice. With the voice, however, Frances loses a more primal sense of expression—she is entering into sexuality, into speech and her hands are no longer tools of expression but are tied to her sexuality. The longing for that “muscle-flexed finger” subverts her ability to “hear” Beethoven.

The disembodiment of the story then makes sense. The narrative presents Frances as fragments of disembodied limbs surrounded by disembodied sounds.

She came into the living room, her music satchel plopping against her winter-stockinged legs and her other arm weighted down with schoolbooks, and stood for a moment listening to the sounds from the studio. A soft procession of piano chords and the tuning of a violin. The Mister Bilderbach called out to her in his chunky, guttural tones:

‘That you, Bienchen?’

As she jerked off her mittens she saw that her fingers were twitching to the motions of the fugue she had practiced that morning. ‘Yes,’ she answered.

‘It’s me.’

‘I,’ the voice corrected. ‘Just a moment.’ (58)

Frances, not unlike Maybelle, is described as “winter-stockinged legs,” an “other arm”⁶² and “twitching” fingers that seem to move of their own accord. Mister Bilderbach, her piano teacher, on the other hand is present as a disembodied voice. Yet although he is identified simply as “the voice” he is more sound—“chunky, guttural tones.” When she finally approaches the piano “her hands seemed separate from the music that was in her” (68). She has an uncanny sense that she has separated from her hands that play the

music. And when Bilderbach asks her to play Beethoven, she is confronted with the failure of disconnect.

“There were no flaws that jarred on her” she realizes, “but the phrases shaped from her fingers before she had put into them the meaning that she had felt.” Playing flawlessly is not enough. Speaking is not enough. The corporeal, the body itself is crucial to expression, but not to speech. In fact, speech moves us farther from the body, even if, especially if, that body is on the outside: broken, fractured, wounded or grotesque. Adolescence brings the desire that makes her fear and loathe her body, brings the mind to intercede on behalf of the imagination. Adolescence is the tyranny of the voice over the body—the transition into the symbolic, into the chaos of modern life—when the body can no longer be heard.

“The Shape of her Hands”: *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*

From this time on you must shut your ears to the roaring of the voices.

—Sherwood Anderson, “Hands” in *Winesburg, Ohio*

I’d almost decided that the book [The Heart is a Lonely Hunter] was no novel, that I should chop it up into short stories. But I could feel the mutilations on my body when I had that idea, and I was in despair.

—Carson McCullers, “The Flowering Dream: Notes on Writing”

The concerns that run through McCullers’ early stories find their expression in her 1940 opus *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. The failure of the hands and listening are embodied by John Singer, the central character who can “hear” because of his ability to read the body. McCullers herself “discovered” Singers’ “deaf ears” as the fulcrum for her lost characters. In her memoir, *Illumination and Night Glare*, she explains: “as I was thinking and pacing, I realized that he was a deaf mute, and that was why the others were always talking to him,

and why, of course, he never answered” (McCullers and Dews 3). It is this “illumination” that allows McCullers to become committed to the novel with her “whole soul” (McCullers "Flowering Dream" 275). Singer as a whole, silent body rescues the narrative from becoming fragmented into smaller stories—what McCullers psychosomatically experiences as causing “mutilations” on her own body. Indeed, the novel’s working title, “The Mute,” emphasizes Singer’s discomfort with vocal language and his use of sign language rather than his inability to hear.

What makes Singer so fascinating and leads to his mythical status is this silent discourse materialized in his literal deafness. Much of the irony of the novel, of course, and what critics have quickly pointed out is that Singer is baffled by his listeners’ idealization of him. Further, it is precisely because he does not speak that others are able to idealize what he would say if he would (not could) speak; the adolescent heroine Mick “wondered what kind of music he heard in his mind that his ears couldn’t hear. Nobody knew. And what kind of things he would say if he could talk. Nobody knew that either” (53). E. Miller Budick sums up this critical faction:

There is no mistaking McCullers’s sympathy for her isolated individuals—no ignoring, either, the complaint about lonely hearts who ruthlessly hunt companionship, only to use the other as a sounding board for the self [. . .]—the characters of McCullers’s novel seem to speak only to hear their own voices. They convert each other into self-reflections, allegorical mirrors of the self, which permit them to engage in endlessly self-referential monologues. (144)

Singer is no doubt *the* narcissistic symbol in the novel, an allegorical figure of the solitary soul. McCullers herself in her detailed outline of the novel⁶³ establishes Singer as such:

“Because of his deaf-mutism he is isolated from the ordinary human emotions of other people to a psychopathic degree” (McCullers and Dews 165). And she clearly had no interest in getting to know “real” “deaf-mutes”—when her husband Reeves suggests she attend a nearby Deaf-Mute convention she refused. “I had already made my conception of deaf mutes,” McCullers explains, “and didn’t want it to be disturbed” (McCullers "Flowering Dream" 276). She even offers her own critical reading of the novel which later literary critics merely echo: “In his eternal silence there is something compelling. Each one of these persons make the mute a repository for their most personal feelings and ideas” (McCullers and Dews 164).

Yet, Singer’s role in the novel is more than empty cipher. While Singer is easily a symbol of isolation—separated from the rest of the world by a wall of silence—the language of his muteness has been ignored. McCullers, I argue, self-consciously chooses Singer not only for his receptive faculty but for his expressive modality as well. Singer, McCullers explains shortly after establishing him as the “mute” center, “does not think in words but in visual impressions. That, of course is a natural outcome of his deafness” (McCullers and Dews 165). Like Woolf, McCullers subscribes to the theory that “visual impressions often communicate thus briefly statements that we shall in time come to uncover and coax into words” (189). For Woolf these visual signals are like flashes of light, ephemeral, almost coy. “Uncovering” these impressions suggests a sensual process that brings these illuminations hiding in our unconscious to the fore. For McCullers, however, these “visual impressions” seem to work more concretely. Rather than revealing themselves as words, they are the

words themselves—more accessible, more direct. Singer is able to offer a material body and a material language for her gesturing protagonists.

Key to *Singer*, then, is his ability to think visually. Yet, *Singer*'s deafness often leads not only the other characters but critics as well to idealize and even infantilize his deafness. Oliver Wendell Evans in one of the first full critiques of the novel makes such a discovery: “although a mute, he is the most eloquent of all the characters: the language of the heart does not require a tongue and may even be the more eloquent for lacking one.” Evans’ crescendo seeks to give *Singer* voice, arguing: “The deaf mute is indeed a *singer* and his song [. . .] is all the sweeter for its silence” (Ballad 44). His conclusion initially seems to celebrate *Singer*'s deafness—or rather, Evans’ fantasy of the stoic deaf-mute who is “sweet” despite his handicap.

In fact, the novel’s opening line: “In the town there were two mutes, and they were always together” (3) provides “mute” not as an adjective, a description of, but as a noun. These “mutes” are not given proper names until their silent routines are established (“the two friends walked silently together”). John *Singer* is introduced as “the thin mute,” the smart, sober contrast to his dumb, sloppy cousin Spiros Antonopoulos. But these mutes share in their silence a wordless understanding as *Singer* “nearly always put his hand on his friend’s arm and looked for a second into his face before leaving him” (3). It is this move, the touch and the gesture, which proves to be the heart of the novel. The problem with staying on this first page is that *Singer* does not, like Ovid’s *Philomela*, lack a tongue; in fact,

the reader learns that he used both sign language and speech during his education at the deaf institution in his youth. His experience of speech, however, is not pleasant:

But he could never become used to speaking with his lips. It was not natural to him, and his tongue felt like a whale in his mouth. From the blank expression on people's faces to whom he talked in this way he felt that his voice must be like the sound of some animal or that there was something disgusting in his speech. (11)

For Singer, speaking is “not natural.” He recalls speech as not merely awkward but “painful.” This description is but an echo of the animal-like death in the courtyard. In *Heart* the grotesqueness of speaking seems to mirror most explicitly the violence associated with Jake Blount, whose “tongue was so heavy with drink and he talked at such a violent pace that the sounds were all shaken up together” (25) and whose words were expelled from “his throat like a cataract” (17). Muteness, then, is a choice⁶⁴.

Singer, in fact, is described as “always talking” to his deaf companion Antonopoulos: “His hands shaped the words in a swift series of designs. His face was eager and his gray-green eyes sparkled brightly” (4). His signs are strong, “swift” and an intelligent contrast to Antonopoulos’ “vague, fumbling signs” (4). We learn that Singer is neither “silent” nor “lonely” when he is able “to talk with his hands eagerly to his friend about all that was in his mind” (6). Singer’s silence is marked, not by a mere absence of speech but by the stillness of his hands. When his deaf companion is institutionalized early in the novel, Singer, once alive with the movement of language speaks no more. His hands, like those of Sherwood Anderson’s Wing Biddlebaum⁶⁵ are cast away—“stuffed tight into the pocket of his trousers” (12)—awakened only when shaping words in his dreams. It is only when he stops

signing is he described as “silent and alone” (13). Singer, then, who thinks in “visual impressions”⁶⁶ is not a *singer* but a *signer*. Moreover, as a signer, his connection with deaf language offers a listening that does not involve hearing and a speaking that does not ultimately involve the “tongue.” He is *both* sentimental allegory and literal prototype. I suggest, then, reading Singer as a signer, as both literally and critically deaf. Further, Singer’s signing relationship with Antonopoulos allows for a reflection akin to look-listening “The eyes of his friend were moist and dark, and in them he saw the little rectangle pictures of himself that he had watched a thousand times” (220). Singer as “cipher” is not simply an empty vessel, but a silent, visual mirror for the other characters who can make silent reflections of their verbal violence. This further moves us to the end of Kendon’s Continuum from gesticulation to signed languages— from gesture that accompanies speech to a visual language that doesn’t require speech.

Singer continues to engage critics and readers from Richard Wright to Oprah Winfrey⁶⁷. In his 1940 review for the *New Republic*, Richard Wright describes *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* as a “picture of loneliness, death, accident, insanity, fear, mob violence and terror” over which hovers “mockingly” “primitive religion, adolescent hope, the silence of deaf mutes,” and a “sheen of weird tenderness” (Wright 195). It is difficult, Wright himself confesses, to know “what the book is about.” Except this—a universe of characters isolated and “lonely, separate, different, apart”:

The core of the book is the varied relationships of these characters to Singer, a lonely deaf mute. There are Mick Kelly, a sensitive, adolescent white girl; aged Dr. Copeland, the hurt and frustrated Negro; Jake Blount, a nervous

and unbalanced whiskey-head; and Biff Brannon, whose consciousness is one mass of timid bewilderment. All these characters and many more feel that the deaf mute alone understands them; they assail his deaf ears with their troubles and hopes, thereby revealing their intense loneliness and denied capacity for living. (Wright 195)

Indeed, McCullers' discovery of Singer's "deaf ears" emerged as the fulcrum for her lost characters. Underneath a shared "sheen of weird tenderness" (Wright 195), these characters are drawn to the way in which only Singer seems to "understand" or "hear" their message.

For Jake Blount, the violent talker, speaking in Singer's presence soothes him; he notices: "the mute's eyes were cold and gentle as a cat's and all his body seemed to listen" (23). McCullers emphasizes the corporeality of deafness by endowing his entire body with linguistic capabilities. As a "deaf-mute," Singer's receptive faculty is not the uncertain locale of the ear—constantly interrupted, threatened, and unreliable—but the eyes. As a signer he is a literal look-listener, accruing visual information in order to "listen." Biff Brannon, more observer than speaker, is struck by the mystery of "the mute"; he thinks:

The fellow was downright uncanny. People felt themselves watching him even before they knew that there was anything different about him. His eyes made a person think that he heard things nobody else had ever heard that he knew things no one had ever guessed before. He did not seem quite human. (25).

Singer is the embodiment of McCullers' recurring figure of obsession: the red-headed man in the courtyard—"His mouth was blunt at the corners [. . .] his eyes drooped slightly [. . .] something about the man made me feel I could stand there watching him all morning" (13); and later Penderton's soldier in *Reflections*—"The thought of the young man's face—the dumb eyes, the heavy sensual lips" (96). In part, Brannon is observing the natural result of

lip-reading: the slow, often delayed reaction as the lip-reader re-assembles information. Yet, at the same time Brannon suggests that Singer, in his “uncanny” ability to “hear” what others cannot hear approaches the Lacanian “real” of language—the unspoken, shared reality that is accessible only beyond verbalization.

Although Singer does not sign to his “listeners,” his centered body importantly offers Mick, the novel’s boyish heroine on the verge of adolescence, a model for hearing and speaking without speech. Like Woolf’s “moments of being” that I argue are suffused with deafness, *Heart* too offers deafness as a means to counter the violence of language. Yet, as Davis makes clear—a literally deaf figure in literature functions differently than the presence of critical deafness. Yet, the presence of a “real” deaf body makes possible a “critical” moment of deafness. That is, McCullers gives us both a deaf body as the narrative center and from this center spring deafened spokes. It is, like the hand, both metaphor and meaning. The key moment, I argue, of deafness is not with Singer but with Mick. Specifically, this moment erupts as an “epiphany,” a sexual and self-awakening initiated by Beethoven’s third symphony. Deafness is engaged as a means to articulate her desires and to feel. Like Frances, in order to express herself musically, Mick must learn to close her ears “to the roaring of the voices” and feel. Despite the aurality of the experience, listening and speaking fall short of articulating feeling.

This moment occurs when she finds Beethoven one night as she listens to radio music through an open window during one of her regular uptown evening strolls. Mick feels

the music as if it were her very soul communicating: “this music was her—the real plain her” (118). But quickly she discovers the limitations of hearing:

She could not listen good enough to hear it all. The music boiled inside her. Which? To hang on to certain wonderful parts and think them over so that later she would not forget—or should she let go and listen to each part that came without thinking or trying to remember? Golly! The whole world was this music and she could not listen hard enough. (118)

Mick immediately makes a distinction between listening and hearing—despite how hard she tries she can neither “listen good enough”; “listen hard enough” nor “hear it all.” She brings to the fore the haunting refrain: “listen here” still echoing from “The Court.” From the first movement Mick becomes conscious that the music is more than the sound she hears; the music is too big—“the whole world”—to “hear.” Furthermore, the music has gone beyond bodily barriers and taken on a sensual, corporeal presence as it “boiled inside her.” Once inside, the music is treated materially as Mick considers whether or not to deconstruct it and whether or not to hold it.

As the symphony moves into the second part, Mick realizes:

This music did not take a long time or a short time. It did not have anything to do with time going by at all. She sat with her arms held tight around her legs, biting her salty knee very hard. It might have been five minutes she listened or half the night. The second part was black-colored—a slow march. Not sad, but like the whole world was dead and black and there was no use thinking back how it was before. (118)

This was different from the language she knew; it is neither linear nor temporal. Here she is literally moving off the plane of speech⁶⁸. It is as if language has ceased and this music has become not only this moment but all moments. Unlike language that works diachronically,

this music becomes, for Mick, synchronic—“there was no use thinking back.” What is more, Mick holds her body as if to contain the music and marks her body as if to seal it. Like the signer who uses body and space to hold linguistic information, Mick is performing a similar body shift, holding the sound so she can return; the sound has by now become “black colored,” already a visual rather than an aural “march” and is violently and vigorously cathected: “Then the music rose up angry and with excitement underneath” (118).

When the music moves into its final movement Mick realizes: “Wonderful music like this was the worst hurt there could be. The whole world was this symphony and there was not enough of her to listen” (118-19). As a result, by the end of the symphony Mick desires nothing less than deafness:

It was over, and she sat very stiff with her arms around her knees. Another program came on the radio and she put her fingers in her ears. The music left only this bad hurt in her, and blankness. She could not remember any of the symphony, not even the last few notes. She tried to remember, but no sound at all came to her. (119)

At first deafness is a physical gesture. Mick blocks the receptive ports of sound but finds only emptiness. Then she experiences an involuntary silencing in which her mind can no longer hear. However, after experiencing a moment of deafness—that which has the potential to enact a “reconnection or reconfiguration of the body”—Mick quickly retreats from ear-listening and reaches instead to make her *body* hear. She yearns to remember with and through the flesh:

Suddenly Mick began hitting her thigh with her fist. She pounded the same muscle with all her strength until the tears came down her face. But she could not feel this hard enough. The rocks under the bush were sharp. She

grabbed a handful of them and began scraping them up and down on the same spot until her hand was bloody. Then she fell back to the ground and lay looking up at the night. With the fiery hurt in her leg she felt better. She was limp on the wet grass, and after a while her breath came slow and easy again. (119)

Like the experience of sexuality, McCullers illustrates this orgasmic intensity with violence. Her experience of critical deafness, though, assuages the pain and leads to “immanence”; the shape of sounds appears in her consciousness and the silence is lucid in her mind:

The night was quiet. There was the smell of warm cedars. She was not trying to think of the music at all when it came back to her. The first part happened in her mind just as it had been played. She listened in a quiet, slow way and thought the notes out like a problem in geometry so she would remember. She could see the shape of the sounds very clear and she would not forget them. (119).

The silence is no longer a painful “blankness” but the quiet night allows for hearing to dissipate as the other senses come to the fore. She experiences both smell and touch with the “warm cedars.” Unlike Frances she “was not trying to think of the music” but held in her body, it comes back as filmic—“just as it had been played.” Like Singer, whom McCullers “chooses” as deaf because he thinks in “visual impressions,” Mick finds the visual shape that accompanies the sound she hears. In a sense, Mick has created the sign—the “visible verb”—that is more than the symbol for the sound in that it is the gesture that *is* the sound.

This is as near God as Mick could hope to be, as near the outer limits of existence and language, the precipice of the “real.” And when she contemplates her epiphany she concludes that like Singer, “God was silent” (119-120). And if she could “hear” Singer, she would see and understand the hand shapes of *his* language. So for Mick, deafness leaves her

neither without hearing nor without speech—but transports her to a silent space. By “shaping the sounds” Mick is able to hear “feelingly” in a way that Frances in *Wunderkind* cannot. She preserves this feeling in what she describes as “the inside room,” a retreat from the noise of everyday, where “foreign countries and plans and music” exist (163). Here the symphony waits for her, and grows “slow like a big flower in her mind” (163).

But like Frances she also confronts failure and is expelled from the “inside,” unable to find her music. And like Frances Mick’s exit from the inside room comes with female adolescence (Heime is a “wunderkind still”). When Mick has her first sexual encounter with her childhood friend Harry, her experience shares the sense of violence and disembodiment present in “Wunderkind” and “Court.” This is not the bloody but orgasmic experience of listening to Beethoven where Mick literally bruises her body with the feeling of sound, but a breaking apart of her body. Sex causes her hands nearly shatter as “she felt him trembling and her fists were tight enough to crack” (274). Harry moans “Oh, god” over and over but this is not the God she envisions with Singer and silence. The greatest violence though is the separation between mind and body, the severing of herself from herself as she feels “like her head was broke off from her body and thrown away” (274). She endures the experience, narrated in a brief but violent paragraph, by fixing her eyes on “the blinding sun while she counted something in her mind” (274). Mick, too, is aware of the inevitability of it—this necessary and violent shedding of herself: “This is how it was”; “She felt very old, and it was like something was heavy inside her. She was a grown person now, whether she wanted to

be or not” (276). The heaviness, the weight of adult sexuality has taken over her body and “Now she could not stay in the inside room” (305).

When Singer too becomes “cut off” from his “inside room”—he experiences a disconnect similar to Mick’s sexual encounter. He makes his usual journey to see Antonapolous at the asylum. During the trip Singer is described as literally carrying his signs in his pocket; when he finds Anatopoulous has died he is left with nowhere to leave his signs. Following this rejection, Singer becomes “speechless” in the presence of three mutes he meets in a drugstore and is only able to stand “with his hands dangling loose” (325). He too looks up at the “unrefracted brilliance of the sun” (326) and the “something heavy in his pocket” (326) is no longer the weight of his hands but a pistol with which he takes his own life “with swollen eyes and an aching head” (326). Without signing, without visual language, without an inside room there is only emptiness, silence and lack of understanding.

The narrative becomes a panorama of deafness—from the oppressive quiet of misunderstanding to the peaceful silence of contemplation—after Singer’s suicide. Like Mick’s severed head the modes of speaking and hearing are disembodied and violent and speech and hearing become truncated. Deafness, then, turns into an anecdote for violence. When Portia delivers the violent news that her brother and Doctor Copeland’s son Willie has been tortured and left to die after suffering an incident on a chain gang the truth is unbearable.

She spoke and he could not understand. The sounds were distinct in his ear but they had no shape or meaning. It was as though his head were the prow

of a boat and the sounds were water that broke on him and then flowed past. He felt he had to look behind to find the words already said.

‘. . . and their feet swelled up and they lay there and struggle on the floor and holler out. And nobody come. They hollered there for three days and three nights and nobody come.’

‘I am deaf,’ said Doctor Copeland. ‘I cannot understand.’ (254)

This is a distinctly different “deafness” from Singer’s or Mick’s critical deafness. In fact, reading closely reveals that Dr. Copeland experiences not deafness per se; he hears the sounds “distinct in his ear” but the words float past without “shape or meaning.” He is unable to see the “shapes” of language—and as such he seems to suffer a kind of blindness or lack of deafness in that he cannot visually find meaning in the words. Unlike Mick who desires to feel, Copeland aches to disconnect from feeling. He cannot see the shapes nor find the meaning, for the image forces him to confront the horror and truth of Willie’s torture. As a man who has hidden from his children behind words, Copeland cannot face a narrative that cannot be countered or assuaged with more words. He feels as “deaf” as the “nobody” who heard Willie scream for “three days and three nights.” Left impotent, Copeland recoils from the “real,” the materiality of death. When he is carted away on a mule to stay with his in-laws, he thinks of words unsaid, and clings to them—like Mick and her music—as the only hope for his purpose. Seated next to his complacent father in law, “The words in his heart grew big and they would not be silent. But the old man had ceased to listen and there was no one to hear him” (336).

Likewise, Jake Blount, after raging in the eye of a race riot decides to abandon the town to drift farther south in search of his nameless purpose. He has, for the first time, a clear vision of the nightmare that has been haunting him:

He did remember now [. . .]. There was a terrible bright sun and the people were half-naked. They were silent and slow and their faces had a look in them of starvation. There was no sound, only the sun, and the silent crowd of people. (348)

In this dream he carries a basket, wandering through the crowd indefinitely; in the basket are his words which will not be heard and which he cannot speak. Hearing, then, continues to move further from listening and violence affixes itself to hearing.

Mick having experience the one “true” moment of deafness in the novel offers redemption, however bleak, absent from McCullers’ earlier narratives. Exhausted and trapped in her job as a counter girl at the ten-cent store, she has been exiled from her “inside” room, and can no longer hear her music. But Mick also carries with her the deafened moment’s potential to enact the “contingent”—hope for what is possible, not probable. She thinks: “maybe she would get a chance soon. Else what the hell good had it all been . . . It had to be some good if anything made sense” (354). The novel fades as “night” leaves us with Biff Brannon, alone with “deep and unbroken” silence to contemplate the mystery of Singer

“A Curious Lapse of Sensory Impressions”: *Reflections in a Golden Eye*

Past midnight. Never knew such silence.

The earth might be uninhabited.

—Samuel Beckett, from *Krapp’s Last Tape*

If Singer's absence leaves a deafened vacuum in *Heart, Reflections in a Golden Eye* is the narrative of this emptiness. This chapter concludes by looking at what happens when the body disappears off the Kendon continuum. The 1941 novella begins with a breach of boundaries and continues to underscore the ways in which broken boundaries surface as annihilations of the body. "Within its 183 pages a child is born (some of whose fingers are grown together), an Army captain suffers from bisexual impotence, a half-witted private rides nude in the woods, a stallion is tortured, a murder is done, a heartbroken wife cuts off her nipples with garden shears" (Agee 27). So explains James Agee in the *Time* book review for Carson McCullers' bizarre narrative. "It is not," he confirms, "the work of a normal 24-year-old girl" (27). Set on an army base in the American South in the 1930s, *Reflections* tells the story of Captain Penderton—the one who is suffering bisexual impotence; his "handsome" (7) and tempestuous wife Leonora and her stallion Firebird—the one who is tortured; Major Morris Langdon with whom Leonora is having an affair; his fragile wife Alison—the one who is heartbroken; and her wispy Filipino houseboy Anacleto. The orginary breach is performed by Private Elgee Williams—the one who is "half-witted" and to whom "murder is done"—when he is summoned by Captain Penderton to clear some limbs off the scrub oaks surrounding the perimeter of the property. He cuts more than was asked and a distressed Penderton complains: "The way the boughs swept down and make a background shutting off the woods was the whole point. Now it is all ruined" (McCullers *Reflections* 9). This incident begins a voyeuristic triangle in which the reprimanded Private, from the clearing, sees the orange glow of Leonora's "luminous" (14) naked body and

having been sensually awoken, makes nightly pilgrimages to gaze upon her sleeping, naked body: “His memory of these times was wholly sensual [. . .] once having known this he could not let it go, in him was engendered a dark, drugged craving as certain of fulfillment as death” (125). Penderton, too, experiences a “drugged craving,” but for Private Williams who “During their brief, impersonal meetings he suffered a curious lapse of sensory impressions; when he was near the soldier he found himself unable to see or to hear properly” (95).

Published in 1941 on the heels of the overwhelming success of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, *Reflections in a Golden Eye* was met with accusations of “depravity and slavish Gothicism. According to the *Yale Review*, its ‘inversions and mutilations and nastiness stick in one’s mind like burrs’⁶⁹ [. . .] and to the *Hartford Courant*, it is the kind of book ‘most persons wish to spew out of the mind as rapidly as possible’⁷⁰” (James 60). But this vision—distilled in this imagined garish painting: “A peacock of a sort of ghastly green. With one immense golden eye. And in it the reflections of something tiny and [. . .] Grotesque” (McCullers *Reflections* 86)—is not so easily forgotten.

As Tennessee Williams insists in his 1971 afterword of the novel, McCullers’ “grotesque” is more than gratuitous depravity; rather, he argues, McCullers not only gives ghastly and grotesque form to an “incommunicable something” (133) that hovers over an “underlying dreadfulness in modern experience” (131) but “*Reflections in a Golden Eye* is one of the purest and most powerful of those works which are conceived in that Sense of the Awful which is the desperate black root of nearly all significant modern art” (Williams 134). Hailing McCullers as a champion of an artistic modernist sensibility, Williams launches a

reconsideration of *Reflections* wherein McCullers paints a particular kind of grotesque rather than spews the nasty byproducts of a diseased Faulkner. Manifesting itself in *Reflections* via synaesthetic infection and outbreaks of aphasia, I argue this "something" surfaces as incommunicability itself infecting the deviant—and increasingly queer—bodies within the novel. In the McCullers trajectory from *Wunderkind* to *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* to *Reflections in a Golden Eye* the body slowly becomes more “grotesque.” That is, as these grotesque bodies strive to express an “incommunicable something” they move away from conventional modes of speech—which fail as witnessed by Frances in *Wunderkind*—and towards a more literal language of the body—which Mick reaches for in *Heart*—to a complete breakdown and rearrangement of the senses—which Captain Penderton in *Reflections* experiences.

Described by Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things* as one “whose language has been destroyed,” but who “will create a multiplicity of tiny, fragmented regions in which nameless resemblances agglutinate things into unconnected islets,” the aphasic “speaks” in modes inaudible (xix). This definition is particularly useful when considered alongside recent queer reexaminations of the grotesque⁷¹; importantly, these readings suggest the ways in which the “freaks and queers” in McCullers’ fiction⁷² are deviant bodies with subversive potential⁷³. In particular, Rachel Adams makes a useful parallel between sexual difference and a more existential alienation, emphasizing the link between alienation from bodies and alienation from society (552). Adams redefines “queer” as referring “loosely to acts and desires that confound the notion of a normative heterosexuality as well as to the homosexuality that is its

abject byproduct”; freaks, then “are beings who make those queer tendencies visible on the body’s surface” but both suffer “because they cannot be assimilated into the dominant social order, yet their presence highlights the excesses, contradictions, and incoherences at the very heart of that order” (552). The problem particular to *Reflections* is that Penderton attempts to divert his queer tendencies onto another body, so that this severing between mind and body leads to a literal disconnect of his senses. That is, Penderton so thoroughly denies his body of excess and seeks to silence his body that the “breach” of boundaries has the effect of literally being unable to reassemble the “fragmented regions” of his senses. Penderton’s experience of this “incommunicable” something underscores the links between disease and failure of speech which manifest itself on the body as *both* queerness and deafness *both* of which signal deviance from the normal, speaking body

Deafness hovers over the novel as a particular and pervasive form of grotesquery in the novel; it exists in the thick silence encasing the characters, suffocating and unmasking their desires—bringing them closer to the language within their body. Private Elgee Williams, the Body of Captain Penderton’s desire, seems the personification of primal silence itself:

In his eyes, which were of a curious blend of amber and brown, there was a mute expression that is found usually in the eyes of animals. At first glance Private Williams seemed a bit heavy and awkward in his bearing. But this was a deceptive impression; he moved with the silence and agility of a wild creature or a thief. Often soldiers who had thought themselves alone were startled to see him appear as from nowhere by their sides⁷⁴.

His actions are punctuated by silence, from his reprimand by Captain Penderton which he received notably “in silence” (8) to his work in the stables where it is emphasized that “he

did not speak all day” (26). Williams possesses the “lithe silence of a cat” (53) and in his nocturnal visits to Leonora “did not move, or make a sound, or take his eyes from the body of the Captain’s wife” (54). His very presence is silence, for silence is “an imminent state of the body in which the body can be present, but verbal communication is absent” (Davis *Normalcy* 111). Like the courtyard, the space of the army base does not allow for private, anonymous existence. The silence that pervades the base, the home of the Captain Penderton and his sensual wife Lenora, are made visible on the soldier’s body⁷⁵.

As Penderton’s desire surfaces he not only faces sensual confusion but experiences broad spectrum of deafness. To understand the significance and the presence of this deafness it is useful to consider Deaf and Disability Theorist Christopher Krentz’s useful trope: “the hearing line.” Defined as “the invisible boundary that separates deaf and hearing human beings” (234-35), the “the hearing line” works much like the color line in that it “reveals an intricate relation among physical difference, social construction and identity” (235); but unlike the color line written on the skin “deafness becomes apparent only through behavior, when a person does not respond to sound, uses sign language, or perhaps speaks in an unusual manner” (235)⁷⁶. This notion is useful for thinking about deafness in the novel, particularly as it is mapped onto a queer body. For in *Reflections* we confront language and behavior that are cast outside, what Lennard Davis marks as “eccentric occurrences” (*Normalcy* 103). Both the deaf and the queer person can be “outed,” so to speak, by behavior—one linguistic, one sexual—particularly, behavior revealed by and originating from a confrontation with the body. The mapping of both suggest a convergence of the

incipient sexuality and loss of voice central to McCullers' narratives. What has changed, however, in *Reflections* is that Penderton denies both the body and the language that speaks. As a result, mere contingency to his desire affects a kind of deafness:

When the Captain knew in advance that he would meet the soldier, he felt himself grow dizzy. During their brief, impersonal meetings he suffered a curious lapse of sensory impressions; when he was near the soldier he found himself unable to see or to hear properly, and it was only after he had ridden away and was alone again that the scene developed itself for the first time in his mind. The thought of the young man's face—the dumb eyes, the heavy sensual lips. (95-96)

In absence Penderton has his voice; silence exists with the body and the voice exists with absence. And with a sensual veil over his eyes and ears, his own voice becomes disabled. “When from a distance he saw him, walking with sluggish grace, the Captain felt his throat contract so that he could scarcely swallow” (96). Following an “unexplainable attack of amnesia” (120) Penderton tries to speak to Williams but instead “stood mute and suffocated before the young man” (121). The height of this deafness seems to signal a larger slippage and confrontation with the abject: “He thought of the soldier in terms neither of love nor hate; he was conscious only of the irresistible yearning to break down the barrier between them” (119).

Then there is the narrative itself: a chamber of disembodied sounds, as if the silence of the characters has left an aural residue. From the rooms of an old lieutenant “would come the lost sound of some naked melody” (96) and although Penderton “rarely heard the soldier speak [. . .] the sound of his slurring southern voice meandered constantly in the back

of his mind like a troubling song” (96). But while the sounds are disembodied; the silences remain rooted within the body.

Ultimately, the novel concludes in an uncanny confrontation between Penderton and the materiality of his desire—which, of course, can only lead to death. As Williams makes his seventh and final passage up the stairway to Leonora’s bedroom, Penderton waits anxiously in his bedroom: “At first no sound came to him. Then he could feel rather than hear the cautious footsteps on the stairs. The captain’s door was ajar and through the crack he saw a dark silhouette. He whispered something, but his voice was so sibilant and low that it sounded like the wind outside” (126). He has abandoned the faculty of hearing for the more instinctive faculty of the body. When he realizes that the silhouette has not come for him, he must confront his own queerness and literally uncloset himself by entering Leonora’s bedroom. Here the triangulation of desires is completed—within an instant Williams is shot dead: “As he did this, certain dormant fragments of memory—a shadow at the window, a sound in the night—came to him. He said to himself that he knew all. But what it was he knew he could not have expressed. He was only certain that this was the end” (126).

Deafness has moved through the novel as a kind of contagion, plaguing and breaking down what Penderton calls his body’s “diseased obsession” (110). Yet while it is the disease, it is also the cure—even if it leads to death. And death, arguably, is the only real silence. To exist we isolate what horrifies us; when we can no longer do so, we are confronted with our own grotesqueness. In *Reflections* this grotesque, the failure to isolate leads to a bleeding of

the senses, a moment of *jouissance*, if you will, where those “eccentric occurrences” of the body can speak—even if they can be neither heard nor understood. The queer body must become the deaf body—no longer disembodied, written on, but annihilated. The recurring figures of obsession from the red-haired man to the soldier (neither of whom are given a name) all literalize the un-speaking body and the violence that comes from silencing—leaving only lifeless, silent bodies offered (or ultimately taken).

CHAPTER THREE:
“YOU DO NOT SPEAK OR WRITE”:
THE TONGUELESS WORD IN JOY KOGAWA’S *OBASAN*

And I have known the eyes already, known them all—/The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase.

—T.S. Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”

Why the whispering in your cold ear—words, words, words, as if silence isn’t enough. Silence our proper meeting place.

—John Edgar Wideman, *The Cattle Killing*

“If you tell lies,” Naomi is warned, “the king bird cuts your tongue in half and you can’t talk. That’s what it did to the birds. All they can say now is ‘twit twit’” (Kogawa 167-68). The King bird is a cannibalistic (in)version of the “barbarous king” Tereus, making bird-like executions for violations of speech. Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan* follows Naomi Nakane, a thirty-six year old Sansei⁷⁷ woman, and her repressed memories of the evacuation, relocation and dispersal of Canadian citizens of Japanese ancestry during the Second World War through a poetic and painful engagement with silence and speech. The novel’s King bird returns our attention to T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, particularly the still, visual narrative in “A Game of Chess”:

Above the antique mantel was displayed
As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene
The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king
So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale
Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
And still she cried, and still the world pursues,
“Jug Jug” to dirty ears. (2.97-103)

Philomel's song of violence, here and in "The Fire Sermon"—"twit twit twit/ Jug jug jug jug jug jug/ So rudely forc'd. / Tereu" (2.203-06)—relies on both onomatopoeia and vocative referent to verbalize her accusation. Our "dirty ears" hear the staccato of speaking without a tongue. Naomi too, like the nightingale transformation of Philomela, seeks an "inviolable voice" to bring relief to the stone desert; the "living word" she seeks and the tongueless word have much in common. This chapter reads *Obasan* through Naomi's vexed relationship with the King bird to reveal her awakening into "voice" as one that neither involves speech nor hearing. First, I traverse Kogawa's version of *The Waste Land* to read the echoes of voicelessness as one of exile and embodiment. I suggest rethinking Virginia Woolf's *On Being Ill* as a means to consider the material, speaking body. Moving from Woolf I engage critical readings of Asian American silences to apply look-listening to notions of "visible attendance" (Cheung). Ultimately, Naomi's realization that "the avenues of speech are the avenues of silence" comes as she confronts her nightmares as deafened moments and learns the gestures of speech.

Eliot's 1922 poem and Kogawa's 1981 novel both call attention not only to the affliction of voicelessness but to cultural demands for speech. Below the tapestry of Philomel, a wife pleads: "Speak to me. Why do you never speak? Speak" (2.112-14). Her husband, a man with "lidless eyes" (2.138) envisions dead rats and corpses from the trenches of the first World War. Naomi, whose Grand Inquisitor nightmare involves a merciless "prying of the eyes" (274), dreams of "a red red bird, tiny as an insect, trapped in a whirling well" (168). Rough Lock Bill asks Naomi: "Can't talk, eh? King bird got your tongue?"

(170); “Can’t hear you. Speak up.” (171). Like the more violent version of the tale in Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* Naomi writes her name as Lavinia⁷⁸: “I brush the wet sand off my hands and take the stick. NOMI, I print in large letters in the sand” (171). By writing her own name, however, Naomi has implicitly named herself. Her action pushes the connection further as Rough Lock makes a double comparison: “Like that old fella up past the mine. Never said a word. Almost like a mute, he was. But I heard him chirping one time just like a bird. Don’t you never talk?” (173). Under the shadow of watchful eyes Naomi’s speech belongs to an earlier moment just as the birds under the shadow of the King bird speak no more: “Birds could talk once. Bird language. But now all they can say is their own names” (173).

There is a distinction, however, between Eliot’s voicelessness and Kogawa’s. The King bird’s actions are not carnivorous, but defensive. Rough Lock calls attention to the difference between the grey-flanneled protagonists in *The Waste Land* and the dispossessed victims in *Obasan*: “But smart people don’t talk too much. Redskins know that. The King bird warned them a long time ago” (174). The warning here gets to the heart of the mandate for silence. While Eliot’s landscape has certainly been transported in *Obasan*, the conditions have changed. “See how quiet it is? A whole mountain full of birds and not a peep out of ‘em. Used to be a time there’d be music in the morning—enough to drive you deaf” (173). Voicelessness in *Obasan* is not one of the shift from rural silence to industrial noise, of the struggle to be heard above the din and machination of trench warfare and smokestacks, but voicelessness is the literal unvoicing and erasure caused by the stillness of internment and

betrayal. Writing her name in the sand and speaking with the tongue is a dangerous act because it implies both compliance and guilt. Words themselves are suspect.

While Naomi internalizes the King bird's warning, Aunt Emily's speech crowns her as the "word warrior." Also compared to a bird, Aunt Emily is tireless and full of language.

Flightless, her words, though not warbled, emerge as futile and even diseased:

All of Aunt Emily's words, all her papers, the telegrams and petitions, are like scratching in the barnyard, the evidence of much activity, scaly claws hard at work. But what good they do, I do not know—those little black typewritten words—rain words, cloud droppings. They do not touch us where we are planted here in Alberta, our roots clawing the sudden prairie air. The words are not made flesh. Trains do not carry us home. Ships do not return again. All my prayers disappear into space. (226)

This language of negation reveals words and writing as distant, unable to penetrate silence. They are the stone words that preface the novel and are mere "pockmarks on the earth" as effectual as "cloud droppings." Bird language continues to emerge throughout the novel from the yellow chicks in the yellow peril game (180-81); the slow and merciless torture of the chicken against the national anthem; to the Bantam Rooster's "choked chirp" signaling the end of the war. This waste land makes enemies of its victims and pushes the dispossessed further and further into silence. The "victory" that ended the war produces this "fact" as Japanese-Canadians (regardless of citizenship or home) were forced further into the Canadian interior: "families already fractured and separated were permanently destroyed" (219). The narrative of these four years of postwar confinement in Alberta cannot be reconciled on paper and as such is condensed in the close quarters of one chapter

with the chicken coop as metonym. This is a narrative of the voicelessness that comes with exile as Naomi remembers her journey as Goldilocks who can never return home, travelling with the “despised rendered voiceless” on “a trainload of eyes covered with mud and spittle” (132). Even Sensei’s voice “loud and powerful but barely to be heard” (153) cannot break the stone.

Language, like the “choked chirp,” fails to speak the body. Naomi’s vocal resistance reveals an awareness that language assumes an idealized, whole body (Normalcy 103). Her metaphors call attention to both the impossibility of this ideal body and the difficulty of recuperating its fragments in language. Moreover, Naomi’s exile mirrors Virginia Woolf’s experience of illness and embodiment both inside and outside her body. She too is the “creature within”:

All day, all night the body intervenes; blunts or sharpens, colours or discolours, turns to wax in the warmth of June, hardens to tallow in the murk of February. The creature within can only gaze through the pane—smudged or rosy; it cannot separate off from the body like the sheath of a knife or the pod of a pea for a single instant; it must go through the whole unending procession of changes, heat and cold, comfort and discomfort, hunger and satisfaction, health and illness, until there comes the inevitable catastrophe; the body smashes itself to smithereens, and the soul (it is said) escapes. But of all this daily drama of the body there is no record. (Woolf *OBI* 4)

Naomi’s narrative is inextricable from the passage of the “daily drama of the body”—the “procession of changes” from the cool serenity of Vancouver to the hardening labor of the Alberta beet fields. The experience of evacuees gives new meaning to the “whole unending procession of changes” wrecked upon the body. Despite her desire to do so Naomi “cannot separate off from the body like the sheath of a knife or the pod of a pea for a single instant”;

“The hardship is so pervasive, so inescapable, so thorough” she remembers, painfully resurrecting the body of heat and discomfort. She is nothing but the sheath or the pod: “All the oil in my joints has drained out and I have been invaded by dust and grit from the fields and mud is in my bone marrow. I can’t move anymore. My fingernails are black from scratching the scorching day and there is no escape” (232). The “record” of this “daily drama” is unbearable.

Aunt Emily’s demand to “speak” of this time casts the “word warrior” as surgeon, carving mercilessly into Naomi’s scalp: “I cannot tell about this time, Aunt Emily. The body will not tell” (234). Naomi “cannot tell” because “the body cannot tell”; Emily’s actions are envisioned as literally trying to separate speaking self from her embodied self—forcefully removing the knife from its protective sheath. Such an act of separation implies death. Naomi uses metaphor, then, as a means to separate language from her body; linguistic referral defers her body from contact with speech. Naomi’s memory of dispersal and disappearance returns as metaphor: she remembers her body as “a flag fraying against the sky. Or a scarecrow or a skeleton in the wind” (228); Uncle is a sphinx, boxer, statue; they are all “like the remains of dinosaurs” fossilized into insects and dehumanized into machines (234). Her memory does not surface except as a veiled recollection of “sleep walk years.” The shortening of names (241) further attests the distance and removal of speech.

Kogawa presents not only a metaphoric novel of silence, but one laden with the material, the affliction of which is key to many disability theorists who insist upon a bodily recuperation of the disabled subject left behind in poststructuralism’s “celebration” of

transgressive and deviant bodies (Erevelles 96)⁷⁹. *Obasan* implicitly resists such a “celebration.” The novel, in fact is teeming with the bodies of disability: Stephen’s lame leg; Obasan’s hearing impairment; Father’s diseased body; Uncle’s dead body; and the disabled bodies disfigured and devastated in Nagasaki. The litter of corporeal bodies in the novel are the “actively repressed *memento mori* for the fate of the normal body” (Davis *Reader* 1) and of the mother’s abjected body.

Haunting the text is Naomi’s mother; her body materializes as the very “real” corpus and flesh of the text, always already impossibly remembered. Hers is an unnamable body that demands silence to shield the wounds: “The woman was utterly disfigured. Her nose and one cheek were almost gone. Great wounds and pustules covered her entire face and body. She was completely bald. She sat in a cloud of flies, and maggots wriggled among her wounds” (Kogawa 286). It is the repressed “disfigured” body that is marked by absences and abscesses of flesh—unidentifiable but by the only sound emitted from this body: “As Grandma watched her, the woman gave her a vacant gaze, then let out a cry. It was my mother” (Kogawa 286). This cry is the only moment in which mother is “heard”; neither speech nor text, it is a mirror of Naomi’s memory of voice. “[E]ngulfed by knowing” (abandoned on a raft to drown) Naomi accesses the speech “from that amniotic deep” attached to the dream of a “sensate sea” in the novel’s prologue. “From somewhere in my body, a sound comes out intended as a cry—but deep and guttural like the growl of an animal. Again and again I am plunged and twirled in the frantic dizziness” (176)⁸⁰. Naomi’s “deep and guttural”⁸¹ voice is the gurgling of the ant-like red bird from her dream. For the

silence of the mother is never broken, even as Sensei tells Naomi: “listen, your mother is speaking” (Kogawa 282) the mother’s voice is not heard. Her “voice” comes via Sensei’s translation of Grandmother’s letters, which speak against the mother’s doubly removed vow of silence as the translated letter is further translated by Naomi’s narration. Naomi, then, must learn how to understand language outside of the violence suggested by the protective mandate of the King bird and the nightmare of the Grand Inquisitor in order not to be implicated as the Inquisitor herself.

In *Articulate Silences*, the first sustained critical examination of silence in female Asian-American texts, King-Kok Cheung has called attention to Joy Kogawa’s use of silence as an indication of her, and Naomi’s, distrust of “logocentric certainties” (136)—namely, the hierarchy of speech and silence⁸². Like the warning of the King bird Naomi is acutely aware that language “no matter how inaccurate and distorted carries material consequences” (Cheung 139). Thus Naomi is caught in what Trinh calls “Double mischief: unspoken and unable to speak, woman in exile with herself. Stolen language will always remain that other’s language” (20). In a narrative in which “voice” has been obliterated by government mandate the only way that these traumatic narratives can be told is through a language that doesn’t involve writing or speech. Cheung argues that silence is key to this telling. Borrowing Elaine Showalter’s use of “double-voiced discourse,” she reveals the destabilizing narrative tactics of silence employed by female Asian-American authors. These silences must be attended to and can themselves be articulate. She offers not a unilateral reading of silence

but suggests that silence be read as having different modalities and that textual silences, authorial hesitations, and silent gestures “count” as voice.

In her reading of Kogawa, Cheung suggests the use of “attentive silences” which are associated with the “visible attendance” tied to the maternal tradition. These silences are “anticipatory acts” that are performed without speaking as an act of humility and reverence for the recipient to avoid casting embarrassment or shame (148). Attentive silence is linked to the trope of movement, inherent in Obasan who provides Naomi “travel” to a silent territory (149). Through Obasan, Cheung argues, Kogawa “textualizes the inaudible” (149) and makes silence a figure of speech. Silences are more than spaces in the text and Cheung seems to suggest via the modalities of silence a distinction between the absence of sound and the absence of voice; absence of sound suggests a “space” of silence while absence of “voice” suggests a person does not make sound—of the two, absence of voice is most clearly a threat to language (Davis *Normalcy* 118).

Useful for understanding the connection is Traise Yamamoto’s reading of Mitsue Yamada’s haiku—notably a seventeen syllable picture—*Desert Run* in “Different Silence(s).” Yamamoto explains: “silence is often configured in visual and spatial terms; in such an equation, silence equals invisibility or the position of outsider” but Yamada’s poem “realigns silence with visibility, reclaiming it from absence. Silence is healer here, signifies not the absence of self but the complete presence of it” (“Different” 142). This is precisely the shift implied when considering deafness as critical modality—silence is no longer the place of absence but in reconfiguring the terms of visuality and space there is language and presence.

Yamamoto closes her reading of Asian American politics of location with a reading of *Obasan* and explains that “Naomi comes to understand that the ‘powerful voicelessness’ (Kogawa 32) that has sealed the past and projected it, missile-like, through her life can also be the silence that dances, moves, listens speaks” (142-43). The key to this living silence are gestures that signify without sound

Look, for example at a defining moment of attentive silence:

Above my bed with the powdery blue patchwork quilt is a picture of a little girl with a book in her lap, looking up into a tree where a bird sits. One of the child’s hands is half raised as she watches and listens, attending the bird. (64)

Like Septimus’ listening with his hand up, the child’s hand is “half raised” in a gesture that ties looking and listening in its attendant silence. The girl and the bird suggest a peaceful evocation of Philomela who speaks with “speechless lips” and whose story is understood because “she made her hand serve for her voice” (Ovid 49). Both narratives clearly connect the use of hand as a vehicle of signaling attendance in a double move of expressive gesture and receptive listening.

This picture suggests a means for speaking the body without voice. I move to consider Cheung’s “visible attendance”—a modality of silence—in terms of critical deafness and further distinguish silence from stillness. Silent gestures, as this larger dissertation argues, suggest an embodiment that transcends language as opposed to a language that transcends the body. For Naomi this means the difference between metaphor and metonym and access to a language that acknowledges the inability to escape from the body. To

consider silence through this deafened lens I return to “priceless talk” and my deployment of look listening: “We looked very steadfastly at each other as though we had reached some durable relationship, independent of the changes of the body, through the eyes.” Woolf’s passage can be reconsidered in terms of “Yoku ki ga tsuku ne” from Naomi’s memory of “mother’s and Grandma’s alert and accurate knowing”; “It is a statement in appreciation of sensitivity and appropriate gestures” (68). Obasan, too, a keeper of silence “remains in a silent territory, defined by her serving hands” (271)⁸³. Obasan moves in a silent space but still communicates with her hands—she is not still. This embodiment through the eyes rejects the assumptions of the speaking body especially when narrating racialized, disabled, gendered material bodies.

Look-listening is epitomized by the yellow chicks that at any moment will be picked to death by the White Hen:

If anything goes overhead—a cloud, an airplane, the King bird—they all seem to be connected to one another like a string of Christmas-tree lights. Their orange eyes are in unison, and each head is crooked at an angle watching the overshadowing death. They stop for a moment, then carry on as death passes by. (181)

Like the barren landscape of *The Waste Land* that both is and is not the Canadian interior of exile, this moment is both like and unlike Woolf’s look-listening. Like the shared reading of aerial smoke letters in *Mrs. Dalloway* it effects a communal pause. But it is also a protective, racialized silence that speaks more to exclusion than to communion.

Naomi wonders “Who is it who teaches me that in the language of eyes a stare is an invasion and a reproach?” (58). Like her Aunt Emily and Father, she is “visually bilingual. I too learn the second language” (58). This “second language” is what surfaces in Naomi’s narrative of the self. Her understanding of silence comes as she defines this “language of the eyes” through moments of contrast and negation. She remembers riding with her mother on a streetcar:

I see a man sitting hunched forward, his elbows on his knees. He is looking around quizzically, one dark eyebrow higher than the other. When our eyes meet, he grins and winks. I turn away instantly, startled into discomfort again by my eyes. My mother’s eyes look obliquely to the floor, declaring that on the streets, at all times, in all public places, even a glance can be indiscreet. But a stare? Such a lack of decorum, it is clear is as unthinkable as nudity on the street. (58)

But Naomi contrasts this with an attentive look listening in the intimacy of family: “On the other hand, nudity at home is completely thinkable. Grandma Kato is in the bathtub with me. The water is so hot the skin reddens instantly” (58). Naomi describes the “sweet torture, with Grandma happy and approving and enjoying the heat I cannot endure” and admits she “will suffer endless indignities of the flesh for the pleasure of [her] grandmother’s pleasure” (59). The experience of the bath is one of immersion and “torpid peace” (59):

My body is extended beside hers and she makes waves to cover my shoulders. Once the body is fully immersed, there is a torpid peace. We lie in this state forever.

At some point, Grandma has opened her eyes and rolled her washcloth into a tight damp fist. I stand beside her and over the redness of my body she scrubs vigorously, like an eraser over a dirty page. The dead

skin collects in little rolls and falls off into the water. She exclaims at the rolls.

“Look at this!” Her voice is full of curiosity and amusement and this cleansing and she makes mock cries of alarm at my dirtiness. She rubs each of my fingers, my hands, arms, chest, belly and abdomen, neck, back, buttocks, thighs, legs, ankles, the soles of the feet, between the toes. Then I soak again, watching as Grandma towels herself the same way. (59)

This language “that does not promote hysteria” becomes even more important in this time of exile; it is soothing, safe. Learning how to look-listen is key to Naomi’s telling and the answer to hearing the silent word.

Consider too the contrast in looking between Mrs. Sujimoto and her mother in a time of crisis. After the White Hen mercilessly picked its yellow chicks to death Mother’s gestures are telling:

With swift deft fingers, Mother removes the live chicks first, lacing them in her apron. All the while that she acts there is calm efficiency in her face and she does not speak. Her eyes are steady and matter-of-fact—the eyes of Japanese motherhood. They do not invade and betray. They are eyes that protect. . . (71)

Not only are her “eyes steady” and protective but her “swift deft fingers” further communicate and embrace. Mrs. Sujimoto’s “face is not matter-of-fact like Mother’s. Her eyes search my face. Her glance is too long. She notes my fear, invades my knowing” (71). Mrs. Sujimoto’s speech is made rabid by her sharp teeth, spittle and the exaggerated use of her tongue “making ‘ff’ sounds” as she breathes (71). Even as an adult, Naomi encounters these glances that seek out her fear—from the students in her classroom to Mrs. Barker’s darting eyes, restless “like a pair of trick glasses” (209).

Perhaps the most telling moments of look-listening, though, are archival; they are counter-narratives to the government documents and letters to the RCMP and offer embodied presence in a narrative wrought with absence. These, of course, are the photographs that allow Naomi to engage memory and the body. Photographs illustrate the complexities of looking:

In the picture I am clinging to my mother's leg on a street corner in Vancouver. A small boy is standing hugging a lamppost and is staring at us. His thumb is in his mouth. I am mortified by the attention. I turn my face away from everyone. My mother places her cool hand on my cheek, its scent light and flowery. She whispers that the boy will laugh at me if I hide. Laugh? There is no worse horror. Laughter is a cold spray that chills the back of my neck, that makes the tears rush to my eyes. My mother's whisper flushes me out of my hiding place behind the softness of her silk dress. Only the sidewalk is safe to look at. It does not have eyes. (57)

For Naomi the photograph of her mother is both the reminder of the safety of touch—she hides “clinging to her mother’s leg”—and the terror of invasion—she is “mortified” by the boy’s threatening stare. Naomi recalls searching for safety: “Only the sidewalk is safe to look at. It does not have eyes.” The horror, here, though, seems less the looking than the “cold spray” of laughter that “chills” her neck⁸⁴; it is the sound which causes “tears.” Her mother’s cool touch and silky dress serve as a protective balm. Notably, though, her mother’s gesture: “her cool hand on my cheek, its scent light and flowery” is a motion to look. And key to the photograph is the mother’s enduring gesture that allows Naomi a visual memento of her mother’s body. She clings to its image; it is testament of her mother’s “eyes that protect.”

Likewise, when Penny Barker asks about her Father, Naomi's speech is a corrective utterance—"My father's dead"—causing shock and violence: "a few moments after I say it I find myself collapsed on the sofa with a sharp pain in my abdomen and a cold perspiration forming on my forehead" (252). The recovery comes when she is able to look at the photograph and tie the facts to images: "After this, when my eyes pass over the few framed photographs on the kitchen sideboard, I stop and examine the small black-and-white snapshot of a graveyard scene" (252-253). Kogawa illustrates the difference between knowing and speech as Naomi "tells" of this time for the first time in the narrative. The "facts" of her father's death emerge as a slideshow of images, and he appears to Naomi in a "snapshot" of a man "holding a pick with flowers tied to a handle" as an image recalling the presence of father via memory. Her brother Stephen explains: "He worked with Dad on the roads and always remembered how Dad stuck flowers on his pick to remind him of us and Mother" (253). In a novel with a resistant narrator the story unfolds not by "telling," but by Naomi's act of assembling these photographs: "If I search the caverns of my mind, I come to a collage of images—somber paintings, a fireplace, and a mantel clock with a heavy key like a small metal bird that fits in my palm" (61). Her story is one that she can hold in her hand and she offers it to us, the reader, much in the same way Clarissa Dalloway imagines her own life carried in her arms as an offering. In a sense, then, there is an implicit look-listening involved in reading *Obasan* between the reader and Naomi.

Finally, the key to the tongueless word and the crucial moment of look-listening is found with Naomi's fear and fascination with the Grand Inquisitor, a masochistic figure

whose violence is tied to the sundering of sound and silence and who neither speaks nor hears.

Was it then that the nightmare began? The skin of the air became close and dense, a formless hair vest. Up from a valley there rose a dark cloud—a great cape. It was the Grand Inquisitor descending over us, the top of his head a shiny skin cap. With his large hands he was prying open my mother’s lips, prying open my eyes. (273)

The final of three “speaking dreams” in *Obasan*, the nightmare of the Grand Inquisitor reveals the violent asphyxiation of the unutterable; to Naomi, the hesitant narrator, nocturnal silences bring death: “We die again and again. In my dreams, we are never safe enough” (Kogawa 273). The Grand Inquisitor appears after a vision of her mother with a “knotted string stem” in her mouth; at the end of the stem “hung a rose, red as a heart” (273). As her mother pulls the flower closer to her lips Naomi literally falls out of her mother’s mouth, cries out and awakens. This not only resuscitates her memory of drowning but echoes the “deep and guttural” cries of the body. The dream serves as a critical moment of deafness in the novel, a moment whose violence and terror are inextricable from the sundering of sound and voice by the masochistic figure that likewise neither speaks nor hears:

The Grand Inquisitor was carnivorous and full of murder. His demand to know was both a judgment and a refusal to hear. The more he questioned her, the more he was her accuser and murderer. The more he killed her, the deeper her silence became. What the Grand Inquisitor has never learned is that the avenues of speech are the avenues of silence. To hear my mother, to attend her speech, to attend the sound of stone, he must first become silent. Only when he enters her abandonment will he be released from his own. (Kogawa 274)

Naomi's realization that "the avenues of speech are the avenues of silence" comes with the "prying open" of her eyes as if to suggest a different modality for accessing language. The Grand Inquisitor himself is marked most notably as critically, rather than literally, deaf in his "refusal to hear." Naomi, as the Grand Inquisitor, has the potential to be the deafened critic returned to a "more transgressive role, toward the imperative of Cixous and Trinh to 'write the body'" (105) and "attend" to her mother's silence outside of the normalizing system of blindness/insight whose deafness works as a "signifier for the absence of language" (107). But this recovery is violent and requires violence: "we must kill the false woman who is preventing the live one from breathing. Inscribe the breath of the whole woman" (Cixous 351). This is "the inevitable catastrophe; the body smashes itself to smithereens, and the soul (it is said) escapes" (Woolf *OBI* 4). In her notorious "Laugh of the Medusa" Cixous suggests both that the body still holds the possibility of the pre-linguistic and that a recovery of the "confiscated" body is possible. "There is a hidden and always already in woman the source; the locus for the other" (352)—not the overbearing "clutchy" mother, but "what touches you, the equivoice that affects you, fills your breast with an urge to come to language and launches your force" (352). The "other" *unheimlich* here, of course, is the body of the disabled, the repressed notion of the body as unwhole; for where do we find the disabled body but in our home and in the possibility of our bodies. As Naomi seeks to understand her dream and the role of the Grand Inquisitor in making the silence speak she recalls this gesture:

Once I came across two ideographs for the word 'love.' The first contained the root words 'heart' and 'hand' and 'action'—love as hands and heart in action together. The other ideograph, for 'passionate love,' was formed of 'heart,' 'to tell,' and 'a long thread.' (273)

Her mother's tale "is a rose with a tangled stem" but this is Naomi's tale as well. To understand and make the silence speak Naomi must not only encounter this deafened moment but literally consider love as a gesture of the hands and movement. She must become silent and look-listen rather than simply hear what comes from her mouth—if she does so she will see the rose that allows her to speak.

CODA:
BLINDLY LOOK-LISTENING

Closure and openness, again, are one ongoing process: we do not have bodies, we are our bodies, and we are ourselves while being in the world.

—Trinh T. Minh-Ha, *Woman, Native, Other*

I just adapted to every situation, I could be any role. And I was that role—at least for a while. I was my mother when I had to interpret for her, I was my father when I had to interpret for him.

—“Jim,” informant in *Mother Father Deaf*

Since this project began there have been significant moves in the discourse emerging as Deaf Studies—of particular note is the *Deaf Studies Digital Journal* launching “a new era of bilingual scholarship that will set the standard for academic discourse in signed languages.” In a letter of introduction presented as a digital media file in ASL, Ben Bahan and Dirksen Bauman emphasize their “hope that DSDJ signals the final note in putting to rest the myths regarding the inherent inferiority of manual languages”⁸⁵. I want to conclude here—looking forward from this multi-dimensional, deafened vantage point. My roots come in the very definition of CODA itself—in the “Deaf World” it is the acronym for Child of a Deaf Adult, who contrary to collective belief is not genetically predisposed to deafness, but is usually a hearing child whose first, and home language is sign. Paul Preston’s ethnography *Mother Father Deaf*—the reflexive ASL phrase describing CODAs—was my bridge from personal narrative to public discourse. Preston unveils a latent connection between sign language and memory, encapsulated in this explanation: “Through signing, I remember a long time ago. I can feel the memories in my hands”(Preston 135). These recollections of native signers reveal signing as a “kinesthetically accessed realm of nostalgia and memories”

(135). Preston's insights culled from conversations with CODAs, whom he labels "informants," brings to light⁸⁶ what philosophers, linguists, poets, critics have been grappling with but what native signers have known all along: "sign language is not merely a language of the hands; it involves the entire face and body. Gestures, body postures, and facial expressions can have specific cultural meanings and associations"; sign language, too is outside of the restrictive focus of audist definitions of language and to assume a narrow meaning for the action of language ignores "realms of sound and silence" (135). Domains, I hope, that are not new at the end of this study.

Much of the critical direction of this dissertation springs from interactions with Deaf poets and intellectuals—in particular Lawrence R. Newman: former president of the NAD (National Association of the Deaf), writer of critical essays on behalf of cultural Deafness and poet whose ode "The Ballet of the Hands" merges the personal and political implications of signing⁸⁷. It is notable that I met him as a sign language interpreter for an introduction to ASL course at the local community college; it was my role to "voice" his personal narrative. From Newman I was given one of the highest compliments as an interpreter—my ability to "read" his expressive gestures allowed him to freely narrate his story. As a CODA, reading this language of the body is innate⁸⁸. Speaking, on the other hand, especially "speaking for" others (as I often did for my parents) has its own risks and consequences.

The key critic I engage throughout this dissertation, Lennard Davis, Victorianist-turned-Disability-guru, was introduced to me through memoir. His reflections as a CODA

in *My Sense of Silence*⁸⁹ were familiar, and his ability to push his revelations critically has been a guide throughout this research. Indeed, the prospectus and research for this dissertation began as a response to Davis' invitation in "Deafness and Insight": "This chapter, it is hoped, is a prolegomenon of sorts to a future study of the complex interactions between the body, the text, and the world" (*Normalcy* 125). This is the overlap between CODA and coda—the latter defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "the passage of more or less independent character introduced after the completion of the essential parts of a movement, so as to form a more definite and satisfactory conclusion" ("Coda"). This conclusion, then, has both the genealogy of deafness and a contrapuntal diversion in mind as it hopes to find a "satisfactory" means to close this "movement." As a CODA writing this coda, I re-extend the prolegomenon by offering "look listening" as a response that considers how critical deafness can work to move us not only beyond social models of disability but can engage twenty and twenty-first century literature dynamically considering feminist studies, race, queer theory and a postmodern disability studies.

Disability studies, too, as a larger—if not contentious—umbrella is defining itself as crucial to critical ways of thinking beyond static terms. Coming out of post-structural readings to bear on social models of inquiry; these new theoretical engagements give "disability studies greater historical and theoretical depth and gives poststructuralism a much-needed specificity with regard to theories of the 'normal body'" (Bérubé "Side Shows" x). Davis asserts in *Bending Over Backwards: Disability, Dismodernism, and Other Difficult Positions* that such a move effectively replaces identity politics with "dismodernism"⁹⁰. From this

perspective the humanities, popular culture, and literary theory can begin to interrogate “the grotesque, the gaze, the dialogic, visual theory”(Davis “Crips” 96). Disability (re)emerges prominently at the turn of the new millennium, already heralded as “a new age of uncertainty, for which we need a new language” (Corker and Shakespeare 1). It seems we are on the cusp of another linguistic crisis; “dismodernism,” a kind of postmodern, postcolonial, modernism suggests as much as it revisits our very assumptions of language itself—language launched a century ago to make sense of a changing era. Both the modern language and the postmodern body are destabilized;

Disability (in its mutability, its potential invisibility, its potential relation to temporality and its sheer variety) is a particularly elusive element to introduce to any conjectural analysis, not because it is so distinct from sexuality, class, race, gender and age but because it is already so complexly intertwined with everything else. (Bérubé "Another Word" vii)

In fact, if we put disability in conversation with gendered, sexed, classed and raced turn of the century queries we see that they are always already collaborating.

David Eng in “The End(s) of Race” marks our modern moment as one that is “color-blind” due to the whitewashing of these disparities that “apparently no longer matter” despite continuing struggles with the legacies of empire (Eng 1279). This “modern narrative of freedom,” he argues, is only made possible via what he terms a “dialectic of disappearance.” This narrative is not new, for “ever since the Enlightenment, race has always appeared as disappearing” (1480) while the stakes of erasure become more complex. Disability, too, might be said as fighting to appear, or perhaps is always stubbornly reappearing. In *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* Robert McRuer notes that

the end of the millennium has brought about what he terms “flexible bodies”: “gay bodies that no longer mark absolute deviance, heterosexual bodies that are newly on display” which demand “heteronormative epiphanies” that “are repeatedly and often necessarily, able-bodied ones” (12-13). Like Eng’s color blindness, this is a restorative queer blindness emerging as part of a larger “dominant strategic response” marked by a “rhetoric of healing” to restore heterosexuality (14).

The problem, then, of the twentieth century is not, McRuer cleverly articulates, the “color line” but “heterosexual separation and reunification” (15) resolved by epiphanies which require “flexible bodies” to restore wholeness. Crisis is managed and averted, then, by a similar erasure. The crisis must be made visible, however, and care must be made to avoid calling attention to the “fragmentation and multiplicity it effects” which would be “to perform—or act out—inflexibility” (17). Both Eng and McRuer call attention to the sacrificial bodies needed to reify homogeneity; moreover, both offer critical and conceptual notions of difference as strategies performed by othered bodies. Eng, through a reading of Monique Truong’s *The Book of Salt*—a retelling of Gertrude Stein’s 1930s Paris through the “fictionalized composite” (Eng 1481) of her queer Vietnamese cook Binh, “an exiled queer and a queer exile” (1480)—suggests the novel draws attention “to who and what must be forgotten so that the high modernism exemplified by Stein and Toklas might come to be affirmed” (1481). He reads the novel as an “archive of traces” (1480) that perform the “dialectic of disappearance,” marking moments that force a “crisis in historicism” by bringing together “dissonant desires” (1483). Eng engages Truong in order to identify the

“conceptual category” of “queer diaspora” which exists “outside the boundaries of territorial sovereignty and in excess of sanctioned social arrangements” (1481); “queer desire is not peripheral but central to the narration of race, modernity and the politics of history” (1481).

Similarly, McRuer suggests a critically queer perspective as a corrective against an era of “new, improved, and flexible homophobia and ableism” (28). Such a perspective “could presumably mobilize the inevitable failure to approximate the norm, collectively ‘working the weaknesses in the norm’ to use Butler’s phrase⁹¹” (30). A critically disabled position, then, would call attention to ableism as critically deaf calls attention to audism and give agency to the disabled and Deaf who occupy these othered bodies. Deafness—often marked as an “invisible disability”—stubbornly persists, particularly when it emerges as a cultural and critical phenomenon despite medical and eugenic intervention. Both the Deaf and the queer person can be “outed,” so to speak, by behavior—one linguistic, one sexual—particularly, behavior revealed by and originating from a confrontation with the body⁹². McRuer labels this perspective via a play on the queer use of “fabulous” and the disability modifier “severe.” His explanation is worth noting:

Severe, though less common than *fabulous*, has a similar queer history: a severe critique is a fierce critique, a defiant critique, one that thoroughly and carefully reads a situation [. . .] ‘Severely disabled,’ according to such a queer conception, would reverse the able-bodied understanding of severely disabled bodies as the most marginalized, the most excluded from a privileged and always elusive normalcy, and would instead suggest that it is precisely those bodies that are best positioned to refuse ‘mere toleration’ and to call out the inadequacies of compulsory able-bodiedness⁹³. (30-31)

Compulsory heterosexuality, as well as notions of racial and gender equity are “always in danger of collapse” (31). Both McRuer and Eng suggest that such critical attention “can

continuously invoke, in order to further the crisis, the inadequate resolutions” (McRuer 31) on behalf of “color blindness,” ableism, sexism, and audism.

I want to conclude by building on Eng’s reading of *The Book of Salt*. I suggest a way to consider look-listening in the twenty-first century where we are no longer engaged with critical deafness, but as I propose, a kind of critical deaf-blindness. If Gertrude Stein “is the twentieth century” (Truong 209), then Binh is its twenty-first century echo. Stein was seeking a recovery of language wrought “through overuse and overfamiliarity, names lost their identities, which she was trying to recover” (Ramazani, Ellmann and O’Clair 177). Binh’s use of language via negation, repetition and the nondiscursive language of food and eating⁹⁴—“a pineapple is a pear not a pear”—destabilizes easy dualisms and identities while challenging aurality and visuality. For Binh knows, as Naomi intuits in *Obasan*, replacing one hegemonic linguistic system with another does not liberalize. Similarly, the queer and disabled body has been reintegrated into normate society to quiet the efficacy of counternarratives⁹⁵. A “severely disabled” critique is a kind of checkmate to this move—as McRuer’s *Crip Theory* takes back terms like “super crip” from both marginalization and fetishization. Look-listening in the modern era is a means to engage the body without censure, as I have argued, using the hands an expressive modality and the eyes as the receptive venue. In *The Book of Salt*, the tongue, rather than the eyes has become the receptive organ. This challenges not only audism but the visual politics of the body. What remains, most notably, is the hand as an expressive vehicle. I suggest look-listening emerges with deaf-blindness as its revised critical modality. Addressing the mistrust of visuality and

marking the body's role in listening, such a look-listening is a more intimate memoir of the body. For to communicate as a deaf blind is to use the hands to read the hands—literally reading in the dark. Critically vested it is a seeing and hearing outside of dominant discourse.

Eng's reading of visual reflection in *Salt* is such a moment of asymmetrical look-listening. The scene is Binh's initial encounter with Lattimore—his “Sunday” lover—in the Stein salon: Binh's looks in the mirror and sees himself beside Lattimore. Eng argues that this is *not* the Lacanian moment of *meconnaissance* but that this reflection “brings together two disparate spaces” making it so that “the temple of high modernism does not reflect on itself, Difference does not return on sameness” (1489). His key questions of such an irreducible moment are useful:

It asks how we might move beyond the dominance of the visual register itself, one overdetermining so many of our contemporary debates on race and the politics of recognition. By creating a mirror image of nonmimetic racial identity—Binh and Lattimore's asymmetrical reflection in the mirror stage of Stein's modernity—Truong opens up a queer terrain of racial belonging outside the authorized terms of a dominant representation. She unfolds a viewing practice that obviates the unremitting demand for mimetic fidelity to universal Euro-American aesthetic and political ideals. (1491)

Just as Virginia Woolf wished for another register outside of the masculine patriarchy of language Truong endows Binh with this in-between space—a looking that is not subsumed—and instead of color-blindness, we have deaf-blindness. For very little credence is given to the eyes and looking in the novel: from the questionable science of iridology (Lattimore's proposed profession) to the critique of praise upon appearance alone (Toklas' pre-sale lamb). In the study of the eye, also a looking at the I, Binh proves to be the better

iridologist and distinguishes himself from Lattimore as one who can “see” in the dark: “The pleasure that I take from your words, you cannot take from mine. You are unused to the darkness that surrounds you, stuffs itself into your ears, coats your tongue” (Truong 117). For Lattimore, darkness leaves him deaf and mute—unable to hear and unable to speak. He, unlike Binh, does not transcend through a critical “moment of deafness.” Binh, on the other hand, has learned to see in the dark and speak with his mouth full. Binh explains how he look-listens:

My comprehension, Sweet Sunday Man, is based mostly on my ability to look for the signals and interpret the signs. Words, I will grant you, are convenient, a handy shortcut to meaning. But too often, words limit and deny. For those of us who are better trained, we need only one and we can piece together the rest. We look for blood in the whites of your eyes. Anger, sadness, all of the emotional extremes register there first, a red spider web, a tangle of red rivulets. They all start there and then wash down your face, coloring your cheeks, your neck, the valley above your collarbone. For the subtler details, we consult the dark, round pools, lighter at the shallow edges and darker in the centers’ deep, where light collects and falls inside you. Lies, you should know, always float to the top, foreign objects that, for most people cause considerable discomfort and pain. There are some who are able to still the shift from side to side, calm the spasms of the irritated lids. (117-18)

Binh is very much the sign language interpreter—“look[ing] for the signals” of the body. Spoken words obstruct and veil truth that move through the body like light. But these hidden meanings are not found in the places of illumination, but in the pools of darkness. Lies, interestingly, erupt through the eyes as “spasm” attesting to distortions of sound and vision. As Binh reads signs in the dark he is aware of the hands’ power to reveal. When Stein asks: “Thin Bin, Is Lattimore a Negro?” he recalls such a reading: “They saw your

hands and immediately knew that you were no writer. Too clean and well groomed, they thought” (187). Just as the hands are key to origin, the voice is the mask: “Yes, I know that they could have concluded that just from hearing you speak, but my Mesdames are in this way like me. They never assume that words can tell them the whole story” (187). Further, like the distinction Carson McCullers makes between hearing and listening:

GertrudeStein could see from the way you held your head that you were hanging onto her every word, even as you were walking away. Not listening but hearing. Hearing but not listening. . . Later that evening, GertrudeStein reported your actions to Miss Toklas over a dish of my best Singapore ice cream. They both could taste the vanilla and the crystallized ginger, but only Miss Toklas could detect that there was something deeper, something that emerged as a lingering lace of a feeling on the tongue. (186)

The hands, of course, communicate most prominently as labor and nourishment in Binh’s role as a cook. Binh finds himself as a man without language, tunneling passages in the dark: “Language is a house with a host of doors, and I am too often uninvited and without the keys. But when I infiltrate their words, take a stab at their meanings, I create the trapdoors that will allow me in when the night outside is too cold and dark” (155). Words, when visible, are an appendage of the body and created out of necessity: “We will lie side by side, devising our own language. As in Sundays past we will push and pull at the only one we have in common. [. . .] We will throw all our words onto the table and find those saturated with meaning. [. . .] We will attempt to tell stories to each other with just one word. We will end up telling them on our bodies” (111); Words, when held in the hands are transparent, “water in my hands, reflective and clear” (111)

As a fictionalized memoir of a veiled memoir Binh echoes many of the informants of Preston's ethnography: "Through signing, I remember a long time ago. I can feel the memories in my hands"(Preston 135). Sign language, food and memory are inextricably kinesthetic:

I never forget that tasting is an indispensable part of cooking. [. . .] only a vigilant tongue can find that precise moment when there is nothing left to do but eat. For a less experienced cook, such a turn of events, the sudden absence of appetite, would be disastrous. Imagine a portrait painter who attempts to practice his art with his eyes sealed shut. I thankfully, am able to maintain the quality of my cooking with the help of my keen memory. My hands are able to recreate their movements from earlier times. (137)

Binh, having the memory of gesture and the deftness of hands, needs neither tongue nor sight to create. Deep within his own body the memory of his mother returns him to the enveloping safety of the womb and is marked in his consciousness as an embracing gesture: "In the dark, where my thoughts traveled without a trace of fear, I longed for her touch, for the look in her eyes when I parted the sheet of honey and stood before her"; "She sat down and wrapped herself around me, pressing my stooped back into hers. The gesture stopped time" (173). This is merged with the interlude of hands, kindness, death as the memory of watching a woman's warm hands suffocate a dying pigeon (219).

Finally, as the closing movement, I turn to the domestic space of the kitchen as a maternal place of birth and pre-linguistic speech. It is a moment that serves an addendum to look-listening by reintegrating the tongue's role as an "organ of truth" (Truong 178). However, the tongue is neither receptive nor expressive but ingestive. Binh explains Toklas' lesson of the pre-sale lamb as disabusing the validity of visibility:

Miss Toklas would never waste her words in this way. Admire the china pattern, the crystal wine goblets, the hothouse blooms, but never compliment the food on sight alone. Wait until it has reached your tongue. After all, the tongue is an organ of truth. It cannot pretend to find flavors where there are none. . . Miss Toklas is no fool. She knows and she expects that lamb on sight alone will be sure to disappoint . . . but the lamb is carved and it is eaten and it is never forgotten. (178)

Toklas' triumph is the triumph of the "vigilant tongue" over the speaking tongue; it casts new meaning to "lip reading." The hands are present as the invisible labor of both preparation and feeding. The tongue, no longer a vocative exit, becomes an ingestive rather than expressive organ providing a dark passageway; it is an entrance, rather than an expulsion, into the body.

Endnotes

¹ A consideration of the postmodern inheritor of Freud's psychoanalysis, Jacques Lacan, certainly seems appropriate here. For Lacan, "lack" is intrinsically tied to desire, notably in an unobtainable desire for the "other." Lacan's suggestion of language as tied to the symbolic order also resonates throughout this dissertation, most notably in my discussion of linguistics and the "deafened moment's" utility for defying hegemonic language. Particularly, I suggest that the use of "silent" or alternate languages offers a kind of literal "return" to the Lacanian real—the uncanny and "unspoken" shared reality beyond verbalization. So that voicelessness is both the anxiety of "lack" but also a potentially radical reversal of the Lacanian symbolic order by intimating that only language which does not depend on aural or auditory reception but can sustain meaning outside of the audist restraints of the symbolic order.

² Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* with its anxiety of speaking certainly anticipates these themes that emerge full force in *The Waste Land*.

³ In Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, Lavinia has her tongue cut out and her hands cut out so that she can neither speak nor gesture—and then after reading of Tereus and Philomel—holding Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in her "stumps" (4.1.29 ff) she is guided by Marcus to write with a staff in her mouth and write. Although T.S. Eliot called the play "one of the stupidest and most uninspired plays ever written" (Bevington 938) it is notable that the mouth then becomes a form not of speaking, but of writing.

⁴ Note R. Murray Schafer's concept of "schizophonia" in "soundscapes." Likewise, Paul Rodaway's sensual geographies suggest why the visual becomes so important in modernism: "The sounds of nature seem at times to have been relegated to a background, decorative rather than functional. Inside our buildings and cars, and even public squares and parks, we hide away from natural sounds by playing radios, televisions and compact disc players. In the city, the streets are full of the noise of traffic and the noise of machines dominates the work-place, whether it is on the farm, in the office or in the factory. Human sounds, intentional and unintentional, blanket out much of the auditory world around us. Much of auditory orientation is thus lost and perhaps it is no wonder that the eye gains such dominance over the ear in so many situations of everyday life" (155). This leads to "an auditory geography of hearing rather than listening, or juxtaposition rather than relationship. Much of it is characterized by human generated sounds, many of which are synthesized and repeated incessantly" (158).

⁵ See Roland Barthes, “Lesson in Writing.”

⁶ The foundations of which lead to post structuralism and the philosophies of Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, Kristeva, and Barthes whose ideas are important to the arguments made later in this dissertation.

⁷ These ideas were later published in *Course in General Linguistics* (1916).

⁸ Chapter One will discuss in more detail the disjunction between the acknowledgement that signifiers do not depend on spoken utterance and the requisite of “arbitrariness” that impedes the acknowledgment of signed languages as a valid language.

⁹ Elizabeth Bowen notes the absence of more feminist critical inquiry into their relationship and cites Mansfield as Woolf’s “missing contemporary”. See also Claire Tomalin, Patricia Moran.

¹⁰ “Damn Katherine! Why can’t I be the only woman who knows how to write?” Written in a letter 13 Feb 1921 to Katherine Mansfield *CS1167a* (Lee *Woolf* 390); Upon her death “She felt depressed, disappointed, flat: there seemed ‘no point in writing any more.’ The echo had gone: ‘Katherine won’t read it. Katherine’s my rival no longer.’ The loss of the rival was as important as the loss of the friend. ‘There’s no competitor. I’m a cock—a lonely cock whose crowing nothing breaks—of my walk’ ” (Lee *Woolf* 393, *D* 28 January 1923 2, 228).

¹¹ In *Word of Mouth*, Patricia Moran exhibits these passages to emphasize the way in which each woman felt ambivalently tied to the complex metaphors of the maternal symbolic; Woolf and Mansfield, Moran asserts, both believed in “textuality and technique as a means of escaping from the confines of the body [. . .] promis[ing] a leap *out* of female embodiment.” In particular, Moran calls attention to Woolf’s use of the term “disembodied” to engage a *discussion of the* somatophobia—fear of the female body—inherent in the fiction of these complex women writers (17).

¹² Katherine arguably could be the “absent center” here as upon her death (see note above) she is left without a rival, without someone to write to that shares her sensibilities of what it means to be a woman who writes among men.

¹³ “deaf” refers to the audiological condition of deafness while “Deaf” denotes the sociological identification of deaf persons with a larger deaf culture primarily identified by their use of Sign Language. See However, there is no “universal” Sign Language, as there are sign languages as diverse as spoken languages, but when being specific I am referring to

ASL: American Sign Language for which there has been done the most linguistic research and of which I am familiar. BSL: British Sign Language has also been widely theorized and is internationally known. See Stokoe and Ladd in particular for more discussion.

¹⁴ For a discussion of “autopathography”: autobiographical narratives of illness and/or disability in terms of disability studies see Couser and also Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick.

¹⁵ Neville, “the poet” from *The Waves* voices a challenge to the symbolic order’s ability to make meaningful declarations of truth: “These roaring waters [. . .] are more stable than the wild, the weak and inconsequent cries that we utter when, trying to speak, we rise; when we reason and jerk out these false sayings, ‘I am this; I am that!’ Speech is false” (138).

¹⁶ Woolf makes a similar statement in “Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown” (1924) where critiques the Edwardian writers for their narrow parameters of fiction that exclude women’s voices and “human nature”: “But we cannot hear her mother’s voice, or Hilda’s voice; we can only hear Mr. Bennet’s voice telling us facts about rents and freeholds and copyholds and fines” (753).

¹⁷ Bauman perceptively notes that Derrida “ventriloquizes” deafness “through the ‘voices’ of others: Hegel, Leibniz, Rousseau, and Saussure”; “while he considers logocentrism to be ‘the most original and powerful ethnocentrism’ (3) he does not follow this statement to its most severe sociopolitical manifestation: audism” (318, 19).

¹⁸ There is an entire history of philosophers fascinated with the potentials for the language of the deaf as a more natural language of the body. Leonardo da Vinci in “Treatise on Painting” had suggested more specifically than Benjamin that the language of painters should mimic the language of the deaf: “painters might learn how to give authentic expressiveness to their depictions of the human body by copying the motions of the dumb, who speak with movements of their hands and eyes and eyebrows and their whole person, in their desire to express that which is in their minds” (qtd. in Rée: 120, note 9). This seems to anticipate literary modernists’ desire for the “authentic” that escaped syntax.

In particular, philosophers from Montaigne, Descartes, Bacon were interested in the idea of gestural signs as an alternative to spoken language; “Gestures, in other words, were the primitive original of language, the source of all linguistic sources and the prelinguistic root of etymology itself” (122). John Bulwer, a chirographer (chironomia: “the artivically managing of the hand”) believed that “spoken languages were essentially degenerate and confused” and that the natural languages of the hand were a means of circumventing “the crafty brocage of the tongue” (ctd Rée 124, from “Chirlogia” 5) and Bulwer’s 1628 “Philocophus: or the Deafe and Dumb Mans Friend”: “You want not speech who have your whole body for a tongue” (ctd p.130, note 3, from *Philocophus* pp A3-4); Condillac in 1746 offers sign language

as a language of action and seems to suggest a kind of stream of consciousness: “in spoken language, you could not portray a moment of mingled feelings . . . without separating them one by one in a temporal sequence of words, even though the various ideas obviously do not come one after another in our minds” (ctd p 133, note 12; from Condillac *Cours d’instruction du prince de parme* 1775 vol.1 p.13)

For “The real history of the sign language” see William C. Stokoe “Sign Language Structure” Section 0.12

See also Paddy Ladd’s research of Deaf Parisians and annual banquets where prominent guests such as Victor Hugo were invited to witness beauty of signs and where tenets of “Deaf discourse” were established that marked sign language as a language of the body—generously shared “as a gift to hearing people.” (111). Oliver Sacks also discusses Pierre Desloges’ celebration of sign language to unlock the ideas of the deaf-mutes: “This language is lively; it portrays sentiment, and develops the imagination. No other language is more appropriate for conveying strong and great emotions.”

An important part of this history, however, is the intervention of medical and scientific models that support ‘Oralism’ pathologizing the deaf as defunct speakers hence thinkers and sign language as an inhibitor to speech and socialization. See Ladd for his comparison of the Oralist “hegemony” to a colonial model where the deaf are the subaltern subjects.

¹⁹ Like Davis, H. Dirksen L. Bauman suggests the similarities between the issue of deaf identity and the female body but his focus is on the performative potentials of sign language; his provocative questions are worth noting: “The relation between Sign and *l’écriture féminine* raises questions that could have interesting implications for feminist performance. Does the anti-phonocentric nature of Sign offer a means of averting the essentializing tendency of *l’écriture féminine*? Does the four-dimensional space of performance offer ways of deconstructing phallogocentric linear discourse? How does the gender of the signer influence the reading/viewing of the ‘text’ itself? How does the male gaze construct the female body/text? Can gender ever be bracketed out of a reading of a Sign performance?” (Bauman, “Poetics” 320). But while there is much emerging work in the larger field of disability studies and feminist as well as queer studies—see in particular: Bonnie G. Smith and Beth Hutchison *Gendering Disability*; Susan Wendell “Towards a Feminist Theory of Disability”; and Rosemarie Garland Thomson “Integrating Disability Transforming Feminist Theory”—there is as of yet little engagement with deaf studies and feminist discourses. Arlene Blumenthal Kelly’s article “Where Is Deaf HERstory” notes the “dearth of reading materials by, about, and for Deaf women” (247)—and hopes to launch a consideration of Deaf Studies that mirrors the field of Women’s studies and is concerned with the identity formation of Deaf vs. Deaf Woman.

²⁰ Mike Davidson usefully defines audism as “the ideological replication of humans as hearing subjects” and provides a critical genealogy for this key tenet of Deaf studies: Dirksen Bauman, Harlan Lane, Douglas Baynton, Tom Humphreys and Carol Padden (77).

²¹ For a complete linguistic discussion of sign language that looks at the shared cognitive features between spoken and signed languages see Wendy Sandler and Diane C. Lillo-Martin; Clayton Valli and Ceil Lucas.

²² For a discussion of essentialism and feminism see in particular: Elizabeth V. Spelman and Diana Fuss. Simone de Beauvoir speaks to this as well in her familiar mantra: “woman is made not born.” Judith Butler explains that by creating the feminist category woman it becomes a “juridical system” that seeks to “protect” women (a discursive formation) but by this very relationship has the power also to produce/reproduce what is defined as woman.

²³ From Condillac *Cours d'instruction du prince de Parme* 1775 vol.1 p.13.

²⁴ See this dissertation’s introduction for a discussion of Derrida’s phonocentrism and Bauman’s notion of “deconstructionism.”

²⁵ The history of “Oralism” certainly attests to this. See Harlan Lane in particular for discussion of “language bigotry” and “cultural homelessness—from early beliefs that the deaf-mute was closer to animal than man without speech to current medical, eugenic models that demand suspension of sign language to learn speech.

²⁶ For a concise history of the emergence of sign language see Stokoe’s essay section 0.1. For a discussion of the politics and prevailing assumptions surrounding the re-emergence of Sign Language Studies see the section: “Operating Assumptions in the 1970s” in Scott K. Liddell’s *Grammar, Gesture and Meaning*.

²⁷ William C. Stokoe, Dorothy C. Casterline and Carl G. Croneberg, *A Dictionary of American Sign Language on Linguistic Principles*, New ed. (Silver Spring: Linstok Press, 1976).

²⁸ Thomas H. Gallaudet, “The Natural Language of Signs,” *American Annals of the Deaf* 1 (1847): 58.

²⁹ This “single stream” of hearing, has, of course been challenged by recent linguistics: Roman Jakobson in the 1940s demonstrated how phonemes could be broken down “into smaller co-occurring types of sound and analysed as ‘simultaneous bundles of distinctive features’” (qtd in Rée: 321, note 27). In Jakobson R. “On the Relation between Visual and

Auditory sign in *Language and Literature* (466-73, 469). Music and the range of vocal intonation also contradict and complicate the notion of the auditory as simply linear.

³⁰ See Unit II: “morphology” for a thorough analysis of sign language morphology in Sandler and Lillo-Martin.

³¹ Sign language verbs, for example, utilize “directional instructions for making mental space mappings. This is what verbs in spoken languages are unable to do because of the tongues inability both to produce words and to point simultaneously at mental space entities.” Lidell emphasizes the distinction: “It is not that speakers of vocally produced languages are unable to provide such clues, but rather, that the tongue is unable to provide such clues when articulating words” (40). Spoken language does in fact provide “directional clues” but “In ASL, however, providing such pointing gestures is a codified property of each individual indicating verb” (Liddell, *Grammar* 139, 40).

³² In “Sign Language Structure” Stokoe proposes *Chereme* and *Allocher* as the syntactical equivalents for the sign language concepts corresponding to *phoneme* and *allophone* to avoid false analogies. He establishes *Cherology* then as the “sign language analogue of phonology” (16) and is careful to distinguish two kinds of morphemes in sign language: finger spelling: the “series of digital symbols which stand in a one to one relationship with the letters of the English alphabet” (17) and the sign. Finger spelling “is at one more remove from language itself than writing and thus is a territory symbol system, not itself a sign language” (17); “The nature of finger-spelling, evanescent though the symbols are, is that of a grapheme system” (18). Signs, on the other hand, in its structure “permits considerable linguistic latitude, because the sign itself is not an isolate but a structure of elements which themselves admit of linguistic variation” (17).

³³ Sandler and Lillo-Martin explain this as sign language’s unique simultaneity: “Because of the articulatory-perceptual characteristics of signs, the two independent articulators (the two hands), and the use of non-manual markings together with manual signs, sign languages have the possibility of articulating more than one thing at the same time.” (489).

³⁴ Stokoe identifies three key aspects of the structure of the sign as position, configuration and motion but to distinguish sign’s characteristics he provides the following terms: *Tabula* shortened to *Tab*: the position of the body in space as contrasted with the *Designator* or *Dez*: the handshape that makes a movement in space and the *Signation* or *Sig*: the movement or change of configuration of the hand in space. Stokoe, then uses this three place notation in the order *tab, dez, sig*. I think it is particularly noteworthy that Stokoe acknowledges the range and involvement of the body and touch: “Forehead, temple, cheek,

ear, eyebrow, eyes, nose lips, teeth, chin, and neck may be touched, pinched, brushed, struck, or approached by the dez in the making of signs.” Stokoe, “SLS” 20-21.

³⁵ Interestingly, James uses a similar musical example to explain the influence of change in auditory perception upon thought: “and a note, when the scale is sung up, sounds unlike itself when the scale is sung down; as the presence of certain lines in a figure changes the apparent form of the other lines, and as in music the whole aesthetic effect comes from the manner in which one set of sounds alters our feeling of another” (234-35).

³⁶ Laura, from Mansfield’s *The Garden Party* (a strikingly similar narrative to *Mrs. Dalloway*) has a similar moment of revelation upon viewing the man who has died on the afternoon of her party: “He was wonderful, beautiful. While they were laughing and while the band was playing, this marvel had come to the lane. Happy ... happy ... All is well, said that sleeping face. This is just as it should be. I am content” (81).

³⁷ For discussions of madness and Septimus see Hudock and also Barret.

³⁸ Hite usefully defines two types of body in Woolf’s fiction. The first is what she terms the “visionary body,” a distinctly Woolfian corporeal space “that experiences without social implications” (9). This is the body, that “alone listens” or as Lily Briscoe in *TTL* declares: “It was one’s body feeling, not one’s mind.” The second, or “social body” is that which is “consolidated by and for the gaze of others” (2) and is confined to the strictures of sex and as such must perform according to script—in the case of women’s fiction must follow the codes of the female romance heroine. But Woolf, Hite explains, provides for female moments of ecstasy unavailable to these heroines via a partitioning off of sorts, a linguistic strategy in which the visionary body is created within a textually sealed space. Simply: “The visionary body experiences rapture. The social body undergoes evacuation and, eventually, death” (11). Hite’s “visionary body” is not unlike Laura Doyle’s “intercorporeal”—the defining narrative that, Doyle argues, allows Woolf’s female bodies to exist beyond the models of female embodiment that otherwise demarcate stringent limits upon the female body. These are limits, Hite would contend, that necessarily construct the “social body.” Doyle reads Woolf through a phenomenologist’s lens, revealing the porous boundaries between bodies and things and as such the body in Woolf “survives with and in language and narrative because language’s physicality expands the phenomenal world’s physicality”. “Intercorporeal,” then, defines the way in which language itself rather than the maternal body is generative.

³⁹ This suggests the letter/litterheap in *Finnegan’s Wake*.

⁴⁰ McCullers was invited to respond to the question: “What is a play?”; instead she wrote about her concerns that her audience did not understand her literary intentions.

⁴¹ 1940 review by Fadiman Clifton for *New Yorker* as cited in Judith Giblin James, 195.

⁴² For an overview of McCullers' critical reception and literary scholarship trends including contemporary book reviews see: Bryer and Field; Clark and Friedman; Crocker; James, *Wunderkind*; and Shapiro.

⁴³ "For good or ill, the pinnacle of McCullers's successes in the early 1950s coincided with the postwar expansion of the professoriate, the emergence of the first generation of critics educated under the GI bill, and the full flowering of the age of criticism begun by the, by then, old New Critics of the 1940s. [. . .] McCullers criticism was shaped in this era by an interpretive paradigm which yokes the technical strategies of high modernism (irony, paradox, multivalent symbolism, structural complexity) with the conservative ideologies of southern agrarianism (veneration of the past and moral uniformity, a preference for allusiveness, abstraction, universality, and sameness above anomaly, particularity, idiosyncrasy, and difference" (James, *Wunderkind* 11-12).

⁴⁴ For typical critical assessments of McCullers see: Evans, *Carson McCullers* and *The Ballad of Carson McCullers*; Graver; Cook; and Carr, *Understanding Carson McCullers*.

⁴⁵ Virginia Spencer Carr, *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers*. New preface and paperback edition in 2003. Carr's monumental biography is not without critique. Notably, she worked without access to the unpublished texts and letters in the archives of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas, Austin and without support from Carr's estate and heirs (2-3). Josyane Savigneau critiques Carr's biography as "cold" (3) and offers in its place a "deeply sympathetic" portrait from the "writer's perspective" (4).

⁴⁶ Carson McCullers and C. L. Barney Dews.

⁴⁷ Sherill Tippins.

⁴⁸ For a complete chronology of McCullers' illnesses see Carr, *Lonely Hunter*. McCullers and Dews, *Illumination and Night Glare*.

⁴⁹ From Whitman "Song of Myself" [2]:

[. . .]

The atmosphere is not a perfume, it has no taste of the distillation, it is odorless,

It is for my mouth forever, I am in love with it,

I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked,

I am mad for it to be in contact with me.

The smoke of my own breath,
Echoes, ripples, buzz'd whispers, love-root, silk-thread, crotch and vine,
My respiration and inspiration, the beating of my heart, the passing
of blood and air through my lungs,
The sniff of green leaves and dry leaves, and of the shore and
dark-color'd sea-rocks, and of hay in the barn,
[. . .]

⁵⁰ See for example Westling and also Yaeger.

⁵¹ For additional work on gesture and language see also: Armstrong, *Original Signs*; Critchley; Emmorey and Reilly; McNeill, *Hand and Mind* and also *Language and Gesture*.

⁵² Kendon makes a useful distinction of this overlap in *Gesture: Visible Action as Utterance*.
As we speak or sign we constantly mix in with our discourse all manner of expressive devices, some more, some less well-patterned. Signers use words and syntactic constructions, but they also modulate the performance of their signs in various ways, employ 'classifiers' and pull in kinesic expressions of all kinds, some from the kinesic vocabulary shared by the wider community, some improvised. Speakers act similarly. They use words and syntactic constructions, but they also use intonation patterns, voicings and vocalizations. And when they use gesture they reach out for strategies of expressions that are also found in sign languages. (325)

Likewise, Emmorey's article "Do Signers gesture?" lists the distinctions between gesture and sign and suggests:

'Yes, but not the way speakers do.' The major difference is that signers do not produce idiosyncratic, spontaneous movements of the hands and arms while they are signing. The constraint on such movements is fairly obvious: Both hands are involved in producing the linguistic utterance, and constraints on bimanual coordination and motor resources prevent the production of a lexical sign with one hand and the production of a holistic non-linguistic gesture with the other. (145)

⁵³ The term pays homage to key work done by Kendon in "How Gestures Can Become Like Words."

⁵⁴ Likewise, Stokoe concludes that "language had to begin with gestures." He explains:

It had to start with gestures, because only gestures can look like or point to or hold up otherwise visibly reproduce what they mean. On the other hand, vocal sounds alone cannot connect to meanings unless the makers and hearers of the sounds have agreed on the rules for connecting them. Even with a convention to link vocalizations to concepts, however, there is nothing in unaided sound to show that what is meant is a noun or verb or something else. Words get to be nouns and verbs only by being, or having been, parts of sentences. To put it bluntly, *speech depends on language but language does not depend on speech.* (“Signs” 178)

⁵⁵ For recent criticism see Cynthia Wu. Wu, however, focuses only on *Wunderkind* in terms of *The Ballad of the Sad Café*.

⁵⁶ “Sucker” was written c. 1934, soon after McCullers’ graduation from high school and was published in *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1963 before appearing in *The Mortgaged Heart* in 1971.

⁵⁷ In *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (first published 1940) John Singer as the lover unconditionally loves his fellow deaf-mute Antonapoulos, the beloved, who is unable to reciprocate. In *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (first published in *Harpers Bazaar* by installment in 1943)—a novella centered around Miss Amelia (the lover), a “solitary, gangling, queer-eyed” (217) kind of giantess and Cousin Lymon (the beloved), a hunchback—McCullers expands her thesis. It is worth repeating in detail:

First of all, love is a joint experience between two persons—but the fact that it is a joint experience does not mean that it is a similar experience to the two people involved. There are the lover and the beloved, but these two come from different countries. Often the beloved is only a stimulus for all the stored-up love which has lain quiet within the lover for a long time hitherto. And somehow every lover knows this. He feels in his soul that his love is a solitary thing. He comes to know a new, strange loneliness and it is this knowledge which makes him suffer. [. . .]

Now, the beloved can also be of any description. The most outlandish people can be the stimulus for love. [. . .] The beloved may be treacherous, greasy-headed, and given to evil habits. Yes, and the lover may see this as clearly as anyone else—but that does not affect the evolution of his love one whit. A most mediocre person can be the object of a love which is wild, extravagant, and beautiful as the poison lilies of the swamp. A good man may be the stimulus for a love both violent and debased, or a jabbering madman may bring about in the soul of someone a tender and simple idyll.

Therefore, the value and quality of any love is determined solely by the lover himself.

It is for this reason that most of most of us would rather love than be loved. Almost everyone wants to be the lover. And the curt truth is that, in a deep secret way, the state of being beloved is intolerable to many. The beloved fears and hates the lover, and with the best of reasons. For the lover is forever trying to strip bare his beloved. The lover craves any possible relation with the beloved, even if this experience can cause him only pain. (216)

⁵⁸ T. S. Eliot, "Love Song" (13-15).

⁵⁹ A similar description opens *The Ballad of the Sad Café*: "sometimes in the late afternoon when the heat is at its worst a hand will slowly open the shutter and a face will look down on the town. It is a face like the terrible faces known in dreams—sexless and white [. . .]" (197).

⁶⁰ In 1934 McCullers went to New York City by steamship to study creative writing at Columbia University but after losing her money on the subway is forced to take odd jobs, unwittingly moves into a brothel and spends much of her time reading in phone booths at Macys. Her experience here in the midst of the depression contributes much autobiographical material to this early story. Carr sums up: "Fear, loneliness, and a sense of her own anonymity pervaded her consciousness those first few weeks. The cacophony of city noises, the dirt and poverty, the bold stares and curt retorts of waiters, drivers, clerks, and tradesmen, the labyrinth of subways in which she almost daily became lost—juxtaposed with the glitter and elegance of Park Avenue wealth, bediamonded ladies, and gleaming limousines—all fascinated, yet repelled her" (Carr, *Lonely Hunter* 42-43).

⁶¹ Interestingly, the use of color figures prominently in McCullers' fiction—perhaps as a synaesthetic marker. In these early stories hair color is underscored—Maybelle's yellow hair (which gives way to the yellow car she eventually leaves Pete for) and the redheaded man. In her later work characters and mood are assigned specific colors as well. In *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, for example, Cousin Lyman is introduced with a very specific palate: "His face was both soft and sassy—at the moment his pale skin was yellowed by dust and there were lavender shadows beneath his eyes" (200). But these hues, yellow and purple, take on a life of their own in *Reflections in a Golden Eye*—evident most obviously in the novel's title. The amber hues resonate McCullers' emphasis of the "colors of the senses" (90) from the "pale, cold yellow light" that precedes dusk; the "gold, orange light of the fire" (14) that reflects Leonora's stark nudity; the "gold brown eyes" (19) like "amber buttons" (53) of Private

Williams (19); the “yellow silk spread” over Leonora’s bed; and the “yellow circles” (109) that form under Penderton’s eyes. These jaundiced tones are often offset with purple and blue such as the “pale violet tint” (91) of the winter dusk and the “misty lavender glow” (111) that briefly surfaces after sunset. The film version of the novel was originally shot in an amber hue—a kind of black & yellow instead of a black & white but the affect was too disturbing and seemed “off” that it was quickly changed. This use of color seems to be another way in which McCullers introduces a kind of synaesthetic visuality.

⁶² Interestingly, there is no mention of a first “arm” that would make this one ancillary and marked as the “other”; it is as if there is a phantom arm unmarked in the text.

⁶³ Originally submitted to Houghton-Mifflin on behalf of a first novel contest. She did not win the prize but was offered a contract for the book—which McCullers concedes “was almost as good” (McCullers and Dews 5).

⁶⁴ Rebecca Gilman adapted the novel for Broadway and gave Singer a closing and opening speaking monologues which arguably “turn Singer into more than the cipher he is through large swaths of the 1940 novel.” Her decision, though, based on these remembrances of speech from his boyhood, brought about protests from the Deaf community when the play moved to major production at the New York Theater Workshop in November 2009. The protests come, not from Singer’s speech—indeed one wonders what he would “say” and how it would change the scope of the narrative—but for the use of a hearing actor to play a Deaf man—one deaf actor Linda Bove argues “is tantamount to putting a white actor in blackface.” (Healy).

The critical and racial context for this performance is certainly worth considering and opens active new challenges put out by the Deaf community as well as the larger discourse of Disability Studies. As Lennard Davis responded in his blog on the Huffington Post, this reaction points to an exciting and challenging era building on racial and queer politics of the 20th century: “It [The new York Theater Workshop] shouldn’t be surprised if deaf people turn out not to be the silent, passive, suffering deaf mute of Carson McCuller’s story—itsself an audist and ableist cliché and stereotype—but are vocal, angry critics of the production. After all, playwright Gilman chose to let Singer speak.”

⁶⁵ “The story of Wing Biddlebaum is a story of hands. Their restless activity, like unto the beating of the wings of an imprisoned bird, had given him his name. Some obscure poet of the town had thought of it. The hands alarmed his owner. He wanted to keep them hidden away and looked with amazement at the quiet inexpressive hands of other men who worked beside him in the fields, or passed, driving sleepy teams on country roads” (Anderson and Meyers10).

⁶⁶Notable are the connections between sign and text and that when Singer no longer signs he continues to “shape words with a pen on paper [. . .] with as much care as if the paper had been a plate of silver” (213).

⁶⁷ *The Heart* was the April 2004 Oprah Book Club choice.

⁶⁸ On the grammar of speech and music Wilson quotes cognitive neuroscientist Justine Sergeant who makes similar connections (or distinctions) between speech and sign:

One can speak of a musical grammar in the mind of the composer, performer, and listener that in many respects parallels the grammar of language. . . . However, speech and music also differ in important aspects: A musical phrase does not convey the same sort of information that a verbal sentence does; it evokes feelings or emotions—patterns of body tensions and release—rather than *referring* to specific ideas or objects.
(Qtd. in Wilson 211: 357).

⁶⁹ Littell, xiv.

⁷⁰ “Book to Forget with Promptness” 7.

⁷¹ See, for example: Adams; Brasell; Gleeson-White; McKinnie and Dews; and Phillips.

⁷²Among the most recent critical work done on McCullers include dissertations that examine queer/errant sexuality, “freakishness” and/or disability—pointing to trends in a new generation of McCullers criticism. These include Kathleen Anne Patterson “Representations of Disability in Mid-Twentieth-Century Southern Fiction: From Metaphor to Social Construction” (1998); Alison Umminger: “White Self-Loathing: Masochistic Sexuality and Race in the Works of Jane Bowles and Carson McCullers” (2005); Ellen Matlok-Ziemann “Tomboys, Belles, and Other Ladies: The Female Body-Subject in Selected Works by Katherine Anne Porter and Carson McCullers” (2005); Lisa Claire Roney “Beyond the Pale: Chronic Illness, Disability, and Difference in the Fiction of Katherine Anne Porter, Carson McCullers, and Flannery O’Connor” (2002); Judith Kay Russell, “Queers, Freaks, Hunchbacks, and Hermaphrodites: Psychosocial and Sexual Behavior in the Novels of Carson McCullers” (2000); Cait Holland O’Darling, “Carson McCullers: Palace of Mirrors House of Freaks” (2000). This corresponds with Houghton Mifflin’s reprint of McCullers’ oeuvre under the Mariner Books imprint (1998-2005) and the 2001 Library of America edition of McCullers’ complete novels not to mention the cultural significance of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* making Oprah’s book club.

⁷³ See particularly Gleeson-White.

⁷⁴Of note is the accompanying description of Williams: “His hands were small, delicately boned, and very strong.” Like in the short stories discussed above, special pause is given to the description of hands.

⁷⁵ Another interesting example of a kind of “infectious” muteness exists in Djuna Barnes’ *Nightwood* where Robin’s muteness is literally infectious as she serves as both the aphasiac and the carrier of silence for her lovers: “she [Robin] opened her mouth but no words came. He [Felix] stepped back, he tried to speak, but they moved aside from each other saying nothing.” Notably, this scene is a moment of childbirth, but as with all of her sexual encounters, it is both fruitful and sterile. Nora, her lover, likewise finds herself obsessed with Robin, “unable to turn her eyes away, incapable of speech. . .” (64). The novel’s larger obsession with speech offers primal silence as recovery and complicates the connection between silence and loss—an equation this dissertation is at work to unsettle (47).

Nathaniel West’s *Miss Lonelyhearts* works similarly. The protagonist, nameless save his columnist pseudonym, is haunted by the broken voices of the women who write to him in his sappy advice column about being trapped violently within their own bodies and involve abortions, childbearing, sexual dysfunctions, disfigurements and disease from monstrous and hopeless women in prose equally disjunctive. After a failed and obsessive attempt to create order in the world—trying to connect objects together—in which words and their meanings will not cohere he wanders out into the busy, violent street and sees the crowd of people with “broken hands and torn mouths.” The hands are suggested not as stumps, but broken, still intact but useless to communicate and torn mouths suggest the visibility of its failure as if the lips, tongue, palate hangs bloody while words cannot be formed. When he tries to escape this image he jumps into a cab where he finds that his “tongue had become a fat thumb in, the suggestion here is one of double futility. By his tongue becoming a thumb, he can no longer articulate speech but the suggestion here is also that by removing his thumb to his mouth his hands are no longer useful.

⁷⁶ Krentz’s article builds upon work done in his dissertation which examines how writers both negotiate the emergence of deaf people in 19th century American society and also use a deaf presence to think about their own identity. Like my discussion here, Krentz looks at how “deaf-related topics in literature go to the heart of how Americans grapple with difference”(2).

⁷⁷Nikkei is the term used to describe the four generations of people of Japanese ancestry in North America. The Nikkei community bridges four generations: Issei, Nisei, Sansei and Yonsei. Issei were the immigrant generation from Japan. Their children, the Nisei, are the first generation born in Canada/US. Those Nisei who returned to Japan for education are called The Kibei. The children of the Nisei, the second generation born here, are the Sansei. The children of the Sansei, the third generation born here, are called the Yonsei.

⁷⁸ In 2.4 Lavinia enters with her hands cut off and her tongue cut out and her speechlessness is mocked by the Queen's sons:

DEMETRIUS

So, now go tell, an if thy tongue can speak,
Who 'twas that cut thy tongue and ravished thee.

CHIRON

Write down thy mind, bewray thy meaning so,
And if thy stumps will let thee play the scribe.

DEMETRIUS

See how with signs and tokens she can scrawl

CHIRON

Go home, call for sweet water, wash thy hands.

DEMETRIUS

She hath no tongue to call, nor hands to wash;
And so let's leave her to her silent walks

CHIRON

An 'twere my cause, I should go hang myself.

⁷⁹ Notable is the emerging work on the "postcolonial gothic" which also seeks to recuperate "othered" and "monstrous" identities in a new critical discourse. See in particular Gerry Turcotte.

⁸⁰ The passage echoes "Death by Water" in *The Waste Land*: "A current under sea/ Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell. He passed the stages of his age and youth/ Entering the whirlpool" (4.315-18).

⁸¹ This suggests *Heart is a Lonely Hunter* John Singer's memory of speech—animal like and guttural.

⁸² See also: Fujita; Yamamoto; Sasaki; Kruk.

⁸³ Fu-Jen Chen in a Lacanian Reading of *Obasan* argues: “Naomi is offered three models to deal with her traumatic experiences: Obasan, Emily, and Naomi’s brother, Stephen. Obasan, Naomi’s primary model, is characterized by stoic silence and serving hands” (119). Chen cites this passage and Obasan’s hands as the vehicle which allows Obasan “to remain in her silent and unchanging realm” because of their impenetrability; her hands, however, are also the means for suffocating Naomi. This has interesting potential connections for the hands that strangle in McCullers’ short story discussed in Chapter 2: “Court in the West Eighties.”

⁸⁴ This moment recalls Septimus’ experience of language as touch: “which rasped his spine deliciously and sent running up into his brain waves of sound which concussing, broke.” (Woolf *MD* 212). Naomi feels revulsion and fear rather than joy, but her mother’s whisper which move her from her hiding place are potentially embracing.

⁸⁵ Bauman is also editor of *Open Your Eyes: Deaf Studies Talking* born out of a Deaf Studies Think Tank, at the only liberal arts university for Deaf and hard-of-hearing students in the world: Gallaudet University. Both aim to promote scholarship and engage questions that overlap this dissertation including: “What do Deaf communities teach us about epistemology, about reading the visual/tactile world, about literature, about the human capacity for language?” (Bauman, “Introduction” 15).

⁸⁶ In the preface to *Open Your Eyes* Bauman reflects on the literal lights-out that came during the workshop power outage and the meaning of light/darkness in Deaf culture: “The darkness often associated with deafness, then, is not the horror of hearing loss that most presume, but instead the inability or unwillingness of hearing people to actually *see* what goes on in the Deaf world. This oversight has not only been detrimental to members of the Deaf world, but it has also left us with a legacy of incomplete understanding about the nature of human language, ability, and cultural formation” (xii). I hope this coda is a move forward to seeing in the dark.

⁸⁷ For a collection of essays, poems and critical responses see Newman and Kurs.

⁸⁸ Preston points to a study done at the Salk Institute (1990) comparing brain activity between deaf and hearing individuals:

her study also included a third group—adult hearing children of deaf parents who had acquired ASL as their first language. She found that these adult hearing children had certain left hemisphere activities more like those of deaf subjects than hearing subjects. In particular, both deaf individuals and hearing children of deaf parents had heightened attention to peripheral space and motion.

⁸⁹ *My Sense of Silence*. Davis has also written as a CODA for an academic audience in “Searching for Sign, the Language of Home.”

⁹⁰ Davis illustrates the emergence of disability studies as a critical category with a genealogy similar to feminist studies identifying first the emergence as having a first phase that marks disability as a political and cultural formation and a second wave that redefines and challenges, complicates and creates conflict—e.g. Butler’s critiques of essentialism, i.e. Collin’s notion of “race women”; further he marks a historical emergence following a civil rights model in the 1990s culminating in the ADA and the distinctions between impairment and disability (“Dismodernism”).

⁹¹ Butler, “Critically Queer.”

⁹² See discussion on Queerness and Deafness in terms of *Reflections in a Golden Eye* in this dissertation’s Chapter Two. For the “hearing line” see Krentz, “Exploring the ‘Hearing Line’.”

⁹³ E.g. Lorde’s “one breasted women”; “Rolling Quads”; DPN: Deaf President Now movement etc.

⁹⁴ Wenyang Xu defines food as the “most significant medium of traffic between the inside and outside of our bodies, [that] organizes, signifies and legitimates our sense of self in distinction from others who practice different foodways.” She develops this definition from Claude Fischer’s notion that food signifies; Terry Eagleton’s edible écriture; and Slavoj Žižek’s advocacy of discursive forms of identification (2, 3-4).

⁹⁵ Deborah Cohler shares her experiences of teaching *The Book of Salt*, emphasizing the complex interplay of race, nation and class that disallows for queer solidarity in a novel that “reminds student readers that queer identity does not necessarily produce liberal politics, that the effects of empire cannot be separated from categories of desire and identity, and that even in a queer literature course, the lesbian couple at the novel’s center may not wind up being its heroes” (27).

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