CC2
Week 3 Journals
Deaf Literary Traditions
(My Third Eye, readings, Veditz, ABC stories, etc.)

4/20/11
I would like to concentrate mostly on Deaf Theater, specifically the readings from Padden and Humphries "Inside Deaf Culture." I found it interesting to see/read about the evolution of Deaf Theater among the pages of chapters 4-6. I would have, however, liked to have read more about how the Deaf community received the rapid transformation, how exactly did they take it in? Prior to the great change in Deaf theater brought about by "hearing," David Hays, Deaf theater was completely different. The readings talk about how Deaf theater was interactive, it included the audience, the shows were not just about one person or one "star" but rather all the players were the protagonists representing a "we," and by "we" I mean the Deaf community. The antagonist was usually the hearing world. Performances were not just comprised of the producer, director and star, rather everybody had a say, everybody was involved in the play, everybody was allowed input and was involved with the final production. Also the actual "acting" was different; signers had little to no mouth movement, body was kept stiff, fingerspelling was slow and deliberate, basically, performers wanted to make sure audiences were able to see and understand whatever plot they were enacting. One may even be so inclined as to call it "boring" and uneventful. Gallaudet's rendition of "Lorna Doone" is a great example of "old school" Deaf Theater film, while he loved it and considered it perfection and classic, he had critics who thought it was too stiff, wanting to see something different....[enter David Hays.] What David Hays contributed to Deaf theater, is voice, literally. Prior, Deaf theater didn't utilize voice, but nowadays almost all Deaf theater is accompanied by voice. My issue comes in with the way David Hays introduced this new spin to Deaf theater, as I was reading the chapter entitled "Technology of voice" I got the sense that Hays was too aggressive, following his own vision of Deaf theater rather then respecting the Deaf community. He used hearing actors, even having them sign as well, he had Deaf actors move around and sign faster so as to accommodate the hearing actors, at one point in the reading I had the sense that signing became the backdrop, and the emphasis was on translating the sign into English and entertainment. The focus, for me at least, seemed to shift more towards pleasing hearing audiences as opposed to both hearing and Deaf. Hays' first production received nothing but complaints by Deaf audiences, who said that it was too fast, incomprehensible and too elite, the reading says "tensions mounted as the Deaf actors found themselves competing with hearing actors for the audiences attention." While it is commendable to try to open up Deaf culture and theater to the hearing public to build awareness, appreciation and enjoyment there is a fine line between actually accomplishing that and stepping on peoples' toes. I feel that Hays did the latter, and although it seemed to work out in the long run, because Deaf theater has transformed, incorporating many of the innovations Hays' introduced, I feel that it could've gone more smoothly. In other words I feel Hays went a little too far, too fast, there was no gradual process, maybe he could've been a little more sensitive to Deaf culture.....those are my thoughts on that
In *Signing the Body Poetic*, Cynthia Peters uses Bakhtin's definition of carnival to discuss the progression of authentic ASL drama. Cynthia Peters' examination applies to recent works of playwright Tyler Perry, who addresses critical issues of the Black community similar to those in the Deaf World.

Bahktin’s festive critique "inverts the normal hierarchical order, turning everything upside down and inviting laughter" (p. 77). The humor destabilizes, even dismisses, authority, and liberates the marginalized through the socially acceptable method of humor. Laughter, a universal act, helps bridge the gap between the Deaf and the hearing. In the original play *My Third Eye*, for example, depicts deaf culture as fluid and mosaic. The opposing, hearing world is shown as limited, constrained, and inflexible. Actors "demonstrate how people talk without looking at one another and how one person is hesitant to touch another", whereas tactile communication promotes a more inviting atmosphere (p. 77).

Similarly, playwright Perry employs *soul*, an in-group cultural cachet that transforms from a deep sense of pride to the way Black Americans communicate with one another. The actors enhance black cultural identity through uplifting hymns, bantering, and even *sloppiness* that counterbalances traditional Hollywood culture. Deaf theater is carnivalesque, and the producers love to exaggerate the diverse and quirky aspects. Perry follows the undefined form with his caricature Madea. A pistol-whipping, feisty granny, she personifies the matriarchal order that has held the Black community together for generations.

During the production of *My Third Eye*, actors contributed to the opening sequence by sharing their collective aspirations. The collaborative effort was then extended to the audience members, who are expected to form an intimate connection with the actors. Viewer participation is evident in Tyler Perry plays, as well. His Madea is notorious for pausing a show to scold a late arriver, or admire a passerby's dress. Additionally, audience members are expected to take away the central message and apply it to their own lives.

In Ben Bahan's *Face-to-Face Tradition in the American Deaf Community*, I felt sorry for Deaf performers, who are now expected to accommodate mixed audiences of Deaf and hearing people. It reminded me of ethnic singers, whose music becomes more mainstream as they begin to cater to a White audience. As Bahan noted, "To whom should the storyteller pay attention?" (p. 45). Should they sacrifice their authenticity and cultural identity to appease the highest bidder? I believe this will become less of a problem when ASL becomes more commonplace. Even now, I cannot recall one Deaf actor who has not played the helpless, disabled role. Until then, storytellers will have to strike a balance between English and ASL.
I, unfortunately, was unable to attend the meeting with Janet Marcous because of pneumonia, but, I have very much enjoyed all the readings for this week. My perspective has definitely changed concerning the Deaf community and how they view themselves and others. I can’t say that I had any concrete opinions or knowledge about the Deaf community; in fact, I’m ashamed to admit that I rarely ever thought of the Deaf community until recently. I suppose one tends to be biased towards the issues and concerns of the community closest to them. I did not know anyone who was deaf or hearing impaired and though my family does have a history of vision problems, I do not know anyone who is blind.

I have often wondered what it would be like to be devoid of sound or sight and the thought usually makes me feel extremely uncomfortable. I know that I would learn to adapt and would eventually accept my body, but I know that it would be difficult, at first to do so. This line of thinking has also led me to the question of what it would be like to be born without sound or sight. I wonder if a person can miss what they never had or if they ever suffer psychological crises with the realization that the majority of the world is hearing and seeing. When I read the first books of the class and heard the stories of Patrick Graybill (and Peter Cook in the Fall), I was inspired and somewhat comforted in the fact that the Deaf community was strong, assertive, and confident in themselves. It made me laugh to read in Deaf in America: Voices from a Culture, by Carol Padden and Tom Humphries, that the boy who had been born to a Deaf family thought the girl neighbor was weird because she communicated by moving her mouth.

It has also been extremely humbling to read of the experiences of the Deaf community and to learn of what life is like in their shoes. I feel as though I have been an egotistical person because I have only recognized what it is like to live a life similar to mine (hearing, living in America, educated, Western, etc). I know this is too harsh and exaggerated; the truth is that I tend to be more concerned with other people and their needs and harshest with myself. And I also spend way too much time being frustrated with the fact that I can’t change the education system, feed the homeless, empower the oppressed people to speak up and demand change, or convince the corporations and politicians that tax breaks for the rich are stupid and that people should be treated with dignity and respect. Why do you think I don’t watch the news often? So I should take that back and say something that is closer to the truth which is that I feel ignorant. I feel as though I have ignored an entire body of people (even if it was unintentionally) and that makes me feel ashamed of myself.

I feel ashamed that I don’t know about their culture or their pride. I’m ashamed that I’ve talked about deafness with fear (at the thought that it could happen to me) and occasionally with pity; and I’m ashamed with how ashamed I feel! It’s not as though deaf people are more delicate than other people. They have their own unique community with problems just like other minority groups though they suffer in different ways. I just wish I had been more aware from an earlier point.

I will say that it has been enlightening reading and talking with my friends about the readings. I had a discussion tonight with my friend Derek about the book about Usher’s syndrome by Dorothy Steifel. His expressed his feelings concerning what it would be like to lose both your hearing and your sight. He said that losing one would be bad enough and he wouldn’t know what to do if he lost both. We also talked about deafness and I was surprised because he seemed to be of the opinion that those who are
born Deaf must feel some sort of sadness at the realization they have a lack of something others have. I told him that I had been reading that those who were born deaf and into the Deaf community seemed to be more confident and assertive that those who later lost their hearing because they did not view their situation as an impairment, but as an endowment. He was surprised and expressed skepticism, but then I let him read the closing statement from Stiefel’s book. She says that she would not change who she is and does not believe in “normal.” Her final statements are very eloquent and concise and it was nice to hear that he thought her sentiments were beautiful and well spoken. His opinion also seemed to change and he seemed genuinely interested in learning more. I feel a bit behind in my learning as of now, but am excited to do catch up and learn more about this culture and the experiences that cultivate and perpetuate it.
I’ve appreciated learning more about the traditions and history of American Sign Language and its role in Deaf Culture this past week. I had mixed feelings when reading about the Deaf World’s anxiety toward non-deaf individuals learning ASL. In his essay on film’s influence on ASL literature, Christopher Krentz discusses this concept in the context of film technology allowing non-deaf individuals to gain access to ASL that was not possible prior to modern video recordings. Given that ASL originated from the Deaf community and is intended for the Deaf community, I can understand and respect their pride and desire to protect what is their language.

I feel as though I’ve been taught that when it comes to social issues, increased awareness about a certain issue or topic is usually a good thing. Of course this is a generalization, but prior to this course I would have assumed increased interest in ASL would only be a positive for the Deaf community. However, I can now understand this anxiety about the non-deaf community’s participation in ASL (this realization only now I’m part of this intervening group of non-deaf). Given that there is already conflict over how much, if any, of ASL is “borrowed” from the English language, I can see how the Deaf community may fear that English-speakers’ learning of the language may be disruptive for ASL itself. I especially like Padden and Humphries’ commentary on the contradiction that arises now that non-deaf children are being taught ASL in mainstream schools after years of the Deaf community’s fight over “oralism” (p. 76).

In his famous speech, Veditz concluded that “as long as we have Deaf people on earth, we will have signs.” I think that he’s probably right about this, but at the same time, it’s possible to fathom that in the next century medicine may have a cure for loss of the ability to hear. Although to be Deaf is far more than a physical condition, Deaf culture nevertheless emerges from the physical condition. I wonder if ASL and ASL literature can contribute to preserving the Deaf World even if the number of deaf individuals begins to decline as medicine provides improved cochlear implants, etc. Perhaps in this context, the increased popularity of ASL is a very good thing.

I know that our course is sort of an “experiment,” but perhaps it provides a good format for respectful interest in ASL by non-deaf individuals. Although the course is not even halfway through, I agree with Padden and Humphries that ASL is a “supreme human achievement” worthy of study and respect (p. 76). I can understand the concerns in the Deaf world over the preservation of ASL and fears about outside intervention. However, I also think that increased ASL popularity, whether through take-home videos, classes, or theater productions, is an important way of preserving the language. Perhaps National Theater of the Deaf’s format with both ASL and voice is a successful model of how to bring the Deaf and non-deaf worlds together for the appreciation and preservation of ASL…
This past week’s lectures focused on an introduction to the history of d/Deaf literature identity. Students were able to get a glimpse of this rich history through an examination of the “folk”, storytelling, theatrical, and literary tradition of d/Deaf culture. I honestly never envisaged that d/Deaf culture had a literary and storytelling history; a fact that I am genuinely ashamed to admit. Perhaps this thought was incited by my ignorant and personal idea of the importance of “voice” in storytelling; I could have never imagined being told a story without hearing it orally. It was an incredible experience seeing the story of the “High Diver” performed by Eastman and the performances of the “Star Spangled Banner”. It was only after watching these videos did I realize that we non-d/Deaf people interpret as “voice” as the modality of oral expression, but in ASL “voice” has a different meaning. “Voice” in d/Deaf culture expressed the idea of being heard, and to be heard you only need expression not necessarily an actual voice or sound!!! What was really helpful in explaining how the history of d/Deaf literature identity was formed was Professor Polansky’s explanation of the history of ASL itself. I was fascinated to learn that since American Sign Language resembled French Sign Language some of the signs had a French linguistic basis; just like works in any language have a Latin/Greek or other root. Some signs like those for “to look for” and “to see”, for example, are derived from the verbs chercher and voir in French respectively. Since I have been studying French for many years and I am proficient in the language, I was absolutely astonished to how the linguistic root was interpreted in the sign itself!! The “c” was used in the sign for “to look for” and the “v” was used to make the sign for “to see”-simply remarkable!! Another interesting fact that I had learned was that often ASL does in fact borrow words from
English and converts them to sign. So, essentially, there’s never a barrier in shifting from
a language to a sign in ASL. We all see stories/performances all
the time on TV, in movies, at concerts …everywhere and through different media facets.
As a non-d/Deaf person, I only characterize a performance as “awesome” if whatever it is
that was being performed or shown, whether it be the plot of a movie/play or the songs at
a concert, were interesting in the first place. However, in ASL that’s never the case!!!
The story that Gilbert Eastman performed, “The High Diver”, was a very simple and
rather ordinary story with absolutely no excitement or suspense in the plot. If told
vocally, that story would have been, well, boring!! However, when I saw him perform
rather than just narrate the story, Gilbert brought life into the story through his
demonstrative performance. The story no longer was a lifeless tale of a diver diving from
a board, but rather an entire experience, a spectacle to which both I, as a viewer, and the
audience in the story itself were witnesses. The experience itself was truly incredible and
each movement or trivial event in the story, like the diver climbing the stairs, became so
much more kinetic and lively when converted to signs. I never thought that any human
being is capable of communicating so much detail and bringing so much life to a story
without vocal narration.
I feel by now
after a few weeks of studying ASL that I have a better understanding of the language
itself and a solid introduction to its history. The readings have greatly enhanced my
knowledge and at times, raised interesting points that are worth contemplating. For
example, in chapter 3 of “Inside Deaf Culture” Padden discusses the difference between
signing in the past and in the present. An interesting fact I learned is that the mouth
movement that modern renowned signers use, like Patrick Graybill, never really existed
in the past. These visible “mouth gestures” combined with the fact that nowadays signers tend to allow their bodies to move more flexibly within the signing space are the reasons why ASL performances have become so captivating and vivacious. Even the handshakes have differed over time and signers now use both hands to add detail and new meaning to the stories or poems they perform. There is so much to learn about the rich language of ASL, but unlike any written language, ASL is exceptional in its ability to convey meaning in every way even with a slight shoulder movement.
Although the history of theatrical and literary traditions within the Deaf communities is very interesting I wanted to focus my journal on *My Third Eye* since we have not had much time to discuss it in class. Borrowing from the Ben Bahan chapter, it is clear that the teller and the tale shift to fit two different audiences between the two skits discussed below.

The production of *My Third Eye* made by the National Theater of the Deaf can be read as interesting paradigm of the lived experiences of members of Deaf communities. The production is more than slightly paradoxical. While most of the skits are relatively neutral in nature, two are politically charged with seemingly contradictory messages.

During the sideshow skit the actors comment blatantly on the historical oppression and pathologization of d/Deaf people by invoking a role reversal where two non-deaf people are objectified and become the subjects of scientific speculation. The ringmaster costuming and set conveys all the ambience of attending a “freak show” as the non-deaf people are examined and explained from a Deaf point of view. The use of, as Padden and Humphries would say, a “different center” highlights a Deaf perspective while subjugating the traditional non-deaf perspective. This is an extremely progressive and daring message, especially since the production is primarily targeted toward children. This amazing and politically charged skit provides a drastic and much-needed departure from the ways in which d/Deaf people are typically characterized in dominant society.

The access to the means of autonomous production by the Deaf community is unfortunately short lived. Within a brief hour the proverbial tables have once again turned and the final skit places the actors in a position of subordination. The actors sign the children’s song “Three Blind Mice” in a choreographed round. Here the Deaf perspective
is ignored and the actors are forced to assimilate to the dictations of the dominant culture. The Deaf community is stripped of its independence and forced to play the part of the puppet to further the non-deaf agenda of using d/Deaf people as entertainment. To say that the sideshow skit is negated by this skit would be to undermine the radical potential of the former. However, the appalling finale calls the credence of the entire production into question and is an extremely disappointing end of an otherwise incredible production.
I found the play My Third Eye to be very interesting. My favorite scene in the play was the Side Show scene, where two hearing people from the land of Ababa are showcased as oddities along with their customs.

This scene really turned a number of common perceptions on their heads, both poking fun at stereotypes of the Deaf and showing some disadvantages of being hearing. For example, when the ring master signs that “they are even able to learn simple language” they then depict the voice actor as struggling to sign. This pokes fun of the opposite stereotype that the hearing have of the Deaf, both that sign language is the simple language, and that those who cannot learn to speak are not intelligent.

They also showed the audience a glimpse of how odd hearing people can seem to the Deaf. For example when the exhibitor turns on the cassette tape the two hearing people start to dance, and when they turned it off they stopped dancing. Both the exhibitor and the ringmaster act perplexed, as they see no reason that the two hearing people should start dancing. The way they set up this specific part of the scene even makes me question the normalcy of such an act. Also, the constant movement of the mouths showed how speaking people look to the Deaf. The hearing actors move their mouths but no meaning comes out of it, only when the voice is accompanied by signing does it mean anything, both to the Deaf people, and to the hearing in this case, as the voice actors only voice what is signed. Thus it turns another perception on its head, with signing carrying true meaning, and sound not standing on its own.

Furthermore, it showed how hearing can also be a disadvantage, something that I had never thought of before. For example, they depict how hearing people are very averse to being touched or having any physical contact with each other, depicted by the subway scene where everyone jumps if someone puts a hand on their shoulder. This is in contrast to immediately after, where all the Deaf actors are shown holding hands. The other point they brought up is the
obsession with the telephone. In this case the hearing girl is shown talking on the phone to the exclusion of interacting with anything else. Even though someone right next to her is attempting to talk with her, she will only speak to that person on the other side of the phone, even when she is turned upside down or moved around. This girl shuns the contact and communication of those right next to her and prefers to speak into the phone, thus showing a negative aspect of the hearing culture.

The Third Eye play was very interesting to me. It introduced new ideas and methods of looking at things that I had not thought of. The Side Show scene especially did that for me, helping me to both experience some glimpse into what it is like to be seen as an oddity and to understand some of the stereotypes about the Deaf and how odd these stereotypes are.

{} Deaf in America presents life as a Deaf person. One story that really struck me was the one about Joshua Davis, and how he was almost killed in the civil war because Union soldiers thought he was a spy, lying about his deafness. It kind of reminded me of some sort of horror flick, or a really bad nightmare. Heck it probably would make a good horror movie. As a student interested in Education and the way people learn, the whole chapter, “A Different Center” was interesting to me. Although different, it was interesting to me how Deaf children might consider someone who hears pretty well as “Very-Hard-Of-Hearing” and how “Hearing” often means “those who are different.” I really liked how they related it to how kids also might understand that there are such thing as black people, but not that black refers to the skin, and not the hair color or eye color. Its all about the view point, which I think is important to understanding everything in life, from good guys and bad guys, to friends and strangers.

My third eye, although a little dumbed down at times, presented some neat concepts. I couldn’t help but constantly think, “wow, how are they keeping the beat without hearing the notes?!” It also made me think about how music and rhythm might be hardwired into us and not learned through experiences. I really found it odd that they spent so much time on translating one to one English to ASL signs. That seems to be one belief about ASL, that it is merely a mapping onto English that makes it a lesser language. So I don’t know why they would want to propagate that idea. Dorothy Miles story about being numbered in school seemed like one of those non-Utopian society novels, but was REAL LIFE! That was astounding and sad. Richard Kendall’s story about being in the chorus also struck a chord with me because my father used to tell me about how he always cheated like that in chorus because he hated singing,
which I know is a much different predicament, but still interesting to think about.

One subject this week we touched on often was the Star Spangled Banner. I found it really interesting that it is performed in so many different ways in ASL. It’s always the same in English, and it’s a bit blasphemy to change anything. Jimmi Hendrix’s rendition, for example, had many people up in arms when he performed it. There are viral videos all over the Internet of people “messing up” the national anthem at sporting events, and they are ALWAYS a laughing matter. I’ve never seen anyone change the words to make it more relevant today, and I doubt it would be accepted well. In a way, the English of formal pieces such as the national anthem or the pledge of allegiance are restrictive to us non-Deaf people in the same way it restricts Deaf people. I wonder why it is acceptable for Deaf people to interpret it for their culture, while it is not OK for us to interpret it for our culture, which differs in time frame from when it was written.

Inside the Heart of the Hydrogen Jukebox was a great intro to ASL Poetry. It did keep me wondering, however, if ASL poetry is all going to be about being Deaf. I think it would be more productive for both hearing people and Deaf people to share our similarities instead of pointing out our differences. That’s why I really like Peter Cook and Debbie Rennie, because they really talked about the human experience. I’m super excited for Peter Cook to come into class.
In reading the articles in “Signing the Body Poetic” concerned with the emergence of ASL performed poetry and theater and its establishment as respected form of artistic expression, I was struck by the intriguing parallels to the development of written language literature.

To begin, although the Deaf community’s artistic prowess far predates the twentieth century, it was not until the advent of modern film that performed storytelling, poetry, and drama was able to be recorded for both contemporary audiences as well as for posterity’s sake, and thereby achieve a far greater level of mainstream appeal. As George Veditz, one of the most outspoken advocates for manualist education of the deaf, said in 1913, “As long as we have deaf people on earth we will have signs, and as long as we have our films we can preserve our beautiful sign language in its original purity.”

Prior to the cinematic technological advancements of the early twentieth century, signed literature suffered problems akin to the limitations of spoken language oralist tradition predating the advent of the printing press. These limitations include the lack of standardization of a work of literature amongst different communities, the inability to accurately document the work for historical record, and lack of mainstream recognition for the art form due to its inherently local scope. All of these problems and related issues were resolved thanks to the emergence of motion pictures, ultimately resulting in a much broader, mainstream appeal of signed art.

It is a direct consequence of this ever-broadening range of appeal of ASL performed literature that non-deaf individuals have been able to better understand and appreciate Deaf culture. For instance, as noted by Cynthia Peters in her article pertaining to Deaf American theater, modern deaf drama allows for the creation of “a mundus inversus” in which deafness is the norm and spoken language is viewed with the same peripheral disparagement as is often the unfortunate reality for signed language. Theatric performances, such as “My Third Eye”, though farcical, exemplify this point, satirize the disconnect between Deaf and hearing cultures within the modern world, and ultimately, effectively dispel the
numerous misconceptions about deaf people prevalent within hearing society.

One of the most recurring misconceptions of the deaf is one which Peters cites as occurring in the 1994 adaptation of Stephen King’s “The Stand.” I personally have seen this miniseries and definitely understand what the author means by the stereotype of deaf individuals as “saintly speech readers who integrate amazingly well into mainstream society.” As a matter of fact, this statement made me consider the fact that virtually all popular representations of the deaf in the media that I know, ranging from sitcoms, such as Seinfeld, to law-enforcement dramas involving deaf characters as auxiliary support, play into this one particular image.

Fortunately, through increased awareness of Deaf culture and the great diversity of people and ideas that it has to offer provided by modern media, these traditional misconceptions will be dispelled by more accurate portrayals of the deaf.
Week 3: Deaf Literary Traditions Reaction Paper

The readings from this past week have given me greater insight into the world of Deaf culture. Each author’s varying viewpoints allowed me to further understand and appreciate the traditions, history, and language of the Deaf community. Consequently, I took away a number of interesting points from each of the readings and would like to further reflect upon them.

In *Inside Deaf Culture*, Padden and Humphries discuss four aspects of Deaf culture: the ability for the Deaf to pass on their culture even though they have no “voice,” class divides, the technology and services that allow them to pass on their culture, and the conflicts and anxiety that exist within ASL. Of these chapters, I found the class consciousness aspect particularly striking. It was interesting to discover that although the Deaf clubs created allowed for people to meet on weekends and socialize, there were still divides in ethnic and racial lines. It was a bit surprising to find that even though African Americans were refused membership by the National Association of the Deaf, they were still pursued to play for club teams. I suppose I didn't really expect segregation within the Deaf community to exist, as they were already “segregated” from non-Deaf individuals in that they comprised of a smaller population than the non-Deaf community. At the same time, however, it isn’t surprising to discover that racial divides existed, as the history of American culture was entrenched in that type of mindset in the first place. With time, however, the popularity of Deaf clubs began to decline as there was a shift in the growth of the Deaf middle class. Padden and Humphries assert that a class divide developed between those who pursued professional careers and those who still worked in trades like printing and manufacturing jobs. As Deaf club buildings were sold off, however, the independence of the community still remained.
As Padden and Humphries focused on the history of Deaf Culture, in Deaf American Literature, Peters provided a more technical approach to the language. I agree with much of Peters’ assertion of how ASL maintains a cultural meaning in that the language is used as a mode of storytelling and performing. I have found from viewing ASL poems so far that ASL is indeed a narrative and type of folklore, as pieces are interpreted differently depending on the performer, yet still express the same underlying message. It was nice seeing instances of this in class - for example Mary Beth Miller’s performance of the Star Spangled Banner.

Peters explains that her version of ASL incorporates a “burlesque” quality by varying the speed and intensity of signing to control excitement and give the performance a suspenseful atmosphere. Peters also discusses other aspects of ASL such as multifunctionality, multidimensionality, rhythm, tempo and motion in ASL and I appreciated the introduction to the technical aspects of ASL.

Similarly, in The Signs of Language, Bellugi and Klima also delve into the technical aspect of ASL art sign by examining the poetic structure. I learned that art sign is distinguished by three levels of structure: an internal poetic structure, superstructure, and external poetic structure. I think the overarching summary and importance of art sign in general is the significance of using both hands. Signers are able to use both hands to emphasize multiple ideas at the same time, which non-Deaf individuals can’t do because they can only express one idea at a time using their voice. This is an especially important quality that is emphasized greatly upon in these readings, as it gives signers freedom and ability to express feelings and qualities that can’t exactly be translated. Bellugi and Klima describe how there was a shift from “straight” conventional sighting to art signing and with this, the art of signing developed.

The final readings by Padden on Veditz’s speech, Rutherford’s A Study of American Deaf Folklore, and Bauman’s Signing the Body Poetic, gave me further insight into the Deaf
community. Veditz’s speech of passing on signing through films, and Rutherford and Bauman’s emphasis on Deaf folklore and film were further depictions of how the Deaf community maintains pride and independence. One aspect I found interesting was how Rutherford asserts that those who are deaf but don’t use ASL aren’t considered members of the cultural group. Additionally, the play, *My Third Eye*, was entertaining to watch as all of the author’s opinions in the readings supplemented my experience into learning more about the Deaf world.
ASL Poetry, Literature and Performance in Translation
Professor Polansky
Week 3: Deaf Literary Traditions

National Theatre of the Deaf’s original production *My Third Eye* was comprised of an interesting amalgamation of stories and sketches. While the clips ranged in tone, from the humorous and facetious to the serious and intimate, each managed to display American Sign Language and capture some aspect of the private Deaf experience.

The clip “Side Show” was particularly memorable because of its unique comedic farce. I found their depictions of the non-Deaf world very funny and sometimes even accurate, as with the domination of technology over individuals’ lives. The mood throughout the sketch was carefree and jovial, showing that the Deaf actors did not take themselves too seriously, until the conclusion. It ended with a shocking look at a mother (played by Mary Beth Miller) who supports oralism, forcing her Deaf “child” to speak aloud instead of sign. Not only was it a surprise to see this bit at the end of such a playful skit, it was upsetting to observe the lost and disoriented expression on the “child’s” face. His confusion made apparent the Deaf actors’ support of manualism in education over oralism, which seems like an unnatural and fruitless way to teach a Deaf child.

I also thought that many of the “Biographies” were very poignant, because they provided the audience with a closer look at actual events in the Deaf actors’ personal lives. In particular, one of the memories provided by Dorothy Miles struck me as rather sad. She recalls that teachers and administrators at the Royal Deaf School in England identified schoolchildren solely by their given numbers. I was surprised that she admitted that the children often didn’t even know each other’s actual names, instead calling out each other’s numbers in greeting years later. It seemed very callous and impersonal that random, arbitrary numbers composed children’s outward identities.

Finally, I found the last clip, entitled “Curtain Raiser,” extremely bizarre. It didn’t make sense to me that these Deaf actors were signing and dancing-not to the music, but in synchrony with the music, since they couldn’t have heard it. As Padden and Humphries point out in *Inside Deaf Culture*, this “choreography was entirely alien to Deaf club theater,” because “the performance was guided by voice” (115). The whole skit seemed unnatural and out of place, especially when Mary Beth Miller yelled out “1, 2, 3, 4!” to the ensemble in the beginning. Not only could the Deaf actors not hear what she was saying, the whole point of the production was to discourage oralism and the use of voice and promote manualism and ASL instead. The only beneficial aspect of this skit was that it did have a didactic tone that indicated its target audience was Deaf children. The actors were clearly trying to appeal to kids, signing the nursery rhyme “Three Blind Mice” and stating, “Any child could do it.” In this fashion, it mirrored the instructive purposes of clips such as “Manifest” and “A Little Dictionary of Slang,” which emphasized some of the qualities unique to sign language and ASL poetry.

Overall, I thought that NTD’s production was very innovative and educational, proving to both the Deaf and non-Deaf communities that ASL is a beautiful and remarkable language, crucial to Deaf individuals’ abilities to communicate with one another, create poetry, and have a voice in society.
In this reflection, I wanted to focus on the integration of Deaf people into mainstream culture by looking at two things covered this week.

First, I wanted to comment on the development and changes in the Deaf community throughout the 20th century. As mentioned in the readings, the Deaf community was strongly tested when technology and increasingly clear class divides decreased the need for a tight-knit community. It seems that a community such as the Deaf that is held together by physical limitations is much more vulnerable to changes that come with time compared to a community based on cultural or societal restrictions. Even though the demise of Deaf clubs and small pocket communities that accompanied them may have been considered a loss for the Deaf culture, it is also important to consider the positives: for one, the very fact that the Deaf split among class lines implies that some Deaf people became "successful" enough in mainstream society to no longer fit in with the Deaf majority. That was something that wasn't even in the realm of possibility a century ago. While things could obviously be better, that people have come to be much more accepting of differences in physical appearances, disabilities, and other factors that are out of a person's control when evaluating a person will make it much easier for a Deaf person that wants to become a part of mainstream society.

My second comment is about something that was brought up last Tuesday. Larry mentioned while teaching that he had decided to teach us some basic signs, but qualified it by saying "despite not being qualified" to do so. I didn't think much of it at first, but later realized the implications of the statement, and more importantly the underlying influences that led to that comment.

We are all here advocating the acceptance of the Deaf as an ethnicity. How do we define acceptance and when does it happen? I think, for one, that acceptance of something happens when we no longer have to think about it. More clearly, Deafness will have become "accepted" when Deaf people are integrated with every day life, much like how we no longer think about racial differences during everyday conversations with people of another race. Despite its good intentions, a comment such as "not being qualified to teach sign language" unfortunately stands in the way of such acceptance. This unintentional categorizing of someone as qualified or unqualified tags Deaf people the exact "special" label that needs to be shed for them to be fully accepted. For example, lectures of African-American studies, Asian studies, or Women's studies do not necessarily have to be members of that particular group to be qualified lecturers. As long as they are knowledgeable and respectful of that group and have a scholarly interest, they are as qualified as anyone else. To put it simply, people do not and should not qualify themselves with statements such as "Well... I'm not black/asian/a woman..." when discussing other ethnic groups, but do so for Deaf people. As unfortunate as it is, I think this implies that full acceptance of Deafs as an ethnic group may still not quite be within reach.
The readings this week really provide a better idea of the evolution of Deaf culture, as well how it progressed in tandem with the evolution of ASL. The renditions of the Star Spangled Banner illustrate this point most accurately. Mary Beth Miller tried to convey this point in the excerpt we saw on Tuesday. In the early renditions, ASL was intimately tied to the English version - it was sign-to-word, and less a depiction of the event. As the versions became more recent, there is an obvious move towards portraying the event, the image, the core meaning of the song, rather than just the English words. This idea of linguistic evolution harkens back to what Dennis Coakley mentioned to us in class the week before about how languages become more efficient. Over time, the renditions of the Star Spangled Banner are more tied to meaning and provide a clearer interpretation of events by working within the conventions of ASL. Later renditions especially those most current utilize the languages’ native grammatical and structural rules, including referencing the noun at the beginning of the song, forgoing initialized signs derived from English were they are clumsy, and also using classifiers to increase clarity of the portrayal.

The Star Spangled Banner also shows the evolution of the culture as well. As the poem begins to step farther from a language translation towards a translation of pure meaning, it also signifies the formation of a stronger Deaf identity. It is very apparent to see that this is the same time in which Deaf individuals are really recognizing that their language is truly a language, and thus that it has its own creative and expressive potential. Signing the Body Poetic mentions that both Ella Mae Lentz and Clayton Valli both wrote poems in English before they used their own language as a medium for poetry. Naturally such a move from English to their native ASL would have hugely empowering effects, and I think that you can see this in the body of ASL poetry as well as the increased visibility of the culture as a whole. I think that one reason why poetry holds such a significant position in Deaf culture is due to it being a product of this acknowledgement of ASL as being its own language. In this way, ASL becomes the center post for the formation of an identity independent from the native English-speaking non-deaf world.

I thought the excerpts of Deaf National Theatre performances in the Third Eye showed that the Deaf community had at this point, created a strong group identity, but was still trying to define this identity to the outside world. So many of their anecdotes and skits hinged on the idea of "how would you feel if you lost your hearing?" With some skits they also reverse roles, and portray the larger culture as being signing, and the minority culture being non-deaf to hone in on this message and forge a common understanding with their non-deaf audience. It is important to note that the Deaf National Theatre wasn't necessarily forging new ground with their message, but rather with their increased audience. The theme seems to be fairly prominent in ASL poetry and storytelling, as in the story of "Eyeth," yet the message was intended for young children in the Deaf community. In taking these themes and broadcasting them to the larger American culture, the DNT is defining their community’s place in society rather than having the larger American culture define where the Deaf community fits. This point would not have been reached without the recognition of ASL as a language and the empowerment that resulted from this event. As a result, in order to really understand the importance and significance of ASL poetry, as is the focus of this class, it is imperative to understand the role it plays
in shaping its own culture and how it was used to define the Deaf identity for a collective body of individuals.
For this week, I found myself very intrigued by the idea of what could be considered offensive and not offensive to people who are deaf and Deaf culture. For example, when reading the books, I noticed that so many distinctions were made constantly regarding the use of phrases like “hard of hearing” or “deaf and dumb” or “deaf-mute.” Before, these terms seemed to be fairly generic and part of everyday speech to me. But once I read more about Deaf culture, I realized what connotations these terms have and how oblivious I was to their meaning when using them.

I think the most interesting thing I noticed in the writing styles was the treatment of the Deaf community as a race or culture, not as a “disabled” community. I think that in itself makes the topic much more relatable to non-deaf people, especially when talking about ASL. America itself is a melting pot of various cultures, and I think with that mentality, Americans have been on a global scale more accepting and integrated with the Deaf community than in other countries. I think the speech we watched in class and read really put that viewpoint on a clear platform. Because for the first time, someone had acknowledged that Deaf culture is not a worldwide standard; it is different for each country and community.

I think one thing that started to make me question the true essence of ASL poetry was when I noticed reading Deaf in America that the experience of growing up being deaf plays such a big part in the poetry. It was interesting to see how much more personal and meaningful deaf poetry seems to be compared to English poetry. Apart from the standard topics of love and hate and emotion, rarely do the great English poets we read about discuss life experiences in their writings. In fact, I find that ASL poetry, especially when watching The Third Eye is more about conveying a feeling without words or signs. The emphasis is on the gesture. In that way, I find ASL poetry to be much more expressive and telling of the writer and the poet and the art than any English poetry can be. I recall the first day watching “Liberation” and finding myself immediately connecting with Patrick Graybill’s story. Just through his performance he could convey all of that raw anger and frustration; but simultaneously, his hand movements were so graceful that the poem seemed to “reverberate” in the room even after the performance was over.

Probably the most eye-opening reading I did was reading the Guidelines book for today’s class with Janet Marcous. Probably the most interesting concept was “check-ins,” where progressively you check in with the other speaker in the conversation to make sure he/she understood what you have signed. It also surprised me to see that often you need to sign slowly when signing in the hand of the other speaker. I find myself constantly amazed at the dexterity and nimbleness of the fingers of ASL speakers, who can make such quick movements with their hands. I had never thought that you might actually have to slow down to speak to a native ASL speaker; that was definitely surprising for me to see.

Also, I think the other interesting thing this week was realizing that some Deaf people can actually speak. I think this was most apparent in class discussion. It never occurred to me that some Deaf people might have learned to speak growing up. It added another dimension to the poetry we looked at this week. It must have been so difficult to be told not to sign and to speak when you could not even hear the sounds you were
making. I find myself having so much difficulty with sign; I cannot even begin to imagine how hard it must be to learn to speak, even lip-read, when growing up. I think that probably add to the incredible perception and insight native ASL speakers have, because they seem to understand you before you can even understand yourself in a conversation.

While I love seeing poetry about subjects other than Deaf culture and growing up in the Deaf community, I found a new appreciation for the poetry this past week when I for the first time tried to put myself into another person’s shoes. I think that ASL poetry is almost exclusive in its ability to convey emotions and feelings about Deaf culture that most people would not understand in plain prose. I think it actually bridges an invisible gap between non-deaf and deaf people because it allows us to step back from the sign and see the emotion, see the artistic performance, and try to understand a culture that we have not been exposed to. That in itself is a gift and luxury that only a sign language can offer. I recall in class discussing how deaf children have no other choices when picking a native language; while non-deaf children can choose from a wide variety of accessible spoken languages, in the Deaf community, there is only sign. But in this way, they have the added capability of being visual and verbal artists in their conversations, which is a great asset for native ASL speakers.

Lastly, watching the Third Eye made me think of Sesame Street somehow. I know in class we discussed how the theater was an outlet in this performance for deaf children, so they can be proud of their culture. It was very similar to something I remember from Sesame Street and one of my favorite performers on that show, Linda Bove. I recall her being one of my favorite characters. She was probably the first and only exposure I had to the Deaf community growing up, and one of the reasons I wanted to learn ASL so badly. I recall her performing “Sing a Song” on Sesame Street when I was a kid; her performance of that song was so wonderful for me to watch, especially because no one had to verbally sing the words for me to understand the lyrics.
Week 3: The Collective

In her essay on Deaf American Theater Cynthia Peters notes that both “the de-emphasizing of specialized labor” and “ensemble acting” reflect the communal nature of Collaborative Theater within the Deaf community. This is an interesting observation since it suggests that Deaf American Theater is viewed less as an art form to be crafted and then presented to an audience for aesthetic enjoyment and more of an organic collaborative project that should have an almost grassroots appeal to its audience.

She further notes that during the production of *My Third Eye* scenes were developed from the collective experiences of its cast members. This process of collective vocalization mirrors the oral tradition that we discussed earlier in class. By forming a collective tale from their individual stories, Deaf members of *My Third Eye* seem to create a form of theater that can be passed along and serve the same role that oral tradition has served for the non-Deaf world. This focus of art on the collective rather than individual heightens the significance of collaborative theater by making these productions historical reference points that describe sentiments within Deaf communities at a particular time and place. As an outsider, viewing Collaborative Theater offers me stories and tales that can be deconstructed and placed within their corresponding political and social contexts to provide insight into the Deaf world. In contrast, if Collaborative Theater were more a product of one director or focused simply on telling a singular tale, it could not provide us with these communal insights. I contend that Collaborative Theater
is a more important cultural aspect of the Deaf community than most mainstream plays are to their non-Deaf communities.

Although cognizant of the benefits of this communal art form, I must also question whether or not it diminishes the role of the Deaf individual by presenting audiences with story lines that fail to acknowledge the great diversity within the Deaf community. Peters recognizes this lack of focus on the individual when she states that, “when a production does feature a solo performance or spotlight… that performer is singled out as a representative; as the Deaf American.” Forcing a character to constantly be the Deaf American risks undervaluing the differences that Deaf Americans experience in their lives and individuals’ perceptions of both the Deaf and non-Deaf worlds. These differences might be especially marginalized if they conflict with the consensus of other cast members, writers, etc. In two ways---by having to confirm to a particular image of the Deaf American, and having to find consensus among fellow production members---the Deaf individual risks being marginalized in Collaborative Theater.

On a final note, my critique of Collaborative Theater within the Deaf community is based on a very individualistic view of society. Essentially, I cannot escape my own prejudices towards my society’s belief that every individual is unique in a way that often serves to overshadow the idea of a collective identity. In contrast, collaborative theater does not share this prejudice so it seems almost unsound to critique its approach to story telling from within my own partiality.
April 20, 2011

Week Three Reflections

Last week readings gave me a very insightful look into the Deaf community and how the culture has adapted to both internal and external changes since the early 1900s. From the movie Third Eye to the book Inside the Deaf Culture, there are a lot of intriguing and informative aspects about the deaf community that were discussed. After completing most of the readings and watching all the movies, I cannot help but note that despite the marginalized position of deaf people in our society, the deaf culture resembles mainstream in many ways and went through the same changes such as racism and lost of a vibrant music/poetry era.

Just like mainstream culture, the deaf community experienced a language change which comes with the passage of time. Thanks to Vedlitz efforts to preserve and document sign language from some of the most prominent people at the time, today’s deaf people along with hearing people are able to see what signs/fingerspells have changed and those [fingerspell/signs] that are no longer used. However, it is very interesting that though technology (e.g. movies) has helped preserve historical artifacts (e.g. language), it has simultaneously contributed to the decline of deaf people congregating in clubs due to accessibility of things once shared in clubs.

Reading about the importance of face-to-face communication in the storytelling tradition reminded me of how some cultures in other parts of the world passed down their traditions. For example in India, young children who are perceived to have a gift in singing are sent to live in the households of master singers. Over there, they learn ancient songs and traditions that have been passed down from generations to generations. Similarly like deaf “smooth signers”, these children become apprentices and learn the
ways of singing so that one day they could sing traditional songs and become teachers to others.

One intriguing and eye-opening section that I found is in Carol Padden & Tom Humphries *Inside the Deaf Culture*. In Chapter 4, Padden and Humphries talk about how the deaf clubs used to be the quintessential venue for deaf culture and communication. Deaf people came together in these clubs to share their ideas, celebrate the deaf traditions and learn basically what is going on within the community. There were many clubs situated in several states that hosted these vibrant as well as intellectual discussions. I must say that I was very surprised as well as disturbed to find that racism existed within the deaf community just as it was in the mainstream culture. Maybe I am naïve to think such division could never exist in a “deaf minority culture” but I truly was shocked that the mainstream view of race had also diffused into the deaf community. Not only were there segregated schools, but also black deaf people were not allowed inside white deaf clubs and as a result they were forced to form their own clubs. I was intrigued to discover that while deaf African Americans were discriminated against, paradoxically they were also sought after by white athletics organizations simply because blacks could guarantee a spot in the championship. Padden and Humphries state “Though prohibiting African American athletes from joining as members, white deaf clubs aggressively pursued them to play for club teams… because any one of them could take a team to the national championships” (Padden and Humphries 81). This mirrors the same exploitation of black athletes that was taking place in the mainstream culture and it surprises me that this was going on within the deaf community. It is especially hard to fathom a racial segregation
within a small community that was struggling against the mainstream culture to be heard and recognize.
I finished Deaf in America. I liked the book. A really good part was the joke about a couple in a motel, and the husband leaves to get something out of the car, and then forgets which door is his. He honks the horn until everyone turns on their lights except one room. I laughed so hard when I read about that because it is funny how the Deaf community knows that the non-Deaf community is caught up in sound. The non-Deaf community is caught up in sound almost to a fault. If someone squeaks their chair a little too loudly in class people turn. I think this story shows a lot about the Deaf as well as the non-Deaf world, and how the Deaf world can use the non-Deaf world to their advantage.

The Star Spangled Banner was an interesting thing. In English you have to use certain words, and they NEVER change. But in ASL, they change over the years or between people. Is that wrong? Isn’t that changing the meaning? I think that ASL has its own meaning, and is less stringent than English, whether for good or bad. I still am not so sure about signing English, and how that all works. There are signers who sign the Star Spangled Banner in English, and there are signers who sign it in ASL, and then there was that one really cool old lady who signed it in the “future” ASL format. That was hilarious. She said something like, this is about a flag and how great it is and how much it represents, and that I pledge myself to it. But in a way English can be similar to this, even if it doesn’t appear so at first. People would never use those eloquent words in the Star Spangled Banner in ordinary speech. They would just say they are patriotic and pledge themselves to their duty. That’s all. So in a way, it is more poetry and prose.

I think it is interesting how the National Theater of the Deaf was designed to be a bilingual show. It is not solely for Deaf people, which I think is strange. Is there demand from non-Deaf people to see such a performance? Is there even enough demand from the Deaf community to see theater? I don’t know, but it is interesting. Also, I thought that it was daring to do some of their performances regarding talkers and making fun of them. The show is all done in a good spirit, but the fact that they are making fun of speakers and signers reveals a lot about who they are and what they think is significant.

Lastly I was watching Peter Cook’s performance in the Flying Words another time. First off, he does sooooo much signing and poetry without consulting anything. It is like stand-up. How does he memorize it all? And rather than having to remember what you are talking about, he has to physically perform everything, and since it is poetry, he has to do it dramatically. It seemed like he was playing the longest charade game ever. Doesn’t he get tired? Do signers get tired faster than non-Deaf people with English?

I would like to perform something myself, even if it is something very very small. Or even try and do an ABC poem. Perhaps that can be my final project; perhaps me signing a song.
Week 3 Journal

I believe that many of the viewings from the last week have captured the highly visual nature of ASL in performance; *My Third Eye*, as well as those video selections that we have had the opportunity to view in class, have demonstrated the way in which ASL artists are able to manipulate the physical form of their language to put forth a true performance that is geared toward a specific audience. In *My Third Eye*, I especially enjoyed the artists’ interpretation of “singing.” The general concept of “choreographing” sign demonstrates not only the highly rhythmic and playful nature of ASL, but also the ways in which it can be easily applied to performance.

As I mentioned in class, I interpreted the title “My Third Eye” to be a nod to the heightened level of perception among the Deaf community. Consequently, I was looking forward to readings about Deafblind communication and the consequences of conditions like Usher’s as a contrast to these films. Following exposure to multiple visually-based demonstrations of ASL poetry and performance, I wondered how members of the Deafblind community were able to participate in Deaf culture. From what I have read, it appears that such a situation entails a hugely different cultural experience. One thing that appears to be highly unique about ASL is the use of classifiers—almost immediately, the subject of conversation is replaced with signs that demonstrate the movement or physical appearance of that initial object. Does the high degree of reliance on classifiers in ASL present a profound challenge to Deafblind individuals? Do they rely on other descriptive forms apart from classifiers in regular conversation? I am interested to hear if, or how, the Deafblind deal with this issue. I enjoyed the way in which the “Sideshow” segment of *My Third Eye* critiques non-Deaf individual’s reliance on hearing alone. However, I
wonder if the Deafblind present a similar type of criticism of the Deaf—does their reliance on sight alone place them within the same realm as the non-Deaf?

It seems that Dorothy Stiefel lived for many years with only partial loss of her hearing and vision; I can imagine that this experience would be different for an individual who was born both profoundly deaf and blind. Based off of her account, there is no insight as to how the Deafblind are incorporated into the Deaf community. Consequently, I am truly looking forward to learning how Janet Marcous, as a representative of the Deafblind, engages with ASL both as a language and as an artform. I look forward to learning if there is a distinction between blind and the capital “B” Blind communities and to see how Janet Marcous identifies herself, as Deaf, Blind, or exclusively Deafblind.

Lastly, I felt that the “Guidelines: Practical Tips for Working and Socializing with Deaf-blind people” is a bit offensive in its aims. At one point, the author states that one is not to “handle” a Deafblind person like an object. However, she then goes on to present something resembling an owner’s manual for the Deafblind. Through Patrick Graybill’s visit and the various readings we have had, I have come to realize how the experience of deafness is truly a cultural one. I would never expect to see a rulebook outlining “Practical tips for socializing with [insert cultural group here].” Ultimately, I found this type of publication to be highly problematic and culturally insensitive, despite its practical value.
Journal Week 3

I thought this week of learning and reading about sign language story telling and history was very interesting, and I am finding the more I read about this culture, the more I want to learn. In this journal I am just going to comment on some things we talked about in class and interesting things from the readings.

One of my favorite parts of this week’s discussion was just learning some new signs, and learning some of the history behind the signs. When I first saw the sign for “to see” I assumed that it was just made to look like two eyes are looking at something by using the first two fingers in a “v” shape. When I found out in class that it really comes from French sign language, it suddenly clicked in my head that it really came from the French word for to see which is “voir”. The same thing happened for the sign for “to look for” which is an initialized “c” sign. It comes from the French verb “chercher” which means “to look for” in English. I also really liked learning the sign for “New York” and how it’s the sign for “subway” just turned upside down. Just learning about the linguistics of ASL is super interesting to me. With every new sign I learn I come to realize more and more how truly complex and nuanced ASL really is.

One video clip we watched that really exemplified ASL story telling to me was “the High Diver”. Without knowing any ASL at all I think most people would be able to understand what the story is about, and understand some of the emotion and feeling of the story. Something that I had read about but hadn’t really seen yet was how many film techniques seemed to be reflected in ASL story telling. There really were different camera angles, and long shots and close ups. You got to see the same event from different perspectives (the audience and the diver) all being signed by the same person in relatively the same space. Just by subtly moving his shoulder or head, the whole perspective of the scene changed. It was really amazing to see something that I had read a lot about.

An interesting part of ASL story telling that came up in “Signing the Body Poetic” is the idea of ownership over the stories. Because ASL is primarily a “face-to-face” tradition stories have been told to audiences and passed down through the communities. This makes it hard for one poet or storyteller to really claim individuality
over a story, especially since most stories deal with many of the same themes of Deaf culture. Interestingly, the book points out that with the increasing use of technology and video recording, “the ownership question has been undergoing further re-evaluation” (pg. 43). Now if an artist can have their work recorded and saved, it is almost like having it written down and signing their name to it. Something that the book doesn’t mention but I think is interesting is the difference between English written poetry and ASL poetry in the way that it is performed by other people. To me it seems like if someone who is not the poet is going to read aloud a certain poem, most people will read it in almost the exact same way since the words are right there in front of you, very clearly defined. However in ASL, I feel as if there is more room to play around with other people’s poetry and even if not intentional, when someone who is not the original poet signs the poem, it is going to come out a little bit differently, just because of the different styles many signers have.
Journal: Week 3

What really stands out to me about the readings, viewings, and class discussions from this past week are those that pertain to the National Theater of the Deaf (NTD). Much of what we read revolved around the theater group or additional work by their actors, and watching *My Third Eye* was really an enlightening experience. I have thought a lot about Professor Polansky’s proposition that the NTD was, or is, directed toward Deaf children. At first, I did not quite agree, but as I continue to consider that idea, it seems to make more and more sense. That said, however, I continue to hold on to my feelings of frustration and even disgust. I was really surprised to learn about the founding and development of the NTD, and I question the motives of Hays and the other non-Deaf people involved. While it certainly helped to build the arts of the Deaf community, in large part through inspiring children, this seems to be solely the goal of the actors involved. At least as it has been portrayed, it seems to me that Hays and his collaborators did not always have the interests of the Deaf community at heart, if at all. If they had cared about a Deaf audience, they would have listened more closely to the suggestions of the actors when it came to things like moving while signing or having many people scattered across the stage and signing simultaneously.

The last piece of the performance, *Three Blind Mice*, was the moment when this “puppet show” mentality was clearest to me. This could just be because this is the part that I watched after having done the readings about the NTD, but it seemed very much geared to a non-Deaf audience. I’ve thought a lot about the common perceptions of the Deaf community and what type of impact a show like this would have on the ordinary viewer. In my opinion, non-Deaf people would be impressed by the patterns and
synchronicity, they may find some parts humorous, but they would miss the deeper messages, and end up with a borderline animalistic view of the capabilities of Deaf people. Clearly, this is far from the truth. The point that I’m trying to make here is that by adapting the show for non-Deaf audiences, the actors were prevented from truly showcasing their talent, as we saw done in many other recordings of their poetry and other forms of artistic expression.

I also wanted to spend a little bit of time reflecting on the chapters that we read in *Inside Deaf Culture* for this week. I was able to connect with this book much more so than *Deaf in America*, and I am not really sure why that is. I found these chapters to be clear; the authors argued brilliant claims with specific examples. The overall message that I took away from this reading, the constant struggle for identity as a culture, is one that is echoed in *Deaf in America*. It is interesting to consider what and who defines the American Deaf culture. In large part, what I said about the NTD applies here as well. The non-Deaf people seem to set the boundaries, and the Deaf, in return, do their best to define themselves within those limits. At the same time, this book presents the dynamic nature of this definition of culture. Within the culture, there are many different ideas of progress, and much of that progress is out of the reach of the individual, and lies instead in the hands of the society at large. The workers who were recruited to work in factories during the wartime and the emergence of the middle class that followed are two examples of this. Each of these larger events had enormous repercussions for the Deaf community, as Padden and Humphries discuss.

I am beginning to feel myself very much engaged in each of these readings and viewings, and hungry for more, which is a wonderful feeling. I would love to see more
productions by the NTD, for instance *A Deaf Family Diary* or *Tales from a Clubroom*.

The fact that these productions are not easily available frustrates me immensely, but I guess there are great lessons to be learned from that about the overall disregard and lack of appreciation for the Deaf culture and its art.
In reading the material for this week, I was often surprised about how well-versed Deaf people can be with understanding rhythm, tempo, rhyme and other concepts that I associate with the ability to hear. I am learning that Deaf people’s relationship with speech and sound is very complex—it is not by any means a world entirely closed off to them.

In “My Third Eye,” the actors exhibited an amazing sense of rhythm in their performance of “Three Blind Mice.” It got me thinking about how rhythm is visible and not just audible or tactile—watching a metronome, or something of the sort, would suggest how you can see something move in a repeated pattern and pick up rhythm that way. I’m curious as to whether the actors got a sense of visible rhythm as well as tactile rhythm—I suppose their bare feet allowed them to feel the vibrations of the music—during the performance. Peters explains how moving one’s body to create rhythm and tempo are old practices, and it’s only relatively recently that music has become more divorced from the body. I remember being surprised to learn that Debbie Rennie was a dancer (in “The Heart of the Hydrogen Jukebox”) but now I realize that this is not so strange.

Another compelling example of the relationship between Deaf people and sound or rhythm that I found was in Dorothy Miles’ book Gestures, in which she has written many poems that rhyme. It seems she has a brilliant understanding of how language sounds. I have considered several possibilities about how she acquired this understanding: perhaps she examined how words are spelled, looked in a rhyming dictionary, or asked non-Deaf people what words rhyme or flow together. After looking into her biography, I think the most likely possibility is that she retained a sense of rhyme throughout her career despite losing her hearing at a young age.

In addition to the sound of her poetry, Miles’ work stands out because of its content. In her poem “To a Deaf Child,” she sends a message to Deaf children that their language is useful, legitimate and the only one they can perfectly master—but more than that, it is vibrant and beautiful. This is a very important lesson about sign language to all people, but there is no more important audience than a Deaf child.

The idea of the audience and how it affects the work was addressed in two other readings: Padden and Humphries as well as Signing the Body Poetic have stated that theater with Deaf actors, like NTD, which used to be for the Deaf audience is changing in that both spoken word and sign are presented simultaneously now. Still, the book states that Deaf theater is not meant to give lessons to the non-Deaf, which makes sense because it’s probably that the audience members already know something about Deaf culture, which is why they are going to Deaf theater. While the readings state that the purpose of Deaf theater is to entertain Deaf people, the theater itself speaks to me in a different way. Just like Rutherford’s stories about Deaf people’s experience with alarm clocks and driving, “My Third Eye” seemed to me primarily a lesson aimed at the non-Deaf person who is curious about the lives of Deaf people, but perhaps doesn’t know a Deaf person well enough to ask. The actors even taught signs to the audience, which surely suggests it is aimed at the non-Deaf audience (in addition to the Deaf audience). This is different from the comedy of Mary Beth Miller, whom we watched in class and read about in Peters’ book. Her jokes are accessible to both Deaf and non-Deaf people,
but some sketches are more aimed at the Deaf; for example, when she signs with two hands talking to each other, or jokes about how non-Deaf ASL students are like.

Miller’s sense of humor seems to be characteristic of many of the Deaf people I have seen or interacted with. Peters writes about it as a method of storytelling, but I’m not sure that that is the entire picture. I imagine there are other reasons: first, that it is often too easy to make jokes about awkward situations involving non-Deaf folks, and also that at times it is freeing to make light of difficult situations or discrimination that Deaf people may come across.
I, unfortunately, was unable to attend the meeting with Janet Marcous because of pneumonia, but, I have very much enjoyed all the readings for this week. My perspective has definitely changed concerning the Deaf community and how they view themselves and others. I can’t say that I had any concrete opinions or knowledge about the Deaf community; in fact, I’m ashamed to admit that I rarely ever thought of the Deaf community until recently. I suppose one tends to be biased towards the issues and concerns of the community closest to them. I did not know anyone who was deaf or hearing impaired and though my family does have a history of vision problems, I do not know anyone who is blind.

I have often wondered what it would be like to be devoid of sound or sight and the thought usually makes me feel extremely uncomfortable. I know that I would learn to adapt and would eventually accept my body, but I know that it would be difficult, at first to do so. This line of thinking has also led me to the question of what it would be like to be born without sound or sight. I wonder if a person can miss what they never had or if they ever suffer psychological crises with the realization that the majority of the world is hearing and seeing. When I read the first books of the class and heard the stories of Patrick Graybill (and Peter Cook in the Fall), I was inspired and somewhat comforted in the fact that the Deaf community was strong, assertive, and confident in themselves. It made me laugh to read in Deaf in America: Voices from a Culture, by Carol Padden and Tom Humphries, that the boy who had been born to a Deaf family thought the girl neighbor was weird because she communicated by moving her mouth.

It has also been extremely humbling to read of the experiences of the Deaf community and to learn of what life is like in their shoes. I feel as though I have been an egotistical person because I have only recognized what it is like to live a life similar to mine (hearing, living in America, educated, Western, etc). I know this is too harsh and exaggerated; the truth is that I tend to be more concerned with other people and their needs andhardest with myself. And I also spend way too much time being frustrated with the fact that I can’t change the education system, feed the homeless, empower the oppressed people to speak up and demand change, or convince the corporations and politicians that tax breaks for the rich are stupid and that people should be treated with dignity and respect. Why do you think I don’t watch the news often? So I should take that back and say something that is closer to the truth which is that I feel ignorant. I feel as though I have ignored an entire body of people (even if it was unintentionally) and that makes me feel ashamed of myself.

I feel ashamed that I don’t know about their culture or their pride. I’m ashamed that I’ve talked about deafness with fear (at the thought that it could happen to me) and occasionally with pity; and I’m ashamed with how ashamed I feel! It’s not as though deaf people are more delicate than other people. They have their own unique community with problems just like other minority groups though they suffer in different ways. I just wish I had been more aware from an earlier point.

I will say that it has been enlightening reading and talking with my friends about the readings. I had a discussion tonight with my friend Derek about the book about Usher’s syndrome by Dorothy Steifel. His expressed his feelings concerning what it would be like to lose both your hearing and your sight. He said that losing one would be bad enough and he wouldn’t know what to do if he lost both. We also talked about
deafness and I was surprised because he seemed to be of the opinion that those who are born Deaf must feel some sort of sadness at the realization they have a lack of something others have. I told him that I had been reading that those who were born deaf and into the Deaf community seemed to be more confident and assertive that those who later lost their hearing because they did not view their situation as an impairment, but as an endowment. He was surprised and expressed skepticism, but then I let him read the closing statement from Stiefel’s book. She says that she would not change who she is and does not believe in “normal.” Her final statements are very eloquent and concise and it was nice to hear that he thought her sentiments were beautiful and well spoken. His opinion also seemed to change and he seemed genuinely interested in learning more. I feel a bit behind in my learning as of now, but am excited to do catch up and learn more about this culture and the experiences that cultivate and perpetuate it.
I found the play My Third Eye to be very interesting. My favorite scene in the play was the Side Show scene, where two hearing people from the land of Ababa are showcased as oddities along with their customs.

This scene really turned a number of common perceptions on their heads, both poking fun at stereotypes of the Deaf and showing some disadvantages of being hearing. For example, when the ring master signs that “they are even able to learn simple language” they then depict the voice actor as struggling to sign. This pokes fun of the opposite stereotype that the hearing have of the Deaf, both that sign language is the simple language, and that those who cannot learn to speak are not intelligent.

They also showed the audience a glimpse of how odd hearing people can seem to the Deaf. For example when the exhibitor turns on the cassette tape the two hearing people start to dance, and when they turned it off they stopped dancing. Both the exhibitor and the ringmaster act perplexed, as they see no reason that the two hearing people should start dancing. The way they set up this specific part of the scene even makes me question the normalcy of such an act. Also, the constant movement of the mouths showed how speaking people look to the Deaf. The hearing actors move their mouths but no meaning comes out of it, only when the voice is accompanied by signing does it mean anything, both to the Deaf people, and to the hearing in this case, as the voice actors only voice what is signed. Thus it turns another perception on its head, with signing carrying true meaning, and sound not standing on its own.
Furthermore, it showed how hearing can also be a disadvantage, something that I had never thought of before. For example, they depict how hearing people are very averse to being touched or having any physical contact with each other, depicted by the subway scene where everyone jumps if someone puts a hand on their shoulder. This is in contrast to immediately after, where all the Deaf actors are shown holding hands. The other point they brought up is the obsession with the telephone. In this case the hearing girl is shown talking on the phone to the exclusion of interacting with anything else. Even though someone right next to her is attempting to talk with her, she will only speak to that person on the other side of the phone, even when she is turned upside down or moved around. This girl shuns the contact and communication of those right next to her and prefers to speak into the phone, thus showing a negative aspect of the hearing culture.

The Third Eye play was very interesting to me. It introduced new ideas and methods of looking at things that I had not thought of. The Side Show scene especially did that for me, helping me to both experience some glimpse into what it is like to be seen as an oddity and to understand some of the stereotypes about the Deaf and how odd these stereotypes are.