Introduction: Listening to Deaf Studies

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My line of work obliges me to go into many homes. Once inside I am invariably questioned about the deaf. But most often the questions are as laughable as they are absurd; they merely prove that almost everyone has gotten the falsest possible ideas about us; few people have an adequate notion of our state, our resources, or our way of communicating with each other in sign language.

—Pierre Desloges, deaf bookbinder, 1779

What does it matter, whether one speaks or signs, as they both pertain equally to the soul?

—St. Augustine

Among the seismic shifts in culture brought about in the 1960s was a much quieter but nonetheless profound revolution in our understanding of human language and culture: the validation of the fully linguistic nature of sign languages and the subsequent rewriting of deaf identity from deaf to Deaf, that is, from a pathological state of hearing loss to the cultural identity of a linguistic minority. Prior to this time, prevailing wisdom perceived signed languages as primitive communication systems limited to iconicographic representations. Even worse, their use was thought to pose a grave danger to society, as it encouraged defective individuals to socialize, form associations, and ultimately intermarry and increase their numbers. In the spirit and momentum of the eugenics movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an all-out campaign was waged to remedy what Alexander Graham Bell warned against: the formation of a “deaf variety of the human race.” By the 1920s, “oralism”—the method of instructing deaf people through the exclusive use of speaking, lip-reading, and hearing—had become the dominant method of teaching, making it virtually impossible for Deaf individuals to maintain teaching positions that they held since the creation of American residential schools for the deaf in 1817. To ensure purely oral environments, schools banned the use of sign language, often physically punishing anyone caught signing. It is common for Deaf adults of today to recount stories of their hands being beaten with rulers and sticks, while others tell of more calculated punishments such as being forced to kneel on a broomstick while holding dictionaries with outstretched arms.

This literal and figurative shackling of deaf students and sign language may now be placed in stark relief against what we now know—that these deaf children were beaten for behaving as humans do, for exercising the indomitable human will to communicate. We now know, after four decades of linguistic research, that “language” may just
as well be visual-manual as aural-spoken. We know that infants—whether hearing or deaf—may just as easily babble their way into a fully grammatical signed language as they would a spoken language. Now that we can spy on the neuroanatomical structure of language through brain imaging technology, we see that the regions once thought to process speech in the right hemisphere also light up like a city at night when processing sign language.\(^6\) Whether ignited by sound or by sight, neurons ferry the electric luggage of language along a matrix of pathways that ultimately lead toward full linguistic and cognitive development. Long before the supple linguistic capacity of humans was verified by extensive research, Jean Jacques Rousseau intuited this deeper conception of language in the eighteenth century: “the invention of the art of communicating our ideas depends less upon the organs we use in such communication than it does upon a power proper to man, according to which he uses his organs in this way, and which, if he lacked these, would lead him to use others to the same end.”\(^5\) In other words, language behaves a lot like running water. If one way is blocked, it will well up and find another.

Given prevailing wisdom, readers most likely assume that such blockage is due to deafness; I want to suggest the counterintuitive position—that our historic disregard for manual languages has formed its own blockage. Not coaxed down the pathway of signing, language has opted for speech. The road less traveled, however, is still a road and is becoming more and more traveled as time goes on.

In retrospect, we may now see that the historic misunderstanding of sign languages is one of the longest enduring errors of human thought, leaving us with an incomplete understanding about the nature of human language—the implications of which have rippled throughout the centuries.\(^6\) While effects of such a misalignment of thought can be traced throughout the history of Western thought, they have been felt most profoundly by deaf individuals whose intellectual abilities have been grossly misunderstood and their full humanity put into question. Indeed, the history of deaf individuals, like that of women, African Americans, Native Americans, gays and lesbians, and persons with disabilities, has been one of marginalization and misrepresentation. Nineteenth-century science did not treat deaf individuals any kinder than these maligned minority groups; the same scientific apparatus that proved their inferiority and deviance determined the pathological meanings of deafness and relegated sign languages as outcasts from the family of human languages.\(^7\)

In the 1970s, however, the intellectual and cultural climate began to change. Not long after sign languages were accepted into the fold of human languages, Deaf people began to see themselves as belonging to the fold of human cultures. If Deaf people belonged to a culture, they would require a very different set of educational, legal, economic, political, and creative relations to the world.\(^8\) This wholesale recategorization was the catapult that sent Deaf politics into a whole new direction. “The modern age for Deaf people,” writes Tom Humphries, “did not begin until the 1970s,”\(^9\) and it began through a rhetoric of culture.

The emergence of the cultural model came on the heels of the 1960s civil rights movements, which brought about a chorus of political and cultural voices that spoke out against systemic social injustice. Deaf activists were eager to join in this chorus, yet they faced a dilemma at ground zero of resistance: While “vocal” minority groups used
the rhetoric of “gaining a voice” and “speaking out” without a second thought, the Deaf community faced the fact that the hegemony of the “voice” and “speaking” was precisely what they wanted to “speak out” against. This metaphorical incongruity magnifies the crux of Deaf political activism: how to seize a public voice that commands attention, how to speak out without speaking.

To complicate matters further, this public voice has had a daunting rhetorical task given the entrenched logic of normalcy buttressed by massive biopower institutions that promote medicalized constructions of deafness. It quickly became evident that the Deaf community and its allies would have to develop a body of knowledge about its ways, values, literature, politics, arts, and history. That is, Deaf Culture needed Deaf Studies to articulate, explore, and promote the phenomenon of Deaf Culture, both to the hearing world and to Deaf individuals themselves. Through this process, which Tom Humphries (in this volume) calls “talking culture,” Deaf Studies has sought to gain control over the politics of representation by “speaking for itself” instead of being spoken for, which has been the case throughout history.

As a result of Deaf Studies’ thirty years of “talking culture,” the meanings of deaf have indeed changed. Nearly any dictionary includes the definition of Deaf as referring to “the community of deaf people who use American Sign Language (ASL) as a primary means of communication.” Today, the existence of a social formation of Deaf people is largely accepted. Deaf Studies may now move on beyond proving that a Deaf Culture exists to ask what it is about Deaf Culture that is valuable to human diversity. It asks what the previously obscure history of sign languages and their communities reflects and magnifies about the linguistics and cultural possibilities of the human character. If language is not what it used to be, then what about our constructions of literature and literacy? As language is a principle means of knowing the world, and as some would contend, of producing the world, then what sort of world have we made? How has the assumption that language = speech borrowed itself within the fields of education, anthropology, psychology, medicine, history, and the philosophy of language? As it engages questions fundamental to a deeper understanding of human language, communication, and cultural formations, Deaf Studies is relevant not only to members and allies of this community; anyone interested in questions of language, culture, identity, disability, and critical theory will have something to gain from engaging the field of Deaf Studies.

Historically speaking, however, few have listened to the insights from Deaf Studies. This book, *Open Your Eyes: Deaf Studies Talking*, intends to compel a variety of audiences to listen—from eavesdroppers to longtime residents of the Deaf world. *Open Your Eyes* hopes to encourage readers to consider new ways of listening, new ways of thinking, new ways of seeing the world through Deaf eyes. Throughout this volume, readers will be provided with a wide array of critical lenses that will magnify aspects of the world often overlooked in the peripheries of the phono-centric focus of the West. In this sense, the peripheral is both literal and metaphorical. As Ben Bahan documents in this volume, Deaf eyes have the uncanny ability to process simultaneous information through enhanced peripheral vision. Whereas hearing people depend on sound for information along the outskirts of their sight, Deaf people’s vision pushes the boundaries
of the peripheral, affording them the ability to entertain nuanced sensory input across a wide field of vision. Deaf vision, in other words, disperses the single-point perspective along a spectrum of perception, allowing the viewer to process multilayered, divergent information simultaneously.

Such acute visual practices can be extrapolated to deeper ways of seeing the world; it may lead toward a cultural and political vision in which the periphery is not so peripheral, in which the spectrum of focus is widened, becoming less hierarchical and more horizontal and democratic. The ability to bring the peripheral out of hiding serves as a model for Deaf critical lenses as well. *Open Your Eyes: Deaf Studies Talking* hopes to widen the spectrum of the humanities, to magnify ways that this peripheral area of study contains insights that affect how those in the "center" see the world. *Open Your Eyes*, like James Fernandez’s chapter on "Peripheral Wisdom," “proceeds from the assumption that the experience of being in the peripheries shapes the sense of identity and the way of thinking, and also it assumes that centres have need of peripheries, not only for their own identity because there is always something to be learned from the peripheries.”11 Indeed, there is much to be learned from the peripheries, as this volume attests, but readers must open their eyes wide to entertain the world through Deaf lenses.

*Open Your Eyes: Deaf Studies Talking* features leading and emerging Deaf Studies scholars from a variety of subject positions, from Deaf of Deaf families to hearing families, and all points in between. This collection offers the long overdue opportunity to reflect on the development of Deaf Studies as an academic field, assess where it is, and suggest future directions for inquiry. While a wide range of topics are covered—colonialism, visual culture, transnationalism, literacy, philosophy of language, place, critical pedagogy, race, gender, sexual orientation, and disability—all the essays explore, critique, and reflect on the unique phenomenon of the language, culture, and identities of a visual-tactile minority living in a phonocentric world.

For many, this will be an eye-opening experience where sensory lack becomes phenomenological plentitude, where the peripheral becomes central, where Deaf becomes desirable. Deaf Studies has been trying to explain such counterintuitive positions for decades now. The difficulty has been in gaining an audience that truly listens. “To compel listeners, yes,” Tom Humphries writes. “A self cannot exist if it is not heard. Deaf people have had to create voices, learn to hear their own voices, and now it remains to compel others to listen.”12 *Open Your Eyes* intends to compel an audience to listen in on the issues and insights gained from the unique perspectives in Deaf Studies.

Readers who do take the time to listen to Deaf Studies talking may sense that they have entered a conversation that began a long time ago. Indeed, some catching up is needed. Hence, in what follows, this introductory essay will back up and listen in on what Deaf Studies has been talking about for quite some time.

**A Pre-History of Deaf Studies**

As with any field of study, specific origins are difficult to pinpoint.13 Long before there was a Deaf Culture or Deaf Studies per se, there was a long and sporadic philosophi-
cal fascination with sign languages and deaf individuals. Tracing this early Deaf history is a bit like tracing the paths of fireflies: the field is mostly dark, except for scattered moments of illumination. The darkness results in part because manual languages have had no written system, no way of preserving thoughts beyond the moment of utterance. One is always haunted by how much may have occurred among deaf individuals and communities throughout history but was never recorded. What we do have, however, are sightings of signing communities over the past two and a half millennia. These sightings appear as hearing philosophers, poets, and artists have come into contact with deaf individuals and their communities and then pondered about this alternative way of being-in—the-world. Two and a half millennia ago, for example, Plato referred to a group of signers in Athens in the Cretus (see Bauman, this volume). Since then, a number of philosophers and writers—including St. Augustine, da Vinci, Cardano, Descartes, Rousseau, Leibniz, Diderot, Condillac, and others—have mused about deafness and manual languages. For nearly two hundred years, travel writers noted with great curiosity that the famous Topkapi Palace in Constantinopole was populated with signing mutes. In the end, we are left to connect the dots from one sighting of deafness to the next to form a ventriloquist historiography, where the actual lives of deaf people and signing communities are known only through the writings of others.

It was not until 1779 that a deaf person, Pierre Desloges, seized control of a public voice—through written French—that commanded the attention of Parisian society and its intellectuals. When Desloges took up pen and paper, little did he know that he would lay the rhetorical foundation for Deaf Studies some two hundred years later: catalyzed by the widespread misunderstandings of sign languages and their communities, he provided insights into the social, cultural, and intellectual livelihood of the Deaf community.

There are congenitally deaf people, Parisian laborers, who are illiterate and who have never attended the Abbe de l’Epee’s lessons who have been found so well instructed about their religion, simply by means of signs, that they have been judged worthy of admittance to the holy sacraments, even those of the eucharist and marriage. No event—in Paris, in France, or in the four corners of the world—lies outside the scope of our discussion. We express ourselves on all subjects with as much order, precision, and rapidity as if we enjoyed the faculty of speech and hearing.

Desloges’s insider perspective testifies to the fact that Deaf people do what any other human would do in similar circumstances—develop a natural language and social discourse. Yet, Desloges goes even further to claim that sign language is not only good for deaf people, but that it could be of immense value to all of humanity. “I cannot understand how a language like sign language—the richest in expressions, the most energetic . . . —is still so neglected and that only the deaf speak it (as it were). This is, I confess, one of the irrationalities of the human mind I cannot explain.” Over two hundred years later we are now beginning to realize the broader cognitive and psychological benefits of sign language for all humans—whether hearing or deaf. Desloges would be vindicated to learn about the lucrative industry that encourages hearing parents to
sign to their hearing babies in order to stimulate cognition, social behavior, and language skills.  

A contributing factor to this “irrationality” may be that hearing people don’t actually see sign language, even when they look directly at it. It is not only a foreign language, but a profoundly foreign concept that a language could exist outside the full presence of sound. This leaves defenders of sign language to explain themselves in print, rendering sign language lost in translation. Desloges was quick to admit that “My presentation of sign language is limited to a simple outline of it, with no claim to a full explanation of its mechanism. That would be an immense enterprise requiring several volumes. Indeed, sometimes a particular sign made in the twinking of an eye would require entire pages for a description of it to be complete.” Desloges and the generations of Deaf activists after him would have to resort to print to defend something that cannot be rendered in print. Yet, print would have to be the voice of self-representation throughout the nineteenth century.

In the tradition of Desloges, Deaf Americans began to claim their own meanings, identity, and language. While there were Deaf communities prior to the founding of the residential school in 1817, the American Deaf community formed in numbers like never before as residential schools spread across the land, bringing with them the “sign language” and a growing sense of solidarity and shared experiences. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Deaf world grew into a transnational cultural phenomenon with residential schools, clubs, and local, national, and international associations; it argued its rights in education and employment; it created new literary genres; it made films, art, literature, and published a national network of newspapers known as the “Little Paper family” forming what Benedict Anderson calls an “imagined community.”

The title of the newspaper from the Mississippi Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb during the years 1882–1910—The Deaf-Mute Voice—sums up the rhetorical position of the Deaf community: its lack of a literal voice would by no means stop its members from speaking out by any means necessary.

As technology advanced in the early twentieth century, Deaf activists sought another means for the real Deaf-mute voice to speak out: film. In 1913, the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) collected funds to produce a series of short films with the intention of defending, preserving, and promoting sign language use. These films included samples of master signers engaging in political oratory, storytelling, songs, translations, and historical events. Today, they are regarded as cultural classics, leaving behind a signed history and insight into the evolution of “the sign language” that was to become American Sign Language.

In addition to creating films, the NAD would work through the first half of the twentieth century to defend Deaf workers’ rights, the right to drive cars, and the right to intermarry. Despite such organized resistance, Deaf issues remained peripheral to American cultural consciousness. Only those who happened to be involved in Deaf education, churches, or employers’ families would have taken notice of the Deaf world and its concerns. The hearing world’s ignorance of Deaf ways of being has had particularly deleterious effects on the majority of deaf people as they are born into hearing households and are therefore cast into a medicalized version of deafness that will indelibly mark their
lives as disabled. The “Deaf-mute voice” has been no match for the ideological megaphone of the biopower institutions designed to fix deafness and discourage the formation of a deaf variety of the human race. Just as Desloges faced a public that had the “falsest possible ideas” about deaf people, the Deaf community generations later would still be plagued with the common misunderstandings promoted by medical and educational experts. Rarely would the public listen to Deaf people themselves explain what it is like to live Deaf lives. Clearly, it would take more than renegade writers like Desloges and films by the NAD. It would take a formalized area of study and inquiry: it would take the scientific validation of sign language and the subsequent formation of Deaf Studies to gain a wider audience to hear Deaf political and cultural voices.

Deaf Studies in the Academy

The first known public mention of the term “Deaf Studies” came in 1971, from the executive director of the NAD, Frederick Schreiber. “If deaf people are to get ahead in our time, they must have a better image of themselves and their capabilities. They need concrete examples of what deaf people have already done so that they can project for themselves a brighter future. If we can have Black studies, Jewish studies, why not Deaf studies?”

Soon after, the 1970s saw the first Deaf Studies articles, such as Robert Panara’s “Deaf Studies in the English Curriculum” in 1974, the first courses, “The Deaf in Literature” (1972), and the first master’s thesis, Dennis Hoffmeyer’s “The Rationale for Developing a Deaf Studies Curriculum” (1975). The Deaf Studies movement was also advanced by the Linguistic Research Laboratory, directed by William Stokoe at Gallaudet, and the journal he founded, *Sign Language Studies*, which published early works on the sociolinguistic and cultural aspects of sign languages.

Deaf Studies curriculum was indeed under development in the 1970s, but came to greater fruition in the early 1980s with the first degree-granting programs: Boston University established its Deaf Studies program in 1981 and California State University at Northridge in 1983. In addition to these programs, which examined the Deaf community from sociological, cultural, and linguistic perspectives, there was a proliferation of seminars and workshops on American Sign Language and Deaf Culture. The primary agenda during these years was the defense of Deaf Culture, defining attributes of Deaf identity, and the development of a bilingual/bicultural model for Deaf education.

It would not be until 1994 that Gallaudet University, the world’s only liberal arts university for deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals, would establish a Deaf Studies program. This is partially due to the fact that Deaf Studies was already taught across the curriculum at Gallaudet University and partially due to resistance within Gallaudet University, for fear that such a program would foment resistance and activism. In any event, the solidification of a department was an important moment in the field’s history, as was the formation of its graduate program in 2002.

Despite there being no program in the 1980s, Gallaudet was an important site for Deaf activism. No event galvanized the Deaf world as much as the Deaf President Now (DPN) movement at Gallaudet University in 1988 when students, faculty, staff, and community members shut down the university in protest of the hiring of a hearing
president. The protest seized international media attention and led to a new visibility of the Deaf world as a political group. Deaf President Now has been referred to as the Selma and the Stonewall of the Deaf rights movement. The visibility of this protest was an impetus for the groundbreaking Americans with Disabilities Act, which followed DPN by two years.

One year after DPN, Gallaudet University sponsored the international Deaf Way conference in 1989, convening over six thousand people from more than eighty countries. This festival gave way to an international Deaf art movement, known as DeVIA, or Deaf View/Image Art. The 1990s then saw the first academic conferences to focus on Deaf Studies. Gallaudet sponsored the first two Deaf Studies conferences in 1991 and thereafter conferences took place every two years from 1993 to 2001. While not directly referred to as Deaf Studies conferences, Gallaudet University Press Institute has sponsored several conferences on specific topics of genetics, deaf people in Hitler's Europe, Deaf life-stories, and sign language linguistics, literature, and literacy. Thirteen years after the first Deaf Way celebration, in 2002, Gallaudet University hosted Deaf Way II, which brought nearly 9,700 people from 121 countries. Beginning in 2004, Utah Valley State College has taken up the biennial Deaf Studies Today conference and has published the proceedings. These Deaf Studies conferences featured the majority of panels on issues of education, art, literature, anthropology, history, sociology, linguistics, and psychology.

In addition to these conferences, the number of publications within Deaf Studies has grown rapidly. Deaf Studies has grown over the past two decades with many texts focusing on the multidisciplinary aspects of the Deaf world—including Deaf cultural studies and critical theory, American Deaf history, international Deaf history, the Holocaust and Deaf people, collections of Deaf writers, philosophy of signed languages, and sign language literature.

Not only has Deaf Studies grown in its academic output, students are lining up to take American Sign Language classes. According to an MLA survey, the number of students enrolling in ASL classes over the past five years has increased 435 percent. Currently, American Sign Language is the fifth most taught language in American colleges and universities and the second most taught language in community colleges. ASL was offered for the first time in 187 universities between the years 1998 and 2002. Many new ASL programs leave hundreds of students on waiting lists every semester. There is a growing, multimillion-dollar industry to learn American Sign Language and Deaf Studies.

Such growth and exposure is undoubtedly positive insofar as it increases public awareness of the Deaf world. Yet one of the great social contradictions of Deaf Studies is that while hearing individuals are being encouraged to sign in unprecedented numbers, from infancy through higher education, deaf people are being discouraged from signing, also from infancy through higher education. This contradiction—that sign languages are good for hearing people but bad for deaf people—is indicative of the historical situation of deaf people being spoken about and spoken for in the institutions designed to serve them. Even within the field of Deaf Studies, perspectives of Deaf people are often not valued. Many programs call themselves Deaf Studies but are actually based on an audiological model or are focused on deaf education and the strategies for
acquiring English. The same is true for publications. The *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education* and the *Oxford Handbook of Deaf Studies, Language and Deaf Education*, for example, provide important research primarily on deaf education, but focus very little on the cultural dimensions and theoretical critiques of existing social structures. The struggle over the contents of Deaf Studies is symptomatic of larger battles over self-determination that have been a part of the critical work of Deaf Studies since its inception. The field of Deaf Studies originally developed along the model of other minority studies; yet it would be unthinkable for African American Studies or Women Studies journals to focus almost exclusively on empirical educational research. Instead, African American Studies, Women's Studies, Deaf Studies, and other allied fields critique existing social arrangements that have served to marginalize their kind; they explore the complexities of identity construction within a political context, and they celebrate what is most unique to their ways of being. As such, Deaf Studies has explored a wide spectrum of topics, many of which fall under the more general notions of *identity, power*, and *language*.

In what follows, the reader will be provided with an overview of some of the principle discussions that have taken place in the field. Having such a background will help provide context for the discussions that take place in the following chapters.

**Deaf Identity and Cultural Politics**

It should come as no surprise that the concepts of identity and culture have been a central preoccupation of Deaf Studies since its inception. This focus is not unique to Deaf Studies, but to all minority studies, especially in their formative stages. Power over defining and developing identity is itself the battleground of the most important ideological battles of the past thirty years. Rewriting deaf to Deaf is about disowning an imposed medicalized identity and developing an empowered identity rooted in a community and culture of others who share similar experiences and outlooks on the world. As soon as the orthographic proclamation of "big D" Deaf was made, Deaf Studies scholars had to describe what made someone Deaf as opposed to deaf. Carol Padden was one of the earliest to ask and answer the question, "Who are Deaf people?"39 "Deaf people can be born into the culture, as in the case of children of Deaf parents. They begin learning the language of their parents from birth and thus acquire *native competence* in that language."40 This early model clearly favored those who enter the Deaf world at birth, who are themselves deaf, and, most importantly, who share the cultural values of Deaf people. These values, according to Padden, are, first and foremost, use and respect for ASL, as opposed to speech, for face-to-face communication. Deaf people also value their social and family ties within the Deaf world and they learn values of the culture through literature. Padden then makes further distinctions of the cultural boundaries of Deaf people by how difficult it is for outsiders, such as those raised orally, to assimilate to the ways of Deaf people—from eye gaze to cultural patterns of introductions and value systems.

As a means of bringing further relief to the ways of Deaf Culture, Padden distinguished the *deaf community* from *Deaf Culture*. The Deaf community "may include persons who are not themselves Deaf, but who actively support the goals of the community..."
and work with Deaf people to achieve them" while Deaf Culture is "more closed than the deaf community." With the focus on the most "native" Deaf individuals, the notion of the "center" or "core" became an important feature of cultural discourse. In Deaf in America, Padden and Humphries explained the distinct ways that Deaf people described their experiences as a result of being aligned toward a "different center" than hearing people, a center where sign language use and not relying on sound was the norm, not the deviation. Similarly, Cokely and Baker reinforce the model of a strong Deaf center in their Venn diagram to demonstrate four attributes of being culturally Deaf—audiological deafness, use of ASL, social affiliation, and political involvement (see Figure 1.1). When in alignment, these attributes create a strong Deaf-centric identity. This diagram was often used to describe the phenomenon of Deaf identity affiliation.

In addition to the model of a Deaf Culture, the concept of ethnicity was introduced as a means of explaining the nature of Deaf people's identities. The model of ethnicity deepens the ontological connection between Deaf people and their identity. Harlan Lane adopts A. D. Smith's definition that ethnicity consists of a collective name, feeling of community, norms for behavior, distinct values, knowledge, customs, social structure, language, arts, history, and kinship in order to demonstrate the ethnic status of Deaf people. Ethnicity has also been used to denote the "core" group of those who are natively Deaf. As Lawrence Fleischer writes, "Deaf Ethnicity consists of Deaf people of Deaf parents whose lives were entrenched in traditions. It can also include CODAs (Children of Deaf Adults)." Along with belonging to a Deaf ethnicity come self-identification and -esteem. "The members within the Deaf Ethnicity circle feel right about themselves as Deaf people. However, the Culture group is somewhat less sure about its understanding of what it means to be Deaf. The Community is much more unsure and more diverse in its understanding. Finally, those in isolation are completely outside." Such descriptions of Deaf Culture and Deaf ethnicity serve to describe that a group of people who were once considered a social group have deeper ties connected to their language, history, and traditions—a culture or ethnicity like any other in most important respects.

While the discourse of Deaf Culture and ethnicity in the 1980s and early 1990s was largely about defining Deaf as a single axis of identity, the 1990s brought about recognition of the complex relationship with the wider world. Rutherford noted that the concept of "subculture" would be more accurate if only the term would not be taken
negatively, while Turner suggested the model of a Deaf "microculture" that coexists within a larger cultural world. Padden noted that the 1980s discourse of Deaf Culture had begun to shift toward the "bicultural" model. "To talk of the 'bicultural' is not to talk about an additive state, to be of two cultures, but more about states of tensions. Deaf people coexist, indeed work, with hearing people in different ways today than they did thirty or forty years ago." This evolving cultural identification was the impetus for MJ Bienvenu and Betty Colonimos to form The Bicultural Center in 1987, an activist organization dedicated to promote understanding of bicultural education and qualified ASL teaching and interpreting. The Bicultural News was published quarterly until 1994, featuring articles and opinion pieces on the politics and realities of Deaf bicultural life.

The shift from the cultural to the bicultural is indicative of the dynamic nature of identity construction. Where there was once the central focus on the right way to be Deaf, the complexities of Deaf identity could not be ignored. "The reality of the 'authentic' Deaf person is one that holds for just about any modern individual—it is an ideal. Not surprisingly, such individuals are not numerous." In fact, their numbers may be shrinking since, in reality, less than 4 percent of deaf children are born to one or more deaf parent, and further, the commanding majority of deaf children are educated in mainstream schools instead of separate deaf residential schools. In 1989–90, 23 percent of deaf children were educated in residential schools compared to 13.6 percent in 2003–4.

Increasingly, the disconnect became more obvious between the rhetoric of an authentic Deaf identity and the reality that most people do not fit this model. The majority of Deaf people do not come from Deaf families. There are those who are Deaf of hearing families, Deaf of mixed families, hard of hearing from Deaf families, hard of hearing from hearing families, hearing of Deaf families, spouses, siblings, friends, and as many points and variations in between as befitting the astounding variety of human experiences. As Lennard Davis notes, this move toward recognition of the diversity of d/Deaf experiences parallels that of most forms of identity politics.

The first wave of any struggle involves the establishment of the identity against societal definitions that were formed largely by oppression. In the first phase, the identity—be it blackness, or gayness, or Deafness—is hypostasized, normalized, turned positive against the negative descriptions used by the oppressive regime. In a second wave, the principals are comfortable about self-examining, finding diversity within the group, and struggling to redefine the identity in more nuanced and complex ways. Often this phase will produce conflict within a group rather than unity.

Indeed, the 1990s have seen efforts at moving beyond the notion of an autonomous cultural identity to one that is more aware of the various ways of being Deaf along a complex assembly of borders as d/Deaf people will be found in every race, ethnicity, tribe, nationality, economic class, gender, sexual orientation, and geographic region.

As the Deaf community is not immune to ideologies of oppression, it should come as no surprise that the first models of Deaf Culture have been criticized as being from
a default white Deaf Culture. On a cultural level, however, groups within the Deaf community have long felt the need for organizations of their own. Despite the formation of the NAD in 1880, African Americans were not admitted until 1965; despite the founding of Gallaudet University (formerly known as the National Deaf-Mute College) in 1864, African Americans were not admitted until 1951. As a result of the dominant white Deaf discourse and political activism, the Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf was founded in 1977, the National Black Deaf Advocates in 1982, Deaf Women United in 1986, and the Intertribal Deaf Council in 1994.

Amid the tensions of reifying a culturally Deaf identity and the recognition of diversity within the Deaf world, the question of essentialist features arises. Invariably two factors combine to form the common ground of a Deaf identity: audiological deafness and use of sign language. These two factors of identification meet in an intriguing question: Can a hearing person such as a Coda be more Deaf than a nonsigning deaf person? If so, then language use would trump audiological deafness. However, if this is the case, then how can one explain the argument for the desire of Deaf people to have deaf babies, since hearing children can become just as fluent in ASL as deaf children? Initially, audiological deafness was disavowed as a factor in the Deaf world, and the word deafness today still carries negative connotations in the Deaf world.

A recent example of the wholesale dismissal of deafness and "deaf" as the ground of identity is to refer to the "signing community." The British Deaf Association now calls itself the Signing Community followed by the smaller "British Deaf Association" underneath. By shifting the focus to sign language use, this move makes clear distinctions between oral deaf and signing Deaf. Ironically, this move opens the cultural borders to hearing signers who participate in the community. For some, this undermines the nature of the Deaf community, but for others, the notion of "signing community" de-pathologizes deafness by removing it from the equation of identity, focusing instead on language use.

A similar move had been made in defining Deaf people as "visual people." Ever since George Veditz referred to deaf people "as first and foremost and for all time, people of the eye," Deaf people have been referring to themselves through visual metaphors. Ben Bahan wonders about referring to Deaf people as "seeing people," and in his contribution to this volume he further explores the visual orientations unique to Deaf ways of being. Like the notion of "signing community," "visual people" focuses on the plenitude of Deaf experience rather than on auditory lack. Critics, however, note that such a label effectively dismisses Deaf-Blind people from the community and does little to distinguish Deaf people from sighted hearing people insofar as they all share the sense of vision. Clearly differences exist in Deaf and hearing vision—as pointed out in Bahan's chapter in this volume—but no consensus exists to adopt the visual label as the essential defining character of Deaf identity.

In addition to these constructions, Paddy Ladd's concept of Deafhood appears to be gaining wider usage in the Deaf community as witnessed through Web sites and vlogs (video blogs). Ladd writes, "Deafhood is not seen as a finite state but as a process by which Deaf individuals come to actualize their Deaf identity, positing that those individuals construct that identity around several differently ordered sets of priorities and
principles, which are affected by various factors such as nation, era and class." Further explanation of Deafhood in historical perspective is presented in Ladd's contribution to this volume.

These newer conceptualizations of Deaf identity seek to find ways to avert the dead end of identity politics and instead forge a broad construction that encompasses the myriad ways of being d/Deaf, yet while maintaining some critical features that distinguish the existential state of being Deaf from other identities. Addressing the complexities of Deaf identity construction, Guy McIlroy proposes the term “Deaf” where the capitalized F indicates a fluidity of identities, not essentially rooted in either Deaf or hearing worlds, but in the cultural agility that “handles the interface/tension between both worlds." The Deaf position is to be aspired to where one's identity is bilingually and biculturally fluid and fluent.

From deaf and dumb to Deaf; intense battles have been fought, not only over the power to name oneself, but over what sort of self should be named. Each label is a specific lens ground through the heated debates over the meaning of bodily difference within a context of unequal power-relations. Deaf Studies has provided a field in which these debates may be discussed and debated; it has also brought these concerns from the peripheries of social concern directly into the discourse of civil and human rights. Open Your Eyes features several chapters that discuss the myriad ways that people are Deaf, as well as the profound impact that oppression—in this case, audism—has on the lives of Deaf individuals. As audism is a new concept for many, some background information will be helpful for those listening to Deaf Studies talking.

Power: Audism and the Critique of Normalcy

Before there was racism, there was racism; before the word there was the practice. Yet, after the word was coined, it has become a powerful tool to collect the diverse practices of oppression and compress them into a single lens through which we can see just how deeply racism structures societal arrangements and identities. While the concept and word racism has shaped how we see the world, the discriminatory treatment of deaf individuals throughout history had no name until 1975 when Tom Humphries coined the term audism, based on the Latin audire, meaning “to hear.” In his original article, Humphries defined audism as “the notion that one is superior based on one's ability to hear or behave in the manner of one who hears.” Despite the usefulness of having a name for oppression, Humphries did not publish his article on audism, and the word remained dormant throughout the 1980s, despite the explosion of Deaf activism. It was not until Harlan Lane's 1992 The Mask of Benevolence that audism gained further definition and usage. Lane discussed the systemic nature of audism, defining it as “the corporate institution for dealing with deaf people, dealing with them by making statements about them, authorizing views of them, describing them, teaching about them, governing where they go to school and, in some cases, where they live; in short, audism is the hearing way of dominating, restructuring, and exercising authority over the deaf community.” Thanks to Lane's development of the concept, awareness of audism began to spread through the 1990s. A few years later, Lennard Davis alerted
readers to pay attention to the “audist assumptions that readers tend to make about texts. The conflict may not be between a conception of language as oral versus written. Rather these assumptions of Western culture may be related to the originary point of language—the mouth or the hand—and the receptive point of language—the ear or the eye.” As such, audism influences some of the most fundamental orientations that humans have toward language and textuality—so fundamental that they go undetected. Davis’s discussion of audism as an ideological orientation would be discussed further in the twenty-first century as Bauman discussed the roots of audism in the metaphysical orientation of phonocentrism that conflates a full human identity with speech. Given audism’s presence on individual, institutional, and ideological levels, Deaf individuals cannot help but internalize aspects of oppression, a phenomenon Genie Gertz labels “dysconscious audism.” Lindsay Dunn also explores the effects of audism on identity construction, likening it to the impacts of racism. Despite these academic discussions of audism, the word did not enter Deaf cultural consciousness until the first decade of the twenty-first century, thanks in part to the documentary film Audism Unveiled. The dynamics of audism principally take the form of colonial relations. Ladd and Lane have both explored parallels between colonization and the Deaf experience, through the eradication of indigenous language, education, values, and history. The claim of a hearing-colonialist regime may seem extreme on the outset, but once the history of deaf people comes to light, we see that it is bound up in the historical practices of normalization, and thus linked with institutional practices of ableism, racism, and sexism. The same scientific apparatus that “proved” the hysterical nature of women and the intellectual inferiority of African Americans also proved the deleterious effects of allowing deaf people to congregate, mate, and spread the use of manual languages. There is perhaps no more telling example of audism than the targeting of deaf people in the Holocaust. For some the atrocities of the Holocaust are of a different era, and deaf people are no longer threatened by forces of genocide. However, it is revealing that while the German government has paid restitution to Jewish families of persons persecuted in the Holocaust, it refuses to pay restitution to deaf individuals who were sterilized because it is still considered justified to sterilize deaf and disabled people.

While the critique of the eugenics movement can be chalked up to the “history of a bad idea” as one scholar puts it, the ideology remains intact despite different labels, what Black refers to as “newgenics.” The question of what lives are worth living is now answered in doctors’ offices instead of in the Nazi’s T-4 program. Currently, parents have the option of aborting their fetus based on amniocentesis results indicating deafness and many other disabilities. The forces of normalization seem to be gaining ground, particularly in cases like Australia, where one researcher predicts the death of Australian Sign Language (Auslan) within the next few generations due to high rates of mainstreaming, cochlear implantation, and genetic testing and counseling that discourages parents from carrying deaf babies to birth. With whole signing communities in danger, the stakes over medical versus cultural models of Deaf people are quite high and are being waged over the ideological terrain of normalcy, oppression, disability, identity, and culture.

Being on the defensive, however, is nothing new to Deaf people. From Desloges to
Vedzí to the formation of Deaf Studies, Deaf people have been defending the right to use sign language, the right to intermarry, and the right not to be subjected to medical and religious cures, the right simply to be left alone. Yet, increasing numbers of parents opt for surgical cures to deafness. The argument of cultural genocide, however, often falls on deaf ears. While Deaf Studies has proven the existence of Deaf Culture, the cultural argument is often not enough to convince hearing doctors and parents to cease their endless search for a cure. Why should society want to keep and promote Deaf people? What good are Deaf people to society? What good are deaf children to a family? These difficult questions must now be explored if the Deaf world is to continue in the face of biopower institutions intent on the eradication of the Deaf community. In addition to arguments on the grounds of cultural defense, arguments about the need for cultural, cognitive, and linguistic diversity need to be developed. How would the world be affected negatively by the loss of Deaf communities? What do Deaf communities teach us about epistemology, about reading the visual/tactile world, about literature, about the human capacity for language?

This last question has received the majority of research attention over the last forty years as research on sign language has brought about a paradigm shift in human understanding of our capacity for language—not just for deaf people but for the very nature of language—its origins, acquisition, and neurological basis. The following is a brief background on the role that language has played in Deaf Studies since its inception, so that readers may listen in to what Deaf Studies has been talking about for the last few decades.

Language

Along with identity and power, language is a key concept in Deaf Studies, perhaps the key concept as it was the revelation of the linguistic nature of sign languages that opened the way for Deaf Studies to enter the public discourse within wider civil rights and cultural studies movements. Though others before William Stokoe have asserted the linguistic status of sign languages, Stokoe was the first to validate that signs, like spoken words, could be broken down into smaller parts, which he initially referred to as cheremes to distinguish them from their spoken counterparts, phonemes. Linguists, however, opted instead to expand the meanings of phonology beyond sound-based units to include the visual/kinetic/tactile units of signs, which include particular handshapes, movements, movement paths, palm orientations, and nonmanual markers. Once these sign parts were documented and observed, sign languages were seen, like all other human languages, to be complex systems operating according to an intricately governed structure.

When Stokoe proposed the linguistic nature of signed languages, the idea was so radical that even native Deaf signers thought it preposterous. Yet, the weight and clarity of his vision soon caught on, and Stokoe’s Linguistics Research Laboratory (established 1971) at Gallaudet University became the epicenter of a paradigm shift in the understanding of human language. Soon after, Stokoe formed the journal Sign Language Studies, which began to collect the first articles on a wide variety of topics regarding
sign languages. In addition to the East Coast work on signed languages, Ursula Bellugi formed the Laboratory for Cognitive Neuroscience in 1970 at the Salk Institute in California where she and colleagues began exploring the neurological underpinnings of sign language to find out, as the title of her book with Howard Poizner and Edward Klima puts it, *What the Hands Reveal about the Brain*. From these two centers of exploration, collections of articles followed, and a growing body of literature began to form by the late 1970s and early 1980s.

One of the early tasks of early sign linguistics was to dispel centuries of misunderstandings regarding sign languages. Principle among these misunderstandings is that sign language answers the historic yearning for a pre-Babel era of a universal language. Sign languages, however, are as diverse as spoken language, with migration patterns all their own. Though Deaf Americans and Deaf Britons live in English-speaking societies, their sign languages—ASL and British Sign Language (BSL)—are mutually unintelligible; in fact, fingerspelling English words to each other would only deepen miscommunication as BSL and ASL use completely different manual alphabets (BSL uses a two-handed alphabet while ASL uses a single-handed one). An ASL user would instead be more likely to recognize some aspects of French Sign Language (LSF) due to the particular historical circumstances that brought a French Deaf man and his language to the United States to help establish American deaf education.

Though not the case in America, sign language migration often follows colonial rule. Australian Sign Language (Auslan) and New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL), for example, have both evolved from the original importation of BSL. However, in other instances, sign languages from developed countries, such as ASL, are often imported through missionaries, educators, and development projects rather than through political rule. This explains why sign languages in the Philippines, Costa Rica, Thailand, and Nigeria are deeply influenced by American Sign Language, although there has been no overt American government installed in these countries. The importation of ASL at the expense of local sign languages creates conflicts in countries that are all too familiar with linguistic colonialism. In the Western African nations of Burkina Faso and Benin, hearing educators insist on using ASL signs while mouthing French words. Not only does this make for a dubious language-learning practice for students, it is a dramatic example of the ways that neocolonialism and global power continue to discipline the bodies and minds of a nation’s youth.

The growing dominance of ASL, though, is being countered with movements to recognize and encourage the growth of local sign languages. We cannot be precisely sure how many local and national sign languages exist in the world. In Thailand and Vietnam alone there are at least seven different sign languages, each developing for historically and geographically specific reasons. Iranian Deaf use the Tea House Sign Language and Persian Sign Language, and Canada has both American Sign Language and Quebecois Sign Language (LSQ). A map of all the sign languages in the world would most likely have to also include sign languages and sign communication systems of indigenous people. The Australian Aboriginal Sign Language has over thirteen different dialects, while North America has been home to various incarnations of manual languages and communication systems as well.
It should now be clear: sign languages do not form a single, reductive brand of Esperanto. This point needs to be made explicit, for even language experts such as those who edit the Modern Language Association Bibliography categorized sign languages as “Invented Languages” next to Klingon and Esperanto as recently as 1996. While the MLA has since recategorized sign languages on par with other natural human languages, the fact that those allegedly most knowledgeable about languages were so unknowledgeable means that there remains much explaining to do.

Another means of setting the record straight is to compare natural sign languages of Deaf communities with intentionally contrived communication systems. While there is no single, universal sign language, there is, however, a system of International Sign used in international deaf gatherings. The system of International Signs is a pidgin language formed through a lexicon used in the contact of several languages, especially taking advantage of a visual, iconic logic inherent in signed languages. While Deaf people have guided the formation and uses of International Sign, they have largely resisted artificially constructed manual codes for spoken languages, such as forms of Manually Coded English (MCE). Ever since the inception of formalized deaf education, teachers like the Abbe de l’Epee sought to transform the sign language into a manual version of spoken language, replete with articles and verb conjugations. The cognitive disconnect between the properties of a natural sign language and these systems provides clear testimony to the widely divergent grammatical logic required of a visual as opposed to a spoken language.

The differences between speech and sign are also magnified through the practice of Simultaneous Communication (referred to as SimCom) where one speaks and signs at the same time. This popular educational practice is akin to producing divergent languages, say Navajo and English, simultaneously. Clearly the accuracy and integrity of each language is nearly impossible to maintain, and given the heavy presence of the voice in the phonocentric loop of hearing oneself speak, the speaker is often under the illusion that she is communicating. SimCom, more often than not, produces signs that are misshapen, misplaced, or missing altogether.

These communication practices, which may have been developed with the most benevolent of intentions, often result in diminished communication between teacher and students. Seeing the need for the use of a fully developed and intelligible language in the classroom, educators and activists called for a revolution in deaf education, toward a bilingual model that would use ASL and written English. The 1980s saw the first bilingual programs founded along with curriculum developments. The fight for bilingual education has been central to Deaf activism from the 1980s to the present. Despite the long-standing recognition of the linguistic status of ASL, many state residential schools do not consider themselves bilingual/bicultural programs. Protests continue to call attention to the need for bilingual education for deaf children. In addition to incorporating ASL into the K–12 classroom for deaf children, activists and scholars have called for the recognition of ASL as a foreign language in American colleges and universities, where considerable headway has been made, making ASL the fifth most taught language in American higher education.

By the 1990s, the case for the linguistic status of sign language had long been made.
The implications of sign language research began to extend beyond educational policies to encompass the fundamental questions of human identity and language-making capacity. Old questions could be asked in new ways, such as the eternally perplexing problem of the origin of language. Though it was a widely debated topic during the late eighteenth century, the Linguistic Society of Paris banned discussion of language origins in 1866, claiming that no evidence could be found to prove any one point of view. The emergence of sign language linguistics, however, began to shed new light on this age-old problem. The hand, it seems, must have been present in order for signs to be linked with the world. How else could the link between sound and the world be forged? “Visible human movements,” writes Stokoe, “are not merely sufficient for language but were absolutely necessary for making that first solid connection between sign and meaning.”

If this is the case, then the implications of manual languages extend beyond—but never lose sight of—the Deaf community, to reach into the very core of our humanity.

The study of sign language also afforded researchers the rare opportunity to study just how languages are born and evolve. The founding of a deaf school in Nicaragua and the discovery of an emerging signing community using the Al-Sayyid Bedouin Sign Language in the Negev desert have allowed researchers to witness the emergence of a new language and to study its evolution in the first generations of use. On another scale, researchers have redefined our understanding of the neurological basis of language. As noted earlier, we now know that language processing is not dependent on sound, but rather on deeper neuronal patterning, whether triggered by sight or sound or touch. Without the emergence of sign language studies, these insights would not have been revealed to us with such clarity.

The insights into the nature of human languages revealed by sign language studies and Deaf Studies have led to a popularity of sign language not experienced since the end of the eighteenth century. Ironically, while hearing individuals become enamored with the aesthetic and cognitive benefits of signing, deaf children are systematically denied access to sign language, creating the strange message that sign language is good for hearing people but bad for deaf. As William Stokoe notes, increased knowledge of ASL should directly affect deaf children: “The status of deaf people, their education, their opportunities in life, and the utilization of their potential—all these could be much enhanced if we understood that the way deaf people still make language may be the way the whole human race became human.”

While the epicenter of the cultural and linguistic revolutions brought about by Deaf Studies was in the field of linguistics, it was soon felt in the fields of literature and literacy. A growing body of criticism has developed around sign language literature, exploring its poetics, genres, and the ways sign literature challenges fundamental notions of literature and textuality. Similarly, traditional definitions of literacy are being challenged from Deaf Studies, as can be found in Marlon Kuntz’s chapter in this volume, “Turning Literacy Inside Out.” So entrenched are conceptions of literacy based in reading and writing phonetic languages that Deaf Studies scholars and sign language linguists have much work ahead.

These prove to be exciting years as increased opportunities to publish sign language on the Web will broadcast sign languages as never before, something akin to advance-
ments of the printing press and the dissemination of print. American Sign Language literacy will rise with increased publication of academic ASL, replete with standardized citation format. Sign language publishing will continue the tradition since the initial writings of Desloges—of defending sign language and educating the public about the Deaf world. Only now, Deaf Studies may begin to publish bilingual texts where the Deaf-mute voice—the voice of sign language—may be listened to with wide open eyes, loud and clear.

For the time being, though, the voices of Deaf Studies scholars are speaking through print in this volume. With the background presented here, readers may now tune in and listen to the wide array of voices presented in Open Your Eyes. Below is a synopsis of the book’s sections and chapters.

Open Your Eyes: Deaf Studies Talking

The first section, Framing Deaf Studies, features three articles that reflect on the state of Deaf Studies, putting the field into perspective. Humphries begins with a reflective essay on the past forty years of “talking culture” in Deaf Studies—of connecting “deaf peoples all over the world to the notion of ‘culture.’” This talking culture involved the search for a public voice. Humphries reflects on what was said about culture, the anxiety of having to prove a culture. Yet, Humphries notes, “Before we talked culture, culture talked. Without mentioning the word ‘culture,’ Deaf people have historically maintained a discourse that was about themselves, their lives, their beliefs, their interpretation of the world, their needs, and their dreams.” Humphries advocates that Deaf Studies scholars need “to achieve a balance between the rhetoric of talking culture that too often seeks to ‘prove’ something and talking culture that is about the circulation and acceleration of culture. . . . Put simply, we need to move on from ‘How are we different?’ to ‘How are we being?’” Humphries’s distinction is borne out through the book. Many of the articles engage in listening to “culture talking” and then draw out the implications that such “talk” has on ways of being human.

What Tom Humphries refers to as getting back to “culture talking” Paddy Ladd refers to in his chapter, “Colonialism and Resistance: A Brief History of Deafhood,” as a “second phase” of Deaf Studies: “We now face the challenge of bringing about the second phase, to search for more explicit Deaf epistemologies and ontologies that can frame these developments in a more holistic way, so that Deaf Studies can become a more conscious model for Deaf-centered praxis.” Ladd conducts this search, beginning with the lofty and proud rhetoric of nineteenth-century French Deaf Banquets, and then through the colonialist assault of oralism in twentieth-century England, and finally to the “Deaf Resurgence,” the coming to a greater activist and liberatory engagement evident in Deaf Studies. This is a story about the way that culture has talked and has searched for a “Deafhood” that Ladd defines as the existential state of Deaf “being-in-the-world.”

Like Tom Humphries and Paddy Ladd, Frank Bechtler’s chapter, “The Deaf Convert Culture and Its Lessons for Deaf Theory,” advocates a full-hearted listening to Deaf Culture talking—and he does so through two genres of traditional ASL storytelling. Bechtler suggests that such talking through indigenous cultural forms is the very voice that is
most transformative. Deaf Studies needs not to prove that it is a culture like any other, but to argue for what is most unique and instructive about this culture and its language. "Standing on the public stage is not enough," Bechter writes. "For deaf life truly to be heard there (for a subaltern voice truly ‘to speak’ and no longer be subaltern), the very terms of discourse on that stage—its very ‘alphabet’—would need to be transformed. Deaf Studies should strive to be a producer of theory, rather than a consumer of it—to penetrate contemporary discourse at its fundamentals, in both content and form.”

Together, these three articles call for a deeper listening to Deaf Culture talking—to its internal and indigenous ways of being that are themselves powerful means of "speaking out" with a Deaf public voice that speaks on its own terms.

The following section, Deaf Perception and Community, carries out Ladd’s search for Deaf epistemologies as it examines the visual orientation of the Deaf world and its impact on the formation of Deaf communities, leading to the larger question of the relation of sensory perception and community affiliation. Long before they ever called themselves a culture, Deaf people referred to themselves as “people of the eye.” The notion of visual plenitude has always stood in contrast to auditory lack. Ben Bahan’s chapter, “Upon the Formation of a Visual Variety of the Human Race,” is the first time the various perspectives of Deaf visual-cultural talking have been assembled into a single story. Bahan takes an interdisciplinary approach to Deaf visual practices through sign language linguistics, storytelling, pedagogy, cognition, proxemics, art, and literature. Through this interdisciplinary inquiry, we see how the Deaf world pushes the boundaries of vision beyond other cultural groups.

If, as Bahan suggests, vision is a primary dimension of being in the Deaf world, then this way of being would logically transcend national and linguistic boundaries, opening the possibility for a transnational affiliation based on common ways of perception and experience. As Joseph Murray writes, Deaf people have historically “shared a common experience of living as members of a visual community in an auditory world, an experience transcending local contexts and national boundaries.” In his chapter, “Co-equality and Transnational Studies: Understanding Deaf Lives,” Joseph Murray listens to another aspect of Deaf cultural talking—the talking that took place over the centuries between Deaf individuals from across the Atlantic. By moving beyond the nation-state narrative, Deaf Studies may better see the bonds that draw Deaf people together—to see what is most Deaf about being Deaf.

Hilde Haualand’s essay, “Sound and Belonging: What Is a Community?” turns the gaze in the opposite direction: toward the deeply influential role that sound has played in dominant constructions of belonging and community. Haualand describes how the physical properties of sound and light operate differently and thus disclose a different sensory grasp and metaphysical relation with the world. The perceived bond between sound and being may have profound cultural, linguistic, and cognitive consequences. "Confusing language with speech,” Haualand writes, “may thus be a consequence of the metaphysics of sound.” Such an approach marks a new direction for Deaf Studies that would parallel the turns in Black Studies to investigate the constructions of whiteness or in Women’s Studies the construction of masculinity. Now, the notion of hearing can be placed in relief through the perspective of a Deaf anthropologist for its difference.
When read together, this section advances previously described notions of Deaf Culture by delving into Deaf epistemological orientations as a formative element in community affiliation, which adds new insights into the relations of sensory perception, embodiment, and cultural formation.\textsuperscript{116}

The following section, Language and Literacy, extends the previous section's critique of dominant ideas regarding vision, community, and language. While Deaf Studies has long discussed language as the fundamental cultural marker, this section expands the discourse on language to examine the fundamental construction of language in the Western tradition, and therefore of literacy. In his chapter, "On the Disconstruction of (Sign) Language in the Western Tradition: A Deaf Reading of Plato's Cratylus," Bauman critiques the disconstruction of language; that is, the notion that categories of language, being, nature, and human identity have been constructed within a fundamental oversight: the inability to see language in all its modes. Bauman explores one of the West's earliest and most influential oversights in Plato's Cratylus, the only Socratic dialogue to focus on the question of names and language. When read through a Deaf Studies lens, the contradictions in the Cratylus become magnified and the implications on Western thought and the denigration of signed languages made explicit.

If the encompassing category of language has been disconstructed, then the implications ripple outward, touching all other aspects of language—including literature and literacy. While the implications of sign literature have been explored elsewhere,\textsuperscript{117} the concept of literacy remains entrenched in the common wisdom of meaning "reading and writing." In this volume, Marlon Kuntze calls for "portraying literacy in a radically new way." Kuntze illustrates how the essentialized connection between writing and literacy ignores the broader relation of language and cognition in the manual mode that produces characteristics of literate thought. Kuntze shows how studying ways that deaf children acquire the properties of literate thought provides a strong argument for revaluating literacy's basic definition. This call exemplifies what Frank Becher calls for in Deaf Studies, "to penetrate contemporary discourse at its fundamentals, in both content and form."

One of the difficulties, however, of arguing for literacy in sign language is the paucity of texts. Lawrence Fleischer's "Critical Pedagogy and ASL Videobooks" addresses this problem through a case study of one project that sought to create hundreds of ASL texts for children to "read." Through Fleischer's argument, we see a case study of the hegemony of English, even within attempts to create texts in ASL. Fleischer shares his correspondence with the Director for the Clearinghouse for Specialized Media and Technology under the auspices of the Department of Education that coordinates the "ASL Videobooks" project with the California School for the Deaf, Riverside (CSDR). As Fleischer notes, such a project has enormous potential for an engaged critical pedagogy, yet the result is a reinscription of dominant notions of literacy and textuality. Allowing us to listen in on this case study affords us insight into a continuum of disconstruction that has been traced in this section—from the Western disconstruction of language in an important text in the fifth century BC, to a rethinking of literacy, to a specific instance where change was attempted. The long arm of speech does not let go of its grasp easily.

As these discussions on visual language and communities show, the critiques of
Deaf Studies work to redraw previously drawn borders, widening them to include the broad and more complex ways that being human is illuminated through Deaf lives and a Deaf lens. While Deaf Studies expands the boundaries of the hearing world's categories, it encounters a complex set of its own. The next section, Places and Borders, inquires into these internal borders—from the physical and cultural boundaries of Deaf places to the boundaries around and between the wide variety of d/Deaf identities. The issues of where to draw the line are complicated for any minority group, yet perhaps even more difficult for the Deaf world as there is no indigenous homeland, no territorial boundaries to circumscribe "a people." However, the visual ways of being and the visual language of the Deaf world discussed in the previous two sections have emerged in bastions of educational institutions and Deaf clubs throughout America since the nineteenth century. Despite their longevity, these spaces are rapidly decreasing. Fewer than 10 percent of deaf children now attend residential schools and Deaf clubs are closing all around the country. In her essay, "The Decline of Deaf Clubs in the United States: A Treatise on the Problem of Place," Carol Padden suggests that the clubs' demise is due to larger shifts in the economic structure of the Deaf community, the rise of a professional Deaf class, and a recognition of the diversity of Deaf identities. "The story about American Deaf clubs should be told as a narrative about how Deaf people's work lives changed, and how their relationships with each other changed, introducing new tensions of class, race, gender, and ethnicity, in the end rendering the Deaf club irrelevant to the new social realities." Through Padden's essay we can see the broad cultural shift in the Deaf world and a new dispersal of Deaf cultural life, where attachment to place is temporary and nomadic. This problem of a physical place is now a question of shifting borders in a postmodern world.

Brenda Brueggemann's essay, "Think-Between: A Deaf Studies Commonplace Book," extends Padden's discussion of the relation of place and identity, only she engages in a very different type of "place"—that is, the metaphorical notion of the place between allegedly fixed identities. The "Think-Between" in her title plays off of the ASL sign think-hearing in which the handshape and movement of the sign hearing is placed not on the mouth, but on the forehead, denoting a deaf person who thinks in the manner of one who hears—that is, who prefers to speak, use the phone, and take advantage of hearing ways. Brueggemann suggests that the binary thinking inherent in Deaf Studies rhetoric—that one is either hearing or deaf—would be enriched by exploring the space between the two. "What I am suggesting," Brueggemann writes, "is that we might begin in Deaf Studies to push beyond the mere recitation of the 'd/Deaf' pledge in our footnotes and to explore, instead, all the rhetorical situations that arise from the d/D distinctions, that bring the distinctions to bear, and that, most importantly, keep shifting them like an identity kaleidoscope in our own hands." In her "commonplace book" Brueggemann notes a series of rhetorical situations in which it would behoove Deaf Studies to "think between" the rhetorical positions of Deaf and hearing.

Robert Hoffmeister's chapter, "Border Crossings by Hearing Children of Deaf Parents: The Lost History of Codas," explores just such a "between" space described by Brueggemann. Children of Deaf parents grow up straddling a myriad of borders, as they are often culturally Deaf but physiologically hearing, creating the odd circumstance in
which they may be “more Deaf” than some people who cannot hear at all. Hoffmeister examines the multifaceted situation of Cods whose identities are created along a constant negotiation of physiological and cultural borders. The insights into the particular positionalities of Cods offer a new set of angles from which to view Deaf and hearing cultural and political lives.

Taken together, these three chapters illustrate the complexities involved in the Deaf world in its search for a place and in defense of an identity they are frequently taught to disavow. Yet the act of drawing boundaries is no simple task and perhaps in this difficulty we gain insights into the complexities of identity formation.

The following section, Intersections and Identities, extends the discussion of borders and Deaf identity politics by looking at Deaf identity within the context of audism. It also seeks to move beyond the discussion of Deaf identity as a single axis of identity, and seek a more complex notion of identity as being always formed at the nexus of multiple intersections.

In her chapter, “Dysconscious Audism: A Theoretical Proposition,” Genie Gertz builds on the notion of Joyce King’s “Dysconscious Racism” that implies the internalization of oppression that impedes one’s critical consciousness that detects and critiques the systemic nature of oppression. Gertz listens to Deaf Culture talking through the narratives of Deaf individuals from Deaf families to explore just how deeply embedded audist ideologies may be in the allegedly “most Deaf” individuals. She focuses on these individuals’ perceptions of language and finds that there are a host of conflicting views, some of which reveal the presence of dysconscious audism.

Lindsay Dunn’s chapter, “The Burden of Racism and Audism,” also explores the impact of institutionalized oppression on the creation of privilege and identity formation. Dunn engages in a dialogue about the twin circumstances of racism and audism, confronting such issues as the social pressures to conform to white standards and hearing standards. Dunn muses, for example, on whether hair straightening, melanin treatment, and cochlear implants could have similar sources in the social arrangement of power and normalcy. Dunn then draws parallels between theories of Black Identity Development and Deaf Identity Development, providing a sense of just how pervasive institutional oppression can be. By placing audism and racism in the same dialogue, Dunn reminds us that discrimination follows similar patterns though it may be focused on particular identities.

Arlene Kelly’s chapter, “Where is Deaf HERstory?” takes a critical look at Deaf Studies’ elision of feminist perspectives. Kelly’s call for a more gendered Deaf Studies signifies an important moment in the field that, like other areas of identity politics, realizes the exclusions that take place when movements coalesce around a single identity. Identities, however, do not come in singular packages: no one can be exclusively Deaf, but is always Deaf and a complex host of other identities including one’s gender, race, class, ethnicity, ability, and so on. Looking at Deaf Studies through a feminist lens, Kelly draws attention to the notion of the “feminist standpoint epistemology” and asks whether there is a Deaf standpoint and further, a Deaf feminist standpoint.

Similarly, MJ Bienvenu illustrates the particular positions that Deaf and Queer people face—issues of dueling identities, allegiances, and cultures. Bienvenu listens to the
culture talking that has taken place at the cultural intersection of Queer and Deaf over the past thirty years. Often there have been collisions between competing agendas and pathologized identities—homophobia within the Deaf community and audism within the Queer community. Bienvenu critiques the mindset that attempts to hierarchize identities (Are you Deaf first or a Lesbian first?). There have been improvements and advances made as each identity gains greater public acceptance. Bienvenu looks at these changes through language use and the negotiations of the intersections at social and political gatherings of either affiliation. Taken together, this section adds to the growing discourse about the inherent diversity of the Deaf world.

The final section of the book, The Question of Disability, addresses the politics of the disability label and identification in Deaf Studies. Deaf Studies began in the first place largely as a disavowal of the disability label. Deaf individuals have traditionally sought to distance themselves from the notion of disability. In their efforts to demonstrate their lack of disability, they have shown how other persons with disabilities do not share a common language and culture. Historically, this lumping together has created profound misunderstandings, especially in the early years of the inclusion movement, with the notion of integration into the “least restrictive environment.” While early disability movements sought greater inclusion, Deaf advocates wanted greater seclusion; this set up a difficult agenda between Deaf and disability agendas. For many deaf people, the residential school is the “least restrictive environment” where access is in a visual language and their peers share the same language, rather than being in a mainstream school where their interaction is mediated through an interpreter, which often restricts their social and extracurricular activities. With different agendas, Deaf and disability communities have had a contentious relationship, though they do share similar forms of oppression. The chapters in this section debate the implications of either dismissing or accepting the disability label.

Harlan Lane explores the social construction of disability at length in his essay, “Do Deaf People Have a Disability?” Lane answers the title’s question by noting that the question ultimately does not make sense, for a disability is not something to have but a label one acquires. The question then becomes whether or not Deaf people should openly acquire and accept this label. Lane proceeds to make the case for rejecting the disability label, noting that culture, like disability, is also a social construction and that Deaf people may have more power to construct the meanings of “Deaf” in cultural ways precisely by rejecting the disability label. To accept the disability label would be a great detriment, as it, among other things, “encourages the technologies of normalization in their eugenic and surgical programs aimed at eliminating or severely reducing the ranks of culturally Deaf people.” Clearly, no culture wants to intentionally hasten its demise.

Doug Baynton’s chapter, “Beyond Culture: Deaf Studies and the Deaf Body,” begins by noting that the “existence of a deep, rich, and longstanding culture of American Deaf people is now beyond reasonable dispute”; however, he argues that “the concept of Deaf culture increasingly appears inadequate by itself as an explanation of the Deaf community and the experiences of Deaf people.” Unlike other cultures, Baynton notes
that Deaf people align themselves along sensory differences (i.e., as people of the eye); they form unusually strong transnational bonds and exhibit wholly unique enculturation patterns. Baynton agrees with Lane that the medical model of disability is an inappropriate label for Deaf people, and he goes on to note that it is also precisely this model that disability studies and activists also reject. The social model of disability, on the other hand, "is entirely compatible with an understanding of Deaf people as a cultural minority group and, as a complement to the cultural model, accounts for much about Deaf experience that the cultural model cannot." Together, Baynton argues, Deaf Studies would have a more accurate description of the unique phenomenon of living lives in d/Deaf bodies.

In “Postdeafness,” Lennard Davis critiques Deaf identity politics by asking why Deaf people would want to tie themselves to an increasingly suspect model of identity based on cultural ethnicity. “The very idea of a singular, unproblematic identity is crumbling. . . . So, given these complexities and attacks on identity, why should Deaf people now choose to see themselves as fitting into the kind of identity politics now being reexamined by society at large?” Counter to Lane's position, Davis notes that clinging to the ethnic model of Deaf identity may actually be complicit in a labeling practice with negative effects. “The ethnic argument sets up a model of the true or ‘pure’ Deaf person, in imitation of the worst aspects of racially defining a people.” In an age where we have witnessed the deleterious effects of a politics based on ethnic purity—think Darfur, Uganda, Rwanda, Bosnia, Serbia—any celebration of the ethnic basis of Deaf identity needs greater scrutiny. “A better course for Deaf Studies would be to examine the situation in identity politics now, learn from the past, think about the beyond-identity issues floating in the public sphere, come up with flexible and nonhierarchical models of being, and lead the way out of the dead end of identity thinking.”

This volume of essays then concludes with an editor's postscript that reflects on the issues circulating throughout this volume—identity, power, language, and the struggle for a Deaf public voice—as they played out in the Gallaudet University protests of 2006. As many of the contributors to this volume were involved in the protest—on both sides and in the middle—it thus seems only fitting that a postscript be added to clarify the context and consequences of the protest that garnered widespread media attention.

Conclusion

As these chapters demonstrate, the meanings of Deaf extend far beyond the medical notion of hearing loss, and the possibilities of Deaf Studies extend into the very reaches of how we see the world. Taken together, the essays collected in Open Your Eyes hope to compel readers to listen to previously marginalized voices, with wide-angle lenses that draw the peripheral out of historical blind spots and put them clearly on display. Just as sign language studies have revealed that neuronal plasticity rather than sound is the hallmark of human language, Deaf Studies and this volume hope to show that there are a great number of ways to be human, and that Deaf ways of being human are not only valid, but are worth preserving and promoting.
Notes

I would like to thank Tom Humphries, Lennard Davis, Nicole Salimbene, and Richard Morrison for their feedback on drafts of this chapter. The organization and content of this chapter evolved through ongoing discussions with Ben Bahan. I take full responsibility for the contents.


17. The Abbe de l'Epee was the founder of the first formalized school for deaf children that would become Institut Nationale des Jeunes Sourds. Most histories of deaf education assert that French Sign Language largely began at Epee's school. Desloges's account relates that sign language existed prior to the founding of the school.


19. Ibid., 46.


23. Before there was any talk of a Deaf Culture, Deaf people were referred to through the sign deaf-world. It is unclear as to when the use of the sign deaf-world came about, but it clearly dates back generations. "Deaf people in the U.S. use the sign deaf-world to refer to...the social network they have set up and not to any notion of geographical location." Harlan Lane, Robert Hoffmeister, and Ben Bahan, A Journey into the Deaf-World (San Diego: DawnSignPress, 1996), 5.


25. I thank Ben Bahan for bringing this title to my attention.

26. These films have been collected in one video: Preservation of Sign Language: The Historical Collection (Burtonsville, Md.: Sign Media, 1997).

27. Burch, Signs of Resistance.


29. Ibid., 121.

30. The Linguistics Research Laboratory produced groundbreaking work in linguistics from scholars such as Carol Padden, Harry Markowicz, Robbin Battison, Charlotte Baker, Dennis Cokely, James Woodward, and Robert Johnson.

31. This program was founded by Stephen Nover and Dr. Robert Hoffmeister.

32. This program was founded by Drs. Larry Fleischer and Ray Jones.

33. The undergraduate program was founded by Dr. Verker Andersson and the graduate program by Drs. Ben Bahan, H-Dirksen Bauman, and MJ Bienvenu.


35. Carol Erting, Robert C. Johnson, Dorothy Smith, and Bruce Snider, eds., The Deaf Way:


37. See Paddy Ladd, "Colonialism and Resistance: A Brief History of Deafhood," this volume, for a political context for these conferences.


42. Renate Fischer and Harlan Lane, eds., Looking Back: A Reader on the History of Deaf Communities and Their Sign Languages (Hamburg: Signum Verlag, 1993).


45. Réé, I See a Voice.


48. Ibid., 153.


50. Ibid., 95.

51. Ibid., 92-93.

52. Padden and Humphries, Deaf in America.


57. Ibid., 140–41.


59. Carol Padden, "From the Cultural to the Bicultural: The Modern Deaf Community," in Parasnis, Cultural and Language Diversity and the Deaf Experience, 94–95.

60. Ibid., 67.


63. Leonard Davis, Bending over Backwards: Disability, Dismodernism, and Other Difficult Positions (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 11. I thank Chris Krentz for important discussions regarding the politics of deaf identity; an e-mail posting of his reminded me of Davis's discussion of identity politics.


65. See Lane, Hoffmeister, and Bahan, Journey into the Deaf-World, 164. Women were admitted into the NAD and Gallaudet (the Deaf-Mute College); however, they were prevented from attending soon after, in 1865. A letter-writing campaign was led by Georgianna Elliott and Angeline Fuller Fischer in 1866–67 to argue for admission for women. Fischer threatened Edward Miner Gallaudet, the President, that she would start a college for deaf women elsewhere. In response, Gallaudet admitted six women in 1867. Only one of the six actually graduated: Alto May Lowman (Maryland); Fischer, however, never enrolled. Arlene B. Kelly, personal correspondence, June 12, 2006.


69. See Sign City at http://www.sigm.org/.


72. Originally developed at length in Ladd, Understanding Deaf Culture, the concept of Deaf-
hood has been the focus of various conferences and Web sites. For example, the Deafhood: Meeting the Challenges of a Changing World conference, London, July 12–14, 2001; see also Web sites that further explain and explore this concept, such as Patrick Boudreault’s at http://www.csun.edu/~patrickb/DH/DH.html.

73. Ladd, Understanding Deaf Culture, xviii.


75. “Racist” was originally used to describe the race-hygiene politics of Hitler in the 1930s.


77. Lane, Mask of Benevolence, 43.

78. Davis, Enforcing Normalcy, 102–3.


81. See Lindsay Dunn, “The Burden of Racism and Audism,” this volume.

82. Audism Unwooled, documentary film. See note 3 above.

83. Lane, Mask of Benevolence: Ladd, Understanding Deaf Culture.


90. Before William Stokoe and his fellow researchers in the Linguistics Research Laboratory at Gallaudet University in the 1970s, a few insightful scholars also recognized that sign languages were languages in every sense of the word. In 1779, Pierre Deslorges wrote, “In sign language we find verbs, nouns, pronouns of every kind, articles, genders, cases, tenses, modals, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, interjections and so on. Finally, there is nothing in any part of speech that cannot be expressed in sign language,” Deslorges, “Deaf Person’s Observations,” 37.


93. The Language Research Lab employed many Deaf and hearing researchers, including Robbin Battison, Charlotte Baker, Dennis Cokely, Harry Markowicz, Carol Padden, and James Woodward.

94. *Sign Language Studies* was initially published semiannually with the support of Thomas Sebeok through Mouton and Indiana University (1972–75) and was then published quarterly by Linstok Press from 1975 to 1996. Today Gallaudet University Press publishes *Sign Language Studies*, with David Armstrong as the journal’s editor.


97. In 1977, Harry Markowicz published a primer on correcting the myths of sign language that can now be accessed on the Web at http://facstaff.gallaudet.edu/harry.markowicz/asl/.

98. Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet was sent to England by Mason Cogswell, a wealthy doctor and father of a deaf girl, Alice, in order to learn the best practices in deaf education. Rather than being trained in the oralist practices prevalent in England, Gallaudet was drawn to Paris after witnessing a performance of sign language education in London. Within a year, he returned to America along with Laurent Clerc, a deaf French teacher who would bring LSF and sign language–based education to the United States. The first school, the Connecticut Asylum for the Education and Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons, opened in 1817. For more on the history of deaf education, see Van Cleve and Crouch, *A Place of Their Own*.


100. The Deaf Empowerment Foundation was founded, in part, to encourage development work in which local sign languages have to be equally respected and encouraged. For more information, see http://www.def-inf.org/.


104. Such transnational events have been a hallmark of deaf people since the nineteenth century as Joseph J. Murray, “Coequality and Transnational Studies: Understanding Deaf Lives,” this volume, describes and are increasing now given globalization and development forces and the founding of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) and the European Union of the Deaf (EUD).

105. International Deaf events are extraordinary sights of multilingualism in practice, with a display of interpreters from across the globe and an International Sign interpreter. For more on the linguistic properties of International Sign, see Rachel Rosenstock, “The Role of Iconicity in International Sign,” *Sign Language Studies* 8 (forthcoming).
106. Manually Coded English (MCE) takes the shape of various systems developed that essentially replicate English word order and vocabulary through signs.


113. Stokoe, Language in Hand, 16.


115. One example of increased ASL presence on the Web can be seen through vlogs, or video blogs. See also Christopher Krentz, "The Camera as Printing Press," in Bauman, Nelson, and Rose, Signing the Body Poetic, 51–70.
