The Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies (DiGeSt) is a bi-annual, peer-reviewed journal dedicated to the intersection of diversity and gender studies. It welcomes contributions from a broad array of disciplines in the arts and humanities (such as sociology, philosophy, anthropology, history, arts, and literature) but also from the natural sciences. DiGeSt aims to provide a forum for debate on current research regarding gender and diversity in Belgium, yet also has a keen interest in practices and research on other countries and societies. It comments on topical and/or coming trends that affect research in these areas. In highlighting the significance of ongoing research for knowledge, culture and daily life, it aims to appeal to both a specialist and a wide audience.

EDITOR: Birgit Van Puymbroeck

SUBSCRIPTION: € 35 (postage excluded)

ORDERS
Academia Press Academic & Scientific Publishers
P. Van Duysseplein 8
B-9000 Ghent
Belgium
Phone: (+32) (0)9 233 80 88
info@academiapress.be
www.academiapress.be

Academia Press is a subsidiary of Lannoo Publishers.

Cover: Els Van Hemelryck

Lay-out: punctilio.be

ISSN: 1781-1902
ISBN 9789401443319
D/2017/45/164

DiGeSt is the continuation of Verslagen van het Centrum voor Genderstudies.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in print, by photocopy, microfilm or any other means, without the prior written permission of the publisher.
# Table of Contents

**Editorial.** .......................................................... 3  
Josephine Hoegaerts & Pieter Verstraete

**Silence and Sexual Difference: Reading Silence in Luce Irigaray.** .......................... 9  
Caroline Godart

**Intercession, Emancipation, and a Space In Between: Silence as a Mode of Deaf Citizenship in the Nineteenth Century and Today.** ................................. 23  
Goedele A.M. De Clerck & Josephine Hoegaerts

**The Victorian Unspeakable: Stammering and Same-Sex Intimacy between Men** ............................................. 43  
Riley McGuire

**Lessons in Silence: Power, Diversity, and the Educationalisation of Silence** ............................................. 59  
Pieter Verstraete

**The ‘Other’, Power Relations, and the Zoo Humain: An Interview with Theatre Artist Chokri Ben Chikha** ...................... 75  
Liselotte Vandenbussche, Tine Brouckaert, and Laura Andriessen

**About the Authors** .................................................. 91
Editorial

In the last few years, the concept of gendered silence, or gendered practices of silencing, has gained urgency. The publication of Rebecca Solnit's book *Men Explain Things to Me*, which calls attention to the “slippery slope of silencings”, has sparked a renewed discussion on who gets to talk, and who gets to be heard in professional and academic contexts (Solnit, 2015, p. 4). These public debates show just how pervasive gender is in assigning the right to speak. In her 2014 Winter Lecture for the *London Review of Books*, the British classicist Mary Beard elucidates the long-standing tradition of silencing women in public, specifically on political platforms (Beard, 2014). She traces back the notion that “speech is the business of men” to the classical world, but also draws attention to its ongoing currency in a world where the most acceptable political leaders are white, middle-class males who have been educated in a system that highly values classical rhetoric. To put it in her more eloquent words:

> Classical traditions have provided us with a powerful template for thinking about public speech, and for deciding what counts as good oratory or bad, persuasive or not, and whose speech is to be given space to be heard. And gender is obviously an important part of that mix.

Naomi Klein’s recent call to young women to “give up the vocal fry”, a vocal technique resulting in a pronounced “croak” that has become increasingly popular among female celebrities and young women at large, underscores the ubiquity of that template. Even in an attempt to raise women’s audibility (Klein calls for women to reclaim their “strong female voice”), the sound of their actual voices (the so-called “vocal fry”) is summarily dismissed (Klein, 2015; Riley, 2015). While it is true that, historically and currently, women have been silenced more frequently than men, the gendered nature of speech does not simply translate into female silence and male audibility. Similarly, silence does not equate with a lack of power or influence. In her study on gender and silence, early modern literary scholar Christina Luckyj shows that in early modern England the “meaning of silence shifted to suit the politics of gender”. Women’s silence “alternately signified both the cause and the result of women’s insubordination”. Silence was associated with femininity, but so was gossip and senseless chatter. Male rhetoric could carry authority, but masculine silence
could also be heard as “presence and possession”, to be associated with strong actions rather than inane talk.

Moreover, not all speech was – or is – free: in many contexts men and women have been forced to speak. They often still are in court, school, and some religious contexts. “If speech bears traces not of personal agency but of institutional constraint”, we may ask with Luckyj whether “the men who can speak [are] freer than the women who keep silent”; and “[i]f discourse is a site of the most insidious, internalised social controls”, we could consider whether silence might “offer a rival, less highly regulated space?” (Luckyj, 2002, p. 5).

Philosophers of female speech – especially French feminist critics – have explored the possibilities of female silence as a means to counteract the constraints of male-dominated discourse. There are other contexts in which active silence can carry creative potential. Not least because the feminised silence of the Subaltern is not limited to the muffling of women’s voices. Children, who have been most obviously silenced in what we now perhaps consider old-fashioned classrooms, but who are still barred from citizenship and public speech, generally manage to mobilise our senses and emotions exactly by not appealing to rational discourse. In the context of the recent “refugee crisis”, their quiet embodiment of violated innocence has in many ways been a louder reminder of the unequal way in which the right to speech (and indeed the right to live) is distributed globally, than public political discourse. In the past few decades, artists too have increasingly turned to silence and thus paradoxically have given voice to their discontent by turning silent in public. One can, for example, think of Marina Abramovitz’s 2010 MOMA performance *The Artist Is Present* or the Russian artist Petr Pavlensky who sewed his mouth and stood outside of Cazan Cathedral in St Petersburg in 2012. As this special issue elucidates, dichotomous norms of speech and silence as well as the creative appropriations of quietude – to be encountered in the abovementioned artistic performances as well as in children – can be heard wherever diversity is present.

For anyone whose voice, pronunciation, language, or corporeal characteristics do not comply with reigning conventions of social acceptability, speech can be a very dangerous thing. Mary Jo Brueggeman, when analyzing a performance piece on disability (characterised, among other things, by the heavily distorted speech of one of the actors) draws our attention to precisely that kind of danger. In Neil Marcus’ *Storm Reading*, the audience is confronted with its own expectations to be catered to by an easily readable voice. As Brueggemann points out, “rhetoricians and orators have always taken for granted that those who hoped to control the will of an audience had first to control their own voice and body”. In order to find an audience willing to be convinced, the speaker must adhere to a range of conventions that are not only socially and culturally defined but that are also linked to the body and are deeply
engrained in our thinking. Departing from these norms with a marked physical disability and a speech impediment, one of the artists in *Storm Reading* laboriously vocalises what happens when someone refuses or fails to perform “normal” speech and posture: “People are always watching me”, he says, “they’re watching to see how well I do this thing called human”.

It is perhaps this tenacious (Aristotelian) notion that speaking distinguishes “us” from animals that makes speech such a powerful tool for some, and such a dangerous substance for “Others”. If stepping outside the confines of “normal” speech and communication can see us carelessly stripped of our humanity, the practice of “speaking up” against convention or for diversity becomes fraught with inherent tensions and contradictions. For how can we convincingly speak of difference, if the audience can only “hear” convincing arguments when they are presented in a conventional (i.e. visually, socially, or culturally acceptable) way? As Brueggemann notes, in order to be audible

speech must convey the force of the speaker’s passionate conviction without transgressing cultural codes of conduct and deportment. It must, that is, perform “normalcy” even as it incites and inspires some difference (otherwise, we would not be moved by, or remember, it) (Brueggeman, 2005, p. 20).

This is, of course, exactly the kind of paradoxical problem Mary Beard ran into when she tried to vocalise both her identity as an established academic, and as a woman vulnerable to gendered practices of silencing. It is particularly true on a public platform, during a talk in which the gendered body of the speaker is as explicitly at issue as the more abstract politics of speech and eloquence. There are not enough carefully translated Latin quotes in the world to hide the fact that this type of speech – one dealing openly with the gender of its own voice – is still somehow disturbing.

The complex and often contradictory relationships between sounds, silence, and power can be found in other contexts than that of gender. When turning to disability, for instance, one easily finds examples that point to the turbulent and discriminatory impact of “normal” language on individuals who do not speak like everybody else. Disability activist Amanda Bagg’s 2007 YouTube post *In My Language* illustrates this beautifully. After having introduced the spectator to her own way of communicating with the world and others she emphasises the following:

I find it very interesting by the way that failure to learn your language is seen as a deficit but failure to learn my language is seen as so natural that people like me are officially described as mysterious and puzzling rather than anyone admitting that it is themselves who are confused not autistic people or other cognitively disabled people who are inherently confusing. We are even viewed as non-communicative if we don’t speak
the standard language but other people are not considered non-communicative if they are so oblivious to our own languages as to believe they don’t exist.

Like female public speech, Bagg’s ‘own’ language crosses the boundaries of convention: it “transgresses cultural codes of conduct and deportment”. This special issue aims to do precisely that: to question the cultural meaning of sound and silence, to joyfully transgress codes of conduct, and to give a platform to silence in all its diversity. It aims to examine the various links and tensions between silence and (political and cultural) agency in detail, offering insights into different practices of both silence and silencing.

This special issue is the result of an IdeaLab project carried out by doctoral and postdoctoral researchers funded by the Academische Stichting Leuven (ASL). For two years five researchers, from various disciplines, came together on a regular basis to discuss the potential value of silence for societal change. The Dutch book Stilte: essays over cultuur, macht en verandering [Silence: Essays on Culture, Power, and Change], published by ASP (Academic and Scientific Publishers), that came out of these discussions, explored the following topics: the place of silence in art history, the role of silence in parliamentary debates around 1900, the educationalisation of silence, silence in the context of Congolese immigration, silence in the psychological treatment of refugees’ trauma, and the value of silence for thinking about public pedagogy. This special issue of DiGeSt is based on a conference held at the University of Leuven in November 2014 that explored the intersection of silence and gender. It is supplemented by an interview with the Belgian theatre artist Chokri Ben Chika.

The first contribution to this issue, “Silence and Sexual Difference: Reading Silence in Luce Irigaray” by Caroline Godart, examines the relation between silence and agency by turning to Luce Irigaray’s notion of the “interval” as a visceral, creative, and explicitly “feminine” practice of silence. By creating a space for listening to oneself and others, these silences allow us to move beyond phallogocentrism. As Godart argues, they “can then turn into a creative threshold of sexual difference that can foster love and mutual self-engendering between lovers, and beyond them family, friends, and strangers”.

The creative capacity of silence is also at issue in “Intercession, Emancipation and a Space in Between”, a contribution on Deaf citizenship by Goedele De Clerck and Josephine Hoegaerts, in which the accessibility of modern representative politics is under scrutiny. Tracing the enduring influence of nineteenth-century understandings of “rational speech” in parliamentary politics, De Clerck and Hoegaerts take the contrast between national parliaments and the recently established Flemish Deaf parliament as a point of departure to explore the possibility of creating a space in
between speech and silence to accommodate diverse embodiments of citizenship and political participation.

At times, the active and passive natures of silence are barely distinguishable, as Riley McGuire’s exploration of “The Victorian Unspeakable” shows us. The “love that dare not speak its name” was, especially in the nineteenth century shrouded in silence as its urges and acts were considered too perverse to be discussed. But, as McGuire points out, the silence of same-sex love was not only the result of social and legal prohibition, a range of forbidden statements, it was also connected to a (perceived) “embodied inability to articulate speech in a standardised way” as dysfluent voices were represented as articulations of non-normative sexualities.

In his contribution “Lessons in Silence”, Pieter Verstraete sets out to critically look at the increasingly heard idea that silence and the act of learning to be silent hold the promise of building communities where diversity is accepted and celebrated; communities where one can develop one’s own strengths without being compromised by discriminatory attitudes or normalizing tendencies. By turning to some historical examples that feature silence as a positively valued goal of education, he convincingly shows that silence today nevertheless cannot be considered as disconnected from power-effects as such. The more we long to learn how to be silent, the more we subject ourselves to new power techniques that make use of our freedom in order to transform us into the diverse creatures we all want to be.

Finally, Liselotte Vandenbussche, Tine Brouckaert, and Laura Andriessen interview the Belgian theatre artist Chokri Ben Chikha. Ben Chikha explores the notion of the zool humain or “human zoo” as historical phenomenon and critical concept in his scholarly research and artistic work. According to Ben Chikha, the zool humain “blows up differences and creates invisible borders”. It questions notions of identity. For him, the critical idea of the zool humain is about more than giving a voice to those who are oppressed; it is about exposing boundaries, indicating silences, and creating a dialogue. As an artist, Ben Chikha reminds us of the aesthetic strategies that can be used to expose or maintain silence. In his work, he explores what can and cannot be said; what is and is not accepted; and why we continue to hold on to particular notions of identity.

The guest editors,
Josephine Hoegaerts & Pieter Verstraete
References


Silence and Sexual Difference: Reading Silence in Luce Irigaray

Caroline Godart

Abstract
How can silence, one of the most efficient and vicious weapons of phallocentrism, be mobilised as a force for feminism? This article examines the place of silence in the work of Luce Irigaray, offering an account of her analysis of silence both as a concept (the interval) and as a tactic to subvert phallocentrism (primarily through mimicry and, in her later work, through meditation). However, Irigaray’s own silences are also examined, particularly as they relate to her study of Eastern religions and to her approach to LGBQ (lesbian, gay, bi, and queer) and TIGNC (trans, intersex, gender-nonconforming) experiences.

Keywords: Silence, feminist philosophy, difference feminism, Luce Irigaray, interval, meditation.

Patriarchy consistently deploys silence as a weapon against women: the crimes committed against them, such as rape, harassment, and battery, are systematically muted, and their relationships with other women are rarely thematised (very few films pass the Bechdel Test). Tellingly, psychosomatism, the bodily expression of unspeakable trauma, was long called “hysteria” and cast as a typically female phenomenon. Yet silence can be productive: from the fissures it makes into the raucous world, new thoughts, aspirations, and desires can emerge. Allowing phallocentrism to define quietness cuts us off from a crucial source of philosophical innovation and dilutes the creative force of silence into nothingness and alienation. But how can this generative potentiality be put to the service of feminism?

Luce Irigaray offers answers to this question in her rich, at times challenging, reflection on sexual difference. Silence is pervasive in her work: it is conceptualised as one of the guises of the interval of sexual difference, the barely perceptible close dis-
tance through which the world could be transfigured, and deployed as a tactic to undermine phallocentrism, either as mimicry in the early works, or as meditation starting in the 2000s. The purpose of this paper will be to trace the question of silence in her philosophy, accounting for both her conceptualization of quietness and her strategic use of it.

Irigaray is without a doubt the most famous Belgian-born philosopher in the world today. Yet she is hardly read in her country of origin. Her work is too often quickly dismissed as old-fashioned or rejected on the basis of its purported essentialism. However, this disregard is far from being universal. Irigaray has remained an important figure on the international feminist academic scene: in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Scandinavia, Italy, and East Asia, she is well-researched, even enjoying a strong regain of interest in a wide range of disciplines. Further, she is the subject of a scholarly society, the Irigaray Circle, which meets every two years, and several books grounded in her work are published each year, covering a wide range of topics. Irigaray’s thought is used productively to engender reflections on philosophy, film studies, architecture, religious studies, literature, etc. She is also one of the key figures in New Materialism, a flourishing field in contemporary Continental philosophy that gathers theoreticians who reject the traditional division of body (matter) and mind, and display a strong interest in questions of difference. For the past fifteen years or so, Irigaray has also conducted a yearly Doctoral Seminar, in which ten graduate students from all around the world convene to study with her for a week. The graduates of this seminar, however, are among the very few scholars to have had the opportunity to study directly with her. Irigaray, contrary to most influential academics and in spite of her prestigious credentials, has never held a tenured professorial position. Because of this professional trajectory, unusual for an intellectual of her distinction, she has personally trained very few followers.

Her influence was further hurt by Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont’s diatribes in their infamous *Fashionable Nonsense*. But even before that, Irigaray’s work had started to take a different, in many ways more controversial turn, silencing the experiences of several communities: starting with *Ethics of Sexual Difference*, she began explicitly locating the possibility of a social revolution within heterosexual relationships, and therefore to focus her intellectual efforts in this project. This emphasis on straight love makes sense: most women and men identify as heterosexual, and Irigaray argues convincingly that the nexus of all social change is the private sphere. However, her work can reek of unpleasant undertones of heterocentrism. Likewise, she does not address the urgent questions raised by transgender, intersex, and gender nonconforming (TIGNC) subjectivities. Further, starting with *Sexes and Genealogies*, Irigaray has begun turning to Eastern religions and spiritual practices to offer an alternative to the phallocentrism of the Judeo-Christian tradition, which honours a
male God. She is herself a devoted yoga practitioner. Unfortunately, her forays into Asian philosophies are tainted with Orientalism, as she often does not account for the great complexity of the traditions that she addresses. This paper will not be primarily concerned with a rebuttal of her work – I think that the world needs more of her thought, not less – but these issues, especially as they pertain to the silencing of others, must and will be addressed.

Irigaray’s thought hinges on one fundamental intuition: sexual difference is not, as constructivists would have it, simply the product of a given social environment; nor is it, as essentialists claim, the expression of immutable natural laws. Rather, sexual difference is the unpredictable becoming of sexed forces as they emerge, briefly crystallise, and ceaselessly metamorphose in the bodies of women and men. Irigaray observes that the two sexes (she regrettably only considers cis women and men) have different bodies. For instance, it is well-known that they have different metabolisms, which is why medical treatments ought to be sex-specific – though they often are not, as the pharmaceutical-industrial complex mostly tests medication on men. Further, women and men’s respective sexual organs, and the particular ways in which desire channels its force through their bodies, make for profoundly different experiences of sex.

Lastly, these two types of bodies correspond to two fundamentally different positions with regard to life: one either belongs to the group that gives life or to the group that does not. This does not mean that all women have children and even less that they should. But it does mean that bodies, the material foundations of our existences, are sexually differentiated. Therefore, they put women and men in divergent positions in relation to life and its proliferation. In other words, different bodies entail different ontologies.

Irigaray is often charged with essentialism, that is, of reducing sexual differences to eternal, unchanging traits. This accusation is unfair: Irigaray’s focus is not on women’s essence but on their becoming. In other words, what interests her is not what bodies are, nor what they are purported to be, but what they could accomplish. Whereas essentialists postulate a certain number of female and male qualities – men, the proud descendants of some fantasised macho hunters, are the beasts of prey of the modern world, while women form delicate yet hysterical creatures – Irigaray tells us that phallocentrism has never allowed women to explore the true possibilities that their bodies offer. Instead, phallocentrism has systematically sought to destroy alterity by bringing all differences in relation to a single, male model. In Elizabeth Grosz’s terms, Irigaray shows that instead of existing in their own right, women can only function in relation to men, acting as their “subordinates, complements, or opposites” (Grosz, 1989, p. 112).

The result of this alienation is that women are silenced not only in their everyday experiences of phallic oppression, but also at a very fundamental level: we do not
know who or what they are, how wild and creative and violent they could become if able to pursue their true callings. Neither do we know how diverse the expressions of the feminine would be, nor which shapes they would take: What, we may ask, would it mean for the most masculine of women to explore and relish their virility without the constraints set by phallic domination? Further, crucially for Irigaray, we do not know what relationships between women would look like, and especially between mothers and daughters. But this muting of the possibilities of the feminine goes beyond identity: what new languages would women speak if unhindered by the demands of phallic symbolic systems? What poetics would they develop, what tunes, what rhythms? What Gods? But also, how would science and mathematics evolve if they were no longer shaped by selective phallocentric perspectives?

At least half the world remains to be discovered. This brings us to the heart of one of Irigaray’s key insights – that feminism should not only be about the critique of old concepts, but also about the production of new ones, in all areas of knowledge. Hers is fundamentally a creative feminism, one that invents more than it destroys. Like Nietzsche, Irigaray rejects resentment and the Hegelian slave’s desire to be recognised by the master. Rather than proclaiming that, as egalitarian feminists do, women are as good as men (while hoping for the latter’s approval), Irigaray enjoins women to cultivate autonomy and singularity regardless of anyone’s opinion.

To develop an affirmative feminism is a paradoxical task, as feminism, like all theories of emancipation, must in part rely on demolition: the master’s house needs to be dismantled. But devoting one’s efforts mostly to criticism causes its own form of self-destruction, as the critic runs the risk of becoming an entirely reactive being, much more eager to indict someone else’s position than to build a world of her own. Irigaray develops a clever response to this conundrum: as a feminist philosopher, she offers elaborate critiques of Western thought, but her attacks always address concepts she finds deeply compelling in some ways. And her strikes, numerous as they may be, are always seductive operations, grounded in a true esteem for he who is bitten by her venom – tellingly, one of her most incisive works is titled Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche. How is this charm conveyed? Her critical strategy in the early works is at once intellectual and stylistic: her precise philosophical invectives testify to a thorough command of the works she is analysing. But the style in which she delivers them is poetic and often humorous. Irigaray’s early writings are rarely purely descriptive: beyond philosophical exegesis, she is also evoking a feminine-to-come, conjuring up that which lies speechless within women’s souls and bodies through images, such as that of the lips, which are at once referential and metaphorical. Her writing style is an invitation to embrace what lives beyond phallocentric limitations.
The early Irigaray also uses silence strategically and with great wit. For instance, in *Speculum*, instead of identifying the victims of her wily philosophical attacks explicitly, she gives a few carefully chosen hints as to their identity, such as a quote at the beginning of the essay, or a few italicised key terms, thereby playfully turning her reader into an intellectual detective of sorts. Further, her favourite method to expose an author’s incongruities with regard to sexual difference is simply to quote him. Her chapter-long critique of Plotinus forms a particularly brilliant example, as it relies exclusively on this strategy: Irigaray carefully selects paragraphs from his books and arranges them in a meaningful order but does not add a single word. This tactic is one of mimicry: Irigaray imitates Plotinus of course, quoting as she does his exact words, and her philosophical analysis, which is very clear to the exercised reader, is draped in complete silence: her own words are nowhere to be found. But even more than Plotinus himself, she imitates the compliant and wordless (feminised) apprentice who would scrupulously, quietly reproduce her master’s words – and she derides both, all while offering a disconcertingly specific analysis of Plotinus’s phallocentric pitfalls.

Mimicry is a fundamental tactic for Irigaray, not only in her critique of male philosophers, but also as a means of weakening phallocentrism: in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, she suggests that since women can only have access to subject positions defined by phallocentrism, they could offer caricatural versions of these roles in order to elicit their artificiality (Irigaray, 1985, p. 134). Besides mimicry, Irigaray offers two other methods to move beyond phallocentrism: self-exploration and the interval of sexual difference, both of which have silence at their core.

Irigaray elaborates on her concept of the interval in the context of heterosexual relationships, and before moving on to this crucial concept, upon which much of the discussion that follows will rest, I would like to address the issue of her hetero- and ciscentrism.

Irigaray has had a tendency, especially in her more recent work, to deliberately quiet the experiences of queers, gays, lesbians, and bi’s, and of transgender, intersex, and gender nonconforming people, focusing on heterosexual relationships and the lives of cisgender individuals. This, sadly, is also an iteration of silence in her work. Her surprising conservatism is quite new, as it only began in the 1980s. In her early work, and especially in “When Our Lips Speak Together” (Irigaray, 1985, pp. 205-18), she appeared to endorse intimate relations between women and was generally regarded as a very lesbian-friendly author.

Irigaray sometimes explicitly elevates gender-normative, heterosexual experiences above others. In an interview, she said of “man and woman” that they are “the most mysterious and creative couple. That isn’t to say that other couples may not have a lot in them, but that man and woman is the most mysterious and creative”
(Schor & Burke, 1994, p. 347). This statement makes sense in the larger context of her work: being situated differently in relation to life and reproduction entails that women and men may observe in each other visions and approaches to the world that are fundamentally different from their own. Moreover, as T. Johnston reminds us, it must be kept in mind that Irigaray is not talking about heterosexuals as they function today, in a suffocating, phallocentric mode, but as they may one day learn to discover each other in non-hierarchical ways (Johnston, 2015, p. 621).

Still such a remark remains cringe-worthy: Can we accept this blatant heterocentrism? Can other differences not matter much more in practice than sexual difference? What about class, race, and health? These questions need to be addressed in a way that both does justice to the depth of Irigaray’s work and acknowledges its limitations.

She argues convincingly that sexual difference is the only ontological difference. Yet this does not necessarily make it the most determining manifestation of alterity in the flow of everyday experience: to a gay Muslim Syrian being denied asylum in Europe, class, race, citizenship, sexual orientation, and religion are likely to matter as much, if not more, than gender. However, this example does not invalidate Irigaray’s point about the ontology of sexual difference – while experience modulates the urgency of various forms of alterity, sexual difference does remain uniquely tied to our understanding of being, as it positions us in a particular way with regard to life and its perpetuation. In short, while Irigaray’s focus on heterosexuality and sexual difference can (often) be frustrating, both are justified within the parameters of her work: heterosexuality is the libidinal economy that is best able to subvert and transform phallocentrism, operating as it does from the inside. Further, a focus on sexual difference is vital for feminism and philosophically relevant. Moreover, since human experience far transcends the ontological weight of sexual difference, her work does not preclude a reading that embraces all forms of difference.

Unfortunately, her commentary on transgender people is more dubious. For instance, in an attempt to include non-cis individuals, Irigaray has begun talking of “at least two” sexes in I Love to You (1996, p. 35). But this “at least” puts into question the very categories that it is supposed to recognise: it suggests that there are maybe more than two sexes, but we cannot be sure. Relegating non-cis subjectivities to a hypothetical universe is a pernicious form of erasure. Johnston remarks aptly that, “Irigaray is clear in her belief that transgender experience is another way in which phallocentrism seeks to suppress sexual difference” (Johnston, 2015, p. 625). As much as I think that it is necessary to produce rigorous readings of Irigaray, rightfully showing her work to be more complex than it may appear at first sight, explicitly acknowledging the points on which we disagree with her is the necessary condition to move beyond the limitations that she has imposed upon her own thought. From
there, we could begin to produce theories of sexual difference that are equally relevant to all beings, regardless of their sexual identity or preferences.

Irigaray’s categories of sexual difference need to be expanded to recognise those who inhabit a male or female body while experiencing the world from the other gender’s perspective, or those who refuse to identify with either gender (trans, genderfluid, genderqueer, and other forms of gender identity). Her work does not in fact preclude such readings: feeling intimately male in a female body can be seen as a different mode of embodiment, in the same way that the experiences of very masculine women and very feminine men are also manifestations of sexual difference. I want to suggest that Irigaray is in fact well-suited to address trans and intersex experiences: within her framework, all bodies have a particular ontology, including those of TIGNC people, who entertain dialogical relations with the two most common sexes; relations neither of opposition and identity, nor of inferiority or complementarity, but of creation, expansion, convergence, imitation, borrowing, and subversion. Their alterity needs to be affirmed in the same way that woman’s own alterity must be claimed: in their singularity and independently of a normative standard. In fact, difference feminism can only be relevant if it considers (and celebrates) all forms of sexual difference rather than silencing those who do not fit neatly into its operative categories. The fruit of this reflection will be its own reward: a theory of sexual difference that can account for all ontologies, grounded in the work of one of the great poetic thinkers of feminism, as well as its most astute philosopher.

Let us now go back to Irigaray’s discussion of silence and sexual difference. As shown earlier, Irigaray frequently resorts to mimicry in order to critique the philosophers whom she analyzes, and she exhorts women to subvert phallocentrism using the same tactic. Mimicry is a quiet ploy, one that feigns obedience to the master while planting the seeds of his undoing. But she sees mimicry as a negative tactic; in “Place, Interval” (Irigaray, 1993, pp. 34-58), she develops the concept of the interval, a key one in her work, which enables her to propose an active, constructive, positive way out of phallocentrism.

In this chapter of Ethics of Sexual Difference, she indicts phallocentric straight men for using their wives and girlfriends as spaces upon which they can develop their own singularities, turning women into readily available narcissistic supplies whose role is to nurture male subjects. But rather than writing off heterosexual relationships as incapable of offering forms of self-actualization for women and men, Irigaray sees them as the most valuable loci for the elaboration of new forms of sexual differentiation.

Indeed, Irigaray envisions relationships in which the logic of the master and the slave, which underpins phallocentrism and all systems of domination, would be replaced by mutual admiration. How? A very specific form of mediation would be needed: a distance, infinitesimal when lovers are touching, which would guarantee
that they remain grounded in their own singularity and do not become subsumed to
each other. This minute separation, which Irigaray calls the “interval” of sexual dif-
ference, is that which enables lovers to be together without merging and without hier-
archy; it is that which allows for the feminine and masculine forces of life to grow,
converge, and proliferate, beyond the constraints of phallocentrism. The space of the
interval takes on different shapes and names in her work, such as love, mucous, and
the angel.

Silence is an important figuration of the interval: without it, the two cannot
approach each other and welcome their mutual otherness. Its presence can open up a
field from which each subjectivity can emerge (2008, p. 10). Silence can generate a
form of listening through which the other is allowed to exist as other: in order to truly
listen, we must act from a position of complete openness and renounce our own mode
of approach to the world in order to let the other’s unfold. What will arise from the
other’s discourse if we listen in such a manner? Irigaray writes

I am listening to you rather as the revelation of a truth that has yet to manifest itself –
yours and that of the world revealed through and by you. I give you a silence in which
your future – and perhaps my own, but with you and not as you and without you – may
emerge and lay its foundation (Irigaray, 1996, p. 117).

Irigaray’s contention in this passage is surprisingly strong: what will emerge from lis-
tening is not simply an account of the other’s experience. Rather, a mysterious truth
will be revealed, set in a puzzling temporality: at once divulged in the other’s dis-
course and always deferred (it has “yet to manifest itself”). This paradoxical form of
verity is at odds with the common definition of the word as fixed or permanent.
Truths do not normally transmute in the Western tradition, but rather, in the image
of God, are eternal, unchanging, and infallible. Conversely, the truth that Irigaray
addresses here is in constant becoming: each singularity opens up to a particular rev-
elation of the world, itself grounded in particular embodied experiences. The other’s
verity appears because she is listened to, and a space is created in which she can come
into her own; but it is also yet to be manifested, so deep is the obliteration of differ-
ence performed by phallocentrism. What Irigaray alludes to, and which we may per-
haps hear the whispers in the other’s speech, does not translate (yet) into the actual-
ization of a virtuality. Therefore, listening is about the future: identities are in no way
settled, and time is the source of endless, unpredictable potentiality.13

To open up to the future, we must learn to listen in silence. And to do so, we must
be capable of solitude:

To attain sexual difference requires: I do not know you, hence the birth of solitude and
respect for the mystery of the other. I comprehend you, I know you, often express the
impossibility of attaining solitude. I alienate myself and I alienate you to/in a pseudo-reality or truth. I reduce you to my existence, to my experience, to what I already know so as to avoid solitude (Irigaray, 1996, p. 116).

The possibility of self-actualization, and therefore the coming into being of sexual difference, rests on two conditions: the ability to endure solitude and the ability to listen. These may seem to be mutually exclusive, but Irigaray shows that they are in fact complementary: it is only when I cease to fear solitude that I can stop projecting my own image onto others, and that I can at last allow myself to come into my own. From there, I can also start listening to the other, and give her the space she needs for her own coming into being. All this, however, can only happen if we learn to cultivate silence, as the interval of sexual difference that could open us up to the other.

Irigaray suggests that women turn their gaze inside to uncover their own selves, beyond the carnivalesque demands of phallocentric masks. The speculum would then become an instrument of exploration, not only of intimate landscapes, but also of one’s profound, unearthed character. Woman should, she writes in *I Love to You*, “gather herself within herself” (1996, p. 27) and use this meditative approach to develop a stronger sense of her aspirations and needs.

This new direction can best be understood in its context, that of Irigaray’s deep-going engagement with Eastern philosophies, which began in the early 1980s, and which she develops in detail in *Between East and West* (2002). Unlike other well-known Western commentators on Eastern religions, such as Hegel and Schopenhauer, Irigaray grounds her study not only in research but also in a rigorous daily practice focused on yoga and breathing exercises. In fact, she considers the texts she examines to be secondary to this practice and to the verbal teachings that she has received from masters and gurus.14

Before moving on to the discussion of the book, it must be pointed out that this practice-based, devotional, rather than scholarly approach raises a series of issues tied to Orientalism. In *Between East and West*, Irigaray lumps together “Eastern philosophies” without drawing distinctions between different traditions, although her emphasis is largely on Hinduism (itself a complex, diverse tradition) and a form of tantric yoga. Further, Morny Joy, in her pointed critique of the book, highlights the fact that Irigaray takes many intellectual shortcuts, in particular in relation to the position of women both in India and in Hinduism, and appears to have written her book “without reference to issues that are prominent in contemporary feminist scholarship, to recent historical research of early India and to post-colonialist discussions” (Joy, 2006, p. 130). I agree with Joy that *Between East and West* makes an insufficient scholarly study of Hinduism and Buddhism, and I second her in deploring Irigaray’s at times superficial account. I also agree with Joy’s accusation of Orientalism. To
mitigate somewhat this condemnation, Irigaray is explicit about her choice to draw primarily from her own experience and the oral teachings that she has received in France and India, as the book’s ambition is not to offer a theological study, but to encourage its readers to develop a practice of being attentive to their own breath, and of using this awareness to connect both with their own selves and with others. This of course does not absolve Irigaray from the charge of Orientalism, and her superficial approach, her refusal to engage with the intellectual complexity of the traditions that she addresses betrays neo-colonial reflexes that are still prevalent in Europe. Still, the book offers interesting perspectives on the ways in which meditation, that particular cultivation of silence, can be mobilised in order to create a world beyond phallocentrism.

The question that lies at the basis of Between East and West is: what can we do about modern alienation and our lack of sense and direction? How can we move beyond artifices and illusions to develop relations with ourselves and with each other grounded in genuine encounters instead of masquerades?

Irigaray finds psychoanalysis and deconstruction, the two predominant modes of personal emancipation for French intellectuals since the 1960s, to be lacking. Deconstruction, she suggests, is a clever intellectual construct but it does not engage the embodied and spiritual dimensions of life, while psychoanalysis keeps its patients dependent on others, imaginary mothers and fathers, collective narratives of nurturing and rejection. Conversely, breathing by oneself requires in its essence no screen, intellectual or otherwise, no mental estrangement from the body, no effort of invention. It provides the foundation for an autonomous life, as the practitioner learns to draw from their own breath that which is needed to live in the world, and thereby takes the absolute first step toward liberation. Silence, the absence of speech, provides the inalienable basis for breath meditation, the necessary condition for an attention to respiration to develop. Her work on the breath is therefore a reflection on what proceeds when speech ends and that which is begins to unfold.

Irigaray is particularly interested in Eastern philosophers’ alternative to the hierarchical separation of the mind and the body that sustains Western thought. The texts that she reads suggest that the body itself can be spiritualised, made into more than flesh through the cultivation of the breath. Western traditions treat the body as fallen, split from the mind, and unreliable: the body is that which needs to be sustained only as a vehicle that permits the intellect to function, and that which needs to be surpassed in order to access the spiritual. Tellingly, one of the primary ways in which the body can bring a Catholic closer to God is through the mortification of her or his flesh. Only through pain, which marks at once the intensification of the visceral and its coming demise, can a body approach the sacred.
In contrast, Irigaray shows that the divine need not be outside the self in an unreachable transcendental realm, but can rather be incarnated in the subject, accessible without mediation, through the breath. The purpose is an all-embracing communion with the world: the Buddha, Irigaray writes, “tries to become pure subject but on a model forgotten by us: pure subject means here breathing in tune with the breathing of the entire living universe” (Irigaray, 2002, p. 40).

This profound respect for the body goes hand in hand with a particular understanding of its place and function in ethics. The breath, because it nourishes self-knowledge and autonomy, becomes a powerful vector of freedom. Irigaray claims that when it comes to discursive expression, a tradition articulated around the breath, anchored in an ever-fluid present rather than bound to eternal written truths, will tend to prefer poetry and song praising the cosmos over injunctions on how an individual should behave in society (2002, p. 55). This emphasis on liberty is especially important in relation to the couple: Irigaray encourages her readers not only to seek to spiritualise their bodies and lives, but also love itself, especially as it occurs in relations between men and women. In these conditions, heterosexual love would no longer be assimilated to the subjection of woman to man’s desire but would “come to pass between two freedoms” (2002, p. 62). And these two autonomous, fully realised beings would forge relationships that are not ruled by regression, but by reciprocity; relationships in which the roles of master and disciple are forever interchangeable, each of the partners initiating the other into the pleasures and worlds particular to their sex (2002, p. 63). Revitalised by silence, sex itself would become an important locus of the spiritualization of life.

Irigaray reclaims silence as a regenerative force. In her work, it becomes much more than absence and privation: by turning our ears away from the sirens of egalitarian constructivism to the visceral abysses to which Irigaray invites us, we gain a theory of the quiet as the ability to listen to one’s own and the other’s mystery. Silence can then turn into a creative threshold of sexual difference to foster love and mutual self-engendering between lovers, and beyond them family, friends, and strangers. Instead of marking woman’s hysteria or the erasure of her speech, quietness comes to function as a field from which difference can unfold and from which another world, or rather other worlds, can come into being.

References


---. (1985) *This sex which is not one*. Trans. C. Porter and C. Burke. Ithaca: Cornell UP.


Notes

1. The “Bechdel Test” finds its source in Alison Bechdel cult comic *Dykes to Watch Out For*, in which a character named Ginger declares that she only goes to a movie if it satisfied three basic requirements: it needs to have at least two women with names, who talk to each other about something else than a man.

2. For an interesting exception, see Benjamin Biebuyck, “Differentie en levenskracht: over het werk van Luce Irigaray”, *Verslagen van het Centrum voor Genderstudies* 11, pp. 39-47.

3. There is a resurgence of interest for Irigaray’s work in several fields, such as philosophy (see, among many others, Elizabeth Grosz’ *Becoming Undone*. Durham: Duke UP, 2011); religious studies (Morny Joy’s *Divine Love*. Manchester: Manchester UP 2006); literary criticism (Abigail Rine’s *Irigaray, Incarnation and Contemporary Women’s Fiction*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013); or architecture (Peg Rawes’ *Irigaray for Architects*. London: Routledge, 2007).

4. Irigaray has earned a PhD in linguistics from Paris-VIII-Vincennes and another one in philosophy. After *Speculum* was published, she was fired from the positions she held at Paris-VIII and the Ecole freudienne: the book’s indictment of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytical theories cost her career. She later became “directrice de recherches” at the CNRS.

5. In the book, published in 1997, the two authors led a quixotic crusade defending the sciences from the purported attacks of ruthless left-wing philosophers, and in particular of poststructuralist thinkers. Several other names were stained by the duo’s facile exercise in Humanities bashing, such as those of Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, and Bruno Latour. But Irigaray, a woman without a prestigious academic position, bore the brunt of the vilification. It is easy to see why Sokal and Bricmont chose her as one of their victims: her early work is not only remarkably clever, it is also difficult to follow, sometimes even baffling. She resorts to plethora of metaphors, some of
them scientific – and this is of course what that triggered the vituperations of our two asinine liter-
alists. How could she, resounded their dribbling charge, hijack scientific knowledge and use it
poetically? How dare she impinge on the immutable purity of the laws of matter with her philo-
sophical gibberish?
6. Of course, desire is not an arrested phenomenon; its becomings are always being created and its
manifestations cannot be foreseen. Saying that desire is sexually differentiated does not entail that
we know what women’s and men’s desire is or what it could be. Hill offers a sophisticated analysis
of queer sex within an Irigarayan framework in Interval (2012, p. 78-79).
7. See for instance the works of Desmond Morris and Richard Dawkins. Neo-Darwinians in general
have a tendency to support extremely conservative views of the evolution of the sexes, much more
so than Darwin himself.
8. Irigaray criticises the inability of Western science, and by extension of its entire sign system, to
embrace paradigms to explain the world that go beyond those laid out in the interest of phallocen-
trism. In particular, she resents its incapacity to account for fluids beyond a model grounded in an
account of solids, and she establishes a parallel between this and the place that has been attributed
9. Irigaray has dissected many of the great names in the Western philosophical tradition (Plato, Aris-
totle, Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, Lacan, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, etc.). Her critiques address
each particular work in its singularity, but they all find their root in a particular vision: in Speculum
of the Other Woman and elsewhere, Irigaray argues that since Western thought has (almost) exclu-
sively been phallocentric, it has been founded on a central theft: the philosopher, who like any
other being owes his existence to his mother’s body, does not acknowledge his existential debt.
Rather, he develops intricate theories in order to foster the illusion that the generation of life and
thought are the products of either masculine instances (God, Reason) or of neutral matter (‘matière
première’), thereby depriving mothers, and by extension all women, of their ontological claim to
creation.
10. The lips are a central image in This Sex Which is Not One. They refer at once to the vagina’s and to
the mouth’s lips, and also serve as metaphors for woman’s lack of access both to language and to a
sexuality, as in phallocentrism, both are set up to serve male interests.
11. Still, TIGNC subjectivities confront Irigaray’s work with a series of difficult questions. For
instance, what does the feminine, that which flows from women’s bodies, become if women’s
bodies also can produce male identities? How can we reconcile difference between more than two
with Irigaray’s cogent case that “multiplicity” is a phallocentric ploy aimed at maintaining a
fantasy of difference in an actually monolithic world (I Love to You 46)? And how can the feminist
emphasis be maintained if the focus is no longer solely on women? All these issues require careful
elaboration. But they will need to be addressed.
12. For a more extensive account of the interval, see Godart 2016; Hill 2012.
13. This interpretation is confirmed in the rest of the passage: “This silence is the condition for a
possible respect for myself and for the other within our respective limits. It also assumes that the
already existing world, even in its philosophical or religious form, should not be considered
complete, already revealed or made manifest. If I am to be quiet and listen, listen to you, without
presupposition, without making hidden demands – on you or myself – the world must not be
sealed already, it must still be open, the future not determined by the past. If I am to really listen to
you, all these conditions are esse-
tial” (Irigaray, 1996, p. 117)
14. She cites for instance The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, the Upanishads, and Tantric manuals.
15. This is deeply paradoxical for a religion that rests so thoroughly on the dogma of incarnation
(Jesus is the Word made flesh; the Eucharist manifests transubstantiation). Irigaray acknowledges
this tension, pointing out that Christianity’s message is in essence the potentially divine nature of each body (Irigaray, 2002, p. 61). She further elaborates on the divine nature of the breath as Spirit in both the Old and the New Testaments (Irigaray, 2002, p. 73).

16. *Between East and West* has frequent essentialist and heterocentric undertones. For example, Irigaray claims that women and men have different relationships to their own breaths, which makes sense since they inhabit different bodies. But she goes on to give uncomfortably precise definitions of these divergent approaches to respiration, purporting that man uses his breath to build a world outside of himself, while woman’s breath needs “to remain in her to be able to be shared, to be made fertile” (Irigaray, 2002, p. 81). Whereas her early works had left the content of sexual difference open, *Between East and West*, grounded in an explicit preference for heterosexual love, often purports to know who women are.
Intercession, Emancipation, and a Space In Between: Silence as a Mode of Deaf Citizenship in the Nineteenth Century and Today

Goedele A.M. De Clerck & Josephine Hoegaerts

Abstract

This paper examines deaf citizenship in the nineteenth century and today to determine how metaphors of voice and silence have been used to refer to political representation, emancipation, and participation. The notions of speech and citizenship are metaphorically interdependent and they contrast with the perceived ‘voicelessness’ of deaf adults that corresponded to the practices of intercession in the nineteenth century. Around the turn of that century, deaf citizens began to claim a ‘voice’ by developing means of social and political agency and representation. This challenged the dominant educational and societal views, and also preserved sign language and deaf cultural practices. Later, social movements in the second half of the twentieth century contributed to the political participation of deaf citizens. This led to their identity formation and consequently encouraged deaf communities to be emancipated. We argue, however, that many in the mainstream continue to consider deaf citizens to be ‘voiceless’. To create new pathways for critical citizenship and political participation that are adequate for conventional ‘speakers’ as well as for the ‘voiceless’, we need to both venture beyond the speech-centric metaphors of voice as well as redefine silence. Research on the deaf rhetorical culture in the Flemish Deaf Parliament, a platform for participatory citizenship in contemporary Flanders in northern Belgium, discusses the many possibilities of “between spaces” (Brueggeman, 2009, p. 4). Rather than looking to make people ‘audible’, this text ultimately proposes political practice outside the spaces for a vocal debate that have thus far dominated our image of a ‘government through speaking’.

Keywords: silence, emancipation, nineteenth century and contemporary deaf citizenship, participation, political representation
This study is the result of an ongoing dialogue between two scholars, but more importantly, it is also a discussion among different disciplines and their associated materials and methods. This is a ‘space in between’ that has been reflected in the style of the present paper and in its use of theoretical perspectives to highlight metaphors of voice and silence and their role in deaf emancipation. Our objective is to draw on the combined results from an ethnographic and participatory study of the Flemish deaf community and its recent Flemish Deaf Parliament initiative, a platform of deliberative democracy. We have also conducted a historical analysis of the metaphoric practices of modern citizenship and the central position occupied by the exclusive notions of voice and speech within representative democracies. Both projects offer very different approaches to parliament, citizenship, and the public sphere. However, they also share the common observation that inspired this collaboration: participation in any political process and society depends on being ‘heard’. The acoustic character of this metaphorical understanding of political dialogue has its roots in the ‘modern’ practices and imaginations of the citizen’s voice, and continues to have important implications for the practices of democracy and exclusion.

Notions of audibility are an integral part of modern democracy: vocal metaphors are frequently used for emancipation and political action. For example, we speak of groups that have a voice, or those that cannot be heard. Representation and election also demand a vocal debate. In parliamentary practice, as in electoral campaigns, speech is an essential feature. “Parliament”, Mladen Dolar has noted, “is derived from the Latin parlare [‘to speak’]…as a space reserved for speech” (2006, p. 109). This notion of parliament as a site for speech can be traced back to the ancient Greeks (Heath, 2005), but it really became prominent in Western Europe during the nineteenth century. According to James Macaulay, parliamentary government was “government by speaking” (Sullivan, 2009, p. 82). The focus on speech in representative politics is usually understood as shorthand for its emphasis on transparency, which includes debate, potential discord, and opposing opinions. Moreover, speech may appear as a particularly democratic road into politics; naturally, the right to speak is not equally open to everyone, but the metaphors of raising one’s voice rest on the assumption that at least everyone can speak. Gayatri Spivak (1988), analyses the inability of colonial and female ‘subalterns’ to participate in politics, or even to be heard in the public realm, and asserts that what the subaltern needs is a place to speak from.¹

We would like to argue that merely having a place to speak from is not sufficient in a political sphere that is saturated with expectations of ‘proper’ speech. As Brenda-Jo Brueggemann has observed, deafness can disrupt the conventions of our rhetorical culture and democracy.²
When deaf ears are literal – not just figurative – the motives of competing parties are often not intelligible, audiences are usually not available, expressions are anything but reciprocal, and norms remain untranslatable. Only the silences stand noticeable.

(Brueggemann, 1999, p. 2)

In her essay entitled ‘Echo’, Spivak (1993, p. 13) explains the complexity, nuances, and emergent awareness in the “politics of subalternity-on-the-move”. She also explores repetition of another person’s voice in ‘Echo’ as a contextualised performance. According to Hiddleton (2007), this includes a “possibility for difference in self-representation, of alterity within the copy” (pp. 627-628). In other words, this provides an alternative reading of agency and voice that is sensitive to “the glimmer of a possibility” (p. 631), and to the uncertainties, ambivalence, and hidden responses in ‘silence’. Hiddleton (2007) argues that ‘Echo’ aims to open up our understanding of response in such a way as to make it impossible for the critic or the writing subject to create the subaltern’s response herself. [Spivak’s] analysis certainly does not provide a practical version of resistance, but it sketches the ways in which Echo might resonate within criticism without the critic appropriating her voice, forging her agency or giving her a specificity that is not hers.

The main objective of this analysis is to examine how the pervasive metaphors of voice and speech affect the representation of deaf citizens’ political competence, emancipation, and participation. In order to provide new insights into critical citizenship for ‘conventional’ speakers as well as those usually interpreted as voiceless or speech impeded, we also explore the possibilities that lie beyond these metaphors. We propose to create a political space for the many possibilities between speech and silence, and for the state of ‘not yet knowing’, the state of emergent awareness. Instead of trying to discover ways to make voices ‘audible’, we ultimately imagine political practices outside the paradigm that have thus far compelled us to conceive of a “government by speaking” (Sullivan, 2009, p. 82).

Our analysis attempts to preserve the dialectical practice that is the basis for our argument and conclusion. The following pages present a story that is told chronologically, beginning with the conceptualisation of the modern citizen and his voice in the nineteenth century. This story ends with a reconceptualisation of citizenship in a deaf parliament where silence provides new avenues for deliberation and communication. Rather than presenting a history that is homogenous or linear, we have aimed to explore alternative means of communication. These means are suggested in the conclusion of this text. The result is a conversation that did not attempt to dispute or convince, but one that embraced divergent storytelling and multi-layered silence.
Gendered Narratives of Intercession in the Nineteenth Century

Any history of voicelessness should perhaps begin with the Latin *in-fans* (meaning both ‘speechless’ and ‘childish’), which has included children, women, and deaf people. For example, Karen Sanchez-Eppler argues that childhood in the nineteenth century “is better understood as a status or idea associated with innocence and dependency than as a specific developmental or biological period”, and characteristics connected to childishness could therefore easily be associated with other groups of people as well (Sanchez-Eppler, 2005, p. xxi). Little is known about the experiences of the ‘voiceless’ actors in history, such as children. This is because adults supervised them, disciplined them, cared for them, and adults also spoke for them. Moreover, other adults, such as parents, teachers, or priests, would intercede for children, similar to what saints would do for a praying Christian (Hoegaerts, 2009).

Children especially witnessed intercession in their homes, and this was a practice of articulating relationships of dependence and devotion. In the public sphere, fathers spoke (and voted) for their whole family, constantly moving between the public and the private spheres (Tosh, 1999, pp. 123-140). Within this system, women were considered to be ‘minors’ under Napoleonic law, and therefore *in-fans*. Similar to women and children, deaf adults had to ‘acquire’ the right to vote, which, as we shall see later, reflects how their voiceless nature was translated into a wider notion of infantility (Higgins, 1980, p. 25; Baines, 2007, p. 27). On a practical level, citizenship and political representation were therefore not only gendered by the exclusion of women from the vote, indeed, many practices of masculinity were also connected to citizenship (Surkis, 2006; McCormack, 2007). The inherent ‘masculinity’ of nineteenth-century citizenship also depended on the cultural connection between political representation and the masculine practices of intercession and this was therefore ultimately based on the sound of the male voice.

Mothers were responsible for domestic spirituality and they interceded for their children in the private sphere only (Browne, 2001, pp. 58-87). Furthermore, feminine modes of intercession were religious rather than political, and were labelled as being emotional rather than rational. Maternal love was consequently represented sentimentally, which allowed for a highly charged rhetoric with mothers portrayed as regarding their children as ‘little angels’, protecting them from the strictness of fathers, and frequently praying for them. As an illustration, Dutch speakers might recognise this trope in the classic nursery song *Klein, klein kleutertje* ‘Little urchin’, which features a toddler who implores his mother ‘Not to tell Papa’ of his transgressions. In addition, the typical nineteenth-century image of a mother in literature, art, and poetry was a woman who ‘asked nothing for herself’, but had plenty to ask on behalf of her children. For mothers with deaf children, their child’s voicelessness was
magnified, leading to an even stronger need for spiritual intercession. A poem by Elizabeth Cook entitled ‘The deaf and dumb child’ depicts a mother with one deaf and several hearing children (Roe, 1888, p. 12). She, too, prays for all her children, but specifically for her “wordless boy”, who was most in need of divine intervention.

Oh, thou art very beautiful to me
My own dumb boy, my gentle, voiceless one.
And while it throbs thy mother’s heart will be
Thy best and first interpreter, my son.

This motherly mode of intercession was portrayed as emotional, mysterious, and undeniably ‘feminine’. When mothers performed the act of ‘interpreting’, it was from their hearts, rather than an act of professionalism, or multilingualism.

The continuous intercessions for deaf children were reiterated in non-domestic settings, and the practice of interpretation was politicised and made public (and predominantly taken up by men). Institutions regularly spoke ‘for’ their charges. For example, the president of Derby’s deaf institute stated that to “interest the public”; thoughts and texts were attributed to generic deaf figures, such as “the deaf and dumb girl” in an attempt to ‘grant’ them a voice (Roe, 1988). The message of these texts was ambiguous: they frequently emphasised the deaf student’s capabilities to think and feel, yet also appear to have been written to invite pity. A poem in Roe’s collection describes the perspective of “the deaf mute”, including the following lines:

O, must I ever silent be?
And speak alone, my God, to thee? (p. 26)

This poem is an interesting example because it portrays deaf people as ‘speaking’ only in silence and as representing themselves before God, but not in the public sphere, where political representation and other acts of citizenship took place.

**Silent Prayers, Sign Language, and Identity in the Nineteenth-Century School**

Roe’s discourse dovetailed with the preconceptions of charitable institutions and schools, where ‘emancipation’ was principally a by-product of pragmatic and moralising education. Sign languages typically develop when deaf people assemble. An example of this was the deaf community in Paris that existed even before Abbé de l’Épée established his Paris school for deaf children in the 1760s. Deaf schools in Europe and the US have frequently been institutions that offer deaf children the opportunity to acquire sign language in interaction with their peers. Despite the
INTERCESSION, EMANCIPATION, AND A SPACE IN BETWEEN

The influence of oral approaches and oral deaf schools, such as Heinicke’s school in Germany, which was established in 1778, schools served this social function since their inception in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Lane & Philip, 1984; Van Cleve & Cruch, 1989; Burch, 2002; Fisher & Lane, 2003). This was also true for deaf schools in Belgium, as they were inspired by notions of Catholic charity, and were established in the first half of the nineteenth century. As elsewhere, these institutions used sign language in their instructions and this brought deaf children out of their isolation. These schools were also not sequestered, but were part of a larger international network of deaf educators. Flemish teachers obtained their expertise from schools in France (that of Abbé de l’Epée, in Paris) and the Netherlands (in Groningen). The networks among the deaf students and graduates in these schools led to the foundation of deaf clubs in Europe and the US. These clubs fulfilled a social and welfare function by providing a space to nurture intellectual and moral knowledge (Raemdonck & Scheiris, 2007).

The attempts to educate deaf children and to invite charity therefore encouraged some degree of agency and identity-building. Charitable institutions as well as ‘morali\'ng’ programmes within deaf institutions served as evidence that signing children could be accepted as fellow humans who share our religious and other emotions, not only to be perceived merely through their foreign suffering. And yet, by repeating the need for teaching, aiding, and protecting the voiceless, champions for the ‘deaf and dumb’ created a rhetoric of childlike dependence that contradicted the contemporary notions of citizenship that were invested with independence and maturity (Surkis, 2006).

However, educators did not deny the existence of deaf students’ discourse. For example, Heinicke and de l’Epée corresponded about their educational methods, and a student of l’Epée, an educator of the deaf, Ferdinand Berthier, wrote about the relationship between deaf education and emancipation (Lane & Philips, 1984). Rather, what their narratives suggest is that educators in institutions considered the ‘deaf and dumb’ voice to be inefficient. In other words, no one could hear their voices and signing was considered to be “but a poor substitute for speech” (Sleight, 1849, p. 13). William Sleight’s book, entitled A Voice from the Dumb, represented a particularly explicit example of this notion of an authentic voice trapped in a deaf body. The voice in the title is that of John William Lashford, a representative of the ‘uneducated deaf’, who had entered the Brighton and Sussex Institution at the late age of 13. Sleight noted that “though entirely shut up within himself during these [preceding] years, he had evidently been a thinking boy” (p. 30).

Sleight’s text shows how the deaf voice failed to be audible, and criticises hearing people’s unwillingness to engage with a signed language. Nevertheless, Sleight ultimately concludes that it is impossible to understand the ‘silent voice’ of
deaf children. A poem from the book frames the plea to be heard as a ‘prayer’ directed at God:

Then let our wants your pity move,
To teach us of a Saviour’s love,
And guide our souls to joys above,
This is our silent prayer!

The need for intercession was put into perspective by recognising an authentic and autonomous voice that could be heard in prayer. Through education, deaf children could learn to distinguish between right and wrong, obtain knowledge of scripture and eventually pray for themselves. This was what Sleight presented as the great success of Lashford’s education, exemplifying it by a scene after the funeral of Lashford’s little brother:

When at home, seeing his parents weeping, he looked about the room, and saw a hymn book; [...] and, on looking through a few pages, he found the word body, which he showed to his mother, pointing to the coffin in which the body of his brother was laid. On searching a little further, he found the word soul, then he found heaven and then Jesus. He now pointed to the dead body again, and signed that it must be put into the grave; and then he pointed to the word soul, and signed that it would not go there, for it had gone to dwell in heaven, with Jesus. (Sleight, 1849, p. 11)

Young Lashford had not only acquired the means to grasp difficult and abstract concepts, such as death and resurrection, but he had also devised ways to communicate them. This means that educating deaf children to sign could therefore allow them to participate fully in domestic life, attain devotional independence, and to acquire the written language. However, the recurring insistence that sign language (or ‘silent prayer’ for that matter) was insufficient for communicating in the public sphere served as further evidence that educators considered the interaction at home to be irrelevant.

**Emancipation and finding a voice at the turn of the century**

Many of the endeavours that were initiated to ‘educate’ deaf pupils were devoted to speech and lip-reading, which became part of deaf schools’ curricula to supposedly enable deaf people to engage in ‘normal’ public life, including conversation and debate (see also Söderfeldt, 2013). This was part of the theory of the norm. These became prominent concepts in the second half of the nineteenth century (Widell, 2000; also see Davis, 1995). Initially, deaf education was oriented toward employ-
ment and civil respectability. Nonetheless, as some schools prohibited sign language in the late 1800s, deaf people were also expected to adopt a spoken language. (Van Cleve & Cruch, 1989; Burch, 2002; Fisher & Lane, 2003; Raemdonck & Scheiris, 2007).

The ideal pursued by these oralists seems to have led to invisibility rather than audibility. Deaf people who were promoted as ‘successful’ in this discourse, such as Mabel Hubbard (Mrs Bell), were described as those who managed to conceal their lack of hearing. In other words, they were expected to ‘achieve’ more than merely participating in conversation per se. Deaf speakers who aspired to respectability were to display a ‘proper’ voice to replace other modes, such as signing, that was now restricted to private use, and to abandon the ‘improper’ sounds of the untrained or impeded voice. Almost concurrently with Bell’s visible alphabet and his work with Helen Keller, a host of self-help manuals for stammerers were published and an ‘elocutionary’ movement thus spread, predominantly throughout the US, but also under different guises in Europe. At this time, speech therapists also thrived (Rockey, 1980; Bergeron, 2010) and the ‘proper’ voice was especially essential in political contexts. Indeed, a growing class of professional politicians participated in a brand of politics that highly valued transparent communication (Meisel, 2001). Throughout the nineteenth century, as European nations installed their parliaments, platform speaking became the electoral norm. In addition, elocutionary schools and debate clubs became part of privileged young men’s grooming, and politics through speech thrived.

The result of this insistence on a proper voice was twofold. Firstly, it meant that improper voices, such as the syncopated speech of stammerers, the high pitch of women, and the ‘vulgar’ sound of the lower classes, were either not welcome in politics, or were excluded through ridicule or misunderstanding. Secondly, the notion that one had to speak ‘like an intelligent man’ in order to succeed in politics equated speech with intelligence, and eloquence with good breeding (Hoegaerts, 2015). Due to the intimate connection that had been forged between propriety in speech, education, and civil participation, those without a ‘proper’ voice were labelled as uneducated, infantile, and ultimately, uncivilised. Within this context, the notion that deaf people could be politically active appeared to be somewhat ludicrous. ‘Deaf-mutes’ were discussed in parliaments throughout Europe – predominately because the education of the deaf and the blind was a major concern for philanthropists and the welfare state – but deaf-mutes were not welcomed on the benches. In 1889, when a Belgian liberal MP, Eudore Pirmez, proposed that mechanical contraptions would allow deaf-mutes to participate in second Chamber votes, his suggestion was swiftly derided as “inadmissible hypotheses” by his opponent, Charles Woeste, and as a consequence, that issue was not raised again.
And yet deaf people in Belgium, as elsewhere in Europe and in the US, had already been politically active in many ways, developing the means of their own emancipation. Deaf clubs had been formed alongside the peer-groups established in schools for the deaf and, despite opposition by educators, the use of sign language daily continued to flourish, providing a source of resistance. Another platform for sign language advocacy was found in international congresses. One example is the national federations of the deaf, which were first founded in France and America, and later throughout the world (a Belgian national federation was established in 1901). The deaf advocates in these federations addressed educational issues, such as the use of sign language and the combined method of de l’Epée, the employment of deaf teachers, and the possibilities to increase vocational training. They also highlighted the problem of maintaining a narrow focus on oralism, citing the consequences of segregation, limited reading and writing skills, and a reduced acquisition of general knowledge. The national federations provided community and advocacy, but were also subject to internal discord. For example, Belgium experienced linguistic and ideological conflicts as well as financial problems. Furthermore, personal issues divided the Belgian leadership, and the original federation dissolved within eight years. However, the deaf community gathered in sports organisations (see also Verstraete, 2012), and a new federation was established by Flemish clergy in 1936. Resistance during this period of oralism proved to be beneficial for the preservation of the community (Raemdonck & Scheiris, 2007; De Clerck, 2009).

“I began to understand, ‘I am deaf’”: Identity formation processes in the twentieth century

As a consequence of oralism, it became challenging for the ‘voice’ of the deaf advocacy to be heard in the twentieth century. The concept of deaf communities representing minority groups and identifying as such would not attract political attention until the wave of social movements in the late 1970s. Influenced by developments abroad, a group of Belgian deaf leaders reacted against paternalism, advocating for sign language in deaf education. Nonetheless, it was not until the late 1980s that this type of rhetoric garnered support in the broader community. By that time, a process of emancipation or ‘awakening’ had begun, related to transnational contact with deaf peers in signed languages and visual modes. Exposure to shared experiences and more equal citizenship was perceived as an informal yet empowering ‘deaf way of education’. This moved beyond barriers in formal schooling and furthered the community’s emancipation (De Clerck, 2007). Beginning in the mid-1990s, the community began to expand its means to access information by organising Flemish Sign Language and deaf culture/Deafhood courses and by collaborating with researchers.
in Flemish Sign Language and other relevant domains. Likewise, the increased number of opportunities to be mobile or to study and work abroad and to establish virtual/remote contact have introduced a range of identity constructs that are being disseminated in the field of deaf studies (De Clerck, 2007; 2009).

Among the most well-known of these constructs that have been adopted in linguistic, social, and cultural research are the terms deaf culture and deaf identity (De Clerck, 2010; 2016c). Furthermore, Ladd (2003, p.3) coined the strategically essentialist notion of Deafhood. This refers to the overall deaf experience, including “the struggle by each Deaf child, Deaf family, and Deaf adult to explain to themselves and each other their own existence in the world”. Indeed, Deaf people’s “struggle for voice” (Padden & Humphries, 2005, p. 165) has persisted since the nineteenth century. Today, developments in biotechnology, including cochlear implants and genetic engineering, and the educational ideal of integration, have been experienced as threatening to deaf communities. Padden & Humphries (2005) notice the echo of nineteenth-century oralism in these “themes of silence and the problem of voice, of dominance and control in institutions, and of the struggle to shape the future of deaf children and adults” (p. 164). In these “conflicts of voices”, deaf people’s distinctive acquired knowledge can be instrumental:

Without the diversity of culture, language, and different ways of seeing the world, we would never have learned what we now know about the different ways humans live.

The linguistic and social lives of deaf people have provided us with unique and valuable ways of exploring the vast potential for human language and culture. (Padden & Humphries, 2005, p. 180)

Padden and Humphries’ reappraisal of the humanity that is inherent in deafness connects them to earlier practices of advocacy. Their work also demonstrates the change in how people perceive the humanity of deaf people. As we discussed earlier in connection with O hear our silent prayer, charitable understandings of deaf people’s humanity in the nineteenth century were based on the emotional and religious sameness that they shared with the majority (which supposedly disregarded their silent Otherness). For Padden and Humphries, shared humanity in both vocal and signed language is not accounted for by assimilation, but by difference and appropriation.

In accordance with these authors, but also transcending the American context, we argue that the practices created by sign communities and passed on by them throughout the world, as well as notions of deaf culture and deaf identity, can all be interpreted as expressions of recognition and requests for the recognition of intrinsically human diversity (De Clerck & Pinxten, 2012; De Clerck, 2016c). Reflection on these concepts also provides insight into the cultural construction of knowledge pro-
cesses, particularly on how the practices of spoken-language communities were useful in deaf political action and sign language documentation. In the meantime, we have learned that these culturally situated concepts of identity and community, while potentially empowering, may also serve as master narratives. These concepts and narratives may also be experienced as threatening or limiting to indigenous/minority sign language users and deaf people of diverse backgrounds (De Clerck, 2010; 2016c). Deaf identity is therefore increasingly understood as being complex, dynamic, and multi-layered with many perspectives on knowing, and learning about the world and being deaf. In other words, there are multiple deaf epistemologies. (De Clerck, 2010; 2016c; Young & Temple, 2014; Young, in press).

This emancipation process involves deaf people’s reflection on their journeys as they deconstruct and reconstruct their past. These journeys may include both ‘silence’ and ‘voice’, dialogue with family members from different perspectives, and input from educational ideologies and structures. One illustration of this is a conversation with a Flemish deaf woman born in the 1960s that echoes the story of young Lashford we discussed previously. The deaf woman here dialectically describes a deaf identity connected to an ‘awakening’:

My mom says that, in my early childhood and until I was 7-8 years old, I was a very difficult child. Not a naughty child, but a difficult child. She thinks that I was difficult because I am deaf and I was angry and experienced lot of frustration. When I was 7-8, this suddenly changed. At school, there were older deaf peers and I often asked them many questions: “Why am I not able to communicate with my family at home? Nobody can talk to me.” These older girls said, “Of course, they are hearing and you are deaf.” “Oh, we are different.” “Yes, of course we are different. You are deaf; you can’t talk.” That is how I started to think. Then I gave up at home. My family noticed that I had changed, but at the time, they didn’t know why.

…I remember when my infant cousin passed away because of a heart problem, and my aunt and uncle visited us. I did not know about the death, and only had some understanding that the baby had been ill. I asked my aunt: “Where is baby Peter?” She and my uncle both began to cry and mom became angry with me: “You can’t talk about that.” She had informed me before that the baby had died, but I didn’t understand the word and had no idea what I had done wrong. Then I asked at school and was told: “Ah, but he passed away. He’s not going to live again; he’s buried and he’s up in heaven.” That was a difficult period in time, before I started to understand that “I am deaf”.

This is not a story of education and assimilation, and unlike Lashford, the lead character does not appear as the successful product of schooling. Instead, her account
emphasises peers rather than teachers. Moreover, her narrative suggests an on-going emancipation process and a deaf identity construct that is perhaps prevalent in the adult deaf community (also see De Clerck, 2007; 2009; 2016c). It is important to note that, unlike the classic emancipation story of a minority finding their voice, hers is a story that includes silence at crucial moments. Finally, although knowledge is obtained through interaction with peers in the emancipatory narrative, it is a consciously personal story of “I am deaf”. Today, deaf children who have lived their entire childhoods with cochlear implants and have been educated in mainstream education may have very different perspectives, and other backgrounds of diversity also need to be considered. Amartya Sen points this out: “Along the recognition of the plurality of our identity and their different affiliations, there is a critically important need to see the role of choice in determining the cogency and relevance of particular identities which are inescapably diverse” (Sen, 2008, p. 4).

This role of choice is intimately related to the identity narratives that are available in a society (Verhaeghe, 2014), such as those that relate to the dichotomy of loss and gain, which have increasingly become constructs for deaf identity formation and may risk limiting alternative identity narratives and subjectivity (De Clerck, 2016b). Within the emancipatory moment, it is necessary to create room for that inescapable diversity. It is important not only to rethink modern notions of humanity based on ‘sameness’, but also to reflect on the meanings and practices of (political) emancipation. This may require considering the possibilities of political inclusion that is not only about ‘raising’ a unified minority ‘voice’.

**Spacess in between speech and silence**

This paper aims to contribute to the redefinition of silence as a complex, multi-layered concept related to the unique context of representation and deaf participation, with room for observing, listening, not knowing, and emerging awareness, as spaces of silence or in between silence and speech. Through decades of educational, artistic, and political practice, the deaf community has found a voice for itself. By extending dominant notions of ‘proper speech’ through the exploration of signed and visual modalities, deaf citizens have shifted the emphasis to disclosure. The nineteenth-century notion that a deaf-mute presence in parliament would be an “inadmissible hypothesis” now seems absurd. And yet, we still seem to have difficulties imagining the political world, and parliament in particular, as anything other than a space for speech. Rather tellingly, the first political debate in Flemish Sign Language occurred only a few years ago, in preparation for local elections in 2012 (Reynaert & De Clerck, 2013). In short, models of democracy are predicated upon the choice to ‘speak up’ and on a rhetorical tradition related to the dominant notions of language and citizen-
ship. Brenda Jo Brueggeman (1999, p. 218) observes that these have been challenged by sign language and by the use of a visual space:

while sign language has often been paradoxically designated as an ‘oral’ language – because it has no written form, because it takes place in the present-tense interaction of two or more bodies face-to-face, it is also recognised as anti-oral (or beyond oral?) in its visual nature.

This means that “vision is voice”. In a “world beyond the glorified audiocentric one”, the ‘silence’ of signing can be preferred over voice or speech; it “signifies a choice, not a default” (Brueggeman, 1999, p. 226). For Brueggeman, this choice of ‘silent rhetoric’ extends far beyond the world of deaf culture, being a more general post-modern reframing of the relation between speech and power: “For both a postmodern and a deaf perspective, then, language exists not only in silence, but with silence and even beyond silence” (1999, p. 225). It is in these transcendent “between spaces” (Brueggeman, 2009, p.4), in this case, spaces between silence and speech, that more scope for the irreducible diversity of humanity might arise and be politically recognised.

Recently, members of the deaf community have explored these spaces between voice and silence on a citizenship platform. The initiative by the Flemish Deaf Parliament was inspired by mainstream initiatives of participatory democracy in Flanders. These include the G-1000 citizenship platform, the deaf indigenous forms of participatory citizenship in other contexts (for example, Uganda), and the collective and organisational structures of the Flemish deaf community (De Clerck, 2016a; c).

The deliberative platform was organised through deaf clubs in 2014, and opened up a space for the type of communication suggested by Hanna Arendt (1998) when she reflected upon the act of inscribing ourselves in a web of interpersonal relations and changing this web by doing so (see further). For example, for some of the teenagers, this was the first time that they had met deaf elders, and the presence of diverse ages fostered intergenerational dialogue. For instance, an 85-year-old deaf woman explained to a deaf teenage girl why it might be unsuitable for her to communicate with a nurse through writing and why caregivers who sign can be preferable. Furthermore, older members learned about the young people’s experiences of just having entered the community, having gone through the mainstream education system, and some of them did this with cochlear implants. And thus,

[the disclosure of the ‘who’ through speech, and the setting of a new beginning through action, always fall into an already existing web where their immediate consequences can be felt. Together they start a new process which eventually emerges as the unique life story of the newcomer, affecting uniquely the life stories of all those with whom he comes into contact. It is because of this already existing web of human rela-
tionships, with its innumerable, conflicting wills and intentions, that action almost never achieves its purpose; but it is also because of this medium, in which action alone is real, that it ‘produces’ stories with or without intention as naturally as fabrication produces tangible things (Arendt, 1998, p. 184).

This quote comments on the ‘potentiality of being deaf’, the process of ‘realized and unrealized possibilities’ of being deaf in the past, present, and future’ (Pratt, 2007, p. 403 in De Clerck, 2016b), which is particularly relevant in the history of deaf education.

Questions regarding the role of choice in identity formation were also highlighted in Flemish Deaf Parliament. During that initiative, Diane, a deaf woman in her 50s, spontaneously adopted the role of a ‘mediator’, thus bridging the gap between the younger and older generations. While creating room for ‘voice’/signed stories, this mediation also reflects the complexity and uncertainty that related to the agency, possibility, and knowing that was involved in emancipation. The following quote constitutes part of the dialogue between Diane and a deaf teenager, Annelien, on her experiences of being deaf in a regular school setting. It can be seen in the Flemish Deaf Parliament documentary (available on http://www.signlanguageprojects.com/en/flemish-deaf-parliament), whose format poses a challenge to the “between spaces” (Brueggeman, 2009, p. 4) in representation (how much ‘silence’, for example, through attentive listening, is it practical to display in a documentary on participatory citizenship that reports on deaf citizens’ voices on stage?):

“You have now been mainstreamed in regular education. How do you experience the contrast with deaf education? Do you feel positive or is it difficult?”

“There are some difficult moments, for example, in communication with a group of people. They are talking back and forth, and it is hard for me to follow. However, classes are different than before at the deaf school.”

“You think the level of the classes is a better match for you?”

“Yes, indeed, the level is higher in regular settings. That’s good for the future, for my degree and employment. I prefer it this way.”

“But you miss your friends?”

“Yeah, I miss some friends…”

“Social contact…”

“Sometimes I am alone while hearing friends are talking and having fun. Then I am quiet.”

While this extract reminds us of Echo’s mirroring dominant narratives and prompts us to be sensitive toward Annelien’s response, including silences, dialogue reframing, and the ambiguity of choice, there is another possible interpretation.
Reflecting on the role of Diane in Flemish Deaf Parliament during the making of the documentary, the notion of a ‘deaf mother’ emerged. She was a character who took care of the community and enabled younger members to learn to voice. In a deaf emancipation movement with a strong emphasis on autonomy and rhetoric, promoting a sense of interdependency is significant. Cavarero, Guslandi & Bruhns (2014) problematise the absence of the ‘mother’ in the work of Arendt (1998), which concentrates on the second birth, and has political origins in public storytelling. They adopt Butler’s (2004) perspective on vulnerability and relationality:

The issue here is not that of ‘correcting’ individualist ontology by inserting the category of relationality. The issue, instead, is that of adopting a more radical perspective in order to think relationality as an essential dimension of the human, which, far from simply relating free and autonomous individuals to each other – as the social contract paradigm would do – focuses on our being vulnerable creatures that materially, and often in deeply unbalanced circumstances, give ourselves over to one another. In spite of Arendt, relational ontology – in its radical version, devoid of any residue of individualist ontology – does not call for symmetry, but rather for a continuous interweaving of multiple and singular dependencies, sometimes extreme in their accentuating the unbalanced relations of the protagonists on stage, and therefore exemplary. (Cavarero et al., 2014, pp. 22-23)

The storytellers and listeners in this ‘parliament’ can shift the centre of the deaf community’s political participation by selecting a position between silence and speech and between claiming a voice and lending an ear. This means that disclosure, rather than speech per se, is central to their endeavour. Thus, all who are in-fans have the choice to announce their human presence within that space that neither demands a ‘proper voice’, nor requires assimilation into a narrowly defined humanity that is based on sameness. Parliament, the modern symbol for participatory democracy, can perhaps be not only a place for speech, but for spoken, silent, signed, and diverse human presence.

Conclusion

The main objective of this study has been to assess the impact that voice and silence metaphors have had on the opportunities for deaf citizens’ participation and emancipation. Through interdisciplinary dialogue, we have constructed a heterogeneous narrative. Our narrative began by citing notions of modern citizenship and by exploring the gendered practices of spiritual intercession for deaf children’s perceived ‘voicelessness’ in their domestic life sphere. Moreover, we demonstrate that in
In non-domestic settings, deaf people were only able to represent themselves ‘in silence’ and through prayer, rather than by participating in the public sphere and being politically represented. However, the deaf students’ ‘silent prayer’ in educational institutions in the nineteenth century also reveals an authentic and autonomous voice, which challenges their perceived ‘voicelessness’ and their need for intercession.

At the turn of the century, the orientation towards participating ‘normally’ in the public domain placed a stronger emphasis on speech and lip-reading. Nonetheless, the relationship between these developments and the installation of parliaments in Europe at the time, and the ‘elocutionary’ movement there and in the United States, may suggest that only ‘a proper voice’ provided a ticket to political participation, which excluded all those who did not meet this definition of intelligence and eloquence. Indeed, although deaf education was discussed in several European parliaments, deaf citizens were not included in the debate. Despite these barriers, however, deaf people organised themselves in their own communities and on international platforms.

The social movements of the second half of the twentieth century changed the perceptions of humanity and ‘voice’. As a consequence, deaf people could establish their participation in the public domain as well as the domestic life sphere. The lived narratives of deaf adults are now told, signed, and listened to, and these narratives provide critical alternatives for dominant notions of educational success. During the initial stages of this emancipation movement, the deaf community found a ‘voice’ and articulated it by employing signed and visual modalities. Deaf citizens have challenged the dominant notions of ‘proper speech’ and citizenship. Yet today we continue to struggle to conceptualise political participation in general, and parliament in particular, as something beyond a space for speech. Thus, the gendered practices in the Flemish Deaf Parliament reveal citizens’ exploration of spaces between silence and speech, and between listening and storytelling, in their paths of disclosure. While disclosure through signing in this platform can be viewed as a unique process of birth and revelation of potential, the storytelling, listening, and mediation in this intergenerational phenomenon also testify to uncertainty and not knowing. This activity further uncovers an ambiguity of choice in representation, and a relational dimension to humanity and voice. Therefore, redefining ‘silence’ and ‘voice’ in relation to deaf citizenship not only supports the emancipation movement through creating room for diverse voices, but also enables us to rethink the notion of participatory democratic practice.
References


Widell, J. (2000). *The Danish deaf culture in European and Western society.* In A. Bergmann & T. Ravn (Eds.), *Deaf language culture* (pp. 26-45). Destelbergen: Cultuur voor Doven.


Notes

1. Spivak’s notion of the subaltern is explicitly political. This may be why the ability of the subaltern to ‘speak’ is conceptualised as a metaphor, which is analogous to the metaphors of voice that are commonly used in modern representative politics. The concept of the subaltern as developed by Spivak and others does not explicitly refer to the practices of exclusion connected to deafness or impeded speech. However, her proposal that "measuring silences" can create a space for those who cannot ‘speak to be heard’ is a particularly useful one (Spivak, 1988, p. 286). We reconsider this perspective in this text by insisting on the complex and multi-layered nature of the ‘silence’ that can emerge between speakers of different methods, languages, and sounds.

2. We use the notion of ‘deafness’ to refer to fluid deaf identities, which may position themselves in the spaces between silence, voice, and the potentialities of citizenship.

3. Due to space limitations, we have not been able to cover deaf emancipation during the twentieth-century period between these points in time. For further information on topics such as the deaf advocating for deaf-led associations, or on how the influence of oralism seemed to contribute to the disappearance of deaf cultural rhetoric in the 1960s, we refer the reader respectively to Raemdonck & Scheiris (2007) and De Clerck (2007).

4. These data were collected as part of a doctoral project on deaf empowerment, identity, and agency in Flemish deaf role models (2003-2009). For further information on the methodology, see De...
Clerck (2007; 2009; 2016c). Although these data were collected from an anthropological perspective, they are being approached in this paper from a textual perspective.

5. The exploration of these spaces in between is particularly relevant for the deaf community, which has long experienced limited access to information and barriers to inclusion. The deaf community is one group that is perhaps most likely to benefit from the opportunity of participating flexibly in any possible manner and or mode (also see De Clerck, 2016a).

6. These data were collected for postdoctoral research on the worldviews, sustainable development, and equal opportunities of the Flemish deaf community (2012-2015). For further information on Flemish Deaf Parliament as a participatory citizenship platform, see De Clerck (2016a).
The Victorian Unspeakable: Stammering and Same-Sex Intimacy between Men

Riley McGuire

Abstract
This article explores two overlapping meanings of the phrase “the unspeakable” in Victorian culture through a primarily literary archive. The unspeakable was mobilised to represent both socially forbidden utterances and physically impeded enunciations. In terms of the former, this article attends to the unspeakable as a representative stand-in phrase for sodomitic acts between men – a code word used in an attempt to avoid imbuing these acts with contagious appeal through their explicit naming. Regarding the latter, it examines the unspeakable as a synonym for dysfluent forms of vocalisation – specifically, stammering.

The intersections of these two iterations of the unspeakable are sounded out through a queer reading of the understudied quasi-autobiographical bildungsroman The Unspeakable; or, The Life and Adventures of a Stammerer (1855) by James Malcolm Rymer, a Victorian author of penny dreadfuls. Rymer’s text traces the acquisition and eventual “cure” of the stammer of its protagonist, Charles Theodore Monckton. The narrative of The Unspeakable links normative speech (overcoming a stammer) with appropriate intimacy (forsaking an overemphasis on homosociality in favour of heterosexual desire). This reading is followed by a brief discussion of the potential of a sexological archive as an alternative source to unpack the resonances between non-normative desire and vocalisation in the period.

This article contributes more broadly to dysfluent and queer studies by dialogizing two forms of the unspeakable – a verbal impediment like stammering with a “love that dare not speak its name” – one convergence of dysfluent and queer voices in a vast and multitudinous history.

Keywords: dysfluency, intimacy, queer, stammering, unspeakable, voice
What constitutes the unspeakable? Is it comprised of ineffable or forbidden statements, of secrets that are socially disciplined into silence? Or is it an embodied inability to articulate speech in a normative way? In short, are proscribed words (the content) or hindered enunciations (the form) at the root of the unspeakable? This article looks at the intersection of unspeakable content and unspeakable form by focusing on the representation of dysfluent voices as they relate to socially prohibited intimacies in Victorian England. By invoking dysfluency, I refer to a word increasingly mobilised as an umbrella term for a variety of speech patterns that deviate from normative scripts of vocal fluency, pace, pitch, and other qualities; in short, to those who lisp, stammer, etc. The growing field of dysfluency studies aims to unpack the lived experiences and cultural resonances of these voices in order to “understand mastery over language as always already tenuous, fragile, and partial” (Eagle, 2013, p. 6). This article examines dysfluent voices alongside homosocial intimacies as a way of exploring intersections between dysfluency and queerness. I focus on James Malcolm Rymer’s *The Unspeakable* (1855), a text that links fluent vocalisation (overcoming a stammer) with appropriate desire (overcoming a primary focus on homosocial relations). By doing so, Rymer’s book resonates with similar connections in later Victorian accounts from the field of sexology that aim to medicalise aberrant intimacies.

What is at stake here is not synonymy or interchangeability: I am not arguing for a causal relation between stammering and homoeroticism. Rather, this article is invested in the intersections of the discourses that surround these two forms of relational non-normativity, whether vocal or sexual, in the Victorian social imaginary. Rymer’s text dialogises two forms of the unspeakable – a verbal impediment like stammering with a “love that dare not speak its name” – and points to the durable cultural association between non-standard vocal articulation and sexual non-normativity that remains pertinent today.¹ The Victorian period provides rich terrain for exploring this intersection. Much ink has been spilled on the pivotal role of the nineteenth century in changing perceptions of human sex and sexuality. Though less frequently noted, the period is also a time of crucial developments in the history of the human voice: Paul Broca’s influential declaration of the neurolocalisation of speech, Thomas Edison’s invention of the phonograph, and the continuing institutionalisation of speech pathology as a discipline, to name a few key instances.

Michel Foucault’s first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, key to the former type of scholarship, provides a conceptual foundation for some of the interconnections between the discourses on sexuality and non-normative vocality in the nineteenth century. Foucault’s critique of the belief in Western sexual repression in general and Victorian prudery in particular entails a re-evaluation of what we conceive of as silence. His assertion that, in regards to sex, Western society “speaks verbosely of its
own silence” (1990, p. 8) collapses the binary of silence and articulation, suggesting instead a mutually imbricating relation. This relation of constrained vocalization in the pretension of silence connected with a generation of discourse characterises understandings and representations of both non-normative speech and sexuality. A stammer, though categorised as a speech impediment (obstruction, blockage), is also associated with repetitive speech, with multiplying phonemes distinct from conventional semantics – it is a restriction that proliferates. As Christof Migone puts it, a stammer “disturbs fluency, which injects difference amidst repetition” (2012, p. 132). In short, stammering is not restricted vocality but rescripted vocality.

Similarly, the social sanction on articulating non-normative sexual behaviours like those associated with homosexuality is more accurately conceived of as a generative impediment, as an extremely vocal silence. In the nineteenth century, homosexuality – specifically, the act of sodomy – was something to be prevented, though left unsaid. Court cases against sodomites and the press articles that reported on them struggled with convicting sodomy without naming it and thereby imbuing it with a form of seductive appeal for the general populace. As such, sodomy indictments were often couched in the language of “misdemeanour”, “assault with intent”, “inflammatory” or “unnatural” crimes, and other phrases gestured to under the title of H. G. Cocks’s book on the subject, Nameless Offences (2003, pp. 78-9). To avoid becoming contagious, homosexuality had to be censured without being spoken. As Cocks summarises, “silence about sex does not produce an absence, but merely incites other, richer languages of description” (p. 2); like a stammer, it is the repurposing of an impediment into a proliferation of alternative expressions.

My conception of the unspeakable is one that encapsulates both parallel discursive formations described above. It aims to take Foucault’s metaphors around the saying of sex and examine them in embodied speakers with dysfluent articulations to recognise that “[t]here is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses” (1990, p. 27).

My turn to the literary to engage with the idea of the unspeakable has important scholarly precursors. In Sex Scandal, William Cohen explores a “specifically literary form of sexual unspeakability” that is located at the nexus of “something incapable of being articulated as well as something prohibited from articulation” (1996, p. 23; p. 3, italics original). Jack Halberstam discusses the equivalency of the unspeakable with homosexuality in Gothic romance in Skin Shows, arguing that “[t]he secret and sexuality are forever linked, of course, by the 1890s legislations against homosexual activity and […] by the 1890s medicalization of sexuality” (1995, p. 65). Additionally, Kate Flint explores “the ‘unspeakable’ status of male homosexual desire in the Victorian period”, as well as that of lesbian desire, in fiction and poetry (2015, p. 2). This article provides an attention to physical, in addition to social, unspeakability.
through an emphasis on dysfluent voices absent in these generative scholarly accounts. Both stammering and male same-sex intimacy destabilise any clear distinction between articulation and silence by turning physical and social impediments into alternative modes of discourse. By examining the intersections of the two in Victorian literature, this article elucidates the duality of the unspeakable, one convergence of dysfluent and queer voices in a vast and multitudinous history.

**From Penny Dreadfuls to Pathography**

The remainder of this article focuses on a sustained reading of the dynamics of dysfluency and queerness within James Malcolm Rymer’s *The Unspeakable; or, The Life and Adventures of a Stammerer* (1855), a quasi-autobiographical bildungsroman that borrows from the literary traditions of the Gothic and the sensational. Rymer’s text is used as a focal point due to its detailed representation of the struggle to speak in the face of physical impairments and social sanctions. In addition, the specificity and affective complexity Rymer provides in his description of the subjective experiences of a Victorian stammerer is rare, perhaps only matched by Martin Farquar Tupper’s “The Stammerer’s Complaint” (1838), making it a clear candidate for a literary analysis of dysfluent speech during the period.

Following an introduction of the text’s history, I will proceed through an overview of critical conceptualizations of the unspeakable, before turning to a reading of the novel’s engagement with dysfluency and sexuality to consider how we can read the unspeakable. Rymer presents a narrative centred on attaining a socially sanctioned model of masculinity, an attainment that is predicated on the coincidence of learning how to speak and desire in normative ways. The temporality of the text presents a shift in the relational focus of the central protagonist, Charles Theodore Monckton, from a primary emphasis on homosociality to a primary emphasis on heterosexuality. This relational change is inextricable from a vocal change as Charles’s stammering eventually turns to spoken fluency. The movement between these two modes of relation, though not incompatible, indicates that fluent speech is seen as a prerequisite for successfully transferring from a student in a homosocial schoolroom to a husband in a heteronormative domestic sphere.

Rymer was a prolific Victorian author of penny dreadfuls, a sensational and inexpensive genre of serial literature aimed at “the reading public of the slums” (Sutherland, 2007, p. 82). He wrote under various pennames – anagrams of his last name, such as Errym and Merry – and is credited with writing in excess of fifty full-length books for the publisher Edward Lloyd over several decades. While the authorship of many penny dreadfuls remains contested, scholars have attributed some of the most culturally influential examples of the genre to Rymer. He is believed to have created
one of “the earliest and most recognizable serial killers”, the infamous Sweeney Todd, in *The String of Pearls* (1846) (Collins, 2008, pp. 2-4) and to have written the first full-length vampire novel in English, *Varney the Vampire* (1847). Interestingly, E. F. Bleiler stakes his attribution of *Varney* to Rymer, rather than to Thomas Preskett Prest, on differences in each author’s representation of speech through various dialogue tags (2008, p. 791).

_The Unspeakable_ is a departure for Rymer: leaving behind vampires and homicidal barbers, the text is a sort of medical (auto)biography, or pathography, that explores the challenges of navigating Victorian society with a stammer and critiques contemporaneous “cures” for stammering. Very briefly, the text follows the protagonist Charles as he grapples with the death of his mother, his sister’s subsequent demise, and his resultant adversarial relationship to his cruel new stepmother and her insidious relative, Ogden. Charles’s exposure to these menacing figures, particularly Ogden, initiates his stammering, which complicates his experiences attending various boarding schools and seeking employment. After pursuing a bevy of ineffective “cures”, Charles’s stammer is alleviated by the methods of speech pathologist James Hunt, to whom the book is dedicated, leaving Charles on the cusp of entering Parliament as the narrative concludes (p. 155).

The focus on disability, specifically stammering, coupled with Rymer’s sensational style finds many parallels in the proliferation of nineteenth-century illness narratives that were “inevitably fashioned with reference to the melodramatic conventions that permeated cultural constructions of disability” (Holmes, 2009, p. 133). Although understudied today, _The Unspeakable_ received considerable attention at the time of its publication. Advertisements for the book, such as a representative one in _The Sunday Times_, declare it to be “an Authentic Autobiography” available at “all booksellers” and includes several reviews from other prominent publications (The unspeakable, 1856, p. 1). The original reviews are largely positive: _The Era_ states “its literary merit is high above the average” (The unspeakable, 1855, p. 10), _The Newcastle Guardian_ claims it is written with “the skill of a literary master” (The unspeakable, 1856, p. 3), and a piece in Charles Dickens’s _Household Words_ refers to it as a “Romance of Stammering” full “of startling events – and extraordinary words and phrases” (Dixon, 1856, p. 468). The review from _The Athenæum_ is less enthusiastic, declaring “The only good point about the book is the description of the nervous suffering entailed by the consciousness of being liable to stammer” (Our library table, 1855, p. 320).

Several reviews emphasise the paratextual elements of the narrative, pointing to the dedication of the book to James Hunt. Hunt was the author of *A Treatise on the Cure of Stammering* (1854) and the dedication of _The Unspeakable_ thanks him for conferring “the blessing of unimpeded speech” on the author. At times, the main
body of the text reads like an advertisement, promoting the efficacy of Hunt’s method of curing stammerers by including the testimonials of various patients. Charles describes Hunt’s treatment as based on “rules of enunciation, and for the management of the organs of speech”, which by habitual enforcement will overcome the stammer. After one session of treatment with Hunt, Charles exclaims “I hear my own voice emerging like some poor prisoner from its long confinement” (Rymer, 1855, pp. 145-6).

The dedication corroborates the preface’s claim to the authenticity of the narrative. The preface describes the text as an amalgamation of the experiences of several stammerers that is “lifted far out of the category of works of fiction; it is true – strictly true” as “an epitome of the experiences of a stammerer” (p. vii) and Rymer asserts throughout the book that he is writing a “biography” and not a “novel” (p. 112). The text declares that it will be recognizable as authentic to any who have suffered from a stammer, giving the authority to proclaim the veracity of the text to an imagined community of stammerers (p. vii).

Conceptualisations of the Unspeakable

Marc Shell – a professed member of this community of stammerers (though at the remove of well over a century) – believes Rymer’s truth-claims, describing The Unspeakable as a “memoir” (2006, p. 9) and claiming Rymer himself as a stutterer (p. 106). Shell mentions The Unspeakable in passing, crediting it with the inaugural usage of the “shifting meaning of the term unspeakable […] in stutter narratives and quasi-scientific studies of stuttering” (p. 201, italics original). Moving beyond the socially inexpressible (descriptions that are too great for words or phrases prohibited by religious groups, for instance), Shell’s interest is in scenarios “where there are words to say and the will to say them” but the words remain “unspeakable [as] the individual is physically unable to speak” (p. 202, italics original). In this case, the unspeakable is embodied in the stammerer. This emphasis on the physically unspeakable is of course central to Rymer’s narrative of stammering.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick details an alternative understanding of the unspeakable as she traces the representation of the porous and blurred line between homosociality and homoeroticism in a variety of canonical English texts in Between Men (1985). Building on her earlier work on the Gothic fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Sedgwick describes the unspeakable as one of the most significant tropes of the genre and one used specifically as a euphemism for homosexuality. According to Sedgwick, “Sexuality between men had, throughout the Judeo-Christian tradition, been famous among those who knew about it at all precisely for having no name – ‘unspeakable,’ ‘unmentionable,’ ‘not to be named among Christian men’” (1985,
p. 94). She argues that the nameless presence of same-sex desire is particularly prominent throughout Gothic fiction. Rymer’s *The Unspeakable* inherits much from its Gothic predecessors: an ancient, “haunted” mansion (p. 5); a spectral figure moving mysteriously at night, which is later explained away as a commonplace occurrence; manipulative and morally bankrupt surrogate parent figures; and, more covertly, the trope of unspoken same-sex intimacy.

In a similar vein, Elaine Showalter emphasises the connection between homosexuality and the unspeakable in the context of Victorian literature. For instance, writing of Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Adventures of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Showalter states: “In the most famous code word of Victorian homosexuality, [the other characters] find something unspeakable about Hyde” (1990, p. 112, italics original). In this literary critical tradition, the unspeakable is embodied in the homosexual. Placing Shell’s unspeaking stammerer in dialogue with Sedgwick and Showalter’s unspeakable homosexual suggests a potential double entendre to the title of Rymer’s text for Victorian audiences. Though the work of these critics is from the last few decades, their distillations of the unspeakable are drawn specifically from a Victorian literary and cultural context, providing a provocative apposition of two types of compromised voices within the nineteenth-century unspeakable: that of vocal pathology (specifically, stammerers) and that of non-normative sexuality (particularly, homosexual men). While stammerers are stigmatised because of their inability to speak in a normative way, this formation is inverted for homosexuals who, because they are stigmatised, come to embody a sexual subjectivity that cannot be spoken.

**Disrupting Epochal Masculinity**

The temporality of Rymer’s *The Unspeakable* is particularly relevant in exploring the nexus of these two types of compromised vocalisation. Structurally, the book proclaims a generic chronology that maps out a linear tale of emergent masculinity. Charles’s life is divided into three sections, each designated as an “epoch”. In order, the story progresses from “Epoch I: Childhood” (p. 1), to “Epoch II: Boyhood” (p. 26), and concludes with “Epoch III: Manhood” (p. 89). This development of normative masculinity – obtaining an awareness of gender differentiation (from gender-neutral child to male-coded boy) to the (sexual) maturity of manhood – is mirrored in Charles’s vocal disability as his stammer is acquired, exacerbated, and ultimately cured. This epochal structure works to interweave heteronormative masculinity with fluent speech.

This macro-perspective of section titles and overarching narrative trajectories indicates what the text articulates as its essence; they are the spoken components, but not the unspoken ones. A micro-approach, attentive to the representation of the quo-
tidian experiences of a stammerer, troubles this linear development. It reveals the double temporal disruption occasioned by the presence of both the queer and dysfluent elements of the unspeakable within Rymer’s text. In a recent article, Joshua St. Pierre (2015) makes a similar point from a phenomenological point of view. St. Pierre argues that the speech of a stutterer challenges both the regularity of clock time and straight-masculine time (building on Alison Kafer’s definition of straight time as the “linear development from dependent childhood to independent reproductive adulthood” [2013, p. 34]). Charles affirms his opposition to the former when he declares “[I] could not have told the time of day until the time I wished to tell had passed” due to his stammer (p. 113). His non-normative speech reveals a uniformly forward-marching conception of temporality as impracticable and exclusionary.

Similarly, Charles is removed from straight time. His stammer distances him from both capital accumulation and familial reproduction – signposts of normative ideals of masculinity. This is evident in a sampling of the catalogue of incidents related to his dysfluent articulation: Charles’s stammer proves fatal to a proposed plan to become a military cadet; it temporarily traps him in a marriage proposal he had no desire to make; later, his attempt to elope with a different woman is foiled by his stammer; and he loses a large sum of money while gambling due to the same reason. This list of failed attempts to earn money and procreate belies the simplified epochal structuring of the narrative. As St. Pierre suggests, the stammerer challenges “an encoding that defers the present for an ableist and heteronormative future” and instead “embod[ies] crip and queer time” (2015, p. 54). The temporality of queerness and disability – outside of clock time and the mandatory futurism of heteronormative reproduction – complicates the epochal poles of masculinity that hold up the framework of the narrative and delays the end goal of attaining normative desire and speech.

**Contagious Stammers and Unspeakable Intimacies**

The more circuitous temporality of the narrative is emphasised in Charles’s acquisition of a stammer and its sporadic appearance within the text. As a young child, Charles speaks fluently. He acquires his stammer from the narrative’s primary antagonist, Ogden, a relation of Charles’s unkind stepmother. The initial encounter between Ogden and Charles, told from the latter’s first-person perspective, is worth quoting at length:

[Ogden] really tried to speak, but previously to the utterance of a word, he went through a series of such extraordinary and terrible contortions of countenance, that, in a manner fascinated with terror, I gazed at him, and involuntarily opened my mouth as he opened his, contorted my lower jaw as he contorted his, and wrenched my neck
about as he wrenched, until at length, to my inexpressible relief, he spoke [...] I had never seen a stammerer before, and the singularly terrible efforts of this man to speak, filled me with dismay. My tongue refused its office for a moment or two, and the whole muscular structure of my throat and jaw acted in sympathy. I had to give a stamp with my foot, in order to get voice to reply (p. 20).

This bizarre scene depicts stammering as a contagious affliction passed from Ogden to Charles through involuntary bodily mimicry – the stammering Ogden renders Charles mute. Their synchronised gaping mouths present a sort of seduction scene, in which Charles cannot help but follow Ogden’s lead, although the climax of the contortions is vocal rather than sexual in nature. For the rest of the narrative, Ogden remains at the root of Charles’s stammer: either the literal sight of Ogden brings on an episode of stammering or the haunting memory of Ogden’s convulsions impacts his speech. This initial scene of mirroring – of perverse doubling – partakes in another Gothic trope, one that would become crystallised in more canonical pairings in later Victorian fiction, such as Stevenson’s Jekyll/Hyde dyad and Oscar Wilde’s Dorian Gray and his infamous picture. We can add Ogden and Charles to the list of what Jack Halberstam has termed “the dialectic between monster and maker” (1995, p. 53), a relationship that lends itself to queer readings of texts such as Stevenson’s and Wilde’s in which desiring an image of the self is akin to desiring one’s own gender.

This type of reading engages stereotypical notions of the narcissism of homosexuality and the potential for non-normative modes of reproduction outside of the domestic family. Ogden is in a childless marriage, but births a fellow stammerer by infecting Charles with his form of vocality; he begets a stuttering child from homosocial proximity, not heterosexual marriage. The relationship between Charles and Ogden is not romantic or sexual, but the anxiety about mobile afflictions that it represents is notable, especially as comparable anxieties were prevalent at the time of the composition and publication of Rymer’s text, especially relating to sexuality. While the Victorian press and legal system struggled with suppressing homosexual acts like sodomy, the very mention of which “threatened [...] to encourage the acts themselves” (Cocks, 2003, p. 79), the very witnessing of a stammerer infects Charles. He declares that “the image of Ogden always, spectre-like, rose up before me whenever I stammered” (p. 34).

Furthermore, the inspiration for this contagious stammer can be traced to the influence of the work of James Hunt, the book’s dedicatee. Hunt identified imitation as a “principal cause of Stammering” (1854, p. vii), later claiming that stammering “was neither hereditary nor congenital” but “arises, in most cases, from unconscious, or may be, voluntary imitation” (1861, p. 50). A model of vocal replication inde-
dependent from heteronormative reproduction can be extrapolated from Hunt’s claims: dysfluent articulation is not an inherited familial trait but a verbal contagion and, as such, the best way to stop the spread of stammering is to prevent stammering from being heard, paralleling the logic behind rendering sodomitic practices unspeakable. The unspeakable – both as a code word for non-normative sexuality and dysfluent vocality – is represented as a contagion caught from male same-sex intercourse.8

The remainder of The Unspeakable can be read as two competing modes of socialisation as they relate to Charles’s stammer: homosocial situations that exacerbate his stammer and encounters with seraphic women that alleviate it. Although Charles “catches” his stammer from Ogden, it makes its initial appearance on his first day at boarding school. Similarly, his stammer worsens during his time at Eton when he is initiated into the hierarchical system of fagging, in which older students select younger ones to become their servants. Charles states how “A big hulking boy […] was out of a fag, so I became his slave – his serf, and bondsman” (p. 79), lamenting this homosocial relation of domination. Charles’s experiences in both male-only school spaces correspond with a marked worsening of his stammer.

Significantly, Charles gets into difficult situations at both schools that he is physically unable to talk himself out of until angelic female figures come to his support. At Dr Briggs’s boarding school, Charles is able to converse fluently with the proprietor’s beautiful niece, Annie, after getting into a physical altercation with several other boys due to his stammer (p. 37). Later, at Eton, the isolated presence of the similarly captivating Dorinda allows Charles to articulate clearly his innocence in the destructive plans of his male peers (p. 84). In sum, the image of Ogden – feared for his perverse desire, his “sensuality and reckless intemperance” (p. 19) – stalks Charles into homosocial spaces, turning his infectious stammer into a warning against male same-sex intimacy that dissipates at the appearance of a normative sight of desire: a beautiful woman. Excessive closeness to men, exemplified in the mirroring of Ogden’s actions, inhibits the instrumentality of the voice for obtaining normative masculinity and its accoutrements (a job, a wife, money). The unspeakable content of male same-sex intimacy is rendered through the unspeakable form of a stammer within Rymer’s text and normative desire accompanies normative speech, linking fluency to heteronormativity.

Coda: Sexological Voices

This article suggests a literary basis for thinking through the relation between dysfluent and homosexual voices in the nineteenth century. Ultimately, these voices are constructed precisely in their mutability: they are unstable, affixing to different
sounds, words, actions, and subject positions, particularly in a period like the nineteenth century when a dominant notion of homosexual identity had yet to emerge. This fluidity does not deny the existence of very real social ramifications attendant to either type of aberrant vocality, but rather demands careful attention to the variety of complementary and competing discourses surrounding homosexuality and dysfluency at the time.

Other directions for elucidating this topic abound; for instance, the exploration of the emergence of modern sexology alongside the birth of the discipline we would today designate as speech therapy, two strands of the “medicalization of unconventional behavior” that was characteristic of the nineteenth century (Hoegaerts, 2013, p. 20). Fin-de-siècle sexological texts like Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s influential Psychopathia Sexualis repeatedly reference dysfluency in the accounts they provide of homosexual men. The 1892 translation of Krafft-Ebing’s work is credited with introducing the term homosexual into English; however, if Krafft-Ebing’s work constitutes a break in the unspeakability of homosexuality, it is a highly qualified break. He deliberately chose a Latin title “understood only by the learned” to dissuade “unqualified persons” from reading the book and left “certain particularly revolting portions” in Latin as well (Krafft-Ebing, 1894, p. v). Underlying these decisions was a fear that the book would be adopted for immoral purposes, a fear akin to the struggle of the Victorian courts and press discussed above to find a language to discuss sodomy acts without encouraging or promoting them. The English translator of Psychopathia Sexualis confronts these fears, admitting that the high circulation of the book is partially attributable to “pornographic interest” on the Continent, but he notes defensively that the existence of homosexuality predates the publication of Krafft-Ebing’s work (p. vii). In short, a type of restricted vocalisation about homosexuality characterises the composition of the text.

The book engages with aberrant vocalization in literal as well as stylistic ways. Several of the men included in Krafft-Ebing’s account are reported as having dysfluent articulations: one homosexual man is documented with “stuttering speech” (Krafft-Ebing, 1894, p. 403) and another “trips and lisps” (p. 417). In some accounts, homosexual desire is explicitly linked to speech pathology, as one individual claims “Any man could excite me to such an extent that, for some moments, I would feel my memory fail, and I would stammer” (pp. 328-9), echoing Charles’s homosocially exacerbated stammering. Even more abundant are references to homosexual men possessing high “feminine” voices and homosexual women possessing deep “masculine” voices (p. 262, 305, 307), a classic component of “sexual inversion”. Perhaps oddest of all, the text repeatedly reports that homosexual men are incapable of whistling (p. 295, 354). Connecting all of these threads is the positioning of heterosexual vocality as normative vocality, constructed in opposition to the careful documenta-
tion of how a homosexual sounds – in terms of articulation, fluency, and other vocal elements. The work performed in sexological accounts like Krafft-Ebing’s is another discursive contribution to the cultural construction of the queer voice as a dysfluent voice in the period.

Written accounts as diverse as Rymer’s *The Unspeakable* and Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* help us understand dysfluency’s shifting relation to non-normative sexuality during the nineteenth century, a period that witnessed the sharp increase of writing on both topics. The proliferation of writing on dysfluency is clear in G. M. Klingbeil’s (1939) survey of texts on the treatment of stuttering, which contains eleven entries from the 1700s and one hundred and four from the 1800s. As Foucault argues, a similar discursive explosion in the same period “initiated sexual heterogeneities” (1990, p. 38), leading to his oft-cited claim that, as of 1870, “The sodomite had [become] a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species” (p. 43). Foucault describes the invention of the pathologised homosexual “persona” via a variety of medical, psychological, and legal discourses, which name and publically circulate the category of the homosexual for the first time. The unspeakable becomes explicitly spoken. This article has argued for the discursive richness of silence by attending to the symbolic alignment between the emergent discourses surrounding male same-sex desire and dysfluency in the middle of the century. Both non-normative subject positions, though marginalised, were far from mute; instead, they embody the transformation of physical and social restrictions on vocalization into tools for proliferating discourses about their respective existences, jointly viewed as threateningly contagious. In this way, the apposition of queerness and dysfluency is conveyed in the duality of the unspeakable.

**References**


THE VICTORIAN UNSPEAKABLE


Rymer, J. M. (1855). The unspeakeable; or, the life and adventures of a stammerer. London: Clarke & Beeton.


Notes

1. For instance, David Thorpe’s documentary *Do I Sound Gay?* (2014) explores the stigma associated with stereotyped attributes of the voices of homosexual men – qualities like up speaking and lisping – and the desirability of altering a “gay voice” through speech therapy and vocal coaching in order to acquire a normative vocal identity. An affirming connection between dysfluent voices and non-normative sexual orientations is exemplified in the group *Passing Twice: An Informal Network of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Persons Who Stutter & Their Friends*, an organization formed around the experience of having to come out of the closet twice, as both sexually and vocally non-normative (for more on *Passing Twice*, see Roe, 2012).

2. Tupper was a popular Victorian poet who mainly wrote didactic and moralizing poems on religious themes, exemplified in his *Proverbial Philosophy* (1838).

3. At times, the text reads as a literature review of treatment guides for stammering, demonstrating Rymer’s awareness of contemporaneous debates about this topic: his protagonist reads stammering treatises by Joseph Poett, Richard Cull, Henry Monro, John Bishop, and others. He lambasts all of these texts as deceptive and inferior to the work of James Hunt. The catalogue of treatments Charles undergoes throughout the narrative to cure his stammer is long and diverse, and each option is systematically dismissed – whether musical, elocutionary, or surgical in nature – as inferior in preference to Hunt’s.

4. Of interest, James Hunt treated several Victorian writers for their speech impediments, including Charles Kingsley and Lewis Carroll.

5. Like Rymer’s text, this article uses the words “stutter” and “stammer” interchangeably.

6. For a more detailed account of Sedgwick’s thoughts on the Gothic in general and the unspeakable within the Gothic in particular, see her book *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (1980), specifically pp. 14-20.

7. This progression fits with the narrative schematic for the literary representation of disability described by David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder (2001, p. 53). Their model neatly aligns with the epochs of masculinity that Rymer stakes out as the formal pillars of his narrative; as Charles progresses from a child to a man, his “disability” is rehabilitated.

8. Hunt, almost as an afterthought in one of his stammering treatises, notes “the comparative infrequency of females who stammer”, adding that it “is generally estimated that the number of females amounts to little more than five percent” (1854, p. 78).

9. Stereotypes about gendered voices also play a significant role in the history of speech pathology. In her work on the social meaning of nineteenth-century stammering, Josephine Hoeegaerts writes that “stammering was […] suggestively equated with a lack of manliness” (2013, p. 26), citing examples of treatments that advised masculine exercise and comportment as key components in curing a stammerer. As Hoeegaerts argues, “Stammering obviously complicated the association of
masculinity with maturity, or femininity with infantilism, and therefore presented researchers with irreconcilable statistic results” (p. 27). The role of differently gendered subject positions in discourses of non-normative sexuality and vocal dysfluency is a complex topic worthy of an article of its own.
Lessons in Silence: 
Power, Diversity, and 
the Educationalisation of Silence

Pieter Verstraete

Abstract
The famous French historian Alain Corbin recently published a history of silence: Histoire du silence (Albin Michel, 2016). In this publication he argues that in the course of the twentieth century silence has lost its educational value. Based on an analysis of Maria Montessori’s book The Method Montessori (1912) and a 1953 documentary entitled How quiet helps at school (Coronet films) it will be argued in this article that silence has not lost any of its didactical capacities. On the contrary, the hypothesis will be formulated that in the course of the twentieth century silence has been educationalised. In this sense a plea is made for a nuanced reading of silence’s place in the contemporary Western world; a place that cannot and should not be disconnected from politics. Consequently, all hypotheses that present silence as the *sine qua non* for authentic diversity – understood as not being contaminated by any power structure – have to be looked at rather critically.

Keywords: History of Education, Silence, Educationalisation, Maria Montessori, Power

Since the second half of the twentieth century schools increasingly have been conceptualised as places where issues of diversity need to be addressed. Although the first pleas for the reconceptualization of school in response to and/or in search of a diverse society – from the perspective of class, gender, sexual preferences, race and disability – date back much further, the second half of the twentieth century can be characterised by an ever increasing awareness of and preoccupation with diversity. To mention just one example of how diversity has informed educational practices and poli-
L **ESSONS IN SILENCE**

cies one can refer to the 1994 *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education* where the need for inclusive education was partly based on the conviction that “education systems should be designed and educational programmes implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs” (UNESCO, 1994, p. VIII).

Recently some scholars have pointed towards the interconnectivity between diversity on the one hand and silence and sound on the other hand. In their article *The Sound of Silence in Pedagogy*, for instance, Zembylas and Michaelides conclude that the absence of experiences of silence compromises respecting the otherness of the Other and “care, generosity, and compassion remain sentimental and distant objectives” (2004, p. 210). By emphasizing the value of silence for education these authors counterbalance the dominant negative perspective on the place one can attribute to the use of silence in emancipatory and educational processes. Inspired by Paolo Freire’s analysis of silence in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) there is indeed a longstanding tradition of critical thinking that presents speech and sound as the main instruments leading to the liberation of the oppressed (Li Li, 2004, p. 77). In order to get rid of these “cultures of silence” people are required to learn how to speak, to use words and to express themselves (Freire, 1970). As a consequence of these approaches to silence, power, and diversity, silence and sound respectively became connected to power/denial of otherness and freedom/celebration of difference. This dichotomous approach towards sound and silence, difference and sameness, however, is too simplistic and overlooks the complex and contradictory ways in which silence works and is experienced (e.g. Le Breton, 1997).

The main aim of this article is to make use of some case studies taken from the history of education in order to show that silence cannot be presented as a pure and uncontaminated instrument of freedom. The line of thought that will be developed leans heavily on the work of the later Foucault. In particular Foucault’s ideas on governmentality – the insight that in the course of Western history people have come to steer their own behaviour in a way that is in line with broader political goals – have been influential (Burchell, Gordon & Miller, 1991). In a first paragraph the reader will be introduced to two studies that focus on the role played by silence in the history of education. After this overview, two case studies will be presented. The first case study will deal with “a lesson in silence” presented by Maria Montessori in her influential book *The Montessori Method* (translated from the Italian original in 1912). The second case study will turn towards a 1953 Coronet educational film entitled *How quiet helps at school*. Both case studies will be used in order to show how silence has come to play a crucial role in overcoming the educational paradox between power and freedom. Montessori’s “lesson in silence” and the images of silence in the instructional 1953 Coronet film on quietness demonstrate that silence cannot be discon-
nected from particular power-effects. As a consequence, all hypotheses that present silence as the sine qua non for authentic diversity – understood as not being contaminated by any power structure – have to be looked at rather critically.

Silence, Educational Authority, and Diversity

A quick overview of recently published studies in the field of history of education reveals at least two studies where the authors explicitly address the particular ways sound, silence, and diversity have been interconnected to one another in our educational past. The first study was undertaken by Verstraete and Söderfeldt. It focuses on the presence of sound and silence in nineteenth-century reports about the education of deafblind persons (Verstraete & Söderfeldt, in press). When one thinks about the history of deafblind persons the iconic figure of Helen Keller immediately comes to mind. This American and successful deafblind woman dominates the existing historiography to such an extent that it almost seems true to say that in other parts of the world one simply did not have any deafblind persons. That of course is untrue. Just like in America, so in Europe people were born and lived without being able to see and hear. Up till now their stories simply have been silenced as a consequence of the sound produced by and about the life of Helen Keller. If the study by Verstraete and Söderfeldt clearly shows that the silence of European deafblind people can be relatively easily breached, their analyses also point towards another important issue, namely the way in which the sound produced by the deafblind themselves changed over time.

On the basis of several nineteenth century reports and stories about European deafblind persons the authors argue that an attitude of acceptance towards the sounds produced by the deafblind themselves gradually has been replaced by a growing preoccupation with the sound produced by the experts who engaged themselves in the education of the deafblind. In line with a contemporary interest of intellectuals in persons who missed one sense, the first reports about European deafblind persons were interested in solving particular intellectual problems on the basis of close observations and what we nowadays would call thick descriptions. In one case, for example, the hypothesis was raised that the lives of deafblind persons contained the answer to the heatedly debated Molyneux-question. Described at the end of the seventeenth century in a letter to John Locke by the Irish mathematician William Molyneux – who himself was married to a blind woman – the Molyneux-question is: imagine a blind person from birth who has learned to distinguish a cube from a globe on the basis of touch. What would happen if this blind person successfully could be given back their sight by means of an operation and would be afterwards confronted with a cube and a globe placed at a distance? Would he or she again be able to distin-
guish between both objects only by looking at these or would this be impossible? For at least one philosopher the answers given by the treated (previously blind) persons were not entirely reliable because who could say that the patient did not make use of their hearing abilities in order to come up with the 'right' answer. So in order to determine the role of the recovered eyesight, the philosopher continues, one should turn to a deafblind person who, after surgery, would not be able to base their answer on the covert use of the auditory senses. Intimately interwoven with the philosophical interest, the first reports on European deafblind persons also seemed to reserve an important place for the voice of the deafblind themselves. They emerge from the text as individuals who were integrated in their family and community, and characteristics like a sense of humour, agency, and authenticity were attributed to them. In the course of the nineteenth century this particular approach gradually made way for a different acoustic landscape; one in which the dominant sound to be heard was the sound of the educational expert who, among other things, made use of the education of the deafblind in order to promote his or her educational institute/method.

Besides this study on the evolution of silence and sound in the care for and education of deafblind persons there is one more historian of education who explicitly reflects on the role played by sound and silence in the history of education, namely Joakim Landahl (2011). In his article “The Sound of Authority” Landahl presents an acoustic perspective on the history of the monitorial system or Lancaster-Bell educational method. The method itself enabled a single teacher to educate a large group – sometimes consisting of 400 children – simultaneously by means of an elaborate system of monitors. After having divided the large group in different smaller units, every smaller unit was supervised by a monitor. This monitor was responsible for the educational activity that would keep the children in that smaller unit busy for a particular amount of time. As all of these smaller units were still learning in one and the same space one can imagine the particular educational soundscape that surrounded the children, the monitors, as well as the central teacher. Most of the educational tasks children were asked to fulfil consisted of repeating aloud what had been said or recite things like the alphabet. As a result the educational space became packed with all of the sounds produced by the children. The background of this chaotic acoustic space was formed by the silence of the teacher who was explicitly asked to speak as little as possible. His of her silent gaze sufficed in order to exert authority. The only things that were needed were the vocal accomplices, the monitors. Interestingly, according to Landahl who studied the evolution of this monitorial system in Sweden, this particular educational soundscape was increasingly questioned from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, leading to a complete reversal of the authoritative relationship between a silent teacher and noisy children. In the course of the nineteenth century children became the ones who needed to
become, and learn how to be, silent. The teacher on the other hand was the one who needed to do the talking. As a case in point Landahl refers to the practice of hand-raising. In a 1903 Swedish manual, for example, the following citation could be found:

Those children who wish to answer a question make this fact apparent by quietly raising two fingers of the right hand while resting the elbow on the table. N.B. It should never be permitted for anyone other than the child so indicated to answer, not even half-aloud or in a whisper. The children should respond in unison only to the teacher’s instruction, and then always as one (Quoted in Landahl, 2011, p. 12).

The two studies referred to in this paragraph make clear that it is very difficult, not to say impossible and even undesirable, to come up with a well-delineated, straightforward, and universal relationship between sound, silence, and diversity. The study of Landahl clearly demonstrates that in the history of Swedish education the teacher has learned how to exert his/her authority both by means of silence as well as by means of sounds. And if sound in the study of Verstraete and Söderfeldt around 1800 could indeed be considered a symbol of diversity – reflecting a genuine and authentic interest in the particular situations of people who were considered to be rather different from the average European man or woman – it gradually became more and more an instrument educational experts used to institutionalise and silence the voices of deafblind persons themselves. Scholars interested in the particular relationships between silence, sound, authority, and diversity consequently have to pay attention to these diverse and contingent relationships and not fall into the trap of presenting sound and silence in a dichotomist way. In what follows the question will be asked what kind of role was attributed to sound and silence in the work of the Italian pedagogue Maria Montessori and what kind of educational soundscape she connected to with the promotion of diversity.

**The Sound of School Furniture and a Lesson in Silence**

Maria Montessori (1870-1952) was an Italian reform pedagogue, whose educational legacy is still present in the so-called Montessori schools but whose ideas and insights with regard to education and instruction, have also, to a great extent, been integrated in the regular school system. She is probably best known for her educational work in some impoverished neighbourhoods in Rome around 1900, that led to the establishment of the Casa dei bambini. Inspired by her educational experiences with “idiotic” and “imbecile” children in a large psychiatric institution, she established an educational program in which the child no longer needed to fit within a pre-organised school structure. On the contrary, the educational methods used in schools needed to
fit the individual character of each child. The word that probably best characterises Montessori’s ideas on education and instruction is “freedom”. For Montessori, the educational methods that were used at that time did not pay attention to the individual development of children. Children were considered to be creatures that followed more or less the same developmental pathways, which could easily be translated into common curricula that could be applied to all children. This belief in a universal and almost a-historical development, according to Montessori, no longer matched the kind of citizens society was looking for. Rather than being interested in the production of individuals that all looked and acted more or less the same, society increasingly sought to stimulate the individual’s development towards creativity, activity, and responsibility. In order to realise this, another educational system needed to be given shape and one of the most important things that needed to be revised was the furniture in school.

In order to make her point about the school’s inclination to suppress the individual development of children, Montessori refers in her book *The Montessori Method* (1912) to the material conditions that were used in order to educate children in the old-fashioned school system. The thing that characterised this system most, according to Montessori, was the school desk. At the end of the nineteenth century the desks used by children in schools were made in such a way that it made it impossible for the schoolchild to move. So not only the desk itself was often unmovable – as it was made out of heavy steel and wood – it also prevented children from moving freely within the classroom or to use their desks adequately. Maria Montessori obviously was not the only one to criticise the use of these heavy and cumbersome school desks. Other educators and psychologists too had already pointed towards the negative influences of these school desks on the mental and bodily condition of the schoolchildren. These critical voices, however, tried to optimise the school desk in such a way that the possibly negative impact of the desk on the child’s spine, for instance, was kept to a minimum. For Maria Montessori these kinds of solutions demonstrated clearly that educators did not understand the real root of the problem. It reminded her of the bodily problems encountered by miners and other labourers. The specific work circumstances these labourers encountered in the mines led to diverse belly and back problems. In order to solve these problems one came up with different technological devices that made the symptoms disappear. However, Montessori emphasized the origin of the problem, namely the work circumstances themselves as well as the unequal structure of society, did not disappear. The same, according to her, could be argued with regard to the solutions offered in the context of the schoolchild’s bodily health. Instead of optimizing the school desk, it needed to be replaced in order to give the child the opportunity to develop freely. If the old school system fixed children on their desks like dead butterflies in an entomologist’s showcase, the new
school would promote the freedom of the schoolchildren and make them fly away to a bright and better future.

Although Montessori did not reflect on this issue herself it is not very difficult to imagine that the two school systems stand for two rather different educational soundscapes. In the old fashioned system the school class was covered by a disciplined silence. Not being able to move his/her desk or his/her own body the child was only surrounded by the sounds produced by the schoolteacher. The soundscape Montessori so heatedly tried to get rid of consisted of silent children who were dominated by the sound coming from a master who knew what was best for all children. How different then sounded the rooms Maria Montessori had in mind. Here the child was able to move freely, and not only the child him- or herself but also the school furniture, which now consisted of light, colourful, and portable chairs and tables. The sound of the teacher faded out until the children almost did not perceive it anymore. What was heard in such a room was the sound of children developing freely while being surrounded and confronted by environments carefully shaped by adults.

The ideas, insights, and practical initiatives of Montessori need to be historicised by placing them against a quest that had occupied the minds of many European intellectuals since the middle of the eighteenth century. At that time the human being was increasingly reconceptualised as a free individual. Exemplary of this evolution is the famous essay written by Kant around 1800 where the author pleas for the liberation of men from all kind of structures and beliefs that limit his/her individual capacities (Kant, 1784). Already around 1750 educators had tried to figure out a new educational system that could match this enhanced emphasis on the individual’s freedom. This reconceptualization of mankind around the notion of freedom brought with it what we have come to refer to as an educational paradox (Depaepe, 1998). In a time-period when men and women were increasingly looked at as individuals who had the right to act and think freely, one turned to education in order to prepare them for this task.

It probably will not come as a surprise that this particular reinterpretation of mankind’s identity problematised some of the existing educational methods as these primordially wanted to discipline the schoolchild. Authors like Jean-Jacques Rousseau pleaded for an educational method that intervened as little as possible in the development of the child (Rousseau, 1979). The task of the teacher was to organise the educational structures in such a way that the child was able to develop freely without explicitly being taken by the hand. The method of Maria Montessori needs to be placed in this new educational context based on individual freedom and development. What Montessori presents in her book is an innovative and clever way to combine the enhanced emphasis on freedom with the ever-present necessity of leading children to this freedom. Although the above-mentioned attitude of Montessori
towards silence suggests that she did not make use of it in her own educational alternatives, this is not entirely true. In her book *The Montessori Method* (1912) one can also find references to silence that are integrated into this new approach towards education and freedom. For one of the lessons Montessori describes, is “A lesson in silence”:

I am about to describe a lesson which proved most successful in teaching the perfect silence to which it is possible to attain. One day as I was about to enter one of the ‘children’s Houses,’ I met in the court a mother who held in her arms her little baby of four months. The little one was swaddled, as is still the custom among the people of Rome – an infant thus in the swaddling bands is called by us a pupa. This tranquil little one seemed the incarnation of peace. I took her in my arms, where she lay quiet and good. Still holding her I went toward the schoolroom, from which the children now ran to meet me. They always welcomed me thus, throwing their arms about me, clinging to my skirts, and almost tumbling me over in their eagerness. I smiled at them, showing them the ‘pupa’. They understood and skipped about me looking at me with eyes brilliant with pleasure, but did not touch me through respect for the little one that I held in my arms.

I went into the schoolroom with the children clustered about me. We sat down, I seating myself in a large chair instead of, as usual, in one of their little chairs. In other words, I seated myself solemnly. They looked at my little one with a mixture of tenderness and joy. None of us had yet spoken a word. Finally I said to them, ‘I have brought you a little teacher’. Surprised glances and laughter. ‘A little teacher, yes, because none of you know how to be quiet as she does’. At this all the children changed their positions and became quiet. ‘Yet no one holds his limbs and feet as quietly as she’. Everyone gave closer attention to the position of limbs and feet; I looked at them smiling, ‘Yes, but they can never be as quiet as she’. The children looked serious. The idea of the superiority of the little teacher seemed to have reached them. Some of them smiled, and seemed to say with their eyes that the swaddling bands deserved all the merit. ‘Not one of you can be silent, voiceless as she’. General silence. ‘It is not possible to be as silent as she, because, – listen to her breathing – how delicate it is; come near to her on your tiptoes’.

Several children rose, and came slowly forward on tiptoe, bending toward the baby. Great silence. ‘None of you can breathe so silently as she’. The children looked about amazed, they had never thought that even when sitting quietly they were making noises, and that the silence of a little baby is more profound than the silence of grown people. They almost ceased to breath. I rose. ‘Go out quietly, quietly,’ I said, ‘walk on the tips of your toes and make no noise’. Following them, I said, ‘And yet I still hear some sounds, but she, the baby, walks with me and makes no sound. She goes out
silently’. The children smiled. They understood the truth and the jest of my words. I went to the open window, and placed the baby in the arms of the mother who stood watching us (Montessori, 1912, pp. 213-5).

If on the one hand one can find in the Montessori method a clear dislike towards silence – when it is the outcome of an outdated educational system that makes use of cumbersome discipline and merely expects docility from the side of the children – the Italian reform pedagogue on the other hand clearly contributed to a process which we can describe as the educationalisation of silence. This is not to say that Montessori was the first pedagogue to point towards the usefulness of silence in educational processes. Already during humanism one was aware of the usefulness of silence in order to educate individuals towards this or that particular goal. In religious circles, for example, one extensively has made use of silence as a tool, a practice in order to come closer to divine knowledge. In a collection of works attributed to the blind spiritual master Jean de Saint-Samson for example one can find a chapter on *De l’excellence & de la nécessité du silence* (Saint-Samson, 1658, pp. 858-863).

If the process that consisted in the association of silence with particular educational goals can indeed be traced back to a time long before the end of the nineteenth century, Maria Montessori nevertheless brought it to another level (Depaepe, 2014). Montessori’s lesson in silence clearly shows us how silence helped her to find a way out of the complex and seemingly unsolvable tension between educational authority on the one hand and the emphasis of the child’s freedom on the other hand. The cumbersome silence of the outdated school system has been replaced by a joyful, game-like activity in which the children are made responsible for their own activity. It is no longer the teacher who asks the children to be silent. Although the teacher is still present, she seems to have become the background against which the educational activity takes place. Interestingly Montessori also does not speak anymore in terms of ‘teacher’. Rather she prefers to speak in terms of a director who directs the behaviour of the children in such a way that they do not notice her/his involvement anymore. Montessori’s lesson in silence clearly illustrates this point. As the silence in the game is a challenge rather than an obligation and as the children are challenged by the baby rather than the teacher, the resulting discipline has almost nothing to do anymore with the old schemes of authority and docility. On the contrary, recalling Adam Smith’s famous hypothesis of the invisible hand in economical processes in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), children themselves are made responsible for their own behaviour and the behaviour of others.4

Although at first sight this evolution only seems to entail a change in terminology – namely from ‘ssshhht be quiet’ to ‘can you be as quiet as’ – it also points to a much wider phenomenon, the impact of which is still tangible today: the sound of authority
gradually has been replaced by a discipline that silently has been interiorized. After having outlined this important transformation with regard to the acoustic qualities of authority it now becomes important to figure out to what extent the silently developing selves can become associated with the sound of diversity, for one of the presuppositions of the Montessori Method is that the freeing of the selves will end up in the emergence of a society that consists of a diversity of individuals. In order to shed light on this important question we would like to turn now to a short educational movie that was produced in 1953 by the American Coronet Instructional Film, namely *How quiet helps at school.* In the next paragraph the transcription of the voice-over that parallels the moving images on silence is provided. In the concluding paragraph some of the recurrent themes will be picked up on in order to tentatively answer the question with regard to the way sound, silence, and diversity are connected to one another.

“Could you do all that as quietly as Bobby did?”

Narrator: Did you ever walk through the hall at school when the other children were in their rooms? Did you ever listen to the sounds that come from the rooms? Some rooms sound like this.

*(Children talking loudly)*

Narrator: What’s happening inside? It looks like everyone is busy at work. But it’s so noisy. What makes the room so noisy? Well, children don’t stay in their own workgroups. Sometimes children drop things on the floor. They call across the room and talk out loud. It’s hard to think about your own work in such a noisy room. You couldn’t learn very much here. And you couldn’t be proud to be part of such a noisy room, could you? Do all the rooms in school sound like this? Let’s visit another room. Listen, it’s so quiet. Aren’t there any children in this room? Ooh! There are children here and they’re all busy too. But there aren’t any loud noises, just the sounds of working. We call these work sounds. Listen.

*(Silence, few quiet sounds)*

Narrator: Why do you suppose this room is so quiet? Perhaps we can learn from the teacher, Miss Bradley.

Miss Bradley: Well I think it’s because each of us helps to keep the room quiet when we’re working. But we’re not quiet all of the time.

Narrator: You’re not?

Miss Bradley: No, we know there are times and places to be quiet and other times and places when we can make noise if we want to. For example, when we play we make all the noise we want. Sometimes making a lot of noise is part of the fun of the game. But when we go to the library, we are very quiet because we know it’s a room where we read to ourselves. When we watch a movie, we are careful not to make too much noise, that
way we can hear and learn more. And you know, we found that knowing when to be quiet is a part of growing up. Offices where people work are busy but quiet and that is the way we keep our room. Because a quiet room helps all of us learn.

Narrator: How do you do it?

Miss Bradley: Well, each of us knows how to work quietly. That’s very important.

Narrator: Will you show us?

Miss Bradley: Of course. Boys and girls, how would you like to show some of the ways we know of being quiet?

Children: Yes.

Miss Bradley: Well while we pretend to be working, who would like to show how we work quietly at our desks? Bobby?

Bobby: (nods)

Narrator: Now why is Bobby clearing his desk? Ooh! Now there won’t be anything to fall off and make noise. You keep on your desk only things you need. That’s part of keeping the room quiet. Uh-oh, the point broke. He’ll have to sharpen the pencil. Can he move quietly so he doesn’t disturb anyone? Do you think you could walk this quietly? Listen to this work sound. When he turns it slowly it doesn’t bother anyone. Work sounds tell that you’re busy, they don’t disturb others. But June seems to have lost something. Look, an eraser! Whose do you think it is? Bobby won’t talk to June, will he?

Bobby: (whispering): June, here’s your eraser.

June: (whispering): Yes, thank you.

Bobby: (whispering): You’re welcome.

Narrator: Ooh! Whispering is the quiet way to talk when you have to talk. Well Bobby has moved about quite a bit without disturbing the class. Could you do all that as quietly as Bobby did?

Miss Bradley: Now let’s suppose Bobby wanted to get something from the cabinet. How would you do it quietly Bobby?

Narrator: Bobby certainly knows the quiet way of working by himself, doesn’t he?

Miss Bradley: Well of course all of us have to if our room is to be a good place to work. Now, Bobby has shown us some of the ways of working quietly by ourselves. Who would like to show how we work quietly in a reading group?

(Some children raise their hands.)

Miss Bradley: Alright, bring your chairs up.

Narrator: Ooh! Moving chairs will certainly be noisy. Well! There is a quiet way to move chairs, isn’t there? There wasn’t much noise at all. No one was disturbed. And look, they all have their books with them. Now they can get started without having to wait for any children to get ready.
Miss Bradley: Now we’ll read ‘A Day at the Fair’ on page 24. Let’s read the first paragraph silently to find out who’s going to the fair.

Narrator: All the children are quiet while they read, aren’t they?

Miss Bradley: Who can tell us who is going to the fair?

Boy: Mary, mother and father.

Narrator: See how no one else talks when someone is speaking? It’s fun to work together that way. Do you think you could work together that well?

Miss Bradley: Now we’re going to show you how we work quietly together in another way. Who wants to show how we’re quiet when we work on our model farm?

’Somewhere raise their hands.’

Miss Bradley: Alright go ahead. Now you return to your desks...

Narrator: All of the children work quietly here. They speak very quietly. When one speaks, the others listen. That’s polite. They stay near the table. They are not bothering children working nearby. And see how well they work together and do things together?

Miss Bradley: Now let’s see, have we shown you everything? We saw that there are times for noise and fun such as play periods and times for quiet and work such as the library or our classroom. And we saw some ways of working quietly. You remember how Bobby showed us ways to work quietly by yourself. And how we talk together quietly when we read or tell stories and how we work together quietly when we work in groups. Those are some of the important ways we help keep our room quiet. Thank you children, now let’s get back to work. You can see how quiet helps us, can’t you?

Narrator: Thank you Miss Bradley. This is a good room, isn’t it? A good room to work in, to learn in. Do you know some things you can do to help make your room a quiet place for work?

From its very first scenes the Coronet film *How quiet helps at school* seems to affirm a positive link between silence and the possibility to develop oneself into an independent and self-fulfilling individual. By first of all confronting the spectator with the boys and girls lost in the cacophony of the noisy classroom the film sets the stage for a positive reinterpretation of silence. After the camera has moved towards the other side of the corridor, and the sounds coming from the chaotic classroom are left behind, silence enters the scene (as well as the voice-over) as a kind of *deus ex machina*: ‘Let’s visit another room. Listen, it’s so quiet. Aren’t there any children in this room? Ooh! There are children here’. By contrasting the noisy and the silent classroom, the film suggests that individual development only can be secured when noise is limited to a minimum and everybody respects the (acoustic) individuality of the other. Diversity, so it seems, cannot thrive in a loud and noisy environment. On the contrary, the individuality of the child gets lost in the uncontrollable production
of sounds. Growing up, becoming a real person that can be distinguished from another person depends on the capacity of someone to be and behave silently: “we found that knowing when to be quiet is part of growing up”, we hear Miss Bradley say.

The positive connection being made between silence and individuality is not only implicated in the first scenes of the Coronet film. It is a recurring theme throughout the video clip that constitutes the film’s core educational message. First of all, there is one individual chosen from the many who raised their hands when Miss Bradley asked “who would like to show how we work quietly at our desks?”. In the noisy classroom Bobby would have never been able to demonstrate his capacities of acting in this or that way for nobody would have been able to hear or see what he was doing. Only against the background of the silent classroom Bobby can be chosen and asked to show what he is capable of. The consequence is that Bobby appears as a real individual who does not merge with the others. But there is much more to say about the precise ways silence and individuality are linked to one another in the movie. Besides Bobby being asked by the teacher to illustrate the need for and usefulness of silence, the movie also establishes an individual relationship between the spectator and the teacher. At different occasions Miss Bradley, just like Maria Montessori did with the children in her lesson on silence, addresses the spectator individually: “Well Bobby has moved about quite a bit without disturbing the class. Could you do all that as quietly as Bobby did?” and “Do you know some things you can do to help make your room a quiet place for work?”. Miss Bradley exemplifies the teacher who does not enforce discipline anymore. Rather she creates an environment in her own classroom, but also in the households/classrooms where children are watching the movie, where children are invited to do what is in their best interest.

This move from obligation towards invitation is clearly present in the voice-over as well as the corresponding images. However, concluding from all of this that silence has been disconnected from power and leads to diversity (being the result of an individual’s development) is a bridge too far, for the individual’s individuality, time and again, seems to converge in the sound of work. Whether it is Bobby, who demonstrates how he can go quietly to the cabinet, a reading group raising hands in order to give an answer to Miss Bradley, or a bunch of children silently standing around a model farm, they all act the same way: they work. If closely listened to, the sound of work is what can be heard in all silent activities of the children. It is what will define them when they are older and grown up. Their individuality will consist mainly of work sounds or in the words of Miss Bradley: “And you know, we found that knowing when to be quiet is part of growing up. Offices where people work are busy but quiet and that is the way we keep our room”. The dream of individuality aspired
to in the Coronet movie results in images of people silently working as mere numbers in the big book of sameness.

The Silence and Sound of Diversity

Just like the lesson in silence of Maria Montessori, so the short instructional film clearly presents silence as an educational tool. The opening scenes, in which a noisy and a silent classroom are compared, immediately try to convince the spectator of silence’s usefulness and thus the need to learn how to be quiet. Again, the envisioned learning process does not follow the old and outdated ideas of imposing discipline and silence by a central authoritative figure. On the contrary, what the transcription of the voice-over shows us is that the responsibility of becoming silent seems to be distributed among the silently busy children in the classroom, the main protagonist Bobby, and the spectators themselves. Just like the lesson in silence described by Montessori, the silent outcome of the whole thing results from a complex interplay of playfulness, responsibility, competition, self-discipline, and the withdrawal of the teacher. On top of this remarkable constellation, the transcription of the voice-over makes another thing very clear: the fact that the envisioned diversity – being the outcome of a process that allows for all the time and space necessary to develop freely and individually – cannot merely be summarised by the sound of silence. On the contrary, what is very audible when all of it succeeds is the sound of work. “Ooh! There are children here and they’re all busy too. But there aren’t any loud noises, just the sounds of working. We call these work sounds. Listen”.

By turning to the work of Maria Montessori – and especially her ideas on how to deal educationally with silence – as well as by referring to and representing the voice-over of the 1953 Coronet Film How quiet helps at school, we hope to have made the reader aware that today’s dominant approaches to silence and diversity have to be looked at critically. An often heard argument is that learning to be silent has the potential to create an environment where one can accept oneself as one is – as well as an environment where everybody can flourish according to one’s own wishes, needs, and longings. In other words, silence and the act of becoming silent would hold the promise that everybody can be the authentic person he or she wants to be – devoid of all possible power-effects. The above-mentioned lessons of silence, as well as the script of the 1953 documentary, however, abundantly make clear that modern approaches to silence cannot be considered devoid of power. On the contrary, silence seems to have been linked to new and subtler ways of exerting power over others and oneself.
References


*How quiet helps at school,* 1953, Coronet Films.

**Notes**

1. The author is grateful to Iulia Delia Popa for having provided the transcription of the voice-over included in the 1953 Coronet educational film *How Quiet Helps at School.*

2. Besides the two publications mentioned in this paragraph one definitely can find other studies that focus on the role played by silence and sound in the history of education. There is for instance the work carried out by Ian Grosvenor and colleagues on the connection between silence and images (Grosvenor & Rousmanière, 1999). With regard to the history of deaf education several scholars have pointed towards the problematic issue of silence in the use of sign language throughout history (see for instance Rée, 1997). But one can also think about how the particular place attributed to speech and silence reflects issues of gender differences between boys and girls (Gal, 1991; Hoegaerts, 2014). In general the article is heavily influenced by the recent rise of hearing history, which aims to explore how in previous cultures people interacted with sound. Soundscape and acoustic landscape then refer to particular ways of how people’s behaviour and ideas were influenced by existing sounds and how these have led to the production of new sounds (Thomson, 2002; Smith, 2004).

3. The argument developed in this article was inspired by the particular sound/silence analysis conducted by the French philosopher Michel Foucault in his book on the history of madness. In the introduction to this book Foucault explains that he had not been interested in describing the history of the language/the sound produced by psychiatrist or psychiatry. Rather his aim had been to describe an “archaeology of silence” in order to find out how the old dialogue between reason and madness gradually had been replaced by a monologue of reason over madness (Foucault, 1997).

4. A comparable argument can be found in the introduction to the *Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies* edited by Pinch and Bijsterveld where they consider the use and function of silence in Kindergarten (2012).

5. This short movie can be watched on Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOtQWp-KABo
The ‘Other’, Power Relations, and the Zoo Humain: 
An Interview with Theatre Artist Chokri Ben Chikha

Liselotte Vandenbussche, Tine Brouckaert, and Laura Andriessen

Chokri Ben Chikha is a Belgian actor and researcher who deals with power relations and the concept of the “other” in his work. A particularly salient topic in both his oeuvre and his doctoral research is the concept of the “human zoo” or “zoo humain”. Laura Andriessen, Tine Brouckaert, and Liselotte Vandenbussche visited Ben Chikha at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Ghent for an interview.

DiGeSt: The Truth Commission is probably your best-known artistic project. What is your intention with it: giving a voice to people who are being oppressed or provoking the viewer who might be left with a sense of guilt?

Ben Chikha: If you are left with a sense of guilt afterwards, then we have not really succeeded in what we wanted to achieve. Do you know Brett Bailey? He made Exhibit B, where he emphasised that sense of guilt. It is a very inspiring performance in a way, with very disputable artistic strategies. If you want to expose power relations you can “play” with guilt, but that “playing” is serious business. Everything – in the arts but also beyond that – can make a brute into a victim. But a victim can also quickly become a brute. When you only create a sense of guilt, you have depicted a black-and-white version of reality. Reality is more complex in my opinion. Bailey wanted to question the exhibition of “exotic” people as a colonial concept, but it is easy to make the white spectator feel guilty.

What is interesting about the zoo humain is that everyone benefitted from exhibiting people, and that is what makes this phenomenon so impressive. Science, the arts, politics, the church, they all had their reasons. It was an enormous racist propa-
ganda machine. The people exposed were victims because they were badly paid or exploited or transported for false reasons, like Saartjie Baartman. However, to label them as only victims – a very passive term – is not correct either, because they were not completely passive, and they were not just victims.

**DiGeSt: But they were not given a voice.**

**Ben Chikha:** No, they did not have any say in the matter but in some ways they did. That is the complexity of it. Of course they had to stage day-to-day life but they also played around with this. In the case of Saartjie Baartman it was very clear that she was being exploited. But in other zoos humains things were more complex because some people got a wage. A very low wage, but a wage. They did stagings but they also had a lot of autonomy in those stagings, deciding what they wanted to show and what not. So, in that sense, I refuse to see things in black and white, because that is not correct. A good example is Josephine Baker. Josephine Baker was not exclusively a victim. She was also playing with her audience and playing with the audience’s perception.

Why do I think that is important? Because victimization does not really get us anywhere. What you get is paternalism instead. That is the mistake Bailey made. He allegedly challenged certain ideas but kept portraying the people as victims. And that is why he faced so much criticism at a certain moment.

**DiGeSt: Was it not also some kind of performance that they did? What is the difference with your work in The Truth Commission?**

**Ben Chikha:** Well, it was indeed a performance, but I literally gave the actors a voice. Bailey did not. He did it – and that is a strategy of course – to focus even more on that victimhood. To show that black-and-white image and to evoke that feeling of guilt. But the guilt he created is false and reproduced. Imagine, for example, that you would ask Jewish people to “play concentration camp”, hell would break loose. You just do not do that. The question is, are you doing anyone a service?

Of course, as an artist you are allowed to do anything in my opinion. Otherwise you get a kind of artistic censorship. I found the zoo humain, as a performative mode of exhibition, an interesting (re)search tool to study and discuss in my PhD, but the strategy of re-enactment is really not that interesting to me. The weird thing – regardless of Bailey himself – was the fact that the media and some of the art critics did not realise that. They all felt a sense of pity but they did not realise that you get stuck with a new kind of stereotype. Kunstenfestivaldesarts – a renowned art festival – did not realise that. In fact, Bailey could have solved the problem in an interesting way. At a certain moment there were protests, especially by civil rights movements.
and by people of colour, in Berlin, London, and Paris. He could have countered that by entering into a dialogue with the people who opposed the project, and to present that as part of the performance.

**DiGeSt**: So dialogue is the alternative you put forward? Do you see this as literally “giving a voice”?

**Ben Chikha**: Yes, literally giving a voice, whether through words, dance, or music. You have to give your subject a voice in a considerate way. In fact, you have to make your story multi-voiced or polyphonic. That is the core of my argument: polyphony. Why? In these villages, women, for example, were being oppressed by men in one way or another, and so on.

**DiGeSt**: Giving a voice, how does that happen? Does that mostly take place in the process of creation?

**Ben Chikha**: Yes. Absolutely. Also in Bailey’s case the preparation was really haphazard. He claimed that there had been a discussion but I do not believe that. I was involved in the preparation for *Exhibit B* and they did not really have much time to get everything done and to find the necessary people. Preparing such a complex exhibition requires a lot of time and dialogue. To go back to *The Truth Commission*, investing time is also what happened with the Senegalese people I invited then. I had worked with them in Senegal, had been on tour with them so that they were familiar with my way of working. I selected two boys and a girl and frequently entered into dialogue with them, and sometimes it got very fierce.

At a particular time we were discussing their passports, because we held their passports. It is an unwritten rule in Belgium that the director keeps the passports of foreign artists (especially from Africa) to avoid problems. Following the advice from a Senegalese man who had worked for a long time with artists from Africa at *Zuiderpershuis* we kept their passports. We often had discussions about this, and eventually we gave the passports back. We did, however, use this as an element in the performance by invoking a discussion about it with the audience. A very important element in the end, because they ran away afterwards and got into illegality.

The question at the time was: can you keep those passports with you? Do you have the right or not? Because of that dialogue, it became an element in the performance. I am certain that Bailey had a lot of similar discussions but you do not see them in the exhibition. A very important element in the end, because they ran away afterwards and got into illegality.

The question at that time was: can you keep those passports with you? Do you have the right or not? Because of that dialogue, it became an element in the performance. I am certain that Bailey had a lot of similar discussions but you do not see them in the exhibition. A very important element in the end, because they ran away afterwards and got into illegality.
a lot of discussion. You had to stand where you were told to and you did not have a voice… As an artist, you have to be open about these issues in my opinion. You have to be open in some way or another, by somehow making it part of the polyphony in your work. By showing, for example, that the "Other" or people with a migrant background can have bad intentions as well.

DiGeSt: Berber Bevernage tries to import a social context in his work about truth commissions in order to make a dominant group realise that an injustice has to be recognised. He mentions, for example, the association Madres de Plaza de Mayo, real truth commissions. The injustice done to these mothers has to be recognised. Only then is it possible for both parties to move forward together.

Ben Chikha: That is correct. With whatever kind of injustice, the first step is recognition. Certain issues have been erased from our collective memory. Even when I was studying history at university I was not confronted with the zoos humains. That knowledge was lost for a long time. Yet we, Belgians, were leaders in world exhibitions and in exhibiting people in great numbers.

The best-known case is the World Exhibition in Brussels in 1897, for which 267 Congolese were brought to Belgium. Seven of these Congolese died and were buried in Tervuren. But also on the first World Expositions in Antwerp in 1885 Congolese were exhibited: 12 Congolese from the Vivi-region were transported to Antwerp. This first “transfer of Congolese” was legitimised as a "diplomatic mission". On the second World Exhibition in Belgium (also in Antwerp, in 1894), however, 144 Congolese were bluntly exhibited as an attraction. Three of them died and nobody knows where they are buried. For The Truth Commission in Antwerp in October 2016 we recovered their names. Also in Ghent 218 Senegalese and 60 Philippines were exhibited. These case studies show that Belgium is a deplorable champion in exhibiting people… The exhibitions attracted millions of visitors, not the mention the propaganda machine of posters, postcards, etc. And yet, today, all of that has been forgotten in some way or another.

DiGeSt: At a certain moment in your doctoral research, you also mention the idea of “rewriting history together”.

Ben Chikha: Yes, that is what I would like to achieve. The idea of rewriting history together is a very important one. A phase in between that is recognition. We accomplished that by, for example, interviewing the mayor of Ghent Daniel Termont. As the first mayor in office of a city where a world exhibition took place, he acknowled-
edged the injustice and formally apologised. Making that apology is very important. If you make an apology, you acknowledge the injustice. To my knowledge that has never happened in Europe until now, by a mayor who is in office. That is phenomenal, but the sad thing is that his recognition and apology caused a wave of protest. Even within progressive circles people made fun of it. It is at a moment like this that you see that Flanders and Belgium are not ready for this at all.

**DiGeSt: Even the first step of recognition is too much.**

**Ben Chikha:** Yes, recognition itself is already a very sensitive topic. Either people do not take it seriously or they completely ignore it. I am very curious how the mayor of Antwerp is going to react when we will hold The Truth Commission in his city from 28th of October until the 1st of November 2016. When you manage to get recognition, you can take a new look at history and rewrite it. People have been saying that for years. But right now it is urgent. We are at a crossroads. In The Truth Commission I made a link between migration, our perception of migration, and our colonial past (specifically the zoo humain). It becomes clear that certain parts of that imagery recur. Now we are at a turning point because of the terrorist attacks. We are at a turning point because of some kind of new barbarism: IS or Daesh which is threatening Western societies. Populist individuals from different parties utilise that rhetoric. So what you get is a new image of the enemy. And not only an image of the “enemy” but also a new perception of so-called “backward people, barbarians.” Because of the attacks – and not only the attacks, because Europe is also in an identity crisis – people start to question everything. National borders, for example: are we Belgian, are we Flemish, are we European? It is time for something new. We need new input to talk about our own identity. That is also a reason why “new barbarism” is a success. The attacks have put more pressure on the situation, which makes rewriting history an absolute necessity. Europe is fundamentally changing. In Ghent alone half of the population will be from a different origin soon. Our identities are changing.

There is a kind of weariness that is very well put into words by a person like the French author Michel Houellebecq: a kind of cynicism, lack of inspiration in Europe, a way of feeling lost. There is an identity crisis: who are we, the threat of the “barbarians” and so on. These elements can make sure that history gets rewritten thoroughly. That, in turn, can give new ideas and impulses for the future.

**DiGeSt: You have already mentioned that it is necessary to recognise injustice in the first place. Is this also applicable to discrimination and everyday racism nowadays? Can a new story only be written when that injustice is acknowledged first?**
Ben Chikha: There are two important trends. There is the populist tendency to dismiss racism as something trivial. Liesbeth Homans, vice-minister-president of Flanders, for example, puts it like this as does the N-VA (Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie, New Flemish Alliance, the conservative, right-wing party that won the last elections in Flanders in 2014). That is one tendency. There is another tendency of people like Dyab Abou Jahjah (a Belgian-Lebanese writer and civil rights activist) and many well-meaning leftist persons who want to instrumentalise discrimination in some way or another. In my performances you will see that certain figures experience discrimination and have something to say about that to make sure it gets acknowledged. But you can also see that these persons are trapped in some kind of mental slavery. Do you understand? He or she feels they cannot change their situation and so they do not even try to. Do you see how hard that is?

Of course, if you give the example of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina you cannot say that they have to acknowledge that they are also wrong in some way. The dictatorship is wrong. That is very clear. The dictatorship has committed crimes. It is more complex for us, and that is why The Truth Commission is also a bit more complex than the one in South Africa. You cannot deny that a certain part of the population faces discrimination on the one hand, but will not or cannot let go of certain values on the other either.

DiGeSt: Isn’t that a very general view?

Ben Chikha: No, I said a certain part of the migrant community – whether it is first or second or third generation. For instance, I gave a performance “The Finale: A Stand Up Tragedy” in De Singel (a cultural centre for modern art in Antwerp) for a teacher-training programme in which the topic was Islam. I played with that. A lot of young guys from Moroccan descent came to that performance because of my name. They started to protest because at some point I had drawn the prophet Mohamed on the blackboard and scratched it out and made some jokes about it. And I was not allowed to do that because, they said, it “was not allowed according to the Quran.” Those guys were second generation and they could be the future teachers of our children. They had such a narrow view of what was acceptable, according to the Quran. Yet artistic freedom is very important. Do you understand? Of course they are being discriminated against! Because of their name, in education and so many different areas – housing, gender, and so on. But on the other hand, I expect that they too are open to new values if they expect the Belgian or Flemish community to be open to new cultural influences. It has to come from both sides. But, and that is important to mention, the power and tools to change their situation lie mostly with the white majority that sets the policy and is in charge. Still, I want to emphasise that these
second-generation migrants are not powerless victims.

At a certain point, when a person radicalises, he/she also becomes a perpetrator – an executioner. In certain families this happens too. My own father, for example, was a dictator who would not let go of certain principles. Yet, my father was also a victim. I try to put that kind of complexity in my performances. It is true that the majority which is holding the power should start to recognise that, to set effective policies and so on – but it does not stop there. Absolutely not.

DiGeSt: In what way does the research tool of the zoo humain that you use in your theatre performances correspond to the research tool that you used in your doctoral research?

Ben Chikha: Well, I wrote two to three hundred pages about it so I cannot explain it in a nutshell. But it comes into play at different levels. You can use the concept of the zoo humain in your artistic strategies. You can see it as a performance, some kind of re-enactment like Bailey’s and provoke a discussion during the performance. So that is one way. The second way is to apply the concept of the zoo humain so as to scan the reviews of Bailey’s exhibition, which were all very positive. There you see that, by forcing the performers into the position of victims, you create a zoo humain again. It is a very interesting instrument in art criticism. To analyse the rhetoric of politicians or policymakers – for example the issue of integration or the “integration package” that I use in my performance – you can also apply the concept of the zoo humain there. If you tell people who are integrating “do not make any noise and you are Flemish” or “we always put our bins out, then you are a good Flemish citizen”, you create a zoo humain: you assume that people will not do those things unless they are told. And actually you assume that there is also a “we” that always does that.

DiGeSt: Do you object to policymakers creating a finite set of identities to which newcomers should adapt?

Ben Chikha: No, applying the zoo humain starts from creating an invisible border between the civilised and the primitive on the one hand and blowing up differences in our superdiverse society on the other hand. That is the core argument of the zoo humain for me, magnifying differences and creating invisible borders. With the colonial zoo humain there was a literal border but now you create an invisible one. When Jan Jambon (the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Internal Affairs, N-VA) says: “A significant part of Muslims were dancing when the attacks in Brussels took place”, you can apply the concept of the zoo humain. After all, historically speaking, dancing was always associated with the devil. Dancing witches, dancing
THE ‘OTHER’, POWER RELATIONS, AND THE ZOO HUMAIN

black people, … It was considered barbaric, uncivilised. I explained that in De Afspraak (a daily talk show on Flemish television). The debate went on about whether or not it was a significant part of the Muslim population but never about that image of the dance, “barbarians who are dancing”. Still, by using that image Jambon was stigmatising a whole population group.

That is how I apply the idea of the zoo humain. You can apply it to statements or a particular policy. If you claim that refugees peek at girls in swimming pools you create a certain group, because you are also saying that Flemish people do not peek. Applying the idea of the zoo humain is possible at different levels.

DiGeSt: Isn’t every theatre performance a zoo humain then?

Ben Chikha: Excellent question! But then you are completely flattening the concept. Then it does not have any meaning anymore. What is really important is the idea of the invisible border. You are not only magnifying differences but you are also creating a hierarchy, as in the (historical) zoo humain and nowadays in religion. Some politicians do not want to say it outright, but the Islam is “barbaric” in their eyes. End of discussion. In that sense you are creating a hierarchy with Christianity and so on. If your performance makes that happen or encourages that way of thinking, then you are creating a zoo humain. If the performance is stigmatising a certain group that is in fact oppressed, then you are creating a zoo humain.

And that can be the problem with social-artistic work as well. Social-artistic work is sometimes a zoo humain too. Maybe that is a bold statement that a lot of people in social-artistic work will disagree with. But if you do not make sure that polyphony is part of the performance and only put socially vulnerable groups on stage and let them tell their story, which you then exaggerate a little, you are creating a zoo humain.

DiGeSt: What is the difference exactly with the way you make your performances polyphonic? I can imagine that people in social-artistic work also try to find some kind of polyphony.

Ben Chikha: There exists very good social-artistic work as well. But the problem with lesser works is that people barely pay attention to artistic strategies. They often do not know anything about it either. They assume that there is polyphony but they often lack the tools to create that polyphony. The result is that the work is ultimately not polyphonic. I work with people from the social-artistic sector from time to time and often they just do not get those different artistic strategies in their performance.
DiGeSt: Could you give an example of an artistic strategy that makes a performance polyphonic?

Ben Chikha: In most of my performances movement plays a very important role. My work is interdisciplinary through movement, music, and text. There I hope to get polyphony. But to work with movement you need to know a thing or two about choreography, and a lot of people do not. You need to know about music and text and so on, in particular the interaction between those three. Performers should not always play themselves. If a performer wearing a headscarf adds something to the performance, it has to be considered even if the performer is not religious in that way. With social-artistic performances there is no difference between the performer and the character anymore. That is problematic, and in those instances I can be very harsh. The poetical power of art should not be compromised for wanting to please amateur actors and letting them be who they are on stage. That is very patronizing, and that is the trap. Patronization is a trap, I keep telling people. That is why I work with long processes. If I do social-artistic work it involves a long process. Not everyone can handle that. In social-artistic projects they often say that everyone should participate and everyone has to be able to do what they want, but then you lose that artistic aspect.

DiGeSt: Are you still giving people a voice then? Is your way of working not close to what Bailey does?

Ben Chikha: No, but obviously it is an exercise in balance. Bailey is situated at one end of the spectrum and well-meaning social-artistic projects are at the other. The truth lies in the middle. With Bailey, the message is purely aesthetic. With social-artistic projects the focus is mainly on the social aspect. In my opinion both are inadequate.

DiGeSt: Do you think the identity of the maker matters in those cases? Bailey is South African but white.

Ben Chikha: Good question. We were in South Africa with our performance *The Truth Commission* and Bailey was there as well. We did the performance in collaboration with the University of Western Cape. That was great, but also very heavy. The format of the truth commission comes from South Africa of course, and we were very nervous about that. Belgians already have a very bad reputation there because of our colonial past. Bailey was invited for a debate which he refused to attend because there were academics in the panel and not only artists. I thought that was a shame. Granted, those academics can be very harsh or confrontational but is that not very interesting for your work?
Of course you cannot completely separate the performance from the identity of the maker. There is a whole generation that ignored that, that thought the identity of the makers did not matter. In my case, people placed too much emphasis on my identity. Being one of the first theatre directors with a migrant background, there was a lot of talk about “migrant theatre” which is as absurd as the idea of “women’s theatre”. When one of my first performances came out, De Leeuw van Vlaanderen (The Lion of Flanders), a review in De Standaard (a major Flemish newspaper) had as its headline: “Moroccans tame lion.” First of all, we were not even Moroccan and second, the play had nothing to do with that. Eventually we became so annoyed that we started to play with our identity in our performances ourselves. Because we knew that we were being promoted this way, we started to question that in the performance.

On the other hand, you cannot ignore identity either. Particularly if the subject of your performance is precisely that. In those cases, I do not think you have to hide your identity. Bailey tried to be invisible, and that was a capital mistake. Make it visible!

**DiGeSt:** Do you think that theatre is a good place to question social dynamics or trigger social change?

**Ben Chikha:** Well, you should not overestimate that. What percentage of the population goes to the theatre, five percent?

**DiGeSt:** Is that one of the reasons why you are moving from the playhouse to the street in more recent work?

**Ben Chikha:** Yes, that is one of the reasons. I seek the public space now. I find it an interesting strategy to not only bring reality to the scene but to also bring fiction into reality. The reverse movement. Incidentally that is the subject of my postdoctoral research. I explore which strategies are interesting to bring fiction into reality, because I think that more and more fiction is placed into reality without people noticing it. Look at political statements, for example. That is one of the reasons why I give so many interviews, why I participate in news programs like De Afspraak. It is very stressful, everything comes very close, but it is necessary.

**DiGeSt:** In your doctoral research you say: “Theatre is the perfect medium to create that interdisciplinarity because it happens ‘now’, to create some sort of dialogue ...”

**Ben Chikha:** That is true, that is one advantage theatre has. Not bringing it to a large public but creating a dialogue because it is happening “live”.

---

**THE ‘OTHER’, POWER RELATIONS, AND THE ZOO HUMAN**
DiGeSt: But is it really a dialogue? Or only afterwards or with the critics...

Ben Chikha: In several of my performances I really do engage into dialogue. In De Leeuw van Vlaanderen, for example, I was really looking for that dialogue, but not in all of my performances. But in a lot of them we do go into dialogue with the audience. The performance that got out of hand in De Singel, for example. I really entered into a dialogue with those youngsters, and that was very heavy. In our last performance Join the Revolution, about the Arab Spring, we engaged in a dialogue with the audience. The performance had no “real” end or time for applause; we just invited the audience on stage to start “the revolution” with an open conversation.

Theatre is the place where you can experiment with identity. In television your format has to be good, you need to have an audience and so on. In theatre you can experiment, you can try different things. In fact, you can start to reflect on identity. Theatre is a place for play, in whatever way you want. It is no coincidence that the most interesting TV series come from theatre concepts. And with theatre you can also make the link to current affairs.

DiGeSt: When do you feel that you are being heard? How can you measure that?

Ben Chikha: When I am asked for an interview (laughs).

DiGeSt: Or is it when you perceive real change in society?

Ben Chikha: Look, I hit a low point at a certain moment. It was just after 9/11. I had been making performances for years and I was feeling that the impact was almost non-existent. That was very frustrating and confronting. But on the other hand I also run into people who are struggling with their identity, or with a certain policy, or something else. And it means a lot to them in some way, a certain performance. But I got into theatre by chance. I am not a die-hard theatre freak. I am looking for “play” in all sorts of places. At first I found it in music, after that in dance, and only then in theatre. If I notice other interesting strategies or different environments where there is more potential for making a change, then theatre is not sacred for me.

DiGeSt: Can you tell us something more about your postdoctoral research?

Ben Chikha: My doctoral research was about stereotypes as theatre symbols and the zoo humain as a research tool. It was mainly about strategies to put stereotypes on stage; about how to capture the complexity, reality, and especially the power relations
of reality on stage; and playing with your audience. My postdoctoral research happened by accident when I was working on my latest project *The Truth Commission* and when I did that interview with the mayor. Because of that interview he apologised, and that had a much bigger impact than many of my performances. That really got me thinking. At the time I was already experimenting with doing other things than theatre and I wanted to know more about that. I felt like I had to master those different strategies.

**DiGeSt**: You once put yourself forward as a candidate to become Minister of Culture, and after the attacks in Paris you sent an Easter message into the world where you said: “Look, petitions or a Facebook post that goes viral, a poster on your window, all of that remains symbolic.” Is that a message to change things or to implement change?

**Ben Chikha**: Yes, absolutely. That is the thing: you keep going. You stubbornly keep questioning certain things. That is basically what I do. That is my profession. When I put myself forward as a candidate to be the next Minister of Culture, for example, some of my friends in parliament or in the Socialist Party said: “Are you also interested in taking up a political role now, meaning a Socialist role?” while I was not on any list or a member of any political party. I am someone who questions the status quo, whether you like it or not. That is what I did with that Easter message.

It was a call for some kind of emergency. I also participate in “Hart boven Hard” (a civil anti-austerity movement), but afterwards I always have this annoying feeling. It was fun, but… Why not organise a demonstration and stay in Brussels for two weeks? If you stay in Brussels with 20,000 people, that is the start of a revolution. Do you understand? I think we are past the stage of symbolic gestures.

**DiGeSt**: The “Nuits Debouts” is a recurring event that they are trying to expand.

**Ben Chikha**: That is great. I think that is a good thing. But let us think about things for a bit like they did in 1968: “We have had it, we do not want small measures here and a symbolic project there.” Maybe it is time for a real revolution.

**DiGeSt**: You are saying that we need new models. What new solutions, new ideas, new impulses do you have in mind?

**Ben Chikha**: The zoo humain, for example, as an investigative tool. That is a new model for me that comes from my own research. But it goes beyond that. While I was
doing my research I thought: “There’s a whole new art movement happening right now”, that I call “Zooïsm”. There was Exoticism, Romanticism, Classicism, and now there might be “Zooïsm”. “Zooïsm” is essentially the exhibiting of people, so reality TV is part of that and what I am doing now, performing in reality. That is a tendency that is becoming more and more important, but there has not been that much critical attention yet. It is spreading through social media, though. Eventually you cannot tell the difference between a lie and reality anymore.

In De Afspraak, for example, there was a conversation about supposed hidden places of worship in the basements of Zaventem (Brussels Airport). VTM (a commercial television station in Flanders) had launched that story. It was picked up by the Belgian news agency Belga. Others picked up that story too, like the newspaper De Morgen. The first one who wondered if the story was true was the Flemish broadcasting station VRT. The line between fact and fiction is blurring. Afterwards the whole thing was not properly set right so that it continued to live in the minds of the people.

The same happened with an action I had set up. I was filming – that was before the attacks in Paris – and wanted to make a parody of IS propaganda, with an IS-flag right by the statue of Manneken Pis. The people from the neighbourhood were amused; there was a relaxed atmosphere. Then all of a sudden, an undercover agent shows up. I was brought to the police station, questioned and all that. On my way home I heard on the radio: “Five suspected terrorists arrested at Manneken Pis.”

What I want to say is: we do not know the difference between fact and fiction anymore. We accept anything as true and that frightens me. As an artist it is very interesting of course. I create even more confusion. Just because people need to realise that checking facts is important.

A lot of things are staged. Now, with “Zooïsm” you really create a border between the normal and the abnormal. Naturally artists also stage certain things to provoke discussion, like we did with our IS-parody. So there is “doctrinarian Zooïsm” and “critical Zooïsm”. “Doctrinarian Zooïsm” happens when you stage something that seems to be real, but you are actually trying to implement some kind of dogma, whether it is sexist or racist. You stage dancing Muslims, for example. Jambon literally said: “I do not need facts for that.” That is staged, but it is “doctrinarian Zooïsm” because you are trying to implement a certain ideology. On the other hand, there is “critical Zooïsm”, the people who are trying to counter that tendency.

DiGeSt: Do you see yourself as part of that movement, “critical Zooïsm”?

Ben Chikha: Yes. I invented it in a certain way, the term I mean. That is a personal example of a different way to approach art and reality. But we will need more. We
know the definition of “refugees”, for example, but the people who come here and have been here for years, are they still refugees? Aren’t they part of society? Migrants, the globalised world… You travel here and there and come back; were you ever a migrant there? The concepts that surround refugees, the terminology, it all needs to be re-evaluated. And I am not even talking about the term “allochtone” (literally meaning “someone who is not indigenous”, yet used mainly for third and fourth generation Turkish and Moroccan Belgians).

We have the feeling that we have tried everything. We came up with all sorts of solutions and reconsidered and adjusted them. There is a kind of weariness emerging. And that is because we are constantly recycling a lot of things from our past again and again. But there is not a lot of room for new ideas, terminologies, and insights.

*DiGeSt:* You also wrote in your letter: “The Islam can play an important role in that process.”

**Ben Chikha:** Yes! That is the surprising thing about it. Because we are being confronted with a new religion we have to reposition ourselves. So it is actually a gift – that is how I put it in the Easter message. For the record, I am not Muslim myself, that is also in the letter. But you have to reposition yourself in some way or another. Indeed, you have to question yourself. The N-VA uses a classical recipe of islamophobia; that is the easiest road. The hard road requires the realisation that there are different kinds of Islam. Which ones are interesting, which are dangerous? Take the whole headscarf debate for example. It used to be very simple, you just prohibited the headscarf everywhere and that was that. Now it becomes clear that things are not that simple. Mind you, I have to say I was of the same opinion back then. But now young girls in their twenties who are clearly not being oppressed wear a headscarf and say: “Fuck off!”

*DiGeSt:* There was an article in *De Standaard* today (26 April 2016) that said: “The focus is too much on headscarves and not enough on identity.”

**Ben Chikha:** Yes, but it is more particularly about our own identity here. People always think that it is about the other when it is really about us: how we are going to reinvent ourselves? To give an example, I advertise a vacancy and someone with a headscarf applies. What position do you take? How do I deal with that, how can I “place” that?

*DiGeSt:* Do you see theatre as a tool to think about identity?
Ben Chikha: Yes, it is a place to play. It is a place like any other where you can try out different things and launch them into the world. It has to be a place where you experiment with models, with ideas. But you have to dare to reject certain things or radically question them. Some people, some academics are not ready for that. Some feminists and leftist activists are not ready for that. And that is holding back a lot of things. People look to the past for inspiration, to a certain kind of symbolism.

DiGeSt: When you say that we need to experiment and make models in theatre, do you think those models have to be put into reality?

Ben Chikha: Yes, that is something I am doing at the moment. I am working on adjusting my doctoral thesis to make it suitable for the general public. Because it is one thing to experiment and another not to keep it for the happy few. A book is also a place for experimentation, a place where there is room for both reflection and experiment.

DiGeSt: The third instalment of the trilogy of The Truth Commission is called Amnes(t)ie (Amnesia/amnesty). Is that some sort of culmination point in your work?

Ben Chikha: Yes, that is correct. We are actually trying to see if there are similarities with former Eastern Front fighters and foreign fighters in the Syrian Civil War, and to what extent you can re-educate people. Former Eastern Front fighters need to be re-educated too. But that is all very sensitive, because you can feel the N-VA’s rhetoric there. They act very aggressively to anyone who has anything to do with Syria, while they are full of empathy for former Eastern Front fighters. That fascinates me. Are there similarities or not?

In fact, we are researching that with Bruno de Wever and Koen Aerts from Ghent University. I really love that early stage in the research. With Join the Revolution in Tunisia we started working with Sammi Zemni and his research group [also at Ghent University], and for The Truth Commission we worked with Annelies Verdoolaege and the department of African Studies, and Christel Stalpaert and Evelien Jonckheere and the department of Theatre Studies. It is a real pleasure. All those data and all that knowledge, you have to do something with that. We are creating slow art in that sense, taking our time. I do not know if it will work out yet. We also have fast art, where we do an intervention from time to time like the one in Brussels near the Manneken Pis statue or when I put myself forward as a “candidate” to become Minister of Culture, to avoid being only in research mode. With quick interventions, we ques-
tion current socio-political events that, in turn, provide the inspiration for “slow art”. Yes, it is all very exciting.

DiGeSt: Thank you for this talk.

Notes

1. With thanks to Laura Andriessen for transcribing and translating the interview.
2. *The Truth Commission* is a performance piece that questions the limits of theatre, using dance, testimonies, and elements from real truth commissions in one performance. In 1913, 128 Senegalese and 60 Filipino’s were part of the world exhibition in Ghent. One performer did not survive. In *The Truth Commission*, Ben Chikha forces the spectator to reflect on Belgium’s colonial past and its consequences to this day.
3. Brett Bailey is a South-African artist whose performance piece *Exhibit B* caused a wave of protest. The exhibition replicates the human zoos from colonial times with black performers and actors. Bailey himself saw his exhibition as a critique on human zoos and the colonial gaze, but critics protested that *Exhibit B* reinforces rather than challenges racism and colonialism. The installation got cancelled in London after several protest actions.
4. Saartjie Baartman was the more famous of at least two Khoikhoi women, who due to their large buttocks, were exhibited as attractions in nineteenth-century Europe under the name “Hottentot Venus”.
6. Kunstenfestivaldesarts is a contemporary arts festival in Brussels.
7. Zuiderpershuis is a cultural organisation and platform in Antwerp. It regularly organises exhibitions and events and focuses on intercultural cooperation and knowledge exchange.
8. The Madres de Plaza de Mayo is an association of mothers whose children were abducted by the military dictatorship in Argentina between 1976 and 1983. In an attempt to find out what happened to their children and to protest, they marched at the Plaza de Mayo in front of the presidential palace. In this way they opposed the state’s terrorism and silencing of opponents.
About the Authors

Laura Andriessen is an MA student in Gender and Diversity Studies at Ghent University. She holds a BA in Eastern Languages and Cultures (India) from Ghent University. Her MA thesis focuses on right-wing Hindu nationalist women’s movements in India.

Chokri Ben Chikha is an international performer, artistic director, and researcher, who has won prizes with his productions (Louis Paul Boon prize, 2005; Artist Award at the Afrika Film Festival, 2014). He obtained an MA in History at Ghent University and accomplished additional trainings as theatre-maker, actor, dancer, and choreographer. He has taught at several institutions (a.o. KASK/Faculty of Fine Arts/University College Ghent, RITS/Brussel, Toneelacademie Maastricht, Universiteit Antwerpen). Since 2007 he is lecturer and researcher in Arts at KASK/Faculty of Fine Arts/University College Ghent. He obtained his PhD in 2013. Today Chokri Ben Chikha teaches and is post-doc researcher at KASK/Faculty of Fine Arts/University College Ghent and artistic director/performer of Action Zoo Humain (www.actionzoohumain.be).

Tine Brouckaert holds a PhD in Comparative Sciences of Culture at Ghent University and the University of Saint-Etienne. Her dissertation “Giving Birth to Citizenship” (original: “Accoucher la citoyenneté. Expériences et témoignages de femmes sans-papiers à propos de leur travail maternel”) addresses questions of mothering with an undocumented citizenship status. Her research interests are critical citizenship and migration studies and the anthropology of mothering. Currently, she is the gender policy advisor for the policy unit “Diversity & Gender” at Ghent University.

Goedele Declerck specializes in interdisciplinary research with deaf people and sign language communities on their cultural diversity and wellbeing. As a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow, she is affiliated with the Social Research with Deaf People (SORD) group at The University of Manchester. She holds a PhD in Comparative Sciences of Culture (anthropology) from Ghent University (2009). Her research has
focused on deaf communities’ emancipation, empowerment, identity dynamics, sustainable development, cultural diversity, cross-cultural perspectives, and processes of learning (epistemologies). Apart from generating projects in Flanders, she has extensive experience in working with deaf people and sign language communities around the world. During her doctoral and postdoctoral research at Ghent, she was a visiting scholar at Gallaudet University (USA), the University of Buea (Cameroon), and Kyambogo University (Uganda).

**Caroline Godart** is an Assistant Professor of Communication, Germanic Languages, and Cultural Studies at IHECS (Institut des Hautes Etudes des Communications Sociales, Brussels) and a Scientific Collaborator at the Université Libre de Bruxelles. She holds a PhD in Comparative Literature and Cinema Studies from Rutgers University (USA). Her first book, *The Dimensions of Difference: Space, Time and Bodies in Women’s Cinema and Continental Philosophy* was published in 2016 by Rowman and Littlefield.


**Riley McGuire** is a PhD student in the Department of English at the University of Pennsylvania. His research is at the intersection of queer, disability, and sound studies. More specifically, he is interested in examining the ways in which nineteenth-century texts inscribe various marginalised vocal subject positions into their textual form. He has published on topics such as queer childhood and the politics of collaboration in the humanities.

**Liselotte Vandenbussche** obtained a PhD in 2006 at the Centre for Gender Studies with a dissertation on liberal women writers in Flemish literary and cultural journals (1870-1914), published as *Het veld der verbeelding. Vrijzinnige vrouwen in Vlaamse literaire en algemeen-culturele tijdschriften* (1870-1914) (2008). It was awarded the Jozef Vercoullie Prize 1998-2006, the Provincial Prize for History 2008, and was nominated for the Frans van Cauwelaert Prize 2008. She is currently a lecturer and researcher in the department of pre-school education at Artevelde University College.
Pieter Verstraete is an assistant professor at the research unit Education, Culture and Society (KULeuven, Belgium) where he teaches history of education. He generally focuses on the history of educational initiatives for persons with disabilities and this from a critical point of view. Besides having an interest in disability history he also focuses on the role played by emotions, silence, and sounds, and contagious diseases in the history of education. He is currently working on a book project entitled Learning To Be Disabled: An Educational Heritage of the Great War. Recent publications include Le silence mutilé, In the Shadows of Disability, Afterschool: Images, Education & Research, The Imperfect Historian: Disability Histories in Europe. He has been awarded the DHA best book Award and the Mauritz de Vroede Award (BNVGOO).
SCOPE AND GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSIONS

SCOPE

DiGeSt wants to explore the ways in which the rich tradition of research on sexual difference, with its established critical frameworks and methodologies, can both further and build on research that, in many different domains, tackles the question “what is diversity?” In order for the power systems and the mechanisms of exclusion – in our societies and environments at large as well as in our everyday lives, our thinking, our beliefs and (cultural) production – to be brought to light we need to map the ways in which gender inequality relates to other processes that select, structure and set standards. We are especially interested in contributions that deal with the hurdles modern societies need to cross so as to be the “open” and just society they claim or want to be. Societal openness is defined as the condition in which individual life chances or the formation of social boundaries are not determined by social categories such as sex, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, “race”, class, age, disability, (chronic) illness, ...

EDITORIAL BOARD


ADVISORY BOARD

Carla Billitteri (University of Maine), Sarah Bracke (Ghent University), Eva Brems (Ghent University), Gily Coene (VUB), Nathalie De Bleeckere, Gita Deneckere (Ghent University), Bart Eeckhout (University of Antwerp), Anke Gilleir (KU Leuven), Margaret Homans (Yale University), Vivian Liska (University of Antwerp), Chia Longman (Ghent University), Petra Meier (University of Antwerp), Joz Motmans (Ghent University Hospital), Karen Nakamura (University of California Berkeley), Nouria Ouali (ULB), Ingrid Palmary (University of the Witwatersrand Johannesburg), David Paternotte (ULB), Katharina Pewny (Ghent University), Marjan Sterckx (Ghent University), Aagje Swinne (Maastricht University), Piet Van Avermaet (Ghent University), Sofie Van Bauwel (Ghent University), Mieke Van Houtte (Ghent University), Sami Zemni (Ghent University)

SUBMISSIONS

DiGeSt solicits articles that problematize gender or/and focus on issues dealing with diversity in all its manifestations and which address the problems described above. It seeks original contributions written in English that present the results of new research, reflect on methodological challenges, engage with new theories or work across disciplines. In addition to full essays (approximately 6,000 words), DiGeSt is interested in round table contributions, consisting of shorter notes (2,000-4,000 words) by different scholars addressing a topical issue, and progress reports of ongoing research (1,000 words). All of these contributions will be peer-reviewed. The “What are your reading?” section invites (early-career) researchers to report on works that are deemed relevant to the field and that are of particular significance to the author’s ongoing research (300 words).

DiGeSt welcomes suggestions for guest-edited special issues and invites potential guest editors to send their proposal, with suggested contributors, to the editorial assistant (digest@ugent.be).