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Feeling for Deaf Resonance in the Eighteenth Century and Beyond

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The article examines how *resonance* has anchored deaf self-representation in the eighteenth century and the present. Through an interdisciplinary framework that foregrounds Deaf and sound studies in the context of the eighteenth century, the article conducts a close reading of writing from two of the first published deaf authors, Pierre Desloges and Charles Shirreff. The argument is that synchronous vibration figures centrally into their sentimental self-fashioning at a time when organized deaf education was first being implemented in Europe. The article also reveals personal stakes in examining resonance alongside John Bulwer's seventeenth-century multisensory model of perception in *Philocophus: or the Deafe and Dumb Man's Friend* (1648). Along the way, the article introduces the term *deaf resonance* to theorize the transhistorical, transformative possibilities that inhere in deaf sociability, and to affirm the multimodal character of sound and communication in deaf self-representation.

Introduction

Vibration is an orientation device for deaf people.¹ It can be a source of auditory access and pleasure. Vibration is felt in one's body, of course, but for contemporary Deaf artist and activist, Chella Man, it is a multisensory experience. In his video poem, "The Beauty of Being Deaf," Chella Man expresses the significance of vibration for sensation, sign language, and the building of community. Three people (including Chella Man) are filmed signing the lines of the poem while underwater in a brightly lit pool. They take turns, moving slowly and expressively as tiny air bubbles escape from their mouths and noses: "I see the ripples of vibration / I feel them / experiencing what others / are too busy to appreciate." Chella Man revels in what hearing people often disregard: the sensory pleasures afforded by vibration. The very next line shifts from vibration to sound, underscoring their synonymous relationship: "Sound is movement I make with my body / and see with my eyes."



Figure 1. Raven Sutton wears a black bathing suit top and is underwater signing the lines to "The Beauty of Being Deaf." Sutton looks to her left with her right hand positioned near her neck and her left arm jutting outward. Sutton wears ear jewelry and has a nose ring and vibrant blue nails and blue hair. The caption reads "ripples of vibrations." Image courtesy of Chella Man.

In Chella Man's Deaf poetics, vibration is felt, it has a visual character, and it is transmitted by the body silently. In the poem's final line, vibration gives way to sign language's extraordinary aesthetics: "how beautiful is it to be able to communicate underwater?"

"The Beauty of Being Deaf" signals how deaf people harness vibration to communicate with interlocutors and to orient themselves in the world. A neuroscientific study found that deaf people's brains rewire themselves to process vibrations in the auditory cortex, where sound is usually processed in hearing people (Levanen and Hamdorf 75–77). And indeed, for Chella Man, vibration is something that Deaf people masterfully employ to fertile ends: "This expertise, this Deaf gain that we are all granted / Come together to form community / culture / establishing a continuum of people who are different... yet connected."



Figure 2. Rayly Aquino is underwater. Aquino is shirtless and has several tattoos, including one of signing hands. Like Sutton, Aquino wears striking silver jewelry in left ear meant to capture, amplify, and represent a hearing aid. Aquino is in the midst of signing the line "to form community." Image courtesy of Chella Man.

Vibration's social valences encompass the philosophy of "deaf gain," a radical challenge to the deprivation usually associated with hearing *loss* to instead assert "a distinct way of being in the world, one that opens up perceptions, perspectives, and insights that are less common to the majority of hearing persons" (Bauman and Murray xv). In "The Beauty of Being Deaf," vibration aides in the establishment of a community of feeling individuals who become co-creators of language, knowledge, and culture.

Implicit in Chella Man's poem is the presence of multiple subjects who experience vibration together through *resonance*. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines resonance as "The reinforcement or prolongation of sound by reflection or by the synchronous vibration of a surrounding space or a neighbouring object" (OED).

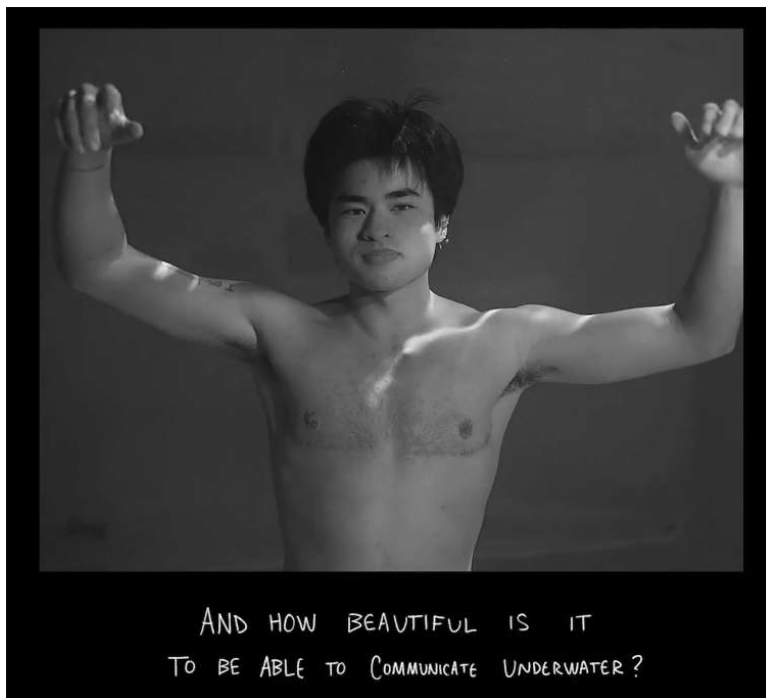


Figure 3. Chella Man is underwater, shirtless, and looking directly at the camera. He wears the same ear jewelry as his fellow signers. His arms are both raised upward. He looks defiant and determined. The caption reads "and how beautiful is it to be able to communicate underwater?" Image courtesy of Chella Man.

When vibration is coordinated among subject(s) and object(s) in a productive acoustic space, it becomes *resonance* by means of reflection, with synchronous vibrations creating the conditions for a multisensory-based relationality. Resonance has various applications. For example, in physics resonance involves a particle's transfer of energy while in astronomy it describes the gravitational pull between orbiting bodies (Erlmann, "Resonance," 175). Beyond its usages to describe acoustic and scientific phenomena, resonance has helped to define modern subjecthood. In *Reason and Resonance: A History of Modern Aurality*, Veit Erlmann demonstrates how resonance in its "acoustic and physiological" aspects "played a constitutive role in the history of modern aurality and rationality" and in the making of the modern self (11). I would add that, for deaf people, *rationality* has been an exclusionary category. Moreover, *resonance* has served as a dynamic source of deaf multisensory experience.

In this article, I explore how resonance has anchored deaf self-representation, particularly in the later eighteenth century. In foregrounding deafness in the study of the auditory, the article participates in interdisciplinary scholarly conversations that illuminate how deafness shapes the cultural, material, and technological contours of sound, building on the work of Carol Padden and Tom Humphries, Mara Mills, Rebecca Sanchez, Jaipreet Virdi, Jonathan Sterne, Joseph Straus, Michael Davidson, Michele Friedner, and Stefan Helmreich.² By focusing on the writing of two of the first deaf authors to be published, Pierre Desloges and Charles Shirreff, I show how resonance figures into deaf subjectivity at a time when organized deaf education was first being implemented in Europe. Throughout this period, deaf people found themselves at the center of natural philosophical debates about language and rationality, culminating with the birth of systematized deaf education in the second half of the century (Davis 50–56; Branson and Miller 100–07). It is no accident, I would add, that deaf education became

formalized at a time when people became attuned to social reform measures through a sympathetic, relational exchange informed by resonance. In the coming pages, I argue that Desloges and Shirreff employ resonance in their writing to demonstrate sentimental expertise at a time when sentimental discourse was hegemonic. Along the way, I introduce *deaf resonance* to theorize the transhistorical, transformative possibilities that inhere in deaf sociability, and to affirm the multimodal character of sound and communication in deaf self-representation.

My Personal Stakes in Examining Resonance

I begin by discussing why resonance has become so fascinating to me, first in a scholarly and then in a personal sense. For the cover of my book, *Novel Bodies: Disability and Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century British Literature*, I chose the frontispiece image from the 1648 treatise, *Philocophus: or the Deafe and Dumbe Man's Friend*, in which John Bulwer makes the first serious case for deaf education in England (Figure 4). This image illustrates an argument I make in chapter 1 of *Novel Bodies* about how early modern deaf people queerly orient themselves to objects and other subjects. The figures underscore the relationship between deaf sensory perception and queerness, a pervasive acoustemology assigned to deaf people at the time. As a term, *acoustemology* joins acoustics with epistemology "to investigate sounding and listening as a knowing-in-action," in both a material and a social sense (Feld 12). The image also demonstrates how deaf people were depicted as playing or listening to instruments by placing their mouths over vibrating strings.³ In the preface to *Philocophus*, Bulwer calls this "Dentall Audition," or the manner in which "intelligible and articulate sounds" find alternative routes to the "brain then by the ear or eye, shewing that a man may hear as well as speak with his mouth" (A5). Bulwer's sensory model is inclusive and justifies the education of deaf people, who were generally misconstrued as incapable of acquiring literacy. Bulwer, however, deems the frontispiece a representation of "the Senses Masque"—a feast that celebrates deaf people as "Divine" and rational.

The image is composed of three men who are in the foreground of a banquet hall. To the left, a man plays a bass viol. The instrument extends into the air, and the upper- and lower-bouts rest between the man's legs, reminiscent of a tumescent penis that reverberates with sound. Just to the right of the bass violist kneels a deaf man with head turned to the left, his mouth over the right ear of the scroll. He places his mouth on the instrument in this manner so he can hear the bass violist's music, a form of "Dentall Audition" (or bone conduction) in which vibrations that emanate from the instrument are transmitted to the teeth, through the skull, and on to the inner ear, granting the deaf man access to the music through resonance. The homoeroticism of this image is indicated by the deaf man's multisensory orientation toward the player's instrument. Vibration in this image is sonic eroticism and mutual understanding. The queer orientation of the subjects in relation to the instrument illuminates more broadly how early modern deaf acoustemologies were understood to be reliant upon the synchronous vibrations that constitute resonance.

I also have a personal stake in writing about resonance and it is this: I became hard of hearing at age 29 during my second year in graduate school, some fifteen years ago.



Figure 4. Three figures participate in John Bulwer's community of senses. To the left, a man plays a bass viol. In the center, a deaf man places his teeth over the scroll of the bass viol to feel its vibrations. To the right, a man sits at a table. On the table, from left to right: a portrait, a canister of incense, and a bowl of fruit (not shown). Each of these objects connect via dotted lines to unexpected sense organs on the man. A dotted line along the top of the image connects all of the men and includes the statement "Ad motum labioru," which translates to "the movement of lips." Detail, frontispiece from John Bulwer's *Philocophus: or the Deafe and Dumbe Man's Friend* (1648). Courtesy of the Huntington Library.

I've progressed to moderately severe hearing impaired in most ranges since that time. Over the years, I have adapted to the strenuous challenge of vocal exchange by paying close attention to visual and facial cues, since I am sighted. My hearing aids help me immensely, though even with them I am far from the auditory capacity of hearing people. Over the years, I have learned to savor vibration. Rhythmic basslines at live music events and clubs course through my body, connecting me to the people and space around me and affording me pleasurable sensations. A more intimate example involves my husband, Alan. If he speaks to me when I am not wearing my hearing aids, I can place my hand on his chest and lean in. Vibrations produced in his larynx are transmitted to his lungs and then on to his chest wall. On the other side of Alan's flesh, my hand picks up vibrational sensory activity. From there, his message gets relayed through bone and flesh and nerves to my inner ear, where the relayed signal is processed. I am able to hear him fairly well like this. This is an example of vocal fremitus, which physicians typically listen for in patients when diagnosing pulmonary diseases like pneumonia. But for me, Alan's vocal fremitus is a no-tech accessibility device. Mia Mingus would call the embodied connection between Alan and me a form of "access intimacy," or "that elusive, hard to describe feeling when someone else 'gets' your access needs. The kind of eerie comfort that your disabled self feels with someone on a purely access level." Our communication requires proximity, intimacy, and trust. This is all to say that, along with visual cues, vibration is a stimulus to which I have become increasingly attuned as I have gained deafness.

Bulwer's *Philocophus* and Alan's vibrating chest against my hand both entail an intimate, multisensory relationality among deaf people and hearing loved ones. Vibrating chests and stringed instruments transmit signals that are conveyed and received. Sara Ahmed thinks of the phenomenological intimacy between atypical bodyminds and objects as analogous to "desire lines": "not unprecedented routes to

get from here to there," but routes which are unexpected and not always perceivable (19–20). Desire lines faintly mark the paths that nonnormative bodyminds use to orient themselves to other subjects and objects. In the case of deaf listeners, verbal communication is subject to blockages and must take alternate routes. Whether through resonance, repetition, captioning, interpretation, or transcription, deaf people receive sound and spoken language in ways that do not adhere to hearing temporalities.

As these examples demonstrate, resonance is the means by which vibration relays sensory information that we can feel, see, hear, move with, desire, and know—an acoustemology that I call *deaf resonance*. Deaf resonance is an interdependent, multisensory domain in which human connection occurs through the acoustic transfer of energy. Vibration makes us intelligible to one another. As this relationality takes shape, deaf resonance holds the potential to facilitate a collective orientation toward sociability. Inasmuch as resonance entails subjects and objects that are proximate to one another, deaf resonance is a manifestation of access intimacy for deaf people. Though it is a transhistorical phenomenon due to its materiality, deaf resonance has a literary and philosophical history that can be traced to the past.

Deafening Enlightenment Resonance

My objective for the remainder of this article is to *deafen* resonance, to show how it functioned as a productive site of sentimental self-fashioning for eighteenth-century authors. In using *deafen* in this way, I invoke Rebecca Sanchez's critical methodology in which deaf epistemologies are brought to bear on literary texts. Sanchez's use of *deafening* challenges the audist tendency to think of deafness as peripheral to hearing. Similar to *cripping* or *queering*, *deafening* does not require "an identifiable deaf subject" and engages "with deafness's multisensory and active listening practices, the expansion of the sensorium beyond the individual corpus and, as a result, the development of complex interdependent relationships with both human and non-human entities" (274). Following Sanchez, I use *deafening* to apply deaf acoustemologies to the literary, the auditory, and sociability. Resonance, I argue, should be considered alongside what Christopher Krentz has identified as the "the deaf presence" of literary texts: gesture, sound, silence, and "deaf-related metaphors" (13).

Resonance's expansive history can be traced to the early modern period. Veit Erlmann identifies resonance's "sprawling conceptual terrain" from the seventeenth century onward, noting its implications for the sciences, arts, literature, and philosophy ("Resonance," 176). Denis Diderot, as Erlmann notes in *Reason and Resonance*, conceived of the ideal philosopher as one who sits in silence, simultaneously reasoning and physically quivering as his ideas come into contact with each other, "in the way that the strings of a harpsicord make each other quiver" (9). Diderot's stringed-instrument analogy gets at "the very core of the enlightened self" (11). Throughout his wide-ranging study, Erlmann demonstrates why critical attention to resonance is necessary for countenancing the making of the modern self.

It might also be noted that Western subjecthood is deeply immersed in the idea of individualism, a construction which creates barriers for deaf and disabled people. Regarding sound as vibration is one way to rethink this entrenched paradigm. Nina Sun Eidsheim, for example, theorizes music as a vibrational, material field that reveals our interconnectedness and orients us toward a common good. By focusing on listeners of music, Eidsheim shows how we might evade the imperative to "mold our bodies to create an expected sound, and toward accepting the vibrations that pulsate from our

material, sonorous beings" (20). Such renderings of sound as vibration, I would add, are amenable to the capaciousness of deaf and disabled lived experience—a move away from the strictures of "mold" and toward the limitless possibilities of sensation and community. Underlying Eidsheim's argument is an understanding of music and sound as multivalent and expansive. The consequences of such a shift, for Eidsheim, are that we change our mindset from that of conqueror of sound, to instead become "plain member and transmitter of a vibrational field," which in turn "implies respect for fellow" humans "and also respect for the community as such" (21).⁴ Vibration thus shapes the lived experience of all people and can be a key determinant for the composition of multifarious communities. When we are proximate to one another, vibration becomes resonance, cultivating feeling and understanding as we recognize our interconnectedness.

The variable, vibrational character of sensory cues as they are transmitted by one person and taken up by another also happens to be a foundation of eighteenth-century sentimental discourse in the medical, philosophical, aesthetic, and literary realms. In the mid-to-later eighteenth century, *sentiment* was the embodied, affective experience of morality or perception, while *sensibility* was the visible exhibition of sentiment (Binhammer 288). To be a person of feeling, one was moved by another person or by the outside world, experiencing an embodied response that reflected moral sentiment in a demonstrably public way. In other words, one harnessed vibration by both broadcasting and absorbing feeling according to established customs. G. J. Barker-Benfield argues that sensibility was "a new psychoperceptual scheme" for the time, whose principles were based to a large extent upon Newtonian conceptions of vibrating nerves and tense fibers (xvii). As Barker-Benfield notes, the physician George Cheyne conceived of vibration as the vehicle that moves sensation of all kinds through the nervous system and to the "intelligent principle," or soul, which functioned as a sixth sense (Cheyne 11–12). The reflection of these vibrations, initiated externally and then coursing through one's elastic bodymind, indicates that resonance was the philosophical basis for Cheyne's reckoning of feeling and perception.

Cheyne was a major influence on the novelist Samuel Richardson, whose epistolary novels *Pamela* (1740), *Clarissa* (1748), and *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753) established sentimental writing as a dominant literary mode, a trend in which the values of an emergent bourgeois class became instilled in Britain (and similarly, across the channel, in France). In their trembling and quivering, Richardson's virtuous characters react viscerally to the specters of violence and rape, but they also emote in the contexts of moral goodness and desire. Such character comportment appears in the plots of eighteenth-century fiction, on stage, and in a variety of other forms. More broadly, various social movements of the later eighteenth century, including feminism, abolition, and the animal rights movement, were reliant on the resonant discourses of sympathy (Binhammer 288–95). The same could be said of the formalization of deaf education. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, sentiment and sensibility figure centrally in the work of the deaf authors Pierre Desloges and Charles Shirreff.

Pierre Desloges's Vibrating Sentiment

Within the culture of sentiment and sensibility, systematized deaf education was born. In Paris, Abée Charles-Michel de l'Épée initiated a pedagogical method based on warmth, humility, and feeling to deaf students. In the beginning, he agreed to teach religious principles to the deaf daughters of a woman who sought him out. L'Épée quickly learned that he could help these young women progress in

their studies by learning their signs and then converting them to the French language structure for the purposes of instruction, to create "a manual dialect of the national language" (Lane 7). L'Epée soon gained acclaim and began working with many deaf students who regularly visited his home. However, a rival teacher, Abbé Claude-François Deschamps de Champloiseau, attacked L'Epée's methods, denigrating the use of sign language in his instruction. Deschamps chose to focus his own deaf pedagogy exclusively on the teaching of vocal speech and writing through dactylology and other laborious methods, though as Jonathan Rée observes, L'Epée's support of sign language was limited by his main objective, which was for his students to "hear with their eyes and express themselves with their voice" (Lane 28 and Rée 176).

In his stirring first-hand account, *Observations d'un sourd et muet* (1779), Pierre Desloges fired back at Deschamps. The finished product—a blend of essay, memoir, and linguistic observation—brought Desloges renown as possibly the first deaf person to publish a book (Fischer 391). In *Observations*, Desloges writes briefly of his childhood in Le Grand-Pressigny (located in the Loire Valley) and narrates how a case of the smallpox caused him to lose his hearing and teeth at age 7. As a consequence, he became nonverbal. Up until the illness, Desloges had received some formal education and possessed a little knowledge of reading and writing in French. After his illness, his formal education came to a halt, though he continued to teach himself how to read and write. At age 21, Desloges moved to Paris where he became a bookbinder and furniture upholsterer. Eventually he would meet an Italian servant who would teach him the sign language in use among the deaf of Paris, indicating that the roots of modern French Sign Language are not in L'Epée's methodical signs, but in the sign language used in Paris's deaf community. Desloges's essay is unique for various other reasons. Along with his assertion of sign language as natural purveyor of sentiment, Desloges discusses how resonance enables deaf people to experience sound. For Desloges, signing and resonance are evidence of the elevated feeling that deaf people are capable of feeling all on their own, without help from the hearing.

Throughout *Observations*, Desloges argues that sign language is a complex language with rules that evolve over time as deaf people come into contact with one another.⁵ He distinguishes between what linguists now call "home sign," or signs invented and mediated by isolated deaf people and their hearing loved ones, and the systematic sign language he learned from his deaf friend in Paris:

At the beginning of my infirmity, and for as long as I was living apart from other deaf people, my only resource for self-expression was writing or my poor pronunciation. I was for a long time unaware of sign language. I used only scattered, isolated, and unconnected signs. I did not know the art of combining them to form distinct pictures with which one can represent various ideas, transmit them to one's peers, and converse in logical discourse. (32)

Desloges offers insight into how the "scattered, isolated, and unconnected signs" of his youth differ from the sign language he would learn in Paris, which conveys both "pictures" and "ideas." From capturing the material world to portraying abstract ideas, this Parisian sign language facilitates "logical discourse" among its fluent users. Desloges indicates that "when a deaf person encounters other deaf people more highly educated than he, as I myself have experienced, he learns to combine and improve his signs, which had hitherto been unordered and unconnected" (36). Sign language, as Desloges affirms, is a mediated system that promotes the attainment of literacy and self-improvement on an individual level, while serving as the foundation of community on a social one. By equating sign

language with spoken languages such as French and German, Desloges asserts the rational makeup of systematized forms of nonverbal communication, a bold challenge to the thinking of Deschamps and others who regarded sign language as mere pantomime.

Further, Desloges's account reveals that sign language is bound up with the cosmopolitanism of the time. Desloges writes: "No event—in Paris, in France, or in the four corners of the world—lies outside the scope of our discussion. We express ourselves on all subjects with as much order, precision, and rapidity as if we enjoyed the faculty of speech and hearing" (36). The "order, precision, and rapidity" of sign reflects the cultural adeptness of its users, who observe the world around them, reflect upon what they observe, and then discuss their thoughts with peers. Their cosmopolitanism is facilitated by the nature of hearing impairment itself: "The privation of hearing makes us more attentive in general" (37). Desloges shows pride in his deafness by recognizing the distinct advantages that "the privation of hearing" brings about in himself and his peers.

To further strengthen his argument about deaf linguistic sophistication, Desloges invokes the cultural capital of sentiment. He writes of sign language: "This language is lively; it portrays sentiment, and develops the imagination. No other language is more appropriate for conveying great and strong emotions" (37). Sign language is not, as one contemporaneous English philosopher argued, a manifestation of humanity in its uncivilized state, nor is it merely *adequate* for transmitting ideas; rather, it is the singular, most suitable language for enabling one to "develop the imagination" and to share ideas through affective expressiveness.⁶ Sign language is therefore the most capable conduit for cultivating refined sentiment, and for displaying the cultural markers of sensibility. Such powerful lines as these from Desloges confirm that *Observations* is no mere defense of sign language, but rather, an argument for its superiority over spoken language. Through their refined use of sign language—the most ready developer of the imagination and best purveyor of sentiment—Desloges and his deaf companions feel and exhibit sentiment.

Another facet of deaf peoples' sentimental subjectivity for Desloges inheres in feeling of the haptic, physical sort. Desloges attacks Deschamps's argument that signing was of no use in the dark: "Put me in a dark room with a deaf friend, and I will tell him with signs to run some errand, in Paris or in the outskirts; I will inform him about any event you like and I will need no more signs than I use in daylight" (39). Desloges here explains what is now called *tactile signing*, which he claims "is as rapid as the wind":

When I am in darkness and wish to speak to a deaf person, I take his hands and with them form the signs that I would be making with my own hands if I were in daylight. When he wishes to answer me, he in turn takes my hands and forms them into the signs he would be making with his own if we could see clearly. (39)

Desloges conveys the usefulness of tactile, hand-over-hand signing for deaf people, which was especially pertinent, one imagines, in a time before electricity, on long winter nights or for deafblind people. As Desloges shows here, he and his interlocutor can feel their way through darkened conversations in an intimate manner. Desloges's depiction of tactile signing once again reveals the multisensory dimensions of deaf communication, in which a capacious model of sensory perception allows for improvisation and intimacy. Sentiment can be transmitted and received through touch, regardless of the light available or the degree of sightedness one might possess.

Beyond tactile signing, the sense of touch allows Desloges to experience sound. In response to the questions he often gets from hearing people about whether he has "some idea of sounds," he writes that he is able to distinguish between violins and flutes through what he calls "the simple disturbance" ("*une simple commotion*"): "When I put my hand to a violin or flute being played, I can hear some distinct sound, even with my eyes closed. I can easily distinguish the sound of a violin from that of a flute, but without my hand on an instrument I can make out absolutely nothing." Much like the figure in Bulwer's frontispiece illustration, Desloges can discern music through vibration and touch, even in the absence of sight. Desloges relates how the same principles of bone conduction and resonance apply to speech sounds:

I cannot hear a speaker unless I have my hand on his throat or the back of his neck. With my eyes closed I can still hear him talking into an empty cardboard box in my hands [...] I have even tried to see whether I could manage to form a fairly distinct idea of the various articulations of my acquaintances which would enable me, by putting my hand on their throats and the back of their necks, to recognize them in the dark. I was unsuccessful in doing this but it still seems to me possible. Furthermore, the different ideas I have of sounds are the same as those of my deaf comrades, some of whom hear much better than I. (31–32)

Desloges notes here that he is able to hear speech sounds through proximity and the vocal vibrations that move through his hand. His experimental curiosity in the realm of sound is evident in his use of an empty cardboard box, which he holds in his other hand to reflect the speaker's vibrations. Even though he is not able to discern individual words from the speaker with this DIY hearing aid, Desloges confirms that he and his companions all share the same tactile orientation toward resonance. Rée considers Desloges an example of how "the perception of sound is hardly distinguishable from touch" but perhaps what he leaves out is that many of his examples involve objects (36). In *Observations*, a vibrant model of deaf resonance emerges, involving the queer phenomenology of multiple subjects and proximate objects (cardboard box, musical instruments). In Desloges's manifestation of deaf resonance, the sensory organs work together with objects to ascertain meaning and exhibit feeling, which in turn enables deaf people to access sentiment. In this way, deaf resonance becomes a multimodal, multisensory experience that yields the feeling necessary for public, intellectual life.

Charles Shirreff's Deaf Gaze

Whereas Pierre Desloges registers the multisensory dynamics of resonant sentiment, Charles Shirreff affirms the consequence of gesture and visuality for the elevated feelings of deaf resonance.

Born to a wealthy wine merchant, Shirreff became profoundly deaf at age 3. Without access to specialized instruction, he didn't learn spoken English as a child. In 1760, when he was age 11, Shirreff was enrolled by his father at Thomas Braidwood's academy in Edinburgh, populated until then by hearing students. As the news of Braidwood's success with Shirreff spread, more deaf students arrived, and Braidwood's academy soon became the first school in Britain to be dedicated to deaf education. By 1767, Shirreff had departed from the school, having shown aptitude in a variety of subjects. Shirreff would subsequently enroll in the Academy for Royal Arts during its first year of existence in 1768, and eventually find success as a painter of miniatures. He moved to Madras and Calcutta for eleven years at the turn of the nineteenth century to further his career (Jeffares).

Painting was not the only medium through which Shirreff expressed his artistic sensibilities. He also wrote a poem that praises David Garrick's moving stage performance of Shakespeare at Drury Lane, the theater that Garrick managed and in which he acted. Garrick was the leading actor of his day, known especially for his ability to convince audiences of a spontaneity of thought and gesture. Shirreff's "On Seeing Garrick Act" revels in Garrick's masterful performance, focusing especially on his body's fluid movements and facial cues:

When Britain's Roscius on the stage appears
Who charms all eyes, & (I am told) all ears
With ease the various passions I can trace
Clearly reflected from his wond'rous face
While true conception with just action join'd
Strongly impress each image on my mind.
What need of sounds, when plainly I descry
Th' expressive features & and the speaking eye
That eye whose bright and penetrating ray
Doth Shakespeare's meaning to my soul convey.
Best commentator on great Shakespeare's text
When Garrick acts no passage is perplex.

With Shirreff as spectator and primary consciousness of the poem, readers are granted extraordinary insight into the keen attentiveness of the deaf gaze. Shirreff focuses on the striking visuality of Garrick's stage presence, fixating on his eyes and facial expressions. Shirreff's perception of Garrick underscores sighted deaf peoples' adroitness at visual processing, particularly with regards to "spatial cognition, facial recognition, peripheral processing, and speed in detecting images" (Bauman and Murray xxiv–xxv). Shirreff is at an auditory advantage, too: given that the eighteenth-century theater was a noisy place, he is not distracted by audience chatter.

In terms of its formal elements, the poem is written in iambic pentameter, in rhyming couplets and with little metrical variation, making it highly conventional for the period. However, other aspects of this poem are unique. The concluding couplet, for example ("Best commentator on great Shakespeare's text / When Garrick acts no passage is perplex") imbues "passage" with double meaning, referring both to the passages of Shakespeare's texts that Shirreff has learned to read at Braidwood's academy, and to his own ear passages, which are in no way confounded by the lack of speech sounds due to Garrick's telling visual movements. The trochees which begin lines four and six, "clearly" and "strongly," leave little doubt about the speaker's ability to correctly interpret Garrick's gestural performance. As these trochees disrupt the otherwise fluid iambic rhythm of the poem, the reader pauses to contemplate the clarity of Garrick's message through the speaker's resolute reading of his embodied signs.

Shirreff's poem reveals how gesture and facial expression are central for deaf communication and meaning-making while relegating vocal speech to the margins, as in the query "what need of sounds?" In lieu of speech, Garrick's eye delivers a "bright and penetrating ray" that moves as vibrational force to Shirreff's receptive soul "with ease." Here, nonverbal expression is more than enough to sustain a cultivated, sentimental self, and Garrick's resonant performance finds its way into Shirreff's soul through visual emissions that penetrate, vibrate, and transform. Deaf resonance radiates from Garrick

to Shirreff, as the former's movements become perfectly legible to the latter through his perceptive, adoring attention.

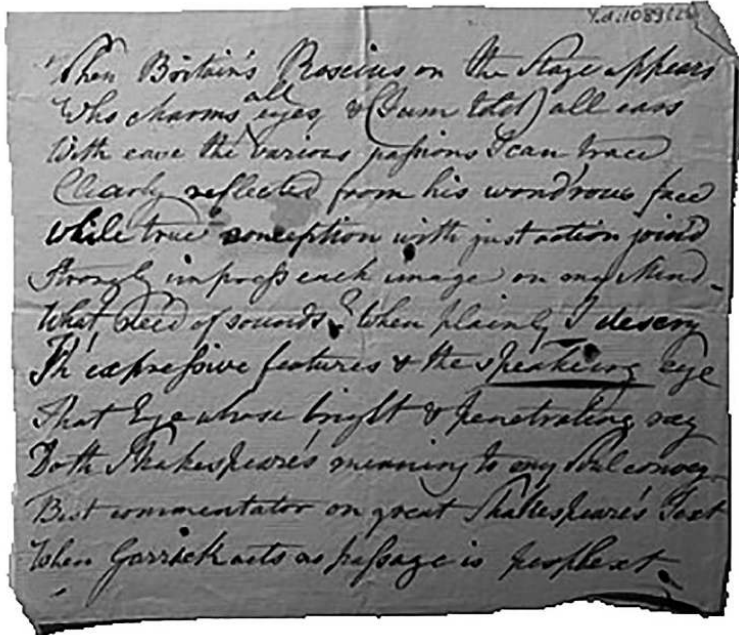


Figure 5. Handwritten copy of Charles Shirreff's poem, "On Seeing Garrick Act." Each line is written in cursive script. Image courtesy of The Folger Library.

Garrick's performance "strongly impresses" images upon Shirreff's mind, but Shirreff is far from passive recipient in the exchange; instead, he holds the requisite feeling to take in Garrick's performance through fibers and nerves that undulate with vibration and deliver meaning to the sense organ that matters most: the soul. Shirreff reflects his sensibility outward by way of his own radiant body, which would display understanding and emotion to his neighbors in the theater. In a material sense, Shirreff's sensibility is confirmed by the poem itself, which is profoundly immersed in a poetics of sentiment that becomes public once shared.

On this note, the poem's circulation is remarkable. A mutual friend, Caleb Whitefoord, arranged for Shirreff to meet with Garrick and give him his poem. Garrick cherished it for its flattering portrayals of a gestural virtuosity so electric that speech becomes superfluous. The poem was eventually published in *The Gentleman's Magazine* and, later, in a treatise about deaf education written by Francis Green in 1783 meant to affirm Braidwood's students' ability to learn and become cultured. The Folger Library holds perhaps the original copy of that poem, a handwritten version of which was included in some of Garrick's papers that they acquired in 2009.⁷

Conclusion

We have observed the contours of deaf resonance in a variety of forms and cultural contexts. Chella Man's recent poem, "The Beauty of Being Deaf," conveys how vibration is a multisensory experience that becomes a catalyst for community formation. On a personal note, my husband's vibrating vocal transmissions move through my bodymind, bringing pleasure, intimacy, and understanding. Deaf resonance appears when we look to the past as well. The illustrated frontispiece to Bulwer's

1648 *Philocophus* imbues deaf listening with the queer phenomenology of "Dentall Audition." In the later eighteenth century, Desloges affirms the multisensory, multimodal sentiments of sign language and sound in Paris. Finally, in Shirreff's 1772 poem, visual rays emanate from Garrick to Shirreff at Drury Lane, creating a deaf, sentimental poetics. In these eighteenth-century cases of deaf resonance, nerves and fibers transmit energy from one feeling, intuiting being to another, sometimes through objects, sometimes through flesh, and sometimes through visionary projection. Deaf resonance manifests uniquely in each example in this article and is informed by a variety of cultural factors. The eighteenth-century texts by Desloges and Shirreff, for example, radiate cultural literacy through the exhibition of moral feeling. Interlocutors become edified through a sentimental resonance that unites them, offering insight into the creative, resourceful self-fashioning that these authors used to navigate audist society in the early days of deaf education. More generally, in contemplating the presence of deafness in a longer cultural history of resonance, we begin to grasp the vital role that deafness has played in constituting aural modernity, with the auditory becoming a multisensory experience.

A concept grounded in lived experience and literary representation, deaf resonance probes the audism of reason and interrogates what Felicity Nussbaum has called "the limits of the human" (3). Deaf resonance affirms that vibration is rife with expressive possibilities, opening the door to nonverbal communication while critiquing the common, exclusionary notion that vocal speech is a prerequisite for agency and freedom. Deaf resonance thus offers a critique of those alienating structures of Enlightenment thought that conceive of rationality as the domain of the vocal speech of hearing people, structures which continue in our present day in varying guises.⁸ However, when we attend to resonance as a deaf domain, we countenance deaf people experiencing the exquisite pleasures of feeling and connection. These models offer a radical challenge to misplaced assumptions about sound, language, and sociability.

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Footnotes

1. I use "deaf" to describe people with hearing impairments in the past and present and "Deaf" to describe people in the present who share a signed language and culture. I often use "deaf" to encompass both sets of people.
2. See, for instance, Padden and Humphries, *Deaf in America: Voices from a Culture*; Mills, "Hearing Aids and the History of the Electronics Miniaturization"; Sanchez, "Deafness and Sound"; Viridi, *Hearing Happiness: Deafness Cures in History*; Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Production*; Straus, *Extraordinary Measures: Disability in Music*; Davidson, *Distressing Language: Disability and the Poetics of Error*; and Friedner and Helmreich, "Sound Studies Meets Deaf Studies."
3. There are several examples of deaf people playing or listening to stringed instruments from around this time. Another example involves Duncan Campbell, a deaf soothsayer: "he could distinguish Sounds, as was evident by putting the Neck of the Violin between his Teeth, and holding it there till he screwed the Pegs to what Pitch he thought fit" (Anon., *The Friendly Daemon or the Generous Apparition*, 233–34).
4. These are Eidsheim's words, adopted from Aldo Leopold, the ecologist and conservationist.
5. The following citations from Desloges are from an English translation found in Harland Lane's *The Deaf Experience*.
6. The philosopher noted above is James Burnett, Lord Monboddo, who demonstrates this line of thinking: "But what puts the matter out of all doubt, in my apprehension, is the case of deaf persons among us [...] that they are precisely in the condition, in which we suppose men to have been in the natural state: for, like them, they have the organs of pronunciation, and, like them, too, they have inarticulate cries, by which they express their wants and desires" (190).
7. Given that the poem is handwritten and was part of Garrick's papers, it very well could be the original. The Folger purchased the collection that held Shirreff's poem in 2009 from a rare book dealer; the papers were owned by the descendants of Thomas Rackett, who was Eva Maria Veigel's executor (Veigel was married to Garrick).
8. Chris Gabbard's memoir, *A Life Beyond Reason* (2019), makes clear the impact of the ableism of Enlightenment philosophy on the present day. Gabbard meditates on how Enlightenment philosophy's afterlives impacted the life of his intellectually disabled, nonverbal son, August, with whom he found ways to communicate beyond verbal language.