

Echoes in the Body

Understanding Deaf Embodiment

NOORA KARJALAINEN



Growth (2021)
Photo: Heidi Koivisto Robertson

ABSTRACT

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<p>ABSTRACT</p> <p>In this thesis, I consider the corporeality of a deaf person in the context of theatre pedagogy. I approach the subject through the framework of embodied learning and holistic conception of human beings, looking for answers to questions such as how deaf bodies are in this world, and how deaf bodies think. With these questions, I seek to find new practices in my own artistic and pedagogical practice that I can use to develop deaf-based learning environments and performative spaces. These pedagogical and performative spaces are not based on the laws of the theatrical tradition of the hearing people, such as sound and speech, but seek to free the deaf from a constant cycle of adaptation and reasonable adjustments towards self-determined corporeality, theatre, and aesthetics.</p> <p>My thesis work was divided into two parts: it includes an empirical data collection part and a written study part. In the practical part of the thesis, I conducted a total of four days of art pedagogical laboratory at the Theatre Academy and yoga studio Joogaholiaa, where we studied embodiment and corporeality with five other deaf signers. I approached the laboratory work in such a way that instead of asking precise questions, I let the work to proceed according to the interests of both the group and myself, and I observed what this laboratory brought to the surface. The research method thus became <i>echoes in the body</i>, in which my own position as an art pedagogue-researcher was determined through continuous cycle of presence, listening, and reflection. In the written part of the thesis, I present the findings made during the laboratory and reflect on the deaf embodiment in the light of my personal experiences and observations. I discuss, among other things, the embodied trauma experienced by the deaf, the contradictions between the deaf and the hearing lifeworlds that have occurred in different teaching situations, and aside of verbal or signed input what else can an instruction be.</p> <p>This thesis aims to participate in art pedagogical and norm-critical discussions about, among other things, the role of art pedagogy and the representation in performing arts. In support of my reflection, I use the central ideas of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy and bell hooks' engaged pedagogy. The aim of this thesis is not to produce or present generalizable information about the embodiment of the deaf, but its perspective is experiential and reflective.</p>			
ENTER KEYWORDS HERE Embodiment, corporeality, perception, theatre pedagogy, deafness, multisensory experience, multimodality, experiential knowledge, critical thinking, critical pedagogy			

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<i>Kirjallisen osion/tutkielman saa julkaista avoimessa tietoverkossa.</i> <i>Lupa on ajallisesti rajoittamaton.</i>	<i>Kyllä</i> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Ei</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Opinnäytteen tiivistelmän saa julkaista avoimessa tietoverkossa.</i> <i>Lupa on ajallisesti rajoittamaton.</i>	<i>Kyllä</i> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Ei</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
TIIVISTELMÄ <p>Tässä opinnäytetyössä pohdin kuuron ihmisen kehollisuutta teatteripedagogiikan kontekstissa. Lähestyn aihetta kehollisen oppimisen ja holistisen ihmiskäsityksen kautta etsimällä vastauksia muun muassa siihen miten kuurot kehot ovat tässä maailmassa ja miten kuurot kehot ajattelevat. Näiden kysymysten myötä pyrin löytämään omaan pedagogiseen ja taiteelliseen praktikkaani uusia käytäntöjä, joilla voin kehittää kuurolähtöisiä oppimisympäristöjä ja esityksellisiä tiloja. Nämä pedagogiset ja esitykselliset tilat eivät perustu kuulevien teatteriperinteen lainalaisuuksiin, kuten äänimaailmaan ja puheeseen, vaan ne pyrkivät vapauttamaan kuurot jatkuvasta sopeutumisen ja kohtuullisten mukautusten kehästä kohti omaehtoista kehollisuutta, teatteria ja estetiikkaa.</p> <p>Opinnäytetyöskentelyni jakautui kahteen osaan: siihen sisältyy empiirinen datankeruuosa ja kirjallinen tutkielmaosa. Opinnäytteeni käytännön osassa toteutin Teatterikorkeakoulussa ja Joogastudio Joogaholiassa yhteensä neljän päivän pituisen taidepedagogisen laboratorion, jossa tutkimme kehollisuuteen liittyviä kysymyksiä viiden muun viittomakielisen kuuron kanssa. Lähestyin laboratoriotyöskentelyä siten, että tarkan kysymyksenasettelun sijasta annoin työskentelylle tilaa edetä niin ryhmän kuin omankin kiinnostukseni mukaan ja seurasin mitä laboratoriotyöskentelymme teki näkyväksi. Tutkimusmenetelmäksi muodostui näin <i>kaikuja kehossa</i>, jossa oma taidepedagogi-tutkijan positioni määrittyi jatkuvan syklisen läsnäolon, kuuntelemisen ja refleктоimisen kautta. Opinnäytteeni kirjallisessa osassa esittelen laboratoriotyöskentelyn aikana tehtyjä löydöksiä ja pohdin kehollisuutta omakohtaisten kokemusteni ja havaintojeni valossa. Käsittelem muun muassa kuurojen kokemaa kehollista traumaa, erilaisissa opetustilanteissa ilmenneitä kuurojen ja kuulevien elämismaailmojen välisiä ristiriitoja, sekä sitä mitä muuta ohje voi olla kuin verbaalinen tai viitottu syöte.</p> <p>Tämä opinnäyte pyrkii osallistumaan taidepedagogisiin ja normikriittisiin keskusteluihin muun muassa taidepedagogiikan tehtävästä ja esittävän taiteen representaatiosta. Pohdintani tukena käytän Paulo Freiren kriittisen pedagogiikan ja bell hooksin osallistavan pedagogiikan keskeisiä ajatuksia. Opinnäytteen tavoitteena ei ole tuottaa tai esitellä yleistettävissä olevaa tietoa kuurojen kehollisuudesta, vaan sen näkökulma on kokemuksellinen ja reflektiivinen.</p>			
ASIASANAT Ruumiillisuus, teatteripedagogiikka, havaitseminen, kuurous, moniaistisuus, multimodaalisuus, kokemustieto, kriittinen ajattelu, kriittinen pedagogiikka			

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INTRODUCTION

As a theatre pedagogue my curiosity lies in the ways in which we, as deaf people, exist in the world and how we become aware of it. In performative contexts, how do we know what we know? Do we really exist on our own terms, or does the outside disturb our way of being? If that is the case, what kind of disruption is in question and how can we solve it?

Through my work over the last decade, I have come across the same aforementioned questions time and time again. Whether it was a mixed dance class with both hearing and deaf students, or an all-deaf improvisation session, the same questions arose. What is happening here? Something seemed off, and I was troubled as to why.

It came as no surprise that when I started my master's degree studies in the Theatre Academy of University of the Arts Helsinki in 2018, these questions became central to me in my studies. Not to mention that I, as a deaf student, am at the center of these questions as well.

As a natural continuation, the questions that have long preoccupied my mind are now also the cornerstones of my thesis. To keep it as simple as possible, this thesis is an art pedagogical study looking at a single four-day experimental laboratory with deaf participants. At the time, the research question was left intentionally open with my personal goal being asking questions, observing, look at what this empirical part would bring to the surface to reflect on that in a continuous cycle. This thesis calls the research method *echoes in the body*. As a result, a sheer amount of data was collected, which this thesis will present and dissect.

My main objectives for this thesis are to gain a better understanding of deaf embodiment and to put together new tools and practices for my future work both as a theatre pedagogue and as an artist. I will examine the themes that emerge in my work from the perspectives of embodied learning and critical pedagogy. As such, this thesis seeks to participate mainly in art pedagogical debates. I hope this thesis will inspire

other art pedagogues to not only try new practices but to challenge the ones we have been taught so far and to gain more conscious, responsible, and sustainable premises for inclusion.

However, one should keep in mind that this thesis is a case description of a personal journey, and thus does not aim to produce any generalized knowledge regarding deaf life experience and deaf embodiment. Rather, I would recommend you to approach this thesis as a story of growth, emergence, and finding a body. If you wish to reflect on your own work or on current phenomena in the field of performing arts and art pedagogy, you can also take a norm-critical approach.

This thesis has four sections. Section one presents the background to the research as well as the structural problems that led to it.

Section two presents practical experiences from my studies in the Theatre Academy that led me to find new ways to approach and understand my research question. In the fall of 2019, as a part of my studies, I participated in two courses relating to one another: *group as an artistic agent* and *artistic pedagogical event*. Both courses were part of Riku Saastamoinen's doctoral research that focused on performance-based pedagogy. These courses were a professional turning point for me. Through them, I developed a research method called *echoes in the body* which is the method I used to approach the empirical part of my thesis. The method and theoretical framework behind my work will be demonstrated in this section.

Section three focuses on the empirical part of the process; a four-day laboratory with deaf participants where I collected the data for this thesis. The laboratory was conducted in December of 2020 at the Theatre Academy and at a yoga studio called Joogaholiaa for four consecutive days. There were four to five deaf participants in the laboratory each day. All participants were between the ages of 20 and 40 and had previous theatre experience or experience in sign language arts. In the laboratory we had group discussions and tested different embodiment practices. This section also presents the data collected and its reflection. In collecting the data, I used various ways: I filmed discussions, drew body maps, took photos, and kept a teaching diary. Though the most

important and fruitful source of data was a roll of paper where the participants and I wrote visual notes during discussions and practices. As the amount of data was so vast, I have only included the most relevant ones for this thesis.

Section four focuses on the positionality of a theatre pedagogue and the teacher's relationship with the group. In this section I will summarize my overall thoughts after the laboratory and reflect on the journey.

1. BACKGROUND

The idea for this thesis began developing in the fall of 2010. I had just started my bachelor's studies in performing arts in Turku University of Applied Sciences as the only deaf person in the class. When I got my letter of acceptance to the school, I was in Switzerland and my mother, like loving mothers sometimes do, was proudly spreading the word in local deaf clubs back at home. Her daughter was the first deaf student accepted to study a theatre degree in Finland and everybody had to know it.

I soon began to receive text messages from members of our deaf community congratulating me for this achievement and wishing me good luck on becoming "the new deaf Coppola" of Finland. I was told that I should study hard and take Finnish deaf theatre in a new direction, picking it up from dust. I should promote the role of deaf artists in our country and compel the hearing world to see us as their equals.

At first, I was thankful for such support and words of encouragement. But over time, these phrases and expectations began to pile up and weigh down on me. I began to worry if I was deaf enough to take on such responsibility. I was worried that I would fail and embarrass our deaf community, or worse, represent something that the deaf community would not endorse as their own. Being the first and only one began to feel like a huge burden to me. A large portion of the time, unrealistic expectations and pressures from the outside made me question my own experience. I was conscious of teaching situations where I could not "just fit in", paying attention to performative practices requiring me to adapt to the hearing way of being just to be able to join at all. This, at times, made me feel uncomfortable. Yet, I could not name these feelings and thoughts at the time. I had a sense of not belonging but I could not tell what to and why exactly. I did not know how to name my experiences, nor did I know how to explain these certain phenomena. That is to say, it felt like I was lacking an entire vocabulary for a myriad of moments feeling a sense of separation and exclusion.

I felt lonely. I couldn't share my experiences with anyone I knew, and I struggled to form ideas of what was *really* happening then and there. I did not have any peer support

as there was no one who would have had similar experiences, and really knew what it was like to be deaf on a hearing stage.

When I tried to explain my experience to my hearing classmates and teachers, I compared the situation to being behind a big glass: I could see them but there was always something invisible between us. I could not reach them, to actually be *with* them. I did not think I had direct access to my experiences and this was not only because I had to communicate with the others via sign language interpreters. There was this “something” in between, something unknown.

Although I could not name my experiences at the time, I still had a budding idea that my experiences were related to the reality I lived and breathed. A reality of the deaf that is separate from the reality of the hearing. I also realized that my experiences had to be somehow related to corporeality, but the depth and importance of this bodily meaning only dawned on me years later.

After graduation, I moved to Helsinki and founded Ursa Minor with two deaf cultural producers. We began working with various arts institutions, performing arts groups, and theaters to bring about inclusion and to integrate sign language art with different activities of those parties. Our goal was to make the field of performing arts in Finland accessible and inclusive for deaf artists and audiences, and to bring deaf and sign language representation to the field. Very soon, however, we noticed that the general attitude in the field was, in fact, quite different from what we had expected.

Views varied from side to side. Part of the field was positive and open to diversity and inclusion though there were also those who were willing to work only within certain adjustments, rather than focusing on inclusion, diversity and social equality. Many were willing to do “the bare minimum” by making their performances accessible by reasonable adjustments, like providing sign language interpretation or captions on mobile applications but this in itself is neither an artistic nor an inclusive act. There was no clear understanding of the distinction between integration and inclusion, and of what these concepts actually mean in the context of performing arts. (Karjalainen 2020)

Through my work I have witnessed situations up close where the skills and abilities of deaf performers have been downplayed, underestimated, and discriminated against. There is great variation between the experiences of the deaf performers: some have struggled with loneliness and minority stress while others have reported experiences of bullying, rejection and audism.

The problem with all these comments and acts of segregation and exclusion are that they emphasize the superiority of the hearing over the deaf – in other words, audism. Audism refers to the discrimination against the deaf and hard of hearing. Audism can be encountered in all levels of the society: it is institutionalized, structural, interpersonal, and internalized. It often begins in the labour ward with the first hearing tests and follows the deaf and the hard of hearing throughout life, in all aspects of life.

The reasons for inappropriate or discriminatory practices may be, among other things, general misconceptions and prejudices, and lack of knowledge and understanding of sign language, deafness and deaf history. As I have stated elsewhere, for one, Finnish theatrical tradition does not yet recognize nor does it acknowledge the diversity of human realities and the various dimensions to which the reality of the deaf performer belongs to. Secondly, in performative processes sign language and the deaf body have been sought to be faded, hidden, altered, or forcibly fused to conform to audible norms. And last and perhaps most importantly, there are no concrete actions or practices known or used that focus specifically on artistic quality and aesthetics. This shortcoming stems from the fact that the deaf still do not have an equal access to education in theatre today, nor does the funding of arts support long-term professional work in the field enough. (Karjalainen 2020, Salonlahti 2019)

During the scandal the Finnish National Theatre faced in 2020 when they cast a cisgender actor in the role of a transwoman, stand-up comedian Jamie McDonald commented it as such on their Facebook account:

“Theatre says it’s a game where we reflect life back on ourselves, and anyone can play. But this is not true. It is a game where people with

“normal” bodies are allowed to play with all life, and anyone with a marked body can play with some of it.”

(McDonald 2020)

The theatre as well as performing arts in general should represent society as diverse and intersectional. It would fundamentally be amiss for the theatre not to recognize the diversity of its actors and audience and to maintain harmful and unequal structures in this day and age. In this digital era, where social media activism and awareness of social justice are increasing, it is clear that performing arts has to change significantly.

Audiences, artists and allies of today are all expecting transparency, inclusion, and social responsibility not only from theatres and arts institutions but from artists too.

It is not inconsequential who can play who, and whose stories are being set on stage. Theatre as a form of art is the art of humanity in the world. It opens doors to realms we never realized existed. It takes us into the lives of others showcasing to us that our own lived realities are not the only ones out there. Theatre can show us how our lived experience can transform our perception of the world, and the bodies we embody our experiences and carry a full depth of meanings. In essence, it is a question of bodies in performative spaces: bodies that carry meaning and represent certain beings. The theatre must change significantly throughout, starting with the fact that everyone has the right to study theatre and to work on stage. Just like McDonald aptly describes the importance of casting:

“Would you have cast a person without dwarfism to play Tyrion Lannister? Do you remember the moment when his father says he’s not on trial for being a dwarf, and Tyrion replies “I’ve been on trial for that my entire life” – and there is a moment of collapse between the character and the actor? That is the depth that cannot be brought to the role by someone with an unmarked body.”

(McDonald 2020)

Why would it be important to be a body instead of just playing one, you might ask. Is it not the work of acting constructed around the idea of being somebody else? The

question is not about whether someone is capable of acting to be someone else. It is a much more complex question, that is, of which realities does theatre recognise and admit in its performative and institutionalized space. It is a question of power and dominance, a question entangled in social standards and structures, hundreds of years of oppression, violence and eugenics. So far Finnish theatre has been a blind spot for such difficult questions. Freedom of art has been a sacred concept within performing arts and that is reasonable too. There is no art without freedom. It is just that the art is not free for everybody, least to those it aims to portray, that is the problem. We are not free until everybody is free.

As I have presented above, in the arts, especially in performing arts, the need for critical re-examination and reframing of performative and artistic praxis is urgent, timely and necessary.

Though does audism delineate all the phenomena I have mentioned above? Audism is undeniably a major part of the problem but the root behind these phenomena seems to be much more complex and layered. The practice of theatre is fundamentally built on the laws of the auditory realm. These laws come to the fore in theatre pedagogy, for example, in the way the practices of theatre and drama are usually based on sounds; the dominant language of the stage is speech, and in manuscripts the reality of the play is woven into sound effects, music and auditory cues.

This has led me to wonder how I, as a theatre pedagogue and a deaf sign language user, can create a performative space where deaf performers can be present the way they are. How can I create a space where we can decode the hearing standard and build new ownership of this performative space, give birth to a new artistic and performative praxis, which emerges from a deaf way of being?

2. ECHOES IN THE BODY

In the fall of 2019, as a part of my master's degree studies in theatre pedagogy, I participated in two courses relating to one another: *group as an artistic agent* and *artistic pedagogical event*. These courses offered three different groups, each exploring an art pedagogical theme. I chose a group that focused on performance-based pedagogy and was part of Riku Saastamoinen's doctoral research *Performance based pedagogy - starting points, practices, discipline*. This course eventually served as a catalyst for the central questions in my thesis.

To start Riku gave us key themes and ways of working that we would be focusing on: practices of the self (i.e. meditation, concentration, self-awareness and anti-stress dimension), theory (Ranciere, Foucault, Fisher-Lichte, Biesta, Cage, to name but a few), open performance-based group practices (doing, observing, documenting, reflecting) and leisure (resting, doing nothing, eating, partying). We would be taking a critical and reflective look at the issues arising in the group, given that the starting point for this artistic pedagogical work was something that we did not yet know. We would be observing and detecting rigid power structures and status hierarchies that might emerge, and by learning this ability of detection we would get the opportunity to create events. Events, that in this context would mean “questioning something we find self-evident by means of performing arts”. (Saastamoinen 2019)

Before the course started, I had a conversation with myself. As this work was eventually leading to a performative event, I felt it was important to make it clear to myself what kind of position I would actively be taking as a member of the group. What I mean by this is making a conscious choice about how much of my own resources would I use to see the effort to be an equal member of the group, and how this would happen in practice.

I concluded that I had already been studying with the same group for over a year at that time. The group was safe for me, and the multilingual group was already open, caring,

and inclusive. This time I did not feel anxious or nervous about working with a hearing group in advance.

I had a group of three sign language interpreters at my disposal so interpretation was largely maintained and continuous during the course, and I trusted the interpreters seamlessly. The content of the work also seemed gracious to me. The anti-stress dimension interested me as I immediately considered how I could reduce the pressure associated with performative work and working with a hearing group in my case.

I ended up with a solution where I decided to relinquish responsibility for my own participation. I wanted to break a certain kind of tension that is often strongly present when working with hearing people. This includes, for example, the automated need to turn towards interpreters, to be on standby at all times to receive new instructions, to keep glancing around and to be reassured of situations. *Did I understand the instruction correctly? Is the task still running? What sounds or speech do hearing people produce in this situation? Should I react or pretend to react to these sounds or speech somehow? Do I need to be aware of them? Will I be noticed or am I a useless extra on stage? What if I misunderstand, or if hearing people misunderstand me?*

In these situations, I often feel as if I was anchored to many buoys. My body is aware of the locations of interpreters, teachers, and other people. My body is oriented towards these subjects. There are dead spots around my body that are left between the buoys. My body tries to get to these spots but the buoys pull me back towards themselves. I feel limited in my body, and I do not have the space to not think and drift freely in space. The decision to relinquish responsibility for my own participation was therefore a decision for me to break away from these buoys and rely on water. I surrendered to my deaf body. During the practices I consciously disconnected from the interpreters and thereby kind of forced my own bodily reality into the common reality of the group.

At first, I was worried about whether my choice would be selfish. I did not want to be a nuisance to the group, and on the other hand, I did not want to cause myself a situation where the actual research question of working would be overshadowed by my own pain. I thought this pain was separate from the group process and private to me.

As the work progressed, I soon noticed that my worries turned out to be futile. We worked in a black box with a small rising auditorium built on one side, and a row of benches built on two sides next to the auditorium. In the middle was an empty stage where the actual work took place. The practices used during the work were very simple and permissive. They did not force any performative action but the focus was on presence and listening. Listening in this context meant observing and reflecting on space, action, and emergence.

At the heart of the course was a basic practice in performance-based pedagogy developed by Riku, which consisted of five functional phases. What connected these phases was observation of the space from the auditorium.

In the first phase, we sat in silence around the empty space and observed the space. The second phase was also done in silence. In addition to observation, it allowed to follow one's impulse and enter the space by choosing a place and position. One was allowed to change the position and place, and at any time one was allowed to return to the auditorium. In the third phase, sound and music joined as part of the event. In addition to observing and being mentioned above, one was now also allowed to move and act according to one's impulses. In the fourth phase, in addition to all the above, one was allowed to offer one's own impulse to someone else sitting in the auditorium. The person was allowed to decide whether to accept the proposal or not. Sound and music were part of this phase as well. In the fifth and final phase, we returned to the auditorium and sat around the empty space in silence.

Riku took the habit of giving us time to write at the end of each practice session. We were given six minutes to write about our flow of thought, and we were encouraged to write about either the thoughts that the practice brought up, or something completely different. As I began to write this thesis, I returned to my diary and observations from that time. Next, I will highlight my main experiences and reflections from the process. I will also present the theoretical framework of my own thesis.

2.1. New Embodied Modalities Emerge

There were two visiting teachers on the course. We had a guided meditation class two mornings a week led by Gabriele Gorla, and Gesa Piper visited us occasionally for body awareness and presence practices. Because the structure and method of these practices differed from the basic practices, I was prepared to have to be flexible and struggle with receiving instructions from them. I had to go back to a situation where I would get indirect instructions through sign language interpretation and where my body would have to return to some extent to the buoys I have described earlier.

In meditation and presence practices, it is often central to guide participants throughout the practice. The class instructor is present and involved in the situation. They listen to the group and enter new instructions verbally throughout the session, making it easier for participants to follow the practice, to return their attention to it, and to refocus their attention according to the instructions. In theatre, performative practices often follow the same pattern of instruction: for example, in the middle of a practice, a teacher can give an instruction that changes an activity, provides new information, directs to a different quality of activity, or even surprises participants in some unexpected way.

It is natural for the hearing participants to receive instructions from outside the activity in an auditory way. It does not usually require them to interrupt or leave the practice, but they can either welcome the instruction or reject it during the practice without shifting their focus away from the practice itself. The situation is different when the participant is deaf. I must look for an interpreter with my gaze, turn towards and shift my gaze to interpretation. Sometimes this breakout is violent. I cannot follow my own impulses, but my body reluctantly twists towards the instruction. In a way, my body resists turning towards the instruction, while breaking out of ongoing action for a moment.

With Gesa we did walking practices where we moved in an empty space. Gesa gave us instructions that prompted us to observe, for example, some particular bodily knowledge or perception. At times, the instructions would give new qualities of movement or images that affected our movements and bodily acts.

I have often solved similar walking practices by agreeing with sign language interpreters that they would stand in the space on two opposite sides. The interpreters would move around depending on how I work with my body in the space. They would follow the direction of my face and thus be ready to interpret directly in my natural field of vision if necessary. This way I would get to focus on my own physical work. So when I would see an interpreter raise their hand to sign, I would be able to quickly detect this visual movement and look at the interpretation. Sometimes we have also used a solution where the interpreters are involved in the activity in question, e.g. walking around the space as part of the group in my field of vision.

Neither solution is ideal but they have to suffice as there is no better alternative. In both situations, however, I am well aware of the presence and location of the interpreters. When the interpreters are on opposite sides of the space, I can feel the space around me changing, polarizing, and the opposing sides start to attract me. The movements I produce become flat, two-dimensional. I notice other people's bodies and movements around me but my body is not connected to other bodies. It is as if the camera lens is focused on the interpreters and the rest of the world around me is blurred. A similar phenomenon occurs when the interpreter is involved in the exercise as well and walks ahead of me. No matter how I try to move on my own terms, the same tenacious character I am always aware of is constantly running in front of me. There is something distinct about the atmosphere. Not only is the situation limited by the exercise itself but also by the tension between me and the interpreter.

I had previously been in classes taught by Gesa through other courses, so for Gesa, this struggle with my body was already a familiar theme. We had discussed it together before. As a dance teacher, Gesa was sensitive to listening to my body at a level I was not yet able to reach myself. So as we started the walking and presence practices, Gesa came next to me and told me the instructions with her body. She used very simple movements and gestures, keeping an open contact with me, while speaking to participants who heard instructions. Suddenly, the interpreters standing on the sides of the space seemed to dissolve out of the picture completely. Now I was able to listen to the instructions given by Gesa through my own body.

Another interesting note that came up during the course was how I tried to adapt to guided meditation sessions. Even though we were in a black box, there was often a lot of visual noise present in the room. During the course, we had coated the stage with white paper, which we had filled with drawings and writings during the basic practices led by Riku. There was also a lot of stuff in the space: backpacks, jackets, shoes, wool socks, pens, benches, sound and light tables and so on. During the meditation sessions, hearing people often kept their eyes closed but I myself had to keep my eyes open so I could look at the interpreters who were signing the instructions given by Gabriel to me. Because I had to keep my eyes open, I could not filter the tidal wave of visual information that flooded toward me.

I tried to change places from time to time. I would sit with my face toward the black wall with the interpreter sitting on the edge of my field of vision. At times I laid on the ground on my back, with the interpreter standing next to me and signing from above. I tried to focus my eyes on the space closer to myself, so that the interpreter standing or sitting farther away would turn out blurry. Yet my thoughts would sometimes stray. I watched the interpreter's earrings or the texture of their shirt. When our gazes met, I automatically smiled or otherwise reacted to the gaze. I tried to restore myself to a meditative state, close my eyes, and focus on breathing and the small area between my upper lip and nose as instructed. When my eyes were closed, I was worried. What if there are new instructions coming now and I do not see them? Would I be left behind and would the whole meditation be ruined for me? I tried to crack my eyes open just a little bit, so little that only a glimpse of the signs would slip through my eyelids.

My frustration with my own failure in meditation was unintentionally passed on to the teachers. Gesa suggested that she could come sit next to me, so that she could touch my thighs whenever we got new instructions. This way, I could keep my eyes closed and trust that I would be informed of the instructions accordingly. The presence of Gesa in a meditation situation significantly changed my concentration. I was no longer in constant standby or worrying about my own participation. When I felt a soft touch on my thigh, I would just open my eyes to see the interpreters ahead sign the next instructions to me. Over time, the number of instructions began to decrease. We repeated the same

meditation routine several mornings in a row. In the end, I did not need to concentrate on following the instructions so intensely, a quick look at what phase I was supposed to follow next was enough.

I finally started to get into meditation and the themes of the course, listening and observing. I began to pay attention to other details and remarks that somehow resonated with my body. For example, a Tibetan bowl was brought to the basic practice, and the sound of its bang marked the beginning and end of a phase in the practice. The bowl was placed on the ground, and as it vibrated through the floor to my body, I was informed of the transition of a phase. I also started to connect a change in lighting to a change in mood, tension, or soundscape. I was aware of the bodies of my classmates and learned to read their intentions behind their movements and stillness.

2.2. To Rely on Water

When the course was halfway through, changes were made to the stage. Now a row of benches were brought to the fourth wall as well, so that the auditorium expanded to all four walls. This had an interesting effect on my body. Suddenly I had 360 degrees of space around me, and I finally got to say goodbye to the buoys. I was set free to rely on water.

It is natural for me to choose my seating space so that my back is towards the wall and there is nothing, such as doors or other people, behind me. For example, in the elevators of the Theatre Academy, I stand with my back against an empty wall, so that the elevator doors are on my sides and there is a mirror in front of me. At the dining table, I often choose the spot with the best view of the space. I make these choices automatically and often subconsciously. It is as if my body naturally finds a position where it can perceive as comprehensively as possible as well as avoid possible threats.

Deaf theatre exhibits similar methods of corporal positioning, determined by the direction of the audience's gaze. Visibility is integral in deaf theatre; signs and facial expressions ought to be discernible, and actors should principally be acting towards the

audience. It is as if there is an invisible rope between the actor and the spectator, as the actor's body opens toward the spectator. Behind the actor, there is a dead zone where nothing happens while the action is oriented forward.

As the audience was now sitting all around me, I no longer had a place to safely position myself as I entered the stage. My body was puzzled. It was as if I had returned to a primitive state where I had to utilize the knowledge of my body in a whole new way. As I could no longer be in total control of what I see, the importance of other sensorial channels and perception grew. I sensed through my skin and by my movements, my gaze focused on different things around me. I became present, part of the space, breathing with it, instead of observing the space from the outside or as a separate figure.

The experience was – against my expectations – liberating. I was in a situation where I could be nothing but deaf. I could only be present in the situation through the reality of my own body. By relinquishing responsibility for my own participation and thus also following the interpretation, I entered a state that was new, strange, and invigorating for me.

2.3. Being a Deaf Body

At this point, the reason for the struggle I had with my body was gradually dawning on me. In teaching situations, instructions are dominantly directed through speech. I began to realize that my body was actually using several different modalities at the same time. I received information by, among other things, looking, sensing, feeling, moving, and touching. These different modalities together made me aware of the current situation I was involved in and helped to form my understanding of it. Some of this understanding took place consciously and some unconsciously, as if my body had followed the instructions before I had even registered them on a conceptual level.

A similar phenomenon has been identified in the context of embodied learning. Dance artist and phenomenologist Maxine Sheets-Johnstone talks about *thinking in movement*:

“I am exploring the world in movement; that is, at the same time that I am moving, I am taking into account the world as it exists for me here and now in this ongoing, ever-expanding present. As one might wonder about the world in words, I am wondering the world directly, in movement. I am actively exploring its possibilities and what I perceive in the course of that exploration is enfolded in the very process of my moving.”
(Sheets-Johnstone 2009, 31)

Above, Sheets-Johnstone refers to an event where a dancer is thinking as they are moving. Thinking in itself is kinetic and spatial, and in this way, thinking and doing are inextricably intertwined. The body knows what it is doing without being bound to conceptual language or symbolic meanings. It experiences the world in the here and now, resonating with the present and the immediate world. (Sheets-Johnstone 2009, 30-35)

While the body thinks as it moves, it also perceives the world in constant movement. As the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas put it:

“Perception is not possible without the movements of the eyes, for example, and of the head, without hands and legs moving, without the whole body taking part in the act of ‘knowledge’, in which banal analysis sees nothing but a content of representation.”
(Levinas 1998, 163)

Perception is thus an embodied event in which the whole body is actively involved. Knowledge is thoroughly a bodily action traveling to and from the body. We are bodies that know, experience, think, and feel.

The significance of embodiment has only begun to unfold in recent decades in the field of cognitive science. Cognition is seen as a situated and embodied activity, and its “structures and processes emerge from recurrent sensorimotor patterns of perception and action”. (Thompson 2007, 13-14)

We can talk about a broad revolution in information theory, a corporeal turn, that seeks to correct misconceptions and misrepresentations of the body. (Sheets-Johnstone, 2009. 1-2) As a result of Cartesian dualism, the human ontology was divided into body and mind, which is why Western pedagogy has resulted in seeing learning as cognitive processes that take place in the brain of an individual. This view sees information as in a symbolic form outside the learner, and transferred as such to the learner's brain. The knowledge to be learned is already in the world and a skill is learned by imitating an external model. (Anttila 2022)

I began taking an interest in the opportunities created by embodied learning in shaping my own artistic and art pedagogical practice. Could exploring this corporeality open up some new perspectives and approaches to theatre pedagogy? Could understanding the embodiment of the deaf be a key factor in returning agency to us? Instead of using reasonable adjustments and applied methods in teaching, could working within the framework of embodied learning actually create a space where learning takes place in *a shared reality*?

2.4. The Night Without Interpreters

The two courses culminated in an artistic pedagogical event called *every something is an echo of nothing*, where we invited the audience to do the basic practice with us. We repeated the event several times that week. Everything changed when outsiders came into the space: new, unknown and unpredictable interactions entered the situation. For me this change in interaction meant that I was starting to lean back on my interpreters, just to make sure that I was on track in what was happening and what kind of speech and sound this new situation brought forward in basic practice.

One day I got a message from my interpreting services provider. I would not get interpreters for that night, even though there had been an extensive search for a while. I was nervous and started to feel tense. I did not see a way how I could join the event, without having a weight of uncertainty and insecurity in me. I texted our course's

WhatsApp group and let others know that I would not be joining that night because there were no interpreters available. Soon my phone's light flashed, and I read messages on my locked screen. The others assured me that they would take care of me and that someone from the group would always tell me what people were talking about during the night. I was still nervous but as I trusted the group, I decided to take the risk and join the event.

What happened that night completely changed my perception of inclusion. When the audience had come in and everyone was sitting still waiting for the basic practice to begin, I let my gaze wander around the space and observed the atmosphere. I noticed that Riku sat down and lifted the paper of instructions to his hands. As he started to read the instructions aloud to the audience, I shifted my gaze and stared into the emptiness of the space in the middle of us all, already waiting for the first phase. Suddenly something caught my attention. It was one of my classmates, who sat right in front of my field of vision, looked me in the eye intensely and silently articulated the instructions Riku recited. I was surprised. And although I did not get more than a word or two from this articulation, it gave me enough information about at what stage of the instructions Riku was at the moment. After Riku had finished reciting the instructions, I shifted my gaze again. Now another classmate sitting right in my field of vision signed me the sign that represented the bang of a meditation bowl. First phase of the basic practice was opened. I sat in silence, watched the empty space, and let it sink in what had just happened.

The further we got in the basic practice, the more surprised I was. There was always someone in our group, whoever happened to be in my natural field of vision at that given time, either signing me the bang of the meditation bowl or articulating Riku's instructions. If I was in the middle of the space participating in some activity at the time of the bang, someone always notified me by touching me or by signing to me from the auditorium. This was all so random that I did not even need to think about it. It is hard to describe the experience, but I had never felt as free and alive as a part of a hearing group before. At that very moment, I was not attached to anything. It was just me, completely deaf, completely acknowledged, and completely serene.

The atmosphere that night was magical. Someone from the audience had brought a tuba with them and brought it up. I sat on my chair, watched them play and felt the vibrations in my body. Stage lights changed in beautiful synchronization on the stage and in the middle of it, out of theatre fog, rose physical scenes created by our group and the audience together. My mind was touched and wistful at the same time. I sat on my chair for one more moment and let the surrounding events echo in my body.

2.5. Echoes in the Body

“The researcher’s search is at its best when it resembles blind groping in the dark, unaware of the research object or the research tools.”
(Varto 2018, 20)

I had ended up with something new. I couldn’t verbalize my experiences or thoughts. When I started my thesis plan, I had a hard time outlining the overall picture of my research subject and finding a specific research question to address. Even less was I aware of which research methods or tools I would stick to. Hence Varto’s description is apt. The beginning was indeed like groping in the dark, everything was out of reach and constantly changing shape.

I decided to stick to this groping and built my research approach around the concept of echo. *Every something is an echo of nothing* taught me to listen and observe my own body in a new way. When I receive a new perception, it continues its journey in my body, resonating in it over and over again. *Echoes in the body* is a research method where I, as a researcher, am the recipient. I listen to and observe my environment, from which the perceptions vibrate towards me and remain echoing in my body. Sometimes they echo for only a moment, sometimes the same echo may return after a long time, in a different situation and context, with different intensity and tension of the echo. I can look back at my perceptions over and over.

In Finnish sign language, the signs of ECHO, REFLECTION, ACOUSTICS, REPEAT and RETURN are very similar. They share the same handshape and orientation, but the location, movement, and non manual features vary slightly. The similarity of the signs creates connections between the meanings of the signs. In my mind, an echo appears as a thing that is repeatedly returned to the recipient through some source. However, the actual meaning of the word is a little different. Echo is a term used in physics and acoustics to mean the reflection of sound or electromagnetic radiation.

This echo is well embodied and illustrated in Lawrence Shapiro's definition of a loop between perception and action, in which "the contents of perception are determined (in part) by the actions an organism takes, and the actions an organism takes are guided by its perceptions of the world" (Shapiro according to Scarantino 2018, 10).

The research question in this thesis centers on the deaf body, as it can be viewed from many different perspectives depending on which discipline's frameworks, principles, and current research trends are applied. As this is an art pedagogical study, my thesis is built around a holistic conception of the human being, where the echo passes through human ontology and epistemology as whole.

Finnish philosopher Lauri Rauhala describes the construction of human ontology through three characteristics: corporeality, consciousness, and situationality. Being human involves an organic body that forms the life, the potentiality of conscious experience, and the life situation a human is entangled in. (Rauhala 2005, 32-34)

According to Rauhala, consciousness is the totality of the human experience, which encompasses those mental events, feelings, and perceptions that involve awareness. In other words, consciousness is all that we can become aware of. Meaning-making and knowing takes place as we become aware of different phenomena. When we understand the contents and meanings of our consciousness in relation to each other, we learn.

The structure of consciousness is twofold: it is divided into the conscious and the unconscious. *Conscious processes* are processes that we can become aware of and experience. They can either be unaware or aware. Processes are unaware when they

have not yet risen to our awareness. Then we are talking about pre-reflexive and pre-linguistic process that contains the potentiality of something being experienced. The processes we are aware of, on the other hand, are processes that have already risen to our awareness. They are reflexive, linguistic processes that we have consciously experienced. *Unconscious processes* are beyond the reach of our experience and consciousness. We cannot become aware of them. Such processes include, for example, many organic processes in the body, such as cell division. (Rauhala according to Anttila 2022)

By situationality, Rauhala refers to a person's entanglement with being in the world through one's own life situation. Rauhala's idea stems from existential philosophy: a person is thrown into the world and thus cannot always influence their own situation. This is a fatal situation in which a person, for example, cannot influence which family or country they are born in, or whether they are born deaf or hearing. However, some components of one's own situation can be chosen, and thus a person can influence and change their situation. For example, a person can choose to learn sign language, and they can choose whether to use hearing aids or not. However, these optional components cannot be used against a fatal situation. The deaf, for example, cannot choose to become hearing. According to Rauhala, human situationality has two types of components: concrete and ideal. Concrete components include the structures formed by society and culture, the forms of human interaction, and the physical world. Ideal components include values and norms, ideas, art, and perceived contents of human relationships. (Rauhala 2014, 42)

And finally, since my position in this study is to be at the center of all reflection, this thesis includes autoethnographic parts that contribute to the dialogue with the themes of the thesis.

3. LABORATORY OF THE DEAF

At first, my plan was to organize an art pedagogical laboratory in the spring of 2020. I had planned to invite several deaf artists to join me for four days to do embodiment practices in a safe space, and I had planned to collect data from these gatherings. However, I had to change my plans as the society suddenly came to a standstill due to COVID-19. First, came the lockdown and the recommendation to work and study remotely. In March 2020, the Finnish government decided to close the Uusimaa region, including the Helsinki metropolitan area. The duration of these exceptional measures was not known at the time. I ended up postponing my laboratory until it was possible to organize a gathering where people could physically be present.

As I was waiting for this opportunity to come forth, I got a grant from Kone Foundation for a two month home residency in the summer of 2020. During this residency I was allowed to work remotely at home and focus on forming a theoretical framework for my thesis and plan for my laboratory. I also attended weekly gatherings with a multidisciplinary group of other artists of the residency where I gained peer support.

The pandemic situation changed several times before I finally got to implement my laboratory in December of 2020. The laboratory was carried out for four consecutive days. The first two were performed at the Theatre Academy campus in Sörnäinen and the latter two were performed at the yoga studio Joogaholiaa in Katajanokka, Helsinki. A total of five deaf actors participated in the laboratory. The reason for the limited number of participants was the regional state administrative agency's meeting recommendation of the time of six people in maximum. Counting me in, there was five to six of us in total each day.

All participants were deaf sign language users, and they knew each other well before the laboratory. When I was forming our laboratory team, I was aware of the fact that it would probably be impossible to maintain the anonymity of the group. As I needed deaf actors that were native signers and had previous work experience as actors, there was no large pool of them. Indeed, according to the Sign Language Barometer 2020, there are

approximately 2,800 deaf and hard of hearing people that use Finnish Sign Language as their first language in Finland (Rainò 2021). And so, the number of deaf artists is very small.

Before working in the laboratory, I wanted to tell participants about my research process, goals, and research questions as transparently as possible. I held a meeting in Zoom where I talked about my research plan and said that even if I tried to maintain the anonymity of the participants in the written part, I would not be able to fully guarantee it. The participants wanted to participate in the study regardless. I repeated the question of participation and anonymity several times at different stages of the process. All participants still wanted to participate in the study. What is more, they wanted to appear in it with their own names.

As such, I have identified all the participants in this thesis, though only sharing information that is not too personal or delicate. Even though our laboratory focused on certain research questions, the process brought forth experiences and ideas which accentuated our understanding of how complex and intricate the topic at hand was.

Each day started with no rigid plan, as I wanted to have the freedom to change our direction in case something interesting emerged during sessions. I chose to approach these sessions as transparently as I could. I wanted us to be an equal group, and I wanted to create a safe space where participants felt welcomed and safe to explore and share their experiences, ideas and thoughts. I saw the group as an active producer of new knowledge and I took the role of a listener and questioner during these sessions.

Now I will chronologically describe the process of the laboratory from day one to day four. The description is based on my own reflections, teaching diary, data collected from the participants and filmed discussions. From this description I have excluded material that is either too personal or sensitive, or not relevant to the research question. After the process has been described, section four will reflect on the collected data.

3.1. Day One

On day one we met at the Theatre Academy with the participants. I had booked a dance classroom for two days for our use. Because most of the participants had their day jobs/studies and we would be meeting on a Thursday and Friday, we had agreed to book three hours for both evenings.

Day one started with a discussion with the participants. I presented my idea for the laboratory, and gave suggestions as to what we could be doing. I also told the participants that they could make new suggestions at any time. The participants also had the freedom to move aside to observe or refuse to do any exercise. After giving out the basic instructions, I shared more background information so the participants had the chance to familiarize themselves with the subject and ask questions about it. With the topic inciting interest, an open discussion ensued, where participants had a lot to share. In the end the discussions were so intense that we did not have time to do the practices I had planned for the day. Among the many interesting topics we discussed, I have chosen to highlight two.

3.1.1. Marked Bodies

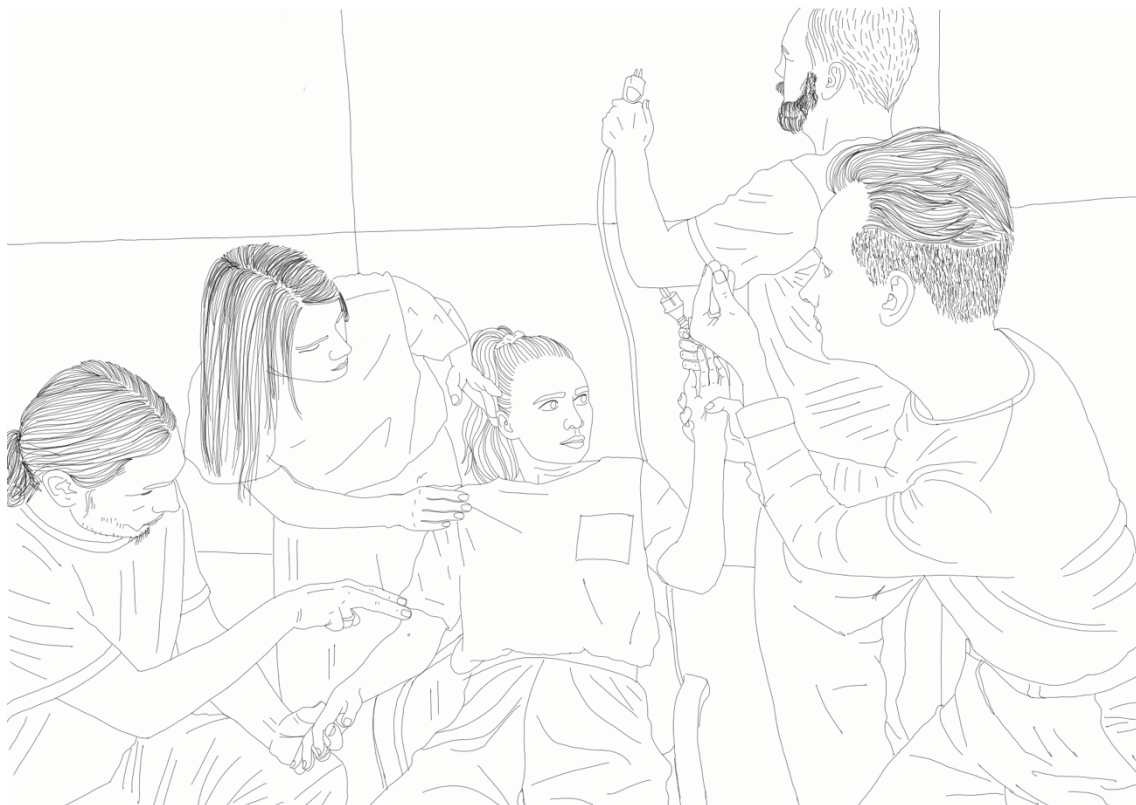
When I was planning the laboratory in my Kone Foundation home residency, I considered at length the depth of this thesis. How far should I go? How much should I share? What is important to understand about the background of this topic? I delved as far as my childhood and family history to better understand the starting point of my own body in this process and my own bodily history.

I was born in 1989 to a deaf mother and a hearing father. At four, I began losing my hearing due to genetic mutation, which is a result of hereditary deafness and hearing loss. A small genetic distinction that would change the course of my entire life and give me access to a world that I would call home for the rest of my life.

My mother realised that I had a hearing loss quite early in my childhood. She had been

questioning the state of my hearing for a while already. My mother had a severe hearing loss herself, and we had some deaf and hard-of-hearing relatives in our family. She tested my hearing by calling my name and as I kept ignoring her, she eventually took me to the hospital for auditive testing. From there, I was sent to a hearing rehabilitation centre for further examinations and tests.

I can still recall the place. Its memory is corroded deep in my bones; hallways reeking of disinfectant, heather grey plastic flooring, a picture of a smiling frog on the door of my dormitory, pastel coloured night gowns, an old CRT television mounted to the roof line. I had to stay there all on my own for a week or two without my mother. I recall it being very scary. I was just a little girl, so little that the hospital staff did not bother to tell me what was happening at the time, and what they were going to do to me. I was taken from one examination room to the next. They put wires on my head and chest, took blood samples by force, injected liquids to my tiny arms. They tricked me into drinking liquid anesthetic and lied. “No, it won’t hurt at all.” “No, we will not take you there, of course.” I woke up in an MRI machine, crying and so scared it rendered me immobile.



When it was finally over, I was sent home with pink hearing aids, a scar in my elbow, and a miserable posture. This posture is something that has followed me all the way to my adult life. When I look at pictures of myself before and after my time at the hospital, the difference is indisputable. My shoulders touch my ears, my eyes are avoidant, there is tension in my body. Lots of tension.

I learned to live with this tension. When I started going to mainstream school, I started avoiding making any kind of sound: no sloughing on streets, no stomping in stairways, no smacking your lips while eating, no clattering the dishes, no slamming doors, no loud chopping in the kitchen. This finally escalated to being afraid of making any bodily noises at all. I laughed without a sound, I swallowed my tears, I held my breath, I tightened my stomach muscles to keep my stomach from growling. What was left of me was a crumpled girl hiding at the back row of a school choir, moving her lips with not even a breath coming out.

I had an enormous amount of tension stored in my body and I genuinely had no idea where it was coming from until I attended actor Marcus Groth's TRE (Trauma Release Exercise) class in spring 2014.

TRE was created by American neuroscientist David Berceli as a method of releasing stress and tension from the body. Berceli had spent years working in traumatizing environments of war and conflict, where he observed himself and others in stressful situations. As a result of Berceli's observations, he came up with exercises to reflect on trauma. With simple movements to stress the body's thigh flexor muscles, the exercises trigger the body's natural tremors causing shaking in different body parts in various patterns. (Berceli & Scaer 2008)

I was lying on the dance floor on my gym mat, waiting for any shaking to start. The tremor first started at my thighs, then spread over my hips, arms, and neck. I was astonished. It was like having a dialogue within my body, as I started perceiving my bodily experience in a detailed and profound manner. This experience eventually led to new realisations. At first, I realised that I do not have a body, I am a body. Secondly, I

realised that my body has its own reality to which its agency is entangled to.

These insights were liberating. I was no longer an individual unfit for society. I did not have an imperfect body that had to be repaired. I did not have to struggle to keep up with the hearing world. It was the society that did neither recognize nor acknowledge the various realities of the deaf body. My body had tried to adapt to the hearing norm for almost all my life and I was tired of it. It was high time to connect with my true body and to find a way to set it free.

The more I studied the subject the more I realised that I was not alone. Similar phenomenon has been identified in other marginalized groups too that experience oppression and othering from privileged groups. Oppression in modern society appears as ableism, audism, microaggressions, color-blindness, and denial of the oppression in general. It occurs in interaction between people, but also in environmental (lack of representation) and institutional (laws, rules and policies) contexts, where “regardless of the perpetrator’s intentionality, microaggressions serve as a reminder that someone doesn’t belong, that they are not valued, or that they are different.” (Bennett Leighton 2018, 18-25)

Recent research has proved that prolonged oppression and microaggressions can lead to bodies of oppressed and marginalized groups to develop severe trauma symptomatology including both physical and mental health effects. It has even been found that individuals from these groups had full PTSD symptomatology even without any acute traumatic event, and that this symptomatology was greater than of those who had experienced a single traumatic event. “Oppression not only increases one’s risk of experiencing trauma symptoms, but it also is traumatic in and of itself and therefore can engender trauma symptoms over time in the same way that developmental trauma develops.” (Bennett Leighton 2018, 18-25)

In 2021 the Government of Finland published a report on the results of the Signed Memories research project, which opened up the historical injustices against the deaf and sign language people in Finland since the 20th century. The report described the lived experiences of oralism, education, eugenics, and hearing rehabilitation, among

other things, that had resulted in both physical and mental effects, anxiety, combat fatigue, minority stress, and internalized oppression. The report emphasizes that while respondents' experiences are personal, they are also collective experiences in the sign language community in Finland. (Katsui et al. 2021)

And this is why it is seminal to take into account that deaf bodies are, in a way, marked bodies, archives of lived experience that span generations and time. Theatre is a form of art in which the body is constantly present, on display, and interacting. As a theatre pedagogue, I have a responsibility to be aware of this sensitivity and to take it into account.

When we discussed this topic on the first day of the laboratory, I shared my own experience with the participants. It turned out that tension and trauma were in fact a familiar phenomenon in the daily experience of being deaf. Participants had had similar experiences of having to mute their natural sounds and voice, i.e. laughing, crying and breathing, in situations and spaces where hearing people were present. Some participants even described that they were afraid of releasing their natural sounds, because they feared that hearing people would find their sounds ugly, awkward, or somewhat wrong. In other words, most of this fear was about the aesthetic quality and socially accepted nature of bodily sounds, and there was a sense of power in relation to the ownership of the auditory world. Hearing people's voices were learnt to be seen in general as beautiful and "right", whereas voices of the deaf were described as an "ugly deaf voice".

Some participants recognized that their bodies reacted differently in different environments. They said that when they were at home or with other deaf individuals in a space that felt safe, they did not pay much attention to their natural sounds or their bodies. They were still restraining their bodily sounds but that was automatized and unconscious to them. However, the situation changed if they were in an environment with hearing or hard of hearing individuals present, like in public spaces or at work. Participants said that in these situations they were alert, increasingly self-conscious, and stressed. They had to work to make sure that their bodily sounds were kept absent.

Prolonged and repetitive stress in the body can eventually lead to one's own body feeling foreign. Whether it is the restraint of natural sounds and cautious behavior around the hearing people, or the bodily stress that results from micro-aggressions and experiences of oppression, all of these experiences can cut off the connection between one's own body and its natural lifeworld.

“When viewing oppression as a form of trauma - which is now assumed to be experienced primarily in the body, for example, as somatic symptoms, dissociation, and implicit memory (memories stored solely on a physiological level) - we understand that oppression, too, could be primarily experienced in the body. Like trauma, oppression can drive a rift between the self and the body. Indeed, researchers in the fields of somatic psychology and dance/movement therapy have found that experiences of oppression over time can cause individuals to feel disconnected from their bodies and dissociated and affect how they move and feel in their bodies. Understanding that oppression, like symptoms of trauma, is metabolized and stored in the body necessitates addressing oppression through the body.”

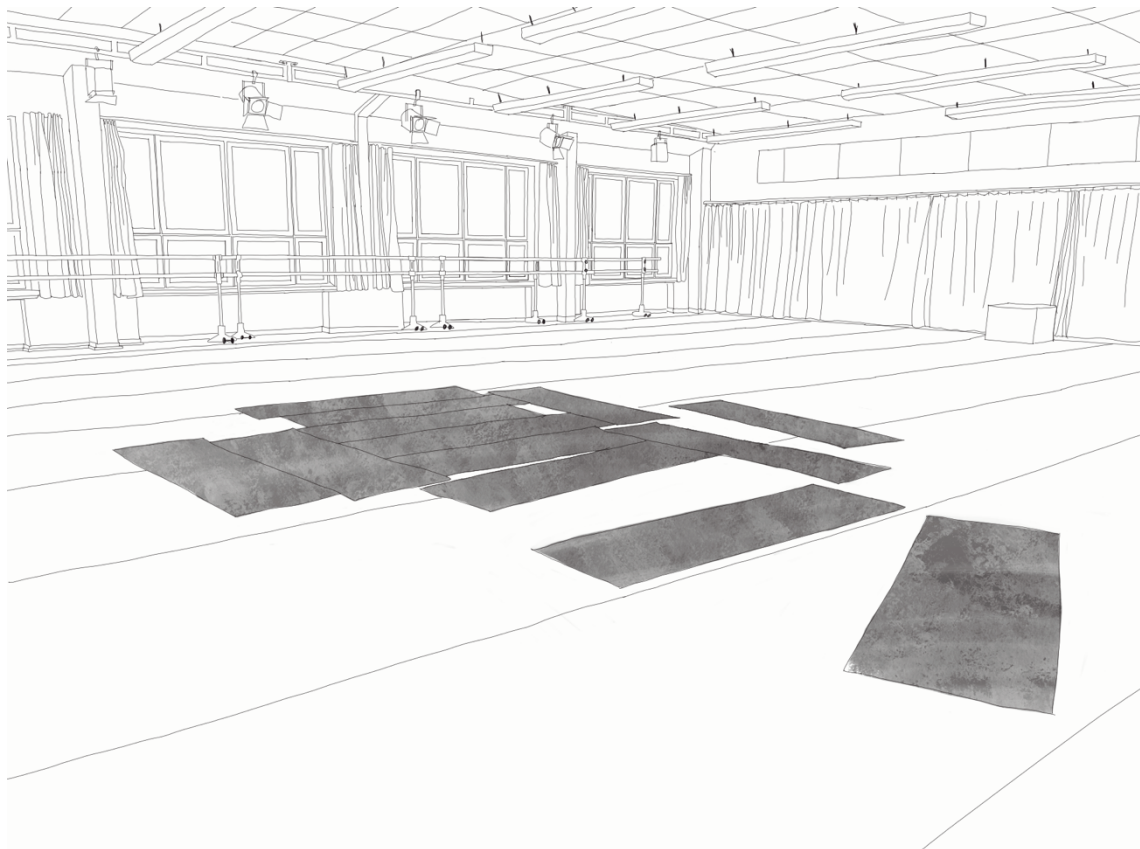
(Bennett Leighton 2018, 21)

This realization incited new questions in me that I was curious to examine further. Can we unlearn the hearing norm? If we abandon the hearing norm and resign from a form of existence governed by aurality, what will we find there? Can we learn to be deaf bodies? To get back to my memory of a TRE class that I described earlier, I cannot help but wonder if that tension was holding me back all those years. It certainly has had a great impact on my relationship with my body. Does this tension and trauma control something intrinsic in our embodiment? If we can find a way to release this tension in the long run, what will be freed in turn? And what does this mean in the context of theatre? Could we possibly find entirely new ways to do actor's training? Could we create new artistic practice, technique and aesthetics that would emerge from the corporeality of the deaf?

3.1.2. Bodies in Space

After the discussion I described above, we took a short break. During the break, one of the participants told me that the lights in the dance classroom were very bright. The room was a large space, with a white dance mat, white walls, a white ceiling, and halogen lights. Indeed, the room was so bright that it was hard to maintain concentration and eye contact at length.

We sat down in a circle at the other end of the space. This is a typical form for the deaf, as it gives everyone direct access to see each member of the group. One participant came up with an idea to put black gym mats in the middle of the circle to reduce reflection from the floor. As such, we took control of the room and created a DeafSpace¹ – a floating little island of our own.



¹ DeafSpace is a term that used to describe an approach in architecture to build spaces that consider the deaf ways of being. DeafSpace has five principles, that is, sensory reach, space and proximity, mobility and proximity, light and color, and acoustics. For further information, see e.g. Bauman, Kusters, O'Brien.

At first I had planned to exclude DeafSpace from this thesis but as we started to discuss the topic further, the infeasibility of not including it when researching deaf embodiment became clear. As a body is inexorably in the world in relation to the space around, DeafSpace and deaf embodiment are intrinsically intertwined. A physical space is what actively shapes our experience of embodiment. It has the power of either nourishing or inhibiting agency. Space affects our bodies in salient ways, and we are informed of these effects by the sensory knowledge our bodies gather.

Some participants shared memories of their childhood homes and how they learned to be aware of what was happening in the house, given that they were the only deaf kids in their families. Some of these descriptions were very detailed illustrations of different sensations and sensory knowledge.

“I remember that in my childhood home, every time someone left the house or came in, I came to be aware of it by sensing a cold breath of air on my feet.”

“My desk was placed in my room in a way that when I was sitting at my desk, my back was towards the door. I had a framed picture on my desk. Its glass plate reflected whatever was happening behind me. So when someone entered the room, I saw a reflection on the glass and knew what was happening.”

“I used different surfaces and their reflections to be aware of what was happening in our house and around me. I still use them whenever I visit my childhood home.”

“Every time someone left the house or came in, the windows rattled, and as I saw it, I knew that someone had arrived or left. Depending on the amplitude of the rattling, I was able to guess who it was.”

Most participants agreed that they had somehow adapted their environment to better serve them as deaf family members. The adaptation methods included using reflective surfaces and placing them to reflect desired areas at home, and placing furniture or yourself in a way that made it easy to face open spaces, and to eliminate possible surprises behind one's back.

The space is constantly present in this thesis, it can both limit and bring in new possibilities. We will learn that deaf bodies receive information about the surrounding world from the physical space around them, for example through vibration, light and shadow, reflections, and flows of air.

3.2. Day Two

On day two, I started to put my research method in action. I had planned to give participants different practices that would focus on listening and observing one's own body in different situations. We would also be reflecting these observations after each practice, so participants would have the chance to get back to their experiences afterwards and name their findings in signs, text, or visual methods.

Even though I had planned some practices in advance, I chose to follow the group's course of interest and gave them an opportunity to have an influence on what we would be doing that day. I was sure that by listening to the group I would find something I had yet not come to think about myself. As a result, we started and ended the day on participants' terms, and in the middle of the day I got to put my planned practices to the test.

3.2.1. Releasing the Deaf Voice

We started day two with a warm-up sound exercise based on the previous session's discussion and participants' suggestions. Before starting the exercise, I told the group that we were alone on that floor of the building, and I would put loud bass music to the background so their own sounds would be covered by it. I also took off my hearing aid

so that the participants would not feel bothered by it. This helped the participants to relax and experiment with their own bodily sounds.

Participants were allowed to use their natural sounds and voices in any way they wished. Some participants screamed at the top of their lungs, roared at each other, bellowed, cried out loud, laughed, growled and snarled. Some of them focused on observing their bodily sounds by clapping, breathing heavily, or stomping around the dance floor. Participants also observed what kind of voices and sounds others were making. They put their hands on the floor or on the other person's chest to feel the vibrations, or on their own chests and throats to feel how the sounds resonated in the body.

After five minutes I called them back to circle, and we had a small reflection on their feelings. One participant said that "screaming was fun, but it would be weird to use voice while acting." Another participant said that it was surprisingly hard to produce voice from the belly, somehow voices always came out of either the throat or the chest, and as that kind of voice was rarely let out, it felt rough. We spent a while discussing different signs for different kinds of "deaf voices", and how they embodied the physical sensation and nature of those various kinds of sounds. Participants said that they would like to dig deeper and try this kind of activity as a form of "sound therapy".

What was interesting to me was that as the participants experimented with different ways of releasing sounds, there was a clear change in the physical quality of their movements, gestures, and actions. Suddenly their movements were voluminous, abrupt, spontaneous, and full of something that I found hard to describe. I do not think it had much to do with the voice or sound itself, but rather, it had something to do with their bodies. It was something about the way they breathed and perceived in the situation, the way they moved and worked with their bodies.

However, as interesting as the topic was, I decided to move on to other practices. I felt that I did not have the skills and knowledge to explore this theme further in practice. I was not trained in vocal exercises or voice production, and I was afraid that I would not

know how to work with one's voice in a healthy way. I wrote my thoughts in my diary. This would be something I would like to research more another time.

3.2.2. Observations in Space

After sound experimentation we moved on to the next practice I had prepared. I had brought a pile of bright colored post-it notes and gave everyone a stack. I signed the instructions to the participants. It was a typical walk-in-the-space practice.

At first everyone was going to focus on their own bodies. As they walked around the space, they could observe their bodies as they were that day without changing anything. How did they breathe? How was their posture? Was there something in their body that felt different that day? How did their feet step on the floor, was it soft or heavy? As they were walking, they could next shift their focus outside their bodies. What did they perceive in that space? What did they sense? What caught their attention and why? How did their body react to this?

As the participants started being aware of their surroundings and their bodies in the space, they were allowed to put a post-it note on whatever caught their attention and keep walking. Slowly the classroom started to fill up with post-it notes. There were notes on the floor, mirrors, curtains, windows, poles, on other participants and on little details around the space, like on backpacks and pens. Some notes started to attract more notes. There were colorful lumps here and there, as if there was an echo after echo after echo of moments of attention.

At the end of the practice I asked everyone to pick an A3 and draw their notes on it. They could focus on what kind of sensations they noticed, which body parts they registered sensations through, and how they experienced their body being-in-the-world during this particular practice.

Instructions:

- Take a paper and as many pens as you want

- Find your own place
- Draw your body on paper and color the parts of the body that made observations in the space

We returned to the circle about twenty minutes later and looked at what kind of drawings had been made.

It is worth noting that I have chosen to intentionally omit these drawings from my thesis, as they could easily reveal the identity of the participant. Some of the drawings also included personal and private experiences that I cannot publish here. Instead of showing the drawings, I am sharing some of the explanations the participants signed during our discussion. The discussion was video recorded and in light of my research question, I have picked some remarks that I found interesting.

Different sensory perceptions were repeated in the responses of the participants. Participants gave detailed descriptions of which body parts they made observations by and what kind of embodied perception they experienced, as well as how these sensations affected their bodies.

“My skin sensed flows of air. My nose could sense the scents of people passing by and the smells of the city from the open window - cars and street food. The eyes sensed light and darkness between the blinks of eyes.”

“At times, I could sense vibration rising up my arm, even though I didn't touch anything.”

“I drew big and yellow eyes because the space was so bright that it hurt my eyes.”

“I was standing in a corner trying to focus on my inner world. However, I was disturbed by sounds transmitted

through the floor: the footsteps of others vibrated towards me.”

One participant described their experience as being continuously connected to the world by an endless chain of perceptions and thoughts.

“My legs went like spontaneously and without thinking. At the same time, my eyes noticed the personal belongings and other details of the space that formed chains of thought in my head. --- The legs are blue because there seemed to be peace in them. The head and upper body are red because a lot happened there.”

“I drew rings around my body that tell me how I sensed different areas around me as my attention was drawn to something.”

Another participant said that they were constantly aware of their surroundings in an alerted manner, ready to react to possible threats.

“I drew in red the areas where I was aware of the danger. I was kind of constantly on standby mode and aware of my environment and other people around me. For example, I knew when not to put my hand on the floor so that someone else would step on it.”

The experiences of the participants confirm to me that consciousness is indeed built on embodied knowledge. Just like Esther Thelen and her colleagues put it:

“To say that cognition is embodied means that it arises from bodily interactions with the world. From this point of view, cognition depends on the kinds of experiences that come from having a body with particular perceptual and motor capabilities that are inseparably linked and that

together form the matrix within which reasoning, memory, emotion, language, and all other aspects of mental life are meshed.”

(Thelen et al. 2001, 1)

This gave rise to a new idea: could my own teaching be embodied as well? What if teaching itself were embodied, could it find ways to give students more space to their own experiences and processes? I decided to take this idea as the theme for the next laboratory day.

3.2.3. Freedom of Play

Last exercise of the day was improvisation, which was also a suggestion from participants. The main motivator for this exercise was that participants felt that they rarely had opportunities to practice improvisation in an all-deaf group. Improvising with hearing people differs significantly from all-deaf improvisation. When improvising with hearing people, deaf actors are often dependent on sign language interpreters and thus not participating in improvised action on their own terms. In a way the reality of the deaf is subordinate to the reality of the hearing. This is common especially in Finland, where improvisation culture tends to focus on speech, sound, music, and verbal interaction instead of a more physical approach. It is also common that many improvisation practices are fast paced, which means that a deaf actor has to work extra hard to keep up and to connect with others.

In an all-deaf group deaf students are present in a shared reality. There is no gap in communication as it takes place in immediate interaction. Participants said that improvising in an all-deaf environment was a liberating experience for them, as they were then allowed to be themselves and be fully present in the moment. They were allowed to play in their own deaf reality without having to feel themselves outsiders. This reminds me of my own experiences, some of which I have illustrated in section two.

We chose to start with a swarming practice in which all participants were working as a swarm in a group. The one standing in the front decides movement or activity and the rest of the swarm will follow this movement. Every time when the swarm turns, whoever is in the front now will change movement and the rest of the swarm follows again. I chose to let the participants explore this play as far as they wished, and I told them that there were no rules for how that practice should progress. At first, I participated in this swarming but after a while I moved to the side and started to observe. Soon the swarming evolved into a drama, where participants signed dialogue and created characters on the fly.

I have chosen not to delve further into this subject in this thesis, though I will elaborate on one interesting detail. When the improvisation session had been going on for some time and it was soon time to end our laboratory day, I decided to give an instruction to end the situation to one participant only, in secret. I chose a participant who was not in the middle of the scene and approached them. I signed to them that it was time to pick some mushrooms pointing at the post-it notes, which were still covering the surfaces of the dance classroom.

What happened next was something that was interesting to the participants, and they got back to that experience many times during our conversations later in the laboratory. The participant entered the situation and started to pick post-it notes into an invisible basket with exaggerated gestures. The participant made strong eye contact with other participants and raised their eyebrows significantly while showing the others what to do. The others started to copy this activity and together they all collected the post-it notes and gave them to the participant who had started it. When all the post-it notes were collected, everyone returned to the circle.

When we were discussing this afterwards, many of the participants said that there was something interesting in this experience to them. They said that there was something in the participant's posture and habitus, strong eye contact, facial expression, and actions that did not belong in the improvised continuum. This exceptional behaviour and traits together made them realize that this was not an impulse of the actor, but an instruction from the outside.

3.3. Day Three

On day two I had focused on different experiments with perception, space and interaction. On day three I wanted to shift the focus to instructions and multimodality. One thing that has often puzzled me in my work as a theatre pedagogue is the format of instructions. In section two, I have illustrated my personal struggles in receiving instructions in different situations. But I have also struggled in giving instructions, mostly for the same reasons as I have presented in section two. Many theatre and drama practices originate from the hearing culture of giving instructions by speech in the midst of action. Students can focus on the action in question while simultaneously listening to the instructions.

With a deaf group of students, I must always think of different ways to repeat these practices in a deaf friendly way and how to give instructions as smoothly as possible. I have to consider how to get students' attention (by waving my arms, switching lights on and off, or stomping the floor). I have to think about when to sign the instructions to all students at the same time and when to repeat the instructions to each student individually. Should I sign all instructions at once, or should I divide the instructions into smaller sections.

Sometimes it has been challenging for me to reconcile the language I use with the intention of the practice. Finnish Sign Language is a visual language and there is a risk that the instruction I sign will inadvertently lead too much into some externally determined outcome. For example, the Finnish word LENTÄÄ² (to fly) is signed in "5" handshape in neutral space, thumbs touching each other and other fingers moving up and down just like a bird flaps its wings. This sign gives a direct idea of flying as an activity where flying takes place with wings. Such visual representations can lead to students copying this kind of activity, even if the original idea of the practice is to understand flying as more of a concept and to encourage students to interpret that concept based on their own impulses.

² See: <https://signbank.csc.fi/dictionary/gloss/529>

The above-mentioned points have led me to consider how I, as a theatre pedagogue, could better support students' own interpretation and creativity, while also supporting the continuity of concentration during the practices. In order to better understand what these other ways of giving instructions might be, I felt the need to better understand the embodied and sensory worlds of deaf students. This became the main theme for day three.

On day three we relocated to yoga studio Joogaholiaa. Change of space gave us new limitations as this new space was much smaller and more intimate. In the center of the room rose a pillar that was a barrier to sight, which meant that we could only use half of the room's capacity depending on the activity. On the other hand, participants said that they liked the atmosphere in this new space. It was kind to the eyes and invited focus to the inner realm.

Because of these spatial limitations, I chose to approach multimodality and explore sensory and tactile experience in simple contact practices. I formulated my research question for the day as follows: *aside of verbal or signed input, what else can an instruction be?* I presented this research question to the participants as well, so that we could narrow down the theme of the day and focus our attention to this question.

At first, we had a practice in pairs: one was the medium and the other was the mediator. The mediums had the chance to decide whether they wanted to keep their eyes open or not. The mediator's task was to give tactile and haptic instruction to the medium. Medium was then allowed to interpret these instructions however their first impulse directed and act based on that.

Interestingly, everyone chose to keep their eyes closed. It might have had something to do with this limited and intimate space: there was no place to diverge to, so other participants may have been too close which was probably distracting. Also, participants might have wanted to reduce visual noise to intensify concentration on the instructions instead.

There was a lot of variation in the interpretation and implementation of the practice. Some participants interpreted instructions through internal imaginations and feelings, while some interpreted instructions as representational instructions that led to outward action. The instructions, on the other hand, varied from bold and firm touch messages to cautious and gentle stimulus.

After this simple practice we returned to the circle, and I opened a discussion. We started by sharing different experiences and observations that came forth. I had laid a roll of paper on the floor and participants had the chance to write and draw down their thoughts as we discussed and listened to each other. This helped many to put their ideas into a visual form as some participants found it hard to find words or signs to describe their experiences. This turned out to be the most important and rewarding source of data for me. Next, I will share the observations, experiences, and ideas that emerged from the discussion, and reflect on them in the context of art pedagogy and theatre in particular.

3.3.1. Light and Darkness

One recurring phenomenon in participants' experiences was related to light and darkness. With light, many felt they could perceive the space with their eyes closed. The space had a large window on one wall, while the opposite wall was dim with only a small warm mood light on. Through these two sources of light participants were aware of where they were moving. They could also perceive the presence and movements of others in the space by sudden changes in light. The brightness of light was also brought up. Participants could perceive whether the light was cold or warm. If the light turned brighter at some point, some participants found themselves to tense and slow down a little as if they were cautious of their surroundings and automatically started to protect themselves.

In teaching situations light can be a very useful tool to give gentle and simple instructions to deaf students even from another side of a room. Switching lights on and off is a typical deaf way of informing others about something, but in some situations

clicking bright roof lights on and off can be more of a distraction than a benefit. Eyes still perceive light through closed eyelids and this sensory stimulus can be intense, even a little change in light can be sensed. Finnish yoga teacher Saija Uussaari has used light as a gentle tool in her sign language yoga classes. When she asks her students to close their eyes for *savasana*, she also makes sure that the students do not need to check every once in a while, if it is over yet. They can focus on breathing and relaxing their bodies, and Saija would switch off and on a little warm floor light next to her. If a student did not notice this, she would gently put her hand on their foot. Many of Saija's students have praised this method, as it allows them to have their personal space and lets them be in control of their own focus.

While we were doing the practice in pairs, I had taken an opportunity to take photographs and record a video of the situation to collect visual data for my thesis work. However, my camera had a tiny red shutter light, and I did not realize that it would distract the participants until one of the participants told me about that afterwards. This participant was having their turn to be the medium and they were getting instructions from their pair in touch messages. This pair was standing behind the participant and I stood in front of them with my camera. Every time I took a photo or clicked "record" the participant was puzzled. What was this light and what was its purpose? The light felt very bright, and it filled their eyelids. When the participant told me about this, I was amazed. How can such a small light cause such intense sensory stimulus?

One participant said that they were able to sense the light on their skin. This was an interesting observation, because as we have now noticed from participants' experiences above, even a small amount of light can be perceived through closed eyelids. Another participant said that in the darkness their thoughts slowed down, though as it became brighter their thoughts began to run faster. This too seems reasonable, as participants had said that their bodies reacted to the brightness of the light.

3.3.2. Touch

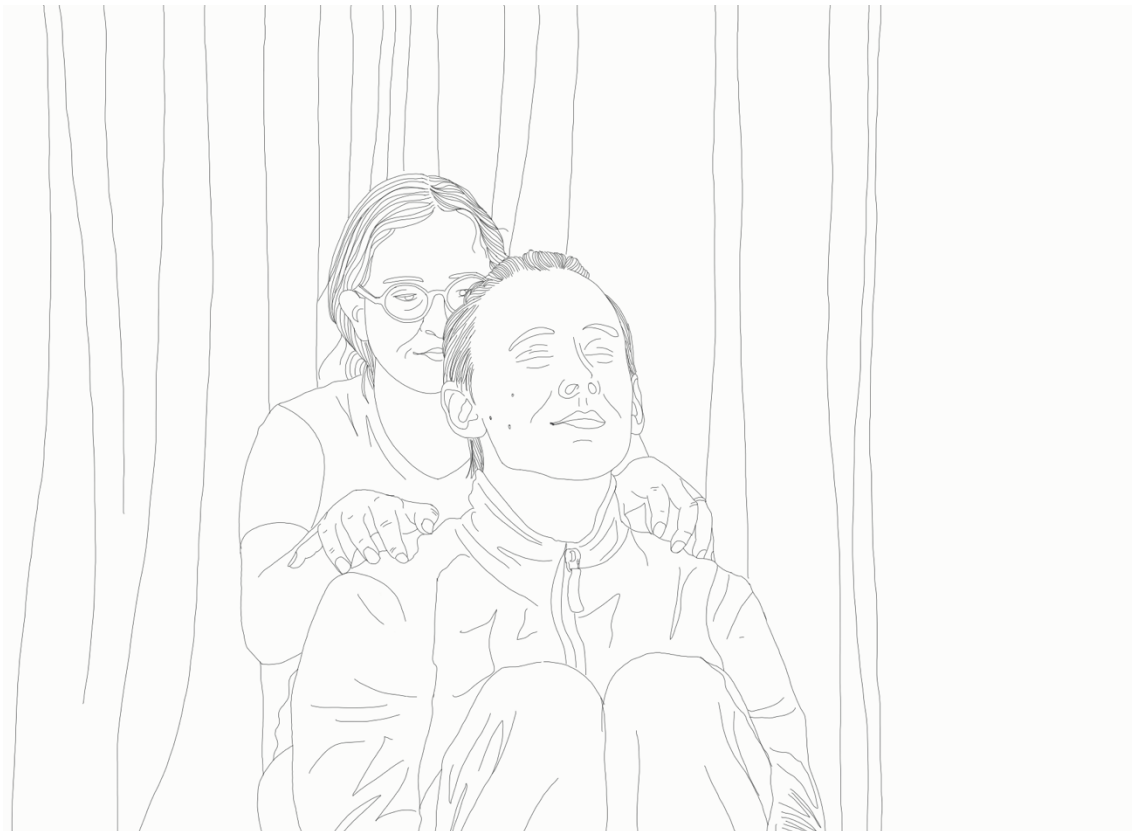
For the deaf, touch is an essential part of non-verbal communication. Although there are some commonly used manners and no-go's associated with touch, touch in the deaf community has not been studied in depth yet. Interestingly, in the case of deafblind people, touch is strongly associated with its own grammar and language. Dr. Riitta Lahtinen and music therapist Russ Palmer have together researched, analysed and developed the social-haptic communication framework, in which touch messages are portrayed by haptemes (the grammar of touch) and haptices (a single touch message). In social-haptic communication haptices are constructed of haptemes which give additional information to the touch message, e.g. about the direction of movement or frequency. (Lahtinen & Palmer 2022)

Here I will share some of the thoughts, experiences and ideas of the participants related to touch. It is worth noting that in this laboratory we did not aim to use social-haptic communication in particular, but to discover different ways of giving instructions to a deaf body without defining the touch too much in advance. Although some of the participants had previous experience of working or communicating with the deafblind in tactile signs or in social-haptic ways, and some of them had little or no previous experience, this did affect the way they approached the contact practice and touching itself. I have chosen to use the term 'touch message' when writing about these touch-based instructions emerging in the laboratory, and 'haptices and haptemes' when referring to the social-haptic communication developed by Lahtinen and Palmer.

I had instructed the participants to tell their partners about their thoughts and concerns related to touch in advance, e.g. how they wished to be touched and what were their own boundaries with touch. This discussion was especially important because each body is unique and the experiences and memories with touch can vary significantly. Since the deaf also do not have any uniform rules regarding touch, it is important to note that what is acceptable for one may be an absolute no for the other. As one participant later signed:

“... there are also a lot of memories associated with touch, such as how we have been touched or how I personally touch others, and this experience of touch also affects my own interpretation. There are touches I like, and then there are touches I hate. I react to this touch and it affects all the actions that follow.”

While doing the practice, participants experimented with various methods and techniques. They gave touch messages to each other on different body parts: to limbs, back and head. These touch messages varied from neutral stimulus to more challenging patterns of touch. During the discussion, participants pointed out that they recognized different tones and qualities in touches. Touch can be, for example, soothing, stressful, comfortable, intense, bullying, suggestive. Touch has an intensity, duration, rhythm, tempo, sequence, orientation. It can be repetitive, informative, stimulating, directive, etc.



Participants divided these touch-based instructions into three different categories:

1. Moving touch
2. Touch with a message
3. Stimulating touch

The first category consists of touches that move different parts of the body. These touches can for example be pushes, presses, pulls, and sweeps. Following these instructions was easy, as participants did not need to make their own interpretations. They just followed the movement.

The second category includes instructions based on more complex touch messages. In them, the instructor might try to communicate about some particular desired outcome. This instruction was more challenging. Because participants had little or no experience in social-haptic communication, they created their own touch messages, which easily led to misinterpretations. Participants reflected on their experiences in the contact practice by saying that they noticed that sometimes their pairs did not respond to the touch messages as they had expected. Sometimes this disconnection was puzzling, sometimes it was a gift that led to something new and unexpected to emerge. This may have been due to the fact that participants were accustomed to different touch cultures which led to interpretations taking place in different bodily archives. One participant said that it was somehow easier to give instructions from categories one and three, as the social-haptic framework was something that needed to be internalized at first before being able to use it naturally.

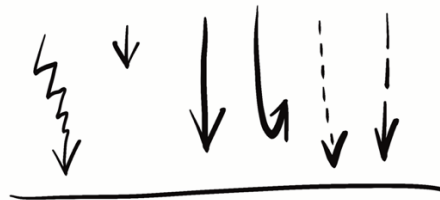
The third category includes instructions that seek to stimulate and offer new impulses for movement or some other activity. These instructions were not precise, but rather sought to support ongoing activities. When the participants received the stimulation, they took it according to what first came to their mind. For example, one participant began to lead an orchestra with their hands while another participant played on their shoulders like a piano.

The quality of the touch seems to be directly related to the quality of the movement or action that results from it. For example, repetitive instruction led to continuous

movement. Sometimes several different qualities were involved in one touch. This was not surprising to me, as sign languages work in similar ways. One sign consists of many parts: handshape, orientation, space, movement, and facial expression, which together form a sign. Instead, in this discovery, I was interested in its potential for performative work. With touch, it is indeed possible to stimulate such performative and embodied action that words and signs cannot reach. With touch, we can reach the body itself, the living body, the thinking body.

3.3.3. Vibration

In our discussion, participants described different situations in which they noticed vibration. Vibration was sensed through various surfaces, such as the floor or the walls. Participants noted that the qualities of vibration were diverse, and these varying qualities provided detailed information. They were able to identify, name, and describe some of the activities they sensed around them through vibration. This phenomenon is best illustrated by a visual observation drawn by a participant.

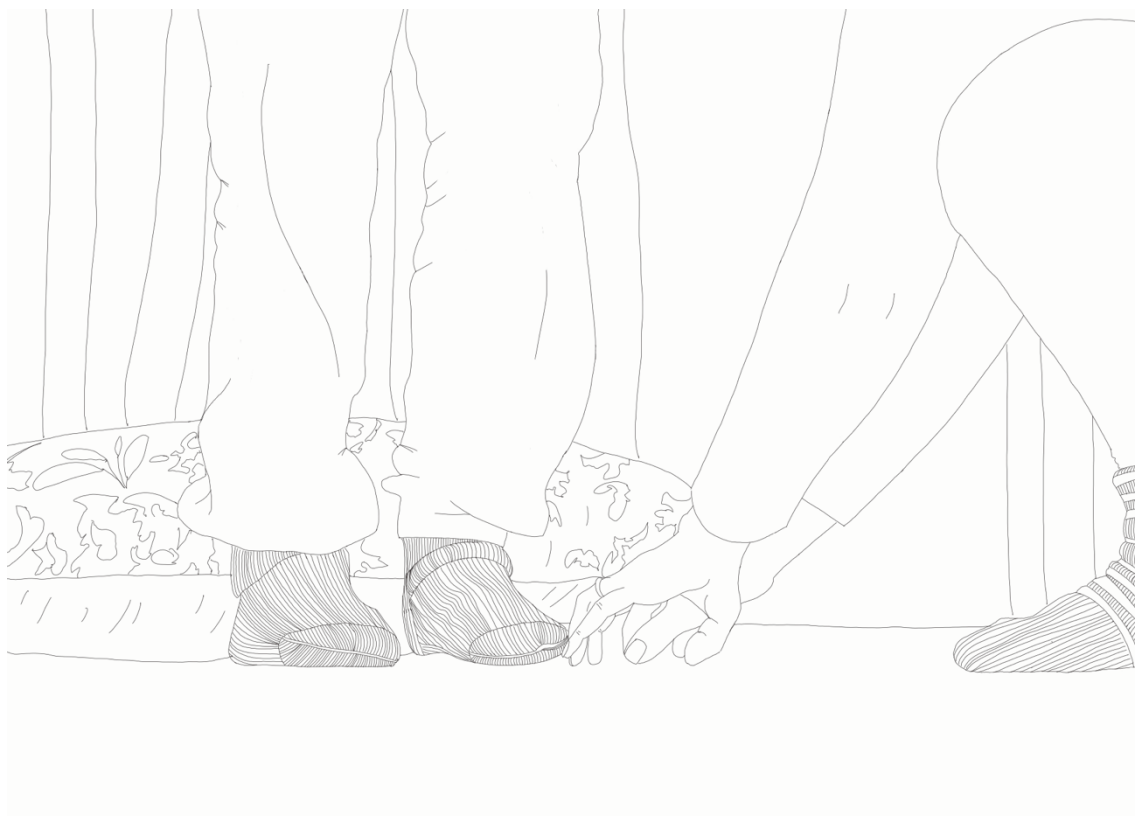


Visual description: In the picture is a black and white drawing of a floor. Six different top-down arrows are pointing towards the floor, representing different kinds of vibrations.

These identifications included walking, running, jumping, stumbling, to name but a few. Some participants even experimented a little with vibration by tapping the floor or by jumping around the space. However, many of the participants said that the acoustics in this yoga studio were not optimal for such experiments. In the dance classroom many of the participants had noted that they could sense vibrations from a distance, while in this yoga studio, vibrations had to be made very close to the recipient to be sensed at all.

The reason for this was in acoustics and construction materials. The dance classroom had a sprung dance floor, which was ideal for sensing vibrations from different sources.

Although we did not focus on this subject in the laboratory any more than this, this is still a remarkable finding. The vibration too can serve as an instruction and whole practices and artistic aesthetics can be built around this tool.



3.4. Day Four

Above, I have presented three main themes that emerged from the discussions during the third day. These themes show that the deaf are in the world with their whole bodies, and that the consciousness is intertwined with extensive bodily knowledge. When I am aware of this lifeworld, I can approach my work as a theatre pedagogue in the form of embodied teaching.

On the last day of the laboratory, I wanted to put the previous session's findings to the test in the context of theatre pedagogy. At this point, I had no clear idea of what exactly I was looking for. There would not be much time left, so I would have to make a decision on what would be relevant to this process and the ongoing discussion with the participants. I ended up building the theme of the day on exploring the embodied communication between a director and an actor so that we could experiment with the bodily knowledge and communication in a performative situation.

3.4.1. Director as an Ally

I created a small stage with a small row of chairs in front of it. Each participant had the chance to try a solo improvisation with another participant as their director. Participants were sent to another room to prepare for a minute. The director could give the actor a simple essence, for example an emotion or a character they were going to portray on stage. I also put a chair in the middle of the stage and gave an instruction that the chair should be used at least once.

When the actor and the director were ready, the actor was allowed to step on stage. The director's task was to support the actor by giving simple haptic and touch-based instructions. The director stayed behind the actor. The audience's task was to watch and play along and take notes if they noticed something interesting.

In the first round the pairs agreed on how the director was going to give instructions to the actor. Some participants decided to give instructions related to emotional states, while others did not define the content of the instructions precisely but allowed the actor to interpret them within the given framework (character, situation, objective). In this round, participants used different touch messages and haptics to stimulate the actor's work. Actors often interpreted the instructions as prompts to change an action, to move in a certain way or to a certain direction. One participant interpreted the instructions through their character which led to changes in the signing style or the character's sentiments and lines.

In the second round, I asked the directors to describe the instructions related to moving in the space by drawing body maps on the back of the actor. In this round, the directors had fewer freedoms as the description of the space and conveying the message to the actor required precision. The director had to think about the position of the actor and how the actor perceived the space around them as they moved. Some participants solved this by drawing a fixed floor plan of the room on the back of the actor. When the actor moved, this floor plan did not change. Some participants drew a floor plan that moved with the actor in the same way as on GPS. These two floor plans worked differently, and it seems that the GPS one was easier for the actors because it took better account of the actor's own position and their embodied perception of the space at the time of the instruction.



After these two rounds, we returned to the circle for the last time to reflect on the practice of the day. One participant, who had been sitting in the audience, noticed that the less instructions that were given, the less expression there was in the actor's work. As instructions were given more frequently, the amount of expression increased and intensified. Another participant noted that in the first round, the instructions given by the director strongly evoked emotional interpretations, while in the second round, instructions were related to movement in space and the quality of that movement.

When we talked about the implementation of the instructions, one participant said that it was more natural to them to make interpretations of the instructions so that they directly affected the sign language expression. The reason for this, according to the participant, was that the participant's previous theatre experience was strongly based on sign language theater. The experience of another participant was the opposite: this participant had a strong background in hearing people's theater, where there was very little or no sign language. As a result, instructions coming through touch messages were interpreted mainly as movement-related instructions. From this we can conclude that interpretation and implementation are always tied to a person's previous experience and knowledge of performing arts, its techniques, and practices.

A significant difference was identified between the two different rounds.

“As a director, the first version seems to fit well into an earlier stage in the rehearsal process when you get to look and try things out. What happens if I do this? The second version is suitable for a later stage when the scene is already starting to be clearer and now the movements need to be directed more precisely. The first version gives more freedom to the actor, while the second version somehow limits it.”

I agree with this participant. I think this model we created could be a good tool, for example, during the rehearsal phase of a performance, if the director does not want to give signed instructions in the middle of a scene from the outside. Then the director can be present on stage and give instructions to the actor by using bodily stimulus, touch messages, haptics and haptemes. In the final performance, we will no longer see the director, but only the actors. As one of the participants stated, this would give a deaf actor a chance to get to a flow where one is still concentrated and focused on their physical work without having to turn away from it.

“The fact that the director was behind the actor allowed me as an actor to focus on rehearsing the scene continuously without stopping. As a comparison, if the director was

signing the instruction, I would have to move my field of vision towards the director, and that is when the actor is completely interrupted. But with haptic touch messages, I was allowed to continue working. I now understand what it's like when a director gives an instruction through speech, and hearing actors can simultaneously listen to the instruction and continue their action, so, in the same way this haptic communication allows us to continue action while receiving instructions through touch. Now there may have been times when you stopped to think, but I think it's related to us not being used to it yet, but if we get used to it, then it will certainly only give us more than pausing and looking at the signed instruction does while breaking concentration."

Instead of a dominant top-down relationship, the director's role in this practice was to be an ally that walks through the scene with the actor, gently giving new stimulus and supporting the actor's work. The relationship between the director and the actor is based on dialogue and agreements. Together, the director and the actor can build and create a common way to communicate. They can agree in advance, for example, when and in what situations the instruction will come to the areas of the head, back, shoulders or arms, and whether these areas are representing different qualities or aspects of an actor's work. The director can also consciously limit the actor's interpretation by defining in advance in which frame of reference the instructions will be given. For example, the director can specify that the instructions now relate to space, movement, emotion, gaze or dialogue, and so on. During the process, as the director and the actor become familiar with each other, the content and format of the touch messages may evolve and refine, and the number of instructions may decrease.

4. ECHOES OF GROWTH

Our four-day laboratory was completed. I packed rolls of paper and coloring pens in a durable bag and closed the door of the yoga studio. Part of the group still stood on the street, giggling and signing vividly. We walked together towards the tram stop wishing each other Merry Christmas and gradually one by one left the group to the next destination. On my way home, I reflected on the past four days and our group. I was suddenly filled with a warm feeling of relief; I was no longer alone.

I started this process with an open question about what deaf embodiment really is all about. Now I had not only discovered new information about the deaf embodiment but also ended up with new art pedagogical insights. I realized that I had only scratched the surface. This got me both excited and worried; excited that a whole new world was opening for us, though worried on the other hand about how long and how far we would be allowed to continue this work.

During the laboratory, participants had repeatedly brought forth the feelings the laboratory had awakened in them. Joy, inspiration, excitement, curiosity, painlessness, puzzlement, sensibility. They had stated that the laboratory space had been a safe space as they felt they had been seen and heard. No struggle, no uncertainty, only freedom – a place, where they could just be.

Our work had been based on openness and dialogue, and I had chosen to share my own vulnerability during the laboratory as well. If we, together, were to step into this research question and explore our own embodiment, it could only happen through our own experience and engaged pedagogy, in which the participants and I as a pedagogue would create a respectful, trusting and committed learning environment for mutual growth and learning.

“When education is the practice of freedom, students are not the only ones who are asked to share, to confess. Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model

of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks.”

(hooks 1994, 21)

In her engaged pedagogy bell hooks continues Paulo Freire’s pedagogical thinking, where Freire delineated learning as a situation in which “praxis [is] action and reflection upon the world in order to change it” (hooks 1994, 14). Freire himself was the voice of critical pedagogy, for whom dialogue was essential to human existence. According to his philosophy, the role of educators is to encourage students to think critically of power structures and oppression, and to act and reflect on it.

“Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world. To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new naming. Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection.”

(Freire 2014, 88)

This naming takes place through one's own situation, always based on the current historical background. When I think about the historical and cultural background this thesis rests on, I realize that it is impossible to name the deaf embodiment in a general form. Although I did not seek to do so in this process, the process made it clear that the different lifeworlds of individual deaf people are intertwined and in order to name the world and to transform it, we need to find a common vocabulary to discuss these issues and address the problems.

I hope that this thesis will serve as breach to a new discussion in art pedagogy. This thesis can also act as a catalyst for further artistic or art pedagogic research. At present, the practices of theatre and theatre pedagogy are insufficient to take into account the lifeworlds of deaf performers. This is a major gap in performing arts, as understanding and incorporating the deaf embodiment into art pedagogy and artistic work has

enormous artistic, practical, and aesthetic potential. From an educational policy point of view, the education of the performing arts in particular has an extremely important and responsible role to play here. For example, Theatre Academy should actively provide a space for deaf students and researchers so that the deaf can develop their own artistic practice, principles, and aesthetics. Only then can we break free from the constant cycle of reasonable adjustments, adaptation, and assimilation, and eventually transform the world.

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