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c/o ACTION
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ATTENTION: the language of these poems is that
of the poets, including "PICTURE
EDITING IN MIND" by Peter Cook.

Because of the unique language bond between the Navajo
& American Sign Language (ASL) users, ACTION encourages
you to write the U.S. Congress urging the repeal of PL
93-531 which calls for the forced relocation of these
Native Americans from their sacred lands for the purpose
of strip-mining.

A TRIBE IS DEAF

On February 1, 1984, Allen Ginsberg & Robert Panara gave a workshop on poetry and sign language at The National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID). That day sparked an explosion of Deaf Poetry in Rochester. In this issue of ACTION, we wish to show the extent to which a new Deaf American poetry has already gone visibly public. The sheer appearance of the 3 poets whose work we print AS IS attests to their courage and strength, as well as other deaf poets not collected herein, but working within the context of American Sign Language (ASL) only. We feel this work provides a most contemporary window into the language of silence - opposed by poetry - which has befallen these times. To Peter Cook, Debbie Rennie, and Patrick Graybill, we proudly hail the raw and naked language of your poems & talk. Your immunity to fatigue. Graced to struggle for expression, these poems, interviews and poetics portray their legitimate difference. That is, as the hands are the mouth, as the body is the Voice, so the printed page - for the deaf poet - is the spokesperson, the "press-secretary". It is not a metaphor when we say that the Deaf are a tribe in the hearing people's world. ASL, which has no written form, is a predicate, classifier-based system similar to the Athabaskan language family, which includes Navajo: the greatest North American native poets. Often, as children, the Deaf are cut off from their homelands. Their hearing parents. Their Deaf Elders. In Rochester, the largest federal outpost on earth, they suffer the indignities common to linguistic minorities. Educationally, a not too subtle policy of bi-non-lingualism is practiced whereby the use of ASL is restricted to extra-curricular activities. This is perennially enforced not only by maintaining a low quota of deaf teachers, but also by hiring monolinguals regardless of their instructional/communication skills. We are fortunate, however, that such discriminatory procedures do not hold true in the local poetry community. In fact, Rochester has become an infinitely richer city due to the direct involvement of the Deaf poets. Our language is enhanced by this confluence. What goes on in our cafes & bars, in Jazzberries & Snake Sisters, as well as our federally-funded center- Writer & Books, is a model for other bio-regions to follow. It is only through this use of the poetic, whose existence is spiritually funded by the expenditures of poets, that we can prevent the utilogue/disinformative phase of language from overwhelming us, as W.C. Williams so carefully warned.

P E T E R C O O K

Cold and Heat

Here am I with cold;
Live with a frosted heartbeat,
So cold,so freezing.

Jack F. laughs at me;
Unseen frost is around me,
I become statue.

Looks for hope with fail;
No heat is around me,yet,
It is at other side.

I'm stuck with pain;
Heat is the cure to the cold pain,
Heat,the great warm love.

I need it badly;
Sir, any feeling that I'm need?,
Beg for it with vain.

Small sparks or big flame;
Whatever: I love it,
Heat is you, my love.

america: land of poets in exile

in the red, blue and white of america,
where people worship apple pie, no, no, no not grandma's pie,
the one, frozen aunt marie's pie in american freezer.
friend or not, may i ask for the existence of poets in
every corner of darkness in the great melting pot
where are they now? how come we don't see any reading in:
Mc Donald? the deli counter in Queens?,
next to x-ray machine in dentist's office?
the refund office in j.c. penny? ladies room in maxium?
the city dump? the sheep shed in iowa?
basement of miss manners? the room of the way and mean
committee, government, usa.002003-345
please raise your hands if you have seen them and i'll give
you a gold star for your head.
but be careful.
it's america that you have too look out.
they view our exiled poets, who have the power to create emotion
as the element of facisism.

DON QUOXITIE DIDNT REALLY ATTACK THE WINDMILL

he never attack the windmill

i shall prove it with my wooden shoes on

doing some cola on rust

it's in the book that said he did.

but book is a book; i saw in my own eyes

don't get me wrong, i'm deaf and truth can't lie to me

wanna know the stuff, the right stuff?

just look at those federal kids brawling in the

great fueless heated cone house.

sir, have you make any progress?

yes, with a snicker in the corner of mouth

oh.. you mean that all problems is over?

well, ya know, it's in the paper now, don't worry man.

oh.. is the lybian problem over?

russian over?

south african over?

deficit over?

environment over?

snicker still there.. Don Quoxitie didn't really attack...

breath thru your knees

eight sparks in row,
highlightened by fourth ones
do the parallel road, please with quiet energy
let your nostrils as the guide of movement
lines of warm human legs with
freedom of chains.
knees started to spoke as they bend down,
while reaching out for the sky:

alark! life is so tender
why can't we keep this way?
we beg for you to keep us
alive
with joynous energy to jump
into love's lives.

sweat as inspiring with new cosmic wave
filled with sweetness in our lung
bend over with our right legs while
riding in air with our left legs
keep up in air long as our
noses give breath to our knees
if they do, the sacred moment of human density
has captured two hundred sparks for our big night,
the night we color the sky with sparks.

honey on a nipple

wet stick in a dark bag
fingernails snort every sweat
from curve line to toe line
taste buds are thrilled by foreigners
nice to learn other communications
rubs that stick and hears the
released sound; you can hear
with mind
nostrils sting by human creams
teeth vibrate as sound escape
grabs those cheeks until cherries blossom
see a mountain evolues during
the peak of oneness
salty water streak thru hair of hairs
motion in movement, more please
yes more i wannnnnnnnnnnaaaaaaaaaa!
legs with lava ooh must be turn on
sorry, just a lumply ones
swallow that warmth with open pupils in
covered eye sockets, body jerks, bents, gasps, sheirks
better than a one hand date.....

WHY AM I DEAF?

(to answer why i am not hearing.)

why couldnt my eardrum wake up and dance?
must be wonderful to hear all those noise
bach, mozart, chorus, birds, bells, snow thru branches.
must be so glamorous! always brings me a tear in my eyes
but why couldn't my ears feel what i think?

now as i seek the world:

marcos announced a reinstatement
on his boys; not to play with fire.

plo declared a war against jew state bec
they don't like the taste of matzo.

people of ethoptia scream for life.

reagan bluffed about his star war project, i.e., toys
road shcrrecch people yyyeel gun party bomb blammbo pek a
boo mrs sterling's non chat yeyeyeyey wall street upupppuuu band
boom grrrrrrr whap bobobbobkakakakakakaka

mine ears are sometime wiser than me.

Social Critism

for 1. with cost of a trouble.

why social critizing
a way to promote yourself
a fast leader is fake.

but...

the inner core of the POETRY is'nt on you

the poetry don't critize society but rather voice
out an unspoken concern labeled with silence by a
big head cigar smoker

need to reach the soul of the poor
use that stuff than those madison ave stuff MAN!
poetry don't need someone to critize society; itself will.

take a heart and let ur poem do the tricks..

Rochester sucks.

SUSAN

i always thought that susan, that name is too common
but i couldn't see that in you
i used have a rival named susan in my grade school
always pull her hair and pick on her for being a tail tale.
she wasn't good at school
but you, susan, don't fit in that category
you have ur own wise inside of you but there is
laybrinth inside of that wisdom that you'll have to learn
i always thought any one named susan usually end up
in the suburanism fever, working for ibm.
you susan, don't fit into these category
your inner soul is restless and need to spread out
to show that susan isn't always be susan.
i know you did that that's what make me adore you
susan.....

THE BIG BLUE TILED BATHTUB IN LITTLE RED HOUSE

every time i think of the blue tiled bathtub
in that red house, i aroused
never forget the the time in the steam
oh i want that so badly
red hair still tangle in my old brush
love the felt of the fannel blanket
where i could kiss the warm sweet from her
i still recall the time when we as fragile
naked human beings
looked at each other with a smile
no need to be shameful, sir.
those round body that my vibes always explore around
i groan everytime i think of the blue tiled bathtub
in that red house.
someday, shall we have a glass of warm life in
the pool of steam for the taste of love?

12/3/85

visual sign of red wave at the great wave

Scent of sandalwood travels
thru inner dream of mine
with soft smile of sadness
quiet clouds encircle my pupils
only noise can be heard:
springly movement of rust hair curls
at rims of my beard.
one can tell a dream from a thought
heart began to lean back and wonder
the primo life of past
entering the state of precious present
urges to feel the seriousness
inside my lungs, and realizes
that we are the historians
of each contemporary
interpretation not started at
the blossom of the lady of paradise...

PICTURE EDITING IN MIND:

Mine Ears Sometimes Are Wiser Than Me

"No whood sal ova kom a sekl moosun of
a fenkur."

- a deaf person in a speech therapy
room.

Feb, 1st 1984, a day to remember. my nerves quickly
rush to my eyes bank to collect the image that I
captured at that day: the finger-touching between
two great, inspiring poets who are the living
proof of Ying-Yang i.e. a totally different world,
allen ginsberg and robert panara. there were beauty
in their eyes and I was overwhelming to know that
they were communicating to each other's heart in
silent. both of them knew why there were there;
to seek for a door to open each other world.
And their smiles was the proof that they did found
the key.

Do not take the great union of Ginsberg and Panara as
a token for a birth of visual poetry. this form of
art has been hidden in the darkness of
the kingdom of noise for ages. In fact, it is older
than the Uluru Song stick. Let me give you a light,
How do you expect a primitive person telling a story
about his/her hunting experience to his/her tribe
without using any verbal constructive language?
Body language! Those people use their bodies as the
medium of their own communication channel. This has
been gone thru ages.

I rather call this form of art as visual poetry rather than deaf poetry because you don't need to smash your own ear drums to do visual poetry!

Sterotype is one of the deadliest handicapped that a deaf person ever face. It must be mentioned that deafness is'nt handicapped but a different perceptive system. Sterotype just makes us llk like being labeled as "handicapped". I feel that I want everyone to be aware of this because majority of population believed that there is no place for a deaf person on the world of poetry because of the use of rhythm, and the use of constructive grammar language. I find this a pure rubbish. each of you have your own rhythm or pace to follow. Have you try to lay down and listen to ur own heartbeat and be able to follow it. That's rhythm! I can write song between each beat. See? Would you lend me an axe to chop up that sterotype.

Hand twists, torso jerks, eyes frown, feet tip, arms stretch, teeth shutter, hairs dance, cheeks tighten, veins pop, balls crotch, stomach holds. -an action of a moment in a line of visual poetry.

Paper, the most valuable tool for a poet. one must treat a piece of paper as a child. no godfather like a wrinkle paper- omen. I would like to point out that written language is a secondary tool to visual poets. it reminds them their works: a nice form of memo. I call my poems (written) the PRESS SECRETARY. It tells people what kind of works do I represent, rather show the beauty in written English. There is one advantage about the press secretary is that it gives my audience an individual experience which I cannot do with my main performance. I need to give out a group experience to succeed. Thus, make visual poetry movement spread slowly.

Remember that in the mind of visual poet that no such written word is more powerful than a blink of an eye.

I have a special relationship with energy, the cosmic one. I use them to create a situation for my audience to think about the action or moral of my works. If I want my poem to be harsh, I must save my energy at specific level while performing a poem, then by the time I want to be harsh, I break out of that surface of previous level of energy and force the cosmic wave into higher level without any preparation. When my energy loses its "virgin" - the vibes are confusing & there's no place to go. As result, I give out raw energy at the harsh part of my work.

When I work with my materials for a show, I do not work alone; just had to call a synod with my inner ambassadors to discuss about the materials to receive the signals inside of my stomach. School of thought only exist in my stomach. I don't dare to use my mind to dominate over my stomach because it is the center of my energy. What you have seen in my performance is my relationship with my inner world.

One thing that make my work very risky is that it can make be blind very easily. Only it need a bit of an iota to make me involve in my world. Every time I perform there is a wall of bricks conducted by a spiritual contractor. It is very painful to take them down. Who want to destroy the beauty of art? I hate to do that at every end of a poem. It's like a world that does not exist in our life such as Sara in Mark Meddoff's Children of A Lesser God, who told James that if they met again, it have to be in the world that do not have any sense of deafness and hearing. I need people to tell me, giving me feedback, any kind of information relating to my works so I can reanalyze their thoughts with my works.

It's nice to be a black sheep in the kingdom of noise.

Why deaf culture have go thru the dark age while there a are a fruitful orchard awaiting for visual artist? The beauty in deaf culture are need to be protected. So many school of thoughts are being thrown out for no reason. It is frustrating to see a hearing teacher trying to throw out american sign language, the official language of the deaf population. We make it official, not those hearing professors trying to force deaf students to accept English as their natural language! Why does that happen so often? So our founding father can be comfortable with us instead of being an illegal alien.

It is strange to see ASL as a big issue in the term of what kind of language to use in the service of deafness. I think ASL is more obvious than verbal written English because of ASL's ability to use the visual channel of communication which verbal English cannot. Why are those scholars trying to throw this sacred language and replacing with an alien language while we are living in a visual-oriented society? I shall will never understand mankind.

Our colonial period in America isn't over bec of the majority of population like the English tea men want to force the deaf minutemen to adapt their life.

The role of interpreter in visual poetry is a controversial issue. Every time I give out a performance, I often end up with a conversation with people about use of interpreters. There are two schools of thought:

- 1) The process of translating a visual poet's work into a constructive verbal English that will meet the level of the energy of the poet's work.
- 2) The control of the application of words in a minimal manner to enforce the audience to analyze the works of the poet.

Let's analyze a few points about these schools of thought. Some people argue that an interpreter or reversal voicing artist must translate every movement of poet's work in order to meet the level of the poet's work. I respect them for their professionalism and the challenge they face. However, there is one caution for visual poets that his/her work may be successful because of a clear translation, not his/her state of art. There is a loss in the original production of a poet's work during a translation and the audience might be forced to image their thoughts or mind pictures from the interpreter's view; not the artist.

In another hand, I appreciate those who use little choice of words to voice out during a poet's performance to make a direct contact between the poet and the audience. There will be a definite flow of energy among the audience from the poet's works.

There are two weak area in this practice

1) It is always possible that a specator misses the point of the poet's work because there is not enough of a translation

2) The poets must know if the translator are controlling the right channel of mass communication during a performance. The poet have to be aware about the time to use the words, and the application of sound effect to dramatize his/her work thru the mouth of translator.

I tend to avoid any of these issue by making my movement be more universal so the audience would not have to depend on my voicing artist. I find this method more pleasure and challenge.

"traditore tradutore" Latin, means "translator is traitor."

What I enjoy about visual poetry is that the opportunity to create ideas is limitless. It can be happened in McDonalds, Sears, darkroom in RIT, Gregory St, a bathroom with a picture of Reagan on toilet, you name it, you got it. When I want to create an idea or a theme for my works I tend to talk with people with few subject that come up from mind picture bank dept. then talk around with the subject and see an application relating to it. For an example. it is always possible to prove that Shakespeare had a deaf mistress by looking up his sonnet #54 and twisting the translation of his work to make sense that he did fool around with a deaf girl ! Of course I expect some people rebuffed at this, but the point is that creativity always pops up when there is no moral value relating to the subject.

The bridge between the poet community and the deaf culture is becoming visible. The traffic on the bridge is a bit slow but very progressive. What I am worry is that there might be a set up of toll on that bridge . Too much tolls in deaf education already happen.

Visual poetry, as I hope, gives a special opportunity to deaf community to control the authority of their own naive language. There is no way for a capitalist or hearing educators to control the application of language in poet's work. It is virally impossible to copy a movement of a poet and identify it with "golden rule". Visual poetry give a space for deaf artist to express out their emotion with maxium amount of freedom-a rare experience for an instituted deaf person. I predict that visual poetry will be the main drive tool to preserve the value of deaf culture in the future.

- pete cook
laburnam cres. 4/86

DEBBIE A. RENNIE

This is not English

this is not a poem

this is for you

but i know that this

look like a poem

but i am talking with you

if it is a problem, call me or

hit the walls

i only can say

i love you for yourself

As Sarah

I played her
because she drew a hearing aid on
a picture of Virgin Mary
Her mother cried and
threw her out to deaf school
she thought that her own daughter is
mental retarded.

I understand her very well
She filled up with rage inside her
Again, mother wants her to be normal by
fucking with hearing boys.

The Street People

In Boston, I just sit on the bench
besides the mystery old woman
she just sit right there
she roll her hair with plastic rollers
she has a grease gray hair
she just keep talking and gestures to nowhere
I wonder what happens in her mind
Is she choose that kind of life?
A sort of nice man give her a sandwiches
she takes and eats half
she said nothing to that man
Looking like that she feels normal
Many and many people stared at her
And I am still sitting on the same bench
My God, I don't even move

Anger

What is anger?

Does the anger helps you feel better?

Is it good for us to be anger?

Does anger with children is good?

How do we feel after we anger?

Why the angers exist?

Does the anger has its own mind?

Let me to ask you again

Do you know that Americans

Stole children more than cars?

My Mother

My mother

She walks through her garden and
picks the flowers

Sometimes she trims the tree as she express her love there
She is brave and strong

Imagine that she meets her own son who is deaf
for first time

She never know about deafness before her son born

Again, she had another son who is hearing

Then me, her own daughter who is also deaf

Next one, her own son who is hearing

That's it

One day, my mother and I take a nap

She holds my hand all through

I wake up and see that

Now I understand her love so much

She is very silent

but her eyes tell everything

She doesn't know sign language but

I have seen that she is better than other mothers

So I wish that she can measure my love

I love her rest of my life

A Joke

When I want to be funny,

I cannot

When I do not want to be funny,

I can

Like all of my poems are not funny

I try to write a poem which should be funny

It becomes serious

like grow ups

like me

when I was a young girl (must be very cute)

I always be creative and be funny

It works

But now I just can't laugh at the world

Rte. 96

I see the farm land on the side
And there have yellow corns
the big fence with barbed wires crossed each other
the wires look like monsters hang up
on the fence
the sign say "Seneca Depot Area"
that is where the large numbers of mx all over
beat the world
the fucking fence continues...

The Sky is Purple

the music cannot through my ears
because I cannot hear since I born
but...

the music can through my mind
I could dance anytime, anywhere, anyhow
I can see music in my mind
like the sky is purple

A Note To Interpreters

Poems in English

is art

same with

poems

in ASL is art

if it is interpreted in signed

English is not art!!

Who is Kenny?

The man who calls me Teppy

because he thinks that I misunderstand lipreading

D look like T

B look like P

He believes that all of my life

I misunderstand

Yes, true as well as the hearing people

But I never misunderstand the beautiful love from
this man who calls me Teppy

INTERVIEW WITH DEBBIE RENNIE

Debbie Rennie (DR), deaf poet, clown and actress, has lived in Rochester, New York, on and off for the past 10 years. She was a member of Sunshine Too, a performance troupe based at The National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID). During her two years with the Fairmount Theater of the Deaf, in Cleveland, Ohio, she toured both Jordan and Czechoslovakia. In November, 1983, she performed at The Eighth Annual International Pantomime Festival of the Deaf in Brno, Czech., where she won the festival's top award. This interview - conducted and transcribed from videotape by Donna Kachites (DK), took place during the March, 1986 run of Children Of A Lesser God, in which Ms. Rennie starred as Sarah Norman, the leading character in Mark Medoff's classic play on the subject of deafness in America.

DK: Today is, what, March 16...

DR: No, the 16th is Sunday.

DK: Today is March 14, 1986, and I am interviewing Debbie Rennie. I want to ask you how you first became involved in performance art?

DR: It depends on what you mean by performance art.

DK: What kinds of performance have you been involved with?

DR: Really, I began performing the moment I was born. I performed in order to communicate with my family. Then, when I attended The Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf (WSPD), I took a mime workshop. I really enjoyed it and that's when I began thinking about my career. Later on, I saw an NTID performance. I liked what I saw. A friend of mine convinced me to audition for Commedia dell'arte. I got a part. That was my first role. I really got into developing the character. Afterwards, the response from the audience was really positive. They felt I did a nice job. That was real inspiring.

DK: I know that you perform as a clown. Can you talk about that?

DR: Really, that came about in 1981 when I joined FTD, The Fairmount Theater of the Deaf. A deaf man, Adriene Blue - he's a director and a playwright - saw me and gave me a clown to do. I was quite nervous about it so I went to the library

and researched clowning. I'm self taught. I found out everything I could about clowning techniques, including mime. I had to think about make-up, clothes... Adriene told me what he wanted me to do and I improvised on that, came up with many ideas that the two of us chose from to use for my clown. I really enjoyed relating with the audience. My best talent is my ability to relate with the audience. So, I became a clown. I thought I would perform one time and that would be it, but then a friend of mine who is a clown himself encouraged me to continue clowning. I realized I could do clowning in the schools. It's something I can do for the rest of my life.

DK: You said your best talent is your ability to relate with the audience. Does it matter if the audience is hearing or deaf?

DR: No, it doesn't matter.

DK: Right now, you're involved in a play that's really popular. People are really applauding your work. I've seen newspaper articles about it and TV interviews with you. How is all that for you? What's going on with the play?

DR: It's strange because I've done that sort of thing all my life with Sunshine Two and FTD- a lot of TV interviews, newspaper articles... but that was a once-in-a-while thing. Now, everything is happening at the same time. The newspaper articles and interviews all happened in one week! I've gotten used to the idea of interviews and TV because people want to talk to me. Of course people want to get to know me. I'm open to interviews. And also, I don't think of it as "WOW, I'm so popular." I don't think like that. It's just people getting to know me. I doubt I'll become rich and famous. I'll prevent that from happening. But, it's nice exposure for me, for my work. It's given me the chance to prove I do good work.

DK: So you've proved yourself as a deaf person, as a performer?

DR: Right!

DK: And as a woman?

DR: My work is proof that deaf people can do what people have always said they can't do. I don't act like a hollywood star. That's not for me.

DK: How do you feel playing the role of Sarah in Children Of A Lesser God?

DR: Wow! I can't believe it. That play has lead my thoughts about the future to become much more complex. My original goal was to do clowning to which I added poetry and then story-telling and now I've added theater. As time goes on I'm getting more deeply involved in them all. It's so much to incorporate into my life, to what I want to do. Being involved with Children Of A Lesser God is a wonderful experience for me. There is such raw emotion involved in the play. It's the first time I've caused an audience to cry. Up until now, most of the time I've made the audience laugh. But with this play, they're crying. It's intense. I can't bear it.

DK: I remember the performance I saw. When it was over and the cast came out for their bow you were crying. That was something. That performance really touched you.

DR: Yes, a lot of Sarah's experiences are similar to my own. Several different things in the play reminded me of my own experiences. At times, the reminders were so overwhelming I didn't want to go on with rehearsal. I just wanted to get out of there. I had bad experiences at the Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf (WPSD).

DK: Really, what bad experiences?

DR: I was 13 years old when I was sent there. I was the new girl there and naturally all the kids taunted and made fun of me. They kept it up for close to two years, until finally, I had to become a real "tough guy". I'd play tricks on the supervisor. I was real rebellious, real mischievous.

DK: Did you know American Sign Language (ASL) when you got to WPSD?

DR: Well, sort of. I wasn't real fluent. I lacked education.

DK: Until you got to WPSD?

DR: Yeah, at the age of 13 I became aware of education. That was when I was in sixth grade.

DK: What was going on before that? Did you go to public school?

DR: Yes, I went to Wayne School in Erie, Pa.. It was a public school with a mainstreamed program.

DK: Did you have a sign language interpreter?

DR: Oh no, none at all. It was an oral program. I used speech-reading and gestures to communicate all that time. My education there involved music, reading, spelling and speech. There was no emphasis on English grammar. Oh, they also had a good math program but their teaching of English stunk. Of course, that's why my English stinks. I didn't learn anything about the English language until I was 13. It was quite a struggle, like learning a second language. I believe that slowly but surely my English is improving.

DK: Has learning sign language helped you to learn English?

DR: Yes, definitely.

DK: We've talked about the variety of performance art that you do, one of which is poetry. When did you first start writing or making poems?

DR: I wrote my first poem at a time when I had fallen in love with a man. He was a beautiful person. He was hearing, but he could sign very well. I was so in love with him I could hardly stand it. The two of us talked about our relationship. We were such good friends, but we had never slept together, never had that kind of deep relationship. I said to him, "I'd like to have a relationship with you," and he said, "No, no, no... I feel like I'm in a goldfish bowl... I mean because you're deaf I can't share everything with you." That broke my heart. It just tore me up. He wouldn't be with me because of my deafness. For a year after that I was angry about being deaf. At that time, 1979, I started writing in a diary everyday. I wrote a poem after him and I gave him the poem. He read it and was very touched. Then, the second poem I wrote was in 1980. I was in a relationship with a different man of course, and it was going fine, but he wouldn't allow me to share his music with him. He couldn't accept the idea of me, a deaf person, being able to understand music. I told him I could understand it in terms of art, but he wouldn't listen to that. I had always considered poetry very private - as writing just for myself - but since the Bird's Brain Society, I've begun to get my work out.

DK: When did you begin making poems in ASL? Was it for the Bird's Brain Society? (The BBS was a sign language poetry performance series, founded during the fall of 1984, in a bar on the campus of the Rochester Institute of Technology. The name itself is taken from the poem "Birdbrain" by Allen Ginsberg.)

DR: Really, before that time I had done translations of other poems into sign language, when I was in Sunshine Too, but I never created my own poems in ASL until the Bird's Brain Society.

DK: What difference do you see between ASL poetry and English poetry?

DR: Really, there is no difference.

DK: Oh really?!

DR: Because both are languages, both have beauty.

DK: Yes, but because they are separate languages, their poetry must be different.

DR: Yes and the difference is in pictures. ASL poetry is visual while English poetry depends on sound. Basically, the two languages use the same poetic concepts, but ASL poetry is more connected with acting, more related to theater, while written poetry is related more to literature. So there are differences.

DK: It's interesting that you said English poetry depends on sound. That's true for some English poetry, but William Carlos Williams said, "No ideas but in things," meaning what's important in poetry is when you see something happening to capture it - to put down that image and to have a clear picture. That doesn't involve sound.

DR: I mean in terms of word choices. Sometimes when you and I discuss translations, you'll say, "That doesn't sound quite right," and we'll change the words around so that they work better together. That's the idea I'm getting at. It's depending on the sound, but ASL is depending on the visual image. The written English must read smoothly in the same way that the ASL performance must flow.

DK: What effect did performing in the Bird's Brain Society have on you?

DR: It helped me to think about the possibility of doing poetry. Something I hadn't even considered before.

DK: Do you think poetry is a source of power for deaf people?

DR: I don't know.

DK: Do you think ASL poetry could be a source of power for deaf people?

DR: I'm sure when deaf people see more and more ASL poetry it will have an effect on them. It will make them realize it's something they can do too.

DK: It seems like you've been telling me your ASL poetry has been a source of power for you.

DR: Yes, for me definitely.

DK: Do you have a sense of a growing community of deaf artists, especially poets?

DR: It's a slow growth. I'm sure that Jim Cohn has helped a lot. If he wasn't there, things might never have changed, but when he came along, things started to develop. It's due to his work that I'm doing poetry; that Patrick Graybill performed his poetry at Jazzberries (March 20, 1986). There is progress being made. I feel that Jim has done a lot of work to lead the local deaf community towards taking control of their own language. I believe that once they see the monthly readings at Jazzberries, the NTID community will become more involved. It's a possibility I hope for. I feel strongly that the deaf poetry scene will continue to grow.

DK: You recently mentioned translations. I'd like to talk about that now. You perform to a variety of audiences. Often, they don't know ASL so you use an interpreter. Can you talk about the translation process, any problems that have come up, and your solutions to those problems?

DR: Translation is a fun process for me because, well, of course you, Jim and I have worked on translations together. Sometimes it comes real easy and it's pure inspiration. Sometimes there's a real clear picture in ASL and finding the words in English seems impossible. But working together, playing off each other's ideas, that's fun. Really, I enjoy having a problem in front of me and going about solving it. I enjoy the challenge. If it's a difficult problem, we work on it and that's the fun part.

DK: Yes, you work on it until it resolves itself.

DR: And it becomes beautiful. It's such an exciting process. I think it's more fun than translating other foreign languages. I think, I don't know. I don't KNOW any foreign languages.

DK: Maybe that's just because ASL and English are the only two languages you know. It would be pretty difficult to translate a poem into French if you didn't know any French.

DR: It's interesting because I do know English and that helps with the translation.

DK: Is there a difference between a translation done for a live performance and those done for the page?

DR: My own way of writing is a mystery to most hearing people. Like, one time I showed Laura Briaggiotti a poem of mine and after she read it she said, "I'm jealous of you." I said, "Why?" and she said, "I would never think that way." The line she was talking about was "The music can't through my ears." A hearing person would never think of putting it that way.

DK: Because they already know the rules of English. You don't and so you don't follow them.

DR: Right... I would say that a translation done for the page is different from that done for a live performance in that what's done on the page depends upon sound, the flow of the words, and how it looks on the page while the "live" translation considers the voice intonation, the emotion.

DK: And also the performance itself is visual. People can depend on your body language for information. A "total translation" may not be necessary.

DR: I also feel like I do two different things at the same time. For example, my signed poem "Rte 96" and the written version I've done of that are completely different.

DK: When thinking about doing this interview, I had planned to ask you why it's important for you to have your work on the page, but now it seems like maybe it's not that important to you. Is it?

DR: Translating my poems for a live performance is very important to me.

DK: But I mean, is it important to translate your ASL poems for the page?

- DR: I don't know. I'm scared of it. To print my own writing is a scary thing. I like what I write, but I don't know how the community will react to it. This is the first time my work will be published and it's exciting, but at the same time I'm nervous... Yes, it's important because I will learn from it. Learning what other people think of my writing will be a way to improve myself.
- DK: I see. Jerome Rothenberg edited Shaking The Pumpkin: Traditional Poetry of the Indian North Americans. In his introduction to that book, he talks about the "total translation" as taking into account any or all elements of the original poem - beyond the words. That seems particularly relevant to a translation of a performed sign poem. What do you think?
- DR: Oh definitely, definitely. You have to see it all. For example, when I translate an English poem into ASL, I study the poem until I know it. Then, I sign it. The order may be completely different in ASL than in English. It's important that the concept is there and the timing is right. Placement is also important in ASL translations. You must look at the concept first.
- DK: Paul Blackburn (1926-1971), poet and translator, in an interview with The New York Quarterly in the early 1970s said translators can introduce variations which his own language permits but the original does not IF the distortion of meaning isn't too great. "Equivalencies," said Blackburn, "are different in different tongues and different generations. Who's expected to read the final job?" In other words, different translations for the same poem can work for different audiences. What do you think of that?
- DR: If I were giving a poetry reading for a group of mentally retarded people I would do it differently. I would not include as many specific details, but would exaggerate for clarity. I would say you have to take into account the culture of the particular group you are performing for. Really, there are so many ways to translate.
- DK: I was thinking Blackburn's feelings on different translations for different audiences related to different translations for the page and for the performance.
- DR: Yes, they are different in that they're different forms of expression.

- DK: Going back to Rothenberg... he says, for a translator to match the interest of the original, he/she must extend its meaning into his own language and by means of his own voice. "This assumes a poet's voice to begin with." Do you think the translator must be a poet?
- DR: Sometimes I do feel that. I feel that it's important for the person to be involved with poetry, to enjoy reading poetry, but I doubt you would have to be a pure poet. Some poets, as performers, are totally inept. Some poets are wonderful readers. But where is there another person with my exact style? There is none. I'm me, Debbie Rennie. I have my own poetic style, my own way of approaching poetry, of expressing myself. It's hard, but I have found people who I feel connected with, who understand me. We'll sit down and talk about the translation together, really work together. Like I work with you. I feel that your voicing style compliments my poetry, Susan Chapel's compliments my storytelling, and Kenny Lerner's compliments my clowning.
- DK: So it's like the character has to match?
- DR: Right, but I don't think the person's voice must be poetic.
- DK: I remember Paul Blackburn in that same interview said something like becoming a translator means you have to be willing and able to go into another person's head. That's what you're talking about, right?
- DR: Yes, I'm always open to anyone I'm working with because I care about what I do and I want them to know me even including my private life.
- DK: When you go to a poetry reading that's interpreted for the deaf, do you prefer a more literal translation (signed English) or an actual translation into ASL? Why?
- DR: I'm strongly dependent on sign and I prefer an ASL translation. That's a tough thing to do. Some poetry is literal and doesn't seem possible to interpret. Sometimes the poets' words have double meanings that are hard to show in sign language because signs are so explicit and depict a single concept at one time. I prefer an ASL translation because I rely on the concepts in the poetry rather than the original language used to express them. I'm much more into abstract feelings than surface statements. If someone signs to me the signs I LOVE YOU that doesn't tell me much, however if they sign the idiom "I've fallen head over heels in love with you"

it means a lot more. It's incredibly difficult to interpret poetry from English to ASL. You have to talk with the poet to find out his or her intentions so that the translation will be clear for the audience.

DK: There was something you said that I wanted to comment on... Oh yeah, Paul Blackburn talks about what to do with words that have double meanings - he says that if the language your're translating into doesn't have an equivalent word with the same double meaning he should chose "which ever single meaning seems most genial to the (translated) text or strongest to his understanding."

DR: Oh yes, it's a difficult choice.

DK: Can you talk about your other work as an artist? Your work as a woman, as a deaf woman?

DR: Interesting... I never really paid much attention to feminism but I do place a lot of emphasis on my deafness because I know a lot of deaf people who wish they were hearing. You have to accept who you are. Maybe some hearing people are worse off than I am. So I'm deaf, so what! Some of my poems talk about my deafness. Also, it's hard for me to think of myself as a woman because I've always considered myself a human being first. I see all people as human beings and I don't focus on their gender. Although sometimes I do like men to respect me as a woman.

DK: Do you think you've been treated differently because you're a woman?

DR: I wouldn't say that, but I think any special treatment I've gotten is due to my deafness.

DK: That's interesting. I was expecting you to talk about negative treatment and not positive.

DR: When I'm doing my clowning I'm neutral. I don't portray the clown as male or female, but I make fun of both. When I was in Jordan, men treated women there terribly - as if they were dogs. Women even had to walk at a distance behind the men. But those same men treated me with much respect. More than the men I was working with.

DK: Why do you think that was?

DR: I think I have a very strong personality and that was obvious to them. I'm not a very feminine woman, but then again, I'm not a real hard-ass either. I had the same experience with the men in Czechoslovakia.

DK: When you travel to other countries and you meet other deaf people, what is your communication like?

DR: I just love it!! I wish that was my job. I use a lot of improvisation. A lot of people actually asked me to interpret for them. I think the combination of my skills with clowning, mime, gesture and communication with my family have enhanced my ability to do that. It was funny- in Jordan, one time, a newspaper reporter was interviewing me and during the interview he asked me if I would interpret a question to a deaf man from Jordan who was with us even though the two of them both knew the same language. He wanted to know what the guy did for a living. So, I mimed out waking up in the morning and going off to work. I acted out several different occupations such as: carpentry, painting, and sewing. The man answered me.

DK: Far-out!

DR: Yes, it was. That would be such a fascinating job for me... I would just love it.

PATRICK GRAYBILL

The Surprise

I'm imagining a mental-clear picture...
There a girl diminutive and cute,
A balloon held - purple and squeezeable,
Lets the balloon grow tall
'Til it is stopped by a string
Trailed and tied around her ring finger.
She pulls the toy down, lets it soar off.
So does the string. Farewell and farewell!
The balloon purple pulls the string - -
This string pulls the visual picture away.

The Paradox

The woman black sings a story
While pounding the piano keys, sings,
"Where's my man, the man I love?"
The keys, those white and black ivories,
Up and down, up and down, sing,
"Where's my man, the man I love?"

Women, women all over
And men, all men among them
Watch the singer wailing
"Where's my man, the man I love?"
The piano, black and white,
Makes a soundless pause.

Women in the black and white room
Arise to their feet with their men,
Clapping hands continually.
The singer black grins and bows.
Then she walks to meet her man.
For her the song is only a song.

The inner song always pesters me,
"Where's my man, the man I love?"
My mother can hear, can sign.
My father can hear, can't sign.
The true song inside me lasts,
"Where's my man, the man I love?"

The Disease

The mindless, heartless, and dark lives,
Suicide-prone. Zest for life, where?
They walk all day, all night,
Looking for something they don't know.

Helloless, goodbyeless dark lives
Laugh seldom if ever, cry at times.
They gaze at nothing all days,
Hoping for somebody they can love.

REFLECTION

5 4 3 2 1 0 - Smoke...
The liftoff of the Challenger inspired me.
1 minute 49 seconds later - explosion!
My heart halted.
The maimed shuttle descended,
Thus depressing me.

It dawned upon me...
Flashback...Memory
1963: President Kennedy was shot,
His head blown to bits,
His body bent.
Teardrop.

MEMORIES

1

Every Sunday...

Ah! That smokestack red brick!

Kansas School for the Deaf.

2

Cheap institution colors!

Paints: eyesore yellow,

Pale blue, sickly green. Blah!

3

Again, a speech lesson!

I talked in signs.

Punishment: mitts tied together.

4

Miss Kilcoyne, my teacher...

Always waddling in grouch.

Sh! That bulldog!

THE PATRICK GRAYBILL INTERVIEW

Patrick Graybill (PG) brings to his poetry a long-standing career in theater performance which entails world travels with the National Theater of the Deaf (NTD) and currently, director/actor and teaching responsibilities at The National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) in Rochester, New York. He has spear-headed the recent poetry activity by deaf poets in his desire to make American Sign Language (ASL), his native language, public. These activities include performances with Peter Cook and Debbie Rennie in the Bird's Brain Society (1984-85) and at Jazzberries, a local coffee-house (1986). The following interview occurred 26.II.86. It was conducted and later transcribed by Jim Cohn (JC).

JC: It's February 26, 1986, and I'm with Patrick Graybill, from Kansas. And presently, Rochester, New York. My first question is related to history and language. Back in 1983, in San Francisco, there was a meeting of Deaf artists. One of those deaf artists was Ella Mae Lentz. Ella. In the course of that workshop, she stated, "Most deaf people are bilingual." My question is, are you?

PG: I think so, yes. I already have a first language: ASL. It was easier for me to obtain a second language. Growing up at a school for the Deaf, I learned English. Also, at home, my mother often encouraged me to read and write. So, English is my second language. Perfect? No, but I'm comfortable using English, both, so yes I am bilingual.

JC: Which school did you attend?

PG: The Kansas School for the Deaf (KSD).

JC: Is that school still in existence?

PG: Oh yes, it's about 12 miles from my home.

JC: What years did you attend?

PG: 1945-1956, before going on to Gallaudet College.

JC: Where's KSD located?

PG: In Olathe, Kansas. About 25 miles south-east of K.C..

JC: In school, did your teachers teach using ASL?

PG: Oh no.

JC: Strictly English?

PG: Yes, but the school never forbid the use of ASL in the dorms. In class, we had to use English, but sometimes we deaf people would just sign away in ASL...during class. The teachers had a hard time asking for silence. A real hard time. We were forced into using a second language, but my English was awkward. I hadn't yet learned it. We were free to use ASL but not in class. From the time I was 5 until 9 years of age, I had to wear white gloves if I signed in class. You had to talk. It was strange, I mean, we couldn't use signed English which IS English. We had to speak. I grew up in a deaf family. My parents are hearing, but with 3 deaf sisters and a deaf brother, ASL was in use all the time...and that's why I appreciated dorm life. Class was to be endured. Later, I became a top student and I progressed more easily with classes where signs were used. When I looked at the teacher, I employed signed English. With the other students- ASL.

JC: What years did you attend Gallaudet College?

PG: 1958-63. Then I continued another year for my M.S. which I received in 1964.

JC: In drama, right?

PG: My major was English. Gallaudet didn't have a major in theater then.

JC: It's known that you are "famous" in the acting world of the Deaf. You were a founding member of the National Theater of the Deaf (NTD)-

PG: Hold it. First, I'm curious. What do you mean by "founding member"? Because that's often confused. I joined NTD during its third year and often people call me a "founding" member. I get uneasy...

JC: I guess that's the Myth of Patrick Graybill.

PG: Yeah. Sometimes I tell people straight out that I'm not. That I'm part of NTD's early history. But they still think founding member means first year, first group. Anyway, back to your question.

JC: Well, I'm curious. With your involvement in NTD you travelled the world. You saw many different cultures. Because of ASL, and deaf people's use of ASL, you saw these cultures in the context of a linguistic minority. What with your travels with NTD, how did you begin to change your perceptions of language itself? I mean politically, do you feel your language is suppressed - maybe suppressed at home, locally - but around the world it's accepted? And is that a cause of conflict within you?

PG: I think I was born into the world at the right time. When I majored in English at Gallaudet, the chairperson of that department was the person who declared that ASL was a true language. He, himself, does not sign very well, but he is a skilled researcher.

JC: Who is that?

PG: Dr. William Stokoe. He was chairperson at that time. He "found" ASL. I didn't understand him. At the time (early 60s), his findings puzzled me. I thought English was the first language and all the world studied it, exclusively. To me, ASL was used among the Deaf only- in the dorms, the (Deaf) club, at home, but that was the extent of it. I saw, at the same time, a lot of negative bias against him and I didn't want to support him for the reason that this same discrimination would eventually fly in my face...so when I joined NTD, I felt we should use signed English. NTD has really never spoken out against ASL, or against signed English, but their notion is that hearing people should be able to see and hear the words at the same time. Also, signed English meets the requirements of the Voice performer (that is, the interpreter who speaks for the deaf actor as he or she signs.)...

JC: What Arden Neisser calls "fake bilingualism".

PG: Right. We deaf actors are used to that. Growing up, it's always been that way. We're accustomed to language freedom only in the dorms or by ourselves. But, on stage, even the school stage, it was always signed English. So that has been an on-going conflict for me, a struggle, but that's how it's been and I accept it. I don't understand oppression. I don't understand it, but I can accept it. I'm always having to accept it... Then, in my eighth year with the company, the artistic director, David Hays, requested I do a monologue from "The Harmfulness of Tobacco" by Chekhov. It's about a 25 minute solo and I was excited. On the way out he told me not to practice with anyone else in the company. He said, "I want you to use the language you use in the dining room."

I didn't get it, but he continued, "You sign differently in the dining room than you do on stage. I want you to use THAT dining room language." I was a little embarrassed, but I accepted. And then, Hays barred the signing coach from rehearsals. He wanted me to develop on my own because the director's knowledge of ASL was zilch. So, I became my own "boss" and the voice actor, ignorant of ASL, followed along, trying to get his spoken lines down as I practiced. I really enjoyed making my own translations from the English. Looking back, I understand now that I was more at the ASL end of the continuum than English, but it wasn't pure ASL, because the voice actor had to follow me. And how could he if not skilled in ASL? He could not function with confidence at an unconscious automatic level... So, when the show opened, I was nervous about showing my own language in public.

JC: Why, did you feel naked?

PG: Yeah, because I had to show my true feelings. If I used signed English, my feelings show through so little. It continuously blocks my own expression. I remember clearly standing outdoors on stage-

JC: Where?

PG: At the O'Neill Theater Center, the home-base of NTD. Not now, but back then. We had 2 outdoor theaters plus a theater in a barn. I was standing in one of the outdoor areas. There were maybe 150 seats. And as I signed, I was watching the audience. The people's faces showed real joy. They seemed to be understanding more than before. I felt a wonderful rapport with the audience. When the monologue was over, I walked off stage and I couldn't believe it, this new feeling I had. The next night I performed in the barn and my acting company was in the front row of a full house. I was even more nervous. It was the worst. They can be the worst critics. As I performed, it took no time to establish a very tight relationship with them. When I finished, I felt happy, free. My peers were ecstatic. Even the sign coach came over to me. He had some criticism, but still he was knocked out. Since then, I prefer working in a pure ASL mode even though NTD moved back towards the English side of the continuum. They use signed English because it's better incorporated with the spoken English. And that's, well, their show to the world. Now, when I travelled around the world, I met many deaf people outside the theater, and we used a basic - not really ASL - "true" language- basic gestures. Sometimes, they used signed French, signed British-- in that I'm lost. It required two weeks

for me to learn that language. That aside, we used Free Gesture. I did use ASL, but with more basic gestures, expressions. When they came to see us perform on stage, they were completely lost, frustrated. One good thing was they were forced to set up their own theaters (of the Deaf). These are cropping up everywhere now. It's good. They know that we employ two distinct languages: one outside the theater, and one on the stage. They've often told me that they don't understand the language used on stage, but they were proud to see deaf people acting for all the world to see. I'm proud of that. It wasn't easy, after a show, having them ask me what I was doing on stage, but they'd get it after I explained the logic behind it.

JC: You mean that deaf people in other countries you've travelled through don't understand the NTD plays?

PG: Right.

JC: Where did these occurrences happen?

PG: With many audiences. First, Japan. Then, Korea, France, Yugoslavia, Israel, Australia, New Zealand...many other countries. We never went to South Africa or South America, but in the others, they had little idea about what we were doing.

JC: Looking back, can you recall - if you had to talk about your experiences with deaf people from other countries while on your travels - what would the most mind-blowing experience be?

PG: Maybe I should tell you about one poem. It's a haiku. I used to sign this haiku with NTD. They tended to encourage us to present haiku in ASL for both NTD and LTD (Little Theater of the Deaf). One poem I continuously performed is about a frog. It's quiet, dark, and the frog leaps into a pond with a splash. Then it's silent again. I was doing that-

JC: The poem of Basho's?

PG: Yes, I signed it as if it were a large pond. As if the frog made a big splash. Once, a deaf Japanese man came to an NTD summer school session. He had seen us do the poem before. I was proud. He was an artist. He had the Basho piece written in ideograms and gave one to each of us. Well, when the company travelled to Japan, the same deaf man wanted to show us where the poet had seen the frog. I was very excited. When we arrived at a stone garden, he suddenly pointed to a spot and signed, "That's the place!" I looked down, confused.

The pond was only a very small puddle. The frog was no bigger than a bee. I felt enlightened. It meant the poem, the poet, could capture the slenderist moment into a picture with just a few words. We Americans tend to think so big, but the Japanese poet had the time and patience to sit and watch. That experience really shocked me awake!

JC: For myself, I wonder why poetry is such a difficult concept for the Deaf-

PG: It's not that it's a tough concept, it's just that as a whole, the Deaf haven't yet seen their poetry. They've always been restricted to poetry in English. So, no, it's not that poetry is an alien concept, just that most deaf people haven't seen enough models showing poetry in their language. Then, they would surely understand. But there hasn't been enough yet.

JC: Does the Deaf Community realize that poetry can happen in any language?

PG: I dunno. I feel they're not exposed. It's true, if you're a college graduate or an English major, maybe you know poetry in English. But probably not poetry in French. When you read haiku, it's in English translation...

JC: I feel it's been a long-standing problem Deaf students don't realize that poetry happens in every language. They think "poetry", "English", and then they make a connection and hate them both.

PG: Or "poetry" means "hearing people", but not that poetry is universal. That it shows a person's inner feelings. They don't understand that yet. Poetry still implies the world of the hearing...

JC: I'd like to ask you a few questions about Allen Ginsberg. A.G. came to NTID February 1, 1984.

PG: Right. Two years ago.

JC: Two years ago...whooo, time flies. I remember you being there. I remember it clearly, like it happened yesterday. Ginsberg read from "Howl" and when he arrived at the famous phrase in the poem he asked for a translation of it into sign language. The phrase is "hydrogen jukebox". I remember you doing a spontaneous translation of that into ASL from the English. What was your experience of that? Did it effect you?

PG: At first, as I walked up, my knees were rattling. I thought to myself, if I translate these words into my language, will Allen Ginsberg feel hurt? Will the meaning be destroyed? My next thought was, will the other people in the room understand what I'm trying to tell them? Third, there was the problem of my own ego, in so far as I wanted to show what I believed. So, I stood up and tried. The result was important because Ginsberg said, "That's IT!" I was pleasantly surprised by that from him, but when I was doing it, I could see the picture very clearly. That is, the line itself didn't matter. I had read the words, "hydrogen jukebox", but I didn't really know what they meant. If I had followed the words, what meaning would I have shown? If I did it free, I could capture the inner-understanding. My inner-vision - revealed. I was surprised that I didn't need to worry about end-rhymes or alliteration. I didn't have to... A.G. distributed examples from other poets. I didn't worry about the prosody in those either.

JC: Oh- William Carlos Williams?

PG: Yes.

JC: "The Red Wheelbarrow".

PG: Yes. It was an exciting experience for me at the time. I was awed. Ginsberg is such a successful poet, yet he allowed that.

JC: Related to that workshop, let's continue with the idea of cross-culturalism. During the workshop with Bob Panara, Mr. Ginsberg said, "The clear, hard image is international." Also, he said that the concept of the Image - the clear, hard image - could be useful for deaf poets. Was he right?

PG: Yes. If the poet is not hung-up with excessively decorative language, but worries about showing the image, then in sign language it becomes clear. If it's too cumbersome, it's hard to translate. It works sometimes, but then the signing becomes overly cumbersome as well. What I don't understand is the QUALITY of ASL which gives the CONCRETE picture, regardless of its transcendent capabilities. Sometimes, when I see a lecture or a story or a poem in ASL I don't get it. Even when the images are there. So, I think about this transcendent capacity. I believe that if a person honestly analyzes his or her language, then they can make ASL international.

JC: Do you feel that ASL poetry happens at a minimum level because the education of the Deaf is controlled by the English speaking majority?

PG: Yes, clearly. It's easy to destroy any language if you can't use it in school. And ASL is not really used formally, in formal educational settings. The Deaf world is small to begin with, and at the schools for the Deaf, they waste a lot of time teaching English, teaching speech. ASL does away with that- in the dormitories anyway. But that's why we don't see enough ASL poetry in PUBLIC.

JC: There's no relationship between ASL in public and ASL in private?

PG: Current research is showing that ASL, as a language, is becoming more public. But even recently, it is still being suppressed. For example, the ASL Research Lab at Gallaudet College closed. It closed last year in December, not this past year, but December, 1984.

JC: Why?

PG: The official announcement was that there was already enough research going on through other departments. They didn't feel any more need for an ASL research lab. From stories of people who worked in the lab, the real reason was they were too outspoken. Like gadflies. A constant nuisance. I think this honestly shows that Gallaudet and other schools for the Deaf haven't as yet accepted ASL as the OFFICIAL language used in education. They would rather restrict its use to the dorms, the home, the Club, or the street. I recently received a letter from a friend in Washington, D.C., who told me that one deaf woman who got her Ph.D. in linguistics last July was already fired. Her job was terminated in May. I don't know the whole story, but she wasn't even working in the research lab. She worked in the TV/Media department. But, with a focus on sign language. They just pushed her out the door.

JC: Do you ever feel like...an Indian?

PG: Yeah. Our rights are often taken away and then we're given in exchange something that doesn't apply to us.



