

# **Deafness/Disability - problematising notions of identity, culture and structure**

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## introduction

The aim of this paper is to examine the tension-ridden relationships between Deaf and disabled people, linking them to theoretical analyses of identity, structure and culture. On a surface level, this tension is evidenced not only by the marginalisation of Deaf people from disability politics, and vice versa., but also by the separate evolution of Deaf studies and disability studies. However, this paper will examine the divisions at the deeper level of theory, taking as its basis Margaret Archer's (1996) view that the structural ('parts') and cultural ('people') domains are substantively different, as well as being relatively autonomous from each other. Thus theories developed about the relationship between structures and social agents and between cultures and cultural actors have to recognize the autonomy of structure and culture. The paper argues that different theories are used in Deaf studies and disability studies to conceptualise and explain the same phenomena - identity, culture and structure. This has led to the conflation of these phenomena that has two main effects when we begin to consider the relationship between them. First, somewhat crude unilateral accounts are produced in which one of the phenomena is elided or rendered inert. Second, the phenomena are assumed to be tightly constitutive of each other, with the result that all of them disappear, and so any examination of their interconnections is precluded. Nevertheless 'parts' and 'people' are always interpenetrative, and this becomes particularly visible when their relationship is performed in the battleground of cultural politics. In this respect the structural penetration of culture in Deaf politics and the cultural penetration of structure in disability politics marks Deaf and disabled people as always already divided. In the light of this the paper asks whether Archer's theory has limitations and concludes with a brief look at what the future might hold for political relationships between Deaf and disabled people.

## Deaf studies: the structural penetration of culture

No-one disputes the fact that contemporary relationships between deaf and disabled people are fractured, nor that the meaning of the terms 'deaf' and 'deafness' are central to this. For the purpose of this paper, I will refer to deaf people as that group of people with hearing impairments who are excluded from the dominant areas of social and cultural reproduction by the perpetuation of a phonocentric world-view. They may also feel excluded from the disability movement because the movement is seen to reflect this world-view in the way in which it is socially organised around phonocentric language 'norms'. This description does not include people with hearing impairments who, with the use of hearing aids or surgically implanted

devices, are able to participate fully in a phonocentric society. It does include *Deaf* people - those who use sign language and are excluded *collectively* on the basis of their status as a minority language group. Deaf people, who represent about 3 - 4% of the larger group, include a political element that distances itself from both phonocentric society and Corn my suggestion that they are people with impairments or disabled people (Corker 1998). The decision to include this group in the operational definition given above is therefore immediately contested. But it should be emphasised from the outset that this definition is a *nominal* one. That is, it is not intended to signify deafness as some 'natural', innate or essential human characteristic.

From a historical perspective, much energy has been concentrated either on viewing deaf people as part of the re-articulation of a 'universalising discourse' on disability (Thomson, 1997), or on searching for the origins of a distinct 'Deaf culture'. I will return to the first approach in the next section. For the moment, I want to begin with a focus on the search for 'culture', along with the linguistic analysis of sign language and discourse practice, which is at the heart of Deaf studies - a discipline that has evolved quite separately from disability studies. The Deaf studies agenda assumes that there must be evidence somewhere of a spontaneous and natural uprising of Deaf culture, and that conditions for this could only have been present in contexts and structures where deaf people could come together and interact socially in some form of "community". Language needs the social, and, in the Deaf studies view, the language in question is sign language, which is the 'natural' language of Deaf people. However, we do not know when such communities began to emerge because, as Edwards (1997: 31 & 36) notes, there were, for many centuries, formidable barriers within historical records to identifying deaf communities. For example, in societies where agriculture was the most dominant industry, or where the vast majority of the population was illiterate, deafness would not have been visible. Moreover,

. . . any condition that manifested in muteness would not have been differentiated from deafness. Muteness can result from faulty information processing brought on by forms of autism, learning disabilities and mental illness . . . we are confined to learning about deafness in the ancient Greek world through the filter of the literary elite. In other words, the closest we can observe everyday life for deaf people is through the partial reconstruction of attitudes towards deaf people.

Deafness was perceived not as a physical handicap but as an impairment to reasoning and basic intelligence.

What does seem to be clear is that *interpretations* of cultural discourse in particular historical contexts contrasted sharply even when the spatial and temporal location of ‘culture’ was the same. There is, for example, considerable documented evidence that deafness and other impairments have been, subject to very different cultural constructions at the same point and location in cultural history (Davis, 1995, 1997), and this is commonly cited as one reason why Deaf and disabled people are different. For example, Winzer (1997: 80) notes that ‘the etiology and character of deafness eluded early physicians and philosophers, the condition was usually attributed to supernatural causes. Blindness was more clearly conceptualised, and blind persons throughout the centuries generally attracted more humane treatment that did those suffering other conditions (sic).’

Nelson and Berens (1997: 53) comment that literary and cultural representations of deaf people ‘generally begin to occur with the realisation - largely in the mid-17th century - that deaf were actually educable in ... the majority language of their country, and, as a result, become ‘representable’ *within that majority language*. It was at this point that deaf people became visible, and the term ‘deaf’ began to carry two meanings, one biological and the other social. As such, it seems likely that the emergence of ‘Deaf culture’ resulted from attempts to institutionalise particular approaches to deaf education. Wrigley (1997: 54-55) says that it is therefore important to clarify who controlled this process:

Historically, the management of Deaf identity has shifted between two contrasting but related strategies. In the traditional approach, which began with their “discovery” by hearing people, deaf people were excluded and isolated from society as a group. Though a distinct Deaf identity was denied through removal from society, it was facilitated through this physical warehousing of deaf people together. In the modern approach, exclusion and isolation are achieved through dispersal - by mainstreaming, a watering down of the group identity in order to deny the unintended results that isolation as a type has produced: the “accident” of Deaf culture . . . Here again we might observe that the

motivations of the conquistadors and of the “discoverers” of Deaf people seem not so very different, nor do they seem so very different today . . . it is an open question whether today’s scientific examinations seek to “save” Deaf culture’s “soul” in order to expropriate it as an object of curiosity or they simply seek “scientific facts.”

However, the separation of the biological and the social eventually became the basis of a distinction between biological deafness and cultural Deafness, even though Deaf people are both deaf and Deaf (Padden & Humphries, 1988). Lane (1984) implies that cultural Deafness was wholly liberatory, and that sign language users were effectively rescued from the shackles of a phonocentric culture by enlightened benefactors. Therefore, the concept of ‘culture’ has come to rest upon the theory that the entire process of identity formation is conceived of in terms of *an optimisation framework* associated with the “freedom” of the individual to manipulate pre-existing identities in order to achieve maximum social and material benefit (Corker, 1999). The primary motivation for this manipulation, which, it must be said, assumes that people are rational actors in this process, is the exclusion of “negative” identity. That is, the aim is to conform to the Enlightenment ideal of the ‘rational, liberal subject’. This implies that certain identities are valorised as “positive” while others are excluded as ‘negative’, irrespective of the fact that ‘positivity’ and ‘negativity’ are themselves culturally constructed.

With the rise of ‘modern’ Deaf studies, it was cultural Deafness that eventually assumed the status of ‘nature’ within the distinction between biological deafness and cultural Deafness. Important in this respect were two things. The first was the harnessing of the knowledge that greater cultural capital is attributed to language difference than to what is perceived as pathological difference, and so sign language was increasingly promoted as the ‘natural’ or ‘native’ language of all deaf people. Indeed, Deaf people were able to see themselves as exemplars of the ‘subject-of-language approach to understanding identity, and found much support from the ‘turn to language’ in social theory. The second was the harnessing of the public’s fascination with the ‘exotic’ in the pursuit of a durable ‘positive’ Deaf identity as ‘given’, which also gained much credence the rise of a ‘politics of identity’. As Todorov (1993) has argued, the main exception to the tendency to regard the Other as something fearful or ‘negative’ is the phenomenon of *exoticism*, where the Other - though still misunderstood - is considered to be

strange but beautiful, perhaps even superior. However, he does not view exoticism in a positive light, however, believing that it ranks with racism and nationalism in acting as a barrier to the acceptance of human diversity. In this respect, he says that:

. . . patriotism is the perfect mirror image of exoticism, which also forswears an absolute frame of reference but does not give up value judgments; exoticism is the opposite of patriotism in that it valorizes what does not belong to one's own country (*ibid* 1993: 173).

Ladd and John (199 1: 15) suggest that 'to be involved in the political struggles [of Deaf people] gives our members the full knowledge, commitment and allegiance of *the partisan*.' The meanings of patriot and partisan are in some circumstances very similar. In the context of current moves to re-define sign language users *in terms of nation and nationalism*, it is probable that partisanship has evolved into some form of patriotism, as is alluded to in notions of DEAF-PRIDE and DEAF-WORLD. In this way exoticism is concerned with the valorization of Deaf people within the majority culture whereas patriotism is part of the codification of cultural norms within the Deaf community. But, in part because of the cultural focus on belonging, solidarity and recognition, an excess of partisanship has resulted in some Deaf activists focused on rooting out the 'impurities' within their communities on the grounds of language skill, place of education, and identity 'norms' (Corker, 2000a). This pits deaf people against each other as the labels assigned to alternative ways of being 'are actively policed' (Wrigley 1997: 225); in fact, such a view is inherent in the oft-repeated and somewhat superficial dichotomy based on the Woodward convention (1972) which translates as 'good - Deaf' and 'bad - deaf s Put another way, cultural discourse is enmeshed in power play, and this is the main way in which structure penetrates culture.

The dichotomy between deaf and Deaf it should be said, also implies a rejection of *impairment*, largely because its perceived 'negative' meaning appears to contradict the claim to 'naturalness' and 'nationhood' (see Corker, 1998). But this only touches the surface of the complex web of linguistic interaction that constructs particular versions of impairment and disability. The sign which can be glossed as DISABILITY-OPPRESSION is a combination of the 'neutral' sign DISABLED, which does not indicate different impairments, plus the sign OPPRESSION. It is used mainly by the

Deaf elite - that is, those sign language users who have been privileged in their immersion in Deaf culture and language by birthright or by educational location. And, as Wrigley (1997: 110) notes, paraphrasing bell hooks (1984), 'by ignoring the differences among deaf people and claiming further elite status, relatively privileged Deaf people are able to claim identification with all experience of Deafness while also assuming special authority to speak for Deaf people quite unlike themselves.' Hence, some Deaf activists, whilst using DISABILITY-OPPRESSION privately, continue to use in more public arenas the sign referred to in the British Deaf Association's BSL/English dictionary which glosses as CRIPPLE. Those who are involved in disability politics know that some disabled people use the term 'cripple' in the same way that some gays use the term 'queer' (Peters, 2000). It is a political statement of defiance and pride in the face of societal oppression. But ordinary Deaf people translate CRIPPLE from within an understanding of disability as tragedy and pathology (Corker, 2000c). Further, the meanings of 'difference' in use amongst deaf people, who are marginal to cultural politics, are by no means as clear cut, as recent work with deaf children has shown (Corker 2000c, 2002a, 2002b).

We therefore have to ask whether this use of the sign CRIPPLE is *intended* to put social distance between Deaf and disabled people? In other words, when particular sociolinguistic strategies are used by those who have 'knowledge' in the Foucaudian sense, does this mount to the strategic reinforcement of unequal power relations? Certainly, Ladd and John (1991: 14) argue the political position that Deaf people do not want mainstream society to restructure so that they can be included in it. Instead they must claim their inalienable 'right to exist as a linguistic minority group within that society'. In other words, linguistic minority discourses affirm the discourse of pathology and tragedy by emphasising their distance from it, whilst seeking to re-articulate Deaf people's 'exotic' status *within* this discourse. In a phenomenological context, then, it seems that Deaf people and disabled people represent *different* Others in their relationship with the dominant culture. Further, Ladd, writing in Jane Campbell and Mike Oliver's book *Disability Politics* (1996: 120 - 21), suggests that it is disabled people's understanding of culture that is responsible:

Culture as in art is one thing. Culture as in deaf culture is another. Basically, deaf people whose first language is BSL, should be seen as a linguistic minority . . . the whole definition of culture is so much wider than the

one the disability movement is espousing. [. . . .] The centrepiece of it is our schools . . . where we are socialised into the culture. Integration threatens to destroy these centres of achievement. The irony is that 80% of deaf kids are integrated, with no little thanks to disabled people; we are the ones sent to the valley of Undeaf, not they.

The claim of Deaf people to particularistic minoritizing rights has specific implications for contemporary relationships between Deaf people and the disability movement, because both are engaged in the pursuit of inalienable 'rights'. Further, the 'rights' in question are ultimately expressions of contested 'rights' to self-definition and self-determination (Shakespeare 1993; Jankowski 1997; Oliver 1996).

Disability studies: the cultural penetration of structure

It should be clear from the above discussion that culture is viewed by Deaf studies as the main battleground for the tension between Deaf and disabled people. On one level, this tension is explicit, as Vie Finkelstein's (1996: 111) rejoinder to Ladd's point about the definition of 'culture' shows:

. . . there is a great deal of uncertainty amongst disabled people whether we do want 'our own culture'. After all, we all have had experiences of resisting being treated as different, as inferior to the rest of society. So, why now, when there is much greater awareness of our desire to be fully integrated into society, do we suddenly want to go off at a tangent and start trying to promote our differences, our separate identity? Secondly, at this time, even if we do want to promote our own identity, our own culture, there has been precious little opportunity to develop a cultural life.

Later on, he describes disabled people's 'distinctive group identity' as a 'cultural' identity, and other writers refer to disability arts as "engaging in alternative cultural production" which enables the fight back against a disabling 'culture.' However, what seems to be happening is that though two distinct meanings of culture - culture as a distinct way of life (the DEAF - WAY); and culture as the production and circulation of meaning - or 'what enables us to "make sense" of things [through] social discourses and



practices which construct the world meaningfully' (du Gay et. al., 1997: 13) -are being used interchangeably, a disability studies perspective on culture is seen to diminish Deaf people's culture.

It seems paradoxical, then, that it is the cultural meaning of Deafness that is reified in disability theory, but this, I suggest, is a result of the structural penetration of culture driven by a politics of identity. On one level, this contributes to the silencing of constitutive understandings of deafness because the diverse language preferences, language ability, hearing status, social identifications and personal, social and cultural identity that are as characteristic of deaf people, as they are of any language community are ignored (Kannapell, 1993). On another level, however, for those who have little or no language of any kind, the risk of this strategy is that it can reinforce dependency on the power, administrations and beneficence of the state, which defines the terms and boundaries of their lives (Corker, 2000a). This likelihood significantly increases when the only social or linguistic links between separatist and mainstream cultures are *necessarily-mediated* by the mainstream culture through sign language interpreters or social workers, for example. In this way, as Wrigley (1997: 59) notes, some deaf people have been 'appropriated and exploited for purposes entirely external to themselves [. . .] often . . . given voices not their own Authentic voices, in any sense of the phrase are in short supply. Signs are plentiful, but the code by which the dominant readings might be challenged is unprivileged and disenfranchised'. When the structural account is foregrounded, this amounts to disablement, which gives some weight to Finkelstein's concerns about disabled people's uncritical acceptance of the 'cultural' route to liberation, expressed quite explicitly in his work with Ossie Stuart (1996).

I am mindful, however, that more recent writing from key disability studies scholars in the UK has argued for a multi-level, multi-dimensional analysis of disability that incorporates different paradigms, along with their competing world-views and methodologies (Barnes et al, 1999). Indeed, writing from an American disability studies perspective, Rosemarie Garland Thomson (1997: 22), goes so far as to present such an analysis as a set of structures whose logical form is both *universalistic* and rooted in *structure*:

Disability studies should become a universalizing discourse. Disability . . . would then be recognized as structuring a wide range of thought, language and perception that might not be explicitly articulated as

“disability”. I am proposing then a universalizing view of disability by showing how a concept of disability informs such national ideologies as American liberal individualism and sentimentalism, as well as African American and lesbian identities.

Such a universalist logic is presumably meant to include Deaf people - indeed Thomson does imply that this is the case on a number of occasions. But this logic clashes with the minoritizing logic promoted by Deaf people, which is just one indication that its socio-cultural reception is likely to be far from universal. Indeed, when we turn the focus to disability studies, and examine how culture penetrates structure, it seems that the very way in which culture is appropriated by disability theory is part of the problem. In this context, it has to be emphasised that when tension and conflict are thought about in particular ways, this works *against* multi-level, multi-dimensional analysis. The result can be that particular world-views and methodologies are conflated and this leads to a narrowing of explanatory power rather than its broadening. Further, because ideas and knowledge are part of the *social constitution* of disability, as well as its *social determination*, and as such, they are socially embedded in the diverse realities of disabled people’s lives, particular disabled people identify with and even come to signify particular ways of thinking about disability.

In Britain, disability theory as we know it emerged from and built on a document published by the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS), called *The Fundamental Principles of Disability* (1976). The structural and material emphasis of this document on status, rights and redistribution is clear: for example, it uses the word “social” 59 times and ‘society’ 24 times, but ‘culture’ is not mentioned at all. This document also introduces *the social model of disability*, which makes a conceptual distinction between *disability* and *impairment* - a distinction that has been and continues to be useful for explaining disability as a form of institutionalised social oppression and for challenging normative world-views. The distinction is intended, I think, as an *analytical dualism*, though it is more commonly viewed and used in practice \*as a *dichotomy*. This tendency to dichotomy is the subject of my earlier work, where I look at the structuration of deaf and Deaf (Corker, 1998). This is because the focus on disability must be justified to a certain extent by the marginalisation of both impairment and subjectivity within a discrete analytical field. Thus it has remained under-examined *from a disability studies perspective* until

comparatively recently, and even then such examination has met with strains of disease (see for example Abberley, 1987; Hughes and Paterson, 1997; Corker, 1998; Thomas, 1999).

The tendency to use a dualism as if it were a dichotomy is also extended to the less explicit, but more fundamental distinction between structure and culture. This distinction, in connection with the relations between Deaf and disabled people, can be paralleled with Lockwood's (1964) distinction between socio-cultural integration and cultural system integration. That is, Deaf people are primarily concerned with the relationships between cultural agents, whereas disabled people are concerned with the relationships between the components of culture, and neither can be adequately analyzed within a timework that conflates them. This ought not to be surprising given that the two views of culture presented above remain one of the central arguments between sociology and cultural studies (for further analysis, see Peters, 2000). In this respect, and in view of Margaret Archer's concerns presented in the introduction, it is interesting that in more recent disability studies accounts, the term 'culture' has suddenly appeared *within* the structural analysis of disability. For example, Barnes et al (1999: 2), describe disability as 'socially created' - constructed 'on top of impairment' - continuing that 'the explanation of its changing character is located in the social and economic structure and culture of the society in which it is found.' As Archer (ibid) continues, 'parts' and 'people' 'are not co-existent through time' and so a particular structure of disability, for example, pre-dates our contemporary constitution as disabled subjects. Therefore 'if "culture" is simply 'added in', it 'prevents the interplay between 'parts' and 'people' from being the foundation of cultural dynamics' and so it can only underpin certain kinds of social relational models.

I want to be clear at this point that I do not dispute that disability can usefully be viewed as a social relation. However, I contest Carol Thomas' (1999: 40, my italics) view that an analytical approach that is focused on structure and on materialism can adequately explain disability as a product of 'social relationships *between people*'. Such analyses take a view of culture that tends to be concentrated on 'cultural system integration' (Archer, 1996; cf Lockwood' 1964) and on 'economic reductionism' (Abberley, 1998: 89) And, as Archer (1996: xvii) explains, this is perhaps a product of the pervasive 'myth of cultural integration' appropriated by sociology from early anthropology, which perpetuates an image of culture as a coherent pattern, a uniform ethos or a symbolically consistent universe.' From this

perspective, 'culture is not viewed as something that is susceptible to malintegration, let alone conceptualised in terms of its degree of integration (either comparatively or historically)' (bid). I would argue that such a perspective re-produces a *specific understanding* of social relations and 'co-operation between individuals' (Man and Engels, 1970: 50) in the domain of 'socio-cultural integration'.

Of course, this 'image of culture' is, as we have seen' also appropriated by Deaf studies and this perhaps leads to the illusion of cultural integration, especially when it is framed by a politics of visibility. Further, like Deaf studies, disability studies extends this view of culture to a view of 'identity' as an irreducible 'given'. But this is as far as socio-cultural integration can go, because the view of language that is assumed by these images of culture and identity is often naive in that 'communication and 'co-operation' in terms of a sender-hearer model (see Jakobson, 1960). That is, a message is perceived as something that is emitted by a sender and received by a receiver, and the communicative or relational content of the message doesn't change as it circulates between human subjects. This places an emphasis on language as socially determining and sidelines its socially constitutive element, which is bound up in issues of identification and negotiation. The sender-hearer model of communication has been challenged by recent theoretical developments in communication and media studies (Luhmann, 1995). It is seen to present a very limited view of the possibilities of socio-cultural integration - or to use the contemporary term 'inclusion' - in its positioning of people as mannequins who are the puppets of social structure. I feel, therefore, that this is where we begin to see signs of cultural malintegration. Thus the explanatory power of a 'social relational model' is weakened by a conflation that '*sinks* the difference between the 'parts' and the 'people' who hold positions or ideas within them' (Archer, 1996: xiv).

#### The future of cultural politics

As Hall (1996) suggests, the irreducibility of the concept 'identity' emerges from its centrality to the question of agency and politics. Hall uses agency in the Foucauldian (1970) sense to mean 'discursive practice', which, in Archer's terms would threaten the relative autonomy of structure and culture. Correspondingly, Hall's interpretation brings to mind the 'subject-of-language' approach to identity, which foregrounds social constitution, and examines the unique and pervasive influence of language on human experience and activity *in socio-cultural interaction*. Thus, for Hall, politics means 'both the significance of modern forms of political movement of the

signifier 'identity', its pivotal relationship to a politics of location - but also the manifest difficulties and instabilities which have characteristically affected all contemporary forms of 'identity politics' (ibid: 2). 'Identity politics' is generally taken to mean that marginalized groups generate a self-designated identity or group consciousness that is instantiated by the individual identities of its constituents. Further, some would argue that identity politics differs from many *new social movements* because the constituents of the former - such as women, gays and lesbians and people of colour and ethnic minorities - are politically marked as individuals. It is also the case that claims for group rights are often a challenge to the *modern* interpretation of universal citizenship, which is itself a very powerful group identity. This is important because 'identity' is more usually viewed in its association with the cultural account, but here, it is being implied that it is also part of the structural account.

It is perhaps for this reason that, within the arena of identity, disabled people occupy a somewhat fuzzy position. First disability is not a 'natural' category, but an elastic and transient one (Silvers, 2000; Longmore and Goldberger, 2000). Second, though analysis tends to present a 'politics' of identity' as a "politics of visibility", impairment is not always visible and so questions of 'marking and 'recognitions are complex. And finally, in the Global village, local actions are extremely diverse, and the clarity that can be attributed to identity becomes blurred. For example, 'identity politics' is dominant in North American approaches to analysing disability as a political question, whereas British approaches have traditionally regarded disabled people as a 'new social movement', and have favoured a 'politics of disability'. Nevertheless, though both are concerned with claiming inalienable rights, the rights in question are increasingly delineated. North American approaches (now) talk about the "claiming" of 'knowledge and identity' that positions disabled people as cultural actors (Linton, 1998), whereas British approaches emphasise the 'right' to employment, housing, transport, goods and services and so on, which positions disabled people as social agents and citizens (Oliver & Barnes, 1998). Again, I must emphasise that I'm talking about *dominant* trends. This is not to say that American analysis excludes 'structure' (see, for example, Russell, 1998) nor that British approaches exclude 'culture' and 'identity' (see for example Shakespeare, 1994; Corker and French, 1999), just that these forms of analysis are elided within dominant paradigms. For disability theorists who believe the main object of struggle should be economic redistribution, cultural politics is too fragmented, incoherent and 'merely cultural' - that is

too far removed from the economic realm - to achieve social transformation. To Deaf people and others, the fragmentation, incoherence and symbolism of cultural politics are precisely its political strengths. They believe that groups suffer injustices and inequalities on the basis of unequal and unfair distribution not only of economic capital but also of symbolic, social and cultural capital. Certainly, it is the latter form of capital that has assumed particular signification in the Global village.

However, as Archer might suggest, perhaps the important point is that the distinction between culture and economy, cultural and structural, and hence, between redistribution and recognition is an analytical distinction that, in their everyday struggles, Deaf and disabled people do not make. Indeed, I wonder if this is the danger of analytical dualism at the level of theory because theory *itself* located in the world of ideas and, in a dualistic relation to the world of 'people', can achieve a conflation that dis-embodies the world from its 'people'. In view of this, it is interesting that Archer's ideas include no more than a passing reference to the body of work that might be glossed as 'post-modern', but which includes poststructuralism, social constructionism and postcolonialism. This is in some ways regrettable because it seems to reflect the tendency within contemporary theory to draw uncritically on social and cultural metaphors that emerged at, and were contextualised by earlier times in history. On a theoretical level, 'post-modern' work has been at the heart of the cultural penetration of structure and has informed our understanding of changing cultural, social and political structures in western society and of the phenomenon of social constitution. One could therefore ask whether Archer's apparent suspicion of this work is yet another example of "the fallacy of conflation", which has resulted in the erasure of troublesome theories in the dumping ground of 'postmodernism - blah, blah, blah' (Corker and Shakespeare, 2002).

That being said, and particularly in view of the comments made above about people's everyday struggles, it is important to ask where the battleground of cultural politics leaves Deaf people, and what possibilities there are for socio-cultural and cultural systemic integration. My answer to these questions has been explored extensively in earlier work (Corker, 1998, 2000a, 2000b). Here it will be brief. From Deaf people's perspectives, the turn to culture in disability studies should be welcome as it might enable some interface where cultural dissonance can be explored from a measure of common ground. It is nevertheless clear that even in countries where a movement to cultural politics has gathered momentum, notably North

America, Deaf people are largely invisible, except by way of anecdote in disability studies accounts. Where Deaf and disabled people do come together, it is on the basis of majority-minority relations where they co-exist rather than intermingle (Peters, 2000). If there is little socio-cultural integration in reality, one has to ask serious questions about whether Deaf people want to engage in disabled people's universalistic brand of cultural politics. I think the answer to that is negative. I also think that Deaf people's own version of cultural politics has harnessed the support of three powerful cultural sponsors of integration - 'exoticism', 'naturalness' and consensus with the dominant cultural discourse - support that is sufficient to sustain its particularist political agenda without help from disabled people. In fact, the very nature of this sponsorship means that disabled people's involvement would be seen as a form of pollution. As Martha Minow (1990: 22) writes:

Neither separation nor integration can eradicate the meaning of difference as long as the majority locates difference in a minority group that does not fit the world designed for the majority... Difference, after all, is a comparative term. It implies a reference: different from whom? And perhaps even more interesting, how much does it matter, and to whom?

Clearly difference matters a great deal to Deaf people (Corker, 1999b, 2001b). The best case scenario, then, is that disabled people's cultural campaigns work towards a form of cultural systemic integration, which recognizes the rights of individual groups, whilst keeping in mind that deaf people are not born or *made* equal.

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