Mike Gulliver

Write me a memory

Or, the constructions of the deaf-mute banquets in 19th century Paris

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Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation is carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original except where indicated by special reference in the text and no part of the dissertation as been submitted for any other degree.

Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University of Bristol

This dissertation has not been presented to any other University for examination in either the United Kingdom or overseas

Signed:

Mike Gulliver

Date:

“On s'était dit rendez-vous dans 10 ans,
Même jour, même heure, même pomme.
On verra quand on aura 30 ans
Sur les marches de la place des grands hommes…
On verra quand on aura 30 ans
Si on est d'venus des grands hommes...”

- Patrick Bruel

“For a hundred years now, we’ve supported a ritual and mythology that is becoming more and more venerable, traditional and immovable. In some ways, it isn’t under our control any more”

- Ankor Jael in Isaac Asimov’s Foundation

Contents

Abstract

This study challenges traditional understandings of the Deaf-Mute banquets of mid 19th century Paris by showing how they have been created by a selective transfer of certain structures of significance evident within parts of the original records of the banquets. By investigating other records and presenting an alternate interpretation based on them it demonstrates the existence of contested significance structures. Based on evidence from the records themselves, it demonstrates the processes that lead to the creation of these structures of significance, which are instrumental in forming imaginings of reality that are independent of reliance on historical fact, and shows how these imaginings have been extended to the creation of power structures within knowledge. It ends by suggesting that further research into constructions of imagined reality form an important role in defining both the historical record, and ourselves.

1. Preamble and acknowledgements

In 1995, following my graduation, my parents gave me a book. White, with red lettering on the cover, it was handed to me still in a carrier bag with the words "You've been talking about this for ages, now do something about it"! The book was *Sign Language* by Jim Kyle and Bencie Woll (Kyle & Woll 1985).

I had indeed been talking about it for ages. Fascinated by minorities, I had frequently frustrated the lecturers trying to teach me the finer points of Chomskian linguistics by my insistence that language was, above all, a political and symbolic act couched in social interaction and better explored through such fields as history, geography and social theory. Language was identity, a reality-building filter which created epistemologies that crafted our very understanding of reality, a focus for tradition and a rationale for separatism.

On the other hand, I reasoned that Sign language had to be a single international code of communication, tied directly to thought; the perfect interface of language and symbolism, the panacea for the world's linguistic and symbolic compartmentalisation. However, as I began to read and understand the history and situation of the world's Deaf communities I found myself faced, not by a happy band of international communicators unshackled by the strictures of language-imposed understanding, but by an innumerable number of small communities, with their own languages, demonstrating the same structure of feeling (Williams 1961) as other minority language communities. However, with their similarities came an understanding of differences that challenged many of the accepted ways of knowing about minorities and prompted further excitement.

The more I read, the more I wanted to read, to the point where I was unable to satisfy my curiosity with the restricted literature and time available and so, in 2001 I returned to university to undertake an MSc in Deaf Studies. A move which brought me into a community of academics also interested in the same areas as myself. I would therefore like to thank: firstly Dr Paul Glennie, my supervisor and Drs Paddy Ladd and Simon Naylor for their help and advice. I would also like to thank Prof Paul Cloke for his support and friendship.

In addition, I have to thank my friends and church family in Bristol. Particularly the members of the yoof team and 'Midlife Crisis' including Olly Wainright, who watched over my emotional health and fed me beer. Lastly I have to thank Joanna Wicks just for being, that's enough for me.

2. Introduction

History appears to play a more overt role in establishing the identity and epistemology of minority groups than it does for majorities (Gulliver 2002, Ladd 2003). This is particularly true for the Deaf[1] community who see, in their past, the variously contested paths that have led to their classification as: a linguistically, or culturally, or psychologically, or pedagogically, or medically defined community. History, for the Deaf community, is a place of contested interpretations and epistemological roots.

However, as I found during my time in the Deaf Studies department, direct access to historical records can be problematic for English-world Deaf academics since many of them are written in French, a language they do not know. They are, therefore, reliant on work by hearing academics for interpretation. Unsatisfied with this, I began to locate, and read for myself the original historical material in French with the aim of translating it at a later date.

This dissertation provided a perfect opportunity to begin some initial research into the epistemologies of the 19th century and I selected the accounts of a series of deaf-run banquets from the 1830's to 1860's as my principle source. However, I was rather stunned when, during a research visit to the library of the *Institut National des Jeunes Sourds*, I became increasingly aware that the existing hearing-written commentaries, on which Deaf research work was

[1] The term 'deaf' is commonly capitalised in academic literature when it refers to a group for whom their identity is not medically defined, but rather culturally and linguistically defined. This, however, is a recent development and so does not appear in the historical records accessed during this study. Instead, the term deaf-mute (which is actually insulting nowadays) is used. Because of these difficulties, I have opted to use 'Deaf' when referring to a modern-day, culturally defined community of Deaf people, and deaf at all other times. However, I have preserved 'deaf-mute' where it appears in the record since it has a unique reference, specific to the historical context.

being carried out, represented the events of the mid 19th century in a very different way from the original material.

I was presented with a quandary. I felt the need to share what I had found. However, to simply present it 'raw' could be potentially damaging to political, epistemological and identity issues based upon previous research. At this point it was suggested to me that, in fact, the material offered the perfect opportunity to study just this tension by using the evidence discovered during this investigation to explore the mechanisms that have led to this tension and the reasons for its significance to the field of historical studies.

2.1 Research questions

There are, therefore, two principle research aims of this study.

1. To situate and explore, in detail, information concerned with divisions within the Paris deaf community as manifested through the banquets from 1834 to 1861..

2. Based on this data, to explore the nature of the historical record, the mechanisms of its construction, and the constraints that operate upon our freedom to explore it.

3. Background

The background to the banquets is presented in several sections that begin by situating them within a simplistic overview of the received course of Western Deaf history. This is followed by a more detailed look at the discourses that surrounded the creation of the particular Paris community and the historical development of that community prior to the inception of the banquets in 1834.

3.1 The Tradition[2]

The Paris deaf community is so central to conceptions of the modern Deaf community that backgrounding it to form an introduction is impossible. True, alternative histories find Deaf people in the philosophies of Ancient Greece, or their influence within monastic signing communities of medieval Europe, or Samuel Pepys' post-fire London, or as the incarnation of wisdom in the Ottoman court. However, traditional modern histories of the Deaf community in the West generally begin with the Paris deaf school[3].

These histories typically describe how deaf people, emerging uneducated and isolated from the mists of antiquity, are united through the creation of the first residential sign language based school for deaf people by the Abbé de l'Epée in the late 18th century. This school acts as a 'glass-house' encouraging the students to develop a language, a culture, and a metaphysics that grow stronger as the community establishes itself into the early 19th century

[2] Although references to works are not provided within the text, aspects of this tradition can be found in many introductory works, including Lane et al. (1996), Lane (1984), Lane (1999), Kyle and Woll (1985) and a plethora of websites, pamphlets and lecture notes from Deaf organisations and study departments.

[3] There are many other countries with different traditions, particularly the UK where deaf education was not based on offshoots from the Paris school. However, even here, much of the academic core of historical understanding of the D/deaf condition and the epistemological positioning of the Deaf community comes from France, via North America (as explored below).

eventually spawning others based around similar schools in continental Europe and America[4].

Having reached a point where it becomes able to stand on its own, it experiences a golden age from 1830 to approximately 1870 in which a strong and politically active deaf community, influential at national and international levels and replete with artists and poets, sculptors and writers, activists and educators who embrace a strong deaf-centred epistemology based around sign language, celebrate their strength with a series of annual banquets. However, this strong community eventually crumbles under scientific discourses of disability and education in 1880[5], deaf education is hijacked by a group of hearing educators who ban sign language, impose oral teaching and secure their position by classifying deaf people as unfit to decide over their own fate.

This situation continues for 80 years during which time the deaf community grows increasingly accepting of hearing run structures and discourses of disability, eventually internalising them in self-oppression and ultimately rejection of sign language itself. The deaf schools become places of oppression. However, in the late 1960's and early 1970's, academic research into sign and the impetus of the civil rights movement in America causes deaf people there to rise up injecting new purpose into the European deaf community which experiences an academic, cultural and political resurgence heavily based on a rediscovery of the potential for deaf self-determination evident within the golden-age of the mid 19th century.

[4] This school, created in conjunction with Laurent Clerc, a teacher from the Paris School, eventually developed into Gallaudet University, the only Deaf university in world (see below and in section 4.1 for its later influence in the field of Deaf studies).
[5] At a conference in Milan which gathered together hearing educators of the deaf from all over the world.

3.2 The discursive context[6]

Clearly this presentation is simplistic and uncritical. However, it goes some way to demonstrating the traditional iconicity of the French deaf community and the 19th century 'golden age' banquets to contemporary Deaf communities. However, we now turn away from tradition to describe in more detail the discursive and historical backgrounds of the banquets.

3.2.1 Early discourses on deaf people

Historically, official discourses on deaf people have varied enormously. However, although there are those who have favoured them as philosophically or intellectually superior, the majority have either seen deafness as a purely physical condition to be overcome or equated it with some form of mental or moral deficiency. The latter was particularly evident within the reaches Western Church who equated faith with hearing, and saw Jesus' ability to exorcise deafness from those afflicted as evidence of deafness as demonisation[7].

However, this official church-handicapping of deaf people that should have precluded them from marriage, property ownership etc. appears to have generally been overlooked by a lay society more concerned with the practical business of everyday life. By medieval times, the actual state of those who could not hear varied widely and those becoming deaf in maturity, through accident or illness, were often able to continue with their normal lives[8]. For

[6] Again, whist direct reference to some works has been made, general introductions to the discursive systems surrounding the Deaf community are available from Lane (1999), Rée (1999), Ladd (1998 and 2003), Griggs (1998), Cuxac (1983), Karacostas (1989) and various small studies carried out into specific historical periods

[7] Although there is disagreement here too. Augustine, for example, saw deafness as little more than a physical disability.

[8] Deafness being considered less problematic than other physical complaints such as the loss of a limb (Cockayne 2004).

those who became deaf young, the quality of their lives depended crucially on their means, with the wealthy and influential clearly faring much better than the isolated poor who were reliant on family for support, unless they were able to secure some form of visually guided employment. The only significant exception to this appears to be deaf people who were part of a deaf community where there was little difference between them and other children[9].

Similarly, educational provision for deaf people varied. Those brought up in a deaf community were given whatever education was traditionally available within their community[10]. Other deaf people relied on what, if anything, they could afford. For the nobility, the requirement to enunciate their identity verbally in order to secure an inheritance gave rise to a number of individual speech tutors. However, the isolated, poor deaf had little or no provision unless they could secure a place within a monastery where there was a tradition of educating deaf children through sign language[11].

3.2.2 Enlightenment discourses

This situation apparently continues until the period of the enlightenment, at which point we suddenly see two main changes. Firstly deaf people are lifted from obscurity to form the focus of much philosophical discussions on the

[9] Records exist of these well-respected communities developing throughout the world (see for example Groce 1985, Ladd 2003, Ladd et al 2003): either spontaneously around geographical areas or families with high incidences of congenital deafness, or artificially, through travel or transportation. Over time the contact of deaf people in large enough numbers gave rise to a commonly agreed community sign language, which was often then passed down from generation to generation, including to hearing people who also formed part of the community and appear to have interfaced between the deaf people and other non-signing hearing people. These communities appear to have been aware of each other and indications are that they communicated, even across national borders.

[10] Clearly, the fact that a community was signing does not immediately predispose it towards providing any more education than a similar hearing community of the time.

[11] There is discussion over the extent to which the education of deaf children in the monasteries, in fact, was the source for monastic sign language (Ladd 2003).

original nature of man. Secondly, the philosophical discussions represent a return to the establishment of official discourses aimed at categorising deaf people according to wider forms of reason.

Significantly, it is the latter that has the greatest effect. The philosophical discussions are not so much about the deaf *person* but the language. Based, apparently on a good knowledge of signing communities (Ladd 2003), Descartes, Diderot, Montaigne, Rousseau and Condillac all arrive at the conclusion that sign language is not only a full language but perhaps even the original language of mankind, one that perhaps offers the possibility of universal communication if it were taught to everyone. However, it would be a mistake to assume that these enlightenment philosophers considered Deaf people as equal to them in all ways except language. It was their very status as 'savages' which allowed for their reasoning.

Consequently, it is here, in the rationalist humanism of the enlightenment that we find the germ of the scientific and medical discourses which allowed for the eventual compartmentalisation of society into the 'well' and the 'ill' of different types (Foucault 1972), the rise of the asylum (Foucault 1979) and the development of welfare based on voluntary organisations and patronage (Oliver 1990). Deaf people, being highly visible were simply 'caught in the spotlight'.

3.3 The historical context

3.3.1 Beginnings

It is in the light of these enlightenment discourses that our story of the Paris deaf community begins in the person of the Abbé Charles-Michel de l'Epée[12]. Born into Versailles' aristocracy in 1712, he was in the rare position of being a priest and a lawyer. However, it is his independent refusal to adhere to the traditional forms of either religion or law that characterise him. Initially refused holy vows, he was admitted to the Paris Bar after four years of training but quickly gave up the legal profession, electing - as did Isaac Newton - to shun official religious views for the risky ideals of his own beliefs.

De l'Epée was strongly liberal, rejecting the narrow theology of the papal church. He was also strongly influenced by enlightenment philosophies, particularly those of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and a perceived need "to reach heaven by trying at least to lead others there"[13]. Thus, in the early 1760's, in a story that has become legend, during one of his visits to the poorer quarter of Paris he found shelter in a home where two deaf sisters were sewing. Unable to communicate with them, he experienced an epiphany:

> "I am prohibited from leading the hearing to know God; I will lead the deaf to know him. I am prohibited from teaching those who speak to sing His praises; I will teach the deaf to sign them. The state has deserted me through intolerance; I will repatriate an entire class of the abandoned as useful citizens. No one will aid me; then I will do it myself… I will overcome all obstacles, I will compensate for the weakness of the senses, I will give men to nature, Christians to the gospel, citizens to the nation, and souls to eternity."[14]

The method he elected to use, independently of any pedagogical training, was education through sign language

3.3.2 The community

[12] Also known as 'de Lespée'. Brief biographical details of main characters that appear in the study are presented in annexe 2.
[13] Epée 1776:98
[14] Lane 1984:54

De l'Epée was clearly unaware of the existing deaf communities in Paris[15] and set out to learn sign language from his own students, which he then 'improved' according to his understanding of grammar[16]. Training his pupils through this new 'methodical' sign, he gained a reputation with the philosophers and nobility of Paris through his public demonstrations in which he and his deaf pupils would explore philosophical ideas through writing and sign. With royal approval, private daughter schools were established throughout France in the 1770's and 1780's.

However, de l'Epée was aging and as the school-based community grew, his health failed. He began to worry about the future of his deaf 'children', and was relieved when, upon his deathbed, he received a promise that *la patrie*[17] would take on the responsibility for continuing his work. He died in 1789, leaving a community of students and ex-students in Paris who had little or no links with the extant Paris deaf community and appear reliant on each other and public charity[18].

3.3.3 The revolution

However, before the new scheme for deaf education could be developed, the events of the revolution intervened and the project was shelved for several years during which time it fell into the hands of a provisional revolutionary government guided by the new discourses of the revolutionary regeneration.

[15] We have little information on these communities prior to their involvement with the community surrounding the deaf school. However, we know that they existed (Carroll 1991), probably in the form that many Deaf communities exist today through an affiliation of deaf people who find themselves in the same urban space.
[16] Sign language grammar differs widely from that of spoken languages partly because it uses physical space to carry grammatical information. De l'Epée's changes to the grammar of sign language were to make it a more linear-string language that would be, in his eyes, better suited to the learning of written French and therefore, the holy scriptures.
[17] The idea being, at this point, a continuation of his philanthropic methods (Mirzoeff 1995, Bernard 1999)
[18] Caroll (1991) even suggests that they continued to use his methodical signing and continued to live according to the philosophical and religious ideals taught to them by de l'Epée.

Thus, whereas the original promise had been to accept their deafness and to continue their education through sign, the new proposals targeted the establishment of a deaf school as the means to advance the restoration of deaf people to society through education and speech (Furet & Ozouf 1989, Outram 1989).

3.3.4 The Institution

By the early 1790's the project was complete and the *Institution Nationale des Sourds-Muets* (National Institution for Deaf-Mutes) was founded. However, as an official establishment, its directorship carried formidable prestige and it became the target of the ambitious Abbé Roch-Ambroise Sicard who engineered his appointment to the post[19] and established himself in the *Célestins*[20]. In 1794, the *Institution* was re-located outside of the Arsenal in the former convent of Saint-Magloire on the Rue St Jacques, where it remains to this day.

However, if the physical location of the *Institution* became fixed from this point on, the community it served and the methods it employed were far from decided. Indeed, Sicard increasingly found himself having to justify his position against a rising tide of competent and intelligent young deaf people and their supporters in the government who considered deaf people entirely capable of assuring their own education. Eventually, in a calculated attempt to keep their own jobs, the administration of the Institution appealed to the new ideas associated with the asylum: "The Deaf-Mute [is] a savage, always close to ferocity and always on the point of becoming a monster." (Perier, an III)

[19] Against the original wishes of de l'Epée who had specified another successor, the abbé Masse, who was the interim director.
[20] In which Sicard had apparently invested quite heavily of his own money. This nepotistic move was abhorred by the director of the co-located Institute for the Blind who had Sicard briefly thrown in prison as a counter revolutionary

3.3.4 Medicalisation

The result was a reclassification of deaf education under the auspices of institutional medical care. On the 6th May 1795, (Mirzoeff 1995:64) *le Sourd-Muet* (the Deaf-Mute) became the official object of institutionalised medical discourses concerned with a cure (Bouvoyer, an VIII, Lane 1984, Branson and Miller 2002, Ladd 2003). This was signalled with the eventual appointment of a Dr Itard to the school in the early 1800's[21].

However, once Sicard was secure in his post, his attention turned away from the school itself and although he continued as the school's director until his death in 1822, his loose-handed approach led to financial ruin. In addition, whilst Dr Itard clearly appeared free to continue his medical trials on the deaf students with impunity[22], the other, largely deaf teaching staff were moving further and further away from the idea of a cure, creating links with the wider Paris deaf community and introducing more and more natural sign inside and outside the classroom.

3.3.5 Oralism and revolt

However, under the auspices of medical care, sign language no longer had any place in an institution aimed at restoring deaf children to society. The government therefore intervened, establishing an administrative council with a well-known Napoleonic politician-philanthropist, the Baron de Gérando, at its head. De Gérando immediately sacked Bébian and set about suppressing the deaf teaching staff who promptly revolted. In 1830, a teacher by the name of Férdinand Berthier, at the head of a deaf contingent and armed with a petition

[21] Dr. Itard is well known to deaf people as the proponent of some of the most horrific attempted treatements of deafness, including artificial infection, puncturing of the eardrum and breaking of the skull. He is also known to the French medical profession as the 'father of French medicine'!

[22] Since their classification within institutional care refused them any opinion or right to opposition.

signed by staff and students, presented their complaints to the newly restored king Louis-Philippe.

Louis-Philippe knew of de l'Epée and had attended some of his public demonstrations before the revolution. However, de Gérando's presence as the deputy minister of the interior kept him in place as the administrative head of the school. Berthier therefore appealed directly to de Gérando's superior, the minister of the interior, on the 12th December and again on the 18th. The letter of the 12th was undersigned by some 60 members of the student body, including a 15 year-old named Jules Imbert. De Gérando's embarrassment was acute, and his action was swift and harsh. Imbert and 7 other students were expelled. Berthier and his deaf colleagues were timetabled out of their normal teaching duties and appointed to 'special needs' classes.

As an additional measure, on the 14th November 1831 de Gérando appointed Désiré Ordinaire, an academic, doctor and staunch anti-signer as director of the Institution. He immediately began to force speech teaching on the students. Despite numerous attempts by the students to escape from the Institution by tunnelling or climbing the garden walls, his measures continued, increasing surveillance to the point where students were followed to the toilet in the night, and bound hand and foot to force them to speak.

These conditions continued into and beyond 1832, at which time we begin to see the genesis of the events that are the focus of our study and to which we now turn.

4. The record

Having outlined the traditional significance of the mid 19th century banquets, and detailed the discourses and history immediately leading up to them, we now turn our attention to the banquet records themselves. This will be done in two sections: Section 4 is a brief overview of research already available in English, followed by a précis of the accepted banquet tradition similar to the historical context given in 3.1. Section 5 contains an exploration of the methodology that guided the research itself.

4.1 Introduction to Previous research

Given the importance of the deaf golden-age, and the banquet accounts in representing them, we might expect to find a great deal of research already available. However, this is not the case. In addition to the English-world Deaf academics great reliance on hearing-produced translations, particularly within the realm of history there are several other reasons.

The first is that there appear to be no French Deaf (or French-reading Deaf) academics able to publish at this level. This, of course means that there is an enormous epistemological gap from within the community of the banquets itself.

The second is that the majority of English, Deaf-centred history has been created by researchers at, or associated with Gallaudet University in the US. This university, birthed by a teacher from the Paris school in the early 1800's, has therefore been strongly influential in positioning the French deaf community's presence as a central axis of Deaf history. However, much of the research done there is follows the development of the American tradition and is drawn away from Paris just before the banquets begin.

Another, more general reason is simply the relative newness of Deaf history as an academic subject and its identity as a minority study. Hence, whilst there is a plethora of 'introductory' works available that mention the banquets[23], little time has yet been invested in specific academic research.

4.1.1 Three works

There are, however, three principle works known to English-language Deaf academia that reference the original banquet documents: The first is Harlan Lane's seminal "When the mind hears" (Lane 1984). The second is "Silent poetry" by Nicholas Mirzoeff (1995) and the third, a translation of a short paper (Mottez 1989), originally published in French. Each of these will be described in more detail, followed by a description of the banquets according to the three

4.1.2 "When the Mind Hears"[24]

It is difficult to overestimate the role that "When the mind hears" has played in the world of Deaf academia and the formative influence that it has had on continuing perceptions of Deaf history. In 1984, at the time of publishing, Lane was a 46-year-old American hearing psychologist who had developed an interest in the Deaf community through linguistic and philosophical research in Paris in the late 60's and early 70's.

A meticulously researched and avowedly politically motivated opus of some 500 pages, "When the mind hears" was greeted eagerly when it was published

[23] Such as Lane, Hoffmeister and Bahan's "Journey into the Deaf-world" (1996)
[24] Professor Lane was unable to dedicate time to specific questions concerning his methodology and motivations. Thus, the content of this section has been gleaned from the introduction to Lane (1984), from the bibliographical information contained within his personal webpage (Lane 2004) and from the biosketch and C.V. which he graciously provided (Lane 2004 – personal correspondence)

in 1984, and its contents were immediately political. However, for our purposes, the book is limited since its service to the American Deaf community means that it sidesteps Parisian events in the manor described above. It is, therefore, of little use to us other than in setting the scene for early 19th century French deaf life and characters[25].

4.1.3 "Silent Poetry"[26]

A more useful work is Nicholas Mirzoeff's "Silent Poetry" (Mirzoeff 1995) if only because it was published ten years later and thus had the luxury of less political urgency. Although an exploration of visual culture in the French deaf community, Mirzoeff is clearly concerned to outline the historical context in which this visual culture operates. This leads him to carry out a minutely studied historical analysis of the period which is based on firsthand study of original documentation and, in contrast to Lane, remains rooted in French deaf culture through the whole of the 19th century. However, given the scope of the work, we are only presented with a few pages of carefully crafted exploration of the genesis of the Banquets and of the discourses that surrounded them.

4.1.4 "Deaf Mute Banquets"[27]

A final work is an introductory-length paper by Bernard Mottez which was originally written in French and presented in celebration of the 200th anniversary of de l'Epée's death in 1989. The paper was then re-presented at 'Deaf Way', an international Deaf festival, before finding a home in two slightly different translated versions in Renate Fischer and Harlan Lanes

[25] It does, however, contain a number of footnotes that were very useful in deciphering some crucial background aspects of my research.
[26] Nick Mirzoeff was initially happy for me to contact him regarding his research but then failed to respond to any further e-mail contact.
[27] Having retired and unequipped with e-mail, I was unable to contact Bernard Mottez. A communication was promised by the current secretary of M. Mottez' previous place of work but took too long to materialise to be of any use in this study.

"Looking back" (1993) and John Vickrey Van Cleve's "Deaf History Unveiled" (1993)

Mottez's paper is the only single-minded treatment of the Banquets available, and is clearly written to remind the contemporary French Deaf community of the origins of their banquet tradition. However, he is keen to describe the immediate context leading to the banquets and moves on to detail the format of the banquets themselves.

There is more detail in Mottez's analysis than either of the others concerning the actual organisation and discourses of the banquets. However, he chooses to simply present the facts, more as a taster and an invitation to further investigation than a designed study. However, Mottez is able to conjure up something of the atmosphere of the banquets and this has been picked up on by more recent commentators (Ladd 2003).

4.1.5 The traditional banquets

Given these three accounts' prominence in forming our understanding of the banquets, it comes as no surprise to see them in close agreement, fulfilling the role designated within the traditional account presented in 3.1 above.

According to this tradition, the essential story of the banquets is the establishment of a *Société Centrale* (central society) of deaf people as a deliberate deaf-controlled forum, based around sign language and deaf epistemologies, in opposition to those prevalent within the school. Beginning in 1834 and programmed to coincide with the birthday of the Abbé de l'Epée (who is represented as a messiah-type 'intellectual father') they were modelled on the republican banquets of the time, and were designed to be a subaltern

space that constituted a "permanent revolt against the institute" (Mirzoeff 1995:114).

The principle discourse of the banquets is the pride of place given to deaf culture, particularly the work of poets, writers and artists, and to sign language which is used in all interactions. Guests were both members of the deaf elite - previous students of the school and other likeminded deaf individuals who often travelled from abroad for the occasion - and hearing friends of the deaf community, often able to sign.

Politically, the *Société* was well connected at all levels of power establishing itself as a self-appointed deaf assembly to represent a fully-fledged deaf 'nation', an idea which generally encapsulated the deaf epistemologies of the time. It achieved its highest success early on, toppling the oralist control of the Institition, and thereafter continued as the principle focus for the political aspirations of the international deaf community. Despite mild and short-lived internal rivalries, the deaf community increasingly drew together in Republican action through the revolution of 1848 and the mid 19th century to eventually fade under oralist pressure in the early 1860's.

The principle legacies of the banquets are not only the discourses of deaf nationhood that were expounded each year, but the knowledge that for a short period at least, deaf people united in being in charge of their own lives, in celebrating their language and culture and in presenting a united front against the oppression of a rising oralist tide. Key to the banquets are the characters that inhabit them. Particularly de l'Epée, the intellectual father of the nation and Berthier, the intellectual giant and doyen of the educated deaf community whose constant opposition to oralist teaching throughout the 19th century and whose deaf nationhood discourses form the backbone for more modern conceptualisations of the Deaf community (Ladd 2003).

5 Approaching the record

Having examined these backgrounds and outlined the evidence offered by previous analyses, the study's next task is to explore ways to access and understand new material.

5. 1 Historiographical debates

As explored above, I initially approached a study of the deaf-mute banquets unaware of what I would find. My initial concern, therefore, in preparing myself with methodology was to ensure that I overcame my relative lack of experience in anything much greater than lay 'potterings' through history.

In order to address this, my reading concentrated on acquiring a knowledge of the various debates associated with historical research and building a range of methods to use. Iggers "historiography" was useful as an overview highlighting various traditions of approach as were examples of later historical works by Ginzburg (1980), le Roy Ladurie (1980) and so on. This led me to formulate a series of tools that I believed I could directly apply to the research such as: multiple times and spaces, or subjective place (Iggers 1997), considerations of scale (Ankersmit 1998), idealism (Collingwood 1961) and so on.

5.1.1 The Challenges of the field

However, having a considerable time preparing this methodology, writing it into a chapter and using it to prepare an outline of approaches based on the records that I had available to me, I then travelled to France where I discovered the unexpected discrepancies in the record. I was left to navigate the implications of this discovery with only a short period of time available to

me, and no theoretical guidance. I therefore made the best attempt I could at gathering the most information possible so that I could transport it home and seek help in analysing it later.

It was only, upon my return to the UK that I found myself in a position to begin understanding what had happened and how to frame it within the dissertation. Worse, having 'burned up' a significant period of my allotted working time in investigating historiographical methods which were suddenly no longer so useful, I now found that I needed, but could not have, a similar period to investigate issues surrounding the role of representation and meaning in: the construction of the record (Secord 1994), epistemology (Lorimer 2002), significance (Geertz 1973), semiotics (Sewell 1980) and so on.

5.2 Different roles for history

The crucial problem that I faced was how to reconcile the various post-modern approaches to history with which I had become familiar, with the knowledge that invoking these methods would fail to justify the validity of my findings to a Deaf community with academic, political and communitarian aims already invested in the traditional understandings of the banquets presented above. I found that whilst these first methods were effective in their ability to capture the objective minutiae of the historical material they appeared to sideline the emotional and political import of the banquet community to the Deaf community, past and present.

History, here, could not be allowed to be simply an investigation of unrelated historical microcosms devoid of context other than that suggested by their study (Ankersmit & Kellner 1995). It needed to have a wider application, a larger-than-self implication. It needed to also pay attention to the grand-narrative type questions that modern historiographical methods had abandoned

towards the beginning of the 20th century along with a simple chronological charting of events (Iggers 1997).

5.2.1 Minority Studies and history

I therefore turned initially to an area with which I was more familiar and where I had already met this debate. Previous study (Gulliver 2002, Ladd et al. 2003) highlights the tensions that surround historical investigations by, and about, minorities and the reluctance that insider and outsider groups have in accepting each others historical interpretations.[28]

The crux of this tension is the refusal, by minorities, to accept the objective 'levelling' of historical information that is a feature of post-modern approaches, whilst at the same time fending off accusations of 'mythology' from the outside. Clearly, approaches to history are different. Thus, whilst post-modern historical methods has progressively moved towards eschewing stark statements of truth in favour of presenting history as increasingly fictionalised, minority epistemologies have shifted in totally the opposite direction becoming more deeply entrenched in seeking to provide a stark 'self-other' contrast.

5.2.2 History and heritage

The reason for the importance that minorities attach to history has been explored by several writers: Conversi (1997), for example, draws a direct link

[28] It is clear from the initial introduction to this work that I have a great interest in minority groups both for their fascinating individuality, but also for what they offer in terms of commonalities and their importance for the understanding of social theory and the social sciences. There is little space here to explore the background to minority studies and what I have dubbed "Minorityhood" however, the reader is invited to consult work by Gulliver (2002), Ladd (2003), Tajfel (1978), Anderson (1991), and more importantly from a theoretical basis, Deleuze and Guattari (1988). Also interesting is Ladd, Gulliver and Batterbury (2003) and Ladd, Batterbury and Gulliver (forthcoming) for the implications of minority studies work. Work in this area is ongoing.

between the fragility of the distinguishing features of minorities and the strength with which they protect them. However, most of this literature exists within the fields of social theory, and political and cultural studies. My aim was to find a way to bridge the gap between the two from within historiography literature.

The key to this came, ironically perhaps given the debate surrounding the field, from discussions of 'heritage' by David Lowenthal (1997) and Raphael Samuel (1994). Both of these writers present information on modern historiographical debates within the same space as debates about heritage agendas such as the need to engineer 'truth' and the search for right and wrong.

The reservation, of course, in approaching minorities through a heritage model is that, given the debates on the validity of heritage, to equate minorities with a heritage-stance on history is to tar them with the 'bad history' brush, and tantamount to dismissing them as 'quackery'. Indeed, this appeared to be the accepted opinion: Lowenthal, in particular, argues that "heritage in general becomes a strictly minority virtue" (Lowenthal 1997: 81).

5.2.3 Significance and reality

It was actually, in reading Lowenthal's argument through the filter of later historiographical studies by, Geertz (1973), Darnton (1985) and the historico-political studies by those such as Furet and Ozouf (1989) and Sewell (1980) who have claimed that "although we obviously cannot hope to experience what… [historical subjects]… experienced… we can, with a little ingenuity, search out in the surviving records the symbolic forms through which they experienced their world" (Sewell 1980:105), that I found a way to resolve the tension that I was experiencing. For these writers, it is not the objective

veracity of history that is the issue, but rather the way in which reality is perceived by those in a historical context.

If this is true and the investigation of historical significance is a valid study, it frees us from the need to 'prove' history. Rather, our task is to explore the Geertzian "webs of significance" that form reality. This is confirmed by Satya Mohanty who has argued that a lack of objective evidence for a particular epistemology does not necessarily make it less real for those who live within it (Mohanty 2003). We are not dealing with objective truth, but with a series of potentially conflicting 'structures of truth' that could also include, as one of those truths, the kind of fetishised history that 'heritage' represents.

5.2.4 A mixture of methods

Thus we find that we have a number of methods available that initially appear to be mutually exclusive, but can in fact be made to work together. Not only are we able to use the various methodologies highlighted in 5.1 as micro-level tools to objectively access information from the documents and records available but we are also then able to critically examine how this objective information is subjectively interpreted by a transformation away from 'fact' into significance which is written into the record.

Furthermore, the existence of the instinctive reluctance that I felt in challenging the significance of the accepted tradition of the banquets indicates that we should also be able to use this method to challenge our own epistemologies and question our own ability to access and interpret historical material with impunity.

5.3 The record

Both of these interpretative tasks clearly depend heavily on the nature and availability of the record as evidence both for objective historical research and for the structures of significance that we expect to find. There is a thriving literature dedicated to examinations of issues surrounding the location and interpretation of archival resources in such a way as to offer us access to the best possible access to the widest range of records.

5.3.1 Accessing the record

Much of this literature contains guidance that should be common sense. For example, suggestions that social structures are written into the record (McCook 1996, Secord 1994) or recommendations that we remain critical of our own ability to see past our preconceived epistemologies (Lorimer and Spedding 2002). However, the fact that these apparently straightforward safeguards needed mentioning is indicative of the kind of ready acceptance of the record that had clearly been so instrumental in creating the hegemony of the traditional banquet account in the first place.

I therefore decided to take Haydon Lorimer (2002) and Chris Philo's (1998) advice and travel to Paris in order to carry out research in the library of the *Institution* (now the *Institut National des Jeunes Sourds*), which continues to this day in its original location on the Avenue St-Jacques.

I progressed by, first confirming material contained within Lane, Mirzoeff and Mottez' accounts of the banquets. Then by seeking out other material as I became familiar with the various interpretative strands that presented themselves. Due to the lack of indexing, most of the records had to be skimmed[29], and then investigated in more detail if they revealed important information.

[29] A substantial task in some cases.

5.3.2 French language analyses

I was not surprised to find that the English texts of Lane, Mirzoeff and Mottez were not the only written analyses available. Indeed, a three tome thesis on the history of gesture in the Paris school by Yves Bernard (Bernard 1999) quickly became much more useful than the three English texts along with a study by Encrevé (2002) on the rise of Deaf identity. However, I quickly found these works limited partly because the aims of the authors were different from mine, glossing over information that I considered crucial.

However, the main limiting factor to their use is that all research done within the boundaries of the Paris institution over the last few years appears to have been carried out in the midst of constant upheaval from building and decorating work, which clearly restricted their access to records[30]. In addition, sporadic gaps in referencing prevented me from definitively locating some of their more intriguing sources. In sum, little new information on the banquets themselves was gleaned from these works which largely followed the same line of argument as the English texts.

5.3.3 Firsthand, available, sources

I was, therefore, forced to access original records directly. These fell into several revealing categories:

The first contains official documentation from the administration of the *Institution* in the form of printed circulars aimed at the daughter schools written in the 1820's and 1830's. These were mostly used to confirm the interpretation of events leading up to Désiré Ordinaire's installation, and the efforts of the directorship to eradicate sign language in teaching. However,

[30] As it did mine, although it was gratifying to find that I had more material available to me than had Encrevé at the time of her writing.

they go little further and offer little evidence of the Institution's official stance vis-à-vis later events.

The second are the principle published works of those associated with the banquet committee and by the school. These take the form of yearly banquet accounts, the *Banquets des Sourds-Muets* (henceforth *Banquets*), authored by the secretary of the *Société Centrale* and bound in two volumes (1834 to 1848, and 1849 to 1863) and a series of works by Berthier himself from the 1830's to the 1870's which include philosophical and pedagogical treatises alongside correspondence, petitions and other communiqués.

A third set of records are from the deaf press that grew from hearing controlled journals in the mid 1800's to a burgeoning deaf-authored series of journals (henceforth *Journaux*) in the later quarter of the century. Intriguingly, until the 1860's Berthier is a pivotal member of many of the journals' editorial boards. However, following his departure, and even more so following his death in the 1880's, the tone of the journals changes and it is in these later editions that we find the primary source for alternative versions of earlier events.

A final set of records available to me were 'ad hoc' papers such as the '*coup d'oeil*' without clear, traceable origins[31]. Apparently published in the late 19th century as single tracts or included in other works, it was these that originally sparked off my scepticism concerning the homogeneity of the official traditional banquet accounts. However, lacking information on authors or dates I had to go through a lengthy period of cross checking to ascertain their veracity. Having done this, I was left with nothing to do but conclude that the

[31] Because of their appearance as single papers, or their use by other writers without sufficient referencing.

events reported were accurate, and that the venom evident in them was worth considering as an historical part of the record in its own right.

5.3.4 Unavailable sources

Whilst all of these above were available within the library, there are more sources that I would have liked to access but was unable to: Minutes of *Société Centrale* and *Institution* meetings, menus from the banquets, school reports, members' correspondence etc, government society registrations and charters, public press and media, mayoral reports, membership lists, financial accounts, etc.[32]

However, another form of record that I expected to find but didn't, was the official documentation of many of the 'alternative' societies and banquets which were set up in opposition to the *Société Centrale*. However, little, if anything of this has found its way into the library. It is difficult to say whether this is as a result of deliberate suppression, or a lack of interest or availability. However, it goes some way to explaining how an exploration of the banquets based on the INJS library might have generated the accounts by Mirzeoff and Lane[33].

[32] Many of these will suggest themselves from the account of the banquets below. Indeed, the librarian could confirm to me that some of this was available, spread throughout the 60 cardboard boxes currently awaiting analysis in the cellar, but was reluctant to let me examine them for myself.

[33] But not Mottez since he worked at the INJS for many years. However, as described above, his paper is designed as a presentation of the banquets' historical legacy and not as an analysis of the wider implications of events around it.

6.0 Data

We now turn to a presentation of the events of the Paris banquets as contained within the various banquet records. Despite the alternative versions of the record it was possible to accurately establish the events that occurred. However, presenting this information was problematic. I could either present a series of different narratives based on the accounts of the different camps, or draw them together into a single account. Eventually, given insufficient evidence to create a full account from all parties, I opted for the second route and chose to highlight different sources within the account.

The presentation of events is necessarily presented in chronological order, with the years included in the section titles to provide temporal references to the development of ideas. Clearly, operating this way forces the data to take on the form of a narrative. However, the referential information should guard against this being the sole interpretation. All references are as footnotes so as not to disrupt the reading of the text with constant bracketed referencing.

A brief overview of the banquets and the representations of them by the principle sources is presented in Annexe 1.

6.1 Le Comité des Sourds-Muets (1834-1837)

6.1.1 The origins of the banquets

Our records of the origins of the official deaf-mute banquets lie outside the *Banquets* documents in the *journaux*[34]. They attribute the original idea to little more than a chance recollection on the evening of the 25th November 1832, when Forestier and Gide[35], two deaf members of staff at the *Institution*, found themselves mulling over the actions of Désiré Ordinaire and realised that it was 120 years to the day that the Abbé de l'Epée had been born. Raising a glass, the two decide to hold a commemorative meal the following year (1833) and invite two other colleagues, Ferdinand Berthier and Boclet to join them[36]. During this meal, the four decided to adopt a suggestion by Forestier and form a committee (*Le Comité des Sourds-Muets*) whose responsibility would be the establishment of an annual banquet on a Sunday evening, on or around the same date with the purpose of formally celebrating the birthday of the Abbé de l'Epée. It was not until the middle of the following November that this committee, which by this time consisted of eleven members, met for the first time at the home of Berthier (who was elected president of the banquet) and laid the foundation for the first banquet which was held at the restaurant "la veau qui tête" in the Place du Châtelet and was attended by 52 deaf and 2 hearing people.

6.1.2 1834: Beginnings

As far as the *Banquets* are concerned, the first banquet took place on the 20th November 1834. It was an emotional affair. Following dinner itself, Berthier's

[34] And are thus either likely to be apocryphal or based on records which are so far unavailable to us.
[35] Little more is known about Gide since he does not feature in any further banquet documentation. As with many of the other personalities associated with the Paris school, an examination of the school records would provide much needed background.
[36] Société d'Appui Fraternel (1913:3-4)

signed[37] speech and toast to "the eternal memory of the Abbé de l'Epée"[38] ended with two of the older attendees in tears. However, hiding behind the emotion associated with memories of de l'Epée, especially in a context dominated by the heavy handed Ordinaire, is a far more wide-reaching political aim.

This aim, clearly thought out and developed well in advance by Berthier[39], is based on an entire re-configuring of the deaf community from the way that it had so far been perceived by the government and the institution.

He starts with sign language and de l'Epée's divinely inspired ability to see it as the only way to raise deaf people out of their isolated, unhappy situation[40]. However, what de l'Epée's actions accomplished was not a temporary appeasement of deaf sufferings, but the definitive emancipation of deaf people to full intelligence and full expression through sign language. These intellectually emancipated deaf people he describes as a 'deaf nation'.

It is this deaf nation that he sees before him. Not a group of 'idiots' as the 1795 law decrees, but an international community of; painters, artists, writers

[37] Although sign language was given primacy throughout the banquets, each speech was translated into spoken French and vice-versa. This impartiality is in stark contrast to the banning of sign language within the walls of the *Institution.*

[38] *Banquets* 1834:15

[39] Although this is the first time we see it expressed as such in public. It may be wondered whether there are earlier indications of such a strong discourse either from Berthier, or others. The likelihood is that Berthier found much inspiration for this nationhood discourse from discussions with Bébian and Massieu (Berthier's deaf mentor at the school) and from the nationalist philosophies of the time. However, this will have to remain the subject of further study since the difficulty of tracing its constituent parts falls outside of the possibilities here

[40] "Before our immortal founder there were indeed those men who were committed to the appeasement of such a cruel infirmity, but their efforts were destined to fail in the midst of public indifference. Their efforts in giving our brothers back the use of speech, considered at that time the only medium for the transmission of ideas, were too weak to overcome so many obstacles. Only one was able to discover this infallible way… In his happy wisdom he seized upon the language that is given to all intelligent beings, without exception, the language that our ancestors used, that our descendents will use. A language understood both by the desert dweller and by the town dweller. The language, at last, of gestures." (*Banquets* 1834:13-14)

and academics. The banquet hall a deaf-nation space in which the 'foreign' hearing are "unfinished, unhappy … deprived of mimicry, pariah of this society and obliged to have recourse to a pencil in order to converse with the heroes of the celebration"[41] unless like the writer Eugène de Monglave, they are a "friend of the deaf-mutes… and initiated into the habits and customs of the nation"[42]

6.1.3 1834-7: A deaf nation

It is the scale of this deaf nation thinking that the first banquets really show. Employing all the rhetoric of nationalist discourse and borrowing heavily from religious imagery[43], the banquets are the "holy institution"[44] of a "nation apart"[45] called to remember and pay "homage"[46] to their "redeemer"[47]. And it is the implications of a deaf nation discourse, appearing from the beginning of the *Banquets* that sets the tone for political action.

Clearly, setting aside the happenstance nature of their origins, Berthier does not regard these banquets as mere celebrations and his tone is more presidential that is required from the mere president of a feast. He sees himself, in fact, as appointed president of the nation and as such, charged with the responsibility for its future political struggle.

> "I understand, furthermore, all that the unanimous support of my brethren imposes upon me in terms of devotion and perseverance in the accomplishment of these new obligations that I undertake on your behalf, before heaven and

[41] *Banquets* 1834:12
[42] ie: sign language (*Banquets* 1834:12)
[43] such is the exuberance of this imagery that some have suggested it represents evidence of a quasi-religious cult to de l'Epée himself. However, as I argue below, it is more likely to be evidence of a deliberate presentation of one version of Deaf history as a tool for framing Deaf nationhood, and the Comité's role within it
[44] *Banquets* 1834:13
[45] *Banquets* 1834:11
[46] *Banquets* 1837:45
[47] *Banquets* 1835:19

> before man. My whole life belongs to you: only you have the right to dispose of it as you see fit."[48]

This struggle is to consist of two main aims: Fistly, the repeal of the erroneous legislation of 1795 that, despite the 'Code Napoléon' of 1804, still effectively condemned deaf people to 'idiocy', and following from this, the inevitable reversal of the actions of the revolutionary government who took de l'Epée's work and turned it into an institution[49]. Deaf nationhood offers proof that deaf people should never have been considered idiots under law, but rather full citizens of France with the rights and privileges of all other citizens. As such, their education should be removed from the auspices of a public institution, and returned to deaf control.

[48] *Banquets* 1834:13
[49] *Banquets* 1834:15 (and see Sicard's actions and the resultant 1795 decree above)

6.2 La Société Centrale des Sourds-Muets (1838 - 1849)

6.2.1 1837: The foundation of the *Société Centrale*

The scale of the *Comité*'s plans did not take long to show. From 1834 until 1837, the *Banquets* report that the internal development of the committee continued apace until its remit extended beyond the simple organisation of the banquets to become a self-appointed deaf "chamber of representatives, their state council"[50]. Eventually, monthly meetings[51] were adopted[52] dealing, not only with the banquet administration, but also with all general matters concerning deaf-mutes[53]. The elected president was Ferdinand Berthier who was assisted in the running of the committee by a vice-president, a secretary and a treasurer[54], and in the practical organisation of the banquet by a number of *commissaries*, chief amongst whom was Forestier.

At the end of October 1837, 5 weeks before the 4th annual banquet, Berthier submitted a project to the minister of the interior proposing the creation of a Central Society of Deaf-Mutes (*Société Centrale des Sourds-Muets*)[55]. The news is communicated to the 1837 banquet invitees (which, for the first time, included a serving member of the government in the person of Laurent de Jussieu, Secretary General of the Seine *Préfécture* and elected MP for Paris) by Berthier in a speech which is much less religious and much more ambassadorial in tone[56]. The foundation of this society appears to have surprised no one, a conclusion supported by the speeches by Forestier and

[50] *Banquets* (1836:32)
[51] Given some of the references made by Yves Bernard (Bernard 1999) it would appear that records of these monthly meetings have been preserved. However, I was unable to locate them in the time available.
[52] *Banquets* (1836: 32)
[53] *Banquets* (1836:32)
[54] *Banquets* (1836:23)
[55] *Banquets* 1847:48
[56] Lending support to the interpretation of section 6.1.3

Lenoir, and appears to be little more than a formalisation of the Comité into an official body.

6.2.2 1838: The establishment of the *Société Centrale*

Thus, on the 27th May 1838, the *Société Centrale des Sourds-Muets* was formally established with: Berthier as President; Forestier as vice-president, Lenoir as secretary, Allibert[57] under-secretary and Boclet treasurer[58]. The aims of the society are enshrined at two levels. The first is addressed to the needs of a Deaf and hearing elite:

> "Its principle aim is to deliberate upon the interests of Deaf-Mutes in general, to gather into a commonly united accord deaf-mute luminaries scattered across the surface of the earth and other learned men who have made a deep study of this speciality, to strengthen the ties that unite this great family, to offer to each of its members a rallying point, a place for reciprocal communication and the resources to make themselves known in the world. However, the Society will not interfere in any way in any associated affairs of the Royal Institution in Paris, nor in any other school for deaf-mutes"[59]

The second level is aimed at a different class of Deaf person:

> "Its concern is also to provide deaf-mute manual workers[60] with the opportunity to meet and study, and to lead them into good habits by the continual assistance of free lessons and wise counsel, to obtain for them space in which to exhibit their art and to ensure for them the patronage of such hearing people whose social standing and acquaintances render them useful for the central Société"[61]

In all of this, the incarnation of deaf nation ideas is evident. A number of elements are striking, particularly in the light of some commentators' arguments that the *Société Centrale* was modelled on welfare societies such as Ozanam's philanthropic *Société de Saint-Vincent-de-Paul*[62]. Principle among these is the complete absence of any overt 'outreach' work to the deaf

[57] Also found as Alibert
[58] Société Centrale (1838)
[59] Société Centrale (1838)
[60] The French word is "ouvriers" which often contains the idea of physical labour. However, it is clear from the rest of the article that artists are included, hence the use of the rather awkward "manual workers"
[61] Société Centrale (1838)
[62] Quatararo (1996)

community[63]. Indeed, the entire focus of the society appears to be the growth and strengthening of an elite deaf-nation[64] community and the provision of ways to enable this group to exert influence in the highest ranks of society.

A second discourse, represented by the non-interference clause of the first paragraph and the tone of the second, is that the Deaf nation, embodied in the *Société Centrale*, had developed to a point where it sees itself as needing to purposefully disassociate itself with the disabling discourses of the *Institution*[65].

6.2.4 1838: A first attempt

However, later on that same year, the Société broke the non-intervention clause in spectacular fashion. The failure of his strict oralist policies had finally led Ordinaire to admit defeat and resign. Seeking to calm the situation, the ministry of the interior bypassed the administrative council, still led by De Gérando, and late in 1838, directly appointed the mayor of the 12th district, Mr de Lanneau, a man with 25 years experience in education, as the new director.

According to the *Banquets,* De Gérando and the council[66] were furious. They refused to attend de Lanneau's inauguration ceremony and barricaded the doors to his office, blocking his access. The resultant stalemate lasted several weeks until the Minister of the interior stepped in and engineered a provisional peace.

[63] In fact, additional articles of the charter outline in great detail the fees to be paid and the obligations placed on members
[64] remember that hearing people could also be members of the deaf nation if, as was the case of Eugène de Monglave, they were sufficiently versed in its customs.
[65] However, Berthier and others continued to work there and as future events show the Institution was not to be spared pressure if it served the greater good of the Société's aims.
[66] Whose responsibility it had previously been to select the director

However, in the meantime, the leaders of the *Société,* ostensibly concerned by the fate of their brethren in the school[67] but also clearly seeing an opportunity to gain influence at the highest level and begin the repeal of the 1795 law, sent de Lanneau a deputation consisting of Berthier, Lenoir and Allibert requesting his presence at their Banquet. De Lanneau, who had no experience of deaf education or sign language[68] was clearly delighted by the overt support offered to him by the three representatives of his teaching staff and accepted.

6.2.5 1838: A false victory

Given the perceived implication of this as a political victory, it is hard to underestimate the excitement of the deaf attendees upon seeing the entrance to the 5th annual banquet, on the 25th November 1838, of a group consisting of their president Berthier, the director of the school, and Mr. Dupin the elder, the president of the elected chamber of deputies. Clearly seeing this as a moment of watershed, the hearing guests were treated to a detailed breakdown of the numerous woes to befall the Institution since the death of Sicard.[69]

Berthier's speech, as recorded in the *Banquets*, confirms to the audience the political symbolism of the presence of de Lanneau and Dupin, linking their presence at the banquet and the nomination of de Lanneau to the directorship of the school to the success of the *Société* in gaining political recognition and the "measure of influence that the government has taken in the interests of the Royal Institution of Paris"[70]. Change, one feels, is just around the corner. His discourse is followed up by Forestier - who has clearly prepared his speech under the assumption that the deaf nation has somehow been officially

[67] *Banquets* 1838:60
[68] and in fact, never learned any sign language. However, as is evident from the lack of loyalty paid to him later on by Berthier, he himself appears to have been of little immediate value. Rather it was the influence over perceptions of the Institution that Berthier and others were seeking.
[69] *Banquets* 1838:61
[70] *Banquets* 1838:62

recognised and lays all the credit for this at the feet of Berthier -, and by Lenoir who paints a picture of the utopias that other deaf school have become, free from the strictures of French law.

Reading between the lines, all of this rather takes Dupin by surprise, especially since he was not invited as a representative of the government but as the coordinator of another of Berthier's projects, to create a memorial to de l'Epée in Versailles. Both he and de Lanneau, appear unaware of the significance that has been read into their presence.

6.2.5 1839-40: The indispensable four

However, if the leadership of the Société were pleased with the results of 1838, the *journaux* and *coup d'oeil* do not report anything of the events of that year. Instead they choose to concentrate on an attack upon Berthier from some of the more reactionary, younger members of the *Société* who felt that they weren't being given enough say in a society closely controlled by Berthier and the existing leadership. The *Banquets* mention nothing of this in the 1839 banquet account, making only a passing mention of Berthier and Forestier's appeals to those present for faith in the association of Deaf people[71], and the person of the president[72].

Despite these appeals, the resistance to Berthier continued through 1840 and the *journeaux* report that the banquet of that year had to be postponed by a week[73] because of disagreement[74] between the elected[75] commissaries[76] who

[71] *Banquets* 1839:78
[72] *Banquets* 1839:82
[73] Not an uncommon occurrence, unusual - in fact the banquets held in 1835, 1836, 1837, 1839 were also postponed by a week - but it is the first time that the given reason is disagreement.
[74] JSM 25th Oct 1900: 154
[75] We know that, by this point, the commissaries are elected during the monthly meetings of the *Société Centrale*. (JSM 25th Oct 1900:154)

numbered amongst them for the first time Mr Badolle de Roanne[77], a young deaf man who was known for comically exuberant mime[78].

It is not hard to see why Berthier was incurring the displeasure of some, especially if they found him overly controlling. However, he clearly perceived himself to be the elected spokesperson for the nation, and wary of allowing others to influence its course, he spent 1840 couching the *Société Centrale* firmly at the core of the deaf nation with a work entitled "*Les Sourds d'avant et depuis l'Abbé de l'Epée*"[79].

Whilst it seems that his aim in writing was nothing more than establishing the inalienable right of deaf children to sign language medium education within a deaf cultural setting, to those already resistant to the control of the society's tightly-knit leadership this was an indication of Berthier's desire to draw the deaf community away from the hearing world and 'hog' control of it themselves[80]. According to the *coup d'oeil*, he, and three of the society's committee gained the nickname of '*les quatre indispensables'* (the indispensable four)[81]

6.2.6 1840: Overt resistance

[76] Since I have so far been unable to locate the minutes of the monthly meetings of the Société Centrale, we do not have a complete list of the commissaries of each banquet. However the 1840 banquet is the first time that a commissary other than Forestier actually makes a speech.
[77] Little else is yet known about Badolle de Roanne.
[78] In the manner of many oral societies, great significance is attached, certainly within the modern deaf community, to those who demonstrate a particular ability to tell stories and jokes (Rutherford 1993)
[79] "Deaf people before and since the Abbé de l'Epée" (1840)
[80] Bernard goes further than this (Bernard 1999:679) suggesting that challenges were levelled, even at this time, at the extent to which Berthier and the other members of the *Société Centrale'*s committee were crafting themselves into an exclusive caste, a nation apart with its own language, laws and priesthood (centring around Berthier).
[81] although there is no explicit mention of who these four were, an analysis of their roles reveal that they were Berthier, Lenoir, Forestier and probably Allibert.

Given the discord within the Société, attendance was down for the 1840 banquet where the *journaux* inform us that the tone was, apparently, less than convivial[82]. However, the *Banquets* show Berthier still in charge and resenting the attacks:

> " Brothers! In this ovation of joyful memory, why is it that instead of singing along with you our common happiness, your thankful president is reduced to sharing with you the pain that he feels in the depths of his heart?… It is true that no one dares openly attack the society which we are so proud to have formed… but new efforts are carried out in the shadows to divide us, all means being just for those who would harm us."[83]

He goes on to deny his perceived separatism..

> "It has been said that nothing would be worse for deaf-mutes than to only frequent other deaf-mutes. To form deaf-mutes into a separate nation, a separate caste, would be to condemn them to a terrible exclusion"[84]

However, Berthier is defiant:

> "Never did such a narrow, selfish idea, take root in our hearts. Voluntarily cut ourselves off indeed! They wanted to force us out of their hearing banquets and outlaw the use of our deaf-mute language even within our own deaf-mute nation. That sublime language that was given to us by nature. The Deaf-mutes said to their hearing brethren 'Come amongst us, mix with our labours, with our play, learn our language as we learn yours…' Brothers! Is this selfishness? Is this isolation? Oh accusers without conscience, do you dare still raise your voices against us?"[85]

This speech provokes an immediate call to unity by a young poet named Pélissier, who until this point has featured little in the banquet proceedings.

The unity does not last long. As further speeches describe the successes of the deaf "family"[86] in achieving political and cultural emancipation one cannot but sense a growing tension in the room; Berthier's critics have been described as cowards, hiding in the shadows when clearly they believe that they have been shut out of honest representation by Berthier and the '*indispensables*'. Thus, as the names of de l'Epée, Berthier, Forestier, Lenoir, Allibert and others are

[82] JSM 25th Oct 1900: 154
[83] *Banquets* 1840:95
[84] *Banquets* 1840:96
[85] *Banquets* 1840:96
[86] *Banquets* 1840:102

cited once, then a second time, the frustration appears to have become too much.

Crucially, however, when the attack comes in the form of a toast by Badolle to the Abbé Sicard[87] and the proposal of a monument to him at Père La Chaise [sic], equal to the one being constructed in Versailles to de l'Epée[88], it is clear that the differences are no longer anything to do with the political aims of the society, which would allow for discussion and compromise, but have centred on an unresolvable personal condemnation of Berthier and his leadership.

6.2.7 1841: A return to sign language

Little more is recorded in the *Banquets* for 1840 and the habitual mentions of cordial handshaking that continues late into the night are missing, suggesting that Badolle's speech caused a substantial upset amongst the guests[89]. Thus it is perhaps surprising to see him, according to the *journaux*, re-elected for 1841[90]. De Roanne's name does not, however, appear in the *Banquets* which cites Allibert, Pélissier and Nonnen[91] as elected commissaries. The disappearance of de Roanne from the official record is, however, easily explained:

[87] One can almost hear a sharp intake of breath, and see those more sensitive souls clutching at their heads in horror. To cite Sicard, commonly viewed as the embodiment of evil in Deaf education, alongside those other names can be seen as nothing less than a direct challenge to the hegemony of the *Société Centrale*'s central figures.
[88] Given Berthier's personal involvement in the creation of the Versailles memorial to de l'Epée, this can be seen as nothing less than a personal attack on his carefully crafted portrayal of de l'Epée's role in birthing the Deaf nation and the direction in which he was taking the *Société*
[89] It is interesting that Badolle had previously made a toast to Sicard, in 1835. However, it appears that it is the tone of this latest toast, along with the development of Sicard as equal to de l'Epée that had the impact.
[90] JSM 25th Oct 1900: 154
[91] Little is known about this third commissary and this is the only time he is mentioned in the records.

The year of 1841 saw de Lanneau's long-term battle with de Gérando's administrative council come to an end when it was dissolved by the government[92]. In its place, on the 22nd June, a government appointed, consultative commission was created to oversee the *Institution* consisting of (amongst others) Eugène de Monglave, and de Lanneau himself, all of whom were either known sign language users or sympathetic to the use of sign language in Deaf education.

Thus, the banquet, held on the 3rd December 1841 without any apparent delay and bringing together 48 deaf and 9 hearing guests[93] who included several members of the new consultative commission and other members of the school staff, was characterised by

> "eyes that sparkled in the most complete joy. There was not one single sad expression such as was seen last year at the same time. This year, in celebrating its hero, the assembled guests were celebrating their most outstanding triumph, the return to traditions too-long-distained, the most decisive victory of tolerance over a system that was narrow, petty and exclusive. The victory of true philanthropy over a nepotism that simply paraded as such."[94]

This celebrated return to sign language centred education, a first step in the aims of the Société, appears to have been too much for the dissidents. Unwilling to sit and watch the inevitable celebration of the *indispensables*, they simply chose not to attend[95].

Non-attendance is clearly not a satisfactory solution to the situation for Berthier who, in his presidential address, is clearly worried by the long-term effects of such a divide: "Who knows" he asks "whether the civilisation and the enlightenment of our eccentric people will not suffer if this should continue?"[96]; and direct in pointing out the dangers to the future:

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[92] Bernard (1999:661)
[93] JSM 25th Oct 1900: 154
[94] *Banquets* 1841:116
[95] *Banquets* 1841:117
[96] *Banquets* 1841:117

> "… these dissidents who look only to their own interests and who afflict us so deeply. It is not as if you have not tried, alongside me, to open their eyes to the harmful consequences of this separation"[97]

6.2.8 1842: Sabotage

Inevitably, opposition between the two parties was not going to resolve itself. On the one hand we see Berthier, clearly a strong leader who felt a deep personal responsibility for the political aims set out in 1834, but with a potentially abrasive personality and a reluctance to trust in others' abilities. On the other, a group of ambitious young men, confident of their own abilities and seeking to carve out a role in the newly powerful deaf community.

Indeed, the *Banquets* tell us that the situation worsened into 1842 as the disagreement gradually spilled over into the staff of the *Institution*, further souring[98] already tense relations and disagreements over methods between pro-signers such as de Lanneau[99] and those such as Dr Blanchet, who as the successor to Dr Itard, saw his mission as the eradication of deafness and its language. Meanwhile, the banquets continued, albeit with a change of president.

This shocking evolution is glossed over by the *Banquets*, but explored by the *journaux*. The dissenters had decided that since the Société Centrale was the only deaf organisation in Paris, they had to change their approach. They therefore used their continued membership to force a preparatory meeting[100]

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[97] *Banquets* 1841:117

[98] *Banquets* 1841:119. There is evidence from later events (particularly the formation of the *Société Centrale d'Education*)

[99] who by this point appears to have adopted the common sense approach that sign language was the best way to teach deaf children.

[100] It is unclear exactly whether this meeting was open to only the Société or the wider Paris Deaf Community, there is evidence to suggest that this was a specific, open meeting of the wider community and thus open to elements who would not normally have had an influential role within the Société decision (JSM 25th Oct 1900: 154). This preparatory meeting would play a significant role in future banquet preparations since, in an open forum before the rest of

which was held on the 18th November 1842 and engineered a vote in which Alphonse Lenoir[101] was elected to the banquet presidency, and Jules Imbert[102] were elected as commissaries along with Pélissier. The leadership of the *Société*, apparently taken by surprise, only succeeded in proposing Allibert[103] as a commissary.

6.2.9 1842: A shift in aims

The choice of president and commissaries appears to have been effective and the *Banquets* record the presence of both sides on the 11th December 1842. Indeed, the atmosphere through the meal appears to have been much more convivial and Lenoir's presidential speech, which sticks to a detailed, and above all safe, description of the work of de l'Epée, is well received.

However, the shadow of previous conflict is not far away and Pélissier's toast to Lenoir clearly explains that the grass roots deaf community will no longer tolerate headstrong leadership at the expense of community support[104].

> "… the fact that you regard the honour of presiding over this solemn occasion as something beyond you is precisely the reason that you are worthy of it. The modesty that hides you from seeing yourself as you are, reveals your true nature and makes you great in the eyes of others. You received our votes precisely because you were not expecting them…
>
> As progress in education has given us more understanding of the delicacies of social sentiment, we have learned to better judge the true value of men, and to establish through this knowledge a more equitable hierarchy of their qualities…… [sic]

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the Paris Deaf community, it would have been harder for any specific group to forcibly guide participation.

[101] It may come as a surprise to see Lenoir elected to the presidency, given his position as an overt supporter of Berthier and one of the *indispensables*. However, a closer examination of his personality reveals a man who was notable within the Deaf school for his calm. It is, therefore, unlikely that he had been representative of any overt partisanship over the previous year and probably represented a more neutral position between Berthier's supporters and the dissenters

[102] See below in 6.2.10 for more information on Imbert

[103] Allibert's election is recorded in the *Banquets*, but not in other later records. It is possible that he was not, in fact, elected at all. However, he was the secretary of the *Banquets* at the time and may have ensured that his name appeared in the official banquet record.

[104] Which is at odds with the tone of later speeches by him raising the question of whether he was subject to a change of allegiance later on.

> This is why we have chosen to make modesty our ruler. What other domination could have been more beneficial or more useful for us? Yours encourages all efforts, is joyful at all success, is indulgent towards all weakness, brings a rapprochement to all dissention. It is only yours that can move between camps in times of unhappy discord to resolve unjust barriers and funeral irritation. "[105]

Berthier appears to have been warned in the strictest terms not to cause offence and he remains silent, only rising at the very end of the speeches to propose the purchase of a painting[106].

6.2.10 1842: The origin of the July Banquets

Despite electing Lenoir to the banquet presidency, the dissidents were beginning to identify a leader in the person of Jules Imbert[107]. Imbert, who at 15 had been expelled from the *Institution* after joining in Berthier's attack on de Gérando (see section 3.3.5)[108] had returned to Paris after passing through various forms of employment[109] and ended up working as a scribe in a banking house[110].

Late in 1842, the *Journaux* tell us that Imbert proposed a series of banquets to be held, beginning the following summer, July 1843. The idea behind them was ostensibly[111] to celebrate the laws of the 21st and 29th July 1791 which had seen the original establishment of the *Institution*. At first glace, there is no reason why these banquets could not have been an addition to those held in de l'Epée's honour[112]. However, Imbert's role in their organisation, their

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[105] *Banquets* 1842:138
[106] Peyson's "Last moments of the Abbé de l'Epée"
[107] It is likely that they didn't propose Imbert for the presidency of the 1842 banquet because they knew that he wouldn't receive any support from the traditional leadership of the *Société*.
[108] Although it appears that Imbert never held his expulsion against Berthier (see his earlier support for Berthier's presentation of de l'Epée) other than perhaps in self-recrimination at being so gullibly led. This may have provided the backbone for his later resistance.
[109] All characterised by tensions between the strongly independent Imbert and authority figures.
[110] *Banquets* 1842:130
[111] The importance of the July declarations was as iconic as the role of de l'Epée in the *Société* banquets and probably designed specifically to signify the 'new order' of the deaf community.
[112] and, indeed, there is no reason to reject the idea that some guests attended both.

deliberate foundation around the 'new' époque of deaf education and their election of Benjamin Dubois, a well known director of a Paris school for the 'speaking deaf'[113] as the president suggest that the July banquets were a focus for the alternative set of discourses[114] that were anathema to Berthier's: community support of poor deaf people as an aim in itself, and the emancipation of the deaf community through an increased integration with hearing society.

6.2.11 1843: A return to Berthier

From the 1843 ***Banquets*** account, it appears that the idea of the July banquets[115] provided the security that Imbert and the other dissenters needed since, assured of space to develop their own discourses they allowed Berthier to be re-elected to the presidency of the 1843 *Société Centrale* banquet[116]. Indeed, the banquet that year is characterised by a perception, amongst the larger-than-normal attendance[117] that a unity has finally been reached between the two groups by combining the aims of each group. This is certainly Berthier's view as he stands to speak:

He begins with an outline of the original aims of the *Société Centrale*, aims which he admits have not been fully realised[118]. However, he claims, this is not good enough. "In the past" he says "our efforts have lacked unity; … Today everything indicates that times have changed; our members are once again drawing together in unity. The moment has come for us to agree"[119].

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[113] Dubois, himself deafened at the age of 7, had been a pupil at the Institution in Paris before opening his school in 1837 to teach speech to deaf students

[114] Whilst it is not clear to what extent these separate discourses were developed at this time, this is certainly the emphasis of the July declarations in 1791, and the direction that Imbert and others took later in allying themselves with Blanchet.

[115] The first of which we held in the summer of 1843

[116] One presumes in a vote similar to the previous year although this is not made explicit in the record. However, we do know that the November planning meetings continued as is evident from the events of the following year.

[117] *Banquets* 1843: 145

[118] Particularly the creation of adult classes

[119] *Banquets* 1843:153

This agreement will be especially necessary for the success of a new project, the creation of a patronage society based on the model of the *Société de Patronage et de secours pour les aveugles* (The society for the help and patronage of the blind)[120].

His speech is received with acclaim, in particular by Allibert who takes upon himself the task of celebrating Berthier's return to the presidency with an exuberant speech in which he credits Berthier with every possible plaudit including some that are unmerited[121]. Imbert also, must have been delighted in seeing such a quick response from the previously uncooperative Berthier to the discourses of his July banquets. Certainly, the general audience believed that they had finally seen unity achieved, Charles Sibodre, an artisan woodworker, is described as jumping up and down six or seven times before finally securing the floor and proposing that Berthier and Imbert be nominated together as life presidents of the banquets[122].

6.2.12 1844: Post Euphoric depression

However, the euphoria extended little beyond the end of the 1843 banquet[123]. Indeed, by late the following year the journaux tell us that the *Société* was in internal chaos. Although there are no explicit records[124], it is easy enough to trace the path of debate through the year, which appears to have been based on

[120] This was clearly not Berthier's idea as we will see later from his imagination of what a patronage society should be

[121] In the eyes of a 21st century reader, Allibert's discourse is so gushingly fawning that it provokes discomfort. However, it is well received by the audience who comment on his ability in discourse. This appears to be nothing more than an enthusiastic speech in the eyes of those present.

[122] What became of this nomination is unknown. However, this would not have been the officially recognised place to debate it. Interestingly, however, the reception of Sibodre's word is commented on at length in the official account since it appears that the man himself was an actor whose tendency to 'ham it up' characterised his proposal to the point where it is unclear whether he was even taken seriously by anyone other than himself.

[123] *Banquets* 1843:171

[124] The internal minutes of the Société would be very useful here. However, until they are located, interpretation will have to suffice.

a complete lack of communication between the two groups except at the annual November banquets.

As far back as 1841, at the banquet that Imbert and others boycotted, Berthier had made minor mention of a project to extend to poor deaf people the services of a patronage society based on the "model of the one that, you know, has been established amongst their brothers, the blind"[125]. However, at least in Berthier's mind, this was likely to be based on his understanding that the root problem of the disenfranchised deaf was still their status under the law. If the law could be changed, he reasoned, financial and educational support for all deaf people, urban and rural, rich and poor, would have been guaranteed under law as was the provision for all other French citizens under the Napoleonic code. He therefore began to petition highly placed individuals as early as 1842 to build together a 'patronage society' who could be a political lobby for the deaf nation.

The other group did not get to hear of this until 1843 since their actions at the 1842 banquet meant that Berthier was forbidden from speaking. They therefore developed their own ideas on the need for community emancipation based on a much more traditional patronage system. Thus, when the two ideas finally met in the apparent unity of the 1843 banquet, it was not a question of a single idea, but rather two different projects with two different origins.

Clearly, by the time the banquet planning meeting was held in the salle d'exercice or the *Institution* in early November 1844 Imbert had reasoned that the difference between his idea and Berthier's idea was, again, not a simple difference in objectives, but a direct attempt by Berthier to wrest control of the project from him and place it under the auspices of the *Société Centrale.* At the meeting both the *Journaux* and the *Coup d'oeil* tell us that Imbert stands

[125] *Banquets* 1841:119

and delivers a direct criticism of the "indispensable four for their interference amongst adult business"[126].

It is easy to imagine the two arguing about the project at cross-purposes since neither of them would have understood the others point of view. The argument probably belonged to the category of those that somehow inevitably occur between young up-and-coming leaders and members of the 'old guard'. However, unfortunately for Berthier, Imbert's support appears to have grown to a sizeable group who were equally fed-up with Berthier. Imbert and his supporters stormed out.

6.2.13 1844: Recrafting the Society

Unsurprisingly, the result of this exchange was catastrophic, dividing the Société into two factions and which even the belated, token election of Lenoir to a second banquet presidency could not resolve. Thus, the *journaux* report that on the evening of the 1st December 1844, whilst the official *Société Centrale* banquet was held in the left bank district of Saint-Germain, near to the Institution, an entirely separate banquet, also to celebrate the birthday of de l'Epée, was held in opposition by a separate group in Montmartre[127].

However, the speeches recorded by the *Banquets* for 1844 are far from the beligerant kind that we might expect. It appears that furious discussions between the leadership of the *Société* in the month between the planning meeting and the banquet had succeeded in Lenoir and Pélissier persuading Berthier that, faced with such opposition, the death of the *Société* was

[126] Coup d'oeil document entry for 1844 (backed up by JSM 25th Nov 1900:175 albeit without naming Imbert directly)
[127] The documents available at this time record the event and confirm the location as Montmartre but offer no information about the number or identity of the guests and organisers. However, it is likely that Imbert was at least present. Apparently, the unsigned text of the president's speech was preserved until at least 1900 in an archive. However, the location of this document is now unknown.

imminent. They then appear to have engineered the banquet in order to provide the greatest possible chance of reconciliation[128].

Initially, Lenoir delivers a carefully choreographed and anti-inflammatory speech and response in the mould of an apology:

> "It has always been, and always will be your understanding of this passing glorification should not degenerate into questions of preference, into a cause of dissention… The aim of our annual meetings is to celebrate the memory of our intellectual father who reached out his hand to us all, without distinction… Our different opinions must be silenced then before such a great example. The president's only task here is to satisfy the gentle obligation… to publicly laud, once a year, what we privately admire all year round - the qualities of the Abbé de l'Epée and the sacrifices that he made…"[129]

He then moves onto the main subject of discussion:

> "You all know the aim of deaf-mutes in founding their central society and the fruits that it has produced… Thus, you have all seen how the statutes that govern it need, as do all human endeavours that are tested, to receive modifications suggested by time and experience… No thought is ever perfect in its original form. It is in the destiny of all offspring to be born imperfect, and thereafter to progressively shake off imperfections as it grows… At the same time, no creation, however good, cannot rejoice in the most deserved applause… without at the same time, attracting criticisms and envy… It is not clear, therefore, that the society - in the light of those very criticisms that tear it apart - is trying to rebuild on a better foundation?"[130]

Following this, Pélissier and Berthier both stand to toast the new patronage society in the vaguest possible terms.[131].

6.2.14 1845: A return to unity

The *indispensables* must have breathed a sigh of relief since the *Banquets* for 1844 report that the "The guests went their separate ways congratulating

[128] With the exception of Allibert's who clearly remained unconvinced. His bellicose diatribe is an extraordinary example of inappropriate, die-hard support for Berthier in a forum specifically designed to achieve the opposite effect.
[129] *Banquets* 1844:179
[130] *Banquets* 1844:180
[131] *Banquets* 1844:189. In fact we know that, other than discussions with high ranking members of government and the currying of favour, there was no patronage society as such.

themselves on the celebration of this birthday whose admirable results, must over time cement the unity and strength of deaf people…"[132].

Indeed, the aim of Pélissier and Lenoir in deliberately obfuscating the nature of the patronage society comes to fruition early in 1845 when they manage to apparently persuade Imbert that the two ideas are the same and convince him of the need for unity over personal ambition. The *Journaux* tell us that Imbert decided to lend his support to the *Société* for the good of the deaf community [133]. As a mark of his influence, this appears to cause a spontaneous fusion of other deaf-mute societies that, until that point, had felt it necessary to celebrate separately. Thus, on the 30th November 1845, the official banquet saw the attendance of a large number of guests, both hearing and deaf; the re-election of Berthier to the presidency; and the election of Imbert as head commissary.

The 1845 banquet is friendly and the speeches recorded in the *Banquets* apparently warmly received. On the surface, all is well again. However, familiarity with previous years reveals that unity is fragile, especially since none of the parties involved have made any significant changes to their views and the papering-over threatens to tear at every mention of the patronage society[134]. However, Allibert, who has shown himself to be the least containable of Berthier's supporters, appears to be absent[135] and Berthier, who also appears to have been warned against saying anything inflammatory, gives the most extraordinary speech choosing to recount in great detail and praise the work of some fifteen separate men involved in deaf education after de

[132] *Banquets* 1844:189
[133] JSM 25th Nov 1900: 175
[134] It is truly astonishing that the frail unity of the banquets didn't shatter either in 1845, 46 or 47. All it would have taken is one slightly inopportune question for the charade to be revealed. However, it appears that this never happened.
[135] Or at least convinced of the need for his silence. Again, this would be confirmed by full details of attendance which have not yet been located

l'Epée, including traditionally vilified figures such as Sicard, de Gérando and Itard[136].

6.2.15 1848: Berthier's campaign

According to the *Banquets*, the banquets of 1846 and 1847 also passed without a hitch. However, both the *Coup d'oeil* and the *Journaux* tell us of a disruption that occurred after the 1847 banquet, instigated by a man named Laroucau following the proposal that the King be petitioned to award the *legion of honour* to Berthier. Interestingly, this is gleefully attributed to continued tension between the wishes of the *indispensables* and the grass-roots members of the *Société*[137]. However the unprecedented suppression of the details of the event[138], which by all accounts was covered in the press[139], suggests that it was actually more likely to be an argument over the stability of the King[140].

However, for the deaf community, 1848 was dominated, not by the fall of the monarchy but by the actions of Berthier. Who abandoning the conservativism of the last few years, apparently set out to destroy everything that he had built up over so long.

The rest of the deaf community must have thought he had gone mad as, following years of unity between the *Société* and the *Institution*, he immediately requested a meeting with the provisional government[141] where he poured scorn on de Lanneau's management of the school and requested his

[136] The speech is so different from all those that he has made before, and its length so enormous, that it's very nature could be considered a deliberate act of rebellion to the strictures imposed on him.
[137] *Coup d'oeil* entry for 1847, JSM 25th Nov 1900:176
[138] For the good of the deaf community according to the *JSM*.
[139] and therefore should be possibly to unearth through press archives of the time.
[140] it is simply noted without reference to Laroucau himself within the *Banquets* as "it was made known to us that the timing wasn't quite right" (*Banquets* 1837). If this is the case, it is one of the only times that the larger political context appears to have impinged on the banquets without being deliberately introduced as part of a speech.
[141] 7th March 1848

removal. Then, following the declaration of a general election by universal suffrage[142], he negated the ground gained in 1845, 1846 and 1847 and proposed himself as a candidate[143] for the national parliament.

His candidature was an abject failure. Not only did he receive few votes but those he did receive were rejected by an arbitrating body who, despite the official declaration of universal suffrage, still considered deaf people mentally unable to understand their actions[144]. Even worse, despite the *Banquets'* insistence on circumstantial causes, Berthier's preoccupation with his own affairs sidelined the organisation of the 1848 *Société Centrale* banquet. The planning meeting was overlooked, no guests were invited and only 18 deaf people attended[145]. This is in direct contrast to the 1848 July banquet under the presidence of Imbert[146], which, according to the *Journaux,* was carefully organised attracting some prominent guests that had previously only been associated with Berthier.

6.2.16 A rationale for madness

By the end of 1848, it must have seemed to Berthier's supporters that his rash actions had completely destroyed the work of the previous dozen years. Not only had he alienated himself from the directorship of the *Institution* and the deaf community (including the majority of the *Société's* leadership) but Imbert had taken advantage of the situation to bolster his own position.

[142] Which not only allowed deaf people to vote for the first time (as it did every French citizen if they were physically able) but also allowed anyone to stand for election.
[143] It is unclear what kind of result he was expecting. However, his proposal to the greater electorate of Paris was as the self-declared representative of some 200 deaf Parisians and 20,000 deaf French.
[144] The votes were, in fact, ratified in 1850, long after the election had taken place.
[145] *Banquets* 1848: 268
[146] It is unclear whether Imbert overtly used Berthier's political preoccupation to raise support for his banquet

However, his actions are easy to understand if we see that he had continued to cling to his political aim of overturning the legislation which he believed kept deaf people prisoner, and bereft of rights despite the quiet apparently imposed upon him by other members of the *Société*. Disappointed by de Lanneau's apparent failure to secure this change from within the Institution[147], he was suddenly presented with an opportunity to, himself, become the source of the influence that he needed without the problems of maintaining it along the way. Faced with this opportunity, he clearly felt it was worth the risk.

His almost inevitable failure, however, left him with nowhere else to go and it was only through a miracle of timing and the reappearance of the antagonism between Blanchet and de Lanneau that he finds a role as a prominent member of the deaf community. Albeit as a deaf hostage to hearing disagreements.

6.2.17 1849: Plot and counter plot

In fact, it was the actions of Blanchet in late 1848 or early 1849, which set off events. It is probable that he already had established self-interested links with Imbert from as early as 1842[148]. However, the disillusionment that followed Berthier's candidature, provided him with the perfect opportunity to gain a decisive influence over the deaf community which he could use in furthering his fight against the leadership of the Institution and he approached Imbert with the proposal for setting up a patronage society that much more closely matched Imbert's own idea[149].

Realising that if Blanchet succeeded in establishing the much-awaited patronage society with the help of Imbert, the two would secure the almost

[147] and by his own failed efforts to secure it by bringing the minister for education to the banquets, despite continued invitations. Berthier's hope (from even as early as 1836) was that the evidence of the banquets would persuade the ministry for education that deaf people had been misallocated and that the only common-sense reaction would be change their status.
[148] Since these would have fed his disagreement with de Lanneau
[149] Whether he purposefully set out with the aim of using Imbert's dislike of Berthier for his own benefit is unclear

unanimous support of the deaf community, the hearing teachers Vaïsse, Puybonnieux, Morel, Volquin and de Lanneau himself[150] apparently decided that (despite his recent treason against de Lanneau) Berthier himself represented the best hope as a focus for an opposition society and moved quickly to secure his support.

Meeting on the 7th August 1849 at Morel's house, they appear to have persuaded Berthier of the worth of their proposal[151] and Morel proceeded to prepare the statues of a *Société Centrale d'Education et Assistance pour les Sourds-Muets en France* (Central Society for the Education and Assistance of Deaf-Mutes in France)[152]. Their project was blessed on the 9th when, during the *Institution*'s prize giving, Louis Napoléon himself arrived as an observer. Once again, seizing the opportunity, they present an official request that he decorate Berthier with the *legion d'honneur*[153].

On the evening of the 25th November 1849, therefore, as Imbert and - for the first time - Blanchet arrived at the *Société Centrale*'s banquet, expecting to find Berthier in ruin and the Société in disarray, they found instead a resplendent Berthier decorated with a sash and the society apparently still strongly united around the *indispensables*. No wonder that Imbert's announcement of the proposed Société Blanchet, as recorded in the *Banquets*, is short and delivered through what could only be described as 'gritted fingers'.

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[150] Bernard 1999:680

[151] Which probably involved convincing him of the folly of his alternative political mission since he never returns to it. Having done this, it would have been a simple task to persuade him to renounce any further maverick behaviour for the sake of a united front against Imbert and Blanchet.

[152] Despite the highs and lows of the original *Société Centrale*, it is clear that they wanted to retain a sense of continuity as the principle deaf representative society.

[153] The actual truth about de Lanneau's proposal is not made immediately obvious. Whilst Pélissier had previously tried to secure the decoration for him in 1937, it is unlikely that de Lanneau's official ratification would have been given had Berthier not agreed to 'toe the line' with regards to the proposed patronage society. Indeed, whilst it might be most unclement to suggest it, the fact of Louis-Napoléon's visit 2 days hence and the possibility of a nomination for the *legion* may have played a part in assuring Berthier's compliance.

However, despite the foundational nature of 1849, no hint of the events and no changes of any kind are recorded in the *Banquets* for that year. Indeed, despite the fact that the new Société was not yet inaugurated, those responsible for publishing the banquets chose 1849 as the year with which to start the second volume[154], relegating the brief account of 1848 to the back pages of the first and presenting a smooth, united transition from 1847 to 1849.

6.2.18 1849-1850: Two Societies

Two weeks after the 1849 banquet, on Monday 10th December, Blanchet's society[155] was officially inaugurated with a general meeting held in the amphitheatre of the rue du Paon and was attended by Berthier and his colleagues. According to the *Banquets* their presence appears to be little more than a token gesture designed to show defiance since, as soon as the aims of the society were presented, they left[156]. However, both the *Journaux* and the *Coup d'oeil* tell us that it was the site of an enormous argument which left the unity of the *indispensables* and the Société Centrale in tatters[157].

However, on the following Saturday, 15th December, few of these apparent tensions are visible. Another meeting of the proposed new *Société Centrale* was held and de Lanneau, Berthier and Morel were officially charged with the responsibility for registering the society[158]. Finally, on the 10th January 1850, the first meeting of the new *Société Centrale* was held in the ministry of the interior, presided over by Mr. Dufaure, MP.

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[154] Both are published by the "Société Centrale des Sourds-Muets de Paris" (The Central Society of Parisian Deaf-Mutes) in identical format

[155] The Society was named *La Société générale d'éducation, de patronage, d'assistance en faveur des sourds-muets et jeunes aveugles* (The general society for education, patronage and assistance towards deaf-mutes and blind youth). Given the resemblance between the titles of the two societies and the strong investment of Blanchet's personality in its success, his society was known as *La société Blanchet* (The Blanchet society).

[156] This information is contained within a footnote, added to the account of the 1850 banquet.

[157] *Coup d'oeil* document entry for 1849

[158] Fondation de la Société Centrale. Printed in the Annales de l'éducation des sourds-muets et des aveugles1849:215

6.2.19 1850: Confusion

According to the *banquets*, this new society continued the traditions of the old, holding their first banquet in late November of 1850. By all accounts, a happy and united affair. In addition, they appear to have carried off a great coup by securing Imbert's presence alongside Berthier.

However, other accounts present a very different account since, according to both the *Journaux* and the *Coup d'oeil*, the same *Société Centrale* had fallen into conflict and collapsed early in 1850. Thus, the *Coup d'oeil*, simply reports that, following the dissolution of the Société Centrale, the banquets from 1850 to 1866 were organised by a group of 'independents'. However, the *Journaux* go further, describing an attempt by Blanchet to step into the vacuum and organise the banquets based on an invitation-only basis and the subsequent revolt by Berthier and his supporters upon finding that they were deliberately excluded. The *coup d'oeil*'s 'independents' are, therefore, defined as Berthier and the original Société Centrale.

In the light of this apparent discrepancy, a second reading of the 1850 *banquets* is even more confusing. The *Journaux* report that the independent group elected Berthier as their president that year and held their banquet on the 24th November[159]. The *banquets* report the banquet on the same day, at the same restaurant, with Pélissier in that role. Furthermore, Berthier is present and makes a speech. However, so is Imbert, which clearly would not have been the case. Given the information available, the only reasonable explanation is to conclude that there were, in fact, two banquets: One held by the new *Société Centrale* with Berthier and another by the Blanchet Society with Pélissier as president.

[159] JSM 25th December 1900: 190

6.2.20 1850 and beyond: Divergence

The confusion evident in 1850 continues from this point on and the differences between the various records are increasingly obvious:

The *banquets* continue each year until 1863 describing an increasingly sedate series of banquets that continue to be presided over by members of the *indispensables* and attended by high-ranking members of the school directorship and the government. By the time they eventually draw to a close with Berthier still at their head they have taken on the feeling of an accepted institution, embodying the accepted traditions of the Paris Deaf community and able to pronounce on the appropriacy of other, newer societies including, it seems, the Blanchet society.

At this point, however, other records have barely begun. Outlining the return of the *indispensables* and their hijack of the Paris deaf community upon the death of Blanchet in 1867, the *coup d'oeil*, for example, describes how an increasingly embittered Berthier attempts to suppress all other banquets. Finally they describe how the latter years of the *Société Centrale*[160] were characterised by in-fighting and disorder which led to them being thrown out of their headquarters and how, eventually, they were forced kicking and screaming[161] into retirement. Their unmerited place at the head of the deaf community is assumed by the venerable Imbert and, from the 1880's, other members of the new deaf welfare societies including the Société d'Appui fraternel.

[160] Which by this point was called the Société Universelle.
[161] The exact wording is "despite the *indispensables* pour curses on them" (*coup d'oeil*)

7.0 Analysis

This study began with two initial aims. The first was to explore in greater depth a hitherto unexplored aspect of Deaf history. However, given the importance to the contemporary deaf world of not only the historical French deaf community, but the history of the banquets themselves, a second research aim was to investigate theoretical issues surrounding the construction of the historical record and to explore these particularly with regards to what Raphael Samuel has called a "bid for hegemony" (Samuel 1994:243) It is to this second aspect of the study that we now turn.

7.1 Reliance on the record

Firstly, evidence from the study supports the arguments by Anne Secord and others that we are limited in our understanding of historical situations, not only by what the record tells us explicitly, but also by the social structure it incarnates. Thus, in this case, where the records available to us have been passed through the various filters of the Société Centrale or the editorial board of the different journals we are presented with an official view that is measured and re-worked. We have no private letters, no menus, no newspaper reports, no reported conversations, no napkin scribblings etc.

We can, of course, interrogate these sources for what they tell us about the accepted social structures of the time. However, this clearly leaves us with more questions than answers: For example, the records affirm that women were excluded from the Institution and clearly played no role in the *Société Centrale*, but this immediately raises the question of what their involvement was in the wider Parisian deaf community particularly given their role in the revolution of 1789.

Indeed, we know from previous research into American deaf separatist movements of the 19th century (Gulliver 2002b) that there are likely to be large communities of less presitigious deaf people, not represented by these records: the illiterate, the rural, the poor, the children. The list is practically endless. However, in seeking out these voices, we must also be wary of imposing our own conception of what we think the social structures of the time 'must look like' based on our understanding of hearing French society, or today's Deaf community; we have already seen, in the role of those 'used to the customs of the nation' that hearing involvement within the 19th century deaf community was more widely accepted than it is in the UK today[162].

7.2 The construction of the record

However, whilst this is to interrogate the nature of the record, where this study excels is in its ability to illustrate the processes surrounding the progressive construction of the record, and the mechanisms surrounding its subsequent historical representation.

7.2.1 Writing the record

Clearly, the first element of this is the laying down of the record itself by those who author it, edit it and finally give their approval for its publication. In this, we can see something of the motivations of each group: the *Banquets* are a dedicated record of the banquets, but also serve as a carefully constructed justification of a *Société Centrale* oriented history; the writings of Graff in the *Journaux* are much more the work of one man even if written in the context of a late 19th century organisation; the *coup d'oeil* is clearly presented as an historical document, but is much more likely to have been written from the point of view of a political tract using the historical format as its justification.

[162] Incidentally, a tension that would not be so strongly perceived by the US Deaf community in which hearing people who sign well can play a much more prominent part.

7.2.2 Writing the concrete

Given these various motivations, it is unsurprising to see different presentations of the same events. This sometimes happens through a deliberate alteration of the record:

Many examples of this are available from the study: One deliberate re-writing of events is the presentation of the 1850 banquet by the author of the *Banquets* which appears to be a calculated attempt to present a seamless hegemony of the *Société Centrale* over the official deaf community banquets. Another, this time an example of suppression of information, is the reluctance of the then president of the Federation of French deaf-mute societies to allow the reasons for the 1847 Laroucau 'scandal' to come to light.

However, writing can also be more subtle: The deliberate division of the *Banquets* accounts into two volumes between the years 1848 and 1849, is evidence of the *Société Centrale*'s desire to relegate the events of 1848 to a forgotten past and enables them to use the revolution of 1848 to mask the disruption of that year and present 1849 as a time of new beginnings.

7.2.3 Writing the imagined

In theory, if enough information is available, it should be easy enough to assess the veracity of these re-writings. However, the writing of attitudes and motivations is much more problematic.

One good example of this is the differing depictions of the origins of the banquets. According to the Société Centrale, the banquets are the deliberately revolutionary actions of a largely subjugated minority fighting to keep their "painfully hard won rights"[163] in the face of oppression. However, the account

[163] Banquets (1835:20)

from the *Société d'appui* (6.1.1) depicts them, rather, as much more of an historical accident.

The role of Berthier in each account is also different. For the *Société Centrale*, he is their revolutionary "*Camille Desmoulins*"[164] whose cry "to arms" finally unleashed the revolutionary mob which sacked the Bastille[165]. Whereas for the *coup d'oeil*, it was Forestier who instigated the first banquet which was then appropriated by a heavy-handed Berthier who laid down the law by making attendance at them 'almost obligatory'[166].

7.2.4 Progressively writing-in the past

Whilst these deliberate craftings of events and ascribing of motivations are interesting, they remain 'snapshots' showing us the imposition of already-developed epistemologies on the record. However, the *durée* of the banquets offer us the unique opportunity of unpacking the progressive construction of these epistemologies from their introduction to their embedding as canon.

A prime example of this is Berthier's role in instigating the banquets. In the *Banquets* account for 1844 we see the assertion that it was "… M. Forestier, to whom we are indebted for the first idea of these annual meetings…"[167]. However, by 1852 we find Berthier himself claiming the "title of founder of this family celebration, a title that will always be to my glory before God and before men"[168], a title which is anchored in tradition shortly afterwards: "Our

[164] *Banquets* (1837:47)
[165] Interestingly, Mirzoeff equates the reference to Camille Desmoulins as direct evidence that the Deaf attendees were aware of the political nature of their banqueting. My reading suggests that it may simply have been due to Berthier clambering onto his chair in order to be seen over the throng of the banqueters.
[166] Coup d'oeil entry for the period 1834 to 1837
[167] *Banquets* 1844:183
[168] *Banquets* 1852:52

doyen, Ferdinand Berthier, whom we all know, was the first to found a banquet to commemorate the birth of the immortal Abbé de l'Epée"[169].

However, this is not the only example: Berthier's much-challenged idea of deaf nationhood which initially elicited accusations of separatism is gradually accepted and integrated into discourses and eventually adopted by those who originally opposed it[170]. Indeed, the tumultuous history of the Société Centrale itself is progressively re-configured until, by 1853, Berthier is able to stand and deliver a fifteen minute description of its past which would have been virtually unrecognisable to anyone ceasing their involvement with it in the mid 1840's.

7.2.5 Writing meaning

These gradual changes are fascinating to observe since they show a level of writing-in that builds progressively over time despite the presence of those 'who should have known better'. However, what is so interesting is that we are not witnessing a shift away from historical accuracy itself but away from the importance of that accuracy. Thus, had someone challenged the Société Centrale in 1853 and asked "Was it really Berthier that had the first idea for the banquet?" we can imagine them replying "No, but that's not really the point".

The implications of this are enormous since where previous effort in research, exploration of the record, familiarity with context etc. have allowed us to comment on the veracity of previous analysis, we are faced here with the challenge that this research is virtually moot in the face of historical knowledge that needs no accurate historical basis but is based, instead, on a set

[169] *Banquets* 1853:80

[170] See Imbert's speech at the 1850 banquet. Of course, it is possible, given the doubtful nature of the 1850 *Banquets* account that Imbert never actually gave the speech credited to him in which case the attribution of the Deaf-nation discourses to him can be seen as a measure of its acceptance in general parlance.

of negotiated meanings that (to borrow the language of technology) are 'floated' as self contained elements in their own right, rather than 'embedded' in historical context.

To borrow Marxist terminology, the significance of the historical has become fetishised into an iconic system. Or to coin Deleuze: The need for the 'affect' of history superimposes its own needs over objectivity, effectively rendering historical findings a slave to their representation rather than the other way around (Deleuze and Guattari 1988).

7.3 Implications

However, whilst there are many other theoretical implications of this that could be valuably explored, our immediate attention is on the effect that this has on the construction of the record and its interpretation. Clearly, if significance can carry more weight than historical evidence itself, the structure of that significance will be tremendously important in framing the way that history is understood.

7.3.1 Implications for interpretation

This of course has an implication for our interpretation of the record and places even more emphasis on our efforts to gain access to as wide a range of materials as possible. We know, for example, that the work by Lane, Mirzoeff and Mottez that we previously discussed was, for the most part, based on the *Banquets*. Thus, it is hardly a surprise to see the significances that were taken for granted by the Société Centrale, mirrored in their work whilst historical accounts of the same events, written in the late 19th century by those such as Graff, who lived within a different structure of significance, are quite different.

The effect of this has been to give the *Banquets'* representation of history hegemony, not only within the Société Centrale of the 19th century, but also today within the Deaf community. Of course, it need not have been this way since all that was needed was for those later commentators to access a different source bound up in a different symbolic structure and the deaf community could have looked quite different. Had Lane accessed the *coup d'oeil* document, or the writings of those attending the July banquets, his representation of Berthier would clearly have been very different, which would have had knock on-effects in the construction of banquet discourses, and, given the role of academic discourses in the resurgence of the deaf community, on the identity and political aims of the communities themselves.

7.3.2 Constructions of community

This kind of effect is clear throughout deaf history. Take, for example, the idea of deaf nationhood which, in the UK, is largely based on Berthier's writing:

In the US, the person most representing overt deaf-nationhood is a character named Flournoy. Eccentric, disillusioned and bitter about his exclusion from the hearing world[171] he principally represents a call to separatism which was quashed by a powerfully pro-hearing deaf lobby in the 19th century (Gulliver 2002b).

Whereas, in France, where there is no hiatus in the discursive development of the community, it is no longer Berthier who best represents *modern* ideas of deaf nationhood, but probably a man named Cochefer. A staunch pragmatist, he was the founder president of the 'Federation of French Deaf Societies' in the late19th century in the midst of a move to integrate the deaf community into the hearing community.

[171] Also, interestingly, after a failed attempt to become an elected representative of the people.

Thus, it is not only the person best representing nationhood that is different, but the idea of nationhood itself. In the same way, compare modern French Deaf views, where the mid 19th century has become symbolic of a battle between Berthier and Blanchet over deaf education, to English-language views explored above. Whereas British Deaf epistemology relies heavily on the more metaphysical side of Deaf nationhood and sign language, in France, the same period is evidence used to explore the adequacy of popular constructions of political ethnicity[172].

7.4 Implications for research

However, whilst this highlights a fairly straightforward aspect of the creation of the record, it is much more problematic when we find that instead of exploring the significances, they instead exert pressure on us, and on our ability to carry out research even when we are aware that they are, objectively, as arbitrary as any others.

It is here we find a meeting point between Raphael Samuel's "hegemony" and the discomfort that I felt upon realising that the historical record troubled the integrity of the symbolism placed upon the banquets by the academic deaf community.

7.4.1 Instinctive constraints

Crucially, the impact of this was not, as might be expected, an expectation that I could 'set the record straight' but rather that interfering with the integrity of the symbolism of the banquets would somehow betray the deaf community through undermining understandings of iconic elements as Berthier, banquet nationhood discourses and the idea of the mid 19th century as a deaf 'golden

[172] This is based on conversations that I had whilst in France with the librarian of the INJS and on Yves Delaporte's book "Les Sourds, c'est comme ça" (2002)

age' and, thus, endanger community feeling, identity and political campaigning that are rooted in these ideas.

Interestingly, however, this instinctive reaction was not initiated by some universal mechanism of history that would have led anyone to the same conclusion, but rather was entirely contingent on the length to which I had internalised the significance of the banquets. This would, however, have not been the case for someone who had no such commitment and thus perceived no more importance to the banquets than any other historical period or event.

7.4.2 Epistemological authority

However, the evidence of an instinctive reaction, however, would suggest that a whilst it is entirely possible for an academic analysis of historiographical methods to portray historical records as dismissing objective truth in favour of a series of contested semiotic systems, this is not how each of the groups who hold to those systems see the situation. Indeed, it appears that the luxury of imagining a text as fictionalised is initially only available to those who have little personal investment in its integrity. This, to some extent backs up our previous conclusion that history itself plays a different, somehow 'iconic' role for some groups.

Thus we see a fundamental tension, not only in the way that history is presented, but also in apportioning the authority for each representation: For each insider, they and they alone have the authority to interpret historical material based on their unique epistemological understanding of the context. Whereas, from an outsider point of view, not only is the insider's interpretation of history into symbolic frameworks problematic, but the brandishing of epistemological uniqueness is also problematic since the very bases of the epistemologies are found in the historical interpretation. Fiction writes fiction writes fiction.

7.4.3 Unresolvable knowing

This has enormous implications for each side's ability to read or write histories of the other and essentially limits the production and consumption of knowledge of each about the other. However, theoretically, there is no reason why we should not be able to widen our reading of the record sufficiently enough to gain an insiders view. This would allow us to appreciate the record from the other side whilst holding on to our own understanding.

However, it is my experience that there is a perceivable difference between this kind of 'record widening' which allows us to see from both (or many) sides and the paradigm shift that is involved in internalising these knowledges so as to truly 'see from the gut'. Thus, in the same way that visual illusions impose an either/or interpretation, the same seems to be true of the record. It seems that even if switching back and forth between epistemologies is possible, there is only one way to instinctively *know* a situation[173] at any one time.

7.5 Significance

Thus we appear to find ourselves at an impasse where each group points to the other's systems of significance and condemns them as based on fiction, whilst continuing to live within significance based worlds which, although they may have no objective claim to reality, are more influential than any objectively proven 'fact'.

7.5.1 Knowing authority

[173] Having come from a medically oriented family, I remember *knowing* that the deaf community had to be nothing more than a coping mechanism. I can now appreciate, however, that what I *knew* before, is wrong. I now *know* that deaf people are a linguistic minority, albeit one that defies classical categories. Therefore, it follows that I also *know* that the categories are wrong. This would be an interesting chain of argument to explore further at a later time.

Of course, this has been invested with power characteristics, in other emic vs. etic debates: history vs. heritage, or Subaltern vs. Colonialist, or minority vs. majority[174]. However, by applying the same reasoning as above, we find that the power inherent in the structure is only another form of 'knowing' that each has. One that, for example, Paulo Freire challenges in his "Pedagogy of the oppressed" (Freire 1972).

7.5.2 Symbolism and a virtual world

Indeed, if we continue down this path, we begin to find that we become increasingly aware of the cracks within our 'imagined' world which offer us ways into examining virtually any text for what it tells us about who we imagine ourselves to be, where we imagine ourselves as coming from, what we imagine ourselves becoming, and how all of this knowledge is organised.

This must, necessarily form part of wider research framework in the future, both in specific historical studies, but also in research designed to look at how knowledge is performed (refs). It also offers us the possible to bringing together significant debates on reality construction from other fields such as nationalism (Billig 1995), utopian studies (Levitas 1990) and the fictional worlds of (for example) mythology or science fiction.

In essence, whatever form it comes in, these cracks offer us a way to become, ourselves, the record. And the study of them a way to understand what it is that makes us, us.

[174] Indeed, it may not be particularly useful to cite them since each will conjure up its own discipline-specific theoretical particularities

8.0 Conclusion

The mid 19th century Parisian, deaf community certainly is a "foreign country" (Lowenthal 1985). Increasingly so, given the findings of this study which raises a considerable challenge to those previously carried out. However, the issues surround the construction of the records associated with it are no more foreign than the mechanisms that we use in constructing the knowledges within which we live our own lives. Thus, in studying them, we find ourselves exploring not just the accurate reporting of historical event, but aspects of wider debates concerning the construction of our understanding of reality itself.

Annexe 1 - Overview of de L'Epée Banquets 1834 to 1850 according to different sources documents

Year	**Location**	**Organising committee**	**President**	***Banquets***	***JSM***	***Coup d'oeil***
30th Nov 1834	Le veau qui tête, place du Châtelet	Comité des Sourds-Muets	Berthier	Creation of the Comité and Foundation of the banquets Berthier presents hommage to de l'Epée	Foundation of the first banquet by a committee instituted in 1833	Forestier has idea for banquets
6th Dec 1835	Le veau qui tête, place du Châtelet	Comité des Sourds-Muets	Berthier	Berthier creates a fund to purchase a bust of de L'Epée	Disagreements over the date, led to a postponement of the banquet Creation of a special committee to create a bust of de l'Epée	Banquets until 1837 are run by a committee created by Berthier. Attendance is required
4th Dec 1836	Le veau qui tête, place du Châtelet	Comité des Sourds-Muets	Berthier	Visit of Bouilly, author of a play on the life of de l'Epée. Inauguration of the bust of de l'Epée	The banquet is again postponed so that Bouilly can attend	
3rd Dec 1837	Ladmiral's, Rue Sainte-Marguerite-Saint-Germain	Comité des Sourds-Muets	Berthier	Berthier's announcement of the creation of the Société Centrale is received with acclaim Berthier announces project to raise memorial for de l'Epée in Versailles	The banquet is again postponed Announcement of the creation of a deaf-mute society	
25th Nov 1838	Auger, Casino Saint-Martin	Société Centrale des Sourds-Muets	Berthier	First banquet held by official Société Centrale De Lanneau, director of the Institution invited Berthier announces official recognition of deaf-nation ideas	News that the mortal remains of de l'Epée had been found by Dumic and Berthier	Banquets are organised until 1849 by The Société Centrale
1st Dec 1839	Ladmiral's, Rue Sainte-	Société Centrale des Sourds-Muets	Berthier	Berthier and Forestier mention first signs of division against presidency	The banquet is postponed	

	Marguerite-Saint-Germain			of Berthier and the Société and urge loyalty		
6th Dec 1840	Unknown	Société Centrale des Sourds-Muets	Berthier	Banquet is subdued as some dissenting members fail to attend Berthier condemns attacks against the Société and denies desire for deaf separatism. Calls to unity by Pélissier. Direct attack on hegemony of Berthier and Société Centrale by Badolle de Roanne.	Disagreement in the heart of the Société Centrale Reported to be a sad banquet in which Berthier condemns the divisions	
5th Dec 1841	Ladmiral's, Rue Sainte-Marguerite-Saint-Germain	Société Centrale des Sourds-Muets	Berthier	Dissenters do not attend Banquet is a joyous occasion. Berthier and Lenoir condemn of divisions and blame dissenters for risking the future of the deaf community by selfish action.	Commissaries of 1840 are all re-elected The banquet is a much happier event	
11th Dec 1842	Pestel's, Rue Saint-Honoré	Société Centrale des Sourds-Muets	Lenoir	Preparatory meeting leads to Lenoir's election as president along with Pélissier, Allibert and Imbert as commissaries. Dissenters return to the banquets. All speakers avoid talking of the conflict except Allibert who condemns the dissenters.	Despite the actions of prominent deaf figures, disunity continues. A preparatory meeting is called to elect Lenoir.	
3rd Dec 1843	Ladmiral's, Rue Sainte-Marguerite-Saint-Germain	Société Centrale des Sourds-Muets	Berthier	Berthier announces restructuring of the Société, to include a patronage society. Speeches in support by Allibert who condemns continued attacks on Berthier Announcement of the inauguration of		

				de l'Epée memorial in Versailles		
1st Dec 1844	Ladmiral's, Rue Sainte-Marguerite-Saint-Germain	Société Centrale des Sourds-Muets	Lenoir	Lenoir announces the need to restructure the society Pélissier supports the idea of restructuring and announces the creation of a patronage society Allibert speaks in support of Berthier Berthier describes further divisions and appeals for patience	A split produces a second, rival, banquet in Montmartre	Imbert delivers a speech in the preparatory meeting attacking the interference of the *indispensable four* in the lives of adult deaf people
30th Nov 1845	Cadran-Bleu, Boulevard du Temple	Société Centrale des Sourds-Muets	Berthier	Berthier delivers enormous speech on the continuers of de l'Epée's work Imbert speaks in anticipation of the patronage society Lenoir speaks in favour of modifications of the civil code De Monglave calls for unity	Pélissier and Imbert achieve a reuniting of the two factions Large banquet	
29th Nov 1846	Cadran-Bleu, Boulevard du Temple	Société Centrale des Sourds-Muets	Berthier	Variety of independent speeches* by Berthier, Pélissier, Gazan de la Payrière, Lenoir, Allibert, Imbert, Navarin, Paybonnieux, de Monglave	An even larger banquet than 1845	
5th Dec 1847	Not given	Société Centrale des Sourds-Muets	Berthier	Berthier speaks on the state's obligations towards deaf people Other various independent speeches* by Allibert, de Monglave, Pélissier, Gazan, Imbert, Puybonnieux Allibert proposes petition to see Berthier decorated with the legion of honour.	An even larger banquet than 1846 Unity is almost achieved A scandal erupts at the end of the banquet over laroucau's disagreement with a petition to the king proposed by Pélissier	Laroucau revolts against a petition that the *indispensable four* try to force upon the guests
26th Nov 1848	Pestel's, Location not given	Société Centrale des Sourds-Muets	Berthier	Small banquet Berthier speaks reaffirming the need	Disagreements lead to a small, deaf-only banquet	

				to press on and remain faithful to their original aims		
25th Nov 1849	Chapard's, place d'Angoulême	Société Centrale des Sourds-Muets	Berthier	Very large banquet Berthier has been awarded legion of honour Berthier toasts de l'Epée and the president of the republic. Gazan and Lenoir praise Berthier Imbert announces the creation of Blanchet's patronage society	Société is still riven by division but banquet goes ahead Berthier is awarded the legion of honour Blanchet announces the creation of another society because of the decadence of the original Société	The *indispensable four* lose their iron grip over the banquets through a disagreement at a meeting in the rue du Paon The Société Centrale is dissolved
24th Nov 1850	Deffieux's, Boulevard du Temple	Société Centrale d'Education et Assistance	Pélissier	Pélissier praises the accomplishments of the deaf community Imbert toasts Pélissier Lenoir toasts the patronage societies Berthier toasts the unity of the deaf community A footnote to the record records that Berthier chose the disassociate himself from the Blanchet patronage society	The Société Centrale is dissolved Blanchet attempts to organise a banquet but a revolt from Berthier forms a group of independents who hold their own banquet with Berthier as president	Banquets from this point on, until 1866, are organised by an independent group of deaf people.

* It seems of little worth giving details of all the topics of these speeches since they appear to have been almost apolitical discourses on unrelated topics

Annexe 2 - Biographies

Allibert Eugène (approx 1805 - post 1870)

A favoured student of Dr. Itard, Allibert was a founder member of the Société Centrale and a staunch supporter of Berthier. Raised in a hearing foster family, he was the focus of experiments on deaf education by Itard in the 1810's. However, he went on to become a teacher at the Institution. There is a suggestion that Allibert's mastery of French was the single most important factor in the 'conversion' of Itard to sign language later in life.

Bébian, Roch-Ambroise (1789 - 1839)

Sicard's godson, his early life is characterised by a great deal of contact with the Bordeaux Deaf community from whom he learned to sign, reportedly, better than more deaf people. Bébian's role in the Insitution was short, but eventful. He was encouraged in his work by Sicard, whilst at the same time constrained because of his belief in sign language. He was, however, highly influential in the lives of Lenoir, Berthier and other students at the time and was one of the principles who sought out contact between the Institution and the external Paris Deaf community.

In 1821 he was sacked from the school, ostensibly for striking another teacher. However, it was much more likely to be because of embarrassment caused to Ordinaire when, during a during a visit of the Duchess of Berry he returned from an enforced trip to complain that the students had no clothes or food. Bébian opened a day school in the Boulevard du Montparnasse in Paris and then, from 1832 to 1824 he moved to Rouen to run the deaf school there upon the death of Abbé Huby, the previous director.

Berthier, Ferdinand (1803 - 1886)

Became deaf before the age of three. Initially a student at the *Institution* from 1811, then a teacher from 1823 and soon the doyen of the school, Bérthier w as a thorn in the flesh of a principally oralist management of the school. Berthier's principle influence was Bébian, from whom he learned the power of natural sign language and the habit of writing politically motivated literature.

Berthier was the author of many works on personalities such as Itard, de L'Epée and Sicard and detailed reforms necessary to the Napoleonic code that would allow deaf people their full participation in the law. Presented as a candidate in the elections of 1848, Berthier was decorated with the legion of honour the following year. He eventually retired from the Institution in the

1860's but continued his political campaigning until just before his death in 1886.

Blanchet, Albert (- 1867)

One of a series of doctors who replaced Itard following his death in 1838. Blanchet continued many of the medical experimentation that Itard had abandoned. However, his principle focus was the belief that the integration of deaf and hearing students in schools was the best way forward in gaining the permanent integration of the deaf community into hearing society. This brought him into considerable tension with de Lanneau, and other pro-signing members of the *Insitution* staff. Blanchet established several small integration experiments with no great success and then in 1853, tried to convince the Academy of Medicine of this route.

Blanchet's greatest success was the establishment in 1850, of the Blanchet Society, a patronage society designed to create and distribute a fund for the welfare of poor deaf and blind people.

De l'Epée, Abbé Charles-Michel (1712 - 1789)


Charles Michel Abbé de l'Epee

Charles-Michel de l'Epée studied theology but was refused ordination because of his Jansenism. He went on to study law, but returned to the church when the Bi shop of Troyes consented to ordain him a few years later. De L'Epée travelled to Paris following the Bishop's death and founded a school for Deaf students after meeting two deaf sisters. His main emphasis was on their religious instruction through sign language, which he altered from its natural form so as to contain grammatical information. De l'Epée published a number of works based on the education of deaf people. He died in 1789 (unrelated to the revolution) after receiving a promise that his work would continue in the hands of the country.

De Gérando, Baron Joseph Marie (1772 - ***)

A Philanthropist, given responsibility for the administration of the French administration in Catalonia until the fall of Napoleon and the restoration of Louis-Philippe at which point he became deputy minister of the interior. Given the charge of the *Institution*, he continued until removed by the government following tensions between himself and de Lanneau in 1841. A staunch oralist, he dedicated his entire time at the Institution to the banning of sign language and the imposition of oral teaching.

De Lanneau, Adolphe (-)

De Lanneau became the director of the Institution following the resignation of Désiré Ordinaire in 1838. With a long period of teaching and education experience behind him he was instrumental in overturning the early oralist attempts of Ordinaire and Gérando by uniting a largely pro-signing staff under his authority. Sporadic infighting with Blanchet, towards whom he appears to have fostered a particular antipathy, broke out later on in his career at the school (1840's and 1850's). Upon de Lanneau's death, the directorship of the school was increasingly passed on to directors embracing a more oral approach.

Forestier, Claudius (1810 -)

A contemporary of Berthier's at the *Institution* and instrumental in the revolt of 1830 that saw a complaint sent to the ministry of the interior. Born deaf, Forestier was a pupil of Bébian's and became a teacher himself at the *Institution* in 1837. He was s founder member of the *Comité des Sourd-Muets* and the *Société Centrale*. Highly intelligent, he left to become the director of the deaf school in Lyon in 1840 but still remained influential in the Paris deaf community and in the *Société Centrale*.

Imbert, Jules (1815 - 1885

Jules Imbert was born in Clermont Ferrand and became deaf at the age of 6. He arrived at the Institution where he excelled. However, in 1830, at the age of 15, he was expelled by Ordinaire following his support for Berthier's protest to the King. Returning home, he passed through several jobs, failing to find any of them to his liking. He eventually returned to Paris where he became the scribe in a banking house.

He was a member of the Société Centrale from its inception, even participating in the fund to purchase the bust of de l'Epée. However, increasing personal and discursive differences saw him leave in 1848 to join with Dr Blanchet in founding the Société Génerale, a patronage society, in which he was the primary representative of adult deaf people.

Apparently always a focus for dissention, he was the recipient of a constant stream of abusive letters from other Deaf people throughout his life. Upon the death of Blanchet in 1867 he cracked under the pressure and dropped out of public life. However, he returned in 1882 to a position on the board of a new society and was instrumental in the establishment of ideas that led to the first French federation of deaf societies. He died in 1885 following his wife's death a few years earlier.

Itard, Jean-Marc (- 1838)

Itard was the first doctor to be assigned to the Institution following the law of 1795. His remit, as he saw it, was the healing of deafness. A task he pursued with vigour inflicting all manner of horrific treatments including, burning, infection and piercing of the ears. In later life, Itard experienced a change of heart. Reportedly resigning himself to the uncurable nature of deafness, he became almost sympathetic to the use of sign language and carried out a series of special tutoring sessions designed to compliment normal teaching. Allibert was his star pupil. Itard died, leaving a legacy to the Institution to create several special classes in his name.

Lenoir, Alphonse (-)

A contemporary of Berthier's at the Institution and instrumental in the revolt of 1830 that saw a complaint sent to the ministry of the interior. A pupil of Bébian, Lenoir was known for being calm and imperturbable.

Ordinaire, Desiré (1773 - 1847)

A doctor and teacher, he worked in besançon and then became rector of the university of Strasbourg from 1824 until he was sacked for political reasons. Ordinaire's brother, Jean-Jacques, was a member of the academic board at the *Institution* and Désiré was employed to make a tour of Germany and Switzerland, collecting information about teaching methods in deaf schools there which was published in 1832. Strongly oralist, he was made director of the *Institution* in 1831 with the nominal task of bringing about oral education in Paris. Resistant to sign language education until his resignation in 1838 and replacement by de Lanneau.

Pélissier, Pierre (1814 - 1863)

Pierre Pélissier was another staunchly anti-oral deaf man and contemporary of Lenoir and Allibert. He spent most of his life at the *Institution* where he was a pupil and then a teacher. He was the author in 1856 of the first dictionary showing the natural sign language of deaf people rather than the signs of de l'Epée, or Sicard.

Sicard, Roch-Ambroise Cucurron (1742- 1822)

Born in the South of France, he was ordained at the age of 28 and assigned to Bordeaux where this ambitious young man caught the eye of Archbishop de Cicé. It was de Cicé that made

the 1789 promise to de l'Epée, and de Cicé who secured the *Institution* directorship for Sicard after the revolution.

Having become official director of the *Instutition* in 1790, he increased the public performances of 'deaf intelligence' as a way to gain public funding. However, he was increasingly unpopular due to his interference with sign language and his apparent neglect of the *Institution's* students, preferring instead his own career progression with the new *Académie Française*'s grammar section.

A staunch royalist, he maintained correspondence with the deposed Royal Family even through the years of Napoléon's reign, and spent a brief period in England following Napoléon's return to power in 1815. Eventually, his refusal to leave the school before senility took him reduced it to poverty and chaos and when he died in 1822, no one was disappointed.

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