# The Right to Remain "Silent": Deaf Aesthetics in *GANGSTA.*

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This is a work of fiction. There is no relation between characters and groups depicted with those that actually exist. Due to the nature of the main character, subtitles will appear in some places.
—*GANGSTA.* opening notes, episodes 1–12

To assume deaf people live in silence is to wrongly assume that sound has no place for deaf people.
—A. Avon

In the opening to every episode in the 2015 Japanese anime series *GANGSTA.* (ギャングスタ), there is a cryptic explanation regarding the show's use of subtitles for its main character, the hitman Nicolas Brown. What is not mentioned is that the subtitles are intended for hearing viewers and that it is Nicolas's hands rather than his mouth that require translation. Nicolas's signing reveals that the "nature of the main character" is, in fact, a roundabout reference to his deafness. By framing parts of the narrative from Nicolas's "point of audition," the subtitles emphasize what hearing characters and viewers alike lack in their reliance on hearing, that is, "a reminder of the 'hearingness' of narrative" where meaning uninterrupted by hearing may surface via other modalities of the body (Davis 1995b, 115).[1] While audism assigns hearing to the auditory, Nicolas's signing foregrounds sound's visual and kinesthetic qualities to reveal its fluid movement across the senses. Kanta Kocchar-Lindgren describes this sensorial hybridity as the "third ear"; she reminds us that "there is not just one type of 'voice and body,' understood along essentialist lines, that can be responded to through the body," but rather "various points of the body speak; they are vibrant transmitters of meaning, nodes of sensory and perceptual quotation of a fully material way of being in the world" (2006, 17).

As audist listening practices restrict sound to an auditory phenomenon, a commonly held misperception about deafness is its complete disconnection from the realm of sound. However, deafness's "disruption in the visual, auditory, and perceptual field" creates productive defamiliarizations of the normative to underscore other ways of feeling and being in the world that is often treated as other by hearing culture (Davis 1995b, 129). In *GANGSTA.*, deafness is not a state of being but a socially constructed relation that highlights not what deafness prevents Nicolas from hearing but rather what an audist conception of deafness prevents a hearing audience from perceiving. As such, Nicolas's signing demonstrates the synesthetic nature of hearing to interrogate a framework of perception based on excluding differently abled bodies. When Nicolas signs, he enacts what Lennard Davis describes as a "deafened moment" where hearing (through the ear) and speaking (through the mouth) are not central, and perhaps even inadequate, to the meaning-making process in the text (1995b, 100–101). The "sensorial instability" of Davis's deafened moment requires "more supple modes of interpretation" where hearing "becomes a matter of perspective that involves the whole-body attitude that we take through our ears, eyes, and other resonating points of the body (Kocchar-Lindgren 2006, 4, 6).

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This essay focuses on how cinema and the screen may further develop how the "third ear" can be useful in interpreting meaning systems specific to certain media forms. Theatre and film both have distinct advantages on account of their respective mediums, providing viewers with different and wholly unique perceptions of performance. What is particular about film is its ability to get into the "head" of characters through their point of view, or in this case, point of audition, which I will discuss in more detail later. I suggest that while "the implications of deafness as part of the theatrical sensorium are [often] omitted" in the realm of performance," Davis's "deafened moment" is all the more important in narrative as it allows the "third ear" to unearth meaning obfuscated by listening (Kochhar-Lindgren 2006, 1). Via Nicolas's point of audition, *GANGSTA.*'s "deafened moment" is not meant to reproduce a true-to-life rendering of reality, but to "(convey, express) the feelings associated with the situation" (Chion 1994, 109). It magnifies a moment that opens up a conversation of what Nicolas hears through his body. By treating sound as a synesthetic phenomenon, its production and reception can rewire how sound is interpreted beyond the ear.

Animation is an especially apt medium to explore how the "third ear" defamiliarizes conventional sound practices. Whereas sound facilitates a 360° experience, Robin Beauchamp points out that an audience's field of vision is limited to 180° on screen (2005, 18). As such, the critical role sound plays in animation cannot be understated as the form relies heavily on the sensorial texture afforded by sound to assign meaning to hand-drawn or computer-rendered visuals that may lack the "liveness" found in live-action film. Unlike images trapped on screen, sound can encompass the audience in a full-bodied sensory experience. Its objective, according to Michel Chion, "must [be to] tell the story of a whole rush of composite sensations and not just the auditory reality of the event" (1994, 113). As such, sound in *GANGSTA.* has layers of meaning that cannot simply be heard through listening with the ear. The anime's use of subtitles is just the beginning of a series of cinematic techniques that enforce a synesthetic mode of listening through the "third ear." In this paper, I examine a scene from *GANGSTA.*'s first episode depicting one of Nicolas's hits as the anime's stylistic use of sound, image, and touch demonstrates how the "third ear" enriches the kinds of perception and meanings made possible in mainstream sound aesthetics.

## Deafness, Disability, and Japanese TV

Upending an audist framework of listening via the "third ear" also affects the way power is relegated in the body. As audist standards determine who is and who is not deaf based on the ability to hear through the ear, the extent to which one hears sound is a political act. As such, "far from being a natural or arbitrary function of perception," "listening is an act riven with power relations" (Stoever 2010, 80). Examining the power imbalance between hearing by the ear and hearing through the "third ear" reveals how audism is built into how sound is shaped, both in performance of stage and screen and in real life. In essence, the deaf body disrupts the social construction that relegates hearing as just an auditory phenomenon. As Tobin Siebers points out, "constructions are built with certain social bodies in mind, and when a different body appears, the lack of fit reveals the ideology of ability controlling the space" (2008, 124). Through Nicolas's deaf point of audition, the deaf body forces viewers to interpret the narrative beyond the capacity of the ear so that seeing and feeling become a recognized part of the hearing process. All too often, as Kocchar-Lindgren argues, "not only do we have great difficulty 'seeing' the other, but we also have great difficulty 'hearing' the other as well" (2006, 3). The "third ear" offers a solution to "hear" the other where before, the other was rendered invisible as audist conceptions of hearing was (and still is) an act exclusive to hearing bodies.

*GANGSTA.*'s casting of a deaf character in a major role and its inclusion of Japanese sign language and subtitles foregrounds how audism, rather than deafness, obstructs the means of meaningful communication. *GANGSTA.* is set in a mafia-run city named Ergastulum at a time where its city inhabitants are coping with the aftereffects of a past war in which super-soldiers were created using a toxic bio-enhancement drug called Celebrer. Nicolas, a descendant of Celebrer users (called Twilights), has inherited not only his parents' dependence on the drug and a shortened lifespan but also a bodily impairment paradoxically termed as "compensation." Each Twilight has their own form of compensation, and for Nicolas, it is his deafness.

Television has often conflated deafness with disability, and as such, both are represented with similar perspectives regarding ability and the body. Historically, the most common media representations of deafness and disability subscribe to the medical model of disability, where disability is a problem unique to the individual that must be "cured" so as to reintegrate the so-called disabled person into society. Oftentimes, these characters function as a "narrative prosthesis" where the disabled person drives the (able-bodied) character or plot development (Mitchell and Snyder 2001, 47). In Japan, televisual representations of disability have typically followed the Western medical model of disability with a cultural emphasis on the performance of disability through the terms "gaman" (我慢) and "ganbaru" (頑張る). In discussing the disability boom in Japanese film and television in the mid-90s, James Valentine describes how deaf characters in particular were constructed "in terms of tragic loss of communication potential" (2001, 707–8). Due to their deafness, such characters could only "suffer in silence" or "gaman" in silence. "Gaman" can be described as endurance or perseverance, a concept typically applied to situations in Japanese society where one must stoically overcome an obstacle for the common good.

I use the term "gaman" to amplify how Japanese societal perceptions presuppose that the limitations of a person's disability are their responsibility alone, and that they must strive to remedy it for the sake of able-bodied others. This treatment follows the medical model, where the disability is central rather than ancillary to character development so that the focus is on how deafness prevents the character from communicating rather than the audist prejudice responsible for it (Valentine 2001, 711). The limited amount of time allotted to people with disabilities on prime-time television in Japan means the audience's understanding of disability is dependent on limited and often skewed misrepresentations discussed above (Saito and Ishiyama 2005, 446–47). As the medical model defines people by their disability, the person, as a result, becomes their disability. Disability studies scholars like Lennard Davis (1995b, 2) and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (1997, 6) critique such representations of disability by arguing that the issue is not in the individual but in how society shapes nonnormative bodily experiences into a disability.

Successive disability rights movements throughout the twentieth century contributed to the public shift from the medical to the social model of disability, the latter of which moved the focus on disability from an individual issue to a sociopolitical one. Under this model, society itself and its infrastructure are responsible for branding nonnormative modes of being and feeling in the world as disability. This focus on social dynamics and structures is crucial in examining the construction of disability, as Rebecca Mallett and Brett Mills emphasize, articulating the value of a sociocultural approach in looking at "how environments and social expectations enable, disable, define and redefine people" (2015, 157). However, this model is not without critique. Alison Kafer points out that it "erases the lived realities of impairment; in its well-intentioned focus on the disabling effects of society, it overlooks the often-disabling effects of our bodies" (2013, 7). Through a feminist and

queer approach, Kafer pushes the social model further through a political/relational model that recognizes disability "as a site of questions rather than firm definitions," whose unstable nature has the potential to effect a political transformation of disability futures (9–11). It is in the context of this model that I demonstrate how *GANGSTA.* offers one such active (re)imagining of a disability future through the "third ear."

## Anime's Approach to Deafness

Even while most Japanese TV programs represent deaf and disabled people as stigmatized groups that need to be saved, anime stands out as an exception because its themes and stylized aesthetics allow for more flexibility and experimentation than live-action shows. While it is misunderstood as a low-brow form of entertainment, anime has historically engaged with topics deemed inappropriate in Western cartoons catering to children, such as gender, sexuality, class, and, in this case, disability.[2] In addition, as a made-for-TV product, anime is a mass popular cultural form known for its wide viewership and easy distribution. While television viewership has decreased with the current rise of online streaming services, anime's flexibility allows more venues of exhibition and influence. At the time it was aired in July 2015, *GANGSTA.* was broadcast on the TV channels TOKYO MX, TV Aichi, BS 11, and ABC and livestreamed from *GANGSTA.*'s official website, Bandai, and niconico every Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday at different PM times.[3] *GANGSTA.*, as an anime series, is not only able to depart from media conventions, but the series itself portrays deaf characters outside of the "gaman" and "ganbaru" model often seen on Japanese TV. Its unorthodox ways of representing the experience of deafness expose an audist conception of listening that is often left unchallenged. The amount of airtime invested in the anime points to its mainstream consumption and a possible shift in response to deafness and disability in mainstream Japanese popular culture.

## Nicolas's "Deafened Moment" in *GANGSTA.*

The "deafened moment" in *GANGSTA.* is a fight scene quite different from all the others in the anime series as it alludes to Nicolas's deafness through its stylized use of sound. At the climax of episode 1, "Naughty Boys," Nicolas and his partner-in-crime Worick assassinate Barry, a new mafia don who oversteps his boundaries with the four ruling mafia groups of the city. In this part of the narrative, Nicolas pursues Barry and his men in a back alley. The chase is punctuated by the screams of Barry's men, gunshots, and the visceral sounds of a blade slicing into flesh. When he finds himself at a dead end, Barry attempts to buy out Nicolas, but his plea falls on literal deaf ears as the latter stares impassively at him. Up until the negotiation, Nicolas's leitmotif, "Sword and Bullet," plays in the nondiegetic background, yet its volume is nearly equal to that of the diegetic track; the leitmotif thus becomes an integral part of the soundscape.

The equal attention given to both nondiegetic and diegetic sound signals not only the important role both play in the scene but also the strength of Nicolas's aural presence via his leitmotif. On account of its volume and aural association with him, Nicolas's leitmotif signals his command of the scene, overtly transitioning the hearing audience into his point of audition. Once "Sword and Bullet" establishes Nicolas's presence, the music fades out with a mechanical twang so that only the bass remains. As the camera pans across a close-up of Nicolas's profile, both the bass and Barry's voice become muffled. Both sounds reverberate to impart a sense of spatial distance from the sources producing them. The audio distortion fades in the next shot as the camera cuts to an extreme close-

up of Barry's moving (but soundless) mouth. In this shot, a thumping sound overlays the receding sounds of Barry's muffled voice and the score's bass. Then all three sounds pause. This silence lasts two seconds before it is broken by the abrupt return of "Sword and Bullet" in the following shot. This scene is the only place in the episode and overall series where Nicolas and the audience share the same point of audition where deafness and the deaf body are overwhelmingly represented in the soundscape.

## A Deaf Point of Audition

While the "deafened moment" in *GANGSTA.* revolves around Nicolas's point of audition, *GANGSTA.* is not so much reproducing deafness but approximating a point of audition that challenges preconceived notions of what deafness typically sounds like on television. More so than an accurate representation of a deaf experience, the show brings attention to cross-sensory forms of hearing that can be foregrounded through this medium. Unlike point of view, point of audition occupies a slippery subjectivity; as Chion states, due to its omnidirectional nature, sound does not have a "precise position in space [like an image on screen], but rather of a place of audition, or even a zone of audition" (1994, 91). As this zone is fluid, it operates throughout the diegetic world of the screen as well as in the nondiegetic world of the audience. This zone leads the audience to the critical question: whose point of audition am I hearing and why? The political consequences of Nicolas's point of audition position it as a methodological tool of performance analysis. As Sandahl states, "without the distancing effects of a proscenium frame and the actor's distinctness from his or her character, disability becomes one of the most radical forms of performance art, 'invisible theater' at its extremes" (2005, 2). The silence Nicolas performs is a strategic one as it shows how the ear becomes an inadequate means of gleaning meaning in a scene teeming with other sensorial cues. However, the show does not ignore the ethics involved in taking on an othered position.

Nicolas's point of audition challenges the way television typically presents listening as a singular mode of perception and instead shows that listening is not as straightforward as it seems. Listening is messy. In describing the sound installations she curated for her exhibition *LOUD Silence* in 2014, Amanda Cachia asserts that "there is no such ideal 'seeing,' 'hearing' or vibrating" (2016, 326). Rather, sound "can be quiet and loud, physical, conceptual, visual, metaphoric, synaeshtetic [*sic*], tactile, inaccessible and accessible, inclusive and exclusive, captioned, and more" (338–39). As such, there is no "ideal" hearing practice. Instead, hearing involves a dynamic interplay of senses that encompass the whole body, allowing for accessible, meaningful, and versatile communication without a sensory hierarchy to isolate them into neat categories. The "deafened moment" here is not an entertaining moment, but a *teaching moment*.

By forcing the audience to adopt Nicolas's point of audition, *GANGSTA.* inverts the relationship of sound with marginalizing deafness by rendering an audist point of audition unfamiliar. This heightened emphasis on "noise" and explicit minimization of dialogue in a scene of violence challenges how a typical hearing audience would filter these layers of sound according to volume and relative importance in aiding the narrative (where dialogue would be most prioritized). However, Nicolas does not converse except through the screams he evokes from others. In other words, noise is just as important as dialogue, if not more, for this part of the narrative. This democratization of sound challenges a hearing audience's reception of the scene as *all* sounds must be taken in to fully perceive Nicolas's role in the narrative. His sonic profile, then, is characterized by the soundscape in its entirety.

As the juxtaposition of a hearing character with a deaf character typically revolves around the lack of sound or its distortion, it is necessary to parse how these sounds can be stylized to defamiliarize an audist soundscape. After studying 276 television programs that aired between 1986 and 2013, Katherine Foss observed that "sound cues often serve as the first indication of hearing loss, as distorted, muffled, or even silenced audio," which further marginalizes the deaf or hard of hearing (HoH) person through their association with this distorted audio perception (2014, 895). However, her criticism of televisual strategies to convey hearing loss does not account for ways these conventions might be subverted. Rather than focusing on repackaging a deaf individual's experience to a hearing audience, *GANGSTA*. uses sound effects typically associated with deafness to challenge a hearing audience's expectations as to how sound can be perceived.

## Anti-Naturalistic Selection—Internal Rhythms of the Deaf Body

*GANGSTA*. complicates Nicolas's point of audition by the interplay of diegetic with nondiegetic sound to listen with the "third ear." The interplay of sounds between the audio foreground and background is an example of "anti-naturalistic selection," what Barbara Flueckiger describes as "a shift in the acoustic processing" that "simulates the focusing of attention of a character as a function of his specific interests and objectives" (2009, 177). In listening to this scene, a hearing audience temporarily occupies the phenomenological experience of a deaf body—a move that distinguishes *GANGSTA*.'s use of sound from other television shows that attempt to address the deaf experience.

Such a stylistic move mindfully signals the ethics of representing deafness through aural sympathy on the part of the audience. The audio distortion applied to Barry's voice in this scene extends to the score as well, extending Nicolas's auditory experience in the diegetic world of the anime to the nondiegetic music ostensibly perceptible only by the audience. By pushing Barry's voice to the background and foregrounding the score's bass, the listener's aural awareness attunes to the latter; when the score superimposes a thumping sound, it combines to resemble a heartbeat. This visceral sound simulates Nicolas's point of audition as it roots the reader in the body of the deaf man himself. The thumping not only establishes Nicolas's spatial nearness to the listener but also directs attention to his own body as an auditory organ. Furthermore, the bass also presents an awareness of how a deaf or HoH listener would potentially hear the score. As low frequencies are more easily discernible among deaf or HoH listeners, the increased volume of the score's bass attunes to Nicolas's hearing experience and, as I discuss later, a tactile experience of sound. This scene thus illustrates Chion's statement that "sound here must tell the story of a whole rush of composite sensations and not just the auditory reality of the event" (1994, 113). Anti-naturalistic selection in *GANGSTA*. attempts to relay more than an objective auditory reality of the scene as it puts diegetic and nondiegetic sound and its layered effects in conversation with each other to recreate Nicolas's spatial body through sound. Prior to this, the sounds driving the scene forward were from outside forces, but here, Nicolas's internal rhythms dictate the action rather than those around him. Nicolas's deaf body renders the soundscape for the audience on his own terms.

## Sound Effects: Low-Pass Filter and Fade-Out—It's Not Me, It's You

In *GANGSTA*., sound effects help sonically signal a shift in perception as they tend to reflect a character's interiority. In this case, sound effects—including audio fade-out, echo, and reverberation—ground the audience in Nicolas's point of audition. The additional stylization of the diegetic and nondiegetic sounds strengthens Nicolas's point of audition which, in turn, ruptures a

hearing audience's "natural" perception of sound and reveals the parameters defining sound as central to the ear. Since sound effects are usually relegated to the supporting role of soundscapes, little attention is paid to how they work to convey important yet oft-overlooked, or oft-overheard, sensorial information to listeners. As hearing is a continuous process, it is easy to disregard what it is that makes something sound "natural" or aurally fitting. It is not until this "acoustic continuum" is interrupted that hearing audiences become aware of its significance (Flueckiger 2009, 173).

A sound effect contributing to the anti-naturalistic process involves the use of a low-pass filter to fade out the score and Barry's voice—a technique that sonically signals a significant shift in perception. In this scene, Barry negotiates with Nicolas, saying: "We have no intention of taking a Tag head-on. Who is it that hired you? If you switch over to our side, we'll pay you double. (Hey . . . you listening to me?) [fade-out in parentheses]" ("Naughty boys"). The gradual decrease in volume is a transition leaving the remaining dialogue lost to the hearing audience. Whatever Barry has said can only be inferred by an extreme close-up profile of his moving lips. Low-pass filter furthers the effect achieved through foregrounding the bass in Nicolas's leitmotif earlier in the scene. This effect filters out high frequencies while simultaneously allowing low frequencies to pass through. As a result, the continuation of low-frequency sounds initiated by Nicolas's leitmotif ensures the listener's grounding in Nicolas's point of audition. In effect, low-pass filter fades out the higher frequencies of Barry's speech so that only the lower frequencies remain. While fade-out is commonly used to signal a character's disconnection from reality, that is not the case in *GANGSTA.* (Flueckiger 2009, 173). Nicolas does not undergo any marked psychological change, so fade-out does not impart any useful information on the part of his character. But, as the hearing audience occupies Nicolas's point of audition, fade-out overtly signals to the hearing audience that *they* are being sonically disconnected from reality. In effect, fade-out renders audible the constructedness of this deaf point of audition for a hearing audience by gradually muting an important aspect of the soundscape, that is, a character's speech.

Fade-out typically acts as aural transitions from hearing to hearing "loss" that emphasizes the constructed nature of deafness to a hearing audience. This sound rupture signals that the ear is no longer functioning as expected. In contrast, fade-out cues nothing to a deaf or HoH audience about hearing "loss" as they are proficient in other ways of hearing the soundscape; their ears are working as *they* expect them to work. For a hearing audience accustomed to the interplay of moving image and sound to convey information, this sound effect emphasizes the loss of sonic immersion in the scene's action. With the fading soundscape, the hearing audience has limited access to how the sound in the scene works within the diegetic world. They are forced to rely on other sensory cues—vision—to pick up what they have "lost" in sound. However, this seeming loss for a hearing audience opens possibilities as to how sound can be perceived by listening with the "third ear." Sound is heard through not only the ear but also the body via echo and reverberation.

## Echo and Reverberation—Feeling Sound

Like fade-out, echo and reverberation are also indicative of "auditory subjective transformation," in this case cueing an introspective turn for the character (Flueckiger 2009, 173). However, despite the scene's occupation of Nicolas's point of audition, it is the hearing audience affected by this transformation and Nicolas its instigator. After the fade-out prepares the audience to enter Nicolas's point of audition, echo and reverberation introduce the hearing audience to hearing through the body. Echo and reverberation impart a sense of space in the soundscape, where the former conveys

distance between the sound's source and its reflecting surface, and the latter a culmination of echoes bouncing off multiple surfaces within a closed space. These sounds inform the audience of the proximity of the reflecting surfaces and whether the environment is an open or closed space. The function is the same for both audiences, except a hearing audience would prioritize ears over the body rather than body over ears as with a deaf or HoH audience. Echo and reverberation enhance Nicolas's point of audition as these sound effects show how Nicolas would process sound through feeling rather than hearing. Hearing for Nicolas involves an awareness of sound throughout his entire body, as opposed to a more localized sense of sound entering through the ear that may be common among hearing persons. As such, echo and reverberation illustrate how sound also involves touch, a sensory experience that deaf and HoH individuals would consider an element in the act of hearing. Accordingly, the combination of fade-out, echo, and reverberation enacts an auditory subjective transformation for the hearing audience rather than for Nicolas, thus questioning the former's aural privilege in a soundscape that does not attempt to normalize hearing.

## Silence

The audio stylization of the previous shots culminates in the final shot with two seconds of silence that severs the hearing audience from the "hearing" world. The abrupt change in volume causes an even more dramatic effect, as the actions in the scene continue without change. It is only the sound that is different. Complete silence is usually avoided in film because of its disconcerting effect in confronting the audience. As Mike Figgis explains, with complete silence, "you can literally hear everything, and you don't have the protection of this sound blanket of mush, or just ambient noise, or whatever, which we come to expect of a soundtrack (2007, 2). Silence confronts the listener and makes them hyperaware of the soundscape it unmasks on- *and* off-screen. In *GANGSTA.*, this silence facilitates a productive discomfort where the hearing audience's ears become dysfunctional. Barry's negotiation with Nicolas is central to the scene, and by silencing him, the hearing audience is left to lip-read Barry's words. At this point, the hearing audience must turn to other sensory means of interpreting the scene or become lost in the silence.

## The Resonating Body

Nicolas undermines the usual silence assigned to deaf characters through his ownership of the soundscape. During his hit on Barry, the handyman is the instigator of violence, and its corresponding sounds are jarring against the sudden use of silence. Before Nicolas is even seen on screen, his leitmotif aurally heralds him into the action, and the camera frames Barry and his men's reactions to Nicolas's entrance in a medium shot. The score compensates for his visual absence by an aural presence that is further strengthened by the desperate faces of the mafia. Similarly, the brief jingle of Nicolas's dog-tags—the volume of which is just as loud as the score—acts as a secondary aural signature of himself. Although Nicolas chooses to remain orally silent, his aural body has no such boundaries as he materializes in scenes of violence where noise reigns. Regardless of if he is onscreen or offscreen, Nicolas's aural signature permeates the diegetic and nondiegetic space so that he becomes an aurally omnipresent body. Nicolas is a perpetrator of violence, and this violence, in turn, shapes his aural body. The scene is characterized by gunshots, the plying of Nicolas's sword through flesh, blood splatter, the dull thud of bodies, the rush of footsteps, and men screaming. His deaf body is shaped through sounds associated with violence, which upends other televisual representations of deaf bodies as silent or ghostlike. Conversely, Nicolas's body becomes

substantiated through the sounds he evokes from others. In *GANGSTA*., deafness does not lack sound, as Nicolas calls upon an excess of it to establish his presence.

While the sounds of violence give shape to Nicolas's body, *GANGSTA* also withholds sound in ways advantageous for a deaf and HoH audience. To a hearing audience, this restriction of sound upends the common assumption that deafness disables rather than enables. Rather, hearing through the "third ear" enables a deaf and HoH audience to perceive the scene in a more meaningful way than a hearing one. Nicolas himself withholds "intelligible" sound, that is, spoken word, to keep Barry, his henchmen, and the hearing audience uncertain of his intentions. The only way to listen to Nicolas is through the "third ear." In film and television, typical conversation scenes like Barry's negotiation with Nicolas would be filmed as a shot-reverse shot where the camera alternates between the faces of the speaking characters. Full access to the speakers' range of facial expressions complements the spoken dialogue. However, *GANGSTA*. modifies the conventional shot-reverse-shot for an audience familiar with lip-reading (in Japanese) as the camera only alternates between Barry's silently moving lips and Nicolas's eyes. As Nicolas can lip-read, this silence leaves the audience unable to hear or likewise read Barry's lips as the camera frames Nicolas's profile in a close-up, where we see how his eyes are listening with the "third ear." This shot-reverse shot leads to silence, further precluding a hearing audience's participation in the scene. While the camera is focused on Nicolas, the hearing audience is excluded from this conversation because they can neither hear nor see what Barry says. The hearing audience is left adrift in the two seconds when Nicolas smirks in response to words that the hearing audience cannot hear. Barry's lines are no longer intelligible for a hearing-dependent audience, and the scene is only accessible to those who can lip-read. The lack of sound enhances the hearing audience's dysfunction as the only two sensory options open to understanding the dialogue in the scene are closed off because Barry's voice cannot be heard, and his words cannot be visually read. Listening becomes an experience that goes beyond hearing via the ear to other modes of perception—in this case, sight. *GANGSTA*. uses the presence of sound to challenge audist conceptions of hearing, revealing that seeing is just another mode of hearing the world.

Nicolas demonstrates how sight is another mode of hearing, and it is the camera's lingering on Nicolas's "hearing" eyes—his gaze—that completes the destabilization of the hearing audience. Traditionally, the gaze is a power act where power rests in the controller of that gaze over its subject. But, as Rosemarie Garland-Thomson points out, "because both lip-reading and manual gestures are integral to Deaf communication, Deaf people are *starers*" (2009, 121, emphasis added).[4] Under the normative power operations subtending the gaze, Nicolas's disability would be visible, positioning him as the object of the gaze. However, he flips the framework to position himself as the subject (a position, as Garland-Thomson points out, particularly amenable to the deaf individual). As such, the power of the gaze accrues to Nicolas, who thus undermines the observer's ability to exert the power of the gaze over his body. Nicolas engages with the soundscape in two ways: feeling through the body and seeing through the eyes to demonstrate that listening is not exclusive to the ear. The information he gleans from this scene is multiplied through the layered modes of perception that other hearing characters tend to dismiss in favour of auditory hearing.

## Conclusion

To return to the opening of this essay, it is not the "nature of the main character" that requires subtitles but the "nature of the hearing viewer" instead. From the moment Nicolas first signs in

*GANGSTA.*, he enacts one of many "deafened moments" that unravel audist expectations embedded in mainstream sound aesthetics through his rejection of auditory hearing. By using the "third ear," Nicolas's point of audition demonstrates how sound operates under different parameters than those prescribed by audism to acknowledge a multisensory experience that cannot be contained by the ear alone. My analysis of just one "deafened moment" in *GANGSTA.* reveals how the modality of film can be used to normalize an inclusive and responsive listening practice that can inspire further experimentation and exploration of the perception of sound from the screen to real life.

## Notes

1. I am using the term "point of audition" to refer to Nicolas's sensory experiences as an interconnected whole rather than a single isolated modality like hearing through the ear.

2. For example, early televised anime series like *Princess Knight* (*Ribon no Kishi*, 1967–68) explored "mature" themes such as gender and sexuality, which American-based television broadcasting company NBC viewed as problematic for American audiences because of the main character's "sex switch" (Ladd and Deneroff 2009, 67–68). Subsequently, this conservative attitude continued to the 1990s where Sailor Uranus and Neptune's lesbian relationship in *Sailor Moon* (1991–97) was changed in the English dubbing so that instead of lovers, they became very intimate "kissing cousins." However, in recent years, Western cartoons such as *Steven Universe* (2013–19) and *She-ra and the Princess of Power* (2018–20) suggest a shift toward topics that would have been labelled as too "mature" for children in past decades.

3. "ON AIR | TV アニメ『GANGSTA.』公式サイト." kohsuke / shinchosha・gangsta.committee, 2015, gangsta-project.com/onair.php.

4. In an interview with Garland-Thomson about signing, a deaf signer admitted that "she stares a great deal in general, certainly too much she thinks, at least by hearing standards" (2009, 121). The reason, she explains, is that she stares "'to "hear"' and understand better" (2009, 121). Benjamin Bahan additionally notes that "when engaging in discourse, the listener usually fixes and maintains his gaze on the signer's face, particularly the eyes, thus creating a conversational partnership in regulating different discourse functions" (2008, 86). However, in this scene, the conversational partnership fails because of Barry and the hearing audience's inability to lip-read.

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