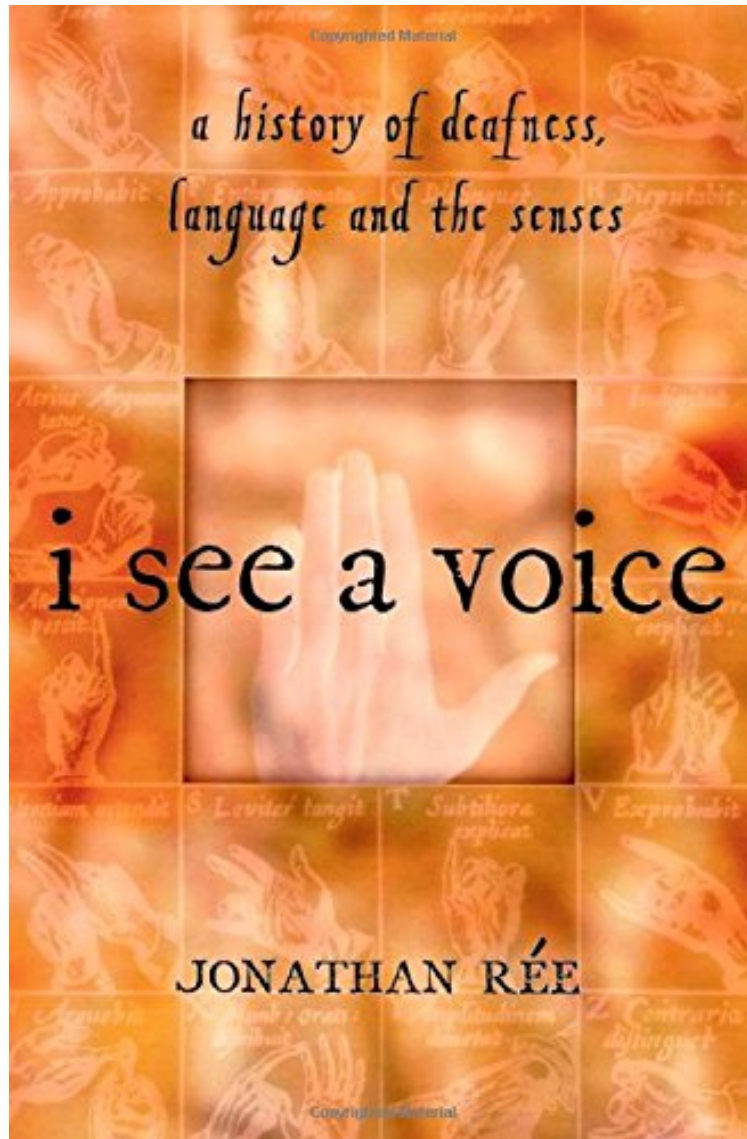


I See a Voice: Deafness, Language and the Senses--A Philosophical History

Jonathan Re

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Jonathan Re : I See a Voice: Deafness, Language and the Senses--A Philosophical History before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised I See a Voice: Deafness, Language and the Senses--A Philosophical History:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Very good book By Zorro If you want to reflect how different senses and explore our history of phono-centrism and sign language. A must read.

A groundbreaking study of deafness, by a philosopher who combines the scientific erudition of Oliver Sacks with the historical flair of Simon Schama. There is nothing more personal than the human voice, traditionally considered the expression of the innermost self. But what of those who have no voice of their own and cannot hear the voices of others? In this tour de force of historical narrative, Jonathan Re tells the astonishing story of the deaf, from the sixteenth century to the present. Re explores the great debates about deafness between those who believed the deaf should be made to speak and those who advocated non-oral communication. He traces the botched attempts to make language visible, through such exotic methods as picture writing, manual spellings, and vocal photography. And he charts the tortuous progress and final recognition of sign systems as natural languages in their own right. *I See a Voice* escorts us on a vast and eventful intellectual journey, taking in voice machines and musical scales, shorthand and phonetics, Egyptian hieroglyphs, talking parrots, and silent films. A fascinating tale of goodwill subverted by bad science, *I See a Voice* is as learned and informative as it is delightful to read.

From Publishers Weekly It has long been understood that the communicative gestures used by non-hearing people constitute more than a language. There is, in fact, a deaf culture, rich in evocation, style, meaning. Re (professor of philosophy at the University of Middlesex and editor of *Radical Philosophy*) brings us a stunning account of deafness from the 16th century to the present. His compelling chapters draw upon metaphysics, science, history and philosophy as they touch upon such areas as grammar, sound and the uncanny resonances of inarticulate human sounds; time, syntax and the language of nature; signs and primitive culture; and space, time and the aesthetic theory of art, among much else. Graphics from a variety of eras and cultures enrich this exceptionally comprehensive volume. Re (who is not deaf) uses everyday experiences to buttress what might be abstract points. He is equally adept at exploring the science of deaf culture: "The mere fact that signers can make different linguistic signs simultaneously with each hand, and possibly with other parts of the body as well, means that any Sign Language script will have to be written in more than one string of characters—more like polyphony than a single vocal line." Mixing the erudite with the experiential, Re gives the reader a new understanding of deafness as possibility. Though densely written, this is a book that rewards patient attention: it is both useful in the classroom and a passionate experience for the intellectual, curious reader. Illus. (Nov.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *Scientific American* Re, who teaches philosophy at Middlesex University in England, presents a book that is both philosophy and science. In the two mainly philosophical parts, he considers how people have viewed the five human senses over the centuries. In the mainly scientific part, he focuses on one of the senses, hearing, and its close connection with speech, by way of examining the experience of people who lack the sense—who are deaf. "Ever since the sixteenth century," he notes, "they have been attended by troops of priests, doctors, teachers and philanthropists dedicated to releasing them from their silent world (or perhaps expelling them from it against their will), by devising ways of making them understand language, despite their inability to hear it." Re bolsters his history of those efforts with a number of unusual pictures, among them a French "voice machine" of 1908 that synthesized vowel sounds by pumping air past rotating perforated disks and then through rubber replicas of human mouths. From *Kirkus* s With an exhaustingly researched exploration of the history of deafness as its core, this muddled volume seems to deplore the importance Western philosophy has given to the five senses over the centuries and tries to point another way. Author Re (philosophy/Univ. of Middlesex; literary editor, *Radical Philosophy*) examines the historical squabbles, from Socrates to Derrida, over which of the senses is more virtuous and valuable. Re characterizes these arguments as "rather inane," arguing ultimately that it is not through the individual senses that our worlds are constructed, but through the whole of a person's experience. Looking at the obverse of one sense (in this case, deafness), Re postulates, will teach us about how the absence of hearing, for instance, might affect the experience and development of a human being. From the days of the Greeks and Romans and before, deaf persons were often considered mentally defective. That conceit lasted until the middle of the 16th century, when a Spanish monk taught two young deaf aristocrats to read, write, and speak as well as lip-read. Advances were also being made in France and England, where the still-active argument between sign language and lip-reading and speech took root. Re crosses the Atlantic, reporting advances in teaching and tools to help the deaf communicate, as well as studies in linguistics indicating that sign language is as rich and complex as any other language. In a concluding section, Re ruminates on how the five senses continue to be seen as channels to experience, and how philosophers might strive to shed "metaphysical notions" and subscribe to phenomenology describing the world as it is, and from there ascribing meaning to it. Some interesting historical background for students and teachers concerned with the deaf in society; the rest is best left to Prof. Re's philosophy class, where they can question him directly about what he is trying to say. (73 black and white illus.) -- Copyright 1999, *Kirkus Associates, LP*. All rights reserved.