Abstract (Summary)

This essay explores the dynamics of national identification represented in two literary recreations of Saartjie Baartman (the "Hottentot Venus"). Long a symbol of visual demarcations between Africans and Europeans, Baartman here represents the possibility of national identifications imagined through sonorous and acoustic forms of resemblance and difference. [PUBLICATION ABSTRACT]

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[Headnote]
This essay explores the dynamics of national identification represented in two literary recreations of Saartjie Baartman (the "Hottentot Venus"). Long a symbol of visual demarcations between Africans and Europeans, Baartman here represents the possibility of national identifications imagined through sonorous and acoustic forms of resemblance and difference.

There are two beginnings that sound this essay's themes. The first is Stephen Jay Gould's essay "The Hottentot Venus," an influential source for renewed interest in Saartjie ("Sarah" or "Sara") Baartman, which begins not with his discovery of Baartman's preserved genitalia at the Musée de l'Homme but with an anecdote on the importance of seeing differently. He recalls advising a classmate that while adults always looked up, "little folk" might "find all manner of valuable things on the ground if only we kept our gazes down" (291). Having learned, in adulthood, to look up as well as down, Gould discovers Baartman's genitalia on a shelf just above the brain of Paul Broca. (He found no women's brains or any male genitalia.) As the essay proceeds, an emphasis on vision becomes increasingly problematic, since Gould's sympathies never transcend a non-reciprocal gaze that reaffirms Baartman's purported racial and sexual otherness. Although he notes that Khoi-San "languages [. . .] were once dismissed as a guttural farrago of beastly sounds" but have since been "widely admired for their complexity and subtle expression" (300), Gould's prioritization of vision replicates the original dismissal of Baartman's voice by Georges Cuvier, whose autopsy report of her "mentions, in an off-hand sort of way, that Saartjie [. . .] spoke Dutch rather well" and had some familiarity with English and French (Gould 296, emph. mine). Framed through this visual logic, Gould's reflections continue an Enlightenment tradition in which visual observation is privileged over aural observation as bearer of scientific evidence, and thus they sustain Baartman's status as visual icon of racial and sexual difference.
A second beginning of significance here is that of Barbara Chase-Riboud's novel Hottentot Venus, which opens with "The Heroine's Note," a paragraph from Baartman's perspective explaining colonialism in South Africa and the origins of the appellation "Hottentot." After colonizing South Africa, the Dutch renamed the members of the Khoekhoe nation "Hottentots," an insult, equivalent to "nigger," "which means 'stutterer' in Dutch, because of the way [the Khoekhoe] language sounded to them" (xi, emph. mine). The Hottentot epithet refers not to the visual forms of difference through which race is often categorized but to less tangible forms of sonorous difference. This process of appellation attenuates the forms of identification available to Baartman and the narratives that she can construct, for, as she reveals, "to tell this, my true story, I was stuck with a name we didn't choose but must use so that those who gave us these names may listen" (xi, emph. mine). For Chase-Riboud, the visual scrutiny of Baartman's body represents a secondary form of scrutiny that substantiates her difference with more viable forms of "evidence," but that also necessarily succeeds the more ephemeral form of sonorous difference that the sounds of her voice construct.

During displays on English and French stages, Baartman was used to demonstrate visually ideological preoccupations with physical and cultural differences between Europeans and Africans, and Gould's essay does little to overturn that visual prejudice. However, Suzan-Lori Parks's play Venus and Chase-Riboud's Hottentot Venus use images of sound and speech to counter the visual demarcations between self and Other that her staged display was meant to reify. These texts forego the use of her sexual features as icons of racial and national difference and, instead, deploy the voice to renegotiate the terms of national identification. Baartman's speech moves her observers from the comfortable position of spectators to the uncomfortable one of audience compelled to acknowledge in her voice the lack of difference between spectacle and audience, between repudiated Other and national community. In these narratives, Baartman's speech problematizes national identifications during a series of deeply symbolic interactions with audiences at London's Piccadilly Circus, with a British court, and with Cuvier's troupe of naturalists at Paris's Jardin du Roy. Despite the varying effects of Baartman's speech in each space, Parks's and Chase-Riboud's narratives reveal throughout that sounds play a crucial role in the construction and the destabilization of exclusive national identities. Their representations of Baartman position the speaking subject-and the sounds of the subject speaking-as simultaneously essential to national identification and subversive of its foundational principles of imaginary exclusion. In their narratives, sounds and voices enable recognition of non-visual differences that both produce and disrupt communal affect.

Analyses of the "Hottentot Venus" traditionally rely upon a limited historical record constituted by European impressions of Baartman's body's symbolic meanings. Born in 1789 in the Gamtoos Valley, Baartman was a resident of the Cape of South Africa and a member of the Khoekhoe tribe. While employed-or enslaved-by Peter Cesars, a Boer farmer, she became the object of his brother Hendrik's lascivious and entrepreneurial interests. In 1810, Baartman travelled to London for display in the Piccadilly Circus, where her caged performance titillated and enraged audiences, who fixated on the display of her body and on that display's apparent violation of the recent abolition of the slave trade. Because of her supposed affront to anti-slavery law, Baartman's promoters were unsuccessfully tried for keeping her in involuntary servitude, after which the show toured England and relocated to Paris in 1814. There, Baartman drew the attention of Georges Cuvier and the French scientific establishment. Baartman died in 1815, but her public display continued in the form of autopsy reports presented by Henri de Blainville and Cuvier in 1816 and 1817, respectively. Her genitalia and skeleton remained on display at the Musée de l'Homme until the 1980s. In 2002, the French National Assembly agreed to return Baartman to South Africa, where she was buried in the Gamtoos Valley.
nearly two centuries after her death (Crais and Scully; Holmes).

That Chase-Riboud and Parks have chosen to recreate this narrative comes as little surprise to those familiar with their work. The intersections of race, gender, and national identity have long interested each, though such interest comes in vastly different forms. Chase-Riboud's Hottentot Venus, the latest in a series of historical novels emphasizing the functions of race and gender in the shaping of national identities, differs only slightly from the record of Baartman's experiences. Indeed, Chase-Riboud describes her narratives as "nonfiction novels," rivalling scholarly biographies and historiographies in their presentation of historically verifiable events. She reinforces the purported veracity of her narratives not only through adherence to the historical record and liberal quoting from historical documents but also, and more significantly, through adoption of linear narratives whose simplicity mimics conventional historiography. Thus, while Hottentot Venus presents history as a racially and sexually specific construction, it can only reclaim Baartman from European historiography by adopting the methods and teleological narrative forms complicit in the raced and gendered textualization of her experiences.

Although Parks would certainly agree with Chase-Riboud's diagnosis of Baartman's history as a raced and gendered construction, her response to this diagnosis differs from Chase-Riboud's, pardon the pun, dramatically. Parks's Venus plays with the past, inventing historical events and recreating characters in ways that Chase-Riboud's more realist depiction of Baartman's experiences does not. Parks's depiction of Baartman as an agent in her own oppression, rather than as a noble victim of European prejudice, has garnered trenchant criticisms (see Jean Young). While not the most experimental of her plays, Venus has an interdependent form and content that reveal Parks's penchant for formal innovation and historical play. Among the most significant of Parks's dramaturgical innovations is the use of "Repetition and Revision," or "Rep & Rev," a "concept integral to the Jazz aesthetic" and to black "literary and oral traditions" in which textual elements are repeated several times, each time with variation (Parks, "Elements" 8-9). This technique allows Parks "to create a dramatic text that departs from traditional linear style to look and sound more like a musical score" (9). It is particularly significant in historical plays like Venus, because it represents "a literal incorporation of the past" in the present and on the page or stage (10). The play persistently incorporates not only its own "history," in the form of repeated scenes and dialogue, but also the history of Baartman's representations, through inclusion of the playwithin-a-play, "For the Love of Venus." In this way, it dispenses with the conventions of linear historiography and the implications of historical reclamation that Chase-Riboud's narrative upholds. Parks implies through her circularity that, in Baartman's case at least, the recycling of racial and sexual stereotypes hinders reclamation from a traumatic past.

Despite significant differences in their recreations of Baartman's experiences, however, Chase-Riboud and Parks share concerns with the role (and the absence) of sounds in conceptions of history. For these two writers, Baartman's enforced silence and occasional speech result both from and in an urgent disidentification by the European national communities with which she comes in contact. In Parks's and Chase-Riboud's narratives, these communities' symbolic existences are dependent upon the polarizing presence of racial and sexual otherness that Baartman symbolizes. Chase-Riboud's Sarah reflects, concerning the responses of her audiences, "I was the glue of common contempt and rejection that held them all together" (8). As the narrative progresses, Sarah comes to occupy an antinational symbolic position that Lee Edelman describes (in another context) as "the repudiated negativity without which community is never imagined, let alone brought into being" (471). Following Edelman's and Chase-Riboud's suggestions, my focus rests on the ways that Baartman's
voice problematizes-if not nullifies-the "rejection" that images of her body enable and the process by which national identity is "imagined" vis-à-vis the sounds of speech.

Parks's Venus articulates the destabilizing role of speech in a conversation between The Venus Hottentot (Parks's Baartman figure) and The Mother-Showman (her version of Baartman's British promoter, Alexander Dunlop) regarding the profitability of The Venus's display and the prospects for her vocal performance. The scene in which the conversation occurs, subtitled "Counting the Take/The Deal that Was," represents a significant "Rep & Rev" of an earlier scene, "Counting Down/Counting the Take." As shown in the first of these scenes, early in The Venus's British experiences her vocal role is limited to counting along with The Mother-Showman. The simplicity of The Venus's speech contrasts with The Mother-Showman's artful hawking of The Chorus of the 8 Human Wonders, the troupe that The Venus joins. In her advertisements for The Chorus, The Mother-Showman emphasizes heavily the role of visual spectatorship:

Step inside come on come see
the ugliest creatures in creativity
Come on in in [sic] take a look
see a living misfit with yr own eyes.
Take a look at one for just a penny and a half
you can gawk as long as you like.
Waiting for your gaze here inside
they're all freaks and all alive. (31)

In the repeated scene, though, The Venus questions not only her "contract" but also her enforced, staged silence:

THE VENUS:
We should spruce up our act.
I could speak for them.
Say a little poem or something.
You could pretend to teach me and I would learn
before their very eyes.

THE MOTHER-SHOWMAN:
Yr a Negro native with a most remarkable spanker.
Thats what they pay for.
Their eyes are hot for yr tot-tot.

Theres the poetry. (51)

While Parks's The Venus only hypothesizes an economic potential in the spectacle of the voice, The Mother-Showman acknowledges the political potential of presenting The Venus as a speaking subject. As a representative of the national community that The Venus would penetrate via this tableau, The Mother-Showman recognizes the threat that such an act might signify for audiences. Implicit within her rejection is anxiety about the forced identification with The Venus that might result from The Venus's seemingly spontaneous vocalization in recognizable language. Addressing this enforced silence on the London stage, Baartman biographers Clifton Crais and Jennifer Scully distinguish between Baartman's experiences and those of other South African women paraded in Europe to advance efforts at Christian conversion: "For Sara to have spoken of her history would have been to cast her more in the realm of the 'converted Hottentot' who could be admitted into English society, and thus perhaps rendered less unusual" (73). Symbolic speech, in other words, would traverse the boundaries of the established visual spectacle, representing a non-visual realm of resemblance that could shrink the distance between spectators and the object of their gaze. The audience that The Mother-Showman desires would pay only for a nonreciprocal, visual interaction with their object, and this performance must remain visual at the exclusion of speech.

The Mother-Showman's anxiety about transgressing the comfortable boundaries of spectatorship makes good sense when we account for vision's role as "the privileged sense of modernity" (Wiegman 3). Vision has played a key role in the formation and definition of a quintessentially "modern" institution and social reality, the nation. Parks reveals the national(ist) implications of The Venus's and The Chorus's performances by having The Chorus explain that they "wander thuh world," alienated because their "funny looks read as High Treason" (33). Their visual appearance not only reveals their difference but also confirms that such difference threatens the fantasized internal consistency of the (national) communities they encounter. In their suggestion that their "looks" represent a crime against the state, The Chorus also confirms a common theoretical opinion that the nation is imagined largely through systems of visual racial classification, through what Homi Bhabha refers to as a "naturalistic" "scopic regime" ("Anxious" 205). In making this argument throughout his writing, Bhabha builds on Frantz Fanon's famous scene of colonial identification-his response to the exclamation "Look! A Negro!" (89)-and on early Lacanian notions of imaginary identification. Anticipating Edelman's and Chase-Riboud's suggestions regarding identity and negativity, Bhabha contends: "to exist is to be called into being in relation to an otherness, its look or locus. [. . .] This process is the visual exchange of looks between native and settler that structures their psychic relation" (Location 63). But, just as the contexts of Baartman's physical performance in two European imperial centres reverses Bhabha's and Fanon's centre-periphery models of identification "between native and settler" in the colonial space, her vocal performance unsettles the grounding of "their psychic relation" in "the visual exchange of looks" between colonizers and colonized. Indeed, The Mother-Showman's immediate rejection of The Venus's suggestion about incorporating speech and song discloses an anxiety about the ebbing power of the look in colonial identifications and an implicit acknowledgement that sight and sound—looks and speech—work together to structure psychic relations and communal identities.

The noise The Mother-Showman effectively suppresses in The Venus's performance rings out in Chase-Riboud's depiction of Sarah's arrival in London. For the British observers Sarah encounters, the discrepancy between her visual appearance and spoken performance throws into disarray the imaginary and symbolic systems used to identify themselves and Others. In a repetition of the original
encounter between Dutch imperialists and the Khoekhoe people that resulted in the appellation "Hottentot," the initial sensation Sarah causes results from her sonorous, rather than visual, appearance: "In the lobby of the hotel on Duke Street off St. James's Square, ladies' and gentlemen's mouths dropped open as I excitedly exclaimed in Dutch and my few words of English over the beauty of London and Londoners themselves" (89). In an ironic reversal, these observers are rendered mute not by their inability to decipher the sounds of the Other but by their immediate recognition of symbolic speech from someone they might otherwise deem racially and nationally Other. Sarah has a similar effect when she meets William Bullock, the proprietor of Egyptian Hall, where Dunlop, her promoter, seeks to establish an exhibition:

- She speaks only her own language, my master insisted. Saartjie, this is Mr. Bullock.

- Happy to meet you. I said finally. Master Bullock was as startled as if he had heard one of his stuffed specimens speak.

- I thought you said she spoke only her own language. She speaks the King's English.

- Only a few words, said Master Dunlop, cursing his own stupidity under his breath. (91)

Importantly, Sarah's speech demonstrates not only her humanity-as opposed to the animality of Bullock's "stuffed specimens"-but also the possibility of her inclusion in a community imagined both politically and linguistically. Chase-Riboud's Sarah thus actualizes the disruptive power of speech that remains only a potential power for The Venus. The surprise and disbelief that her vocalization in European languages elicits substantiate the fears that Parks's Mother-Showman expresses but never faces.

Taken together, The Mother-Showman's fears and Sarah's effects on Londoners expose both the privileging of vision in Western modernity and the under-acknowledged reciprocity of sight and sound in the formation of national identities. Such a privileging of vision is elemental to the psychoanalytic tradition upon which Bhabha's and others' theories of collective identities rely. For Lacan and his followers, identifications with visual images (beginning with the infant's ego formation before the mirror) and with linguistic signs-the imaginary and symbolic registers of identification-participate equally in precluding consideration of the voice and sound. In his early thinking about the imaginary and symbolic, Lacan contends that the mirror stage, in which the subject's primary identifications are formed, has an undeniably "optical presentation" (74), and concludes from this that the "eye is here, as so often, symbolic of the subject" (80). This contention re-emerges in Lacan's graphs of desire, where the voice is merely carrier of the signifier, a non-signifying and insignificant remainder of the signifying process. When Lacan does turn to language and the symbolic order, he does so from an intensely "occularcentric" position and "always through an implicit and powerful visualization of the sign" (Moten 183). As Mladen Dolar further points out, "Lacan's early theory has given an unquestionable privilege to the gaze as the paradigmatic instance of the Imaginary, elevating it into a model." For Dolar, though, this "model" dispenses too easily with sound's role in the elementary processes of identification, leaving him to ask: "If the voice is the first manifestation of life, is not hearing oneself, and recognizing one's own voice, thus an experience that precedes self-recognition in a mirror?" (39). Dolar's suggestion of an elementary aural identification bears striking resemblance to the attachment of the "Hottentot" sign to black South African bodies. In that scene of colonial identification, which Chase-Riboud alludes to and later inverts, the subject forms
imaginary identifications not through a visual image alone, but through the necessary interconnection of visual image and sound.

By compellingly retooling Lacanian concepts and applying them to understandings of national identities, Tracey Sedinger offers a theory of the nation as a "substantive community" in which the common substance may be either visible or audible. Imaginary identifications, for Sedinger, "produce or underwrite a particular type of collective or class on the basis of a resemblance between their members, most often based on a shared property, which can often be represented in visual form" (48). Though Sedinger holds the Lacanian line of prioritizing vision and the visualization of the sign, her repetition of "often" suggests that the visual entails other forms of resemblance, and that imaginary identifications might rest on relations between nonvisual "substances," such as sounds and speech. Speech and aurality, that is, supplement vision in the construction of national imaginary identifications by marking the limits of communities, which are partially imagined through sonic markers of resemblance and difference.

This acknowledgment of the mutuality of sound and vision also occurs regularly in black diasporan cultural studies, where it serves to counter the Euro-American privileging of vision and its corollary, logocentrism. Critics like Alexander Weheliye endeavour to demonstrate how, within Western conceptions of subjectivity that privilege the visual, "the phono and the optic" actually "cannot materialize without each other" (41). Such a project is undertaken to disestablish what Weheliye calls "the equation of script with reason and humanity" (45), an equation that rests on the prejudicial prioritization of the "signing voice," "alphabetic writing," and "graphic mastery," with all their "attendant qualities of reason, disembodiment, and full humanity" (36). Throughout much of European colonial history, black subjects were violently and legally barred from literacy, particularly in the aftermath of the democratic revolutions. Given the history of vision's and script's privileged positions, it is necessary to recall that Benedict Anderson's ubiquitous theory of the nation as an "imagined community" rests on a similar notion of script as a source of communal identification. For Anderson, the principal vehicles by which national communities imagine themselves are "print-languages," "which created unified fields of exchange and communication" (44) and facilitated collective identifications among fellow readers across vast spatial and temporal divisions. From my perspective, though, the limitations of Anderson's approach are overwhelming. Because spoken language serves as much to differentiate as to unify, Anderson's insistence upon the role of print-language compels questions about the role of non-scripted or un-scripted linguistic articulation in the formation of national identities. What of the potential for "activating difference" (Weheliye 32) that emerges in the sonorous, spoken reproduction of print-languages? Is it possible to displace the assimilative demands of language through which speech, according to Fanon, means "above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization" (17)? Can we attend more carefully to the immanent communal self-difference that sonority reveals when the marginalized "assume" the mantle of civilization from which they have been excluded?

Recreations of Baartman's experiences before British courts provide initial answers to such questions. The London performances that landed Baartman's promoters in court did include acts in which Baartman sang in African and European languages, but her promoters "preferred her to sing traditional folk songs, in order to emphasize her strangeness and African authenticity" (Holmes 41). The promoters' preference reflects their evident desire for the increased profit congruent with an ideologically safe performance. But, while the Piccadilly audiences desired and received a primarily visual performance at the exclusion of Baartman's (symbolic) voice, the British court demands a vocal performance. As Holmes reveals, "Saartjie had no voice in the press debate over her freedom. By
going to law, the African Institution aimed to give her an opportunity to have her say" (57). Trials demand the "use of the 'living voice'" (Dolar 108) in public proceedings, to demonstrate what Dolar calls the completion or accomplishment of "the letter" and to "enable [the law's] enactment" (113). Indeed, "for the law to become effective, or be enacted, one has to have recourse to the voice, to orality" (109). In other words, it is only through the speaking subjects' vocal and vital repetition of the law's mandate to speak that the mandate becomes real.

In Chase-Riboud's narrative, the trial scenes illustrate this interpellative power of speech that facilitates identifications between Baartman and members of her British audience. During the promoters' trial, Bullock recalls his aforementioned meeting with Sarah and testifies to the power of symbolic speech to overcome dehumanizing theories of racial otherness. He tells the court,

My museum of natural history is designed not only to display the natural world as it is, but also to influence the minds and behavior of the people who visit my museum to contemplate their own higher, rationalized human behavior and establish the distance between human and animal nature. But when I met Sarah Baartman, I was amazed that she spoke our language-English. But if she possessed a language, the King's English, rudimentary as it was, I believed that meant she possessed the humanity of the King as well! No! I could not exhibit another human being no matter how spectacular! (142)

For Bullock, the museum's tableau facilitates division and disidentification between the audience and the "natural" objects of their gaze. The museum, by this logic, establishes an immutable hierarchy in which the "spectacular" image of otherness distinguishes between the "human" (rational, English) observers and the "natural, animal" (foreign, atavistic) objects. Sarah's voice ruptures the museum's logic of visibility-ascaptivity and compels Bullock to acknowledge the immanent self-difference of the community he had previously imagined through "our language," the King's English. By speaking in English, Sarah possesses more than just "the humanity of the King"; indeed, from Bullock's perspective she appropriates what Slavoj Zizek calls the "Nation-Thing," the national "way of life" that others "cannot grasp, but which is nonetheless constantly menaced by them" (52).

Recognition of this "menace" compels the court to quell the political disturbance that Sarah's performances create by binding those performances to narratives of economic freedom and entrepreneurial enterprise. To perform this binding, the court demands that Sarah testify to her experiences in Piccadilly. Sarah, however, does not willingly succumb to the court's mandates. Throughout the courtroom scenes, she overtly resists the court, answering questions that relay simple information but remaining obstinately silent on questions that require interpretation. This refusal intimates that, for all its pretences to power and privilege, the court still requires the Other's recognition in order to sustain its power. Sarah's complex mixture of speech and silence disallows such simple recognition, beginning with her responses to questions posed by abolitionists Peter Van Wageninge and Robert Wedderburn, who brought the case to court. They ask her a series of questions, including "Are you here under your own free will?" "Are you happy here?" and "Would you like to go home? Would you like us to send you home?" To each of these questions, "the Venus remained mute" (120). This muteness indicates neither passive acceptance of the unspeakable nature of her experiences nor misunderstanding of what she is asked or of what is at stake in her questioning. Rather, her refusal is an active response to the very act of questioning, to the interpellative demands that questions place on the subject whose spoken response is solicited.

Sarah realizes that any spoken response in this context, where vocalization is mandatory, will result
only in adherence to another's demands. She reveals as much near the end of her questioning by Wedderburn, before the British judge sanctions the performances:

-You haven't understood a word I've said, have you?

Yes, I wanted to say, I understand you. I understand that your ideas about me are more important than me myself. You see me as yours, as much yours as Master Dunlop sees me as his. You see me as a means to your goal of revolution, and rebellion, against the English. You are so angry you don't really see me at all—only as an object in the eye of the storm. (134)

Throughout this scene, Sarah's strategic speech and silence present a savvy awareness of the assimilative demands that both speech and silence place on her during the trial. A refusal to speak or to reflect upon her status indicates acquiescence to the demands of Dunlop and Cesars that she not jeopardize their investment in her, but it also implies acquiescence to the demands that ex-slaves or non-slaves in Britain adhere to the free-market economic principles that Wedderburn represents. Vocally interpreting her experiences as a form of slavery, however, means submitting to the demands of abolitionists, and also to those of her promoters and others who see African women only as profitable commodities for sale and display. Sarah's awareness of these double-binds simultaneously calls into question the motives of the abolitionists and those of the promoters. And neither party, in Chase-Riboud's imagination, can rightfully claim benevolent treatment of Sarah, despite the gulf that divides their motivations for her public display, for her silence or speech.

Venus's courtroom scenes similarly depict the tensions between speech and silence, but Parks's representation of the trial provides The Venus with far more agency than Chase-Riboud offers Sarah. Whereas Chase-Riboud carefully straddles the contentious issues of reclamation and revision, Parks wilfully reconstructs Baartman as nearly autonomous, in this scene and throughout the play. When The Venus is called to testify, her speech reflects back to the court the interpellative potential of the courtroom tableau:

THE CHORUS OF THE COURT:

We call The Venus Hottentot.

THE VENUS:

I'm called The Venus Hottentot.

THE CHORUS OF THE COURT:

She speaks!! (74)

Here, The Venus confounds the "call" of the law by exposing its conflicting meanings. While The Chorus demands testimony before the assembled witnesses for the proper functioning of the law, The Venus responds by acknowledging, instead, their call for her to identify with the signifier they attach to her. She acknowledges the interpellative call implicit in the court's restaging of her identity—the call to perform her symbolic identification with the signifier The Venus Hottentot. She follows this enigmatic response with another in the same scene: she replicates their desire for her to remain a speechless object beneath their gaze by answering them, simply, "The Venus Hottentot is unavailable for comment" (74). The Chorus's original shocked response, "She speaks!!" reflects, then, both their
realization of the implicit interpellation of the "call" of the witness before the court-their call for submission to a prescriptive symbolic mandate-and their recognition that, by speaking, The Venus violates the prescribed identity to which they have "called" her. The Chorus's shocked response to The Venus's speech thus reveals the impossibility of maintaining her otherness while requiring her to speak in court. For Parks, unlike Chase-Riboud, the demands for speech and silence still offer The Venus the prospect of active resistance to the court's interpellative impositions.

Ultimately, the court must speak for Baartman by permitting her to continue to stage her spectacle. By subsuming her performance under the laws of the nation and sanctioning her performance, the court reasserts its control over performance and audience. In the conclusion of Parks's trial scene, The Chorus remarks,

In closing, whatever happens to her

we should note that

it is very much to the credit of our great country

that even a female Hottentot can find a court to review her status. (78)

After this, they erupt into laughter. Similarly, Chase-Riboud's Solicitor General concludes, "Regardless of the outcome of this procedure, anyone hearing of this action must certainly feel that it is very much to the credit of this country that even a Hottentot can find friends to protect her interests" (152-53). The court, as vehicle for the nation, here locates its power in the creation of a subject out of the non-citizen spectacle, and in the recreation of the nation itself as a community of disembodied spectator-citizens. Baartman's otherness is entirely contained-the "menace" neutralized, the "Nation-Thing" wrested back-and her confirmed alien status reasserts the boundaries of national identification. By posit(ion)ing themselves as bodies supposed to speak for Baartman, The Chorus and Solicitor General affirm their privilege and preserve their self-image, not as members of a nation that has profited greatly from the trade in slaves and the colonization of Africa, but instead as members of a nation that provides asylum and economic opportunities for African women.

Baartman eventually prevailed in the battle over the place of her voice in her performances. By the time she reached Paris, Baartman "joked with her audience in Dutch and English" (Holmes 77), demonstrating a mastery of idiomatic speech that troubled the linguistic foundations of racial nationalism. In her recreation of Baartman's experiences, Chase-Riboud makes this plain by incorporating a French advertisement that proclaims, "She speaks Dutch, English, and her maternal language, in which she sings original songs" (10), and by illustrating the French audience's shocked responses to hearing Sarah's symbolic speech. Yet Chase-Riboud and Parks downplay this aspect of Baartman's experiences in France by prioritizing, instead, experiences with Cuvier and the French scientific establishment and the role of acousmatic voices in the shaping of those experiences. In Chase-Riboud's novel, upon Sarah's arrival at the Jardin du Roy, her French promoter, Master Reaux, tells her, "You are not here to talk. You are here to be seen" (220). This compulsory silence and enforced visibility contrasts with, and ultimately enables, the fantasy of European Enlightenment acousmatic discourse. Both narratives explore the fantasy of the acousmatic voice-what Dolar calls the "voice whose source one cannot see, a voice whose origin cannot be identified" (60)-in the form of Cuvier's anatomical and anthropological discourse. The acousmatic voice aspires to the status of law and objective truth, and "because it cannot be located [...] it gains omnipotence" (62). This
supposed omnipotence—speaking on behalf of an ostensibly universalizable reason and humanity—marks the racial and national differences between Baartman and the audiences of scientists and socialites she encounters in Paris.

The voice of Enlightenment rationality, through which Parks's Baron Docteur (her tragicomic gloss on Cuvier) speaks, aspires to—but fails to attain—this pure, omnipotent reason. Parks constructs The Baron Docteur's desire for the omnipotent acousmatic voice in a scene titled "Intermission," a recitation of Cuvier's 1817 autopsy report during which The Baron Docteur remarks,

As an aside I should say

that as to the value of the information that I present
to you today there can be no doubt.

Their significance

will be felt far beyond our select community. (91)

The "value" of this report, its political and scientific usefulness, here assumes the transcendental position of omniscient law, rather than national discourse. Following this, The Baron Docteur attempts to position his own voice as manifestly acousmatic. He continues,

I do invite you, Distinguished Gentlemen,

Colleagues and yr Distinguished Guests,

if you need relief

please take yourselves uh breather in thuh lobby.

My voice will surely carry beyond these walls and if not

my finds are published. Forthcoming in The Royal College

Journal of Anatomy. (92)

The acousmatic voice can exist, in this case, only as accompaniment to or transmission of a written text. Only the printed account of the autopsy report, not its oral repetition, can exist in the abstract.

This potential evasion is revealed as fantasy, since acousmatic voices cannot evade the mutual materialization of sound and sight. Indeed, acousmatic voices necessitate visible images by requiring listeners to "imagine what it was that made the sound," to "listen indexically"—that is, to "imagine what it was that made the sound" (MacWilliam 4). Acousmatization, then, is improbable at best, because a visual image of the acousmatic voice's source voice will inevitably be imagined by its listeners. As the scene continues with its litany of The Venus's bodily characteristics, The Baron Docteur repeatedly tries and fails to escape the indexical listening that will result from the departure of the audience. The necessary "Rep & Rev" of his earlier claim approaches desperation:

Go take a break.
Ive got strong lungs:

So please, if you need air, excuse yrself.

Youll hear me in the hallway. (95)

This request proposes not only that the voice can exist outside of the visual exchange but also that it requires the lack of visual reciprocity for its particular power. To evade the situatedness of his own discourse, The Baron Docteur must plead with his audience to look away, to aid him in constructing the (partial, incomplete) acousmatization of his voice. To appear as subject only of the discourse of science, The Baron Docteur must not visually appear; he must use the rhetoric of Enlightenment rationality to veil the specifically Eurocentric basis of his autopsy and its purported disclosure of national identities.

Parks carries her critique of the fantasies of acousmatic voices further, through two contrasting embodiments in an "amorous" bedroom scene. Here, while The Baron Docteur again aspires to the acousmatic by turning away from The Venus's and the audience's gaze, The Venus's vocalization intersects with a more commonplace form of identification. In this scene and throughout the final sections of Venus, her voice overtly represents the threat of oral incorporation that defines her as menace to national identities. In the scene, her incorporative threat inheres in the consumption of chocolate, the addictive substance Parks uses to allude to and reconfigure Baartman's purported alcoholism. Here, The Venus's insatiable hunger for chocolate symbolizes both the sexual fantasy and the nationalist dread of incorporation by the racialized Other:

THE BARON DOCTEUR:

Here. Yr favourite: Chockluts. Have some.

(The Baron Docteur turns his back to her.)

THE VENUS:

Petits Coeurs
Rhum Caramel
Pharaon
Bouchon Fraise
Escargot Lait
Enfant de Bruxelles
(Rest)
Do you think I look like
one of these little chocolate brussels infants?
Cappezzoli di Venere.

The nipples of Venus. Mmmmm. My Favorite. (105)

This dialogue figuratively restages the Freudian mise en scène of the infant's oral incorporation of, and identification with, the mother during breastfeeding. Even more significantly, however, The Venus's question voices her national, racial, and sexual identification with The Baron Docteur's image of her as African Other and consumable, sexual object. The Venus has come, in other words, to envision herself from the position of the Other's desire. By vocalizing the question, though, she violates the stable, silent projection of her otherness onto the chocolate. Her consumption of the "Cappezzoli di Venere" redoubles the threat that her spoken question poses. By orally incorporating the image of her own otherness, she identifies with the Other who would construct her as such, exposing both identities as established only through European fantasy. Through her speech and her consumption of the chocolate, then, she disrupts the national identifications founded upon the image of her simultaneously as incorporable and incorporative Other.

As the scene continues, The Venus tries to reverse the gazing relationship that has been established between herself, The Baron Docteur, and the play's audience. Her interrogation of him later in the same scene attempts to render visible the erotic elements of the European construction of the incorporative Other. Sensing his sexual excitement, she asks,

Whatre you doing?
Lemmie see.

THE BARON DOCTEUR:

Dont look! Dont look at me.

Look off

Somewhere.

Eat yr chockluts

eat em slow

thats it.

Touch yrself.

Good.

Good.

(He's masturbating. He has his back to her. He sneaks little looks at her over his shoulder. He cums.) (106)

Parks rehearses a number of the aspects of vocal performance already constructed in The Baron Docteur's speeches. Here again, he tries and fails to escape embodiment by turning his back and
removing himself from the audience's gaze. Concomitant with this fantasy of disembodied gazing and acousmatic appearance is The Venus's full embodiment. She must assert her tactile presence by both eating the chocolate and touching herself. In The Baron Docteur's fantasy, her mouth supplements her buttocks and her "Hottentot apron" (elongated labia) as the object of his desire. Importantly, she is instructed to "look off" and to touch herself, to sustain the European male fantasies of invisibility and disembodiment so central to the construction of the racially embodied and erotically charged Other.

The Venus's mouth-as orality and voice-fosters a threatening identification that troubles The Baron Docteur's unified image of himself and his national community. By simultaneously inhabiting and ingesting the image that European fantasy projects onto her, The Venus consumes that image from the position of her European Other and wrests from The Docteur the ability to maintain national identities via racial fantasies. In Chase-Riboud's fantasy, this fantasy-fear of incorporation by the Other partakes more thoroughly of fears of cannibalism, fears shared by Sarah and her European audiences. Upon first meeting her, Cuvier is observed "devouring Sarah" with "his pale avid eyes" (211). His cranial measurements purportedly reveal that Hottentots "were destined to eat instead of think" (236), but, from the perspective of Alice (Sarah's friend and caretaker), Cuvier and the rest of the French audiences "had seen not a human being, but a specimen for their delectation and nothing more" (271). Even after her death, Sarah looks down upon Cuvier "hunched over me, devouring every detail as if I were his most treasured possession" (277-78).

Chase-Riboud develops this connection between vision, orality, and incorporation throughout the narrative, beginning not with Cuvier but with Sarah's first experiences before London spectators. Alexander Dunlop openly propagates the myth of Hottentot cannibalism: "They eat anything-roots, berries, entrails, raw meat, whether beast or human" (61). He later refers to Sarah as an "insatiable" and "superstitious man-eating, dirt-eating heathen" (97). In her depiction of Sarah's first exhibition at Piccadilly, and in Wedderburn's response to the scene, Chase-Riboud demonstrates the multiple valences of oral incorporation and vocalization. Upon entering Piccadilly Circus, Wedderburn reverses the conventional racial logic of noise and of cannibalism. He notes the "babble of the hawker, the showmen, the trainers" (111), and he links this noise to Sarah's "audience," who "surged forward as if they were going to devour the woman alive" (112). Likewise, at the opening of her show, Sarah thinks, "When the curtain drew back for the first time and I walked onto the wooden stage and became the silent, unmoving, unblinking object of the audience's gaze, the silence was like a cannibal's mouth" (105). Just after this, though, the audience's noise, not their silence, solicits the same fears from Sarah: "From the first, I was astonished by the viciousness and the voracity of my audience. On the very first night, hundreds of people dressed to the nines pushed and elbowed the crowd, [...] shouting and waving, stomping and clapping, cheering and hurling epithets" (106). She links this noise and visual incorporation specifically to the violent destructiveness of British colonial practices: "These people gaping at me were the same-the same race that had murdered my mother and beheaded my father with the same mindless cruelty, the same unyielding desire to devour and destroy" (107).

By conflating these notions of incorporation and vocalization as identification, Chase-Riboud and Parks demonstrate the necessity of rethinking the constitution of the subject-racial or national-via the look or the privileging of script over sound. In their recreations of Baartman's European experiences, it is not only the eyes of the Londoner or Parisian but also the voice of the repudiated national Other that mediates their social relations and determines the boundaries of national identities. Through both its utter banality and its profound significance, Baartman's voice reveals the inevitability of a national community's immanent internal antagonisms, as well as the power of its fantasized internal
consistency. If these narratives reassess the historical significance of Baartman's experiences, they do so by demonstrating the possibility of transcending the deadening visual polarities of national imaginary identity and negativity through the vital necessity of listening, of heeding the Other's call, of responding to the ethical demands voiced by the Other subject.

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