

The Poetics of Sign Language Haiku

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the poetic features of sign language haiku. Sign language haiku can be defined as a very short piece of poetic signing, which is influenced by the traditional Japanese haiku form. Traditional Japanese haiku form is known for strict formal discipline, objective description of nature, and strong visual appeal. Sign language haiku retains some of the basic features of traditional haiku, but has turned itself into a new poetic form which inherits characteristics both from general artistic signing and the particular discipline of haiku.

The research draws together the performances of signed haiku from a variety of languages. The major source is the poems from the haiku festival I organised in 2006, which aimed at encouraging British Deaf people to create haiku in their own language (BSL, British Sign Language). The outcome is the emergence of a rich corpus, which allowed me to analyse signed haiku poems both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Because brevity is the fundamental feature of sign language haiku, all the poetic features are condensed and have become highly symbolic. There is a close relationship between form and meaning in sign language haiku, which requires a deep investigation into both formal and thematic aspects. Theme-wise, sign language haiku inherits topics linked to nature from the traditional haiku discipline, but also adds issues of Deafness and identity from the larger body of sign language poetry. In terms of formal features, sign language haiku makes the most of its visual-spatial nature, resulting in highly expressive, emotional, and embodied language. Features such as rhythm, symmetry, handshapes, blending of poetic spaces, and use of eyegaze are all indispensable parts of sign language haiku as in sign language poetry in general.

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Author’s Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was 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 has been submitted for any other academic award.

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

The thesis has not been presented to any other University for examination either in the United Kingdom or overseas.

SIGNED:..... DATE:.....

Michiko Kaneko

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Conventions

- In this dissertation, I follow the convention which distinguishes “Deaf” and “deaf”. “Deaf” (with a capital D) refers to deaf people who identify themselves as a cultural/linguistic minority and who use sign language for daily communication.
- Names of the Japanese poets are written in Japanese name order (surname first), and are referred to by the first name only from the second time onwards: e.g. Matsuo Bashō (family name, first name)→ Bashō
- Translations of non-English poems are done by myself, unless otherwise specified.
- The list of handshapes used in this dissertation is given in the appendix.

Abbreviations for sign languages

ASL	American Sign Language
BSL	British Sign Language
DGS	Deutsche Gebärdensprache, German Sign Language
FSL	Finnish Sign Language
JSL	Japanese Sign Language
LIS	Lingua Italiana dei Segni, Italian Sign Language
LSF	Langue des Signes Française, French Sign Language
NGT	Nederlandse Gebarentaal, Sign Language of the Netherlands
SSL	Swedish Sign Language

Glossing for signing

- 1) The meaning of a sign is provided using an English word, which is written in small capital letters: e.g.) the sign that means ‘tree’ is glossed as TREE.
- 2) When a sign cannot be glossed by a single English word, it is written with several words joined by a hyphen. This means it refers to a single sign: e.g.) THEY-LOOK-AT-EACH-OTHER.

- 3) When a word is fingerspelled, it is glossed by small letters with hyphens between each letter: e.g.) a-u-t-u-m-n
- 4) RH stands for the right hand and LH for the left hand. When one hand is on hold while the other moves, the symbol ‘-’ is used to express the hold.

Glossing for Japanese language

This dissertation does not provide detailed transcriptions of Japanese haiku poems. It is usually enough to give an English translation of the poem. However, on several occasions, the following glossing is used to give some grammatical information.

PAR particles

TOP	topic
NOM	nominative
POSS	possessive
LOC	locative
EXCL	exclamatory
CONJ	conjunctive
CUT	cutting morpheme

Conjugation of verbs

CONT	continuative
IMP	imperative
TERM	terminative
PROG	progressive

Table of Contents

Abstracti

Acknowledgements ii

Author’s Declaration.....iv

Conventions vii

Table of Contents viiii

List of Tables.....xix

List of Figuresxx

Chapter 1 Introduction..... 1

1.1 Statement of purpose..... 1

1.2 The definitional problem.....3

1.3 The structure of this thesis4

Chapter 2 Previous Research on Signed Poetry6

2.1 Introduction.....6

2.2 Overview6

2.3 Klima and Bellugi (1979).....7

2.4 The early formal approach9

2.5 The visual approach13

2.6 The cinematographic approach16

2.7 The performative approach18

2.8 The thematic approach20

2.9 The holistic approach21

2.10 Summary22

Chapter 3 Methodology23

3.1 Introduction.....23

 3.1.1 The nature of this research23

 3.1.2 Theoretical background.....23

 3.1.3 Catalytic validity24

 3.1.4 The role of the researcher.....24

3.2 Corpus creation25

 3.2.1 Overview of the data26

 3.2.2 Language.....27

 3.2.3 Setting28

 3.2.4 Audience.....28

 3.2.5 Original or translated.....29

 3.2.6 Three major sources29

3.3 BSL Haiku Festival30

 3.3.1 Overview of the data32

 3.3.2 People involved.....33

 3.3.3 Workshops.....33

 3.3.4 Poetry evening.....33

 3.3.5 Haiku walk34

 3.3.6 Competition.....35

 3.3.7 Selection of prizes36

 3.3.8 Results.....37

 3.3.9 Achievements37

 3.3.10 Webpage.....38

 3.3.11 Some issues raised39

3.4 Glossing and translation.....40

3.5 Analysis41

3.6 Summary42

Chapter 4 Haiku43

4.1 Introduction.....43

4.2 Historical background	43
4.2.1 Overview	43
4.2.2 Collaborative aspect of classic Japanese poetry.....	45
4.3 Basic features of haiku	45
4.3.1 Brevity.....	46
4.3.2 Implicitness	46
4.3.3 Simplicity	47
4.3.4 Objectivity.....	48
4.3.5 Concreteness	49
4.4 Other features of traditional haiku	50
4.4.1 Syllabic prosody.....	50
4.4.2 Juxtaposition	51
4.4.3 Fragmental nature.....	52
4.4.4 Perspective shift	55
4.4.5 Sensory experiences	57
4.4.6 Synesthesia.....	59
4.5 Summary	61
 Chapter 5 Sign Language Haiku.....	62
 5.1 Introduction.....	62
5.2 The myth of objectivity: Vollhaber's (2007) experiment.....	62
5.3 What is retained.....	66
5.3.1 Brevity.....	66
5.3.2 Theme.....	67
5.3.3 Visual representation.....	68
5.3.4 Contrast, juxtaposition, and internal divisions.....	69
5.3.5 Perspective shift	71
5.4 What is dropped	72
5.4.1 Syllabic prosody.....	72
5.4.2 Objectivity.....	72
5.4.3 Implicitness	74
5.4.4 A snapshot	75

5.5 What is added.....76

5.5.1 Structure76

5.5.2 Three Es77

5.5.3 Deaf perspective.....78

5.5.4 Productive lexicon.....78

5.5.5 Various poetic devices.....79

5.6 Transforming written haiku into signing: two attempts80

5.6.1 JSL haiku.....80

5.6.2 *Seasons* by Dorothy Miles82

5.7 Summary84

Chapter 6 Metaphor85

6.1 Introduction.....85

6.2 Cognitive accounts of metaphor.....85

6.2.1 Metaphor85

6.2.2 Poetic metaphor.....87

6.2.2.1 Extending, elaboration, question, combination.....88

6.2.2.2 Global metaphor.....90

6.2.2.3 Personification.....91

6.3 Metaphor and haiku.....92

6.4 Metaphor in sign language.....95

6.4.1 Interplay of iconicity and metaphor: Double-mapping in sign language metaphor.....96

6.4.2 Metaphor at a phonological level.....98

6.4.2.1 Handshape.....98

6.4.2.2 Location.....98

6.4.2.3 Movement99

6.4.2.4 Palm orientation103

6.4.2.5 Eyegaze103

6.5 Metaphor in sign language haiku104

6.5.1 Metaphor or simile?104

6.5.2 Visual motivation: Dorothy Miles’ *Evening*.....106

6.5.3 Case studies in haiku.....	109
6.5.3.1 Danielle Rogers' <i>Tree</i>	110
6.5.3.2 Jessica McKinney's <i>Memory</i>	111
6.5.3.3 Penny Beschizza's <i>Grass</i> and Rita DeSarker's <i>Rose</i>	113
6.5.3.4 Samuel Sanders' <i>Fireflies</i>	115
6.6 Summary	116
 Chapter 7 Theme.....	 117
7.1 Introduction.....	117
7.1.1 Theme and Topic.....	118
7.1.1 Form and theme interrelated	120
7.2 Overview of themes in two poetic traditions	121
7.2.1 Themes of Japanese haiku.....	121
7.2.2 Themes of sign language literature	124
7.3 Themes in sign language haiku -overview.....	125
7.3.1 Nature.....	127
7.3.1.1 Seasons.....	127
7.3.1.2 Animals	127
7.3.1.3 Heavenly Bodies	128
7.3.1.4 Plants.....	128
7.3.2 Deafness and Identity.....	130
7.3.3 Daily life.....	134
7.3.4 Others	134
7.4 Some issues	135
7.4.1 Deaf perspective.....	135
7.4.1.1 Emphasis on vision	135
7.4.1.2 Unique perspective.....	136
7.4.2 Anthropomorphisation	138
7.4.3 Reference to multiple senses.....	140
7.4.4 Trees	142
7.5 Summary	146

Chapter 8 Rhythm.....148

8.1 Introduction.....148

8.1.1 Rhythm and poetry.....148

8.1.2 Definition of rhythm149

8.2 Visual rhythm in Japanese haiku.....151

8.3 Rhythm in sign language poetry154

8.3.1 Rhythm in sign language poetry: introduction.....154

8.3.2 Rhythmic units157

8.3.2.1 Speed.....158

8.3.2.2 Body posture159

8.3.2.3 Shifting perspectives159

8.3.2.4 Pause and motion160

8.3.2.5 Size of the movement.....161

8.3.2.6 Visual density162

8.4 Rhythm in sign language haiku.....164

8.4.1 Syllabic haiku: Wim Emerik’s *Vallend Blad (Falling leaf)*164

8.4.2 Rhythmic haiku: Jesus Marchan’s *Fish*166

8.4.3 Shifting Perspectives: Sam Sepah’s *Cornfield*.....168

8.4.4 Dorothy Miles’ *Seasons*169

8.5 Summary172

Chapter 9 Symmetry173

9.1 Introduction.....173

9.1.1 Definition of symmetry.....173

9.1.2 Symmetry in language175

9.2 Symmetry in poetry.....176

9.2.1 Symmetry in form176

9.2.2 Symmetry in theme179

9.3 Symmetry in sign language.....179

9.3.1 Inherent symmetry in sign languages.....179

9.3.2 Three planes182

9.4 Symmetry in sign language poetry.....	184
9.5 Symmetry in sign language haiku.....	187
9.5.1 Symmetry in Japanese haiku.....	188
9.5.1.1 Form.....	188
9.5.1.2 Theme.....	189
9.5.2 Symmetry in sign language haiku.....	190
9.5.2.1 <i>Eclipse</i> by Linda Day.....	190
9.5.2.2 <i>Haiku –a LIS poem-</i> by Rosaria Giuranna	191
9.5.2.3 <i>Cornfield</i> by Sam Sepah.....	192
9.5.2.4 <i>Fish</i> by Jesus Marchan.....	193
9.6 Summary.....	195
 Chapter 10 Handshape.....	 196
10.1 Introduction.....	196
10.2 Basic effect of handshape in sign language poetry: rhyme and chiming.....	197
10.3 Handshape symbolism	200
10.3.1 Previous research	200
10.3.2 Inherent semantic quality in handshapes: BSL dictionary project.....	201
10.3.3 Form-meaning associations in some handshapes.....	204
10.3.3.1 Conventional association: I and Å handshapes.....	204
10.3.3.2 Metaphorical association1: Substantial and non-substantial handshapes	204
10.3.3.3 Metaphorical association2: Open and closed handshapes	205
10.3.3.4 Metaphorical association: Plain and bent handshapes	205
10.4 Handshape symbolism in sign language haiku	208
10.4.1 Sound symbolism in Japanese haiku.....	208
10.4.2 Case studies.....	211
10.4.2.1 Chiming effect: Raquib Din’s <i>Summer</i> and Stephen S. McDonald’s <i>Red Sun</i>	211
10.4.2.2 Penny Beschizza’s <i>Sign Language</i>	213
10.4.2.3 Wim Emmerik’s <i>Falling Leaf</i>	214
10.4.2.4 Rita DeSarker’s <i>Rose</i> and Penny Beschizza’s <i>Grass</i>	215

10.5 Summary	217
Chapter 11 Blended Space.....	218
11.1 Introduction.....	218
11.2 Terminology	218
11.2.1 Frame.....	218
11.2.2 Perspective	225
11.2.3 Space	226
11.3 Conceptual blending and poetic blending.....	229
11.3.1 Original idea of blending.....	229
11.3.2 Poetic blending in sign language haiku.....	230
11.4 Summary	233
Chapter 12 Eyegaze	235
12.1 Introduction.....	235
12.2 Eyegaze in sign language.....	236
12.2.1 Linguistic functions of eyegaze	236
12.2.2 Eyegaze in poetic signing	237
12.3 Eyegaze patterns.....	240
12.3.1 Gaze patterns in narratives versus poetry.....	240
12.3.2 Five major criteria.....	241
12.4 Categorisation of gaze patterns	244
12.4.1 Gaze to the audience	244
12.4.2 Character's gaze.....	248
12.4.3 Poetic-I.....	250
12.4.4 Gaze at hands a) Reactive gaze at hands.....	253
12.4.5 Gaze at hands b) non-reactive gaze at hands	256
12.4.6 Prescient eyegaze	258
12.4.7 Non-directed gaze	262
12.4.8 Summary of the gaze patterns.....	262

12.5 Summary	264
Chapter 13 Three Haiku Quartets by Deaf Poets.....	265
13.1 Introduction.....	265
13.2 Overall characteristics.....	266
13.3 <i>Day</i>	268
13.3.1 Translation and glossing.....	268
13.3.2 Overall theme	269
13.3.3 <i>Morning</i> by John Wilson.....	269
13.3.4 <i>Afternoon</i> by Paul Scott	271
13.3.5 <i>Evening</i> by Richard Carter	272
13.3.6 <i>Night</i> by Johanna Mesch	273
13.4 <i>Year</i>	275
13.4.1 Translation and glossing.....	275
13.4.2 Overall theme	276
13.4.3 <i>Spring</i> by Paul Scott.....	276
13.4.4 <i>Summer</i> by Richard Carter	278
13.4.5 <i>Autumn</i> by Johanna Mesch.....	279
13.4.6 <i>Winter</i> by John Wilson	282
13.5 <i>Life</i>	284
13.5.1 Translation and glossing.....	284
13.5.2 Overall theme	285
13.5.3 <i>Infancy</i> by Richard Carter	285
13.5.4 <i>Childhood</i> by Johanna Mesch	286
13.5.5 <i>Middle Age</i> by John Wilson	287
13.5.6 <i>Old Age</i> by Paul Scott	289
13.6 Summary	290
Chapter 14 Poems from the BSL Haiku Competition 2006	292
14.1 Introduction.....	292
14.2 <i>Kettle</i> by Maria Gibson	293

14.2.1 Translation and glossing.....	293
14.2.2 Structure	293
14.2.3 Metaphor	293
14.2.4 Theme.....	293
14.2.5 Rhythm.....	294
14.2.6 Symmetry	295
14.2.7 Handshape	295
14.2.8 Blending.....	295
14.2.9 Eyegaze	295
14.2.10 Haikuness	296
14.3 <i>Walking</i> by Maria Gibson.....	297
14.3.1 Translation and glossing.....	297
14.3.2 Structure	298
14.3.3 Metaphor	298
14.3.4 Theme.....	298
14.3.5 Rhythm.....	299
14.3.6 Symmetry	299
14.3.7 Handshape	302
14.3.8 Blending	302
14.3.9 Eyegaze	303
14.3.10 Haikuness	304
14.4 <i>God</i> by Penny Beschizza.....	306
14.4.1 Translation and glossing.....	306
14.4.2 Structure	306
14.4.3 Metaphor	307
14.4.4 Theme.....	308
14.4.5 Rhythm.....	308
14.4.6 Symmetry	309
14.4.7 Handshape	309
14.4.8 Blending	309
14.4.9 Eyegaze	309
14.4.10 Haikuness	310
14.5 <i>The Warm Sun</i> by Siobhan O'Donovan	311
14.5.1 Translation and glossing.....	311

14.5.2 Structure	312
14.5.3 Metaphor	312
14.5.4 Theme.....	312
14.5.5 Rhythm.....	313
14.5.6 Symmetry	313
14.5.7 Handshape	313
14.5.8 Blending.....	314
14.5.9 Eyegaze	314
14.5.10 Haikuness	314
14.6 <i>River and Stars</i> by Donna Williams.....	315
14.6.1 Translation and glossing.....	315
14.6.2 Structure	316
14.6.3 Metaphor	316
14.6.4 Theme.....	316
14.6.5 Rhythm.....	316
14.6.6 Symmetry	316
14.6.7 Handshape	317
14.6.8 Blending.....	317
14.6.9 Eyegaze	317
14.6.10 Haikuness	318
14.7 <i>England</i> by Nigel Howard	319
14.7.1 Translation and glossing.....	319
14.7.2 Structure	320
14.7.3 Metaphor	320
14.7.4 Theme.....	320
14.7.5 Rhythm.....	320
14.7.6 Symmetry	321
14.7.7 Handshape	321
14.7.8 Blending	321
14.7.9 Eyegaze	321
14.7.10 Haikuness	322
14.8 <i>Deaf</i> by Nigel Howard	322
14.8.1 Translation and glossing.....	322
14.8.2 Structure	320

14.8.3 Metaphor323

14.8.4 Theme.....323

14.8.5 Rhythm.....324

14.8.6 Symmetry324

14.8.7 Handshape.....324

14.8.8 Blending.....325

14.8.9 Eyegaze325

14.8.10 Haikuness326

14.9 Summary327

Chapter 15 Conclusion328

References330

Appendix - List of handshapes.....339

List of Tables

Table 3.1 Overview of the corpus27

Table 3.2 The contrast between reading *out of* the poem and *into* the poem42

Table 4.1 Horiuchi’s classification of the combination of senses in synesthesia.....62

Table 5.1 The length (in seconds) of Dorothy Miles’ *Seasons* performances in
different years and by Carol Padden66

Table 7.1 Breakdown of theme categories 126

Table 8.1 Examples of Chinese logographs and Japanese characters152

Table 8.2 Different lengths in Dorothy Miles’ three renditions170

Table 10.1 The distribution of semantic qualities in plain and bent handshapes.....206

Table 10.2 Chi-Square Tests.....206

Table 12.1 Overview of the six gaze patterns264

Table 13.1 Overview of the quartets266

Table 14.1 Overview of the poems292

List of Figures

Figure 2.1 The interaction among three poetic lineages	16
Figure 2.2 Johanna Mesch's <i>Kayak</i>	17
Figure 3.1 The creation process of Maria Gibson's <i>Water</i>	35
Figure 3.2 Example of a hands-down posture.....	36
Figure 5.1 Visual representation in Linda Day's <i>Eclipse</i>	69
Figure 5.2 Juxtaposed images in Donna Williams' <i>Research and Duck</i>	70
Figure 5.3 Contrastive locations of signs in Carol Padden's <i>Winter</i>	70
Figure 5.4 Gaze shift in John Wilson's <i>Winter</i>	71
Figure 5.5 John Wilson's <i>Lift</i>	73
Figure 6.1 BSL sign SURF	97
Figure 6.2 Maria Gibson's <i>Water</i>	106
Figure 6.3 Signs from Dorothy Miles' <i>Evening in Trio</i>	109
Figure 6.4 Some upward signs in Danielle Rogers' <i>Tree</i>	111
Figure 6.5 Jessica McKinney's <i>Memory</i>	113
Figure 7.1 Theme categories in sign language haiku.....	125
Figure 7.2 Topics that are mentioned more than twice in the corpus	127
Figure 7.3 TREE in Paul Scott's <i>Spring</i>	130
Figure 7.4 Two signs from Maria Gibson's <i>Water</i>	131
Figure 7.5 Donna Williams' <i>Identity</i>	133
Figure 7.6 The sequence from Linda Day's <i>Eclipse</i>	136
Figure 7.7 Examples from O'Donovan's <i>Sixty-One Steps</i>	137
Figure 7.8 Maria Gibson's <i>Cat</i>	139
Figure 7.9 The rabbit's fingerspelling in Jerry Hannifin's <i>Little Red Riding Hood</i> .	140
Figure 7.10 Two signs from Penny Beschizza's <i>Sign Language s</i>	141
Figure 7.11 Examples of synesthesia	142
Figure 7.12 Danielle Rogers' <i>Tree</i>	143
Figure 7.13 The signs TREE in BSL and in JSL.....	146

Figure 8.1 Two different sized signs for TREE in Danielle Rogers’ *Tree*..... 161

Figure 8.2 The notation with music notes for Wim Emerik’s *Falling Leaf*..... 165

Figure 8.3 The notation with music notes for Jesus Marchan’s *Fish*..... 167

Figure 8.4 The release point in Dorothy Miles’ *Autumn*..... 171

Figure 9.1 Continuum of symmetry 174

Figure 9.2 Percentages of symmetrical signs across different planes in ASL based on Napoli and Wu (2003) and BSL based on Sutton-Spence and Kaneko (2007) 182

Figure 9.3 Examples of symmetric signs (left-right, up-down, front-back) 182

Figure 9.4 Symmetry in the poem performed by Ella Lentz and Joe Castronovo (from Klima and Bellugi 1979)..... 187

Figure 9.5 Symmetrical sequences in *Eclipse* by Linda Day..... 191

Figure 9.6 Symmetry in sequence from Giuranna’s *LIS Haiku* 192

Figure 9.7 Symmetric signs in Sam Sepah’s *Cornfield* 193

Figure 9.8 Two-handed sign FISH-SWIM..... 194

Figure 9.9 Asymmetrical signs in *Fish* 195

Figure 10.1 Signs from Dorothy Miles’ *Summer* 199

Figure 10.2 Distribution of handshapes for each semantic category 202

Figure 10.3 Distribution of semantic categories in average and in some handshapes 203

Figure 10.4 The distribution of semantic qualities in plain and bent handshapes ... 206

Figure 10.5 Some signs from Wim Emmerik’s *Garden of Eden* 207

Figure 10.6 Sequence of signs from Wim Emmerik’s *Desert*..... 208

Figure 10.7 DARKNESS-LIKE-A-BAT-FLIES-CLOSE from Dorothy Miles’ *Evening*..... 208

Figure 10.8 Chiming of features in Raquib Din’s haiku 211

Figure 10.9 Signs from Stephen S. McDonald’s *Red Sun*..... 212

Figure 10.10 Changing handshapes in Penny Beschizza’s *Sign Language* 214

Figure 10.11 Changing handshapes in Wim Emmerik’s *Falling Leaf*..... 215

Figure 10.12 The sign sequence from Rita DeSarker’s *Rose*..... 216

Figure 10.13 Three signs from Penny Beschizza’s *Grass*..... 217

Figure 11.1 A poetic frame reconstructed from Dorothy Miles' <i>Spring</i>	220
Figure 11.2 Spaces involved in haiku (11a)	221
Figure 11.3 Spaces involved in haiku (11b)	223
Figure 11.4 Spaces involved in Sepah's <i>Cornfield</i>	224
Figure 11.5 Spaces involved in Williams' <i>Research and Duck</i>	225
Figure 11.6 The different spaces involved in sign language haiku	229
Figure 11.7 Sequential blending in Williams' <i>The River and Stars</i>	231
Figure 11.8 Christine LaFrance's <i>Bird</i>	232
Figure 11.9 Dynamic blending in Penny Beschizza's <i>Sign Language</i>	233
Figure 12.1 Upward gaze and hand movement in Johanna Mesch's <i>Aeroplane</i> (a) and in Danielle Rogers' <i>Tree</i>	239
Figure 12.2 Gaze shift in John Wilson's <i>Winter</i>	240
Figure 12.3 Gaze pattern in Linda Day's <i>Deaf Cat</i>	246
Figure 12.4 Gaze to the audience in Wim Emmerik's <i>Falling leaf</i> and Carol Padden's <i>Winter</i>	248
Figure 12.5 Gaze of one fish in Jesus Marchan's <i>Fish</i>	249
Figure 12.6 Character's gaze in John Wilson's <i>Lift</i>	250
Figure 12.7 Rita DeSarker's <i>Forget Me Not</i>	251
Figure 12.8 Jessica McKinney's <i>Memory's Ashes</i>	253
Figure 12.9 Gaze at hands in Rosaria Giuranna's <i>Haiku –an LIS poem-e</i>	255
Figure 12.10 The sequence of FLOWERS and BUTTERFLY in Marita Saunamäki's <i>Spring</i>	255
Figure 12.11 Sequence of DEATH in Carol Padden's <i>Winter</i>	256
Figure 12.12 Gaze pattern in Wim Emmerik's <i>Falling leaf</i>	257
Figure 12.13 Non-reactive gaze at hands in Dorothy Miles' <i>Autumn</i>	258
Figure 12.14 Carol Padden's examples of prescient gaze	259
Figure 12.15 Examples of prescient gaze in Donna Williams' <i>Identity</i> and Penny Beschizza's <i>Politics</i>	259
Figure 12.16 A poetic frame reconstructed from Dorothy Miles' <i>Spring</i>	260
Figure 12.17 Eyegaze and manual signs used to represent the image in Figure 12.16	261
Figure 12.18 Shift of gaze and manual signs according to time	261
Figure 12.19 Example of stable gaze versus transient manual signing	257

Figure 13.1 <i>Morning</i> by John Wilson	270
Figure 13.2 Diagram of the blended spaces in <i>Morning</i> by John Wilson.....	271
Figure 13.3 <i>Afternoon</i> by Paul Scott.....	272
Figure 13.4 <i>Evening</i> by Richard Carter.....	273
Figure 13.5 <i>Night</i> by Johanna Mesch.....	275
Figure 13.6 <i>Spring</i> by Paul Scott	276
Figure 13.7 <i>Summer</i> by Richard Carter.....	279
Figure 13.8 Blended spaces in TREE2 in <i>Autumn</i>	281
Figure 13.9 <i>Autumn</i> by Johanna Mesch	281
Figure 13.10 <i>Winter</i> by John Wilson.....	283
Figure 13.11 <i>Infancy</i> by Richard Carter.....	286
Figure 13.12 <i>Childhood</i> by Johanna Mesch.....	287
Figure 13.13 <i>Middle Age</i> by John Wilson.....	288
Figure 13.14 <i>Old Age</i> by Paul Scott.....	290
Figure 14.1 <i>Kettle</i> by Maria Gibson.....	297
Figure 14.2 Blending in <i>Walking</i> by Maria Gibson	303
Figure 14.3 Signs from <i>Walking</i> by Maria Gibson.....	306
Figure 14.4 Penny Beschizza's <i>God</i>	311
Figure 14.5 <i>The Warm Sun</i> by Siobhan O'Donovan.....	315
Figure 14.6 <i>River and Stars</i> by Donna Williams	319
Figure 14.7 Nigel Howard's <i>England</i>	322
Figure 14.8 <i>Deaf</i> by Nigel Howard.....	326

Chapter 1

Introduction

I was impressed by their translations of Japanese Haiku – very short poems, each giving a simple, clear picture. I tried to do the same thing, and to choose signs that would flow smoothly together.

Dorothy Miles (1976)

The particular compression and rich imagery of haiku seem especially suited to sign language.

Edward Klima and Ursula Bellugi (1979)

The haiku's strong emphasis on creating a visual image makes sign language an ideal vehicle.

Rachel Sutton-Spence (2005)

Haiku is very good in sign language. It's very simple and has great effect.

Judith Jackson (2006)

1.1. Statement of Purpose

This dissertation provides an overview of the features of sign language poetry, focusing on a particular type or *genre* of poetic signing - *sign language haiku*. Haiku is a very short form of poetry originated in medieval Japan. Its concise form and rich imagery has attracted many people outside Japan, including Deaf people in the western world.

Many poets and researchers have claimed that sign languages can be a perfect medium for haiku, or vice versa. The thirty-year span of the above quotes suggests that haiku has been an interest of sign language poets and researchers for almost as long as the history of sign language poetry itself.

Poets from different countries experiment with the idea of what a signed haiku can be. A British Deaf poet Dorothy Miles was the first to compose haiku in sign languages in 1970s, followed by many other poets in different countries. The popularity haiku has achieved in sign language literature is remarkable. For a long time, haiku has been the only form (or discipline) of spoken language poetry which Deaf people eagerly learn and adapt into their language. Although there are some

recent attempts to compare some poetic signing with other genres such as Greek epics (Harmon 2006), no other poetic form has aroused the same kind or amount of interest in Deaf people. Sign language poetry has a short history and there is not yet anything that can be called a “genre” in it, apart from sign language haiku (Sutton-Spence 2005).

While there is a worldwide recognition that haiku is an appropriate form for poetic signing, there has been no research on *why* it is so. My research is to fill this gap by collecting as many haiku poems as possible in different sign languages and illustrate what binds them together to become a poetic genre in sign language poetry. Such research is indispensable not only to find out about sign language haiku, but also to account for why, how, or if, a certain form can turn into a genre in sign language poetry.

The starting point of my research was a simple question: *Is haiku really an “ideal vehicle” for sign language poetry (and vice versa)? What is so special about haiku that it deserves all this attention by poets and critics?*

Initial answers are filled with positives. Haiku and sign languages share crucial features which may explain the firm tie they have formed. Both haiku and sign language are capable of expressing many things in short span of time. Haiku is also known for its direct appeal to our senses, especially for creating a strong visual impression in the reader’s mind, for which sign language can indeed be an ideal vehicle.

However, when taking a closer look, one will find more contrasts than similarities between the original form of haiku and sign language haiku. Although both traditional and sign language haiku are governed by economy of language, the former reduces it to the minimum to create objective, detached, and non-emotional language. In contrast, sign language haiku, although it is reduced greatly in terms of temporal duration, it is not the art of minimalism. It is highly expressive and emotional, with the use of visual, dynamic and simultaneous signing, facial expressions, and role shift. The nature of sign language - the very fact that signers use their own body and face - makes it impossible to remain detached and objective.

To put the conclusion first, sign language haiku is fundamentally different from the traditional notion of haiku. This is because it is a fusion of two different poetic

traditions: the lineage of traditional Japanese art form and the rich heritage of Deaf art and poetry. As a result of this fusion, a new form has emerged. The aim of my dissertation is to explore what this new form can inform us about the nature of sign language poetry when contrasted with a spoken language poetic form.

1.2. Definitional Problem

So far, I have taken it for granted that “sign language haiku” already exists within the larger body of sign language poetry¹. However, there are no clear criteria to decide whether a piece of poetic signing can be recognised as haiku or not. Traditional Japanese haiku is primarily defined by the form (17 syllables, divided by 5-7-5), but sign language haiku does not have a corresponding formal feature. Loosely speaking, sign language haiku consists of a variety of short signed poems possessing some features which exist in original idea of haiku (which I call “haiku-ness”). A precise definition of sign language haiku is probably impossible and ultimately unhelpful. Rather, I would leave it to Wittgenstein’s account of a category as “family resemblance”- a category is bound not by a single defining feature but a collection of features, each of which is fulfilled by some members, but not all (Wittgenstein 1953). There is no single defining feature of signed haiku but a collection of features associated with it. Sign language haiku are usually very short, but each haiku varies in length. It is most helpful here to simply leave it to the poet’s intention to call a poem haiku. In this thesis, I only deal with haiku poems which are acknowledged to be in the form of haiku by the poets themselves. This entails that the poets are aware of the features of haiku and that they try to represent the “haiku-ness” in their work (how it is represented depends on each poet’s understanding of what haiku is).

¹ In this thesis, sign language poetry (including sign language haiku) means a collection of poems in sign language, composed and performed by Deaf people. This excludes written poetry by Deaf people, or simple translation of spoken language poems into sign language.

1.3. The structure of this thesis

This thesis consists of fifteen chapters including this introduction and conclusion. Chapter 2 surveys previous research on sign language poetry in general. Although the history of sign language poetry only dates back to 1970s, there is plenty of important research which lays the foundation for my analysis of sign language haiku.

Chapter 3 examines the methodologies used in this thesis. This mainly focuses on the creation of the corpus, and the BSL Haiku Festival I hosted in order to encourage British Deaf people to create haiku in their own language. This festival is an important part of my research, so the details of the festival, its outcome and some issues will be illustrated.

In Chapter 4 there is a summary of the features of traditional Japanese haiku. Haiku has a history of more than four centuries, and therefore it is not possible to provide all the information in one chapter. I will focus on the aspects of traditional haiku which will be relevant in our discussions of signed haiku.

Chapter 5 focuses on how original ideas of Japanese haiku are (re)interpreted in sign language haiku in order to fit into the medium of visual and spatial language.

In Chapter 6, there is a detailed account on the use of metaphor in sign language haiku. Although traditional haiku does not favour figurative tropes, it will become clear that metaphor plays an essential role in sign language haiku.

In Chapter 7, I will explore the themes of sign language haiku. Themes in sign language haiku are influenced both by traditional haiku and sign language poetry, and it shows most strongly the nature of sign language haiku as a blended form of two poetic forms.

Chapters 8 to 12 focus on formal aspects of sign language haiku. Chapter 8 will discuss rhythm, Chapter 9 symmetry, Chapter 10 handshape, Chapter 11 blended space, and Chapter 12 eyegaze. All of those poetic devices contribute to the aesthetic accomplishment of a haiku poem, but they are also linked to its theme.

The last two chapters, Chapter 13 and 14 analyse poems from my corpus, and illustrate how the poetic devices examined in earlier chapters are organically merged together to contribute to the overall poetic effect.

Finally in Chapter 15, I draw conclusion from my findings and propose future research possibilities.

Chapter 2

Previous Research on Signed Poetry

A frog in the well knows nothing of the great ocean.... Come out of your well and see the great ocean: then you may talk about the truth.

Zhuangzi

2.1. Introduction

Sign language haiku is part of the large body of sign language poetry. Thus it is essential to situate my analysis of sign language haiku within the rich soil (or the “great ocean”) of research on signed poetry in general.

Research in sign language poetry has a history of only 30 years. Despite the classical analysis by Klima and Bellugi (1979), most research came only after the 1990s. This is related to the fact that sign language research itself is a recent development. Poetic investigation was left behind while linguists were seeking ways to establish the same linguistic status of sign languages as of spoken languages. I will not go through the history of sign language researches, to quote Bauman (2003), “As four decades of linguistic research have shown, ASL possesses all the symbolic properties of spoken-written language. Criticism of sign poetry may now be free from the duty of validating ASL as a language to explore sign’s most unique quality: movement within three-dimensional space” (38). This chapter focuses on previous research on sign language poetry.

2.2. Overview

Although there is no “paradigm” in the research of sign language poetry (because of its short history and the small number of researchers and poets), a few major groups can be identified reflecting different interests.

I will start with Klima and Bellugi (1979) as one of the first attempts to analyse poetic signing. They treated poetry as part of wider linguistic phenomena. Then, the study of sign language poetry in its own right came in the early 1990s with the poet-scholar Clayton Valli's attempt to popularize the notion of sign language poetry in order to empower Deaf people in the United States. Although Valli's attempt is highly valued, his analysis raises "more questions than it answers" (Bauman 2006: 98) as he appears to squeeze the spatial and kinetic features of sign language poetry into the linear structure of spoken language poetry. The reaction to Valli's theory made some critics turn to the unique visuality of sign language poetry. Ironically, such attempts seem to have more in common with contemporary movements in mainstream poetry than Valli's attempt, especially with the Imagists and the Beatnik poets. Dirksen Bauman and Jim Cohn are among those who took interest in sign language as a medium for visual poetry.

Soon Bauman's interest in "four-dimensional" aspect of sign language poetry moved him into a cinematographic approach, in which a signed piece is seen through analogy with films, rather than static, two-dimensional paintings or three-dimensional art (Bauman 2003, 2006, Bahan 2006).

Valli's contribution to develop the study of sign language poetry for its own sake evoked various other approaches. Some take a performative/theatrical approach to sign language literature, focusing on the issues such as performance, the notion of "body" and filming (Krentz 2006, Peters 2000, 2006, Rose 1992, 2006). Others focus more on the thematic aspects of signed poems, delving behind the aesthetics of poetic signing, especially in relation to the poet's identity as Deaf (Ormsby 1995 a, b, Rose 1997, Sutton-Spence and Müller de Quadros 2006).

Other researchers seek for a linguistic/formal approach to sign language poetry such as Sutton-Spence (2005), Blondel and Miler (2000, 2001), and Russo, Giuranna, and Pizzuto (2001). They take interest not only in the formal aspects of poetic signing, but also in the symbolic association between the form and the meaning of the poem.

2.3 Klima and Bellugi (1979)

Two American linguists, Edward Klima and Ursula Bellugi initiated research in sign language poetry. In 1979, they dedicated the last chapter of their book on ASL to a study of poetry, which is one of the first pieces of study of this kind. It is interesting that they included the word “poetry” in their chapter title, but it is used rather metaphorically, and in the text they used the phrase “art signs” to refer to sign language poetry. This means that the notion of “poetry” was still foreign to the critics of sign language studies.

Klima and Bellugi identified three interrelated structures of poetry: internal, external and superstructural. *Internal poetic structure* refers to grammatical/linguistic components of a poem. It refers to, for example, a choice of lexicon (words or signs) and how they are put together (grammar). In spoken language poetry, it could be either “conventional” (following a certain poetic tradition, such as meter pattern in English poems) or “individual” (original and creative use of words and grammar in each poem). Sign language poetry, Klima and Bellugi argued, mostly consists of individual internal structure. This is perhaps due to the fact that there is no such thing as established poetic patterns in sign language poetry, and poetic signing is largely based on an individual poet’s original composition. The internal structure involves the selection of handshapes (Chapter 10), movement, and location of the signs.

While internal structure determines “what” a poem is about, *external poetic structure* is related to “how” it is presented. It has to do with the arrangement of signs. Specifically, Klima and Bellugi remarked that it involves “creating balance between the two hands, creating and maintaining a flow of movement between signs, and manipulating the parameters of the signs” (1979, 341). External structure is almost inseparable from internal structure, as the way a poem is presented will influence the choice of signs, and the choice of signs will inevitably change the way they will be presented. For example, Bernard Bragg’s performances based on e.e.cummings’s *Since Feeling Comes First*, show great differences in choice of handshapes between poetic and non-poetic translations. In the poetic rendition, Bragg used a particular set of handshapes, to create balance between two hands and reduce the transitional movement. Or we can say that his intention to create such

external poetic effect result in that selection of handshapes. Features such as symmetry (see Chapter 9) and eyegaze (see Chapter 12) impose this external structure.

Superstructure refers to a global patterning imposed over the sequence of signs, which creates an overall effect of a particular poem. In sign language poetry, this includes rhythm. Blondel and Miller (2000, 2001) have been particularly interested in overall rhythmic pattern in superstructure. Rhythmic structure of sign language haiku will be discussed in Chapter 8.

The significance of dividing poetic structures into three is that it manages to capture some unique characteristics of sign language poetry, while maintaining its linguistic status. By analysing internal structures in signed poems, Klima and Bellugi showed that sign language poetry is fundamentally different from miming, and that it deserved a proper linguistic analysis just like spoken language poetry. At the same time, they implied a crucial difference in sign language poetry. Klima and Bellugi observed that, whereas internal structure is present in both spoken and signed poetry, the other two structures (external and superimposed structure) are unique to the latter. If we suppose that internal structure is a faithfully-coded linguistic pattern, the purpose of adding other two structures is to distort such a grammatical pattern. In spoken language poetry, most poetic devices take place within the realm of the linguistic system, except for certain extra-linguistic elements such as an imposed melody over a song. In sign language, how grammatical signs are *modified* to be poetic is as important as the choice of signs itself. Sign language has more layers in making the language poetic. This indicates the importance of “performance” in sign language poetry, as opposed to the solely “text”-orientated analyses of spoken/written language poetry (Rose 2006).

2.4. The early formal approach

The possibility of in-depth analyses of sign language poetry, suggested by Klima and Bellugi, has attracted many researchers. In 1990s, research in sign language poetry increased.

These content-based divisions naturally appeal to our instinct and it is not necessary to create artificial devices in recognising lines. Manipulation of handshape and movement is without doubt an important element in sign language poetry, but not necessarily a useful device by itself to divide lines.

Another problem with Valli's approach to segmentation is inconsistency, which can be illustrated in his attempt to divide lines in *Cow and Rooster* (Valli 1993). He reconstructed the poem into the following lines:

Line1	FARM (1)	VAST-LAND (2)
Line 2	COW (3)	FAT (4) LAY-DOWN (5)
Line 3	ROOSTER (6)	IN-HIGH-FEATHER (7) STAND-FIRM (8)
Line 4	CHEWING-GRASS (9)	
Line 5	SCRATCHING-DIRT (10)	
Line 6	BRAGGING (11)	FOOL-AROUND (12)
Line 7	SLUGGISH (3)	AWFULLY-LOUSY (14)
Line 8	CHARGE-ROOSTER (15)	CHARGE-COW (16)
Line 9	TURN-AROUND (17) WOBBLING (18)	
	HORNS-&-TAIL-SWAYING (19)	
Line10	TURN-AROUND (20) STROLLING (21)	
	CROWN-&-FEATHERTAILS-SWAYING (22)	
Line11	FARM (23)	VAST-LAND (24)

He gave his justification for this line break pattern:

There is a variety of features that can be used in order to determine line breaks: long line-end pause, eyebrow shift, eye gaze shift, head shift, body shift, location change, movement path change, handshape change, handedness chance, and/or end-rhyme. (1993: 66)

However, if we focus on signs on Line 4 and 5, and on Line 8, we can see that his division of lines is not so consistent. He breaks the sequence of "CHEWING-GRASS (cow), SCRATCHING-DIRT (rooster)" into two lines (even though each line consists of only one sign) based on the fact that they involve a change in handshape and head shift. But line 8, which has a similar sequence of "CHARGE-ROOSTER (cow), CHARGE-COW (rooster)" with a change in handshape and head shift, remains as a single line. Valli explains: "The head shift, body shift, and handshape change in signs 15 and 16 occur but don't cause the line to break since the roles of cow and rooster are emphasized as they challenge each other and their syllables are balanced in one line"

(67). Such forced explanations as “emphasis on roles” and “balanced syllables” remain ambiguous and subjective, and need much more investigation.

The main problem with Valli’s approach is that he restricted his explanation too much to the formal elements of a poem. It is because he tried to make an analogy with written English poems, in which some formal devices usually determine a line. As Bauman (1998) points out, a notion of “line” is deeply related to linear structure of a language (especially in a written language), whereas sign languages are fundamentally three-dimensional and dynamic. Thus what Valli tried to do was to squeeze the spatial and simultaneous capability of sign languages into temporal and sequential arrangements. Sutton-Spence (2005) summarises it:

“This repetition might loosely be called “rhyme”, but the distinctions of rhyme, assonance, alliteration, consonance and others that are made in spoken language poetry are not directly applicable to signed poetry. These distinctions in spoken poetry only arise because of the sequential nature of spoken words, and in sign languages the parameters such as handshape, location and movement tend to occur simultaneously.” (42)

Blondel and Miller (2000, 2001) manage to overcome Valli’s segmental problem by making it simpler and broader. They claim that signed poems are divided into segments when there is a change in poetic patterns. For example, in one of the LSF nursery rhymes they analyse, the boundary between segments is made by rhythm (pauses², shift between long/short units), syntax (a syntactic boundary between two constituents), and information structure (topic + comment structure). In their other example, a segment is divided by alternation of dominant and non-dominant hands.

“A line is characterized by homogeneity or regularity, i.e. some unifying internal motif, while a boundary between two lines is characterized by a break or contrast or, at least, by being an anchor point with respect to which a structural parallel can be drawn with another line. This break can be of any sort: signing rhythm, syntax, orientation of the body, dominance reversal, and so on”. (2000: 68)

2 Pauses are usually the biggest clues for line segmentation. Ormsby (1995a) also divides Valli’s *Snowflake* “with stanza breaks placed at the two points where the poet brings his hands to dramatic rest in front of his abdomen.” (181), which actually corresponds to the thematic construction of the poem, consisting of three parts, present, past, and back to present.

Added to these perspectives are eye gaze and poetic themes, which may also function as a segment boundary (Bahan and Supalla 1995). This loose notion of segmentation, as opposed to strict line distinctions, can provide more adequate framework in analysing sign language haiku, as haiku brings in its own notion of segmentation due to its frequent use of juxtaposed images (see Chapters 4 and 5).

2.5. The visual approach

Valli's work is valuable in that it took the first step into the maze of analysing artistic signing. But when researchers saw the inadequacy of Valli's model, they started to look for other frameworks more suited to the poetic features of visual-manual language, because they are not based on a linear, temporal, non-spatial structure of spoken language poetry. They tried to draw a comparison between sign language poetry and other visual art such as visual (concrete) poetry or painting.

It is at this point that sign language poetry truly began to make connections with the modern development in "mainstream" poetic framework, and also to the framework of haiku. The attempt to find a non-traditional way of expressing themselves made the western poets turn to new mediums, including ideographic Chinese characters, the Japanese haiku form, and sign language poetry, mainly for their potential to create more visual and direct association between poetic language and reality. There has been a fruitful union among these different poetic traditions for the last century.

For example, the movement of Imagism at the end of the 19th century, led by Ezra Pound, was deeply influenced by Fenellosa's paper on Chinese ideographs as a visual poetic medium. Imagists were fascinated with the way some poetic mediums can provide an immediate and physical representation of nature in the art. In their attempt to bring the verbal forms closer the real world, the imagists made their poem visual, but differently from the concrete poetry in the 18th century. Whereas concrete poets played around with "typographical tricks" (Bauman 1998: 120) and thus limited their attempt to the visual appearance on the page (see Chapter 9 for some examples when I discuss symmetry), the imagists used the language in its own right

to create a visual, direct, and clear image. It is this attitude that turned them toward the Japanese haiku form. Haiku shares the desire to create physical and immediate pictures of the real world, which is highly relevant for the Imagism movement. For example, the following poem of William Carlos Williams shows a great many haiku-like characteristics.

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens

This brief poem is charged with visual images such as the contrast of red and white colour and the glaze of water. The use of preposition “upon” in line 2 is both notional and typographical (the rest of the poem is literally located “below”). The mysterious line breakdown adds typographical appeal. It is an attempt to isolate and reconstruct with the power of the language a visual scene from the real world. The visual imagination expands as the reader goes through the poem.

Such attempts of Imagism influenced some critics in sign language poetry, such as Dirksen Bauman and Jim Cohn. They found that the imagist approach to poetry, to give poems a highly visual and spatial shape while “refusing to sacrifice the complexities of the words” (Bauman 1998: 120), was very motivating for sign language poets. Bauman (1998) especially makes a detailed reference to the Imagism as an attempt to follow a spontaneous impulse to merge poetry (temporal) and painting (visual). This is linked to the notion of “the poem in the ears” versus “the poem in the eyes” in Hollander’s terms (1975), or in the ancient inscription of “Painting is mute poetry; Poetry is speaking painting”. Bauman brings a dichotomy of poetry and painting to the centre of his argument, and claims that sign language can provide a perfect medium for such fusion of poetry and painting, time and space, verbal and visual forms of poetry.

The imagist movement also influenced the Beatnik poets and writers in the United States in 1950s. Once again an interesting triangle that links the western “mainstream” poets, the haiku form, and sign language poets can be found in this era, as if the contemporary poetic world is determined to bring together these apparently unrelated traditions (Figure 2.1). Cohn (1999) reports the meeting of Alan Ginsberg, the representative of the Beatnik poets, and some Deaf poets including Robert Panara and Patrick Graybill at Rochester, New York, in 1984. Graybill translated one of Ginsberg’s poems into ASL, and Ginsberg was fascinated with the way a Deaf poet managed to express (with apparent ease and spontaneity) what he struggled to convey in his poem. As Cohn puts it: “what deaf people *do* with language is what hearing poets try to *make* their language do” (27).

These Beatnik poets and Deaf poets not only shared their enthusiasm toward visual and direct representations of poetic language, but also their interest toward the Japanese haiku form. The Beatnik poets Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac were known for their fascination with the haiku form (Kerouac 1971, Packard 1987). Kerouac praised haiku for its simplicity; “a Haiku must be very simple and free of all poetic trickery and make a little picture and yet be as airy and graceful as a Vivaldi Pastorella” (in *Scattered Poems* 1971). Many Deaf poets, such as Robert Panara and Dorothy Miles, began to take interest in the haiku form at this time. The increasing enthusiasm for visual representation of reality underlies such proximity of spoken language poetry, sign language poetry, and the haiku form.

All these movements in modern poetic trends, the Imagists, the Beatniks, and Bauman’s claim of sign language poetry as a new medium, foreground the visual and kinetic nature of sign language poetry, as opposed to Valli’s focus on temporal and linear aspects of poetic signing.

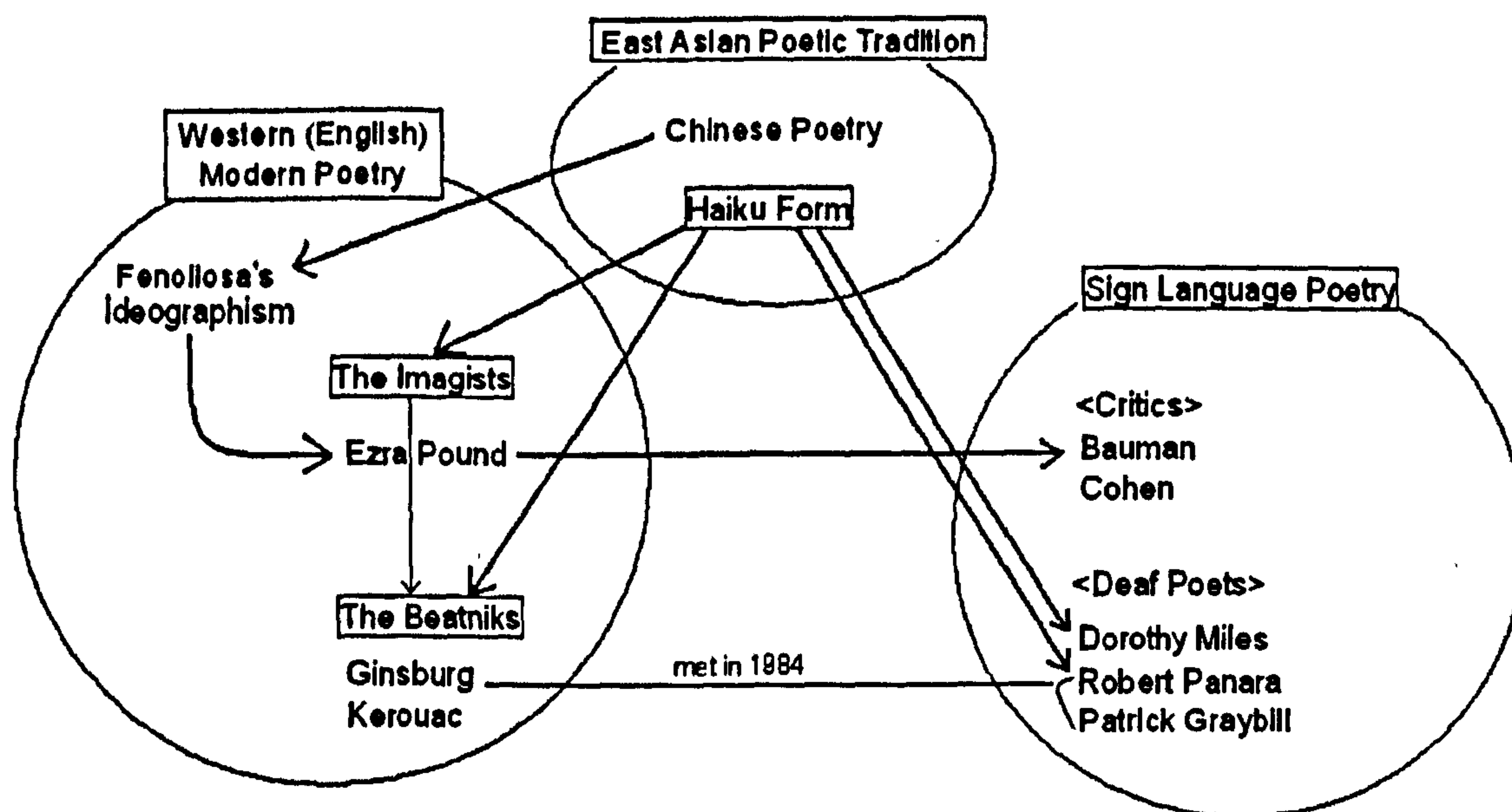


Figure 2.1 The interaction among three poetic lineages

2.6. The Cinematographic approach

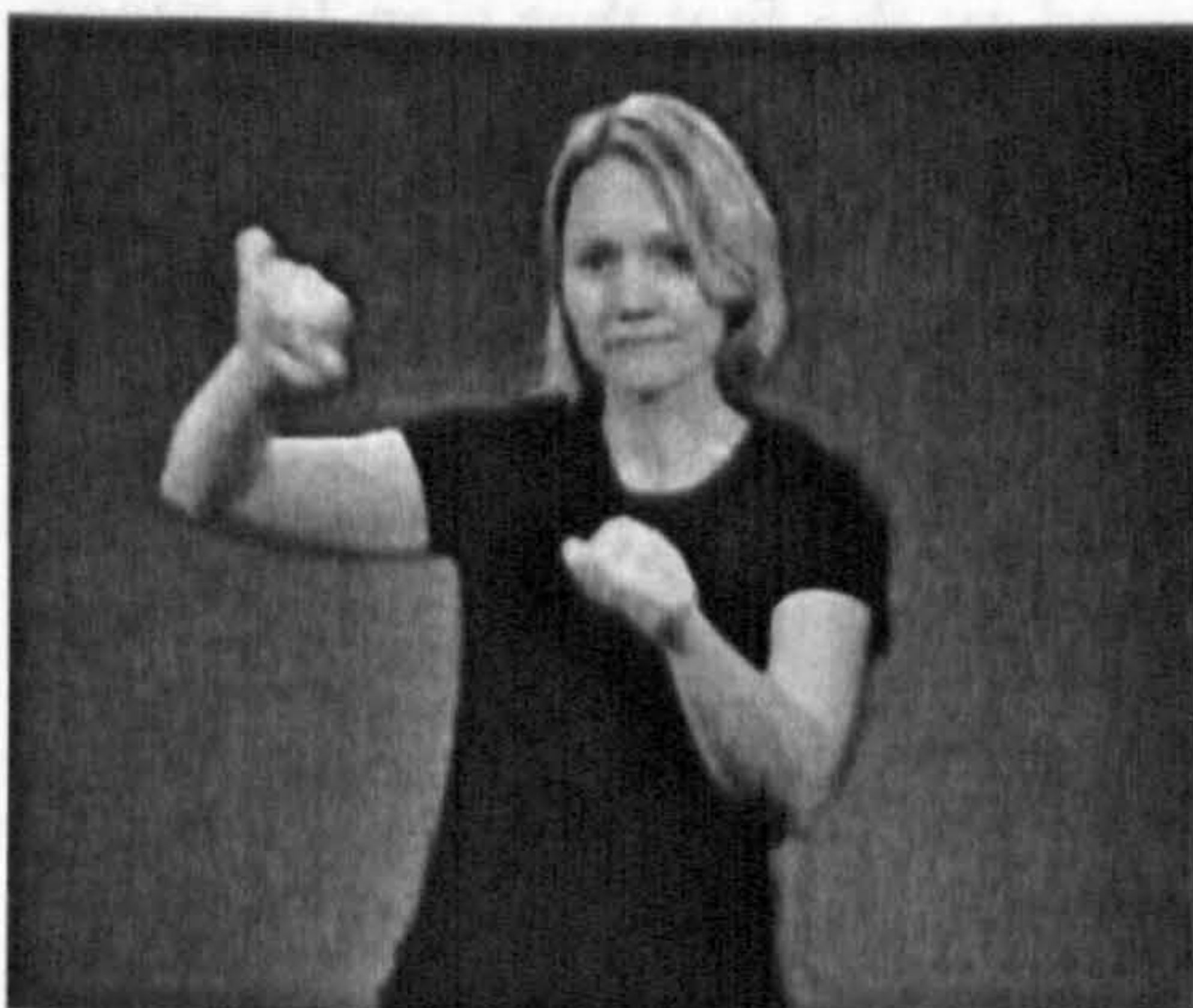
The visual and kinetic structure of sign language poetry is very productive and flexible, and no existing framework from other poetry can adequately explain its mechanism. Some critics turned to a different set of terminology that could successfully account for the poetics of the visual-manual language. The framework that shares the same flexibility and visual-spatial-kinetic nature as sign language is cinematography.

The origin of cinematographic (or cinematic) approaches to sign language literature is Bernard Bragg's notion of "visual vernacular", the ability of poetic signing to shift between different perspectives (Wolter 2006). Bauman (2006) develops this idea into a larger framework borrowing the lexicon from cinematography.

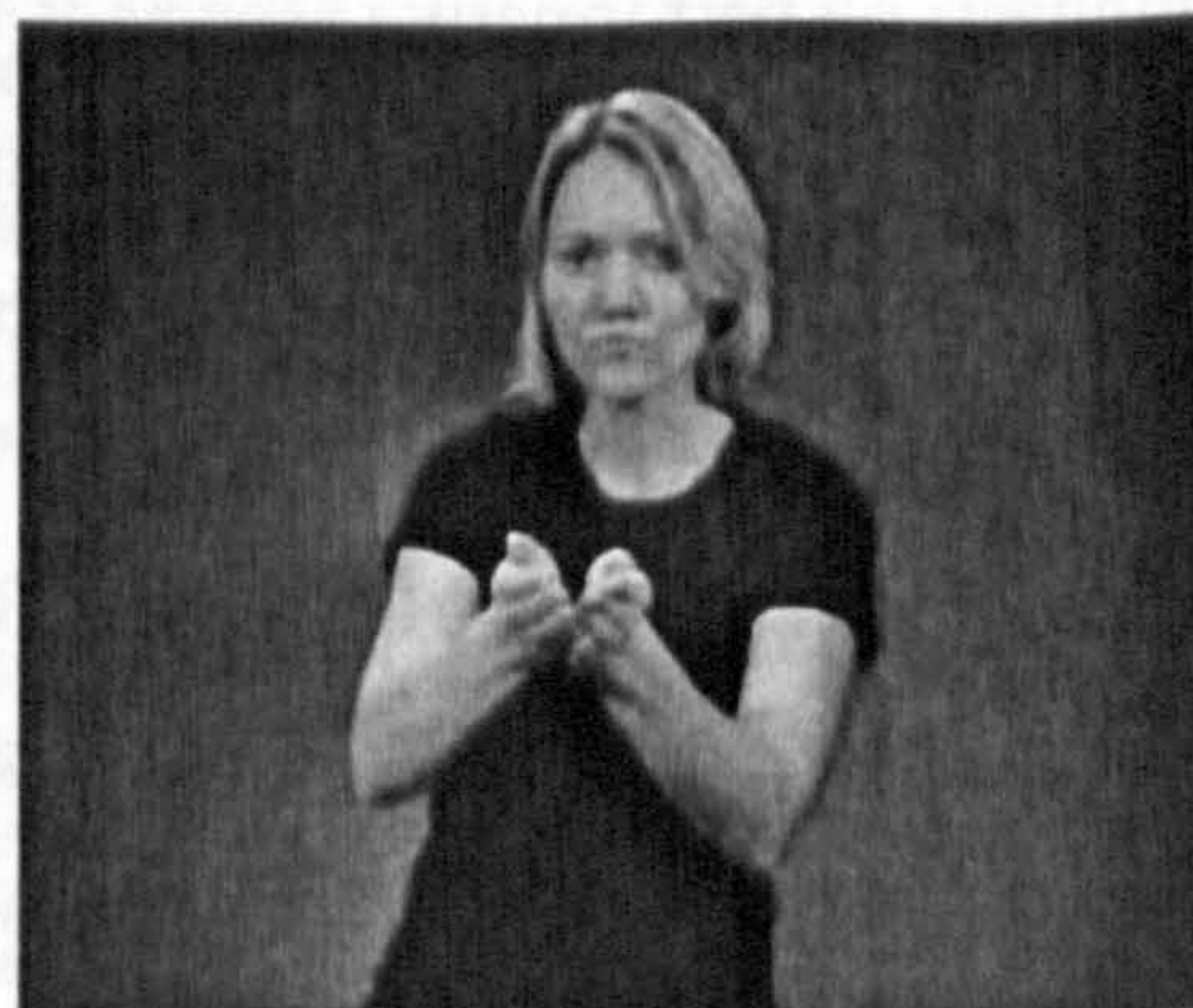
The cine-poetic structure of a signed piece involves three properties: camera, shots and editing. The signer fulfils the function of a camera, such as producing "images from any number of angles (high, low, left, right, so on) and movements, from *panning* across a landscape to *tracking* an individual character through a busy street" (Bauman 2006, 111). A shot is defined as "an uninterrupted flow of presentation of the visual field with a distinct beginning and ending" (Bauman 2006,

111). Each shot varies in its size, perspective, length, and speed. Editing in sign language poetics means the shift of shots. According to Bauman, there are different types of techniques, such as *dialogue editing* (shifting between different characters, more commonly known as “role shift”), *parallel editing* (shifting between two parallel events), *cutaway* (shifting between unrelated scenes), and *montage* (blending of separate shots into a single visual space). Sign poets create different shots and connect them in order to create a dynamic piece of signing, in order “to give viewers the illusion that they are watching film footage” (112). The smooth editing is often a quality that distinguishes “fluent” signers from less experienced signers (such as hearing people learning a sign language).

For example, Johanna Mesch’s SSL poem *Kayak*, is characterised by the shifting dynamics of the paddling of a kayak. The major part of the poem is characterised by a shift between a close-up shot of the protagonist paddling a kayak (Figure 2.2 a) and a long shot, in which the audience sees the entire shape of the kayak made with the poet’s both palms (b). The shifting between these two shots can be understood as “parallel editing” in Bauman’s terms. The second long shot is the case of “montage”, because the face of the poet retains a close-up shot of the protagonist while her hands provide a zoomed-out shot. There is a change in atmosphere in the latter half of the poem, when the water in the river starts to get choppy and the protagonist has to paddle through the rough waves. The two shots and the editing remain the same, but the speed of each shot increases, adding tension to the poem. In the end, the poet resumes the slow shifting between two shots.



a) a close-up shot



b) a long shot

Figure 2.2 Johanna Mesch’s *Kayak*

This approach to understanding signed poetry is significant in the discussion of sign language haiku, because such cinematographic techniques are not only inherent in sign language literature but also in the traditional haiku form. Traditional haiku often involves a perspective shift (Chapter 4), and the changeover between images takes place as flexibly as in a filmed or signed piece. The only difference is that such changeover does not take place physically but is visualised in the mind of the reader. I will examine the notion of shifting perspectives and shots in detail in Chapter 11.

2.7. The performative approach

Another important aspect of the research on sign language poetry is the performance-based approach. This approach focuses on the fact that sign language poetry has traditionally been situated (literally) in front of a live audience and thus the notion of “performance” (as opposed to “text”) becomes very important. Rose (2006) puts it in this way:

ASL literature is...a literature of performance, a literature that moves through time and space, embodied in the author's physical presence. [...] The literary power of ASL literature is defined by, and coexistent with, its theatrical or performative power; thus the Deaf poet's gift with language is always already a gift of bodily expression and dynamic stage presence (131).

In this framework, sign language literature is seen to have a closer relationship with art forms such as theatrical work and performing arts rather than with the traditional notion of “literature”,

This emphasis on performative aspects is based on the fact that sign language literature bears strong similarities to “oral” literature (Ong 1982). Before the advance of video technology, there was no means to document a piece of signing, and the major part of sign language literature has been “passed on through a face-to-face performance tradition” (Bauman, Nelson, and Rose 2006: 5). Culturally significant language forms such as ABC-stories, Number stories, One-handshape stories and Fingerspelled word/name stories, name signs, narratives, jokes, and so on, have all been passed down through generations and they have formed literature tradition in American Deaf communities (Peters 2000).

Such tradition met a fundamental change with the arrival of new technology. Rose (1992) applies a concept of *pre- and post-videotape literature* into the categorisation of sign language art forms. Pre-videotape literature refers to all these materials which have been passed down “orally” as mentioned above. Post-videotape literature, on the other hand, refers to literature which comes after diffusion of video (later DVD and other electronic forms) and is now able to be recorded, distributed and preserved. Krentz (2006) also makes an explicit analogy between the effect of the printing press on spoken language literature, and the effect of filming on sign language literature. He provides a list of different ways in which print/film has influenced the literature. Among some immediate effects (such as preservation, wider availability, and recognition of the literature), a notable influence of filming on sign language literature is that it increased the distance between the performer and the audience. Filtered through a lens, a signed performance has turned into “an act where the audience is silent and invisible, implied rather than involved” (Krentz 2006, 57). Additionally, video recording provides objective and analytical reflexivity to Deaf artists. It makes it possible for them to watch the performance repeatedly, Moreover, the performance is preserved, studied, and can be performed by others (Rose (2006) discusses the actual instances of a signed “text” performed by a person who is not the creator). As a result, Deaf artists may become highly conscious of their performance, elaborating the language and the theme as much as they can. Krentz observes that, whereas the main purpose of pre-video ASL literature is to entertain the live audience and therefore not so much “literary weight” can be found, the post-video ASL literature is characterised with thematic complexity which requires more than one viewing as in Ben Bahan’s *Bird of a Different Feather*. In this aspect, the transition between pre- and post videotape literature is where the notion of “text” comes in. Peters (2000) observes that the textualisation of ASL literature has led to an “increase in aesthetic play” (189), which, in essence, is the development of poetic language.

However, such notion of text cannot be completely separated from the influence of performance. As Rose (2006) claims, the text of sign language literature is on the body of the signer. A written text in spoken language can entirely be separated from the author to the extent that the reader often knows nothing about him or her. But in sign language poetry, regardless of whether it is watched live or

through the camera, the very fact that the poem takes place on the body of the signer inevitably pushes poet-and-performer to the foreground. Sign language poetry “highlights the body as the site of a four-dimensional literary text” (Rose 2006: 140).

This notion of body as text is crucial in understanding sign language poetry. The poetic language of Deaf people cannot be cut off from the notion of self. This is in sharp contrast with spoken language poetry. As we have seen in the previous section, the contemporary poets try to bring their work closer to the reality, and in doing so, often eliminate the subjective self from the poem (recall the poem of William Carlos Williams). This attitude of non-subjective description of nature is also prevailing in the haiku form.

When sign poetry is merged with spoken language poetry, as in the case of sign language haiku, the strong “self” of the poet-and-performer is retained. Deaf poets’ self-identity may subside when they *write* their poem, but becomes fully foregrounded when they *sign* it with their body. This might be one of the reasons why the theme of identity is so popular in sign language poetry.

2.8. The thematic approach

Since Valli’s research first shed light on the poetics of sign language, the research on themes of sign language poetry has developed in parallel with its formal framework. Understanding thematic aspects is crucial in sign language poetry, as it is used to express the struggle of Deaf poets as members of a minority group (Ladd 2003, Sutton-Spence 2005).

Alec Ormsby (1995 a, b) compares Valli’s *Snowflake* with an English poem with a similar theme and structures, *Frost at Midnight* by Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Snowflake can be divided into three parts. The time setting for the first part is the present, and it is characterised with the description of cold winter. The second part takes the poet back to the past. The poet describes an anecdote that reveals miscommunication between him and his father. His father was showing off his Deaf son (the poet), being proud of how the child “could” speak (which is in fact an unintelligible speech - in Ormsby’s translation, it is represented by broken Spanish). The third part takes the poet back to the present again, and ends with the description

of a brighter snow scene. This construction of three stanzas - present, past and back to present – is common to many spoken language poems including Coleridge's *Frost at Midnight*.

Both poems show a similar theme as well, namely isolation and lack of understanding from others. In *Frost at Midnight*, Coleridge shows his isolation in his school. In *Snowflake*, there is a huge distance between the poet (as a boy) and his father who is fascinated with oralism and forces the child to articulate. Ormsby observes that Valli shifts his body and eye gaze whenever he changes his role from the father to the son, and as a result, we can guess that the boy is physically situated in the edge of the scene (where the father and his guests, to whom he was trying to show his son's "progress", were centred). This physical peripheralisation of the boy emphasises his emotional isolation. Body shift in sign language is commonly found in everyday conversation and in narratives, but Ormsby demonstrated that it can play a significant part in poetry as well.

Ormsby further discusses that the third stanzas in both poems symbolise the triumph of the poet's present over the past. Valli overcame his barrier between his Deaf identity and his false identity forced by Oralism, and now became able to make an elaborate use of sign language.

There is other research which deals with the theme of a signed poem. Most of them (Rose 1997, Sutton-Spence and Müller de Quadros 2006) pick up "identity" as a central theme of sign language poetry. This notion of identity and other common themes of sign language poetry will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

2.9. The holistic approach

The realisation that no single framework can adequately explain the complexity of sign language poetry results in a more flexible and holistic approach to poetic signing.

Many researchers in this approach show strong interest in surface structure as it is the linguistic modality that makes sign language poetry unique. Their view of poetry as primarily *linguistic* art goes back to the notion of "language for the language's sake" in Klima and Bellugi (1979). But they are also interested in the

symbolic association between the form and the themes which are woven underneath the surface.

The goal of the holistic approach is not to come up with a theory which can explain the underlying mechanism of sign language poetry. Rather, analysts are interested to observe poetic phenomena and how they create poetic effect. In this sense, this approach is considered bottom-up, as opposed to Valli's top-down imposition of the theory of rhyme and line segmentation. Sutton-Spence (2005) observes various poetic devices, such as repetition, symmetry, neologism, and so on, and demonstrates how they contribute to the poem's theme and overall aesthetics.

2.10. Summary

This chapter overviewed the previous research on sign language poetry which had informed my thinking on sign language haiku. Although the history of sign language poetry is relatively short, there have been different approaches to explain the mechanism of sign language poetry. All of them are relevant in the following discussion of sign language haiku.

Sign language haiku benefits both from the research on sign language poetry and that on the traditional haiku form, which will be illustrated in Chapter 4. Prior to this, however, the next chapter will explain the methodology used in this research and the corpus creation of signed haiku poems.

Chapter 3

Methodology

It is within a framework of community based upon a generative and symmetric visual intentionality that serves as my point of entry into the Deaf heritage of poetics

Jim Cohn

3.1. Introduction

3.1.1. The nature of this research

This research focuses on the linguistic/literary aspects of sign language haiku. The basic approach I took was concrete and straightforward - looking at the data directly and analysing the formal and thematic components which contribute to the poetic effect.

Although the study of sign language poetry is closely linked to the issues of Deaf people as linguistic/cultural minorities, this is not an ethnographical piece of research. For example, I did not formally interview the poets (although I did discuss their work with some of them), nor did I involve myself in participant observation. I was, however, directly involved in the situation that led to the creation of haiku poems that form the existing corpus of BSL haiku poems.

3.1.2. Theoretical background

As made clear in Chapter 2, no single approach can adequately account for the effectiveness of sign language poetry. In such a multi-disciplinary research enterprise, the literature I used draws upon different approaches to poetry, including general linguistics, methods for analysis of spoken language poetry, haiku theory, theatrical frameworks, and so forth.

3.1.3. Catalytic validity

Although this is not a piece of ethnographic research, I have been working with Deaf people and it is worth mentioning to the catalytic validity of this research. Catalytic validity points to “the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it” with the researcher’s attempt “to consciously channel this impact so that respondents gain self-understanding and, ultimately, self-determination through research participation” (Lather 1991: 68). It is the way to give something back to the informants or community with whom the research has been conducted.

The catalytic validity of my research is to introduce the poetic form of Japanese haiku to members of the Deaf community with the hope of enriching the field of sign language poetry. As mentioned in Chapter 1, many researchers and poets have commented upon the importance of the haiku form in poetic signing but few research attempts have been made to actually connect Deaf people with this particular form of poetry. One element of this research has been to build up this connection to the extent that Deaf people start to create haiku on their own initiative. This attempt is similar to that of Clayton Valli who introduced American Deaf people to ASL poetry as part of his doctoral dissertation work (1993).

While haiku helps discipline poetic signing, sign languages in turn can breathe new life into traditional haiku circles. When haiku is created in a language which is entirely based on vision not on sound, the concept of “haiku-ness” demands a radical reconsideration, through which hearing poets may obtain a new approach to the haiku form. This research offers new perspectives to both haiku and sign languages by connecting the two.

3.1.4. The role of the researcher

I am a hearing researcher with limited signing skills. I did not have much connection with the Deaf community before embarking on this research. Therefore

the only way to make my research more valid and relevant to Deaf community was to take advantage of my background as a Japanese researcher. I decided to bring in the poetic tradition I have been brought up with, to introduce something they do not know but I know - something to enhance the understanding of sign language poetics, to which I can contribute.

My task was to connect the traditional Japanese art form with the wealth of talent in British Deaf people. The first stage was to introduce Deaf people to traditional haiku (through workshops and in seminars) and secondly to encourage them to get involved in the creation of BSL haiku and to create the first corpus of BSL haiku poetry; the final stage is this dissertation, which explores ways of analysing the haiku form in sign languages to inform other linguistic and literary approaches to poetry.

3.2. Corpus creation

This research is the first to deal with a substantial number of haiku poems in sign languages. It was essential to build up a corpus from a scratch, simply because there was none. Rutherford (1993) collected various vernacular art forms of ASL and Peters (2000) provides many examples of Deaf American literary forms, but there has been no corpus dedicated to sign language poetry. This is mainly due to the fact that the study of sign language poetry has tended to be a qualitative rather than quantitative research matter. Researchers have used a limited number of poems and analysed them in depth. Clayton Valli in his dissertation focused on the poetic features, mostly meter and rhyme, of two ASL poems (Valli 1993); Heidi Rose analysed four artistic texts in ASL including poems, stories, and theatrical work (Rose 1992). Alex Ormsby provided close readings of two ASL poems to support his theoretical discussions (Ormsby 1995 a, b). Sutton-Spence (2005) mainly uses the work of two British Deaf poets, Dorothy Miles and Paul Scott, but that description of signed poetry also aimed at providing qualitative rather than quantitative analyses.

The value of my corpus is that it brings together a substantial number of poems of the same poetic genre (118 poems in total) from different sign languages. With this number of poems, it is possible to make some generalisations, make

comparisons, look for a specific poetic feature across poems (top-down approach) or overview various poems to find a common feature (bottom-up approach), all of which contribute to the attempt to answer the question of “what is sign language haiku?” This thesis is one of the first attempts to identify a “genre” in sign language literature (which lies somewhere between the very broad categories such as “stories” “poems” “jokes” and “dramas” and much narrower categories of “ABC stories” and “one handshape stories” that only have limited examples) and the creation of a corpus is an indispensable part of it.

3.2.1. Overview of the data

Table 3.1 shows the overview of the corpus. One fundamental decision was that I only used the poems created and performed by Deaf people in sign languages. I did not use any performances by hearing signers. However, I did consider some poems originally created by hearing poets in spoken languages but then translated by Deaf people. This is because Deaf people often make a considerable change to the original in order to make it “natural” in their language, and thus the outcome is worth analysing as a piece of poetic signing

Source	Language	Year	Number of poems
BSL Haiku Festival (poetry evening)	BSL	2006	12
BSL Haiku Festival (competition)			27
Robert Panara Haiku Contest	ASL	2001	9
		2002	7
		2005	5
	JSL	2001	9
		2002	7
		2005	5
FSL Haiku	FSL	1986	8
Dorothy Miles	ASL	1980	4
	BSL	1987	4
		1988	4
Carol Padden's rendition of DM's poems	ASL	?	4
Wim Emmerik	NGT	2004	1
Rosaria Giuranna	LIS		1
Johanna Mesch		2006	1
John Wilson	BSL		1
DGS Haiku	DGS	2007	9

Table 3.1 Overview of the corpus

3.2.2 Language

I have obtained poems from seven different sign languages: BSL (British Sign Language), ASL (American Sign Language), JSL (Japanese Sign Language), NGT (Sign Language of the Netherlands), LIS (Italian Sign Language), FSL (Finnish Sign Language), and DGS (German Sign Language). In sign language poetry, especially in haiku, which is very brief and highly visual, the spatial, kinetic, and iconic nature of the visual language stands out. It is also characterised by the universal sensory experience of Deaf people. Such dynamics of poetic signing outweigh any differences in specific languages.

In most cases, these are the first sign languages of the poets, but two of the people involved in BSL Haiku Festival are not native signers of BSL. They were native signers in other sign languages, and fluent BSL users (therefore the mixing of different sign languages did take place). Further linguistic background of the

performers (such as if they attended mainstream education) is not taken into account relevant to this dissertation.

3.2.3 Setting

There are three types of setting for the data: competition, public stage performance in front of an audience, and individual video recording. In competition settings the performers aim for certain criteria and their performances will be judged and compared with others. It requires a lot of individual practice, and sometimes the whole setting of competition may affect the psychological state of the performers (see the section below). This category includes poems from the Robert Panara Haiku Contest and BSL Haiku Competition (part of BSL Haiku Festival).

Stage setting, by definition, means the performance “on the stage”. The haiku poems were often performed on festive occasions, at a formal or informal gathering of Deaf people. Three performances by Dorothy Miles (BSL 1987, 1988, and ASL 1980) fall into this category. The stage performance can also be cooperative work. A pair or a group of people perform individual poems in liaison with others (as in the FSL and BSL haiku quartets studied here).

Individually recorded haiku poems are the ones in which the poets sign solely to the camera. The haiku poems of Wim Emmerik, Rosaria Giuranna and Carol Padden are such recorded poems. Linda Day’s haiku poems, although they are part of the BSL Haiku Competition, fall into this category, as she did not take part in the actual competition but filmed herself in a separate occasion (due to an injury on the competition day).

3.2.4. Audience

It is also essential to consider if the performance had a live audience or not. Poems from the Robert Panara Haiku Contest and those which are categorised as individually recorded poems above were performed to the camera and did not seem to have the big audience (they might have a few people present such as the camera

operator). The rest of the poems were performed in front of a live audience. The presence or absence of the audience often influences the performance of any kind. It is reported that storytellers may adjust the narrative according to the feedback of the audience (Peters 2000). Although the situation is less dynamic in the case of poetry, as the poets have structured the poem in advance, the live audience may still affect their performance, especially in their gaze behaviour (see Chapter 12).

3.2.5. Original or translated

Some of the haiku poems in my corpus were not originally created in sign languages but translated from spoken language haiku. This includes haiku in Finnish Sign Language (translation from Japanese haiku) and John Wilson's translation of an English haiku poem.

Ambiguous cases are Dorothy Miles' *Seasons* quartets, because she produced those haiku poems in English as well as in ASL/BSL. In fact, her English poems precede signed poems because they were composed originally in English. However, the signed versions have strong originality and some extra features were added (see Chapter 5 for more discussion).

The rest of the poems are composed by Deaf people as original works in sign languages.

3.2.6. Three major Sources

1. The BSL Haiku Festival (see section 3.3)

2. Robert Panara Haiku Contest

This series of haiku contests is organised by PEN-International, National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), Rochester, NY, and Tsukuba College of Technology (TCT), Tsukuba, Japan. They conducted haiku competitions at their respective institutions in 2001, 2002 and 2005, amounting to six competitions in total. The contest was named for Dr. Robert F. Panara, a renowned deaf poet, actor

and educator. In 2001 and 2002, they set up different prizes (first to fourth, plus other prizes such as Honourable Mention or Best New Poet), but these distinctions were removed in 2005. They renamed the contest in 2005 to Robert Panara Haiku/Tanka Contest, widening the scope to include both haiku and tanka poems (see Chapter 4 for the discussion of tanka and haiku). However, apart from the different number of lines in their English translation, there is no clear way to distinguish haiku and tanka poems. Therefore I categorise all the poems as haiku in this dissertation.

Haiku poems which received awards have been available online³:

<http://www.pen.ntid.rit.edu/news.php>.

3. FSL Haiku Poems

This four minutes' stage performance of haiku poems was part of the Finnish Deaf Culture Festival, held in Helsinki, Finland in 1986. Two signers, Marita Saunamäki (today Marita Barber) and Johanna Lehtomäki (today Johanna Mesch), translated a collection of Japanese haiku poems into Finnish Sign Language. They are all seasonal haiku poems. Although they are translations of classic Japanese haiku, they are part of the corpus because, while retaining the meaning of the poems, the two poets fundamentally changed the structure of the poems to fit into the sign language and added a great deal of originality.

3.3. BSL Haiku Festival

The BSL Haiku Festival was held in July 2006. I organised the event as a central part of my research work. The idea was not only to obtain data for my research, but also to give something back to British Deaf community by passing on my knowledge on haiku and sign language poetry to Deaf people, and also to develop a large publicly available corpus of haiku poems for the general community and for future research.

³ This site is currently unavailable (as of February 2008)

This idea of a poetry festival or a haiku gathering comes from both the side of traditional Japanese haiku and from Deaf literature. Thus, this event in itself is a fusion of two poetic traditions.

It is well-known that such face-to-face gatherings are an indispensable part of Deaf culture. As Peters (2000) observes, Deaf people “greatly value the immediacy of personal experience and the more intensive social interaction” (35). Moreover, empowerment of Deaf people through such events is very important. Such occasions as poetry festivals contribute to public awareness that Deaf people, a cultural-linguistic minority, really possess a literature.

Face-to-face gatherings are also deeply rooted in Japanese haiku culture, as haiku is believed to be a collaborative form of poetry (see Chapter 4 for details). They are called “haiku gatherings” (句会, *kukai*), in which a group of poets sit together, compose, perform, and discuss the best poems. As Furutachi (1989) summarises:

“Haiku is not monologue but dialogue. Haiku has existed as ‘group literature’, where poets sit together and exchange their greetings. They wish for an eye-to-eye, heart-to-heart communication, which is the essence of group literature. Haiku gatherings are the true places for haiku composition” (Furutachi 1989).

Nowadays, many haiku contests in Japan take place as a contribution to a literary magazine. With the spread of the internet, online contests have become popular for the younger generation. But traditional gatherings retain their popularity.

In cases of a contest by contribution or through the internet, most likely a panel of experienced poets select the best poems. In haiku gatherings, on the other hand, peer evaluation among the members of the haiku gathering (sometimes combined with the panel of leading poets) is indispensable.

Each haiku gathering is organised in a different way, but essentially they have the following procedure.

1. Composition

Each member composes several haiku poems. The topic is often assigned by the organiser. Participants then write their poem on a piece of paper and put it in a box without putting their names on the paper.

2. Reading

A selected person (or everyone in turn) reads out the poems from the box.

3. Screening

Participants vote for a poem (or poems) they like most. Normally they are not allowed to vote for their own work.

4. Selection

Although the screening takes place, selection of best poems is not a simple decision by majority. The group will take time to discuss and decide which one(s) to give a prize to among those which have been selected.

5. Commendation

Winning poems are announced and the composer's identity is revealed, followed by further discussion and comment on the poems.

The BSL Haiku Festival was designed following the pattern of typical haiku gatherings, especially the competition part.

3.3.1. Overview of the festival

The festival was held on the weekend of the 29th and 30th of July 2006. It mainly consisted of two parts: workshops and the competition. Workshops gave the participants an idea of what sign language haiku is. People were then encouraged to create their own haiku poems, which were performed in a competition the next day. There were several other events during the festival: a poetry evening (in which established Deaf poets performed their poems), a computer-assisted practice session, and a so-called "Haiku Walk" (see section 3.3.5).

3.3.2. People involved

Organiser: myself (hearing)
Panel: four Deaf poets, and one hearing haiku poet
Staff: two interpreters, one general support, one camera man (all hearing)
Participants: seven Deaf (one male, six female), one hearing woman (accompanying her Deaf partner). Among them, five took part in the competition.

The participants were all Deaf (apart from the one accompanying partner, who did not take part in the competition), and none of them had much previous experience of sign language poetry. Five established poets were invited as a panel. They were three British Deaf poets (Paul Scott, John Wilson, and Richard Carter), one Swedish Deaf poet (Johanna Mesch), and one hearing poet (Alan Summers). John Wilson and Johanna Mesch had worked upon haiku prior to the festival, whereas Richard Carter and Paul Scott had not. Alan Summers is a published hearing haiku poet based in Bristol. He was also involved in the organisation process. He does not know BSL.

There was a very good rapport among the whole group. They had meals and drinks together, and many of them stayed in the same hotel. Participants who did not know each other before the weekend quickly became good friends, and some of them took part in another Deaf art event together later. This is one of the major achievements of this festival.

3.3.3. Workshops

Three workshops were organised in order to familiarise the participants with the idea of what haiku is: one on traditional Japanese haiku (given by myself), one on English haiku (given by Alan Summers), and one on sign language haiku (by myself based on my research up to that point). Part of each of the workshops took the style of presentation using power point slides, but we also had an ample time for free discussion and question-and-answer sessions. The interest of participants varied:

some people were eager to learn the concept of traditional Japanese haiku, while others were more keen on learning its application to sign language.

3.3.4. Poetry Evening

In the evening of the first day, four Deaf poets on the panel gave a one-hour stage performance in Bristol Deaf club. They performed poems and/or gave a talk about their poetic activities. At the end of the evening, they performed a series of haiku poems, which was requested by the organiser. I asked them to create three haiku quartets: *Day*, *Year* and *Life*. These three quartets (twelve poems) will be analysed in detail in Chapter 13.

3.3.5. Haiku Walk

On the second day, the participants took part in a semi-guided walk in a park, where they had an opportunity to get inspiration from nature for their haiku poems. This walk was guided by Alan Summers based on the Japanese tradition of 吟行 *ginkō* (the poets wander around in nature to find a topic for their work). He distributed a notebook and encouraged the participants to sketch a scene or note down their ideas for a poem. This helped participants develop their ideas on the poems. The theme of Maria Gibson's *Water*, for example, draws upon her experience during this walk. Gibson observed the stream of water in the park (Figure 3.1. a) and sketched it down on her notebook with her awareness of similarity between water stream and signing (b), and then composed a poem called *Water* (c). Siobhan O'Donovan's *Twin Trees* also got the inspiration from her observation during the haiku walk.

Water by Maria Gibson

I watch the flow of water
It runs, runs, and runs!
And never stops at all

I thought: it's the same with Deaf people.
We sign, sign, and sign!
And never stop at all

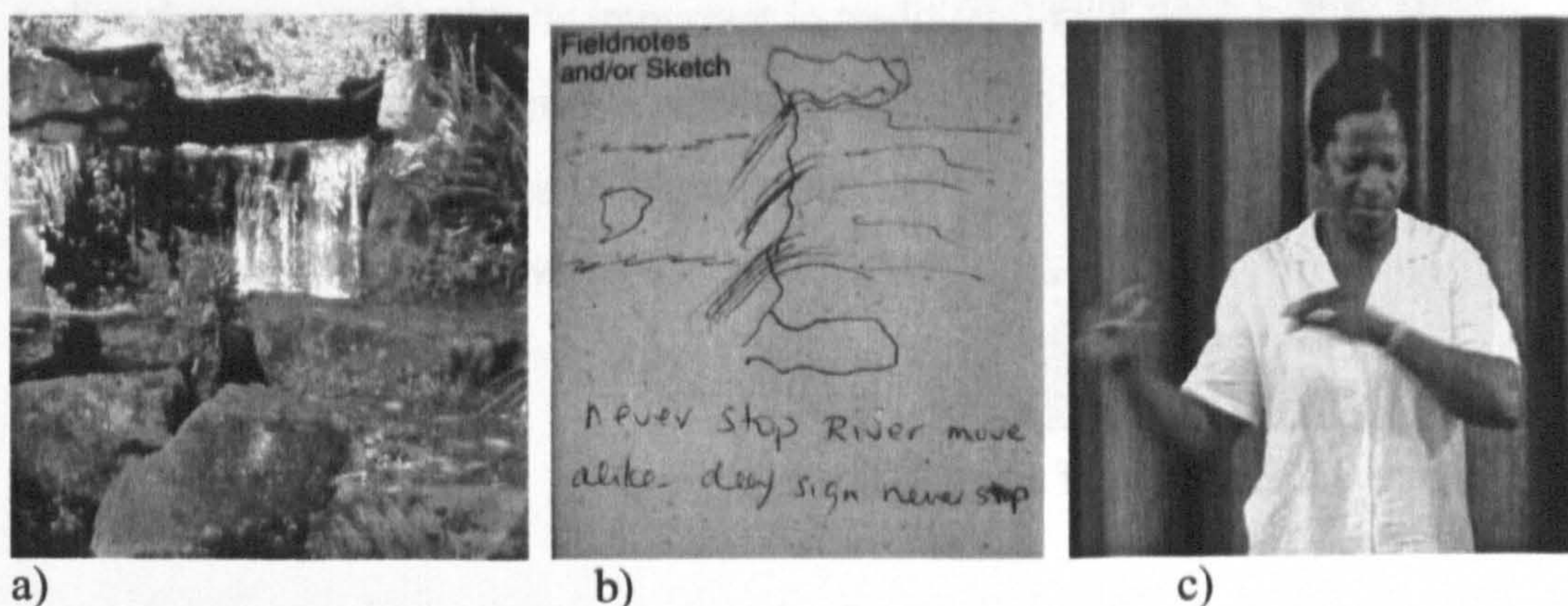


Figure 3.1 The creation process of Maria Gibson's *Water*

3.3.6. Competition

The competition was the main part of the festival. Five participants (one male, four female) took part. The general descriptions/rules for the competition were:

- Each participant was allowed to compose and perform up to five haiku poems
- They were allowed to give a brief explanation about their poems before the performance. Bauman (1998) points out that, because sign language poetry is new and may appear “strange” to mainstream art world, Deaf artists often have the urge to “explain” their work in displaying it to a wider public.
- One haiku poem had to be on a fixed topic given to them (in this case, the topic was “cat”). This is based on the tradition of Japanese haiku gatherings (see above).
- Although emphasis had been placed on the brief nature of haiku, there was no time limit on individual poems (but participants were asked to finish their entire performance and explanation within ten minutes)
- Haiku does not normally have a title. But in this competition, they were asked to give a title to their poem for the sake of convenience.
- Participants were asked to start and finish their performance with hands-down posture. This made clear to everyone the beginning and the end of the poem (which was useful later in the editing process).



Figure 3.2 Example of a hands-down posture

3.3.7. Selection of prizes

After the competition, the panel members (with the interpreters) were called up to have a discussion of the prizes. The discussion lasted for about 45 minutes. I had suggested possible types of the prizes based on traditional Japanese haiku contests and also on general criteria of being a good signed poem, and the panel agreed to follow that categorisation (see below). The idea was to give everyone at least one prize.

I was present in the latter half of the discussion, but intervened only when asked for clarification. I wanted the panel discussion to be Deaf-oriented.

Prizes 1st to 3rd: based on overall excellence, both theme-wise and form-wise, and general fluency of signing

Audience Prize: based on vote from the participants; given to a participant (not to an individual poem)

Bashō Prize: a poem which shows the haiku-ness best

Dot. Miles Prize: a participant who represents with excellence the nature of sign language poetry (for example, visual and kinetic use of space, rich facial expressions, and so on)

Originality Prize: a participant creating poems which hold ideas or forms which are highly innovative (such as unique perspectives)

There were no strict guidance criteria and the panel needed considerable discussion to decide the prizes.

All the prizes except the audience prize were decided by the panel. I mentioned earlier that peer evaluation is important in traditional haiku contests. However, because sign language haiku is a new and young field, it is also important to have experienced poets (both in sign language poetry and spoken language poetry) select the best poems. The peer evaluation is reflected in the audience prize.

3.3.8. Results

1st prize: Maria Gibson *Kettle*

2nd prize: Nigel Howard *Deaf*

3rd prize: Donna Williams *Cat*

Audience Prize: Nigel Howard

Bashō Prize: Nigel Howard *England*

Dot. Miles Prize: Penny Beschizza

Originality Prize: Siobhan O'Donovan

Most of the prize-winning poems will be discussed in Chapter 14.

3.3.9. Achievements

The major achievement of this event is the emergence of a corpus that can be used for future research and enjoyment of the genre (as already discussed). But apart from that, it provided a good opportunity for non-experienced Deaf people to become closer to sign language poetry. As explained in Chapter 1, haiku is very approachable, and it encourages lay people to try and experience the world of poetry. For example, one of the participants, Maria Gibson, was never interested in poetry before because she thought she was not able to do it herself. But in the end she won the first prize which gave her a great deal of encouragement and confidence. In the interview, she said she would like to pursue her poetic activity. Another participant,

Linda Day, said that poetry was something she always wanted to do, but just did not know where to start. This festival gave her a good first step.

Not only Deaf participants but also some of the staff experienced something new. The camera operator had never worked with Deaf people before, but he enjoyed the festival so much that now he thinks of working with Deaf people more often. The hearing poet Alan Summers also obtained new ideas from Deaf participants regarding the haiku form. The attempt to build a bridge between hearing and Deaf poets was successful. A future collaboration between Deaf and hearing poets in Bristol was suggested.

3.3.10. Webpage

Traditional haiku gatherings have an evanescent nature (the attitude to regard each gathering as “once-in-lifetime” which is prevailing in other Japanese art forms such as the tea ceremony) and less emphasis is put on the archive of past events (Furutachi 1989). However, one of my main purposes of hosting this festival is to build up a corpus, and therefore the outcome of the event is as important as the event itself.

The website was designed by a company called *Eyegaze*, which provides technological support to Deaf people. The webpage was designed in a way that it is easy for a wider public, both hearing and Deaf viewers, to obtain essential information on sign language haiku and about the event that took place. It contains a written summary of what sign language haiku is, accompanied by videos of the performances. It is the first webpage that provides substantial information on sign language haiku. (Robert Panara Haiku Contests do contain videos of haiku poems in ASL, but they do not provide structured information on the haiku form and on sign language haiku).

The webpage address is <http://haiku.eyegaze.tv/index.html>

3.3.11. Some issues raised

Obtaining permission

I prepared a document asking permission to use the recorded materials in this festival in my research. The document also includes the permission for publicising the video materials on a website. All the people involved in this festival (participants, panel, and the staff) signed this document at the beginning of the event. The content of the document was explained clearly by the organiser at the beginning of the festival.

However, two participants came to me at the end of the festival, and said that they did not want to show their performance to a wider public. They have never taken part in a poetry competition, and their attitude changed before and after the performance (perhaps they were not so confident about what they did, and that was when they really started to think about the meaning of being recorded and published).

“Competition” in Deaf and sign language context

The idea of competition is reinforced neither by traditional Japanese haiku nor general Deaf culture. Haiku prefers mutual appreciation of good poems among a group of poets rather than individual attempts to win a prize. Deaf community values emphasise group achievement rather than individual prominence (Sutton-Spence 2005). Therefore the appropriateness of the idea of “competition” needs consideration. It is also the nature of sign language literature in general that artists can never be anonymous (recall that in traditional haiku gatherings members do not know the identity of the author while they are discussing the poems). The notion of competition also becomes difficult as the division between art work and artists becomes blurred (Rose 2006).

I went ahead with the competition style because I believed that it was a good way to develop the notion of “good” poems. It is very important to encourage all participants no matter what or how they performed (especially in a Deaf context with Deaf people being a cultural minority). But at the same time, they need something to aim for. By introducing the concept of competition, it makes (or helps) participants

ponder upon how to improve their performance and to some extent raise their motivation.

How to decide a “good signed haiku poem”?

In relation to competition, there is an issue of how to judge poems. There was a significant difference in the criteria between Deaf and hearing members of the panel. Alan Summers, who does not have knowledge of BSL and sign language poetry, mainly discussed the prizes from the viewpoint of haiku quality. Deaf poets focused more on how “Deaf” a poem is, rather than how it stands out as a haiku poem (i.e. they judged the poems in a similar way as they would judge a signed poem in general). This justifies my attempt to bring in poets from different backgrounds. Sign language haiku is a fusion of two poetic forms, and thus no single set of criteria exists to identify a good sign language haiku poem.

3.4. Glossing and Translation

The poems in the corpus are transcribed using glossing. Signs are transcribed using English words in small capital letters (for the details of glossing, see the ‘Conventions’ section).

English translation accompanies the glosses. Translations of the poems from Robert Panara Haiku Contest were provided by the contest organiser. Johanna Mesch provided the translation and glossing of the FSL haiku quartets. The rest of the poems were glossed and translated by myself (unless otherwise specified) with the help of my supervisor, English/BSL interpreters, and other fellow researchers. These English translations are purely used for “functional equivalence” (Rutherford 1993; ix), and do not serve as aesthetic counterparts for the original signed poems. As most sign language researchers would acknowledge, the two-dimensional written form cannot adequately reproduce the original signed text. As Bouchaudeau (1994) claims, “[w]hat is unique to sign language has nothing to do with words and thus untranslatable” (27). I will provide as many pictures as possible to make up for this inadequacy.

3.5. Analysis

The major part of this dissertation is the actual analyses of those collected haiku poems. My analyses were guided both by deductive (top-down) and inductive (bottom-up) approaches. Chapters 6-12 pick up specific poetic phenomena and look for examples in the corpus. Chapters 13 and 14 view it the other way around and look at the material first and describe various poetic devices used to highlight each poem.

Reading in and reading out of the poem

Most of the analyses here do not take into account if a certain poetic effect was intended by the poet or it is generated by the audience. This is because it is often impossible to tell what is intended and what is not, and also because it does not really matter for our appreciation of the poems.

Readers often “read in” to a poem and find many things which may or may not be intended by the poet. The folklorist Alan Dundes suggested that some interpretations in folklore “are read into, not out of, the tales” (1965; 108). Reading out of the tales/poems means that the readers receive the meaning made visible by the author, whereas reading into the tales/poems mean the readers can develop their own interpretation regardless of whether or not the author intended to convey to them.

Some people believe reading into the poem has negative effects. Stanley (1994), in his approach to Old English literature, emphasises the importance of literal qualities in the poems, and criticises some of the deconstructionist approaches as being no more than reading into a poem. He was afraid of the possibility that the act of reading into a poem creates an entirely arbitrary connection between what it says and what it means in literature.

However, an alternative view is that readers should be encouraged to read into a poem, especially into a haiku poem. Free interpretation is an essential part of haiku. As illustrated in Chapter 4, and throughout this work, the essence of haiku is

to trigger a vast imagination in readers' mind. It is simply not enough to follow the literal qualities of the poems.

Another justification of reading into a poem comes from the issue of poets' lack of awareness. Poets themselves are not always aware of what they are doing, and thus poems can provide (i.e. readers can interpret) different things regardless of the poet's intention. As Jacques Derrida says, an author "might always say more, less, or something other than what he would mean" (1976;158). This is especially true in young poetic fields such as sign language haiku where the poets are still at the stage of experimenting with possible ways to express themselves.

This research focuses on both intended and possible non-intended elements of a poem, and both literal and interpreted meanings. A summary comparing the effect of reading meaning out of a text and reading meaning into a text may be seen in Table 3.2.

	Reading Out of	Reading Into
Readers' role	More passive	More active
Meaning	Literal meaning	Interpreted meaning
Sources	Visible text	Visible/invisible text
Topic/Theme	Topic	Theme
Author's intention	Matters	Does not matter

Table 3.2 The contrast between reading *out of* the poem and *into* the poem

3.6. Summary

This chapter explained about my research, especially focusing on the creation of the corpus of sign language haiku. The emergence of a corpus makes it possible to conduct both quantitative and qualitative analyses through close reading.

Before analysing the actual poems in this corpus, however, I will overview the features of traditional Japanese haiku in the next chapter in order to appreciate the nature of haiku in sign language.

Chapter 4

Haiku

Haiku is a humour; haiku is a greeting; haiku is an impromptu.

Yamamoto Kenichi

4.1. Introduction

Haiku is the shortest poetic genre in the world. Japanese haiku consists of 17 sounds (syllables), divided by 5-7-5 sections (lines)⁴. From such brevity comes some of the richest imagination in poetry. The essence of haiku is to create maximum effect based on the minimum number of words.

The brevity of haiku results in strict disciplines in both the form and theme of haiku. This chapter considers such basic rules and features of traditional Japanese haiku, with occasional references to other spoken or signed languages. Some of the features are applicable to sign language haiku; others are not. However, even when they are not applicable, it is important to understand the fundamental characteristics of the original haiku form, in order to appreciate why this particular form of poetry has become popular in sign language literature.

4.2. Historical background

4.2.1. Overview

Japanese written poetry dates back to the 8th century, when an anthology of more than 4,000 poems (called *Manyōshō*) was compiled. Although the poems in

⁴ In the discussions below, I will use the term “syllable” to mean a basic sound unit in Japanese (which consists of either the combination of a consonant and a vowel, or a vowel on its own, or an alveolar nasal [n]), and “line” to refer to each section of 5-7-5. I am aware that these terms are controversial and often considered not appropriate to use without precise definitions, but such terminology is not the main focus of this dissertation.

this anthology varied in their forms, many of them already showed a preference for the alternation of five and seven syllables. Out of this tradition, a fixed 31 syllable (5-7-5-7-7) came to be established as a form of poetry called *tanka* or *waka*.

During medieval times in Japan, many people were engaged in a poetic activity called *renga*, in which a single *tanka* was divided into two parts and each part was completed by a different poet. This separation of the first and the second parts, although neither part was yet independent of the other, is generally considered to be the origin of haiku.

The founder of haiku is traditionally said to be the 17th century poet Matsuo Bashō (1644-1694), who developed the first three lines of *tanka* (called *hokku*) into an independent form of poetry, which he called *haikai*. Bashō set up disciplines which are now considered to be defining features of haiku, such as inclusion of a season word (季語, *kigo*) and so-called “cutting morpheme” (切れ字, *kireji*), and objective description of nature.

Season words are obligatory in traditional haiku. Each haiku poem has to include one word which refers to a season in which the poem is set. Some of the season words are straightforward (such as “cherry-blossoms” for spring, “snow” for winter), but others are not. For example, things that exist throughout the year are still considered to belong to one particular season (e.g. “moon” for autumn).

Cutting morphemes come at the end of the first or the second line, and are used to produce a brief pause and to divide the haiku into two parts. The pause is not only a physical one but also represents a pause in the semantic content. In English translation of Japanese haiku, punctuation marks such as ‘...’ or ‘;’ often indicate this cutting function (Higginson 1985). In the following examples 4a, *ya* functions as a cutting morpheme:

4a)

Natsukusa *ya* tsuwamono domo ga yume no ato (Bashō)

Summer fields;
the remains of ancient soldiers’ dreams

Furuike *ya* kawazu tobikomu misuno oto (Bashō)
Old pond;

A frog jumps in
Sound of water

In these two poems, the morpheme *ya* separates the first image (a vast summer field in front of the poet or an old, still, and quiet pond) from the rest of the poem (the reference to battlefield or the sound of frog jumping in). This gives the reader to pause and ponder upon the contrast between the first and second images.

The use of the word “haiku” was initiated by Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902), another influential 19th century poet. Shiki was a revolutionary haiku poet, introducing a new concept of haiku as a *sketch of life*, a strictly objective/realistic method (see discussion below). The haiku from the period of Bashō to Shiki is regarded as “classic”, whereas those haiku that come after Shiki are considered to be “modern haiku”.

4.2.2. Collaborative aspect of classic Japanese poetry

One of the characteristics of Japanese classic poetry is its collaborative nature. Tanka was created both individually and as a group work, and haiku developed out of such joint poetic activity. Such a collective art form is “unlike anything that existed in the Western tradition before the twentieth century” (Gurga 2003: 119).

4.3. Basic features of haiku

In this section, a summary of five fundamental characteristics of haiku will be provided. Those features include: brevity, implicitness, simplicity, objectivity, and concreteness.

4.3.1. Brevity

Brevity is the defining feature of haiku. Traditional Japanese haiku consists of only 17 syllables. Haiku in other languages are also very short, and sometimes called “six-second poems” (Alan Summers, personal conversation).

The significance of such brevity is inestimable. It is not too much to say that other fundamental features of haiku, such as implicitness, objectivity, and a powerful imaginative response generated in readers’ minds, are all secondary to the importance of this concise nature. Brevity is the feature that distinguishes haiku from other forms of writing. As Higginson (1985) repeatedly suggests, “The brevity of haiku forces a deeper, more disciplined approach to language than any other kind of writing” and “Brevity, and the consequent stripping away of the unnecessary, provide haiku with advantages not always found in longer kinds of writing” (120). Brevity may also be the only possible definition that binds together haiku in different media including sign language haiku.

To illustrate the importance of the brevity in haiku, Widdowson (1975) reduced William Wordsworth’s 32-lines lyric *The Solitary Reaper* to the three-line haiku form step by step, cutting out apostrophic expressions, redundant expressions and some concrete descriptions. By taking these elements off, the poem became more objective and detached. The elimination of detailed descriptions deprives the poem of dimensions, but makes it more notional and universal.

As we have seen, haiku provides abundant scope for interpretation. In this sense, brevity in form and abundance in meaning are not contradictory. The fewer the number of words, the more possibility is left with readers. This capacity of haiku could be the reason why it attracts a great number of poets in different languages.

4.3.2. Implicitness

Closely connected to its concise nature is the fact that haiku does not favour explicitness. Expressing too much is considered to be undesirable in haiku. In many cases, the poets would rather leave the message *inferred* than *explicitly stated*. This

forms the essence of haiku. For example, observe the following haiku poem written by Tomizawa Kakio.

4e)

Ryūboku yo semete minami o muite nagareyo
(Driftwood, drift toward the south, at least)

This poem may be highly symbolic, but what it symbolises is not clear. This does not mean that it is an abstract poem. It does talk about a particular scene in nature: the poet is addressing to a piece of driftwood which came floating on the river toward him. But the reader cannot help but feel that there is another message implied beneath the surface language. However, the poet does not explicitly refer to any interpretation. For example, the significance attached to the direction of the south (does it symbolise the warmth and fertility?), or the reason why he says “at least” (is he sympathetic toward the driftwood which is deprived of its life?), remain a mystery. If the poet tried to explain it explicitly, it would not only limit the free imagination of the readers, but also spoil the gracefulness of the language.

The implicit nature of haiku is strongly linked to Japanese culture, which favours inferences. It also contributes to the basic economy of haiku because by implying something the poem can trigger a vast far-reaching imaginative process in the reader’s mind using only a few words.

4.3.3. Simplicity

Haiku uses simple language. Japanese haiku is often written in archaic language but it uses plain and daily vocabulary, so that anyone can understand what it says. Haiku is demanding because readers need to read between lines, not because the language is difficult. Also, haiku avoids any kind of explanation; it describes a poetic scene with simple language and leaves everything else to the interpretation of the reader. Verity (1996) states:

A true haiku should be a simple and direct expression (sometimes an exclamation) of pure response to a glimpse or a scene in life, with no intervention from logical intellect. The good haiku is a picture in words, rich in suggestiveness – not an explanation or argument. (33-34)

Simplicity of haiku is interrelated with the concrete nature of haiku below.

4.3.4. Objectivity

Another very important feature of Japanese haiku is objectivity. It is not considered appropriate to use emotional expressions. The objectivity of haiku was already an essential aspect of classic haiku (Bashō) but it was particularly reinforced by Shiki in the 19th century.

Shiki introduced the concept of *shasei* (a sketch) into literature. It is an idea borrowed from painting. He proposed that a poet should *copy* the target *as it is*, without inserting any subjective thought of the poet. This approach, together with the movement of realism in literature, became very popular in Japanese poetry. Especially in haiku, the doctrine of objectivity and avoidance of emotional expressions prevails. It is clearly stated in “Eight Taboos in Creating Haiku” by Mizuhara Shūōshi (1960), one of the most influential haiku poets in the 20th century. In two out of eight articles on proscriptions in haiku, he refers to the importance of NOT showing emotion in haiku:

1. Do not make haiku without reference to a season.
2. Do not make haiku with reference to more than one season.
3. Do not write about imaginative things.
4. Do not use both *-ya* and *-kana* in a single haiku.⁵
5. Do not exceed the number of syllables.
6. Do not expose emotion.
7. Do not exaggerate emotion.
8. Do not copy existing haiku.

(emphasis added)

⁵ Both *-ya* and *-kana* are particles of exclamation.

However, this does not mean that haiku is emotionless art. It is capable of appealing to readers' emotions, but the form of haiku does not reveal the emotion of the poet. For example,

4f)
Dead cat...
open mouthed
to the pouring rain
(Michael McClintock)

is describing a scene which is potentially very emotional, but its *language* is free from any sentiment attached to the dead cat.

4.3.5. Concreteness

Related to the notion of *shasei*, objectivity and simplicity, haiku is characterised by its use of concrete language. Haiku simply describes the things/scene in front of the poet. It does not talk about imagined things or abstract ideas (see no.3 in Mizuhara's list of "taboos" above). Nonetheless, such "here and now" topics can have universal appeal to the readers.

4g)
natsukusa ni kikansha no sharin kite tomaru (Yamaguchi Seichi)

in summer grass
a steam engine's wheels
come and stop
(translation by W.J. Higginson)

Inexperienced readers might feel at a loss how to interpret this haiku, but this is the true charm of appreciating haiku. It triggers an ample scope for imagination. It opens many possibilities. At one end of the creative process, there is a simple and concrete description of an everyday scene, and at the other end there are as many possible outputs as the number of readers.

The concrete language of haiku suggests two layers of interpretation. Readers often need to understand both what haiku *says* (topic) and what it *means* (theme).

While the topic of a haiku is a simple and concrete description of things, its theme can be more complex, abstract, and universal. As Faverio (2001) describes:

...(we) have observation of a naturalion which hints at something significant beyond appearances: a theme behind the topic. The effect is to get the reader to ponder on what that might be (2).

This notion of “theme beyond topic” is important in understanding haiku in any language. We will discuss the themes of sign language haiku behind the language in Chapter 7.

4.4. Other features of traditional haiku

4.4.1. Syllabic prosody

Haiku is an invention of the Japanese language. Much of its nature comes from the fact that it has a “syllabic prosody” (Verity 1996: 31). Japanese is a syllable-based language, which results in a unique rhythmic pattern in the poetry. Syllabic prosody leads to a very monotonous rhythm, characteristic in Japanese haiku. This is because each syllable will be produced with the same length of time and will be given equal stress, as in the following example:

4h)

Sá-mí-dá-ré-wó á-tsú-mé-té-há-yá-shí mó-gá-mí-gá-wá (Bashō)
Rain in May; poured and flowing fast; River Mogami

Stress is equally distributed to each syllable (as shown with an accent symbol ´), independent of the lexical significance. There is no way to stress one word and add importance to it. It produces a flat rhythm. Also, the fact that most syllables in Japanese end with one of the five vowels adds certain monotony to the language. Such monotonous rhythm contributes to the detached and objective impression of traditional Japanese haiku.

This syllabic aspect becomes a challenge for non-Japanese haiku. While some poets try to maintain the regular 5-7-5 syllable pattern, others seek other ways to

grasp the spirit of haiku. Jack Kerouac realised the inability of English to create a strict 17 syllable haiku and proposed a very loose definition of haiku in Western languages:

A "Western Haiku" need not concern itself with the seventeen syllables since Western languages cannot adapt themselves to the fluid syllabic Japanese. I propose the "Western Haiku" simply say a lot in three short lines in any Western language. (*Scattered Poems* 1971)

Thus, on one hand haiku imposes a strict discipline on its form, but on the other hand it is highly tolerant of various amendments made to it. This flexibility made it possible for non-Japanese writers to compose haiku in their own language, but it also poses a question of how much such extension is possible before it is no longer a haiku.

4.4.2. Juxtaposition

To juxtapose is to put two things together in order to highlight a new relationship between them. In many cases, these two elements are seemingly unrelated and the reader is expected to find a link. Montgomery et al (1992) define it as:

The combination of two or more elements in such a way that connecting links between them are suppressed, and where there is some degree of surprise or puzzlement in their close placement (145).

Juxtaposition is commonly found in haiku. Poets arrange two apparently unrelated things in parallel and create an unexpected association. It is also termed *collision* (二物衝突, *nibutsu shōtotsu*), because the two things involved in juxtaposition are often so unrelated that putting them together may appear somewhat reckless. Such collision is considered to be successful when the blending makes the readers think and come up with a new and original relationship between these apparently unrelated objects. In other words, by fusing two elements, haiku poets can add a third element - the process of linking - and increase the depth of appreciation. For example,

4i)

kaki kueba kanega narunari Hryuji (Shiki)

Tasting a persimmon; the temple bell starts to ring; at Hōryūji

In this example, tasting a persimmon (common autumn fruit in Japan) and hearing the bell of Hōryūji (an ancient temple in Nara, Japan; said to be the oldest existing wooden building in the world) appear to have nothing to do with each other. In order to appreciate this poem, readers need to fill the gap between these two separate images. It may be a certain dullness that links the two, represented by the taste of a persimmon (they are sweet, but they do not have a strong taste) and the low and heavy echoing sound of a big bell. Or it can be the image of a relaxing autumn day triggered through such dull impression.

Moreover, these two images are bound together by contrast - a contrast between a small persimmon in the poet's hand and the grand bell of an old temple, between the anonymity of common fruits and the uniqueness of Hōryūji. There is also an example of synesthesia, in which two different senses (taste and sound) are put together in a single poem (see the section below).

A successful juxtaposition hints at *something* in our mind that allows us to connect two separate images. The more unexpected the connection is, the more powerful its effect can be. The American writer Allan Ginsberg calls this "something" a *lightning* in the mind.

I was thinking then about what Kerouac and I thought about Haiku ----two visual images, opposite poles, which are connected by a lightning in the mind.... Two disparate images, unconnected, which the mind connects.

(from a *New York Quarterly* interview with Mr. Ginsberg in Packard (1987)).

4.4.3. Fragmental nature

Another important aspect of the haiku form is that, as Faverio (2001) points out, haiku seldom consists of a full sentence. It is a poem of fragments. Observe the linguistic structure of the following poems:

4j)

na	no	hana	ya	tsuki	wa	higashi	ni	hi	wa	nishi	ni
green	PAR	flower	PAR	moon	PAR	east	PAR	sun	PAR	west	PAR
	(POSS)		(CUT)		(TOP)		(LOC)		(TOP)		(LOC)

(Yosa Buson)

(a field of) green flowers; moon in east; sun in west

4k)

natsukusa	ya	tsuwamono	domo	ga	yume	no	ato
summer-grass	PAR	soldiers	(plural)	PAR	dream	PAR	ruin
	(CUT)			(POSS)		(POSS)	

(Bashō)

Summer fields; the remains of ancient soldiers' dreams

These haiku cannot be proper sentences, as they lack predicates.

The practical reason for such fragmental nature is simply that it is difficult to construct a full sentence within the limit of 17 syllables. Brevity requires unnecessary words to be stripped out. However, this distinction out of necessity creates another feature of haiku. It contributes to the fact that haiku is *a poem of essence*. It captures a moment of life and creates a sharp and vivid impression. In order to achieve this, a fragmented collection of words rather than fully composed sentences is often a better medium.

Another effect of such fragmental haiku is that it often leaves a lingering emotion behind. Haiku is open-ended, as if the sentence might continue. As discussed earlier, this is due to the fact that haiku is originally only a part of tanka, which usually has a complete sentence structure.

Significantly, such a fragmental nature does not make haiku “telegraphic”. Although an incomplete sentence, haiku uses otherwise grammatical language and it flows naturally. Occasionally we are directed to read between lines, but most readers can successfully understand the meaning without the need for a full sentence.

When a poet decides not to use a full sentence in haiku, it is important to know which linguistic units to omit and which to retain (omission is an essential skill in

creating haiku). There are certain grammatical units which are more likely to be omitted than others – such as connectives and predicates.

Higginson (1985) makes an interesting observation about why connectives need to be left out. Connectives unnecessarily make an explicit link between words in a haiku poem. This spoils readers' independent awareness of interacting images. Such interaction should take place naturally and gradually in the reader's mind without linguistic help.

Omission of a predicate promotes the objective description of a thing. Verbs or adjectives *explain* actions or attributes of an entity, whereas a noun *represents* an entity itself. Thus nouns are preferred in haiku over verbs (as the poet Archibald MacLeish said, "A poem should not mean. But be.").

Predicates form a statement or a proposition, which is linked to subjective viewpoints. Predicates are also bound to temporal modification (past, present, future tense). In contrast, nouns do not have the concept of time by themselves. Without these subjective or temporal modifications, a noun phrase can take the character of a static photograph. Haiku makes use of these features of a noun.

A frequent technique in haiku is a 'noun stop' (体言止、*taigen-dome*). It means to end a sentence with a noun instead of a predicate. In a narrow sense, it specifically means a sentence which consists of a noun and a modifying clause. In Japanese modifiers always come before the noun, which makes a noun stop possible.

There are several poetic effects of a noun stop. First of all, because it is an unusual way to finish a sentence (or rather, it leaves a sentence unfinished), it draws extra attention to the form of the sentence and its implication. Secondly, through omitting a predicate, it helps create a detached description. Finally, because the sentence is incomplete, a noun stop creates a powerful lingering effect.

Some haiku poems simply arrange nouns in a row (4l); some add a noun at the end as part of juxtaposition as in (4i) which we discussed in 4.4.2; others take the form of a modifying clause as in our earlier example of Bashō (4h).

4l)
meniwa aoba, yamahototogisu, hatsugatsuo

Green leaves for the eyes; a mountain cuckoo, the first bonito⁶ of the season
(Bashō)

4i)
kaki kueba kanega narunari Hryuji
Tasting a persimmon; the temple bell starts to ring; at Hōryūji
(Shiki)

4h)
samidare wo , atsume-te haya-shi, mogami gawa
Rain in May; poured and flowing fast; River Mogami
(River Mogami, which flows fast with gathered rain in May)
(Bashō)

The following example, however, has a different effect.

4m)
samidare ya, taigawo maeni, ie niken
Rain in May; next to a huge river; two huts
(Buson)

The tension of this haiku is mainly due to the fact that it ends with a noun phrase “two huts” in contrast to a big river accumulating the heavy rains in May. This noun phrase is the end of a “zooming-in” perspective akin to a close-up shot in film (from a reference to the general weather to a river, and then from the river to a pair of small huts), and functions as the climax of the poem. The hopelessness of two small huts is best expressed by the noun stop that cuts off any available explanation.

4.4.4. Perspective Shift

Haiku often presents a single snapshot of a scene as in 4n):

4n)
akizorawo futatsuni tateri shiitaiju
Autumn sky; divided into two; by a big chinquapin tree.
(Takahama Kyoshi)

⁶ A popular fish in Japan, closely associated with the arrival of summer.

But sometimes the vision in haiku either ‘zooms in’ or ‘zooms out’ along the way. Buson’s poem above (4m) had a zooming-in effect (rainy weather > river > huts). The same effect can be observed in Kobayashi Issa’s following haiku:

4o)
yuzuki ya nabe no naka nite naku tanishi
Evening moon; snails are singing in the pot

This haiku shows a shift in focus between the large-scale moon in the sky to small snails in a pot. This shift highlights the contrast and emphasises the smallness of the snails. Similarly,

4p)
Banryoku no naka ya akono ha haesomuru
In deep green; my son’s tooth is coming out
(Nakamura Kusatao)

The new tooth of a small child is compared with the deep green leaves of summer. This comparison is vividly presented through shifting a focus from the vast greenness of leaves to one tiny white tooth of the child.

The zooming-out effect is also popular in haiku as in the following poem by Issa.

4q)
suzume no ko, soko noke soko noke, onma ga tooru
Baby sparrows, go away, go away! A horsie is coming

Our attention is first on baby sparrows and then zoomed out to see the whole situation in which the horse is coming along the street.

4r)
Kōtō ni hato ooki hi ya sōtsugyōsu
School steeple, pigeons are gathering around; graduation
(Kusatao)

This haiku gathers the readers’ attention to one concrete image of a school steeple at the beginning, and ends with the reference to a general term “graduation”. Readers are slowly ushered from a zoomed-in focus on the steeple, pigeons gathering around it, and then to the graduation ceremony. The zooming effect is used

to emphasise the contrast between parts and whole, particular and general, and concrete and abstract. There is a certain psychological shift of focus in this haiku (see Chapter 11 for more discussion of this particular poem in relation to a poetic space).

Perspective shift is an important skill in haiku, as it adds depth to the poem. By changing the focus, a haiku can show different viewpoints within a very short span of time. One of the characteristics of the early 20th century haiku poets is the technique to create a pseudo-perspective by combining the distant view and the foreground.

4s)
imono tsuyu renzan kagewo tadashiusu
A dewdrop on a sweet potato vine
A range of mountains
Straighten their shadows
(Iida Dakotsu)

4t)
takadakato chō koyuru tani no fukasa kana
High and aloft
A butterfly is crossing
The depth of the valley
(Hara Sekitei)

Both poems create a poetic effect by foregrounding a small object (a dew drop and a butterfly) with large-scale scenery as background (a range of mountains and deep valley). The reader's gaze shifts from small-scale to large-scale views as they go through the poem, as if to shift the focus of the binoculars. This "movement" of the readers' gaze within the linear structure of the language adds great depth to the poem.

4.4.5. Sensory experiences

A successful haiku arouses vivid imagery in readers' mind through appealing directly to their senses, rather than to their logic or emotions. The poets attempt to share their sensory experience with the readers by simply reproducing it in the poetic

form. Bashō's haiku above (4l) is a good example. It expresses the freshness of a new season (summer) by juxtaposing three images which appeal to different senses (vision, sound, and taste).

Among our five senses, vision is the most common source of poetic expressions in haiku. Many haiku are visual representations of a scene in nature or in daily life. Aural expressions are also popular (such as in Shiki's persimmon haiku above), but pictorial haiku outnumber them, for "more things affect our eyes than our ears" (Rousseau (1749), quoted in Cohn (1999:7)). In this sense, a good haiku is analogous to a good photograph. Both of them capture one particular moment of life, without inserting any subjectivity of the artist, and create timeless and placeless impact. In order to achieve this effect, haiku tries to visualise the scene as vividly as possible. Making a contrast is the most common device for achieving such vivid impression. In the following example, a contrast in colours helps us develop a clear poetic image.

4u)
At sunrise I see
Tanned faces of fishermen
Among white poppies

Buson's haiku discussed earlier also shows visual contrast

4j)
Na no hana ya tsuki wa higashi ni hi wa nishi ni
(a field of) green flowers; moon in east; sun in west

This is a beautiful representation of a visual contrast in nature. It illustrates the picture of a field covered with flowers with the moon above the east horizon, rising, and the sun above the west horizon, setting. With the elementary astronomical knowledge that it is only a full moon that rises at sunset, we can imagine the complete contrast of two circles of light, temporarily located in opposite directions.

Visual representation is the forte of sign languages. One of the features sign language haiku inherited from traditional Japanese haiku is the technique of visual contrast. Buson's haiku above can be better represented in a sign language.

4.4.6. Synesthesia

The importance of senses in haiku leads to another phenomenon: synesthesia. Synesthesia is a fusion of senses. It is defined as “the perception of one sense described in terms of another” (Gurga 2003: 87). We often encounter an experience that stimulates more than one sense in our mind. Synesthesia is an attempt to capture such mingling senses and express it in the language.

For example, a Japanese idiom *kiroi koe* (literally translated as “yellow voice”) is a combination of colour (sight) and voice (sound). It is used in a sentence like “The rock star was welcomed by the yellow voice (excited shrieks) of his fans”. The images we have for the colour yellow such as vividness, brightness, and garishness, are mapped onto a high-pitch shrieking voice of excited people. The same synesthesia is found in Issa’s haiku:

4v)

Uguisu ya, kiiro na koe de, oya wo yobu

The bush warblers; calling their parents with a yellow voice

Popular expressions such as “loud colour”, “cold voice” “cool-looking dress” are all instances of synesthesia.

As is clear from Gurga’s definition, synesthesia is a kind of metaphor. The standard definition of metaphor is “understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 5). Synesthesia is “a way of enriching imagery” (Horiuchi 1989: 39) by combining two entities that belong to different domains. The difference between synesthesia and many other kinds of metaphor is that two domains involved in synesthesia do not have an abstract-concrete relationship as in a common metaphor like ARGUMENT IS WAR.

Synesthesia is common in haiku, as in Bashō’s following poem:

4w)

Umi kurete, kamo no koe, honokani shiroshi

Night has fallen on the sea

The voices of the wild ducks

Faintly white

Horiuchi (1989) classified examples of synesthesia in Japanese haiku into fifteen mapping patterns, based on the combination of the senses in source and target domains. Note that she includes in her examples not only direct synesthetic mappings but also juxtaposition of two senses as in:

4x)
Semi naku ya tsukuzuku akai kazaguruma (Issa)

A cicada is chirping:
The toy wind-mill
Is bright red
(translation by R. H. Blyth)

Table 4.1 below is the summary of her classification. The number in parentheses shows the number of haiku examples she found for each pattern (both in Japanese and in other languages); the number in square brackets shows the number of instances from other poetic forms. Note that two most common senses are sight and hearing. Especially sight is used as one of the two domains in 9 out of 15 patterns (38 out of 57 haiku examples).

1. H-S (12[1]) Searching on the wind, The hawk's cry Is the shape of its beak (J.W. Hackett)	2. H-T (5) Sara wo fumu nezumi no oto no samusa kana (Buson) The sound of a mouse Treading on a plate Is cold. (translation by R.H. Blyth)	3. H-M (6[1]) Children's play below the waterfall—laughter flows toward the sea (Alan Fisher)
4. H-H⁷ (6) Shizukasa ya iwani shimiiru semi no koe (Bashō) This quietness: the shrilling of cicadas stabs into the rocks (translation by H.G. Henderson)	5. H-O (1) Kane kiete hana no ka wa tsuku yube kana (Bashō) The temple bell dies away. The scent of flowers in the evening Is still toiling the bell. (translation by R.H. Blyth)	6. S-T (7) Samidare ya ume no ha samuki kaze no iro (Saimaro) In the summer rain, The leaves of the plum-tree Are the colour of the chill breeze (translation by R.H. Blyth)

⁷ Horiuchi includes juxtaposition of two things from a single sense as examples of synesthesia. H-H is defined as “two acoustical senses support one another harmoniously” (35).

7. S-H (4) Horo horo to yamabuki chiru ya taki no oto (Bashō) A lighting gleam: into darkness travels a night heron's scream (translation by H.G. Henderson)	8. S-O (2[1]) Sazanami ya kaze no kaori no aibyōshi (Bashō) rippling waves with the wind scent beat together (translation by W.J. Higginson)	9. S-P (1 [2]) Shiratsuyu ni sabishiki aji wo wasururu na (Bashō) Never forget The lonely taste Of the white dew. (translation by R.H. Blyth)
10. S-M (2) from the water barrel reflections of the clouds spill over the edge (Richard Boder)	11. S-S⁸ (4 [1]) Owarete wa tsuki ni kakururu hotaru kana (Ryōta) Being chased The fire-fly Hides in the moon. (translation by R. H. Blyth)	12. T-S (5) Chiru susuki samuku naru no ga me ni miyuru (Issa) Pampas grass is falling: The eye can see The cold increasing. (translation by R.H. Blyth)
13. O-T (1) inochi tsukite yakuko samuku hanare keri (Iida Dakotsu) His life has ended--- the medicine's smell coldly leaves the body (translation by Makoto Ueda)	14. O-S (1) Ume ga ka no tachinoborite ya tsuki no kasa (Buson) From the plum-tree bloom Does the fragrancy float upward? There's a halo round the moon! (translation by H.G. Henderson)	15. O-H (0 [2]) (No example)

Table 4.1 Horiuchi's classification of the combination of senses in synesthesia
(H=hearing, S=sight, T=touch, M=movement, O=olfaction, P=palate)

4.5. Summary

This chapter overviewed the history and basic characteristics of traditional Japanese haiku. We have identified a variety of features, but everything in the end comes down to brevity. Haiku's aim is to create maximum effect based on minimum words. All the other features are generated in following this simple principle. What haiku does, by keeping the language simple, concrete, direct, visual, objective, implicit and fragmental, is to trigger a vast imaginative response in the reader's mind.

There are many ways to define what haiku is, and the features dealt with in this chapter are just part of it. They were selected because they are relevant in the discussion of sign language haiku. In the next chapter, the characteristics of sign language haiku will be discussed.

⁸ Again, this is not the example of synesthesia in a strict sense as it involves only one sense.

Chapter 5

Sign Language Haiku

The signed haiku...is sign language poetry at its most disciplined.

Rachel Sutton-Spence

5.1. Introduction

Haiku's fundamental aim to create a brief, intense, and highly visual snapshot has attracted many Deaf poets and scholars. For a long time, haiku has been the only form (or discipline) of spoken language poetry which Deaf people have eagerly learned and adapted to their sign language.

It was not only poets and critics who found haiku useful in sign language. The Deaf community in general seems to find haiku very attractive. Haiku is approachable for Deaf people in that it is short and filled with visual images. Written haiku is used to develop Deaf children's literacy at school. Panara (1997) reports that Haiku's visual nature helps Deaf children form a bridge between their visual world and the written form of poetry. Haiku in sign language has been created (or translated from written haiku) and performed by Deaf poets on various occasions (as reported by Peters 2000 and Vollhaber 2007). This chapter serves as an introduction to explore the relationship between haiku and sign language. It will first refer to the fundamental paradox of sign language haiku – namely, the myth of objectivity. Then several specific features of sign language haiku will be discussed in relation to the characteristics of traditional Japanese haiku identified in Chapter 4.

5.2. The myth of objectivity: Vollhaber's (2007) experiment

The notion of haiku-ness requires reconsideration when it is brought to the context of sign language. To state the key claim of my thesis first, *sign language*

haiku is fundamentally different from traditional Japanese haiku. They differ in so many ways that the definitional problem of sign language haiku always comes to the surface.

This is because sign language haiku is the fusion of two completely different poetic traditions. We have on one hand the form of traditional Japanese haiku which is deeply rooted in the Japanese culture, language, and history. This form, on the other hand, is a seed planted in the rich soil of sign language literature which belongs to Deaf people and their cultures and languages. The outcome is a new form, in which the features from both sides are richly blended. This process of blending necessarily involves the decision of what to retain and what to abandon from both sides, especially when they have some contradicting features. This decision is, in the end, up to individual poets, but there is a certain tendency beyond individuals regarding what consists of sign language haiku.

Among many conflicting features, the objectivity of traditional haiku poses the biggest challenge to sign language haiku. Sign language poetry is essentially a very *expressive, embodied, and emotional* poetic form (what I call “three Es”), which inevitably contradict the reticent and detached nature of traditional haiku.

There is a paradox here. On one hand, being a visual language, sign language haiku can literally “sketch” a scene, which may go well with Shiki’s notion of *shasei* and often (mis-)guides many critics into believing that sign language can provide a more direct, “self-less” representation of nature. On the other hand, it is also a strongly embodied language – signers express their message using their body and hands. It is very common in sign languages that the signer “becomes” a character, and vividly shows their feelings through eyegaze, facial expressions, and body shift. The language cannot be separated from the “I” of the signing person because it is directly made on the body and the face of the signer.

Vollhaber (2007) describes this paradox as “endless oscillation” between “I” and “non-I” (12). There is always the interaction between the signs and the self in sign language. Vollhaber directly questions this interference of “I” with the poetic form, saying that sign language haiku should retain the same objective nature as found in traditional haiku.

In his paper, Vollhaber reports his attempt to translate haiku poems into DGS (German Sign Language) with his hearing students at Hamburg University⁹. They selected a few poems by Shiki and his contemporaries, which have been translated into German. Their aim was to produce the sign language equivalents of these German poems in clear and simple forms. The students had studied the basic features of Japanese haiku prior to their experiment.

Vollhaber was especially keen to recreate the same objectivity in sign language translation as in the original. He asked his students to exclude facial expressions from their signing because they add emotion and personality to the poems. As a result, the manual signing became the focus of signing. Vollhaber reports that it was a huge challenge for the students. Because facial expressions are part of everyday signing, the students felt extremely uncomfortable signing with a blank face. They felt as if their arms were cut off from the body (i.e. signs are not embodied). The result is a depersonalised, expressionless piece of signing, which Vollhaber claims is exactly what he wanted to reproduce:

To remove facial expressions from signing and to entirely concentrate on manual signing is a huge challenge and requires a lot of practice and intense concentration. Facial expressions add a personal touch to sign language. To give them up means to remove personality and identity. That's exactly what haiku is. Haiku's aim is not to express meaning. On the contrary, it frees itself from the Western obsession toward the search of meaning. What it does is not to narrate but to show. (11)¹⁰

At the same time, Vollhaber asked a Deaf student to translate the same haiku poems into DGS, but this time without telling him what to do, or what haiku is. This Deaf person's signing was clear, natural and spontaneous, and he used a great deal of facial expression. His poems were very expressive, emotional, and powerful, which is in sharp contrast with the hearing students' monotonous, objective, and awkward signing.

Although Vollhaber acknowledges the power and the beauty of this spontaneous translation by the Deaf person, he immediately goes back to the hearing students' examples to discuss the possibility of removing "self" from the language, which, according to Vollhaber, is the essence of haiku.

⁹ The students are in the interpreters' course and thus assumed to be advanced signers.

¹⁰ Citations from Vollhaber (2007) are translated from German by Silke Matthes and myself, with the approval of Dr. Vollhaber

Vollhaber's attitude toward sign language haiku is clear throughout his paper: that it is capable of expressing the objective nature of traditional haiku form. He regards sign language haiku as a series of snapshots and thus can ideally manage objective description of haiku:

Haiku's aim is to show and not to make a statement. There are pictures to which the readers of haiku are introduced, and our task is to find sign language pictures to match these word pictures. (10)

Vollhaber's view on sign language haiku is potentially controversial. He says that people should "see the language for itself, not the person" (2007: 10). His underlying belief is that a linguistic art can exist independently from the people who create it. In other words, sign language haiku should be able to exist in its own right, free from the history and culture of Deaf people.

While such independence of art is theoretically possible (and perhaps even attractive to some extent), it does not represent what is happening in the socio-political context of sign language poetry. Sign language poetry has always so far been linked with the identity of Deaf people. To create a poem in any sign language inevitably has a political function symbolising the elevation of the status of Deaf people and of sign languages. Sign language haiku in this sense is political in nature.

Vollhaber seems to focus on the potential for sign language rather than what is actually happening in spontaneous signing. Objective, "cut-off-arms" type of signing is *possible*, but not necessarily *natural*. The perplexity of the students in Vollhaber's project, and the fact that the Deaf person's spontaneous translations are filled with facial expressions, clearly suggest that it is not natural to exclude facial expressions. It may be questioned if it is appropriate to ignore such impulse and spontaneity in order to pursue "what is possible" or "what should be".

Vollhaber's attempt is valuable, but it does not go beyond the theoretical/experimental level. This research focuses more on what Deaf poets spontaneously come up with – i.e. what sign language haiku currently "is", and not what it "should be". There are no rules, just phenomena.

The rest of the chapter explores the general features of sign language haiku as observed in the actual poems. We have overviewed the features of traditional

Japanese haiku in the previous chapter, some of which are faithfully reproduced in sign language haiku, while others are completely absent. Sign language haiku also inherits certain features arising out of the structures of sign language. In what follows, I will use examples from the haiku poems in my corpus to illustrate the features of sign language haiku in terms of what is retained, what is dropped, and what is added.

5.3. What is retained

5.3.1. Brevity

Brevity remains as a fundamental feature of sign language haiku. It is true that each sign language haiku varies in length. For example, in three performances of the four haiku in Dorothy Miles’ *Seasons* quartet, we see (Table 5.1) considerable variation not only between poems but also between performances of the same poem. Carol Padden’s renditions also vary from Miles’ performances.

Performance	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
ASL (1980)	30	41	22	44
BSL (1987)	16	34	18	48
BSL (1988)	25	37	16	52
Carol Padden	11	13	9	23

Table5.1 The length (in seconds) of Dorothy Miles’ *Seasons* performances in different years and by Carol Padden

However, they are still considerably shorter than other sign language poems. The Deaf poets are aware that haiku requires concise form. This awareness is more important than the actual length, as brevity does not simply mean being short but suggests the poets’ intense effort to keep the form minimal. The haiku form forces the Deaf poets to ponder upon how to create maximum effect based on minimal formal devices. This may result in manipulation of handshapes, smooth transitions, blending of the signs, use of metaphors, and so on. Thus whatever is produced is the result of careful selection and elaboration.

5.3.2. Theme

Another feature sign language haiku inherits from Japanese haiku is the theme. Detailed account of the thematic aspects of sign language haiku will be given in Chapter 7, but they clearly show the influence from both Japanese haiku and sign language poetry. While Deaf poets embrace the theme of identity, they also actively take in a theme which is typical in traditional haiku: nature. The majority of the haiku poems do talk about nature either primarily or as a background.

Haiku poets look for a moment in which an everyday incident suddenly becomes evocative to their eyes (“haiku moments”). This search for a significant moment in mundane life prevails in sign language haiku as well. While many longer sign language poems may illustrate the more ceremonious moments in Deaf people’s lives (as in Dorothy Miles’ *Staircase* and *BDA Is...*), sign language haiku picks up a subtle moment in everyday life that creates a long-lasting impression. Most sign language haiku is based on what the poet actually saw or experienced (such as Maria Gibson’s *Water*, Siobhan O’Donovan’s *Two Trees*, Nigel Howard’s *Sunset*, among many others), rather than on wide imagination and allegorical themes (which are popular in non-haiku poems such as Dorothy Miles’ *Hang Glider*, *Elephants Dancing*, and Paul Scott’s *Five Senses*). This attitude can be understood as following two of the most basic features of traditional haiku – simplicity and concreteness.

Furthermore, the essence of humour is present both in traditional haiku and in sign language haiku. It is not a kind of humour which makes us burst into laughter, but it produces a subtle, heart-warming, and amusing poetic scene. Especially, the unique perspective and sympathetic attitudes of Issa toward small creatures are common to many Deaf poets. For example, both Issa and Deaf poets often personify nonhuman existences:

5a
Haiku by Issa

Yare utsu na hae ga te o suri ashi o suru
Don’t swat!
The fly is rubbing
Its hands and feet

5b

Spring by Paul Scott

I am a tree, standing
With heaviness on my shoulders
I shake it off and straighten myself up
Ow, ow!
The buds are coming out

Such subtlety in daily life seen from a new perspective creates a smile in the mind of the reader, and is a characteristic common to both sign language haiku and traditional haiku.

5.3.3. Visual representation

Sign language haiku is characterised by its strong emphasis on visual representations of the world. While brevity is imposed solely by traditional haiku, this visual impact is a happy union of common features from both sides. Both traditional haiku and sign language poetry are characterised by their strong emphasis on visual representation of the world. Traditional haiku uses words to describe a visual scene, while sign language represents it more directly through the visual-spatial modality.

Deaf poets select a theme which is highly visual by itself, and try to reproduce it by making the most of visual-spatial language. For example, Linda Day's *Eclipse* picks up a very visual moment in nature and faithfully represents it with iconic handshapes and symmetrical movements (Figure 5.1). This reminds us of Buson's haiku example we discussed in Chapter 4 (Green flowers; the moon at east; the sun at west).



Figure 5.1 Visual representation in Linda Day's *Eclipse*

5.3.4. Contrast, juxtaposition, and internal divisions

In Chapter 4, the importance of contrast in traditional haiku was emphasised. This contrast can be purely visual (as in Buson's example) or thematic (in Bashō's haiku below (5c), the present peaceful field is contrasted with the battlefield in an ancient time, or an old quiet pond with a sudden sound of a frog jumping in). Contrast in haiku often takes the shape of juxtaposed images.

Contrasting two things is a useful way to create poetic impact within a limited time. It is a technique commonly found in sign language haiku as well. Dorothy Miles' *Winter* explicitly talks about contrast in various natural scenes in winter. Three out of four Donna Williams' BSL haiku poems *Research and Duck*, *Identity*, and *River and Stars* are all made up with a juxtaposition of two unrelated or opposing images (but always with a cohesive marker – see section 5.4.3). John Wilson compares summer and winter in *Winter*, Nigel Howard contrasts the vast field and a small brick in *England* and Penny Beschizza puts America and Britain side by side in *Politics*.

In sign language haiku, the juxtaposed images are often visually motivated. Sometimes they have inherent common configurations, as in the identical handshape, location, and movement of a person typing hard and a duck paddling hard in Donna Williams' *Research and Duck* (Figure 5.2). Sometimes the poet *creates* the contrast by arranging the two signs at opposing locations in the signing space (such as up and down, left and right, front and back), so that their contrast becomes visually clear. In Carol Padden's ASL translation of Dorothy Miles' *Winter*, the poet visually juxtaposed two the images, so they become not only propositionally but visually opposed (Figure 5.3).



TYPING-HARD



PADDLING-HARD



WE-ARE-CONNECTED

Figure 5.2 Juxtaposed images in Donna Williams' *Research and Duck*



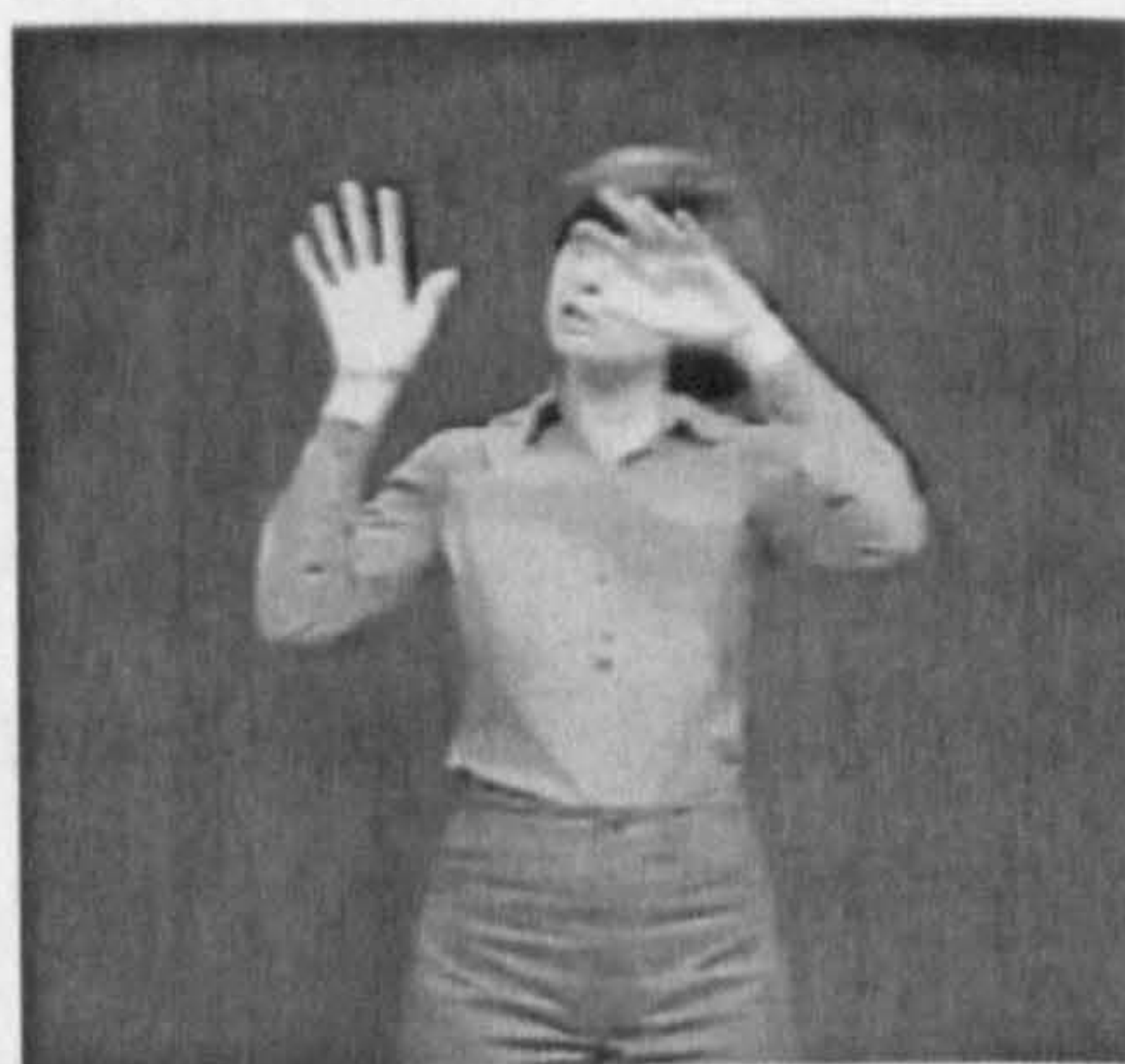
BLACK (right hand)



WHITE (left hand)



ICE



SNOW

Figure 5.3 Contrastive locations of signs in Carol Padden's *Winter*

Traditional haiku is also known to have an internal break within its brief form. A break is often inserted between juxtaposed images, or simply when the poet wants to create a pause (both physical and psychological). Such internal division is marked by *kireji*, a cutting morpheme. We have discussed the following examples:

5c (=4a)

Natsukusa **ya** tsuwamono domo ga yume no ato (Bashō)

Summer fields;

the remains of ancient soldiers' dreams

Furuike **ya** kawazu tobikomu misuno oto (Bashō)

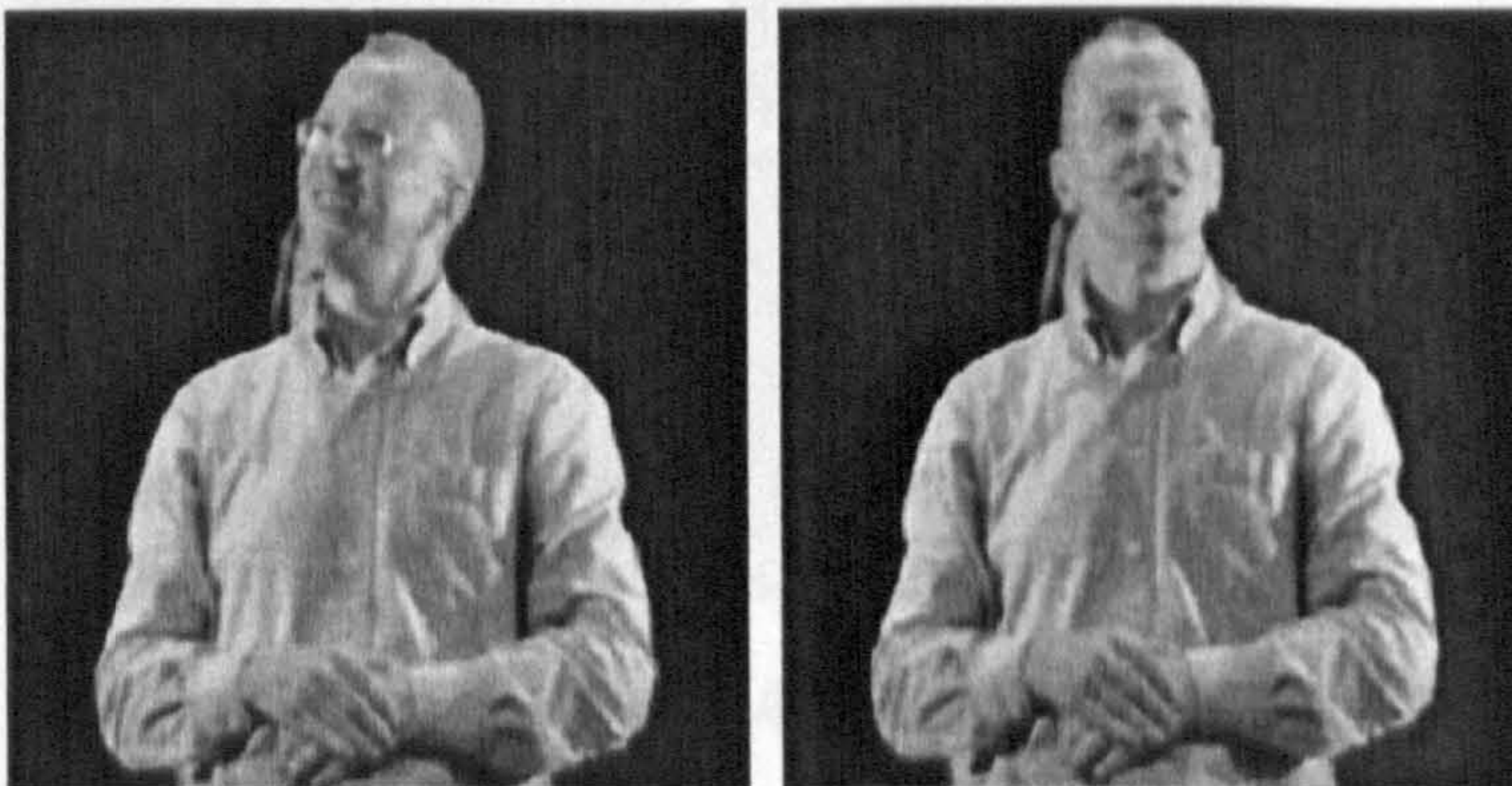
Old pond;

A frog jumps in

Sound of water

The cutting morpheme *ya* in above examples marks the internal division between the two contrastive images. They do not have meaning by themselves and thus in English translation it is normally represented by symbols such as ‘;’ ‘:’ and ‘-’.

Sign language haiku does not have a specific formal device that corresponds to a cutting morpheme, but a change in any poetic device marks an internal division (eyegaze, handshape, symmetry, or movement and hold may be used). For example, in John Wilson’s *Winter*, his gaze shift from right to left serves as a cutting morpheme which shows that the poem is shifting from one image (summer) to the other (winter) (Figure 5.4).



a) Gaze to right

b) Gaze to the left

Figure 5.4 Gaze shift in John Wilson’s *Winter*

5.3.5. Perspective Shift

As observed in Chapter 4, Japanese haiku uses the technique called perspective shift, in which the poet’s viewpoint shifts between different scales (big and small, distant and near) and adds depth to the poem. Such perspective shift is very common in poetic signing. The poet either keeps shifting focuses to create a rhythmic pattern, which Bauman (2006) calls a cinematographic technique (see Chapter 2), or involves

a single shift from a larger picture to a focused picture (or the other way around) to highlight the contrast, which is closer to the traditional sense of perspective shift in haiku. Sam Sepah's ASL haiku *Cornfield* is a good example of the former (the poet alternates focuses between close-focused expressions) and Nigel Howard's BSL *England* involves a single shift from the vast green field to a small old brick, which has the similar effect as in Issa's moon and snail haiku poem discussed in Chapter 4.

5.4. What is dropped

5.4.1. Syllabic prosody

There are as many characteristics of Japanese haiku which are absent in sign language haiku as those which are present. First of all, sign language haiku does not follow the syllabic structure of Japanese haiku. As Frishberg (1992) puts it:

The original Japanese form of haiku, with its three line format with precise number of syllables per line [...] and the invocation of seasonal imagery, is often followed in English translations, but is less emphasized in ASL translation, where the notion of 'syllable' has no direct equivalent. Rather, the ASL version of haiku highlights building a single image with a high value on economy of signs employed to produce the mood and scene.

There is only one example in my corpus that tries to imitate the number of syllables in Japanese haiku. The hand movement in Wim Emmerik's *Falling leaf* is dissected into equally-timed small moves, which represents syllabic and monotonous prosody. However, such dissected movement is a highly unusual and marked form in sign language. It restricts the natural flow of signing. Therefore the majority of sign language haiku does not follow the feature of syllabic prosody, and as a result it has a very rhythmic flow.

5.4.2. Objectivity

We have already discussed in detail the lack of objectivity in sign language haiku. Most sign language haiku shows a great deal of emotional involvement of the

poet. In order to illustrate this point, compare the following haiku in English with its translation into BSL by John Wilson.

5d
an empty elevator
opens
closes

(Jack Cain)

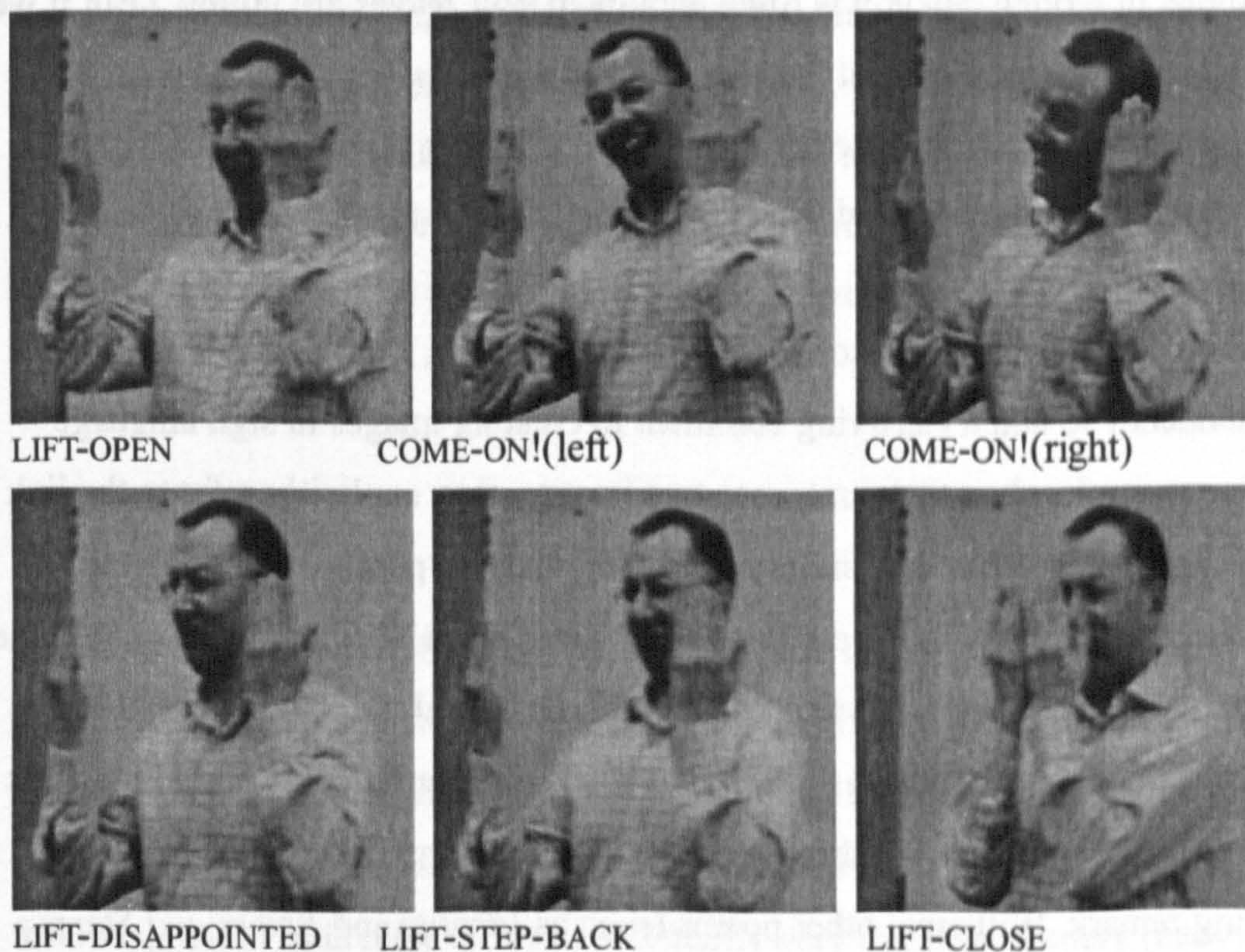


Figure 5.5 John Wilson's *Lift*

It is clear that John Wilson's translation is completely different from the original. While the original English haiku is one of the simplest haiku that leaves everything in the hands of the readers, John Wilson personifies the elevator and shows its feeling (enthusiasm and pride for the expectations to carry people, and the disappointment to find no one wanting to use it). Such emotional language does not fit the nature of traditional haiku, but it is an indispensable part of sign language literature.

5.4.3. Implicitness

We have observed in Chapter 4 that traditional haiku does not explicitly state what it means. This poses an interesting case for sign language haiku because it has both implicit and explicit meaning at different levels. First of all, sign language is visually very explicit. This is again because of the nature of visual language. In sign languages, everything needs to be given a specific shape or particular movements. For example, in written haiku, it is often enough to say “leaves are falling”. But if we want to express the same content in a sign language, it is essential to add specific manner of how they fall: i.e. whether the leaves are falling slowly or quickly, whether they are simply falling down or whirling. It is not meaningful to sign FALL without those specifics¹¹.

Apart from this explicit nature of the visual language, Deaf poets in general show a tendency to add a clarifying comment in creating images in sign language haiku. For example when they juxtapose two images, they explicitly refer to the link between the images rather than simply displaying them in parallel and implying the connection. For example, in *Research and Duck* by Donna Williams (Figure 5.2), the poet juxtaposes two images and refers to the link at the end. Signs for TYPING-HARD by the researcher and PADDLING-HARD by the duck are clearly identical and thus it is easy to see the connection. But the poet still explicitly comments on the link as a concluding remark. Williams’ other poems (such as *Identity* and *Rivers and Stars*) also consist of two contrasting images and a connecting sign at the end. Such overt connectives are normally omitted in traditional haiku.

However, the language of sign language haiku can also be very vague due to the use of productive signs without an identifying lexical sign (see 5.5.4 below). Sign language in general uses a great deal of productive or classifier signs. They are visually clear and may determine how referents look, but they do not *identify* the referents (which in turn allows the same sign to be used to express different meanings as in TYPING-HARD and PADDLING-HARD in above example of *Research and Duck*). Thus the audience can respond freely and imaginatively regarding the underspecified referents of the signs. For example, in Jessica McKinney’s ASL

¹¹ Sandra Smith, a news presenter at Deaf Station, once said: “I cannot sign HE COMMITTED SUICIDE. I need to know exactly *how* he did it”

haiku *Memory*, the most important sign of the poem (MEMORY) is underspecified and the audience cannot identify what it exactly refers to. All the poet does is to locate the object near her forehead using a classifier. What is presented to the audience is the explicit illustration of this object (that it is soft and fragile with a certain shape) and how it moves in the signing space. The audience will get a certain message and impression regardless of the fact that they may not understand exactly what she is referring to.

In short, sign language haiku often provides ample visual information about the poetic image, without identifying the actual image. This is in sharp contrast to the implicitness of traditional haiku. Traditional haiku uses conventional words to identify actual images (i.e. what they are), as in “old pond” and “frog” in Bashō’s earlier example, but does not explicitly explore beyond such identification.

5.4.4. A Snapshot

Japanese haiku is often described as a sketch of life or a snapshot. Those so-called “haiku moments” tend to be static without involving much action or motion. It captures the exact moment when an everyday incident turns poetic (to the poet’s eyes) and freezes that moment to prolong its significance. For example, the following haiku indirectly refers to potentially very dynamic scenery (heavy rain and the flooding river) but the poem itself is a simple snapshot which imprisons a single moment.

5e (= 4m)
samidare ya, taigawo maeni, ie niken (Buson)
Rain in May; next to a huge river; two huts

In sign language haiku, however, the haiku moments tend to be more dynamic due to the kinetic nature of sign language. Thus, sign language haiku is not a single or a series of snapshots but involves a great deal of motion. For example, Wim Emmerik’s *Falling leaf* is the most “haiku-like” haiku in that it has monotonous rhythm and detached impression, but still it cannot be regarded as a snapshot. It is a poem of motion – i.e. the movements are foregrounded in that poem.

Sign language haiku also involves a great deal of action. This is especially true when the poet is taking over a character's viewpoint. Jesus Marchan's *Fish*, Paul Scott's *Spring* (in which the poet becomes the tree), and Maria Gibson's *Cat*, all illustrate the actions of an embedded character.

In short, sign language haiku is not a static illustration of a haiku moment. It has more motion and action, and as a result adds more dynamic impression to the poem.

5.5. What is added

Finally, there are several elements in sign language haiku that do not exist in Japanese haiku form. Many of them are inherited from the features of general sign language poetry. As repeatedly discussed above, sign language haiku actively takes in the characteristics of artistic signing to enrich the haiku form.

5.5.1. Structure

Due to its kinetic and dynamic nature, sign language haiku is likely to incorporate more events and as a result develops more complex structures than one may expect from the haiku discipline. In this aspect, sign language haiku shares characteristics of a signed story. Especially, those slightly longer haiku poems (longer than 20 seconds) tend to have an internal structure. For example, Johanna Mesch's *Aeroplane* can be identified as having three or four internal parts: it begins with the take-off of two planes and their separation, the flight and the crash of one of the planes. The climax of the poem is the last sign where the soul of the aeroplane ascends to the heaven. In order to make this end significant, the poet builds up the story that leads to the climax. Penny Beschizza's *Sign Language* also identifies four stages in which the two people become closer to each other (walking toward each other, looking at each other, touching, and signing). It's not a poem of a single moment, but of a gradual process of Deaf people coming together.

Such internal structure is not characteristic of Japanese haiku, but has widely been used in other East Asian poetic traditions. For example traditional Chinese quatrains (which are short but not as short as haiku) always have a four-section structure (“introduction” “development” “turn” and “conclusion”). For instance:

5f

Spring Dawn: A Quatrain with Five-Character Lines

By Meng Hao Ran

春眠不觉晓	(Asleep in spring, dawn has passed unnoticed)
处处闻啼鸟	(I hear birds singing everywhere)
夜来风雨声	(Wind and rain had clamoured during the night)
花落知多少	(I wonder how many flowers have fallen)

Usually, “introduction” presents the topic and the scene, “development” expands the topic without being too eventful, “turn” provides a new element or a shift in the perspective (in the above example, the poet suddenly mentions the clamour of wind and rain, which is in sharp contrast with the peaceful spring morning described so far), and “conclusion” provides a closing remark with a lingering effect. The third and the fourth sections are usually regarded most important.

Some longer sign language haiku (the two poems mentioned above, plus some more discussed in Chapter 14) have a similar four-section structure.

5.5.2. Three Es

As already said sign language haiku differs from traditional haiku because it is created in sign language and inherits the fundamental characteristics of poetic signing – that it is highly embodied, emotional and expressive. Sign language haiku is highly *embodied* in a literal sense that it is made on the body of the poet. Because the poets use their own body, particularly their face, sign language haiku tends to be emotional. The poet puts a great many expressions into the poems (excitement,

happiness, sadness, anger, surprise, and so on). Thus the signing becomes very expressive.

This does not mean the poems are sentimental. The purpose of the poet's expressions is not necessarily to evoke an emotional response from the audience. The facial expressions are part of the sign language and the poet is simply using it as a tool to reinforce the poetic message. This is evident in the case of personification (such as *Lift* by John Wilson discussed above). But even in a simple description of nature such as Dorothy Miles' *Seasons*, the poet adds certain expressions to support her manual signing.

5.5.3. Deaf perspective

Deaf poets add a great deal of Deaf perspective into sign language haiku. The most evident instance of Deaf perspective is the theme of Deaf identity, but it also means to approach the material as a visual and signing person. Deaf poets often see the world in a way which is different from hearing people. Their experience of being in a social minority perhaps leads them to sympathise more with things that receive less attention from the mainstream. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

5.5.4. Productive lexicon

Sign language poetry in general is known for its highly visual and productive lexicon (e.g. Valli 1993, Sutton-Spence 2005). In any language, poets seek for a new way of expressing themselves instead of relying on the existing set of conventional words. In sign language poetry, this results in the use of non-lexical signs or visually-motivated lexical signs. Non-lexical signs are so-called productive signs (those which are not listed on the dictionary), created in order to efficiently describe the referent ad hoc (Johnston and Schembri 2006). They are highly original, but justified by their iconic, metaphorical, and highly visual mapping with the referent. Visually-motivated lexical signs are signs like TREE or SUN, which are part of the established lexicon but preserve the appearance of the referent. Both types of signs

are more “transparent” than lexical signs (i.e. people may watch and understand them regardless of their knowledge of the language). Such a visual-productive aspect of the poetic lexicon is even more salient in sign language haiku because it requires a very brief, visual, and intense form. For example, BSL haiku quartets (*Day*, *Year* and *Life*) mostly consist of non-lexical or visually-motivated lexical signs. In the transcription below, I highlighted the lexical signs which are not much motivated visually (i.e. those with which non-signers may have problems). The detailed analyses of these poems will be given in Chapter 13, but it is clear that the lexical signs are only a very minor part of the whole poems.

Day

STRETCH OPEN-WIDE LOOK-DOWN CARS-GO-BY LOOK-DOWN PICK-UP-A-CAR ROLL-A-TOY-CAR
 TYPING LOOK-LEFT TYPING PILE-GONE MOUSE-CLICK CLOSE CLOSE CLOSE GO-HOME
 ORDER
 LIGHTS LIE-DOWN LOOK-UP
 DAY ME FINE NOW GO-AWAY NIGHTFALL FINE ME DAY-PASSES

Year

TREE-STANDING TREE-STOOPING TREE-SHAKING-OFF TREE-STANDING-HAPPILY OW!
 BUDS-COMING-OUT
 SWEAT-DRIPPING FAN SWEAT-DRIPPING-REVERSE
 TREE1 TREE2 EMBRACE STORM TREE-FALLS-DOWN PIT LIGHT-CAST-UPON-PIT
 PICTURE-ON-THE-WALL PERSON-LYING SUNSHINE SNOW-FALLING COLD

Life

COME-OUT-OF-WOMB SUCK-BREAST GROW-UP
 MOVE-AROUND-TOY-CARS FRUSTRATED WANT GROW-UP WELL... LIFE LIFE-BIG SMALL
 ADMIRE-TEETH- SMOOTH-HAIR FASTEN-BELT LOOK-INTO-THE-MIRROR LOOK-AROUND
 PICK-UP-TWEEZERS PULL-OUT-NOSE-HAIR
 WALK-WITH-STICK LOOK-UP NOT-YET HEART-ATTACK DEAD

5.5.5. Various poetic devices

Traditional haiku aims at creating the simplest representation of nature, and thus does not favour any linguistic or rhetorical tropes. The basic attitude is to minimise linguistic expressions in order to create a vast imagination in the reader’s mind. The simpler the language is, the wider the interpretation becomes. In contrast, sign language haiku makes the most of the linguistic capability of sign language.

Most sign language haiku actively utilises all the poetic devices available to poetic signing. These include repetition, rhythm, symmetry, symbolism of parameters (handshape, movement, location), blending, neologism, metaphor, use of space and eyegaze.

Sign language haiku inherits and utilises such devices because it is the most spontaneous form of expression for most Deaf haiku poets. This goes along with the fundamental attitude of haiku, which minimises the artificiality and conspicuousness of the language. While unadorned language is mostly unmarked in Japanese poetic language, sign language haiku uses a variety of poetic devices to make the poetic language run smoothly.

5.6. Transforming written haiku into signing: two attempts

So far we have observed the characteristics of sign language haiku in contrast to those of traditional haiku. In what follows, I will briefly illustrate two attempts to transform a written haiku into a signed haiku, because it is a good way to highlight the features of sign language haiku.

5.6.1. JSL haiku

Herlofsky (2003) discusses the translation of a Japanese haiku into Japanese Sign Language (JSL) by two deaf people. The poem he chose is Bashō's following haiku:

5g
Araumi ya sado ni yokotau amanogawa (Bashō)
荒海や 佐渡によこたふ 天河

Rough sea: Lying down on Sado Island, the Milky Way¹²

The Japanese original has its own poetic features which are analysed in detail by Hiraga (2003). Thematically, it incorporates highly complicated metaphors and

¹² Translation by Herlofsky

cultural associations within 17 syllables. The Island of Sado is primarily known as an isolated prison, cut off from the mainland by the Sea of Japan (which is very rough throughout the year). Thus by referring to Sado, the poem is evoking the feeling of isolation, sadness, and despair. The poem also indirectly refers to a well-known Chinese legend of Vega and Altair, the star-crossed lovers separated by the Milky Way. In both story frames, water is metaphorically seen as an obstacle for people: the rough sea for prisoners, the Milky Way (which is called “Heaven’s River” in Japanese) for the lovers. The poem also contrasts the power of nature with the helplessness of humans, the bright stars with the dark sea, the pre-history legend with the here-and-now situations of the prisoners (at the time this poem was composed, Sado was still actively used as a prison), and so forth. Formally, it creates a visual rhythm with the alternative use of complicated Chinese logographs and simple Japanese letters (see more discussion of this in Chapter 8).

Herlofsky asked two deaf acquaintances to translate this poem into JSL. The process involved two stages. First, deaf translators were given the above haiku and simply translated it into JSL. This version conveys all the lexical information and retains the order of the original, with a minor change to fit into the grammar of JSL. Although it is an accurate translation (and already shows certain symbolic aspects at a lexical level, such as using “crookedly bent” fingers and “jagged” movement to symbolise the roughness of the sign ROUGH), not much poetic signing could be observed at this stage. The deaf translators were not happy with this “literal” translation because it “did not really convey in an artistic way the imagery of the original” (55). Therefore the same translators made a second attempt, making several changes to match the sign language to the same artistic level of the original haiku. Herlofsky points out that all the features which are added at this second stage are in accord with the features of sign language poetry in general (identified by Klima and Bellugi 1979 and Sutton-Spence and Woll 1999). They include balance and symmetry, more fluent movement, smoother transition of one sign into the next, expansion of the signing space, and neologisms.

For example, the JSL sign HEAVEN was transformed from a one-handed sign (citation form) to a two-handed sign, with the non-dominant hand of the translator remaining in the signing space after the preceding sign for SADO. This suggests the

creation of symmetry and smooth transition. Other fluidity in signing is added mainly by leaving the stationary non-dominant hand in the space while the next sign takes place. The sequence of HEAVEN RIVER (heaven's river) expands the normal signing space. The sign RIVER is usually located lower (in front of the stomach) but in this particular poem it is made at a higher location around the head, iconically and metaphorically representing the Milky Way (also reducing the transition from HEAVEN, which is made at the forehead). Herlofsky also reports neologism in this poem, which is a sign for SADO. In both attempts, SADO is expressed as a compound of the sign for NIIGATA (the prefecture in which the island of Sado is situated) and one more sign to disambiguate the meaning between Sado and Niigata. In the first non-artistic version, the translators simply fingerspell さ ど (SA-DO) before the sign for NIIGATA (which is the normal way to refer to Sado). In the second rendition, however, instead of fingerspelling the name, they produced a sign which can be glossed as ISLAND-SURROUNDED-BY-WATER. The fist of the left hand is held in front of the body, and the right hand moves around the stationary left fist.

All those changes are subtle but they show how deaf signers, who are aware of the nature of haiku, tried to adjust their signing to an artistic level while retaining the basic structure and elements of the original.

5.6.2. *Seasons* by Dorothy Miles

The first quotation given at the opening of this chapter is from the writing of Dorothy Miles when she first saw the translations of Japanese haiku into ASL by the people at NTD (National Theatre of the Deaf). Impressed by the rich imagination of haiku, Miles composed her own haiku *Seasons* in English and in sign languages (ASL and BSL). It was Miles' way of self-expression to compose her poems in both modalities. But it provides a good opportunity to highlight the transformation of a written haiku into a signed haiku.

Sutton-Spence (2005) compares the poetic features of Miles' *Seasons* in English and in ASL (Klima and Bellugi (1979) also analyse the features of *Summer*). In English, Miles follows the 17 syllables of Japanese haiku, and also combines some

English poetic techniques such as alliteration and consonance. For example, the repetition of the [h] consonant in *Summer* (heights, hours, hot, heavy on hands), [k] sound in *Winter* (contrast, black, covered).

When she composed the sign version, however, all of these features disappeared and instead other general features of poetic signing were added. For example, Sutton-Spence observes that each signed haiku shows a dynamic use of space. *Spring* and *Summer* are characterised with top-right to bottom-left shift in the signing space, *Autumn* from left to right, *Winter* makes use of opposing heights in the space to symbolise the theme of contrast. All four signed poems are also characterised by smooth transition, largely due to the fact that the poet selected a sign which has similar location, handshape, or movement from the preceding sign (“blended” signs). Miles also produced rhythmic structure in those poems: *Spring* with a shift from quick fluttering movement to slow movement, *Summer* is signed slowly throughout the poem, *Autumn*, as opposed to *Spring*, shifts from slower to quicker tempo, and *Winter* has sharp movements which in the end turn back to the gentle fluttering movements observed in *Spring* (thus rhythm contributes to bind the four poems into one quartet). The manipulation of the handshapes and a balanced use of both hands (symmetry) are also observable in signed versions of *Seasons* (Sutton-Spence 2005: 162-167).

Apart from the disciplines Sutton-Spence observed, there is a clear suggestion of the expressive nature of poetic signing in Miles’ signed haiku (which is not observable in her English versions) due to the fact that she used her face as part of the signing. Both in her ASL and BSL renditions, *Spring* is signed with lively expressions on her face (raised eyebrows, smiles, eyes following fluttering hands with occasional gaze to the audience); *Summer* has more suppressed expressions (no smile, eyes move slowly following or preceding the hands, no eye contact with the audience); *Autumn* starts with a slightly blank face, but then becomes more cheerful and lively (the same facial features as in *Spring*), and then turns back to a somewhat “serious” face at the end, leading to the non-smiling face of the poet in *Winter*, which at the end turns to a gently smiling expression, connecting its theme back to *Spring*. Such facial expressions and eyegaze add “a human perspective” to the signed poems (i.e. the audience gets the impression that they are watching the poems *through*

someone else's viewpoint), which is entirely absent from the English version of *Seasons*.

Both English and signed versions of Miles' *Seasons* retain some features from Japanese traditional haiku, such as brevity and theme of nature. But they clearly utilise the poetic disciplines arising out of their own languages (some rhyming structures for English haiku, the features of poetic signing for ASL/BSL haiku).

5.7. Summary

This chapter overviewed the characteristics of sign language haiku, in contrast to traditional Japanese haiku. Signed haiku poems share some features with Japanese haiku, while they have dropped and added other features. By observing the features of a blended poetic form, one can see the essence of the original forms. In this sense, sign language haiku provides excellent materials to illustrate the nature of haiku and poetic signing in general.

This chapter, together with the previous ones, has formed the foundation of our discussion on sign language haiku. In the following chapters, I will select and discuss particular features of sign language haiku, such as metaphor, theme, rhythm, symmetry, handshape, poetic spaces, and eyegaze.

Chapter 6

Metaphor

*The metaphor is... a tool for creation which God forgot inside one of
His creatures when He made him.*

Jose Ortega y Gasset

6.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, we have observed that sign language haiku is fundamentally different from traditional Japanese haiku. One of the crucial differences between the two is that sign language haiku utilises various poetic devices available in signing that traditional haiku tries to minimise. Among these poetic devices, the most powerful tool is the use of metaphor. Metaphor is pervasive in sign language haiku both at thematic and formal levels. This chapter illustrates the basic mechanism of metaphor, prior to our discussion of themes and forms of sign language haiku.

6.2. Cognitive accounts of metaphor

6.2.1. Metaphor

Metaphor is a poetic, linguistic, and conceptual phenomenon which has received considerable attention from philosophers, linguists, literary critics, poets and writers. Traditional views on metaphor, represented by Aristotle and Cicero, regarded metaphor as intentional misuse of language – that it is a deviant and decorative way to express our thought, which can be rewritten with an orthodox, literal, non-metaphorical expression (e.g. “Jack is a lion.” → “Jack is very brave.”). Romantic poets, on the other hand, saw metaphor as insight. In their view, metaphor

is not simply a decoration, but a way of shedding light on something which otherwise remains unknown.

Metaphor has been a major concern of cognitive linguistics since Lakoff and Johnson (1980). The cognitive account of metaphor differs fundamentally from traditional views on metaphor in two aspects. First of all, they challenge the dominant view of metaphor as something extra, unusual, and deviant, by claiming that metaphor is pervasive in our everyday life. Secondly, they believe that metaphor is not simply a matter of language but rooted in our conceptual mechanism.

Lakoff and Johnson define metaphor as “understanding one concept in terms of another” (5). Metaphor is the mapping between two concepts. Often abstract concepts such as life, love, mind, emotions, are expressed using the terms from more concrete concepts such as journeys, plants, nature, or food. A well-known example is LIFE IS A JOURNEY. We think, understand, and talk about life in terms of journey. This conceptual metaphor produces the following expressions:

6a)
Look *how far* we’ve come.
We’re *at a crossroads*.

(Kövecses 2002: 5, emphasis in the original)

This conceptual metaphor consists of a set of correspondences between the source domain (journeys) and the target domain (life), as follows:

Source domain		Target domain
Travellers	.....	People
Road	.....	Path of life
Distance	.....	Time in life
Destinations	.....	Life goals
Impediments in journeys	.....	Difficulties in Life

This is the example of “structural metaphor”, in which one concept is systematically mapped onto another. Lakoff and Johnson identify two more types of metaphor: orientational metaphor and ontological metaphor. Orientational metaphor is the association between directions and abstract concepts (such as GOOD IS UP, BAD IS DOWN); ontological metaphor allows us to conceptualise abstract concepts in terms of tangible objects and substances (as in expressions like “Please convey my

regards” “I put a lot of effort into this project”). All three types of metaphor are equally common in sign language, but orientational metaphors are especially pervasive because sign languages are spatial languages.

6.2.2. Poetic metaphor

Cognitive linguistic approaches treat metaphors as conceptual phenomena, rather than linguistic ones. In other words, they are more interested in the underlying metaphor such as LIFE IS A JOURNEY behind a variety of linguistic expressions given above than in the expressions themselves. Whereas linguistic metaphors may vary according to each language, the underlying conceptual metaphor is more universal because it is based on our basic cognition and bodily experience. More attention has been paid to general conceptual metaphor, while its individual expressions have been seen as superficial phenomena.

However, linguistic metaphors can be as insightful as conceptual metaphors because they show how we instantiate underlying conceptual metaphor. This is especially true in the study of poetic metaphor. Poetry is the ideal stage where linguistic metaphors can be foregrounded. It is where the surface structure matters. While poetic metaphor is based on conventional metaphor (which serves as the common ground the poet shares with the reader), what makes it poetic is *how* poets instantiate those conventional metaphors using their own language. Such metaphorical expressions in poetry can be made ad hoc and used only once in that particular poem. While approach to conventional metaphor deals with the question of “What is metaphor?”, literary critics need to consider “What is the metaphor (in a particular poem)?”

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) focused entirely on metaphors in everyday language, but soon interest in poetic/literary metaphors was stirred within such cognitive frameworks (Lakoff and Turner 1989, Gibbs 1994). Poetic or literary metaphor is defined within cognitive linguistics viewpoint is defined as the “non-conventional use of conventional metaphor” (Hiraga 2005: 26). Although many poetic metaphors appear to be completely original and novel, they are in fact based

on conventional conceptual metaphor. Conceptual metaphor is a basis for our understanding of both everyday and poetic languages. Without support of such conceptual metaphor, poetic metaphor ceases to make sense.

6.2.2.1. Extending, elaboration, question, combination

Lakoff and Turner (1989) point out four major ways to develop poetic metaphor out of ordinary conceptual metaphor. Poets can *extend*, *elaborate*, *question*, or *combine* conventional metaphor to achieve poetic effect.

A. Extending

One common way to turn an ordinary metaphor into a poetic one is to add new elements to the domains. Kövecses (2002) provides the examples from Robert Frost's *Road Not Taken*, in which the poet uses a conventional metaphor of LIFE IS A JOURNEY but adds extra details such as his encounter with two roads, one of which is less travelled than the other. Similar addition of details can be found in Dorothy Miles' BSL poem *Staircase*, in which characters encounter a huge staircase and manage to climb all the way to the top to achieve a certificate. The poet is using the same metaphor of LIFE IS A JOURNEY (people are travellers, the achievement of the purpose of life is reaching the destination, obstacles in life are obstacles of journey). But she extends its source domain by adding the details of the huge staircase.

B. Elaboration

While extending adds a new element to the source domain, elaboration makes use of an existing element but uses it in an unusual way. In Lakoff and Turner's terms, the former is "to map additional slots", the latter is "to fill in slots in unusual ways" (67). In sign language poems, the poet often maps a quality of deafness onto a nonhuman entity (because they do not speak a human language) as in Yumiko Nagai's JSL haiku poem:

6b)
The sea is my friend;

It has no language
that I must try to hear

The poet personifies the sea as a possible “friend”, which by itself is a common metaphor (see section 6.2.2.3 for personification as a type of metaphor). But she further elaborates this metaphor and projects a quality of deafness onto the sea to create extra sympathy. This is an unusual way of mapping, because lack of language in nonhuman entities is not normally associated with deafness. The poet is not simply *adding* a detail in the source domain but *creating* a new association.

C. Questioning

Poets can take conventional metaphor into poetic language by pointing out its inadequacy, i.e. to highlight a mismatch between source and target domains. The commonly-found example is to use LIFETIME IS A DAY metaphor but then indicate the difference between two domains, such as repeatability of a day and mortality of human life. Lakoff and Turner provide following example:

6c)
Sun can set and return again,
but when our brief light goes out,
there's one perpetual night to be slept through.
(Catullus 5)

In *Evening in Trio*, Dorothy Miles challenged the metaphor UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING. This metaphor is normally very strong in sign language poetry (seeing is crucial for Deaf poets), and thus one may expect when a Deaf persona is left in the darkness at the end, she is unable to do anything. However, Miles defies this metaphor by reaching out into the darkness through her sense of touch. Lack of seeing is not portrayed as the end of understanding in this particular poem.

D. Composing (Combining)

According to Lakoff and Tuner, composing or combining can be the most powerful way in which poetic metaphor goes beyond conventional metaphor (1986: 70). It is the way to combine more than one source domain to describe a target. Taub

(2001) observes that sign language poets also combine separate metaphors “to form a coherent whole” (196).

In Dorothy Miles’ *Evening*, darkness is understood through more than one metaphor. First of all, the state of getting dark is understood as a physical approach (change of location). This is part of a conceptual metaphor TIME IS SOMETHING MOVING (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 76). We commonly say “Darkness approaches.” Dorothy Miles further elaborates this metaphor by combining it with DARKNESS IS A BAT metaphor, comparing darkness with a bat - a living creature (another combination with a common metaphor EVENTS ARE AGENTS). The approach of darkness becomes a volitional one, with a slow, uncanny, flapping movement.

6.2.2.2. Global metaphor

Another important notion in understanding poetic metaphor is the difference between local and global metaphor. Local metaphors are individual linguistic expressions driven by conceptual mappings or image mappings. But often the poem as a whole can be a metaphor.

Lakoff and Turner (1989) suggest that whereas readers can develop their own understanding of the poem’s global metaphor, such interpretation has to “make sense” and be “justified” (146). They give three main constraints: by the use of conventional conceptual metaphor, by the use of common knowledge; by the iconic mapping between form and meaning.

For example, Dorothy Miles’ *Elephants Dancing* lends itself to a global reading of Deaf people’s deprivation of freedom. It describes the “dance” of an elephant which is trained to repeat the same steps with its legs chained. The elephant cannot move freely, which is associated with the oppression of Deaf people. This reading is justified because, first of all, the poem utilises conventional metaphors such as ANIMALS ARE HUMANS, PHYSICAL RESTRICTION IS PSYCHOLOGICAL RESTRICTION. It also relies on the audience’s background knowledge of Deaf people - that they are a cultural-linguistic minority who have been subjugated in hearing-dominant world (Ladd 2003). It also makes use of iconic

mapping between the signs and the meaning, such as the awkward movements of the hands symbolise the restricted freedom of the Deaf people.

As Lakoff and Turner (1989) admit, a poem often lends itself to multiple global metaphorical readings. People from different backgrounds may see the poem in a slightly different way. In the above example, although their linguistic medium (sign language) provides optimal justification to the identification of the elephant with Deaf people, the oppressed minority can be anyone (black people, women, aborigines, or can even be taken down to individuals). Wilcox (2000) reports interesting findings regarding different interpretations of an ASL poem *The Dogs* by Ella Mae Lentz. This is a poem about two dogs (a snobbish Doberman and an angry mutt), who hate each other but they cannot be separated because they are tied with the same chain. They eventually accept they are bound together and decide to live in peace. This poem is generally understood as the conflict and reconciliation of two groups of people who are different in nature but need to coexist in the society. However, when it comes to *whom* those two groups stand for, there is variation among audiences from different backgrounds. Deaf Americans most typically take this as a conflict between two Deaf groups, namely “English-using educated Deafs” and “ASL-using less educated Deafs”. Deaf people from Switzerland, where such division among Deaf people does not exist, interpret this poem as a conflict between Deaf and hearing people. This really shows the importance of common knowledge among the audience. Moreover, Italian Deaf people took this metaphor as representing the conflict between races (Wilcox 2000: 191-193). The multiple ways to read a text is characteristic of poetic language in general.

6.2.2.3. Personification

Lakoff and Turner (1989) also identify personification as one type of metaphor. Attribution of human characteristics (thoughts, behaviours, and emotions) onto non-human beings and vice versa is very popular in poetry and literature. It is usually given a special name such as personification or anthropomorphism. I will define and use the term “anthropomorphism” in the specific context of sign language poetry in

the next chapter, but for now I use “personification” because it is a more general term used among literary critics.

The most evident case of personification is when animals are given human qualities and talk in human language (ANIMALS ARE HUMANS), which is common in many nursery rhymes and children’s stories. The story of human-like animals in turn allows an allegorical interpretation, i.e. readers understand certain aspects of human beings through observing animal behaviours and emotions (HUMANS ARE ANIMALS). Subtler examples are found in conventional expressions such as “Christmas is approaching” or “Long winter has finally gone and spring is here”, where events and seasons are seen as human beings (EVENTS ARE AGENTS), particularly as travellers (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Hiraga 2005).

Personification, especially when creative, is very common both in sign language poetry and in traditional haiku, and thus it serves as a common ground for sign language haiku.

6.3. Metaphor and haiku

Before moving onto the discussion of metaphor in sign language haiku, it is important to overview metaphor in haiku in general. As repeatedly discussed, haiku’s fundamental feature is its simplicity. Therefore elaborated tropes such as metaphor are not favoured in traditional haiku. The fundamental conflict is that metaphor tries to clarify the relationship between two concepts while haiku shows a clear image but does not clarify what it means. As Gurga (2003) simply puts it: “The genius of haiku is...that it is about how things are rather than what they are like” (84).

Gurga introduces the term coined by Paul O Williams, *unresolved metaphor*, to describe the nature of metaphor in haiku. That is, the language of haiku may hint at, but does not clarify, possible metaphorical interpretations.

Traditionally, metaphor is considered to have three parts - one concept (*tenor*, or *target domain*) is expressed with a different concept (*vehicle* or *source domain*) with a certain relation between the two (*ground*) (Richards 1936, Lakoff and Johnson 1980). What is significant about haiku is that it does not specify the tenor and the ground of a metaphor (they remain “unresolved”), and the appreciation of metaphor

is completely up to the reader. The haiku poet just suggests that there may be some sort of significance attached to a described scene and that is all. For example:

6d)
Oritorite hararito¹³ omoki susuki kana. (Iida Dakotsu)
Picking up a (branch of) (dried) pampas grass: softly heavy

This can be read as a simple descriptive haiku. But at the same time, most readers cannot help reading beyond actual words, although they are not led to any specific concept. A branch of pampas grass, apparently very fragile and weak, is in fact full of life and importance. This haiku may imply the fact that what looks less important is not necessarily so. But the language of haiku does not specify any further reading than what it says.

In other more “metaphorical” haiku, the tenor can be specified. This is often the case for haiku which involve juxtaposition. While not all juxtaposed images are connected via metaphor (most of them are a collision of two images, rather than concepts), the images in the following haiku clearly are:

6e)
Mizu makura gabarito samui umi ga aru. (Saitō Sanki)
Water pillow; cold ocean is there

Notice that the poet does not say “water pillow is (like) cold ocean”. He simply talks about two distinct images of water pillow and ocean. As a result of this blending, however, the third image can be roused - the poet’s feelings of weakness, anxiety and fear of being ill and lying on the bed (which is not expressed in the poem itself). The tenor is specified, but the ground of metaphor is still left to the reader.

In short, haiku triggers a certain image or concept, and *entrusts* the reader to come up with what is implied. Metaphor in the traditional sense often specifies the relation between what is said and what is inferred, and in that way lays rails for readers’ interpretation. This would spoil the free imagination and weaken the power

¹³ This onomatopoeia “harari” is a very soft and small sound which a very light object (a piece of paper, a tear drop, a handkerchief, etc.) makes when it falls, or when it is waved. See Chapter 10 for more discussions of this poem and 6e in relation to handshape symbolism.

of haiku. This is the reason why poets and scholars are so much against the use of metaphor in haiku.

“...haiku poets usually avoid similes or metaphors. If we say ‘smoke rises like a twisted snake into the sky’ we are using a simile; if we say ‘a twisted snake of smoke rises into the sky’ we are using metaphor. In either case, a person hearing or reading this is likely to make a picture of a snake in the mind’s sky, and that is not what the poem is really talking about. A haiku poet might say simpler, like ‘Smoke rises, twisting, into the sky’.”
(Higginson 1985: 173)

In poetry, form matters as much as content does, and haiku is no exception. However, haiku tries to keep its language to a minimum in order to present a clear, direct, and objective picture. By doing so, it allows readers to directly “re-experience” the moment the poet has gone through. Any decorative expression that would divert the reader’s attention to something else is strictly proscribed. Haiku highlights the picture it presents, not the language itself. “When the poetic device becomes the master rather than servant of perception, the haiku fails” (Gurga 2003: 84).

While haiku poets avoid obvious metaphor such as “twisted snake of smoke”, personification (or what Higginson (1985) called “pathetic fallacy”) is common in humorous haiku. This is because personification is seen more to be the way of creating a unique perspective than a metaphor, and haiku favours such originality. As already discussed in Chapter 5, Issa is known for his humanistic haiku poems in which he describes animal behaviours as if they were human beings.

6f) (=5a)
Yare utsuna; hae ga tewo suru ashio suru
(Don’t swat! the fly is rubbing hands and feet¹⁴)

Higginson (1985) introduced the following poem by Sokan:

6g)
te o tsuite uts moshiaguru kawazu kana
hands to floor
offering up a song
the frog...
(translation by Higginson)

¹⁴ This behaviour is typically considered to show the act of begging.

When western poets create haiku in their own language, they bring their own poetic tradition into the form of haiku. Although many haiku guidebooks written for English speakers encourage people to use simple and literal language (for example, Higginson 1985, Gurga 2003), English speakers are so accustomed to metaphorical expressions that they cannot totally do away with them. This is not something which should be entirely discouraged. Non-Japanese haiku (including sign language haiku) is a fusion of two languages and two cultures. There is a spontaneous urge for poets to bring in their own poetic tradition and make it compatible to their understanding of haiku-ness. Metaphor is one of the things non-Japanese poets actively bring into their haiku form.

6.4. Metaphor in sign language

Having observed the traditional haiku's attitude toward metaphor, this section shifts the focus to metaphors in sign language in general. The unique modality of sign languages makes the linguistic instantiation completely different from that of spoken language. The underlying conceptualisation is the same, but the visual-manual modality of sign language develops its own ways to express such conceptual metaphor. Some metaphors work in the same way in spoken and signed languages; others are more mode-specific.

Sign language metaphor has two features which are distinct from spoken language metaphor. First of all, iconicity plays a crucial role in sign language metaphor. Iconicity interacts with metaphor to enrich the association between form and concept, and between two separate concepts. Secondly, metaphor in sign language takes place not only at sign (word) level but also at a smaller level, namely at a phonological level (Brennan 1990).

6.4.1. Interplay of iconicity and metaphor: Double-mapping in sign language metaphor

Many researchers have agreed that iconicity plays a crucial role in constructing metaphor in sign language (Brennan 1990, Taub 2001, Mier 2007, Sutton-Spence, to appear).

Iconicity is the mapping between form and concept, while metaphor is the mapping between two concepts (Lakoff and Turner 1989, Hiraga 2005). In other words, metaphorical mapping requires “the involvement of separate semantic domains” (Wilcox 2000: 51), whereas iconic mapping refers to the *resemblance* between the form and the meaning of a concept which does not require two semantic domains. However, what constitutes a semantic domain is often not clear. Some researchers, notably Brennan (1990), parallel iconicity and metaphor on the grounds that both symbolically represent one image/idea in another.

Iconicity plays a significant role in metaphorical construction in sign languages because metaphorical mapping is often both motivated and constrained by iconic forms. Taub (2001) observes the interplay of metaphor and iconicity in ASL. Most importantly, she points out that both mapping between form and meaning (iconic) and mapping between two meanings (metaphorical) need to preserve their structure. For example, in Dorothy Miles’ *Elephants Dancing*, the feet of the elephant are iconically mapped onto the closed fists of the poet, because they preserve similar shape and movement. These feet of the elephant (or the fists of the poet), which are chained, are then metaphorically understood as the struggle of the oppressed people because there are structural similarities between these two concepts (the unchained feet are understood as the physical and psychological freedom of the people, the chain as the restraint, and the limited movement of the elephant’s feet as the limited freedom of the oppressed people).

In sign languages, metaphors are often constrained by visual iconicity of the signs. Mier (2007) proposes a *Double-Mapping Constraint* in metaphorical extension in sign languages, based on Taub’s double mapping mechanism. When signs are formed based on *iconic mapping* between the form and the meaning, any further mapping (*metaphorical mapping*) needs to preserve the structure that corresponds to the iconic mapping. For example, in English, the verb “surf” can be used to mean “search something quickly on the Internet”. This metaphor does not work in BSL because its iconic form specifies a certain manner of surfing which

cannot be metaphorically extended. The concept of “to surf” has several possible semantic features, including:

- Surf: a) to ride on waves on a surfboard
 b) to move quickly on the surface of water

A BSL sign SURF (Figure 6.1) highlights the first meaning (a), iconically representing the surfboard and human legs (using a classifier). On the contrary, the English metaphor “to surf on the Internet” is based on the second meaning (b), which profiles the general movement of surfing, ignoring the details of how a surfer would use their legs or the surfboard. When we talk about “surfing on the Internet”, it is this second meaning that serves as the ground of metaphor (“moving across the surface of something quickly”). BSL sign SURF cannot be extended in the same way, because there would be a mismatch between iconic mapping (based on meaning a) and metaphorical mapping (based on meaning b).



Figure 6.1 BSL sign SURF

Because sign languages make use of visually iconic signs, the interplay of iconicity and metaphor becomes very important. Iconicity may restrict certain metaphorical extensions which are possible in spoken languages. But it also allows many unexpected liaisons of two concepts based on visual iconicity. For example, in Richard Carter’s *Father Christmas* story, the reindeer can “talk” (sign) using his antlers as his “hands” because the antlers *look like* hands, which motivates the personification of the reindeer into a signing person. Similarly, in *Research and Duck*, Donna Williams successfully personifies a paddling duck and creates a connection with a typing researcher via the identical iconic signs (TYPING-HARD and PADDLING-HARD, see the Figure 5.2 in the previous chapter). Such examples are

possible and lead to a poetic effect because they are motivated by visual iconicity, and they only make sense in sign languages.

6.4.2. Metaphor at a phonological level

One thing which is distinctive about sign languages is that metaphorical association takes place at the smallest linguistic construction level (i.e. phonological levels). In many sign languages, metaphorical mapping is involved in all parameters which constitute a sign, that is, handshape, location, movement, palm orientation, and nonverbal expressions (such as eyegaze).

6.4.2.1. Handshape

Selection of a particular handshape is sometimes governed by metaphorical principles. The target domains are “emotional effects commonly associated with particular handshapes” (Sutton-Spence 2005: 26). Physical configuration of handshapes, such as open/closed, sharp/non-sharp, substantial/non-substantial, often stands for abstract concepts, and these are used effectively in sign language haiku. More discussion on the symbolism of handshape will be given in Chapter 10.

6.4.2.2. Location

Location of a sign in signing space often symbolises our understanding of abstract concepts. There are three bases that underlie locational metaphor: symbolism of locations, distance, and orientations.

First of all, certain locations are symbolically associated with abstract concepts. For example, both in BSL and in ASL, signs whose meaning is related to mental activities (such as THINK, UNDERSTAND, REMEMBER) are likely to be located at one’s head. In contrast, signs associated with feelings tend to be produced on one’s chest (FEEL, LIKE, LOVE) (Brennan 1990, Valli and Lucas 1995).

Locating a referent at a certain distance from the body may symbolise the signer's attitude toward it. This is closely linked with the inward/outward movement (see below). Physical distance can metaphorically show emotional attachment or detachment. Engberg-Pederson (1993) observes that Danish signers place the referents closer to the body when they feel attached to them (and away from the body when they are not emotionally attached). The conceptual metaphor underlying this is INTIMACY IS PROXIMITY metaphor (Taub 2001: 118). For example, in Nigel Howard's *Deaf*, the baby is iconically and metaphorically located closer to the body while he is held by his parent. When he is given to the doctor, however, the baby is located away from the body, symbolising the emotional distance between the doctor and the baby.

Locations are also motivated by orientational metaphors. For example, signs that are placed higher up in the signing area tend to represent something good, while lower locations are sometimes connected to signs with negative meaning (this is closely linked to the movement as well). Signs placed at the centre of the signing space may be more important than those placed at the peripheral areas (IMPORTANT IS CENTRAL, LESS IMPORTANT IS PERIPHERAL). For example, in John Wilson's BSL *Winter*, the summer is located on the right side of the poet, whereas the winter (the real season in which the poem is situated) is centralised. Similarly, in BSL haiku *Night*, Johanna Mesch establishes her night time (her private world) in front of her by turning away others to her side. Symmetrical arrangements of signs also have strong metaphorical connotations (see Chapter 9).

6.4.2.3. Movement

Meaning in sign language can be metaphorically represented through the *speed*, the *kinds*, and the *direction* of the movement.

First of all, different speeds often are linked to abstract concepts. Quick rhythm can be associated with the concepts such as liveliness, agitation or busyness, while slow tempo suggests calm, fatigue, or rest (as in Dorothy Miles' *Seasons*, where the quick tempo in *Spring* stands for the excitement of the season, and the slow movement in *Summer* contributes to the representation of the heat). Being

rhythmical itself stands for a well-balanced emotion, while lack of regularity in rhythm refers to a disturbed state of mind. Dorothy Miles was aware of this metaphor in rhythm, as she said, “If they want to make it exciting, they will have a fast rhythm. If they want it slow, boring, sleepy, they’ll have a long rhythm...” (quoted in Sutton-Spence 2005). Judith Jackson (2006) also suggests:

Rhythm and speed can show different emotions. Fast speed can show excited, confident, or overconfident, such as “I can do this!” “I’m okay!” Slow could be discouraged, tired, or old, but it could also be positive, happy, relaxed, and content, a sense of pressure is eased.

Different speed can also signify abstract concepts, so that fast movement symbolises efficiency and slow movement represents laziness. In BSL poem *Five Senses*, Paul Scott uses fast speed in the final section of his poem in order to highlight the importance and efficiency of the sight to Deaf people (Sutton-Spence 2005). Another example is Judith Jackson’s untitled poem dedicated to her father (Jackson 2006). The poem depicts scenes when the father went out to various places to register to be a soldier but rejected because he was deaf. At the beginning of the poem Jackson signs with fast movement, representing the eagerness, confidence, and excitement of her father. When he is repeatedly rejected, however, he loses his confidence which is mirrored by slow signing. Such changes in speed have physical basis (that a discouraged person may actually walk slowly) but it has more symbolic effect mirroring the emotion of the character.

Secondly, kinds of movement also have metaphorical association. For example, rhythmical movements are associated with liveliness (as in Dorothy Miles’ *Spring* and *Autumn*) while simpler, less dynamic movements suggest calmness and monotony (as in Wim Emmerik’s *Falling leaf*). A circular movement is linked to the passing of the days and life as in Ella Mae Lentz’ *Circle of Life* and in Paul Scot’s *Tree*.

Thirdly, and most importantly here, the directions of movement play a significant role in metaphorical signing. This mechanism is based on orientational metaphors such as GOOD IS UP, BAD IS DOWN (as in “I’m feeling up/down today”), or RATIONAL IS UP, EMOTIONAL IS DOWN (“He fell in love and could not rise again”) (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). The strength of sign language is that it

can directly connect directions by simply moving their hands. Below are a few examples of orientational metaphor which governs the movement of certain signs.

Upward and downward directions

There is clear and strong association between upward movement and positive meaning, and conversely, between downward movement and negative meaning. For example, many BSL signs which have positive meaning (such as WELL, ACHIEVE, IMPROVE, CONFIDENT) are signed upward; those with negative connotations (such as ILL, LOSE, NOT-CONFIDENT) move downward.

In sign language poetry, this up and down direction is used coherently. For example, Dorothy Miles' *Staircase* relies on this metaphor. The movement of climbing up the staircase is perceived as the way to achieve success, and many dangers (obstacles) are displayed with downward movement such as sinking into the ground and the head being cut off and dropped. Similarly, Miles' *Hang Glider* successfully illustrates the wavering emotion of the poetic persona between her resolution to take off and the fear of falling by alternating the promising sign of WINGS, which is made by raising her arms, and downward signs such as SEA-FAR-BELOW and FALL-FROM-CLIFF that represent the anxiety.

Up and down movement can be associated with a different set of emotions when conceptualised in a different way. BSL signs CONTENT, RELIEVED are signed with the hand moving down on the chest, instantiating a conceptual metaphor of EXCITED IS UP, RELAXED IS DOWN. Dorothy Miles' *Spring* starts with a series of quick movements at a higher location, which are moved downward toward the end, forming a bridge with *Summer*, which is characterised with slow and calm atmosphere.

Front and back direction

In many languages, front direction is associated with future and back direction with the past. This is true in many sign languages; for example in BSL TOMORROW is usually made forward, while YESTERDAY is most commonly made backward. This association is further developed into GOOD IS FRONT, BAD IS BACK metaphor, because it is generally understood as a bad habit to keep thinking of the past. Thus in

English a “forward-looking” person is a positive thinker, and a “retrograde” step makes the situation worse.

In sign language as well, moving forward often has positive connotations. This orientational metaphor contributed to a positive ending of Dorothy Miles’ *Evening*, when the poetic persona steps forward into the darkness.

Outward and inward direction

Another example of orientational metaphor is based on the direction away from the body (outward) and toward the body (inward). This is inherently linked to the location of the signs in relation to the body, i.e. the physical distance between the body and the hands. Consequently this direction involves various other notions, and different conceptual associations are possible. Outward movement uses more signing space and thus is perceived as “bigger”, whereas inward movement uses less space and leads to the sense of confinement. Or, inward movement can be associated with emotional closeness (as it decreases the distance between the signer and the referent) whereas outward movement can be seen as emotional detachment or indifference (see the above discussion in location).

Sutton-Spence (2005) observes in Dorothy Miles’ *Trio* how the poet makes a contrastive use of inward and outward directions to symbolise the poetic content. In *Morning*, most signs are located at a greater distance in front of the poet, and as a result the signs are made away from the body. This metaphorically stands for the open and positive atmosphere of fresh morning and plenty of possibilities in youth. In contrast, signs in *Evening* are produced toward the body (or on the body), creating a closed, suffocative, and restricted impression.

Sutton-Spence (to appear) notes that in *Morning*, there is a greater sense that we might be in control of time, as the signs move away from the body. Certainly the “end of the road” from the perspective of time and life is a long way off. Signs can move forward unencumbered, with the idea that in youth there is plenty of time and, metaphorically, plenty of space between our point in time and The End. We feel we are more in control of our destiny. In *Evening*, the signs move inwards repeatedly towards the body or contact the body, as the events of time move towards us unstoppably. Towards the end of that stanza, the signs BAT-COVERS-FACE, DEAF and BLIND all make contact with the face and head. We have arrived at the end of the line

where the physical end of life and the end of the allotted span of time are conveyed as the end of any more space. Both the Poetic-I and the signs have, in effect, hit the buffers. However, the final signs of the poem REACH-OUT, REACH-OUT suggest that the Poetic-I is back in control, once more stepping forward against the flow of time and beyond death, as the signs move outward, away from the body once more.

6.4.2.4. Palm orientation

The palm often represents the front or the visible side of an object, while the back of the hand is linked with the back or the invisible side of an object. For example, the BSL sign BOOK maps the inside of the book (written pages) onto the palm of the hand, and the back of the hands is understood as the cover of the book. The signer looks into the palm of the BSL sign MIRROR which stands for the reflecting side.

Once this association is established between the palm and the front, and the back of the hand and the back of the thing, it is easier to expand a general orientational metaphor of GOOD IS FRONT, BAD IS BACK, which in English produces an expression like “confront your enemy, instead of showing your back to them” or “She turns her back to me (=she refuses to talk to me)”. The palm is associated with concepts such as light, and the more important or positive side of a thing, whereas the back of the hand is associated with darkness, and the less important or negative side. Some ASL signs are distinguished by different palm orientations (DAY showing the palm toward the audience, NIGHT showing the back of the hand to the audience), which is symbolically used in Johanna Mesch’s haiku poem *Night* (see Chapter 13).

6.4.2.5. Eyegaze

Finally, eyegaze also plays a crucial role in metaphorical operation in sign language poetry. First of all, the gaze direction is often associated with orientational metaphors. Looking up can mean something positive in a simpler case, or can be

negative when it is constructed in a certain situation in which the person needs to look “up” because they themselves are situated “lower” than their interlocutors (see more discussion in Chapter 12).

Moreover, the act of looking can change the meaning of a manual sign. Often the gaze is used to turn non-tangible and abstract concepts into tangible and concrete objects. For example, in our earlier examples from Dorothy Miles’ *Evening*, there is a clear shift in gaze when the darkness turns into a bat. While Miles signs DARKNESS, an intangible concept, she does not look at her hands (see the picture d in Figure 6.3 below). Once it turns into BAT, however, her eyes are cast upon the hands because she can now “see” it (e in Figure 6.3). Her hands metaphorically become “visible”. It is the shift in gaze that shows this transformation.

6.5. Metaphors in sign language haiku

We have observed the basic mechanism of metaphor in sign language which is applicable to both poetic and non-poetic signing. In what remains, I will illustrate how metaphors are used in sign language haiku.

6.5.1. Metaphor or simile?

Many metaphorical expressions in sign language haiku (and in sign language poetry in general) do not fit into a strict category of metaphor in traditional literary terms because many of them in fact take the form of simile. Like metaphor, simile also connects two concepts, but with explicit linguistic clues such as “like” or “as”. As observed in the previous chapter (5.4.3) many Deaf haiku poets prefer to insert such overt clues and make the expressions more explicit. Thus similes are more common than metaphors in sign language poetry when the poem presents two concepts or images.

Traditionally, metaphor and simile are studied separately, and more attention has been paid to the former. Metaphor shows the connection in an implicit way, and scholars have been interested in the way the receiver rebuilds this unseen link. Simile is more straightforward, and has been seen as wordy, less sophisticated, and

less inspiring phenomenon (Sato 1978). As Aristotle noted, “simile is a different predication of metaphor, with a longer sentence and less pleasure” (*Poetics*, Volume 3, Chapter 10).

However, metaphor and simile are not necessarily two distinct phenomena but may form more of a continuum (Sato 1978). According to Sato, whether one uses metaphor or simile is not randomly decided. It often depends on the immediate context or cultural background. He explains,

“If Jack is standing in front of you with a stupid look, and there is no donkey as far as you can see, and you are in France where the donkey has been associated with stupidity over centuries, all you need to say is ‘Jack is a donkey’. There is no point elaborating this into ‘Jack is as stupid as a donkey’ unless you want to prove yourself to be as stupid as a donkey [...]. On the other hand, try to say something like ‘the beautiful small leech below her nose smoothly stretches’ ----the reader will be at a loss. In such occasions, you have to use a simile ‘her thin and closed lips stretch like a beautiful leech’” (92)¹⁵

In short, metaphor is more appropriate in one context, simile in another. Sato’s observation also entails that poets need to be aware of the possibility of losing their audience in exchange for the novelty of their poetic language, if they stick to minimum metaphoric expressions without clarifying them. This was the main concern of Dorothy Miles when she wrote:

“TAKE YOUR TIME. For both similes and metaphors, plenty of time should be given for the audience to follow the transformation from one image to another. For similes pause after introducing the first image before signing the linking word (‘like’, ‘looks like’, etc.): for metaphor, pause and possibly freeze the sign after establishing the key image.”

(from her lecture in 1976, cited in Sutton-Spence 2005: 119)

Miles used similes extensively (as seen in *Trio*) with those explicit “linking words”. Her prudence may partly be attributed to the fact that sign language poetry itself was still in its infancy and frequently performed live and thus the audience needed more time to grasp poetic signing. But many recent haiku poets in my corpus also show the same carefulness in dealing with metaphorical signing. Either consciously or unconsciously, they tend to make the link explicit when they present two discrete images. For example, Maria Gibson’s BSL haiku *Water* (Figure 6.2)

¹⁵ My translation. Original in Japanese.

compares the flow of water with the flow of signing, and she adds an explicit link SAME at the end of the poem. This is a clear example of simile. Deaf people’s general attitude to insert overt connectives makes most of their poetic metaphors in haiku more like similes.

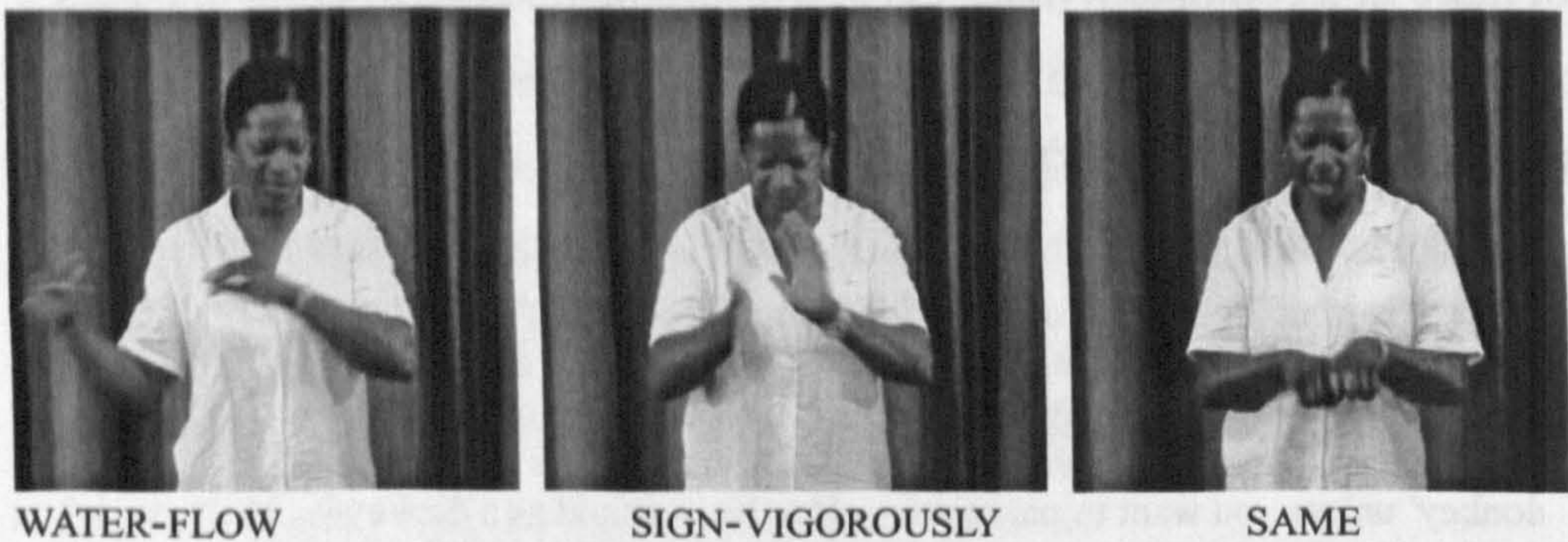


Figure 6.2 Maria Gibson *Water*

In summary, both metaphor and simile connect two discrete concepts or images A and B based on certain similarities between them. We can add juxtaposition to these two, as juxtaposition is essentially the same mechanism (recall our discussion of the haiku poem 6e). They take different forms:

- Metaphor: A is B
- Simile: A is like B
- Juxtaposition: A, B

In sign language poetry, such formal distinction loses the significance it originally had in spoken languages. The important point is that all three of them aim at bringing unrelated concepts together, suggesting a common ground, and leaving the audience with possible interpretation(s). I will treat all of them as metaphor in its broadest sense.

6.5.2. Visual motivation: Dorothy Miles’ *Evening*

In sign language haiku, the importance of visual motivation is salient. Instead of using a set of lexical signs to set up a metaphorical “scenario” (Taub 2001), haiku poets rely more on the immediate impact of visual metaphor at a surface level.

In longer poems, the poet may use conventional signs to construct a global metaphor. For example, Taub analyses Ella Mae Lentz's ASL poem *The Treasure*, which systematically connects the target domain (the act of researching ASL) with the source domain (the act of digging and finding a treasure) through a set of conventional signs. Linguistic expressions themselves are not necessarily metaphorical but their connections (= scenario) are. But because haiku is short, poets normally cannot afford to establish such complicated metaphorical scenarios. Instead they utilise local (linguistic, ad-hoc) metaphors that have immediate impact. This often results in selecting highly original, creative and visual signs. Metaphors in sign language haiku exist not only in the *meaning* of the word but in their *appearance* as well. This also means that visual similarity as a metaphorical ground is even more emphasised in sign language haiku.

I will illustrate this point by using Dorothy Miles' *Evening in Trio*, as it is a very good example of metaphor based on visual iconicity. The poems in *Trio* are not haiku, but with their brevity and visual impact, they are very similar to haiku in many ways. For detailed discussions of the metaphors in this particular poem, see Sutton-Spence (in preparation).

The translation and gloss of the poem are as follows (the translation is by Dorothy Miles, and the glossing is provided by Sutton-Spence 2005):

Like a flower the sun folds itself up
 Darkness, like a bat, flies close,
 and closer
 Deaf blinds me.

[stand, no smile]
 EVENING EVENING
 SUN LIKE FLOWER SUNSET HOLD-SUN/HOLD-FLOWER-FOLDED
 DARKNESS
 WINGED-CREATURE LIKE b-a-t
 BAT-FLIES BAT-COVERS-FACE
 DEAF BLIND ME
 REACH-OUT REACH-OUT
 [blink, blink.]

There are two examples of simile in this poem. The sun is compared to a flower, and darkness is compared to a bat. Both are motivated by the visual similarity

between the two signs. SUN and FLOWER-HEAD have very similar handshapes (although not exactly the same). SUNSET and HOLD-FLOWER-FOLDED share the same movement, although the forearm is not part of the sign in the former whereas it represents the stalk of flower in the latter. DARKNESS and BAT share the identical handshape, palm orientation, and location (Figure 6.3). Also, darkness is often associated with blackness, which is commonly believed to be the colour of bats.

Other instances of metaphorical mapping via visual resemblance are:

SUN IS A FLOWER

Closing of fingers = withering flower = diminishing light

Downward movement = drooping head of a flower = setting sun

Slow movement = gradual process of withering = gradual process of sunset

Some conventional conceptual metaphors are the base of this first metaphor; such as downward movement is linked to something negative (orientational metaphor); or closing something is keeping something away. Closing of the hand in sign languages is especially an interesting case. It means the disappearance of the palm, which often metaphorically represents the light side of a thing, and leads to positive interpretations whereas the back of the hand represents the dark side.

DARKNESS IS A BAT

Movement toward the body = the bat approaching to a person = darkness falling

In the second simile, the movement toward the body is understood both as the approach of the bat and the darkness. Covering the eyes stands for something negative, based on another conceptual metaphor UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING. Lack of sight is considered as lack of clear state of mind ("She does not see the importance of the incident"). The act of seeing is especially significant for Deaf people, which can be observed in the cross-categorical expression in the last sequence of this poem, DEAF BLIND ME.

As a result of the metaphorical blending, new associations are formed. The selected elements in source domains which are not originally part of the target domain are forced upon the latter in order to enhance poetic imagination. For example, in our daily experience, the sun does not fold and the darkness does not fly.

But since the association between the sun and the flower, and the darkness and the bat have already been established, it is easy to map extra elements.

In sign languages, this mapping is shown visually. The sign for SUN actually starts to fold, and DARKNESS starts to fly. There is a point of ambiguity where audience cannot tell what the poet's hands are representing - it can be either SUN or FLOWER that is folding, or DARKNESS or BAT that is flying. Such ambiguity adds depth into the interpretation of this visual poem. In other words, metaphorical fusion is reinforced by its visual representation.



a) SUN



b) FLOWER



c) HOLD-SUN / HOLD-FLOWER-FOLDED



d) DARKNESS



e) BAT

Figure 6.3 Signs from Dorothy Miles' *Evening in Trio*

6.5.3. Case Studies in haiku

Attitudes toward metaphor in sign language haiku vary. Some poems stick to the description of what things are (e.g. Dorothy Miles' *Seasons* does not show the same conscious attempt to produce simile and metaphors as in her *Trio*), while others make active efforts to take metaphor into their poems. This diversity makes it more

important to look at individual metaphors. In this last section, I will pick up five haiku poems to explore how they use metaphors to convey their poetic message.

6.5.3.1. Danielle Rogers' *Tree*

The trees are strong;
Human-like scratching the sky;
They hold my soul aloft.

TREE TREE STRONG
TREE-SCRATCHING
REACH-OUT-SKY
SOUL SOUL-ALOFT

This haiku in ASL is very short, but it has a strong poetic effect. It does use a few lexical signs (TREE, STRONG and SOUL) but the major part of the poem is a visual/iconic/metaphorical illustration of a personified tree. There is iconic mapping between the tree and human body (serving as a base for personification) and metaphorical mapping between the upward direction and the uplifting of the soul. During the major part of the poem, the poet's body is used iconically and metaphorically to represent the tree, which in turn is used to celebrate the spiritual elevation of a human soul. The last sign SOUL-ALOFT (Figure 6.4 c) is in fact ambiguous in that the poet can be interpreted both as representing the tree or as a human being admiring the elevation of the soul.

In sign language poetry in general, there is a good ground for personifying a tree using the signer's body (see Chapter 7). This poem adds further ground by identifying the growing branches as the act of scratching. The hands of the signer are seen iconically as the branches and leaves of the tree, but metaphorically as the "hands" of the tree scratching the sky.¹⁶

The most impressive feature of this poem is the consistent upward movement (Figure 6.4). The poet consistently moves her arms upward, creating a very positive and strong impression based on the prevailing metaphor of GOOD IS UP, BAD IS DOWN. Such movements are highly marked because they use the shoulder joints.

¹⁶ Dorothy Miles used a similar metaphor in *Exaltation*.

They are perceived as “big” signs, located outside the normal signing space. This also contributes to the huge impact of this poem.



a) SCRATCH-SKY



b) REACH-OUT-SKY



c) SOUL-ALOFT

Figure 6.4 Some upward signs in Danielle Rogers' *Tree*

6.5.3.2. Jessica McKinney's *Memory*

Memory's ashes
Drift softly into a fast river
Full of life

MEMORY1 MEMORY2
HOLD
ASHES THROW-ASHES
WATER WATER-FLOWS FULL LIFE

Another ASL haiku by Jessica McKinney uses a classifier to represent the objects (= the topic of the poem) instead of a lexical sign. Classifiers indicate the kind of object (such as “a long and thin object”) but do not specify what it is (the long thin object can be a person, a pencil, or a hand of the clock). The English translation helps us understand that it is “memory” and “ashes” but the signing itself does not specify what the poet is holding. This underspecification of the object may result in many interpretations.

In this poem, the abstract concept of memory is associated with a more concrete concept of ashes (MEMORY IS ASHES). It is an example of ontological metaphor in that an abstract concept is understood in terms of tangible substance. The two concepts are *conceptually* connected based on our general knowledge – both are the remains of something else (memory of the past events, ashes of the extinguished fire) and both do not have a fixed shape. They are *linguistically*

connected through the use of the same classifier, which is a softly-closed O-handshape (the handshape used in the BSL sign SOFT). This classifier is used to represent something delicate, fragile, soft, and tender. It iconically represents ashes and metaphorically stands for memory.

While the identical handshape is used for MEMORY and ASHES, the location and the gaze metaphorically transform the former (abstract concept) into the latter (tangible object). The first sign MEMORY is held next to the head, and thus suggests that it has something to do with mental activities (recall our discussion at 6.4.2.2). When the same classifier is located lower and in front of the poet, its association with the mental activities is lost and the audience is led to believe that the sign is now a tangible object (ASHES). In other words, lowering the location (i.e. moving signs away from the head) helps to transform abstract concept into concrete concept. The gaze also contributes to this transformation. The poet looks sideways while signing MEMORY, but then looks at her hands to ASHES into the water. This symbolises the fact that the sign is now “visible” (just like Dorothy Miles turned DARKNESS into BAT by *looking* at the sign).

There is a metaphorical use of shifting speeds as well. The poet signs MEMORY and ASHES slowly, which reinforces their softness and fragility. This is contrasted with a quick flow of water. The last sign LIFE is slowed down again, contributing to the lingering effect.

This poem overall is a good example of unresolved metaphor. For example, it does not clarify what throwing memory/ashes into water symbolises (i.e. does it symbolises the poet’s resolution to leave the past behind and move on, or simply mean to let one’s precious thing go, or contrary, to entrust it to a larger existence?). Nor does it specify what the last sequence (“full of life”) is referring to (is it referring to the river, or the ashes, or something else?). The interpretation is entirely up to the audience. The lack of facial expressions of the poet also widens the scope of interpretation.



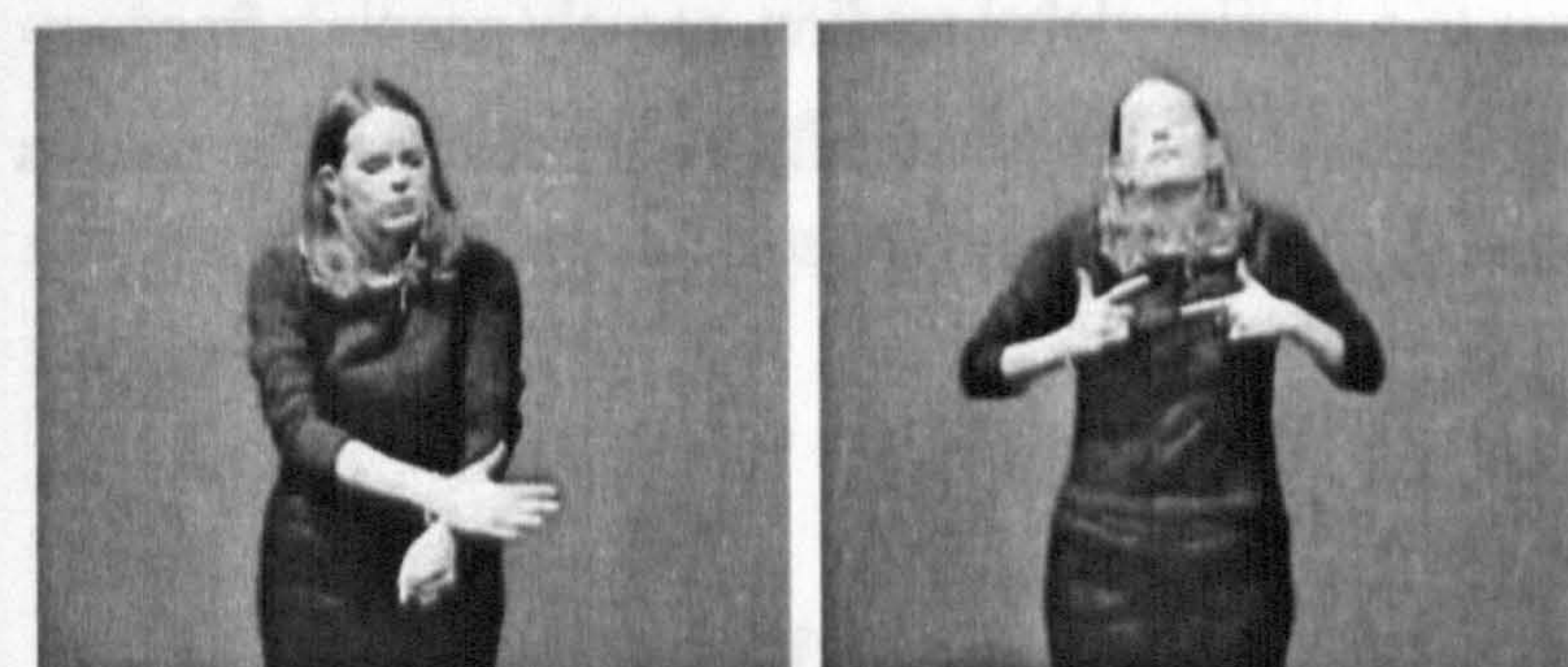
a) MEMORY (right) b) MEMORY (left) c) HOLD1



d) HOLD2 e) ASHES f) THROW-ASHES



g) WATER h) WATER-FLOWS1 i) WATER-FLOWS2



j) FULL k) LIFE

Figure 6.5 Jessica McKinney's *Memory*

6.5.3.3. Penny Beschizza's *Grass* and Rita DeSarker's *Rose*

Grass

Grass swaying happily in the wind
The strong sun appears

And slowly, gradually, and persistently
It withers out the grass

GRASS-SWAYING
STRONG-SUN
SUN-CAST-HEAT-OVER-THE-GRASS
GRASS-WITHERS-OUT

Rose

A rose was beheaded
By the frost that had fallen
On its crying bloom

ROSE STRONG FROST FROST-APPROACHING
COVER-ROSE ROSE-BEHEADED
TEARS TEARS-OVER-ROSE

Earlier I claimed that sign language haiku did not normally set up a metaphorical “scenario” to systematically map more than one element from the target/source domains. However, both Penny Beschizza’s BSL haiku *Grass* and Rita DeSarker’s ASL haiku *Rose* do produce such scenarios. They consist of similar elements and have similar structures. *Grass* describes how lively grass is withered by the strong sun, and *Rose* illustrates how a beautiful rose is beheaded by the frost. Both of them lend themselves to a similar global reading, namely people’s freedom and happiness taken away by external force. Specifically, both poems can be read as Deaf people being oppressed by hearing authority. The set of correspondence in these two poems are listed below:

Target domain	Source domain
(Deaf) People	Plants (GRASS or ROSE)
Happiness of people.....	Healthiness of the plants
(Hearing) Oppressing force ...	Natural force (SUN or FROST)
Deprivation of happiness.....	Death of the plants (WITHER-OUT or BEHEADED)

Such metaphorical interpretation is justified because it is firmly based on our general understanding of conceptual metaphors such as PLANTS ARE HUMANS, NATURAL FORCE IS HUMAN FORCE, and PHYSICAL PRESSURE IS PSYCHOLOGICAL PRESSURE. The first conceptual metaphor PLANTS ARE HUMANS is particularly reinforced in *Grass*, because it is justified by the use of the

open-5 handshape, which iconically refers to a collection of long, thin objects, but also metaphorically represents “people” (Brennan 1990).

The linguistic structure of these poems links structural similarities to the concept of oppression. For example, in both haiku poems, a plant (the grass/rose) is located lower in the signing space. The natural force (the sun, frost) comes outside the signing space, in a higher location, and casts a downward movement to the plant. This structure corresponds to our understanding of power and suppression - i.e. HIGH STATUS IS UP, LOW STATUS IS DOWN (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 16). People with power and authority are metaphorically situated higher, and therefore the act of oppression is conceptualised as downward movement. Common words and expressions such as “suppress” (literally means “push downward”), “subjugate”, “subordinate”, “under pressure”, and “under the control of...” metaphorically indicate this downward movement of power. The “external” force literally and iconically is located outside the signing space, which also shows structural mapping. They also use the metaphorical handshapes (bent fingers to represent the negative aspect of external force), which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 10.

6.5.3.4. Samuel Sanders’ *Fireflies*

Finally I will consider a very simple haiku poem whose poetic effect is reinforced by the power of metaphor. Observe the following ASL haiku by Samuel Sanders.

Under the stars
Fireflies swirl and dance
Above dying embers

STARS-TWINKLING
FIREFLIES-SWIRLING
FIRE-GRADUALLY-DIE-OUT

This very symbolic poem is a good example of “unresolved metaphor” in that it simply describes a scene in nature but makes the audience wonder that something remains unsaid. The contrast of bright stars and dying embers is striking by itself, but becomes even more impressive when connected via the image of fireflies, which

seem to be enjoying fleeting liveliness but are primarily associated with a brief span of life (thus it organically connects long-living stars and dying fire). This is a good haiku moment as it is (visual, intense, and beautiful) but it also triggers a common metaphor of LIFE IS LIGHT, DEATH IS DARKNESS in the audience's mind (which is represented in the English translation "dying embers").

Such thematic impact of the poem is reinforced by linguistic metaphors as well. The three images, all of which are related to light, are formally linked via similar signs (they are all signed with both hands with internal movement of the fingers). The poet visually locates these three signs' up-and-down orientation to highlight their distinction. By doing so, it utilises the LIFE IS UP, DEATH IS DOWN orientational metaphor. The shining stars (standing for life) are iconically and metaphorically located upward, while the disappearing fire (standing for death) is placed at the bottom of the signing space. The sign for fireflies, which represent present vitality and approaching death, is physically located between the other two extremes.¹⁷

The three images are signed with a different speed as well. Stars and fireflies are signed with quick whirling movements, while the sign for embers is slowed down considerably, which metaphorically suggests decreasing energy and gradual loss of life. Unlike its English translation, the poet does not sign DIE or DYING. The poet, instead, shows the dying fire through the visual arrangement of the sign and slowed-down speed.

6.6. Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of how metaphor is used effectively to convey the poetic message of sign language haiku. We have observed that, although traditional haiku uses metaphor only in a subtle way, sign language does exploit metaphor in various ways at various levels. Iconicity plays a crucial role in sign language haiku, sub-lexical parameters tend to carry symbolism, and many

¹⁷ There is a very iconic and direct mapping between form and meaning in this poem that fireflies are actually placed "under" the stars and "above" the fire (both in signing and in the typography of English translation). This is a kind of directness which the Imagist poets (see Chapter 2) such as William Carlos Williams tried to re-produce in their written poems (Bauman 1998).

metaphorical associations are visually motivated. This works extremely well for the haiku form in which the visual presentation of the world is essential.

The ultimate goal of metaphor is to successfully connect the form and the theme of a poem. In the next chapter, the thematic aspects of sign language haiku will be analysed.

Chapter 7

Theme

To produce a mighty book, you must choose a mighty theme.

Herman Melville

7.1. Introduction

This chapter explores the thematic aspect of sign language haiku. Traditional Japanese haiku is characterised by its strict discipline both in form and in theme. While the major part of the formal aspects is not directly applicable to sign language haiku, it is relatively easier to follow the thematic regulation of traditional haiku. In other words, the poets seek for an appropriate theme to represent the haiku-ness in their poems. The influence of Japanese haiku is clear from the popularity of nature and season in the theme of sign language haiku. But sign language haiku also inherits the thematic heritage of sign language poetry. It not only includes some of the common themes in poetic signing, such as deafness and identity, but also actively takes in the so-called “Deaf perspective” in general. Therefore, the theme of sign language haiku highlights once again the fact that it is a fusion of two poetic traditions.

This first section will provide a few key notions relevant to the discussion of the theme of sign language haiku. The next section will provide an overview of the thematic features of traditional haiku and of sign language literature. Detailed analyses of themes that can be found in the poems in the corpus will be given in 7.3. Section 7.4 will discuss various important issues in the theme of sign language haiku.

7.1.1. Theme and topic

Before discussing different kinds of theme, it is important to distinguish between “theme” and “topic”, in any piece of literature. Whereas topic is what is actually described in the poem, theme is the underlying message of the poet. In some cases, the topic can be identified with the theme, but in other cases, theme is never explicitly stated but woven deep under the surface of the topic. For example, Dorothy Miles’ *Elephants Dancing* is not just a simple poem of an elephant (topic), but also implicitly refers to the situation of Deaf people (theme). Ben Bahan’s story *The Bird of a Different Feather* is not about the exclusion of a bird which has different physical appearance from its siblings (topic) but about the situation of Deaf people and the ignorance of the surrounding hearing people toward them (theme).

Haiku provides an interesting case regarding the distinction between topic and theme. To interweave a theme beneath a topic provides an additional layer of meaning, and thus it becomes a form of metaphor. As discussed in Chapter 6, haiku prefers simple and straightforward descriptions. It is about “what it is” and not “what it stands for”. Therefore it is not the case that there is always a theme in haiku. For examples, recall the following haiku examples which we discussed earlier.

7a (=5d)
an empty elevator
opens
closes
(Jack Cain)

7b (=4g)
natsukusa ni kikansha no sharin kite tomaru (Yamaguchi Seichi)

in summer grass
a steam engine’s wheels
come and stop¹⁸

It is difficult (though not impossible) to say that these poems have a theme beyond the things they describe. What comes into the reader’s mind on reading these poems is limitless and unrestricted, but there is no clear topic-theme correspondence.

¹⁸ Translation by W.J. Higginson

Whereas some haiku are highly symbolic and use the power of metaphor to convey their message, haiku always has an option of having a simple single layer of meaning.

In this chapter, I will mainly use the term “theme” to refer to the subject of a haiku poem, which may or may not overlap with the notion of “topic” but I will distinguish theme and topic when it is appropriate to do so.

7.1.2. Form and theme interrelated

Form and theme in poetry are closely interrelated. Form motivates a certain theme, and theme often dictates the formal aspects of a poem. This is the case for haiku as well. The brevity of Japanese haiku, its syllabic structure, and the monotonous rhythm it produces, result in simple, detached, and static descriptions rather than dramatic themes. The preference for simple and day-to-day topics, in turn, favours unadorned language.

In sign language haiku, the spatial dynamics of the visual language often influences the selection of a theme (i.e. themes are often visually motivated, as in Donna Williams’ *Research and Duck*). On the other hand, selected themes inspire certain formal aspects of the poem (as to which handshape, location, and movement to be used). Such active interaction between form and theme can be observed in symmetry (Chapter 9), in which duality and contrast, common themes in sign language haiku, encourage the symmetrical arrangement of signs, and the beauty and the relative ease of symmetrical signing motivates the theme of contrast. The simple fact that we have two hands often results in perceiving natural objects as pairs (such as Johanna Mesch’s *Twin Leaves*, Siobhan O’Donovan’s *Twin Trees*). The selection of handshape also influences the theme of a poem and the theme often decides the handshape to be used (see Chapter 10).

Another example is the theme of life metaphorically perceived as a circle (“circle of life”) and represented through circular movements. In many cultures, life is understood both as a linear path (Robert Frost’s *The Road Not Taken* is a good

example) and also as having a circular structure. The circular perception of life is based on our experience of recurring days and seasons. Such perception is not particularly Deaf, but sign language poets seem to embrace the theme of circularity. Dorothy Miles' *Seasons* quartet suggests a new life at the end of *Winter*, and therefore successfully refers back to *Spring*, the beginning of the quartet. Paul Scott's *Tree* describes the life of a tree, but it does not finish with the death of the tree but with the sprouting of a new seed which grows into another tree. There is a strong suggestion of circularity in many life-related poems.

In sign language poetry, the theme of life as a circle is reinforced through the use of repeating actual circular movement. The poets often illustrate the passage of time with a circular movement. Ella Mae Lentz's *Circle of Life* is a typical example as the title suggests. The repetition of vertical circles in her poem not only adds beauty and consistency to the poem but also provides a visual link with the theme of life as a circle. In the above-mentioned *Tree* by Paul Scott, the passage of time is also seen through repeated vertical circles parallel to the body. This circular movement is repeated throughout the life of the tree. The understanding of life as a circle encourages the particular movement of circles and vice versa.

7.2. Overview of themes in two poetic traditions

7.2.1. Themes of Japanese haiku

In Chapter 4, it was noted that haiku picks up a so-called "haiku moment" and vividly illustrates it with simple and concise language. The brevity of haiku cannot provide enough space to develop complicated themes such as love, politics or war. Thus haiku requires careful selection of a theme.

The fundamental task of haiku theme is to create a simple but vivid image that leaves a long-lasting impression in the mind of the reader. Haiku does this through providing a unique perspective in an everyday situation, not by celebrating a special and eventful moment of life. The simpler the haiku language is, the more imagination it can stimulate in the reader. Thus haiku does not talk about imagined

things. Whatever the topic it picks up, it has to be based on the thing we can actually see (or hear, touch, smell, and so on).

Historically, haiku has been deeply involved with the theme of nature, as other Japanese art forms are (Higginson 1995). As a rule, Japanese haiku should include one word that indicates which season the poem is set (called *kigo*, “season word”). Reference to nature is indispensable in traditional haiku, and even when a haiku poem involves other general themes it is described through, or accompanied by, natural phenomena. The association of haiku with a natural theme is very strong. As we see later in this chapter, sign language haiku actively takes in this thematic tradition of Japanese haiku.

Another feature of the theme of haiku is everyday life. The poet’s task is to find a significant moment in the non-significant, normal routine of life, as in the following example:

7c

Asagao ni tsurube torare te morai-mizu

The well-bucket taken by a morning glory; asking for water

(Kaga Chiyojo)

The poet captures a moment in her daily routine. One morning, she went to the well and found a tendril of a morning glory coiled around her bucket. As she did not want to cut off the tendril to get her bucket back, she went out and asked her neighbour for water. Such an incident is not a big moment in life, but its subtleness and the sympathetic attitude of the poet toward the flower leave the reader with a lingering emotion of warmth. The poet highlights the uniqueness of this moment by adding a human-like quality to the morning glory (the verb *toru*, “take”, usually requires an animate subject).

Empathy toward non-human creatures, such as small animals, birds, fish, and insects, is also an important part of traditional Japanese haiku. In the following haiku, Bashō attributed some human-like quality to birds, fish, and the monkey, in association with the passing of pleasant spring or the first cold rain of winter.

7d

Yuku haru ya tori naki uo no me wa namida
departing spring-----
birds cry, in the fishes'
eyes are tears¹⁹

7e
Hatsushigure sarumo komino-o hoshigenari
The first winter drizzle
Even the monkey
Seems to want a small raincoat

Haiku seldom talks about “big” animals such as bears and tigers because they do not interact with people on a daily basis (except horses which have been part of human life). Instead, small creatures, especially birds and insects (fireflies, flies, crickets), are very popular. Recall some of Issa’s poems (e.g. 4q, 4v, 5a) which talk about birds and insects. Here is another one, in which Issa shows a empathetic attitude toward a cricket by addressing it:

7f
Negaeri o suru zo soko noke kirigirisu
Look out!
I’m going to turn now—
Move over, Cricket!²⁰

The existence of such insects may appear insignificant, but haiku’s preference for everyday topics and the unique perspective renders such small creatures the focus of attention.

7.2.2. Themes of sign language literature

Themes of sign language poetry and stories vary, but there are common features across different poems. Themes related to deafness (Deaf experience and sign language, Deaf identity in the hearing-dominant world, and so on) dominate the body of sign language literature.

¹⁹ Translation by David Landis Barnhill

²⁰ Translation by Lewis Mackenzie

First of all, sign language is used to celebrate the language and the culture of Deaf people. This is especially reinforced by the use of sign language as a poetic medium itself. Dorothy Miles' *Language for the Eye* celebrates the beauty and capability of sign language. Paul Scott's *Five Senses* positively illustrates the sensory experience of Deaf people. Some of the poems by deaf children in *Life and Deaf* also highlight the pride of being Deaf.

But being Deaf also requires a deep reflection about oneself. This results in many sign language poems that choose "identity" as the theme. This includes the poet's search for "who am I?" in relation to the surrounding world (Richard Carter's *Identity* declares the poet's identity as being a Deaf, signing, and gay person) and the issue of split identity between hearing and Deaf worlds (Sean Timon's *Half Personal Poetry*, in *Life and Deaf*, explores this theme with beautiful symmetrical arrangement of signs).

Sign language poetry also expresses the Deaf poets' frustration toward the world. It can be the frustration of being deaf/Deaf (as in 12-year-old Richard Achiampong's poem *Look at the Front* in *Life and Deaf*), but mainly it is the frustration and anger towards the hearing dominant world which does not pay any attention to the minority Deaf population. Especially, this frustration is linked to the ignorance of hearing people regarding sign language. Dorothy Miles' *Walking Down the Street* and Clayton Valli's *Snowflake* are the representatives of this category. Such Deaf experience can be represented through allegory as well. Miles' *Elephants Dancing* and *An Ugly Duckling* both symbolise the situation of Deaf people in the hearing dominant world.

Animals play a very important role in sign language poetry. Deaf people are fond of describing animals in creative signing, especially adding some human quality to animals. Plants and non-living things are also given humanistic characters. This technique will be termed here "anthropomorphism" and discussed later in this chapter in relation to sign language haiku.

There are many other daily-life themes expressed with the excellent use of visual language (Scott's *Train*, St. Clair's *Sun and Spots*). They are characterised almost entirely by the formal beauty of the language (a linguistic play, as it were), such as symmetry, unifying handshapes and movement. They do not convey a strong

message in a propositional sense, and thus translation of those poems often loses their original power.

7.3. Themes in sign language haiku -overview

In order to give the overall view of the theme in sign language haiku, the poems in my corpus are categorised in terms of their primary themes. The corpus of 107 poems includes four different renditions of Dorothy Miles’ *Seasons*, but for the purposes of analysis here they are only counted as one set. Thus the total number of the poems is reduced to 95. Then the poems are divided into four categories: nature, deafness and identity, daily life and ‘others’. As shown in the pie chart in Figure 7.1, 58 out of 95 poems (61%) talk primarily about nature, 14 (15%) about deafness and identity, 9 (9%) about daily life, and 14 (15%) have a variety of other themes. The breakdown of each category is shown in Table 7.1.

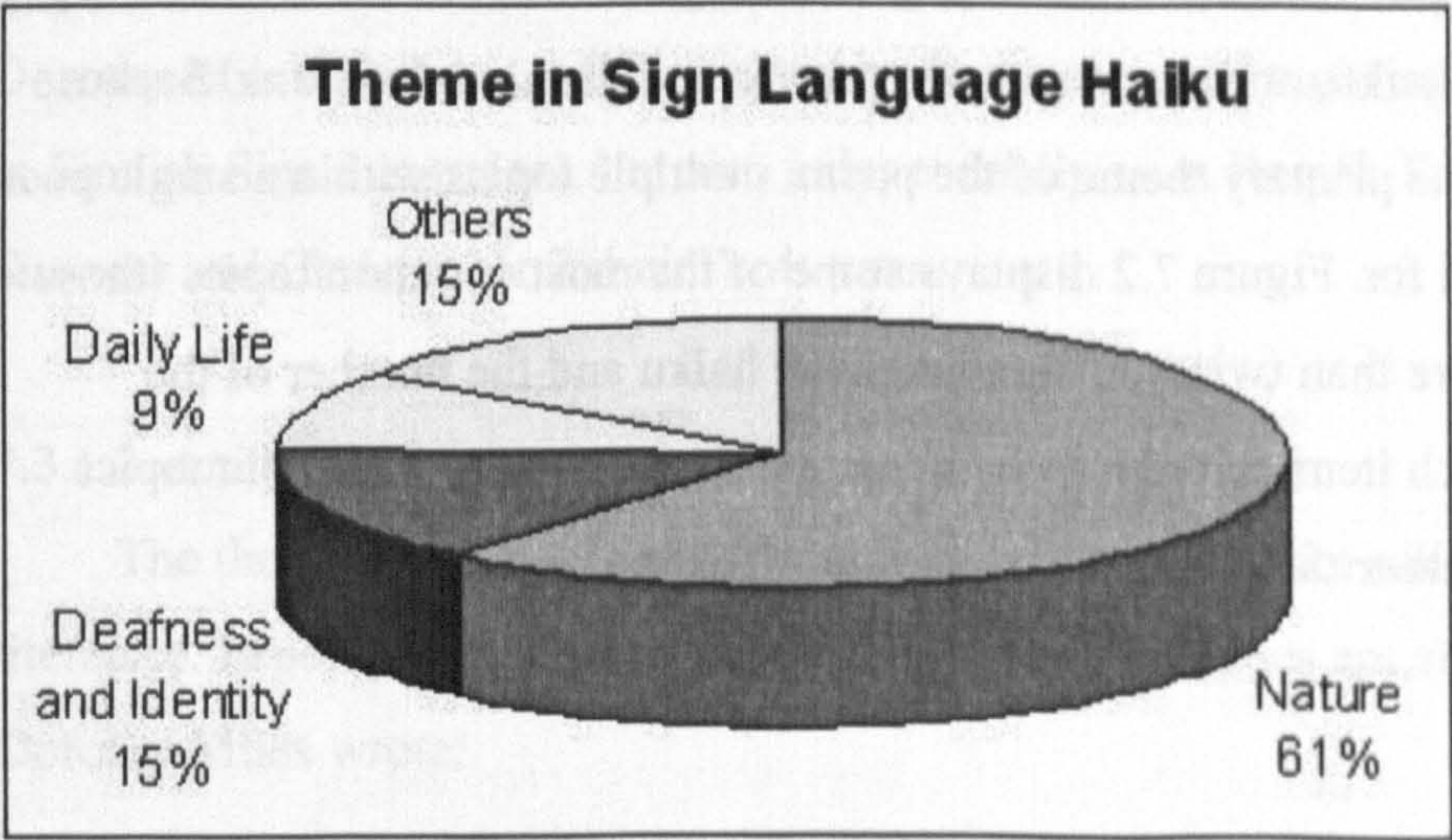


Figure 7.1 Theme categories in sign language haiku

1. Nature (58)	1.1. Seasons	25
	1.2. Animals, birds, insects	12
	1.3. Heavenly Bodies	8
	1.4. Plants (trees, flowers)	6
	1.5. Others	6
2. Deafness and Identity (14)	2.1. Deaf Identity	
	celebration of sign language	3
	grief over lack of hearing	2
	frustration toward hearing world	2
	positive view on deafness	2
	split identity	1
	Deaf perspective	1
	2.2. Other identity	1
3. Daily-life		9
4. Others		14

Total		95

Table 7.1 Breakdown of theme categories

The aim of this categorisation is to give a rough idea about the thematic aspect of sign language haiku, and not to provide precise and detailed divisions. Because this is based on the primary theme of the poem, multiple topics within a single poem are not accounted for. Figure 7.2 displays some of the most common topics (those which appear more than twice) in sign language haiku and the number of the appearance of each item, in order to demonstrate the popularity of certain topics regardless of whether they are primary or minor figures.

Tree	15
Sun	12
River	6
Cat	(6) ²¹
Bird	5
Rain	5
Star	5
Flower	4
Field/earth	4
Snow	4
Mountain	3

Figure 7.2 Topics that are mentioned more than twice in the corpus

7.3.1. Nature

7.3.1.1. Seasons

61% of the poems talk about nature in general. The high percentage of seasons (26% of the entire corpus) especially reveals a strong connection with the original Japanese haiku. The theme of seasons is often explored as a set of four seasons (as in Dorothy Miles’ *Seasons*, a BSL quartet by four poets, and eight season haiku poems in Finnish Sign Language), but also independently as in Raquib Din’s *Last Day of Summer* and Christopher Zahniel’s *Autumn*.

7.3.1.2. Animals

The theme of animals comes from both traditional haiku and sign language literature. Especially in sign language poetry, animal themes are abundant. As Dorothy Miles wrote:

Using Ameslan [=American Sign Language], it’s very easy to imitate animal characteristics and behaviour. In turn, animal stories and poems are good for demonstrating Ameslan. (1976: 22)

There are twelve instances of haiku poems with animal themes, although half of them come from the BSL Haiku Festival in which the participants were requested to make a haiku poem on “cat”. Nevertheless, the following examples show how sign language haiku includes the thematic heritage common to both of its origins.

²¹ This is because “cat” was the assigned topic for the participants of the BSL Haiku Festival.

The first example from JSL inherits the attitude of haiku toward a small creature with a reference to the season, while the second example from ASL shows more of the characteristics of sign language poetry in general, in that the poet takes in the entire perspective of the fish to express the theme.

7g

After a spring shower;
In the drops on a new leaf;
A snail is playing
(Hiroyuki Matsumoto)

7h

Fish swim eagerly;
in a mad dash for the prize;
only to be hooked
(Jesus Marchan)

One difference between traditional haiku and sign language haiku is that the former prefers smaller animals, or even insects, as observed earlier but the latter does not. Whereas such smallness of the target provides subtle but unique perspective to the written haiku poem, sign language poets often “turn into” the target using the entire body (for example, four out of six “cat” poems in BSL create a reproduction of the real-size, anthropomorphised cat), and thus bigger animals are more popular.

7.3.1.3. Heavenly Bodies

It is notable that quite a few of the signed poems in the corpus talk about heavenly bodies, such as the sun, moon, stars. They are essential part of our experience with nature and they provide clear visual inspiration. There are many examples of haiku poems that refer to the heavenly bodies (especially the moon has a unique spiritual status in Japanese culture).

Deaf people’s strong association with vision further encourages this theme in sign language haiku. Sutton-Spence (2005) observes the way Deaf poets celebrate sight by referring to “lights” and “seeing”.

7.3.1.4. Plants

Plants are also a common theme in sign language haiku. They may not be used as a primary theme (only 6 out of 95 poems have plants as a central theme), but their

presence can be observed throughout the body of haiku poems. For example, Figure 7.3 shows that the trees are found in 15 poems (for the discussion of the tree as a popular topic, see section 7.4.4)

The metaphor of PLANTS ARE HUMAN is a common theme in sign language haiku. As we have seen in Chapter 6, Penny Beschizza's *Grass* and Rota DeSarker's *Rose* both deal with an innocent plant attacked and killed by external force (the sun in *Grass* and the frost in *Rose*). They can be understood as a human soul overtaken and destroyed by the major surrounding force.

In Linda Day's *Spring in the Air*, a pair of flowering trees is juxtaposed with a human couple.

7i

Spring in the Air by Linda Day

A couple sitting side by side
On the swing
Looking at each other

Flowers growing side by side
Their stalks entangled at the top
Looking at each other

Both couples hugging and kissing

The unique feature of sign language haiku is that this metaphor of PLANTS ARE HUMAN can be shown more literally. The poets describe the plants using their body so that they look begin to like human beings. Paul Scott's *Spring* is a good example, in which the poet's whole body represents the tree (Figure 7.3). Thus this metaphor has even stronger impression in sign language poetry.



Figure 7.3 TREE in Paul Scott's *Spring*

7.3.2. Deafness and Identity

Although the theme of nature shows strong influence from traditional haiku, sign language haiku also inherits thematic traditions from sign language literature.

To perform a poem in sign language by itself is a means for signing poets to identify themselves as “Deaf” (Sutton-Spence and Müller de Quadros 2006). However, some poets deal with their identity in a more direct way. Any art form is a means of self-expression, and for Deaf people the question of “self” cannot be separated from their deafness (see Forbes-Robertson (2004) for discussion of deafness in Deaf art). Fourteen per cent of the sign language haiku select it as a central theme.

While traditional haiku does not tend to make direct reference to such subjective themes as identity, the issue of deafness and identity is one of the central concerns of sign language haiku. It is almost meaningless for hearing people to create poems about being hearing, but for Deaf people, being the cultural and linguistic “other” in this world, it can be extremely important to speak out about their identity. By using the traditional poetic form which is widely accepted outside the Deaf world, Deaf people can have a “voice” to speak to the majority.

The breakdown within the category of deafness and identity above shows the similar pattern that can be found in sign language literature in general. The most popular theme is the celebration of sign language. Maria Gibson's *Water* connects her observation in nature (she got the inspiration for this poem when the participants of the BSL Haiku Festival took a walk to a park where she saw a small stream) with

her identity as a signing person, and expresses the connection using a simile. There is visual motivation to a certain extent in that two signs WATER-FLOW and SIGN-VIGOROUSLY are made with the same handshape (open-5), similar signing speed and are both two-handed (Figure 7.4).

7j
Water by Maria Gibson

I watch the flow of water
It runs, runs, and runs!
And never stops at all
I thought: it's the same with Deaf people.
We sign, sign, and sign!
And never stop at all



WATER-FLOW



SIGN-VIGOROUSLY

Figure 7.4 Two signs from Maria Gibson's *Water*

Sign language literature is used to celebrate the Deaf culture and sign language, and thus negativity toward being Deaf is unlikely to be found. However, there are a couple of haiku poems which directly express the grief over lack of hearing.

7k
No angel's voice
No words from the gods
I shall not hear
(Sam Sepah)

7l
Oh, please ears
Let me hear the true voices
Of my deaf parents
(Eri Takeshima)

It is worth noting that both of them come from the first year of Robert Panara Haiku Contest. In the second and the third contests, such negative views toward deafness entirely disappeared. This may coincide with the gradual improvement in the awareness of poetic signing as a means for celebrating the capability of the language and culture of Deaf people.

Thus instead of focusing on lack of hearing, the poets usually explore the way to express their positive experience with the sense of hearing, as in Keiko Toyota's following haiku poem.

7m
I experience sound;
With my whole body;
Like a huge ear

Yet, the frustration toward ignorance of hearing people is still prevailing, and many Deaf poets use poetic language as a means of expressing such frustration. Yumiko Nagai's following haiku (which we discussed earlier in Chapter 6) indirectly illustrates her annoyance with the situation that she is expected to hear like other hearing people.

7n (=6b)
The sea is my friend;
It has no language
that I must try to hear

Donna Williams' *Identity* shows the ambivalent status of a deaf person who has grown up within the mainstream education system as half belonging to the Deaf world and half to hearing world. The poet uses symmetrical distribution in order to explore this theme (Figure 7.5). This is a good example of form and theme being interrelated.

7o
Identity by Donna Williams

If
half Deaf
half hearing
what am I?

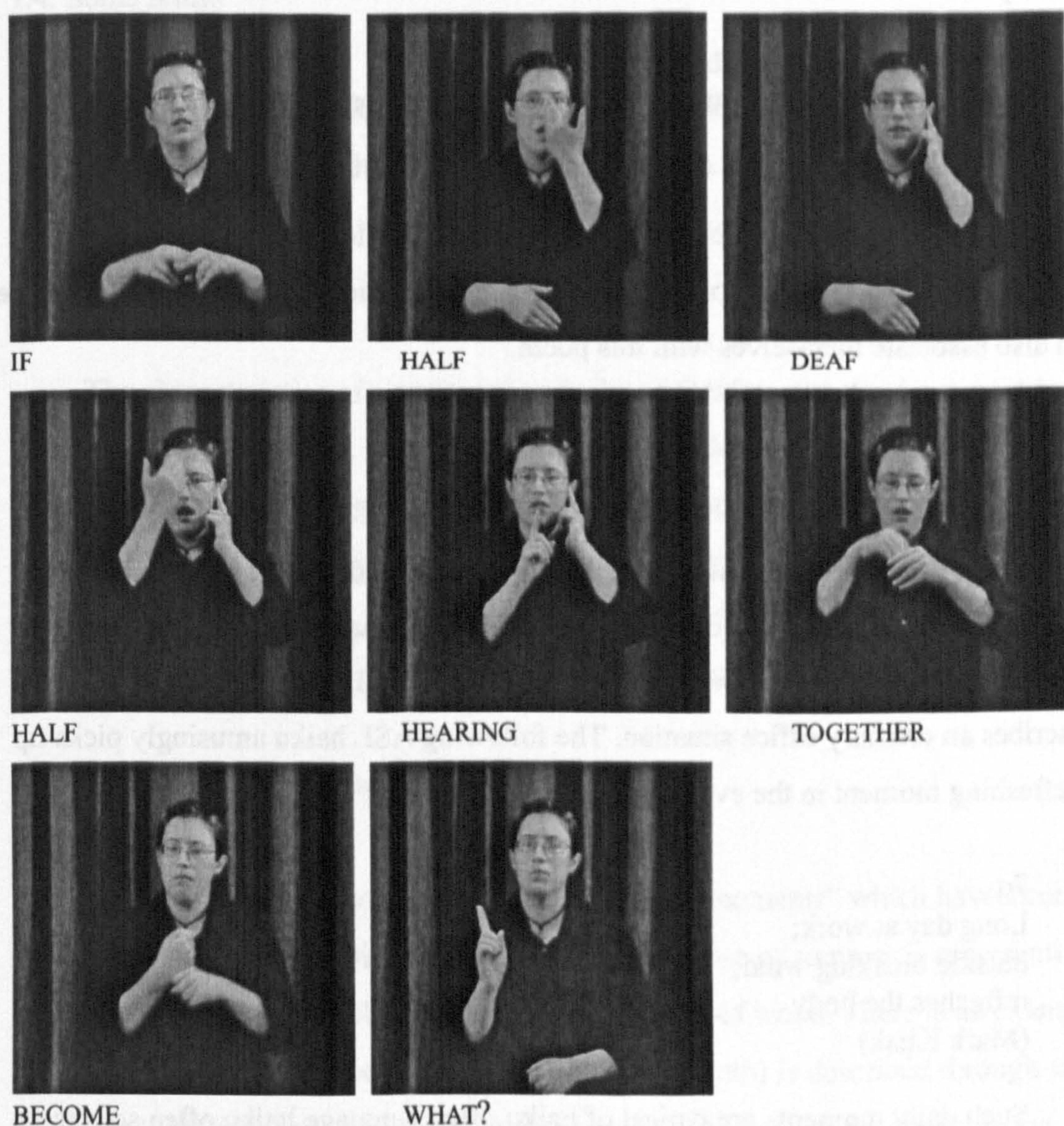


Figure 7.5 Donna Williams' *Identity*

Siobhan O'Donovan's *Deaf Head*, does not talk directly about identity, but it provides a unique perspective which only Deaf people can have. It describes people's behaviour on the train. While most people are reading a newspaper or talking, the poet finds one "head" which keeps looking up and around. She concludes: "That must be a *Deaf* head!". The poet is making a humorous comment on Deaf people's unique behaviour (that they "see" things around them much more than hearing people do), but the poem itself is also based on the Deaf perspective, and thus shows the identity of the poet as a Deaf person.

There is one example of identity theme which does not directly refer to deafness:

7p

To identify myself;
I pick out these old clothes; for today;
walk out into a winter street; proudly straightening myself
(Kazuyuki Oyatsu)

By knowing the background of the poet it is possible to connect this to his pride of being Deaf, but this provides broader interpretation, so that hearing audience can also associate themselves with this poem.

7.3.3. Daily Life

There are some poems which pick up a moment in daily life as a topic. Maria Gibson's *Kettle* talks about a daily routine of making a cup of tea (although from a very original and "Deaf" viewpoint - see Chapter 14) and Paul Scott's *Afternoon* describes an ordinary office situation. The following ASL haiku amusingly picks up a refreshing moment in the evening after the day's work:

7q

Long day at work;
outside breaking wind;
refreshes the body
(Mark Kijak)

Such daily moments are typical of haiku. Sign language haiku often selects them as a theme, but present them with highly visual and dynamic signing, instead of creating a static "snapshot" as traditional haiku does.

7.3.4. Others

The last category includes various different themes such as love, life, politics, and religion. Unlike traditional haiku, sign language haiku does not limit its range to static descriptions of real world. Using the power of visual language, these poems explore imaginative worlds, various actions and emotions.

7.4. Some issues

The remaining part of this chapter picks up some further important issues and topics in order to explore the thematic features of sign language haiku.

7.4.1. Deaf Perspective

The characteristics of sign language haiku as Deaf poetry stand out most in the theme of Deaf identity. However, even when the poems are dealing with non-Deaf themes, they are “used to create ‘Deaf’ images” as “the poems are composed from the perspective of a Deaf poet” (Sutton-Spence 2005: 101). This “Deaf perspective” is characterised, for example, by strong emphasis on vision, and with empathy toward minority (rather than mainstreamed) existence, such as animals, plants, and inanimate objects.

7.4.1.1. Emphasis on vision

Many poems in the corpus pick up their “haiku moments” which have strong visual appeal. In Raquib Din’s ASL haiku (7n), the close of summer is represented through the images of sunshine and the yellow colour of wood. There is an example of synesthesia (see 7.4.3. below) in which touch (warmth) is described through sight (sunshine). Bright images of sunshine and of yellow colour vividly illustrate the poetic scene.

7r
The last day of summer
Warmth shining from the sun
A yellow wood color

Samuel Sanders’s ASL haiku (7o) which we discussed in Chapter 6 is characterised with three different “lights” (stars, fireflies and embers) against darkness, which leaves a strong visual impression.

7s
Under the stars
Fireflies swirl and dance
Above dying embers

Appeal to vision is one of the prominent features of sign language poetry in general. Deaf people are “seeing” people, and to highlight visual aspects of the poetic scene leads to the celebration of sight and of Deaf culture (Sutton-Spence 2005). It is also the thematic heritage of traditional haiku. Having both as backgrounds, sign language haiku shows strong connection to vision.

While spoken language haiku simply chooses a visual moment and describes it, the forte of sign language haiku is the fact that it is also capable of *reproducing* such visual aspects. For example, Linda Day’s *Eclipse* not only picks up a highly visual theme (eclipse) but also successfully represents its vivid image using sign language. It highlights the process of a visual event rather than focusing on a single snapshot (which is typical of traditional haiku). Its visual effect lies on the motion of two hands, representing sun and moon, slowly coming closer, overlapping completely, and then set apart (see Figure 7.6). Such reproduction of a visual theme is an important characteristic of sign language haiku.

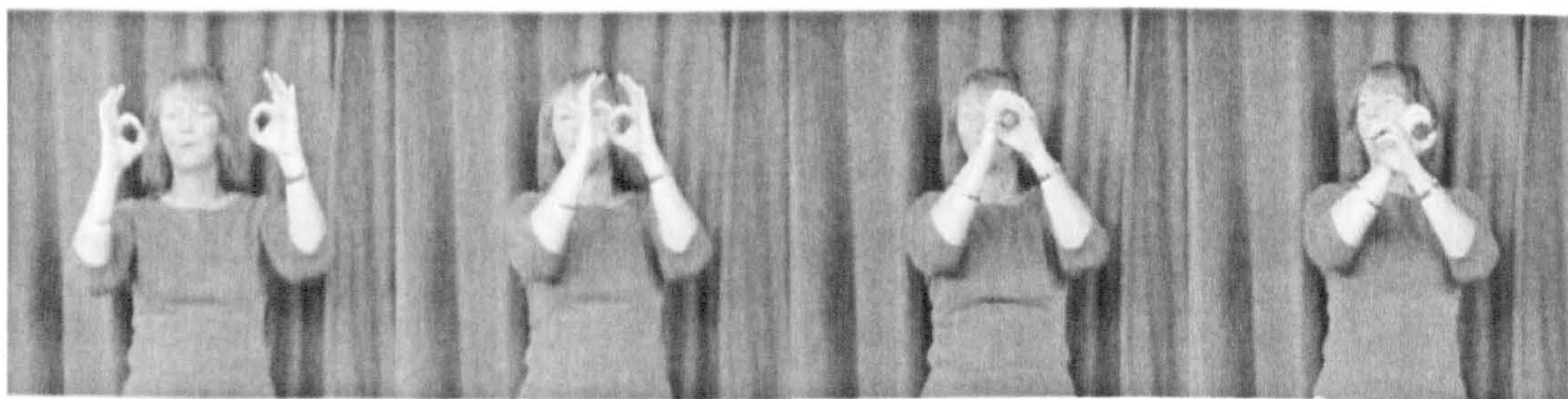


Figure 7.6 The sequence from Linda Day’s *Eclipse*

7.4.1.2. Unusual perspective

Another feature of Deaf perspective is their presentation of the story from a minority viewpoint, most commonly from the perspective of non-humans such as animals, plants, and inanimate objects. Deaf people, being a minority people themselves, provide a keen observation of things which otherwise are simply ignored. Such empathy toward animals and objects is commonly found in sign language poetry in general, but especially in haiku, because re-evaluation of a daily event from an unusual perspective is highly encouraged in the haiku discipline.

For example, Siobhan O'Donovan's longer poem *Sixty-one steps* focuses on the steps instead of the people trampling upon them. The poet shows empathy towards the steps by taking the perspective of the steps, imagining what it is like to be trodden on the face and be scratched on the forehead. It is a unique poem in that it consistently provides two contrastive signs representing two perspectives (from the human perspective and the steps' perspective). Figure 7.7 shows a few examples. Not only are her manual signs made with reversed orientation and movement, but her eyegaze, facial expression and body posture also highlight the viewpoint of the steps. Visual representation of the thematic reversal makes this poem very original.



a) FOOTSTEPS



b) FOOTSTEPS (reversed viewpoint)



c) GRASS-COMING-OUT



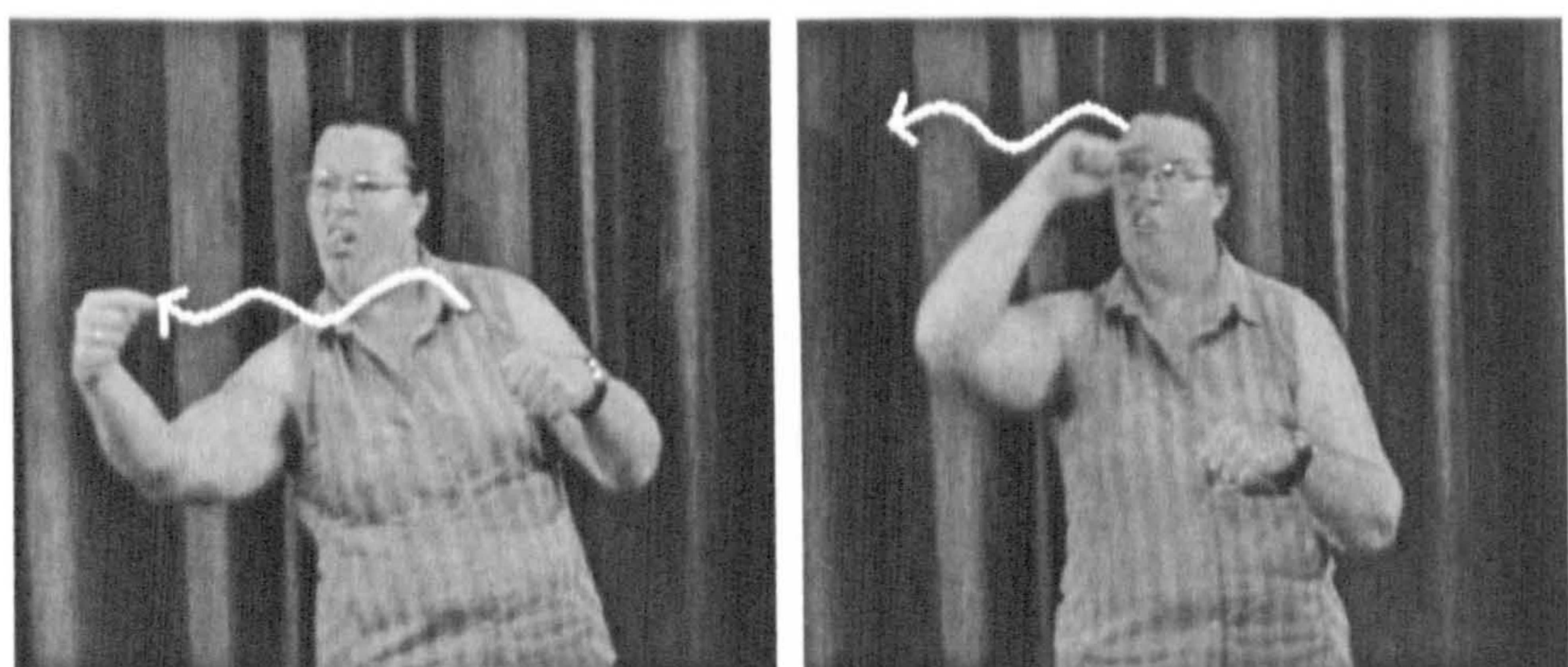
d) GRASS-COMING-OUT (reversed viewpoint)



e) SCRATCH



f) SCRATCH (reversed viewpoint)



g) STONE-FALLING-OFF

h) STONE-FALLING-OFF (reversed viewpoint)

Figure 7.7 Examples from O'Donovan's *Sixty-One Steps*

7.4.2. Anthropomorphism

A representative phenomenon of the Deaf perspective is anthropomorphism. Anthropomorphism is the attribution of human behaviour, emotion, perception, communication, and personality, to something which in itself is not human, such as nonhuman beings (animals), inanimate objects (trees, cars, etc), and abstract concepts (time, life and death, etc) (Sutton-Spence 2006). Anthropomorphised animals or things behave like human-beings. It is a kind of personification which we discussed in the previous chapter, but whereas personification includes conventional and subtler expressions such as “Inflation *has attacked* the foundation of our economy” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 33, emphasis in the original), anthropomorphism suggests much more active, creative, and stronger involvement of human qualities into non-humans. For example, animals may speak, the tree may feel, the cars can think, and so on.

Anthropomorphisation as a technique is commonly found in literature. It is especially important for, although not at all restricted to, children's literature. For example, in Aesop's Fables, not only animals but also natural forces are given human quality (as the wind and the sun in *North Wind and the Sun*). Anthropomorphising non-human characters helps people understand the moral lessons in these stories.

Anthromorphisation is not a preferred technique in traditional haiku. This is partly because it brings a great deal of emotion into the poem, and haiku does not favour such emotion. It is also because anthromorphisation often requires a longer

text to establish the human characters of those nonhuman beings and objects, and thus it is more common in longer poems and stories than in haiku.

However, because sign language haiku inherits features from poetic signing in general, and anthropomorphism is firmly established in poetic signing, sign language poets actively adopt this technique into haiku poems as well.

Anthropomorphism can be found throughout the corpus. The fundamental fact that Deaf people use their human body to express nonhuman concepts motivates the signers to give human qualities to them. In other words, Deaf people literally “embody” nonhuman concepts. Moreover, as Sutton-Spence (2006) explores, anthropomorphisation in poetic signing often specifically means to give “Deaf” characteristics to non-human things. As a result, animals and objects start to behave like a Deaf human. Those Deaf attributes include communication through signing, emphasis on vision, and the use of some deaf-related items (such as hearing aids and flashing door lights). For example, the cat in Maria Gibson’s poem is portrayed as a “seeing” cat rather than as a hearing/smelling/touching cat. As shown in Figure 7.8 the cautious cat in this poem keeps looking to its right and left while walking.



Figure 7.8 Maria Gibson’s *Cat*

It is important to note that anthropomorphisation in sign language is not simply the attribution of human quality onto nonhuman things. It works the other way around as well. The signing of the human poet is also influenced by the way an animal or a thing may behave. For example, in *Little Red Riding Hood*, Jerry Hannifin anthropomorphises the rabbit and fingerspells its name with the palms that are shaped like rabbit’s paws (Figure 7.9). It is amusing because the poet still retains the feature of the rabbit while he is clearly anthropomorphising it (normal rabbits don’t sign or talk to humans). Similarly, the tree in Paul Scott’s *Spring* still looks like

a tree with both arms extended like branches, while having a lot of human features such as the grumpy face (see Chapter 13 for more discussion of this poem). It would not be so entertaining if the tree completely turned into a human and started to sign like a normal Deaf person. Therefore, the effect of anthropomorphism is seen as a case of blending of two different characters.

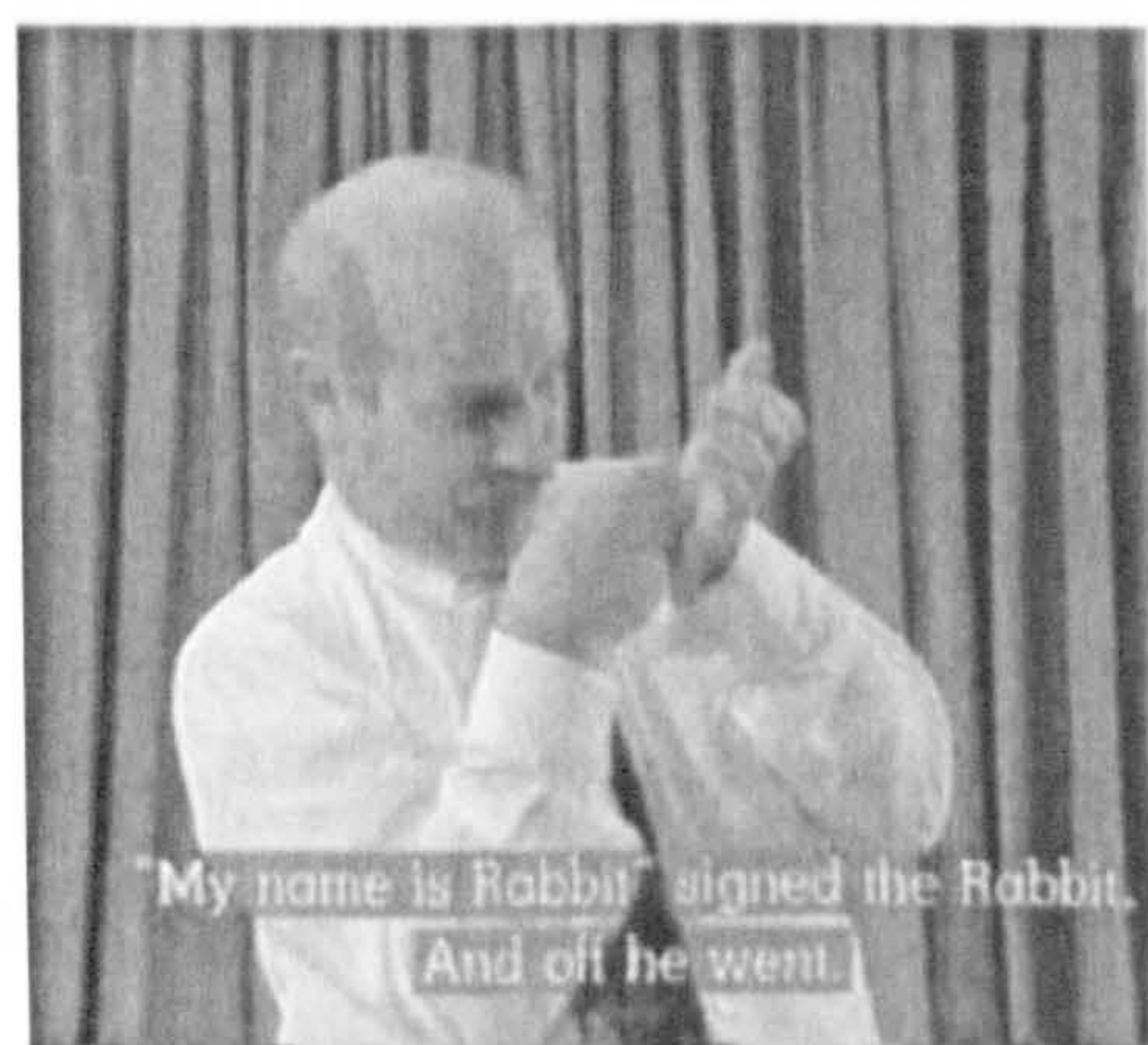
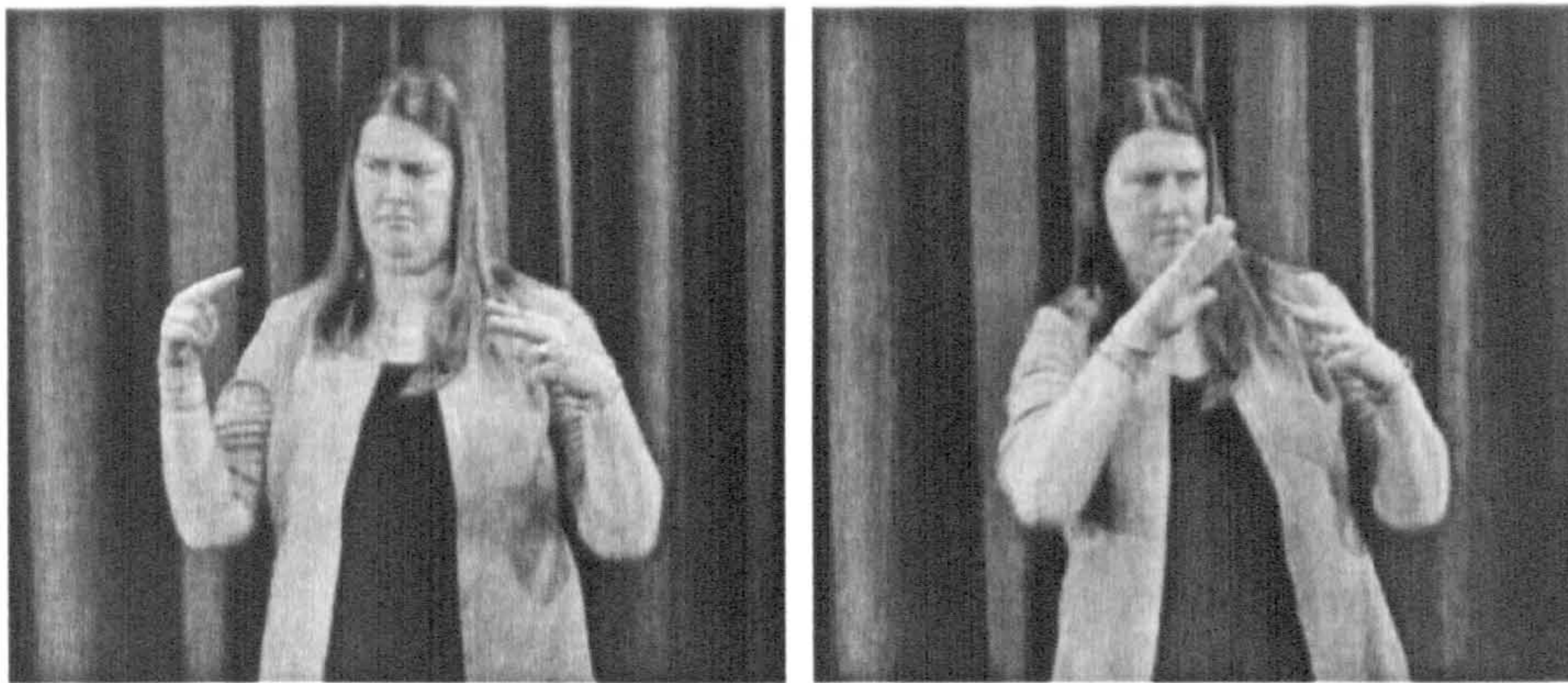


Figure 7.9 The rabbit's fingerspelling in Jerry Hannifin's *Little Red Riding Hood*

7.4.3. Reference to multiple senses

Deaf poets make the most of their sensory experiences to explore the theme of haiku. Vision is the foundation of Deaf people's sensory experience, but it is often accompanied by other senses. For example, abstract, non-sensory concepts are often understood in terms of tangible experience. In Penny Beschizza's *Sign Language*, the process of understanding and getting to know someone is expressed through the combination of sight and touch. The two people first see (Figure 7.10 a) and then touch each other while still seeing (b).



a) LOOK-AT-EACH-OTHER

b) TOUCH-EACH-OTHER

Figure 7.10 Two signs from Penny Beschizza's *Sign Language*

Interaction of more than one sense often takes the shape of synesthesia. As explored in Chapter 4, synesthesia is a kind of metaphor in which one sense (sight, hearing, touch, smell, or taste) is expressed in terms of another.

Sign language haiku has many examples of synesthesia. The combination of visual information (sight) and temperature (touch) is the most common instance. In both Linda Day's *Eclipse* and in Siobhan O'Donovan's *The Warm Sun*, the appearance of the sun is "felt" through the warmth it produces. Or in the following JSL haiku, the poor light of cloudy and misty weather is expressed in association with the lack of warmth.

7t
On Mount Tsukuba;
the storm clouds
and the mist have stolen the warmth
Ami Nakajima

These poems are primarily visual, but reference to the temperature adds dimension to the visual description and helps the reader to re-experience the poetic scene.

There are other examples in which a Deaf person expresses their understanding of hearing through another sense. For example, in 7w, the sound of a basketball is experienced through its bouncing, and in 7x the auditory concept of chatting is replaced by the twinkling of the stars. Note that both themes are visually motivated. In 7r, the lying down posture of the poet also represents the poet's attempt to "hear" the bouncing through the vibration, but by covering her ear, the poet symbolises that

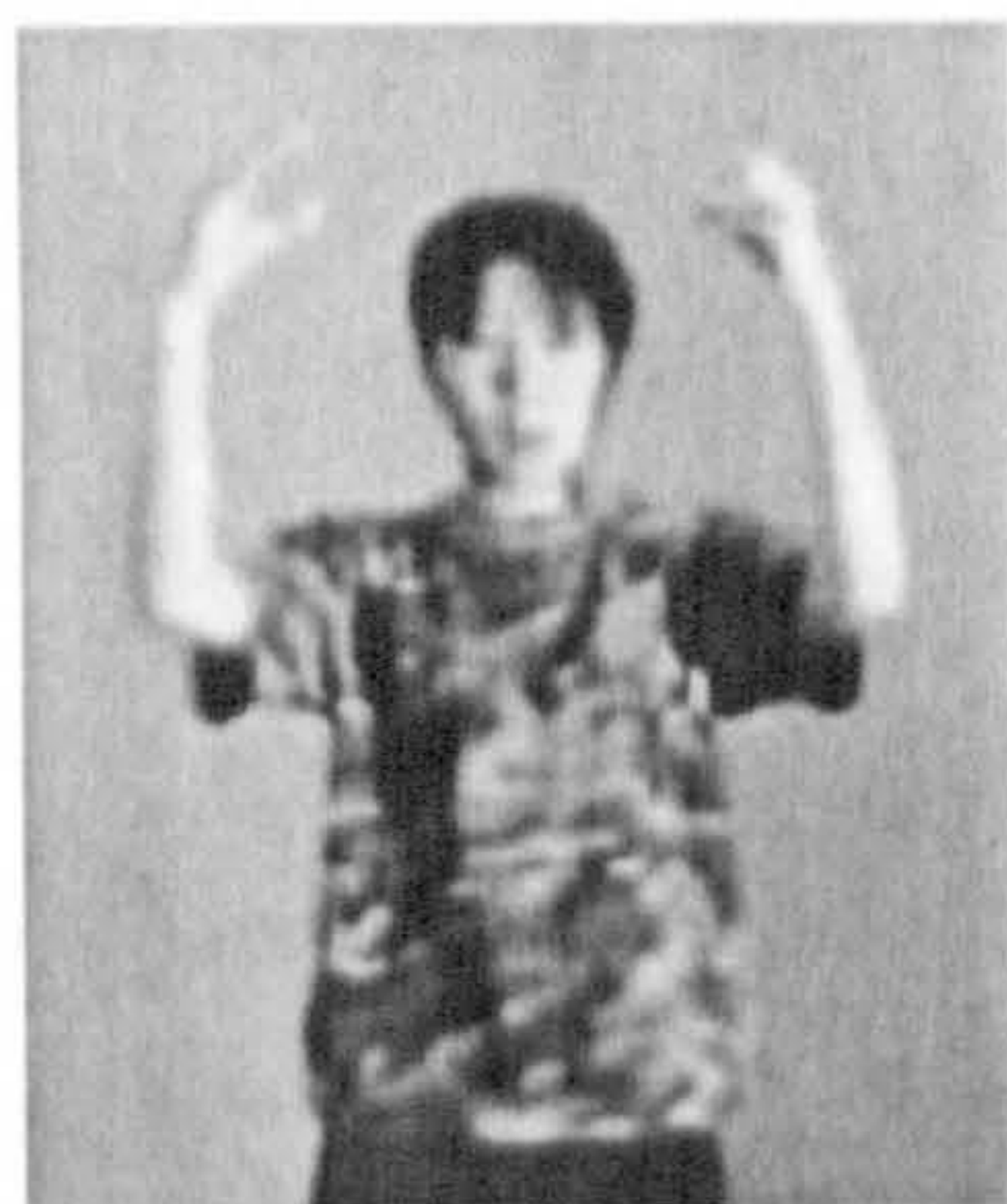
she is actually not listening but feeling the sound (Figure 7.11 a). In 7s, the handshape and the movement of the hands stand for both the twinkling lights and chatting hands (b).

7w
Without my hearing aids;
I still hear the bouncing basketball;
banging on the floor
(Sakiko Yajima)

7x
In the midnight sky;
I hear the chatting of
Orion as it rustles
(Chikako Ikeda)



LIE-DOWN / HEAR-BOUNCING



STARS-CHATTERING

Figure 7.11 Examples of synesthesia

As Paul Scott's poem *Five Senses* highlights, Deaf people do not consider their lack of hearing as a loss but rather as something they experience differently from hearing people. Their way of expressing hearing through other senses in itself is a good example of synesthesia.

7.4.4. Trees

This last section addresses one particular theme in sign language haiku, "the tree", and discusses the way poets develop their ideas on the concept of the tree.

As Figure 7.3 shows, the tree is the most popular "character" in the sign language haiku corpus. It appears in 15 out of 95 haiku poems (14%), either as a

primary theme (Danielle Rogers’ *Tree*, Siobhan O’Donovan’s *Two Trees*) or as a by-player (in most of the haiku for seasons).

The popularity of the tree can be observed throughout sign language literature in general. Paul Scott’s story *Tree* and June Smith’s *The Tree* (see Chapter 11 in Sutton-Spence and Woll 1999) both illustrate the life of a tree in a humorous way. The tree and leaves are the central characters in Johanna Mesch’s poem *A Pair of Leaves*. It is also a frequent figure in many of Dorothy Miles’ poems, such as in *Morning in Trio* and in *Language for the Eye*.

There are many reasons why the tree is very popular in literary contexts. First of all, it is one of the most familiar existences in our surroundings. It can be found throughout the world and throughout the year (although perhaps in significantly different ways). In other words, it is not culture/place/time-specific phenomenon.

Secondly, the tree is *conceptually very positive*: it grows; it roots, it bears flowers and fruits; it can protect people/animals/plants under its “roof”. It is also strong, solid, and firmly rooted. These immediate conceptual associations can easily be taken into a poem. In sign language haiku, Danielle Rogers’ *Tree* describes the strength of the tree with signs (Figure 7.12) that are especially sonorous because of the additional use of the forearm in the signs’ formation.

7y
The trees are strong;
Human-like scratching the sky;
They hold my soul aloft.



TREE



STRONG



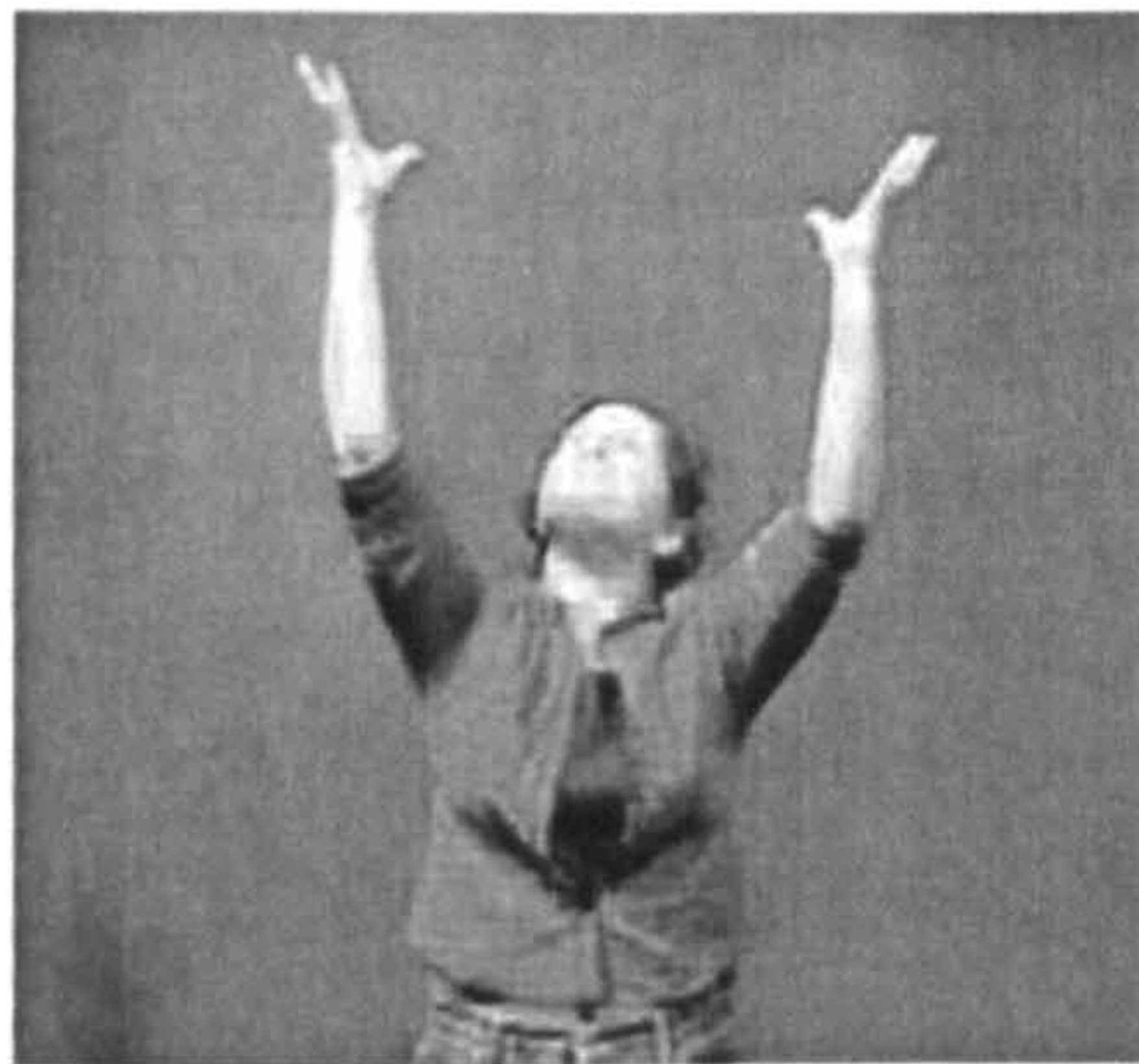
HOLD-SKY



REACH-OUT-SKY



SOUL



ALOFT

Figure 7.12 Danielle Rogers' *Tree*

The tree also has mysterious and spiritual implications. It may be due to its connection to the underground (unknown world). In many cultures, people bury dead bodies under the tree, which is a common topic in poetry.

7z

I will sleep in earth, a phantom without form;
In the myrtle's shade I will take my repose.

(Pierre de Ronsard, *Sonnet pour Helene*, translate by Riley Burr)

"Under the cherry-blossom tree lies a dead body."

(Kajii Motojiro, *Under the Cherry Tree*)

In sign language haiku, Johanna Mesch's *Autumn* is the example of focus on this darker and spiritual side of the image of the tree (see Chapter 13 for more discussion).

Another important feature of the tree is that it shares some human quality. It has its own life, which is often seen analogous to human life in literature. A seed

comes up and grows into a big young tree, which produces leaves, flowers, and fruits, and will die after many years. To some extent it also visually resembles a human being. The trunk is the body, and the prototypical upper area with branches and leaves can be identified as a head. Branches are often seen as arms/hands. This makes it easier to project our thought, emotion, and experiences as humans onto the tree. Paul Scott's tree in *Spring* is probably the best example of this aspect.

Another very important point is that trees are often sensitive to seasons. That is, they change their appearance according to each season (prototypically, spring with flowers, summer with green leaves, autumn with coloured leaves and fruits, winter with bare branches). This is crucial for traditional Japanese haiku where reference to season is obligatory. The tree is an indispensable feature in sign language haiku, too. In Dorothy Miles' haiku quartet she either directly or indirectly refers to trees.

Spring: SPRING-TREE

Summer: no reference to the tree, but reference to "greenness" can be found
in GREEN-HEIGHTS, GREEN-DEPTH

Autumn: SCATTERED-LEAVES

Winter: BARE-TREE

There are three seasonal quartets in the corpus: those by Dot Miles, by Finnish poets, and by the poets at the BSL Haiku Festival. Out of 12 poems of these quartets, 9 poems (75%) do talk about the tree and/or parts of the tree (such as leaves and branches). Especially in spring and autumn, the tree functions as a key character, perhaps because these two seasons are more transitional than summer and winter and the tree can represent such change of seasons.

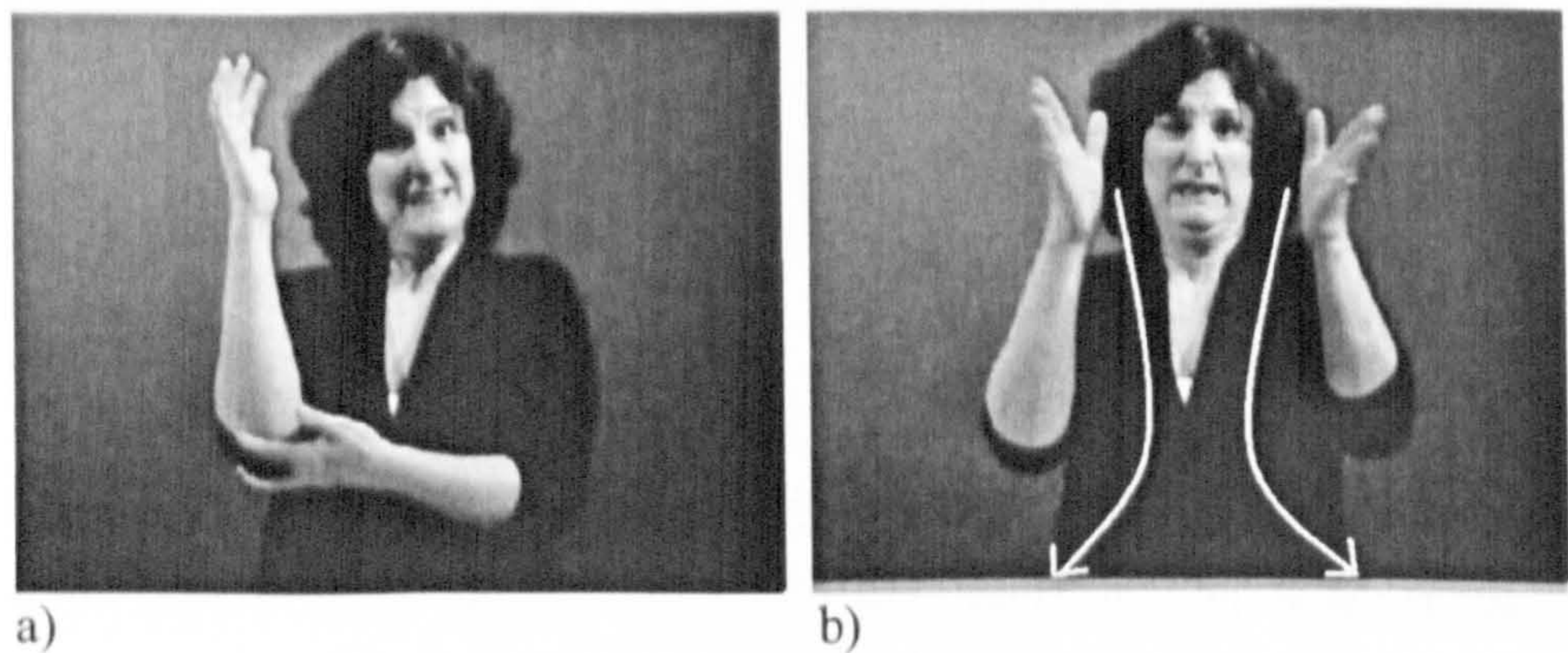
Apart from these conceptual depths described so far, there is a pure physical/linguistic advantage of the sign TREE in sign languages. Such visual advantage adds further importance to the tree in sign language haiku.

Many sign languages (BSL, ASL and NGT, for example) have the identical or similar sign for TREE: the 5 handshape (fully open and extended), the fingers pointing up, with a simple uplifting movement (Figure 7.14. a). Sutton-Spence (2005) observes this open and uplifting configuration of the sign TREE, and concludes that "such a sign means that it is hard to treat trees negatively in a sign

language poem”. Dorothy Miles’ TWIN-TREES in *Trio* is one of the most beautiful creations in BSL poetry.

The sign TREE is visually very solid and stable. The whole forearm is used to iconically represent a tree, and not much movement is required for this sign. It is an ideal sign to be set up as a background for other more active signs. For example, in many sign language haiku, such as Wim Emmerik’s *Falling leaf*, Marita Saunamäki’s *Spring*, and Danielle Rogers (1999)’s *Flower Petals*, use TREE (the right hand) as a basis from where actions take place.

It is worth pointing out that there are fewer haiku poems on trees in JSL, whose sign for tree is different from the one described above. Instead of having a solid and stable forearm (Figure 7.13 a), JSL TREE is an outlining sign (b). This can explain why it is not common to use it as a base for poetic signing.



a) b)
Figure 7.13 The signs TREE in BSL (a) and in JSL (b)

7.5. Summary

This chapter has observed various features that characterise the theme of sign language haiku. It has highlighted the fact that sign language haiku inherits the thematic heritage of both traditional Japanese haiku and sign language literature in general. The theme of nature, especially seasons, is a direct influence from traditional haiku, with some addition of Deaf perspective such as anthropomorphised animals and plants. Sign language haiku is most influenced by general artistic signing in the theme of Deaf identity. The intermingling of two different poetic forms provides rich soil to produce a variety of themes in sign language haiku.

The next five chapters (Chapter 8-12) will mainly analyse the formal features of sign language haiku, but the thematic aspects repeatedly come into the discussion as they largely influence the outward appearance of a poem.

Chapter 8

Rhythm

Poetry is the rhythmical creation of beauty in words.

Edgar Allan Poe

8.1. Introduction

So far I have focused on the thematic aspects of sign language haiku. The next five chapters will provide the formal poetic devices which are essential in signed haiku poems. I will start with rhythm.

8.1.1. Rhythm and poetry

Rhythm is often considered to be a defining feature of poetry. *Defining* here means that rhythm is likely to be the criterion for deciding whether a written work is poetry or not, especially in western poetic traditions. “A regular rhythm is often precisely the way we first recognize a piece of writing as poetry” (Tamplin 1992; 1). If a spoken language work follows a certain rhythmic structure, it is likely to be regarded as a poem, regardless of what it tries to convey, as Aristotle clearly declares:

People do, indeed, add the word 'maker' or 'poet' to the name of the meter, and speak of elegiac poets, or epic (that is, hexameter) poets, as if it were not the imitation that makes the poet, but the verse that entitles them all to the name. Even when a treatise on medicine or natural science is brought out in verse, the name of poet is by custom given to the author...
(Aristotle Poetics I translated by James Hutton)

Aristotle immediately disclaims this idea of formal supremacy over the content (or “imitation” in Aristotle’s word) and goes on to discuss the fundamental differences between a verse and a prose written in a verse-style. Yet, it is still true

that the meter or the rhythm functions to distinguish poetry from other forms of prose in many spoken languages.

Rhythm is an essential feature of sign language poetry as well. The same content can be performed very differently depending on the rhythm. As Jackson (2006) suggests, rhythm and timing is one of the features that distinguish sign language poetry from stories. Not all sign language poems have regular rhythm in a strict sense, but various visual and sequential features are used to form a pattern in the signing and make the poem flowing. Such rhythmical elements are present in sign language haiku as well, even though traditional haiku does not actively take in rhythm in a standard sense. This chapter will explore the basic units which create rhythm in sign language haiku.

8.1.2. Definition of rhythm

Most narrow definitions of rhythm are restricted to the repetition of sound, but there are broader definitions such as “the iteration (repetition) of a group of elements” (Jahn 2002), which can be applicable to sign language poetry. Allen, Wilbur and Schick (1991) define rhythm, in the sign language context, as “some sort of predictability to the sequence being produced or perceived.” (297). They call this “sequential structure”, as opposed to “temporal structure” where mostly sound is taken into consideration.

Although there are many different ways to define rhythm, certain common features are observable: rhythm has to be regular and it is sequential; it involves alternation of discrete events; and rhythm need to be both produced and perceived. First of all, the most important aspect of rhythm is regularity. Rhythm forms a regular pattern. Regularity is our recognition of something, which occurs just as it did in the past and as it will in the future. By following a regular pattern, we can *predict* what will happen. This predictability or expectation is the essential part of rhythm. With this foundation of regularity one can “break” the rhythm by suddenly introducing an irregular, unexpected pattern, and successfully gain the attention from the perceiver.

Secondly, rhythm is a sequential notion. It has to follow time. Bernhart (1999) defines rhythm simply as “segmentation of time into perceptible units”. For instance, it is difficult to describe a piece of painting as rhythmical, at least in a non-metaphorical way, because it does not require the concept of time. The notion of rhythm comes into play when events are arranged temporally.

Thirdly, rhythm involves alternation of discrete elements. In order to perceive a unit as rhythmical, there must be certain contrastive patterning, such as motion and pause, slow and quick speed, or big and small movement. Rhythm is a series of discrete events that needs be arranged into a pattern. The alternation of individual events will create a rhythmic structure, as we can see in Attridge’s definition of rhythm as “a series of alternations of build-up and release, movement and counter-movement, tending toward regularity but complicated by constant variations” (1995: 3).

The last aspect of this definition highlights the fact that rhythm needs not only to be produced but also to be *perceived* to form a pattern. Perceptive aspects are as important as productive aspects in rhythm because produced rhythm and perceived rhythm do not always coincide. In other words, we do not necessarily perceive rhythm as it is produced. We can perceive or “sense” a rhythmic chunk of events even when there is no regularity when strictly measured. On the other hand, there is no guarantee that we will always find the physically equally-distributed rhythm (such as from a metronome) to be rhythmical. It is reported that equally-distributed events can be divided and formed into groups solely based on one’s perception (Suetomi & Nakajima 1998). Such study justifies the favour of rhythm as a perceptual unit rather than a productive unit.

In summary, rhythm is a word with a broad definition, with a couple of crucial notions (regularity and predictability, distinct events, time, and perception), adjustable to fit when it is applied to a specific area. Especially in sign language, the notion of rhythm needs flexibility as it expands both temporally and spatially. In what follows, I will first discuss the typographical rhythm in traditional Japanese haiku (as it will give some insight to the spatial rhythm in sign language haiku) and then move on to explore rhythmic units in sign language haiku.

8.2. Visual rhythm in Japanese haiku

We observed earlier that traditional haiku is characterised by syllabic and monotonous prosody (see 4.4.1). While this means that haiku does not actively utilise rhythmic patterns, it is common for a written haiku to utilise the typography (visual appearance of the poem) to create rhythmical impression in the eyes of the reader. I call it *visual rhythm* in haiku, as opposed to *temporal rhythm* discussed so far.

The text of Japanese language is a combination of Chinese logographs (*kanji*) and Japanese characters (*hiragana* or *katakana*). Some morphemes can be represented only with Japanese characters, but most words can be written either by Japanese characters, or Chinese characters, or combination of both. Although there is a certain agreement among the Japanese speakers (writers) how to combine these three different sets of writing system, it is theoretically up to each person whether to write a certain word with Japanese characters or with a Chinese logograph, or their combination. Being literate in Japanese means to be able to read both types of Japanese characters (*hiragana* and *katakana*) and some basic level of Chinese logographs. Because the number of the Chinese logographs is said to be more than seven or eight million, the knowledge of Chinese logographs depends on each person.

The combination of *kanji*, *hiragana* and *katakana* can create different impressions in written poems (Hiraga 2003, 2005). Chinese logographs are visually very complex and *dense*. Each logograph consists of many lines and shapes, and it physically takes time to write them (but not necessarily to *read* them, as described below). On the other hand, Japanese characters are quite simple and easy to write (see Table 8.1 for examples). Visual density (as opposed to visual simplicity) is a key word to distinguish these two characters.

Chinese logographs	Japanese characters
詩 手話	し しゅわ
言語	げんご
韻律 隠喩	いんりつ いんゆ

Table 8.1 Examples of Chinese logographs and Japanese Characters

In terms of variation, the number of essential Japanese characters is limited to about 50, but that of Chinese logographs is practically infinite. We also need to take into account the fact that Chinese logographs are ideograms, i.e. each character represents the meaning, while hiragana and katakana are considered to be phonograms, i.e. they have no meaning in themselves. The former could be very iconic; the latter are neutral and arbitrary to what they are physically representing. Finally, it should be noted that most function words (which cover grammatical information) are written in Japanese characters, whereas Chinese logographs are commonly used for content words (which contribute to the meaning of the sentence). As a result, we can easily scan a text and grab the meaning by just picking up Chinese letters.

When put together, these two writing systems appeal differently to our eyes. With their simple and arbitrary shapes, Japanese alphabets look less individual and therefore they do not distinguish themselves in the text. As a result, they visually work as background. Chinese logographs have more visual appeal based on their complicated figures and come to the foreground. Consider one of our previous examples from Chapter 4:

8e. Nano hana ya tsuki wa higashi ni hi wa nishi ni
(a field of) green flowers; moon is east; sun is west

In Japanese, it will be written like in 8f below:

8f 菜の花や 月は東に 日は西に

8f is a combination of Chinese logographs and Japanese characters (hiragana). In this haiku, those Chinese logographs 菜 (literally means “vegetables”) 花

(flowers) 東 (east) 西 (west) are visually dense and will immediately jump out to our eyes, while Japanese hiragana (の、や、は、に) serve as background (these Chinese logographs are the words which exclusively contribute to the meaning of the poem²²). The important point here is that Chinese logographs are visually so striking that they actually take less time to process, compared to Japanese characters. When the same haiku is written all in Japanese characters, like 8g below, the reader has to follow each character one by one, to find out what they mean (while Chinese logographs, being ideographs, can immediately show what they mean).

8g なのはなや つきはひがしに ひはにしに

This contrast of processing time between Chinese logographs and Japanese characters creates “visual rhythm”, as it were. The reader of a poem quickly picks up the Chinese logographs and slows down to process Japanese alphabets. The contrast of visual rhythm in 8b and 8c could be expressed as 8f’ and 8g’ respectively:

8f’ ● – ● – ● – ● – ● – ● –
8g’ — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

While 8g’ is the normal “flat” or syllabic rhythm when spoken (5-7-5 moras), the written form 8f’ attaches a sense of visual stress (●) to the poem.

Another example is the following haiku poem we discussed in Chapter 5.

8h (=5g)
Araumi ya sado ni yokotau amanogawa (Bashō)
Rough sea: Lying down on Sado Island, the Milky Way²³

This haiku poem is written in the following combination of kanji and hiragana:

8i
荒海や 佐渡によこたふ 天河

²² It is interesting to see that this is parallel to the stress system in spoken language; generally speaking, content words tend to bear stress whereas function words are unlikely to be stressed. This parallelism underlies that Chinese logographs do function as visual stress for written language.

²³ Translation by Herlofsky

This poem, unlike the previous one, has three clusters of Chinese logographs, 荒海 (rough sea), 佐渡 (Sado), and 天河 (the Milky Way). Each consists of two logographs and thus has more substance and complex visual appearance than those in 8f. In contrast, the verb (lie down) and other function words, which are mainly located in between the second and the third kanji clusters, are all written in hiragana. While 8f produces a more steady and staccato-like rhythm (accurately repeating visually dense and light letters), 8i is characterised with more irregular and “rough” visual rhythm (compare 8f’ and 8i’), which metaphorically represents the theme of the poem. This poem is also a good example of a noun stop (Chapter 4), and the final noun is written with Chinese logographs to add extra impact at the end.

8i’ ● ● – ● ● – – – – – ● ●

Such visual rhythm becomes relevant in the discussion of sign language haiku, because sign language also creates rhythm through manipulating visual density.

8.3. Rhythm in sign language poetry

8.3.1. Rhythm in sign language poetry: introduction

Although it is difficult to tell what exactly consists of rhythm in signing, there seems to be an understanding that some signers sign more “rhythmically” than others, and often such rhythmical signers are identified as “good” signers. According to Allen, Wilbur and Schick (1991), one of the criteria to judge someone’s fluency in sign language is whether s/he follows rhythm when signing. The research of Boyes-Braem (1999) is motivated by a widely-held impression that early sign language learners are somehow more “rhythmic” and therefore easier to understand than late learners. These studies suggest that rhythm contributes to the fluency of signing, which is an indispensable aspect of artistic signing.

With regard to the rhythm in artistic signing, Klima and Bellugi (1979) deal with rhythm in their discussion of poetic signing. As described in Chapter 2, Klima and Bellugi (1979) identified three structures in sign language poetry - internal, external and superstructure. Rhythmic structure falls into the last category, as it is superimposed over the sequence of signs. Klima and Bellugi selected Dorothy Miles' work to illustrate the rhythmic structure of poetic signing because her poems are characterised by a dynamic rhythm structure. As they point out, "A careful examination of Miles' rendition...reveals a special sort of superstructure, not spatial but temporal and rhythmic" (358). While other poets tend to create effects by intentionally breaking the signing space, making larger, exaggerated movements, Dorothy Miles tried to balance the sequential and spatial nature of sign language poetry. Miles made the most of the spatial nature of sign language such symmetry and symbolic and contrastive use of space (Sutton-Spence 2005) but she also paid attention to the signs' sequential nature and created rhythm in poetic signing.

Klima and Bellugi adopted a music notation to transcribe the rhythmic structure of Miles' *Summer* from *Seasons*²⁴. They divided the poem into three, based on the equality in length. Then they pointed out that the two hemistiches in the first line have a similar pattern, and so does the second hemistich in the last line. There is a clear rhythmic pattern in her poem. These patterns become clear when shown with music notes and rests. My attempt given in 8.4 is motivated by Klima and Bellugi.

Blondel and Miller (2000, 2001) look at rhythmic structure of LSF (French Sign Language). They analyse nursery rhymes, motivated by the fact that rhythm is crucial in that particular form of poetry. They have demonstrated that sign language users do create rhythm in telling those poems.

Artistic signing shares certain features with oral literature, one of which is embodied rhythm. Signers perceive and produce rhythm in a dynamic and spontaneous way using their body. This often resembles the beats of drums. Bauman (1998) observes Peter Cook's ASL poem *Poetry*, and finds a strong connection between the signing and the physical rhythmic body movement. He wrote:

²⁴ The attempt to analyse language in music framework has been made by several researchers, including Lerdahl and Jackendoff (1983).

He [Peter Cook] begins by stamping his foot repeatedly signing
POETRY...Cook retains an almost primordial connection to an embodied
oral tradition through keeping rhythm by the tapping of his foot (138).

This leads to the notion of “percussion signing” discussed in Bahan (2006). He reports three patterns “one, two, one, two”, “one, two, one-two-three” and the combination of the two. For example, Bahan introduces a rhythmic pattern in a duo between two signers in Charles Krauel’s film (originally reported in Supalla 1994):

BOAT	BOAT	
1	2	
BOAT	-BOAT	-BOAT
1	2	3
DRINK	DRINK	
1	2	
DRINK	-DRINK	-DRINK
1	2	3
FUN	FUN	
1	2	
FUN	-FUN	-FUN
1	2	3
ENJOY	ENJOY	
1	2	
ENJOY	-ENJOY	-ENJOY
1	2	3

(Bahan 2006: 35)

Percussion signing has clear patterns and is highly predictable and encourages the participation of the audience. This contributes to “a sense of unity” among the audience (Padden and Humphries 1988: 78).

Such strongly regular rhythm is observable in some sign language poems, such as the BSL poem *Look at the Front* composed by Richard Achiampong, a 12-year old pupil at the London Borough of Greenwich. The poem is characterised with a repetition of the sequence of the same sign (LOOK-AT-THE-FRONT) which is repeated three times with a strongly regular and rhythmical tempo. But such poems with strict regularity remain the minority in sign language poetry. Most poems utilise looser patterning to allow natural flow of signing.

The next section overviews what consists of rhythmic units in poetic signing.

8.3.2. Rhythmic units

The notion of rhythm in English poetry consists of rhyme and meter. But such poetic terms available in spoken language are generally not directly applicable to sign language poetry. Although Valli (1990, 1993) tried to apply the notions of meter and rhyme to ASL poems, he failed to provide a sufficient account of such illustration (see Chapter 2). This is largely due to the fact that sign language follows not only temporal/sequential structure but also the visual, kinetic, and three-dimensional constructions, which play an active role in the production of rhythm.

Both spoken language and sign language poetry create rhythm by patterning certain units, but what constitutes such units is fundamentally different. Spoken language poetry repeats stressed and unstressed sounds to create rhythm (meter) or utilises the quality of sound to pattern the sequence (rhyme). Sign language poetry uses a variety of temporal and visual features to create contrastive units in signing (Blondel and Miller 2000, 2001). When we feel that a piece of poetic signing is “rhythmical”, it is largely due to the fact that there is a repeated pattern of such contrastive qualities (such as movement and hold, oscillating body posture, fast and slow speed, and proximalisation and distalisation).

Valli (1993) claimed that ASL poetry creates rhythm by producing emphasis or stress among the signs. He wrote:

Stress in English and emphasis in ASL are similar for the perspective of poetics since each provides contrasts between “heavy” and “light” syllables, which is the essence of meter (68).

Valli listed four different kinds of emphasis that contribute to the rhythm:

1. hold emphasis (long pause, subtle pause, strong stop)
2. movement emphasis (long movement, short movement, alternating movement, repeated movement)
3. movement size (enlarged movement path, shortened movement, reduced movement path, accelerating movement)
4. movement duration (regular, slow, fast)

Some poems straightforwardly utilise these elements and show regular rhythmical patterns (like Valli’s own poems). When it comes to sign language haiku, however, most poems do not form clear patterns, mainly because they are too short

to develop regular patterning. But nonetheless many poems exploit some of those contrasts. This section observes several elements that contribute to the rhythmic structure of sign language poetry.

8.3.2.1. Speed

The manipulation of speed creates rhythm in poetic signing. This corresponds to the last point (movement duration) of Valli's observation. The poet may keep to the same speed throughout the poem, but they can also speed up and slow down to create extra impact. Contrast of quick and slow signs is a major tool to create rhythmic structure in sign language poetry and it can be found in many signed haiku poems as well. In Penny Beschizza's BSL haiku *Sign Language*, the initial uncertainty between two people who have just met each other is represented by a slow speed. They gradually become aware that both of them are Deaf, and then burst into signing. Such change in speed represents the process of people getting to know each other. Similarly, Rosaria Giuranna's *Haiku –A LIS poem-* uses slow speed at the beginning to symbolise a gradual process of two people becoming friends (or lovers) but then uses a quick movement to represent an abrupt separation at the end.

The contrast of fast and slow signs often leads to the smoothness and sharpness of the signing. A good example is Nigel Howard's *Deaf*, which is characterised by smooth and relatively slow movement except for the last sign which he signs quickly and abruptly (and with sharp handshape), creating enormous contrast at the end.

Johanna Mesch's *Aeroplane* contrasts the quick and bumpy signing when the plane crashes onto the ground, and a slower and smoother signing when the plane's soul ascends to heaven (AEROPLANE-ASCENDS).

To slow down the movement like in these examples is especially powerful. It not only arouses certain emotions but also highlights the manual sign and adds extra significance to it. The sign KISS in Sepah's example is a beautiful sign with front-back symmetry, and AEROPLANE-ASCENDS in Mesch's example is a creative sign inspiring aesthetic pleasure. The beauty in the movement and configuration in both signs is highlighted by slow motion.

To slow down the signing pace is not uncommon in everyday signing, but it is often restricted to the signs that actually involve motion (such as describing someone walking slowly). What is interesting in poetry is that the speed can be modified not only to reproduce the physical and symbolic sense of speed in actual motions, but also simply to highlight manual signs. For example, in both Carol Padden's ASL haiku poem *Winter* (originally composed by Dorothy Miles) and Penny Beschizza's BSL *God*, the poet signs DEATH much more slowly compared to normal signing (and compared to other part of the same poem). This does not mean that the process of death was slow. The speed is used to highlight the movement paths to add a dramatic effect to this important word.

8.3.2.2. Body posture

Body movement also contributes to the production of rhythm in sign language poetry. Johanna Mesch's *Kayak* and Maria Gibson's *Walk* are both distinguished by their left and right oscillation of the upper body. Such body shifts are rooted in our daily physical activity (such as walking or rowing a boat) and sign language is capable of faithfully reproducing the same rhythm using the body.

This is perhaps when the nature of sign language poetry as performative and embodied poetry comes to the surface. This is also linked to the point we discussed above, that signers often follow the spontaneous dynamic embodied rhythm commonly found in oral literature. While most haiku poets do not involve the larger use of the body common in stage performance, it is true that the rhythmic structure of poetic signing often blurs the boundary (if there is any) between text and performance. The largely rhythmic body shift in Gibson's *Walk* retains many features of performative art.

8.3.2.3. Shifting perspectives

Shifting perspective also functions as an underlying rhythm in a poem. It can be understood as rhythmical interchange between different roles or different scale.

The poet creates rhythm by turning the body to left and right to indicate different roles, or by shifting from the small-scale (“zoom-in” with whole body) to large-scale signs (“zoom-out” to manual signs). Both poems mentioned above (*Walk* and *Kayak*) are characterised both by body shift and the shift between “zoom-in” and “zoom-out”.

8.3.2.4. Pause and motion

Pause, i.e. absence of motion, can be used in liaison with active signing to produce a certain rhythm. Pause can be “hold” (holding the movement of a sign while keeping its appearance in the signing space), or absence of the entire signing (complete stop). Whereas the skill of pausing is essential in longer poems and in story telling, most sign language haiku does not involve much pausing because they are usually short enough to be signed in one flow. When there is a pause, there is a reason for that. For example, the poet may pause to mark the internal division within a haiku poem (the *kireji* effect observed in Chapter 4 and 5), especially when it involves two juxtaposed images. In John Wilson’s *Winter*, the poet creates a pause between his summer image and winter image. In Donna Williams’ *Identity*, she holds the sign of DEAF before she signs the next sign HEARING (although both cases involve gaze shift and thus it may be different from a complete pause). This absence of signs attracts the audience’s attention and let them prepare for the next sequence. In this aspect, the effect of pause in sign language poetry is analogous to that of “rest” in music. As Joseph Lhevinne claims in his piano instruction manual, “Very often the effect of the rest is even greater than that of the notes. It serves to attract and prepare the mind.” (Lhevinne 1972: 3).

Holding a sign also highlights the significance of that particular sign. This effect is similar to slow-down speed discussed above. The poet tends to hold a sign which is unusual, new, or important, in order to call the audience’s attention to the sign itself. Such techniques can be found in Dorothy Miles’ *Trio*, in which the impact of creative signs (such as TWIN-TREE and DARKNESS which turns into BAT) is maintained by holding the sign for a while.

8.3.2.5. Size of the movement

Valli mentioned movement size in his list of the rhythmic elements in sign language poetry. The shift between large and small signs produces a certain rhythm just like shift between quick and slow movements does. But changing the size of the signing has more visual appeal as it uses space to create the rhythm.

The size of a sign is determined by the joint the signer uses to produce the sign. Those so-called “internal” movements are made by moving knuckles and finger joints (as in the BSL sign ELEVEN). Ordinal numbers (FIRST, SECOND, THIRD...) are made by moving the wrist. The sign POWER uses elbow joints to produce the movement. The sign BOWLING uses the shoulder joint. The size of the sign becomes bigger as it uses joints higher in the body hierarchy.

The selection of the joint also influences the movement of the sign. Signs made with lower joints (finger joints and knuckles) are likely to have smaller but quicker movements such as flapping or wiggling. When the signs become bigger with upper joints, it is difficult to move them around quickly and thus the motion is slowed down. Such size and movement of the sign accounted for by the use of different joints can explain some of the impressions we obtain from haiku poems.

For example, Danielle Rogers’ *Tree* uses two different sized signs for TREE. One is the lexical sign which is made by bending the elbow (Figure 8.1. a). The other one is a larger sign using the shoulder joints (b). This creates a contrastive visual impression within the same poem.



a) TREE (smaller sign)



b) TREE (larger sign)

Figure 8.1 Two different sized signs for TREE in Danielle Rogers’ *Tree*

In relation to the joint selection, one has to take into account whether the moving parts of the arm function as articulators or not (Brentari 1999). Hands and fingers are usually essential articulators in sign languages, but other higher parts (forearms, upper arms, shoulders, and the whole body) are not necessarily mapped to the parts of the referent. For example, in the sign TREE, the forearm represents the trunk of a tree and is thus meaningful. The sign for FIVE may be identical in configuration and location as TREE, but the hand is perceived as the only articulator and the forearm is not part of the sign. Similarly, the fist alone is significant in NOD, whereas in DINOSAUR the forearm is part of the sign. To know a sign is to understand which body parts function as articulators. There hasn't been enough research to show if such difference affects the perception of the viewer, but it is likely that the sign FIVE is perceived as being "smaller" and possibly visually "lighter" than TREE, even though they involve identical configurations.

8.3.2.6. Visual Density

Finally, what I call "visual density" can be listed as one of the units that contribute to the creating of rhythm in poetic signing, although it is not a single feature but a combination of those features described so far.

The notion of visual density is closely connected to the visual rhythm of Japanese haiku. We have observed above that the written language of Japanese haiku produces a certain typographical rhythm through the combination of visually dense Chinese logographs and visually light Japanese letters. The same mechanism can be found in sign language poetry. The common feature between Japanese typography and sign language is that both of them can change the visual density of the language (although there is a crucial difference that the former is static and the latter is dynamic). Both of them are capable of visually controlling the complexity of the poetic language. In sign language, some signs are very complex and visually appealing and demanding, while other signs are plainer and less demanding for the eyes. Visually dense signs are tenser, while visually light signs are more relaxed. By

alternating signs with different degree of visual density, the poet can produce a rhythmic pattern.

The visual density is obviously zero when the performer is not signing and non-manual elements such as facial expression or body shift are in their neutral position. Once the performer starts signing, various factors correlate and various degrees of complexity are added to the signing. For example, two-handed signs are more dense than one-handed signs, because they occupy more space. This concept of visual density is hard to define, because it largely depends on “impression” rather than objective measurement. However, we can list some elements which result in creating such impressions.

The most important feature that determines visual density of signs is signing speed. The perceptual complexity in Dorothy Miles’ *Spring* and *Autumn* derive from the fact that she is signing fast. Especially in *Autumn* the whirling movement of leaves is performed with rapid and bustling movement of hands. Visual density is high in this part because there are more elements involved in a short span of time than in other part of the poem.

The size of signs also contributes to the visual density (Brentari 1999). Visual density is different from visual sonority, in that those so-called big and “sonorous” signs are not necessarily “dense”. On the contrary, sonorous signs are usually easier to perceive (thus they are less demanding for their eyes), partly because the signs are bigger and partly because the speed is naturally slowed down in order to move the larger joints. The smaller signs may be less sonorous, but the speed tends to get faster for moving smaller joints and therefore they are more demanding to watch, especially when they are part of larger movement (such as moving finger joints while moving the arm itself). The fluttering movement of fingers, which is typically found in Dorothy Miles’ *Seasons*, are visually very “noisy”, creating a restless impression.

Other factors, such as facial expressions, also control visual density. A vacant look on the face reduces the visual density while an expressive face carries a lot of information and often adds a certain tension to the overall signing.

One may expect that we need more time and effort to grasp the visually dense signs than light signs. However, as we discussed for Chinese logographs, visually dense signs actually contribute to a fast grasp of the meaning. Because several

elements are packed together, we can see the whole picture within a short and intense time span. Dorothy Miles’ selection of highly complex signs for her haiku poems (especially *Spring* or *Autumn*) might have been motivated by their capability of giving a holistic description of the scene within a few seconds.

8.4. Rhythm in sign language haiku

Having observed the basic rhythmic units in poetic signing, I will shift focus to sign language haiku. Each poem has its own rhythmic structure and it is often difficult to generalise so-called “rhythm of sign language haiku”. But I will analyse three short haiku poems and Dorothy Miles’ *Seasons* quartet in order to illustrate some basic features of rhythm in signed haiku.

8.4.1. Syllabic haiku: Wim Emerik’s *Vallend Blad (Falling leaf)*

Vallend Blad (Falling Leaf)

A tree standing still
Mist turns to leaves turn to fall
Leaves falling to purple²⁵

RH: TREE _____ PURPLE
LH: TREE MIST-APPROACHES-TREE MIST/LEAF LEAF-SHRINKS LEAF-FALLS

The first example comes from Wim Emmerik in NGT (Sign Language of the Netherlands). The title is *Vallend Blad (Falling Leaf)* and it describes how mist covers a leaf at the tip of the tree, and how the leaf shrinks and falls from the tree. The English translation of the poem manages to capture the 5-7-5 haiku rhythm. In signing, the repetition of move-and-hold creates a similar rhythm to the one in the translation.

The first four seconds are given to the performer to set up TREE at 00.04, then the performer pauses for a second (the first hold). During the next five seconds, the

²⁵ Translation provided by ECHO (European Cultural Heritage Online)

performer describes how MIST drifts in the air and approaches the tree, using his left hand while keeping his right hand for TREE. The second hold is at 00:10, when his left hand representing LEAF or MIST (this is an ambiguous moment as both signs are identical) touches the tip of the tree and pauses. Then, LEAF shrinks gradually one second after another. Finally this shrinking process stops at 00:16 for a brief hold. After this pause follows a quick movement of a fall, and the final sign PURPLE.

This haiku poem lasts for 21 seconds. Within this brief and intense period of time, the poet manages to create a simple, very monotonous, and regular rhythm, which is the main characteristic of this poem. The music score of Figure 8.2 highlights this monotonous rhythm using music notation. The music notation shows the glossing, the timing of the signs, handshape in HamNoSys (Hamburg Notation System), and facial expressions at the bottom. The aim of this notation is to show visually how rhythm is created as a sum of several features.

From the notation it is clear that each sign in this poem is performed with approximately the same length of time. This produces timing similar to the syllabic prosody of Japanese haiku. The poet is clearly aware of the defining feature of traditional haiku. In this sense, *Falling Leaf* is a good example of syllabic haiku. Throughout the poem, the beat is steady and monotonous, contributing to a symbolic representation of a slow but irreversible change in an autumn scene. The poem creates a very detached and objective impression, which is largely supported by the monotonous rhythm. The visual density remains low throughout this poem because the speed is very slow, most of the signs are one-handed, and there is little expression on the face.

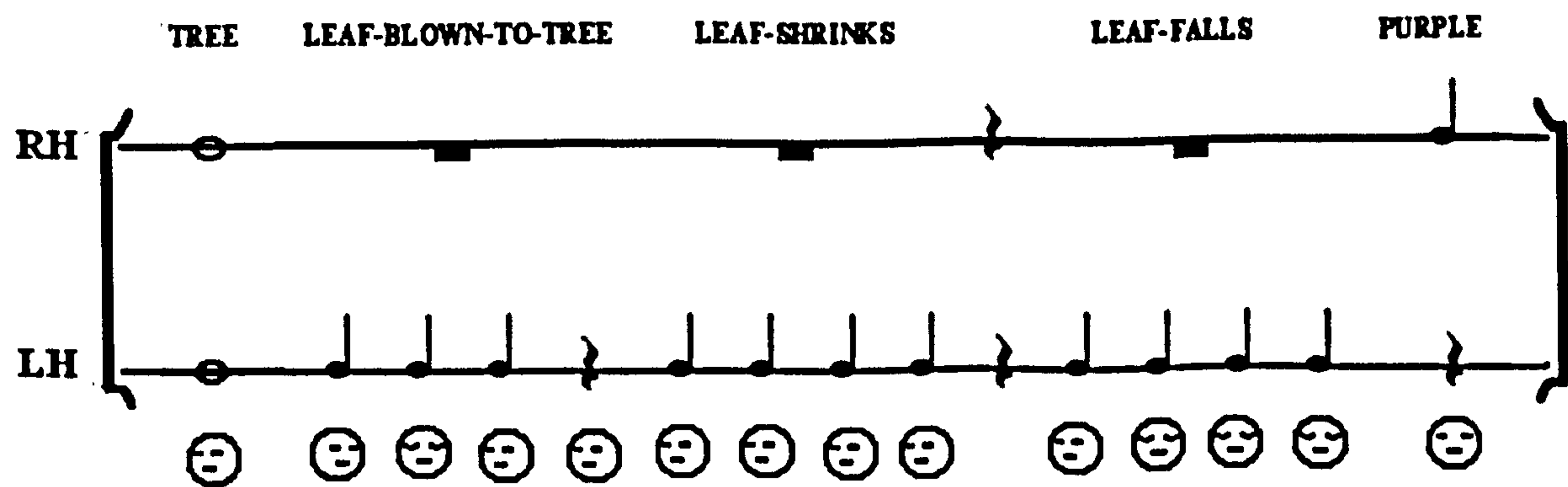


Figure 8.2 The notation with music notes for Wim Emerik's *Falling Leaf*

8.4.2. Rhythmic haiku: Jesus Marchan's *Fish*

Syllabic haiku, represented by Wim Emmerik's work, remains very rare in sign language haiku. Most of the signed haiku falls into the category of rhythmic haiku, in which the poet abandons the regular rhythmic patterns and enjoys shifting the speed and pace. A good example of such rhythmic haiku is Jesus Marchan's ASL haiku *Fish* which won Honourable Mention at the Robert F. Panara Haiku Contest 2002. It describes the way a fish swims toward what it thinks is a prize, but is hooked in a trap. It is about the same length as the previous example, but the rhythmic pattern is completely different.

Fish swim eagerly
In a mad dash for the prize
Only to be hooked²⁶

RH: FISH _____ FISH-SWIM EAGER
LH: FISH _____ FISH-SWIM EAGER

RH (continued): FISH-SWIM LOOK-FOR FISH-SWIM _____
LH (continued): FISH-SWIM LOOK-FOR FISH-SWIM SEE-HOOK

RH (continued): _____ FISH-DASH _____ FISH-FLAPPING-TAIL
LH (continued): FISH-DASH GRAB BE-HOOKED _____

This poem is characterized by manipulation of signing speed and effective use of "release of tension" in signing, which is commonly found in many rhythmic haiku. The basic movement in this poem is the swimming of fish, which is consistent throughout the poem. The poem can be divided roughly into three sections by brief pauses and difference in speed (the glossing above shows the division). Marchan starts with slow movement (the first segment), then after the sign EAGER, the speed of the movement gradually increases (the second segment). The last move (after the fish has seen a "prize"- the third segment) is literally "a mad rush" toward the goal (which is actually a hook in a trap). Marchan accelerates the speed as he progresses

²⁶ Translation by PEN International

through each part, showing the eagerness of the fish toward its goal. There is an iconic mapping between the increased speed of signing and increased speed of fish swimming, and a metaphorical mapping between such movement and psychological excitement of the fish. This increasing speed highlights the accumulating tension of this poem. The climax of the poem is when all this tension is “released” which highlights the instant when the fish is hooked by a trap. Such a dramatic moment, which serves as the division of this haiku, is foregrounded by a hold of the sign (visual density is dropped down to the minimum). The dynamic rhythm never returns after this sudden release, which symbolises the loss of psychological excitement of the fish.

Facial expression also contributes to the increasing tension of the poem and its sudden loss. The poet’s face tenses as the poem develops. In the end, when the fish has been hooked, his facial expression becomes vacant, loosening the tension which has been gradually built up till that moment. Proximity (the size of signs) possibly affects the overall complexity of a sign as well.

The music notation in Figure 8.3 shows the way that the increase in speed and size of the movements, and facial expressions are all related. This highlights the fact that rhythm is not constituted by a single factor (such as speed) but rather it is an overall structure which binds several elements together to create a unified flow of signing. The elements in Figure 8.3 all correlate with each other to set up the tension and its release. It also shows that the rhythmic structure in *Fish* is much more complicated (and visually dense) compared to *Falling leaf* (Figure 8.2).

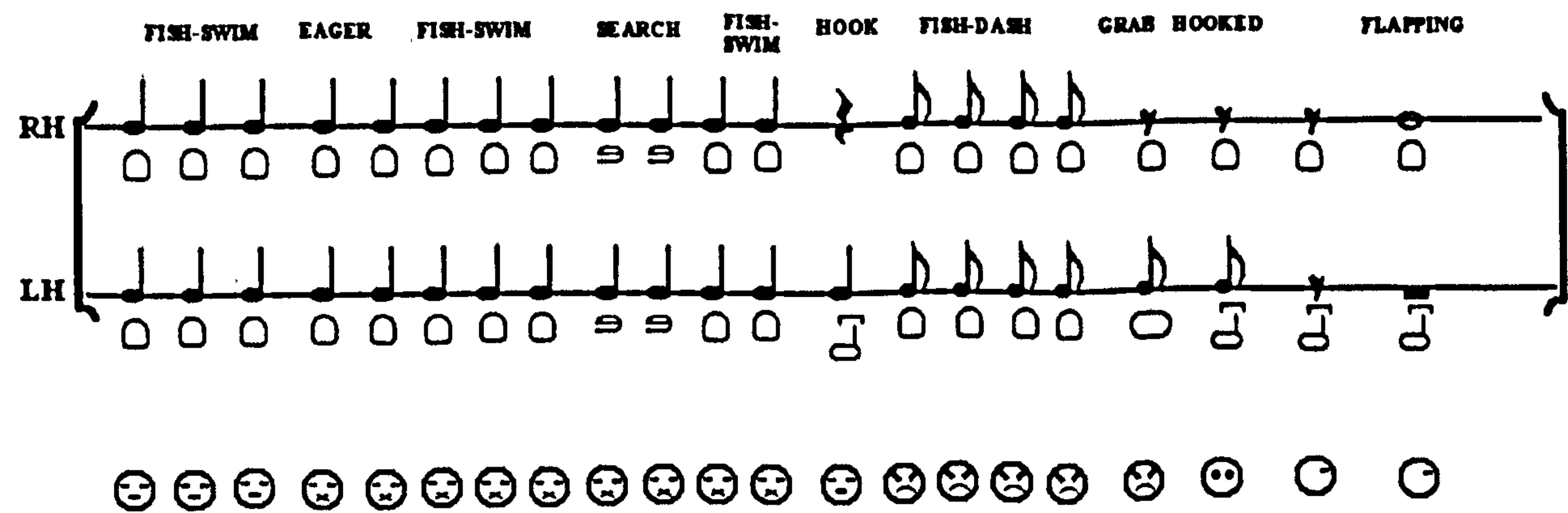


Figure 8.3 The notation with music notes for Jesus Marchan’s *Fish*

8.4.3. Shifting Perspectives: Sam Sepah's *Cornfield*

Playing hide and seek
Chased into the cornfield
Our first kiss

RH: PLAY HIDE-SEEK CHASING RUNNING CORN VAST-FIELD
LH: PLAY HIDE-SEEK CHASING RUNNING _____ VAST-FIELD

RH (continued): SLASHING-OUR-WAY LOOK-AT-EACH-OTHER
LH (continued): SLASHING-OUR-WAY LOOK-AT-EACH-OTHER

RH (continued): OUR FIRST KISS
LH (continued): _____ KISS

Sam Sepah's ASL haiku *Cornfield* is also a very rhythmical poem, but it produces rhythm in a different way, namely by shifting between two different types of signs. One is small-scale, focused (using whole-body), using fast signs, with intense facial expressions (CHASING, RUNNING and SLASHING-OUR-WAY); the other is large-scale, defocused, and using slow signs (VAST-FIELD, LOOK-AT-EACH-OTHER and KISS). The shift between large and small scale signs is common to other poems such as Johanna Mesch's *Kayak* and Maria Gibson's *Walk* discussed above. Sepah also adds the alternation between quick and slow speeds to create further contrastive units. The poet produces quicker signs while the characters are chasing each other in the cornfield. Signing is significantly slowed down when the poet signs defocused signs such as VAST-FIELD (the slow and big movement iconically represents the vastness of the field), and when the two characters look at each other and kiss. Especially the slow motion of KISS highlights the climax of the poem.

This poem accumulates visual density through quick and "zoom-in" signs and releases the tension when he signs slow and "zoom-out" signs. This release can be observed twice in this poem, resulting in a three-part structure as suggested by the above transcription. The first release is when the poet signs VAST-FIELD, at which moment all the restless movements of the previous signs describing the act of chasing disappear and the audience is suddenly introduced the image of a vast corn field with a slowed down and large-scale sign. Then the poet goes back to the quick signs to further develop the action of children chasing after each other. The second

release comes as a hold of the sign LOOK-AT-EACH-OTHER. The poet suddenly stops the movement and, together with a beautiful front-and-back symmetrical sign, highlights the zoom-out view of the sudden encounter of two people. Then he slowly signs two lexical signs (OUR and FIRST) and then the last sign of KISS follows. After a series of quick and agitated signs (visually dense), this simple and visually light sign foregrounds the climax of the poem.

8.4.4. Dorothy Miles' *Seasons*

As I mentioned earlier, Dorothy Miles was skilled in manipulating rhythm as part of her performing techniques. This especially stands out in her *Seasons* haiku quartet, in which the four poems show different types of rhythm reflecting the different nature of each season. I will illustrate several features of rhythm in this quartet to wrap up the discussion of rhythm.

Overall features

My corpus contains three different renditions by Dorothy Miles of her composition *Seasons* (1980 ASL, 1987 and 1988 BSL). Although each rendition differs considerably, the basic rhythmic structure is common to all of them. Namely, *Spring* is characterised by a fast, fluttering movement; in *Summer* the movement slows down and becomes more continuous and fluid; *Autumn* is again a fluttering piece of performance and *Winter* adopts a crisp and clear manner for signing individual signs. All these rhythms metaphorically express our general understanding of each season. Spring and autumn are the seasons of change: everything is busy and moving. Summer, with its intense heat, makes everyone sluggish and dull. Winter is a season of sharpness with its cold and crisp air. The fluttering, slow, fluttering (again), and sharp movements in this quartet stand for these concepts respectively.

Regarding the size of the movement, each poem in *Seasons* uses different joints. The movement in *Spring* is characterised by fast movements of fingers (knuckles). This contributes to the busy and lively atmosphere of spring. In sharp contrast, *Summer* uses shoulder joints frequently. This slows down the speed, which,

in turn, symbolises the dullness and heaviness of summer heat. Signs in *Autumn* mainly use wrists, and thus are capable of reproducing the liveliness of Spring, but in a limited way (wrists cannot move as freely or as fast as knuckles). *Winter* uses various joints to explore different images of contrast.

The rhythm of each poem is influenced by their neighbouring season. The quick motion of *Spring* slows down at the end leading to the slowness of *Summer*. *Autumn* starts with slow movement after *Summer* but then quickens to symbolise the rhythm of this season, but then shows a sudden hold at the end, as if to anticipate the abrupt rhythm of *Winter* (Sutton-Spence 2005),

In Miles’ English originals, each verse has the same amount of timing (as she followed the syllabic structure of traditional haiku). In signing, however, each poem has a different length reflecting different pace and rhythm (see Table 8.2 below). The length differs in each rendition, but common in all three renditions is the fact that *Spring* and *Autumn* are shorter than *Summer* and *Winter*. The 1987 performance in BSL has the most pronounced variation among the four seasons. *Spring* and *Autumn* are almost instantaneous compared with *Summer* and *Winter*. They are more “dense” with quick and intense signing, which suits to the transitional nature of these two seasons.

Performance	Spring (secs)	Summer (secs)	Autumn (secs)	Winter (secs)
ASL (1980)	30	41	22	44
BSL (1987)	16	34	18	48
BSL (1988)	25	37	16	52

Table 8.2 Different lengths in Dorothy Miles’ three renditions

Spring

Miles had her own way to increase visual density in her poems. *Spring* especially is the most visually dense poem in the quartet. This is mainly due to the fact that she utilises a great deal of internal movements, i.e. trilling and fluttering movement of fingers. Such trilling movements are visually very “noisy”, and capture the attention of the audience. Her expressive face also adds extra visual information.

She further combined such internal movements with the fast path movements of her hands, creating even more dense, dizzying and dazzling impressions.

Summer

Summer, in contrast to *Spring* and *Autumn*, is characterised by slow movement. It is also in sharp contrast with *Winter* in that the signing is more transient and smoothly merging into the next sign (while *Winter* has staccato rhythm). These features result in the dull impression of hot summer.

Autumn

Autumn is similar to Jesus Marchan's *Fish* above in that it provides a good example of accumulating visual density and its sudden release. After producing a continuing, fluttering movement of whirling leaves (which starts slowly and becomes quicker), Miles suddenly holds her motion, with both hands pointing to the front (Figure 8.4). This sharp contrast between the fluttering movement and the unexpected stop (decreasing visual density to almost zero) leaves a strong impression on the audience. The lively expressions on the poet's face disappear after this moment, as the poet goes through the rest of the poem and shifts into *Winter*.



Figure 8.4 The release point in Dorothy Miles' *Autumn*

Winter

Winter is characterised by frequent holds of the signs. Each sign is discrete, and as a result the poem creates the clear and crisp impression. Miles held her signs BLACK, WHITE, ICE, highlighting their significance and completely isolating them from the preceding and following signs. Miles also inserted a significant pause after

the sequence of HARD ICE, SOFT SNOW as if to suggest a new phase in the poem (thus it marks an internal division). As a result of these frequent pauses, there is certain awkwardness or abruptness in the rhythmic structure of *Winter*. This is in a sharp contrast with *Spring*, which is more smooth and flowing (with no pause). This may be because *Spring* portrays one coherent and visual picture, whereas *Winter* consists of a series of different concepts (because it is a poem of contrast), many of which are represented by discrete lexical signs.

8.5. Summary

In this chapter, rhythmic structures of sign language have been discussed. The sound-oriented notion of rhythm goes through a radical change in order to incorporate rhythmic structure in sign language. Defining rhythm in units and introducing the concept of visual density help our understanding of rhythm in poetic signing.

Chapter 9

Symmetry

The chief forms of beauty are order and symmetry and definiteness.

Aristotle

9.1. Introduction

To produce symmetrical signs, i.e. to create balance between the two hands, is identified as an essential feature of poetic signing by many researchers (Klima and Bellugi 1979, Sutton-Spence and Woll 1999, Russo, Giuranna, and Pizzuto 2001, Sutton-Spence 2005, Sutton-Spence and Kaneko 2007). It is the feature which can draw out the maximum poetic effect in a visual and spatial language. Symmetrical signing is purely aesthetic for the eyes, and can also be developed as a means of symbolism, i.e. to link the form and theme of a poem.

This chapter will discuss the way Deaf poets create symmetry, and how it is used effectively in haiku. Symmetry creates simple but striking effects, which go along with the nature of haiku.

9.1.1. Definition of symmetry

It is conventional to open a philosophical account of symmetry by giving two kinds of definition: broad and narrow (Weyl 1952, Walser 1998). The Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary presents a narrow definition: "the exact match in size and shape between two halves, parts or sides of something". This geometric definition of symmetry, restricted to two-sidedness of an entity, is also called "bilateral symmetry". Many objects in our life show such bilateral symmetry, varying from our own body structure to the shape of an aeroplane, from a tiny crystal of a snowflake and to the enormous Taj Mahal.

On the other hand, symmetry in its broader sense is identified through the notions of balance, harmony, invariance and equality, and ultimately with beauty. This broader notion of symmetry is based on our understanding of something symmetric as orderly and pleasing. Symmetry represents a “created order, beauty and perfection” in our world (Weyl 1952: 5).

In relation to sign languages, I would like to loosely define symmetry as *the arrangement of two elements which are located across a certain plane or axis*. This notion of symmetry does not form a strict dichotomy of what is symmetric and what is not. Rather, it is a continuum. For example, two-handed signs are more symmetric than one-handed signs; two-handed signs at the same height are more symmetric than those at different heights; two-handed signs with the same handshapes are more symmetric than those with different handshapes (see Figure 9.1).

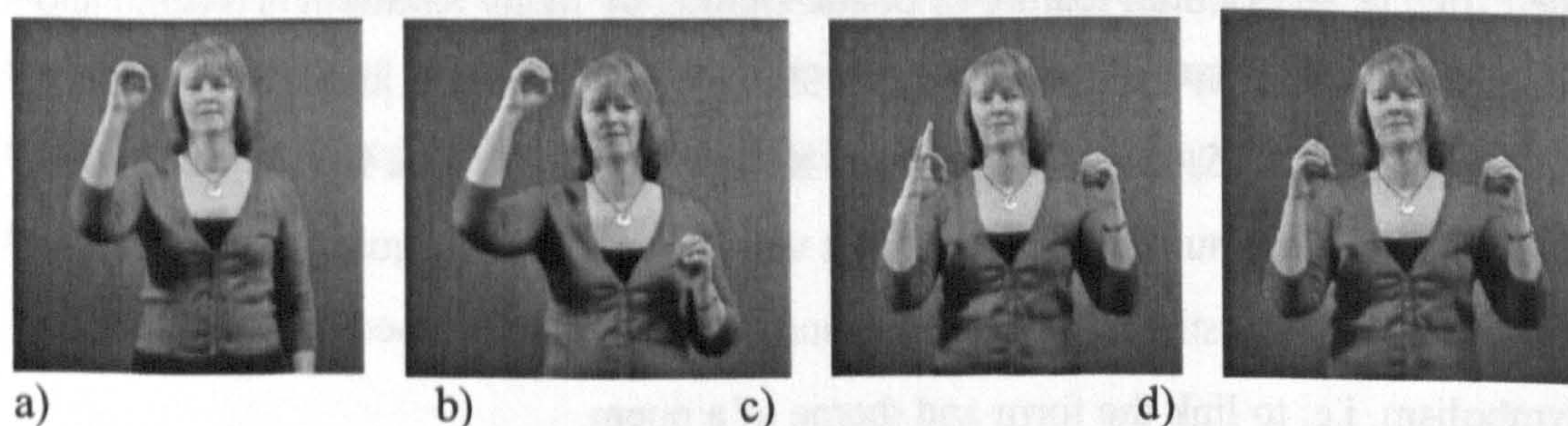


Figure 9.1 Continuum of symmetry: a) one-handed signing, b) two-handed signing at different locations, c) two-handed signing with different handshapes, and d) most symmetric two-handed sign

The antonym of symmetry is considered to be *asymmetry*. However, the notion of asymmetry presupposes the notion of symmetry. In other words, asymmetry is understood as incomplete symmetry. In poetry, asymmetry is often considered to be the poet’s *deliberate breaking of symmetry*. We need to distinguish asymmetry from *non-symmetry*, absence of symmetry without any (poetic) intention.

Intended asymmetry, or symmetry breaking, is an important feature of sign language poetry. Symmetry in poetic signing is so pervasive that its absence stands out as something marked. While our every day life is full of confusion and disorder, a poetic view of the world offers a well-balanced, stable and solid basis, on which poets build up their imagination. This often comes to the extreme where symmetry in poetry is *taken for granted*. In poetic language, where symmetry is presupposed, lack of such symmetry reversibly becomes marked. Poets first make an effort to create

and maintain symmetry in their poems, and then create further poetic effect by breaking that symmetry.

This is related to Geoffrey Leech's notion of obtrusive regularity and irregularity. Leech (1969) illustrates two ways that poetic language can be foregrounded: either the language is used in a deviant and marked way (obtrusive irregularity) or in "abnormally normal" (Sutton-Spence 2005) ways so that such normality becomes noticeable (obtrusive regularity). Symmetry in sign language poetry first stands out as regularly obtrusive (unusual perseverance of two-handedness). But then it reaches the stage where such symmetry becomes a norm. At this point, breaking such symmetrical signing demands attention. Symmetry breaking creates great poetic effect in the audience who expect, or have got used to, the harmony and balance which have been built up so far. I will give one example of such symmetry breaking later in this chapter.

9.1.2. Symmetry in Language

In discussing symmetry in language, one has to take into consideration the contrast between the spatial nature of symmetry and the time-bound nature of languages. Whereas rhythm, as discussed in the previous chapter, is primarily a temporal notion, symmetry is closely linked with spatial arrangement. The fact that symmetry may be narrowed down exclusively to geometry shows that symmetry has fundamental appeal to the spatial and visual domains of our senses. Creating symmetry in language tends to be more challenging than in paintings, for example, because language is time-bound and time is non-symmetric. It flows unidirectionally from past to future and not vice versa. People need to make an extra effort to create symmetry in language. For example, palindromes are a big challenge to the non-symmetric linear structure of languages. Conscious and intense efforts are required to make a good palindrome, such as "ABLE WAS I ERE I SAW ELBA", ironically attributed to Napoleon (Walser 1998).

Sign languages, on the other hand, have a unique status, in that they are both spatial and time-bounded. As with all languages, they follow a linear structure. But at the same time, the visual-manual modality of sign languages makes it possible to

create simultaneous, visual/spatial configurations, which spoken languages do not have. This is why symmetry is so popular and important in sign language poetry.

9.2. Symmetry in Poetry

Symmetry in poetry (both in spoken and signed language) may be considered in two ways - symmetry in form and symmetry in theme. Symmetry in form refers to the use of the language, for example, rhyme and meter of a poem (*temporal symmetry*), or in case of so-called visual poems, the actual appearance of a poem (*visual symmetry*). On the other hand, symmetry in theme means something hidden below the surface. In other words, it is in the core of the poem, directly connected to the message the poet wants to convey. It appears in the whole structure of a poem (including development of the theme, characters and setting), analogy, contrast, metaphor, similes, and so on. Both types of symmetry function to develop the poet's thought, ideas, and intentions, and are closely linked.

9.2.1. Symmetry in form

There are two ways to achieve formal symmetry in poetry: in repetitive patterns along the time line (*temporal symmetry*), and in the actual, visual configuration of a poem (*spatial symmetry*). Temporal symmetry is closely linked to the rhythmic structure of a poem, to rhyme, meter, and repetition of parts of the poem.

William Blake's *Tyger, Tyger*, (also known as *Fearful Symmetry*) provides many examples of this. There is a useful analysis of the symmetric structure of this poem by Winfried Nöth (1999).

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes!
On what wings dare he aspire?

What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, and what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? and what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

It is obvious that the first and the last stanza are almost identical (except the first word of the last line). This creates one sort of symmetry in this poem - with four inward stanzas being "sandwiched" by the first and the last stanzas. Nöth also points out that there are certain kinds of identification between stanza two and five, and between stanza three and four, creating symmetry between the first half and the latter half. The rhyme pattern of this poem is AABB (in each stanza, the first two lines rhyme, and so do the last two lines), which also contributes to the regularity of this poem.

After illustrating a variety of symmetrical patterns in this poem, Nöth suggests that perfect symmetry is not necessarily highly regarded (the theme of this poem itself can be understood as "fear" of such perfection). She gives some examples of pattern-breaking in this poem. For instance, two very important words in the first and the last stanza "eye" and "symmetry" do not rhyme perfectly. Rhyming here does not directly connect to the notion of symmetry but it contributes to break the perfection of stanza. Also, as mentioned above, a difference in one word spoils perfect identification of the first and the last stanza. This preference for (intentional)

symmetry breaking is a very important point in discussing symmetry in poetic language - where the existence of symmetry is often assumed and expected.

Whereas temporal symmetry, by definition, is bound to time, spatial symmetry involves visual representation of a poem. Although in many cases the configuration of written poems is insignificant, there are some examples where the shape of the poems has a meaning. Such visual poems are visually pleasing, but the intention of the poet is not just to add aesthetic effect to their work. Visual symmetry is often deeply related to the theme of the poem.

George Herbert's following poem is a good example:

Easter-wings

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,
Though foolishly he lost the same,
Decaying more and more,
Till he became
More poore:
With thee
O let me rise
As larks, harmoniously,
And sing this day thy victories:
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

My tender age in sorrow did beginne:
And still with sickness and shame
Thou didst so punish sinne,
That I became
Most thinne.
With thee
Let me combine
And feel this day thy victories:
And feel this day thy victorie:
For, if I imp my wing on thine,
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

George Herbert (1693)

First of all, this poem *looks* like a wing - representing the topic of the poem. But at the same time, it tries to show symbolically the process of fall and rise of a human soul by creating an X shape. In the first stanza the physical appearance of the

poem is reduced while the poet recalls the process of losing, and with the words “Most poore” it reaches the least stage. Then it will start increasing the number of words, as the poem proceeds talking about the wish to rise. As Hollander (1975) analyses, this visual configuration has a strong metaphor of “what goes up will come down” “what becomes less will be more”. This is one example of how visual representation is metaphorically connected to the poem’s theme.

9.2.2. Symmetry in theme

Together with symmetric forms, poetry has themes of duality. This symmetry in theme can be found not only in poetry but also in drama and prose, which may not have formal symmetry as much as verse does. For example, symmetry in theme appears as symmetric arrangement of characters. In Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, the two families of Montagues and Capulets are placed symmetrically as opposing powers, both of them having teenage children who are ready to fall in love. In both sides, there is someone who tries to understand and help the young couple (Juliet’s nanny and the priest to whom Romeo confesses everything). The tragic outcome of the young love joins two families together, with two fathers swearing that they will grow peace between the families. Another example of symmetry in display of characters can be found in analysis of Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, where he showed how two sides of the central character of Rasconicov are symmetrically mapped onto other two characters (good and evil) (Makarova 2005).

9.3. Symmetry in sign language

9.3.1. Inherent symmetry in sign languages

Before discussing symmetry in poetic signing, it is necessary to refer to symmetry in sign languages in general. The classic notion of symmetry was first

introduced in sign language research by Battison (1974), when he proposed two related constraints:

1) Symmetry Condition

- a) If both hands of a sign move independently during its articulation, then
- b) Both hands must be specified for the same location, the same handshape, the same movement (whether performed simultaneously or in alternation), and the specification for orientation must be either symmetrical or identical.

2) Dominance Condition

- a) If the hands of a two-handed sign do not share the same specification for handshape (i.e. they are different), then
- b) One hand must be passive while the active hand articulates the movement, and
- c) The specification of the passive handshape is restricted to be one of a small set: A, S, B, 5, G, C and O.

Napoli and Wu (2003) have replaced these two conditions with more detailed accounts of two-handed signs. Using *The American Sign Language Handshape Dictionary* as a database, they categorised signs into the following groups. The number at the end of each category refers to the number of signs that fall into that category.

1. Reflection (444; 27.8%)

Simple reflection (301; 18.8%)

- 1) Vertical midsagittal plane (Type 4A) 271
most common signs which are created based on vertical (left-right) plane
- 2) Vertical wall plane (Type 4B) 5
signs which are reflected across a front-back plane
- 3) Horizontal plane (Type 4C) 7
signs which involve “extremely imperfect” reflection over horizontal signs
- 4) Rotated vertical midsagittal plane (Type 4D) 6
signs which are reflected against the vertical midsagittal plane, which is rotated 45 degrees to either side of the body.
- 5) Semantically selected plane (Type 4E) 3
signs whose selection of the plane is based on a particular demand of a lexicon
- 6) Vertical midsagittal plane over time (Type 4F) 9
signs which involve reflections over time

Reflection with inversion (143; 8.9%)
 (Signs which show reflection, but the direction of the movement of two hands are opposite).

- 1) Vertical midsaggital plane with inversion (Type 4A-i) 57
 signs which are reflected with inversion in vertical midsaggital plane
- 2) Horizontal plane with inversion (Type 4C-i) 10
 signs which are reflected with inversion in horizontal plane
- 3) Imperfect reflection (Type 4*) 76
 signs which do not show perfect reflection due to physical reasons

2. Rotation (9; 0.5%)

- 1) Vertical wall starting point (Type 5B)5
- 2) Horizontal starting point (Type 5C) 4
- 3) Ambiguous signs (Type 5A or reflection) -

3. Translation (23; 1.4%)

- 1) Hand parallel (Type 6) 19
- 2) Moving as a Unit (Type 6+) 4

4. Glide Reflection (43; 2.7%)

- 1) Vertical midsaggital plane (Type 7A) 34
- 2) Semantically selected plane (Type 7E) 3
- 3) Vertical midsaggital plane over time (Type 7F) 6

This categorisation is unique in that they try to introduce bases of symmetry other than reflection. However, it is very clear that the majority of the symmetric signs are based on a reflection across vertical midsaggital plane (i.e. left and right). To highlight this point, I listed the number and the percentage of the reflection signs in three planes (left-right, front-back, and up-down):

Vertical midsaggital plane (left-right)	Type 4A+4D+4F+4A-i = 341 (78%)
Vertical wall plane (front-back)	Type 4B = 5 (1%)
Horizontal plane (up and down)	Type 4C+4C-i = 17 (4%)
Others 81 (17%)	

Similar attempts were made for BSL in Sutton-Spence and Kaneko (2007) using *The Dictionary of British Sign Language / English*. They found that two-thirds

of two-handed signs are symmetric, at least partially (i.e. some part of signs, such as handshapes, locations, movements, show symmetrical distribution). They also found that there are far more examples of symmetrical signs based on vertical plane (which corresponds to Napolia and Wu’s “vertical midsaggital plane”) than the other two planes. Figure 9.2 summarises the distribution of the symmetrical signs according to each plane.

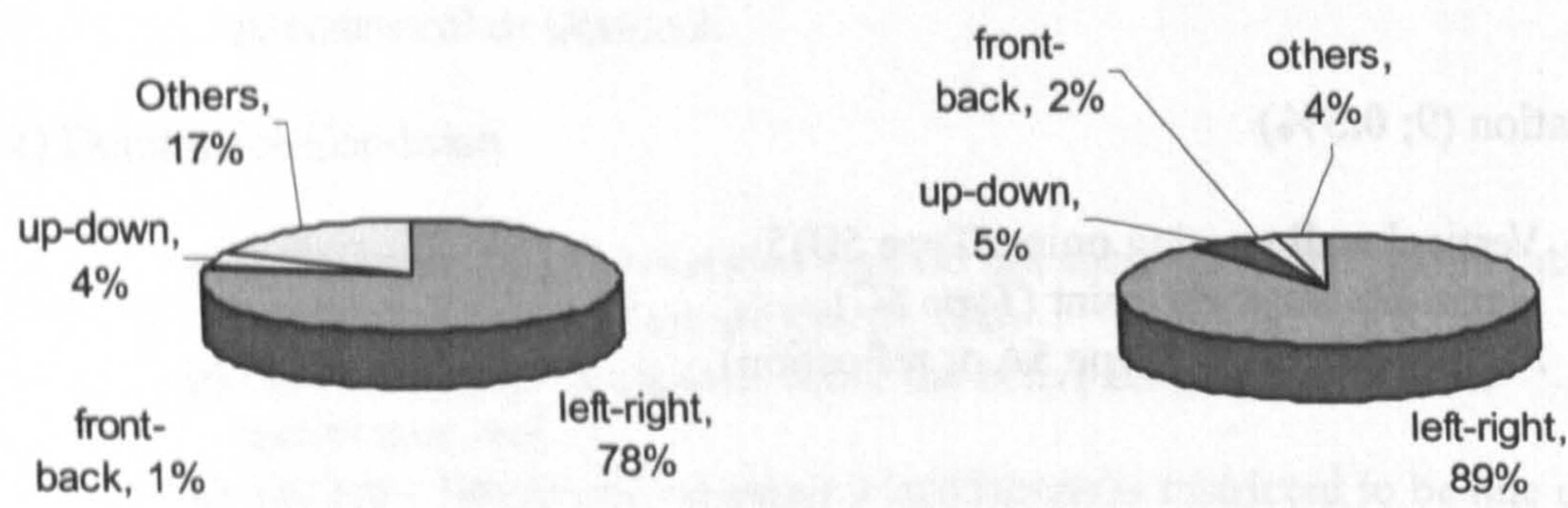


Figure 9.2: Percentages of symmetrical signs across different planes in ASL (left), based on Napoli and Wu (2003) and BSL (right), based on Sutton-Spence and Kaneko (2007)

In the following discussions for sign language poetry, I primarily discuss the symmetrical signs based on left-right (vertical), up-down (horizontal), and front-back axis for reflection.

9.3.2. Three planes

Three principle planes for symmetrical signs result in left-right, front-back and up-down symmetry. Figure 9.3 shows examples from each plane.



Figure 9.3 Examples of symmetric signs (left-right, up-down, front-back)

As observed above, the majority of the two-handed signs are based on left-right orientation. It is worth noting that only this left-right symmetry is given a special name of “bilateral symmetry”, while others do not have corresponding names. The main reason why left-right symmetry is much more common than the other types of symmetry is a matter of physiology. Our body - the way our muscles, bones and joints are put together - makes the production of vertical symmetry much easier than the others. Up-down symmetry involves locating signs at different altitudes, which is less easy than left-right arrangement. Front-back symmetry requires twisting the wrists/elbows/shoulders, which is physically very demanding.

Left-right symmetry has perceptual merits as well. If two hands are placed on both sides, nothing is blocking the line of view between the signer and the viewer. This applies to up-down symmetry too, but not to perfect front-back symmetry (one hand always stands between the viewer and the other hand). This can be one of the reasons why signers tend to rotate the front-back configuration up to 45 degrees off the centre, apart from the obvious physiological difficulty in producing strict front-back symmetry.

Additionally, left-right distinction has a unique status compared with other orientations of the body because our body is symmetric in this orientation only.²⁷ This, for example, leads to the fact that left-right direction functions less frequently as a basis for orientational metaphors (see Chapter 6) than other two directions. Whereas “up” is universally associated with positive concepts, and “down” with negative concepts (“He cheered me up” “Don’t let me down”), and front-back orientation is usually associated with time (“I look forward to seeing you”), such orientational metaphors are rare with left and right. We do have many metaphors that make use of left and right distinction, but their association with concepts is more arbitrary. For example, “right” tends to mean something good in Western cultures (“right” means “correct” or “true”, while “left” can be a synonym of “clumsy”)²⁸, but this is not necessarily the case in East Asian cultures. In traditional political systems

²⁷ While most people do not have any problem in distinguishing up and down and front and back (e.g. when being told to look “up”, we can do so instantly, without ever giving a thought to it), quite a few people have a difficulty in telling right and left immediately. This is because they are symmetric.

²⁸ The main logic for this is that most people are right-handed, and therefore something done by right hand is likely to be regarded as proper.

in China the minister at the highest position is called “Left-Minister”, and so-called “Right-Minister” is placed one rank below. In other words, attribution of good and bad to right and left is a by-product of cultures.

Orientational metaphors are based on our experience with the body. Since the up-down and front-back orientations are asymmetric in nature, it is easier to attribute two opposing concepts (such as good/bad, more/less, past/future) to two sides. But we cannot so easily or systematically assign different concepts to left and right, simply because there is no significant difference between them (Ohori 2002).

Such invariant status might motivate poets to make more left-right symmetry than other two types. There is no evidence of presupposed attribution of concepts to either direction, and it is up to the poet to create the meaning behind the symmetry/asymmetry using this orientation.

9.4. Symmetry in sign language poetry

As mentioned earlier, the primary purpose of symmetric signing is to create aesthetic effects. Therefore, we can assume that the number of symmetrical signs increases in poetic signing (which uses artistic language) compared with daily signing. Russo, Giuranna, and Pizzuto (2001) have pointed out that the proportion of two-handed signs is very much higher in poetry compared to everyday conversation. In their analysis two-handed signs occupy 49% of poetic signing but only 21% of non-poetic signing (106). This shows that symmetric arrangement of two-handed signs is an established device in sign language poetry.

Both Sutton-Spence (2005) and Sutton-Spence and Kaneko (2007) provide examples of spatial symmetry. For instance, they analyse a BSL poem *Staircase* by Dorothy Miles as a beautiful example where symmetry in form and in theme is viewed as an organic whole. *Staircase* describes how a group of people who encounter a huge staircase manage to climb up to the top of it, being led by a man who is bald, somewhat plump and wearing glasses. There is, of course, theme beyond this topic. It shows the story of the first Deaf students who completed the first British university course in sign language with the help of a Deaf tutor. This poem makes considerable use of left and right symmetry. When people gather and

proceed on their way, Dot Miles uses both hands to show the process - first one person, then two, and then many. The increase in number is represented with both hands. The poet uses many two-handed signs in the remaining part of the poem as well, but this process of gathering people has a particular aesthetic effect, as it is the combination of temporal and visual symmetry (visual symmetry changes dynamically along time). It is also deeply related to the theme of this poem, that is, the success that can be achieved through “the togetherness and collective nature of the Deaf community” (Sutton-Spence and Kaneko 2007).

Many sign language poems involve the theme of duality, for which symmetry is an ideal tool for representation. Fourteen-year-old Sean Timon’s BSL poem *Half Personal Poetry in Life and Deaf* talks about many “halves” in his identity (such as “half rich and half poor” “half child and half adult” “half white and half black” “half Deaf and half hearing”, “half signing and half speaking” and so forth). He places each sign left and right on the signing space, shifting his body posture, up to the penultimate sequence (“I want to belong half in the Deaf world and half in the hearing world”). The last part “I don’t want to half belong in a whole world” is centralised to mark the difference from the rest of the poem²⁹.

Symmetry stands out even more in case of duet poems (i.e. poems performed by two people). The LIS poem *Thanks*, performed by Rosaria and Giuseppe Giuranna, is characterised by the interaction between two poets standing side by side. They take turns in signing at the beginning, creating discrete sequences, but gradually, as their communication becomes smoother, they start to sign the same content at the same time. The sequential symmetry merges into simultaneous symmetry when they start to sign in harmony. Another good example of symmetry in a duet poem is an ASL poem by Ella Lentz and Joe Castronovo (described in Klima and Bellugi 1979). Symmetry is created purely for aesthetic purpose in this poem, in which one poet stands behind the other, making it possible to use four hands from the same plane. The first and the last segments make the most of this four-hand symmetry, and create enormous aesthetic effect. The middle segments are also symmetrical both in form and in meaning, as they try to show two contrastive

²⁹ Translation by *Life and Deaf* 2006 (www.lifeanddeaf.co.uk)

notions (such as FATHER and MOTHER, HAMMERING and STIRRING) through arranging the signs in opposing locations. Most signs are minimal pairs, only different in handshape, which highlights the symmetrical locations of the two signs. This poem shows temporal symmetry as well, both in form (the first and the last lines are almost identical with reversed sequence) and in theme (contrast between the first and the last lines - sunrise versus sunset, house opens versus house closes).

<first segment>

EL and JC: SUN RISE HOUSE OPEN

<middle segment>

JC: FATHER HAMMERING BROTHER BATHING GRANDPA ROCKING

EL: MOTHER STIRRING SISTER PLAYING GRANDMA KNITTING

<last segment>

EL and JC: CLOSE HOUSE SUN SET

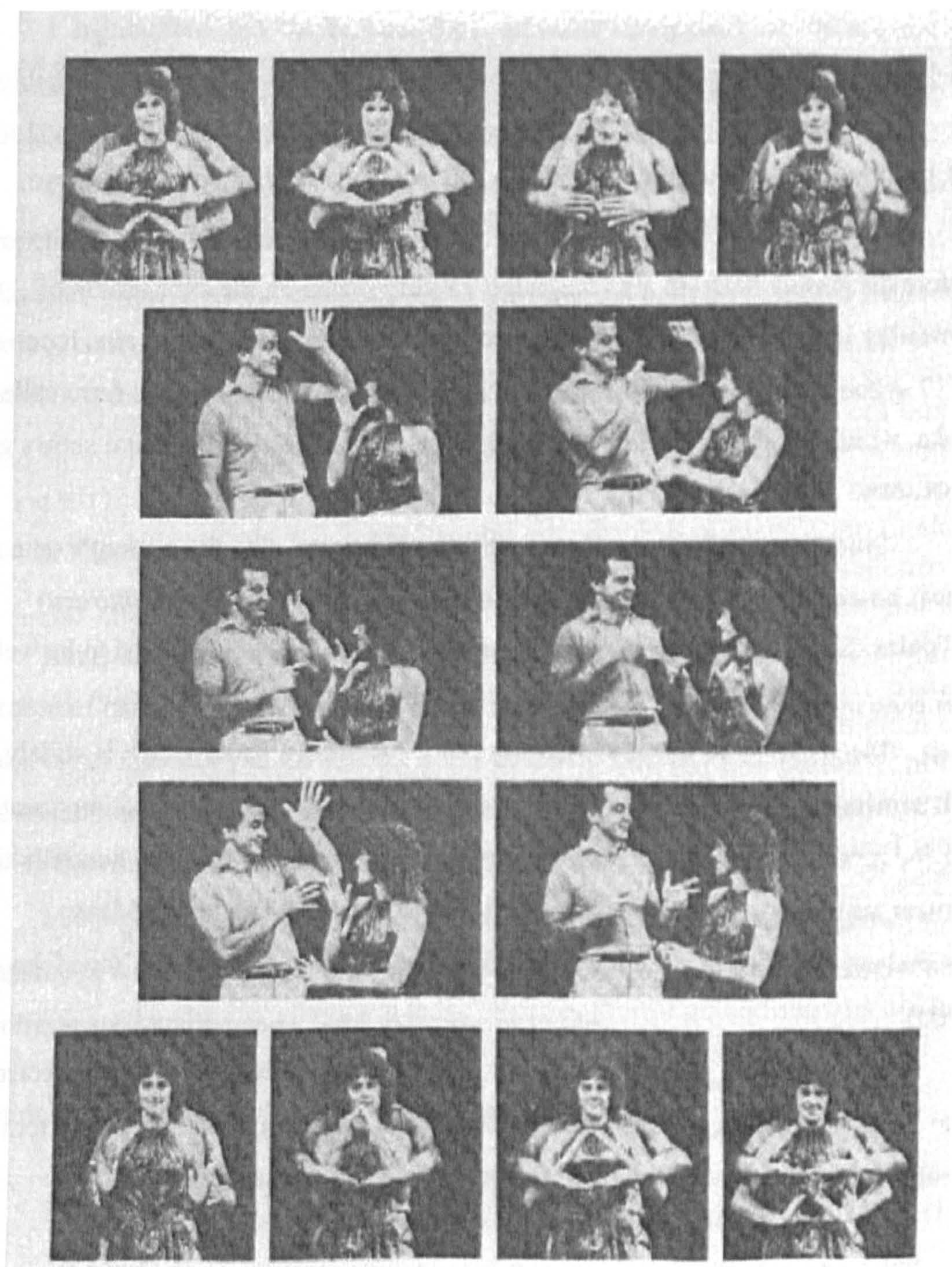


Figure 9.4 Symmetry in the poem performed by Ella Lentz and Joe Castronovo (from Klima and Bellugi 1979)

9.5. Symmetry in sign language haiku

The ideas presented so far can be used in considering examples from sign language haiku. As shown in Chapter 4, Haiku requires a concise form in expressing rich meaning, which make poets utilise any possible techniques, including the display of symmetry.

9.5.1. Symmetry in Japanese haiku

9.5.1.1. Form

Before discussing haiku in sign language, I briefly recap on the explanation of symmetry in haiku in general. The form of haiku clearly shows symmetry. It consists of 17 syllables, divided into three sections of 5-7-5. Unlike its original form called tanka, which has lines of 5-7-5-7-7, the arrangement of sections in haiku shows good symmetry.

Sometimes haiku poets have to disobey this restriction for content's sake. Those so-called "broken" haiku have either more (*jiamari*) or fewer (*jitarazu*) syllables than 17. Although they are acceptable, they are not considered to be well-formed.

However, there is one special type of those broken haiku which is widely acknowledged as proper haiku. They have 8 syllables in the middle section, creating a 5-8-5 structure (note that it is also symmetric). This pattern flows so naturally that sometimes readers don't even notice that it is a case of broken haiku. Many researchers pay special attention to this 5-8-5 pattern (see Gilbert and Yonedoka 2000).

Mukai (2000) points out that this 5-8-5 case can often be further dissected into 5-4-4-5 structure, because the middle section can be divided into two in terms of meaning. He gave the following examples:

9a)

iwashi	gumo	hirogari	hirogari	kizu	itamu
sardine	clouds	stretch (CONT)	stretch (CONT)	wound	hurt

Mackerel clouds; stretching stretching; wounds hurt

9b)

suzume	-no	-ko	sokonoke	sokonoke	onma	ga	tooru
swarrow	PAR	child	get-out (IMP)	get-out (IMP)	horsie	PAR	pass
	(POSS)					(NOM)	(TERM)

Baby sparrows; get out of the way, get out of the way; the horse is coming

I highlighted the middle sections of those examples, which are lexically divided into 4-4. Mukai emphasises the naturalness of this pattern, saying that they would be spoiled if we make them into “proper” 5-7-5 form.

One thing Mukai did not observe is that in 3 out of 6 examples he gave there is a repetition in the middle section - such as “hirogari-hirogari” (9a) “sokonoke-sokonoke” (9b). If we cut the whole haiku into two parts, these repetition help create a sort of mirror image. This is another piece of evidence that symmetry is an underlying force that contributes to the formal structure of haiku.

9.5.1.2. Theme

Haiku has a symmetric structure in terms of theme as well. Since the biggest purpose of haiku is to create a vivid image based on a few words, haiku poets often make use of symmetry in their structure. It is also connected to the idea of *contrast*, one of the fundamental features in haiku (see Chapter 4). Contrast is defined as having opposing qualities in two sides, a feature relevant to the notion of symmetry.

Making contrast is essential as the purpose of haiku is to create a good snapshot of an instantaneous and yet long-lasting image of a scene in nature. Contrasts are usually visual. Here are some examples:

Examples of thematic symmetry (visual contrast) in haiku

- 9c) Nanohanaya tsukiwahigashini hiwanishini
Yellow flowers; Moon on the east; Sun on the west.
(Buson)
- 9d) Akaitsubaki siroitsubakito ochinikeri
Red camellia; white camellia; falling off
(Kawahigashi Hekigotou)
- 9e) Akizorawo futatsuni tateri shiitaiju
Autumn sky; divided into two; by a big chinquapin tree.
(Takahama Kyoshi)

Examples 9c) and 9d) are symmetric both in the form and in the visual sketch they are trying to illustrate. Symmetry in form here is expressed by repeating the same or similar words/expressions, and using words which are in contrast to some

extent, such as “moon” and “sun”, “east” and “west”, and “red” and “white”. Example 9e) does not have formal symmetry, but manages to create a beautiful image of a blue sky (in Japan, “Autumn sky” often refers to a perfect, clear sky) with a big tree lifting its head in the middle of one’s field of vision.

9.5.2. Symmetry in sign language haiku

In this section, several haiku poems with symmetrical arrangements of signs will be analysed in depth.

9.5.2.1 *Eclipse* by Linda Day

There are many objects and natural phenomena in our world that show symmetrical patterns. As Weyl (1952) points out, one of the functions of symmetry is to reproduce *the existing order* in our world. Sign languages, being visual-spatial languages, are capable of faithfully reproducing such symmetrical order in the language. With the help of aesthetic symmetry, such simple reproduction of natural phenomena by itself can be a piece of poetic signing. This is especially important in sign language haiku, in which a simple description of nature is highly regarded.

The BSL haiku poem *Eclipse*, composed and performed by Linda Day, provides an illustration of a solar eclipse using left-right symmetrical signs, each of which represents the sun and the moon. The effect of symmetry in this poem is highlighted by the gradual approach of sun and moon, represented by identical (but reversed) movement of two hands toward the vertical midsagittal plane. The climax of this movement is when the two circles overlap and become one (see Figure 9.5).

Day successfully “miniaturises” the phenomenon of solar eclipse into the signing space, while faithfully preserving the main characteristics (such as movements, locations and the shapes of the sun and the moon). There is a direct one-to-one mapping between the elements in the actual eclipse and those in signing (circular handshapes represent the shapes of actual heavenly bodies, movements of

hands are movements of the sun and the moon, the locations of two hands are the locations of the two bodies).

The simplicity and the vividness of symmetrical representations in this poem best fit the characteristics of haiku.



Figure 9.5 Symmetrical sequences in *Eclipse* by Linda Day

9.5.2.2. *Haiku –a LIS poem-* by Rosaria Giuranna

This poem is composed and performed by the Italian Deaf poet Rosaria Giuranna. It describes a process of two people coming together, holding each other, and being separated at the end. Giuranna in this poem makes considerable use of symmetry and asymmetry. First of all, she creates temporal symmetry in the structure of the poem. For example, she uses the same handshape, location, and (reversed) movement for signs at the beginning and the end of the poem (a closed fist with extended thumb, moving toward/away from the centre). Between these initial and final signs come signs with B-handshape (an open hand with fingers together), which are signed in a smaller scale at the centre of the signing space. This arrangement of signs creates a “sandwich” effect, which is a good example of temporal symmetry.

In terms of spatial symmetry, all signs are created based on perfect bilateral symmetry. Throughout the poem, both hands have the same handshape, movement, and location. This feature contributes to unification and aesthetic effect of this poem.

On the other hand, there are certain elements which are not symmetric in this poem. For example, although she uses the same signs at the beginning and the end of the poem, the speed of signing is completely different. While the initial movements are slow and gradual, the final movement is abrupt and instantaneous. This might

metaphorically represent the fact that we normally take some time to get to know other people whereas separation can come suddenly.

Another asymmetric feature is facial expression. Giuranna's face changes according to the development of her poem, but the pattern is not symmetric. The initial neutral expression is followed by smile while two hands are held closely, and then by negative facial expressions when two hands move apart. The pattern does not follow the "sandwich arrangement" of the manual components, representing the irreversibility of a human encounter.

In this ten-second haiku poem, Giuranna manages to show the essence of human interaction. Her use of symmetry helps create depth in her performance.



Figure 9.6 Symmetry in sequence from Giuranna's *LIS Haiku*

9.5.2.3 *Cornfield* by Sam Sepah

This is a haiku poem created by Sam Sepah in ASL. No title is given, but I call it *Cornfield* for convenience's sake. The English translation of the poem is:

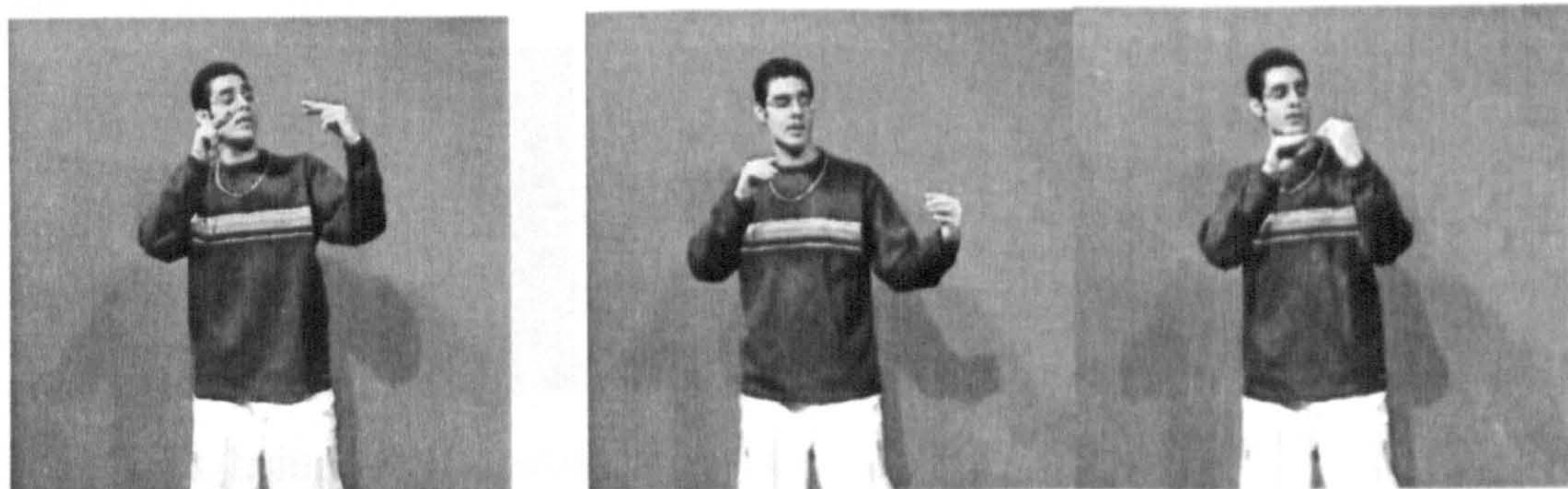
Playing hide-and-seek
Chased into the cornfield
Our first kiss
(translation by PEN International)

Unlike Giuranna's poem above, there is no consistent use of symmetrical signs in this poem. However, the last two signs show good examples of front-back

symmetrical signs and they add considerable poetic effect to the poem. The first sign iconically expresses two people's encounter, as if they are looking at each other in the mirror. The second sign expresses the kissing of the two (Figure 9.7). The axis for these two signs is slightly oblique against the body.

Up to this point, the poet uses numerous lexical signs in rather a busy manner (fast signing speed, involving various movements and perspective shifts). However, when these symmetrical signs are introduced, the poet reduces the speed of signing to attract attention. By doing so, the poet maximally highlights the beauty of the two symmetrical signs.

The kissing scene is the climax of this poem. The vividness of this scene is best represented by the use of front-back symmetry. Symmetry also highlights the mutuality of the kiss (not "I kissed her" or "she kissed me" but "we kissed"). It looks as if they are spontaneously pulled together with equal and gradual speed, which contributes to a heart-warming afterglow of the poem.



LOOK-AT-EACH-OTHER

KISSING

Figure 9.7 Symmetric signs in Sam Sepah's *Cornfield*

9.5.2.4. *Fish* by Jesus Marchan

The last example is another ASL haiku by Jesus Marchan, which I call *Fish*.

Fish swim eagerly
In a mad dash for the prize
Only to be hooked
(translation by PEN International)

Throughout the poem both hands are active in the signing space. Six out of ten segments involve bilateral symmetry. Considering that another four are instantaneous movements, symmetrical signing commands most of the poem. In most cases, the handshapes of the two hands are the same, and both hands move in perfect mirror-image across the vertical midsagittal plane. This continuation of symmetric signs adds an aesthetic sense to this poem.

However, symmetry in this poem is not just for the sake of beauty. It is deeply related to the theme of the poem, that is, the fish's freedom and its loss. Jesus Marchan uses his two hands (and the fact that we *only* have two hands) to show this theme. At the beginning, he establishes a link between "free swimming" and a symmetric figure-of-eight movement created by both hands (see Figure 9.8). In other words, in this particular poem the sign for swimming *has to be two-handed*. Throughout the first half of this poem, this two-handed signing associated with free swimming successfully continues.



Figure 9.8 Two-handed sign FISH-SWIM

Then, a "prize" (or a "hook" in reality) comes into the picture. In order to express this third element, the poet has to give up the perfect symmetry of two-handed signing. He uses his left hand to refer to the existence of the prize/hook (Figure 9.9), but by doing so, he destroys the balance of two-handed swimming which has been kept intact till that moment (the right hand remains inactive while the left hand is engaged in "hook" expression, which may symbolise the fact that one hand alone cannot express the act of swimming). The scene when the prize/hook first comes into the poem is the scene when asymmetry is first introduced to the poem, and also, it is the scene of a warning toward the forthcoming loss of free swimming in this poem. In fact, the moment the fish reaches out to grab the prize, the balance is lost forever and there is no symmetry beyond this point. The last sign of this poem, a "flapping" movement signed only with the right hand (Figure 9.9), is an attempt to

re-create free swimming, which is extremely imperfect as two-handed symmetry is already lost.

This is not simply a poem about fish that is hooked by a trap. It tells us about the innocence of a free fish, which is only highlighted by its loss. The symmetry of two-handed swimming symbolises perfection, balance, and satisfaction of the fish as a free swimmer. The symmetry breaking in the end shows incompleteness, and sudden loss of freedom.



SEE-HOOK



BEING-HOOKED

Figure 9.9 Asymmetrical signs in *Fish*

9.6. Summary

As I have described in this chapter, symmetry is an important feature of sign language haiku, both as an aesthetic tool and for its symbolic function. Successful poems can connect the formal beauty of symmetrical elements with their theme. Sign languages, being visual-spatial languages, can apply the notion of symmetry more directly to the poetic language than spoken/written languages can. The elaborated use of symmetrical signs contributes to the overall effect of poetic signing.

Chapter 10

Handshape

...she joins the tips of the thumb and forefinger of her right hand in the shape of an 'O'... "See the pretty white flower!" She says, admiring her handicraft.

Robert Panara

10.1. Introduction

Handshape is one of the basic parameters of a sign, together with location, movement, palm orientation and nonverbal elements (Stoke 1960, Battison 1974, Friedman 1977). Various handshapes are used in every day language, combined with other parameters to create an infinite number of meanings. There are 57 different handshapes listed in Dictionary of British Sign Language, some of which have more than a hundred signs associated with them. Some handshapes have a motivated relationship with their referents. They may iconically represent the referent (B handshape representing DOOR), or they serve as classifiers (e.g. 1 or G handshape describing a long and thin object or a human being). But other handshapes are selected arbitrarily and randomly without any apparent reason.

Manipulating handshapes is one of the most familiar and efficient ways (though not necessarily the easiest) to create poetic effect in artistic signing. While other parameters such as movement and location can be equally prevalent, “organising the structure of a poem around the repetition of a single handshape seems to be the most usual, the most conscious and the most easily perceivable organising principle” (Blondel and Miller 2000; 61).

A well-known example of the manipulation of handshape (particularly in the United States) is *one-handshape stories*. In one-handshape stories, the narrator is allowed to use only one handshape, and they need to develop a story with the signs using that particular handshape. This can be an enormous challenge, as the number

of signs in one handshape is quite limited and we cannot freely change the handshape of a sign or create new signs.

In sign language poetry, manipulation of handshape is a demanding but rewarding task. Poets pay great attention to which handshape they should choose, because they are aware of the impact of handshapes.

This chapter explores the poetic effect of handshape, focusing on the symbolic power it possesses in relation to form-meaning association.

10.2. Basic effect of handshape in sign language poetry: rhyme and chiming

The basic poetic effect of handshape is to create a visual resonance by repeating the same handshape. Visual resonance creates harmony and rhythm among signs with aesthetic appeal to the eyes.

The repetition of the handshapes is often considered to be an equivalent of rhyme in spoken language poetry (Valli 1990, 1993). Rhyme is a repetition of an identical (or similar) sound in different words. Often, two different sets of identical sounds alternate at the end of each line.

Piping down the valleys wild,
Piping songs of pleasant glee,
On a cloud I saw a child,
And he laughing said to me:

(William Blake, *Songs of Innocence*)

In his discussion of different rhymes and line division in ASL poetry, Valli (1990) claims that the repetition of a handshape is analogous to alliteration (the repetition of the same consonant at the beginning of successive words, such as “Whisper Words of Wisdom” in a Beatles’ song), while the repetition of the movement can be compared with assonance (the repetition of the vowel sounds, such as “fleet fet sweep by sleeping geeks”). Kaneko (to appear) also compares handshape repetition with alliteration, claiming that handshapes have the same “initial” impact as alliterated consonants have.

However, although such terms from spoken language poetry are useful, handshape is not a strict equivalent of rhyme or alliteration. They both aim at creating a unifying impression over the poem, but sign language does not follow a linear sequence of sounds, and thus the manipulation of handshapes can be more free and irregular. In this aspect, it is closer to the notion of “chiming”.

According to Leech (1969), chiming is “a phonetic bond between words”, or more specifically, the use of the same phoneme in different words. It is a simple, possibly irregular, reoccurrence of the same sound throughout the poem. For example, Edgar Allan Poe’s *Annabel Lee* shows a cluster of the same consonant [l], in the lines like:

*But we loved with a love that was more than love-
I and my Annabel Lee;
(line 9-10)*

*That the wind came out of the cloud by night,
Chlilling and klilling my Annabel Lee.
(line 25-26)*

While rhyming requires strict regularity, chiming is a more natural and free way of creating (and describing) resonance in a particular poem. The effect is much subtler but nonetheless it contributes greatly to the overall impression of a poem. In the poem above, the repetition of [l] (represented by the name of a heroine) adds a slow, smooth and fragile impression, which overlaps the frailness of the heroine and the fleeting happiness of the lovers.

Chiming effect is common in sign language poetry in general and in sign language haiku as well. Many of the haiku poems we have observed so far involve a selection of the same handshape. In Jesus Marchan’s *Fish*, the B handshape is used for most of the time, creating a simple but unified impression. In Dorothy Miles’ *Summer*, some handshapes also reoccur, such as slightly-bent 5 handshape for GREEN, HOT, HEAVY-ON-HANDS (a-c in Figure 10.1) and F handshape for QUIET and HOUR (d and e in Figure 10.1).

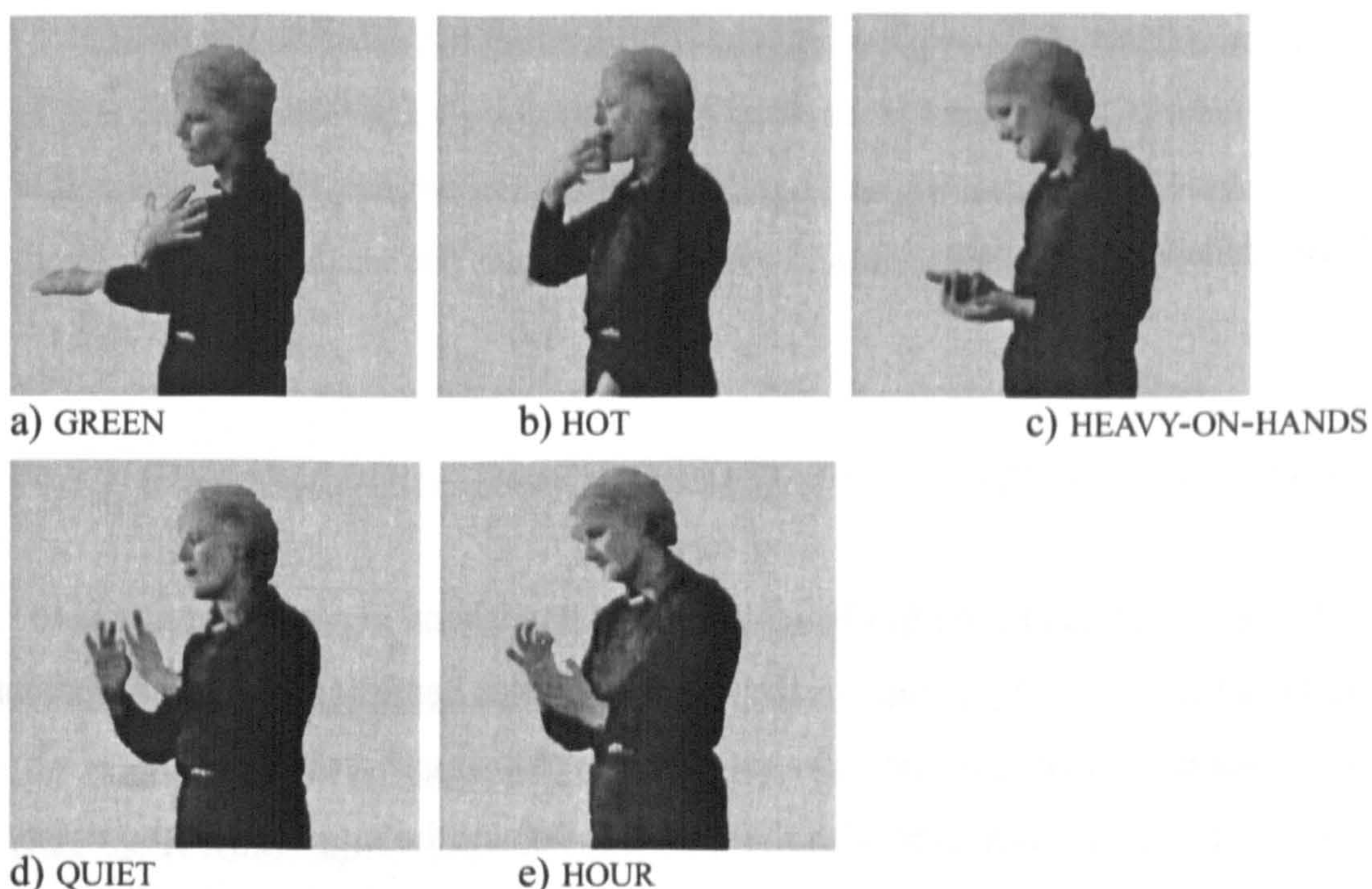


Figure 10.1 Signs from Dorothy Miles' *Summer*

The essence of chiming can be preserved not just among identical handshapes but also among different handshapes that share the same *features*. Distinctive features (developed by Chomsky and Hall 1968) are the elements which distinguish one phoneme from the other, such as sonorant/non-sonorant, voiced/voiceless, and nasal/nonnasal. It helps further specify the components of a phoneme and makes it possible to compare two distinct phonemes. This feature system in sign language phonology has yet to be fully explored. Here I simply use the expression “chiming of features” to refer to a phenomenon of resonance between a multiple of different handshapes whose resemblance is visually noticeable.

For example, all of Å, G, ʌ, and I handshapes involve the extension of a single finger or the thumb ([+single finger extended]). This common feature allows them to “chime” in a certain poetic context. Paul Scott’s poem *Five Senses* uses all of these four handshapes (plus a handshape with a ring finger extended, which is not normally used in BSL). The visual resemblance of these handshapes contributes to the regular tempo of the poem. I will give some more examples of chiming later in this chapter.

Chiming of handshape or of features is a useful concept to illustrate the production and perception of resonance and harmony in poetic signing.

10.3. Handshape Symbolism

10.3.1. Previous research

As explained so far, the fundamental role of handshape in poetic signing is to create visual resonance by repeating the same or similar handshapes. In many poems, however, the manipulation of handshapes goes beyond simple repetition and resonance. It is often associated with the thematic aspect (the message) of the poem in metaphorical ways. In other words, there is a symbolic, motivated and non-arbitrary association between the form (physical configuration of a handshape) and the meaning (a concept being represented).

Many researchers have acknowledged that some handshapes are associated with certain concepts or create a certain impression on the mind of the audience. In other words, handshapes are not randomly selected to convey meaning, but have a symbolic nature. Brennan (1990) talks about metaphorical associations in handshapes; Valli (1993) refers to what he calls “soft” and “hard” handshapes; Zeshan (2000) in her cross-linguistic research on handshapes, finds that some handshapes do contribute to the meaning of a sign.

Sutton-Spence (2005) points out the association of particular handshapes and the emotional effects created in the mind of the audience:

In general, the ‘5’ and ‘B’ handshapes, being open, are symbolically more ‘positive’ in connotation than closed handshapes, such as ‘A’ or ‘À’. Handshapes bent at knuckles, such as ‘5''' and ‘V''' are associated with more tension and are ‘harsher’ than other non-claw handshapes, which are more relaxed and ‘softer’. The ‘G’ ‘V’ ‘I’ and ‘Y’ handshapes are “sharp”, while ‘A’ and ‘O’ handshapes are not. ‘G’ and ‘I’ are more uni-dimensional while ‘B’ and ‘5’ have more substance, and ‘A’, ‘O’, and ‘C’ handshapes are the most solid. (2005: 25-6)

However, there is not much empirical data to support why such emotional effects can be imposed by particular configuration of handshape. In what follows, I will examine the symbolic nature of handshapes by providing some evidence from the dictionary analysis and from the analyses of actual poems.

10.3.2. Inherent semantic quality in handshapes: BSL dictionary project

A symbolic view on handshapes proposes that a handshape, even before it is combined with other parameters and formed into a word, has a meaning by itself. For example, some handshapes may be more easily associated with positive meaning (like the Å handshape), whereas others are more inclined to have negative connotation (like the I handshape).

In order to test this hypothesis, all entries in *The Dictionary of British Sign Language/English* (hereafter DBSL) are categorised into three types of meaning - positive, negative and neutral.

The categorisation of signs into these semantic values is not always self-evident. Some words may symbolically, metaphorically and conventionally be attached to positive/negative connotations but the word itself is neutral (e.g. “dark” and “heavy”) or they can be either positive or negative depending on a perspective (e.g. “old” “slow”). I put them into neutral groups, unless they are accompanied with clear positive/negative facial expression. Below are the examples of how I categorised some ambiguous signs:

Positive: AGREE, EASY, SOFT, HOPE, QUIET, ACHIEVE, HOLY SKILL,
Negative: DIZZY, NOISY, DENY, DISAGREE, AVERAGE (meaning more like mediocre),
CANNOT-BE-BOTHERED, DO-NOT-GIVE-IT-A-DAMN, PUT-UP-WITH
Neutral: BELIEVE, AVOID, PROTECT, DARK, HEAVY, LIGHT, QUICK, SLOW, NOTHING

There are 1736 entries in DBSL, but as a result of dividing an entry into more than one sign (whenever there are several distinct meanings attached to one entry), there are 2122 signs with distinct form and meaning. Then each entry is judged to have positive, neutral, or negative meaning.

There are two ways to look at the data:

- Does each semantic value category have a different handshape distribution pattern?
- Does each handshape have its preferred semantic value category?

If there is no relationship between handshape and those semantic values, handshapes will be *equally* distributed into three categories and each handshape will not favour any particular semantic value.

However, there is clear uneven distribution, both of handshape in each semantic value and of semantic values in each handshape.

The pie charts in Figure 10.2 show handshape distribution in each semantic category.

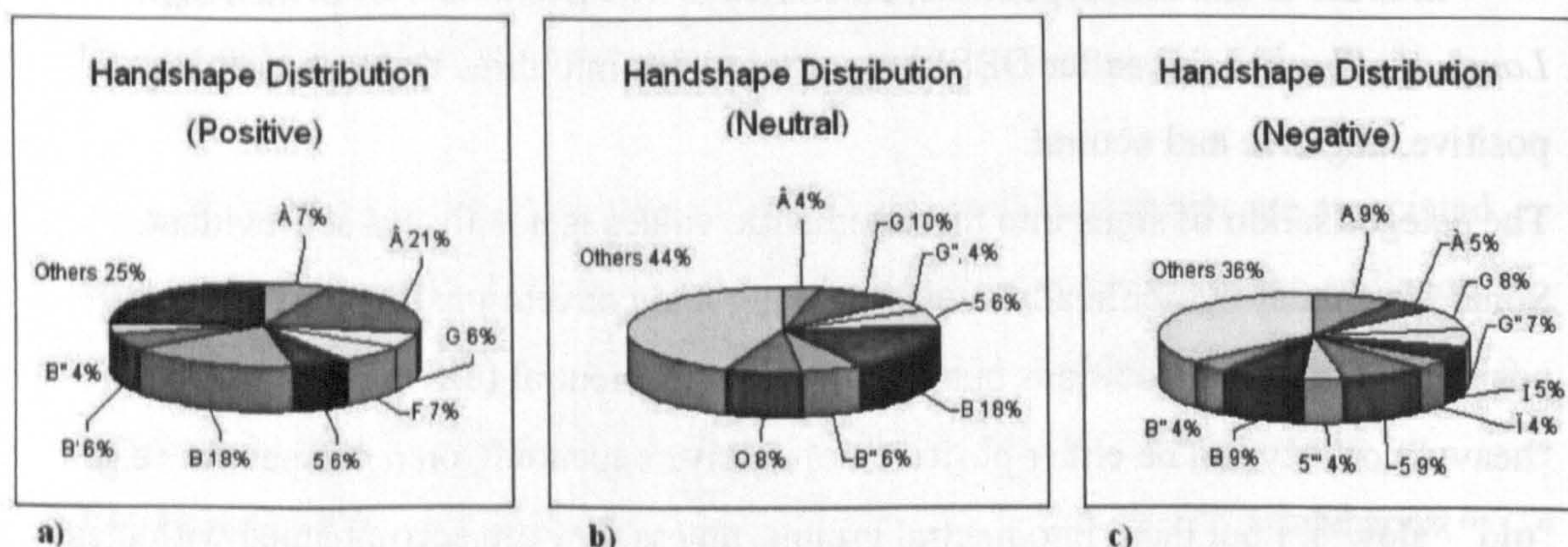


Figure 10.2 Distribution of handshapes for each semantic category

This clearly shows that the relationship between a handshape and its association with meanings is not entirely arbitrary.

The other way to look at the data is to see the distribution of semantic values in each handshape. The overall (average) distribution of the three semantic categories is shown in Figure 10.3 a).

If we assume form-meaning relationship is entirely arbitrary, the semantic distribution for each handshape will be more or less identical to this overall distribution. However, this is clearly not the case. Figure 10.3 shows the overall distribution of semantic categories (a) and the distribution in some particular

handshapes (b-h). It is clear that each handshape has its own allocation of the three semantic categories. Some handshapes are more likely to be associated with positive, others with negative. There are two possible explanations why such distribution is made.

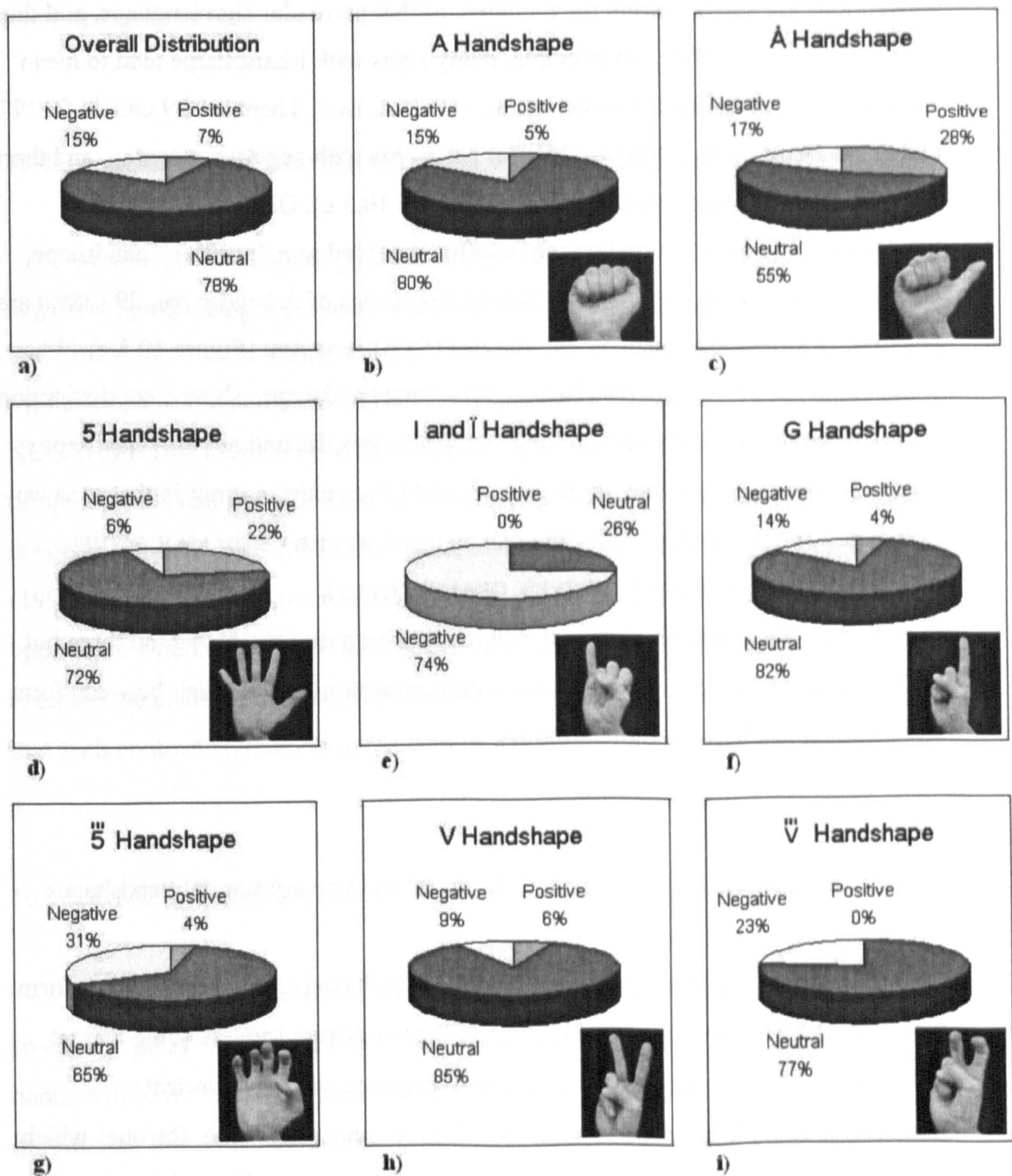


Figure 10.3 Distribution of semantic categories in average and in some handshapes

10.3.3. Form-meaning associations in some handshapes

10.3.3.1. Conventional association: I and Å handshapes

Sometimes, a particular sign language has established certain conventions as to which handshape is used to represent positive and negative concepts. Such conventions are agreed within the members of that particular sign language, and thus are not universal. In BSL, for example, many signs with I-handshape tend to mean something negative - such as BAD, WEAK, EVIL, ILL, FAIL. There are 39 entries for “I” and “I” in DBSL, out of which 29 (74%) are words with negative meaning, and there is no word which has a positive meaning (Figure 10.3 e). On the other hand, Å handshape (with the extended thumb) is often regarded as a “positive” handshape, such as in GOOD, FINE, WELL-DONE. Out of 104 entries of Å handshape, 29 (28%) are positive, 18 (17%) are negative, and the rest (55%) is neutral (Figure 10.3 c). When compared with the average distribution, these two handshapes show clear distinction.

In many cases, such convention is language-specific and not universal. For example, in JSL, the distinction between Å and I does exist, but not in the same way as in BSL. The pair is used to distinguish men and women (Å for MAN, FATHER, GRANDFATHER, I for WOMAN, MOTHER, GRANDMOTHER).

Such cultural conventions may originally have a motivation behind them but such motivation had become less conspicuous over time, and the link between form and meaning has become more arbitrary.

10.3.3.2. Metaphorical association¹: Substantial and non-substantial handshapes

The other type of association is more directly based on the link between form and meaning. The physical configuration of the handshape triggers some mental images in our mind, which is based on our experience and metaphorical understanding of the world. For example, “bigger” handshapes (i.e. the ones which have more substance) are considered to be more positive than less substantial ones. This is motivated by the metaphor MORE IS GOOD, LESS IS BAD (Lakoff and

Johnson 1980).³⁰ For example, 5-handshape has all the fingers and the thumb extended, and thus can be understood as more substantial than G-handshape, in which only the index finger is extended. In other words, the number of visible fingers is more in 5-handshape than G-handshape. This may be the reason why the former has more positive signs and fewer negative signs than the latter (compare d and f in Figure 10.3).

10.3.3.3. Metaphorical association2: Open and closed handshapes

We often conceptualise physical openness as positive, and physical closure as negative. Spoken languages have many expressions such as “open-minded” or “close one’s mind to...” or in Walter Gropius’ phrase “The human mind is like an umbrella - it functions best when open”. This conceptual metaphor (POSITIVE IS OPEN, NEGATIVE IS CLOSED) is instantiated in sign languages with the contrastive use of open/closed handshapes. Especially the closed fist (which results in A handshape) is contrasted with open-fist handshapes (the best example is 5 handshape). Rose (1997) claims that the hand with a close fist is used to symbolise the concept of oppression whereas an open fist is likely to be associated with freedom. If we compare pie charts b (A handshape) and d (5 handshape) in Figure 10.3, it is clear that such contrast is inherent in the lexicon of BSL.

10.3.3.4. Metaphorical association: Plain and bent handshapes

Finally, there is another salient contrast between two kinds of handshape: those so-called “plain” handshapes and “bent” handshapes. When fingers are bent, the hands will have “claws” at joints. Those claws create an uneasy and tense impression. It is also an unnatural posture for a hand. Such visual features of bent handshapes often lead to negative connotation. This becomes clear if we compare 5

³⁰ This might be the underlying motivation for our earlier example of conventional association between A and I handshapes in BSL. The thumb is bigger than the little finger, and thus regarded as positive.

handshape (d) and 𐌆 (bent-5) handshape (g), and V handshape (h) and 𐌆 (bent-V) handshape (i) in Figure 10.3.

The positive/negative association with plain and bent handshapes respectively is one of the most striking contrasts in this dictionary project. In order to show this contrast even more clearly, I divided the entries in DBSL into two categories: bent and plain. When those signs and their semantic distribution (positive/neutral/negative) are compared, the difference is significant. Table 10.1 and Figure 10.4 show the distribution in the table and in the pie charts. Table 10.2 shows that this distribution is statistically significant.

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Plain handshapes	280	1485	131	1896
Bent handshapes	8	170	48	226
Total	328	1655	139	2122

Table 10.1 The distribution of semantic qualities in plain and bent handshapes

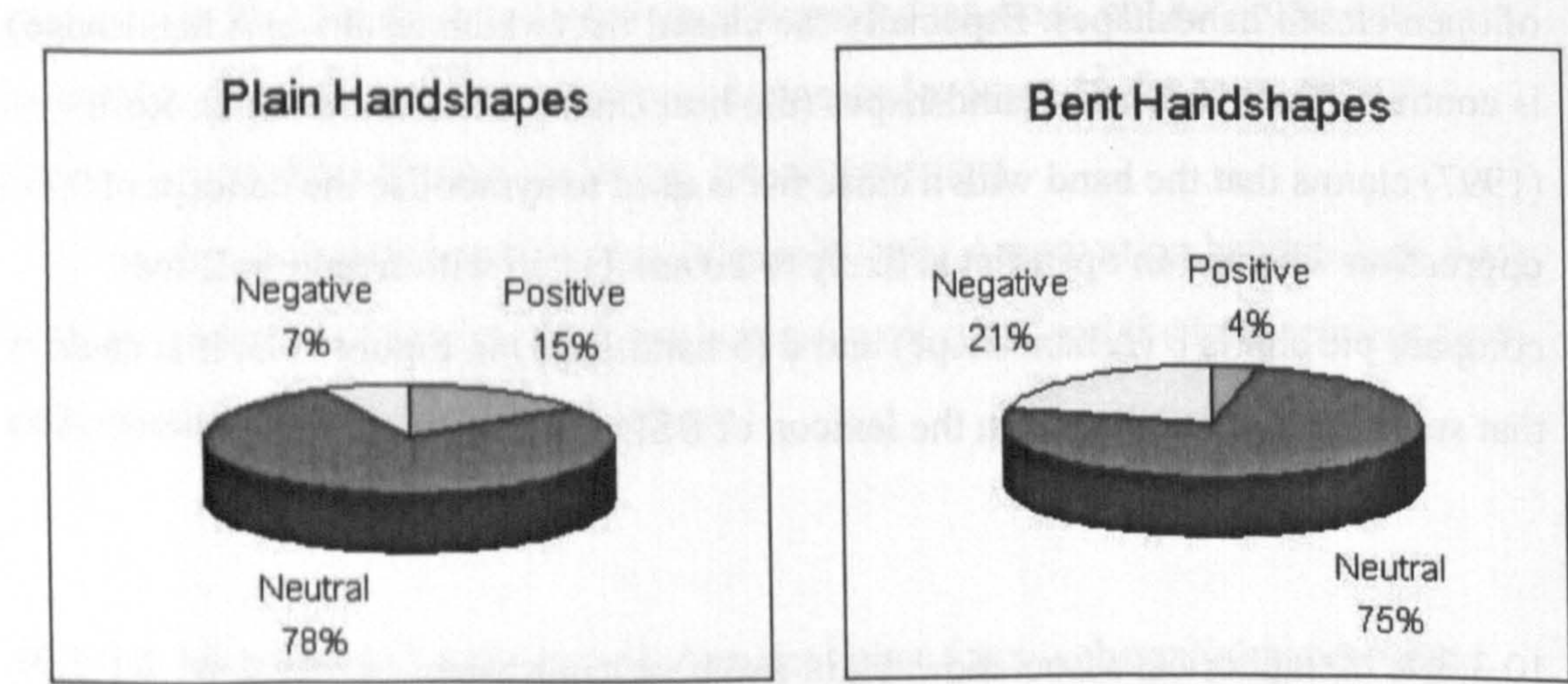


Figure 10.4 The distribution of semantic qualities in plain and bent handshapes

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.219(a)	2	.010
Likelihood Ratio	9.342	2	.009
Linear-by-Linear Association	9.213	1	.002
N of Valid Cases	2122		

a 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 14.80.

Table 10.2 Chi-Square Tests

This contrast of plain and bent handshapes is commonly used in sign language poetry. Wim Emmerik, has an excellent command of those “negative” handshapes. He often shows a systematic use of bent handshapes associated with negative impression in his various poems. For example, in *Garden of Eden*, the impression of the poem linked to the theme of lost paradise is largely realised by the frequent use of bent fingers. Signs such as snake (crawling), beckoning, and asshole are expressed with bent fingers. Even a common sign like APPLE is signed with tension in this particular poem, with the claws at joints given more emphasis.

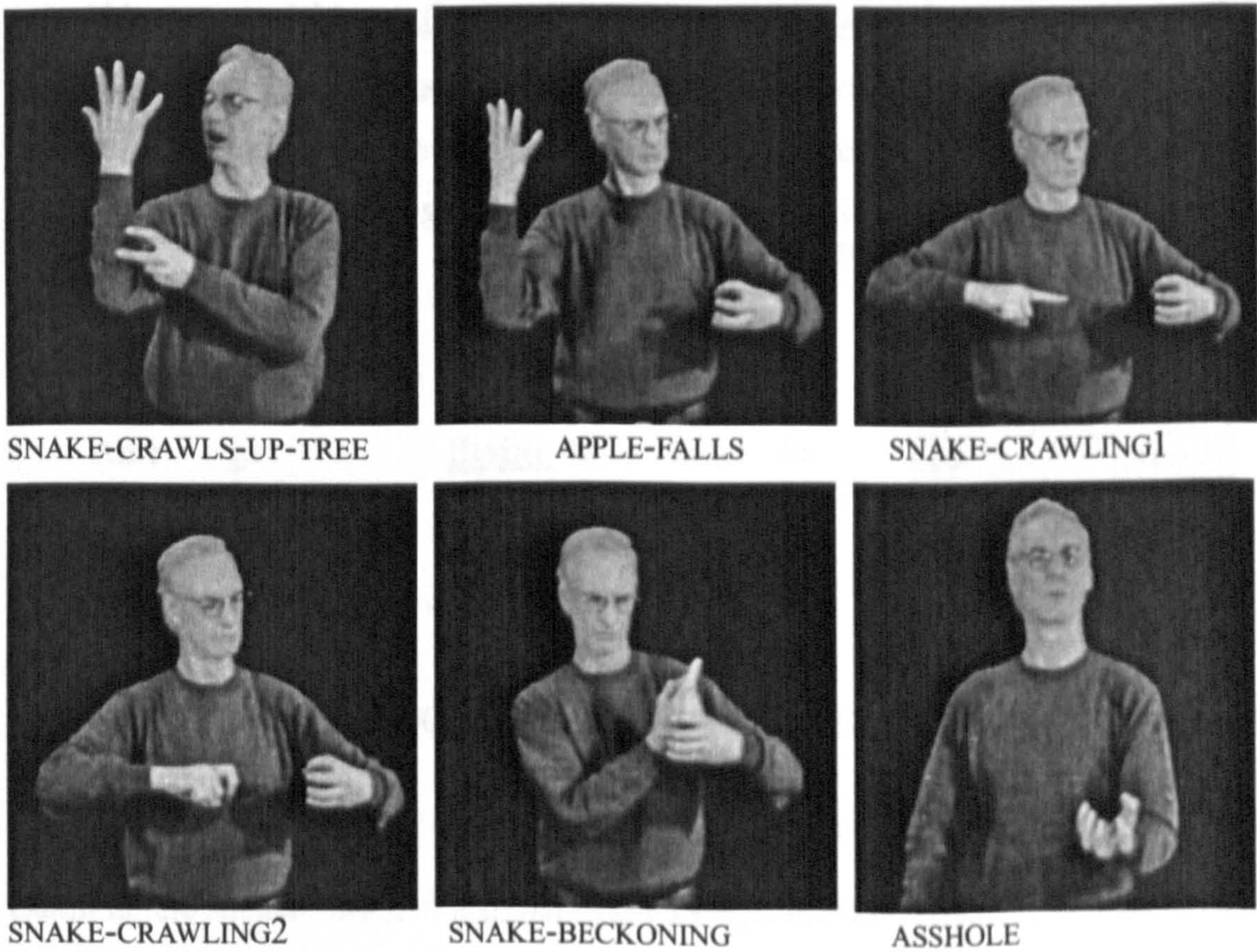


Figure 10.5 Some signs from Wim Emmerik’s *Garden of Eden*

Another of his poems *Desert* is a highly symbolic and mysterious story of a traveller who wanders into a desert and encounters various eerie symbols (skeleton, ghost, and death). Emmerik shows the consistent use of 5 handshapes in the following sequence (Figure 10.6). This greatly contributes to the overall uncanny atmosphere of the poem.

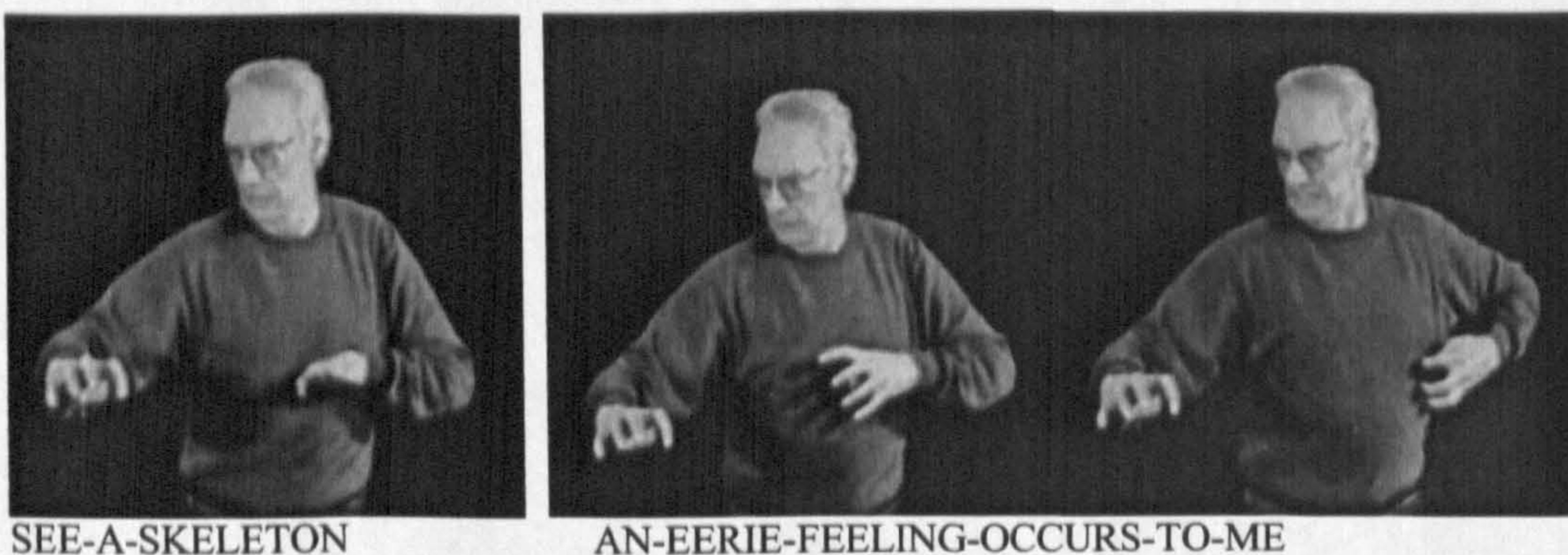


Figure 10.6 Sequence of signs from Wim Emmerik's *Desert*

Another example is from Dorothy Miles' *Evening* in *Trio*. We have extensively discussed this poem in relation to metaphor (Chapter 6), to which we can add her metaphorical use of 5 handshape. When Dorothy Miles signs DARKNESS-APPROACHES, she keeps bending and opening her fingers to represent the flight of a bat. Moving these bent-5 fingers produces a frightening and disquieting impression.



Figure 10.7 DARKNESS-LIKE-A-BAT-FLIES-CLOSE from Dorothy Miles' *Evening*

10.4. Handshape symbolism in sign language haiku

10.4.1. Sound symbolism in Japanese haiku

Such handshape symbolism in sign language is closely linked to the notion of sound symbolism in spoken language. Although Saussure's doctrine of 'l'arbitraire du signe' (i.e. there is no/little connection between form and meaning of the language) is still dominant in linguistics, some found that sounds could be associated

with certain concepts and thus appeal to the listener/reader's emotion. A simple, non-poetic example is “break bread” or “sew silk”. The voiced plosive of the consonant [b] is linked to the act of breaking bread while voiceless fricative [s] arouses soft and delicate images of silk.

One of the representing phenomena of sound symbolism is the use of mimetics in Japanese, which is used effectively in some haiku poems. Specifically, there is a systematic use of voiceless and voiced consonants to represent two contrasting concepts. Voiced consonants are more likely to be associated with heaviness, jerkiness, and negative meaning, whereas voiceless consonants are either positive or neutral. The former is more marked and the latter is unmarked. This tendency creates a variety of paired expressions which are only different in the voicing of the consonant. Observe the following pair:

Ame	ga	<u>shito</u> shito-to	futte	iru.
rain	PAR (NOM)	mimetic	fall	be (PROG)
		しとしと		

A gentle rain is falling.

Ame	ga	<u>jito</u> jito-to	futte	iru
rain	PAR (NOM)	mimetic	fall	be (PROG)
		じとじと		

It's raining, damp and wet.

These sentences only differ in one word, shito-shito (しとしと) and jito-jito (じとじと). However, they create opposing impressions in the reader. In the first example, the speaker has a slight positive feeling toward the rain, by saying that it is raining “gently”, whereas in the second example, it is clear that the speaker does not like the fact it is raining. Now he or she is complaining that it is damp. By changing the voiceless consonant (shi) into a voiced one (ji), the speaker added a negative connotation. The two dots on the Japanese script for *jito-jito* suggest that it is a marked form with something added, and in this case, what is added was the displeasure of the speaker toward the wet weather. In such ways, mimetics are closely associated with the speaker/writer's emotion and they try to reproduce the same emotion in the mind of the listener/reader. This is similar to the ways bent

fingers create negative impression on the audience whereas plain handshapes are perceived as positive.

Kita (1997) proposes that Japanese mimetics have appeal to the *affecto-imagistic dimension* of meaning (i.e. direct contact with sensory, motor, and affective information) rather than the *analytic dimension* of meaning (objective representation of meaning, a statement of fact). This affecto-imagistic dimension is crucial in poetic language, which is why the mimetics are often used effectively in Japanese poetry, especially in haiku, with its tendency to appeal to our senses directly. Recall the following two haiku poems from Chapter 6.

oritori	te	harari-to	omoki	susuki	kana.
pickup	PAR	<i>mimetic</i>	heavy	pampas-grass	PAR
	(CONJ)				(EXCL)

Picking up a branch of pampas grass: softly heavy

(Iida Dakotsu)

mizu-makura	gabari-to	samui	umi	ga	aru.
water-pillow	<i>mimetic</i>	cold	ocean	PAR (NOM)	be (TERM)

Water pillow; cold ocean is there (underneath my head)

(Saitō Sanki)

Both poems use the mimetic word effectively to convey their message. *Harari* is an expression to describe a feather-light object falling slowly. *Gabari*, on the other hand, stands for a quick and abrupt movement of something very solid. The fragility and softness of pampas grass in the first example is well represented with a voiceless fricative [h], whereas the voiced stops [g] and [b] in the second example create a very abrupt and rough image, which corresponds to the image illustrated in the poem (the sick poet imagining an cold ocean beneath his water pillow).

In sign language haiku, Deaf poets make use of the visual appeal of handshapes in order to achieve the similar poetic effect as in the mimetics in Japanese haiku. In what remains, I pick up several signed haiku which are characterised by the effective use of handshapes.

10.4.2. Case studies

10.4.2.1. Chiming effect: Raquib Din’s *Summer* and Stephen S. McDonald’s *Red Sun*

Raquib Din’s *Summer*

The last day of summer
Warmth shining from the sun
A yellow wood color

	LAST	DAY	SUMMER	WARM	SHINE	SUN	YELLOW
RH	I	G	G	5	8	A>5	Y
LH	I	B	B	-	8	-	-

	WOOD	COLOUR	ALL-OVER
RH	5	5	5
LH	5	5	5

The first two examples from sign language haiku show how visual resonance is made by using similar handshapes. Raquib Din’s *Summer* starts with a combination of the handshapes with the feature of [+single finger extended]. The I handshape is used for LAST, and the G handshape is used for DAY and SUMMER (Figure 10.8). Although they are different handshapes, they resonate visually and the transition between these two handshapes is smooth and subtle.

Also, this poem starts with uni-dimensional I and G and ends with open 5. This increase in substance in handshapes contributes to the lingering effect of yellow colour spreading all over.

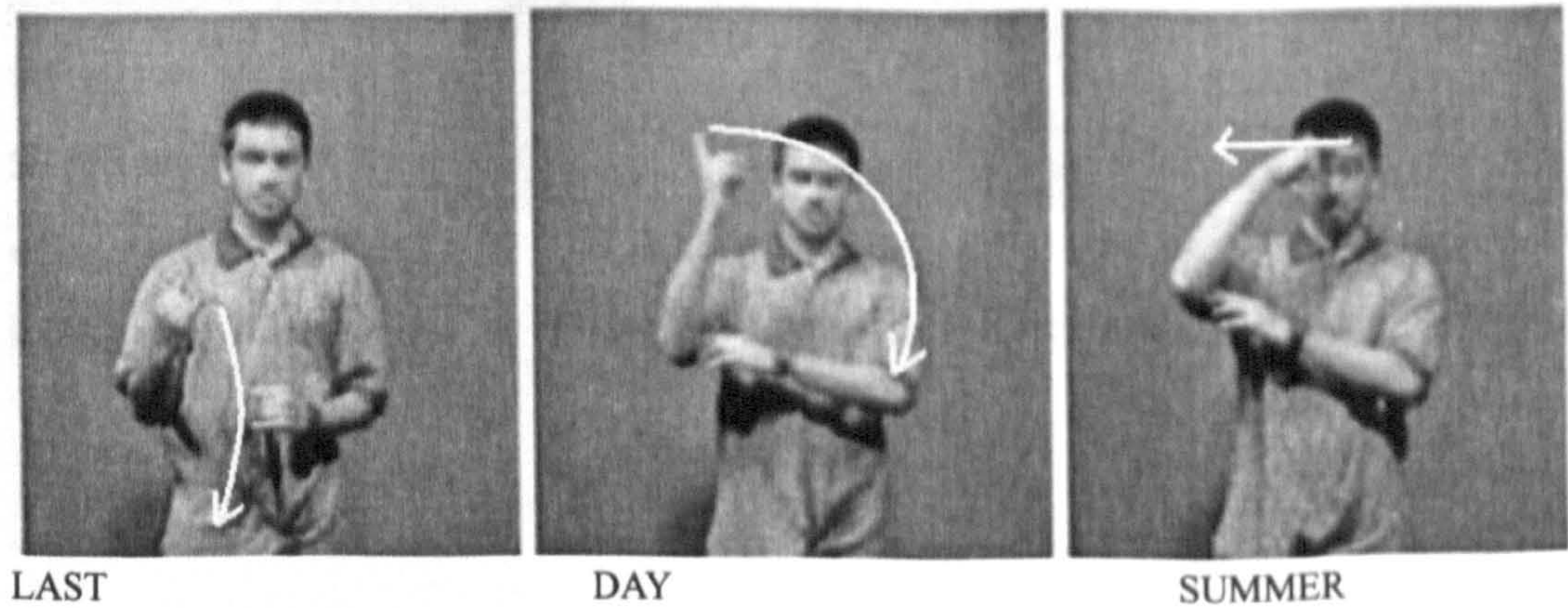


Figure 10.8 Chiming of features in Raquib Din’s haiku

Another example of chiming of features is Stephen S. McDonald's *Red Sun*.

Red sun on the horizon
Reflecting off knolls of sand
My desire to drink

	RED	SUN	SUN-CASTING	HILL	SAND1	SAND2	DESIRE	THIRSTY
RH	G	A>5	5	5	B	⌘	⌘	⌘'
LH	-	-	5	5	B	⌘	⌘	⌘'

In this poem, the last three signs (SAND2, DESIRE, THIRSTY) are expressed with similar handshapes (Figure 10.9). The handshape for SAND2 and DESIRE is identical (⌘). The handshape for THIRSTY is almost identical except that the index finger is bent instead of the middle finger (⌘'). The standard handshape of THIRSTY in ASL is G (only index finger extended and the fist is closed), the poet uses ⌘' to resonate with the preceding two signs. Although the three signs have entirely discrete meaning, the similar configuration of their handshapes binds them together to create visual resonance.

This delicately-bent single finger, maintaining only a point of contact with something (with the invisible surface of sand in SAND2, with the signer's body in DESIRE and THIRSTY), symbolically represents unsatisfied feelings portrayed in this poem.



Figure 10.9 Signs from Stephen S. McDonald's *Red Sun*

10.4.2.2. Penny Beschizza’s *Sign Language*

Two strangers walk slowly toward each other
They look at each other, doubtfully
They touch each other, as if to make sure
And they sign to each other, lively and vigorously

	TWO-PEOPLE-APPROACH	TWO-PEOPLE-LOOK-AT-EACH-OTHER
RH	G	V
LH	G	V
	TOUCH-EACH-OTHER	SIGN-VIGOROUSLY
RH	5>V>5	5
LH	V>5>5	5

In the dictionary project, it was suggested that the number of visible fingers influences the way we associate positive or negative concepts to a certain signs. We have seen that the 5 handshape (with all the fingers extended and visible) has more positive links than G or I handshape (in which only one finger is extended), which may be accounted for by the common metaphor of MORE IS GOOD, LESS IS BAD. Penny Beschizza’s poem *Sign Language* makes use of this increase in the number of fingers extended in the different signs. This poem is about the two Deaf people’s encounter. First they approach in a very dubious way, not certain if they want to interact with each other. Beschizza first uses the G handshape as a classifier to represent two people standing at opposite locations, slowing walking toward each other (Figure 10.10 a). Soon she changes the handshape in to V handshape, a classifier to represent gaze, in order to express the way in which those two people are staring at each other, still with doubtful expressions (b). Then they start to touch, for which the poet uses open-5 handshape (c), which smoothly turns into the sign for SIGN at the end of the poem (d). This poem is characterised by the increasing number of extended fingers (1 →2→5), which corresponds to the increasing intimacy between two strangers.

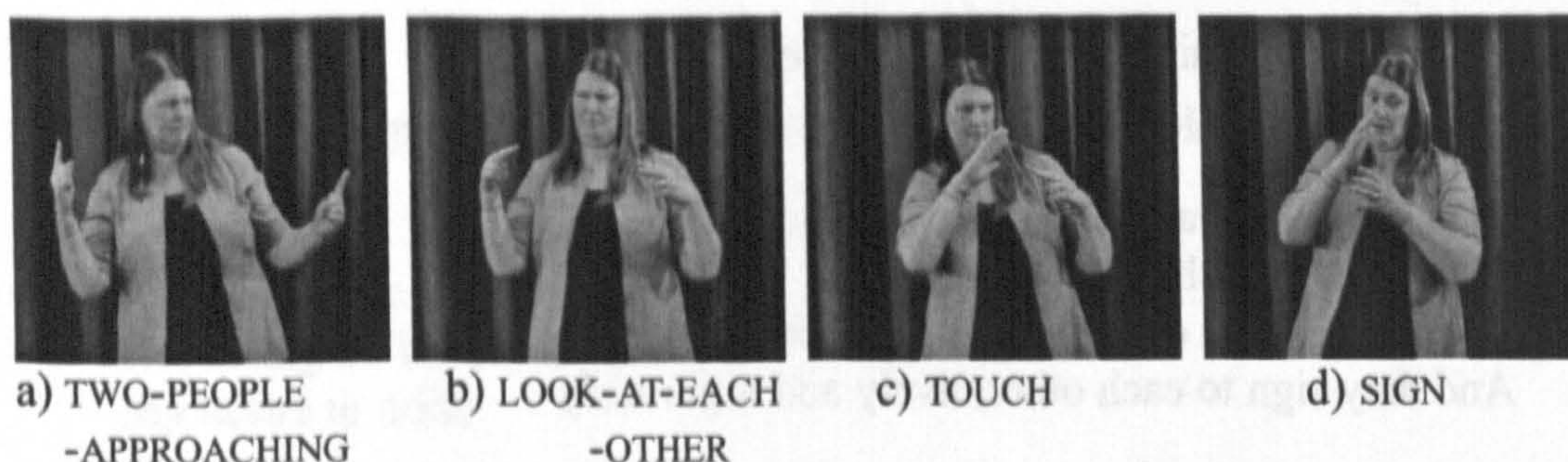


Figure 10.10 Changing handshapes in Penny Beschizza's *Sign Language*

10.4.2.3. Wim Emmerik's *Falling Leaf*

A tree standing still
Mist turns to leaves turn to fall
Leaves falling to purple³¹

	TREE	MIST-APPROACHES-TREE	MIST/LEAF	LEAF-SHRINKS	LEAF-FALLS	PURPLE
RH	5	5	5	5>G	G	G
LH	5	-	-	-	-	G

This short haiku involves only two handshapes. It starts with an open 5 handshape (LEAF) which (very slowly) shrinks into G handshape, which is used in the lexical sign for PURPLE at the end of the poem. The number of unbent fingers is reduced from 5 to 1, which is a reversed transition of Beschizza's poem above. Emmerik uses 5 handshape to represent two discrete signs MIST and LEAF, and thus there is an ambiguous moment when the audience cannot decide if his palm represents mist or the leaf until it starts to bend its fingers (clarifying that it has turned into a leaf). This shrinking process is very slow, so that the audience actually sees the closure of the hand and bending of the fingers. This transition cleverly involves all the three metaphorical associations we have discussed earlier, such as decreasing number of fingers, closing of the fist, and bending of the fingers to represent the negative impression associated with the shrinking and falling leaf.

As described earlier, Emmerik is keen on manipulating handshapes in his poems, which he does in his haiku as well.

³¹ Translation provided by ECHO (European Cultural Heritage Online)

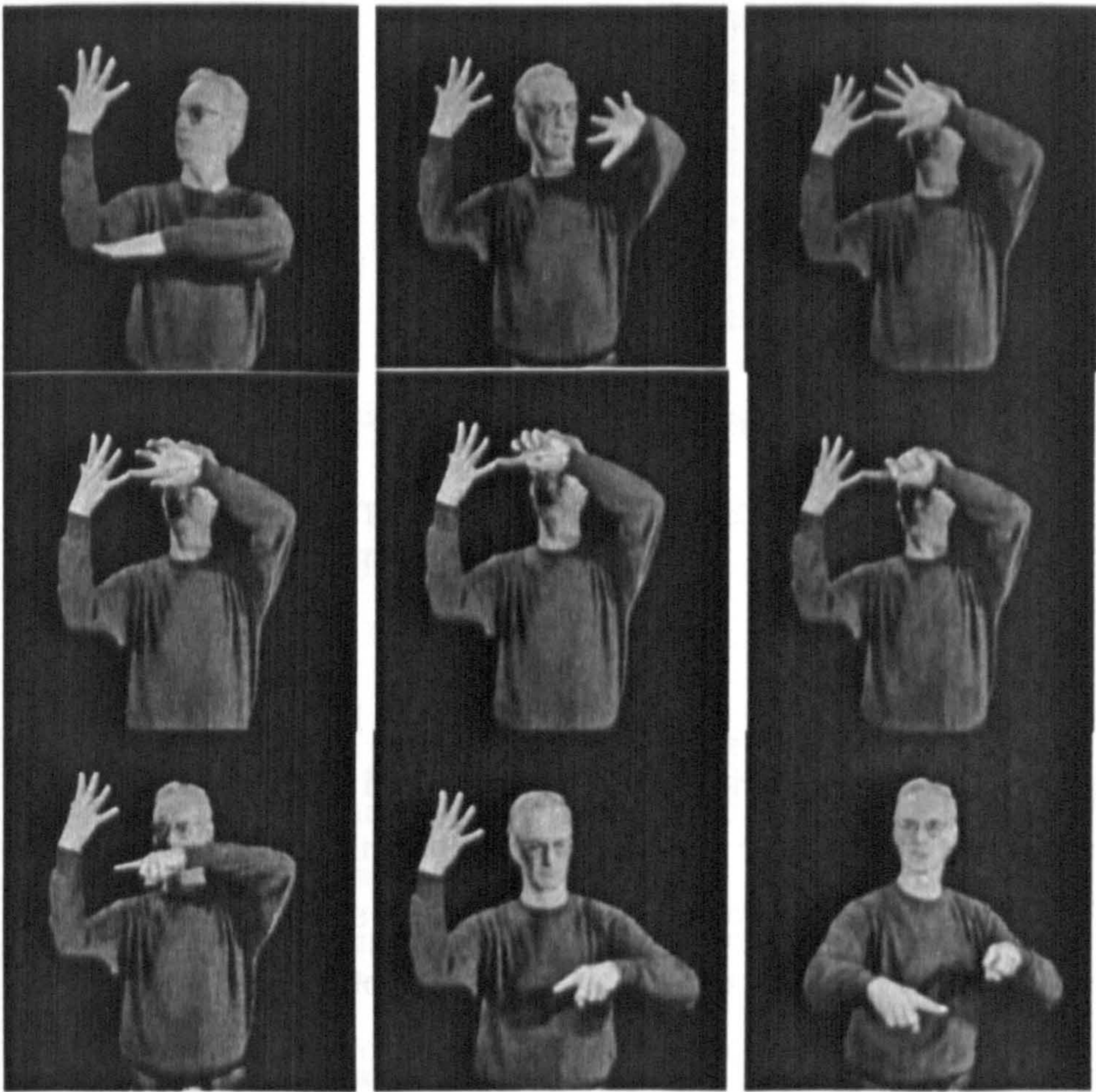


Figure 10.11 Changing handshapes in Wim Emmerik’s *Falling Leaf*

10.4.2.4. Rita DeSarker’s *Rose* and Penny Beschizza’s *Grass*

Finally, I will consider two poems in which a bent handshape is used effectively to convey negative connotation: Rita DeSarker’s ASL poem *Rose* and Penny Beschizza’s BSL poem *Grass* have a very similar theme. Below are the translations and glossing for both poems.

Rita DeSarker *Rose*

A rose was beheaded
By the frost that had fallen
On its crying bloom

	ROSE	STRONG	FROST-APPROACHES	COVER-ROSE	ROSE-BEHEADED
RH	\hat{B}	\hat{B}	\hat{B}	\hat{B}	\hat{B}
LH	-	A	$\overset{|||}{5}$	$\overset{|||}{5}$	$\overset{|||}{5}$

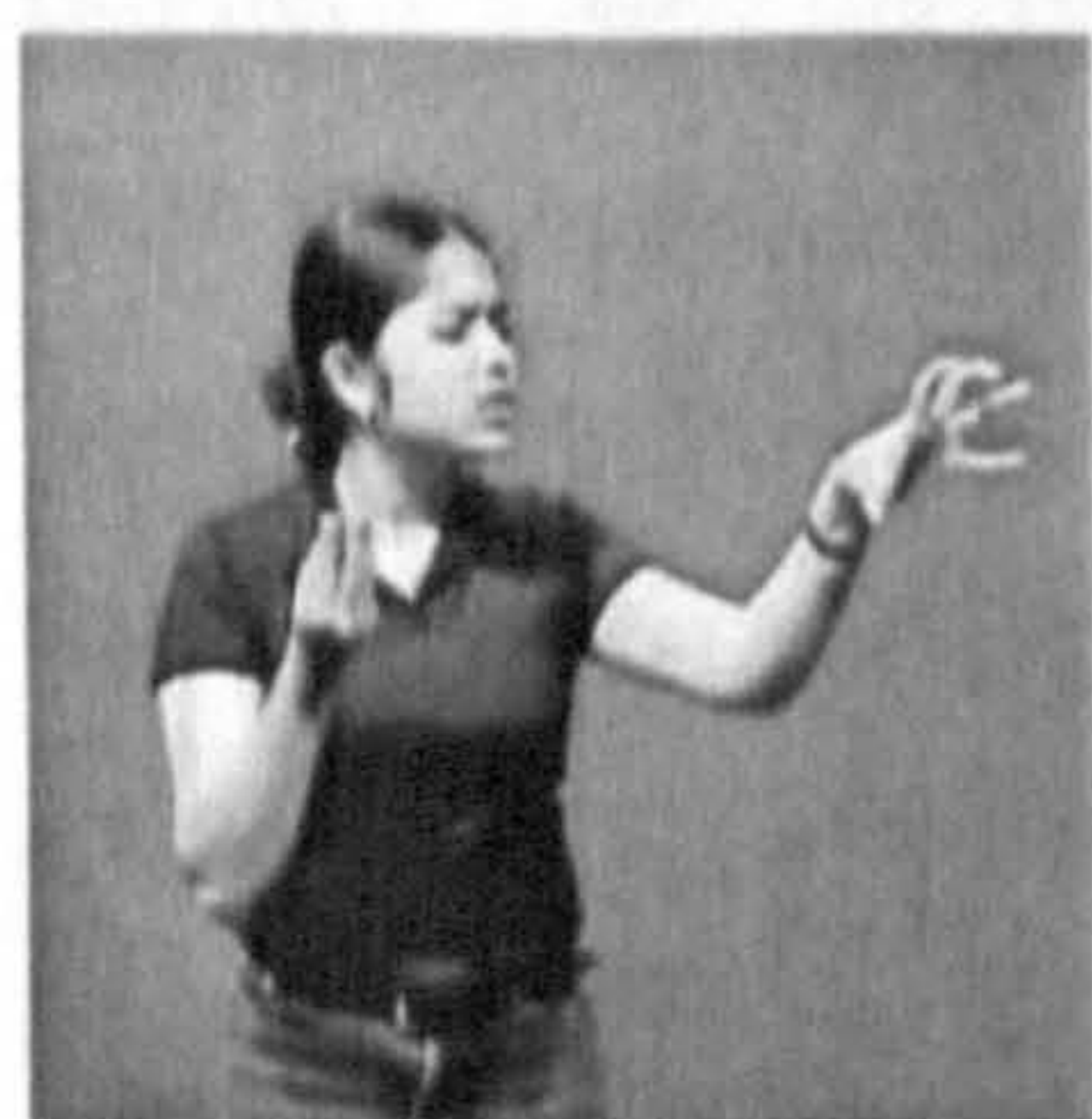
	TEARS	TEARS-OVER-BEHEADED-ROSE
RH	\hat{B}	\hat{B}
LH	5	5

Penny Beschizza *Grass*

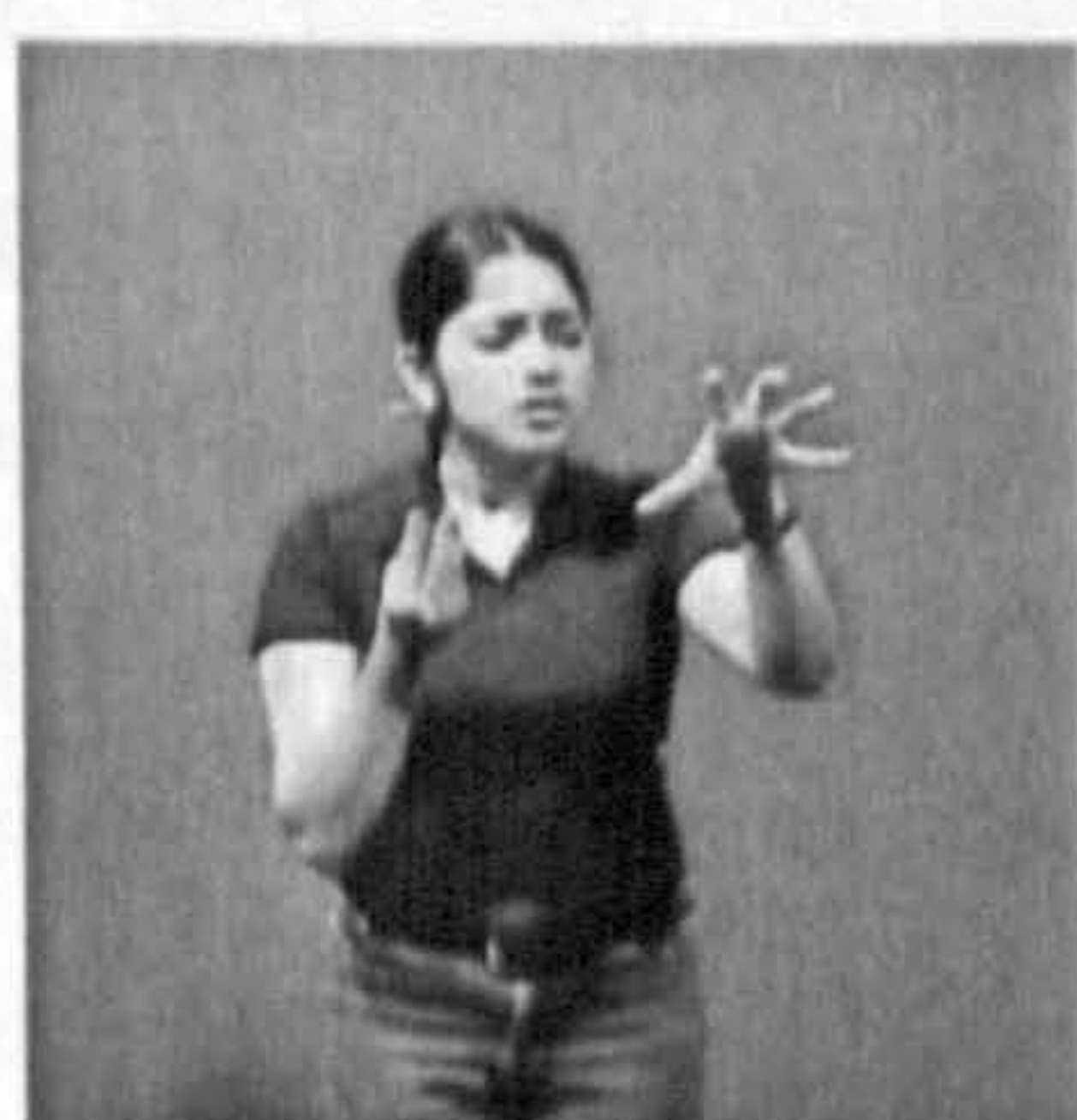
Grass streaming in the breeze
Strong sun appears
And slowly scorched the grass

	GRASS-WAVING	SUN	SUN-CASTING-DOWN	GRASS-WITHERS
RH	B	A>$\overset{|||}{5}$	$\overset{|||}{5}$	B
LH	B (static throughout)			

Both poems talk about a small plant overwhelmed and killed by an external strong natural force. They metaphorically suggest some kind of oppression and deprivation of freedom (see Chapter 6 for the discussion on their metaphorical structure). When they express the external force (FROST and SUN), they both use the bent-5 handshape as Wim Emmerik used in his poems. In both poems, the claws at joints produce a tense, eerie, and strongly negative impression in the audience's mind. Especially in *Grass*, the open-5 handshape used to represent happily waving grass is in sharp contrast with the negative bent-5 handshape representing the strong sun.



FROST



FROST-APPROACHES



FROST-COVERS-ROSE

Figure 10.12 The sign sequence from Rita DeSarker's *Rose*



GRASS-WAVING

SUN

GRASS-WITHERS

Figure 10.13 Three signs from Penny Beschizza's *Grass*

10.5. Summary

In this chapter, I have observed the poetic effect of handshapes, one of the basic parameters in sign language. The poets repeat the same or similar handshapes to create visual resonance in their poems.

I have focused on the symbolism of handshape. Handshape symbolism is the idea that the form and the meaning of a sign can be related, creating a parallelism with the notion of sound symbolism in spoken languages. By analysing the entries in the Dictionary of British Sign Language, it became clear that certain handshapes do have an inherent association with certain concepts: some handshapes trigger more positive feeling, others more negative. Especially, those so-called “bent” handshapes have strong negative association compared with “plain” handshapes.

Handshape symbolism is extremely important in poetic signing. Poets make the most of symbolic aspect of the handshape to convey their message effectively and aesthetically to the audience.

Chapter 11

Blended Space

The power of blending as a basic human cognitive ability not surprisingly extends into all aspects of human creativity.

Margaret H. Freeman

11.1. Introduction

In any piece of poetic signing, poets use the space in front of them to present their poetic images. In such a highly visual poetry as sign language haiku, a faithful reproduction of a haiku moment onto the signing space, and eventually onto the audience's mind, without adding any extra comment, is particularly important. Successful poems are capable of literally “visualising” a poetic scene in a clear and coherent manner.

In this chapter, I consider the mapping between the poetic spaces (the content of the poem) and the physical space (the language of the poem). I will especially highlight the mechanism of *blended space*, in which more than one poetic space is presented in the physical space. It is a feature unique to poetic signing in general, and very common in sign language haiku. In order to discuss blending, however, several terms need to be introduced and defined.

11.2. Terminology

11.2.1. Frame

I define “frame” here as a coherent structure that represents a poetic scene. It is a holistic visualisation of a poetic/imaginary world, parts of which can be focused upon (highlighted) by linguistic expressions and brought to the foreground.

The notion of poetic frame is based on the idea of “conceptual frame” in so-called frame semantics developed by Charles Fillmore (Fillmore 1982). In frame semantics, frame is defined as a cohesive structure of related concepts. It is the encyclopaedic knowledge of certain concepts and their relation to each other. The classical example is *buy* and *sell*. These two words are closely related to each other to the extent that it is difficult to understand one concept without understanding the other. Both words trigger the trading frame. One cannot understand the concept of *buy* or *sell* without understanding the overall knowledge of a trade (which entails other words such as “customers”, “goods”, “money”, and so on).

Frame semantics can successfully explain many linguistic phenomena which are otherwise left unaccounted for. For instance, the use of a definite article in the following expression can be described through the concept of frame.

11a I went to a café and the waiter was very nice.

The definite article is usually used for the known elements. The waiter in this sentence comes to the scene for the first time, but it is possible to refer to him as the waiter, because the sentence has established the café frame (encyclopaedic knowledge of a café situation), in which waiters and waitresses are already incorporated. Thus they are treated as the known element.

It is not possible for a single linguistic expression to refer to all constituents of a frame, because they are infinite in theory. Instead, a linguistic expression *highlights* a certain part of the entire frame. For instance, *buy* and *sell* in above example highlight different perspective of the frame. Linguistic expressions highlight a specific perspective from which the frame is viewed, and we can only take one perspective at a time (i.e. we cannot use both *buy* and *sell* at the same time to refer to the single action).

The notion of poetic frame is developed out of Fillmore’s conceptual frame, but it does not necessarily involve conventional knowledge. Each poem can set up its own frame (i.e. poetic world) productively and ad hoc, as long as it is consistent within the poem.

In sign language haiku, a frame is understood as an overall visual structure of a poetic scene. For example, Dorothy Miles' *Spring* has a firm visual image of a sunny spring day in nature, which can be reconstructed as in Figure 11.1. The actual poem cannot represent the entire frame, because sign language is not panoptic. Instead, it highlights parts of the frame sequentially (the sun, the tree, and the rippling water).

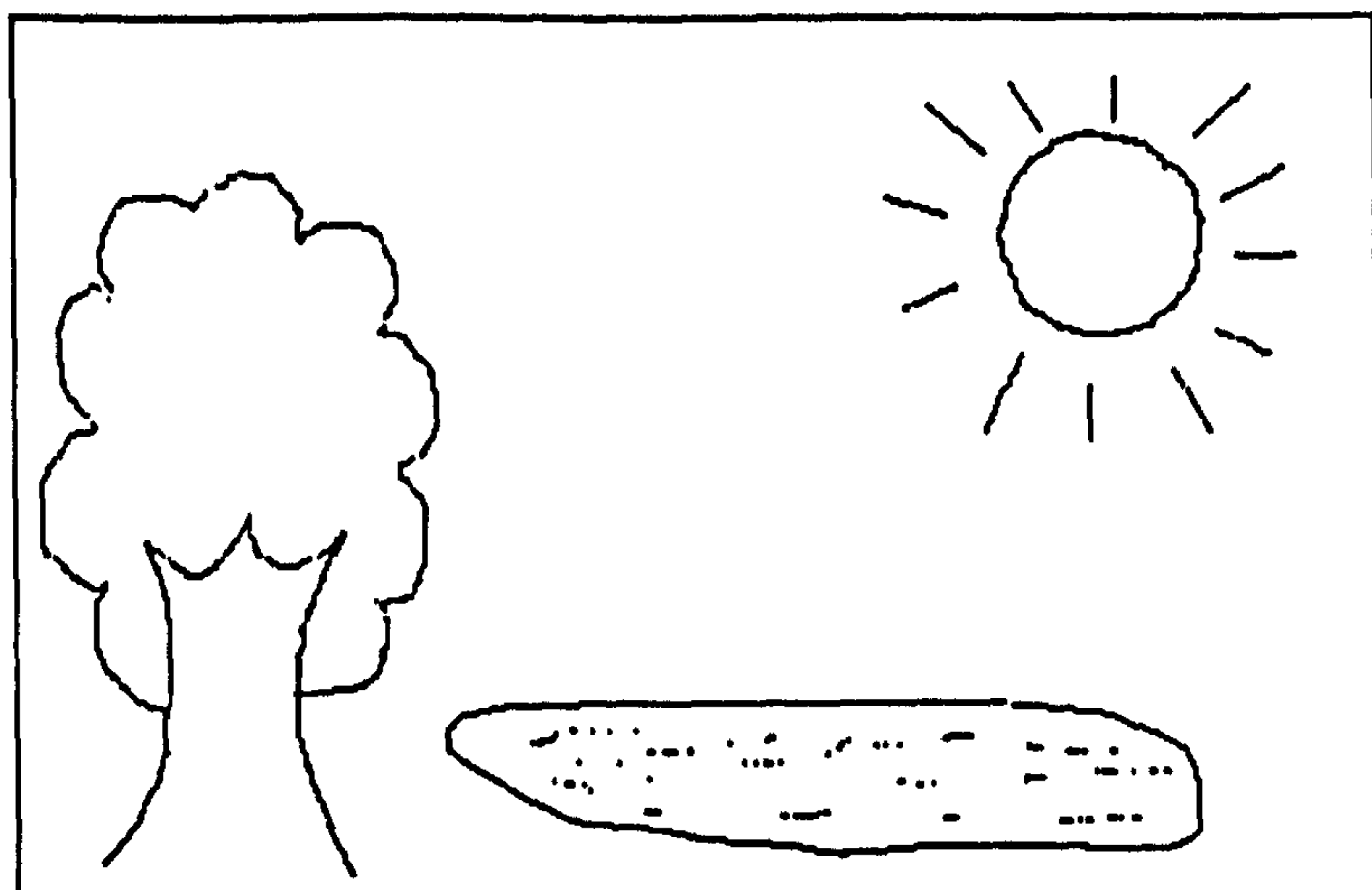


Figure 11.1 A poetic frame reconstructed from Dorothy Miles' *Spring*

This notion of frame is very useful in analysing sign language haiku, as traditional haiku can be analysed as making use of the frame concept. A haiku may involve a single frame or multiple frames. For example, the following haiku uses a single frame.

11a Kōtōni hatō ōkihini sotsugyōsu

Around the school steeple
Pigeons are gathering
On our graduation day

Although it consists of three discrete images (the steeple, pigeons, and graduation), they are connected by postpositional particles to form a single sentence, which helps the reader visualise the scene as a whole. All the images are understood as belonging to the same poetic frame, namely the *graduation-day frame*, and the steeple and the pigeons are highlighted by the poet to symbolise the entire frame. The originality of this poem lies in the way it shifts perspectives within the same frame. It first refers to the steeple, then shifts the focus to the pigeons which are

gathering around the steeple, and finally “zooms out” to the long shot of the graduation day. This shift in focus results in different poetic “space” (see 11.2.2). Figure 11.2 demonstrates how the same frame produces different spaces based on different focus/perspectives.

This last word (“graduation day”) provides access to a specific situation visualised in this particular poem, with the steeple and pigeons at the background. There is a link between a flock of pigeons and the gathering of a group of graduates. But it also provokes the general emotion which is part of the graduation frame (such as departure, loneliness, sadness, expectation to new life, and so on).

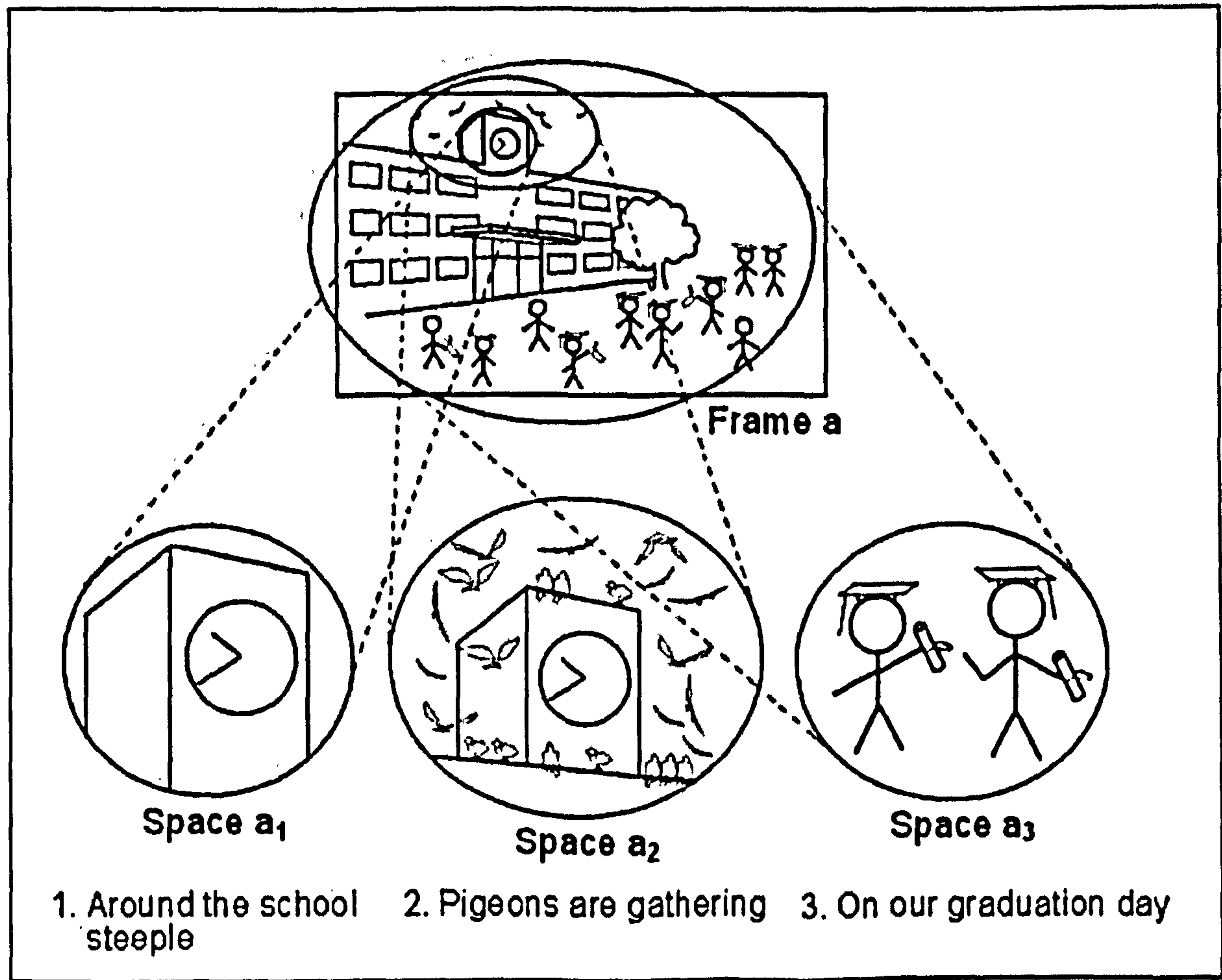


Figure 11.2 Spaces involved in haiku (11a)

In contrast, the following haiku involves two separate frames.

11b Mizumakura gabarito samui umiga aru

Water pillow: the cold ocean is there

This poem also has a couple of discrete images (pillow and ocean) but unlike the previous example of graduation they do not belong to the same poetic frame. This haiku consists of two frames: the frame of someone staying in bed and of the cold ocean in winter. Whereas the previous example adds depth by shifting focuses within the single frame, this haiku creates poetic effect by juxtaposing two unrelated frames. Figure 11.3 shows that two spaces involved in this poem come from separate frames.

Whereas different parts in the single frame (Figure 11.2) can be understood as metonymy (parts representing the whole), the involvement of two frames (Figure 11.3) is a case of metaphor. The terms we have observed in Chapter 6 (metaphor, simile and juxtaposition) can be redefined in terms of frame. They involve two separate frames and parts of those frames are seen as compatible, motivated by similarity (in haiku 11b, it is the sound of water and the image of a cold winter ocean). The connection of two frames is most obvious in simile, and least in juxtaposition.

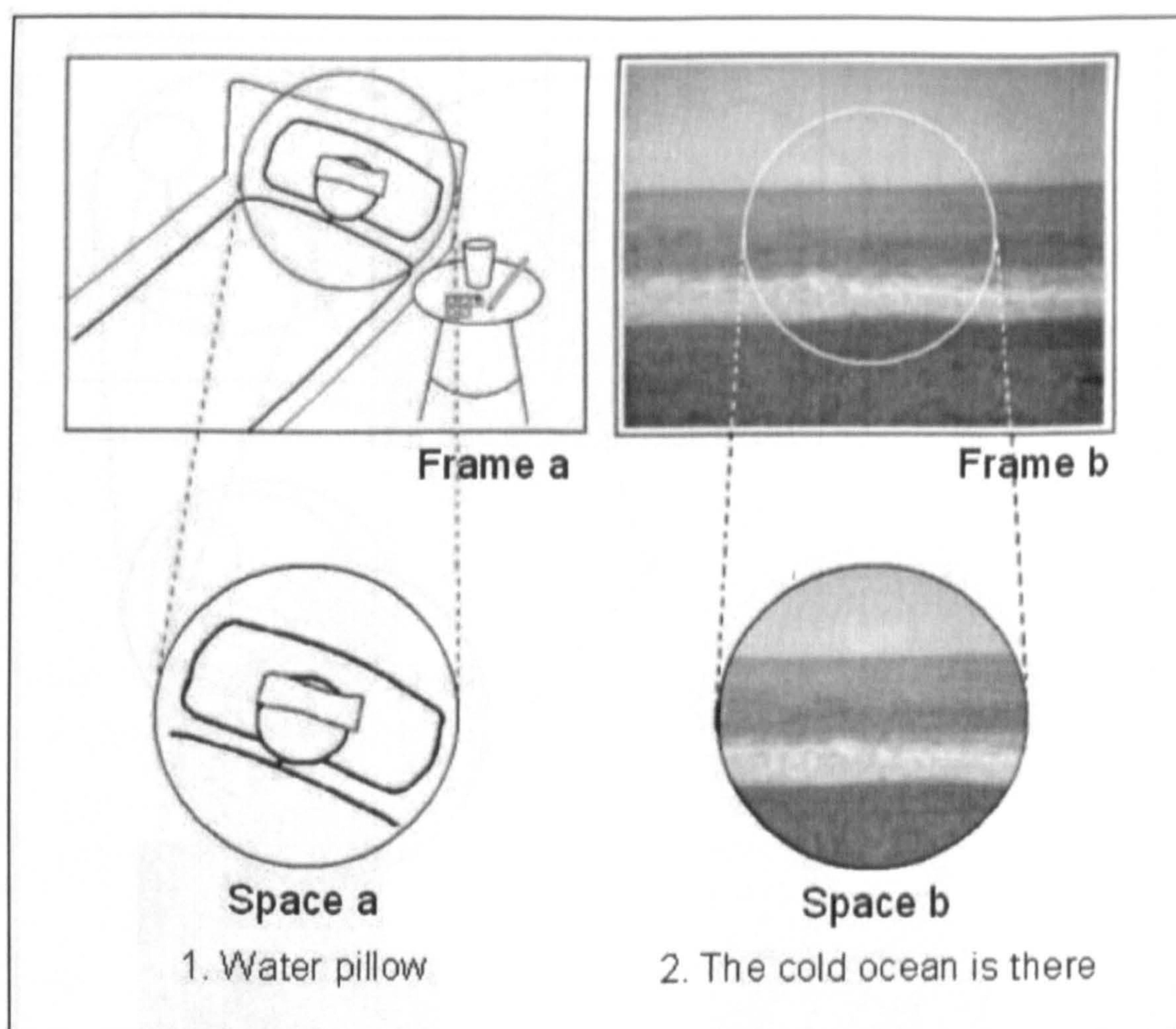


Figure 11.3 Spaces involved in haiku (11b)

The similar mechanism can be found in sign language haiku. For example, in Sepah's *Cornfield*, there is a single consistent poetic scene of children playing hide-and-seek in the cornfield (the frame). The poet uses different perspectives resulting in different spaces and different effects, but they are all within the same cornfield-frame which is consistent throughout the poem.

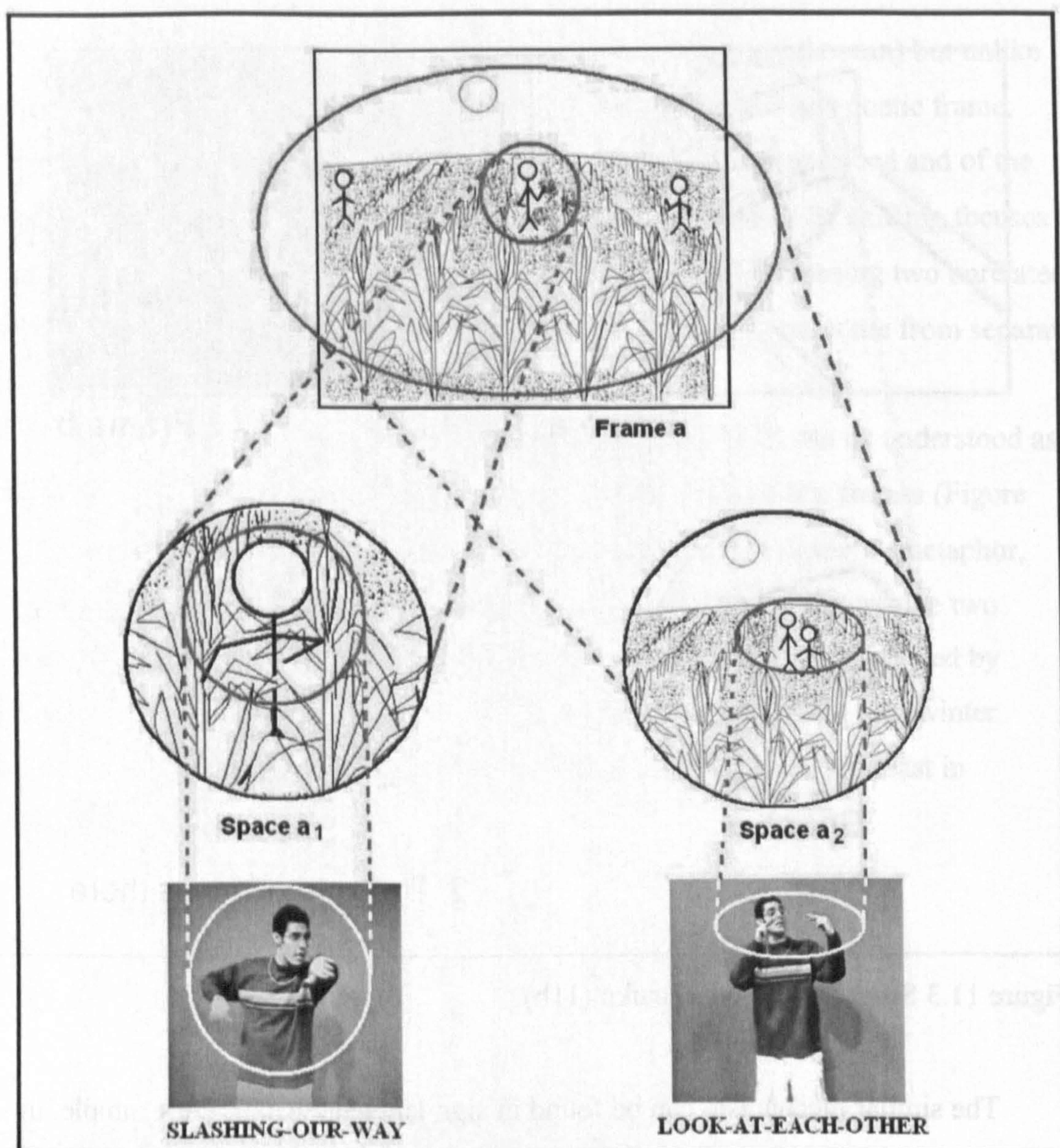


Figure 11.4 Spaces involved in Sepah's *Cornfield*

On the other hand, Williams' *Research and Duck* involves more than one frame. It starts with the frame of research (someone typing) and then moves onto the frame of duck in the park. The fusion of the two frames is motivated by the identical signs of TYPING-HARD (the researcher) and PADDLING-HARD (duck). In sign language haiku, the merging of two frames is very often visually motivated.

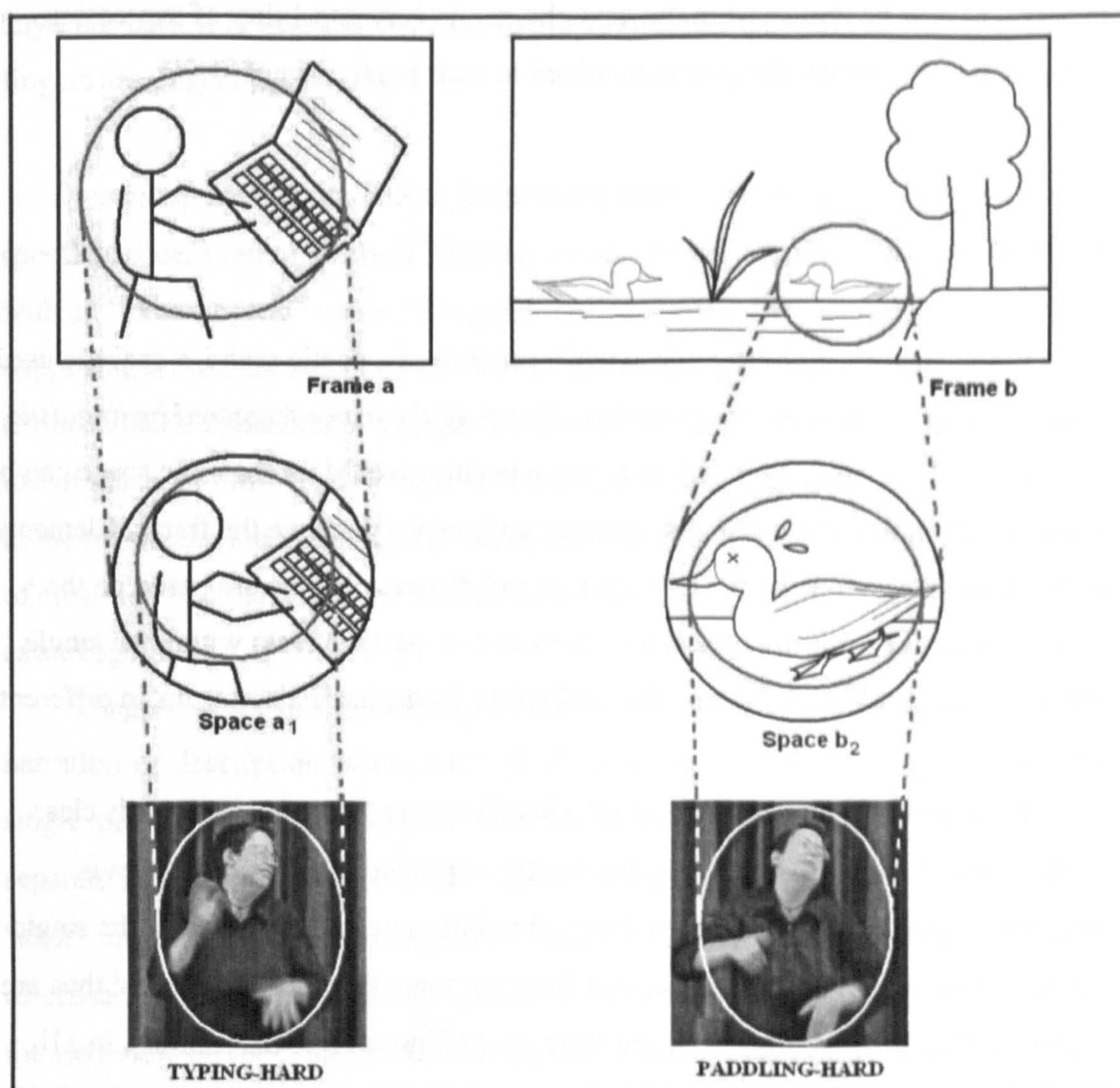


Figure 11.5 Spaces involved in Williams' *Research and Duck*

11.2.2. Perspective

Perspective is a viewpoint in which the frame is perceived. It is the indicator of shift of space, regardless of whether it is within the same frame or that of the frame itself. The shift of perspective is indicated by the linguistic expressions (for example, the sentence "He wanted to sell his car and she bought it" involves a perspective shift within the same trading frame, triggered by the different verbs).

In sign language, Liddell (2003) claims that eyegaze, facial expressions, and body posture are the three elements that mark different perspectives. Especially

eyegaze, as will be discussed in the next chapter, is very capability of expressing different ways in which the poet is involved in their poetic scenes.

11.2.3 Space

While frame is a holistic conceptual structure of a poetic scene, a space is used in this chapter to mean *the instantiation of parts of the frame triggered by linguistic expressions*. Each space is based on a single perspective. More than one space can be generated from the single frame depending on how we perceive the frame. Elements in the same space abide by the relative size and distance as they are based on the same perspective. Shifting of scales or focuses (i.e. perspectives) within the single frame produces different spaces. The shift of the frame itself also results in different spaces.

Both haiku examples (11a and 11b) involve more than one space, as is clear from Figures 11.2 and 3. However, the trigger of producing different spaces is different in each poem. In 11a, it is due to the shift in perspectives *within* the single frame. All the spaces in 11a are derived from the same frame (Frame a) and thus are represented as Space a₁, Space a₂ and Space a₃ in Figure 11.2. On contrary, in 11b, the shift of the frame itself (Frame a and Frame b in Figure 11.3) results in two different spaces (Space a and Space b)

Different types of spaces in sign language haiku

The unique feature of sign language poetry is that this relatively abstract notion of a poetic space is represented in real, physical space. The process of mapping elements of poetic space onto real space produces a complex mechanism in the spatial construction of sign language haiku.

There are four types of space involved in sign language haiku: real space, diegetic space(s), extradiegetic space and blended space.

Real space is the physical signing space. This includes the body of the poet and the surrounding space. Elements in real space are regarded as not yet representing

anything until it is mapped with the elements in other spaces (thus hands are hands, fingers are fingers and so on).

Diegetic space corresponds to the notion I have so far simply referred to as a (poetic) space. I redefine it as a “diegetic space” in order to highlight the contrast with an “extradiegetic” space. “Diegetic” (or “intradiegetic”) means that things are happening within the story world; “extradiegetic” means outside the story world (Prince 2003). This notion of diegesis is developed in an attempt to account for the use of music in film. When someone in the story is playing an instrument or listening to the music, the music is diegetic; when the music is added externally for the sake of creating effect, and thus the characters are not aware of it, it is understood as extradiegetic.

Diegetic space in sign language haiku is an imaginative space in which a poetic narration or description takes place. Each diegetic space has a single frame and a single perspective, and whenever there is a shift in perspective and/or in frame, separate diegetic spaces will be generated. In this sense, it roughly corresponds to a “shot” in Bauman’s cinematographic terms (see Chapter 2). Sepah’s *Cornfield* discussed above has two diegetic spaces: a “zoom-out” view of the entire field and a focused view on the protagonists (i.e. shift in size and perspective generates different diegetic spaces). Williams’ *Research and Duck* also produces two diegetic spaces: a space based on the research-frame and on the park-frame (i.e. different frames result in different diegetic spaces).

Extradiegetic space is a commentary space, in which the poet comes out of the story world and comments on the poem from an outsider’s viewpoint. For example, Wim Emmerik’s *Falling leaf* consists of a single diegetic space of a leaf falling from the tree. The last sign, however, does not belong to this diegetic space. The poet suddenly looks at the audience and signs PURPLE. The audience understands that the poet now comes back to himself and comments on the diegetic space he has established in his poem. Sign languages are visual languages, but they cannot show colour directly to the audience, and thus they need to be expressed via lexical signs. It is possible to include lexical signs within the diegetic space, but the frame of a

falling leaf in Emmerik's poem is so iconic and visual that he excludes a lexical sign from the diegetic space.

Blended space is generated as a result of blending the above-mentioned spaces. More than one space is projected onto the real space, and as a result we see a montage of different poetic scenes. A very common example of this is when two diegetic spaces with different perspectives are mapped separately on hands and face, the former providing the defocused view of a poetic scene (such as the G-handshape classifier representing a person at a distance) and the latter showing the actual (real-size) face of a character involved in the scene. I will discuss blending in the following section.

The different space types involved in sign language haiku are displayed in Figure 11.6. There is only one real space in which the poet exists in the reality with his/her physical environment. The trapezium marked with a dotted line includes all the elements that consist of a story world. In the story world, it is possible to have two frames (Frame a and b). While Frame b simply produces a single space out of it (Diegetic Space b), Frame a has different parts highlighted by different perspectives, each of which results in different diegetic space (Diegetic Space a_1 and Diegetic Space a_2). Extradiegetic space is placed out of this dotted story world, as in this space the poet stays out of the story. All of the diegetic and extradiegetic spaces are mapped onto the real space. It is often the case that two spaces (such as Diegetic Space a_1 and Diegetic Space a_2) are "blended" and mapped onto the real space simultaneously. This case of blending will be discussed in details in the following section.

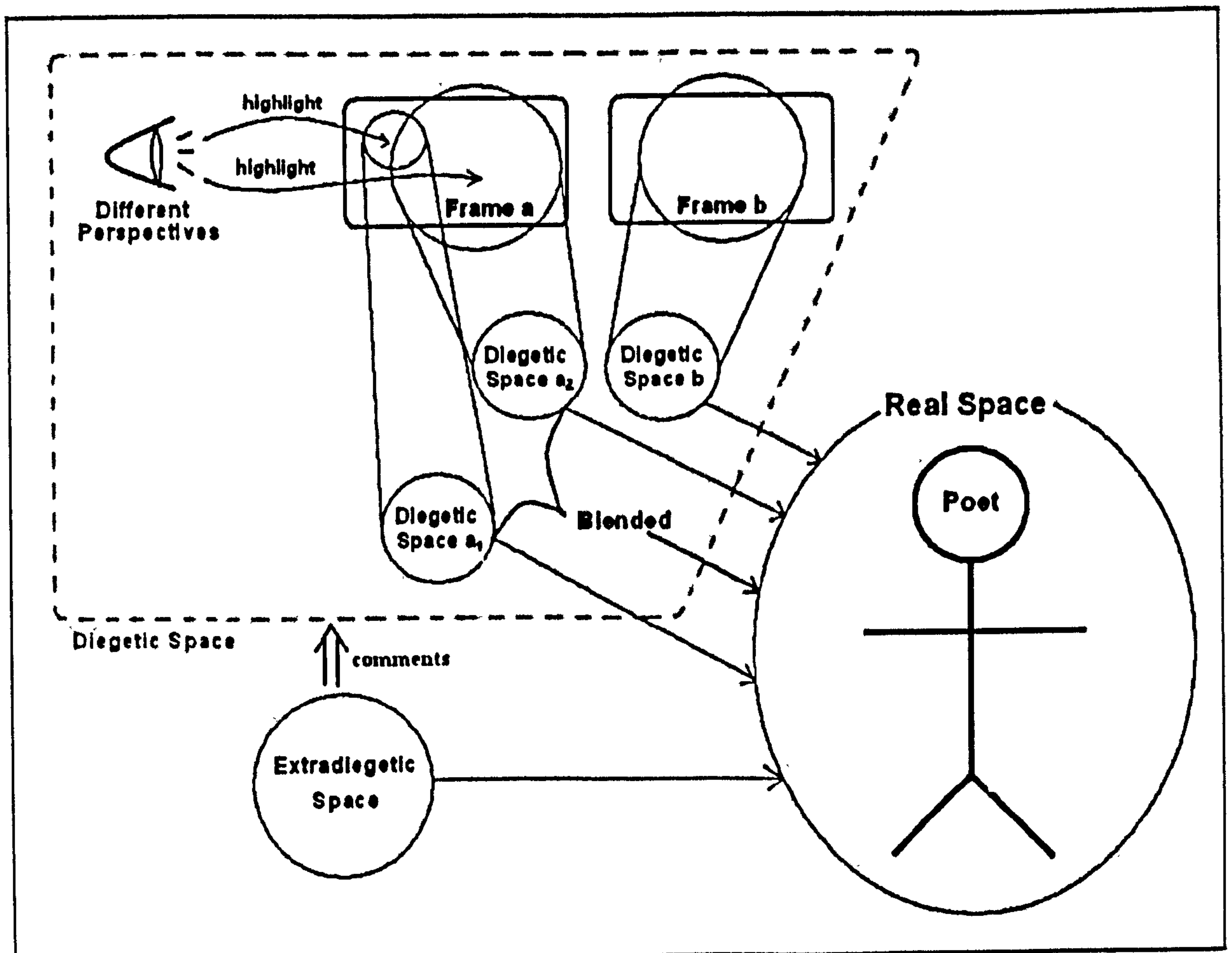


Figure 11.6 The different spaces involved in sign language haiku

11.3. Conceptual blending and poetic blending

In this section, I will develop the idea of blended space introduced above. Blending of spaces is unique to sign language poetry in general, and especially important in sign language haiku, because to blend and combine spaces often contributes to the economy of the language used.

11.3.1. Original idea of blending

The notion of blending is first developed by two cognitive linguists, Mark Turner and Gill Fauconnier. Their primary concern was to explain the conceptual mechanism that underlies an expression like the sentence in 11c. A clipper called *Northern Lights* made a historical run from San Francisco to Boston in 1853. 140

years later, in 1993, a modern catamaran *Great America* took the same route and 11c is the expression people used to talk about the two boats before *Great America* reached Boston.

11c At this point, *Great America II* is 4.5 days ahead of *Northern Lights*.
(Fauconnier and Turner 1998)

This binds two separate spaces into a single expression, creating the image of two boats competing in the same place and at the same time (in 1993). Fauconnier and Turner explained that in order to understand this sentence, two separate conceptual spaces (*input spaces*) need to be accessed: the sailing that took place in 1853 and the sailing in 1993. Then these two spaces are “blended” to create *blended space*, with elements from both input spaces and from a schematic *generic space* (containing highly abstract elements without any specifics). Certain elements are extracted from the input spaces (such as the boat and the sailing course from both inputs, and the year 1993 from the modern day sailing space), and other elements are dropped (such as the year 1853, and other details of each sailing). The blended space has a new structure of its own, namely, the competition of the two boats (what Fauconnier and Tuner call “emergent structure”), which exists neither of the two input spaces. Blending not only puts two spaces together but also enriches them.

In sign language, Liddell (2003) and Dudis (2004) has developped this idea into sign language research. Dudis (2004) especially discussed the creation of multiple space blends and pointed out that they “create a more explicit description” of the event being illustrated. Following section will discusses this mechanism in poetic sign language.

11.3.2. Poetic blending in sign language haiku

I apply the notion of conceptual blending to poetic blending. Poetic blending presents two discrete events (i.e. two diegetic spaces) simultaneously at the real space. Two types of blending can be identified in sign language haiku: sequential blending and simultaneous blending.

Sequential blending juxtaposes two diegetic spaces one after another, and then provides a third space (blended space) in which those two spaces are linked. For example, in Donna Williams' *The River and Stars*, the poet signs two sequences one by one. Firstly, she signs RIVER DAY (the river at day) and then STARS NIGHT (stars at night), shifting from one frame to another and thus having two separate diegetic spaces. The river sequence is located downward and leftward, and the star sequence is located upward and rightward (Figure 11.7). At the end of the poem, after the lexical sign LINK that explicitly connects the two images, the poet produces a visual sign BOTH-SPARKLING toward the two locations at which the two diegetic spaces are assigned earlier. This last sign can be understood as a blended space in that, although the actual signs (RIVER and STARS) are not present in the real space, the two diegetic spaces are still accessible through their association with the particular locations. In reality, the daytime river and the nighttime stars cannot coexist, but in this blended space the audience can see both lights at the same time. This is similar to the mechanism that underlies the sentence in 11c, in which we see a competition of two boats which is not taking place in reality. However, whereas such blending remains conceptual in spoken languages, sign language can actually show the blended "space" in front of the audience.

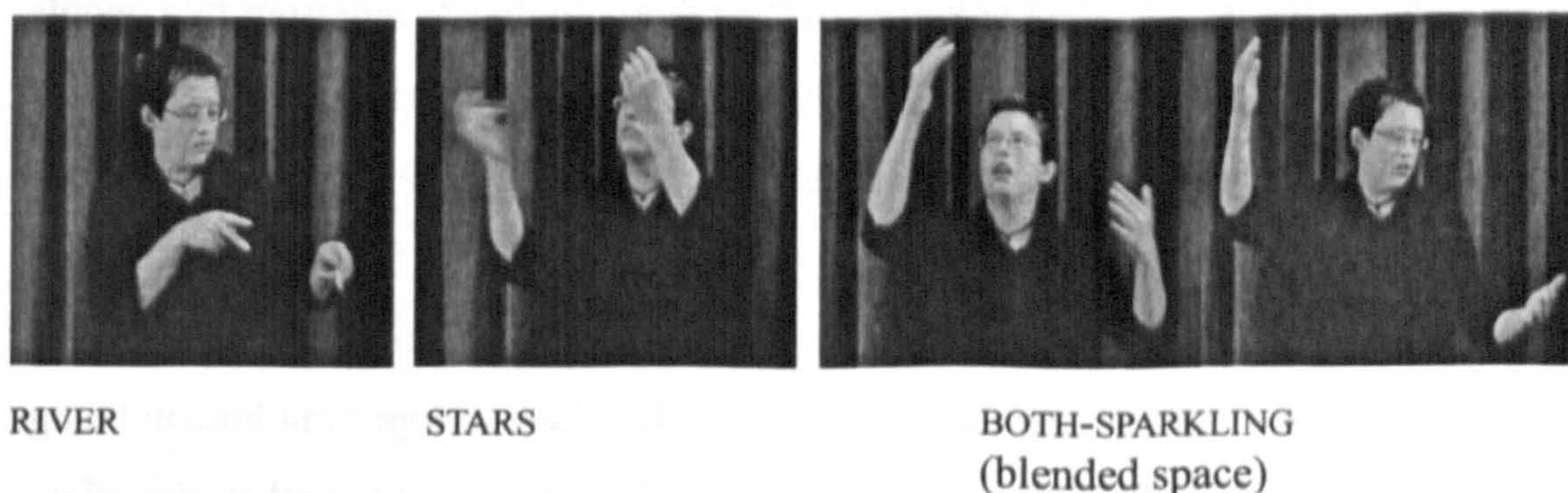


Figure 11.7 Sequential blending in Williams' *The River and Stars*

In *simultaneous blending*, two diegetic spaces are mapped onto different parts of the signer's body at the same time. Instead of referring to them in advance as in sequential blending, the poet introduces different spaces simultaneously by using different parts of their body. Such body parts include the dominant hand, non-dominant hand, body posture and the face (most importantly, the eyes)

In the majority of the cases, the eyegaze and the manual signs represent two separate spaces. For example, in Christine La France's *Bird*, the performer's hands represent the bird as a whole, offering a defocused view of its flight. But his eyes are those of the real-size bird (Figure 11.8). The poem has a single frame (the bird's flight in the air) but two diegetic spaces are instantiated based on different perspectives, and these are blended simultaneously on the real space.



Figure 11.8 Christine LaFrance's *Bird* (performer is different from the composer)

Dynamic use of simultaneous blending can be observed in Penny Beschizza's *Sign Language*. This poem has a single frame, in which two Deaf people meet each other (frame of encounter). The two Deaf people approach with a dubious and uncertain look, but gradually they start to talk in sign language, and their signing overflows in the end. At the beginning of the poem, her hands represent two people with the classifiers, while her face clearly takes on a character's expression. The audience is presented with a "zoomed-out" representation of the situation (Diegetic Space 1) and the focused, real-size view of a person (Diegetic Space 2) at the same time (a in Figure 11.9). This is a good example of synchronic blending. At this point, the hands form a G-handshape and are used as classifiers to represent human beings. The next scene shows a similar blending, but the hands turn into another classifier (V-handshape) representing the gaze of each person (b). The audience still sees two separate diegetic spaces. In the third sequence, however, one of the hands turns back into a real-size hand and "touches" the other person (c). The other hand remains as a classifier, so it still involves both focused and defocused diegetic spaces. However, the boundary between the two spaces has shifted. Now the dominant hand joins the face to its real-size space, and non-dominant hand alone retains the defocused space. This sequence is repeated, alternating dominant and non-dominant hands (the left

hand touching the classifier on the right hand). During this touching sequence, each hand belongs to a different space (i.e. both hands are not seen as a pair of hands). However, in the last part of the poem, both hands of the poet start to move in tandem, and turn themselves into a conventional sign for SIGN (d). At this moment, the defocused space disappears and we now have a single and real-size diegetic space of someone signing.

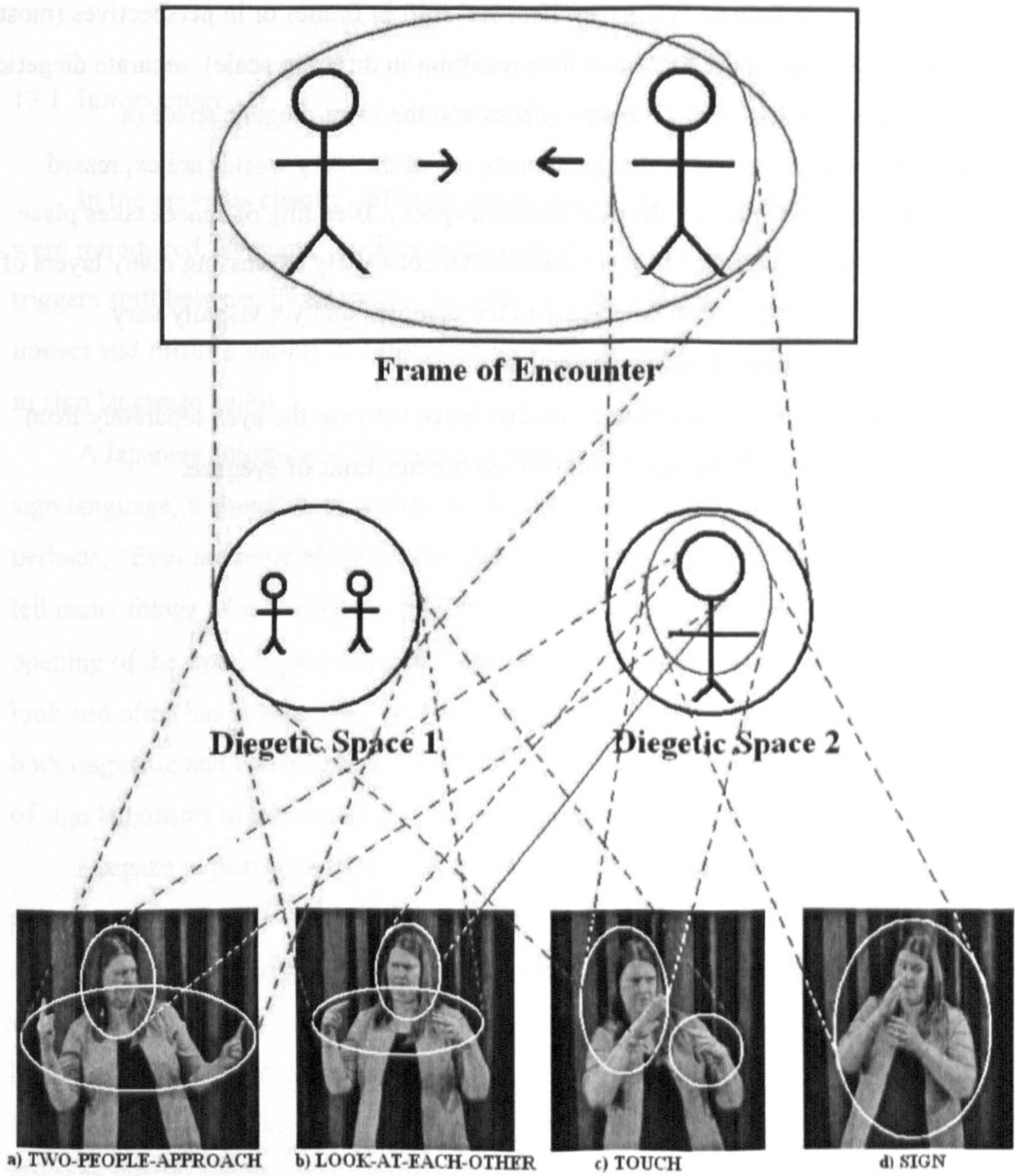


Figure 11.9 Dynamic blending in Penny Beschizza's *Sign Language*

11.4. Summary

In this chapter, the mapping of poetic spaces onto the real space has been discussed, focusing on the phenomenon of blending. A poetic scene is often based on a cohesive structure called “frame”, parts of which are highlighted by particular perspectives. Some poems maintain a single frame throughout the poem; others involve a shift in frames. Whenever there is a shift in frames or in perspectives (most commonly, changing the focus and thus resulting in different scale), separate diegetic spaces are generated. These diegetic spaces and the extra-diegetic space (a commentary space in which the poet comes out of the story world) are expressed using the physical space of the poet (the real space). Blending of spaces takes place when more than one space is accessed simultaneously. By expressing many layers of representation, the poet can contribute to the complex and yet visually very economical structure of sign language haiku.

A major means to generate a blended space is to use the eyes separately from the hands. In the next chapter, I will discuss the functions of eyegaze.

Chapter 12

Eyegaze

How eye gaze direction is used to get across the intended message and effect is an art in itself.

From the webpage of Dawn Sign Press

12.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, different poetic spaces involved in sign language haiku were introduced. Eyegaze, together with body shift and facial expressions, often triggers shift between those spaces. A subtle look by the poet often has an enormous impact and fulfils a variety of functions. This chapter will explore the gaze patterns in sign language haiku.

A Japanese idiom says, “Eyes are as eloquent as the tongue”. In the case of a sign language, it should be rewritten as “Eyes are as eloquent as the hands” or perhaps, “Eyes are more eloquent than the hands”. Through aperture and gaze Eyes tell many things which words do not express. While eye aperture (the degree of opening of the eyes) is part of facial expression, eyegaze involves the direction of the look and often has similar functions as pointing. For Deaf people, eyegaze conveys both linguistic and non-linguistic information. It is an intrinsic part of the linguistics of sign languages in general, and in artistic signing in particular.

Eyegaze in poetic signing invites the audience into the poetic world. When the poets look straight into the audience, they are probably inviting us to the story world as a narrator. When they are taking over a character’s gaze, they want us to see the world through the eyes of that particular character. When they look down at their hands, they are leading our attention to a certain manual sign (Bahan and Supalla 1995, Engberg-Pedersen 1999, and Sutton-Spence and Woll 1999). Whatever the eyegaze they use, it indicates a particular way in which the poets want to guide us into their creative world. While manual signing builds up the basic storyline of a

poem, eyegaze (with other nonmanual signs) *presents* this story-world to the audience. The same content of the poem can be delivered in completely different ways depending on how performers use their gaze. In this sense, eyegaze is where “text and performance overlap” (Sutton-Spence 2005: 136).

Although there are various patterns of eyegaze in sign language poetry, their ultimate goal is the same - to successfully draw the audience into the poetic world. This is true for sign language haiku as well, even though traditional haiku do not actively involve readers in their world. They simply depict a scene and make the readers ponder upon how to approach the poem. This is one type of reader involvement and some signed haiku take the similar approach. However, there are many other ways in which the poet’s gaze can lead the audience’s attention. This chapter considers such gaze patterns and their effects in sign language haiku.

12.2. Eyegaze in sign language

12.2.1. Linguistic functions of eyegaze

A sign-naïve person might assume that eyegaze in sign languages accompanies manual signing in the same way that it accompanies speech, that is, to add emphasis or emotions to the discourse, to get feedback from the addressee, or to indicate turn taking in conversations. However, these extralinguistic functions are only part of the gaze behaviour in sign languages. Eyegaze in sign languages has various lexical, grammatical, and discourse functions. As Bahan and Supalla (1995) point out, the gaze behaviour in sign languages is “linguistic in nature” (179).

Sutton-Spence and Woll (1999) list six different linguistic functions of eyegaze in BSL. First of all, eyegaze is used to mark a lexical contrast (BSL signs BOSS and GOD are minimal pairs that only differ in the direction of eyegaze). Secondly, it is used along with, or independently from, manual signs to point at a referent or trace its movement. It is also used to indicate a role shift, to distinguish genuine questions from pseudo-questions (for example, a rhetorical question like MY SON HOW-OLD? FIVE “My son is five years old”), and to indicate turn taking in dialogues. Finally,

the direction of eyegaze can convey temporal information: sideways glances indicate past, straight or downward gaze indicates present, and upward gaze indicates future.

Much research has been conducted on the linguistic use of eyegaze in other sign languages (especially in ASL), particularly focusing on two areas: agreement marking and role shift. Eyegaze is used to mark verb agreement either with or without manual signs (Liddell 2003, Metzger 1995, Thompson, Emmorey and Kluender 2006). Agreement verbs are directed toward certain locations in the signing space to indicate the subject and object of the verb, accompanied by nonmanual features which mark those referents. Neidle, Kegl, MacLaughlin, Bahan, and Lee (2000) report that in transitive constructions eyegaze marks object and head tilt marks subject while in intransitive constructions either eyegaze or head tilt alone marks the subject. This is one example showing how eyegaze plays an active role in grammar

Eyegaze is also an essential part of role shifting. In role shift, a signer takes up the viewpoint of someone else and starts to use a first person pronoun to refer to that third person. Some researchers adopt different terms for this structure such as *referential shift* (Poulin and Miller 1995) or *constructed action* (Metzger 1995), but I will use the traditional term of “role shift” in this chapter. Role shift is indicated by the signer’s nonmanual behaviours (facial expressions, eyegaze, and body shift). Eyegaze especially plays a crucial role in demarcating a shift in signer’s perspectives. As Poulin and Miller (1995) point out, signers break off eye contact with the addressee before taking up a third person’s viewpoint, which is “the most consistent change to indicate that the signer has entered a referential shift” (120). By observing the signer’s gaze behaviour, the audience can tell whose eyes he or she is representing. Role shift is widely used not only in normal everyday signing but also in artistic signing, and it will be discussed later in this chapter.

12.2.2. Eyegaze in poetic signing

Eyegaze is deeply involved in poetic signing. Not only does it show how the poet involves the audience in the poetic world, but it also reveals the different ways poets themselves are involved in their signing. Eyegaze shows how much personal

investment is made by the poet, whether such involvement is subjective or objective, and the perspective through which poets enter the poetic world.

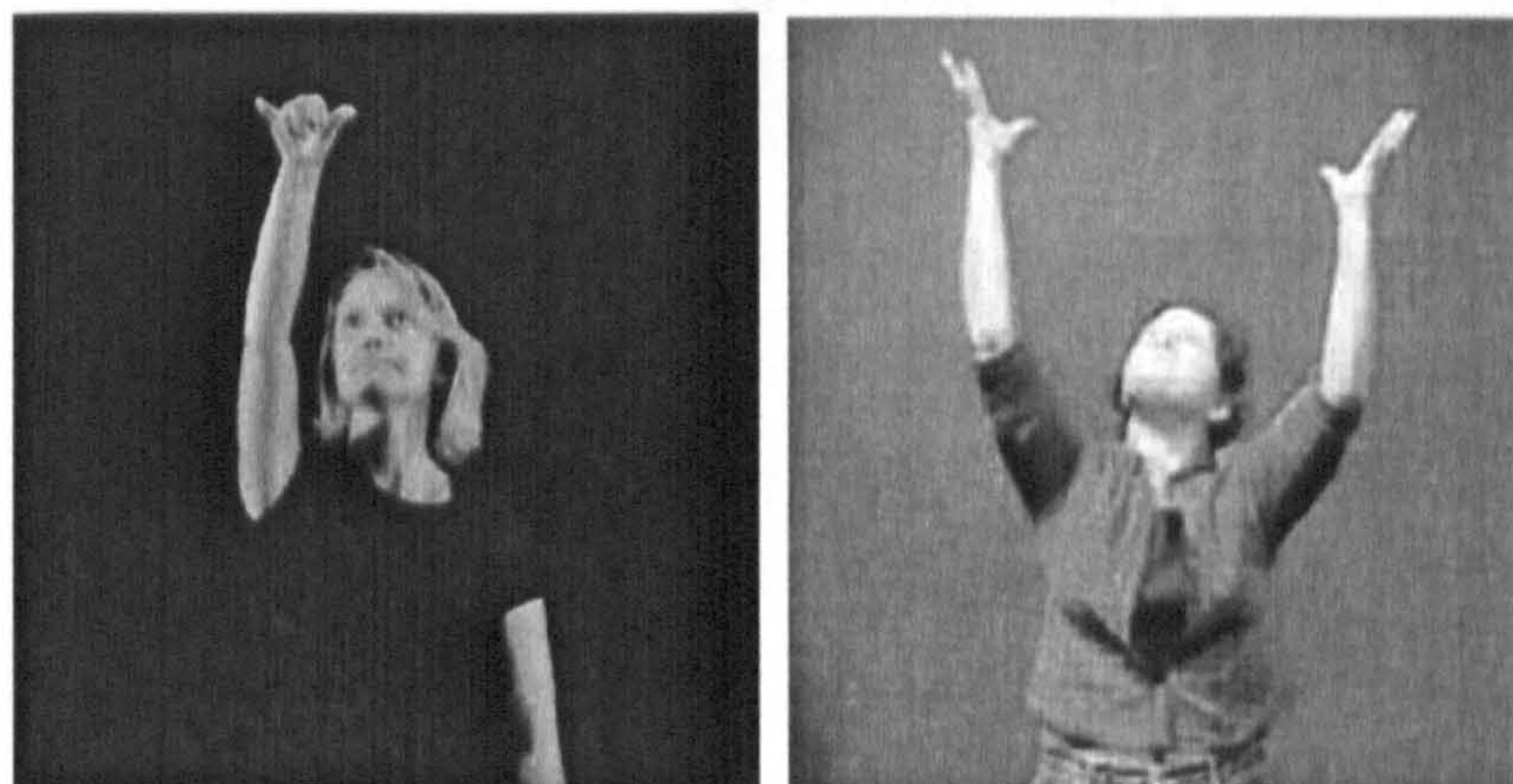
The degree and the types of involvement vary depending on the poet. Some poets look straight into the audience throughout the performance, while others break eye contact from time to time. It will also vary depending on the types of the poem and the situation of performance. Especially, whether they are signing to a live audience or to the camera influences the gaze behaviour of the performers significantly (Krentz 2006).

Eyegaze is also used to connect the physical space and the imaginary, diegetic spaces. Gazing and pointing are two main ways to take the audience beyond the immediate signing space. Through looking at or pointing at a certain location in space, the signer is saying that there is something out there, which is physically unseen but made visible through signer's and viewer's imagination.

The direction of eyegaze can give us many clues about the placement of people and objects in the poem. Especially, the gaze direction can metaphorically stand for the power relationship among the characters in the poem. Ormsby (1995) reports Clayton Valli's use of gaze direction in *Snowflake*, the story which tells the ignorance of a hearing father toward his deaf son (the poet). When the poet represents the boy, he systematically looks upward, representing not only a physical difference in heights between the father and the child, but also the boy's "deference and trust" (239) to his father. But this upward gaze also reveals his inability to read his father's speech. In contrast, when the poet represents the father, he sharply looks down to his side, to "project the boy as peripheral to the action of the stanza" (234), which in turn signifies the father's indifference (or rather superficial interest) toward the deafness of his son. Bauman (2003) illustrates the symbolism of the gaze in another Valli's work, *The Lone, Sturdy Tree*, in which the trees (representing deaf children) "are constantly monitored by the panoptic gaze" of the sun (representing the hearing educators). Similar gaze patterns that represent the unequal relationship between the authority and the powerless individuals can be found in Judith Jackson's BSL poem dedicated to her father and in Nigel Howard's BSL haiku *Deaf*.

Such symbolic association of gaze direction is based on our conceptualisation of orientational metaphor (Chapter 6). Upward gaze is most likely associated with positive meaning, whereas downward gaze is more negative. In Mesch's *Aeroplane*

the physical downward movement of a plane crash and the fall of the wreckage of the plane bears symbolic nuance when contrasted with the upward gaze of the poet in the end, suggesting an interpretation of the plane's soul called up the heaven (Figure 12.1 a). Similar spiritual association of upward gaze and soul can be found in Danielle Rogers' *Tree* (Figure 12.1 b).



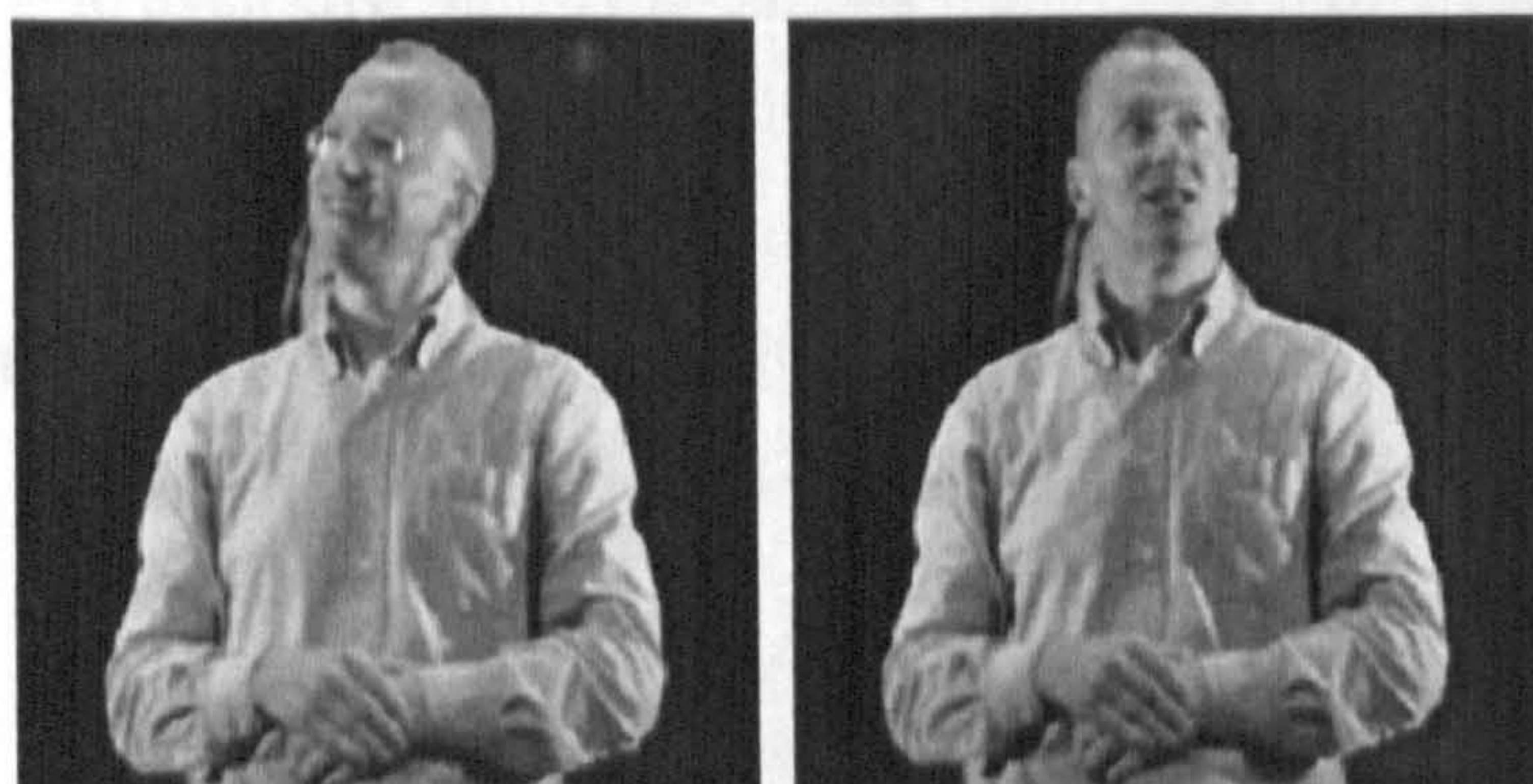
a) PLANE-ASCENDS

b) SOUL-ALOFT

Figure 12.1 Upward gaze and hand movement in Johanna Mesch's *Aeroplane* (a) and in Danielle Rogers' *Tree* (b)

Gaze can show the emotion of the poet (or of someone whose viewpoint is represented) in a subtle but powerful way. Dorothy Miles wrote, "It is not necessary to use exaggeration or sentimental expressions or movements. Emotions can be shown subtly through the eyes and the posture, even at a distance" (cited in Sutton-Spence 2005: 136). Indeed, subtle movements of eyes can tell us many things.

In sign language haiku, gaze has one more unique function - it may correspond to the function of *kireji*, the cutting morpheme in traditional Japanese haiku (Chapter 4 and 5). Both *kireji* and shift in eyegaze mark the internal division within the single haiku poem. Just like *kireji* (it is usually expressed with <;> or <-> in English translations), eyegaze by itself does not have a propositional meaning and does not develop the story. The most notable example of this is John Wilson's *Winter*, when the poet's gaze shifts from his right to left, indicating the switch between the first and the second sequences (Figure 12.2). Note that this sequence functions as a brief pause in this poem, which moves from summer to winter, and eyegaze successfully ushers the audience's attention from one season to the other (see more discussion in Chapter 13).



a) Gaze to right b) Gaze to the left

Figure 12.2 Gaze shift in John Wilson's *Winter*

12.3. Eyegaze patterns

12.3.1. Gaze patterns in narratives versus poetry

In relation to the formal aspect of eyegaze in sign language poetry, Valli (1990, 1993) made an attempt to define a line through repetition of gaze behaviour, together with other elements such as handshape, movement and location (which he called rhymes). However, as I already described in Chapter 2, such a notion of line or rhyme is not directly applicable to sign language poetry, nor to traditional haiku. The fundamental problem is that gaze behaviour is controlled by more complex, multidimensional factors, and does not follow a simple linear regularity.

Bahan and Supalla (1995) and Engberg-Pedersen (1999) investigated the patterns of eyegaze in sign language narratives, based on the direction and function of the gaze. They came up with similar classifications:

Bahan and Supalla (1995)

1. Gaze to audience
2. Character's Gaze
3. Gaze at hands

Engberg-Pedersen (1999)

1. Sender's eye contact with the receiver (=1 above)
2. Imitative eye gaze (=2 above)
3. Configurational eye gaze (= 3 above)
4. Sender's reference-tracking eye gaze

Both classifications distinguish gaze according to its direction (if the gaze is cast toward the audience (1) or on hands (3)) and the role/function of the poet (if the poet is taking a particular character's viewpoint or not (2)). Engberg-Pedersen adds one more type (4), in which the poet casts a glance at a certain place to refer to something.

These two categorisations are relatively simple, and work adequately with narratives. However, as I will demonstrate, gaze behaviour in poetic signing is more complex and needs more detailed categorisation. This is mainly because communication is the most important purpose of signing in narratives and dialogues. Signers constantly look at the audience or enact certain characters to keep the attention of the audience and make the story easy to follow. In poetic signing, however, the main purpose of signing is not communication but often is the sheer enjoyment of linguistic beauty ("language for language's sake"). Especially in haiku, communicative intent is reduced to minimum, to allow the audience to directly experience the haiku moment. This results in wider variation of gaze patterns in sign language haiku.

No single criterion is capable of explaining such complex gaze patterns. In what follows I will illustrate five major criteria, and then propose a possible categorisation based on the interaction of these various criteria.

12.3.2. Five major criteria

Direction of the gaze

The first criterion is the direction of the gaze. This essentially distinguishes:

1. gaze to the audience (or camera)
2. gaze at hands (including the gaze that precedes or follows the hands)
3. non-directed gaze

Although this provides a clear classification, this does not take into account the significance of such directions. In other words, even when the poet looks at the same

direction, the meaning of the gaze can be completely different depending on whether the poet is looking that direction as a character, or as an omniscient narrator. This also does not consider if the act of “seeing” is really “seeing” (i.e. whether the poet looking at a certain direction with volition and intention, or the direction of the gaze is not important in itself).

Role of the poet

Another major criterion in patterning gaze behaviours is role of the poet. The gaze is classified according to how the poet functions in relation to their poems.

1. as a narrator
2. as a character
3. as a viewer
4. as a poetic tool

First of all, the narrator’s gaze corresponds to the gaze to the audience in the first criterion, as poet-as-narrator acknowledges the presence of the audience and ushers their attention to the story. Secondly, the character’s gaze is more commonly known as role shift: i.e. the poet enacts a character using their body. Thirdly, the poet sometimes behaves as a “viewer” – i.e. they watch and react to their own signing as if they are part of the audience. The fourth category, “poetic tool”, is used when the poet does not take in any viewpoint but rather uses eyegaze to convey the poetic message. The poet ceases to exist as a person but becomes the poetic instrument. Bahan and Supalla (1995) claim that such eyegaze is “not that of a narrator or character, but rather that of the narrative itself”.

This categorisation works well when a piece of signing involves clearly distinguished characters, which may be the case of many stories. Both Bahan and Supalla (1995) and Engberg-Pedersen (1999) base their analyses of the narratives on the combination of these first two criteria, direction and function of the gaze. However in poetry, there are many different ways for the poet to get involved in the story world, which requires more detailed analyses.

Extra- and intra-diegesis

Another important criterion is if the gaze is extradiegetic or intradiegetic. As discussed in Chapter 11, the notion of diegesis is used to explain whether something

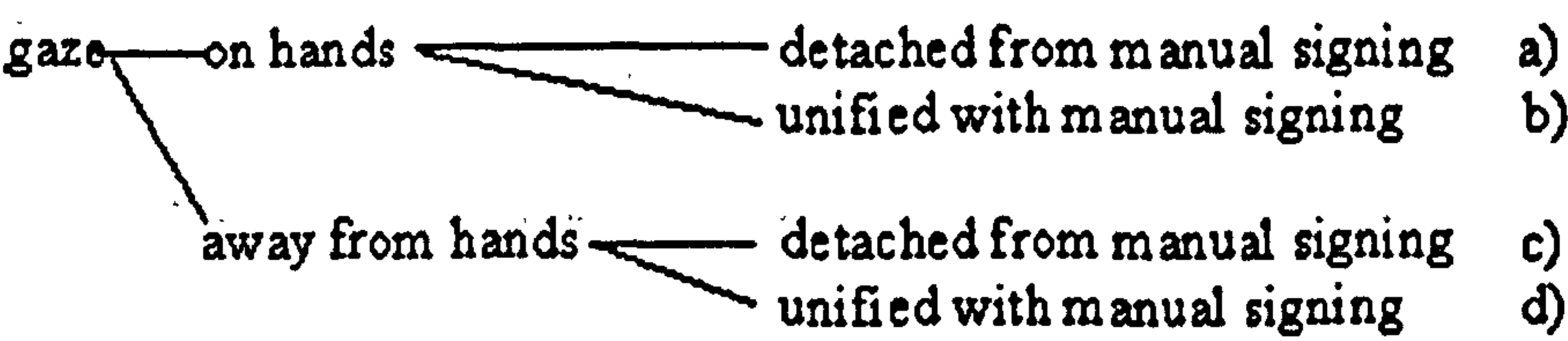
is happening within the story world or not. The gaze of the poet is intradiegetic when it takes place in the story world (such as taking a character’s viewpoint). When the poet comes out of the story by mainly acknowledging the audience, it is extradiegetic.

Omniscience and ignorance of the poet

The poet in the real space obviously knows what they are signing. However, they can also pretend that they do not know (“feigned ignorance”). Eyegaze reveals if the poet is pretending to be omniscient or ignorant. Omniscient eyegaze shows the poet’s knowledge about the poem by preceding the manual signs (prescient eyegaze). Ignorant eyegaze follows the manual signs and reacts to their movement.

Relation to hands

Lastly, it is very important to understand the gaze behaviour in relation to manual signs. This involves two sub-criteria. First of all, the poet may or may not look at their hands (gaze at hands). Secondly, the gaze and the hands are seen either as separate entities or as one.



Gaze a) in the above diagram means that poets look at their hands as if they do not belong to them. Thus the poets react to their manual signs. In gaze b), the poet’s gaze simply follows the hands as if it is part of the narrative. Gaze c) is the case in which the poets are apparently unaware of what their hands are doing, or where they are. Gaze d) is the example of omniscient gaze where the poet does not look at the hands but knows what they are doing.

Bauman (1998) observed Peter Cook’s two different gaze behaviours in his poem *Poetry*, one following his hands when he signs FALCON, the other gazing straight ahead, pretending not to notice his sign BUTTERFLY. He concluded that Cook’s gaze during the falcon sequence creates “a link between the artist and his image” while his non-directed gaze in the sequence of the butterfly is “wholly

separated from the convincing movements of the butterfly”. In my classification, both of them are the examples of the gaze separated from manual signing (a and c in the diagram above). Bauman’s comment that the first gaze has a “link” between the poet (gaze) and the image (hands) is simply because the poet looks at his hands (the notion of linking presupposes two distinct entities).

12.4. Categorisation of the gaze patterns

All of the five criteria introduced above highlight important aspects of gaze behaviours but none of them alone can successfully account for different gaze patterns. Drawing from multiple criteria, I propose the following seven categories.

- 1. gaze at the audience
- 2. character’s gaze
- 3. Poetic-I
- 4. reactive gaze at hand
- 5. non-reactive gaze at hands
- 6. prescient gaze
-
- 7. non-directed gaze

The remaining part of the chapter will explain each category using examples from sign language haiku. Note that in many cases, the gaze behaviour is ambiguous and not clearly classified into a single pattern (for example, a poet looking at his or her hands may be representing a character’s viewpoint or Poetic-I, or simply following their manual signs as part of narrative). The aim here is not to provide a clear-cut, comprehensive classification, but to find a way to approach the complex maze of gaze patterns in sign language haiku.

12.4.1. Gaze to the audience

Gaze to the audience is the gaze directed toward either a live audience or an invisible audience through the camera. The poet keeps eye contact with the audience

to lead them to the poetic world. In this gaze pattern, the poet is outside the story world (extradiegetic), and acts as a narrator.

Gaze to the audience indicates the relationship between the performer and the audience. In theatrical terms, it is the gaze cast upon the “fourth wall”. The fourth wall is an imaginary wall between the performer and the audience. The term comes from the proscenium theatre, where the audience is separated from the three-wall stage by the invisible fourth wall. Actors on the stage normally pretend not to notice the audience. However, they can “break” the fourth wall by directly addressing the audience. The act of looking at the audience is one of the ways to acknowledge their presence, and therefore blurs the boundary between the fiction and the audience.

Gaze to the audience is an essential part of narrative in sign language. As Bahan and Supalla (1995) stated: “Unlike a speaker telling a story, a signing storyteller is not able to gaze away from the audience and still narrate” (178). When they break eye contact with the audience, signers abandon their role as a narrator.

The main function of the gaze to the audience is to maintain contact with them. Dorothy Miles emphasised the importance of glancing at the audience from time to time (“do not become so engrossed in your images that you ignore the audience”--- from her unpublished notes in 1991, cited in Sutton-Spence (2005)). By looking at the audience, the poet can help create empathy among them.

For example, Linda Day’s BSL *Deaf Cat*, is characterized with the constant shift between the narrator’s and character’s gaze. The poet takes in two characters’ viewpoints (the cat and the man), but always comes back to the gaze to the camera in between. Even when she signs the cat’s action such as CAT-HACKLES-UP, she looks at the camera to maintain eye contact with the audience. The gaze pattern in g) in Figure 12.3 is clearly that of the narrator, not of the cat, as at that moment the cat is turning to its right (as in f and h). Day’s other poems, such as *Eclipse*, *Reflection*, and *Spring is Everywhere*, are all characterised with frequent gaze to the audience.

A deaf cat is sleeping under the sun
Happily and relaxed
A man approaches and shouts at it
The deaf cat keeps on sleeping
The man touches the cat
The cat jumps up!
Hackles up in surprise



a) SUN-CASTING (gaze to the camera)



b) DEAF-CAT-LYING (character's gaze)



**c) A-PERSON-APPROACHING
(gaze to the camera)**



**d) PERSON-SHOUTING-AT-THE-CAT
(character's gaze)**



**e) CAT-TAPPED-ON-SHOULDER
(character's gaze)**



**f) CAT-LOOKS-UP
(character's gaze)**



g) CAT-HACKLES-UP 1
(gaze to the camera)

h) CAT-HACKLES-UP 2
(gaze to the camera)

Figure 12.3 Gaze pattern in Linda Day's *Deaf Cat*

Gaze to audience often co-occurs with other types of eyegaze. For example, the poet, who is taking a character's gaze throughout the poem, casts a glance at the audience from time to time. This gaze is only instantaneous as the poet goes back to the character's gaze immediately. Bahan and Supalla (1995) characterised it as "eye gaze behaviour without duration" ([*-duration*]) (189), as opposed to eyegaze that occurs along with the sequence of manual signing ([*+duration*]). This quick shift between narrator's gaze and other types of gaze occurs frequently in sign language haiku.

Gaze to the audience is not as common in poetic signing as in narratives or in conversations. The frequency of gaze to the audience varies significantly across poems. Whereas some poets like Day consistently look at the audience, other signers decide not to maintain eye contact with the audience at all (as in Jessica McKinney's *ASL Memory*, which will be discussed later). This can be regarded as deviant use of eyegaze, but it is totally acceptable in poetic signing.

There is a double layer of poetic effects created by such deviant use of eyegaze. Whereas breaking eye contact is a marked gaze pattern in normal signing, it can be set up as the norm in poetic signing and become *unmarked* as the poet consistently looks away from the audience (just like unusual perseverance of two-handedness functions as unmarked background). Such "regular irregularity" (Leech 1969) is disrupted when the poet goes back to the regular pattern. In other words, the poet who has been avoiding eye contact suddenly looks straight into the audience in order

to emphasise something. In both Wim Emmerik's NGT *Falling leaf* and Carol Padden's adaptation of Dorothy Miles' ASL *Winter*, there is only one occasion when the poet looks at the audience. In *Falling leaf*, it is the last sign PURPLE. In *Winter*, it is the initial sign CONTRAST. Both signs are key words of the poem, and are highlighted by a gaze pattern which looks straight into the audience/camera. This new supposedly-unmarked form stands out as unusual (simply because it is not there in the rest of the sequence), getting new attention from the audience. A similar effect can be found when most poets sign the title of the poem. The poets look straight into the camera while signing the title to distinguish it from the main body of the poem.

Although the gaze to the audience in poetic signing may not be used as often as in everyday signing, it is still one of the major gaze patterns.



Figure 12.4 Gaze to the audience in Wim Emmerik's *Falling leaf* and Carol Padden's *Winter*

12.4.2. Character's gaze

Character's gaze in ASL narratives is defined by Bahan and Supalla (1995) as "seeing the story-world through the eyes of the character" (179). The signer takes on a role of a character, and the eyes of the signer become the eyes of the character. The direction of the gaze varies in character gaze, depending on where that particular character is looking. In many examples not only the eyes but the hands and/or the body of the signer represent the character.

Character's gaze shows full involvement of the poet into the poetic world. By presenting the story through the eyes of a character, the poet can create empathy in the mind of the audience.

Jesus Marchan's ASL *Fish* takes the character's gaze and incidentally clarifies the ambiguity created by manual signing. It is ambiguous whether this poem involves a single fish or two. The basic figure-of-eight movement of the poem can be regarded as the swimming of one fish, or the way two fish swim side by side (each hand representing one fish). However, it is clear from his eyegaze and eye aperture that the poet clearly takes on the character of one particular fish. The way he looks forward (but with no eye contact with the audience, since the poet as fish does not acknowledge the presence of the audience) to the direction of the prize clearly shows a perspective of a single fish. He also narrows or widens his eyes (change in eye aperture), which helps the audience understand that he is representing one fish (Figure 12.5).

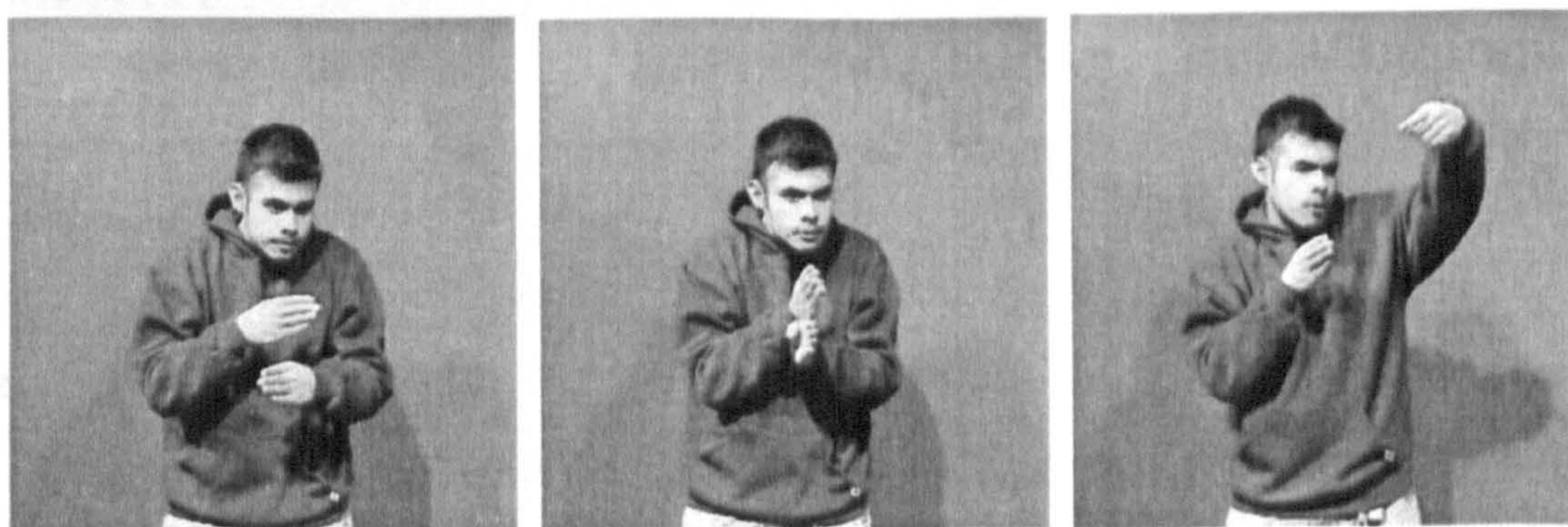


Figure 12.5 Gaze of one fish in Jesus Marchan's *Fish*

Characters can be animate, or inanimate objects which are anthropomorphised through being taken into the poet's body. As discussed in Chapter 7, anthropomorphism of nonhuman/inanimate objects is an intrinsic part of sign language poetry. Character's eyegaze contributes hugely to the poetic effect of anthropomorphisation. For example, in John Wilson's BSL *Lift*, the poet enacts the character of the lift through eyegaze. Eyegaze is a crucial element of this poem. It is not too much to say that the entire poem is about the eyes of the lift (considering that the manual signs are inactive in this poem, as clear from Figure 12.6). The poem starts when the door of the lift opens, and the audience is immediately taken into the

story-world through the combination of lively facial expressions and expectant eyes of the lift which looks to its left and right hoping for any passenger. The eyegaze suggests that there are some passengers in front of the lift to whom the lift is appealing energetically, eager to interact, but is ignored. The story is told thoroughly through the gaze, supported by facial expressions which show the emotion of the lift (expectation and disappointment) and add enormous (and humorous) poetic effect to this haiku (Figure 12.6).



Figure 12.6 Character’s gaze in John Wilson’s *Lift*

12.4.3. Poetic-I

I define Poetic-I as a distinctive voice in the poem whose identity is not specified. It can be understood as a special case of the character’s gaze, or rather as a “default”, in which the poet represents a subjective viewpoint without taking in any particular character (such as fish or lift), and therefore does not bring in any distinct personality (what Bauman (1998) calls an “identity-less” gaze (148)). Because it is identity-less, there is a certain universality in the character of Poetic-I and thus it is relatively easier for the audience to empathise with it. Unlike an established character whose basic character is fixed by the poet, Poetic-I is more general and flexible and the audience can project their own feelings.

This gaze pattern of Poetic-I is distinguished from gaze to the audience, in that the poet does not acknowledge the audience. It is also different from prescient gaze (discussed below) in that the poet exists as a person, not as a poetic tool. The act of “seeing” is actual “seeing” of that person, and it is possible in this gaze pattern to reveal emotion through facial expressions.

For example, in Rita DeSarker’s ASL *Forget Me Not*, the poet abandons the role of extradiegetic narrator by avoiding eye contact with the audience (except during the hands-down posture in Figure 12.7 a) and as a result creates the impression that she is representing “someone” in the story world. But this “someone” is not specified.

A written note that says
Tosses in the ocean
Forget me not



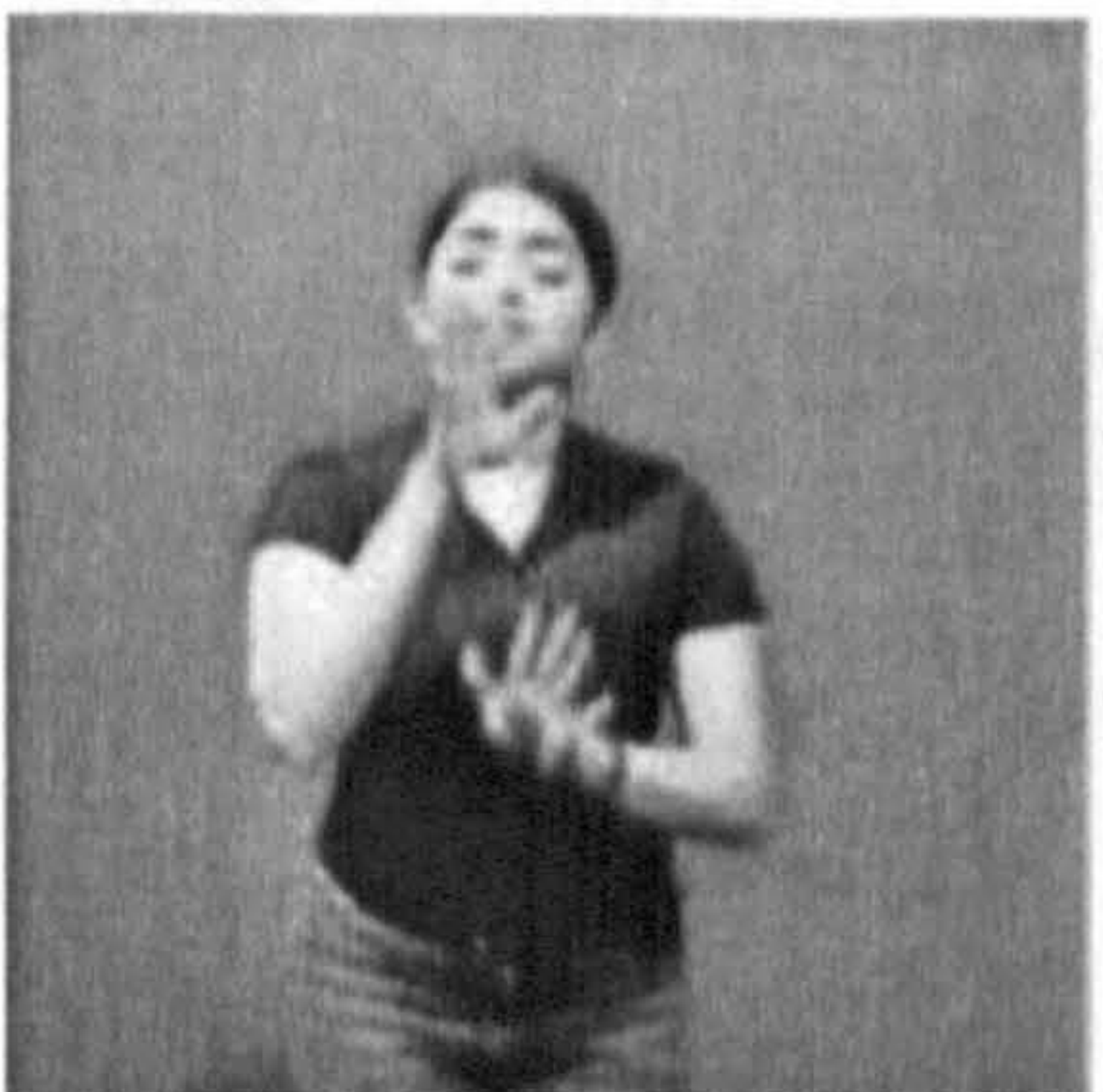
a) hands-down posture



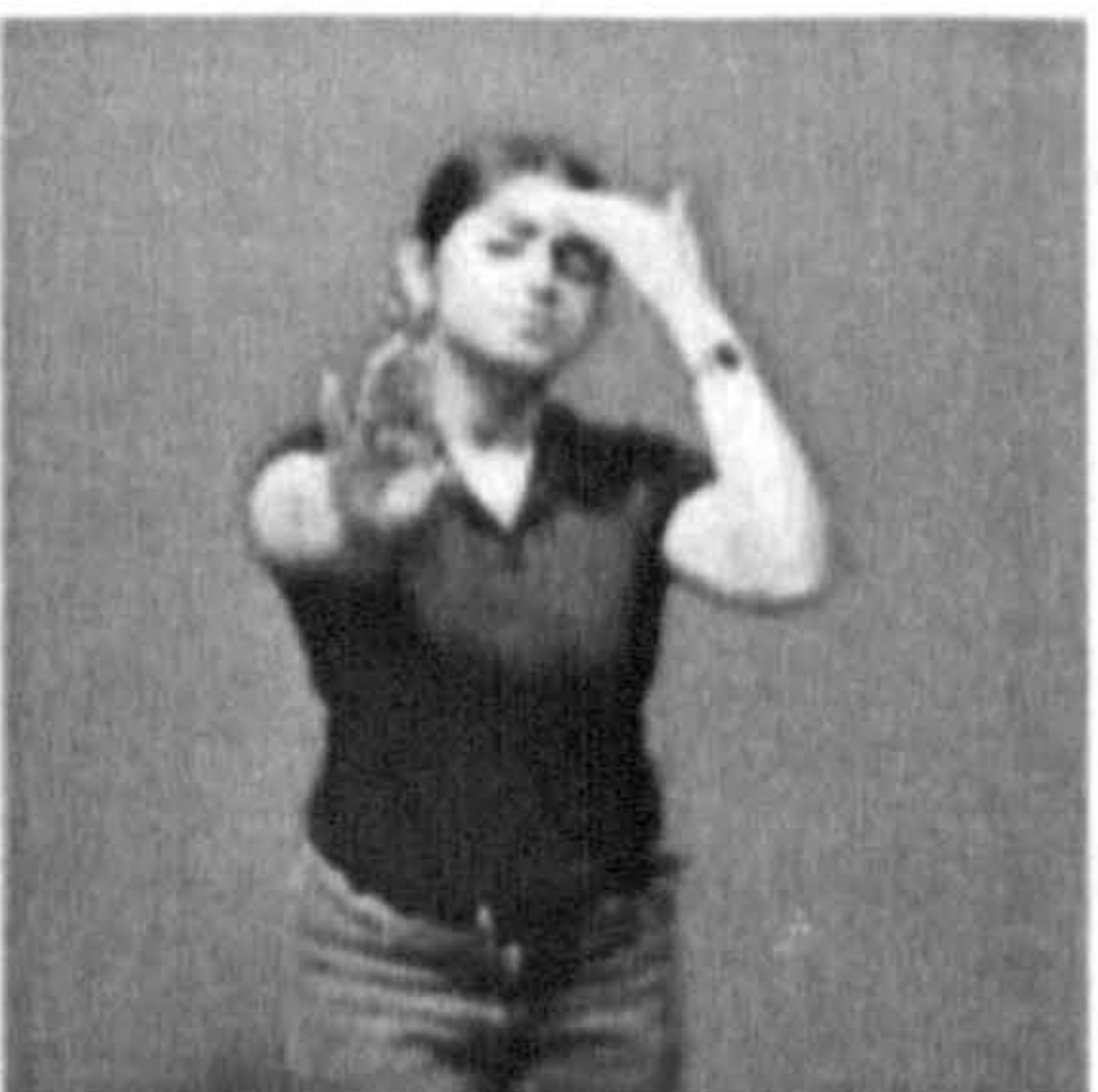
b) LETTER



c) THROW-THE-LETTER



d) WATER-FLOWS



e) FORGET-ME-NOT1



f) FORGET-ME-NOT2

Figure 12.7 Rita DeSarker’s *Forget Me Not*

This underspecified person the poet takes is analogous to the first person narrative with the use of “I” in spoken language fiction or poetry. As in the case of the first person narrative, this Poetic-I is not necessarily overlapped with the poet. However, because no other character is referred to, the audience is often naturally drawn to identify Poetic-I with the poet. Unlike character’s gaze, in which there is an understanding that the poet and the character are separate identities, the distinction between Poetic-I and the poet is usually very vague. This reflects the nature of body-as-text in sign language literature. Rose (2006) states that because artistic signing is

“filtered through the body of the artist/performer”, it “transforms the notion of identity in relation to text” (134). The strong embodiment we find in sign language haiku further blurs the division of the poet and Poetic-I.

The first person narrator in written fiction sometimes comes out of the story and acknowledges the presence of the reader (as in *Jane Eyre* when the heroine declares “Reader, I married him”, or when Mark Twain starts *The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn* with the protagonist’s monologue directly addressing to the reader: “You don’t know about me without you have read a book by the name of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer; but that ain’t no matter”), although it is still clear that they are fictional characters and are not identified with the author. This function is fulfilled in sign language poetry through the gaze to the audience. The gaze of Poetic-I, on the other hand, is more internalized in the story. It abandons extradiegetic awareness and prescience, and by doing so, creates intimacy between the poem and the audience. Poetic-I is a medium through which the audience experiences the poetic world more directly. It is characterized by both direct involvement as in character’s gaze and lack of specific identity as in prescient gaze or in gaze on hands b) (in this sense, Poetic-I is an “I” without too much “I” in it).

Just as there are different types of first person narrators (some are omniscient while others are ignorant; some are identified with protagonists, while others narrate through more marginal characters, some are more emotional, others are more detached), the gaze of Poetic-I creates different impressions. For example, Jessica McKinney’s ASL *Memory* can be characterized with the same unspecified Poetic-I as in DeSarker’s previous poem, and both of them contain similar topics (memory and oblivion, flow of water, throwing an object into water). But the impression of the two poems is very different. DeSarker’s poem involves more emotion than McKinney’s. This is partly because DeSarker looks forward (although not directly to the audience) whereas McKinney maintains a sideways gaze. This contrast is most evident from their contrastive gaze pattern in hands-down posture (Figure 12.7 a versus Figure 12.8 i). McKinney refuses to enter eye contact with the audience. The forward gaze of DeSarker brings the poem into here-and-now space, whereas the sideways gaze of McKinney creates distance between the real world and poetic world (recall the discussion of Sutton-Spence and Woll (1999) that straight gaze indicates present while sideway glance indicates past).

Memory's ashes
Drift softly into a fast river
full of life

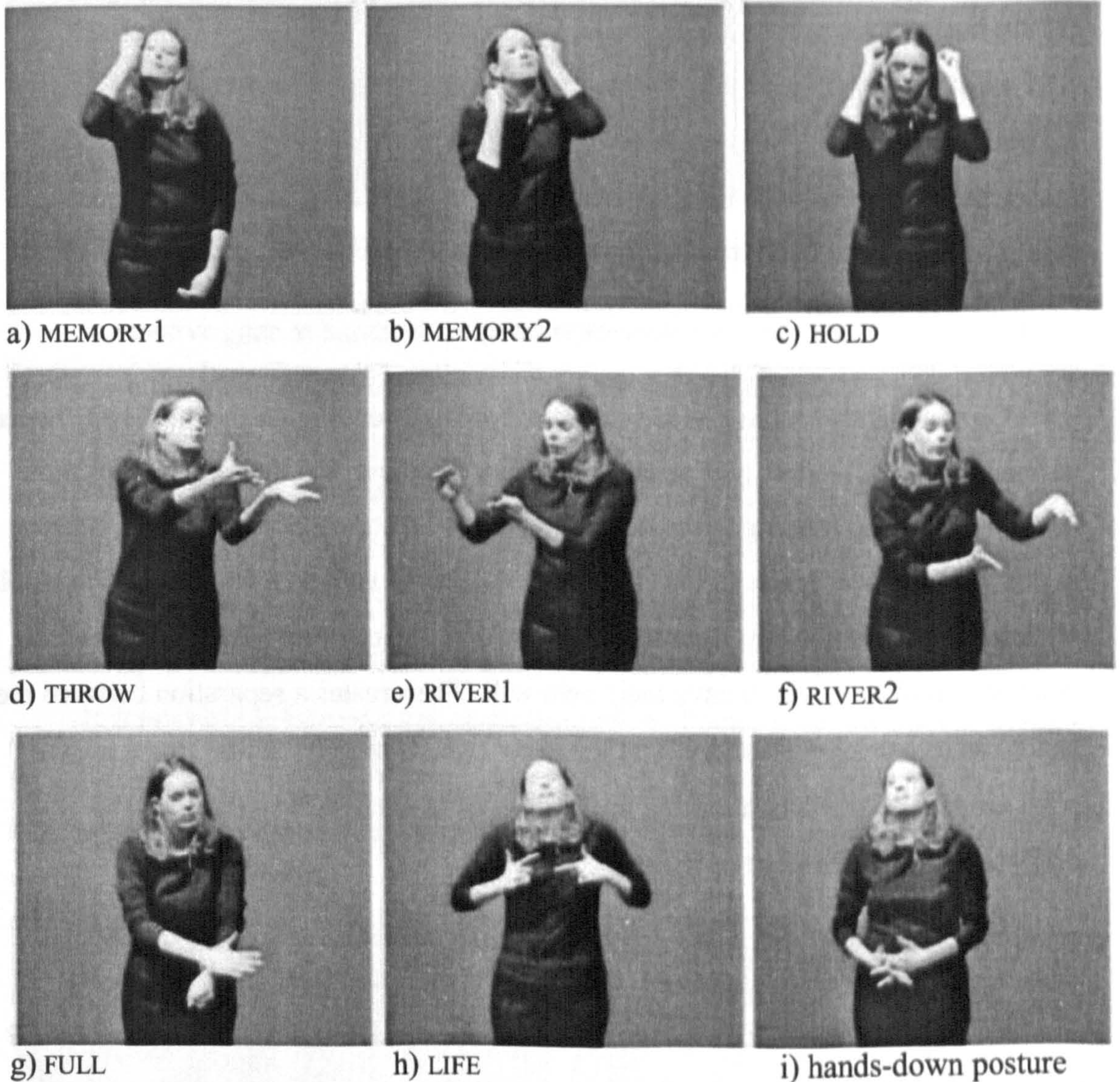


Figure 12.8 Jessica McKinney's *Memory's Ashes*

12.4.4. Gaze at hands a) Reactive gaze at hands

Gaze at hands is the gaze that is cast upon the signer's hands and follows their movement. As Sutton-Spence (2005) points out, such use of eyegaze is frequently deviant - something that is not commonly found in everyday signing. In everyday conversation, signers mostly look at their interlocutors, not at their hands.

However, in poetry, it is quite common to constantly look away from the audience and gaze at hands.

By casting a glance at the hands, the poet foregrounds the configuration or the movement of manual signs. It is connected to the point Sutton-Spence and Woll (1999) made in relation to the linguistic gaze behaviour. The gaze follows the hands only when their motion is perceived as motion (such as OPEN-THE-DOOR). When the movement of the hand does not imply action (DOOR as a noun) eyegaze does not follow the hands. In poetic signing as well, gaze at hands highlights the configuration or the movement of the sign, and sets “poetic expression on display” (Ormsby 1995b: 240).

Gaze at hands can be divided into two types, depending on the relation between gaze and hands. The first type separates the poet (represented by the gaze) from the manual signing by looking at the hands. I call this “reactive gaze at hands”, because in this gaze the poet reacts to the storyline just like the audience would do. They look at their hands as if they are remote and unfamiliar objects. The hands are “seen” as independent objects which have their own will. This creates a separation between the hands (which develop the story) and the body (which watches it). By doing so, the poets emphasise the dynamics and immediacy of manual signing (the fact that it is really taking place in front of them).

Reactive gaze at the hands shows strong empathy of the poet to the poem. The poet exists as a person with a certain perspective. This is a crucial difference between reactive gaze and non-reactive gaze at hands (see below). The poet actively uses facial expressions to show their reactions to the poem

For example, in Rosaria Giuranna’s *Haiku –a LIS poem–*, the poet looks at her hands as if she is actually looking at a pair of lovers (Figure 12.9). This allows her to show emotion through facial expressions. She even smiles or frowns at the lovers as their story is developed through her hands. In doing this, she is fulfilling the role of “a model viewer”, that is, to react to the storyline developed by the manual signing.

This gaze pattern requires the metalinguistic awareness of the audience that the poet’s hands and eyegaze represent different poetic spaces, even though they physically belong to the same person. Thus this is understood as a case of *poetic blending*, as discussed in the previous chapter.

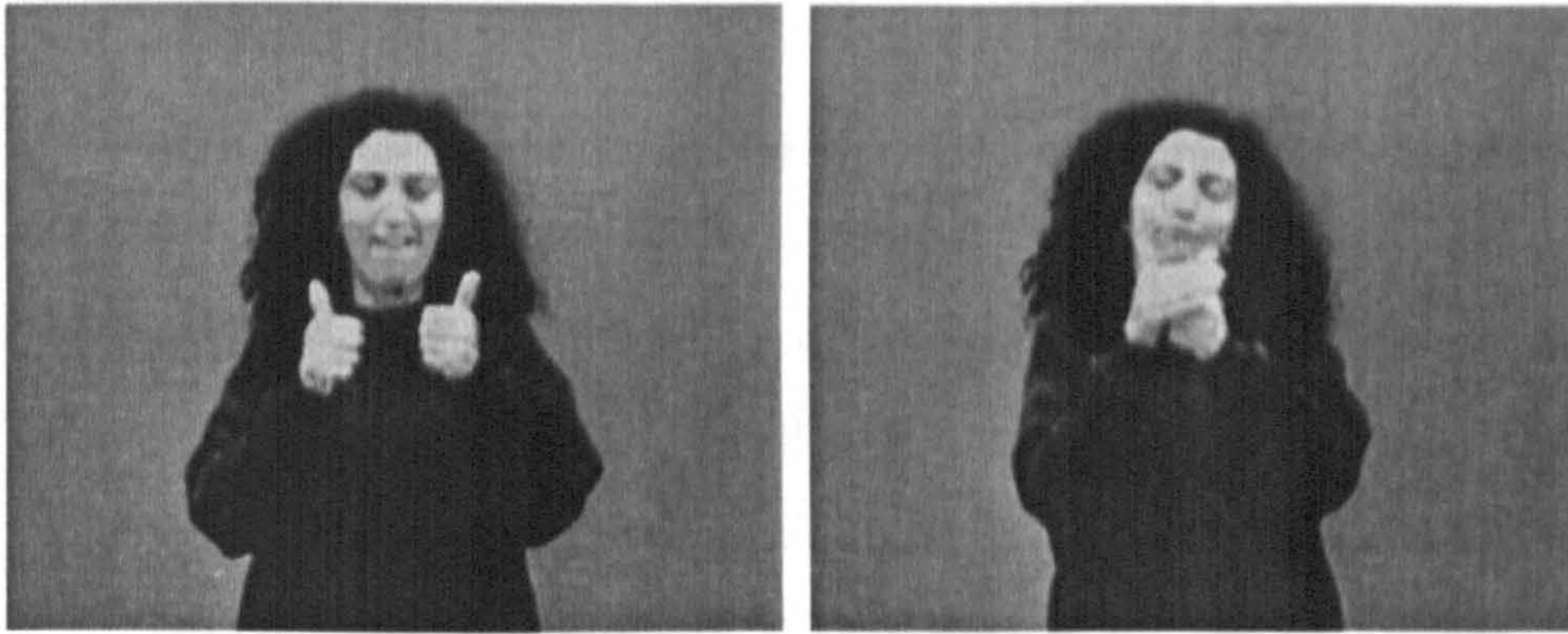


Figure 12.9 Gaze at hands in Rosaria Giuranna’s *Haiku –an LIS poem-*

In reactive gaze at hands, the signer, represented by the eyes, pretends to know nothing about what hands are doing or where the story is going (“feigned ignorance”). As a result, the poet often pretends to be surprised by the movement of their own hands. *Spring* by Marita Saunamäki provides a good example. Throughout the poem, the poet follows her hands with uncertainty. When she signs FLOWERS, she puts her face near her hands, and suddenly withdraws with a surprised look when the hands turn into BUTTERFLIES and fly away (Figure 12.10).

It is possible to interpret this as an example of Poetic-I; i.e. the poet is taking in the first person narrative. However, an intense look of the poet on her hands highlights a strong division between the gaze and the hands.



Figure 12.10 The sequence of FLOWERS and BUTTERFLY in Marita Saunamäki’s *Spring*

Sutton-Spence (2005) mentions similar use of gaze on hands in Dorothy Miles’ *Trio*. There are two occasions where Miles creates a new sign and looks down at her hands as if she is not certain what they are signing. As Sutton-Spence puts it:

It is almost as though she is asking, “What is this sign?” Clearly, such a question would rarely be asked in normal everyday signing because signers would expect to know what signs they were making. (193)

12.4.5. Gaze at hands b) non-reactive gaze at hands

While reactive gaze at hands separates the poet from the hands, non-reactive gaze at hands merges into manual signing. The hands, the gaze, and the body are all made into one coherent poetic narrative. In this way, the poets can show the complete immersion in their signing. Gaze is cast upon hands, but this act of “seeing” is not significant because it does not provide a subjective viewpoint. The poet ceases to exist as a volitional being, and the gaze has become part of the narrative (the poet as a poetic tool). Thus non-reactive gaze at hands does not reveal much emotion through facial expression. The audience is drawn into the story not *through* someone’s perspective but by directly watching the poet.

Carol Padden’s ASL sign for DEATH in *Winter* (Figure 12.11) is a good example of non-reactive gaze at hands. The poet does not react to her manual signing, but simply traces the movement of her hands to highlight its significance. The ASL sign DEATH does not inherently involve motion in everyday signing (i.e. the movement of the hands does not have direct association). But in this particular performance, Padden foregrounds its movement, and as a result DEATH is seen more like a transition from life to death than a simple lexical sign. This contributes to the symbolic effect of this poem (which talks about contrast in life to death).

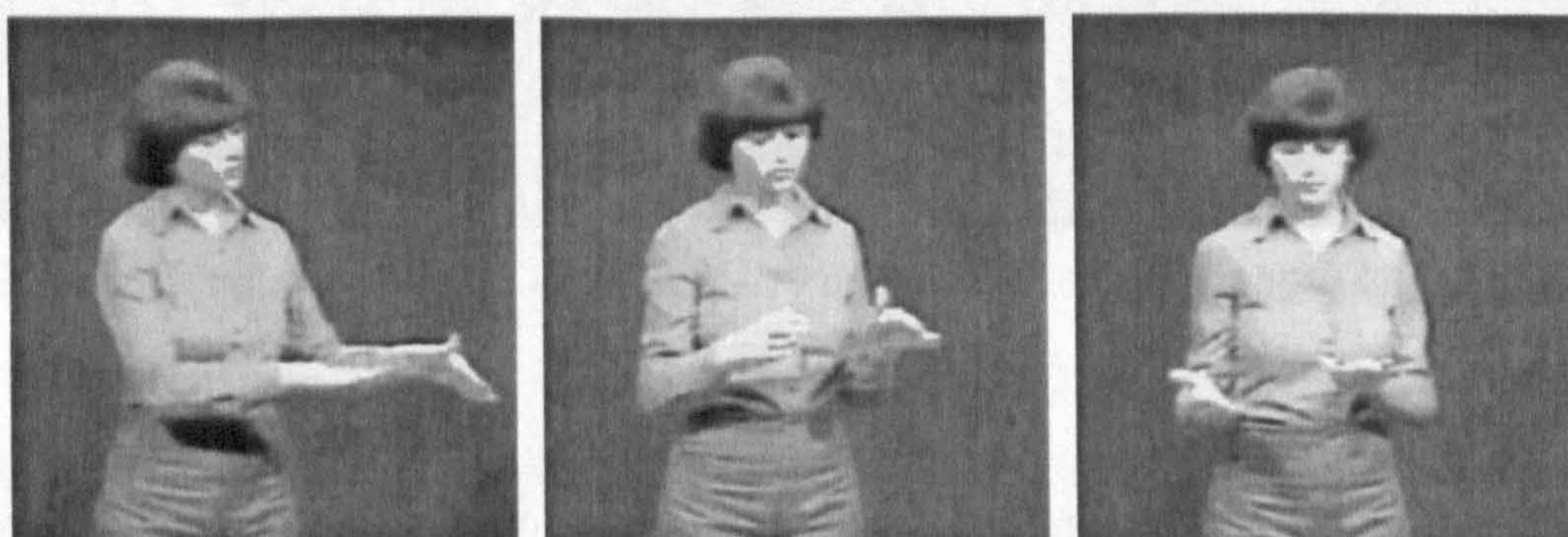


Figure 12.11 Sequence of DEATH in Carol Padden’s *Winter*

Wim Emmerik’s *Falling leaf* also shows non-reactive gaze at hands throughout the poem. The only exception, as we discussed earlier, is the last sign PURPLE, when Emmerik looks straight into the camera. This corresponds to the contrastive use of

productive versus lexical signs in this poem. The last sign PURPLE is the only arbitrary lexical sign. In other words, it is not visually linked to its referent, i.e. the colour purple (because sign language is not capable of direct visual representation of a colour). Therefore the poet is not motivated to look at his hands to highlight its physical configuration. He changes his gaze pattern into an extradiegetic narrator's gaze and adds a comment to his visual description (recall the discussion on commentary space in Chapter 11). Figure 12.12 e) and f) show this transition from gaze at hands to the narrator's gaze. Because two signs, LEAF-FALLING and PURPLE share the same handshape, there is an ambiguous moment when it is unclear whether his left hand represents a leaf or has become part of the lexical sign PURPLE. The shift of gaze takes place during that ambiguous moment and marks the division of the poem (performing the function of *kireji* which we discussed earlier).

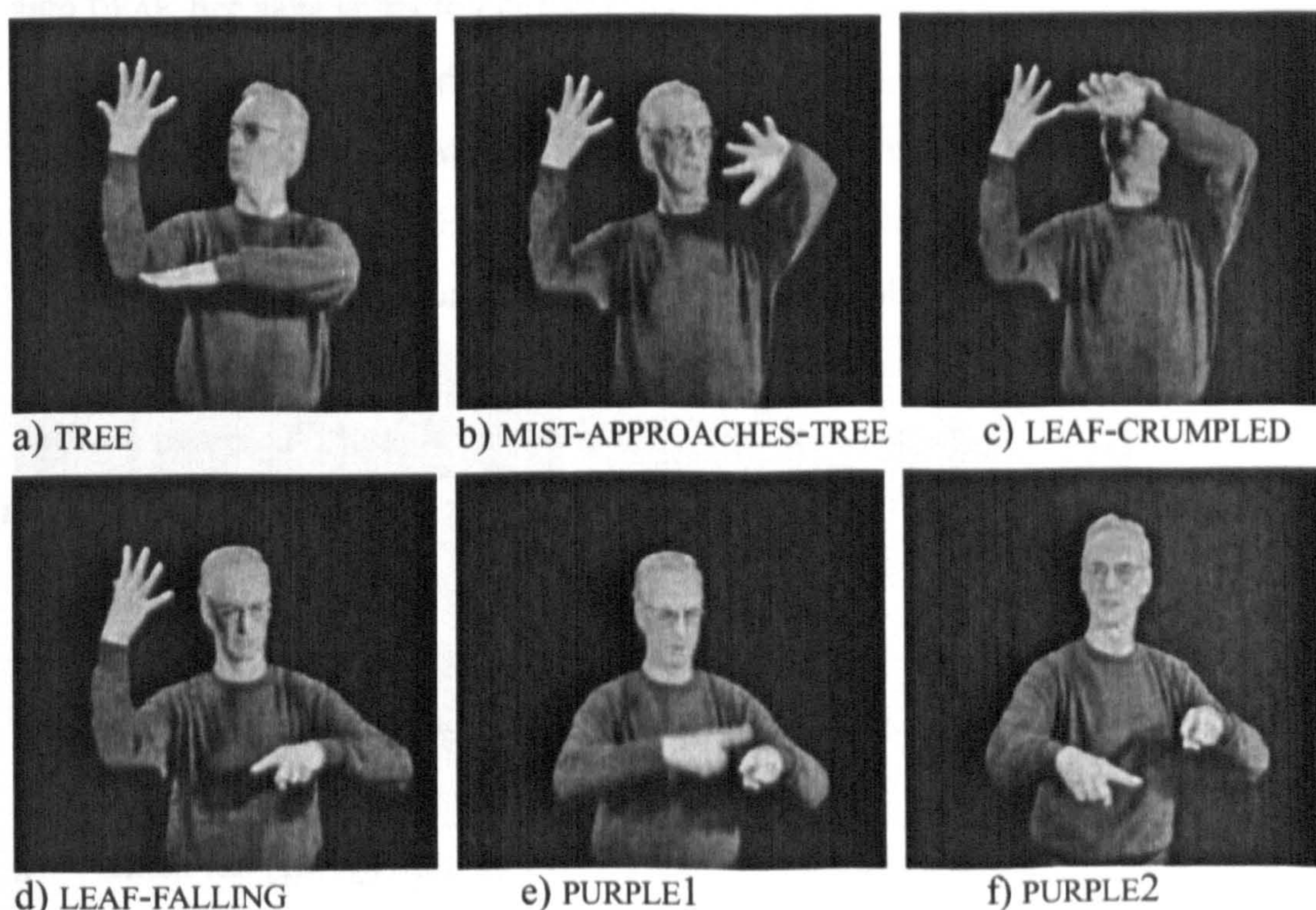


Figure 12.12 Gaze pattern in Wim Emmerik's *Falling leaf*

Non-reactive gaze at hands is similar to prescient gaze (see below) in that the poet has omniscient power. This is in contrast to reactive gaze at hands in which the poet pretends to be ignorant. For example, when Dorothy Miles traces her hand movement at the beginning of BSL *Autumn*, she shows prescient/panoptic use of

gaze, i.e. she sees the whole tree in front of her before her hands trace the outline (Figure 12.13 c).

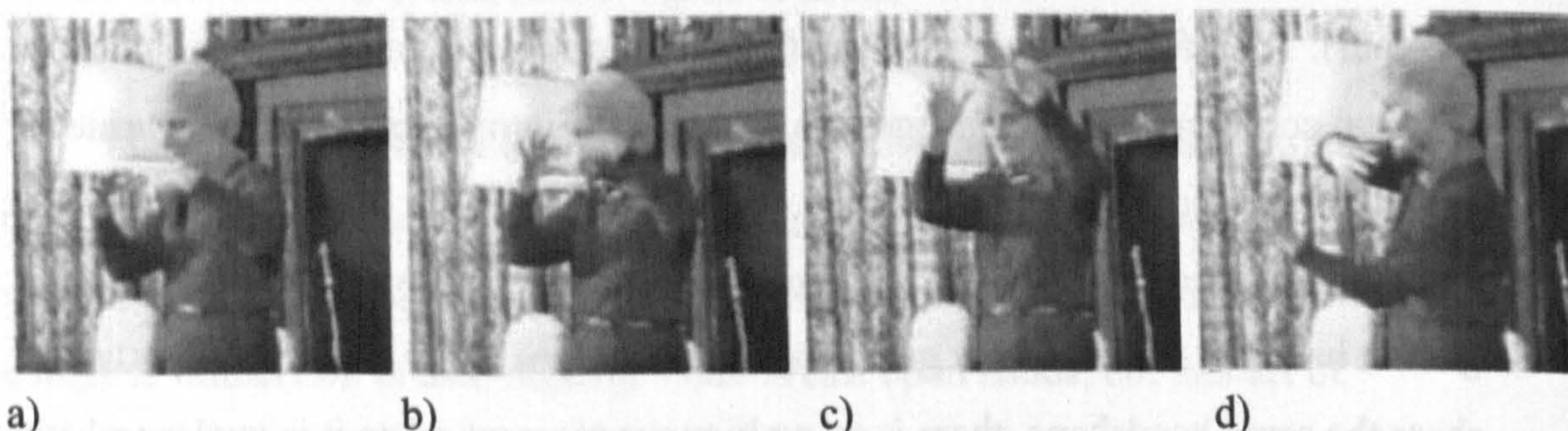
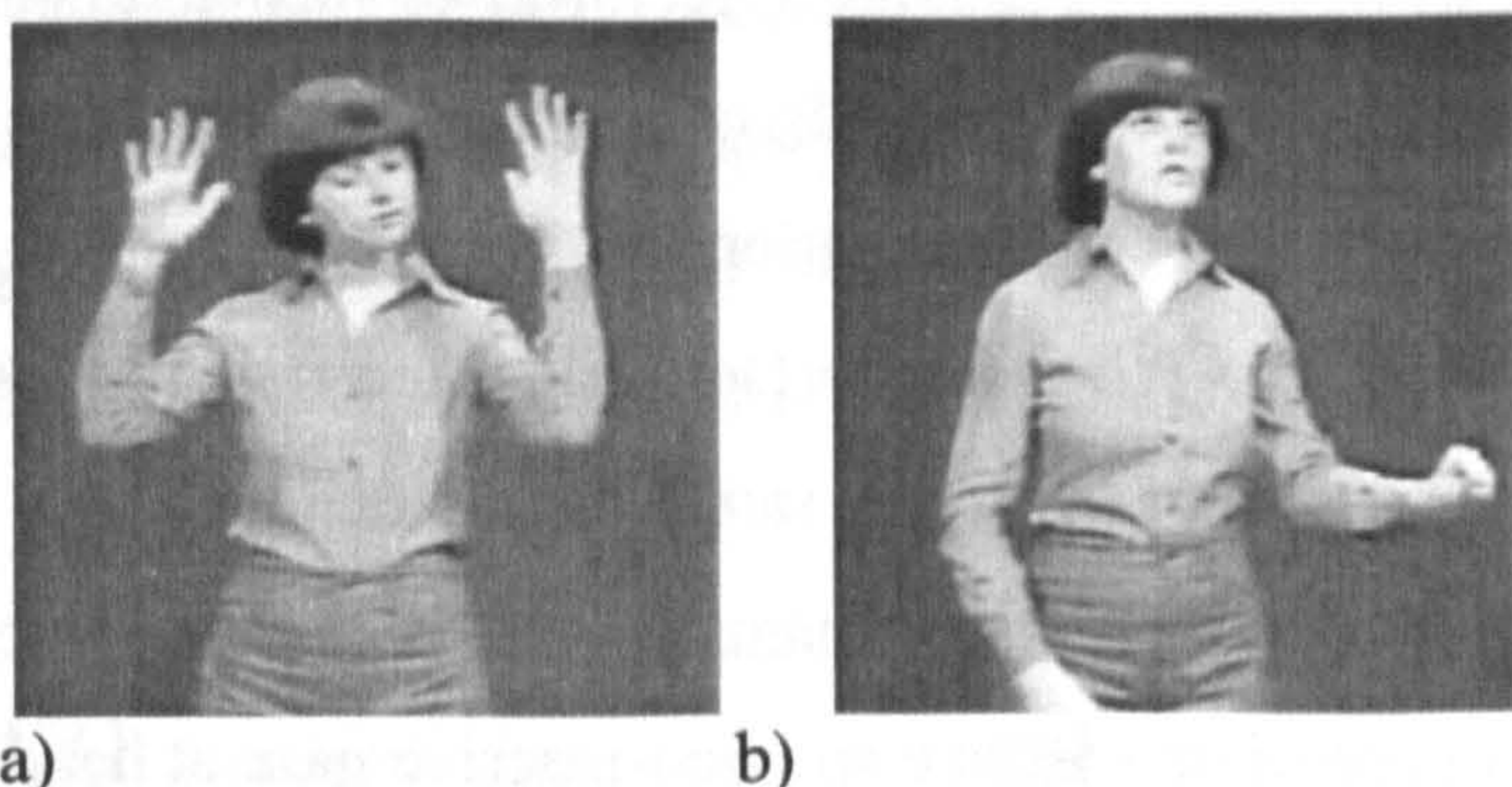


Figure 12.13 Non-reactive gaze at hands in Dorothy Miles' *Autumn*

12.4.6. Prescient eyegaze

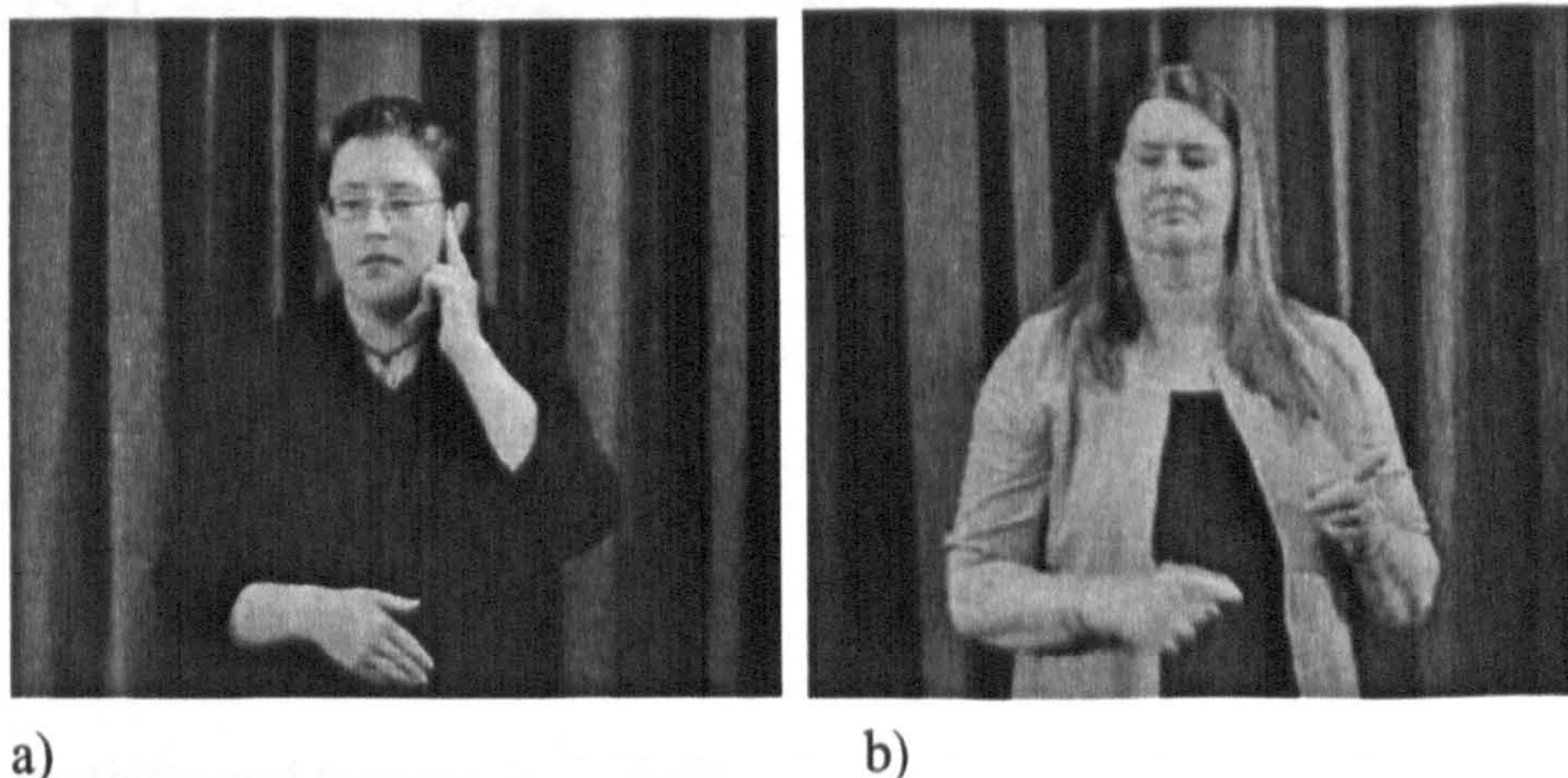
In sign language poetry, the poet often “foretells” the location of an upcoming sign by looking at that location. This is what I call *prescient gaze*. In prescient gaze, the gaze is cast upon a certain direction and the hands will follow it (in contrast to reactive gaze at hands, in which the gaze follows the hands). This reveals the omniscient power of the poet. The poet knows precisely what is happening in the poem, so their gaze can go one step ahead of the manual signing. As in non-reactive gaze at hands, the poet with prescient gaze does not exist as a volitional being with a subjective perspective. Instead, the poet uses his or her gaze to smoothly lead the audience to the next scene. The audience is introduced to the next move before the hands start signing. Prescient gaze makes the transition of signs smooth.

For example, in Carol Padden's ASL performance of Dot Miles' *Seasons*, her gaze often precedes manual signing. In Figure 12.14 a) from *Spring*, her hands present SUNSHINE (right hand) and TREE (left hand), while her gaze already looks down, foretelling the next sign (ON-RIPPLED-WATER) which will be made at the lower space. Figure b) is a gaze shift in the sequence of GREEN-DEPTHS GREEN-HEIGHTS from *Summer*. Padden's eyes are already looking up when she finished signing GREEN-DEPTHS, foretelling the location of GREEN-HEIGHTS.



a) b)
Figure 12.14 Carol Padden's examples of prescient gaze (a: SUNSHINE and TREE, b: GREEN-DEPTHS on the hand, eyes raised toward GREEN-HEIGHTS)

Prescient gaze is often used to indicate the second element in juxtaposition while the hands are still referring to the first. For example, Donna Williams' BSL *Identity* involves two images of herself (as hearing and as Deaf). At the end of the sign DEAF, her gaze shifts to her right to foretell the sign HEARING (Figure 12.15 a). Similar use of prescient gaze can be found in Penny Beschizza's BSL *Politics*, when she juxtaposes politicians in the United States (left) and Britain (right) (Figure 12.15 b).



a) b)
Figure 12.15 Examples of prescient gaze in Donna Williams' *Identity* (a) and in Penny Beschizza's *Politics* (b)
(a: DEAF on the hand, eyes cast toward HEARING, b: hands pointing to UNITED-STATES, eyes cast toward BRITAIN)

Prescient gaze and non-reactive gaze at hands are especially popular in poems which involve more description than action. When there is a great deal of action in the poem (as in Jesus Marchan's *Fish*, John Wilson's *Lift*, or Marita Saunamäki's

Spring), the poem consequently involves an agent and/or recipient of such action and thus the poet is likely to take in someone's viewpoint. In contrast, there are poems which describe a natural scene, which may involve motion that does not require human agency, such as Wim Emmerik's *Falling leaf* or Dot Miles' *Seasons*. In those poems, eyegaze is used to highlight parts of the scene, rather than to denote a subjective viewpoint. Such objective description of a natural scene is characteristic of traditional haiku. Utilisation of prescient eyegaze and non-reactive gaze at hands in sign language haiku can be understood as a counterpart to the use of objective language in traditional Japanese haiku.

Prescient gaze helps to instantiate a poetic frame. As explored in the previous chapter, a skilled poet is able to re-produce a clear, coherent, and panoptic mental image of a poetic scene (=frame) in the signing space. For example, Figure 12.16 is the poetic frame reconstructed from Dorothy Miles' *Spring*, which we discussed in the previous chapter.

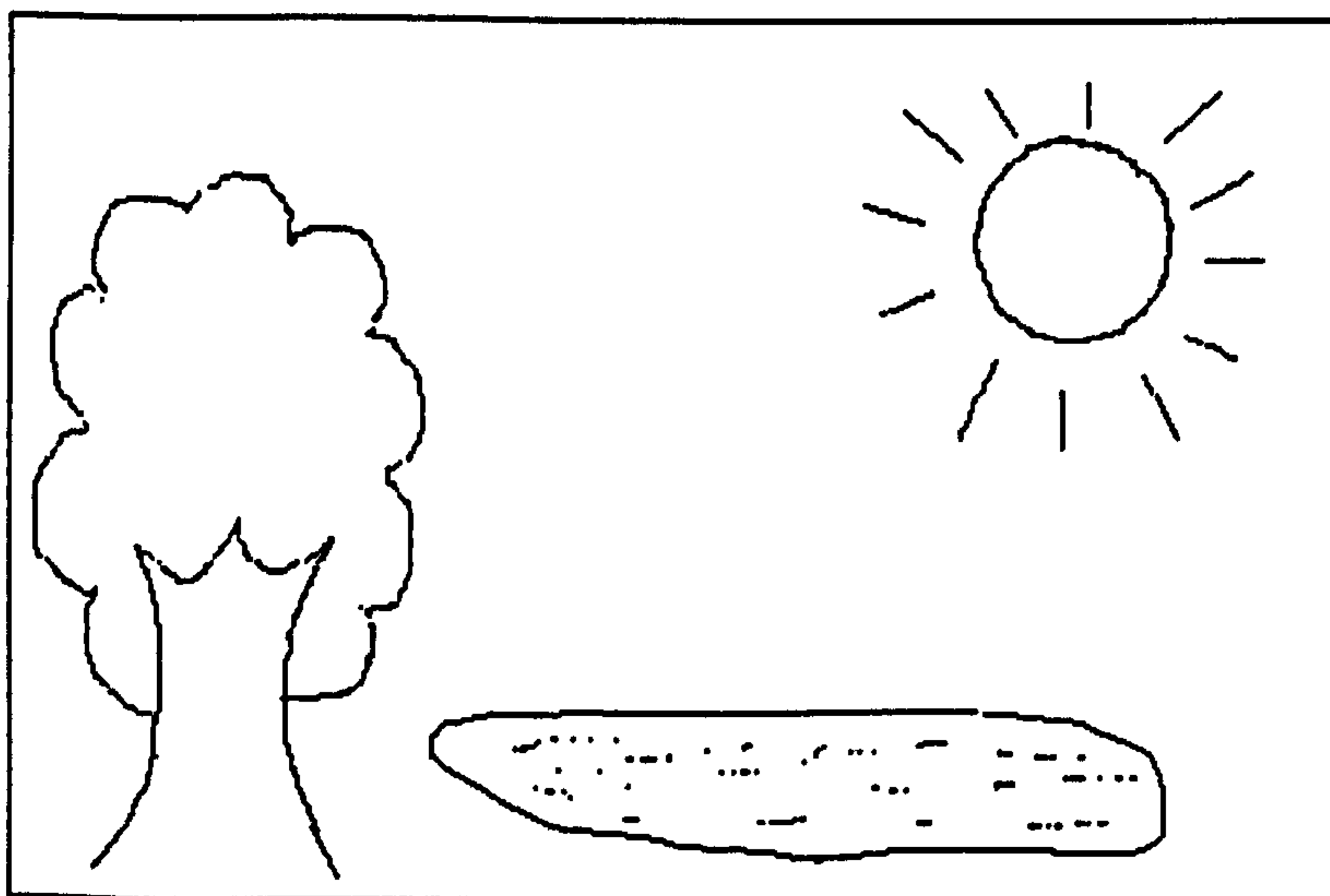


Figure 12.16 A poetic frame reconstructed from Dorothy Miles' *Spring*

The presentation of a poetic frame in the signing space is most successful when eyegaze and manual signs interact to instantiate various parts of the frame in a short span of time. Figure 12.17 shows how manual signs and eyegaze map the frame onto the real space. Because there is a time lag between prescient gaze and hands that follow it, the visualisation of the poetic frame becomes multi-layered, which allows

a detailed and panoptic description. Figure 12.18 shows the temporal development of gaze and hands. From Figure 12.17 and 18 together, it is clear that three components (gaze, right hand, left hand) move independently from each other to instantiate different parts of the frame at a different timing.

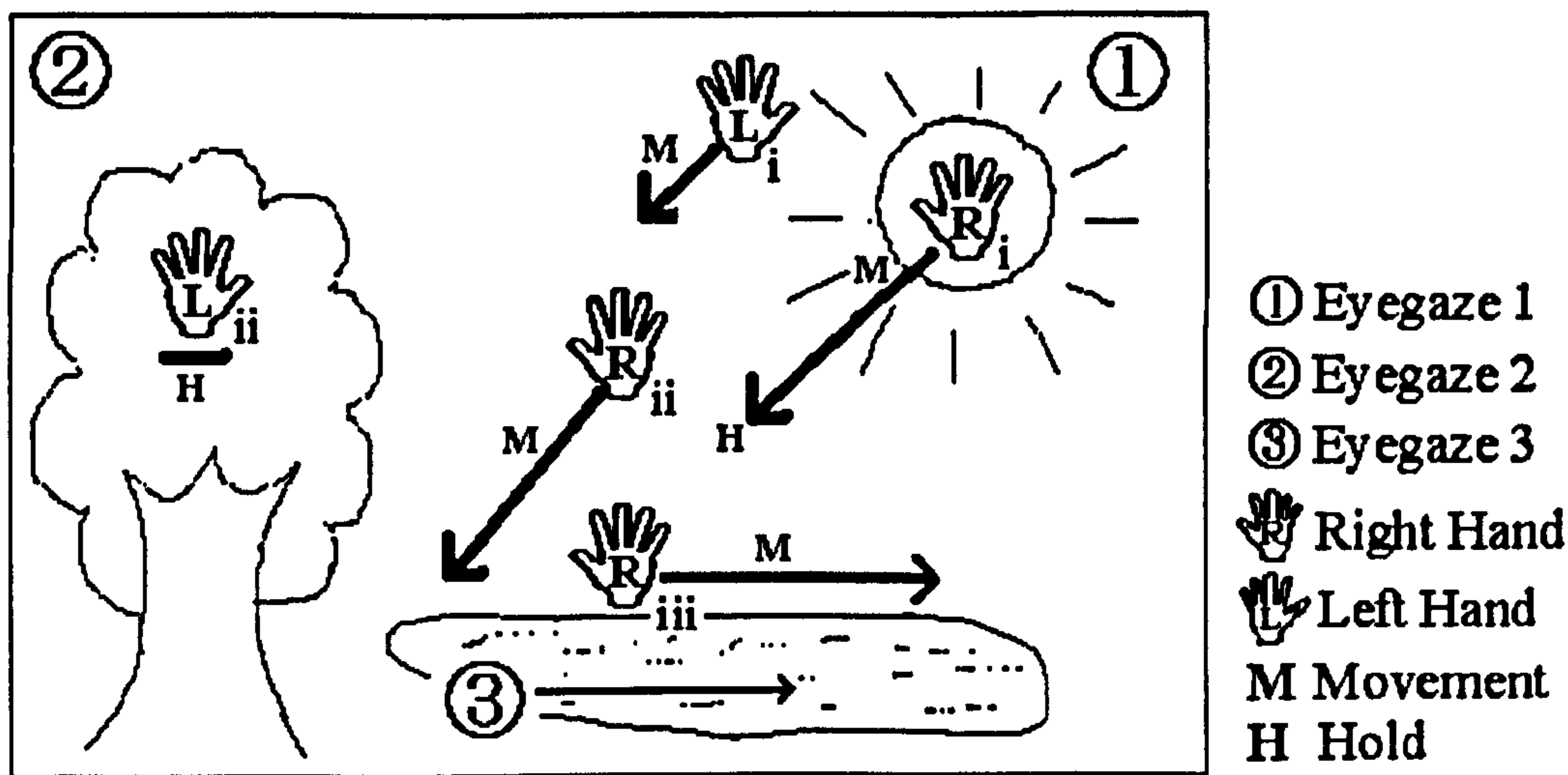


Figure 12.17 Eyegaze and manual signs used to represent the image in Figure 12.16

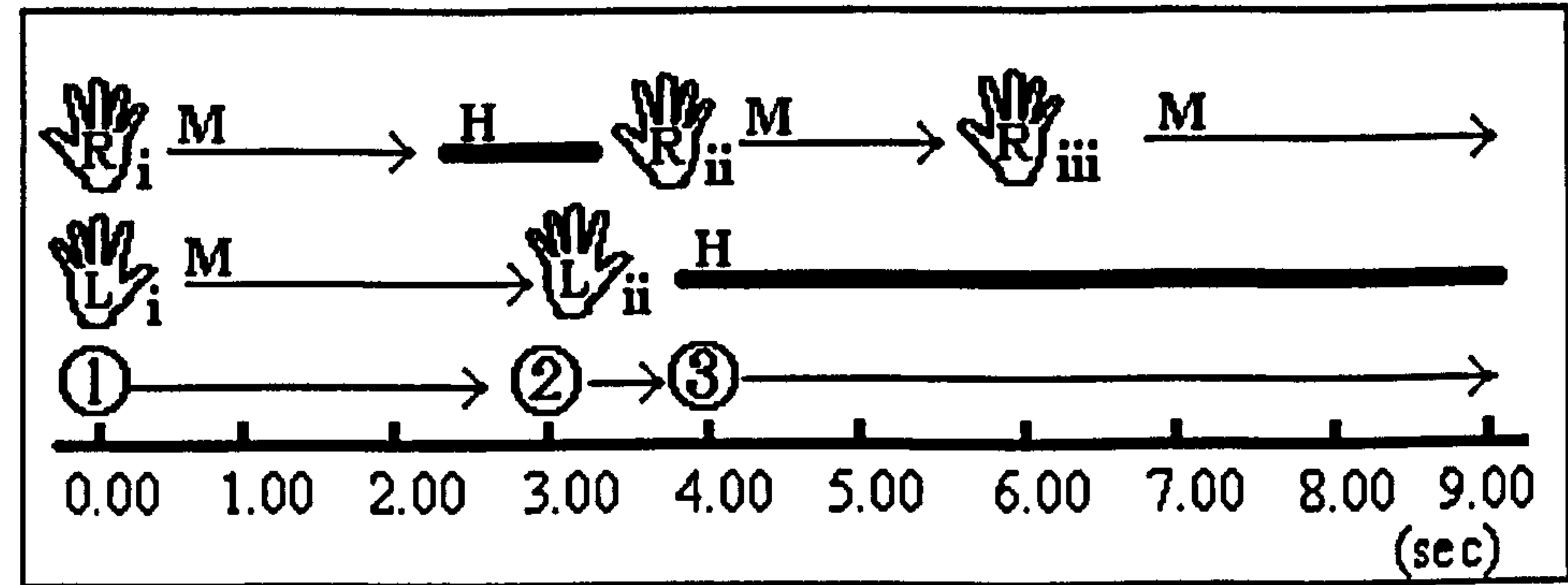


Figure 12.18 Shift of gaze and manual signs according to time

Note that prescient eyegaze is more extensive than manual signing, both spatially and temporally. Spatially, the prescient gaze can direct the audience’s gaze beyond the signing space. This is in contrast with gaze at hands, in which the direction of the gaze is identified with the location of the hands. Figure 12.17.illustrates this point by placing the gaze (①②③) external to the area of hands. Temporally, the prescient gaze is often less transient than hands. Once the gaze is cast upon a certain location, it stays there throughout the duration of corresponding hand movements, or stays even longer until a new location is assigned. For example, at the beginning of *Spring*, Padden’s gaze is fixed onto the direction of the sun while

the manual signs evolve, changing handshape, location and movement (Figure 12.19). Because the gaze direction is retained for longer, the audience can still “see” the sun at its original location even after the hands start to move downward. This can be seen as a “pegging” function of eyegaze.



Figure 12.19 Example of stable gaze versus transient manual signing

12.4.7. Non-directed gaze

From time to time, the poet casts a glance at an unspecified location simply to avoid eye contact with the audience. The direction of the gaze is not significant. It may be regarded as a short pause. I call it non-directed eye gaze.

12.4.8. Summary of the gaze patterns

I have identified seven main gaze patterns in poetic signing, using examples from sign language haiku. As an overview, I have summarised the features of the six major patterns in Table12.1 below.

First of all, the direction of the gaze is a defining factor in gaze to the audience and in both types of gaze at hands. In character’s gaze and in the gaze of Poetic-I, the direction of the gaze varies according to where the character is looking. Prescient gaze can be cast upon any place which corresponds to parts of the poetic frame which will be highlighted by manual signs.

The poet represents different roles in each gaze pattern (the question of “whose eyes do they stand for?”). In gaze to the audience, the poet is a narrator who is aware of the presence of the audience. In character’s gaze the poet acts as a character, and

in Poetic-I the poet takes in a viewpoint of an unidentified first person. In reactive gaze at hands, the poet functions as a model viewer who reacts to the story line just like the audience. In non-reactive gaze at hands and in prescient gaze, the poet exists as part of the narrative without bringing in any subjective viewpoint.

The six patterns can be divided into two groups: those which allow the poet to exist as a person with volition (in gaze to the audience, character's gaze, in Poetic-I, and in reactive gaze at hands), and those which do not (non-reactive gaze at hands and prescient gaze). In the first group the poets can show volition and emotion; in the second group they cannot. Also, the act of "seeing" in the second group is not significant because the poet does not exist as a seeing person in the poetic space.

Character's gaze, Poetic-I, non-reactive gaze on hands, and prescient gaze are all intra-diegetic (i.e. the signer is completely immersed within the story world), whereas gaze to the audience and reactive gaze on hands are extra-diegetic (the signer steps out of the story world and observes the story from a distance).

The relation to hands is also an important feature. In gaze to the audience, the hands are seen as the hands of the narrator (represented by the gaze). In non-reactive gaze and in prescient gaze, both hands and gaze are unified to be part of the narrative. In contrast, in reactive gaze at hands, the hands are seen as having an independent existence from the poet. In Poetic-I and character's gaze, hands, gaze, and the body usually belong to the same person, but it is possible for the hands to be separate from the body of the poet. For example, in the sign CAT-TAPPED-ON-SHOULDER in Linda Day's *Deaf Cat* (Figure 12.3 e), the poet's gaze takes the viewpoint of one character (the cat) but her right hand belongs to the other character (the man) and thus there is a separation of the hand and the gaze.

Finally, the feature of omniscience indicates if the poet shows their omnipotent knowledge of the story or they pretend to be ignorant. In character's gaze and in Poetic-I, the poet cannot possess this knowledge because he or she is only a character in the story world, and in reactive gaze at hands, the poet pretends to be unaware of the story developed by the hands. In the other three gaze patterns the poet possesses omniscient power.

	Gaze to the audience	Character's gaze	Poetic-I	Reactive gaze at hands	Non-reactive gaze at hands	Prescient gaze
Direction of gaze	at camera /audience	various	various	at hands	at hands	various
role of the poet	narrator	character	Poetic-I	viewer	poetic tool	poetic tool
Volition	+	+	+	+	-	-
Emotion	+	+	+	+	-	-
Significance of "seeing"	+	+	+	+	-	-
Intra/extra diegetic	extra	intra	intra	extra	intra	intra
relation to hands	unified	unified/ detached	unified/ detached	detached	unified	unified
omniscience	+	-	-	-	+	+

Table 12.1 Overview of the six gaze patterns

12.5. Summary

This chapter has observed different gaze patterns in sign language haiku and what they reveal about the stance of the poet in relation to their poems.

Poetic signing is very flexible in shifting between different gaze patterns. Sometimes it is difficult to identify the exact moment when the poet shifts between different gaze patterns, resulting in ambiguity. Such ambiguity is part of the poetic effect, producing various interpretations among the audience.

Earlier I claimed that eyegaze is linked with *how* the poems are presented rather than *what* they are. In other words, eyegaze is more related to the *performance* side of sign language haiku. In the next two chapters, I will analyse the performance of BSL haiku poems in order to observe how particular features identified in the previous chapters and this chapter work to create the overall highly intense poetic effect of a signed haiku.

Chapter 13

Three Haiku Quartets by Deaf Poets

13.1. Introduction

The BSL Haiku Festival 2006 had four Deaf poets who constituted the panel for the competition. They performed several poems in the evening of the festival, which include three haiku ‘quartets’ created impromptu and partly collaboratively.

The basic structure and topics were proposed by the organiser. Each one of four poets would take one part of the quartet, and three different quartets would be performed: *Day (Morning, Afternoon, Evening, and Night)*, *Year (Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter)* and *Life (Infancy, Childhood, Middle Age, and Old Age)*. The information on the poems, the poets, and the length of each poem are provided in Table 13.1.

Although the idea was delivered to the poets in advance, most of them created the poems on the day of the performance. They had about 30-45 minutes for preparation. At the beginning, they talked to each other to assign who would take which part, but then they individually composed and practised their parts. In other words, although they were aware that their performance would be part of a larger body (both formally and thematically), each poem was composed independently for its own sake.

This chapter analyses these three quartets in depth in order to explore the features of sign language haiku as created by experienced Deaf poets.

Quartet	Poem	Poet	Length (sec)
Day	Morning	John Wilson	00.12
	Afternoon	Paul Scott	00.09
	Evening	Richard Carter	00.06
	Night	Johanna Mesch	00.11
Year	Spring	Paul Scott	00.12
	Summer	Richard Carter	00.07
	Autumn	Johanna Mesch	00.12
	Winter	John Wilson	00.13
Life	Infancy	Richard Carter	00.04
	Childhood	Johanna Mesch	00.11
	Middle Age	John Wilson	00.12
	Old Age	Paul Scott	00.08

Table 13.1 Overview of the quartets

13.2. Overall characteristics

Although these poems were individually created and they are very different in their theme and form, there are a few characteristics common to all of them.

Brevity

The length of each poem varies (4-13 seconds), but all of them are very brief. This may be not only because the poets were aware of the concise nature of haiku, but also because their poems are part of the larger body. The brevity of these poems is impressive especially when compared with the poems created by the participants of the Haiku Festival, most of which go over 30 seconds. This clearly shows that these four poets are more experienced in the discipline needed for the creation of haiku than the participants of the festival.

Humour

The majority of the poems are casual, light-hearted, and humorous. As described in Chapter 4, traditional haiku includes humour, which is easily applicable to sign language poetry as humour is an essential part of Deaf literature. The humour in these poems is frequently impossible to translate directly into a spoken language.

Subjectivity

In the majority of the poems, the poet takes in the perspective of Poetic-I, or a character's viewpoint. There is strong subjectivity in the way they describe the poetic scene. As a result, there is a great deal of embodiment and emotion expressed through facial expressions. For example, in *Spring* Paul Scott not only takes the perspective of the tree but also *becomes* the tree himself and develops the story using his body. Thus this poem is full of anthromorphism.

Creativity

All poems are characterised by the use of creative signs, rather than using established lexical signs. For example, there is not a single established lexical sign in either Paul Scott's *Spring* or John Wilson's *Morning*. These poems are highly iconic.

Individual Styles

So far, the overall similarities among these twelve poems have been described. But there is a great deal of differences in the poems because each poet has their own firmly established style or "poetic voice". These quartets are a good opportunity to compare individual styles, as the four poets were asked to create poems in the same poetic style (haiku), with similar topics, and with the same amount of preparation time.

Richard Carter's poems are by far the briefest and the least descriptive ones. The minimalism in his approach to haiku creates intense poetic effects within a small number of signs (his poems consist of only 2-3 signs).

Johanna Mesch's poems, in contrast, are characterised by longer and more detailed descriptions of a poetic scene (especially in *Autumn*). Her signing tends to create a relatively detached impression, and is less expressive or embodied, making her poems more solemn, symbolic and spiritual.

John Wilson's poems also describe poetic scenes, but he adds comical or personalised touches to his poems. He is capable of turning descriptions into stories.

Paul Scott shows his skills in completely turning himself into a character (whether he is acting as an unspecified office worker as in *Afternoon*, or as someone else such as an old man in *Old Age*, or as "something" else such as the tree in *Spring*). His signing is highly embodied, emotional and expressive, in which sense it

can be said that his poems represent the most “typical” nature of sign language poetry.

13.3. Day

13.3.1. Translation and Glossing

Morning (John Wilson)

I wake up and open the window wide
And look down on the busy traffic
Cars from left, cars from right
I pick up one car and play with it

STRETCH OPEN-WIDE LOOK-DOWN CARS-GO-BY LOOK-DOWN PICK-UP-A-CAR ROLL-A-TOY-CAR

Afternoon (Paul Scott)

Working hard
A pile of documents has disappeared
Mouse click
Close, close, close
Everyone, go home!

TYPING LOOK-LEFT TYPING PILE-GONE MOUSE-CLICK CLOSE CLOSE CLOSE GO-HOME ORDER

Evening (Richard Carter)

A line of lights
Lying down
Looking up

LIGHTS LIE-DOWN LOOK-UP

Night (Johanna Mesch)

The day has been good for me
Now leave me alone
The earth turns and the night falls
I like the night, too
Another day passes

DAY ME FINE NOW GO-AWAY NIGHFALL FINE ME DAY-PASSES

13.3.2. Overall Theme

The start of the three quartets is Day, in which the four poets each present an aspect of the day (morning, afternoon, evening, and night).

13.3.3. *Morning* by John Wilson

This poem describes a scene in the morning, when the person wakes up and looks down on the busy street.

During the first part where he wakes up and looks down on the street, all signs are symmetrical and even the eyegaze is cast left and right (Figure 13.1 a-f). At the end, when the poet picks up a car, everything becomes “centred” and “closer to the body”, focusing on the car that surprises the audience by turning into a small toy car. These last two signs PICK-UP-A-TOY-CAR (g) and ROLL-A-TOY-CAR (h) are the climax of this poem. Until this point, the poem has been describing two separate spaces in the same frame, namely, the illustration of someone at the window and the street scene (the existence of which is only revealed through the gaze direction of the poet and the classifier representing the cars). But in the last sign, Wilson blends these two spaces in a surreal way. He literally picks up a car from the street, and starts to play with it. This is not a simple blending of the two spaces, as it involves the *action* of the protagonist in one space toward the object in the other, which violates the size and the distance compatibility between the spaces. The person cannot pick up a car from the street because, first of all, the car is too big for a hand and, secondly, he cannot reach out to the street from where he is. This last sign only makes sense in the real space, where the audience understands that the poet is using sign language in which the car is represented in front of the signer with a miniature size. It requires metalinguistic awareness of the audience. It may resemble the reaction to a Cubistic painting which synthesizes multiple perspectives into a single image.

This blending of spaces makes this poem very original.

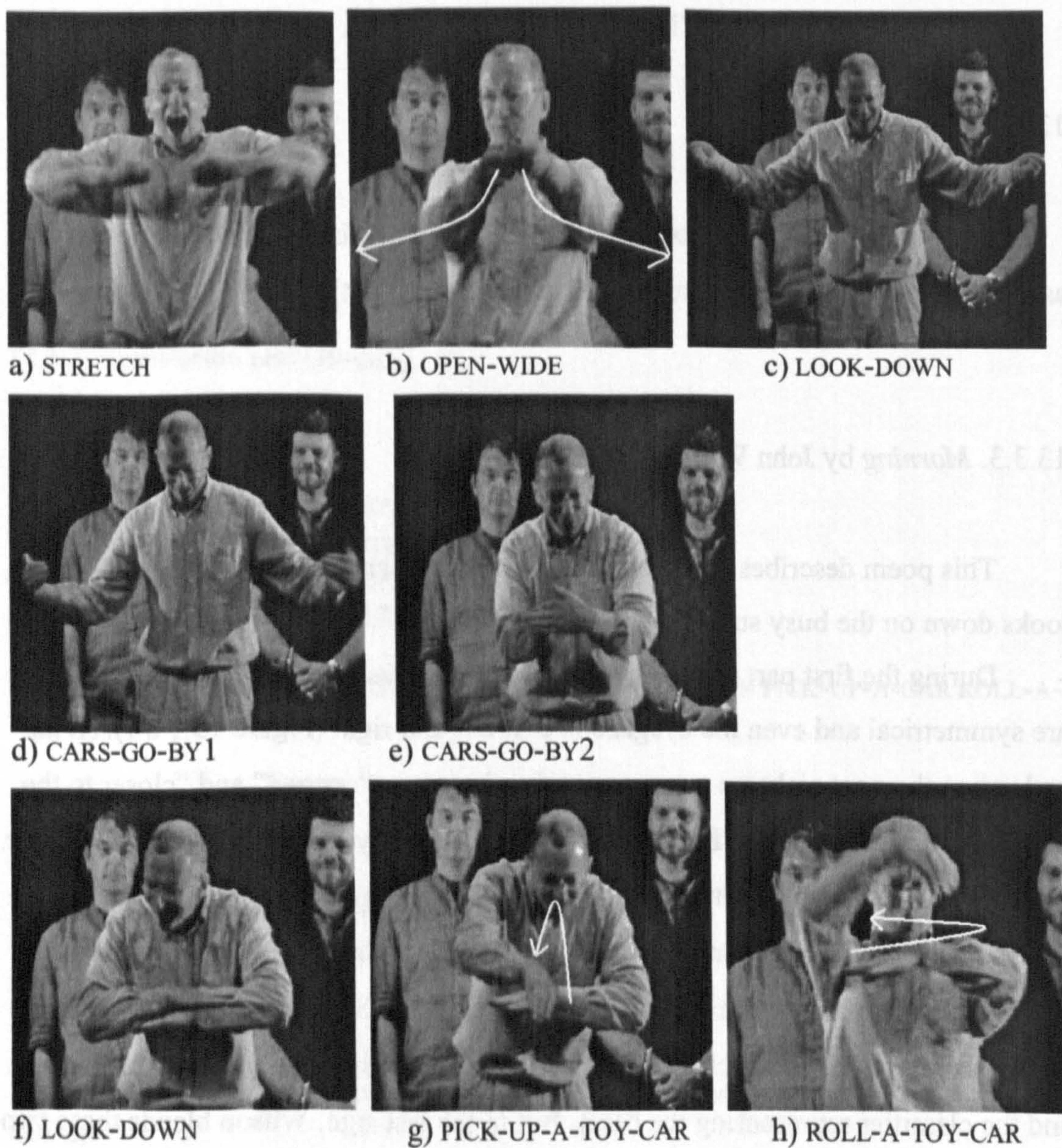


Figure 13.1 *Morning* by John Wilson

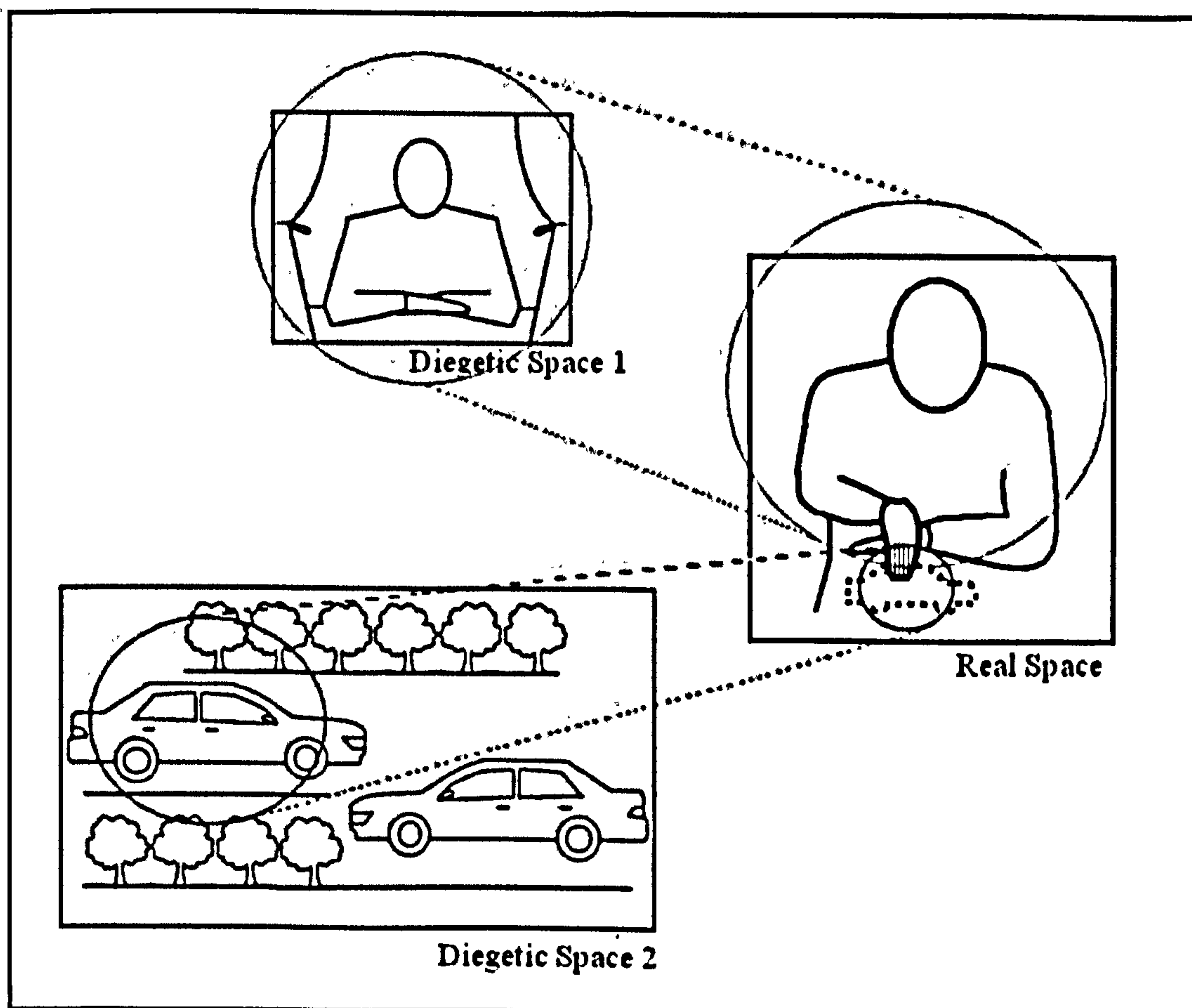


Figure 13.2 Diagram of the blended spaces in *Morning* by John Wilson

13.3.4. *Afternoon* by Paul Scott

The theme of this poem is an ordinary afternoon at the office. Such description of everyday life is a good theme for a haiku. The poet takes a character's viewpoint throughout the poem.

Symmetry is used effectively to create a rhythm in this poem. The poem has the pattern of repeating symmetrical signs and asymmetrical signs (S→A→S...).

TYPING (S) → LOOK-AT-LEFT (A) → TYPING (S) → PILE-GONE (A) → MOUSE-CLICK (S) → CLOSE (S) → GO-HOME ORDER (A)

There is also a symbolic use of the right and left spaces in this poem. Whereas the major part of the signing takes place at the centre of the signing space, serving as the default location (Figure 13.3 a, d, e), there are a few occasions when the signs are located either on the right or on the left. The documents are piled up on his right (c),

and the invisible colleagues are located to the right as well (f). This right space stands for his work and interaction with the colleagues. In contrast, there is only one occasion when he looks at his left, most likely casting a glance at the clock on the wall (b). This subtle gaze reveals the protagonist's longing to go home. In this sense, the leftward direction symbolises his private time. The contrast of right and left directions as public and private spaces can be observed in Johanna Mesch's *Night* as well.



Figure 13.3 *Afternoon* by Paul Scott

13.3.5. *Evening* by Richard Carter

This poem is very brief, and it is difficult to grasp exactly what this poem is talking about because of the under-specification of meaning of the classifier signs. Each viewer will come up with their own interpretation. One signer who saw this poem understood it as a description of someone lying in a bathtub with lines of candles on both his sides. This is Carter's own explanation. Others say that the poet is lying on the street looking at the street lamps, which is also plausible. The brevity

and simplicity of this poem leaves a huge space for interpretation, which is very close to the essence of traditional Japanese haiku.

The arrangement of signs is sometimes symmetrical (LIGHTS) and sometimes centred (LIE-DOWN, LOOK-UP), adding an aesthetic aspect to this short poem.



a) LIGHTS

b) LIE-DOWN

c) LOOK-UP

Figure 13.4 *Evening* by Richard Carter

13.3.6. *Night* by Johanna Mesch

This is the poem about the night time in contrast to the day. The poet is telling the audience that she has been equally fine during the day and the night. But her language (the way she signs the poem) reveals her special sentiment attached to the night.

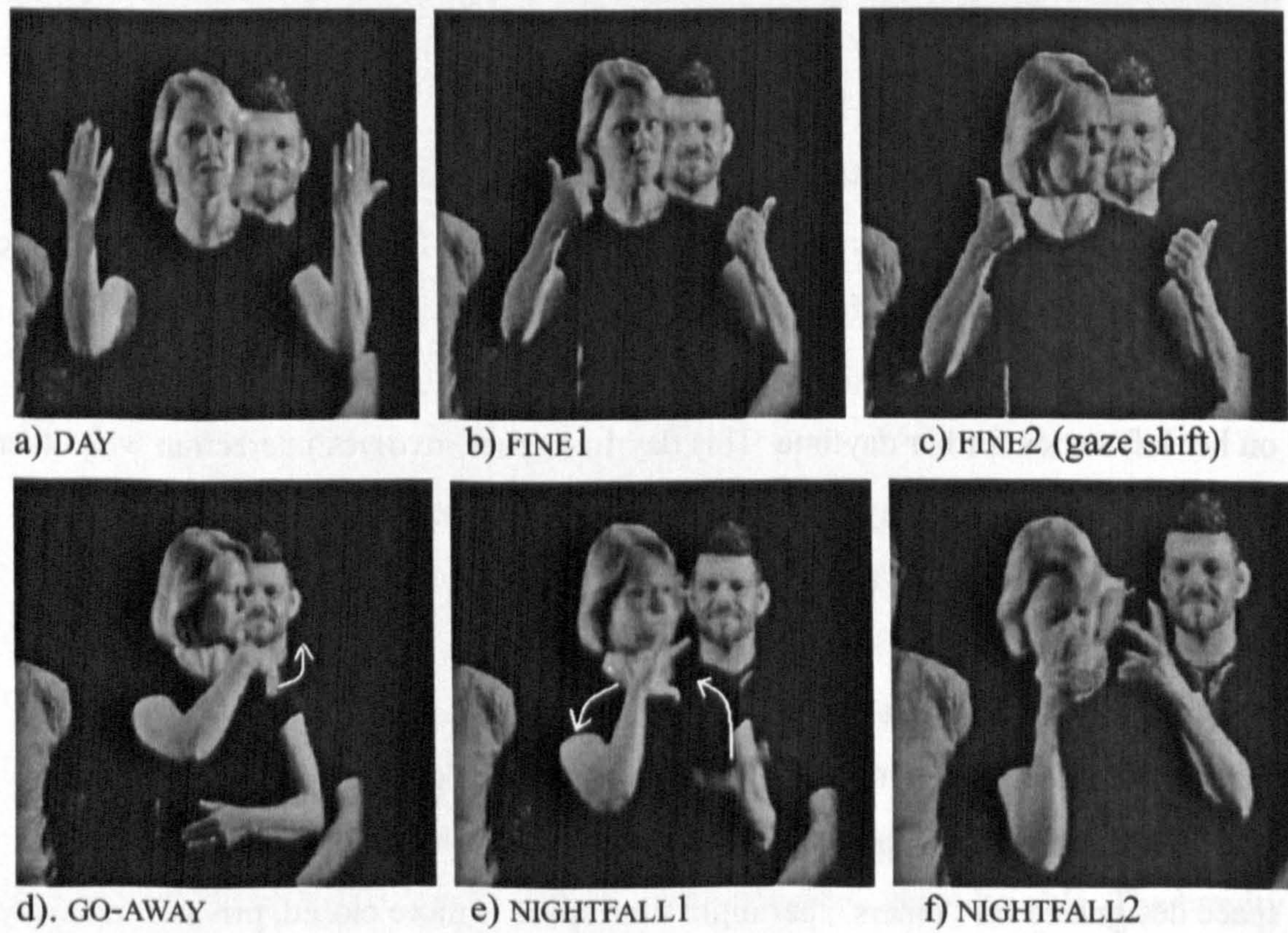
The gaze pattern in this poem separates the signing space into daytime (on her left) space and night time (on her right). During the first three signs (DAY, ME and FINE) Mesch looks directly into the centre of the audience (neutral direction). Then while she is still signing FINE, her gaze shifts to the left (Figure 13.5 c). This space on her left stands for her daytime. This daytime space involves interaction with other people. Thus, when the day finishes, she turns to an invisible audience on her left and tells them to go away and leave her alone (similar to the way Paul Scott places his GO-HOME sign toward his right). Then the earth turns and the night falls, during which she does not maintain eye contact with the audience. When she returns her gaze to the audience, this time she is looking slightly rightward (i), setting up her night time space on her right. While her daytime space is leading to the left end space designated for “others”, her night time space is more closed, private, and away

from the interaction with others. The final sign of DAY-PASSES nicely makes a bridge across these two spaces (the sun rises from left and sets into right).

In this poem, the passing of the time is expressed twice, NIGHTFALL (e-h), and DAY-PASSES (j and k). NIGHTFALL is a very dynamic sign, involving both her arms that move from the shoulder joints. It also involves the turnover of the palm from outward to inward, symbolically representing the day turning into night (as observed in Chapter 6, the palm is likely to be associated with the light, whereas the back of the hand is more connected to the darkness). During this sign, Mesch closes her eyes and ducks her head, as if the signer herself is transforming into new self. This is a very complex and unusual way to express nightfall.

In contrast, DAY-PASSES is expressed with her right hand moving in an arc, representing the sun. This is a common sign to represent the day. It is shorter and simpler than NIGHTFALL, with only one hand from the elbow being mobile, creating a less sonorous impression. Also, the poet looks at her hands while producing this sign, separating herself from the manual signs (whereas in NIGHTFALL, she uses all her body to express the beginning of the night).

All of these contrasts highlight the significance of the night for the poet, which is the theme of this poem.



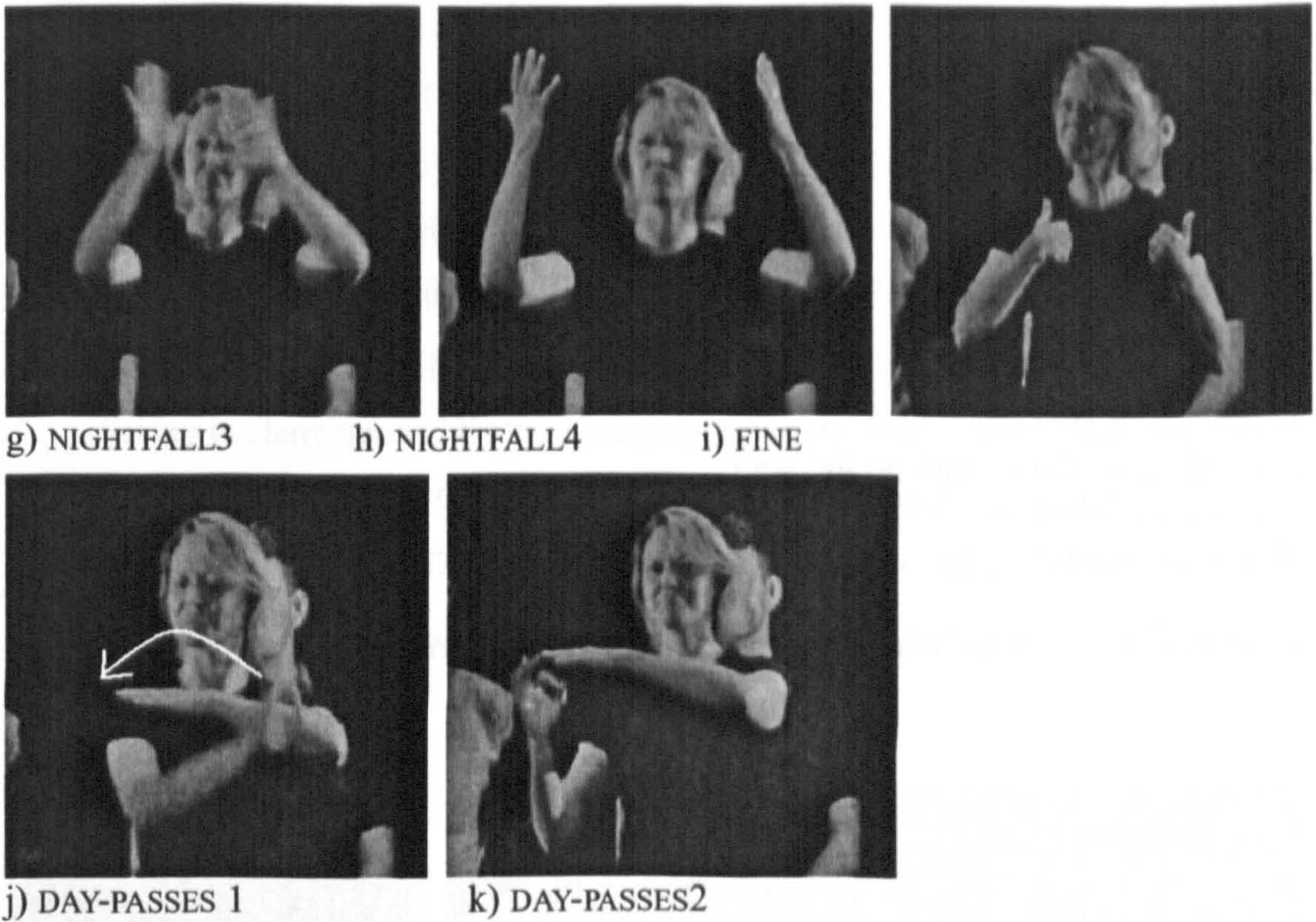


Figure 13.5 *Night* by Johanna Mesch

13.4. Year

13.4.1. Translation and Glossing

Spring (Paul Scott)
 I am a tree, standing
 With heaviness on my shoulders
 I shake it off and straighten myself up
 Ow, ow!
 The buds are coming out

TREE-STANDING TREE-STOOPING TREE-SHAKING-OFF TREE-STANDING-HAPPILY OW!
 BUDS-COMING-OUT

Summer (Richard Carter)
 Sweat dripping
 The fan turns
 Sweat g-n-i-p-p-i-r-d

SWEAT-DRIPPING FAN-TURNS SWEAT-DRIPPING-REVERSE

Autumn (Johanna Mesch)
I embrace a tree
A gale blows it down
Soft light cast upon the pit

TREE1 TREE2 EMBRACE STORM TREE-FALLS-DOWN PIT LIGHT-CAST-UPON-PIT

Winter (John Wilson)
Sunbathing in the picture on the wall
I see a flake of snow
Falling before my eyes

PICTURE-ON-THE-WALL PERSON-LYING SUNSHINE SNOW-FALLING COLD

13.4.2. Overall Theme

Year is a quartet about seasons. Seasons are always associated with nature and form an essential part of traditional Japanese haiku.

Two out of four poems (*Spring* and *Autumn*) pick up “the tree” as a topic. This supports the claim in Chapter 7 that the tree is one of the most popular topics in sign language haiku. However, although Paul Scott and Johanna Mesch selected the same topic, their outcomes are very different from each other.

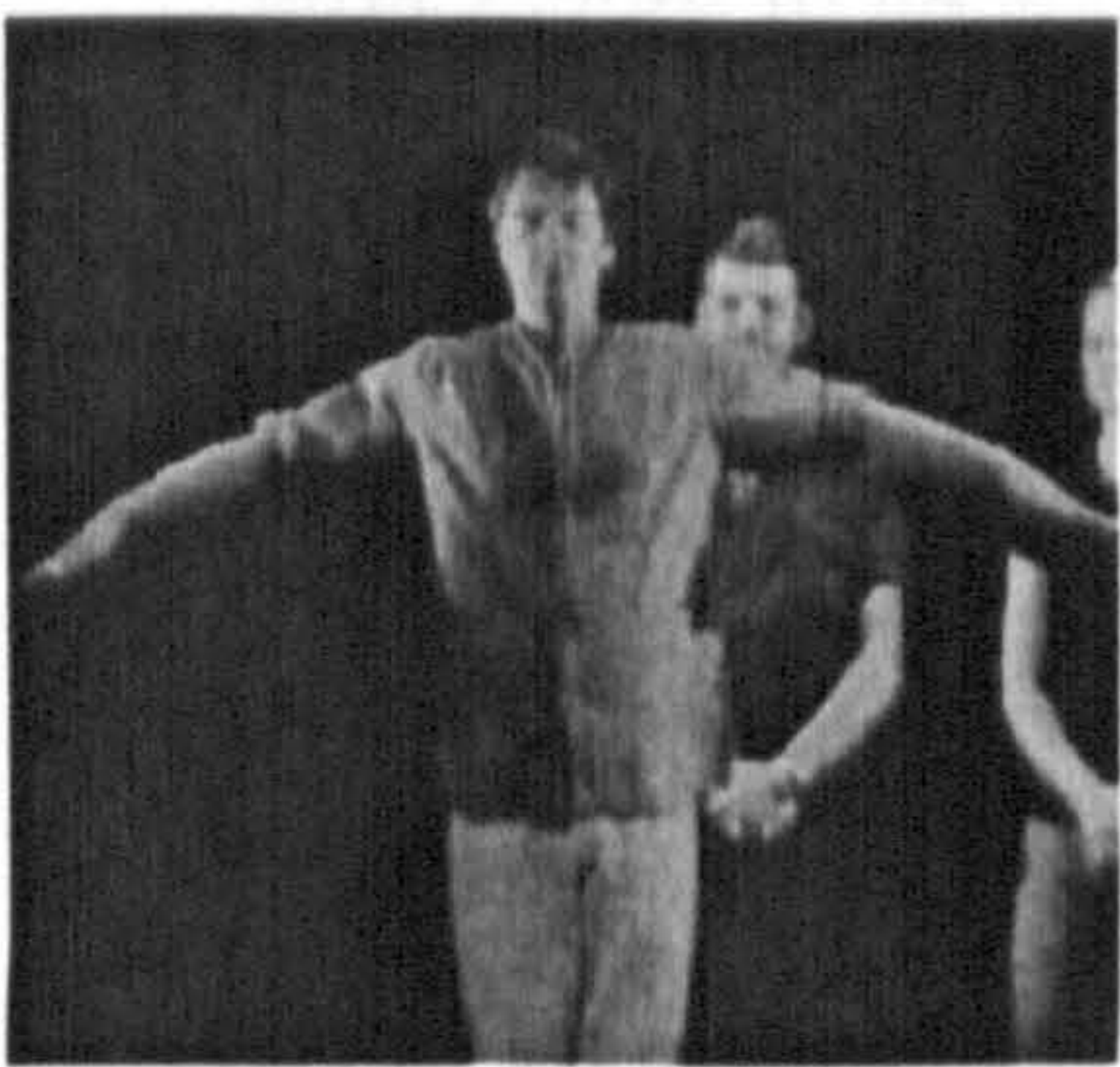
Although these poems are made individually, cross-reference to other seasons can be observed. For example, *Spring* describes snow on the tree’s shoulders: *Autumn* starts with a happy tree of summer and then moves on to deep and solemn atmosphere of autumn. *Winter* makes a contrast with summer in the picture on the wall. The result is a pleasing and satisfying overlap of changing seasons.

13.4.3. *Spring* by Paul Scott

In *Spring*, Paul Scott anthropomorphises a tree, and narrates the poem through the perspective of the tree. During the winter, his shoulders are covered with heavy snow (the poem does not specify what is on the tree’s shoulders, but because this is the poem of spring, it is logical to assume that it is the remaining snow from

the winter). When spring comes, he shakes the snow off from his shoulders and is seemingly happy for a brief moment. Then the buds start to come out from inside the tree and he becomes grumpy again. For the tree, a fresh and happy new season (from a human's viewpoint) simply brings new trouble. This poem starts with one burden (heavy snow) and ends with another (the discomfort of buds coming out), which is a unique way to look at the change of seasons from the tree's perspective.

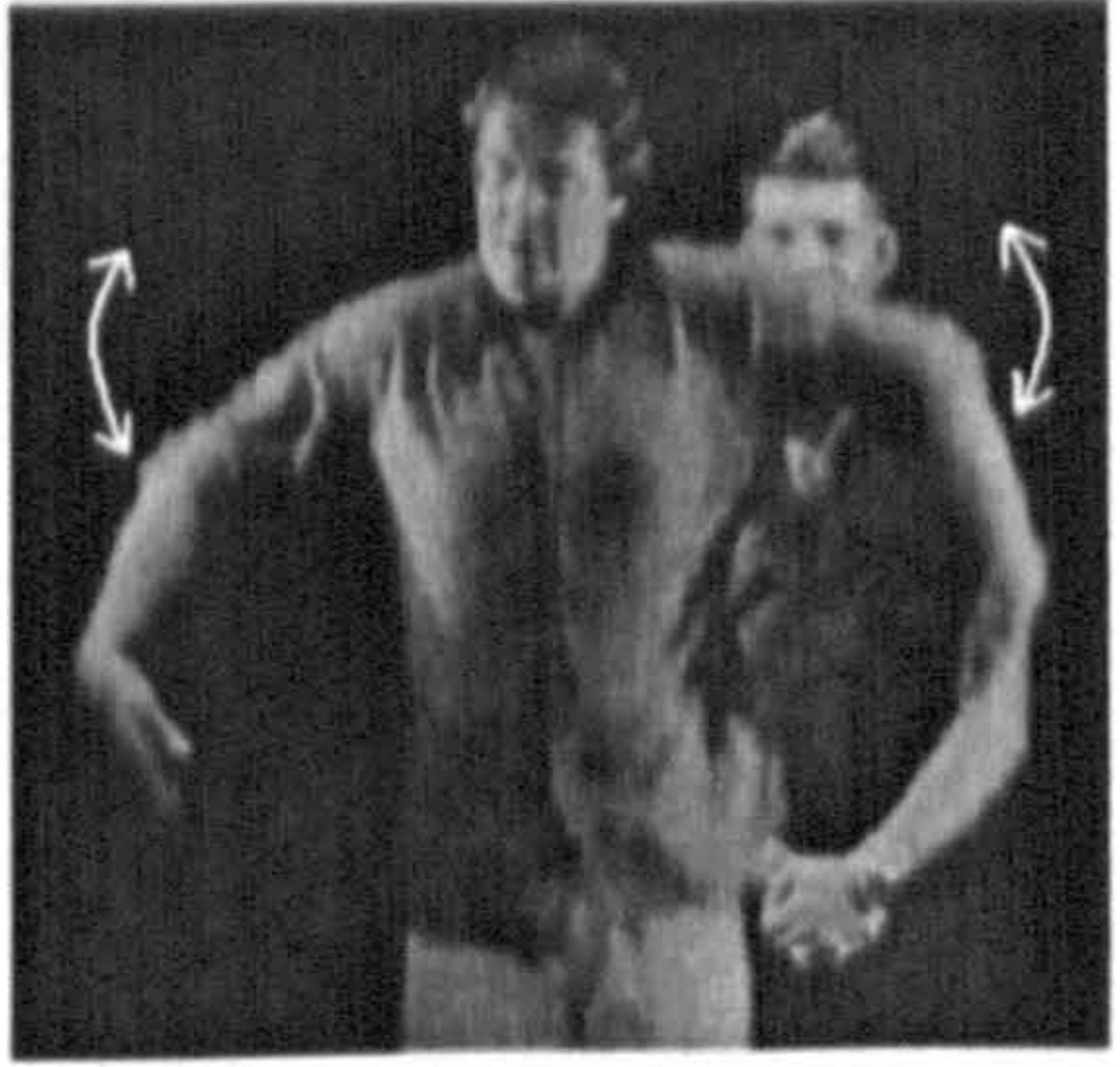
Spring is characterised by the overall use of symmetry. This is due to the fact that the prototypical image for a tree is symmetrical, and that the body that represents the tree shows bilateral symmetry. The buds are also arranged in left and right symmetry and they come out alternatively from left and right, twice from each side.



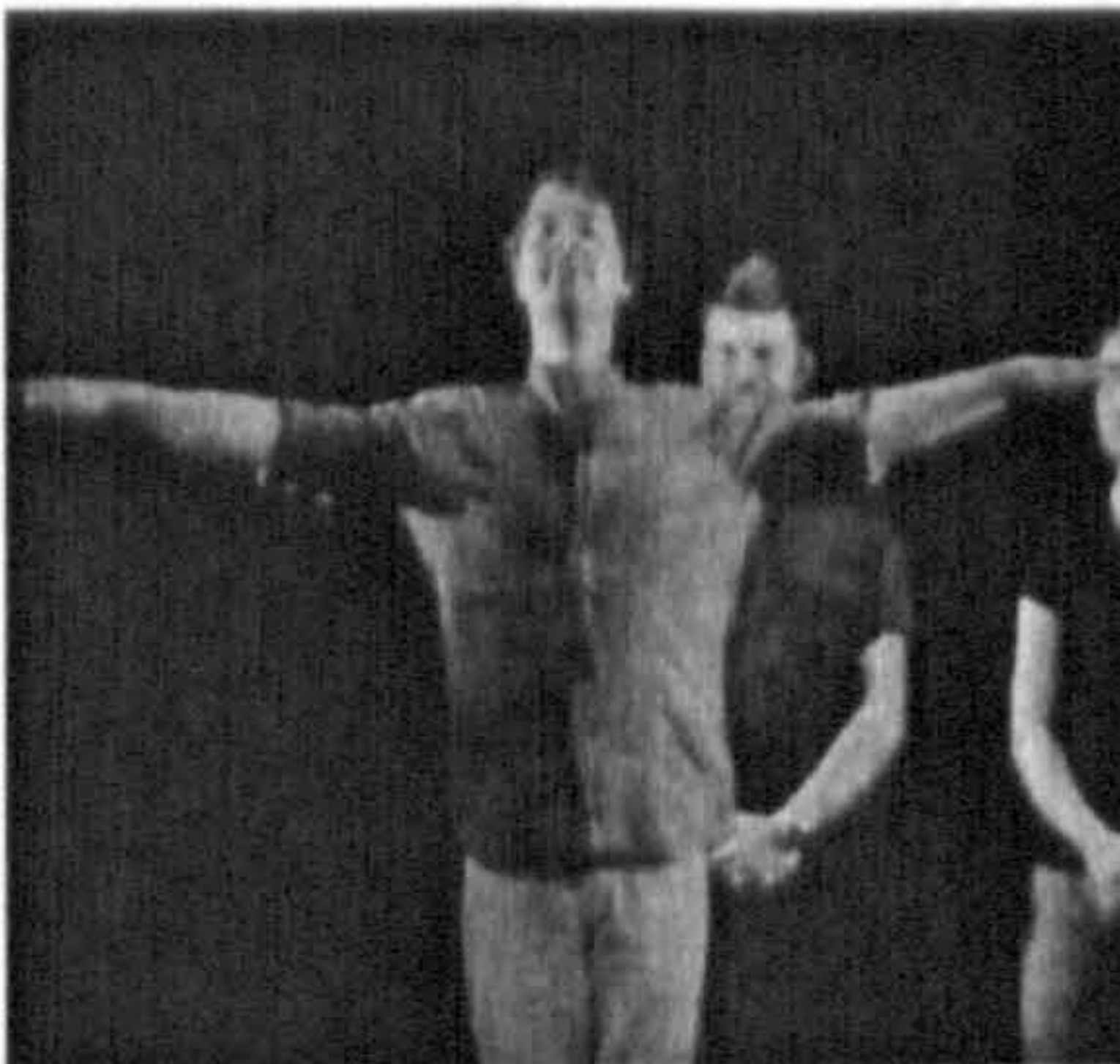
a) TREE-STANDING



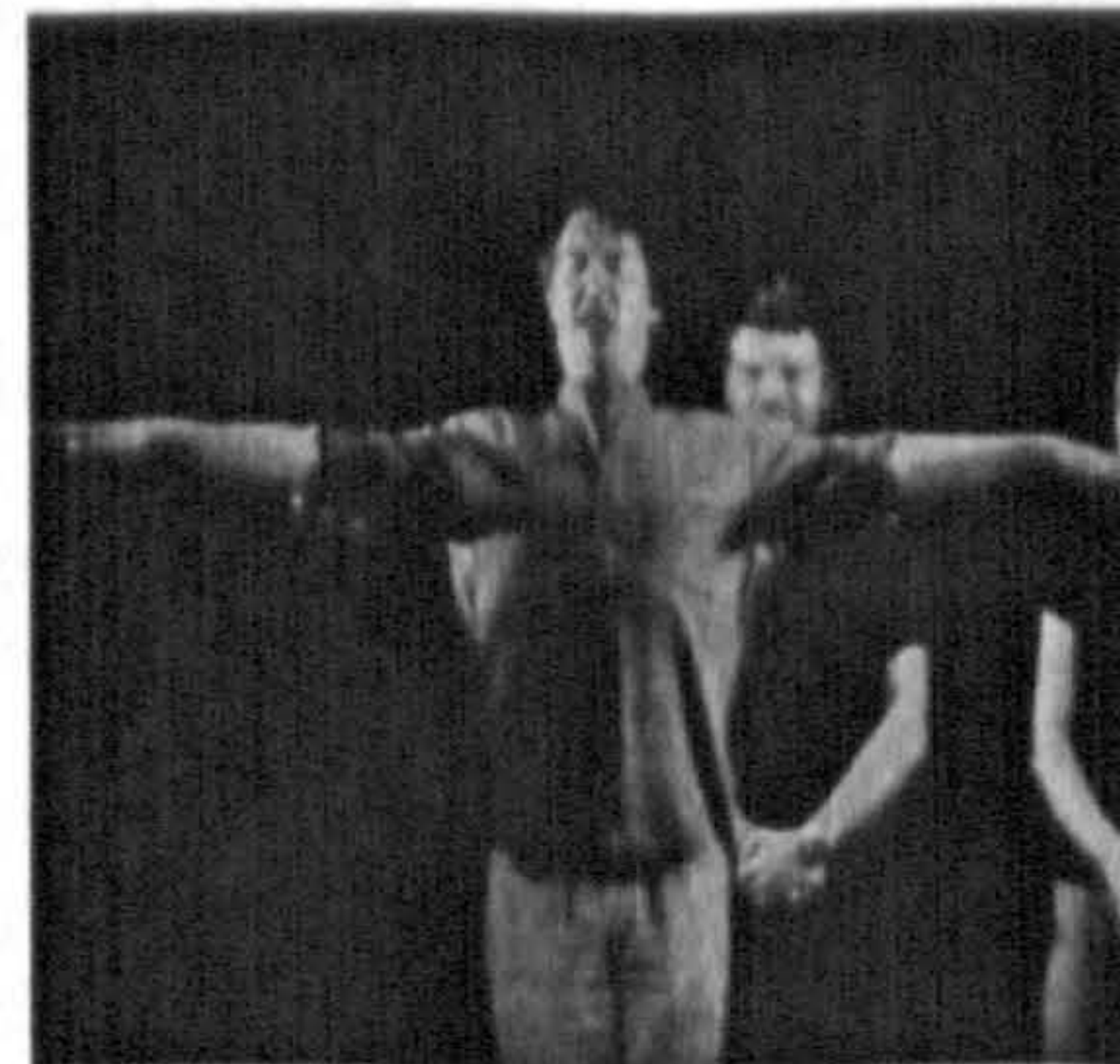
b) TREE-STOOPING



c) TREE-SHAKING-OFF



d) TREE-STANDING-HAPPILY



e) OW!



f) BUDS-COMING-OUT1



g) BUDS-COMING-OUT2



h) BUDS-COMING-OUT3

Figure 13.6 *Spring* by Paul Scott

13.4.4. *Summer* by Richard Carter

Richard Carter's *Summer* is highly unusual. The poet makes use of the paradoxical nature of sign language as being a film-like visual material while also being a language. The poet is "rewinding" the scene, as it were, but unidirectional flow of the language cannot be stopped (i.e. even though the movement is reversed, it is still part of the ongoing poem). In a propositional sense, the second half is simply the "reversed" version of the first half, a mere shadow, as it were, but in fact it is this second part that binds together the first half and makes this poem original.

In order to create a lasting effect within a very short span of time, Carter squeezes in many poetic features. Regarding handshape, the G handshape (an index finger extended) is used in all of the three signs in this poem, creating a unified impression.

Symmetry is also used to create brief but focused signing. This poem has only three signs (SWEAT-DRIPPING, FAN-TURNS, and SWEAT-DRIPPING-REVERSE). The first and the last are symmetrical, and the middle sign is not. The asymmetry of FAN-TURNS clearly marks the turning point in this poem ($S \rightarrow A \rightarrow S$).

This poem is symmetrical not only spatially but also temporally. It has a similar structure to Rosaria Giuranna's *Haiku –a LIS Poem* in that the poem ends with the reversed movement of the initial part. As in the LIS poem, there is a difference in speed between the reversed movement and the original. In other words, temporal symmetry is achieved but not completely. The second half is considerably slower in *Summer*, highlighting the movement for its own sake.

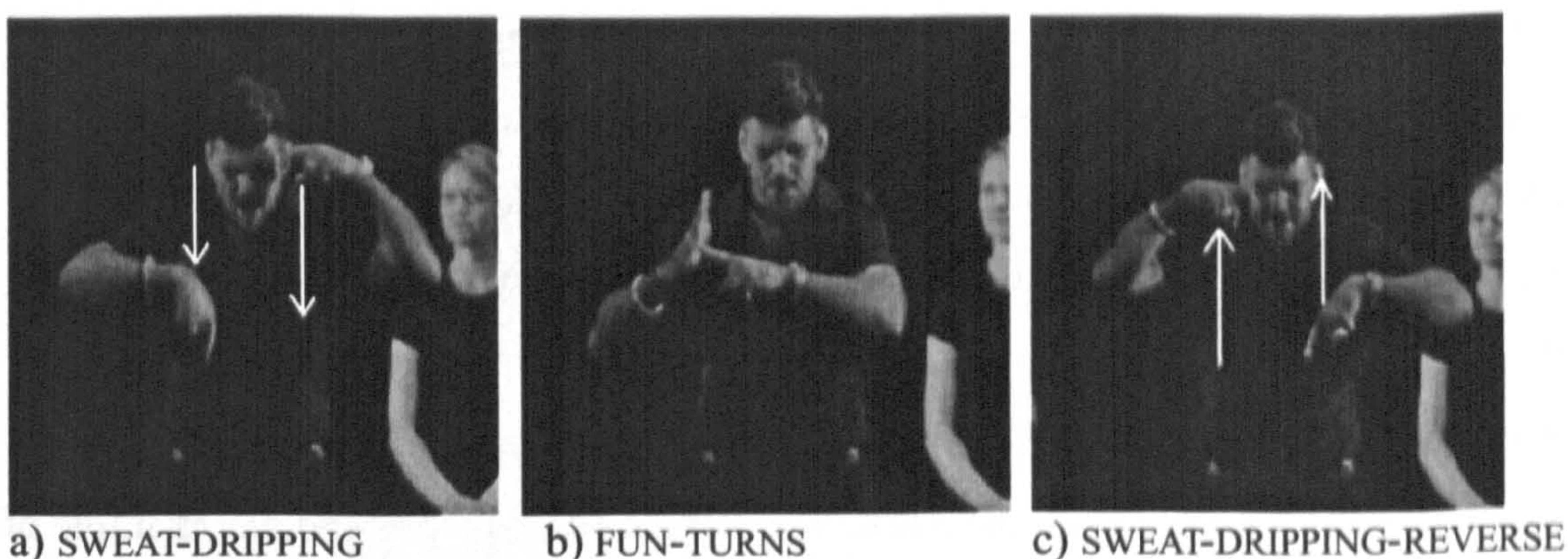


Figure 13.7 *Summer* by Richard Carter

13.4.5. *Autumn* by Johanna Mesch

Paul Scott anthropomorphises the tree by completely turning himself into the tree. There is a great deal of emotion and a comical touch to his poem. In contrast, Mesch's poem *Autumn*, whose topic is also a tree, is less personalised and is highly symbolic and spiritual. She describes a healthy upright tree at the beginning of the poem, and then moves on to the part in which the tree falls down and a soft light falls upon the pit. The poem starts with a smile and ends with a darker impression, which in itself represents the shift from bright summer to deep autumn. Mesch uses a variety of poetic devices to represent this theme.

Regarding handshapes, Mesch shows the consistent use of the similar handshape. All the signs in this poem are either 5 or B, or their variations. This adds harmony and unification to the poem. The sign PIT (Figure 13.9 i) resembles the sign for GRAVE in BSL. This resemblance adds extra solemn impression to this sign³².

In terms of symmetry, Mesch uses two-handed signs throughout the poem. The only one-handed sign comes at the end of the poem. Thus the shift in symmetry marks the end of the poem. This last sign is very symbolic and the sudden lack of two-handedness highlights its significance.

Regarding eyegaze, this poem gives an excellent example of prescient gaze. As a prescient describer, the poet marks two important locations in this poem even

³² I thank Sarah Haynes for pointing this out.

before she starts to sign the actual poem (i.e. during the hands-down posture). Her first gaze is cast downward (a), which later corresponds to the location of PIT. Her gaze is already marking the location of a later sign. The last sign uses the same downward gaze direction, so there is a match between the first and the last gaze in this poem. The second gaze is cast upward (b), which foretells the direction of the tree coming immediately after the initial posture. The poet once again marks the location of PIT with her eyes just before she signs it (h), which is another example of prescient gaze in this poem.

During the first half, the poet takes in the viewpoint of Poetic-I. She looks up at the top of the tree. This continues while she is signing TREE1 TREE2, and EMBRACE. Then there is an example of gaze on hands when the tree falls down. Then she goes back to the prescient eyegaze in the last part.

There is a contrast of up and down gaze directions as well. The tree is physically tall, and thus the poet naturally looks up. In contrast, the pit is at the root of the tree, so the gaze is cast downward. This is very symbolic, considering the strong metaphor of UP IS GOOD, BAD IS DOWN.

This poem involves a single frame (the tree standing somewhere), but there is a perspective shift within the same frame, which produces two different spaces. During the first few signs, the poet provides the focused view of the tree (Diegetic Space 1). The real-tree exists in front of the poet, and the audience “sees” the tree mainly through her physical interaction with the tree (upward gaze, upward smile, and embracing). Because the poet is involved in the space, there is a more personal touch attached to the scene than the second half.

In the second half, the poet “zooms out”, and shows the entire frame (Diegetic Space 2). The tree is now expressed with her forearm. The audience now can see the whole scenario with their own eyes. The poet herself does not physically exist in the space.

The manual sign TREE2 (d) is a case of blended spaces. It is the conventional sign for TREE in BSL, but because it is highly iconic, it serves the function of visually showing the distant view of the tree (Diegetic Space 2), while the poet’s gaze follows the real-size tree standing in front of her (Diegetic Space 1). It appears

as if two trees exist in the same signing space. This can only be explained by the blending of the spaces.

The shift from Space 1 (focused) to Space 2 (defocused) corresponds to the shift from the happy atmosphere of the first half to the dark tone of the second half.

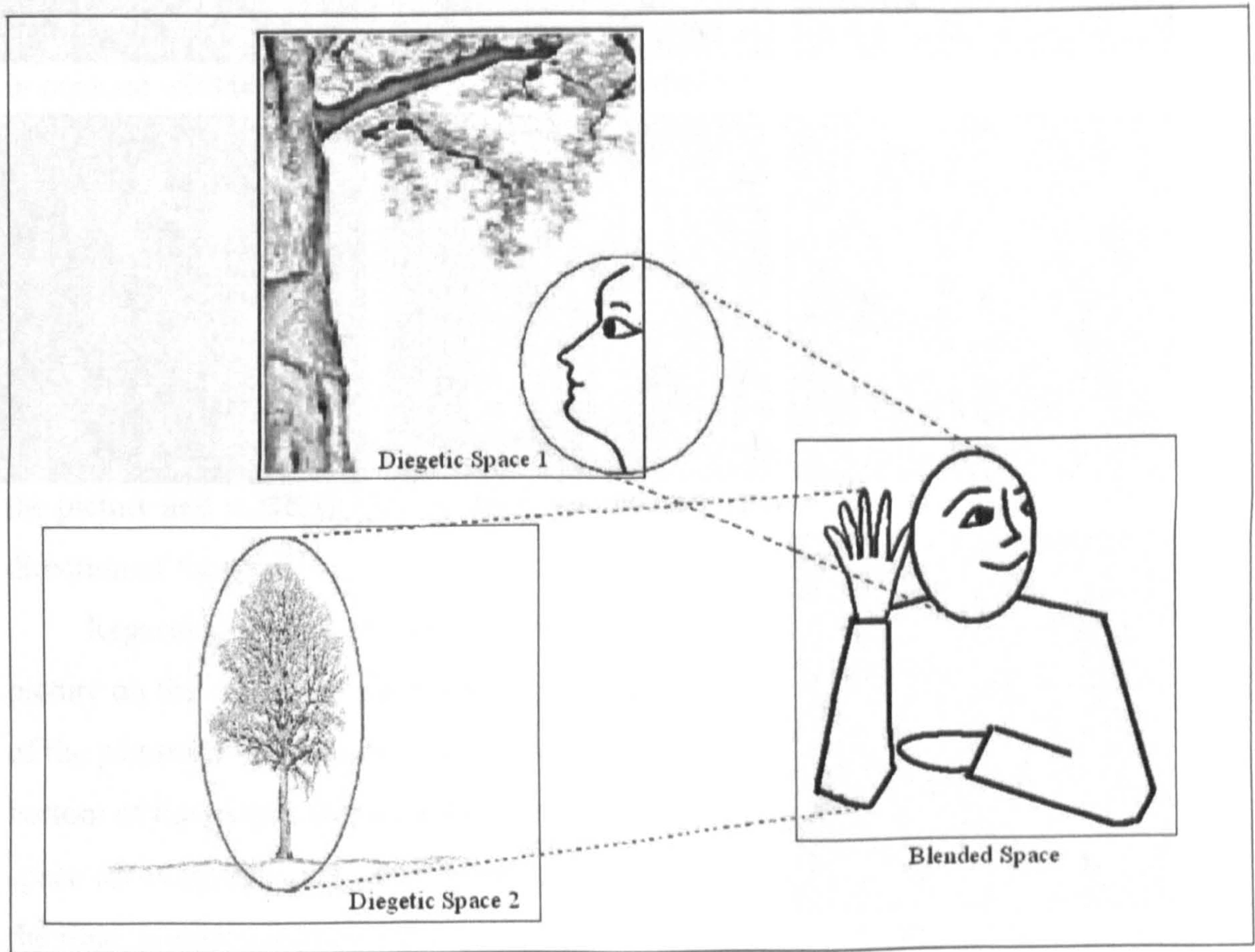
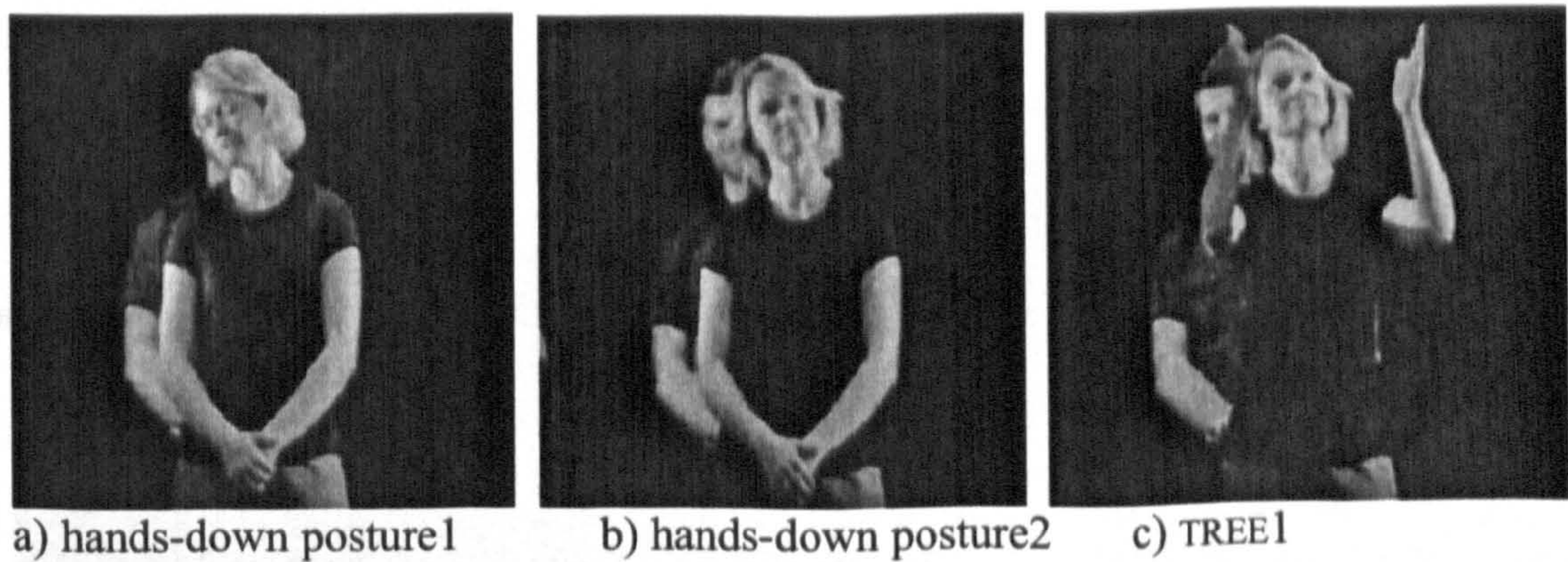


Figure 13.8 Blended spaces in TREE2 in *Autumn*



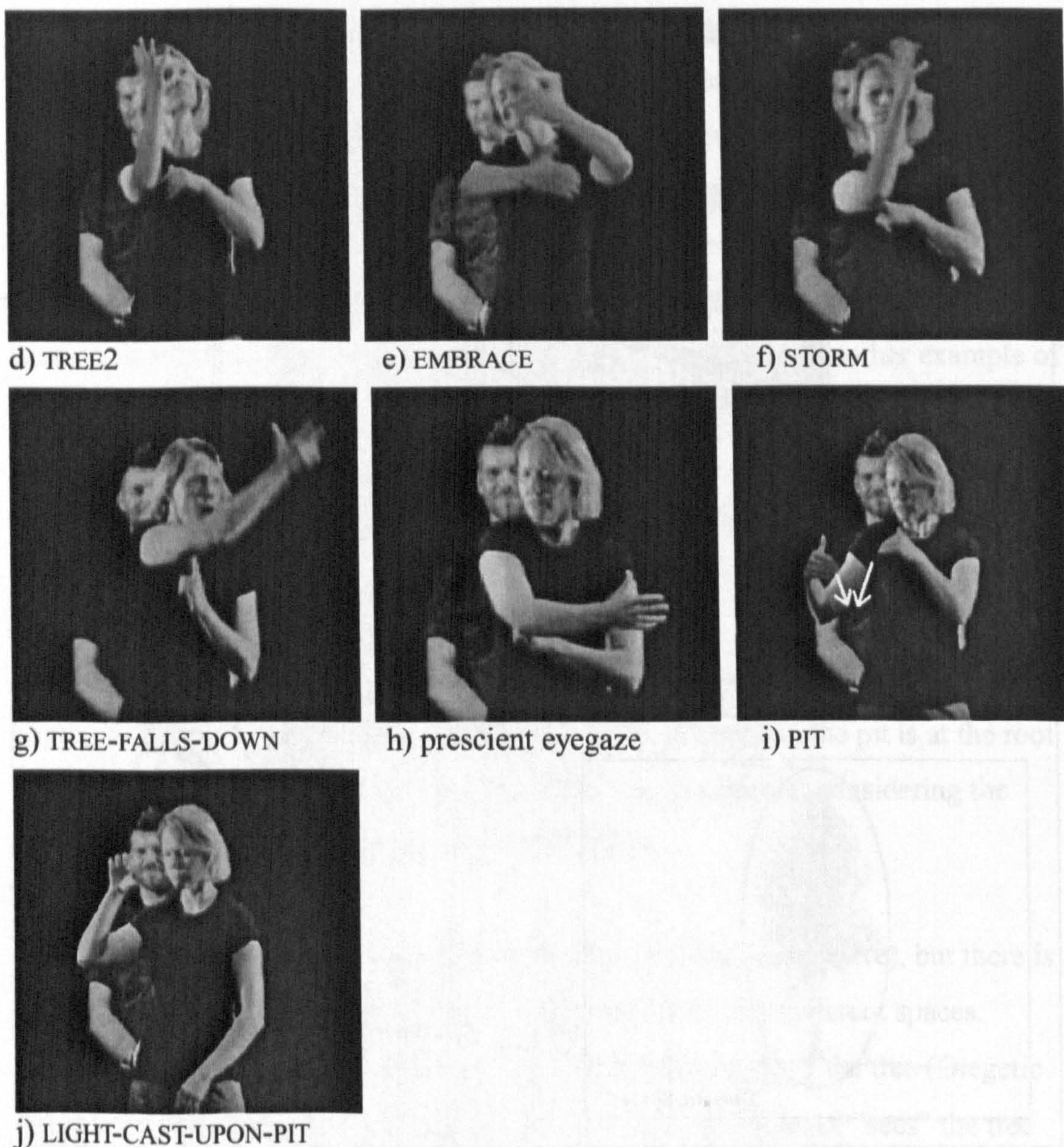


Figure 13.9 *Autumn* by Johanna Mesch

13.4.6. *Winter* by John Wilson

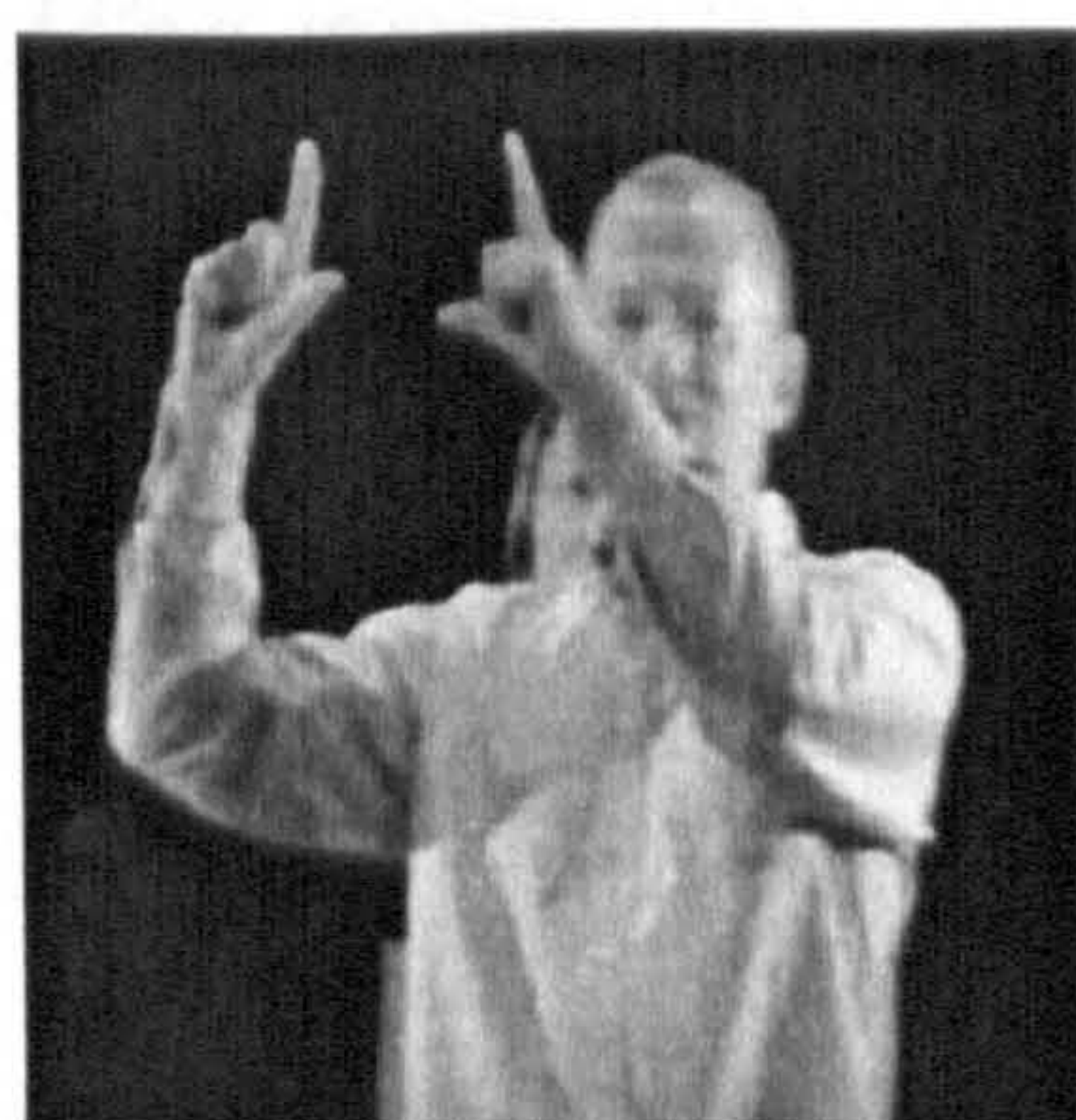
John Wilson's *Winter* is characterised by the contrast between sunbathing in the picture on the wall (summer) and snow in the real world (winter). The poet uses the following devices to highlight this contrast.

First of all, there is a contrast of two-handed signs and a one-handed sign. All signs are signed with both hands except SNOW-FLAKE. The one-handedness of SNOW-FLAKE stands out because the other signs are two-handed. It helps emphasise the fact that it is the first single flake of snow coming into the poet's view.

Eyegaze plays an important role in this poem. During the first half of this poem, the poet keeps eye contact with the camera, clearly taking the narrator's viewpoint. When he finishes describing the picture, he takes his time to look at the picture (Figure 13.10 d) and then he enters the perspective of Poetic-I. The rest of the poem is characterised by this Poetic-I and the poet no longer looks at the camera. This Poetic-I allows the poet to feel and express coldness with his body (g). This is in contrast with the warmth of the summer which can only be imagined by the manual sign SUN. The poet cannot directly express the warmth because he, as the narrator, is outside the story world.

The long gaze toward the picture marks the end of the first part. Then the next eyegaze ushers the audience to the second part (there is no manual sign during the transition of the first and second parts). The gaze to the picture is directed toward the right (d), and the next gaze is directed toward the left (f). The contrast of summer in the picture and winter in the real world is highlighted with the use of contrastive direction of the gaze.

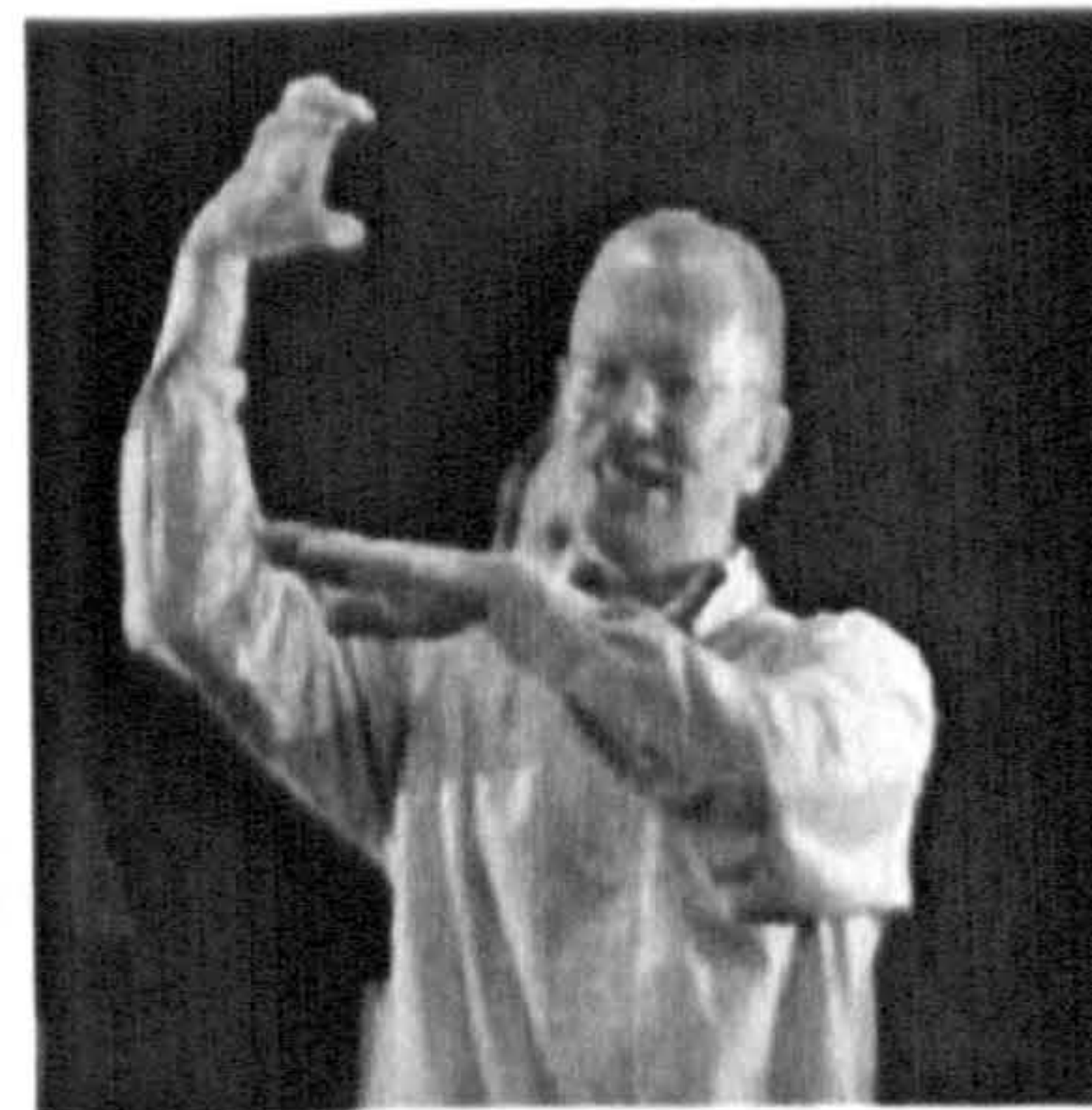
Regarding the use of space, Wilson uses a small space on his right to depict the picture on the wall. The space used to represent summer is limited to the actual size of the picture frame. This is clear from the way the poet places the horizon (or the bottom of the picture frame) at the very high place (b), compressing the signing space for summer into a small frame. On the other hand, winter, the real season of the time, is expressed using the rest of the signing space. There is a contrast of the smallness of an imagined season and the big space for the real season (winter is everywhere, whereas summer is only visible in a certain part of the signing space).



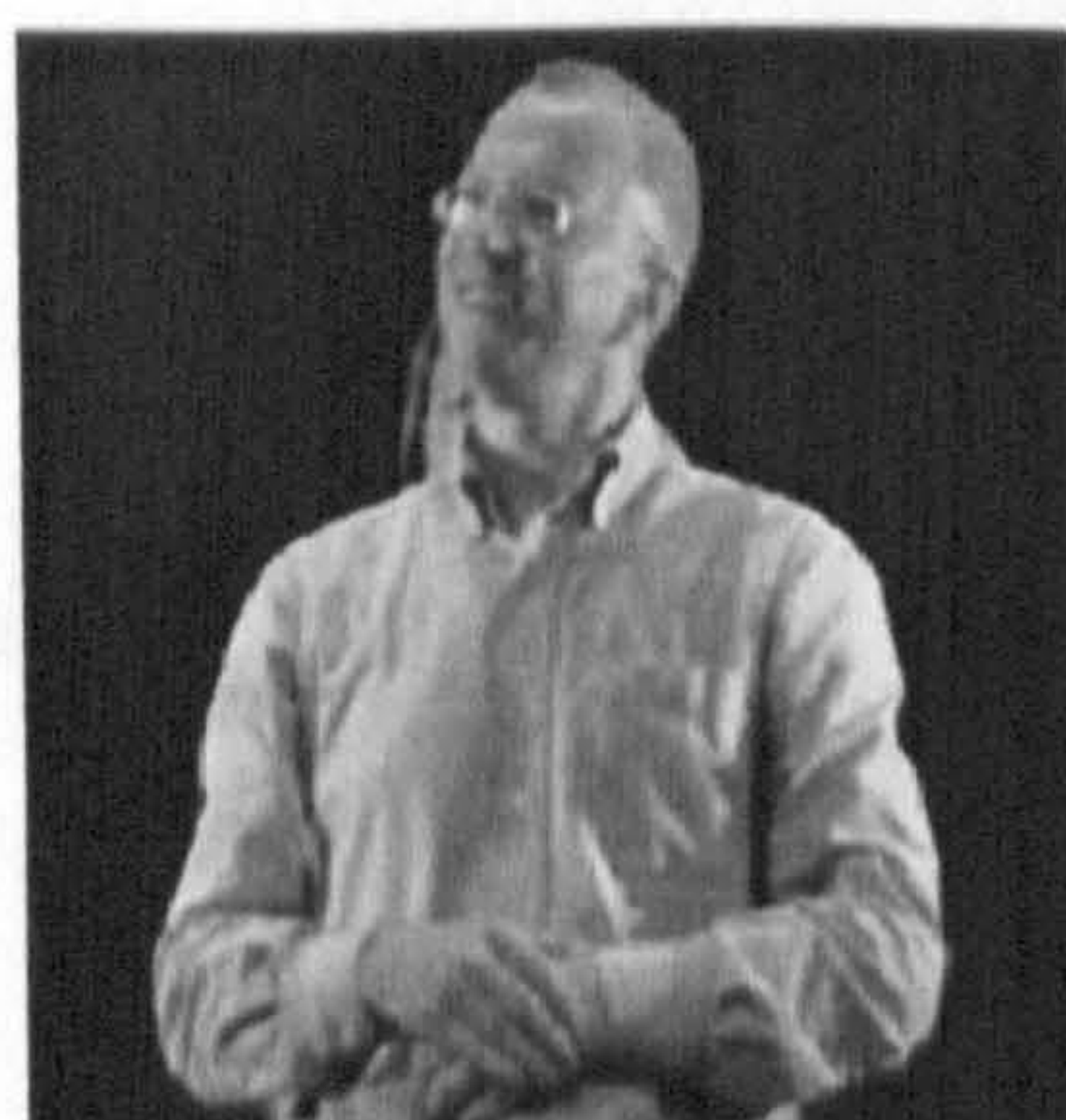
a) PICTURE-ON-THE-WALL COLD



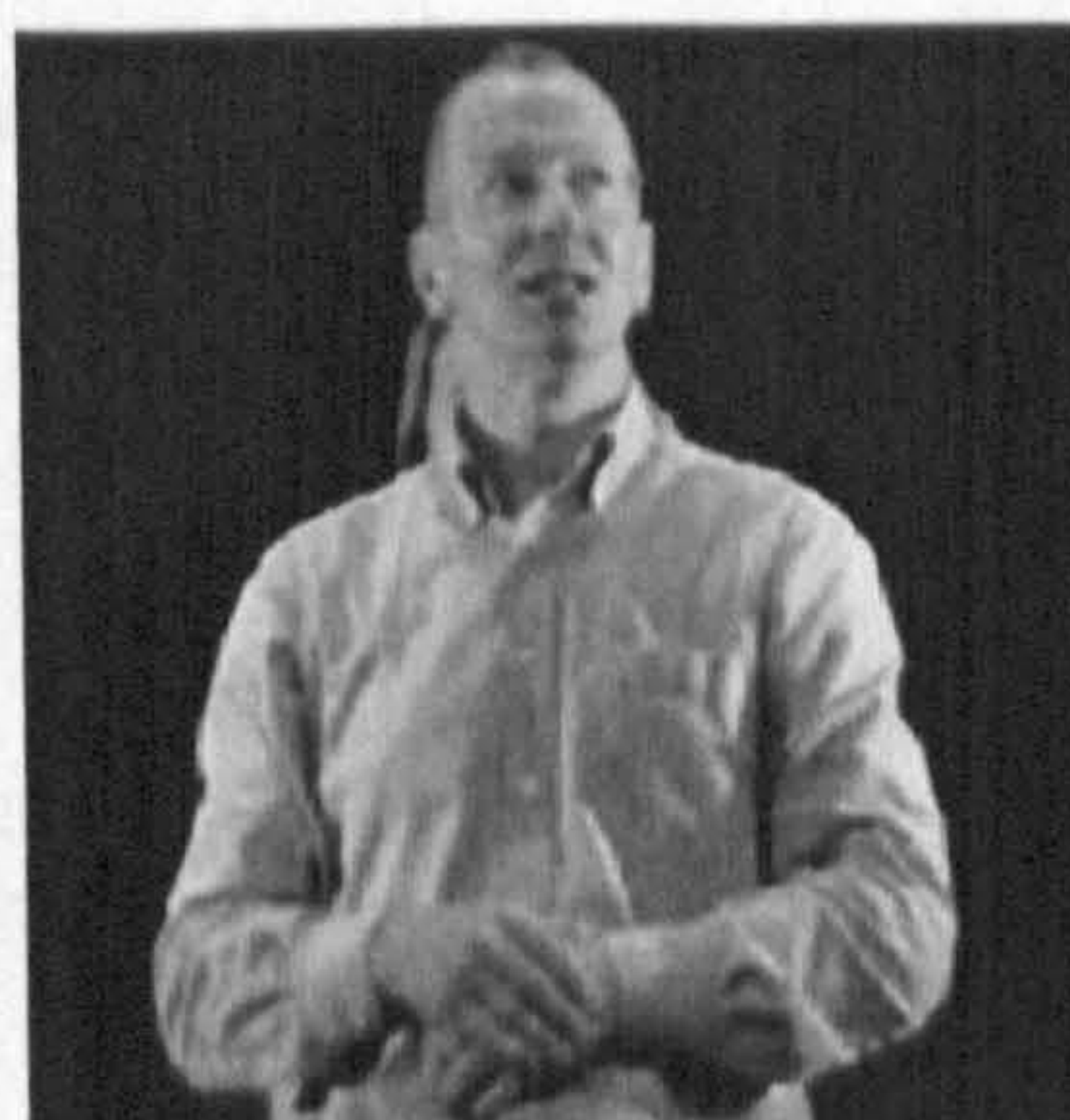
b) PERSON-LYING



c) SUN



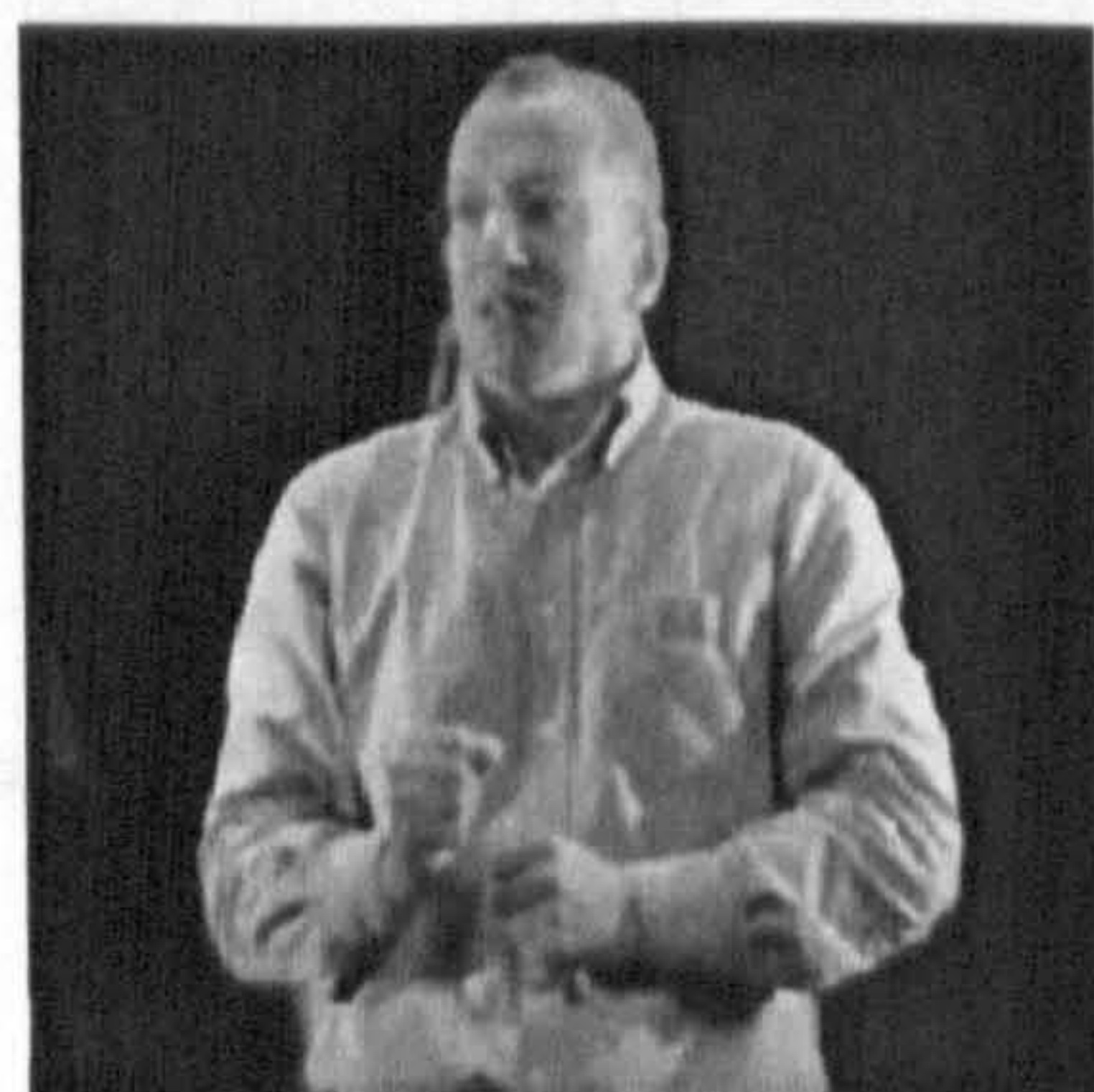
d) Gaze to the picture



e) Gaze to the left



f) SNOW-FLAKE-FALLING



g) COLD

Figure 13.10 *Winter* by John Wilson

13.5. Life

13.5.1. Translation and Glossing

Life

Infancy (Richard Carter)

Emerging out of the womb

Suckling mother's breast

Growing up fast!

COME-OUT-OF-WOMB SUCK-BREAST GROW-UP

Childhood (Johanna Mesch)

Bored with toy cars

I want to grow up!

Life is such a huge thing

And I'm still so small

MOVE-AROUND-TOY-CARS FRUSTRATED WANT GROW-UP WELL... LIFE LIFE-BIG SMALL

Middle Age (John Wilson)
Healthy teeth, plenty of hair
I fasten my belt
Eh?!
I pull out my first nose hair

ADMIRE-TEETH SMOOTH-HAIR FASTEN-BELT LOOK-INTO-THE-MIRROR LOOK-AROUND
PICK-UP-TWEEZERS PULL-OUT-NOSE-HAIR

Old Age (Paul Scott)
Tottering with a stick
Death approaches
Not yet, not yet!
Dead

WALK-WITH-STICK LOOK-UP NOT-YET HEART-ATTACK DEAD

13.5.2. Overall Theme

The last of the three quartets is *Life*. The four poets represent each stage in life (infancy, childhood, middle age and old age). It is interesting that three out of four poems, excluding *Childhood*, somewhat “underplay” the significance of life, by either quickly signing the poem or making fun of it (even *Childhood* talks about the insignificance of youth in life). Especially the brevity of the first and the last poem (beginning and ending of life) humorously represents the triviality of life. As a result, *Life* is ironically the shortest among the three quartets, which, in terms of theme, are expanding from a day to a life.

13.5.3. *Infancy* by Richard Carter

This is the shortest haiku poem in my data. Within these four seconds, the poet uses many poetic devices to create strong impact. First of all, regarding handshape, Carter uses the B handshape throughout the poem. The same hands that represent the

womb in the first sign (a and b) turn into the poet's own hands sucking the mother's breast (c) without any transition. The ambiguity is resolved by the shift in meaning carried in the head, not the hands

In terms of symmetry, the first two signs are symmetrical, but the last sign is not. Break of symmetry is thus used to mark the end of the poem.

The prominent feature of this poem is its fast speed, resulting in the very short outcome. The brevity of this poem represents how fast a baby grows up, symbolically denying any sentiment attached to the *process* of growing up.

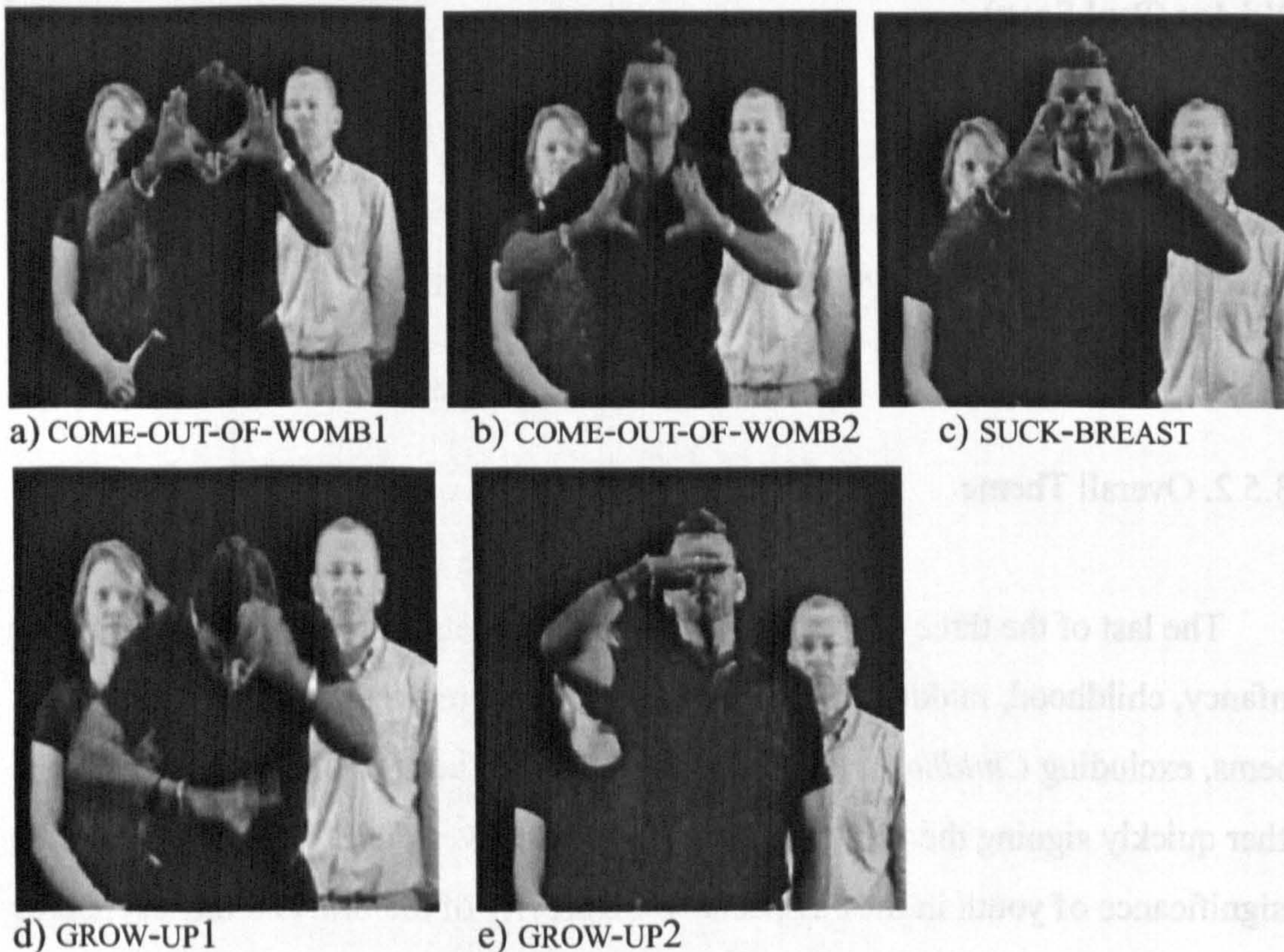


Figure 13.11 *Infancy* by Richard Carter

13.5.4. *Childhood* by Johanna Mesch

Mesch's *Childhood* illustrates the frustration of a young child who wants to grow up. Theme-wise, this is in sharp contrast with the Carter's *Infancy*, which focuses on the instantaneous growth. After viewing the quick, speedy *Infancy*, the audience is caught in the slow speed of Mesch's *Childhood*, understanding both aspects of growing-up. Especially, Mesch's poem is created from the perspective of

the child, which may symbolise the fact that for a child the growing process is unbearably long and boring (whereas for surrounding adults, it appears as if they are growing too fast).

The child’s frustration at the smallness of her existence is represented through the small toy cars. The handshape used for TOY-CAR is O, which is comparatively “smaller” than open flat handshapes such as B used in LIFE-BIG. When she locates herself in this long continuum of life, she uses another small handshape (C).

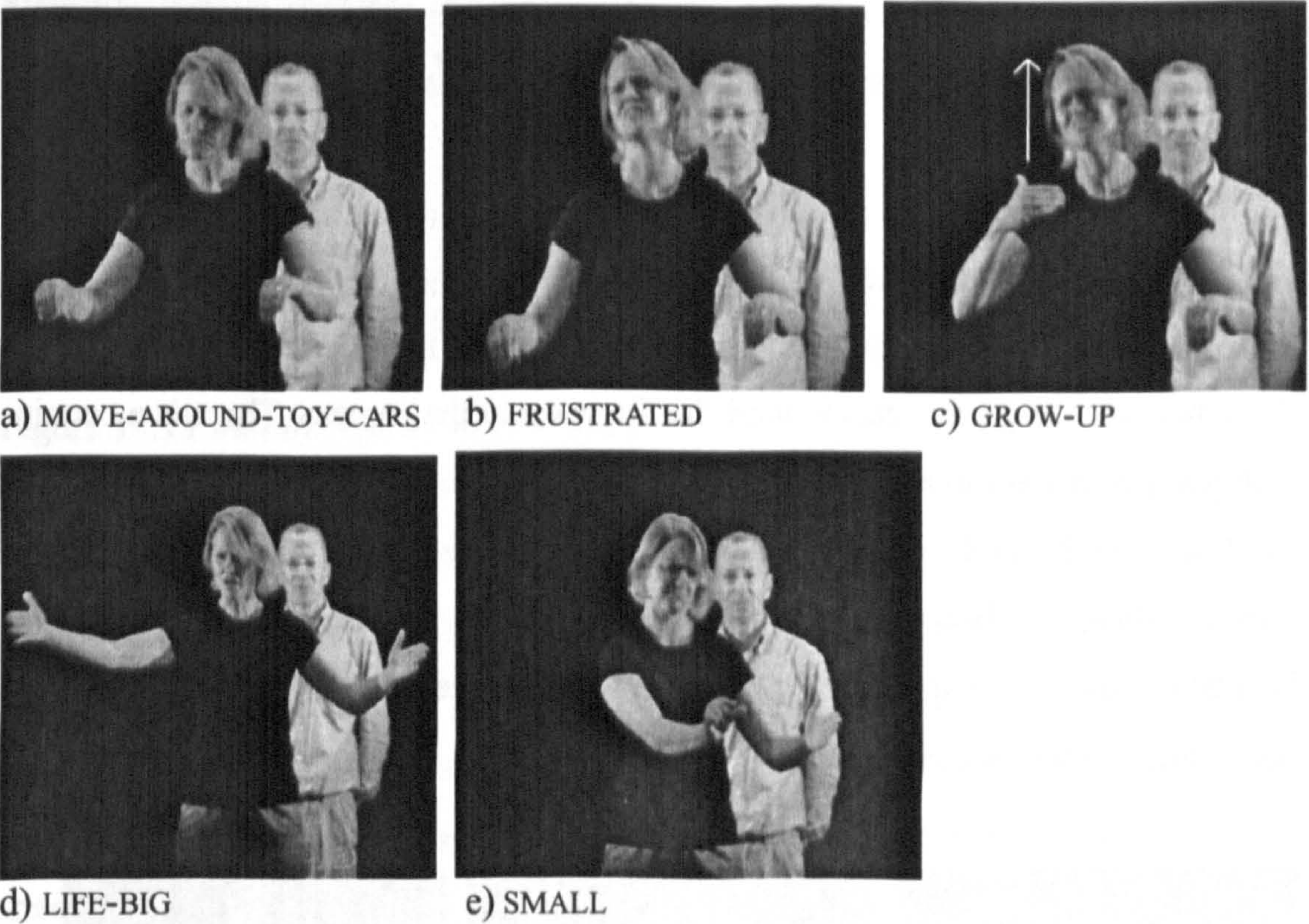


Figure 13.12 *Childhood* by Johanna Mesch

13.5.5. *Middle Age* by John Wilson

This is a very humorous poem, making fun of a middle-aged man who thinks he is still handsome (“healthy teeth, plenty of hair”) but in the end finds his first nose hair that reveals his true age. Such realisation is a crucial moment in life, but it is also very subtle and only meaningful to the person in question. This poem is funny because it exaggerates the significance of such comical moment in life. It is well-

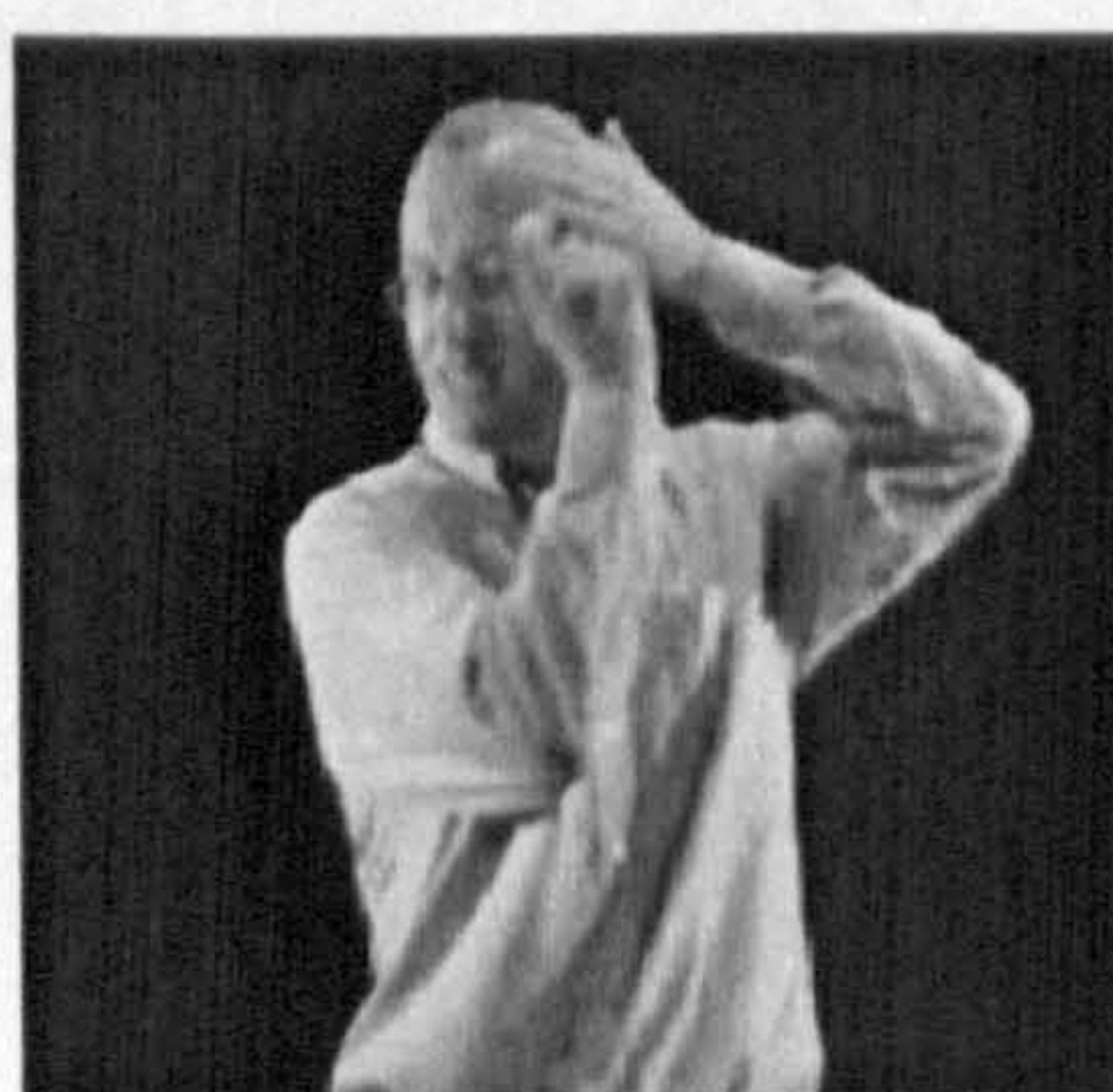
structured, so that the last sign functions as a punch line, while the rest of the signs build up the story leading this last sign

Eyegaze plays an important part in this poem. The turning point in this poem (a confident man suddenly realises the shocking truth) is expressed solely by his eyegaze, body posture, and facial expression. Especially, the sideways gaze in LOOK-AROUND is suggestive that he has seen something very embarrassing. While these non-manual signals are moving the story, the hands are frozen on the spot as they sign FASTEN-BELT (Figure 13.13 c, d, e, and even f, in which the non-dominant hand still holds the same posture as before). The bewilderment of the protagonist is well-expressed by these two layers of signing (expressive non-manual signs versus frozen manual signs).

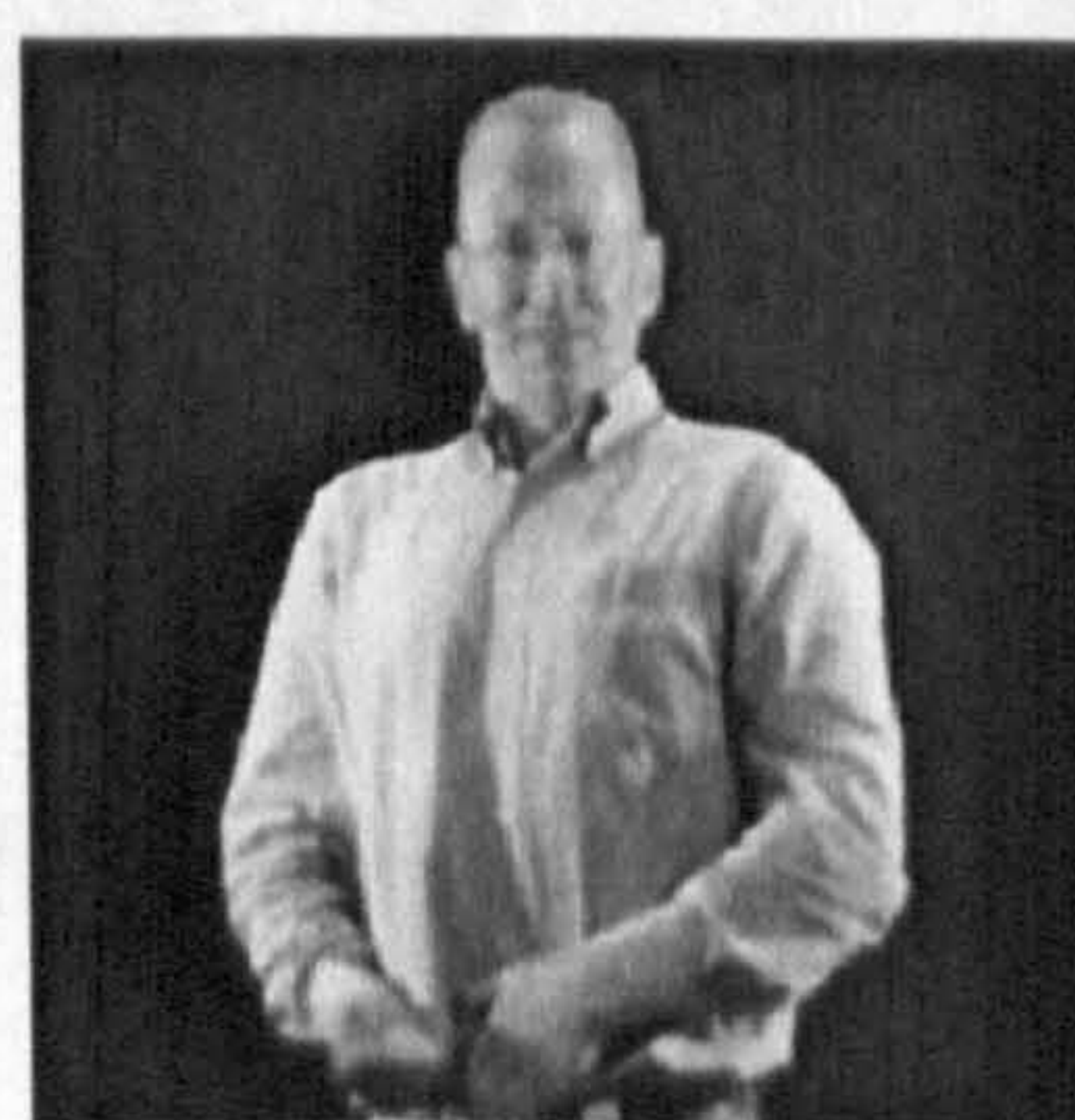
Throughout the poem he takes the character's viewpoint. Although he is looking straight into the audience, it is understood that he is looking at himself in the mirror. Even so, however, the audience cannot help but feel that he is looking at *them*, because his gaze is cast toward the direction of the camera. There is a certain ambiguity or duality in his straight frontal gaze. Especially after the sign LOOK-AROUND, which clearly locates "others" at his sides, the frontal gaze toward the mirror/audience (f) becomes very private and personal. The audience happens to be located in this private space, and consequently plays the role of a witness or an accomplice of his "secret" action.



a) ADMIRE-TEETH



b) SMOOTH-HAIR



c) FASTEN-BELT

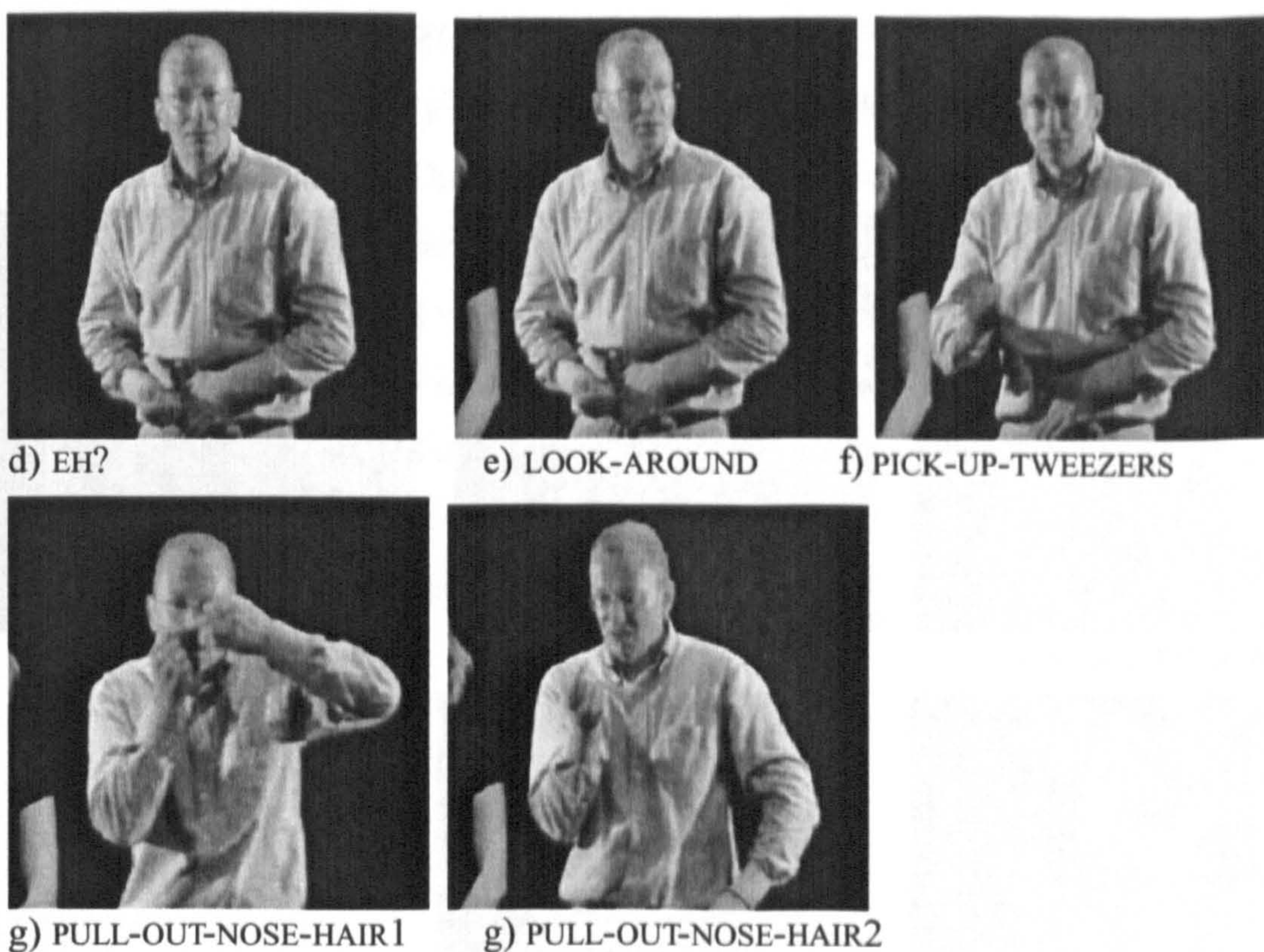


Figure 13.13 *Middle Age* by John Wilson

13.5.6. *Old Age* by Paul Scott

This has resemblance to Wilson's *Middle Age*, in that both of them are comical and do not use lexicalised signs. In this poem, the poet represents an old man, who tries to deny death ("Not yet, not yet!") but instantly has a heart attack and dies. Whereas Death is portrayed with significance in this poem (although Death is not visible, the audience can see it approach through the fearful eyes of the old man), the actual transition from life to death comes instantly and there is no emotion attached to it. It is as if to deny any significance attached to life and death, which leads to Carter's detached view of growth at the beginning of life.

Throughout the poem, his right hand is used to express the old man's stick. It is fixed to one location and does not move at all. As a result, the poet is entirely dependent on his non-dominant hand to develop the story.

Also, the movement of his left hand is restricted to the forearm. His shoulder remains still. The only mobile body parts in this poem are his left forearm and the

head. In other words, the visual sonority of this poem is very low. This symbolically expresses the awkwardness and incapacity of the old age.

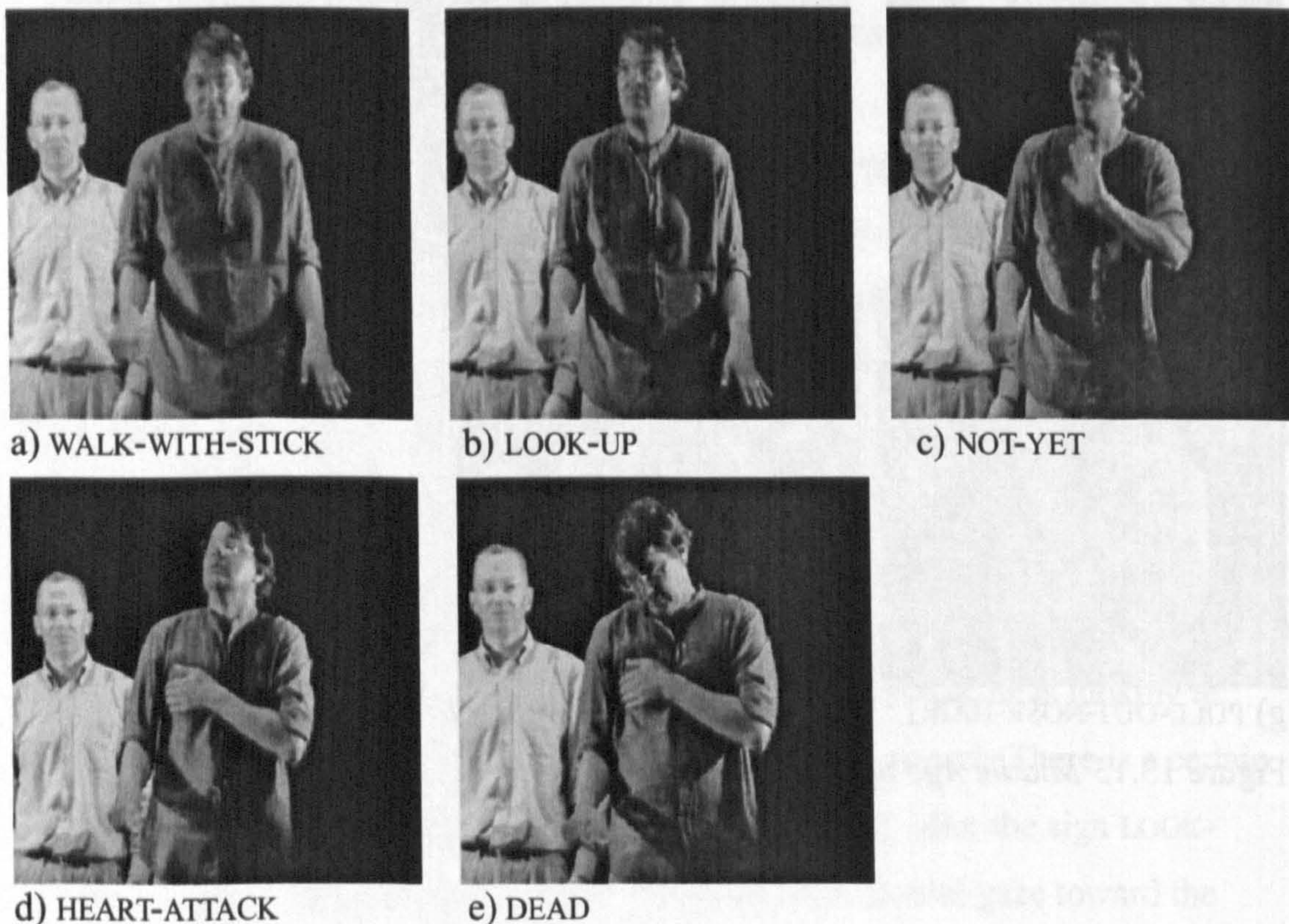


Figure 13.14 *Old Age* by Paul Scott

13.6. Summary

All of the twelve haiku poems discussed in this chapter are very brief. Within such a limited amount of signing, the four Deaf poets managed to pack a great deal of poetic effect. They all make use of the poetic features we have observed in the previous chapters, such as productive lexicon, anthropomorphism, symbolic use of space, rhythm, symmetry, handshape and eyegaze. Those poems are impressive at the first viewing, but repeated viewings provide even deeper appreciation.

The poets' experience as professional poets results not only in the high quality of the composition of the poems but also of their presentation (performance). All twelve poems are equipped with the features necessary for artistic signing. The poets are confident in signing their pieces. They have memorised the story line perfectly, and thus no hesitation or blur is observed. The transition between signs is smooth.

They do not randomly change their signing speed, gaze patterns, perspective, symmetrical patterns, body posture, and so on, unless there is a certain meaning attached to such change. Those are the qualities that may not be found in the poems performed by non-professional signers.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the poems from the BSL Haiku Competition. Those poems are made by non- or less-experienced Deaf participants of the festival. They are not yet as skilled as the professional poets discussed in this chapter, but the in-depth analyses of their poems show their attempts to make the most of the poetic features available in sign language haiku.

Chapter 14

Poems from the BSL Haiku Competition 2006

14.1. Introduction

This chapter applies poetic features to actual haiku poems, in a similar way to the previous chapter. Whereas the poets in Chapter 13 are all established Deaf poets with many years of experience, this chapter deals with the work of the participants of BSL Haiku Festival (see Chapter 3 for details), most of whom are lay people in terms of creating poems in sign languages. All of them went through the workshops the day before the competition, through which they acquired some knowledge about sign language haiku.

The poems which will be discussed in this chapter are shown in Table 14.1. It starts with *Kettle*, the poem which won the first prize, and then moves on to discuss three relatively long poems (*Walking*, *God*, and *The Warm Sun*): These poems are over 30 seconds, and lack the brevity necessary in the discipline of haiku, but they nonetheless show various poetic features of haiku and are thus worth discussion. The last three poems are very brief, and provide good examples of sign language haiku.

Poem	Poet	Length (sec)	Prize
Kettle	Maria Gibson	00.29	1 st prize
Walking	Maria Gibson	00.42	winner of the 1 st prize
God	Penny Beschizza	00.36	winner of the Dot Miles prize
The Warm Sun	Siobhan O'Donovan	00.46	winner of the originality prize
River and Stars	Donna Williams	00.13	winner of the 3 rd prize
England	Nigel Howard	00.06	Bashō prize
Deaf	Nigel Howard	00.10	2nd prize

Table 14.1 Overview of the poems

14.2. *Kettle* by Maria Gibson

14.2.1. Translation and glossing

Kettle

I put water in the kettle and switch it on.
The water bubbles, the kettle whistles, the steam hisses out.
I pour the water and have a cup of tea

KETTLE TURNING-THE-TAP PUT-THE-KETTLE SWITCH-ON
BUBBLES-COMING-UP BOILING BOILING-HARD STEAM-OVERFLOWS
POUR-WATER DRINK-TEA

14.2.2. Structure

This poem has a ‘sandwich’ structure. The first and the last parts describe the poet as a person who is boiling water to have a cup of tea. In the middle part, the poet becomes the kettle and illustrates the process of water being boiled from the perspective of the kettle.

There is no clear transition point between the signer acting as herself and as the kettle. There is ambiguity at the first posture of the middle section (d). It can be understood both as the person waiting for the kettle to be boiled (idling), and as the kettle before its water starts to bubble. It is when she starts to move her hands and the mouth to express that something is coming within herself (e) that the viewer realises that she has turned into the kettle.

This three-division also suggests the same division in traditional haiku.

14.2.3. Metaphor

Except for a striking instance of personification, which turns the kettle into a human-being, there is little metaphorical interpretation available for the audience. This is because this poem talks about our routine of making a cup of tea, without adding any extra layer of meaning to it.

14.2.4. Theme

This poem won the first prize in BSL Haiku Competition 2006. One reason that this poem obtained the prize was it shows a Deaf perspective strongly. Even though

it does not talk about Deafness or Deaf identity, the topic she chose and the way she presents it are unique to Deaf people and to sign language poetry.

The poet describes the mundane act of boiling water and making a cup of tea from a completely new perspective - from the kettle's viewpoint.

To reverse the relationship between people and things (things are given human-like qualities, and as a result, they start to see people, instead of the other way around) is very popular in sign language poetry. This is also seen for example, in O'Donovan's *Sixty-One Steps*, which describes the feeling of the steps.

Spoken language poetry can also take the perspective of the things, but the uniqueness of sign language poetry comes from the fact that Deaf poets can far more directly represent the metaphorical process of representing the thing by turning themselves into the things they want to describe. As a result, that "thing" is given the body and the face of the signer and thus the features of anthromorphisation can be more directly conveyed than in written or spoken language. In this case, what makes the poem so entertaining is that the poet asks us to understand that she turns into the kettle itself. Gibson commented in the interview after the competition: "I boil water everyday and this time I thought: why not turn myself into the kettle?"

14.2.5. Rhythm

A notable element in this poem is that the poem's rhythmic features go along with the process of water being boiled. There is correspondence between the increasing intensity of her signing and the actual state of water. As the water is heated, her facial expression becomes intense (eyes open wider, her mouth opens and closes more quickly, her body posture becomes more tense), signing gets faster and faster, and even the number of fingers used in the signing increases. She first extends her index finger to express the boiling process, which is the standard sign for BOIL (Figure 14.1 f), but then in order to express the intensity of boiling she starts to use all fingers to express BOILING-HARD (g). This shows the metaphor of increased number being linked with increased power. This increase of fingers, together with increasing speed, increases visual density toward the climax. The beauty of this poem is partly due to the fact that it has a "release point" (climax) at the end of the middle part. It is when the steam is released and overflows into the air. The handshapes do not change, but the signing speed is considerably slowed down. More

importantly, hands move away from the body, as if to get rid of all the tension accumulated so far. The signer exhales at the end of this release point, which also suggests the removal of tension from the signer. After that, the signer goes back to showing the person and makes a cup of tea.

14.2.6. Symmetry

As we have seen above, the middle part of the poem is clearly distinguished from the first and the final parts mainly because of the different perspectives the poet is taking (the poet as a person versus the poet as the kettle). Another salient feature that highlights the kettle sequence is the preservation of symmetry. During the first and the last parts (i.e. while the poet is acting as herself, not as the kettle) all the signs are one-handed (such as KETTLE, TURNING-TAP) or asymmetrical (DRINK-TEA). But in the middle section, almost all the signs are symmetrical. Symmetry in this poem does not have a symbolic association, but functions as marking different parts of the poem.

14.2.7. Handshape

The handshapes used in this poem vary, and they are not particularly associated with any additional symbolic meaning.

14.2.8. Blending

This poem involves two diegetic spaces. The first and the last sections are in the same space, that is, the entire view of the person making a cup of tea. The middle part zooms into the kettle and provides focused space. Both spaces belong to the same frame (tea-making), but are seen from different perspectives. There is no blending of the spaces.

14.2.9. Eyegaze

During the first and the last sections, she does not meet the eyes of the audience (except the last sign DRINK-TEA), which makes it clear that she is simply describing the act of boiling water rather than narrating or commenting on it. During the middle part, she does look at the camera, but the gaze belongs to the kettle and it does not narrate either. In other words, throughout the major part of the poem, the

poet herself does not come into the scene. This is in contrast with poems like *Eclipse*, in which the poet looks at the camera all the time as if to say “Look, it’s beautiful, isn’t it?”. This separation of the poet from the scene described is an important part of traditional haiku.

14.2.10. Haiku-ness

The poet Maria Gibson never had the experience of composing poems in BSL or in English, and had no knowledge about haiku prior to the workshops. Her natural talent as a Deaf/signing poet successfully provides the poem with Deaf perspective and beautiful poetic devices, as we have observed so far. The question of if it can be called a haiku still remains, but Gibson uses characteristics which are essential in haiku.

First of all, she shows the brevity of haiku. *Kettle* is less than thirty seconds long, and in it she efficiently presents the sequence of water being boiled with the sandwich structure described above. Secondly, the poem talks about an everyday scene using everyday language, which is an important aspect of traditional haiku. She has chosen a very common routine of boiling water as a topic, and expresses it with simple signs, although, crucially the perspective she describes it from is unique and impressive. Finally, the haiku-ness of this poem comes from the fact that it is a description, not a narration. That is clear from her gaze behaviour, as described above. Gibson succeeds in describing the anthropomorphised kettle without adding the extra emotion of the poet.



a) KETTLE



b) TURNING-THE-TAP



c) SWITCH-ON

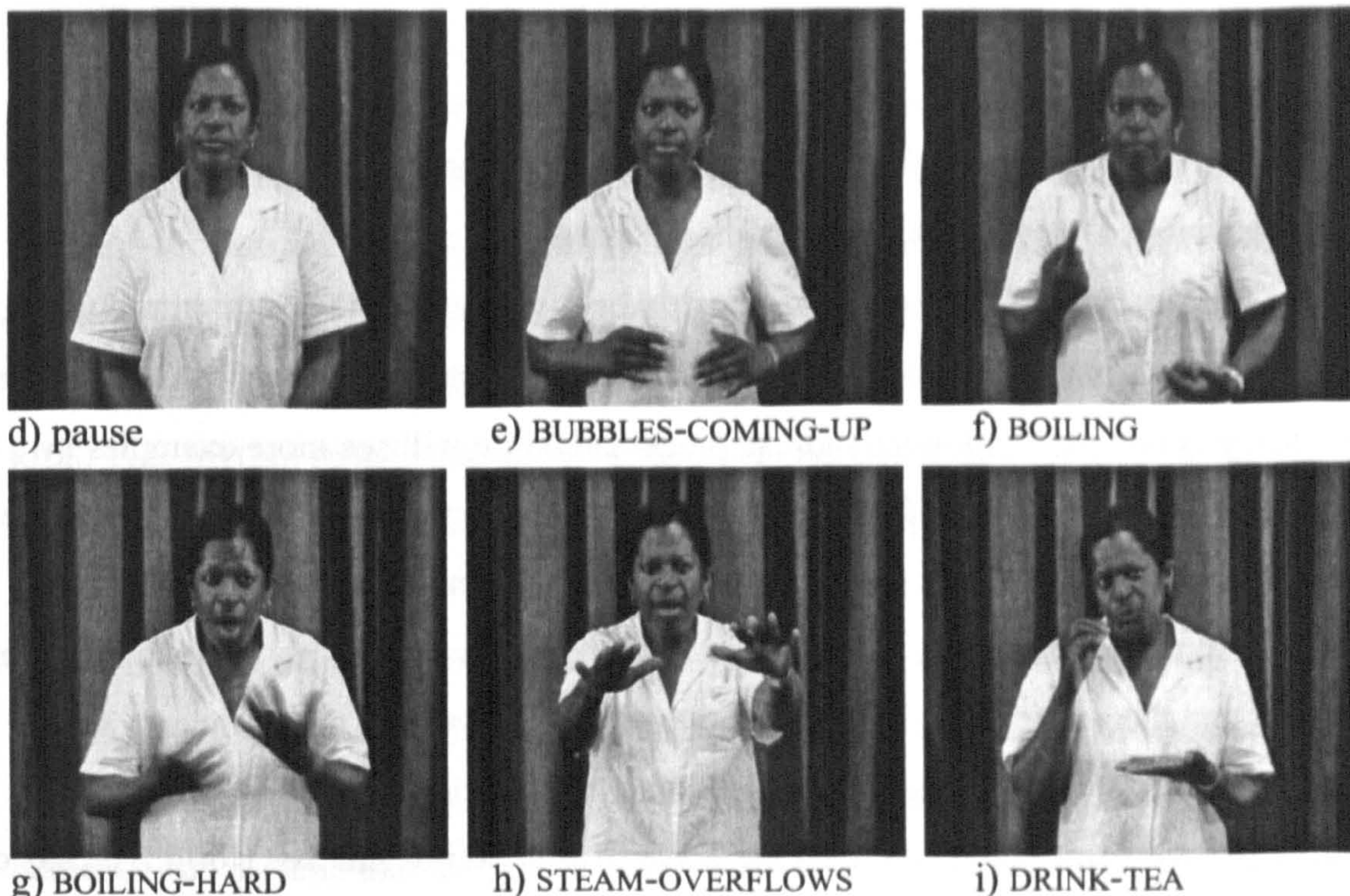


Figure 14.1 *Kettle* by Maria Gibson

14.3. *Walking* by Maria Gibson

14.3.1. Translation and Glossing

Walking on and on
 Carrying a backpack on my back
 Seeing the view ahead
 A range of mountains
 A huge lake
 Lovely!
 A range of mountains
 Walking on and on

I wonder...
 If only I had a horse
 Riding on its back
 Over a range of mountains

But...
 I have to keep on walking
 Carrying my backpack
 Plodding my way

(For glossing, see the section of symmetry below)

14.3.2. Structure

This poem is noticeably long for haiku, which results in it having more complex internal structure than other shorter poems.

The structure of this poem can roughly be divided into four parts: introduction, development, turn and conclusion. As observed in Chapter 5 (5.5.1), this four-section structure is common in longer sign language haiku (we will see more examples in the following poems). The first part (introduction) “sets the scene” by describing the person walking, and the second part (development) extends the theme by adding more information about the views. These first two scenes are firmly based on the real world, and the poetic features such as rhythm, speed, eyegaze, and symmetry are mostly consistent during the first section. The third section (turn) is when the protagonist dreams about riding on the horse. It is in an imaginative world. The basic rhythm ceases for a moment, and some asymmetric signs are introduced. Then finally, the signer goes back to the real world, sighs, and keeps on walking (conclusion).

14.3.3. Metaphor

This poem does not explicitly involve a global metaphor. It is possible to interpret walking as life in general, in which people dream of a more efficient way of life but often have no choice but continue their way. But such interpretation is entirely up to the audience.

There are some orientational metaphors found in the use of eyegaze (see the section below).

14.3.4. Theme

As in *Kettle*, the poet chose an everyday theme: of walking. The protagonist is walking along the path toward the mountains, and the poem provides a few descriptions of natural scenes along the way.

There is not much symbolism in this poem. The uniqueness of this poem comes from the presentation of the poem, rather than the theme itself.

14.3.5. Rhythm

This poem is characterised by its rhythmical signing. The basic tempo is created by the repetition of two signs representing the walking. WALK is the sign with the bent-V classifier (a) and HIKE is the sign using the whole body to express how she walks, carrying her backpack and swinging from left to right (b). This pendulum-like movement is then applied to other signs such as MOUNTAIN, VIEW, and HORSE-RIDE. This rhythm remains as unifying factor in this poem, and the poet keeps coming back to it. The similar rhythmic pattern and tempo can be found in Johanna Mesch's *Kayak*.

The rhythm and tempo are closely linked with the action of the person walking. The swinging movement on her body (on her shoulder) represents the walk more than the manual signs of WALK or HIKE. Thus without manual information, the audience can assume that the poet is still “in action” as long as there is this swinging rhythm on her body. For example, when she is signing MOUNTAIN, her body keeps on swinging from left to right, suggesting that she is still walking. In contrast, when this rhythm is lost in the middle section (WONDER, WISH, ME), it is suggested (not by the manual signing but through the lack of swinging movement) that the poet actually stops and starts to wonder. The symmetry and the swinging movement come back when (in her imagination) she starts to ride on the horse.

In the last section, this swinging movement is lost. The sign for WELL... and LOOK-AROUND do not follow the left-right oscillation. The tempo of walking resumes in the last sign (WALK2), but the swinging movement is no longer on the shoulder. The rhythm is only expressed on the right hand. The dynamic body movement is lost, symmetry is broken, and the eyegaze has turned into extradiegetic, all of which are used to highlight the isolation of this last sign from the main part of the poem.

14.3.6. Symmetry

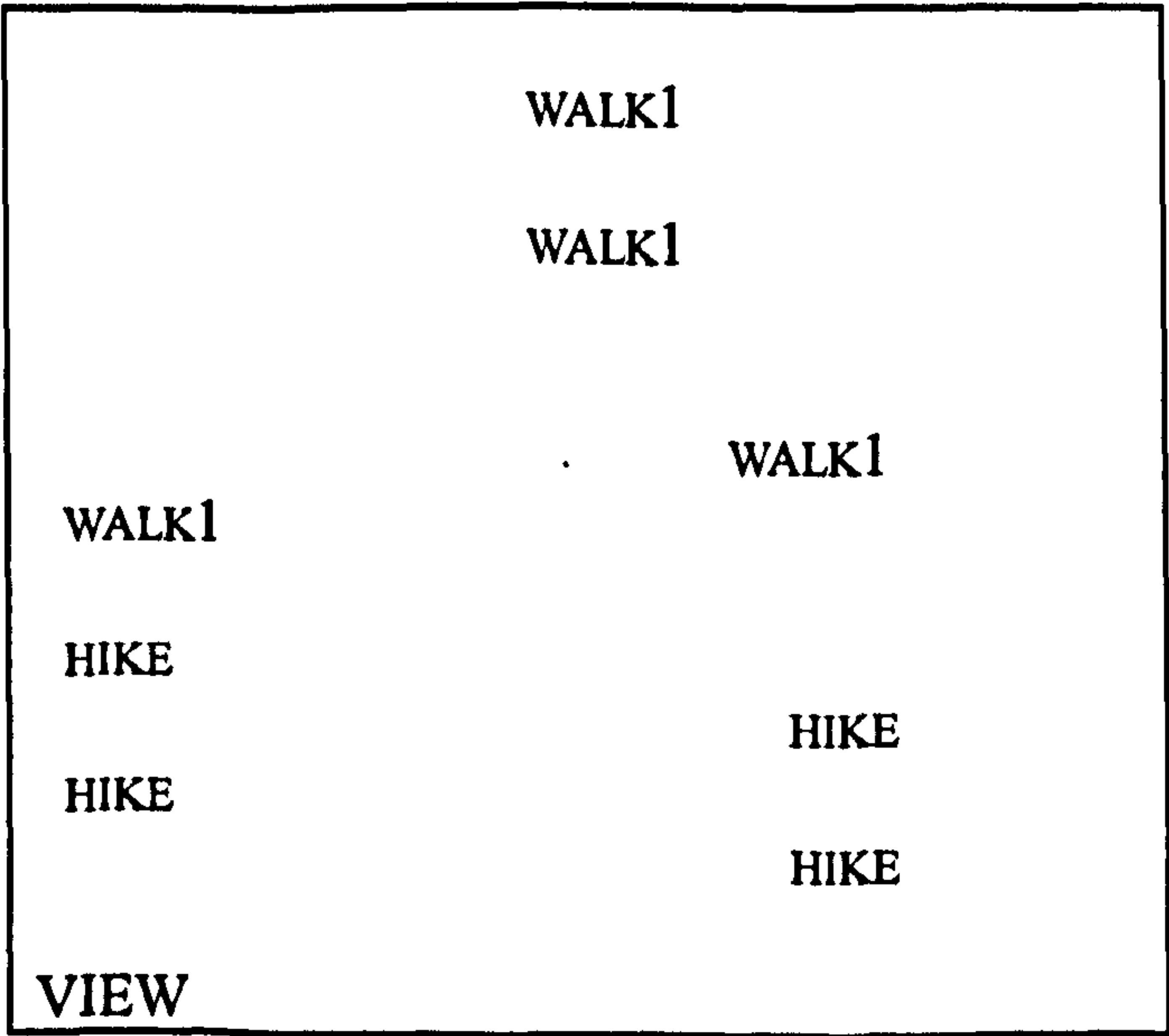
Symmetry abounds in this poem, not so much in the handshape but in the repeated movements on right and left sides (see the transcription below).

Gibson repeats many signs (most of them are asymmetrical by themselves) on left and right, such as WALK1, HIKE, VIEW, and MOUNTAIN. Some other signs are repeated at the centre of the signing space (the first two segments of WALK1, LAKE, LOVELY, HORSE-RIDE, and WELL...). All of these signs contribute to the symmetrical

development of the whole poem, which is visually very pleasing. It is closely associated with the left and right swing of a walk (see the rhythm section above).

There are two occasions where asymmetry can be observed. The first occasion is in the middle part when she starts to ponder upon the horse-riding. Whereas up to this moment the poet uses very iconic and productive signs, this section consists of three less iconic lexical signs (WONDER, WISH, ME). These lexical signs, together with the broken symmetry, suggest a shift in the structure. So far the poet has been “showing” the way she walks or the view she sees, but with these three lexical signs she “explains” what is going on in her mind. The asymmetrical pattern suggests that it is not part of the dynamic narrative, which is the characteristic of this poem, but rather it is a commentary. When she goes back to the “showing” mode (HORSE-RIDE), the symmetrical pattern resumes. In other words, symmetry is used to mark the different sections in the poem.

The other example of asymmetric pattern can be found at the end of the poem. Asymmetry in this section has more function than simply marking a change in the structural pattern. When she comes back to the reality from the horse-riding dream, the poet sighs and rather reluctantly starts to walk again. This reluctance is shown using broken symmetry. Instead of adapting the signs WALK1 or HIKE, she uses the one-handed sign WALK2 with asymmetrical movement to express the way she is plodding her way along the path. This lack of symmetry symbolically suggests the reluctance of the protagonist.



	VIEW	
HIKE		
	HIKE	
MOUNTAIN (LH) →		← MOUNTAIN (RH)
	LAKE	
	SOOTHING	
		← MOUNTAIN
	(RH)	
MOUNTAIN (LH) →		← MOUNTAIN
	(RH)	
MOUNTAIN (LH) →		
	WALK1	
WALK1		
	WALK1	
WALK1		
	WONDER	
	WISH	
	ME	
	HORSE-RIDE	
MOUNTAIN (RH) →		
	HORSE-RIDE	
	HORSE-RIDE	
	WELL...	
LOOK-AROUND		
	SIGH	
	WALK2	
	WALK2	
	WALK2	

14.3.7. Handshape

There are three handshapes used in this poem. WALK1&2 and HORSE-RIDE are signed with the bent-V (V'') handshape: HIKE shares the same handshape (Å) with WISH and ME: the rest of the signs are using open-5 handshape (MOUNTAIN, VIEW, LAKE, LOVELY, WONDER, WELL...). It is significant that WALK and HORSE-RIDE share the same handshape because they are two contrastive ways to climb up the mountain in this poem and the handshape visually connects them.

The handshape in this poem does not have a striking pattern as in Nigel Howard's *Deaf* (see below). Instead, it holds different ideas with the same handshape. It functions as a visual stabiliser, by limiting its variation to the minimum, so that other more prominent features (in this poem, it is the left and right rhythmical movement) stand out.

14.3.8. Blending

This poem involves one frame and two diegetic spaces, focused (giving the real-size representation of a walking person) and defocused ("zoom out" to see the walking person from a distance, or describes scenery ahead). In some signs, synchronic blending can be observed in many signs, in which the face of the poet represents the real-size protagonist's face while her hands are describing scenery at a distance or using a classifier to represent a person (as in WALK).

The last sign (o) shows an excellent use of synchronic blending. In Chapter 11, we have observed several cases of synchronic blending, all of which involve two diegetic spaces (which are different in size and focus) mapped onto the real space. What is unique in this poem is that there are *three* different spaces blended together. First of all, her left hand and her body posture still represent the poet as a walker. It creates the space focusing on the close-up of the protagonist (Diegetic Space 1). Secondly, her right hand is using the classifier to express the person walking, which provides the zoomed-out view of the protagonist from a distance (Diegetic Space 2). Finally, her gaze is cast upon the right hand, "seeing" the walking person, which suggests that the eyes of the poet belong to the extradiegetic space. The eyes of the signer are the eyes of the poet herself, not of the protagonist. The downward gaze previously expressing the reluctance of the protagonist (described above) has now

turned into the describer's gaze without changing the direction itself. The change in facial expression from n) to o) in Figure 14.3 (from a grumpy face to more neutral, smiling face) is the proof that the signer's identity has shifted from the protagonist (first person) to the describer (third person). Figure 14.2 illustrates the mechanism of this three-space blending. The blended space is a nice summary of the whole poem, with the emergence of the describer's gaze ushering the viewer out of the poetic scene.

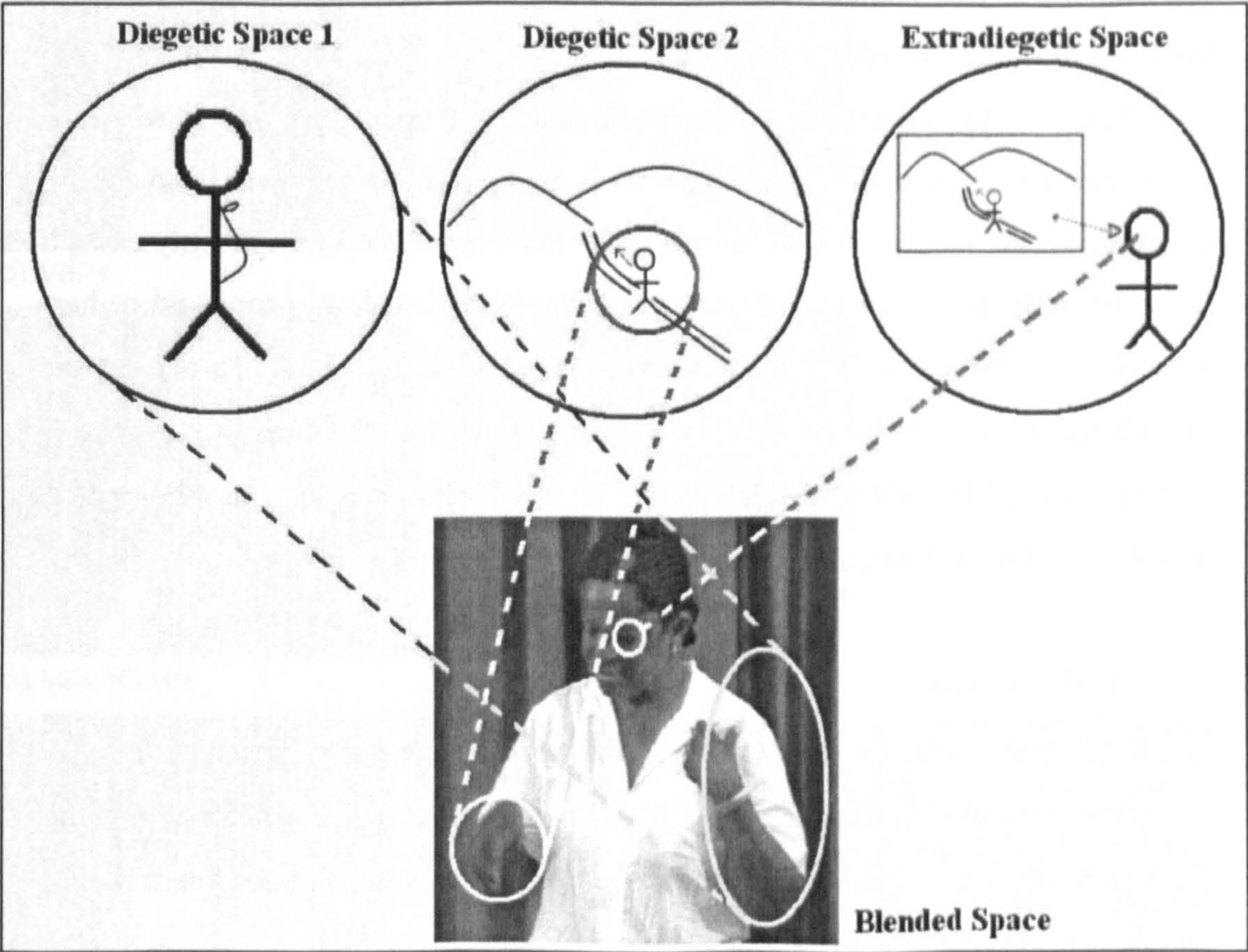


Figure 14.2 Blending in *Walking* by Maria Gibson

14.3.9. Eyegaze

Eyegaze in this poem is consistent. Throughout the poem the poet's gaze matches the protagonist's gaze (that is, the person walking), except for two occasions when she looks at her hands (gaze on hands). Those two exceptions are highlighted in bold in the above transcription. The first exception is at 00:19 in the middle of the MOUNTAIN repetitions. When she signs MOUNTAIN for the third time during this section, she suddenly looks at her hand, and her face portrays more emotion (g). By

tracing the manual signs with her eyes, the movement turns into the illustration of *actual* slope of the mountains, rather than the symbolic representation of MOUNTAIN. The physical movement of the hand (up and down) directly corresponds to the degree of the steepness of the mountains. By doing so, the poet is highlighting the manual sign, as if to say “Wow, look how steep it is!”. In this gaze on hands, the signer is still the protagonist in the story world, and she is not functioning as a prescient, extradiegetic describer.

In the last sequence of the sign WALK2, the signer looks at her hand again, but this time not as a protagonist but as an extradiegetic describer. The signer observes her hand from the outsider’s viewpoint.

There is also a symbolic contrast of upward and downward gaze direction in this poem. Throughout the poem, the poet is casting her gaze forward and slightly upward, just the natural way to look at the scenery ahead of her. The only exception (apart from the gaze on hands described above) is the last few seconds when her gaze is cast downward. This is when she comes back to the reality, sighs, and starts to walk again. She has no choice but to keep walking on foot. This leads to the metaphor of UP IS GOOD, AND DOWN IS BAD. Her reluctance is well-expressed with this downward direction of the gaze.

14.3.10. Haiku-ness

This may not be the best example of sign language haiku because it is not particularly concise. It has more emotional involvement than *Kettle*. But nonetheless the description of natural scenes shows the poet’s association of her poem to the theme of traditional Japanese haiku.



a) WALK1



b) HIKE



c) VIEW



d) MOUNTAIN



e) LAKE

f) LOVELY

g) MOUNTAIN
(gaze on hands)



h) WONDER

i) WISH

j) ME

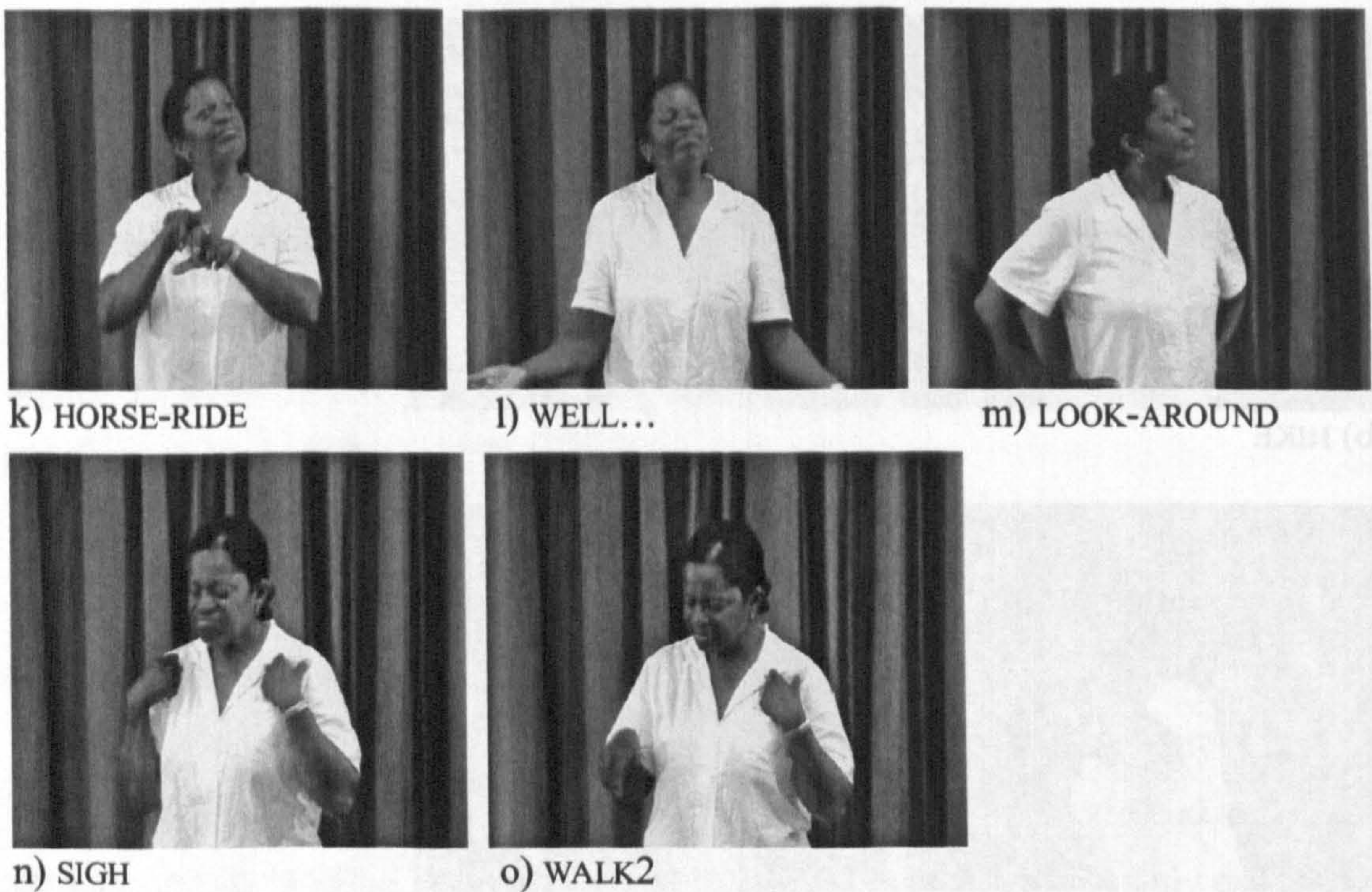


Figure 14.3 Signs from *Walking* by Maria Gibson

14.4. *God* by Penny Beschizza

14.4.1. Translation and Glossing

God sees the world and is discontented
 He sends his other half down to the world
 He meets people, people gather around him
 Then they start to throw stones at him
 He is crucified and dead
 Anger arouses, turbulence spreads
 Taking it all in, building it all up
 Everything goes back to God

GOD LOOK-DOWN GLOBE LOOK-DOWN SHAKE-HEAD NOD TWO-PEOPLE-STANDING-
 SIDE-BY-SIDE DESCEND WALK-AROUND MEET-PEOPLE CROWD-OF-PEOPLE ATTACK1
 ATTACK2 CRUCIFIED DIE ANGER TURBULENCE TAKE-IN BUILD-UP LINK-TO-TOP

14.4.2. Structure

The four-section structure found in *Walking* can be observed in this poem as well. First of all, the poet describes how God sees the human world and decides to send His son (introduction). Next, Christ is sent to the earth and meets many people

(development). But then people start to attack him and crucify him (turn). The final part consists of the sequence after his crucifixion (conclusion).

However, it is also possible to divide this poem into two halves, according to its formal structure (note that the four-section structure is based on the thematic development of the poem). This division is subtle, but marks a crucial shift in the narrative. The sign of ATTACK2 (Figure 14.4, l) at 00.20 is the dividing point. This division is purely formal, as theme-wise it is in the middle of the same event (Christ being attacked). Up to ATTACK1 (k), the poet has been using the classifier (mainly the G-handshape to indicate a person) to describe the scene from a distance (first of all, God looks down on the earth, decides to send Christ to the earth, and then Christ meets people, the crowd gathers, and people start to throw stones), although her gaze and facial expressions often express a character's feeling (God or Christ). In other words, there is a blend of spaces (face = focused view of God/Christ, manual signs = defocused illustration of the overall scene). When people start to throw stones at Christ, the poet suddenly changes perspective and illustrates the same scene from entirely from the Christ's viewpoint (ATTACK2). At this moment, the poet completely turns herself into Christ. From here onwards, no classifier can be observed, and the passion and the death of Christ, and the disorder that follows, are depicted more directly on the poet's body (i.e. the signs are more embodied). The signs are made closer or on the body (such as CRUCIFIED, ANGER, TAKE-IN, BUILD-UP), whereas the first half has more distant signs. Also in this second half, no blending of spaces can be observed. By restricting the narrative into a single space, the poet manages to depict the poetic scene with a stronger impact.

Several features (see below) highlight this contrast in the structure.

14.4.3. Metaphor

This poem makes metaphorical use of upper/lower space to make a contrast. There is a consistent division of space in this poem. The (right) upper space is associated with God, and the (left) lower space is associated with the world of humanity (the earth). This poem starts with God looking down on the human world, and ends with all the emotion building up to link with God.

This upper/lower contrast becomes symbolic based on the metaphor UP IS GOOD, DOWN IS BAD. For example, many negative signs such as DIE, ANGER, and TURBULENCE are either made at a lower place or with a downward movement.

The second half of the poem is characterised by dynamic up-and-down movements. Beschizza identifies the ending location of the previous sign with the starting location of the next sign, so that the transition becomes smooth. CRUCIFIED is made at the upper space, and the following sign DIE starts at the same location but then moves downward. The next two signs (ANGER, TURBULENCE) are made at the lower space. Then TAKE-IN moves from the bottom to the top, and back to the bottom again. The next sign (BUILD-UP) moves from the bottom to the top once more, and this time it links to the final sign, which is made at the highest location possible, corresponding to the initial location of the poem. The fact that this poem ends with the highest location leaves a certain positive interpretation.

14.4.4. Theme

This poem talks about the story of God, His son (Christ), and Christ's crucifixion, which is familiar to Christian people. However, this is not a simple retelling of the Bible story (for example, it does not talk about the resurrection of Christ). The poet brings in certain themes from Christianity, but she reinterprets such themes and fits them into the dynamic poetic signing. The interaction between God and human world is expressed skilfully through the use of space and up and down movement.

14.4.5. Rhythm

The first part of the poem has rather monotonous rhythm. Each sign is discrete and produced with approximately the same amount of time. The rhythm in the second half is more dynamic. The short and abrupt movement of ATTACK2 and CRUCIFIED is in good contrast with a very slow movement of DIE. The slow motion of DIE is the climax of this poem in terms of rhythm. After DIE, the signs become speedy, continuous, and flowing, leading the poem to the end in a rush.

14.4.6. Symmetry

There is not much symmetry observed in the first half of the poem, and even some symmetrical signs, such as GLOBE and TWO-PEOPLE-STANDING-SIDE-BY-SIDE, are made at one side of the signing space, not centralised. In sharp contrast, the second half is characterised by strong symmetry. All signs are symmetrical and made at the centre of the body. This contrast in symmetrical pattern helps highlight the division of the first and the second half of this poem.

14.4.7. Handshape

The first half of the poem is characterised by the frequent use of G-handshape, which is the classifier to represent a person. It is also understood as a pointing finger, which is the motivation for the sign GOD (pointing to the higher place). In this poem, Beschizza makes a clever use of this G handshape. She first uses it to point at GOD, but later the same handshape serves as a classifier for God and Christ (i.e. it is not pointing anymore, but the long and thin configuration of the index finger stands for a standing person). The second half mainly uses 5 and B handshapes (CRUCIFIED ANGER TURBULENCE TAKE-IN and BUILD-UP). They have much more substance than simple G handshape. These substantial handshapes contribute to the high visual sonority of the second half.

14.4.8. Blending

As described earlier, there are many signs which show synchronic blending in the first half of this poem, such as WALK-AROUND, MEET-PEOPLE, CROWD-OF-PEOPLE and ATTACK1, in which the face instantiates a focused diegetic space and the hands represent the defocused view of the whole situation. The second half is characterised with the use of a single diegetic space.

14.4.9. Eyegaze

Although this poem has a clear story to tell, the poet does not take the role of extradiegetic narrator. This is clear from the way she does not look at the camera throughout the poem. Even in her hands-down posture (a), she does not look straight into the camera but casts her gaze to the position of the first sign (prescient gaze). Instead of serving as a narrator, Beschizza keeps shifting between character's gaze,

the Poetic-I, and the gaze at hands. For example, during the first sign GOD she simply looks at her own hand (with neutral facial expression on her face), but then immediately her face turns into that of God (with dissatisfied expression). Such changeover is very subtle in this poem, or sometimes there is not significant changeover at all, and it creates certain ambiguity in some signs. For example, we cannot tell exactly who the subject of ANGER is at the death of Christ: the eyes may represent Christ, God, or the crowd (character's gaze), or an unidentified subjective viewpoint (Poetic-I). It is also unclear whose body the poet represents when she "takes in" everything into herself. This ambiguity adds depth to the interpretation of this poem.

14.4.10. Haiku-ness

This may not be a good example of haiku, as it is not brief and religion is not a particularly common theme for traditional haiku. However, the latter half has strong visual impact, and also is highly symbolic and leaves the audience with various interpretations, which is an important aspect of haiku.



a) prescient gaze



b) GOD



c) LOOK-DOWN



d) GLOBE



e) SHAKE-HEAD



f) TWO-PEOPLE-STANDING
-SIDE-BY-SIDE



g) DESCEND



h) WALK-AROUND



Figure 14.4 Penny Beschizza's *God*

14.5. *The Warm Sun* by Siobhan O'Donovan

14.5.1. Translation and Glossing

I walk to the sea and look around, but there is nothing.
 I lie down on the damp grass and watch the wavelets of the sea.
 Gradually, the red light begins to brighten the horizon.
 I see the sun slowly rise
 I am absolutely astonished!
 The warmth brushes against my cheek

ME WALK SEA SEA ME LOOK-AROUND NOTHING

ME pointing GRASS GRASS-WAVING DAMP ME LIE-DOWN REST-ON-ELBOWS SEA REST-ON-ELBOWS

RIPPLING-SURFACE RED WAVERING-LIGHT SUNRISE STUNNED ABSOLUTELY-STUNNED
 FEEL WIND-BRUSHED-CHEEK WARM

14.5.2. Structure

Theme-wise, this poem has a four-section structure similar to *Walking and God* discussed above. The poet goes to the sea to see the sunrise (introduction); she decides to lie down on the grass and wait (development); the sun starts to rise and the poet is delighted (turn); the poet feels the warmth accompanying the sunrise (conclusion).

These four parts are formally divided by pauses. The first pause comes at 00.10 when the poet signs NOTHING and puts her hands down for about two seconds, marking the end of the first section. Then at 00.22, she holds her sign REST-ON-ELBOWS for another two seconds. This not only divides the sequences but also helps to build up the expectation toward the third section. The sign ABSOLUTELY-STUNNED at 00.35 is produced slightly longer than other signs with its bouncing movement, which marks the division of the third and the fourth sections.

Form-wise, there is one major division that comes after the poet lies down on the grass (which corresponds to the shift from development to turn in thematic construction). Up to this moment, the signs are mainly lexical and she uses many classifiers as well (as in WALK and LIE-DOWN). After the next sign (REST-ON-ELBOWS), the poet exists as real-size person and the signs become more visual and iconic. This is similar to the division found in Beschizza's *God* in the previous section.

14.5.3. Metaphor

Because this poem talks about a scene in nature, a faithful retelling of the poet's experience of watching the sunrise, there is no explicit metaphor in this poem.

14.5.4. Theme

This poem is the first-person narrative of an experience of waiting for the sunrise at the sea. As O'Donovan explained in the introduction to this poem, this is her own memory as a child who was asked by the geography teacher where the sun came from and decided to go and watch it. This experience left the poet with a vivid impression, and years later she decided to pick it up as her "haiku moment". There is

a lot of emotion in this poem, and the poet's bewilderment on seeing the actual sunrise is reconstructed as vividly as the first-hand experience.

The narrative of this poem is similar to story-telling. The poet has an event to tell to the audience, and she does it in a less formal or disciplined way than, for example, Nigel Howard's poems that will be discussed later in this chapter. For instance, there is spontaneous repetition of a few signs (such as SEA or REST-ON-ELBOWS), without much poetic intention, which emphasises the character of this poem as narrative (rather than strictly disciplined poetic signing). It also uses many lexical signs instead of productive signs.

14.5.5. Rhythm

This poem flows at a natural speed, as if the poet re-experiences the whole event. Each sign is discrete, produced with about the same length of time, and there are a couple of pauses in between. This produces consistent monotonous rhythm throughout the poem. The increased sonority toward the climax of the poem (sunrise) is expressed mainly by the facial expression of the poet.

14.5.6. Symmetry

The majority of the signs in this poem are symmetrical (such as SEA, NOTHING, GRASS, DAMP, REST-ON-ELBOWS, WIND-BRUSHED-CHEEK, WARM). Many of these are used to illustrate the static scene. In contrast, the actions in this poem are either one-handed or asymmetrical but made at the centre of the signing space (WALK, LOOK-AROUND, LIE-DOWN, SUNRISE, and FEEL). Symmetry marks the division of backgrounded scenes and foregrounded actions in this poem.

14.5.7. Handshape

There are various handshapes involved in this poem. The handshapes that are used repeatedly are 5, O, and A. There is a contrast between the vast spreading images of the sea and the grass, and the sun as a single round object, which is expressed through the contrastive use of 5 (open) for SEA and GRASS, and O/A (closed, round) for SUN. Especially in the sign of STUNNED, the poet's rounded eyes, the half-opened mouth, and the handshape of both hands (round A) all echo the

roundness of the sun, creating a visually amusing effect for the viewer (see k in Figure 14.5).

14.5.8. Blending

This poem involves one frame (sunrise at the sea) which is narrated from a fixed first person perspective. Some signs synchronically blend focused and defocused spaces as in WALK and LIE-DOWN (the face is that of first person but the classifier shows a view at a distance), but there is not much of blending of shifting between different spaces in this poem. This is probably due to the fact that it contains many more lexical signs than creative signs, which means that the hands are seen more as linguistic tools than as visually instantiating parts of diegetic spaces.

14.5.9. Eyegaze

Throughout the poem, the poet takes in the viewpoint of Poetic-I. Because this is the first-person narrative, there are many ambiguous signs in which the poet can be understood as playing the role of a narrator (she looks at the camera occasionally, as in NOTHING or WARM).

14.5.10. Haiku-ness

This poem is far too long to be a good example of sign language haiku. However, the poet picks up a vivid moment in her life which is closely linked with a natural phenomenon, which represents the thematic aspect of traditional haiku.



a) WALK



b) SEA



c) LOOK-AROUND



Figure 14.5 *The Warm Sun* by Siobhan O'Donovan

14.6. *River and Stars* by Donna Williams

14.6.1. Translation and Glossing

River at day
 Stars at night
 Both sparkling

RIVER DAY pointing STARS NIGHT LINK SPARKLING

14.6.2. Structure

This poem is characterised by the contrast in terms of topic and form, and it is reflected in the structure. The first four signs juxtapose two images, and the last line connects the two and adds extra visual connection. RIVER + DAY and STARS + NIGHT have contrastive structures.

14.6.3. Metaphor

This poem involves a clear juxtaposition of two distinct images. They do not form a metaphorical relationship with each other in any traditional sense because both of them are equally concrete. Nonetheless, the crush of the images adds a certain depth to the appreciation of this poem.

14.6.4. Theme

As the title shows, the theme of this poem is the contrast of two discrete images. There is a contrast of the river on the ground and stars in the sky, and daytime and night time. Such contrasts are dissolved into a single unifying factor, namely, the sparkling light. This is a strongly visual poem. It combines a theme typical of traditional haiku (contrast) and a Deaf perspective (visual aspects of images).

14.6.5. Rhythm

The rhythm of this poem is very simple. RIVER and STARS are signed slightly longer, followed by one short movement of DAY or NIGHT. The last sign, SPARKLING, is the climax of this poem, and slightly slowed down speed is used to draw attention to this sign.

14.6.6. Symmetry

All signs in this poem are symmetrical, adding beauty to the simple arrangement of two images in nature. Symmetry can also be observed in the contrastive left and right locations of the juxtaposed images. The sequence of RIVER and DAY is located lower and on the left of the poet: STARS and NIGHT are located

higher on the right of the poet. This is motivated by the geological facts that rivers run on the ground whereas stars shine in the sky. But it also makes the poem visually very pleasing. Moreover, this “diagonal” symmetry (i.e. the plane of symmetry is both horizontal and vertical, producing left/right and up/down contrast simultaneously) adds a dimension to the otherwise flat construction of juxtaposition. The last two signs are centred in the signing space, both hands moving closer and away from each other. Perfect symmetry underlines the finale of the poem.

Symmetry in this poem simultaneously highlights the contrast *and* the similarities between the two images. By arranging the signs diagonally, the poet emphasises the contrast between RIVER + DAY and STARS + NIGHT. But at the same time, because they are symmetrically arranged, the audience is led to understand that they are closely bound together (which is reinforced by the sign LINK). This is in contrast with *England* (see below), which also contrasts two different images, but without highlighting the possible union between the two.

14.6.7. Handshape

Handshapes used in this poem vary, and they are not used particularly symbolically as is the case in other poems. But the common B handshape in DAY and NIGHT, together with the same palm orientation and the opposite, symmetrical movement direction, functions as a unifying factor. There is a loose pattern of less-open handshape followed by open handshape (V for RIVER followed by B for DAY, F for STARS followed by B for NIGHT, and F for LINK followed by 5 for SPARKLING)

14.6.8. Blending

In Chapter 11, I have already discussed this poem as an example of sequential blending. The two images are made at two discrete locations, one after another, and these locations are united by the third visual sign SPARKLING. Although the actual signs (RIVER, DAY, STARS and NIGHT) are no longer visible, they are seen as elements in the blended space, because their locations are retained.

14.6.9. Eyegaze

The gaze pattern in this poem is mostly the gaze on hands. The poet does not take any particular viewpoint but instead she describes the poem by tracing her

hands with the eyes. At the last sign, her gaze traces both her hands in turn. By watching her own hands, the poet equally highlights the twinkling of the river and the stars.

The only exception is when she looks at the camera between RIVER and DAY. She casts a glance at the audience, as if to emphasise, or make sure the audience get the sign correctly. It is interesting that in the RIVER and DAY sequence, the poet not only shows exceptional gaze pattern, but she also points at the location of RIVER. This may be because it is the first one of the two contrastive sequences (and thus the poet needs to create initial impact) or because the river is less likely to be associated with the twinkling light than the stars (this is because the river simply reflects the sunlight, whereas the stars produce light), so she felt the need to emphasise the river sequence more than the star sequence.

14.6.10. Haiku-ness

This is a good example of sign language haiku that shows features of traditional haiku. It is concise, it has strong visual appeal, and it juxtaposes two discrete images. The only difference is that the poet explicitly states the basis for juxtaposition, adding the last section (“Both sparkling”). Traditional haiku would not include “the answer” in the poem.

In sign language, juxtaposition is often visually motivated (for example, see Williams’ *Research and Duck*), which means that it is often the answer that makes the poem interesting (there is no point *not* showing the connection when it is visually motivated).



a) RIVER



b) RIVER (gaze to camera)



c) DAY



Figure 14.6 *River and Stars* by Donna Williams

14.7. *England* by Nigel Howard

14.7.1. Translation and Glossing

England

Vast green field

An ancient brick

GREEN FIELD(-SPREADING-OUT) OLD BRICK

14.7.2. Structure

Following the contrast in theme, this six-second poem is divided into two parts (GREEN FIELD and OLD BRICK).

14.7.3. Metaphor

As in the above example of *River and Stars*, the contrast of the juxtaposed two images does not explicitly refer to any metaphorical relationship. However, the visual and thematic contrast of the vast green field and an old brick makes the audience wonder what it stands for. This is a good example of an unresolved metaphor (see Chapter 6) which is common in traditional haiku.

However, there is an instance of metaphorical use of the physical space. In the first half of the poem (GREEN FIELD), the sign spreads out away from the signer's body. In the second half, the signs are made just in front of the body. This makes a visible contrast between the vast, spreading green field and the small, sturdy single brick. This may represent the openness of nature and the familiarity and approachability of a manmade craft.

14.7.4. Theme

Contrast is a key term to understand this poem. The fundamental contrast is (green, vast) FIELD and (old, small, red-brown) BRICK. There is a visual contrast between the vast field versus a small brick, and a chronological contrast between a present changing scene in nature and a piece of brick that has been there for many centuries, representing the heritage of England, or it can be a more notional contrast of nature versus human art. The interpretation is up to the audience.

In order to highlight this contrast effectively, Howard makes use of many different devices as explained below.

14.7.5. Rhythm

The sign FIELD is signed spreading out a considerable distance across the signing space with considerable length, both in time and space, illustrating how the field spreads out in the space (there is an interesting metaphor of longer signing time being understood as wider space). In contrast, BRICK is signed with a brief sharp movement. This difference in signing speed between the two signs is highly

noticeable and adds vivid impression to the poem. The shortness of the movement in BRICK especially stands out as the viewer, after observing the pattern of GREEN (short) + FIELD (long), expects the long sign to follow after they watch another short adjective sign OLD. Also Howard holds this sign for a while, emphasising its impact.

14.7.6. Symmetry

There is a simple pattern in the symmetrical structure of this poem. The adjectives (GREEN and OLD) are signed with one hand, and the noun equivalents (FIELD and BRICK) are signed with two hands. This creates another pattern of 1→2, 1→2. This does not make the first and the second half contrastive, but to the contrary works as a unifying factor of these two.

14.7.7. Handshape

The handshape used in the two signs in the first half are both open 5 handshape (GREEN and FIELD), whereas in the latter half the handshapes are more closed (bent-V and C). Once again, this metaphorically suggests the openness of nature and closedness of manmade crafts.

14.7.8. Blending

Two different frames are involved in this poem. The first half sets up a frame of the green field, which is a defocused, zoomed-out view. The second half is a separate frame in which the poet presents on a real-size brick in front of him. The perspective does not shift in this poem (the same poet looking at two different things), but the shift in the frame generates two diegetic spaces and divides the poem into two.

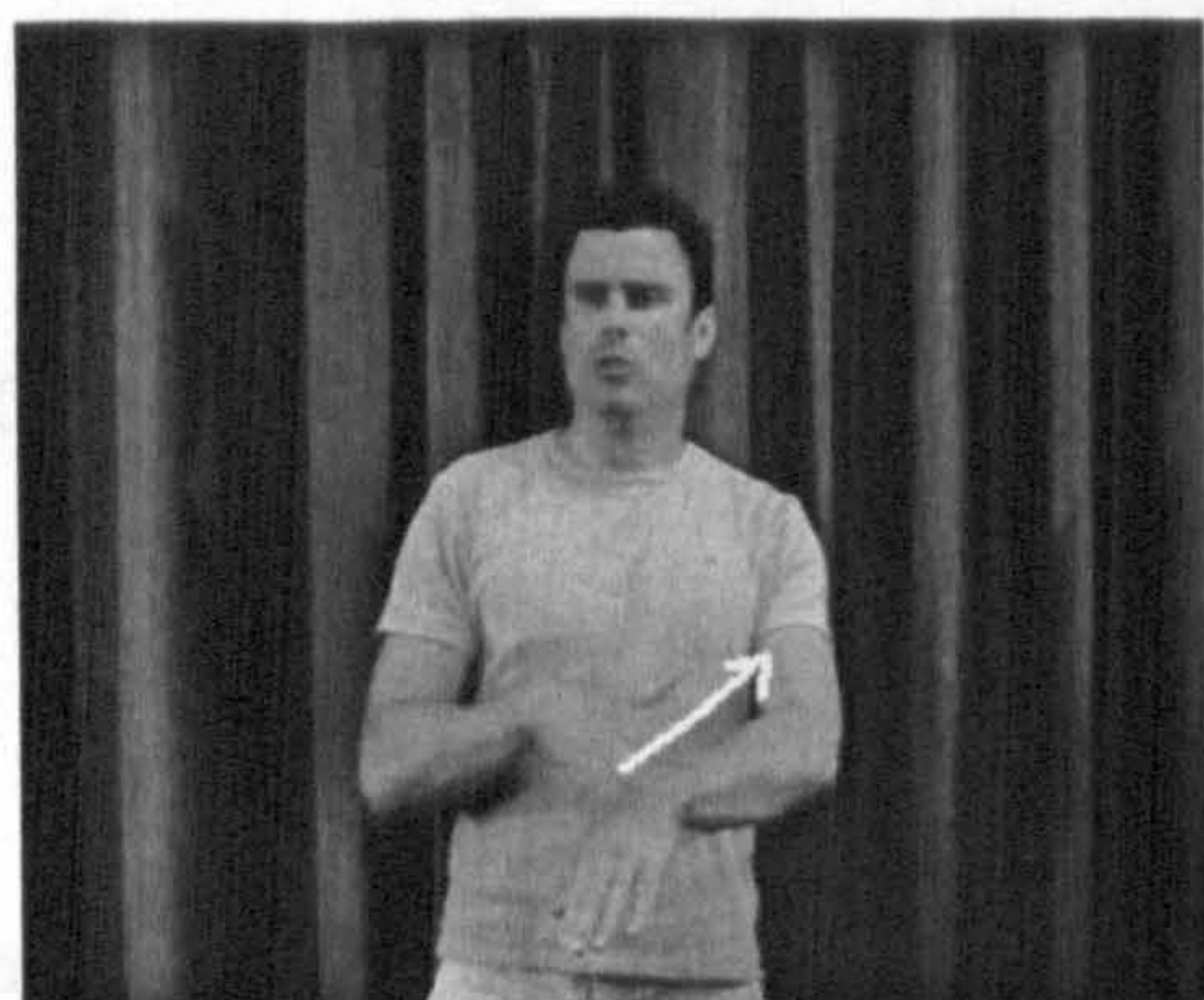
There is no blending of spaces in this poem.

14.7.9. Eyegaze

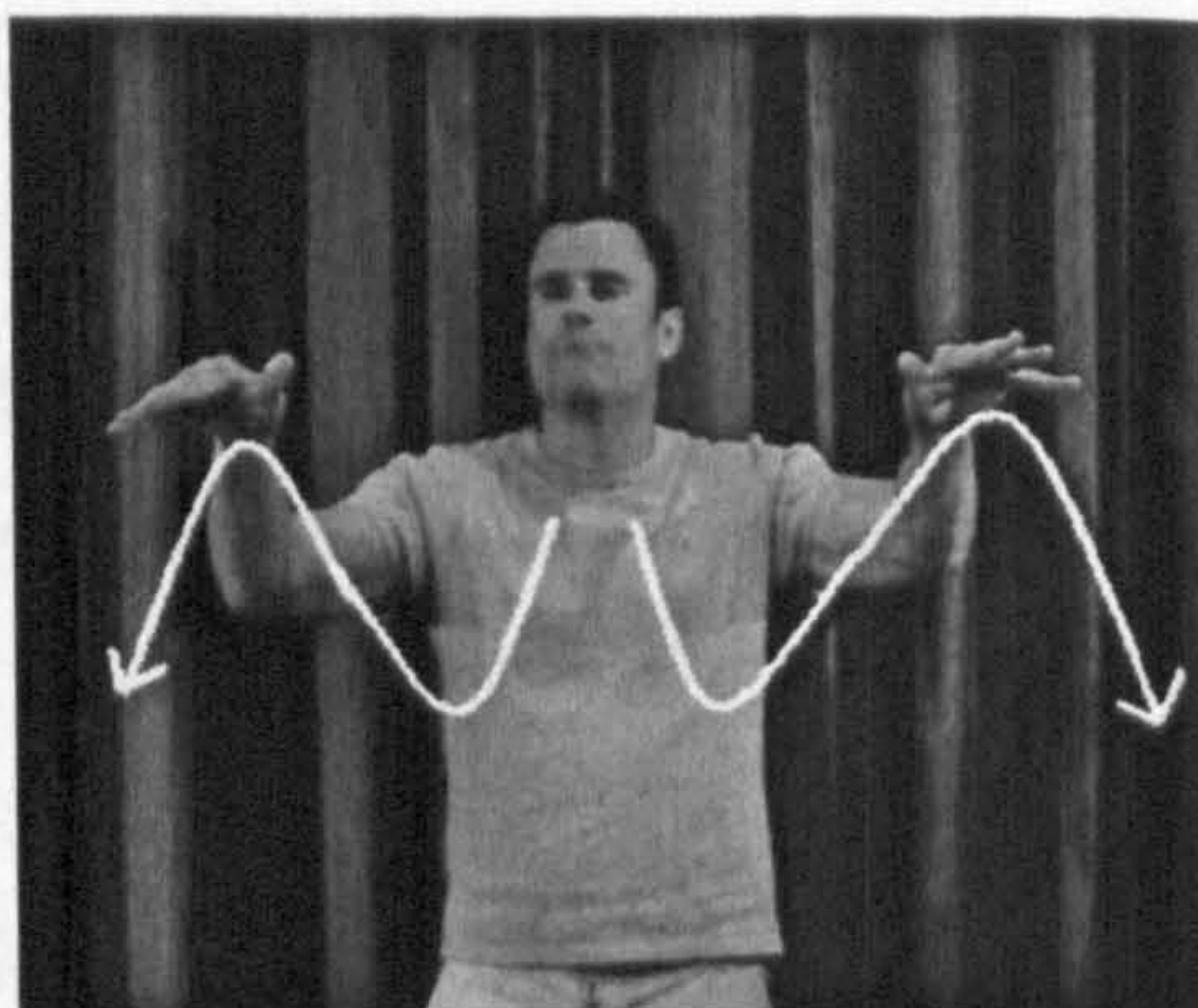
In contrast to *Deaf* (see below), the poet does look at the camera from time to time, showing that he is taking the role of the narrator. Although two different frames are involved in this poem, the gaze belongs to the same person (the poet).

14.7.10. Haiku-ness

The poet Nigel Howard has lived in Japan and has been interested in haiku for some time, even before the haiku festival activities. This may explain his enthusiasm for bringing major characteristics of Japanese haiku into his BSL haiku. His effort toward brevity, objective description and visual contrast in this poem, deserves the Bashō prize given to this poem.



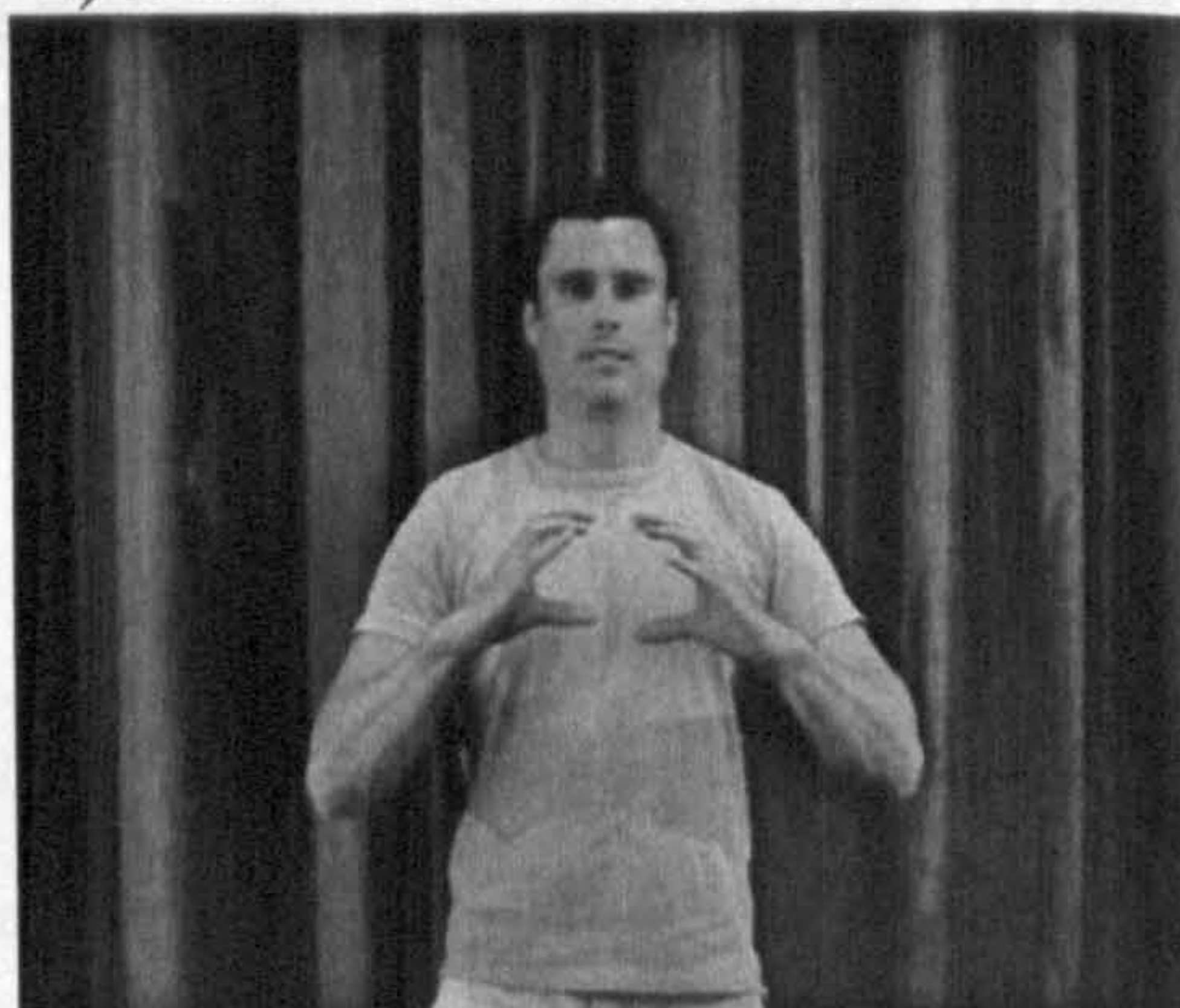
a) GREEN



b) FIELD-SPREADING-OUT



c) OLD



d) BRICK

Figure 14.7 Nigel Howard's *England*

14.8. *Deaf* by Nigel Howard

14.8.1. Translation and Glossing

A baby is born!
Oh...is he deaf?
Take him to the doctor
Implant him!

BORN BABY DEAF TAKE RECEIVE LAY-DOWN COCHLEAR-IMPLANT

14.8.2. Structure

This poem does not have internal divisions, except for one role shift that divides the poem into the first half (the parents holding a baby) and the second half (the doctor's viewpoint). But rather than having contrast between these two parts, this poem is more characterised by a smooth flow of signs toward the climax, that is, when the poem reaches the last and the most important sign of the poem COCHLEAR-IMPLANT.

14.8.3. Metaphor

This poem is highly symbolic in that a concrete event (a deaf baby is taken to the doctor and implanted) stands for the ignorance of hearing people and the frustration of Deaf people towards them.

Howard utilises various ways to metaphorically associate linguistic features to this larger picture of the Deaf issues. For example, the poet adds depth by differentiating the space near to the body and away from the body using the metaphor PHYSICAL PROXIMITY IS EMOTIONAL CLOSENESS (as discussed in Chapter 6). While the parent is holding the baby, it is situated just in front of the poet's body, representing the proximity of the parent and the baby. When the doctor receives the baby, he lays the baby slightly further away from his body. The last sign COCHLEAR-IMPLANT is made with both arms greatly extended. This may symbolise the attitude of the doctor who regards the baby as a mere object, or the emotional distance of the doctor toward the baby (as opposed to that of the parent to his own child).

The poet also uses handshape and eyegaze to produce metaphorical association (see each section below).

14.8.4. Theme

This poem contains a very strong message. In order to appreciate its message, background knowledge about Deaf people and their culture is indispensable. Deaf people regard themselves as linguistic/cultural minority, and *not* as disabled people who need medical care. They are proud of being Deaf and being signing people.

Therefore, hearing doctors' attempt to implant deaf babies with cochlear implants is seen as negative. This poem expresses the poet's anger and frustration at the ignorance of hearing people regarding cochlear implants. However, instead of directly showing his emotion, Howard makes this poem more symbolic and implicit.

14.8.5. Rhythm

The rhythm of this poem is characterised with the contrast of slow and smooth flow of signs until the last sign. Together with the unified use of handshape and symmetry, it creates harmony. After such slow-speed signing the tension is suddenly produced at the end of the poem. The movement speeds up, the facial expression becomes intense, and the fingers are bent with strength. No sign follows to make up for the tension accumulated at the end. This resembles the piece of music that ends with one fortissimo note, or a fortissimo broken chord in contrast to a series of harmonious chords that precede it. With its strongly negative handshape (see below) and the abrupt end, this poem leaves an uneasy lingering effect in the mind of the audience.

14.8.6. Symmetry

This poem shows a consistent use of symmetry. All the signs are two-handed and symmetrical (see Figure 14.8). This adds an aesthetic aspect to this poem.

The last sign COCHLEAR-IMPLANT is usually signed with one hand (against the side of the head behind the ear). It would have been possible to produce this sign one-handed and express the negative connotation of the cochlear implant through the broken symmetry. But Howard keeps his perfect symmetry until the very end of the poem. Instead of creating symmetry/asymmetry contrast, he chose to keep the symmetry intact in order to highlight a change in handshape (see below). Signed with two hands, it also emphasises the visual impact of the last sign, creating the impression of entrapment from both sides³³.

14.8.7. Handshape

Handshape in this poem produces the most striking effect. Howard shows consistent use of the 'B' handshape throughout the poem. The only exception is the

³³ I would like to thank Graham Turner for pointing this out

last sign COCHLEAR-IMPLANT, which is signed with the bent-V handshape. As mentioned above, this is the most important sign of the whole poem. The poet's hatred toward cochlear implant is best expressed by the sudden change in the handshape. As we have seen in Chapter 10, open handshapes are likely to be associated with positive meaning whereas bent handshapes often express negative connotations. Howard makes clever use of it in this poem. The strong contrast between the flat, open, positive 'B' throughout the poem, and the bent, tensed, and negative 'bent-V' at the very end, is extremely impressive.

14.8.8. Blending

Because the poet is taking a character's viewpoint throughout the poem, there is only a single diegetic space involved in this poem, in which the characters are portrayed in real size including the invisible baby. Thus there is no blending observed in this poem.

14.8.9. Eyegaze

The poet takes the viewpoint of the parent at the beginning, and later of the doctor. Thus the gaze behaviour in this poem is consistently that of one character or another. It is worth mentioning that, despite his clear intention to convey a strong message to the audience, the poet never looks at the audience throughout the poem. As is made clear from his speech below, Howard wanted to make each viewer ponder upon the message of this poem, and thus he refuses to "guide" the audience by being a narrator.

I would rather not explain about this poem. It's better to simply perform it and leave it as it is. Both Deaf and hearing people should directly watch it and understand by themselves. The aim of this poem, whatever it is, is up to you.

But there is an instance of symbolic eyegaze in this poem. The three "characters" in this poem, the baby, the parents, and the doctor, are placed from lower to higher locations in the space, respectively. Therefore when the parents look at the baby the gaze is cast downward, and when they look at the doctor they look up. The doctor's gaze is always downward both toward the parents and to the baby. This symbolically suggests the hierarchy, from the powerless baby to the influential

doctor. Especially the placement of the parent and doctor represents the strong power relationship between the parent and the authoritative doctor.

14.8.10. Haiku-ness

The vivid contrast between the last sign and the rest of the signs creates intense poetic effect, which leads to the nature of traditional haiku. Also, the way Howard presents a potentially very emotional theme in a detached and less emotional manner (although the facial expression of the last sign is intense, it still does not reveal the emotion of the poet) may be influenced by the reticence of traditional Japanese haiku. Above all, as in *England*, the brevity of this poem strongly suggests that it is made as a sign language haiku.

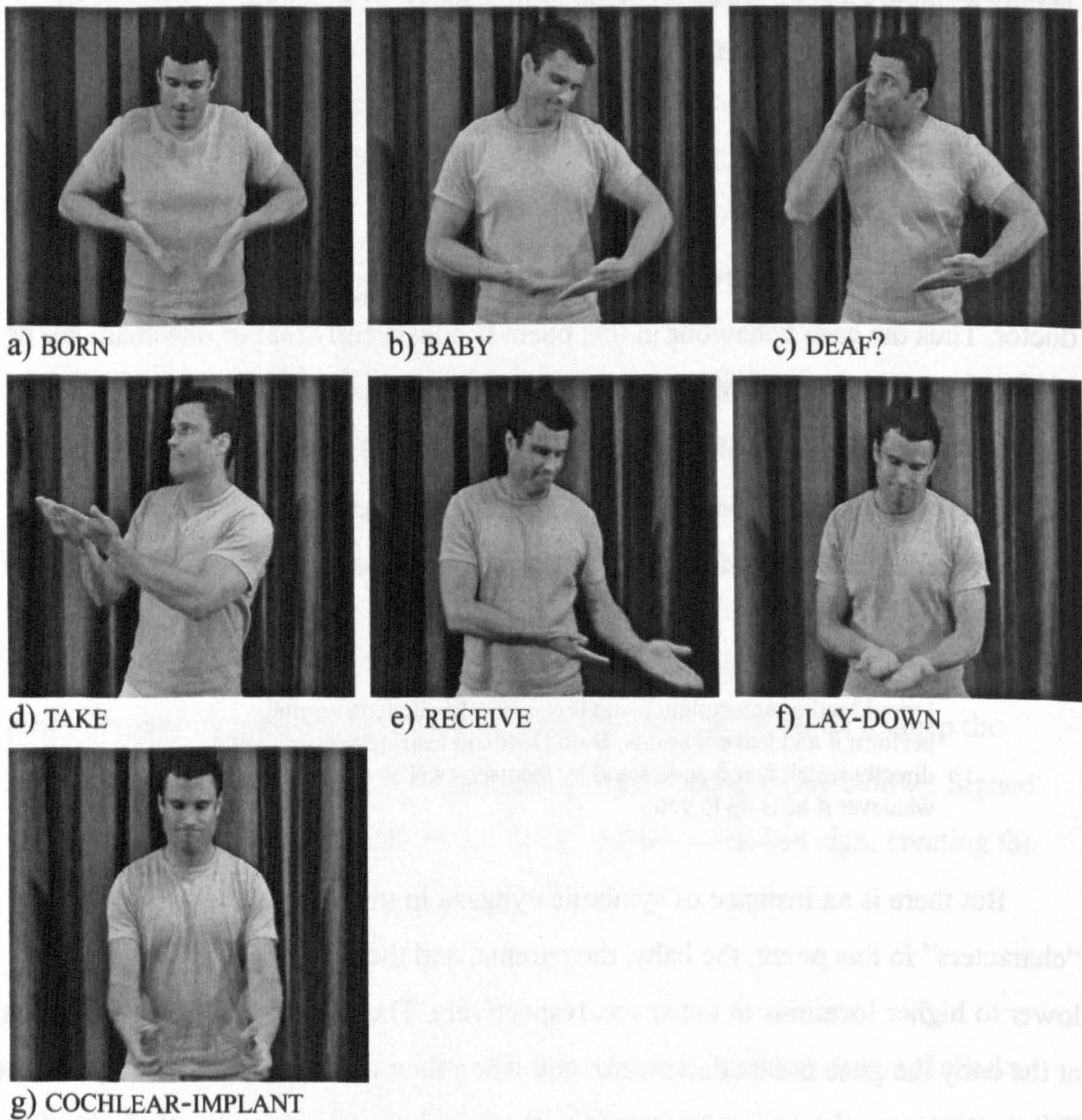


Figure 14.8 *Deaf* by Nigel Howard

14.9. Summary

The seven poems discussed in this chapter are the Deaf participants' first attempts to compose a poem that fits into the haiku discipline. In fact, they are their first attempts at poetic signing in general. Their lack of experience may show from time to time (such as general poor hand control, unintended repetition, halting transition, and so on), but overall they still utilise a variety of poetic techniques examined in earlier chapters.

In terms of haiku-ness, some poems are closer to the traditional haiku poem, while others retain more features of other genres of creative sign language. The participants' attempts to reconstruct what consists of a haiku vary significantly, which takes us back to the definitional problem of "sign language haiku". The only common feature across these seven poems (and across twelve poems from the Haiku Quartets discussed in Chapter 13) is the (relative) conciseness of the form. All participants are aware of the brief nature of haiku, and while some are more skilful than others in compressing the poetic effects, all poems successfully pack a great many poetic features into a short span of time. Such success may not have been achieved if the participants were simply told to perform a poem without any formal discipline. The brevity of haiku poses a huge challenge, but also encourages non-experienced Deaf people to take the first step into the world of composing poetry.

The successful performances of these seven poems prove that haiku can provide useful means for Deaf people to express their thoughts and experiences.

Chapter 15

Conclusion

Begin at the beginning, and go on until you come to the end: then stop.

Lewis Carol

The last two chapters were useful summary of the poetic features of sign language haiku discussed throughout this dissertation. Because each haiku is very short, they provide useful observations on how individual poetic features are drawn together to create the overall impact. It is precisely this brevity, this economy of the language, that has made haiku an ideal tool to overview the structure and poetic devices of artistic signing.

This dissertation is one of the very few attempts to identify a particular genre in sign language literature. A genre can be established when poets are aware that they are following certain rules to meet the basic requirements of a particular form, in which sense sign language haiku can be called a genre in the larger body of signed poetry. Although many original ideas of haiku were discarded, the poets seek alternative ways to achieve their understanding of the haiku discipline. I have shown the fundamental characteristics of sign language poetry through focusing on the particular style. I also hope that it can enhance the idea of haiku in the wider hearing audience.

As I have repeatedly claimed, sign language haiku is a fusion of two poetic forms: traditional art form in Japanese spoken/written language and sign language poetry. The merit of researching a blended poetic form lies in the fact that it informs us about the nature of each original form. There are great many features which the Deaf haiku poets did not give up for the sake of making their poem closer to the original sense of haiku, such as expressive, emotional, and embodied nature, anthropomorphism, metaphors and subjective themes of Deaf identity. This suggests

that they are the features which the Deaf poets truly acknowledge as their own heritage. This research was an attempt to identify such features through various different methods.

And yet, sign language haiku has a great deal of potentiality for future research. In spite of the King's useful suggestion in *Alice in Wonderland*, it is difficult to know how to stop, because simply there is no end in any kind of research. So many things I have left untouched. There are issues I could not incorporate in this thesis, such as neologism, blending of forms, the poetic use of classifiers (metaphorical classification of images involved in a poem), and the mouth patterns accompanying the manual signs, which is especially important for BSL poems in which mouthing and mouth patterns are essential part of the language. The notion of visual sonority and visual density needs much deeper exploration, and so does the concept of poetic frames and spaces. The research on metaphor is advancing day by day, both in the literary and linguistic field. The advance in technology itself can cast a new light upon the creation of signed poetry, as it is now not only possible but has become common to watch the signed performance in a digital form, which allows the Deaf poet to experiment with using various delicate movements that are not perceivable in a live performance.

The notion of sign language haiku is very transient. I have only dealt with about a hundred of examples in this thesis. When more haiku poems become available in the future, more research and new findings will inevitably change our understanding of this particular genre. With its shortness and approachability, sign language haiku has a huge potential to become (or remain) a popular form of signed poetry for Deaf people, young and old, new and experienced. A wealth of talent in Deaf people will, and should, keep enhancing the rich and intense art form of haiku.

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Appendix

List of handshapes



A



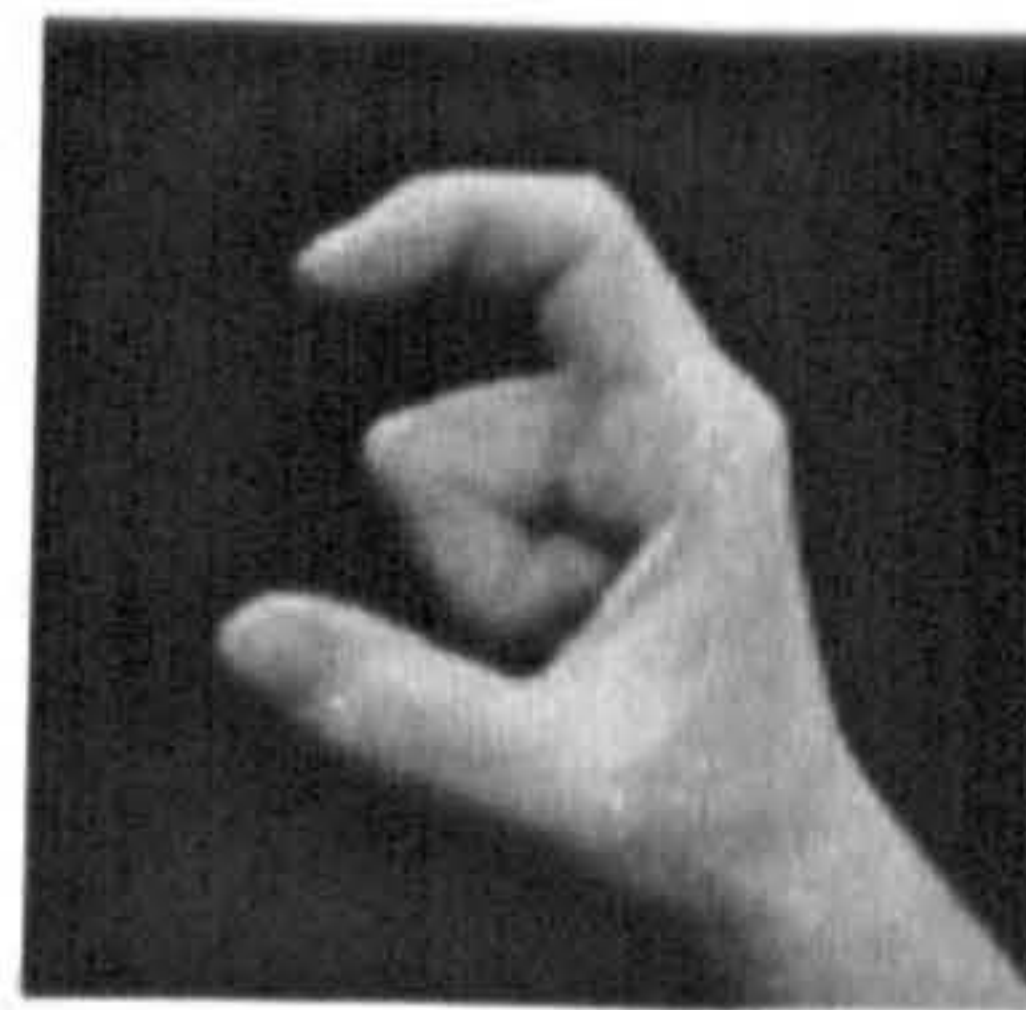
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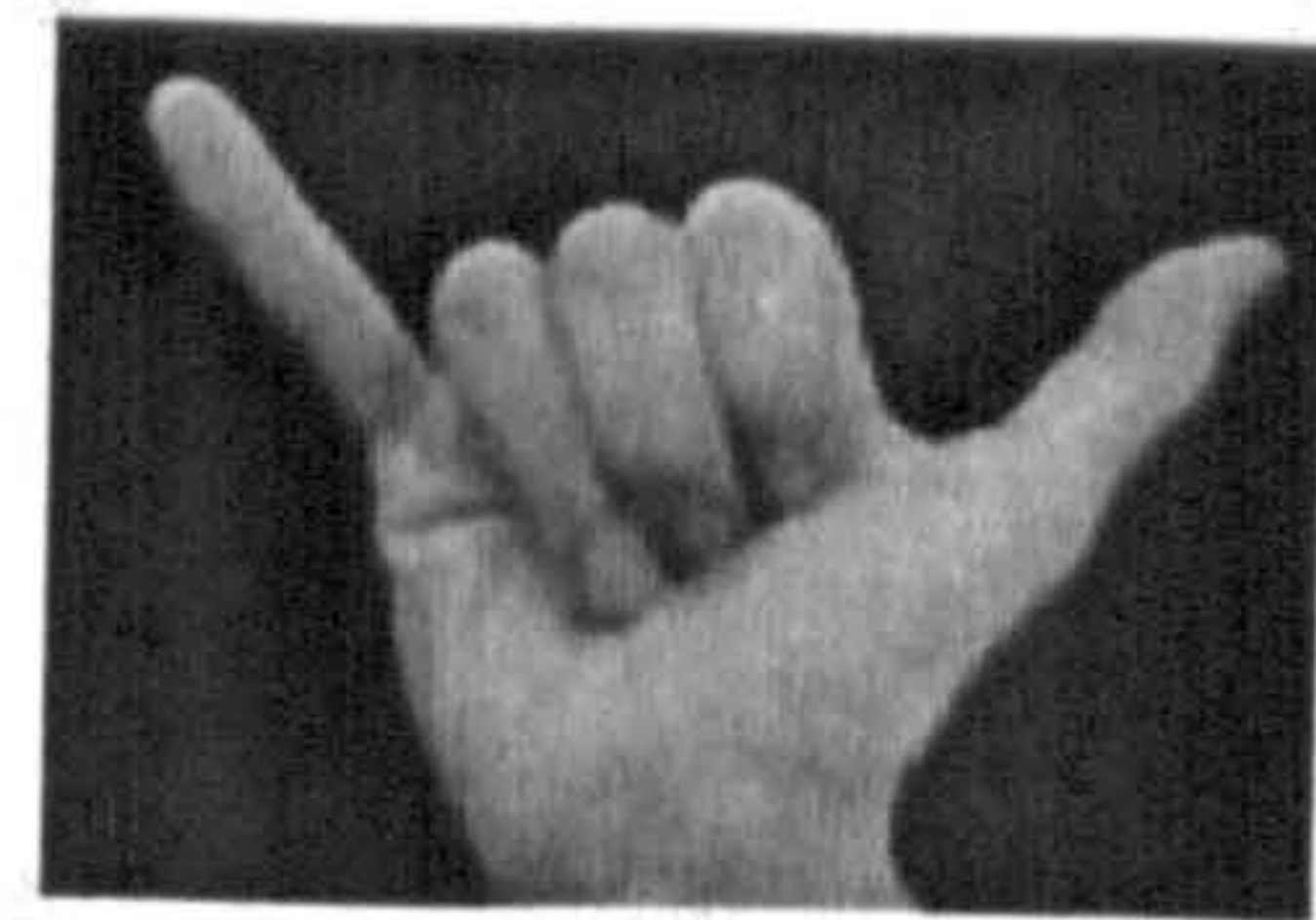
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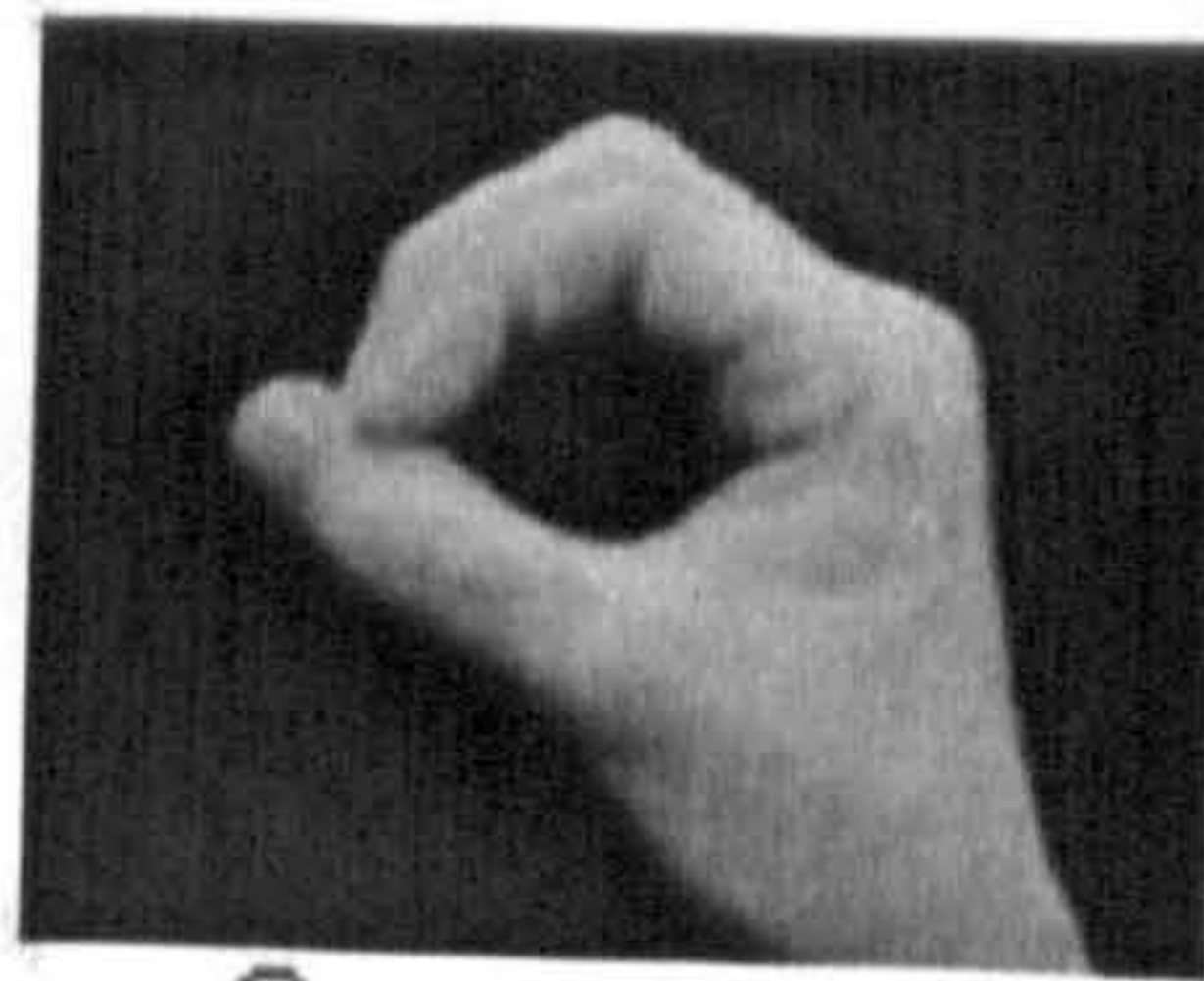
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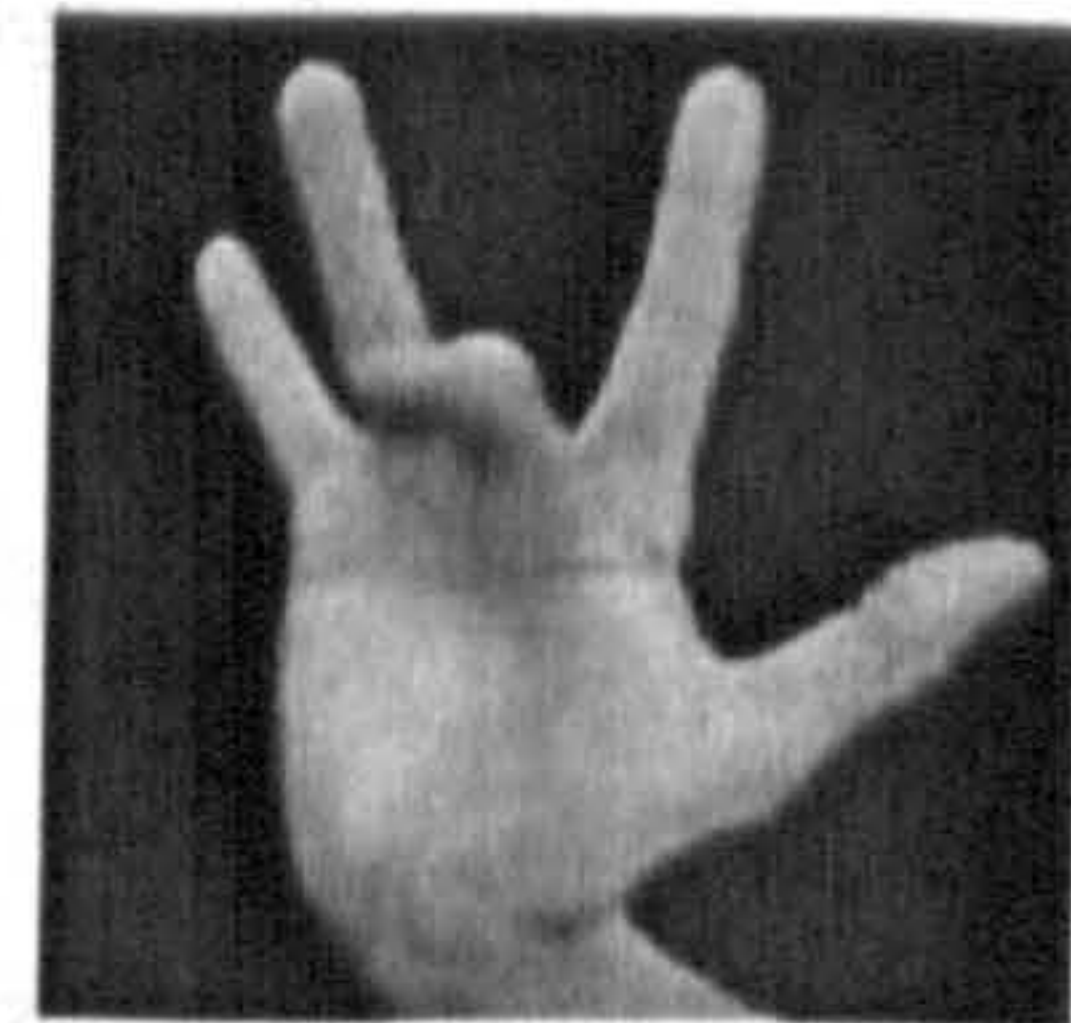
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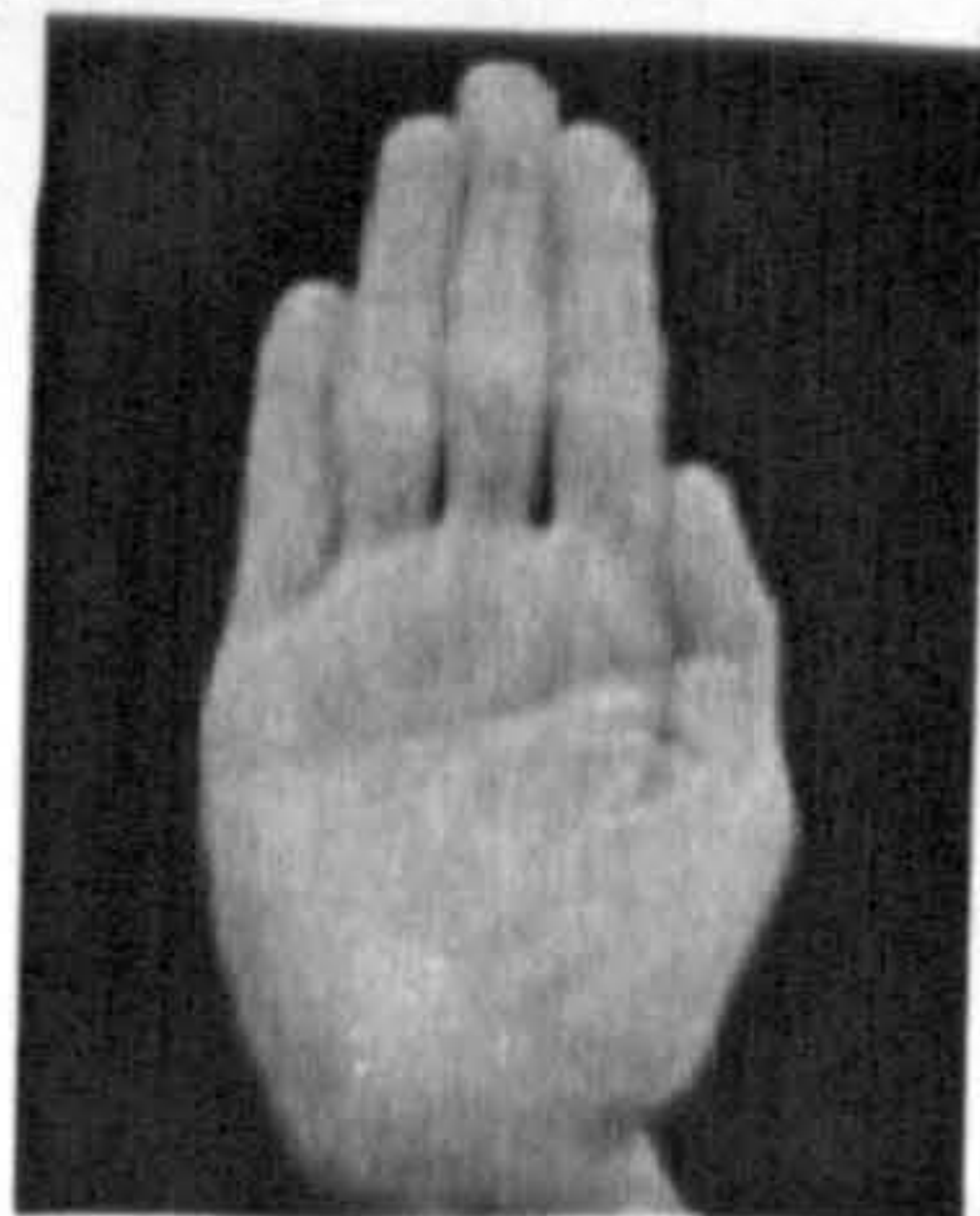
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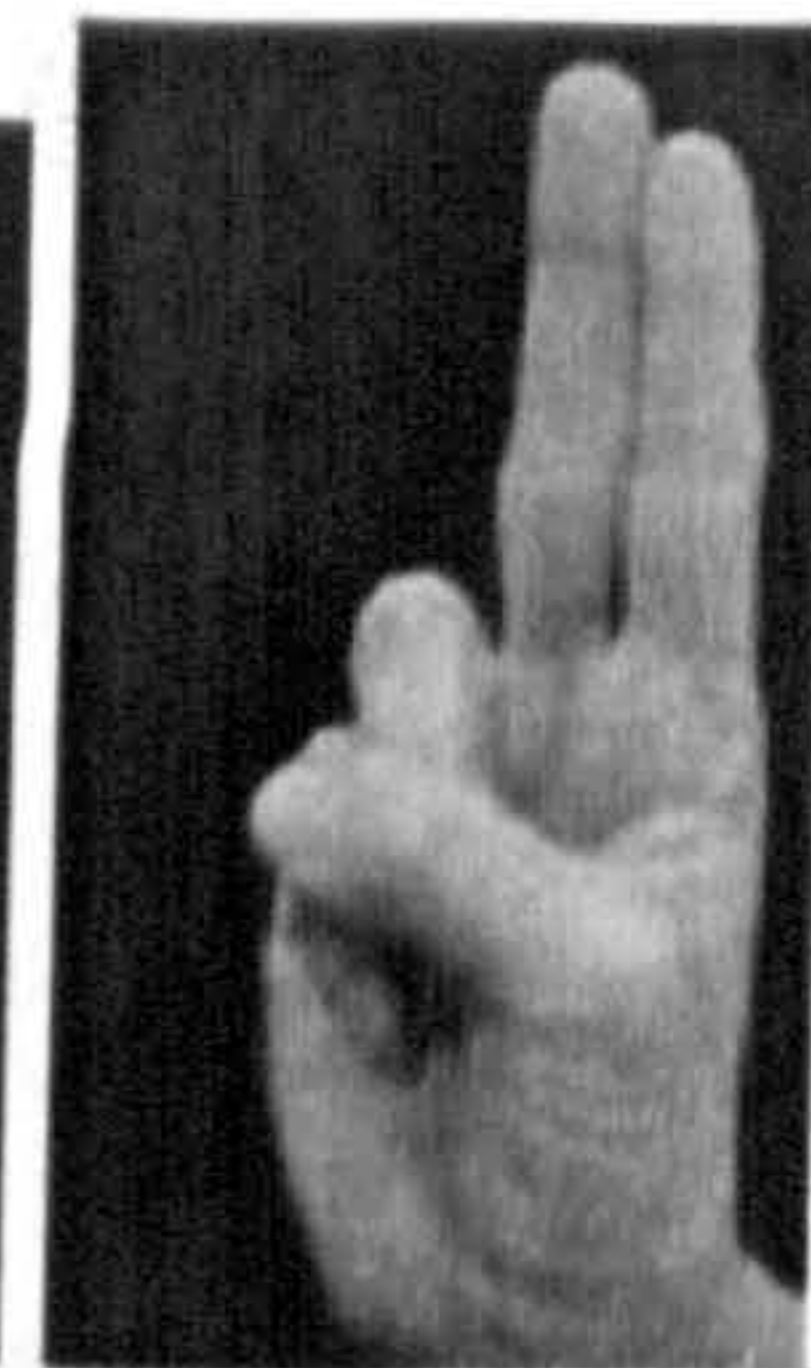
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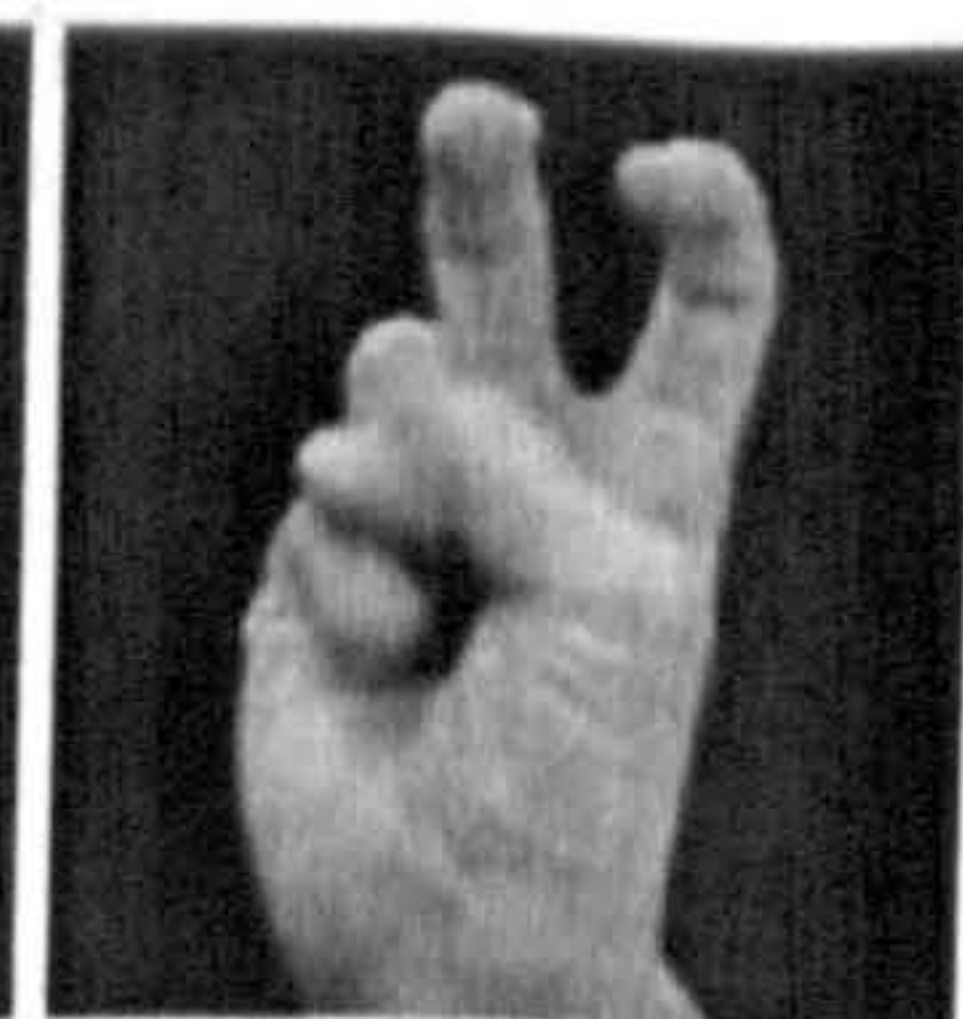
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