

# SOUND AND FURY

## NEW DIRECTORS/NEW FILMS REVIEW

IndieWire, April 7, 2000

Josh Aronson's "Sound and Fury" surprises on a number of levels, most notably in its refusal to serve as a routine triumph-of-the-human-spirit documentary about deaf people transcending their handicap. Billed as a new film about the communication wars of the deaf, Aronson's thoroughly engaging doc examines the controversial cochlear implant (a surgical procedure that restores some level of hearing to the deaf) and its volatile influence on three generations of an extended family from Long Island, the Artinians, for whom deaf identity is either celebrated or bemoaned.

Some of the Artinians are outspoken advocates of the device, others worry it will create a legion of robots. Among its intended recipients in this family are an infant and a five-year-old girl. The procedure's rate of success isn't guaranteed, which gives the cochlear skeptics in the family more fuel for the fire. What's important to consider in "Sound and Fury" is that the device's advocates and detractors come from both the deaf and hearing worlds. You'd think those living in utter silence would give their left foot to hear again but a number of the Artinians are willfully deaf, having accepted, if not embraced, their deaf identities.

Doesn't language determine who we are, even if it's sign language, they argue? Nonsense, proclaims an elder Artinian who isn't deaf, and who can't forget how hard it was to raise deaf kids in a hearing world that refuses to learn sign language. Children shouldn't grow up in isolation, grandma maintains.

One of the skeptics in the bunch is Peter, a deaf computer technician on Wall Street whose plucky five-year-old daughter, Heather, decides she wants a cochlear implant during the opening minutes of the film -- she doesn't want to be a misfit among kids her own age and you certainly don't blame her. As you watch Heather's navigation into the hearing world, to see if the surgical procedure is the right option for her, "Sound and Fury" takes a detour into the nebulous world of children's rights.

Heather's parents don't want her to get the implant -- they've found happiness in the deaf world, so why can't she? But at what point is it Heather's decision? To what extent does a body belong to a child? Meanwhile, Peter's brother Chris and his wife Mari discover their baby is deaf and decide to implant the infant with a cochlear device, stirring up yet more hostility from the deaf Artinians who argue that a child is not a guinea pig, that perhaps he was born deaf for a reason, and that deafness need not be a handicap.

"Sound and Fury" triumphs as a moral debate because it's so keen on exploring every possible angle of the Artinians' deeply existential dilemma. The film is refreshingly bias free. Aronson spends ample time showing us the positive merits of living in a non-hearing culture (the Artinians are a happy, well-adjusted clan of whom many have turned their handicap into an advantage) so that when a child does get implanted, and experiences sound for the very first time, we don't feel moved by an excess of emotion to race out and donate half our incomes to science.

"Sound and Fury" starts off a bit like some clinical medical documentary exploring a innovative new surgical technique -- something you might find yourself watching on the Discovery Channel. But it confounds expectations and raises fascinating new questions about cultural identity in general -- and not merely among the deaf.

<http://www.indiewire.com/article/ndnf-review-sound-and-fury-signifies-everything-riveting-doc-on-cultures-he>