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# Deaf Theatre: Audience Appeal

Pamela R. Linza  
*The College at Brockport*

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DEAF THEATRE: AUDIENCE APPEAL

by

Pamela R. Linza

A Thesis

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1999

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## Abstract

A majority of Deaf Americans agree that viewing a typical theatrical performance is a formidable task. In the second half of this century, attitudinal changes made by Americans have resulted in new and increased opportunities for their Deaf counterparts to participate in American theatre. American theatregoers who are Deaf can choose plays in general theatre as well as those in Deaf theatre. However, they experience problems in appreciating plays in Deaf theatre. More specifically, audience appeal is the main problem. Audience appeal refers to a concept in which major aspects of performances are designed to engage the thoughts and reactions of a group of spectators. Its definition is slightly expanded for playgoers who are Deaf; the aspects of performances are generally designed so that they play on human visual capacities. Essential characteristics of audience appeal for Deaf audiences consist of adding sign language principles and conventions from Deaf culture. Scholarly research in the recent years has shown that the Deaf audience members have preferences as to how they enjoy a theatrical experience. Some experts argue that the visual aspect of the performance is the most important consideration, while others contend that choice of language and culture contributes most significantly to appeal for Deaf audiences. Some argue that accessibility, not audience appeal, is the main problem. This may be misleading. Accessibility can simply refer to the way of getting in the theatre and provision of services. But it does not optimize Deaf audiences' theatrical experiences. In the light of textual, historical, and cultural research, the problem of audience appeal for Deaf people is investigated. To address the persistent problem of audience appeal, some experts recommend careful attention to cross-cultural issues. Other experts endorse innovative strategies that meet the needs of both Deaf and hearing audiences. Some contend that the above proposals will not help resolve the problem. They claim that development of productions unique to Deaf people is the only feasible solution. However, according to other experts, this solution is impractical in terms of costs and attendance. This thesis informs that

audience appeal for the Deaf in theatre is problematic, evaluates the existing strategies that have been implemented, and offers a set of suggestions for an improved Deaf theatre for its audiences.

This thesis includes information and recommendations for playwrights, directors, casts, audiences, and critics who are advocates of audience appeal for theatregoers who are Deaf.

## Chapter One

Since the early 1970's, documentation concerning aesthetics for Deaf people in hearing and Deaf theatres has mushroomed. One of the main concerns is audience appeal. The problem is that the current concept of audience appeal, those aspects of theatre that increase the appeal for audiences, is so varied. Some experts argue that the visual aspect of the performance is the most important characteristic of audience appeal, while others contend that choice of language and culture contributes most significantly to appeal for Deaf audiences. Still others argue that accessibility, not audience appeal, should be the main focus. This can be misleading. Accessibility can simply refer to provisions of services such as an appropriate language vehicle. But it does not necessarily optimize the theatrical experience for Deaf people. This thesis explores different issues related to audience appeal distinctive to Deaf Americans. The purpose of this thesis is to clarify and re-define the theatrical concept of audience appeal for Deaf people.

This thesis should make it apparent that Deaf theatre is in critical need of a new definition of its concept of audience appeal to ensure enhancement of its quality. Chapter one introduces modern theatre for Deaf people and defines terms relevant to the thesis. Chapter two reports the early trends in Deaf theatre and representative theatrical entertainment for the Deaf in the 20th century. Chapter three discusses different ideas proposed by scholars in response to diverse concerns and challenges of audience appeal unique to present-day Deaf theatre. Finally, the conclusion makes recommendations designed to enhance audience appeal in Deaf theatre.

Currently, a wide range of theatrical experiences is available to Americans who are Deaf. An increasing number of performances in professional theatres in major cities across the country are interpreted, making them readily accessible to Deaf people. In addition, the trend of community and school theatres in the United States offering signed translations of their shows has been growing steadily. Deaf patrons can attend not only performances found in general theatres, but also performances that are tailored to their needs. Such performances are usually

presented in Deaf theatres by professional and amateur troupes, a majority of them Deaf plus a small number of hearing actors with strong affiliations to the American Deaf community.

In the last thirty years, social progress for Deaf people in theatres has been made by leaps and bounds. The establishment of a national theatre for the Deaf in 1969 has spawned many small Deaf theatrical companies throughout the United States. As a result, the growth of Deaf theatre has created increased opportunities for Deaf people in many areas such as acting, training, translating, and so on. Americans also have formally acknowledged Deaf performers by casting them in roles in notable plays and films. Perhaps the most acclaimed Deaf actress today is Marlee Marlin who made deafness a household word by winning an Oscar award for her acting in "Children of a Lesser God," a movie based on a 1981 Tony-winning play of the same title. Another significant national event that has contributed to the study of the present-day American Deaf theatre is the Deaf President Now (DPN) movement at Gallaudet University (GU) in Washington, DC that occurred during the first week of March, 1988. This movement brought to justice the lack of faith the hearing people had in the ability of the Deaf to hold high-ranking job positions. The 1988 student-led protest inspired newly empowered and prospective Deaf theatrical professionals to seek job opportunities in hearing and Deaf theatres. It has also heightened the pride of Deaf theatrical professionals in exhibiting their talents in both theatres. Another milestone that has significantly altered the history of the American Deaf theatre is the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), signed into law by President George Bush on July 26, 1990, which legally mandates the rights of disabled Americans to have barrier-free access to public places. For Deaf American theatregoers, it means broadened access to performances and more job opportunities in theatres that typically hired hearing professionals.

Despite the flourishing knowledge on Deaf theatre, the information on audience appeal for the Deaf community remains rare. A bulk of the records exists in the form of newspaper, magazine and journal articles, reports and reviews about performances. However, a minimal quantity of scholarship on audience appeal is available, and it indicates the need for further inquiry into the topic. Experts who have varying perspectives about audience appeal have

conducted some studies. Major difficulties confronting researchers are: 1) the use of criteria that is based upon an aural language; and 2) the dearth of scholarly sources characterizing American Sign Language (ASL), a visual-gestural language, as an appropriate and innovative tool for development of theatrical productions for Deaf people. To overcome these challenges, the existing proposals for the critical analysis of audience appeal that is unique to Deaf people should be fused to become a new theoretical definition. In her dissertation entitled "Deaf Theatre Performance: An Aristotelian Approach," Rusalyn H. Andrews proposed a lexicon based on Aristotle's theories to analyze Deaf theatre performances. In his written presentations, Donald Bangs maintains that a successful production in Deaf theatre is dependent upon considerations relevant to Deaf culture. In this thesis, incorporation of certain Aristotelian principles proposed by Andrews and pertinent cultural studies about Deaf people are proposed for merger to define audience appeal for Deaf audiences more appropriately.

It is acknowledged that the scope of this thesis is narrow. Prior research in the area of audience appeal is seriously limited. This written discussion is built on only a few scholarly sources as well as first-hand insights. This writer also recognizes her biases as a Deaf person. Having attended a school for the deaf, the writer has found it important to take into consideration beliefs of deaf individuals from a wide range of academic and social backgrounds in order to reach valid conclusions about audience appeal unique to Deaf Americans.

A few key concepts used in this thesis require definitions. Due to the fact that the American Deaf community is constantly re-defining itself, it is necessary for terms used throughout this thesis to be clarified. It is helpful to have a common understanding of the terms in order to be able to follow the discussion in this paper.

According to a 1991 report by the National Center for Health Statistics of the US Health and Human Services (NCHS), about 20 million persons above three years of age, or 8.6% in the total United States population, have hearing loss. Hearing loss is generally classified as mild, moderate, moderately severe, severe, and profound. Some people with varying degrees of hearing loss do not define themselves based on their auditory and speaking abilities. Instead,



and work with Deaf people to achieve them (92).

According to Padden, many deaf communities in the United States tolerate the public use of different languages, especially spoken English and variations of signed English, within their communities in order to reach the common goals. Padden also observes that various cultural groups do co-exist within deaf communities, and because of such cross-cultural differences, internal conflicts are created. Padden says this phenomenon is also prevalent in other communities. Her point is that deaf communities are just like other American communities that consist of various cultural groups sharing common goals despite their differences. However, Padden finds that many deaf communities in the United States share “a single American Deaf culture” (93). That is, they share one primary characteristic, which is American Sign Language (ASL), described elsewhere in this thesis. Padden’s distinction between “deaf community” and “deaf culture” explains the sociolinguistic phenomenon of Deaf people allowing the use of different languages, but embracing ASL for communication ease. This thesis incorporates the cultural aspect of the American deaf community for re-defining audience appeal.

Another definition is essential to the purpose of this thesis is ASL, the most important cultural aspect of the American deaf community. ASL is a visually based language used by a majority of Americans who are members of deaf culture. Just like any other language, it has an elaborate system for human communication. Compared to hearing people, Deaf people use ASL to conceptualize, process, and view the “world” in the visual modality. According to Padden, values of speech and acting like a hearing person are not acceptable because they imply that Deaf people are incapable of communicating “deeply and comfortably” (96-97). Unlike spoken English, ASL provides Deaf people full access to natural communication.

According to historian Jack Gannon, ASL was first introduced in the United States in 1817 when the first American school for the deaf was founded. Developed on principles of sign language from France, ASL was also used for instruction in other schools for the deaf in the United States founded after 1817. Prior to this, schools for the deaf in Europe had adopted the oral method for years. During this period, educators were in disagreement about the method of

communication used to educate deaf students. Oralists claimed that sign language would isolate deaf people from the hearing world. Manualists advocated the use of sign language as a facilitator of deaf students' learning to live in the hearing world. This worldwide debate raged on until 1880. In 1880, the International Conference of Teachers of the Deaf met in Milan, Italy, to resolve the controversy between the manualists and oralists. The outcome of the conference was that the oral method was chosen to be the exclusive practice in deaf education.

Consequently, the use of ASL in American schools for the deaf was banned until the 1960's. From 1960 on, the skeptical attitudes about ASL began to change after researcher William Stokoe published Sign Language Structure: An Outline of the Visual Communication Systems of the American Deaf. The book asserts that ASL is a distinct language, not some sort of flawed manual English, as many experts in deaf education previously believed. Stokoe's publication has generated extensive research on ASL and eventually revived the use of ASL in some schools for the deaf throughout the nation (Gannon 359-365).

ASL is generally acquired by Deaf individuals while attending schools for the deaf, and the language remains to be used and valued in their adulthood through continued participation in local clubs and organizations for Deaf people. There are deaf people from different academic and social backgrounds who are not aware of Deaf culture. However, most of them do assimilate easily into the deaf community after they make the discovery. They eventually understand and even use practices found in deaf culture. All in all, the American deaf community is widely diverse. But when it is mentioned in this paper, it refers to Deaf proponents who appreciate ASL and their Deaf heritage.

Distinguishing different types of theatres discussed in this proposal is imperative for the ultimate goal of this thesis to be captured. In his dissertation on deaf-related issues in drama, Samuel Zachary refers to Deaf theatre as a collection of companies, productions, plays, techniques, acting, and other theatrical aspects associated with deafness. Deaf theatre is an umbrella term that covers two categories of theatres dealing with deafness: theatres of the deaf

and theatres for the deaf (Conley interview). Historical definitions of theatres of the deaf and theatres for the deaf come next.

In 1973, the term “theatre of the deaf” meant “sign language theatre.” In a monograph, actors Dorothy Miles and Lou Fant describe typical productions of such theatres as those that are based on:

a text originally written for spoken theatre, or with selected items of literature (poetry or prose), and arranges this work for simultaneous presentation in spoken language and in the sign language used by deaf persons in that country or locality (4-5).

Because all productions are spoken and signed concurrently, both hearing and Deaf audiences are at the same advantage of understanding the action. The reason is that hearing readers recite lines for signing actors on stage, who supplement performances. How readers are incorporated into the overall action varies from production to production. In consideration of audience appeal in the 1970’s, this was confined to voicing the texts of performances.

In the 1980’s, the 1973 definition for “theatre of the deaf” evolved slightly. Now it encompasses artistic possibilities of sign language. Contemporaries such as Stephen Baldwin, in Pictures in the Air, note that scripts are “translated into sign language, sometimes stylized or theatricalized for expressive or artistic reason” (38). The purpose of stage sign language used in creative ways is to reach out and include hearing audiences. According to Harlan Lane, this can be compared to opera, which is often appreciated by patrons of arts (151). Despite the lack of access to language, opera appeals to the auditory facilities of hearing audiences. In the same manner, stage sign language is appreciated by hearing audiences for its beauty and versatility of expression.

Other scholars have offered their definitions for theatres of the deaf. Zachary describes theatres of the deaf as those that combine Deaf and hearing cultural aspects to be presented to both Deaf and hearing audiences. That is, dialogue is signed and spoken simultaneously. Themes in the plays do not have to be about deafness, but they can as long as such themes are

also universal. Another writer, Rusalyn Andrews, states that theatres of the deaf are characterized by “transliterating words of a text written in English into some sort of signed English code” (35). The National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD) has historically demonstrated English-like signing that does not reflect the natural communication that Deaf people use daily. NTD, discussed elsewhere in this paper, exemplifies the concept of the theatre of the deaf. Theatres of the deaf such as NTD usually develop productions that do not typically deal with deafness. Instead, they usually attempt artistic techniques that provide entertainment for both Deaf and hearing audiences.

In contrast to theatres of the deaf, theatres for the deaf are restricted in audience appeal and experimentation with artistic techniques. Deaf audiences are the primary targets. Baldwin states that theatres for the deaf are likely to focus on scripts about Deaf people and their culture, and Deaf actors who use sign language are selected for performances (38). From Zachary’s viewpoint, only Deaf theatrical professionals should present productions (9). Most plays in this type of theatre examine issues that are unique to Deaf people. However, Zachary’s definition differs than Baldwin’s definition; he states such plays can be of universal significance. Performances in general are presented in sign language and not voiced for appeal to hearing audiences. Theatres for the deaf recognize and use as a guideline the preferences of their local deaf communities to adapt and/or develop effective signed productions. Therefore, this theatre is limited in its audience appeal and philosophy. Many theatres for the deaf, found mostly in community centers and schools across the United States, fit in this category. One example is Lights, On! of Rochester, New York. Schools and colleges for Deaf people that offer theatrical entertainment also belong to this category. Gallaudet University (GU) and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) are two major schools in the United States with a history of offering productions that appeal to Deaf people.

Although there is some disagreement among scholars regarding the terms related to Deaf theatre, there is general agreement that the ultimate purposes of theatres of the deaf and theatres for the deaf are dissimilar. Theatres of the deaf intend to present performances that meet the

needs of hearing and Deaf audiences. However, access to these performances through readers, aesthetic exploitation of sign language, and utilization of specific language and issues suggest that they are more suited to the needs of hearing audiences than those of Deaf audiences. By contrast, theatres of the deaf attempt to match the interests of Deaf audiences by applying ASL and cultural-specific issues in their productions. Consideration of the needs of hearing audiences is not fundamental to the goals of theatres for the deaf. Even though both types of theatres deal with deafness, theatres of the deaf aim to educate hearing people about deafness and theatres for the deaf intend to present performances that are aesthetically pleasing to Deaf audiences.

However, theaters for the deaf, especially academic theatres, have confronted difficulty in developing appropriate artistic elements for appeal to Deaf audiences. Even though productions at Gallaudet and NTID are primarily developed for the benefit of Deaf audiences, these theatres occasionally use material derived from texts for spoken theatre as they rarely come by original scripts from Deaf writers. They also incorporate hearing actors or translators for the benefit of hearing audiences, depending on the goals of productions.

In summary, general documentation in the last thirty years indicates that modern American society has changed for Deaf Americans. Social milestones such as legislative acts and the DPN movement have increased opportunities for Deaf people in many aspects of society, including theatre. Definitions associated with deafness as well as deaf-related issues in theatre have also been presented for a common basis for discussion of Deaf theatre in this thesis.

## Chapter Two

Theatrical entertainment for deaf people was available before 1900. However, it was primarily restricted to deaf people affiliated with the National Deaf-Mute College, the only college for the deaf in the United States. This college remained to be a steady influence in Deaf theatre into the next century. Deaf Americans outside the college had very limited opportunities to appreciate theatre. They had access to theatrical entertainment at their own gatherings. By the late twentieth century, major social changes resulted in an increasing availability of Deaf theatre for deaf Americans as well as hearing Americans. This section delineates the general history of Deaf theatre from 1884 to present.

In the early nineteenth century, the American system of education for the deaf was manual education, which refers to the use of sign language. In 1817, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, an American clergyman, and Laurent Clerc, a deaf Frenchman, co-founded American Asylum for the Deaf, the first school for the deaf in the United States. Subsequently, additional schools for the deaf were established across the country. During this period, deaf culture emerged and was extensively recorded. Concurrently, a growing number of educators began to condemn the manual education. They believed it impeded deaf people from mastering spoken and written English. Distinguished nineteenth-century thinkers such as inventor Alexander Graham Bell and educator Horace Mann denounced deaf people for conversing in sign language. In 1880, Dr. Bell was awarded the Volta Prize for his invention of the telephone and used the money to establish the Volta Bureau, a center for information on deafness (Gannon 77). In 1883, Bell, whose wife was deaf, presented a paper entitled "Upon the Formation of A Deaf Variety of the Human Race" for the National Academy of Science, according to Gannon. In his presentation Bell said, "Those who believe as I do, that the production of a defective race of human beings would be a great calamity to the world, will examine carefully the causes that lead to the intermarriages of the deaf with the object of applying a remedy" (Gannon 75). Bell also noticed that deaf people tended to "hold reunions, have social gatherings, form their own clubs

and associations, publish their own newspapers, hold religious worship, and state and national conventions.” He also argued against deaf people marrying deaf people by recommending that such social exchanges be forbidden and even outlawed. Bell believed that schools for the deaf were to be blamed for the formation of a deaf race. Bell’s theories had created disputes among the administrators of schools for the deaf. On the one hand, some administrators believed that his theories were misrepresented, as there was little statistical information on intermarriages of the deaf. On the other hand, others supported Bell, as manual education was not having any effect on progress of deaf students (Gannon 76-77).

Even though sign language was used in most schools for the deaf, administrators and educators were struck by the ideology of oralism that was strongly indoctrinated at the 1880 Milan conference. Even though the United States delegates opposed the establishment of oral methods, other delegates blamed sign language for the poor quality of educational programs for the deaf (Gannon 359). Consequently, oral methods were introduced in schools for the deaf in this country. Some school administrators ceased the practice of hiring deaf teachers. The percentage of deaf teachers in schools for the deaf gradually decreased from 36.6 in 1850 to 14.0 in 1927, reflecting the fall of manual education and the rise of oral education in the United States (Gannon 3).

By the late nineteenth century, the American political and social context was hardly conducive to nourishment of deaf culture. Despite the ongoing attacks from the institutions that defended oral methods and discouraged collectivity of deaf people, the American deaf community resisted the efforts to embrace the social changes. They organized rallies and events that preserved and promoted their sign language heritage. One of many ways to endorse deaf culture was theatrical entertainment. The earliest indications of activities in Deaf theatre are linked to the National Deaf-Mute College, founded in 1864 and located in Washington, D.C.

The National Deaf-Mute College, presently known as Gallaudet University, presented a production for the first time in 1884. Men in 1891 and then women in 1895 formed their first drama clubs (Gannon 38, Lane 145). Between 1884 - 1889, the earliest theatrical forms called

open pantomime and shadow pantomime were presented. Other programs shown at Gallaudet between 1884 - 1900 included melodramas such as Ten Nights in a Bar Room in 1894 and Lend Me Five Shillings in 1896, burlesques such as “A Pack of Cards” in 1892 and “Humpty-Dumpty” in 1899, a Minstrel show called “The Blackville Minstrels” in 1890, and an adaptation of She Stoops to Conquer in 1895 (Tadie 140-43, 189). Actors did all performances in either mime or sign language with no formal training (153). According to researcher Nancy Tadie, deaf audiences had to deal with many problems in watching performances during this period. Problems included not being able to see student actors who did not make their signs large and clear enough and signed their lines word for word without understanding what they meant. The stage situated at Chapel Hall was also low and flat, which made the plays difficult for deaf people to watch. It was poorly lit, interfering with deaf audiences’ ability to see the plays fully (190-1). Despite all kinds of difficulties, however, drama at the college continued to prosper.

At the same time that drama became available at the college, writer Dorothy Miles and writer Shanny Mow speculate that deaf people were involved in drama outside the college. Based on the records found in The Silent Worker and The Deaf Mutes’ Journal, newspapers for deaf people, early theatrical entertainment was available to deaf people in their communities. St. Ann’s Church for the Deaf in New York City frequently provided entertainment over the years. Another group called the Protean Society of New York City presented its “third theatrical entertainment” at the New York Institute for the Deaf and Dumb in January 1892. The Silent Worker indicates that the Xavier Deaf Mute Union of New York performed Valerian and Tiberius in New York in 1894. The All Souls Working Club of the Deaf of Philadelphia played The Merchant of Venice in 1894 at Mt. Airy School for the Deaf and in downtown Philadelphia. Pas-as-Pas Club of Chicago regularly provided miscellaneous theatrical performances at Clark and Randolph which had “an auditorium with a large, well-lighted stage, a drop and a full set of scenery (Miles 8-9). Miles believes that early American theatre was appealing to deaf people because theatre was visual. She states those types of plays in early American theatre, especially vaudeville, farces, melodramas, and swashbucklers, “emphasized physical responses” (9). Mow



argues that literary societies in schools and communities for deaf people contributed significantly to the early development of Deaf theatre. Presentations at meetings of the societies included poetry recitals, songs in sign, monologues, readings, storytelling, skits, charades, and pantomimes (Mow 288). Debates and discussions were also offered. Founded in 1865, the Clerc Literary Association of Philadelphia and the Ballard Literary Society, founded in 1874 at Gallaudet, are prime examples of the societies that were in existence in the United States in the late nineteenth century (Mow 288).

One of the earliest historical records shows a theatrical program presented by one local American deaf community before 1900. This rare source is not only historical, but also proves to be enlightening in terms of appeal to deaf audiences. In Chronicle of Chicago, published September 27, 1896, an anonymous report describes deaf audience members' responses to a production entitled Dr. Cureall, a comedy played by deaf actors at the Pas-as-Pas club. Before the production began, the unidentified reporter described the atmosphere in the auditorium as energetic. After the curtains were drawn, the audience abruptly became solemn upon seeing a portrait of the principal character Dr. William Bryant, which was prominent on-stage. They disapproved of the portrait by not applauding enthusiastically. The reporter described the leading character as "an example of a man who has too much of the gift of speech." Although it is not known what or whom Bryant signified, it is possible that he may have represented William Jennings Bryan, a nineteenth century American politician-orator. When the attention of the portrait shifted to the action, the mood in the club auditorium became less intense. Deaf audience members were continuously amused by the actions of the leading character, a doctor who attempts to cure diverse afflictions by prescribing the same medicine for his patients and charging outrageously high fees for his services.

The Dr. Cureall production is noteworthy for two reasons. The title suggests a satire of the negative stereotypes of hearing people about deaf people and their culture. Another reason is that Dr. William Bryant in Dr. Cureall and Dr. Alexander Graham Bell pose striking resemblances. Better known among the hearing for his invention of telephone, Bell was seen by

many deaf people as their opponent for espousing oralism in deaf education. Bell's many beliefs about deaf people enraged a majority of deaf Americans. To people like Bell, deaf people were seen for what they lacked, not what they had. One speculation as to why deaf audience members enjoyed the Dr. Cureall production so much is that the play projected and validated their disappointment about one-sided political and social resolutions pertaining to educating deaf people at the time. In light of the historical context, Bryant in Dr. Cureall is a likely parody of oralists such as Bell. The production seems to attack the arrogance and ignorance of institutions that vehemently supported oralism as the treatment of speech defects associated with hearing loss.

It is quite possible that the Dr. Cureall production belongs to a time when old ways of thinking about deaf people that began to clash with doubts of deaf people. In America during the nineteenth century, societal views brought here from other parts of the world revealed deaf people as social outcasts and unintelligent. One instance of many developments that reinforced these views occurred in the early nineteenth century. Frenchmen Jean-Marc Itard and Baron Joseph-Marie De Gerando conducted fruitless experiments such as fracturing skulls and threading needles through necks to transform deaf students' hearing status (Lane 132-134) The Dr. Cureall tale might have been designed as a subtle attack against ineffective experiments such as that of Itard's and prejudiced theories such as that of Bell's.

Although there is no information on the script or who wrote the play, the Dr. Cureall production is a contrast to Gallaudet productions, which were mainly adaptations. According to Miles, deaf people in the early nineteenth century did not write plays that were based on their lives. She does not attribute this to the lack of originality as many activities such as skits and plays showing originality were reported in various publications for deaf people (17). She speculates that it was "a reflection of the standards and values of the time" and deaf people were to believe that their handicap "must be overcome rather than lived with" (18). It is this writer's contention that plays at Gallaudet were adaptations because students were supervised and directed by educators, whose views of deaf people were stereotypical, whereas deaf people

developed community theatrical activities themselves. Not affiliated with any educational institutions, deaf people freely chose themes that they believed were appropriate to their audiences.

By 1900, a significant number of schools for the deaf were in existence in the United States. Formed in 1880, the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) served as the organization addressing unique needs of deaf Americans. Led by deaf leaders, NAD combated oralism and preserved American Sign Language, improved social conditions, and educated hearing Americans about what deaf people can do (Gannon 62). At the turn of this century, the foremost agenda of deaf Americans was to revive the use of sign language in schools for the deaf and to support the preservation of deaf culture. The nationwide oppression brought them together and clubs for the deaf were established in major cities. Over the years, these clubs regularly offered theatrical entertainment by special groups and deaf individuals with natural acting talent. As discussed elsewhere in this paper, such clubs have historically played an important role in the development of Deaf theatre.

Between 1900 and 1920, American theatre was becoming more established as indicated by its scope and depth, according to Miles (11). Musical comedies and other forms of musicals such as burlesques and comic operas were frequently performed in a growing number of repertory theatres across the United States. The new trend in America theatre was the use of voice in performances, resulting in a decline of visual emphasis (Miles 11-12). More and more plays also emerged as realistic, as opposed to earlier plays, which contained simplistic rural and regional themes of the late nineteenth century. As a result, they became inaccessible to deaf people, as they were unable to follow plots and dialogue. Because of strong emphasis on movement and color, vaudevilles and musicals continued, however, to be accessible to deaf people (Miles 12). During the 1920's, such performances were widely popular in schools and organizations for the deaf across the country, according to Miles. For example, Fanwood and Tennessee Schools for the Deaf had bands playing musical instruments. Vaudeville shows were

common at NAD conventions, banquets of the National Fraternal Society of the Deaf, and local groups such as clubs and literary societies (Miles 15).

Between 1900 - 1930, Gallaudet students continued to support theatrical endeavors. Tadie observes that the repertoire of plays by different student organizations during this period suggests students' awareness of the trends in the American theatre. The 1900 production of The Ups and Downs of Farmer Hayseed was a hit, according to the Buff and Blue, a school newspaper (157). "The play was free of all dull conversational acts and was made up almost entirely of acting and mechanical shiftings such as the mysterious disappearance and re-appearance of things...." (Tadie 157). Two plays well received by students in 1901 were Levin C. Tees' Tatters for scenery and Shakespeare's As You Like It for costumes. The above reviews allude that deaf audiences were especially attracted to the visual elements of drama - stage business, scenery and costumes. Subsequent plays included The Taming of the Shrew in 1903, The Scout of the Philippines in 1904, By Force of Impulse in 1905, She Stoops to Conquer in 1906, "Ici on Parle Francaise" in 1907, Uncle Rube in 1909, The Freshman in 1910, The Princess in 1911, and Cricket on the Hearth in 1914. Between 1920 and 1933, plays at Gallaudet were The Doctor in Spite of Himself, Leoncavallo's opera Pagliacci, Booth Tarkington's Beauty and the Jacobin, Macbeth, The Three Musketeers, The Curse of the Idol, and "While the Ship Sinks" (Tadie 156-70). Although it is not known how deaf students organized these productions, a glimpse at many titles of the productions indicates that they borrowed the scripts from spoken theatre for sign language adaptations.

During the 1930's, the Great Depression and the advent of silent films plagued American theatre, according to Miles. Due to poor economic conditions, fewer performances were played on Broadway. Writers such as George Gershwin, Richard Rodgers, Cole Porter, and Eugene O'Neill raised standards. Ironically, these factors improved the artistic quality of American theatre (Miles 19). The arrival of silent films in 1927 drew its audiences away from theatre houses, which were eventually abandoned. Vaudeville also decreased in its popularity. The continued unemployment crisis in the United States prompted the government to create new

projects in 1935. Among them was the Federal Theatre Project, which proved to be beneficial. It created new jobs for the unemployed. However, it was so powerful that it was suspected of instigating Communism, so the project was terminated in 1939 (Miles 19-20).

It is Miles's contention that the American deaf community continued to provide theatrical activities during the 1930's. She states that The Silent Worker, a publication for deaf people, went out of press, however, other records indicate that theatrical activities by deaf people continued. One instance is an announcement found in The Green Bay Press Gazette published on November 13, 1935. According to the article, the Green Bay Deaf Mute troupe presented a farce comedy entitled Too Many Babies. Along with the production, there was a series of several short comic skits performed behind a white screen. The idea for these activities in Wisconsin seems to have its origins at Gallaudet. As stated earlier, shadowgraphs were among the earliest theatrical productions at Gallaudet.

At the time when drama continued to thrive at Gallaudet, silent films were a favorite entertainment for the American public. As stated earlier, they were also popular among deaf people outside Gallaudet, as they were adequately accessible. According to Tadie, silent films were frequently shown at Gallaudet during the late 1920's and 1930's; the Buff and Blue publication reports that "movies are beginning to be more and more a part of the social life of the undergraduates" (168). Even though silent films were regularly shown, the interest of Gallaudet students in drama did not extinguish.

The popularity of silent films at and outside Gallaudet provides meaningful information on the history of Deaf theatre. According to some scholars, a few deaf people engaged in filmmaking activities. Some mime performances by silent-film actor Charlie Chaplin were the work of a deaf painter, Granville S. Redmond (Gannon 136). Albert Ballin, alumnus of the New York School for the Deaf and writer of The Deaf Mute Howls, was in Hollywood for some time as an actor in "His Busy Hour," which was never released (Gannon 78; Lang and Meath-Lang 26). He also made many attempts to encourage Hollywood to include deaf people in the filmmaking industry. For example, he wrote "Motion Picture Making as Seen from A Deaf

Man's View" which discusses the advantages of sign language use on high platforms and noisy sets (Lang and Meath-Lang 25-26). Emerson Romero was another deaf person associated with Hollywood for his accomplishments in silent films (Lang and Meath-Lang 302). He was recognized by many for his work with hearing actors to perfect his acting and movement techniques (Lang and Meath-Lang 304). Silent films were eventually replaced by talkies, which excluded deaf people from participating in the years following the advent of the talkies (Schuchman 1988). The involvement of deaf people in theatre diminished to almost nothing during the 1930's.

Several important developments occurred at Gallaudet during the 1930's that improved the quality of its following college productions. In 1934, the all-male Saturday Night Dramatics Club was reorganized. It changed its name to the Dramatic Club and extended its membership to women in 1935. Also during this year, A new curtain was also purchased by different student organizations for \$200 to replace "a drab curtain." From 1936 on, faculty members' assistance in students' staging productions and the use of readers became standard, attracting many hearing people to attend performances. Ben Jonson's Volpone was the 1936 production that featured all of the new changes (Tadie 172-6). Its audience was the largest ever at Gallaudet; the number attending was 275 (176).

Performances given at Gallaudet between 1936-1940 were Goethe's Faust, Cyrano de Bergerac in 1939, Percy MacKaye's A Thousand Years Ago also in 1939, and R.C. Sherriff's Journey's End in spring 1940. In January 1938, the Dramatic Club presented the "Amateur Night" for the first time. It was an annual contest to recruit new student talents to participate in dramatic presentations (Tadie 178-85). Although it is not known whether conventional scripts were used at the try-outs, it is possible that students may have contributed their original acts.

A newspaper report published in October 1940 by Brooklyn Eagle makes a rare reference to the connection between deaf people and theatre early in this century. It lauds the efforts of one deaf tutor for adequately preparing an Hispanic hearing actress for her role as the mute Belinda in Johnny Belinda, a play written by Elmer Harris. This production by an all-hearing

cast was premiered at the Belasco Theatre in New York City on September 18, 1940. The leading actress, Helen Craig, credited deaf Mrs. Florence Lewis May for helping her to represent the mute appropriately. Mrs. May, a graduate of Gallaudet, tutored Craig in sign language for a month. According to Craig, Mrs. May had on-stage experience; she played roles in MacBeth and Hamlet while a student at Gallaudet. The article also reports Mrs. May's active membership in the Hispanic Society of America, which advocated the arts. The organization had many deaf members, suggesting that deaf people were, indeed, interested in the arts. The report further mentions that many deaf people attended the Johnny Belinda production. They were thrilled to witness a "representation of the life of a deaf person...rarely in the theatre itself, the legitimate theatre" (Corby). Corby concluded that the play served to inform the public that "the deaf as human beings, (are) entitled to a place in society." The report implies that the social conditions in America continued to be difficult for deaf Americans. Opportunities for them to seek theatrical experience and entertainment continued to be seriously restricted in the 1940's.

On the contrary to Corby's report, it is likely that some deaf people were hardly impressed by the Johnny Belinda production. According to Miles, Johnny Belinda was adapted as a movie in 1948 after having a long run on Broadway. This movie drew different reactions from the deaf community. Some deaf people were delighted about Hollywood's acknowledgement of the existence of deaf people. However, other deaf people reported disappointment in how Belinda was portrayed as a deaf person. To them, Belinda was not an average deaf person. They feared that hearing people would see deaf people in the same way they saw Belinda (Miles 38).

Two years after Johnny Belinda was shown on Broadway, the Gallaudet College Dramatic Club under the leadership of student Eric Malzkuhn was invited to present Arsenic and Old Lace at the Fulton Theatre on Broadway. On Sunday evening of May 10, 1942, the college troupe enraptured the audience with their signed production of Joseph Kesselring's play, which received good reviews. Hearing critic Burns Mantle saw the production as "a harbinger of things to come" (qtd in Baldwin 9). Reviews describe this production as exceptionally good because

of the theatricalized sign language. However, it did not make any lasting or deep impact in the American theatre, suggesting that the American public continued to overlook the potential of deaf people making significant contributions.

By fall 1940, a course entitled Dramatics was part of the Gallaudet curriculum, which dealt with “the study of plays and the production of annual programs” (Tadie 310). Another course called Dramatics II was added in 1946. Frederick H. Hughes was the only instructor who taught drama during this period. Plays at Gallaudet between 1940 and 1953 were linked to the courses. Plays presented under Hughes’ guidance were Arsenic and Old Lace, The Pirates of Penzance and The Mikado, and Moliere’s The Miser, The Would-be Gentleman, and Tartuffe. Arsenic and Old Lace is noteworthy because it was the first play ever to be presented by deaf people on Broadway and Tartuffe is distinguished for being the first play performed outside the United States (Tadie 311).

By 1950, theatrical entertainment was popular at local clubs for the deaf and schools for the deaf. Three grassroots theatres of the deaf in New York City were in existence during the 1950’s, according to Baldwin (4). The Metropolitan Theatre Guild of the Deaf, the New York Hebrew Association of the Deaf, and the New York Theatre Guild of the Deaf presented skits, mime, anecdotes, and poetry, but not any full-length productions. The Metropolitan Theatre Guild of the Deaf was founded in 1957 by Richard Meyer and Joseph Hines and became the New York Deaf Theatre in 1979 (Mow 289). Emerson Romero, whose career in silent films was cut short by the talkies, and Wolf Bragg, father of Bernard Bragg, who is currently widely known in the international deaf community for his exceptional acting skills, performed frequently for the New York Theatre Guild of the Deaf (Baldwin 4; Miles 22). According to Miles, Bragg presented ASL adaptations of short plays and stories such as The Monkey’s Paw, Auf Weidershen, and The Necklace (24). There were similar groups in Washington, DC, Chicago, and San Francisco (Baldwin 5). According to Mow, the Dramatics Guild of the District of Columbia Club of the Deaf was popular among deaf people in the DC area during the late 1950’s and early 1960’s. Lithuania, its 1962 production directed by Betty Miller, won an award



in the one-act play tournament sponsored by the D.C. Recreation Department. It also presented Flower Drum, the first ever full-length musical attempted by a Deaf theatrical company. This theatrical company was renamed the Frederick Hughes Memorial Theatre (Mow 289). Long one-act plays done by members of literary societies at schools for the deaf were also common (Baldwin 3). The above historical information demonstrates some evidence of nonprofessional theatre made available by and for deaf people outside the Gallaudet community in the 1950's.

Meanwhile, Gallaudet made new developments in its drama curriculum. In 1953, drama courses at Gallaudet were dropped. The following year, the instructor Hughes' sudden death rekindled students' interest in having the drama offerings reinstated. The administrators responded three years later by offering World Drama in 1957. The course was taught by hearing Leonard Siger whose expertise was classical drama. In 1958, Play Production was offered for the first time and remained in the curriculum until 1963 (Tadie 311-2).

Students in Siger's World Drama requested that a classical play be presented at Gallaudet. Siger initially discouraged it, but eventually sought opinions of his colleagues Robert Panara and George Detmold, Dean of the college. Siger, Panara and Detmold eventually brought together all clubs affiliated with drama, and told them that the Dramatic Club was weakening because so many students were involved in drama offered by different clubs. The clubs agreed to relegate the responsibility of staging annual productions to the Dramatic Club when Detmold promised them a course offering to compensate for the change (Tadie 312-3).

As a result of the above negotiations, the Dramatic Club was reorganized and its first advisors were Detmold, Siger, and Panara. Its initial production was Oedipus the King in 1957. Hamlet, Othello, Rhesus, and Trojan Women were presented in later years. One of the major challenges the advisors had to overcome was adapting the English versions of the classics for sign language presentations (Tadie 313). With stalwart support of faculty, the drama program at Gallaudet improved considerably in the late 1950's.

Increased publicity about drama at Gallaudet served to encourage future endeavors in the establishment of a national theatre for deaf people. In March 1958, a report in The Evening Star

describes deaf students' rehearsal of Shakespeare's Hamlet. The article also contains a series of pictures of student Harold Palmer as Hamlet translating a line into sign: "That two-faced hypocrite who wears the crown..." The pictorial depiction of the signed line is actually an improved version of Palmer's original signed translation. The report mentions that the rehearsal was a time-consuming process because of the translation, one of the biggest challenges in Deaf theatre. The play was also filmed as a documentary for a NBC program in Washington, DC (Baldwin 10). This press report and the filmed documentary are among the first records that reached a large number of Americans.

Publicity about Gallaudet theatre became widespread by the late 1960's. It came in forms of reports in newspapers and appearances of Gallaudet students and faculty on television programs. A report by Siger in an issue of John Hopkins magazine exemplifies the type of publicity the college received at the time. Siger describes how he got involved with productions of Oedipus and Antigone. He invited his colleague Panara to translate the plays. Their collaborative efforts resulted in presentations of college productions of classics such as Hamlet in 1958 and Othello in 1959. Siger's report also discusses the benefits of sign language in theatre such as its inherent beauty and power for expression of thoughts and feelings. Siger further argues that, despite the small number of signs in ASL, its value is underestimated. He said that ASL is laden with non-manual signals, making it possible for deaf people to express a wide range of meanings while using only one sign. For example, the ASL expression of "YOU GO-TO STORE" with raised eyebrows is equivalent to the spoken English version of "are you going to the store?" In the ASL question, only three signs are used, but the raised eyebrows indicate that the statement is a question. Due to the expanded publicity about Gallaudet's flourishing drama program, the American public finally acknowledged the existence of Deaf theatre.

However, the debates about drama at Gallaudet reveal the initial skepticism of the hearing public about the potential of sign language in theatre. A reply that Siger made to the John Hopkins Magazine in 1960 is as follows:

Of course, the sign language of casual conversation is not appropriate to the stage. But sign language properly learned and properly used can be a vehicle of considerable power and beauty, better suited to the expression of emotion, in some respects, than any spoken language (12).

Such statements were representative at the time. People like Siger tried to justify the stage sign language as a legitimate theatre art form. Even though awareness of Deaf theatre was growing, the general understanding of the American public about Deaf theatre was minimal.

At the same time, deaf people began to express their needs as audience members for the first time in print. The first critique written by a deaf person appeared in the Buff and Blue, a college newspaper, in 1961. Some of the points student George Johnston raised in his response to a college production The Late Christopher Bean:

1. A play performed for deaf people in Sign Language had to be carefully selected on the basis of all the the visual elements contained in it, including the setting, costumes, lighting, and the action depicted on stage.
2. Deaf people generally prefer plays with lots of action since they rely on sight for understanding.
3. If a play did not have much action, then other visual aspects had to compensate, such as interesting, colorful sets and Sign Language dialogue that was clearly defined.
4. Plays for deaf people had to be carefully translated into Sign Language that was easily understood by a deaf audience, and this involved translating meanings instead of translating word for word, which sometimes happened in plays produced at the College.

Johnston identified clearly the preferences of deaf audiences; they wanted plays with the fewest visual distractions, a lot of action, creative substitutions for verbosity, and use of sign language for dialogue. Johnston's analysis is one of the first critical reviews written by deaf people that raise a set of issues unique to deaf people in terms of audience appeal.

Another significant development in the history of Deaf theatre occurred in 1959.

Distinguished representatives from the Broadway went with psychologist Edna Levine, who was known as a strong advocate of the deaf community, to Gallaudet to see Othello. In that group were Anne Bancroft currently appearing as Helen Keller in The Miracle Worker and its director Arthur Penn. The group's fascination with the students' presentation was so absorbing that the concept of the establishment of a national theatre of the deaf was seriously considered (Baldwin 10-11).

In 1960, Mary Switzer of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare was contacted by Levine, Bancroft, and Penn to develop a proposal to seek governmental funding in establishing a national theatre for the deaf in which deaf people could hone and demonstrate their theatrical talents. The proposal, however, was rejected for the lack of a sponsor to oversee the funds of the proposed theatre. Bancroft and Levine teamed up once more, and yet the grant was turned down again due to "lack of financial backing" (Baldwin 14).

It was not until after Bancroft and David Hays, scenic designer of The Miracle Worker, saw the Gallaudet production of Our Town directed by Detmold in 1961 when the idea of the national theatre of the deaf became much more feasible. Hays had formed a special relationship with Detmold who worked closely with dedicated faculty members such as Siger and Panara and students active in the Dramatic Club such as Harold Palmer and Gilbert Eastman. Hays and Detmold frequently corresponded with each other. In 1962, Hays met George C. White, who was a theatre executive interested in purchasing the childhood home of dramatist Eugene O'Neill. Hays contacted Levine who, in turn, made arrangements for Hays to meet with Switzer. A proposal was written for the third time, and it was finally accepted. The grant of \$16,500 by the Rehabilitation Services Administration of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare was awarded to National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD) to cover the period between June 1, 1966 and March 1, 1967 (Baldwin 11-17).

The first national tour of the National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD) began in the fall of 1967. The year before the 20-city tour, an almost all deaf troupe performed live before the audiences of university and amateur acting groups. The original troupe consisted of 17 people –

13 deaf and four hearing serving as readers (Baldwin 27-32). According to Gannon, a performance of NTD was also broadcasted on "Experiment in Television," a one-hour NBC program. The purpose of this program was to show the American public what Deaf theatre could do and that it could make contributions to American theatre. This televised presentation is also noteworthy for what had happened prior to its broadcast. The Alexander Graham Bell Association, an organization historically noted for promoting speech training as the primary method for educating deaf people, sent to the NBC officials its objections to the NTD's scheduled appearance. It argued that "the exposure of sign language on television would undermine the efforts of thousands of parents of deaf children and teachers of the deaf who are trying to teach deaf children to speak" (Gannon 346). In response, Hays presented convincing counterarguments, and the program went on air as scheduled.

The first contributions of the NTD to the American theatre were: Giacomo Puccini's "Gianni Schicci," William Saroyan's "The Man With His Heart in the Highlands," Tsuruya Namboku's "The Tale of Kasane," and Willam Blake's "Tyger! Tyger! and Other Burnings." Published reactions to NTD performances were from mostly hearing critics. Many of them were attracted to the NTD's theatricalized sign language. One critic called it "pure art, drawn from a medium of human expression" (Hirsch qtd in Gannon 346). The Time magazine stated, "They paint pictures in the air; it is language" (4-5). Based on various reviews of hearing critics, the novelty of sign language was the main attraction of the first NTD productions for the American public.

Responses to the NTD's first productions were mainly inspirational, but objections were made as well. Critic Otto Dekom of the Wilmington, Delaware Morning News announced a charge against the direction of the NTD. Was the NTD about theatre, therapy, or teaching? Perplexed, Dekom boldly stated that:

Yet the ability to react physically, to convey ideas with movement or expression, is not theatre --at best it is theatre only within a narrower range. Theatre, as we know it, includes speech -- communication by means of words. Movement can give luster to words

[sic] or ideas, but it cannot eliminate them (Tadie 379).

Dekom was displeased for not knowing what to look for in the NTD production. However, he finally concluded that ASL worked best when presented simply and briefly. According to Baldwin, other critics complained that they were not impressed by NTD's productions because, if it were not for the voice actors, these productions would have been inaccessible to non-signing audiences (37). At the time, what NTD offered was completely new to critics. They did not know what to criticize in NTD productions. Criticism about Deaf theatre was focused mainly on the beauty of sign language and public awareness about deaf people in general.

In its early years, NTD received a mixed reception from its audiences. On the one hand, it was widely acclaimed by hearing audiences. On the other hand, deaf people complained how artificial the NTD's sign language was. They did not recognize artistic uses of sign language and noticed that the theatricalized sign language was restricted to the principles of spoken English. Robert A. Halligan's letter in the Deaf American "accused hearing people of exploiting the deaf and their sign language" and Elizabeth Lawder of Gallaudet wrote in The Buff and Blue that NTD was not 'deaf' enough for the deaf audiences" (Baldwin 37). Thereafter, the American deaf community continued to complain about the simultaneous use of both deaf and hearing actors.

In 1978, Hays, long-time director of NTD, attempted to resolve the issue by announcing the goals of the NTD in a report called "The Healing Role of the Arts." He states the NTD had two goals: 1) public relations for the deaf to demystify them and 2) to produce high quality drama. The most important mission of NTD was to educate the public through theatre about what deaf people can do. Therefore, NTD was established to help hearing audiences to understand the implications of deafness. He made a strong statement to National Observer: "This is not, let me repeat, not a theatre for the deaf. It is a theatre of the deaf, just as the name says; a new form of theatre, aimed at general audiences but always to remain intelligible to the deaf" (Simon 8). Hays also claimed that because the theatregoing deaf audience is so small, NTD's main mission of entertaining primarily to the hearing audiences is justified. Therefore, the original mission of NTD was to develop productions for public relations, not to meet the

aesthetic needs of deaf theatregoers. The rights and values of the American deaf community continued to be overlooked by NTD.

The year 1970 arrived with an increasing number of opportunities for deaf people interested in pursuing careers in theatre. According to Gannon, there were over 50 theatrical companies using deaf and hearing actors by 1980 (376). However, writer Mow observes that it is difficult to keep an accurate record of the existing theatrical companies for deaf people in the United States. He states that such theatrical companies “go as quickly as they come” (289). Mow further notices that even though some theatrical companies are identified as theaters of the deaf, they have more hearing members than deaf members (289).

Today, NTD continues to expand. Currently located in Chester, Connecticut, NTD has a company of 12 to 14 actors who experiment, improvise and collaborate during the five-week rehearsal prior to starting each season with a production and spending 27 weeks on road (Mow 233-4). This national company also offers classes and demonstrations and oversees smaller theatres called “Little Theatre of the Deaf” and a “Theatre of Sign,” which is theatre done in only ASL (Gannon 356; Mow 234). Little Theatre of the Deaf has two companies of five actors each who perform to children in schools, libraries, museums, and parks across the nation. The one-hour program consists of short stories, fables, fairy tales, poems, and an introduction to sign language. Actors also do improvisations at the request of children audiences (Mow 234). Currently located in Chester, Connecticut, NTD also has an annual program called the “Professional School for Deaf Theatre Personnel.” After morning calisthenics at 7:30, students take classes in acting, dancing, movement, and theatre literature and arts. Participation, experimentation and leadership are also required for students in this program. Stipends for tuition and room and board are awarded to students on the basis on dramatic aspirations or prior involvement in community or educational theatre, according to Mow (234).

As mentioned earlier, while drama classes were first offered at Gallaudet in 1940, it was not until 1964 that the Gallaudet College Drama Department was formed and not until 1969 that Gallaudet started offering drama as a major. Gilbert Eastman, a former Gallaudet student

associated with the Dramatics Club, was the first Drama Department chair. Students majoring in drama could take Play Production, Introduction to Theatre, History of the Theatre, World Drama, Sign Language Translation for the Theatre, Fundamentals of Acting, Advanced Acting, Fundamentals of Stagecraft, Visual Elements of The Theatre, and Independent Study (Eastman, memo I, May 1970).

According to Eastman in his open memo to the Gallaudet community, the main mission of Gallaudet theatre in 1970 was to produce deaf actors and to provide signed performances. The criteria for choosing plays were not strict; any play could be chosen for presentation. Even though it had been done in some past productions, incorporation of aspects of deaf culture in productions was not necessary. The practice of readers continued to be standard; they were responsible for voicing all the lines that were signed. Another goal of Gallaudet theatre was to develop appropriate signed translations of plays written by hearing playwrights. Distinguishing stage sign language from every day sign language was another goal of Gallaudet theatre to make its productions aesthetically appealing to deaf audiences. Situations were adapted to fit the world viewpoint of deaf audiences, and blocking was also done to avoid visual barriers. Plays reflecting deaf experiences did not exist, and Eastman concluded his memo with a suggestion to create opportunities for deaf people to write plays (Eastman, memo II, May 1970).

Eastman, however, became the first deaf playwright whose plays were produced at Gallaudet. In 1974, Sign Me Alice was presented at Gallaudet and is noteworthy for several reasons. It is one of the first plays ever to be written by a deaf American. Detmold said of the production: "It had the longest run, the largest audience, the greatest critical acclaim" (Gannon 376). It was widely praised by deaf people because Eastman knew his audience. The play is a comedy about sign language systems. It reflects the outside debate surrounding different communication methods that were invented for use with deaf people. During this period, artificial signed systems such as Signed Exact English (SEE) and Total Communication (TC) were gaining popularity among educators of the deaf, and were eventually adopted by some schools for the deaf (Baldwin 40). Like Dr. Cureall in 1896, Sign Me Alice attacks educators'



proposals on the ideal communication for deaf people. Eastman's play mocks the artificially developed languages that are not readily accessible by the eye.

In addition to the long-time existence of Gallaudet's drama program, the drama program was established in 1969 at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), which was founded in 1968 to afford deaf individuals post-secondary opportunities to seek technical careers. The production history of NTID theatre includes comedy, musical, drama, dance, classic, kabuki, experimental, puppets, and new works by both deaf and hearing writers. History of NTID theatre has spanned almost 30 years, and it has witnessed a sizable number of productions (Meath-Lang, Orr).

History of NTID theatre began in 1969 with Robert Panara, formerly affiliated with Gallaudet's Drama Club, spearheading efforts in founding a NTID Drama Club. The club presentations from 1969 to 1974 were "Footlight Fever," "The Silent Stage", "Highlights of 70", "The Pardoner's Tale", "The Face on the Barroom Floor", "French Apache", "Haiku Harvest," "My Heart's in the Highlands", "All Star Variety Show", "Rashomon", "It's a Deaf, Deaf, Deaf, Deaf World", "The Madwoman of Chaillot", "What's Wrong with the Girls?" "The Serpent", and "The Twins Separated" (Orr). Refer to Appendix A for NTID theatre's production history.

Panara, the first deaf teacher ever to work for NTID, taught drama and literature courses to deaf and hearing students. He also developed plans to establish a theatre program for deaf students. He wanted the program that would encourage students to become creative, improve communication skills, become enlightened in traditional subjects, and experience personal and social development situations (Halverson 286).

As a result of Panara's work, NTID established a 500-seat theatre called the Experimental Educational Theatre (EET) in the fall of 1974. The new theatre program was also established. In October 1974, it presented a production of Taming of the Shrew by Shakespeare. Also in the same year, the EET faculty offered classes in acting, directing, design, and technical directing. For some time, Panara was involved in the theatre program (Halverston 286).

During the 1970's, NTID theatre saw additional expansions and accomplishments to its program. Seasoned actor Patrick Graybill joined the department for acting, teaching and directing. Veteran NTID faculty member Jerome Cushman taught movement and dance for the first time (Halverston 287). In 1975, Wall was the first original production attempted by NTID students, according to NTID Focus. Directed by Jerome Cushman, the production focuses on a central character who grows up trying to cope with his deafness. Based on their experiences as well as those of other deaf students and deaf staff members at NTID, seven students transformed these experiences into the production that made a "powerful statement about a deaf 'Everyman' character (6). The play was performed "using a combination of mime, sign language, speech, and powerful visual metaphor utilizing ramps, masks and a fabric sculpture (6). Wall was also the first NTID play that traveled out of state; it was shown in Maryland, New Jersey, Washington, DC, and Michigan. Michigan Free Press said of the production, "People fell asleep at and walked out on several school-produced plays, but 'Wall' received a standing ovation (qtd in NTID Focus 6). In 1977, the NTID's production Alice in Wonderland won first place in New York State Theatre Festival and one of the regional finalists in American College Theatre Festival (Orr).

By 1982, a music program called the RIT Dance Company was also established. It presents productions annually by deaf and hearing actors. Two faculty members Robert Mowers and Diane Habeeb who developed opportunities for deaf students to play various musical instruments further enhanced the music program. Deaf students were further afforded opportunities to boast their talents locally, nationally, and internationally. They also played band with hearing students at RIT and in NTID's theatrical performances (Halverston 287).

During the 1980's, NTID theatre continued to grow. In 1979, NTID established Sunshine & Company, a pilot program featuring deaf and hearing performers for dramatic presentations in the Rochester area. In 1980, this company was renamed Sunshine Too. It features three deaf actors and three hearing actors who perform for local, national, and international audiences. Using material that focuses on deaf-related issues, it has toured to increase general awareness

about deaf people and offer entertainment that is accessible for deaf and hearing audiences.

Sunshine Too productions include one-act plays, mime, personal stories and monologues, poetry, song, and an introduction to sign language and deafness (Panara 276). In 1987, Sunshine Too performed outside the United States for the first time; it toured England, Denmark, and Israel (Orr). It has also appeared on television specials (Halverston 287).

NTID theatre was involved in two important developments in the latter half of the 1980's. Directed by veteran faculty member Jerome Cushman, the Macbeth production, which was shown in 1986, is noteworthy as a successful production. It was one of the regional finalists in American College Theatre Festival (ACTF). It incorporated high-tech elements that were highly appealing to deaf audiences. On May 19, 1988, the EET stage was renamed Robert F. Panara Theatre in honor of NTID's first deaf professor who founded NTID's Drama Club.

NTID theatre has continued to expand in the 1990's. It offers at least three full-length productions annually. In most of its productions, deaf actors are given major roles and hearing actors are assigned minor roles to voice for deaf actors. NTID theatre adapts plays by hearing writers for sign language presentation (Halverston 286). "West Side Story" by the RIT Dance Company, Adam and the Experts, and Marriage debuted in 1990. Also in the same year, Sunshine Too was presented an award by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This company toured Alaska, Hawaii and Japan two years later. In 1991, the RIT Dance Company made a special appearance by featuring "Romeo and Juliet." Shown in the spring of 1993, Meta is a noteworthy production because it represents the creation of a deaf female playwright named Patti Durr. "Medea" by the RIT Dance Company was presented that year. The NTID Department of Performing Arts was also featured on "CBS Sunday Morning with Charles Kuralt." In 1997, NTID theatre hosted an American Deaf Play Creators Festival, which offered experienced deaf writers to workshop their original plays with professionals and students.

In addition to offering annual performances by different groups, NTID Department of Performing Arts has a transfer course agreement that leads to a BFA degree in a Theatre track through the Department of Film and Video housed in the College of Imaging Arts and Sciences

at RIT. It also has a program that offers 29 courses. A certificate is planned for 1999 (Performing Arts Curriculum, NTID, 1998).

NTID theatre is intended primarily for deaf audiences. Like Gallaudet, NTID continues to experience problems in developing presentations that are preferred by deaf people. Of course, this is not to say that NTID theatre does not have a great deal to offer deaf audiences. Where NTID theatre, like Gallaudet theatre, exerts its appeal to deaf audiences is in the use of ASL. But when it comes to conveying dialogue in the simultaneous presentation of ASL and voice, audience appeal for deaf people becomes weak. Presented in 1998, The Good Person of Setzuan is noteworthy as a problematic production. The production represented a collaborative effort of deaf students from NTID and Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) and hearing students from RIT. A deaf audience member who saw the play condemned the production as an act of oppression. In an open letter that appeared in Deaf Rochester, dated April/May 1998, deaf playgoer Ethan Sinnott writes:

The Good Person, from a Deaf perspective, was doomed from the start.

The opening almost always defines the production: when the play opened with a Hearing actor and an ASL interpreter in tow, this was an immediate slap in the face for Deaf audiences accustomed to Deaf and Deaf-friendly performances at Panara (18).

He also complained about other aspects of the play, especially blocking and lighting, that are essential for deaf audiences who must have clear sightlines and bright lights to understand what is going on stage. And Sinnott concludes "Deaf culture has been brazenly compromised at a theatre named after a Deaf man to cater to the Hearing point-of-view." As a result, some deaf people left at intermission. Sinnott's message echoes persistent problems in presenting plays in Deaf theatre.

One question, which seems to endure today, is whether to present plays for both deaf and hearing audiences or to present plays for only deaf audiences as it was done in the early history of Deaf theatre. It seems impossible for NTD and NTID/RIT to present successful performances

that incorporate worldviews of both deaf and hearing audiences. Whether theatrical experiences of deaf audience members at Gallaudet have been diminished by the practice of using readers in its productions is also debatable.

NTID theatre is similar to Gallaudet theatre in many ways. NTID theatre considers many factors before presenting a production. According to Orr, costumes and sets are designed simply so that deaf audiences are not distracted visually. Developing visual representations of off-stage dialogue and sound effects is one of the many challenges NTID directors and producers confront in making their works accessible to both deaf and hearing audiences. Staging, blocking and translating are other additional challenges for development of NTID productions; cultural, visual and linguistic analyses are necessary for the benefit of both deaf and hearing audiences. While Gallaudet theatre, which has traditionally used offstage voice actors, the NTID theatre often incorporates hearing actors in its productions for accessibility to hearing audiences as well as using the offstage voice approach. The program has also used ASL-only with no voice and subtitles or captions.

Deaf theatre has its origins at Gallaudet, dating back to 1884. Many earliest productions at Chapel Hall were performed in mime and sign language on a poorly constructed and poorly lit stage. Pantomimes, melodramas, burlesques, and skits were early types of productions staged by inexperienced student actors. Due to high student interest and involvement in drama, Frederick Hughes began teaching drama in 1940. The quality of productions at the college improved significantly; students received training and support for their work in drama. The reassignment of theatrical duties by different student organizations to the Dramatics Club also contributed to the overall quality of the college productions. Oral narration for hearing audiences became standard by the 1950's. Dramatics I and II were dropped in 1953, but students objected to the elimination. The agreement between the college and the student organizations resulted in a new drama course entitled Play Production was offered in 1957. By 1963, the Drama Department was established and six drama courses were in place by 1968. At around this time, the first written theatre criticism by a deaf person was published. Also during this period, the efforts of

many individuals made possible the establishment of a national theatre for the deaf in 1967. NTD contributed to the proliferation of many community theatres for deaf people across the United States. Also at that time, NTID began its history of providing coursework and training to deaf people, beginning with the NTID Drama Club, formed in 1969; the establishment of the Educational Experimental Theatre in 1974; and subsequent additions of two special groups called RIT Dance Company and Sunshine Too which have a history of performing at and outside Panara Theatre. The NTID Department of Performing Arts offers degree-bearing courses that fulfill Humanities requirements and transfer to the Film/Video BFA. A certificate is planned for 1999.

According to the National Information Center on Deafness (NICOD) in 1998, 27 performance groups of and for deaf people are currently active in the United States, as opposed to over 50 groups in 1980. The groups on the list are professional, amateur, community, or educational. In recent years, post-secondary training in theatre for deaf people has improved. Gallaudet and NTID are the two colleges in the United States with an extensive history of offering theatrical training to deaf people. Additionally, professional training by the NTD is available for deaf people who seek career opportunities in theatre. For approximately 100 years, Deaf theatre was limited in its scope and depth; it was available only to deaf Americans who either attended college or represented local organizations of deaf people. By contrast, Deaf theatre is widely available and visible to deaf and hearing Americans today. However, it has not been well received by the American deaf community. Though intended primarily for deaf audiences, Deaf theatre does not always meet the expectations of deaf people. To this day, the gap between the American deaf community and Deaf theatre continues to remain.

## Chapter Three

In recent decades, Deaf theatre in the United States has received a wider recognition by the American public, even though it has been around for more than one hundred years. Unlike their predecessors, hearing people today are aware of Deaf theatre, but are still unfamiliar with enduring issues found in Deaf theatre. Leading deaf theatrical professionals in the United States agree that Deaf theatre has made tremendous strides in the last few decades. However, they also note persistent problems such as lack of funds, lack of deaf playwrights, lack of deaf directors, and lack of deaf administrators. This section examines the definitions of criticism and audience appeal as they apply to Deaf theatre. It first presents synopses of the viewpoints of established experts who have analyzed and published their findings that are necessary for an improved Deaf theatre. The working philosophies of two active theatrical companies for the deaf are then described and analyzed for issues related to criticism and audience appeal.

### Current Problems Found in Deaf Theatre

Historically, hearing critics have often written reviews of performances in Deaf theatre, while reviews done by deaf critics have been sporadic. In the last few years, deaf entertainers have expressed disappointment about how their works have been judged. In 1995, deaf performing artist Peter Cook's concerns about the standards in Deaf theatre appeared in Critical Angles. He objects to the tendency among hearing critics to rely on voice actors to review works performed by deaf people. Hearing critics who are unfamiliar with deaf culture also have had reported mostly on the novelty of sign language, ignoring other aspects of the production. One citation of hearing critics' common misconceptions about deaf culture is critic Ernest Schier's comment about NTD's 1971 Milkwood, in a Philadelphia publication, The Evening Bulletin. He criticized NTD's presentation by saying that it should have geared more toward dance and pantomime. Dramatic sign language does not always express thoughts most successfully through

dance and pantomime. Apparently, Schier was not aware that other aspects of dramatic sign language such as hand signs and non-manual signals are also necessary for articulating thoughts.

Cook further observes that majorities of deaf people do not have a general knowledge of standards for criticizing works on account of their limited exposure to the general arts (5). It is speculated that jobs in theatrical criticism are not available to deaf people. However, publications for deaf people have provided their readers with reviews of productions in Deaf theatre. Deaf people not strongly affiliated with theatre have written most of these reviews. Contemporary concerns pertaining to the reviews of Deaf theatre productions support the need for appropriate standards for judging artistic performances by and for deaf people.

Another problem found in Deaf theatre is that deaf and hearing audience members have had difficulty showing appreciation for its performances. Deaf members say that some productions are not real and believable because they do not demonstrate intimacy with deafness and deaf-related issues. And poor production decisions such as blocking and lighting impair deaf members' ability to see and understand what goes on stage. Likewise, hearing people have had difficulty understanding Deaf theatre. Some of them have commented on how challenging it is to follow actors' conversations. For some reason, they are also led to believe that Deaf theatre is for deaf people. Additionally, themes in plays in Deaf theatre are sometimes ambiguous to hearing audiences unfamiliar with deaf culture.

It is clear from the existing evidence that hearing and deaf critics have not been equipped with the tools to judge performances in Deaf theatre. Hearing critics have the tool of standards, whereas deaf critics have the tool of deaf culture. Documentation also indicates that, despite recent accomplishments, productions in Deaf theatre come short of deaf and hearing audience members' expectations.

Although no methodical study has been done, several authors have cited a need for critical standards and improved strategies for audience appeal in Deaf theatre. Arguments for appropriate criticism to improve Deaf theatre come from two principal sources. Rusalyn Andrews argues for a modified use of Aristotle's terminology to analyze and improve



performances in Deaf theatre, whereas Donald Bangs gives much attention to cultural issues specific to Deaf theatre, which he believes, would improve performances in Deaf theatre. The purpose of this chapter is to synthesize the findings by Andrews and Bangs and analyze the philosophies of two leading theatrical companies for the deaf to demonstrate the existing problems of critical preparation and audience appeal.

### **Criticism in Deaf Theatre**

Andrews states that general criticism of Deaf theatre has been unreliable. She notes a major difference between hearing and deaf critics. She believes that hearing critics have an understanding of standards for judging works in general theatre, but do not possess knowledge of deaf culture to evaluate works found in Deaf theatre. Andrews also assumes that deaf critics have an ability to review performances in Deaf theatre because they have knowledge of deaf culture. However, they do not possess knowledge of critical standards to judge works found in both hearing and Deaf theatres because of the lack of theatrical heritage as also suggested by Samuel Zachary (Andrews 7).

The difference between hearing and deaf critics that Andrews has speculated is illustrated here. In 1994, Karen Christie, a deaf English professor at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, and Eugene Marino, hearing staff theatre critic for the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle/Times-Union, reported their insights into criticism of Deaf theatre in New Traditions, a newsletter of the Non-Traditional Casting Project. Their reports describe their experiences of reviewing a show presented by LIGHTS ON! in 1992. Although Christie is not a professional critic, her commentary has proven to be useful. It shows an intimate knowledge of deaf culture and sign language that is necessary for providing accurate criticism of Deaf theatre. Christie and Marino wrote separate reviews of Trouble's Just Beginning by Dorothy Miles. Their reflections of writing their reviews, which were published concurrently, suggest that their experiences with the performance were different, which are attributed to their cultural differences. Marino, unfamiliar with deaf culture, did not have the advantage of a voiced

narration at the premiere. For that reason, his analysis of the performance did not provide much feedback for improvement. He acknowledged that Christie's review was more useful than his, and concluded his report by questioning why the deaf community in Rochester has not been active in attending and demanding more and better interpreted performances in hearing theatre. He also admitted to not understanding "how alien some deaf people apparently find musical theatre, because it is so much a part of hearing culture" (6). Marino's perspective contains more questions than answers.

Unlike Marino's response about general critiquing in Deaf theatre, Christie's response reveals much about what is needed in Deaf theatre. She claims that newspapers and theatre companies "have traditionally ignored significant audience members- people whose experiences and values are specifically addressed" (6). She further states with sarcasm that reading reviews by hearing people about deaf people helps deaf people understand how hearing people view them rather than how they really view the play. She asserts that it is annoying to read about hearing critics commenting on "'flying fingers' and 'the range of human emotions that appear on the faces' of deaf actresses/actors," which causes them to overlook themes related to deaf culture (7). She also notes that "the hearing critics in the past never really questioned what they have to consider when reviewing a deaf play" (Christie). Christie also describes some of the conventions that are observed in Deaf theatre: eye contact between deaf actors is important; the house lights remain lit during the performance for deaf audiences to comment on the performance and for Deaf actors to receive feedback from their audiences; and if there is no "noise" in the audience, it means they are not interested in the performance (7). One of Christie's observations concurs with that of writer Herbert M. Simpson. In his review of a performance of Deaf writer Thomas Holcomb's Hear No Scream, he states that signed conversations among Deaf audiences during the performance are typical in Deaf theatre.

Christie implied the need for deaf critics in Deaf theatre when she wrote, "...mine (review) turned out to be the first review I had ever read by a deaf person!" (6). She also questions how deaf people could criticize productions in hearing theatre. There are several

major issues the deaf critic would have to consider in developing the review of the hearing production. A few questions Christie has posed are as follows: Could the deaf critic evaluate the play without remarking on the interpreters and the interpretation? Would it be possible for the deaf critic to write reviews of the hearing production without explaining the unique set of expectations that he/she brings to hearing theatre? (7). She concludes that hearing theatre and Deaf theatre are different in expectations and experiences, and both types of theatre should be equally available to both hearing and deaf critics and audiences.

### **Aristotelian Criticism For Deaf Theatre as Interpreted by Andrews**

Many professionals of Deaf theatre agree that appropriate criticism is critical for a successful production. In her dissertation, Rusalyn Andrews defines criticism as an essential element for improvement of performances in Deaf theatre. According to Andrews, modern critical standards of hearing theatre are based on Aristotle's Poetics (45). Although many critics have dissented from Aristotle's arguments, the book is the "cornerstone for the hearing theatre's critical heritage" (45). Andrews has proposed a modification of Aristotle's ideas to redefine the concept of criticism in Deaf theatre. In redefining Aristotelian criticism for Deaf theatre, she focuses mainly on factors associated with deafness and its implications and how these factors can be taken into account by way of the Aristotelian method.

Andrews summarizes Aristotle's arguments about art as follows: 1) All art is imitation and 2) there are four causes and six elements for creation of dramatic art: a) formal, b) material, c) efficient, and d) final (46). The process of attempting to imitate the object through three elements called plot, character and thought is called formal cause (46). Material cause refers to elements of diction and melody used in the creation of the object. How the performance is presented is called spectacle, an element associated with efficient cause (47). And the final cause means catharsis which is referred to as "a purging of emotions" (49). Aristotle ranks plot as the most important element, and ranks the other elements in the following order: character, thought, diction, melody, and spectacle (49). He also distinguishes "internal" elements and

“external” elements of a play; the internal elements are plot, character and thought, creating a basic structure for the play. Diction, melody and spectacle are the external elements, which help determine the boundaries of the internal elements.

Andrews finds it challenging to apply Aristotle’s elements to Deaf theatre. Even though internal elements in Deaf theatre and hearing theatre are similar in form, they are different in “substance” (49). The internal elements are influenced by cultural values, perceptions, lifestyles, and so forth (49). Andrews believes that the “logic” of imitation may prevent a hearing critic from evaluating the performance successfully. Hearing critics may easily recognize characteristics of deaf culture in the performance, but they do not have the solid foundation to recognize potential flaws that can affect the overall logic (51). According to Aristotle, the lack of knowledge of the object of imitation and poor artistic creation is two major flaws. Aristotle believes that the latter flaw is more serious than the former (51). Andrews concurs with Zachary who implies that hearing playwrights will be more likely to make the flaw in creation due to their lack of knowledge of deaf culture (51). For instance, Johnny Belinda, developed by hearing Elmer Harris in 1940 for hearing audiences, discloses stereotypical representations of deaf people. By contrast, deaf playwrights will be inclined to develop poor artistic creations because of the lack of theatrical background (51). Despite recent accomplishments in Deaf theatre, original scripts by deaf writers remain scarce. Systematic studies concerning these plays are non-existent. However, Aristotle claims that if the lack of knowledge of the imitation is present, then the second flaw is also likely to be present (51). Therefore, both flaws are considered serious and can be used to identify the weaknesses of productions in Deaf theatre.

Andrews finds that Aristotle’s explanation about external elements is based on the assumption that “language is received only through aural channels” (52). Aural elements such as melody are identified as more important than visual elements such as spectacle. Andrews is certain that hearing and deaf critics would have difficulty applying Aristotle’s elements to production aspects in Deaf theatre, as the language is not aural. Andrews, then, presents a

challenge: “How can Deaf theatre be analyzed in terms of Aristotle’s six elements?” (52) Her answer is development of “an analytic lexicon useful to the critic of Deaf theatre” (52).

Andrews argues that Aristotle’s elements can be filtered through a deaf perspective.

Andrews describes the Aristotelian mimesis as an initial process that includes “portrayal of objects as they are (or were); artistic representation portraying the object of imitation as it is reputed to be (or reputed to have been) and representation showing objects in an ideal fashion, as they should be” (69). The mimetic process found in hearing theatre and Deaf theatre is the same, but the mimetic products are different (69). Andrews attributes this to cultural differences. Aristotle’s basis is simple; a play must follow its logic, and all other rules are governed by this logic (70).

Aristotle claims that essential errors and accidental errors influence one’s perception of the represented object. Artists make essential errors when “artistic execution and control” are poor (Andrews 70). Accidental errors occur when the artist chooses incorrect representation or makes a technical error or includes “impossibilities into a work” (Andrews 70). However, Aristotle tolerates such errors as long as the integrity of the artist and the flow of logic are present in the represented object (Andrews 71). Clearly, accuracy of the represented object is not important as long as the artist takes poetic license to maintain the goal of imitation (Andrews 71).

The fact that Aristotle prefers accidental errors to essential errors is noteworthy. In Deaf theatre, hearing playwrights are prone to commit accidental errors in representing deaf people in their works. And deaf playwrights are likely to commit essential errors due to limited opportunities for art appreciation and training, according to Andrews (51). However, Andrews points out that Aristotle stresses logic in representation of art. If the creation of imitation is poorly presented the foundation or logic is also weak (51). Andrews implies that accidental and essential errors in Deaf theatre are equally serious.

Aristotle proposes five questions from which criticism develops: 1) is the action possible? 2) is the action rational?; 3) is the action morally harmful?; 4) is the action consistent?;

and 5) are there any technical errors? Critics can use these questions to recognize weaknesses in all of the six elements. If the production violates any of these five sources, it is expected to be weak unless it meets exceptional criteria (Andrews 72). Aristotle offers 12 exceptions that accept productions that seem impossible or irrational. These rules are largely associated with poetic license which artists take to justify the errors they are seen to make. Although he has listed the guidelines as stated above, Aristotle firmly believes that the “logic” of the play is the most important and constant principle for evaluating the production.

According to Aristotle, plot is defined as “the ordering of events around a central conflict in such a manner that the reordering of the events would lead to a different outcome,” and is the most important element in theatre (Andrews 73). The second most important element is character, being responsible for implementing actions that support the basic structure of the play (Andrews 74). Thought, another element that contributes to the logic of the work, is found through expression of each character or the entire work. The function of thought is to convey “a rhetorical and/or philosophical purpose” or “the disclosure of truth” (Andrews 75). Plot, thought and character are the internal elements that establish the foundation of any play. Though these three elements can be defined independently, they are tightly intertwined with the overall logic of the play.

Andrews states that “the logic of the play must be based on a common foundation agreed on by playwright, performer, director, audience, and critic” (75). The process of mimesis in Deaf theatre and hearing theatre is the same, but the foundations are not. In Deaf theatre, deaf experience is built into the depiction while hearing experience is built into the depiction in hearing theatre. Andrews makes an important point: “The ‘logical’ world to which Aristotle refers relies on a context that is supplied in Deaf theatre by deafness and meanings of that condition created not on a pathological level but on a personal level” (76). In other words, productions portray how deaf people with deaf cultural values perceive the world, not how they and their world are perceived by hearing people. Andrews also states that deaf culture and how it influences deaf people’s perception of the world contribute to the foundation of Deaf theatre

(83). Deafness is always part of the production, but is not necessarily the only reason for the development of the production.

Andrews describes the characteristics found in deaf culture that she believes contribute to the “logic” of the play in Deaf theatre. Like hearing theatre that adheres to hearing culture, perceptions, experiences, and values associated with hearing, Deaf theatre consists of deaf culture, perceptions, experiences, and values associated with deafness.

Andrews states that, although deaf people have various lifestyles, they share similar experiences and perspectives, which are:

- 1) Major sensory reception is altered.
- 2) The world may be perceived, related to, integrated into or adjusted to differently.
- 3) There may be perceptual differences directly linked to language development.
- 4) Emotional and social development may occur differently.
- 5) Any hearing impaired person is automatically in a minority.
- 6) Hearing impaired individuals may be victims of social, economic and educational prejudice.
- 7) As members of a smaller consumer group, special products and service suppliers can extract high fees.
- 8) An awareness of any or all of these factors may create a reactionary response for deafened individuals (78).

Andrews’s arguments imply that, if Aristotle’s ideas are to be applied in Deaf theatre, deaf people and hearing people agree on world assumptions and values within their groups. However, there are significant differences within the deaf community, which will be discussed in chapter 4.

Andrews also believes that isolation and marginality in the deaf population should be investigated for the development of the logic of the play in Deaf theatre. Andrews further

observes that representations in Deaf theatre deal with issues of power or personal significance (103). Hearing culture is seen and understood by deaf people as more controlling and powerful than their own culture. Andrews believes that incorporation of power and/or personal significance should be continued to be considered in the development of productions in Deaf theatre to combat isolation, the most persistent social problem associated with deafness.

Andrews discusses two kinds of isolation experienced by deaf people. Deaf people experience isolation from hearing people and isolation from other deaf people. The lack of spoken language skills prevents deaf people from interacting with hearing people comfortably. Both often leave conversations exhausted and confused. Hearing people also perceive deaf people as having a lack of intelligence, social mores, and so forth. Negative stereotypes of deaf people further obstruct interactions between hearing people and deaf people (Andrews 79). Deaf people are not only isolated from hearing people but also other deaf people. Early on, deaf individuals born into hearing families have little access to role models and peers who sign. During the critical years of language acquisition, deaf children often do not have opportunities to interact with other deaf children and adults simply because their hearing parents often do not have educational resources on the deaf community. Thus, isolation limits deaf children's access to communication, language development and other areas of growth (Andrews 79).

To explain what typical isolation is like for most deaf people, Andrews presents a model of adaptive behaviors to deafness as defined by sociologists Jeffrey Nash and Anedith Nash. They are "passing," "retreating," "membership," and "advocating." Those with "passing" and "retreating" behaviors embody the values of hearing culture and try to act like hearing people. Unlike those with "membership" and "advocating" behaviors, they do not acknowledge their deafness. The philosophical stance of those in the "membership" category is that both deaf and hearing cultures are equal, stigmas are tolerated, and more time is spent with deaf peers than hearing ones. "Advocating" members are proud of their heritage, spend time and energy fighting for the rights of deaf Americans, which sometimes create difficulties in their dealing with hearing people who stigmatize them (Nash and Nash in Andrews 202).



Nash and Nash discuss the concept of “marginality” which refers to the contradictory condition in which most deaf people born into hearing families face conflicts from trying to belong fully to both hearing and deaf cultures. Deaf people from hearing families are more likely to try to assimilate into both hearing and deaf cultures or sway from one to the other (Andrews 84). Conflicts often occur as a result. For most deaf people, the struggles are resolved by incorporating ASL and deaf culture. As a result, they are emancipated from isolation and conflicts associated with marginality (Andrews 85-86). This subject is further treated under the topic of catharsis in this chapter.

Because not that many plays for and about deaf people have been written, Andrews recommends that deaf playwrights seek assistance from hearing playwrights for the development of such plays (104). Andrews implies that hearing playwrights can dramatize conflicts faced by deaf people in the hearing world better than deaf playwrights can. She also proposes that deaf playwrights explore situations unique to deaf people for novel conflicts and innovative plots (104-5). Andrews revisits the process of character development in Deaf theatre and hearing theatre, which is not different. But the “logic” is. Using this defense, Andrews believes that deaf writers are capable of creating believable deaf characters, but is skeptical about their ability to develop hearing characters on their own. Their psychological understanding of hearing people seems to be limited, claims Andrews (105). “Hearing culture is...perceived as aloof, indifferent, untrustworthy and beyond a deaf person’s ability to understand,” concludes Andrews of deaf people’s common view of hearing people (106). Her assertion is based on the studies conducted in the early 1960’s by researcher William Stokoe and his colleagues who found that an average deaf person’s overall personal growth and knowledge of the culture are retarded due to the fact that he does not have the same access as his hearing counterpart to spoken English.

Universal themes can be explored through “specific and detailed situations” (Andrews 108). According to Aristotle, universal truths are stronger than the truths developed for only one group (108). Such themes include “the struggle to be all that one can be, the struggle to be a ‘good’ person, the struggle to be accepted, to love and be loved” (108). Based on Lerner and

Loewe's My Fair Lady and George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion, Sign Me Alice by deaf playwright Gilbert Eastman is one instance. It explores the struggles of a young deaf woman who gets caught in a disagreement between artificial sign systems and ASL (Lang & Meath-Lang 105).

Although the object of imitation is different, Aristotle's definitions of these elements are the same in hearing theatre and Deaf theatre, according to Andrews. However, three elements of plot, character and thought in Deaf theatre are to be drawn out of deaf culture. Andrews also believes that deaf playwrights can better depict the deaf experience by collaborating with hearing writers who have a longer playwriting heritage, but suggests that careful attention should be made to avoid discussing conventionalized ideas such as stereotypes that are imposed by cultural boundaries.

Aristotle's ideas about diction, melody and spectacle can be applied to Deaf theatre, according to Andrews. Andrews define these terms for establishment of guidelines in Deaf theatre in the subsequent discussion. Diction, melody and spectacle are external elements that Aristotle says help define the internal elements of plot, thought and character. The former elements refer to form, whereas the latter elements refer to content (Andrews 119). Melody consists of volume, tempo, pitch and quality. Aristotle also includes rhythm and harmony in this category (Andrews 128-9). Diction refers to uttered and unuttered use of language in patterns (Andrews 131). Aristotle identifies eight parts of diction: letter, syllable, connecting words, particle, noun, verb, inflectional endings, and the speech (Andrews 141). Phonemes can stir emotions through sounds and the feel they produce in the mouth (Andrews 134). Syllables play a significant role in poetry for achievement of stress, meter and rhyme (Andrews 135). Aristotle believes that poets frequently use connecting words to create and reinforce intended metaphors (Andrews 135). He further states that nouns as dictional aspects could be used in several ways: 1) used in a standard manner; 2) strange words - words that are uncommon or foreign; 3) used as a metaphor; 4) ornamental (formal, technical or archaic) for special effect; 5) neologisms; and 6) modifications (lengthening, contracting or varying). Another category of diction is verbs that

demonstrate action. The next category discussed by Aristotle is inflection that distinguishes functions of statements (declarative, exclamatory, question, etc.) and completes thoughts. Inflection and melody are non-verbal aspects that overlap to convey verbalized meanings (Andrews 137-8). Aristotle identifies the speech as the highest level of diction; it can range from a phrase to a composition (Andrews 138).

The playwright is responsible for creating diction and the actor assumes the responsibility for recreating diction. Aristotle states that the role of playwrights is to create “the prose of ordinary life” (Andrews 138). One problem some modern critics have with Aristotle’s definition is how to achieve an artistic creation without creative uses of diction (Andrews 138). Metaphorical uses, argues Aristotle, make up for this deficiency of poetic diction in plays. Poor diction means fancy use of compounds, frequent usage of rare words, lengthy epithets, and inappropriate metaphors (Andrews 139). All in all, Aristotle believes that theatrical language is to encompass “a diction.... that is not strictly poetic nor so close to life that it can not serve as an artistic expression” (Andrews 151).

Andrews finds it problematic for these elements to be incorporated into criticism of productions in Deaf theatre, since Aristotle’s discussion of diction and melody is aurally based. Spoken English is oral and aural, whereas ASL is gestural and visual. However, Andrews notes the parallels of spoken English and ASL by stating that:

Spoken language is articulated through the vocal mechanism. three formational parameters, place of articulation, voicing, use of breath, can alter a sound into readily distinguishable sounds referred to as phonemes. Sign language is articulated mostly by the hands but involvement of the whole body is not uncommon. Those factors that give meaning to signs include: space, relation of hands, place of articulation, movement of hands, hand configuration, face, and eyes (153).

While spoken English is expressed through voicing, breath flow and articulators, ASL has its parallels that are cheremes: handshape, placement of hands, and movement of the hands (Andrews 155). Phonemes or letters are the smallest meaningful units in spoken English, whereas the smallest meaningful units in ASL are primes or cheremes (Andrews 142). ASL also has a set of principles by which signed communication is governed. Syllables and affixes in spoken English, when combined with phonemes, produce specific meanings. The same can be said about ASL. Specific uses of primes and negations through headshake produce meanings. For example, space placement in ASL can change verb tenses. Another example is that signers place one set of ideas, issues, people, and so forth in one space and another set of ideas, issues, people, and so forth in another space. The purpose of this physical set up is to show contrasts (Andrews 146). Both languages also have complete units of meaning. Like spoken English, ASL incorporates inflection. It is done through non-manual signals expressed by the body and face. For example, signing with raised eyebrows means that the signer is asking a question. According to Baker-Shenk and Cokely, spoken English is more dependent on word order, while ASL is more dependent on inflection for expression of idea (33). Spoken English and ASL are vastly different, yet alike. They both contain distinct and comparative linguistic structures that are expressed through different channels.

Andrews believes that Aristotle's rules for diction and melody can be applied to theatrical sign language as long as the intrinsic rules of sign language are observed: 1) signs can be literal; 2) dialectal or foreign signs can be used; 3) signs can be ornamental; 4) signs can be coined; and 5) signs can be lengthened, shortened, contracted or modified (149). It is also possible for ASL to observe Aristotle's rules for melody. According to researchers Edward Klima and Ursula Bellugi, ASL can also incorporate poetic and melodic features through: a) making a symmetry between the two hands when signing; b) making and retaining a flow of movement between signs; c) making creative uses of the parameters of signs (Andrews 150).

Andrews also discusses the issue of language choice in Deaf theatre. In addition to ASL which has been discussed, she mentions two other systems of sign language such as Signed

Exact English (SEE) which represents spoken English exactly as it is and Pidgin Signed English (PSE) which is governed by principles of both SEE and ASL. SEE performances are associated with acceptance of attitudes and values of hearing people, whereas PSE performances incorporate both hearing and deaf cultures. Andrews states that the choice of one sign system over others without its content sends a message to its audience (125). For example, if one attends a performance conducted in SEE, he would immediately know the lifestyle and philosophy of individuals involved in the production. Andrews recommends that “no matter which sign system is employed, the message conveyed by dictional choice should complement the thought of the play and it should be suited to the intended audience for any production” (126). As Andrews implies, if audiences are ASL users, ASL should be used, if audiences are SEE users, SEE should be used, or if audiences are PSE users, PSE should be used.

Andrews also states that “Deaf theatre may employ any of the sign codes or languages on the diglossic scale or it may blend use of spoken language. Because of controversy and highly emotional issues directly related to language use, any language utilized in a Deaf theatre production automatically conveys a “political attitude.”” (Andrews 153). In other words, it is feasible for Deaf theatre to incorporate ASL or SEE or PSE, with or without supplement of voice narration, to present a production. However, Andrews further implies that the language choice of the production conveys its beliefs and values that may clash with those of its audiences’. For example, the ASL production may be appealing to ASL users, but not to users of SEE and PSE.

Spectacle, the least important element of all elements identified by Aristotle, is associated with the aesthetic appreciation of visual arts. The definition also includes appreciation of change and movement (Andrews 162). Spectacle is achieved mainly through color, form, contrasts, and movement. Andrews believes that spectacle in Deaf theatre is more challenging to identify because of the very nature of sign language itself. One would need to distinguish between linguistic and visual elements in sign language. Therefore, Andrews has proposed a continuum with linguistic elements at one end and visual elements at the other end, which will be discussed.

Andrews states that, in hearing theatre, spectacle is created in many possible ways to maintain the audience's focus throughout the production. It is achieved by blocking, which refers to the placement and movement of characters on stage. Designs and choreography are also coordinated for audiences to see the visual aspects of the production at certain moments. Designers control color, line and flow of movement to ensure the overall physical unity of the production. Sets and costumes supply color and shape, direct the eye, isolate or unify characters, supply movement, restrict and define actors' movement, and contribute to character definition. In short, spectacle elevates the communicative aspects of the production (Andrews 166-8). However, spectacle is defined differently in Deaf theatre.

"Spectacle in Deaf theatre as in hearing theatre involves all nonlinguistically related visual aspects of a production. The difference is that in Deaf theatre there is such a thing as linguistic movement while in hearing theatre there is not," says Andrews (177). As stated earlier, identifying spectacle in Deaf theatre can be difficult, but it is possible. Visual aspects such as color and shape are easy to identify; they are inherently spectacular. By contrast, signed communication that occurs on stage belongs to the dictional aspect. However, visual elements that can be interpreted as either linguistic or non-linguistic are more difficult to categorize. Theatrical diction becomes less obvious when diction and spectacle are fused (Andrews 174). One example is sign mime. Is it dictional or spectacular? Andrews believes that, although it contains some sort of linguistic code, it leans more towards the non-linguistic aspect. The reason she states is that competence in the language is not required for one to appreciate sign mime and dance (175). Andrews offers a continuum with linguistic codes at one end and non-linguistic cues at the other end, and indistinct codes such as sign mime and dances fall at different points along the continuum (171).

Well-planned productions in Deaf theatre take into serious consideration non-verbal aspects, according to Andrews. As similarly done in hearing theatre, directors, designers, choreographers, and actors must determine how they can use spectacle to present the overall production. The director assumes responsibility through blocking. He also handles

choreography such as dances and fights for visual aesthetics (Andrews 166). In addition to those conventions observed in hearing theatre, the director finds a way to get deaf audiences focused on the first actor to sign on stage before he engages in speech production (Andrews 179). While it is the director's responsibility to see how all visual elements of a performance converge to achieve unity, designers take care of color, line, flow of movement, props, and costumes for the purpose of maintaining continuity of on-stage communication as well as promoting the aesthetics principle (Andrews 168). Other conventions of spectacle to observe in Deaf theatre are: 1) make sure that actors are in full sight of the audience; 2) actors face each other in communicative exchanges; and 3) actors have hands free of props during monologues or soliloquies (Andrews 178). Additionally, skin tone of actors are not to be blended with sets and costumes such as clashing patterns and accessories are avoided; they take away the deaf audience's aesthetic experience (Andrews 180). If skin tone and sets and costumes are of the same color, it is difficult for deaf audiences to read sign language.

Andrews describes another issue pertaining to spectacle that is unique to Deaf theatre. NTD pioneered a technique of staging sign actors and voice actors simultaneously (180). Using voice actors to blend with signed productions is difficult. In the early years, Deaf theatre observed the practice of placing voice actors or readers out of sight from the audiences. Since then, creative attempts to incorporate voice actors include using them as minor characters or extras or making them become part of the set (Andrews 181). Some attempts were successful. One example of successful incorporation of voice actors is an actress voicing for deaf actors while hanging out her laundry in the NTD's Pinocchio production (Andrews 182). On the other hand, incorporation of voice actors in some past productions in Deaf theatre was ineffective (Andrews 182). One prime example is window washers interpreting the dialogue between Oscar and Felix in The Odd Couple. Veteran actor Patrick Graybill said it made the imaginary world on stage less credible and believable (Bangs 760). According to Andrews' Aristotelian arguments, productions are expected to be weak if poor execution of voiced narrations detracts from deaf audiences' aesthetic experiences.

Catharsis is another Aristotelian element that is necessary for audiences' understanding of general theatrical productions. Andrews first introduces the Aristotelian and contemporary concepts of catharsis and then uses these concepts to define catharsis in Deaf theatre. In the Poetics, Aristotle describes the concept of catharsis as related to music, but Andrews asserts that it can be applied to present-day theatre and Deaf theatre. According to Andrews, Aristotle states that music has three benefits: education, intellectual enjoyment and catharsis. The final cause, as stated earlier, is pleasure, and going to theatre to learn or provoke one's knowledge is pleasure. However, Aristotle argues that catharsis refers to pleasure at the highest level. The first two benefits (education and intellectual stimulation) achieve non-artistic goals, whereas catharsis is an entirely artistic goal (Andrews 187). Andrews defines catharsis as "the direct involvement of the audience with what occurs in a play" (188). Also noting its deficiency, Andrews states that the current definition of catharsis refers to the audiences experiencing sympathetic or empathetic reactions or identifying with on-stage characters totally or engaging in characters' lives vicariously are said to have experienced catharsis. By contrast, Aristotle calls it "the re-creation of an individual," which disregards the first two characteristics of the current term (Andrews 188). According to Aristotle, audiences watch characters "to compare actions and responses, learn about the world and self, grow, change, and mold themselves" (Andrews 188).

Andrews utilizes the ideas of other scholars to define further the concept of contemporary catharsis. Therapist T.J. Scheff says that catharsis offers psychological and social benefits. It releases repressed emotions, which have negative consequences on an individual: passing negativity to others, having a reduced clarity in thinking and perception and isolating self from others. Theatre also provides audience members an outlet to form and/or maintain "cohesiveness and group solidarity" (Andrews 189). Playwright Ann Jellicoe says those audiences' identification with characters affirms their lifestyles and existence (Andrews 189). Experiencing catharsis, in other words, is psychologically and socially beneficial for audiences.



Andrews states that catharsis is based on the development of a relationship between a production and its audience which depends on the nature of an audience, the characteristics of a play and the ways in which the audience interacts with that play (190). The first factor refers to the phenomenon of individuals with specific life experiences coming to a theatre to become an identifiable agent. Once that transformation is made, the group diminishes specific life experiences of individuals in that group (Andrews 190-1). The development of the production also focuses on intellect of audience members, according to Andrews. Audience members perceive a certain distance between themselves and the production before experiencing catharsis (Andrews 191). After that recognition, they enter in the subconscious state and proceed into the characters' role for the duration of the performance (Andrews 192). The intellectual base developed by a production which establishes the aesthetic distance also offers a contract with the audience to accept the world views found in the production (Andrews 194-5). The process of initiation results in audiences' acceptance of the logic that is found in the play. "A willing suspension of disbelief" enables audiences to accept the assumptive base of the play that is not found in their world, states Andrews (195). If audience members start asking questions about the play, the potential catharsis will not occur.

Scheff informs that catharsis occurs with the development of characters whose ideal values are similar to those of audiences'. Or how devices in the production are used to appeal to audiences with diverse backgrounds, which involves "recognition of the audience's belief system and value system and introduces disparate aspects of the world of the play through that system" (Andrews 196-7). In other words, audiences can accept inconsistencies such as the invisible fourth wall as long as there are connections between the world of the play and their lives (Andrews 198). If a production uses a world view that is greatly different from that of its audience, the audience members depend on their world view to experience a "willing suspense of disbelief" to accept the logic of the production as long as it does not ignore its own conventions (Andrews 198). Andrews believes that catharsis is possible in a production with a

world view that does not match that of audience members when they are introduced to that view and agree to accept such discrepancies for the rest of the play (199).

Scheff alerts that audiences may be emotionally under-distanced or over-distanced from a production. Over-distancing and under-distancing result in the lack of catharsis, according to Andrews (192). Under-distancing takes place when the audience encounters emotional stress instead of discharge (Andrews 192). The audience experiences strong feelings such as anxiety and fear, feeling alienated after the production ends. By contrast, over-distanced plays result in the lack of emotional discharge as they attempt to educate or propagandize. Over-distancing occurs when the production deliberately manipulates spectators' emotions for rhetorical purposes such as informing and/or indoctrinating propaganda and the result is absence of emotional response (Andrews 192).

Isolation is the major reason why Andrews believes catharsis is important in Deaf theatre (201). Andrews believes that the nature of theatre offers individuals the opportunity to observe how others deal with problems, and in Deaf theatre, deaf people see characters like them dealing with real life problems and issues, which liberates them from isolation (Andrews 204). Nash and Nash's model of four adaptive behaviors to deafness, which has been discussed earlier in this chapter, is also proposed by Andrews as a major factor to consider for the development of intellectual logic of deaf audience members so that catharsis becomes possible. Andrews believe that the assumptive bases of "passing," "retreating," "membership," and "advocating" groups furnish producers with the information base on deaf audiences in order to establish favorable conditions for the anticipated catharsis.

According to Andrews, considerations for catharsis to occur are the same in Deaf theatre and hearing theatre. That is, distancing must be set up between the audience and the production. Also, when perceptions different from the audience's usual assumptions are introduced, they must be accepted by the audience. Once the audience has the willing suspension of disbelief, the points of contact between the audience's worldview and the world of the production are made. As a result, the characters with representations of the audience's lifestyle are depicted (Andrews

205-6). However, Andrews also believes that other factors in addition to knowledge of catharsis are necessary for creating potential catharsis in Deaf theatre. They are adaptation to deafness, deaf culture, and Deaf theatre production styles. Issues that can result in over-distancing or under-distancing are language choice, thought, character portrayal, placement of personal power, and the relationships of hearing and deaf individuals (Andrews 206).

Andrews employs Nash and Nash's model to offer "points of contact" for appropriate development of productions targeted towards deaf people. Determining the assumptions about the lifestyle of each deaf group is necessary for the director to present a production in order to elicit appropriate cathartic responses. "Passing" membership is placed at the left end of Andrews' spectrum, "advocating" membership in the middle, and "membership" at the right end. Those of "passing" status tend to attend hearing productions presented in SEE as provided by interpreters. Advocates of deaf culture recognize the value of both hearing and deaf cultures, and they may attend productions presented in both languages - spoken language and signed language. They also may attend hearing productions that are transliterated to learn about the hearing culture, and at the same time, attend productions in Deaf theatre to affirm their human existence as deaf individuals (Andrews 217). As opposed to the first two groups, members are likely to attend productions that incorporate values associated with their lifestyle. They do enjoy productions in Deaf theatre periodically (Andrews 217). Andrews omits the retreatists from the spectrum as she believes that, because they lack control of their own lives, they would not go to theatre unless their hearing peers take them (215).

Although she cautions not to rely heavily on her model to describe the phenomena in Deaf theatre, Andrews believes that assumptions of each behavior provide a basis that theatrical professionals need to recognize in order to develop productions that offer cathartic experiences for different groups of deaf people except "retreatists." Playwrights need to know the characteristics of an intended audience and those who develop productions also need to know this particular audience (Andrews 217). To reinforce the importance of catharsis in Deaf theatre, Andrews restates Aristotle's discussion about the logic of a play:

The play, in its early stages, touches base with the audience member's world view [sic], thus creating a potential for identification with the protagonist. After that, if a successful "suspension of disbelief" contract has been entered into by production and spectator, the "world of the play" relies on its own treated logic rather than that world view [sic]/logic normally accepted by the audience member (219-20)

To this point, Andrews has presented the Aristotelian theoretical framework as it applies to Deaf theatre.

### **Audience Appeal in Deaf Theatre**

Problems with embracing Deaf theatre have been reported. Many deaf people lament that some plays in Deaf theatre are difficult to understand because production factors are inappropriately used. For instance, a group of eight deaf audience members left within the first five minutes of The Signal Season of Dummy Hoy produced by the L'Act theatrical company in the fall of 1990. The opening prologue, staged behind a scrim, blocked deaf audience members' view of the interpreters' signing (Buckley 129). Like deaf audience members, hearing audience members struggle in understanding and appreciating Deaf theatre. They express dislike for hearing actors' concurrent signing and speaking as it "threatens to produce information overload" (Armstrong qtd in Buckley 138). The other drawback to this method is that hearing people do not know who to watch (Hollander).

Another critical component of this chapter provides an alternative approach for studying Deaf theatre. This method comes from the works of scholar Donald Bangs who has stated those critical standards in Deaf theatre can best be explained through the needs of deaf audiences.

### **Bangs' Findings on Audience Appeal in Deaf Theatre**

In his essays, Bangs has addressed various issues related to audience appeal in Deaf theatre. His main concern is with the needs of deaf audiences for the quality of Deaf theatre. He notes that many theatre programs by and for deaf people such as the NTD, Gallaudet and NTID have struggled in bringing in deaf audiences to their productions. Unlike Andrews who attributes the problem mainly to the lack of theatrical heritage, Bangs argues that the problem is how performances in Deaf theatre have been developed for deaf audiences. He claims that the needs of deaf audiences have been overlooked (752). Over the years, he has collected evidence showing why deaf people have had difficulty being involved in Deaf theatre. Bangs' inquiry attempts to describe the complex nature of Deaf theatre and offers practical solutions for bringing deaf audiences back to Deaf theatre.

Bangs has identified and described genres of theatrical productions that are appealing to deaf people. Using the arguments of actors Dorothy Miles and Lou Fant, Bangs states that deaf people are highly captivated by skits, songs, mimicries, melodrama, farces, and thrillers. He further discusses three other categories of plays that are also popular with deaf people. The first group is cross-cultural plays that focus on issues between hearing and deaf people. The second category are performances that display the creative uses of sign language, and the third category are hybrid works which are hearing plays adapted into works about deaf culture. He also believes that psychological plays such as The Gin Game and The Glass Menagerie are likely to be popular with deaf people. Hybrid works are the most common works used by Deaf theatre to demonstrate the universal experiences of deaf people in the context of a deaf world.

Like Andrews, Bangs refers to the ideas of critic Bernard Beckerman to define deaf audiences' experiences. As stated earlier, Beckerman believes that an interrelationship of what happens on-stage and the background specifics of the audience induce the experience of an audience member. Bangs is convinced that reactions between hearing and deaf people to works in hearing and Deaf theatres are different. He illustrates the differences between hearing audiences and deaf audiences in their reactions to NTD's production The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter. Hearing audiences feel sympathy for the deaf character John Singer who is lonely and

isolated, whereas deaf audiences question why he does not move to a big city and make social contacts with other deaf people (753). It would make much more sense to deaf audiences if Singer would decide to move to a city where deaf culture exists.

Like Andrews, Bangs believes that the imaginary world of the play must be based on deaf culture in order to connect to deaf audiences. However, he has dissented from Andrews's arguments about the responsibility of Deaf theatre in addressing the needs of deaf people with marginal lifestyles. He believes that the task of connecting becomes more challenging, even impossible, if deaf people are shown the imaginary world based on hearing culture (754). Bangs further states that it is even more challenging to present a play with deaf actors incorporating deaf culture and sign language to hearing people (754). Bangs argues that it is extremely difficult for Deaf theatre to present productions that stimulate either deaf or hearing audiences to participate in the imaginary world due to cultural differences.

Attention to the world views, the belief-disbelief continuum of the audience and the catharsis of the audience, according to Bangs, are necessary in the development of productions appropriate for deaf people. As stated earlier, NTD's A Heart is a Lonely Hunter elicited different responses from hearing and deaf audiences because of the contrasting worldviews. To deaf audiences, protagonist John Singer offers negative experiences, which could have been easily resolved by moving to a city and making friends with other deaf people. By contrast, hearing audiences sympathized with Singer because of his loneliness and isolation associated with deafness. The production, in general, did not do well with deaf audiences, but was well received by hearing audiences (128-9).

In any given performance, the balance in the belief-disbelief continuum must be achieved. In order to achieve that balance, the director or producer needs to find ways to get people to imagine themselves on-stage, explains Bangs (129). In Deaf theatre, deaf audiences "are pushed toward the disbelief end of the continuum because they don't understand or grasp what is happening" because the logic of the production does not match with their world views (130). Bangs notes that deaf audiences may comment on any or more aspects of any production

such as signing, action or staging, but they are not fully involved (130). Bangs' interpretation echoes Andrews' discussion about Aristotle's arguments about the connection between the logic of the play and catharsis.

Catharsis occurs only when audiences relate to the play and identify with the characters. Bangs believes that deaf audiences need to feel involved in the world of the play and to know that characters are deaf in order to experience catharsis. Bangs then attempts to address his own question of whether plays written for hearing people can be used in Deaf theatre. Based on his 1987 directing of The Glass Menagerie, he says it is possible. He revised the original script by adding lines that made clear to deaf audiences that characters are deaf (130-1). As Bangs implies, hybrid works with themes that are universal to hearing and deaf people are likely to be successful in Deaf theatre.

Bangs says that it is hard to develop productions to meet the needs of both deaf and hearing audiences. Deaf people and hearing people do not experience catharsis similarly due to cultural differences presented in the performance. Bangs implies that it is more appropriate to present productions to only deaf audiences or only hearing audiences so that full cathartic experiences can occur. It is clear from Andrews and Bangs that culture is an important factor in determining the characteristics of audiences for the development of appropriate plays in theatre. Thus, Bangs seems to suggest that strict observation of deaf culture conventions is a requirement for the development of performances in Deaf theatre so that deaf audiences can experience purgative moments.

To this point, Bangs has concluded that specific cultural considerations are necessary to develop productions of high caliber in Deaf theatre to draw deaf audiences. His study indicates that productions should focus on deaf people rather than both hearing and deaf people as the intended audience, and plays in general should display clearly authentic characteristics of deaf culture for appropriate cathartic experiences of deaf people.

In another study, Bangs compares how three theatrical companies for the deaf have developed productions for deaf audiences. "What is a Deaf Performing Arts Experience?"

summarizes Bangs' study of NTD, NTID and FTD (now Cleveland SignStage). Issues Bangs raises are considerations of theme and genre, the sign language styles displayed in performance, and deaf cultural elements within a performance, and theatre space and production considerations.

NTD, NTID and FTD have developed repertoires based on the needs of their audiences. Mainly for hearing audiences, NTD has chosen to present myths, legends, fairy tales, poetry, farce, opera, Japanese theatre, contemporary works, and original works about deaf people (Bangs 756). For deaf students and members of the local deaf community, NTID has provided a variety of theatrical genres such as a mix of skits, songs, poetry, and one-act plays, musical plays, contemporary works, classical works, epics, fairy tales, and original works about deaf people (Bangs 756). Unlike NTD and NTID, FTD has developed a wide variety of works for both hearing and deaf audiences. It has created a significant number of original works that deal with deaf culture and sign language as an art. Other contributions of FTD, according to Bangs, include signed translations of farces, contemporary works, epics, musicals, and classical (756).

Reactions of hearing and deaf audiences to performances by NTD, NTID and FTD are different, according to Bangs. Hearing audiences prefer musicals, poetry, epics, farces, and classics, whereas deaf audiences enjoy epics, myths, fairy tales, and farces because of "their emphasis on basic plots, physical action, and bold characteristics," observes Bangs (757). Another genre that is effective with deaf audiences is contemporary realism. One example is The Gin Game, in which actors sit and talk continuously about their daily experiences (Bangs 757).

Another difference between these two audiences is how they view theatricalized sign language. Hearing patrons see it as art form, while deaf people see it as visual communication. Bangs also notices that deaf people are not drawn towards classics, as they are unfamiliar with such works. In his other essay, Bangs attempts to invalidate the claim of other deaf theatrical people that deaf people are not as sophisticated as their hearing counterparts in terms of appreciation for the performing arts. He argues that Shakespeare's plays, which are considered



to be “high culture” today, were popular in his day because they were developed to meet the needs of his audiences who were illiterate (126). However, Bangs notes that The Glass Menagerie production, popular with hearing audiences, fared well with deaf audiences because of its universal themes.

Works about deaf people and their culture have drawn different responses from hearing and deaf audiences. Themes about communication problems, the role of schools for the deaf in transmitting sign language and deaf culture, the oppressive attitudes towards deaf people in schools, respect for deaf people, and the beauty and artistry of sign language are prevalent in original works about deaf people, notes Bangs (758). Deaf people endorse such works, whereas hearing people are unable to relate to such on-stage renditions because they are unable to grasp the cultural subtleties depicted in these performances. However, as one might recall, The Children of a Lesser God drew favorable responses from hearing audiences because they understood the conflicts that resulted from communication problems between lovers and particularly a hearing person’s view of loving a deaf person. As Bangs implies, reactions of hearing audiences to cross-cultural works are likely to be positive because they incorporate the worldviews of hearing people and themes in these works are congruous to their life experiences.

The second issue Bangs discusses is the sign language styles and how they impress hearing and deaf audiences. NTD’s primary emphasis is on the artistic aspect of sign language. Creative sign language is more popular with hearing people than it is with deaf people. As stated earlier, deaf people have complained about unfamiliarity with NTD’s sign language, the fast pace of signing and signs with ambiguous meanings (Bangs 758). By contrast, NTID and FTD have acknowledged the importance of sign language for deaf people. Highly skilled translators of NTID and FTD have focused on clarity of narrations in signed productions. The focus of FTD is different, though; it attempts to achieve a balance between artistic signing and signing as communicative function to reach out to both hearing and deaf audiences. NTID and FTD companies recognize that it is more effective to present the communicative aspect of sign language for their deaf audiences.

Deaf theatre has a history of receiving complaints from deaf people about the artistry of signing. There has been considerable discussion among members of the deaf community about NTD's sign language. NTD is renowned for developing artistic sign language to meet the challenge of appealing to its hearing and deaf audiences. According to Bangs, NTD's sign language has not worked well with deaf audiences for three major reasons (758). First, deaf people are not familiar with NTD's sign language, which is dissimilar to ASL. Second, the pace of signing is also too fast as NTD aims to synchronize it with the pace of voiced narrations. According to Paul Ogden in Daily Collegian, hearing people talk about 120 words a minute, whereas deaf people sign 90 words a minute. NTD signs 120 to 130 words a minute in their plays. And the artistic signs are sometimes ambiguous (Bangs 758). Even though they are frustrated by communication difficulties in NTD performances, deaf people continue to attend them because NTD attempts to improve the status of deaf Americans.

Incorporation of deaf cultural nuances in performances is another consideration of the three theatres. NTD uses deaf culture in its repertoire very sparingly to avoid alienation of its hearing audiences, whereas FTD attempts to incorporate deaf culture to educate its hearing audiences and entertain deaf audiences. Acknowledging the needs of its deaf theatergoers, NTID embodies characteristics of deaf culture in its productions. Some of the conventions observed by FTD and NTID are maintaining eye contact, avoiding deaf actors to portray hearing characters and vice versa, and identifying characters' hearing status (Bangs 759).

Theatre space and production considerations are important to NTD, NTID and FTD to address special needs of deaf audiences. In general, accommodations made to theatre space and production considerations are beyond the control of NTD. It is at a disadvantage of presenting its performances on different stages. NTD also has had to make minimum use of props as it travels extensively from one place to another. NTID has a medium-sized theatre, which enables deaf people to watch the play within the distance of vision comfort. The seating arrangement is specifically designed so that all deaf people can see plays without obstructions of people's heads in front of them. Technical devices are also available, which can be used in unique and

imaginative ways to appeal to the visual strengths of deaf people. FTD has two homes; one is a small theatre with the seating like NTID theatre and the other one is a large theatre with a raised stage and raked seating (Bangs 760). Sets, props, and costumes have been selected to be presented aesthetically and to make it easier for deaf people to see what is happening on stage. The physical arrangements of NTID and FTD theatres are best suited to the visual needs of deaf audiences. All three theatres use hearing actors to supplement the signed translation for the benefit of hearing audiences. Techniques attempted include making voicing actors subsidiary characters and placing neutrally dressed readers in the back section of the stage (Bangs 760). Deaf audiences find the on-stage presence of readers distracting. As stated earlier by Andrews, poor implementation of voiced narrations can make performances less intimate and believable.

In another essay entitled “New Ideas, New Directions in Deaf Theatre,” Bangs identifies several major issues in Deaf theatre that have surfaced as a result of its increasing recognition in the last few decades. An increasing number of hearing theatres in the United States have tried to make their productions accessible to deaf people by providing interpreters and by making outreach efforts to the local deaf communities. They also have attempted new techniques to involve deaf people in their productions. One notable example offered by Bangs is the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre’s production of Thornton Wilder’s Our Town. In a historical setting of Martha’s Vineyard where its residents used sign language at one time, a deaf family and a hearing family were portrayed (125). Currently, hearing theatrical companies are making progress by experimenting with styles to make their productions available to deaf people. This phenomenon did not exist at the time when NTD was founded.

Another observation made by Bangs is that while hearing people have supported Deaf theatre since NTD was founded, deaf people’s support has staggered. NTD’s early performances were well attended by deaf people, but the subsequent years saw a gradual decrease in the attendance of deaf theatergoers. As mentioned earlier, Bangs argues that the NTD style does not appeal to the needs of deaf audiences. Deaf people who have complained about fast signing and nonsensical artistic signs verify his argument (Baldwin 34). Bangs believes that serious

consideration of sign language style in performances is essential in bringing deaf people back to Deaf theatre in general.

Bangs then attempts to answer his own question: What kind of theatre will work with deaf audiences? He has proposed a model that considers three factors. It calls for the development of a continuum with deaf culture at one end and hearing culture at the other end and the development of continuum for three aspects of a play - the language, performance characteristics and the cultural content. In order to develop an effective Deaf theatre production for deaf audiences, theatrical professionals should determine where the language, performance characteristics and the cultural content fit on the continuum. Once this process is completed, adjustments should be made according to the needs of deaf audiences (Bangs 133).

In the language continuum, ASL rests at one end and the invented systems such as SEE fall at different points along the continuum. Bangs also says that there is no such thing as “pure ASL” in real-life everyday conversations of deaf people, and advises that ASL conversations in Deaf theatre be presented as naturally as possible. He also gives special attention to the art of translation. He states that a team of translators, not actors, should be responsible for developing a signed translation of the script. Additionally, they should be present at rehearsals to supervise the whole translation of the production. Bangs further cautions that actors should be chosen for their talents, not for their fluency in English.

As for performance characteristics, productions are to be analyzed for clarity of characters' hearing status, clarity of action, appropriate signing distance, and eye contact. For example, Bangs attended a performance by deaf actors of the Moscow Theatre of Mimicry, and found it strange that the actors lacked eye contact among each other. They instead looked at the audience the entire time. Bangs called it a hearing performance style (132). Actors should be deaf and act like deaf persons such as maintaining eye contact and avoiding hearing behaviors such as playing the violin and signing into a telephone (Bangs 134). Bangs stresses that casting hearing people to play deaf characters should be avoided. It is an act of transgression to most deaf people. He further observes that deaf directors are more sensitive to deaf audiences than

hearing directors. Deaf people have had difficulty following hearing-directed productions because of the inappropriate placement of actors. Actors have been put in places that prevent deaf people from seeing signed conversations fully. Bangs believes that deaf directors are inherently sensitive about blocking and visual cues to enhance deaf audiences' ability to observe fully what is happening on stage.

The third factor is called the cultural content, which ranges from deaf at one end to hearing at the opposite end. Performances can be about deaf culture. Or they are not. For appeal to deaf audiences, Bangs suggests that themes of plays be about deaf community activities, conflicts between deaf people and hearing people, respect and dignity for deaf people, and/or beauty of ASL (134).

Bangs believes that the continuum between deaf and hearing cultures can be applied to help in planning and developing productions in Deaf theatre. Elements such as language choice, performance style, and subject matter are to be analyzed according to this continuum. According to Bangs, the continuum can help directors and producers to determine whether or not the needs of the intended audience correspond to the development of the productions. If they mismatch, adjustments are to be made.

There are many factors that determine whether or not a production in Deaf theatre succeeds, according to Bangs. Bangs believes that a successful show in Deaf theatre depends upon the preferences of deaf audiences.

### **Operating Philosophies of Two Deaf Theatrical Companies**

In consideration of the present-day issues in terms of criticism and audience appeal in Deaf theatre, the next section of this chapter will review the operating philosophies of two active professional Deaf theatrical companies, Deaf West Theatre (DWT) and Cleveland Signstage Theatre (CST). DWT and CST are among the very few Deaf theatrical companies in the United States that bring professional Deaf theatre to deaf people. They have gained distinction for

theatre excellence, and, for that reason, DWT and CST are selected for discussion of the approaches they have used in providing enhanced audience appeal for deaf people.

### **Deaf West Theatre**

Funded by the United States Department of Education, DWT was established in January of 1991 with its first home at the Fountain Theatre in Hollywood. Two years later, it relocated to a 99-seat theatre with a wide stage on Heliotrope Drive in Los Angeles. Since 1991, DWT has won over 30 entertainment industry awards for artistic excellence. Due to its growing critical acclaim, a proposal for another relocation of DWT is currently underway. The planned facility in the area of North Hollywood Arts District will continue to serve the cultural needs of deaf and hard of hearing people in the greater Los Angeles community.

According to DWT artistic director Ed Waterstreet, the purpose of DWT is to offer performing arts programs to the two million deaf and hard of hearing people in the Los Angeles area. Waterstreet further states that DWT also attempts to make professional theatre available and accessible to deaf artists and audiences. DWT has cultural, educational, social and employment resources for deaf people pursuing theatrical careers. DWT makes ongoing efforts to invite all artists and audiences, regardless of their special needs, to enjoy its productions. Waterstreet states that one of DWT's responsibilities is to educate disabled and disadvantaged youth about its theatre through outreach programs. According to reporter Lee Condon, the goal of the outreach programs is to "demonstrate, through theatre, a cultural experience where deaf and hard of hearing people are represented in roles and situations that show them as imaginative, resourceful and enterprising." In addition to offering in-house workshops, DWT travels extensively to area schools to conduct sessions on the basics of ASL theatre.

For presentation of effective theatre, DWT is committed to developing adaptations of classics and contemporary and original works by training its actors, writers, directors, and designers in honing their talents. Although DWT produces conventional plays, director Waterstreet prefers original plays by deaf people. Presented during the 1993-1994 season,

William Moses' comedy "Am I Paranoid?" was the first original play ever to be produced at DWT. Deafness as an issue is included in Moses' script. All of DWT's productions are rendered in ASL with simultaneous translation of spoken English for both deaf and hearing audiences. The production history of DWT is listed in Appendix B.

General strategies DWT has used in making its productions accessible to both deaf and hearing audiences have been used by NTD for years. They include using both deaf and hearing actors and presenting shows in both ASL and voice. Variations of presenting ASL and spoken English in DWT's productions include some characters sign only while others voice for them, some characters sign and voice simultaneously, and some voice only while others sign for them. However, director Waterstreet prefers keeping on-stage interpreters offstage. He told reporter Condon, "You're watching the interpreter and you miss the action." The other reason is that working without voice actors gives deaf actors more control of their on-stage acting. In other words, they are not burdened with the responsibility of being concerned during rehearsals and live performances about how voice actors keep up with them. Otherwise, this is detrimental to their focus on their acting. To eliminate such problems, DWT is devoted to exploring new and innovative approaches to developing productions in order to provide its actors and audiences with ideal theatrical experiences. The DWT vision is revealed through the words of Waterstreet: "I would like to see hearing people come and see our deaf shows without depending on hearing the words." Waterstreet's statement connotes that Deaf theatre is ideally presented without any spoken English translations.

DWT has employed a new technique in making its productions accessible to hearing audiences. The first strategy is called the Sennheiser Infrared Audio Headset System. DWT is equipped with a soundproof enclosure where voice actors interpret plays and headsets are provided for hearing audiences to hear voiced interpretations. According to Waterstreet, this system works best for small cast shows. As deaf actors sign their lines, hearing actors watch them from the sound proof booth and render their lines verbally for hearing audiences with headsets. Waterstreet asserts that it enables hearing audiences to appreciate the beauty of ASL

and understand what is going on at the same time. According to reporter Condon, DWT used this system in other theatres and it created problems for hearing audiences familiar with sign language. They claimed they could hear the voice actors through the booth, which distracted them from watching the play.

In 1997, DWT introduced another new method called Supertitles for hard of hearing, late-deafened, and non-signing audiences. Supertitles is a device placed hung from the ceiling of the stage that transmits printed English versions of DWT productions, supplying non-signing audiences with information on what is happening on stage. In reference to the real-time captioning in a DWT production of George Bernard Shaw's Saint Joan, a deaf writer Lawrence Newman wrote in Silent News, dated March 1997: "A large and clear body of captions were strategically located and in no way interfered with the visibility of the stage activities." Deaf entertainer Vikee Waltrip acknowledges in Silent News, dated January 1997, that it did not interfere with her viewing of DWT's Orphan production. It is clear from the remarks made by deaf audiences attending DWT productions that real-time captioning is among those most recent methods that might be effective in strengthening audience appeal for non-signing audiences without inhibiting audience appeal for deaf audiences.

DWT regularly makes efforts to monitor the quality of its productions by experimenting with new ideas. One instance is its meeting the demands associated with translating in DWT's 1992 production of Shirley Valentine. DWT confronted the task of "triple-translating," as coined by Waterstreet in his director's note in the playbill. The original script by Willy Russell, laden with British vernacular expressions, was translated to American English and was then translated from American English to ASL without losing the British gusto. In 1995, DWT decided to try another experiment by inviting a hearing director to produce its production Sleuth. A DWT newcomer Dennis Erdman was highly commended by Waterstreet for his intuitiveness in working with ASL translators. Erdman paid attention to the voices of hearing actors to ensure that they harmonized with varying inflections of signs expressed by deaf actors to avoid vocal monotony in the performance.



According to Waterstreet, opinions of deaf and hearing audiences regarding the strategies that DWT has used for audience appeal vary. Some people prefer the supertitles, some prefer Sennheiser, and some prefer all actors on stage all the time and others object to simultaneous signing and voicing of hearing actors. In response to varying opinions, DWT determines which strategies are best used in each production based on artistic and aesthetic considerations.

The seven year-old DWT continues to be recognized as a leader dedicated to finding ways for the development of productions that are emotionally rousing for its audiences. Still in its infancy, DWT is currently experiencing a period in which its programming is still being developed. However, its accomplishments are comparable to those of CST, another theatrical company known nationwide and worldwide for its long-time reputation in broadening access to exceptional theatre for deaf and hearing people.

### **Cleveland Signstage Theatre**

Cleveland Signstage Theatre (CST) is the second oldest American Deaf theatre. In 1975, it was established as a community theatre called Fairmount Theatre of the Deaf (FTD) by deaf actor Brian Kilpatrick and hearing actor Charles St. Clair. Since then, the FTD has been renamed CST and turned professional. It is located in the 139-seat Brooks Theatre at the Cleveland PlayHouse in the downtown district. Beginning its 24th season, CST is one of the few resident theatres in the nation that has long-term contracts available for its producers and entertainers.

CST's repertoire is comedy, drama, Broadway musicals, and original works about deafness. It shows three mainstage productions annually in Cleveland. This year, it has been slated to present Spoon River Anthology by Charles Aidman, Peter Rabbit by Eric Schmiedl and A Taste of Sunrise by Susan Zeder. Zeder's play, however, will be presented at a location outside of the Brooks Theatre and is the first play of the forthcoming plays in the next three years that focus on themes of deafness to be produced by CST. In 1995, CST toured nationally for the first time in its history to present its mainstage production. It visited 32 cities for nine weeks to present Children of a Lesser God. In early 1997, CST went to 63 cities and performed

Winnie the Pooh to over 150,000 children and adults. Refer to Appendix C for the production history of CST prior to 1998.

CST has earned prestigious artistic honors for its programming. It has won four local Emmy Awards and two Cleveland Drama Critics' Circle Awards. An Old West adaptation of Moliere's The Miser, a CST production directed by Donald Bangs, earned an Emmy. Another instance is Circus written by Adrian Blue, which won the "Outstanding Original Script" from the Cleveland Critics Circle. In 1983, CST has won two awards for its participation in the International Pantomime Festival of the Deaf in Brno, Czechoslovakia. CST brought home the "Best Actor" award for Debbie Rennie and the "Most Popular Show" award for Smircus, which is actually a variation of Blue's Circus. Internationally, CST also performed at the Jerash Festival in Amman, Jordan. CST is further distinguished for having received the Ohio Governor's Award for Arts Outreach in 1991.

The mission of CST is to offer "extraordinary theatre" for both deaf and hearing people by making "the theatrical experience emotionally enhanced and more enjoyable, as well as understandable, by the use of two languages and cultural adaptation," writes Rachel Hollander, assistant to CST artistic director Aaron Weir. The following passage is excerpted from the vision of CST:

Cleveland Signstage Theatre will offer broad community access to extraordinary theatre and will be known nationally and internationally as a leader in providing professional theatrical and educational experiences presented simultaneously in spoken English and American Sign Language. Through the establishment of a year-round ensemble of artists, we will maximize our programming and create artistic training opportunities for individuals who are deaf and individuals who are hearing.

CST is active in its commitment to practicing equal treatments of deaf and hearing cultures in its artistic works and programs. However, CST is also dedicated to recruiting deaf individuals for leadership development skills in theatre. Even though hearing individuals are encouraged to join

up CST, resources at CST are primarily reserved for deaf people whose opportunities for making breaks in theatre are against all the odds.

In 1993, CST developed another program that promotes theatre access. CST's Instant Theatre national residency project involves inviting and directing deaf and hearing people from the deaf community to participate in a small production. The small production consists of a collection of short scenes and stories. Through the project, CST hopes to establish community theatres, increase deaf people's interest in theatre, and provide access to the shared theatre experience by deaf and hearing audiences. During the residencies, deaf and hearing people of all ages and abilities are invited to an open audition to develop a production, which is to be presented at the end of the program. Workshops on ASL, script development, improvisation, blocking, and many more are also offered to the communities during the residencies (Masse 7). This touring season, the CST ensemble is traveling all over Ohio and the Northeast region to play OY! Gevalt and Myths by the Handfuls. These presentations, written by artistic director Aaron Weir, are Jewish folktales and myths. Future productions will focus on different cultures to reflect the cultural diversity found in Cleveland. In each of the plays, deafness is also treated as to how it fits in each culture.

CST has developed a unique approach to make its productions accessible as well as appealing to both deaf and hearing people. It has developed productions that attempt to present and treat both languages and cultures equally. At CST, sign language is produced artistically which adds to other styles in conventional theatre. This enables hearing people to enjoy the visual style to which they are unaccustomed. This technique also enables deaf people to view a range of works in traditional theatre that have not always been accessible to them. Deaf audiences are challenged "to see things they have never heard before" (Hollander). For example, CST produced Shakespeare's A Comedy of Errors in the fall of 1997 and the biggest challenge in making the production was to present Shakespeare in the visual form so that deaf audiences could be intellectually challenged. CST also tries to make its productions attractive to deaf

people by producing on-stage sign language that reflects the actual sign language used within the deaf community.

CST's another trademark is using specific tactics that appeal to the ears and eyes in every performance. According to Hollander, CST presents ASL in ways that hearing audiences learn to appreciate its beauty and intensity. However, CST avoids taking too much license to present dramatic sign language that can be understood by non-signing people or exaggerating sign language to make it look great on stage. For hearing audiences, musical interludes are used during blackouts in CST productions. At CST, movement is also a top priority; it is carefully arranged in every performance specifically for deaf audiences so that they can benefit from knowing what is going on stage without any obstructions and enjoying the spectacular element concurrently.

Audio description is also available at CST. It is a provision that makes CST productions accessible to visually impaired and blind people. Earphones are provided for visually-impaired and blind people to hear an interpreter's explanation on the physical aspects of the production such as the set, costumes, lighting, body language, visual humor, entrances, exits, and on-stage actions. This technique does not obtrude with the concurrent presentation of spoken English and ASL in the production.

One constant struggle experienced by CST is how to best use voicing actors. The challenge is twofold. CST is confronted with decisions as to how to present them artistically. Voice actors are incorporated in the stage actions to translate deaf actors for hearing audiences, but their on-stage presence also needs to be accepted by deaf audiences as well. CST has successfully executed the use of voice actors in some of its productions. For example, in one scene of Anton Chekhov's The Marriage Proposal, two hearing actors donned in dog suits voiced for deaf actors while they talked about their dogs. In another CST production Four Poster, a deaf couple conversed about their thirty-year marriage in the bedroom with "portraits" which actually consisted of frames with two voice actors interpreting the couple's signed dialogue (Masse 7). If voice actors are placed inappropriately, deaf audiences get distracted from the action to observe

them, and, consequently, miss the action. According to CST representative Hollander, CST also avoids to synchronize voice actors with deaf actors because it believes that both languages can be misrepresented. So it alternates speaking and signing in its productions. However, CST has received complaints from hearing audiences that this technique confuses them. They do not know whom to watch. So CST's ongoing goal is to clarify its technique to hearing audiences and advise them always to watch whoever is signing.

Marketing to the deaf community as well as hearing people in Cleveland has been a rigorous process, according to Hollander. Members of the Cleveland community come from different communication backgrounds, which makes it hard for CST to get them all to come together to attend its productions. Obstinacy found in each group is the biggest problem CST has encountered in marketing its theatre. Another issue is getting hearing people to know that CST's productions are accessible to them. Hearing people are often concerned that they come to watch a CST production and do not understand what is going on. CST has changed its name for that reason.

DWT and CST producers adjust factors in all aspects of productions in order to serve the needs of deaf and hearing audiences. Even though deaf and hearing actors perform together for deaf and hearing audience members, the goals of DWT and CST are primarily targeted to the preferences of deaf theatrical professionals and audiences. Current guidelines used by DWT and CST repeatedly emphasize incorporation of deaf actors, deaf roles, and themes dealing with deafness in their artistic works. For that reason, it can be said that the highest priority of DWT and CST is to focus energy and attention to deaf actors and audiences, while their energy and attention to the needs of hearing actors and audiences are minimal. The primary consideration of DWT and CST for the needs of hearing audiences include using hearing actors to play minor roles to provide spoken English translations. Other considerations include the development of traditional and non-traditional approaches of providing spoken English translations.

Despite some negative feedback and pressure from the deaf and hearing communities, DWT and CST continue to take risks in making unconventional and innovative artistic and cultural decisions to develop successful productions for deaf and hearing audiences.

This chapter has presented a discussion of terms and issues pertaining to criticism and audience appeal in Deaf theatre. Primary sources of support for the points made in this discussion include dissertations and studies pertaining to criticism and cultural issues in Deaf theatre. Other sources of support used in this chapter include theatrical reviews of deaf and hearing performances, newspaper articles, playbills, letters, essays, and written responses to questionnaires concerning criticism and audience appeal in Deaf theatre.

## Chapter Four

This chapter presents concepts and tools for experimentation that may contribute to an improved Deaf theatre. It responds to the different aspects of criticism and audience appeal about Deaf theatre found in chapter three. It also presents considerations other than those already mentioned in chapter three that could perhaps be used to improve Deaf theatre. Finally, it offers an action plan that may prepare Deaf theatre against future risks or for future needs in providing the state-of-the-art theatre for its audiences.

Attention to the modified Aristotelian critical terminology and views of proponents of deaf culture may be useful to critics and supporters of Deaf theatre. Although Aristotle's arguments as presented by Rusalyn Andrews can be applied as a critical method to determine the quality of Deaf theatre, some of them are insufficient for the development of appropriate and honest reviews. Donald Bangs gives much attention to cultural issues specific to deaf people, which can be considered to improve performances in Deaf theatre. However, focus on cultural issues only is also inadequate to improve performances in Deaf theatre. Either of these two critical models does not satisfactorily reflect the overall definition of what Deaf theatre should be. However, this chapter proposes that Andrews' model of Aristotle's criticism and Bangs' deaf cultural considerations be merged, which would considerably improve critical preparation for Deaf theatre. A merger with improvements of these two views would provide the basis for an improved critical method for judging productions in Deaf theatre, which would increase audience approval as well.

Some current concepts proposed to evaluate and improve Deaf theatre are ambiguous and confusing. Much has been discussed about what works well and what does not work in Deaf theatre. It has been found that some arguments about criticism and cultural issues have distorted the fundamental nature of Deaf theatre. Because the criteria are partially derived from values and needs associated with both hearing and deaf cultures, it appears to show a compromise of some sort between hearing theatre and Deaf theatre. As a result, the proposed criteria that

provide a foundation for developing and evaluating productions in Deaf theatre seem cumbersome and do not capture the essence of Deaf theatre. Therefore, the intent of this chapter is to present the findings on the proposed critical models and offer practical explanations and recommendations for the potential improvement of these models. The review of Andrews' discussion suggests that Nash and Nash's model of adaptive behaviors of deaf people is the major determinant to be used by producers to incorporate Aristotelian elements for the effective development of the "logic" of productions in Deaf theatre. Although Andrews' ideas accurately describe the characteristics of the American deaf community, the issues about adaptive behaviors should not be used for defining critical preparation in Deaf theatre for these reasons.

The first reason why the theory of adaptive behaviors should not be used in Deaf theatre is that proponents of ASL and deaf culture reject Nash and Nash's marginality concept, a phenomenon in which deaf people confront conflicts from trying to fit into both hearing and deaf cultures. Their views are justified on the basis of prejudiced educational and political practices. For many years, hearing educators and administrators have dominated deaf education, resulting in the lack of deaf role models as well as the support for ASL. As a result of this domination, diverse communication forms such as SEE, oralism and so forth have been developed and implemented. Against the wishes of many deaf people, educational practices have enforced the practice of artificial signed systems in the belief that deaf people would function more appropriately and successfully in the "hearing world." For decades, supporters have argued for ASL to be used in educational programs for deaf people to acquire necessary skills to live comfortably in both hearing and deaf worlds. They assert that ASL has visual-based linguistic structures, providing deaf people with meaningful social interactions, self-worth, power to control their own lives, and so on. Because of the lack of consistency in educational philosophies and beliefs in deaf education, many methods of communication used by deaf people exist.

Secondly, Nash's model falls short of mentioning that deaf people whose educational backgrounds are associated with the use of communication modes other than ASL often discover



ASL after they leave school or they meet deaf ASL users. After they discover ASL and deaf culture, non-ASL users often choose to join the deaf community. In fact, they are also likely to gain and demonstrate some fluency in ASL. Furthermore, their choice of communication changes according to the hearing status of others. SEE, PSE, or the oral method is frequently seen in conversations between hearing and deaf people, whereas oralists and PSE or SEE signers tend to use ASL with other deaf people.

The third and final reason why Nash's model should not be used to promote the development of productions in Deaf theatre is that ASL is the performance language of professional theatrical companies for the deaf. The fact that such theatrical companies as DWT and CST acknowledge ASL indicates that its main audience is ASL users. The overall composition of audience in both DWT and CST is Deaf and hearing audiences. However, many members in Deaf theatre use ASL. The percentage of deaf adults who, by choice, continue to use communication methods other than ASL is insignificant, compared to the total number of ASL users.

In a candid interview, Patrick Graybill, deaf himself, with over 30 years of acting experience for some professional Deaf theatre companies, sheds some light to the use of SEE in Deaf theatre. He was asked if he ever performed in SEE productions or saw them. He responded that he has never done or seen a SEE performance by professional Deaf theatrical companies. However, Graybill states that some educational programs do use SEE in their productions. He recalls viewing a production by deaf children in Chicago that used SEE. Another instance is one high school production that he directed a few years ago. It was interpreted twice using SEE. He expressed disappointment for not being informed in advance that the SEE interpreter would be used for the ASL performance. According to Graybill, he found out about this special arrangement prior to the opening production when he saw a spotlighted area adjacent center downstage. When he was told that the area was for the SEE interpreter, he immediately requested that the interpreter be relocated to the area near stage right. The interpreter remained in that area for the rest of the production. The second showing with the

SEE interpretation took place at another auditorium. Graybill admitted to being distracted by the SEE interpreter who slowly moved toward center downstage during the course of the performance (Graybill Interview, August 19). He speculates that the decision of assigning the SEE interpreter to his productions was made by the school because of its philosophy of signed English use for its deaf students.

In his discussion of non-ASL audiences in Deaf theatre, Graybill believes that Deaf theatre has been overly concerned about meeting the needs of its audiences. He was asked the following hypothetical situation: If hearing theatre offers ASL translations of its spoken English productions for deaf patrons and Deaf theatre provides spoken English translations of ASL performances for hearing audiences, would it be reasonable to recommend that Deaf theatre provide SEE or PSE or oral translations of its ASL productions for its non-signing deaf audiences? Would providing such a provision be likely to respect the rights of non-signing deaf audiences attending productions in Deaf theatre without diminishing or taking away the rights of ASL audiences? Graybill responded that Deaf theatre should not be finding a middle ground simply to satisfy non-ASL users. He presents an analogy: "Is it fair to ask Italian opera singers to shift its opera performance language from Italian to spoken English?" He also asserts that ASL actors should not be asked to use any of the non-ASL-signed systems in order to perform their roles unless their roles call for them to do so. He also states that non-ASL audiences should demonstrate the willingness to withhold questions and accept dramatic ASL as part of their total theatrical experience (Graybill Interview, August 19). For aesthetic and political reasons, the use of any of non-ASL methods as the performing language or for interpretation of ASL performances in Deaf theatre should be discouraged.

If it is aesthetically unpleasant for ASL users to see interpreters assigned to productions for non-signing deaf audiences, DWT may have the answer to the concerns about accessibility of ASL productions for non-signing deaf audiences. It has experimented with the real-time captioning innovation in some of its recent productions, and positive feedback from the deaf community about this approach has been received. ASL audience members were not distracted

by the presence of captioning and non-ASL users were presented a printed English translation of theatrical ASL.

Another perspective can be added to question Andrews' choice for Nash's model for the development of successful productions in Deaf theatre. Is it possible for Deaf theatre to employ the multi-linguistic and multi-modal approach in a production to respect the rights of all deaf audiences? The answer is likely to be no. It would be like attending a performance that incorporates German, French, Japanese, and Italian to accommodate the needs of these audiences. It has been a practice of conventional theatres to use one language in the production and use interpreters on or off stage to convey the information in other languages and/or linguistic modes. The use of different communication modes within Deaf theatrical productions is likely to be confusing and aesthetically unpleasant for the main audience of ASL users unless it accomplishes the playwrights' purposes.

Deaf theatre is unnecessarily challenged by the fact that it has deaf audiences from various communication backgrounds. The question of accommodating diverse communication preferences of its intended audiences should not be addressed. Instead, artificially developed systems such as SEE and PSE could be used in ASL performances to demonstrate conflicts in communication experiences of hearing and deaf people. Artistry, registers, and variations of ASL should replace these systems in Andrews' critical framework. These systems should also be placed as an exceptional criterion within that critical framework for only a small proportion of deaf people use them. In that criterion, an historical explanation of the ASL/English disagreement should be stated, and suggestions for incorporating such issues into the development of ASL productions can be offered.

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Andrews' assertions about deaf playwrights' potentially flawed development of hearing characters and themes of isolation to be explored in Deaf theatre are subject to controversy. Currently, very few deaf people in the United States have experimented with playwriting, and not many playwriting programs for deaf people are available. Those writers who have successfully developed plays that incorporate deaf cultural ideas include Donald Bangs, Eugene Bergman, Bernard Bragg, Willy Conley, Patti Durr, Gilbert Eastman, Thomas Holcomb, Shanny Mow, Paul Ogden, and Rico Peterson. One known playwriting program that is available on a regular basis for promising deaf script writers is the Deaf Playwrights Conference which is held at NTD in Chester, Connecticut. New plays are developed by deaf writers under the tutelage of specialists in dramaturgy, recited by NTD actors, and reviewed by professionals in readings open to the public (Mow 234). Other programs have offered such training on either a one-time or vacillating basis. Experiences of some deaf playwrights have been recorded, revealing the current understanding of Deaf theatre.

Andrews doubts the ability of deaf playwrights to develop acceptable hearing characters because of their perceptual differences. While Andrews' concern is acknowledged, it is important to note that deaf people have unique perspectives of hearing people on the basis of their interactions with hearing people. Many of them are generally aware of their hearing counterparts' culture and values as most of them come from hearing families. Deaf people often experience difficulty in communicating with hearing people who do not sign, and the most common result of this problem is that the typical conversation is either limited in depth and breadth or cut short. Therefore, the access deaf people have to hearing people and their thoughts is usually restricted and vice versa. To demonstrate such representative communication

problems, the development of hearing characters by deaf writers is deliberately flat. One instance is Ruth's hearing fiancé in Trouble's Just Beginning -- A Play of Our Own, a 1973 comedy by deaf British writer, Dorothy Miles. Deaf critic Karen Christie noted the restricted development in Ruth's relationship with her hearing fiancé in the production presented by Lights On! Deaf Theatre in Rochester, New York, in 1992. She alerted her readers that "the hearing characters are intentionally made to be one-dimensional." In other words, communication problems between hearing and deaf people are typical, which explains why deaf people tend to enjoy seeing themselves and hearing people this way in Deaf theatre. Such situations are realistic and naturalistic; they mirror how most deaf people normally communicate with hearing people.

Another point for consideration related to Andrews' statement about deaf people's views of hearing people is historical representations of deaf people in the canon of literary works by hearing writers. According to writer Eugene Bergman in Angels and Outcasts, most deaf characters developed by hearing writers are depicted as either mystical or villainous. Such representations about deaf people are inaccurate, but this is how hearing people have traditionally viewed deaf people. As mentioned in chapter three, Aristotle argues that limited knowledge of objects of imitation and accidental errors are tolerated. Therefore, if deaf writers choose representations of hearing people that may be inaccurate from a hearing perspective, are hearing people to be asked to accept such inaccurate "objects of imitation" and accidental errors on the basis of Aristotle's arguments?

Insights of one deaf playwright are noteworthy for understanding playwrighting for Deaf theatre. Paul Ogden, winner of the Ford Foundation for American Playwrights' Award for Come Dance With Me, discusses some points that deaf playwrights could use. His play, performed in 1981 by the California Theatre of the Deaf at the College of the Sequoias, incorporated sign language, mime, narration, and dance to portray the doomed romance of a deaf man and a hearing dancer. The reason why Ogden wrote the play is that he hopes for more plays about the universal problems deaf people encounter in the hearing world. His play was written for both

deaf and hearing people, but Ogden said it was prepared more for deaf people. He said that the performance was a problem for hearing audiences who expected to see NTD's style. For example, there was no music in the background while the dance was executed. From Ogden's perspective, potential themes in Deaf theatre can spotlight problems deaf people endure in the hearing world, and music can be omitted from performances as the absence of aural experiences represents deaf people's world experiences more accurately.

While Andrews' call for the theme of isolation to be thoughtfully examined in Deaf theatre is acknowledged, it is important to note that plays by deaf playwrights in the recent years have broadened and diversified in terms of conflicts and issues. Two obvious examples are Willy Conley's Waterdrop (1997) and Thomas Holcomb's Hear No Scream (1996). Themes in these plays are not about power or personal significance associated with deafness, but about the ripple effect of a family member's suicide and AIDS in the deaf community. Although the foundations of these plays are based on the deaf worldviews, the themes are universal. The theme of isolation seems to have lost impact on deaf people who are too familiar with it. Thus, themes other than isolation in Deaf theatre have already been explored.

Andrews also argues that deaf playwrights should develop themes that deal with "the choice of abandoning familial culture, ideas, and values" (109). There is a lot of potential in this theme, however, as mentioned earlier, deaf people are way too familiar with alienation and isolation in the hearing world. Thus, the theme of alienation is likely to lose impact on deaf audiences unless it is presented in an innovative and original way. It may also work in cross-cultural works. An example would be a deaf Russian family relocating to America and confronting conflicts in their attempts to familiarize themselves with the American deaf community.

Established playwrights like Shanny Mow and Donald Bangs might serve as consultants for new and emerging deaf playwrights. Mow and Bangs have experimented with playwriting and have found what works and what do not. For example, Mow stressed that he has long ago discarded the possibility of using anger as a theme in his works, and advises deaf writers to

explore themes other than anger (his taped lecture). Bangs advises that plays written by hearing playwrights can be adapted for productions in Deaf theatre. He recommends that deaf cultural information be included in productions to identify clearly the hearing status of characters. This way, deaf audiences would be able to identify with the deaf characters. Feedback from deaf writers can bring attention to thematic issues sometimes overlooked by hearing writers.

Even though ASL is the primary performance language in Deaf theatre, languages and other communication forms and lifestyles adhered to by a small fraction of deaf people can be represented through the Aristotelian elements of plot, character and thought to demonstrate conflicts that result from historical, educational and political decisions. Those conflicts are anticipated to be phased out in the indeterminate future when deaf Americans continue to exert their political influence to defend ASL and their culture. They will most likely be replaced by new conflicts that illuminate the authentic deaf experience. Or these conflicts can be demonstrated in historical plays. Again, the feedback of deaf writers may be the best source for development and enhancement of the Aristotelian elements for Deaf theatre.

Based on recorded facts about works and experiences of deaf playwrights, it seems reasonable to say that the responsibility of judging deaf writers' development of the Aristotelian elements is to be assigned to critics and audiences familiar with ASL and deaf culture. Because of their intimate knowledge of ASL and deaf culture, they should be able to determine whether or not hearing characters are believable and offer reasonable feedback that could establish standards for analyzing development of hearing characters in Deaf theatre. For successful themes to be presented in Deaf theatre, insights of deaf writers should accurately address the potential weaknesses associated with thematic development. And deaf playwrights should not be assisted by hearing writers about how to develop hearing characters unless both hearing and deaf writers agree to specific conditions prior to working collaboratively. The agreement would enable deaf writers to develop their ideas without having to experience any potential power struggles.

Another topic Andrews has discussed is similarities in the process of creating dramatic language in hearing theatre and Deaf theatre. Her recommendations about dramatic ASL are legitimate, however, some important topics about dramatic ASL are worthy stating here. The subsequent discussion focuses on the other theoretical and practical aspects of dramatic ASL, which can be added to Andrews' theoretical aspects on dramatic ASL.

ASL research in the last thirty years has shown that mainly deaf people have developed the language. Features in ASL that are sensitive to changes in artistry and in register have been studied. However, there is little information on ASL artistry and register. Deaf theatre also recognizes the importance of involving deaf people in the process of translating written and spoken English aesthetic texts into signed performances. Though limited, these studies provide a great deal of insight into how dramatic ASL can be rearranged to fit a wide range of social situations and purposes.

“Sign Language on Stage” by Shanny Mow, based on his work with NTD which has created artistic uses of sign language, explains the function of theatricalized sign language. According to Mow, the six basic conventions of sign language are correlated to the visual capabilities of deaf people watching performances from the playhouse. First, everyday signs are magnified on stage, enabling deaf people to see dialogue with ease. Secondly, actors' signing space is more enlarged. The enlarged space makes it possible for actors to communicate on stage without colliding with the signing of other actors. Thirdly, fingerspelling is used sparsely; it is usually used only once to specify a character's name and is afterward replaced by a name sign. This practice attempts to avoid potential eyestrain as a result of viewing names being fingerspelled repeatedly. Fourthly, sign choices are also based on contextual and aesthetic considerations, discussed elsewhere in this chapter. The next convention discussed by Mow is the power of emotions. It is displayed through the varying intensity of movement, which allows deaf audiences to experience the depth of emotions. Lastly, how sign language is used propels how actors move around on the stage. The actor moves in a certain direction while signing a line to demonstrate where he is going. According to Mow, this convention optimizes the



audience's ability to follow what is happening on stage. Overall, stage sign language is used in ways that reduce the potential of eyestrain experienced by deaf audiences. It also reduces the risk of deaf people's missing the action and enhances deaf people's appreciation for visual aesthetics.

In his personal commentary, Lou Fant, hearing son of deaf parents, discusses the artistry of sign language as well as translation in Deaf theatre. Fant, who has played various roles in Deaf theatre, films and television, states that "artistic interpretation of English literature into ASL is not interpretation at all, but rather a rendering of spoken English into manually coded English" (196). He states that transliterations and translations are dissimilar and concludes that translations are more effective for theatrical performances in Deaf theatre. He illustrates the difference between transliteration and translation with Hamlet's famous line "to be or not to be: that is the question." The signed transliteration of the line would be the same as the English version, whereas the translation of Hamlet's line would be rendered as: "DECIDE POSTPONE WHICH." Fant describes the process of developing the ASL translation. He first consulted the background information to know Hamlet's situation. Secondly, he chose the sign "DECIDE" because Hamlet is not sure what he wants to do. Thirdly, he initially considered "DECIDE DON'T" for "NOT TO BE," but decided not to use this phrase because it was not aesthetically pleasing. He came up with the concept of "POSTPONE" as "DECIDE" and "POSTPONE" have the same handshape. The unchanging representation is artistic and represents Hamlet's dilemma accurately. Fant also determined that the slight shift of the signer's body from left to right while the line is signed demonstrates clearly Hamlet's two choices. Lastly, he selected "WHICH" which parallels the movement of scales moving up and down to represent the word "OR" for it conveys a strong visual image. The outcome of the translation is a vividly visible explanation of Hamlet's difficulty; there is equilibrium in handshape and placement, and opposing ideas (Fant 197-8).

Mow's descriptions of stage sign language and Fant's interpretation of Hamlet's line show that artistic creations of ASL for signed narrations in Deaf theatre are conceivable.

Concerns Mow and Fant have pertaining to thespian ASL are clarity of signing and meaning, vividness of visual images and development of harmony and uniformity in signing. These considerations are similar to Aristotle's concerns about melody.

ASL research shows that ASL is used differently in formal and informal situations. Register refers to "variation in language according to the formality or informality called for by the social situation" (Lane et. al 66). Several levels of register include intimate (informal), casual, and formal (66). According to ASL linguists Charlotte Baker-Shenk and Dennis Cokely, formal signing occurs in formal situations such as academic lectures and business meetings, and informal signing is seen in everyday conversations with friends and family (93). Formal ASL involves more use of two-handed signs, larger signs, slower pace, and fewer facial expressions (Baker-Shenk 94). In contrast to formal signs, informal signs are usually one-handed, smaller, and faster. Non-manual signals in informal contexts are more explicitly expressed than those found along with formal signing. The production of ASL signs is often reduced in everyday conversations. For example, some signs are considered informal if they start from the mouth but are lowered during conversations to the cheek area or the neck-chin area (Baker-Shenk 96). ASL researcher Catherine Kettrick has found that specific grammatical markers in casual signing are clearer than those found in informal signing (Lucas 258). Researchers Scott K. Liddell and Robert E. Johnson have found that the nondominant hand blends into the dominant handshape in casual signing (259). Researcher June Zimmer presents an example of casual signing: the sign "THINK," normally made with a 1-handshape, is made with a Y-handshape with extended index finger, so that the subsequent sign "PLAY" can be made (258).

One example of ASL register in Deaf theatre is found in the ASL performance of Shakespeare's Twelfth Night. In their notes in the playbill, experienced translators Lou Fant and Tom Henschel illustrate how they developed the ASL register for the performance to distinguish social class. In the translation, Feste says to Olivia: "Thank the gods you are clever. Why? For thy uncle's brains are out." ASL "because" could have been used, but Fant says that the signed rendition is more appropriate as posing rhetorical questions and answering them is colloquial

ASL. This translation of colloquial ASL matches colloquial Shakespeare found in Twelfth Night.

Studies of ASL variations have implications for Deaf theatre. In general, ASL registers change as situation change. ASL research even has some information on ASL variations based on age, gender, race, and region. For example, Baker-Shenk and Cokely found that, at Gallaudet, female students used one form of the sign “TERRIFIC,” while male students used another variation of the same sign when they talked about sports (87). The phenomenon of ASL variations is important for critics whose goal is to analyze ASL for correct linguistic forms and structures in the context of the performance. Therefore, they should be familiar with ASL discourse variations to determine appropriateness of how ASL is used in performances.

In addition to ASL artistry and variations, translating in Deaf theatre warrants considerable attention. Experts in theatrical translating have systematically reported that it involves an intensive four-to-six week preparation and requires knowledge of ASL and English. Bernard Bragg, a deaf actor, director and playwright, states that translation from written texts into sign language is a vital part of Deaf theatre (20). Translators know, as Bragg calls it, the art of “signsmithing,” to ensure the clarity of signed versions of written texts. They also use poetic license to develop appropriate artistic features of sign language (20). The process usually involves the script being divided into manageable parts, according to the character and action. In the Twelfth Night playbill, Fant and Henschel describe the challenges in the process of translating Shakespeare into ASL. As opposed to spoken English, negatives in ASL are often found at the end of a sentence, interrogatives occur at the end of a question, events are presented sequentially, placement of persons, objects or events in the space around the signer clarifies referents, and, as stated earlier, rhetorical questions are usually found in colloquial ASL. All in all, translators must possess knowledge of ASL and American deaf culture in order to develop appropriate signed presentations in Deaf theatre.

In addition to the Aristotelian code for sign language, conventions on ASL artistry and variations as well as rules for translations can be used in analyzing the theatrical ASL in Deaf

theatre. Critics in Deaf theatre are likely to find this information base useful to evaluate effectively how well ASL is presented in the performance.

Andrews and Bangs have proposed that the linguistic needs of non-ASL audiences be considered. However, studies on artistic and aesthetic qualities of SEE and other artificially signed systems are non-existent. There is no information on artistry and variations of SEE or any of the other artificially developed sign systems, which cannot be used following Aristotle's ideas about language. Based on Baker-Shenk and Cokely's definition of the deaf community, which will be discussed later in this chapter, artificially signed systems also do not represent deaf cultural values, which cannot be used to describe Deaf theatre. Therefore, Deaf theatre can hardly be expected to provide its audiences with SEE or any of the other artificially signed systems as its performing language.

Although Andrews has discussed issues for critics to evaluate spectacle in Deaf theatre, she has not cited how important it is in Deaf theatre. As opposed to spectacle in hearing theatre, the implications of spectacle in Deaf theatre are more important. The role of spectacle in Deaf theatre is dual, which is to convey visual elements for aesthetic appreciation and convey messages through ASL. Because of its unique contributions to Deaf theatre, spectacle should be considered to be one of the more important elements, as opposed to Aristotle's ranking it as the least important element in general theatre. It should be acknowledged that extreme views are likely to assert that spectacle is the most important element in Deaf theatre. Assigning more importance to spectacle would greatly facilitate the critics' ability to determine whether or not spectacle weakens the production in Deaf theatre.

Another perspective can be added to stress the importance of spectacle in Deaf theatre. Theatre enthusiast Christie offers observations about the experiences of deaf people when they attend a performance in hearing theatre. Comedies and dramas in hearing theatre are "often too much talk," which is visually challenging for deaf audiences. The visual elements in comedies and dramas are usually simple, which is not entertaining for deaf audiences. Conversely, musicals are appealing to deaf people as long as there is a lot of action and brilliant and

multicolored production aspects (7). The issues related to deaf audiences' needs in hearing theatre can be applied to Deaf theatre. As Christie implies, spectacle is of paramount importance for deaf audiences; it manifests more weight than any of the other Aristotelian elements.

Although Andrews' description about adaptive behaviors of deaf people to discuss cathartic experiences in Deaf theatre is important, the information should not be pursued when it comes to developing and evaluating performances in Deaf theatre. While it is acknowledged that the phenomenon of four adaptive behavior types is prevalent in the general deaf community, Deaf theatre should avoid consulting such guidelines to develop productions to meet the expectations of deaf people with diverse attitudes about deafness. Andrews' model appears to be too restricted; it excludes certain members of the deaf community from Deaf theatre. It also suggests that there is something wrong with deaf people.

Based on Andrews' theory, deaf people with marginal attitudes are likely to attempt to accept incompatible values from both cultures. Under-distancing or over-distancing is highly probable. Under-distancing is likely to occur when deaf people with both hearing and deaf cultural values see a performance in either hearing theatre or Deaf theatre. They are likely to experience emotional distress since they are unable to identify fully with either hearing characters in hearing theatre or deaf characters in Deaf theatre. Over-distancing is also probable if they watch a production to learn about hearing culture or deaf culture.

It seems unattainable to develop an ASL production that is grounded on assumptive bases of deaf people who attempt to incorporate the belief systems of both deaf and hearing cultures. As Andrews' model suggests, it is possible for producers to blend the belief systems of deaf people with both cultures into the development of the logic of the production. However, it appears to be unworkable to develop such a production because Deaf theatre represents deaf culture and its values. ASL is the endorsed communication mode and its use is presumed. Since non-ASL deaf audiences have attitudes and values not found in deaf culture, their potential for catharsis in Deaf theatre is impossible. The event of either under-distancing or over-distancing

is likely. Under-distancing will most likely happen for non-ASL deaf users who become emotionally disturbed by the fact that they are unable to relate to deaf characters, and over-distancing will presumably occur when non-ASL deaf users attend Deaf theatre to learn about ASL and deaf culture.

Therefore, Andrews' description about catharsis in Deaf theatre should be replaced with another point of view to clarify and strengthen the definition of catharsis in Deaf theatre. In addition to researcher Padden's general definition of deaf community as stated in chapter 1, the data presented by researchers Baker-Shenk and Cokely is the most sophisticated model as it considers many factors in determining who are the members of the deaf community. It also recognizes deaf people as a cultural group.

According to Baker-Shenk and Cokely, one major factor that helps determine who is a member of the deaf community is called attitudinal deafness (56). In addition to attitudinal deafness, there are four ways people can access to the deaf community: 1) audiological; 2) political; 3) linguistic; and 4) social. The audiological avenue refers to the amount of hearing loss; the political avenue applies to involvement in political activities at local, state and/or national levels; and the linguistic avenue relates to knowledge of ASL. It is important to note that only ASL is mentioned. It is clear whether or not a person uses ASL. Lastly, the social avenue pertains to attending and supporting social functions of the deaf community (56-57). As Baker-Shenk and Cokely imply, people who are attitudinally deaf and can access at least two of the four avenues are considered members of the deaf community. Therefore, it is clear from the model that hearing people who are attitudinally deaf may be considered members of the deaf community. It is also apparent from the model that deaf people who are not attitudinally deaf and do not have access to any of the four avenues may not be considered members of the deaf community.

Prospective critics of Deaf theatre will find the model by Baker-Shenk and Cokely more comprehensive than the one proposed by Nash and Nash about attitudes and perspectives about deafness. Familiarity with the model will affect the potential of critics to determine the quality

of performances in Deaf theatre. The model enables critics and producers to determine the characteristics of audiences and their cathartic experiences in Deaf theatre more accurately and completely.

As stated in chapter 3, problems experienced by both hearing and deaf people while viewing the same performance in Deaf theatre have been reported by Bangs. Hearing audiences are fascinated with the signing aspect of the production and the information about deaf culture accessible to them via voiced narrations, whereas deaf audiences are confused by cultural representations in the performance that are incongruous with their world views. As a result, both hearing and deaf audiences lack catharsis, which is the ultimate goal of productions. Instead, both hearing and deaf audiences experience over-distancing. They are unable to experience the desired emotional discharge because these productions attempt to either educate or propagandize. Based on this analysis, it does not seem possible to develop presentations that attempt to achieve a balance of hearing and deaf perspectives in Deaf theatre for both hearing and deaf audiences to experience purely cathartic moments.

Therefore, in order to overcome the difficulty of developing and offering cathartic experiences, Deaf theatre should recognize and endorse ASL as the only performance language because its main audience is ASL-users. Some theatre experts have argued that it may not be possible because of the complex nature of its audiences. Deaf people who use signed systems such as SEE or PSE would be excluded from the benefit of appreciating Deaf theatre. However, the existing documentation has suggested that it is impracticable to present a production that addresses the needs of deaf audiences with diverse communication preferences. Additionally, deaf users of systems other than ASL actually have two clear-cut options: hearing theatre or Deaf theatre. If their primary culture is hearing culture, they can opt for hearing theatre. If their primary culture is deaf culture, Deaf theatre best suits their needs. While their initial experiences in Deaf theatre may be frustrating, their problems will disappear once they understand the fundamental nature of Deaf theatre.

It is also unworkable to offer non-signing hearing audiences cathartic experiences in Deaf theatre. Deaf theatre can provide a barrier-free communication environment by making its productions accessible to non-signing hearing people through spoken English translations. However, Deaf theatre reflects deaf people's experiences, histories, struggles, and victories. For non-signing hearing audiences supported by spoken English translators, over-distancing is very likely. Instead of experiencing appropriate emotional discharges, this group of people will be educated about deaf people's voices, visions, and perspectives because Deaf theatre is ASL-oriented. According to Bangs, it is challenging, but possible to develop productions for non-signing hearing audiences in Deaf theatre. He states that hybrid works are likely to be successfully received by non-signing hearing audiences because of universal themes found in these works. However, Christie disagrees; she believes that hybrid works are highly likely to be less successful with hearing audiences due to the fact that their world views match those found in plays written for hearing theatre more closely than those plays written for hearing theatre that are translated for Deaf theatre. Hearing audiences seek mainly aural cues to enhance their overall theatrical experience. Since typical productions in Deaf theatre exhibit visual aspects more often than aural aspects, they are likely not to find full satisfaction from viewing a hybrid work.

Deaf theatre should continue to develop productions solely based on authentic deaf experiences. This does not necessarily mean that hearing culture and values are to be discounted in Deaf theatre. Instead, hearing culture and values are to be seen from deaf perspectives. For example, if deaf characters are passing by a rock-n-roll concert attended by hearing fans, they are most likely to comment on the concert and music. Their dialogue would reveal their views of hearing culture and values. Opponents say that Deaf theatre would not satisfy the needs of deaf theatregoers who embrace hearing culture and values. Again, it can be argued that hearing theatre is available and accessible to those people. Hearing theatre is associated with spoken English and hearing cultural values, and its performances are accessible through oral or SEE or



PSE interpreters upon request, which are likely to meet the aesthetic needs of deaf users of oralism or SEE or PSE.

As stated by Hilary Cohen, Deaf theatre in the United States and Deaf theatre in Europe are “politically motivated” (69). The shared goal of both theatres is to explore meaningful ways for recognition and acceptance of deaf people in their societies. However, their approaches differ, according to Cohen. American Deaf theatre offers accessibility to its productions to win acceptance and respect for ASL and deaf culture, whereas European Deaf theatre resists the use of spoken translations for hearing Europeans to gain access to its productions. The work of European Deaf theatrical companies “embodies a more direct affirmation of the right to communicate through sign language” (Cohen 69). The belief among deaf Europeans is that if anyone wants to gain entry into European Deaf theatre, he or she must learn sign language. Considering the European Deaf theatre’s militant philosophy, would problems of audience appeal in American Deaf theatre disappear if it adopts the European approach? While the question may be unanswerable, it can be anticipated that American Deaf theatre would receive improved results associated with audience appeal for ASL users.

Another observation is worthy of consideration to address the overall problem of audience appeal in Deaf theatre. American Deaf theatre in its early years was successful in entertaining its deaf audiences as it was visually oriented and developed by only deaf people. Given the above knowledge, would it be appropriate for American Deaf theatre to revive the practice of developing and presenting its productions for ASL audiences? If the answer is affirmative, then would it be possible for non-signing hearing and deaf audiences to experience catharsis without any access to voiced translations in Deaf theatre?

It is perhaps inappropriate to make Deaf theatre inaccessible to non-signing audiences. After all, hearing theatre is accessible to ASL users. However, problems with hearing audiences’ theatrical experiences in hearing theatre because of interpreters have been noted. Interpreters take hearing audience members’ attention from the production because the presence of theatrical signing is often an interesting and novel experience for such audience members. If hearing

theatre and Deaf theatre should be made available and accessible to both groups of hearing audiences and deaf audiences, how can these theatres make their audiences' cathartic experiences possible, given the fact that their audiences have reported problems experiencing ideal theatrical experiences because of voice and ASL interpreters?

If the goal of Deaf theatre is to provide its audiences with extraordinary theatre, it needs to make a commitment to its future. Given the comprehensive literature of Deaf theatre, Deaf theatre has not reached its goal of theatrical excellence for its diverse audiences. Supporters of Deaf theatre must realize that they are threatened by the lack of power, limited financial resources, and not enough top management positions held by deaf people. Although Deaf theatre has made remarkable attainments in the last 30 years, it is entering the twenty-first century with too few opportunities to become emancipated of pre-dominantly hearing assumptions and perspectives that continue to devalue ASL and deaf culture.

Addressing the future of Deaf theatre may be examined through the following possible avenues. By way of government, mass media, schools, and private and public organizations, the concept of Deaf theatre and its place in the pluralistic American society should be explored. Survey instruments can also be developed for Deaf theatre audiences to obtain audience satisfaction information. The data should be summarized, analyzed and published for information sharing. Deaf theatre should expand sources of revenue through foundations to address areas needing improvement. Having improved financial security should enable Deaf theatre to continually evaluate and enhance the existing use of technology to provide its audiences accessibility services. It should also experiment with the cutting edge technology such as computers that may enhance its productions. Most importantly, a productive dialogue among supporters of Deaf theatre must take place to face and discuss the realities of not being able to meet its audiences' expectations, especially those of non-signing hearing and deaf audiences.

The critical model, as proposed by this thesis, will improve and enhance audience appeal of audience members who use ASL. The lingering, old views of deaf people that have been adopted to define Deaf theatre should be abandoned because they do not fit the current

phenomenon that exists in the contemporary American deaf community. Recent developments in ASL, current trends in research about deaf people, and the current political climate of the American deaf community represent the closing of an old era in American deaf history. Appreciation and respect for the visually oriented language and culture of deaf people are also slowly replacing stigmatizing attitudes of hearing people.

Although Aristotle and deaf cultural perspectives serve as a better foundation for criticism and audience appeal in Deaf theatre, they still do not address the needs of non-signing hearing and deaf audiences who are unfamiliar with ASL and deaf culture. It is hoped that, as Deaf theatre continues to mature, more attention will be given to the insufficiency of ideal cathartic experiences for non-signing audiences without interfering with ideal theatrical experiences of ASL audiences.

This thesis offers pertinent issues necessary for improving criticism in Deaf theatre to improve as well as enhance audience appeal for deaf people. Andrews' modified critical framework based on Aristotle's theory has been reviewed, and that framework is proposed for further modification to gear more to the aesthetic needs as well as rights of deaf people in Deaf theatre. The works of Deaf theatre proponents have also been reviewed. These perspectives have identified and described the aesthetic qualities that are unique to Deaf theatre. This study proposes that it is possible and important for critics to employ the Aristotelian critical standards supplemented with an updated informational base on deaf culture to judge performances in Deaf theatre. Using these guidelines, critics would be able to provide accurate feedback, which would significantly improve audience appeal in future performances in Deaf theatre. However, there is a need for research to explore other directions that might develop better methods for Deaf theatre to provide appropriate criticism as well as audience appeal for its non-signing audiences without sacrificing its artistic principles unique to ASL audiences.

**Appendix A**  
**NTID Theatre Performance History**  
**1969-Present**

1969-1970

Footlight Fever  
The Silent Stage  
Highlights of '70

1970-1971

The Pardoner's Tale  
The Face on the Barroom Floor  
French Apache  
Haiku Harvest  
Variety of skits and songs

1971-1972

My Heart's in the Highlands  
All Star Variety Show

1972-1973

Rashomon

1973-1974

It's a Deaf, Deaf, Deaf, Deaf World  
The Madwoman of Chaillot  
What's Wrong with the Girls?  
The Serpent  
The Twins Separated

1974-1975

The Taming of the Shrew  
Lysistrada  
Wall and Spring Showcase

1975-1976

Us  
Volpone, the Fox  
Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat  
Tormented Pathway

Dark of the Moon

1976-1977

Signs of the Times

Celebration

Wenebojo

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum

1977-1978

Alice in Wonderland

A Streetcar Named Desire

The Phoney Gentleman

1978-1979

Fall Arts Festival

See How They Run

Romeo and Juliet

1979-1980

Jubilee by Sunshine & Company

A Piece of Grease

The Fantastiks

One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest

1980-1981

The School for Wives

Once Upon a Mattress

Eve and Adam

Everyman

1981-1982

The Tempest

The Threepenny Opera

Sunshine Too

The Odd Couple

1982-1983

Tonight at Cinema 4

A Christmas Carol: Scrooge and Marley

The Diviners

Croquet – dance recital

1983-1984

Arsenic and Old Lace

The Ice Wolf

Bury the Dead – dance recital

Oklahoma!

1984-1985

The Adding machine

The Caucasian Chalk Circle

An Italian Straw Hat

1985-1986

The Passion of Dracula

The Troll and the Elephant Prince

Tennessee & Porch

Carousel

1986-1987

Macbeth

The Foreigner

Scapino

Gravity's Angels by RIT Dance Company

1987-1988

The Matchmaker

Amahl and the Night Visitors

Last Dance

1988-1989

The Death and Life of Sherlock Holmes

Night Memories

The Good Person of Setzuan

1989-1990

Great Expectations

Tianenmen Square by RIT Dance Company

Cabaret

1990-1991

Adam and the Experts

Symphonic Dances from West Side Story by RIT Dance Company

Marriage

1991-1992

NTID Student Variety Show

The Miss Firecracker Contest

Romeo and Juliet by RIT Dance Company

1992-1993

The Grapes of Wrath

Medea by RIT Dance Company

Meta

1993-1994

The Miser

Steel Magnolias

Cinderella by RIT Dance Company

1994-1995

The Member of the Wedding

Cinderella by RIT Dance Company

The Three Musketeers

1995-1996

The Woolgatherer

Love Thy Neighbor

Picnic

1996-1997

Cat Spanking Machine (American Deaf Play Creators' Festival)

Whispers of a Savage Sort (American Deaf Play Creators' Festival)

Jackson Pollock: In the Painting Myths, Fables and Legends

Importance of Being Earnest

1997-1998

Blithe Spirit

Good Person of Setzuaa

The Spirit and the Man- A Dance Tribute to Michael Thomas

A Sailor's Daughter

1998-1999

Squanto Spoke English (American Deaf Play Creators' Festival II)

The Golden Arrow (American Deaf Play Creators' Festival II)

The Odd Couple

Extremities

West Side Story



**Appendix B**  
**Deaf West Theatre Company**  
**Production History**

1990-1991

The Gin Game

1991-1992

One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest

1992-1993

Shirley Valentine

1993-1994

Am I Paranoid?

Cinderella

'Night, Mother

His Wife

Sign Me a Story

1994-1995

Of Mice and Men

Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp

Sleuth

Medea

1995-1996

Medea

A Christmas Carol; The Ghost Story of Christmas

Eggus

Alice in Wonderland; Ears, Hands and Hearts

1996-1997

Orphans

Saint Joan

Alice in Wonderland; Ears, Hands and Hearts

1997-1998

Brilliant Traces

Romeo and Juliet; Circus Verona

Hand in Hand and Foot in Mouth; An Unmusical

**Appendix C**  
**Cleveland Signstage Theatre Company**  
**Production History**

1978-1979

Alice in Deafinitely

The Silent Screen

The Doctor in Spite of Himself

Beauty and the Beast

The Glass Menagerie

Falling in Love, an Evening of One-Act Plays: The Boor

1979-1980

Gas Light

Silence, Please

Waiting for Godot

The Half Baked Bride

1980-1981

The Four Poster

La Ronde

The Diary of Adam and Eve

The Second Shepherd's Play

Seascape

The In-Group

1981-1982

Dracula

The Odd Couple

Circus of Signs

Story Theatre

1982-1983

The Amorous Flea

1983-1985

None were listed.

1985-1986

Building Bridges  
Signs of Love: Visitor from Forest Hills  
I Can't Imagine Tomorrow

1986-1987  
Frankenstein: The Modern Prometheus

1987-1988

Double Pierrot  
Light, Space and Time

1988-1989

Mime Time  
Fool for Love  
24 Poets and One Little Moon

1989-1990

Storm Reading  
You Asked for It! (developed for school productions)

1990-1991

Noodle Doodle Box (developed for school productions)  
Fools  
The Case of the Crushed Petunias

1991-1992

Letters from Heaven  
The Diary of Adam and Eve

1992-1993

Eight Handfuls of Myths

1993-1994

Pinocchio Live!  
Children of a Lesser God

1994-1995

I ought to be in Pictures

Counterfeits  
Children of a Lesser God  
Owl Be...  
Eyes of the Night  
Give and Take  
The Defenseless Creature  
Humpty Dumpty Goes to Court  
The Colored Museum

1995-1996

The Unscratchable Itch  
Children of a Lesser God  
Some Things You Need to Know before the World Ends: A Final evening with the Illuminati

1996-1997

Children of a Lesser God  
The Glass Menagerie  
A Child's Christmas in Wales  
The Cat Spanking Machine  
Winnie the Pooh (National tour January-May 1997)

1997-1998

The Digestible Comedy of Errors  
Death Trap  
A Story's A Story  
Winnie the Pooh (National tour January-May 1998)  
The Hobbit (National tour January-May 1998)

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