

EDITORIAL: DEAF CULTURE

CRISTINA GIL

Polytechnic Institute of Setúbal, School of Education;
Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Research Centre for Communication and
Culture, Deaf Studies Lab, Portugal
ORCID ID 0000-0002-1356-998X
cristina.gil@ese.ips.pt

GENIE GERTZ

Gallaudet University, Washington
ORCID ID 0009-0009-7737-7942
genie.gertz@gallaudet.edu

JOANA PEREIRA

Polytechnic Institute of Setúbal, School of Education;
Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Research Centre for Communication and
Culture, Deaf Studies Lab, Portugal
ORCID ID 0000-0001-8821-6524
joana.pereira@ese.ips.pt

TOM HUMPHRIES

University of California San Diego, California
ORCID ID 0000-0002-1824-9045
thumphries@ucsd.edu

DEAF CULTURE is the topic of issue 7 of *Diffractions*, FCH-UCP's Graduate Journal for the Study of Culture. It seems to be yelling at the reader. It is not. The full capitalization of words stands for the representation of sign language in writing, and we mean to hold up this banner right from the start.

DEAF CULTURE is a term, present in many signed languages around the world, that is used in two different ways. Firstly, it is used to refer to the local culture of signers in a particular linguistic community among the numerous existing

autonomous communities. Secondly, DEAF CULTURE is an umbrella-term for the common phenomena encompassing the histories, heritages, and cultural practices of Deaf communities, all deriving from the use of sign language. It is, at the same time, a sign of distinction from cultures of people who hear. DEAF CULTURE comprehends the customs, values, beliefs, artistic and literary expressions, and institutions arising from Deaf communities. DEAF CULTURE is both transnational, due to the strong bonds between Deaf people and the similarities between Deaf experiences, and local, due to the traits and practices that characterize each Deaf cluster.

Moreover, DEAF CULTURE is also shaped by the interactions and the power dynamics between Deaf minorities and hearing majorities. The social tensions that have existed between these two groups throughout Deaf history (and still exist) not only precede Deaf activism and associative dynamics but have also generated certain behaviors and values in a multitude of ways (Holcomb 2013). DEAF CULTURE is rich and diffracted, spawning from both intra and intercultural grounds (Padden and Humphries 1988; Ladd 2003; Holcomb 2013).

In Deaf Studies, the traditional practice of capitalizing the letter D in *Deaf* has been used when referring to Deaf people as members of a specific socio-ethnic group. This connects to a common identitarian perspective, parallel to that expressed by the capitalizations of Black, BIPOC, Indigenous or Jewish, for instance (Lane et al. 2011). This differentiates it from *deaf*, an audiological condition (Padden and Humphries 1988). Nevertheless, this usage has recently sparked discussions mostly amongst Deaf Studies academics who feel there is no longer a need for this distinction (Kusters et al. 2017). There are ongoing debates, predating the academic discussions within Deaf Studies, such as whether the emphasis should be in Deaf identity or Disability (De Meulder and Murray 2017), whether the D/d usage is a form of strategic essentialism (Spivak 1990; Ladd 2003), or whether it might deepen a sense of division within this community. Although these are all important, current, and valid reflections, it is important to say that the capitalization of Deaf serves political and cultural purposes, as a means of highlighting the importance of Deaf individuals and signed languages (Gertz and Boudreault 2016). This is particularly crucial in countries where Deaf discourses are far from being heard by political authorities, and where the general well-being

of Deaf people, the valorization of a country's signed language and of Deaf cultural products, are far from being attained.

This explains the reason for our use, in this text, of the D/d distinction, as from the Portuguese Deaf Studies research standpoint this is still an important practice to uphold. In Portugal, Deaf rights are not commonly debated, Deaf representation is still rare in policy making, and Portuguese Sign Language (*Língua Gestual Portuguesa - LGP*) is yet to be given the constitutional minority language status it deserves, although it was legally recognized by the constitutional law in 1997 (Presidência do Conselho de Ministros 1997). Thus, audist practices, resulting from the assumption that being able to hear is better, or even superior to being deaf (Humphries 1975), are a widespread phenomenon reported by Portuguese Deaf people, experienced in both private and social settings, professional environments, and in education.

Joyfully, this journal issue is the first ever exclusively focused on Deaf culture in Portugal. In the following pages we present a set of scholarly articles written exclusively from a Deaf cultural and ethnic point of view. Furthermore, our guest editing team consists of insiders from Deaf communities, mirroring good practices in Deaf Studies research, by bringing together an international group of Deaf and hearing Deaf Studies scholars, with extraordinary expertise in DEAF CULTURE.

Deaf Studies has always been a multidisciplinary area of study, exploring cultural, historical, linguistic, and other facets related to Sign Language Peoples (SLPs) (Batterbury et al. 2007). As such, this issue gathers several works conceived in a multitude of academic spheres, having DEAF CULTURE as the uniting thread. We approached this publication with respect and striving to maintain each author's personal and culturally-driven written register (U.S. English, British English, native English/Portuguese, English/Portuguese as a foreign language, and English/Portuguese as a second language, in the case of Deaf authors). We also welcomed all positionalities on the D/d terminology, allowing the much-needed academic exchange on this topic. This variety illustrates diversity amongst language use, brings forth different voices, and mirrors various communicative practices currently in place.

Besides welcoming articles written in English and in Portuguese, we solicited contributions as video-abstracts in Portuguese Sign Language (LGP), International

Sign (IS), and other signed languages for the first time in the history of this publication.

Amidst the work of our authors, we find several pivotal concepts rooted in Deaf cultural notions. Scholars in Deaf Studies have developed significant theoretical approaches, some inspired by Foucault's ideas of biopower and biopolitics to better code and decode the power dynamics between the Deaf and the hearing communities. Throughout these pages, we find concepts such as Ladd's Deafhood (2003), focusing on identity formation and the pursuit of a sense of belonging within the Deaf community; Bauman and Murray's Deaf Gain (2014) offering a novel perspective on world-making considering the valuable contributions of SLPs; and Lane et al.'s notion of Deaf Ethnicity (2011), rethinking Deaf existence throughout history as a legacy and adding to our understanding of Deaf cultural identities.

This pioneering academic publication in Portugal is a result of a collective effort: the generous contributions of our authors, the dedicated work of our peer-reviewing team, editorial board and guest-editorial board. It also extends beyond these pages, as it is equally made by our readers and the insights these readings will generate.

The selection of articles that we present here was carefully curated with the purpose of bringing forth relevant discussions within the heterogeneous field of Deaf Studies under the umbrella of Culture Studies, even harboring into the recent intersection of Deaf Culture Studies. Deaf Culture Studies widen the scope of Culture Studies by bringing researchers and institutions dedicated to DEAF CULTURE and Sign Language Peoples worldwide together.

This conjunction points towards endless potential pathways that may be explored and numerous, productive discussions that may arise from either scientific field, as they can mutually be nurtured by one another's contributions.

DEAF CULTURE research is crucial in informing societies and propelling Deaf empowerment, thus promoting the well-being of Deaf individuals and communities as well as preserving Deaf cultural practices. On the flip side of the coin, Deaf perspectives on the improvement of educational policies and methodologies, on understanding identity intersectionality, human languages and linguistics, among many other issues, can immensely benefit humanity as a whole (Bauman and Murray 2014).

We introduce this issue with a group of articles focusing on several aspects of Deaf Education. Vaz de Carvalho and Carmo approach this subtheme from a historical perspective by discussing the role of traditional Deaf schools (Deaf Institutes) in rethinking the History of Deaf Education.

Deaf Institutes in the 18th and 19th centuries: Centers for Signed Languages and Deaf Culture (Os Institutos de Surdos dos séculos XVIII e XIX: Centros de Língua Gestual e Cultura Surda) presents several Deaf Institutes in France, Sweden, and Portugal, operating between 1760 and 1834. This pathway shows how French Institutes had a pivotal role in the history of Deaf Education in Europe as the birthplace and role models of Deaf education. This public Deaf education model inspired other countries, such as Sweden. Portugal later followed Sweden's footsteps. Vaz de Carvalho and Carmo invite the reader to reflect about the Deaf Institutes' history, questioning the inclusive theories that are currently guiding Deaf education policies, justifying this in the light of the communality benefits that these Institutes provided Deaf children with. Historical Deaf Institutes were sign language and DEAF CULTURE hubs providing children with opportunities for the development of their language, social competency, intergenerational contact, and knowledge on their country's culture and its Deaf community. Particularly in the Portuguese case, Vaz de Carvalho and Carmo discuss how Deaf Education and the spreading of mainstream practices of inclusion can not only constrain sign language acquisition, usage, and development, but also prevent students from accessing DEAF CULTURE, which might lead to severe implications in Deaf lives. The article concludes with a set of thought-provoking questions on how the educational success of Deaf children should be measured and reiterates that Deaf Institutes were promoters of Deaf individuals as DEAF CULTURE placeholders.

Still in the field of Deaf Education, the following contribution focuses on Critical Deaf Pedagogy, a topic widely explored by Michael Skyer in his recent work. In *A Decisive Role For Deaf Epistemologies: Analyzing Power/Knowledge in Critical Deaf Pedagogy*, Skyer presents an in-depth analysis of a collection of videos from the activist duo Facundo Element, featuring the dynamics between Deaf teachers and their Deaf students, while exploring elements of DEAF CULTURE in teaching. With the aid of widely known works from Rancière and Vygotsky, Skyer discusses how Deaf students prefer to learn, resorting to Deaf

Critical Pedagogies to unveil orientations on how to build adequate culture-oriented pedagogies that agree with Deaf aesthetics and with the needs expressed by both learners and educators. This work aims at contributing to resolving power/knowledge imbalances in schools with Deaf children in the United States, interlinking Deaf epistemologies and ontologies with Deaf Critical Pedagogies to revitalize Deaf educational practices.

Our thematic section on Deaf Education closes with a work reflecting on the specific needs of hearing parents of Deaf children. In *The Importance of Teaching Deaf Community Cultural Wealth in Family-Centered Sign Language Curricula*, Geer and Zarchy explore the positive impact of sign language curricula designed for hearing parents of Deaf children, particularly those which strongly relay elements of DEAF CULTURE. The authors explain how the perspective of Deaf Community Cultural Wealth is an affirmation of Deaf Gain, and how specialized cultural knowledge can help both parents and children in cultural mediation, both within family and societal dynamics. Moreover, Geer and Zarchy argue that such knowledge is crucial in giving parents the conceptual tools and necessary critical lens to deal with hearing-centric messages conveying prejudicial audism and linguicism treatments that they may receive, particularly from medical providers. Advising parents in this way aids the family to survive external oppression, promoting the development of a healthy identity in their Deaf child. Equipped with such knowledge, parents can create a home which their children can comfortably navigate, feeling that they belong.

Next, we present a section focusing on Diachronic Linguistics via an article that provides us with a deep reflection on how to best name a language, most particularly, a signed language. Equivalences vary from one language to another. It is common for one language to present two or more terms for a certain notion, but for another to make use of only one, for instance. Perhaps the most common example in the field of linguistics is the word *language*, in English, which can mean both a structured human language (*i.e.* English, French, etc) and the broader notion of the ability of animals to communicate, irrespective of complexity level (*i.e.* music, mime, mathematics, and varied animal systems). In Latin Languages, such as French and Portuguese, these two notions are expressed by two different words. *Langue/língua* for the former and *langage/linguagem* for the latter. In *Why the term Portuguese Sign Language? (Porquê o termo Língua Gestual Portuguesa?)*,

Carmo, Freire and Vaz de Carvalho discuss the use of the term *gestual*, part of the official name of Portuguese Sign Language (LGP) in Portuguese. Some of the latest research efforts regarding this matter suggest a different approach. In general terms, in Portuguese, the word *signs* has two possible translations, *sinais* and *gestos*. In Portugal, there have been substantial debates regarding which of these terms might be the most appropriate in the case of the name of Portuguese Sign Language. The authors intend to shed light on the ongoing debate and give clarity on the terminology. In Brazil, the name of the national signed language is built differently than in the Portuguese case. The Brazilian Portuguese nomenclature for the country's signed language is *Língua Brasileira de Sinais* (LIBRAS), thus *sinais* is used whereas in Portugal *gestual* remains the preferred term. For those unfamiliar with Portuguese, or unaccustomed to signed languages, LGP and LIBRAS have no relation with one another since they derive from different families of signed languages. Furthermore, European Portuguese and Brazilian Portuguese have evolved differently and present many divergent terms resulting in different terminology for Sign Language. This article presents the argument towards the continued use of the traditional nomenclature of *Lingua Gestual Portuguesa*, bearing in mind historical, linguistic, socio-cultural, and legal reasoning, as well as the strong, emotional significance of this term to the Portuguese Deaf Community.

Within the realm of Deaf cultural productions, most particularly Theater History, the following article by Benvenuto and Schetrit explores the trailblazing work of the International Visual Theatre in France. In *International Visual Theatre (IVT): Amongst Deaf Identity Repair Processes and Emancipatory Impulse*, the authors present an analysis of archival and human-conveyed elements originating from two plays by the IVT from the late 1970s. These creations convey and reveal how Deaf people's identities suffered from the widespread pathologizing standpoint on deafness, which reduces the immense complexity of Deaf lives to the mere biological condition of hearing loss. This, in turn, has damaged Deaf people in terms of their emotions and identities, leading to individual and community suffering, and providing fertile ground for Dysconscious Audism (Gertz 2003, 2008). This article shows how a theatrical catharsis, protagonized by Deaf actors, spontaneously arises, allowing us to question what the phenomenon of repairment really is. It illustrates how healing from these damaging processes can be achieved on and off stage, further emphasizing the crucial role of Deaf theatre in French Deaf activism.

Through artistic practices, Deaf agents express a reply to society's questionings about themselves. They react and challenge social impositions, such as those of normalization and homogeneity, and they both deconstruct and rebuild internalized conceptions and perspectives, toward liberation processes from hearing oppression.

Moving into an intersection between the field of Migration Studies and those of Ethnography and Anthropology, Mellett presents us with a piece of research on Deaf people's experiences while living and communicating with others abroad. Deaf people are a tight-knit international community and encounters between Deaf signers from all over the world are frequent occurrences. In these moments, the plasticity of signed languages, particularly the experience of signers in using visual/gestural depictions, makes room for cross national communication. Deaf people who are well-traveled gain experience in what works and thus they are often experts in international forms of signed communication. In *Deaf immigrants in the Northeast United States: Intelligibility & the interpersonal*, Mellett explores the experiences of Deaf immigrants in the United States of America focusing on how communication occurs in interpersonal encounters, particularly on how meaning is co-constructed between locals and the newly arrived in a dynamic and collaborative process. She emphasizes the role of close social Deaf relationships in facilitating understanding when newcomers arrive in the country. Mellett describes how exclusionary the U.S. citizenship process can be and how networks of both formal and informal interpreting are created to attempt to resolve the system's hardships related to the process of naturalization. Therefore, this article illustrates the crucial importance of Deaf collaborative networks for vulnerable populations, such as Deaf migrants, arriving from countries with limited or nonexistent services for the Deaf, and/or from hearing families whose members do not sign.

Finally, we end our issue by looking into DEAF CULTURE from a legal perspective. Deaf cultural notions are yet to be commonly used worldwide, both in formal and in informal social dynamics, but especially in legal procedures. Policy making is still lacking Deaf perspectives and is yet to benefit from DEAF CULTURE, since it is profoundly anchored on a variety of factors: whether medical perspectives on being Deaf supplant cultural notions; whether Deaf Studies research has delved into these matters and has raised enough awareness; whether Deaf discourses include DEAF CULTURE and exert the necessary political pressure to endorse the expression, so that it gains visibility; and whether, as a result of all this, there is a

common knowledge of what it means and the benefit it brings to humanity. In his article *Exploring Deaf Culture in Legal Texts: A Journey from Deafology to Cultural Rights*, Sousa provides us with a curious exploration of how the cultural perspective of Deaf people is (or is not) mentioned in legal texts looking at different legal systems in countries across the globe. He describes how d/Deaf people are legally referred to in different countries, thus offering a window into international readings on what it means to be Deaf. This article reflects on the importance of having Deaf cultural notions in legislation especially concerning local policies that can improve Deaf people's quality of life, by implementing and motivating an increased respect of Deaf people's cultural rights. Sousa also proposes the notion of Deafology, a broad concept encompassing the many dimensions of the Deaf experience as well as the impact that Deaf lives, Deaf knowledge, and Deaf agency can have on the global population. He explains how the concept refers to a multidimensional field of study, that embraces both the communal and individual dimensions of Deaf experiences and incorporates the active agency and socio-political engagement of Deaf individuals within society.

In the next section of this issue, we present two interviews with António Cabral and Colin Thomson, two Deaf artists, both acknowledged experts in the art of signed songs (singing in a signed language).

António Cabral is a Portuguese Deaf musician, painter, and illustrator. He is part of the collective *Mãos que Cantam* (Singing Hands) that produces mainstream songs in Portuguese Sign Language (LGP). Moreover, Cabral kindly agreed to create an illustration for this issue's cover. It depicts the never-ending repertoire of Deaf cultural productions mesmerizingly emerging from the Deaf experience.

Colin Thomson is a British Deaf musician who also works with mainstream songs in British Sign Language (BSL). His work is particularly interesting because Thomson largely reshapes the lyrics so that his performances mirror Deaf cultural issues. The two interviews were conducted for an international research project, developed in Portugal and in the UK between 2017 and 2021.

The guest editors hope that this collection of texts and videos inspires our readers and viewers to broaden their horizons, leading to future contributions both in the academic and social fronts toward the expansion of knowledge in Deaf Culture Studies.

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