



Deaf people and the theatrical public sphere

MICHAEL RICHARDSON & DAVID THOMPSON

The Scottish Journal of Performance
Volume 5, Issue 2; September 2018
ISSN: 2054-1953 (Print) / ISSN: 2054-1961 (Online)

Publication details: <http://www.scottishjournalofperformance.org>

To cite this article: Richardson, M. and Thompson, D., 2018. Deaf people and the theatrical public sphere. *Scottish Journal of Performance*, 5(2): pp.11–33.

To link to this article: <http://doi.org/10.14439/sjop.2018.0502.02>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> for details.

Deaf people and the theatrical public sphere

MICHAEL RICHARDSON & DAVID THOMPSON

DOI: 10.14439/sjop.2018.0502.02

Publication date: 30 September 2018

The nature of any public sphere is that it embraces all private citizens: it is, in current parlance, accessible. The British theatre institution demonstrates a commitment to accessibility in its funding structures and performance programming. Much of the modern theatrical public sphere is, however, mediated not through performance itself, but rather through various framing activities. Marketing and audience development initiatives constitute the means by which theatre institutions engage in communication with their audiences and have more recently become increasingly dialogic through the use of social media and online criticism.

For Deaf people who use sign language, the principal method chosen by theatre managers to provide access is the Sign Language Interpreted Performance (SLIP). Research into SLIPs has suggested that the performance itself is not effective in giving Deaf people an equivalent participative experience to their Hearing peers. This paper goes further, and interrogates the framing activities of marketing and feedback. It argues that there is failure both to accommodate the visual (rather than auditory) orientation of Deaf people, and to use sign language when communicating with them. Consequently, Deaf people are excluded from the theatrical public sphere, and rather than providing access, theatre institutions contribute to undermining Deaf people's full citizenship.

Keywords: performance in society, Deaf, audience, theatrical public sphere.

Introduction

The performance practices of disabled artists are well documented (see, for example, Koppers, 2013). Hadley (2014) argues that disabled bodies also 'cause a commotion' (Sandahl and Auslander, 2005, p.2) in front of house areas. In contrast, the relative invisibility of Deafness¹ often leaves Deaf people's needs ignored by Scottish mainstream producing and receiving theatres. Many of the current efforts to make performances accessible for Deaf people are ineffective, not only because the creative techniques employed during performances do not facilitate adequate actor-spectator interaction, but also because the activities that frame performances are grounded in a pervasive language ideology that excludes Deaf people. These framing activities constitute the pre- and post-performance communication between theatre institutions and their public. In the twenty-first century, when performances in mainstream theatres are arguably not often socio-politically impactful (Reinelt, 2011), it is these communications that trigger the creation of a theatrical public sphere. However, they are typically presented in society's dominant (spoken and / or written) language and consequently exclude Deaf people whose first language is a signed language.

This paper is co-authored: Michael, Hearing², is conducting doctoral research into the participation of Deaf people in theatre; David, Deaf, is an active theatre-goer who has been campaigning for over two decades for theatres in Scotland to improve their services for Deaf people. The paper begins with an introduction to the notion of the theatrical public sphere and its location in contemporary mainstream theatre practice predominantly in pre- and post-performance activity. Following a brief introduction to the Deaf community and the Sign Language Interpreted

Performance (SLIP), the typical means by which Deaf people are encouraged to attend mainstream theatre, the article goes on to present the methods and results of a study into the effectiveness of SLIPs. We argue that the processes within which SLIPs are framed actually exclude Deaf people from the theatrical public sphere; we propose a number of easily achievable additions to the communication activities of venues that would include Deaf spectators and prevent theatres from unwittingly denying full citizenship to Deaf people.

The history and development of the theatrical public sphere

When Habermas (1989) introduced his concept of the bourgeois public sphere, he was referring not to a specific physical space, but to something more akin to a Bourdieusian field in which individuals and institutions interact (Balme, 2014). Such a field is genuinely public when it is open to all private citizens to come together, to discuss the social and political issues of the day, and ultimately, to influence or challenge the actions of the dominant strata of society: it is 'political participation ... enacted through the medium of talk' (Fraser, 1990, p.57). In practice, the proto-public sphere of the late sixteenth century was dominated by the aristocracy, who met in relatively exclusive coffee shops. However, from the early seventeenth century, theatres (such as The Globe in London), concert halls, and museums offered more accessible and inclusive locations as public meeting spaces for people from all social classes. A more encompassing public sphere began to develop, although it remained available predominantly to property owning, educated, white men. Despite its idealistic goal of inclusion, women and those of lower social status were unwelcome (Fraser, 1990). Deaf people were also excluded, triply compromised by their inability to interact using speech (the dominant form of communication), by their

inadequate education, and by the law that prevented Deaf people from owning property (Sacks, 1991).

A public sphere in which ordinary citizens can debate matters of public interest regardless of their background is necessarily dependent on free speech, and by implication, freedom of artistic expression. In the pre- and early modern theatrical public sphere, the institution of the theatre, the plays it chose to perform and the way it broadcast itself all acted as stimulants to public debate. Additionally, the provision of a range of architectural spaces within theatre buildings supported several foci for communication, of which the stage was only one (Balme, 2014). The mid-eighteenth century view that the stage reflected society back on itself was central to the notion of a politically efficacious theatrical public sphere, with potentially revolutionary consequences. Indeed, Beaumarchais' play *The Marriage of Figaro* was initially banned by Louis XVI and several censors for its satirical content (Wood, 1964, p.30). One contemporary commentator felt it marked 'the end of the old order' (*ibid.*) by putting into the public sphere the social and political unease that was already being expressed privately. Mozart and da Ponte's operatic version of the same story was widely felt to have contributed actively to fomenting the French Revolution of 1789 (*ibid.*).

Reinelt (2011) argues that twenty-first century mainstream theatre has, to a large extent, lost this ability to be politically active, not least because of prevalent funding regimes in which budgets are underwritten by the very sectors of society that writers and directors might wish to critique. Even when plays are politically provocative, the conditions of audience reception in modern theatres resemble more a multitude of private spaces rather than a single public one. It is more than a century since the audience sat in the light, using the theatrical event as an occasion for personal display and public interaction (Kennedy, 2009). Instead, the

typical theatre has a darkened auditorium in which spectators are encouraged to focus on the stage (Bennett, 1990) and to establish a personal interaction with the actors in that aesthetic space (Fischer-Lichte, 2014). Such prioritising of theatre aesthetics is not conducive to supporting the development of a theatrical public sphere; indeed, it can often only be seen to be effective if the performance engenders impact *outside* the auditorium at a later date, as Brecht (1964) aimed to achieve with his political theatre. For Habermas (1989), society has shifted from publicly critiquing culture (in its broadest sense) to passively consuming culture (in the narrower definition of the arts and heritage) in spaces which do not allow for public discourse and are thus essentially part of the private sphere. Rancière (2007), however, calls into question the views of those who, like Habermas, Brecht, and Artaud (1989), want to challenge this perceived passivity of spectators, arguing that spectatorship is always active, generating individual interpretation of what has been seen that may inform subsequent discussion with other spectators.

Production and audience reception are not the only means by which the theatrical public sphere is created; theatre exists within wider society and communicates with the institutions and individuals that make up that social space, through marketing and audience development initiatives. Playbills, posters, programmes, play scripts, specialist magazines, the arts pages of newspapers, and radio and television have all provided a medium for monologic communication by theatre institutions (Balme, 2014). More recently, online resources such as theatre blogs, social media and online criticism have allowed for a more dialogic relationship with audiences, again something advocated in the pre-digital age by Brecht: 'a theatre that makes no contact with the public is a nonsense' (1964, p.7). Together, these phenomena provide a trigger for a theatrical public sphere that is not centred on the stage, and which uses

forms of communication that extend beyond performance. Such an active dialogic public sphere potentially recreates what Habermas originally invoked, and might reconnect the theatrical public sphere with the 'wider public sphere of genuinely important social and political issues' (Balme, 2014, p.73).

This paper argues, however, that the creation of the theatrical public sphere is not fully inclusive. Rather, it excludes the participation of Deaf people, even when the communication initiated by theatre institutions relates to performances that have been created with the specific intention of providing accessibility for the Deaf community. To consider this situation, it is necessary to briefly introduce the notion of Deaf culture, and the means by which Deaf people are encouraged to attend performances in mainstream theatres.

The Deaf community and theatre

The early conceptualisation of Deaf culture as a linguistic minority group by Carol Padden and Tom Humphries (1988) offers a cultural model of Deafness that foregrounds the use of a signed language as a first language, and the maintenance of familial and / or social ties with other people who self-identify as Deaf. The cultural model was initially presented as a valorisation of Deaf culture (Bechter, 2008), a defence against the increasing medicalisation of deafness, described by health professionals only in audiological terms as a hearing loss which should be 'cured' (Miller, Vandome and McBrewster, 2010). The rigid binary opposition between the cultural and medical models is now contested, and a range of Deaf ways of being are identified that reflect a number of potential language choices and audiological statuses (Corker, 1998; Bauman, 2008; Davis, 2008; Young and Temple, 2014). However, the early cultural model is useful here, as this article is grounded in research carried out with Deaf people who specifically choose to

access theatre through the visual channel and the medium of sign language.

A number of features of sign languages are relevant here. Firstly, dialogic communication in sign language almost always necessitates bodily co-presence, relative proximity and direct visual contact³ (Bauman and Murray, 2013; Lockwood, 2014). Secondly, there is no practicable written form of any sign language (Conley, 2001; Woll, Sutton-Spence and Elton, 2001). Whilst Deaf people often borrow from the written form of the local spoken language, this is usually their second language. Conrad (1979) described the low levels of written language literacy of Deaf people and this is little improved, even with greater use of hearing aids and cochlear implants (Harris, Terletski and Kyle, 2017). Accordingly, monologic communication with Deaf people can often be more effective using sign language video rather than written text. Finally, the use of signed languages by Deaf people has been oppressed by the Hearing majority since the mid-nineteenth century. The underlying ideology that privileges spoken (and written) languages operates hand in hand with 'audism': the notion, originally coined by Humphries (in an unpublished essay in 1975), that one is superior based on one's ability to hear (Bauman, 2004).

In theatre performances, the role of sign language in defining Deaf identity is fundamental, as was made clear by Miles and Fant (1976). These writers, both founder members of the National Theatre of the Deaf in the United States, formulated a definition of Deaf theatre that is still relevant today. They describe the genre as theatre created and performed in sign language, by Deaf actors, which puts on stage elements of the experience of Deaf people. This is unsurprising; most theatre audiences prefer to see performances that are performed in their own language, and feel a particular connection with productions in which their own experience is reflected back to them from the

stage (Tulloch, 2005). Historically, many Deaf theatre performances took place in the separate 'DeafSpace' of Deaf clubs and schools (Atherton, 2009) although social and economic pressures have caused many of these institutions to close down in recent decades (Padden, 2008).

For Hearing theatre venue managers, sign language is seen as a mechanism for providing access for Deaf people, but not by programming Deaf theatre; instead, the prevailing paradigm for encouraging the attendance of Deaf spectators is the sign language interpreted performance (SLIP)⁴. SLIPs are performances of Hearing (spoken language) theatre scripts that are interpreted into sign language for Deaf spectators, often by a single interpreter (Rocks, 2015). Interpreting Deaf theatre for Hearing audiences in mainstream theatre buildings is unheard of, and the interpreter's role is seen exclusively as providing access for Deaf sign language users (Gebron, 2000). Following their introduction in London in the 1980s, SLIPs are now widespread throughout the UK. The typical model has the interpreter in the platform position, either onstage in a downstage corner, or just outside the proscenium arch, or on a small box on the auditorium floor (Gebron, 2000). The impetus to provide an interpreter is administrative rather than artistic, and consequently the interpreter is presented as aesthetically and spatially separate from the production (Richardson, 2018).

Access to the theatrical public sphere

There has been little research on SLIPs, and what research there is has been conducted predominantly by and with sign language interpreters. The literature highlights the complexities of theatrical sign language interpreting and the relative lack of support provided by theatre companies and theatre venues (Turner and Pollitt, 2002; Rocks, 2011; Ganz Horwitz, 2014). Others have written, from a Hearing perspective, of the relevance of performance skills to

interpreters (Ruane, 2009; McDougall, 2015; Richardson, 2017). The research presented here complements those approaches by foregrounding the perspective of Deaf spectators at SLIPs.

The study involved Michael, in his role as researcher, attending a SLIP in a receiving venue (a city-centre, proscenium-arch theatre) accompanied by ten spectators. Five of the spectators were Hearing and five Deaf. Each group was constituted of people with a history of interest and participation in theatre, who might be assumed to have sophisticated and critical responses to performances. The Deaf group, which is the focus of this article, was recruited by David; he also participated in the project. The Deaf participants all self-identified as choosing to attend performances mediated in sign language: the two participants who used electronic aids to hearing did not have sufficient residual audiological function to access onstage speech.

Following the performance, Michael ran focus groups with each group lasting approximately 80 minutes, in the style of Sauter's (2000) Theatre Talks. The SLIP we attended was used as an elicitation tool, following the model of O'Brien's (2013) visual research with young Deaf people, with the intention of provoking responses about the group's experience of attending SLIPs in a range of mainstream producing and receiving theatres in cities across the central belt of Scotland. The Deaf focus group was conducted in sign language without an interpreter. Qualitative data (the responses of participants) were video recorded and subsequently transcribed (and thus translated into English) by Michael. The analysis prioritised the Deaf respondents, with the intention of making the study as methodologically and epistemologically 'Deaf-friendly' as possible (Young and Hunt, 2011). Quotes from the data are presented later in this article (in italics and unattributed to preserve anonymity).

Only data from the Deaf group are presented, as this article is focused on the particular Deaf experience of attending a SLIP rather than on the delivery and broader impact of the interpreted performance on all spectators.

The strength of the data is its generation by (rather than about) Deaf people, and its collection by the researcher directly in sign language rather than through an interpreter. However, of necessity, the presentation of results involves translation into English, which is a highly subjective process. Furthermore, although Michael is fluent in BSL, it is not his first language. A further concern is the small size of the focus group, which suggests that the results are not generalisable. However, the Spearman Brown Prophecy Formula (Weller and Romney, 1988) suggests that when a group of respondents share cultural knowledge and generate similar data, then a large group is not required, and the results can be assumed to be representative beyond the experience of the respondents.

The intention of the study was to interrogate the effectiveness of SLIPs in providing access to Deaf spectators, or as Fischer-Lichte (2014) would have it, in allowing Deaf spectators to establish interactions with the actors from which they can construct the meaning of the play. The focus was on the theatrical space and the performance event, and the results strongly suggest that SLIPs are not effective in providing access. Interpreters are spatially separated from the actors in a visually neutral space, making it difficult to follow both simultaneously. Furthermore, they are rarely conceptualised as performers, instead treated by administrators as 'access technology' that can be 'plugged in' to a production at short notice (Richardson, 2018). Additionally, the creation of a sign language translation equivalent to the source text is problematic, especially when that source may incorporate not only spoken dialogue but also auditory components such

as music and sound effects (Richardson, 2017). Each of these shortcomings of SLIPs compromises the performance's communication to its Deaf spectators.

From Michael's own experience as a spectator at SLIPs, these results were unsurprising. Unexpected, however, was the importance placed by the respondents on effective dialogic communication between theatre institutions and the Deaf community. They critiqued the establishment of a theatrical public sphere that is exclusive and directed predominantly at Hearing patrons, even when it concerns SLIPs and other performances which are intended to be inclusive.

If we return to Balme's (2014) list of mechanisms by which theatre institutions engage with their audiences, we find a variety of methods of communication that convey different information about a particular performance. Repertoire, actors' names, character lists, synopses, and reviews are all published with the intention of encouraging attendance. Furthermore, online forums give spectators the opportunity to critically discuss performances that they have seen. This reflects the processual nature of audience response, active before, during and after the performance across perceptual, cognitive, emotional and communicative dimensions (Bennett, 1990; Cremona, et al., 2004; Tulloch, 2005). Each contributes to Balme's notion of what constitutes the theatrical public sphere, and yet, the Deaf respondents describe them as exclusive, and not public (in the sense of being open access) at all.

The root of the problem is language choice, and for Deaf spectators, the solution is simple:

Signing gives access.

However, despite the recognition that at least some Deaf people are accessing the performance through sign language, other communication between the institution and its Deaf public is not reoriented to the visual mode. Instead, the language ideologies of the Hearing hegemony negatively influence communication practices. Deaf spectators are expected to access the theatrical public sphere using their second language, which, as previously explained, is not necessarily an area of significant competence.

It need not be this way. To start at the beginning of the audience process, the respondents suggest that access to the theatrical public sphere would be improved if venue staff were more able to adopt the perspective of Deaf people and to respond to what Bahan (2014) calls their visual orientation to the world. This means recognising that English-language marketing material and websites are not accessible to many Deaf people. Short BSL videos would be more useful as marketing tools:

[If the theatre] had a signed synopsis of what the play is ... if they had clips like that, Deaf people could actually say 'Oh that's what it is about—no, I don't fancy that or yes, that looks really good'... That would make it a bit easier.

Furthermore, advertising repertoire in Deaf-friendly spaces is much more likely to encourage attendance than simply using the theatre's own website. It is not likely that Deaf people have a developed tradition of accessing Hearing theatre venues (Rocks, 2011), given their practice of socialising in their own separate 'DeafSpace' (Atherton, 2009), so an element of outreach is required to encourage engagement by the Deaf community. This is being made easier in the twenty-first century. In the place of gradually disappearing Deaf clubs and schools, the Deaf community is

developing a virtual 'DeafSpace' on social media (Valentine and Skelton, 2008).

Adopting a visual perspective would also support Deaf spectators during their visit to the theatre, using pre-performance talks delivered in BSL.

An interpreter explains the background to the story, how it was created, what it is about, and then moves on to pictures of the actors, matching faces to the characters' and their sign names⁵.

An explanation of the synopsis, and the matching of actors to characters (ideally using photographs) and their sign names, would provide an element of pre-show preparation for Deaf spectators that is already more frequently offered to visually impaired audiences through onstage touch tours of the set and costumes.

Importantly, theatre institutions need to recognise the central role played by the interpreter in the experience of Deaf spectators at SLIPs. Advance information about the interpreter is essential.

Looking down the list of every show, it says it's interpreted but there's no name, no indication of standing on the right or left.

In the same way that different actors appeal to different people, so different interpreters are preferred by different Deaf spectators. Additionally, the position of the interpreter on stage is crucial in determining which seats to book in the auditorium, and could be included as supplementary information to the show advertising. It could also usefully be

confirmed at each performance by visual signage within front of house spaces, to avoid later embarrassment.

If I see the interpreter is on the wrong side, it's too late, the show has started. How are you supposed to change?

Sitting at an excessive distance from the interpreter renders the SLIP pointless, as it is impossible to 'read' the sign language.

After the show, Deaf people also appreciate the opportunity to discuss the performance together, and to give feedback.

When it's finished we're back in the room, writing feedback and that's it, the end of the day. And we go there again and again.

Peter Eversmann describes such post-show discussion as an essential part of the audience reception process (Cremona, et al., 2004). For him it is a typically collective activity in which groups of spectators consider the performance cognitively, together analysing its meaning. For Deaf spectators, the provision of a space in the theatre for post-performance discussion in sign language would support the collective and collaborative nature of the community. Video cameras could be used to capture critical feedback that could subsequently be disseminated online. This is an achievable visually oriented alternative to the written language online discussion forums used by many Hearing theatre-goers.

Some of these recommendations are made by Solar Bear, a Scottish theatre company with experience of working with Deaf actors, in their best practice documents for accessible

theatre (Solar Bear, n.d.), and within a Deaf audience development pack produced by Arts Council of Wales (2018). Best practice has been demonstrated since 2015 at Glasgow Film Theatre with its Visible Cinema Club (Glasgow Film Theatre, n.d.). Here, the venue is the instigator and provider of all the aids to accessibility, allowing for a coherent approach. In mainstream Scottish theatres, however, this is not the case. Instead, in some mainstream venues a Deaf Theatre Club is delivered by an independent organisation, Inkblot Collective (2016), that provides direct marketing to Deaf people, and pre- and post-show communication in sign language as described above. As an independent service, however, they are unable to directly influence the activity of venues, who do not themselves demonstrate widespread implementation of the available best practice advice. Accordingly, and in pursuit of equal access to the theatrical public sphere, we propose a best practice checklist for theatres to ensure appropriate and effective communication with Deaf spectators. This list has been developed predominantly by David from his own extensive experience of attending theatre advertised as accessible, supplemented by the responses of this study's Deaf focus group, and subsequently refined during several face-to-face and email conversations with Michael.

Best practice checklist for theatres

1. For each show, identify the ways in which it might be accessible for Deaf spectators—visual theatre with no dialogue, Deaf theatre in sign language, SLIP, captioned, super-titled opera—and add this information to all marketing material connected to the show.
2. In the case of a SLIP, add the name of the interpreter, the position in which they will stand (right or left side of the stage when looking from the audience

perspective), and whether they are a local interpreter or touring with the production.

3. Upload the information from above to the theatre website and to the Access Scottish Theatre (or similar) website.
4. Upload to the theatre website recent photographs of the actors in the production and a sign language video giving information about the synopsis for each show that specifically targets Deaf spectators.
5. Use this 'Deaf-friendly' marketing material to target Deaf spectators through appropriate channels, for example, Deaf clubs and Deaf online spaces.
6. Hold seats for Deaf spectators that have a good view of both the interpreter and the stage: in the stalls, on the same side of the auditorium as the interpreter and approximately 10 to 12 rows back from the stage.
7. Set up a pre-performance talk in sign language, with recent photographs of actors and an opportunity to introduce not only the synopsis, but also the sign names for characters and locations. Market this to Deaf spectators and book an interpreter or other sign language user to deliver it.
8. Before the performance, indicate pictorially the position of the interpreter on auditorium doors, so that Deaf patrons can check they have the right seats before entering. Be prepared to offer replacement seats if the position of the interpreter has changed from that advertised.

9. Ensure that programmes include photographs of the actors who will be performing, rather than standard publicity shots with actors who are no longer members of the cast.

10. After the show, provide a forum for post-show discussion in sign language. Video the feedback and use it for subsequent audience development.

Conclusion

Since the initial work of Habermas (1989), there has been ongoing interdisciplinary study on the public sphere, and a body of essays has been drawn together in an online forum (Koller, 2012). The mapping project that initially accompanied that forum, the Public Sphere Guide, is no longer available, but Balme (2014) reports that it suggests three dimensions to the public sphere: the production structures of public communication, the social stratification inherent in all forms of public communication, and the potential creation of counter-publics, groups that are excluded from the public sphere.

This article argues that the Hearing-Deaf stratification of public communication by theatre institutions contributes to the creation of a Deaf counter-public, by prioritising the language choices of the Hearing hegemony and paying little attention to the visual orientation of Deaf people. Historically, this has been inconsequential, as the widespread existence of Deaf clubs allowed for the creation of a separate and highly active Deaf public sphere. Current socio-political trends, however, favour access and participation, and the creation of one fully inclusive public sphere. The checklist above represents steps that support Deaf people to attend performances and thereafter to engage in public debate and discussion stimulated by that

performance: they support Deaf people to be part of the theatrical public sphere.

Unfortunately, the current state of theatre's accessibility project is, for Deaf people, one of frustrating inadequacy. It represents one of many examples of the social contract between Deaf and Hearing communities being excessively phono-centric and audist. This paradigm denies Deaf people full citizenship by compromising their full participation in the institutions of civil, political, and social society through limiting the language of public discourse to that of the dominant community (Emery, 2009). The irony of the situation is inescapable: theatre institutions profess themselves committed to accessibility, and yet because they do not question their own language ideologies and fail to understand the visual orientation of Deaf people, they actually contribute to the institutional audism of Hearing society. If theatre genuinely hopes to attract Deaf spectators, be it through SLIPs or through other performance styles, it needs to consider every step of the production process, not just the performance event, and ensure that all communication with Deaf people is framed appropriately, for example by using the check-list proposed above.

It could be argued that the provision of opportunities for post-performance discussion in sign language will only lead to the creation of a different Deaf counter-public, not outside but within and subordinate to the Hearing theatrical public sphere. Warner (2002), however, suggests that such a counter-public is a public in its own right, formed as it is by the same performance trigger, and for Fraser (1990) a multiplicity of interacting publics is a more realistic and perhaps more desirable paradigm than an idealised fully inclusive public sphere. The challenge for the future is to find ways to stimulate dialogue between Deaf and Hearing public spheres, and on this matter, theatre could provide a

meaningful pathway. In the meantime, supporting the development of a Deaf theatrical public sphere is a useful first step.

Notes

1. The capitalised form 'Deaf' is used conventionally to refer to those people who consider themselves part of a cultural linguistic group. Specifically in this article, 'Deaf' signifies those who choose to participate in theatre through the medium of sign language. ^[1]

2. We adopt the convention, equivalent to 'Deaf', of using the capitalised 'Hearing' to signify cultural identity rather than audiological status. Specifically, we use it to refer to people who choose to participate in theatre (as actors, audience or programmers) that is mediated predominantly through spoken language and the auditory channel. ^[1]

3. More recently, innovations in video technology such as Skype, FaceTime and Glide have made possible sign language communication at a distance. ^[1]

4. Captioned and super-titled performances (including of opera) also provide access to those with an audiological hearing loss, although they may not be effective for Deaf people whose first language is a sign language. ^[1]

5. Deaf people typically use a single sign as a name for an individual or location, rather than rendering their name in full using the manual alphabet. This is particularly important for theatre interpreters, who are likely to be too far away from Deaf spectators for fingerspelling to be easily read. ^[1]

References

Artaud, A., 1989. *Artaud on theatre*. Translated by C. Schumacher and B. Singleton. London: Methuen Drama.

Arts Council of Wales, 2018. *Developing D/deaf, deafened and hard of hearing audiences in Wales: a toolkit for venues and theatre companies*. [online] Available at: <<http://www.celf.cymru/advice/online-equality-guide/138581.file.dld>> [Accessed 22 February 2018].

Atherton, M., 2009. A feeling as much as a place: leisure, deaf clubs and the British deaf community. *Leisure Studies*, 28(4), pp.443-454.

Bahan, B., 2014. Senses and culture: exploring sensory orientations. In: H-D. L. Bauman and J. J. Murray, eds. *Deaf gain: raising the stakes for human diversity*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, pp.233-254.

Balme, C. B., 2014. *The theatrical public sphere*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bauman, H-D. L., 2004. Audism: exploring the metaphysics of oppression. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 9(2), pp.239-246.

Bauman, H-D. L., 2008. Introduction: listening to deaf studies. In: H-D. L. Bauman, ed. 2008. *Open your eyes: deaf studies talking*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp.1-33.

Bauman, H-D. L. and Murray, J. J., 2013. Deaf studies in the 21st century: "deaf-gain" and the future of human diversity. In: L. J. Davis, ed. *The disability studies reader*. New York: Routledge, pp.246-262.

Bechter, F., 2008. The deaf convert culture and its lessons for deaf theory. In: H-D. L. Bauman, ed. *Open your eyes: deaf studies talking*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp.60-79.

Bennett, S., 1990. *Theatre audiences: a theory of production and reception*. London: Routledge.

Brecht, B., 1964. *Brecht on theatre: the development of an aesthetic*. Translated by J. Willett. London: Methuen.

Conley, W., 2001. In search of the perfect sign language script: insights into the diverse writing styles of deaf playwrights. In: L. Bragg, ed. *Deaf world: a historical reader and primary source book*. New York: New York University Press, pp.147-161.

Conrad, R., 1979. *The deaf schoolchild: language and cognitive function*. New York: Harper & Row.

Corker, M., 1998. *Deaf and disabled, or deafness disabled?: Towards a human rights perspective*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Cremona, V. A., Eversmann, P., Van Maanen, H., Sauter, W. and Tulloch, J., 2004. *Theatrical events: borders, dynamics, frames*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Davis, L. J., 2008. Postdeafness. In: H-D. L. Bauman, ed. 2008. *Open your eyes: deaf studies talking*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp.314-325.

Emery, S. D., 2009. In space no one can see you waving your hands: making citizenship meaningful to Deaf worlds. *Citizenship Studies*, 13(1), pp.31-44.

Fischer-Lichte, E., 2014. The Concept of Performance. In: M. Arjomand and R. Masse, eds. *The Routledge introduction to theatre and performance studies*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp.18-45.

Fraser, N., 1990. Rethinking the public sphere: a contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy. *Social Text*, 25/26, pp.56-80.

Ganz Horwitz, M., 2014. Demands and strategies of interpreting a theatrical performance into American sign language. *Journal of Interpretation*, 23(1), pp.1-18.

Gebron, J., 2000. *Sign the speech: an introduction to theatrical interpreting*. 2nd ed. Hillsboro: Butte Publications Inc.

Glasgow Film Theatre, n.d. *Visual Cinema Club*. [online] Available at: <<https://glasgowfilm.org/plan-your-visit/venue-access/visible-cinema-club>> [Accessed 19 April 2018].

Habermas, J., 1989. *The structural transformation of the public sphere*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Hadley, B., 2014. *Disability, public space performance and spectatorship: unconscious performers*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Harris, M., Terletski, E. and Kyle, F. E., 2017. Literacy outcomes for primary school children who are deaf and hard of hearing: a cohort comparison study. *Journal of Speech Language and Hearing Research*, 60(3), pp.701-711.

Inkblot Collective, 2016. [online] Available at: <<https://www.facebook.com/inkblot.collective/>> [Accessed 10 January 2018].

Kennedy, D., 2009. *The spectator and the spectacle: audiences in modernity and postmodernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Koller, A. ed., 2012. *Transformations of the public sphere*. [online] Available at: <<http://publicsphere.ssrc.org/about/>> [Accessed 22 January 2018].

Kuppers, P., 2013. *Disability and contemporary performance: bodies on the edge*. London: Routledge.

Lockwood, E. M., 2014. Effective deaf action in the deaf community in Uruguay. In: H-D. L. Bauman and J. J. Murray, eds. 2014. *Deaf gain: raising the stakes for human diversity*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, pp.321-340.

McDougall, D., 2015. *We are (not) rockstars: honouring the performance without overpowering it*. [online] Available at: <<http://www.terptheatre.com/not-rock-stars/>> [Accessed 25 November 2015].

Miles, D. and Fant, L. J., 1976. *Sign-language theatre and deaf theatre: new definitions and directions*. Northridge, CA: California State University.

Miller, F. P., Vandome, A. F., and McBrewster, J., 2010. *Medical model of disability*. Saarbrücken: Alphascript Publishing.

O'Brien, D., 2013. Visual research with young d/Deaf people - an investigation of the transitional experiences of d/Deaf young people

from mainstream schools using auto-driven photo-elicitation interviews. *Graduate Journal of Social Science*, 10(2), pp.152–175.

Padden, C., 2008. The decline of deaf clubs in the United States: a treatise on the problem of place. In H-D. L. Bauman ed. 2008. *Open your eyes: deaf studies talking*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp.169–176.

Padden, C. and Humphries, T., 1988. *Deaf in America - voices from a culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Ranci re, J., 2007. The emancipated spectator. *Artforum International*, 45(7), pp.271–280.

Reinelt, J., 2011. Rethinking the public sphere for a global age. *Performance Research*, 16(2), pp.16–27.

Richardson, M. (2017) Sign language interpreting in theatre: using the human body to create pictures of the human soul. *TranscUlturAl - A Journal of Translation and Cultural Studies*, 9(1). [online] Available at: <<https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/tc/index.php/TC/article/view/29265>> [Accessed 23 November 2017].

Richardson, M. (2018) The sign language interpreted performance: a failure of access provision for deaf spectators. *Theatre Topics*, 28(1), pp.63–74.

Rocks, S., 2011. The theatre sign language interpreter and the competing visual narrative: the translation and interpretation of theatrical texts into British sign language. In: R.W. Baines, C. Marinetti, and M. Perteghella, eds. *Staging and performance translation: text and theatre practice*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.72–86.

Rocks, S., 2015. Theatre interpreting. In: F. Pochhacker, ed. *Routledge encyclopedia of interpreting studies*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp.417–418.

Ruane, T., 2009. *Theatresign*. [online] Available at: <<http://www.theatresign.com/>> [Accessed: 30 November 2015].

Sacks, O., 1991. *Seeing voices: a journey into the world of the deaf*. London: Picador.

Sandahl, C. and Auslander, P., 2005. Introduction. In: C. Sandahl, and P. Auslander, eds. *Bodies in commotion: disability and performance*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, pp.1–15.

Sauter, W., 2000. *The theatrical event: dynamics of performance and perception*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.

Solar Bear (n.d.) *Best practice for creating accessible theatre for D/deaf audiences*. [online] Available at: <<http://www.solarbear.org.uk/resources/best-practice-for-accessible-theatre/>> [Accessed 19 April 2018].

Tulloch, J., 2005. *Shakespeare and Chekhov in production and reception: theatrical events and their audiences*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.

Turner, G. H. and Pollitt, K., 2002. Community interpreting meets literary translation. *The Translator*, 8(1), pp.25–47.

Valentine, G. and Skelton, T., 2008. Changing spaces: the role of the internet in shaping deaf geographies. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 9(5), pp.469–485.

Warner, M., 2002. Publics and counterpublics (abbreviated version). *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 88(4), pp.413–25.

Weller, S. C. and Romney, A. K., 1988. *Systematic data collection*. London: SAGE Publications.

Woll, B., Sutton-Spence, R. and Elton, F., 2001. Multilingualism: the global approach to sign languages. In: C. Lucas, ed. *The sociolinguistics of sign languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.8–32.

Wood, J., 1964. Introduction. In: Beaumarchais, P.-A.C.d. and Wood, J., 1964. *The Barber of Seville and The Marriage of Figaro*. London: Penguin Books.

Young, A. and Hunt, R., 2011. *Research with d/Deaf people*. London: NIHR School for Social Care Research.

Young, A. and Temple, B., 2014. *Approaches to social research: the case of deaf studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

About the authors

MICHAEL RICHARDSON is a PhD candidate at Heriot-Watt University. He is researching the participation of Deaf people in theatre and has presented his work at several international conferences. He previously worked in applied theatre and musical theatre, and his book, *Youth theatre, drama for life* was published by Routledge in 2015.

DAVID THOMPSON is a keen theatre-goer. He has participated in every stage of Michael's PhD research, including its dissemination to the Deaf community. He has worked with several theatres to try to improve their service to Deaf people, and is a founder member of Alba Cats, a Scottish collective of Deaf creatives.