

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY



*Figure 3.1.* Anthony Buscato and his group “Tribe” evidence Deaf leadership in the natural setting of a poetry performance at Wallace Library at Rochester Institute of Technology. For my study, I maintained a naturalistic Deaf cultural setting as well.

#### Position in the Philosophy and Theory of Science

The philosophy behind the ethnographic approach to this study is based in Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s work. Since there have been few studies to date on Deaf leadership styles, the question for this dissertation on “whether theater can reveal a Deaf leadership style” is an open-ended question with no assumed answer. This type of questioning is comparable to the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, who establishes his phenomenology on the primacy of perception. Merleau-Ponty (1962) says the phenomenologist returns “to the world which precedes [scientific description], [the world] of which science always speaks, and in relation to which every scientific

characterization is an abstract and derivative sign language as is geography in relation to the countryside” (p. 21).

Beginning with things as they show themselves perceptually, Merleau-Ponty discovers that things do not simply impose themselves on consciousness, nor do we construct things in our minds. Rather, things as we experience them are discovered through a subject-object dialogue. This dialogue is a comfortable fit with theatrical approaches to script analysis commonly used by directors when creating a vision for a production. Playwrights do not include deep description of action or thought process and so a director must analyze the dialogue written to uncover logical and symbolic suggestions in the lines to develop movements for the actors as well as analyze the word choices to reveal sub-textual emotional choices for the actor. Also in kinship with theater is a new idea, something that Merleau-Ponty brought to phenomenology: the idea of the lived body.

For Merleau-Ponty, consciousness is not just something that goes on in our heads. Rather, our intentional consciousness is experienced in and through our bodies. With his concept of the lived body, Merleau-Ponty overcomes Descartes' mind-body dualism without resorting to physiological reductionism. For Descartes the body is a machine and the mind is what runs the machine. For Merleau-Ponty the body is not a machine, but a living organism by which we express our potential in the world. The flow of a person's intentional existence (intentionality) is lived through the body.

In Meyerhold's physical acting approach, called biomechanics, the same sensibilities are discussed. A course in biomechanics begins with physical training.

Nevertheless, the purpose of that training is to forge the connection between mind and body, to "teach the body to think." Through this process, the actor's moment-to-moment awareness expands and deepens. As a result, biomechanics provides the student with a concrete methodology for addressing – physically and through action – issues of acting that are almost universally regarded as fundamental in the Western tradition since Stanislavski (1964).

This methodology in acting parallels Merleau-Ponty's philosophies for research. As Merleau-Ponty discussed, we are our bodies, and consciousness is not just locked up inside the head. In his later thought, Merleau-Ponty talked of the body as "flesh," made of the same flesh of the world, and he argued it is because the flesh of the body is of the flesh of the world that we can know and understand the world.

For Merleau-Ponty, however, the body cannot be understood as separate parts; it must be understood as a whole, as it is lived. The body as it is lived is an experiential body, a body that opens onto a world and allows the world to be opened for us. Physiology is not pointless; it has value, no doubt. However, it does not reveal the lived body. If we want to understand the body as it is lived in our experience, we have to use a phenomenological method that addresses not only parts but also the whole. Thus, if I am to study Deaf leadership, I need to study the entire community. Based on my observations that individuals in a hierarchical structure are not the natural form of Deaf leadership, it is the group or community as a whole that will draw Deaf culture forward. In turn, I was drawn to follow the physical voice of the community itself through my own experience.

Experience as it is given to us is always a subject-object dialogue. I can never experience things independent of my experience as a living being in this world. Space is always in relation to my body as situated within the world. The same is true of time. I can never be two places at once as a body. I am always situated in the present, on the way somewhere and having been somewhere. Thus, experience is always in the process of becoming. Just when I am aware of things as determinate and thematic, new possibilities emerge on the horizon and the past fades away as more ambiguous. Thus, when I experience Deaf culture or observe Deaf leadership within a context, this spatial-temporal context is temporary and unfolding over time, and thus subject to change.

You may ask: “How do I know if I've found what I'm looking for?”

I know when I have found what I am looking for because the world is already pregnant with meaning in relation to my body. Things begin as ambiguous but become more determinate as I become bodily engaged with them. On the other hand, I do not previously know what I am looking for because the world transcends my total grasp. At any given time, the world as it is given includes not only what is revealed to me, but also what is concealed. Heidegger (1987) similarly refers to this concept as our “referential context of significance” and he says it is constantly changing depending on the context. What was determinate becomes indeterminate and what was indeterminate becomes determinate.

I cannot do justice here to the richness of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. However, as I have discussed, for Merleau-Ponty lived experience is prior to abstract reflection; it is pre-thematic. We live it, but do not explicitly think about and calculate what we are

doing. When I am most typically engaged in a task, I do not reflect on the task. As an actor you are always required to remain “in the moment” while on stage. Reflection and analysis only occur AFTER the action. My training as an actor is ingrained; therefore, in this study it would be most efficacious to employ a qualitative method that allows me to act and then reflect. I rendered myself open to the experience as I lived it and then took the time to reflect on it.

### Description of Research Methods

In order to know subtle forms from the inside as well as the outside, to apprehend them implicitly prior to explicitly, to feel the knowledge before “knowing” it, we must be immersed in the experience and embrace the phenomenological diagrams. These ideas form an essential foundation for a theory of ethnographic practice particularly suited to experiential knowledge of the aesthetic dimensions of social and cultural activity. *Knowing* can also be understood by employing the Aristotelian goal of providing catharsis for the audience (Aristotle, 1957). Thus, my approach to this study makes use of a range of qualitative theories all of which lead to ethnographic performance. That method is the offspring of two disciplines: from social science, it inherits ethnography; from the arts and humanities, it inherits performance traditions, skills, analysis, and interpretation.

The graceful fit of theater as an ethnographic performance and as a methodology to study elements of the Deaf community cannot be overstated. Historically, marginalized people have found expression that is not subject to alteration from the majority culture in their arts. An example would be the people’s theater in Third World countries. “In

people's theater, members of the local community who have previously been denied power – such as the elderly, ethnic minority groups, women, the handicapped and the imprisoned – become performers of their own stories” (Boal, 1979, p. 34). Boal's concept of a “Theater of Oppression” follows the same principles.

Oppression, according to August Boal, is when one person is dominated by the monologue of another and has no chance to reply. In Deaf Theater, marketing requires that the performances be “voice interpreted” in order to sell more tickets by offering access to the hearing as well as the deaf. The danger is that the involvement and actual use of the hearing physical voice can change or manipulate the story. The key to Boal's theater is the “spect-actor,” an audience member who is invited onstage to take part in the drama. In the performance of *Windows of the Soul*, which forms the core of this study, the audience is asked to participate by joining the actors on stage in a dance, by coming into the metaphoric house of the Deaf community at the end, and by being given a voice in the after show talk-back to express their observations and feelings.

This compares easily with Boal's work in poor communities. Boal served as a facilitator to help volunteers create dramas around problems that affected their lives. At the performance, audience members were free not only to comment on the action, but also to step up on stage and play roles of their choice. In doing so, they discovered new ways of resolving the dilemmas that the play presents. In follow-up exercises, community members learned how to translate these insights into social action.

If we, as Denzin (2003) suggests, “inhabit a second-hand world” where, through technology and media, the visual has more impact than the text, then the Deaf community

has always had “a first-hand” world – pun intended – as the visual is implicit in the language of their hands! By allowing the Deaf community to take the stage, I am making a conscious environment for reflexive sociology in order to study Deaf society in a dramaturgical production. By allowing the outsider a short two-hour visit to Deaf culture, the awkwardness that comes of interacting with the unknown is removed, and those unfamiliar with the culture can absorb what they see at a protected pace. By allowing the Deaf community to represent itself, the imposed “silence” of differing communication styles can be bridged in the common culture of theater. The result, as Boal suggests, will at the least be a cultural awareness and sensitivity change and will at the most lead to social action.

Dr. Simon Carmel, Deaf anthropologist and performer in this ethnographic performance study, has remarked many times that culture is a verb, an action, a movement, a gesture; it is not an established, static, unmoving noun (Carmel, 2006). Theater as a form of cultural expression lives “in the moment” (Stanislavski, 1964). Since the birth of the theater of realism (19<sup>th</sup> century), lived experience is the hallmark of quality theater. From a research standpoint, this makes theater an extremely valuable research method. When we cannot study experience directly, we study it through and in performance representations (Denzin, 2003). Cultures often find performance a place and a time when memory, emotion, fantasy, and passion intersect (Madison, 1998, p. 227). If the personal is political (Helgeson, 1990), then the performance of personal stories is innately so (Madison, p. 227).

Ethnographic praxis and performance can highlight the collaborative process, which also has methodological implications (Denzin, 2003). Fieldwork can easily follow the footsteps of the theatrical production process to heighten the concept of collaborative work (Conquergood, 1991, p. 190). As my literature review points out, the Deaf community does not exist in isolation, and so collaborative practices would be the appropriate foundation or pedestal on which to display an image of the Deaf leader. So too should the foundation for a research study support the natural environment of the community being studied. Ethnographic approaches in theater provide a space for the observer and the observed in context.

Performance can also be connected to hermeneutics (Denzin, 2003). Hermeneutics is the work of interpretation and understanding, and so the theatrical analysis process used to prepare a performance, develop a script, or create a character can again be used as a template for structured research of this type. Many ethnographers may follow modes of naïve practice in observing behavioral patterns or repetition. But, participation and imitation is necessary for the acquisition of culturally-specific habits which give insight to culture

Through group interviews styled as theatrical “salons” in which conversation is started with a topic, or an issue, or a question, I was able to see the group set about connecting to the conversation, reflecting, and offering personal insights. Because the salon setting allowed for brainstorming, it sped up the creative process, resulting in multifarious expressions of story in storytelling, poetry, painting, or music as those involved in the salon became steeped in each other and in the process.



I served as the reflexive interviewer, as the facilitator of such a meeting, and I was able to deconstruct the interviews leading to clear expressions of lived experiences as narratives. The salons were able to turn a spontaneous experience into a consumable commodity. The audience for this narrative would have had the impression of the original person and could celebrate the universal biographical elements while protecting the privacy of the individual. In theater, there is the concept of “persona,” taken from the Etruscan word for “mask.” As a performer, you endeavor to present the heart and soul of the character, and you often use true elements of your own personality or experiences to heighten the appearance of reality. However, every trained actor knows to maintain a balance between the real self and the character.

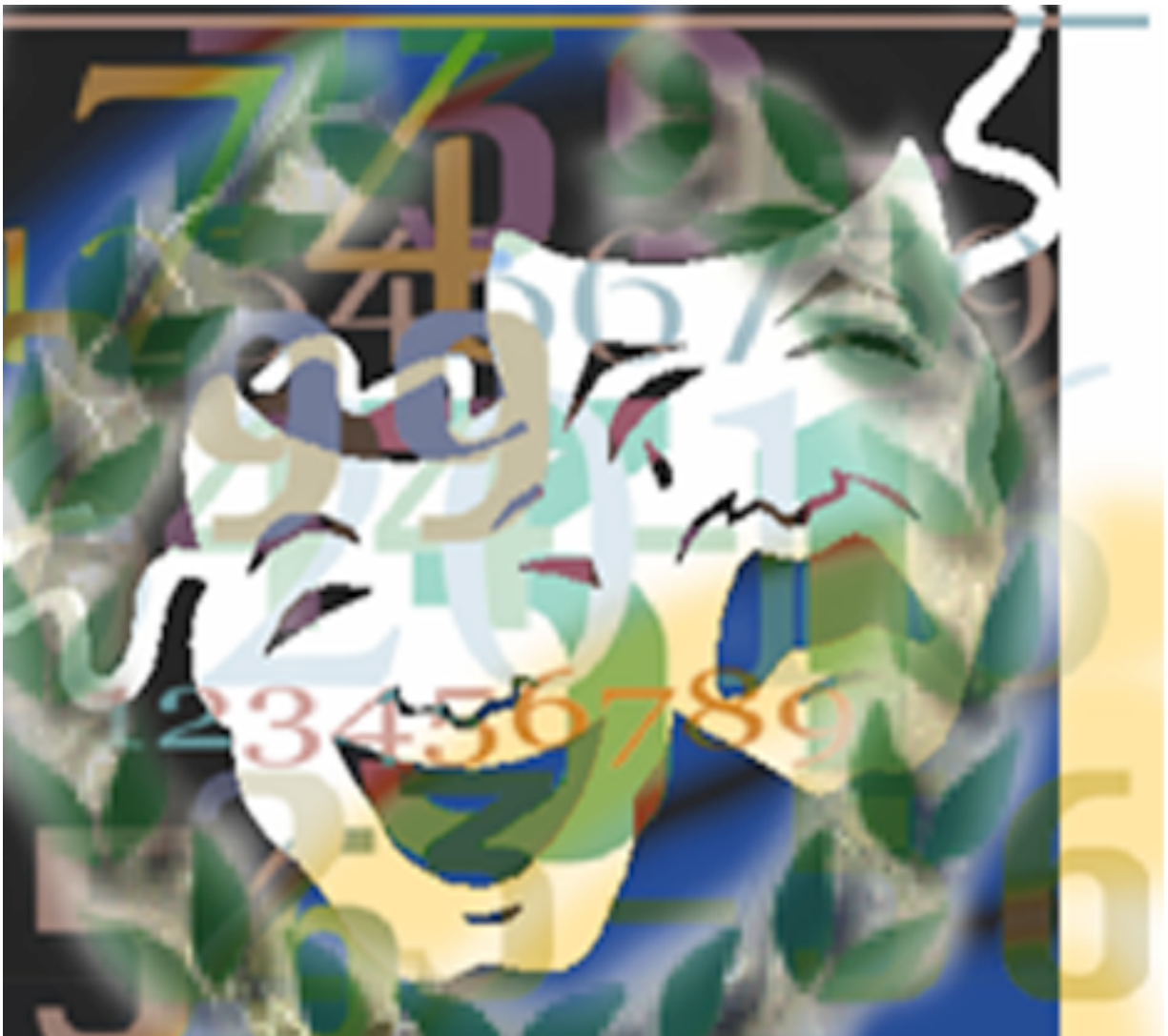
Denzin (2003) seems to feel that there is no essential self, or private real, or self behind the public self; he seems to feel there are only different selves appearing as facets for different environments. I disagree. I feel that anyone who has changed his or her tone of voice when asked to speak in public has felt the shift required to “put on the mask.” To take a lived experience, edit it down to its dramatic components, combine it with several other similar experiences, and then have the originator perform the piece is, in a sense, a *pentimento*, i.e. a layering of images. In practice, during the process some of the images become covered and protected, while others become more exposed.

Let me illustrate my point with figure 3.2 (p.68). I began my *pentimento*<sup>7</sup> with a theatrical mask in black and white, hiding and expressing emotion at the same time. Next,

---

<sup>7</sup> This began as a painting term for when an artist changes his original intension, painting a new image over an older image. It was expanded as a concept for personal growth to include people who influence you by Lillian Hellman in her novel *Pentimento*. In Italian the word “pentire” denotes concepts

I added the layer of confusion represented by a confusion of shapes – letters and numbers of different sizes and fonts. This represented the learning or rehearsal process. I then added in washes of color representing my environment. I ended with the last layer, a representation of the laurel wreath as a symbol of success in reaching my goal. Using this description, you can make out each element; however, the result is a new image.



*Figure 3.2. Pentimento.*

---

such as to repent, re-think, or change your mind. The production process in theatrical presentation is a profound way to “change your mind.”

While it may be relatively new to speak of the performer's body and physical communication as an ethnographic document, I am using this study to demonstrate how the approach I used draws together and builds on the fundamental ideas of Franz Boas. Boas argued for the "psychic unity of mankind," i.e., a belief that all humans had the same intellectual capacity and that all cultures were based on the same basic mental principles. Variations in custom and belief, he argued, were the products of historical accidents. Deaf culture and hearing culture are equal and parallel, but the accident of history rendered one with a verbal communication skill and the other with a manual communication skill. This accident left both groups with a corresponding difference in their perception of the world. This difference in perception and communication has led to a separation that can be bridged with a common communication style – theater.

As you follow the process of this study, you may begin to see the way that habits and experiences are absorbed, as indicated in Merleau-Ponty's ideas on the primacy and centrality of perception in all human activity.

One additional methodology I consulted in my process was Action Research. Action Research may be defined as engaging researchers, students, and community leaders "in a collaborative process of critical inquiry into problems of social practice in a learning context" (Argyris et al., 1985, p. 236). My process in using Action Research to investigate my area of inquiry began with a core group of participants who were interested in sharing personal stories from the Deaf community. Their excitement led me to follow their lead in choosing topics for discussion. Their own interest in the project

encouraged them to invite others to join into the discussion groups that followed, and the support of and participation in the fieldwork spread. The resulting action was that over 600 people contributed their stories to the process of creating the script for *Windows of the Soul*. The next step in the process was to encourage the actors to inform their interpretation of the roles with their own life experiences while still maintaining the integrity of the original shared stories. The final form of Action Research was revealed in the after show talk-back sessions where audience members added to the information and revealed their own willingness to change perspective inspired by the performance. According to Kurt Lewin, who coined the phrase Action Research, this methodology displays the following characteristics:

1. A change experiment on real problems in social systems that focuses on a particular problem and seeks to provide assistance to a client system. (Various topics that create conflict or fear in the Deaf community were represented on stage. These conflicts were then resolved, providing the audience members with a suggested approach to solving problems in their own lives.)
2. Iterative cycles of identifying a problem, planning, acting, and evaluating. (The stages of developing the production, performing it, and reacting to it as outlined above.)
3. Reeducation to change well-established patterns of thinking and acting that express norms and values. (For example, the audience members who indicated that they would now change their actions, like the hearing father who spoke of starting sign language classes so he could communicate better with his daughter or the Deaf college

student who indicated that she would stop being passive when her family left her out of gatherings.)

4. Challenges to norms and values of the status quo from a perspective of democratic values (Older Deaf community members voiced feelings of being challenged by the depiction of such a diverse cross section of the community. The exclusion of conventional Deaf role models and the inclusion of negative Deaf stereotypes caused some discomfort as well.)

5. Contributions to basic knowledge in social science and to social action in everyday life (Argyris et al., 1985, p. 9). Since the Deaf community has had so little research done on their culture as opposed to their disability, simply the act of writing and presenting real life stories satisfies this criterion.

This type of Action Research leads to participatory Action Research.

Participatory Action Research adds the dimension of participation of the people for whom the knowledge is being produced and accountability of the researchers to them. An early article on participatory Action Research identified its following characteristics:

1. The problem under study has its origins in the community
2. The community controls the process of problem definition, information gathering, and decision making about action following the action.
3. Members of the community are equals in the research process with those conducting the study. Everyone is regarded as a researcher and learner. Skills are transferred among all participants and information is shared (Couto, 1987).

### Description of the Process

As part of my method of research on Deaf leadership, as it is evidenced in the process of a theatrical production, I needed to formulate data to be analyzed. Since the data does not exist in a fully conceptualized form, I used the data naturally generated by the process. I began by holding a series of group discussions, which I called salons. In these salons, free flowing conversation would come across topics of interest in a natural way. These topics included parenting issues, technology and cochlear implants, and bad habits perceived as stereotypes within the community. I documented these conversations on videotape, transcribed the parts I thought were most dramatic, and showed the English transcriptions to the participants to insure that my notes were accurate.

My records included the conceptualization of the project and my pre-production research. My field notes are in the form of director's notes. These notes take the form of a journaling process mixed with creative ideas for continuing the vision of the staging of the text. I then distilled those notes into essays that are more easily read and understood, which allowed for hours of material to be condensed and allowed for me to more clearly express my observations of and reflections on the process. This is similar to the style used by Ron Pelias in much of his qualitative research reporting and is a style that matches my own.

I videotaped rehearsals and had an open camera on which the contributors made personal statements without being observed in the moment. These tapes were edited and made available on-line and in CD-Rom format. The hearing model of collaborative work that I intended to compare to the Deaf actors' style was that of how the artistic staff

traditionally works on bringing the set, lights, costumes, and publicity designs together to insure a unified vision of the piece. Unfortunately, academic department budgetary limitations, staffing cutbacks, and a poor approach to the design work left that standard model dysfunctional, and so I was unable to show design process through sketches and models since they were never created. I did create rough thumbnail sketches of the set and projections myself and gave them to the set designer to develop, which he did. I have kept as documents TTY correspondence<sup>8</sup> and e-mail with the participants as well as letters that include copyright permissions from visual artists and Deaf poets who allowed me to use pieces of their work.

Much of the natural rehearsal process for a theatrical production follows the natural hermeneutic curves identified as the four cornerstones of phenomenology by Van Manen (1990) – temporality, corporality, spatiality, and reationality. Each circle of understanding forms a plane that can lead to deeper understanding. For example, during the period of time given for each piece of the process data was collected, analyzed, and used as a foundation for the next stage of development. If we look at the temporality of the project, it begins with three months of collecting stories through the process of holding salons. This provided data, which led to the creation of a script. I needed time to reflect on this script, to re-write it and to involve others in the reading of it. In approximately two months time that level was complete and a rehearsal script resulted. The next curve in temporality was the rehearsal process itself. After that and some, three months later, we were ready for an audience. The performance level completed the arc of

---

<sup>8</sup> TTY refers to teletypewriters or “telecommunication devices for the Deaf” used to type conversations back and forth between two machines in real time phone conversations.

the project, letting the initial participants see how their stories had developed into performable pieces.

Corporality was addressed when new forms of participation were created through rehearsal as the body fell into iconic/indexical step with the particular array of phenomenological experience that here constituted process for presentation through conversation or code. In anthropological study semiotics discusses the non-verbal responses or signs that a participant gives. There are several ways of analyzing these “signs” as communications. Corporality deals directly with physical expression and sign language directly relates to this concept. The documentation of the hermeneutic circles involving corporality is best seen in the form of an American Sign Language (ASL) glossing<sup>9</sup> of the translation, which I created for the script. The next spiral of the hermeneutic curve was also documented by a video tape of the performance, which provided evidence for the non-verbal responses that also appeared in signed communication.

In the process of day-to-day being in strange lands, one feels the force of their affective and affecting way of life. As surely as a people express uniquely the content of their mind through a language and logic, just as surely do they express in appropriate ways the content of their feelings and their influence upon a society. (Armstrong, 1971, pp. 184, 192)

Now if perception is thus the common act of all our motor and affective functions, no less than sensory, we must rediscover the structure of the perceived world through a process similar to that of an archeologist. For the structure of the perceived world is buried under the sedimentations of later knowledge .... (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 5)

---

<sup>9</sup> ASL gloss is an approximate English translation of the signs. It can only represent word order and as a document is flawed since it cannot reflect body language, spatial referencing, or facial expression. I hope the addition of a production video tape will supply the more accurate ASL translation document.



Boas had the idea that cultural customs and traditions are composed of “well-established habits,” and that these habits were learned best by imitation (Boas, 1911, p. 224). He also suggested that perceptual experience becomes culturally organized according to the following paradigm: “Hand in hand with the decrease of consciousness required by daily and customary actions goes an emotional value of the omission of such activities and still more the performance of actions contrary to custom” (pp. 224–225).

To understand that, let us think about learning a language for the first time. The first time you hear a word in a language foreign to you it is possible you will not understand it and you will mispronounce it when trying to copy it. How much more inaccurate can we be as ethnographers, then, if we are not immersed in a cultural experience that is familiar so that the daily, unremarkable aspects of the culture can be omitted and the more specialized and unique aspects of the culture commented on? This is one of the reasons I feel I am well positioned to use an ethnographic performance method in uncovering the Deaf leadership style. My commitment to and membership in the community allows me a vantage point that will let me pull the specialized behaviors of leadership into the light without becoming sidetracked by common custom.

Spatiality was addressed in the environment of the salons, which were always a social setting. The next curve brings us to rehearsal, which was in a well-appointed college experimental theater. Deepening the participants’ perception of the seriousness of the project, the performance space provided the metaphor of an apartment building as community and the conversation deepened as room for the audience was prepared.

The next phenomenological curve to address is relationality. The relationship of the researcher to the participants is crucial. As Sapir mentions, “outsiders” often inadequately apprehend the “cultural key” to the form and significance of actions. He says failure on the part of the ethnographer to grasp “native patterning” of forms and significances leads to “unimaginative and misconceiving description” of those actions. Thus, social patterns of behavior “are not necessarily discovered by simple observation” primarily because, as “deep seated cultural patterns,” they are “not so much known as felt, not so much capable of conscious description as naïve practice” (Sapir, 1949, p. 548). Sapir notes that an unimaginable number of subtle patterns of behavior exist that cannot be understood in explicit terms, and so an ethnographic approach to seeing and analyzing a particular aspect of a minority culture is most useful.

Although my dissertation focuses on the process of this theatrical production, I trust the result is an authentic representation of the Deaf community through the metaphor of an apartment building. The production gave glimpses of the lives of the people who lived behind the lit windows in the building. The stories represented were generated by the lived experiences of the participants/actors. The character of the “custodian” of the building, who inserts comments on Deaf cultural history and literature, carried out a dramatic through line. The participants/actors determined how they presented their own stories or their choice of the cultural canon. Dance, song, mime, monologues, and poems were all included. *Windows* was originally produced as a part of the National Technical Institute for the Deaf’s Performing Arts Department 2005/2006 season. The full title was *Windows of the Soul: Deaf Literature in the Context of Real*

*Life Stories*. The production was also picked up by the Interborough Repertory Theater (IRT) and became the centerpiece for a collaboration between theater companies that hire Deaf theater artists. The week of March 6 – 12, 2006 was the time frame for the New York City Deaf Theater Festival, which was hosted by IRT, and *Windows of the Soul* ran at 154 Christopher Street, Suite #3B for five performances, playing to sold-out houses and garnering overwhelmingly positive audience response.

### Specifics of the Methods Used in This Study

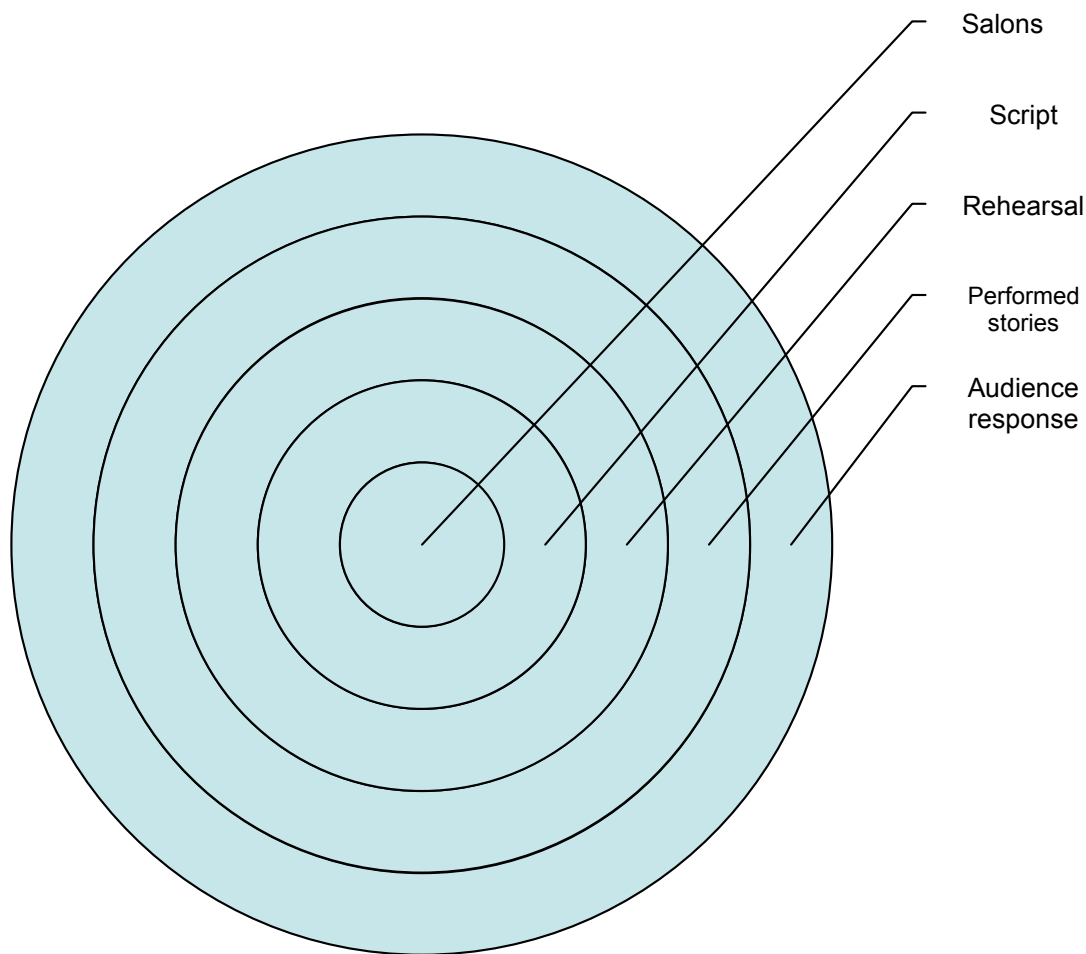
The first curve in the hermeneutic phenomenon was simple collection of materials from a broad range of perspectives. In order to better picture these hermeneutic curves, Figure 3.3 shows elements of the five parts of the process, which I used as a structure for this research tool.

*Part I:* initial data collection and the creation of the script began in May 2005. A variety of approaches was used. The attempt was to stay with the shared experiences as long as possible before shaping a script.

I collected recommendations of pieces of established Deaf cultural literature that lent themselves to theatricality from Deaf faculty members who have taught, written, or published these materials. I also asked NTID students from literature courses to reveal their favorite pieces of Deaf cultural literature and to begin the spiraling hermeneutic circle suggested by Carolyn Kenny during an Antioch Residency in Santa Barbara. I wanted to know what it was they liked about those pieces.

I then returned to these same sources and informed them of the goal of a theatrical production, asking if they would like to write about their own experiences in the form of

monologues or dialogues that could be considered for inclusion in the final production. I then collected and transcribed these experiences. (NOTE: two Deaf independent study students who had written songs also offered their work.)



*Figure 3.3.* Five-part methodological process.

*Part II:* I next began the hunt for the essence by holding a bi-monthly “salon” through the summer months. The salon was posted to the RIT and Rochester community. The group that self-selected to appear was informed of the research aspect of the gathering and the

final goal of a theatrical production. Those who attended the salon took the collected texts and experiences, read them, and discussed them to explore concepts of meaning, themes, and metaphors. The opportunity to add stories from those who attended the salons was made available through videotaping the readings and discussions. Another activity in the salon setting was a discussion of “community,” “leadership,” and the expression of those observations through movement pieces created through contact improvisational dance techniques. Results were videotaped.

*Part III:* the materials gathered were shaped into a performable text with the assistance of several colleagues (Deaf and hearing) who have skills and knowledge of Deaf culture, literature, drama, and performance. We then created a structured outline with which to begin the rehearsal process. All materials decided upon required me to inform the creator/writer and gain written permission to use the materials (following standard copyright procedures).

*Part IV:* auditions were held and the rehearsal process began. We had a four-week rehearsal period, during which time the previous procedure was repeated with this smaller select group. Additions and deletions were made to the text and movement pieces. Artistic staff was consulted as to how best support the actors visually, and unlike many productions the actors had input on designs – I acted as a conduit. The rehearsal process used an approach that encouraged a Deaf “friendly” environment. Sign language was used directly (not through interpreters) and a cohesive ensemble was the goal (rather than a divide between principal players and chorus). Actors invited trusted “outside eyes” into rehearsal for continuing feedback, and student clubs were asked to create their own

“set pieces” (dances or other “stand alone” performance work). Rehearsals were conducted using a repeated structure. See steps 1 – 12 of the daily rehearsal process in the chart below.

- 
1. Greetings
  2. Explaining the purpose of the show and warm-up using foundations of Del-Sign.<sup>10</sup>
    - 2.1 – breathing exercises – standing in a circle, we breathe together as a group with the imagery that, as we breathe in, positive energy is brought in and we purge negative energy in the exhale. We then share the breath. One person begins by making eye contact and exhaling. The person who receives the breath inhales, changes eye contact, and the process begins until all participants have shared the breath.
    - 2.2 – handshape handoff – standing in a circle a single handshape (for example, the ASL number one, i.e., index finger pointing up, all other fingers curled) is used gesturally in a different way by each person.
    - 2.3 – bonding energy – standing in a circle all participants allow their palms to nearly touch each other and focus on the feeling of warmth and tingles that suggests a transfer of energy around the circle.
  3. Asking questions
    - 3.1 – What did people notice from the warm-up?
    - 3.2 – How should we begin the rehearsal?
    - 3.3 – Discussion of material and personal observations.
  4. Group improvisation on the material (asymmetrical turn taking)
  5. Shaping the work (expressing interest in the actors’ ideas)
  6. Expressing cultural ignorance (encouraging the actors to explain their perspective).
  7. Repeating what was discussed and repeating the physical work on the material.
  8. Keeping the language that the actors used naturally in documenting the dialogue for the script. This is done using Director’s rehearsal notes as well as the Stage Manager’s and Assistant Stage Manager’s rehearsal notes.
  9. Using the actor’s linguistic choices in further discussions on the material.
  10. Creating hypothetical audience response to the work.
  11. Taking breaks for ten minutes every hour allowing for friendly and informal interaction.
  12. Coming together for “notes” before taking leave.

Figure 3.4. *Elements of the daily rehearsal*

---

<sup>10</sup> Del-Sign is a physical approach to acting using elements of Francois Delsarte’s codified movement techniques from the late 1800’s and the foundations of American Sign Language. I am the creator of this approach and have been developing the concept for the past 10 years through Interborough Repertory Theater (IRT) in NYC.

*Part V*: performances at the NTID 1510 Theater Lab were sold out and we had to add two additional performances to accommodate the numbers of people who wished to see the show. This was unprecedented. I know of no other show in the last eight years at NTID where additional performances were added to the schedule. The *Canandaigua Daily Messenger*, a local newspaper, gave us attention in the form of an article and a photo in their weekend section. My clinical subjectivity indicates that the production accomplished what it set out to do.

Evidence of audience engagement was in the attendance of the post-show discussions. No audience member left at the end of the show; all wanted to continue to discuss what they had just seen. The need to add more performances to accommodate the lines of people who were not able to get in to see the show indicated that the “word of mouth” reviews of the show were very positive. The reviews were positive enough to fill the house more than twice. Even now, there are people who had wished to see the show who were not able to get in. Several of those people were so motivated to see *Windows* that they came to the performances in New York City, at the Interborough Repertory Theater (IRT), in Greenwich Village.

By creating a production process that is similar to the ethnographic research practice of hermeneutic circles, the gathered data from the process yielded a successful theatrical production as well as rich material revealing Deaf leadership styles. This process allowed me to analyze how the horizons of these circles connect. I spent nearly six months with the interviews before committing them to a rehearsal script and I spent

over three months in the initial rehearsal phase. I had built in reflection time that coincided with an academic calendar. That decision to allow the data to settle and to have time to reflect truly honors the idea that anything perceived is “real.” It was also a decision that allowed the essential elements of experiential consciousness to reveal themselves.

### Selection of Participants

The cast list of my dreams read like a director’s nightmare. Each character was an extreme type: a recognizable and well-respected older actor; an eight-year-old outgoing fluent signer who is Hispanic; an openly gay professional Deaf person; and an actor with a cochlear implant who can speak and sign well. If any one of these character types appeared in an agent’s breakdown (a list of characters needed for a production), they would be scrambling for the phone to set up a “specialty call” with the Actor’s Union.

Somehow, I wasn’t worried. I tend to like shows with diverse casts and every time I set up the audition call pessimists feel the need to step into my office to express something along the lines of, “Are you crazy?” You’ll never find those actors here.” So far, both in Rochester and in New York, I have found that if you trust in it they will come. (Ok, I’ll admit that if they don’t come, I do have a few other approaches to casting and I don’t rely solely on the open call.)

Since the initial production was at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), I knew I could find Deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing people who sign. However, this is a technical college with a mainly male, mainly white student body. I had no worries. I reserved an audition room and planned the process. There would be three



evenings of auditions where I would ask the actors to present a monologue, a story about their own life, or a joke. I had a volunteer from the NTID Drama Club ready to collect audition forms and keep order. Unfortunately, there had been budget cuts in the Performing Arts Department and a week before the audition no notices had been posted and no audition flyer had been made. Therefore, I contacted every actor I had worked with in the past by e-mail and made a flyer to post all over campus. No volunteers appeared so I did the footwork as well. I have never stood on ceremony when it comes to theater. I'll paint sets, sweep the stage, sew costumes, and do whatever it takes to get the show on the boards.

The first night of auditions brought in nearly half the cast. Actors who worked in the award winning *Emperor Jones* production that went to New York in 2002 came; actors who had been in *Walls*, an original play about 9/11, came; and batches of students from the NTID Drama Club. But no older actors and no kids came. Because of the familiarity of the people who did come, the formality of a normal audition system broke down almost immediately. Normally, as the actors arrive they sign a list, wait their turn, and enter the room one at a time with either a photo resume or, because it is college, an audition form. Many of these actors already knew each other and didn't feel a need for the privacy. The new actors were treated with as warm a welcome as anybody and the whole crew of about 40 people ended up crammed in the audition room, sitting on the floor, on desks, and leaning on mirrored walls – all with hands flying.

So I changed my plan and let the natural exuberance dictate the method. I made an announcement to the whole group. I explained the show and how it was part of a

research project. I told everyone that this would be a play of real life stories and I needed to see that they could play roles that were revealing about private issues: ethnicity, gayness, family problems, and cochlear implants. I preferred they use their own stories for monologues but that prepared pieces from published plays were ok as well as poetry, folklore, or jokes. Finally it came down to, “Who’s first?”

And so it began! The atmosphere in the room was not the competitive air of *American Idol*. This was not a competition at all; it was a community gathering where everyone wanted their friends to do well. The stories were honest, revealing, and heartbreaking; they made me think that maybe my preparation of a script through interview was not the right way to collect stories. The audition could have been a show in and of itself. Immediately in on the process were four veterans. Troy Chapman was a 40-year-old, hard-of hearing. UPS worker who performs in theater every chance he can get. He starred in the production of *Emperor Jones*. Lou Labriola was an Italian Stallion from New Jersey who had worked with me in New York before deciding to come to Rochester to study. His high performance skill level and constant flow of ideas always enhanced the group. Idalia Vazquez had worked for RIT campus safety for the past eight years. I dragged her into a show about Hispanic Deaf artists and she hasn’t left the theater yet. Even with a heavy Spanish accent, she has played Asians, Scottish dancers, and a range of hearing characters in Deaf theater. Joe Fox, president of the Drama Club and recently out of the closet, had also been in shows with me before. These actors became the core group and the foundation of the ensemble. As different as they all were, they knew each other through theater and respected each other greatly.

Several very new actors appeared, nervous and tentative at first, until the core group warmed them up, acted opposite them, and pulled a performance out of them. Holly performed a poem about women's rights in a fluid almost dance-like style. Then, Joe got her talking about her family and background. She is Asian and African-American. Her story of black/white/asian/deaf/hearing family holidays had everyone laughing so hard we were crying. The four first-year interpreting students who appeared around that time were left asking everyone, "What? What's she saying?!" I pointed out to them that the rehearsal process would be mainly in Sign, and although I speak and sign for myself and will voice for others or sign for those who can't, I wouldn't be doing it all the time and they would have to be prepared to be independent and not be upset to be left out occasionally. They all nodded eagerly, hungry for an experience of total immersion in the culture. I let them all in. Crystal also came that night with her Mom. She was hearing, only 15, and didn't have her license yet. Her Mom and Dad were Deaf and getting a divorce. The room went silent as she told her story of being a child of Deaf adults and feeling torn in two by an upcoming divorce. We were amazed at her honesty about the situation, even with her Mom in the room, and she was cast originally as Sharon, the child of Deaf adults.

I started to get nervous about the older character and figured that maybe stars needed to be treated differently. I contacted every well-known Deaf actor within a 40-mile radius of Rochester – Peter Cook, internationally known poet; Terry Harrison; Vicky Norquist; and Dana Gorelick. All had gone to school at NTID and had toured with NTD in the 1980's. I contacted Patrick Graybill, a local actor who is revered as the Deaf

“Laurence Olivier.” Although we have co-directed and worked in the Performing Arts Department together, we are total opposites. He is very “old school” conservative and traditional, and I am risk-taking and avant garde. However, for the role of the custodian he would hit the audience immediately as a believable “custodian of the culture.” But no one wanted to do a show in the smaller experimental theater in the dead of winter for no pay – I wonder why? So I looked past my own front door and dreamed about who would be the ideal person for the role if I could really get anyone I wanted. Dr. Simon Carmel had retired from NTID a few years earlier. He is a folklorist, magician, and trusted colleague with a look like a mischievous Grandpa. He immediately came to mind.

After reading the script, Simon was in and committed to helping on this project; but, he needed airfare, a place to stay, a rental car, and honorariums to live on. I figured if he believed in me and my project enough to take three weeks out of his busy lecture/magician/book signing schedule, I could find a way to get what he needed. My chairperson agreed to his airfare (remember: the department was under strict budget cutbacks – this was tricky!). Another retired colleague, Andrew Malcolm, who had a big house, agreed to let Simon stay with him (remember: this is for three weeks! Not a weekend). And the Drama Club, Interpreting Club, and I came up with \$300 toward the rental car (which ended up being more like \$500). Then, I was on to the schmoozing of the departments. The Professional Development Committee agreed on a lecture (\$200); the Commission on Pluralism had a Black History Month celebration (\$200); the English Department had Simon come into classrooms (\$100); and finally the American Sign Language Interpreting and Education Department took the last possible opening in

Simon's schedule (\$200). Altogether I think Simon did not make any money; I also think he did not lose any either. An added benefit was that at all of these lectures and presentations across campus he was busy talking up the show, too, so the added promotion was a wonderful help.

One last problem was the fact that although we would start rehearsals several months before the production, Simon could only join us in our last three weeks. Technology saved the day however, and weekly videophone rehearsals were scheduled between Simon and I. We later added the other actors, too.

We started rehearsals with everyone but the little girl written as the future of the Deaf community. I asked every colleague for their kids, I sent out requests to the Rochester School for the Deaf, and I hit up local churches. No Deaf kids appeared and certainly not really cute 8-year-old Hispanic Deaf kids! But, providence provides if we can be patient. Every Wednesday morning I run with a group and we all have breakfast together afterward. One Wednesday I was complaining to them about not having a child for this role. Dr. Robb Adams of the Counseling Department at NTID said, "Gee, my wife Nancy is teaching a Deaf Hispanic girl. Maybe that could be your actress." She turned out to be a child born to the stage. Even more fortunate for me was that her Mother and Father – and Nancy (her teacher) – were all willing to do the driving, supervising, and rehearsing of lines that needed to happen with a child actor.

I had also cast a few "extra" actors, people who were very excited and eager to be a part of the project. I wasn't sure how I would use them and I didn't have parts written for them, but I figured I might need replacements later on in the process and they would

be able to move into spots vacated by people with unexpected schedule conflicts, problems with the material, or inability to commit to the process. When rehearsals started, I had 24 actors, 1 stage manager, 1 assistant director, and 2 “non-speaking” actors. By the time we opened, we had 18 actors, a replacement stage manager, an assistant director, and no “non-speaking” roles.

### Summary

The resulting performance of *Windows of the Soul* told stories of lived experiences from within today’s Deaf community. The intellectual context of performance ethnography was connected to Norman Denzin’s (1997) notions of performance texts from this perspective: “The researcher's goal is not to put forth something that ‘looks like the truth’ but rather to contrast multiple verisimilarities, multiple truths” (p. 20). This study used the methodology of having salons, which allowed personal stories to form the initial script material. Those stories were then reshaped to fit within a dramatic context. For the purposes of representing the Deaf community, the metaphor of an apartment building was used. The ways that the lives of those who lived within the building intersect borrowed elements of Brecht’s symbolic use of theater (Brecht, 1964). Color was added to the stories by allowing the actors to enhance the telling with details from their own lives and presenting the work in a forum that allowed the originators of the stories to see and comment on the work created more than triangulation. This honors the theater tradition of encouraging social change established by August Boal (1979). It was also designed to morally move both actors and audience to create a cultural sensitivity shift in awareness. Similar to Ron Pelias’ work in

writing essays about his experiences with ethnographic performance, my own experiences and reactions are included within the chapters as I describe how the script was composed and transformed through the history of its performances. These passages – sometimes written as journals, sometimes written as essays, or even sometimes drawn as artwork – allow the reader to follow the process and see the results in a chronological context similar to my own.

Based on the videotapes we made throughout the process, on my journal and field notes, and on the actor's journals, the script of *Windows of the Soul* depicted instances of performative interaction and discussion. The devising process included the scenes that the actors created, the animation of these scenes as well as the responses to our performances in the talk-back sessions after the shows, and conversations with the actors throughout the process.

My notes and transcriptions served as memory aides, but the script is also partly fictionalized (Banks & Banks, 1998) for ethical, thematic, and practical/writerly purposes. While the details do not always represent precisely what happened, to the extent to which it is possible, acknowledging that all interpretive work is inherently subjective (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994), I have tried to remain true to the substance of our work and also tried to capture the spirit of the interactions the scripted descriptions depict. For example, sections of the script that Dr. Simon Carmel narrated to the audience were never formally scripted; rather they were improvised anew each time they were performed based on notes and using information Dr. Carmel had gathered over time in his own work on Deaf folklore. This proved to be particularly challenging for my

husband, the actor, Peter Haggerty, who had to read Simon's signs in the moment and act the role vocally as a spontaneous improvisation not just interpret it.

My scripted recreations of this work are compilations based on videotapes of specific performances interwoven with details from discussions that arose on various occasions as recorded in my field notes. As can be anticipated, no text can claim to be free of the author's subjectivity (Banks & Banks, 1998). My scripts are constructions, but self-consciously so. I acknowledge that even in my choice of moments to script an interpretive process was involved. Thus, my account of our participatory work is inherently partial.

The script is meant to be expressive and evocative rather than just explanatory. It is a performative text that brings the processes of academic interpretation and representation in closer touch with the actual performative events. My initial series of scripted vignettes, which were later pieced together into a single script, preserves some of its performative quality. It embodies the context and dynamics of the original situations and it preserves some of the authenticity of actor/participants' voices and gestures. The scripts served as an initial level of interpretation for my subsequent interpretation/inquiry.

I combined my interpretation of our performances, my theoretical investigations on Deaf leadership styles, and my auto-ethnographic understandings so I could provide a layered exploration of modern Deaf community issues. This allowed me to re-frame the concept "Deaf community" to include the present generation's own perceptions of their culture and their conflicts. The salon discussions, the theatre work with Deaf actors which included a participatory, performative approach to doing research, and my



interpretation of it present a counter-narrative (Foucault, 1977) that interrupts the “common sense” or taken-for-granted understandings of Deaf community. This approach provided a more complex picture of a Deaf community that remains cohesive despite divisive issues and personalities. My study affirms the potential of theatre as a research method based on the new insight and critical understanding it has yielded (Denzin, 1997; Lather, 1986) for the actors/participants, for our audiences, and for me.