

## DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

The deaf as well as disabled are usually considered passive, recipient-only elements of cultural circulation, rather than creative actors in it. They are perceived as having special needs, requiring assistive technologies, such as captions and audio descriptions to access other peoples' work. In contrast to these considerations, the proposed project investigates deaf people as active partners in the cultural exchange; as creators themselves. The main area of my interest here is the cinema, which history merges with the history of deafness surprisingly often.

The main aim of the project is to research historical sources (including official and private documents, patent letters and technical descriptions, personal autobiographical narratives, and films), in order to present and investigate the mutual relations and influences between film and deaf communities and individuals. 'Film' is understood here as being not only a work of art, but also a technology, an invention. These relations are far more wide-ranging than commonly recognized – both in film studies and in deaf, and disability studies. To cite just two examples, one of cinema's inventors, Thomas A. Edison, was basically deaf, while one of the most well-recognized actors of early cinema, Lon Chaney, was a hearing child of deaf parents. Many deaf actors worked in American silent movies (for example, Redmond Granvill, who worked with Charlie Chaplin), but had to leave the film industry with the introduction of sound – just as immigrant actors did – because of their speech. The interesting thing is that the sound revolution that ended up excluding deaf viewers from participating in cinema, owes a lot to deafness-related sound amplification technologies. This is also an element of the research involved in the proposed project.

The deaf were, and still are, film creators, and their productions constitute a large part of the project. I plan to investigate and compare two amateur film-making movements, the American and the Polish. I will investigate how the production, distribution and reception of deaf films was shaped by historical, social, political and cultural factors of the 1910s and 1920s in the United States, and the 1970s-1990s in Poland. The research on American deaf film projects will be conducted through archival, historical and film studies' paradigms. In the case of Polish deaf films, a different, ethnographic approach has to be used. The Polish deaf community does not have a centralized, organized system of collecting and archiving its heritage, which is why the most telling data will be conveyed by the film makers themselves, during interviews. These meetings will be led in Polish Sign Language, with the added effect of the creation of a database of Polish amateur deaf film makers. Hopefully, this will also help future deaf film researchers.

I hope that the additional effects of the proposed project will be both recognizable and profitable to the Polish deaf community, which is undergoing a difficult period of self-redefinition, recognizing and protecting its cultural history and heritage.