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PhD Project
Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona

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Name of PhD Supervisor: Dra. Pilar Orero

Audio Description: Seeing With the Mind's Eye—
A Comprehensive Training Manual and Guide to the
History and Applications Of Audio Description

Originally proposed and project accepted: October 2009

Figure 1.

The "audio description" logo, above, was developed in the United States by the Graphic Artists Guild and the National Endowment for the Arts. The logo is freely available for download at:

https://www.graphicartistsguild.org/resources/disability-access-symbols/

Others used include:

Figure 2.   Figure 3.   Figure 4.   Figure 5.

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- Dr. Elaine Gerber, Montclair State University and the Society for Disability Studies;
- Joan Greening and Marcus Weisen, Royal Society of Blind People, London;
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3. INTRODUCTION

3.1 Initial observations-State of the Art and Literature

In some ways, for an access technique/form of audiovisual translation that is over 30 years old as a formal practice or area of inquiry, a great deal of progress has been made. Most notably in the U.K., where a mandate exists (albeit relatively modest) for description on braodcast television, significant strides have been made in developing the state of this art, for media, in performance (including sporting engagements), and for exhibitions.

But as far as the actual practice of audio description, other countries fall far behind, including my own United States, the birthplace of the technique. It is noteworthy too that practically all research in this field originates in Europe where description is considered a form of translation and studied as such. An informal survey of American graduate programs reveals no "homes" for advance study of audio description.

There is currently no comprehensive, publically-available training manual for the practice of audio description in the range of genres or formats for which description can be effective--or a guide for the training of trainers. This relates directly to research I have been conducting on description standards as they currently exist (what constitutes quality description and how can it best be taught).   In addition, little exists that accurately "describes" the history of audio description's development. Further, I have a special interest in certain areas: can description affect literacy?; what does audio description for dance performance have in common with movement analysis?

Bernd Benecke (2004: 78) notes that audio description is "as old as sighted people telling visually impaired people about visual events happening in the world around them." Pujol and Orero (2007: 49-60) add an interesting twist on that perspective: "While it is true that research in the field has just started, with no PhD to date, we believe we should take into consideration the many studies and range of experience which already exists, since this may shed some light on the topic and further the insight of new research." They cite "ekphrasis" (or "ecphrasis"), " a literary figure that provides the graphic and often dramatic description of a painting, a relief or other work of art. This rhetorical phenomenon is common in the epic poems of Ancient Greece."

But I have noted that audio description as a formal process of translation and accessibility is just over 30 years old—if one counts as its genesis in the literature the landmark 1978 Masters thesis by Gregory T. Frazier, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman: An All-audio Adaptation of the Teleplay for the Blind and Visually Handicapped.*

Since that time, the vast bulk of serious study of audio description has been in Europe as a form of "audio-visual translation." The field of study derives from/relates to a focus on subtitles for video and film. The majority of English commercial media originating in the United States of America is accessible for speakers of other languages via subtitling or dubbing. Audio description represents another kind of "translation" in media—from visual images to words for the benefit of those who have no access to the visual image. Unlike most "light dependent"

people, people who are blind or have low vision speak a language that is not dependent on the visual. Consequently, audio description has been embraced as a new field of study in academic programs that encourage the exploration of audio-visual translation. (See Bibliography at the end of this paper.)

So audio description can no longer be considered in its infancy—perhaps it is in its adolescence. New techniques are on the horizon as are aesthetic innovations incorporating description within the material it supports, broadened access to new media, and more varied settings for increased numbers of people who are blind or have low vision.

3.2. PhD Structure

This dissertation and book is grounded in my *practical application* of audio description techniques which I developed over the last 32 years of professional work in the field and in virtually all formats in which audio description is practiced: performing arts (theater, dance, opera), media (television, film, DVDs, web streaming), museums/visitor centers, and in other cultural or recreational endeavors (parades, sporting events, personal tours, shopping, on cruise ships—and karaoke competitions). It encompasses various delivery mechanisms: personal/one-to-one, FM radio or infra-red beam systems (via battery-operated or AC-powered transmitter and hand-held receivers), analog players (audio cassette), digital players (CD players, MP3 units, wands, auto-triggered mechanisms), DVDs (with and without audio menus and on-off options), broadcast (via a seondary audio program-SAP-channel), film (via CD sync, FM radio or infra-red systems, or smartphone downloads), and on the web (embedded or with and without players that allow for an on-off option).   The descriptions have been voiced live, recorded, scripted, or extemporaneous—or by use of a combination of these methods.

Thus, this dissertation is structured so as to convey my experience in all audio description formats and mechanisms. It begins with an

- Introduction and my
- Initial Observations-State of the Art and Literature

followed by a statement of my

- Objectives and Hypothesis and the
- Theoretical Framework and Methodology for my discussion.

The bulk of this dissertation is

- THE CORPUS: "The Visual Made Verbal – A Comprehensive Training Manual and Guide to the History and Applications of Audio Description"

including practica for the student of description. The corpus will be published by prior arrangement with the American Council of the Blind based in Arlington, VA in the United States of America. It concludes with a discussion of the

- Development of The Corpus and its implications
- Further Research and an extensive bibliography.

A special feature is the dissertation's "associated web site": www.thevisualmadeverbal.com which is available to all readers of this dissertation and the subsequent publication of the corpus. Use of all figures, photographs and video elements are made either under fair use or with the kind permission of the content owners as noted throughout the text.

3.3 Objectives and Hypothesis

- To develop an overarching (applicable to all genres/formats, e.g., performing arts, media, visual art, special events, etc.) guide or manual for the training of describers based on my background as the most experienced trainer of describers worldwide including a review of standards as they currently exist (what constitutes quality description and how can it best be taught).

Over the last three decades, having introduced description techniques and trained prospective describers in thirty-four nations and more than thirty states in the U.S., I have developed a range of exercises and practices that I will share in a structured approach to building an awareness of the audience for whom description is intended and creating effective methodologies for conveying visual images with language.

As noted above, this Ph.D. project is grounded in my training approach developed in part by my review of extant material and development of overarching audio description guidelines, applicable to various genres: media, performing arts and visual art. A variety of documents already exist that address aspects of audio descrisption technique. My aim is not to "reinvent the wheel"; I want to cull from these documents—pull together the "best of the best"—and through a "wiki-dot" post of my dissertation material on the Internet potentially allow description enthusiasts to provide comments on my compilation of material. I believe that this approach will best reflect a broad diversity of opinion, process, practice and involvement.

-To develop a hypothesis regarding the development of literacy and the use of audio description in connection to picture books for small children and children's videos.

-To develop a hypothesis suggesting that audio description for dance performance can be informed and enhanced by Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) and determine whether LMA techniques are effective tools for the dance or movement describer.

3.4 Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The focus of my PhD work is the development of an overarching (applicable to all genres/formats, e.g., performing arts, media, visual art, special events, etc.) guide or manual for the training of audio describers. In conjunction with the production of the dissertation, I have an agreement with the American Council of the Blind (ACB) for: a) the establishment of ACB-sponsored guidelines/best practices for the practice of audio description, and b) the publication of a manual/manuscript based on this dissertation along with an associated website.

Thus, this dissertation is not research-based, in the formal, academic sense. Rather it is based on the practical application of fundamentals and techniques, discussed throughout this dissertation. It is the result of over three decades of work in the field of audio description.

A portion of my work during the development of this dissertation has involved the production of professional description for a range of genres. This activity has been invaluable in fine-tuning my approach to quality description production—all activity has been reviewed not only by clients but also by experienced consumers of audio description. This work includes a range of genres; the projects noted in each genre represent only a sampling my audio description work in each area:

- VIDEO: Arts & Entertainment Network documentary *Barack Obama* for Described and Captioned Media Program (DCMP);
- BROADCAST TELEVISION: *Monica and David* an HBO documentary;
- FEATURE FILM: *Saving Private Ryan, Mrs. Doubtfire, Aladdin, Meet the Parents*
DVD: the SHOUT Factory DVD of *The Miracle Worker*;
- INDEPENDENT FILM: *War Against The Weak*, presented at the "disThis" film series in New York City;
- EDUCATIONAL VIDEO: dozens of videos and audio described tours for the National Park Service including The White House visitor center—see *Where History Lives* at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1vUruvnN9Xw;
- MUSEUMS: the Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History—*The Star-Spangled Banner—The Flag That Inspired the National Anthem* exhibit accessible at: http://americanhistory.si.edu/starspangledbanner/mp3/Complete.mp3;
- WEB-BASED VIDEO: *Count Us In*" for the United Nations/International Labour Organization (Geneva) at: http://www.ilo.org/public/english/disability/countusinad/countusinad.mov ;
- PERFORMING ARTS: hundreds of performances including theater and opera at the John F. Kennedy Center, Arena Stage, Wilma Theater, the National Theater, Ford's Theater, and, in particular, Open Circle Theatre and Axis Dance Company;

and live events/tours for the United States Department of Justice, tours of The White House (East and West Wings), and cruises for The Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines.

Similarly, I have conducted a broad range of description training workshops throughout the United States and internationally (34 nations at this writing), for entities including:

- work as a member of the Federal Communications Commission "Video Programming Access Advisory Committee" charged with crafting recommendations to the FCC for the implementation of mandated description for broadcast television in the United States;
- ongoing participation as a member of International Telecomunications Union-Telecommunications Standardization Bureau Focus Group on Audio Visual Accessibility;
- the World Blind Union in Geneva, Switzerland;
- the Disability Network of New York City;
- the International Pacific Rim Conference on Disability and the Hawaii Council of the Blind;
- the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired;
- the American Council of the Blind's Audio Description Project Audio Description Institute;
- the International Association of Audio Information Services;
- the Brazilian/International Translation Forum in Ouro Preto, Brazil;
- the Third International Conference "Media For All" at Universiteit Antwerpen in Antwerp, Belgium;
- the Third International Conference on the Inclusive Museum in Istanbul, Turkey;
- the International Conferences on the Arts and Society in Venice, Italy (a paper presentation on description and Laban Movement Analysis);
- Sydney, Australia; Vision Australia in Melbourne and Sydney, Australia—listen to my interview with Vision Australia Radio at http://www.visionaustralia.org/docs/Talking%20Vision%20021%20Week%20of%2023%20Aug%202010%20Week35.mp3;
- the International Listening Association Conference;
- Media for All, 2010 in Berlin, Germany;
- VIZIRIS (Netherlands Council of the Blind) and the European Council of the Blind;
- SoundFocus in Amsterdam, The Netherlands;
- the Seattle Art Museum on the American west coast;
- the Americans for the Arts, arts access webinar;
- the Indian Translators Association in New Delhi, India;
- KL VISION 2011 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia;
- National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission in Bangkok, Thailand**;**
- Arts and Disabilities Association of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China;
- Innovative Center for Cultural and Creative Industries, Tamkang University, Taipei, Taiwan;
- the Audio Engineering Society Conference in New York, New York;
- the International Seminar on Translation and Universal Accessibility in Granada, Spain;
- the Icelandic Association of the Blind in Reykjavik, Iceland;
- the International Association of Translation and Intercultural Studies, Queen's University in Belfast, Northern Ireland;
- the Montclair Art Museum in Montclair, New Jersey;
- the American Association of Museums conference in Houston, Texas;
- the Social Security Administration in Baltimore, Maryland;
- the Advanced Research Seminar on Audio Description in Barcelona, Spain;
- the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois;
- the Points of View Conference, Jagiellonian University/UNESCO, Krakow, Poland;
- the Association of Performing Arts Presenters and the National Endowment for the Arts in New York, New York;

- the VSA Arts International Conference in Washington, DC.; and
- the South African Council of the Blind in Cape Town, Durban, and Johannesburg.

In addition, I established the world's first web-based audio description training course at the "Fractured Atlas" web site: http://www.fracturedatlas.org/u/courses/46; and began teaching the United States' first semester-long audio description course at a community college: Montgomery College in the Washington, DC area. In Fall 2013, I will teach a semester-long course in audio description at George Mason University in Fairfax, VA, USA.

During the period of preparation of this dissertation, I also published three papers directly related to the material in my dissertation:
"Audio Description: An Aid to Literacy"; The International Journal of the Book, Volume 6, Number 3, 2009;
"Listening to Movement: LMA and Audio Description" (co-authored with Esther Geiger); The International Journal of the Arts in Society, Volume 5, Number 1, 2010.
"Teaching Audio Description: An On-line Approach," Brazilian Journal of Visual Translation, Volume 12, Number 12, 2012.

Upcoming training events and presentations include the second meeting of the Video Description Development and Research Center in San Francisco, CA; George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia; the Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, the Israeli Association of the Blind in Tel Aviv, Israel; the Council for Exceptional Children conference in Denver, Colorado; the Canadian Association of Translators in Waterloo, Ontario; and the implementation of an audio described tour for visitors to The White House in Washington, DC.

Progress continues on the review of a draft of national guidelines for description (subsequent drafts will be posted to a wiki-site and available for discussion by AD enthusiasts world-wide); discussion of a certification process for describers; and a review of how people who are blind can be involved in the production of description. With respect to description and its benefits for literacy, I created and implemented (in conjunction with the Described and Captioned Media Program of the National Association of the Deaf) the "Listening Is Learning Campaign" (http://www.dcmp.org/ai/listeningislearning/) and its "Young Described Film Critic" contest: six awards made to blind students, aged 10-16, in recognition of their written reviews of described media.

Finally, I conducted an extensive interview with Chet Avery, a blind man and former U.S. Department of Education official, the first individual to propose an audio description funding effort (c. 1960s); and obtained Gregory Frazier's Masters thesis on the development of audio description for *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (c. 1978): "The Autobiography of *Miss Jane Pittman*: An All-audio Adaptation of the Teleplay for the Blind and Visually Handicapped."

Throughout this latest period of my work building the background for this dissertation, I have reviewed description standards/guidlines as they currently exist ***** (see below) focusing on what constitutes quality description and how it can best be taught. The most vexing issue I've encountered in the consideration of the various standards/guidelines/best practices created to date

(as the foundation for a comprehensive training manual) is the search for consensus among colleagues in this field and experienced users of description. Many consider the evaluation of description to be principally a subjective activity, subject to individual preference or taste. I maintain that the development of description can be based on solid fundamentals and guidelines which ensure quality description according to objective considerations. In addition, the practice of providing description in certain genres (primarily the performing arts) has historically been offered by non-professional volunteers who are often resistant to setting standards and/or establishing a certification program for describers and/or the companies that coordinate description production.

*
- Art Education for the Blind's "Making Visual Art Accessible to People Who Are Blind and Visually Impaired"
- SPAIN: Audio description for visually impaired people. Guidelines for audio description procedures and for the preparation of audio guides
- IRELAND: http://www.universaldesign.ie/
- "Audio Description Techniques" by Joe Clark (Canada)
- "Audio Description: The Visual Made Verbal" by Joel Snyder from The Didactics of Audio Visual Translation, edited by Jorge Diaz Cintas, John Benjamins Publishing, London, England and on-line course for Fractured University
- Described and Captioned Media Program "Description Key" (developed by DCMP and the American Foundation of the Blind)
- ITC (Independent Television Commission) Guidance on Audio Description (U.K.)
- National Captioning Institute Described Media "Style Guide"
- Audio Description Coalition Standards and Code of Conduct (the ADC Code of Conduct is reprinted, with permission, at the end of this document)

4. THE CORPUS

4.A.   ***THE VISUAL MADE VERBAL: A COMPREHENSIVE TRAINING MANUAL AND GUIDE TO THE HISTORY AND APPLICATIONS OF AUDIO DESCRIPTION***

BY JOEL SNYDER, PHD – UNIVERSITAT AUTONOMA DE BARCELONA, 2013

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8.11   Associated Web Site—www.thevisualmadeverbal.com [User Name:
VisualVerbal; Password: **Udescribe**] (UNDER CONSTRUCTION)

Chapter 9 – BIBLIOGRAPHY

FOREWORD
By Stevie Wonder *

* Mr. Wonder has been contacted; use of this Foreword is pending his agreement.

Isn't It Lovely – Access To Images

Audio description is a topic that's near and dear to me. As a successful artist, I know first-hand about the vibrant cultures that are a part of American life. And as a man who has spent the bulk of his life without sight, I also know that all too many elements of our culture have been inaccessible to people who are blind or have low vision for way too long.

Back in 2005, I produced, for the first time in music history, a music video of my song "So What The Fuss" with a descriptive audio track, recorded by hip hop star Busta Rhymes, making the piece accessible to people who are blind or have low vision.

But what about television, film, museums, performing arts? Audio description is now being used more frequently to create access—but so much more needs to be done. I think that Joel Snyder's book goes a long way toward helping people become top-notch describers and boosting awareness of description among the general public. When description is as well-understood as captioning and sign interpretation for people who are deaf, then I bet we'll see far more of it. And we'll see more blind folks out and about and becoming more important members of the community.

Wouldn't that be lovely?

PREFACE
By Kim Charlson, President, American Council of the Blind

Access to Culture

"What's happening now?" is the proverbial question whispered by a blind or visually impaired person at a cultural event. Enjoying the experience while being compelled to rely on the description of a friend or family member has made attending cultural events a bit tricky. The ultimate hope may be that the plot be understandable and heavy on the dialogue.

Cultural activities are an important element of our society, often expressing values, trends, fads, historical perspectives, or future directions. People who are blind or visually impaired want and need to be a part of society in all its aspects. Audio description provides the means for blind or visually impaired people to have full and equal participation in cultural life, accessibility to an event, and the right to be first-class citizens. In short, the ability to contribute to, participate in, and enjoy the treasures that society offers.

Hopefully, the description is a vividly written, detailed explanation of what is happening so that interpretation can be left up to the blind audience member, just as it is left up to a sighted person. It provides a fully accessible performance and places the blind audience member in an equal position to discuss the event, how it ended, and what happened in its various parts. Audio description allows for the ultimate decision as to whether they liked the event to be made by the blind person.

Audio description is truly the key to providing accessible experiences for blind or visually impaired individuals. The blindness community has experienced that access on a small scale and is ready for more cultural access opportunities with audio description in the future. It can be done!

Equal access shouldn't be considered a luxury but rather an opportunity to broaden and reach out to a new audience who wants to attend events and will return time and time again. Audio description gives blind audience members the freedom to attend an event and not rely on others to tell them "what's happening."

DEDICATION

For Esther and Emerie

My love and respect for them is ... indescribable.

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- Joyce Adams, Jack Gates, and Marc Okrand, National Captioning Instutute;
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- Shakila Maharaj, Durban; Dr. Jan-Louis Kruger, Johannesburg; and Jeremy Opperheim, Cape Town, South Africa;
- Tricia McCauley and Bill Hensel, top-notch audio description voice talents;
- Dr. Josh Miele, Smith-Kettlewell Eye Research Institute and director, Video Description Research and Development Center, San Francisco;
- Jesse Minkert and Joan Rabinowitz, Arts and Visually Impaired Audiences, Seattle;
- Karen Pelz-Strauss, Esq., Federal Communications Commission;
- Suzanne Richard, Open Circle Theatre;
- Denise Rova, Perspectiva, Moscow, Russia;
- Dr. William Rowland, former president, World Blind Union;
- Kamal Sinclair and Adam Natale, Fractured Atlas, New York, NY;
- Judy Smith and Mollie McFarland, Axis Dance Company;
- Bill Stark, former director, Described and Captioned Media Program;
- Paula Terry, former Director of AccessAbility, National Endowment for the Arts;
- Ed Walker, former "Joy Boy", long-time inspiration, and voicer of the audio described tour of The White House;
- Dr. Alan Woods, Ohio State University;
- Beth Ziebarth, Director of Accessibility, Smithsonian Institution;

- my many audio description clients and colleagues world-wide including: Kristinn Einarsson, Blindrafelagid, Reykjavic, Iceland; William Kleinbaum and Adina Tal, Nalaga'at Theater, Tel

Audio Description Logos

Figure 1.
The "audio description" logo, above, was developed in the United States by the Graphic Artists Guild and the National Endowment for the Arts. The logo is freely available for download at:

https://www.graphicartistsguild.org/resources/disability-access-symbols/

Others used include:

Figure 2.   Figure 3.   Figure 4.   Figure 5.

Figure 6.   Figure 7.   Figure 8.

Chapter One

Introduction

In some ways, for an access technique/form of audiovisual translation that is over 30 years old as a formal practice or area of inquiry, a great deal of progress has been made. Most notably in the U.K., where a mandate exists (albeit relatively modest) for description on braodcast television, significant strides have been made in developing the state of this art, for media, in performance (including sporting engagements), and for exhibitions.

But as far as the actual practice of audio description, other countries fall far behind, including my own United States, the birthplace of the technique. It is noteworthy too that practically all research in this field originates in Europe where description is considered a form of translation and studied as such. An informal survey of American graduate programs reveals no "homes" for advance study of audio description.

There is currently no comprehensive, publically-available training manual for the practice of audio description in the range of genres or formats for which description can be effective--or a guide for the training of trainers. This relates directly to research I have been conducting on description standards as they currently exist (what constitutes quality description and how can it best be taught). In addition, little exists that accurately "describes" the history of audio description's development. Further, I have a special interest in certain areas: can description affect literacy?; what does audio description for dance performance have in common with movement analysis?

Bernd Benecke (2004: 78) notes that audio description is "as old as sighted people telling visually impaired people about visual events happening in the world around them." Pujol and Orero (2007: 49-60) add an interesting twist on that perspective: "While it is true that research in the field has just started, with no PhD to date, we believe we should take into consideration the many studies and range of experience which already exists, since this may shed some light on the topic and further the insight of new research." They cite "ekphrasis" (or "ecphrasis"), " a literary figure that provides the graphic and often dramatic description of a painting, a relief or other work of art. This rhetorical phenomenon is common in the epic poems of Ancient Greece."

But I have noted that audio description as a formal process of translation and accessibility is just over 30 years old—if one counts as its genesis in the literature as the landmark 1978 Masters thesis by Gregory T. Frazier, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman: An All-audio Adaptation of the Teleplay for the Blind and Visually Handicapped.*

Since that time, the vast bulk of serious study of audio description has been in Europe as a form of "audio-visual translation." The field of study derives from/relates to a focus on subtitles for video and film. With the majority of commercial media originating in the United States of America, in English, access to this work for speakers of other languages happens via subtitling or dubbing. Audio description represents another kind of "translation" in media—from visual images to words for the benefit of those who have no access to the visual image. Unlike most "light dependent" people, people who are blind or have low vision speak a language that is not

dependent on the visual. Consequently, audio description has been embraced as a new field of study in academic programs that encourage the exploration of audio-visual translation. (See Bibliography.)

So audio description can no longer be considered in its infancy—perhaps it is in its adolescence, with new techniques on the horizon, aesthetic innovations incorporating description within the material it supports, and broadened access to new media and varied settings for increased numbers of people who are blind or have low vision.

Attitudes Are The Real Disability

Who Are "The Blind"? They are *not* "the blind." They are individuals – housewives, scientists, artists, business people. They are you – or me – at some point in our lives.

The American Foundation for the Blind reports that 21.2 million Americans have vision loss; in 2007, Nigeria's Minister of Health reported that the number of people who are blind worldwide is likely to increase to 75 million by the year 2020. While description was developed for people who are blind or visually impaired, many others may also benefit from description's concise, objective "translation" of the key visual components of various art genres and social settings. Audio Description is an "assistive technology"; it is meant to enhance, not replace the user's own powers of observation.

Disability is indiscriminate and universal -- and the responsibility of us all. It demands attention from us regardless of race, age, size, gender. "The blind" don't exist. They are unique individuals living with some degree of vision loss as the result of a wide range of causes. Most users of description are not totally blind; indeed, only 1-2% of the legally blind are congenitally blind (blind from birth); others are adventitiously blind or developed total blindness later in life. Most at one point had all or some of their sight and now they may have only peripheral vision, they may see only shapes, light and dark, colors, movement, shadows, blurs, or "blobs" -- or have "tunnel vision." Only 10% know Braille.

The following images will provide a glimpse at the effect of various low vision conditions (definitions from Wikipedia):

Figure 9. Myopia (near-sighted): a condition of the eye where the light that comes in does not directly focus on the retina but in front of it. This causes the image that one sees when looking at a distant object to be out of focus, but in focus when looking at a close object.

Figure 10.

Hyperopia (farsighted): a defect of vision caused by an imperfection in the eye (often when the eyeball is too short or the lens cannot become round enough), causing difficulty focusing on near objects, and in extreme cases causing a sufferer to be unable to focus on objects at any distance. As an object moves toward the eye, the eye must increase its optical power to keep the image in focus on the retina. If the power of the cornea and lens is insufficient, as in hyperopia, the image will appear blurred.

Figure 11. Macular Degeneration: a medical condition which usually affects older adults and results in a loss of vision in the center of the visual field (the macula) because of damage to the retina. It occurs in "dry" and "wet" forms. It is a major cause of blindness and visual impairment in older adults (>50 years). Macular degeneration can make it difficult or impossible to read or recognize faces, although enough peripheral vision remains to allow other activities of daily life.

Figure 12. Glaucoma: an eye disease in which the optic nerve is damaged in a characteristic pattern. This can permanently damage vision in the affected eye(s) and lead to blindness if left untreated. It is normally associated with increased fluid pressure in the eye.

Figure 13. Astigmatism: an optical defect in which vision is blurred due to the inability of the optics of the eye to focus a point object into a sharp focused image on the retina. This may be due to an irregular or toric curvature of the cornea or lens. The two types of astigmatism are regular and irregular.

Figure 14. Cataract: a clouding of the lens inside the eye which leads to a decrease in vision. It is the most common cause of blindness and is conventionally treated with surgery. Visual loss occurs because opacification of the lens obstructs light from passing and being focused on to the retina at the back of the eye.

National Eye Institute, National Institutes of Health

Figure 15. Retinal Detachment: a disorder of the eye in which the retina peels away from its underlying layer of support tissue. Initial detachment may be localized, but without rapid treatment the entire retina may detach, leading to vision loss and blindness.

A true story: a blind fellow visiting a museum with some friends was once asked, "Excuse me, but what you doing in a museum? You can't see any of the exhibits." His response? "I'm here for the same reason anyone goes to a museum.   I want to learn, I want to know and be a part of our culture." His inability to see shouldn't deny him access to our culture and I believe it the responsibility of our arts institutions to be as inclusive as possible. Cultural access is everyone's right. There simply is no good reason why a person with a particular disability must also be culturally disadvantaged.

The person that confronted that gentleman in the museum – along with too many organization staff members – have a serious disability: they're "attitude impaired." Indeed, I often wear a pin that reads "Attitudes are the Real Disability."   We all need to understand that notion, particularly when encountering someone who perceives the world in a different way. Being blind is less about the loss of sight and more about perceiving the world in new ways--ways which are not dependent on light. And they are people with a wide range of *abilities*: there are blind skiers (see the American Blind Skiing Foundation: http://www.absf.org/index.htm) , blind photographers (see: http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,1897093,00.html), blind visual artists (see Blind Art at: http://www.blindart.net/), blind bowlers (see the American Blind Bowling Association at: http://www.abba1951.org/), blind attorneys (see the National Association of Blind Lawyers at: http://www.blindlawyer.org/), blind restaurateurs (see a review of "Blindekuh" or "The Blind Cow" at: http://justhungry.com/2006/02/restaurant_blin.html --Note: I've dined at The Blind Cow in Zurich and the food is … "indescribably" delicious!) … and the list could go on.

In June 2013, a "day of solidarity with the blind and visually impaired community" was established in Israel (June 6). A blogger for *Haaretz,* Neta Alexander, writes of a blind marathon runner she interviewed. She asked him what other hobbies he has, besides running. She was surprised by his response: "I love the cinemas. I go almost every week. … I go with a

companion and he fills in details that are very valuable to understanding the plot. … But I especially love the thrill that I feel from the audience. When I'm with a lot of people, I actually can feel when they are going to laugh or when they react with excitement. I experience the film through their feelings.

Ms. Alexander continues: "In one event on the Israeli "Blind Day," the Tel Aviv Cinematheque will allow the audience to experience a movie as blind people experience it: the film *Proof* [see p. 43 and this book's associated web site, #1] will be screened and sighted people will get a blindfold and headphones through which they will hear not only the sounds of the film, but also description of what is happening on the screen. … If you ask yourself why the hell you should try and experience a movie for an hour and a half without seeing it, the answer is quite simple: the event is not only a gesture of solidarity with the blind, but can extend our sensory perception of the world which consists of - unfortunately - almost total reliance on the sense of sight. In fact, the digital culture we live in is so visual, it is hard for us to imagine we could ever live differently. But in early societies, for example, there were communities that were based on oral traditions passed orally from generation to generation. Humans relied on memory, learned to memorize complex mythologies with dozens of characters and numerous events. Before the invention of writing our ears were as dominant as our eyes, as were the senses of smell and taste, which allowed people to identify hazards. … Life in a visually-oriented society completely changed the way our brain works: from the loss of the ability to memorize phone numbers (not to mention texts, songs and speeches) to our virtual addiction to visual stimuli."

Avraham Rabby (born blind) writing in *The Jerusalem Post* of Israel's day of solidarity with the blind and visually impaired community, provides an important alternative perspective: "On that day, you will be able to participate in numerous events supposedly aimed at raising your awareness of the nature of blindness, of how blind people live their daily lives and of what problems they face. … At the Knesset, some Knesset members will be called upon to blindfold themselves and compete against a team of blind athletes in a game of "goal-ball," a sport specially designed for the blind. At other venues, people will be invited to perform everyday tasks, such as eating at a restaurant and shopping for groceries, with their eyes closed or in a totally dark environment."

But Rabby has concerns with this approach to "awareness": "All the blindness-simulation exercises on the Blind Day schedule are gimmicks which assume that the principal problem facing blind people is the actual loss of sight. … [But] the Knesset members who will blindfold themselves and attempt to play goal-ball will never function as practiced blind people do. As soon as they don their blindfolds, they will be virtually paralyzed by fear for their physical safety and exasperated by their inability to perform the simplest of tasks as they did with their eyes open. They will be totally disoriented on the goal-ball court while their blind opponents run rings around them, and their self-confidence will be at zero. As a result, rather than raising the Knesset members' awareness of the true nature of blindness, this experience will reinforce whatever stereotypes and prejudicial notions they may have had about the helplessness and incapacity of blind people."

Unfortunately, what will remain is the real problem facing blind people: "not so much the physical loss of sight but the low expectations the sighted society has of us and the discrimination we constantly encounter."

Rabby's conclusion is that "Blind Day should be used … to compel the Ministry of Education to provide [students] with Braille and recorded textbooks ... to highlight the fact that blind 18-year-olds [are exempt] from mandatory military service, even though … if they insist on serving, only permits them to enlist as volunteers … to protest [the] failure to install voice announcements of bus numbers and routes on all buses and at all bus stops … to [convince people] of the abilities of the blind [with] live demonstrations of blind people at work, competently performing a wide variety of jobs, including jobs with high-level professional and managerial responsibility."

Let's turn it all on its head: can sight be a "liability"? In his book, *An Anthropologist On Mars,* Oliver Sacks' fourth tale, "To See and Not See," is about partially restored sight and how it was not a blessing. This story illustrates how sight is learned from infancy and is largely a constructive and interpretive function of the brain. A man, aged 55, has been blind since age 5. He regains partial vision but is no longer able to walk: his distance perception is skewed and he stumbles over shadows. Eventually, gradually, his vision deteriorates again. This story, based on the experience of one of Sacks' patients, lets us see how the world of the sightless can be rich and fulfilling beyond our imagination.

In the same vein, Brian Friel's play *Molly Sweeney* depicts a woman who is blind and is presented with the possibility of a cure. Her husband, Frank Sweeney, cries "If there is chance, any chance, that she might be able to see, we must take, mustn't we? She has nothing to lose, has she? What has she to lose? Nothing! Nothing!" The play makes evident that Frank Sweeney devalues the life his wife has led as a blind woman. The program notes for the Arena Stage production of the play suggest that "He, like most people, think the blind have been cheated out of living life to the fullest, and at best, can only be pitied. … studies indicate that the sighted know almost nothing about the blind. They are frequently astonished when the blind demonstrate any level of competence. … They cannot comprehend that the blind may be perfectly content to remain so. … The more informed are likely to treat a blind person with more respect."

Still, many people have never met a person who is blind. He/she is A PERSON first—with low or no vision and a wide range of abilities. We must strive to "See the person not the disability." And keep in mind a few things that may help in commjnicating with the community for which we are providing audio description. For instance:

Don't use hand signals.

THE FISH WAS THIS BIG!

People who are blind cannot see waving or pointing hands.

Figure 16.

Don't shout.

HOW ARE YOU

Visually impaired or blind does not mean deaf.

Figure 17.

Don't omit words like "See" or "Look"...

I SAW BILL YESTERDAY

HOW IS HE?

Persons who are visually impaired or blind are not offended by these words and understand that these words are part of normal conversation.

Figure 18.

Do speak directly to a person who is blind.

RESTAURANT

WHAT WILL SHE HAVE TO EAT?

ASK HER.

Don't speak to a family member or friend and ignore a person who is blind. She can speak for herself.

Figure 19.

Don't push, pull or grab a person who is blind.
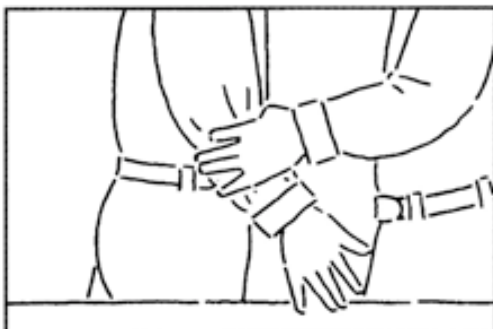
This can cause accidents and is often embarrassing.

Figure 20.

Do offer your arm for assistance.

A person who is blind would rather take your arm than have you take his arm.

Figure 21.

Illustrations from "A Guide for Sighted People" ©Jewish Guild Healthcare, and used with their permission.

It is also important to acknowledge that there is only a thin line between "ability" and "disability."   In working with people who have sight loss, we must strive to dissolve any sense of separateness between those who can see and those who cannot.   It must be remembered that "to be able" is a relative condition -- the great majority of Americans are only "temporarily able-bodied" anyway! Consider Christopher Reeve. One moment he was an actor cast as the cinema's "Superman"; only moments after a horse-riding accident, Mr. Reeve was a quadriplegic.

Was he no longer capable of being a "superman"? Some might say that he demonstrated courage in his struggle to deal his new circumstances – but perhaps that feeds into the notion that people with disabilities are either heroes or helpless. Each situation is different and people who are blind are not helpless—they're not coutrageous. They're simply folks making the most of their abilities – as we all do.

FIGURE 22.

FIGURE 23.
Paul J. Richards/AFP/Getty Images

<u>Seeing With Your Ears: Audio Description, A Definition</u>

Audio Description (AD) makes the visual images of theater, media and visual art accessible for people who are blind or have low vision. Using words that are succinct, vivid, and imaginative (via the use of similes or comparisons), describers convey the visual image that is either inaccessible or only partially accessible to a segment of the population. In addition, the visual image is often not fully realized by people who see, but who may not observe.   Description may also benefit people who prefer to acquire information primarily by auditory means and those who are limited—by proximity or technology, for instance—to accessing audio of an event or production. While description was developed for people who are blind or visually impaired, many others may also benefit from description's concise, objective "translation" of the key visual components of various art genres and social settings.

I believe that Audio Description is a literary art form in itself. It's a type of poetry – a haiku. It provides a verbal version of the visual – the visual is made verbal, aural (*he points to his ear*) and oral (*he points to his mouth*). A haiku because describers must use as few words as possible to convey that visual image for the benefit of people—all people, including children—who are blind or have low vision. Audio Description is an "Assistive Technology"; it is meant to enhance, not replace the user's own powers of observation.

The Describer
The person responsible for developing the description to be voiced.

Voicer (or Voice Talent)
The person who voices the description (in some cases, often in the performing arts, the describer also is the voicer).

(As Canadian writer Joe Clark makes clear, describers and voicers serve the audience and the production, not themselves. He explains: "You're not providing descriptions to show off your vocabulary or to highlight your beautiful voice. You work for the production and the audience. A certain self-effacement is required.")

The Audio Description User
Again—it bears repeating: the American Foundation for the Blind reports that 21.2 million Americans have vision loss.   People who use audio description are unique individuals living with some degree of vision loss as the result of a wide range of causes. Indeed, only 1-2% of the legally blind are totally or congenitally blind (blind from birth). Most users of description are not totally blind; others are adventitiously blind or developed total blindness later in life. Most at one point had all or some of their sight and now they may have only peripheral vision, they may see only shapes, light and dark, colors, movement, shadows, blurs, or "blobs" -- or have "tunnel vision." Only 10% know Braille.

CHAPTER TWO

Audio Description: A Brief History (From Prehistoric Times to the Present)

(This account is from an American perspective; much has been written of audio description development in other countries in other languages, such as Benecke 2004 in German.)

I think it was back in prehistoric times when two sighted cavemen were munching on some leftover saber-tooth tiger. One fellow screamed to the other, "Look out behind you, there's a mastodon coming from the left!" There you have it, ladies and gentlemen -- the origin of Audio Description (AD), for the **sighted** who happen to be looking the wrong way.

Or perhaps an audience member is just a tad myopic (near-sighted): as a result, the caption at the bottom of the following cartoon, viewed as a projected image in a large room with the viewer in the back row, might be totally inaccessible:

Figure 24.
CLOSE TO HOME ©1999 John McPherson. Reprinted with permission of
UNIVERSAL UCLICK. All rights reserved.

My description:

"On a stage – at left, a woman in a flowing gown, her hands clasped in front of her, stands before a kneeling man in a doublet and feathered cap. He croons, 'Why dost thy heart turn away from mine?' At right, a man at a microphone speaks: 'Basically, the guy with the goofy hat is ticked

because this babe has been runnin' around with the dude in the black tights.' The caption reads: 'Many opera companies now provide interpreters for the culturally impaired.'"

Since prehistoric times, description has been employed regularly if not professionally by companions and family of people who are blind or have low vision. Sometimes total strangers, compelled by the urge to "help," will approach a person who is blind and describe/offer directions/provide guidance (whether it's requested/needed or not!) Such is the case in the 2001 film *Amelie*:

> *Description (in italics): Amelie, a young woman with short dark hair, crosses a bridge.*
>
> Narrator: It's a perfect moment. Soft light. A scent in the air. The quiet murmur of the city. She breathes deeply. Life is simple and clear. A surge of love, an urge to help mankind comes over her.
>
> *An elderly man, standing on a sidewalk, taps a white cane on the curb of a busy street. Amelie gazes intently at the man and grabs his arm and ushers him along the street.*
>
> Amelie: Let me help you. Step down. Here we go! The drum major's widow! She's worn his coat since the day he died. The horse's head has lost an ear! [LAUGH] That's the florist laughing. He has crinkly eyes. In the bakery window, lollipops. Smell that! They're giving out melon slices. [VENDOR SHOUT] Sugarplum ice cream! We're passing the park butcher. Ham—79 francs, Spareribs—45! Now the cheese shop. Picadors are 12.90. Cabecaus, 23.50. A baby's watching a dog that's watching the chickens. Now we're at the kiosk by the metro. I'll leave you here. Bye!
>
> *She darts off.*

Figure 25. A still from *Amelie.*

The 1991 film *Proof* features a young man who is blind who photographs his surroundings and has a trusted, sighted friend describe the photos. Eventually, the friend asks "You ever had

moving pictures described?" And they're off to a drive-in (with hilarious results – see this book's associated web site, #1).

In the 1940s, the mayor of New York City, Fiorello LaGuardia (LaGuardia Airport is named in his honor) practiced description – although he may not have realized he was doing so. A newspaper strike was of great concern to New York residents. Mr. LaGuardia, a savvy mayor, refused to side with the striking news workers or the owners of the papers. He took the side of *the people,* taking to the radio on WNYC to give the people what they were missing: the comics! He read the comics on the radio and, of course, interrupted the text with colorful descriptions of the cartoon images – see this book's associated web site, #2.

People will often compare audio description to radio theater. They're both aural conveyances of narrative material. The essential difference, though, is that radio theater assumes all listeners have no access to the visual. Consequently, "visual" elements are conveyed principally by sound effects created by a "foley man." Television, on the other hand, assumes that all patrons can see. Audio description fills in that gap—the gap created when the "default" audience member is an individual with five senses.

Audio description might be more precisely compared to the "play by play" offered by sports announcers on radio broadcasts. Again, the assumption is that all listeners are "blind" and while the sound of the game may be in the background, the commentator will describe visual elements in order to make them accessible to his listeners.

Figure 26. Ronald Reagan, sports announcer for WHO in Des Moines, Iowa, c. 1934. Courtesy Ronald Reagan Library

Early in his career, former president Ronald Reagan was a sports announcer, offering play-by-play of Chicago Cubs baseball games *via telegraph*. During one game in 1934 between the Cubs and their arch rivals the St. Louis Cardinals that was tied 0-0 in the 9th inning, the telegraph went

dead: an often repeated tale of Reagan's radio days recounts how he delivered "play-by-play broadcasts" of Chicago Cubs baseball games he had never seen. His flawless recitations were based solely on telegraph accounts of games in progress. Reagan smoothly improvised a fictional play-by-play (in which hitters on both teams gained a superhuman ability to foul off pitches) until the wire was restored. Reagan says: "There were several other stations broadcasting that game and I knew I'd lose my audience if I told them we'd lost our telegraph connections so I took a chance. I had (Billy) Jurges hit another foul. Then I had him foul one that only missed being a homerun by a foot. I had him foul one back in the stands and took up some time describing the two lads that got in a fight over the ball. I kept on having him foul balls until I was setting a record for a ballplayer hitting successive foul balls and I was getting more than a little scared. Just then my operator started typing. When he passed me the paper I started to giggle - it said: 'Jurges popped out on the first ball pitched.'"

Using only his imagination, Reagan managed to "describe" what *wasn't* happening. Obviously, describers must be faithful to what can be seen, but the difference between a narrative that will conjure images and one that doesn't is often the imagination employed by the describer (see the Training chapter).

So audio description has a place wherever the visual image is important to the experience of an event. I have provided description for office meetings, award ceremonies, parades, sports events, weddings, and even funerals.

And on cruise ships:

Figure 27.
Joel Snyder uses an FM steno mask microphone and transmitter to describe a glass-blowing show for Marlaina Lieberg who uses an earpiece and an FM receiver. The show is aboard a Royal Caribbean Cruise Line ship in Alaska.

Figure 28. Also aboard a Royal Caribbean Cruise Line ship (in the Caribbean), Joel Snyder provides "description" of the lyrics on a karaoke monitor for singer and blind woman Denise Colley (the first known instance of "karaoke for the blind").

And other "live" settings—wherever the visual image is critical to the event.
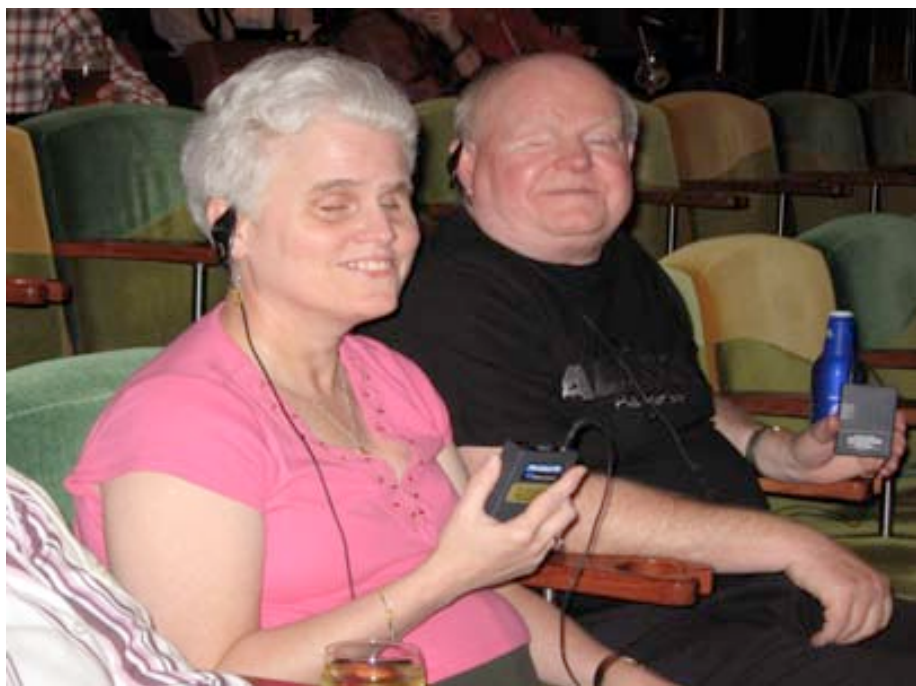
Joel Snyder

Figure 29. Denise and Berl Colley, both blind, in the main theater aboard a cruise ship, display the FM receivers they use to access description being transmitted from another part of the theater.

Figure 30.
President Barack Obama greets the author following a White House ceremony for which audio description was provided.

It's also quite clear that audio description can have a place in office meeting or conference presentations. In a plenary session at the VISION 2008 gathering in Canada, I enjoyed much of what the keynote speaker, a former astronaut, had to say in her future-oriented address. At its end, apparently impressed with the international scope of the conference, she remarked that she hoped to see us again, perhaps – "here." The room erupted in applause and laughter – but I didn't join in, noting that a number of audience members who were blind remained silent, turning to people at their sides. The speaker had flashed a slide of an astronaut with a "VISION" flag, planting it on the moon. Had she prefaced that slide with just a bit of audio description, she would have gracefully included all of the attendees in her concluding remark.

In the 1960s, Chet Avery, a blind theater-lover, now retired from the Department of Education, conceived of audio description as a formal process that could convey the visual images of theater performances to people who are blind or have low vision.

He shared his experience with the concept of audio description in an interview in July 2011. Mr. Avery was born in Sanford, Maine in 1937 and by the age of 17, he lost all vision due to a detached retina. He notes that he had some vision as a teenager but once he had lost all vision, he felt a sense of relief—he no longer had to "spend my life concerned about my eyes."

He was "really into" movies: it was 1954 and "everyone had great voices and there was a lot more storyline than today's films … but they're a visual experience principally."

Mr. Avery recalls that he used talking books with earphones and live readers and soon graduated from high school with honors, pursuing a college education at Harvard. Ultimately, he received a Masters degree from Harvard in education and guidance counseling, taught at private schools and moved to Washington, DC in 1964 to accept a grants management position at what was then the United States Office of Education.

It was a time of increased government focus on domestic programs. The area that managed statistical information and grants for "special education" (programs for children with disabilities) was close to Mr. Avery's office. Part of the special education division office responsibilities involved support for captioning programs for educational video. Avery knew the head of that division at the time – John Goss – and Avery proposed "audio captions" on film for blind people. That was in 1964. (Avery recalls that a non-government worker – Spencer Tracy's wife, Louise Treadwell – was the moving force behind getting captions developed for film. 35mm films were sent to schools with the captions burned in, as was done with silent movies.)

Nothing came of Avery's proposal – his plea fell on the proverbial "deaf ears." Even among other blind people, the notion, according to Avery, seemed "like cheating. Blind people should be as independent as possible, getting along with Braille, tactile techniques and service animals or the white cane." One of Avery's colleagues, Josephine Taylor, a project officer and branch chief with Special Education Services, was a strong advocate for educational services for blind and multiple-handicapped children and supported teacher training programs for those specialized populations. Ms. Taylor, however, believed that "a parent who describes is not helping. [Blind children] should learn to think with their ears. [Using description] is cheating! The visual doesn't exist for that person so you need to orient the child to the world around them using their own capabilities."

In 1967 a new administrator, Dr. Morland Woods, appointed Avery director of the Office for the Disadvantaged and Handicapped. Over the next decade, Avery made links with what was then the Arts Program in the Department of Education and worked actively with Washington, DC-based arts entities on access provisions. Title 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 provided that any organization receiving federal dollars must be accessible – "No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States … shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." In 1998, Title 508 was included in the law requiring government agencies to abide by the following, mentioning audio description specifically: "All training and informational video and multimedia productions which support the agency's mission, regardless of format, that contain visual information necessary for the comprehension of the content, *shall be audio described*." (emphasis added)

As a part of Avery's activity locally, he helped Wayne White, house manager at Arena Stage in Washington, DC, create an access committee to advise Arena on ways to make theater accessible. Much of the focus was on access for people who use wheelchairs as well as the use of a new electronic development: an assistive listening system designed to boost sound for people who are hard-of-hearing.

Once again Avery wondered aloud if the "audio caption" idea could be employed using the same equipment – except with an individual voicing descriptions during the pauses between lines of dialogue and critical sound elements. This time, Avery was among a receptive audience, including fellow committee members Margaret Rockwell, a blind woman with a PhD in Education, and her future husband Cody Pfanstiehl, an expert in media and public relations. Rockwell had founded The Metropolitan Washington Ear, a closed-circuit radio reading service for people who are blind or for those who don't otherwise have access to print; Avery served on its original board of directors. The Ear had dozens of volunteers with excellent language and speech skills; Dr. Pfanstiehl realized that she had the capacity to develop an audio description service that could realize Avery's "audio caption" concept.

From there, in 1981, the Washington Ear's Audio Description program was developed. I was already a volunteer reader at The Ear, and a professional voice talent/actor and English teacher. (When I began reading for The Ear in 1972, one of my assignments was The Washington Post on Sundays – and just like Mayor LaGuardia, I became a describer of "the funnies"!) I became one of the first audio describers in The Ear's program, the world's first ongoing audio description service.

At the Arena committee's last meeting, White recited the list of access features that the group had recommended, emphasizing the recent installation of an "assistive listening system" to boost sound for the benefit of theater-goers who had difficulty hearing. Folks using the system would don earphones and listen to theater dialogue and music amplified by microphones placed on stage. White asked: "Is there anything else?" Avery piped up: "There's one more thing! Could we have the plays described, perhaps using the same listening system?" Rockwell noted that her radio-reading service had recording equipment (for recording pre-show material) and a core of talented readers who might serve as describers. That was in 1980. The Pfanstiehls gathered about 5 or 6 of volunteers that she hand-selected. As a part of that small group, we began to define and develop what was to become the world's first ongoing audio description service.

On the U.S.'s west coast: Gregory Frazier, a professor at San Francisco State University, formally developed the concepts behind audio description and general guidelines for its use. His work happened in the 1970s, unknown to Mr. Avery and Dr. Pfanstiehl on the east coast. In its 1996 obituary of Gregory T. Frazier, the New York Times called Frazier "a San Francisco visionary who hit on the idea of providing simultaneous electronic audio descriptions for the blind so they could enjoy more than the dialogue of movies, television and theater performances."

In the early 1970s, Frazier was relaxing at his home with a friend who happened to be blind. The evening's entertainment? *High Noon* with Gary Cooper, playing on television. The NY Times article relates that "At the friend's request, Frazier, speaking rapidly between the lines of dialogue, provided terse descriptions of the scenes and actions. The friend was so appreciative that by the time Gary Cooper had shot Frank Miller dead, ripped the star off his own chest and thrown it to the ground before climbing into a carriage and driving off with Grace Kelly, Mr. Frazier … was a changed man."

Frazier realized that the concise descriptions he provided for his friend extemporaneously could be thought-through, edited, recorded and played through FM radio receivers at movies – or carried over secondary audio channels on television. Frazier, a graduate of San Francisco State University, returned to college to obtain a Masters degree in broadcast journalism, developing a thesis—"television for the blind"— that explored the use of description to enhance the 1974 television production of *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman.* Over the next ten years, Mr. Frazier worked in communication arts at the university, ultimately founding the non-profit corporation AudioVision SF in 1991 to provide description for the performing arts in San Francisco-area venues.

Late in Frazier's tenure at San Francisco State University, August Coppola, the head of the communication department at the university, became an enthusiastic supporter of the concept Frazier continued to nurture. Mr. Coppola's brother, the director Francis Ford Coppola, and Frazier established the Audio Vision Institute and Coppola agreed to incorporate audio description for his 1988 movie, *Tucker.*

AudioVision SF still exists, providing description on a regular basis for theater performances throughout the Bay Area. In 2010, Audio Vision SF and Gregory Frazier posthumously received the Barry Levine Memorial Lifetime Achievement Award in Audio Description, presented by the American Council of the Blind's Audio Description Project.

The Washington Ear's service premiered on April 1, 1981 at an Arena Stage performance of George Bernard Shaw's *Major Barbara.* By the end of the 1980's, over 50 theaters throughout the United States were producing described performances. Over the next two decades, audio description accompanied a wide range of arts events.

Between 1982 and 1985, The Ear experimented with offering description for television, including an unsuccessful attempt to "simul-sync" description delivered over FM radio with television broadcasts. Eventually, Dr. Barry Cronin and Laurie Everett of the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) station WGBH in Boston, MA approached the Pfanstiehls about developing AD scripts that could be recorded on a secondary audio track. This alternative audio track would be transmitted over the "SAP" (Secondary Audio Program—also known as "MTS" or Multichannel Television Sound) channel that was available on most stereo televisions in the United States.

In 1984, the Secondary Audio Program ("SAP") or Multichannel Television Sound ("MTS") standard was established in the United States by the National Television Systems Committee ("NTSC") as part of an auxiliary audio channel for analog television.

Initially, the primary broadcasting application of SAP was for the voluntary transmission of a secondary language program dialogue audio track, such as the Spanish translation of an English language program.   With the realization that SAP could also be used for delivery of other program related audio services, video description for broadcast and cable television was born.

On January 18, 1988, the first national television broadcast was made available with audio description—a program in the PBS series *American Playhouse*—Eugene O'Neill's *Strange*

Interlude. (I feel honored to have written and voiced the audio description for the *American Playhouse* productions of *Native Son, Rocket To The Moon,* and *The Diaries of Adam and Eve.*)

The PBS effort, led by the WGBH Educational Foundation, became a year-long nationally broadcast test of what would, in 1990, become the Descriptive Video Service, as a part of the WGBH Educational Foundation. For the first time, synchronized, pre-recorded audio description was broadcast for the season's 26 *American Playhouse* productions.

[International activity: While this overview is focused on the United States, it is important to note that the earliest known audio described television was transmitted in 1983 by the Japanese commercial broadcaster NTV. Its descriptions continued on an occasional basis and, interestingly, were "open", added to the program's original soundtrack and heard by all viewers. In the late 1980's some occasional open broadcasts were also made by Television de la Cataluna in Spain.

By the mid-1980's audio description was in place in the United Kingdom, premiering in a small theatre--the Robin Hood--at Averham, Nottinghamshire; this was the locale for the first described performances in Europe.

Today, U.K. leads the world with the number of venues (for live performance, film screenings and DVDs) which regularly offer audio described performances. (In addition, certain movie theaters in the U.K. and the U.S. have offered live reading of audio description scripts via the FM Radio or infrared equipment used in performing arts settings, while in France the Association Valentin Hauy established a portable service travelling throughout the country giving "performances" to audiences of people who are blind or visually impaired.)

In 1991, the U.K. also was first to establish, under the rubric of the ITC (the Independent Television Commission, its duties now a part of OFCOM, the Office of Communications), a working group (the Audetel consortium) charged with exploring all the issues associated with beginning regular broadcasts of described programs, concentrating initially on the development of descriptive styles and guidelines.]

The first film screening with audio description (and closed captions) was *The Jackal*, exhibited at a California movie theater in 1997. *The Jackal*'s release was followed by the release of *Titanic*--the first major studio direct-release of a movie with audio description (and closed captions). In 1992, WGBH began its Motion Picture (MoPix) Access project providing "closed" audio description (via headsets) for first-run films in selected theatres nationwide (in conjunction with its Rear Window System for displaying captions). *Forrest Gump,* with "open" audio description, was screened on December 28, 1994 at the Cineplex Odeon/Fairfax Theater in Los Angeles, CA, sponsored by TheatreVision, a subsidiary of Retinitis Pigmentosa International.

In the late 1980's and early 1990s, the first "audio described tours" of museum exhibits and National Park Service exhibits were developed. In 1986, The Metropolitan Washington Ear created the first audio described exhibit tours – recorded on audio cassettes – for the Statue of

Liberty and Castle Clinton in New York State. Others soon followed – I produced an audio cassette based tour of the Clark County Heritage Museum in Henderson, NV chronicling the development of gaming and the area around Las Vegas, NV.

Description for broadcast television continued with funding from the U.S. Department of Education, and other providers joined WGBH. In 1988, James Stovall of Tulsa, OK, a blind man, produced audio description of classic TV shows and movies for home videos and one year later Stovall founded the Narrative Television Network to offer description for movies on cable television. In 2009, James Stovall and the Narrative Television Network received the Barry Levine Memorial Lifetime Achievement Award in Audio Description, presented by the American Council of the Blind's Audio Description Project.

In 1990, The Metropolitan Washington Ear created the first audio description soundtrack for an IMAX film, *To Fly!*, premiering at the Smithsonian Institution's Air and Space Museum. It was soon followed by other IMAX film with description – including *Blue Planet*, for which I wrote and voiced the audio description – and my audio description for the Air & Space Museum's Planetarium show *And A Star To Steer Her By*.

Also in 1990, the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences acknowledged the burgeoning audio description efforts for television by awarding special "Emmys" to four organizations that brought audio description to television: AudioVision Institute (Gregory Frazier), the Metropolitan Washington Ear (Margaret Pfanstiehl), the Narrative Television Network (James Stovall), and PBS/WGBH (Barry Cronin and Laurie Everett).
Note: In 2009, following the death of Margaret Pfanstiehl, the American Council of the Blind's Audio Description Project (created and directed by this author) established its Margaret Pfanstiehl Memorial Research and Development Award in Audio Description.

In live theatre, Rod Lathim, the Artistic Director of Access Theater, developed the first audio description script for the company's touring production of *Storm Reading*: this allowed *any* performance to be audio described as opposed to the usual practice of providing AD only at selected performances. Audio description was growing and growing up—its consumers and practitioners began to gather to discuss common concerns. A passionate advocate for and practitioner of audio description, Rod Lathim brought together a small group of people involved with description at a pre-conference meeting of the Association for Theater and Accessibility – that was in 1994 and I was pleased to be a part of that group. Access Theater produced a video, *Theater Without Limits* –
it provides an excellent overview of assistive technology for live performing arts events: see this book's associated web site, #3.

Also on this book's associated web site (#28) is a videotaped live performance of Access Theater's landmark piece *Storm Reading* with description provided by this author.

About thirty states in the U.S. have AD in live theater and in museums via live description, audio tours or trained docents.

In a live theater setting, at designated performances (depending on the availability of the service

and how it is administered), people desiring audio description are provided headsets/earplugs attached to small receivers, about the size of a small pocket calculator. Often, before the show, a taped or "live" version of the program notes plays through the headsets, after which a trained describer narrates the performance from another part of the theater via an FM radio or infrared transmitter. The narrator guides the audience through the production with concise, objective descriptions of new scenes, settings, costumes, and body language, all slipped in between portions of dialogue or songs.

Joel Snyder

Figure 31.

The FM radio steno mask microphone, a headset microphone, a portable FM transmitter, an FM receiver with earpiece, a "plug-in" FM transmitter (at rear).

Often, the designated performance is accompanied by a "touch-tour," allowing AD consumers to touch costumes, props, set pieces – even the performers themselves, during a post-show gathering backstage.

Joel Snyder

Figure 32. Theater-goers handle a prop circulated among them during a post-show visit backstage.

In 1995, audio describers and description consumers from across the U.S. and Canada gathered for the establishment of "Audio Description International (ADI)," a meeting hosted by the National Endowment for the Arts (I was the NEA's arts specialist for presenting organizations) and The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC. I was the Chair of the Founding Steering Committee and Alan Woods of Ohio State University became the President of ADI; the organization incorporated in Washington, DC in 1998.

A second gathering was chaired by me and held at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in 2002; Barry Levine was elected President of Audio Description International (ADI). The Conference proceedings for both of these meetings are available on this book's associated web site.

Audio description continued to grow in performing arts settings, principally staffed by volunteer describers using notes gathered at one or two viewings of a performance. Description on broadcast television was also still available, largely due to the ongoing funding from the Department of Education. Leading entities providing description with this support included WGBH/Media Access Group, the Narrative Television Network, Caption Max, Closed Caption Latina (now DiCapta) and the National Captioning Institute. Children's programming was enhanced with the addition of audio description tracks; as the Director of Described Media for the National Captioning Institute for over five years, I coordinated the production of description for shows like *Sesame Street* including *Sesame Street* DVDs as well as the Spanish-language version of the show, *Plaza Sesamo*. NCI also became the only other entity beside WGBH to provide description for first-run feature films—highlights included *Wallace & Gromit and the Curse of the Were-Rabbit, Flags of our Fathers, Dreamgirls* and *Shrek III*.

Figure 33. An excerpt from a *Sesame Street* episode (*Elmo's World)* with description written and voiced for national broadcast by this author is included here: see this book's associated web site, #4.

The process for developing description for film is highlighted in a FOX-TV news broadcast: see this book's associated web site, #5.

The availability of description and captioning on educational media gave rise to the Described and Captioned Media Program (DCMP), administered by the National Association of the Deaf. DCMP exists "to promote and provide equal access to communication and learning for students who are blind, visually impaired, deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind." The DCMP media library has over 4,000 free-loan described and captioned media titles available to its members who can watch media online or order a DVD copy to be shipped to them.

Further, with the support of the Department of Education and the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB), DCMP developed a *Description Key*. The Key began as recommendations,

suggestions, and best practices culled from an extensive literature search and meta-analysis [PDF] in 2006.   AFB assembled an expert panel (of which I was a part) in media description and education for children with visual impairments to help evaluate media description strategies for educational material.

Meanwhile, the Federal Government was taking note of the value of adding audio description to federally-produced or financed media. In 1998, Congress amended the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 by adding Section 508 to require Federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities.   All film, video, multimedia, and information technology produced or procured by Federal agencies must include audio description. Certain agencies, like the National Park Service, have created audio description projects at highly visible parks: for example, I created description for the Death Valley National Park, Philadelphia's Independence Hall, and the Star-Spangled Banner exhibit for the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History.

Indeed, museums can use Audio Description techniques to translate the visual to a sense form that is accessible. Using these techniques for the description of static images and exhibitions, museum docents find that they develop better use of language and more expressive, vivid, and imaginative museum tours, greatly appreciated by all visitors. In this way, docent-led tours are more appropriate for the low-vision visitor and docents find that their regular tours are enhanced.

Some museum administrators are interested in having a recorded tour, specifically geared to people with low vision. Combined with directional information, these recorded tours on audiocassettes enable visitors who are blind to use a simple hand-held audio player to tour at least a portion of the museum independently and with new access to the visual elements of exhibitions. Other curators are interested in having certain videos within an exhibit or a special film described.

An excellent video that encompasses the broad range of access issues involving museums was produced by the American Association of Museums: *Universal Design: Museum Accessibility*: see this book's associated web site, #6.

Another important resource for developing accessibility in a museum or visitor center is the organization Art Beyond Sight (formerly Art Education for the Blind). More information is available at: http://www.artbeyondsight.org/

Returning to highlights in the development of description for broadcast television, in 1997, the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB), published the seminal work *Who's Watching?: A Profile of the Blind and Visually Impaired Audience for Television and Video*, by Jaclyn Packer, and Corinne Kirchner. Based on a survey of blind and visually impaired people, this publication provided detailed demographic information about the experience with and interest in video description as well as viewing habits and preferences among this population. The survey found that blind and visually impaired individuals watch television at comparable rates to the general population. The report also addressed the real life consequences of lack of full access to television programs.

In 1999, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) also acknowledged how AD can enhance popular culture for people who are blind or have low vision. The agency issued its Notice of Proposed Rulemaking for phased-in video description for television and in 2000 the FCC implemented the rules requiring major broadcast networks and cable companies in the top 25 television markets to provide 50 hours of described programming per quarter effective April 2002.

Unfortunately, late in 2002, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia reversed the FCC ruling, finding that the FCC had acted beyond the scope of its authority in adopting those rules. CBS and PBS continue to provide approximately the same 50 or more hours of described programming per quarter. Other broadcast and cable networks also continue to provide varying amounts of described programming.

Essentially, an act of Congress would be required that authorizes the FCC to mandate description on broadcast television. In 2003, Representative Ed Markey (D-MA) introduced a bill to update the FCC's authority to adopt audio (video) description rules; the bill did not pass. In 2005, Senator John McCain (R-AZ) introduced a bill to update the FCC's authority to adopt audio (video) description rules; the bill did not pass.   Largely in response to these events, the Coalition of Organizations for Accessible Technology (COAT) was formed. COAT is a national advocacy organization of almost 300 national, regional, state and community-based disability rights organizations to advocate for legislative and regulatory safeguards that will ensure full communication and video programming access, including the reestablishment of the FCC's 2000 rules regarding description on broadcast television.

It would not be until a new administration and a new Congress before the mandate would be put in place as part of a far-reaching access rights bill—The Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010, signed into law by President Obama on October 8, 2010.

[see http://www.coataccess.org/node/9890]   Figure 34.
President Barack Obama finishes signing the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010 during a ceremony in the East Room of the White House in Washington, Friday, Oct. 8, 2010.

The bill – and its mandate for about 4 hours of description per week by the top 9 broadcasters in the nation's top 25 markets – went into effect on July 1, 2012.

Digital television makes it possible to transmit many secondary signals like that employed for

audio description. Unfortunately, while it is technically possible, broadcasters are reluctant to use bandwidth for additional audio signals, preserving their capacity for bandwidth-devouring video quality.

In 2009, the American Council of the Blind launched its Audio Description Project (ADP) to promote and produce description via a range of initiatives. When Barry Levine passed away, the ADP took over the Audio Description International website and listserve and built various programs: description training, description conferences including awards for leading describers, and young AD consumers who write reviews of described video, a greatly expanded website (www.acb.org/adp) with listings of describers and description programs and services worldwide (but principally in the United States), the production of description for the ABC broadcast of President Obama's inauguration. Several specific projects include: description of the DVD of *The Miracle Worker,* the HBO broadcast of *Monica and David*, and the development of a self-guided, audio described tour of The White House, put in place in January 2013. Most critically, the ADP hopes to establish national, consumer-focused guidelines or best practices for the production of description in a variety of formats, leading to the development of a certification program for professional describers in the United States.

There's still much to be done in other formats: DVDs and downloads via the Internet. The percentage of all video and film that incorporates description is still miniscule. DVDs are an ideal format for description because the audio track can be turned on or off as desired and an audio menu can be programmed. Given that fact, it's unfortunate that there are still so few DVDs produced with description in the United States.

"You can see a lot just by lookin'."

Yogi Berra, philosopher and catcher/manager, NY Yankees

CHAPTER THREE

AUDIO DESCRIPTION TRAINING

In developing audio description for television, a video, for theater, for a museum – in any context – I keep in mind / emphasize four elements which I developed many years ago.

The Fundamentals of Audio Description:

OBSERVATION
EDITING
LANGUAGE
VOCAL SKILLS

The first of these is all about the skill that Sherlock Holmes honed: Observation.

"I Never Noticed That ..." - Learning To See: OBSERVATION

"Those who have never suffered impairment of sight or hearing seldom make the fullest use of these blessed faculties. Their eyes and ears take in all sights and sounds hazily, without concentration and with little appreciation."
Helen Keller
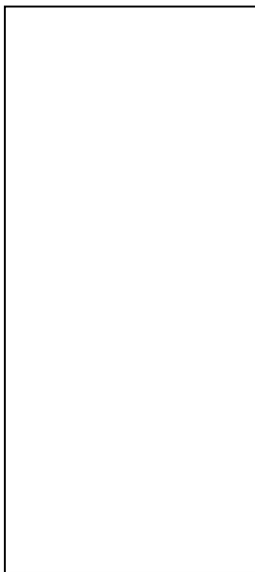
The well-trained describer is an incredibly astute "eye witness."   It's well-known in law enforcement that twenty eyewitnesses may relay twenty different versions of the same event.

Describers must learn how to see the world anew, accurately and with comprehension of all that can be seen.

Figure 35. In profile silhouette, Sherlock Holmes in his trademark deerstalker hat, smoking his curved pipe and gazing through a magnifying glass.

I recall being simply amazed when I first encountered Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's brilliant detective, Sherlock Holmes. Brilliant ... and incredibly observant.

In his book, *Seen/Unseen: A Guide to Active Seeing*, the photographer, John Schaefer, coins the phrase *visual literacy*. This is what describers must nurture. Schaefer refers to the need to "increase your level of awareness and become an active 'see-er'". An effective describer must

what we see."

uskin , British art critic   "See with exactitude."
                             Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, German writer

55

increase his level of awareness and become an active "see-er," develop his "visual literacy," notice the visual world with a heightened sense of acuity, and share those images. The best describers will truly notice all the visual elements that make up an image, just as Emily does in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*. Looking back from the grave, she **sees** for the first time:

"I didn't realize. So all that was going on and we never noticed. Clocks ticking, Mama's sunflowers, food, coffee, new-ironed dresses, hot baths. Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it? Every, every minute?" The Stage Manager answers: "No. The Saints and Poets maybe, they do, some."

And audio describers?

In his *Acting—The First Six Lessons,* Richard Boleslavsky teaches that "We think that we see everything, and we don't assimilate anything. But in the theatre, we can't afford that. We are obliged to notice the material with which we work."

But it is only to the degree that we focus on the task of seeing that we will notice all that there is to see. Intense *concentration* is key. Again, Boleslavsky: "Concentration is the quality which permits us to direct all our … forces toward one definite object and to continue as long as it pleases us to do so – sometimes for a time much longer than our physical strength can endure."

Indeed, the description of a two-and-a-half hour play requires a focus and strength that must be developed. By the end of the performance, a describer should feel exhausted!

Describers must see with a heightened awareness that allows us to enlighten even the sighted but casual observer.

The great philosopher Yogi Berra said it best: "You can see a lot just by looking."   An effective describer must increase his level of awareness and become an active "see-er," develop his "visual literacy," notice the visual world with a heightened sense of acuity, and share those images.

Miss Helen Keller saw the concept clearly: "Those who have never suffered impairment of sight or hearing seldom make the fullest use of these blessed faculties. Their eyes and ears take in all sights and sounds hazily, without concentration and with little appreciation."

In providing a service like audio description, as noted earlier, we establish a foundation of respect for all individuals, and their individuality, and learn to appreciate their abilities. That consciousness starts with our own skills and abilities. When we come to terms with, even embrace our own situations, find and nurture our abilities, we can see things, accomplish things that seem amazing, simply by developing our own capacities. For describers, we start with our sense of sight.

Figure 36.   What do you see in this image?

And in this one?

Figure 37. A face … or a liar?

How about this one?

Figure 38.

Private, commercial entities are well aware of the power of the visual image and spend many thousands of dollars on the development of their logos. As did FedEx, I suspect.

But five block letters, in two colors, arranged so that each letter abuts the one before and after?

Did you see the arrow?

I often ask my students the color of a McDonald's french fries box. Red! Of course – studies show that red, a warm color, also evokes *hunger.* And the color on the inside of the container? Golden and white vertical stripes – so that it looks as though you have many more fries than you've been served!

Figure 39.

An important point: there is often a temptation to "describe" by assigning a label, by naming an object. Labelling is not describing. Indeed, by dismissing the FedEx label by simply acknowledging *what* it is (as opposed to *how* it is), the beginning describer loses the opportunity to truly look at the image and discover its "essence."
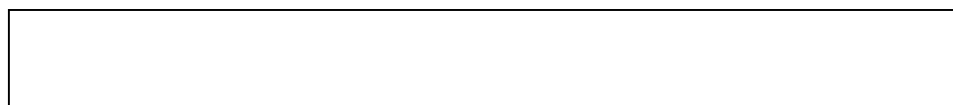
Many factors contribute to what we see/notice/perceive. Magicians know that a prior suggestion can distract you from what he/she wants you to see. The U.K.'s "Transport for London" agency also uses distraction to address a public safety concern (see page 7 of the associated website).

I began this section on Observation with reference to the character created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Sherlock Holmes. You may know that Doyle was a medical doctor. He based his famous detective on his interaction with one of his medical school professors, a Dr. Bell. Bell understood that the best physicians observe their patients carefully, detecting clues to an accurate diagnosis. The two video clips that are cited next, from *The Origins of Sherlock Holmes,* illustrate the importance of thoughtful and thorough observation:

Holmes #1 – See page 8 of the associated website.

But Doyle is not persuaded by the good doctor. He pursues Bell with a challenge:

Holmes #2: See page 9 of the associated website.

Speaking of the distinguished detective – an old Sherlock Holmes joke making the rounds on the Internet finds the humor in a situation where even the obvious is overlooked:

> Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson went on a camping trip. They spent a pleasant day walking in the foothills of the Austrian Alps, and when it got dark, they pitched their tent in a sheltered spot. Dining well on rabbit stew and a bottle of red wine, they both fell asleep before midnight.
>
> Holmes woke a few hours later in the small hours of the morning, grunted and nudged his sleeping companion.
>
> "Watson," he said, "quickly, look up at the sky and tell me what you see."
>
> Watson struggled awake. "I see stars, Holmes," he replied. "Untold numbers of stars."
>
> "And what does that tell you, Watson?" asked Holmes.
>
> Watson thought for a moment. "Well, Holmes, I deduce from the pink dawn light on those clouds that we are in for some good weather this morning. It tells me that there are uncounted stars and galaxies and perhaps thousands of planets. I would guess that the odds are very much against the theory that we are alone in the galaxy. And I look up and feel humble, for I see God's work in the night sky. What does it tell you?"
>
> 'Watson, you fool!" shouted Holmes, "Somebody has stolen our tent!"

Finally, I will often ask my description students to choose a partner from among their fellow trainees and decide on who is "#1" and who is "#2". Then, I ask the couples to stand and face each other. I have the #1 partners, when signalled, move their faces, arms, and torsos in slow deliberate movements; the #2 partners are to *observe their partners carefully* and mirror what they see.

After 30 seconds, I ask them to "switch": the #2 partners initiate movement and the #1 partners become the mirrors.

Thirty seconds elapse again and I have all participants turn their backs on their partners. I ask all to change three things about their presence, their visage: remove a ring, open a button, etc. When done, the trainees turn around to face their partners and must find the three changes.   Did you get all three? Two? Only one? None??!!

Developing a sense of "visual literacy" – nurturing more acute powers of observation – builds a foundation for the skilled describer.

t is only by selection, by elimination, by emphasis, that we get
the real meaning of things."
                                    Georgia O'Keefe, American artist

                                                                    59

Oliver Wendell Holmes, American jurist

What Not To Say ... And When Not To Say It: EDITING

The art of audio description ends up being about describing far less than we see – there's never time enough to convey in words all that is there. As Cody Pfanshtiel remarked many years ago: "The eye is quicker than the fastest of mouths."

And so, the audio describer must Edit.

Description becomes an exercise in what *not* to describe. WE must make choices, decide what is not a priority for description. We leave out far more than we ultimately include in our descriptions.

Describers must cull from what they see, selecting what is most important to convey. "Leaving out all but the essential" is the describer's struggle – Holmes might well have been speaking of the describer's craft (as well as the artist's).

How are those choices made?

We must ask ourselves:

What is most important to an <u>understanding</u> (he points to his head) and <u>appreciation</u> (his hand is on his heart) of the visual image? ("Appreciation" refers to information that conveys mood, color, and other elements that support the image.)

Audio Description is provided for a broad range of users, i.e., people with varying degrees of vision loss, from description enthusiasts who are congenitally blind to those who have a relatively modest level of low vision. Indeed, the percentage of people in our audiences who have never had any useful sight is quite small. This is key – we are providing description for a broad range of individuals and can rarely have an accurate sense of precisely who comprises that audience.

To a certain extent the describer's choices of what to describe are based on an understanding of blindness and low vision:

- <u>going from the general to the specific</u>—start generally, creating a context, then move to details to enhance understanding and appreciation. Provide <u>visual perspective</u> as appropriate and as

time allows. The initial information presented about a scene will create a foundation in the minds of the audience members.

- use of color—the U.K.'s ITC Standards explain: "Most visually impaired people have at some time seen colours and either retained the visual memory of colour or can remember the significance and impact of a particular colour. … People who are blind from birth or from an early age cannot 'see' colours but they do understand the significance of a particular colour by its association. They may not 'see' green, but the colour of flower stalks, leaves and grass, which people can touch and smell does mean something." When asked about the perception of color, a congenitally blind audio description user in Oregon recommended reading Mary O'Neill's "Hailstones and Halibut Bones," a children's classic of poetry and color. An excerpt from the book reads:

<div style="text-align:center">

"What is Black?

</div>

Black is the night   Black is kind—
When there isn't a star   It covers up
And you can't tell by looking   The run-down street
Where you are.   The broken cup.

Black is a pail of paving tar.   Black is charcoal
Black is jet   And patio grill
And things you'd like to forget.   The soot spots on
                                              The window sill.

Black is a smokestack
Black is a cat,   Black is a feeling
A leopard, a raven,   Hard to explain
A high silk hat.   Like suffering but
                                              Without the pain.

The sound of black is
"Boom! Boom! Boom!   Black is licorice
Echoing in   And patent leather shoes
An empty room.   Black is the print
                                              In the news.

Black is beauty
In its deepest form,
The darkest cloud
In a thunderstorm.

Think of what starlight
And lamplight would lack
Diamonds and fireflies
If they couldn't lean against
Black.

The movie *Mask* features a scene between a blind teenage girl and a teen boy whose facial features are distorted. He teaches her about color in the following excerpt:

In an industrial kitchen.

Rocky: Hold out your hands. Ready? Wait right here.
Diana: What is this? [GIGGLE]

Rocky retrieves two objects, one from a freezer, the other, an avocado, from a refrigerator.

Rocky: Okay, ready?
Diana: No, what?
Rocky: This is blue.

He places the frozen object in Diana's left hand.

Diana: Ah! It's freezing! [PAUSE] It's blue?
Rocky: And this is green.

He puts the avocado in Diana's right hand. She sniffs it.

Diana: Rocky, I think I understand.
Rocky: Hold on a second.

Using a ladle, he scoops a potato from a pot of hot water. He juggles the potato between his hands.

Rocky: Okay, put those down. This is red.

He places the potato in her right hand.

Diana: AH!

She quickly exchanges it between her hands.

Rocky: And when that cools down, it'll be pink.

Diana: Rocky! I understand!

Rocky: Okay, hold a second.

He reaches for a plastic bag of cotton balls and hands several to Diana.

Rocky: And this—is billowy.

Diana: Wow.

Rocky: And this—

Rocky touches Diana's cheek.

Rocky: --is beautiful.

Figure 40. A still from *Mask.*

And the following cartoon emphasizes the importance of color:

Figure 41.

Is the picture a small for you to make out clearly? Clearly (again) audio description is not only for people who are blind!

My description:

"In the first panel, Red, a red-haired eight-year-old boy, is outdoors, lying on the ground against a tree, facing away from us and his right arm is around Rover, a white, short-haired dog, a lab-beagle mix. A leaf falls – Red announces, 'Brown.' In the next panel, as Rover's tail taps, Red notes, 'Orange, Red, Yellow.' In the following panel: 'Red, Orange, Yellow, Yellow.' Next, Red turns toward us, eyes wide, and tells us: 'Dogs only see in black and white.' The final panel depicts a more full view of the tree, leaves scattered about the pair as Red continues: 'Yellow, Orange, Brown, Red, Orange …'"

- inclusion of directional information—whether on a screen, a stage, or in front of an exhibition, some audio description users will "see" if you tell them *where* to look. In addition, directional "pointers" can help audio description users organize the information they hear, i.e., going from top to bottom, right to left, clockwise, etc.

Echoing Justice Holmes' caution, noted above, remember:

- describe what is most essential for the viewer to know in order to understand and appreciate the image being described.

Consider the following statement: "To accomplish more, sometimes you have to see less." How could that be? Earlier, I emphasized seeing all that can be seen. But next, you must narrow in/focus on the essence of the image. I recall an advertisement at an airport featuring golfer Tiger Woods lining up a putt:

"Cupping his fingers around the brim of his cap, his hands curve at his cheeks like blinders on a horse." Woods instinctively knows that "to do more," he must cull from what he sees the images/the information that is most crucial to his objective – sinking the putt.

Think: Can I visualize what's happening without becoming confused?
Feel: Did I correctly convey the mood/quality/emotion of the scene?

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Complex images, like Diego Velasquez' *Las Meninas,* present special challenges to the describer striving for succinct description, even when timing is not as critical an issue as it is when placing description between dialogue or sound effects in a film, video or theatrical presentation.
Based on your review of *Las Meninas,* augmented, perhaps, by analyses of the painting often provided to the describer by museum staff or through private research, what elements are most critical to an understanding and appreciation of the painting?

Figure 42.
Las Meninas painting by Diego Velasquez (1656). Housed in the Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain.

; the difference between
nd the lightning."
to George Bainton, October 15, 1888

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The Words You Say ... : LANGUAGE

We translate it all to words – objective, vivid, specific, imaginatively drawn words, phrases, and metaphors.

The audio describer is part journalist, faithfully relaying the *facts*:

WHEN/WHERE

Time of day (is it light or dark? Cloudy or sunny?) and location.

Examples: The sun sits low over the horizon.   (But is it a sunset or is the sun rising?) A full moon. A clock: 7:00 a.m. A city park. A two-story brick townhouse.   Under a wide portico. On a raised platform near a gazebo.

WHO

Who is in the image? Names are less important than what an individual looks like.

For example:

Age – One doesn't see someone's age unless the individual being described is wearing a button that proclaims, "I'm 60!" What does he/she look like? Those are the characteristics to cite, the things you see that prompt you to think that the individual is a certain age. In some description formats, of course, time is of the essence, and short-cuts include: In her late forties; in his sixties; pre-teen; teenage.

Hair/Build/Clothing – Cropped brown hair; long blond hair; red-headed woman; slim; tall; stocky; dressed in a white pantsuit; wearing a blue floral dress; in a bright red sweater; the tuxedoed "Bond."

Relationship – Taller, shorter ; mother, father, son, brother-in-law, etc. – but take care to only note a specific familial relationship if it is known/has already been established.

Characters / People – Describe individuals by using the most significant physical characteristics.

Identify ethnicity/race as it is known and vital to the comprehension of content. If it is, then all main characters' skin colors must be described – light-skinned, dark-skinned, olive-skinned.

(Citing the race only of non-white individuals establishes "white" as a default and is unacceptable.)   Many description consumers will say, "But I need to know someone's race." Race, however, is often unknowable solely from an image: is he "African-American" or is he actually from the Caribbean? And, as noted earlier, description involves making choices – it is simply impossible to convey all that one sees. Race/color of skin should only be conveyed when it is known and when it is important to the content.

WHAT

- What's happening? What actions are most important for a clear understanding and appreciation of the image(s)?

Describe expressive gestures and movement – resist any temptation to convey what you may feel is inferred by them, such as an emotional state. Ask yourself:

"What is that I *see* that makes me think he's angry?" Say *that* – what you see."

What is the critical visual information that is inaccessible to people who are blind or have low vision? This includes: key plot elements, people, places, actions, objects, unknown sound sources not mentioned in the dialogue or made obvious by what one hears.

Example: Mention who answers the phone—not that the phone is ringing. It's not necessary to describe obvious sound cues. At times, the source of a sound may not be clear—a description may be appropriate

- Specificity creates images in the minds' eye to a far greater degree than a general reference. It is more interesting to hear the items in a mound of clutter if time permits than to say, "The attic is cluttered." In other words, if at all possible, don't take a series of specific, separate actions/events/images and describe them as one. More specifics: is it just a smile or is it a broad grin? Similarly, is the image a photograph – color or black-and-white? – what size? how many? (5 men, 6 airplanes) position? (He comes up behind her.   A car turns left.)

- Less Is More. Description cannot and need not convey every visual image on display. Quality audio description is not a running commentary. Listeners should be allowed to hear actors' voices, sound effects, music, ambiance in a museum—or experience silence periodically throughout the description.

The ITC Standards cautions that "However tempting it is to use colourful imagery and elegant turns of phrase, clarity is the main aim of audio description. As a rule, too much description can be exhausting or even irritating. The [image being described] should be allowed to breathe from time to time, allowing its atmosphere to come through. The describer must learn to weed out what is not essential."

And Joe Clark adds (in speaking of description for media), "Describe when necessary, but do not necessarily describe."

- Be clear, concise, conversational: Use "everyday" terms. Describe a technical term, *then* name it, e.g., "she bends at the knees, a plié"; limit the use of slang or jargon unless appropriate to the content/image being described. Describers are writing for a broad audience.

- Point of View and NarrativeTense
Deliver description in present tense, in active voice (e.g., "Ted breaks the window," is preferable to, "The window was broken by Ted.") Use third-person narrative style to show neutrality and noninterference.

- Consider your audience.
If you know that your audience is primarily young people, use simple language structure in your descriptions.

- Consider the material
Use language that is consistent with the content of the material. Match vocabulary to the material being described.

- "We See"
Avoid telling your guests that "we see" or notice or view—it's a given.

- Vary Verb/Word Choices
How many different words can you use to describe someone moving along a sidewalk?   Why say "walk" when you can more vividly describe the action, as appropriate, with "sashay," "stroll," "skip," "stumble," or "saunter"? In training sessions, it is often noted: "I feel like I need to be a walking thesaurus!" Indeed. Or, of course, in these days of digital access to thousands of resources, keep www.theasurus.com on your desktop, at the ready. I've found it helpful to do one or two crosswords each day!

- Definite/Indefinite Articles
Use "a" instead of "the"—a sword, instead of the sword, unless there's only one sword. If the sword has already been introduced, it becomes "the" sword.

- Pronouns
Use pronouns only when it is clear to whom or what the pronoun refers.

- Multiple Meanings
Identify words that have multiple meanings; be sure that the intended meaning is conveyed.

- Adverbs/Gerunds -ly words and -ing words
Suspiciously, furiously, nervously. Ask yourself: "What is it that you *see* that prompts you to

think that he/she looks suspicious, furious, or nervous? Instead: "raises her eyebrows", "clenches her fists", "twists a napkin".

Use "-ing" words in phrases, not as continuing present tense, e.g., "Stomping up the stairs, he…" instead of, "He is stomping up the stairs."

<u>Censorship</u>
Within the constraints of quality description, describers must convey *all* of the visual elements of the material being described. Describers must not censor information for any personal reason such as their own discomfort with the material or a political belief, i.e., describers must relay objectively the visual elements of nudity, sexual acts, violence, etc. Our constituents have the right to know the critical visual material that is evident to sighted people and we have the obligation to convey that material. If a describer feels that describing particular material will make him/her uncomfortable, s/he should not accept this assignment.

Let me share one example of a "description problem" that I found amusing. A news report in the "Pioneer Press," a daily paper in Minneapolis, Minnesota printed an article about description under the headline, "Words can't quite describe scenes on this stage." The article continued: ": "There's a moment in *Puppetry of the Penis* where two naked men on stage manipulate their respective private parts into a piece of body-sculpture called 'The Hamburger'. If reading that sentence makes you wince, think how Rick Jacobson felt describing it. … 'If you use the proper terms, you're going to get caught up in the words and will be tripping over yourself,' he said. '(Some theaters) even offer 'sensory tours' for its visually impaired patrons. 'They take them up on the stage, let them walk around and feel the props,' Jacobson said, wryly adding: 'That ain't gonna happen here.'"

OBJECTIVITY

The best audio describer is sometimes referred to as a "verbal camera lens," objectively recounting visual aspects of an event. *Qualitative judgments get in the way – they constitute a subjective interpretation on the part of the describer and are unnecessary and unwanted.* Let listeners conjure their own interpretations based on a commentary that is as objective as possible.

So you don't say "He is furious" or "She is upset." Rather, "He's clenching his fist" or "She is crying." Rather than "It's a dream." or "She dies.", the objective describer might say: "Now, through a white mist, Joan runs through a field." or, "His head lolls back and his eyes close." The idea is to let the audience make their own judgments – perhaps their eyes don't work so well, but their brains and their interpretative skills are intact.

- Walter Lippman, journalist

It's critical to maintain that sense of objectivity – describers sum it up with an acronym. The oft-referenced "first rule of description" is to "Describe what you see" or

W.Y.S.I.W.Y.S. – "WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU SAY"

Because the image is created in the minds of our constituents, we avoid labeling with overly subjective interpretations and let our visitors conjure their own images and interpretations, as free as possible from the influence of coloring. There is no specific, objective thing – indeed, Anais Nin and Walter Lippman remind us that:

IMAGINATION

In order to be most effective as describers, we become language artists ourselves to a certain extent, if we want our visitors to truly experience our events or exhibits. As I mentioned earlier, at its best, AD can represent an aesthetic innovation as long as it is still of service to our constituency. It must always be "in the background" – the image being described is "the star."

A describer must use language that helps folks see vividly – and even see beyond what's readily apparent. Describers must develop their ability to see beyond what's there in order to evoke images in the mind's eye.

Metaphor/Simile

Describe shapes, sizes, and other essential attributes of images by comparison to objects or items/areas that are familiar to the intended audience.

Dimensions provide a bland accuracy that may not always be easily understandable – is the room 500 square feet large, or is it the size of a one-car garage? Is the Washington Monument 555 feet tall, or is it as high as fifty elephants stacked one on top of the other, or as tall as two football fields set up vertically? We try to convey our descriptions with a kind of "inner vision" that results in a linguistically vivid evocation of the image being described.

ı your eyes … when your imagination is out
                              - Mark Twain, American humorist

Figure 43.
National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior

There aren't any elephants there – but you may evoke them in order to convey a particular image (the height of the Washington Monument). Yes, a contradiction of the describer's "first rule" – Say Only What You See – but the use of imagination in crafting description is appropriate in certain instances because of what Jonathan Swift and Mark Twain observed:

If imagination – "vision" – is an essential part of the description process, is it dependent on *sight*?

A slogan of disability activism is "Nothing About Us Without Us." How can the consumers of description be involved with its creation? In the United States, there are at least a dozen people who are blind who work as audio editors; even more people who are blind work as voice talent – Scripts can be Brailled or read via a Braille display. But AD consumers can be valuable as consultants on the development of audio description scripts. Rick Boggs of Audio Eyes in California conducts "description quality specialist" training sessions for people who are blind or have low vision. I use AD consumers *who know audio description* on a regular basis to check media scripts for effectiveness, to test audio described tours for directional accuracy, and to confirm whether the language choices convey a clear and evocative sense of a space or an image. The following anonymous story provides a sense of how even the blind can "describe" with imagination:

ndow overlooked a park with a lovely lake. Ducks and swans played on the water while children ir model boats. Young lovers walked arm in arm amidst flowers of every color of the rainbow. l trees graced the landscape, and a fine view of the city skyline could be seen in the distance. As the he window described all this in exquisite detail, the man on the other side of the room would close nd imagine the picturesque scene.

Two men, both seriously ill, occupied the same hospital room. One man was allowed to sit up in his bed for an hour each afternoon to help drain the fluid from his lungs. His bed was next to the room's only window. The other man had to spend all his time flat on his back.

n afternoon the man by the window described a parade passing by. Although the other man couldn't band, he could see it in his mind's eye as the gentleman by the window portrayed it with descriptive

The men talked for hours on end. They spoke of their wives and families, their homes, their jobs, their involvement in the military service, where they had been on vacation. And every afternoon when the man in the bed by the window could sit up, he would pass the time by describing to his roommate all the things he could see outside the window. The man in the other bed began to live for those one-hour periods where his world would be broadened and enlivened by all the activity and color of the world outside.

weeks passed.

ning, the day nurse arrived to bring water for their baths only to find the lifeless body of the man by w, who had died peacefully in his sleep. She was saddened and called the hospital attendants to ody away. As soon as it seemed appropriate, the other man asked if he could be moved next to the The nurse was happy to make the switch, and after making sure he was comfortable, she left him

ainfully, he propped himself up on one elbow to take his first look at the world outside. Finally, he ve the joy of seeing it for himself. He strained to slowly turn to look out the window beside the bed. blank wall.

Figure 44.

asked the nurse what could have compelled his deceased roommate who had described such l things outside this window. The nurse responded that the man was blind and could not even see She said, "Perhaps he just wanted to encourage you."

he man who was blind had tremendous vision. It allowed him to describe with a clarity and that we as audio describers can only hope to achieve.]

Another example of imagination, on the part of the *consumer*, was evident in an art show called *The Exhibition To Be Constructed In Your Head.* It relied on the power of the viewer's imagination to create the exhibit. As reported by BBC News in 2001, "visitors to the week-long show will be faced with white-washed walls and asked to conjure up images from written descriptions."

Description – in reverse?

Figure 45. The art group "Proto-Mu" exhibit.

And How You Say Them: VOCAL SKILLS

In addition to building a verbal capability, the describer (and the voicer of description) develops his/her vocal instrument through work with speech and oral interpretation fundamentals.

We make meaning with our voices.

Some studies suggest that within face-to-face spoken interpersonal conversation the majority of content is communicated non-verbally, through gesture and facial expression but also through a variety of speech and oral interpretation fundamentals including speech skills like pronunciation, enunciation, breath control, and volume; and oral interpretation elements like pause, inflection, pace, tempo, phrasing, tone, and what I refer to as consonance.

Pronunciation

Prepare in advance and/or use transliterations to indicate pronunciation.

Enunciation / Word Rate

Speak clearly and at a rate that can be understood. Generally, a rate of 160 wpm (words per minute) is an acceptable pace. Try speaking descriptions to yourself to make sure they flow casually.

Consonance

Overall, the voicer's delivery should be consonant with the nature of the material being described. The voice should match the pace (including word rate, noted above), energy and volume of the material. Just as the describer should not assume a detached, lecturing or clinical tone, the describer should not attempt to project him- or herself into the performance as another performer. Allow the performance to set the tone and rhythm of the description, remembering that the performance, not the describer, should be the focus. The description is supportive of "the main event." Narrators' voices must be distinguishable from other voices in a production, but they must not be unnecessarily distracting, as with recognizable celebrity voices. For instance, the language and vocal delivery used to describe a fight scene would differ from that used to describe a love scene.

The oral interpretation elements noted above are a part of the voicer's delivery. To demonstrate the importance of skillful oral interpretation, I will ask students to say the following phrase aloud:

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If you agree with its sentiments, I suspect that you have few female friends.

If you don't, say the same words aloud—don't change their order—and with your voice alone, change the meaning so you convey a sense that is quite the opposite of the "original."

Punctuation allows us to make visible what we do with our voices quite naturally in conversation; what I hope you were able to accomplish in this exercise with your voice alone.

With punctuation, here's the alternative meaning:

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Try the same with:

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Stumped?

Try it with punctuation:

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Application-Specific Notes

"The American Council of the Blind, through its Audio Description Project, believes it is critical for knowledgeable users of description to establish guidelines / best practices for audio description as it occurs in a broad range of formats: television/film/DVDs/downloads, performing arts, visual art and other areas. Only in this way can we be certain of receiving a consistent, high-quality product, developed in a professional environment."

Kim Charlson, Vice-President, American Council of the Blind
Chair, Audio Description Project Committee
American Council of the Blind (ACB)

Under my coordination, the following material—"Application-Specific Notes"—was gathered by the ACB's Audio Description Project chaired by ACB's Vice President Kim Charlson. It is a part of an ongoing process of AD guidelines/best practices development.

The word "gathered" is used since the work here is not, by and large, new: it is a "review of the literature," a culling of material that exists in documents that are widely available. Generally, those documents are not the result of scientific research. But they reflect best practices based on many years of experience with audio description in a wide range of contexts.

The material cited earlier in this chapter is intended to be both overarching in nature while also acknowledging that there are, of course, significant differences in describing media as opposed to developing a tour for a museum exhibition. But many practices overlap—a best practice for media may be equally valuable for performing arts and vice versa. Consequently, the following pages are divided into sub-sets, each noting some particular practices for consideration: performing arts (theater, opera, and dance), media, and visual art.

An initial draft of the following notes was reviewed by the public on a wikidot.org web page throughout June 2009 and was discussed in depth at the Audio Description Project Conference in Orlando, Florida, July 6-8, 2009. They were reviewed by a Guidelines Committee including Kim Charlson, ACB's Vice-President and Head Librarian, the Perkins School for the Blind; Fred Brack, webmaster, www.acb.org/adp; Thom Lohman formerly of the Described and Captioned Media Program; Rick Boggs of Audio Eyes; Bryan Gould of WGBH; Lisa Helen Hoffman, Audio-Description Consultant, Trainer and Patron of Audio-Description Services of LHH Consulting; Deborah Lewis, CEO, Arts Access Now, founding member, Audio Description Coalition; Elizabeth Kahn, WordPros, Raleigh, NC; Nina Levent, Art Education for the Blind (now Art Beyond Sight) and the Metropolitan Museum of Art; and Christopher Gray, immediate past president of the American Council of the Blind.

Finally, I want to credit with a large measure of appreciation the original source material on which the following material is based. The material includes:

- Art Education for the Blind's "Making Visual Art Accessible to People Who Are Blind and Visually Impaired"
- "Audio Description Techniques" by Joe Clark (Canada)

- "Audio Description: The Visual Made Verbal" by Joel Snyder from The Didactics of Audio Visual Translation, edited by Jorge Diaz Cintas, John Benjamins Publishing, London, England and on-line course for Fractured University
- Described and Captioned Media Program "Description Key" (developed by DCMP and the American Foundation of the Blind)
- ITC (Independent Television Commission) Guidance on Audio Description (U.K.)
- Opera guidelines, drafted by Elizabeth Kahn
- National Captioning Institute Described Media "Style Guide"

PERFORMING ARTS – Theater, Opera, and Dance

Theater

- For most performing arts events the describer should allow listeners to participate in the "willing suspension of disbelief" by describing in terms of the story rather than the theatrical experience. Avoid stage directions – stage right, house right, and downstage as well as words like "enters" and "exits." Also, avoid theatrical references or jargon, especially names for technical equipment and devices, which would draw listeners' attention away from their involvement in the story ("break the fourth wall") and may introduce confusing, unknown terms.

Example: Say "John [character's name] is 6 feet tall with curly black hair …" instead of "the actor playing John is 6 feet tall …." "Susan runs from the kitchen" rather than "Susan exits the stage."

The exception to this "maintain the illusion" caution would be when the style of the production is presentational, calling attention to its theatricality. Because the production makes the audience aware that it is "watching a play," it's appropriate for the describer to do so as well.

- Some organizations utilize a pair of describers to cover a performance. For instance, the first describer describes the performance while the second describer prepares, and sometime delivers (recorded or live) the pre-show and intermission notes (as applicable) and serves as backup describer.

- Give listeners a means of providing the management with feedback on the description by announcing the process at the end of the description and/or providing a Braille/large print handout for responses when reception equipment is distributed.

- In addition to performing arts events, live description may be provided for live broadcast programs such as a Presidential inaugurations, space launches, national disaster news coverage, etc. With no opportunity for previews, pre-show notes to provide background information, or preliminary description of certain general elements, consider using some silences to describe the "big picture" rather than what is specifically onscreen.

Scheduling of Description:

- Typically, audio description is offered at one to three performances throughout the run of an extended series of performances, often one evening performance and one matinee. This, of course, limits AD consumers in their flexibility to attend performing arts events on their own schedule. Some organizations ask for advance notice of two weeks or more in order to provide AD as a special request. In an effort to put the AD user on a par with any other performing arts patron, certain producers will "cast" a describer who can attend selected rehearsals, develop an AD script and be available at every performance (similar to an understudy). If no one desires the service, the describer is free to go.

- For touring productions, experiments have been made with scripts that have been produced in one locale that can be shared with describers in another city.

- Increasingly, certain productions have *recorded* description tracks keyed to lighting cues and accessed via PDAs attached to seatbacks. The descriptions (as well as captions and simultaneous translation) are available at any performance.

To Script or Not To Script:

- Some performing arts description producers will have a describer preview a performance (as production schedules allow) enough times to allow for the development of a description script. Others depend on one or two previews where notes are made and the describer provides description in a more extemporaneous manner. If time and schedules allow, the development of a script permits the careful consideration of the various fundamentals of description outlined earlier. The describer using a script does not, of course, read the script without looking at the live performance; he/she must know the script well enough to use the script as a prompt and be free to describe extemporaneously when changes warrant departing from the scripted material.

Equipment:

- With the exception of recorded descriptions noted earlier, audio description is delivered wirelessly via microphones (headset or steno-mask style), transmitters, and receivers with earpieces used by AD patrons. Generally, the transmissions are accomplished via infra-red (line-of-sight) or FM radio systems. FM systems can be portable and are often shared by multiple theaters.

Pre-Show and Intermission Notes:

- The purpose of pre-show notes is to prepare the patron by including descriptions that the describer will not have time to provide during a performance. In addition to the credits on the playbill, the pre-show notes cover descriptions of the sets, with the location of doorways or means of egress, levels, placement of furniture, etc.; the physical characteristics of the characters, the roles they play, their costumes, any gestures or mannerisms they use repeatedly; dance movement; recurring staging techniques; and any props that are significant. All these descriptions should be complete and detailed, tightly organized and not exceed 10–15 minutes. Most describers prepare scripted pre-show notes to be sure that they're covering everything in a coherent, organized and timely manner. Productions with intermissions provide a second opportunity to provide additional information.

- The pre-show notes are also the place to define any terminology that might be used in the performance. In a period piece, terms of clothing or architecture might be explained. Unusual props can be defined. The remaining time before the curtain can be filled with the director's notes, articles about the playwright, the actors' biographies, the appearance of the audience and the theater, etc.

Keep in mind that listeners are trying to absorb and remember a great deal of verbal information. Describe settings and costumes in the order they appear. As much as possible, describe each setting in the same order (left to right and top to bottom, for example).

When many of the characters wear costumes that are variations of the same style, it's helpful to establish the basic style of the male and female costumes ("most of the men wear three-piece suits, white shirts and string ties while the women's dresses are high-necked, long-sleeved and have straight skirts to the floor") and then describe the specifics for each costume.

- If the play has a complex plot and/or a confusing set of characters, there may be a synopsis in the playbill. Just as this information is helpful to sighted audience members, sharing this information with listeners during pre-show notes may aid their appreciation of the performance and the description. Make clear that the information comes from the program so listeners understand that everyone has access to this information – that the describer is not providing special information because the listener may have trouble following the material. If it's important to the plot or content, try to repeat some information during the description for those who didn't hear the pre-show notes.

- If there's a delay in the start of the performance or during a scene change or an emergency in the audience, describe what the sighted audience can see – a large group has just arrived and is being seated, the curtain is caught on a piece of scenery, etc. If it's not apparent why there's a delay, it's fine to say so and that reassures listeners that the describer is still there. Indeed, often AD consumers will arrive before pre-show notes begin; having recorded music playing through the system reassures consumers that the system is working.

- In productions with intermissions and a great deal of information to cover in pre-show notes, consider limiting the pre-show notes to overall production information (credits, etc.) and the first act's details (settings, costumes, characters, etc.). Then, return during the final minutes of intermission with notes to describe the second act's details, important reminders from the pre-show notes, and, if time allows, share additional information from the playbill. At the end of the pre-show notes and at the end of the first act, it might be helpful to tell listeners what you will share with them during intermission. Listeners may decide whether they want to return in time to hear that information.

Assuming that some of the listeners will not hear the full intermission notes, repeat the essential information during the second act whenever possible. If the new information for the second act is very brief, listeners may appreciate its inclusion at the end of the pre-show notes or while the house lights are dimming for the second act so they won't have to shorten their intermission activities to return for the second set of notes.

"Stepping On Lines":

- Descriptions are usually delivered during pauses between lines of dialogue, avoiding other critical sound elements. But since it is more important to make a production understandable than to preserve every detail of the "soundtrack," the describer will speak over dialogue and other

sounds when necessary. In most instances, a describer may talk over background music or underscoring as well as the lyrics of a repeated chorus of a song.

- It is also appropriate to let pauses or quiet moments pass without a description. Listeners want to hear the performance first and the description second. The dialogue, the sounds – and even the silences – are telling the story and must be experienced.

- Use caution in talking over a "song played on the radio" because its recognition by the audience and/or the audience's awareness of its content may be important to setting a mood, recalling an era, making an emotional statement, etc: all of this material constitutes the "appreciation" of the event, often as important as an understanding of plot.

Example: Emerie is talking non-stop about making a pie, but she is quietly taking a gun from a drawer. The describer may need to speak over her dialogue because the audience will hear a gunshot before she stops talking about making the pie.

Sound Effects:

- Be mindful of any sound effects in the timing of descriptions, e.g., he turns away from her and she pulls out a revolver. [BANG] He falls over a desk [CLATTER]. Description involves the *weaving* of its material within the structure of the event or images. This is an example of a practice that is critical to description for media as well and involves careful consideration on the part of the describer, the voicer and the audio editor. Usually a sound effect, or the event leading up to it, is described just before it happens: "The burglar drops his sack." [THUD] At times, the description can be as effective after the action. "Waving their arms they run towards the platform..." [Chuff chuff... the sound of a train pulling away] "the train is pulling out of the station."

- In a live setting, it may be warranted to alert AD users to upcoming sound effects as they could affect service animals accompanying a patron (although service animals, generally, are well-trained and not easily distracted) .

Identification:

- Identify characters as they have been identified in the production. Introduce them only after they've been introduced in the dialogue. Consistently identify people/characters by name. Use a character's name only when sighted audience members know the name. When an unknown character appears, refer to the person by a physical characteristic used in his/her initial description until his/her name is revealed. Once everyone knows the character's proper name, tie the name to the physical description at the first opportunity ("John, the redheaded man") and afterwards use only the character's name.

- Be certain to describe entrances and exits – who and where – especially when there's nothing audible to indicate someone has joined or left the scene.

It may be helpful to create a list of the established names for each character for reference during the description. A list of commonly paired couples may also be useful in plays with difficult character names. Some AD consumers have suggested that once the material has identified a character, the describer could match the character's name with the actor's voice by mentioning the character's name just before s/he speaks. Although the describer usually doesn't need to repeat the voice identification, this might be necessary after a character has been silent or absent for a long time or if several voices are similar, particularly when it is important to know exactly who is saying what at a specific point.

Timing:

- Theatrical surprises should, ideally, come at the same time for all audience members. If characters' appearances or actions, hidden identities, costumes, sight gags, sound effects, etc. happen as a surprise to sighted audience members, don't spoil the surprise for listeners by describing (and revealing) them in advance.

Example: If a character is in disguise, he becomes "the man" rather than "John wears a disguise." Use a neutral term "the figure in red" when characters are disguising their gender. If the action that accompanies a sound effect will result in a reaction from the audience, treat this as if describing a sight gag. Time the description to allow listeners to react at the same time as sighted audience members.

Example: If the audience sees something happening that might "warn them" of the possibility of, say, a loud noise, be sure to describe that action. For instance, "Pat" loads a rifle, so we know that there's a possibility he or she will fire it.

- With experience, describers learn to gauge when laughter and applause have peaked and begun to die down. If possible, hold description until the audience begins to quiet. If not, speak loudly when describing over loud laughter, music or applause.
- When an effect will be repeated, try to describe it the first time in a way that allows a "shorthand" reference later.

Example: In a play where characters vigorously smoke cigarettes to underscore their tension, describe the first instance as, "Mary and John light cigarettes, inhale and exhale deeply." On later occurrences, as listeners understand the pattern of their behavior, simply say, "Smoking again."

Opera

Note: Much of the material in this section was developed in correspondence and conversation with veteran describer of opera, Elizabeth Kahn of Raleigh, North Carolina.

Surtitles:

- Opera, even when sung in English, requires that someone read the surtitles projected above the stage. Generally two describers, a male and a female, are employed – one to read the surtitles,

the other to describe. A splitter on an FM or infra-red transmitter that can accommodate *two* microphones is often helpful.

The surtitle voicer need not identify the soloist who is singing but he/she should use subtle shifts in vocal tone to convey the character changes. Since the text on the screen can change quickly, the surtitle reader, steering the libretto through the performance, generally has "right of way."

One solution to the overall problem of reading the copious amount of language represented by the surtitles is to abridge the text, leaving out all but the most essential dialogue. An advance copy of the surtitles is extremely helpful in this regard.

Respect the Music:

- Attendees come to the opera to hear the music, especially the singing, and experience the opera's visual spectacle. It's critical then that the describer respect arias and strive to limit description to orchestral passages. The surtitle, of course, still has to convey the text.

Knowledge of the Genre:

- As with any art form, an understanding of a particular genre can be helpful, particularly with respect to overall flow and styles or traditions. Preparation and research are key. With opera, there are special reasons to spend time becoming familiar with the production's score and libretto. Knowing the score will help the describer know in advance when there may be available passages for insertion of description or the reading of surtitles. Also, the insertion of description into short passages of instrumental music—sometimes only a couple of measures— could require that the describer "count beats" and prepare a description that doesn't overflow into the singing and the reader's translation.

Most opera productions have relatively few technical or dress rehearsals and a limited number of performances. Thus, describers may have fewer opportunities to preview the work before the described performance. To augment the few rehearsals and performances available for previewing, look for every opportunity to become familiar with the opera and timing critical to preparing description: read the libretto, listen/read the score, watch a video of another production of the same opera – keep in mind, however, that the describer's obligation is to convey the images involved in the particular production being presented; take care to focus on the production being described. As with other genres, it may be possible to work with a production company to increase familiarity of costumes, set pieces and even directorial elements. The company may have access or education staff that can assist. Indeed, it may be possible to attend a *sitzprobe* (a seated rehearsal which brings together singers with the orchestra) – adjustments to the score for the particular production will be evident at this rehearsal and will inform the describer regarding time frames available for description.

Pre-show notes:

- As with spoken drama, pre-show notes provide an opportunity to provide description and information available to sighted patrons in a more relaxed time frame. For opera, the plot

synopsis from the printed program is important – almost without exception, this information is available to all patrons. The reading of a plot synopsis, however, can involve a fair amount of time: it's wise to communicate in advance with AD consumers so every effort is made to arrive well in advance of the start of the opera. Keep in mind—it is not the responsibility of the describer to provide information that is not available to the sighted audience.

Pronunciation:

- Pre-show notes should include the pronunciation of all character names or other possibly unfamiliar words and names that appear in the text or the program (e.g., composer and conductor names).   An excellent model for pre-show notes is the format developed for Metropolitan Opera radio broadcasts. Pioneered by Milton Cross in the 1940s, these introductions to each act of an opera are first-rate examples of an important element of opera description—before there was opera description. In this sense, it is clear that descriptive elements provided to opera lovers before or during a performance can enhance the experience for *all*.

Dance

See Chapter 5 – AUDIO DESCRIPTION AND LITERACY: WORDS AND MOVEMENT

MEDIA

General:

- Audio description for film, broadcast television and DVD is scripted and recorded on an audio track separate from the material's soundtrack.

- Generally, description is "closed", i.e., consumers have the option to turn the descriptions on and off. Typically, in a movie theater the consumer uses a headset -- a movie's original soundtrack is heard through one channel while the AD track is played through the other channel. Volume for each track can be controlled separately. For broadcast television, a mixed version of the audio – the original audio track with the audio description – is available via a secondary audio channel.

- The aim of the describer is to write complete, accurate descriptions that will precisely fit during the available pauses between dialogue or critical sound elements. Close coordination is required on the part of the producer of an AD project who marries the writing, its voicing, and the audio editing to achieve a quality product.

- When drafting the script, read the script aloud at the rate it will be read for recording to verify its timing/that it will "fit" within the pauses noted above.

- If a description is essential and a silence is especially short, the describer may have to step on the first syllable or two of dialogue or narration. This often occurs when the "next voice" must be identified so listeners will understand the speaker's vantage point. This is also appropriate when the beginning sounds of a dialogue are relatively inconsequential – "er," "um," etc. Ask the question, is it more important for the AD consumer to hear description of a particular visual element than to hear the bit of sound that the description may cover. But this must be done with all due respect for the original material – the consumer is there for the movie or television program, NOT the description. We are in support of the AD consumer as well as the material being described.

- Similarly, allow listeners to appreciate the media's score without interjecting descriptions. Only interrupt for vital, timely information that must be described during the music.

Scene Changes:

- Scene changes can be confusing particularly when the soundtrack does not indicate a change. Actions, characters, and details can be confusing if we don't know where we are. Simplicity is always a guide: "In the bedroom," "At the police station," etc. When there's a change of place, start the description with the location ("general to the specific").

Example: "In their bedroom, John and Mary embrace tightly and kiss on the lips." The preceding scene took place with the whole family gathered around the dining table and nothing on the soundtrack indicates we've changed locale.

- On occasion describers use the word "now" or "next" to indicate a change of scene. Because there will be many opportunities that seem to call for the use this word, use it sparingly.

- As time permits, describe montages of images, but be succinct and clear. Similarly, a series of still images, such as those often used during a documentary interview, can be summarized to highlight certain subjects being discussed by the person or people being interviewed.

Passage of Time:

- As with scene changes, indicate passages of time that are essential to the comprehension or appreciation of a program's content. Do not interpret the passage of time specifically, however, unless objective evidence supports it.

- When describing certain passages of time, such as flashbacks or dream sequences, describe the visual cues that let the audience know there is a flashback, e.g., the image ripples, a white flash of light. Music and visual effects may further identify time changes. Often, a sound will accompany the image further providing a clue to the passage of time – "whoosh". For younger audiences, it is sometime impractical to use describing conventions that one might use for adults. In those cases, it may be necessary to explicitly tell the audience what is happening rather than describing the action (e.g., a flashback or dream sequence).

- Address time shifts (flash backs or visions of the future) in relation to the character.
Example: "Lighting shifts to pale amber as George takes his childhood place at the family dinner table."

- Use "while" and "as" to join two actions only if there is a connection between them.

Example: "John picks up the knife as Jill turns away."

Foreshadowing:

- Sometimes a describer will describe what's about to appear because there's no silence for the information when it does appear. For instance, the audio description of what's currently occurring and the current background noise may indicate that a waterfall is evident; the describer may need to say "In a moment, a NASCAR racetrack with a dozen cars circling the track." This alerts viewers with low vision that the racetrack isn't onscreen at present.

- Occasionally there's no silent opportunity to describe something essential to listeners' understanding while that specific visual image is on the screen. The describer may need to omit a less significant description of what's onscreen in order to interject the critical description.

Consistency:

- Utilizing the same character names and/or vocabulary throughout a production or series of productions is essential. For instance, on a longer production, often more than one description writer will work on its description script. Just as filmmakers will have staff check for

"continuity" between scenes, it is critical that a draft AD script is reviewed in its totality for consistency.

Jargon:

- Just as a describer for a live performance should avoid theatrical jargon or references, a film or video describer should avoid calling attention to the filmmaking process. Generally it's appropriate to avoid filmmaking jargon and reference to filmmaking techniques, e.g., "close-up" or "fade to black." Most film or television is naturalistic, i.e., the intent of the creator is to have the audience engage in the "willing suspension of disbelief" – just as with live theater, the area surrounded by the proscenium (the film or television screen) is considered the "fourth wall" of the area in which actors are playing. This technique helps consumers feel as though the action is "real." When a describer calls attention to the artifice of filmmaking, he/she "breaks the fourth wall" and is at odds with an effective, realistic portrayal.

Point of View:

- Describe the point of view when appropriate – "from above," "from space," "moving away," "flying low over the sandy beach," etc. It is understood that a film/video/DVD is being viewed; repeated references to the screen are unnecessary.

- Occasionally, the audience is directly engaged, particularly with children's material or educational productions. An on-screen character might ask the audience to "Watch me and follow along," or an instructor might ask, "Can you see what color the liquid is turning in the beaker?" In such cases, it is important for the audience members to know that it is they who are being addressed (as opposed to an on-screen character). One way to accomplish this is to refer to the audience as "you."

Logos / Credits:

- Treat logos as any other image to be described and read the company name(s) with, as time allows, a brief description of the logo.

- Reading disclaimers and credits at the beginning and end of films, videos and television programs is an important function of audio description. In addition, the describer should read text and subtitles. Generally, on first appearance, text or subtitles can be introduced with a phrase such as, "Words appear" or "Subtitles appear." Subsequently, tone of voice may be employed to draw a distinction between description of on-screen action and the reading of text or subtitles.

Note: Because the describer can never read as rapidly as the onscreen credits appear and disappear, the describer must "edit" this material and may include a line such as "Other credits follow" or "Credits scroll including."

- Often, some or all of the opening credits appear over the beginning of the action. In this situation, experiment with description of the action in sync with the material (in real-time) and

read the credits before or after their actual appearance.   By grouping the credits the describer can avoid confusion created by the reading of a credit, then describing, then a credit, then a description, and so on.

Enhanced Description

– For DVDs and on web sites, enhanced description can be employed to provide additional detail via a link to a pop-up window or even a hyper-link to a website. This allows for elaboration on elements that cannot be adequately described during the body of a production, akin to pre-show or intermission notes used in describing performing arts presentations.

VISUAL ART

Note: Much of the material in this section was developed in correspondence and conversation with Nina Levent and Elisabeth Axel of Art Beyond Sight (formerly Art Education for the Blind) and is a part of their *Making Visual Art Accessible to People Who Are Blind And Visually Impaired.*

General:

- Audio description in a museum, visitor center or gallery often begins with standard information included on a label, such as the name of the artist, nationality, title of the artwork, date, dimensions or scale of the work, media and technique.

Subject, Form, Color, Style:

- The basic object-label information might be followed by a general overview of the subject matter and composition of the work. Generally, a coherent description should provide visual information in a sequence, allowing a blind person to assemble, piece by piece, an image of a highly complex work. First describe the explicit subject, that is, what is represented in the work (General to the Specific). After the general idea of the work is conveyed, the description should describe pertinent details. For example, "This painting features a recycled Savarin coffee can filled with about eighteen paintbrushes." Include in this description the color tones and the mood or atmosphere. Many people who have lost their sight have a visual memory of colors and even people who are congenitally blind have their own concept of color (as each of us do)..

- The style of a work of art refers to the features that identify a work as being by a particular artist or school, or of a movement, period, or geographical region. Style is the cumulative result of many characteristics, including brushwork, use of tone and color, choice of different motifs, and the treatment of the subject. After the basic information about subject, composition, and mediums are conveyed, the audio description can focus on how these many elements contribute to the whole. In a tour that includes several works of art, comparisons are an effective way of making stylistic features tangible.

Art Conventions:

- Art terms and pictorial conventions such as perspective, focal point, picture plane, foreground, and background should always be defined for your audience. Typically, it is useful to introduce the definition or concept when the discussion turns to that aspect of the work of art. Comparisons to items or objects that may be familiar to the average person's experience are especially helpful.

Orient the Viewer with Directions:

- Specific and concrete information is required to indicate the location of objects or figures in a work of art, especially for AD consumers who have some vision and can "see" if you tell them where to look. A useful directional method is to refer to the positions of the numbers on a clock.

Most blind people are familiar with this method of providing direction. Also, when describing a figure depicted in a work of art, remember that the image is the equivalent of a mirror's reflection. Right and left can be very ambiguous terms unless they are qualified.

Indicate Where the Curators Have Installed a Work:

- Generally, a work's placement in an institution reveals important information about its meaning, as well as its relationship to other works in the collection. Include in your discussion a description of the gallery or sculpture garden where the work is installed, and mention the surrounding artworks. Describe how the work under discussion relates to these other works, as well as to the viewer and the surrounding space.

To Touch or Not To Touch: Tactile Illustrations and Touchable Materials

- Description provides access to a museum's collection particularly when the works of art are not available to touch. But arts access is best accomplished when a range of techniques are employed including the tactile. For visitors who are blind or vision impaired an immediate, personal experience with three-dimensional works of art through touch is the best way to explore the art. For conservation reasons, however, some museums require people to wear thin gloves made of cotton or plastic. (An informal poll at the Museum of Modern Art in New York indicated that most people prefer plastic gloves to cotton because the texture and temperature of the work's material can be felt.)

When it is not possible to touch original works of art, alternative touchable materials can be provided. In some instances, these can provide a fuller and more complete understanding of a work because they can be touched without gloves. Tactile diagrams or three-dimensional dioramas of a work of art are effective ways of making visual art accessible. These are essentially relief images. They do not represent the actual object in every detail; they are intended to be used in conjunction with audio description. Other auxiliary aids include three-dimensional reproductions; samples of art-making materials such as marble, bronze, clay, and canvas; examples of the tools used in various media, such as paintbrushes, chisels, and hammers; and replicas of the objects depicted in a display.

Classroom Lessons:

- Audio description and discussion about the work of art can be a part of a class that precedes or follows a museum visit. Teachers can incorporate audio description of art, architecture, and design objects into history, social science, math, and other classes. Precise and organized description is one of the basic tools of effective communication. It can improve students' awareness of their environment and enrich their vocabulary.

Multisensory Books:

- Multisensory art books or models created for people who are blind or have limited sight integrate audio description, high-resolution reproductions of the images, a tactile component, and sometimes an audio component.

For Docents / Museum Guides:

- When a group of visitors includes blind, visually impaired, and sighted visitors, museum professionals or docents can incorporate audio description into their regular tour.

- When planning a tour, keep in mind that audio description adds time. Therefore, fewer works may be included on a tour. A general rule of thumb is to use half the number of works you would use in a tour without audio description. So it's important to carefully select the works for your tour.

- Develop audio description scripts for the objects on your tour and review them with visually impaired advisors * for effective language, clarity and length of the descriptions, and appropriate pace of the tour. As audio description skills increase, these scripts will serve as guidelines, rather than as a text to be memorized.

> * It is critical to the development of a quality audio description program (in this case a museum exhibit) to have experienced users of audio description test a draft of the AD features before the program is finalized (this consultant must not simply a potential user of the service, a person who is blind or has low vision, but a potential user of the service at the site who is experienced in the use of and development of audio description programs).

- When first meeting a group that includes people who are blind or visually impaired, briefly describe the lobby or meeting space. Then, so that you may adjust your tour to your visitors' needs, find out more about the type and degree of visual impairment. Throughout your tour, include brief descriptions of gallery spaces through which you pass and museum architecture and ambiance.

- It is important to keep audio description separate from information about the historical context. If your tour includes both sighted and visually impaired people, present your description first.

- Get feedback. After the description of the first work, ask one of the tour participants if the description is meeting their needs or if you need to make any adjustments. At the end of a tour for people with visual impairments, take the opportunity to emphasize the organization's accessibility features and programming. Create a sense of welcome and encourage a future relationship with the organization.

Audio Guides:

- Some museums create an additional audio guide for blind and visually impaired visitors or include extensive audio description of artworks in their standard audio guide, following the universal design concept. Sighted museum visitors report that they benefit from this practice as well.

- Museum staff * who distribute audio guides to visitors should provide a short orientation on how to use the player and guide.   The player should have some type of neck strap so that a user has both hands free to use the buttons, touch a tactile exhibit, or use a cane or other assistive device.

> * All staff who encounter the public should receive training in blindness awareness (e.g., by law in the United States, a service animal is allowed wherever its master goes) and have basic knowledge of audio description and the fact that it is offered by the museum.

- Depending on the needs and resources of a particular organization, delivery mechanisms will vary. Some choices include: audio cassette, CD, digital wands, cell phones or PDAs, or concealed triggering mechanisms. The last three mechanisms are digital methods that allow for the option to choose between various exhibits and the ability to choose layers of description, e.g., for consumers who wish to hear all of the text offered in an exhibit, that can be an option (whereas time would not allow for all text to be included in the "base" tour).

- Generally, visually impaired visitors need orientation and navigational information that can be incorporated throughout the described tour.

- Using infrared or FM systems (similar to those used in a performing arts or movie theater setting), AD users can privately access an audio description of a program, lecture, video, or performance.

Digitized Historical Images:

- Increasingly, audio description is being used to improve access to digitized historical images, such as old photographs, held by libraries, museums, and other cultural institutions. As these institutions continue to add large numbers of digitized historical images, they are discovering that audio description not only greatly improves the accessibility and meaning of these images for individuals who are blind or who have low vision, but also that the general population appreciates these perceptive, carefully crafted descriptions. One example of how librarians are embracing audio description is the Audio Description Illinois project:

http://www.alsaudioillinois.net/

A wide range of examples of description for visual art is accessible at:

www.artbeyondsight.org/handbook/acs-verbalssamples.shtml

Web-based Description:

For a website that has important image content, those images should be made available to all via a "longdesc tag." This is a critical part of a web accessible image; it enables web authors to provide longer text descriptions for complex images. Shawn Lawton Henry of the W3C Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology notes that a current, updated working draft of instructions for developing "longdesc tags" is at:

http://www.w3.org/TR/html-longdesc

Finally, I conclude this section with the audio described tour that I developed for the Smithsonain Institution's National Museum of American History exhibit *The Star-Spangled Banner: The Flag That Inspired the National Anthem.* An audio only version of the tour is available on Track 29 of the associated web site.

What follows is the bulk of the written tour accompanied by selected images from the exhibit. The final slide notes other resources for the development of AD tours in museums.

You're standing just outside the exhibit, in front of and below an abstract representation of the United States flag designed by architects at the firm Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. It is suspended thirty feet above you and consists of fifteen horizontal rows of sixty-two "pixels" or silver blocks. The rows, representing the fifteen stripes of the Star-Spangled Banner, undulate in curving waves as though the stationary flag is waving in a breeze.

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Figure 46.   Joel Snyder

To your right is the entry portal to our exhibit and the first of three areas: the entry corridor with four sections. It will be followed by the viewing area and then the exit corridor and its five stations.
Now, let's begin our tour! As you approach the entry corridor, you may notice the blocks of textured glass below your feet. The flooring of the entry corridor shifts to wood.
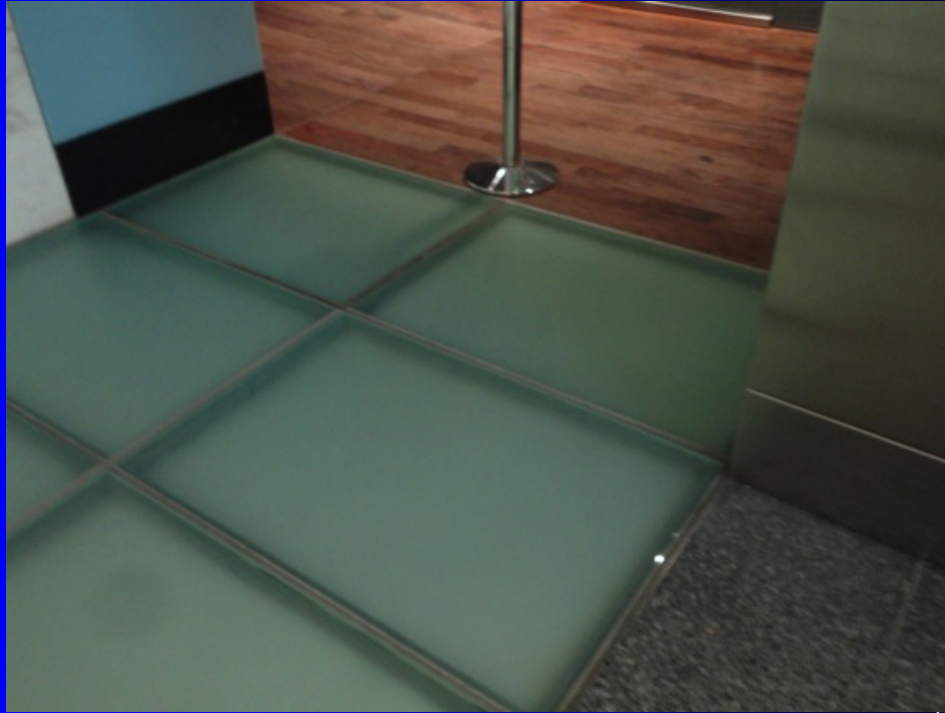
Figure 47.   Joel Snyder

The Entry Corridor

You've entered a corridor that stretches to your left about seventy-five feet and is on a slight incline. As you stroll down this corridor, exhibits will be on your right. A three foot high glass barrier runs along the length of the hall between you and the exhibits immediately in front of you.

Notice the music playing at this first station: this is an harmony-only version of the Star-Spangled Banner played on a cello. In the background in this area is an enlarged color photo-reproduction of a detail from the flag: its broad red and white stripes and large blue field with white stars. On a horizontal placard, text reads:

"The Star-Spangled Banner

"On September 14, 1814, U.S. soldiers at Baltimore's Fort McHenry raised a huge American flag to celebrate a crucial victory over British forces during the War of 1812. The sight of those "broad stripes and bright stars" inspired Francis Scott Key to write a song that eventually became the United States national anthem.

"Key's words gave new significance to a national symbol and started a tradition in which generations of Americans have invested the flag with their own meanings and memories."

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12/31/2012

Figure 48.   Joel Snyder

Perhaps you can hear the sounds of rockets and bombs exploding over Ft. McHenry. Indeed, in a tall glass case is a Congreve [CON-GREEVE] rocket of the type fired on Fort McHenry in Baltimore Harbor. The rocket is about four feet tall and cylindrical with cone-shaped top. It's brown and rusted and on its back a wooden rod is held in place by three metal bonds—the rod extends beyond the base of the rocket.
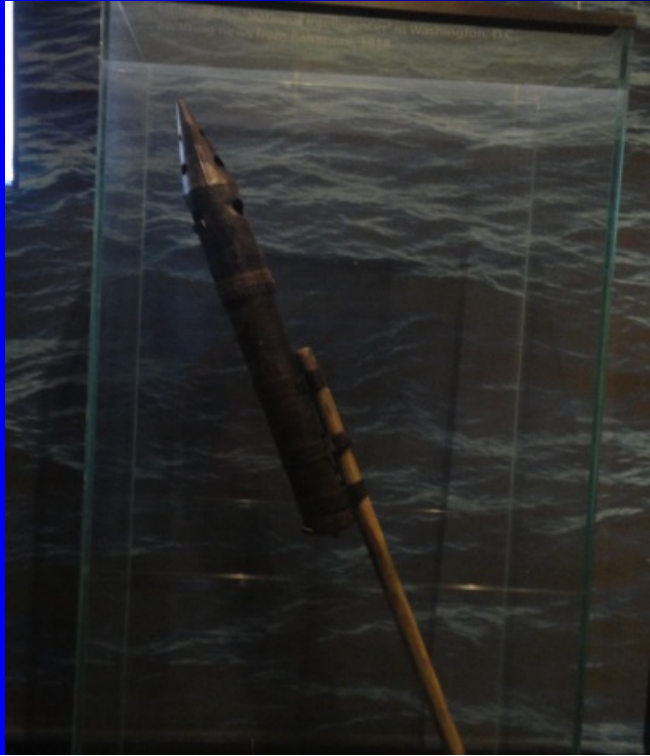
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Figure 49.   Joel Snyder

On a slanted podium just behind the glass barrier that runs along the corridor, rests a tactile fragment of an actual exploded bombshell—*please touch and explore the ragged rust-colored remnant!*

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Figure 50.   Joel Snyder

Now, a turn to the left will take you into the second corridor of our tour—The Viewing Area. This fifty-foot hallway is dimly lit; you may notice pinpoints of light beaming from the floor along the way. It's important to protect the Star-Spangled Banner from light which can be the source of greatest damage to the flag's delicate fabric.
To the left, stretching along the length of the hallway, is a floor to ceiling glass wall between you and the display of the Star-Spangled Banner. The darkened chamber that holds the flag is the size of a small home. The massive flag is laid out flat on a table that is tilted up 10 degrees. The flag glows in the darkness. It is 30 feet high and 34 feet wide; that's a quarter the size of a basketball court! Each read and white stripe is nearly two feet wide; they are tattered and faded; large portions of the white stripes have deteriorated and are missing entirely. A huge field of blue in the upper left corner of the flag has stars that are two feet across. One of the stars is missing. The right side of the flag—called the fly edge—is jagged; many pieces on this side of the flag were cut away as patriotic keepsakes in the 1800s. Although it seems large today, a garrison flag like the Star-Spangled Banner was a standard size for the time. It was intended to fly over forts on flag poles as high as ninety feet and to be seen from great distances.
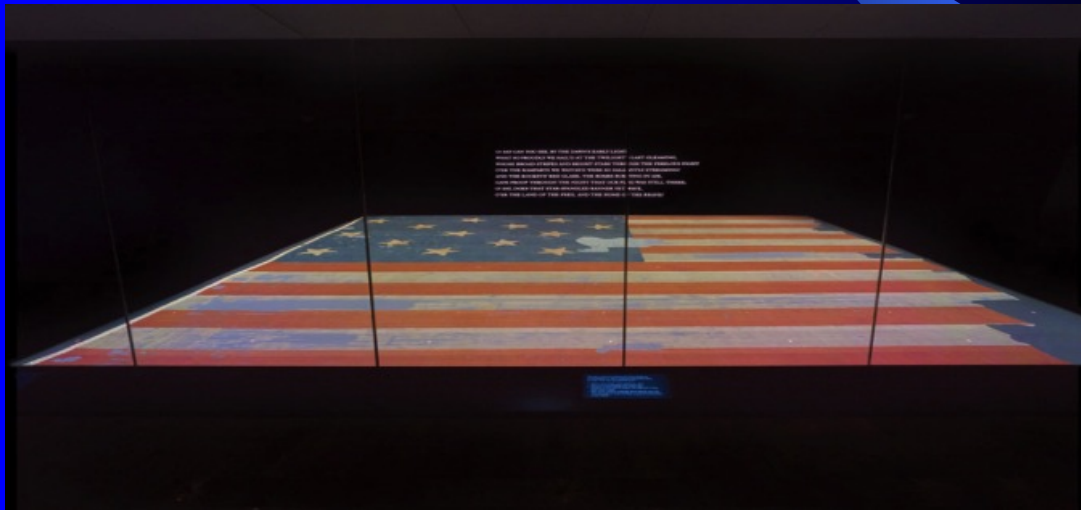
8
2012

Figure 51.   Joel Snyder

Running along the base of the glass barrier is a slanted ledge within which are illuminated text panels, each with the same message:

"This flag, raised over Baltimore's Fort McHenry on September 14, 1814, inspired Francis Scott Key to write 'The Star-Spangled Banner.'
- Maker: Mary Pickersgill, Baltimore, 1813
- Material: wool bunting with cotton stars
- Design: 15 stars and 15 stripes, the official U.S. flag from 1795 to 1818
- Size: 30 by 34 feet; originally 30 by 42 feet (one star and other pieces were cut away as patriotic keepsakes in the 1800s)"

Along the back wall of the flag's display area are projected the words to the first stanza of our national anthem:

"O! SAY CAN YOU SEE, BY THE DAWN'S EARLY LIGHT,
WHAT SO PROUDLY WE HAIL'D AT THE TWILIGHT'S LAST GLEAMING,
WHOSE BROAD STRIPES AND BRIGHT STARS THROUGH THE PERILOUS FIGHT,
O'ER THE RAMPARTS WE WATCH'D, WERE SO GALLANTLY STREAMING?
AND THE ROCKETS' RED GLARE, THE BOMBS BURSTING IN AIR,
GAVE PROOF THROUGH THE NIGHT THAT OUR FLAG WAS STILL THERE;
O! SAY, DOES THAT STAR-SPANGLED BANNER YET WAVE,
O'ER THE LAND OF THE FREE, AND THE HOME OF THE BRAVE?"

At the rear of this viewing area is a bench if you would like to rest.

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Figure 52.

At the far end of the glass wall that separates the Viewing Area from the flag chamber is a tall glass panel. On the top right is a tactile, cast glass image of the flag. It's labeled The Star-Spangled Banner in raised letters and in Braille. Below it is an actual size, tactile, cast glass star. Enjoy getting a hands-on sense of the Star-Spangled Banner and one of its stars.
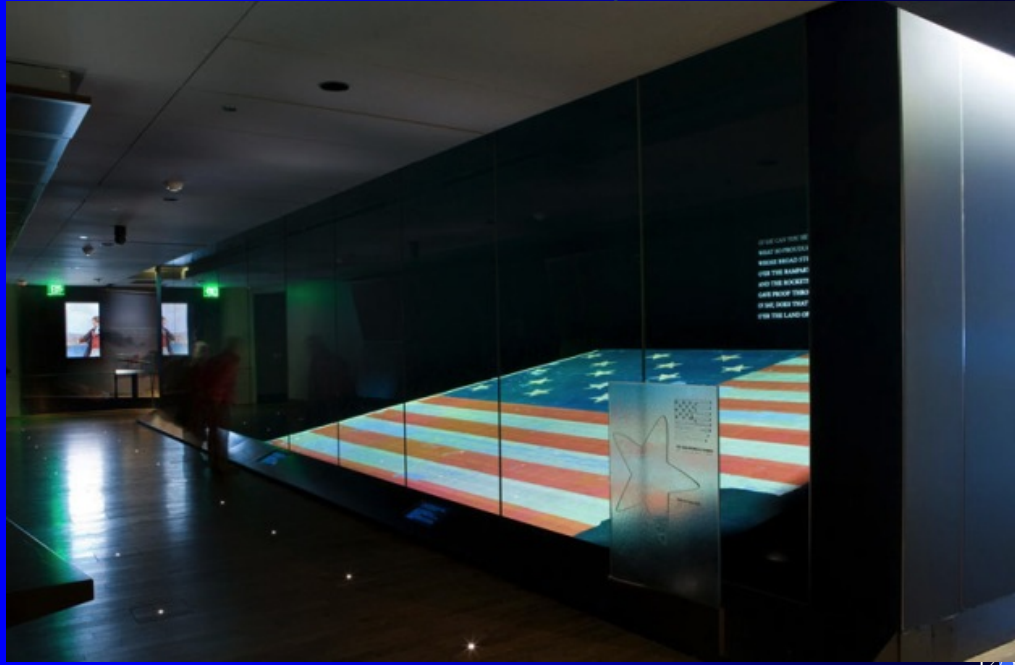
Figure 53.   Joel Snyder

If you turn around 180 degrees, you'll find a wide table-top that is an interactive activity. On it is the moving image of an actual size detail of the Star-Spangled Banner—you can control how the image moves by touching it and moving your hand up, down or sideways. Also on the image are circles and hand-shaped "paddles". When these "hot spots" are touched, various facts about the Banner are displayed. For instance:

•The blue canton is made of wool dyed with the indigo plant. The red stripes are made of wool dyed with the roots of the madder plant.
•The stripes of the flag were pieced together from two narrower strips of wool bunting that was imported from England.
•The stars are made from cotton and were attached by reverse appliqué, in other words, each star was stitched into place on one side of the flag, then the cloth behind cut away to reveal it. Each star measures approximately two feet across.

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/31/2012

Figure 54.   Joel Snyder

A few steps further left is a black-and-white photograph, the first photograph of the Star-Spangled Banner, taken at the Boston Navy Yard in 1873. The flag hangs outside a building with its field of stars at right; it is already missing one of its original fifteen stars and a large section of its fly edge. Tattered stripes and holes are readily apparent. Perhaps most striking is
Its enormity: a soldier at attention on planks at bottom is dwarfed by the Banner—the top of his cap reaching only to the edge of the third stripe.
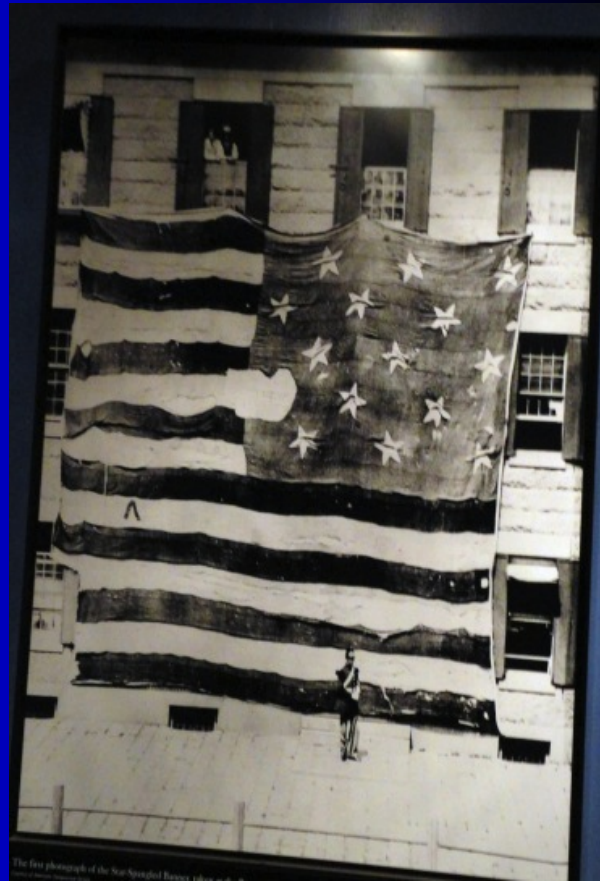
Figure 55.   Joel Snyder

MUSEUM ACCESS – RESOURCES

-Art Education for the Blind / Art Beyond Sight
Making Visual Art Accessible to People Who Are Blind And Visually Impaired
www.artbeyondsight.org/handbook/acs-verbalsamples.shtml

-American Association of Museums – *The Accessible Museum;*
video - "Everyone's Welcome: Universal Access in Museums"
www.aam-us.org

-*Access To Art: A Museum Directory for Blind and Visually Impaired People;*
What Museum Guides Need To Know: Access for Blind and Visually Impaired
Visitors, American Foundation for the Blind www.afb.org

-*Guidelines for Accessible Exhibition Design*
Smithsonian Institution, Accessibility Office
www.si.edu/resource/faq/access.html

-*Programmatic Accessibility Guidelines for National Park Service Interpretive*
Media, National Park Service
http://www.nps.gov/hfc/pdf/accessibility/access-guide-aug2009.pdf

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1/9/2013

Figure 56.

Chapter Four

Practica
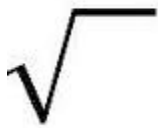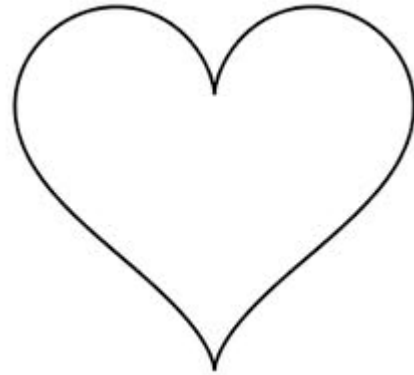
Figure 57.   Figure 58.   Figure 59.

1. Three graphic images.

What could be easier to describe?

Not so, according to William M. Ivins, *Prints & Visual Communication*:

"The moment anyone tries to seriously describe an object carefully and accurately in words his attempt takes the form of an interminably long and prolix rigamarole that few persons have the patience or the intelligence, to understand. A serious attempt to describe even the most simple piece of machinery … a kitchen can opener … results in a morass of words, and yet the shape of that can opener is simplicity itself compared to the shape of a human hand or face."

In scores of describer training sessions around the globe, I have confirmed Ivins' summation! I print one of the three images noted above on a small slip of paper and then I ask for vict … er, I mean, volunteers. The brave trainee must then proceed to use as few words as possible, spoken aloud, to describe the image so that his/her colleagues can reproduce the image on their own pads of paper.   The only stricture I insist on is that the trainee not simply name the shape (e.g., the square root symbol, a quarter-note, a heart – titles are not descriptions. And besides, it would spoil the exercise!

2. Objects in a bag.

At times, I will ask trainees to reach into a bag of miscellaneous objects. Again, without naming the object, describe it so that others can determine what it is. Can you do so with only five words? 10 words? 30 words?

3. Three Billy Howard photographs.

In the year 2000, I was asked to travel to Vermont for a 10th anniversary celebration for the Americans with Disabilities Act. A highlight of the festivities was the exhibition of photographs by artist Billy Howard and I developed audio description to read aloud as the photos were projected on a screen.

I use three of these photographs as practica for my students; following their voicing of their descriptions, I voice the descriptions that I crafted in 2000.

Kate Gainer, first Disability Affairs Coordinator for the City of Atlanta

Figure 60.   Reprinted by permission of Billy Howard

Kate Gainer was one of 18 students to attend Atlanta's first special education class for black children. It was an empowering experience for a black child growing up in a Southern segregated city. She says the most frustrating thing she went through as a teenager with cerebral palsy was that she couldn't "strut" like the other girls could.   "If I ever write my

autobiography, I'm going to title it: 'I was born colored and crippled but now I'm black and disabled'."

OBSERVE - What can you see? Just look – try to see as objectively as possible.

EDIT - What are the most critical visual elements of the photo? What elements are most necessary to an understanding and an appreciation of the image? You've been given some background information – the subject's name and her position. Keep in mind that the photographer is a professional – positioning, angle, exposure, all are considerations in providing clues as to what to describe.

LANGUAGE - What words will you use? What language most closely matches the elements on which you wish to focus? How will you structure your description – what will come first? Last? Can you structure your description with a logical order that might make it easy to follow?

VOCAL SKILLS – What is the tone of the image? How will you voice your description so that your vocalization is consonant with the image? Are there oral interpretation techniques that you want to use: Pause?; Inflection?; Volume?

Here's an annotated version of what I came up with back in 2000:

"Photo-1 of a black-2 woman, mouth open in a broad smile, nose crinkles, as if to flirt with the camera-3. Her cheeks shine echoing lights suspended behind her-4; she twists toward us, seated in a power chair-5 facing right — on its side, a round decal reads 'ADAPT — We Will Ride.'"-6

1 – What is it, overall, that's here: a *photo*--Kate is not actually with us. "General to specific"

2 – Given the context, using the information provided (from a curator, from your research), citing Kate's skin tone is important to understanding the impact of this image. Here's a woman whose forebears were *slaves* who is now in the cabinet of the Mayor of Atlanta. And if I was going to cite skin color in one of the ten images, I chose to cite it in all: otherwise, the "default" is "white".

3 – Not sure I would include this reference were I to redo it today – the idea is to convey the tone, the joy of the image. In one word, I would title the image "PRIDE" or "JOY".

4 – A bit of photographic genius: the joy is reflected in the lights suspended behind her. It conveys a sense of the location (City Hall) and there is a link between it and Kate – literally and figuratively.

5 – "Power Chair" – the colloquial phrase for a motorized wheelchair. Indeed, the photo is to a certain extent about power – and Kate's rise to a *seat* of power. It's referenced in the

middle/toward the end of the description – the fact that she uses a wheelchair isn't so important when considered in the context of her pride and joy. Also note that there is an adjective, "seated," prior to the mention of the wheelchair – it is in keeping with the philosophy behind the saying "People First Language – See the person, not the disability": *she* is "active," not the wheelchair – she is not "confined to" or "bound to" or "wheelchair bound."

6 – The decal on the side of the chair is difficult to make out – but it's clear in the original image from which I crafted my description. The slogan comes out of the disability activism movement and highlights the power and pride being exhibited. It leads me to wonder if it's a part of why Billy Howard has Kate face right – so that the decal is visible.

Try the same process with the second of Billy Howard's photographs:

Al Mead, Paralympic Medalist, Track and Field

Figure 61.   Reprinted by permission of Billy Howard

As a youngster, Al Mead lost his left leg above the knee due to circulatory problems. Mead has grown into the quintessential Paralympic athlete -- he holds a U.S. high jump record at 1.73

meters. He set the world record for the long jump with a gold medal performance in the 1988 Paralympic Games in Seoul, Korea.

"I grew up in a Christian home so when I was told that my leg would be amputated, it didn't really affect me like you think it would, because I thought God would grow it back."

Keep in mind: "general to specific," following a logical order – top to bottom; what's most important: POWER? – "his arm, sinewy, sculpted"; what's least important: the prosthetic; clarity: "an upper-case T"; contrasts: horizontal/vertical, light/dark.

Here's my description:

"Photo of a black man, in profile, facing left, he stretches his body into the shape of an upper-case T — his left arm, sinewy, sculpted, extends left — dark skin against a white tank top; his right leg and arm point right while he balances on his left leg, a prosthetic nestled within a running shoe."

And the last Billy Howard photo, my favorite:

Lauren McDevitt, Paralympic Medalist, Equestrian

Figure 62.   Reprinted by permission of Billy Howard

Lauren McDevitt was ten when she experienced a muscle cramp in her thigh. She went to the school nurse to lay down. Within an hour, she lost all feeling and movement from her waist down. It has stayed that way. Now in her mid-twenties, she is working on a master's degree in

therapeutic recreation. She captured a bronze medal at the 1996 Paralympic Games in dressage, a test of ability of rider and horse to communicate and work together through a series of complex moves.

"Riding a horse is something that gives me an immense freedom. In a [wheel]chair, you have a lot of barriers on the ground. But you get on a horse and none of those barriers are there. The horses are your legs for you. And they know that."

Keep in mind: what's most important: CONNECTION?; light/shadow; size: horse's head/her torso; what else?

My description:

"Backlit, and in wispy silhouette, a photo of a white girl in her teens in profile, facing left — only inches away, a horse (his head, the size of her torso) nuzzles her open hand in her lap as she rests in a wheelchair."

4. Two visual jokes.

Professional comics know that a joke spoken aloud must be swift, succinct and often, be structured to end with a "punch line."

Always keeping in mind the four fundamentals of audio description, how would you structure your descriptions of the next two images so they "set up" the scene (observation-general to specific), focus on key elements (editing), find words that match the tone and specifics (language-use alliteration?), and, when spoken aloud, find the correct balance between the opening narrative and the punch line (vocal skills)?

Figure 63. With your words and your voice, how would you craft a description that maintains the humor inherent in the visual image?

And how about this image of a *totally* clothed older woman and a *totally* nude statue of a male figure?

Figure 64.   What are the other humorous contrasts you can observe?

5.   Mata Hari – The International Spy Museum

The above image appears to have been photographed in a museum. Let's try reversing the process – read the following description of an exhibit in one of Washington, DC's most popular museums. Then, the image will be displayed on the following page. Can you annotate the description yourself according to the items that were focused on and the language used?

"At the end of the hallway is a life-size black-and-white photo portrait of

Mata Hari. Her dark hair is topped with a bejeweled tiara and she is

costumed exotically: fabric drapes her left shoulder and her right arm is

raised with her hand at her tiara; her top is bare save for jewel-encrusted arm and wrist bands and brassiere. Her midriff is exposed and the lower portion of her body is swathed in additional folds of fabric.

"A placard tells us that she was a 'Legend in Her Own Mind--Mata Hari embodied all the romance of espionage. This exotic dancer turned World War I spy supposedly seduced diplomats and military officers into giving up their secrets. But history shows that most of her exploits took place only in her imagination.'"

Joel Snyder

Figure 65.

VIDEO EXCERPTS FOR PRACTICA – Each excerpt is played *without* description so that trainees can practice developing their own descriptive scripts. That excerpt is followed by the same excerpt *with* description, as it was broadcast nationally.

6.   Video - *The Color Of Paradise* - Total Run Time (TRT): 2:37

In live presentations, I often ask people to listen to an excerpt from the feature film *The Color of Paradise*, as described by me for national broadcast. I play it first with *no picture on the screen and no description* – just as someone with no vision might experience it if he or she had no access to description – see page 10 of the associated website.

Imagine a sighted person (#1) inviting a friend who is blind (#2) over to enjoy this great film. The film gets to this excerpt and after 10 or 15 seconds, the two friends might say:

> #2:   "Uh, gee, what's going on? All I hear are birds."
> #1:   "That's right. Well, he's going to—
> #2:   "Who's going—to do what?"
> #1:   "Oh, yeah—well, oh, wait a second, he's about to—
> #2:   "I can wait all night, but I don't really know what's going on! It's boring. Are they at the beach? Are those seagulls?"
> #1:   "No, of course not. They're not seagulls, they're—well, I don't know what kind of birds they are. Just let me get a handle on—
> #2:   "I don't need to know what kind of a bird it is. I just—
> #1:   "Alright, but I can't tell you until I get a sense of it myself—and if I'm talking to you, I miss what's going on."
> #2:   "Fine! You take your time—I just don't have a clue about the scene and this is boring. I'm going home!"
> #1:   "Fine, if that's what you want!"
> #2:   "Fine!"

Our friends are no longer friends! All because there was no audio decsription!

Then I play the same excerpt, still with *no video, but with audio description* (see page 11 of the associated website).

Okay – much clearer. For everyone! Oftentimes, sighted people (who see but do not observe) will miss relevant images – the audio description will fill in those gaps. (Just as captions allow me to enjoy a movie without elbowing my partner – "What'd he say?!")

But – the excerpt is from the middle of the film. The main character has already been described, i.e., his physical appearance, his clothes, etc. I ask my students: "Just from having listened closely to the descriptions, what can you tell me about the main character?"

The descriptive language will confirm what has already been described earlier in the film – the main character, Mohammed, is blind. You will note: "Mohammed extends *an open hand*. He *touches* a branch and *runs his fingers* over wide, green leaves. He *pats his hand* down the

length of the branch. His *fingers trace* the smooth bark of the upper branches, *search* the network of connecting tree limbs, and *discover* their joints."

This focus is not used because the describer wants to highlight blindness. The describer takes his/her cue from the director of the film: the images being described have been framed by the director – *he* has put the focus on those images. A skilled describer is in service to his/her listeners by relaying a faithful depiction of the film; he/she is also in service to the art form being described.

Finally, the excerpt is played one last time *with the video intact and with description* so a sighted viewer (or a trainee) can make his or her own judgments about the effectiveness of the descriptions (see page 12 of the associated website).

What follows is an annotated script of the description for this brief excerpt. The notes will afford some insight into the reasoning for choosing the precise language used – why I selected particular words to bring these images to the mind's eye.

ANNOTATED AUDIO DESCRIPTION SCRIPT FOR *THE COLOR OF PARADISE*
Cues in CAPS and within [brackets]; annotations are in bold at right, keyed to numerals in description text.

Note: The appearance of the character "Mohammed" is described earlier in the film.

1   01:01:36:12   00:00:10:26   --:--:--:--
 Mohammed kneels and taps his hands
through the thick ground cover of brown **1.**
curled leaves.

1 – Color has been shown to be important to people with low vision, even people who are con-genitally blind.

2   01:01:46:16   00:00:00:23   --:--:--:--
[CHIRPING/RUSTLING :02]

3   01:01:48:16   00:00:04:04   --:--:--:--
A scrawny nestling struggles on
the ground near Mohammed's hand.

4   01:01:52:19   00:00:00:23   --:--:--:--
[GASP/CHIRPING :02] **2.**

2 – Timing is critical in the crafting of description. We

5   01:01:54:19   00:00:15:00   --:--:--:--
His palm hovers above the
baby bird. He lays his hand lightly

weave descriptive language around a film's sound elements.

over the tiny creature. Smiling,
Mohammed curls his fingers
around the chick and scoops **3.** it into
his hands. He stands and strokes
its nearly featherless head with
a fingertip.

3. – Vivid verbs help conjure images in the mind's eye.

6   01:02:08:12   00:00:00:23   --:--:--:--
[CHIRPING/RUSTLE :01]

7   01:02:09:12   00:00:17:19   --:--:--:--
Mohammed starts as the bird
nips his finger. He taps **4.** his
finger on the chick's gaping
beak. He tilts **4.** his head back,
then drops it forward. Mohammed
tips **4.** the chick into his front
shirt pocket. Wrapping his legs
and arms around a tree trunk,
Mohammed climbs.

4. – Description, like much poetry, is written to be heard. Alliteration adds variety and helps to maintain interest.

8   01:02:28:10   00:00:01:04   --:--:--:--
[HEAVY BREATHING/CLIMBING :11]

9   01:02:39:10   00:00:17:19   --:--:--:--
He latches onto a tangle of
thin, upper branches. His legs
flail for a foothold. Mohammed stretches
an arm between a fork in the trunk of the
tree and wedges in his head and shoulder.
His shoes slip on the rough bark.

Note: Throughout this excerpt, for the most part, descriptions are written to be read "in real time," i.e., as the action being described occurs on screen. However, in many films descriptions may precede the action on occasion. This is a useful convention – it accommodates timing required in films with a great deal of dialogue and allows description users the opportunity to know "what happened" moments before the action occurs or to understand a sound effect.

10   01:02:55:11   00:00:00:23   --:--:--:--
[SCRAPING :03]

11   01:02:58:11   00:00:16:04   --:--:--:--
He wraps his legs around the
lower trunk, then uses his arms

to pull himself higher. He
rises into thicker foliage and
holds onto tangles of smaller
branches. Gaining his footing,
Mohammed stands upright and
cocks his head to one side.

12   01:03:13:20   00:00:01:04   --:--:--:--
[CHIRPING/FLUTTER]

13   01:03:18:15   00:00:10:15   --:--:--:--
An adult bird flies from a nearby branch. **5.**   **5 – What to include? This**
Mohammed extends an open hand. He   **image is important – the**
touches a branch and runs his fingers   **adult bird returns in the**
over wide, green leaves.   **next scene.**

14   01:03:27:11   00:00:00:23   --:--:--:--
[RUSTLING :03]

15   01:03:30:11   00:00:14:08   --:--:--:--
He pats his hand down the
length of the branch. His fingers trace the
smooth bark of the upper branches,
search the network of connecting tree
limbs, and discover their joints.

16   01:03:43:20   00:00:00:23   --:--:--:--
[RUSTLE :02]

17   01:03:45:20   00:00:05:06   01:03:50:26
Above his head, Mohammed's
fingers find a dense mass of
woven twigs--a bird's nest.

18   01:03:50:26   00:00:00:23   --:--:--:--
[CHIRPING :03]

19   01:03:53:26   00:00:07:15   --:--:--:--
Smiling, he removes the chick
from his shirt pocket and drops
it gently into the nest beside
another fledgling.

20   01:04:01:00   00:00:00:23   --:--:--:--
[CHIRPING :03]

21   01:04:03:04   00:00:13:04   --:--:--:--
He rubs the top of the
chick's head with his index **6.**   **6 – Be specific-- precision**
finger. Mohammed wiggles his   **creates images!**
finger like a worm **7.** and taps a
chick's open beak. Smiling, he   **7 – Similes paint pictures!**
slowly lowers his hand.

7.   Video – *The Empire Strikes Back* – TRT: 1:01

Without description (see page 13 of the associated website).

With description - (see page 14 of the associated website).

8.   Video – *"Hercule Poirot"* – TRT: 1:27 (from an episode of "Mystery" on PBS, description created by WGBH)

Without description (see page 15 of the associated website).

With description (see page 16 of the associated website).

9.   Video – *"Ned's Declassified School Survival Guide to Halloween"* – TRT: 1:52

Without description (see page 17 of the associated website).

With description (see page 18 of the associated website).

10.   Video – *Pretty Woman* – TRT: 3:33

Without description (see page 19 of the associated website).

With description, created by WGBH (see page 20 of the associated website).

With description, created by U.K.'s Royal National Institute of the Blind (see page 21 of the associated website).

11.   Video – Popeye cartoon *Fright to the Finish* – TRT: 6:22

Without description (see page 22 of the associated website).

With description (see page 23 of the associated website).

12.   Video – *The Miracle Worker* (the breakfast scene) – TRT: 8:02

Without description (see page 24 of the associated website).

With description (see page 25 of the associated website).

13.   Video – *The Shining* – TRT: 1:37

Without description (see page 26 of the associated website).

With description (see page 27 of the associated website).

14.   Video – ILO – Count Us In TRT: 4:04

Without description (see page 43 of the associated website).

15.   Video – ILO – Count Us In TRT: 4:52

With description (see page 44 of the associated website).

16.   Video – KCCI News report on AD training, Des Moines, Iowa TRT: 2:25

See page 45 of the associated website.

17.   Video – "Literal Video" – *Total Eclipse of the Heart* TRT: 5:34
With description – ?! (see page 46 of the associated website).

CHAPTER FIVE

AUDIO DESCRIPTION AND LITERACY: WORDS AND MOVEMENT

Hypothesis: Audio Description in picture books for small children can demonstrably improve literacy levels.

Hypothesis: Audio Description, employing Laban Movement Analysis fundamentals, can improve an audio description user's comprehension of dance performance or movement sequences.

Years ago, my wife, Esther Geiger, was driving some children to a drama class and the kids were chattering excitedly about the movie "Toys." It takes place in a toy factory and the film is filled with colorful images and movement gags—but not a lot of dialogue. One child in the car, who was blind, said, "Oh I saw that. It was the most boring movie I've ever been to!" Indeed, this was well before the advent of audio description for film.

Esther is a CMA, a Certified Movement Analyst, a practitioner of Laban Movement Analysis developed in the early 20th century by Rudoph Laban. Laban is also known for Labanotation – a system for notating dance. As you might imagine, movement analysis and audio description have much in common: in particular, careful observation, the need to objectify our ways of looking at what we observe, and find more ways to say what we see. Because description happens in "real time" – and especially if a program contains a lot of dialogue or other pertinent sound elements – describers must be clear and succinct. There's not time to describe everything; they must choose what's most important to convey the essence of the visual experience. Then they must find words that are concise, vivid and imaginative to elicit images in their listeners' mind's eyes.

Finding words—we all deal with that, just about every moment of our waking lives. But children or people with learning disabilities have particular needs that might be addressed effectively through the use of description. In developing a rather elaborate audio described tour for the Connecticut Children's Museum in New Haven, CT, complete with navigational/ directional information and tested by people who are blind, I conducted a workshop with day care workers and reading teachers on what I think represents a new application for audio description—literacy. We experimented with developing more descriptive language to use when working with kids and picture books. These books rely on pictures to tell the story.

Figure 66.

But the teacher trained in audio description techniques would never simply hold up a picture of a red ball and read the text: "See the ball." He or she might add: "The ball is red--just like a fire engine. I think that ball is as large as one of you! It's as round as the sun--a bright red circle or sphere." The teacher has introduced new vocabulary, invited comparisons, and used metaphor or simile—with toddlers! By using audio description, you make these books accessible to children who have low vision or are blind <u>and</u> help develop more sophisticated language skills for all kids.

A picture is worth 1000 words?

Maybe.

But the audio describer might say that a few well-chosen words can conjure vivid and lasting images.

As noted earlier, I led a team of describers who provided description—for the first time—for *Sesame Street*. I was heartened by a letter I received from a blind parent of a sighted child who, for the first time, could follow along with her daughter the antics of Elmo, Bert, Ernie, and all the other denizens of *Sesame Street*. We also provided description for the Spanish version of *Sesame Street—Plaza Sesamo*—and added descriptive tracks to all newly released *Sesame Street* DVDs.

But there are various kinds of literacy – one person may perceive and learn most effectively through the use of language; someone else may relate more readily to movement. (The Public Broadcasting Service in the United States provides a helpful overview and definition of learning modalities: http://www.pbs.org/teachers/earlychildhood/articles/learningmodalities.html) Indeed, it was description of *movement* that first captured my wife's attention and led the two of us to collaborate on several projects that experiment with movement literacy.

Much of the narrative that follows immediately is based on concepts put forth originally by Rudolph Laban (1879-1958), codified under the rubric "Laban Movement Analysis" (LMA). It

is offered here as a basis from which further Guidelines/Best Practices for dance description may be developed.

In his introduction to the second edition of *The Mastery of Movement*, Rudolph Laban wrote: "What really happens in [dance] does not occur only on the stage or in the audience, but within the magnetic current between both these poles." He suggests that the dancers on stage form the "active pole of this magnetic circuit [and] are responsible for the integrity of purpose" in the performance that determines the quality of the "exciting current between stage and audience."

Laban's focus here is on the skill of the performer in communicating with the audience. It is assumed that the audience is able to fully perceive that skill and experience that communication. But what if the "magnetic current" is interrupted, not by lack of clarity on stage, but rather by an audience member's lack of access to that full perception. How, for example, can a blind person "see" a dance performance?

Esther has focused on using LMA to enhance audio description. LMA offers description writers and live describers a valuable tool for observation, selection and description of important movement elements in live performance, video and film.

Esther's interest in this endeavour was first sparked watching a broadcast of the audio described version of the film *Saturday Night Fever*. A turning point in the story occurs during a dance contest, when the protagonist (played by John Travolta) discovers something about his own limitations—and unearned advantages—by watching the performances of the black and Hispanic couples that place behind him and his partner. To Movement Analyst eyes, it was clear that the stylistic differences between the performances served as an important device to convey character and further the plot. But what was heard in the description was only a focus on naming the moves the dancers were making; one couldn't hear as much difference between the couples as could be seen. The concern about this missed opportunity in description led us to contemplate how the LMA framework might contribute.

Can you pick up the distinctions (or lack thereof) that Esther noticed?

- Audio – *Saturday Night Fever* Travolta clip TRT: :41
With description (see page 30 of the associated website).

- Audio – *Saturday Night Fever* "Hispanic" clip TRT: :34
With description (see page 31 of the associated website).

- Video – *Saturday Night Fever* Travolta clip, with video and audio   TRT: :41
With description (see page 32 of the associated website).

- Video – *Saturday Night Fever* "Hispanic" clip, with video and audio TRT: :34
With description (see page 33 of the associated website).

Since 2003, Esther has offered workshops for describers and others, introducing participants to LMA concepts that provide describers an expanded range of seeing and a more specific

vocabulary for describing movement. There is a significant difference between saying what someone is doing and describing how they do it. Description is often about what a mover is doing. But to convey as much information in as few words as possible, we need to describe <u>how</u> the mover is accomplishing the action. What dynamic qualities of the movement flavor its meaning? The describer needs to choose concise wording that will capture the primary elements, communicating to the listener the most essential visual cues. Most recently, Rachel Howard summed up this concept in discussing *visual* art in her excellent essay "Gesture Writing" (NY Times, May 25, 2013):

> " 'Find the gesture!' the instructor would shout, as the would-be artists sketched. 'What is the *essence* of that pose? How does that pose *feel* to the model? The whole pose — quick, quick! No, not the arm or the leg. The line of the energy. What is that pose *about*? Step back and see it — really see it — whole. … Don't worry about the details. What is the essence of that pose? Where's the line of energy? What is the essence of what you see?' … Realizing that writing is a lot like drawing gives us a deeper approach. Because really, before we put a word or a mark on the page, both writers and artists must first step back and see … to see deeply enough to capture the vibrancy of life on the page, a writer must move her consciousness out of information organizing mode into an intuitive way of seeing subtle organic connections and capturing them in bold strokes."

Try describing a Jackson Pollock painting! Dot after swish after swirl? In the same way, a dance, described simply as a series of movements—the *what* of the image—would never do justice to the larger meaning represented in the overall choreography.

Describers are already practiced observers, and they understand how to look for essence and pattern. Beyond that, what the LMA approach offers them is an expanded range of seeing and a more specific vocabulary for describing movement.

In a recent workshop, Esther talked with describers about the difference between just saying what someone is doing, and describing <u>how</u> they do it. Workshop participants observed clips of people walking, where just hearing "walk" doesn't give nearly as much information as seeing the image. For example, watching Charlie Chaplin in *City Lights*, it was agreed that his body organization and movement phrasing are essential elements of his signature character. In *My Fair Lady* it's Audrey Hepburn's postural attitude and movement qualities, as much as her costume and speech, that demonstrate how Eliza Doolittle has changed after being groomed by Professor Higgins. In other examples, the focus was on gait patterns, spatial interactions and other movement ideas that inform characters' walks.

Take a look:

- Video – Charlie Chaplin TRT: :30
Without description (see page 34 of the associated website).

- Video – Cuckoo-Ratched TRT: :30
Without description (see page 35 of the associated website).

- Video – Cuckoo-Nicholson TRT: :32
Without description (see page 36 of the associated website).

- Video – *My Fair Lady*-1 TRT: :26
Without description (see page 37 of the associated website).

- Video – *My Fair Lady*-2 TRT: :17
Without description (see page 38 of the associated website).

- Video – *Quill*-cane TRT: :25
Without description (see page 39 of the associated website).

- Video – *Quill*-dog TRT: :39
Without description (see page 40 of the associated website).

- Video – *Ministry of Silly Walks,* Monty Python TRT: 1:13
Without description (see page 41 of the associated website).

Describers can use "walk" verbs to incorporate adverbial ideas more succinctly; the following list is an example of a vocabulary roster developed by Esther for describers. It consists of "locomoting" words, organized from an LMA framework.

<u>Vocabulary for Audio Describers: Locomoting</u>

Writers of Audio Description search for both brevity and clarity of expression. Movement Analysts use the LMA framework and language to look for pattern, essence and meaning. Here is a sample word list for describers, organized from a Movement Analyst's overview.

VERBS INDICATING LOCOMOTION (TRAVELLING THROUGH SPACE)

Category #1: Some basic verbs that denote a specific **Body Action**
WALK, STEP, RUN, JUMP, HOP, SKIP, LEAP, GALLOP, TURN

These words tell <u>what</u> the mover is doing. Describers need to be succinct, but also specific. To convey as much information in as few words as possible, they often need to describe <u>how</u> the mover is accomplishing the action. What sort of pathway in space does the mover follow? How does the shape or "attitude" of their body convey character or context? What dynamic qualities of the movement flavor its meaning? Below are some verbs meaning "locomote" which contain modifying information about the "how" of the movement.

Category #2: Movement Dynamics
(The main idea in the locomotion is seen through the mover's use of dynamic factors: flow, time, force and focus.)

The locomoting movement is mostly "about" <u>Flow</u> (releasing or containing):

FLOW, PROGRESS, STREAM, SURGE, YIELD, EASE
STIFFEN, RESIST, TIGHTEN

The locomoting movement is mostly about <u>Time</u> (quick or sustained):

RACE, FLY, DASH, TROT, DART, ACCELERATE, HUSTLE, RUSH, ZIP, SPEED,
HASTEN, SCURRY, WHIZ, STROLL, LINGER, LOPE, HESITATE, SAUNTER,
DECELERATE, DALLY, MOSEY, DAWDLE

The locomoting movement is mostly about <u>Force</u> (strong or light):

STOMP, CRASH, THUD, TRUDGE, PLOD, CLOMP, LUMBER
FLUTTER, TIPTOE, FLIT

The locomoting movement is mostly about <u>Focus</u> (direct or diffuse):
THREAD, HOME IN, TREAD, TRAIL, TRACK, FOLLOW
WANDER, WEAVE, EXPLORE, SURVEY

Many locomoting verbs contain ideas combining two or three of these factors within the category of movement dynamics. For example:

(Time and Force) BARRELL, STAMP, MARCH, FLUTTER, BOUNCE, PLOD

(Flow and Focus) ROAM, WITHDRAW

(Force and Focus) LUNGE, STABILIZE

(Time and Flow) MOBILIZE, CAVORT

(Time and Focus) PRANCE, WAVER

(Flow and Force) SURGE, MINCE, DRIFT

(Force, Time, Focus) FLOAT, POUNCE, GLIDE, FLING, GRIND, FLIT, PRESS

(Force, Time, Flow) FLAIL, CAREEN, BURST, STAMPEDE

(Time, Flow, Focus) TRANSPORT

Category #3: Space (Spatial Direction or Pathway)
(The "main idea" in the movement is where it goes and how it navigates through the environment.)

ENTER, APPROACH, ARRIVE, CIRCLE, NAVIGATE, CIRCUMNAVIGATE, SIDLE, STEP, WEND, MEANDER, STRAGGLE, ZIG-ZAG, ANGLE, WANDER, SPIRAL, ORBIT, FOLLOW, FORGE, SLIDE, TRAVERSE, EVADE, INTRUDE, PURSUE, CHASE, TURN

Category #4: Body Shape or Attitude
(The main idea is contained in the mover's way of forming their body shape in relating to the environment as they locomote.)

ADVANCE, RETREAT, WRIGGLE, CRAWL, WRITHE, OOZE, HOBBLE, WIGGLE, WADDLE, PARADE, STRUGGLE, ENTWINE, TANGLE, SHAKE, SHIMMY

Combination Verbs
Of course, many locomoting verbs combine ideas from the above categories:

(Space and Dynamics) DIVE, HURTLE, LURCH, SCOOT, SASHAY, SWOOP, FLEE, BLUNDER, STALK, PLUNGE, SKIM, STRIDE

(Space and Body Shape) LEAN, LIST, SLITHER, SCUTTLE, SIDLE

(Space and Body Action) SLIDE, STUMBLE

(Body Shape and Dynamics) JERK, SLINK, STRUT, STUMBLE, SCOOT

(Body Action and Dynamics) TWIRL, WHIRL, TRIP, MARCH

(Space, Dynamics, Body Shape) SNEAK, CREEP

Describing a play or a movie is a challenge: conveying the visual elements clearly, while still allowing the audience to hear dialogue and sound effects. When first tackling description for a <u>dance</u> performance, the challenge seemed unmeetable: dance is just too visual! The insights that allowed a "way in" to this challenge came from a blind audience member and from Laban training.

This special project was a collaboration between Audio Description Associates (ADA) and the Axis Dance Company, based in Oakland, California. Axis pioneered "physically integrated dance."

Axis Dance, committed to inclusion and accessibility, asked ADA to provide live description for a performance presented by the Flynn Theatre in Burlington, Vermont. ADA was to write a script based on videotapes of the choreography, and participate in training workshops for the live describers. The describers would attend rehearsals, script in hand, to practice "speaking the motif" as the dancing occurred and then describe the performance live for blind and low-vision audience members. For most of these patrons, this would be the first time they had attended a live dance performance.

At a pre-performance workshop organized by Axis, we heard from one blind participant, "I never go to dance because all I get is the music, and if I don't like the music, it's really boring!" (How reminiscent of our young friend from years ago, who was so bored by the movie that the sighted kids had found exciting.) When asked what he would need to hear in the description in order not to be bored, he replied, "the story". One of the describers responded in dismay, "But it's modern dance; it's abstract. There is no story!" Indeed, Laban wrote that "Pure dancing has no describable story. It is frequently impossible to outline the content of a dance in words, although one can always describe the movement." [Introduction to the second edition of *The Mastery of Movement*, p. 4] And here we were hoping to somehow describe the movement in a way that would give the listener access to the content!

But Laban himself showed how; just a few pages earlier he'd written, "…the artist playing the role of Eve can pluck the apple in more than one way, with movements of varying expression. She can pluck the apple greedily and rapidly or languidly and sensuously… Many other forms of action are possible, and each of these will be characterized by a different kind of movement… In defining the kind of movement as greedy, as sensuous, or detached, one does not define merely what one has actually seen. What the spectator has seen may have been only a peculiar, quick jerk or a slow gliding of the arm. The impression of greed or sensuousness is the spectator's personal interpretation of Eve's state of mind…" [p.1]

Here Laban is alluding to the interactive nature of the "current between stage and audience". He also suggests an important principle of audio description techniques, noted earlier: "WYSIWYS: what you see is what you say." In other words, it's important to describe accurately and vividly, but to allow the listener to create meaning. Audio describers try to be objective, by using words that are specific and imaginative, without being interpretive (Eve snatches the apple "with a quick jerk of the arm" not "with a look of greedy guilt".)

LMA vocabulary provided the words to describe the movements happening in each Axis Dance piece. In addition, LMA offered a vantage from which to find the "story" of each piece of choreography, whether or not there was a narrative plot.

Watching each Axis piece on video in developing the audio description script, the focus was on finding the "story" it tells: what main idea does the dancing communicate to the viewer/what is the essence of the dance? What information would be most important to allow a blind audience member to "view" the performance as fully as possible, to help him follow the meaning of the choreography? The LMA framework provided a lens for seeing essence and meaning. Since there's not time while it's happening on stage to describe everything about a dance piece, the describer needs to choose which elements comprise the structure and themes of the choreography, and what words would most succinctly convey those ideas.

For example, one piece seemed mostly "about" spatial patterns and sequences of group clustering and scattering; the dancers' specific movements seemed less important, and their individual characteristics (gender, hair color, body shape, etc.) seemed not to matter at all. In another piece, where each dancer played a unique character, those particulars, along with body attitude, were meaningful factors.

Some believe that it is helpful for the describer to understand the foundation of the dance styles being viewed or immerse him/herself in the vocabulary of "the dance." Take care –

a) a describer need not have deep knowledge or even enjoy every subject he/she describes – most important is keen observation of the movement and <u>movement patterns</u> and a vocabulary that allows its verbal expression in clear and vivid terms;

b) jargon or labeling are "short cuts"—it's quicker and easier to say "plié" than "a bending of the legs at the knees." But its first use must accompany the actual description to accommodate listeners who have no prior knowledge of ballet terminology, for instance. It may be that in a live, performing arts context, pre-show notes can be used to introduce certain vocabulary for selected movements and then those words could be used during performance; the describer makes a judgment with respect to what language is within the realm of "general knowledge", e.g., choreography, ensemble, and the use of these words will help couch descriptions within the genre;

c) in the words of Paul Valery: "Seeing is forgetting the name of what one sees" Labels—for movements, terms, jargon—take us a step away from truly looking at the particular image or movement: it's a plié, yes, but what's the nature of this particular plié?

As with any genre (theater, media, opera), visual images in dance—multiple moves in several shapes and on varied levels—can occur in quick succession and even simultaneously. Dancers do not always perform in unison! Again, a description that attempts to convey *everything* will convey nothing well. The specifics of each move are less important than the overall patterns created by their combinations thus creating a style (tap? African? modern?), concept (a particular idea?) or "the vision," if you will, of the choreographer.

The musical or sound score:
Consider how the range of movements interacts with any accompanying score. Be certain to time description to empathize with choreographic intent, e.g., an increasingly furious swirl that is in consonance with the crescendo of a drum, culminating with a loud crack! How disappointing it would be if the describer were speaking "over" the artists' carefully crafted ending.

Brevity:
Use as few words as possible, vivid words, words that evoke specific and clear images. Is it a jump? How high? A swirl? A twirl? Are arms and legs akimbo or simply pointed to the side like the limbs of a tree (use of simile)?

Resist the temptation to assume that, without dialogue (in many, but not by any means all) dance pieces, you have more time within which to describe! Indeed, a description of a painting on the wall may nave no time limit bounded by a linear performance—but this cannot imply license to use more words than less. (See William M. Ivins' quotation from *Prints and Communication*.) Extra verbiage invariably complicates and confuses. And description of sound (seemingly a "no-no") has its place when its origin could be a mystery (a slap on the ground or a knee, a hoot, etc.).

Scenic elements:
Again, as with other formats, dancers' appearance and costumes, scenic elements and props, also can inform the overall and the particular effect of the performance and must be noted according to the describer's judgment.

Musicals:
Musical theater offers particular challenges and opportunities—lyrics must be respected but the pauses between refrains or repeat choruses provide precious seconds within which description may be inserted.

For example, "The Chava Ballet" in *Fiddler on the Roof* provides an opportunity to highlight movement characteristics of individuals and plot elements (each daughter leaving her family) that reinforces an understanding of character and the narrative. Be certain that the visual images that convey these important points are described with vivid language and specific image-evoking words and metaphors.

Touch:
As with any performing art experience, describers do well to borrow the "please touch" attitude of the best museum educators who incorporate tactile and other sense experience within access programs.   Pre-show backstage sensory (tactile) tours help audience members become involved with the performance, exploring props and costumes, and even dancers bodies!

Experience:
Finally, allow dance audiences to find the visual image in the choreography by experiencing it in their own bodies. Explore the potential for establishing pre-performance workshops led, ideally, by a member of the dance company or its staff along with the describer. Once again, this is a technique that is often employed by our colleagues in museums—what better way to understand the image of a tall obelisk (the Washington Monument?) than to *become* that structure, stretching high? A plié becomes known not simply as an intellectual concept but as an activity that is a part of one's own body; a "time step" becomes associated with the movement and sound of one's own feet and will be immediately recognizable in performance.

The following material is a portion of the describers' script for one of the Axis Dance pieces: "Dust", choreographed by Victoria Marks. The script is designed to be spoken while the movement occurs; viewing a tape of the piece, you would notice that much has been left unsaid in order to focus on communicating mood, theme and choreographic structure, while leaving aural space for the impact of the musical score. I invite you to test the description by having it read aloud to you. To what extent does hearing the dance allow you to see?

Audio Describers' Script for a Live Dance Performance (excerpt):

DUST
By Victoria Marks

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR DESCRIBERS:

This dance is structured to employ many types of <u>contrasts</u>. Examples include….

Visual contrasts: light/dark, warm tones/cool tones, patterns/full light, one or two dancers/large group.

Sound contrasts: nature sounds/music, quietness (serene sounds)/active (agitated) sounds.

Choreographic idea contrasts: stillness/mobility, passive/active, initiator/follower, intensity (seriousness)/lighthearted busyness, isolation/interaction.

Note that the activeness/passivity, stillness/mobility of each dancer at any given choreographic moment is <u>not</u> based on who's in a wheelchair/"disabled" or not. Sometimes the choreographer purposely turns that around.

<u>DESCRIPTION</u>

1
A small pool of light reveals a woman lying still, face down. From left, a second woman drives her motorized wheelchair into the light.

2
She pauses next to the prone woman, then reaches down to lift the woman's shoulder and change her pose.

3
The woman in the wheelchair continues to pose the other, moving one body part at a time. The woman on the floor moves only as she is molded, holding each new shape.
[SLIGHT PAUSE]
The mov-er steers her wheelchair to gently nudge the mov-ee onto her back.

4
The passive dancer on the floor is softly pulled and pushed, her head lifted, her back lightly touched, to bring her to sitting. The wheelchair presses into her from behind; she slides to a crouch, then a squat. In stages, her partner stands her up. The standing woman now turns her head—on her own—toward the wheelchair dancer. Light fades to black.

5
Light comes up. The standing woman faces a new dancer. She who was passive is now the initiator. One press of her forefinger against the other's breastbone sets off a cascade of movements. The first backs away and watches as the new dancer flails and dangles, drops to her knees, her elbow, then splays onto her back. Lights fade out.

6
The circle of light comes up. A new dancer stands beside the splayed woman, slicing the air with sharp arcing arm movements. The splayed woman lifts her head, as the other gazes upward. Light fades to black.

[PAUSE, MUSIC CHANGES]

7
Full stage lights up. From left, a man and woman, in time to the music, prance and dip forward. They are met, from right, by a dancer motoring her wheelchair on, dragging another who hangs on to its back. Now dancers converge and scatter busily all over the stage—two drive wheelchairs, five are on foot. Greetings, hugs, taps, re-groupings. Dancers wave, bump, tease, chase, shove, lean, flop onto and roll or climb over each other, scurrying and whizzing playfully from place to place.

8
Now, as lights begin to dim, the dancers spread across the stage and slow to stillness, pausing in tableau. Lighting creates an uneven geometry of shadows slashing across the floor.
In unison, the dancers begin to turn slowly in place. Now all are seen in right profile.

9
Now their backs all face us.

10
[CHIMES]

11
The dancers continue their slow-motion rotation.

12
Now all are in left profile

13
At left, suddenly a wheelchair dancer sweeps her arm up and circles her chair to the right. At this cue, a man at right spins, then reaches out to draw her to him. While some continue their slow, in-place rotation, others break rank and repeat some of the earlier greeting, reaching, running, and pushing. Each always returns to a still patch of light and rejoins the ongoing group rotation.

14
Small groups step forward, then back into place. Now all pause, in tableau again, their backs to us.

15
In unison, all look over their right shoulder then turn toward us.

16
They are still.

17
The two at right turn away.

18
The two at center turn away.

19
The remaining three turn away.

20
Steadily, evenly, all rotate to their left, to face the far left corner.

21-22
Abruptly breaking the spell, a woman dashes from right to left, slicing through the group. She flings herself to the ground, then scrambles up and races back as the others pull away from her and stride off left. She repeats the run and slide, left alone on stage. The lights have brightened and the floor pattern disappears. The lone dancer runs off as others return along her same diagonal path (from far left to close right). They are tugging, shoving, catching and lifting each other. Some push, roll and dart past others to advance along the diagonal and scatter offstage right.

23
Now all but two have exited. They pause, stare at each other, and one runs off right, leaving the other standing alone.

24
Body erect, she gradually turns her back to us…

25
…then pivots slowly on one foot then the other to complete her rotation.

26
Now she looks at us, then walks forward, gazing across the audience.

27
The light brightens on her as she bends forward, hands to her right knee, and unfastens her prosthetic lower leg. She sets it upright in front of her. It stands alone as she kneels behind.

28
Crouching, she slides left on her knees.

29
She glances at us, leans forward to peer at the leg, reaching out slowly with her index finger to poke the leg and tip it over. As she sits up, another dancer, in a separate pool of light to the left, reaches upward, arching her back, then crumples to the floor, face down.

Now, watch and listen to the excerpt from *Dust* with description -

The concepts and projects detailed above – both training audio describers and writing description – are beginning explorations in the application of LMA to description and an exploration of how description can build literacies: verbal, visual and movement. It's clear that describers and all lovers of language have much to share, and a lot to learn together about observation, clarity, efficiency of description – and how the use of descriptive language can build more sophisticated literacy for all.

Figure 67

An excerpt from *DUST*.   AXIS Dance Company

Chapter Six

BRINGING AUDIO DESCRIPTION TO YOUR COMMUNITY

Bringing Audio Description To Your Community –

- Cooperation with the Community of AD consumers

First and most essential, cultivate awareness and cooperation with current and potential description consumers. Support and funding will flow from evidence of the desire and need for the service as demonstrated by the people for whom the service is designed. Administration by a service organization run by people who are blind or have low vision is a logical starting place, perhaps with a committee of individuals dedicated to building an AD service for the community. The Ameriucan Council of the Blind and the National Federation of the Blind both have state and local affiliates (see www.acb.org and www.nfb.org).

- Potential Service Providers (theaters, museums, etc.) / Outreach

A survey of theaters and/or museums could be conducted to generate interest in collaboration in developing the service and, potentially, a new and enthusiastic audience.   In addition, find out whether AD is available in a particular community for broadcast television. Generally, description on broadcast media is the AD consumer's first exposure to AD. Do local libraries carry DVDs that are described? (Do they know the difference?!) You may find that potential service providers may require some education with respect to access for people who are blind or have low vision. All too often, advocates will be confronted with "attitudes" based on a lack of exposure/education: "Why would we offer that service? We've never had a blind person come by!" And, of course, that attitude results in a cyclical pattern that reinforces itself: "We don't offer the service because we've never had it requested." But perhaps they've never attracted anyone from this sub-set of the population because the venue isn't accessible. If it isn't accessible, consumers stay away. When consumers are not evident, the entity doesn't consider accessibility. And if there is no accessibility, consumers stay away, and on and on.

The development of audio description for any facility is not a "build it and they will come" project. Traditionally, people who are blind have had little meaningful access to events or exhibits that are primarily visual in nature. Transportation and costs are also barriers for this population (Americans who are blind or have low vision have a 70% unemployment rate). Consequently it is important that the development of AD is publicized in the appropriate channels and with as much direct, personal contact as possible—and with unique outreach efforts that address the barriers noted above.

Keep in mind that in the United States, the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) requires that most public entities be accessible, although audio description is not specifically mentioned. Further Title 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 mandates that any entity that receives funding from the federal government must be accessible—and audio description is noted.

But too many people think that accessibility involves only ramps and seating for people who use wheelchairs. Programmatic accessibility is key—what good is entry to a theater if the event in the hall is not accessible? With audio description (as well as sign interpretation) most performing arts facilities that do offer the services will provide them only at select performances – sometimes arrangements for access at a performance can be made with two weeks' notice to the organization. Too little thought is given to how access can be available at *every* performance. Access Theater in Santa Barbara, CA and Open Circle Theater in Montgomery County, MD have had success in this area: either with maintaining an audio description script for a production and having a skilled describer and/or voicer available; or by "casting" an audio describer along with other members of a show's ensemble – he/she would then attend rehearsals, develop the audio description, and be available at every performance, like any other cast member. (Of course, the difference is that if the service isn't desired at a particular performance, the describer may leave.)

- Training

After engaging potential consumers of description and cooperating with potential service providers on establishing an audio description program, the next step may involve the training of describers (a list of AD training providers is available at www.acb.org/adp). Depending on a community's circumstances, candidates for AD training could be auditioned (see appendix 8.7.1) and, as appropriate, pay a tuition fee for the training. A sample outline for a three-day series of intensive training sessions is also available as Appendix 8.7.2)

Of course, candidates may naturally inquire: can I be hired as a describer and, if so, what might I earn? Currently, no more than two-three dozen individuals work full-time as professional (paid) describers, either as a staff employee or as a freelancer (a list of description producers in the United States can be found as Appendix 8.7.4). The vast bulk of people who work as describers are volunteers in community programs focused on the performing arts or as docents in museums. Many of these organizations are listed at: www.acb.org/adp.

Will I be a "certified" describer once I've completed the training? NO! "Certified" implies a status conveyed by an appropriate entity in recognition of significant training and work experience. One set of training sessions does not a describer make; you may receive a "certificate" which signifies that a training course has been completed successfully. But certification by some sort of over-arching body is something else entirely and at this writing does not exist in the United States. (In the U.K., the Audio Describers Association offers a series of training sessions and tests as well as experiential criteria which comprise a certification process for description *in the performing arts*.)

- Budgeting / Funding

We come full circle here: I began this section by noting the importance of connection with the community of potential AD consumers. Just so, without that support it will be far more difficult to develop a realistic budget. Several factors should be considered:

-- a sponsoring organization: a local radio reading association; a service organization for people who are blind or have low vision; a committed arts organization in the community; a media entity—a television or radio broadcaster; service organizations for people who have various disabilities, e.g., a partnership with an organization that supports people who are deaf would allow the sharing of staff and resources. It's critical to identify a person who has the time and organizational expertise to serve as the principal administrator for the program. As for the describers themselves, costs cover a broad range—from volunteer efforts with description based on only two or three viewings of a performance, to honorariums that cover travel costs and a nominal fee, to more substantial compensation: up to $250 for preparation of a prepared script and $250 per performance (sign interpreters often receive far more for their work and generally two individuals are required). For media description, compensation for description writing is based either on a salary (often starting as low as $30,000 per annum) or per program freelance efforts: from $50 for a half-hour program and up. *Voicing* is generally handled separately and payment is made to a union (AFTRA—American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, or SAG—Screen Artists Guild, now officially one union) member or a non-union voice talent: generally costs can range from $100 for a half-hour program and up. If a union rate has been established, the fee may be based on the number of hours the voice talent is in studio and a separate Pension and Welfare payment will be required.

-- As noted above, training for a core of local describers is important to the process. Not all trainees will become expert describers; but hopefully all participants will become "boosters" for the program and might contribute to its administration in a variety of ways: outreach, P.R., equipment maintenance, liaison to description providers, back-up describers/writer of program notes, etc. Depending on individual circumstances, an initial training course of at least several days may cost between $4,000 and $8,000.

-- For a local community performing arts program, generally a portable set of FM receivers (with FM transmitters, steno-mask and headset microphones) will range in cost from $4,500 to $9,000 (see appendix 8.2 for suppliers).

Some communities have used this same equipment to provide live description in movie theaters for a first-run film (based on multiple viewings, the preparation of an AD script, and the scheduling of screenings when the script will be voiced and consumers can listen in via the FM receivers). Most movie theater halls are already equipped with an infra-red audio transmission system used primarily for assistive listening, the boosting of sound for people who are hard-of-hearing. If the system has more than one channel, a second channel can be used to transmit description for AD consumers wearing headsets modified to receive that second channel of sound. This is often how recorded description in movie theaters is received via systems like WGBH's MoPix system or the DoReMi Fidelio product (see appendix 8.2—costs for these systems are relatively significant and at times modifications must be made in each hall where films are projected).

-- As for funding, a variety of sources should be explored:

Local Lions Clubs, community foundations, communications companies, local businesses, individuals, www.kickstarter.com/ – all of these are potential sources of contributed income.

Some communities will offer description training and charge tuition; in addition, once a service is established, it's appropriate to charge the service providers (venues/theaters) a fee per performance described.

- Marketing

The development of audio description for any venue or genre is not a "build it and they will come" project. Traditionally, people who are blind have had little meaningful access to material that is primarily visual in nature. Museum exhibits are a particularly area of concern: "Do Not Touch" signs are ubiquitous; but is an audio description tour available? Are models of exhibit content available for tactile examination? In theaters, are touch-tours a part of the facility's accessibility program? Transportation and costs are also barriers for this population (people who are blind or have low vision have a 70% unemployment rate).

Consequently it is important that audio description programs be publicized in the appropriate channels and with as much direct, personal contact as possible—and with unique outreach efforts that address the barriers noted above. It is critical for staff to do as much as possible to encourage visits by potential AD consumers.

In 1997, the U.K. Royal National Institute of the Blind (now the Royal National Institute of Blind People) and its then audio description coordiunator, Marcus Weisen, developed an excellent summary of marketing techniques that can be adapted for programs in any country. Portions of the summary, adapted and updated, are presented here:

How do I reach visually impaired people?

• Local societies for visually impaired people and self help groups. Developing a good relationship with local societies can be invaluable. Societies may publicise your service to individuals through their newsletter or mailing list. The society may also be interested in organising group visits. A special event such as a touch tour of the stage set might help to attract local groups. Alternatively, offer to go along to one of their meetings and talk about the new audio description service.

• Talking newspapers. [Radio Reading Services in the U.S. – see the Interantional Association of Audio Information Services at: http://iaais.org/]

The Talking Newspaper Association of the UK (TNAUK) publishes a directory of all local talking newspapers. Ask your local talking newspaper if they would like to 'publish' a review of an audio described event. You could also offer the talking newspaper a demonstration tape which they could air.

• Local social services. Your local authority may know of visually impaired people in the area who are interested in greater access to cultural events.

• Organisations of and for older people. The majority of people who are blind or vision impaired are older people. Market your service to local organisations, clubs and day centres for older people. There will inevitably be some visually impaired people who attend these groups.

• Mailing lists. It is highly likely that there are people who have a vision impairment already coming to your theatre who would benefit from an audio description service. Existing patrons may have visually impaired friends and family who they could tell about the service.

• The media. 94% of visually impaired people watch television and 91% listen to radio, so do make use of your existing media contacts. Sighted friends and family also relay information from newspapers and magazines. If you have already established links with local groups, see if visually impaired people would be prepared to give interviews from a user perspective.

• Specialist publications. Target notices to publications that cater to older people or people with disabilities.

• Make your publicity welcoming. Avoid using terms such as "the blind or "the disabled." "People first" is the rule: "People who are blind, people who are partially sighted people, people who have a vision impairment" are phrases that are much more welcoming and accurate. Try to include photographs of AD consumers and/or people who are older in your leaflets.

• What information do AD consumers need? Remember that audio description is [still!] a relatively new concept. Regular theatre goers and the more active members of local societies will probably be familiar with it. There are however, a lot of potential AD consumers who have never experienced it. Explain what audio description is in all your publicity.

• Explain how the system works. Do people need to arrive early to listen to an introduction before a play begins? Do they leave a ID for headsets? Can they sit anywhere in the auditorium? Are guide dogs welcome? Think about all the "extras," not just the performance itself. Can intermission drinks be brought to AD consumers who may find it difficult to find their way to the bar? Make sure that all box office and front of house staff are familiar with audio description and how it works. As noted, transportation can also be a major obstacle for AD consumers: include details of public transport with your literature. Local groups may need details of parking for mini-buses and coaches. You might also like to examine the possibility of providing transportation for specific performances or events. Some organizations offer discount rates for people with disabilities and their sighted guides. The policy should be clearly indicated in all publicity.

• The AD logo (see page 2) should be used to indicate that an organization offers the service. Downloadable copies are available at: https://www.graphicartistsguild.org/tools_resources/downloadable-disability-access-symbols

• Don't forget information on the content at a facility. That is what the audience is interested in - audio description is a facilitator.

• How can information be made accessible? Follow established large print guidelines and produce information in other formats such as braille and audio formats. (See: http://www.miusa.org/ncde/tools/altformats) If you keep a mailing list, ask consumers which format they prefer.

Chapter Seven

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER IMPLICATIONS

What are the specific areas where audio description holds promise for future development? In no particular order, I see a range of opportunities. Let me "describe" them:

- "Self-description": No, I'm not speaking of describing one's self! In schools, including higher education, in employment settings, and at conferences, description is most efficiently provided by the speaker making a presentation. "Describe as you go" is the key, not necessarily assuming that all in an audience have easy access to the images being presented. It's common for speakers to ask: "Can everyone hear me?" But can everyone see the images in your PowerPoint or in a short video? At best, a presentation without description is insensitive to an audience's needs; at worst, the situation results in an embarrassing episode similar to that which occurred at VISION 2008 in Canada cited earlier.

- Video Description Research and Development Center (VDRDC): http://www.vdrdc.org/. Supported by the U.S. Department of Education, the VDRDC "investigates innovative technologies and techniques for making online video more accessible to blind and visually-impaired students and consumers. Through collaboration with a broad array of partners and stakeholders in the Description Leadership Network - http://www.vdrdc.org/dln, we are developing advanced video annotation methods for use in a wide variety of educational settings, as well as helping educators and other description providers make better use of the tools already available." I served as a member of the Description Leadership Network.

A key project of the VDRDC is its Descriptive Video Exchange (DVX), a set of web-based tools that enable anyone to create, access, and share video description content from anywhere video is being streamed or played – also dubbed "You Describe." While I am an unwavering advocate for the highest quality in description, a mechanism for encouraging all people to become familiar with description by doing description can only help build awareness of a relatively new access technique.

- Visibility: As I craft these notes, I pause to follow the television coverage of the 2013 Memorial Day ceremonies in the United States. An army sergeant performed a stirring rendition of "America, The Beautiful" – accompanied by a sign language interpreter. All people see the interpreter and are reminded of the importance of making the words being sung accessible to people who are deaf.   And yet my own description of the presidential inaugurations for ABC-TV in 2009 and 2013 was heard only by those who accessed a separate audio channel. Similarly, at a performing arts event, description is accessed only by those who desire the service.

And that's how it should be. But the result is that audio description is "invisible."   I believe that to a great extent the future of audio description is tied to its visibility among consumers as well as the general public. We need to create more effective PSAs (Public Service Announcements),

perhaps in association with the public sector – see examples at:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IgSnrRjOG7Q and
http://www.afb.org/section.aspx?FolderID=2&TopicID=521; and it is critical that advocates for audio description collaborate with other constituencies – people who are deaf, people with learning disabilities, people learning English, all people who can benefit from the development of audio description.

- Information: As a member of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Video Programming Accessibility Advisory Committee (VPAAC), I advocated for the widest possible distribution of information regarding: a) what description is available on public broadcast television; and b) how to access the AD feeds. The committee's final report notes "the importance of making widely available information about what programs are video described … (that) entities required to provide described programming … must also provide information about described programs on their websites, provide this information to programming information distributors such as Rovi and Tribune Media Services, and consider alternative ways of ensuring that blind and visually impaired consumers have access to such information. … (that) networks should provide information on their web sites indicating which programs they are airing with video description. To ensure that the information can be accessed, it must be provided in a manner that is accessible to and usable by individuals who are blind or have a visual impairment (and that) information regarding programs with video description be made accessible, usable, and searchable online and through other means such as by telephone using an automated Integrated Voice Response (IVR) system." The full VPAAC report is available at:
http://vpaac.wikispaces.com/file/view/120409%20VPAAC%20Video%20Description%20REPORT%20AS%20SUBMITTED%204-9-2012.pdf/318855494/120409%20VPAAC%20Video%20Description%20REPORT%20AS%20SUBMITTED%204-9-2012.pdf

In addition, the American Council of the Blind (through its Audio Description Project), the Royal National Institute of Blind People, and Canada's Accessible Media, Inc. maintain excellent repositories of information on audio description in a wide range of genres. Those resources are available at:

- www.acb.org/adp;
- http://www.rnib.org.uk/livingwithsightloss/tvradiofilm/Pages/audio_description.aspx; and
- http://www.acb.org/adp/tvcanada.html

- Quality: It is my hope that this volume will contribute to more audio description world-wide and audio description that is of the highest quality. Guidelines have been established in a number of countries – and this volume is informed by many of them – but I believe that a "guideline of guidelines" developed with significant input from and endorsement by users of description could be an important advance for the field. Rick Boggs, of The Accessible Planet and Audio Eyes, is a long-time advocate of more—and more informed—inclusion of description consumers in the development of guidelines and, as importantly, the involvement of description consumers in the production of audio description – as consultants, audio editors, voice talent and in other capacities. He offers workshops focused on audio description skills for consumers of audio description.

It is my hope that in the coming years a national certification program can be established for the review of individuals and companies who offer audio description professionally and trainers of describers, similar, perhaps, to the program established in the U.K. for describers in the performing arts.

- New Developments: Two prospects on the horizon warrant special note:

Ryerson University – Deborah Fels, PhD: When I coordinated funding for multidisciplinary categories at the National Endowment for the Arts, I developed guidelines language that invited applications for funding of access projects that represented aesthetic innovation. In the same vein, Deborah Fels of Ryerson University in Canada posits that "Accessibility can be entertaining."   The Ryerson website notes that "Video description and closed captioning (can be) an integral part of the creative process." Quoting Dr. Fels, it goes on: "Normally this work is done by a third party after the film is complete. We are working with the creative team to write these tracks at the same time they put together the show. Artists are very happy to do this. They love their work, and they understand what's important." For instance, in every episode of CTV's *Odd Job Jack*, an animated production from Smiley Guy Studios, there is an extra track narrated *by one of the characters*. (emphasis added)

Parlamo: Parlamo is a patented Smartphone application that will deliver simultaneous, synchronized foreign language audio and audio description tracks (in English or Spanish) at any movie theater or at home. It targets hundreds of millions of moviegoers worldwide who are not fluent in the local language and exclude movies from their leisure activities.   It is designed to run on hundreds of millions of devices operating under iOS (iPhone, iPad and Touch), Android and Microsoft Phone platforms. The app downloads an encrypted language or audio description soundtrack to the device; the app is free with users paying a small fee per downloaded language soundtrack (audio description soundtracks are provided at no cost).

I mentioned earlier that in the United States there are over 20 million individuals who are either blind or have trouble seeing even with correction—that amounts to almost 8% of our population. Whether one speaks of public or commercial broadcasting, why would a broadcaster—or any institution—not wish to tap such a significant and underserved portion of the population. There is simply a lack of awareness of the need and a misunderstanding of the public benefit that could result from reaching out to this population, not to mention the financial benefit that might be gleaned from this untapped market.

Here in the United States the principal constituency for audio description has an unemployment rate of about 70%. I am certain that with more meaningful access to our culture and its resources, people become more informed, more engaged with society and more engaging individuals—thus, more employable. With a focus on people's *abilities*, we will come much closer to greater inclusion and total access.

Chapter Eight

<small>APPENDICES</small>

8.1 - Audio Description Around The World
  8.1.1 - Who's Doing It

8.2 - Equipment Needs and Specifications
  8.2.1 - For Live Events
  8.2.2 - For Media

8.3 - Transcript of An Audio Described Scene From A Film: *Night of the Living Dead*
(see this book's associated web site #47)

8.4 – *Night of the Living Dead* (full movie) without audio description
(see this book's associated web site #48)

8.5 – Conference Proceedings from The Audio Description Project Conference of the American Council of the Blind (July 12-14, 2010, Phoenix, AZ)
(see this book's associated web site #49)

8.6 - Transcript of Conference Proceedings from The Audio Description Project Conference of the American Council of the Blind (July 6-8, 2009, Orlando, FL)
(see this book's associated web site #49)

8.7 - Transcript of Conference Proceedings from The International Conference on Audio Description (June 15-17, 1995, Washington, DC)
(see this book's associated web site #50)

8.8 - Transcript of Conference Proceedings from The International Conference on Audio Description (March 23-24, 2002, Washington, DC)
(see this book's associated web site #51)

8.9 - Training
  8.9.1 - Auditions
  8.9.2 - Outline
  8.9.3 - Press Release

8.10 – AD scripts for a scene from *Pretty Woman*: Royal National Institute of Blind People, WGBH, and my own (Audio Description Associates, LLC).

8.11 - Associated Web Site—www.thevisualmadeverbal.com (UNDER CONSTRUCTION)

8.1 – AD Around The World

Audio Description is an international phenomenon.

And I think it's been so for a long time. As noted earlier, in the United States the first ongoing audio description service was begun by Dr. Margaret Pfanshtiel at her radio-reading service The Metropolitan Washington Ear in 1981 in Washington, DC. I'm quite proud to have been among that small group of audio describers working with Arena Stage and then branching out to other theaters in DC. Later, we conducted the pilot for the WGBH experiment with description—that test later became DVS or Descriptive Video Service, founded by Dr. Barry Cronin, the featured speaker at the ACB Audio Description Project Conference in July 2009.

In the early 1980s, Japanese broadcasters conducted a trial of description for broadcast television—and in the 1970s, a Masters Thesis was written at San Francisco State University by my friend and colleague, the late Gregory Frazier, the founder of Audio Vision, a San Francisco-based AD service, still quite active.

And description was being discussed within the hallowed halls of our federal government in the 1950s and 1960s by a gentleman to whom I refer as the grandfather of AD—Chet Avery, a blind man--at the time, he was a grants specialist for the Department of Education.

Description has a great deal to offer sighted people. In this country, we think of AD as an access technique, principally for people who are blind—that's how it was developed back in Washington, DC. I have been fortunate to work in three dozen countries helping to establish AD programs for theater, cinema and broadcast television, and making presentations on description at academic conferences. It should be noted that in many countries, particularly where English is *not* the dominant language spoken or native tongue, description is not studied as a form of access, per se, as part of a disability studies program at a university. It's considered a kind of translation—it's part of the audio-visual translation programs in language and interpretation departments. It's a kind of sub-titling. What's quite wonderful is that it is studied! Universities in the following nations now offer Masters and even doctoral programs where one can focus on AD: the U.K., Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Belgium, South Africa, Germany, and Austria.

In this country, I can think of only several colleges where one can even enroll in an undergraduate course in AD—I've been involved with most of them: an on-line course offered by the New-York-based Fractured University, semester-long courses at Montgomery College in Montgomery County, MD and (in fall 2013) George Mason University in Fairfax, VA, and one other Institute that used to exist at Penn State University. In addition, Lisa Helen Hoffman, a long-time audio description trainer and consultant who happens to be blind, has taught an AD course in New York State at the State University of New York at Brockport.

A short-lived rule promulgated by our FCC (Federal Communications Commission) in 2002 was struck down in the courts after about six months but in its brief lifespan was responsible for the development of description efforts at several major networks. The U.S. Department of Education has been a consistent source of funding for description of education programming.

But for two years, this funding was unavailable and during that period relatively little description could be found on broadcast or cable television. Adding to the difficulty for description in the U.S. is the switch to digital transmission which occurred on June 12, 2009. Before that time, either Spanish translation or description was accessed via one secondary audio channel; in the digital era, a range of audio tracks is available. Unfortunately, there are currently no standards for how to access AD on which track. The FCC has a group looking at the issue.

But the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act for mandated description took effect in July 2012. Currently the top nine broadcasters—cable and "over-the-air": ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX, TBS, TNT, Disney, USA, and Nickelodeon—are required to provide audio description (dubbed "video" description by the FCC) in the top 25 TV markets for 50 hours per calendar quarter (about 4 hours per week) during prime time and/or children's programming. (See the FCC's "encyclopedia" entry on description at: http://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/video-description.)

That's the decidedly mixed American story with respect to broadcast and cable or satellite—there's still much to be done in other formats: the percentage of all DVDs, downloads or web streaming that incorporates description is miniscule. DVDs are an ideal format for description because the audio track can be turned on or off as desired and an audio menu can be programmed. Given that fact, it's unfortunate that there are still so few DVDs produced with description in the United States (several hundred—perhaps a handful have audio menus).

AD is also still available on videotape by special order or on eBay and in certain movie theaters for first-run movie screenings.

In the "live" arts area, about thirty-five of the fifty States in the U.S. have AD in live theater and in museums via audio tours or trained docents.

In a formal sense, the U.S. is the "home" of audio description. We may have started it all—but our mother nation, the U.K., has taken the AD ball and run with it. Consider the availability of DVDs: the U.K. has a population that is about one-fifth that of the United States—and yet the U.K. has more than five times the DVDs with descriptions—easily over 1000. And, of course, description is mandated for broadcast television—10% of all broadcast programs must include description.

Indeed, the U.K. is galloping past us on a number of fronts. Past us and around us, I might say. Let me explain—when I train describers I will often play the same excerpt of a video as described in the U.K. some years ago by the Royal National Institute by the Blind, then by WGBH's DVS program in an early effort, and finally by my own Audio Description Associates. They're a bit dated but I think the point is still of interest—and that is the differences in style (and perhaps even in substance?) in the approach taken to AD for the same film, "Pretty Woman." The audio description scripts for all three versions are appended at this document; I will leave an analysis of the versions to your own efforts.

The following material, in no particular order, are snapshots of AD activities in other nations:

- U.K.: In the U.K., more than 15% of television broadcasts are described—legislation requires that 10% of broadcasts be described and the push is on to raise that to 20%; 80,000 hours of television on 72 channels are described each year ; as noted earlier, in this nation with a fraction of the U.S. population, thousands of DVDs have description; many hundreds of cinemas provide description; the U.K. has the advantage of a single major blindness service organization—the Royal National Institute of Blind People—that is extremely active in its support of description and also has an Audio Describers Association focused on performing arts; most recently, the RNIB has focused on developing description at sports venues, for Bollywood films, and in conjunction with I Pods. The leading researcher in audio description based in the U.K. is Professor Jorge Diaz Cintas of Imperial College.

- Scotland—it's part of the U.K., of course, but I do want to note that several years ago I spent a day in Edinburgh with a film describer there—Carol McGregor. She's described a number of well-known feature films like *Moulin Rouge* and *Big Fish*—and what do they have in common? They featured Carol's son, Ewen McGregor. I suspect that he insisted that the films be described and why shouldn't Mom provide the description?;

- E.U.:   At the end of 2009, a non-binding and very general directive encouraging inclusion was offered;

- Germany: Most AD work is in media, split between two companies. Bernd Beneke and Bayerischer Rundfunk (the Bavarian Broadcasting Corporation) do work for Switzerland and Austria as well. Bernd has experimented with what he calls hyper-description (combining the name of a character with his/her description, often because voices are changed due to dubbing) along with other innovations that "assist" AD users (noting "the next day" or labeling a flag/naming a landmark, mentioning the prior roles of a known actor);

- Belgium: Study in description is pursued under the supervision of Aline Remael at University College in Antwerp;

- Switzerland: This country has passed a minimal mandate for description (Switzerland has *four* official languages!). The description work is generally fulfilled by German description providers;

- Poland: In the late 1990s, one VHS experiment was produced with freeze frames; description in cinema began in 2006 in Bialystock using "open" description; in 2008 in Warsaw, closed description was available with SDH (subtitles for the deaf or hard-of-hearing) and labeled "Cinema Beyond Silence and Darkness"; limited description on public TV and for live theater—children's theater, one or two museums; no DTV until 2015; principal researchers: Agnieszka Szarkowska, University of Warsaw and Iwona Mazur, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan; see: http://fundacjakatarynka.pl/audio-description-in-poland/;

- Spain: Active academic study on description and translation at universities in Barcelona and Madrid; in particular, the Universitat de Autonoma de Barcelona is exploring the use of eye-tracking to determine priorities for what to describe—leading researcher: Pilar Orero); ONCE, the national service organization of/for the blind, has developed guidelines for description—it is

unclear to the extent that ONCE has been able to develop description for media or other art forms; written descriptions exist for ONCE's Museum of the Blind in Madrid;

- Netherlands: In the late "00s", four films were equipped with description via a Dolby system–plans are in place for description for musicals and amusement parks;

- Canada: Several organizations dominate the description scene for media—Accessible Media, Inc., John Hauber Productions, and Descriptive Video Works. In addition, the National Library of Canada is committed to working with description for archived films.   Research on description is a priority for Professor Deborah Fels at Ryerson University.

- France: Description in media is the province of the L'Association Valentin Hauy and Marie Plumazille.

- Italy: No description for media as yet but experiments have ensued for description at selected film festivals (the Rome Fiction Festival) and with opera; in addition, an intriguing experiment in subtitling and description for feature films is dubbed "Movie Reading": see http://www.moviereading.com/;

- Australia: Media Access Australia is a major service organization that works to build description for media (and other access techniques) throughout Australia—similarly, Vision Australia (an organization of blind people in Australia) includes Maryann Diamond as one of its leaders, the current president of the World Blind Union and a strong supporter of description; a fair amount of description is imported on TV and film from the U.K.; description for performing arts is available throughout the nation to a limited degree;

- South Africa: there is now a renewed push to encourage the South African Broadcasting Corporation to move forward with description—William Rowland, former head of the SA Blind Union and former president of the World Blind Union is a leading proponent, as is Shakila Maharaj, a tourism professional based in Durban; in 2012, I trained describers during three 3-day sessions in the country—in Durban, Cape Town, and Johannesburg;

- Greece: Yota Georgakopoulou of the European Captioning Institute provides a limited amount of description for media; some live description is provided by VSA Hellas; the Hellenic Audio Visual Institute studies translation, including description;

- Brazil: Some description for films and performing arts exists as a part of efforts/studies led by Dr. Eliana Franco (Universidade Ferderal da Bahia); in addition, Dr. Francisco Lima (a blind academic) leads studies at the Universidade Federal de Pernambuco in Recife;

- Russia: During trainings I conducted, live description was developed for the International Disability Film Festival presentations in Moscow—I also conducted workshops in St. Petersburg;

- Portugal: Significant research and work exists with museums and description—see Professor Joselia Neves: joselia@netcabo.pt

- Sweden: contact Syntolkning Nu (Audio Description Now) at www.syntolkning.se
 or www.syntolkning.nu +46 031-3608445

- Ireland: contact NCBI Media Services at www.ncbi.ie/services/services-for-organisations/making-print-and-multimedia-accessible-mcs +353 (0)1 864 22 66

- Iceland: Iceland is developing work in description for museum exhibitions, film and television; contact Kristinn Halldór Einarsson, Blindrafelagid, Icelandic organization of the visually impaired (BIOVI) http://kristinnhalldor.blog.is/ www.blind.is

- Czech Republic, Norway, Finland, Bulgaria, Denmark, Lithuania, Slovakia, Israel, Japan, China, Taiwan, Malaysia, India, Thailand, Turkey, Croatia, Slovenia, and Romania: I have made presentations /conducted workshops but only modest interest has developed.

Finally, I refer readers to an excellent recent article on the state of mandates for audio description worldwide by Alex Varley, CEO of Media Access Australia: "Regulating Audio Description, The Only Way". Go to: http://www.mediaaccess.org.au/latest_news/australian-policy-and-legislation/opinion-regulating-audio-description-the-only-way

A final note: after leading several days of AD training in Moscow, I came home with a new insight into the arts and access. My colleagues there taught me that audio description, access to the arts, must be a part of any democracy. In the United States, a prosperous, democratic nation, accessibility generally is not yet viewed as a right, as a reflection of the principles upon which our nation was founded. People in Russia are wrestling with economic circumstances attendant to a shift in government that accommodates democratic elements, yet to them incorporating democracy means "access for everyone." I learned that from my friends there and I share that wonderfully inclusive notion with you.

Over time, I think that in this tremendously prosperous land of ours, the United States, with all of its bountiful resources, there shouldn't be a state in this nation or a television network or a cable channel or a movie theater that doesn't offer full access. We can, we should, we must be a model for nations around the world. And if we choose not to be, we can learn a great deal from the efforts of our colleagues who realize the value for everyone of building access for all.

8.1.1 – Who's Doing It *(Many thanks to Fred Brack, webmaster of the American Council of the Blind's Audio Description Project)*

United States

Organization	Location	Services	Contact
Access-USA	Clayton, NY	Production of all types of alternative format media	www.access-usa.com 800-263-2750 info@access-usa.com
Accessible Arts	Columbus, OH	AD primarily for local movies	www.accessibleartsinc.org 614-470-4777 AJWestlund@insight.rr.com
Alice Austin	Portsmouth, NH	Description Services for live theatre, museums, presentations, events, video, DVD, and film. Will travel for all or work remotely for video/DVD.	617-513-5373 DXER@comcast.net
Arts Access	Raleigh, NC	AD primarily of Triangle-area live theatre, plus education and information statewide	www.artsaccessinc.org 919-833-9919 info@artsaccessinc.org
Arts and Visually Impaired Audiences	Seattle, WA	AD services for local organizations	www.artsvia.org 206-323-7190 aviaboss@artsvia.org
Arts for All	Tucson, AZ	AD primarily of local live theatre	www.artsforallinc.org 520-622-4100 execdirector@artsforallinc.org
Audio Description Access	Cincinnati, OH	Audio description for live performing arts	Mike Snyder snyder1944@aol.com 513-703-0355
Audio Description Associates	Takoma Park, MD	AD for museums, perf. arts, and describer training worldwide	www.audiodescribe.com 301-920-0218 jsnyder@audiodescribe.com
Audio Description Colorado	Denver, CO	Lists audio description in the Denver area	www.audiodescriptionincolorado.weebly.com

Audio Description Solutions	New Oxford, PA	AD for video, multimedia, museums, and exhibits, plus trains describers	www.AudioDescriptionSolutions.com 717-624-8496 info@AudioDescriptionSolutions.com
Audio Eyes, LLC	Northridge, CA	Blind professionals producing video description for broadcast TV	www.audioeyes.com 818-678-0880 sales@audioeyes.com
Audio Reader Service	Lawrence, KS	Provides trained Audio Describers for live theater events in Kansas City and Lawrence	reader.ku.edu/description.shtml 800-772-8898 (Jennifer)
AudioVision, Inc.	San Francisco, CA	Provides AD consultation, description, and training for film, TV, theatre, etc.	www.audiovision.org katiemags@aol.com didisalvo@msn.com
Bridge Multimedia	New York, NY	Description and captioning for television, digital media, and educational technology -- all languages; full audio production capabilities, HDCAM-SR, NTSC/PAL	www.bridgemultimedia.com 212-213-3740 mkaplowitz@bridgemultimedia.com
CaptionMax	NY, DC, Los Angeles, Minneapolis	Audio description for television, webcast, and DVD; DVD authoring, including talking menus; Multi-language Closed Captioning and Subtitling	www.captionmax.com 612-341-3566 services@captionmax.com
Creative Audio Description Services	Denver, CO	Provides AD for live theatre	970-785-6481 BonnieJBarlow@aol.com
Deluxe Media	Burbank, CA	Audio Description for Theatrical, Home Entertainment, Television Broadcast & Section 508: Rehabilitation Act compliant Educational IP content, Captioning, Subtitling (50 languages), Scripting, Dubbing, Web-streaming, Editing, Data Asset Management, multi-media platforms, Archival Preservation, Worldwide Full-service production & post-production facilities	www.bydeluxe.com (818) 565-4463 elissa.sarna@bydeluxe.com

Descriptive Audio for the Sight Impaired (DASI)	Asheville, NC	AD for all main stage productions at Asheville Community Theatre and other venues upon request	www.ljrsandbox.com/DASI wstanko@charter.net 828-253-8781
Descriptive Video Works	Los Angeles, CA	Descriptive video for media and live audio description	www.descriptivevideoworks.com 888-998-9894 info@descriptivevideoworks.com
DICAPTA / Closed Caption Latina	Longwood, FL	Video / Audio Description, Closed Captioning, Real Time / Live Event Captioning, CART services in English & Spanish, Dubbing, Real Time Dubbing to Spanish, Remote Simultaneous Translations, Audio / Digital Books, Audio Recording Services, Voiceovers, Narrations, and other post production services. All services available in English & Spanish.	www.dicapta.com 407-389-0712 info@dicapta.com
Disability Rights & Resources	Charlotte, NC	AD services for local organizations	704-537-0550 Julia Sain or Becky Williams
HAI Describe! (Hospital Audiences Inc.)	New York, NY	Offers AD at various Broadway and Off Broadway shows	HAI Describe! 212-575-7663 THennessey@hospaud.org

Hollywood Access Services	Burbank, CA	Audio description and captioning for movies, television programs, exhibits and online content	www.hollywoodaccessservices.com 818-333-5087 info@HollywoodAccessServices.com
JBI Studios	Los Angeles, CA	Full-service audio, video, and multimedia production house specializing in foreign languages. Provides video descriptive services (audio description) for TV and film	http://www.jbistudios.com/ 818-592-0056 info@jbistudios.com
Karla Pederson	Fargo, ND	AD for local theatres	218-233-2677 kp7181@yahoo.com
Kentucky Center for the Performing Arts	Louisville, KY	Provides AD for live theatre, museums, films, and custom recordings.	502-562-0111 access@kentuckycenter.org
LHH Consulting	Rochester, NY	Audio description consulting and training	www.lhhconsulting.com 585-328-7491 lhoffman@lhhconsulting.com
Mary Lou Fisher	Greenbelt, MD	Audio Description for live theater, movies, meetings, cultural events, museums and multimedia presentations in the Metropolitan Washington, DC and Baltimore. MD areas	301-351-4025 MaryLFisher@comcast.net
Maryland Arts Access	Baltimore, MD	Provides AD of live theatre and other events	410-252-7239 mdartsaccess@comcast.net
Media Access Group, WGBH	Boston, MA	Video description, captioning, more	access.wgbh.org 617-300-3700 access@wgbh.org
Media Movers	New York, NY	Audio description dubbing, subtitling, voiceovers, & production in all languages	www.media-movers.com 646-233-2226 info@media-movers.com
Metropolitan Washington Ear	Silver Spring, MD	Provides AD for live theatre, museums, films, training; Radio Reading Service; Dial-In Newspaper and Magazine Reading	www.washear.org 301-681-6636 information@washear.org

Mhairi Steenbock	Los Angeles, CA	Freelance audio describer with 5 years experience working in film and TV for ITFC in London. Now based in LA. Writes and voices audio description and will work remotely for film/TV.	310-308-0867 mhairisteenbock@gmail.com
Mind's Eye Audio Productions	Madison, WI	Enhanced Audio, Description, voiceovers, languages, more	www.mindseyeaudio.com 608-438-4178 kelly@mindseyeaudio.com
Narrative Television Network	Tulsa, OK	Video description for TV and movies	www.narrativetv.com 800-801-8184 info@NarrativeTV.com
National Captioning Institute (NCI) Described Media	Chantilly, VA	Description for TV, DVDs, Film, Gov't	www.ncicap.org 703-917-7600 mail@ncicap.org
PA Cultural Access Project of VSA PA	PA	Stimulates statewide growth of AD and regional access coalitions, and provides AD equipment, training, consultation, and free solutions for accessibility and audience development	http://www.vsapa.org/ 814-777-0669 (Ermyn King) efk103@gmail.com
Rick Jacobson	Bloomington, MN	Provides AD services for theatres primarily in the Bloomington / Minneapolis / St Paul area	jakemn1@yahoo.com
Softel-USA	Norwalk, CT	AD soundtrack production equipment	www.softel-usa.com 203-354-4602 sales@softel-usa.com
Taping for the Blind	Houston, TX	Provides AD for live theatre, museums, films, rodeos, parades; custom recordings, plus Radio Reading Service	www.tapingfortheblind.org 713-622-2767 info@tapingfortheblind.org
TDF/TAP (TDF Accessibility Programs)	New York, NY	Offers audio description and discount tickets, among other accessibility services. Read articles about their work at TDF1 and TDF2.	TDF/TAP access@tdf.org (Fran Polino)
View Via Headphones (via Sight-Loss Support Group)	State College, PA	Provides AD for live performing arts, museums, and other cultural events, plus consultation and training	www.slsg.org 814-238-0132 slsg1@verizon.net

Vision Loss Connections	Seattle, WA	We organize groups to attend Audio Described Performances at the 5th Avenue Theater and Seattle Opera and coordinate outreach for Seattle Art Museum's Access Tours	www.visionlossconnections.org (206) 282-3913 info@visionlossconnections.org
VITAC	Canonsburg, PA	National providers of video description and closed captioning for broadcast and non-broadcast media	www.vitac.com 724-514-4000 sales@VITAC.com
VSA Arizona ARTability Program	Tucson, AZ	Audio Description services for live performances, meetings and art museums. Coordinates and trains qualified describers.	520-631-6253 artabilityaz@hotmail.com
VSA Arts of Georgia	GA	Provides a list of local audio describers	vsaartsga.org/index/technical_services/SL
VSA Minnesota	Minneapolis, MN	Assists and publicizes AD, ASL, and other access services at MN arts events	www.vsamn.org 612-332-3888; 800-801-3883 jon@vsamn.org
VSA Texas	Austin, TX	Provides AD for live theater, dance, art events and first run feature movies in Austin, and promote AD in San Antonio through ACCESS San Antonio	www.vsatx.org 512-454-9912 info@vsatx.org

Figure 68.

International

Canada - Commercial Services

Organization	Location	Services	Contact
AMI	Toronto	Video description for movies and television	www.ami.ca 800-567-6755 info@ami.ca

Descriptive Video Works	Vancouver	Descriptive video	www.descriptivevideoworks.com 604-542-9894 866-818-3897 (toll free) diane@descriptivevideoworks.com
John Hauber Productions	Toronto	Descriptive video services	descriptivevideoproductions.com 416-823-5492 john@descriptivevideoproductions.com
Sassonique Productions	Montreal	Audio description (French and English), closed captioning, dialogue and continuity transcripts, translation and sub-titling	sassonique.com 514-488-7444 sasharris@sympatico.ca
The Media Concierge	Toronto	Descriptive Video / Closed Captioning / Subtitling / Language Dubbing / Conversions and Transfers	www.themediaconcierge.com (647) 994-3003 trevor@themediaconcierge.com

Figure 69.

United Kingdom - Consumer Services

Organization	Location	Services	Contact
Access London Theatre	London	Consolidated listing of all accessible London theatrical performances	www.officiallondontheatre.co.uk/access/ 020 7557 6751 (recording)
ADA - Audio Description Association	Romsey	Supports audio describers and the providers and users of audio description	www.developingaudiences.com/audiodesc.asp 01794 510343 ADSE@hants.gov.uk
ADA(S) - Audio Description Association	Scotland	Describing theatre performances and the Edinburgh Tattoo as well as sporting events	www.adascotland.com
Beachbog's Audio Description Diary	Edinburgh, Scotland	Database of audio description activity in Scotland	www.adscot.org.uk bb@adscot.org.uk
RNIB - Royal National Institute of Blind People	London	Everything you need to know about audio description and where it is available	www.rnib.org.uk/livingwithsightloss/tvradiofilm/Pages/audio_description.aspx

			0303 123 9999 audiodescription@rnib.org.uk
Vocal Eyes	London	Provides access to the arts for blind and partially sighted people through both live and recorded audio description	www.vocaleyes.co.uk 020 7375 1043 enquiries@vocaleyes.co.uk

Figure 70.

United Kingdom - Commercial Services

Organization	Location	Services	Contact
Aurix Ltd	Worcester, UK	Speech detection software to assist in audio description	www.aurix.com +44 (0)1684 585101 info@aurix.com
European Captioning Institute (ECI)	London, England	Description for DVDs	www.ecisubtitling.com (+44) (0) 207 5800 mail@ecisubtitling.com
ITFC, Independent Television Facilities Centre	London, England	Media Access services for Broadcasters, Cinema and DVD distributors both UK based and globally	www.itfc.com +44 (0)20 8752 0352 info@itfc.com
Softel Ltd	Pangbourne, Reading, UK	Audio Description soundtrack production equipment	www.softelgroup.com +44 (0)118-9842151 info@softel.co.uk

Figure 71.

AD in Other Countries - Consumer and Commercial Services

Organization	Location	Services	Contact
Association française d'audiodescription	France	General information site about audio description in France	www.audiodescription-france.org (French)
Audioscenic	Brussels, Belgium	Audio description of living art performances in the French speaking part of Belgium	www.audioscenic.be (French) 00 32 473 549 013 info@audioscenic.be (English OK)
Bayerischer Rundfunk	Munich, Germany	Audio description for TV, movies, DVDs	www.br-online.de/hoerfilme +49-89-3806-6027 bernd.benecke@brnet.de

Media Access Australia	Sydney, Australia	The home of information about audio description in Australia!	www.audiodescription.com.au +61 (02) 9212 6242 info@mediaaccess.org.au
Mixwerk	Berlin, Germany	Audio description for corporate movies, elearning, television, dubbing, voiceover in 20 languages	www.mixwerk.com (5 languages) +49 30 29007959 uweengel@mixwerk.com
Natasha Kanakaki	Athens, Greece	Audio description services, closed captioning, and subtitling in Greek and English	+30 210-9341980 k_natash@yahoo.com
NCBI Media Services	Finglas, Dublin, Ireland	Audio description production for television, film and theatre	www.ncbi.ie/services/services-for-organisations/making-print-and-multimedia-accessible-mcs +353 (0)1 864 22 66 lina.kouzi@ncbi.ie
Subbabel	Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain	Audio description, production, dubbing, subtitling, closed captioning and voiceovers	www.subbabel.com +34 928-352-803 (Eng/Span) info@subbabel.com
Syntolkning Nu (Audio Description Now)	Sweden	Audio description at theatre, cinemas, arenas and for film on DVD	www.syntolkning.se or www.syntolkning.nu +46 031-3608445 info@syntolkning.nu

Figure 72.

Museums –

- London Featured Museums:

THE LORD ASHCROFT GALLERY, EXTRAORDINARY HEROES
Audio-described guide
Imperial War Museum
Lambeth Road
London, SE1 6HZ
Tel: 020 7416 5000
Open daily 10.00am - 6.00pm, last admission 5.45pm (closed 24, 25 and 26 December)

The Imperial War Museum worked with VocalEyes to produce an audio described guide of the Lord Ashcroft Gallery for blind and partially sighted visitors which is available

from the information desk at the front of the Museum.

THE HUNTERIAN MUSEUM: SCALPELS, SKULLS AND A GIANT SQUID - A COLLECTION OF CURIOSITIES UNCOVERED
Audio-described tour
The Hunterian Museum
Royal College of Surgeons
35-43 Lincoln's Inn Fields
London, WC2A 3PE
Tel: 020 7869 6561

The Hunterian Museum at the Royal College of Surgeons has worked with VocalEyes to produce an audio-described tour of its free public collection. The guide is designed to help blind and partially sighted visitors find out more about the museum, its collections and history.

The tour, which features the actor John Sessions, explores the curious collection of the eighteenth century surgeon and anatomist John Hunter. An assortment of preserved specimens in pots, dried preparations, skeletons and teeth from over 500 species types, including human, his collection forms the stunning centrepiece of the museum.

The audio-described tour is informative, entertaining and produced to VocalEyes' high standards. The tour is available from the museum reception desk for £3.50 or is free to download to your MP3 player from the museum's website.

For further information please contact Jane Hughes, Head of Learning and Access on 020 7869 6561 or email jhughes@rcseng.ac.uk

- London Beyond Sight (Audio Description of London Landmarks from VocalEyes): http://www.vocaleyes.co.uk/feedpage.asp?section=213&sectionTitle=London+Beyond+Sight

Television –

- Australia
  The Media Access Review of Access to Electronic Media for the Hearing- and Vision-Impaired:
  http://www.mediaaccess.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=231&Itemid=86

- Canada
  Described Video TV Guide: http://www.ami.ca/Pages/Described-Video-Guide.aspx
  The Described Video TV Guide, the DV Guide, was launched on June 1st, 2012 and is maintained on a daily basis by Accessible Media Inc. (AMI). It was developed in partnership with their Canadian broadcast partners and the Canadian Radio-Television & Telecommunications Commission's (CRTC) Described Video Working Group. The

intent of the DV Guide is to build the awareness of described video programming while providing an aggregate daily list of most described video programming from across Canada, to allow a viewer who may benefit from described programming the ability to plan their television watching.

Additional information:
(CRTC) Access to TV for people with visual impairments: audio description and described video
www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/info_sht/b322.htm
(CRTC) Programming Services Providing Described Video Content:
www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/publications/reports/rp120229.htm
(CRTC) Broadcasting Accessibility Fund:
www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2012/2012-430.htm

- Europe
  - Deutsche Horfilm gGmbH (DHG: information on German and Austrian TV, films, and DVDs with audio description; in German):
    http://www.hoerfilm.de/
  - Bayerischer Rundfunk (Audio description for TV, movies, DVDs; in German)":
    http://www.br.de/service/programm/blindengerecht/index.html

- United Kingdom
  - BBC Guide to Audio Description:
    http://www.bbc.co.uk/ouch/fact/ouch_guide_to_audio_description.shtml
  - BBC launches Audio Description on BBC iPlayer (news release from 2009):
    http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2009/08_august/26/description.shtml
    (NOTE: This service only works from computers in the UK due to "rights" issues.)

- New Zealand
  - Audio Description Pilot to Roll Out in 2011 (press release):
    http://www.nzonair.govt.nz/news/newspressreleases/pressrelease_2010_08_12.aspx

Movies and DVDs –

- United Kingdom
  - Audio Described Movies Now Showing in the UK:
    http://www.yourlocalcinema.com/ad.html
  - List of Audio Described DVDs in the UK:
    http://www.yourlocalcinema.com/ad.dvd.html
  - Minds Eye Movies (audio described films on CDs, not DVDs):
    http://www.mindseyemovies.co.uk/
  - Rentals from:
    - Hampshire County Council:

> http://www3.hants.gov.uk/library/audio-described-dvds.htm
> ▪ Southend-on-Sea Borough Council:
> http://www.southend.gov.uk/a_to_z/service/173/libraries-special_needs

- Germany and Austria
  - Deutsche Horfilm gGmbH: see above
  - Bayerischer Rundfunk: see above
    Note that DVDs in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria usually start with a voice announcement about description that can be activated at that point by pressing the Select button.

- Australia
  - Media Access Australia: see above
    AudioDescription.com: http://www.audiodescription.com.au/

Other –

- Audio Description Blog (in French): http://audiodescription-france.org/

8.2 – Equipment Needs and Specifications

8.2.1 – For Live Events

Most often, audio description at live events is delivered via an FM radio or infrared system. The leading providers of this equipment are:

-	Williams Sound, Eden Prairie, MN, 800 843-3544 www.williamssound.com

-	Phonic Ear, Petaluma, CA, 800 227-0735 www.phonicear.com

-	Telex, Minneapolis, MN, 612 887-5550 www.telex.com

In addition, the following vendor offers "steno mask" microphones:

-	Martel Electronics, Placentia, CA, 714 572-0100
	www.martelelectronics.com

Sound Associates, Inc. - www.soundassociates.com – in New York, NY offers "D-Scribe" at large, computerized shows on Broadway and elsewhere. "D-Scribe" is a system of recorded descriptions synced to a show's light cues.

Similarly, Parlamo, Inc. – www.parlamo.com – based in London provides real-time description for film using "watermarks" or "finger-printing" and live events via light cues.

8.2.2 – For Media

The best resource for detail on broadcast television technical capabilities and description can be found in Sections III and IV (pp. 8-21) of the final report of the FCC's Video Programming Access Advisory Committee:

http://vpaac.wikispaces.com/file/view/120409%20VPAAC%20Video%20Description%20REPORT%20AS%20SUBMITTED%204-9-2012.pdf/318855494/120409%20VPAAC%20Video%20Description%20REPORT%20AS%20SUBMITTED%204-9-2012.pdf

As for the recording of description for use in media, most often a media product to be described (preferably with time code) is accessed digitally, i.e., a digital file is delivered electronically. However, media on tape can be accommodated. The following formats are most common (in order of image quality/preference, from lowest to highest): 8mm (analog), VHS (analog), ¾" (analog), BetaSP (analog), DV (digital): DigiBeta, DVD, DVCPRO (Panasonic), DVCAM (Sony) or as digital tapeless files, e.g., MPEG, AVI, Quicktime, RealMedia, WindowsMedia, etc..

An initial draft of the description script is prepared—on average, it takes about one hour for every 5 miniutes of program to produce the initial draft description.   That draft should be reviewed by a separate describer or a trained audio description consumer as an important quality control step. A final draft of the script is used at the recording session where changes can still be made. Descriptions should be voiced by professional, union (AFTRA) voice talent—preferably individuals who understand audio description—and recorded, a process that takes about 1 ½ times real time. As noted earlier, the voicing of description presents an opportunity for skilled voice talents who are blind to participate in the process, using a Braille script or accessing the description electronically via a Braille display.

The fastest and most accurate way to record the voicing of audio description is using software that allows for both video and audio playback of the show being described, while recording the AD in sync with the show. This makes sure the AD goes where it should and does not interfere with the program content. Further specifications are provided by Bill Parks of Dominion Post in McLean, VA:

"The narration booth used by the voice talent should have a monitor, snug headphones, a high quality microphone and minimum outside noise. The recorded audio should be clean with at least a 30 dB signal over noise ratio. Peaks should be no higher than –10 dB using a digital volume meter. A compressor/limiter can be used to assure this. Mild compression of 2:1 yields good results with roll back starting at –20 dB. Talkback from the recording technician should be available in the headphones along with the program audio. A visual timecode inserted over the video is a big help when accurately placing the AD in time with the show.

"There are several software packages commercially available to record and edit the AD. General purpose software such as Avid Media Composer and Final Cut Pro do a good job when using the 'Audio Punch In' tool to record the AD. First step is to ready the show for editing. The audio needs to be captured at 48 kHz and uncompressed. The video does not have to be the highest quality since it is used just for playback and timing. If laying-back everything directly, then the video should be captured at the same quality as the show master.

"Record the AD from script in time with the show onto an available track on the timeline (usually channel 3). When done, go back and remove the silence between AD segments leaving 0 dB dead space. Trim to a few frames from the start of the AD to a few frames after the end. The volume of the AD should match that of the show, especially of its spoken dialogue, to within 3 dB on the VU meter. Ideally the AD should not seem to be too loud or soft as compared to the show soundtrack. When the AD is present, the show audio should dip to about a 15 dB separation in level between it and the AD. This is usually accomplished by dropping the show audio -15 dB from its normal. At the edit points, a half second dip down to and then back up from, helps smooth out the transitions to the AD voice.

"Some clients request the AD voice be unmixed with the show audio. It needs to match the volume of the show in general with peaking at the same level. Most shows require the AD voice to be mixed with the show soundtrack. This is usually a mono mix. The audio levels need to match the soundtrack as has been previously mentioned. Frequently when mixing a stereo track to mono, the result is +6 dB louder. Drop the mono track by -6 dB to compensate.

"When voiced and edited properly, the audio description track should be enjoyable to listen to by the audience."

The creation of an audio description script can be created with nothing more complicated than a free commercial media player and a word processing program. Software packages allow the syncing of media with word processing, the automatic insertion of timecode, tracking of word rate / timing of pauses with lines of description, and even a recording function (Swift-ADePT). Software packages include:

AegiSub – http://www.aegisub.org/
Anglatecnic – www.anglatecnic.com
Audacity – http://audacity.sourceforge.net
Auto Description – http://www.cpcweb.com/autodescription/autodescription.pdf
Live Describe – http://www.livedescribe.com/
SWIFT-ADEPT – www.softelgroup.com/products/swift-adept
Subtitle Workshop – http://www.urusoft.net/products.php?cat=sw

Essentially, these software packages allow an individual to write description with efficiency. Certain of them go even further, allowing the describer to also function as audio editor and voice talent. But in my opinion, asking staff to develop proficiency in three skills—each of which is a professional endeavor unto itself—may be quite a bit more than can be reasonably expected, particularly if the goal is the highest quality product.

8.3 – Transcript of An Audio Described Film: *Night of the Living Dead*
(see this book's associated web site, #47).

8.4 – *Night of the Living Dead* (full movie) without audio description
(see this book's associated web site, #48).

8.5 – Conference Proceedings from The Audio Description Project Conference of the American
Council of the Blind (July 12-14, 2010, Phoenix, AZ)
(see this book's associated web site, #49).

8.6 – Conference Proceedings from The Audio Description Project Conference of the American
Council of the Blind (July 6-8, 2009, Orlando, FL)
(see this book's associated web site, #50).

8.7 – Transcript of Conference Proceedings from The International Conference on
Audio Description (March 23-24, 2002, Washington, DC)
(see this book's associated web site, #51).

8.8 – Transcript of Conference Proceedings from The International Conference on
Audio Description (June 15-17, 1995, Washington, DC)
(see this book's associated web site, #52).

8.9   Training

AUDIO DESCRIPTION: The Visual Made Verbal
Making Visual Images Accessible to People
Who Are Blind or Have Low Vision

Summary: At this interactive, multi-media session, participants will experience how Audio Description (AD) makes visual images accessible for people who are blind or have low vision— the visual is made verbal. Using words that are succinct, vivid, and imaginative, describers convey the visual image that is not fully accessible to a significant segment of the population: over 21 million Americans who are blind or have trouble seeing even with correction (American Foundation for the Blind, 2008).

Through this hands-on workshop, describer training will be detailed according to the Fundamentals of Audio Description developed by Joel Snyder. Participants will experience how description makes performing and visual arts programming, websites and myriad activities more accessible to patrons who are blind or have low vision – and more enjoyable for all.

For example, anyone who presents visual images (museum docents, teachers, health care workers) can use AD techniques to "translate" the visual image to words. Through careful observation and the skillful use of language, he/she enlivens the presentation for all listeners.

In addition, in the United States, the Americans With Disabilities Act and Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act focus on access; these regulations apply to the broad range of American businesses and organizations as well as Federal agencies: Section 508 requires the Federal government to make its electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities. Inaccessible technology interferes with an individual's ability to obtain and use information quickly and easily.   Most recently, President Obama signed into law the "21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act" which establishes a mandate for audio description on broadcast television.

Finally, the program will introduce attendees to the varied AD programs and resources available world-wide including ACB's Audio Description Project website and activities, the U.K.'s Royal National Institute of Blind People, Independent Television Commission and Audio Eyes resources, and guidelines/literature established by the Described and Captioned Media Program, the Audio Description Coalition, Art Education for the Blind, and "The Didactics of Audio Visual Translation" by Dr. Jorge Diaz-Cintas.

Program Goals/Outcomes: At the conclusion of the session, participants will know/experience:

-- who are "the blind"?
-- the history of Audio Description
-- Active Seeing / Visual Literacy
-- how to develop skills in concentration and observation
-- the art of "editing" what you see
-- using language to conjure images

-- how to use the spoken word to make meaning
-- developing an Audio Description program

Who Should Attend: all interested in an overview of Audio Description—particularly arts providers (performing arts producers/presenters, museum/visual art professionals), educators, writers, artists, government personnel, health-care workers

Content Level: Beginning

Prerequisite Knowledge: None

Format: The session will involve approximately 40% lecture, 20% PowerPoint-slide-DVD presentation, and 40% interactive participation throughout the session via give-and-take/discussion and, as time allows, practica during which participants will draft and voice description of still images or videotape excerpts.

Training Leader: As one of the nation's first audio describers and having trained audio describers in a dozen states and abroad, Joel Snyder will share his 30+ years of experience with audio description and services for people who are blind or have low vision including the screening of excerpts from nationally broadcast videos with description written and voiced by Mr. Snyder. Joel Snyder is the President of Audio Description Associates, LLC (www.audiodescribe.com) and Director of the American Council of the Blind's Audio Description Project (www.acb.org/adp).

Technical Requirements:

A classroom-type space with access to AC power and a screen will be needed for all training sessions. If a data projector with external speakers and access to Xeroxing can be provided, that would be helpful.

8.9.1   Auditions

- Auditions for individuals interested in working as audio describers should be held approximately three-four weeks prior to scheduled training. Audio Description Associates (ADA) can assist in developing press materials and contacts to advertise the auditions and training sessions and to educate and encourage individuals to participate.

- Auditions can be coordinated by a staff-based project coordinator who will brief prospective describers regarding Audio Description, provide each applicant with a copy of the Audio Description Training Summary Page, and have each applicant complete an informational application form. All auditioners will then view a two/three-minute videotape of a production that has been described by ADA. (This introductory videotape may be viewed by a group of auditioners, if appropriate.) Each auditioner will then read narrative material (ADA will provide--applicants may review the material for up to 2 minutes) followed by a viewing of a separate video excerpt twice--once to note the visual aspects of the scene, the second time with the prospective describer providing audio description for the segment (ADA will provide video segments). The readings and the second viewing/audio descriptions should be recorded and conducted individually. On the basis of these auditions, the project coordinator may choose between 8 and 12 individuals to take training OR audio files can be shared with ADA who will choose individuals for training in consultation with the project coordinator.

- Criteria for individuals to be selected for training include:

* Concentration
* Eye for details
* Vocabulary
* Objectivity
* Sense of timing

8.9.2   Outline

Training Outline (2 ½ days)

DAY ONE –

7:00 pm - 9:30 pm

* Introductions

* Opening Workshop
- The Visually Impaired User
- Audio Description History and Theory

DAY TWO –

9:00 am - 11:00 am

* Concentration / Observation
* Editing What You See

11:00 am - 12:30 pm

* Language

12:30 pm - 1:30 pm - LUNCH

1:30 pm - 2:30 pm

* Speech / Breath Control / Oral Interpretation exercises

2:30 pm - 3:30 pm

* View mini-documentaries on AD

3:30 pm - 6:00 pm

* Viewing/analysis of audio described excerpts

* Practicum -- Individual description sessions with selected video scenes

Evening

* Possible attendance at theater event with description if possible

DAY THREE –

8:30 am - 12:30 pm

* Practicum -- Individual description sessions with selected video scenes (continued)

12:30 pm - 1:30 pm - LUNCH

1:30 pm - 4:00 pm

* Practicum -- Individual description sessions with selected video scenes (continued)

* Mechanics - Review

* Graduation!

8.9.3   Press Release

Sample advertisement/press release for announcement of AD program/recruitment of describers:

AUDIO DESCRIPTION TRAINING

_____ is recruiting individuals to be a part of a professional Audio Description service.

Audio Description makes the visual elements of arts events accessible to people who are blind or have low vision -- the visual is made verbal.   For example, in theaters, users of the service hear a description of the visual elements of the performance through a small FM receiver and headset, with the descriptive narration delivered inconspicuously between lines of dialogue. The result is that the theater experience is more nearly equal to that of the audience member who is sighted. The technique is also used with other performing arts forms, in museums, and with television broadcasts and film.

_____ has scheduled auditions for people interested in training to be a part of this audio description service. Auditions will be held on _____ at the _____ located at _____. Training sessions for successful candidates will be held on ----- and will be conducted by Joel Snyder of Audio Description Associates, LLC based in Washington, DC, a 30+ year veteran of audio description efforts throughout the nation and abroad, one of the nation's first audio describers.

For further information, please contact _____ at _____.

Suggested distribution:
- local Lions club;
- local social service agencies who provide assistance to individuals who are blind or have low vision;
- local radio stations;
- local theater groups;
- State arts agency;
- local agencies coordinating volunteer efforts;
- local newspapers;
- area colleges/universities (theater/arts programs).

8.10 – AD scripts for a scene from *Pretty Woman*: Royal National Institute of Blind People, WGBH, and my own (Audio Description Associates, LLC).

PRETTY WOMAN excerpt
Audio Description by RNIB

… manager of the hotel, sir.

Barney has proffered his card but Edward is already out of earshot on his way into the bar.

A sophisticated creature in a scooped black lace dress sits at a bar stool with her back towards him. He looks in her direction then turns away. He looks back again just as she turns toward him. It's Vivian. Her hair is combed back from her face, her long curls cascading down her back. Around her neck, a black lace choker. She wears long black gloves and smiles to him coyly. He smiles in surprised delight.

… Shall we go to dinner?

He offers her his arm. She takes it, a little uncertainly, and he leads her out of the bar.

In a restaurant, they're led to a table.

… Please sit.

They all sit—but Vivian stands up again. The men leap to their feet. She leans toward Edward.

… Please do so.

Vivian walks up a winding staircase in the center of the restaurant. First on the menu, toast and pate.

… which goes with what.

Mr. Morse picks up a piece of toast and bites into it. Smiling gratefully, Vivian follows his example. Edward nods approvingly.
Next on the menu, snails.

… have my shipyard. [CLICK]

A snail flips through the air and is caught by a waiter.

… Slippery little suckers.

David suppresses a smile.

PRETTY WOMAN excerpt
Audio Description by WGBH

… manager of the hotel, sir.

He offers his business card as Edward walks away. Edward strides quickly into the lounge past a small palm tree and a wooden pillar. He stops halfway to the bar and looks around. As he turns, Vivian swivels around on her bar chair. Edward spots her straight in front of him. He squints at her, smiling in disbelief.

Her auburn hair pulled back into a high-flying ponytail, she wears a black, lacy off-the-shoulder dress with a scoop neckline and long black gloves. He stands still, admiring her. She grabs a black coat and joins him.

… Shall we go to dinner?

She takes his arm hesitantly then accompanies him out of the lounge.

Later, in the Voltaire, a Maitre'D escorts them across an elegant dining room.

… Stop fidgeting.

They approach two men at a table.

… Please sit.

Vivian pumps David's hand. The Maitre'D pulls out her chair. She sits down, then leans toward Edward.

… Excuse me.

As she gets up, the men stand.

… Yeah.

She bites her lips.

… I'll do that.

The men sit back down. Later, a waiter sets a plate of toast-pointes with pate in front of Vivian.

… That's the fork I know.

David smiles as Vivian counts the tines.

… which goes with what.

Mr. Morse picks up a toast-pointe with his fingers and bites into it. Vivian grins and follows his lead. Brushing off a black olive, she takes a bite and looks at Mr. Morse who nods. Edward watches, smiling to himself.

… have my shipyard. [CLICK]

A shell flies out of Vivian's tongs. A waiter catches it.

… Slippery little suckers.

David hides a smile. The waiter looks up.

PRETTY WOMAN excerpt
Audio Description by ADA (Audio Description Associates, LLC)

… manager of the hotel, sir.

He offers his business card as Edward strides away. Edward breezes into the lounge past a pillar and upholstered armchairs. Approaching the bar, he glances around and turns. As he does, Vivian swivels on her bar stool facing him. Edward pivots and leans in, a slight smile on his face.

Vivian's auburn hair is pulled back into a ponytail; she wears a black, lacy off-the-shoulder dress with a scoop neckline, long black gloves, and a black lace choker. She grabs a black coat and joins him.

… Shall we go to dinner?

He offers his arm and she takes it after a moment; he escorts her out of the lounge.

Later, in the dining room, a Maitre'D escorts them across a grand dining room.

… Stop fidgeting.

They approach two men at a table set for four.

… Please sit.

Vivian pumps David's hand. The men wait as she sits down; they sit. She leans toward Edward.

… Excuse me.

As she gets up, the men stand.

… to the ladies room.

She grins broadly.

… Yeah.

She bites her lip.

… I'll do that.

The men sit back down. Later, a waiter sets a plate of toast-pointes with pate in front of Vivian.

… That's the fork I know.

David smiles as Vivian counts tines on a fork.

… which goes with what.

Mr. Morse uses his fingers to pick up a toast-pointe and bites into it. Vivian grins and follows his example. Brushing off a black olive, she takes a bite and looks at Mr. Morse who nods. Edward watches; he smiles and nods.

… have my shipyard. [CLICK]

A shell shoots out of Vivian's tongs. A waiter catches it. Vivian grins sheepishly.

… Slippery little suckers.

David hides a smile behind his raised hand. The waiter stands with hands clasped.

8.11 – Associated Web Site— www.thevisualmadeverbal.com [User Name: **VisualVerbal**; Password: **Udescribe**] (UNDER CONSTRUCTION)

1- Excerpt from 1991 film *Proof*
2- Fiorello LaGuardia reading comics over the radio
3- *Theater Without Limits* by Access Theater
4- *Sesame Street* excerpt *Elmo's World*
5- FOX-TV feature on developing film description
6- *Universal Design: Museum Accessibility*
7- Awareness Test
8- Holmes #1
9- Holmes #2
10- *The Color of Paradise* – no video, without AD
11- *The Color of Paradise* – no video, <u>with</u> AD
12- *The Color of Paradise* – <u>with</u> video, <u>with</u> AD
13- *The Empire Strikes Back* – <u>without</u> AD
14- *The Empire Strikes Back* – <u>with</u> AD
15- *Hercule Poirot* –<u>without</u> AD (from an episode of "Mystery" on PBS)
16- *Hercule Poirot* –<u>with</u> AD (description created by WGBH)
17- *Ned's Declassified School Survival Guide to Halloween* – <u>without</u> AD
18- *Ned's Declassified School Survival Guide to Halloween* – <u>with</u> AD
19- *Pretty Woman* – <u>without</u> AD
20- *Pretty Woman* – <u>with</u> AD (description created by WGBH)
21- *Pretty Woman* – <u>with</u> AD (description created by U.K.'s Royal National Institute of the Blind)
22- Popeye cartoon *Fright to the Finish* – <u>without</u> AD
23- Popeye cartoon *Fright to the Finish* – <u>with</u> AD
24- Two- *The Miracle Worker* (the breakfast scene) – <u>without</u> AD
25- *The Miracle Worker* (the breakfast scene) – <u>with</u> AD
26- *The Shining* – <u>without</u> AD
27- *The Shining* – <u>with</u> AD
28- *Storm Reading* – <u>with</u> AD
29- *Star-Spangled Banner: The Flag That Inspired the National Anthem* – audio only
30- *Saturday Night Fever* Travolta clip, audio only
31- *Saturday Night Fever* "Hispanic" clip, audio only
32- *Saturday Night Fever* Travolta clip, with video and audio
33- *Saturday Night Fever* "Hispanic" clip, with video and audio
34- Charlie Chaplin
35- *One Flight Over The Cuckoo's Nest*-Ratched
36- *One Flight Over The Cuckoo's Nest*-Nicholson
37- *My Fair Lady*-1
38- *My Fair Lady*-2
39- *Quill*-cane
40- *Quill*-dog
41- *Ministry of Silly Walks,* Monty Python
42- excerpt from *Dust,* AXIS Dance Company, choreography by Victoria Marks – <u>with</u> AD

43- ILO – *Count Us In* <u>without</u> AD

44- ILO – *Count Us In* <u>with</u> AD

45- KCCI News report on AD training, Des Moines, Iowa

46- "Literal Video" – *Total Eclipse of the Heart*

47- Transcript of An Audio Described Script (full movie): *Night of the Living Dead*

48- *Night of the Living Dead* (full movie) without audio description

49- Conference Proceedings from The Audio Description Project Conference of the American Council of the Blind (July 12-14, 2010, Phoenix, AZ)

50- Conference Proceedings from The Audio Description Project Conference of the American Council of the Blind (July 6-8, 2009, Orlando, FL)

51- Transcript of Conference Proceedings from The International Conference on Audio Description (March 23-24, 2002, Washington, DC)

52- Transcript of Conference Proceedings from The International Conference on Audio Description (June 15-17, 1995, Washington, DC)

Chapter Nine

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- "Standard Techniques in Audio Description" by Joe Clark (Canada) – http://joeclark.org/access/description/ad-principles.html

- Described and Captioned Media Program "Description Key" (developed by DCMP and the American Foundation of the Blind) – http://www.dcmp.org/descriptionkey/

- ITC (Independent Television Commission—now "OFCOM") Guidance on Audio Description (U.K.)

- National Captioning Institute Described Media "Style Guide"

- "What Do You See—Notes on Audio Description" by Tom Weatherston, Kentucky Center for the Arts

4.b. **Listening to Movement: LMA and Audio Description**

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A skilled performer almost always seeks to communicate with an audience. It is assumed that the audience is able to fully perceive the skill of the artist and experience that communication.

But what if the exchange is interrupted, not by lack of clarity on stage, but rather by an audience member's lack of access to that full perception. How, for example, can a blind person "see" a dance performance?

This paper will discuss how audio description, enhanced by Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) fundamentals, provides access to the arts for people who are blind or have low vision. Describers observe, select, and then succinctly and vividly use language to convey the visual image that is not fully accessible to a segment of the population—new estimates by the American Foundation for the Blind now put that number at over 21 million Americans alone who are blind or have difficulty seeing even with correction.

In the United States, the principal constituency for audio description has an unemployment rate of about 70%. With greater access to our culture and its resources, people become more informed, more engaged with society and more engaging individuals—more employable.

Keywords: Applied Translation; Narrative Techniques; Screen Translation; Target Audience; Translation Theory

Introduction

In his introduction to the second edition of The Mastery of Movement, Rudolph Laban wrote: "What really happens in the theatre does not occur only on the stage or in the audience, but within the magnetic current between both these poles." He suggests that the performers on stage form the "active pole of this magnetic circuit [and] are responsible for the integrity of purpose" in the performance that determines the quality of the "exciting current between stage and audience."

Laban's focus here is on the skill of the performer in communicating with the audience. It is assumed that the audience is able to fully perceive that skill and experience that communication.

But what if the "magnetic current" is interrupted, not by lack of clarity on stage, but rather by an audience member's lack of access to that full perception. How, for example, can a blind person "see" a dance performance?

This paper concerns a relatively new and unexamined development in audio description: description of movement and specifically the use of the ideas behind Rudolph Laban's Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) to enhance what describers do.

What is Audio Description?

We describe Audio Description (AD) as a literary art form, a type of poetry—a haiku. Using as few words as possible, describers offer a verbal version of the visual—the visual is made verbal, and aural, and oral. Thus, visual images in a film, television show, live performance, or museum exhibit are translated into words that are succinct, vivid, and imaginative to elicit images in their listeners' minds' eyes, to convey the visual image that is not fully accessible to a segment of the population: new estimates by the American Foundation for the Blind now put that number at over 21 million Americans alone who are blind or have difficulty seeing even with correction. But description is also valuable when the visual image is not fully realized by the rest of us: sighted folks who see but who may not observe.

For television and film, an audio describer reviews the program and writes descriptions of visual elements and action, timed to be read between dialogue and other audio elements. The AD script is then recorded by a professional voice talent on an auxiliary sound track. In live performances, audience members who are blind or have limited vision use headset receivers to listen to a live describer reading program notes and describing sets and costumes before the show, then relaying the action (during pauses between dialogue) throughout the performance.

Many years ago, our daughter's friends were chattering excitedly about a movie they had just seen. The film, called Toys, takes place in a toy factory and is filled with colorful images, movement gags and sound effects—but not a lot of dialogue. The one blind girl in the group declared, "That was the most boring movie I've ever been to!" How different her experience was from the sighted children's.

What is Laban Movement Analysis?

We began using, on some projects, Laban Movement Analysis to enhance audio description. LMA offers description writers and live describers a valuable tool for observation, selection and description of important movement elements in live performance, video and film. It provides a systematic framework for analyzing any kind of movement by organizing observations around categories including:

- body actions (what part moves where);
- dynamics (expressive qualities);
- body shape (changes in form and "body attitudes"); and
- spatial patterns (how the mover relates to the environment).

This was all sparked when we considered a broadcast of the audio described version of the 1977 film Saturday Night Fever (with the original description by the program Snyder directed at the time at the National Captioning Institute). A turning point in the story occurs during a dance contest, when the protagonist (played by John Travolta) discovers something about his own limitations—and unearned advantages—by watching the performances of the black and Hispanic couples that place behind him and his partner. To a movement analyst, it is clear that the stylistic differences between the performances served as an important device to convey character and further the plot. But what was focused on in the description, admittedly (and unfortunately) was a labelling of the moves the dancers were making; there wasn't as much difference in the descriptions of the couples as could be discerned by watching them move. This was a missed opportunity—how could we incorporate movement analysis to convey a more complete and a more vivid description of the movement sequences?

A New Way of Seeing

Describers must be clear and succinct—and we must edit from what we see: this corresponds to the idea behind motif notation in LMA: looking for essence and pattern so as to home in on what is most critical to an understanding ("he points to his head") and an appreciation ("his hand is on his heart") of the visual image(s). Further, LMA can help find broader ways of looking at movement and more expressive words to say what we see--an expanded range of seeing and a more specific vocabulary for describing movement.

One important distinction is between the difference in just saying what someone is doing (body actions), and describing how they do it (looking for which aspects which clarify the movement's meaning).

At the same time, describers strive for simplicity, succinctness. As the 17th century mathematician and writer Blaise Pascal noted in writing to a friend: "I have only made this letter longer because I have not had the time to make it shorter." The answer to effective description is not discovered by adding words, but rather culling and focusing. In William Ivins' Prints and Visual Communication, Ivins observes that "The moment anyone tries to seriously describe an object carefully and accurately in words his attempt takes the form of an interminably long and prolix rigamarole that few persons have the patience or intelligence to understand. A serious attempt to describe even the most simple piece of machinery, a kitchen can opener, results in a morass of words, and yet the shape of that can opener is simplicity itself compared to the shape of a human hand or face."

The Story

The first time we worked on live dance description, an insight on how to proceed came from a blind audience member and from Laban himself. This involved a collaboration between Audio Description Associates and Axis Dance Company in Oakland, California, a pioneer in the area of "physically integrated dance"—Snyder sits on its advisory board.

At a pre-performance workshop organized by Axis, we heard from one blind participant, "I never go to dance because all I get is the music, and if I don't like the music, it's really boring!" When

asked what he would need to hear in the description in order not to be bored, he replied, "the story". One of our describers-in-training replied in dismay, "But it's modern dance; it's abstract. There is no story!" Indeed, Laban wrote that "Pure dancing has no describable story. It is frequently impossible to outline the content of a dance in words, although one can always describe the movement."

But just a few pages earlier Laban had written, "…the artist playing the role of Eve can pluck the apple in more than one way, with movements of varying expression. She can pluck the apple greedily and rapidly or languidly and sensuously… Many other forms of action are possible, and each of these will be characterized by a different kind of movement… In defining the kind of movement as greedy, as sensuous, or detached, one does not define merely what one has actually seen. What the spectator has seen may have been only a peculiar, quick jerk or a slow gliding of the arm. The impression of greed or sensuousness is the spectator's personal interpretation of Eve's state of mind…"

Here Laban is alluding to the same "current between stage and audience" mentioned above. And he is pointing out the interactive nature of that current. Laban might also be alluding to an important principle of Audio Description: what you see is what you say. It's important to describe accurately, but also to verbalize vividly and allow the listener to create meaning. Audio describers try to be objective, by using words that are specific and imaginative, without being interpretive, i.e., Eve snatches the apple "with a quick jerk of the arm" not "with a look of greedy guilt".

Finding the Right Words

LMA also prompts the use of a more specific vocabulary for describing movement: again, the emphasis is on the difference between just saying what someone is doing (body actions), and describing how they do it.

We train describers to use "walk" verbs which incorporate adverbial ideas; describers must become "walking" thesauri in order to conjure synonyms like HOP, SKIP, LEAP, GALLOP, DASH, TROT, DART, HUSTLE, RUSH, ZIP, SCURRY, STROLL, LINGER, LOPE, DALLY, MOSEY, DAWDLE, TRUDGE, PLOD, LOMP, LUMBER, FLUTTER, TIPTOE, FLIT, TRACK, WANDER, or WEAVE.

In description workshops we screen video clips of people walking, sequences where just hearing "walk" doesn't give nearly as much information as seeing the image. For example, watching Charlie Chaplin in City Lights, we agreed that his body organization and dynamics are essential elements of his signature character. In My Fair Lady Audrey Hepburn's body attitude and expressive qualities, as much as her costume and speech, are what demonstrate how Eliza Doolittle has changed after being groomed by Professor Higgins. In other examples, we focus on gait patterns, spatial interactions and other movement ideas that inform characters' walks.

So considered in a broader LMA context, this observation discipline provides a vantage from which to find the "story" of each piece of choreography. Whether or not there is a narrative plot, it offers describers an expanded range of seeing. In developing description for movement or

dance, we look for the "story" it tells: what main idea does the dancing communicate to the viewer/what is the essence of the dance? What information would be most important to allow a blind audience member to "view" the performance as fully as possible, to help him follow the meaning of the choreography? The LMA framework provides a lens for seeing essence and meaning.

What's It All About?—Two Samples

Since there's not time while it's happening on stage to describe everything about a dance piece, describers must choose which elements comprised the structure and themes of the choreography, and what words would most succinctly convey those ideas. For example, one piece might be mostly "about" spatial patterns and sequences of group clustering and scattering; the dancers' specific movements would be less important, and their individual characteristics (gender, hair color, body shape, etc.) might not matter at all. In another piece, where each dancer played a unique character, those particulars could be meaningful factors. Below we have reproduced a portion of the describers' script for one of the Axis Dance pieces: "Dust", choreographed by Victoria Marks. The script is designed to be spoken while the movement occurs; viewing a tape of the piece, you would notice that much has been left unsaid in order to focus on communicating mood, theme and choreographic structure, while leaving aural space for the impact of the musical score. We invite you to test the description by having it read aloud to you. To what extent does hearing the dance allow you to see?

We also share a brief excerpt from the audio description script for "Phoenix Dance," a documentary about dancer Homer Avila (in the "Phoenix Dance" script, audio cues are preceded by ellipses). The "Phoenix Dance" introduction highlights a movement piece of Mr. Avila's; again: are you able to hear (read) the "story" the visual images tell: what main idea does the dancing communicate to the viewer/what is the essence of the dance? What information would be most important to allow a blind audience member to "view" the performance as fully as possible, to help him follow the meaning of the choreography? We try to choose which elements comprise the structure and themes of the choreography, and what words would most succinctly convey those ideas. (Note: the video of "Phoenix Dance," with description, can be accessed at: http://www.audiodescribe.com/samples/ .)

"Phoenix Dance"—A film by Karina Epperlein

… [tones]
The screen is black. In a moment, a reflection of trees and cloudy sky ripples in a pool of water.

[out of black]
… in the end, it's beauty.
The reflected image fades.

 On a dark stage floor, Lights fade up on Aa man lies, prone on a dark stage floor, balancing on his hands and his outstretched left leg. Slowly he lowers himself, bending his presses his hands against a stage floor, his muscled arms, bent at the elbows and he faces the floor—his sinewy left leg extends extending to thethe our right.

The clean-shaven, olive-skinned man with close-cropped, dark hair pushes himself backward with his hands andthen bends his left leg at the knee. His arms undulate at his sides, first one then the other as he rises to sitting. He poses with until he holds his right arm in a vertical pose abovereaching up alongside his head while he points his left arm toward his extended left leglooks toward the floor where his right leg would be. He wears a black tank top and black tights, cropped at the thigh.

He bends overturns toward his left leg , his cheek pressed to his knee—his arms grasping his toes, and then presses his hands against the floor at his hips raising his lean body into the air, creating a three-dimensional triangle shape: his arms form two angles at the left and rear, his left leg forming an angle at the right. and bends to lie along it for a moment. Pushing his hands into the floor, he hoists his hips high, torso still lying on his straightened leg. He balances on hands and foot.

He pulls himself into the shape of a tall triangle, bending at the hip, placing his hands on the stage floor and standing on his only leg, his left. He walks himself to the right with his arms, thrusting his leg under his torso and onward. He repeats the process but this time he swings his leg to the front, rolls to the right facing the floor and sits upright, facing front and extending his arms to the sides.

With his leg bent at the knee and curled under his torso, he circles his hands slowly.He strides toward theour right, animal-like, head down, shifting his weight from hand to hand, then swinging his leg through.

…right leg and hip due to cancer.
Seen through a partially open door, a bespectacled Homer, in a green pullover, jumps and twirls and bends over, bringing his hands to the floor. Heon his one leg, then crouches and cocks his head slightly away from us.

In red script against black: Phoenix Dance
In white lettering: A film by Karina Epperlein
With Alonzo King, Homer Avila, Andrea Flores

"Dust"—Choreographed by Victoria Marks

Notes: This dance is structured to employ many types of contrasts. Examples include:
Visual contrasts: light/dark, warm tones/cool tones, patterns/full light, one or two dancers/large group.
Sound contrasts: nature sounds/music, quietness (serene sounds)/active (agitated) sounds.
Choreographic idea contrasts: stillness/mobility, passive/active, initiator/follower, intensity (seriousness)/lighthearted busyness, isolation/interaction.
The activeness/passivity, stillness/mobility of each dancer at any given choreographic moment is not based on who's in a wheelchair/"disabled" or not. Sometimes the choreographer purposely turns that around.

1
A small pool of light reveals a woman lying still, face down. From left, a second woman drives her motorized wheelchair into the light.

2
She pauses next to the prone woman, then reaches down to lift the woman's shoulder and change her pose.

3
The woman in the wheelchair continues to pose the other, moving one body part at a time. The woman on the floor moves only as she is molded, holding each new shape.

[SLIGHT PAUSE]

The mov-er steers her wheelchair to gently nudge the mov-ee onto her back.

4
The passive dancer on the floor is softly pulled and pushed, her head lifted, her back lightly touched, to bring her to sitting. The wheelchair presses into her from behind; she slides to a crouch, then a squat. In stages, her partner stands her up. The standing woman now turns her head—on her own—toward the wheelchair dancer. Light fades to black.

5
Light comes up. The standing woman faces a new dancer. She who was passive is now the initiator. One press of her forefinger against the other's breastbone sets off a cascade of movements. The first backs away and watches as the new dancer flails and dangles, drops to her knees, her elbow, then splays onto her back. Lights fade out.

6
The circle of light comes up. A new dancer stands beside the splayed woman, slicing the air with sharp arcing arm movements. The splayed woman lifts her head, as the other gazes upward. Light fades to black.

[PAUSE, MUSIC CHANGES]

7
Full stage lights up. From left, a man and woman, in time to the music, prance and dip forward. They are met, from right, by a dancer motoring her wheelchair on, dragging another who hangs on to its back. Now dancers converge and scatter busily all over the stage—two drive wheelchairs, five are on foot. Greetings, hugs, taps, re-groupings. Dancers wave, bump, tease, chase, shove, lean, flop onto and roll or climb over each other, scurrying and whizzing playfully from place to place.

8
Now, as lights begin to dim, the dancers spread across the stage and slow to stillness, pausing in tableau. Lighting creates an uneven geometry of shadows slashing across the floor.

In unison, the dancers begin to turn slowly in place. Now all are seen in right profile.

9
Now their backs all face us.

[CHIMES]

10
The dancers continue their slow-motion rotation.

11
Now all are in left profile

12
At left, suddenly a wheelchair dancer sweeps her arm up and circles her chair to the right. At this cue, a man at right spins, then reaches out to draw her to him. While some continue their slow, in-place rotation, others break rank and repeat some of the earlier greeting, reaching, running, and pushing. Each always returns to a still patch of light and rejoins the ongoing group rotation.

13
Small groups step forward, then back into place. Now all pause, in tableau again, their backs to us.

14
In unison, all look over their right shoulder then turn toward us.

15
They are still.

16
The two at right turn away.

17
The two at center turn away.

18
The remaining three turn away.

19
Steadily, evenly, all rotate to their left, to face the far left corner.

20
Abruptly breaking the spell, a woman dashes from right to left, slicing through the group. She flings herself to the ground, then scrambles up and races back as the others pull away from her

and stride off left. She repeats the run and slide, left alone on stage. The lights have brightened and the floor pattern disappears. The lone dancer runs off as others return along her same diagonal path (from far left to close right). They are tugging, shoving, catching and lifting each other. Some push, roll and dart past others to advance along the diagonal and scatter offstage right.

21
Now all but two have exited. They pause, stare at each other, and one runs off right, leaving the other standing alone.

22
Body erect, she gradually turns her back to us…

23
…then pivots slowly on one foot then the other to complete her rotation.

24
Now she looks at us, then walks forward, gazing across the audience.

25
The light brightens on her as she bends forward, hands to her right knee, and unfastens her prosthetic lower leg. She sets it upright in front of her. It stands alone as she kneels behind.

26
Crouching, she slides left on her knees.

27
She glances at us, leans forward to peer at the leg, reaching out slowly with her index finger to poke the leg and tip it over. As she sits up, another dancer, in a separate pool of light to the left, reaches upward, arching her back, then crumples to the floor, face down.

Conclusion

We end by noting that all of this is about making our world accessible. All citizens have the right to be full participants in their nation's cultural life; there is no reason why a person with a visual disability must also be culturally disadvantaged.   We are certain that with more complete access to culture and its resources, people become more informed, more engaged with society and more engaging individuals—thus, more employable. In the United States, where the principal constituency for audio description has an unemployment rate of 70%, audio description for film and media, in particular, can have a significant impact. With a focus on people's abilities, we will come much closer to greater inclusion and total access.

Author Biographies

Joel Snyder is the President of Audio Description Associates, LLC and the Director of the American Council of the Blind's Audio Description Project in the United States. One of the first

audio describers, Joel Snyder began describing theater events and media in 1981. In addition to his ongoing work in these genres ("Sesame Street," DVDs, and feature films), each year he develops audio described tours for major museums throughout the United States including the Smithsonian Institution, the Getty, the Albright-Knox, the National Aquarium, and several State museums and myriad National Park and Forest Service exhibit centers.

He has introduced audio description/conducted audio description workshops in 30 states and D.C. and in over 25 countries; in summer 2008, Snyder presented workshops in Montpellier, Shanghai, and Beijing and provided description for the World Blind Union in Geneva. Most recently, he trained describers in Brazil and presented papers on description in Italy at the International Conference on the Arts & Society. He holds an M.A. in theatre arts and is a Ph.D. candidate with a focus on audio description at the Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona.

Esther Geiger was exposed to both German Expressionism and Labanotation by dance mentors in the 1960's and 70's, and first encountered Laban Movement Analysis in 1980 as a Movement Major in Wesleyan University's Master of Arts program. Her thesis on playground design used LMA to look at how the architecture of a play space might affect children's movement and interactions. Having applied the Laban work to yoga practice/teaching and to personnel administration for a number of years, her certification project integrated LMA and yoga, exploring stillness as a component of movement (she is a Certified Movement Analyst—CMA) . Currently, Esther coordinates professional gatherings and enrichment activities for WACMA (Washington DC Area CMAs) and has served as an Assistant Faculty member in the LMA Certificate Program and an Instructor for Pre-requisite courses. She is also the full-time administrator and a faculty member at Unity Woods Yoga Center, the USA's largest Iyengar studio.

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5. CONCLUSIONS and FURTHER RESEARCH

What are the specific areas where audio description holds promise for future development? In no particular order, I see a range of opportunities. Let me "describe" them:

- "Self-description": No, I'm not speaking of describing one's self! In schools, including higher education, in employment settings, and at conferences, description is most efficiently provided by the speaker making a presentation. "Describe as you go" is the key, not necessarily assuming that all in an audience have easy access to the images being presented. It's common for speakers to ask: "Can everyone hear me?" But can everyone see the images in your PowerPoint or in a short video? At best, a presentation without description is insensitive to an audience's needs; at worst, the situation results in an embarrassing episode similar to that which occurred at VISION 2008 in Canada cited earlier.

- Video Description Research and Development Center (VDRDC): http://www.vdrdc.org/ Supported by the U.S. Department of Education, the VDRDC "investigates innovative technologies and techniques for making online video more accessible to blind and visually-impaired students and consumers. Through collaboration with a broad array of partners and stakeholders in the Description Leadership Network - http://www.vdrdc.org/dln, we are developing advanced video annotation methods for use in a wide variety of educational settings, as well as helping educators and other description providers make better use of the tools already available." It's been my honor to serve as a member of the Description Leadership Network.

A key project of the VDRDC is its Descriptive Video Exchange (DVX), a set of web- based tools that enable anyone to create, access, and share video description content from anywhere video is being streamed or played – also dubbed "You Describe." While I am an unwavering advocate for the highest quality in description, a mechanism for encouraging all people to become familiar with description by doing description can only help build awareness of a relatively new access technique.

- Visibility: As I craft these notes, I pause to follow the television coverage of the 2013 Memorial Day ceremonies in the United States. An army sergeant performed a stirring rendition of "America, The Beautiful" – accompanied by a sign language interpreter. All people see the interpreter and are reminded of the importance of making the words being sung accessible to people who are deaf.   And yet my own description of the presidential inaugurations for ABC-TV in 2009 and 2013 was heard only by those who accessed a separate audio channel. Similarly, at a performing arts event, description is accessed only by those who desire the service.

And that's how it should be. But the result is that audio description is "invisible."   I believe that to a great extent the future of audio description is tied to its visibility among consumers as well as the general public. We need to create more effective PSAs (Public Service Anouncements), perhaps in association with the public sector – see examples at:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IgSnrRjOG7Q and
http://www.afb.org/section.aspx?FolderID=2&TopicID=521; and it is critical that advocates for audio description collaborate with other constituencies – people who are deaf, people with

learning disabilities, people learning English, all people who can benefit from the development of audio description.

- Information: As a member of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Video Programming Accessibility Advisory Committee (VPAAC), I advocated for the widest possible distribution of information regarding: a) what description is available on public broadcast television; and b) how to access the AD feeds. The committee's final report notes "the importance of making widely available information about what programs are video described … (that) entities required to provide described programming … must also provide information about described programs on their websites, provide this information to programming information distributors such as Rovi and Tribune Media Services, and consider alternative ways of ensuring that blind and visually impaired consumers have access to such information. … (that) networks should provide information on their web sites indicating which programs they are airing with video description. To ensure that the information can be accessed, it must be provided in a manner that is accessible to and usable by individuals who are blind or have a visual impairment (and that) information regarding programs with video description be made accessible, usable, and searchable online and through other means such as by telephone using an automated Integrated Voice Response (IVR) system." The full VPAAC report is available at: http://vpaac.wikispaces.com/file/view/120409%20VPAAC%20Video%20Description%20REPORT%20AS%20SUBMITTED%204-9-2012.pdf/318855494/120409%20VPAAC%20Video%20Description%20REPORT%20AS%20SUBMITTED%204-9-2012.pdf

In addition, the American Council of the Blind (through its Audio Description Project) and the Royal National Institute of Blind People maintain excellent repositories of information on audio description in a wide range of genres. Those resources are available at:

- www.acb.org/adp; and
- http://www.rnib.org.uk/livingwithsightloss/tvradiofilm/Pages/audio_description.aspx

- Quality: It is my hope that this volume will contribute to more audio description world-wide and audio description that is of the highest quality. Kim Charlson, the Chair of the American Council of the Blind's Audio Description Project Committee and President of the American Council of the Blind (as of July 2013), writes that "(We) believe that it is critical for knowledgeable users of description to establish … guidelines / best practices for audio description as it occurs in a broad range of formats: television / film / DVDs / downloads, performing arts, visual art and other areas. Only in this way can we be certain of receiving a consistent, high-quality product, developed in a professional environment." Guidelines have been established in a number of countries – and this volume is informed by many of them – but I believe that a "guideline of guidelines" developed with significant input from and endorsement by users of description could be an important advance for the field. Rick Boggs, of The Accessible Planet and Audio Eyes, is a long-time advocate of more and more informed inclusion of description consumers in the development of guidelines and, as importantly, the involvement of description consumers in the production of audio description – as consultants, audio editors, voice talent and in other capacities. He offers workshops focused on audio description skills for consumers of audio description.

It is my hope that in the coming years a national certification program can be established for the review of individuals and companies who offer audio description professionally and trainers of describers, similar, perhaps, to the program established in the U.K. for describers in the performing arts.

- New Developments: Two prospects on the horizon warrant special note:

Ryerson University – Deborah Fels, PhD: When I coordinated funding for multidisciplinary categories at the National Endowment for the Arts, I developed guidelines language that invited applications for funding of access projects that represented aesthetin innovation. In the same vein, Deborah Fels of Ryerson University in Canada posits that "Accessibility can be entertaining."   The Ryerson website notes that "Video description and closed captioning (can be) an integral part of the creative process." Quoting Dr. Fels, it goes on: "Normally this work is done by a third party after the film is complete. We are working with the creative team to write these tracks at the same time they put together the show. Artists are very happy to do this. They love their work, and they understand what's important." For instance, in every episode of CTV's *Odd Job Jack*, an animated production from Smiley Guy Studios, there is an extra track narrated *by one of the characters*. (emphasis added)

Parlamo: Parlamo is a patented Smartphone application that will deliver simultaneous, synchronized foreign language audio and audio description tracks (in English or Spanish) at any movie theater or at home. It targets hundreds of millions of moviegoers worldwide who are not fluent in the local language and exclude movies from their leisure activities.   It is designed to run on hundreds of millions of devices operating under iOS (iPhone, iPad and Touch), Android and Microsoft Phone platforms. The app downloads an encrypted language or audio description soundtrack to the device; the app is free with users paying a small fee per downloaded language soundtrack (audio description soundtracks are provided at no cost).

I mentioned earlier that in the United States there are over 20 million individuals who are either blind or have trouble seeing even with correction—that amounts to almost 8% of our population. Whether one speaks of public or commercial broadcasting, why would a broadcaster—or any institution—not wish to tap such a significant and underserved portion of the population. There is simply a lack of awareness of the need and a misunderstanding of the public benefit that could result from reaching out to this population, not to mention the financial benefit that might be gleaned from this untapped market.

Here in the United States the principal constituency for audio description has an unemployment rate of about 70%. I am certain that with more meaningful access to our culture and its resources, people become more informed, more engaged with society and more engaging individuals—thus, more employable. With a focus on people's *abilities*, we will come much closer to greater inclusion and total access.

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- "Standard Techniques in Audio Description" by Joe Clark (Canada) – http://joeclark.org/access/description/ad-principles.html

- Described and Captioned Media Program "Description Key" (developed by DCMP and the American Foundation of the Blind) – http://www.dcmp.org/descriptionkey/

- ITC (Independent Television Commission—now "OFCOM") Guidance on Audio Description (U.K.)

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- "What Do You See—Notes on Audio Description" by Tom Weatherston, Kentucky Center for the Arts