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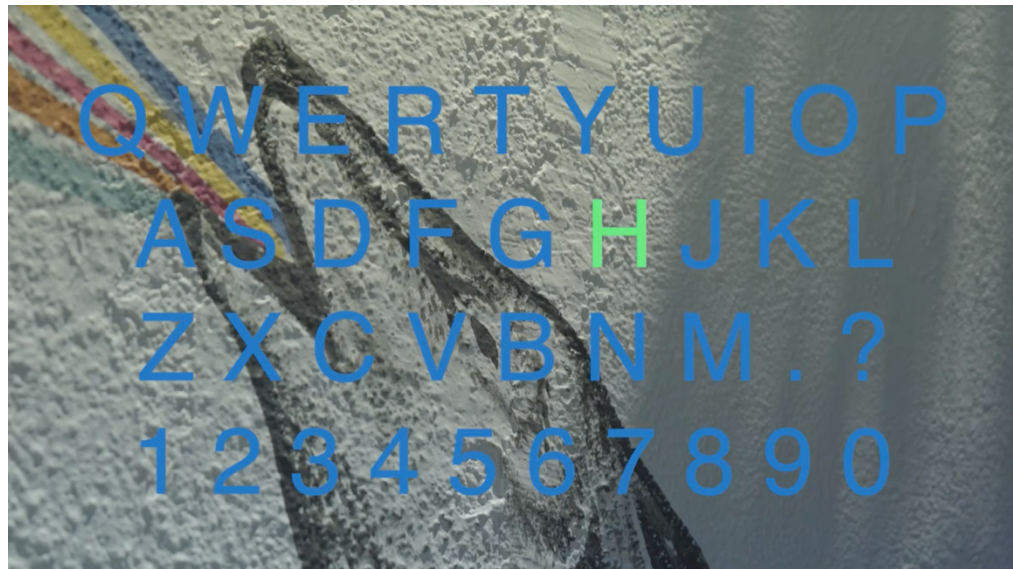
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Untitled (Speech Poem #2)

Marrok Sedgwick



Marrok Sedgwick, Untitled (Speech Poem #2) (still), 2018, 6 minutes 53 seconds.¹

Closed captions often do not fully convey the meaning, emotion, or even the full dialogue of spoken English to a d/Deaf audience. They are often incomplete, whether due to audist assumptions about the ability of d/Deaf to understand content (such as with captions that present allegedly less lofty language than that spoken by the actors on-screen), or the technological failure whereby caption decoders in televisions, and in the devices cinemas use, drop a line of dialogue. Other times, the failure of closed captions relates to the more subtle inability of formal written captioning protocols to capture tone of voice or to really represent what emotional information is portrayed by a soundtrack. What does it mean to have “upbeat music” or to name the instrument itself? My work subverts this obfuscation of meaning, turning the tables to privilege disabled communities over nondisabled communities.

My speech poem series is an ongoing experimentation with translation, bilingualism, and ASL poetry in film form. I play with the translation of sound, the translation of sign language, and the translation of poetry. Sometimes I withhold information from the hearing audience that would be self-evident to a d/Deaf and hard of hearing audience, and other times I offer the full translation. The poem I use is about my relationship to speech, as the second portion of the artist’s statement in the video itself makes clear. This offers the translation required for hearing people to begin to understand the phonocentric values that my experiments with translation complicate.

Sometimes, instead of stating a translation through a subtitle, I prefer to teach the viewer the meaning of a sign, and permit the audience to watch as the performer turns the word into something with greater meaning. In the speech poem series, the operative word is *SPEAK*, and I am the performer. Signed languages have the ability to use the words themselves in physical form to transform the meaning of the signed word into a multiplicity of meanings. It is not just that the word *SPEAK* can be signed such that you know a person dislikes or likes speech, the way that English tones can tell you attitude and emotion. It is that I can take the sign *SPEAK* and turn it into a story, the translation of which would require a paragraph in English. A paragraph that I will not provide because the work is not meant for English.

I will likely never arrive at a finalized version of this video. Instead, I will continue to explore different ways of communicating poetic meaning through further iterations. This iteration contains additional experimentation beyond closed caption, subtitle, and sign. I have also woven in other means of communication used by nonspeaking people. For example, I translate a physical object to animation: a letterboard (typically a plastic or laminated paper card with the alphabet or other things written on it that the disabled person uses to communicate by pointing

at letters, phrases, or images to spell out sentences). This iteration of the video represents one of my earliest experiments with this kind of translation—the translation of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) tools from a physical object into a video/film technique. Including other unspoken forms of communication reminds the audience that language comes in many forms, and only d/Deaf and disabled people hold the key to translating our lives.

This iteration of Untitled (Speech Poem #2) 2018 includes cinematography by Marrok Sedgwick, Chrissy Marshall, and Daryl Jones, and was created in Spring 2018 SOCD 201B at the University of California, Santa Cruz, as part of the MFA Social Documentation program. Thanks to all who participated in that class for feedback that led to this iteration.

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Marrok Zenon Sedgwick is a disabled trans educator using artmaking as a tool for challenging society's injustices. As a creative producer and documentarian, Sedgwick's work has screened internationally. His film *Stim* won the PK Walker Innovation Award at the 2018 Superfest International Disability Film Festival. As an educator, Sedgwick has worked in general education and special education classrooms, as well as with a drama program for youth with disabilities.

Notes

¹ *Untitled (Speech Poem #2)* (2018) is available for viewing at <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4wq347rr#supplemental>.