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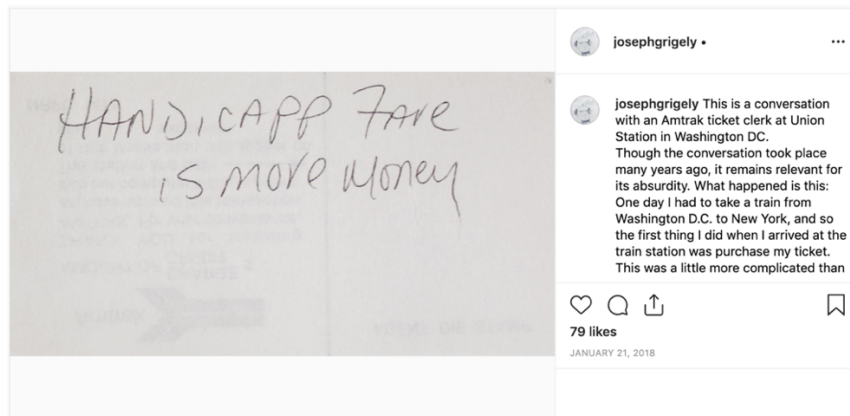
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Craptions: Instagram Notes from Joseph Grigely

Joseph Grigely

Joseph Grigely is, among many things, an artist, a writer, and a person who is deaf. On his public Instagram page, he occasionally posts documentation of his experiences navigating a world designed for people who can hear. Grigely has generously allowed *Refract* to publish a selection of his Instagram posts, curated below by managing editor Kate Korroch. These posts expand the notion of translation beyond that of language to think instead of the aural, the visual, and issues of access and inclusion. Grigely's playful documentation reveals a deeply problem-

atic and systemic failing to account for differently abled bodies. His posts offer a perspective that is invisible in a society made for people with hearing. In this instance, *mis*translation becomes a form of erasure. The photo-essay below offers a selection of Grigely's original Instagram posts, with minor edits to his narrative voice-over.



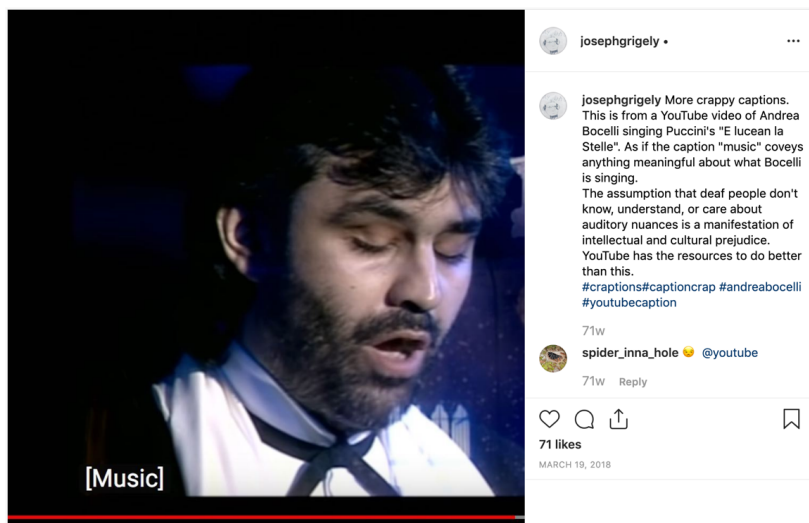
January 21, 2018

This is a conversation with an Amtrak ticket clerk at Union Station in Washington, DC. Though the conversation took place many years ago, it remains relevant for its absurdity. What happened is this: one day I had to take a train from Washington, DC, to New York, and so the first thing I did when I arrived at the train station was purchase my ticket. This was a little more complicated than it seems, though. In America there is a federal law that stipulates that disabled people are entitled to reduced fares to compensate for the hassles and added expenses that disabled people typically incur when traveling. Normally this isn't something I'd ask for, but I thought—why not?—if only to see how much cheaper it would be. So I went up to the service counter and asked the clerk for a round-trip ticket to New York at the disabled person's rate. I showed her my transit ID card, which identified me as "a person with a disability." She smiled and wrote out my ticket, and then she said something to me that didn't quite make sense. So I asked her to write it down and this is what she wrote: "handicapp fare is more money." As she further wrote, the handicap fare was \$102 round trip, but the regular excursion fare was \$92 round trip. It didn't make sense then and it doesn't make sense now. A lot of things related to disability laws don't make sense.



August 5, 2018

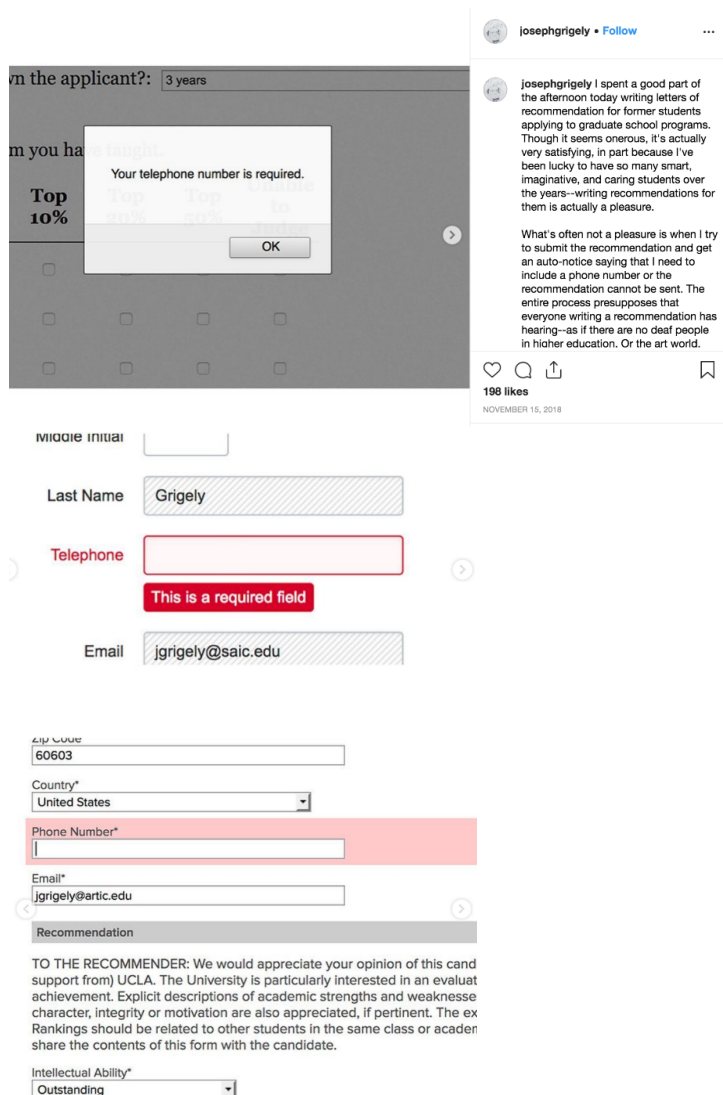
More craptions. We are approaching the fiftieth anniversary of putting a man on the moon and still can't get right the technology for captioning. No one ever said speech-to-text processing would be easy, as language is like water—always slipping through our fingers. But still . . . the legal requirement for captions does not solve the problem that many captions simply fail to do what they are designed to do.



March 19, 2019

More crappy captions. This is from a YouTube video of Andrea Bocelli singing Puccini's "E lucevan le stelle." As if the caption "music" conveys anything meaningful about what Bocelli is singing.

The assumption that deaf people don't know, understand, or care about auditory nuances is a manifestation of intellectual and cultural prejudice. YouTube has the resources to do better than this.



November 15, 2018

I spent a good part of the afternoon today writing letters of recommendation for former students applying to graduate school programs. Though it seems onerous, it's actually very satisfying, in part because I've been lucky to have so many smart, imaginative, and caring students over the years—writing recommendations for them is actually a pleasure.

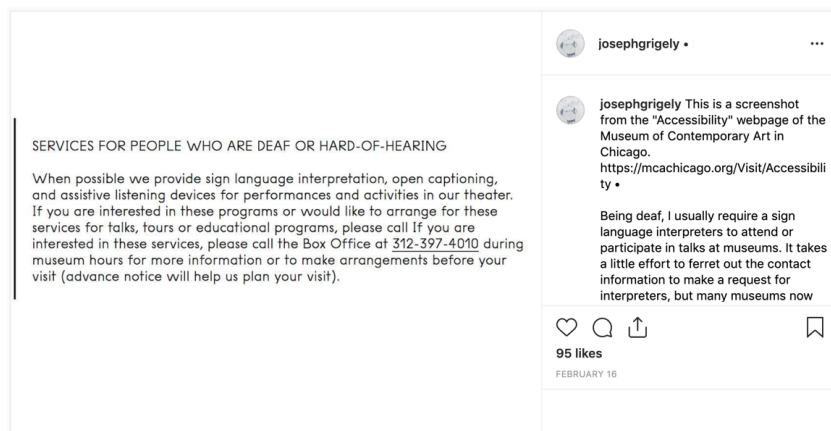
What's often not a pleasure is when I try to submit the recommendation and get an auto-notice saying that I need to include a phone number or the recommendation cannot be sent. The entire process presupposes that everyone writing a recommendation has hearing—as if there are no deaf people in higher education. Or the art world.

But it doesn't stop here: I can't buy a plane ticket without a phone number. I can't schedule a doctor's appointment without a phone number. Some years ago, I had a request for a bank account denied to me because I did not have "a verifiable telephone number." This isn't a lot different than traditions of institutional racism: it's about how institutions presume homogeneous bodies are the only bodies that write student recommendations or buy plane tickets or have bank accounts. It's fucked.

I really don't understand how any of this is legal.

Once, when I was trying to buy a book through Powell's Used Books, but needed a phone number to do this, I emailed them and asked them why. I received a polite response saying that it was just a formality, I should just lie and make up a number. After that, I started using the number for Dial-a-Prayer whenever I was asked for my phone number.

What bothers me most in the end is the constant reminder that I am deaf and my deafness does not fit into paradigms of normalcy. "Diversity" is really a mythology.



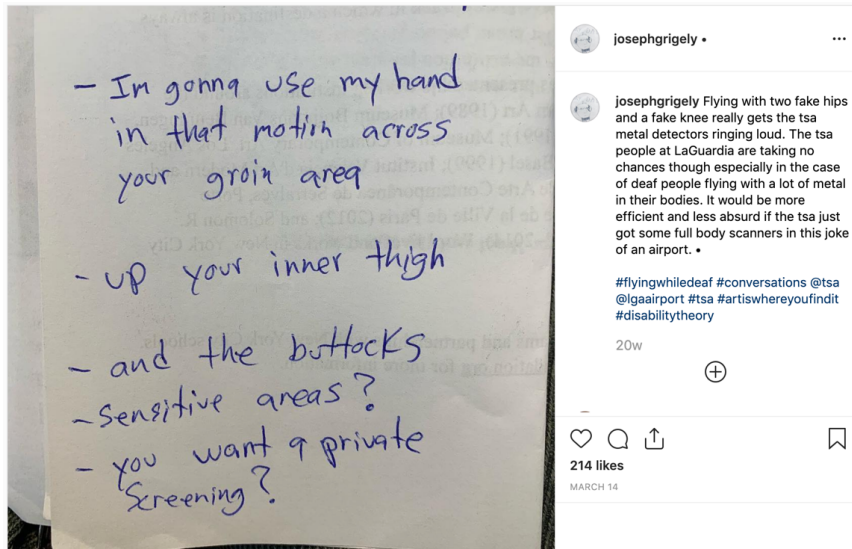
February 16, 2019

This is a screenshot from the “Accessibility” webpage of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. <https://mcachicago.org/Visit/Accessibility>. Being deaf, I usually require a sign language interpreter to attend or participate in talks at museums. It takes a little effort to ferret out the contact information to make a request for interpreters, but many museums now have a webpage on accessibility, and this is good. But I had to read three times the MCA’s statement on services for people who are deaf before I could even begin to make sense of it. To request an interpreter, it says: “If you are interested in these programs or would like to arrange for these services for talks, tours or educational programs, please call If you are interested in these services, please call the Box Office at 312-397-4010 during museum hours . . .”

Both in grammar and content, the statement is convoluted. “If you are interested . . . please call . . . If you are interested . . . please call . . .” OK—understood—you don’t have to say it twice. But by saying it twice, the insult comes across twice. While some deaf people are happy to make a phone call using the video interpreting relay, it strikes me as being limiting to require deaf people to call the box office, of all places, during box office hours alone. Does the MCA have a coordinator for visitors with disabilities?

And an email or web contact, so one also has a written record of making accommodations requests and noting details related to those requests?

To its credit, the MCA website acknowledges: “We still have a lot to learn from our visitors with disabilities and from others who are thinking about accessible practices, but we aspire to be leaders in the community in embracing tenets of universal design.” That’s good. Please fix this very inefficient and unsatisfying process of making access requests.¹



March 14, 2019

Both of my hips and my right knee are made of cobalt-chromium and titanium, and whenever I pass through airport security, they make the metal detectors ring loud. The TSA agents at LaGuardia are especially vigilant. Once when I was pulled aside after setting off the metal detectors, the agent said to me some things I couldn't lip-read, so I had him write them down for me.



Josephgrigely • Follow

Josephgrigely How does someone see deafness? How can one make visible what is, by biological design, invisible? Not just in and among the people who surround us on a daily basis, but also, by extension, culturally? •

Since 1999, I have been saving, when I can find and record them, images of street signs indicating that a deaf person lives in the vicinity. Sometimes they say "Deaf Person" but usually they say "Deaf Child Area"—a cautionary warning that the child on the verge or in the street might not hear your horn when you are driving by. The signs are present in all kinds of places: in the city, in quiet suburbs, along country lanes, and even on the dirt roads of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. •

213 likes

MAY 22



May 22, 2019

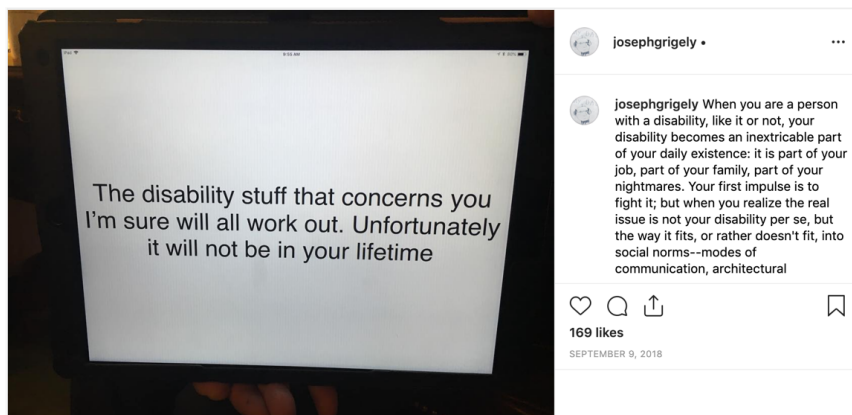
How does someone see deafness? How can one make visible what is, by biological design, invisible? Not just in and among the people who surround us on a daily basis, but also, by extension, culturally?

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What I like about the signs is how they make deafness both visible and present, in a practical and meaningful way. It's hard to do this when you are walking around, or when you are in airports or museums or other places where people congregate, and where rules regulate behavior. Once, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, while sitting on the floor as I spent time with David's Marat, a museum guard struck me on the shoulder and berated me for not getting up on my feet the first time he warned me. He had approached me from behind, and I had no idea he was

yelling at me to get up. Another time, at Union Station in Washington, DC, four police officers dragged me outside because I did not follow their directions to get on my feet. A “deaf person” sign on the street where you live is an affirmation that your deafness is real, and so are you.

I never had a sign on my street when I was growing up. A couple of years ago, as the traffic on my block in Chicago became increasingly busy, I asked my alderman’s office if they could arrange to have a deaf pedestrian sign installed. It was a slow process and took a couple of reminders—but today I noticed the sign had finally been installed. I guess, at age sixty-two, I’m a little old for a “Deaf Child Area” sign.



September 9, 2018

When you are a person with a disability, like it or not, your disability becomes an inextricable part of your daily existence: it is part of your job, part of your family, part of your nightmares. Your first impulse is to fight it; but when you realize the real issue is not your disability per se, but the way it fits, or rather doesn't fit, into social norms—modes of communication, architectural environments, and so on—it becomes more a matter of avoiding intractable situations. Over time, though, you are put in a position of requesting, if not begging, for what is called by the Americans With Disabilities Act a “reasonable accommodation”—one of the most inherently demeaning phrases in constitutional law—as if my very presence as a person with a disability is a problem that needs to be “accommodated” by others. After fifty years of being the problem, you tend to reflect on what has happened, what is happening, and what still needs to happen to change all of this.

I try to be optimistic about the future. My therapist, a real pragmatist, is also optimistic. Within reason.

* * *

Joseph Grigely is an artist and writer. He has had solo exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art; the MCA, Chicago; the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris; and the Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin; and he has participated in the Whitney, Venice, Berlin, Istanbul, Liverpool, and Sydney Biennials. His books include *Textualterity Art, Theory, and Textual Criticism* (1995), *Conver-sation Pieces* (1998), *Exhibition Prosthetics* (2010), *MacLean 705* (2015), and *Oceans of Love: The Uncontainable Gregory Battcock* (2016). He has a D.Phil. from Oxford University and is professor of visual and critical studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Note

¹ The current language on the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago's website has been updated and now says, "When possible, the MCA provides sign language interpretation, open captioning, and assistive listening devices for performances and activities in our theater as well as talks, tours, or educational programs. These preplanned services are often denoted in the event's page," and they continue, "If you are in need of a particular service during your visit to the museum, our Visitor Services staff will do their best to accommodate. If you would like more information, or have any questions, you can email Box Office staff at BoxOffice@mcachicago.org."