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Protest and Practice Live transcript

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SPEAKERS
Hannah Wallis, Sarah Hayden, Jaipreet Virdi, Emila, Bea voiced by Natasha, Ciaran

00:03 Hannah Wallis
Hi everyone, many thanks for joining us tonight. My name is Hannah Wallis. I am a white woman in her early 30s. I have short, wavy brown hair. And I also wear a cochlear implant in my right ear. I am currently calling in from Cambridge. And I am working in an associate capacity at Nottingham Contemporary to co-conceive and deliver Caption Conscious Ecology, a programme that I'm delivering with Sarah Hayden, who I'll pass you over to shortly. Before Sarah introduces our guests, I just wanted to share some brief housekeeping notes. So our live programmes of talks, performances and screenings, really seek to create challenging environments, where open mindedness and respect for each other's experiences and perspectives can foster growth. We will keep a really informal atmosphere throughout this evening, and I know that public intervention is limited in this sort of digital format, but we do welcome you to join the conversation as much as possible. You can use the chat on YouTube to write your questions and any comments as we go along and I will gladly share these during the discussion in the second half of the evening. I just want to take this opportunity to show our gratitude to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for generously supporting Caption Conscious Ecology through Sarah's Voices in the Gallery project. And just to acknowledge the amazing support of my colleagues, Catherine, Canan and Jim, who are all working hard behind the digital scenes for us this evening. Just a note

Talk

on access, for all of these events in the Caption Conscious programme, we will be including BSL interpretation -today that is provided by Hayley Wiseman and Sarah Perks, and we also have with us this evening, Natasha. Alongside this we also have live captioning, which is provided by Andrew. If you'd like to activate the captions on your device, you can click the closed caption button in the corner of the YouTube screen. Or alternatively, there will be a link to the stream text, which will come up in the YouTube chat. For tonight's main screening, we have three amazing films. Each film will have integrated captions, and will also be audio described by Elaine Lillian Joseph. More information about Elaine's work can also be found in the chat. An edited version of the talk will be made available online after the event this evening, so you'll be able to return to the conversation, and we hope to share it with others who aren't able to be with us tonight. So I will just hand over to Sarah who will tell you a bit more about the programme. Thank you

03:07 Sarah Hayden
Thanks, Hannah, and hello, everyone. Welcome to Protest and Practice, the third event in the Caption Conscious Ecology programme. I'm Sarah Hayden. I'll be the one with the Irish accent trying to speak a bit more slowly than I am often given to do, and which I'm working on. I'm a white woman in silver stripes speaking from upstairs in my home, probably with bits of plants in various states of health and hydration poking into frame behind me, and hopefully without any intrusive contributions from my very, very vocal dog downstairs. This four part series has been devised through a partnership between Nottingham Contemporary and Voices in the Gallery, which is a research project that I lead on voice, art and access. More specifically though, the series came about through a very close and jolly and sustaining collaboration between curator Hannah Wallis, our host tonight, and myself. Caption Conscious Ecology arose from our shared desire to open conversations about accessibility in moving image and voice driven practices. We set out to gather insights on captioning and media access from activists, from access workers and scholars across the fields of communication, critical disability studies and Deaf Studies. Our contributors tonight come to captioning from different angles with different experiences and we're thrilled to bring them together. In inviting historian Jaipreet Virdi, we were conscious both of how Jaipreet's scholarship anchors the advent

of captioning in a history of protest and resistance, and of how her activism highlights and enacts its continuing importance as an act of protest and resistance today. Reading Jaipreet's book Hearing Happiness, I was bewitched by the story she tells, how she tells that story, and struck by the implications of her account for how deafness has been historically framed by the medicalised discourse of an ableist, audist context. In her work Jaipreet stresses that captioning is essential for, in her words, the mental and social well being of D/deaf people, arguing that it is the means by which political participation, and I think that's a really important concept that she brings to us, as well as art and media can be made accessible. We became aware of Collective Text through their committed and incredibly creative work to make accessible some of the most progressive moving image programmes and most interesting moving image practices in art in the UK today. What compelled us to seek them out for this programme was not just the knowledge that they are revered by the artists with whom they collaborate, as well as by the film and art publics that have been so long locked out of moving image by an accessible screenings and presentations. In part, this collective regard for Collective Text has developed because the captions they collaboratively devise do so, so much more than just nod to the presence of sound besides dialogue. They don't rehash familiar, hollowed out boilerplate descriptions. Instead, Collective Text's captioning stretches the form to communicate richly textured, often surprising, informative, and contextually congruent, verbal translations of a work's audio content. But beyond those reasons, what really made it urgent that we invited Collective Text to be part of this event was what they have to contribute about how they work, and about who needs to be involved and centred in the work of access, as creators, as well as users when it comes to access work. In addition to inviting voiced and signed contributions from brilliant scholars, activists, and artists, in devising Captain Conscious Ecology, we also wanted to draw attention to just a little of the amazing abundance of moving image work being made out of and with captions and audio description today. Amazing work being made in large part by D/deaf and disabled people, and their access conscious allies. So tonight, we're really excited to be screening three marvellously caption conscious videos. Seo Hye Lee's Sound of Subtitles, 2021; Jordan Lord's, I Can Hear My Mother's Voice, 2017; and Abi Palmer's, What Now?, 2020.

And our excitement is only amplified by the fact that we'll be doing so with audio description by wonderful collaborator, Elaine Lillian Joseph. Through the series, we hope to prompt event organisers, institutions, artists, and arts workers to begin to think about how and why captioning could be embedded in what they do, from the point of conception, rather than as a fix, a compliance widget, a box ticking exercise, laid over the top in post production. Our hope is that these events might contribute to the germination of a more caption conscious ecology, a shift in attitudes and a shift in expectations, but also, crucially, a shift in institutional and making practices. If we can be forgiven for borrowing and willfully reassigning meaning to one of the pandemic's tawdriest phrases, what we're hoping for here are new, and that's to say more accessible, ways of working. The conversation, of course, won't end with the close of this programme. There's so much more to be done. And I'm delighted to say that with Nottingham Contemporary, we've been awarded an Art Fund Reimagine grant to develop and expand this work, on which we'll be giving you more news soon. Hannah and I, and Voices in the Gallery and Nottingham Contemporary, are all going to be thinking about access and captions into the future. And we're keen to connect with others who might be interested in getting involved. So do get in touch if that's you. Our first events on Access and Abundance featured really wonderful talks from Louise Hickman and Tanya Titchkosky, and a screening of Louise and Shannon Finnegan's film, Captioning on Captioning. And you can watch now a video of that that's available on the Nottingham Contemporary YouTube channel. We're also really keen, and I mean that more genuinely than perhaps it sometimes is meant, to receive any feedback you might have on tonight's event, on our last talk, or on the programme in general, whether it's about what worked or what didn't work in terms of access, or anything else you'd like us to know about your response, what you learned or what you'd like to learn more about, what you would have liked to have happened differently. So Canan is going to put a link to a Padlet page in the chat, and you can either drop any comments that you have there, or use the usual chat function on Youtube, whatever is more comfortable for you. So tonight, we're going to have Jaipreet Virdi on captioning and protest, a break then for five minutes, Collective Text on captioning and practice, a screening, another five minute break, and Hannah will then host a conversation between Jaipreet, Emllia, Bea and Ciaran from Collective Text. You'll be

invited to contribute questions via the chat. So before I hand over to Jaipreet, allow me to say finally, thanks to you all for being there. And thanks Jaipreet and Collective Text for taking up this invitation. Jaipreet Virdi is an assistant professor in the Department of History at the University of Delaware, whose research focuses on the ways medicine and technology impact the lived experiences of disabled people. She is author of Hearing Happiness, Deafness, Cures in History, 2020, which just last week was awarded a prize, a very well earned prize from the British society for the History of Science. It's extraordinarily readable, it's genuinely phenomenally compelling. It's the kind of book that anyone can pick up. You don't need to come from a medical or historical background. And you will find your way through it with a kind of joy and pleasure. It's amazing. She is co-editor of Disability and the Victorians: Attitudes, Legacies, Interventions, 2020, and has published articles on diagnostic technologies, audiometry and the medicalisation of D/deafness. Her new research project historicises how disabled people tinkered with their prostheses and perceived their devices to be prosthetic extensions of themselves that were crucial for their self crafting of normalcy. Through case studies of users adopting what Virdi refers to as the disabled gaze, this project forces us to confront how disabled people challenged medicalised assumptions about their bodies, and claimed their own spaces to craft their identity. So I'm going to hand over to Jaipreet now, and after Jaipreet, there will be a five minute break before we're back for the presentation from Collective Text. Thank you.

12:43 Jaipreet Virdi
Thank you so much Sarah for that introduction. And hello, everyone. It is my absolute pleasure to be here tonight and deliver a talk for the wonderful, and necessary event on caption conscious ecology. And let me just say, I absolutely love that phrasing. It has a lot of power behind that. I want to give special thanks to Hannah Wallis for the invitation. And to all the organisers, staff and volunteers who put together this very exciting programme. And of course, thank you audience for your participation and engagement. I have been very excited for a few months now about this talk because A, I enjoy sharing my work with different audiences, and B, this gives me a chance to pick up research that is very much integral to my activism. And it's always nice to bring my academic

and activist sides together. By way of an audio description, I am a South Asian woman with short, curly, black hair, I am wearing a purple and pink Paisley top and sitting in my home office, which means I am surrounded by lots of books and lots of green lush plants that are totally my partner's doing, so he's the one who takes care of the plants, so any credit about how green they are goes to him. I am zooming in from my home office in Newark, Delaware in the United States. And I want to take a moment to just very briefly acknowledge that this occupied land is the traditional home of the Lenni-Lenape and Nanticoke tribal nation, the Delaware nation. Without them, we would not have access to this gathering and to this dialogue. And I take this opportunity to thank the original caretakers of this land. But beyond speaking mere words, I am actively and consciously working to decolonise my own scholarship and teaching. I invite you to visit the website Native Land, which is native-land.ca to better understand the occupied lands where you currently are. So next slide, please, the home slide. So let's begin with Black Bars, White Text: Captions in Protest. And let me preface by saying two things, first, I am positioning that history that is largely an American history, because that is my area of expertise. So I hope in our Q+A later tonight, we'll be able to link some of the American history where it was also happening in the UK and Ireland as well. And the second thing I want to talk about very briefly, and please forgive me, Sarah and Hannah for bringing this up, is this ongoing practice of how capturing works, just before we all started this event, behind the scenes in our green room, we were struggling to put together the captionings in order, and I made a remark of how ironic it is we're having a panel about captioning while struggling with our own captioning issue, which shows, you know very simply, we have a very long way to go. This is not perfect technology, this is a technology that's still very much a work in progress and can be improved. Don't just never take for granted what we do have, and I can tell you personally on my end here, we have the captioning provided by Andrew, I also have captioning set up on my iPad and on my phone as backup options, because as a deaf person I cannot actually communicate or function in this virtual space without accessibility.
So my talk today is positioned from my vantage point as a historian, specifically a historian of medicine, technology, and disability, and also as a deaf person who wears hearing aids and relies on lip reading and captioning for communication. I am not very fluent in American Sign

Language or British Sign Language, which goes to show just how varied the experience of D/deafness actually is. Next slide, please. I'm going to begin with a statement given by Alice Wong, who is an Asian American woman and wears a respirator mask, and Alice is an American disability activist, who in 2020, was listed in BBC's 100 Women list, and it's a list of extraordinary and influential leaders from around the world. And in her statement to the BBC, Alice stated, "the world had changed a lot in 2020. And I don't ever want thing to return to normal."

18:01 Jaipreet Virdi
We all experienced the drastic and difficult shift during lockdown during the COVID 19 pandemic, when many workforces shifted to virtual spaces, and redesigned technological assets for communicating and sharing information online. We persevered, for the most part as a society with this shift, but for disabled people who have long campaigned for remote access to work and learning, but been routinely denied for reasons of impracticability or expense, suddenly it seemed, accessibility was realised. Accommodations, in other words, emerged as a byproduct of the pandemic. And during this period, I spent three months consulting with different captioning companies, some of which I was actually previously unaware of. And I tested out their programmes, I wrote accessibility reports to disseminate amongst various academic societies and universities on best practices for captioning, for virtual conferences, events and classrooms. This is all work that I did for free. I was not paid for my labour, but it became very clear to me that it was work that was necessary at this period, that's essential when we are all making adjustments, to working online, communicating online and very uncertain about what it means to live through a pandemic and deal with the global devastation that follows from it. What became abundantly clear, however, is that many of the captioning platforms were severely limited. They rely on nonsensical auto-captions, which tend to deliver sometimes incomprehensible run-on sentences, and the algorithm is often slow, censors words, or fails to achieve speech-recognition accuracy. The gold standard of live captioning, Communication Access Real-time Translation, or CART, relies on human steno-captioners. But they are often too expensive for online event or otherwise ignored in favour of built in captioning, that as many deaf people point out, are merely another form of "auto-craptions". A further complication

moreover, is that captions are not always legally provided. Even though since the 1970s, the American D/deaf community have been advocating for the full inclusion of captions in all forms of telecommunications. In the United States, the Americans with Disabilities Act outlined captions as a legal requirement overseen by the Federal Communications Commission. Yet even today, this is regulated only to television broadcasts and film, not for digital content, such as YouTube, or live events hosted on conference platforms such as Zoom. Next slide, please. And even when event organisers go above and beyond to ensure that virtual spaces are accessible, the technological limitations are often troublesome for D/deaf people. So in my own experience, for example, captioning delays aggravate brain fog, it makes it difficult for me to concentrate and respond to questions in a timely manner. My digital hearing aids often fail to capture certain frequencies coming from the computer, and spotlighting Zoom video don't always capture the nuances of accent that are necessary for lip-reading. And there's also a tremendous energy drain that we all feel, especially when we're trying to participate in a platform that is not designed for D/deaf and hard of hearing people. When again, all I can do in my end is ensure that I have the technological setup that is necessary for me to participate fully. And again, sometime all the proper event planning and contigency measures cannot prevent a disaster. Sometimes the technology just refuses to work, can't figure out why, it just has a mind of its own. And even a few months ago, when I was delivering a public lecture, all four captioning platforms that I had set up failed to work properly. So the Q+A section of my own talk became inaccessible to me.

22:53 Jaipreet Virdi
And here's the thing about closed captioning, especially for us who are familiar with the black boxes that used to sit on top of televisions, as shown in this image of a television, a 1980s television more accurately, showing the news reporter and there is a black box on top of the television and a remote control next to it. These are boxes that gave us access to the hearing world through black bars with white text. Access to spaces that I, like many deaf people, were often barred from because we were told it was too costly. It was technologically impossible, if not an absolute inconvenience to provide on a regular basis. Yet this access - this is closed captioning - is essential for our mental and social

wellbeing. Captions are words displayed on screen that provide the speech or sound portion of audio for deaf people to follow along with the programme. With this access, they're better able to comprehend speech, retain information longer, and it also improves reading literacy. Studies have demonstrated that captions can also assist in language comprehension and retention in people whose first language is not English, and it also presents a sociological breakthrough for D/deaf people as it provides them with the ability to communicate more freely with their hearing peers. My colleague at the University of Delaware, Sean Zdenek, argues in his book Reading Sounds, that even people who have difficulty processing sensory or speech information have reportedly found benefits from closed captioning. And although much of the history of closed captioning has largely been framed as a history of legislative changes for accessibility and the technological progress that turned captioning decoder boxes like the one in this image into decoder chips built in televisions and other telecommunication platforms, this is also a social history. Next slide, please. Captioning emerged out of protest. It began with Cuban American silent film actor, Emerson Romero, who we see here in this photograph, along with a white actress who was performing with him, and Romero performed under the screen named Tommy Albert, during the 1920s. And at the time was one of five deaf actors working in the film industry. As was typical of small production company, Romero also edited the film reels, wrote and corrected scripts, and wrote the intertitles, which is the dialogue or information text that is shown between scenes that are typical of early silent films. The introduction of "talkies" ended his acting career and also made intertitles redundant. By 1947, guided by his experience at the production company and responding to the deaf community's request for accessibility in film, Romero began creating a caption library, purchasing various titles and then splicing subtitles between picture frames like how it was in early silent films. And he rented out the captioned films to deaf school and deaf clubs. And though his work was the first technique for captioning in film, his method was considered to be unsatisfactory, if not crude. For one thing, his technique interrupted the flow of film and dialogue. It damaged the soundtrack and it significantly extended the viewing length. And copies of his edited films were often of poor quality. Keep in mind, Romero was doing this essentially in his garage, and paying out of his own pocket to cover the

cost of these films. But lacking funds and support from the film industry, he eventually abandoned the work. But Romero's technique did capture the attention of Edmund Burke Boatner, who was the superintendent of the American School for the Deaf, and who would later found the nonprofit Captioned Films for the Deaf company with another man named C.D. O'Connor.

27:43 Jaipreet Virdi
Their technique adapted a Belgian company's development of etching in films, which is essentially printing captions directly on the master film copy, and then distributing the captioned film to D/deaf communities across the United States. Next slide please. From 1947 to 1958, this nonprofit company captioned and distributed 29 educational and Hollywood films, until American President Dwight Eisenhower signed Public Law 85-905, which provided federal funding to CFD, for the company, and to support the United States Department of Education, so we have one of the first formal laws to ensure captioning accessibility in film. By 1979, the National Captioning Institute would expand the work of the CFD to promote and provide access to television programmes on companies such as ABC, NBC and PBS. The process was time consuming and expensive. It could take up to 40 hours a week to caption one television show, with the going rate for a steno-captioner up to $2,000 an hour, so it was a very expensive enterprise. But access was still limited, so D/deaf people took to the streets. Next slide, please. On May 19 1982, the National Association for the Deaf organised a multi city demonstration to protest CBC's refusal to caption their programmes or to cooperate with the D/deaf community. In New York City, protestors marched to the CBS headquarters, some of them with signs reading "CBS, please lend us, deaf people, your ears".

29:52 Jaipreet Virdi
Next slide please.
Further protests from the D/deaf community, D/deaf and disability communities led to more legislative changes, including the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, which considered captioning as an auxiliary aid that must be provided by businesses and public entities. Also in the same year, the Television Decoder Circuitry Act was passed which mandated closed captioning decoder chips to be built into

all television sets that were larger than 13 inches, and this later was expanded to digital television under the 1996 Telecommunications Act. And then, the 1998 amendment of section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act which was passed in 1978, that requires federal agencies to make all their products and services accessible. So that includes things like television in Federal Buildings, or like advertisements that were funded by the federal government. In 2010, President Obama passed the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act which requires broadcasters to provide captioning for their online video content and mandated captioning to all video programmes on a small screen and that includes like your tablet, and your cell phones. Next slide, please. But things changed with the growth of social media and the increasingly digital transmission of information, which poses challenges to how people can access online content, including the quality of automated captioning tools, in other words "craptions" that are only in place to meet the bare minimum of the 2010 act. So the lack of captioning and the inadequacy of online captioning even led deaf activist Rikki Poynter who is shown up here on the screen to launch a hashtag protest campaign in 2016, Hashtag no more craptions. And while these campaigns had drawn crucial awareness to the issue of the poor auto captions available on digital content, the fact remains that closed captioning has barely improved since the 1970s. And moreover, restrictions about how we participate in activism online, and the lack of access seems to become all the more urgent when we are faced with a global event. When breaking you and real time social media videos are being shared online at a rapid pace. So in other words, if there were ever a time for Black bars with White text, it would seem it would be during a crisis. My neighbour decided this is a good time to start hammering so I apologise. Next slide please. I'll speak louder. The visibility of the Black Lives Matter movement, meant that we saw thousands of video and images from frontline circulating quickly on social media and mainstream news. Because most of the posting was immediate and urgent, they were shared without accessibility in mind. This meant that D/deaf people cannot understand video or audio dialogue. And without alt text description, blind and low vision people cannot use the screen readers to adequately translate the fragmented documentation of protest and rage. On Twitter, frustrated by the lack of captioning or even transcript of all this video, I started responding to every Black Lives Matter video

by asking for transcripts. Strangers worldwide took the time to type up the transcript in the tweet reply or else directed me to another video that was captioned. And long story short what ended up happening in the Summer of 2020 is that within a week of Black Lives Matter content being regularly shared online, a small group of disabled volunteers and allie including D/deaf Twitter users and CODAs - child of Deaf adults, banded together to form protest access. Next slide please. Which is a digital collaboration to caption and transcribe and provide alt-text for any social media content related to Black Lives Matter. This group provided access to spaces that were barricaded or limited and have grown to include over 200 global volunteers and a regular roster of tech designers devoted to making sure the content is accessible. The vision is to strive for a world in which they no longer need to exist because accessible media becomes the standard, and that could be the mandate that we all carry forward. If there's one thing to take away from today's event, it's that captions benefit everyone. Thank you.

35:27 Sarah Hayden
Hello, everyone, welcome back. A huge thanks to Jaipreet for that stirringly powerful provocation. And for the sneaky peek that we have of your own canine right now behind the behind the scenes. This is Sarah speaking again to introduce Collective Text with great pleasure for myself and Hannah. Collective text is a collaborative working process supporting accessibility in Art and Film through creative captioning, audio Description and interpretation. Recent Projects include captions and/or audio description for The Work We Share with Cinenova feminist film distributor, If From Every Tongue It Drips by Sharlene Bamboat, and A So Called Archive by Onyeka Igwe. From Collective Text today we have Emilia, Bea and Ciaran, with Natasha interpreting, over to you.

36:36 Natasha
Hello, hello.

36:39 Emilia
Who wants to go first?

36:43 Ciaran
Emilia, why don't you go first.

36:45 Emilia
Okay. My name is Emilia. I am an artist, captioner, which is to say an access worker and sometimes a beekeeper. I am a light skinned person was short buzzed hair. I'm wearing headphones. I'm in my bedroom. There's a kind of soft pink light. Two prints behind me, one that has a lavender and the other one that has a poster that says "queer solidarity smashes borders".

37:28 Ciaran
Hi, my name is Ciaran. I have worked with Collective Text for a couple of years now, working in supporting them in their captioning. I work as an actor as well. So I'm an artist. I'm currently in Birmingham doing research and development for a project, and just a wee description, I've got shaved hair with a cochlear implant you can see on my left side, and I've got round, brown rimmed glasses that I will be putting on my forehead and on my nose throughout this session. I've got a mustard, yellowish jumper. Behind me I've got red curtains. I'm currently staying in a dig so I this is not my place, I've got like a chest, wardrobe with books and stuff all over on the top.

38:33 Bea (voiced by Natasha)
Hello, Hi, my name is Bea. This is my sign name. I am the same as Ciaran, I am a captioning consultant, collaborator with Emilia. I'm also an actor, a writer, performer, everything theatre, basically a creative. I am working in London, but I'm originally from Scotland, Glasgow. But I'm living in London at the moment. This is not my digs. I am mixed race, Scottish Thai. I've got brown hair in a ponytail. I've got gold rimmed glasses, a bit like Harry Potter. And I got a Lucy and Yak jumper, which is like a blue and orange mix. I think that's a wardrobe. Yeah, there's a picture to the other side of me, a black and white, quite an old picture. And you can hear my lovely voice which is actually my interpreter Natasha. Natasha is a mixed race woman. She's got dark brown hair. She's got a red top on and a white background. Cool. So that's us.

39:53 Emilia
I'm gonna do a little introduction and background to Collective Text. Also I'm very nervous speaking in public, online, whatever and I today I

really feel the kind of grief of the ongoing present moment that we're in. So I just want to thank everyone here in the room and all the audience for holding me in this. So Collective Text co-creates captions, audio description, and other forms of interpretation. We work with artists and institutions at all stages of artistic production, and presentation to consider access within creative practice. In particular, captioning for films made by artists. Our collaborative process involves facilitating dialogue between artists or filmmakers, exhibitors, organisations and distributors, access workers such as captioners, and audio describers, and importantly, artists who rely on captions or audio description to access film. Then the captions and audio descriptions are collectively authored. We also often find ourselves advocating for working conditions that don't make us and our collaborators more sick. We can talk more about this later. Now comes a long list of names. So a few acknowledgments and gratitude, Collective Text grew from backstage and kitchen table conversations between artists in Glasgow, including sick, mad, disabled and D/deaf people. Our practice is modelled on disability justice, which is a framework created by Black, Brown, queer and trans people in the US that examines disability and ableism as it relates to other forms of oppression and identity. And one of the key principles of Disability Justice written by Sins Invalid is that "collective access is an integral part of collective liberation". So some of the people that we learn from and are indebted to are Park MacArthur, Constantina Zavitsanos Sandra Alland, Glasgow's Birds of Paradise, Nosheen Kwhaja, and GLITCH festival, Rosita McKenzie, QUIPLASH in London, David Ellington, and all of our collaborators and artists that we've worked with, including, and I'll go for first names here, Omeima, Amy H., Ross, Craig, Joseph, Jamie, Elaine, Mark David, Amy C, Kyra, Ari, Sarya, Cass, Callie, Daniel, and Sharif. Thank you, Natasha. Sorry.

43:46 Bea (voiced by Natasha)
Cool. Should I start? Yes, start sharing. Okay, so my interpreter. So linked to the videos you've just watched, I just wanted to speak about the equivalent experience. So for example, I watched a TV show recently, it finished and I chatted to a hearing friend of mine. And when we had a conversation, we had totally polar opposite experiences. And she was just like, it was really scary. These things happened and I'm thinking what this is, this wasn't scary what are you talking about. And what I

realised was that sound hadn't been described properly, songs hadn't been described. So I watched it with my cochlear implant, I switched my cochlear on, with the sound and it was a totally different experience that I had. It was emotive, I was in floods of tears. And I just thought, wow, I was so confused. And I realised it was because the subtitles hadn't described tone, emotion, it was a totally different experience that I had. Emilia and I really work together, we collaborate with one another to try and achieve equivalence, the equivalent experience for a D/deaf and hearing audience. And also, of course, we have different perspectives. But I think we've also had quite similar experiences. With that specific show I was talking about, there was some lines in which I thought was a specific character talking, but it turned out it was another character talking. So it's totally confused. It wasn't clear. And I had to work really, really hard to comprehend what was going on. For me, that is so important. And Emilia, and I really talk about the emotional journey for a D/deaf person watching the film. So another example is, when I first watched the film, I was watching it, and a film that we worked on, they were speaking Arabic, and the original film had no captions whatsoever, no translation. And I was just thinking, I'm fed up of going to a film in which they speak a different language, but they translate it for a D/deaf person, but the hearing person doesn't have the same experience. If you know Arabic, then of course you'd understand. But if you don't know Arabic, you shouldn't understand, that's the whole point of it. And I want to have the same experience as a D/deaf person. So we decided to keep the Arabic subtitles. So if a D/deaf person knows Arabic, they would understand it, but if they didn't, then they wouldn't. But that's the whole point of it. But it means as a D/deaf and hearing person, we're getting the same equivalent experience. I don't want to be spoon fed the translation, I want the equivalent. Thinking about sound that is really, really important, which you saw in the last clip, sound, which is just one word is just not enough. When they say you know, somebody's scared, or something's far, or the proximity, or it's lovely sound, I don't know what that means. How do I know what the sound specifically is? So when I watch lots of descriptions, I don't specifically understand, I don't know what the feeling is, what's the mood? I think it's really important to describe sound, obviously not too much information, you don't want to be overwhelming, but just define what the sound is. Explain what it is. Also, what is the emotional journey? I know, obviously, that is different.

But you could, you know, add that, I think you can definitely add that in films. I think that's really, really important. I've also seen films, which have songs, but they don't have the lyrics of the songs, they just say a song is playing. And I just think well hang on. Why is there no lyrics for this actual song? Two more points. I'll keep them brief. The third one is what I was saying, recently, having clear font, having colour to signify which characteristic is speaking, because I don't want to have to work hard to know who's speaking at a given time. And if someone's off screen, please add their names. So we know who's speaking off screen. And that actually doesn't happen. So I don't even know who's speaking. Sometimes, you know, if any added information, for example, what's the accent? My partner said to me recently, Oh they have got a Glasgow accent. I was just like, wow, I didn't even know that. So it's really important to add accents. My last point is, we had a split screen film, Emilia and I made a decision to use captions on both split screens. We just wanted to have the equivalent for hearing and D/deaf audience. And it's almost like you had to decide as a D/deaf person or hearing person, which captions you wanted to read or listen to. So it was the equivalent, and we feel that just matched. I think, you know, captions have been going for so long. And we just want to change things up. We want to have the equivalent, we just don't want the same old. I just think it's really, really important that you work with a D/deaf person and a hearing person to collaborate, to work hard just to make sure that films are clear, and there's any added information because actually having those two perspectives gives a really rich experience. Over to you Ciaran.

49:42 Ciaran
Thank you and I'm going to be listing a whole bunch of names for you Natasha, just to annoy you, no, I'm kidding. As the perfect link to what Bea is talking about, the kind of captions what they've given is really good examples of things that should be considered. And, you know, oftentimes people forget that what captions are created for, the captions are created for access, and they're created for access for a D/deaf audience, but if you don't consult with a D/deaf person, from the beginning, about what things should work and what doesn't, and what isn't clear like, then you're, then the D/deaf audiences might not necessarily understand what's going on, and missed information, gaps in information. And I think one is, like, for example, me and Emilia were

working last week on a film, which had a lot of, kind of, they were trying to create the impression of what the film was doing. And it was kind of kind of a lot of jaggy captions. I don't know if it's the film last week, or a couple weeks ago, I can't remember. And it was a lot of the caption was just doing weird stuff. And I think it was meant to emulate a walkie talkie thing. And I said to Emilia, I can't follow that at all, because it's really hurting my eyes. And you know, people want to create captioning that's really fun and accessible and create new ways. But sometimes they forget to talk to a D/deaf person, because at the end of the day, the D/deaf person needs to be able to be comfortable to watch the caption that's happening on the screen, but still have the really exciting, creative new ways of doing it. But if it's still like it was, it was a lot and it's overwhelming for my eyes. And I was finding it really difficult to link with and I think one of the conversations when me, Bea and Emilia were preparing for this conference this evening, one of the things that we said is that collaboration is sexy. And I think that's such an important thing, because you know, for us, me and Bea, we're experts, because we have our own deaf experience and our own, and what we offer to Emilia is deaf lens. And that's one of the words that, because I've been working this week, and a lot of things that was talked a lot about is D/deaf lens, that if you're a captioner, and you're typing in captions, and you're not D/deaf yourself, you don't have the full understanding of what it's like to rely on captioning. And also one of the things that we've talked about when it comes to captioning is that sometimes captions is a last minute thing. And you know, the amount of time that Emilia has texted me on a Friday evening being like, I got a film, we need to review the captions for it, are you able to do it, but we need to do it for Monday. So therefore, I'm not able to have the chance to watch the film, feed back to Emilia, Emilia, take on my notes, and then send it back to me, I look at it again and go, oh, I need that change, that oh that doesn't work. It doesn't allow creative freedom to do more experimental things with the film or experimental things with captioning because we have two days to get it sorted, and obviously sometimes happens at the weekends. And sometimes, you know, we as freelancers tend to end up working over the weekends. And sometimes, you know, we forget that we need that time to ourselves. And when it's rushed, it's really, really hard. So I think I believe that when it comes to if you're going to do something with captions in it, you need to consider that right at the beginning and

decide who you want to do it with. And for anyone to have a conversation with them. That means as part of your process, when you're filming, you can consider where the captions is, and what that possibility may look like, we can actually have a proper in depth conversation about what captioning can offer. Because it doesn't have to be words in the bottom of the screen. Captions can be a lot more than that. And I've seen great films that have really exciting captioning that pops up, or a made to represent drip, like if there's drip, the caption will kind of do the drip, drip, drip. Things like that makes the film because I think it just adds a lot more to the film. And if you consider having conversations right at the beginning with D/deaf people, and captioners it would add a lot more flavour to your film rather than it being a last minute thing and it's just looks quite rushed and panicky. And that means we can't really process the film and kind of go okay, I know what this film is about. And yeah, I think that's one of the things is really great about this company is that they're employing D/deaf artists to really support you guys, if you have a film with captions, we can provide that support and that expert knowledge. And Emilia listed some great D/deaf artists who are brilliant and have offered such great insights into it.

55:20 Emilia
Thanks, Ciaran, and thanks for the mention about the weekend working because I think as all of us being freelancers and caring so much about the work that we do, when we're trying to build a collaborative process, and something that's meant for a kind of tick box, get something done way, then the institutions pass on the sense of urgency and scarcity to the artists, and then the artists pass it on to us. And then I pass it on to you. And I don't want to do that, you know, and and so much of our, Bea and I have this text to each other, which is like, don't over work. And we're always supporting each other in that process, but what it takes, within especially captioning within artists' film where we're always working outside of the guidelines, because guidelines were written for the news and for soap operas, right? So artists' film already is so far away from that, we're really inventing it as we go together.

56:43 Ciaran
And I think that's one of the things that hopefully will bleed, sorry to interrupt, that will bleed into more mainstream stuff, because we have

that everyday thing that we want something and as Bea's mentioned already before, that information, so much information is missed. And you have a responsibility as captioners to provide that information, and if so much information is missed, it's clear that there isn't any constitution with D/deaf people. Sorry, I just had to interject that one point.

57:21 Bea (voice by Natasha)
Yeah, yeah, a very short example is, I watched a horror film. And it was really, really bad because they didn't have any captions. There was no scary music at the start. So my partner responded and was like Aaaargh and I was like, what, what's happened? Had no no idea what was going on, it was just an example of equivalence. I had a totally different experience.

57:52 Emilia
I think that's us for time, but I was, should we end on one of the other film clips? Maybe, I think maybe it would be nice to end with the film clip from House Made of Tin by Raisa Kabir. I don't know how clear it will be in the watching of it, but this was a process, Omeima Mudawi Rowlings did the caption consultation, Omeima's a brilliant weaver. The film was called House Made of Tin, socially distanced weaving performance, and it brought together several artists to do a performance and the film was really made in such a way where I feel that access was woven in to the whole process of the filmmaking which has a lot to do with how Raisa just so generously put the project together. So I think that's a nice place to finish.

1:00:28 Hannah Wallis
Sorry, that was so incredible. Thank you so much, Emilia, Bea, and Ciaran, and Natasha, of course, for sharing with us, it's just really brilliant to hear so much about these ideas of practice, but also protest, in your presentation, and in Jaipreet's, of course, as well. Hi, everyone, welcome back. Thank you so much for sticking with us throughout that second glitch there. But yeah, it's just really brilliant to be able to bring together all of these artists, along with our presenters tonight. So just to reiterate, if you do have any questions for any of our presenters, for Jaipreet, for Emilia, Bea or Ciaran, please do pop them in the chat. And

I'll be really happy to share them. I just have a few questions of my own. So I'll get started. And then. But also, just to say, of course, I'd really love if the presenters wanted to ask each other questions as well, that would be, you know, would be really amazing to sort of facilitate that, too. So I think the first thing really, I just wanted to sort of bring us back to one of the things that you talked about Jaipreet. You mentioned about protest access, and just this idea of, you know, their vision for a world in which we, you know, their work, their practice doesn't need to exist, because accessible media is the standard. And I think this is something that feels really, really important in all of the work that we're thinking through at the moment in terms of captioning. And I just really wanted to sort of pass that back to you, and sort of ask if you had any ideas for, you know, sort of concrete steps maybe that you foresee could be taken to sort of fulfil this mandate, whereby, you know, protest access don't need to exist, where we don't need to have these conversations necessarily. Just yeah. What you think we might need to do next, to make that happen?

1:02:48 Jaipreet Virdi
Absolutely. I mean, one of the things about protest access that we have to remember is that they're a volunteer group. I mean, they have banded together in response to what they perceive to be a very urgent social and political need and then stepped in with their necessary skill. And keep in mind, the cultural context in which protest access emerged as well, you know, this was during lockdown, so people were at home and then had the means and the time to be able to provide this kind of volunteer service, so I was very much appreciative of that effort. And ongoing from that, I think, the key mandate that protest accesss, as well as accessibility advocates more generally, push for is to provide accessibility at the forefront, not as an afterthought. So, for example, we go on Twitter, and we put an image, oftentimes people forget to put an alt-text description, or think that well, they don't really provide a full description, like this is a photo of a person standing, but when you're looking at it, you know that there's so much more to it. So these kind of descriptive nuances are really important for contextualising the message of an image or audio, but are often ignored for purposes of inconvenience or the time it takes to do that. So I think like making that part of a regular mandate is something that we need to create, like it's not an annoying add on to share information, but a necessary aspect

of sharing information. In my own media policy, like I won't do any radio or podcasting interview if they don't provide accessibility, if they don't provide captions for video recording or they don't provide transcript I won't do it. Like there'll be somebody else who will ask me to interview and oftentimes when I have conversation about this with the producer, they just seem flabbergasted by how they can provide this accessibility. And I have to remind them, it's not my job, it's your job. If you want to have your content be understood and be, you know, absorbed by a wider audience, then it's your responsibility to figure out the technical requirements and your responsiblity to ensure that there's transcripts or alt-text or captions, not to put the the onus on disabled people to do the work often for free. So I think making this more rigid policy for telecommunication, for education, for work, and even generally, for social media, I would say is a huge step, going forward to making sure that all content we create online, is accessible. And obviously, bringing in disabled expertise is very important. And we saw with the examples of the video, how captions can change your meaning or provide more meaning.

1:05:58 Hannah Wallis
Yeah, absolutely. And actually, you know, something that you've just mentioned is this sort of sense of captioning or accessibility tools being an afterthought, and this add on, and I know that this is something that you talked about a lot, Ciaran, and all of you I think in Collective Text. I don't know if you wanted to respond a bit more to this, because I think they did a really key part of how we would drive this work forward.

1:06:27 Ciaran
Yeah, and just as a quick response, you know, one of the things that what a deaf person was doing an interview, and she said, if you provide me the access, I will do the same job as everyone else. And I will do it the same as everyone else. What you need to provide is access. And I think that what you've raised is a really important point. And also, like, we keep hammering on about it, but I think it's so important that it should be considered at the beginning. And I think sometimes people think access is just a simple thing. It's just a simple thing. It's just words on the screen, or just a simple audio description that you hear, but actually it's a lot more than that, it's a skill. It's an important skill that film makers

need to consider from the very beginning. So yeah, what they've been saying, it's really, really important.

1:07:28 Bea (voiced by Natasha)
Yeah, and Bea just wanted to come in. I just wanted to add that to that quickly. I forgot to actually speak about this. Lots of people assume, you know, sign language and spoken language, for example, English and British Sign Language, you think it's the same. So if we know BSL, we know how to read English. But actually, that is not the case. They are two separate languages. And that's why my concern sometimes is if we're using captions to explain sound, for example, you have to make sure that you don't over complicate it, don't use over complicated words. Otherwise, it's just not understood. And actually, it's not accessible either. And another thing, which I think is quite important to bring out is, captions are not only accessible to D/deaf people, you know, it is for D/deaf people. But on top of what you're saying, what Ciaran and Jaipreet were saying, how do you make it fully accessible? And it is really, really difficult, a difficult thing to achieve. But your audience is predominantly D/deaf.

1:08:44 Emilia
Can I also respond? I really appreciate it. Well, thank you, Ciaran, and Bea, and Jaipreet. And Hannah for the question. I think, I love this idea of refusal, and refusing to participate where there's not access. But I wonder what's been the conditions that allow that to be possible across a complexity of situation? And I guess my question is, where, you know, in a world where, for example, we had a universal living wage, what would our art look like? And what would access look like and what would our capacity to refuse look like?

1:09:52 Hannah Wallis
Thank you. Yeah, I think they're, you know, really, really important questions that we need to be continually asking ourself and it also makes me think, just what you were talking about Jaipreet as well, in terms of the idea of energy drain. And just, you know, it would be interesting to know, considering everything that we've just talked about where perhaps then you as Collective Text or as individuals, and also Jaipreet, you know, where do you think that people, where are

you putting your energy at the moment? And what feels like the most important thing to pursue?

1:10:38 Jaipreet Virdi
I mean, that's a great question. I mean, what's important, what's the point of having a dialogue. And you know, Hannah, when you invited me to be part of this panel, I was, a first I was hesitant, because I'm actually on my academic sabbatical right now, which means I'm supposed to be focusing more on finishing my second book, than doing these kind of events. But as you know, I have an auto reply for whenever people message me. And one of the things it says in that auto reply is, I'm not taking on any extra work, except when it relates to disability justice, because I think this is something that is so urgent right now. And one of the huge worries I have is, as we move back into a world that's no longer in a pandemic, all the hard fought access spaces that we made is going to disappear. In fact, they already are, they are already starting to disappear. Because whenever access is for disabled people, it seems to be overlooked. But when it's for everybody, then it's like the urgent thing, like how easily we moved to the Zoom world in the middle of the pandemic. And I think maintaining your energy, is so important because it also allows us to stress that there is a responsibility on the part of corporations to talk about access. And if they were thinking about a wider reach, whether it's through film or selling products, or etcetera, then to be fully ingrained in social justice means between as many people as possible. And accessibility provides that, but as we know many corporations choose to ignore that, because they have the flawed belief that disabled people, disabled consumers are only a very small portion of the population, which isn't true, and even if it's a small portion of the population, we're still talking about millions of people who are locked out from the film the product or etcetera. So I'm right now, as somebody who has become an activist, as someone who's also deaf and disabled, I try to be very cautious with my time, to also set an example for other people. So if I refuse to work, in a space that's not accessible, I don't expect someone else to pick up on that work, I want them to also refuse. I want to set better standards for how we educate ourselves and how we work with, you know, with, able bodied people.

1:13:11 Ciaran

Yeah, I think that's an interesting, one of the things that Emilia spoke about earlier on, that's actually the point about the living wage. That being paid for our time. Because, you know, I've seen, you know, when I was younger, and I accepted things for free because I was like, oh, at least I'm educating other people. And I'm, you know, giving them a little bit more D/deaf awareness or whatever. And I realised that at the end of the day, like, you know, when we're talking about captioning, I'm always happy to help and support and as long as I'm getting paid, because that's my time, and that's my, my expert. That's my knowledge, but also, I'm deaf every day as well. That, you know, every morning, every afternoon, every evening, I still have a disability that sometimes it's exhausting to talk about that. That when it comes to captioning that, you know, I rely on it. So many times. And I think what's great about Collective Text is that, you know, sometimes companies hire one person, and they do everything that's to do with access. And that's their role as a freelancer, that's what is great about Collective Text because it's literally a collective. And they have a collective of other D/deaf artists as well, that they provide work for and that means we're not doing it all the time because sometimes it can be exhausting, it can be tiring to educate. But at the same time, it's exciting when companies are willing to listen and willing to learn that I think it's really important that Jaipreet made a point about saying no, because there's been situations where it looks like we're about to be underpaid for so much work. And I think it's we need to, then other people will accept that work, therefore if other people are accepting a low wage, and for too much work, but then at the same time it's like, but those people need to be paid. So it's a very complicated issue. But there needs to be a conversation around paying for our time, when it comes to providing our knowledge about our disability. It's a really important conversation, especially around captioning.

1:15:35 Bea (voice by Natasha)
Yeah, I just wanted to talk about two things, one link to what Jaipreet was saying and what Ciaran was saying. So what you said about doing the work for free, sometimes you go to an event, and they say oh well, we've got a really small budget, and we go there, and they've booked two interpreters for the entire day. And I'm just thinking, well hang on a minute, you know, you're paying for the interpreters, but you're not paying for, you know, you can't afford to pay me, you know, and, you

know, D/deaf and disabled people, I just think is so, the cheek of it, almost to not see us as equal citizens to you know, for example, paying the interpreters. And talking about turning down jobs, it's a difficult situation, because I, yes, I want people to say no, but sometimes, you know, I can't afford to say no, you know, as we said before, what we earn is, you know, is not as much, what with COVID, the pandemic and everything that's happened, you think, right, okay, I'm actually getting work. It's almost like I have to accept it. Because I can't afford not to. So it's a bit of a catch 22. And it just makes it difficult, of course, I need to work. But a lot of situations aren't accessible for me. So I want to provide that information. There's, you know, there's this idea of disability justice that we mentioned before. And I think this is, you know, as both of you have said before, we need to think about it at the very beginning, not as an afterthought, it needs to be, there needs to be budget for us to be paid for the work that we do. But that needs to be at the very, very beginning. And I think that's so very important to you know, I'm going to be paying for a captioner, I'm paying for interpreters, I'm paying for access. Because often what happens in Scotland and Arts Council England, people don't actually ask at the very forefront, it's always an afterthought. So if you put it in your budget, you know, I do feel that D/deaf and disabled people are kind of working class people, and that's how we're represented, and that's how we're paid.

1:18:13 Hannah Wallis 1:18:13
Thank you so much. It's all, so, it's just so important to hear all of the things and I think what's really clear from both of your presentations is that essentially, you know, what comes hand in hand in thinking about access, and also thinking about conditions of labour, and thinking about what it means to invite people into a conversation, and what work that really entails. I am actually going to have to wrap up now, because we actually haven't had any more time for more questions. So I do hope that at some point, we can continue the dialogue part of it together. Just to say that we have had a few, we've had lots of comments from people saying thank you so much for all of your presentations. And yeah, a lot of agreement with ideas of not been paid enough for the work that you're doing. And so I think there's really, you know, there's a lot of people out there who are agreeing, and so there's still a lot more work to do. But I think if we're all in it together than that, then that's great. So I'm

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just going to pause for a moment, and then I'll say my thank yous. So yeah, just you know, first of all to say thank you to everyone who's been working behind the scenes. We've got Catherine, Canan and Jim from Nottingham Contemporary, and also the rest of the team at Nottingham, supporting this work. Just to say thank you to Sarah and to the AHRC funding, with Voices in the Gallery for making this project happen. Thank you to Jaipreet, to Bea, to Ciaran, to Emilia, and of course, to Natasha, for presenting tonight. It's really inspiring to hear all of your thoughts. And also thank you to the artists who agreed to share their work with us tonight, Seo Hye Lee, Jordan Lord and Abi Palmer. And of course, thank you to everyone who joined us tonight and shared your thoughts and your comments. If you do have any feedback, please do send it to us. But otherwise, we will wish you a really good night and hopefully see you soon. Thankyou.

Colophon

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