

Data, Disability, Detour, Détournement

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INTEREST HAS BEEN PERCOLATING in the educational application of images to convey information in data visualizations, also known as infographics (Bertling et al. 2021; Kammer et al., 2021; Shreiner et al., 2021; Tønnessen, 2020). This may be partly a curricular manifestation of the positivist culture of data-driven education (Grodoski, 2018; Klein, 2014; Sweeny, 2017), in keeping with a long visual legacy of empirical research within education, dating back to the study of drawing among proponents of the Child Study movement at the turn of the 20th century (Efland, 1990; Korda, 2020; Levi & Tucker, 2020; Ryan, 2009). These recent efforts continue the legacy of STEAM projects that incorporate numeracy and systematic observation into creative work, but also reflect the past few decades of education policy and research more generally, during which quantified data have become the supreme criterion of legitimacy (Irby et al., 2018), echoing a tendency to value the supposed objective authenticity of the image over the more personal and subjective category of the oral and verbal. As an intrinsically multimodal and interdisciplinary field with vocational applications, there are many ways in which data science seems relevant to the study of curriculum.

However, art has long been considered a medium for learning and study within curriculum studies (Rolling, 2009; Springgay et al., 2005), while in recent art history there is a genealogy in which information developed into an autonomous medium in global postwar fine art that de-emphasized the authority of the image, replacing it with verbal speech and visual text (Alberro & Stimson, 1999; Camnitzer et al., 1999; Gilman, 2005; Lippard, 1973; Ramirez & Olea, 2004). In the Dada revival of the 1960s and 1970s, this impulse was expressed in poetic works by artists: text interacted with material space in visual works by Lawrence Weiner and Bruce Nauman, among others, and speech-based works were performed live and/or in recordings by John Cage and Steve Reich, among others. Sometimes, however, creative approaches to information merged the pedagogical epistemology of social science with the materials of archives and communications media and the content of anti-totalitarian politics. In looking at this artistic tradition, over a half-century old, there are many ways in which artists have used symbolic and analytic approaches to make artwork that defied and undermined institutions, rather than reflecting and reifying them, presaging an interest among arts education scholars and practitioners in emancipatory, sensory-based action research (Daza & Gershon, 2015; Gershon, 2020; Miraglia & Smilan, 2014).

Though the rosters skewed toward white male Americans, both Seth Siegelaub and John Wendler's (1968/2012) publication-based exhibition "Xeroxbook" and the show "Information" at the Museum of Modern Art (McShine, 1970/2017) catalogued strategies being invented at that time for depicting, informing, disseminating, and provoking through text, speech, and documentation. Feminist artists like Martha Rosler, Adrian Piper, Mary Kelly, Suzanne Lacy, and Andrea Fraser helped to clarify the political possibilities of this intellectual approach to artmaking (Shaked, 2017). Artists in other parts of the world, particularly in Latin America, employed a variety of tactics to introduce forms of public subterfuge in response to state repression (Bishop, 2012). Other than in the writing of Jorge Lucero (2006, 2013, 2014), who takes significant inspiration from the work of Uruguayan artist and theorist Luis Camnitzer (1980/2020), not much has been made of the language-based legacy of conceptual art and institutional critique within curriculum and pedagogy, despite the overtly didactic form and aims of much conceptualist art.¹

Art education, for its part, has engaged for some time with the field of disability studies (Derby, 2012; Eisenhauer, 2007; Gross, 2021; Symeonidou, 2019). Significant contemporary manifestations of information-focused conceptualism can be found in work by disabled artists who are making use of assistive communication tools to poetically problematize language in new and specific ways that interfere with and mutate information, rather than faithfully representing it, using tools that mediate between text and speech. Captioning, screen readers, audio descriptions, and alt-text are harnessed by artists to generate evocative communicative conjunctures. While 20th-century conceptualists were widely known for dematerializing the art object (Lippard 1973), contemporary disabled artists are calling attention to an embodied history of technological development that has by turns engaged, exploited, and ignored the perceptual and expressive needs of disabled people (Clare, 2017; Dokumaci, 2023).

In much this same way, recognizing and reflecting back the ways in which nearly all schools project an ableist and positivist normative paradigm onto young people (Hunter-Doniger, 2017; Mayes, 2022; Watkins, 2001; Winfield, 2007) can point to new possibilities for "data art" pedagogy. By adding a disability perspective to the avant-garde conceptualist legacy, teachers and young people can develop artistic research aimed not merely at visualizing personal habits through quantitative journaling (Lupi & Posavec, 2016), but at unsettling, criticizing, analyzing, mystifying, and publicizing a range of social dynamics, including schools and the systems of power they embody and enact, through communication tools that translate to and from the sphere of aurality, rather than visuality.

This paper explores the educational possibilities of engaging with conceptual art that focuses on information and communication not by asserting objectivity, but rather through directly engaging with specific politics related to particular bodyminds—an approach that seems to resonate with the intimately-construed modality of hearing, rather than the putatively universal faculty of vision. I begin with a discussion of artists whose works enact "sousveillance," the use of information as a politically engaged view from below rather than above. I then go in depth into forms of communication sabotage undertaken by disabled artists from the 1960s to today and close by proposing that all of these artists present not only meaningful experiments with ideas and technologies, but also educational models that can be adapted to a range of learning contexts.

Conceptualism as Sousveillance

In the 20th century, critical and popular impulses in art certainly often have worked together. Steve Mann et al. (2002) coined the neologism “sousveillance” to denote a view from below, rather than the view from above implied by the French term “surveillance.” During the Cold War, artists throughout the world took up language and its transmission as sources of inspiration, and some of this work manifested radical aims in its form and/or content. These artists drew on the information-based models of systems theory and cybernetics, while the professionalized expertise of the modern security state was at the same time making information a key implement of control (Brodeur, 2010; Deleuze, 1992; Garland, 2001; Sommerer, 2022).

Guy Debord’s (1967/1995) opening assertion in *The Society of the Spectacle* is that “all that once was directly lived has become mere representation” (p. 12). Growing out of the oral and textual language experiments of Lettrism, the artists of the Situationist International, aligned with the psychogeographic politics of Henri Lefebvre and distilled in Debord’s utopian iconoclasm, played a major role in student organizing and resistance in the May 1968 uprisings in Paris. Also in 1968, the Argentine artist David Lamelas created an installation for the Venice Biennale, *Office of Information about the Vietnam War at Three Levels: The Visual Image, Text and Audio*, in which updates about the war came in and were printed, posted, and read aloud over electronic devices located behind a glass partition.

That same year, a group of Argentine artists risked their freedom and safety to create an ambitious didactic project entitled, *Tucumán Arde*, or *Tucumán is Burning*, which intended to inform viewers about the conditions imposed by the U.S.-backed military dictatorship on residents of the impoverished rural sugar-producing province of Tucumán. Interviews, photos, and economic research were all included in the exhibition, and the research materials were published as part of the international exhibition Documenta 12. Police pressure shut down the remote instantiation of the exhibition in the city of Rosario after two weeks, but the show in the capital of Buenos Aires was closed after two days. The crackdown on these artists had a chilling effect on Argentine art for years to come (Camnitzer 2007, p. 92). All of these artists offer models for how to share information publicly, without sacrificing complexity, in a way that is politically informed, and which teachers and students can emulate.

Figure 1

Photograph from *Tucumán Arde* installation at Rosario, 1968 (Wikimedia Commons)



In the English-speaking world, discussions of art and systems were strongly influenced by art critic and historian Jack Burnham, who in a 1969 lecture referred to art as a “mediocre teaching machine.” In Burnham’s (1969) prophetic vision, improvements in visual pedagogy would come about through interactive “computer-based, real time simulations” like those used in “the testing phases of the missile defense program and space program” (p. 27). However, the artist Hans Haacke, whom Burnham references in his lecture, became known for making didactic artwork that eschewed technocratic politics and technological visualization. A landmark of what would come to be known as institutional critique, Haacke’s installation, *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971*, consists of text, photos, and images drawn from public records documenting the disreputable dealings of an exploitative New York landlord. Haacke’s scheduled show of these works at the Guggenheim Museum was infamously canceled, and the curator responsible for the exhibition was fired.

Text and communication media have since become common in politically progressive art. For one example, feminist artists Margaret Harrison, Kay Hunt, and Mary Kelly spent two years recording the experiences of women working in a metal box factory in Bermondsey, in the U.K., and presented their findings as an informational exhibition: *Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labor in Industry 1973-1975*. Other examples of reportage in conceptualist art, however, have expressed intentions beyond straightforward communication. For his 1980 *Studies in Happiness* project, Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar created a public survey and advertising campaign that asked the simple question, “Es usted feliz?” or, “Are you happy?” Since the country was under the control of brutal U.S.-backed dictator Augusto Pinochet, the expected and universally untrue answer was “yes.” In 1991, American conceptualist Chris Burden created *The Other Vietnam Memorial*, a giant interactive book-like sculpture etched with three million Vietnamese names, randomly generated. Referencing artist Maya Lin’s famous Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial in Washington, D.C., dedicated in 1982, Burden’s piece symbolizes the loss of Vietnamese lives during the war. Studying these historical examples of censorship and official erasure can shed light on current efforts to control curriculum and can inspire group research on topics of community concern.

Similar efforts continued in the new millennium. Since 2000, the War on Terror, among other intrusions into everyday life, unleashed a deluge of artistic responses to electronic and digital surveillance, often highlighting official and corporate misuse and obscuring of information. Jenny Holzer, Steve McQueen, and Laura Poitras have made use of redacted declassified text in their work, as have Jill Magid, Jamal Cyrus, and Navine G. Khan-Dossos. Secret state operations have been a main subject of Trevor Paglen’s often ambiguous images, as well as the work of Forensic Architecture, a legal advocacy organization comprised of activists with legal, technological, artistic, and design expertise. Electronic Disturbance Theater’s 2007 app, *Transborder Immigrant Tool*, aimed to help migrants find water and safety in the Mojave Desert, and technology artists Ben Grosser, James Bridle, and Heather Dewey-Hagborg critique forms of electronic surveillance. Meanwhile, branching off in their own genealogy, disabled artists took the critique of information beyond content to the level of form, enacting the iterative, creative, and distorting translation of verbal and textual language.

Disability as Detour

While artists throughout history have been disabled, artists who make work consciously focused on experiences of disability have gained prominence in recent years. This correlates with the rise of critical disability studies as a robust area of research and scholarship, which in turn owes its emergence to the disability rights activism of the 1970s and 1980s, inspired by midcentury civil rights and feminist movements (Garland-Thomson, 2014). Disability activists coined “the social model” of disability, an explanation in which social conventions, institutions, and practices are taken to be primary causal factors producing the experience of disability, as opposed to individual diagnoses and personal incapacities (Shakespeare, 2006). While later activists and scholars have since added qualifications to this framework (Gabel & Peters, 2004; Puar, 2017), the social model of disability remains a vital reference point for politically conscious disabled activists. As a result, the presumption that scientific data represent neutral and incontrovertible evidence has become negatively associated with the “medical model” that the social model aimed to replace, as well as with traumatic experiences in the lives of disabled people. As in conceptualism, tools and theories of communication have thus become significant as both form and content in work by disabled artists. Unlike previous information art, however, many of these works either focus on text as a means of addressing D/deaf viewers,² or make use of speech as a means of addressing both visual and verbal disabilities.

The sound artist Alvin Lucier spoke with a profound and pronounced stutter. In his landmark 1970 audio performance and recording work, *I Am Sitting in a Room*, Lucier set up two tape recorders in a space and recorded a brief oral statement describing the intention of the performance, which is then played back into the space and repeatedly re-recorded until “any semblance of my speech, with perhaps the exception of rhythm, is destroyed ... as a way to smooth out any irregularities my speech might have” (Lucier, 1969/n.d., para. 6). Whether despite or in keeping with his intentions, art scholar Christof Migone (2012) feels that Lucier’s stutter remains the most enduring sonic element as the audio decays (p. 181). Discussing this piece, Heather Warren-Crow (2018) mulls over the degree to which Lucier’s piece directly addresses disability, versus offering a more abstract and universal metaphor. But his intention to address his disability is explicit in another 1969 work, *The Only Talking Machine of its Kind in the World*, which Lucier dedicated to “any stutterer, stammerer, lisper, person with faulty or halting speech, regional dialect or foreign accent or any other anxious speaker who believes in the healing power of sound” (as quoted in Cox, 2018, p. 100). As many disabled artists have demonstrated, sound, both verbal and otherwise, offers an enormous range of ways to experimentally explore and comment on the politics of communication.

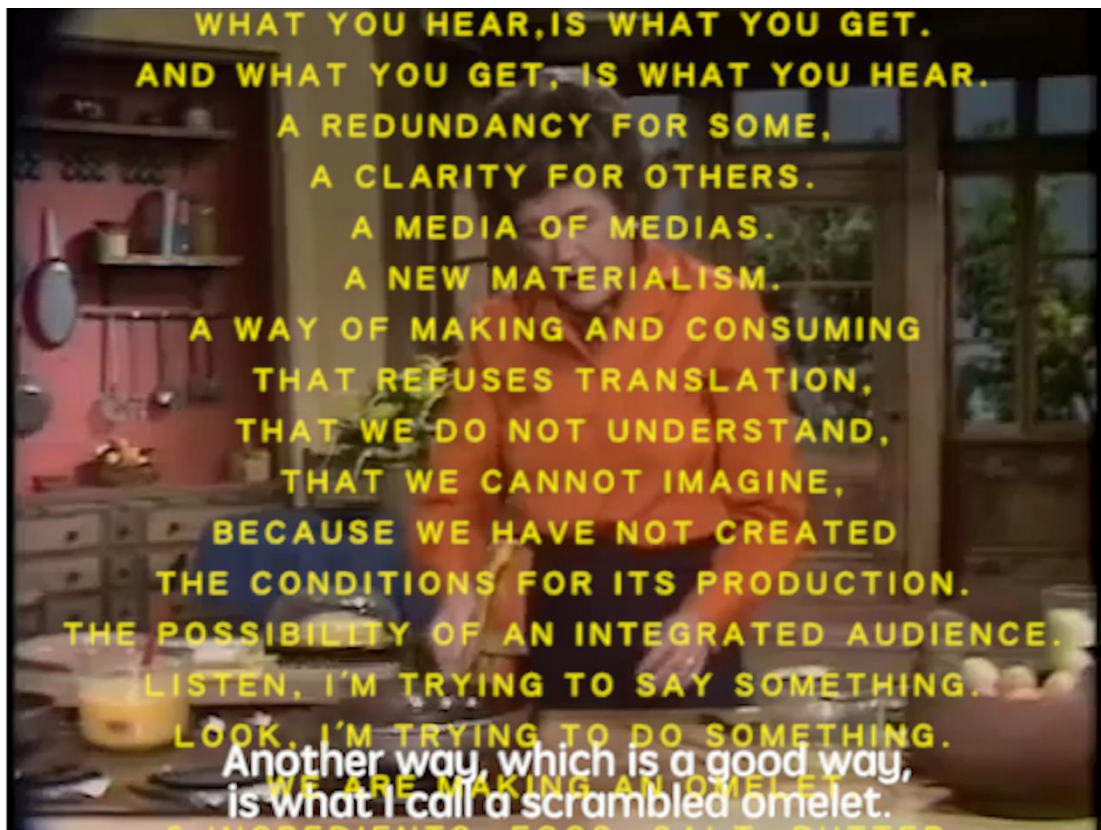
Media theorist Jonathan Sterne (2021) lost his full vocal function following surgery related to thyroid cancer. He describes impairment, which he discusses as an overlapping but non-identical category with disability, as a “detour” (p. 194), as opposed to a dead end. Hope is not lost when forced to take a detour, but ingenuity, cooperation, and the ability to improvise and develop unique skills are necessary to survive and get by in an ableist world. Sterne proposes an imaginary art exhibit themed around the voice, featuring several conceptual artworks that detour meaning through forms of translation. In Erin Gee’s 2014 *Larynx Series*, the composer used an abstracted vector graphic of an endoscopic photo of a human larynx to create musical charts for a four-part vocal piece (Sterne, 2021, p. 98). For *Talking Popcorn* [2001, 2012], artist Nina Katchadourian created words by digitally translating the sounds of a popcorn popper into Morse code. When a popper caught fire and ceased to function, Katchadourian called on a range of human experts to

interpret the popper’s “last words” (Sterne, 2021, p. 108). And musical expression is conveyed entirely through sign language and movement in Hodan Youssouf’s 2018 silent music video *Masques*.

This kind of translation between modes and forms of communication has become a major feature of conceptual work by disabled (and d/Deaf)³ artists, particularly in the use of adaptive communication tools, many of which are now accessible online and within schools. An early example is Lucier’s 1968 composition, *Vespers*, which made use of echolocation devices designed to aid the blind (Cox, 2018, p. 95). More recently, in their 2018 piece *A Recipe for Disaster*, disabled Black artist Carolyn Lazard produced a creatively re-captioned version of one of the first television shows ever to feature closed captioning, Julia Child’s classic cooking show *The French Chef*. Lazard also used their own voice to vocalize captions and add audio descriptions for blind and visually impaired people. Rather than commenting on the events on screen, Lazard’s poetic text resembles a militant access manifesto, a trenchant critique of accepted ableist standards claiming and partitioning the sensorium, while also “wielding performance and aesthetic objects of dominant culture to raise skepticism about whiteness and white supremacy” (McClendon & Okello, 2021, p. 59).

Figure 2

A Recipe for Disaster, Carolyn Lazard, 2018, digital projection, 27 mins (looped)



Deaf sound artist Christine Sun Kim’s work offers several straightforward models for engaging socially with perception. Kim’s art plays with the idiomatic features of sign language, video captioning, and musical notation. For her 2016 collaborations with Thomas Mader, *Tables and Windows* and *Classified Digits*, the two artists use sign language to talk about Deaf culture and communication through use of the “helping hands” improv game, in which one artist stands behind the other, with the partner in front providing facial expressions as the partner behind uses their arms and hands. In her 2020 video, *Closer Captions*, Kim signs about the shortcomings of video captioning and accompanies enigmatic cinematic visuals with poetic captions like “electricity attempting to find its outlet” and “words throwing punches,” and in *CAPS SUBS* [2019], Kim wrote evocative captions at the top and bottom of translucent pages overlaying text and images in the art magazine *X-TRA*. For a major public art commission in Manchester, *Captioning the City*, Kim created huge all-caps sans-serif captions that were installed on building facades, such as “THE SOUND OF BUILDINGS COUNTING CARS” and “THE SOUND OF BLAMING THE MOON.” In drawings on paper like *The Sound of Temperature Rising* [2016] and *The Sound of Obsessing* [2016], later developed as large-scale wall drawings, Kim makes use of musical notation to express experiences in time. And she uses other forms of visual communication, as with her drawings from 2019, *Shit Hearing People Say to Me* and *When I Play the Deaf Card*, which depict humorous pie chart infographics.

Other artists have also been working with technologies that translate between modes of verbal communication. Blind artist Bojana Coklyat and sighted disabled artist Finnegan Shannon created a project called *Alt Text as Poetry* in 2019 to encourage public engagement with the practice of adding textual descriptions to online images. “Alt text” refers to descriptions of images embedded in HTML that can be read out loud by a screen reader, but Shannon and Coklyat also include textual descriptions in other forms, including captions. The artists have presented the project many times as an in-person or remote workshop and created a website for the project, featuring a range of interfaces, which includes a clear and in-depth workbook on creating meaningful descriptions of visual information that are neither dry and perfunctory nor overly detailed.

Along similar lines, blind sound artist Andy Slater has made several works that incorporate extensive and imaginative written texts that do more than offer mundane descriptions. In the strange audioscapes of *Unseen Reheard* [2020], *Waiting Rooms* [2020], and *At Arm’s Length* [2021], Slater composes with field recordings and low- and high-tech audio tools, often featuring the taps and scratches of his cane, as well as apocryphal fictional narratives. For his *Invisible Ink* series, he created blank images that only exist as alt-text descriptions. And in 2021, he collaborated with disabled composer Molly Joyce to create the video piece, *Side by Side*, in which Slater created poetic captions describing his experience of Joyce’s music over footage of her composition being performed.

Figure 3

Liza Sylvestre, *Audio Description Project*, 2018. Copyright Liza Sylvestre.



Figure 4

Liza Sylvestre, *Audio Description Project*, 2018, Detail. Copyright Liza Sylvestre.



Liza Sylvestre, a deaf artist with a cochlear implant, creates works that depict many disabled detours in translating between audio and visual media. In her piece, *Audio Descriptions* [2018], Sylvestre presented audio descriptions of eight artworks from three museums, without any visual reference, and invited attendees to listen and imagine, while also displaying visual works she had engaged four artists to make in response to the audio descriptions. In her *Interference Drawings* series [2017], as well as in her video piece *__a_i_I_old you a __ory in a language I __an__ear?* [2014], Sylvestre obscures written or spoken text in a way that recreates her own experience of selective inability to perceive certain sounds. For her 2019 installation *The Conversation*, or *_ommuni_a_ion*, she showed a two-channel video projection with two images of herself speaking on facing walls with a visual blur filter aligned to different levels of audible discernibility. The exhibition also featured illustrations of fallacious sign language translations and a booth where visitors attempted to communicate with Sylvestre while wearing headphones that obstructed their perception. Her 2017 series, *Chart Drawings*, feature abstracted forms based on data visualizations, while for her series of *Captioned* videos, *Channel Surfing* [2017] and *Twentieth Century* [2018], as well as her two-channel video, *Third Space* [2019], Sylvestre adds her own captions to silenced TV and cinema footage.

Works such as these take up visual text and verbal speech as forms of expression germane to both conceptual art and social functionality, dealing with information as sensory experience rather than abstract content, available for interpretation by the audience as well as the artist. These artists play with language and communication in the manner of Dada and neo-Dada conceptualist artists but in a context grounded in the embodied experience of non-access to able-bodied media, an alienation that offers a form of aesthetic distance. The translation these artists orchestrate between modes of perception and idioms of communication enacts new forms of ekphrasis, the poetic tradition of describing images in words, famously exemplified in John Keats' (1819/n.d.) poem "Ode on a Grecian Urn." As different minds, media, and machines translate information through successive ekphrases, meanings stretch and change, and the limits of communication are foregrounded.

These ekphrastic repetitions are not only semantic but also somatic, as well as historic. In his 2012 book on the history of the MP3 audio file format, written before the surgery that made him disabled, Jonathan Sterne recounts the history of telephonic engineering, one of many technologies that were developed to aid disabled people, with the aid of disabled people. Along with voice recognition and speech-to-text tools, and other obvious items like curb cuts and fidget spinners, there is also the typewriter, with its ubiquitous alphanumeric keyboard. In his treatise on the mechanization of thought via modern communication, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, media theorist Friedrich Kittler (1986/1999) contends: "Blindness and deafness, precisely when they affect speech or writing, yield what would precisely be beyond each: information on the human information machine. Whereupon its replacement by mechanics can begin" (p. 189).

Kittler does not imply that sensorially impaired people are incomplete or insufficient, thus avoiding the eugenics of Alexander Graham Bell (Greenwald, 2006). Rather, Kittler, who highlights early typewriters created by blind inventors Foucauld and Pierre, opposes the ableist ideal of an integrated Vitruvian body with a model of the mind or self reducible to the functionality of multiple organs and systems, including but not limited to the brain, the ears, and the voice. What Cristoph Cox (2018) ascribes to vocalization, in analyzing works by Alvin Lucier, could be extended to all human communication, including communication within and about education: "the product of a machine subject to failures of all sorts" (p. 102).

Resisting Rationalization

Minoritized subversion of official representations is not restricted to disabled artists, and particularly not white disabled artists. Kittler’s insights could extend to the algorithmic grid drawings produced by the Black conceptualist Charles Gaines, a quasi-digital depersonalizing rasterization of organic images that Kris Cohen (2022) presents as a formal tactic for diffusing the aura of integrated ocular individualism implicit in white cultural supremacy. These drawings could be compared in turn to the ingenious sociological infographics created by W. E. B. DuBois for the 1900 Paris Exposition, which Lynda Olman (2022) talks about as an expression of resistance in content against the racist social Darwinism of contemporary social theory, while also an expression of resistance in form to a “panopticism” implicit in mapping practices undertaken to enact, extend, and reinforce centralized control. And these visual works could be seen as precedents for the performances of stuttering Black sound artist and musician JJJJerome Ellis, who brings his experience of spoken language into music, performance, and video works that represent the traumatic and creative disruptions that help to define Black history, spirituality, and culture (McClendon & Okello, 2021).

Artworks that recontextualize communication offer a meaningful contrast with traditional conceptions of art and information. These works by DuBois, Gaines, and Ellis can be seen as drawing on a Black oral tradition of questioning and reinterpreting history and language through story and song—as with the King James Bible in the case of enslaved Africans or, in the case of these more recent figures, the transparency presumed in infographics and other standardized forms of visual and vocal representation. Disruption is a unique and essential element of diasporic Black aesthetics and is also a key aspect of ways in which artists of all backgrounds push against ideals of integrity and perfection, a tendency that Tobin Siebers (2010) described as “disability aesthetics.”

Speaking of the celebration of accidental cracks in the 1915-1923 piece, *The Large Glass (The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even)*, by its creator (and challenger of retinal art) Marcel Duchamp, Deaf theorist Michael Davidson (2022) states, “The incorporation of error into the work acknowledges the fragile nature of aesthetic value and complicates any presumption of a gap between art and life” (p. 2). Davidson (2022) goes on to elaborate how and why the bodies of disabled artists are often inseparable from the ideas in their artwork, as expressed through subjective and imperfect ekphrastic translations in captioned video works by Lazard, Kim, Sylvestre, and others (pp. 157–182). This intimate link between information and material existence has important implications for education as well as for art, particularly as regards the way in which disability conceptualism, through sound and text, reveals distortions and refractions inherent to language and present in all communication and, thus, in curriculum.

The detouring and *détournement* schemes of conceptual art, particularly as pursued by disabled artists, offer tools that are critical—meaning necessary—resistant, and precise, in understanding the uses and abuses of data in contemporary schooling and in the wider media landscape. Numeracy can be promoted through art lessons that deal with data, research, information, and communication, but the use of quantified measures in evaluating educational aptitude and achievement, many of which have explicitly eugenic origins (Au, 2009; Hunter-Doniger, 2017; Stoskopf, 2002; Watkins, 2001, Winfield, 2007), can be historicized and critiqued. The creative aspects of using facts and measurements to tell stories can be explored in ways that question the algorithms that govern everything from school funding to online advertising (Daza & Gershon, 2015; Gershon, 2020; James, 2019).

Emulating a project like *Tucumán Arde* can involve using collective action research as a jumping-off point for making collaborative immersive artworks on any matter of public concern, relating to events and conditions within the school, or histories that haven't received adequate attention. However, teachers in some American school districts now face a degree of scrutiny comparable to that faced by Argentine artists during the years of police-state repression during the Cold War. For that reason, following the example of Alfredo Jaar, provocative questions can be used to tell a story without a fixed outcome, in which the reader, listener, or viewer can reach their own conclusions. Toward this end, as the examples I've mentioned demonstrate, the productive distortions and critical fabulations of disabled conceptualist artists are highly worth taking up in classrooms.

The discipline imposed on disabled students by the eugenic history of standardized testing is softened but sometimes also deepened in the quantified techniques of special education (Baglieri et al., 2010; Connor, 2019; Gabel, 2005; Mayes, 2022; McCloskey, 2018; Reid & Knight, 2006; Wexler, 2016), and forms of group inquiry focused on disability can be one way to push against the individuating and normalizing pressure that all schooling imposes on students (Erwin et al., 2021). The sonic and textual embodied ekphrases practiced by disabled conceptual artists like Lucier, Lazard, Kim, Ellis, Slater, and Sylvestre make possible a collaborative conversation in which students can poetically narrate their experience—educational, cultural, and/or personal—and then open it up to creative interpretation and recontextualization by other students, as well as by non-human media. Adding subversive captions or audio descriptions to narratives of educational failure may be a first step into a wider field of critical tactics in opposition to a visual and epistemological regime of measurable assessment. In keeping with principles of critical pedagogy and art-based research, sound and text art can be explored as a productive distortion of official visualizations, rather than a passive reflection that adheres to institutional parameters for validating competence.

Notes

1. Perhaps the most noteworthy overlap of recent visual culture with the visual idioms of conceptualist art, albeit entirely coincidental, is in memes, which have gotten some attention in art education literature (Jones, 2015; Sederholm et al., 2022; Smith, 2020).
2. Over the last few decades, many people who live with hearing loss have become thoroughly integrated into communities formed around hearing loss, such that they identify themselves with the capitalized term Deaf, used to indicate a cultural as opposed to a merely sensory identification with small-d deafness.
3. Historically, many members of the culturally Deaf community have rejected the label of disability. They may also reject technologies designed to enhance hearing and strongly insist on communication through signing rather than verbal language. For this paper, I am including Deaf artists like Kim under the general heading of disabled artists, with whom she is commonly associated. Some chronically ill people have also resisted adopting the disabled identity.

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