

Arts Lecture Series

7:30 pm Wednesday, March 26, 2014
Lecture Hall 1011, Education and Arts Building

“Reading Sounds: Accessing Popular Culture Through the Lens of Closed Captioned Media”

Speaker: Sean Zdenek, Ph.D.

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Texas Tech University

ABSTRACT

Closed captioning is often narrowly defined as a mechanical process of unreflective transcription. The captioner simply writes down what people are saying in order to make the soundscape accessible to viewers who are deaf and hard-of-hearing. But as I suggest in this talk based on my forthcoming book, *Reading Sounds*, the captioning process is rhetorically complex. Every sound can't be closed captioned. The captioner must interpret the soundscape, distinguish significant from insignificant sounds, and rhetorically invent meaningful written descriptions within the constraints of screen space and reading time. What is needed is a humanistic rationale for closed captioning. Such a rationale would show us how captions are just as potent and meaningful as other kinds of texts we study in the humanities. Drawing on clips from popular TV shows and movies, this talk describes a number of transformations that captions enable. Captions contextualize, clarify, formalize, equalize, linearize, and distill meaning. When viewed through the lens of non-speech sounds (e.g. sound effects) and with a rhetorical sensibility, we see how the captioned text is not so much a copy or transcript of the original, but a new text.

BIOGRAPHY

Sean Zdenek is an associate professor of technical communication and rhetoric at Texas Tech University. His research interests include disability and web accessibility studies, the rhetoric of closed captioning, deaf studies, sound studies, methods of rhetorical criticism, and animated software interfaces. He teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in disability studies, web accessibility, document design, sound studies, and rhetorical criticism. He has published articles in *Disability Studies Quarterly*, *Discourse and Society*, *AI and Society*, and *The Review of Communication*. His book on closed captioning, entitled *Reading Sounds*, is under contract with The University of Chicago Press and scheduled to be published in spring 2015.

Upcoming Events

Euclid Quartet String Studio

Students of the Euclid Quartet present solo and small ensemble pieces
7:30 pm, Wednesday, April 2
Art Gallery, Education and Arts Building

Woodwind Studios and Flute Ensemble

An evening of flute and woodwind music led by
Rebecca Hovan and Chris French
7:30 pm Thursday, April 3
Art Gallery, Education and Arts Building

Kiss Me, Kate

A Broadway musical by Cole Porter
8 pm 4/10-4/12, 2 pm 4/13, Campus Auditorium

Tickets \$3-\$12 | FREE to Students/Children
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