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HOW DO YOU WRITE THAT IN SIGN LANGUAGE?

A Graphic Signed Novel as a Source of Epistemological Reflection on Writing

Véro Leduc

Alfred Metallic, who wrote and defended the first Indigenous-language thesis in Canada, reflected on the fundamental importance of his First Nations' language, Mi'gmaq, in producing knowledge: "Our language, it's how we maintain our relations and how we understand where we come from. It gives you access to your place in the world."¹ Reading his words, I realize once again the importance of language in building minoritized epistemologies.² Maybe one day, I will submit a chapter in sign language and you would read me with a book-reader technology, watching a video of someone signing Quebec Sign Language or international signs, reading or listening to captions. For now, I'll write with these words, the ones I write and you read, the ones that represent the oral languages of hearing people.

This chapter presents reflections on videography as a way of writing sign languages through an exploration of ideas that emerged during the production of *It Fell on Deaf Ears (C'est tombé dans l'oreille d'une Sourde)*,³ the first graphic signed novel in Quebec Sign Language (LSQ).⁴ Furthermore, the situation of videography at the core of this creation raises the importance of digital media for the creation of signed knowledge and cultural production.

As a comic book lover, I decided to explore the comic medium through a research-creation project that was part of my doctoral studies. When I decided to produce a graphic novel⁵ in LSQ, however, I was unaware of the enormity of the task that lay before me. I discovered a number of comics about Deaf people and deafness but almost nothing in sign language, which led me to wonder about the presence, or rather the relative absence, of signed literature. Were there no signed books, no novels in sign language, no signed stories like the French ones I had devoured since childhood? This led to questions about writing itself, an act I had always taken for granted. Being able to read and write in a first language had always seemed self-evident. We write to think, contemplate and communicate. We read to discover, imagine new possibilities and connect with the world. Inasmuch as traditional writing requires paper, pen or computer as media, in the sense of medium and support, videography especially involves digital media.

As I began to consider power relations from a new perspective, writing, it also opens reflection to power relations across media and technologies. Looking around me, I realized that although most hearing people have the opportunity to read and write in their first language, Deaf signers whose first language is signed do not share this privilege. Because culture is transmitted through language and vice versa, it seemed to me that the lack of signed literature, despite a very small number of signed articles and cultural production, contributed to placing Deaf people in

a minoritized and subaltern position. From that moment on, creating a graphic novel in LSQ became an inspiring avenue toward greater agency.

A Graphic Novel in LSQ

Produced with material from encounters with Deaf people and members of my hearing family, the graphic novel *It Fell on Deaf Ears (C'est tombé dans l'oreille d'une Sourde)* was part of my doctoral research-creation project.⁶ Protagonists of this documentary production each share anecdotes and reflections on different themes such as Deafhood, belonging, historicity, oppression, agency and intersectionality.

With the affects and effects of living as Deaf as the main theme of my graphic signed novel, I sought to question what Deaf epistemological perspectives might look like, both technologically and politically. Using videography as a medium and as a form of writing capable of rendering sign languages and their linguistic components in three dimensions, the graphic novel takes the form of video chapters posted online.⁷ I chose video because the three-dimensionality of sign languages fits perfectly with the three-dimensionality of videographic writing.

The three dimensions of sign languages disrupt traditional ideas of writing by forcing it to reveal its inability to capture certain movements. The linguistic modalities of sign languages involve several dimensions, including the configuration of fingers and hands, gestural movement, location of signs and non-manual expressions such as movement of the eyes, mouth, eyebrows, head and torso.⁸ Lines drawn on paper are insufficient to write sign languages in ways that render its complexity. It is certainly possible to represent the alphabet or fixed images that *evoke* a sign, but sign language is primarily a language in movement. Just as a second of film contains 24 images, the expression of a signed gesture often includes several positions.

Although I had read all these comics—"the ninth art"⁹—I had never realized the extent to which they expressed hearing forms and cultures. In other words, many of the formal codes and structures used in comic books are based on the writing of oral languages of hearing people and are therefore incompatible with the three-dimensional, embodied linguistic modalities of sign languages. By deconstructing the codes of hearing comics—traditionally produced in paper format—I was able to perceive the limits of their forms and move towards other possibilities by producing a filmed graphic novel.

For example, even when a character's body is drawn very small within a larger scene, a panel in a hearing comic can easily represent the character's talk because speech bubbles and font size can be adjusted to make the words legible. Two characters can have a conversation even if their bodies are not visible in the image because the reader still has access through speech bubbles alone. Sign languages, however, are embodied in the sense that they require bodies as sites of communication: if the body cannot be seen, neither can the message.

Beyond the literary and aesthetic stylistic possibilities offered by comic books, sign-language writing raises a number of issues. For Derrida, "writing is the condition of the episteme."¹⁰ If writing—an act through which language is inscribed on a medium—is capable of communicating, reflecting upon, debating, citing, remembering and translating knowledge, what kind of writing is needed for signed knowledge to exist? How is this possible when writing has more often than not been understood as a representation of oral languages, a proxy?¹¹

The Many Ways of Writing Sign Languages

With the fifteenth-century Cervera Manuscript being the oldest known movement-notation system, there are approximately 100 in all, including Labanotation. Unlike writing systems most commonly used in dance, sign-language writing systems include a linguistic component. Research on the topic most likely began with the work of Auguste Bébien¹² in the early nineteenth

century. In 1960, hearing linguist William Stokoe created a system of notation for American Sign Language (ASL) as part of a flurry of research through which he sought to create recognition for sign languages as complete languages in their own right. In 1966, hearing dancer Valerie Sutton created *DanceWriting*, a visual writing system for dance. In 1974, Sutton invented a system for writing sign language known as *Sutton Sign Writing*. In 2003, Deaf writer Robert Arnold Augustus designed a way to write American Sign Language called si5s.¹³ This last system was developed by two Deaf women artists Andrean Clark and Julia Dameron, as *ASLWrite*, a open-source writing system.

Each of these writing systems, in their own way, make it possible to write certain sign languages. Although studies have been conducted on the relevance of an LSQ writing system,¹⁴ no such system is either consistently or widely used in Quebec. Committed to making my creation accessible to the largest possible number of Deaf LSQ signers, I turned to video, an almost natural medium for writing sign languages.¹⁵

In the early twentieth century, the advent of film finally made it possible to capture sign languages as they are: gestural and linguistic movement that photographs are incapable of rendering in their entirety.¹⁶ If the power of cinema is to “bring images to life”¹⁷ then, for Deaf people, its power also lies in the ability to represent and record their languages in movement.¹⁸ Between 1910 and 1920, thanks to an initiative by George Veditz, the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) produced 13 silent films on 35 mm stock in order to preserve and transmit American Sign Language, which had been increasingly threatened since the Milan Congress, an event I will discuss more in detail in the next section.

The Milan Congress and the Oppression of Sign Languages

It is not only because sign languages are three-dimensional that classical writing may not be the best media for them. The history of writing sign languages, and subsequent media technologies appropriate for sign language, has also been significantly marked by oppression, as demonstrated in particular by an event, the International Congress on Education of the Deaf, often simply referred to as “the Milan Congress” of 1880.

During the Congress, it was decided that sign languages should no longer be taught in schools because it was believed that what separated humans from animals was the ability to speak.¹⁹ For example, Dr. Johann Conrad Amman said of deaf people: “How dull are they in general! How little do they differ from animals.”²⁰ According to Lewis J. Dudley, founder of the Clark Institute for the Deaf, an American boarding school for deaf students, deaf people were “human in shape, but only half human in attributes.”²¹ It follows, then, that the gathering’s first resolution stipulates that:

The Congress, [c]onsidering the incontestable superiority of speech over signs in restoring the deaf-mute to society, and in giving him a more perfect knowledge of language, [d]eclares [t]hat the oral method should be preferred to that of signs for the education and instruction of the deaf and dumb.²²

One of the first bilingual articles in French and LSQ published in Quebec summarized the scope of this event:

Resolutions adopted after the congress recommended that sign languages be banned. The impact of the ban was felt throughout the West. Deaf and signing teachers were dismissed and corrective measures taken to prevent students from signing: tying students’ hands behind their backs and preventing older students from socializing with younger

ones in order to stop them from transmitting the language are but two examples. It [the date of the Milan Congress] is a traumatic date.²³

The Milan Congress sparked the rapid spread of oralism. Because this method focused on a variety of speech therapies to teach deaf people to speak, this is how students spent most of their time, much to the detriment of instruction in other disciplines.²⁴ Still today, oralism is more highly valued than sign-language instruction in many countries.

Comparing the events of 1880 to those of 1492 for First Nations Peoples,²⁵ Deaf researcher Paddy Ladd asks, “What could a Deaf person, and a Deaf community *become*? What could we have been”²⁶ if the Milan Congress (and its subsequent consequences) had never taken place? It was Ladd who, in 2003, invented the concept of Deafhood, which is particularly useful to deconstruct medical discourses concerning Deaf people. This concept, an efficient tool for deconstructing oppression, focuses on the many ways of living as Deaf persons and thinking about power relations between Deaf and hearing people while also problematizing the hearing privileges.

By banning sign-language instruction, the Milan Congress significantly compromised the conditions of possibility of signed knowledge and, simultaneously, Deaf becoming. As the quotation that opens this chapter suggests, we use language to think about our future, where we belong and our relationships to the world. As sign languages require media technologies that are able to render their complexity, we may ask ourselves how they would have developed without the advent of oralism. The Internet has facilitated accessibility of media technology for sign-language communication and knowledge production. However, despite the breadth of knowledge on technology, the development of accessible technologies regarding sign languages is particularly slow, despite the variety of conventions to promote disability rights that have emerged in the wake of advocacy movements, particularly in Western countries.²⁷

For example, there are abundant writing and translation technologies, but those for sign-language writing and translation are still at the prototype stage, despite being promising. When I think how Google’s translation module has greatly improved since its invention and, despite possible inaccuracies, how it offers a very useful baseline for translations between several oral languages, I strive for the advancement of such technologies for translation between different sign languages and between oral and sign languages.

Three-Dimensional Writing for a Three-Dimensional Language

As I pursued my interest in sign-language writing forms, I sought media technologies capable of rendering their three-dimensionality. My discovery of the existence of avatar-based²⁸ mechanical transcription systems was followed by the understanding that programming them is very complex, requiring that each sign made by a human be recorded with sensory capture devices. The work of Braam Jordaan, a Deaf South African artist who created a character called Siphon the Lion²⁹ who signs, is particularly impressive in this regard.

Although avatars are expressive in their way, their signs do not render the full range of human expressivity.³⁰ Working directly with excerpts of encounters filmed with a video camera allowed me to use three-dimensional writing for a three-dimensional language without resorting to avatars. By trusting in the importance of autonomy within the creative and writing processes and by drawing on my experience as a video artist,³¹ video was an appropriate choice for writing LSQ, particularly because video software includes special effects that can contribute to making my work resonate with the codes used in comic books.³²

Because I was accustomed to typographic writing, the transition to videographic writing became an exploration of previously unanticipated political and epistemological implications.

Transforming the Writing Process

The political and epistemological decision to create in both LSQ and French raised unexpected difficulties during the writing process, especially regarding media technologies. First, my relationship to the act of writing itself was transformed. The pens, pencils and notebooks I carried about to scribble fragments of ideas, reflections and sketches were traded in for an iPhone to record signed notes ... until the device warned me of the battery's imminent death or that I was low on memory. One day I ran out of memory while I was out hiking—mountaintops are one of my favourite places to write and draw—and, because I could not transfer the files to my computer, I had to watch my previous recordings to decide which ones to delete in order to make space for new ones. And then I saw myself. This body, my body. Although I sometimes used to flip through my notebook to review my notes before moving on, I now realized that typographic writing, no matter how personal, allows for a degree of distance between the words and the embodied subject. A text written in French can evoke ideas of absence and presence, and I was looking for these possibilities related to sign languages' embodied modality.

Second, the visibility of the writing subject raised a whole series of reflections concerning the codes of virtual presence and the perception of self. Although writing with a pen in a café is a common and generally private affair (people can see I'm writing, but not what I'm writing), using a technological tool to record a signed video often attracts attention. Furthermore, using video as a way to write sign language requires showing your face; writing in French does not. Although this may appear to be a small distinction, it generates a new set of relationships to the act of writing. For example, I can write the final version of a French journal article in my pyjamas, even if the article is for a prestigious publication. However, because producing the final version of a videographic text implies a particular relationship to the codes of image presentation, I attribute greater importance to my physical appearance than I normally would. The visibility of the writing subject required by the embodied modality of sign languages unsettled me in many ways.

Third, videographic editing differs considerably from typographic editing. In the latter, corrections are easily made by deleting letters or words in an existing document; in the former, correcting an error often requires filming the entire scene over again. Without affecting the appearance of the final version, a typographic text can be freely modified by moving sections as often as desired. Changing the structure of a video, however, produces visible ruptures in the final cut, which creates a feeling of discontinuity not present in a similarly altered typographic text. Furthermore, the form of a typographic text does not reveal its temporality, while videographic text bears the marks of space, time and editing choices: whether or not the video was produced all at once or in several stages is revealed through haircuts, facial appearance, background, clothing and lighting, among other things. A single typographic text can be modified indefinitely, from draft to final version, without losing the appearance of homogeneity understood as professionalism. In contrast, because every modification to a videographic text requires filming, putting it all together can create an impression of a jumble of disorganized parts.

Fourth, the type of files used in each of these writing forms influences production decisions and relationality to media technologies. Text processing software, like Word, creates files that can contain as many pages as desired and can easily be sent by email or saved on a USB key, making it possible to work easily in different locations. Video-processing files are considerably more difficult to move from one place to another due to their much larger size. Equipment like external hard drives is much more costly than USB keys. Internet video transfer rates are also significantly slower, which means either more uploading or increasing file mobility through more expensive strategies (server, storage services such as Dropbox or other tools that charge for bandwidth).

These transformations and technical constraints related to the writing process stimulated reflection on many levels. Among other things, becoming aware of the embodied aspect of sign languages revealed by video mediality raised the question of situated perspectives.

Transforming Situated Perspectives

Experiencing the embodied modality of sign languages provoked an epistemological rupture in my relationship to the materiality of writing, the body and subjective situations rendered by videography. Especially relevant to this discussion are ethical concerns raised by approaches in which knowledge is understood as situated, subjugated and silenced, such as those developed by Michel Foucault, Donna Haraway, Nikita Dhawan and others. Using video as a form of writing facilitated an exploration of relevant political and epistemological implications.

I recall that, at a time when I was working specifically on anti-oppression approaches, I was concerned with the ethical and political significance of naming my whiteness in a text I was writing in French. I considered the importance of disclosure and of the different ways I could address this component in accordance with my situated viewpoint and asked myself simple-looking questions: Do I say it? What do I say? How do I say it? Signed writing occasioned an interesting discontinuity. Whether or not I wanted to address my racial identity, the embodied nature of sign language reveals both my body and its whiteness despite myself. Because I believe that the situated knowledge approach allows us not only to name the groups to which we belong but also to critically reflect on what it means to belong to them, this realization confirmed my desire to ask the people who were participating in the creation of my graphic novel not only about Deafhood or hearing experience, but also about belonging to other intersecting groups.³³ Furthermore, recognizing the in/visibility of certain group memberships required critical reflection on these belongings. With Deaf people in particular, this opened up a space that allowed the graphic novel to address a variety of belongings, including race, disability and gender identity and sexual orientation,³⁴ as well as their intersections with Deafhood.

The Graphic Novel, Agency and Digital Media

Producing a graphic novel in the context of a research-creation project presented a unique opportunity to understand the affective and political importance of signed writing in particular and of signed digital media in general. Along with the majority of Deaf people involved in the project and those with whom I have discussed it, I am thrilled to have contributed to one of the first graphic novels produced entirely in sign language, and hence the first in LSQ.

Although I sometimes experienced feelings of oppression when faced with inaccessible, poorly adapted, or non-existent writing, editing and translation technologies, the innovative use of digital media in my research-creation project also produced an undeniable experience of agency. Without a doubt, one of the strengths of the graphic signed novel *It Fell on Deaf Ears (C'est tombé dans l'oreille d'une Sourde)* is its ability to name oppression, identify systemic barriers, deconstruct prejudice and open avenues for further reflection in ways that reach Deaf, hard-of-hearing and hearing people. In the graphic novel, the vast and irreducible universes of Deafhood and Hearingness are addressed from different philosophical angles and through a variety of media, technologies and languages, each of which offers a different point of entry into the work.

To give one example, using speech bubbles allows signers to “speak” for themselves. Of course subtitles can translate any type of content, but beyond that, the use of the phylactery has opened a reflection on the notion of voice. Insofar as voice is not considered sounds produced by the body but understood as media that facilitate “the expression of opinion, or, more broadly, the expression of a distinctive perspective on the world that needs to be acknowledged,”³⁵ using speech bubbles

clearly represents the act of “speaking up,” another expression suggesting the extent to which the language of social recognition is marked by phonocentrism. In the bilingual context of the graphic novel, Deaf people “speak up,” or more accurately, send a clear sign for us to listen.

Indeed, the sense of agency created through the translation of signed communications and experienced by signers and family members interviewed for the project³⁶ proved to be another rich avenue for reflection: although many people are critical of hearing, able-bodied people playing Deaf or disabled roles in traditional TV and film productions, my graphic novel presents an interesting reversal. As recounted somewhere else,³⁷ I remember the actor Pierre-Olivier Beau-lac’s amazement upon realizing that he was playing the role of a hearing person (in this case, my hearing brother, who does not sign). We had to shoot a scene where Pierre-Olivier has to re-do the scene of answering the phone several times because, as a Deaf person, he does not use the phone the same way as Philippe, my brother. Pierre-Olivier had a tendency to start talking before bringing the phone to his ear and to continue speaking as he put it back in his pocket. Even in the take we used, the phone is no longer near his head when he says, “I’ll call you back.” The strangeness of his interpretation of a hearing person, as a Deaf actor, seems to highlight why hearing actors and actresses playing Deaf roles is problematic. These experiences of agency were made possible by a transmedia approach to using digital media that provides a fertile ground for thinking about sign languages and mediality.

Episteme and LSQ: What Does the Future Hold?

I realized at the beginning of my project that acts that I had taken for granted in French—speaking, communicating, reflecting, writing—were not available to me in LSQ in the same ways. At the time, I didn’t know how to produce a work of signed literature as creatively as I could in French. I was motivated to pursue this research-creation project by a kind of political, ethical and artistic imperative. I was carried by the creative desire to bring together writing and LSQ without preemptively establishing technical and technological limitations and by working with media technologies in curious, creative ways. The graphic novel was a pretext: if it exists in French, why shouldn’t it exist in LSQ?

Deleuze and Guattari present writing as a site of becoming³⁸ and Derrida understands it as a condition of the episteme.³⁹ For me, writing in sign language is a necessary condition for Deaf becoming and knowledge. In this way, digital media contribute to the very conditions of possibility of signed epistemologies by embracing multiple sign-language modalities.

The development of signed literatures is intimately linked to the possibilities of video editing and of translation between signed and oral languages. These subjects have been raised in a variety of scientific works of crucial importance. Indeed, editing software for sign languages⁴⁰ and new, avatar-based, translation technologies already exist. However, when I surprise myself by thinking about what these technologies could look like in 2050, it seems that all we have today are a few tentative and prototypical first steps. Actual two-dimensional sign-language writing systems are certainly useful, but digital technologies and videographic writing allow us to imagine producing signed knowledge far beyond textual typographic writing. We must push the limits and uses of media technology in order to create even more opportunities to facilitate the development of signed knowledge and Deaf becoming.

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Daz Saunders, Pamela Witcher, Theara Yim, Hodan Youssouf, my family, Deaf actors and production team for their precious participation and collaboration to the research and to the graphic novel; Alexandre Baril for his constructive reading of the text; Gerard Goggin for funding the translation; the Fondation des Sourds du Québec (Foundation of the Deaf in Quebec) for a scholarship; and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for the Vanier Scholarship that funded my doctoral studies and the dissemination of my research.

Notes

- 1 Alfred Metallic who defended the first Indigenous-language thesis in Canada quoted in Sandra McLean, “PhD Student Defends Thesis in Mi’Gmaw Language, a York First,” *YFile, York University’s Daily News*, November 24, 2010, <http://yfile.news.yorku.ca/2010/11/24/phd-student-defends-thesis-in-migmaw-language-a-york-first>. Deaf academics are still emerging in Canada. Evan Hibbard was the first academic to produce a PhD in ASL and English, and I was the first to produce a PhD in LSQ and French. In 2018 there are six Deaf university professors in Canada, including me as the first in Québec.
- 2 Among others, the anthropologist Frank Bechter has insisted on the need of innovative translation and distribution strategies in order to foster Deaf perspectives. Interested readers can refer to Frank Bechter, “The Deaf Convert Culture and Its Lessons for Deaf Theory,” in *Open Your Eyes: Deaf Studies Talking*, ed. L. Bauman H-Dirksen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 60–79.
- 3 Literally translated as “it fell into a deaf person’s ear,” the expression is a play on the French expression “*Ce n’est pas tombé dans l’oreille d’un sourd*” (“it did not fall into a deaf person’s ear”), which means “to be heard, to be taken in consideration.” The French expression also implicitly and pejoratively suggests that Deaf people do not understand and take nothing into consideration. This paradoxical evocation of the original French expression hence merits consideration from a Deaf perspective—that’s why it does indeed fall on Deaf ears.
- 4 Véro Leduc, *C’est tombé dans l’oreille d’une Sourde*, bilingual digital graphic novel in LSQ and French (Montréal: Distribution Le Vidéographe, 2016), <https://vimeo.com/channels/bdlsq>.
- 5 Mainly intended for an adult readership, graphic novels are usually longer comic books propitious for documentary and in-depth narratives as well as for realistic aesthetic. Interested readers can refer to David A. Beronà, *Wordless Books: The Original Graphic Novels* (New York: Abrams, 2008).
- 6 Véro Leduc “C’est tombé dans l’oreille d’une Sourde: la sourditude par la bande dessinée” (PhD diss., Department of Communication Studies, Université de Montréal, 2015).
- 7 The integral graphic novel is composed of ten video chapters available online (<https://vimeo.com/channels/bdlsq>), each featuring an encounter with a Deaf person or a member of my hearing family. A short 16-minute film has been made for public distribution and festival screenings and is available online with English speech bubbles (<https://vimeo.com/221637869>). It was released at the Montreal International Documentary Festival (RIDM) in 2016 and won an award for the best experimental film at the Toronto International Deaf Film and Arts Festival (TIDFAF) in 2017.
- 8 The Research Group on LSQ and Deaf Bilingualism (Groupe de recherche sur la LSQ et le bilinguisme sourd à l’Université du Québec à Montréal) has created a chart of handshapes, included in the dissertation of Julie Chateauvert “Poétique du mouvement: ce que les langues des signes font à la littérature” (PhD diss., Université du Québec à Montréal, 2014), <https://archipel.uqam.ca/7739/1/D2704.pdf>.
- 9 The “ninth art” is an expression to designate comic books and graphic novels. Morris and Pierre Vanker, “Neuvième Art, musée de la bande dessinée,” *Spirou* no. 1392 (1964).
- 10 Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967): 43, original translation from French.
- 11 Notably, Ferdinand de Saussure considers writing “a system of representation of oral language.” See Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, 49.
- 12 Roch-Ambroise Auguste Bélian, *Mimographie, ou Essai d’écriture mimique, propre à régulariser le langage des sourds-muets* (Paris: Louis Colas, 1825).
- 13 In ASL, the sign for “to sign” can be divided and broken down into the handshapes “s,” “i,” “5” and “s” strung together, hence the name. Other sign-writing systems exists, including but not limited to *HamNoSys*, *SignFont*, *ASLphabet* and *SignScript*.
- 14 Louis-Félix Bergeron, “Pertinence d’un système d’écriture pour la langue des signes québécoise” (Master’s Thesis, Montréal: UQAM, 2004).
- 15 Patrice Dalle and Juliette Dalle, “Langues des signes, enseignement et nouvelles technologies,” *La nouvelle revue de l’adaptation et de la scolarisation* no. 64 (2013): 189–202.

- 16 Jane Norman, *Deaf Filmmakers: Take One! Opening Night*, ASL video translated in English (Toronto: Deaf Culture Centre, 2008); John S. Schuchman, "The Silent Film Era: Silent Films, NAD Films, and the Deaf Community's Response," *Sign Language Studies* 4 (2004): 231.
- 17 Fernand Léger quoted in Tom Gunning "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," *Wide Angle* 8 (1986): 3–4.
- 18 Christopher B. Krentz, "The Camera as Printing Press: How Film Has Influenced ASL Literature," in *Signing the Body Poetic: Essays on American Sign Language Literature*, ed. H-Dirksen L. Bauman, Heidi M. Rose and Jennifer Nelson (Oakland: University of California Press, 2006), 51–70.
- 19 Although Deaf people are not mute (vocal chord function is not associated with organs used for hearing or language), their different way of speaking, refusal to do so and non-vocal dimensions of sign languages have traditionally been linked to muteness. Frequent association of deafness and muteness is a form of audism due to the suggestion that Deaf people cannot speak and have nothing to say.
- 20 J. C. Amman, *A Dissertation on Speech* (London: S. Low, Marston, Low and Searle, [1700] 1873), 2, quoted in H-Dirksen L. Bauman, "Audism: Exploring the Metaphysics of Oppression," *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education* 9 (2004): 243.
- 21 Lewis J. Dudley quoted in Bauman, "Audism," 243.
- 22 International Congress on the Deaf, *Report of the Proceedings of the International Congress on the Education of the Deaf: held at Milan, September 6th–11th, 1880* (London: W. H. Allen, 1880), 4, <https://gaislandora.wrlc.org/islandora/object/rarebooks:56>
- 23 Pamela Witcher, Geneviève Deguire, Julie Chateauvert and Dominique Lemay, "La communauté sourde québécoise," *À bâbord! Revue sociale et politique* no. 53 (2014): 5:53–6:19. Bilingual citation in LSQ and French, original translation from the French version. www.ababord.org/La-communaut%C3%A9-sourde-quebecoise.
- 24 Katherine Jankowski, *Deaf Empowerment: Emergence, Struggle and Rhetoric* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1997), 9.
- 25 This date marks the arrival on the American continent by Christopher Columbus, that is to say the beginning of the colonization of Indigenous people and their lands. Despite their metaphoric power, reducing comparisons between colonialism and oralism or between racism and audism have been criticized with reason during discussions, such as at the Deaf Academics and Researchers Conference in Copenhagen (2017), as as it erases specific oppression lived by Indigenous Deaf people and racialized Deaf people. I would like to thank particularly Rezenet Moges and Onudeah Nicolarakis for the critical reflections and shared discussions.
- 26 Paddy Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood* (Buffalo, Toronto, Sydney: Multilingual Matters, 2003), 3–4.
- 27 Gerard Goggin and Christopher Newell, "The Business of Digital Disability," *Information Society* 23, no. 3 (2007): 159–168.
- 28 An avatar is an animated character. There are videos explaining the creation process for signing avatars, including: *The Making of "The Forest": An ASL Story* (Washington, DC: Vcom3D, 2008) 1:44, www.youtube.com/watch?v=u1imqBc-RW8; and *Automatic Sign Language* (IBM UK and Ireland, 2012): 3:43, www.youtube.com/watch?v=bGWrrqElrPQ.
- 29 *Sipho*, directed by Braam Jordaan, Trailer (2011), www.braamjordaan.com, 1:24, www.youtube.com/watch?v=32SS4SiWjvM.
- 30 J. R. Kennaway, J. R. W. Glauert and I. Zwitserlood, "Providing Signed Content on the Internet by Synthesized Animation," *ACM Transactions on Computer–Human Interaction* 14, no. 3 (2007): article 15.
- 31 I generally use the medium of video to deconstruct specific social norms and make minoritized voices "heard." The videos and compilations that I have produced "give voice" to disabled children, sex workers, people living with HIV, queer and trans people, Indigenous people, refugees and undocumented people. My habit of using phonocentric expressions such as "giving a voice" is what gave rise to the paradox of using such a phonocentric language in relation to Deaf issues, something I wanted to highlight in the graphic novel.
- 32 Animated characters, simplified features, exaggerated contrasts and the black and white aesthetic are a few examples.
- 33 Developed primarily by Afro-American feminists such as Kimberlé Crenshaw, the concept of intersectionality allows the study of how various social belongings interact in subjectively constitutive ways.
- 34 On this subject, refer to Véro Leduc, "Diversity: LGBTQI," in *The Deaf Studies Encyclopedia*, ed. Genie Gertz and Patrick Boudreault (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2016), 315–319.
- 35 Nick Couldry, *Why Voice Matters: Culture and Politics After Neoliberalism* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2010), 1.

- 36 Because my family members do not sign, their comments were interpreted by Deaf people in the graphic novel. However, the text presented in speech bubbles reflects original French-language excerpts of original interviews.
- 37 Véro Leduc, “Est-ce vraiment une bande dessinée? Langues des signes, Déconstruction et Intermédialité,” *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* 8, no. 1 (2019): 58–97.
- 38 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2* (Paris: Minuit, 1980), 338.
- 39 Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, 43.
- 40 Annelies Braffort and Michel Filhol, “Constraint-Based Sign Language Processing,” in *Constraints and Language*, ed. Philippe Blache, Henning Christiansen, Verónica Dahl, Denys Duchier and Jørgen Villadsen (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 191–218.