Event Title:

Disabled Voices: Disfluent Writers Speak

Event Description:

Sound and voice are vital elements of prose and poetry. Writers with speech disabilities (cerebral palsy, stuttering, and dystonia) discuss how their speaking voices have influenced their writing. This panel explores how vocal difference can serve as a catalyzing force in form, content, and performance across many genres, and discusses the realities of public speaking and publishing as a writer with a disability. Writers talk about their processes and make recommendations for further reading.

Event Category:

Multiple Literary Genres Craft & Criticism

Event Moderator and Participants:


Denise Leto is a poet, writer, editor and dance dramaturge. Her current project involves an ecopoetic exploration of the San Francisco Bay. She wrote Your Body is Not a Shark, the book of poetry for a multi-genre performance piece exploring vocal difference. She co-authored Waveform, a poetry collaboration on speech and disability. Her work has appeared in Rogue Agent, Los Angeles Review, In-Dance Magazine, Puerto del Sol and other publications. With the art collective, Olimpias, she does cross-genre and disability culture work.

David Shields is the internationally bestselling author of more than 20 books, including Reality Hunger (30 "best books of 2010" mentions), The Thing About Life Is That One Day You'll Be Dead (NYT bestseller), The Trouble with Men, & Nobody Hates Turmp More Than Trump. NBCC finalist. Books in 24 languages.

Remarks:

Adam Giannelli

I have written a series of poems and prose poems about stuttering that examine and call into question the ways it is represented in society. Taking into consideration my own stuttering and my mother’s slurred speech, these autobiographical texts also look outward, confronting the
listener and engaging with other texts. Influenced by disability culture and the social model of disability, they examine the interaction between impairment and environment, blur the boundary between disability and ability, and portray stuttering in a positive light, even likening it to poetry itself. Stuttering serves as both form and content, and through alliteration, repetition, and disjunction the poems themselves, in an act of pride, stutter across the page.

Denise Leto

I plan to discuss how working with dystonia and “dysfluent” verbal communication as a poet/writer/artist required a shift in how I thought about language-making and a re-envisioning of my engagement with readers or listeners. I will discuss how I began to experiment with various adaptive strategies: more collaboration, choral readings, recorded voice, music, sound art, performance, movement and dance in multi-layered works that reside in the conscious rendering of an actual body moving through the physical world.

David Shields

I’ll discuss how stuttering has underwritten everything I’ve written—either explicitly as subject and metaphor or implicitly as artistic strategy and motor.

Discussion Questions:

1) How has your speech impacted your relationship with the written word? Describe in terms of form and content how your speech has influenced your writing.

2) While speech and writing both draw upon language, they are different modes of expression. How have you negotiated representing a spoken voice in written form?

3) What are some of your adaptive strategies for vocal difference and speech “accessibility” (such as logistical, artistic, aesthetic approaches) when working with the performative aspects of poetry and writing, for example, when preparing and giving readings, lectures, etc., in terms of engaging the listener, audience, spectator?

4) What other texts and authors have influenced your own work? What texts would you recommend to writers interesting in exploring disfluency?

5) What advice would you give to emerging writers of disability, particularly those hoping to share the experience of disability through their writing?

Reading Recommendations:

Campbell, Patrick, and Christopher Constantino. Stammering Pride and Prejudice.
Leto, Denise. Your Body Is Not a Shark.
Mitchell, David. *Black Swan Green.*
Scott, Jordan. *blert.*
Shields, David. *Dead Languages.*