



# Crowdsourcing in Audio Description: the Blue Description Project

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# 1. Introduction

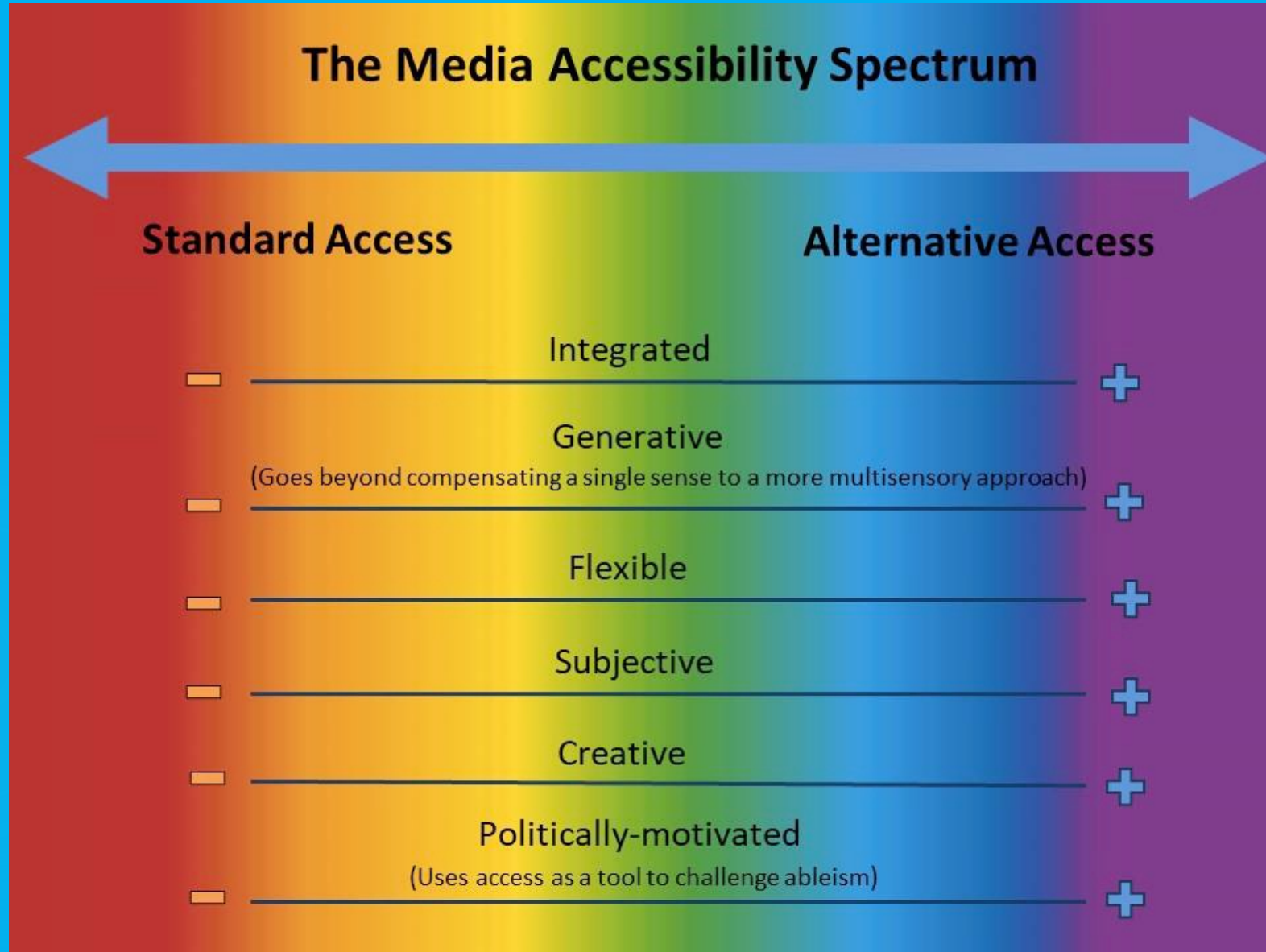
- ▶ The aim of this presentation is to share how crowdsourcing has been applied in an audio description and caption project generating a type of non-standard accessibility that defies ableism and ocularcentrism in the media.
- ▶ In addition, I will examine some of the challenges of translating this creative audio described script into Spanish.

## 2. Alternative accessibility

### ▶ Standard AD

- ▶ The task of the audio describer is to provide an accurate description of the images in a film (objectivity) in order to fill in the gaps caused by blindness (compensation) and to bring the blind users' comprehension as close as possible to that of the sighted audience.
- ▶ Therefore, the ultimate goal of media access is to replicate the experience of the non-disabled viewer, which means treating disability as a deficit, instead of as a gain.
- ▶ For many authors, this approach to standard AD is both impossible, as there is no one single non-disabled experience, and highly questionable, because it denies the different ways in which individuals can choose, or be able, to experience art (Szarkowska, 2013; Fryer's and Freeman, 2013; Walczak and Fryer, 2017; Jekat's and Carrer, 2018; Bardini, 2022; and Ameri and Reza Ghaffari, forthcoming)

# 2. Alternative accessibility



Romero-Fresco (2024)

## 2. Alternative accessibility

- ▶ As Romero-Fresco (2024) states
  - ▶ “As with any other spectrum, these two poles include a multitude of options in between. However, if we move too close to the left-hand side of the spectrum, we may lose sight of the human dimension and treat access as a transaction where what matters is the production of access, not how it is received; in other words, access in the passive voice. This turns access into a technique (separated from the artistic process and from the social and political context in which it exists), access experts into operators (likely to be replaced by automation) and users into customers.”

# 3. Corpus of analysis

- ▶ Among those artists who advocate for alternative ways of accessibility are the authors of the Blue Description Project (BDP): Liza Sylvestre and Christopher Jones at the University Urbana-Champaign, in Illinois.
- ▶ The BDP is a collaborative endeavor based on Derek Jarman's film *Blue* (1993). *Blue* is an experimental film that combines visual, aural, and textual components to create an affective experience: [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeJ-BFXNpTuDJQKfsTeUXMkcD5Z\\_5rsp0jEW6UPEh3RrSCc9w/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeJ-BFXNpTuDJQKfsTeUXMkcD5Z_5rsp0jEW6UPEh3RrSCc9w/viewform)
- ▶ *Blue* was directed by Derek Jarman, a well-known British filmmaker and gay-rights activist. In this movie, he reflects upon his battle fighting AIDS against a blue backdrop. For the duration of the entire film (79 minutes), the only visual projected on the screen is a single shot of International Klein Blue. Derek was losing his sight during the same year he was working on this film, only being able to see in shades of blue.
- ▶ The experimental nature of the film and the fact that it included different formats: film, theatrical screening, radio and tv broadcasting, and a book makes this product susceptible of being accessed in multiple ways.



# 4. Non-standard accessibility in the BDP

The BDP offers three tracks of captions in *Blue*:

- 1) Audio description that is spoken (by a female voice), but it is also legible on screen (yellow captions)
- 2) Creative sound description of the musical score and sound effects of the original film (blue captions)
- 3) Open captions of the film's original spoken narration (male voice and white captions)

[slower, Blue singlets, soft on the edge of hearing — then four fast]

A blue... at times, a witness... of what is to come.

[strings fade into a minor plucking — the wind becoming turbulent]

NARRATOR: I'm walking along the beach in a howling gale.

# 4. Non-standard accessibility in the BDP

At the presentation of the BDP at the Whitney Museum in NY in July 2024, there were 2 ASL interpreters working at the same time: one translating the creative sound track and the other translating the narrator's captions

## blue description project

... a screening tour

[February 15th]	Gene Siskel Film Center (Chicago, US)**
[March 8th]	BFI Southbank (London, UK)**
[March 14th]	MIT List Visual Arts Center (Cambridge, US)
[April 6th]	Personal Space Gallery (Vallejo, US)
[June 5th]	aemi/Irish Film Institute (Dublin, IE)**
[June 6th]	Triskel Arts Centre (Cork, IE)
[June 13th]	Bonington Gallery (Nottingham, UK)**
[July 17th]	Whitney Museum of American Art (NYC, US)**
[August 3rd]	Grundy Art Gallery (Blackpool, UK)
[August 4th]	EMBASSY Gallery (Edinburgh, UK)
[September 19th]	MCASD (San Diego, US)

\*\*includes Q+A/ Conversation





# 5. Non-standard AD: Crowdsourcing and subjectivity

- ▶ A standard AD would have been: "International Klein Blue fills the screen" or "blue background." The objective normative AD would have conveyed content, but it would have not provoked a reaction nor felt an experience.
- ▶ The BDP solicited multiple descriptions of Blue, from many, MANY different individuals. This is why some ADs are very personal, some of them are political, some are metaphorical, poetic....
- ▶ These descriptions occupy the pauses and breaks in the original film. Each of these descriptions begins with: "A blue."

# 5. Non-standard AD: Crowdsourcing and subjectivity

- ▶ This diversity in the AD choices of the same visual input may correlate to the diversity existent in the visually-impaired and blind audiences themselves (Kleege, 2018: 100), making subjectivity the leading force in this creation.
- ▶ In this project, what blind scholar Georgina Kleege (2022a) claims, more than ever, it is manifested: “Who are you and what are you bringing to the audio description? What does your knowledge bring?” To the listener, that knowledge may be interesting and certainly there is also something empowering in bringing who you are for the collective enjoyment of the group.

# 6. AD translation into Spanish

1) Descriptions about the color itself:

[campanilleo rítmico y jugueteón]

## 6. AD translation into Spanish

A blue that could be  
Prussian blue, cobalt blue,  
ultramarine, or indigo...

[guitarra eléctrica, banyo, dialogando entre sí]

Un azul que podría ser azul de Prusia, azul cobalto, ultramarino o  
índigo...



# 6. AD translation into Spanish

2) Descriptions about physical resemblance to a blue object:

La tierra se muere,

## 6. AD translation into Spanish

Un azul que no es un azul océano. Le falta el verde del fitoplancton y el marrón del sedimento.

[obscured droplets, slower than time, distant as wind chimes]

**A blue that is not an ocean blue. It lacks the green of phytoplankton and the brown of sediment.**

48:15

# 6. AD translation into Spanish

3) Descriptions that convey emotional reactions to the color:

[Campanas de iglesia en lucha permanente, que no logran zafarse del zumbido opresivo]

hasta que lo único que pudimos oír fueron sus quejidos a través del teléfono desde la otra punta del planeta.



# 6. AD translation into Spanish

## 4) Personifications

[world fades, dissolves to water]

a blue that is drowning in grief. A blue... that is tired.

Un azul que se ahoga en el dolor. Un azul... que está cansado.

42:06

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# 6. AD translation into Spanish

Translation challenges:

A) play on words and connotations

[shouldered about, drowning in CHAOS]

**A blue that attacks... my BLUES!**

Play

15:28

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# 6. AD translation into Spanish

## B) Cultural references:



[bottom-of-piano deep and crackle of thunder, both descending]

A blue like Parliament blue, the blue in the brand of cigarettes my mother used to smoke.

# 6. AD translation into Spanish

C) Relevance of intonation in the decision-making process of translation:  
the case of “numb”

[agua, marea, yendo y viniendo]

# 7. Conclusions

- ▶ The BDP is an example of alternative access not only in the product (three tracks of captions), but also in the method used to generate the AD track (crowdsourcing) with the purpose of triggering as many filmic experiences as possible offering multiple AD for the same image. This approach aims at reflecting the various feelings and emotions behind those multiple audio describers.
- ▶ In the same fashion, the translation into Spanish of the AD aimed at generating multiple filmic experiences for the Spanish-speaking audience listening or reading the AD captions.
- ▶ Reception studies to see what experiences it actually generated in Spanish
- ▶ This type of accessibility is definitely another example of embracing access as collaboration and conversation (Romero-Fresco & Dangerfield 2022), as well as a form of access as intimate connection (Mingus, 2011; García-Vizcaíno, 2024; Romero Fresco, 2024; Romero-Fresco, García-Vizcaíno and Fryer, forthcoming), rather than a mere service to be provided to the blind and low vision community.



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