Decolonising Media Accessibility: Alternative Approaches to Media Access for Film and Live Events

 Kate Dangerfield ✉
Independent researcher

 Zoe Moores ✉
University of Warwick

 Pablo Romero-Fresco ✉
Universidade de Vigo

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Abstract

In this article, we explore the different forms that accessibility can take, both in theory and in practice, focusing on filmmaking and live events. We question the role and responsibility that we, as humans, have in determining how collaboration and participation can be successful within the research process, in bringing creativity and difference to the content that is created, and in challenging biases and discriminatory practices. We situate this discussion within broader societal debates: we question the balance of ideology and art and explore how questions of justice lie behind the access that is provided. We weave together the voices of three academics and use our discussions to reflect on where theoretical notions meet as we face the reality of trying to embed translation and access in the creative projects we are involved in. By exploring case studies of accessible filmmaking and practical considerations around how access can be implemented at the live events that showcase them, we try to illustrate the different forms that access can take and how we can continue to build a notion of more generative access, by welcoming in new approaches and perspectives and using them to create a more equitable and inclusive society.

Key words: media access, decolonisation, films, events, participation, justice, intersectionality.

✉ access2film@gmail.com, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0200-5433
✉ zoe-moores@outlook.com, https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9876-8795
✉ promero@uvigo.gal, https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2166-5792

Introduction

Alternative approaches are emerging within the field of audiovisual translation and media accessibility, where humans play an important role in determining how collaboration and participation can be successful within the research process while bringing creativity and difference and challenging biases and discriminatory practices. This article focuses on accessibility in filmmaking and live events, in theory and practice. The discussion will centre on the chain of access (Greco et al., 2012) that needs to be created so that every step within this process becomes as accessible as possible. But more than this, the discussion follows Jorge Díaz Cintas (2012), who urges academics and researchers in audiovisual translation and media accessibility to focus more "on unmasking the rationale behind the ideologically motivated changes [in the field] and by contextualising them within a wider socio-cultural environment" (p. 279). This call is still relevant today, as William Brown and Pablo Romero Fresco (2023) suggest "rebalancing [or decolonising] our pedagogy (Burnard & White, 2008) (…) so we can embrace creativity and approach AVT/MA not only as a technique, but also as (part of) an art" (Brown & Romero Fresco, 2023).

Terms such as "decolonise" and "intersectionality" have become scholarly buzzwords (Persard, 2021), and these concepts and rhetoric need to be examined critically to avoid furthering or creating different forms of oppression. Colonisation is often understood as the continuously violent and political process that affects the global South and its diaspora (Grech & Soldatic, 2016). However, through the lens of disability, colonisation can also be a metaphor illustrating how disabled people in the global North experience, or have experienced, oppression, marginalisation, and alienation in Western society (Barker & Murray, 2013). From both perspectives, disability can intersect with structures such as race, class, gender, sexuality and religion (SOAS, 2018). Yet, as Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang forcefully remind us, it is important that decolonisation is not only considered as a metaphor (2012). For Gurminda K. Bhambra "[t]he easy adoption of the language of decolonisation within our disciplines and institutions is no substitute for doing the work needed to effect both material and epistemological change" (2021, np).

Decolonising access and questioning the principles upon which it has been built can all too easily lead to a demonisation of standard access and even of its users. That is not what we are trying to do with this article. It may thus be useful to address some of the questions we normally ask when we discuss the theory and practice of accessible filmmaking and alternative media access: Are we arguing that standard media accessibility can only be seen as a problem? Are we advocating against the existence of any kind of guidelines on media access? Since alternative media access originated as a response to standard, guideline-based access, can the former have guidelines? And if alternative media access ever becomes the norm, what would it be an alternative to?

In this article, we introduce ourselves as individuals and discuss our potential biases (section 1). We bring insights from critical disability studies, film studies, and critical theory to further understand what decolonisation means to us and the practices in media accessibility studies. We present this

section as a dialogue to reflect that while we share the same aim, our perspectives and approaches differ (section 2).

Following on, we focus on what accessible filmmaking and alternative media accessibility are understood to be today (section 3). We use the Arts Council England funded project 'Sensory Microphone: Les Handicaps Kaddux/The Disabled Voice', as a case study to explain how the filmmaking process, when considering access and translation from the beginning, can challenge normative assumptions (section 4). Then, we consider the form accessibility can take with live events and the potential frameworks that must be in place to facilitate this process (Moores, 2022, 2023). This consideration is necessary if, having reinstated access into the filmmaking process, we also wish any events where films are showcased to be accessible for those who were involved in their creation as well as for the wider audience who wish to attend (section 5). Finally, we explore how our perspectives and the approaches we discuss might align with broader changes taking place in society: sustainability, climate awareness, questions of marginalisation, poverty, social justice and equity. These all demand action (section 6).

1. Who Are We? What Are Our Biases?

All three of us are members of GALMA, a research group made up of non-disabled and disabled academics, trainers, and professionals who aim to promote research, training, and knowledge transfer in the area of media accessibility. We align with a wide notion of media accessibility that concerns anyone who, for different reasons, does not have access to audiovisual content produced in their language or in a foreign language. We are committed to a vision where access is integrated into the audiovisual production process through the collaboration of non-disabled and disabled people, not only as users/informants but also as decision makers.

Yet, before researchers, we are individuals who undoubtedly bring our biases into our writing. Zoe is a white, bisexual, cisgender woman, middle-class, from London, in her 40s, and a committed dharma-practitioner. While she might "look" conventional, she wouldn't describe herself or many of her life choices that way. Although she uses this string of labels to describe herself out of linguistic necessity, she does so whilst acknowledging the risks of simplification or homogenisation that each one entails. Like Hill (2018, p. 18), capturing the essence of Hall's discussion of Who needs "identity"? (Hall & du Gay, 1996. p.1-17), she thinks of identity as "a state of becoming, always moving towards a future self that is made up of our past and present experiences".

Kate is a white, middle-class, heterosexual, cis-gendered 40-year-old woman from Southwest UK. As a researcher often working with disabled and non-disabled people who are marginalised in a white, western, patriarchal society, her lived experience is one of relative privilege. During her PhD, she came to realise the relationships of power within a researcher/participant dynamic. Following Sara Ahmed, she started to understand the extent to which she inhabits privilege. Ahmed writes,

> [w]hen a category allows us to pass into the world we might not notice that we inhabit that category. When we are stopped, or held up, by how we inhabit what we inhabit, then the terms of habitation are revealed to us. (2012, p. 176)

In agreement with Ahmed, "we need to rewrite the world from the experience of not being able to pass into the world" (2012, p. 176).

Pablo is a white, heterosexual, middle-class, non-disabled male in his 40s who meets the notion of "normal" upon which ableism is developed. As will be argued below, it is his experience of film (or that of people like him, whatever that means) that many media access guidelines are designed to convey to disabled users. He positions himself as an ally, and he is aware that, as a non-disabled person who is committed to anti-ableism, he is what many institutions need to "feel that they are making a gesture towards 'doing the work' without necessarily engaging disabled practitioners/producers" (Garde, 2023). However, while pushing, as will be the case in this article, for the employment of disabled people in senior and leadership roles to produce more embedded and long-term change, he believes in participating in "the labour of advocating for accessibility and inclusive practice that usually and unreasonably falls to disabled people" (Garde, 2023).

For us all, decolonisation refers to challenging dominant ways of thinking, knowing and looking in "our everyday interactions, [and in] our habitual, disciplinary norms", "call[ing] out unconscious biases, resist[ing] the urge to draw lines, do[ing] everything to decentre and resituate ourselves as unconditional allies" (pui san lok, 2020, np).

2. Decolonising Media Accessibility: A Dialogue

Pablo: For me, the main idea is to decolonise the notion of disability that access is built on, that is, to rethink "how we have already imagined who or what is in need of access" (Titchkosky, 2021). In relation to blindness and AD, Kleege (2018, p. 3) urges us to "scrutinize ideas about blindness that shape the image of the intended audience for these services". For her, blindness is usually thought of as something that "takes away from or even destroys identity" (Kleege, 2018, p. 9), which means that, in a world made largely by and for sighted people, the blind person is almost exclusively defined as someone who cannot see. This impacts access, which is usually made by sighted experts "from the perspective of someone looking at flawed eyes from the outside" (2018, p. 6). Here is where compensation and objectivity come into play. In this view, the task of the audio describer is to provide an accurate description of the images in a film (objectivity) 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. It thus follows that the ultimate goal of current mainstream media access (which includes what we often refer to as traditional and standard practices) is to replicate the experience of the non-disabled viewer, even though this is both impossible (there is no one single non-disabled experience) and highly questionable (it denies the lived experience of disabled people and the different ways in which they can choose, or be able, to experience art). More importantly, behind this view of media

access as compensation lurks the question, "Wouldn't you rather access the original?" which is akin to asking, "Wouldn't you rather be 'normal'?"

Kate: I wonder if not only is it that we need to acknowledge that in media accessibility, we have been replicating the experience of the non-disabled viewer, but we also need to acknowledge that we are using the non-disabled experience as the benchmark in other concepts/terms we use. Aims such as comprehension, engagement, immersion, embodiment, enriched/enhanced/"full" experience become blurry when we challenge normative ideas. What does comprehension, etc., mean to who?

Zoe: Intersectionality and social/epistemic justice can help us understand that. The fact that we have complex internal and external identities is a fundamental aspect of any discussion about access. For that reason, the first lens I draw on is intersectionality. It takes account of the interconnected nature of the different labels any individual has and acknowledges how these categorisations act in a simultaneous and mutually constitutive way (Kang et al., 2017, p. 19): when experienced together, the discrimination that results from the combined effect of two or more labels is greater than the sum of experiencing the effect of any of these labels individually. Thus, a person at any marginalised intersection is potentially more vulnerable to societal discrimination: "notions of gender and the way a person's gender is interpreted by others are always impacted by notions of race and the way that person's race is interpreted" (Kang et al., 2017, p. 19); they, in turn, are shaped by notions and interpretations of the other labels the person holds. That's why intersectionality has come to be viewed by many as a web-like (Atewologun & Mahalingam, 2018, p. 163) or multidimensional (De Vries', 2015, p. 11) concept.

Social justice, with its demand for a fairer and more equitable world with respect to how wealth, opportunities and privileges are distributed within a society (distributive justice) (Legal Dictionary Content Team, 2016), is a fundamental aspect of intersectionality. For this to be achieved, change at many levels within society is needed. Epistemic justice (Fricker, 2007) adds an additional slant to this demand: in addition to achieving a distributive change, a shift in our values and understanding with respect to people who are different to us is also required. If equitable access is to be provided, we first need to understand the individual and diverse ways in which society is experienced[1].

Kate: So we need to recognise the oppression of the individual and the collective while recognising our subjectivity. Decolonising for who, by whom?

Zoe: This would decolonise the idea that there is a single experience – and draw in different voices so that space – and access – can be created to allow for those different experiences. Then, we move past the idea that a single solution will always work and get to the need to explore the context of each film, situation, and event to determine what approach – or approaches – could be adopted.

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[1] This explanation of intersectionality and social and epistemic justice is based on section 2.2 of Moores (2022).

Pablo: We get to alternative and creative access practices where we do not have to try to be objective (which is impossible anyway) and obsess over controlling the interpretation of the work. We can leave it open and can experiment with multisensory film and access.

Kate: And these approaches/tools might be able to help us get past ideas that are so deeply embedded in ableist attitudes, which I discuss more in section 4. I hope these ideas create generative practices, and if we create new norms with the ideas we suggest in the following sections, they are norms that do not give the impression of good and bad access or create more binaries and divisions between us. Otherwise, we may perpetuate the us and them narrative, whether disabled or non-disabled.

3. Accessible Filmmaking and Alternative Media Accessibility

Back in 2013, we defined accessible filmmaking (AFM) as "the integration of AVT and accessibility as part of the filmmaking process, often involving the collaboration between the translator and the creative team of the film" (Romero-Fresco, 2013, p. 211). The principle underlying AFM was not new. As shown in the AFM database compiled for GALMA by Tendero et al. (2023), the history of cinema includes examples of pioneering accessible filmmakers who made a point of considering issues of translation and access during film production. Yet, they remain as exceptions to the still prevailing industrial model adopted by the film industry, where translation and media access services (such as dubbing, interlingual subtitling, accessible subtitles, audio description and sign language interpreting) are produced during the distribution stage, involving no contact with the creative teams.

Over the past ten years, the integration of access from inception has gained considerable ground, for instance, with the notion of integrated access in the scenic arts (Fryer & Cavallo, 2022). The ensuing collaboration between artists and access experts has led to practices that go beyond standard guidelines, using access to enhance the user experience in a creative or imaginative way or exploring the artistic potential of access. This alternative media access has been adopted by different artists and institutions. It may be found under labels such as "creative media access" (Romero-Fresco & Chaume, 2022), "the aesthetics of access" (Sealey & Lynch, 2012) or "radical accessibility" (Garde, 2022), amongst others. Despite their differences, there are some common traits to these alternative media accessibility approaches. The main ones are the consideration of access from inception, the creative or even artistic treatment of access, the acknowledgement that it is not possible to provide access for all (there are always some users excluded from this "all", hence the importance of personalised access) and finally the need to have disabled people in leadership and decision-making roles. Alternative media access compels us to address the politics of media access and to use it as a tool to resist the ableism that pervades our society.

These alternative approaches expose the limitations of the original definition of AFM, which in some instances referred to the need to make films accessible for all and stressed the primacy of the original version, as though replicating the viewing experience of the non-disabled audience was the ultimate

aim of media access. Most importantly, although this initial conceptualisation of AFM mentioned the possibility of including disabled consultants, this was not a central concern. Neither was the identification of nor the resistance to ableism in the film and media access industry and in society at large. In other words, although AFM stretched the boundaries of media access to bring it closer to film(making), it fell short of addressing the social and political dimension of media access. The new definition that we propose for AFM, which has been included in the Spanish Film Academy's Glossary of inclusive language in the filmmaking industry, amends the original one by using a wider lens:

> The consideration of media access (and often translation) during the production process through collaboration between the creative team and the accessibility/translation team. It is also a way of understanding film that questions who is able to participate and who is excluded, both in terms of the creation of content and the possibility of accessing it. (Academia de Cine, 2023, p. 7)

4. What These Approaches Might Look Like Within Filmmaking

I (Kate) wonder whether accessible filmmaking and alternative forms of media access can help us get past ideas that are deeply embedded in ableist attitudes. The case study here focuses on the experimental practices of a film made with the UK Sensory Theatre and disability arts company A Blind Bit of Difference in collaboration with Senegal's leading Forum Theatre company Kaddu Yaarax for the project Sensory Microphone: Les Handicaps Kaddux/The Disabled Voice. Combining creative theatre, sensory arts and film with the hope of connecting and fusing senses with disabled and non-disabled people, the project involved workshops to explore our different experiences and express our stories through differing art forms. In one of the workshops as part of the Forum Theatre Festival in Senegal, people communicated in many languages: Amy Neilson Smith (Creative Director), Zara Jayne (Lead Disabled Artist and myself (Kate) speak English fluently with some basic phrases in French and Wolof; Gustavo Dias Vallejo (Artist and Interpreter) speaks English and French fluently with basic phrases in Wolof; the disabled and non-disabled people involved in the workshop had varying degrees of fluency with English, French and Wolof.

Here, I explain the approach our team adopted – to make the film and offer access to it – that challenges aesthetic hierarchies and traditional (ableist) perspectives that film is ocularcentric. Ocularcentric paradigms are deeply rooted in modes of knowing and looking at contemporary culture. An ocularcentic paradigm favours the idea that truth and knowledge are associated with vision, which is a notion that dates back to ancient Greek philosophy and the works of Plato and Aristotle. However, there has been, and still is, widespread criticism of the perspective that vision is the "noblest sense" by philosophers, feminist theorists, social theorists, poststructuralist theorists and cultural critics, underpinned by scientific discoveries that reveal the limitations of human vision. Furthermore, perspectives depend on an individual's cultural experience and what sensory experiences they may have been exposed to. As Foucault writes, there are limitations with language and sense perception, according to what is accessible to a person at one given time (Foucault, 1966).

Therefore, sense experience is something that can be learned or cultivated, and it is possible to argue that an encounter with a multisensory work can activate a sensory experience, which invites a more nuanced embodiment in relation to the world around us (Marks, 2000). This experience can create a space for new thoughts based on sensory experience to emerge. As Deleuze writes on Foucault, new thought emerges from not being constrained in the present, which is defined by the past, but to "think otherwise" (Deleuze, 1989, p. 98). So if new thought can call for a new language in which to think, multisensory experiences may be able to shift ocularcentric perspectives that uphold binary ways of thinking and potentially divide disabled and non-disabled people.

The ideas of Tina Campt (2017), a non-disabled/non-blind black woman, could be a way to shift ocularcentric paradigms, as she proposes "listening to images" rather than solely focusing on looking. What started as a metaphor for Campt became a description and a methodology, and a way to reveal untold stories through different types of encounters. Furthermore, this methodology can reveal the multisensory and embodied nature of images while putting intimacy at the centre of how we interact with the world. Campts writes that traditionally, the sonic has been considered distinct from the visual, and people are often resistant to thinking about both in a synesthetic way. But, if this is the case, how do you get past something that is so deeply embedded? Campt suggests, what if we do not focus on the details of the image? What if we listen? After all, sounds are vibrations that touch us. So, what if we focus on how images affect us? Which impressions are left with us?

Following Campt, if we focus on artworks that profoundly impact us, we can write "to" them rather than "about" them. If we write "to" something, we can change our relationship with it. As Campt writes:

> Rather than telling others what a particular artwork is about and prescribing how they should see it or hear it or interact with it, I'm trying to create a journey that I'm inviting you to go on with me. You may or may not see it the same way. It may or may not have the same effect on you. You may not hear something in the same way. But what I've begun is a conversation with you that you can argue with me about. (2023, p. 3)

Thinking about these ideas in the context of disability, Sandra Alland (2017) writes that there is resistance in writing "to", "in refusing to seek the normative world's approval" (p. 27). With this case study, "normative" would refer to traditional (or standard) approaches in filmmaking and translation/media access that can uphold ocularcentric paradigms.

Laura U. Marks (2000) explains that experimental cinema lends itself to represent these "configurations of sense perception different from those of modern Euro-American societies, where optical visuality has been accorded a unique supremacy" (p. xiii). The elements of an embodied response to cinema, the response in terms of touch, smell, rhythm, and other bodily perceptions, have until recently been considered "excessive" and not amenable to analysis, yet Marks proposes ways they can be met halfway. I shall discuss how we approach these ideas in the context of the project: Sensory Microphone: Les Handicaps Kaddux/The Disabled Voice.

In one of the workshops as part of the Forum Theatre Festival in Senegal, Amy Neilson Smith started by using food to build metaphors all around the idea of "tasting colour". There was a whole selection of food – tomatoes/strawberries for red, cheese/lemon for yellow, capers for green. As the people in the workshop ate the food, they had to think about questions to evoke an embodied experience, such as: how would you describe it? What does it taste like? What does it smell like? What does it sound like? What does it feel like? Does it remind you of anything? Does it evoke any memories?

The process allowed us to connect deeply with the senses. Thinking about how we could translate the senses and communicate our stories through film, we captured their experiences with close-ups that merged with the sounds of people eating and responding. The people themselves then explored filming with cameras attached to their bodies while relating our activities to their own theatre practice, which created haptic footage capturing their movement and ideas visually and sonically. Amy Neilson Smith, Zara Jayne, Ushiku Crisafulli, and I edited their footage when we returned to the UK, as Kaddu Yaarax had asked for our perspective on the festival.

The access and translation became a conundrum due to the experimental nature of the project and film, as well as the different languages (Wolof, French and English) and varying degrees of fluency of the people involved. Questions arose, such as who would be sharing the film with? Whose perspective, out of the multiple perspectives, were we trying to convey? Especially as everyone had a different experience. There were no guidelines I could find to cover this situation, and following conversations throughout the project, and due to the focus on the senses and embodied experience, the decision not to subtitle any of the dialogue from the workshop footage seemed most appropriate to emphasise the sensory qualities of the film, as well as a paradox of translation, and access – that it is both necessary and impossible. Instead, Amy Neilson Smith, Zara Jayne, Ushiku Crisafulli and myself (as we edited the film) chose moments that affected us and created poetic multisensory descriptions, each of us recording our parts to include as a narration, which we planned to subtitle. It was important to strike a balance between writing "to" and writing "about". We wanted to explain what the content was about, but also the impact it had on us, while being clear about our subjective positions and recognising there are limitations with our perspectives:

> We fly past brick-shaped buildings
> a blur of grass
> people
> flip flops
> and the loud thunder of wind against the microphone…
> It feels like someone rubbing your ear (written and voiced by Zara Jayne).

Figure 1

Freshly Cut Tomatoes

Source: A Blind Bit of Difference and Kaddu Yaarax. (2023). Sensory Microphone: Les Handicaps Kaddux/The Disabled Voice. Image credit: Kate Dangerfield.

> A man rubs a tomato across his lips
> his tongue…
> to taste it…
> Amongst the babble of English, French and Wolof
> Red is tranquil and natural
> Eat it as a colour.
> But what would a rainbow taste like? (written and voiced by Ushiku Crisafulli)

With this case study, alternative access is experimental and multisensory and can invite embodied thought. While elements of these strategies could be taken up by standard access, experimental work does not have the same constraints as standard access and can continually focus on experimenting and trying to unsettle dominant modes of thinking, knowing and looking.

5. How do These Considerations Transfer to the Live Event Setting?

The previous sections of this article have explored how access and translation can change the filmmaking process when they are considered from the outset. However, the creation of the film (even in its potential myriad of forms) is not the end of the process. If we wish the screenings, Q&A,

award ceremonies and celebrations that follow to be accessible for all who have been involved, as well as for the diverse audience who may wish to attend, then the question of accessibility at these live events is just as important a consideration.

A clear example of this was seen when actor Liz Carr was nominated for her portrayal of Dr Emma Brookner, a wheelchair-using doctor in The Normal Heart (Official London Theatre, 2022). Unlike the nominees for the other categories that evening, the nominees for Best Actress In A Supported Role had to congregate backstage for the announcement, as the stage was not wheelchair accessible. Carr called out the need for accessible ceremonies during her acceptance speech. The following year, when Carr returned to present an award, she was able to access the stage from the audience, thanks to the ramp that had been created:

> Unless we have access for everyone, it's not worth doing. So thank you, Oliviers, the Albert Hall, DANC, all the disabled people that have contributed. I cannot believe… And I can't believe how excited I am to have a fucking ramp. And I'm not allowed to swear, but anyway… (Official London Theatre, 2023)

Organising any kind of live event, be it an award ceremony or film festival, is a complex process and, if the aim is to embed access within it, then every arrangement, every stage of the day requires consideration from the point of view of how accessible what is being suggested is for those expected to and hoping to attend – and these two groups of people may not be the same. From a theoretical perspective, having an event that is not accessible could be an example of social injustice (in the distributive sense, as access is not available) or testimonial injustice (if the credibility of the user as an expert over what accommodations they require is called into question at any point) or of hermeneutical injustice (if the organisers of events, through a lack of knowledge or awareness, do not even register the need for access and consequently fail to make any accommodations towards it) (Fricker, 2007, p. 1; Moores, 2022, p. 75).

So what might be involved in providing access? Table 1[2] illustrates some considerations that planning a film-related event might raise:

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[2] Compiled from my own research (Moores, 2022) and from a selection of guidelines on accessible performances and events including CMU (2021), #We Shall Not Be Removed et al. (2021) and Tourettes Hero (2023). Many of these considerations were also explored in Accessibility to the Scenic Arts (https://www.coursera.org/learn/accessibility-scenic-arts) created by Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona as part of the Erasmus + Act Project, 2015-1-ES01-KA203-015734 (https://webs.uab.cat/act/).

Table 1

Access Considerations When Planning an Event

Access considerations when planning an event	
Website(s)	How easy is it to use? Is the site accessible? Is there a section about accessibility at the venue and during the event? Is the content available in plain language?
Tickets	How do you book tickets – online, over the phone, both? How much are tickets? What about carers? Is there flexibility if someone is unable to attend? Are there cancellation restrictions?
Getting to the venue	Are there travel routes nearby? Is there public transport or parking nearby? Signs to the venue? Good lighting at night?
Physical access	Getting into and around the building – are there stairs, ramps, lifts? Regular or revolving doors? Will ease of moving around the building and time need to be taken into account when planning the schedule? Are toilets accessible?
Access awareness	Do staff know what access provision is available? Can they direct people attending to the right place to make use of these services? Has there been any training on deaf/disability awareness? Do any staff know sign language? What information is given to people on the day to explain why these measures are being taken?
Media access	For the live spoken elements of the event, will there be subtitles or sign/spoken language interpretation? Which languages will be included? What will access professionals need to prepare? Where will they be located? Do all seats provide a good view? If any films are screened, will they already have subtitles and audio description? Will the event be audio described? Are announcements on safety and on the running of the event also made in an accessible way?
Varied performances	Can the principles of different kinds of performances (relaxed, dementia-friendly, autism-friendly, baby-friendly…) and awareness of different audiences be accommodated within a larger event? Are there chill-out spaces? Can sound and lighting levels be adjusted?
Hybrid scenarios	The event experience is different when attending in-person and remotely. How will both audiences be accommodated? Will there be interaction between both groups? If not, how will each stage of the event be replicated for each?
Food and drink:	What range of dietary requirements will be catered for? How can protection against allergies be accommodated?
Health needs	Will any Covid-19 precautions be taken? Are any warnings about different lights/environmental factors that may impact attendance, engagement and participation shared in advance and on the day in an accessible format?

While there are many questions to consider when planning for access, it is also very important to note that there is no single concept of access. Exactly what makes an event "accessible" is likely to vary from person to person, and from event to event; different aspects of the event and the access needs of the different people who attend will all determine what access is required, so from the outset, rather than thinking of an ABC-style checklist, where checking off each item will ensure access has been achieved, it is more appropriate to approach access as something more fluid. Lazard (2019, p. 10) describes access as "a promise rather than a guarantee", and it is through examining the different elements of the event on offer and asking questions about how each could be made accessible that an event which is "as accessible as possible" is likely to be achieved.

Many arrangements will require foresight and planning – the ramp at the Oliviers is a clear example of this – and the same proactivity that benefits the filmmaking process certainly applies when planning live events. Although certain decisions, such as the provision of food for a particular guest, may need to be adjusted closer to the start of the event, knowing that a range of diets will need to be catered for and that additional care might need to be taken while preparing certain foods is something that would be useful to plan for early on. The provision of media access is not something that can easily be arranged at short notice, as professionals get booked up; planning for this early will not only mean that bookings can be secured, but that the professionals can do the necessary preparation before the event begins. Perhaps most importantly, knowing what access will be provided means that this provision can be advertised in advance on platforms and distribution lists that allow different audience groups to find this information. According to the most recent survey by Euan's Guide, 91% of those who responded try to find disabled access information before visiting a new place, and 58% avoid going to a new venue if it has not shared its disabled access information "because they assume it's inaccessible" (Euan's Guide, 2023, p. 3).

Approaching access in this way may require a shift in thinking. There are suddenly new considerations to be aware of, and adjustments and additions to what has gone before (whether in that venue or at similar events that those involved have worked on) may be needed as new audience members sign up and purchase tickets. This is part of the fluid nature of access outlined above. Whilst the very nature of access may mean that it is never possible to say, "We've done it – our event is fully accessible!" it is likely everyone involved will gradually feel more able to meet new requests that come in and understand how the role they usually play may also need to shift and grow. Involving everyone in this process is important so that accessibility can ultimately become part of the event ethos (Moores, 2022, p. 165). By centring access within the different discussions that take place, and considering what needs to happen before, during and after the event for the provision to be smooth, it is likely that the fullest possible access provision can be achieved. One tool which could be useful in facilitating this process is the model of participatory engagement (Moores 2022, pp.387-391, 2023, pp.108-111). It is also likely that this new awareness will travel with individual members of the event team to new events they work on, allowing the seeds of access to become even more widespread.

6. If Access Demands That our Perspectives Widen, What Other Questions Could We Tackle at the Same time?

Throughout this article, we have all been promoting the need for a wider frame of reference – both so that different voices are brought into the conversation and represented and because of the complexity inherent in the lives and identities of every person. Our premise has been that if films and film-related events, and indeed any live event, are made more accessible, groups who are often forgotten about and excluded can be included. The case studies we have shared, and the discussion of how this access might be continued as film-related events are organised show how approaching access often requires a shift in thinking, with new questions being asked and innovative solutions being found. The question I (Zoe) wish to raise today is whether widening our thinking to include access is enough or whether we could go even further and address other justice- and equity-related issues at the same time?

Who is at the heart of the conversations we are having? Who should be? How can everybody claim the space and rights that they are entitled to? To answer these questions, we need to think about the complex identities that we all hold, which encompass race, gender, sexuality, disability, age, language spoken, nationality, religion, class and body size… (Atewologun & Mahalingam, 2018, p. 163; De Vries, 2015, p. 11). As Faye (2021) demands in her argument for trans liberation and justice, what is required is "a manifesto for change, and a call for justice and solidarity between all marginalised people and minorities" (Faye, 2021); that is how all groups will be heard, and none will be forgotten.

Let's take the example of climate change and sustainability. Today, the way we approach these matters is of vital importance. It is also a question of equity and justice since, just as with other forms of discrimination, it is people who are already marginalised who are more likely to be affected by it: "Climate change violates human rights (…) but it doesn't violate them at random. Climate injustice feeds on existing violence and discrimination, on a history of rights abuses. Until we understand that, there is no prospect of climate justice" (Cripps, 2022, p. 71). As well as being a question that ultimately affects us all, it is also something that we can all – and all need to - act on (United Nations, n.d.; United Nations Foundation, n.d). Arts organisations can play an important role in this action.

Theatre Green Book, an initiative "by the whole of theatre" in the UK, found that 86% of cultural audiences are worried about the climate crisis (Raines & Carr, 2022, p. 4). Seventy-seven per cent of those surveyed thought "cultural organisations [had] a responsibility to influence society about the climate emergency", but only 17% thought cultural organisations [placed] great importance on the role they played within it. This might provide an opportunity for change. The slogans for climate action at Theatre Green Book centre around reducing, reusing, recycling, and building on the principle of sustainable productions, buildings, and operations (Theatre Green Book, n.d.). There are a range of ways that this might happen in practice, from supporting biodiversity, reducing waste and encouraging greener travel options to hosting programmes that tackle climate changes and sharing sustainability policies with audiences. Just as the questions posed on access provision in Table 1

related to many areas of event organisation, so, too, do these potential areas of climate-related change – and there are a number of places where decisions taken in the name of access or in the name of climate justice potentially conflict. In order to avoid such a conflict from arising, there seems to be a benefit in tackling both questions alongside each other to prevent the risk of further exclusion and eradication of the voices of those involved.

In many places, plastic straws have been banned or discouraged in favour of paper or glass alternatives in the name of climate change. For many, this might seem a sensible decision, yet when such decisions are taken without proper consultation, that is, a consultation which includes disabled people, there is a risk that they lead to discrimination: before becoming a mainstream device, plastic straws played a vital role as an accessibility tool for people who were ill or disabled, a role which their more environmentally-friendly alternatives cannot perform (BBC News, 2018). Initiatives such as Car Free days[3] or encouraging greener travel options might pose similar problems for people who rely on a car for transport, either because of disability or because their location is too remote to be able to use public transport at certain times of day (Aston, 2022). Here, alternative solutions are needed where accessibility and climate action can be successfully aligned; this might include a range of options allowing for reduced carbon footprints whilst permitting safe and practical travel arrangements.

Many organisations are already associating different forms of justice-related action[4] so that they can be tackled together. I hope that accessibility may soon be aligned with these core questions so that more effective solutions can be found. Questions such as how to deal with racial injustice, climate change, the cost of living crisis, and other forms of marginalisation are intertwined and complex. By addressing them together, it is more likely that a better approach will be found. However, it will be important to ensure that this new approach does not welcome one group at the expense of another, as this would unwittingly re-embed the social and epistemic injustice that, we assume, the organisation was seeking to avoid. As a tool for raising questions and framing discussions, the participatory model of engagement, which examines how access can be embedded into live events to foster inclusion (referred to in section 5), could be extended to include this wider range of questions as each area of organisation and approach is examined.

7. Conclusion

At the start of the article, we raised some questions that we are normally asked when we discuss the theory and practice of accessible filmmaking and alternative media access: Are we arguing that

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[3] Car Free days are initiatives where drivers are encouraged to take a break from their vehicles for the day. Sometimes, other events are organised around them so that local people can enjoy a range of activities in car-free streets. See, for example, Around Ealing(2019).

[4] For example, in the face of Black Lives Matter in 2020, the Broadway Green Alliance posted "There is no climate justice without racial justice" on Instagram (Broadway Green Alliance [@broadwaygreenalliance]. 2020, June 1st. https://www.instagram.com/p/CA5sna9DZ3m/).

standard media accessibility can only be seen as a problem? Are we advocating against the existence of any kind of guidelines on media access? Since alternative media access originated as a response to standard, guideline-based access, can the former have guidelines? And if alternative media access ever becomes the norm, what would it be an alternative to?

Our intention and discussion here are far from demonising standard access. As pointed out by Georgina Kleege (2018), Hannah Thompson (2018) and many other authors who propose alternative forms of media access, standard access provides the infrastructure that many disabled people need to navigate – or, as put by Mingus (2017), to survive in – an ableist society. This compliance-based access has been extremely beneficial for millions of users around the world, many of whom may choose this approach over more creative or experimental forms of access. In our view, the problem occurs when standard access is presented as the only possibility, and is not question, which is a breeding ground for ableism. As shown in Figure 2 (Romero-Fresco, 2024), although standard access and alternative access have different features, they sit along a spectrum that allows for different perspectives:

Figure 2

Media Accessibility Spectrum
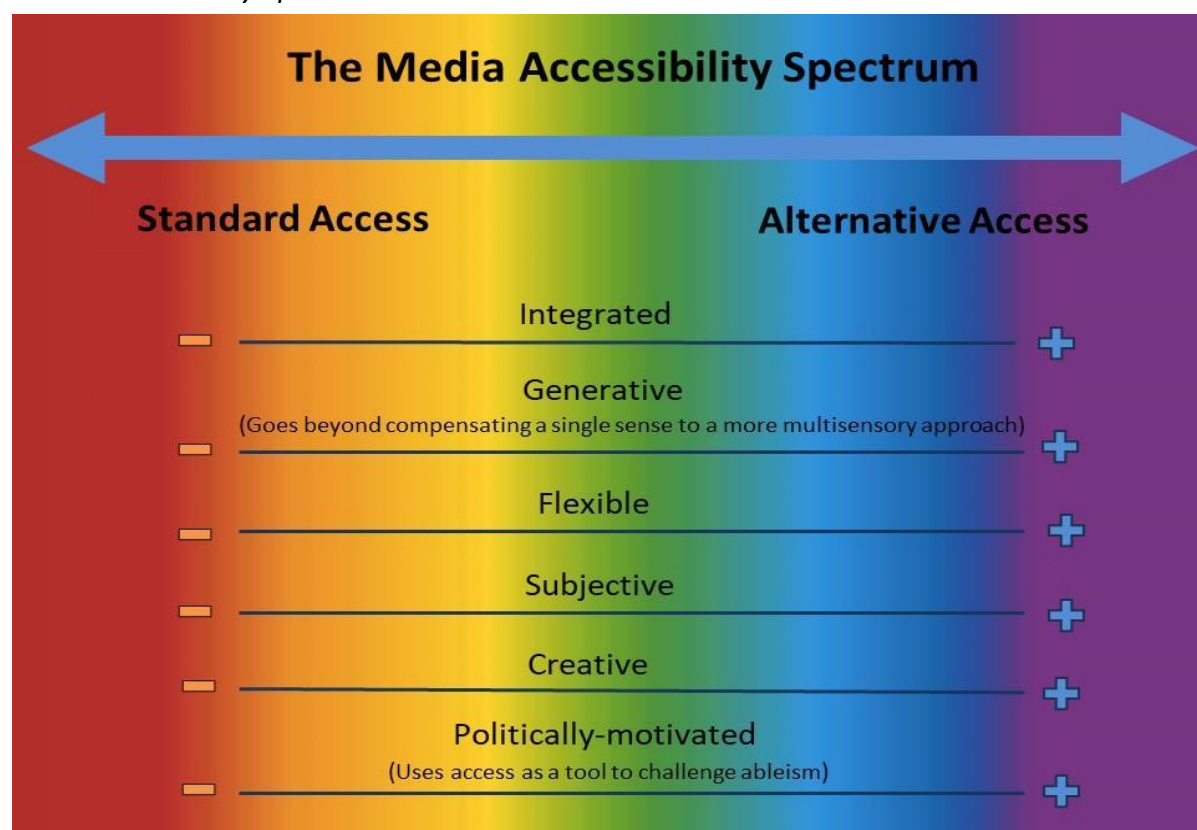
Source: Romero-Fresco (2024).

In theory, standard access is more likely than alternative access to be built around guidelines and requirements, but this does not mean that all these guidelines need to be very strict or prescriptive.

The latest Ofcom (2023) guidelines, for instance, turn away from the requirement-heavy, one-size-fits-all approach that they used to follow and move along the spectrum to incorporate some of the traits that could be ascribed to alternative forms of media access. They recommend accessible filmmaking and acknowledge that media access is a creative endeavour that seeks not only to enable users' comprehension but also their enjoyment. They encourage broadcasters to adopt a flexible view of access so that it can cater to different types of users and include alternative approaches beyond traditional access practices. Likewise, artists such as Carolyn Lazard (2019) and Documentary Filmmakers with Disabilities (FWD-Doc, 2021) and organisations such as Unlimited (2018) and The Space (2023), all of whom would be placed closer to the alternative media access side of the spectrum, have also produced guidelines and codes of practice. Inevitably, they look different to official guidelines (less prescriptive, more open, featuring examples rather than rules, etc.). Still, they are instrumental in explaining the ideas underlying alternative access and providing examples upon which to build new practices.

This leaves us with one unanswered question: If alternative media access ever becomes the norm, what would it be an alternative to? This is related to another concern that we have heard from professionals when they are exposed to alternative forms of media access, that is, whether alternative media access will ever become mainstream or whether it will remain the luxury of some access experts who manage to work with access-conscious artists, while for the bulk of the professionals, it is still a utopian scenario. To answer these questions, it is important to firstly point out that becoming mainstream is not the ultimate goal or measure of success for alternative media access, which exists precisely as a way to respond to and question mainstream practices. However useful as it may be, unravelling the principles that underpin standard access is only part of the job. We should be able to propose or imagine what a different type of accessible society would look like. As Benjamin (2019) puts it, "remember to imagine and craft the worlds you cannot live without, just as you dismantle the ones you cannot live within" (p. 14).

This is what many of the people working on "radical access" are currently doing. A good example is the Melbourne Fringe Festival (2022), which has set up a ten-year social change project in partnership with Arts Access Victoria to introduce a "radical version of best practice accessibility for the independent arts sector" that moves beyond standard, compliance-based access to a model based on participation and leadership by disabled artists, non-discriminatory representation of disability and integrated and creative approaches to access in the arts. In an online event organised by Melbourne Fringe and entitled "Radical Access: The Future of Access" (State Library Victoria, 2023), a group of artists were asked the following question: "In your future, what does an inclusive arts industry, practice or experience look, sound and/or feel like?" One of the participants was the Deaf Australian artist Asphyxia, who presented Amplio, an app that enables Deaf people to engage with music through a multisensory experience. In the following lines, Asphyxia speaks to us from 2063, letting us into what her imagined accessible future looks like:

> Back in 2023, I started to design an awesome vibrational experience for music. Now, 40 years later, that's a very sophisticated area. Many people are designing amazing vibrational

experiences. It's at a completely new level. People have awesome tactile experiences and they're just making new ones every day. Hearing people love it as well and are learning how to listen not just with their ears but also with their body, through their senses. They're experiencing an immersive musical experience, so it's become a mainstream way now.

But it took deaf people to get us there.

In order to move towards this creative and multisensory access, it is necessary to upend the ableist roots that keep disabled people away from decision-making:

Now, 40 years into the future, we, people who are deaf and have a disability, are all in leadership roles. All those old ideas about what equals success, beauty and value have completely shifted. They're not just aligning with the perspective of white, CIS, male, able-bodied people and their experience of the world. We're thinking again about the bottom line and we've changed what we think are non-negotiables and what are optionals. We've decided to be inclusive of the needs of everyone in our plans and not just the need of a few people at the top.

As we come back to the reality of our current access spectrum in 2023, the above lines serve as a reminder of the kind of world we do not want to live without.

Acknowledgements

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