



CARRIE SANDAHL

Interview Date: March 24, 2021

Image Description: Text reads “The Remote Access Archive” atop a screenshot of a Zoom shared screen, which shows a work of art by Yo-Yo Lin. The art is a white and grey blob on a black background. The bottom shows a series of grey buttons, along with an orange chat button that is lit up. A speech bubble above it “From Dominika to everyone” says “yes same issue with audio.”

KEYWORDS

academia, captions, collaborative access, COVID-19 pandemic era, digital event moderation, disability arts, disability community, disability knowledge, higher education, hybrid access, hybrid teaching, in-person, remote socializing, remote work, video chat, Zoom

IDENTITIES GIVEN

white, woman, disabled person

LOCATION

United States

Introductions

Kelsie Acton:

Okay, so, could you start by telling us your name and where you currently call home?

Carrie Sandahl:

Sure. Carrie Sandahl, and I live in Oak Park, Illinois, in the US.

Kelsie Acton:

And what words do you use to describe your race and gender?

Carrie Sandahl:

I'm a woman, and I'm white. I'm 54, almost 55.

Kelsie Acton:

And, just because we are recording video, do you mind giving a brief visual description?

Carrie Sandahl:

Sure. I am a white woman with short, brownish blonde bobbed hair, glasses, and a velvety burgundy shirt sitting in my home office. There are bookshelves in here, and my wheelchair is parked behind me.

Kelsie Acton:

Brilliant. And this is Kelsie doing this interview, I'm sat in a... well, I'm a white woman with clear glasses, mid-30s. My brown hair is very frizzy today, and it's pulled back. And I'm sat in a white room with a picture of a multicolored deer over my shoulder. Okay, so do you identify as a disabled person or a person with a disability?

Carrie Sandahl:

I prefer "a disabled person", but I will accept person with a disability. I interchange the two depending on context and who I'm talking to, so I'm fine with either.

Kelsie Acton:

Awesome. And do you consider yourself to be a part of disability community or disability culture?

Carrie Sandahl:

Yes, both. I'm very strongly identified with both.

Kelsie Acton:

Do you mind saying just a little bit about that?

Carrie Sandahl:

Sure. Gosh, it's... disability identity is infused in every part of my life. I'm a professor of Disability Studies in the Department of Disability and Human Development at the University of Illinois at Chicago. So my literal work is on the topic of disability. I teach classes in disability arts and culture. I co-direct a disability arts and culture organization called Bodies of Work, which is a network of disability art and culture that exists to support the development of creative work that illuminates the disability experience in new and unexpected ways. That's a mini elevator speech about who we are.

And I'm an artist, and a lot of my work, pretty much all of it, addresses disability experience in one way or another. I run an artist residency program for artists with disabilities. My whole identity is informed by my impairment experiences, which were present at birth. Everything, too, is changing as I age and acquire new impairments. I have two disabled children with impairments very different from mine. So disability is steeped in my every day: my work, my life, my perspective, my body. So, yeah, a "disabled person" is pretty much who I am.

Remote Participation - Hybrid Classes, Event Accessibility, and Zoom Fatigue

Kelsie Acton:

Amazing. So have you participated in remote forms of participation? For example, Zoom, like what we're using right now, during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Carrie Sandahl:

Yes. So during the pandemic, or before?

Kelsie Acton:

I think we ask about before later, but also this is your interview. If talking about before, feels important, let's start there.

Carrie Sandahl:

Let's start before the pandemic. I was just getting used to using Skype or Google Meet for occasional student advising or distant collaborations, since that's what people were using at the time, but these services were very glitchy so I preferred not to use them. I tried to do almost everything in person or by telephone whenever possible. I am a strong lover of in-person interaction. I'm a theater and performance scholar/artist so in-the-flesh liveness is central to what I study and to what I find essential for effective communication in human relationships. Since 2015, though, I have taught an online, asynchronous version of my Disability in American Film class, which alternated with the in-person version each academic year. I started the online version to provide more access to the material for students in myriad situations: new parents, deployed military, those with disabilities, and so on. We would also provide access via Skype for some of the disability art and culture events that we would do, as a remote option, but the remote was very, again, glitchy and not all that great.

Since the pandemic shutdown in the spring of 2020 until the spring of 2023, I have been teaching exclusively online – not my favorite thing to say the least. This semester, I am still teaching my undergraduate course online and asynchronously, but I'm back to having a grad seminar in person, although it's hybrid and kind of complicated that way. Since the shutdown, I have hardly gone been on campus. This semester, with my in-person class, I only go to campus once a week because so many people are still getting

sick, and we're around vulnerable populations. So yeah, online almost all day, in one way or the other.

Kelsie Acton:

Amazing, and I picked up just like a couple of things. So you mentioned that pre-pandemic, you had tried out some remote options for disability arts events. Can you tell me what those were?

Carrie Sandahl:

Sure. So our arts organization Bodies of Work has ongoing programming: exhibitions, performances, lectures, panels, special projects, and an artists-in-residence program. We have a cohort of four artists per year: each resident is asked to provide one student-oriented event and one in-person event. Some of our events are co-presented with UIC's Disability Cultural Center, which Margaret Fink directs, or with two programs Sandie Yi directs – the Disability Culture Activism Lab at the School of the Art Institute Chicago and the Art and Culture Project at Access Living. Margaret and Sandie were both great about providing online access to live events even before the pandemic. I have to say, though, that the pre-pandemic events with remote access were not really integrated hybrid events. We often had a camera streaming onto Skype, but not much attention was paid to the online experience and I'm not ever sure that that many people even logged in. Also pre-pandemic, I might occasionally Skype in a guest lecturer or artist, but that was rare because the technology was so glitchy. I have to say I was a "liveness" snob as a theater and performance person and, as I've admitted, the online access to our events in the past was not as well-considered as it could have been. But since the pandemic, that's all changed.

Kelsie Acton:

[laughs] Sorry, I'm also like... I really appreciate that phrasing, it's quite lovely. Can I also, this might jump around a bit, because I'm just trying to pick up on the interesting things. You mentioned hybrid teaching. Can you talk about some of the complexities of doing that right now?

Carrie Sandahl:

Right now I'm teaching a graduate seminar called Disability and Culture. We meet once a week on campus; the class size is about ten people. Unfortunately, the technology in our classroom is very poor, which makes hybrid teaching infinitely more complicated than teaching from home with everybody on Zoom. My students have a variety of access requirements, so hybrid teaching makes the class accessible to them. Some of them are at high risk of complications due to COVID and would not take my class at all if it were only delivered in person. Since the pandemic we've gotten some new graduate students whose primary way of participating has been hybrid, which made graduate school even possible for them due to their access needs. I have a couple of students who have only come to campus a few times ever. In my hybrid classes, I have an open invitation for disabled artists in the community to pop in on my class via Zoom to participate in discussions or share their work with the class. So that's really cool. But, hybrid teaching with students in person and online has been very difficult due to bad technology in the classroom that we can't seem to get resolved properly. The problem is that the camera captures little detail of people's faces and doesn't cover the whole room. Also, it's difficult to hear everyone, even when we use microphones. It's been very frustrating. We had to come up with a hack to make the class meaningfully hybrid given the situation.

What we do is have everybody who is in person brings their laptop to class, and everybody logs onto Zoom. This way, everyone on and off Zoom can see each other's faces and hear the speakers using their laptop sound systems. However, for those participating remotely, we need to use the speakers in the room so they can be heard by everyone in person. Using mics this way, though, can result in ear-piercing feedback when a laptop mic and the room mic/speakers are on at the same time. To minimize feedback, we have created a complicated microphone choreography to ensure that the room mic/speaker and a laptop mic/speaker are not on at the same time. If someone who's participating remotely wants to speak, I have to remember which buttons to push to turn off the room mic but leave the room speaker on so there's not hideous feedback. And then if I want to speak, it's another constellation of buttons to remember to push so that I don't create feedback. If the students present in the room want to talk,

that's another set of buttons we have to push. I've created a written key chart so we remember which combination of buttons need to be pressed each time anyone in these scenarios wants to speak. As a group, we made a commitment to collective access. Since the class is almost all disabled artists/students, we are all extra sensitive to making sure our access hacks works as well as possible. Students take turns monitoring the chat. Since everyone has their laptops, people in person and people on Zoom can see everybody's else's face equally (though individuals can turn off their cameras should that be an access need on their part). Also added to this mix is a live captioner as we have a hard of hearing student. The captioner has told me this is the most accessible class she has provided captions for because we are all so careful to be sure that we are speaking into our individual microphones. Being able to see everyone's face clearly when speaking also provided additional access to my hard of hearing student as well as my student who is an English language learner because they can clearly read the lips of those participating on Zoom (those in person are masked) Despite our best efforts, the hideous screeching feedback goes off several times each class, but it's become a running joke, and everyone helps each other to remember which buttons we're supposed to be pushing.

Another benefit of this hack is that the process has really slowed down the conversation. And I think I have more participation by people who tend to be quiet because everything's slowed down. Only one person can speak at a time when people can't jump over each other because of the complicated microphone choreography. We're all finding this collective access experiment super interesting as a disability culture endeavor in and of itself. I think I'm gonna keep this access hack going in perpetuity unless we get much better technology for hybrid teaching. At the least, I will continue to ask everyone to bring their laptops; almost everyone has them with them anyway, and have their face on Zoom, because it's so nice for people who are participating remotely, to have access to each other's faces, even though those in person were masked. I'm proud of my students and myself, because I'm not technologically inclined to have figured out this hack.

Nobody else is adopting this method in my department because it's too complicated. And your students really have to be committed to the collective nature of the hack. Everybody in my class is committed, not only because they're mostly disabled themselves, but because the class itself is about experimentation in disability arts and access. I'm loving it, I'm loving how everybody helps each other.

This has been kind of a long-winded answer, but it's, I think, a good example of crip ingenuity and commitment and things that I'll keep doing or figure out how to do better when everything is back in person. It's amazing to be able to have disabled artists from the community participate in these conversations without having to formally audit or travel from a far-away suburb; they can just pop in when we're covering a topic of interest.

I do have to say this sort of teaching is exhausting, though. It requires an intense level of concentration and stamina. And I do miss the lack of spontaneity because we are somewhat tethered to our laptops. It's a whole separate choreography of moving people with their laptops into different rooms if we want to do small groups. The process has been changing my pedagogy.

Kelsie Acton:

Yeah, it's really beautiful. And also, I love that you're acknowledging, like, the incredible level of complexity and labor that's involved. And I think it's telling that it's your class adopting that and not the rest of the department.

Carrie Sandahl:

I think they would like to but, you know, it depends on who the students are, or how many people are in the class, I mean, we don't have very many classes in person right now. All of the undergraduate classes are still online. So it's just the graduate classes.

Kelsie Acton:

Yeah, yeah.

Carrie Sandahl:

Hopefully, that'll change. But given my own bout of COVID in February, I was able to teach while I was sick, which is positive and negative. My students helped me out. My throat was so sore, I was so sick, but I wanted to teach the class still so badly. There were two classes where we were all remote because of too many people sick with COVID. During the weeks I was too hoarse to speak, class members shared the labor of facilitating using the lesson plan I had prepared. If I was hoarse and I couldn't even speak, someone would just pick up where I left off. One time, when I was too sick to come to class, my students still elected to be in person and I was on Zoom. Half the students were remote, about half of them were there, but I was logged in to teach remotely. It was hard to lead the class, not being there in person to do the microphone choreography. But because they had been so involved in collectively helping me with the mic choreography, they were able to do it on their own when I wasn't in the room. We could have all just gone on Zoom. But people felt so so much value in being together that we made hybrid work and they trusted that no one's going to get left out if they couldn't be in person on a particular day.

Kelsie Acton:

Yeah, yeah. Can I slightly switch us and ask about Bodies of Work? So I'm presuming at the moment of the pandemic, you also had to suddenly put this like massive complex arts program online as well. Tell me a little bit about that.

Carrie Sandahl:

Well, we were in the middle of planning a festival when the shut-down happened. We had committees, people were putting together the programming from the proposals we'd received. They were writing grants. All of the work that went into planning the festival abruptly stopped. And we had to figure out how to keep our current programs going, how to plan ahead, how to do the stuff that was already on our plate that we were required to do, and then, it was just so stressful. It was so discouraging and difficult for all of us.

But we were able to meet online. And once people switched to Zoom, it was a lot better than Skype, or Google Meet, at least for us. Then things

got better, and we started using shared Google Docs to work collaboratively and share the labor of taking notes – that was a big game changer. What was the hardest was moving all our planned events online because the labor involved was much greater. On the plus side, we're hosting people coming from all over the world at our events, which is great. But then there's a downside, which is having to maintain a level of professionalism and the anxiety that comes with knowing that you're putting out something that's available to anyone in the world, rather than just like 15 people who show up for something. They might even be recording it. If the event ends up not being so great, it's very public. Very, very public! I mean, people have been very gracious and generous, but the pressure has made doing an event, probably five times more work.

An issue that increases labor cost and time is the growing expectation that all the online events be recorded and made available for later viewing. These recordings must be made accessible; we feel obligated to correct the captions that were generated live, for example. We also must have some sort of audio description for recordings, even if one was not needed during the initial event. Service providers charge an additional fee, and rightly so, if their work will be available by recording. We also need to secure additional permissions. Where are we going to store the recordings? Do we want these recordings available in perpetuity? Speaking of additional labor, one of the hardest things for me has been not knowing when these expectations were going to end because we have all been extending ourselves 250%. And it was like, we just need to meet this finish line – the finish line of the pandemic's end. We would plan ahead for things to be back in person, only to realize at some point that we'd still be online, and we had to switch up our plans again. While it has been awesome to attend remote disability art and culture events all over the world, at some point the access to everything became too much, participation began to feel like pressure, a strange obligation. And I remember, I mean, there were days where I would just go to different online events back-to-back-to-back-to-back with giddy excitement! But that level of participation was completely unsustainable. Even the recordings of online events became a backlog of things I wanted to—or was asked to—see. I felt obligated to watch all of them, which I realize was a pressure I

was putting on myself more than anything... With my particular impairment, that much screentime became excruciating with neck and head pain. I was injuring myself trying to do all the things! [laughs] And as a group, we were injuring ourselves because we were so committed to making things accessible and so excited to have access to everything.

But I think by the time it was maybe '21-'22, that school year, Bodies of Work admin realized that what we were doing was not sustainable. We had to cut our programming in half.

For me, personally, the pandemic shutdown came at a terrible time in my creative life. The documentary I had collaborated on (ten years in the making!), **Code of the Freaks**, came out. The premiere was the second week of March 2020. We had premieres planned on the West Coast, on the East Coast; we had, like five festivals in Europe, all got closed. The ReelAbilities Film Festival went online... I mean, it was amazing that a lot of festivals still screened the film online, but it was sad not to experience all the travel we had planned to see the film live in community with different kinds of audiences. We ended up getting invited to a lot of online discussions and panels as part of the film roll out. I was excited to have all these opportunities to share our work online. Before the pandemic, the opportunities were limited by time and space. I wanted to promote the film, but the online events surrounding the film became too much physically. I also realized I was repeating myself on numerous recorded events. I had saturated the events with anything I had wanted to say. My collaborators felt the same. Not only were we experiencing fatigue and saturation, but we wanted to pass opportunities to speak about the issues the film raised to other people in the disability community. Other activists, artists, and scholars, especially BIPOC individuals.

We ended up getting a grant for Bodies of Work to do some strategic planning during the early part of the pandemic. We wanted to focus our efforts on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Doing that work remotely was emotionally very difficult for all of us. I think we're much better at communicating on Zoom now, but the early days of the pandemic, when the internet sucked, it was not as fast, people would accidentally talk over

each other. We'd be talking about some very painful reckonings while experiencing technology glitches, each of us in isolation at home. A lot of good came out of the strategic planning, but the challenges of doing it remotely during that time was distressing.

Kelsie Acton:

It's something I want to, yeah, ask you. I hear when you're speaking, I hear this sense that going remote opened up a world of possibilities. But in some ways, some of those natural boundaries on your time because of geography just, like, vanished. There's not a question in there. I'm just reflecting back. Have I gotten it right?

Carrie Sandahl:

Yes, the overwhelm was not just with Bodies of Work or teaching, but with other work at UIC. In the before times, I would be able to turn down a meeting or committee work because I would be limited by time and geography from going from one side of campus to another. Or if I were to attend more than one meeting, there would be a natural break due to travel time. But now you are expected to be able to go to meetings back-to-back, and often without a break. It's really hard to say no now to online meeting requests.

During the pandemic, I think that people really kicked into gear grant writing. What happened to us is that some grant-funded projects were put on hold when the pandemic shut everything down. Then, during the shut-down, we applied for new grants. When things started to ease up, we received some of the grants we applied for, but then, the old grants that had been paused, unpaused. So now we had new things, and a backlog of funded activities to complete. And that was when I kind of just lost it. I was like this much work is not humanly possible, even if I can do all of it from home. Moving forward, we have been a lot more being intentional about overlapping projects and what we can take on at any given time.

Kelsie Acton:

Yeah. Do you feel like it helped you as an organization also be a bit more intentional about what were the things you really wanted to do? Just because online became so much work?

Carrie Sandahl:

Yes. But we are much more aware of making room to meet our obligations properly even as we get excited about new projects. One of the larger projects we took on was working on Kinetic Light's **Wired** at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.

Working on the access plan for **Wired** in May of 2022 was the first event my students and I did on a large scale and only the second in-person event we did since the shut down. For that event, we worked with the dance company and the museum to create a unique and extensive relaxed performance environment that was unlike any we had had done before with the museum. **Wired** was the first live performance that the MCA held after the shut-down so even getting audiences back in to the theater was a challenge, let alone a large audience of disability community members with myriad access provisions. The house of the theater and stage floor of the theater was reconfigured, new creative access features such as haptic wires that translated sound into vibrations, and Kinetic Light's innovative audio description technology "audimance" was rolled out for Chicago audiences. We had to keep ourselves and audiences safe with masking, social distancing, and vaccine requirements. Multiple remote streaming options were available or recorded for future use. And we had a crew of access doulas to welcome the audience into the space and acclimate them to the relaxed performance environment. My students, staff, and I had to consider what kind of risks we were willing to take, or could take, in terms of COVID exposure. We're trying to juggle specific rules of UIC, of the MCA, of the City of Chicago with the needs of the dance company, the needs of the audience, and our own needs. Hybrid and remote participation was part of the process from beginning to end.

Remote Access Now

Kelsie Acton:

So are you continuing to sort of do hybrid as you move forward?

Carrie Sandahl:

Most of the time. Yeah, every once in a while, we'll have something that's in person only. Our first in person event was called Access Praxis at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago with an artist named Justin Cooper. The event was an artist talk and audience engagement activity. We only did that event in person, because we couldn't figure out how to make everything work. Again, we were having to work with different regulations with the city of Chicago about whether masks needed to be worn or not. Our staff, students, and the artist all wanted the event to be masked and asked those attending to wear masks. This event was like the first time, for a lot of people, they'd seen each other in like two years. Our team tried to enforce masking and social distancing, and then what happened? All the crips showed up, started hugging each other, and taking their masks down, so they could read lips or be heard. Some had trouble breathing with masks on. And I was like, crips! [laughs] We had promised the audience accessibility and a masked experience to keep ourselves and our communities safe. Due to the crip exuberance in the room and competing access needs, we found ourselves in the position of having to police wearing - and keeping on - masks.

Even with all the frustrations and complications, it was still really beautiful. People were drawn to each other like magnets, it was so awesome, but was so dangerous, too. We have to keep a remote option because it's dangerous for many of us to meet in public. Yet we can't stop people from being human with each other. So when I saw that, it's like, okay, we have to keep a remote option going because there's no way to keep everyone safe in person. Even in our own community. And then who do they complain to? [laughs]

Kelsie Acton:

[laughs] Yeah, so as you move forward, you've talked a lot about like the labor and complexity of remote access. Are you putting, are there certain kinds of remote access you're focusing on as opposed to others?

Carrie Sandahl:

We were doing events like artists interviews and panel discussions. And then we all got tired, and wanted to do something less presentational and more participatory. So we've started doing more online workshops, where people could make something together. We might have a short artist talk, because nobody's brains could be staring at a screen any longer. So we would have like a short opening, and then an art-making activity or movement activity. People have really enjoyed those.

Kelsie Acton:

Yeah, that makes sense.

Carrie Sandahl:

Yeah, so the things we'll be doing are more low tech.

Kelsie Acton:

Yeah. I'm just looking at the questions because I know I caught us a little bit off track, but I wanted to ask.

Carrie Sandahl:

No, I totally did. I think we've wended our way through a lot of the questions... so you had a question on here about being denied access to remote participation? I haven't, I think that's where a lot of my privilege lies, because I don't rely on the captions. Captions help. But I'm not, I don't need them to be able to participate. And I don't need audio description. But I have noticed, lack of such access to online events or meetings happening to other people. We've been working hard to make sure we don't perpetuate that harm. Sometimes cost is an issue if an event is ticketed. So almost all of our events are free.

Kelsie Acton:

So are you saying that you feel like remote access isn't necessarily the issue, but things like CART or interpretation, and anything served with a financial cost attached starts to become the barrier remotely?

Carrie Sandahl:

I think so? For example, sometimes events won't have the resources to get an interpreter. So they'll rely on the AI captions. And maybe those don't work well for whatever reason... Or maybe someone needs to request an accommodation by such and such date. If that deadline is missed, those who need it don't have the luxury of deciding to attend something last minute. I've also seen people forcing themselves to attend something if they've made a request, but don't feel up to going, because they don't want to disappoint the event producers who arranged and paid for accommodations for them. That sucks, too... But for me right now, it's almost like, too many opportunities. Because I want to see everything. As disabled artists, it's so hard for us to see each other's work. And we've had to travel a lot to see each other's work or go to conferences or festivals or... So now all of a sudden, everybody's having all their work out there. And it's incredible. And I want to be part of it. So often doing too much is my own undoing. A lot is being archived right now, too. I feel like scholars and artists of the future are gonna have a heyday when they want to explore the disability art of this period.

Kelsie Acton:

Yeah. I'm gonna do one of those things where I say a sentence, and let's see if I get to a proper question by the end of it. I feel like you're getting at something here, where you have this big disability arts community that's actually quite like national and international, I imagine. But then, once everything went remote, the sort of like, ways you were a community changed very fundamentally, that it wasn't like emails, and, you know, a trip every few years.

Carrie Sandahl:

Yeah, that's true. This flurry of opportunities to see more work hasn't always been good for my bodymind. Because too much screen time exacerbates my impairment. Barriers are not quite as geographical as they are the limits of what your bodymind can handle. Now you can see something that is going on in Switzerland, or Germany, or New York, or Los Angeles. In the disability art community, we are excited to invite others to our online events. We can get disappointed if people don't show up. I've been on both sides of this disappointment.

Kelsie Acton:

Oh, interesting. Okay.

Carrie Sandahl:

I've learned to not have any hurt feelings if someone I've extended an invitation to it isn't able to make it, really respecting people's time and boundaries. Just because it's remote doesn't mean that everyone can consume everything all the time.

Kelsie Acton:

Yeah, it's actually really beautiful in some ways, because I think disability culture often extends people that kind of grace about in-person stuff. So it makes sense that we should extend the same grace around remote events. But maybe that, we need to learn that.

Carrie Sandahl:

It took a little time for people to realize that, just because you can see so many things, doesn't mean you should, or that it's good for you all the time. So that's hard. But one thing that was really cool is that in the fall of... no this, when was it? Time loses meaning as we all know, the pandemic, but I had, during the fall semester of '21, I had surgery on my ankle, it was a very major surgery. I was on medical leave for ten weeks. I was able to do the surgery during the pandemic. Before the pandemic, it would have been, not an emergency or anything. But it was something I really needed to get done. So I was like, okay, I'm gonna do it. I was slated to give a keynote at a conference in Germany and I thought I would still be able to do it online.

But the surgery was way more painful and slow going than I was led to believe it would be. As the day approached for the talk, I was on so many painkillers. I couldn't even write anything. So I contacted the organizers, and they were so awesome. We decided to have a three-way conversation on the conference topic and called it, [Crippling the Keynote](#)." I was in my bed, I had made almost like zero effort with my appearance. I was in pajamas, lying on a bunch of pillows, pretty drugged up. But we had so much fun with that.

We thought about what does it mean to really crip the keynote? Usually, I'd go buy a new outfit and rehearse, rehearse, rehearse, and write something that I felt was worthy of the occasion. But I was just like, hey, everybody, I'm on a lot of painkillers right now. The conference was online, and everyone was so gracious. I tried to apologize and say, I can't do this. But in crip solidarity, the organizers, Noa Winter and Kate Marsh, said, "let's make it work, and let's do it together." I couldn't do it by myself. Another great instance of collective access.

Kelsie Acton:

[laughs] That's an amazing story. Thank you for sharing that. Is there anything I should have asked about that I didn't, or I guess, imagining 200 years from the future anything you want those disabled folks to know about this moment?

Carrie Sandahl:

I think it's a time of incredible change. And that the disability community is... I think we're really interrogating what disability culture is, what a disability identity is. I think more participation has increased our thinking around how we should think more in terms of coalition building and allyship rather than coming together under just the one term: "disability." Now, for instance, if someone doesn't want to identify as disabled, I'm less hurt and offended. I'm more curious now about why that person does not identify as disabled, what's the painful point there? Why doesn't disability identity work for you? People identify as mad, or neurodivergent, or chronically ill, deaf. There's so many ways that people do or do not identify with the term disability.

But I think remote has enabled us to have many more of those conversations, and to be in the same virtual room to deal with some of the hard stuff that I think would have been even harder if we had saved those conversations for the rare in-person meetings. So I'm just seeing the disability art and culture movement more like a kaleidoscope: fracturing and building and growing and less of a consolidating. And I don't know what that means, whether the movement will become so fractured and

decentralized that it ceases to be something that can be held together. But I think we'll find out in the next five to ten years. Change is necessary, but I don't know where that's gonna lead us. And, you know, I want to be there for the movement's next iteration, whatever that may look like.

I have spent so much of my career trying to make Disability Art and Culture a thing. So when people would disidentify or disavow, or form parallel, offshoot, or intersecting movements, I would feel like our progress was under threat. I've just had to check myself and ask, what does this mean? Without an overarching category, it makes it harder to write grants. It makes it hard to convince people that there's a rubric to organize around for a festival or a gathering. This conundrum is why disability is so endlessly fascinating.

Kelsie Acton:

Yeah. And do you feel like, you said you felt like remote had enabled those conversations? Do you feel like those conversations are still mostly remote? Or are they like, hybrid now?

Carrie Sandahl:

I think hybrid, but I still think mostly remote. Because I think what it's allowed is, let's say, for example, a group of Black Mad folks who might be meeting on the South Side of Chicago. They were not coming up to disability arts event on the North Side, nor did they feel connected to it. So there was the identity barrier, but also the geographic barrier. So now, there's all these spaces where we can be together and have conversations that we didn't have before. So I think remote allows more lower stakes conversations that can take root and evolve because if you haul your ass from one side of Chicago to the other and it takes you two or three hours a couple of trains for something that you don't really know you could be part of, or want to be part of, then why would you show up? But remotely, people are talking to each other now.

Kelsie Acton:

Sounds like really exciting and hopeful to me the way you describe it, actually.

Carrie Sandahl:

I think so. But it's also like the movie **Everything Everywhere All at Once**.

I think we are all going to have to learn to pace ourselves better. With all this excitement, it's just so easy to get so revved up

Kelsie Acton:

Yeah, I'm looking at the time, and I want to like, as much as it's a pleasure to chat to you, I want to respect it. So are there like any very last thoughts that you want to share?

Carrie Sandahl:

Just thank you. This has been a fun conversation. And I think that by going forward and backward and thinking through what's happened, it's helped me see some of the connections your questions have prompted.

Kelsie Acton:

I'm glad and thank you. This has been a really lovely, insightful interview. So thank you so much.