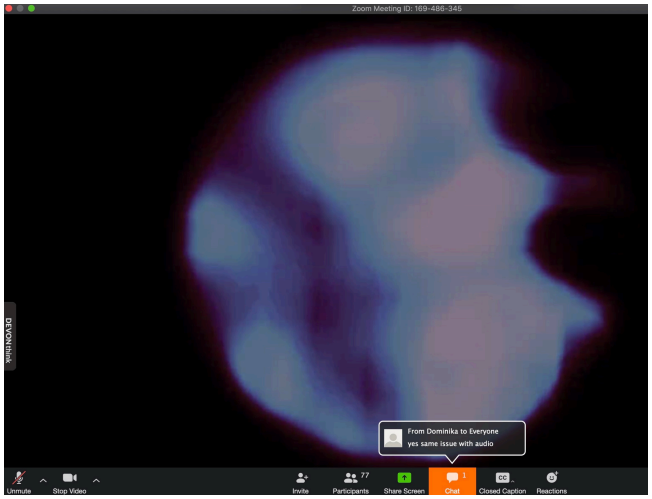

JULIE DIND

Interview Date: April 18, 2023

Image Description: Text reads “The Remote Access Archive” atop a screenshot of a Zoom ıared 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 uttons, 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, autism, belonging, correspondence courses, COVID-19 pandemic era, disability arts, higher education, home, international students, policy, online teaching, remote work, video chat, visa, Zoom

IDENTITIES GIVEN

white, woman, disabled person, autistic person

LOCATION

United States

Introductions

Kelsie Acton:

Let's start with the usual. Can you tell us your name and where you currently call home?

Julie Dind:
My name is Julie Dind, and the place I call home is a complicated question. I'm at the moment in France, which is the place where I grew up. But I'm a PhD student in Providence, Rhode Island, so I guess that will be home at the moment. But I'm finishing my PhD next year, so I don't know where home will be. I guess that's home!

Kelsie Acton:
Very fair. What words would you use to describe your race and gender?

Julie Dind:
I'm a white woman.

Kelsie Acton:
Awesome. Do you mind giving a short visual description of yourself?

Julie Dind:
Sure, so I'm a white woman with very long — but you can't see it at the moment, because I have them in a ponytail — light brown/dark blonde hair, I guess, and I'm wearing a very bright hand-knitted sweater, which is pink and white.

Kelsie Acton:
Magic. I'm Kelsie. I'm a white woman in my late thirties, long brown hair as well, and today purple glasses. Would you identify as a disabled person or person with a disability, or other words?

Julie Dind:
If I was to write about myself, I would say I'm a disabled person, I prefer using "disabled person." I don't have very strong feelings about people using "person with a disability" to describe me, but I would prefer "disabled person," though I'm fine with both. I most often describe myself as an

“autistic person,” though. I would not like to be described as a “person with autism,” on the other hand. This is not something I would like in a description of me.

Kelsie Acton:
Very fair. Do you consider yourself to be part of disability community or disability culture?

Julie Dind:
I would say so!

Kelsie Acton:
Do you want to tell me more about that?

Julie Dind:
I mean, this is one of the wonderful things. I grew up in France, where I did not have the impression that there was a (disability/autistic) community to be part of. That's part of the reason why I came to the US. First with the Fulbright Program, and then to do my PhD. (I initially came to the US as part of the Fulbright program to study at an art school and to learn more about the Neurodiversity Movement, disability studies and disability culture.) I'm grateful that there is a community I can feel part of, and which I can connect to with my work and with other things, so I consider myself part of both (the disability community, and disability culture). It took me time to get there, but I consider myself part of both.

Personal Protective Purple Daikon

Kelsie Acton:
Lovely. So tell me about Personal Protective Purple Daikon. How did it start for you?

Julie Dind:
It started with the pandemic, and the experience of taking an art class during the pandemic. Part of the reason I took an art class during the pandemic was to have access to spaces where I could do art, and things changed a little bit because we moved online. The pandemic was this weird moment, especially as an international student, where I had no idea what

was happening. Like, everything is happening. We don't know if…we don't know what will… is happening. We keep receiving emails saying “Maybe you need to go home. Maybe you don't need to go home. Maybe it's not safe for you to go home. Maybe if you go home you can’t come back But maybe you need to go home.”

And that's the question about home. That's the moment where it's like, “Okay, I need to go home. Where is home?” Because at that moment, I thought it was the place where I was at. And then in the middle of this, I'm still taking the class, and we need to do projects for the class. And this is the moment where the question is, “Okay, we need to do projects. But I have no idea where I will be next week. And like, can we have a break, and acknowledge that the situation is a little bit weird at the moment, and that making an art project might not be my priority at the moment?” So in a way, that's how it starts.

Kelsie Acton:
What did you make? Tell me what Personal Protective Purple Daikon is.

Julie Dind:
I made a personal protective equipment out of purple daikon (which is a delicious vegetable), using the peel (I was eating a lot of daikon at the time, and the peel is very beautiful). So I decided to use that to make a mask. And I think, in a way, it's the question that, like…I took an art class to have access to a space, and to have access to facilities, and to be able to make art. And that's the moment where it's like, “Okay, you’re home. You have no supplies, but just make something because it's the pandemic, and you have to be very productive and very creative and make something amazing, because now you have a lot of time.” I think it's my way of reacting to that. It's a messy project. I had a lot of vegetable peels drying in my home. Also, I was quite annoyed by the way things were framed, where making art was regarded as what would “keep us sane” during the pandemic. I don’t think I qualified as being “sane” before?

It was a messy and weird project. Daikon peel was drying everywhere in my flat. I went to Zoom calls wearing my masks.

Kelsie Acton:

And how did it— okay, this isn't on the list of questions. But how did people react when you showed up with vegetable protective equipment?

Julie Dind:
It was an art class. That's the good part about being in an art class people are used to people being weird. So I think it was okay. I went to other non-art classes, plus meetings with my mask, usually in places where I knew, "Hey, I will be fine." I think people found it fun. I think so. People did not necessarily understand it, and I think my point was not necessarily that people had to understand it.

Shifting Relationship with Remote Access

Kelsie Acton:
You write really beautifully in this article in Lateral about research creation as an active dialogue, and this art piece as a dialogue with that initial moment of the pandemic. But now, you say it's lost currency in the current world. Can you tell me a little bit more about your relationship to remote access in this current moment of the pandemic?

Julie Dind:
I think I still have a relationship to remote access. We are doing this (Zoom call) at the moment. So, this is remote access as well. But I think it's different, because at the beginning of the pandemic, that's what we (disabled people) were doing and that's what everybody (disabled or nondisabled) was doing. This is not the case anymore. I think there was something very specific about the early days of the pandemic, about everyone being in their home during lockdown, and how remote access functioned then.

Remote access still happens, but not in the same way. That's still the case for some people. That's still the case for me at times. But that's not the norm anymore, as it was during the very beginning of the pandemic. During the early days of the pandemic, I was taking all my classes online, I was teaching online. That's not something I could do anymore, specifically, because I'm an international student. If I was in the US, I couldn't do that anymore and keep my visa. I think there is a change around remote access; it doesn't work the same way anymore. I feel that in many cases,

remote access has been back to…people have been putting it back to what it was before, that is an accommodation which we give *sometimes*. I'm taking part in a conference; well, the disability-related working group has access online. The other groups do not. So there is this change around remote access. Whereas at some point it was mandatory, because we were all in lockdown, and it had to be, now people are hoping to go back to "normal," when remote access was an exception. I feel sad that things have changed.

But in relation to remote access, I feel my relationship to it has changed because of the way it works in the university system. And then the world has changed. I was hoping that we would keep more options for remote access, and we're not necessarily keeping them anymore, because not everybody needs to be in lockdown anymore. And the care for the people who need to not be in this space doesn't necessarily exist in the same way.

Kelsie Acton:
You're saying that because policy has changed, you necessarily have to shift with it because of your position?

Julie Dind
Yes.

Kelsie Acton:
Do you feel comfortable telling me more about the restrictions on international students, about not having access to remote access? That's a bad sentence, sorry.

Julie Dind:
No, that's a good sentence. I'm not exactly sure about the guidelines at the moment, but I know that this was a big question during lockdown whether we could stay in the US if we were studying online. If you're studying online, then you're not necessarily considered to "need to be" in the country. And you cannot be an international student in the US taking a fully-online course load. You can take some online classes, but you at least need to have some in-person classes, to justify getting a visa and being in the country.

Classes have started back in-person at my university, so mainly if you're teaching a class, or if you're TAing a class, you need to be in-person because the students will be in-person. There are some exceptions to that, but it's a bit more complicated at the moment (if you want to teach or learn online). I mean, I'm still grateful. I will still be teaching an online class next spring, which I'm happy about. But I think it needs more work to do that.

Kelsie Acton:
Do you mind telling me — tell me if you don't wanna totally go off the plan — but do you mind telling me a bit about the work that's involved in teaching remotely?

Julie Dind:
Could you elaborate on the question more?

Kelsie Acton:
You said it requires a little bit more work, the online class. What kind of additional work does it involve?

Julie Dind:
I don’t think that teaching online requires more work in itself. But now that universities are “back to normal,” it is necessary to argue why one wants to teach online – so, that part is more work. In my case, the person I will be TAing for has asked to teach the class online, and because of that, I am able to TA the class online. I am not sure I would be able to ask for that by myself. In a way, it’s still considered an accommodation (and like all accommodations, one needs to show it’s “reasonable”).

Meltdown

Kelsie Acton:
Yeah, absolutely. You talk a bit about Personal Purple Daikon as autistic meltdown, and I was so caught by that. Was there a connection for you between remote performance and the experience of meltdown as research creation?

Julie Dind:

Sure, I like this question. I thought a lot about it, because first, I wasn't sure that I had an answer to that. I will say that a meltdown is usually something I will try to have in a private place like my home. If I knew I was going to have a meltdown in a class, I probably wouldn't go to that class, and I would stay home. But with the pandemic, everybody entered my home, because we had to be in class at home. So in a way, that's people entering into my private space. And if you enter my private space, you also get to experience the meltdowns I have in private. That's one connection I see. You enter my space, and the pandemic and remote access created a different relationship between “school” and “home,” where I didn’t have the option to miss school and go home to have a meltdown. People were in my space, so things worked around different lines. I think that's where I see the connection between the meltdown and the remote access.

You also, by the remote access, by getting access to my room on Zoom, get some degree of access to my meltdown(s). And I think that at times, a meltdown can be a creative act. It doesn't have to be, it isn’t always (a creative act). I think that Remi Yergeau is someone who writes amazingly beautifully on that, on the rhetoricity or the non-rhetoricity or the demi-rhetoricity of meltdowns and how that changes across times.

For me, the fact that remote access gave people access to *my* space was something very strong, linked both to performance, to meltdowns, and to my project. (As a side note the space captured by Zoom also often has to do with performance. The space captured by Zoom tends to be much less messy than the rest of my flat. And for this interview, I actually used my sister’s room.)

Kelsie Acton:
Yeah…! Sorry, I'm having like all these sudden feelings to what you're saying. I'm thinking, as another neurodivergent person, how hard I try to keep people out of my space, and I'd never thought about the invitation in. I'm also thinking about the acceptable public presentation of autism, which deeply excludes meltdowns, and how interesting that shift and break in the pandemic... There are no questions here. I'm just articulating things. I don't know if you have any thoughts and responses to that, as I search for good questions.

Julie Dind:

In a way, this is a strange phase, because I feel that the early days of the pandemic, in a way, for people who are around me, felt like an “acceptable” moment for me to have an autistic meltdown, where other times would not feel like that. Because of the pandemic, and because of the weird situation, everybody was experiencing weird feelings, and it was more acceptable. I don't know if an autistic meltdown as an artistic or an academic piece would always be received in the same way outside of this beginning-of-pandemic moment. So that's also a question I have. I think it worked at the time, because people were sharing the same feelings. In other moments, the meltdown might just be my meltdown, related to a specific situation which people do not identify as strongly with, and I don't think it would be acceptable in the same way, necessarily.

Kelsie Acton:
Yeah, I think you're very correct. I wonder if it's all tied back to the, “reintroduce that normalcy.” As soon as we move away from lots of people having remote access, and back to the “normal world,” all of this shifts, too.

Julie Dind:
But I'm hoping that people change. I also think that people are doing the work to make things better. Like, for me, your work (about access) is doing a lot of work for my meltdowns to work in the way I want them to. Things are shifting back to “normal”, or trying to shift back to “normal” — which is sad — But I think people are still doing the work (of creating access). I'm still hoping that things continue to change.

Kelsie Acton:
Do you have hopes for remote access or remote connection as part of this world we’re hoping for?

Julie Dind:
Yes, I think remote access is very important. It's interesting for me, because I have been an online and a remote student for years and years before the pandemic. I finished high school remotely. It wasn't online. It was pen and paper remote at the time, but that's the way I finished high school. I was an online student for part of university, and all these things were not part of the conversation before we moved online during the pandemic. So, I hope things continue (to move toward access), but I think that what the pandemic did was make it mandatory to give remote access, and that has shifted

back, and I find that sad. I think that conferences should be truly accessible, offering online access, not just the disability studies-related groups, because disabled people can want to take part in other groups than the disability studies-related ones. It's just sad, we know that we can do things on Zoom. We know it works, we know it has worked, and people are willingly not doing it anymore, which is just sad. It was possible. It works!

Remote High School in France

Kelsie Acton:
Could I ask you about the high school by pen and paper? I'm so caught on this. Can you describe, like, how were…were you receiving in packages through mail? How did how did high school remotely work?

Julie Dind:
That's part of the French system. It's a lot of disabled students doing that, but you can do it for a variety of reasons. What the French system does (or at least, did when I was in high school, which was many years ago) is that you can receive a package of school books and homeworks, and then you receive the package and you have all your coursework, and then you send the assignments back by the post. Then, they are mailed back to you (corrected and graded). That's how I finished high school. We started to have some online components to it, but mainly it was small booklets.

Kelsie Acton:
Amazing. Did you ever have any contact with anybody else doing high school remotely? What's that part of it? Or was it just you with the booklets?

Julie Dind:
It was mainly me with the booklets, but I think because I was doing high school remotely between 2005 and 2008, the internet was starting to be more available, and we had online forums where people discussed. I really saw the change when I moved to university online, that things were really working online in an actual format where you could see people, where you could have classroom discussion. I don't think I had the experience of having classroom discussions when I was in high school. It was me and my booklets.

Kelsie Acton:
And what was that moment like, of coming into university and learning how to have a discussion in a classroom online? Do you have any memories of that?

Julie Dind:
I mean, before I was an online university student, I actually started university in-person in Japan. I had that experience in-person, which was weird, because the Japanese system is very different from the French system. The French system is not discussion-based, so it's also the reason why we had these booklets, because it's not discussion-based. You learn by reading, you respond in writing, and that's it. We're not discussion-based, whereas in the American system, or even when I was in Japan and I was in an English speaking university, it was very much discussion-based, and it was completely new for me. So, I think by the time I started doing that online (having class discussions), it was something I was more used to.

Kelsie Acton:
Yeah, that makes so much sense. And I've suddenly learned so much about French educational systems, so thank you.

Julie Dind:
Things might have changed. This was a while ago.

Kelsie Acton:
Yeah, no, it's just very interesting to think about. There's been a lot of time and energy dedicated to trying to replicate online classroom discussions. And to think about the fact that, maybe, that wasn't actually important to a lot of educational systems is really, really fascinating.

Julie Dind:
But I also think it's interesting that during the pandemic, people have the impression that remote education was something new, when it really isn't.

Kelsie Acton:
I imagine the system you were in for high school was very established, and had been around for a while.

Julie Dind:
Yes, and it's also for people traveling. People do that for many different reasons, and I think it has been existing for a very, very long time. I won't say that the system was always amazing, but I probably wouldn't have finished high school without that. I think it is funny that during the early days of the pandemic, people were really talking about the fact that online education "won't work," that people wouldn't be able to follow. I was in the classroom, knowing that I had done that for years, when people said that remote education had no value, and people would probably not learn anything. It's like, "I'm in this classroom. That was my education for a very long time. And it's great to know that you don't value how I have learned." But yeah, it's always these weird differences in timeline.

Kelsie Acton:
That question of value is interesting. The fact that it's something that's often accessible for people in particular ways is inherently disvalued by valuing liveness and presence and being together.

Julie Dind:
I think it's also interesting, the value of being together in a classroom setting — I have had more intimate conversations, sometimes, during the classes I took online than during the classes I took in-person. But I think people think that there is necessarily something lost in being remotely accessible, being online, that it doesn't work the same way, that it won't have the same value. Sometimes I feel it has more value.

Kelsie Acton:
Yes, or different kinds of value, very much. Is there anything I should be asking you — about remote access or Personal Purple Daikon, because we've wandered all over the place — that I should have asked, but didn't?

Julie Dind:
I don't know. If you have other questions, I will be happy to answer. I'm not really good at staying on question.

Kelsie Acton:

Clearly, neither am I, and my brain is very tired today. I guess I'll ask, is there anything else you want me or want the archive to know about your experiences of remote access, either before or during the pandemic?

Julie Dind:
I don't know if I have a very articulate answer at the moment. I think that if I can re-emphasize that it's important that we continue offering remote access options, because they are important. And yeah, they should be. And we all have Zoom installed on our computers. So there is no excuse.

Kelsie Acton:
Yes. Amazing. Then, thank you so, so much for your time. I so appreciate it.

Julie Dind:
Thank you.