

accessibility in the arts workshop / discussion
by billie rain - may 23, 2013
www.billierain.com

- **part 1: outline - hour 1**
 - show video 1: bed: a place called home
 - **my disabilities:**
 - i have:
 - fibromyalgia
 - benign metastasizing leiomyomatosis
 - hashimoto's disease
 - multiple chemical sensitivities
 - reactive airway disease
 - traumatic brain injury
 - complex ptsd
 - dissociative identity disorder
 - how it effects my life:
 - i spend almost all of my time in bed.
 - when i'm in production with a film, literally all i do is work and lay in bed.
 - i have trouble with basic life things
 - breathing
 - eating
 - sleeping
 - cleaning
 - writing
 - comprehension & focus
 - i've built my day to day life around my capabilities and challenges. for example:
 - i'm mostly at home in bed
 - i consistently reach out to my community for help with food, cleaning, and other needs that help me live and work

- i work to maintain strong boundaries so i can live a life free of as much day-to-day ableism as i can
- **how does this effect me as a worker and artist?**
 - here are some of the problems i face:
 - number of hours i can work per week.
 - many jobs and/or artistic projects require a large time commitment, both in terms of overall time, and in terms of how many hours per day. i can't work as many hours per day as is 'normal' in the film industry as well as in most jobs.
 - air quality.
 - the air quality of sets, and other work environments need to be non-toxic for me to participate.
 - what extra lengths do i have to go to create those non-toxic spaces?
 - is a space even remotely accessible, or do i have to try to move the work to another space?
 - do i have the energy to take this on?
 - quality of life at work related to mental health
 - for example, i worked at a phone bank job and always had major anxiety attacks. how would i create an environment that would be less anxiety-inducing, even if the process was laborious or intensive in other ways.
 - lack of accommodation
 - i've had jobs that fired me because i asked for accommodations that they didn't want to meet.
 - i've worked on artistic projects that were not accessible, and therefore cut me out of the

process

- **what are the solutions?**
 - getting my needs met:
 - self awareness:
 - i've spent time identifying what my needs are.
 - self advocacy:
 - i make sure that i communicate those needs at the start of the project.
 - accountability:
 - we weed people out of the project who are unwilling to accommodate.
 - the billie bag
 - my personal health bag contains:
 - epi pen,
 - mask,
 - asthma inhaler and nebulizer,
 - fragrance free baby wipes,
 - a bottle of water,
 - emergence,
 - rescue remedy,
 - snacks for low blood sugar
 - air purifier on set
 - this helps me clean the air in the spaces i'm in
 - fragrance-free sets for cast & crew
 - trial sizes of deodorant, soap, shampoo, conditioner
 - time-limited work hours
 - i've identified that it's difficult for me to

work more than 6 hours a day or 16 hours a week. i make sure that i do not do this. on film sets, the film crew will arrive and set up before i get there, and then take down after i leave.

- having a unit b director
 - having someone who can work for me when i can't be there, who understands vision and needs
- accessibility production assistant
 - someone who can be on set with me who
 - has a specific understanding of what my needs are
 - is trained to deal with these needs
 - is paying attention to whether i'm getting these needs met
 - can advocate for me
- changing structures embedded in the film industry
 - environmental standards and air quality
 - part of the problem:
 - most feature film sets have trucks, vehicles, generators running engines
 - toxic make-up, hair-care, and special effects products
 - harsh cleaning chemicals
 - part of the solution:
 - implementing low-impact solutions to change the standards around lighting and vehicle needs
 - providing non-toxic products

- universal design principles
 - what is it:
 - designing all products and the built environment to be aesthetic and usable to the greatest extent possible by everyone, regardless of their age, ability, or status in life. for example:
 - curb-cut side-walks, or sidewalk ramps
 - low-floor or "kneeling" busses
 - applying it to film:
 - we go through every part of the filmmaking process and redefine it to meet the most needs possible.
- accessibility coordinator
 - we're trying to create a position on film sets for an accessibility coordinator. this person will assess the accessibility needs of people on set and coordinate to make sure those needs are met. this person is the liaison between the person who needs an accommodation, and anyone who could have an influence on that need being met.

- **how i'm trying to do this:**

- **I started my own company: dual power productions:**
 - dual power is an entertainment company in Seattle, Washington. We produce media that promotes understanding, critical thinking, personal development and social change. Our work can be serious, fun, thought-provoking, educational or absurd. We use a multi-faceted approach to getting

the message out. What's the message? In the words of Alice Walker, "Surely the earth can be saved by all the people who insist on love." In the words of Utah Phillips, "You've got to mess with people!"

- dual power is run by me, basil, and ponyboy.
- the projects that i've put out on dual power are:
 - fix this mess - my book of poems and art
 - heart breaks open - feature film
 - humor me - short film
 - r/evolve - feature film
 - love like a heart attack - forthcoming feature film
- here are a couple trailers of the feature films i directed
 - show video 2: heart breaks open trailer
 - show video 3: r/evolve trailer
- **wrap-up**
 - society has very very low expectations of me. the fact that we systematically attacked ableism within film, and the film industry, led me to be able to direct two films. it's a huge accomplishment. we're creating systems that allow us to repeat this process, and to inspire others to do the same.
 - having people around me that were allies and advocates, helped me to get all of these needs met.
 - if we don't change structures within the arts, people with disabilities aren't going to have the opportunities to tell stories, in the way we see fit.
- **part 2: discussion questions - hour 2**
 - what are some of the access barriers you've observed in the arts?
 - what are your ideas of ways to break through ableist

barriers?

- are there assistive devices, technologies, or accommodations that could be made available to people with disabilities in the arts?
- what are some of the resources for disabled people?