

INTERVIEW WITH DAVID BOBIER

THE FOLLOWING IS THE FULL INTERVIEW WITH DAVID BOBIER, WHICH TOOK PLACE VIA EMAIL. THANK YOU, DAVID, FOR YOUR INSIGHTS.

David Bobier is a hard-of-hearing media artist and the parent of two deaf children. He is a collaborator on Bodies in Translation (BIT) and co-leads the “Accessing the Arts” stream. David conducts research into employing vibrotactile technology as a creative medium at VibraFusionLab in London, Ontario. He also is founder and co-chair of Inclusive Arts London and has been conducting research and collaborative initiatives with the Deaf and Disability Arts communities in the UK. BIT is proud to have both VibraFusionLab and David Bobier as partners on the project.



The image is a colour photograph of David Bobier, with his hair pulled back in a ponytail, wearing a black sweater and glasses. His right hand is extended and adjusting a Vibro-projector.

WHAT DREW YOU TO BODIES IN TRANSLATION?

I think I first became aware of the Bodies In Translation project through Eliza Chandler. It was still in it's early development stages and Eliza encouraged me to consider being part of

it. She also introduced me to Carla Rice then as well. I remember having the loveliest Skype chat with Carla and between the two of them and their incredible spirit and energy I was hooked. As I became more familiar with the project in it's evolution and created a stronger connection with Carla and Eliza, I think I would have pleaded to be part of it. That, however, wasn't necessary, as they kindly welcomed me and VibraFusionLab into the family, so to speak! I believe 'like minds' quickly recognize each other and get right into the commonly-shared intentions.

Once that bond was made I was drawn to the comprehensive scope and vision of BIT. I was pretty much in awe of the amount of time and energy that was committed to the formation of such a project and to the gathering of such an elite group of researchers, academics, artists, elders, etc. It was also the affinity that I felt for the ambitious embrace of the project through its activism, its desire for change and its passion for nurturing a more inclusive society that hooked me. In the life work that we do around justice, accessibility and creative practices it can often be a solitary path. Through VibraFusionLab we have tried to carve a small 'space' for change. I saw Bodies In Translation as an exciting and humbling opportunity to join the incredible diversity of people and energies that make up the project and that will prove to be an instrumental force and a legacy in redefining the art of activism and the access to a creative life, in all its manner, for everyone.

Oh, and just an added comment – anytime I am given an opportunity to consider the role of inclusive technologies in the arts, let alone the opportunity to practice it, you pretty much have my attention!

IN WHAT WAYS DOES VIBRAFUSION'S WORK PUSH THE BOUNDARIES OF ACCESSIBLE ARTISTIC PRACTICES FOR CREATORS AND AUDIENCES?

With increased awareness through the Deaf and Disability Rights movements, the aging of the Boomer population and increased funding for research and development in Deaf and Disability Arts in Canada, the interest in sensory-based technologies in the arts is increasing. Through the creation of VibraFusionLab I have been able to provide access to some of these technologies to many artists from both the disabled and non-disabled communities. There is an evolving investigative interest in diversifying artistic practice to incorporate other-sensory or multi-sensory and other-modality or multi-modality experiences.

This project furthers my own personal desire of exploring, developing and integrating alternative sensory methods, stimulation and 'languages' such as the use of human biofeedback technologies, digital recording and software coding of natural phenomena. As well, the reimagining of existing inclusive technologies as alternative methods of communication and emotional connections through artistic practice will attract and accommodate a more diversified and integrated audience. I believe that other sensory

technologies, while developed for very practical inclusive use and for improved and enhanced life experiences, have enormous potential in providing more accessibility to art making and to greatly improved and more immersive access to art of all disciplines. This belief and artistic focus is the framework for this project and will form the singular basis for this research and the future development of my own artistic practice.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT FUTURE ACTIONS FOR ACCESSIBLE ARTS PRACTICE?

First and foremost, we need to provide opportunities for the voices of those who are experiencing inaccessible art practices and arts venues and to reach out into the alienated communities to identify those who desire creative opportunities and those who are struggling to access arts education, art making facilities and arts organizations to be heard.

Along with this we need to develop trusting and healthy relationships with the people behind these voices to build best practices in breaking down these barriers and allowing these voices to be heard in the broader mainstream arts communities.

We need to inform these broader communities of the emphasis on the social model of inclusionary arts.

We need to recognize and honour those before us and their ambitious and innovative spirits that pushed the boundaries in accessible arts practices in Canada and who have been instrumental in challenging us to acclaim who we are and to celebrate what we have to say as artists.

We need to allow and to encourage a political as well as the personal voice within accessible arts practices.

I believe we need to develop greater connections with mainstream arts organizations, arts professionals and arts practitioners. Through these connections we need to influence and broaden their understanding of and appreciation for alternative practices in the arts. We need to encourage their commitment to diversified arts programming that is inclusionary of all artists and arts practices and to imagining new ways of providing access to the entirety of their arts programming. Equally vital is that these potential partners need to practice ongoing accessibility training individually and for their staff and to use available accessibility guides and resources.

We need to continue to work with arts funders to assure equality in their funding models and in their individual funding programs and we need to continue to emphasize the need for ongoing evaluation of the integrity and equality of their granting guidelines and jurying practices. As the accessible arts movement grows arts funders will need to continue to respond to the voices struggling to be heard.

My final thoughts are that we need to reach out to each other, encourage each other and congratulate each other as we move forward. We need to become a unified force through partnerships and collaborations. We need to share our thoughts and aspirations. And we need to continue to build on these hard-fought strengths and achievements to continue pushing this movement forward, to build a new force and identity in the arts community and to create our own space for it to thrive.

Oh, and one final comment – technologies used for accessible arts practices are pretty darn cool too!