

## RESEARCH ESSAY

# Access as Form: Inclusive Performance Design Beyond Accommodation

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Access is often added to performance after the central artistic determinations are complete. Captions, audio description, relaxed protocols, ramps, and sensory guidance then appear as parallel services rather than elements that can shape rhythm, space, and address. What would inclusive performance design become if access were treated as form from the first rehearsal? Access-led design expands artistic possibility when multiple modes of perception and participation share dramaturgical authority. Rather than asking whether the object is inherently progressive, authentic, communal, or memorable, the assessment asks how design timelines, disabled artists' selections, rehearsal changes, audience choice, sensory load, navigation, and feedback across access modes organize the interdependence between aesthetic structure and equitable agency in process.

A captioner joins development while dialogue is still changing. Caption timing reveals overlapping speech that is unintelligible for many audience members, leading the ensemble to turn selected overlaps into projected visual rhythm rather than merely transcribe them. Seen closely, the scene contains its own internal relational study: before and after, near and distant, permitted and discouraged, stable and revised. Those contrasts show how the connection between aesthetic structure and equitable agency is produced. They also identify which part of the view derives from evidence and which part remains a hypothesis about intention.

The case contains several positions that cannot be merged without loss. Makers, users, custodians, audiences, and later interpreters encounter design timelines, disabled artists' determinations, rehearsal changes, audience choice, sensory load, navigation, and feedback across access modes with varied authority. Mapping those positions shows how the connection between aesthetic structure and eq-

uitable agency is negotiated. The conclusion is warranted only where whether people can choose meaningful modes of encounter without receiving a secondary or diminished version, not where one well-documented perspective is allowed to stand for all others.

Inquiry matters because the phenomenon changes across time and position. Using participatory design account following how access requirements transform the work's formal development, the investigator can align design timelines, disabled artists' decisions, rehearsal changes, audience choice, sensory load, navigation, and feedback across access modes without pretending they share one perspective. The contrastive reading is disciplined by whether people can choose meaningful modes of encounter without receiving a secondary or diminished version; where that test cannot be met, the result should remain a question or a limited description.

A dance work integrates audio description through a performer who moves and speaks onstage. Description becomes a situated voice with perspective, while tactile orientation before the show changes how the choreography establishes space. Placed beside the first instance, this case alters the position's scale. The relevant difference is not medium alone but the distribution of choice. It demonstrates that the alignment between aesthetic structure and equitable agency cannot be inferred from appearance; it must be traced through the consequences of participation and the limits placed on revision.

The case alignment revises the central vocabulary. The tie between aesthetic structure and equitable agency is better understood as a contingent outcome than as a quality stored in a work or procedure. The approach of participatory design account following how access requirements transform the work's formal development identifies its material and social depen-

dencies, while contrary evidence prevents the concept from explaining every possible result and therefore explaining too little.

Claims of universal inclusion can hide conflicting access needs and pressure one design to serve every person in the same way. The force of the objection lies in its attention to scale. A operation may benefit one encounter while producing harm after repetition or institutionalization. Using whether people can choose meaningful modes of encounter without receiving a secondary or diminished version across those scales keeps the position from confusing a compelling episode with a durable public good.

Teams should include disabled leadership, budget access as core production, publish clear sensory information, offer alternatives, and document unresolved conflicts honestly. The proposal also redistributes expertise. Technical staff, contributors, caretakers, performers, users, and local knowledge holders may see separate failures. A process that allows those observations to redirect the work is more informative than consultation whose only product is institutional reassurance.

The archive for this topic will always be uneven. Design timelines, disabled artists' decisions, rehearsal changes, audience choice, sensory load, navigation, and feedback across access modes may document formal judgments closely while leaving informal negotiation unrecorded. Fieldworkers should treat that imbalance as a finding, seek accounts from those absent in official files, and avoid translating archival silence directly into agreement, passivity, or lack of expertise.

A further limit concerns causation. The presence of design timelines, disabled artists' decisions, rehearsal changes, audience choice, sensory load, navigation, and feedback across access modes may coincide with a change without fully producing it. Economic pressure, institutional history, bodily difference, or un-

related technical conditions can redirect the same form. Comparative account should therefore identify plausible rival causes and reserve causal language for cases in which sequence and mechanism are sufficiently documented.

Additional study should connect close reading with institutional history. Budgets, staffing, property, platform governance, training, and maintenance often determine whether whether people can choose meaningful modes of encounter

without receiving a secondary or diminished version can be met. Studying those infrastructures would prevent formal innovation from receiving credit for conditions supplied by hidden labor or from being blamed for constraints imposed elsewhere.

The stakes extend beyond this topic. Cultural work often gains authority by hiding the labor that organizes encounter. Making that labor legible does not dissolve expertise; it shows how expertise

can become answerable to people who meet its outcomes from varied positions.

Taken together, the two scenes show that the interpretation is relational and conditional. Accommodation changes into art-making when access expertise can redirect the shared form rather than decorate a finished plan. Inclusive performance does not remove difference from the audience; it composes with difference as a source of structure, choice, and connection.