

No Boundaries 2014

This is a transcript of a series of video interviews with Jo Verrent, Senior Producer of Unlimited.

Do you want me as part of your audience?

Do you want me as part of your audience? That's what I end up saying to myself a lot as I go and consume art product across the country. I'm hearing impaired, so if something has words I really need captions or subtitles or British Sign Language translation, or even a script in advance or an indication of what the words might be. But these things are really rarely available. They are not part of what we normally provide and I don't understand why. For me art is about communication, it's about getting a message across to an audience. And I always thought artists wanted that audience to be as wide as it could be, to allow as many people to access their work as possibly could. So I'm quite surprised that we haven't yet been able to integrate strands of access into our mainstream delivery, into what we just do as standard. We think 'Oh maybe deaf people it's a small audience.' But it's not. It's actually quite a big audience. Also things like that help a much wider range of people too. People who've got English as a second language. People consuming material in places where they can't have sound, if you're looking at video material in that kind of way. The only thing I can come back to is that somebody somewhere has made a decision to not include those people. That's the only reason that I can think of for those services not being part of the mainstream. They're not that expensive anymore. Yeah there's time, there's planning that needs to be taken into account, but it really is quite simple. So do you want me as part of your audience? If so, then include me.

Why don't we talk about the value, not the cost, of providing access?

I'm always surprised by the fact that we are so uncreative when it's comes to access. If you think we work in the arts because we're full of creativity, we like experimentation, we like new things that's part of the life blood of being involved in the arts, it's certainly is for me. Why don't we take that perspective and that approach into our consideration when we're looking at access? Looking at how we are making our work more accessible to a wider range of people? Why do we always go to the kind of easiest, simplest, possibly cheapest, but mostly mundane route? Why don't we actually look creatively and get enthused and excited about it? There is fantastic practice out there don't get me wrong. But it's on the margins and it's a tiny minority of work that actually gets that type of treatment. Why isn't that part of what everybody does? Every arts organization, every producer, every venue, every artist surely could creatively look at how they expand the reach of their work so that it includes more people. Why is that so difficult?

Are audiences simply a numbers game?

Is it simply about bums on seats? If so, then we are really missing a trick in relation to diversity. Diversity is never going to be simply about the numbers. It's got to be about who's included within that audience. If the only things we ever monitor are how many people attended something or how many people watch this. Rather than actually looking at the composition of who was included in that 'many'. Then we're never really looking at stretching out, and making sure that the work we create really does hit much wider demographic markers or other diversity markers. Why should we just produce work just for one narrow tranche of people and surely we want our work to reach a wider audience, and surely we want to make sure that different audiences are accessing that? But we are not going to get that if we simply count numbers.