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A review of Irene Hermosa-Ramírez, “Embracing community-based participatory research in Media Accessibility”**William Brown, University of British Columbia, Vancouver**

I am not sure that any changes are necessary — although I found that the early sequence involving the man identified as black signing that “your actions are useless” was a bit too rapidly edited (I did not have time to read the titles, and so had to go back and look at them again, unsure as to whether they read the same as what the voiceover speaks).

On a related note, I noticed that the deaf man here is identified as “black” (and visually ‘othered’ through the use of a red filter), while the main figure that we see (the author) is described as having “fair skin” (and “no filter”). While the term ‘fair’ goes some way to acknowledging race, I note that the person of colour is identified according to colour, while the white person is identified euphemistically (‘fairness’). Similarly, the stock footage, not described but deployed generally at times when the film is describing community-based participatory research, always includes people of colour. On one level, this is great: it suggests inclusivity and the like. But on another level, given that the paper is dealing with accessibility in relation to ability, there is a kind of implicit sense that race and ability are both ‘problems’ to be solved, and that these problems can be solved by inviting the ‘other’ to take part. Again, in some senses, there is a truth here: White hegemonic society has indeed historically excluded people of colour and disabled people — and continues in many ways to do so. But at the same time, this arguably runs the risk of reifying this difference. All this being said, the aim here is not to propose a solution; I am not sure that there is one. But it is to demonstrate that there are no easy solutions to accessibility; but even as it aims to question the very centrality of a white (‘fair’) and potentially paternalistic approach to accessibility, the film cannot but in some respects recreate just that.

This in turn begs the question: did this film employ the very approach that it is advocating? In its attribution of single authorship, it might seem not, even though the filmmaker does acknowledge collaborators. Has the film been screened to diverse audiences? What was their feedback? And if a film audience is too much a ‘user’ and not enough a ‘participant,’ then did such participants help in the conceptualisation and delivery of this work? And if so, how (and why is it not made visible here)? Perhaps this is too much to ask of this work, and I ask it only in the context of liking and endorsing this work. But this also feeds into some of the technical/technological aspects of the work: the voiceover mixes studio-based direct sound with voiceover recorded on what could be a smartphone or similar device. There is a large qualitative difference between these two voices, while the film also has a technical ‘rawness’ in terms of some of its edits (see above for not being able to read the deaf man’s subtitle). This is not necessarily a problem — for this cis-gendered male and white reader/reviewer. But one wonders to

what extent it affects the engagement of different audiences, if at all — and whether the film might address this issue.

This then further begs the question of accessibility in relation to the economics as well as the politics of film and media more generally; who can afford to make films/media that are 'clear' in their audio and visual delivery, and how does this translate into clarity for specialised audiences for whom texts such as this might need to be made accessible? Again, there is no (easy) answer to this question, but the paper leads to these wider issues — not only in a very exciting fashion (this is important work!), but also in a way that might begin to be addressed within its own bounds, perhaps...should the author wish to do so.

Biography

William Brown is an Assistant Professor of Film at the University of British Columbia. He is the author of *Non-Cinema: Global Digital Filmmaking and the Multitude* (Bloomsbury, 2018) and, with David H Fleming, of *The Squid Cinema from Hell: Kinoteuthis Infernalis and the Emergence of Chthulumediality* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020). Forthcoming works include *Navigating from the White Anthropocene to the Black Chthulucene* (Zer0 Books, 2023). He also makes no-budget films.

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