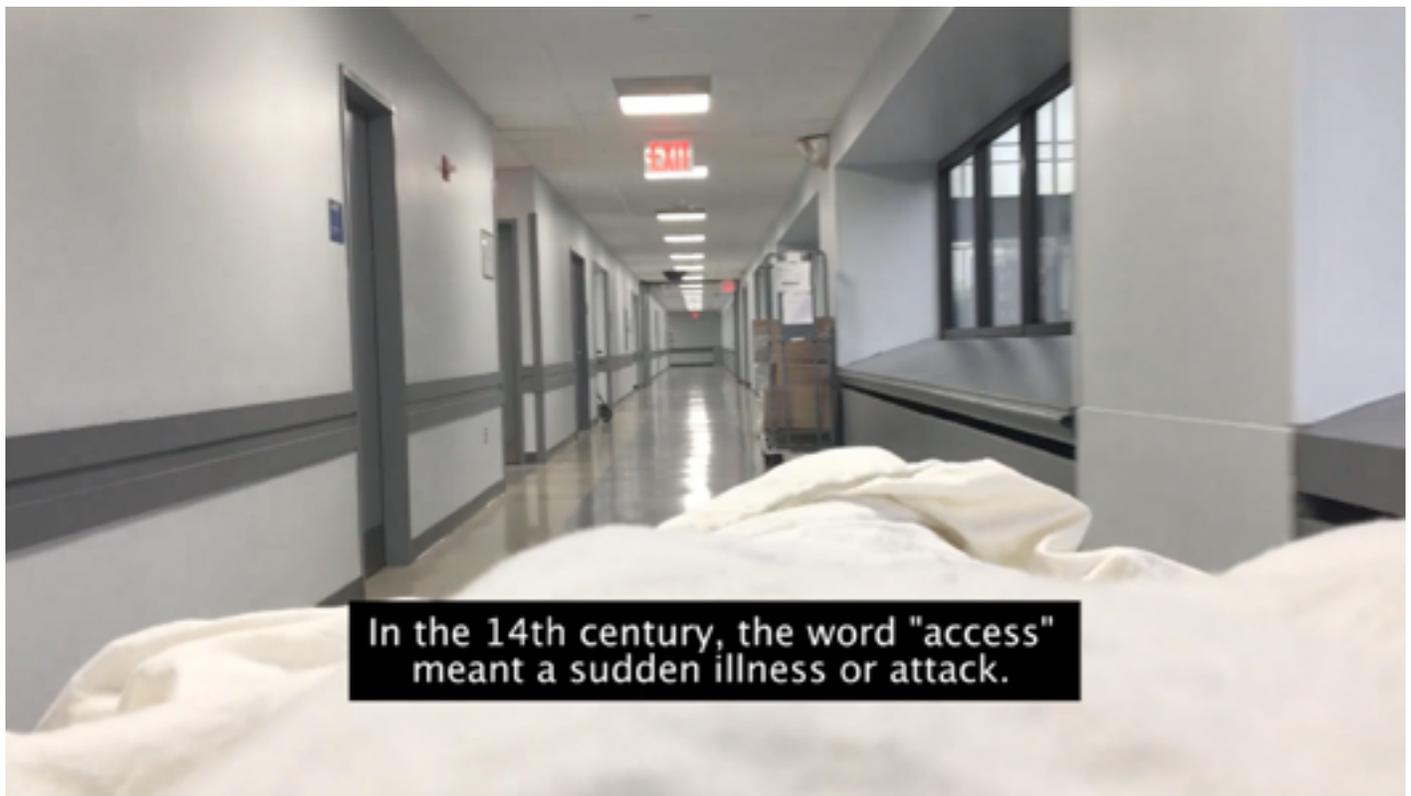


A FILM THAT CARES
BY EMILY WATLINGTON
ON JORDAN LORD'S
AFTER... AFTER... (ACCESS) (2018)

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Jordan Lord, *After... After... (Access)*, 2018 (still), HD video, 16 minutes.
Courtesy the artist.

Image description: The lower half of the artist's body is beneath a blanket on a stretcher in a brightly lit hospital corridor. Along the bottom of the image a caption reads, "In the 14th century, the word 'access' meant a sudden illness or attack."

BIG WINDOW

I thought about Jordan Lord's sixteen-minute video *After... After... (Access)* (2018) this past summer, when I was trying to access my medical records. Delays kept cropping up when I requested the documents be sent from one care complex to another. I'd just relocated to a different city, again, and this process was getting in the way of the treatment that I needed. I decided to try getting a copy for myself, thinking I could handle bringing it to visits. Finally, I got hold of someone, after being transferred to radiology from medical records and back again, only to be told that my options, format-wise, were fax or compact disc. "But I don't have a fax machine," I informed the person on the other end of the phone, "or a CD drive." Nor do most people, I imagine.

"I gave the hospital permission to go inside my body, even though they wouldn't give me permission to film what happened after," Lord tells us, narrating their short documentary about their open-heart surgery. This concession points to one type of "access" Lord's film ponders, concerning information about one's own body through—and in spite of—the medical-legal industrial complex. Lord would have needed a multi-million dollar insurance policy, as I would have needed vintage electronics, in order to access information about their own body.

Instead of showing us their open-heart surgery, Lord reflects on it. This directorial decision is a necessary break from the filmmaking 101 mantra that they cite in the film's beginning: show, don't tell. A necessity not only given the hospital's refusal to grant permission, but also for making the film accessible to blind and low vision audiences. And, a welcome relief from having to witness incisions. Much of the story is conveyed in Lord's narration, rather than in the visuals. All of it is captioned.

We don't hear "the surgeon put his tweezers on my aorta" sort of descriptions. The specifics of the surgery aren't the point. It's not a film about the medical experience of disability, but the social one. When things do happen on screen, though, Lord describes them: the process of putting together a bedframe, their mom and aunt looking at their phones on the couch. Lord doesn't say outright, "I am doing this for blind and low vision audiences," but those who know, know (and if you didn't, now you do).

There are other scenes that are visible, though hardly intelligible, to sighted audience members who lack medical training: an ultrasound of the artist's heart, for example. Captions and image descriptions in other films, if they exist at all, are usually relegated to special, separate tracks that can be turned on and off. In Lord's work, the descriptions

are not squeezed to fit between moments of spoken dialogue. Rather, they are folded into the narration and inform which images the artist does and does not show.

One of my favorite moments is when the open captions¹ interact with other access needs. In one scene, the caption box eclipses a potentially triggering video of an open heart surgery that Lord watches on their laptop. Captions cover images all the time, but more often in careless, rather than careful ways. In addition, the film boasts the only useful strobe warning I have ever encountered in a film: “Please note: there is a stroboscopic effect about 8 minutes into this video.” Usually, if I am not alone, I have to rely on friends to tap me when an unannounced strobe has finished so that I can unbury my head. With this gesture, I feel cared for by *After... After... (Access)*. I don’t think I’ve ever felt that way about a film before.

Still, Lord knows, “the descriptions are partial and insufficient,” and goes on to ponder, “How inaccessible thoughts and feelings can be.” But, by conceiving of captions and descriptions as integral parts of the film, rather than add-ons at the end, Lord—with some of their contemporaries and collaborators whom they cite at the beginning and say this film is “after” (Carolyn Lazard, Constantina Zavitsanos)—is writing a new chapter in the filmmakers’ handbook.

¹ Unlike closed captions, which can be turned on and off, open captions are always on.