

Access Intimacy by Mira Thompson and Carly Everaert  
English with Dutch subtitles, 13:19 minutes  
Descriptive transcript

[View of ceiling and corners of Mira's softly lit bedroom pans down to Mira laying in her bed. We're in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Mira is a white woman with long blonde hair wearing pink earrings, a pink blouse and gold jacket. Mira narrates this lesson.]

I would like to start with a small associative assignment.

I will play a song of mine that is partly made with the sounds my wheelchair makes. The wonderful video clip was made by my friend and artist Feline Hjermind. **[Assignment 1] After I play the song, I would like for you to write down six associations.** I hope you can turn inwards for this too.

[Colorful static fuzz as if changing the channel on an old TV. A music video by Mira titled "Tiny Shoes" begins with the title in yellow, capitalized font gently swaying and morphing over a light blue background before disappearing. Animated, amorphous shapes show different parts of Mira's body as well as her wheelchair and appear to grow, shrink, and then grow again to reveal more of her before fading to disappear. There are repeated sounds of vocal harmonizing and sounds from her wheelchair.]

"... You can understand why this is very awkward ..."

Oh my god. I would love to sit down all day! Do you sleep in your chair? Were you born this way? What happened to you? You are so brave. You are so courageous. You are such an inspiration. If I have a bad day I just think about how horrible your life must be. Have you tried... ginger tea? Did you try yoga? You are soooo tiny! Look at those teeny tiny shoes! Can you like... do it? You should read the bible more often. I'll pray for you. I had a cold last week; I know exactly what you're going through.

"... You can understand why this is very awkward ..."

[Colorful static fuzz from changing the channel. Mira sits on her bed.]

Today I want to concentrate on the ways in which artists function within institutions with so-called **[ding!]** "set hierarchies" while alternatives are possible and we can create imaginary worlds. Because **[bloop]** contemporary art offers an **[blop]** experimental space.

[Camera pans black and white abstract artwork. Fish eye lens zooms in on Mira.]

It's also possible to think about how the existing [blip] **power structures** are questioned and viewed. I also believe art can be used to explore how we can make [ding] **collective care** a more [ding] **central topic**.

[Mira claps and then channel changes with an oval view of Mira's eyes with the text below "OPEN YOUR EYES"]

What I'm talking about today is nothing new. For decades Disabled activists have been speaking out on these topics. I want to acknowledge and make clear that what I am saying now wouldn't be possible without the work of these resilient people with disabilities. The reason I show examples from the US is because I use their work within my own practice. Firstly I will introduce you to the work of [zipp] **Mia Mingus**. Mingus is a queer, physically disabled and transracial Korean writer, educator and focuses on Transformative Justice and Disability Justice.

[A photo of Mia Mingus appears above Mira and Mira's bed as if a poster on the wall. A photo of a Mia Mingus, a queer, physically disabled Korean American transracial/transnational adoptee, smiling with long hair and glasses, sits on a wooden chair with plants and trees all around her]

This is one of the people who shaped the Disability Justice framework. Much of her work has become a permanent part of university curricula. A very important term for me that she has invented is [zoop] "**access intimacy**." I'm highlighting this term because I am sure everyone will be familiar with this feeling.

[A quote from Mia Mingus appears on the screen and is read aloud by Mira:]

"Access intimacy is that elusive, hard to describe feeling when someone else "gets" your access needs. The kind of eerie comfort that your disabled self feels with someone on a purely access level. Sometimes it can happen with complete strangers, disabled or not, or sometimes it can be built over years. It could also be the way your body relaxes and opens up with someone when all your access needs are being met. It is not dependent on someone having a political understanding of disability, ableism or access. Some of the people I have experienced the deepest access intimacy with (especially able bodied people) have had no education or exposure to a political understanding of disability."

[Panning keys on a piano, the text appearing on the screen and continues to be read by Mira:]

"Access intimacy is also the intimacy I feel with many other disabled and sick people who have an automatic understanding of access needs out of our shared similar lived experience of the many different ways ableism manifests in our lives. Together, we share a kind of access intimacy that is ground-level, with no need for explanations. Instantly, we can hold the weight, emotion, logistics, isolation, trauma, fear, anxiety and pain of access. I don't have to justify and we are able to start from a place of steel vulnerability. It doesn't mean that our access looks the

same, or that we even know what each other's access needs are. It has taken the form of long talks into the night upon our first meeting; knowing glances shared across a room or in a group of able bodied people; or the feeling of instant familiarity to be able to ask for help or support."

[Audio and visual static as if changing the channel on the TV. A hand braids Mira's hair. A close up of Mira's greenish blue eye while she begins to speak.]

A couple of years ago I was in the south of France (5.00 min) with my best friend and I was at the swimming pool and I really had to go pee. But then, the problem came in: I couldn't find an accessible toilet. So, she was like, I'm going to get you through this so, I'm going to help you to the toilet. [Mira's face with her eyes closed, and then a view of her face from the side, staring into the distance] But it was bloody hot. And she had to lift me out of my chair and then we almost fell on the ground because we were laughing so hard. The situation was just absurd. The toilet was half open. We were both sweating in our bathing suits. Everyone was watching us. And I was almost like, holding her. And it was such an intimate moment for both us. [Mira's fingers comb through her hair.] And I will always treasure this as a memory.

[Mira is in front of plants in her living room. Her hair is braided and she is wearing a black top with a black cardigan with white dots. A view of the many books in her bookshelf. Mira enters the room and positions herself in front of the bookshelf. Details of the book spines in her bookshelf. A view of song lyrics and musical notes above her piano.]

I think Access Intimacy can be an important principle of equity on which you can move in the field and provide collective care to each other. To give and receive help to each other that is based on equity.

A while ago we saw a great interest in the world wide Black Lives Matter protests. We have to recognize that ableism and disability is the work of every revolutionary and every human being. We all get older and we all deal with illness and disability in our lives. We live in a broken world and all of this should be enough for us to pay attention to ableism and disability.

Many people discovered or rediscovered [zipppp] **Audre Lorde's** words. A quote I saw popping up again and again was:

[Text appears on the screen and spoken aloud:] "Your silence will not protect you."

But also, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation and that is an act of **political warfare.**" [Channel changes on the TV]

(7:03) I would like you all to take a close look at *The Cancer Journals* of Audre Lorde [Book cover appears on screen which features the author's portrait, a Black woman wearing glasses and giving a closed-mouth smile.]. This shows how closely connected different forms of oppression can be and what that looked like as a lived experience. [channel changes on the TV]

Hereby I will show some examples of how accessibility or inaccessibility and ableism is addressed in contemporary art.

First of all I will show you **Park McArthur** [Park, a white woman in a wheelchair is inside of an exhibition gallery in front of four artworks on the wall.] She is a conceptual artist from the US who is also a wheelchair user. She uses existing objects to eliminate both the physical and architectural and the social side of inaccessibility. This photo [of a sandy landscape scene where scraps of wood and various flat material and debris are scattered on the ground] is called *How to Get a Wheelchair Over*. [An image of Park's exhibition Ramps at Essex Gallery] Planks and flat surfaces that Park's colleagues and friends layed over the sand so she could get to the campfire in her wheelchair. This is a beautiful example of how to move over a surface that flows into a social meeting place.

[Gentle piano sounds while Mira strikes a pose and gestures with her hands.]

Next we have the exhibition **Activating Captions** of the online platone Argos in Brussels, [artist Christine Sun Kim and curator Niels van Tomme sit on a long wooden bench. Niels holds and looks down at a large square and blue cushion that is part of a work by artist Shannon Finnegan called "Do you want us here or not?" from 2019. The seat cushion reads, quote "Museum visits are hard on my body. Rest here if you agree."] where subtitling, which is essential for deaf and hard of hearing and many others, was applied as an autonomous artistic form.

But there are also artists and grassroots organizations such as **Sins Invalid**. [Text appears on the screen.] This is how they describe themselves:

"Disability justice based performance project celebrates artists with disabilities, centralizing artists of color and LGBTQ / gender-variant artists as communities who have been historically marginalized."

[An image of Nomy Lamm, a fat white femme dressed as a baby bird, hovering over a nest made of twisted prosthetic limbs. Cara Page, a Black femme with short hair, wearing a black body suit, holds her hand, extending the other arm behind her body. They are framed against a background of dappled leaves. Below the image text reads "Sins Invalid performance with Nomy Lamm and Cara Page." Mira finishes reading and taps her foot as the channel changes. Text appears that reads "Patty Berne, director Sins Invalid, Stacey Milburn, organizer Sins Invalid" and then the channel changes.]

I want to show you a short part of a conversation.

[A captioned video titled "My Body Doesn't Oppress Me, Society Does" features Patty Berne, director and Stacey Milbern, organizer of Sins Invalid in conversation. Each in electric wheelchairs from inside a bedroom, Stacey begins to speak using a larynx speech aid. A close up of Patty, wearing a black top, necklace and chest length brown hair.]

Patty Berne speaks: "I'm not saying it's easier to live with an impairment. It's not easy to live when you have four kids. It's not easy to live when it's 20 degrees (F) outside, for those of us in the Bay Area, where 55 (F) is freezing. You know, there are times when it is just not convenient to have a body. But that is not what oppresses us. What oppresses us is living in a system that disregards us, is violent towards us, essentially wants to subjugate our bodies or kill us. That's oppressive. My body doesn't oppress me. My body is fine. But society... that can be incredibly oppressive. [channel changes 9:37]

Another example I have is from a piece **I have written together with writer and curator Staci Bu Shea**. I have written this piece for the art magazine Metropolis M about access in arts. I'm going to highlight a paragraph from the piece [\[text appears on the screen\]](#):

"Art and culture can be the place where accessibility is reimagined and practiced beyond diversity, equity, inclusion and access frameworks that are often based on state intervention, legal compliance, and adjudication. Instead, accessibility in the arts can be in support of justice, interdependence, liberation, and intimacy. We find that this produces an aesthetic and poetic register of mixed-ability and abundance that forms new ways of being together. We need to look at access not as something incidental or inconvenient that needs to be fixed, but as part of the entrance to an event or artwork. For as much as we articulate accessibility in the arts here, we want to mention how often disabled people and the reality of disability are left out of activism and movement organizing. Metropolis M Aug/Sept No. 4 2021"

Accessibility also includes creating an accessible place, like this lesson, which I can give online. There have always been disabled artists. Artists who have had to function in a world that was not made for them. Because I'm sure most of you know her, but probably for other reasons, I want to touch on **Frida Kahlo** [\[an excerpt of a painting by Frida appears above Mira's head as a thought bubble.\]](#) Many know her as an artist of colorful, surrealistic paintings about her sick body. [\[Text appears on the screen: "I am my own muse, the subject I know best," Frida Kahlo\]](#) A feminist, a Mexican revolutionary, a communist, maybe even a style icon. [\[A postcard of a Frida Kahlo portrait painting with a monkey on her shoulder.\]](#) But Frida Kahlo was an artist who in addition to making art about her illness, also found ways to use her body and environment for her art. [\[Frida Kahlo painting where she sits in a wheelchair in front of an easel.\]](#) In a same way the online world is an indispensable place for many disabled activists and artists. Even before Corona, the internet was a place where people who couldn't leave their bed, have a lot of pain, are at home a lot and thus create their own worlds are able to organize and meet others.

I would therefore like to place the photo of Frida Kahlo [\[lying in her bed\]](#) next to an initiative by Tash King. This self-published magazine called **Bed Zine** uses the bed as a starting point, more precisely the bed of the sick and the disabled. Anyone can submit their work and be published in the magazine.

[\[A screenshot of the Bed Zine instagram post of a collage by Akissi Nzambi. The collage is minimal, featuring white cotton and gauze over a light blue background. Text below the](#)

collage reads “My bed: a safe haven and a net that keeps me trapped.” The post’s caption is available which reads “This collage so perfectly summarizes the contradictory feelings about bed that Bed Zine exists to explore. The use of medical supplies, the short yet concise and powerful text, the simple shapes and colors; these elements come together in such an effective and emotionally resonant way.” Channel changes to a slideshow of images of people wearing face masks, including Louise Bourgeois, Kara Walker, Maria Lassnig, Marlène Dumas, Yinka Shonibare, Paula Rego.]

The pandemic has exposed structures that many people with disabilities have been aware of throughout their whole life. The unfortunately wide shared idea disabled and sick lives are less worthy. Statements such as: “Only people with compromised health, the elderly and people with underlying conditions are the ones dying from Corona.” Or the idea that people without underlying conditions will be prioritized when a shortage of medical equipment will be a reality.

These statements haven’t come as a surprise for people like me. For a long time, non-disabled people have had the luxury to assume that they will not be severely affected by a crisis such as the pandemic. Also in times like these the internet has been a space where people who could not leave their homes, could not even leave their beds, could meet and interact. [A close up Mira’s eye blinks.]

**[Assignment 2]** Now that you have digested all of this information, I want you to go back to the words you’ve written down in the beginning. **Can you name your dream world in one sentence?**

### ***Access Intimacy credits***

Concept by Mira Thompson and Carly Everaert

Video artist Tiny Shoes: Feline Hjermind

Artwork: Veere van Gent

Caring hands: Bea Goethart

Lijntjes artwork: Sidsel Mehlsen

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