

ARTISTS SPACE

Jordan Lord:

Prophetic Memory

May 9, 2012 - August 31, 2021

From a certain angle of my grandmother's room, her face is reflected in the tv screen. Even if she's not watching it, the tv is on most of the time. It's a tv she regrets buying, not only because it listens to her, and whoever else is in the room, and turns what's said into a series of imperfect captions. Sometimes the screen turns pink and refuses to do anything else. Nearly everything on the tv is shown in a letterbox format, and inside the bottom black box, my grandmother's face appears. She's sitting in a recliner; she's watching the tv.

The burden of representation weighs on the presumption that whatever needs transforming could occur by seeing, hearing, or recording someone. We know so many have been and will be lost and that what's left behind not only fails to give us who and what we need access to. Of course, they did live, but so much of it couldn't be said. And, for what could be, the recording devices weren't listening, weren't allowed to hear; couldn't understand; affected, occluded or selected what they were saying, such that most of the stories we might use to know what is and what will be must be fabricated from what remains.

In the film we're making together, my grandmother speaks, but we're not sure yet to whom. Sometimes she speaks directly to an audience she hasn't yet met; sometimes she speaks to me. A lot of what we talk about are her memories. One story she's told me several times is that her mother said, each night, she would listen to her husband tell the same stories before they went to bed. Her mother told her, "and even though I had heard them all before, every time, he would tell me a story, I would laugh."

My family's life has been on tv recently. A film I spent the last five years making about my parents' bankruptcy has been playing on people's computers, scattered around the world, while the weekly late night news program I watch covered bankruptcy last night. The previous week it focused on long-term care for disabled people.

As I watched that episode, I took the following notes.

In the United States:

- One third of the people who have died from Covid-19 were living in long-term care institutions. As of today's writing, 182,228 people.
- Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, 82% of nursing homes were cited for insufficient infection prevention measures and about half had "persistent problems and were cited across multiple years."
- As of 2020, there were 56.1 million people over the age of 65. By 2060, there are projected to be 94.7 million people in that age group. A report from the Congressional Budget Office from 2013 estimated that more than two-thirds of people over 65 will at some point need long-term care assistance "to perform routine daily activities, such as eating, bathing, dressing, paying bills, and preparing meals." (The episode did not calculate or project how many disabled people under 65 also presently need or will need these forms of long-term care).
- As of February 2020, nearly 80 percent of people who depend on long-term care receive it from unpaid in-home caregivers. (The source from which this statistic is taken does not give its source).
- As of 2013, if unpaid in-home caregivers had been paid, they would have made \$67 billion (I'm not sure according to which degree of compensation); by 2050, if they remain unpaid, they are projected to lose \$132-\$147 billion in wages. (Neither the episode, nor its source, reflect on the care work disabled people perform and will perform, nor the wages they have lost, as this work has not been conceived as such).
- As of 2015-2016, 2.1 million people were living in long-term care facilities.
- As of 2016, 69.3% of nursing homes and 81% of assisted living facilities were for profit.
- The average cost of a private room in a nursing home is more than \$100,000 per year.
- The median national salary for nursing assistants working in nursing care facilities is \$30,120. (The episode did not report on this, but the median national salary for personal care attendants providing home healthcare is \$26,220; for those working in assisted living facilities, it is \$27,430).

- One nursing assistant said in the facility where she worked, each employee was responsible for 22 residents per shift. (Based on the median national salary, this breaks down to \$1369 per resident per year or \$3.75 per day).
- If a resident qualifies based on low income, Medicaid will pay, but at less than half the rate paid by Medicare.
- If the resident's Medicaid benefits do not meet the cost of living at the nursing home, they may be subject to a practice of eviction called "resident dumping."
- The episode refers to a bill that proposes making it easier to use Medicaid to cover the cost of in-home health. (It does not mention the activism of Nick Dupree, who worked to change Alabama state law so that people dependent on ventilators to breathe would no longer "age out" of Medicaid coverage from in-home care, after they reached the age of 21. Initially, the state legislature agreed to changing these rules, only to pay for his personal coverage, before gradually expanding the program).
- The average cost of a room in an assisted living facility is \$51,600.
- The largest corporate assisted living facility chain, Brookdale Senior Living, puts a special emphasis on advertising their "memory care programs." Medicare (the system Americans pay into with their taxes to cover their own healthcare post-65 or for certain disabilities) fully covers the cost of staying in a nursing home for 20 days after an eligible hospital visit; it will then partially pay up to 100 days; after that, residents are responsible for all costs.

One commercial for Brookdale's memory care begins with an image of a white nursing assistant wrapping her arm around an elderly Black woman who turns the page of a scrapbook. There's a match cut (one that implies no lapse in time) of a hand turning the page of the scrapbook, which shows photos of eight people of various ages, all of whom appear to be white. Next to the photos are two pieces of paper, both written on by hand. One reads "FAMILY;" the other reads, "Honesty." In between is a printed doo-dad that reads, "LOVE MAKES THE WORLD GO ROUND."

Sources:

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- Jordan Lord

Jordan Lord is a filmmaker, writer, and artist. Their work addresses the relationships between historical and emotional debts, framing and support, access and documentary. Their films and performances have been shown at festivals and venues including Artists Space, EFA Project Space, DOCNYC, and Camden Arts Centre. Their work was shown in the festival *I Wanna Be with You Everywhere* at Performance Space NY, and their solo exhibition *After... After...* was presented at Piper Keys in 2019. Lord currently teaches at Hunter College in the Integrated Media Arts program.