

# **Juanrie Strydom**

## **Out of Order**

4 November 2025  
– 31 January 2026















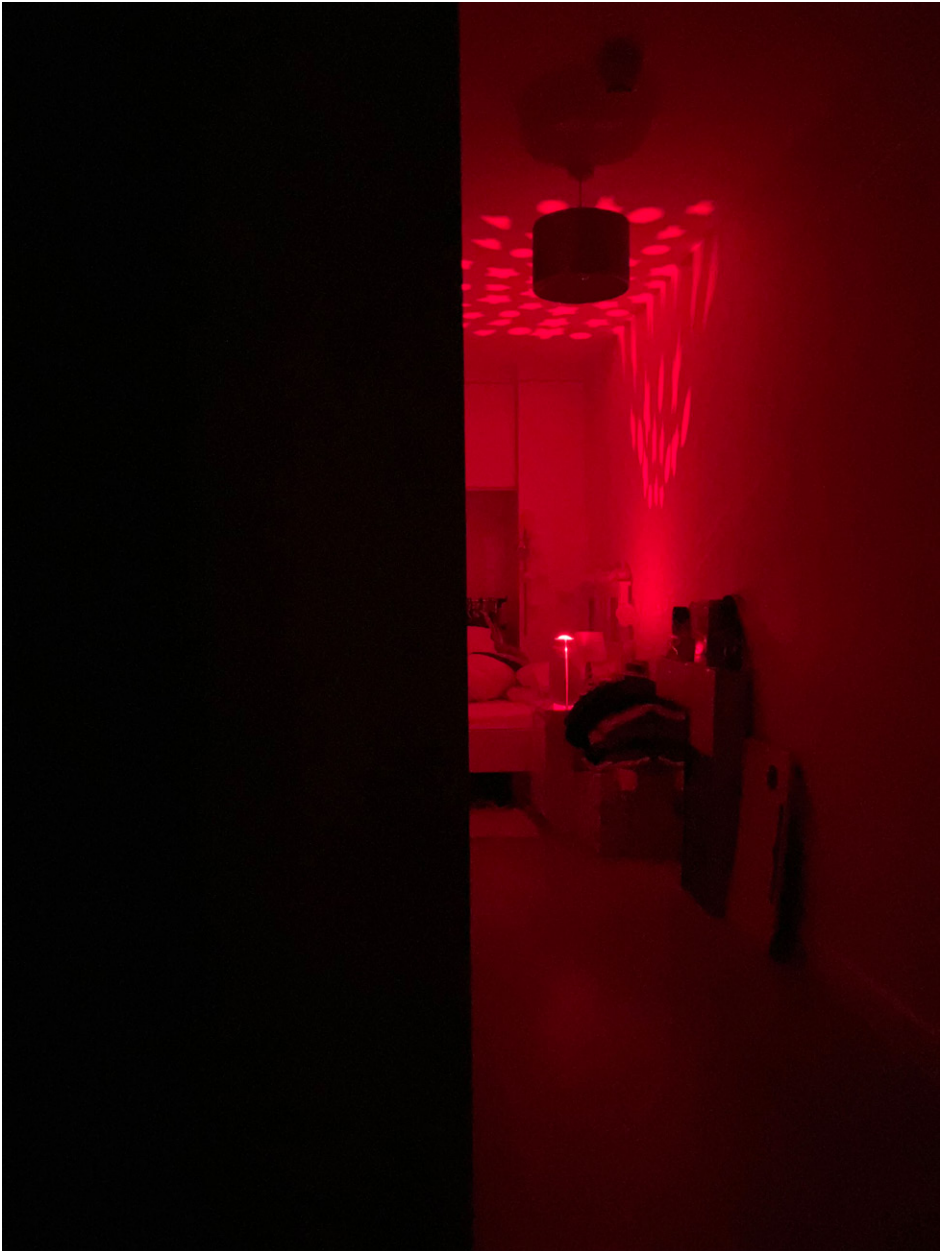




































I am sitting here trying not to cry. I feel the panic and anxiety rising. My arms feel heavy and numb. I feel pressure in my chest, tears from behind my eyes, and my skin begins to crawl. I gather myself to make the phone calls and send emails to cancel or reschedule plans, once again putting my life on hold. I have done this many times before, but each time feels heavier than before. I must pause my life again and wait for it to resume when I am free again. It takes a fraction of me every time, chipping and breaking away at me. I do not feel like a person. This is the most dehumanising experience, being a wheelchair user trapped in your apartment several times a year because of a lift (having my access revoked for days to weeks). The longest I was stuck to date was for just over six weeks. Nothing can ever fully prepare you for these moments, even though they happen so frequently. My instincts are to look out for the warning signs and anticipate when the lift might be out of order again. I still panic every time the lift breaks down. It almost feels like one of those films where the day repeats, and when I am stuck, the days feel endless, on a loop. No matter how hard I try or plan an escape, I still wake up in the same place.

I try to gather my thoughts and emotions, put my life on hold and somehow go on because life moves forward regardless of my situation. What else am I supposed to do? I have no options, no way out and no solutions. I discussed my options with others, reached out to organisations and asked for advice. No one has answers or is at a loss for words. I keep to myself and plot a way out, but still know I am stuck here with no way



out. I try my best to remain calm as my heart sinks, and I feel frustrated that I am in the same situation again. I cope with the anxiety and go on while I feel distressed, and my mind races. My mind swirls and screams in chaos, fear, anger and sadness. I hold on to the good thoughts to remind me that I still have things to look forward to and plans to resume. I have people who care and support me - even when I live alone, I am never fully alone.

I could not do this 'fully' alone because it would break me. The panic and anxiety make me feel overwhelmed and stressed beyond measure. These feelings cloud my thoughts. The fear of being trapped and not knowing when I will be free to resume my life throws away all rationality. The closest experience I can describe to this entrapment was the experience of the first COVID19- lockdown in 2020, when no one knew what to expect. For me, every time the lift breaks down, I am back in that moment in time, as if I am reliving that form of isolation all over again, except everyone else is free to live their lives. In those moments, I feel more alone than ever - it almost feels like being frozen in time, and time moves excruciatingly slow. Days feel like weeks and weeks feel like months. When I think about how many times I have been stuck in my apartment, it feels like I have missed a year of my life.

With all the anxiety and panic attacks, I feel more disabled by the lift being out of service than my physical disability. I cannot find balance or logic in the situation. I feel on edge

(even when the lift is working, I still feel uneasy knowing that the lift can break at any time). I constantly worry about the lift breaking down and try to prepare for the eventual breakdown, as if I can get ahead of the situation. Some days, I check that the lift is working if it has not been in use for a while. The fear of being entrapped and unable to get out by choice is the worst experience. I don't rest until the moment the lift works again. I know this has caused a lot of damage and affected me emotionally, physically and mentally. I know that I will never fully feel at ease until the day I move out. With the lack of accessible housing available and a long waiting list for a wheelchair accessible place through the council, I do not have much of a choice but to stay. If I were to move away, I could lose my place on the housing list. The best advice was to remain here despite noting that I was in "distress". Anyone would be distressed if they could not leave their own apartment for a period and constantly had to deal with the lift breaking down, having no control over any of it.

The lift controls my decisions and plans. Sometimes I leave my apartment, and I cannot get back upstairs or wait for the lift to reboot itself. For that moment, I can get back up temporarily, until the lift eventually breaks down completely. I can try and stay positive and see the good in every situation, but how long do I need to relive this experience for there to be an understanding that this is not okay? I am good at being okay to a point, which helps me to keep going and stay present in everyday things, but I know that nothing about this is good.

But I must keep going and do what I can to function. I cannot waste my life and let this shatter me, but I also cannot keep quiet and pretend that this has not affected me. I need to tell my story, share the parts that overwhelm me, make me panic and feel anxious. I was scared to let people see me at my most vulnerable. I could not take the photographs or write about my experience without sharing how it felt to relive the same experience repeatedly.

This project is not just for me, but those like me who must live this life, being entrapped, isolated and alienated from living their lives because of inaccessible housing and lack of accessible housing available with 'considerable' long waiting lists. The photographs and these words are not for perseverance or empathy, but to share how, even in 2025, we live in a society that makes disability a very isolating experience. I hope that my experience will shed some light on the situation and that others like me will know they are not alone. I dedicate this project to all the allies, friends, family and people who have been there for me during the hardest times. Thank you for not leaving me in the dark when I am not at my best and for your support. Thank you for listening to my stories. This project would not have happened without the support of those who are always there when I am trapped in my worst nightmare.

Juanrie Strydom



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