



Creative Intervention

Small Repairs: Reworlding Anxiety and Burnout

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Artist Statement

May Chazan (2023) characterizes writing about her pandemic experiences, including burnout, grief, and a cancer diagnosis as a “kind of artful practice,” one that pushes back against “the limits of the neoliberal academy” (p. 1). Bringing together critical disability studies, personal narrative, and slow scholarship, she argues that artful practice can be understood as an act of reworlding (pp. 1-2). For Chazan, creative acts can produce “alternative ways of being, knowing, and relating, outside of existing colonial structures, and making future worlds in the present moment through the ways we relate, imagine, and act” (p. 2). In the context of a global pandemic, making these futures present involved embracing the “tempo change” acknowledged and advocated for in crip studies as well as sharing stories of vulnerability, disruption, and self-care.

My creative practice, which comprises audio-poetic-visual formats, is grounded in slow scholarship and what human geographer, Laura Pottinger, calls “gentle methodologies” (2017, 2021). Pottinger defines gentleness as “an embodied relation to the self and others, one that is often associated with slowness, quietness, and tenderness” (2021, p. 2). Echoing Chazan, this gentleness requires a temporal shift that allows researchers to pay attention to mundane moments – listening to birds, noticing the patterns of tires, shadow, and light on a driveway, feeling the grass against one’s body – in which future worlds are made present. These moments can be conceptualized not only as acts of reworlding but also of small repairs. The small repairs presented took place during the COVID-19 pandemic after being diagnosed with Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) in August 2020 and following a burnout, resulting in short-term medical leave from my university between January and April 2021.

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The audio recordings and photographs that make up my works reflect specific repairs: how I imagine myself and my actions in the world. I use my cellphone to take the photos and record the audio samples. I do not retouch them. They are subsequently integrated with poetry, as with the poems below that were written during the period leading up to and after my diagnosis and burnout. This creative practice has continued to help me reimagine what it means to be an interdisciplinary artist-scholar with an at times debilitating anxiety disorder and having experienced burnout. In other words, the practice allows me to move more slowly and gently when needed, and to reevaluate two realities that I previously believed to be personal failures. As Natalie Loveless (2019) asserts, “‘How might the world be organized differently?’ is a question that matters urgently, and it is a question that art – particularly art attuned to human and more-than-human social justice – asks in generative and complex ways” (p. 16).

The poems presented can be read while listening to the sounds of one’s own surroundings (e.g., birdsong, traffic, trees, fridge) and viewing the accompanying photographs. They are meant to be experienced together.

An Ode to Advice (Lovingly Given)

November 19, 2020

Today: I am too
tired to be anxious.
[take a moment to listen]
This desk lamp,
has burned for hours.

I am reminded, lovingly to:
STOP self-sabotaging.

Self: “a person or thing referred to with complete individuality; a person's nature, character, etc.” (Webster's College Dictionary, 1991, p. 1215).

Sabotage: “deliberate damage of equipment, materials, etc., or underhand interference with production or work, any undermining of a cause, plan or effort” (Webster's College Dictionary, 1991, p. 1181).

Filled with despair,
and a fine point of rage,
I decide to throw out
all of my dictionaries.



Hardwood Floor

April 21, 2021

I want to lie on this
hardwood floor:
indefinitely.

Frazzled
like a piece of yarn.

Feeling
the light at the edges of
my eyelids.

Hearing
the fridge and
the traffic outside.

Somehow, the
hardwood floor
is comforting.

[take a moment to listen]

The small space taken up
by the curve of my body:

liminal.



References

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