SHAPER?

A study and practice of self care as activism

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Am I PANICING?
no. I am afraid.
I don't quite feel like I can breathe right. I used to feel like this all the time.
Am I gonna cry?
Maybe.

Thoughts: I AM NEARLY FAILING.

↑  ↑  ↑

Excerpt from notes, written in class, PEAC 101 "Intro to Peace, Justice, & Human Rights"

↑  ↑

ANXIETY
What is the— What is the assignment again?

So, it's like... talk about activism, and essentially that's the only thing that I have to do, in whatever form.

And what are you vaguely doing?

So, um, I have two things that I'm going off from, almost kind of like found work. Because I'm just looking back at past notes. Mm-hmm?

And taking meaning out of them...

And I'm just kind of connecting, um, care for the self and activism, and how that functions—what I've learned about that recently.

Yeah, and I think that you could say, um, oh god. I lost it, but I will find it, give me a second...

That, um...

Like...

Oh, godammit. I this isn't totally it, but that the ending might be, but not the beginning at all. That like your— the act of you doing this project, and of oh exposing—working through this...

Yeah, and of exposing these like very, you know, personal, very intimate things, in and of itself is a form of activism.

Because— god, I had such a better way to say it— Like, this in and of itself is activism, writing this, not just —

I... I don't think it is. I don't know...
Well, does she have tons of knowledge on mental illness?

Yeah.

Well, she might not have... (laughs...)

No, it's fine. Um, I might include that. I don't think I will.

OK, sorry then. What were you going to say then?

Um...

... so, self-activism, you were saying.

Yeah. Well, no, self-care, um... no, well I guess you're right.

Self-care is a form of— that's, that's what I wanted to say.

That's what you're saying (overlapping), yeah!

Self-care is a form of— yeah, my bad.

Self-care is a form of activism in and of itself. That's what I was trying to say.

So, um, this... I'm going to make this project something that makes me feel good. I'm going to make it self-care. And that--

Because this class is f*cking stressing me the goddamn hell out and like, (laughs) interfering with, um, shit.

But the community in our class, the community of the students— is really banding together. And like, um, the group of us who goes to the prison were coming up with this thing. This concept of a zine, which I told you about.

Mmm. Hmm.

Um— there— we're really working closely with
The people on the inside, um, to like find out what they’re comfortable with, what would be useful to them—Mmm-hmm

And trying to even acknowledge the fact that we’re still kind of in a position of power. Yeah

And so like, like try and mitigate for that, like, for example when we’re saying um “are you comfortable with such-and-such.” What if someone is not, but isn’t comfortable speaking up? So maybe passing around something anonymously, or like um, yeah. Just—This is the first time I actually feel like we’re engaging in some form of activism.

Oh yeah

’Cause going in and hanging out with them & having a class with them is great, and it’s like, it’s probably… I know that they enjoy it. But like I just—I don’t feel comfortable calling that activism. I don’t think it is. I think it’s great. I don’t think it’s activism.

So are you writing about two forms then? Are you writing about that?

Um—Right now I’m just kind of brainstorming.

Okay.

But the connection between them is that I think the reason I’m able to engage in that right now is because I’ve been doing a lot of self care. I’ve been, um—You’re here. I’ve been—well I’ve been changing my medication first of all. And I’ve been having therapy, and having psychiatrist appointments, and whatever
And I've also been going vegan, and meditating. I was just gonna say it could be the same concept of the one before—

It's very similar, cause then—

It's just from a different viewpoint, from a different lens.

Yeah, exactly. So I'm going vegan. And um I'm... yeah, the meditating and there was another...

There was a last one I was— Oh yeah!

I've been exercising, I've been swimming and going to the gym. And like all of these, this time for self-care, which like—I haven't been doing any fuckin' work. I haven't been doing any schoolwork, pretty much, for weeks more or less. Um, and yet I'm still caring for myself even though I haven't been doing any quote schoolwork, I'm now in a mental state where I feel able to actually put work and thought and, like, centered effort into this zine. And like, I was able to speak on it in class, and like, help explain it, and— I don't know, I could just tell from inside of myself that it was useful what I was saying, which hasn't happened in a while.

Yeah, and that's a direct result of all these things that you're caring for yourself. And I don't know if you might want to say like, individually these things might not be enough in and of themselves, but having slowly but surely accumulated
now have reached the threshold that it's enough. And not only does it allow you to um
like, go to the prison—
L: But it allows you to, like be, you know, be really
M: present
L: Yeah, present and...
L: And like feel energized
M: mm-hm
L: And like be able to process thoughts, and brainstorm.
M: Exactly
L: Like that's not an ability you had when you
were worse
L: I know you said it didn't matter how long it is but...
M: There isn't anything
L: And you're just gonna give her — yeah, I mean, you could finish this quite quickly
M: No, I could Finish this now...
And you know what I just realized is, they're very interested in having things be like um
new and innovative. I'm gonna just f*ing write
this transcript, man. I'm gonna write this as a
transcript, what we just talked about.
M: Awesome
L: I'm doing it in sections. That's gonna be one of the sections.
M: Awesome!
3/15/17
In “Carceral Education,” Sabrina Alli writes,
Re-entry programs aim to prevent recidivism despite the insurmountable bureaucracy of extra­penal surveillance....[These] are not an example of the state’s generosity, let alone a revolutionary concept in a society that has...5.1 million people under the form of surveillance called "community supervision."

In “Building a Prison-to-School Pipeline,” Larissa MacFarquhar writes,
Thinking politically meant not falling in love with your own story and letting yourself imagine that...you were special... the redemption narrative...lets society off the hook....

Write for a few minutes about the intersection of these two analyses with the experiences of Elaine Bartlett. Does what happened to her--and the way Gonnerman tells her story of negotiating re-entry programs and becoming a political activist—exemplify, challenge, complexify these claims, or...?

Idle man I have absolutely nothing to say right now. Not knitting—Feeling panic in this moment.

Exeuses
why should my faults (brain chemistry)
get in the way of
fucking academia*

*
IDENTITIES

Key: How I feel about these identities

(PAST) TRAUMA
- CONNECTION POINTS/
- PROUD IDENTITIES

SQUEAMISH ABOUT MY OWN PRIVILEGE

Role at praxis site... Identities I carry into RCF:
- White
- Woman
- White woman
- Experienced/experiencing depression
- Never been arrested
- Grew up in very White suburban neighborhood
- Sexual identity (Survivor?)
  - Jewish
  - Spanish-speaker
  - Girlfriend
  - Friend
  - Sister
  - Daughter
  - Fatherless

Witness to attempted suicide (x2)
- Grieving (father figure/unde/ned)
- Femme
- Badass
- Afraid of my own whiteness/privilege

"Foucault found that self-writing played an important role in helping citizens master the art of living..." (Mofell 143)
CONCLUSION

This project is the first time I have felt creative in months.

Today I described the experience of depression with a metaphor. You know when you're wearing sunglasses, and then it gets dark, or you go inside but forget to take off the glasses? For a while you feel something's wrong, in the back of your mind, but you can't quite pinpoint what it is. Everything is dimmer and less defined, harder to see. Finally, you realize what's going on, and slip off the dark lenses from your grateful eyes. Color! Light! Vibrancy! Again, you can sense the true beauty of light (and even the darkness) of your world. Relief.

Depression is moving through the emotional and physical world with metaphorical sunglasses. Simply.

Unfortunately, no one has the ability to shed those lenses at will. Wonderfully, gratefully, joyfully, safely... for now, my glasses have lifted.

Finally, I feel again. I am a "Shaper of the world." (Morell 175)

Let's hope this lasts.