

Resilience or Fuck You Neoliberalism - a strike poem

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I should do a squat every day
My yoga teacher tells me
While I am perched awkwardly on my mat
Breathing through the pain
I'm not supposed to be feeling
Every day just do a squat
And a plank
And a downward facing dog.
It's just a little effort and you'll feel so much better.

I should meditate every day
The book tells me.
The book that tells me that I can cure my anxiety
If I just meditate everyday

And change my diet
And my exercise
And my life
Just 45 minutes every day.
It's just a little effort for my mental health.

I should draw a little every day
Because drawing relaxes me
So I need to keep doing it.
Do a little something I enjoy
Every day
And I'll love myself more.

Just these few things I should do every day
To take care of myself.
Do my breathing exercises
Walk 10.000 steps
Eat my five a day
Write in my journal
Practice my drawing
Water my tomatoes
Meditate for 45 minutes
Do a squat, a plank, a downwards facing dog

And if I just do these few small things
I'll be fine
I'll have been sufficiently kind to myself.
I can tick off all the items on the to-do list of my wellbeing.

And I thought about how few items I had ticked last year
Last year when the world was closing in on me
When the world wouldn't stop spinning
And fear spread through my body
Unstoppable
Unmanageable
When I sat at my desk shaking
Not knowing if I'd be able to get up again
I thought of all the things I could have done to take better care of myself

And how I would not have felt like this
If only I had
Meditated every day
Done my breathing exercises
Walked 10.000 steps
Watered my tomatoes
Written in my journal
Practiced my drawing
And done my squat, my plank, my downward facing dog.

And I knew that it was my fault I wasn't coping
And that if only I'd have done those few things I would have been able to handle it
all.

I would not have cried like I did
When my pay was cut.
I would not have felt so dejected
When I had to fight to get paid even what little I was owed
For the third time.
I would not have lashed out like I did, at others as stuck in these structures as I
am
When I didn't like their tone when they delivered me the messages that threatened
my income.
I would not have lost so much sleep worrying about deadlines, about angry emails,
about how I was failing my students, about whether, between my four different
jobs, I would be able to pay my rent next month.

I would have been able to handle all this
If I'd taken better care of myself
If I'd only built up my resilience.

And it's only now
That I've found my feet again
(and yes
I did meditate
And did do breathing exercises
And all the things I was supposed to do
And yes, they did help)

It's only now that I feel myself again
And trust myself again
That I can say

That I was never meant to handle this.
That we're not meant to handle this.

That when you're telling me to be resilient you are really telling me that I am failing
the system, when really it is the system that is failing me.

So fuck you.

Fuck you for sending me invitations to stress reduction courses
While you make me teach larger classes for less money.
Fuck you for sending me booklets with breathing exercises
While my workload grows higher and higher
And fuck you, especially, for telling me to work on my resilience
While you try to dismantle the pension
That I can't even pay into yet
Because you prefer to give me four casual jobs, rather than one contracted one.

Because you and I both know that if you take this pension from me
It will mean I was living a lie
That I was lying to myself
Thinking my precariousness was just a temporal phenomena
A stage I have to go through, on my way to the stability of tenure.
Instead I can look forward to lying awake at night again
Worrying about how I will pay my rent when I'm too old to do a squat, a plank, a
downward facing dog.

And, seriously, fuck that. And, seriously, fuck you.

I refuse to be resilient.
I refuse to be ok with this because I am not.
Because none of us are. Not really.
I refuse to numb myself
to the pain caused by a system
Which treats me like a thing.

I refuse to be complicit in my own oppression.

I will continue to meditate (irregularly)

Because it helps me calm my mind and to know myself (and I'm getting to like this person that I'm learning I am)

I will continue to draw

Because it brings me joy (but under no circumstances will I 'practice' drawing.)

I have made peace with the fact that my tomatoes are all dead.

I will go for walks when the weather is nice.

Occasionally, when my back feels tight,

I will squat

I will plank

I will do my downward facing dog.

But do not for a second think that I am doing any of these things for you,

That they will make me more

Resilient

Efficient

Compliant

That they will make me forget.

Don't think for a second that they will make me forget

The better world that I deserve.

The better world I can imagine.

The world I have seen on picket lines

And community halls

In whispered conversations

And shouted in slogans

Scrawled all over sidewalks

And written on the internet.

Because fuck you and your individualising bullshit.

Because I know (as we all know)

That this is a world we can only achieve together

And that this is a world that we can achieve together.

Because while I refuse to take

Responsibility for my own suffering

I will gladly accept
Responsibility for our collective wellbeing.

We are the university

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