

FILM

# GOOD MEASURE

Lizzie Homersham on Carolyn Lazard's *CRIP TIME* (2018)

By Lizzie Homersham

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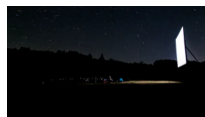
**Carolyn Lazard, *CRIP TIME*, 2018**, HD video, sound, color, 10 minutes. Artist-provided description: A set of hands sort seven pillbox compartments on an embroidered tablecloth. The image is taken from an overhead position with the hands partially obstructing the view of the differently colored compartments. The compartments are yellow, blue, pink, green, and white. They are filled with differently colored pills too. There is a patch of bright sunlight on the tablecloth and there are a few pill bottles barely visible along the edge of the frame. Bright orange pills are held in the palm of one hand.

***PLEASE BELIEVE THESE DAYS WILL PASS.*** Amid a massive collective reckoning with sickness and death, these words are emblazoned on billboards across ten UK cities, oblivious to anger and grief. Carolyn Lazard's work offers a markedly different perspective on temporality, putting store in indeterminacy. How will disparate feelings around what could have been, and what is now, affect what happens in the future? The Philadelphia-based artist's first UK solo show, "Safe Space," originally scheduled to open on April 2 at Cell Project Space in London, is indefinitely postponed. An April screening of Lazard's videos at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts is similarly on hold. In their 2019 essay "The World Is Unknown," belief—

which is, as they point out, mostly absent in healthcare unless “sequestered as a control factor”—takes a central role in nonlinear processes of re-enchantment and healing that recognize trauma and ghosts. “Sometimes,” Lazard writes, “haunting or being haunted is the best way to describe an experience in the absence of words.” As a chronically ill person living with multiple autoimmune diseases for many years, they describe taking “two steps forward and one step back,” toward a “sensuous” medicine, a “language of dreams.” In their writing, video art, and sculpture, Lazard unfolds “the stuff of the past mixed up with the present” and holds up the need for timescales of investment in contention with capitalist clockwork.

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For *Support System (for Park, Tina, and Bob)*, 2016, Lazard spent one day of their residency at Room & Board in Williamsburg in bed, receiving visitors who had signed up for thirty-minute appointments between 9 AM and 9 PM. Gesturing to the incommensurability of time and money, the admission cost to the artist’s bedside was flowers, leading the twelve-hour performance to culminate in a sculpture composed of twenty-four bouquets. Paying tribute to artist peers Park McArthur, Constantina Zavitsanos, and the late “supermasochist” performer Bob Flanagan, *Support System* reflects a desire Lazard expressed in their 2013 essay [“How to Be a Person in the Age of Autoimmunity”](#): “I want to valorize my time in ways that have nothing to do with work.” This ambition is a through line in the radically slowed approach to art espoused by Canaries, cofounded in 2013 by Carolyn Lazard, Jesse Cohen, and Bonnie Swencionis as a support network for cis women and trans and nonbinary people whose needs cannot be met by conventional medicine. The group’s primary focus is on the sharing of resources, treatments, and company, as well as the building of a language around sickness and healing that mitigates isolation. “We start things, we get sick, we stop, we start again. There’s a nonnormative pacing of the work that

happens,” Lazard says. Like “canaries in the coalmine,” the collective warns against unsafe working conditions and other environmental stressors that increase vulnerability. Notes for the Waiting Room (2017), an atypical medical questionnaire and guide authored by multiple Canaries members, was intentionally left by members in “spaces that we feel some familiarity with and which we feel are relevant to investigations of our embodiment—the gallery and the waiting room.”



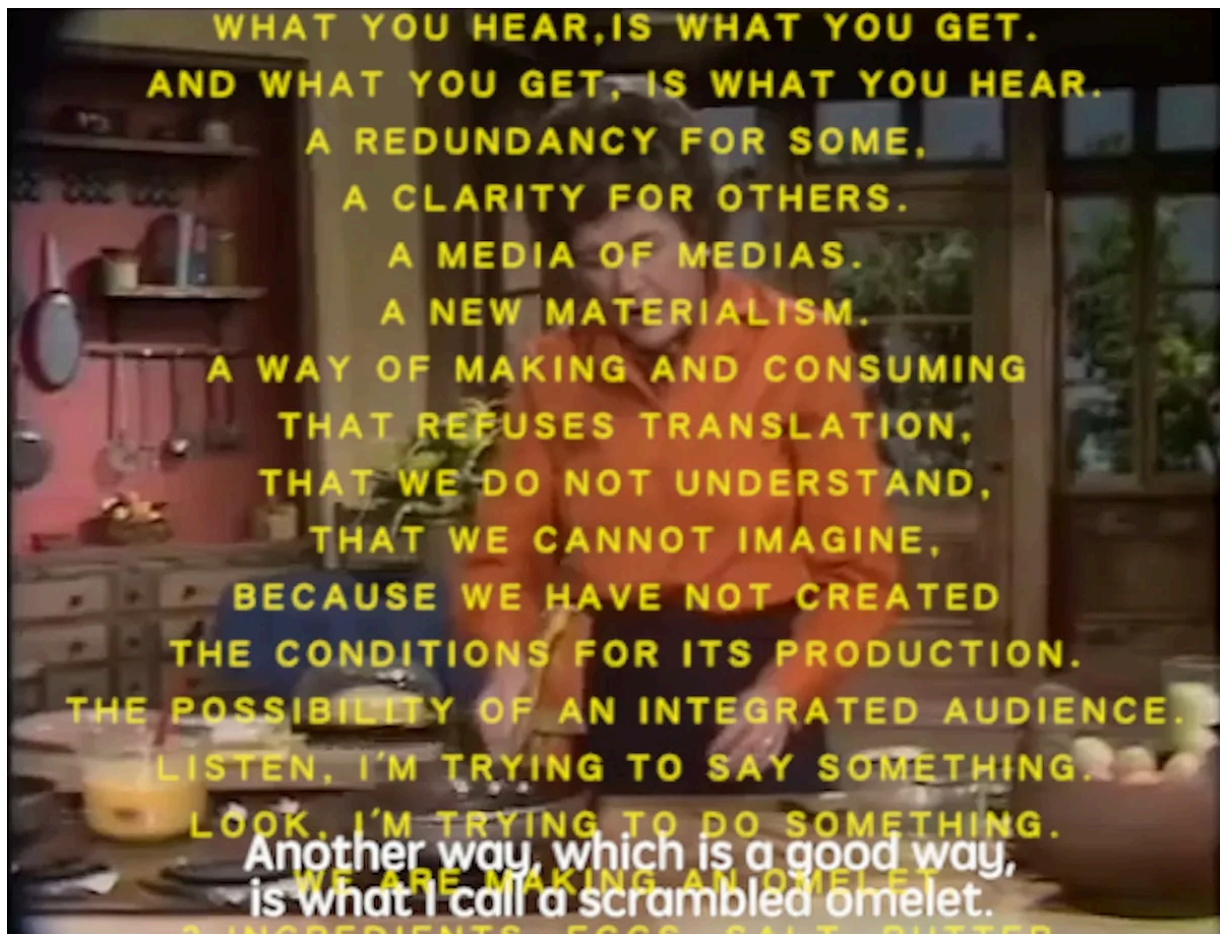
Carolyn Lazard, *Support System (for Park, Tina, and Bob)*, 2016, durational performance with gifted bouquets, dimensions variable. Artist-provided visual description: An assortment of flower bouquets in jars and vases are gathered together on top of a wooden desk. Behind the desk is a library wall of books and periodicals.

Such projects are working to catalyze a cultural transformation informed by disability justice, an endeavor mapped out by Lazard’s *Accessibility in the Arts: A Promise and a Practice*, a 2019 guidebook tailored to small cultural nonprofits. In a recent definition put forward by Jordan Lord—whose work screened alongside that of Kathleen Collins, following Lazard’s, in a 2018 program at Camden Arts Centre devised by Emma Hedditch—access

is “a confrontation with a structure” that may be a discrete hurdle or, when combined with another structure, become a barrier of epic proportions. Last year, Lazard’s 2019 video *Pre-Existing Condition*, shown on a monitor embedded flush into one of the Institute of Contemporary Art Philadelphia’s walls by means of a surgical cut, made physical the institutional relationship between the site of the exhibition (the ICA as attached to the University of Pennsylvania) and the subject of work, the university’s medical experiments between 1951 and 1974, under the aegis of Dr. Albert M. Kligman, on incarcerated people at Holmesburg Prison. The image is a slow-moving, slideshow-style procession through archival scans that Lazard digitized and rendered as negative images, facilitating access to history. The singular voice of Edward Yusuf Anthony, a survivor of the experiments who wakes up every day in pain, resounds and aids interpretation of an otherwise dumbfounding record of classificatory violence.

*A Recipe for Disaster*, 2018, draws on footage from Julia Child’s show *The French Chef*, selecting a 1963 episode devoted to omelets to highlight the moment when open captioning first appeared in US broadcast television, on Boston’s WGBH. The innovation, trialed in a 1972 rerun, prompted much negative feedback, including complaints about distracting visual noise; at this stage of technological development, captions were burned into the image, impossible to turn off. Lazard intensifies image, sound, and text, adding audio description and a further layer of scrolling all-caps yellow commentary that boldly states some more or less obvious things that bear repeating: “THIS WHITE WOMAN DEDICATED HER LIFE TO MAKING FRENCH FOOD ACCESSIBLE TO THE MASSES,” and may embody “AN INFRASTRUCTURE OF SEGREGATION.”





Carolyn Lazard, *A Recipe for Disaster*, 2018, HD video, color, sound, 27 minutes. Artist-provided visual description: Julia Child holds a pan over a stove in a rustic pink and beige kitchen. She is a white woman with short curly brown hair. She wears an orange button-down shirt with a black apron. On the counter is a bowl of eggs and a glass container of whisked eggs. Behind her is a wall of kitchen utensils. Behind her is also a doorway leading into a courtyard with plants. On top of this image, aligned to the center of the frame is a block of yellow, sans serif text. It reads, "WHAT YOU HEAR, IS WHAT YOU GET./AND WHAT YOU GET, IS WHAT YOU HEAR./A REDUNDANCY FOR SOME./A CLARITY FOR OTHERS./A MEDIA OF MEDIAS./A NEW MATERIALISM./A WAY OF MAKING AND CONSUMING/THAT REFUSES TRANSLATION./THAT WE CANNOT IMAGINE./BECAUSE WE HAVE NOT CREATED/THE CONDITIONS FOR ITS PRODUCTION./THE POSSIBILITY OF AN INTEGRATED AUDIENCE./LISTEN, I'M TRYING TO SAY SOMETHING./LOOK, I'M TRYING TO DO SOMETHING./WE ARE MAKING AN OMELET." Layered on top of this text is a white subtitle at the bottom of the frame that reads, "Another way, which is a good way, is what I call a scrambled omelet."

Spoken by Lazard and Zavitsanos, whose regular rhythms contrast with Child's affected singsong, the words drive home the division of audiences and the problem of finding an average: What would need to happen in *The French Chef*, or indeed in *A Recipe for Disaster*, "*FOR EVERYONE TO GET LOST . . . TOGETHER*"? After bringing in differences of taste—the narrator doesn't even like omelets—the work begins to wrench its operation apart: "*NO MORE INTERVENTIONS / AS THE CONDITIONS OF ACCESS. / A WORK MADE FROM THE CONDITIONS OF DEBILITY OR DIFFERENCE, NOT TRANSLATED FOR DEBILITY OR DIFFERENCE.*" *A Recipe for Disaster* plays on loop when installed, allowing conflicts between

*original and commentary to face off ad infinitum. Discrepancies synchronize in tragic and comic ways; where yellow text repeats, “EVERYTHING IS A SPECULATION OF NEED” for “A HUNGRY INSATIABLE AUDIENCE,” Child draws the episode to a close with some math contrived to imagine how quickly you could throw a dinner party for three hundred people. You could get the whole family in on the act, she says, after invoking an imaginary mother-in-law, and have everyone served in twenty minutes.*

The scramble to remediate hierarchies of attention in *A Recipe for Disaster* contrasts with the hypnotic focus on one person’s need in *CRIP TIME*, 2018. Opening onto a tabletop view of pill organizers labeled by day of the week, the video consists of a single fixed aerial shot. Watching on Vimeo, I turn on the subtitles, which narrate what unfolds in the work on a slight delay: “(pills empty into a hand),” “(pill distribution continues).” At 06:59, a sound that I had originally guessed to be a baby’s cry appears as “(a cat meows).” The word sigh came to mind as the sound of breathing reached my ears and occurred to me as an expression of frustration—a projection of mood in excess of the official captioning, which describes breath at different stages as “shallow” and “deep.” In “*The World Is Unknown*,” Lazard describes the moment when they first truly meditated, during an instance of unbearable pain: “The only thing I could control was the pace of my own breath.”



CRIP TIME

Carolyn Lazard

10:20

To describe the time of writing about Lazard's work would require me to use more than words; to what extent have my interpretive failures been shaped by the conditions brought on or exacerbated by Covid-19 and the pressure points it touches? At one point in CRIP TIME, *hands flutter as if grasping to remember their next move. At another, the action seems slowed by faltering Wi-Fi. The longer I spend with CRIP TIME, the more I think of time as its subject, and social reproduction—those gendered, racialized, and often unwaged forms of labor that reproduce the conditions of production—as its constraint. Here, time is a medium as well as a resource—distinctions that are not opposed in Lazard's hands. A self-administration routine, performed so many times as to be committed to muscle memory, is repeated once more on camera, as art. Appearing as building blocks in white, yellow, red, and different shades of blue and green, each ready-made day is further subdivided into four windows of time: morning, noon, evening, and bedtime, all stamped and faded through use.*

JULY, 1964						
Number of Protocol	Date Approved	Brief Description of Test	Name of Investigator	Fee Paid to Inmate Volunteer	Number of Inmates To Be Used	Source - Name of Firm Providing Money
H-365	July 14, 1964	Transplant Removal	Univ. of Penna. (Dr. Waldorf)	\$ 13.00	One (1)	Univ. of Pennsylvania
H-366	July 14, 1964	Topical Caproic Acid Study	Univ. of Penna. (Dr. G. H. Reichling)	\$ 1.00	Eight (8)	Univ. of Pennsylvania
H-367	July 15, 1964	Regional Variation Topical Mercuric Chloride Test	Univ. of Penna. (Dr. G. H. Reichling)	\$ 4.00	Ten (10)	Univ. of Pennsylvania
H-368	July 15, 1964	Topical Caproic Acid Test (Environmental Chamber)	Univ. of Penna. (Dr. G. H. Reichling)	\$ 3.00	Ten (10)	Univ. of Pennsylvania
H-369	July 15, 1964	Intradermal Injection of Dextrose Solution	Univ. of Penna. (Dr. G. H. Reichling)	\$ 1.00	Seven (7)	Univ. of Pennsylvania
H-370	July 16, 1964	Inner lip exposure to sun lamp and biopsy study	Univ. of Penna. (Dr. Waldorf)	\$ 5.00	Two (2)	Univ. of Pennsylvania
H-371	July 17, 1964	Sweat Study	Univ. of Penna. (Dr. Shelley)	\$ 3.00	Two (2)	Univ. of Pennsylvania
H-372	July 17, 1964	48-80 on Inner Lip	Univ. of Penna. (Dr. Waldorf)	\$ 1.00	Three (3)	Univ. of Pennsylvania
H-373	July 20, 1964	Deodorant Study	Univ. of Penna. (Dr. Shelley)	\$ 1.00	Four (4)	Univ. of Pennsylvania
H-374	July 20, 1964	To check absorption of MK-705 administered orally (6-aminopenicillanic acid)	Univ. of Penna. (Dr. A. M. Klugman)	\$ 15.00	Six (6)	Merck, Sharp and Dohme Company

they keep giving me medicine that makes me sick.

Carolyn Lazard, *Pre-Existing Condition*, 2019, HD video, color, sound, 6 minutes. Artist-provided visual description: A scanned document of a table of information pertaining to medical experiments conducted in a prison in 1964. The scan is an inverted image: white, type-written text on a black background speckled with white dots and a white margin on the left side of the frame. The information presented includes the dates of these experiments, the University of Pennsylvania doctors who facilitated them, the number of inmates who participated in the experiments, and the amount that inmates were paid, ranging from one to fifteen dollars per study. Brief descriptions of each test is listed, including "Transplant Removal," "Topical Caproic Acid Test (Environmental Chamber)," "Intradermal Injection of Dextrose Solution," and "48-80 on inner lip." At the bottom of the frame is a yellow subtitle, "they keeping giving me medicine that makes me sick."

"Love and time. It is basic," writes Ian White in "Removing the Minus," an essay rejecting the idea that illness subtracts from life. To the equation "life + cancer = -life," he brackets a reply: "(Let's not do this.)" Neither love nor time can be abstracted beyond the political, least of all when the distribution of debt and care are concerned. I'm haunted by the description of test subjects in *Pre-Existing Condition's* *archival display* as "volunteer inmates," and my attempt to do justice to the interconnected questions of free will, the right to work or refuse work, and the inability to work across Lazard's practice has consisted in reading between "Removing the Minus" and Denise Ferreira da Silva's 2017 essay "1 (life) ÷ 0 (blackness) = ∞ - ∞ or ∞ / ∞: On Matter Beyond the Equation of Value." Exploring a relationship to time through public clocks and heirloom timepieces, Gregory Pardlo, in "Colored People's Time" (2016), affirms that the clock of those who profit from slavery is "a controlled burn," keeping circadian rhythms in fetters. The runtime of CRIP TIME is exactly ten minutes, according to Lazard's website listing, and 10:19 according to Vimeo. But while watching, I find



*myself considering the other ways to appreciate time's passage: in the play of sunlight and shadow on the floral tablecloth supporting pill distribution, in how long it took to embroider in contrast with the central activity, or the minutes spent applying golden polish to each of the artist's fingernails. I think of the moment described in Lazard's 2017 essay "Colostomy Fannypack": the artist, hospitalized, enjoying having long nails for the first time before friends cut them short and paint them matte "post-recession austerity" gray. Each nail became a "safe unimaginative square with the dull flatness of our foreboding futures."*

There is no destination in CRIP TIME, *no narrative progression toward a standard of recovery, including preconceived ideals of autonomy for artist or artwork. Viewing CRIP TIME\_ on my laptop, the hands appear on screen at 1:1 scale with my own, which are neither quite at rest nor at work. I feel as though I'm sitting across from the artist, in the strange position of committing to the rhythms of someone else's self-care. And yet I'm distanced, as fixed into position as the camera is steady, and withheld from seeing what the pill bottles contain. I do not take this performance as a prescription but as a ritual and a grounding, inspiring study, acts of faith, and solidarity, in a present continuous tense.*

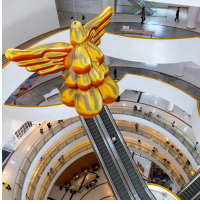
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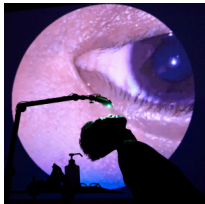
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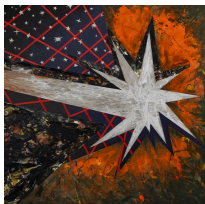
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