

AMBER N.

Lol white men bore me

15TH FEB 2012 | 177 NOTES

Look bored, not boring

Bored because the world sucks and there's nothing worth minding for more than a moment
and goddess I burn incense in your honor grant me the psychic strength to bend cosmic
energy

Beauty is so rare a thing

So few drink at my fountain.

There's a certain brand of flippancy that belongs to the queer kids who stay up all night on Tumblr. It's that bored thing, because there's only so many times you can say the word empire without it becoming hilarious in your mouth, the little accent on the em and then the word kinda dips and comes up again and all you're left with is something that sounds like umpire, does colonization have anything in common with Little League? It's because there's only so many times you can write the words intergenerational trauma but if you repeat yourself enough maybe you'll be able to sleep one day.

I'll admit it now, I was never too good at being flippant. I feel too much, which is why this essay is a certain travesty to her memory if you look at it close enough. The point is that all the Tumblr posts where the queer kids who are sometimes me say they want to die are either straining against or molded in the image of her flippancy, holy as it was, or in the image of something like it, or its opposite, or whatever spawned from its flipside one empty predawn hour. If you've spent some time on Tumblr, you may have seen her most famous poem, breathless in all caps. "BLESSED ARE THE SISSIES," it goes. "BLESSED ARE THE BOI DYKES/ BLESSED ARE THE PEOPLE OF COLOR MY BELOVED KITH AND KIN/BLESSED ARE THE TRANS/BLESSED ARE THE HIGH FEMMES/BLESSED ARE THE SEX WORKERS/BLESSED ARE THE AUTHENTIC..." There's

something that echoes inside me whenever I read her longest posts. It's that thing, where a lonely brown kid can sit behind a computer screen and write words that travel around the world and still choose to die because life is so lolzy and empire was always too real anyway.

31ST DEC 2011 | 13 NOTES

2012 NEW YEARS RESOLUTION:

Realize my destiny as the beauty queen marvelous creature M.C. Butterfly, Downfall of all whitekind

2ND JAN 2012 | 8 NOTES

NATIVE OF MANILA, PHILIPPINES, IS OF CHINESE-FILIPINO-SPANISH DESCENT, AKA FILIPINO

Her name is Mark Aguhar and she lives on in my every 2 am. She was a performance artist and I am inclined to believe that her twenty-five years were chock full of snark. Her blog exists on Tumblr at calloutqueen.tumblr.com, where she once wrote “I think it can be pretty hot when trans* people don't change their names,” and so she didn't. The last post she ever wrote was “lol white men bore me,” after which she decided that even the best things in her life had ceased to be compelling enough to make her stay. She also helped me

write this essay you are reading right now, or wrote me into it at the very least. You might point out that she's dead, how can she be writing anything. But I reject your linear construction of time and your Western epistemologies of knowledge. And if there's anything Mark has taught me, it's that our queerness can bend our words beyond the limits of our skin.

21ST DEC 2011 | 26 NOTES

BEING A LESBIAN SEEMS SO MUCH EASIER THAN BEING A DIRTY TRANNY GIRL AND BY EASIER I MEAN JUST AS DIFFICULT AND AWFUL UNLESS YOU'RE PRETTY AND WHITE

“[S]ometimes I think that asking someone to not kill themselves is an act of violence and selfishness”

I don't need to be strong, I need for the world to stop being so fucking weak, that my sisters are being swallowed up before my eyes

I am not writing about her because Mental Illness is a Problem or Suicide Prevention Hotlines Save Lives or Queer and Trans People of Color Are Oppressed. There's a way in which Mark makes me ashamed of my polemic tendencies, and I'm too acquainted with the darkness of her most glittery posts to be so presumptuous anyway. But I am writing because she haunts me, and because she might haunt you too. What I mean is that the diaspora

itself is luminescent with our ghosts. This is one thing that happens when bodies scatter across the sea. There is a certain kind of walking with death that our mothers did while laughing, the stories etched into the phone lines and altars of remembrance. We are born already haunted, always dancing with the women who made us, even if you can't see their smiles. And every time you ask us not to kill ourselves, you are trying to deny us the possibility of haunting you.

“The past few days have been this exercise in remembering that I have a million reasons to want to give up,” she wrote, and years later she did. When I read this post, the words existed not in themselves but in the context of what you might call the end of her life and what she might call being free. Someone read the post when it was written, and it appeared as one of the millions of angsty posts that exist in the recesses of Tumblr. Someone read the words after she was gone, and wondered if they should have seen it coming. “What if I died and no one knew because my Tumblr kept publishing scheduled posts?” I wrote once on my blog. “Writing into the void is the best thing ever technology is so fucking sexy and it loves me back.” The meaning of our words is never overdetermined. The ways in which we will haunt each other are always still being written.

”lol trans-misogyny is so gross and simultaneously lolzy ew transphobes are so ugh”

9TH FEB 2012 | 19 NOTES

so like, u know how i don't care about “identity” as a critical category and instead think about “lifestyle,” I was just thinking what a “white lifestyle” would be and loled to myself

“DID YOUR WHITE ASS SRSLY JUST SAY ‘ETHNIC CLOTHING’”

I am in love with Mark, but only in the way that we can never escape those who write us. Hers is a certain brand of flippancy that I will be learning all my life, but in a way she writes me into it and continues to write me, even before I know myself. I was carrying out her lessons yesterday when I messaged my friend in the middle of Social Theory class and said “fml explaining racial

oppression to 3 white girls. What is historical materialism? WE TALKED ABOUT IT FOR TWO CLASS SESSIONS.” I was thinking of her last summer when my friend was teasing me about how much I was falling in love and screenshotting peoples’ Instagram photos and I replied something like “lol” and also something about coming to love myself through loving other Black and brown bodies and the politics of screenshots and carrie mae weems and image making and media theory. Mark helped teach me the ways that some of us talk about academic theory as a kind of hyperventilation, as a way of making sense of the absolute and utter hilarity of the ways we were once young enough to think we could stain the ivory tower with our own brown blood. The ways we talk about Bodies in Space and Affect and Emotionality and also boys we love and also the latest episode of RuPaul’s drag race and also why electoral politics is doomed. The words of those who know both that they are beautiful and that they are not long for this world. The way the things we read become a part of us and the things we write no longer belong to us. The ways that the nonsense and strangeness and fragmentation of our words can become a reflection of the violence that has made us who we are. The ways we claim our ancestors and our elders, because Tumblr is for finding kin and keeping them alive.

Although I came to love Mark’s words, I first found her blog by clicking on a picture of her in a yellow T-shirt, a large topknot, dark red lipstick, and lots of rouge, daring me to know more. There is something inescapable about the image that is important here, especially since there are people who would do anything to avoid a confrontation with our bodies. And so if there is anything like a home to be found in this, I think it is in the selfie as final resting place, a place in which Mark resides and one of the ways in which she speaks. In her essay about selfies titled “Closing the Loop,” Aria Dean writes that “it is perhaps inadvisable for those of us whose subjectivities have not yet been recognized on a large scale to objectify ourselves further using the tools vetted by those who perpetuate our oppression... And anyway, on the Internet, this subversion is hardly revolutionary work. In fact, the algorithm thanks you for your contribution.” The algorithm thanks her for her contribution, but so do I. The algorithm thanks me for my contribution, but so do you. I think Dean is rightfully pointing out a reality of an Internet run by multinationals, but I want to consider how we might exist within this reality while still questioning the ways it works upon us. Can we lay bare our desire to be seen while also recognizing how our visibility is a constant

negotiation? How can we go beyond a simplistic politics of representation and beyond the deterministic facts of surveillance, to see not only this person in the selfie, but the ways in which she looks at us?

Selfies, like all photos, like words, are entwined inescapably with death. In the early decades of photography, it became common to commission photos of the dead, the messiness of a life frozen forever in the folded hands, the closed eyelids, the pious pleats of clothing, flattened into a 2D prayer against the vagaries of time. Given that one had the right amount of money and the least amount of melanin, one could negotiate the relationship between the decaying body and the image that would outlast it. This is still the case-- consider the contrast between the photos used to portray, say, Michael Brown, and the photos used to portray the white people who died in the Paris attacks. The former has become canonized by the media as a slovenly Black teenager throwing gang signs, with the tacit suggestion that he deserved to die. Not so for the countless paeans to white victimhood, pristine in their button-downs.

If you are not pretty and white, and if you are a dirty tranny girl or a Black person, then the ideal place for your picture is below a headline announcing your gruesome death. Like words, photos are also a haunting, but even more than that, they are an investment: in memory, in history, in a time when our bodies will no longer exist. Photos are the things that will be used to remember us when we are gone. But what photos, and who will do the choosing? In the weeks following Michael Brown's murder, Black people took to social media with pairs of pictures, wondering what images would come to signify their lives #IfTheyGunnedMeDown. Side by side, photos of high school graduations, weddings, gowned and shaved, paired with photos of parties, drunkenness, the tight tube skirt riding up the ass as God intended.

#IfTheyGunnedMeDown which one would they choose? Which images would be given the honor of the haunting, the remembering, and which images would be left to die?

For most of us, there is a "they" who will be choosing our images, who will circulate the deadname, the final moments, the gang sign, the tube skirt. An image is just that-- a moment in time-- and as such, it is often used as an excuse to misremember. And so I am not arguing, as many have, that representation itself is groundbreaking, that to turn the camera on oneself will solve the problem. Selfies like Mark's are not a solution. But I do think they can be a directive: a safeguard against the inevitable violence of collective memory, an embrace of the bizarre, and a call for an alternate remembering. Thinking

back on the experience of scrolling through Mark's blog, memories of her selfies blend into one another, a repeating pattern of eyeshadow and lipstick and hair weaves and patterns. Certain images stand out to me, like the one where her eyebrows are light blue and she wears a red and black flannel shirt. But all of them, like the blog itself, point to a constant practice of revision, of meeting the eyes of the world, of creating a self defined by changeability.

By making this body of images, Mark did her best to ensure that she would be remembered how she lived, not as we would like to remember her. No art history-like critique or cursory Google search of her can fail to contain the fact of her as a chubby brown femme with a bomb ass makeup contour, because despite the memory of her that society would like to create, Mark got there first. Her selfies are an invective against whitewashing and all forms of queer respectability. They are also a celebration of the bizarreness of the image, the ways that the image is used and circulated and interpreted. Because the joke is that none of the college diplomas and suits and job offers ever mattered. The joke is that racism doesn't care about job offers. The joke is that maybe we should just coat our hair in glitter and post all the selfies anyway because this is how we want to be remembered, this is how we see ourselves, because we know that when they come to gun us down, when they succeed in making this world an impossible place to live, the graduation photos will have died along with our bodies. Those photos, the ones our mothers were proud of, were never meant to outlast us anyway. They were just a temporary thing, a practice in signification, an inside joke from the universe.

Mark's selfies are the closest thing on the blog to a self-written obituary, an answer to the question, What would you like people to say when you die? I would like them to say that I was beautiful, and that I was queer. That I knew how to rock blue eyebrows like no one else. That I was beautiful, despite knowing that beauty could not save me. That I believed in makeup as the queerest tools. That the lift of the hand to angle the phone, the tilt of the face, the turning of the laptop screen towards the body, these were the moments when I gave birth to myself. Because this is what we do, reaching across the ocean, deep into the sea, trying to learn body languages that hundreds of years of empire have denied us. And may our words always reflect the in between. May you read dislocation through our bodies and fragments in our gaze. May our selfies be a looking, a reckoning, a seeing. May you look until you can't look away.



sometimes I wonder how I'm still alive





I'm just so bored and so pretty and not white

Amber N. is a student who currently lives and works in NYC. She enjoys cooking, watching B-rated Netflix movies, and making white people uncomfortable.