

My Suicide Notes

by

Brian Garcia

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Fine Arts in Interarts-Performance
Stamps School of Art & Design; School of Music, Theatre & Dance
in the University of Michigan

2016

Advisors: Holly Hughes,
Heidi Kumao and
Carolyn Clayton.

Introduction

On September 21, 2001 my uncle was found dead in his apartment in Mexico City. Nine years later, columnist Dan Savage launched a YouTube campaign telling American youth, “it gets better”. At age ten, I write my first suicide note. This project seeks to connect three disparate narratives as markers of oppression countering an expectation for queer trans voices of color to speak in diluted, conforming, or apologetic manners. My Queer Suicides is a 20 minute spoken word performance documenting the remnants of depression following my uncle’s suicide in 2001. This project argues a link between systematic oppression and dominant arguments for survival, suggesting suicidal ideation as a revolutionary act of agency. The work calls for a proactive organization of prevention methods that separate ideation from act, removing stigma from romanticized rhetoric.¹



Figure 1: Luis Vidales poses atop a snowy mountain after a hiking expedition in central Mexico. Source: Unknown photographer.

¹ Note to the reader: As an optional source of insight, the artist submits four short stories meant to depict the circumstances of depression that have influenced the creative work. These entries are intended as supplemental snapshots too complex to condense into the written guidelines of this thesis paper. Take these stories as you will.

The Stories Behind My Depression

Death of my Uncle

I was 8 years old the night my uncle died. I remember the moment my parents received a phone call late at night announcing his death. Not long after I found myself in my grandmother's courtyard watching an open casket vigil as distant family members wept. The experience of mourning was confusing but not new. For the past few weeks America mourned the lost lives of the attacks on the World Trade Center. This encounter with my parent's homeland would be my last but the depression of my mother would come home with us. I remember the first sign: a sudden seize of holiday celebrations including Christmas and Halloween. I found myself inexplicably trying to recreate traditions that I barely understood while my mother was less motivated to leave the house. I grew up in a depressed household, one that mirrored the social and political depression of the time connected by the affect landscape left behind by the attacks on 9/11.

My First Suicide Note

I wrote a suicide note when I was ten after being punished for an insignificant disobedience. Where I imagine most kids would write a letter about running away, I wrote a letter about wanting to kill myself. I felt the impact of disappointing my mother unbearable perhaps unable to separate the totality of my statement and its impact. I sometimes wonder if this is a phase one ever grows out of. Reflecting back at the note points to a moment during which my sadness had convinced me that death was the only answer. In this way, the note captures an intensity of these emotions more reliably than memory that is clouded with childhood amnesia. The note was a photograph of my state of mind- an elusive moment captured in writing.

High School

In high school my ongoing depressive episodes were heightened by the usual teenage dilemmas of fitting in and feeling left out. The pressure of coming out as a means of asserting my identity and finding community only made my depression worse. When I came out to my mother, she initially offered hesitant support asserting that my sexuality can only be determined after adolescence. This influenced her reaction when I publically came out over social media. Hurt, my mother accused me of not attempting to understand what she was going through. Lashing out in a depressive state of mind, I claimed that I would kill myself after feeling rejected and a lack of support from her. In desperation, she screamed in agony telling me to kill myself rather than torturing her with ongoing threats. This reaction came from fear of mourning a child lost to suicide. This moment resurfaced the aftermath of trauma left by my uncle's passing. This moment interconnects my queerness and depression.

College

My depression in high school eventually settled before moving to college. At the academy a constant academic pressure of success defined by measures of capitalist or creative output added to ongoing anxieties of failure. In turn, emotional dependency of an intimate partner would eventually lead to a breakup after two years. The disillusionment of monogamous stability was the breaking point in my downhill plummet. I found myself suicidal once more in the winter of my sophomore year of college making various failed attempts at suicide while desperately searching for resources to help cope and understand my depression. Eventually this suicidal ideation would also settle to a coping degree however its effects would continue to ripple with the passing of every academic semester.

Social Protest as Cultural Context

September 21, 2010, nine years following my uncle's death, Dan Savage and husband Terry Miller launch a YouTube campaign telling gay youth, "It gets better".² The campaign is aimed at young gay John Doe as a response to increasing coverage of teenage suicide due to gay bullying.³ Billy Lucas' death, a fifteen year old from Greensburg, IN, would inspire Savage to create the video that would become a 501(c)3.⁴ Celebrity supporters followed with "it gets better" video-responses while critiques of privilege go largely ignored. In their critique of Savage's work, Isaac West et al. point out, "Many of these high-profile suicides involved White teenagers and it deserves consideration given the curious lack of sustained coverage of similar incidents involving two 11-year-old African-American boys".⁵

Public attention surrounding the death of black teenagers however would soon reach headlines as 17-year-old Trayvon Martin's death in 2012 launched a #BlackLivesMatter - an effort by black activists to end police brutality on black bodies.⁶ In May 2015, Sandra Bland, a 28-year old Black woman from Naperville, Illinois alleged to have assaulted a police officer during a traffic stop was found dead in a jail cell three days later igniting activists to launch the #SayHerName.⁷ A new message of survival centered on the intersectional gendered ways in

² Itgetsbetterproject. "It Gets Better: Dan and Terry." YouTube. YouTube, 2010. Web. 6 Apr. 2016.

³ "What Is the It Gets Better Project?" It Gets Better. Web. 4 Apr. 2016.

⁴ "In Memorium: Remembering Billy Lucas, the Boy Whose Suicide Inspired a Movement." LGBTQ Nation. 09 Sept. 2013.

⁵ Isaac West, Michaela Frischherz, Allison Panther, and Richard Brophy. "Queer Worldmaking in the "It Gets Better" Campaign." in *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking* (2013): 49.

⁶ "About." BlackLivesMatter. Accessed April 23, 2016. <<http://blacklivesmatter.com/about>>.

⁷ African American Policy Forum. *Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women*. Issue brief. (New York, NY: Center for Intersectionality And Social Policy Studies, 2015).

which police violence affect black cis/trans women would pave the way for media attention on the alarmingly low life expectancy of trans women of color in the coming year.⁸

Living at the margins of these social movements, *My Suicide Notes* creates an interjectional artifact providing countercultural narratives not rooted in messages of survival. Drawing a link between social oppression and epidemics, the project critiques this elusive power maintained by media scrutiny as it stems from retroactive action. By defining the performer's identities as a suicidal nonbinary person of color, the script challenge blanket messages of "it gets better" creating a space to congregate around living bodies rather than post-mortem. The philosophy behind this project does not define utopia as an abolition of an oppressive act but suggests such privileged survivalist ideals as continued violence. By raising questions of what it means to live, this project defines its existence not as a cry for help but a call to reflect on unlivable social circumstances.



Figure 2: The skull on a penacho designed using references to Nahua ceremonial headdresses watches as the performer retells his encounter with a mother's trauma. Still from *My Suicide Notes*, 2016. Source: Nikki Horowitz.

⁸ Dominic Holden "Why Are So Many Black Transgender Women Getting Killed in Detroit?" (Buzzfeed News, 19 Nov. 2015).

Depression as Personal Context

What people didn't tell me about my depression: Your emotional mind will disconnect causing an agonizing spiral of pessimism. In an attempt to survive, your rational mind will cover its tracks pretending nothing has happened. A trigger will cause an unexpected emotional reaction but your analysis for causation will be stopped by over-stimulation or rapid-fire worry thoughts. Even when rational observations are made, the ability to enact learned behavior will be stumped by impulses to stop feeling all together. This cycle continue eating at your self-worth, develop into isolation, destroying your ego.

Analyzing a part of myself that wants to die contradicts a dominant narrative of survival.

Antidepressant ad campaigns imagine utopia as long walks on the beach with low emotional labor used to process everyday stressors.⁹ According to this model of neurological health: happiness is equated as the opposition of pain achievable by the overcoming of obstacles and in hopes of shedding the “othering” status of mental illness. In other words, if “depression hurts, Cymbalta can help” remove it.¹⁰

In his book, *Optimism: The Biology of Hope*, anthropologist Lionel Tiger argues, “Suicides . . . make a major statement about the value of life and thus call into question the very source of optimistic gregariousness which sustains us all”.¹¹ Optimism is defined in opposition to a desire to die - a binary that posits death as feared and life as precocious. This message attempts to prevent suicide by reminding those contemplating of the pain they may cause others.¹² Thus, the value of life is placed on that surrounding the living or optimistic and any opposition to this is deemed unthinkable.

⁹ "No One" Nice Shoes Creative Studio, 2009. (Cymbalta. 02 Nov. 2009) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTZvnAF7UsA>>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Lionel Tiger. *Optimism: The Biology of Hope*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979) quoted in Gayle Rosellini and Mark Worden. *Here Comes the Sun: Finding Your Way out of Depression*. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

¹² "Suicide Prevention." How to Help Someone Who Is Suicidal. HelpGuide.org.



Figure 3: An earlier iteration of the work performed on November 12, 2015 featured gendered garments as representations of anxieties. *Light A Candle, Interarts Showcase - 2016*. Source: Erica Gavin.

This project takes precedent in the work of queers of color Carmelita Tropicana, Brittany Chavez and Guillermo Gomez Peña who deploy the use of disidentification or dominant (read: oppressive) narratives repurposed for personal objectives. Jose Esteban Muñoz writes, “disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture”.¹³ By project will in turn use the anti-suicidal logic of the act of suicide as a selfish act afflicting the living with a burden aftermath as raw material.

¹³ 31. José Esteban Muñoz, introduction in *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1999).

Using suicide ideation as an intervention to redefine life's value based on the individual, this project suggests life to be a temporal state of being offering choice to deny or consider new possibilities. The piece speaks to a demographic constantly denied choice (read: oppression) while being weary of continued romanticizing of the act of suicide. As prevention research finds, speaking about suicide will not correlate to a completed suicide attempt¹⁴ therefore this project is derived from a need to reevaluate a relationship with mortality, removing fear of death through coercive reasons based on other's happiness stating. In the end, my reason to live should rely on me and nobody else.



Figure 4: Performer places a crown of thorns as music blares with the words: “¡Si lo vas a hacer hazlo ya pero no me tortures!” - “If you’re going to do it, do it now but stop torturing me”. *My Suicide Notes, 2016*. Source: Mona McKinstry.

¹⁴ "Suicide Prevention." How to Help Someone Who Is Suicidal. HelpGuide.org.



Figure 5: Early in the exploration of material, body stand-ins were used to depict the missing bodies of trans women of color. This idea was later scrapped due to its objectifying nature. Source: Photograph by author.

My Suicide Notes: Methodology & Creative Work

Initial goals for the project included creating a documentary performance as the foundation of a nonprofit organization. Statistics surrounding trans women of color's low life expectancy motivated a desire for community action. Using charred dummies as representations of murdered trans women, the piece would chronicle a series of interviews with trans women in Detroit, Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor. Due to voyeuristic and appropriative qualities, the project was abandoned however the experience moved the project in the direction of personal narrative.



Figure 6: Stills of *My Suicide Notes*, 2016. Source (Top/btm-left, right): Nikki Horowitz (center): Mona McKinstry.

My Suicide Notes is a series of sixteen spoken word pieces performed in sequence connecting personal story with social commentary. Each monologue is written as a stand-alone piece concurrently illustrating three core narratives: My uncle's death, my suicidal coming out and my current depressive state. Each piece is edited from journal entries documenting the evolution of my depression over the course of six months. The writings hold an elusive

connection to a desire to end my life. These entries were then used as raw material for the creation of a final 20-minute script.

In selecting entries, preference is given to those that illustrate one of the three core narratives. Objective distance caused an undesirable message of hope or survival to tint the piece. A method was developed that retraced moments leading to a depressive episode allowing remnants of trauma to resurface. Attraction to phrases, words or flow of thought during these moments was favored over edits made in controlled environments without reference to depressive thought. Conjuring this state offered genuine ways of weaving poetry and storytelling with personal and societal depressions.

On stage, the performer dresses in pre- and post- colonial Mexican apparel following an excerpt by Mexican musician Jorge Reyes y Nok Niuk's "La danza del Fuego".¹⁵ Each monologue corresponds to a clothing article (Figure 7): black eye/lip makeup; *maxtlatl*, "nude" tights, candle, black floral corset, penacho repurposing LGBT newspaper as feathers., Spanish lace skirt; black military boot and a contemporary wedge decorated in coopted Native American patterns.



Figure 7: Original costume design mockup for final performance of *My Queer Suicides*.

¹⁵ Mictlannokniuk. "(MICTLAN) DANZA DEL FUEGO JORGE REYES Y NOK NIUK." (YouTube. 28 Nov. 2007), < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_6LhIxKGvo>.



Figure 8: *La Catrina* center in “Sueño de Una Tarde Dominical en la Alameda”. Source: Diego Rivera.

José Guadalupe Posada’s *La Catrina* as satire of Mexican aristocracy in the pre-revolutionary era was used as inspiration for costume design. Diego Rivera’s “Sueño de Una Tarde Dominical...” (Figure 8) reimagines the character synonymous with Mexican Day of the Dead celebrations¹⁶ however origins are traced to indigenous depictions of Mictlantecuhtli - The Nahua death diety. Similar to *Catrina*’s subversion of social class, death for the Mexica people acted as an ultimate equalizer. “The Aztecs did not believe in a special paradise reserved only for the righteous but, rather, that all people

shared the same destiny after death, regardless of the kind of life they had led”.¹⁷ Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s work inspired repurposing MesoAmerican and post-colonial figures through a ChicaniX “*ni de aquí, ni de allá*” (“Not from here, nor from there”) lens for the final design.

¹⁶ MoKa Hammeken. "La Catrina – The Woman of Mexico." RockyPoint360. (29 Oct. 2012).

¹⁷ Mark Cartwright. "Mictlantecuhtli." Ancient History Encyclopedia. (22 Sept. 2013).

Conclusion

This project has inspired new ways of thinking about suicide ideation beyond implications of moral judgment. Further development will include organizing activism to remove stigma from suicidal thoughts. What happens if we live in a world where death is not thought of as an end but a transitional state? What happens if we live in a world where the dead aren't mourned but thought of in totality? By imagining death as a ripple of reality, this piece allows me to think of the aftermath of my uncle's suicide not as depression but as an opportunity to reaffirm my survival. *My Suicide Notes* creates a cultural lens for which to view my world. Thoughts of suicide give me an opportunity to reaffirm my agency in this world. My words document an intimate relationship with death. My art gives me a reason to live. In the end, I stand knowing that "I too will end."



Figure 9: Still from *Light a Candle*, 2015. Consumed in flames, the performer washes his body in light revealing a nude body underneath. This performance served as inspiration for *My Queer Suicides*. Source: Erica Gavin.

Bibliography

"About." BlackLivesMatter. Accessed April 23, 2016. <<http://blacklivesmatter.com/about>>.

African American Policy Forum. *Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women*. Issue brief. New York, NY: Center for Intersectionality And Social Policy Studies, 2015. Print.

"Ancient Aztec Clothing." Aztec-History.com. Web. 6 Apr. 2016. <<http://www.aztec-history.com/ancient-aztec-clothing.html>>.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands: The New Mestiza = La Frontera*. San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987.

Cartwright, Mark. "Mictlantecuhtli." Ancient History Encyclopedia. 22 Sept. 2013.

COMROCK85. "JORGE REYES - DIA DE MUERTOS, INVOCACION (01 NOV 1991)." YouTube. 16 Nov. 2009.

Costantino, Roselyn. "Politics and Culture in a Diva's Diversion: The Body of Astrid Hadad in Performance." *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 11.2 (2000): 149-73. Web.

Cvetkovich, Ann. *Depression: A Public Feeling*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2012.

"Disidentification." Enculturation. Web. 3 Apr. 2016.

Gavin, Erica *Photograph Documentation of "Light a Candle" 1 & 2, 14 Nov. 2015.*

Hammeken, MoKa. "La Catrina – The Woman of Mexico." RockyPoint360. 29 Oct. 2012.

Holden, Dominic. "Why Are So Many Black Transgender Women Getting Killed in Detroit?" BuzzFeed. BuzzFeed News, 19 Nov. 2015.

Horowitz, Nikki, *Photograph Documentation of "My Queer Suicides"*, 14 Apr. 2016.

"In Memorium: Remembering Billy Lucas, the Boy Whose Suicide Inspired a Movement." LGBTQ Nation. 09 Sept. 2013.

Itgetsbetterproject. "It Gets Better: Dan and Terry." YouTube. YouTube, 2010. Web. 6 Apr. 2016.

"La Catrina." Copal, Mexican Folk Art at Its Best Online. Web. 5 Apr. 2016.

McKinstry, Mona, *Photograph Documentation of "My Queer Suicides"*, 15 Apr. 2016.

Mictlannokniuk. "(MICTLAN) DANZA DEL FUEGO JORGE REYES Y NOK NIUK." YouTube. 28 Nov. 2007.

"Mictlantecuhtli." Ancient History Encyclopedia. Web. 4 Apr. 2016.

"Mictlantecuhtli". Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2016. <<http://www.britannica.com/topic/Mictlantecuhtli>>.

Muñoz, José Esteban. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 1999.

"No One" Nice Shoes Creative Studio, 2009. Cymbalta. 02 Nov. 2009. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTZvnAF7UsA>>.

Rosellini, Gayle, and Mark Worden. *Here Comes the Sun: Finding Your Way out of Depression*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988.

Rivera, Diego. *Sueño de una Tarde Dominical en la Alameda Centra*, 1946-1947. Mural, 51 ft × 15 ft, Museo Mural Diego Rivera, Mexico City. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_Kid_-_Diego_Rivera.jpg>, accessed 22 Apr. 2016.

Scelfo, Julie. "Suicide on Campus and the Pressure of Perfection." New York Times. 27 July 2015.

Stossel, Scott. *My Age of Anxiety: Fear, Hope, Dread, and the Search for Peace of Mind*. 1st ed. New York, NY: Knopf, 2014.

"Suicide Prevention." How to Help Someone Who Is Suicidal. HelpGuide.org.

Tara Parker-Pope. "Showing Gay Teenagers a Happy Future." New York Times: Well Blog 22 Sept. 2010. <http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/>.

Tiger, Lionel. *Optimism: The Biology of Hope*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979.

Unknown photographer, "*Luis Vidales poses atop a snowy mountain*", 1995-2001, Mexico City, MX, Dgital scan of original image.

West, Isaac, Michaela Frischherz, Allison Panther, and Richard Brophy. "Queer Worldmaking in the "It Gets Better" Campaign." QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking (2013): 49. <http://www.academia.edu/>.

"What Is the It Gets Better Project?" It Gets Better. Web. 4 Apr. 2016.

MY QUEER DEATHS

by

Brian Garcia

Dear reader,

What you hold in your hands is a snapshot, a moment being shared in the hopes of opening conversation. Some may read this as testimony, others as over-sharing and yet others as a story that feels all too familiar. This project was conceived after continued realization that many of my close queer/trans loved ones and friends of color at this institution and beyond have shared in stories enveloped with similar threading. This is one in many attempts to continue this dialogue fueled by expression but engrained in survival.

While my use of "queer" throughout this piece resonates with my capacities to embrace and navigate the term [read: privilege - that should be scrutinized in itself] I use the term to mean the uncanny, the unexpected, the intangible and unknown which performance can only begin to access. Embodied histories (both of privilege and oppression) gives way in my body to an ancient practice that I begin to only start to understand. My hope with this work is to share with you what I have learned scribing at diaries through depressive thoughts through space both on stage and through these pages.

This piece hopes to engage primarily with other queer/trans people of color and to affirm new possibilities, ongoing frameworks of thinking and the many complex and vital lived experiences we share. I say this however, while reinstating that my experiences are limited and in knowing that these existences will go on long after my own corporeal death, I hope to remember those who have passed with just as much strength and power. To my family, for their ongoing support and love, to the many queer/trans radical activists that have shared time and words with me and to those who have held me, embraced me or listened in my times of need: I thank you from the bottom of my heart. To the many neurodivergent, queer/trans/gendernonconforming folks and people of color with whom these words might resonate: I love you. You are beautiful. You are powerful. You are enough.

In power, resistance and care,

Brian Antonio Garcia

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brian Antonio Garcia', written in a cursive, fluid style.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EL GRITO

A NOTE

ON DEPRESSION

ON CURRENT AFFAIRS

ON SOLIDARITY

ON ISOLATIONS

ON LOCATION

ON MOURNING

ON MEMORY

ON FORGETTING

ON BEING

ON DEVIANCE

ON FAMILY

A CROSS-GENERATIONAL NOTE

ON BEING ENOUGH

ONE FINAL NOTE

There was no note the night my uncle died.
He was simply found flameless.¹

¹ *Performer proclaims the following words enacting a deep ritual*

A NOTE

These are my suicide notes. Not the literal interpretation of words that suggest my death but words near death. That which rub against the fragility of life. That which crack the boundaries of a tormented mind. That which break the illusion of a depicted happy and healthy state. That which I attribute to be a lie in the eyes of most. That which I attribute to be imbalanced. That which I attribute to be queer, nonconforming, bodies of color.

ON DEPRESSION

I'm embarking on a journey
to connect the death of my uncle
To the depressions of being queer
And the queerness of being depressed
It's an experience uniquely mine
Culturally shared
Exploited by the media
Shall I say more?

ON CURRENT AFFAIRS²

A la roro niño
A lo roro ya
Duérmete mi niño
Duérmete me ya.

² *Performer sings the following excerpt from a Mexican lullaby. The tone is charged and melodious, forcibly trying to put the subject to sleep, an impossible task - as if to muffle any outside noise.*

ON SOLIDARITY

People keep coming up to me through the course of the project. She wore see through platform heels, a black dress, and bleached hair.

“I overheard you talking about your project.

I couldn't help but notice it was about suicide.

I think that's really important.

My friend committed suicide last week,

I think he really needed it.

He was in so much pain.”

I could see the universe in her eyes.
We agreed to mourn in silence.

ON ISOLATIONS³

“I like to play part time in the feminine/masculine binary otherwise known as my gay agenda.”

“I am not a man, I am not a woman, I am God.”

“I think he really needed it. He was in so much pain.”

After my uncle's death my mother underwent a deep depression. It's an illness we both undergo.

³ *Sound bites: Treat them with care as they all come from a different kind of pain - unique in wisdom in their own right.*

ON LOCATION

It's about 9pm on a Sunday in 2001
Outside the miles and miles
Of Central California farms
Happy farms
Where happy cows go to live
Amidst the ruins of colonialism
Where missionaries
With giant bell signal:
"Indios- your time has come!"
But that's another story for another time
So I digress.
It's September
Picture big suburban houses
In a big suburban neighborhood
New development
Ready to crash
Amidst American values
"Our Grief is Not a Cry for War!"
But I digress
This is the truth:
2001, small town, central California
Big suburbia - happy cows -
And a phone call
A phone call from down South
Keep thinking South
Further South
Not fried chicken and slavery but
Borders and borderlands South
A phone call asking to be present
To be here,
To be now,
In the moment,
To take time
A phone call announcing a loved one has died
And no explanation why

ON MOURNING⁴

When you're so drunk the candle burns so low and you forgot you
even lit it
You're so drunk you forgot there was a candle there for you in
the first place
You're so drunk you can't remember why you're lighting another
one again
And again
And again
Until all you can say is - don't tell me to light another fucking
candle
Because I'm still sitting here wondering
When you'll be lighting one for me
And it could be
Very soon
But
Light another fucking candle you tell me
And so I do
Make your art you tell me
And so I do
Carve their names you tell me
And so I do
So far in their mind it's engraved in stone
Cracked, broken
So shed a tear
Because
You are just as responsible
Simply for the act of being
And when you're done shedding tears
We can barely stand to count
Get up here
And tell me
To light another fucking candle.

⁴ *Performer begins a musical piece that slowly deconstructs into a cacophony of screams and moans of pain and agony. In the final moments, the performer reconstructs themselves picking up where they left off. Addressing the audience with determination in anger - Anger is valid, anger is real, anger is key.*

ON MEMORY

I was eight years old the last time I went to Mexico
City smells deeply rooted in my mind:
Tacos behind wired windows
In forced European floral patterns
Smell
Laundry detergent from rooftops
Down tight paved corridors
Smell
Lime green buggies spewing gas pollution
I'm puking most of my stay there
Gringo stomach not able to take the
Smell
Fucking colonialism.

I was eight years old the last time I went to Mexico. I was eight years old the first time I told Derrick:

"I'll show you mine if you show me yours."

I had yet to reach the age in which I would realize I was uncircumcised - my foreskin "other" still foreign to me. Derrick's penis had a ridge beneath the head like the other boys that I attributed to be the consequence of maturity. One day my penis will look like his- one day. Perhaps I should stop here to mention that Derrick was a circumcised black man but I won't because as we sat beneath Misses' Hill's giant desk all I wanted to do was taste maturity on my lips. At this point, Christian- who had no idea what the fuck was going on looks at us and says:

**"Uh, guys- I'm going to go play over there.
I'll see you all later."**

I was eight years old the last time I went to Mexico. I was eight years old the first time I sucked dick. I was eight years old the night my uncle died. I didn't know him. He was young and it was weeks after the 9/11 attacks. America was fearful. My family was fearful.

ON FORGETTING

I remember an open-casket funeral
Up my grandma's spiral staircase
To her sotea
Like my mother's sobs
His cold skin
Unfamiliar to me
Our annual trips to Mexico
Ended

There was no note the night my uncle died.
He was simply found flameless.

ON BEING⁵

Reflecting upon questions of who I am and what it means is what I do. So here is a timeline of me:

Age 3: my parents construct a conglomerate of Mexican-American holidays in an attempt to assimilate. Halloween, mother dresses us up in extravagant costumes. In a candlelit kitchen, the following night we erect a shrine from cultural memory.

Age 6: mother buys me a Ken doll after my Barbie fetish is scrutinized by my uncles. Her emphasis is not on heteronormativity but minimizing the effects of sexuality in general. Whether I was gay or not was only important to those who wanted to bring me down.

Age 12: my older brother finds gay porn on my computer. This was my first outing. Mother punishes him for violating my privacy. She doesn't question my "curiosity for men."

Age 13: I begin to come to terms with my sexuality realizing: Holy shit, I'm going to have to come out!

Age 14: I finally come out and like any fresh out of the closet teen I needed a boyfriend! I posted an ad on facebook like some sort of preteen Craigslist. My aunt found out who told mom who in turn accused me of being selfish. Why couldn't I just think of how this was affecting her? Apparently, it's only okay to be gay in the nuclear family; mother was not ready to go viral.

⁵ *Performer is playful and displays with all manners of delight in each fragment. The speed is fast. An emphasis should be placed on dissemination of information rather than clarity of moment. Think more of a lecture space and less of a conversation with a friend.*

⁶It's late at night and we're kicking, screaming, fighting for survival and identity. In a fit of rage I did what in hindsight should have been done at a different time. I told my mother I wanted to kill myself. I wanted her to feel my anger, my loneliness, my pain - unaware that she already did.

“SI LO VAS A HACER,
HAZLO YA,
PERO NO ME TORTURES!
IF YOU'RE GOING TO DO IT,
THEN JUST DO IT
BUT PLEASE
STOP TORTURING ME!”

At this point I find myself floating in blank mental space. That night I became 2001. That night I was simultaneously her brother and her son and as we sat in the middle of the room crying, all I can think of was how I was the one we lit the candle to, I was the reason she lived in fear and eventually I too would be the reason she would want to die.

Ignited I feel a rapid loss of oxygen, of purpose, of self worth. How do you come terms with your reality when the one you've based it on tells you to end it? In darkness I hear a voice telling me to do it. I calculate all the possibilities; in none of them was society able to save me.

⁶ *The pace of the breath slows down. There is a meditative concentration on what is being said. Each word has its moment.*

ON DEVIANCE⁷

I have a theory
That my sexuality is due to deviance
That my gender identity is due to anger
And my gender expression is a morbid

**“What the fuck am I supposed to do with this
depressed brown body?”**

I know: Drag!
But I fail
Much like I failed Mother Monster when she told me I was born
this way
And the HRC when they told us our trans issues took up time
My deported sisters had to wait-
Take a number and sit down
Because Dan Savage is going to tell us how to be gay
And capitalism.
But what if I wasn't made this way?
What if I chose to be this way?
What if I was told from a young age
That a swoosh of the hips meant I was gay
A limp wrist meant I was gay
And a lisp meant I was gay
And so, I chose to be gay!
Like REALLY gay
Like REALLY REALLY REALLY GAY!
Because maybe those hips did mean I wanted cock in my little 6 yr
old ass,
Maybe flicking my wrist meant my sassy 7 yr old self just wanted
to get gay married
IF YOU WANTED IT THEN YOU SHOULD HAVE PUT A RING ON IT!
And perhaps my depressed 8 yr old self just wanted to talk about
sadness
Because emotions were all the rage in 2001
Because depression was all the rage in 2001
And who doesn't want to be all the rage?

⁷ *This is the performer's diva moment. Take it. Enjoy it!*

ON FAMILY⁸

My brother is a person of many voices
His words were the ones to bring me down that night
Together we spoke of changing times
About growing up
About why mothers are not perfect
Reparations are difficult between a mother and a son who are both
damaged
But not impossible
The night my mother told me to die was
The night I saw the universe in her eyes
Her complexities
Her oppressions
A woman who sacrificed a world
To give birth to me in this country
A single mother ostracized at a young age
A mother who loved me enough to tell me to die
Because when you grow up in a depressed society
Who's to tell you what's fucked up and what's normal
All they can say is: "it gets better".

⁸ *Conjure: A complex being. Delicacy. This may be impossible.*

A CROSS-GENERATIONAL NOTE⁹

† = All: "There was no note"

For
We feel
Pain
Stinging within
We are
Afraid
To touch
Inside

†

For
Final moments
All things
We feel
Demons
We fight
They say

†

We are
The slip
Don't love
Don't know
Don't care
For us
Cherish us
Adorn us
And grace us
With your humble and excited pleasure

†

⁹ Performer introduces the audience to a call and response. Care is given to acknowledge every person in the room. Discomfort is embraced. This can feel like group mourning - whatever that may look like. This can also be a moment to breath, to laugh, to cry.

To take
The shape
Of a fetus
To pound
The demon
Into the back
Of my mind
Because the thought
Of losing him
Is something
I can't bare
Right now.

Perhaps time does this to everyone

†

Perhaps it's inevitable

†

But yet he drifts

†

And like my body that will rot in the ground
I too will end this relationship
I too will end this
I too will end.

ON BEING ENOUGH

To be enough
To find worth
In words
To love
To fight
To live
In a culture
That mourns the future
Crushing nostalgia
Acknowledging reciprocal pain
With beauty
I value a world
That reevaluates freedom
Embracing loss
I value a world
That doesn't conflate pains
But dances in complexity
I value a world
That has other queer, other nonconforming, bodies of color...

**What kind of a world do you
value?**

In the moments when
We say

†

ONE FINAL NOTE¹⁰

I'm here to tell you that
You may not be a special snowflake
You may feel tired
I can see the universe in your eyes
You are enough to
Find fire
Through difference

I'm tired of burying my friends,
Of not knowing who will be next
Of not having a past
Of being told to grow up when
The generation before me didn't get to
Disidentify
With pain

And I don't know if it gets better
But I do know that you matter
You are an expert in yourself
A catalyst of critical intervention
To partake part time in the feminine/masculine binary
And like many binaries

It's all fucked up.

It can be fucked up.

We will fuck them up.

Disidentify
With pain
Find fire
Through difference
Choice
In resistance

¹⁰ *This moment is intimate. This moment is not pedantic. This moment has possibility. This moment may or may not be needed. This moment is confession. This moment is yours.*

For Luis.