

25 october 2020

Bea

you know fuck it I don't know where to start. It's so good to hear from you. I've re-read your letter three times now and am feeling...a lot of things.

Things are such a mess right now. Trying to not sink into despair, trying to be active / take on semblance of action (postcards / letters / text-banking, trainings on resisting/surviving fascism) -- but there's so much dread I feel about this election, & what comes after, whatever the results are. (& no matter what happens, we know 4 out of 10 ppl in a room support this guy...& that's a disturbingly large percentage of ppl who are cool w/ white supremacy. Right? Not just me, that's a large %?)

This shit is so relentless...the marches never do feel like enough. Yes I was out at the protests here in spring/summer -- felt momentarily beautiful & triumphant, and deeply sad & painful, and then always the rage spilling through all of it... at the time I wondered is it going to be hot & alive & urgent for a bit, then fade away again -- & yeah there were bad moments, cops did some scary-ass shit, but there was this spirit of jubilation & of kindness, ppl taking care of each other, distributing water & masks ... it felt like a sea change. I wanted it to be. But then, we keep getting kicked in the face.

There's a brownstone across the street from my apt building, I don't know the folks who live there but it's a white couple, maybe around our age, or older...they put a BLM sign up in their window in June. Which is great, there are signs up all over my neighborhood. But on this one sign the lettering is all faded now. Every time I pass it I have this odd sensation of the sign being from another era, like the movement's already weathered and gone. And it makes me feel dislocated & unmoored & broken somehow.

Maybe the moral of the story is, glad you're for anti-racism, but c'mon, touch up your solidarity sign.

Hate that I've had to compartmentalize to hold on to sanity...which feels insane in & of itself, to move forward with paying rent & utility bills, scheduling work stuff for six months or a year from now when we don't even know what the world will be in a few weeks...just cooperating & placidly doing the day-to-day & upholding the social contract when we should all be in the streets setting fire to shit 24/7 before fascism settles in for real.

It feels so good to read your letter & hear your voice right now, in the midst of all this fuckeduppedness -- I'm so grateful you're in my life, even if we communicate only once every year or two ...& see each other maybe once a decade? I didn't realize it had been eight years until I read your letter, & I went back through my gmail to search for the thread where I told you I was going to be in portland for that art & public space conference & could finally get back to Moody...and yup: 8 years five months ago. May 2012. (It was such a relief seeing you after that toxic panel & all its crazy

microaggressions ...choice moderator quote: "Would you say you are more preoccupied with questions of race & identity than you are interested in making art with more universal themes?"... sigh... Depresses me how consistent & repetitive that sort of experience has been over the years, & how it feels burned into me -- this awareness of other people in the art world (or world, period) looking at me as some little kid who can't get over her race issues. I know that in this Moment of Reckoning folx are talking about this stuff & Institutions are trying to have conversations and Reckon with their institutionalized racism but I don't know. I wanna believe it & I wanna trust it but I don't know if I believe it, I don't know if I trust it. And honestly I'm so exhausted from it.

And oh man growing up in Moody apologizing for being who you are, & mourning who you might have been... I wonder who I would have been if I'd had the space to grow up in pursuit of something instead of always pushing back against something else. & I know that even though my experience was adjacent to yours, what you experienced was way different (for instance, I don't think Justine and Dana went around "complimenting" you in seventh grade by saying they didn't even think of you as Black).

(one time they cornered me in the library to tell me I shouldn't worry, they didn't even think of me "that way" -- "Seriously, Ona, you don't even really look Asian to us!"... I didn't know how to respond & reflexively said, "thanks" -- it's so deeply fucked, all the times people hurt us and we thank them because we're stunned and don't know what else to say. I remember staying at school that night plastering stickers all over the stairwell in this blind rage...don't even remember which ones, maybe the dumbass I/EYE/I ones (oooooh, clever, ona!)...& totally in secret, of course. Because I couldn't actually say to their faces what I was feeling. Because I didn't really know what I was feeling)

I want to tear up this piece of paper & start over but no the world is literally on fire, don't rip up a letter you've already started, stop making yourself into more a part of a problem than you already are. (That's my flimsy, cowardly way of being in the world these days -- how can I be just a little less as big a part of the problem?)

It's funny your mom thought of me as nice and quiet...& how generous of you to say I was loud "in my art"...makes it sound more principled than it actually was, like being an asshole was some kind of artistic choice (ha). The more distance I get from moody, the more I think of myself as being this kid who couldn't handle being in her own skin. Putting up those anonymous tags & slapping those stickers all over was me clawing & screaming...out of anger, out of sadness, for attention. Like: a little child. Which yes, I realize I was in fact a child, and I do try to have compassion for the child I was then and the shitty choices I made (& the courageous choices I didn't make). But I wish I could have been one of those super precocious wise teenagers who already understood existence/life/death/meaning of & didn't worry about what other people thought of her all the time.

(keep thinking I'm grown & past all that adolescent shit & I've figured it out, but: nope.)

Shit Bea, about you & Chris – I'd heard you weren't together anymore (I think my mom told me & I sent you some weakass dm?), but I didn't know that's how things went down...

(btw, over a year ago now, but my first response when I learned you two had split was an exultant yay...in part bc he wasn't even close to good enough for you, but also bc oh cool: entering a new phase of life. Which felt exciting, & like cause for celebration.)

But I'm glad Natural is all yours now – what you've created with it is truly beautiful. You did change Moody (& beyond ... remember when my friend Greg passed through? He played a set there one night, & you guys hung out until you had to open up the next morning? He still talks about that as one of his top ten favorite gigs/trips, just the whole vibe there).

(oh & DO NOT SELL NATURAL TO CHESTER BLOOM OR TO ANYONE ARE YOU CRAZY??? NO. DO NOT SELL TO CORN MAN.)

...

[went to bathroom. you didn't need to know that, but now you do. back.]

Just had a fun* encounter w/ my roommate/ex (*not actually fun) in the kitchen. Apparently I have zucchini that's getting wrinkly (I know, criminal to let zucchini go bad. Forgive me).

don't think you know this but Wen (dude I'd been with the last 4-6 years give or take a breakup) & I broke up. In March. And we are still living together.

Bc we broke up right when I was about to leave the country for a three-month residency (in a Scottish castle! never felt real tbh), & then covid, & then I actually got covid (I got off easy, was never hospitalized), & then we were basically trapped together.

Short story is the new roommate-to-be never made the move to nyc for obvious reasons. And I'd sunk into one of my depressive states, could barely get myself to take a shower much less conceive of packing up six years worth of shit & searching for an apt. So we just figured, more out of inertia than intention, that I'd stay.

Lately though I've been feeling things starting to shift, & a friend just told me about a possible sublet, so maybe I'll be able to pull it together to make a move soon... and in the meantime I've been cobbling together zoom gigs & trying to start a new project -- trying to even conceive of a new project I could start is maybe more accurate... but my brain feels like a desert. Although writing to you now actually feels like engaging in process again – working with actual materials, moving my hand & scratching pen across paper, creating text to communicate & respond to something...sorry augh that sounds pretentious. But feels like coming back to myself, & also stirring something up at the same time. (I guess the point is: I'm into this letter-writing thing.)

The breakup with Wen was rough, even if it was a slow-motion collapse over the years. It was hard to end bc we had so much tied up in each other – we got together collaborating on projects, & we would spend weeks & months working on an installation

where he'd be assembling some large-scale mixed-media sculpture & I'd be creating text around it – & the time making that work together was so intense, & so loaded, & so deeply entwined w/ creative identity & couple identity & individual human identity...it's a lot to try & extricate yourself from (similar w/ you & Chris, & Natural, now that I think of it?). There were all these red flags but I always made excuses or dismissed them (artists = moody! artists = irrational! artists = total dicks!) -- I remember talking w/ him one time about a piece, & he said that a material he wanted to use (polyester resin) was pretty dangerous – it had killed some people working w/ it in XY places. And I was like, guess we shouldn't use it then. And he said, yeah we totally should use it. If your artwork kills someone, you get a pretty good rep. You gain notoriety. Which can be really useful in your career. And I thought he was kidding. Because, how can you say that and not be joking. But he wasn't kidding, he was being totally serious. He cited some Richard Serra sculpture killing someone at the Walker Art Museum in the '70s, & when I reacted like a normal human person, he accused me of being a sheltered American who doesn't understand what it means to sacrifice & to suffer as an artist. Because he grew up where it was actually incurring real risk to make art. But I was just like fuck you, you grew up in this super wealthy family, you are not one of the people suffering in prison for your art. Of course he's right, too –I've never been imprisoned for my work.

Yeah really gotta move out. Fingers crossed about this sublet.

By the way, I think it's hilarious that my mom told you I'm doing great in nyc.

I didn't get to say this in the (inadequate) card, but I always thought of your relationship with your mom as the model of what a parent-child relationship should be -- how the two of you talked / listened to / learned from each other, & laughed together. I have this one memory of being in the kitchen with the two of you, & you started talking smack about her rum cake (even though we both know her rum cake was insane) and she picked up a handful of flour and just threw it into your face, no warning, just: bam...& after a moment of shock, you both burst out laughing

I love that you see your mom on a cruise ship in the Caribbean. (Throwing flour in someone's face, probably.)

So crap hand tired brain fried, I'm going to put the pen down & sleep & pick this up again tomorrow... not that you will know that but I want you to know because process process it is endlessly fascinating and it's like my entire Becoming/Authenticity project that has somehow become my entire life (need to find new way to describe focus of work) – okay more tomorrow. Unless I give in to the urge to rip up this paper against my better environmental judgment & start fresh & you never even know this first draft ever existed....

gnight.

* * * *

And I didn't rip it up and start all over!
(but it is taking every ounce of will power I have not to do so.)

There's so much I want to say and respond to ...
But realizing I should end or I'll never send. So I'm gonna end/send.

final thoughts:

- of course I remember that night at safeway...there was a grocery cart involved (definitely upped our parking lot game). Remembering it makes me feel sorta achy, in a good way (in the sense of, I'll never be that good again, or have that much urgency & promise & truth. Which doesn't sound good when I write it out, but it is.)

- Sera sounds cool. Life coach sounds cool. I've always wanted a life coach. Tell me more.

- #fuck2020 YES.

- *love* the stationary.

write back too okay? but no pressure i know life crazy.

o.