

Exhibit Me / Prohibit Me

Alok Vaid-Menon

To cite this:

[Alok Vaid-Menon. "Exhibit Me/ Prohibit Me." *Wagadu: A Journal of Transnational Women's and Gender Studies*, Fall 2021, vol.22, pp. 171-172]

Originally published in *Femme in Public* (2017) © Alok Vaid-Menon

when the 17th person takes a photo of me without my consent today

i begin to wonder if i. have. a. body. anymore.

i? = a recognition that at some point so many hands & eyes consumed me that there was simply nothing left for myself. this is what happens when the private parts become public domain. and i say "the" instead of "my" because i looked in-between my legs and saw a chat forum happening there. (i tried to chime in but got blocked.)

have? = how naive it would be to believe i could own something that others hold on to so dearly. the other day my doctor asked me to breathe and i tried, but i forgot how. there was no frame of reference. all the images i remember of myself involve me doing everything but breathing. there is no animated GIF for that.

a? = there are hundreds of photos of me circulating in text threads and web forums across the world. "look at this souvenir i

found in new york” “look at this thing today i saw at the mall” “#me”
“#same” “#mybf” “#tearemoji”

“#wtf” “#goals” what i have learned is that it is only socially permissible to identify with me online. there is a type of loneliness that comes from everyone staring at you but no one seeing you. every time someone takes a photo of me i want to give them a hug to remind them that i am real. but the moment a meme becomes a person, the screen cracks and there is violence.

body? = i have come to the conclusion then, that the only place i am allowed to exist is a photograph. EXHIBIT A: a costume for a play. EXHIBIT B: HOW INSPIRATIONAL! (read: i would never) a transgressive model breaking down gender norms! EXHIBIT C: an art installation! EXHIBIT D: a social media selfie that inspires you...to only like the photo, not stop the violence. EXHIBIT E: *SHARE THIS* LMAO! a monkey wears a dress and calls himself a woman! EXHIBIT ME

EXHIBIT ME. TO PROHIBIT ME.