In-formation: Aging in the Queer Community

Description

The AutoEthnographer

In-formation: Aging in the Queer Community

Authorâ??s Memo

This piece works to contextualize aging in the queer community, the complexities of developing trends in spectacle versus intimacy, the depth and shallow natures that are found in performance, as well as the fear and hope that can be found as a queer person. This is a conversation I had, and while it is only one part and one side it is whole in its ability to convey the formation of an in-crowd. It pulls the reader into the formation of a community as they become the one who is being spoken to.

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By Joshua Hoehne for Unsplash

Girl, you missed out. Last night was lit. â?? Hold on. I need to find a different seat. Some dude is looking at me funny. Okay, so the tea. Have you ever been to the Seymour Marine Center? â?? No itâ??s not the kiosk-sized thing near the boardwalk. Itâ??s a whole-ass deal out on the West Side. They have big fish tanks full of jellyfish and other oddities from the bay. They have a touch poolâ?¦ Sometimes they bring a shark into a larger shallow poolâ?¦

â?? No? Okay wellâ?¦ Itâ??s not as grand as Montereyâ??s Aquarium, but itâ??s all right if youâ??re into fish or whatever. People have weddings and other events there, and UCSC uses it to pretend they care about the environment. â?? Right?! Well, the students get something out of it, I guess. Itâ??s weird to me how quickly they turn that place into a bumpnâ?? dancehall though. The boom box was blasting and I always wonder how that affects the fish. â?? What? Shut up! I give a shit even if Iâ??m not into aquariums generally. Itâ??s fine, my bleeding heart is still intact.

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So *ANYWAY*. I walked around the back of the building and watched the sunset while the girls begged me to let them climb in a huge whalebone arrangement. It wasnâ??t exactly what I would call a peaceful moment, but it was beautiful out there. Windy. Those girls, I swear. I canâ??t tell if they actually like each other. â?? Yes, I *had* to bring the kids. Dragon would have never forgiven me if I hadnâ??t brought her, and Stella is about as straight as her parents so she needs some culture. People love seeing children at events like that. Itâ??s hopeful, you know? â??

For sure. I saw a bunch of the kids from my class, and the girls got to show off their outfits to them and talk to some youngsters who were also dolled up. â?? Honey yes. They *are* kids. Iâ??m 41 and I doubt if most of them have crested 20. The MC straight called us fucking *ancestors*. â?? Yes bitch! â?? Well obviously â??eldersâ?• is more indicative of age and nobody wants that, but â??ancestorsâ?• sounds fucking dead! â?? There were about 10 other people our age there, two of them were part of the event, and no one was older than us, so Iâ??m *pretty sure* he was talking about me, girl. He would have been talking about *you* if youâ??d bothered to drag your ass out there. â?? I know love, Iâ??m fucking with you. Itâ??s fine, Iâ??m sure Iâ??ll get a chance to kiss that pretty face soon.

â??â?¦the depth and shallow natures that are found in performanceâ?¦

Itâ??s funny, everyone our age makes a point to acknowledge the rest of us. â?? Oh I donâ??t knowâ?¦ Like a nod and some really meaningful eye contact, or a wave from across the room like, *Look, weâ??re here with all the babies. We made it, weâ??re still alive*, you know? â?? Yeah. Itâ??s kinda sweet, and also a bitâ?¦ I donâ??t know. But the place was packed with the youth, and unless you know one of those youngsters, they avoid looking at you as if theyâ??re going to straight catch a wrinkle or something. â?? HA! Yes! Exactly.

I was sitting behind this couple. We were all on those white plastic fold-out chairs places like that always have for events. Anyway, they were both bent over their phones to an uncomfortable degree looking at the five *thousand* pictures theyâ??d taken of each other overlooking the bay. â?? Obviously. Every picture was nearly indistinguishable from the last. Like that girlâ?¦ what was her name? â?? Thatâ??s right! Larissaâ?¦ HA! She would hand me her phone and want me to take 50 shots of her in 20 seconds. She shouted at me that one night at The Blue. Remember that? *I told you to just keep pressing it!* Damnâ?¦

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â??â?¦as well as the fear and hope that can be found as a queer person.

Well, apparently she was ahead of her time. The place was full of people who were on their phones half the time. I thought for sure the event was entertaining enough to hold their attention. â?? Yeah, I get socially awkward too. Thatâ??s true. It just feels like theyâ??reâ?¦ hold on, speaking of escape. That creeper moved seats. Why is he *looking* at me like that?! Ugh â?? No! I donâ??t want to leave. Iâ??m still drinking my Golden Chai, and I like it here. Fuck that. Iâ??m not letting him push me out.

So anyway. The actual show. Not only did the MC do an Indigenous land acknowledgment but an *African diaspora* acknowledgment. It was deep. And he was all about educating us on the efforts that some of the performers have been about and the efforts of *actual ancestors*. â?? Yeah. The *actual* dead ones from the civil rights era and shit. He was not your average drag MC thatâ??s for sure. â?? Yeah, they can be. For me it can anyway. Land acknowledgments are usually a little hollow. Theyâ??re just regurgitating what UCSC came up with a couple years back. They read it like theyâ??re checking a box and then going out after to buy some fast fashion thatâ??ll for sure be in the dumpster before the year is out. Fake ass. But, I donâ??t know, this MC seemed to really care. Like, he was really trying to impart some knowledge.

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But thatâ??s not what made the event feel weird. â?? Iâ??m not exactly sure. Iâ??m not one to simply observe without thought and consideration, I do try to cultivate my attention; I analyze things that are going on culturally, historically, and I ask myself how the event affects meâ?¦ and I was there because I wanted to be, but I was *also* there because of the assignment, you know? Like, there was this paper we read for class that talked about Paris is Burning, â?? I know, classic. Anyway, this paper talked about how the filmmakers and the cameramen kinda took the power away from the queens.

And for me to be at the event for this class, it was likeâ?¦ like I was a whole lens unto myself. I felt like I needed to take notes in order to remember things that had to go into this *thingâ?¦* this assignment. â?? Shut your face! Iâ??m old, but I will still come after you. *Pshhh*. Girl, you are so extra. But seriously, I was there to enjoy the event, and for my kid nâ?? her friend, and to show the youth that they too can surviveâ?¦ but I was also there because I *had* to be.

Itâ??s a self-involved goal. Getting this grade and passing a class to *hopefully* get a better job than the one I might have gotten without the BA. I donâ??t know. It just felt like it addedâ?¦ or maybe took something away from it all. â?? Oy! I know. I just keep getting distracted. Iâ??m a horrible storyteller. â??

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My favorite bit? I kinda had two, but Iâ??ll tell you about one of them because I might have to bounce out of here after all. That guyâ?¦ â?? No, itâ??s fine. *SOOOOOO*! There were only three official performers who showed up. â?? Yeah. For whatever reason, I guess a bunch didnâ??t show. So they had an intermission and a bunch of people signed up to perform impromptu. â?? *Me*? Hell no girl. My performing days are over. Plus this is *drag*. My thing was burlesque and there is a â?? Yes! The difference is major. Dragon wanted to get up there. â?? HA, you know it! But she thought about it and knew she didnâ??t have the right makeup to pull off what she wanted to do. But a bunch of the youth got up to strut their stuff, and it was the best thing that could have happened.

Drag is classic, and it has its deep roots, but everything changes. â?? No, Iâ??m not going to go on another rant about change. But it *does*. And this generation is all about their micro stardom. Social media, and constant self-expression. There were people at the event who were dressed to the *nines*, but they *always* rock that gear, you know? Like, they are *on* all the time. And the majority of the people who went up on that runway rocked it *so* hard. It was as if they had been doing their bit in front of their phones for weeks in preparation. And who knows, they might have been doing just that without knowing they would have the chance to do it on stage.

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This one person got up there. They were a fem-leaning thick little cutie. They had on this baby blue spaghetti dress covered in butterflies, looking like stationery from the 90s, feel me? â?? HA, yes, very Lisa Frank adjacent. *And* they were wearing highlighter green furry ears, *and* homemade cardboard-cutout butterfly or fairy wings- whatever. *Aaaand* â?¦ baby. blue. Uggs! â?? No, for real. Iâ??ve never seen Uggs that color but she was rocking them. â?? Sorry, they, yeah. They went by Ducky. â?? Yep super cute. â?? Bad Romance?

â?? Yeah. Lady Gaga, for sure. I know the song too, and I like it and everything. But Oh Em Gee. That shit was the audienceâ??s anthem or something. â?? Right? It never struck me as a queer song either. Even the music video is all about dying for the male gaze. â?? I donâ??t know if babies watch music videos these days, but *I* still do.

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â?? Whatever. Everything is gay if we want it to be I guess. But this kid got up there and the audience. fucking. exploded. It was insane. They were singing along and rocking back and forth as if everyoneâ??s heart was broken together. Ducky did a pretty haughty stomp march and had every word of the song down, even the French bit. They got down on the floor and crawled the catwalk, and I thought the audience was going to completely melt into those shitty plastic chairs.

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I think what I liked about it the most is that this kid was not your average superstar, you know? They were straight-up average. And it was fucking beautiful. Ducky got up there and everyone in the audience became a star *through* them. They crawled around on their hands and knees, let their heart break with Gaga, and smiled so big when the audience ate it up. It felt like a community.

As if we were all part of the same social consciousness. It didnâ??t exactly feel like drag, but it felt likeâ?¦ like the product of all the work drag has been doing for all these years. Blazing across the stage saying, *Look! I am here, and I can be* you *better than* ***you ever could****, and Iâ??m with my people, and we are fuckinâ?? hot shit baby*. *What are you going to do about it?* And all that fear, all that righteous anger, all that love, and sorrowâ?¦ Even if they were doing it for themselves to survive, they did it for this generation and the next too. And there was Ducky, they didnâ??t have to be the skinny perfect thing on the strip fulfilling every capitalistic dream, they didnâ??t have to be overtly boy or girl.

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Even as fem-leaning as they were, those furry ears signaled a defiance of gender normality through their association with the animal nature of humanity. Those wings signified the *becoming* that this youthful generation is still fighting for today. They were *alive* with Earth-Day energy, both human and animal queendom. Their wings and ears and their average body, serving gender-neutral magic for everyone to enjoy without shade. It was fucking empowering. â?? No Iâ??m not crying in public, *you are*.

You know what? I think Iâ??m going to ask that guy what heâ??s looking at. Please hold. â??Dude, you will never guess. He wanted to know where I got my LGBTQ Milk sweaterâ?¦ Maybe the world is getting better. â?? I know, weâ??re in a bubble. But sometimes things feelâ?¦ possible. Hey, I gotta go write this thing. â?? I love you too. â?? Yeah, next time, for sure. â?? We will. Soon bitch.â?? Okay, love you.

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