



EMBODY

By Sossity Chiricuzio

Perspectives

Embodiment - What are you proud of?

by Sossity Chiricuzio, PQ Monthly

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I remember my first queer pride event vividly. It was 1989 and I was nineteen, attending college in Tucson, just learning what it really meant to be out and then, in that sudden way that such things can happen, I found myself in San Francisco for the summer. Not just strolling along Castro, reveling in the brazen gay heights of it all (though that did happen,) but studying LGBTQ history and activism at a queer youth training camp meant to give us context and tools and a network of activism to rely on.

We were not, of course, a unified front. The LGBTQ community has a long history of divergent agendas and approaches, even before you factor in sexual proclivities and issues of class and race and privilege. We did find some common ground, through hard work and deliberate communication and group protests and an entire day spent naked in the backyard and pool of a rich lesbian in Marin. We had caucuses large and small, discussion groups, and dance parties. We watched each other, we asked questions, we made room, we apologized, we kept trying.

Our entire group was invited to march in the Pride Parade, which was overwhelming in theory and exponentially more so when we arrived on the scene and I could see and feel the tens of thousands of people all around us. Awash in emotions; inebriated on visibility, or various actual intoxicants; wanting to be every kind of different or almost just the same; celebrating our differences in the bright light of day. Boas rippled, rhinestones flashed, leather shone, and rainbows rippled above it all.

Before that day, the biggest queer crowd I'd ever been in was at a lesbian softball game. Before that day, I had no idea of the bounty of genders and aesthetics and pairings that were possible. Before that day, I had never felt the power of being part of a crowd of people that are all refusing to hide or apologize. Before that day, I had never really felt beautiful, or like I could belong. But that day, I was radiant. I strode tall and smiled like I'd never have to hide again. I was proud.

Some of our group had come prepared with fancy clothes and costumes, but many of us were just wearing versions of our usual. For me, this meant flowy black pants and a modified Act-Up t shirt, which seemed not only inadequate to the glittery occasion of it all, but was also becoming increasingly too warm. Many of the other dykes around me were having similar realizations, so we decided to strip off our shirts and be the black bra brigade. A small thing, but potent. Some part of my femme identity was solidified that day. Some part of my resistance.

We had marched together several times already this summer—protesting local news outlets for discriminatory language, protesting a gay bar with racist gatekeeping practices, backing down a small group of homophobes at the beach who forgot to count before they started heckling—and while our solidarity felt similar, this time we were surrounded by supportive faces and comrades. This time we weren't pushing back, we were pushing forward, full of pride at how we were learning to combine civil disobedience and radical truth telling and active listening and so many kinds of loving.

It's been almost 30 years since then, and I've been to all manner of Pride activities, in small towns and big cities. Dyke marches and Trans marches and play parties and picnics and rallies. Standing at the back of the crowd, and on the main stage. Avoiding it altogether and escaping to the beach. Gathering in a back yard with chosen family. Pride is an important tradition, a link that reaches back to the ancestors who, with their sacrifices and passion and perseverance, make who we are now possible.

It's also just one small part of the year, and, in my own experience and opinion, often too concerned

with consuming and not nearly enough with resisting. We absolutely deserve to celebrate, but we do so on a shaky stage if there is no foundation building. Who is organizing the space where we can gather with our Elders to hear stories and pay respect to their lives and work? Who is sharing resources to make possible an event run by and for Queer/Trans youth? Who is showing up to small towns to show solidarity at their Pride events?

Pride is many things, and that sometimes includes scary. The world is a frightening place right now. We need to be marching beside each other, wherever we are. We need to lift up and stand strong with folks in our community with less resources and privileges, and commit ourselves to holding to that all year long.

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