



EMBODY

By Sossity Chiricuzio

Perspectives

Embody - The Cost of Geography

by Sossity Chiricuzio, PQ Monthly

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How much would you pay to find a place where you finally feel like you belong? Every cent in your pocket? Some of us do. All your belongings and some self respect? That too. How about your family? Your childhood friends? Your hometown?

This is a choice many queers have to make, even sometimes one that is made for them. Homeless youth, kicked out or running for survival, and those of us who can't stand to blend or pass, or just can't. Those of us who, even if we weren't queer, wouldn't fit in. Those of us who want to make truthful art, or enjoy visible love, or just take up space. Those of us who often leave small towns and rural areas for big cities. Leaving an emptiness behind, and often creating one inside.

All through high school in my tiny desert town, I hid my queerness. Finding a best (gay) boy/friend helped for awhile, but then he couldn't hide anymore and ran away to California. Finding it more

socially acceptable to be a slut than a dyke, I gave handjobs and blowjobs to male classmates, or, more often, their older brothers, cousins, etc—no pleasure, just proof. Finding all of this more than I could stand, I disassociated for years, until I finally got to college and found some other queers. Even then, I was a weirdo, but at least they really saw me, and didn't hate what they saw.

I tried to find what I needed in that college town, just big enough to have a queer community center, a feminist bookstore, a pride festival. Just big enough that eventually I wasn't the only visible femme, but not nearly big enough to find many folks that knew what to do with the kind of femme I am. No polyamorous community, no fat community, no writers community or open mic that was ready for my voice, but nowhere else that was big enough to suit me better and still within a days travel of my mothers house.

My mothers love and support was and is and will always be one of my greatest strengths. My source of faith in the world, and the determination to do my part to make it better. My best friend. Even those measly 67 miles from Tucson to the middle of the desert where she lives often felt insurmountable since I had no car, but at least I knew I could find a way to get to her. Could rest in the ease of her garden. Could gather with my siblings and cousins and friends, playing dominoes and dice and storytelling for hours. Could smell the rain coming over the desert like a spell, washing my spirit.

The rain in Portland is softer, less fragrant, and even after 12 years here, can still sneak up on me. Like the wave of longing I get when the sky opens up at the edge of town and the sunset hits a high bank of clouds just right and the train is calling and it almost for a moment feels like home. By which I mean home that was, because this is also home now. This gorgeous jumble of cultures and art and gender and sexualities and faiths. This cornucopia of freaks and geeks and deviants and givers. Where I'm not even the only fat, bearded, tattooed, poly femme who writes dirty poetry. More to the point, I'm far less likely to be harassed or killed for it.



All the talk of community and diversity aside, the main reason to move somewhere bigger is survival. More liberal laws or politics, more tolerant (or jaded/impervious/too busy to bother) strangers on the street. More doctors who might treat you like a human, more job options, more chances at joy. We move not only to increase our quality of life, but our life expectancy. It's not a simple math, involving as it does the sharp percentages of race, gender, ability and class, but it does add up to a better chance.

Some of us choose to stay in our small towns and rural areas, for love or duty or a preference for quieter living. If we're lucky, we'll find another bright fish in our small pond who meets us, other shiny creatures to connect and collaborate with. If we're lucky, we have family that loves us anyways, and tries to create safe spaces. If we're lucky, we can find work and happiness that is as expansive as we need. I couldn't rest on luck anymore, rolling snake eyes like I was. I sold or gave away most of my belongings, kissed my family not nearly enough times, and moved across the country.

I flourish here like I never have before, and my family sees it, values it, is happy for me. My art and community expanded beyond any dream I had, and I finally met a partner who can meet me in all things. I spend my work hours contributing in meaningful ways, my questioning voice is an asset, and I can get the healthcare I need. I am also carrying around an empty place where the arms of my family is an echo, and I left the work I do here, undone there. There is a cost in this equation, no matter the choice. An identity tax, a gender fee, a sexuality surcharge. We all pay, and yet still often fail to invest in each other, valuing radical over rural, dismissing what it takes to stay put.

I want to see what it could look like if we shared the work and wealth of being queer, regardless of location. Even better, if we could be valued wherever we are.

Artist credit: I'm very pleased to be collaborating with local artist Galadriel Mozee!
(galadrielmozee.com)

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