

Our Queer Breath

Joseph M. Pierce

I see myself reflected in the window, with those fluorescent letters in red. I am kissing my boyfriend. His skin, his scent, remind me of what I came for, of what I'm here for. That desire. And that desire is a revolutionary act. That search. That breath.

Our queer breath is a revolutionary act. To breathe as a fugitive, delinquent body, as a body that exists in spite of this violence.

I had woken up a bit late and I didn't realize it until later. Until I opened Facebook. I didn't think I would cry. And I didn't, until I saw a video of a mother receiving text messages from her son, her son who had been kidnapped in the bathroom at Pulse. Her son who did not make it out alive.

I saw the news that 49 people had been killed in Orlando, Florida. In a gay bar. *Latino Night*.

Latino Night. Bodies entangled. Sweat. Brown bodies, Black bodies. Dance. Bodies dancing lost in the night.

I went to Stonewall because places have their history, their memory. I thought that that place would give me something of that fight, that defiance. I thought that those copper bricks, that darkness, that dirty floor, would give me something. Would make me *feel* something that I had lost.

Stonewall. That place which, after a police raid in 1969, inspired a series of violent, explosive protests. *Travestis, negras*, drag queens, Puerto Ricans, fags, butch-dykes. The beginning of the gay liberation movement in the United States. A place where our dissident bodies started to feel free.

Latino night. When you exist as a brown body, when you love, survive, as a brown body, when your body is always subject to the various modes of violence

that threaten your very existence. When you are a body that should never have existed. That was never meant to survive. To thrive. What does it matter if you can dance? If you have that space to dance? What value can that dance floor have on Latino Night?

Or, what happens when dancing is the only thing that makes you human? What happens when your body only becomes a body when it dances, when it articulates, when it shimmies, when it sweats, when it sways? Is that why a gay bar matters? Latino Night? When that space allows you to be, to move, to breathe, to become.

What do those Latinx bodies dancing at Pulse on its Latino Night say? What air, what space, what environment do they change with their black-brown bodies?

What changes when you move the air with those beautiful brown legs? What arabesques, what queer wake do you leave?

That Sunday at the Stonewall a spontaneous vigil after the massacre at Pulse. Around 200 people gathered on Christopher Street. It was strange. Anti-terror police next to those brown bodies trickling in after the Puerto Rican Pride Parade. A historic irony. The police “protect us” from the terrorism that they themselves created. A multitude. Anti-Islamaphobia signs. Signs in favor of gun control. Outside the bar activists and comrades spoke about resistance. About love. We echoed their calls to not lose ourselves. To not fall into the facile categorization of the massacre as simple “terrorism.” Members of Black Lives Matter. The critique cannot be tautological.

We cannot stop dancing. We cannot stop sweating, swishing, desiring. We cannot stop insisting on the complexity of this issue, insisting on a critique of misogyny, racism, homophobia, Islamophobia, toxic masculinity, in constant crisis.

Journalists who asked the typical: How do you feel? Do you feel safe? Why did you come to Stonewall?

Why go to Stonewall? To be with those bodies, bodies that we love, that we desire, that move us, that we caress, that we yearn for. Bodies given in to the night. Bodies that will not return. Bodies that come undone. Bodies that break. Bodies whose sweat, whose glimmer, we will never inhale again. Bodies that matter. Bodies whose matter, whose becoming, will save us from oblivion.

To breathe that desire, that breath, that intransigence that the queer body stages with its terrible incommensurability. To see, feel, touch, kiss, dance.

NOTE

This text was originally published in Spanish as “Travestis, negras, boricuas, maricas” in *Revista Anfibia* on June 13, 2016, and has been translated for *QED* by the author. See <http://www.revistaanfibia.com/cronica/travestis-negras-boricuas-maricas/>.

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