

queer tribes & the mash version

by Astrée Duval

Bourgeois culture, idealized under capitalism and reproduced by cis-heteronormativity, brought us into modes of sociality centered on competition and private property. This has shown to be critically unadapted to the challenges we face as a society. In this context, it matters which tribes one looks for oneself, with queerness as a line of flight from that social order. To run away from your birth tribe: the seminal trope of queer culture, exemplified by Bronski Beat's anthem "Smalltown Boy," or Sateen's "Now She's a Witch," a song I much relate to as it perfectly captures the spirit of my springtime transfem magic errands. Here is the chorus:

*Now she's a mystic, now she's a witch
She's throwing good vibes all around town baby
Casting spells of sisterhood and love*

Certainly, what I didn't anticipate while engaging in my gender deconstruction journey, is how magical it would be. To join the queer tribe is to open a portal that obliterates the shackles of normative subjectivity. It is a collective process of becoming, echoed by the communal ethos generally expressed in queer circles. It is also a form of healing. For the postmodern, fragmented self of the atomized society, queer tribalism has a taste of relational ontology that spills beyond the metaphysical individualism of the western subject. It's hot. It's cosmic. It's irresistible!

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I'm proud to be part of a tribal process of emancipation from the miserably self-interested, ultimately isolated, and powerless neoliberal subjectivity that is imposed on us. Indeed, what are the spells of sisterhood and love thrown by Sateen's heroine if not the potential of the queer movement as a feminist inter-class struggle against the stratified society, to dismantle the oppositions between workers built by the bourgeoisie in order to maintain its domination, leading the people to desire their own repression?

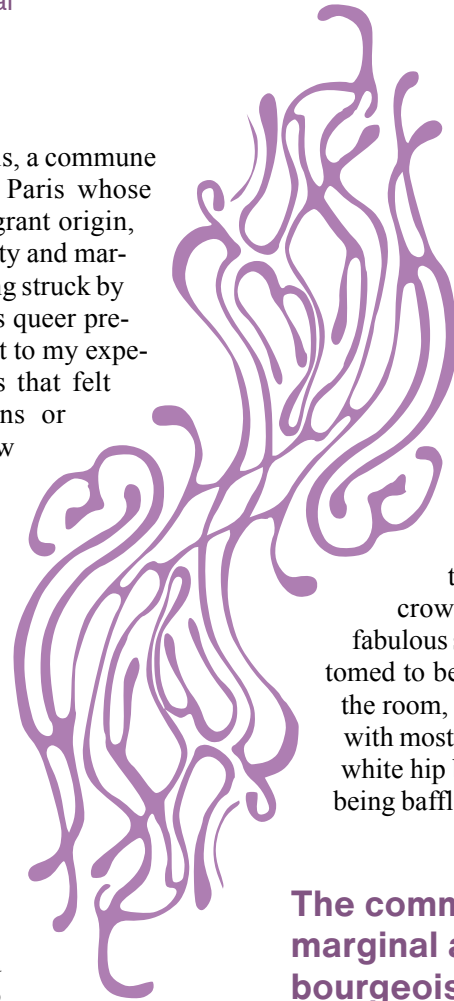
To illustrate this point, one event that I particularly cherish is the *Pride des Banlieues* (Pride

of the Suburbs) in Saint-Denis, a commune in the northern suburbs of Paris whose population, largely of immigrant origin, is heavily affected by precarity and marginalization. I remember being struck by the political relevance of this queer presence in the street, in contrast to my experience of other pride events that felt more like mere celebrations or worse, ambulating rainbow zoos. Here, the activist solidarity was tangible, and the point made clear: the "arabs versus fags" trickery is over now; it's the poor against the rich, the working-class against the capital—full stop.

In my case, on top of all the superfab prosocial benefits of deconstructing my masculinity, becoming fem has provided me with new cross-class experiences of precious value for a middle-class feminist and social theorist. When two women are sticking close to each other at a bus stop in the middle of the night, it matters little how different their backgrounds are or what genitals lie behind their skirts. Indeed, losing the privilege of cis-masculinity comes with a downgrade in comfort and safety. One could say that this demotion is the necessary price to pay for a revolutionary becoming. The social control of gender is intense, to say the least. For those of us deviating from the norm, solidarity is a need, not an option.

Nonetheless, queer tribalism can also come with segregating tendencies. The songs I cited earlier point at this: if queerness as a call to break from the norm is lived and narrativized as an escape towards the center, from the normative provincial life to the metropolitan avant-garde sociality, it is at risk of becoming a form of symbolic capital conflated with bourgeois status. From my uncompromising street hip-hop cultural background, to become versed in queer and feminist theory ironically came as a key phase of my embourgeoisement. Moreover, it is this proximity with power that neutralizes queer subjects as they entangle themselves in (individualist, competitive) bourgeois spheres of sociality and structures of power such as, notably, academia and art.

I have seen this happen so many times: queer beings, incredibly badass butches and witches and faggots who could be smashing down patriarchy from breakfast to supper, instead write boring PHDs or perform for a polite seated



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Laina, *The more than human love*, 2023. © and courtesy the Artist

audience in a bourgeois theater, reinforcing queerness as an elitist aesthetic, a social code for the sophisticated progressive urbanite, while on top of it all fabulating their middle-class comfort as "precarity."

A friend from a modest class background once shared with me how they were intimidated to enter the bar where we were supposed to meet because, I quote, "the crowd looked so queer." To me, a fabulous socialist transfem queen accustomed to being the most stylish person in the room, the place seemed to be packed with mostly straight liberal creative-type white hip bourgeois fuckers. I remember being baffled: how wrong was this?

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This tribal reading of the social, mobilized where a sole class analysis would be too limiting, should therefore point at rather than obfuscate the power dynamics at stake. Queerness as a movement serves when embedded in a cross-class, multiracial, street and punk sociality. The commodification of marginal aesthetics by the bourgeoisie should not prevent us from making the right political alliances to break, rather than reproduce, social hierarchies. This piece is a call to remember the focus of LGBTQIA+ praxis, our tribal rainbow superpower: queer sexuality and gender trouble are dynamite, torches of revolutionary becomings. Queer hipsterism is not.

Ultimately, it is a matter of territoriality and gentrification. We need to be careful: the queer tribal call should lead to the protest, the squat, the political organization—eventually to the club's darkroom for its pleasure politics and subjectivation power—but not, or at least not primarily, to the museum or the university. Otherwise, "queering the institution" might come at the cost of taming down the scream from the gutter, where the truly delicious queer magic comes from.

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