

Observational Approaches: Performing Stories

Excerpts

I was accosted by an outgoing drunk (early thirties) in company with two other men of a similar age who continued to scan the dance floor. Having established that this was my first visit, he asked, "Are you more of a 'Mystery type boy' then?" (Referring to a club associated with older gay men). Although in jocular fashion, its undertone was that I'd been rumbled as a 'gatecrasher' at a youth club. [Disco Inferno 12/6/09].

Two small 'bears' (fat, hairy) about early and late forties respectively and both stripped to the waist, were snogging each other to within an inch of their lives. The older, fatter man displayed a thick, dark matt of hair on his chest. The younger was pressed up tightly against the back wall and pulled the other man, doing the pelvic thrusting, closer. He then pushed the bigger man away and began to bite vigorously on the other's left nipple, to which the latter abandoned himself. The bigger man reciprocated by tweaking the other's right nipple and his face became a picture of mock agony/ecstasy. [Club Mystery 4/4/09].

Oriental (mid/late forties) well defined arms and torso. His dress suggested much care and investment - tight-fitting, light blue, rugby style, short-sleeved t-shirt that accentuated his physique and complimented his skin tone. For the duration of his stay, about half an hour, he sat alone with his back to the wall behind a group of seven men. Various, he occupied himself by leafing through a (free) magazine, leaflets and a task that involved vacillating attention between a mobile phone and pocket diary. He snatched occasional glances at the group and around the bar and made subtle adjustments to the nap of his t-shirt. When I looked back later, he was almost holding himself; his right hand holding his left shoulder with one leg crossed over his knee and his right hand on left ankle, foot twitching nervously. [Frontier Bar 11/5/09].

Early sixties, unshaven, straggly hair. He accosted or pointed at anyone who came within his orbit. He 'gatecrashed' a party of three – gay man (late forties) with two straight friends (couple, mid-thirties). This 'pantomime' provoked amusement and disdain in equal measure in onlookers. At one point, he mimed pulling out a Priapus-sized penis from the former's trousers. The trio laughed at these antics but rictus smiles suggested they were tolerating a drunk. On finding out that the younger man was straight, the drunken man challenged him as to why he was doing in a gay bar. The trio left soon afterwards. Shortly after this episode, a gay man (early forties) who had witnessed the event angrily confronted the perpetrator. [The Stream 30/12/08].

Outside were several men who used wheelchairs and walking sticks (mostly fifties and sixties). A younger man (early thirties) was overheard referring to a wheelchair user as, "a spastic" and asked out loud, face etched with distaste, "What's *he* doing here?" When challenged by the older man, who, ironically, he had been chatting up, the younger man breezily confirmed that he had used the very term. The older man replied evenly, "That's a putdown. My boyfriend is in a wheelchair." This prompted a rather hysterical explanation, "Oh, it's just a word... I never meant anything by it," followed by a very terse 'apology' that was barked, almost spat. The younger man swiftly turned back to face the group he was with. [Together Bar, early Saturday evening, 'Pride' 29/8/09].

Late thirties/early forties with man late fifties. The younger had the most exquisite head movements and facial expressions that were totally in sync with Kylie Minogue's, "Your Disco Needs You!" His floorshow was elaborated by pursing of lips and expansive, swishy, arched, hand and arm movements in time with the grand gestures within the music and reminiscent of a well-rehearsed girl band member/showgirl. He would glance periodically to as if to see if this was attracting attention. His whole body was abandoned to these moves, though he was able to switch in a blink from camp to not. The campy was executed both with and in-between attention to a mobile phone whose screen he sometimes showed to his companion and which served as a source of mirth between them. [Empire Friday 9/1/09].