

## ***Ageing – To Party or Not?***

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It happens, it happens all the time, continuously, without us looking for it or requesting it. Its the only guarantee - you will get older.

'Let me die before I get old' Did my generation, who so happily sang along, so long ago, really agree? Do they now? as grey and white overwrite black, blonde and red, first dancing at the temples, then advancing, gaining ground. To dye or not to dye?

It shouldn't matter of course. Just like it shouldn't matter what you wear or whether you are beautiful or not. But it does. How much do you prejudge on the basis of what you see? How does that change? What a frivolous concern, appearance. Yet we live in an age of appearances, surface, immediacy - where disguise is all, because, in a hurry, what can I know but what is in front of me. What you see is what you get.

'Forever young, forever young, may you stay forever young' So who will take the time to discover the richness, or even the bitterness that lies behind grey. Grey skies, men in grey suits, it was a grey day - grey does not inspire much joy. Yet - grey is such a versatile colour, almost chameleon, changes so subtly, according to which colour is beside it. Flexible and open to interpretation.

Re-invention. Yes, its the task of my generation to re-invent what aging can be. Take back the power of knowledge, the tolerance of having seen it all, the forgiveness of practice. But, a voice in my head moans, but. Miserable, panicked voice - the voice that realises that there is an ending, only finite time left, and instead of issuing a pass to freedom screams the fear of lost opportunities. Is that the tragedy of ageing? The mountains I will never climb, the lakes I will never swim in, the people I will never meet again.

When young I saw it all as limitless possibility, potential. Now with the heavy feet of clay of middle-age, is the progression of loss, of letting go and learning the skills of good-byes hard to celebrate? How can each of us sit with these inevitable changes, having argued a need for inclusion and the acceptance and welcoming of difference all our lives, to now find ourselves in the one group that is so despised, overlooked and feared. What is so terrifying? Is it the sudden recognition of the reflection of the mother, the father, in the mirror - all that we thought we had left behind, grown away from in the search for our singular identity, now reasserting itself in the all too familiar. Is this return to roots a cause for celebration?

We were the generation who said 'Don't trust anyone over 30' -changed to 40, 50 even 60- how do we cope with being the people we fought against? A generation, who by force of numbers and self-assurance pushed their agenda all the way, first youth culture, then feminism, then the concerns of middle-age, now the issues of an ageing population - ourselves. True, it is time to contest ageism. Is it the final fear of the 'Other'? The fear of difference is strong, but in this case are the negative projections so profound because the 'Other' is indeed the one we will each become.