

## Keynote for Western Regional Queer Conference 2008 at UCLA

by Kate Bornstein

Here we are at the end of a powerful and dramatic conference. That there has been respectful, articulate controversy—dialogued respectfully—points to the fact that there is indeed a queer revolution in progress. I want to thank Natalie Castillo and Julio Rodriguez, the conference organizers.

And will all the conference staff, volunteers and supporters and sponsors please stand up for some applause? And thank you to Mary Thornton for interpreting today.

Thank you all for inviting me, and welcoming me with such warmth.

OK, I have a lot to say and not much time to say it in. I know the acoustics in this room truly suck, and this is gonna be a pretty dense talk. So if you cannot hear me or you cannot understand me, please raise your hand or call out. Here we go.

There are three areas in life that can make our lives worth living: who we are, what we do, and who and how we love. I'm talking about identity, power, and desire. These are three arenas of life that ideally would be guided by the human spirit. But they're not. Our identities, our desires, and our power are all monitored by hierarchal systems of oppression, sanctioned and encouraged by the politics of power..

For thousands of years, humanity has governed itself by a politic of power that depends on authoritarian hierarchies. Power politics depends on obedience to those in power, or you die.

"My way or the highway," says the politics of power.

"You're either with us or you're against us," says the politics of power.

You *never* have to answer anyone who demands any either/or of you. Either/Or is the language of bullies. The politics of power has degenerated into global bully-ism.

Then along came democracy—with roots in Athenian Greece and blossoms in the founding of the United States of America, a little over two hundred years ago—brought with it a politic of identity. It's a great politic with one major drawback: in order to have a voice in a democratic government, you must be part of an acceptable demographic.

None of us in this room has an acceptable recognizable identity.

In the history of humanity, we have governed ourselves using the politics of power and politics of identity. But there has never been a politic of desire. How about that? Never.

Since you're here this afternoon, I'm guessing that your identity—like mine—is in large part based in Desire. For lack of a better word, let's call us queer. I know that's an offensive word to some people, and I'm sorry. Please come up with a better word to express the unity of our outlawed desires. And for this afternoon, please allow me to use the word queer. What do I mean by queer? I mean tribe. I mean family. Queer is not a community. Queer is many, disparate communities.

Queer is a tribe that includes anyone whose dangerous dreams and damned desires push their lives out to the extreme radical edges of any given culture. Queer is a family, a tribe that includes anyone who practices, studies, makes art from, or fights on behalf of sex positivism and gender anarchy. To navigate the world, queer people must become politicians not of Power or Identity, but politicians of Desire.

Fact is, whether you want the job or not: you are the leaders of the next generation of sex positivism and gender anarchy in the world. And I want you to know, I believe in you. You are the next generation in a long line of people who have fought for the right to express their damned desires and dangerous dreams.

Forty years ago, when the Gay movement started up, people on the front lines of action were proud of their desire. We were proud of who we were fucking, how we were fucking, and how loudly and with what great humor we spoke about fucking. And we looked good! We were pretty, we were handsome. We were fabulous!

Over time, the Lesbian and Gay movement became all about pride—not pride of our desire, but rather of our identities: *I'm a gay man, and I'm proud. Or, I'm a lesbian and I'm proud of that.* We found that identities, not desire, would bring us power in the world.

And while it's true that Ls, Gs, Bs, and Ts are taking on more and more power in today's world, I hafta tell you: I am not at all proud to be entering mainstream American culture. It is far too sex negative and gender rigid for me to have any fun in. And when I *do* live out the fun of my harmless desires, mainstream American culture is downright mean to me. Mainstream American culture is nothing I want to be on the front lines of. So, what front lines of queer action do you want to be part of?

Over the past couple of decades, a great many kind, generous, and inclusive lesbian women and gay men stood fast on the front lines of queer action when they added the B and the T to their movement. At that moment, the lesbian and gay movement blew wide open—beyond an either/or sexuality to a more fluid expression of sex and gender.

Over the last ten years or so, Queer Studies has brought about a redefinition of straight and queer, lesbian and dyke, gay man and faggot. Queer and straight became less about who you were fucking, and more about supporting or opposing sex positivity and gender anarchy. So we have in parts of the world more and more straight lesbians and gay men who want nothing more than gay marriage, joint stock certificates, and Gay Days at Disneyland. Thank goodness, there are also more and more queer heterosexuals who enjoy and support alternate sexualities and wacky gender expressions.

And those are the front lines of the queer revolution, because the front lines are always way out there on the dangerous edges of a culture. That's where we live when we come to terms with our individual desires and dare to express them in a world that would rather see us dead. A queer revolution must embrace of a Politic of Desire. What would that look like?

A politic of desire would look like great sex: consensual, unpredictable, respectful and truly yummy. A politic of desire would embrace sex positivity and gender anarchy.

Who is having sex with whom would matter less than the love and joy of sex itself. Gender would be more of a game and less of a power struggle. A politic of desire would follow the example of the brave lesbians and gay men who decided to be inclusive, back when they first added the B and the T to their movement.

LGBT is an uneasy, unstable coalition. LGBT can and does fall apart at any bend in the road. We divide ourselves by saying things like: "let's leave trannies out of the non-discrimination act," or "let's make marriage equality our number one issue"—all at the expense of everyone who doesn't have the great good fortune to pass and afford to live and pass with an identity acceptable to George W. Fucking Bush. I dunno about you, but I don't wanna be acceptable to the likes of Georgie boy.

As inclusive as it's become, LGBT is only the beginning. There are a fuck of a lot more letters with whom LGBT Culture can ally itself. In the burgeoning world of sex positivists and gender anarchists, in addition to LGB and T, there would also be:

- Q for Queer
- Another Q for Questioning
- A for Asexuals
- Another A for Adult Entertainers
- S for Sadomasochists

- S for Sex Workers
- S for Swingers
- And another S for Sex Educators
- There would be I for Intersex
- There would be an M for men who have sex with men.
- And a W for women who have sex with women.
- There would be a G for Genderqueer
- A T for Two-Spirit
- There would be a K for Kinky
- P for Pornographers
- P for Pansexual
- And another P for Polyamorists.

Any letters I missed?

- Oh yeah, there would be an H for sex positive, gender fluid heterosexuals too.

I'd fight on the front lines of a coalition of desire like that. And that's just the beginning.

In his opening keynote of this conference, Dean Spade remarked that social movements have been successful when they have articulated a vision of a mass movement.

Well, let's say that queer is the ever-expanding edge of Desire of any given culture. How can your generation articulate a vision and take action on an even larger frontline? You *could* put together a truly intersectional, international coalition of all the people in the world who form the ever-expanding edges of Identity and Power.

That would be a lovely thing for your generation to come up with. Because we cannot come together as a coalition of desire without including in our fight all the other people who are pushed out to the edges of the dominant culture.

Sure, it's your sexuality and your gender expression that make you a target, but that's just desire. Your race makes you a target. Your age makes you a target. Your class makes you a target of the dominant culture. Your looks, your ability, your citizenship all can make you targets of America's bully culture that says to us: if you want any power in this world, then it's our way or the highway. Choose one or the other. Well, either/or has no place in the politics of desire.

The politic of desire can become a politic of love. How about that? Because love is created and maintained when you desire well-being for people besides yourself and people just like you. It's called generosity. It's called compassion. Everyone in this room has known love like that. Love is always more than doing something solely for yourself or for people just like you.

Last month, I turned 60 years old. That makes me an elder of our queer family. And *that* makes you all my children. Look at you, you are so cute! I just want to pinch your adorable cheeks and tell you that I love you. But I don't have time to do that with each of you, so I'm going to leave you with a few words about sex that I hope you carry on into the rest of your adorable queer lives. This is from my latest book, "Hello Cruel World: 101 Alternatives to Suicide for Teens, Freaks, and Other Outlaws."

Sex doesn't have to mean marriage, children, or even I love you.

Sex can be right this minute or next year some time. You get to decide. And you get to change your mind about that whenever you want to.

Sex can be a passionless quickie.

Sex can be any way you imagine it can be.

Sex doesn't have to be any way you don't want it to be.

Sex doesn't have to be with one person all the time, or even with one person at a time.

Sex doesn't have to be with anyone but yourself. You get to control the guest list.

Sex doesn't have to happen with anyone of any particular race, religion, gender, age, class, education level or body type as you.

And sex doesn't have to be for free. You can buy or trade sex for things if you need and want to do that.

Sex doesn't mean you're a slut or a whore, unless of course that's what you'd like to be.

Sex doesn't have to be genital and you don't have to do it in private.

Sex doesn't have to end with an orgasm for everyone.

During sex, you can be any gender, age, race, class, animal, object or alien life-form that you'd like to be as long as you both or all agree that's what you're safely being together.

Sex doesn't have to be in the missionary position.

Sex doesn't have to happen on the bed in a bedroom in the dark.

Sex can be really yummy, sick-o, gross, painful, scary, bloody and/or degrading when you all or both agree to do it that way safely together. Sex can be hilariously funny.

Sex can be a lovely gift you give someone or someone gives you.

Sex can be a blessing, a prayer, and a generous act of healing.

Sex can involve costumes, props and a script.

Sex can be on your way home this afternoon, or even before I've finished speaking.

Look—and I'm wrapping up now—the ONLY way that the politics of power can deal with sex is to demonize, silence and invisibilize sex.

The ONLY way that the politics of identity can deal with sex is to police it.

The ONLY politic that can LIBERATE sex is your personal politic of conscious desire, your personal politic of love.

Love will wash away the hierarchal systems of oppression we know as gender, sexuality, race, age, class, citizenship, religion, looks, and ability—all those constructs that are keeping all of us on the furthest edges of the culture. I promise: all you need is action motivated by love and justice for all.

I'm so proud of you and I love you so very much for trying and even for thinking about trying to come to terms with your position on the front lines of outlawed desire. I know how difficult that is. Bless your hearts, and thank you for your kind attention.

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