

Imagine: drawing the energy from your root chakra, breathing slowly at first, and then getting faster, drawing in low deep breaths at first and then as you progress, lifting the pitch of your voice higher and higher. Remember: yawning is good, your body needs oxygen. Let the energy move up your body to your lower stomach, snaking its way round your solar plexus, encircling and spinning round your heart before travelling to throat where you begin to giggle as the breath/motion catches a fuller hold of you, the energy moves further; spinning around your third eye before pushing out of your crown as the breathing comes faster and louder and then: clench! For 15 seconds as the energy you have raised is contained within your body before the final release where your bodily boundaries shake, explode, become pixelised within energised space around you.

Imagine: doing that in a room of 50-60 people simultaneously and afterwards facing that room full of shagged out and blissed out faces all swimming in the powrr generated in the room.

Imagine doing that at a conference about Lesbian Culture.

Imagine that and you can imagine what I, and around 60 other lucky souls were doing at Lesbian Lives XV in Dublin last weekend.

Barbara Carrelles's 'How to have a Genderless Orgasm' was one of many workshops that took place at the Lesbian Lives at UCD. The conference, which is now in its 15th year, is known for operating at the intersection between academic and community concerns, between art and theory; offering a creative, active and open space of redefinition and exploration of what 'lesbian culture' can be. I may have went to Dublin feeling slightly confused about the whole Lesbian thing, being now a confirmed queerdo at heart, but I definitely felt a renewed kinship of the idea of definining Lesbian culture as an open space, as a culture that has its basis in desire, and reaches outside of that 'identity' to make alliances with other identities or positions based in desire. As a culture that doesn't exclude people on the basis of difference. No no, the dogma days of Lesbian cultural are most definitely a thing of the past if this conference was anything to go by.

The openness of the format of Lesbian Lives that places art workshops beside academic papers, zine making alongside discussions on polyamory, demonstrated for me the possibility of what a conference can be. I didnt attend one paper and felt truly liberated by it! It shakes up the frankly boring, static, alienating and hierarchical formats of most of academic conferences and allows for connections and discussions to occur in a more relaxed, accessible framework that is more inclusive to the majority of people. There should be more events like this that are more true to the whole human beings we are. We are not just a brain, but a body with breath, energy and a complex emotional life – as well as many other things besides. Of course most people, most theorists *know* this, but why do the formats and practices we choose to explore ideas in

not truly reflect the complexity of who we are? It curtails so much possibility. Lesbian Lives offered a breaking out, for sure.

Barbara Carrelles and her girlfriend, Kate Bornstein were the keynotes speakers for this event and their style – which mixes up a lifetime of experience in the theatre and performance art with a lifetime of experience on the margins of society as well as on the margins of lesbian culture – crowned the event perfectly. Their lives alone bear witness to the immense changes in lesbian cultures in the past 30 – 40 years – from its emergence to its multiple forms of existence it harbours now. Bornstein lovingly reflected on its changing nature which is part of its ability to withstand time and space: no cultures that remain monolithic ever survive she said. Embracing the perspective of Bornstein as a gender queer transsexual, at one time lesbian woman is testimony to the evolution of 'lesbian lives' and its refusal to stay monolithic.

Hearing the stories of Bornstein's and Carrelles's lives was inspiring, profound, illuminating; they are both queer elders and, most importantly, they are queer survivors of this less than queer world and they are talking about it. Most importantly for me, their work ultimately helps other queers to survive. Bornstein's '101 Alternatives to Suicide for Freaks, Teens and Other Outlaws' pretty much does what it says on the tin, fusing postmodern theory to mobilise suicide productively to kill off your old self. This advice was carried out in hir characteristically big hearted style. In all of my life, I have not met anyone with as big a heart as Kate Bornstein. A self proclaimed slave and a cutter, she gave out 'get out of hell cards' in hir workshop that closed the conference so that she can go there instead of us. There are social uses to masochism, definitely. Carrelles too, empowering people to orgasm without gender but with the powrrr of energy inspired breath and motion, similarly gave a room full of seething, breathing not quite all lesbians reason to smile and live just that little bit more. Aaaaaghhhhhhh. Both these incredible women fuse their wisdom and experience and harness it for the power of collective queer survival & these are important role models to have within a community and subculture that remains horribly marginalised within a heteronormative world that reproduces itself all too easily.

This kind of wisdom – that we will perhaps call the wisdom of the crone as Bornstein did in her talk – is something that I have often felt to be lacking within my experience of queer subcultural life. Not because we are not wise in our youth but largely because we have been young, vulnerable perhaps, unsure of history because we had very little. That is also part of the glory of queer: its open-ness, its lack of rules, its lack of tradition holding it back allows for the primacy of creativity in the act of everyday living: not looking back, maybe looking forward but definitely creating a vibrant and decisive present. This does have its limitations also – we are not used to having a history even if that history is one shrouded in immense trauma and pain – something we could not fail to notice as Carrelles choked back her tears as she remembered how her queer brothers died in her arms during the AIDS crisis. For the queer community is a

relatively new community, born out of necessity in the face of the AIDS crisis during the 1980s – queers now are finally getting old in body at least – I think i've been an old queer stuck in young body for some time. It was both a pleasure and relief to hear Carelles and Bornstein's witness, no longer do I feel cut off from the queer past. Testimony, witness, these are such important things.

My own contribution to the conference, my reading of Kate Bush's 'The Ninth Wave' as a Lesbian Rebirth journey was met in part with bemusement. The conference organisers neglected to put on the programme that it was an ironic examination of heteronormative socialisation and lesbian literary theory. Some people came along I think expecting a full on holotropic, shamanistic experience which I'm afraid I'm just not qualified to deliver – well, not yet anyway. Little did we know that experiencing union, healing and wholeness through breath, energy and movement was only a few hours away on the floor of the conference room courtesy of dear Barbara and her Urban Tantric vision, and surely now a central part of the fullness of lesbian life.