

bleached blonde bimbos II



sex radical philosophy for everyone
June 2005

The End of Genderqueer

This is a meditation on the word "genderqueer." I'd like to look at what this word means to me and how it functions for me and my community. What potential does it hold? What are its inherent flaws in terms of identity politics and the resulting marginal conformity? What are the consequences when queer people become so focused on grouping ourselves? "Genderqueer" as a concept, identity, movement or just as a word, has meant a lot of different things to me in the past few years. My gut reaction to it has transformed from a feeling that was powerful and exciting into one that is annoying and depressing. Included in this meditation are my thoughts on how this transformation happened, and a few ideas toward a new approach.

I've been really conflicted about writing this zine. Horrified, actually. I wish to deal with the topic of gender in a queer context, but still be readable and interesting. I want to write for all my friends, for those who are passionate about gender and for those who get an easy thrill just at the thought of discussing how words acquire and change meaning. But I also want to write for those who do not spend every spare moment agonizing over the use of language to define gender. Most of all, I must carefully avoid launching into the jargon-heavy, divisive monologue that usually accompanies the word "genderqueer." I do not want to produce yet another queer writing sample that spends time debating the minute details that distinguish one sub-identity from another. I have to watch out for asserting all kinds of distinctions that alienate queers from one another and guarantee that any potential ally reading about them will be turned off by a mind-numbing litany of neologisms and self aggrandizing swill. I must never, ever be that homo who sucks all conversations into the tractor beam of gender and fills up all the available space with their personal gender angst. You could take this zine's theme, "The End of Genderqueer," as a call for an end to the use of this word. I am sick to death of hearing it. However, I cannot be so easily rid of it. Whether I like or not, and whether genderqueers can stand to have me or not, I've got a foot in the genderqueer identity.

A few weeks ago I was wondering if I should bother to finish this zine. Then something happened that reminded me of why I needed to write this. I was riding my bike down the street when an old man sitting outside the Off Track Betting place near my house called out to me "Is that a boy or a girl?" People have been asking this question of me since I was six years old, or more like, people have been reprimanding me with this question from my earliest memories to this day. This obnoxious man reminded me that my queer gender will always be with me. This topic is present for me, today, years after I came out of the closet, years after I got comfortable with describing myself as "butch." If people haven't stopped asking me this question at the age of 31, I doubt they ever will. So I can't resist writing about this topic. I can't resist risking all the booby traps of writing about identity politics and the so-called queer radical scene. In calling for the "End of Genderqueer," I am looking for the purpose of this word. I am also writing about myself, about my personal history, about my relationship to other queers and about how I think life should be.

1. On the Definition of Genderqueer

From the NY Times Sunday Styles, March 7, 2004: "Some transgender students aren't moving between sexes; they're parked somewhere in the middle and prefer to describe themselves as 'gender queer'—signifying that they reject the either-or male-female system."

From Time Out New York, February 3, 2005: "Genderqueer: This umbrella term refers to anyone who doesn't fit into the traditional binary male-female system—from androdykes to trannyboys."

My own personal definition of genderqueer: 1. A person who is painfully deliberate and consciously political in their gender expression. 2. People who identify with efforts to subvert oppressive power dynamics by undermining traditional gender expectations. 3. A person whose gender presentation is over-determined by traditionally gendered signs, somebody who displays excessive femininity or masculinity. Conveniently, this definition could potentially include me, my girlfriends, radical straight people, all our transsexual friends, and anyone else who actually wanted to identify as such.

Why doesn't my definition focus on being in the middle, or outside the male-female binary? Because I want to pull genderqueer back into my own camp, where I first met it, as one of many pragmatic political identities that aspiring queer revolutionaries could use to explain who we are. I want genderqueer to be a true "umbrella" term that includes all of us who fuck with gender, who have terminal gender on the brain, and who never take gender for granted.



Miss Jennifer

2. On Alienation and The Cutting Edge of Gender

From the Village Voice 25th Annual Queer Issue, June 23, 2004: "But the genderqueer generation poses a new reality in which the world doesn't label our identities and our bodies; we do. If you spot these transmales at the Pride parade, or in your local bar, you have seen the future—and it's very queer indeed."

From Gay New York, by George Chauncey: "In 1929, for instance, a conservative village paper attacked bohemian women for being 'so ashamed of their sex that they do their best to appear like men...' It went on to charge that 'the majority of that type manifestly endeavor to create a third sex.'"

If we have documentation showing that queers were endeavoring to label their own identities and create a third sex back in 1929, when exactly does this smug queer future begin? It seems like a long time to be seated on the cutting edge...

3. On My First Contact with Genderqueer

I don't remember the first time I encountered the word, but I am sure it was sometime in 1999, at the now defunct annual True Spirit conference. I met a whole bunch of folks who, like me, were alienated from gender and committed to reclaiming, valorizing and politicizing our difference. Mostly, though, it was just refreshing for each individual attending this conference to see that we were not alone, that in fact, we were part of a whole community of (hot) queerly-gendered, activist-minded deviants. We stayed up late talking and hooking up and planning the revolution, or at least planning panels for the next conference. We formed immediate intimate bonds.

The following year, at the same conference, some comrades and I held a panel we called "Queer As Fuck." The purpose was to discuss how Punk was a way to find strength in our difference, a way to refuse being told what a girl should be, and a way to turn being an incorrigible freak into an actual lifestyle choice. It was also to discuss how being punk for many gender deviants was a first step on the lifelong road of opposition to normality and complacency. Among other things, this was a conversation about how all of our personal experiences with our own unique forms of defiance have been as empowering as they have been difficult. It was an opportunity to laugh together at how people perceived us, and congratulate each other for surviving their harsh and sometimes abusive treatment. Most importantly, this panel affirmed how gender malcontents need to protect each other, look out for each other, and generally have each other's back.

4. On Changes I Have Witnessed in the Media

A reporter from the online magazine Salon attended and covered the Queer As Fuck panel. The article she wrote had more in common with the

1929 "so ashamed of their sex" article than it did with the recent Village Voice "queer future." The theme of the article was that transgendered people either have a spiritual vision or a delusional psychiatric condition, and it varied in tone from uncomfortably describing the range of masculine appearances to uncomfortably dismissing their masculinity. It referred to conference goers as dykes, which is in contradiction to how the majority identified themselves. This was March 2000, and nowhere in the mainstream or even liberal media could you find mention of anyone being permitted to define their own gender.

Fast forward four years to November 2004. The Metro, a free daily paper that is not especially progressive, prints an interview with author JT Leroy. The Metro asks "Do you consider yourself male or female?" JT replies, "I don't know. What do you think? It can be whatever I'm in the mood for. It changes day to day." And the interviewer takes JT's word for it. I can't help but think that's a major step forward.

It seems genderqueer is a concept whose time has finally come, rising up out of the ashes of twentieth century village bohemia to a media where (kind of) famous people are permitted to name, or decline to name, their own gender.

5. On the Revolutionary Heart

After the panel and year 2000 conference ended, many of us went on to adopt "Queer As Fuck" as our motto for any and all subversive activity in any context. That could mean women wearing pants to their conservative workplace, or androgyny in general, or facial tattooing, or your top-secret girlie panties. The motto connected all of our divergent and previously unrelated activities. It allowed us to feel a part of something larger than ourselves. But most importantly, Queer As Fuck did not have any room for a hierarchy of most radical to least radical. There was never any formal structure other than to say that any subversive action could be included. Revolutionary meant fucking shit up productively, not just being provocative and offensive, but being provocative and consciousness-raising. To this day my personal approach is to meet people where they are and try to gradually introduce them to my life experiences and beliefs

surrounding my gender, instead of assuming everyone needs to meet me where I am before we can connect. And that's what I think the evolving gender queer scene is missing. There is too much focus on dividing the world into who gets it and who doesn't, and not enough heart.

6. On Recent History

But maybe I've contributed myself to some of the unsatisfying ways genderqueer-ness has evolved. It could be argued that the whole Queer as Fuck thing was the beginning of the end for True Spirit. This panel and its subsequent incarnations overflowed conference rooms, and always spilled out messily into host hotel's lobby and bar. Because it was somehow a gender autonomous zone, and because of sheer sexual energy, True Spirit managed to double in size every year through 2003. It spawned as many ideological arguments as it did new vocabulary words. It drew homeless queer youth, straight-identified transsexual men, punks of every variety, the pierced, the tattooed, and the truly broke who slept too many to count in a single hotel room. Pissing off every available hotel in the DC area, exposing the under-aged to sexually explicit material, chain smoking in the lobby, arguing loudly, wearing S&M gear shamelessly, sporting ridiculous hickies... this was truly beautiful and consequently could never last. Half the time I felt like shit when I was there, isolated, depressed, angry, unattractive, and stagnant because I didn't opt for testosterone or surgery; but I never lost sight of the fact that the existence of this conference was a miracle. Anyway, the thing that broke True Spirit was the question of exclusion. Could one conference meet the needs of both trans men and under-age over-pierced gender queers? Alas, no, nor could it meet the needs of all of us who fall into more nebulous territory. It was great while it lasted.

To my knowledge there is currently no single space where gender queers talk or meet. I find article after article in the mainstream media attributing new meaning to this word, meaning with which I feel less and less connection. I read increasingly narrow definitions of the concept, and hear from folks who have no sympathy for those who do not "get it." Is my participation in creating the meaning of genderqueer over? I used to feel that this was my word, my subculture, my movement. Now I see things in

newspapers and magazines that I can't even relate to at all. How quickly I have transformed from being a molder of a future that is "very queer," indeed," to a throw back from an earlier queer era!

7. On the Bois

If somebody asked me at the Queer As Fuck panel in 2000 if I thought major news publications would feature people like us, and would even use our language to describe us, I would have laughed. What a mixed blessing the attention has been! The media has granted genderqueers trendiness and certainly contributed to the transformation of the word. In January 2004, New York Magazine ran an article entitled "Where the Bois Are." "Boi" is a genderqueer variation on "boy." This article screwed up people's pronouns and I am sure received many angry letters, but it also aired quite a bit of dirty laundry that I couldn't ignore.

NY Magazine 2004: "What all the bois have in common is a lack of interest in embodying any kind of girliness, but they are too irreverent to adopt the heavy-duty, highly circumscribed butch role. To them, butch is an identity of the past, a relic from a world of Budweiser and motorcycles gone by."

The same article directly quotes a self-described boi: "A lot of butch women just think, I'm big, I'm butch. They feel like because they're some big hunk of meat with abs, that's all it takes. I just find other bois to be more open-minded and a little more educated and artsier, like they won't be put in a box..." Assuming the magazine got it right, the one thing that is clear here is scorn for women who call themselves butch, who didn't stay in school as long as you did, and who don't agree with your idea of what art is.

Should I lie to you and say these insults have no effect on me because I know who I am, and fuck what everyone thinks? Yes of course. The problem is that gender queers aren't "everyone." They're my own, and somehow all the new media attention always finds them dis-owning butchness, because the identity itself comes with too much baggage. So here I have the mainstream media telling me what people in my own community think of me. For bois, "butch" contains too many expectations,

too much tragedy, and too much drama. For me, "butch" contains my connection to a long history of fierce queers who made it possible for me to be as free as I am today with both my gender expression and my sexuality. The word also suggests a mature, confident, warm, sexy masculine energy that suits me just fine.



Rocko Bulldagger

8. On Who Gets It and Who Doesn't

From the Voice (same issue as above): "Riley, on the other hand, wants to date biological men (called bio guys), a hopeless prospect, he says, because of "male ignorance" about transmen." This is just a single example of an attitude I have seen expressed widely. You are safe from rejection when you have pre-emptively rejected the object of your desire. If you never give anyone a chance understand you, there is no risk that they won't understand, and no chance that they will.

I remember getting introduced to an FtM at a sex party, and the very first thing he did was complain to me about how a lesbian just hit on him, mistaking him for a dyke. I said uh huh and moved on, but why protect this person's feelings? Does the weight of gender lend them priority in some subconscious inner ranking of queer radicals? Why didn't I just say

what I thought, "Be flattered when someone is attracted to you. How long do you think a femme would last if she got this angry every time a straight man hit on her, mistaking her for something she is not?"

So, men are too ignorant and butches are dinosaurs. Lesbians don't get it. What is with this more-radical-than-thou attitude? If no one has a hope of understanding you, who are you even talking to? (I would feel more sympathetic if I weren't actively being looked down on.) Between being tragically misunderstood, perpetually on the cutting edge and more radical everyone else, when do you have time to connect with others? And how much pain must you be in, that before somebody even has a chance to be interested in you, you have dismissed them? So many strict rules about how to be what you are, what to call it, and how you can expect others to relate to it. All this rigidity seems be isolating, resulting in a cycle of pain, loneliness and bitterness, trying to find people exactly like yourself because they will understand but no one else will, consequently being disappointed, becoming more rigid, more hurt, stricter and more precise about your language and identity... and on and on...

When we define ourselves by opposition to members of our own community, who benefits? If our language and sensibilities are too refined for other gays to get, can we still share a movement for social justice?



Fifi Love

9. Top Ten People Most Excluded from Your Genderqueer Scene

1. People of color
2. Femmes
3. People who use female pronouns
4. People who do not wear the uniform: work pants, trucker hats, etc
5. People over 27, unless they have contributed to your top surgery fund
6. People who express hetero attractions
7. People who do not speak the latest activist lingo
8. People who aren't kissing your ass right now
9. Transsexuals who have "fully" transitioned, however you define that today
10. Cross dressers

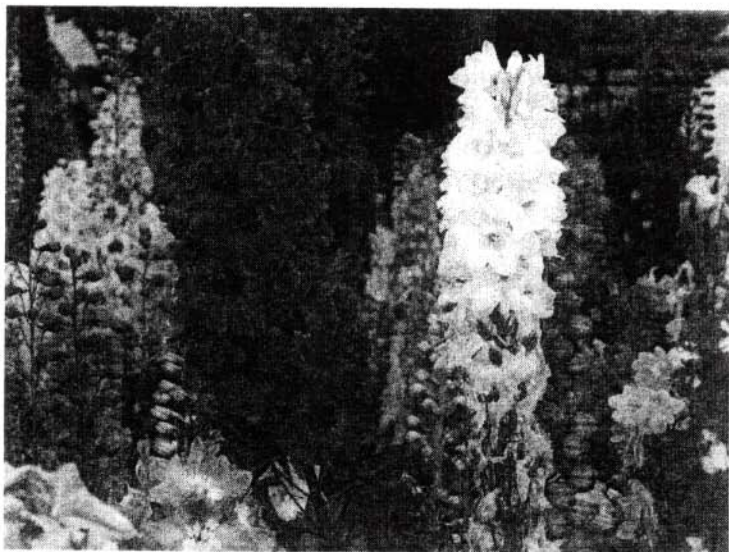
Conclusion

I always wanted genderqueer to unite me with other transgressive queers. Note that I said to unite, not to find people who identify exactly like me. People don't get me and that is OK. I am not holding my breath for a place where I do not have to explain myself. I am just working on creating a space where the explanation is welcome. That's what I want genderqueer to be about. I want genderqueer to be not only an umbrella term for those who reject M or F, but also an umbrella term for all those who queer their gender. And remember that thing I mentioned about loyalty and having each other's back? Maybe that's where the movement has become a scene. Genderqueer was briefly my movement, but it's definitely not my scene.

Despite all this, I will always think of my friends and myself as genderqueer in one way or another. Our queerness can't be pried away from that extra special gender spectacle we live in. It's our gender that's always troubling, always calling attention to itself, always acting like a dowsing rod drawing out sexuality all over the place. (I could write a whole other story about how much I learn about people just from their reaction to my appearance.) Genderqueer is ours in a sense, because we're wholeheartedly engaged with the politics of gender, because microscopic

examination of gender has shaped who we are, and because gender is the stuff of our sexual identity. Our coming-out experiences cannot be extracted from the politics of gender, and all of our relationships get their sparks from gender. Not to mention that the gender dynamics of our ordinary day-to-day lives never escape our close inspection, never fail to be revealing, and never fail to be compelling.

I could conclude by claiming that we are genderqueer because we fuck with gender, and that may include the refusal of both M and F, but on a good day it includes a whole hell of a lot more! The truth is, I rarely use the word, and I don't intend to start using it again just because I've created this zine and consequently launched all these thoughts out into my world. I realize this is quite an unsatisfying conclusion. But I suppose if I have left you with an up-in-the-air, inconclusive discomfort with the word genderqueer, then I have succeeded in sharing how I feel about it.



Bleached Blond Bimbos II: The End of Genderqueer.

BBB is about creating a revolutionary sex radical homo culture, where above all the absence of love and the lack of humor are to be challenged. It's about calling attention to misogyny in gay culture, from the progressives to the assimilationists. This is an unapologetically feminist zine.

Bleached blond bimbos are a symbol to me, a symbol of fun, brash, passionate and revolutionary sex radicalism. They are a symbol of the love that's missing from the queer movement, the common sense approach of down to earth, un-cool, kind of obnoxious and very sexy girls who speak what's on their minds and in their hearts. With this zine I invoke the image of the bimbo because she is a catalyst for confronting all kinds of psychic shit, and because she provokes very strong feelings one way or another. You can tell a lot about a person from their reaction to a bimbo. This bleached blond bimbo is an explosive, and she is dangerous to all nearby assumptions. **Feminine genders are powerful stuff. It is about time for the queer community to start paying attention.**

Bleached Blond Bimbos II is sponsored by The Bent Stiletto Social Club and is a Queer As Fuck production. This zine is dedicated to everyone who feels betrayed by this year's ambition-free gay pride slogan "Equal Rights. No more. No less."

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Please copy and distribute this zine!

Coverstar is La Mome Bijou, photographed by Brassai

An Open Letter to the Human Rights Campaign
(The largest national gay lobbying organization)

Dear Human Rights Campaign:

Please stop direct mailing me. I would rather flush money down the toilet than to send it to you.

I will not send you any money to help you to "better understand how to place the rights and dignity of GLBT citizens squarely in the framework of basic American values." (From the HRC mailer.) You are negligent in your failure to promote human rights that include food, air and water that aren't poisonous; shelter; health care; clothing; economic justice; reproductive freedom; freedom from fear- What human rights, exactly, are you campaigning for? Last I checked, participating in a state sanctioned marriage that gives you a set of legal and financial privileges at the expense of single people and unconventional families was not a step forward in the search for "rights and dignity."

How can you send me your shame-filled propaganda claiming "Not special. Not better. Just equal."!? This you send to a queer woman who understands her own difference as a gift that connects her to a community dedicated to progress, liberation and joy? No, I did not survive adolescence in order to be just like everyone else. I've never been just like everyone else and now that I have finally stopped trying, you want me to go back to that futile, suffocating desire? You betray the idea at the root of the queer liberation movement: Our difference is not to be tolerated, but to be celebrated. Our difference makes us strong, and through our actions and our example we should move society forward. We have survived

and even flourished through so much. You will not erase our life-affirming queer culture with your cowardly yellow equal sign.

Please keep your HRC Mastercard offers with your promise that an undisclosed percentage of the profits go to "fighting for equality." Shopping isn't activism. I really resent your efforts to re-brand gay rights as the right to marry. Our concerns, passions and desires are not yours to re-define! Queers aren't some product that needed a new image.

I believe your organization is the embodiment of everything that has gone wrong at this stage in the queer liberation movement. The arrogant yet shameful nature of your intentions is most clearly expressed in your own name. Your claim to the phrase "human rights" is rather tenuous, not to mention insulting to actual human rights organizations like Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch. You belittle their work by comparing it with your own, by trying to market your self-serving grasps at privilege as comparable to the global struggle for justice. When I think of human rights, I think of Nelson Mandela, not of wealthy white homosexuals collaborating with the racist criminal justice system to enact hate crime laws. When I think of human rights, I think of universal health care, not of fighting for access for just one other person, just for my own domestic partner.

I will leave you with a quote from Larry Kramer, on the subject of HRC: "I never saw an organization exist so long, and raise so much money, and do so little." Please remove my name from your mailing list.

Sincerely,
Rocko Bulldagger

WORDS BY
SISTER DIMCHIS ON

Well, for one thing gay people just invented disco and everybody just knows that anyway, so why mention it? Well, anyway, the other night I was at the disco with some friends and, oh, there was this cute guy on the dance floor and I thought, "Well, he just has the prettiest eyes," and so I danced over to him and said, "Isn't this a great song?" and he said it was his new favorite, and so anyway I said to him, "Wanna dance?" We were dancing and stuff when Lady Pickle, the drag queen, and her entourage made an appearance. And so my dancing partner inquired, "Hee, who goeth yonder in such marvelous and wondrous apparel? Hee, care to dance?" As we danced to the music played by the DJ, I replied, "Why, that's Lady Pickle and her entourage, and anyway, Lady Pickle is the disco's hottest drag queen and stuff so I guess that's why she's here and all that, you know?" To which the stranger replied, "Hee, methinks yon garb of ye olde Lady Pickle hath been wrought of a most unusual manner, no? Care to dance?"

So as we danced and kissed while the disco played on, we found love for a moment as we whirled away on dreams that could only be called our own, if for but a millisecond in the fabulous millennia of feelings that we gays feel so truly and deeply often. The sweet odour of Elysium descended as we traipsed away, floating in this perfumed bog we call life. I realized that sound effects were being used to create an abstract fantasy land filled with the hope of adventure and romance, the mood of which teased I and my pretty-eyed stranger and bewitched us to higher and higher levels of joy as our favorite song played on and on. The powerful gospel vocals seemed to combine the elusive seduction of the mysteries of life with the unresolved whispers of human sadness to evoke an exalting mood in the disco as we thrilled to hours of excited bliss, listening to music and kissing and watching the drag queens in their wigs and heels. Into an intoxicating trance we fell as the hours passed on until we found ourselves lying on pink clouds wearing only silver slippers. A tear beat in every eye, the brotherhood reaffirmed, we descended the disco heavens and made our way home to meditate on the unresolved feeling in our lives, ever with the hope of making a new beginning. That is why I love disco.

illustration by Kabuki

Respectfully copied from My Comrade: Role Models for Modern Youth