Where Are We Going With This? - 5/31/13

Dear Community,

There is a very difficult conversation happening right now that almost feels like it is not happening in our world. Our world. Our big beautiful Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer world. There are blog posts and Facebook speeches (yes, this one included), articles and arguments, terse posts and names called out, and names signed onto letters. In some ways, it doesn't feel like a conversation at all.

Is there a way for us to reach through the noise to where we can grow understanding and build alliance, where no one is disappeared? Where are we going with this?

We need to ask this question because standing in the harsh wind of all of this noise, this noise that growls from every direction, is a womon. An elder, a lesbian feminist, a queer youth, a trans dyke, a separatist, a Wiccan priestess, a straight radical feminist – someone questioning – who is my community? Also standing in that harsh wind are artists who make beautiful, liberating, important and powerful art that speaks to all of us, who are getting hurt. Artists who are boycotted because they play Michigan; who are boycotted even if they disagree with the festival's intention. At the same time, they are boycotted by womyn who love Michigan because they disagree with the festival's intention.

The cultural/political/economic very real power structure as it exists is made for none of us. It is as true today as it was nearly 40 years ago when we started the festival. We are all still trying to learn how to live (how to survive!) in a world that doesn't want us – any of us – to be who we are - and that act of remaining here, never fails to take its toll. That toll separates us from each other (in fact, that is a critical part of how the structure stays in place). Aggressive speech and action become a strategy of coping. Those strategies become survival tools. Our own entrenched projections and assumptions replace listening and learning the truths of others, and we are left arguing with our own projections. In our battle for survival, lines are imagined, lines get drawn, lines that grow ever deeper.

I know the deep cost of this toll personally and professionally. I witness the destruction being done to some artists because of their projected alliance with the festival's intention, regardless of their criticism of or disagreement with it. Silencing artists, walking out during shows, throwing heat on someone's FB page – this is cannibalizing our own. Artists play Michigan for many reasons, and I do not ask nor assume that they are in agreement with the intention of the festival. Likewise, I do not assume if someone speaks out with criticism of the festival's intention, that they do not hold our shared love of festival in their hearts; I continue to hold them as cherished members of our community.

We do not work, think or play in lockstep in this community. We have no party line. There is a herstory of campers, artists, crew and craftswomyn voicing dissent that is as old as the festival herself, and the Michigan community is richer for every struggle we face together with open hearts and respect. Many artists, workers and campers have different opinions, thoughts, analysis and passions about this issue. As we struggle

through our thinking, we use language, concepts and frameworks that span 2nd, 3rd and 4th wave feminist analysis, and we still come together in community. But we must come together to discuss these divergent points of view, and to remain in a dialogue that includes all of our multiple truths. We must see each other through what can feel like the most challenging stalemate.

The voice of dissent and constructive debate in the Michigan community is critical – it is part of what built this town. Educating ourselves about oppressions that press down on each of us and upon each other is vital to our collective survival on and off the land. This must be our commitment, for ourselves, for our loved ones, for our community. We must face up to our worst natures by confronting transphobia in our community, which exists and is real in our language, actions and attitudes. I know that this process has made me search my own behaviors, attitudes and actions. But to grow we must actually engage in these incredibly hard conversations, and do our own personal work.

At the same time we are facing an extremely complex and entrenched set of perceptions and constructs that call into question the very reality of the lived experiences and oppressions of females under patriarchy here, in North America – and certainly throughout the world. Our world. The world where the violent and real enforcement of patriarchy on womyn's minds and bodies has barely been acknowledged, much less dismantled.

So I ask again, where are we going with this? I stand firm in the belief that we must, as a community, honor and support all womyn. I also stand firm in the belief that being born, assigned and raised a female under patriarchy is an experience that deserves autonomous space for healing and rejuvenation. We cannot be afraid to love the gorgeous diversity and particularity of our lived experiences, nor allow fear to prevent us from loving, hearing and recognizing, as vital parts of our greater community, womyn of all experiences and identities. Whether we agree or disagree on this point, I ask you to join me in my commitment to treat all womyn with respect, and without aggression. One of our strongest tools as we work through this process of defining our interlocking circles of community is the art and music created by womyn. Artists who reflect our own truths, those with whom we disagree, and those who help us see new perspectives that will help us grow to unknown places. Please support these womyn.

Our disagreement about self-defined identities and the need for autonomous space today may feel insurmountable – and yet I am sure that we will find a way through this. There is too much at stake for us to lose our selves to each other.

In faith,

Lisa