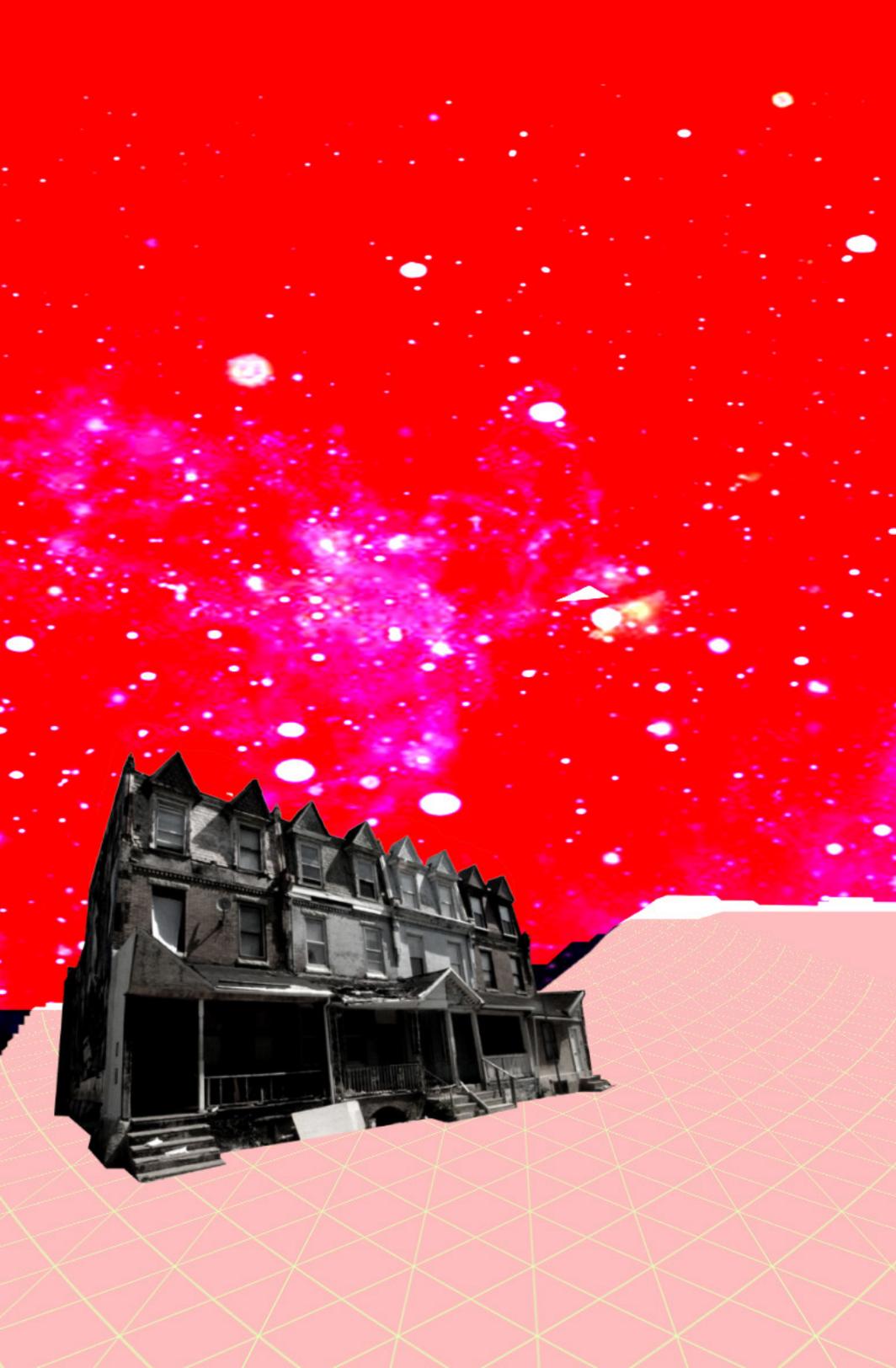




# BEING & BECOMING

*INTERVIEWS ON QUEER REPRESENTATION  
& CARE AS A GUIDE FOR LIBERATORY CREATIVE WORK*

edited by Eva Wö  
in Philadelphia, 2020



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BLACK WOMEN'S  
LIVES MATTER.  
BLACK TRANS + NB  
LIVES MATTER.  
BLACK SEX WORKER'S  
LIVES MATTER.  
ALL BLACK LIVES  
ARE SACRED

# GLOSSARY

**ac·com·plice** /ə'kämpləs/

Being implicated in the crimes necessary to create a just environment for all Black lives.

**an·ti·black·ness** /an-tē-'blak- nes/

A formation held in place by policies, institutions, and ideologies that systematically marginalizes Black people and their issues.

**be·com·ing** /bə'kəmiNG/

The process of coming to be something or of passing into a state.

**BI·PoC** /bɪ' pæk/

A term that stands for 'Black, Indigenous, People of Color,' it is meant to unite all people of color in the work for liberation while intentionally acknowledging that not all people of color face the same levels of injustice, hence centering Black and Indigenous experiences first.

**cen·ter·ing** /sən(t)əriNG/

Centering means that those from the communities most impacted have decision making control, as well as control over timelines, goals, money, and other key aspects of a project.

**in·ter·sec·tion·al·i·ty** /in(t)ərsekSHə'nalədē/

The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. The term was originally coined by Black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw.

**race trai·tor** /rās 'trädər/

A benefactor of white supremacy who encourages dissent from the conformity that maintains it; analyzing the forces that hold it together and those that promise to tear it apart.

**rep·re·sen·ta·tion** /,reprə,zən'tāSH(ə)n/

The description or portrayal of someone or something in a particular way or as being of a certain nature.

**re·spect·a·bil·i·ty pol·i·tics** /rə,spɛktə'bilədē 'pələ'tiks/

When minority and/or marginalized groups are told that in order to receive better treatment from the group in power, they must behave in socially acceptable ways.

**queer im·age con·tin·u·um** /kwir 'imij kən'tinyōōəm/

Representation of genders and identities that do not correspond to established/dominant/stagnant ideas, calling for infinite, expansive and divine images of a queerness spectrum with no limits.

# CONTEXT

*Hello and welcome!* In this zine you will find a series of short interviews compiled by myself, Eva Wö, a visual artist and organizer originally from Pueblo, Navajo, Apache, and Ute land a.k.a Northern New Mexico and based in Lenapehoking a.k.a Philadelphia since 2010. As a queer and kinky cis femme and sex worker, my identities across gender/orientation/occupation have been extremely important for me because I experience, on a daily basis, the toxic impacts of gender-based violence, whorephobia, and respectability politics on myself and others. As a 3rd generation Chinese-American I understand my internalized self-hatred is a direct inheritance from my ancestors' struggles coming to and surviving America. Being a biracial white-passing portrait photographer and curator living in the majority Black city of Philly for the past decade, the power dynamics of race in art practice is essential to me as I grapple with creating work that is actively challenging anti-blackness within and around me. I come humbly, to say that everything here is a draft as I am in the midst of refining my own understanding; and that I don't always succeed at living according to these intentions. What I do hope is for this draft to be of use to some.

*Being and Becoming* was produced in response to being curated by Daniel Tucker to create a project 'activating' a specific historic Mural Arts mural - *Pride and Progress* by Ann Northrup - located on the side of the William Way building in Philly's gayborhood. The image was boasted in local newspapers at the time, to possibly be the largest public LGBTQIA+-themed artwork in the country. According to her interviews, I gathered that Northrup acted out of respect for our community and had good intentions yet she and many of the models depicted were not queer nor part of the LGBTQIA+ community. I appreciated her transparency on this and her position as a straight white woman; and I wasn't surprised, based on the my observations of the work: 5+ rainbow varieties, and men in cargo shorts holding hands. I thought: I don't know any queers that dress like that. Secondly, William Way has served LGBTQIA+ community for decades and the majority of the people I see when I go there are Black. Philly is 54% African-American identified - why isn't this majority reflected in the mural?

Northrup's mural exemplifies the recurrent power-dynamics within art and media industries, where someone outside the community

was entrusted with the responsibility of telling a story on behalf of and without the presence of those whose experiences are at stake. I found this prompt to be a useful jumping off point for a conversation with collaborators and friends regarding our experiences and perspectives on ownership and authorship of the queer image and how that intersects with race and contemporary identity politics.

In the midst of developing this project, in early 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic spread globally, prohibiting all in-person gatherings and exacerbating existing inequalities. My original plans to meet with small groups of community to take photos together and hold recorded round table discussions were put on hold. Therefore, I ended up relying heavily on virtual communications with participants and the existing photos I had in my personal archives which resulted in there being very little age diversity.

On May 25th 2020, four cops murdered George Floyd in Minneapolis in broad daylight, sparking global uprisings in collective outrage against systemic violence against Black people in and by the United States. Social media became flooded by news of daily protests, revolution, calls to action, stories upon stories upon stories: performative, symbolic, educational, sacrificial, heart breaking. The availability of camera phones has ushered in more accessible ways the public are holding individuals, institutions, and state authorities accountable in upholding structural racism. At the same time, non-Black people posting videos of cops brutalizing Black people is traumatizing for Black audiences and perpetuates violence against Black people. Everyone is implicated.

Amidst the chaos, my best friend was taken by the FBI and is now facing up to 80 years for alleged property destruction, a fear tactic by the U.S. government to dissuade activists from supporting the Movement for Black Lives. I grieve her sudden absence while witnessing, from the outside, the vile brutal abusive force of the fascist white supremacist U.S. police state and prison industrial complex enacted under the guise of “justice” and “laws.” My friend is the one of the best people I’ve ever known, who was tirelessly committed to harm reduction and mutual aid work for over a decade. Her abrupt and insanely burdensome (somehow legal) abduction did nothing good for this world. 2020 has been a wild time.

# PARADOX OF REPRESENTATION

Black, Indigenous and Trans people are being disproportionately murdered; face disproportionate precarity and discrimination.

In order to realize ourselves, we need to see articulated visions we can identify with. That inclusion, no matter the accuracy or lack thereof, makes way for others.

The dominant historical narratives in media serve to reinforce white supremacist cis het patriarchy which are largely dehumanizing, exploitative, essentializing, tokenizing, objectifying, and/or fetishizing of BIPOC and trans people.

When in a position of access to creative resources, we can make way for authentic representation and compensation which holds undeniable power and necessity.

BIPOC and trans images are increasingly commodifiable and serve to meet quotas of a surface level diversity. People want to be entertained by marginal culture with little regard for the people who create that culture.

Black people and other creators of culture will and continue to show up full of magic and beauty. Marginal cultures will continue to explode with meaning and value the mainstream cannot keep up with.

Greater visibility can lead to greater danger.

We need infinite more positive and authentic representations in art and media to combat cultural stereotypes, harm, and violence.

*“trans” as an umbrella term encompassing transsexual, transgender, genderqueer, Two-Spirit people, and anyone whose gender identity or gender expression is nonconforming and/or different from their gender assigned at birth (via Leeway Foundation)*

# WHO IS THIS FOR?

I intend for this text to be particularly useful to other **white and non-Black PoC artists who are committed to the work of abolishing white supremacy, anti-blackness and transphobia in their work**. This includes filmmakers, photographers, artists, curators, social practice, performing arts (theater, dance, etc.); anyone who might work with humans and their bodies; or whose work engages with issues of representation, visibility, identity, and/or social justice. I want to be explicit about calling to other non-Black artists because both white people and non-Black people of color benefit from anti-blackness; which is far too commonly minimized. We must understand that our experiences of safety and comfort comes at a cost of the oppression of others and for this we are responsible. Basically, this is for people who find themselves at an intersection of those they are representing and access or proximity to privilege and resources.

In using an intersectional analysis to consider *who* to intentionally center, I ask that white gays be *decentered* from the LGBTQIA+ cannon. The history of gay rights movement and queer culture were started and continue to be led and upheld by Black trans women. Meanwhile BIPoC are continually erased in (whitewashed) history while more white gays achieve assimilation and upward class mobility. They have continued to uphold cultures of violence and have failed to make way for the most marginalized in our communities. I find it dangerous to allow mainstream media to paint a broad picture of us. As a light skinned and half-white person, I do not speak on behalf of all BIPoC. LGBTQIA+ and BIPoC experiences are not monolithic.

For those who are not familiar with sex work (sw) activism: sw is a job that serves as a viable means of income for many people. It is a job like any other job that consenting adults should have the ability to engage if they so choose. Sw is dangerous because of the cultural stigmatization, criminalization, discrimination, and marginalization sex workers face as a direct result of historical bad laws<sup>1</sup>, police violence, and oppression of womxn and queers. Street

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1 The existence of laws like SESTA-FOSTA lump consenting sex workers and victims of trafficking into one category; which fails to support either group and push both deeper underground. As a result, both sex workers and victims of trafficking are often re-traumatized, assaulted and incarcerated if they call the police or ask for help.

based sex workers are disproportionately impacted by these oppressive dynamics; and Black, Brown, trans, and survival sex workers are most likely to be working in more criminalized spaces like the street due to generational poverty, migration, and systemic oppression. To be pro-sex work is to stand against patriarchy and state-oppression on behalf of those who are targeted by the police. Non-sexworkers must do the internal work of unraveling the indoctrinated stigmas in their minds that keep them from supporting their friends, partners, acquaintances, and people in their communities who do this work. Liberation from white supremacy requires all systems of injustice to be eradicated: this includes sexism, whorephobia, classism, ableism, etc.

That said, we must not become overwhelmed to the point of stagnancy. White guilt is useless and serves no one. We need to channel our desire for different worlds into action. Black women and other folks at the margins have already written down and spoken everything that needs to be said regarding systemic injustice. With what I value, I find it necessary to care for those around me, and collect/call in white and light skinned people to address, challenge, and continually adjust our practices toward collective liberation. We need to actively and sustainably take responsibility for internalized and externalized white supremacy by doing our shadow work<sup>2</sup> and speaking out even when uncomfortable or inconvenient to do so. As non-Black people, this [and more] is our work to do.

## VISION

How can art be a tool for creating liberation? As cultural workers, we must align our work with the world we want to see - informed by an intersectional, pro-Black, and pro-sex worker analysis. I dream we all collectively commit to living actively and fearlessly according to these values. As a queer artist, I call for a *queer image continuum* to imagine the queer image as an expansive possibility with the capability to carve space for abundant transformation, liberation, and thriving alongside the evolution of infinite culture and self. We commit to a continual transformation toward becoming ever better

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<sup>2</sup> Anti-Blackness, transphobia, and whorephobia are internalized by everyone and show up in the language we use, the thoughts we think, and our learned behaviors in relationship with others. This is deep and also can be changed when we realize it's there, take note of it, and commit to working on it everyday. This introspective self work is our shadow work.

selfes, ever better accomplices and race traitors<sup>3</sup>.

We need to be critical of easy [or feel-good] ‘solutions’ which fail to disrupt existing power dynamics and combat our complacency with the comforts we’ve been unfairly granted. We must commit to the highest level of accessibility as well as focus our efforts on redirecting power/resources in order to support the people who are most marginalized. Those of us who are in positions of relative privilege and/or have access to resources need to practice creating direct pathways for the holistic self-determination for marginalized people. To do this we must use a critical lens to examine the power dynamics at play, hold ourselves accountable, compensate collaborators appropriately, and be willing to learn, change and grow without expecting accolades. Examples of what this looks like: financially setting up a regular donation or offloading generational wealth<sup>4</sup>; uplifting and serving others with volunteer work, movement organizing (at the direction of BIPoC organizers and/or with your own community), and finding ways of sustainably and selflessly committing to the long-term fight. Our work must make way for the world we want to see though deep and generous relationships of care. We need to see Black trans people in the visions we depict because these visions are necessary for all of our liberation.

In unlearning and deprogramming white supremacy and transphobia, we must be willing to be held accountable. We must commit to being open to the reality we are all capable of causing harm and making mistakes without being defensive or centering ourselves; especially when we have caused harm. Intentions do not equal impact. We must recognize our privilege, level of safety, and proximity to resources when we have caused harm to those who have a different lived experience than us.

All of our work happens under these paradoxes. My goal is not to allow the weight of these responsibilities to stop me or anyone else from committing to the work; but to learn to use our critical politics and embed the collective and collaborative practice with greater care, intentionality and accountability. As creatives from all positionalities we can create work that exemplifies and envisions what our collective world(s) need. I believe that cultural work of many voices and perspectives and across all mediums is essential. Embodying the world we want to see is a gateway to that world.

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3 see glossary

4 got resources/generational wealth? check out [resourcegeneration.org](http://resourcegeneration.org)

# CARE PRACTICES FOR LIBERATORY COLLABORATIVE ART

[this is a working and non-exhaustive list of suggestions based on my own trials and tribulations and is in no way an end-all-be-all]

☯ Make sure you are nurtured and fed spiritually, that you take time to rest. You must be cared for before you can care for others. Maintain healthy boundaries. Interrogate your privilege in context — i.e. if you're a white person with class privilege, think about how you support others to rest and protect their magic by taking on more work. Remember *everyone* is exhausted, even moreso those who have to battle layers of discrimination on a daily basis.

☯ Be the reason someone feels welcomed, seen, heard, valued, loved and supported — think about how you can balance calling in of your people while supporting and sharing your time and energy with those who need it most.

☯ Actively choose not to let the overwhelming weight of the world keep you from seeking joy, being playful, experimental, and taking creative risks in your work. Your divine channel deserves to stay open and flowing. Aim to be soft and open in a world where trauma and violence is everywhere all the time. Vulnerability is the greatest strength.

☯ If you are being asked to take a paid position, particularly if by a majority white/light skinned and monied institution, and are being expected to engage or represent a community which is being paid less or none at all, realize you are being asked to occupy this dynamic as a direct result of your privilege and that the dynamic is an extractive one that mirrors white supremacist capitalism. If in this position 1) consider redirecting the opportunity to a peer artist who may have less access to such an opportunity due to structural barriers but is equally capable; and 2) if it seems appropriate to take the opportunity, make direct pathways for holistic self-determination of others; which may require using your privileges to redirect or renounce power,

provoke dissent within the non-profit industrial complex<sup>1</sup>, and/or actively confront institutional harm. Let go of benefiting all the time.

☯ If you have access to resources or are in the position of a gatekeeper (someone who is in control of a resource), redistribute resources to poor BIPOC and others who are systematically denied resources. REDISTRIBUTE! Share the successes, share the wealth. Remember BIPOC have been systematically denied their worth. Access to money is the ultimate form of self-determination. Pay people for their time, energy and labor.

☯ If you don't have direct access to funds, remember that finances are not the only form of resources — consider your possession of social, emotional, and other material resources. Consider how you benefit those who you work with on a material, everyday, and recurring basis.

☯ In your art and life practice, embed care and reciprocity into your process of the work at every point. Actively de-program the capitalist in your head, affirming rest and resisting the urge to value people for what they provide to you. Learn to give without expectation of receiving in return. Give of what you have, generously yet sustainably.

☯ When collaborating, practice enthusiastic consent with the person we're working with. Be responsive and respectful with your collaborators. If the goal is to heal and get free through art, the process and afterlife of the art must not be oppressive. Listen closely and deliver when needs are voiced (this shouldn't have to be said, yet somehow people fuck it up all the time).

☯ Provide multiple opportunities for collaborators to feedback, edits, and or control over final drafts of the work before publishing or sharing it. You never know if visibility might cause danger for someone. Let them determine what they're comfortable with themselves and respect those decisions. Understand consent is ongoing and can be provoked at anytime.

☯ Feeding people and having food and basic needs met goes

a long way — having food that is selected by collaborators or residents is a form of showing respect.

☯️ Commit to making your work accessible to folks with different neuro- or physical abilities. This includes embracing sliding-scale, NOTAFLOF, making sure venues are wheelchair accessible, hiring translators, providing translations (think ASL, lingual, etc).

☯️ Make sure your space or work is age-appropriate.

☯️ Commit to fiercely protect yourself and others in a world increasingly interested in the subjugation and tokenization of marginalized bodies and communities.

☯️ Seek to document and portray authentic stories, with the understanding and acknowledgement that the color of our skin and the shape and ability of our bodies is a part of our experience, but not the whole of our experience. Consider why you want to work with the people you're working with and what your relationship is to those people or their identities.

☯️ Ask yourself: are you embedded in these people's lives so that you're showing up for each other mutually? Are you invested in their thriving and they in yours?

☯️ Learn the art of shapeshifting to evade the Bullshit. Learn to listen to your intuition. Remember her wisdom is gifted to us by your ancestors. Listen deeply and believe people when they show themselves.

☯️ Speak on behalf of your own experience, not others. Similarly, use inspiration from your own culture. Be careful about how your work is informed by or appropriating cultures outside of your own. When engaging cultural exchange, acknowledge and be vocal about it's origin. Make sure you are not benefiting from appropriation at the expense of people from that culture. If you're white or NBPOC, don't use AAVE and steal from Black culture. Draw from that which you are authentically and ancestrally connected to (your work only becomes more rewarding when you do so).

☯️ Be intentional about who you work with, choosing to extend yourself to those whom you have built strong relationships. Build

strong relationships. Remember trust takes time.

🙄 Resist performative allyship. Resist the urge to use anti-oppressive language with no backing to your words. Do not manipulate people to believe you are an ally.

🙄 Give feedback. Be honest. Resist callout and cancel culture. Shaming, isolating, and excluding people reacts to harm with more harm and fails to separate the person from the action, or create space for change and growth. Consider your tendency to point fingers, instead, channel that energy into helping someone learn. Remember all people hold trauma. The goal is to heal, not cause more trauma. That said, not all people are entitled to your time and energy particularly if they have or continue to cause harm or are unwilling to be held accountable. Be aware of power dynamics and intersectionality as you access conflict.

🙄 Perhaps most important: ACCOUNTABILITY! Receive feedback. Hold yourself accountable and lean into that accountability. Take responsibility for your actions, change your behavior to accommodate new information you learn. Learn to separate the idea of making a mistake from being a bad person. Build in a process and intentional way to invite feedback and critique, understand feedback is a gift. Take time to understand. Be willing to be wrong. Recognize when you have caused harm. Learning and being challenged may not be fun but is essential to growing as a person and is essential to doing this work. Our world is full of paradoxes and there will always be opportunities to learn and grow and do better without further internalizing oppression or oppressive practices.

🙄 Be gentle with yourself and others. We all fuck up and cause harm, directly, indirectly, unknowingly, and unintentionally or through ignorance. Remember that the impact of the work is far greater than the intention. Choose intentional and regular self-education and deprogramming. Our world requires it. Understand this as part of your duty as a participant in and benefactor of an unjust world.

Please enjoy the following interviews from a brilliant gathering of minds on what representation can mean, most of whom I've worked with as collaborators, co-conspirators, and subjects. QTBIPOC are all beautiful, abundant, and infinite; literal stardust! I ask that you treat these insights without judgement, as you would listen to a close friend whom you hold great respect for. If you would like to \$donate\$ toward the creation of this document, find details for doing so in the Outro.

with abundant ♥,  
Eva



# QUESTIONS KEY

- X Tell a little bit about who you are. Roles you play, identities you hold, what you'd like a reader to know about you.
- ✚ How are you? What do you think will be different in a post-Covid world?
- ✿ Is identity, visibility and representation important to you? Why?
- ♥ Share a story about a time when you felt your identity was positively or accurately represented in media (movies, magazines, tv, ads, art, etc)? Describe what you saw and how did that impact you?
- ❖ Share a story about a time when you felt your identity was negatively or inaccurately represented in media? Describe what you saw and how did that impact you?
- ✿ There is a saying, "nothing about us without us." Is this saying meaningful to you? In your opinion, can someone outside an identity group create work that is useful to people within the identity group? What's at stake?
- ✱ Feel free to share any other thoughts that may have come up for you.

*[note] some interviews have been slightly edited for cohesion*



## **MX. ABDUL-ALIY A. MUHAMMAD**

*'Love me or hate me, but in a binary world you must choose one.'*

✕ I grew up in Philly to Black muslim parents. I come from working class parents, my mother worked various jobs, as a SEPTA trolley operator, housing coordinator for an HIV nonprofit and last as an office administrator for a Philadelphia school. My father had extended contact with the carceral state, as is the reality for many Black families. I grew up in the late 80s and 90s during the punctum saliens of the crack cocaine epidemic. I identify as Black, non-binary, queer and poz. Poz means that I'm a person living with HIV. I've mostly worked retail jobs but have experience working at nonprofit organizations mostly focused on LGBTQ2 health and wellness. A few years ago I helped cofound the Black and Brown Workers Co-op<sup>1</sup>, an organization focused on worker's rights and displacement politics. I otherwise write poetry, take sexy photos and sometimes write my opinion about medicalized surveillance<sup>2</sup>, anti-Black racism<sup>3</sup> and AIDS histories<sup>4</sup>.

❖ Grief-shock will envelope our most vulnerable communities in a post Covid-19 world. The infrastructures of policing will be increased exponentially, with the excuse for curbing future pandemics ever

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1 <https://blackandbrownworkerscoop.org/>

2 <https://racebaitr.com/2020/04/24/what-we-can-learn-from-the-history-of-hiv-surveillance-during-the-era-of-covid-19/>

3 <https://www.inquirer.com/opinion/commentary/coronavirus-black-african-americans-philadelphia-healthcare-20200407.html>

4 <https://www.thebody.com/article/covid-19-and-aids-epidemic>

present. The most marginalized will be the Vanguard, as always, and usher in new and necessary liberatory practices and rituals. We will survive in the ways we know how.

\* Identities help me understand my relationship to the world and the material conditions that engulf my existence. It can be a useful tool and helps us answer questions about who and how we are. I have a complicated connection to visibility because without dismantling oppressive structures, visibility can operate like tokenism. I think that representation means that those most impacted by systems of oppression should foreground movements.

♥ I can't say I've fully felt seen or represented in the media, but I guess a close example would be *Naz & Maalik*, a movie about two Black muslim boys exploring their sexuality. I don't think the movie itself is well structured because it was written by a nonmuslim who is white, but that narrative is close to mine.

❖ Oprah's interview with J. L. King made the inaccurate narrative of "DL" purveyors of HIV and other STIs a salient and destructive archetype. It dismisses other causal factors for Black vulnerability to HIV infection and created the idea of the HIV monster lurking in our communities. This narrative about men who sleep with men bringing a virus into heterosexual pockets of the population isn't the dominant way HIV infection persists, but this narrative is deeply seeded in communities because of Oprah's platform and reach.

**\* IF THE WORK IS MEANINGFUL IT WILL BE IN COMMUNITY WITH AND LED BY THOSE COMMUNITIES. ANYTHING ELSE IS GATEKEEPING AND PATERNALISTIC.**

I've seen this in HIV work, the expertise of lived experience isn't uplifted and the result is damaging because people who don't experience living with a virus often dominate the stories told. Black and brown poz experiences are obscured by others telling the stories or are forgotten.

\* My final thoughts are be kind to yourself, fuck productivity and let love, rage and action lead the way. Much Love.

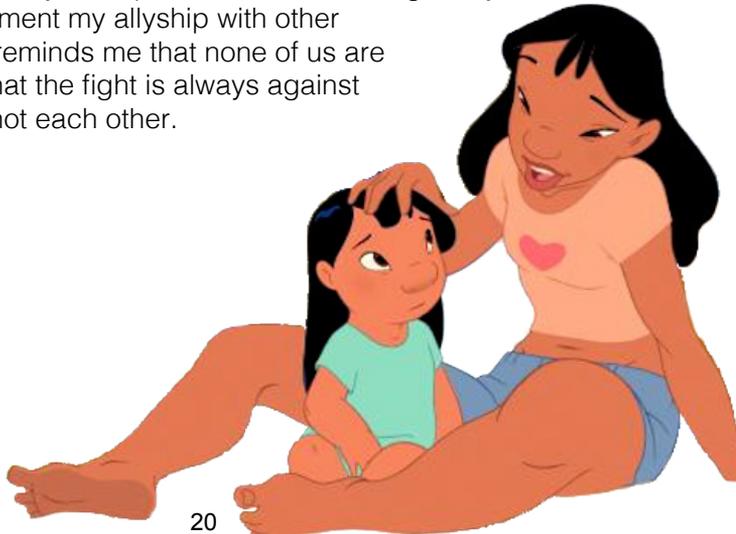
# RAANI BEGUM

Support Raani's work on Patreon and other platforms.  
Links can be found on Instagram or Twitter @raanibegum

✕ I'm a full service sex worker, community historian, and organizer. I have done mostly in person work my whole career but right now, I'm selling my bits on the internet. Other than that, I am a member of the *Heaux History* project. We document and archive the work of sex workers of color. This means tracking and archiving the socio-cultural aspects of their erotic labor and also the communal and political work they do. And lastly, I'm a member of *Project SAFE* and *Philadelphia Red Umbrella Alliance*. This means harm reduction services in the form of giving out thoughtful information, supplies, and funds.

❖ Balancing my own set of mental illnesses with the reality of Covid-19, and with both sex work and organizing work can be overwhelming. All facets of my work, sex work, organizing work, documenting work, is emotional work. Which directly sits in the middle of the human cost of Covid-19 which has exacerbated the vulnerability of my community. So it can be overwhelming.

\* My identities are political. I'm South Asian, queer, Muslim, sex worker. All of these are political identities. I understand them as a juxtaposition against the project of the United States, an entity that has sought to colonize and homogenize the different communities my identities relate to me. It also helps me understand, empathize and work with different communities who experience the United States in the same way. This political understanding of my identities helps cement my allyship with other communities and reminds me that none of us are disposable, and that the fight is always against structural power, not each other.



In that vein, representation is important. The United States and other imperial projects (including the Indian government of Modi) has certain messaging about my communities. Fighting against this homogenization requires a self-determining messaging of my own communities. This can look like, for example, that sex work is work that cannot be eradicated simply when poverty is eradicated. And so on. On a lighter note, visibility and representation is also important to showcase that communities don't have to live assimilated lives to reach their full potential. Making room for that nuance and diversity is good for communal health.

♥ My favorite movie of all time is *Lilo & Stitch*. I really identified with Nani since I'm also the oldest sibling that has cared for her younger siblings from a young age. It's a movie about an untraditional family that's "messy", an Indigenous family trying to stay connected to their roots, and that ultimately wins in the end.

❖ I don't think I can say there's good representation of my identities in mainstream media. Efforts towards "better representation" just end up playing to liberal tropes of "emancipated and empowered" brown woman which I don't identify with, as it pits me against my own communities. And so I'm constantly walking in the shadow of one stigma or the other. It constantly puts me on the defensive, which is not a great place to be. In general terms it makes me retreat from the world at large; in clinical terms I think it exacerbates my mental illnesses.

✱ I don't think any outside forces can ever determine what's good for my community without exerting their own power dynamics. Ultimately, anything other than self-determination is harmful. Community members are the ones living their own lives and are best positioned to speak on what tools and policies we need. A lot of what my communities need don't sit well in the realms of respectability or assimilation. So there's no way outside members can interfere in our lives without bringing more pain.

**WE SHOULD BE BROUGHT TO THE TABLE ON OUR OWN TERMS, BE IT MEDIA REPRESENTATION OR DESIGNING POLICY, AND BE GIVEN THE TOOLS AND FREEDOMS WE ARE ASKING FOR, ON OUR OWN TERMS.**

✕ I am queer, nonbinary, and transmasculine - a white Jewish sex worker of 13 years.

❖ It's difficult not being able to see clients during this pandemic, as well as witnessing the effect it is having on folks who are PoC, trans, and sex workers. The amount of mutual aid happening right now gives me some hope that communities are working together to support the most marginalized and affected people in this global crisis. The economy will be much different after this, as well as nightlife, the arts, sex work, sex and travel.

✱ Identity and visibility affects how people move through the world and understand themselves. Representation is especially important in media depicting people and specific communities. It's especially crucial that people with marginalized identities see themselves depicted in ways that are accurate, humanizing, and empowering.



♥ I was obsessed with the movie and play *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* when I was about 13 years old, as it had the most trans, genderfluid, gay, and queer representation I had seen at the time. Now looking at the film, I see problematic elements such as a cis man playing Hedwig, an ambiguously trans woman and genderfluid person. I related to the faggotry in the film though, and it helped me understand the nature of my own gender fluidity as a young teen.

❖ I remember playing *Grand Theft Auto* with a ex partner shortly after I secretly started doing sex work. I was very triggered by the option of being able to rape, rob, and physically assault street based sex workers in this video game. I didn't know how to put it into words at the time, but I understood how much this normalized violence against sex workers and women - especially after having experiences like this myself.

**\* THE PHRASE "NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US" IN ENGLISH FORM CAME INTO USE DISABILITY ACTIVISM IN THE 90S, AND HAS SINCE BEEN USED BY OTHER MARGINALIZED GROUPS SUCH AS SEX WORKERS. IT'S A POWERFUL CONCEPT HOLDING A DEEP TRUTH: THE BEST REPRESENTATION COMES FROM WITHIN THE IDENTITY GROUP. ANY TIME A MORE PRIVILEGED GROUP OF PEOPLE CREATE WORK REPRESENTING MARGINALIZED FOLKS THAT ARE NOT THEM, IT LOSES ITS ABILITY TO EMPOWER AND ACCURATELY DEPICT SAID PEOPLE. IT LOSES ITS ABILITY TO RESONATE AND OFTEN PERPETUATES FETISHIZATION AND STEREOTYPES.**

This goes for visual art and roles played in movies-like when trans characters are played by cis people, gay characters played by straight people, and poc characters played by white people. It's best to have people tell their own stories.

# ANDREA JACOME

*founder of Cocarosa Apothecary*

✕ I'm an queer herbalist, writer, culture-communications organizer, gardener and descendent of people from the Andean region of Guano, Ecuador and coastal region of Pivijay, Colombia. While I have moved a lot in recent years, I was born and raised in Atlanta so I also hold the South dearly as well.

❖ I'm seeing a lot of loss and financial precarity in my communities here in NYC and Ecuador so I'm doing okay as can be. But, I'm also equally grateful for all the survival ancestral tools that have prepared me for this moment. In a post-Covid world, I anticipate a lot of changes both challenging and hopeful. I can anticipate a rise in xenophobia, borders, debt, homelessness, and overall heightened fear/grief/scarcity trauma that can have people and systems act out frugally and brutality.

However at a community level especially when I look at the emergent mutual aid and [pay]check redistribution efforts, I feel like there's more and more people finally reckoning that we are all that we have.



We live in a world that has scaled and suspended us by what are actually fragile global supply chains—and it shows. It's my hope that we can make more momentum around seriously localizing our economies and practicing localized resilience through efforts like seed saving, gardening, traditional medicines distribution, supporting local worker-coops, etc. We will never see a half decent check for reparations or even a pandemic that the state has visibly and embarrassingly mismanaged. So we must rise to the task of decolonizing the responsibility of an economically just transition.

I also look at how these quarantine measures have shifted our relationship with nature; suddenly overnight it's like walking outside and seeing a bright blue sky have suddenly become much more sacred for everyone. I hope we can hold onto this shift in perspective and shift in spirit; we need to remember the sacredness of all our relations with both humans and non-humans. After all it's an important part to restoring the eco in the economy.

\* I think representation is incredibly important for activating the minds of young people so that they know there's a diversity of ways to live your life, for example. But I certainly don't hold it as the end all be all. I generally look at "representation" and "visibility" with skepticism because usually it means for a white audience or under a white grip.



**I'M LESS INTERESTED IN HAVING A SEAT AT THE TABLE IF THE TABLE IS WOUND UP IN THE EXTRACTION AND EXPLOITATION OF BIPOC COMMUNITY. I'M LESS INTERESTED IN VISIBILITY IF IT'S GOING TO MAKE ICONS IN WAYS THAT AMPLIFY THE HYPER INDIVIDUALISM THAT GOT US HERE. OUR WORLD AND OUR PLATFORMS HAVE SCALED UP IN UNSUSTAINABLE WAYS WHICH HAVE SOCIALIZED US TO LOOK FOR LEADERSHIP OUTSIDE OF OURSELVES & OUR COMMUNITIES.**

And most days I wish we could just smash all these stages so we

can finally look at ourselves and each other to realize we are the leaders we've been waiting for.

♥ Sadly—it's hard to think of an example of being accurately represented! I carry a lot of different identities that can make me a "minority" within a "minority" so I don't even think I've ever really seen myself reflected in any mainstream way. At best, I've found that in music and music videos and when that happens, it usually stops me in my tracks and I feel so nourished! Most recently I felt that when I saw some of Lido Pimienta's latest music videos.

❖ Growing up in the 90s, I was surrounded by a lot of media that was hyper focused on the violence from the war on drugs in Colombia. Whether in movies or TV, there was not only a hypersexualization of Colombian women but a lot of fetishization of the violence of that era. This obviously hasn't changed much when we look at current shows like *Narcos*. Then and now, I generally hate narco-focused movies because they are typically reductionist of the complicated economic-political history that entangled the war on drugs. Like many diasporic Colombians, my mother's family were directly impacted on multiple accounts because of that history, so growing up I would get incredibly upset and offended when I received jokes about being a drug trafficker. Sometimes I would only mention being Ecuadorian to avoid those kinds of comments.

\* At the end of the day, I believe we're all interconnected as a species and thus all our wisdom and liberation is tied up with one another. However, I believe work can't be rootless. This is where there's a lot of harm in appropriation whether in art & healing arts—it compounds to the colonial legacies that have mined and extracted our communities for knowledge and that can hurt. For me, work needs to be rooted and that's done when you name your lineage & teachers, when knowledge is passed through ancestry or rights of passage or when being in deep relationships with people and communities you are accountable to. If you're not in a relationship with the stewards of that said knowledge, you probably have no business there—and much less playing teacher or demonstrator. However I do believe it's possible to be in a deep relationship with communities—outside the ones you are born into—where there can be that kind of exchange of creativity and accountability. Overall, this question makes me think about how for many herbal medicines, the most potent medicine is in the roots and I think our work is similarly most powerful when firmly planted and rooted.

# NOEMI CHARLOTTE THIEVES

x I don't know who I am at all. Everyday I struggle with that question, as it seems I change more than I like to admit and not enough for what I expect from myself, or at least not in the right directions. I know the question is in relation to identity as it pertains to our current societal context, but I feel an immediate hesitation to speak in those terms. They feel wrong. But I know that language, while inherently clumsy, is what we have (even in this case we are limited to text, which is another remove from spoken word, yet alone the complexity of a primary multi sensory experience of one another). But I'll try my best to interpret myself in this form.

I love making movies, am at home in the movie theater or on set, if not in the studio working, writing, drawing, photographing, building objects. I like to read about aesthetics, the way that life forms perceive their environments, the unfolding story of how the universe evolves in every moment. Right now I'm learning about the art of code, attempting to try to build a computer from scratch, and to invest in a camera kit after years without one, which has left me depressed and creatively blocked. I feel like if I had a choice for an identity I would choose an Eclair NPR camera with a 18-250mm 1.4 zoom lens on a tripod with a loose head, strapped to a trackless dolly with Fuji color film stock and unlimited magazines at my disposal, with a Omni Schoeps microphone encased in a blimp recording straight to the optical soundtrack on the film sandwiched



between the exposed image and the registration holes of the celluloid strip.

Superficially you could see me as a queer, transgender woman from a Jamaican mother and a Pakistani father who grew up in South Florida. If you knew me a little more you would know I was narcoleptic, struggled with depression and suicidality, and experienced at numerous times physical assault and abuse. You would know that when I say transgender, I only say so because that's the word that I'm told to use to explain who I am, other times I'm supposed to say I have gender dysphoria. Much of my identity has been imposed on me, whether through the boxes I have to check to qualify for financial aid, or the ones I check to make sure my hormone levels are read appropriately. I consider myself a mutant, like the rest of us. My role I play has shifted as my life has taken me from place to place and as I have been able to express myself and seek the care and support I need, as well as to make sense of what I am, eventually resulting in having to accept a temporary set of roles we haphazardly consider an identity.

❖ I've settled on saying I'm feeling mediocre half the time, grieving the other half. Doing? I'm doing less than I want to be. What happened in a post-Spanish Flu world? In a post-Black Plague world? In a post Hiroshima & Nagasaki world? I don't know what will be different, but somethings will change, others will stubbornly remain the same. Only time and considerable effort will tell. I think that anything I can think about it would be speculative at best and criminally hubristic at worst. I know that we evolved into what we are alongside many virus strains and that they are embedded in our dna, as well as that we will adapt to this whether through prolonged catastrophes, bio-medical interventions, behavioral changes on a macro and micro level, but that it is not a good idea for me to pretend to know how that will all play out. I'm just reading about how the virus is evolving, what people are doing to help one another survive, and trying in small insignificant ways to participate in helping when I'm having one of those mediocre days.

\* It's important to me because I live in the prickly cage of its constructs. I long for expression of how it feels on a sensory level to be another human, to bear witness to how we behave with one another, and to discover new ways of living outside these false enclaves of "community" and "society," which are as reductive and misleading as using the term "white" or "black" to describe another human. But our dominant cultures, driven by a history incapable

of knowing for certain what lay in its wake, has been handed down these rudimentary terms like “man,” “woman,” “Democrat,” and “Republican.” Nagisa Oshima once said “Nothing that is Obscene should be hidden, what is obscene is what is hidden.” That is how I feel about identity, visibility, and representation. I long for a vocabulary of identity based on poetic, psychic being, on making the spiritual visible, and on representing each hominid as that particular hominid, that particular mutant, in all its intricacy and beauty and horror and pain and glory. I long for a representation of the real as a material mystery. I long for an identity based on what we don't know about ourselves and each other, based on what is possible rather than what is probable, what is desired rather than what is enforced, what is changing rather than what appears static. The current dialogue on identity et al feels superficial to me, though I deeply understand the sincerity in demanding to be seen phenotypically and to see one's likeness heralded in the pantheon of popular media. It can achieve an illusion of change, of power, of recognition, however contradictory they may be when broken down (why do I want to be represented in a violent media culture? Why do I long for power within capitalism? Why do I wish to belong in a place built with languages of aversion and diversion?). I think so long as the mediums are as fractured as they are, and our focus is engaged through historical atrocities into perceiving of each other solely through categories based erroneously on these phenotypic variations, we won't create the kind of art I crave, and what ends up being represented will be far inferior to the complexity of the soul achievable through the erotic use of poetry and art.

♥ *The Mirror* by Andrei Tarkovsky. I saw this film and immediately felt like it was ripped from my dreams, like they somehow got some kind of time travel machine and came to the future (the film was made in the 70's under Soviet Russia) and took the aesthetic parameters of my psyche and rendered it onto celluloid. I never saw a film so rich in poetic details that felt specific to my soul, to my pain, to my memories of my mother and of my father and of my childhood and of the way I saw the world. Now, Andrei Tarkovsky was a Russian man born to the state poet and lived through a completely different set of experiences than me, not to mention with different skin color, a different gender identity (at least I assume so), different sexuality (assumed) and a different experience of class, race, and all the rest. But I felt seen by this film most of all, and I cherish it like a diary of my own memories, like a shared dream I had across time with a tender-hearted stranger. I cannot explain exactly why, language

doesn't do it justice, but I can say it had to do with the specificity, the compassion, and the unwillingness to generalize his life that made it feel like it included me, which appears contradictory on the surface, but when reconsidered it makes sense, as good fiction works on the specificity of analogy and metaphor rather than the broad usage of symbol and statement. I can't speak to Andrei's intentions, but I know that he sought for a new language of film and I think he achieved something like it. *The Mirror* helped me through some very hard times and still does. I think what I long for in terms of representation isn't of my body but of my inner world. Another film that did this in a very different way was *The Skin I Live In* by Pedro Almodovar. In this film, there isn't mention of transgender identity as a subject, something to be theorized and unpacked and opined upon, but as a kind of punishment, as a kind of horror, as a kind of desire to mutate pain into something triumphant. In the film the character who technically transitions is actually not a trans woman but a young man who is kidnapped and forced to transition into the image of the grieving surgeon's dead wife, both as punishment for the perceived rape of his dead daughter by the man and as a way to bring her back to life. Through the torment and trauma of the film I experienced something close to how it feels for me to be in this particular state of agony. My experience of watching that film was profound as it felt true and positive in terms of my internal life, the way it feels to have this set of mutations, the actual dysphoria being a mix of hating the body I am "in" (which is a fallacy, I am a body I do not live in a body), and the often terrifying implications of being forced by my own desire to transform and modify myself. The film presented the experience of the poetic nightmare of feeling trapped in dysphoria for me, since I didn't want to feel this way and struggled to play a man as long as I could keep it up, with the woman inside of me coming up as a nightmarish force. This wasn't something I had ever seen depicted in media about trans women and I have held onto it as a chief example of the ways media can express what is happening inside the soul much better than I've found it capable of expressing what is happening outside in society.

❖ My identity is unique to me so I find difficulty in interpreting someone else's work as representing me even if they intend it to in some way because they don't know me. I hesitate to mention the film in mind because I appreciate so much about it. I think *Get Out* was a film that, while on the surface felt like it could offer a fascinating depiction of life akin to my own, felt unwilling to engage with the nuances of love between racial phenotypes, and

as the film progressed it appeared that the European American, or “white,” characters became less and less human and the ideas the film began with, ones that I’ve had to navigate my whole life around being perceived as a “black man” dating “white women,” the questions of trust and hypocrisy within seemingly “liberal white classes,” the exploitation of one’s appearance as a token to be captured and embodied, “Blackness” misconstrued as a talent, as an innate essence, was abandoned for an all too easy narrative of cartoonish vengeance against “Racist White People.” I longed for the film to dive deeper into the complexity of feeling genuine love while at the same time feeling hurt, exploited, discriminated against, about what happens when you see ugly sides of someone and their family but you still long for them, and what happens for someone who carries such beliefs and desires to harm someone they love when they are confronted with their actions and the consequences and yet still want to be together? I felt that the true horror of *Get Out* wasn’t the story presented but the version I have lived, where you don’t kill the “racist white family” but you try to survive and change them because you love that person and they struggle to change because they love you and you both live in the reality that there isn’t an easy way to love one another within the confines of different bodies and different experiences. Had the girlfriend switched bodies with the lead character, then through whatever havoc would ensue, they end up unable to switch back, having instead to live within each other’s bodies and experience racism and sexism and all of it literally within the other’s body, that would have been more accurate to my experience. After the film came out, I was as usual asked by many friends what I thought of it, with the expectation I would love it simply because it was about a “black” guy who was a photographer and was a horror film about race. I felt like I was supposed to agree with the film and by not doing so I was betraying my identity and the assumed beliefs that are supposed to come with it. What the film declared was a far cry more simplistic than what it could have asked, reminding me of the questions James Baldwin asked of Americans at the end of his dynamic essay, *Notes of a Native Son*. He asked what we were going to do together as Americans of African and European descent, knowing we had to live together, knowing that we were capable of loving each other as much as hating each other, rightly noting that we couldn’t kill our ways out of this horror story we were born into, and he suggested that the implications of those answers would have effects around the globe, as America’s dialogue on race happens on a world stage.

**\* I WOULD NEVER TELL SOMEBODY THAT THEY CAN ONLY MAKE WORK ABOUT PEOPLE WHO LOOK LIKE THEM OR HOWEVER WE CHOOSE TO IDENTIFY CHIEF IDENTITY MARKERS BECAUSE I THINK IT MISLEADS AND MISUNDERSTANDS THE USE OF FICTION AND THE USE OF IMAGINATION, WHICH I BELIEVE IS TO BE ABLE TO EXPAND ONE'S SENSE OF SELF, TO EXTEND YOURSELF INTO OTHER BODIES, INTO OTHER ANIMALS, INTO OTHER WAYS OF PERCEIVING, AND TO RESTRICT ANY ARTIST FROM THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLORE BEING OTHER PEOPLE BASED ON PHENOTYPICAL MARKERS OR BEHAVIORAL MARKERS IS TRAGIC.**

What is a stake would be understanding would be empathy, compassion, the basis of what we call being human. I don't want to pretend naivety around how the media has caused great harm by poorly representing people like me and others, but I think that has more to do with a lack of imagination and a lack of capacity to understand outside oneself than an innate inability to because of that person's identity.

I think a larger part of the problem here is actually to do with the mediums and the ways in which these mediums are distributed and imbibed by an audience and as such how they are marketed to us in these market demographics, which is where a lot of the terms we use to identify ourselves first gained popularity, and through the use in census reporting such as here in the US In the 1970s that denoted race within a limit of five reductive choices.

I would implore people who are making works about people that are outside of their perceived identities to ask themselves why, to ask themselves and of those around them what it is they are seeking to represent, and what it is that they are seeking to learn through the creation of a work involving something akin to other people's lives. I believe, and maybe this is particular to narrative work, but I believe that the creation of a character should be treated with the love one

would treat when creating a child and a desire to understand as much as possible about that other human being. So long as an artist is coming from a perspective close to this, I think it is OK for them to make work about anyone of a particular phenotype and assumed set of experiences.

**THE ISSUE AT STAKE OFTEN IS A SOCIO-ECONOMIC ONE IN SUCH THE WAYS THAT MEDIA EXPLOITS IDENTITY AS A COMMODITY, WHICH WE CAN SEE ON THE HOMEPAGE FOR NETFLIX AS WELL AS IN THE RECENT AWARD CEREMONIES WHERE, IN AN ATTEMPT TO APPEAL TO A MARKET AND THAT MARKET'S PERCEIVED MORAL INTEREST AS WELL AS TO ALLEVIATE ANY ACCOUNTABILITY FOR OPPRESSIVE DEPICTIONS, DISCRIMINATION ET ALL, AWARDS ARE LAUDED ON FILMS THOUGHT TO REPRESENT MARGINALIZED GROUPS AS MONOLITHIC MARKETS, OFTEN FILMS OF MEDIOCRE QUALITY BUT ONES THAT CHECK ALL THE RIGHT BOXES OF IDENTITY.**

This is ultimately a distraction, as the very methods of distribution, marketing, accreditation and awarding of works is entrenched in a formal language that promotes a false universality to the images and simulated experiences within the medium. This iconography is inherited from older forms of storytelling that rose out of very specific modes of communication with very specific intentions behind those formal choices. The characters of Myth were perceived of through a very different set of sensory experiences, ones that were often abstracted and oral, with emphasis paid to the artifice, and within the context of diverse individual cultural norms around whom the local archetypes were representing (often not individual people or groups, but aspects within an individual, which is where the term archetype comes from). This is lost on our contemporary media because the inherently photorealistic capabilities of art today call upon different expectations in our ape minds, that are often at odds with the representational intellectual intentions assumed in the work.

\* I think any conversation on identity has to be centered in a neuro-anthropological, neuro-psycho-bio-socio-evolutionary practice, one that respects and bases its understanding of humanity as a branch of primatology, perhaps the most difficult one yet, as we are constantly evolving as we attempt to make sense of ourselves along the way. Any attempt to reconcile culture and society and identity outside of those contexts and the myriad ways in which we are an ecosystem remixing our biology influences and is influenced by the constructs we evolved as a way to alleviate the stress on our genes and other more barbaric forms of evolutionary progress (not to say our current civilization isn't barbaric itself), would be reckless, and would easily fall prey to the mechanisms of superstition, logic, and our moral impulses, which are often reactive rather than responsive.

But we are a young species and are just now working with some very very new tools, struggling to catch up and make use of them while using brains inherited from a very old very different past. I think it's good to experiment with new ways of speaking about what we consider ourselves, how we want to be identified, if we want to be identified at all, and what other languages outside English, outside photorealistic media, outside intellectual and academic discourse, outside policy and social reform, are possible.

The works of speculative fiction writers, philosophers, artists, storytellers, historians, magicians, musicians, dancers, alchemists, they offer glimpses at alternate modes of understanding. I try to find solace and solidarity in them and to keep pushing myself to remain skeptical of our present dialogue while embedded within the fray, as it is the case that I cannot avoid the persecutions and privileges my phenotype has inherited me, I can only question them and choose to behave according to the desires of my imagination and in an attempt to be of use to others. Though some days I just wanna stay in bed and doodle pretty meaningless pictures.

## DARIUS MCLEAN PN

✕ I am Black, I'm queer, I'm trans, I was assigned female at birth and am always in transition and hope to always be. I am both masculinity and femininity, and my pronouns are he/hem/hiz. I am a parent; I am a healthcare worker and advocate. I am Indigenous American of the Lenape Turtle Tribe; I am a first generation Jamaican American. I am Black. These identities cannot be separated and placed into a hierarchical structure. These identities are fluid and shape my experiences in life.

\* I cannot walk out of my home without being reminded of my Blackness, at times I've experienced this in past living situations (which happens in all of places and cannot be escaped even in my home, and the homes of most black folks). It's dangerous but I love being Black and wouldn't trade it for the safety that white folx have. My "queer" identity, for a lack of better words is also very important to me. I sometimes feel invisible because I present as cis at times, I also feel like my queerness is a Black queerness and I am working to decolonize the queer identity and language that was introduced to me and begin to find my own.

♥ Honestly, *Pose* would probably be the closest and it centers around Black trans women, which I am not.

❖ I HAVE ONLY SEEN WHITE TRANS MEN ON TELEVISION AND IN THE MEDIA. THERE ARE ALSO ONLY CERTAIN TYPES OF TRANS BODIES THAT I SEE REPRESENTED IN THE MEDIA. OCCASIONALLY I MIGHT SEE A TRANS MASC GUY ON MY INSTAGRAM FEED BUT AGAIN, THERE ARE ONLY CERTAIN TYPES OF BODIES BEING REPRESENTED THAT DONT LOOK LIKE MY OWN OR MANY OF THE FOLX I KNOW.





THE FIRST PRIDE WAS A RIOT



\* I believe wholeheartedly in the saying “nothing about us without us” and have learned this through both the work and the experience of being a participant in a training about folx like myself, led by people who have no clue of what our experiences are and they are usually triggering. We are also the expert of ourselves and misrepresentation and misinformation is at stake. You must be invited to be an ally, co conspirator, or comrade.

\* I'm learning to rest. I've learned recently that I don't take much care for myself and have been practicing self love and care. I take walks, make body scrubs and hair masks, and take days for self care. I listen to music, I started yoga, and most importantly I listen to my body a little more. I don't use words like I am being lazy and give myself credit for getting even one thing done on my list for the day.



# TRISTAN TK MORTON

*pronouns: Ze/Zir/Zirs*

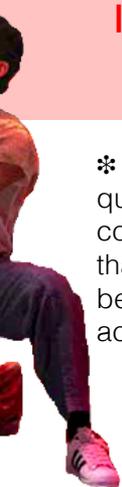
✕ I'm 28 years old Black Trans person living in Kansas. I am a Pisces Sun, Virgo Moon and Rising. I work in on college campus support Black, Brown, and Indigenous Queer and Trans students. I want you to know the beautiful joy there is in a world of uncertainty. I wish for us to truly come together as a community and to make sure that capitalism isn't the driving force of life. Money will never ever save us!

✿ It is important to know I am not alone and being able to give folks hope, but more visibility means more and more people getting harmed and having a sense of fear against folks different than them.

♥ *Pose!* It is such a beautiful show that is a lovely way to show ballroom culture that is not a documentary. Seeing Lizzo being her unapologetic self living her best life is a huge sense of representation! I love her so much!

**❖ I DON'T SEE MYSELF REPRESENTED IN THE MEDIA. FOR TRANS REPRESENTATION, ALL THAT I SEE IS WHITE, FIT, SOCIALLY ATTRACTIVE TRANS MEN. I DON'T SEE FAT TRANS FOLKS WHO ARE SHORT AND IN FASHION, I WANT TO SEE PEOPLE LIKE ME ON RUNWAYS AND IN MAGAZINES. I WANT FOLKS TO SEE MORE THAN JUST ONE TYPE OF TRANS PERSON.**

✿ There has been so much misrepresentation of Black folks, queer folks, trans folks, etc. The only way someone outside of the community can create work is if they are only funding it and letting that group of folks make the decision. There is too much at stake because misrepresentation is wild and telling our stories right and accurately is so important.



**CXODA**

shanghai robot

✕ I'm a teacher on a self care wormhole.

\* Identity is important to me. Visibility and representation maybe. I don't know if I don't want it or if it feels impossible.

♥ Faye Wong in *Chungking Express* made me feel represented. I copied her haircut and watched it 100 times.

❖ I recently read this really annoying article on being nonbinary. I feel exasperated when I read articles about nonbinary addressed to cis world but maybe it's just me living in this cis wooorllld. And I'm like, but for me nonbinary means outside the binary. We are not the same.

\* This was an intimidating list of questions but I am blessed to be able to drink and dance with friends here who I feel like are slowly learning to vibe with me and who I am slowly learning to vibe with.

\*  
**WHEN WE HAVE  
THE INTERNET  
AND  
EVERYTHING  
IS POSSIBLE**



# **FORTUNE** co-edited by

*Andrienne Palchick, Heidi Ratanavanich, and Connie Yu*

✕ *FORTUNE* in the Year of the Pig 2019 was a Philadelphia-based publication project, assembled by and for queer Asian publics, and edited by Andrienne Palchick, Heidi Ratanavanich, and Connie Yu. Each of 13 monthly issues joined letterpress and risograph printing, featured multiple contributors, and was released through community gathering of varied scale. In this Year of the Rat 2020, *FORTUNE* looks forward to hosting archival inquiries, print-based skill-shares, more public collaborations, and many meals with you. We think of printing and self-publishing as a practice of process-oriented learning, and as a means of gathering, remembering, history-making. As such, *FORTUNE* will always be a public project, tended to collectively.

❖ We are doing our best to maintain our health and spirits. Planning for future, especially in community-oriented work, feels abstract when this future is so uncertain. Moving forward, we are having to redefine the ways we think about gathering — the ways we make space for each other on and off the page, the ways we share company, food, and resources, which are central to our *FORTUNE* practice. We also must rethink how to do collective work that is dependent on a shared workspace and communal equipment, access to which was hard to navigate even in a pre-Covid world.

✱ Above all, we are charged by our commitment to our queer API family to think creatively and imagine methods for taking care of each other different from those we've always known — to show up, practice intimacy, stay close even at a distance. We think about *FORTUNE* as a spacemaking project in print and in gathering.

**IT IS IMPORTANT TO US TO FACILITATE  
PLATFORMS FOR DISTRIBUTING WORK BY  
QUEER ASIAN ARTISTS AND WRITERS, TO BE  
SEEN, READ, AND APPRECIATED BY THOSE  
IN THEIR OWN COMMUNITY. WE BELIEVE  
QUEER API CONTENT SHOULD BE REGULAR  
AND DEVOTED. WE ARE COMMITTED TO ITS  
PRODUCTION AND CIRCULATION BECAUSE**

**MANY OF US ARE ACCUSTOMED TO OUR LACK OF VISIBILITY AND REPRESENTATION, AND BECAUSE WE DESERVE TO SEE AND BE SEEN BY EACH OTHER.**

♥ We have a few precious examples that resonate: Alice Wu's *Saving Face* (2004) — that this film could simultaneously hold importance in cultural communities and traditions, and in one's bodily and social autonomy instilled that hopefulness that family relationships could, in fact, be dynamic, and that queer Asian love could, in fact, be modelled. Also, discovering Lucy Liu's second career as a fine artist and her gay, erotic painting series liberated something in each of us — that this artist who took on the role of exotified and hypersexualized (if powerful) women could subvert that imperialist male gaze with her own skill.

❖ Representation of queer Asian intimacy in the media is few and far between. Portrayals of Asian sexuality in mainstream Western media are often reduced to a hyper-feminized Asian man or a highly sexualized Asian woman (whose only relevance is to serve the desire of white men).

**THESE DEPICTIONS, THEN, ONLY ENGAGE WITH QUEERNESS PROXIMALLY, SHALLOWLY, AND VIOLENTLY THROUGH THE EMASCULATION OF AN ASIAN BODY, AND WITHOUT ROOM TO TRAVEL BETWEEN THE BINARY. THESE REPRESENTATIONS HAVE ROOTS, OF COURSE, IN RACIST, XENOPHOBIC, AND UNCOMPLICATED UNDERSTANDINGS OF OUR ANCESTORS IN THIS COUNTRY SO BY CELEBRATING THESE WORKS, OR STANDING BY THEM SILENTLY, WE WOULD ALSO BE UPHOLDING HISTORICAL VIOLENCE TOWARD OUR HISTORIED BODIES.**

\* We think it's presumptuous to speak to experiences that one hasn't lived through. Part of the thrust of *FORTUNE* is that we aim to hold space for narratives by and for queer Asian folks, which we feel is too-often mediated or minimized. We feel lucky to have connected with other artists/zines/publication spaces that hold similar ideals. We also believe in the importance of print and other media in shaping and informing publics — we wouldn't support work made about us, without us because we know how deep that goes. This is also why it is so important to us that our printwork is contributor-based. Though the space we hold is for all Asian-identified writers and artists, we acknowledge that we three have our own specific cultural identities, and don't push that frame of reference onto our contributors — their work can speak for itself. In the same breath, neither we nor our contributors create, or presume to create, work about folks of other diasporas and cultural ties; though we CAN stand in solidarity with, and boost work made by Black and other Brown folks.



# CAROL ZOU

✕ The most succinct way to describe myself is I'm an eldest immigrant daughter. This has shaped my worldview about gender, colonialism, and care work and those areas of inquiry shape my practice and who I am. I think one aspect of immigrant identity that doesn't get talked about is how we cobble together our families and our culture, the same way that queer chosen family does. I exist within a chosen lineage and family of amazing women and queers of color who have always reproduced the world, in one way or another.

❖ I am privileged to have steady income, healthcare, and savings. I am also finding beautiful moments in learning to cook for myself again, and deepening my relationships with the few people that I come into contact with. I hear all this talk about reopening the economy but it doesn't make any sense to me to ask people who have just lost their jobs to spend, spend, spend. I hope that in a post-Covid world, we think about economic degrowth and the lessons of losing part of the consumer economy for a few months. I hope that we can switch from a consumer-based economy to a care-work based economy.

RECOMMENDED  
WATCH:

**DISCLOSURE:  
TRANS LIVES  
ON SCREEN**



\* Honestly identity, visibility and representation are not that important because

**I THINK THAT ASIAN AMERICAN POLITICS CAN OFTEN REST ON VISIBILITY RATHER THAN STRUCTURAL CHANGE AND SOLIDARITY WITH OTHER OPPRESSED BIPOC.**

I also don't enjoy being a visible figure. But maybe it's because I also find most depictions of Asian American identity to rest on a middle class identity and I think that erases the complicated histories that we come from.

♥ The first time I felt seen by the media was watching movies by Wong Kar Wai. They described to me the tension of existing in an East that is touched by the West, the landscapes of where I was born, the dreamy romance as well as the grit of everyday survival. I don't feel represented by the Asian American discourse created in the United States. I feel much more represented by the experimental media that is coming out of Asia, such as the films of Wong Kar Wai and Bong Joon Ho, which are so beautiful, and have such deep critiques of class and colonialism.

❖ I hold a grudge against Disney's *Mulan* because Mulan was such a central myth when I was growing up. I admired her boldness in choosing an unconventional life. In the original Mulan myth, Li Shang doesn't exist and it's ambiguous whether or not Mulan gets married. But in the Disney version, in order to force a love story, it really felt like they cheapened the independent and unconventional heroine that I grew up with.

\* I think that we need to have more nuanced dialogues about how we can be in solidarity with each other and how we can exchange the beauty of our cultures with each other. But I definitely agree that all of those conversations need to center someone that is part of that identity group.

## IXA FKA MR. MANIC

✕ I am a pansexual nonbinary femme identifying African American from Philadelphia, currently living in Berlin, Germany as a musician, DJ, and performance artist (including drag, spoken word, and theater). My name is Kyle, and I used the artist name Mr. Manic (which was also meant to, in a tongue and cheek way, draw attention to my feminine presentation), for 12 years until changing it to Ixa at the beginning of this year. I use pronouns she and they. To summarize some of the identities I hold, and with respect to my leftist politics, then I call myself queer.

❖ All things considered, I am doing okay during this time because I am fortunate enough to live in a country that has provided viable relief for freelancers and people whose employment has been affected by the closures. Since I work in nightlife and as a performer, I am on a spontaneous vacation now, so I channeled that energy to finishing projects that I didn't have time to before and have had streaming performance outlet with the Berlin drag community that I am a part of. In the post Covid world, I think there will be a greater consideration of hygiene and respecting the personal space of strangers for ones own health's sake, but that the social atmosphere might be more conservative because of health risks. Social distancing measures might become more normalized, such limited bodies in stores and mask requirements on public transportation.

✱ I think the importance of identity, visibility, and representation cannot be stated enough in the age of mass media, as long as we live in a world where marginalized persons do not have total agency over their cultural and subcultural narratives. Major media outlets continue to discuss the existence of people without the insight of their lived experiences, so oftentimes the narratives of marginalized people are seen through lenses that either dehumanize them or deny them their individualistic nuances. It has always been incredibly important to me to be perceived as an individual, and judged on my individual merits and character. Therefore, I feel it is also necessary to frame my individuality within the context of my cultural and subcultural identities in order to contribute to the understanding that people within any of these groups have their own journeys and realities. Our experiences, interests, and outlooks are not monolithic. We have diversity among ourselves, and being visible as part of a

marginalized group gives us the opportunity to show who we really are as people.

♥ It's hard to pinpoint a story in particular but from a very young age, my parents made me aware of the concept of positive and negative portrayals of African Americans in the media. My first memories are from the tail end of the 80's, where there was already some diversity in the media of how we were represented, but not to the degree that it is today. I have a clear perception of Black art, fashion, and culture being regarded more positively in the media as I got older and when analyzing this retrospectively, I am able to understand that my parents actually made sure to actively guide me towards more positive media portrayals of us in shows like *The Cosby Show*, *A Different World*, *Living Single*, and *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*. However, since these are fictional characters, my parents also made sure to make sure I understood who different media personalities and public figures were, what they did, and why their accomplishments as African Americans were significant in the context of our history. This is what helped develop my belief in the importance of expressing my individuality as an African American, but that individual accomplishments could never be a credit to one's race.

The portrayal of queerness in the media however, is a bit more complicated, because my first inspirations were often caricatures played by straight cis men in comedic roles and I did not view the performances as being positive or negative. I remember RuPaul being an early inspiration from seeing her music video for Supermodel and watching her talk show on VH1 in the mid 90's. While I did not see her as entirely representative of my personal experience, I remember at least believing that it would be possible for me to go as far as I wanted to go (I always had big artistic ambitions) even in gender nonconforming ways. The only difficult thing in that is that concepts like non binary gender identity were non-existent for a large majority of my life, so a lot of the portrayals of gender nonconforming AMAB [Assigned Male at Birth] persons were only tangentially or partially relatable. I remember the show *Noah's Arc*, which was on when I was much older, being a show that made me feel like gay black men were actually being portrayed in a more realistic, humanized way rather than as caricatures who were necessarily effeminate for comedic effect. It was more about their human experiences rather than how they behave.

❖ As an African American, the idea of accurate representation has been somewhat abstract because I was born into a world where being shown a negative portrayal in the mainstream media was considered neutral. I was to be taught to understand that there were tropes and cliches about how Black people from all walks of life and backgrounds could be expected to behave: which was usually belligerent, sassy, irresponsible, and stubborn.

**ONE COMMERCIAL I CAN THINK OF IN PARTICULAR WAS ONE ABOUT AN AFFORDABLE LAPTOP FOR NEW COLLEGE STUDENTS WHERE THE LAPTOP WOULD BE PASSED FROM ONE KID TO THE NEXT, AND THEY WOULD DESCRIBE HOW THEY USED THE LAPTOP. EVERYONE GAVE SOME SORT OF ACADEMIC REASON WHY THEY NEEDED IT AND THEN PASSED IT ON, BUT WHEN IT GOT TO THE BLACK KID, HIS REASON WAS ONLY TO LISTEN TO MUSIC AND THEN WHEN IT WAS HIS TURN TO PASS IT, HE REFUSED. IT WAS DONE IN A LIGHHEARTED WAY, BUT THE UNDERLYING MESSAGE IS HORRIFYING WHEN YOU REALIZE THAT THIS IS HOW THE MEDIA PROGRAMS HOW THE SUBCONSCIOUS SHOULD SEE AFRICAN AMERICANS AND DAY IN AND DAY OUT, WE ARE CONSTANTLY BEING FED THIS PROGRAMMING.**

Gangsta or hardcore rap as the media called it was just starting to emerge when I was very young. Once my parents got wind of what I was hearing, they forbade me from listening to rap for years. I thought it was purely a matter of shielding me from adult content, but I would come to learn that it terrified my parents to have worked so hard navigating difficulties raising their child in a middle class predominantly white environment. In trying to carefully curate my perception of Blackness, they felt undermined by the glorification

of criminality in the emerging sounds of the time. I do think it was a little reactionary, because it was also rather new for music in general to be as vulgar as it was becoming so I think the shock of the profanity prevented them from delving deeper into the material rather than dismissing it all. But to this day, this experience has shaped my perception of how for all of the beautiful, artistic diversity of hip hop, mainstream outlets seem to only be concerned with a single narrative. This is when so called Gangsta or Hardcore raps feels problematically negative, when it starts to serve the purpose of making audiences feel that this not only the most accurate portrayal of African Americans, but also the most common.

\* This saying is very meaningful to me because of how long I have been in tune with the concept of negative media portrayals of African Americans. I was shown a documentary called *Ethnic Notions* at a very young age, which explores this subject in depth. It shows how media portrayals of Black people were curated and programmed entirely by white people, and so these portrayals had no other function than to serve white political and social agendas. This was in theater, print, animation, and motion pictures, so our journey has been one of struggling for decades to have control over Black narratives.

**THE REALITY IS, FOR US, IT WASN'T EVEN POSSIBLE FOR SOMETHING TO BE DONE "ABOUT US" BUT "NOT WITHOUT US". SO SADLY, THIS STATEMENT IS AN IDEAL THAT WE ARE ONLY JUST STARTING TO SCRATCH THE SURFACE OF REALIZING.**

Writers rooms are only within the last decade starting to diversify. Many Black narratives that have been accepted or even celebrated by our community have been produced by whites, and when Black people were given production and executive roles, it was either under or in collaboration with whites. So it's hard to see this statement as more than an ideal, when society as a whole, is just starting to allow us the opportunity to even have these jobs. So in this case, do I really have a choice or say in the matter as to whether a white person can create work that is useful to me, when

talking about media portrayals of African Americans? I would say yes, because in a way, I have been forced to accept such. There isn't another precedent here. As a queer person, this is even more difficult because a lot of cis het people don't even have a concept of the diversity of identities that exist within queer culture. For many of them it is as simple as gay and straight. For example, they might see a trans woman and it'll register as a gay man who is "so gay" that she want to be a woman, having no idea that there are trans women that are lesbians, trans men that are gay men, that gender presentation does not guarantee a top or bottom role in sex, and that there are diverse overlaps of sexual orientations and gender identities. As a hip hop artist, this is an especially pressing issue now as gender and sexual orientation taboos are beginning to break. There is a lot of punditry from straight male artists about queer artists, and it ends up being so far from reality because how can they speak on queer artists when they don't even understand queerness to begin with? I watch a lot of interviews with (cis het) rappers and many of them have a one dimensional view of the subject. The people in the comments end up agreeing with it as well because they share the same lack of understanding. These same outlets that discuss these subjects very rarely, if at all, have any queer or trans artists to give their point of view so it ends up being one sided, and there is not even one person there to say "that's not accurate" or "here are things you have not considered", etc. So when it comes to something like this, here is an example of how something being done about us but without us is incredibly damaging. Finally, when you look at documentary like *Paris Is Burning*, which has been incredibly influential in making queer and trans black and latinx folks more visible, and more appreciated, and sometimes feels like its making even more of an impact today than when it first came out. However, we all know how it ended up with the white cisgender woman who created the film enjoying financial and professional success while many of the subjects of the film remained in poverty or went on face personal tragedies, some related to their identities.

I don't mean to suggest that the filmmaker herself had malicious intent or that a queer or trans person of color might have been necessarily more generous to the subjects of the film, but I tend to believe that a person from that community would take greater care of their subjects because of that personal cultural relationship.



## BRYAN OLIVER GREEN

✕ I am a writer, filmmaker and performer. I was a filmmaker first, I went to school for it. And I really chose filmmaking in the first place because it incorporates so many different aspects of art that I am into like writing, photography, visual art, sculpture, music, storytelling, and everything else. I do a lot of things but they all kind of revolve around the world of film. In later years I've also become a performer, a model and a burlesque artist. My stage name is Super Bry. And in the kink community I am a member of the Illuminati House of Ra, a queer PoC kink organization. Our master is Eli Ra and I am what he calls "the ferret" of the house because I'm too skinny to be a bear and too hairy to be a twink. I identify as well as a queer person of color specifically bisexual pansexual and at times, demisexual. My pronouns are he/him but I'm also okay with they.

❖ Oddly enough this virus is promoting a lot of healthier lifestyles which is good. It's decreasing a lot of toxic behavior that we're doing as humans that affects the world. What's to think about, is how in this country how easily we can fall into a state of complete marshall law which has less to do with the virus than it has to do with our current president and the decisions he's making for us. Under the guise of the virus he could do a lot of things that infringe on the rights of people in this country and as a person that was marginalized in the first place before any of this began, it's kind of scary to think about. I also feel like a lot of trauma is going to result from this. I feel like even once a vaccine is procured and distributed I feel like a lot of people will be very shy and timid and afraid. And that's very sad but it's a byproduct of a pandemic. And I also think that we were headed in this direction anyway with human beings being an isolated organism rather than a group organism. Like in highly developed countries with technology and wealth such as ours, a lot of people, even before this began, have been using technology to buy things, learn things, and I kinda feel like if we don't watch out, we can become completely isolated organisms that never need to come into contact with each other.

✿ We live in a society that not only forces you to assimilate, (you have to look like everyone else, you have to dress like everyone else, talk like everyone else, act like everyone else). But that's not what humanity is. Humanity is a colorful spectrum of so many different flavors and personalities and races and sizes and shapes and the other thing that society trains us to do is to fear the unfamiliar and

to fear change and fear things that are different from you which isn't healthy! When it comes to identity, living in a society that forces us to all be the same, it takes a certain amount of spiritual maturity and knowledge of self to be able to, in your own mind break down those barriers of what society expects you to do and look and act and become your own person, and that's what makes identity important. Identity is an everchanging process. For you to search that deeply into yourself and for you to acknowledge what makes you different from others - It's important work. In lot of cases where we're depicted in media, in film, in television, all the things, we are being depicted by people who are not us which is not cool. We're living in a cis white majority country and there are just so many other gender identities and races and identities period that need to be represented.

♥ I fell in love with the show *Pose*.

**IT WAS SO REFRESHING TO SEE A SHOW WITH 100% QUEER ARTISTS OF COLOR.**

Actors, performers, and as far as I know even in production. As far as I know there was a lot of diversity on set and once again it brought up a lot of issues that are very prevalent in my life: struggling with poverty; having a house where you're saving young men and trans people from the street and being a mother to them and protecting them. A very important and long overdue show. Growing up in the 90s as a young boy I was expected to talk a certain way and look a certain way and be a certain way. We were pretty much blasted with one type of image of Black male masculinity for such a long time. Seeing this question, immediately Andre 3000 popped into my head even though he identifies as straight, he was the first person I saw on tv that didn't look like anyone else.

**HE DIDN'T LOOK LIKE ANY OTHER RAPPERS, WHO WAS TRULY HIS OWN UNIQUE INDIVIDUAL AND LET ME KNOW THAT I COULD DO THE SAME THING. I DIDN'T HAVE TO BE THIS THUG STEREOTYPE THAT ALL MY FRIENDS WERE BEING AND THAT EVERYONE AROUND ME WAS BEING.**

I could be completely and 100% my own person. When it comes to Black masculinity and sexuality, I remember when Frank Ocean came out, I was just amazed. I was like “omg yes it’s happening!” It was a brave move on his part. And once again it let me know, even though it’s now later in my life, it’s amazing to see once again that I didn’t have to be this stereotype that I grew up with. That I could be my own person, I could have my own gender identity, my own sexual identity. And if anyone doesn’t like it they can go fuck off.

❖ It’s not even just one time, growing up every time I saw myself represented on the news, television show, or music video it was just like ugh, I’m a thug, I’m dangerous, I’m aggressive, I’m in jail, I’m on drugs. It sent the message that that’s what I’m supposed to be. But even in later years I see myself represented on a white tv show with a Black character who’s the token character. And queer people get tokenized too. You got this show with all these cishet people and then you have the gay friend. We’ve only in the past couple of years gotten to the point where there might be a trans character on a mainstream show or film. Until very recent years, I think 92% of the time I felt misrepresented.

❖ I feel the individual’s relationship to the group is important. If you have someone who wants to make a movie that is displaying stereotypes, or perpetuating more ignorance or ignorant stereotypes,



that is extremely harmful. And when I say a balance is necessary, I mean that whatever this identity group is, there can be stories told about them by others but there needs to be stories told about them by themselves to achieve a balance. I think that's what's important. We have to remember to share and celebrate our differences. We can't be afraid of our differences. The key to us all getting along is to share and celebrate. I'm not the kind of person who says if you're not a person of color you can't do or produce anything that has anything to do with us. But I am also aberrantly against our stories as people of color and queer people of color constantly being told by cis white people. That's where the balance comes into play. If we have more opportunities for queer people of color to tell their own stories, and we're given a platform and we're given the resources and the tools to create our own media and tell our own story and we're not always being displayed on the news and in media with our stories being told by cis white people. It's a balance. In a very roundabout way of saying, "nothing about us without us." I don't want to be completely exclusive and I don't want to be excluded. And definitely don't profit off us without us getting a cut.



✕ I'm a black, alternative non binary woman. I'm in my mid 20's, am an artist, sex worker, and a sex positive person. I'm a literature lover, and a film junkie. I am very much into reading, art, anime, cosplay, and video games.

❖ I am currently living at home, and so of course when you live with family, things aren't always peachy. I think the way we travel, the way we shop, and the way we work will change in a post Covid world. It's very much nerve wracking.

✱ Representation is very important to me, because if there's the same people who look like one specific identity (for example, white cis male hero gets the girl), then that would be (1) boring and (2) there are more than just white males in the world. It's important to feel seen, and for different stories to be told.

♥ I remember being a little girl and watching *Cinderella*, the one that Whitney Houston produced and starred in, alongside Brandy. I felt utterly represented: The heroine was a beautiful black woman, as well as the fairy godmother. I still cry to this day, at seeing the representation of not just Black faces, but brown as well!

## A BLACK PRINCESS, FINDING HER PRINCE? A FAIRY TALE COME TRUE.

✱ The saying "nothing about us without us" is new to me, but it makes sense. I think someone outside an identity trying to create work useful for people within that group wouldn't relate really to those in the group. There could be misunderstandings, they could be unaware of certain things within the community of the identity they're portraying.

# MALACHI LILY

*they/them*

✕ Malachi Lily is a shapeshifting, Black, genderfluid poet, artist, curator, and moth. They connect to the Collective Unconscious via energy work, Active Imagination, mysticism, myth, magick, folklore, and fairy tales. This channelling often takes the form of poetry and illustration, as well as the curation of gallery and performance events, exhibitions, and experiences of queer, Black joy. Specifically within human experience, their work aims to reclaim the spiritual body of Black and Brown people. Born and based in Philadelphia, they're living as a freelance artist balancing all of their passions.

❖ Quarantine has allowed me to focus slowly on my art, and not burn myself out by doing too much. I am bursting with creative energy and creating so much. The post-Covid world I'm manifesting is one where no one will have to compromise their dreams and desires because of capitalism.

**WE GIVE ENERGY TO WHAT WE WANT TO SEE,  
TO CREATE. THE MORE WE ARE VISIBLE IN OUR  
EXPANSIVENESS AND OUR JOY, THE MORE  
THAT REALITY WILL GROW.**

\* I find it poisonous that the false monolith of Blackness is often represented by light-skinned, thin, able bodied, and conventionally attractive people (not to mention cis/het). This isn't so much a story but an overwhelming pattern in the media. It's erasure to say the least, a visual genocide.

\* For the most marginalized of identities it is hard to imagine anyone who so directly benefits from colonialism understanding who we are and what we experience. No amount of compassion and empathy will let you understand. If you did understand you would move aside, give us your resources, and let us tell our own story and shape our own image.

## HEART BYRNE

✕ I am a white, queer filmmaker, kinky cis-woman and sexual assault survivor, queer porn enthusiast, festival organizer, lover of collaborating with friends, budgets, spreadsheets, organizational systems, somatic therapy and meditation.

✱ I grew up watching musical films from the 1940s and 50s and that greatly shaped what I thought adulthood, gender, and relationships should look like. I deeply absorbed the messages that romantic relationships are between a man and a woman, that a woman must be skinny, feminine, beautiful, coy, and must reject the advances of the man-- who persists until she says yes. In high school I constantly felt like a failure because I did not feel like boys were interested in me or pursued me (and I didn't feel like I could pursue them). I also felt like a failure and a "poser" when I dressed super feminine, in the ways I thought I "should" dress. Then when I was in college, like so many other young queers, I watched the L Word and it was my first introduction to anything "lesbian," media or otherwise. At the time I was like, "Omg I have never seen anything so hot in my entire life, what are all these feelings I am having?" I was already on a path of figuring out my sexuality, but to actually see women be in romantic and sexual relationships and to notice how my body responded--feeling everything inside me quiver "yes"- was powerful. Something that had the power to affect me both negatively and positively, to make me feel like a failure and to show me a different possibility, must have the power to similarly affect others - and that has got to be important.

♥ In watching the TV series One Mississippi (spoilers ahead!) it felt good to see a butch lesbian, Tig, as a protagonist. While I don't identify as butch, my gender presentation leans androgenous and I have not seen a lot of butch or androgenous people as main characters in media. It was refreshing to see one! The biggest connection I had to the show in terms of identity was the representation of sexual assault/abuse survivors. In the show, Tig comes back to her hometown after her mother's death and with some serious health issues of her own. While she and her brother and step-father manage their grief, Tig also confronts and works through the sexual abuse she experienced from her grandfather. While the topics that the show engages with are dark and heavy, the

show is funny.

## I APPRECIATED HOW HUMOR WAS INCORPORATED INTO THIS STORY OF LOSS, GRIEF, AND TRAUMA. THE STORY WAS ABOUT HEALING, RATHER THAN THE TRAUMA ITSELF.

So much media around sexual assault focuses on and highlights the actual traumatic event, detailing all that happened, making the survivor retell one of the most painful experiences of their life. It's trauma porn.

There is a scene in season one where Tig is in a graveyard, visiting her mother's grave, when all of a sudden these women and girls pop out from behind various gravestones, in pajamas with pillows, a la a slumber party. They giggle as they share the various kinds of sexual abuse that happened to them. Then they all start having a pillow fight. It was absurd, dark, and funny.

Yes, the women were sharing the abuses they suffered, but the scene was not about the details of their particular experiences, it was the fact that they were sharing in community together, in laughter. I laughed and cried when I watched this scene and it was healing to identify and laugh with them. It was such an antidote to other forms of painful and triggering representations of survivors.

\* I think we are in a time and place where marginalized identity groups have been so badly mistreated, ignored, and misrepresented that as a world we are in serious need of remediation and healing. Part of that process is listening to and uplifting the voices, stories, and art of folks with identities that have been ignored.



# OJIELE HAWKINS

she/her @badgrammar\_ @thusnsuch

x if i was asked this question as a child i would have told you my full name, and all the names of my 5 sisters and 1 brother and the last names of my mom and dad and prolli my big brothers middle name too. i would have said i'm the youngest and i'm from south philly and i went to mcdaniel elementary school, which was right around the corner from my house and that lot where all the kids in the neighborhood could go to get free lunches in the summer time. and that i loved the Black power ranger because he was Black like me and i loved the blue power ranger because we both seemed alone and sad sometimes and i loved the pink power ranger because she wore a skirt and for some reason i really wanted to too. i might have even mentioned that i was muslim because my daddy was and duh that meant i was too and i don't eat no pork so don't ask me. and if i was to tell that child, me, what i would be doing today she would cry and jump and holler until her voice was hoarse from joy. she'd see how we ain't hiding nearly as often as we use to. and there's room for her gender to unfurl and friends who don't make her feel like she's in last place and some family who don't know what the word disposable means when it comes to her. and that child, me, would get that lump in her throat that appears when you so happy because just a moment before everything felt so impossible.

\* i grew up watching *eve's bayou*, *house party*, *fresh*, *menace 2 society*, *friday*, *love jones*, *crooklyn*, *love and basketball*, *the five heartbeats*, *claudine*, *goodtimes*, *the jeffersons*, *living single*, *martin*, *the fresh prince of bel air*, *my brother and me*, *gullah gullah island*, and reading books like *bud*, *not buddy*, *the watsons go to birmingham — 1963*, *the snowy day*, *sweet clara and the freedom quilt*, *the people could fly*. and listening to music by patti labelle, luther vandross, phyllis hyman, franky beverly and maze, eve, biggie, missy elliott. and largely, them movies and tv shows and books and the music, they reflected back to me the world i grew up in. my Black neighborhood and Black schools where everybody fluctuated from being poor to working class to surviving from the underground economy. i never was confused about how beautiful my Blackness is and i didn't feel shame about growing up poor. in part, those identities, my race and class, were affirmed through the representation i received through art as a kid. i find great importance in that.

♥ this must have been the very first time i saw myself represented fully. a friend sent me an email with the link to a youtube video of some organizers speaking on a panel talking about building political power. and when i clicked that link so much aligned. i was wearing lipstick the very 1st time i saw Lola. Black like me. queer with her gender like me, wearing a tub top that a future me would have the courage to wear because i saw her do it. she was just talking, waving her hands around like she was going for the biggest trophy at the ball. comfortably in all her width, embracing and inviting connection. to be clear she wasn't *just* talking. baby gurl was giving nectar for sustaining life. reaching back into her competency, procuring the depth of her knowledge, plotting on how we can get free. this butch queen was giving joy and rigor.

**CALLING ON OUR BEST THINKING AS WE  
BUILD OUR LIBERATION MOVEMENTS WHILE  
SIMULTANEOUSLY SOMEHOW DEEPENING THE  
RED ON MY LIPS TO BE MORE VIBRANT WITH  
EACH WAVE OF HER HANDS AND EACH SMILE  
SHE SHARED, REMINDING ME TO BE LONG  
WITHIN MY DIGNITY. I SAW HER THAT DAY,  
SOMEONE LIKE ME.**



# OUTRO

I am eternally grateful for each of the interviewees to have graciously offered their stories and wisdom to this document. The questions I asked only skim the surface of the topic yet somehow these responses manage to capture, vividly, the experience of both being and becoming in an ever changing world. I've also learned a lot from this project and would probably ask different questions next time; namely - how would you describe the feeling of living in your body today? and... what does your process of healing look like?

It seems that media in the form of films and tv is overwhelmingly the source of meaningful identification with characters and stories. This makes sense - moving image has the advantage of time and sound, which infinitely increases the potential of storytelling and character development. In a general sense, all interviews make the case for the inclusion of people of diverse and intersecting experiences (across race, gender, orientation, ability, size, etc.) to be at all levels of decision-making in art and media production; from the writer's room to production, compensating folks for all labor, and treating people with equity and dignity. In other words, we need more work that authentically connects to all experiences outside the standard. Any and all productions should seek to express real experiences that are nuanced and created on the terms of those who are being represented.

This issue is critical because media and image-making has the power to reinforce or resist dominant and harmful dynamics which are deeply impactful to our sense of self beginning at a young age. We are each so much more than what's on the surface. We deserve to be seen and loved at all levels in our fullness. I ask you to reflect: *who* is telling the story and *are* they culturally relevant? Are the relationships and collaborations based in care? How does your work benefit those you directly work with?

Let me know if you have any thoughts or comments to share with me. I would love to hear from you! Write me at [yo@evawo.com](mailto:yo@evawo.com).

Infinite blessings and big love to all,  
Eva (☉•••☉)♡ ✨\*。



If you enjoyed this document, consider donating! All proceeds will go to Black women, trans, and nonbinary contributors on a needs basis. You can find me on Venmo @femme and Squarecash/Cashapp \$feme - just put *'being and becoming'* in the subject line and I will redistribute accordingly.



# POST- SUPREMACY PORTAL

## MAP KEY

[about the title] Imagine Philly after dismantling all cultures of violence and supremacy: racism, anti-blackness, colorism, patriarchy, trans antagonism, ableism, ageism, fatphobia, whorephobia, etc. Perhaps the world looks completely different; perhaps it is full of magic, fullness and joy for all. Perhaps we finally achieve a self-determined and reciprocal coexistence. I hope to channel that feeling in this piece.



1. Mx. Abdul-Aliy Muhammed
2. Alex Smith
3. Andrea Jácome
4. Arazel Thalez
5. Ash Richards
6. Barbara Gittings (1932-2007)
7. Bryan Oliver Green
8. Chaska Sofia
9. Darius McLean PN
10. Dev
11. Dominique "Rem'mie" Fells (1993-2020)
12. Sir Eli Ra
13. Eva Wö
14. Gladys Bentley (1907-1960)
15. Harlow Figa
16. Heart Byrne
17. Icon Ebony Fierce
18. Ixa fka Mr. Manic
19. Juliana Reyes
20. Kira Rodriguez
21. Kiyoshi Kuromiya (1943-2000)
22. Manny Figueiroa
23. Mia Secreto
24. Moor Mother
25. Nizah Morris (1955-2002)
27. ociele hawkins
26. Raani Begum
28. Shoog McDaniel
29. Tristan "TK" Morton
30. Wit López
31. Zuri Love



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# SOME IG ACCOUNTS TO FOLLOW:

// EVERYTHING //

@strollpdx  
@chingonachronicles  
@angryasianfeminist  
@reclaimyourpower  
@indigenousunited  
@queerappalachia  
@spicy.zine  
@yellowjacketscollective  
@annoyed.asian  
@3wavefund  
@mvmnt4blkives  
@bufu\_byusforus  
@idealblackfemale  
@latinarebels  
@habibicollective  
@depressionlife hacks  
@malefragility  
@frontlinemedics  
@seedingsovereignty  
@adriennemareebrown  
@indyamoore  
@mimizhuxiyuan  
@museummammy  
@raquel\_willis  
@munroebergdorf  
@lilychoinaturalhealing  
@high.moon.femme  
@tourmaliine  
@iharerika  
@rioxofia  
@celestiepie  
@mia.mingus  
@rosebuttruss

// ARTISTS //

@lidopimienta  
@moormother  
@djharam  
@cyborgmemoirs  
@navildacosta  
@tranny\_holzer  
@jprattlopez.photos  
@shooglet  
@dorianwoodmusic  
@gracerosarioo  
@habibitus

// SEX ED + SEX WORK //

@domina\_franco  
@kinkyblackeducator  
@linabembe  
@alittleedutainment  
@sexpositive\_families  
@redcanarysong  
@crippingupsex  
@sexworkhistory  
@survivorsagainstsesta  
@swopbaltimore

// PHILLY SPECIFIC //

@phreedomjawn  
@spiralq  
@backbrownworkers  
cooperative  
@qunifyphl  
@hawkmothevents  
@safephila  
@phillyrua

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