

Title Page

# **QUEER (RE)PUBLIC: ON QTPOC LIBERATORY AESTHETICS**

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*"Some will say that all we have are the pleasures of this moment, but we must never settle for that minimal transport; we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds."*

*– José Esteban Muñoz*

*"Freedom dreams are born when we face harsh conditions not with despair, but with the deep knowledge that these conditions will change—that a world filled with softness and beauty and care is not only possible, but inevitable."*

*–Tourmaline*

## **A Note on Terminology:**

This packet uses both POC (People of Color) and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) to refer to people whose bodies have been racialized in America. As this packet is publicized by The Theater Offensive, its title and the enclosed TTO timeline utilize TTO's historic and current term in our mission: QTPOC. This text most commonly uses QTBIPOC in its discussion of aesthetics as a way of future-facing and in an effort to better emphasize the importance of centering Black and Indigenous people in conversations around communities who have been racialized in America.

## **Why is this necessary and important?**

For QTBIPOC, the search for utopia—home, connection, belonging, and more—is a constant. So often this search manifests in the art we make and the art spaces we create, even if they are transitory, impermanent, displaced, and consistently othered. Our creative work and aesthetics contain maps to future worlds while rooted in the worlds we have journeyed from. In this way, QTBIPOC artists are time travelers and prophets, and the in-between space, the ever-shifting liminal space between worlds, is our creative ground.

QTBIPOC ideas, looks, experiences, truths, and artistic and creative work have always been decades ahead of white, cis, and het folks. QTBIPOC arts and aesthetics births possibility and new worlds, and holds the power of transformation—not only when we think about art spaces, institutions, and genres—but also pop culture, beauty standards, and the way the world thinks. We come from, and contribute to, a lineage of brilliance and innovation.

In recent years, QTBIPOC creatives, culture, and aesthetics have been enjoying a moment of shine that even five years ago felt impossible. During the summer of 2020, artist and filmmaker Tourmaline graced the pages of *Vogue* in Bottega Venetta, alongside her brilliant and inspiring tome on freedom dreaming. Indya Moore has been the face of many fashion campaigns and has used these spaces to center trans and non-binary beauty, redefine beauty standards, and communicate the urgency of protecting Black trans lives. And Billy Porter slayed regularly and loudly on red carpets in pre-pandemic life. Certainly part of this moment is about cis, het, white institutions and industries scrambling to make themselves relevant, and some of these

actions are surely performative. Still, the queering of these spaces is powerful, particularly the opportunity to bring QTBIPOC beauty standards, aesthetics, and pageantry into the spotlight. Perhaps most importantly, a question surfaces: What about this moment that we are living through suddenly makes the ways QTBIPOC create, dream, and name ourselves beautiful, necessary, and desirable?

We are living through an era where isolation, economic collapse, climate destruction, and police and state violence are intersecting to have a particular impact on the lives of QTBIPOC. In this moment, aesthetics and adornment as relevant to queerness and claiming our whole selves are more important than ever. The ways that QTBIPOC continue to claim our lineage, map our significance across the places that are our homes by making sure our stories are remembered, and name ourselves beautiful gives our lives legitimacy in a world that is often quick to dismiss us. Our art and beauty—particularly the codes, signals, and disruptions they contain—are needed in this moment . We need to be able to see each other. The world needs to see how we know how to remember, how we know how to make beautiful. The world needs to see how we have learned to survive, beautifully, through the thousands of apocalypses we have individually and collectively lived through.

## **Aesthetics are our Constant and our Conscience**

A 2009 TEDTalk given by Thelma Golden, Director and Chief Curator of The Studio Museum in Harlem, ultimately led me to believe that the reinvention of cultural institutions was possible and would mandate cultural shifts during a burgeoning renaissance. Golden, who took the helm of The Studio Museum in 2005, found herself doing the principal task of shaping an emergent vision for a legacy institution with many accomplishments and an established set of programs, people, and ideas. In her speech "How art gives shape to cultural change" Golden states: "I was interested in the idea of why and how I could create a new story, a new narrative, in art history and a new narrative in the world. And to do this, I knew that I had to see the way in which artists work, understand the artist's studio as a laboratory, imagine, then, reinventing the museum as a think tank, and looking at the exhibition as the ultimate white paper."<sup>1</sup>

This talk helped me understand that if cultural organizations are to remain effective, then institutional leadership has to stay curious—and that curiosity is something that I have learned to relish. For me, the hallmark of engaging and impactful theater is theater that considers the circumstances or the givens, asks the right questions, and invites you to take the sagacious journey to seek answers and their truths. However, truth-seeking is an exploration that rarely produces solutions but rather more profound and informed questions that carry possibilities for transforming individuals and institutions—making questioning, practice, and synthesis cornerstones of liberation. Yes, we liberate

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<sup>1</sup> Thelma Golden, "How art gives shape to cultural change," filmed February 2009 in Long Beach, California. TED video, 12:12, [https://www.ted.com/talks/thelma\\_golden\\_how\\_art\\_gives\\_shape\\_to\\_cultural\\_change](https://www.ted.com/talks/thelma_golden_how_art_gives_shape_to_cultural_change).



ourselves by the questions we ask on our way to wholeness and the truths that we institute.

So when I joined The Theater Offensive's staff as managing director in the summer of 2017, I thought back to Thelma Golden's inspiring words. The organization had started the necessary strategic visioning for a more relevant and liberated future and when we gathered, I along with many others considered this one particular question: After 30 years of radical presence, with the last 10 or so truly guided by community perspective and presence, what's next for TTO?

After two years of strategic planning, we decided that this moment was poised for a paradigm shift, so we changed our mission. We needed to evolve from an organization that "presented the diversity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer lives in art so bold it breaks through personal isolation, challenges the status quo, and builds thriving communities" to an organization which "presents liberating art by, for, and about queer and trans people of color that transcends artistic boundaries, celebrates cultural abundance, and dismantles oppression." So, we did!

The first set of questions that emerged as we considered this mission shift were: What are the constants and connections between these two missions? What are their variables and differences? It would be a major mistake for me to tell you that I knew then, or even that I know now, the correct answers to these questions; instead, I sought a way to pursue their truths. I believe our ability to conjure creative investigations depends on valuing queer and trans lives of color.

So I wondered if, after 30 years of being a learning community, if it would be beneficial to our learning and community building to solidify our establishment as a think tank; a stable home for queer cultural ideations to pursue the aforementioned questions and others. As an imperative think tank, could we not only seek wholeness and liberation, but could we embed and embody it as a

conscious choice, as a way of being and modeling? What about this consciousness could be so open and life-giving that it not only changes existing worlds but births new ones? What is the sheer magnitude of people of color at the intersection of queer cultural possibilities?

Golden said that artists guided her to the truths of her questions, and that resonated with me. So we set out to assemble a community of queer and trans meaning-makers to guide us in a deeper understanding of self, pedagogy, and praxis. Both myself and The Theater Offensive are expanding. This work has nurtured and aggrandized us for the last two years and confirmed my fondest belief: self-determinant queer and trans folks are radical guiding lights. These aesthetics are *fire!*


Gratitude is too cheap to offer in exchange for what these cultural strategists, artists, cultural workers, and resource-sharers have given to us. So more than gratitude, I offer a personal commitment to realize, synthesize, and build upon these truths. I offer this to Maria Cherry Rangel and Sage Crump, our Consultants and Cultural Strategists; Eddie Masonet, Seraah Oose, Tatiana Gil, Letta Neeley, Tonasia Jones, Danny Harris, our Cohort Members; Micah Rosegrant, Pascale Florestal, mei ann teo, Herukuti, Justice Williams, Sharon Bridgeforth, Rebecca Mwase, Nia Faulk, Ty Defoe, Muthi Reed, JD Stokely, and Billy Dean Thomas, our Interviewees and survey participants.

Additionally, I would like to show my appreciation for The Theater Offensive's staff and board, both past and present, and to our funders: The Herman and Frieda L. Miller Foundation, the Barr Foundation, the Boston Cultural Council, the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the Boston Mayor's Office of Arts and Culture, the National Performance Network, the New England Foundation for the Arts, and the Poss Family Foundation, whose financial support enhanced the value of these offerings.

Finally, I invite you, our growing family of artists, youth, community stewards, funders, and curious minds, to do what

adrienne marie brown always summons us to do: understand that what you will experience in the following pages was offered in love. We all have the opportunity to get into the "right relationship" with these aesthetics offerings and the transformative work of The Theater Offensive.

I appreciate you,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a white background. The signature reads "Harold Steward" in a cursive, flowing script. The letters are connected, and there is a prominent loop at the end of the word "Steward".

Harold Steward  
Executive Director and Cultural Strategist

## **WHAT ARE AESTHETICS? WHY AESTHETICS?** **By Sage Crump & Cherry Rangel**

/es'Thediks/

*noun*

1. *A set of principles concerned with the nature and appreciation of beauty, especially in art.*
2. *The branch of philosophy that deals with the principles of beauty and artistic taste.*<sup>2</sup>
3. *Relating to the philosophy of aesthetics; concerned with notions such as the beautiful and the ugly.*
4. *Relating to the science of aesthetics; concerned with the study of the mind and emotions in relation to the sense of beauty.*
5. *Having a sense of the beautiful; characterized by a love of beauty.*<sup>3</sup>

What we find beautiful, we treasure. What we treasure we celebrate, make space for, and fight for. The idea of aesthetics helps us understand the ways we experience beauty, and gives us a framework to talk about how we name and claim beauty and why we choose what we choose. Aesthetics are reflected in the realms of belonging. They communicate a shared set of ideas, values, geographies, and historically defining moments.

In a QTBIPOC context, aesthetics can be all of this and so much more. Aesthetics are resistance and disruption—a rejection of the white supremacist cishetero capitalist patriarchy. QTBIPOC

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<sup>2</sup> *Oxford Languages*, s.v. “aesthetics”, accessed June 24, 2021, <https://www.google.com/search?q=aesthetics+definition>.

<sup>3</sup> *Dictionary.com*, s.v., “aesthetic”, accessed June 24, 2021, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/aesthetic>.

aesthetics are how we claim all of ourselves in a white and narrow world that tells us we are too much. Aesthetics reflect the fullness of our genders, spirits and lives.

Aesthetics are the ways we find and claim each other. Aesthetics are our adornment and the ways we make do and make beautiful. Aesthetics are our dreams and future visions, our hope and possibility. QTBIPOC aesthetics are the embodiment of liberated futures—in bodies that aren't represented in the mainstream aesthetic. QTBIPOC aesthetics propose new possibilities and birth whole new worlds.

## **ON AESTHETICS AND ART: QTBIPOC Aesthetics as Worldmaking**

When it comes to navigating the art world, including institutions and the broader field, aesthetics often determine what kind of space, resources, and opportunities we have access to. Even in progressive arts spaces, QTBIPOC cultural production, work, knowledge, and wisdom are often deemed “too much” or “not the right fit.” Let’s talk about why.

America’s cultural institutions functioned as an extension of empire and the colonial project. These cultural institutions were often founded by wealthy, white, cishetero individuals who made their fortunes off of extractive industry, including stolen land and stolen labor. These institutions asserted white supremacy by assigning worth to European-derived art forms and portrayals and, in doing so, created a deep divide between European-derived art forms and the art forms and cultural practices of the Black and Indigenous communities they were harming and exploiting. This divide meant that the cultural

practices of Black and Indigenous communities were deemed uncultured/uncivilized and not valuable. They were also deemed illegible—white people didn't understand them. And what white people can't understand or grasp, they can't control, and what they can't control, they can't own—which terrifies them.

Just as white supremacy and the cisheteropatriarchy collude to erase our existence as QTBIPOC, they also work together to make access to “established” arts institutions, structures, and resources limited for QTBIPOC, which creates another divide or othering. Erasure, or a denial of our existence, is reified via this othering.

The intersections of aesthetics, legibility, and value are felt deeply throughout our creative BIPOC communities, and even more so for QTBIPOC. Our communities still experience the implications of this today. Cishetero white aesthetics and European-derived art forms are still privileged, while art forms derived from a BIPOC lineage are labeled culturally specific art or folk art. We see this distinction/divide/othering manifest via disinvestment, limited production and exhibition opportunities, silohing, and lack of access to space or establishing our own cultural institutions.

## **The Maps We Make: On QTBIPOC Placemaking + Lineage Making**

Innovation out of necessity also applies to space and geography. Place births culture and informs aesthetics, while aesthetics inform place. We seek places where we belong and we use our aesthetics to signal to and find each other. What do we incubate inside of the places we frequent as QTBIPOC, in the spaces we dance, sing, and share stories? We imprint them with our memory, joy, desire, grief, longing, and beauty.

We queer them.

There are queer cultural expressions born of certain geographies—voguing from the Christopher St. Piers and sissy bounce from the tenth ward of New Orleans, to name two iconic examples. As much as these geographies were sites of belonging for QTBIPOC, they were also shaped by queer culture and were places where queers claimed belonging, found each other, shared resources, and got what they needed in every sense. They were sites of connection.

Through a parallel framing, as QTBIPOC we imprint queerness and queer aesthetic on our cultural lineage. Lineage becomes a site for queer aesthetics and queer futurities to emerge. We powerfully claim sites of queer belonging inside of a lineage, which allow us to claim each other.

*"I think about this idea of love. In terms of looking at something with an indigequeer lens, I think about these constructs, how they're not separated; I feel like they're together. And so I've often used terms like shapeshifting, which I know, in English translates to supernatural entities. But I think this idea of shapeshifting would be my gender, my sexual orientation, my art practice, and the way that I want to show and give love and form relations with all kinds of people. This idea of shapeshifting, when people ask me what that is, I'm really trying to queer that term and bring it back from ancestral knowledge to current times about what shapeshifting could actually be because I do feel like it's in our oral traditions and stories that have been vetted to not have it mean what it needs to for folks." - Ty DeFoe*

*The disappearing city.* The interviewees, cohort members, and community members we engaged for this process shared that Boston, like so many cities, has faced increasing gentrification and displacement which has impacted an already small pool of existing queer places and note that for QTBIPOC the pool was smaller. For Boston QTBIPOC, space was and is created, impermanent, fleeting, or transitory. The temporary gathering spaces, such as kitchen tables, backyards, borrowed venues, designated nights at a club, outdoor cruising spots, etc., are integral to queer cultural production, placemaking, history, and connection. As the queer city continues to disappear, stories and sites of QTBIPOC memory are also at risk of disappearing. Cohort members and interviewees also named the violent historical realities that shaped place and imprinted psyches, citing Fenway Hall's history as a slave market as defining, along with several other histories imprinted on the city.

As we consider the intersections of QTBIPOC aesthetics and place, we must also think about how migration and movement factor into the intersections. Like Boston, many cities serve as a queer mecca, becoming hubs for queers moving from rural to urban places. This migratory search for queer utopia is a kind of pilgrimage and rite of passage for many QTBIPOC, whether it be from a small town to the city, island to mainland, or across town to the gay club for Latinx night. We stay looking for utopia and places where we can find reflections of home, lineage, connections, and community. This search for utopia makes the piers or the Black gay club or sissy bounce or the BAAITS Powwow sites of both initiation and pastiche—e.g., claiming and making these cultural practices and sites our own via QTBIPOC aesthetics. It is a building of cultures and ways imprinted on a lineage practice or geography—sites where people have brought their country or immigrant or guarijo or hood selves to be with



other queers—layered with all of our racialized and migratory experience. There’s a blending and initiation and layering that happens as part of QTBIPOC aesthetics and as part of QTBIPOC placemaking.

What makes multiracial queer and trans spaces beautiful comes from these intersections and the beautiful disruptions—not conformity—that QTBIPOC bring with us via the ways we claim sexuality and break the gender binary so completely while claiming culture. QTBIPOC aesthetics, adornment, and cultural memory in this moment of uprising and pandemic are relevant to claiming beauty, worth, story, and remembering. Claiming our whole selves and whole histories is more important than ever.

## **Moving at the Speed of Trust: TTO's QTPOC Liberatory Aesthetic Development Timeline**

### **Winter 2019**

The TTO Board affirms its commitment to becoming a people of color organization by approving the *FY 2020-FY 2022 Strategic Plan: An Emerging TTO*.

A central goal of the strategic plan is CREATIVE COMMUNITY—a vision to determine and articulate TTO's QTPOC liberatory aesthetic, and to structure and execute TTO's programming to embody it.

### **Spring 2019 - Summer 2019**

TTO receives supplemental funding as part of the Barr Foundation's ArtsAmplified grant program to support TTO's aesthetic development.

Consultants Sage Crump and Cherry Rangel are brought on to coordinate the development of TTO's QTPOC liberatory aesthetic.

### **Fall 2019**

TTO invites community members to two public meetings to shape the conversation around a QTPOC liberatory aesthetic.

TTO consultants and staff convene a cohort of seven Boston-based QTPOC artists—including Letta Neeley, Eddie Maisonet, Tatiana Gil, Tonasia Jones, Danny Harris, and Seraah Oose—to collaboratively begin to define the aesthetic.

## **Winter 2020**

TTO surveys national theatermakers in order to provide a public opportunity for input, include new voices who are invested in aesthetics work, and gather perspectives from a broader swath of queer theatremakers.

TTO conducts in-depth interviews with 12 QTBIPOC local and national artists: mei ann teo, Herukuti, Justice Williams, Micah Rosegrant, Sharon Bridgeforth, Rebecca Mwase, Nia Faulk, Ty Defoe, Muthi Reed, Pascale Florestal, JD Stokely, and Billy Dean Thomas.

## **Spring 2020**

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic challenged TTO to lean into emerging aesthetic values around wholeness and community care. TTO responded by launching the QTPOC Artists and Youth Relief Fund in order to meet the material needs of Boston-based QTPOC artists and current and recent True Colors youth.

The QTPOC liberatory aesthetic process is extended into fiscal year 2021. The cohort continues to virtually meet to define emerging values and themes of the aesthetic.

Consultants Sage Crump and Cherry Rangel present interviewee and cohort findings to the TTO Board.

## **Summer 2020**

TTO's values guide organizational response to the uprisings to end the war on Black people and ongoing cultural and political upheaval. TTO pledges to use its resources to support Boston-based QTPOC artists and queer and trans youth involved in direct actions and to provide financial support to QTPOC-led organizations that are locally, regionally, and nationally on the front lines of the movement for Black lives.

The seven pillars of the TTO QTPOC liberatory aesthetic are finalized:

- Wholeness and Emotional Tenderness
- Unrealities
- Space and Segregation: Honoring the Kitchens
- Medicinal and Healing
- Lineage and Time Travel: The Beautiful Collision
- Edge + Queering and Ambidextrous
- (Be)longing

## **Fall 2020**

TTO launches our re-envisioned True Colors: OUT Youth Theater programming, which engages youth in QTPOC artistic pedagogy and provides mentorship to prepare them to lead as emerging artists and activists.

In September and October, TTO presents *#VoteOffensively*, a cultural organizing and movement building campaign that

uses the creative process to increase queer and trans civic engagement and voter participation. Two events, *Queer and Trans Voting Story Circles* and *The I.D. Monologues*, bring community members together to share the challenges—and triumphs—of the fight to be recognized and heard by the officials elected to represent them.

TTO staff work with consultants to create resources describing the TTO's QTPOC liberatory aesthetic and the process used to conceptualize it.

## **Winter 2021**

As TTO staff and consultants continue to finalize the Queer Aesthetics, the aesthetic values guide TTO to produce programming centering healing, belonging, and community care.

From January to February, TTO joined with Company One Theatre to present *Better Future: Joy & Wellness*, a participatory workshop series that made space for health, relaxation, and artistically-fueled in the midst of a traumatic, isolating COVID-19 surge.

For the first time, True Colors TROUPE includes youth from across the country. From their homes in Massachusetts, Louisiana, Michigan, Iowa, and New York, youth create work that celebrates their experience of digital kinship.

TTO leadership, headed by executive director and cultural strategist Harold Steward and director of programs Tonasia Jones, implement the QTPOC liberatory aesthetic through the rebranding of TTO's OUT in Your Neighborhood program.

As Queer (Re)Public, TTO's artistic programming centers people, place, practice, power, and publics.

## **Spring 2021**

In the wake of the March murders of Atlanta-area spa workers and rise in anti-Asian racist violence across the U.S., TTO redistributed financial resources to support national and local organizations working to advocate for the AA/AAPI community and dismantle hate, as well as queer and trans AA/AAPI artists and youth.

## **Summer 2021**

TTO Board and Leadership vote to evaluate the *FY 2020-FY 2022 Strategic Plan: An Emerging TTO*, as the organization prepares to move into the final year detailed in the plan. The evaluation will result in enhancements that apply TTO's Queer Aesthetics values and the lessons learned from TTO's organizational response to COVID-19 to the Strategic Plan, strengthening TTO's Queer (Re)Public programming and vision for Queer Regeneration.

## **Fall 2021**

TTO staff, graphic designer, copyeditor, and accessibility and cultural strategy consultants undertake an internal review process to create a digital version of *Queer (Re)Public: On QTPOC Liberatory Aesthetics*, a medium to offer TTO's Queer

Aesthetic values and vision to a broader community of QTPOC artists and cultural changemakers.

## **Winter 2022**

TTO launches *Queer (Re)Public: On QTPOC Liberatory Aesthetics*, celebrating the critical movement building tools that Queer Aesthetics offer to the cultural strategy and social change field and tangibly affirming our commitment to QTPOC liberation as articulated in TTO's *FY 2020-FY 2022 Strategic Plan: An Emerging TTO*.

## **QUEER (RE)PUBLIC: ON QTPOC LIBERATORY**

**AESTHETICS** is launched publically released, providing cultural strategists with a new critical resource and learning instrument.

## **The Aesthetics**

This document is not a pronouncement. **It's evidence of the proverbial existence of queer and trans Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color.** It is an exploration into the ever-evolving twin spaces of liberation and queerness. Neither is a destination.

This collection of spells, imaginings, and thoughts drawn from the brilliance of QTBIPOC are meant to function as a kaleidoscope. Each time it is turned, there is another iteration that produces an image of our liberation. To develop this liberatory framework, TTO and consultants involved three levels of information gathering and community.

As a collection of thoughts from QTBIPOC, this required a cross section of thinkers. The group of people talked to included Boston locals, community activists, and QTBIPOC artists from across the country at varying stages of their careers. This was a community-based process rooted in the principles of popular education. This process built three modes of data sourcing and engagement: a Boston-based cohort of artists and cultural workers, one-on-one interviews with QTBIPOC artists and cultural workers, and a survey sent globally through the interweb.



### **A Note on the Use of Spells Throughout This Text**

Throughout this text we lean deep into the spiritual traditions of QTBIPOC magic making, manifestation, and protection ritual. You will see spells heading each of the tentacles that are intended to be used not only as framing, but as recipes for actualization. The spells were inspired by the magic and vision of two New Orleans-based cultural organizers and healers: Aesha Rasheed and R. Cielo Cruz. In considering aesthetics and QTBIPOC creative work, we remain in deep gratitude for the myriad of spiritual practices that QTBIPOC hold dear and the many ways they intersect with creative practice.

### **Wholeness, Emotional Risk, and Tenderness**

*This is how the spell works. We take care of ourselves, we take care of each other, we take care of our people.*<sup>4</sup>

QTBIPOC identities are not fragmented and QTBIPOC deserve spaces where we can show up in the fullness of ourselves—e.g. not having to choose between being Black or Latinx or queer or an immigrant, but being able to show up as an Afro-Latinx queer immigrant and have all parts of our experience acknowledged, affirmed, and respected. Wholeness is a place where all of the parts of ourselves can be seen, known, and held. Wholeness is a place where we have agency, where we can redistribute power, and where people with privilege can take on some of the work so that QTBIPOC can have some respite and just be human—without having to do the labor of explaining every facet of ourselves.

In creating spaces where we can show up as our full selves, we assert collective care and healing as core values. From centering access needs and disability justice, to creating brave space and the capacity to have courageous conversations, to implementing wage equity and justice-aligned labor practices; there is thought, intention, and care woven into our spaces and practices. We create and model life and people-affirming places where we can be vulnerable. Through these practices and commitments, we are able to sustain ourselves as artists, sustain our arts organizations, and model new ways of being. These practices are enacted between artists, presenters to artists, and artists and presenters to tech. Throughout the development and performance process, people feel valued and supported, with their humanity recognized and their dignity upheld.

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<sup>4</sup> The spells throughout this text were inspired by the magic and vision of two New Orleans based cultural organizers and healers: Aesha Rasheed and R. Cielo Cruz. This spell originated via a spiritual download received in a 2019 carnival adjacent ritual at Bayou Bienvenue by Aesha and Cielo along with the collective of QTBIPOC witches that later came to be called moonbeams, of which Cherry is a member.

## **Values:**

- Intersectional practices, perspectives, and frameworks
- Sharing and shifting power
- Disability justice and collective care
- People first practices
- Commitment to decolonization (for BIPOC) and unsettling (for white people)
- Making spaces where people are fully seen

## **Questions for Consideration:**

- Am I asking people to pick between their identities or only show up to this space with fragments of themselves? How can I create affirming spaces that include all facets of an artist's , an audience's, or a community member's identity?
- Am I creating a culture of collective care within this space where we ask for access needs and do our best to fulfill them? Is this a space where we don't continue business as usual when something has happened (police violence, loss of a community member, etc.)?
- How am I supporting artists and crew (via paying people well and in alignment with wage equity, implementing justice aligned labor practices, encouraging rest, self-care, providing snacks and space for rest, etc.)?
- How does this space/work model healing justice and collective care for our broader community?
- How can I commit to dismantling white supremacy and decolonization/unsettling in my programming and venue?
- If I am in a position of privilege (cis, hetero, white, able-bodied, class privilege), how can I share power? How can I show up in allyship and true camaraderie? How can I take on some of the work to lessen the burden on QTBIPOC?

*"As a queer woman of color, there's so many levels to living at the intersections all the time. So much of how arts and culture work is specific to one narrative that cannot be encompassed or cannot include something else that may affect the viewpoint or*

*perspective that the narrative comes from. What's beautiful about the intersection is that it has to have that conversation with both sides or multiple sides or however many ways the intersection is happening within that conversation/person/thing. So by that inherentness of having to have these different conversations, we have to understand all of these things and hold them all at once in one place. And I think so many people have a problem with that because so much of the way we are taught is that we must just hold one—there's only one truth and that one truth is the gospel. The intersection that we, as queer artists of color, have to deal with is holding multiple truths and being okay with that—even if it may make things harder or challenge our ideals and morals with things we may never have thought of.” - Pascale Florestal*

## The Aesthetics

### **Unrealities**

*This is how the spell works. We say what is real about our own lives. We mold the clay of what is into what we need and glory at its beauty.*

Liberation is not a destination but a process. We don't find liberation at the end of a rainbow. For QTBIPOC, it is in the daily work of making a life inside places that still don't want us to exist. But not only do we exist, we make new. Innovation is a survival skill and an act of sublime creation. QTBIPOC can take a form and imagine it to make it unrecognizable—and how we do it is just as remarkable. This is not a time to tiptoe. Innovations are a bold disruption of a status quo that will deny our humanity.

Unrealities recognizes that the term reality embeds a set of norms that currently and historically ignores the existence of queer and trans people. To that end, Unrealities is a way of centering the existence, lived experience, and brilliance of queer and trans people. It is the use of the imagination to create new worlds. These worlds are not random fantasies pulled from the ethers—they are incantations and callings to the creation of a place where safety and dignity can be found for queer and trans kin. Leaning into Unrealities are practice spaces where QTBIPOC people are the acknowledged experts of our own experiences and leaders for everyone else to follow.

Unrealities make a world and invite others to experience it. The invitation is rooted in an unapologetic stance that doesn't look to make lives palatable nor does it exotify QTBIPOC experiences.

This invitation is first for the community itself. It says, "Come. Sit down. Let's spend some time together."

**Values:**

- Ritualizing in the midst of destruction
- How you invite people in matters
- Spiritualist rituals in creative space
- Survival and ritualized joy
- "I can be a person of knowledge in this space"
- Conversation and action at the same time
- Getting basic needs met in order to create/be artist

**Questions for Consideration:**

- What is seen and unseen? What does it mean to support what is visible and what has historically been invisibilized for so many?
- Is there some wild fantastical shit that all lives under the same house because of unrealities?
- What is getting remade/revealed?
- What narrative is getting rewritten?
- Does this innovation create more possibilities?

**Quote:**

*"I think [a QTPOC liberatory aesthetic] can be realist. It has to be realism, but I think it also in some ways has to be challenging realism. Sometimes we are creating worlds that don't exist. It has to be imaginary and pushing; a mixture of high bougie and classy, bougie, ratchet. It is in a constant state of shifting but holds a core, has facts." - Nia Faulk*

### **Space & Segregation: Honoring the Kitchens, Piers, and Community Centers**

*This is how the spell works. We make magic wherever we go—making do, making beautiful, and making the spaces our people most need. We remember and uplift the queer stories that shaped this place. We make our own because we refuse to be disappeared or forgotten.*

Generations of QTBIPOC creatives have found, claimed, crafted, and established our own spaces in which to launch artistic practice and stage creative work. Why has this happened? As often as this is beautiful and innovative, it is also out of necessity. It can be hard for QTBIPOC artists to find spaces that are truly ready to fully encompass our work. For example, an artist might be too queer for the Black theater and too Black for the queer theater. This segregation/exclusion is also the result of a lack of access to resources, be it a lack of access to funding, space, or navigating an arts ecosystem that often operates from a white supremacist cisheteropatriarchal lens. Because of the intersections of racism and transphobia/queerphobia, there is often little funding to support the development or production of QTBIPOC work and limited presenters willing to produce the work. Hence, QTBIPOC are genius innovators when it comes to making stage.

Interviewees for this project spoke of some of their most memorable work being staged in backyards, living rooms, warehouses, and alternative spaces, and spoke to the significance of the kitchen table as a sacred place for gathering, sharing, remembering, and visioning. Ultimately, there are creative spaces that only QTBIPOC can forge, create, and innovate—spaces that are necessary to hold the work we are called to do, that only we *can* do, and that our community most needs. This claiming of space is not only an assertion of worth, but it also fights erasure and displacement.

For QTBIPOC artists, the act of negotiating and claiming space, memory, and lineage within a rapidly changing and gentrifying city is crucial, as is the importance of honoring and preserving the disappearing stories that exist within shifting spaces in the city. QTBIPOC artists and cultural workers acknowledge the different realities, histories, and contexts that exist within a physical geography and that an experience of place is deeply shaped by racial, class, and gender privilege. These differentials have not only impacted quality of life for QTBIPOC but have also impacted arts spaces, access to arts funding and other resources, and collective struggle in Boston, as well as many other cities and hubs. Practitioners in Boston spoke of white queers buying into heteronormativity as legal protections were gained, which deepened divides and resulted in a kind of segregation. As Letta Neely shared: “White folks opted out of the desire to be free together.” This segregation can be deeply experienced within art spaces and can manifest as art being created in venues that are no longer accessible to QTBIPOC or art being created in spaces that are leaving as displacement occurs. All of these factors amplify the need to center, present, and support local work by local artists and exemplify how critical it is to document and preserve this work.

**Values:**

- Respecting where and how the work happens (i.e. releasing preconceived ideas around what performance is supposed to look like and where it should happen)
- Sharing resources such as funds, space, tech equipment, and marketing support with QTBIPOC artists
- Honoring the sacredness and intimacy of spaces for QTBIPOC
- Amplifying the work of local QTBIPOC artists—in this way, we collectively ensure that their work is remembered
- Advocating for inclusion of work by QTBIPOC artists in programming

**Questions for Consideration:**



- How can I support, amplify, and preserve local work created by QTBIPOC artists?
- What place-based stories need to be told and remembered, particularly in the face of displacement or erasure?
- How can I help create a more equitable local arts ecosystem?
- Regarding the intimacy of space: So many of the spaces where QTBIPOC art has been born have been outside traditional art spaces. Regardless of whether the work is performed in an alternative or forged space or a more traditional theater, there should be a sense of closeness or intimacy. How is this ethos of intimacy continued when space is available?

**Quote:**

*"There are a number of us who could only do the work we do in a liberatory BIPOC space. When I talk about my film project, I struggle to get support because we are too queer for Black spaces and too Black for queer spaces. Different kinds of people will say no because some aspect of us pisses them off or disturbs them. So the creation of sources of support—financial, mentorship, that give that kind of work—[helps translate the work] in order for folks to begin to understand it and figure out if they could support it" - Herukhuti*



## The Aesthetics

### **Medicinal and Healing**

*This is how the spell works. Our alchemy is in the marrow of our bones. We are born with the ability to heal ourselves and our kin. Make way for the incantations to begin.*

To think of work as medicine is to understand the hurt and create something that will soothe, restore, and transform it. It asks for a diagnosis, an understanding of where this hurt came from. We were not born with it. It is both given to us and, at times, carried on by ourselves. While we were not born wounded, we *are* born with the compounds and instincts needed to make us whole. We are innately social beings.

### **Values:**

- Spirituality
- Ritual cultural production
- Codification/proliferation of magic
- Creating our own initiation for ourselves and each other when we can't participate in the rituals of our familial lineage
- Tapping into the ways 2Spirit and trans people hold magic in communities across the world and bringing that in particular forward

### **Questions for Consideration:**

- Our wounds may be obvious. What wounds is this work tending to?
- When you are rendered invisible, how do you know that you are hurt and identify where?
- How is love showing up? Who is getting loved upon? What does love look like?
- What do we need to become in order to facilitate healing?

- How does this create or deepen connection?

**Quote:**

*"I do believe that a QTPOC liberatory aesthetic is inherent in our ways of being in order to live and evolve in the world. If we weren't able to exist in those ways we would all die. There's something about it that is in response to erasure, that is a recognition of our own value, worth, autonomy, sovereignty, and brilliance. And then there's part of it—when you say aesthetic, what I hear is a codification of it. It's become an aesthetic because we knew that we needed to ritualize it in order for it to be passed down in such a way that it couldn't be forgotten or lost or murdered out of us. It feels like a codification of the ritual and practices and ways of being that we could pass on so that it couldn't be erased or murdered or forgotten. I think about the witch hunts, the erasure of indigenous shamanic practices which were deeply tied to the movement, and song, and dance, and ritual, and adornment and mask making. Those things had to be passed down so they wouldn't be forgotten—but they already were. I don't think an aesthetic would have been created if we were not at risk of being destroyed. I think we would just be in our splendor and our beauty. An aesthetic is a form of resistance."* - Rebecca Mwase

### **Lineage and Time Travel: The Beautiful Collision**

*This is how the spell works. We remember who we come from. We honor the maps they forged for us through their magic, grief, revolts, triumph, and joy. In their name, we conjure our own magic for ourselves, for each other, and for the ones that will come after. We are the portal and we are the destination. We are the prophets and we are the destiny. This is our birthright.*

Claiming our lineage is revolutionary. We claim our lineage when we call the names of our ancestors, acknowledge the ones who came before us and taught us, or place our creative work in a cultural lineage. We fight cultural erasure, displacement, and historical amnesia when we remember; when we refuse to accept the erasure of our names, lives, struggles, triumphs, and joys.

Similarly, time travel is resistance. Time—the past, present, and future—are not linear. The fabric of space and time are malleable. The past is not fixed, but rather something we interact with. The future is something we can inform and change. Our understanding of time—of not only the present but also the past and future—is something that has the power to be community-generated. Our power to remember is a kind of time travel. We build time machines when we look back and engage with history or look forward and envision queer futures. QTBIPOC artistic work can be a kind of time machine or portal for this time travel—a space where the past, present, and future collide, become intertwined, and are in conversation with each other. QTBIPOC artistic work has the power to help us conjure new realities by giving us access to new visions, possibilities, ideas, and worlds.

QTBIPOC connect through points in time. We also connect through people we intentionally claim and remember through time. Through lineage and inherited story, context, and

experience, we revisit these places, people, and times, again and again. Through these technologies, we see the ones who came before us and see that they left a way for us. The past is not fixed. Rather, it exists as a space of conjecture, broad possibility, and purposeful decoding, unraveling, and interpreting by generations of QTBIPOC. Every time we name a QTBIPOC ancestor and remember QTBIPOC artistic work, contributions to movements, or joy, we change history. To be clear, we do not change the past, but we *do* change our narrative about the past and how QTBIPOC existed. We shift our story around what is possible for QTBIPOC and as we do this, we change the future. With this in mind, we align our work toward becoming ancestors and begin to create a legacy for the generations of QTBIPOC that will come after.

QTBIPOC simultaneously are powerful prophets and conjurers, and inform the future. We are constantly responding to our realities and creating the worlds we want to inhabit through fashion, music, dance, relationship styles, creative work and where we make it, and economies and systems of support and interdependence that exist outside of capitalism. When we do this, we create new models for each other and future generations of QTBIPOC. We are the conjurers, prophets, dreamers, and witches we've been waiting for.

**Values:**

- Intentionally remembering and seeking out stories to fight erasure and cultural amnesia
- Honoring QTBIPOC lineage and ancestors
- Looking to the past to vision our future
- Celebrating historic QTBIPOC joy and triumph as much as we remember QTBIPOC struggle
- Amplifying QTBIPOC prophets, conjurers, and the multiple ways QTBIPOC create new worlds

**Questions for Consideration:**

- What are the names and stories that we want to ensure are remembered? What legacies do we want to honor through our work?
- In what lineage do we make this work or create this space?
- What can the struggles and wisdom of past artists, culture workers, and movement makers teach us about this moment?
- What worlds are we conjuring, divining, and manifesting through our artistic work? Through our organizational practices?
- What do we want to leave behind through our work? How do we want to be remembered?

**Quote:**

*"Toni Morrison, James Baldwin, Malcolm X, Pauli Murray. I never met any of my grandparents. The closest thing I have to elders are these Black artists. Toni said if you feel like there's not a film or story out there that you want, create it. I remind myself that I have to develop what I want to see because there's nobody else doing the work that I want to see out there."* - Billy Dean

*"My work is really an exploration of specifically Black American Southern migration stories. And in the architecture and the history and the telling of that is everything. It's instruction around survival, there is spiritual journeying and messaging that happens, and there is queerness inherently. So my work is made of the tools that have been innovated by the ancestors and the people preceding me. So blues, for instance, is at the base of my work; blues as a transgressive, self-determining form of naming yearning, hungering and seeking."* - Sharon Bridgforth

## The Aesthetics

### **Edge + Queering and Ambidextrous**

*This is how the spell works. Taking flight requires standing on the edge of the precipice. The leap into the murkiness of the unknown is fecund and fertile.*

Taking what has been handed to us has never been an option for QTBIPOC. Much of what is handed to us is meant to make us smaller, keep us confined, and ensure we don't make a fuss. But we believe there are depths to this world that have yet to be shown. Living out lives means pushing against boundaries. Toppling walls and creating new pathways is everyday magic for queer and trans people.

The work of QTBIPOC artists has always stood at the edge of what is known. It is pushed when the form and systems created don't suit us and more likely sought to confine or dismiss us. We have seen the incorporation of the unseen—the mystical—into an experience had by all. We have seen a steely-eyed take on an unvarnished truth that revealed all the ugliness and beauty within it. That reveals the essence of a life.

There is as much magic in the mundane as there is in the fantastical. So a round set of stories get told—ones that share the fullness of the lived experience. There is harm and sadness. There are so many stories told about QTBIPOC from outside the community. Other people are sharing their interpretation of people's experience.

### **Values:**

- Uplifting darkness (the unknown) as the place of birth
- Knowing that change is constant and can be shaped



- Engaging with emotional, spiritual, societal and systemic depth
- Staying curious about what grounds a story and what guides it

### **Questions for Consideration:**

- If we decide not to accept what is fact, what becomes possible?
- Binaries and boundaries are unacceptable. How does this work create a new landscape that we haven't seen before?
- Who is the author of this story and who does this story center?

### **Quote:**

*"A lot of my work also evolves from both decolonizing and indigenizing. At the same time, living in this contemporary world of creating art and the process of that, how to do that is probably with the drumbeat of queering and creating queer spaces because I do feel that queering space is a revolutionary radical act—even within BIPOC communities—because of colonization. So I think when you queer space, you are continuing to create safe and brave spaces for so many various people—like a multiplicity of people. It's so important." - Ty DeFoe*

### **(Be)longing**

*This is how the spell works. As the manifestation of our ancestors longing, we be their longing made flesh. We ask and answer: Whose am I and who is mine? Longing to be and see myself in the We. Spinning webs that reflect us to ourselves.*

So often QTBIPOC have wounds around belonging. In so many ways, the search for a QTBIPOC utopia, and the migrations and initiations that accompany this quest, begin as a search for belonging. In the quest for our together, queerness offers us the opportunity to reimagine longing and how we center our cultures while creating kinship, love, relationships, family, community, commitments, and the myriad of ways to be interconnected, interdependent, and claim each other. QTBIPOC be longing, and create spaces of belonging.

Belonging in this context is a collective endeavor. In an arts context, a sense of belonging is critical for QTBIPOC artists in a world in which we are dismissed, erased, and unseen. When QTBIPOC see something on stage or in the gallery that is a reflection of our experience, it is revolutionary and grounding. It makes us feel seen, affirmed, and connected. It creates a kind of intimacy and knowing.

Belonging can have multiple pieces. First there are the dimensions of time. There is the dimension of replicability and acknowledgement.

In an economy of disposability, and given the structures of the field of art and culture, historically QTBIPOC have often found ourselves engaged with arts institutions for one-time engagements under the guise of inclusivity or making room for as many people as possible. This paradigm doesn't work for QTBIPOC artists as our opportunities are often limited from the

start. There is significant value in investing in and supporting the work of QTBIPOC artists over the long term.

While we often think of liberation as centered on the act of setting free, this paradigm calls for interdependence and pulling folks closer as a liberatory act in order to combat the ways that systems of oppression operate. This aesthetic isn't so much about creating a "sense of belonging." It is specifically leaning into interdependence—the ME/WE. This gives space for trust and accountability to be built and deepened over time. The ways that generations of QTBIPOC artists have supported each other, advocated for each other, helped develop and nurture each other's projects, and established autonomous artistic spaces outside of mainstream arts and cultural institutions speaks to this interdependence.

**Values:**

- Pipelines
- Connectedness/networks
- Intergenerationality
- Value-visibility
- Being claimed, recognized, and cared for
- Loving critique and development

**Questions for Consideration:**

- How can we curate or develop programming in ways that make QTBIPOC feel seen and affirmed?
- How can we create spaces that nurture a sense of belonging?
- What are opportunities outside of one-time engagements for developing and investing in the work of QTBIPOC artists?
- What are ways to support the work where it's happening?
- For organizations/theaters that work on membership models and want members to claim ownership of space, what does it look like to queer this model? Or rethink models of membership/collectivity in new ways?

**QUOTE:**

*"My people kind of just looked at me and took me in. Artists looked at me and claimed me as theirs and moved me along and shaped me, and organizations took me in, so I was raised by community as an artist and was tasked with the work and the tradition of using the art in service of us. I was just doing that and working real hard—working on craft, working on gaining new skills, and working on learning how to collaborate better. I put some skin in it, but really people just loved me and claimed me and gave me space and attention."* - Sharon Bridgforth

## GLOSSARY

**Aesthetics:** 1. A set of principles concerned with the nature and appreciation of beauty, especially in art. 2. The branch of philosophy that deals with the principles of beauty and artistic taste.<sup>5</sup> 3. Relating to the philosophy of aesthetics; concerned with notions such as the beautiful and the ugly. 4. Relating to the science of aesthetics; concerned with the study of the mind and emotions in relation to the sense of beauty. 5. Having a sense of the beautiful; characterized by a love of beauty.<sup>6</sup>

**Cis/Cisgender:** A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with those typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth.

**Colonization:** The action of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area. For example, various European nations explored, conquered, settled, and exploited large areas of the world.

**Culture Bearer:** An individual who practices a traditional artistic activity or skill that is passed along from person to person within a cultural group, has value and continuity for the group as a whole, and is in the process of transmitting the practice or knowledge. The role of culture bearers is particularly important within those cultures undergoing transition or experiencing threat

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<sup>5</sup> *Oxford Languages*, s.v. “aesthetics”, accessed June 24, 2021, <https://www.google.com/search?q=aesthetics+definition>.

<sup>6</sup> *Dictionary.com*, s.v., “aesthetic”, accessed June 24, 2021, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/aesthetic>.

from outside the culture (e.g. colonization, war, displacement, irreversible climate impacts).

**Displacement:** When long-term residents of a neighborhood, community, or region are not able to stay in their place of origin due to gentrification, occupation/colonization, war, disaster, climate impacts, or other factors beyond their control.

**Empire:** An empire is a political construct in which one state dominates over another state, region, or territory.

**Enslavement:** Slavery in the United States was the legal institution of human chattel enslavement of Black folks that existed from the founding of the US in 1776 until passage of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1865, which deemed slavery unconstitutional with the exception of slavery as a punishment for a crime.

**Erasure:** The removal of all traces of something; obliteration. Cultural erasure, in which the cultural and artistic practices of a community are erased or invisibilized, is a direct impact of gentrification, displacement, enslavement, and colonization.

**Folk Art/Culturally Specific Art:** Artistic or cultural practices that originated among a community, region, people, or nation that reflects their aesthetics, values, traditions, and often spiritual beliefs; living traditions intentionally passed down over time and through space.

**Gender Nonconforming:** A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations of their gender or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category. While many also identify as transgender, not all gender nonconforming people do.

**Gentrification:** Gentrification is a process of changing the character of a neighborhood or place through the influx of white residents and more affluent residents and businesses.

**Het/Heterosexual:** Sexual or romantic attraction to people of the opposite sex.

**Homophobia:** The irrational fear of, hatred of, aversion to, discomfort with, or discrimination against queer people/people who are attracted to members of the same sex.

**Integrity:** Firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values; soundness; the quality or state of being complete or undivided; honesty.

**Interdependence:** The state of being dependent on each other; mutual dependence. Interdependence is also the idea that everything in nature is connected to and depends on every other thing.

**LGBTQIA:** An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual.

**Migration:** The movement of people from one place to another—typically over long distances and from one country to another—with the intention of settling temporarily or permanently in the new location. People may migrate for economic reasons, lack of basic needs or services, to escape persecution or war, due to a lack of safety, or for climate impacts.

**Non-binary:** An adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Non-binary people may

identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories. While many also identify as transgender, not all non-binary people do. Non-binary can also be used as an umbrella term encompassing identities such as agender, bigender, genderqueer, or gender-fluid.

**QTBIPOC:** An acronym for queer and trans Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color. QTBIPOC should not be used when there are no Black people or Indigenous people present.

**Queer:** A term people often use to express a spectrum of identities and orientations that are counter to the mainstream. Queer is often used as a catch-all to include many people, including those who do not identify as exclusively straight and/or folks who have non-binary or genderexpansive identities. This term was previously used as a slur but has been reclaimed by many parts of the LGBTQIA movement.

**Trans/Transgender:** An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.

**Transphobia:** The irrational fear of, hatred of, aversion to, discomfort with, or discrimination against transgender people.

**Utopia:** An ideally perfect place, state, or situation, especially in its social, political, and moral aspects.



## **COHORT & CONSULTANT BIOS**

**Maria Cherry Rangel** (she/they) is a non-binary Mexican and Moroccan cultural strategist, resource organizer, cultural producer, equity coach, and ordained priest of Yemaya in the Lucumí tradition. For over 15 years, Cherry's work has helped transform organizations, ecosystems, and fields towards justice. As a resource organizer, Cherry's advocacy has ensured that millions of dollars have been redirected to Southerners, BIPOC communities, and TGNC and queer communities. Cherry currently serves as Director of Strategic Initiatives for Foundation for Louisiana, where she launched FFL's arts and culture program, which identifies artists and culture bearers as critical to liberation work in the state and resources Black and Indigenous cultural practices and resistance. In this role, Cherry also utilizes their expertise in organizational growth, cultural strategy, racial justice, and LGBTQ organizing to inform Louisiana's future. With Ron Ragin, she co-authored *Freedom Maps: Activating Legacies of Culture, Art, and Organizing in the US South*. Cherry was a 2019 Intercultural Leadership Institute Fellow. Cherry wrote her first arts grant at the age of 15 in support of her father's application to be a folklife artist, and after that success, hasn't stopped.

**Sage Crump** is an artist, culture strategist, and facilitator who expands and deepens the work of cultural workers/arts organizations in social justice organizing and supports social justice organizations in understanding the role art and culture can play in movement building. Based in New Orleans but working nationally, she believes in leveraging art, creative practice, and the cultural sector to transform systemic oppressions. Sage is a member of Complex Movements, a Detroit-based artist collective

whose interdisciplinary work supports local and translocal visionary organizing. Sage is principal and co-founder with artist muthi reed of The Kinfolk Effect (TKE). TKE is an incubation space for multimedia interdisciplinary artwork that examines the movement of Blackness through time and space. Sage Crump is the Program Specialist for Leveraging a Network for Equity (LANE) at the National Performance Network. LANE is a 10-year initiative that amplifies the leadership of arts organizations of color and rural organizations and grows their ability to thrive in culturally authentic ways. Sage is Architect of Emergent Strategies Ideation institute, a body that shapes the way movements think about and go about transforming the world we live in. She is a member of the Guild of Future Architects, board chair for Media Justice and board member of Alternate ROOTS. Sage's work incorporates complex sciences, emergent strategy, and creative practice to imagine the world we want to live in and build strategies and practices that will get us there.

**Letta Neely** is a Black-n-Queer poet, playwright, activist, and earthling. She is member of the Traces/Remain Collective, a Co-Artistic Director for Fort Point Theatre Channel, and the Program Director of Apprentice Learning. She believes in the interconnectedness of the struggle and the liberation. She is from Naptown, Indiana and lives in Dorchester, MA.

**Eddie Maisonet** is an interdisciplinary storyteller, teaching artist, and facilitator who is studying to add "dog trainer" to that list. He is a born and bred Boston artist whose 2017 and 2019 artist residencies at The Theater Offensive are collaborative storytelling projects documenting gentrification's effect on his communities. He creates hybrid poetry and prose narrative informed by his life as an Afro-Boricua, disabled, queer, and trans artist committed to centering themes of wellness in the context of disability, joy,

collectivity, humor, and family inheritances. In 2015, he graduated from Smith College with a BA in Psychology. He has been performing since 2016 and writing since childhood. His work can be found in the anthology *Outside The XY: Queer Black and Brown Masculinity*, on the Jaded Ibis Press blog *Scarlet*, and featured in WBUR's COVID poetry series. When he's not doing his artsy stuff, he's gaming, thinking about dogs, or cuddling his seven-pound rescue Chiweenie, Twinkie.

**Tatiana Isabel Gil** is a Queer Latinx writer, dramaturg, and actor with a passion for new work development, art that moves people to take action, and decolonization as a form of healing and empowerment. Some favorite credits include working as a dramaturg for world premiere plays *Hype Man* and *Leftovers* with Company One Theater, playing Kit in Off the Grid's production of *Our Dear Dead Druglord*, working as the director of Theater Performance and Committee member for the Yo Soy Lola movement, and writing three one-act plays exploring intersectional identities within the Latinx experience. Some of her favorite things are collaboration, Pedro Almodovar films, making altars, and Steven Universe.

**Danny Harris** (he/they) is a Boston resident who was the first graduating class from Roxbury Community College. He graduated from Emerson College in 1977 with a BA in Theater Arts. He is a former member of Boston Black Repertory company from 1976-1977 and a former member of Boston Repertory company from 1977-1978. Danny also worked in New York's hair industry from 1978-1985 where some of his clients included Cicely Tyson, Miles Davis Ashford, Simpson Cleavon Little, and many other notable Black artists of the time. He moved to St. Thomas at the onset of the AIDS epidemic where he was head bartender for Studio 54 and became a notable fashion designer, artist, and the

island's first Black sushi chef. He returned to the states and started his business Mennen Black which provides bartenders and waiters for private parties. Danny retired right ahead of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. He is now happily barricaded in his apartment with an ample supply of toilet paper, hand sanitizer, and chicken wings and is looking for a husband/physical trainer who can lift heavy weights.

**Tonasia Jones** (she/her) is a Boston-based Disruptor, Program Director, and Creator (Actor/Director) whose work focuses on diverse collaboration and inclusive storytelling to conquer the societal divides through new and reimagined work. Born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland, in recent years she has ventured to work in places such as Arts Emerson (Creative Producer), Huntington Theatre (Casting/Producing Apprentice), Bad Habit Productions (General Manager), Brown Box Theatre Project (Artistic Outreach Manager), The Theater Offensive (Programs Coordinator, and now Program Director), and StageSource (Program Director). Her Acting and Directing work has enabled her to work freelance at New England theaters and universities such as Greater Boston Stage Company, Suffolk University, A.R.T, Fresh Ink, The Theater Offensive, Speakeasy Stage Company, Huntington Theater, and more. Tonasia is dedicated to collaboration and changing the perspectives of diversity, ethnicity, and gender norms through theater. Utilizing theater to make those uncomfortable conversations happen. She strives to make today's theater genuinely reflect and mirror the world as it is "now". Outside of theater, Tonasia has passions for hiking, Rosie (her American bulldog), dim sum, and embroidery.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

### **Consultants/Cultural Strategists**

Maria Cherry Rangel

Sage Crump

### **The QTPOC Cohort Members**

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Letta Neeley

Tonasia Jones

Danny Harris

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Sharon Bridgeforth

Rebecca Mwase

Nia Faulk

Ty Defoe

Muthi Reed

JD Stokely

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## The Closing Page

The development of the Queer Liberatory Aesthetics was supported in part by

The Barr Foundation  
The Boston Cultural Council  
The Herman and Frieda L. Miller Foundation  
The Massachusetts Cultural Council  
Boston Mayor's Office of Arts & Culture  
The National Performance Network  
The New England Foundation for the Arts  
The Poss Family Foundation

The QUEER (RE)PUBLIC: On QTPOC LIBERATORY AESTHETICS was made with inspiration from, and great admiration for, adrienne maree brown's Emergent Strategy.