

# Shimmers Below the Surface

## *Emergent Strategy and Movement Building through 2-QTPOC Media*

ANABEL KHOO

---

*“You are not a drop in the ocean, but the whole ocean in a drop.”* –Rumi

Somewhere, where the *virtual* and *actual* are intermingling, collective dreams and material enactments resonate together. In the oscillations where chaos and order overlap, something novel is emerging. You need not follow me into this realm. You are already there.

Political potential exists all around us, but it surfaces and circulates in different forms: as ordinary and catastrophic; as mundane and magnificent. I am interested in the ways this fluid complexity of power and materiality is negotiated in the building of social justice movements, and how such efforts generate politicized subjectivities and material realities at the boundaries, thresholds, and margins of the discursive categories of identity and ideologies. To understand and affirm the subtleties in social movement building, I turn to the cultural work of Mangos with Chili, a two-spirit, queer and trans people of colour (2-QTPOC) media performance collective, currently based in the San Francisco Bay Area. To understand deeply the power that media

making and cultural work have to offer for collective liberation, I conceptualize the work of Mangos through the ecological paradigm of emergence, a visionary framework that is attuned to this potential, as one which is ephemerally and materially abundant. In exploring the media and performances showcased at Mangos with Chili events, as well as the politics articulated in interviews with select artists from Mangos, I hope to show how their performances tune into the embodied knowledge and relational experience necessary for the kind of paradigm shift that thinking through queer ecologies engenders.

Through negotiations among non-normative identity, histories of colonialism, and spirituality, Mangos with

Chili offers a politic and set of practices that hold difference affirmatively while leaving enough space to imagine and enact new worlds. Through the lens of queer ecologies, I read the performances and words of Micha Cárdenas, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, Landa Lakes, Qwo-Li Driskill, and Manish Vaidya as texts; the themes of openness, adaptation, excess, and interdependence bring the political potential of ecological complexity to the fore. Through the work of 2-QTPOC media like Mangos with Chili, I hope to illuminate the subtleties of political work and the value of everyday struggle by honouring the work that shapes a paradigm for movement building in the following ways: First, by emphasizing the need for

creative adaptive energy in a time when political resistance is fractured and easily co-opted in neoliberal discourses of freedom. Second, by working with, rather than despite, emotionality, trauma, and intuitive connection to humans and environments. And, finally, by developing sustainable skills and strategies that generate new ways for humans to support and work through conflict with each other.

### **Mangos with Chili: An Emergent Strategy for Collective Liberation**

Founded in 2006, by Cherry Gallette and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, Mangos With Chili, “the floating cabaret of queer, trans and two spirit people of colour bliss, dreams, sweat, sweets & nightmares,” describes itself as:

A North American touring, Bay Area-based arts incubator committed to showcasing high quality performance of life saving importance by queer and trans artists of colour . . . including dance, theater, vaudeville, hip-hop, circus arts, music, spoken word and film. More than a performance incubator, we are also a ritual space for two spirit, queer and trans communities of color to

come together in love, conversation and transformation. Our goal is to present high quality performance art by [2-QT-POC], but so much of our work is also about creating healing and transformative space through performances that are gathering places for community. (Mangos with Chili)

Beyond showcasing various 2-QT-POC artists, Mangos with Chili serves not only as an event and a ritual, but also as a performance of social movements in formation. While Mangos is quite popular, it is neither referred to, nor itself claims to be totally encompassing or even fully representing “The Revolution” or the central point of a mass-based political movement.

## Mangos performances conjure questions about what justice does, feels like, and works for.

Rather, the transformative potential of Mangos is in its “incubating” process in which movements are becoming without already being. Mangos attends to what shimmers below the surface of movements, what pervades between the conscious and unconscious worlds: vectors of political imagination, textures of trauma, and currents of healing forces that push and pull movements. Beyond “calling” for justice, Mangos performances conjure questions about what justice does, feels like, and works for in the present. In this way, Mangos with Chili invites us to consider their cultural production as what Raymond Williams calls a “structure of feeling,” which is “emergent” because it “organizes, moves and shifts as resolution *in solution*: it does not ‘have to await definition, classification, or rationalization before [it] exert[s] palpable pressures and set[s] effective limits on experience and on action’” (qtd. in Gordon 201). Attempting to consolidate identity, goals/demands, and strategy at the expense of the relational dynamics of a community

or movement forecloses and denies the structures of feeling that are nevertheless always producing varying affective intensities that offer fertile substance through which robust movements can grow. It is not only important to name Mangos as a specifically 2-QTPOC performance collective, but to also highlight their work of shifting entire paradigms of thought, imagination, being, and relating to one another.

Neither simply a standalone show nor a mass political campaign, Mangos engages in the ongoing work of fostering the conditions that allow for political transformation. One way to appreciate and explore the organic quality of 2-QTPOC media produced through Mangos – media which negotiates the tensions between representation and materiality—is to understand it with-

in an ecological paradigm described as *emergence*. While the phenomena of emergence and complex systems have been theorized across the natural sciences and sociological explorations of chaos theory (for example, the seemingly spontaneous, self-organizing synchronicity of fireflies, flocking of birds, and weather patterns), my consideration of emergence as it relates to the cultural work of 2-QTPOC media makers is mainly inspired by past and ongoing media-based movement building in Detroit, largely led by women of colour and youth leaders.

In 2013, at the *Allied Media Conference* (AMC), an annual Detroit-based gathering that fosters mediated strategies for social transformation, organizer and writer Adrienne Maree Brown described “emergent strategy” as an approach to movement building that brings together physical science and speculative fiction, defining emergence through several qualities of enactment. First, emergent strategies are rooted in relationships that are forged upon crit-

ical connections (as distinguished from critical mass) shaped by a commitment to community accountability and radical care. Second, emergent strategies build strength by being fractal and decentralized. Finally, emergent strategies are adaptive and generative, in that they create possibilities instead of foreclosing them. In the opening speech at AMC 2013, Brown explained:

Nothing is wasted, or a failure. Emergence is a system that makes use of everything in the iterative process. It’s all data . . . Many of us have been socialized that constant growth, and critical mass, are the ways to create change. But emergence shows us that adaptation and evolution depend more upon critical connections. Dare I say love. The quality of connection between the nodes in the patterns. (Brown)

Emergence can complicate understandings and practices of political resistance that depend on a dichotomy that positions social injustice as a matter of either political apathy or mass mobilization. In turn, 2-QTPOC media making as an emergent strategy redefines or shifts paradigms of social justice organizing. Elizabeth Grosz posits that queer politics teaches us to “embrace the openness, to welcome unknown readings, new claims, provocative analyses—to make things happen, to shift fixed positions, to transform our everyday expectations and habitual conceptual schemas” (qtd. in Mortimer-Sandilands & Erickson 37). If so, then how can a queer ecological paradigm like emergence help us challenge what comes to be considered as a *successful* or *strong* movement?

Brown’s elaboration of emergence helps to illuminate the potential for 2-QTPOC media production, as a relational process, to challenge the objectivity and empiricism so central to the colonialism of Western enlightenment and modernization throughout the last five hundred years. Such claims to objectivity and empiricism have come to

shape the standards and practices of social justice movement building in North America. Brown's vision of emergent strategy is a holistic approach that embraces a diversity of tactics, while remaining imbued with politically transformative energy that does not discount the urgency of political resistance. Taking up emergence as a movement building strategy follows work by Detroit-based philosopher and activist Grace Lee Boggs who, in 2014, at ninety nine years old, calls us to "grow our souls" by embracing a politic that values the quality and sustainability of the organizing process just as much as the public rallies and direct actions. Boggs turns to quantum physics to emphasize the value of local and small scale changes that "affect the global system, not through incrementalism, but because every small system participates in an unbroken wholeness" (50). If, as Boggs describes, "acting locally allows us to be inside the movement and flow of the system, participating in all those complex events simultaneously," then being able to recognize the worth and qualities of process-focused work, such as cultural production, necessitates a practice of listening or attunement to all that is and always will be unfolding, rather than strictly targeting a permanently coherent objective (50).

In our conversations about emergence, Micha Cárdenas, activist, hacktivist, poet, and dancer with Mangos, discussed the merits and challenges of cultural production as an emergent strategy. Having both been at the AMC 2013, we looked at the opening speech together and Cárdenas noted that what she thought was most exciting about emergence was that it was about listening: "[When] Adrienne was talking about meeting strategies based on emergence—when somebody has a feeling—[she was talking about the practice of] stopping and responding to the feeling, instead of just pressing forward with the agenda" (Cárdenas, 2013). However, practicing 2-QTPOC media-based movement building as an emergent strategy that pays attention or listens to natural forms of organization also involves redefining dominant notions

of what is "natural." This is especially important considering both historical and ongoing attempts of institutionalized knowledge to codify sexuality, gender identity, and racial difference based on their deviance from a white, able-bodied, heterosexual, non-working class male norm. For example, there may be evolutionary theories that claim that queerness or transness are counter-survival based on specific ideas of reproduction. According to Cárdenas, the notion that queerness is not "natural" is based on a dangerous logic, because "we are not above nature," and that "the idea of human exceptionalism comes from some kind of Christian, Descartes, Kantian idea that we are embodiments of a Christian god that is outside of nature, and that nature is a defilement of our being, of our true being" (Cárdenas).

### **"We Have Always Existed": Excess and Fluidity in Two-Spirit identity**

As an emergent strategy, Mangos with Chili makes space for movement building among the excesses of emotion, experience, and embodiment. These excesses surround discursive categories of identity and ideology. Instead of attempting to consolidate a single unified notion of queerness and racialization that recreates oppressive standards of normativity, 2-QTPOC media such as Mangos with Chili embraces an expansive and complex notion of identity. Mangos explores the lived experiences that often supersede totalization. Consequently, it shapes new understandings of how to relate to one another and vision new ways of living. In challenging a simple representational politic, Mangos enacts queerness as queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes it: "an open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically" (qtd. in Cvetkovich 122).

Part of challenging simple representations of difference and queerness is apparent in Mangos' featuring of two-spirit artists. However, it is important to note that this inclusion can allow

two-spirit as an identity to also retain its inherent distinction from categorical boundaries of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, which tend to dominate standards of queerness in human and civil rights-based narratives for social justice that are incommensurable with decolonial futures. In his 2010 article, "Settler Homonationalism: Theorizing Settler Colonialism within Queer Modernities," Scott Lauria Morgensen, who identifies as a queer settler, addresses homonationalism—wherein U.S. queers appear as a form of U.S. exceptionalism, becoming what Jasbir Puar has called "queer as regulatory"—claiming that such forms of modern sexuality are not products of settler colonialism, but rather arose as methods to produce settler colonialism. More importantly, Morgensen explains that "[t]he normative function of settlement is to appear inevitable and final. It is natural again whenever sexuality or queer studies scholars inscribe it as an unexamined backdrop to the historical formation of modern U.S. sexual cultures and politics" (117). Therefore, two-spirit people embody an imminent refusal to the inevitability of settlement and modern sexuality.

Furthermore, in the article "Stolen from Our Bodies: First Nations Two-Spirits/Queers and the Journey to a Sovereign Erotic," Qwo-Li Driskill, a Cherokee Two-Spirit/Queer scholar, activist, and performer, describes two-spirit as "a word that resists colonial definitions of who we are. It is an expression of our sexual and gender identities as sovereign from those of white GLBT movements" (52). However, "[t]he coinage of the word was never meant to create a monolithic understanding of the array of Native traditions regarding what dominant European and Euroamerican traditions call 'alternative' genders and sexualities" (52). According to Driskill, "there is currently no term in Cherokee to describe Two-Spirit people. [Two-Spirit people] simply *are*. However, within [their] stories are roadmaps for contemporary Cherokee Two-Spirits. Many Two-Spirit stories address difference, the embodiment of dichotomies, and

journeys between worlds” (55, original emphasis). While two-spirit pushes back against being assimilated into a colonial discursive framework of queerness, it also exists as a guide for ways of living that fluidly negotiate multiple realms simultaneously. In Driskill’s video poem “Stomp Dance: Two-spirit Gathering. A Giveaway Poem,” featured in the 2013 Mangos show in Toronto, Driskill says: “[S]ome say we can’t do these things. But I recall the story of water spider and how she carried that hot coal on her back anyway. . . . This is the work of our two-spirit people. We are part of a story that does not end in the destruction of the Earth. When we dance, manifest destiny shakes. . . . We are an emergence of fire and turtle shells. We are the ones the world can no longer shake” (Quofacnosehead, 2012). Two-Spirit erotics haunt territorial configurations and imaginings of settler futurity as a queerness we may feel as “the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality [as] a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present” (Muñoz 1).

Part of embracing the in-betweenness of queerness also extends to renegotiating the normative linear temporalities of Western institutionalized history by revisiting the blurriness between the past and present. Landa Lakes, two-spirit performer and painter, focused on the history, narrative and implications of residential schools in North America. In her performance at the Mangos 2013 show in Toronto, she particularly highlighted the ongoing renegotiation between traditional and colonial culture: “[The early European colonizers] had this thought of course that dates back to the 1800’s which was you know, ‘kill the Indian, save the man.’ . . . And even today, you still see so many people suffering from this time there, and there is always this clash that exists now between what is Native and traditional and what was taught at the boarding schools that sort of embarrassed people.” The audiovisual and dance performance began with a projected video backdrop, which displayed historical footage of the residential schooling sys-

tem and quotes recounting the violence of its legacy. While the video footage played, Lakes’s dance shifted from her standing alone on stage to a point where she revealed herself wearing traditional dance regalia. She invited audience members to join in a circle dance to “show how, although stripped away by the boarding schools, our culture has somehow survived and continues to prosper” (Lakes).

The power of the performance not only lies in reclaiming the history of residential schooling as a story of resistance, but also in that the struggles to heal from that history are themselves embodied, offering a moment of what Katherine Hayles describes as “rememory.” Referring to Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, Hayles explains rememory as “putting back together parts that have lost touch with one another and reaching out toward a complexity too unruly to fit into disembodied ones and zeros” (13). For Lakes, revisiting the past is a way to inform the present experiences of two-spirit people:

There were some people who were doing some really brave things and that was back like almost a century ago, 40 years ago even, 30 years ago. . . . Especially [for] those who cross over the gender spectrum, it’s good for us to relate to that, because today sometimes people who sort of are in between a gender spectrum sometimes, may feel not yet strong enough. . . . It’s important for us to know that we’ve always existed. (Lakes)

In other words, the ancestral knowledge that two-spirit people “always existed” exceeds the normative bounds of a colonial logic that was designed so that Native people were never meant to survive; it reconfigures what is possible for the future.

### Unapologetic Cultural Work and the Ancient Wisdom of Femme Politics

As an emergent strategy that involves the intuitive work of listening

to desire and vulnerability in everyday experiences, Mangos with Chili performances are also rooted in a femme politic that prioritizes the relationality of movement building. The kind of femme politic I am considering here is not only about a certain kind of aesthetic or identity, but also what Cárdenas describes as “something that exceeds normative bounds of what’s feminine or [what] femininity [is]” (Cárdenas). It is this attention to a vibrant femininity, and an affirmation of its excessiveness, that informs Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, co-founder of Mangos, who identifies as “a queer disabled Sri Lankan cis femme writer performer, organizer, and badass visionary healer.” Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha looks to sharks as an inspirational metaphor for oppressed femininities whose power exceeds normative standards of acceptability and policing:

There’s a lot of femmes of colour I know who have talked—and you know white femmes too, but—they talked about this idea . . . of like battling this idea of feeling like you’re too much. You know, that like, they’re too hungry, they’re too needy, they’re too loud, they’re too feminine, they’re too all these things. And, there’s something about how sharks are unrepentant about their hunger that feels really life affirming to me. (Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, “Leah”)

Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha co-wrote the “Femme Shark Manifesto” in 2008, originally posted online on livejournal.com, which was received as “a femme of colour sermon, call to arms, affirmation and prayer,” and eventually inspired its own contingent in the San Francisco Dyke March. In the zine *All Our Holes are Hungry: Hungry for Justice and Fucking, Femme Shark Communique #1*, the Femme Shark Manifesto proclaims an unapologetic series of statements that articulate the complexity of 2-QTPOC femmeness:

WE WORK TOWARDS LOVING OUR CURVY, FAT, SKINNY, SUPERSIZE,  
THICK, DISABLED, BLACK AND BROWN FINE-ASS BODIES  
EVERYDAY. WE REALIZE THAT LOVING OURSELVES IN A  
RACIST/SEXIST/HOMO/TRANSPHOBIC/ABLIST/CLASSIST  
SYSTEM IS AN EVERYDAY ACT OF WAR AGAINST THAT SYSTEM.

.....  
WE'RE OVER BUTCHES AND BOYS AND OTHER FEMMES  
TELLING US WHAT WE NEED TO DO, WEAR OR BE IN  
ORDER TO BE "REALLY FEMME."

FEMME SHARKS RECOGNIZE THAT FEMMES, BUTCHES,  
GENDERQUEER AND TRANS PEOPLE  
HAVE BEEN IN COMMUNITIES OF COLOUR SINCE  
FOREVER.  
THAT BEFORE COLONIZATION WE WERE SEEN AS SACRED  
AND WE WERE SOME OF THE FIRST FOLKS MOST  
VIOLENTLY ATTACKED  
WHEN OUR LANDS WERE INVADED AND COLONIZED.

.....  
WE RECOGNIZE THAT FEMMES ARE LEADERS OF OUR  
COMMUNITIES.  
WE HOLD IT DOWN, CALM YOUR TEARS, ORGANIZE THE  
RALLY, VISIT YOU IN JAIL, GET CHILDCARE HOOKED UP,  
LOAN YOU TWENTY DOLLARS.  
FEMMES ARE WELDERS, AFTERSCHOOL TEACHERS,  
ABORTION CLINIC WORKERS, STRIPPERS, WRITERS,  
FACTORY WORKERS, MOMS, REVOLUTIONARIES  
DEDICATED TO TAKING THE SYSTEM THE HELL DOWN  
SO WE CAN BE FREE!

(Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, "All Our Holes")

Having emerged nearly 400 million years ago, roughly 200 million years before dinosaurs, sharks are ancient creatures that have witnessed many changes on Earth (Eilperin). And yet, sharks are not revered in Western society as sources of wisdom, but vilified based on their instincts to survive. Some species of sharks are endangered, which, according to Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, parallels the threat of femininity "whether it's cis-gendered femmes of colour, trans femmes of colour, disabled femmes of—or not of—colour, sex working, working poor femmes. . . . There's just this terror of monstrous femininity, and unleashed femininity . . . and you know people are really scared of it. But actually it's a complete typical oppressor flip, because actually femininities are under attack all the time. Like you know we don't rule the world. I mean we kinda do, but we don't" (Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, "Interview").

Considering this, the practice of

femme politics through performance and media making is especially important to highlight, especially since cultural work and emotional support in social justice organizing can often be deemphasized as less urgent and essential than the masculinized roles of public speaking, direct action or leading meetings. It is not necessarily that femme-identified people are always delegated feminized roles, but "it's a feminized skill to nurture and be relational, and nurture relationships in all their complex movement ways" (Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, "Interview"). The support that comes at the micropolitical level that femme politics embraces—from comforting a friend to working overtime—fits with the notion of movement building as ecological complexity, because it is about bringing things back to how do we deal with difficult situations in everyday life, in our material realities. For Cárdenas, "If we're thinking about

emergence as some sort of new model for social movements, or model for social change, then part of that question is: 'Where does social change happen?'" (Cárdenas). While 2-QTPOC media in Mangos strives toward collective liberation from oppression, it is also "trying to create change on an individual scale. Like if you can improve someone's life, that's a political act" (Cárdenas).

Affirming the cultural production and movement building that Mangos enacts through a femme politic shows the immense power that lies in the excess of sensitivity, not as superfluous and unnecessary, but rather as a life sustaining practice and approach to enact, process, and vision new tactics and new worlds. A femme politic also challenges us to tune into the wisdom of human emotionality and embodiment. According to Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, the disparaging of art as activism comes from a masculinist and sexist point of view that prioritizes the "hard facts"

over the cultivation of intuitive knowledge that comes with cultural work when, in reality, both are required:

Audre Lorde said “The white father said I think therefore I am.” And the Black mother, the poet, whispers in my dreams, “I feel therefore I can be free.” And she didn’t say that it was going to be one over the other, but she made an incredibly deep link that Black, queer feminism is about the intelligence of feelings. . . . You know, it’s not a march, but it’s giving us visions, and it’s transforming our consciousness. And helping us see and remember different ways to be, and we absolutely fucking need that. You know, it’s not an opiate—it’s another fucking tool. (Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, “Interview”)

### 2-QTPOC Magic: “Answers to our Ancestors’ Prayers”

The 2-QTPOC media work of Mangos is also grounded in a spirituality that exceeds the confines of institutionalized religion and linear temporalities, and opens up possibilities for movement building. The spirituality in the performances themselves or the politics that inform their work come from personal versions of ancestral practices in faith, hope, and intention that challenge the dichotomy of queerness, as white and secularist, and racial identity, as associated with heterosexuality and organized religion.

As part of media making, 2-QTPOC spirituality offers emergent routes of survival and healing that help imagine new worlds, especially where the “rationality” of neoliberalism and rights-based narratives fail to provide freedom from the violence of structural and internalized oppression. However, it need not follow a linear progression from survival to healing and then, finally, to imagining. Rather 2-QTPOC spiritual practice is a way to enact all these processes simultaneously. Queer of colour scholar and healer M. Jacqui Alexander,

who writes about harnessing a connection with “the Sacred” in order to honour the knowledge that ancestral ghosts offer to histories of survival, notes the ever-present proliferation of the metaphysical that often goes undetected: “If [the Sacred] is to be found everywhere in the terrain of the everyday as part of the continuous existential fabric of being, then it lives simultaneously in the daily lives of everyone, . . . in daily incidents, in those ‘things’ we routinely attribute to coincidence, those moments of synchronicity, the apparently disparate that have cohesion but under another framework” (qtd. in Cvetkovich 137).

Alexander’s approach to metaphysical attunement reshapes what can be considered as ecological or emergent because she claims that it is possible to hold seemingly disparate ideas, identities, and experiences together to find different ways of knowing and generating political possibility. Her approach adds to the inherent queerness of ecology, affirming that ecology itself includes ghosts and memories, just as much as it encompasses molecules and minerals. The electricity that runs through our bodies is the same energy that connects us to the quantum and metaphysical. For Landa Lakes, being two-spirit has “to do with the spirituality behind it” as pivotal and inherent to any political organizing work:

It’s not just that you’re Native and gay, but it’s your spirituality that sort of brings it all together. . . . You’re a part of this greater concept of a tribal base or a nation that you’re also a part of and consequently you’re also a part of, like, these traditions, these old ancient traditions that are just a part of you . . . especially with social justice, especially within the Native community is that in order for me to really respect those who have gone on before me I have to understand what they’ve gone through, and they’ve gone through a lot, so social justice now is about

me getting justice or settling things. (Lakes)

It is not enough to simply identify as 2-QTPOC discursively, as the metaphysical that circulates among our bodies and environments is what gives the experience and wisdom of being 2-QTPOC its potency. These attachments, spiritual residuals, are necessarily part of an emergent strategy for social justice, as they highlight that one’s politics is not only rooted in ideology, but it is also something that we hold in our bodies. Furthermore, M. Jacqui Alexander emphasizes the metaphysical impact of the affective work to maintain political energy that is purely oppositional: “[o]ne of the effects of constructing a life based principally in opposition is that the ego learns to become righteous in its hatred of injustice . . . and it is these psychic residuals that travel, sometimes silently, sometimes vociferously, into social movements that run aground on the invisible premises of scarcity—alterity driven by separation, empowerment driven by external loss—and of having to prove perpetual injury as the quid pro quo to secure ephemeral rights” (326). Bringing in considerations of the metaphysical in 2-QTPOC cultural work and social justice movement building conjures questions that necessitate thinking ecologically—via systems of circulation, pressures, temperature, and electricity that divide and connect humans with others, both human and non-human, as part of the myriad complex dimensions of the universe. What happens to these “psychic residuals” if they are treated as ideological remainders? What do our bodies/minds/spirits know, not separately but simultaneously? What do we choose to hold on to and what do we remain bound to without knowing?

Manish Vaidya, who performed a poem called “In Defense of Magic” at the Mangos show in June 2013, called *Free: Two-Spirit, Trans and People of Colour Visions of Freedom*, describes magic as ancestral power that reclaims co-opted forms of traditional Indigenous and people of colour healing:

When I'm talking about magic, I'm talking about intuition. I'm talking about things like yoga, meditation, acupuncture, acupressure. I'm talking about all these things as ancestral wisdom. [I'm] looking at Western science as the alternative, actually, that's the complimentary thing. That the tools, the skills, the resources that people have learned, how people have built resilience, that that is actually, all of that together, is magic. (Vaidya)

Vaidya takes an expansive approach to a 2-QTPOC magic in his writing to "support people in returning to their inner wisdom" (Vaidya). He helps people to develop emergent strategies of processing the impacts of intergenerational trauma, sexual abuse, and depression, all of which resonate in the body or through what Vaidya calls "blood memory" (Vaidya). When engaging with this level of vulnerability it is crucial to create cultures of collective liberation. Talking about magic and healing re-

in which vulnerability is manifest. This often happens through a mix of comedy, tender confessions, and social critique. Nevertheless, the comedic relief Vaidya offers in his pieces do not discount the power of 2-QTPOC magic; although he is framing magic through humour, he is also upholding metaphysical and embodied intergenerational legacies with unapologetic conviction: "What I'm trying to say is that I believe that each person alive today is the answer to their ancestors' prayers" (Vaidya). Thus, humour allows for a moment of self-forgiveness, either for believing or not believing in magic, a moment that affirms the legacies of femmophobic, homophobic and colonial violence that have come to pervade Western society. Vaidya's comedy opens a space for tenderness and then returns to a personal truth to linger among the audience:

I have this line in that piece *In Defense of Magic*: "Beloved queers of colour, we know we're healers, sacred, right? Don't we know we're irreplaceable, powerful, intuitive, resili-

## Ecology itself includes ghosts and memories, just as much as it encompasses molecules and minerals.

quires navigating the stigmas attached to these concepts because of colonialism and cultural imperialism that outlawed spiritual practices of Indigenous and people of colour, practices which were later co-opted by white cultures. In addition, this cultural dispossession has generated survival strategies that rely on closing oneself off from vulnerability and emotionality, making it difficult to feel safe enough to tune in to the affective and spiritual violences that a body can hold. In his poetry and performance, Vaidya attempts to create openings that allow for a space or moment

ent magic makers, shapeshifters? Don't we know we shape our futures with clues our ancestors drop into our dreams?" And this is a part of tension in the audience, right, that some people are like "Uhhh... what the fuck are you talking about?" you know. So then the next line is: "Sometimes I remember I was taught to forget"... So, I turn it on myself, to make it ok for audience members to have that little bit of distance. (Vaidya)

At the Mangos show *Beloved: A Requiem for Our Dead*, the featured performances commemorated 2-QTPOC who have passed. The show was also significant as "a place [where] a lot of 2-QTPOC came together to collectively mourn our dead and remember our dead" (Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, "Interview"). The show included everything from "a piece about Whitney Houston and queerness . . . to Black closeted queer icons and media and what that means" to "found video footage of Sylvia Rivera when she was still alive when Marsha P. Johnson had just died, talking about their love and their relationship" (Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, "Interview"). However, the event was more than a show with diverse content. It was a collective ritual attending to the perpetual struggles with loss, grief, longing, violence, and love that haunt 2-QTPOC histories and resistance. Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha spoke about the power of having a theatre space, however temporary, not only as a place to remember the fragility of life and our connection to it, but also as a place to affirm the living and their ongoing work: "There's that phrase: 'funerals aren't for the dead, they're for the living.' I think there's something about us coming together, and it reminds me of that June Jordan essay where she said 'Some of us didn't die,' [that she wrote after 9/11]. [She said] some of us did not die. I guess we were meant to live. So what are we going to do with it? . . . How can we be there for each other?" (Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, "Interview").

### "Dare I Say Love": Sustainable Relationship Building Through Complexity

When Adrienne Maree Brown described her vision of emergent strategy, one of the most crucial aspects was that of evolving through "critical connections," which brings up the need to build interdependent, sustainable relationships rooted in love. Through performance art, poetry, visual art, video and dance, Mangos with Chili fosters the relational conditions necessary to forge connections based on a vulnerability that fuels both the pain and the

power to enact and imagine new ways of moving towards collective liberation. Beyond the performances themselves, the 2-QTPOC media that is made within Mangos informs larger skills and practices of community and relationship building. The cultural work of Mangos is part of the labour that goes into building kinship networks of trust that enable visibly mass-based movements for social justice to emerge seemingly spontaneously. Because Brown dared to say “love” in describing emergence and ecological complexity, I want to honour that risk and talk about what love can mean in the context of 2-QTPOC cultural work.

In the Mangos show performed in Toronto in 2013, Manish Vaidya performed a comedic spoken word piece

time [laughs] you know, I sing to her. [These] are little things that are actually huge and important. And the people in my life, my friends, my family, which is my chosen family, and then my very complicated relationships with my birth family. . . . They’re part of my work, how I show up as a cis-gender male, my masculinities, how I perform them, [and] are central to how I build movement. (Vaidya)

In this sense, love is a practice of relating to others with empathetic attention and yet remaining within one’s own capacities. By affirming the complexity of vulnerability that circulates through-

practice communication methods and conflict resolution focused on living *in solution*, while simultaneously confronting violence and internalized oppression holistically by being attuned to the embodied process of making community rather than viewing it as a clearly mapped out destination. Nevertheless, Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha warns that in

working through loving relationships, [we] know [that] love is not automatic. It’s actually like . . . there are so many learned skills that go with figuring out how we love ourselves well, and love others well and not sacrificing ourselves in loving each other... and not, like, smoothing over or minimizing trauma or oppression when we love each other. So, like, it may sound simple, and it is, but it’s also not. . . . As the [Black feminist] Combahee River Collective said in their statement, “We are ready for the lifetime of struggle that lies before us,” and that’s real—it is a lifetime of struggle. (Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, “Interview”)

However, working from an organizing principle of love that is based on ecological complexity in turn creates a paradigm through which conventional notions of what makes a successful social justice movement are destabilized. Often, the relational processes involved in cultural labour of 2-QTPOC media making are absorbed into everyday ritual and intimate histories. Such labour is constant, but it is not always visible or valued as deeply politically transformative. Recently, Bench Ansfield and Jenna Peters-Golden, members of Philly Stands Up!, a transformative justice collective working with perpetrators of sexual assault in radical communities, wrote in the feminist magazine *make/shift* about “how not to succeed in transformative justice,” expressing their ambivalence about the concept of “success”:

## He does not like the word “smash” in “smash the state,” and prefers to substitute it with “lovingly make irrelevant.”

called “Love Letters,” in which he said that he does not like the word “smash” in “smash the state,” and prefers to substitute it with “lovingly make irrelevant.” Such a process of making irrelevant rather than defining the boundaries of “state” or “community” is about the “becoming [of a] political subject whose solidarities and commitments are neither to ends nor to imagining the pragmatics of a consensual community, but to embodied processes of making solidarity itself . . . where the pure mediocrity of being in the present of the political and the sensual is what matters and not any ends or preconditions” (Berlant 260). According to Vaidya, love is a practice in community and worldmaking that “isn’t so much new age, but ancestral,” that works beyond dismantling forms of oppression by simultaneously building new forms of communicating and relating to one another to replace it:

So, I like, I hug my cat all the

out identities and experiences of queerness, racialization, and colonialism, this concept of “love” can also function as an organizing principle to guide interactions and creative movement building that does not necessarily entail forging intimacies and friendships despite one’s capacity or compatibility, but does involve valuing the existence of others within a paradigm of interdependence.

For example, Mangos can be thought of as working toward movements in transformative justice and community accountability. Transformative justice is about holistic approaches to harm reduction and conflict resolution that do not rely on violence and isolation as punitive measures perpetuated through institutions such as prisons and hospitals. Community accountability focuses on practicing a politic of confronting violence and oppression within communities and social movements. Both transformative justice and community accountability approaches

Success is conventionally understood as signifying completion and resolution, as opposed to reflecting the jumble of small victories, uncertainties, and defeats that typify organizing work. . . . Success presumes that there is a way to undo the harm that has occurred, to come out of an accountability process with an unqualified victory. But in an accountability process, it is critical to remember that there is no way to undo harm, that each moment of progress is paired with moments of failure or dismay, and that healing is not the same as curing. (31)

The cultural work of Mangos with Chili emerges from sites and oscillations of attachment, trauma, violence and pain propelled into the present moment through a certain sense of visionary urgency. Their work invests the present with an “urgency [to] reinvent, from the scene of survival, new idioms of the political, and of belonging itself, which requires debating what the base-lines of survival should be in the near future, which is, now, the future we are making” (Berlant 262).

To conceptualize and practice 2-QTPOC media making as an emergent strategy towards collective liberation emphasizes the relationality of ecology and shifts critiques of queer identity and political change from a dichotomous Cartesian analysis toward an affirma-

tive paradigm that holds differences as assemblages of complex relations and contradictions. While it is important to name oppression where it surfaces, it is more important to remember to do so knowing that movement building is so much more than just that. The challenge is to remain committed to political change while also reaching beyond purely oppositional politics; politics that necessitate stabilizing, naming, and structuring as prerequisite to targeting oppression and striving for new ways of living and relating to one another. Emergence occurs in the ongoing work of honoring survival strategies, affirming our vulnerability and resilience, and visioning and practicing ways not only to survive, but also to thrive.

---

## Works Cited

- Alexander, M. Jacqui. *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred*. Durham NC: Duke UP, 2005. Print.
- Ansfeld, Bench and Jenna Peters-Golden. “How Not to Succeed in Transformative Justice.” *Make/Shift Magazine: Feminisms in Motion*. Fall/Winter 2012/2013: 31. Print.
- Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 2011. Print.
- Boggs, Grace Lee. *The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the Twenty-First Century*. Berkeley: California UP, 2012. Print.
- Brown, Adrienne Maree. “Emergence (speech from opening for allied media conference 2013).” *Adrienne Maree: The Luscious Satyagraha*. 2013. Web. 24 Jan. 2014. <adriennemareebrown.net/blog/2013/06/21/emergence-speech-from-opening-for-allied-media-conference-2013>.
- Cárdenas, Micha. Personal interview. 14 Dec. 2013.
- Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Durham: Duke UP, 2003. Print.
- Driskill, Quo-Li. “Stolen from Our Bodies: First Nations Two-Spirits/Queers and the Journey to a Sovereign Erotic.” *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 16.2 (2004): 50-64. Print.
- Eilperin, Juliet. *Demon Fish: Travels Through the Hidden World of Sharks*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2011. Print.
- Gordon, Avery. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minnesota UP, 1997. Print.
- Hayles, Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1999. Print.
- Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, Leah. *All Our Holes are Hungry: Hungry for Justice and Fucking: Femme Shark Communique #1*. Oakland, 2008. Print.
- . “Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha: writer \* performer \* cultural worker.” *brownstargirl*. 2013. Web. 24 Jan. 2014. <brownstargirl.org>.
- . Personal interview. 7 Dec. 2013.
- Lakes, Landa. Personal interview. 11 Dec. 2013.
- Mangos with Chili. “Mangos with Chili: The floating cabaret of QTPOC bliss, dreams, sweat, sweets & nightmares.” 2010. Web. 24 Jan. 2014. <mangoeswithchili.wordpress.com>.
- Morgensen, Scott Lauria. “Settler Homonationalism: Theorizing Settler Colonialism within Queer Modernities.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16.1-2 (2010): 105-131. Print.
- Mortimer-Sandilands, Catriona, and Bruce Erickson. “Introduction.” In *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*. Eds. Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2010. 1-47. Print.
- Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York and London: New York UP, 2009. Print.
- Qwofacnosehead. “Stomp Dance: Two-Spirit Gathering. A Giveaway Poem.” Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 27 Oct. 2012.
- Vaidya, Manish. Personal interview. 20 Nov. 2013.