

NOT QUITE SATISFIED: THEORETICAL  
CURIOSITY AND *QUEER AFRICA*

By

DAKODA SMITH

Bachelor of Arts in English

Oklahoma City University

Oklahoma City, OK

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NOT QUITE SATISFIED: THEORETICAL  
CURIOSITY AND *QUEER AFRICA*

Thesis Approved:

Dr. Katherine Hallemeier

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Thesis Adviser

Dr. Jeff Menne

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Dr. Lindsey Smith

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Name: DAKODA SMITH

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Abstract: Curiosity is often prescribed as a cure for one's lack of awareness or knowledge. After tracing the operation of curiosity by recovering moments from the stories in which the affect of curiosity reveals itself to be particularly anxious and damaging to individuals, curiosity can be distinguished from objectification because of its unceasing drive to satiate (and its inability to deliver the desired satisfaction). This overall project also identifies how theorization is integral to the affective process of curiosity and argues that an interrogation of curiosity must also require a closer examination of how white, U.S.-based queer theory also enacts this affective process of curiosity through its unending theorization of queer of color bodies.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Throughout my two years of graduate study, I have taken every seminar paper as an opportunity to expand my understanding of difficult queer theoretical concepts, explore the applications of queer methodologies in literary and film studies, and familiarize myself with recent trends in the field of queer theory. In each seminar I have taken, I have attempted to draw connections between the overall themes or underlying questions of the course syllabus and queerness. The essays chosen for this portfolio should present the developments I have made in pursuing these goals at OSU, but they should also demonstrate improvements in my own writing abilities, particularly in the skill of organization.

In my first graduate seminar, Global Indigenous Futurisms, I was unfamiliar with the genre conventions of a seminar paper and consulted with the professor for guidance on how to approach my topic. My research questions were: How are queer Native and Two-Spirit people included in Native projects of decolonization, and what do Native drag houses offer to our understanding of decolonization strategies? He advised that I construct a literature review of the recent scholarship that addresses the intersection between queer theory and Native studies for a few reasons: first, it would be beneficial to

building my own argument in the essay, and second, it would be an opportunity to inform other students taking the course about these intersections since this scholarship was underrepresented on our syllabus.

The essay that resulted, which is the first in this portfolio, “Alive in the Erotic: Charting Queer Native and Two-Spirit Decolonization through the ‘Brush Arbor Gurlz,’” locates three decolonization strategies specific to queer Native and Two-Spirit people: making the erotic sovereign, restoring a kinship relationship with the land (the land itself and also the local community as an extension of that land), and ensuring a futurity through the continuous creation of art. The performance art of the queens in the Brush Arbor Gurlz drag house is offered as an example of these three strategies. The format the professor prescribed was a useful one for writing my first seminar paper: introduction first, literature review second, analysis third. Without realizing it, I began to strictly adhere to that format in my following courses. I continued to write seminar papers with this same organizational approach without questioning its usefulness for the changing topics.

The next two essays in the portfolio are reflective of themes and theories that were being heavily discussed in two classes I was taking at the same time, Gender and Sexuality and Theory/History/Screen, and ultimately, I continued to use this original organizational format. Throughout the semester, I was able to identify overlapping themes and theoretical concepts, especially discussions of temporality. Queer temporalities, particularly theories of the death drive and antirelationality put forth by Bersani and Edelman and also responses to those theories such as Munoz’s anti-antirelational thesis, were especially productive for me because of my interest in how

certain queer bodies are targets for violence and are marked for death. For my seminar paper in Gender and Sexuality, I chose as my object of analysis a director whose film I led discussion on in Theory/History/Screen: Derek Jarman's *Jubilee* (1978), an early contribution to New Queer Cinema. Our discussions in both classes helped me form the argument for the essay, in which I explore how Jarman's films embody certain elements of Muñoz's queer world-making as offered in *Cruising Utopia*. The connection to queer temporality in the essay is how I find that *Jubilee* and also *Edward II* (1991) enact a queer revision of history.

In brainstorming for the seminar paper in Theory/History/Screen, I was concerned about how queer of color filmmakers fit into the discussions we were having in both classes. In addition, I was affected by attending a Transgender Day of Remembrance event on OSU's campus, which illustrated the staggering amount of Brazilian trans women who have been subjected to violence and murder in recent years. Taking up Third Cinema critique, I argue in "*Madame Satã* and the Violence of Queering Third Cinema" that queer of color filmmakers are simultaneously ignored by white queer cinema and Third Cinema, forced to fight for representation in both arenas. Again, in the papers for both of these seminars, I followed the trusted format of providing a literature review of everything I could find written at the intersections: in one case, queer futurity, a lengthier review, and in the other, queer Third Cinema, a much shorter review.

The next essay in the portfolio is in response to a myth that I've heard for as long as I've been a member of the queer community—that the death of Judy Garland incited the Stonewall Riots of 1969. In the Contemporary International Film course, we had spent much of the semester interrogating filmic representations of history and how they

operate in service of nationalist discourses. In 2015, Hollywood gave us *Stonewall*, a cinematic amalgamation of myths surrounding the event. Of course, flawless accuracy is impossible in historical representations, but *Stonewall* repeated much of the whitewashing and ciswashing. What I discover in “Reclaiming Queer History in Zines and Comics: An Investigation of Race, Class, and Gender in the Judy Garland Myth” is that there have long been underground artists producing zines and comics that correct these harmful narratives. In terms of organization, this essay is maybe the least guilty in reproducing the format of introduction/literature review/analysis, primarily because of the lack of published historical accounts of the Stonewall Riots that don’t repeat the same, tired myths.

For the course in which I’m currently enrolled, Introduction to Graduate Studies, I wanted to return to a text that I had struggled with early in my first semester at OSU in the Global Indigenous Futurisms course. We read Gerald Vizenor’s *Bearheart* (1990), and while our discussions were fruitful, there were queer instances in the novel that I was unsure how to interpret. One scene depicts a group of gay priests who resort to cannibalism after years of starvation and communal repudiation, and the other stages an erotic moment shared in a pool of water among a group of “weird” and “sensitive” women. Returning to these two scenes, I found that scholarship in queer ecology offered me a framework for approaching the novel’s more difficult themes. In “Unsettling a Queer Ethics of Care,” I hope to expand the scope of Nicole Seymour’s argument for a queer ethics of care by situating it next to an Indigenous ethics of care, building on concepts I began working with early in my studies when looking at kinship relations in Native drag houses.

Finally, the lead paper of this portfolio, “Not Quite Satisfied: Theoretical Curiosity in *Queer Africa*,” is written as a response to some of the recent trends in queer theory that I have identified during my studies at OSU, but I also sought out unexplored areas of study as well. To expand my training in queer theory, I researched the intersections of queerness and African studies. After completing the readings assigned in both Theory/History/Screen and the Affects of Anglophone African Fiction course, I was drawn to affect theory as an approach for literary analysis, which also informed my readings of the stories found in the *Queer Africa* anthology.

Though I originally followed the format I had been using for all my seminar papers, this essay has been heavily revised in an effort to break this habit. For the revision process, it became necessary to experiment with more innovative ways of organizing the essay that prioritized the fiction over the theory. In order to present a more cogent argument, some of the changes I made include the following: opening the essay with a pop culture moment (a recent exchange on Twitter that made certain inferences about queer African life); discussing the fiction and presenting the thesis earlier in the essay; removing the literature review section altogether; integrating the theoretical concepts from my literature review into my readings of the fiction instead; dividing the essay into distinct sections with titles; and ensuring that each paragraph begins with a claim that foregrounds my own argument and clearly guides the reader to the next part of that argument. After examining the six bibliographies in this portfolio, it became apparent that the majority of my research at OSU has come from one journal: *Gay & Lesbian Quarterly*. In light of this, *GLQ* is the intended journal for publication of the lead paper.

## CHAPTER II

### ALIVE IN THE EROTIC: Charting Queer Native and Two-Spirit Decolonization through the “Brush Arbor Gurlz”

“To be ‘in the erotic’ [...] is to be alive [...] the dominant culture can’t deal with a society of alive people.”

—Joy Harjo, qtd. in Deborah Miranda’s “Dildos, Hummingbirds, and Driving Her Crazy:

A Search for American Indian Women’s Love Poetry and Erotics” (pg. 145)

For many years, queer studies and Native studies ignored each other. There have always been queer Native and Two-Spirit people, but academic scholarship did not represent their existence. Working in the tradition of feminist Native writers who paved the way, queer Native and Two-Spirit writers began to develop theory addressing the intersection of the two fields; at the same time, the queer Native or Two-Spirit person remains virtually absent from the field of queer theory as it exists outside of Native studies. While Andrea Smith, Qwo-Li Driskill, and others addressed the queer subject in Native scholarship as early as 2004, it wasn’t until 2010 and 2011 that a surge in publications addressing intersections between queer and Native studies appeared. In early 2010, the *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly* journal, a heavyweight in queer scholarship, devoted an entire issue to the burgeoning field of queer Native and Two-Spirit studies,

inviting scholars working and writing in both to contribute and edit an issue of the journal. Throughout 2011, books merging the two fields continued to be published, leading up to a watershed collection of queer Native and Two-Spirit writings, *Sovereign Erotics* (2011).

Since this stream of visibility in 2010 and 2011, however, only a small handful of articles and book titles merging the two disciplines have been published, (such as Sarah Hunt and Cindy Holmes' 2015 article, "Everyday Decolonization), which leads me to ask: Where is the queer Native or Two-Spirit body situated in Native studies today? To approach this complex question, I have first assembled a literature review of the queer Native and Two-Spirit writers who contributed to the publication surge in 2010 and 2011. I have extrapolated from this scholarship that a vital part of the larger project of decolonization is recovering the queer Native and Two-Spirit body from marginalization and this can take form in a number of interesting ways, particularly the following: making the erotic sovereign, restoring a kinship relationship with the land (the land itself and also the local community as an extension of that land), and ensuring a futurity through the continuous creation of art. Here, I will examine the complex erotics performed by the first Native American drag house located in San Francisco, the "Brush Arbor Gurlz," started by drag performer Landa Lakes, as an example of the kind of artistic creation that, as Joy Harjo writes, is alive in the erotic and also locate those three strategies for decolonization in both their communal relations and their performance art.

The Intersections of Queer and Native Studies

One of the earliest Native scholars to push against that absence of Native consideration in mainstream queer theory and begin merging the two fields is Qwo-Li Driskill. In an effort to extend both the works of queer theory and of Native feminists like Paula Gunn Allen, they highlight decolonization's potential for healing the erotic arenas of queer Native and Two-Spirit lives in their 2004 article, "Stolen From Our Bodies: First Nations Two-Spirits/Queers and the Journey to a Sovereign Erotic." Driskill explains that "it is only within the rigid gender regimes of white America that I have become Trans or Queer" (52); sexuality, then, becomes colonized when it has "internalized the sexual values of dominant culture," for "the invaders continue to enforce the idea that sexuality and non-dichotomous genders are a sin, recreating sexuality as illicit, shocking, shameful, and removed from any positive spiritual context" (Driskill 54). The first step to decolonizing that sexuality, according to Driskill, is to make the sovereign erotic, which they define as "an erotic wholeness healed and/or healing from the historical trauma that First Nations people continue to survive, rooted within the histories, traditions, and resistance struggles of our nations" (51). In Driskill's view, futurity does not ignore, forget, or erase the past; rather, it openly acknowledges the past and uses that acknowledgement as a mode of critique. Part of this approach to settler colonialism and its effects on sexualities is to understand how queer Native and Two-Spirit peoples have been stolen from their own bodies, so sovereignty here is taking on new definitions beyond its legal one. This is not an attempt to take away from the efforts of sovereignty claims that wish to reclaim stolen land for Indigenous peoples; rather, it is extending the notions of sovereignty to other arenas of Indigenous life.

Driskill makes clear that decolonization requires more than just struggling to recover the physical land base: it calls for struggling to reclaim access to and ownership of extensions of that land (the body)—in this case, the (queer Native and Two-Spirit) body and its erotic practice. Sophia Mayer furthered this approach in her 2008 article, “This Bridge of Two Backs: Making the Two-Spirit Erotics of Community,” taking the title from *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, the 1981 feminist anthology edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua. (I mention this to emphasize just how rooted queer Native and Two-Spirit theories are in the previous works of Native feminists.) Mayer posits that all erotic Indigenous practice is a form of resistance. Because dominant heteronormative structures have subjugated erotic practice to enclosed spaces, “for an Indigenous person to speak or act erotically in public is an act of resistance to dominant culture” (Mayer 4). While Driskill champions the healing potential of decolonizing sexuality, Mayer promotes the erotic as a sort of interpretation of Vizenor’s survivance—surviving the colonization of the body by resisting its strict limitations. In this early work, the intersection of queer and Native studies foregrounds one strategy of decolonization: making the sovereign erotic.

It wasn’t until 2010, when *GLQ* devoted an entire issue to queer Native and Two-Spirit issues, that Qwo-Li Driskill included their article that finally explicitly announced the intersection of the two fields of queer theory and Native studies, “Doubleweaving Two-Spirit Critiques: Building Alliances between Native and Queer Studies.” Driskill begins by positioning the new field as one that works toward decolonization by “radically reimagin[ing] our futures,” which is done by weaving together Native and queer critiques (70). Driskill doesn’t necessarily present new information here; rather, they outline the

values for queer theorists in consulting Native works and the dangers in ignoring them. For writers in queer theory, they risk conceding to “master narratives both inside and outside the academy that [...] *un-see* Native people” (74). If queer people of color are even mentioned in mainstream queer theory, they are often listed, and those lists themselves rarely, if ever, include Native peoples. Driskill calls out the act of listing, which “unwittingly contributes to the erasure of the specificity of Native claims to land and to the particular relationships Native people and Native nations have with Euro-American colonial governments” (76). If the two fields can truly intersect, there are many associated risks and dangers; though worth the risk, queer theorists will have to first engage with Native discourse, and second, engage with those voices in a way that does not reduce them to monolithic understandings of queer Native and Two-Spirit lives.

In the same issue of *GLQ*, Andrea Smith’s article “Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism” also finds significant overlaps between the two fields, while drawing influence from Native feminist theory. Smith proposes an adaptation of queer theorist Michael Warner’s “subjectless critique.” In the same way that queer theory transcended the identity politics of gay and lesbian studies and became a methodology, in which *queer* operates as a verb, Smith claims that this transformation is the first step for those working in the intersections of queer theory and Native studies and would lift Native studies from “its position of ethnographic entrapment within the academy” (44). Queer theory isn’t simply a theory of queers or a theory for queers; it is a project to make theory queer. She begins this move herself: first by queering the history of compulsive heterosexuality onto Native communities, and second, by harshly criticizing the “postidentity” of queer theory, since it still continues to operate within settler

colonial discourses. Driskill and Smith's articles here mark great strides in intersecting the two fields by offering two different approaches to that intersection. This is especially important considering the audience of *GLQ*, one that is mostly informed by the settler colonial discourse that feeds back into the academic industrial complex.

Working forward from the foundations that Driskill, Smith, and others had laid by this point, Driskill joined Chris Finley, Brian Joseph Gilley, and Scott Lauria Morgensen in 2011 to collect an anthology of theoretical works in this newly interwoven field, *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature*. These works highlight what queer Native and Two-Spirit writers and/or theorists have to offer the discipline of Native studies, as articulated in the introduction: "by disrupting colonially imposed and internalized systems of gender and sexuality, Indigenous queer and Two-Spirit critiques can move decolonizing movements outside dominant logics and narratives of 'nation'" (Driskill, et. al. 19). That disruption, for Chris Finley, must be focused on decolonizing the dominant modes of thinking that were and are continually being imposed by the settler state onto Native communities. I would explain this by borrowing from Wilma Mankiller's claim that "sexism was borrowed from Europeans"; homophobia and transphobia in Native communities was also imported from Europe by settler colonists. For Finley, "heteropatriarchy has become so natural in many Native communities that it is internalized and institutionalized as if it were traditional. Heteropatriarchal practices in many Native communities are written into tribal law and tradition" (34).

The *GLQ* issue and the key anthology emphasize what we might identify as a second key intervention to emerge from the intersection of Native and queer studies: that queer Native and Two-Spirit people have particular difficulties in reclaiming land when

their bodies are restricted from social acceptance within the community, excluded from the local kinship relations. While attitudes toward nonnormative genders and sexualities vary wildly and depend not just on the tribe but local families and communities within those tribes, it is important to consider how queer Native and Two-Spirit individuals do not often have the same access to land and kinship as other Native members of those communities. In the closing chapter of *Queer Indigenous Studies*, “The Revolution is for Everyone: Imagining an Emancipatory Future through Queer Indigenous Critical Theories,” the four authors collaboratively write toward futurity. They write that the scholarship presented in the collection works to prove that “to interrogate heteronormativity *is* to critique colonial power, which then necessarily intersects the work of decolonization pursued by queer Indigenous people” (Driskill, et. al. 217). But how does one perform that interrogation? It is from the answer to this question that I locate the third strategy for decolonization: that through creating art, these queer Native and Two-Spirit individuals can imagine and reimagine futures for themselves: “queer artistic expression is an important method of survival for queer Native peoples,” and “through this artistic activism, Indigenous queer and Two-Spirit people can reclaim our spirits” (Driskill, et. al. 220).

### Making the Erotic Sovereign

The first Native American drag house, the Brush Arbor Gurlz was founded by well-known San Francisco drag performer Landa Lakes and was born from BAAITSS, the Bay Area American Indian Two-Spirit Society, which was founded in 1999. A drag house or drag family is derived from Harlem ball culture, but the term is now commonly used in drag communities throughout the U.S., particularly in drag pageant circles within those communities. Many times, the name of the house will become the surname of each

drag performer, but not in the case of the Brush Arbor Gurlz. They more often refer to themselves as a troupe, influenced by the tendency of San Francisco drag to place importance on performance art over traditional drag performance. Landa Lakes (Chickasaw) began performing drag in Tulsa, Oklahoma, which features two Native American drag pageants, Miss Osage Hills and Miss Tulsa Two-Spirit Society, and she is currently the matron, or mother, of the house or troupe of the Brush Arbor Gurlz. The group is diverse in its representation of Native American tribes and features a variety of performances, ranging from more serious performance art pieces to more comedic routines, though all of the performances feature the traditional drag act of lip syncing, and the queens themselves usually don traditional stylings of “glam drag” makeup (as opposed to camp drag, clown drag, the New Wave drag of the eighties from which we get punk, goth, and club kid drags, pageant drag, or the “fishy” drag of today). Principal members of the group (all drag performers) are Kenya Pfister (Cherokee), Heklina (Chippewa), Samantha Richards (Navajo), Char Dine (Navajo), Uphoria (Suquamish), Miso Hornay (Inuit), Summer Eve (Cherokee), and Poonie Jones (Metis). Other members and some that just frequently perform with members of the house include Bella Donna, Scherina Marie, Will T. Penis, Poca Indahoochie, Duke of Havoc, Trauma Flintstone, Holy McGrail, and Bubblin Sugare, who represent Chickasaw, Cherokee, Choctaw, Navajo, Ojibwe, and Tohono O’odham Nations (not all of their individual affiliations were available, and not all listed are Native).

The drag house is the focus of this paper for many reasons. First, they represent one of the liveliest examples of resistance in the queer Native and Two-Spirit community that I have encountered, but they do so by blending and merging the practices of

traditional drag performance found in the LGBTQ community in the U.S. with a variety of tribal forms of dress, singing, and dance that members contribute from their own local Native communities. More importantly, it is a very unique mode of both continuing and honoring their own individual tribal traditions while creating new forms of art and performance that actually puts into practice the three strategies for decolonization that I identified in my literature review. The first way that they do this is by making the erotic sovereign—or reclaiming the terrain of gender and sexuality for themselves and on their own terms—through multiple acts. In “Chicks with Dicks, Men in Dresses,” Verta Taylor and Leila J. Rupp’s 2002 ethnographic study of drag queens at the 801 Cabaret, they set out to resolve the divide in the opinions of drag among queer scholars. One camp says that drag is a revolutionary performative act that breaks down the rigid societal barriers of gender and sexuality, while the other camp argues that drag performances only reinforce the heteronormative definitions of gender that it seeks to break away from; the most compelling of these are those scholars who realize that neither one is absolutely true and that drag performance is a complex matrix of acts that are always giving into, playing with, and resisting those same definitions. For Taylor and Rupp, the role of the drag queen is its own entirely new identity: “‘Drag queen’ emerges as an in-between or third-gender category in a society that insists that there are only two” (130). Doing drag is often conflated with being transgender, but a drag queen is not someone whose gender is contrary to the one they were coercively assigned at birth. Rather, most drag queens identify as male and live as male-bodied when they are not performing, and for a male to purposefully dress as female and embody traditionally feminine behaviors is a radical resistance of heteronormative expectations.

For a queer Native or Two-Spirit person, this resistance is multiplied, considering how the Native body, as an extension of Indigenous land that was stolen, was and is colonized by the settler-state. To claim agency over one's body and its erotic representations is an act that resists and subverts that settler colonization. This act is foundational to the Brush Arbor Gurlz, who derive their name from Navajo and other "southeastern tribes [sic] usage of building brush arbor for social and religious occasions. It is here that you will find the flirty girls that giggle and flounce beneath the arbor" ("Rally the Troupes 6"). In an interview with *Native OUT*, Landa Lakes explained a little bit of background on the name: "During the summer and early fall months also known as stomp dance season, Southeastern tribes erect brush arbors. Girls often seek shade under the arbors which gives them ample opportunity to flirt with the roaming boys" ("Brush Arbor Gurlz win performance awards"). As queer Native and Two-Spirit people who identify as men, the Brush Arbor Gurlz are intentionally toying with the implication that the women who hang out in these brush arbors are promiscuous. To flirt with boys is a social performance reserved for women, and the Brush Arbor Gurlz are not just resisting heteronormative definitions of gender by performing as women: they are exercising erotic agency by dressing and performing as promiscuous women with a "reputation," those women who are already often viewed negatively because of their implied sexual sin. Just in the naming of the drag house alone, the Brush Arbor Gurlz are taking Judeo-Christian attitudes toward sexual behavior that were and are imposed by the settler-state and reclaiming them in a radical act of resistance—essentially, making the erotic arenas of queer Native and Two-Spirit life sovereign by subverting and redefining settler-colonial systems of oppression.

## Defining Queer Native and Two-Spirit Kinship

Understanding kinship is an essential part of approaching any topic from a settler colonial studies framework, and kinship itself has many definitions offered by a variety of Native scholars. Mark Rifkin explores this notion from the perspective of gendered relations in his 2011 book *When Did Indians Become Straight?*. For Rifkin, the most useful approach to kinship is the concept of the nuclear family:

the effort to *civilize* American Indians and the attendant repudiation of indigenous traditions can be understood as significantly contributing to the institutionalization of the “heterosexual imaginary,” [...] helping to build a network of interlocking state-sanctioned policies and ideologies that positioned monogamous heterocouplehood and the privatized single-family household as the official national ideal by the late nineteenth century. (Rifkin 6)

A large part of the campaign to supposedly civilize Indigenous people was to impose heterosexuality, monogamy, and other Judeo-Christian values of the settler onto the Native body. Most simply, “U.S. imperialism against native peoples over the past two centuries can be understood as an effort to make them “straight”—to insert indigenous peoples into Anglo-American conceptions of family, home, desire, and personal identity” (Rifkin 8). This process reorganized kinship relationships in Native communities, which is why something so seemingly simple as practicing kinship relationships is presented as a radical act of resistance by other Native scholars. Rifkin agrees, offering kinship as essential to decolonization: “If discourses of sexuality play a central role in interpellating native peoples into Euramerican hegemonies, the trope of kinship can provide a powerful tool through which to mark and contest that process” (9). Rifkin is less interested in

defining kinship and much more concerned with using it as a mode of critique. First, kinship demonstrates how the settler-state coercively colonized Native bodies, and second, kinship offers up the potential for decolonizing those imposed heteronormative structures. Rifkin concludes by explaining how one becomes straight, and therefore, becomes colonized: “To ‘become straight,’ then, involves a (set of) historical, legal, and geopolitical process(es) whereby native peoplehood is conceptualized and represented through an imposed comparative framework in which dominant settler ideals provide the standard” (314). Combining the recognition of those processes with a recognition of the ways that queer people are historically and continually oppressed, one might begin to see how queer Native and Two-Spirit lives have been and are systematically subjugated by intersecting layers of structural powers. Because of this, it is essential to include queer Native and Two-Spirit access to the kinship relationships that are necessary to effectively resist settler colonialism.

In his book chapter, “‘Go Away, Water!’: Kinship Criticism and the Decolonization Imperative,” Daniel Heath Justice intentionally works not to define kinship by what it *is* but by what it *does* and begins by looking at Indigenous nationhood, which is “an understanding of a common social interdependence within the community, the tribal web of kinship rights and responsibilities that link the People, the land, and the cosmos together in an ongoing and dynamic system of mutually affecting relationships” (151). For Justice, these relationships are vital to Indigenous existence today and continuity into the future; therefore, kinship is a powerful statement to the settler-state that insists that the Native has disappeared from modern life, a relic of history. Essentially, relationships are proof of presence. What he doesn’t address in this essay is

how kinship is not offered to everyone. Because of internalized homophobia and transphobia operating within some Native communities, many queer Native and Two-Spirit people do not have access to the kinship that Justice describes, or it might be taken away or limited after coming out. It should be mentioned that this is not true of all tribes and all Native families: in the same way that kinship relationships are wildly diverse and varied across tribes, the restrictions of kinship are diverse and varied as well. Of course, there are Native communities that celebrate queer Native and Two-Spirit presence; there are communities that don't; and more often there are communities where opinions differ among members, and these differences can sometimes divide those communities.

As an example of the work of decolonization, I want to point out how the Brush Arbor Gurlz actively work to create new kinship relationships that don't abandon their tribal affiliations but, rather, open up new avenues for a community that celebrates queer Native and Two-Spirit life. First, the drag house itself is a community of kinship relationships, a non-Native model of drag membership that they have coopted for their own needs. Second, their performances at hundreds of events in San Francisco and particularly with the Bay Area American Indian Two-Spirit Society, through acts like honoring Zuni Two-Spirit leader We'wha, celebrate and champion queer Native and Two-Spirit life but also generate new spaces for these individuals to attend such events and develop new kinship relationships. In addition, the Brush Arbor Gurlz with BAAITSS holds their own annual powwow, the details of which are protected knowledge and won't be shared here, but I will openly discuss the radical potential of having such an event even exist. Landa Lakes describes the group's intentions for the powwow, which was founded in 1999, in an interview with *Oakland Local*:

It's not just about having our own powwow, it's about coming back to the community and giving back to the community. Here in Northern California, we go to powwows and they're pretty inviting of the whole gender spectrum. But that's not always true throughout Indian Country. We wanted to make a space that was welcoming no matter gay straight, somewhere in between—we wanted to make sure that it was open to everybody and that people felt that welcoming spirit. (“Bay Area ‘Two Spirits’ host first ever powwow to Oakland”)

Here, Landa Lakes expresses the immeasurable value for queer Native and Two-Spirit youth who are welcomed at the powwows. Many attendees are accepted as queer or Two-Spirit by their families and communities; many others are not. One young female attendee in particular (who I will not name because I do not have specific permission to share her name and tribal affiliation) told a story about how she grew up watching a certain ritual performed at powwows in her community that held great significance; however, the ritual is only performed by young men. As a lesbian woman and Two-Spirit person, she was not only invited to perform this ritual at the BAAITSS powwow, and she was encouraged to do so. Those from her community who do support her queer identity joined her in both celebrating the tribe that is affiliated with and also in repeating the particular ritual accurately. This is one example of the radical potential of the Brush Arbor Gurlz and related groups to subvert the settler-state's imposition of heteronormative attitudes and serve the overall project of decolonization.

#### Imagining Queer Native and Two-Spirit Futurity Through the Creation of Art

Throughout the scholarship in which queer theory and Native studies intersect are reminders of the importance of telling queer Native and Two-Spirit stories. Daniel Heath

Justice and Qwo-Li Driskill among many others that I have cited in this paper stress that imagining and presenting futurity is vital to the continual existence of queer Native and Two-Spirit lives; furthermore, these imaginings are where the most potential exists for decolonization. But these stories do not have to be told in the form of literature. In the case of the Brush Arbor Gurlz, both performance art in drag and drag performances (and blends of the two) are radical new avenues through which to preserve the past while pushing into the future. One performance art piece that three of the Brush Arbor Gurlz, led by Landa Lakes, presented at an event for the DeYoung Museum in San Francisco on May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011, titled, “Two Spirits: Contemporary Custodians of the Ancient Art of Gender Blending,” is called “To All My Relations.” When introducing the piece, Landa Lakes described the performance as an honor song for We’wha of the Zuni tribe, who is the most well known lhamana (a traditional gender role in the Zuni tribe that we now place under the umbrella of Two-Spirit identities) and was frequently followed, documented, and interviewed by social anthropologists. Lakes further explains for the audience, “Drag isn’t necessarily a tradition among Native people; however, the tradition of blending our genders is” (“Brush Arbor Gurlz.3gp”).

Then, the three drag queens assume their positions on stage, while on screen, a poem is written out, and a recording of Landa Lakes reading the poem is played:

To our elders that teach us of our creation,  
This is dedicated to our brothers and sisters that walk the Two-Spirit path,  
To the Christian ministers that taught our people to shun our traditions,  
To the many warriors male and female living and dead that were persecuted  
because of them,

To the ones that escaped to the cities to hide only to be returned back to the reservations,

To the allocated lands, To the relocated lands in pine boxes or sick due to AIDS,

To those that struggle with their sexuality and to those that celebrate it,

To the ones that kept tradition and stayed behind,

To the ones that hid and the ones that are still hiding,

To We-Wha of the Zuni who became a speaker for his people,

To the ones that are silent and to the ones that can be silent no more,

To our parents that have been ashamed by us and have forgotten us,

And to our parents that will always love us and wonder when we are coming home,

TO ALL MY RELATIONS. (“Brush Arbor Gurlz.3gp”)

The poem is significant in that it refers back to the discussion of kinship relationships from the previous section—Landa Lakes is listing each and every kinship relationship that is valuable to the member of a queer Native or Two-Spirit community. Having moved from the Chickasaw Nation in Oklahoma to San Francisco, she is very aware that the experiences of queer Natives and Two-Spirit peoples are widely varied and not the same across the nation, and that some have received and continue to receive negative reactions to their identities and orientations from their local Native communities.

What’s starkly noticeable as soon as the three queens enter the stage, however, is that, while they are each wearing dresses that are representative of their individual tribes, they are also donning traditional drag queen makeup. The eyebrows are combed back by a glue stick and drawn over with a pencil, the round contours are exaggerated, and bright

colors are chosen for the eyeshadow and lipstick. This makeup is taken straight from the drag of the “glamazon,” the kind of glam drag practiced by performers like RuPaul and Candis Cayne and repeated throughout gay nightclubs and drag pageants to this day. As far as I know, this choice of presentation from the Brush Arbor Gurlz is the first blending of traditional drag performance with traditional Indigenous performance. After the poem is read, the 2006 song, “Going Home/Stomp Dance,” by Pura Fe (Tuscarora) is played. The first half of the song is in English and mentions “stolen people on stolen land,” while the second half of the song is the audio clip of an Indigenous stomp dance being performed. The singer, Pura Fe, is of the Tuscarora Nation, but there are stomp dances practiced in many tribes and the possibilities are numerous. For the first half of the performance, Landa Lakes actually lip syncs along with Pura Fe’s voice, which is also taken straight from traditional drag practice. The other two queens dance behind and on either side of her, performing the simple choreography, just as you would find in the talent portion of any drag pageant. When the singing in English ends, the three drag queens begin to perform a stomp dance along with the audio of it, which is the second way that the Brush Arbor Gurlz blend Indigenous tradition with drag tradition.

While the Brush Arbor Gurlz have in their repertoire a number of comedic performances, ranging from “I Will Always Love Carbs,” where Landa Lakes lip syncs Whitney Houston’s infamous song in an ode to the fast food she’s holding, a medley of church songs performed while dressed as elderly church ladies, and a wedding gag in which Landa Lakes marries drag king Rusty Trombone and the ceremony is officiated by drag queen Miso Hornay (Inuit), I think that looking at one more of their serious performance art pieces is more useful for the purpose of discussing decolonization. In an

untitled performance from 2015, Landa Lakes is dressed in clothing particular to her Chickasaw community. Adele’s 2011 song “Take It All” plays while an Uncle Sam character whose face is covered by the stars of the American flag slowly takes off pieces of her clothing and accessories. As she mouths Adele’s refrain “just go on and take it,” Uncle Sam begins placing the items in a bag marked, “PROPERTY OF U.S. GOV’T.” Eventually, Landa Lakes is left only wearing a body suit which has the insides of the human body printed on it—muscles, nerves, veins, and blood, no skin. She writhes on the floor, continuing to lip sync, and at the end, a quote is read from Reverend A.J. Lippincott’s 1892 commencement speech at the Carlisle Indian School, “Let all that is Indian within you die. You cannot become truly American citizens—industrious, intelligent, cultured, civilized—until the Indian within you is dead” (“Work Landa Lakes J Miko Thomas”).



Landa Lakes toward the beginning of the performance, still mostly clothed.



Landa Lakes toward the end of the performance, after Uncle Sam has taken all her clothing and accessories.

Clearly, both performances described here borrow elements from traditional drag and from various Indigenous cultures; in addition, they are actively working in the present to cope with the past. While these two performances might not be explicitly erotic in nature, the act of dressing as the opposite gender, simply stepping outside the boundaries of heteronormative gender performativity, is a drastic move in resisting those regimes that control the erotic lives of queer Native and Two-Spirit people. In their 2015 article, “Everyday Decolonization: Living a Decolonizing Queer Politics,” Sarah Hunt and Cindy Holmes discuss the importance of work being done outside the academy (without explicitly saying so). They write, “Without grounding decolonial strategies in the immediacy of Indigenous and Two-Spirit peoples’ daily lives at a local level, decolonization can become disconnected from the ongoing everyday manifestations of colonial power” (Hunt & Holmes 160). The work of decolonization is not just academic theorizing; it is also the activists, the singers, the poets, and the painters telling queer Native and Two-Spirit stories that carry the community into the future, and in this case, radical drag queens who carry the realities of settler colonialism back into their performances for the LGBTQ2 community. I would argue that the art of the Brush Arbor

Gurlz drag house is doing necessary and important work in the service of decolonization: by making the erotic sovereign in their performance of dressing and speaking as “promiscuous” women and simply by the act of doing drag; by honoring kinship relationships in their stage performances and also in their efforts to create new communities for queer Native and Two-Spirit people through coopting drag houses and holding special-interest powwows; and by creating and performing artworks that preserve and share queer Native and Two-Spirit narratives that, in turn, present and ensure a queer Native and Two-Spirit futurity.

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## CHAPTER III

### VIOLATING HISTORY: Applying Munoz's Anti-antirelational Turn to New Queer Cinema

“How to make a film of a gay love affair and get it commissioned. Find a dusty old play  
and violate it.”

Derek Jarman, *Queer Edward II*

The scholarship on the body of films known as New Queer Cinema is vast and dense, and the works coming out of this rather short period in time continue to stimulate scholars. Before writing the inaugural essay that named New Queer Cinema, B. Ruby Rich had toured a number of film festivals in 1991 and 1992 and noticed a stream of films addressing queer life in a different way, one that mirrored the theory appearing from scholars like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Judith Butler. Rather than accepting the stereotypes of previous LGBTQ representation in classical Hollywood films or repeating the tired, old narratives of popular LGBTQ genres, like the AIDS melodrama presented in films like *Philadelphia* (1993) and *And the Band Played On* (1993), New Queer films explored the realities of queer existence and offered new characters that were much closer to the lived experiences of their audience members: “there suddenly was a flock of films that were doing something new, renegotiating subjectivities, annexing whole

genres, revising histories in their image” (Rich 16). In the 1992 essay that was published in *Sight & Sound*, Rich recognizes that not all of these films can be grouped together as a genre as their styles differ aesthetically and strategically, but she was able to identify a few commonalities across the body of works: “In all of them, there are traces of appropriation, pastiche, and irony, as well as a reworking of history with social constructionism very much in mind” (18). This one essay has sparked an entire body of scholarship, and each part of its argument has been cited and analyzed in an attempt to contribute to her early findings. But there is one theme that has been under-examined: “revising histories in their image” and “a reworking of history” (Rich 16, 18). None of the scholarship found in *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader* (2004) and *New Queer Cinema: The Director’s Cut* (2013) has adequately addressed this portion of Rich’s original call. Queer studies as a broader field, however, has been very interested in discussions of time, temporality, history, and futurity, and two camps have formed in response: the first argues that a future has never been available to the queer subject because of their inability to participate in normative reproduction (the anti-social thesis, or the antirelational, spearheaded by Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman), and the second (largely driven by Jose Esteban Munoz’s anti-antirelational response) counters with more imaginative thinking and world making, allowing for an attunement to queer temporal relations that exist outside of reproduction.

I will begin this discussion by using Jose Esteban Munoz’s approach to queer world making, particularly his theory of the anti-antirelational, to analyze two of Derek Jarman’s films, one of his earlier works that was an influence on *New Queer Cinema*, *Jubilee* (1978), and then the film that traveled the festivals in the years that Rich was

writing about them, *Edward II* (1991). Jarman is often hailed as the father of New Queer Cinema, and these two films provide an excellent starting point for exploring how history is revised and reworked in the New Queer cinematic movement. At the end, I examine Bersani's comments on Jarman's cinematic style, in which he expresses his disgust and shock at much of Jarman's imagery and heavily criticizes his films, and offer a reading of those comments in light of Bersani's antisocial thesis.

### Munoz's Anti-antirelational Turn

In many of the New Queer films, I see auteurs looking to the past to understand the present and fashion a queer futurity, something very similar to the call made in Jose Esteban Munoz's 2009 book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. The book is an intervention in the antirelational theories of Leo Bersani in *Homos* (1995) and Lee Edelman in *No Future* (2004). These scholars put forth radical polemics criticizing our cultural obsession with reproductive futurity, and their work was important in illuminating the problems not only with how the queer subject was imagined but also contemporary political concerns, like the mainstream gay rights movement's preoccupation with legalizing gay marriage. While Munoz takes care to appreciate and respect the theories presented by the two scholars, he feels the pressing need to intervene at the point that the antirelational becomes antisocial: "it nonetheless quickly replaced the romance of the community with the romance of singularity and negativity" (10). Edelman was not wrong in arguing to imagine the queer subject outside of reproductive futurity; however, the rhetoric became focused on the negative, leading to an image of the queer as alone and destined for death, the "always already shattered queer subject" (Munoz 91). Munoz writes to replace this lonely figure with "an understanding of queerness as

collectivity,” and he performs this intervention in two important ways that I will draw from later in my own analysis of Jarman’s works (11).

First, he recognizes instances of queer relations that negate the antirelational. For example, he recounts a story from lesbian poet Eileen Myles’ 1994 memoir *Chelsea Girls* in which she cares for elderly gay poet James Schuyler in his final days as he instructs her through his actions the ethics of a queer life. While queer people might not reproduce queer children who then care for their own parents when they age (what is considered to be the natural and expected progression of human life), there are sweet moments of queer relations that do not fit into either the socially constructed pattern of straight life (the relational, or the reproductive) or the alone and dying queer subject (the anti-relational). Thus, Munoz offers a “radical negativity, like the negation of negation”: “a mode of understanding negativity that is starkly different from the version of the negative proposed by the queer antirelationist” (13).

What he offers instead is the notion of queer utopia, my second point of entry into Munoz’s analysis. In the introduction of *Cruising Utopia*, Munoz insists that queerness is just on the horizon: “queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future” (1). The exciting potential of creating queer utopias is grounded in the work of German Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch, who differentiated between concrete and abstract utopias. While abstract utopias are unaware of historical consciousness, “concrete utopias are relational to historically situated struggles, a collectivity that is actualized or potential” (Munoz 3). A concrete utopia does not just depend on a broad, generalized past; rather, it recognizes the “performative nature” of history—“the past does things” (Munoz 27-28). Jack Halberstam has contributed

immensely to this topic, too. His 2005 book, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, proposes a queer temporality packed with the potential to “open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space” (Halberstam 2). He also looks to the same time period as Bersani and Edelman, when the gay community had been struck by the AIDS epidemic and the future seemed grim, but he argues instead for an analysis of queer time’s potentiality rather than its dangers. Even though the future is “constantly diminishing,” it doesn’t disappear altogether: “while the threat of no future hovers overhead like a storm cloud, the urgency of being also expands the potential of the moment and [...] squeezes new possibilities out of the time at hand” (Halberstam 2). While the straightness of the present is lethal for the queer subject, Munoz and Halberstam demand that queer politics embrace a concrete utopia that is aware of the historical past in its effort to imagine queer times and spaces outside of the present. Where Edelman encourages his readers to abandon hope and to accept the singular, negative positioning, Munoz wants to build a queer future that escapes the “temporal stranglehold” of straight time (32).

#### Dystopian Strategies in *Jubilee*

In 1978, Derek Jarman released his second feature film *Jubilee* (his first, *Sebastiane*, was in 1976, and he had already produced 24 shorts by the time of its release). The film is an exploration of his contemporary British climate: a quarter of a century into Elizabeth II’s reign (at which point the monarch celebrates her “Silver Jubilee,” or 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, from which the film receives its title), one year before Margaret Thatcher’s appointment to the office of Prime Minister, and at the height of the subcultural emergence of punk style. In addition, Claire Monk points out that the “New

Elizabethan” age was a “dangerous time for queers,” with problems like the move to clean up zoning prior to the 1953 coronation and subsequent public ceremonies and parades, Alan Turing’s chemical castration, police brutality targeted toward queer communities, and media witch hunts (363).

Instead of critiquing his straight present, the toxic political climate of late 1970s England, Jarman turns to the reign of the first Queen Elizabeth. The film opens on a royal courtyard where a queen’s servant tends to a pack of Dalmatians as she strolls into a dark room where Elizabeth (Jenny Runacre) is consulting her occultist spiritual guide John Dee (Richard O’Brien). John Dee was in fact a real historical figure who blended alchemy, mathematics, divination, and philosophy in his role as advisor to the Queen, and he even chose her coronation date using astrology. In the film, John Dee very much offers the same services, summoning the angel Ariel (Ian Charleson), who is a character taken from *The Tempest*. There are two important moves that Jarman makes in this opening scene. First, many friends of Jarman have commented on his obsession with Dee; he referred to himself as “Derek the black magician,” and one close friend in a 2014 essay called him “a modern-day John Dee” (“Derek Jarman’s life”). There is a queer relation that can be identified here similar to the one Munoz illustrates between Eileen Myles and James Schuyler: Jarman is fascinated by queer history, particularly queer British history, and he continues Dee’s work by studying his life and writing and rewriting him into contemporary narratives/dystopian futures. Second, the styling of this opening scene is queer for a few reasons. John Dee is played by the creator of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), who also played the role of Riff Raff; the angel Ariel, donning a black leotard and curly black hair, has the same visual and vocal styling of Dr.

Frank-N-Furter (Tim Curry); and the general fashion of Elizabeth I is an interesting amalgam of actual 16<sup>th</sup> century royal dress and the contemporary British punk aesthetic of icons like Vivienne Westwood, seen in the piles of pearls and the rosy makeup. When *Jubilee* was released in 1978, much of its audience would have been familiar enough with *Rocky Horror* to recognize Richard O'Brien or at least the similarities between Ariel and Frank-N-Furter as it had already begun to amass a cult following as a “midnight movie,” and Westwood’s fashion had been plastered all over British tabloids by that point. If you still question the *Rocky Horror* references, actress Little Nell, famous for her role as Columbia, is cast as main character Crabs later in *Jubilee*. This clever series of positionings is a mode of queering Elizabeth I and her court—a queer choice herself considering she never married or reproduced.



Figure 1 Queen Elizabeth's (Jenny Runacre) dress in the opening scene is influenced by Vivienne Westwood's brand of punk aesthetic.

In the scene, Elizabeth requests a glimpse into Britain’s future, and Ariel transports her, Dee, and the servant to the dystopian anarchy of 1978, a reimagining of Jarman’s present day where the buildings burn, the police are corrupt, murder is rampant,

and morality is lost. Ariel lands them out in a field next to a shed, a seemingly unimportant location until Elizabeth I looks down to find Elizabeth II robbed and murdered, laying dead in the grass, her crown stolen. She then begins her descent through the city, witnessing its wreckage. The main characters of this dystopian satire, though, are the members of a punk girl gang led by Bod (Jenny Runacre), played by the same actress as Elizabeth I. Bod is also the thief who choked Elizabeth II and snatched her crown, flaunting it to her friends and followers when she returns to their loft. She stands at the balcony window, faux-shooting a gun with her hands and proclaiming, “It’s high fashion!” This is the second valuable queer relation that can be identified in the film. Runacre plays both characters and brilliantly switches her performance between the two roles, but this relation does not work in the same way as the others in the film do. Where the prior relations suggest an anti-antirelational turn in that they continue a queer tradition, the Elizabeth I/Bod relationship at first seems to be antirelational, considering that Bod murders Elizabeth II and leads a murderous, violent, incestuous gang of punks—after all, death hangs over the dystopian future as a constant threat. Further, Elizabeth I, also known as the Virgin Queen in British history, could be read as a symbol of negation, and it’s no coincidence that Bod is a virgin herself.

But an antirelational reading only works thematically: Jarman is presenting a dystopian satire, not a dystopian reality. This is not the future that he wants; rather, he fashions a world that he *doesn’t* want—one that could very much be a true British future if Jarman’s contemporary political climate doesn’t change. There are a few moments in the film where this is particularly clear. The most obvious would be the scene at the arcade in which a group of punks are accosted by police without good reason. Kid (Adam

Ant) and Viv (Linda Spurrier) escape, but Sphinx (Karl Johnson) and Angel (Ian Charleson), a pair of incestuous bisexual brothers, are shot and killed. The police brutality directed toward queers in Jarman's daily life directly transfers to the dystopian future, but another subplot of the film proves that the dystopia is satirical and undesirous. Corporate mogul and record label producer Borgia Ginz (Jack Birkett) is a wealthy, loud, laughing, maniacal character, who is styled like a *Rocky Horror* groupie. He embodies the antithesis of punk ethos: he finds punk musical acts, like Lounge Lizard (Jayne County), and transforms them into marketable products ready for mass consumption. The girl gang led by Bod is so fed up with such behavior that they murder Lounge Lizard in her dressing room, but by the end of the film, they succumb to the lure of materialism. Bod and the others join Borgia Ginz at his lavish mansion, where a Hitler-inspired man mumbles in unintelligible German, and Ginz remarks, "They all sign up one way or another."

This prediction of consumerism on Jarman's part ended up becoming remarkably true. The Sex Pistols and Vivienne Westwood, once at the forefront of the punk movement, grew their brands large enough to profit in a massive way. Claire Monk adds, "Afterwards, the film turned prophetic. Dr. Dee's vision came true—the streets burned in Brixton and Toxteth. Adam [Ant] was Top of the Pops and signed up with Margaret Thatcher to sing at the Falklands Ball. They all sign up one way or another" (Monk 359). *Jubilee* was Adam Ant's first introduction to fame; he was an unknown musician before the film was released, and the contrasting image of him sharing a stage with Margaret Thatcher years later is damning proof of Jarman's uncanny prediction. This demonstrates, though, that Jarman was using a different strategy for queer world making than the one

Munoz laid out in *Cruising Utopia* but with the same endgoal. He uses the film to deploy a dystopian, anarchic satire that exaggerates the problems the queer community was facing in late 1970s England. While this strategy appears antirelational, it is actually pushing back on the antirelational itself. Not only is Elizabeth I transported to the present-day but her leadership is carried on through Bod into the dystopia. Elizabeth II and the dangerous neoliberal politics that her reign represent are erased by the alignment of present-day queer life with 16<sup>th</sup>-century queer life. Throughout the film, Amyl Nitrite (Jordan) attempts to preserve British history and share it with those around her, but the members of the girl gang, particularly Bod and Mad (Toyah Wilcox), are constantly silencing her. Mad even challenges Amyl Nitrite to a fencing match to keep her quiet. Jarman's inclination toward history and its queer revisions is made evident through Amyl Nitrite's character. This dialogue between her and Mad stresses the importance of historical awareness to its audience, a quality of New Queer films that Rich identifies in *Edward II* (1991), when she writes, "Homophobia is stripped bare as a timeless occupation, tracked across centuries but never lacking in historical specificity" (21).

#### Caging Time in *Edward II*

Derek Jarman made his tenth feature film *Edward II* (1991) more than a decade after releasing *Jubilee* (1978). *Edward II* was among the early films addressing issues of queer life in a new, non-classical way that toured the festivals in 1991 and 1992, and it is one of the few films described in detail in B. Ruby Rich's inaugural essay on the movement of New Queer Cinema. At this point in his career, the turn to a (sometimes queer) British and European past was nothing new in his works: he created a mostly nude

adaptation of *The Tempest* (1979), he fashioned an experimental dream of male-male love set to Judi Dench's reading of Shakespeare's sonnets in *The Angelic Conversation* (1985), and he lingered over the boys of Baroque paintings in *Caravaggio* (1986), among many other examples.

But *Edward II* is unique from these other works for a few important reasons beyond being the first of his to be included in a new filmic movement. In Jarman's version of Christopher Marlowe's early modern play, Edward II (Steven Waddington) is king of England and fights to restore his lover Piers Gaveston (Andrew Tiernan) from exile. This move angers much of the royal court, including the head of the military Lord Mortimer (Nigel Terry), the Bishop of Winchester (Dudley Sutton), who receives a brutish beating from Gaveston, and Queen Isabella, Edward II's wife (Tilda Swinton). While previous films like *The Tempest* and *Caravaggio* stayed truer to the original conditions of historical narratives, *Edward II* blends times, styles, and genres, which is often read as a queer move in its refusal to conform to strict categories. First, the arrangement of each frame is quite theatrical: its dark, almost unlit rooms are often removed a bit from the camera as if the actors were truly on a stage, and the dialogue is written and performed similarly to Elizabethan dramatic language. Beyond blending theater and film, there is a scene that features Annie Lennox singing a cover of Cole Porter's "Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye," and the editing closely resembles a standard music video for a ballad. Styles mix and merge all throughout the film, too: for example, while the original story takes place in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century and the set design and the language insist that the story is set in (or at least influenced by) the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Elizabethan era, the fashion is a cross-temporal composite of different 20<sup>th</sup>-century

fashions, particularly the late 1980s and early 1990s. Gaveston is often wearing white suit shirts with gold earrings, while Edward II wears a sparkly gold cape fitting of a queer king only to reveal that his undershirt is a white tank top—a clearly modern garment produced in a factory; the advisers to the king all wear business suits, while the members of the military appear to be dressed in earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century fashion with uniforms that resemble those of WWII.



*Figure 2* Queen Isabella (Tilda Swinton) is clearly styled in fashion that is much more typical of a woman in 1991 than a queen in the 1320s.

Michael Bronski argues that these stylistic choices all point to Jarman’s determination “as he states in the film’s program notes, to ‘out’ history—to radicalize it to suit our present day needs” (“Raging Correctly”). There are a number of other examples of this taking place in the film, including the appearance of the year “1991” printed on a government document, and the replacement of military officers with gay rights protesters who act and organize almost exactly like British queer rights group OutRage! Bronski writes:

By then there is little doubt that Derek Jarman is as interested in the way we live now as he is in the way we lived then. History for Jarman—especially the history of homosexual oppression and homophobia—is not something that exists in

textbooks or old plays but is connected, in a visceral, vital and immediate way to what is happening today. (Bronski, "Raging Correctly")

These visual cues signify that something today can be learned from those who experienced oppression in the past, that those historical traumas are very much alive in the contemporary struggles of the queer community.

I would add to Bronski's analysis that this blending of times, styles, and genres is very much in line with the anti-antirelational strategy that Munoz put forth. In an effort to avoid the abstract utopia that Bloch warns us about, though, I want to focus specifically on two moments in the film in which Jarman is altering historical narratives to cast a concrete utopia. In the film, Queen Isabella eventually tires of desperately trying to attract the attention of her husband. Upon realizing that Gaveston will always have the king's love and favor, she begins an affair with commander Mortimer. The two plot to take control of the throne and eventually do, using homophobic sentiment to justify Gaveston's murder and Edward II's imprisonment. The legend surrounding the actual Edward II's death states that he was murdered by an executor piercing his ass with a fiery hot poker, though I couldn't find any historian who reports this as fact. In the film, Edward II, covered in dirt and sitting in a damp, dark cell, imagines his death by poker, with men holding him down in a smoky, red-hot dungeon. When the executor arrives to retrieve him, Edward II begs for mercy, dejectedly remarking, "I see my tragedy written on thy brow." To Edward II's surprise, the man throws the poker into the water with a splash and leans in to gently kiss him on the lips. This historical revision is addressed in Bronski's 1992 review: "Not even history, Jarman seems to be saying, is strong enough to overcome the power and the force of gay sexuality," and I assume that the language

subtitle of his review, “*Edward II* burns itself into our consciousness” is taken from this moment as well. Here, Jarman is pushing back against gay metanarratives like the legend of Edward II’s death that oppress queer Brits and is revising them to design a queer utopia, one in which those working for oppressive governments have either found compassion for their queer neighbors or are coming out as queer themselves. In the companion book that Jarman wrote for the film, *Queer Edward II*, he writes that turning to history first is the most effective method for creating a queer utopia—to take a respectable play from the literary canon and “violate” it.

The second example of a concrete utopia is the scene directly after Edward II receives mercy from his executor. The suggestion is that Mortimer and Isabella will solidify their regime after Edward II’s imprisonment, but they forget to consider the heir to the throne: the prince, Edward III (Jody Graber), the son of Isabella and Edward II. In the final moments of the film, Edward III is dressed in a suit jacket and shorts, but with his mother’s silver, glittery heels, her gold chandelier earrings, and a bit of her red lipstick, dancing to an electronic remix of classical music playing from a Walkman. As the camera zooms out, it is revealed that he is perched atop a cage containing his mother Isabella and her lover Mortimer as the boy begins to conduct an imaginary orchestra. The mother and her lover sit in the straw-covered floor, miserable and covered in white dust.



Figure 3 New king Edward III (Jody Graber) rejoices after imprisoning his mother and her lover.

The dancing queer child is the beginning of a new reign under a new monarch. It would be easy to identify a queer relation here as in Munoz's reading of Eileen Myles' memoir and my earlier reading of *Jubilee* between Edward III and his father. After one queer king is ousted, he is replaced by another, but I read this instead as a move toward queer world making. The rules of the oppressive, homophobic coup d'état have been ousted; said another way, the two figures leading a charge to eradicate queer life, and thus a queer future, from the British royal family have been caged, and their temporal drive toward death has been reversed. Now that the work of reclaiming and violating the metanarratives has begun in the historical revision of Edward II's death, Jarman can begin fashioning a queer futurity, a concrete utopian hope for the queer people of England.

## Conclusion

In his 2003 essay for *Screen*, Daniel Humphrey sets out to expand the definition of "trauma cinema," borrowed from Janet Walker's *Screen* dossier on the term. Interestingly, Humphrey chooses Jarman's film *The Last of England* (1987); produced

just a few years before *Edward II* (1991), it is a much more experimental project than *Edward II*. The film itself is a disturbing and dizzying vision of the English landscape after the destruction of Thatcherism. Humphrey argues that it engages history in a way that “enacts a ‘dialectic of trauma,’” an unsurprising statement after the arguments I have made in this essay (209). What is interesting, and even surprising, is that the antirelationist scholar Leo Bersani actually pans the film, deriding its images of death and disease and calling it “a truly frightening film” for its “fantasmatic” material (Humphrey 213). The “furiously frustrated orality” he identifies in the film is not all that different from the imagery of *Jubilee* and *Edward II*, which range from scenes like Crabs suffocating a man right as he climaxes only to wrap him in pink cellophane and drop him into the river in the former to the numerous characters who are painstakingly tortured in the latter (Humphrey 213). I would argue that this imagery is not in fact gratuitous, but rather the dirty work required to begin the process of queer world making. Concrete utopias require historical specificity, a deeper awareness of one’s place in both historical and present time. At first, it is somewhat surprising to me that Bersani wouldn’t see the film and locate its ravaging, sickly elements as proof of the antirelational thesis. Humphrey, keeping Jarman’s HIV-positive status in mind, reads these images as “a discursive sickness” in which “the trauma of AIDS exposes the trauma of history” (213). Then turning to the cinematography, he writes that “through violent editing strategies,” we find “what Jarman once called the ‘present past’” (Humphrey 214).

This notion of the “present past” is vital to understanding Bersani’s disgusted reaction to the film. A simple reading of images of death as antirelational evidence would

negate the negation of the queer subject—in this case, the queer auteur Jarman: “Jarman’s pained strategies of authorship and cinematic production revealed themselves in the negotiation between the drive towards death and the striving towards the vital, life-affirming performativity of one’s desire, ethics, hopes: in other words, in the self-construction of the author as the creator of his own history” (Humphrey 215). In the process of editing and constructing *The Last of England*, *Jubilee*, and *Edward II*, Jarman had to engage his own national history, thus becoming a member of a communal queer project. He is no longer the singular queer subject, abject and lonely in his negation; he picks up where past queer figures (Elizabeth I; John Dee; Christopher Marlowe; Edward II; and Piers Gaveston) have all left off by engaging the work of queer utopia. A criticism of England under Thatcher’s rule made into film suggests hope on the part of the filmmaker, and when plunging into those fearless explorations of death and disease, Jarman tends carefully to his queer relations.

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## CHAPTER IV

### *Madame Satã* AND THE VIOLENCE OF QUEERING THIRD CINEMA

In the 1960s, Third Cinema filmmakers began the work of deconstructing Eurocentric grand metanarratives and resisting the dominant film model that reproduced them in harmful ways. Because Third Cinema theorists tended to rearticulate and reinforce the strict homophobic and transphobic structures of the Western patriarchy, the new counter-narratives they proposed continue to present an interesting set of problems for queer of color filmmakers. In a similar manner, the queer of color filmmaker cannot turn to an increasingly mainstream contemporary queer cinema that continues to produce films like *The Danish Girl* (2015) and *Carol* (2015) as a refuge because of its systematic favoring of white bourgeois narratives. Helen Hok-Sze Leung's 2004 essay "New Queer Cinema and Third Cinema" offered the first framework for understanding and analyzing the potential overlap of the two moments in cinematic history. By examining Brazilian director Karim Aïnouz's debut film *Madame Satã* (2002), I will add to Leung's research by introducing a discussion of violence and engaging with recent queer of color critique. First, I will explain how the film embodies the characteristics put forth by early Third Cinema manifestoes in its bare visuals, specifically exploring how the film employs Glauber Rocha's aesthetics of hunger that is typically found in Cinema Novo films.

Then, I will look at the violence presented in the film (both enacted upon and enacted by queer people) with the threatening present-day environment of trans and queer Brazilians in mind by focusing on two “weapons” deployed in the film: bodies and guns. Finally, I will consider how this reading is affected under the lens of Ernesto Martinez’s important work on queerness as ethical sociality. With this argument, I intend to demonstrate how queer of color filmmakers, particularly those living and working in regions of the world that are dangerous for queer bodies, are forced to not only push back against a predominantly white queer cinema but also against Third Cinema itself by using its own rhetoric of camera-as-weapon.

Ella Shohat and Robert Stam open their discussion of “Third Worldist Film” with Lyotard’s concept of the *grands recits*, or metanarrative, used to describe a transhistorical, Eurocentric (and thus, very restricting) approach to historical events. They explain that First World minorities have just begun the work of deconstructing their metanarratives, while Third World people began this project in the postwar era with the appearance of independent Third World nation-states. Along with polemic manifestoes declaring a Third Cinema that is starkly opposed to the imperialist Hollywood film model and openly uninterested in monetary gain emerged Third World films that are politically much farther left than those of the preceding Leftist/European movements—Italian neorealism and French New Wave. These Third World filmmakers reclaimed their own histories “in the face of Eurocentric historicizing,” particularly through revisionist historical films that propose new “counter-narratives” (Shohat & Stam 249).

Counter-narrative could also be a useful term for defining New Queer Cinema, the cinematic movement that B. Ruby Rich identified in her inaugural essay by

organizing a list of commonalities in the queer films that she noticed were appearing in film festivals in 1991 and 1992. A wave of queer filmmakers in the early 1990s started producing content that resembled actual queer life rather than repeating tired gay stereotypes from classical Hollywood films, like the male pansy trope or the AIDS melodrama, among many other characters and genres. While these queer counter-narratives were important in transforming queer cinematic representation, Helen Hok-Sze Leung points out that the “political edge” and “aesthetic experimentation” of New Queer Cinema were swallowed up by the mainstream film industry, which overtook the control of queer representation in film (Leung 155). In the essay, Leung explores the potential for a dialectic between the two film movements, and her interrogation reveals that “neither postmodern aesthetic experimentation nor visible expressions of queer identities undermine the global structure of unequal power” (157). The counter-narratives of New Queer Cinema were not nearly enough to dismantle the metanarratives for queer people living outside of the U.S.

At the same time, Leung realizes that Third Cinema itself, in its very important work of deconstructing metanarratives that had and continue to dominate Third World citizens, repeated the repression of marginalized voices of women and queer people within the Third World—what she calls “one of its major blind spots”: “the suppression of queer sexualities in the history of anti-colonial national resistance and the future role of sexuality in socialist politics” (158). Maria Lugones, in writing her decolonial critique, came across the same obstacle. She found that predominantly white feminist and queer theory had never been interested in a “deep imbrication of race into the analysis that takes gender and sexuality as central”; simultaneously, she criticized those in her field that had

written about the “coloniality of power” who “have tended to naturalize gender,” which she interprets as a “violent introduction” of colonialism (186-7).

Even though she points out that it is much too early to identify a Queer Third Cinema, Leung remarks that “it is clear that many new queer cinemas are merging,” from the margins of a variety of nationalities (166). She presents a few films that have operated from both modes and briefly names a few of their tendencies. First, they question or revise historical metanarratives; second, they avoid the technical standards of classical filmmaking; and third, they continue the work of Third Cinema by “remaining on the side of the disaffected and disenfranchised” (Leung 166). While Leung lists early classifications that are important and fit the scope of her project, they are also somewhat broad and need to be expanded and applied to specific global queer films.

Before choosing a film or filmmaker for this analysis, I wanted this project to be located in the margins of mainstream Brazilian culture, as violence against trans women in Brazil has continued to increase over the past 10 years. To put this in perspective, Transgender Day of Remembrance is a worldwide annual event that honors the trans lives that have been lost in the past year due to hate crimes. At my university’s most recent local Day of Remembrance, there were four tables with placards listing the name and home nation for each murdered individual; of the four, three tables only listed names from Brazil, and at the fourth table, half of the names listed were from Brazil, and the other half represented the remaining trans lives lost in the rest of the world. In 2015 alone, 59 trans Brazilians were killed, and this number does not include cisgender members of the LGBTQ community in Brazil that lost their lives to hate crimes. The statistic is stark enough that it has caught the attention of some predominantly white gay

media outlets: center-left publications like *The Advocate* reacted to this high number in an online article, and VICE's new television series *Gaycation*, which aired its first season in 2016 and is hosted by out actress Ellen Page, addressed the issue in the show's second episode, "Brazil."

With the real threat of death that looms over the queer people of Brazil in mind, I chose the debut film of out Brazilian filmmaker Karim Aïnouz, *Madame Satã* (2002), which was released only a couple years before Leung's essay on the relationship between New Queer and Third cinemas. The film easily passes the first and third tenets of a queer Third cinema that Leung outlines: it centers on an actual queer figure from Brazilian history, drag entertainer and capoeirista João Francisco dos Santos (Lazaro Ramos) in the 1930s who fought back against homophobia in his community, and the director slightly revises his narrative to cast him as flawed and angry but heroic and revolutionary; in addition, this fight is not just for his personal rights and acceptance, but he also fights to protect the queer family unit he has surrounded himself with—who are just as disaffected as he is, and maybe even more so, considering that they are not trained to fight in the style of capoeira like João.

What's a little more difficult to prove is the second tenet of Leung's list: "going against conventional paradigms of filmmaking" (166). Here, I want to turn to an early Third Cinema thinker and filmmaker who was also Brazilian, Glauber Rocha, whose 1965 essay famously articulated an aesthetic style contrary to the classical Hollywood film model. Rocha connects this aesthetic style of Third Cinema, and more specifically Cinema Novo, to the very real hunger of those living in poverty. To strive for this hunger on screen is to employ a stripped down, unembellished, and undecorated *mise en scène*

that doesn't glorify or add to the natural setting. He writes, "This hunger will not be assuaged by moderate government reforms and that the cloak of technicolor cannot hide, but rather only aggravates, its tumours" (Rocha 13). This aesthetics of hunger governs Aïnouz's film. Each frame is low-lit, and the film remains quite grainy throughout. The color palette—dull grays, greens, browns, and beiges—is actually less bright and colorful than some of Rocha's color films when placed side by side. The building in which João and his family reside is dilapidated: the rooms are more like enclosures and have dusty floors, paint-peeled walls, and curtains to demarcate separate living spaces. One scholar Marcus Welsh remarks that "there is no desire or attempt to make it glamorous or clean" (194). The only visuals in the whole film that are softer on the eye appear during the nightclub performances which feature a bluish beaded curtain, bright makeup, and vibrant, festive outfits adorned with jewels, though the nightclubs themselves match the dismal palette of the rest of the film.

Beyond color and scenery, though, there is one scene in particular that I think exemplifies an aesthetics of hunger best: while there are many erotic, and often violently erotic moments in the film, there is only one sex scene. It might be useful here to compare to how sex is depicted in the other more prominent gay and lesbian films of 2004, the year in which Leung was writing and that depict sex as one of two extremes (safe and steamy, or dangerous and deadly): in *Eating Out* (Q. Allan Brocka), the first of its franchise, sex is porn-like in its perfection, except when it's campy farce; *Mysterious Skin* (Gregg Araki) uses the metaphor of alien abduction to explore the trauma of sexual abuse and the dangers of sex work; and in *The Raspberry Reich* (Bruce LaBruce), described by the director as "terrorist chic," the erotic is a bizarre assortment of both

political propaganda and pornography. While the examples mentioned are perfectly valid creative decisions, it must be mentioned that *Madame Satã* is an unusually realistic sexual encounter in comparison, lacking metaphor or excess. João's room is enclosed with T-shirts and curtains and lit with one candle, leaving their faces almost completely in the dark, and a baby can be heard crying in the next room. Where a classical sex scene might be flawlessly rehearsed, their movements edited to be seamless and coordinated, João and his lover Renatinho (Fellipe Marques) fumble to remove their clothes for an awkwardly long amount of time, the movements are rough and uneven throughout, their blemishes and imperfections remain untouched, and the encounter ends with Renatinho attempting to steal a wad of cash from João's room. Welsh describes the escapade as situating "the viewer uncomfortably in the midst of intimacy," which speaks to the bare aesthetics of the scene that challenge and undermine the mainstream queer cinematic portrayal of gay sex (195).

While it is clear that *Madame Satã* is stripped down and dull in color, fulfilling Third Cinema's call for an aesthetics of hunger, there is one element of Rocha's essay that I have so far ignored: violence, which Rocha calls "the most noble cultural manifestation of hunger" (13). He envisions violence as a state of being for the hungry person, describing it as "normal behaviour for the starving" (Rocha 13). Cinema Novo, specifically, oriented from a Brazilian worldview, "teaches that the aesthetics of violence are revolutionary rather than primitive" (Rocha 13). *Madame Satã* engages this aesthetic element from a few different angles: not only does João have to push back against the violence of oppressive governmental structures, but he also must fight against the members of his local community in order to gain their acceptance (or at the very least, a

moment of silence from almost constant attack). Lugones explains that both kinds of violence I have mentioned here stem from the violent, colonial introduction of gender itself. João's antagonists are simply repeating the misogynist, homophobic metanarratives introduced by colonizing Western nations. At the same time, though, João himself exemplifies a significant amount of anger throughout the film; he quickly shows his temper, and rarely does a scene end without a fight. He even frequently lashes out at his own queer family members, barking orders at them to clean the floor or to fork over the money they have earned from sex work. Because of the abuse he inflicts upon them, it is surprising that his friends remain in his life, but it is revealed later in the film that João was kind and generous when they all met, offering the lost queers a safe haven from the streets. When his friend and roommate Laurita (Marcelia Cartaxo) directly addresses him, clearly afraid of how he will react to her question, he explains that his anger is a recent development. To her surprise, he is soft and meek in his response, unsure of how to communicate his confusing emotions.

The dual violences—those enacted *upon* João and also those enacted *by* João—are competing in the film. To explore how they interact, it is useful to borrow from the Third Cinema rhetoric of camera-as-weapon and identify the two weapons deployed in *Madame Satã*: bodies and guns. There are many bodily strategies at play in the film: for example, roommates/family members Laurita and Tabu (Flavio Bauraqui) earn a profit from their sex work while Tabu and João are both petty thieves, which in turn assists them in continuing to exist in the face of queer extermination. In addition, João is trained in the practice of capoeira, a highly skilled Brazilian martial art that infuses dance into combat and enables him to protect himself and his queer kin. He depends upon this

training when, after he and Tabu have completed a scheme in which they steal money from the wallet of a john, the police raid their home and attempt to arrest João. He verbally and physically resists, eventually climbing the rock wall behind their home and running away. But the most valuable bodily strategies for João in the entire film is the drag performance and his disidentification with movie star Josephine Baker.

At the film's opening, João is working for a nightclub in which a heterosexual female singer dances for and flirts with an excited, mostly male audience. Each night, she delivers the same set, a series of songs based on *The Arabian Nights* in which a mad king marries a different virgin each night and murders her by the next day. The pattern repeats until the Scheherazade upends the serial killings. João watches from behind the beaded curtains of the dressing room, mouthing every word of the song as she sings it. Later in the film, she catches him dressed up in her clothing as he sings the number. The interaction turns violent when she demands that he remove the clothes and hurls racist epithets at him. João finally gets his chance to perform toward the end of the film when he books a gig at the Blue Danube, a local dive bar that is slowly going out of business. He performs a song that is within "a deep-rooted lyrical tradition that characterized the [samba] genre in the 1920s and early 1930s," typically performed by a "malandro" (Shaw 96). A malandro, which translates to "rascal," is typically of a lower social class and a troublemaker—not a serious criminal, but more of an anti-hero. They are often celebrated in samba songs, and João tweaks the lyrics of the genre of traditional masculinity to parody its preposterous machismo. In addition, João does not fully participate in female illusion for the performance. He does not use makeup or a constructed outfit to give the appearance of breasts, nor does he "tuck," a common practice used in drag to hide the

performer's penis. He is purposefully blending masculine and feminine performances rather than striving for passability in either of the genders, which confuses Gustavo Sobero to the point of dismay in his essay, "Fear of the Trannies." He criticizes Aïnouz for his decision to maintain masculine qualities in João's performance because he reads it as a conventional choice to downplay the *bicha* femininity of the real figure Madame Satã. I read it instead as a radical visual decision that blurs the rules of gender performativity. The mostly heterosexual crowd is wildly shocked and delighted by the song and the jokes he delivers before and after. This is the first moment in the film in which he has a positive social interaction with his local community outside of queer subculture. He is finally presenting himself externally as he has fantasized himself internally throughout the film, and the reception is successful.

There is another level to this bodily strategy that Sobero fails to notice: disidentification. When one-time lover Benedito asks if he is a fan, pointing to the photo of Josephine Baker on his wall, João responds, "I am a son of Lansan and Ogun. Of La Baker, I'm a disciple." Before his performance, João and Laurita visit a film in which Baker dances and dazzles the audience, and it's implied that her performance there inspires João's. Because he is unsatisfied with the blanket representation of malandro as heterosexual in the samba genre, João turns to Baker for influence. Jose Esteban Munoz defines a disidentificatory strategy of both resistance and survival often deployed by queers of color, one "that works within and outside the dominant public sphere simultaneously" (5). João pushes back against the homophobic, oppressive notions of traditional masculinity by working both within and outside of it, creating a composite

representation of masculine and feminine performance. Munoz also stresses the tensions implicated in attempting such a performance on one's own:

There is a certain lure to the spectacle of one queer standing onstage alone, with or without props, bent on the project of opening up a world of queer language, lyricism, perceptions, dreams, visions, aesthetics, and politics. Solo performance speaks to the reality of being queer at this particular *moment*. More than two decades into a devastating pandemic, with hate crimes and legislation aimed at queers *and* people of color institutionalized as state protocols, *the act of* performing and theatricalizing queerness *in public* takes on ever multiplying significance. (1)

The bodily strategy of queer performativity is a valuable resource for João because he uses the stage as a very public outlet for quelling his political rage.

The other weapon that is deployed in *Madame Satã* is the gun. Early in the film, Laurita is enjoying a beverage at the bar when a client approaches her. When she does not return his attention and explains that she is off the clock, he accosts her until her consistent refusals cause him to attack. João quickly intervenes, and the brawl migrates to the street. The man pulls a gun on João, who is easily able to retrieve the gun and floor the man. He later expresses his opinion that a true man doesn't need a weapon like a gun to fight for him, an ironic statement considering that in the final moments of the film, he uses the gun on an intoxicated patron who begins to antagonize him after his performance at the Blue Danube. The man throws a number of racist and homophobic insults at João, questioning if he is a man or a woman. João remains mostly quiet, allowing the man to share his reactions and push him closer and closer to the wall. Fed up, João chases him

out the door and shoots him dead in the street with the same gun that he took from Laurita's attacker. Welsh reads the scene as a transformation in his character: after embracing a much more feminine performance in his stage number than he has presented in the rest of the film, he is perhaps "becoming less of a man," causing him to "[lose] control" (192). Welsh's observations fail because they revert to outdated notions of gender. Instead of relying on the predominantly white field of queer theory to construct an analysis of this scene, I turn back to Rocha's essay: "The moment of violence is the moment when the coloniser becomes aware of the colonised. Only when he is confronted with violence can the coloniser understand, through horror, the strength of the culture he exploits" (13). The exchange between João and the drunk patron is exactly this moment of violence. By this point, João has fought relentlessly against the police, against the members of his local community, and against the violent, oppressive rhetoric they use against him and his family of friends. From the beginning of the film to its final moments, his voice and his bodily reactions crescendo, becoming louder and louder until finally he feels he has been made visible through his stage performance. But after the realization that, even after his ecstatic moment, the violence will continue, João must make a noise loud enough to be heard—a noise that his body cannot produce alone, one that necessitates a gun.

João's series of struggles with violence could be read as an allegory for the positioning of the queer of color filmmaker located in the non-Western world. Similar to João's treatment by his local community and his national government, the queer of color filmmaker is rejected by both the revolutionary Third Cinema theorists and filmmakers and by the mainstream queer film industry that prefers the stylistic standards of the

Hollywood film model and the narratives of white bourgeois lives. While this might be a useful way to think about the battles that a filmmaker like Aïnouz faces, it does falsely place him as an isolated queer subject, which Ernesto Martinez warns of. Rocha predates Martinez with his assertion that “wherever there is a film-maker, of any age or background, ready to place his cinema and his profession at the service of the great causes of his time, there will be the living spirit of Cinema Novo” (13). In a similar argument, Martinez attempts to resituate the imagining of the queer subject communally rather than in seclusion. He calls this a “critical task of survival” for the queer of color artist’s “need to remind oneself that one has a name in the streets—that someone, somewhere, knows our name” (Martinez 136). On stage in the *Blue Danube*, João was named Madame Satã, a member of the community whose name was spoken again and again in the course of one evening. This occurrence, Martinez explains, is the sociality of queerness, a vital intervention in the tendency of white queer theorists to imagine a homogenous queer subject. In the second and third episodes of VICE’s series *Gaycation*, “Jamaica,” and “Brazil,” the dangers of being queer around the world are brought to light—dangers that are often ignored by white gay mainstream cultural production or exploited by the massive gay tourism industry that purports to offer “safer” travel to countries like Brazil for profit. Ellen Page finds herself in a dilapidated courtyard surrounded by very low brick walls in which a group of homeless trans and queer youth reside. The encampment is uncannily similar to the one in which João and his family of friends live. The group explains to Page how unsafe it is; over the four walls, locals throw an assortment of objects at the children and teenagers, ranging from less harmless rocks to more harmful flaming torches or small homemade bombs. One by one, each queer

person stands in front of the camera and points to the many bruises and burns they have on their bodies, narrating the frightening stories behind each one. They are the João, Laurita, and Tabu of 2016, and the violence inflicted upon the characters of *Madame Satã* is very much alive in the neighborhoods of Brazil today. To queer Third Cinema, then, is to resist and survive both the historical and contemporary colonial violences enacted upon queer of color bodies globally by tending to the queer social relations at the communal level.

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## CHAPTER V

### RECLAIMING QUEER HISTORY IN ZINES AND COMICS: An Investigation of Race, Class, and Gender in the Judy Garland Myth

“I think anyone with a critical mind can figure out that no one throws trash at the police  
over Judy Garland.” – Mike Funk, *PQ Monthly*

The history of the Stonewall riots of June 1969 is often misrepresented, and a number of myths surround the weeklong event. One myth in particular, the notion that the death of Judy Garland that same morning inspired the rioting, continues to pervade our collective historical memory. Even recently, a graduate student in our Gender and Women’s Studies department told me that she had just learned this new fact from the popular podcast *You Must Remember This!*, which presents historical research of the lives of the stars of classical Hollywood cinema in narrative form, and she was shocked when I corrected her newfound information. The myth seems mostly harmless: it’s a rather charming idea that is nice to believe, even if it isn’t true. Judy Garland was a celebrated gay icon; her starring role in *The Wizard of Oz* inspired an elaborate gay code that helped many people navigate a closeted society (for example, when gay bars were still illegal in the U.S., many would name themselves after references to the film, like “The Yellow Brick Road,” so that other gays and lesbians could identify safe/safer locations); and

many myths and stories continue to be told about Garland, like her supposed proclamation upon hearing Barbara Streisand's voice, "I am never opening my mouth again," which contributed to the passing of the mantle of gay icon to the young performer.

What is often lost in this web of cultural myth is that Judy Garland was an icon largely for older, upper-class, cisgender, white gay men, and her influence in the community stems from holding the attention of the most influential demographic within it. The idea that her death could be linked to the riot also points out another of the misguided narratives: the Stonewall riots were not incited, or even supported, by this demographic, and if anything, older, upper-class, cisgender white gay men worked actively against those who participated in the riots, who were mostly young and homeless, and many of whom were trans, gender non-conforming, and/or people of color. Years after the event took place, a number of gay publications recognized the myth that had developed and issued corrective narratives as early as 1989. One of these was Frances Negron's 1994 essay in *Gay Community News*, in which he pushes back against the idea that the riots were a conflict between the police force and "a group of non-'politicized'" and "straight-looking" gays (a nonviolent group that was provoked to action, of course) and replaces it with an account of "the participation of gays of color and transvestite gays in both the US and Puerto-Rican based gay and lesbian movements" for whom "violence is part of everyday living" (Negron). Ignoring this account of history only operates in the service of transphobic, classist, and racist ideologies that continue to oppress, and recognizing it is vital to moving forward. Even though recent films like Roland Emmerich's *Stonewall* (2015) both whitewash and ciswash this history, there is

an alternative history that has been cultivated for much longer than Emmerich's work by underground artists, particularly in the production of zines and comics, that offer the LGBTQ community new narratives for correcting and understanding the history of queer riot and protest.

With the queer community's increasing online presence, it's a wonder that Emmerich has managed to avoid—or simply ignore—the wealth of essays that have criticized the whitewashing and ciswashing of fictional works. For his film, Emmerich chose a cis white male lead to frame the story as its protagonist: Danny Winters (Jeremy Irvine), a young gay man from a suburban Indiana town whose dreams of Columbia academics are squandered when he is caught giving oral sex to a male friend. After, he leaves his upper-middle class family to pursue a less restricted life in New York City. He quickly becomes acquainted with a group of trans and GNC PoC sex workers who are mostly homeless and find homes to sleep in to avoid sleeping on the streets of Greenwich Village. Their home bar, the Stonewall Inn, is a dingy dive but a safe space for the group—when it's not being raided by police. Danny's character has no historical basis and is completely fabricated for the purpose of the film's plot. On the other hand, two of the characters in the group are based in fact: Ray (Jonny Beauchamp), a genderfluid/femme male sex worker, is Danny's guide to street life and is loosely based on Sylvia Rivera, a Latina trans woman who helped initiate the 1969 riots, while Marsha P. Johnson (Otoja Abit), another trans woman who contributed, also makes an appearance, though she has very few spoken lines. The third trans woman of color who helped initiate the riots, Miss Major Griffin-Gracy, is completely erased from the version of history that the film presents. To make matters worse, Danny's character is the first

agitator in the film: after the police have raided the bar, Danny yells at the gathering crowd to take action, and he is the one to throw the first brick—a horribly inaccurate and inadequate retelling.

After the trailer for the film was released online, Emmerich received a flurry of negative feedback from bloggers, critics, and fans. It must be noted that Emmerich is a major Hollywood director, and unlike other modes of storytelling, such as zines and comics or even low-budget films, big-budget Hollywood films are expected to present a simple, satisfying narrative that translates to a wide audience, especially if it wants to make back its money. Emmerich must have felt this pressure, but instead of recognizing his dilemma, he refused to engage with or even entertain the notion that he might have misrepresented historical facts. When doing press for his more recent film *Independence Day: Resurgence*, Emmerich was asked in an interview about the criticism, to which he responded:

My movie was exactly what they said it wasn't. It was politically correct. It had black, transgender people in there. We just got killed by one voice on the internet who saw a trailer and said, this is whitewashing Stonewall. Stonewall was a white event, let's be honest. But nobody wanted to hear that any more. (Bernstein 2016)

There are a number of problems with this statement. Critics' issue with the film is not that black, trans people weren't present; it's that the one black, trans character remained in the background, her perspective entirely ignored. While the whitewashing and

ciswashing of history is the primary myth that the film perpetuates, another remains that Emmerich seems entirely unaware of: the film upholds the common but misguided belief that the riots were the birth of the gay liberation movement, when in fact, Stonewall was a culmination of anger and resistance that had built up over a decade of riots and protests, including the Cooper's Donuts riot in 1959 and the more well-known Compton's Cafeteria Riot of 1966, only three years before Stonewall.

Despite the contemporary prevalence of such misguided myths, underground artists and writers have been working for many years to correct and reverse the oppressive narratives. Because of their low production costs, zines and comics have been the primary artistic mode for pushing back on stories like Emmerich's. Other critical work has pointed out the role of zines in the dissemination of queer history and identity formation. Katrien De Moor's 2005 essay in *Cultural Studies* praised certain zines like *Diseased Pariah News*, known as DPN, for questioning and subverting popular tropes of HIV/AIDS patients through dark humor: "As in many of the narratives presented here, rather than providing a mere portrayal of possible subversions, writing in and of itself functions as a sick role subversion and a form of cultural activism" (738). De Moor draws from Foucault's notion of genealogy, which "can bring to light the 'insurrection of subjugated knowledges' and contribute to the re-appearance of 'local, discontinuous, illegitimate knowledges'" (749). It is for this reason that zines can serve to push back against the prevailing knowledges that misinform and erase and instead highlight the "subjugated knowledges" that are forgotten in the process.

There are four zines (ranging from 1995-2005) and one very recent comic that I want to present, all four of which do the work of pushing back on whitewashing,

ciswashing narratives in some way. The first is the 1995 publication *Smeg Dog* in which each issue is a collection of stories either written by the zine's multiple authors or submitted by its readership. Some are true stories written in essay format (many of these are accounts of sex work), others are erotic fictions, and scattered throughout are reader-submitted nude or partially nude photos, money-saving recipes for brewing one's own liquor, and advertisements for upcoming events in the queer community. In this particular issue is a story titled, "Stonewall 25: Banned From the Inn," referring to the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the Stonewall riots and that begins with regret: "The monuments are marketplaces now" (Ken 11). The author recounts their first visit to the Stonewall Inn, expecting an inspiring experience; instead, they and their friends find that the street, which the city has renamed "Stonewall Place" "isn't there anymore, but the building is, and the new bar has a plaque on the front telling what it was" (Ken 11). They describe other details that have been changed:

The outside of the building is tacky as fuck, with fake cracked and peeling plaster arranged a little too perfectly to allow you the mistake of thinking the current bar is a  
dive like the Stonewall was. The windows aren't covered with boards or roll gates,  
but the glass is smoked dark enough to afford the clientel privacy. And of course, tastefully arranged bouquets of rainbow flags (the ones without the extra, black stripe, of course). Very chic, very elegant. (Ken 11)

The black stripe the author references used to be a memorial for those lost to AIDS and

was added by some queer activist groups that insisted upon including the stripe until a cure was found, though the contemporary interpretation of the black stripe is a reference to the leather subculture—another symbol lost.

Giving up on visiting the original dive, “Where It All Started,” the group still has hope: they know from rumors that there might be a room in the back of the new establishment that features materials from the original dive bar in a museum-like display, but they “don’t really know. We weren’t allowed in” (Ken 11). Because of their “crusty hawk” punk appearance, the bouncer denied them entrance, and they resorted to “the darkness” of the Tunnel Bar, where they were welcomed to heal after the insult to “what was once a hangout for drag queans [sic] and street hustlers, fags of color and other assorted rejects and outcasts,” and which “was now off limits to three queer punks” (Ken 11). The essay serves as a coarse elegy for a monument that was overtaken by creeping gentrification: the powerless group of queer punks won’t be able to bring back the Stonewall, but they can preserve the history of their moment through writing and zine-making. The original location might not exist, at least with the same atmosphere and welcoming mission, but the change from dive to elegance can be permanently recorded for future students of queer history like myself.

Other zines prefer to rely on image over narrative. *Homomilitia*, a 2000 publication, features pages covered in collages of images with bits of text randomly laid across or beside them. This zine continues the tradition of criticizing whitewashing, ciswashing Stonewall histories by placing images of the riots and a “STONEWALL WAS A RIOT” poster next to the tagline: “not a cocktail. not a fashion show. not a hot sex party. not a gay credit card” (Smith 43). In addition, on the bottom half of the page is

a photo of two white gay men with tucked-in polo shirts, standing behind a picket fence with the text, “‘WE’RE JUST LIKE YOU.’ sexist.racist.classist.” (Smith 43). The juxtaposition of the image and text rejects the increasing commodification of queer riot and protest symbols for the benefit of corporate capital—ideas that inspired certain activist groups to create “alternative pride” excursions that celebrate markers of ethnic, gender, and sexual difference rather than featuring corporations marketing to upper-class, cis, white gay men (which contemporary pride parades still frequently practice).

In 2005, two zines dedicated entire issues to interrogating popular queer historical narratives. In the first issue of *Out of the Closets and Into the Libraries: a collection of radical queer moments...*, The Bangarang Collective explains the gap in their knowledge of queer history. After learning about the White Night riots and the assassination of Harvey Milk, the author chided their older queer friends and mentors for not educating them, who responded, “you don’t know these histories because a lot of people that could tell these stories were either murdered by homophobes or murdered by AIDS” (The Bangarang Collective 4). The creators of the zine then set out to present a history that is not “complete and definitive” for “such a goal is neither possible nor desirable,” but to celebrate the “difference (race, class, gender, ability, citizenship, etc [sic]) that is often violently erased by mainstream identity politics based organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force”—a project that is “integral and necessary to queer liberation” (The Bangarang Collective 4). It is unequivocally clear that their zine intends to place trans, GNC, and/or PoC queers at the forefront of queer historiography.

What is most revelatory about the zine is that it does not prioritize the Stonewall

Riots over any other riot or protest in queer history; instead, it presents a mostly chronological narrative, devoting one page to each phenomenon, while also including abstract artifacts such as “gay shame,” “a virus in the system” (The Bangarang Collective 11). The Stonewall Riots aren’t mentioned until the thirteenth page (out of only 16 in total), which highlighted the police abuse in the neighborhood and throughout the event and also was careful to include that conflicting witness accounts claim that the riot was either started by Sylvia Rivera or by “a lesbian,” who is rarely mentioned in fictional retellings of the event (The Bangarang Collective 13). On the final page, they discuss the political organization started by Rivera and Johnson after the week of rioting, S.T.A.R. (Street Transgender Action Revolutionaries). In addition to their activism, the group set up a home for homeless trans, GNC, and queer youth which was purchased from the Mafia (who had close ties with the queer community in the neighborhood), and Rivera and Johnson would reportedly provide food to the teenagers and young adults through sex work—additional information which is often ignored in works like Emmerich’s film.

The last zine I will discuss is similar to the one written by The Bangarang Collective in its goals. *Shame on Pride!*, a 2005 publication, frames their issue by defining the word “co-opt”: “To neutralize or win over (an independent minority, for example) through assimilation into an established group or culture: *co-opt rebels by giving them positions of authority*” (Abuzar 3). This definition refers to the commodification of pride parades mentioned earlier in the essay, which presumably inspired the title of the zine. It can also refer to homonormativity, which scholars like Jasbir Puar and Michael Warner have addressed in attempts to call out the privileges pertaining to race, class, and gender that are present in the queer community but often

ignored (*Terrorist Assemblages; The Trouble With Normal*). Essentially, Abuzar is calling attention to the ways in which queer activism has toned down its message in order to maintain coherence in the social and political order. Minor changes and adjustments are made in order to silence the community's demands, while systemic problems concerning oppressed communities within the queer community are ignored. But the inclusion of the definition of "co-opt" can also refer to the other forces that have the power to control how that message is presented to the rest of the U.S. For example, Abuzar includes a collection of headlines from 1969 that misrepresent the riots with headlines like, "4 Policemen Hurt in 'Village' Raid" and "Hundreds of young men went on a rampage in Greenwich Village after 3 A.M. yesterday" (2). The creation of the *Shame on Pride!* zine is an attempt to resist homonormative moves by taking back, or reclaiming, queer historical narratives.

Abuzar opens their version of the Stonewall story with the clear statement that it was "by no means the beginning of the gay movement" but an "ongoing struggle which has taken on different forms over a period of centuries" (13). Rather than presenting the riots as a starting point, Abuzar instead claims that they are a turning point in the movement that worked "to usher in a new era of militant struggle in the gay movement" (13). The riots also marked a turning point in the rhetoric of the movement as well, from "we want to be accepted" to "we are not going to take it anymore" (Abuzar 13). Their retelling of the Stonewall riots and the effects on the queer community doesn't end in 1969, however. They list the many ways in which trans, GNC, and/or PoC folk have been silenced and erased: first, trans women were kicked out of the Gay Activists Alliance, which also removed their concerns from their civil rights agenda, and second,

drag and trans rights were erased from a proposed bill in NYC “to make it more acceptable” (Abuzar 14). They quote Sylvia Rivera from a 1995 interview who explained that “when things started getting more mainstream, it was like, ‘we don’t need you no more’” (Abuzar 14). The zine ends its section on Stonewall by providing a recent example the author had witnessed: at a Toronto Pride event, police were hesitant to arrest a protesting individual for public nudity because it had never been done in Toronto. While the police watched, choosing not to intervene, it was one of the organizers of the parade that insisted upon it, a moment which marked the first arrest for public nudity in the city (according to Abuzar). This is an example of the deep-seated divides in the queer community: often, those with power, placed at the top, are resistant to change and prefer silent assimilation over cultural preservation.

The four zines I have detailed in this essay offer a variety of correctives, unique angles, and new stories to add to the historical canon of information surrounding the Stonewall riots. None of them offered complete, finished histories that start with a clear beginning and finish with a clear end; rather, they offer queer histories that resist linear narratives and allow for inclusive accounts, giving voice to the previously silenced or unheard. Comic artist Mike Funk decided to continue this project in 2013, after noticing that the harmful, oppressive myths surrounding the Stonewall riots continued to prevail. To combat this, he developed a short but succinct account of the story that packed a lot of information into a set of panels less than 20 pages—an effort to make it accessible and easily distributed. Funk’s retelling begins with the connection between the gay bars in Greenwich Village and organized crime. Local Mafia affiliates owned many of the gay bars, including the Stonewall Inn, and paid off police officers so that they wouldn’t be

shut down. The arrangement gradually disintegrated when new vice squad commander Seymour Pine “cracked down on NYPD corruption” (Funk 2). Police began using queer people to meet their arrest quotas and began enforcing ridiculous laws, particularly one that each citizen must wear at least three items of “gender appropriate” clothing in public (Funk 3).

According to Funk’s narrative, on the first night of the riots, the police raided the Stonewall, a practice that had become common. Funk quotes Sylvia Rivera’s account of the evening, as police emptied the dive bar and lined up patrons on the sidewalk: “Faggots over here, dykes over here, **freaks** over here, referring to my side of the community. The queens and the real butch dykes were the freaks” (3). Those patrons whose gender expression didn’t match the identity listed on their IDs were arrested and often abused, and as identity checks continued, one officer “shoved a drag queen,” prompting a negative reaction from the crowd (Funk 4). Next, a “dyke dressed in men’s clothing resisted arrest,” and after being tackled by cops and arrested, she shouted, “Why don’t you guys **do** something?” (Funk 5). After another drag queen smacked an officer with her purse after he made a taunting comment, “the crowd began to throw pocket change, rocks, and broken bottles at the police,” a move “initiated, however, by street queens like Sylvia and her friend, Marsha” (Funk 6). After the crowd formed a “riotous mob,” police officers locked themselves inside the bar and waited for reinforcements. While Johnson climbed a pole and threw rocks at cops, supposedly breaking a windshield, a “tactical police force (a militarized police unit the city invested in to combat racial uprising in Harlem)” arrived, and the crowd “linked arms in a chorus line and sang. We are the Stonewall girls, we wear our hair in curls!” (Funk 10).

Funk is careful to conclude his retelling by setting the record straight on the Judy Garland myth:

The mythology of Stonewall began before the streets were cleared. The *Village Voice*

joked derisively that the riot was caused by Judy Garland's death. Though many gay

men had attended her funeral earlier that day, the pop icon was not an urgent concern for

the gender variant sex workers and homeless kids who slept in the park across from

Stonewall. (Funk 11)

The myth, widely believed by many members of the queer community and by many historians today, is not only false, but created by a journalist in an effort to write a homophobic joke. Funk claims that because of this one transgression, "many publications wrote about it as an uprising of white gay men," and explains that "journalists picked an angle, and soon, so did history" (12). While this might be giving too much credit to the power of one journalist, the basic progression of events is quite believable: the juxtaposition of a gay icon's death with a riot in a gay neighborhood became strongly linked in collective memory, both inside and outside of the queer community.

Funk's comic captures two more elements of the Stonewall history that are often left out as well. First, there were a number of organizations populated by upper-class, cisgender, white gay men, particularly the Mattachine Society, "seeking to make homosexuality 'respectable,'" who were unhappy with the riots. According to Funk,

Randy Winters of the Mattachine Society said, “Screaming queens forming chorus lines and kicking goes against everything I want people to think about homosexuals... that we’re a bunch of drag queens in the Village acting **disorderly** and **tacky** and **cheap**” (12). Often, Stonewall histories don’t include that many gay male activists were actively working against efforts by Rivera, Johnson, and others. Emmerich’s film includes a character named Trevor (Jonathan Rhys Meyers), a member of the Mattachine Society who goes undercover to infiltrate the Stonewall Inn. He falls for Danny and convinces him to move in with him but then breaks his heart after Danny catches him with a younger man. Ray manages to make a couple digs at Trevor’s political beliefs, though the film doesn’t explore this much deeper. And in the final scene, Trevor is inspired by Danny’s rousing speech and joins in the riot. Where Emmerich fails to capture the hateful rhetoric of Mattachine members, Funk is able to fill in the gaps. The second element that Funk incorporates is black trans woman activist Miss Major Griffin-Gracy, who is quoted in the comic as saying, “Don’t listen to the hype about Stonewall 1969. Black transgender women were on the forefront fighting for our human rights. And we are still fighting for our rights” (14). Her inclusion in the comic is important, as it is the only time I have seen her name mentioned in any artistic account of the Stonewall riots—whether through film, literature, zine, or comic. Her contributions to trans, GNC, and queer activism in the neighborhood were vigorous but are often ignored.

History is often reshaped and reformed until it serves the purpose of a particular fictional device, and often, these moves are necessary for certain stories to be presented to wider audiences. It could also be said that historical fiction doesn’t necessarily carry a responsibility to remain perfectly accurate because its overall purpose is to entertain and

not to inform. When this refashioning becomes problematic is when it is employed to assist in the erasure of narratives of oppressed communities, and in some cases, like the Judy Garland myth, the damage is (so far) irreparable. In an interview with *PQ Monthly*, Funk explains why he believes that forms like zines and comics are apt for telling the stories of oppressed people: “because it’s a medium that is at once marginalized and accessible” (Ginelle). He asks, “If novels that center gay characters don’t sell, and if movies are too expensive to make in the first place, how many other story telling options have you got?” (Ginelle). It is unmistakable that, in the case of the Stonewall riots of 1969, zines and comics have been vital to correcting trans, GNC, and/or PoC narratives that have been misrepresented in retellings of queer history and to disseminating diverse and inclusive accounts of these events in easily accessible forms.

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## CHAPTER VI

### UNSETTLING A QUEER ETHICS OF CARE

“Homosexuality is an infectious appetite with personal and social consequences. It is like the dog that gets a taste for blood after killing its first victim and desires to get more victims thereafter with a ravenous hunger.” – psychologist Paul Cameron, 1988 newspaper column.

From its inception, queer theory has been interested in the project of disrupting stable, fixed understandings of nature. As early as his 1976 work *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault recognized that biopolitical regimes exerted the power to cast normative sexual practice as acceptable modern behavior, and any deviation of the normative was identified as being “against nature” (“Queer Ecology”). Certain ecocritical scholars, like Catriona Sandilands, have introduced these queer theoretical concepts to existing scholarship in the field of ecology in an effort to advocate for an environmental justice approach that also pushes back against prevailing heterosexist forms of discussing and depicting nature.

In her monograph on queer ecology, Sandilands’ beginning point is the interest of evolutionary researchers who situate the queer subject, who does not always participate in biological reproduction, as degenerate, and she points out that Havelock Ellis wrote in

1905 that “one might be tempted to expect that homosexual practices would be encouraged whenever it was necessary to keep down the population” (“Queer Ecology”). Since the 1990s, scholars in this field have been exploring these possibilities, often locating many overlaps between the struggles for environmental justice and queer rights.

While queer ecological scholarship is vast and varied, from pushing back against homonormative pursuits to justify queer deviance by locating nonnormative behavior in animal sexual practice to the investigation of myths linking queerness and urban life, more recent scholars working in the broader field of queer theory have begun to reconsider the boundaries drawn between human and animal, nature and culture, leading to questions like, “Has the queer ever really been a human?” While queer theory has only recently experienced its nonhuman turn, Native studies has always been firmly rooted in its concern for the land, and one of its central projects is to prioritize the many varied Indigenous epistemologies that have not always been considered in mainstream environmental justice movements. In *GLQ*'s quite lengthy 2015 dossier on “Theorizing Queer Inhumanisms,” Kim TallBear reminds us of the importance of Indigenous knowledge in theories of the nonhuman:

First of all, indigenous peoples have never forgotten that nonhumans are agential beings engaged in social relations that profoundly shape human lives. In addition, for many indigenous peoples, their nonhuman others may not be understood in even critical Western frameworks as *living*. “Objects” and “forces” such as stones, thunder, or stars are known within our ontologies to be sentient and knowing persons. (234)

Queer ecology occasionally recognizes this: for example, in Sandilands' monograph, she briefly makes note of the toxic effects of pollution on Indigenous communities. In the same dossier, however, Jinthana Haritaworn finds that this engagement with Native studies has been inadequate, and the *Indigene* has remained largely nonexistent. They argue that in order to theorize inhumanisms in a queer context, one must engage Native studies for its attention to the actual populations of people that are affected by toxic polluted environments and disease because of the history and continued presence of racist and colonialist systems of oppression. Haritaworn advises that a project of decolonization must also prioritize a critique of anthropocentrism and how centering the human operates as "colonial discourse" (213).

In order to begin addressing this gap, I want to take up one particular strand of queer ecology put forth by Nicole Seymour in her 2013 book *Strange Natures: Futurity, Empathy, and the Queer Ecological Imagination*. Her overall project is to push back on environmental justice rhetorics that privilege reproductive ideologies:

I would insist that there are ways of thinking about the here and now that are, in fact, crucial: the belief that environmental devastation is a *possibility*, rather than a current and impending *reality*, or that we have to clean up the planet for *future* generations, rather than for *present* ones, allows for the kind of complacency that authorizes such degradation in the first place. (Seymour 10)

Often, such movements garner support for environmental policy reform by championing a patriotic, heterosexual future. Instead of saving the planet for the future children of the U.S., Seymour argues we should save the planet *for* the planet itself. To begin the kind of work she describes, she develops a queer environmentalist mode by analyzing fiction that

connects “the queer to the natural world” and that explores the relations between “oppressed humans (including working-class individuals and people of color, in addition to queers)” and “oppressed non-humans (degraded landscapes, threatened natural resources, and other flora and fauna)” (Seymour 1). What she discovers in these fictions is that human empathy for the nonhuman develops out of shared oppressions—what she calls a queer ethics of care. I would like to add to the scope of her productive interventions by also considering Native fiction that depicts the human and the nonhuman as interconnected. By adopting her approach to examine two scenes in Anishinaabe author Gerald Vizenor’s 1990 novel *Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles*, I hope to demonstrate some of the many potential “sites of slippage” when an Indigenous ethics of care is situated both with and against a queer ethics of care (McHugh 153).

### The Instability of Identities

*Bearheart*, a post-apocalyptic parody of *The Canterbury Tales*, is a complicated choice for such a project: set after the collapse of the American civilization due to a depleting reserve of gasoline, Proude Cedarfair and his wife Rosina are forced to abandon their reservation after government workers begin to harvest the cedar trees from their land. They embark on a violence-riddled journey across the ruins, which is as much about the expedition as it is about the starving, dying, disabled, and diseased plant, animal, and human lives that they encounter and attract along the way.

The first site of slippage, then, is built into the setup of the novel itself: in the way that queer theory has always destabilized fixed notions of identity, some Indigenous

authors like Vizenor, who self-identifies as “mixedblood” and is an enrolled member of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, have also never placed full trust in those notions. In his 2011 article, “Wiindigoo Sovereignty and Native Transmotion in Gerald Vizenor’s *Bearheart*,” Christopher Schedler posits Vizenor’s incorporation of the wiindigoo mythical figure as a critique of the exclusionary and assimilating processes of literary nationalism, a literary movement which foregrounds the very real political issue of tribal sovereignty. Vizenor does not contest tribal sovereignty but expands it: because sovereignty was given to Indigenous peoples by the U.S. and is thus an extension of settler colonial power, “He sees the inherent Native rights of presence, motion, and survivance on this continent as an ‘originary’ form of sovereignty, which is sustained through treaties but is not limited by them” (Schedler 36). In response to the literary nationalist movement, Vizenor introduces the concept of “Native transmotion” as an alternative sovereignty to one that he sees as restrictive, and the traveling protagonists of *Bearheart* exert this political agency when they are forced to leave their reservation behind. The “breakdown of the U.S. nation-state,” Schedler argues, is also the breakdown of “state-based nationalism” and the prevailing thesis of the literary nationalist movement—that these tribal identities are fixed and stable (37). Instead, Vizenor often writes characters who present “multiple tribal and ‘crossblood’ identity associations” and find themselves “far from tribal homelands and still on the move” (Schedler 35). Schedler turns to the wiindigoo, a creature that suffers from physical and spiritual famine and appears in many oral stories, including those of the Ojibwe, Cree, and Blackfoot tribes, to offer a reading of the novel’s cannibalistic tendencies.

Depreciated of all gasoline and food reserves, many of the novel's characters turn to cannibalism (both humans eating other humans, but also humans eating animals that are a crucial part of the interdependent ecosystem and are thus also legitimate members of Indigenous communities), which Schedler interprets "as a warning to those members of the tribal collective whose excessive self-identification, lack of vision, and binary view of the world target them as easy prey for such [...] forms of sovereignty" (37). In the same postmodern moment that scholars like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Judith Butler are interrogating the pervasive fixity of the gender binary, Vizenor draws from Indigenous oral traditions to criticize the binary mindset of literary nationalists.

#### Shared Oppressions

The second site of slippage emerges when one situates the two histories of oppression of queer and Indigenous communities, just as Seymour draws comparisons between the oppressed queer human and the oppressed nonhuman. Queer theory, and gay and lesbian studies preceding it, was of course born out of a response to discrimination against queer folk based on heteronormative assumptions of sex and gender expression, and the oppression of Indigenous peoples by colonial settlers was often also based on these assumptions. If one examines this occurrence in the context already put forth by Vizenor's novel, then a review of the history of the development of sexual attitudes might expand Schedler's reading of it. In her 2014 article "Animal Appetites," Leah DeVun begins with exploring solutions to the question "what crucial quality separates 'us' [humans] from 'them' [animals]?" and ends with a critique of "sexual difference as an analytic tool" (461). For medieval authors, the stability of normative sexual practices hinged upon the following: "A binary and stable sex, a singular means of reproduction,

and a restricted set of possible sexual acts” (DeVun 462). In addition, what differentiated humans from animals, and also prioritized humans over animals, were the distinctly different, rigidly defined sexual roles: “(male) ‘activity’ and (female) ‘passivity’” (DeVun 463).

Of course, the existence of intersex individuals (what medieval scholars would have called “hermaphroditism”) troubled these notions philosophically: these individuals quickly became associated with the East, grouped into “a long-lived tradition of the so-called monstrous races, humanoid creatures with extraordinary anatomies and customs who were thought to reside in Africa, Asia, or at the very eastern edges of the earth” by authors such as Pliny the Elder, Augustine of Hippo, and Isidore of Seville, and appeared in works like *Wonders of the East* and *Mandeville’s Travels* (DeVun 466). Intersex folk were often depicted as “not only monsters but also prostitutes, eliding atypical sex and hypersexuality,” or as having “supernumerary protuberances and orifices,” “excessive or mixed-up sex, as animals did,” and “excessive, animalian appetites” (DeVun 467, 475). Finally, they were often depicted as cannibalistic. This created a repository of deviant sexualities from which one could distance from and served to “bolster Christian and European identity as the human ideal” (DeVun 476). It is no surprise, then, that colonists who settled in Latin America were heavily influenced by such an “intellectual heritage” and continued this rhetoric by casting Indigenous people as “hermaphroditic or sexually deviant, often in terms borrowed directly from the legends of the monstrous races” (DeVun 477-8). Seymour supports these claims by aligning queer and Indigenous oppression based on nonnormative sexual practice: “the forces that malign queer sexuality as ‘wasteful’ and ‘unnatural’ are often the same that wreak destruction against

nature and humans,” and she also adds that “it is often through homophobia, not just sexism or racism, that such domination operates” (167). Settler colonialism, then, is not only powered by embedded structures of sexism and racism, but also heterosexism, cissexism, homophobia, and transphobia.

*Bearheart* presents a motley cast of characters who exemplify the “repository of gender trickery” in a variety of expressions (DeVun 467). Along their pilgrimage, Proude and his company arrive at the Sacred Order of Gay Minikins, a word meaning “small” and “insignificant” or “prim,” “delicate,” or “dainty.” In this case, they are an order of homosexual priests who have taken numbers as names following their initiation rites and who have been rejected by both church and state—neither organization recognizes the legitimacy of their gathering. Because they have run out of gasoline and have been robbed of their food supply, the priests are left to gradually die together of starvation. When Proude and his band of travelers arrive to the order, the priests are described as moving “with grace over the white carpets in the spacious rooms and halls,” and when the First Father speaks, “thin” and “weak from malnutrition,” he is “pressing the graceful sounds of lips each slow word over his tight lips” (Vizenor 59-60). In Vizenor’s rendering, the gay minikins are clearly feminized. The women of Proude’s band are comfortable with the men, and Proude remains very respectful of their hospitality throughout his interactions with them; however, Bigfoot has trouble coming to terms with the situation and asks First Father, “What could be worse than starving to death in the arms of two queer old priests?” And with a “hostile sweep of his hand,” First Father responds, “If you must know, my little queer clown saint, [...] we have suffered less in the hands of ourselves and other men than in the wicked arms of church women”

(Vizenor 60). The sacred order collectively feels their alienation from society: even when demonstrating hospitality, the priests remain reserved and somewhat hostile toward the men, unlike their sometimes jovial embrace of the women.

When the priests share their last meal with the visitors, they reveal, only after eating has ended, that they “have shared the last of their sacred minikin flesh” as Father Nine and Father Sixteen stand and begin to chant “their strange homosexual litanies” (Vizenor 63). Proude and Rosina have demonstrated throughout the novel their refusal to partake in cannibalism, and Proude is clearly upset with the trick that the priests have played on them: when leaving the sacred order, “He did not speak. He did not thank the minikin priests but nodded from a distance to them as he walked out of the house” (Vizenor 64). The priests have been systematically excluded from participating in normative life: their sexual activity is not reproductive, and it is repulsive to both the church and the state; each visitor or passerby has avoided, attacked, or robbed them; and finally, when they invite a friendly group of travelers to dine with them and sacrifice their remaining food supply, the visitors refuse to partake in their method of consumption and must be tricked into doing so. Instead of being accepted, they are treated by the men as degenerate and with disgust. This scene depicts a failure to build coalitions on the basis of shared oppressions, though there is potential for this exchange in the way that women respectfully and empathetically interacted with the gay priests prior to their meal.

#### Kinship and Domesticated Nonhumans

Proude and Rosina’s anxieties over consuming human flesh surface again when they are asked to partake in eating nonhumans that have been domesticated. Here,

another site of slippage is revealed: in a queer ethics of care, empathy for the nonhuman is central, but this has also always been central in some Native understandings of kinship. When Proude and Rosina arrive at a scapehouse populated by a clown-like leader nicknamed Bigfoot, whose gestures are often “twice his actual size,” they also meet an eclectic crew of thirteen women poets, known as “weirds and sensitives,” among other animal and plant lives: “Cats were poised on the shelves and mantelpieces. Birds were perched on the thousand plants and trees and hundreds of rails and posts and roosts in the fragrant demigreen house. Insects sounded from the potted earth” (Vizenor 35). Proude’s first reaction to the domesticated plant and animal life was, “The outside is inside” (Vizenor 36).

In the microcosm of the scapehouse, cannibalism was “practical”:

“The women agreed that their bodies would be their food. The women eat what is known, what and who is part of their lives in the scapehouse, the plants and animals, and so their lives are continued in the cellular consciousness of the living energies in their scapehouse.” (Vizenor 37)

Proude and Rosina, however, are appalled by their intentions to eat the animals with which they have made close acquaintance. When Sister Tallulah points out that Proude has not eaten the stuffed kitten but only breads and vegetables, Rosina responds, “We do not eat . . . meat which has not been praised” (Vizenor 44). An argument ensues, incited by the butcher, who contests that the necessity of caring for the animals that one intends to slaughter. While Proude and Rosina are concerned that the animal would be struck by

fear and surprise at the moment of death, the others insist that the animals are intelligent enough to know that they will eventually be killed and consumed.

Proude and Rosina prioritize an Indigenous ethics of care, one that harkens back to Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice's notion of Native kinship, in which "relationships extend beyond the human to encompass degrees of kinship with other peoples, from the plants and animals to the sun, moon, thunder, and other elemental forces" (151). Here, the kinship that Proude and Rosina express overlaps with what Seymour identifies as a queer ethics of care: she insists that "there are ways to care about the natural, ways to expand the social, and ways to think about the future, that are not heteronormative" (10). Kinship offers an ethical ecocritical approach that does not rely on heterosexist imaginations of future that prioritize reproduction. Seymour argues that a queer ecocritical approach can expand "not definitions of *humanity* but [...] definitions of *what deserves care*," and I argue that Native kinship can also do (and has already been doing) this same work.

### Queer Indigenous Non-Reproductions

The empathy for the nonhuman that Proude and Rosina articulate extends into another potential site of slippage: the notion that life does not always have to be reproductive in order to be generative—instead, reproduction should be decentered in order for other intensities to emerge. Often, environmental justice platforms are built on campaigns for heterosexual futurity: we must save the planet for our children and their children and so on. Seymour disagrees with this discourse:

Reproductive life as we normally imagine it (insemination, growth, birth and rebirth, etc.) is not the only kind of vitality to be found in any given ecosystem, and second, that interactions between the human and the non-human might be reclaimed as erotic, and as queer, in the most positive of senses. (168)

A queer ecological approach, then, would advocate for nature not because of what it might offer humanity but *because of* its nonhuman status—something both queer and Indigenous individuals can relate to because of public discourses that subject them to processes of dehumanization.

While staying at the scapehouse, Rosina spots the eldest “weird and sensitive” woman, Sister Willabelle, who is known as “the survivor,” bathing in the pool. She asks Rosina to massage her back and neck. Rosina began to assist until finding “the deep scars, rippled and discolored flesh on her neck and shoulders” (Vizenor 39). Sister Willabelle sensed her distress and recounted the event that gave her the scars. Rosina learned how she was in a plane crash and woke up in the jungle to find her mother dead and her own body beginning to decompose:

“Worms covered my body and fed on my tender parts. The worms wormed through the openings in my ears and nose and vagina. I could feel them crawling inside of me . . . Then, when I crossed the river to a tribal village on the other side, hundreds of fish grabbed at the worms and took parts of my flesh with their razor teeth.”

(Vizenor 41)

Out of compassion, Rosina made herself feel across the scars and “the rough hard flesh”; as she did, Sister Willabelle began to moan, as “the skin was so tight in places that it turned white when she moved her arms and neck” (Vizenor 40). When asked if she was afraid of nature, Sister Willabelle replied, “No, not now . . . I am never alone here because we are survivors protecting ourselves from our fears and past memories” (Vizenor 41). Other women joined them in the pool, and they began to massage each other as they slowly submerged into the water. The sensual experience presented here is non-reproductive, positive, and queer. Sister Willabelle has experienced the worst dangers of both nature (the worms and the fish) and culture (the plane crash), yet she does not have any fear of nature, and instead, embraces it. Vizenor’s account of the affective, erotic entanglements between these women and nonhumans is further evidence that an Indigenous ethics of care has much to offer a queer ethics of care, particularly in its ability to create positive affects and initiate positive erotic exchanges that don’t necessarily participate in a nationalist politics of futurity.

For Sandilands, a queering of nature opens up possibilities to interrogate the so-called “certain ‘truths’ about ourselves [that] have been allowed to pass, unnoticed, without question” (22). What queer ecology has yet to adequately address is that these false truths don’t only have negative impacts on queer individuals but also the working-class, people of color, Indigenous communities, and the environment itself. Nature is often deployed in the service of a number of oppressive discourses. Consider how the far right often blames violent natural acts of destruction such as hurricanes and floods on the vitality of the queer community. In one instance, evangelist Cindy Jacobs of Generals International claimed that the mass deaths of blackbirds in Arkansas were probably

connected to the repeal of DADT, explaining that “often, nature itself will begin to talk to us” (Advocate.com Editors). Seymour has developed a dynamic critique of such hurtful rhetorics and replaced them with a queer ethics of care that is positively inclusive and future-minded without prioritizing reproductive ideologies. However, her project can be extended by taking into account the many offerings of Native theories and literatures to discussions of environmental racism, sexism, and homophobia. Continuing to engage with Native studies is a necessary ethical move for queer ecology, one that might open up possibilities for a queer ethics of care that also unsettles the queer subject’s settler status.

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## CHAPTER VII

### NOT QUITE SATISFIED: Theoretical Curiosity and *Queer Africa*

On Feb. 16, 2017, James Charles, who made history as the first male spokesperson for Covergirl makeup products, posted a conversation between he and a friend to his Twitter as they were embarking on a study abroad trip to South Africa. Charles asks, “I can’t believe we’re going to Africa today omg what if we get Ebola?,” to which his friend responds, “James we’re fine we could’ve gotten it at Chipotle last year” (Lucas). Twitter users were quick to clap back, criticizing Charles’s ignorance in a flood of responses and mobilizing a boycott of the Covergirl brand. Charles wrote a long apology on his Instagram account shortly after landing (in South Africa, a country that had no outbreaks of the virus). His display of problematic humor showed his lack of understanding about the continent of Africa. What’s also troubling are the other Twitter users who responded to Charles with jokes like, “that’s like saying all gays have AIDS” (@wallahi). Many were right to point out that this second type of response perpetuated the notion that queerness and blackness are interpellated as distinctly divided and separate discourses from each other: queerness is deracinated (assumed to already be white), while blackness is assumed to be heterosexual. This division allows for both jokes (Africans have Ebola, and gays have AIDS) to exist as commensurable constructions.

Despite such exchanges in popular culture, queer African writers are performing the artistic labor of repairing the prevailing narratives that perpetuate ignorant misunderstandings like James Charles's, as well as his respondents on Twitter, who would whitewash queerness. In the introduction to the 2013 anthology *Queer Africa: New and Collected Fiction*, editors Karen Martin and Makhosazana Xaba write that they spent three years assembling the stories in an effort to “[reflect] and [imagine] for us the kaleidoscopic variety of queer lives on our continent” (vii). The editors view these stories as “queer African imaginings” that have the effect of colliding “vastly different conceptual universes” and that push back on the ill-founded imaginary whereby there are no queer Africans (Martin & Xaba ix, 3). Martin and Xaba hope that the collection highlights queer African differences rather than commonalities. This way, the multiple portrayals of queer African lives can work together to “productively disrupt, through the art of literature,” the dominant narratives that hold power over queer African lives, while still prioritizing the reality that while queer voices grow stronger, “terrifying violence, often sanctioned by the state, plagues queer people” (Martin & Xaba viii). In light of the failed humor of figures like Charles, it becomes an urgent task to recover the archive of queer African lives expressed in the fiction in order to declare not only the survival of queer Africans but their varied forms of thriving existence.

While there is immense variety represented in *Queer Africa*, there is also one particular thread that unifies many of the stories in the collection. Again and again, curiosity emerges as a particularly forceful affect in many different individuals: the insatiable, anxious curiosity of tourists and non-queer Africans orients them toward queer African bodies in attempts to know and understand them. In the collection, insidious

curiosities appear in both the public and private spheres, and these can often become destructively violent. Problematically, curiosity is often wrongly offered as a solution to the exclusion of or inadequate engagement with queer of color critique. For example, after James Charles revealed his colossal ignorance on Twitter, he was encouraged to educate himself by becoming more curious about the actual lived experiences of Africans. Curiosity, then, is prescribed as a cure for one's lack of awareness or knowledge. After tracing the operation of curiosity by recovering moments from the stories in which curiosity reveals itself to be particularly anxious and damaging to the individuals, curiosity can be distinguished from objectification because of its unceasing drive to satiate (and its inability to deliver the desired satisfaction). This overall project also identifies how theorization is integral to the process of curiosity: for instance, when Charles was uninformed about Africa and the spread of ebola, he assumed, or theorized, that any part of Africa might be contagious. Furthermore, an interrogation of curiosity must also require a closer examination of how white, U.S.-based queer theory also enacts this process of curiosity through its unending theorization of queer of color bodies.

### Tracing the Psychological Stages of Curiosity

While curiosities with queer African bodies vary across the collection, what they all share is an insatiable drive for knowledge. The curiosity of local members of one's community can sometimes have the most devastating effects on the characters found in the *Queer Africa* collection, and often, this curiosity can become violent, as reflected in "Chief of the Home." Written by Ugandan author Beatrice Lamwaka, the story presents a

troubled narrator; having been displaced from their Acholi community in the Alokolum village of Uganda, the narrator feels the burning need to share Lugul's story, a gender non-conforming (GNC), assigned-male-at-birth (AMAB) resident of the village who confuses their family, friends, and neighbors with their gender presentation. Lugul performs many of the roles assigned to women and more: Lugul would cook, but they would also fetch water or carry firewood if asked. Theories about Lugul abound in the village: some think Lugul is possessed by spirits while others believe they just need a woman to teach them how to be a man. Another theory, which the narrator questions, is that they "only had a penis, but that wasn't enough to make you a man" (Lamwaka 160). Lugul eventually becomes the peace keeper of the village, rushing to a woman's aid if she were beaten by her husband or simply sharing dinner with other families, showing gratitude for the food. In spite of their helpful, caring behaviors, Lugul remains a curious sight in their community, and men tease them, joking that they should come join the men in drinking to prove once and for all that they are a man. One man calls out, "Lugul come and drink alcohol with your fellow men," which Lugul ignores: "You didn't say anything when one man, drunk with *arge*, said, '*Lugul obedo dako ma lacoo*, Lugul is a woman man" (Lamwaka 162). Throughout their day-to-day life, Lugul continues to patiently ignore the taunts and withstand the invasive, curious questions, stares, and whispers.

Research in psychology offers a foundation for the operations of curiosity as an affect and for understanding this exchange between Lugul and the local men, who first experience a desire to understand Lugul and then act out on that desire in search of satisfying their curiosity. In their 2005 essay, "Curiosity and the Pleasures of Learning: Wanting and Liking New Information," Jordan Litman asserts that curiosity is often

defined as “a desire to know, to see, or to experience that motivates exploratory behaviour directed towards the acquisition of new information” (793). The desire to satisfy one’s curiosity is similar to the desire to satisfy one’s need for food or sex in that its need can be satiated with “experiences of reward” (Litman 793). Because of its potential to rid oneself of “undesirable states of ignorance or uncertainty,” needing to know something which one does not know can be quite unbearable. This dynamic is apparent in the locals’ inability to fully accept Lugul: before they can establish a relationship with Lugul, they need to know and understand their body—to obtain the experience of reward that would be finally knowing this information.

Psychologists have long depended on the curiosity drive theory, which is focused on the desire for reduction, to explain how curiosity operates in individual subjects, and I find that anxiety is a central affect in this larger process of curiosity. Any amount of reducing one’s curiosity, or need to know, also reduces one’s “unpleasant experiences” of uncertainty (Litman 794). The more “novel, complex, or ambiguous” the desired information is, the more pleasurable the experience of satisfying the curiosity. At issue is coherence: ignorance causes one’s coherence to be disrupted, but acquiring the desired information can relieve that disruption by restoring coherence (Litman 794).

In Lugul’s case, their ambiguity incites a disruption in the coherence of the ordinary lives of local citizens and causes them to feel anxious due to the public presence of their queer body and behaviors. Indeed, an important aspect of the affective process of curiosity, according to Litman, is anxiety: “because [new and unusual] stimuli may also indicate potential danger, if some degree of threat is perceived curiosity and exploration may be inhibited by unpleasant states of anxiety” (797). Anxiety is so deeply embedded

in the established gendered labor of Lugul's community that the narrator remembers how his father warned him not to befriend them: "My father said boys should not be close to you because you will teach them how to cook, that you didn't know that being near the cooking fire will burn your penis" (Lamwaka 160). The father frets over what he doesn't know and understand. This passage highlights how Lugul's mere existence throws into question many of the commonly accepted beliefs in this community—in this case, gendered labor. In this moment and throughout the story, the presence of Lugul's queer body in the public sphere provokes the anxieties of others to the point of them ultimately being rejected from the community. If curiosity, the drive to restore coherence, is allowed to increase long enough, the anxiety of the curious individual accelerates, and relief is only gained by abjecting the object of one's curiosity.

Eventually, Lugul's presence became too much to bear, and some locals' curiosity grew into violence. After displacement due to wartime, Lugul leaves for another village, Gulu. There, they take on a similar role, performing many of the same duties for the locals, until one day, "the soldiers shot you with six bullets because they suspected that you were a spy" (Lamwaka 162-3). The soldiers were unable to categorize Lugul into one gender, and this confusion, or incoherence, provoked their curiosity. Suspicious, and even anxious, about what to do with Lugul, the soldiers determined that they must not really be a part of their community—a spy. After Lugul's murder, the villagers in Alokolum do not accept Lugul's remains, so they were buried in Gulu. The narrator, visiting the gravesite, questions the locals' decisions, asserting his belief that Lugul should be remembered as a hero—their story to be told around the fire in future generations and after the war has ended: "Today, I will call you my hero because you did what you wanted to do"

(Lamwaka 163). In Lugul's case, the desire to restore coherence to their local community was too much for the soldiers to bear, and the only way to get closer to that coherence was to take Lugul's life.

The editors of the collection call "Chief of the Home" a "love story" in that it recovers "the most frightening and rejected part of the self," which is "a radical revision of the world" in their view (Martin & Xaba 7). While the narrator works diligently to restore respect for Lugul's memory, it remains that they were rejected by their local community—an object of both scorn and judgment but also of curiosity and anxiety. The need to know about Lugul's body and the need to understand was never resolved, and even Lugul's community, who were helped by them, worked with them, and ate with them, was unable to reconcile their memory with their uncertainty—the anxiety that remained after their curiosities were left unsatiated and unanswered.

#### Violence and Partially Satisfied Curiosity

"Chief of the Home" suggests how the process of becoming curious, especially becoming curious with queerness, can be one of annoyance, frustration, uncertainty, and most definitely anxiety. It begins with the realization of ignorance: you notice that you don't know something, that something exists that you haven't yet learned about, and suddenly you feel a desire to know whatever that missing information is. As Daniel K. Cho explains, the curious individual misunderstands something fundamental about their own curiosity: the assumption is that one will discover absolute or total knowledge that will then satisfy and relieve the subject, "as if research were an all or nothing enterprise," but this is misguided (201). What occurs instead is "partial satisfaction" (Cho 202).

Dennis Whitcomb finds a useful comparison in hunger: in the same way that one can continue to feel hungry even after nourishment, “perhaps curiosity is not always sated when you perceived believing the truth,” resulting in “a continued attempt to sate the desire after it has already been sated (more eating, more inquiry)” (Whitcomb 668, 674). The frustration and uncertainty are a response to one’s world becoming incoherent, and the anxious curiosity will only be satiated when one’s world has been restored to its previous state of (supposed) coherence.

But when it comes to affirming cisgender expressions as the ideal, this previous state of coherence is impossible to achieve, and thus, curiosity can never really be satiated. What the curious subject is hoping for is the supposed satisfaction of receiving that new bit of knowledge, but unfortunately, only partial satisfaction awaits. What begins instead is an unending process of partial satisfaction—needing the coherence of your worldview to be restored, though it’s unlikely that it ever will be as coherent as it once was. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler defines this as heterosexual melancholy, the basis for the formation of one’s gender performance. In this scheme, the heterosexual identifies with and repudiates the homosexual: the heterosexual melancholy is the “melancholy by which a masculine gender is formed from the refusal to grieve the masculine as a possibility of love” (Butler 285). In “Chief of the Home,” Lugul is like Butler’s drag queen, who allegorizes this process of melancholia. Because Lugul does not conform to a cisgender identity, and thus a stable gender role in the community, they must be repudiated in order to restore the cisgender ideal. Lamwaka’s story demonstrates how curious individuals grapple with always being left in a partially satisfied state and the extent to which this partial satisfaction can become violent. In addition, it exhibits a

curiosity with queer Uganda bodies shared by Western audiences who participate in the fantasy of Ugandan homophobia and transphobia but manages to subvert the dangers of this curiosity by placing its focus on the actual lived experience of a queer Ugandan, Lugul.

“Chief of the Home” circulates in a global culture in which its description of the exile and murder of Lugul risks affirming Western stereotypes that the queer Ugandan is always disappearing or dying. These stereotypes are perpetuated by discourses that provide just enough information to leave the Western gay interested but only partially satisfied. Such accounts of Ugandan homophobia and transphobia like this one have also been a site of fascination for Western academics and are imbued with their own affects. Currier and Migraine-George thoroughly document in their essay how Western academics have frequently practiced “Afro-pessimism,” assuming that queer lives in Africa, particularly in Uganda which has received most of the attention, are more at risk than other queer lives, mostly because of (threatened and real) antigay legislation. This attitude perpetuates the “colonialist, racist tradition of imagining the area [...] as a continent in crisis that lags far behind ‘progressive,’ industrialized nations in the global north,” but that paradoxically has to be continually studied to reaffirm this supposedly unified theory (Currier & Migraine-George 281). This nationalist discourse surrounding “the international fascination with ‘African homophobia’” brings about two major problems: first, it ignores and erases the extensive work by local gay rights activists and the existence of local gay communities, and second, it increases the risk for violence upon the local queer community because African national governments often look to them as the cause for inviting Western attention and criticism, especially when Western

organizations threaten to rescind aid if antigay legislation and language is not repudiated (Currier & Migraine-George 282). Through this application, it becomes clear that Western curiosity is not a responsible or adequate engagement with queer African discourse; on the contrary, it is a shallow, imperialist interest that feeds the appetite of Westerners with just enough information to be partially satisfying, while in reality, queer African lives are literally endangered by Western intervention.

Other scholars have noted the affects present in the political process of Afro-pessimism, but an inclusion of curiosity might develop this reading further. In his 2012 article, "Queer Africa and the Fantasy of Visual Participation," Tavia Nyong'o charts the affects of African homophobia as represented by the Western world. Responding to *The Advocate's* September 2010 cover story, "Get Out of Africa," which is a cheeky and problematic reference to the film *Out of Africa* meant to garner the attention of white, middle-class gay men for whom actress Meryl Streep has become an icon. Nyong'o finds that these representations rarely have a referent point: "This ambiguity doesn't need to cohere into a stable or singular interpellation, insofar as its primary objective seems to be the broadcast of ambient affects of worry, alarm, and imperative" (46). The urgency of the threat of African homophobia increases exponentially by remaining imaginary rather than real, depending on "a presymbolic image of threat or lure" (Nyong'o 50). Nyong'o's examples are the political petitions specifically responding to Ugandan homophobia that continue to increase, particularly those that include very few concrete facts.

These petitions initially attract their Western gay audience by inciting curiosity about the dangers of queer Ugandan life, but they hold their attention by obscuring lived experiences. Nyong'o argues that these messages have achieved viral status by "the

deliberate reduction of information,” a key component, as we have seen, in the affective process of curiosity and the development of the curious subject (49). Similar to Cho and Whitcomb’s explanations of partial satisfaction, Nyong’o identifies in Afro-pessimism a “negative feedback loop” that continues to seek satisfaction without ever fully obtaining it (49). Concrete and factual information would end white queer Western fascination with queer Africa, but blurring the truth keeps their audience satisfied just enough to continue sharing their petitions on social media. As Whitcomb reminds us, truth is not necessary in this loop of partial satisfaction, only the perceived sensation that one is close to the truth. Through this act, Western gays can distinguish themselves as separate from figures like James Charles, who remain ignorant and uncurious and refuse to seek out the “truth” of queer Africa.

“Chief of the Home” both contributes to and subverts this phenomenon: it does repeat the concerns of the many accounts of Ugandan homophobia but it actually provides a symbolic referent point. Nyong’o points out how when queer Ugandan lives are usually figured into mounting concerns surrounding Ugandan homophobia and transphobia, they are plugged into a preexisting narrative: “Ugandan LGBT folk are depicted through the metaphor of the closet, globally and transhistorically construed and, through that metaphor, placed at a prior point in a historical development that the West has already progressed through” (Nyong’o 50). This maintains the illusion of progress in the West by having a referent point for the lack of progress, which obscures the truth of queer Uganda, and this is only achieved by keeping white queer Westerners partially curious about the plight of queer Ugandans. Instead of continuing this narrative, Lamwaka’s story pushes back on it by grounding Lugul’s account in the lived experience

of a queer Ugandan body. It manages to subvert the imaginary threat (of worry, alarm, and imperative) propagated by Western gays and replace it with the actual threat of rejection by Lugul's community. After encountering Lugul's story, it becomes easier to understand how a highly anxious curiosity can lead to disinterest in the actual survival of queer Ugandans. In Gulu, non-queer Ugandans needed Lugul dead in order to restore coherence to their community, after their curiosity ended in violence. A queer Western political agenda, however, repeats this process in a different way. Because Western gays, caught in a negative feedback loop, are more interested in maintaining viral status, they are disinterested in the reality that their involvement leads to increased threats against queer Ugandan lives. Their curiosity always remains partially satisfied, in which one opts to continue sharing petitions and expressing an empathetic concern for queer Ugandan lives without actually acting on such a concern or pursuing an ethical and adequate engagement with the realities of queer Uganda.

#### The Temporal Difference Between Objectification and Curiosity

It is easy to conflate the two processes of objectification and curiosity. In "Chief of the Home," for example, Lugul is only ever treated as human by the narrator who recovers their story, and the ways in which local members of the community discuss Lugul's body actively reduce them to object status. This sort of dehumanizing objectification occurs at the political level, too: the ethnocentric gaze of white queer Westerners expressing their alarm and concern over the threats that queer Africans face ignores the actual needs and desires of queer Africans. In both of these cases, though, objectification has a specific endpoint. While objectification always achieves its goal, the

temporal difference of curiosity is that it can never fulfill its desire and is thus unending. Furthermore, while objectification erases the humanity of its object, curiosity does not. Rather, it collects subjects of curiosity: subjects on the other end of curiosity who are displayed for examination, used as tools for education, and whose bodies become sites of potential knowledge for the curious individual.

Recent scholarly work in queer African studies has paid close attention to the effects of an ethnocentric gaze, but after encountering the stories in *Queer Africa*, it's clear that the kinds of curiosity that the stories foreground can deepen and expand this conversation in a number of interesting ways. In their 2016 essay, Ashley Currier and Therese Migraine-George explore the possibilities of a queer African studies, an elision that seems impossible considering that both "'Africa' and 'queerness' are largely manufactured or 'invented' to both provoke and satisfy Western normative fantasies" (287). The danger is that "African queerness can be similarly described as an orientalist construction in which 'other' bodies become imagined and simultaneously erased as that obscure object of (Western) desire" (Currier & Migraine-Gorge 287). In this light, the objectification of the queer African body also erases that body, which suggests a finite end. However, as I suggested in the previous section, curiosity does not have such a clear end on a chronological timeline. Curiosity provides the gazer with both an anxious uncertainty that inspires one to seek out the new information and also with little bits of partial satisfaction, so that one's curiosity is never really satiated. Viewing this process as unending also reveals how queer African bodies are affected when they are not permanently erased but instead maintained as objects of curiosity (who are also subjects).

This temporal difference in curiosity—that one’s desire to know never truly feels satisfied—is often most evident in the collection’s erotic accounts. Written by Dolar Vasani, a queer Indian Ugandan who writes erotic lesbian fiction with her partner in Tanzania, “All Covered Up” follows Dr. Carmen Fernandez on a business trip where she meets Fatma. Carmen is stricken with confusing desires for the Muslim women she sees upon arrival, and her descriptions of their clothing and accessories are painful for me as a reader, expressing her overwhelming fascination specifically with the pieces that can be exoticized. For example, she always begins her analysis of their dress with the color of their hijab before being overtaken by their “cinnamon” scent, their “total black” eyes, or their jewelry “dripping in gold” (Vasani 68). After a number of meetings, lunches, and excursions filled with sexual tension, Fatma visits Carmen in her hotel room to supposedly return her cell phone. When they finally embrace and then begin to undress, Carmen is bursting with the desire to uncover Fatma: “My curiosity to explore her body is overwhelming and my hands start discovering this uncharted and hidden territory,” leading her to say out loud to Fatma, “I’ve never navigated a *buibui* before” (Vasani 76). Carmen is literally grappling with the forceful drive of curiosity here. For her, this is not her normal erotic practice. Rather, she has chosen an erotic context to satisfy her curiosity with Fatma’s presentation, and this is made clear when she expresses that she does not see the *buibui* as another piece of clothing but one that has something to be learned about. Fatma’s *buibui*, like Fatma herself, is both a possible site of education for Carmen and is also bound up with Carmen’s sexual desires. Carmen is then delighted to find “lacy lingerie” underneath as well as a “henna tattoo” on her stomach (Vasani 76). Carmen’s sexual desire for Fatma’s physical body is rooted in her curiosity to know and understand

both the culturally specific objects that adorn her body and also the body itself. Finding the lingerie, a more sexually explicit piece of clothing, underneath the buibui only provides Carmen partial satisfaction and fuels her curiosity even more.

While Carmen is stuck in a loop of partial satisfaction that cannot ever really be sated, Fatma is negatively affected by this exchange, insofar as she is objectified. This might be understood by how Livermon explains that in order for black queers to create livable lives for themselves, black queers must struggle for visibility through what he calls “cultural labor”: “Visibility refers not only to the act of seeing and being seen but also to the process through which individuals make themselves known in the communities as queer subjects” (300). It is ultimately through recognition, he argues, that black queers become visible. I would expand his argument to the private sphere: in Fatma’s case, she must perform the cultural labor of educating Carmen about her body. In Livermon’s words, both women’s bodies are marked “as the constitutive outside of blackness” for being queer, but Fatma’s body is doubly marked for being queer and Muslim. Carmen employs Fatma as a site of learning potential that might satisfy her curiosity about queer Muslims and their erotic experiences. Through comments that remind Fatma that she is marked by difference because of her clothing, Carmen places the responsibility on Fatma to perform the labor of satisfying Carmen’s curiosity, and Fatma is never truly able to make herself fully seen in their erotic exchange.

Becoming a subject of another’s curiosity is perhaps different than being objectified in that Fatma’s own desires are virtually erased by Carmen’s unending curiosity. Fatma’s body only served as a tool for Carmen’s education on queer Muslims, and subjects of curiosity like Fatma are continually taken advantage of as potential sites

for the acquisition of knowledge. One of the stories in *Queer Africa* demonstrates this ongoing process by situating one character's experience of being objectified by her peers next to her experience of becoming a subject of curiosity for a passing tourist. In "Lower Main," South African author To Molefe explores the relationship between two friends sitting at a small café on Lower Main Road. The narrator, Dee, notices that the streets are more packed than usual, and a particular pair catch her attention:

Two tourists, a man and a woman, appear to be out of place. They gawk at each person they see. How do I know they're tourists? I don't. But just look at them.

He's wearing

inappropriately short shorts, floral print shirt and a camera around his neck. She's wearing tan capris and a tight, sleeveless knitted sweater. The man stops to take pictures

of bergies passed out with their mouths open outside the liquor store. If this were my first

time on Lower Main, I'd be shocked to see someone taking pictures of homeless drunks.

But it's not. So I'm not. (Molefe 53-4)

Dee's friend Madz has recently broken up with her girlfriend Tee-Kay, and as she details the breakup, Dee continues to return her attention to the quirky and invasive behavior of the tourists. Madz explains that she stopped bathing for days, with no explanation really, but Tee-Kay didn't even notice, or maybe didn't care. While Madz demonstrates the level of her uncleanliness by pointing out her dirt-caked arms, Dee watches the tourists as they stand outside a hair salon to gawk at the poster outside and then later peer into a tattoo

parlor as a girl receives a bellybutton piercing. Madz snaps the narrator back from her gazing at the tourists to explain to her the psychological depth of her breakup: she feels different, for as she becomes dirtier on the outside, she feels cleaner on the inside. She tells Dee of how she ran to the beach and jumped into the water once her skin felt like “crude oil,” swimming out as far as she could until she thinks she blacked out (Mofele 59). After Tee-Kay found her passed out on the beach, Madz is different, and the change causes the end of their relationship. Dee understands, explaining that after bathing, the cleanliness/dirtiness was reversed, causing her to appear filthy to Tee-Kay. At this revelation, Madz pulls Dee’s forehead to her lips and “a warm, woolly silence engulfs” Dee (Mofele 59).

Time freezes until Dee is pulled back to the outside world by the realization that the tourists had settled in at the table next to them. Once they realize that Dee has realized them, they “trade furtive glances,” stow away their notebook and camera, and pretend “not to have been taking photos” of the two (Mofele 60). In this moment, Dee realizes that she has become subject of curiosity for the tourist. As a queer African woman, she is recognized by the tourists as something missing from their knowledge, and they attempt to satisfy their curiosity by taking her photograph. Photographing has a specific racialized history: Rinaldo Walcott, when considering the possibilities of freedom for black queers, demonstrates how the black body marked as nonhuman by a “science of spectacle” (149). He references Susan Sontag’s assertion that “images of suffering have become central to our contemporary human life” and points to the archives of photographs of black men’s lynched bodies through which the white self can identify with fellow whites (Walcott 151). The photographs of Dee can later serve as proof of the

tourists' education when they are disseminated to their white friends. The tourist gazes through the photographic lens at Dee in an attempt to satisfy their curiosity and learn more about her, and the experience, though not explicitly spelled out for the reader, is similar to and situated against her previous work as a nude model for visual artists and photographers. Often, the art students would gawk at the size of her body or make passing comments under their breath. But even though their mocking comments are more obviously sinister, she was less perturbed by them than she is by the tourists. While on display for the students, she is not involved in the process. She is simply another object in the room that can be painted, one that chose to be there voluntarily. However, her pain and frustration with the tourists is more evident in the story because they have ignored her desire to be left alone. It's not that the tourists' curious fascination hurts Dee more than the taunting art students but instead that her feelings are erased in the art classroom. In the exchange with the tourists, however, she becomes a tool for their ongoing education: they will later return to their photographs of Dee, which will invoke positive feelings in them about how they once traveled to Cape Town to learn more about the diverse range of African lives—an interest that doesn't end when art class is over.

#### Conclusion: Theorization and Curiosity as Creative Affect

So far, I have traced an affective process of curiosity in the individual (one realizes one's ignorance, one seeks the knowledge to replace it, and one is caught in a loop of only ever being partially satisfied), and I have also highlighted some of the experiences of becoming someone else's subject of curiosity (Lugul/his local community, Fatma/Carmen, Dee/tourists). But one crucial element of the affective process of

curiosity remains to be directly discussed: theorization. In between feeling the initial pangs of curiosity arise and locating a subject of one's curiosity is the act of writing theories about what the missing information might be. For example, in "Chief of the Home," I noted that "theories abound" about Lugul's gender identity and expression. Until community members could figure out how to categorize Lugul, they generated all sorts of theories about what Lugul might be, resulting in myths and stories that were passed around the community. In this sense, curiosity can be considered a creative affect in that the curious individual creates theories about what the missing knowledge is—a notion taken from Cho's findings when he traces curiosity all the way back to Freud's first essay in his dossier *Papers on Metapsychology*, "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," which he claims provided "the first modern theory of curiosity" (200).

Lugul's story reveals how theorization operates as a part of the process of curiosity in curious individuals, but the act of theorizing is also a part of a larger problem that this essay intends to identify: curiosity, through a politics of recognition, is often offered as a solution to the ignorance of white queer figures like Charles and non-queer Africans who reject their queer neighbors. Scholars like Currier and Migraine-George, as recently as last year, have argued that scholars of queer studies and African studies should remain rooted in the corporeality of queer African bodies—their histories, their affects, their identities, their engagements with the world. They call for those working in queer African studies "to account for the shifting agility of resistant bodies, for their experience of intimacy and pleasure (dating, partying, romance, and fantasy) as well as for their strategic ways to fight pain and suffering (homophobia, discrimination, abuse, taunting, threats, and torture)" (Currier & Migraine-George 293). They argue that this

careful attunement to the erotics of queer African lives can begin to subvert the ethnocentric gaze:

Our treatment of “corporeality” resists the fetishization of the African body that subtended European colonization and its phantasmic imprints on African sexualities. Instead, it describes dynamic sites of affective transaction between discourses and their material impact to account for the moving trajectories of bodies caught between material locations and theoretical dislocations, objective experiences and subjective representations. (294)

They point to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s work as an example of the kind of fiction to which scholarship should turn—one that recognizes the humanity of its African characters by incorporating their sexuality. Ironically, Adichie’s recent comments in interviews on the inclusion of trans women in feminism have been criticized for their erasure of trans experiences because of her assertion that trans women benefit (or have benefited at some point in their lives) from male privilege. Nonetheless, theoretical work, in their view, can assert the humanity of queer Africans by embracing their lived experiences and “the link between sexuality and humanity,” particularly by paying close attention to “the fantasies and desires of queer Africans rather than the fantasies and desires imposed on them by colonizing discourses” (Currier & Migraine-George 295). While much ground can be made from the reclaiming of erotic practice and the discourse surrounding it, the problem I see with this solution, however, is that this same theoretical work is implicated in the processes of curiosity critiqued in *Queer Africa*. These stories suggest how damaging this process can be for those that find themselves to be the subjects of another’s curiosity (queer Africans), and an incessantly curious, constant

theorization of queer African lives does not seem to deliver on its promise. Keguro Macharia's recent essay reflects this claim, in which he explains how he has reached the point of disinterest in colonial histories that forcibly introduced Western models of sex and sexuality and instead places his interest in "how different black people across multiple geohistories have co-imagined each other and attempted to create a shareable world" (186). Productive imagination, in his perspective, might have the potential to subvert Western curiosities. Macharia rightfully expresses his cynicism at the actual possibilities of enacting such a shift, but this doesn't negate the need for imagining a shareable world.

Many other scholars have been grappling with the problem of a white, U.S.-based queer theory that has identified queer of color critiques as a subject of curiosity. Alison Reed recently wrote that racialized bodies are uncritically depicted as "spectacular markers of queerness," which enables "(white) queer theory as a discipline [...] to understand itself" (49). The queer subject, automatically assumed to be white at the moment of being interpellated as queer, then performs a "discursive blackness": by being queer, one feels they can shed their privilege, resulting in white queers "who discursively align themselves with a racialized otherness fetishized as a counterhegemonic way of being in the world" (Reed 53). Her explanation provides a model for understanding how the foreign tourists, the non-queer Africans and the white queer lovers who appear in the stories of *Queer Africa* are all attracted by the curious excitement of "the stranger," in Sedgwick's words: the queer African body becomes a tool for curious exploration and education, and in doing so, one can (falsely) identify with the spectacularly queer body.

There is a long tradition of curiosity with queer of color bodies in queer scholarship that is as well-intentioned as the tourists who snap photos of Dee. The process begins with the realization of one's ignorance and a desire to fill that gap in one's knowledge, and until it reaches its conclusion, it continues to generate theories of what that missing information might be, never fully satisfied or left feeling adequate. What's at stake in this process is the queer Africans who become queer theory's subjects of curiosity, mutually exchanging information under unequal power relations. Clearly, recognition of queer African lives is not enough to end the unending process of curiosity, and this essay highlights the need for new forms of writing, of theorizing, and of knowing that are attuned to the vulnerabilities of an incessantly curious state, in which partial satisfactions lead to partial engagements with queer of color critiques.

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## APPENDICES



VITA

Dakoda Smith

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: NOT QUITE SATISFIED: THEORETICAL CURIOSITY AND *QUEER AFRICA*

Major Field: ENGLISH

Biographical:

Education: BA in English, Oklahoma City University, December 2013

Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts in English at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May 2017.