

“I’m a Mountain Biking Vampire Witch From the Future!”
Queer Decolonial Killjoys in Queer Studies and Politics

by

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Abstract

This thesis asks how queer scholarship and politics will maintain a radically queer critical edge, specifically an unsettling, decolonial approach that does not take for granted the continuance of queer liberal and settler colonial structures. A longstanding debate in queer studies and politics is the tension between queer assimilation vs queer radicalism. However, even the radical unsettling approaches that discuss radical queer futurity (Muñoz, and Edelman) often do not centre the important context of settler colonialism, even while critiquing normativity and imagining better futures. So how do we locate examples of imaginings of queer *decolonial* futures: ones that account for settler colonialism? To find out, I chose to examine selected performances in specific popular “silly archives of unhappy feelings,” and found complex examples of uncanny, at times monstrous, performances by artists (Trixie Mattel, Katya Zamoldchikova and Miss Chief Eagle Testickle). These artists, I argue, exemplify and embody the characteristics of what I call “Queer Decolonial Killjoys” (QDKs). Building on Ahmed’s concepts of “Feminist Killjoys,” and “Unhappy Queers,” I demonstrate that the artists I discuss not only unsettle gendered, sexualized, and racialized norms (à la Ahmed), but that they also act as *Decolonial* Killjoys because they use complex performative strategies to also critique settler colonialism and queer liberalism. Their performances, I suggest, also gesture to important possibilities of queer and *decolonial* futures. Finally, I argue that the performances of QDKs can remind queer studies scholars to become more comfortable with being *uncomfortable/unsettled*, and may help us to learn how to begin imagining radical queer *decolonial* futures.

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**Chapter One:
Introduction**
Unsettling Settler and Race Unconsciousness in Queer Studies and Politics



Figure 1: Trixie and Katya in *UNHhhh. Beauty Tips Pt2*

Over the past year and a half, I have presented my research on the queer aesthetics of the drag queens Trixie Mattel and Katya Zamolodchikova in graduate courses, conferences, and to colleagues. Both drag queens participated on the seventh season of the Logo TV/VH1 reality show *RuPaul's Drag Race*, and have also received a considerable following on their YouTube show *UNHhhh* (which consists of four to ten minute long episodes of Trixie and Katya speaking on themed topics). Trixie is half-Native American and half-white, while Katya is white and of Irish-American ancestry, yet both of their drag aesthetics are characterized by an excessive, even *monstrous*, white femininity. Trixie in particular, is characterized by her blown out makeup which resembles a (monstrous and uncanny) Barbie face. Trixie and Katya's drag may be unsettling in any context. In many of these presentations, I began with showing part of the 25th episode of *UNHhhh*. In this particular episode, the two discuss a variety of topics, mostly skirting the

episode's theme of beauty tips. While presenting this episode to people, I was often surprised by what I interpreted as the audiences' reactions of confusion, surprise, uncertainty, discomfort, and unease. I was, and still am, not entirely sure what precipitated these reactions—was it Trixie and Katya's unique drag aesthetic? Was it the crude humour and jabs at one another? For example, after making an ill-received pun, Trixie tells someone behind the camera to “suck a dick,” and later on Katya makes reference to her “pussy” being old. However, I had presented my work on Miss Chief Eagle Testickle (the alter-ego of Cree artist Kent Monkman)¹ in classes before, and usually was met with a favourable reception (joyful laughter, smiles, excited chatter about his work despite Miss Chief's sexual subversion of U.S. and Canadian landscapes and stories. Fortunately, these (negative) emotions amongst my audience watching *UNHhhh* were usually dispelled, and we then engaged in meaningful dialogue and collaboration regarding Trixie and Katya. However, at one 2018 conference on race gender, and sexuality studies, my colleague Jorge Castillo and I were presenting on settler colonialism, race, and representation in Appalachia. I was surprised when an audience member, a white woman, emphatically informed us that we should not use the term “settler colonialism,” because it would make people uncomfortable and would keep them from engaging with our work. Could our inclusion of the phrase “settler colonialism” truly produce negative affects which kept attendees from engaging in our material altogether?

Following calls by Ahmed (2010), Love (2007) and Halberstam (2011) to sojourn with queer negativity and failure, my doctoral project examines the ways in which queer subjects who reject and/or fail to embody the disciplinary logics of interlocking oppressions of white supremacy, neoliberalism, heteropatriarchy, and settler colonialism, negotiate and are negotiated

¹ To be clear, Miss Chief is not a drag persona nor a drag queen.

within popular culture and quotidian spaces. I want to explore how and why some queer subjects inspire negative affect in queer spaces, and examine what these negative affects may gesture to (specifically, as I will explain later, in terms of decolonization and queerness). As Deborah Gould writes, “the ability to evoke affective states and emotions, as well as to establish and enforce norms about feelings and their expressions- the power of an emotional habitus- is a dimension of power that we tend to overlook” (Gould, 2009, p. 40). Yet, emotive affect is persuasive, as it informs and reflects, and disciplines normative ways of being, acting, and knowing. In this doctoral project, I therefore explore both the tensions and possibilities gestated by subjects who imbue negative, unhappy affective states and emotions such as unease, discomfort, anger, depression, anxiety, and uncertainty. Similar to Judith Halberstam (2011), I am specifically interested in how subjects who fail to adhere to normative demands can permeate negative affective states and emotions and represent and produce what Foucault calls “subjugated knowledges,” forms of knowledge that have been “buried or masked in functional coherences or formal systemizations” (2003, p. 7). Foucault argues that subjugated knowledges represent

a particular local, regional knowledge, a differential knowledge incapable of unanimity and which owes its force only to the harshness with which it is opposed by everything surrounding it. (2003, p. 7-8)

Foucault elaborates that forms of “subjugated knowledges” then, “have been disqualified as nonconceptual knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledges: naive knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity.” (2003, p.7) I am specifically interested in seeking out subjugated knowledges in a discipline which I find myself most connected to – queer studies. More exactly, building off of Ahmed (2010) and Halberstam (2011) I seek those queer subjects who reject models of

happiness, and the ways in which their resistance (conscious or unconscious) may act as forms of subjugated knowledges in and outside of the discipline of queer studies. For instance, following the genealogy of feminist scholarship of the “happy housewife,” Black scholarship on the “happy slave” and queer scholarship which challenges heteronormative conceptions of “domestic bliss,” Sara Ahmed reflects on how “happiness is used to redescribe social norms as social goods.” (2010, p. 2) Normative disciplinary structures and logics often rely on the fantasy of happiness (or the promise of happiness). Ahmed further considers that “happiness as a form of worldmaking...” in which “happiness makes the world cohere around, as it were, the right people,” and epistemologies which reflect and inform “certain forms of personhood.” (2010, p. 13,11) Happiness (the fantasy and the promise) gestates emotional normative attachments and affects of longing and belonging. However, Gould also finds that affect “has the potential to escape social control, and that quality creates greater space for counterhegemonic possibilities and for social transformation” (Gould 2009, p.39) In particular, Ahmed finds that “to narrate unhappiness can be affirmative; it can gesture toward another world, even if we are not given a vision of the world as it might exist after the walls of misery are brought down.” (2010, p.107) What kinds of visions of the world and futures would subjects like Trixie and Katya gesture² to in their unhappy, uneasy, and uncanny affects? What future possibilities would open in academia if the woman who attended our panel self-reflexively questioned and engaged with her discomfort with the term “settler colonialism,” instead of dismissing the term altogether?

² In this project, I use “gestures” à la Muñoz (2001, 2009) to designate glimpses of a temporal/space beyond the here and now. Following Muñoz, I also use “worlds” to designate a messier, shifting temporal/space in the confluence of the here and now, and the then and there. This understanding of queer “worlds” recognizes that we can view glimpse and “gestures” of “futures” in the here and now. This designation rejects the Western linear idea of progress, and as such, I find that it may posit decolonial praxis.

In its focus on the imaginative and utopic possibilities of queer futurity, this doctoral project is primarily inspired by, and indebted to the work of the late José Esteban Muñoz, who brilliantly conceptualizes queerness as an “ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future.” (2009, 1) Muñoz understands queerness as a utopic “structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present.” (2009, p.1) He follows that

utopia is an ideal, something that should mobilize us, push us forward. Utopia is not prescriptive; it renders potential blueprints of a world not quite here, a horizon of possibility, not a fixed schema. It is productive to think about utopia as flux, a temporal disorganization, as a moment when the here and the now is transcended by a then and a there that could be and indeed should be. (2009, p.97)

Muñoz pushes us to consider queerness in terms of building utopic worlds and futures instead of settling on our current “romances of the negative and toiling in the present.” (2009, p.1) In other words, he asks us to not settle for small gains for minoritarian subjects in rights, representation, and inclusion, (and, as such, we must not concede to the allure of normative promises of happiness which are only attainable for certain subjects). Instead, he implores us to fight for better futures which may even seem impossible or utopic now. It is his assertion “that minoritarian subjects are cast as hopeless in a world without utopia” (2009, p.97) and “queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world.” (2009, p.1) More specifically, he contends: “when I refer to the animating force of queerness I specifically want to discuss a mode of *queer performativity*—that is, not the fact of a queer identity but the force of a kind of queer doing.” (2009, p.84 *My emphasis*) Minoritarian subjects, in his view, must be able to imagine and perform futures/worlds in which their ontologies, epistemologies, and bodies are celebrated, continued, thrive within, and do not face oppression and violence. Queerness in this way, is an imaginative and generative

understanding and way of being, and more than a marker of identity. Other queer studies' scholars have referenced queerness as a way of being. For instance, Cathy Cohen explains that:

the label 'queer' symbolizes an acknowledgement that through our existence and everyday survival we embody sustained and multisited [sic] resistance to systems (based on dominant construction of race and gender) that seek to normalize our sexuality, exploit our labor, and constrain our visibility. (1997, p. 440)

While Cohen draws attention to the fact that "queer" is a label, identity, or field, Sarah Hunt and Cindy Holmes further find that

As a verb, queer is a deconstructive practice focused on challenging normative knowledges, identities, behaviors, and spaces thereby unsettling power relations and taken-for-granted assumptions. Queerness is then less about a way of 'being,' and more about 'doing,' and *offers the potential for radical social critique*. (2015, p.156. *My emphasis*)

In other words, calling attention to the reality that our quotidian and overarching oppressions are sustained on multiple sites and systems, queer knowledges are then both knowledges (perspectives, voices, and visions) of queer peoples (non-normative gender and sexual conforming individuals), and radical, unsettling and multi-faceted critiques of the way power operates and how knowledges are produced, transmitted, and received. I want to stress that in this project, I use "queer" in this way—as less about essential identities, and more as a critical and imaginative stance with which to view, understand, and experience the world.

Indigenous studies scholars and artists have also drawn attention to the need to imagine, embody, perform, and build decolonial futures. For instance, Grace Dillon argues that "Indigenous futurisms"³ involve a returning to the self, which "involves discovering how personally one is affected by colonization, discarding the emotional and psychological baggage

³ The term "futurism" originated with an early 20th century Italian art form and social movement. Recently, the term has been taken up by queer, Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other minoritarian groups to describe (re)imagining the future as a space to envision subverting normative and oppressive structures of power and knowledge, and centering their own stories, experiences, and subjectivities.

carried from its impact, and recovering ancestral traditions in order to adapt in our post-Native apocalypse world.” (2012, p.10) Further, Tuck and Yang provide a related definition of “decolonization” as “the repatriation of Indigenous land and life.” (2012, p. 21), and remind us to maintain and centralize the radically unsettling goals of decolonial work. Decolonial work (inside and outside of the academy) then, always involves *imagining* since we do not completely know the structure of fully decolonial worlds. (Cruz, 2012; Sium, Desai, & Ritskes, 2012) For Linda Tuhiwai Smith, in terms of scholarship, “decolonization is a process which engages with imperialism and colonialism at multiple levels. For researchers, one of those levels is concerned with having a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values which inform research practices.” (Smith 1999, p. 20) In this way, Jennifer Henderson (2015) and Eva Mackey (2016) call attention to settler colonial theory and decolonial theory as having two fronts—one of critique, and one of construction. Henderson (2015) explains that the critique front involves “dismantling the masters’s house” in Audre Lorde’s terms. The construction front, Henderson details, involves what Leanne Simpson (2012) calls “(re)build[ing] our own house.” For Simpson (2012) the rebuilding of the house involves Nisnaabeg (re)creation and resurgence. In regards to decolonization and queer studies in particular, Qwo-Li Driskill argues that

instead of seeing decolonization as something that has a fixed and finite goal, decolonial activism and scholarship ask us to radically reimagine our futures. For Native Two-Spirit/GLBTQ people and our allies, part of imagining our futures is through creating theories and activism that weave together Native and GLBTQ critiques that speak to our present colonial realities. (2010, p.70)

Driskill finds, that to this point, queer studies (even in its turn to centering race as a starting point of analysis), has often been replicating “an old story” in which “Native people, Native histories, and ongoing colonial projects happening on [Native] lands are included only marginally, when included at all.” (2010, p. 0) Following Driskill, I suggest that if queer studies

is to build queer futures in the Muñozian sense—futures which centre and (re)produce the ontologies and epistemologies of all queer subjects, including Indigenous peoples—queer studies must more robustly and consistently consider and contextualize queer activism and scholarship within settler colonial structures and logics as well as decolonial goals and agendas (led and articulated by Indigenous peoples). In other words, in order to build both queer and decolonial futures, queer studies must be critical of its entrenchment in settler colonialism, as well as open and willing to engage with (unsettling) forms of Indigenous futurisms. Queer studies needs to critique all normative orders (including settler colonialism) in order to imagine and gesture to possible decolonial futures. As I will explain below, doing so is difficult due to queer scholarship's entrenchment in both settler colonial and queer liberal structures.

In this doctoral project, I confront and seek a practical strategy with which to intercede in a main question in queer studies—how does queer studies maintain a radical edge against conforming to hetero/homonormative, white supremacist, and oppressive logics of power and knowledge? Put differently, I ask: how can and should queer studies build queer and decolonial futures in the Muñozian sense? In order to respond, in this introduction, I first contextualize this question, by outlining a brief history of this debate, as well as the ways in which queer studies is structured by forms of “settler and race unconsciousness”—a reluctance of much queer scholarship and politics to engage and deal with its settler colonial inheritances. Next, I outline my methodology, which in brief, involves turning to what I call a “silly archive of unhappy feelings,” —popular and everyday texts, that, as I will outline, are structured by normative demands including an attachment to toxic forms of happiness. More specifically, I turn to the sites of reality television show *RuPaul's Drag Race*, and the national celebration of *Canada 150*, looking for subjects who perform, imbue, and project unhappiness, despair, disgust, negativity,

and dissatisfaction with normative promises and forms of happiness. As I will outline, what I found in this archive, was the figure of the “queer decolonial killjoy” (QDK). QDKs (including Trixie and Katya, and as I will later explain, Kent Monkman/Miss Chief Eagle Testickle in the context of *Canada 150*), I argue, are those subjects who do not (and cannot) embody and perform the social scripts of happiness, and whose aesthetics, ways of being, and performances critique and unsettle normative queer liberal *and* settler colonial structures and ways of being. These subjects may also gesture to both queer and decolonial worlds in their failure to (re)produce settler colonialism and queer liberalism. I demonstrate that the artists I discuss not only unsettle gendered, sexualized, and racialized norms (a la Ahmed), but that they also act as *decolonial* killjoys because they use complex affective performative strategies to also critique settler colonialism. Their performances, I suggest, also gesture to important possibilities of queer and *decolonial* futures. I argue that the performances of QDKs can remind queer studies scholars to become more comfortable with being *uncomfortable/unsettled*, and may help us to learn how to begin imagining radical queer *decolonial* futures. Finally, I conclude this introductory chapter with brief outlines of the remaining chapters.

Queer Theory, (Queer) Settler Unconsciousness, Queer(ed) Futures

Since its advent in the 1990s, a longstanding tension in queer theory is the struggle over maintaining the radical anti-normative edge in its politics and scholarship, against conforming and assimilating to normative demands and logics. In coining the term “queer theory,” Teresa de Lauretis hoped to draw attention to, and to problematize “the discursive constructions and constructed silences around the relations of race to identity and subjectivity in the practices of homosexualities and representations of same-sex desire” in “gay and lesbian studies” scholarship. (1991, p.viii) Despite de Lauretis having no intention of “queer theory” becoming an

academic field, scholarship under this new term quickly flourished. Scholars in the field attested that queer theory was an innovative approach as it strayed away from identity politics and assimilation to the mainstream, while “pointing out a wide field of normalization, rather than simple intolerance, as the site of violence.” (Warner, 1990, p.16) Judith Butler (1993) argued that “queer” should never seek to describe what it fully represents so that it can be taken up by future generations whose political aspirations and issues may differ from our own. Butler thus understands that there will always be those queer subjects who will not and cannot embody and perform evolving normative disciplinary demands. Furthermore, as Foucault reminds us: “where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.” (1990, p.95). Queer critiques and politics may challenge power, however, they do not operate outside of discourse and can inadvertently replicate normative logics. This inability to totally excise queer politics from structures of power and knowledge produces the tensions in queer studies around radical politics versus assimilation.

My doctoral project intercedes into this ongoing dialogue in queer studies. More specifically, I engage with debates around our current historical moment of *queer liberalism*—“a contemporary confluence of the political and economic spheres that forms the basis for the liberal inclusion of particular gay and lesbian U.S. citizen-subjects petitioning for rights and recognition before the law.” (Eng, 2010, p.3) Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz further explain that under queer liberalism:

Mechanisms of normalization have endeavored to organize not only gay and lesbian politics but also the internal workings of the field itself, attempting to constitute its governing logic around certain privileged subjects, standards of sexual conduct, and political and intellectual engagements... (2005, p.4)

In other words, this normalization occurs in queer studies and in queer endeavours outside of academia, as specific queer subjects are enfranchised and empowered through increased access

to specific rights of citizenship (such as same-sex marriage and the ability to join the armed forces) and upward movement in the capitalist labour economy. (Eng, 2010) With the inclusion of specific queer subjects in national orders and mainstream representation, Dean Spade argues that in this historical moment, “sadly, the most visible American gay politics has become the anti-Black, pro-war, anti-feminist strain that in 2011 rejoiced in the prospect of gay and lesbian soldiers joining imperialist wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and made arguments that gay marriage should be legalized because it will produce more shopping.” (2014, p.206-207) Spade and others (Duggan 2002, 2003; Eng, 2010; Puar, 2007) recognize that by hyper-focusing on a liberal equality-based gay liberation agenda, queer subjects accept, justify, and maintain oppressive intersecting structures of power and knowledge such as white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, capitalism, and neoliberalism in the nation-states of the United States and Canada. Eng argues that this era of queer liberalism is “distinguished by the cleaving of race from (homo)sexuality, (homo)sexuality from race, the systematic disassociation of queer politics from critical race politics, the denial of their coalitional and intellectual possibilities.” (2010, p.4) In other words, queer liberal politics often inform and reflect a teleological fallacy whereby what is currently known as the United States⁴ is considered a post-racial society (after legal victories in the United States’ Civil Rights Movement) and has (or will have) reached a state of equality with gay liberation (in a form of the granting of queer citizenry rights, such as the legalisation of same-sex marriage). (Eng, 2010) By positing and accepting this teleological fallacy, queer subjects (in

⁴ Damien Lee tweeted that “When I write, I avoid the phrase ‘...in what is now Canada.’ I use ‘in what is currently Canada’ to open possibilities for imagining futurities beyond the settler state.” Following this, I use such phrasing in order to gesture to Indigenous futurities throughout this doctoral project. See: damienlee. (2018, January 31). When I write, I avoid the phrase "...in what is now Canada." I use "...in what is currently Canada" to open possibilities for imagining futurities beyond the settler state. [Tweet]. <https://twitter.com/damienlee/status/958698343135244288?lang=en>

particular: white queer subjects) may justify and authorize their privilege and complicity in neoliberal nation-states. Robyn Wiegman reflects that

indeed, we might say that even as liberal whiteness has overseen the rise of ‘diversity’ in the popular public sphere, the nation-state’s capitulation to capitalism—in the deaths of welfare and affirmative action, on the one hand, and the heightened regulation of immigrant populations and borders, on the other—has extended the material scope of white privilege. While the histories of these issues are complicated, it is nonetheless significant how seemingly ‘benign’ is the popular cultural rhetoric of whiteness today and how self-empowering are its consequences. Or, to put this in another way, seldom has whiteness been so widely represented as attuned to racial equality and justice while to aggressively solidifying its advantage. (1999, p.121)

By accepting and promoting a theological fallacy of racial and sexual equality, queer liberalism holds hands with liberal whiteness. Wiegman identifies that this liberal whiteness is informed by and reflected in quotidian sites such as popular culture. Queer representation in popular culture has increased dramatically over the past three decades. For example, ball and drag culture has evolved from a subculture for queer subjects, to being represented on the reality cable television shows *RuPaul’s Drag Race* (which has recently won multiple Emmys) and the fictional FX television drama *POSE* (which began airing in June 2018, and which offers a fictional account of the 1980’s New York City ball subculture, with a cast predominately composed of queer and trans people of colour). To clarify, I am not disregarding the importance of inclusion of queer and trans people of colour in mainstream popular culture representations. However, I contend that inclusion into the mainstream (in sites such as popular culture and queer politics) in queer liberal times must always be critically examined, since inclusion may also reproduce exclusions of particular bodies and practices in specific ways. Heather Love reminds us,

one may enter the mainstream on the condition that one breaks ties with all those who cannot make it – the non-white and the nonmonogamous, the poor and the genderdeviant, the fat, the disabled, the unemployed, the infected, and a host of unmentionable others...Given the new opportunities available to some gays and lesbians, the temptation to forget- to forget the outrages and humiliations of gay and lesbian history and to ignore the ongoing suffering of those not borne up by the rising tide of gay normalization- is stronger than ever. (2007, p.10)

Love draws attention to recent turns in gay and lesbian politics to forget historic and ongoing shame and oppression in order to enter the mainstream and its benefits. In doing so, they may ignore, exclude, and obscure the struggles, challenges, epistemologies, and ontologies of whom I will refer to as *queer(ed) subjects*—those nonnormative racialized, sexualized, gendered, and classed subjects who do not adhere to ever-evolving normative logics in queer studies and politics. In other words, queer liberalism draws *already privileged* queer subjects into the normative fold, and into (re)performing and buying into modes of happiness which ultimately (re)produce neoliberal, white supremacist, and settler colonial logics. Judith Halberstam suggests that “failing is something queers do and have always done exceptionally well...” (2011, p.3) In my view, queer(ed) subjects are therefore failed and failing subjects, for their inability (and/or conscious rejection) to embody, accept, and perform normative logics. For Halberstam, “failure certainly comes accompanied by a host of negative affects, such as disappointment, disillusionment, and despair, it also provides the opportunity to use these negative affects to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life.” (2011, p.3) In this doctoral project I seek out the ways in which the failure of QDKs to embrace “toxic positivity” within queer liberalism may illuminate the possibilities of other ways of being and living beyond our queer liberal moment.

Due to the flexible and ever-changing nature of structures power and knowledge, the context of the debate in queer studies between queer assimilation and queer radicalism is constantly shifting. As such, Mark Pendleton and Carolyn D’Cruz argue that

Clearly, the measure of success for a liberation movement shifts with time. And as we fight among ourselves over our movement’s goals and *what kind of future we want* – not only for our ‘own’ folk, but for the kind of world we want to live in – we have constantly had to reflect on who ‘we’ are. (2014, p.5 *My emphasis*)

Reflecting on this current (queer liberal) moment, queer of colour⁵ and Indigenous studies scholars have long critiqued queer theory's failure to fully engage with challenging and upsetting white supremacy. For instance, due to queer liberalism, Hiram Pérez argues that

Queer studies, despite its critiques of normativity and its calls for non-exclusionary politics remains susceptible to forms of race unconsciousness—that is, subject to a racial unconscious shaped by nation, empire, and the dispositions of global capitalism, as well as resistant to the self-reflexive analytic standpoint that critical race theory advocates as 'race consciousness.' (2015, p.1)

One form of this “race unconsciousness,” I argue, is the reluctance of queer scholarship to engage with the idea that settler colonialism undergirds much of queer politics and scholarship in what is currently known as Canada and the United States. The overall reluctance of queer studies to engage with Indigenous studies and settler colonial studies has been noted by Indigenous studies scholars such as Driskill (2004, 2010), Smith (2010, 2011), and Morgensen (2011). This *settler unconsciousness* in queer theory is unsurprising given the nature of settler colonialism, which inherently works to naturalize and obscure its operations, while privileging (white) settlers. John Hinkman (2012) explains that settler colonialism differs from other forms of colonialism, as it

is where the ‘settler culture’ seeks a *permanent place* in the colonial setting and, as such, enters an unrelenting cultural logic of misrecognition and blindness towards the cultural other, issuing in acts of objective cruelty and cultural destruction. (*My emphasis*)

⁵ Roderick Ferguson identifies the need for queer studies to engage with a “queer of color” critique which “interrogates social formations as the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and class, with particular interest in how those formations correspond with and diverge from nationalist ideals and practices.” (2003, p.149) My doctoral project is indebted to queer of colour critiques, and critiques by Indigenous feminists, queer Indigenous, and Two Spirit peoples. By calling attention to settler unconsciousness and queer liberalism within queer studies, I do not mean to obscure or downplay the critical and significant body of work by these scholars, activists, and community members. Instead, I reinforce their calls to action by queer studies as a whole to recognize its historic and continuing role in the oppression of queer(ed) subjects.

Indigenous peoples are still here, surviving and thriving, so settlers must continuously justify and authorize their historic, current, and ongoing existence on these stolen territories. (Veracini, 2011) Settler colonialism then, as Patrick Wolfe argues, is a structure which involves the practical and symbolic logic of “elimination of the native” (Wolfe 2006, p.389) in order to build and maintain (white) settler⁶ existence on stolen Indigenous lands. Settler colonialism is ongoing and is enacted and maintained through “logics” (Smith, 2012) including “the social, ideological, and institutional processes through which the authority of the settler state implicitly and explicitly is enacted.” (Rifkin, 2011, p.343) Tuck and Yang explain that “within settler colonialism, the most important concern is land/water/air/subterranean earth (land, for shorthand...) Land is what is most valuable. contested, required.” (2012, p. 5) In order to justify their access to stolen lands, settler colonial projects rely on strategies of “replacement and erasure.” (Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013) This replacement may manifest in murderous violence against Indigenous peoples, but also by eliminating the legal status and standing, cultures, languages, world views, and values of Indigenous peoples in order to replace them with those of the settlers. This erasure and replacement is embedded in settler legal and political structures to the point where, as Mark Rifkin argues, they become characterized by a “settler common sense” which marks and “enable[s] non-native access to Indigenous territories” as “given, as simply the unmarked, generic, conditions of possibility for occupancy, association,

⁶ “Settler/settler” is a debated term (Lawrence & Dua, 2011; Morgensen, 2014; Battell Lowman & Barker, 2015). Although some have made a temporal distinction between a historical “settler” (distinguished by lower-case) and the present-day “Settler” identity (Veracini, 2010; Battell Lowman, 2017), I have consistently used “settler” in this dissertation to reference non-Indigenous peoples who occupy Indigenous lands through the process of historical colonization and ongoing settler colonialism. I have attempted to clarify when I am referring to historic settlers, and contemporary settler identity. I also recognize that “settler” is a nuanced category in terms of race, and I will attempt to clarify as to when I am discussing white settlers, recent immigrants, and more.

and personhood.” (2011, p.xvi) Drawing from Andrew Baldwin’s conception of “white futurity,” Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández explain that settler colonial projects are

invested in settler futurity, or what Andrew Baldwin calls the “permanent virtuality” of the settler on stolen land (2012, p.173). When we locate the present of settler colonialism as only the production of the past, we overlook how settler colonialism is configured in relation to a different temporal horizon: the future. To say that something is invested in something else’s futurity is not the same as saying it is invested in something’s future, though the replacement project is invested in both settler future and futurity. (2013, p.80)

Settler colonialism then, operates always to replicate settler physical presence and domination of stolen Indigenous lands in perpetuity. Eve Tuck, Marcia McKenzie, and Kate McCoy further explain that “futurity is more than the future, it is how human narratives and perceptions of the past, future, and present inform current practices and framings in a way that (over)determines what registers as the (possible) future.” (2014, p.16) Settler projects are, therefore, constantly working to justify their past, current, and perceived future possession of Indigenous lands. Settler unconsciousness may also be described as what Eve Tuck and C. Ree term as “settler horror” which “comes about as part of this management, of the anxiety, the looming but never arriving guilt, the impossibility of forgiveness, the inescapability of retribution.” (2013, p.642) Due to settler anxieties and refusal to deal with the horror of their complicity in historic and ongoing physical, material, and cultural violence against Indigenous peoples, settler colonialism relies on gestating feelings of what Eva Mackey (2014, 2016) calls *settler certainty*—the attempts by the settler state and settlers to “constantly reproduce and attempt to naturalize the idea that settlement is settled, that colonization is over, that what exists now is right and inevitable, and that the settler state and settlers are entitled to the land and their authority over its jurisdiction in the past, present and future.” (2016, p.190) Settler unconsciousness then, represents a denial of Indigenous futurisms, in order to justify and continue into the future, the unjust settler occupation of Indigenous lands.

In this project, I pay special attention to how quotidian queer politics and representations, as well as queer studies, consciously or unconsciously invests in narratives and practices which invest in settler futures, futurity, and certainty. Since all politics in what is currently known as North America operate within settler colonialism, Eve Tuck and Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández argue that “anything that seeks to recuperate and not interrupt settler colonialism, to reform the settlement and incorporate Indigenous peoples into the multicultural settler colonial nation state is fettered to settler futurity.” (2013, p.80) Further, Indigenous studies scholars (such as Driskill, 2004, 2010, Finley, 2011; Lugones, 2007; Morgensen, 2010 & 2011; and Smith 2010, 2011) link sexuality to settler colonial logics. More specifically, Lugones (2007) and Morgensen (2010, 2011) find that colonization produced the modern configurations of sexuality and gender—including queer modernities.

For the purposes of my dissertation, it is essential to outline that queer subjectivities are entangled with histories of settler colonialism in what is currently known as the United States and Canada. Morgensen (2011) specifically outlines this genealogy of settler colonialism and queer identity and politics, by building from Indigenous feminist and queer scholarship and queer of colour critiques. Morgensen traces the origins of queer modernity in settler societies, arguing that “modern sexuality arises in settler societies as a function of the biopolitics of settler colonialism.” (2011, p.31) To reach this understanding, Morgensen builds off of Foucault’s conception of biopower and biopolitics, and Jasbir Puar’s understanding of “homonationalism.” For Foucault, “power is everywhere,” as it operates in, through, and by all things. (1990, p.93) Foucault understands that we must stop understanding “the effects of power in negative terms” and how “it ‘excludes’, it ‘represses’, it ‘censors’, it ‘abstracts’, it ‘masks’, it ‘conceals’”. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The

individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production.” (1977, p.194) There is no total oppositional power relation between oppressor and the oppressed. In other words, power is not wielded only (or primarily by) a sovereign entity, rather, it is always relational in that it exists in a “multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization.” (Foucault, 1990, p.92) Foucault contends that power and knowledge together form “discourses,” (1990, p.100) and that discourses layer together to create “discursive formations,” (1972, p.37) which in turn congeal to produce “regimes of truth” about memories, people, identities, etc... (Foucault, 1995) Discourses can congeal to normalize certain forms of power-knowledges (such as settler colonialism) to the point where they appear normative and even natural (as settler unconsciousness). Discourses therefore, establish regimes of truth around bodies, sexualities, genders, and spaces.

For Foucault, the body is understood as being at the locus of power. Foucault contends that beginning in the seventeenth century, the nature of power shifted, and “there was an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation and control of populations.” (1990, p.140) These techniques still structure our bodies, everyday movements, knowledges, ontologies, epistemologies, economies, societies, and cultures. Foucault conceptualizes this era as one of “biopower” in which power and its technologies became organized around two interrelated central poles. One of these poles is organized around the “body as machine” whereby power worked on and through the body in its “disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, [and] its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls.” (1990, p.139) The other pole operates on and through the “species body” (1990, p.139) wherein the body is “imbued with the mechanics of life and serving the basis of the biological processes:

propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary.” (1990, p.139) Foucault refers to the supervision and regulation of the species body as the “biopolitics of the population.” (1990, p.139)

Individual subjects themselves regulate and are the conveyors of power-knowledge onto, and from, themselves. To arrive at this understanding, Foucault builds off of Jeremy Bentham’s concept of the “panopticon” in which prisoners are unaware of whether or not they are under surveillance, so they discipline themselves under the threat of punishment. Foucault explains that

the major effect of the Panopticon [is] to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers... He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. (1995, p.201-203)

This shift of focus of power and its technologies to self-disciplining bodies and broader institutions and populations, Foucault argues, was essential in the development of capitalism, which “would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes.” (1990, p.141)

In summary, power, including settler colonial powers, “reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives.” (Foucault, 1978, p.39) Discourse shapes and disciplines bodies, just as bodies inform and reflect discourse. Scholars have noted that the body and spaces in which the body move through are central to the building, maintenance, and

justification of neoliberal (Giardina & Newman, 2011) homonationalist (Puar, 2007) *and* settler colonial (Morgensen, 2010; Finley, 2011) orders.

To arrive at his understanding of settler colonialism and modern sexuality as a biopolitical manifestation, Morgensen too draws upon Jasbir Puar (2007, 2013), who emphasizes and outlines the role of queer subjects in the terrorizing violence of U.S. imperialism, in their conception of “homonationalism.” Jasbir Puar describes homonationalism as a

a facet of modernity and a historical shift marked by the entrance of (some) homosexual bodies as worthy of protection by nation-states, a constitutive and fundamental reorientation of the relationship between the state, capitalism, and sexuality... Part of the increased recourse to domestication and privatization of neoliberal economies and within queer communities, homonationalism is fundamentally a deep critique of lesbian and gay liberal rights discourses and how those rights discourses produce narratives of progress and modernity that continue to accord some populations access to citizenship—cultural and legal—at the expense of the delimitation and expulsion of other populations. The narrative of progress for gay rights is thus built on the back of racialized others, for whom such progress was once achieved, but is now backsliding or has yet to arrive. (2013, p.337)

Puar identifies that in this historical juncture, three interrelated biopolitical phenomena coalesce to produce normative queer (as in non-heterosexual identity) citizen-subjects, aligned with U.S. imperialist missions against terrorist (brown) subjects: 1.) sexual exceptionalism, 2.) queer as regulatory, and 3.) the ascendancy of whiteness. First, Puar (2007) builds from Foucault’s theory of biopolitics to argue that with the U.S. war on terror, there is a production of white liberal subjects of life. Expounding from Achille Mbembe’s (2003) theory of “necropolitics,” Puar argues that in turn, Sikh/Muslim subjects are often represented as “terrorists” in the U.S. national imaginary, and are therefore “queered.” In this understanding of biopolitics, the U.S. imperial centre is constructed as exceptional in that it is progressive and tolerant because it includes queer (as in gay and lesbian) subjects, while the “queered” (racialized) other is constructed as perverse, backwards, homophobic and misogynistic. For example, by granting queer peoples small gains

in sexual citizenship (like the right to marry), the imperial centre appears benevolent and tolerant, while at the same time, overshadows its own sexual and other abuses of queered others (such as the abuse at Abu Ghraib). U.S. queer subjects become “homonationalist” when they develop “queer as regulatory” over other queered populations. Finally, Puar expands Rey Chow’s (2002) concept of “the ascendancy of whiteness,” which is the biopolitical amalgamation of “the multiplication of appropriate multicultural ethnic bodies,” through a “careful management and domestication of difference: of difference within sameness, and of difference containing sameness.” (Puar, 2007, p.25) This process veils the privileging of white citizen subjects.⁷ Puar suggests that “the twin processes of multiculturalization and heterosexualization are codependent,” yet they do extend some of the elements of white heteronormative citizenship to certain queer and racialized subjects who “reorient their loyalty to the nation through market privileges.” (Puar, 2007, p.25-26) In homonormative times, like the “good ethnic,” the good white queer subject then, is “folded into life” through an “affective be/longing that never fully rewards its captives yet nonetheless fosters longing and yearning of affects of nationalism.” (Puar, 2007, p.32)

Puar’s articulation of homonationalism, while groundbreaking, neglects to contextualize its origins and ongoing processes through settler colonialism. Nationalism and settler colonialism and deeply interconnected. Morgensen contextualizes homonationalism within settler-colonial nation-states, arguing that homonationalism is “an effect of U.S. queer modernities forming amid the conquest of Native peoples and the settling of Native land.” (2010, 105) Morgensen explains that

⁷ Similar critiques of the limits of multicultural inclusion in Canada have been made by Bannerji, 2000; Coulthard, 2007; and Mackey, 2002. Ahmed (2012) also has made similar critiques about “diversity” and inclusion in institutions.

The terrorizing sexual colonization of Native peoples was a historical root of the biopolitics of modern sexuality in the United States. Colonists interpreted diverse practices of gender and sexuality as signs of a general primitivity among Native peoples. Over time, they produced a colonial necropolitics that framed Native peoples as queer populations marked for death. Colonization produced the biopolitics of modern sexuality that I call ‘settler sexuality’: a white national heteronormativity that regulates Indigenous sexuality and gender by supplanting them with the sexual modernity of settler subjects. (2010, p.105-106)

While sexual colonization privileged white settlers by marking Indigenous sexualities and bodies (and those associated with them, mainly people of colour) as perverse and marked for death, Morgensen (2010) argues that eventually even queers of colour attain the benefits of sexual citizenship by participating in “settler sexuality,” which he defines as “a white and national heteronormativity formed by regulating Native sexuality and gender while appearing to supplant them with the sexual modernity of settlers.” (2011, p.31) Morgensen says that “under such conditions, queer movements can naturalize settlement and assume a homonormative and national form that may be read specifically as settler homonationalism.” (2010, p.106) Similar to Morgensen, Hiram Pérez (2015) traces modern gay modernity through the evolution of the “gay cosmopolitan.” Pérez follows the argument of John D’Emilio (1993), who finds that capitalism and modern gay identity coemerge when the tenets of capitalism (namely: wage labour) opens up possibilities of relations outside the nuclear family unit. Pérez argues that from this, the subject position of the “gay cosmopolitan” emerges, who is a

white, urban, leisure-class gay male whose desire is cast materially onto the globe at the closer of the nineteenth century. A range of mobilities, transformed or generated by industrialization (i.e., class privilege, whiteness, transportation technology, mass media, tourism) and, eventually, postindustrial society (i.e., communications and information technologies) provide conditions for a cosmopolitan gay male subject. (2015, p.104)

Pérez notes that while white gay men are most privileged and have the easiest access to the subjects of their gay cosmopolitan desire (often access to brown bodies), gay men of colour may also

participate in these contradictions but do not emerge unscathed. The desires comprising the cosmopolitan gay male subject in fact reinscribe oppressive racial hierarchies while enjoining gay men of color to both authenticate and celebrate those desire and the sexual cultures they organize. (2015, p.105)

Like Morgensen, Pérez too notes that queer people of colour may also (re)produce racial hierarchies such as those which arise in queer liberal and settler colonial structures of power and knowledge, thereby working to exclude and oppress queer(ed) subjects. In summary, if queer studies is to excavate glimpses of queer and decolonial futures which involve all queer(ed) others (including Indigenous peoples), its scholarship and politics must *necessarily* be situated within a context which recognizes the historic and ongoing queer relation to (and complicity in) settler colonial, homonationalist, and other oppressive logics. Next, I outline how settler colonialism and queer liberalism manifests in affect and feelings, which queer studies must grapple with in order to build queer and decolonial futures in the Muñozian sense.

Affect, Feeling, and Settler Unconsciousness in Queer Studies and Politics

Texts in queer studies, such as the clip of *UNHhhh* that I played in classes, are invested with nuanced forms of attachment, which inspire responses imbued with affect and feelings. Scholarship on affect⁸ provides a useful framework to begin articulating how individual feelings (such as those which arose amongst those watching the clip of *UNHhhh*) inform and reflect broader logics of power and knowledge, which in turn may privilege certain subjects in queer studies and politics. Recently, Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth attempt to consolidate a definition of affect, saying that:

Affect arises in the midst of in-between-ness: in the capacities to act and be acted upon. Affect is an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relations as well as the passages (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities.

⁸ Recent scholarship in affect theory is also referred to as the “affective turn.” See: Clough and Halley (2007), and Gregg and Seigworth (2009). Cvetkovich hesitates to invoke the term “affective turn,” finding that “it implies that there is something new about the study of affect when in fact...this work has been going on for some time.” (2012, p.4)

That is, affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, non-human, part-body and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves. (2010, p.1)

Gregg and Seigworth's definition itself is still ambiguous at best, as it does not clearly delineate affect's difference from emotion and feeling. But, as Ann Cvetkovich argues, emotion, feeling, and affect may be understood and deployed as "keywords, points of departure for discussion rather than definition" (2012, p.5). Cvetkovich prefers using feeling instead of affect as an analytical term, finding that feeling "is intentionally imprecise, retaining the ambiguity between feelings as embodied sensations and feelings as psychic or cognitive experiences." (2012, p.4) Furthermore, she acknowledges the "vernacular quality that lends itself to exploring feelings as something we come to know through experience and popular usage... a conception of mind and body as integrated." (2012, p.4) In this project, I use feeling and affect interchangeably to denote feelings and emotions which arise and permeate around certain subjects and objects, which in turn (re)produce and/or unsettle certain emotive, material, and systemic affects. For instance, as previously outlined, the affective responses of those I presented my work to on Trixie, Katya, and settler colonialism, produced negative feelings and affects such as discomfort, despair, confusion, and unease.

In terms of my doctoral project, it is especially pertinent to note that settler colonialism manifests in such forms of affective states and feelings, in and outside of queer studies and politics. Reflecting on affect, feeling, and settler colonialism, Mark Rifkin asks, "[h]ow does that feeling of connection to this place as citizens of the state actively efface ongoing histories of imperial expropriation and contribute to the continuing justification of the settler state's authority to superintend Native peoples?" (2011, p.342) Building off of Raymond Williams concept of "structures of feelings," Rifkin (2011) identifies that longstanding legal, social, and political

frameworks and material relations foster “modes of feeling” amongst non-Native peoples in settler societies. As such, he argues that

Processes and institutionalized frameworks of settlement – the exertion of control by non-Natives over Native peoples and lands - give rise to certain modes of feeling, and, reciprocally, particular affective formations among non-Natives normalize settler presence, privilege, and power. Understanding settlement as a structure of feeling entails asking how emotions, sensations, and psychic life take part in the (ongoing) process of exerting non-Native authority over Indigenous politics, governance, and territoriality. (2011, p.342)

Put differently, feelings, emotions, and affect play a pivotal role in justifying collective and individual settler colonial projects of historic and ongoing settler physical and cultural domination on Indigenous lands. Eva Mackey (2014, 2016) for instance, explores how what Andrea Smith (2010, 2012) calls the “logics” of settler colonialism, intersect with settler structures of feeling, specifically feelings of certainty, uncertainty, and anxiety. Mackey argues

that if settler jurisprudence and settler ‘structures of feeling’ pivot on axiomatic assumptions about settler entitlement and certainty in land, property, and settler futures, and on materializing “settled expectations”, then decolonization, for settlers and for settler law, may entail embracing particular forms of (likely uncomfortable) uncertainty in order to imagine and practice relationships and power in new and creative ways. (2014, p.237)

Mackey thus proposes that feelings of settler certainty often rely on the dismissal of Indigenous nationhood, sovereignty, and legal status. In turn, this dismissal enables a sense of certainty in settler futurity. For instance, the Government of Canada relies on settler certainty in the Crown as the Sovereign authority, in order to dismiss Indigenous forms of governance and sovereignty. This form of settler certainty is disrupted with Indigenous peoples’ enacting their inherit rights to self-sovereignty and nationhood (such as the 2017 Indigenous act of sovereignty of setting up a tipi on Parliament Hill during the *Canada 150* celebrations). Mackey finds that for settlers to engage in decolonization, there must be a disruption of settler feelings of certainty, whereby settlers embrace feelings of anxiety and uncertainty, in order to work towards the “tangible

unknown” (Cruz, 2012; Sium, Desai, & Ritskes, 2012) of decolonial futurity. Following Mackey, I find that embracing and grappling with uncertainty and the unknown in queer studies is essential to challenging settler unconsciousness in queer scholarship and politics. Queer studies, therefore, must be open to accessing, embracing, and analysing negative feelings and affect, such as those I experienced in presenting on Trixie and Katya, as well as settler colonialism in an academic setting. Given the “toxic positivity” (Halberstam 2011, p.3) of contemporary politics, I suggest that queer studies must pay particular attention to locating negative affects in texts, archives, and spaces in which they are most comfortable with, and locate happiness in. If they do not address these feelings, they run the risk of (re)producing oppressive and exclusionary structures of power and knowledge (such as settler colonialism) in their efforts to build queer futures.

Methodology: Accessing a Silly and Unhappy Archive of Feelings

In order to access and engage with such texts, archives, and spaces of “toxic positivity,” (Halberstam, 2011, p.3) my methodology draws on approaches developed by queer theorists to locate a “silly” (Halberstam, 2011) and “unhappy” (Ahmed, 2010) “archive of feelings.” (Cvetkovich, 2003)

Halberstam provides a practical methodological means of unsettling and intercepting dominant archives in disciplinary formations such as queer studies, finding that: “when people want to think differently they actually have to use a) a different archive, and b) different concepts.” (2008) In order to locate one such alternate conceptual archive, Halberstam builds from Lauren Berlant, who assembles an archive of “silly objects”, or “waste materials of everyday communication in the national public sphere, as pivotal documents in the construction, experience, and rhetoric of quotidian citizenship in the United States.” (1997, p.12) Halberstam

selects and analyzes a “silly archive” from popular culture to seek out “low theory and counter knowledge in the realm of popular culture in relation to queer lives, gender and sexuality.” (2011, p.19) Expanding upon the work of Stuart Hall, Antonio Gramsci, and David Graeber, Halberstam understands “*low theory* as a mode of accessibility, but we might also think about it as a kind of theoretical model that flies below the radar, that is assembled from eccentric texts and examples and that refuses to confirm the hierarchies of knowing that maintain the *high* in high theory.” (2011, p.16 *Their emphasis*) Low theory assists in unsettling hierarchies of knowledge and power that circulate in the assembling and recognition of certain archives in academia. (Halberstam, 2015) With their low theory “silly archive,” Halberstam asks: “what are these mass-cultural texts that actually do appeal, do circulate, and do have sort of complex forms, and do contain different kind of messages? Can we pull different kinds of intellectual practice from this material that many, many people actually are familiar with?” (2015, p.3) In terms of my project, this understanding demonstrates a need to analyse academic archives and sites popular to queer studies and politics through different lenses (such as settler colonialism) in order to understand their role in (re)producing discursive regimes. Further, Halberstam’s call to engage with “silly archives” also demonstrates the need to engage with everyday sites such as popular culture and quotidian texts in our national public sphere, in order to more fully understand and destabilize oppressive discursive formations and structures. More specifically, it addresses a need to critically examine and engage with quotidian subjects and texts that fail to replicate normative demands (of our current historical moment).

My silly archive is very personal, as I turn to two popular and public mass-cultural texts which circulate in my own life. First, I became a fan of the show *RuPaul’s Drag Race* around the airing of the sixth season, although the first season of the show aired in February 2009 on Logo

TV. This reality television competition features RuPaul as a main judge/mentor/host, who is seeking out “America’s Next Drag Superstar.” Contestants compete in mini-challenges at the beginning of the episode, and a maxi-challenge which often tie into the final (themed) runway. As a fan, *RuPaul’s Drag Race* (and related content such as *UNHhhh*) is something that brings me happiness. It was not something that I began watching in expectation of witnessing and critiquing queer liberal and settler colonial logics in play. I also turn to a popular national celebration, *Canada 150*, held in 2017 to mark the Confederation of Canada. This site is also personal to me, as I witnessed a great deal of the nation building practices first-hand living in Ottawa in unceded Algonquin territory in 2017, on celebratory public signs, commercials, calls for proposals for related programming, and more. I was also able to experience Cree artist Kent Monkman’s exhibition *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience* in-person on a trip to Calgary (home of the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region III, and the traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta, which includes the Blackfoot Confederacy, the Tsuut’ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda). This exhibition was held as an official part of *Canada 150*. If, settler colonialism is an ongoing quotidian structure (Wolfe, 2006) which queer studies and politics is complicit in, then queer theorists must turn to their own experiences, lives, movementsff, and attachments to seek out how settler colonialism and queer liberalism structures them, and how they themselves are implicated within its workings. As a U.S. permanent resident and Canadian citizen, I have a great deal of privilege.⁹ As such, I feel that I am susceptible to

⁹ I am a settler (of French, Irish, and Scottish ancestry) and I am also a member of a non-status Algonquin First Nation in Ontario (although I am against their involvement in the Algonquin land claim process, and have voted against a settlement being reached until many non-status Algonquins negotiate how to best be responsible to the intersections of their identities and relations). I am still navigating being responsible to the intersections of my identity, communities, and my privilege. In this project, therefore, I do not want to speak for Indigenous peoples on what a decolonial future would look like—I feel that this is a project for Indigenous scholars, community members, artists, and activists (and one that is already being undertaken by them). Instead, in this project, I am attempting a methodology which acts as a way in which myself,

inadvertently being made comfortable with accepting, propagating, performing, and (re)producing queer liberal and settler colonial manifestations, affects, emotions, feelings, structures, and logics, despite my best intentions. Further Muñoz argues that “popular culture is the stage in which we rehearse our identities” (2009, 104) and that “utopia exists in the quotidian.” (2009, p.9) *RuPaul’s Drag Race* and *Canada 150* are discursive formations in which queer identities, in their relation to settler colonialism and queer liberalism, are performed, rehearsed, and (re)produced, and in which are engaged with by people like myself. I look toward these quotidian sites prevalent in my own life, to seek out the ways in which they may be relying on forms of toxic positivity in order to “[make] the world cohere around, as it were, the right people,” and epistemologies which reflect and inform “certain forms of personhood.” (Ahmed 2010, p.13, 11) I thus turn to these sites that circulate prominently in my own life to understand the ways in which I (as well as others inside and outside of queer studies and politics) participate in (and may be complicit in) settler colonial queer liberal sites.

I approach this “silly archive” as what Ann Cvetkovich terms as an “archive of feeling” -- “an exploration of cultural texts as repositories of feelings and emotions, which are encoded not only in the context of the texts themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception.” (2007, 3) Following this, I understand that *RuPaul’s Drag Race* and *Canada 150* are not prediscursive sites outside of queer liberalism and settler colonialism, they too will be informed by and host “settler structures of feeling,” (Rifkin, 2011) and will also bolster sentiments that underpin queer liberalism, settler certainty, and settler futurity. I examine these archives which bring me personal happiness, interpreting them as what Sara Ahmed calls

and other scholars and peoples, can further work towards accepting (instead of dismissing), recognizing (instead of obfuscating and eliminating), promoting, and continuing Indigenous, Black, Latinx, and other forms of queer(ed) epistemologies, ontologies, and futurisms.

“unhappy archives.” Ahmed turns to “unhappy archives” (2010, p.17) from feminist, queer, antiracist, socialist and revolutionary histories and politics to locate negative figures, whose unwillingness (and inability) to conform to scripts of happiness makes them unhappy, and which also may produce negative affects in others who engage with them. In other words, I approached these popular representations to seek out subjects who embody and gestate negative feelings of uncertainty, malaise, unease, sadness, disgust, despair, discomfort, anger, and frustration, to reject “the promise of happiness” (Ahmed, 2010) and settler certainty (Mackey 2014, 2016) and may, therefore, provide new forms of knowledges in the form of glimpses/gestures.

Like Cvetkovich, I compile this (silly and unhappy) archive of feelings “to represent examples of how affective experience can provide the basis for new cultures.” (2007, p.3) As previously highlighted, decolonization requires both critique and imagining/building new futures. (Cruz, 2012; Henderson, 2015; Mackey, 2016; Sium, Desai, & Ritskes, 2012) In order to locate these examples of a basis for new futures, I place Halberstam’s conception of producing new kinds of knowledges by accessing different archives and concepts (2008), with Muñoz’s idea of “ephemera,” as a means to produce and locate queer gestures within queer (liberal) sites. Muñoz explains that “ephemera” are queer “glimmers, residues, and specks of things” that are “firmly anchored within the social.” (2006, p.10) If we understand queer knowledges/bodies as being radically unsettling in their non-normativity, they may be understood as subjugated knowledges. Being unequivocally queer, ephemera as evidence could be understood as a form of Foucault’s understanding of “subjugated knowledge.”

Muñoz further argues that

Often we can glimpse the worlds proposed and promised by queerness in the realm of the aesthetic. The aesthetic, especially the queer aesthetic, frequently contains blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity. Both the ornamental and the quotidian can contain a map of the utopia that is queerness. Turning to the aesthetic in the case of

queerness is nothing like an escape from the social realm, insofar as queer aesthetics map future social relations. (2009, p.1)

Muñoz thus understands that queer artistic representations, while informed and influenced by present realities and discourses, may provide us fleeting glimpses of ephemera. Cultural productions are not pre-discursively produced, transmitted, and received. Instead, like Muñoz, Métis artist David Garneau finds that “what art does do...is that it changes our individual and collective imaginaries by particles, and these new pictures of the world can influence behaviour.” (quoted in Hill & McCall, 2015, p.ix).

In order to locate the critiques and glimpses of queer and decolonial futures gestured to in the affects, feelings, and emotions gestated from these failed and failing queer(ed) subjects, I undertook a discursive analysis of *RuPaul's Drag Race* and related content (namely, as I will outline, *UNHhhh* and other endeavours by specific contestants) and *Canada 150* (specifically, as I will detail, Kent Monkman's exhibition, *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience*) in a Foucauldian framework. Linda J. Graham explains that, “discourse analysis informed by Foucauldian or other poststructural theory endeavours to avoid the substitution of one ‘truth’ for another.” (2010) Graham quotes Wetherall, who asserts that “there can be no universal truths or absolute ethical positions [and hence]...belief in social scientific investigation as a detached, historical, utopian, truth seeking process becomes difficult to sustain.” (2001, p.384) My goal, therefore, was not to replace regimes of truth in queer studies and politics around certain discursive formations with new truths (if that were even possible)—instead, my intention was to complicate these regimes of truth, highlighting how they may exclude queer(ed) others with their borders and boundaries, and that they may also be unstable sites of queer resistance.¹⁰ I was very

¹⁰ Here I am following Fran Tonkiss' warning that “the discourse analyst seeks to open up statements to challenge, interrogate taken-for granted meanings, and disturb easy claims to objectivity in the texts that

cautious to not form any definitive articulations of what a utopic queer and decolonial future may take shape as, recognizing that my own analysis and understanding is not absolute or operating outside of my own bias. In summary, my approach is to excavate both potential *queer tensions and possibilities* within these queer liberal popular and quotidian cultural texts, in order to gesture to, and embrace unsettling and non-normative “uncertainty”, and “anxiety” a la Mackey (2014, 2016) in order to unsettle queer liberal and settler structures of feeling in queer studies and politics.¹¹

What I located in my analysis of *RuPaul's Drag Race* and *Canada 150* were figures who did not perform and embody the “toxic positivity” (Halberstam 2011, p.3) often promoted within these sites. For instance, as I will explain in greater detail in my next chapter, *RuPaul's Drag Race* is also a site which promotes a discursive regime around a kind of liberal drag queen who conforms to dominant queer liberal and settler colonial norms around race, gender, sexuality, citizenship, and more. While watching my favourite season of *RuPaul's Drag Race* (season seven), I identified two drag queens, Trixie Mattel and Katya Yekaterina Petrovna Zamolodchikova, as characters who failed to conform to these normative demands, instead performing their own queer(ed) subjectivities. In doing so, they failed to win the seventh season of *RuPaul's Drag Race*. Their failed to win and thus become “America's Next Drag Superstar,” may be connected to the negative affects generated by their aesthetics and performances, in

they are reading. It would therefore be inconsistent to content that the analyst's own discourse was itself wholly objective, factual or generally true.” (1998, p.259)

¹¹ Ahmed warns us that “opening up the world, or expanding one's horizons, can thus mean becoming more conscious of just how much there is to be unhappy about. Unhappiness might also provide an affective way of sustaining our attention on the cause of unhappiness. Consciousness-raising does not turn unhappy housewives into happy feminists, even though sometimes we might wish that were the case!” (2010, p.70) In this project, I am not calling for a complete turn to unhappiness, nor a complete turn to a hopeful and happy queer future. Instead, I reiterate Mackey's call for embracing uncertainty as a decolonial (and queer) affective strategy in queer studies and other academic disciplines. Embracing unhappiness *and* hope in queer futures, thus produces queer tensions and possibilities.

which they fail at embodying and accepting locating happiness in settler colonial and queer liberal promises. Similarly, I located an artist Kent Monkman/Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, who was invited into the fold of *Canada 150*, having been asked to curate a travelling exhibition of his work to be held as part of the official national celebrations. What I found was that Monkman/Miss Chief fails to embody and perform the nation-state's normative (celebratory) demands in this exhibition, by instead offering a critical rendering of Canada's historic and ongoing violent and oppressive treatment of Indigenous peoples. More specifically, I found that in their failure to perform, embody, and locate happiness in queer liberal and settler colonial demands, these artists may challenge dominant and oppressive discursive formations. As previously highlighted, discourse shapes and disciplines bodies, just as bodies inform and reflect discourse. In other words, I engage with the field of somatechnics, which recognizes "that the body is not so much a naturally occurring object that becomes available for representation or cultural interpretation as it is the tangible outcome of historically and culturally specific techniques and modes of embodiment processes." (Pugliese and Stryker, 2009, p.2) If we, as queer theorists/scholars, are to be vigilant to who and what queer liberal projects are including and occluding at specific historical moments, and how these queer(ed) subjects resist being consumed into its normative demands, a starting point is to turn to bodies, since as Foucault and somatechnic scholars remind us, bodies are a locus of power relations. If those of us in queer studies and politics do not pay special attention to how rapidly queer liberalism shifts to envelop the aesthetics and knowledges of queer(ed) others into its normative structures, we run the risk of reproducing oppressive structures of power which exclude certain bodies and knowledges, and may too miss out on the opportunity to witness how bodies perform and practice imaginative utopic forms of radical queer futurity.

Drag queens (like other bodies) thus inform, reflect, and have the potential to challenge discourse and power. For instance, Judith Butler (1993) expands from Foucault's understanding of discourse and power, in order to understand that gender represents "a stylized repetition of acts...which are internally discontinuous...[so that] the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief." (1990, p.170) Butler (1990) thus understands that gender, sex, and desire are all not pre-discursive, and are instead formed and (re)produced by repetitious performative acts. Following Butler (1990) and Foucault (1995), discourses, therefore, can congeal to normalize forms of power on and through the body to the point where they appear normative, natural, and essential. While Monkman/Miss Chief is not a drag queen, following Foucault and Butler's understandings of power, knowledge, and performance, I understand that the performances and aesthetics of artists like Trixie, Katya, and Miss Chief (and all of those subjects who participated in these sites) are informed and reflected within dominant discursive regimes (queer liberal and settler colonialism). In this way, Rosemarie Thomson Garland might consider such queer(ed) subjects as Trixie, Katya, and Miss Chief as "extraordinary bodies." Garland elaborates that,

the meanings attributed to extraordinary bodies reside not in inherent flaws, but in social relationships in which one group is legitimated by possessing valued physical characteristics and maintains its ascendancy and its self-identity by systematically imposing the role of cultural or corporeal inferiority on others. Representation thus simultaneously buttresses an embodied version of normative identity and shapes a corporeal difference that excludes those whose bodies and behaviors do not conform. (1997, p.7)

These artists, in general, may be understood as "extraordinary bodies" in that they do not easily align with normative gendered and sexed categories. Butler finds that, in particular, "drag is subversive to the extent that it reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is

itself produced and disputes heterosexuality's claim on naturalness and originality." (1993, p.125) Put differently, drag like that of Trixie and Katya may upset discursive formations and regimes around sexuality and gender by performing a gender and sexuality that is not based upon the heterosexual/gender matrix. For instance, drag queens are men, women, and non-binary folk who perform as woman. However, since, as Butler argues, gender/sex does not have an identifiable pre-discursive essence or meaning, their drag will never be a perfect representation of femininity/gender, and this failure to represent femininity/gender may reveal the instability of the gender/sex binary. In the case of Trixie, Katya, and Miss Chief, I am interested in how their failure to embody and conform to the demands of queer liberalism and settler colonialism (and the promises of happiness involved in these structures), may reveal and destabilize the entrenchment of these normative orders. In other words, I am interested in how they use and embody performative strategies (consciously or unconsciously) which fail to align with normative settler colonial and queer liberal demands of this historical moment. However, Judith Butler argues that "there is no necessary relation between drag and subversion, and that drag may well be used in the service of both the denaturalization and reidealization of hyperbolic heterosexual gender norms." (1993, p.125) Racial and class structures may also be imitated and exposed in drag performance and aesthetic, although they too may (re)produce oppressive structures of knowledge and power. Drag thus represent a kind of paradoxical possibility for and against resistance. Butler recognizes that "at best, it seems, drag is the site of a certain ambivalence, one which reflects the more general situation of being implicated in the regimes of power in which one is constituted and, hence, of being implicated in the very regimes of power that one opposes." (1993, p.125) She further explains that "subversiveness is not something that can be gauged or calculated...I do think that for a copy to be subversive of heterosexual

hegemony it has to both mime and displace its conventions.” (in Kotz, 1992) In this thesis, I argue that Trixie, Katya, and Miss Chief offer subversive critiques and challenges of queer liberalism and settler colonialism, in that they mimic and displace its normative promises and conventions through complex performative strategies of what I describe as monstrous white uncanniness, creating queer(ed) heterotopias, and invoking bad queer politics. For instance, I found that Trixie was embodying a form of resistance that I call “monstrous white uncanniness” --- an uncanny performance of whiteness and oft-celebrated and desired characteristics such as material wealth, beauty, and fame, taken to the point where they become ugly/repulsive/strange (while simultaneously desirable/familiar). I find that such an uncanny performance may estrange queer subjects from their attachment to normative settler colonial and queer liberal structures, by drawing attention to their monstrous, unappealing elements, as well as the instability of their continuance. Second, I found that Trixie and Katya produced and engaged in what I am calling “queer(ed) heterotopias,” spaces produced by and for their queer(ed) selves, which may mirror, distort, and unsettle the normative demands of our current historical moment, by affirming their own queer(ed) bodies, ontologies, and epistemologies. Third, I discovered that these queer(ed) subjects were engaging in a performative strategy that I call “bad queer politics,” whereby they perform multiple and seemingly contradictory/oppositional subjectivities and identities (such as American/Russian, and indian/cowboy), and expression unhappiness, disillusionment, and ambivalence with elements of settler colonialism and queer liberalism. Overall, I found that these drag queens were all engaging in *uncanny* performances and aesthetics. Sigmund Freud explores the meaning of the term *uncanny*, tracing it to the word *heimlich*, “what is familiar and agreeable” and the word *unheimlich*, which is “what is concealed.” (1919, p. 224) Freud finds that the word *heimlich*, has developed “in the direction of ambivalence until it coincides with its

opposite, unheimlich,” and it is at this point where uncanniness comes into being. (1919, p. 226)

More specifically, in terms of my project, the uncanny thus represents what is familiar and agreeable (happiness and settler certainty) which becomes simultaneously unfamiliar at the point where repressed feelings (unhappiness and uncertainty) comes to light. These artists embody and perform queer liberalism and settler colonialism in a way which is familiar, recognizable, and aligns with our conceptions of normative happiness (such as settler certainty) while making them seem unfamiliar (and at times, ugly and monstrous).

I found that these performative strategies the artists were using are similar to what Muñoz calls “disidentification”, subversive resistance efforts “...that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology.” (1994, p.11) Muñoz further explains that:

Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture. (1994, p.31)

In other words, I understand that Trixie, Katya, and Miss Chief do not completely reject settler colonial and queer liberal modes and conventions, but instead, they mimic and mock elements in these structures in a way which made them unfamiliar and unnatural. However, I find that Trixie, Katya, and Miss Chief’s performative strategies, were related yet distinct from disidentification as Muñoz describes, since they were specifically disidentifying with settler colonialism and queer liberalism by expressing and imbuing negative affect connected to these structures.

In particular, I discovered that Trixie, Katya, and Miss Chief were using complex performative strategies as what I call “queer decolonial killjoys” (QDKS). I consider QDKs as a

form of what Sara Ahmed calls “affect aliens.” (2010, 2014) Affect aliens are subjects who sense a “gap between the promise of happiness and how [they] are affected by objects that promise happiness” (2010, p.42) and they stand “outside the life-worlds created by passing happy objects around.” (2010, p.217) I tease together two of the “affective subjects” identified by Ahmed—the “feminist killjoy” and the “unhappy queer” in order to arrive at an understanding of what QDKs may offer in terms of gesturing to queer and decolonial futures. First, Ahmed explains that the “feminist killjoy” is a subject who refuses to align themselves towards a normative happiness. Ahmed finds that the feminist killjoy not only gestates bad feelings by calling attention to unhappy topics (such as sexism), but also “by exposing how happiness is sustained by erasing the very signs of not getting along...They disturb the very fantasy that happiness can be found in certain places.” (2010, p.66) Following Ahmed (2010), Halberstam (2011), Love (2007), Sedgwick (2003), Probyn (2005), and Munt (2007) who have argued for a dwelling with shame and unhappy/negative feelings in queer studies, Ahmed next turns to the subject of the “unhappy queer.” She finds that since heteronormativity structures normative modes of happiness, queer subjects can become unhappy because they “are attributed as the cause of unhappiness.” (2010, p.95) She surmises: “queers can be affectively alien by placing their hopes for happiness in the wrong objects, as well as being made unhappy by the conventional routes of happiness, an unhappiness which might be an effect of how your happiness makes others unhappy.” (2010, p.115) Following this, QDKs are those who specifically place their hopes for happiness in the wrong objects—objects which do not conform to conventional routes of happiness related to settler colonialism and queer liberalism.

In regards to those who refuse and/or cannot perform and embody modes of happiness, Ahmed contemplates,

if we listen to those who are cast as wretched, perhaps their wretchedness would no longer belong to them. The sorrow of the stranger might give us a different angle on happiness not because it teaches us what it is like or must be like to be a stranger, but because it might estrange us from the very happiness of the familiar. (2010, p.17)

Expounding from this, I understand that the QDK may estrange us from the happiness of familiar gendered, sexualized, and racialized norms, but they also act as *decolonial* killjoys because their ways of being, and their complex performative strategies may also alienate us from the fantasies/promises related to settler colonial and queer liberal norms. I suggest that QDKs may unsettle queer studies scholars and others from their complicity in settler structures of feeling, including settler certainty, by rendering queer settler ontologies and epistemologies as unfamiliar and undesirable (while alluring and known). Put differently, QDKs may lead us to question our complicity in normative (settler colonial and queer liberal) modes of happiness, by estranging us from our presumptions of their naturalness. Overall, I argue that these performative strategies that QDKs evoke, can remind queer studies scholars to become more comfortable with being *uncertain* and *uncomfortable*, and may help us to learn how to begin to imagine and build radical queer and decolonial futures.

Chapter Summaries:

In Chapter Two, I explore how drag queen Trixie Mattel is represented as a contestant on the seventh season of *RuPaul's Drag Race*.¹² I outline that Trixie is represented as a queer(ed) other in the first episode of the show, as the drag queens perform visible discomfort to her entrance, and by Trixie's own sharing of her Native American identity. I argue that Trixie performs a kind of resistance to queer liberalism which I term as "monstrous white

¹² Trixie also recently competed on, and won, the third season of *RuPaul's Drag Race All Stars*. The season aired too late to include in my analysis. I plan to analyze Trixie's presence and win on this season in future work. I hypothesize that her win is indicative of how queer liberalism's flexible nature that shifts in order to enfold specific queer(ed) subjects.

uncanniness”—a QDK performance of excessive white womanhood which is both familiar and unknown, comforting and horrifying, alluring and disgusting. I suggest that the meaning of Trixie’s monstrous white realness is made illegible in *RuPaul’s Drag Race* and related content, and yet is still a powerful form of queer(ed) resistance.

In Chapter Three, I analyse the Trixie Mattel and Katya Zamolodchikova’s YouTube series *UNHhhh* for queer ephemera. Trixie and Katya started *UNHhhh* after they were eliminated from *RuPaul’s Drag Race*. I explore *UNHhhh* as a space for Trixie and Katya’s queer(ed) bodies, aesthetics, and knowledges—a space which unsettles normative logics and assemblages of queer liberalism—such as the queer liberal affects of *RuPaul’s Drag Race*. I claim that *UNHhhh* operates as a queer(ed) heterotopia, as it reflects, parodies, and distorts normative bodies, spaces, and knowledges. *UNHhhh* and spaces like it, may operate as generative space for queer possibilities outside of (yet connected to) queer liberalism. In creating and engaging with their own queer(ed) heterotopias, QDKs, I argue, gesture to queer temporalities and spaces outside of our oppressive histories and present moment.

In Chapter Four, I argue that queer politics of (white) identity often operates to disavow the intersections of white supremacy, settler colonialism, and privilege in queer liberal times. Identity politics is especially insidious in queer politics in queer liberal times, especially the ways in which certain gay and lesbian subjects maintain a post-race and colour-blind stance on queer politics (Eng, 2010). I analyze various sites of Trixie and Katya’s performance (including Trixie’s folk album *Two Birds*, and Katya’s YouTube series *RuFLECTIONS* and *Irregardlessly Trish*), finding that both embrace the diverse intersections of their identities—rather than a singular “queer” identity. This is significant in an era of queer liberalism in which queer subjects and projects often strive to disavow the intersections of white supremacy, settler colonialism, and

sexuality with identity. I demonstrate that Trixie and Katya embrace and celebrate the negative affects resulting from their inability/failure to perform and attain the false promises of happiness related to queer liberalism and settler colonialism. This QDK performative strategy, which I term as “bad queer politics,” acts as a subversive refusal of the normative demands of identity politics, and may gesture to more complex, complicated, and multiple queer worlds and relations.

In Chapter Five, I move away from discussing Trixie and Katya and drag queens altogether, and turn my attention to an art exhibition of Cree artist Kent Monkman. While I argue that Trixie and Katya are failed queer subjects in regards to many of the normative demands of queer liberalism, Monkman has been very successful, and has been embraced by public and private institutions as an Indigenous artist. I turn to Monkman, given that Trixie and Katya have recently received more mainstream success and acknowledgement. I am interested in examining how QDKs, specifically artists, who are embraced by queer liberal and homonationalist institutions and spaces, may or may not retain their critical queer and decolonial edge. Do (and if so, how do) these subjects maintain their radically anti-normative affect and politics? I argue that a recent move to include Kent Monkman into *Canada 150* was a homonationalist move on behalf of Canada and its institutions. While Monkman agreed to participate in *Canada 150* with a travelling solo exhibition, this inclusion does not necessarily represent the enfolding of the possibility of queer Indigenous resistance into queer liberalism. Instead, I argue that Monkman’s exhibition unsettles Canadian national narratives, by representing an unequivocally queer Indigenous and temporally destabilized picture of Canadian history, whereby popular Canadian symbols and metanarratives are rendered queer(ed) and uncanny. I also argue that in the exhibition, Monkman implicates all Canadians—including queer peoples (especially white gay men)—in the historic and ongoing injustices against Indigenous peoples. Monkman’s exhibition

therefore resists the queer liberal devouring of his queer Indigeneity. In other words, Monkman invokes bad queer politics, and produces a form of a queer(ed) heterotopia in this exhibition.

In my conclusion section I remind queer studies to embrace settler uncertainty and anxiety in their work to scaffold queerer futures. I reiterate that embracing and grappling with QDKs is one methodology to do so, and must be addressed by queer studies and politics, even in this particularly troubling time that may be described as a “political depression.” (Cvetkovich, 2012)

Chapter Two:
Monstrous White Uncanniness:
Unsettling the Settler is a Drag With Trixie Mattel

In the seventh season episode of the LOGO TV reality show and competition *RuPaul's Drag Race*, drag-queen Trixie Mattel enters the workroom as a contestant, jokingly exclaiming: “This isn’t Maury Povich!” The other drag queens’ moods shift as they react to her entrance with visible discomfort and confusion. Sara Ahmed states that “a body can enter the room and cause a shift in the atmosphere because of what that body brings with it; histories that linger as mood.” (2014, p. 22) In this case, in contrast to their more conventionally beautiful, polished makeup and overall aesthetic, Trixie’s bright pink lips are overdrawn to excess. Her contour is a harsh brown sharp line against her white skin; brown eye brows arching so high that they are partially concealed by her bright blonde long hair; and false eyelashes stacked so thick and heavy that they appear to be significantly weighing down her eye-lids. In summary, she enters *RuPaul's Drag Race* as a killjoy—unsettling and displacing the moods of the other drag queens in offering an unsettling and monstrous mirror to themselves.

In this opening, I suggest Trixie is performing an excessive version of a white woman tourist—with her impressively long blonde hair covered with a giant floppy white sun-hat, and a nonfunctional golden camera hanging from her neck. In this same first episode, as she is shown walking down the runway in a challenge, Brian Firkus (Trixie out of drag) says via voice-over: “my family is Native American—we grew up very, very poor. But Trixie: we have it all. The biggest problem in her life is what to wear the next day.”¹³

¹³ Murray, N. (Director). (2015). Born naked [Television series episode]. In Anderson, M., Bailey, F., Barbato, R., Corfe, S., Gargaro-Magaña, M., Johnson, M., Leslie, K., Maynard, K., McCoy, B., Mills, M., Pezely, J., Piane, L., Polly, J., Porter, H. M., Robinson, L. K., RuPaul, Salangsang, M., Smothers, T., Stahovic, B., Stone, K., & Wegener, C. (Producers), *RuPaul's drag race*. Los Angeles, CA: World of Wonder Productions.



Figure 2.0 Trixie's entrance on the seventh season of *RuPaul's Drag Race*



Figure 2.1 Trixie's entrance on the seventh season of *RuPaul's Drag Race* (close-up)

The confluence of Trixie’s overall aesthetic, with her assertion of her Native American identity, is, I suggest, characterized by a form of resistance to queer liberalism and settler colonialism which I describe as *monstrous white uncanniness*. Monstrous white uncanniness is an embodiment and performance of oft-celebrated and desired white characteristics such as material wealth, beauty, and fame, taken to the point where they become ugly/repulsive/strange (while simultaneously attractive/familiar).¹⁴ In my view, Trixie is able to embody, perform, and satirize white characteristics, qualities which are often made to appear as natural, as something we should all strive for, and something we are all supposedly able to achieve through pro-active participation in the capitalist labour market in the nation-states of the United States and Canada. Trixie, as I argue here, embodies these familiar subjectivities as a form of empowerment, while simultaneously destabilizing them by making them ugly/undesirable (monstrous). This familiar and monstrous embodiment and performance resonates an uncanny affect. I will demonstrate below that monstrous white uncanniness is frightening because it makes the known, familiar, normalized and naturalized appear not known and unfamiliar. Monstrous white uncanniness, I suggest in this chapter, holds the potential to unsettle the appearance of logics of white

¹⁴ Trixie is not the only or first embodiment of white monstrous uncanniness. For instance, in her *film To All the Boys I’ve Loved Before* (2008), Nehiyah Cree/Jewish Ariel Smith provides “a darkly humorous, stylish and surrealist examination of why he never calls when he says he’ll call and a gentle reminder to stop giving a f****.” In the short film, a monstrous woman beautifies herself, and as part of the process slaps white flour on her face, while waiting for the boy she loves to call. The final result of her whitening/beautifying herself is a monstrous body of white excess— blackened eyes with white chunky powder adorn her face, as she stuffs immoderate amounts of cake into her mouth. Furthermore, Trixie is not the first or only (Indigenous) drag queen who performs an excessive (monstrous) whiteness. For instance, Andrew Farrell (Wodi Wodi clan) has developed a drag character named “Becky” who “is stark white” and who wears a “temporary mask made of clown white paint.” (Farrell, 2016, p.575) Farrell explains that Becky was developed to challenge those who question/debate Farrell’s identity as Aboriginal based upon Farrell’s lighter skin. I find that Joanne the Scammer (Branden Miller) also performs and embodies a form of monstrous white realness. While Miller was raised by his adoptive parents as white, he later found out that his father was Black and his mother was Puerto Rican. In 2015, Miller began embodying and performing Joanne the Scammer in online videos. Like Trixie, Joanne performs excessive white womanhood, with frequent mentions of her whiteness and being Caucasian, and exaggerating her material wealth.

heteronormative (and homonormative) supremacy as appealing, natural, and enduring—and therefore may work to upset the naturalization of queer liberalism and settler colonialism. In this way, Trixie is not only operating as a killjoy (in Ahmed’s sense), her monstrous white uncanniness is what I call a *QDK* performative strategy.

Out of drag, Trixie Mattel grew up as Brian Firkus—a gay Ojibwe person from the Bad River Band of the Lake Superior Tribe of Chippewa Indians (in what is currently known as Wisconsin).¹⁵ Firkus grew up off-reservation¹⁶, was marginalized both by his homosexuality and lack of material wealth. A key element of monstrous white uncanniness is therefore, reclamation—taking up and/or embodying characteristics and subjectivities that are often out of the reach of queer(ed), subaltern subjects. Trixie Mattel’s name is further evidence of such reclamation. As a child, Firkus was marked as a “Trixie” by his abusive step-father who would call Firkus this whenever he was “...acting too feminine or gay or being emotional.” (Firkus in Brooke, 2015) “Mattel” stems from the company that produces Barbie (one of her inspirations as well as a toy that Firkus was not allowed to play with growing up). Trixie’s aesthetic, name, and performance are therefore sources of reclamation and empowerment for Firkus as a queer half-white and half-Native American subject.¹⁷

¹⁵ See: Trixie Mattel. (2014, December 8). @LadyAnyFace OJIBWE! Bad River!. [Tweet]. <https://twitter.com/trixiemattel/status/542139967653572608?lang=en>

¹⁶ AfterBuzz TV. (2017, January 24). *Interview with Trixie Mattel: Aging, Dating, and Wanting to Look Like a Wind-Up Toy* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2OnPCYMcNk&t>

¹⁷ Trixie/Firkus has described herself/himself as half-white and half-Native American. See: Kacala, A. (2018, August 31). Trixie Mattel talks Drag Race fandom, RuPaul drama and Applebee’s. *OUT*. Retrieved from <https://www.out.com/entertainment/2018/8/31/trixie-mattel-talks-drag-race-fandom-ru-paul-drama-and-applebees> and Brooke, Z. Q&A: Trixie Mattel. (2015, September 8). *Milwaukee Magazine*. Retrieved from <https://www.milwaukeeemag.com/qa-trixie-mattel/>

Queer settler-subjects are not always comfortable and willing to accept and engage with unsettling acts of Indigenous resistance such as monstrous white uncanniness. In this chapter, I will explore how monstrous white uncanniness is interpreted and negotiated in queer liberal spaces. As highlighted in the introduction of this project, queer liberalism represents "a contemporary confluence of the political and economic spheres that forms the basis for the liberal inclusion of particular gay and lesbian U.S. citizen-subjects petitioning for rights and recognition before the law." (Eng, 2010, p.3) These "particular gay and lesbian" subjects are most often white settlers who are able, more easily than their racialized peers, to attain certain rights and privileges, and participate in an upward trajectory in the labour market. More specifically, I argue that *RuPaul's Drag Race* is a reality-show competition which has emerged in, and reflects this epoch of queer liberalism. As I will outline, in *RuPaul's Drag Race*, drag queens compete for the chance to be "America's Next Drag Superstar"—an acceptable liberal integrationist version of a drag queen who is judged to most successfully participate in a (post-racial) U.S. consumerist labour market. I explore such questions as: does, and if so how does, the inclusion of queer(ed) Indigenous subjects in spaces dominated by settler queer liberal subjects challenge settler colonialism? Is monstrous white uncanniness an effective strategy of resistance to settler colonialism and queer liberalism? What might the academic discipline of queer studies and those engaged in queer politics learn from this QDK aesthetic and performative strategy? What kinds of queer knowledges does Trixie's monstrous white uncanniness gesture to?

Trixie performs and embodies monstrous white uncanniness through drag, a complex and contradictory mode of performance. As Butler reminds us, "there is no necessary relation between drag and subversion." (1993, p.125) Racial and class structures may also be imitated

and exposed in drag performance and aesthetic, although they too may (re)produce oppressive structures of knowledge and power. In my analysis, I will also be mindful of the ways in which Trixie's QDK drag is received and interpreted in queer liberal spaces by settler subjects. Does monstrous white uncanniness elicit an ambivalent reception/reaction by queer liberal subjects?

In this chapter, I will first provide a detailed discussion of monstrous white uncanniness. Next, I will analyze how Trixie's monstrous white uncanniness is interpreted in queer liberal spaces, such as *RuPaul's Drag Race* and related various WowPresents YouTube videos. Finally, I will conclude with an examination of how monstrous white uncanniness, as a QDK move, may assist in imagining and/or building queer and decolonial worlds.

The Queer Revolutionary Aesthetic of Trixie Mattel

In the music video for Los Angeles rock duo Deap Vally's song *Little Baby Beauty Queen*, Trixie Mattel performs her monstrous white uncanniness as a child beauty queen contestant living in a trailer park.¹⁸ In the video, Trixie decorates a small Christmas tree and practices her pageant routine to a seemingly disinterested audience in a dusty trailer park clearing.

¹⁸ See: Deap Vally. (2017, October 25). *Deap Vally – Little Baby Beauty Queen* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZI08BQ1SufU>



Figure 2.2: Trixie decorating a Christmas tree in Deap Vally's *Baby Beauty Queen*



Figure 2.3: Trixie dancing in Deap Vally's *Baby Beauty Queen*

Her mother, grandmother, or guardian (played by Veronica Cartwright) fixes her excessive makeup, encourages her to dance, force feeds her carrots and snack-pack fruit, and insists on her tanning outside, despite Trixie's objections. A disgruntled looking (perhaps envious) young woman, wearing gold devil horns, covertly follows Trixie around the park. I interpret this woman as an unhappy queer(ed) other—upset over Trixie's performing and labouring body and white beauty queen aesthetic. In the end, Trixie is strangled to death, bound up in a string of Christmas lights.



Figure 2.4: Trixie strangled in Deap Vally's *Baby Beauty Queen*

It is unclear as to whether Cartwright's character, a jealous trailer park resident, Trixie herself, or one of the Deap Vally members is the sole culprit—or if it was a group effort. The death of Trixie as monstrous white baby beauty queen may be a metaphor for the murder of JonBenet Ramsay (the six-year-old child beauty pageant queen who was the victim of a 1996 unsolved murder). A broader metaphor emerges when we consider the violence of Trixie's death coupled

with the video's scene of a trailer park filled with a vast assortment of aging junk and items related to Christmas.¹⁹ The confluence of the violent end to Trixie's monstrous laboring white beauty queen body, in a space of both poverty and signs of excessive consumerism, posits a critique of the ugliness, exclusionary nature, and violent logics of capitalism, and the related promises of success and material wealth with what is known as the American Dream. In the first known reference to the American Dream, James Truslow Adam says:

It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. (1931, p.404)

Adam's understanding of the American Dream posits a focus on materiality and social and economic mobility. Recognizing that this perception of the American Dream is an evolving yet still deeply foundational national story, scholars, artists, and others have critiqued the reality of the promise of The American Dream. (Coates, 2015; Cullen, 2003; Hochschild, 1995) The promise of materiality and total social and economic mobility would have to rest upon a post-racial, post-feminist, and post-colonial world that does not exist. The American Dream is thus a form of what Lauren Berlant terms as "cruel optimism"—"a relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility." (2011, p.1) The dream is ultimately impossible for many queer(ed) subjects, and it ultimately propagates settler colonialism (in the form of a sustained investment in, and belief in the ongoing permanency of the US nation-state). The American Dream is also a (white) settler colonial project, because it is a dream based on settler entitlement, the theft of Indigenous land/resources, the oppression of people of colour, and an assumption of

¹⁹ Eve Sedgwick critiques Christmas as the time of year where all oppressive institutions align: "...religion, state, capital, ideology, domesticity, the discourse of power and legitimacy" (1994, p. 6) In other words, the event of Christmas queers those who cannot participate in its normative institutions.

settler futurity. Despite this reality, the American Dream is also an alluring promise for queer(ed) subjects. Ta-Nehisi Coates finds that:

I have seen that dream all my life. It is perfect houses with nice lawns. It is Memorial Day cookouts, block associations, and driveways. The Dream smells like peppermint but tastes like strawberry shortcake. And for so long I have wanted to escape into the Dream, to fold my country over my head like a blanket. But this has never been an option because the Dream rests on our backs, the bedding made from our bodies. (2015, p.11)

The promises of happiness fundamental to the American Dream, as Coates describes, gestates particular strong affects of longing and belonging. For instance, Ahmed reflects on Betty Friedman's (1965) exposing of the fantasy of the "happy housewife," a figure who eliminates the issues around gendered labour, by expressing an unwavering image of happiness. Ahmed asks, "how better to justify gendered forms of labor, not as a product of nature, law, or duty, but as an expression of a collective wish and desire. How better to secure consent to unpaid or poorly paid labor than to describe such consent as the origin of good feeling?" (2010, p.50) Similarly, how better to justify and maintain settler colonialism, white supremacy, and heterosexism, and heteropatriarchy of the U.S. nation-state, than to make it the source of happiness? How better to obscure the genealogies of its historic and ongoing violence against queer(ed) subjects (Indigenous people, Black people, people of colour, and queer folx for instance) than to claim that *anyone* can reach this promise of happiness (if they work hard enough)?

Coates (and Trixie with Deap Vally) call attention to the fact that the very promise of the American Dream (material wealth and success) rests on the historic and continued oppression of queer(ed) others. Further, in the music video, the ultimate promise of material wealth is also challenged here—made grotesque by the amount of old, rotting junk in the park, and Trixie's excessive makeup. Trixie's body is a labouring body in this context, as she dances and disciplines her body (withholding certain foods) in order to attempt to reach the promise of this dream.

Further, Trixie's performance of a *monstrous* child baby beauty queen unsettles what Lauren Berlant refers to as the "infantile citizen." Berlant explains that

...in the reactionary culture of imperiled privilege, the nation's value is figured not on behalf of an actually existing and laboring adult, but of a future American, both incipient and pre-historical: especially invested with this hope are the American fetus and the American child. (1997, p.6)

Put differently, Berlant contends that the nation's hopes, dreams, and promises are condensed into the symbolic figure of the "infantile citizen"—an imaginary child or fetus figure of whom citizens are called to protect and (re)produce. As Muñoz reminds us though, "the future is the stuff of some kids. Racialized kids, queer kids, are not the sovereign princes of futurity." (2007, p.363) Trixie makes this "infantile citizen" appear uncanny—she is both familiar and unfamiliar, beautiful and terrifying. In summary, the death of Trixie's monstrous white labouring child body posits a warning to those who attempt and hold on to the promise of The American Dream—there are those bodies who cannot survive navigating social and economic upward mobility. In this way, Trixie's monstrous white uncanniness challenges the national mythology and promise of The American Dream and the infantile citizen (and as such: a premise of settler prosperity and continued existence on Indigenous lands).

As demonstrated with this example, monstrous white uncanniness is a specific kind of aesthetic—it is a form of *embodied* knowledge and resistance. To further explore Trixie's monstrous white uncanniness, I undertake an analysis of queer monstrous bodies and power. Queer and feminist theorists have highlighted the potential of the "monstrous body" in (de)constructing, unsettling, and challenging, cultural and structural norms and logics of power and knowledge. Foucault (1990) offers a starting point in understanding the ways by and which bodies (re)produce structures and norms of power-knowledge. Foucault argues:

... the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but on the other hand, its constitution as labor power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection (in which need is also a political instrument meticulously prepared, calculated and used); the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body. (1995, p.25-6)

With the start of bio-power as a governing tool in the 18th century, the body becomes a central site of power-knowledge in terms of discipline and regulation— “sex” as a quality of bodies in particular is used to access the life of bodies and population. (Foucault, 1990) Foucault understands that biopower is an “indispensable element in the development of capitalism” (1978, p.140-141), since capitalism rests on disciplined, economically productive bodies which are produced by and through regulated reproduction. Bodies are therefore sites of the (re)production of power relations, and a body is always “bound up in the order of desire, signification, and power.” (Grosz, 1994, p.19)

Bodies are thus systematically organized by the state into sexed and racial hierarchies and classes, built upon normalizations, and are marked for life or death in order to (re)produce biopolitical structures of power-knowledge. Judith Butler (1993) finds that under this system of biopower, “sex” is continuously constructed (performed, and reiterated), and marks subjects for life or death. As such, she finds that:

This exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed thus requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet “subjects,” but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject. (1993, p.2)

Abject, queer(ed) bodies do not adequately perform, reiterate and propagate the regulatory, racialized, and sexed norms of interrelated biopolitical systems such as capitalism, heteropatriarchy heteropatriarchy, heterosexism, and settler colonialism. Julia Kristeva argues

that "the abject has only one quality of the object and that is being opposed to I." (1982, p.1) Put differently, the "abject" is the threatening and unsettling "other" which, through opposition, gives the subject meaning. Kristeva further explains that the abject is "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite." (1982, p.4) Kristeva finds that: "essentially different from 'uncanniness,' more violent, too, abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory." (1982, p.5) In summary of Kristeva, Jennifer Lodine-Chaffey finds that the abject "refers to the human reaction akin to an encounter with the uncanny, but markedly different and more violent. Abjection... is a uniquely human response to a threatened collapse of the concept of self." (Lodine-Chaffey, 2013, p. 206) Bodies like Trixie's then, in their monstrous whiteness, may slide from uncanniness into abjection when they pose a threat to the normative (settler colonial and queer liberal) conceptions of self of those who encounter them, thereby potentially inciting a shift of current normative orders. Queer(ed) and monstrous bodies are abject bodies, since, as Elizabeth Stephens recognizes, they: "...have in common the fact that they have no essential meaning in and of themselves but are rather malleable forms or forces ranged against a dominant order they threaten to disrupt." (2009, p.184) As the other, queer and abject bodies therefore only made and interpreted within the very system which they reveal to be unstable.²⁰ In summary, abject queer(ed) bodies are also more than just uncanny, they hold the potential to represent a radically/violent unsettling of taken-for-granted norms and disciplinary demands.

²⁰ In saying this, I do acknowledge that there are constraints in what possibilities these threatening abject bodies gesture to, following Foucault, who recognizes that: "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power." (1990, p.95)

More specifically, in the context of settler colonialism, Indigenous studies scholars have persuasively demonstrated that white and heterosexual subjects become marked for life to sustain the biopolitical underpinnings of the nation-state, at the expense of queer and queer(ed) Indigenous bodies marked for death. (Finley, 2011; Morgensen, 2010 & 2011; Smith, 2006, 2010 & 2011) Marking Indigenous bodies for death does not only refer to historic genocidal violence against Indigenous peoples, or the murderous violence of settler colonialism (such as the epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women), but also includes historic and ongoing settler attempts of eliminating Indigenous sovereignty, cultures, stories, symbols, sexualities, genders, and more. Finley contends that “[t]hrough the action of colonial discourses, the bodies of Native women and men are queered and racialized as disordered, unproductive, and therefore nonheteronormative” (2011, p.37). Indigenous bodies and sexualities are always particularly monstrous in imaginaries of settler subjects, since they continuously represent a threat to the justification and maintenance of settler futurities.²¹ Put differently, Tuck and Yang argue that “the settler positions himself as both superior and normal; the settler is natural, whereas the Indigenous inhabitant and the chattel slave are unnatural, even supernatural.” (2012, p.6) The bodies of Indigenous women are further understood as monstrous since, as Andrea

²¹ Scholars have argued that Indigenous people must be represented/understood as continuously disappearing in the national imagination in order to justify settler colonialism. (Shanley, Shoat & Stam, 1994; Smith, 2003) As a form of this disappearing, Indigenous bodies are all-too-often depicted as “ghosts.”(Bergland, 2000; Boyd & Thrush, 2011). While Indigenous “ghosts” and “monsters” both offer inceptions and disruptions to settler colonial dominance, queer Indigenous monstrous bodies such as Trixie offer a unique form of resistance—a resistance based on what Gerald Vizenor understands as “native survivance”— “Survivance, in the sense of native survivance, is more than survival, more than endurance or mere response; the stories of survivance are an active presence... The native stories of survivance are successive and natural estates; survivance is an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy and victimry.” (1998, p.37-38) In this understanding, settler colonialism may be understood as a haunting (Tuck & Ree, 2013; Morrill, Tuck, and the Super Futures Haunt Collective, 2016). Further, if we follow this line of thinking, some Indigenous ghosts may be monstrous, but only when they actively rail against logics of settler colonialism and inflection of “indian” subjects.

Smith argues, “the demonization of Native women... is part of white men’s desires to maintain control over white women” (2003, p.78). The bodies of Indigenous women had to be portrayed as monstrous, queer, and sexually deviant in order for settlers to justify their colonization which supplements Indigenous orders with a Eurocentric order (Finley, 2011) through the violent placation of Indigenous bodies, genders, and sexualities. For instance, under colonization, Indigenous bodies were also disciplined into heteronormative family units and gendered roles, in order to propagate settler futurity through settler economies. (Emberley, 2007; Lugones, 2007) Queer Indigenous and Two-Spirit bodies have undergone historic and ongoing violence in settler-colonial orders since their queered Indigenous bodies and sexualities are both positioned as oppositional to heteropatriarchal and heteronormative settler lifeways. (Belcourt, 2016a; Miranda, 2010) Furthermore, as Smith notes, “in the colonial imagination, Native bodies are also immanently polluted with sexual sin.” (2003, p.73) Because Indigenous forms of relationality, economy, and sexuality did not (and continue to not) replicate heteropatriarchal structures, settlers marked Indigenous bodies as othered and inferior bodies in the way for (re)producing settler prosperity on stolen Indigenous lands. Settler colonialism requires Native bodies and sexualities to be historically and continuously understood as queer and monstrous in order to persist and to legitimize itself and its continued existence. (Finley, 2011)

In summary, in positing Indigenous bodies as sexually deviant, perverse, and monstrous, settler imaginaries work to justify and propagate settler prosperity on stolen Indigenous lands. Indigenous bodies are therefore, often interpellated as sites of abjection, in the sense that they are sites where the meaning of settler subjectivities (such as sexuality and gender, which are understood as natural and superior) collapse. As previously highlighted, queer abject bodies are

also threatening bodies—they represent potential sites of resistance, subversion, and political agency. (Butler, 1993; Kristeva, 1982) In other words, as Carolyn Dinshaw articulates:

Queerness works by contiguity and displacement, knocking signifiers loose, ungrounding bodies, making them strange; it works in this way to provoke perceptual shifts and subsequent corporeal response in those touched ... It makes people stop and look at what they have been taking as natural, and it provokes inquiry into the ways that 'natural' has been produced by particular discursive matrices of heteronormativity. (1995, p.76-77)

Following Dinshaw, Trixie's body is such a site of queer abject monstrosity—a site of which "...makes people stop and look at what they have been taking as natural..." Mattel's drag aesthetic is very unique. Trixie has recognized that her aesthetic is polarizing amongst drag queens and broader audiences. Referencing her makeup, Trixie has stated that "if you're supposed to paint for the back row in drag, I like to think that I paint for the Denny's down the street." (in Farabaugh, 2015) Her face is painted with deep, harsh contouring (often deep brown on white) with wildly exaggerated and over-extended eye makeup. Her eyebrows are most often painted halfway up her forehead, nearly (or completely) touching her scalp. Her bright—almost neon—blue eyes (contacts) are framed by as many as fourteen larger-than-life sets of false black lashes stacked upon one another, set far off both lash-lines. Nails usually extended an inch over the edge of the finger-tip and are painted pink or other bright colours. She is most often adorned in tall and flowing, white, blonde, hot pink, or pastel coloured wigs. Trixie argues that: "I love women, but I'm not interested in tricking the eye into being their gender." (in Kennedy, 2015) Mattel has argued that if drag queens perform as women, she is a "caricature of a caricature of a woman" (in Weaver, 2017). In other words, instead of focusing on performing a feminized aesthetic, Mattel performs an exaggerated representation of gender-troubling drag itself—a caricature of a caricature—a monstrous version of a women and drag queen. Trixie's drag

therefore may make other drag queens uncomfortable, since she is performing their aesthetic to excess.

I find that not only is Trixie a monstrous caricature of a drag queen, she is a caricature of a *white* drag queen who is a caricature of a *white upper-class* American woman. Trixie thus takes control over her representation by playfully eluding the interpretation of her body as Indigenous, by mimicking whiteness to the extreme. Trixie, as a queer half white and half-Indigenous body, mimicking whiteness and femininity to excess, turns the gaze back to white society, revealing it to be monstrous. Trixie's aesthetic and performance, in this way, may lead viewers to question the entrenchment of logics of settler colonialism and white supremacy.²² This disruption is a deliberate strategy. Firkus (2015) says his drag persona Trixie Mattel is: "the Stepford mom he never had, and the Barbie I always wanted." (in Brooke, 2015) Firkus explains:

There's something to be said that I grew up in a Native American family and poor, and I portray a character who is full-on white, Valley Girl and rich. Native Americans have so many social issues. They're disenfranchised. Alcoholism is huge in the community. A lot of people experience the loss of a parent. Drag for me is all about taking something negative and making it something positive. If I was allowed to have girl's toys when I was little and nothing bad ever happened to me, I wouldn't look like a kid's toy now and have dark comedy. Dressing up as a different person for a living makes you fall more in love with yourself. A little vacation from who you are makes you appreciate what you are. (in Brooke, 2015)

Trixie in this way embodies subjectivities and characteristics associated with the white settler privilege that Firkus wanted (and now desires) growing up Native American and in poverty.

Responding to Gayatri Spivak's (1988) query "can the subaltern speak?" Emma Pérez queries back: "if the subaltern could speak, would not desire be the subject of that discourse?" (1999,

²² In this way, Trixie is enacting what Homi Bhabha (1984) understands as "mimicry." Bhabha understands that colonizers are constantly trying to distinguish themselves from the colonized Other in order to maintain their supremacy. Bhabha explains that "the *menace* of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority." (1984, p.129 *Their emphasis*) The colonized may mimic/mock the colonizer as an act of resistance, which reveals the instability of normative structures of power and knowledge.

p.157) Trixie’s aesthetic and performance alludes to the reality that (queer) Indigenous and other subaltern resistance efforts may engage in and highlight a longing for privileges and realities afforded to white settler subjects such as white beauty standards and material wealth. Firkus’ concludes with a sly jab to white settlers who embody these realities though, by saying that “a little vacation from who you are makes you appreciate what you are.” While recognizing the allure of whiteness, Firkus also ultimately upholds who he is (half-Native American and half-white) as his desired identification. Trixie too has publicly identified as Native American.²³

As previously highlighted, Trixie performs a caricature of a caricature of a white upper-class American woman. Her performance becomes monstrous since she performs this white upper-class American woman to excess. Trixie recycles and rethinks dominant feminine beauty standards and the propagation and acceptance of white settler subjectivities such as active participation in consumerism, as a goal that we all can, should, and must attempt to live up to, by exposing them as unstable and ugly/undesirable. Trixie's monstrous white uncanniness recognizes the allure of whiteness for marginalized others, and does not lay fault on, nor rebuke them for attempting to embody or desire its subjectivities and promises. Instead, in performing monstrous white uncanniness, marginalized others such as Trixie perform the aspects of whiteness they long for, while simultaneously subverting them by exposing them as ugly, grotesque, and unnatural. Trixie embodies the white settler woman too well—to a point of uncanny excess. While embodying what would be perceived as the pinnacle of beauty standards and possessing material wealth is something Firkus himself may truly desire, Trixie’s aesthetic and performance also reminds us that these are not necessarily things that he and we should long

²³ See: WOWPresents. (2016, August 19). *UNHhhh Ep 19: “Religion” w/Trixie Mattel & Katya Zamolodchikova* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X0nSZLH0zYw>

for and work towards—an unsettling thought for those in privilege and for those who strive to reach the promises of the American Dream.

This subversive ambivalence is elucidated by Firkus/Trixie in performances in the public sphere, as they often loudly proclaim their “unparalleled beauty, talent, and superstardom,” and at the same time their extreme lack of talent and material wealth. For instance, in one *Logo* video, Firkus/Trixie half-done in Trixie’s excessive make-up asks the camera: “Do you guys ever look and the mirror and you think: ‘why am I the most beautiful drag queen that has ever lived in this whole earth?’”²⁴ The incongruity of Firkus/Trixie’s statement with the excessive half-done facial make-up creates a moment of uncanniness where the construction of settler colonial beauty standards (where white features are ultimately upheld as the standard, while disavowed) and happiness and prosperity located in achieving American (white) beauty standards and material wealth are revealed as unstable and unnatural. While Trixie embodies white settler subjectivities (material wealth, and beauty), by making them appear ugly/monstrous in their excess, she also exposes their naturalization and normalcy as a fallacy—a fallacy which queered/subaltern others would not necessarily want to mimic or work towards fully embodying. In this way, Trixie is undertaking what Muñoz would understand as “disidentification” which, as he explains

is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture. (1999, p.31)

In a disidentificatory maneuver, Trixie recycles and rethinks alluring aspects of whiteness they long for, while simultaneously subverting them by exposing them as ugly, grotesque, and

²⁴ See: Logo. (2016, March 18). *Drag Makeup Tutorial: Trixie Mattel's Bubble Gum Fantasy | RuPaul's Drag Race* | [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KOhamgj62jQ&t>

unnatural. In these ways, Trixie's aesthetic and performance is an embodied knowledge—an affective way to unsettle viewers' notions of normative structures and knowledges. A (queer) Indigenous subject embodying the American Dream is an unthinkable and illegible politics for many settler subjects. White beauty norms, femininity, and the accumulation of material wealth as ugly and undesirable is also "rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture." Trixie's monstrous white uncanniness, a QDK strategy, is therefore a nuanced form of disidentification.

As a form of what Muñoz terms as disidentification, monstrous white uncanniness is not always an effective and/or enactable form of resistance. Muñoz explains that:

...disidentification is *not always* an adequate strategy of resistance or survival for all minority subjects. At times, resistance needs to be pronounced and direct; on other occasions, queers of color and other minority subjects need to follow a conformist path if they hope to survive a hostile public sphere. But for some, disidentification is a survival strategy that works within and outside the dominant public sphere simultaneously. (1999, p.5)

Put differently, monstrous white uncanniness may not register as abjection in those she encounters. If disidentification is not always an affective strategy of resistance or survival, how is Trixie's monstrous white uncanniness received in settler colonial queer liberal spaces? What are the limits and constraints of the queer/decolonial world-building possibilities of monstrous white uncanniness?

Invading Space as a Revolting White Other

The sites I will use to explore potential possibilities and limitations of Trixie's monstrous body in terms of unsettling and challenging interlocking logics of settler colonialism, capitalism, heteropatriarchy and heterosexism are: *RuPaul's Drag Race* (her season and subsequent appearances in the franchise); and the WOWPresents YouTube channel (more specifically, in the contexts of *Transformations*; and *Trixie, Katya, Raja, Raven, and More RuPaul's Drag Race Queens Read Each Other to Filth! Part 1*). I chose these specific sites due to *RuPaul's Drag*

Race complicity in queer liberalism. As I will demonstrate, *RuPaul's Drag Race* and WOWPresents content highlight the importance of queer subjects participating in an upward trajectory in the capitalist labour market, securing certain rights of citizenry (such as marriage), and adherence to American patriotism. I also chose these sites due to their mainstream and popular circulation. While viewership of *RuPaul's Drag Race* is difficult to calculate due to the proliferation of illegal online streaming, each YouTube video maintains a count of viewership. At this moment, the *Transformations* video with Trixie has over 642 000 views, while the first episode of *UNHhhh* has over 823 000 views. These figures convey a considerable viewership, yet RuPaul still insists that “drag will never be mainstream,” maintaining that: “[Drag is] the antithesis of mainstream. And listen, what you’re witnessing with drag is the most mainstream it will get. But it will never be mainstream, because it is completely opposed to fitting in.” (in interview with Jung, n.d.). While drag may always be against the mainstream, *RuPaul's Drag Race* is gaining more popularity and acclaim in mainstream media (as evidenced by a growing viewership, a move to the more mainstream network VH1, and RuPaul’s recent Emmy win for his work on *RuPaul's Drag Race*).

In fact, *RuPaul's Drag Race* has been the site of a great deal of both praise and critique.

RuPaul finds the show presents the opportunity for social change, arguing that:

What the show has done on a broad level is really spoken to young people who are out in the middle of nowhere who don't know where their tribe is... To help them identify what they're feeling and who their tribe is, and how to live a life outside of what they were told they're supposed to do. How to successfully live your life without buckling under the pressure of society. (in interview with McEvers, 2016)

Despite RuPaul’s understanding of the show building community and teaching young (queer) people how to live in a society that is not necessarily looking out for ways in which to uphold

their ontologies and epistemologies, I find that *RuPaul's Drag Race* represents a site of what Muñoz calls “commercial drag.” Muñoz explains that:

Commercial drag presents a sanitized and desexualized queer subject for mass consumption, representing a certain strand of intergrationist liberal pluralism. The sanitized queen is meant to be enjoyed as an entertainer who will hopefully lead to social understanding and tolerance. Unfortunately, this boom in film and televisual drag has had no impact on hate legislation put forth by the New Right or on homophobic violence on the nation's streets. Indeed, I want to suggest that this “boom” in drag helps one understand that a liberal-pluralist mode of political strategizing only eventuates a certain absorption, but nothing like productive engagement with difference. (1997, p.85)

As “commercial drag”, *RuPaul's Drag Race* may be understood as pushing for social equality and betterment for all people through “integrationist liberal pluralism,” which as I understand, is a manifestation of queer liberalism and settler colonialism. Furthermore, Josh Morrison finds that: “through its ‘edgy’ yet liberal mainstream politics, *Drag Race* promotes the false universals of patriotism, free market economics, and the idea that gays and lesbians are ‘just like everyone else’ in wanting a domestic, state-sanctioned neoliberal life.” (2014, p.134) More specifically, at the heart of *RuPaul's Drag Race* is a queer liberal (and as I discussed above, settler) understanding that all queer(ed) others have the ability to realize individual social equality and betterment through pursuit of the American Dream. One of RuPaul's many catch phrases is “we're all born naked and the rest is drag”—recognizing that we are all players in systems of power which we can freely alter our role in. However, an uncritical interpretation of this ignores and obfuscates the reality that depending on social location, one's ability to alter their perceived roles and subjectivities is limited. Therefore, this form of resistance does not deconstruct the very systems (neoliberalism, capitalism, and hetero-patriarchy) it is attempting to find inclusion in. Instead, it upholds it for certain “homonationalist” (Puar, 2007) individuals who are able to perform well-enough to reach perceived degrees of success. This framework for queer liberation buys into the fallacy of a post-race/post-identity public, where everyone in the U.S. nation-

state—regardless of visible racial identities and multiple subjectivities—can reach success and equality if they work hard enough. Yet, even if the promise of the American Dream rang true, Jodi Byrd justly finds that “settler colonialisms that produced the global North, particularly the United States, have created internally contradictory quagmires where human rights, equal rights, and recognitions are predicated on the very systems that propagate and maintain the dispossession of indigenous peoples for the common good of the world.” (2011, p.xix) Queer liberal inclusion in the labour market and citizenry only reproduces settler futurities on Indigenous lands to the detriment of Indigenous peoples.

In order to operate as a settler colonial queer liberal site which understands race and identity as something that can be transgressed, *RuPaul's Drag Race* relies on the deployment of problematic racial and gendered representations. Ralina Joseph argues that “post-race is an ideology that cannot escape racialization, complete with controlling images of racialized stereotypes.” (2009, p.239-40) *RuPaul's Drag Race* often has contestants deploy performances of racial and gendered stereotypes in order to advance in the competition. Often these stereotypes are based on what RuPaul and the judges²⁵ perceives and deems as authentic and/or appropriate. For instance, Sabrina Strings and Long T. Bui contend that in the competition of *RuPaul's Drag Race*,

while gender can be subverted, inverted, or reified, race must follow a protocol of ‘realness’. Moreover, for the black and brown characters on the show, racial realness means staying ‘true’ to one’s off-stage ethnic/racial identity, a requirement not enforced for the white and Asian characters on the show. This policing of racial identity for certain minty characters re-inscribes them as fundamentally ‘Other’ (F. Fanon 1967; Stuart Hall 1997), re-instating race as ‘natural’ or ‘real’ at the same moment as it undermines gender’s ‘realness.’ (2014, p.823)

²⁵ In saying this, I also understand and recognize that the content, judging, and representations on *RuPaul's Drag Race* are not solely influenced and shaped by RuPaul and the judges, but instead are influenced by the producers, editors, networks, and more.

Racialized contestants are often upheld to perform what RuPaul and the other judges deem as authentic racial markers and tropes of their background. For example, Puerto Rican drag queens on the show are often pushed to fulfil and perform certain markers of Latina-ness (Mayora, 2014; Strings & Bui, 2014). Mayora finds that “this represents a missed opportunity to encourage the Puerto Rican queens to use drag as a way to call attention to the performativity of ‘whiteness,’ much like drag has the potential to highlight the concept of gender as a social construct.” (2014, p.114). This disavowal of race politics, while enforcing racial stereotypes and tropes, may be understood as a specific product of this queer liberal moment, in which, as Eng argues, there is a “systematic disassociation of queer politics from critical race politics.” (2010, p.4) In this context, how will Trixie be received as a half-white and half-Native American performing excessive white femininity?

(Queer) Indigeneity and ‘indian Simulations’ on *RuPaul's Drag Race*

Trixie Mattel’s monstrous white uncanniness on the seventh season presents a unique challenge to RuPaul’s form of racial policing. Despite announcing their Native American identity on the show (in the first episode), Trixie is never pushed by RuPaul or the other judges to perform her Native-Americanness, or specifically Ojibwe-ness). Instead, Trixie performs a version of her monstrous white uncanniness—perhaps being the only queen to do so in the history of *RuPaul's Drag Race*. Trixie may be the only Indigenous drag queen on the show who is *allowed* to do so. *RuPaul's Drag Race* has had two other contestants who identified as Native American on the show: Stacy Layne Matthews and Adore Delano. While Trixie identifies as half-Ojibwe and half-white, Stacy Layne Matthews identifies as Native American and Black, and Adore Delano identifies as Mexican-American and Native-American (Chola).²⁶ While Adore is

²⁶ See: AdoreDelano. (2018, March 1). I am mostly Mexican & Native American & I’m super cool. [Tweet]. <https://twitter.com/AdoreDelano/status/704893465956655104>

less vocal about her Indigeneity, preferring to strictly perform her Chola identity, Stacy Layne Matthews reveals her Native American identity but is marked and held up to black racial tropes and standards by the judges. Strings and Bui explain that

Stacy is a voluptuous queen hailing from Back Swamp, North Carolina. She reveals after several episodes that she is Native American, but curiously enough, her southern credentials, skin color, and weight mark her black by association. Therefore, Stacy manages to excel when she performs two prominent stereotypes of black femininity: The Mammy and Sapphire. (2014, p.828)

Strings and Bui further argue that it is only when Stacy Layne Matthews performs tropes and stereotypes of black women in the United States of America, does she entertain and receive praise from judges. (2014, p.828) In this way, RuPaul (and the other judges) therefore propagate a fallacy of a post-identity/post-race reality while having contestants perform their (read: the wider settler American public's) definition of racial authenticities. Performing Indigeneity has been allowed on the show—but only in what Gerald Vizenor terms as the “indian”: "...a simulation, the absence of natives; the indian transposes the real, and the simulation of the real has no referent, memories, or native stories.” (1998, p.15) For instance, on the ninth episode of Season 3 (titled: “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Style), contestants engage in America-related competitions. For their main challenge, (announced by RuPaul adorned in a cowboy-inspired outfit), the queens are asked to create a one-minute message for the troops. For the main-stage, RuPaul instructs the queens to dress in their “most patriotic outfits.” For the main-stage challenge, Indonesian-American contestant Raja dresses in full red-face (a Plains-inspired headdress, turquoise, and buckskin and leather short-bikini).²⁷ Raja's look is well-received by the

²⁷ Raja's disappointing response to accusations of cultural appropriation warrants a mention. On May 24th, 2015 on her public facebook page, Raja posted: “I need to say something. Those who accuse me of "cultural appropriation" are those who have never left their front lawns, mostly in their small American towns. That is, assuming you have a lawn, or a life. I travel, a lot more than you. No seriously, I travel a

judges, who cry out “How!” and “Nava-HO” as she walks down the runway. Indigenous symbols such as the headdress and buckskin are often appropriated and (re)configured as “indian simulations,” (Vizenor, 1998) which are then, in turn, included in what Lauren Berlant calls the “national symbolic”—a “culture of feelings” (1997, p.43) fostered by the state, media, and others organized around a “collective possession of...official texts” (1997, p.103), in what is currently the United States (and Canada). Furthermore, “playing indian” is a pastime with a continued history in the United States and Canada. Phillip Deloria (1998), Eva Mackey (2001), and Tuck and Ree (forthcoming) address that in the United States and Canada, settler subjects play indian and appropriate Indigenous stories and symbols in order to reconcile their anxieties of the ambiguities of their identities as settlers on dispossessed Indigenous lands. Raja’s dressing up as a hypersexualized indian, coupled with the racist dialogue of the judges, is a form of this. When Raja receives her more formal critiques, RuPaul asks: “can you get more American than Native American?” More specifically, RuPaul’s statement represents a “settler move to innocence” (Mahinney, 1998; Tuck & Yang, 2012)—a crystallization of a settler colonial move of both erasing Indigenous representation, and replacing it with an “indian simulation” (Vizenor, 1998) which is enveloped into U.S. patriotism.²⁸

lot more than most. I come from a mixed background of European and Asian, and I grew up in the hood. Bite me, get a passport, and gag on my sick ass style.

Don't be mad at the person who celebrates cultures that he has experienced and loves first hand.

It's always the ones who sit around watching it thru a screen that have the biggest, worthless opinions.

K bye!!” (see: <https://www.facebook.com/RajaOfficial/posts/1099553886727638>) Raja’s response is another example of a “settler move to innocence.” (Mahinney, 1998; Tuck & Yang, 2012)

²⁸Here, I am paraphrasing Gerald Vizenor. Vizenor explains the “indian”: “...a simulation, the absence of natives; the indian transposes the real, and the simulation of the real has no referent, memories, or native stories.” (1998, p.15) When I use the term ‘indian’ in this project, I am referring to these “simulations” of “indians” as Vizenor (1998) describes.

Trixie is aware that her look is polarizing to drag queens, and also may have been aware of RuPaul's racial policing and marking on the show, and his/her²⁹ potential discomfort with Indigenous bodies (as evidenced by the treatment of Stacy Layne Matthews). For instance, on the show, in my view, Trixie brought a more subdued version of her monstrous white uncanniness, as every look Trixie debuted on the show was a less-excessive version of her makeup (with the exception of her finale look when she was not running a risk of being eliminated). Despite receiving mostly praise for her looks and performances on the show, Trixie was eliminated on the fourth episode.

In the fourth episode, Trixie and most of the other queens received relatively equivalent degrees of criticism. The critiques Trixie receives in regard to her elimination relate to her "standing out" and her comedy. Pearl and Trixie were selected by RuPaul as being the bottom two and proceeded to lip sync for their life, which ends in Trixie being eliminated over Pearl.

Reflecting on her subsequent elimination, Trixie stated that:

I was literally stunned. I couldn't even believe I was in the bottom. I loved my performance in the challenge, I was obsessed with my green runway look, and as in love with Pearl I am, I knew I would slay her in the lipsync. I didn't understand it when it happened in real time. And after watching the episode a few times- I still don't get it. In fact, I understand Ru's decision even less. (in Cook, 2015)

This elimination was also received with great confusion and critique from audiences and *RuPaul's Drag Race* alumna such as Alaska Thunderfuck 5000, and Milk.³⁰ In the (first) episode

²⁹ RuPaul appears in and out of drag on *RuPaul's Drag Race* as "RuPaul."

³⁰ See: McDonald, J. (2015, March 26). RuPaul's Drag Race elimination sparks online furor. *OUT*. Retrieved from <http://www.out.com/popnography/2015/3/26/rupauls-drag-race-elimination-sparks-online-furor>; Pollo Del Mar. (2015, February 26) Returning 'Drag Race' Star Trixie Mattel: My Elimination Made Fans Think the Competition Was Scripted. *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/pollo-del-mar/post_9321_b_7111260.html; and Terrell, M. (2015, April 22). Trixie Mattel elimination casts doubt on RPDR reality. *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/matthew-terrell/trixie-mattel-elimination_b_6936636.html

in which Trixie was eliminated in, the main-stage runway theme was “Green Runway.” Her runway look includes a pastel green kimono with a large fascinator composed of a box of rice, chopsticks, fan, and fortune cookie. While the constraints of this dissertation do not warrant a thorough critical examination into the politics of Asian-appropriation evident in Trixie’s look, an analysis of this specific performance of monstrous white uncanniness and her elimination must be briefly addressed. As previously highlighted, *RuPaul’s Drag Race* often delimits contestants (except for Indigenous ones) into performing only one element of their racial identity, elements that RuPaul and the judges deem acceptable and authentic. Furthermore, RuPaul and the judges have only allowed a non-Indigenous contestant to play “indian”, and no contestant before Trixie has performed monstrous white uncanniness. With her Asian inspired “Green Runway,” Trixie is performing a complex form of monstrous white uncanniness whereby she, an Ojibwe man, is performing a caricature of a drag queen, who is a caricature of a white woman, who is in turn appropriating symbols/stereotypes often conflated with Asian identities in the American imaginary. This quadruple-play on settler colonial racial politics may be extremely unsettling for RuPaul the judges, who have recognized and reinforced post-racial identities and “indian simulations,” (Vizenor, 1998) and who are operating in a settler colonial queer liberal context. Was Trixie Mattel eliminated due to the queer liberal subjects’ anxieties stemming from her monstrous white uncanniness?

In episode eight, “Conjoined Twins,” Trixie and the other queens eliminated that season were brought back to compete for a returning spot in the competition. Trixie (paired with Pearl) wins the spot back in the competition. Again, Trixie faces similar degrees of criticism as the other queens but is ultimately eliminated in the tenth episode. When Trixie is eliminated this time, she is in split cowboy/cowgirl drag. More specifically, Trixie as an half-Ojibwe and half-

white man is performing monstrous white cowboy/cowgirl uncanniness. Cowboys and indians figure prominently in the American national imaginary—with the cowboys playing the role as the hero with the indians usually understood as the sometimes bloodthirsty—and sometimes noble but inevitably inferior and disappearing—villains. William Lawrence Katz (1986) finds that “...frontier omissions lie at the heart of our cherished national myth...”, yet those national myths occlude the fact that both Indigenous and Black men were “creating a culture in the wilderness, bravely rescuing their families, and riding off into the sunset...” (1986, p.16) In other words, Indigenous and Black experiences are stereotyped, misrepresented, and/or erased all together from this national myth, which is a form of what Stuart Hall recognizes as “symbolic violence” whereby it is “established a connection between representation, difference and power.” (1997, 258-259) Reflecting on the erasure of Indigenous and Black experience and histories in this element of the American national imaginary, and his experiences watching and playing cowboys and indians as a Black, gay, effeminate male, Durrell M. Callier argues:

Era(c)sure vis-à-vis mass media communication. The not so subtle message, which inoculated me with a new (dis)ease nursing my cultural amnesia and newly found us/them mentality based upon a tried and true formula—deny/change history, oversimplify a people and their culture, create the Other, fear the Other, control, consume, DESTROY the Other. (2012, p. 504)

Like Callier, as a Black American, RuPaul too would have experienced representations of this element of the national imaginary. As previously highlighted, in the third season of *RuPaul's Drag Race*, RuPaul announces the ninth episode America patriotism theme in a cowboy outfit, in the same episode where Raja dresses in red-face as a symbol of American patriotism.

Participating in the American national mythology of cowboys and indians can be alluring for queer settlers of colour such as RuPaul, since it enables a participation in a national mythology dominated by whiteness and indianness.

RuPaul is a queer Black subject who has found success in his pursuit of the American Dream (success as in: material wealth and fame). On *RuPaul's Drag Race*, RuPaul makes frequent references to how gay men are oppressed (in America), yet he encourages the drag queens to become proactive in the capitalist labour market in order to pursue the promise of the American Dream. To do this, RuPaul must propagate a fallacy of a post-racial, post-feminist, and post-settler colonial U.S. landscape. In my view, when Trixie enters this queer liberal competition, her monstrous white uncanniness is not eliminated from the competition because she does not do as well as the other drag queens in challenges—it is because her monstrous white uncanniness challenges the very queer liberal logics that RuPaul (and the show itself) rely on for meaning. In this way, Trixie's monstrous white uncanniness (especially a half-white and half-Native American man, as white woman, as Asian woman; and half-Native American and half-white man as white cowboy/cowgirl) slides into abjection, yet she ultimately becomes illegible to the queer liberal subject (RuPaul) and project (*RuPaul's Drag Race*). To critically interact with, and begin to understand the meaning of Trixie's monstrous white uncanniness, RuPaul (and the show at large) would be forced to contend with their individual and collective roles in the historical and continuing dispossession and oppression of (queered) Indigenous subjects, and queer(ed) others. To understand Trixie's monstrous white uncanniness is to understand that the American Dream is the maintenance of settler logics (capitalism and heteropatriarchy) on stolen Indigenous lands, taken and inhabited through Indigenous oppression and marginalization. This rendering of Trixie's body as illegible raises a warning for those engaging in performances of monstrous white uncanniness in the public sphere—especially in spaces that are supposedly queer and accepting and celebrating of difference such as *RuPaul's Drag Race*. Even when

Trixie presents a more subdued, yet nuanced, version of her usual monstrous white uncanniness, she is “eliminated” from the space, potentially due to settler anxieties/discomfort.

RuPaul's Drag Race is not the only example of Trixie's body being rendered illegible by queer liberal subjects. Prior to and following the filming of the seventh season *RuPaul's Drag Race*, Trixie's aesthetic, performance, and humour has also potentially met with settler discomforts and anxieties. For instance, in the June 17th, 2015 WOWPresents video *James St. James and Trixie Mattel: Transformations*, Firkus paints James St. James in the style of Trixie Mattel.³¹ James St. James “Transformations” videos follow a typical format where St. James is painted by and in the style of a drag queen, who shares with St. James their style and answers questions about their career, life, aesthetic, and inspirations. In this video, St. James asks Firkus about growing up in Milwaukee. Firkus corrects him, saying “I grew up far north-east Wisconsin like right off of a reservation... Yeah Because I'm like half-Native American.” St. James interjects: “are you?” Firkus responds: “Yeah. I just look really white, I paint like a white woman! I'm Ojibwe. Hi. How, are ya.” St. James interjects again: “There used to be an Ojibwe Park where I grew up.” Firkus jokes, “I'm related.” They both laugh, St. James, apparently recognizes his blunder, and Firkus replies “Well, it's like Chippewa, same thing.” St. James interrupts again, exclaiming: “I went to Chippewa high school!” Firkus appears bemused, responding: “So you get it!” Firkus continues mocking St. James, saying: “I drink Chippewa Spring Water, I totally get it!” The editors cheekily placed a caption above St. James at this point which says: “WHITE PEOPLE ‘We Get It.’”

³¹ See: WOWPresents. (2015 June 17). *James St. James and Trixie Mattel: Transformations* [Video file]. Retrieved from, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RXC54CfEpKM&t=>



Figure 2.5: Trixie Mattel on *James St. James' Transformations*

The exchange ends, and the two begin discussing Firkus' introduction to drag. St. James' interruptions with his perceived personal linkages to Firkus' Ojibwe identity are a form of what Tuck and Yang term as "settler adoption fantasies." (2012, p.13) Tuck and Yang build off Sara Ahmed (2000), who details the importance of being able to replace "the stranger," (or indian), and re-centralization of white identity. Ahmed explains that to "become without becoming," is to replicate "the other as 'not-I' within rather than beyond the structure of the 'I'." (2000, p.132) In making tenuous links to Firkus' articulation of his experiences as an Ojibwe, St. James re-centers and reaffirms his white settler experience. While Trixie (and the editors) are able to expose St. James' white self-centeredness, the exchange ends without additional discussion of Trixie's experiences as and of an Ojibwe, and how this informs Trixie's monstrous white uncanniness (which St. James is being painted as). While Trixie's monstrous white uncanniness was subdued and eventually eliminated from *RuPaul's Drag Race*, monstrous white uncanniness in this

particular exchange is encountered, enfolded into whiteness which it resists against, but is eventually evaded. In the end, St. James is painted as a monstrous version of a white woman, but the opportunity to engage with what this means has been elided.

Trixie's monstrous white uncanniness is evaded/eliminated in at least two other WOWPresents videos. In one WOWPresents video, "Untucked: RuPaul's Drag Race Season 8 - Episode 3 'RuCo's Empire'",³² Trixie receives an uninvited and unexpected read from the queen Acid Betty. In the video, *RuPaul's Drag Race* contestant Kim Chi is surprised by a video pre-taped message from Trixie backstage as the judges decide who to eliminate. Trixie expresses how much she misses Kim Chi, and reminisces about her and Kim Chi's friendship. Throughout the playing of the message, Acid Betty interjects with: "look at that ugly makeup, let's be honest she is ugly"; "that nose contour is atrocious"; and "would you fix her makeup when you go home?" Kim Chi and two other queens defend Trixie in her absence, with Bob the Drag Queen making a comparison between Acid Betty as a freak, and Trixie as a "freak of nature." Acid Betty argues that she doesn't get Trixie's makeup, and Derrick Barry replies that it is not for her to get. This exchange provides an example of a direct attack of monstrous white uncanniness by a white settler (queer liberal) subject. In encountering monstrous white uncanniness, Acid Betty both acknowledges while dismissing the queer potential of Trixie's monstrous body. Acid Betty acknowledges Trixie's body as "revolting"—in the sense that it is ugly and beyond her understanding of positive, and cannot get past this to understand that Trixie's body is "revolting" in the sense that it is subverting and unsettling dominant and oppressive structures of power and

³² See: WOWPresents. (2016, March 22). *Untucked: RuPaul's Drag Race Season 8 - Episode 3 "RuCo's Empire"* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t9RYBK4-YVM&list=PLQfnBbeYjjD0XcR1TpTw6eYy30jLklAIC>

knowledge.³³ Even Derrick Barry's attempt at defending Trixie denies a "revolting" and revolutionary potential of monstrous white uncanniness, since Barry encourages Acid Betty to ignore critically analyzing and engaging with Trixie's aesthetic altogether.

This evasion of settler engagement with monstrous white uncanniness is evident in a second video on WOWPresents. In a June 2016 WOWPresents video *Trixie, Katya, Raja, Raven, and More RuPaul's Drag Race Queens Read Each Other to Filth! Part 1*, Chad Michaels refuses to read Trixie, saying that: "you know what? [Trixie] is just so easy to read. Let's just skip over her, it's fine." In drag-speak, reading is a form of sharp and witty, often exaggerated critique/analysis. Intriguingly, Trixie is the last queen to be read in this part of the series, and is not read by any other queen after. While refusing to read can be understood as a read in and of itself (alluding to the fact that the subject being read is either not worth the critical effort/thought put into a read, or is too easy to critique), the non-read of Trixie by a white subject (Chad Michaels) may be understood as another form of a "settler move to innocence" (Mahinney, 1998; Tuck & Yang, 2012). In reading Trixie, Chad Michaels and the other queens would be forced to critically analyze monstrous white uncanniness, and their implication in it as settler subjects. By refusing to read Trixie, Chad Michaels transforms her monstrous white uncanniness into a ghost (there and not there, continuously appearing to read/provide meaning to others but to never be engaged critically with).

In examining of Trixie's monstrous white uncanniness in the settler colonial queer liberal sites of *RuPaul's Drag Race*, it becomes evident that monstrous white uncanniness is not always a well-received and transformative method of resistance. Mediated by and in settler colonial queer liberal spaces, Trixie's monstrous white uncanniness was made illegible, ignored, evaded,

³³ Here, I am building off of Christine Braunberger's (2000) and Kathleen Lebesco's (2004) conceptions of "revolting bodies."

read as ugly/undesirable, and even completely eliminated from the space altogether. This is particularly disturbing, since these spaces are spaces of acceptance—where difference and marginalized subjectivities are supposedly upheld and celebrated. The reception of Trixie’s body in these spaces illuminates that unsettling the settler as a QDK can be a drag—it can be approached through the medium of drag— but it is a slow, often unwelcomed, grating process met with a great deal of resistance.

This examination of how Trixie’s monstrous white uncanniness is received in the queer liberal spaces revealed a great deal of limits and constraints of the queer/decolonial world-building possibilities of monstrous white uncanniness. This unveils a further question: if Trixie’s monstrous white uncanniness is ignored and/or erased in settler colonial queer liberal spaces, how would she be received in spaces dominated by conservative, racist, sexist, misogynistic, and anti-queer settler colonial whiteness? What stories, perspectives, and futures gestured to are evaded when the stories of queer(ed) others are rendered illegible and ultimately eliminated?

Conclusions: Glimpsing Queer and Decolonial Futurities with Monstrous White Uncanniness

On November 7th, 2016, Trixie Mattel posts a photo of her walking down a daytime New York City sidewalk, on to the social media platform Instagram. In the photo, she drags a large suitcase behind her, and is wearing sneakers, black pants, a bright pink long sleeve shirt, and a grey and red ball-cap over a wig-less head. Tilted downwards, and in profile in the shot, her face is painted in signature Trixie fashion: with harsh brown contouring over white and exaggerated black winged eyes that stretch towards the tip of her already heightened ballcap. Two (visibly white) individuals pass her and are obviously staring at her face as they pass, one (a man) with his mouth slightly ajar. A commenter, moonrockcrises, quips: “the woman behind you is shook by your natural beauty.”



Figure 2.6: Screen shot of Trixie Mattel Instagram from November 2017.

This image is what Muñoz terms as “ephemera”— queer “glimmers, residues, and specks of things” that are “firmly anchored within the social.” (2006, p.10) While the visibly heteronormative white subject is visibly unsettled by the site of Trixie’s aesthetic to the point where they stare, Trixie turns the gaze back at them by sharing the image on Instagram. Put differently, Trixie, a queer half-Indigenous (and half-white) subject, turns the settler-gaze and opens it to the critique of a public audience. A queer glimpse—a moment of resistance and world-building is fully realized as moonrockrises takes the bait and affirms the queer(ed) revolting, monstrous beauty that is Trixie Mattel.

Christine Braunberger finds that “there is a reckless kind of freedom in horrifying others, in making one's body into the seductive and scary and strange combination that is monster beauty.” (2000, p.12) In outlining the ways in which settler colonial queer liberal subjects and spaces limit and constrain (and even eject) the transformative possibilities of monstrous white uncanniness, I also want to bring attention to and celebrate the powerful queer(ed) and decolonial potentialities that arise in the glimpses of monstrous white uncanniness. There is a unique kind of power in this form of resistance, in providing unsettling and even terrifying glimpses of queerness, whiteness, and Indigeneity. Understanding this, I now return to my guiding questions of how would Trixie’s monstrous white uncanniness may be received by settler colonial subjects, and subjects in and outside of queer studies. Instead of focusing on what Trixie could do for these subjects and disciplines, I am interested in turning to the transformative, queer and decolonial glimpses and opportunities presented by and for Trixie and other queer(ed) bodies who enact white monstrous uncanniness. As previously highlighted, monstrous white uncanniness recognizes the allure of whiteness for marginalized others, and does not lay fault on, nor admonish them for attempting to embody or strive towards its subjectivities and promises. Instead, in performing monstrous white uncanniness, marginalized others are enabled to perform the aspects of whiteness they long for, while simultaneously subverting them by exposing them as ugly, grotesque, and unnatural. When performing monstrous white uncanniness in the public sphere, Trixie has identified as half-Native American (or half-Ojibwe), where she could arguably pass as a white subject. The meaning and power of this statement and identification cannot be underscored, since in colonial representations and imaginaries, Indigenous bodies are often marked and depicted as inferior. Trixie’s performance of white subjectivities, and centralizing her Ojibwe identity is a potent and powerful act of fully

embodying love, healing, and home. The allure of the promise of the American Dream and white subjectivities is real, and Trixie accepts this while unveiling them to be unnatural and oppressive, all the while celebrating and propagating her queer Indigenous body. This act of embodiment is also an act of self-care, which as Audre Lorde explains: "...is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare." (1988) Building off of Lorde, Ahmed finds:

To have some body, to be a member of some group, to be some, can be a death sentence. When you are not supposed to live, as you are, where you are, with whom you are with, then survival is a radical action; a refusal not to exist until the very end; a refusal not to exist until you do not exist. We have to work out how to survive in a system that decides life for some requires the death or removal of others. Sometimes: to survive in a system is to survive a system. We can be inventive, we have to be inventive, Audre Lorde suggests, to survive. (2014)

Monstrous white uncanniness is an inventive survival strategy for queer(ed) individuals, who are marked as abject, monstrous and queered bodies from the start. The queer gesture which arises from the exchange of Trixie's Instagram image and moonrockrisers comment posits a hopeful future for the engagement with monstrous white uncanny bodies, beyond the present constraints of settler colonial queer liberalism. If queer studies and queer politics fully welcome and are open to the unsettling and discomfoting monstrous white uncanniness, queer and decolonial world-building potentialities could arise around gender, sexuality, beauty, wealth, materiality, Indigeneity, and tradition. If queered Indigenous bodies such as Trixie are ignored in queer studies and queer politics, they run the risk of attaching to worldmaking structured by "cruel optimism." (Berlant 2011, p.24) Instead, troubling queer monstrous bodies may remind us, as Muñoz argues: to "...never settle for that minimal transport; we must dream and enact other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds." (2009, p.1)

Chapter Three:
‘Queer Thyme’ Because ‘Reality is a Bunch of Bullshit’:
Productive Failure in the Queer(ed) Heterotopia of UNHhhh

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Trixie’s monstrous white uncanniness (a QDK strategy), was an affective embodiment (performance and aesthetic) which reflects and may produce unhappiness and unease with current queer liberal and settler colonial demands. Trixie’s failure to embody objects of happiness affected those around her in *RuPaul’s Drag Race* and related spaces—causing unease, discomfort, uncertainty, and other related (negative) feelings.

Reflecting on (feminist) killjoys, Ahmed says

Even if you do not want to cause the unhappiness of those you love, a queer life can mean living with that unhappiness. To be willing to cause unhappiness can also be how we immerse ourselves in collective struggle, as we work with and through others who share our points of alienation. *Those who are unseated by the tables of happiness can find each other.* (2014, *My emphasis*)

Following Ahmed, I consider those QDKs like Trixie whom locate one another. What kind of affects, epistemologies, and ontologies would they produce in their shared alienation from queer liberal and settler colonial contexts and spaces? Could these queer(ed) subjects form their own queer(ed) spaces? What forms of queer and decolonial futures would they collectively gesture to in such spaces and relationships?³⁴

³⁴ In formulating these queries, I am inspired by David Garneau’s conceptualization “irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality.” Garneau describes “irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality” as spaces where “...Blackfootness, Metisness, Indianness, Aboriginality, and/or Indigeneity is performed apart from a Settler audience. It is not a show for others but a site of being where people simply are, where they express and celebrate their continuity and figure themselves to, for, and with each other in a complex exchange without the sense of feeling they are witnessed by people who are not equal performers.” (2012, p.33) Garneau further explains that these spaces are “sites of epistemological debate” where: in the exchange of stories, gestures, touches, thoughts, feelings, and laughter the very nature of contemporary Aboriginality is subtly tested, reconsidered, provisionally confirmed, or gently reconfigured, composed, and played in rehearsal. This requires separate discursive territories for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit folks to be themselves and to work themselves out.” (2012, p.34) Can other queer(ed) subjects produce their own discursive spaces akin to what Garneau describes here?

To explore these queries, I consider Trixie’s relationship to the drag queen Katya Zamolodchikova, in their shared space of their YouTube show *UNHhhh*. Like Trixie, Katya was a contestant who failed to become “America’s Next Drag Superstar” on the seventh season of *RuPaul’s Drag Race*. Following their elimination from *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, Trixie and Katya begin starring on their own YouTube show, *UNHhhh*, on the channel WOWPresents.³⁵ *UNHhhh* began filming in February 2015, a month prior to the seventh season premiere of *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, with the first episode airing on March 18th, 2016. *UNHhhh* is a series of four to ten-minute-long themed episodes in which Trixie and Katya share their “expert” opinions and advice on topics such as beauty, dating, money, religion, parenting, and health. In each episode, Trixie and Katya sit in front of a green screen, and editors take great liberty in ever-changing backgrounds, music, sounds, animations, and more. Each episode focuses on one of these topics, yet Trixie and Katya’s conversations usually wildly delve away from the episode theme at hand. The series has a considerable viewership and following (as of December 27th, 2016, the first episode has amassed over 737 000 views, with the latest episode at over 355 000 views after ten days). The show became so popular, that in 2017, it was announced that Trixie and Katya would be moving to the network *VICELAND*, to host a show with a similar format to *UNHhhh*, titled *The Trixie and Katya Show*.³⁶

On *UNHhhh*, Trixie and Katya open each episode with a variation of welcoming the viewers to *UNHhhh*—a show, they remind us, where they talk about whatever they want, whenever they want, because it is their show, and ‘not yours.’ I suggest that this frequent

³⁵ WOWPresents is a channel created by World of Wonder, the same company which produces *RuPaul’s Drag Race*.

³⁶ See: *VICELAND*. (2017). *The Trixie and Katya Show*. *VICELAND*. Retrieved from https://www.viceland.com/en_us/show/the-trixie-and-katya-show
Due to the constraints of this dissertation, I focus solely on *UNHhhh*, but plan to compare and contrast *UNHhhh* and *The Trixie and Katya Show* as queer(ed) heterotopias in future work.

reminder evidences that *UNHhhh* is explicitly a creation of an autonomous space for their queer(ed) selves. In this chapter, I explore the transformative, queer and decolonial possibilities of such a space. First, I explore the ways in which queer(ed) subjects experience and move through spacial and temporal manifestations. Second, building from Foucault's conception of heterotopias, I will define *UNHhhh* as a *queer(ed)* heterotopia. Next, I explore *UNHhhh* as a specific site for "productive failure." (Sturn, 2014) Finally, I will explore the transgressive functions and possibilities of *UNHhhh* as a queer(ed) heterotopia, in terms of how the queer(ed) failed and failing bodies, performances, aesthetics, epistemologies, and ontologies may gesture to futures outside of neoliberalism, settler colonialism, and queer liberalism.

Queer Spaces, Temporalities, and Bodies

In order to conceptualize *UNHhhh* as a queer(ed) heterotopia, we must first outline the ways in which queer(ed) subjects experience and move through spacial and temporal logics. It is essential to first distinguish between place and space. Michel De Certeau finds that "a place is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence" and as such "it implies an indication of stability." (1984, p.117) A *space*, on the other hand, as De Certeau understands it, "is composed of intersections of mobile elements." (1984, p.117) Soja further elucidates that "the organization, and meaning of space is a product of social translations, transformations, and experience." (1989, p.80) If we follow this frame of thinking of place and space, *UNHhhh* then, is a *space* on YouTube—a *space* where the queer(ed) subjects Trixie and Katya engage with their own subjectivities, viewers watch and participate in their productions (with each other in the comments and other forums such as the *RuPaul's Drag Race* subreddit or in everyday dialogue with friends, colleagues, and others).

While Trixie and Katya have created this flexible and shifting space for themselves, queer(ed) subjects are often occluded from normative spaces, due to the fact that their subjectivities exist outside of, and therefore reflect, the instability of normative temporalities. Structures of power and knowledge produce specific normative embodiments and trajectories which normative settler subjects are disciplined into inhabiting/embodying. Elizabeth Freeman explains this process through her concept of “chrononormativity”—“the use of time to organize individual bodies towards productivity.” (2010, p.3) Subjects in what is currently known as the United States for instance, are expected to be productive bodies—achieving at least a high school education, joining the workforce, getting married, having children, purchasing property, and completing their civic duties and responsibilities as American citizens (vote, pay taxes, stand for the Pledge of Allegiance and anthem). Each of these chrononormative examples involve their own normative trajectories, and sustain intersecting logics and structures of heteronormativity, homonormativity, neoliberalism, and capitalism. (Freeman, 2010) These trajectories and lifeways are structured, performed, and propagated in a way where they are to appear natural, and commonsensical, and which privilege specific subjects (namely: heteronormative productive white subjects). For instance, Halberstam recognizes a trajectory of “family time.” Halberstam argues that:

Family time refers to the normative scheduling of daily life (early to bed, early to rise) that accompanies the practice of child rearing. This timetable is governed by an imagined set of children's needs, and it relates to beliefs about children's health and healthful environments for child rearing. The time of inheritance refers to an overview of generational time within which values, wealth, goods, and morals are passed through family ties from one generation to the next. It also connects the family to the historical past of the nation, and glances ahead to connect the family to the future of both familial and national stability. In this category we can include the kinds of hypothetical temporality—the time of “what if”—that demands protection in the way of insurance policies, health care, and wills. (2005, p.5)

Halberstam's example of "family time" evidences the heteronormativity which underlies spacial and temporal trajectories. These (heteronormative) trajectories also correlate with, and undergird structures of neoliberalism, capitalism, and nationalism. Bodies and subjects are continuously disciplined and assembled into these chrononormative temporalities such as "family time" through normalization/naturalization, but also through promises and hope. Lauren Berlant describes our attachments to these temporalities/trajectories as "cruel optimism," the

relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is discovered either to be impossible, sheer fantasy, or *too* possible, and toxic. What's cruel about these attachments, and not merely inconvenient or tragic, is that the subjects who have *x* in their lives might not well endure the loss of their object/scene of desire, even though its presence threatens their well-being, because whatever the *content* of the attachment is, the continuity of its form provides something of the continuity of the subject's sense of what it means to keep on living on and to look forward to being in the world. (2011, p.24)

For instance, within the American Dream, hopeful subjects are promised that if they perform those chrononormative achievements, they will be rewarded with success and prosperity. Yet, as highlighted in the previous chapter, many cannot perform and fulfil the demands of these normative and disciplinary trajectories and lifeways, due to how they are structured by, and enmeshed in, the interlocking multiple systems of power and knowledge. Furthermore, Freeman, Halberstam, and Berlant's work on family time, chrononormative time, and cruel optimism is not contextualized within their relation to settler colonialism, the structures and logics which attempt to justify and authorize the eliminating of Indigenous presence (physically and culturally) on Indigenous lands to make way for settlers. (Tuck and Yang, 2012; Wolfe, 2006) Normative temporalities in what is currently known as Canada and the U.S. then, are settler temporalities. By occluding the relation between queer and normative temporalities, these queer theorists inadvertently contribute to maintaining what Mark Rifkin calls "settler common sense." (2014, p.xvi)

In summary, subjects are queer(ed) not solely because their sexual practices are considered immoral/disturbing. Instead, it is their *failure* to adequately conform to socially constructed broad normative discourses and disciplines of knowledge and power (such as family time—reproduction, success in the capitalist labour market, *and* the acceptance and propagation of settler prosperity and supremacy, and more). Due to their position outside of normative time and space, certain subjectivities, bodies, knowledges, and aesthetics are, therefore, queer(ed). (Freeman, 2010; Halberstam 2005 & 2010) They are the others who fail (purposely or inadvertently) and will not, or cannot, adequately perform and embody the constructed demands of this world. In turn, these queer(ed) subjects move through their own queer temporalities, as Halberstam (in Dinshaw et al, 2007) explains:

Queer time for me is the dark nightclub, the perverse turn away from the narrative coherence of adolescence—early adulthood—marriage—reproduction—child rearing — retirement — death, the embrace of late childhood in place of early adulthood or immaturity in place of responsibility. It is a theory of queerness as a way of being in the world and a critique of the careful social scripts that usher even the most queer among us through major markers of individual development and into normativity. (p.182)

Halberstam elucidates that “queer” as a way of being in the world that gestates new temporalities, may enable subjects to “believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience—namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death.” (2005, p.2) In my analysis, I will pay special attention to how on *UNHhhh*, Trixie and Katya critique normative temporal-spatial logics, and may also gesture to queer temporalities outside of heteronormative, chrononormative, *and* settler colonial markers of life experience and being in this world.

***UNHhhh* as Queer(ed) Heterotopia**

Foucault presents a detailed, yet ambiguous description of heterotopias. Using his description, I will demonstrate that *UNHhhh* is an example of a *queer(ed)* heterotopia—an

unsettling spacial/temporal zone both in representation and perhaps, affect.³⁷ More specifically, Foucault provides definitions of heterotopias, as well characteristics which heterotopias embody. These characteristics are particularly useful for me as I reflect on the space of *UNHhhh*. To begin, Foucault explains heterotopias are

Something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality... I believe that between utopias and these quite other sites, these heterotopias, there might be a sort of mixed, joint experience, which would be the mirror. The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place... In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there. (1986, p. 24)

In my view, this explanation of heterotopias (as mirrors to utopias) connects to Muñoz's conceptualization of queerness as a utopic "ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future." (2009, p.1) More specifically, I understand heterotopias to present a practical

³⁷ I am not the first scholar to identify "queer heterotopias." See: Jones, 2009; Munt, 2008; German, 2015). For instance, German describes "queer heterotopias" as "distinct spatial formations in which the experience of sexuality resists the idioms available to fundamentally normative political imaginary." (2015, p.110) Similar to me, Munt turns to popular culture, finding that Philip Pullman's trilogy, *His Dark Materials*, acts as a queer heterotopia since "aspects of sexual subjectivities in the trilogy...can be interpreted as non-normative or 'queer'... Pullman's trilogy is a queer heterotopia in that it insists upon a self-fashioning, or self-work that is achieved through being responsive to the collective good, and by holding fast to ethical truths, achieved dialectically in many forms." (2008, p.199) I designate *UNHhhh* as a queer(ed) heterotopia which differs from these understandings of queer heterotopias. Queer(ed) heterotopias, I find, are spatial formations in which non-normative sexual, racial, classed, subjects perform and (re)produce their own queer epistemologies and ontologies.

strategy to produce queer futures in Muñoz's sense, as they allow us to represent, contest, and invert real sites and meaning, thereby allowing for a space for us to "reconstitute" ourselves in a space that is both real and unreal. In such a site that Foucault describes, new queer(ed) ontologies and epistemologies may emerge. Foucault also describes "heterotopias of deviation" as "those in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed." (1986, p.25) In this way, *UNHhhh* may be conceptualized as a *queer(ed)* "heterotopia of deviation", since as I argue, Trixie and Katya's queer(ed) behaviours and aesthetics deviate from and fail to fully embody the queer liberal idealization of "America's Next Drag Superstar" on *RuPaul's Drag Race*. Following their elimination, they are given the placement/opportunity to become part of *WowPresents*. Yet, as I will demonstrate, their "deviant" queer(ed) bodies and subjectivities are realized and upheld in their own deviant space in *UNHhhh*, and therefore, may embrace and represent their failed selves, thereby gesturing to other utopic queer worlds.

Foucault further argues that heterotopias spatially connect multiple real and incompatible spaces in one space. (1986, p.25) *UNHhhh* connects spatially, the real and incompatible queer spaces of *WowPresents*, *RuPaul's Drag Race*, the queer(ed) bodies of half-white, half-Native American drag queen, a white settler drag queen, fans, and the queer space of the show together into the one virtual space. These spaces are incompatible, in the sense that the *WowPresents* YouTube channel collates and promotes material related to *RuPaul's Drag Race*—a competition which Trixie and Katya were both eliminated from. As previously highlighted, Trixie and Katya make frequent references to *RuPaul's Drag Race* (the show overall, contestants, and judges). They also draw attention to the less pleasant side of *RuPaul's Drag Race*—for instance, in one episode, Trixie refers to the show as the "hunger games" (the name of a dark popular book

trilogy and film series where children are pitted against each other in a violent competition to the death).

In a second sense, *UNHhhh* brings together three real and incompatible (or at least, incongruous) subspaces. First, is the more-constant space of the white-back drop. Most of Trixie and Katya's dialogue occurs in front of this space, and it acts as a sort of neutral zone. On this white space, editors often supplant various backgrounds or items dependent on the topic at hand. This links to the second subspace—the editors' voices which enter *UNHhhh* through an array of random imagery and text that quickly appear and disappear on the screen. The editors, who Trixie and Katya identify as "Chris and Ron,"³⁸ oscillate between following normative editing structures (providing visual references to what is being talked about), and deliberately taunting the pair. For instance, in an episode on social media, Trixie reveals that she cannot delete her *Myspace* page due to forgetting the password, and because of this there are embarrassing photos and song lyrics available online of her sixteen-year-old self. Katya asks Trixie if she realizes that she is "releasing the Kraken...in this case the Kraken is abject humiliation."³⁹ Trixie disagrees, because she is not telling the audience what to search for. As she says this, the editors add a bell chiming noise, and a text URL to the *Myspace* page being discussed which hovers over Trixie's head. In case audience members miss these two cues, the editors have added four neon flashing arrows pointing to the link.

³⁸ In later episodes, the editor "Jeff" is added.

³⁹ WOWPresents. (2016, September 12). *UNHhhh Ep 22: "Social Media" w/Trixie Mattel & Katya Zamolodchikova* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eN9ce0EVD2o&t>



Figure 3: The editors draw attention to Trixie’s Myspace account in *UNHhhh* “Social Media.”

Since the editing occurs after the dialogue is filmed, Trixie and Katya are unaware of what is being edited in (images, sounds, and texts) behind them. As such there are often two conversations/perspectives occurring separately, but in relation to each other in the show.

In the second half of the first season, Trixie and Katya appear to regain some authority over the editors, as they begin “calling” them with a plastic house phone to request/demand specific edits.



Figure 3.1: Trixie calls the editors in *UNHhhh* “Hollywood.”

These fluctuations in power, control, and representation between Trixie and Katya, and “Chris and Ron” are representative of heterotopias in that they spatially connect the two spaces of *UNHhhh* as the space in which Trixie and Katya inhabit, and the incorporeal, otherworldly space which the editors exist in. In my view, put together, these spaces produce *UNHhhh* as existing and operating outside of normative time and space (a queer space). The third subspace of the green screen in *UNHhhh* further cultivates an audience perception of the show existing out of normative time and place, while connecting it to real time/space. The editors will often abruptly cut from the neutral white or edited background to the green screen (often when Trixie and/or Katya makes a mistake or says something particularly outrageous).



Figure 3.2: White background with edited *Contact* poster in UNHhhh “SPACE.”



Figure 3.3: Green screen background in UNHhhh “SPACE.”

I find that these disruptions of an unedited green screen unsettle viewers from becoming too comfortable or lulled into any sense of security or ease by the imaginary of *UNHhhh*. The shifts

to the green screen may remind viewers that Trixie and Katya are not only existing in a constructed, otherworldly, contradictory, and unsettling temporal zone, but are also connected to the here and now too. This third subspace assists in maintaining *UNHhhh* as a *queer(ed)* heterotopia. If “queer” represents a constantly shifting and unsettling site, the space of *UNHhhh* (and the viewers’ experience watching it) is queered by the rapid and frequent shifts in structures of editing, space, topic of discussion, and more.

The confluence of contradictory and connected spaces is closely related to Foucault’s understanding that heterotopias “are most often linked to slices in time.” (1986, p.26) Foucault ascertains that “the heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time.” (1986, p.26) *UNHhhh* may be understood as a heterotopia functioning in full capacity then, as it represents and embodies queer temporalities outside of normative time. *UNHhhh* also demonstrates a queer spacial-temporal zone in terms of place, aesthetic, and cultural references. For instance, in each episode, Trixie and Katya sit in front of a green screen, facing the cameras. The green screen is most-often edited as a solid white background behind them. Often, the editors will impose specific backgrounds and quotes dependent on the topic at hand. For instance, in “UNHhhh Ep 31: “SPACE” w/ Trixie Mattel & Katya Zamolodchikova”, the editors place Trixie and Katya in front of a starry night sky, to give the illusion of them floating in space.



Figure 3.4: Trixie and Katya edited in front of starry sky and satellite in *UNHhhh* “SPACE.”

On closer inspection, the viewer may notice a satellite reminiscent to the one from the 1997 feature film *Contact*, which Katya has a special affinity for. In the same episode, the background shifts to a variety of scenes depending on the topic at hand, including: a fiery ring; a drugstore; planets and stars; a solid white background; a rocky planet with a moon and Saturn in the sky; a hospital delivery room; the outside of a farm house (with UFO hovering above); the judging panel of *RuPaul’s Drag Race*; a living room, an exploding White House; and a 1990’s living room.



Figure 3.5: Trixie and Katya edited in a hospital delivery room in *UNHhhh* “SPACE.”



Figure 3.6: Trixie and Katya edited in front of a farmhouse, with UFO and text in background in

UNHhhh “SPACE.”

Figure 3.7: Edited Trixie as RuPaul and Katya as RuPaul’s Drag Race judge in *UNHhhh* “SPACE.”

The editing allows Trixie and Katya, as queer(ed) others, to embody and move through any space and time. They can be anyone, in any recognizable or unrecognizable time period.

Furthermore, the aesthetic of Trixie and Katya’s drag lends to the queer temporality of *UNHhhh*, as both do not adhere to any current or identifiable coherent fashion trends or identities. For instance, in the episode “UNHhhh Ep 25: ‘Beauty Tips Pt 1’ w/ Trixie Mattel & Katya Zamolodchikova” Trixie wears an oversize pink and blue mini dress which appears to be from the 1960s, with a pink fan in her hair that she eventually removes. Katya is wearing oversize round white glasses, and a tight long-sleeved black dress with a high neckline and embroidered white and red pattern (from no identifiable time period). In another episode, “UNHhhh ep 4: ‘Dating’ with Trixie Mattel & Katya Zamolodchikova,” Trixie wears a bright pink exercise headband, and an oversize collared t-shirt with ruffled sleeves with her face and “Trixie” printed on the front. The top reminds me of the oversize nightgowns that I wore as a child in the 1990s,

with Barbie or various Disney princesses depicted on the front. This may be understood as an act of reclamation on the part of Trixie, who was chastised for “acting too feminine or gay or being emotional” as a child. (Firkus in Brooke, 2015) While Trixie may have not been allowed to play and engage with Barbies as a child, he has become one and can engage with them as an adult. In this same episode, Katya pairs a vest with tan hexagons and black and red cubes printed on it, with a brown and tan long sleeve long shirt. She is wearing a hat of curly tan pieces (which bears a strong resemblance to rotini pasta).



Figure 3.8: Trixie and Katya in *UNHhhh* “Dating.”

Furthermore, as previously highlighted, Trixie is a half-white, half-Native American man in monstrous white uncanniness drag, wherein she is a caricature of white drag queen and woman. Katya too blends cultural identities in her drag. Katya out of drag is Brian McCook—a white American settler of Irish ancestry. Katya’s cultural identity is ambiguous, shifting between an American Katya, and a Russian Katya. This queer aesthetic disrupts normative temporalities of fashion and cultural and ethnic identities—viewers, including myself, are unable to pin down

their fashion or identity to any normative temporality. Trixie and Katya’s cultural references also do not adhere to current trends in mainstream media. A running gag in the show is Katya continuously referencing the 1997 fantasy/sci-fi film *Contact*, which she has a strong affinity for. Queer references to *RuPaul’s Drag Race* are also reoccurring—such as Katya’s frequent interjections of lines from *RuPaul’s Drag Race* contestant Tatianna’s song “Same Parts,” and Trixie mimicking RuPaul with exaggerated head swivels and puns. Furthermore, Trixie and Katya will often repeat and make reference to prior phrases, jokes, and subject matter of *UNHhhh*, such as Katya punctuating points by “thwoorping” (snapping open a fan) or doing “combos” (placing her hands crossed in front of her chest, with an edited ball-cap landing on her head).

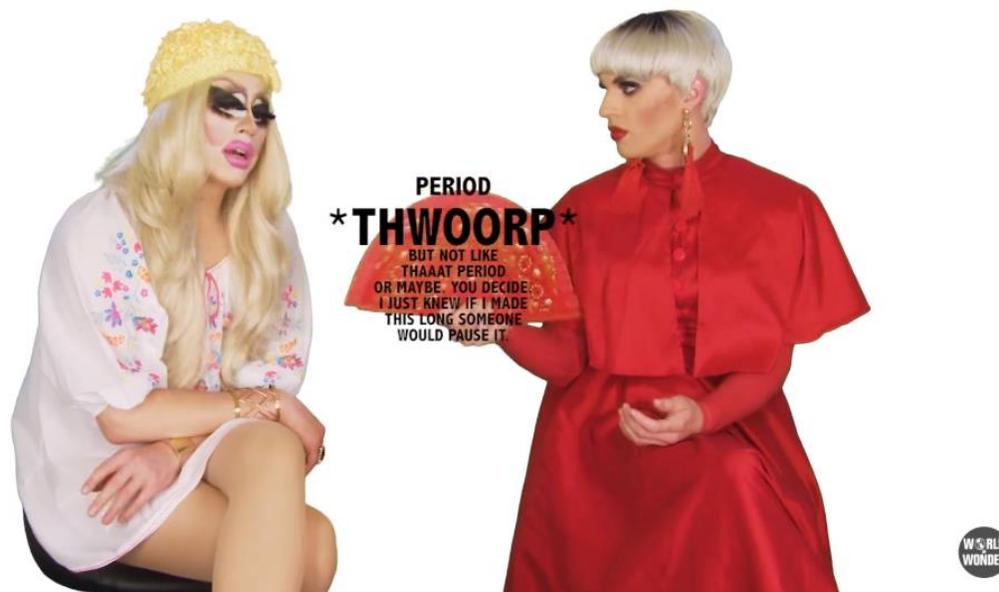


Figure 3.9: Katya “thwoorping” with edited comment by editor(s) in *UNHhhh* “Time.”



Figure 3.10: Katya doing a “combo” in *UNHhhh* “SPACE.”

In later episodes, Trixie develops an impression of “West Hollywood Gays”, characterized by distinctive “Oh honey! Oh HUN-Nee” which is deployed and specifically crafted depending on the topic at hand.⁴⁰ These references to their own content and cultural moments which they appreciate as queer(ed) others, creates a rupture in normative time which centers certain queer cultural moments over others. Furthermore, their references to their own *UNHhhh* material fosters a queer(ed) heterotopia, in the sense that by doing so, they create a space where only those continuously watching will begin to understand the subject matter. Overall, I argue that by establishing *UNHhhh* as outside of normative space and linear time, Trixie and Katya ignore and evade (and perhaps, thereby, unsettle) reckoning with queer shame of the past, or any notions of queer progress of their present moment, which undergird queer liberal and settler colonial logics. Both Trixie and Katya’s bodies, as well as the space of *UNHhhh*, in my view, are acting as

⁴⁰ WOWPresents. (2017, April 3). *UNHhhh Ep 40: “Magic part 2” w/Trixie Mattel & Katya Zamolodchikova* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=evtz0E5uqlo>

heterotopias as they gesture to queer and decolonial worlds which are not structured by any romantic or shameful notions of past, present, and future.

The queer(ed) heterotopias of their bodies and the space of *UNHhhh* though, do not necessarily gesture to a future in which all queer and queer(ed) others have access to. Even having watched every episode of *UNHhhh*, I often feel as both an insider and an outsider. There are some cultural references and jokes that I understand, especially as a long-time viewer of *UNHhhh* (such as the frequent *Contact* references). There are others though, which I consciously or unconsciously do not fully comprehend due to my own social location, world views, and experiences. This is representative of another characteristic of heterotopias as defined by Foucault—“heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable.” (1986, p.26) Foucault explains that generally, “the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place”— for some “entry is compulsory...or else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications” to gain entry. (1986, p.26) There are some heterotopias, Foucault says, “on the contrary, that seem to be pure and simple openings, but that generally hide curious exclusions. Everyone can enter into the heterotopic sites, but in fact that is only an illusion—we think we enter where we are, by the very fact that we enter, excluded.” (1986, p.26) *UNHhhh* is representative of this form of heterotopia—one may feel that they are entering, are included in, and understand, Trixie and Katya’s commentaries. However, as they remind viewers in every episode, the show is ultimately for them, and not viewers. For instance, in an exchange from the teaser episode of *UNHhhh*, Trixie and Katya express their motivations for the show. They say:

Trixie: “What do you really want from doing [*UNHhhh*]? Like in your soul?”

Katya: “Okay, well my goals are to explore issues and topics that help me reassert my faith in contemporary womanhood.”

Trixie: “I’m trying to make sure guys still recognize me on Grindr.”⁴¹

I interpret that Katya’s goal is delivered in a serious and heartfelt tone, and seems introspective, thoughtful, and personal. Viewers may even find this admission altruistic in a sense, since they may learn and benefit from such an exploration. Yet, her confession is made queer by the fact that she is a drag queen exploring “womanhood.” Furthermore, Trixie’s honest admission of her selfish goal of creating *UNHhhh* for a continued general recognition on Grindr (a popular social network application amongst gay men, primarily used for locating sexual partners) provides a queer disruption of the moment. Trixie’s motivation for partaking in the creation of *UNHhhh* implies and reminds the viewer that the show ultimately is for her own benefit, not the audience’s. In another exchange, taken from the final episode of the first season of *UNHhhh*, Trixie and Katya ask audience members to call in. Trixie follows this request, by saying “but also don’t speak to me.” Katya continues, saying: “No, and don’t even try to leave a message because, mama, that ship has sailed.”⁴² These nonsensical demands are representative of this principle of heterotopias—audience members can watch the show, but as Trixie and Katya constantly remind them, they are not fully welcomed in, and are reflected by, the space of *UNHhhh*. This reminder may be unsettling for queer subjects. Heather Love reminds us that “the longing for community across time is a critical feature of queer historical experience.” (2007, p.31) In refusing to let others fully into their queer(ed) space, in this way, Trixie and Katya unsettle any liberal notions of queer liberation through focusing on similarities and sameness to the heteronormative mainstream.

⁴¹ WOWPresents. (2016, March 18). *Trixie Mattel & Katya Zamolodchikova – UNHhhh teaser* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G9aNE3id6zw&t>

⁴² WOWPresents. (2016, December 30). *UNHhhh Ep 37: “New Year New You” w/ Trixie Mattel & Katya Zamolodchikova* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q97H2IstlwY>

Foucault's final principle of heterotopias "is that they have a function in relation to all the space that remains." (1986, p.27) What is the function of *UNHhhh* as a queer(ed) heterotopia—a heterotopia where Trixie and Katya as queer(ed) others (re)claim a space for their own subjectivities—in relation to other spaces? More specifically: what is the function of *UNHhhh* as a queer(ed) heterotopia in relation to queer liberal spaces? Despite his six-part explanation of the principles of heterotopia, Foucault remains coy regarding what the function of heterotopias are.

In a later work, *The Order of Things*, Foucault finds that

Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to 'hold together'. (1994, p.xviii)

Following this second definition, Robert J. Topinka writes:

Yet attacking the space for writing or speaking also entails an attack on the principles according to which texts are written: grammar, syntax, and more generally, order. Thus the description from *The Order of Things* can clarify the desultory definition from "Of Other Spaces" and demonstrate the function heterotopias have in relation to all other spaces. *This function is to problematize the order that undergirds knowledge production.* (2010, p.58 *My emphasis*)

I do not agree with Topinka that Foucault's definition of heterotopias is "desultory." Instead, I feel that Foucault's definition remains open and flexible in order for others to take it up based on the ever-evolving normative demands and structures. In this way, I interpret "heterotopia" as a queer term—unstable and open to redefinition. However, if we entertain the idea that the primary function of heterotopias in relation to other spaces is to unsettle the order and normative structures of knowledge production, heterotopias acting at their fullest function could be understood as queer" as a verb—"less about a way of 'being,' and more about 'doing,' and offers the potential for radical social critique." (Hunt & Holmes 2015, p.156)

If *UNHhhh* is operating as a queer(ed) heterotopia, as I have outlined, it is not only a space for queer(ed) others to perform and embody their own subjectivities, it is at the same time, a space to unsettle normative orders of temporalities and knowledge production through the creation, reiteration, and celebration of queer(ed) lifeways. As I have previously outlined, as a queer(ed) heterotopia, *UNHhhh* (and the bodies of Trixie and Katya) may exist to sustain their queer(ed) selves out of normative time and space, and this may inadvertently unsettle teleological fallacies of historic queer shame, as well as present and future queer progress which underlie queer liberalism. In the next section, I will further explore how *UNHhhh*, as a queer(ed) heterotopia, may function as a space of knowledge production for and around queer(ed): bodies; relationality; and epistemology itself. More specifically, I examine *UNHhhh* as a heterotopia of queer(ed) productive "failure."

Queer(ed) Failure as Resistance

Halberstam (2011), Love (2007a, 2007b), and Jules Sturm (2014) find, that perhaps there are ways in which to reconfigure understandings of failure as a source of productive resistance and resurgence for queer subjects. Noting failure as a practice which "queers do and have always done exceptionally well" (2011, p.3), Halberstam finds that failure "may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world." (2011, p.2-3)

Halberstam explains failure:

as a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline and as a form of critique. As a practice, failure recognizes that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent; indeed failure can exploit the unpredictability of ideology and its indeterminate qualities. (2011, p.88)

Similarly, Muñoz sees a value in engaging with and performing failure and hopelessness in gesting to, and building utopic queer futures. Muñoz argues that "failure can be productively occupied by the queer artist for the purpose of delineating the bias that underlies straight time's

measure. The politics of failure are about doing something else, that is, doing something else in relation to a something that is missing in straight time's already flawed temporal mapping practice." (2009, p. 174) In my reading of *UNHhhh* as a queer(ed) heterotopia, I will pay close attention to the how queer(ed) bodies are failed bodies, in the sense that they will never live up to queer liberal, white settler colonial standards, and how failure may gesture to worlds outside of normative linear trajectories.

In this way, in my view, *UNHhhh* represents a unique queer temporality, which may unsettle a tension in queer studies concerned with the teleological fallacy of queer progress. Heather Love finds that the "central paradox of any transformative criticism," such as those we strive towards in queer studies, is that "its dreams for the future are founded on a history of suffering, stigma, and violence." (2007b, p.1) Love argues that perceived successes in queer organizing have resulted in some reluctance for queer studies to critically engage with queer history, explaining that "the survival of feelings such as shame, isolation, and self-hatred into the post-Stonewall era is often the occasion for further feelings of shame." (2007b, p.4) If queer studies as an academic project would critically engage with queer shame and historical narratives, queer studies may recognize that the progress of certain queered subjects relies on the shame and exclusion of queer(ed) others, and that this queer present may not be so progressive and inclusive after all. Love further explains that "given the sense of destruction at our backs, queers feel compelled to keep moving toward a brighter future." (2007b, p.162) While Love turns to texts from the past to critically engage with affective models of queerness which may be understood as regressive, including "backwardness: shyness, ambivalence, failure, melancholia, loneliness, regression, victimhood, heartbreak, antimodernism, immaturity, self-hatred, despair, [and] shame," (2007b, p.146) I am interested in how Trixie and Katya's performance and

aesthetic on *UNHhhh* (as well as the show *UNHhhh* itself) engages with these models in an ever-changing temporal-spatial zone which cannot be pinned down as past, present, or future, and what this may teach queer studies and politics. Further, I am interested in how centering failure, shame, and other negative modes of queerness in queer scholarship and politics, may unsettle apathetic acceptance of small gains of rights and representation amongst queer subjects, and instead, working towards queer and decolonial futures in the Muñozian sense.

In my analysis of negative affective models of queerness on *UNHhhh*, I will be mindful to look for what Sturn conceptualizes as “productive failure” (Sturn, 2014, p.21) Sturn is hesitant to completely and uncritically accepting failure as a means to resistance and emancipation from oppressive structures of power and knowledge. Sturn finds “the effects of failure are not particularly productive for critical thought, since they can only be measured in dichotomous terms such as good and bad, or better and worse.” (2014, p.22) Discussing power and resistance in terms of dichotomies is not particularly useful since as, Foucault, recognizes: “where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.” (1990, p.95). Bodies and lifeways are always existing in relation to power, and therefore cannot fully fail or fully succeed. For instance, drag is a site of “failed” gendered bodies/aesthetics in the sense that drag queens and kings fail to perform socially constructed gender roles. Drag queens and kings can perform gender, but never to the point where they completely embody it, since there is no prediscursive conception of gender stasis. Below, I examine *UNHhhh* as a heterotopia of queer failure operating within constraints of power and knowledge. Failure may be “productive” (Sturn, 2014) in the sense that it may unsettle oppressive structures of power and knowledge, but it is also ambivalent since it always operates in relation to power. In my view, in this way, “productive failure” will produce uncanny

queer affects—it will be unfamiliar and familiar to the point of gestating unease, anxiety, and uncertainty.

As such, in my analysis, I will excavate examples “productive failure” in *UNHhhh*—ways in which Trixie and Katya (and the space of the show itself) unsettle normative structures by neither fully failing (or fully succeeding) at disciplining and re(producing) disciplinary demands.

***UNHhhh* and the Affirmation of Failed Queer(ed) Bodies**

Writing for the online platform *Odyssey*, Ryan Anderson (2016) explains that *UNHhhh* is “pronounced like the noise you make when you are about to vomit or are trying to turn someone on.” The liminal incongruity of Anderson’s interpretation of the show’s name is indicative of Trixie and Katya’s individual aesthetics as queer(ed) others, and the content of the show altogether. This liminality may produce uneasy/unsettling feelings and responses from viewers—in this sense, it may be what Sigmund Freud describes as “uncanny effect” which “is produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced...” (1919, p.244). I will explore the unsettling potentiality of Trixie and Katya’s failed bodies in the queer heterotopia of *UNHhhh*, by discussing how their aesthetic embodies an uncanny and liminal form of failure, how they uphold their queer(ed) failed bodies on *UNHhhh* as a form of control, and how this may unsettle viewers’ conceptions of normative bodies, spaces, and temporalities.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Trixie’s aesthetic is a form of resistance that I term as monstrous white uncanniness—an embodiment and performance of oft-celebrated and desired white characteristics such as material wealth, (white) beauty, and fame, taken to the point where they become ugly/repulsive/strange (while simultaneously attractive/familiar). With monstrous white uncanniness, Trixie can embody subjectivities that she desired but could not fully attain

(material wealth and white beauty norms), while simultaneously subverting them (by making them ugly/repulsive/unnatural). The uncanny plays a role in Trixie's work, as she says that

I have never felt surprised by the way people connect with Trixie. The look resonates with the toys that people had in their childhoods, so its [sic] fun and comforting. And the comedy dives to a deeper, more dark part of the human experience. It's sort of like feeding a dog medicine by burying the pill in yummy dog food. (in Easter, 2016)

Here, Trixie calls attention to her welcoming/comfortable/fun, and dark/real/deeper elements, and wanting to engage viewers on a deeper (and dark) level with her aesthetic and humour.

Monstrous white uncanniness is not, therefore, unsettling solely because of how dark/ugly it is. Rather, it is unsettling/uncomfortable because of how it is simultaneously dark, ugly, mysterious, fun, beautiful, alluring and familiar (in other words—uncanny).

Katya's aesthetic is something akin to monstrous white uncanniness in the sense that she embodies forms of white subjectivities such as white settler American identity, wealth, and (white) beauty as simultaneously ugly/beautiful, ugly/repulsive, and attractive/familiar. For example, Katya at times incorporates a Russian accent and elements of Russian culture into her performances and aesthetic, yet, she most often does not play up this accent or a Russian aesthetic on *UNHhhh*. The character of Katya is therefore familiar and unfamiliar, simultaneously a sexy (and gross) Russian immigrant woman, an American woman with a Russian name, and an Irish-American white man playing a Russian immigrant woman/American woman. Katya's aesthetic changes frequently and is a mix of eccentric looks, including but not limited to: small doll hands attached to her hair and ears; and eyeballs attached to the middle of her forehead; teased out and tangled blonde hair, erratically and unevenly chopped in the back; a bodycon dress paying homage to the 1997 American film *Contact*; and large pink and beige hats resembling coral. Intriguingly her looks always incorporates and pairs elements which would be considered normal and even beautiful in the American public sphere (long, shiny, blonde hair,

blue eyes outlined with deep black liner; red lips; and body-hugging dresses) with those eccentric, jarring, and at times ugly, elements that were previously mentioned. In “Ep 35: ‘Hollywood’” Trixie describes Katya’s jewelry as “a confusing piece of a greater narrative”, that we can only hope to understand someday. This read of Katya’s jewelry can be applied to her aesthetic in general, which relies on a confusing mix of familiar and unfamiliar. In a 2015 interview with David Atlanta, Katya further describes her drag in the following manner:

it’s like a mixture between glamour and camp. So like, ‘glamp’ or ‘glomp’ or whatever. For me drag is all about the character and the personality. Like I’m not a super-talented designer. I can make my own stuff. I just try to look as good as I can so that people will listen to what I have to say. That’s always the end game.

I like to do a mixture of sexy and gross in my shows. The thing I like about drag is the contrast. People don’t expect me to be pretty and then funny, or really sexy and then lick their face...and smell so bad. Yeah, I stink, it’s gross.

Katya’s aesthetic, humour, and performance therefore blurs the lines of: average and unordinary/extraordinary; mundane and shocking; conservative and wildly inappropriate; masculine and feminine; erotic/sexy and disgusting/repulsive; and finally: Russian and American.⁴³ Paired with Trixie’s uncanny aesthetic, Trixie and Katya’s bodies may be understood as “productive failure” (Sturm, 2014). They are bodies which fail to adhere to heteronormative, homonormative, white American social and cultural standards and lifeways. Instead of completely failing (in only appearing ugly/dark/disgusting), they embrace their liminality as a source of reclamation and to create a platform for themselves through *UNHhhh*.

For instance, the opening of every episode of *UNHhhh* follows a specific script welcoming viewers to their program, with Trixie and Katya introducing themselves individually by name, followed by a unique (and often very silly) description. In “Ep 8: Drag Names”, for

⁴³ Katya’s blurring of her character of an assertive Russian woman and her American self is particularly ironic and unsettling in regards to recent events with the increasing confusion and ambiguity around American and Russian relations following the recent election of the 45th President of the United States.

example, Trixie begins with “Hi I’m the Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe: Trixie Mattel” while Katya says: “And, I’m a complex human person: Katya.” As the season progresses, their opening identifications become more and more detailed, and most often twist familiar (and even nostalgic) symbols and imagery with dark, disturbing, and disgusting notions. For instance, in “Ep 32: ‘Thanxgiving’” Trixie opens with “Hi, I’m the scab that fell off that girl Vanessa’s knee on the bus in third grade and she ATE it, Trixie Mattel.”⁴⁴ Katya follows with: “And I’m a grateful cornocopia filled with lunch meat, Katya!” In a second season episode on magic, Trixie introduces herself as “the sharp stick in the eye that’s still more fun than your parents’ marriage”, whereas Katya introduces herself as “the sole survivor of a sexy shipwreck that ran aground on the coast of your mom’s ASSSSSSS!”⁴⁵ Placed together, Trixie and Katya’s introductions often balance between dark familiarity and ridiculousness/silliness. By introducing themselves this way, Trixie and Katya may be attempting to create and convey an uncanny, unsettling affect from the beginning of each episode. Following their initial identifications, the two begin the episode with the following refrain:

Trixie: And welcome to *UNHhhh*, the show where we talk about whatever we want...

Katya: Because it’s our show...

Trixie: And not yours’.

As previously indicated, the repetition of this refrain at the beginning of each episode adds to the construction of *UNHhhh* as a queer heterotopia—*UNHhhh* is a deliberate counter site of an autonomous space for their queer(ed) selves. By introducing themselves in using uncanny, unsettling, and silly descriptors before this declaration, Trixie and Katya reinforce that *UNHhhh* is a (uncanny) space for their own queer(ed) bodies and subjectivities.

⁴⁴ WOWPresents. (2016, November 21). *UNHhhh Ep 32: “Thanxgiving” w/ Trixie Mattel & Katya Zamolodchikova* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tyj1CsApNAY>

⁴⁵ WOWPresents. (2017, April 3). *UNHhhh Ep 40: “Magic part 2” w/Trixie Mattel & Katya Zamolodchikova* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=evtz0E5uqlo>

In *UNHhhh*, the bodies of Trixie and Katya, with the help of the editors, also occupy and reaffirm a liminal space between queer(ed) subjectivities and the mainstream. For instance, in the 39th episode on magic, Trixie and Katya become “magical” and inhumane as they turn into two birds that fly away.⁴⁶ Following this, Katya has a switch with long black horse tail at the end, and Trixie makes the point that it looks like Gia Gunn and Alaska Thunderfuck 5000’s hair from their “Stun” music video.⁴⁷ Gia and Alaska were both contestants on *RuPaul’s Drag Race*. The editors superimpose Trixie and Katya’s faces on those of Gia and Alaska’s as they both exclaim “STUN” in the style of Gia’s distinctive high-pitch voice.



Figure 3.11: The faces of Trixie and Katya edited on faces of Gia and Alaska in *UNHhhh* “Magic part 1.”

⁴⁶ WOWPresents. (2017, March 27). *UNHhhh Ep 39: “Magic part 1” w/Trixie Mattel & Katya Zamolodchikova* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q97H2IstlwY>

⁴⁷ Alaska Thunderfuck. (2017, February 24). *Alaska Thunderfuck – STUN [Official] ft. Gia Gunn* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IkGbBaYZU1Y>

The editing of Trixie and Katya’s faces over *RuPaul’s Drag Race* contestants (and RuPaul herself), is a reoccurring theme in *UNHhhh*. In doing this, queer(ed) bodies, and cultural productions are privileged in the space of *UNHhhh*.

The editors not only edit Trixie and Katya’s faces and bodies on queer(ed) others, they also edit Trixie and Katya’s faces on popular figures. For example, in a second episode on magic, Katya brings up the 1998 feature film *Practical Magic*, which starred Nicole Kidman and Sandra Bullock as two American sisters and witches, living with their eccentric witch aunts. Katya and Trixie begin articulating their own version of the film. Katya says she is obviously Nicole Kidman, and Trixie replies that she is Sandra Bullock—but without brown hair, because she would hate herself. As they say this, the editors seamlessly cut to the poster for *Practical Magic*, with Trixie and Katya’s faces superimposed on the faces of Kidman and Bullock.



Figure 3.12: The faces of Trixie and Katya edited on Sandra Bullock and Nicole Kidman’s faces from *Practical Magic* poster in *UNHhhh* “Magic part 2.”

The editors then cut to a brief trailer of *Practical Magic*, wherein they have superimposed Trixie and Katya’s faces over those of Kidman and Bullock’s. Trixie continues developing their own queer(ed) version of *Practical Magic*, saying that they live in a mansion with their aunts. Katya asks who their aunts would be, and they decide on Tempest Dujour and Kasha Davis (both being drag queens who competed on the seventh season of *RuPaul’s Drag Race*). Katya states that RuPaul would be the “fleeting ephemeral matriarch”, and the editors cut again to a photoshopped background image of Tempest Dujour, RuPaul and Kasha Davis in black robes, standing behind Trixie and Katya as they are speaking.



Figure 3.13: Tempest Dujour, RuPaul, and Kasha Davis edited in black robes behind Trixie and Katya in *UNHhhh* “Magic part 2.”

Trixie and Katya then quickly switch topics from *Practical Magic* to their experiences of “ghosting” (the practice of abruptly halting communications with someone you are seeing as a romantic and/or sexual partner), the editors superimpose Trixie’s and Katya’s faces over Demi Moore’s face in scenes from the 1990 feature film *Ghost*.

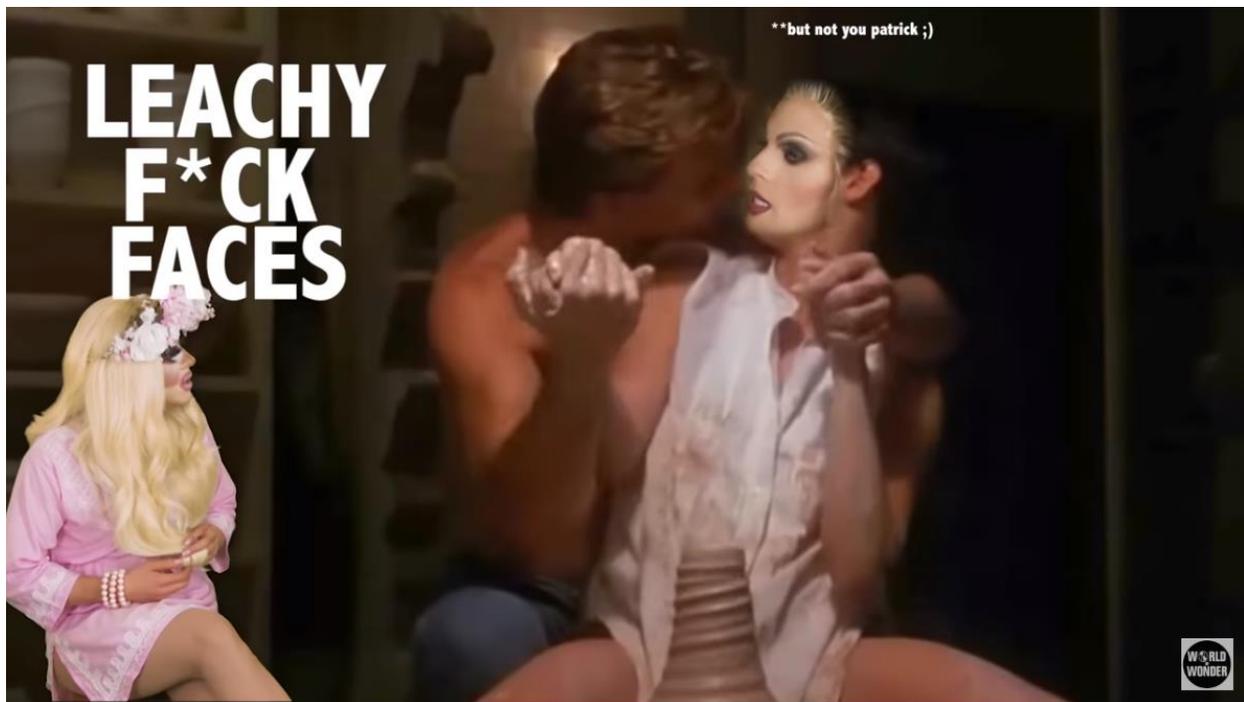


Figure 3.14: Katya edited to be Demi Moore in scene from *Ghost*, in *UNHhhh* “Magic part 2.”

In these exchanges from *UNHhhh*, Trixie and Katya’s queer(ed) bodies shapeshift into the non-human (the birds), to fellow queer(ed) others (drag queens Alaska and Gia), to figures and characters from popular culture (Bullock, Kidman, Patrick Swayze and Demi Moore). Their own queer(ed) bodies and subjectivities are always centralized though—we can always either hear their voices narrating scenes and/or see and recognize their faces with their unique uncanny makeup styles. In the *Practical Magic* scene, Trixie even reaffirms her body, as she insists that she would be Sandra Bullock without brown hair. Furthermore, Trixie and Katya create a liminal zone in embodying both queer subjects such as Alaska and Gia from *Stun*, and the mainstream popular feature length films such *Practical Magic* and *Ghost*. By embodying queer(ed) figures and popular figures, they both make the mainstream queer, and queer the mainstream—an uncanny act of reclamation of space and representation. *UNHhhh*’s rapid oscillations between queer cultural productions (such as *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, campy movies, drag queen music videos, and their own reoccurring jokes/material), paired with mainstream popular culture

references on and through the bodies of Trixie and Katya may further add to the uncanny affect of *UNHhhh*.

Trixie in particular, enacts forms of “productive failure” (Sturm, 2014) whereby she affirms her queer(ed) body, aesthetic and epistemologies by reclaiming and becoming RuPaul. For example, in the 33rd episode opening of *UNHhhh*, Trixie Mattel holds a puppet of a cartoonish looking child, whom she has named TJ, in front of a mirror.



Figure 3.15: Trixie as TJ, in *UNHhhh* “Childhood.”

Trixie as TJ fake sobs: “Th... Things are going to be really hard, for a really long time, and then they’re not going to be hard anymore. And then you’re going to cross-dress. And then you’re going to be yourself.” Trixie then mutters “Oh!” as her monologue is intercepted by a man who enters the shot and claps his hands, in order to later synch the audio.⁴⁸ This performance of Trixie as TJ is, in my view, a reference to a more sombre element of *RuPaul’s Drag Race* in

⁴⁸ WOWPresents. (2016, November 28). *UNHhhh Ep 33: “Childhood” w/ Trixie Mattel & Katya Zamolodchikova* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JsOtrUjRU8&t>

which RuPaul holds up a photo of each drag queen as a child, and asks them to “turn back time, share the wisdom you have today, with the child you were then.”⁴⁹ This request, in my view, becomes a confessional moment whereby the competing drag queens must confess an inner truth to their child selves, and the judges. This confessional moment often results in the competing drag queens breaking in to tears, as they tell their child self some variation of their experience of encountering some hardships as a gay child, but if they “are themselves” they will emerge as a successful, happy drag queen. Michel Foucault finds that “...the confession became one of the West’s most highly valued techniques for producing truth,” (1978, p.58) explaining that “the confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement” (1978, p.61). The confession is a pivotal technique in the production of power-knowledge then, and, “when it is not spontaneous or dictated by some internal imperative, the confession is wrung from a person by violence or threat...” (Foucault, 1978, p.55). When RuPaul ceremoniously/ritually tells the drag queens in the show to talk to a picture of themselves, they do not do so out of their own volition, instead they confess under the duress of being eliminated from the reality show. Their answers must be the “right answers” in order to progress in the competition. As highlighted in the previous chapter, *RuPaul’s Drag Race* informs and reflects a current epoch termed as “queer liberalism. As I have argued, as an assemblage of queer liberalism, *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, often promotes a fallacy of a post-racial, post-feminist, post-colonial neoliberal America. These confessions are thus not emerging out of a prediscursive inner self, they are extracted in the realm of a reality competition which posits the

⁴⁹ Murray, N. (Director). (2016). Keeping it 100 [Television series episode]. In Anderson, M., Arnold-Bluestone, S., Bailey, F., Barbato, R., Corfe, S., Favreau, M., Fisher, K., Markham, J., McCoy, B., Mills, M., Pezely, J., Piane, L., Polly, J., Porter, H. M., Rudnik, E., RuPaul, Smothers, T., Stahovic, B., Stone, K., Vieira, T., & Visage, M. (Producers), *RuPaul’s drag race*. Los Angeles, CA: World of Wonder Productions.

understanding/truth that gay liberation will emerge by queer subjects proactively engaging in American patriotism (and rights of citizenry) and the capitalist labour market. More specifically, these confessions must reflect an inner truth of each contestant—that if they are themselves, if they can be the best neoliberal, homonormative and homonationalist subjects which RuPaul requires contestants to be, they will be happy. In other words—they must parrot the belief that any queer subject can reach success and happiness within the neoliberal capitalist labour market, in order to advance in the competition.

I find that Trixie as TJ's confession parodies the queer liberal constraints of these confessionals on *RuPaul's Drag Race*, while acting as a space of reclamation for Trixie. Many *RuPaul's Drag Race* fans watching Trixie as TJ's confessional will recognize that this is re-enactment from the show. By parodying the similarities of the answers that the drag queens have, Trixie, in my view, queers (unsettles and makes unfamiliar), and playfully teases this more solemn act. Furthermore, Trixie was unable to participate in this confessional act due to her prior two eliminations from the season. Her re-enactment of this moment is, therefore, potentially an act of reclamation for an experience she was denied. In this scene, *UNHhhh* becomes what Foucault terms as a heterotopia, acting in a way which mirrors and unsettles *RuPaul's Drag Race* and tenets of queer liberalism. Uncanny bodies, knowledges, and affect like that in *UNHhhh* posit critiques of our normative queer liberal modes of happiness, while also creating a space for queer(ed) others to perform and embody their own epistemologies and ontologies.

The queer(ed) bodies and performances of Trixie and Katya then, inform and reflect a *UNHhhh* as a queer(ed) heterotopia which may affect viewers by unsettling their knowledges around normative bodies and culture. They gesture towards futures in which their own queer(ed)

selves, references, and desires are reflected within. In this way, they create a space where they can perform and produce what Foucault terms as “subjugated knowledges” on *UNHhhh*.

UNHhhh and Unsettling Knowledges

As previously highlighted, Topinka finds that the function of heterotopias in relation to other spaces “is to problematize the order that undergirds knowledge production.” (2010, p. 58) In grasping to understand order, power, and knowledge, Foucault envisions knowledge as being ordered into “disciplinarity”—a technique of power which relies upon and continuously produces norms, customs, routines, rules, regulations, experts, and administrators. (1995) Judith Halberstam further elucidates that “disciplines qualify and disqualify, legitimate and delegitimate, reward and punish; and most important, they statically reproduce themselves and inhibit dissent.” (2009, p.10). Academic disciplines may be understood as a form of “disciplinarity”—in an academic field, specific canonical literatures and scholars are read, analyzed, reread, and written on. Acceptable theories, methodologies, methods frameworks of study are established and (re)produced. Knowledge production in the academy, does not operate outside of power, it is structured and ordered by and through disciplinarity.

As highlighted in the introductory chapter, Halberstam specifically posits failure as a fruitful alternative means to knowledge production, and suggests collating and examining “silly archives” from popular culture to seek out “low theory and counter knowledge in the realm of popular culture in relation to queer lives, gender and sexuality.” (2011, p.19) Expanding upon the work of Stuart Hall, Antonio Gramsci, and David Graeber, Halberstam understands “*low theory* as a mode of accessibility, but we might also think about it as a kind of theoretical model that flies below the radar, that is assembled from eccentric texts and examples and that refuses to confirm the hierarchies of knowing that maintain the *high* in high theory.” (2011, p.16) “Low

theory” assists in unsettling hierarchies of knowledge and power that circulate in the assembling and recognition of certain archives in academia (Halberstam, 2015). I suggest that *UNHhhh* functions as a queer heterotopia by unsettling the order of knowledge production through 1.) privileging “silly” (Halberstam, 2011) and “subjugated” (Foucault, 2003) knowledges for failed/nonnormative/queer others, 2.) making high knowledge itself seem uncanny, and 3.) queering normative texts/knowledge.

Firstly, on *UNHhhh*, Trixie and Katya privilege specific themes, topics, languages, and discussions based on their experience and location as queer(ed) others. For instance, some episodes are specifically themed on drag queens (their experience as drag queens, and their sharing knowledge to other drag queens). In episode six, Trixie and Katya discuss their experiences with “sex in drag.”⁵⁰ Two episodes later, Trixie and Katya again centralize drag experiences/knowledges with the theme of “drag names.”⁵¹ In this episode, Trixie and Katya specifically focus on the differences between types of drag queen names, and how to choose a drag name. In the second episode, Trixie and Katya address an even more niche audience by focusing on advice for *RuPaul’s Drag Race* season eight contestants. A kind of queer(ed) temporality is established in this episode, as Trixie and Katya admit that the eighth season has completed filming, and they are providing advice to drag queens on how to compete, even though they have finished the competition. Furthermore, Trixie and Katya often discuss what they could have or should have done differently in the past (for instance, choosing a different drag name or approached the competition of *RuPaul’s Drag Race* differently). It is also queer in that they are giving advice to drag queens on how to successfully compete in the competition,

⁵⁰ WOWPresents. (2016, April 29). *UNHhhh ep 6: “Sex in Drag” with Trixie Mattel & Katya Zamolodchikova* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d7dSr8fKGQw>

⁵¹ WOWPresents. (2016, May 20). *UNHhhh ep 8: “Drag Names” with Trixie Mattel & Katya Zamolodchikova* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qFgA31VINWg>

even though they failed to win (in Trixie’s case, she was twice eliminated). Trixie and Katya’s act of producing and sharing their expertise on how to be successful drag queens, as “failed” drag queens (in the context of the commercial national competition of becoming “America’s Next Drag Superstar” through *RuPaul’s Drag Race*), may be understood as a form of reclamation. They are centralizing experience as failed others, and queering knowledge by making their failed bodies/knowledges be considered as expertise.

Secondly, *UNHhhh* posits Trixie and Katya as experts on a wide range of specific topics, yet their advice most-often seems questionable and even nonsensical. Some episodes, such as their first episode on beauty tips, ignore the theme almost altogether, and the two discuss whatever is on their mind. When they do stay on subject, they consciously or unconsciously parody expert/high knowledge. For instance, in “Beauty Tips Pt 2”, they engage in the following passionate exchange:

Trixie: Accept responsibility for the fact that investing in brushes will change your life.

Katya: And fresh water! Nutrition. You cannot do makeup if you do not have a human functioning body.

Trixie: OH! Factual truth!

Katya: Health is the best primer.

Trixie: If you eat correctly, you will look in the mirror and feel like you have makeup on. This is FACTUAL.

Katya: And you take it from us, this is a spackle over sandpaper job.⁵²

Trixie’s exclamation of “factual truth” may be understood as a parody and queering of high knowledge. Is it not that “truth” something already “factual”? What is nonfactual truth? Furthermore, in this exchange, it is not clear whether or not the advice given is actually “factually true” and serious. This lack of clarity and fluctuations between serious and silly advice is a common theme in *UNHhhh*. For example, in “Ep 24: Getting Older”, Trixie explains to

⁵² WOWPresents. (2016, October 10). *UNHhhh Ep 26: “Beauty Tips Pt2” w/ Trixie Mattel & Katya Zamolodchikova* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bh5V15maRk>

Katya that she knows that she is going bald, so she has begun shaving her head so that when she does go bald, people will assume it was by choice.⁵³ Katya interrupts her, saying “You’re such an idiot. I velcro on my leg hair on the top of my head, and I’ve been doing it for years, and look how good it is! Look how good it is!” Both exchanges are examples of how Trixie and Katya rapidly and seamlessly oscillate between “rational advice” and silly/gross/bad advice. In a third example, Trixie reflects to Katya (and viewers) about how erotic it is to suck on toes during sexual intercourse.⁵⁴ When she refers to feet as “pseudopods”, Katya laughs, perhaps at the misuse of the scientific term, and says “fake foot?” Trixie quickly recovers from this failure, arguing “well the guy has a fake leg?!” I suggest Trixie’s claim that she meant “pseudopod” as “fake foot” is a reclamation of her queer(ed) self as having access to, and ownership of high knowledge. In these rapid, seamless transitions from practical and nonsensical/silly advice and expertise, high knowledge and low knowledge, they may make knowledge itself seem uncanny—familiar and unfamiliar. They also gesture to spaces in which their failed, queer(ed) selves are valued as “experts” and producers of high knowledge.

Finally, *UNHhhh* acts as a queer(ed) heterotopia by queering normative texts/knowledge, and therefore unsettling normative knowledges. As previously highlighted, Trixie and Katya (with the help of the editors Chris and Ron), will often queer normative cultural productions. They do this by reimagining these cultural productions and inserting their own bodies and subjectivities into them. Normative phrases, sayings, and jokes are also played on, such as when, in an episode on flirting, Trixie says: “the journey of a million miles begins with a single step and

⁵³ WOWPresents. (2016, September 26). *UNHhhh Ep 24: “Getting Older” w/ Trixie Mattel & Katya Zamolodchikova* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yiE_63qDuRQ

⁵⁴ WOWPresents. (2016, December 30). *UNHhhh Ep 37: “New Year New You” w/ Trixie Mattel & Katya Zamolodchikova* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q97H2IstlWY>

sometimes that step is a flirtatious one.”⁵⁵ or when Trixie suggests an opening flirtatious line of “is your refrigerator running? Yeah, why? Cause I’m going to suck your dick.”⁵⁶ Overall through their shifting and blurring the lines between low and high knowledge, in the queer heterotopia of *UNHhhh*, Trixie and Katya enact a form of “productive failure” (Sturn, 2014) whereby they makes knowledge production queer, and queer knowledges.

Conclusion: “Queer Thyme” Because “Reality is Bullshit”

As highlighted, Queer heterotopias such as *UNHhhh* and the bodies of Trixie and Katya completely reject normative notions of time, space, and epistemology. For instance, the 64th episode of *UNHhhh* on “time”, opens with the following exchange between Trixie and Katya:

Trixie: What are we talking about?

Someone behind the camera: TIME!

Trixie: Time, hmmm!

Katya: There’s psychological time, and then clock time.

Trixie: Now I’m a little embarrassed because I thought we were going to be talking about the spice ‘thyme,’ and that’s really all I studied up on.⁵⁷

Trixie’s performed failure to recognize that the show would center around “time” and not the herb “thyme,” and acknowledgement that she has now prepared to speak about the wrong topic represents (in my view) a complex rejection of normative notions of time and high knowledge. Despite this performed failure to prepare for the correct topic, Trixie speaks at length with Katya about time as if she were an expert on the subject. I suggest that Katya too, rejects normative understanding of time and epistemology, in another queer(ed) space of her creation, the

⁵⁵ WOWPresents. (2016, July 15). *UNHhhh ep 14: “Flirting part 2” with Trixie Mattel & Katya Zamolodchikova* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j0hTb5tMbpM>

⁵⁶ WOWPresents. (2016, July 8). *UNHhhh ep 13: “Flirting part 1” with Trixie Mattel & Katya Zamolodchikova* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6WBh7Hjzd88>

⁵⁷ WOWPresents. (2017, October 16). *UNHhhh Ep 64: “Time” w/Trixie Mattel & Katya Zamolodchikova* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZPcl6uVvZA&index=70&list=PLVmMNOHpsWfkF7E-ZYg_mufJff6_xJBim

YouTube show titled *RuFLECTIONS* (2015), in which she stars in. In Episode 10, Katya (as Russian Katya) is in the woods frolicking (in self doubt), eating human legs, mooing like a cow, spitting, and shooting a machine gun Rambo-style.⁵⁸ Katya provides a voice-over of the scenes, describing and reflecting upon her queer(ed) Russian (or American of Irish ancestry posing as Russian) self. These statements range from the silly (“I am my own worst enemy”; and “the hunter has become the hunted, and the hunted has become the...cunted?”) to the profound (“why try new things, when I can try nothing?”; and “in Russia I am a lot of fun, in America I have no confidence”). At one point, Katya reflects that: “reality is a bunch of bullshit.” The reality of chrononormative, heteronormative, and settler colonial temporalities is “bullshit” for queer(ed) others, as they are often excluded from (or at worst—cannot survive) their normative demands. In this chapter, I demonstrated that despite this, producing and engaging in queer heterotopias such as *UNHhhh* may provide a space for failed, queer(ed) others to not only fully embody and (re)produce their own lifeways, it may provide a space for radical, queer worldbuilding through the destabilization and deconstruction of normative orders of knowledge. In this way, Trixie and Katya’s performances on *UNHhhh* may be understood as a form of queer worldmaking in the Muñoz’s (2009) sense. Muñoz finds that,

Performance is the kernel of potentiality that is transmitted to audiences and witnesses and that the real force of performance is its ability to generate a modality of knowing and recognition among audiences and groups that facilitates modes of belonging, especially minoritarian belonging. If we consider performance under such a lens, we can see the temporality of what I describe as a utopian performativity, which is to say a manifestation of a ‘doing’ that is in the horizon, a mode of possibility. Performance, seen as utopian performativity, is imbued with a sense of potentiality. (2009, p.99)

⁵⁸ welovekatya. (2015, May 6). *RuFLECTIONS – Episode 10 – We Love Katya* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qZYHIXHtvOw>

In my view, Trixie's and Katya's performance on *UNHhhh* embodies this form of utopian "doing" and "possibility." Given Trixie's Indigeneity, *UNHhhh* may also be understood to be a form of what Mishuana Goeman calls "(re)mapping" which involves "acknowledging the power of Native epistemologies in defining [Indigenous] moves toward spacial decolonization, a specific form of spatial justice..." (2013, p.4) Quoting Edward Soja, Goeman (2013) explains that Indigenous "geographies, like our histories, take on a material form as social relations become spatial but are also creatively represented in images, ideas, and imaginings..." (2010, p.18) Trixie and Katya's queer(ed) failed bodies, and the space of *UNHhhh* itself, are queer heterotopias which gesture to, and (re)map queer worlds which reject romantic queer liberal and settler colonial notions of teleological progress. While Muñoz suggests that queerness "as an ideality...can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future," (2009, p.1) my analysis of *UNHhhh* as a queer heterotopia demonstrates that a (re)mapping of queer(ed) (Indigenous) space can be built upon a complete rejection of the past and other normative linear temporalities in order to build queer and decolonial futures.

Chapter Four:
Indian as Sad Cowboy, American as Unhappy Russian:
Trixie and Katya's Bad Queer Politics

Scholars in both Native studies and queer theory have drawn attention to how historic and ongoing relations between queer subjects informs and reflects normative structures such as white supremacy, nationalism, imperialism, and capitalism. They demonstrate that queer subjects (including racialized queer people) do not operate and exist outside of structures of power and knowledge which maintain certain bodies and subjectivities over the erasure and elimination of queer(ed) (Indigenous) others. (Finley, 2011; Morgensen, 2011; Pérez, 2015; Puar, 2007) Scott Lauria Morgensen in particular draws attention to how “in the United States, modern queer cultures and politics have taken form as normatively white, multiracial, and non-Native projects compatible with a white settler society.” (2011, p.ix) Morgensen (2010, 2011) argues that queer politics may work to unsettle white supremacy and nationalism, yet, they are ultimately operating within the confines of settler colonialism whereby queer subjects attempt to become a part of (and thereby maintain) settler society on Indigenous lands. As such, Morgensen contends that “settler colonialism and its conditioning of modern sexuality produce an intimate relationship between non-Native and Native queer modernities” which he interprets as “conversations.” (2011, p.ix) These “conversations”, Morgensen understands, are “power-laden” yet “nevertheless remained open to creative transformation.” (2011, p.x)

Queer liberalism and settler colonialism work in symbiosis, and we must seek to understand and unsettle how they work in unison to maintain (queer) settler knowledges and bodies by evading, erasing, and eliminating Indigenous knowledges and bodies through these “conversations.” Queer liberalism works to discipline queer(ed) Indigenous bodies in insidious, nonchalant, and veiled quotidian ways which often appear innocent and happenstance. In this

chapter, I continue to explore how queer others (specifically Trixie Mattel and Katya Zamolodchikova) resist the disciplinary structures of settler colonialism and queer liberalism in embracing their own subjectivities and failures in the public sphere. For instance, I interpret a January 24th, 2017 interview between *LGBTQ&A* podcaster Jeffrey Masters and Trixie Mattel, as such a conversation. In this interview, the two discuss how *RuPaul's Drag Race* provides a platform for featured queens.⁵⁹ Trixie tells Masters: “*Drag Race* is like: Here, I’m going to give you some corn, you can figure out if you are going to plant it or not, or you can just eat it.” Masters responds, “that’s the Wisconsin metaphor,” referencing Trixie’s Wisconsin roots. Trixie corrects Masters, responding: “yeah, that’s like the Native American Wisconsin metaphor.” Masters expresses visible shock, asks Trixie to confirm that she is Native American, and admits to finding this facet of Trixie’s identity “funny.” Masters asks: “are you part of like a tribe, and like, did you like, do that growing up?” Trixie responds: “No I grew up like, off the reservation. We were just like, bad Native Americans.”

In expressing their disbelief (and perhaps: discomfort) over Trixie’s identity as Native American, in my view, Masters renders Trixie as a “bad indian”—one who does not adequately embody and perform his imaginary of what Gerald Vizenor (1998) calls “indian simulations” — settler fantasies of Indigenous history, experience, and representations.⁶⁰ As previously highlighted, Trixie’s drag is characterized by its monstrous white uncanniness—a QDK strategy whereby she imitates white subjectivities to the extreme, causing uneasy, uncomfortable, anxious, and other negative affects in those queer liberal and settler colonial subjects that she

⁵⁹ AfterBuzz TV. (2017, January 24). *Interview with Trixie Mattel: Aging, Dating, and Wanting to Look Like a Wind-Up Toy* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2OnPCYMcNk&t>

⁶⁰ In coming to this understanding, I was inspired in part by Ryan Red Corn’s poem “Bad Indians.” See: The1491s. (2011, March 17). *‘Bad Indians’ by Ryan Red Corn* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3FUgDutdauQ>

encounters. As such, Trixie may be rendered as a “bad Native indian” in the imaginaries of settlers due to her excessive embodiment of white subjectivities, rather than any identifiable “authentic” and “acceptable” markers of indiansness.⁶¹ Masters’ reaction to Trixie’s Native American identity reveals an affective settler response—one of shock, discomfort, and uncertainty. I suggest that this reaction may be indicative of not only their limited preconceived settler perceptions of what Indigenous peoples are and can be, but also specifically due to their limited queer liberal perceptions of who and what queer individuals are and can be. In 1997, Cathy Cohen warned that “queer politics has often been built around a simple dichotomy between those deemed queer and those deemed heterosexual.” (p.440) Master may have also placed Trixie into this dichotomy—potentially understanding that Trixie was queer, and that this was the only facet of her identity to share and engage with. Cohen addresses the ongoing issue of queer identity politics, saying that there are “those individuals who consistently activate only one characteristic of their identity, or a single perspective of consciousness, to organize their politics, rejecting any recognition of the multiple and intersecting systems of power that largely dictate our life chances.” (1997, p.440) Cohen understands that this form of queer politics would ultimately provide limited radical potentialities, finding that “we need not base our politics in the dissolution of all categories and communities, but we need instead to work toward the destabilization and remaking of our identities.” (1997, p.481) Queer identity politics still operate in queer liberal times in which the privileging and upholding of certain queer subjects is obfuscated and enforced by what Eng (2010) recognizes as a post-race position by certain gay and lesbian subjects. With this post-race position, there is a “cleaving of race from (homo)sexuality, and (homo)sexuality from race” and the “systematic disassociation of queer

⁶¹ By “indianness” I mean general settler perceptions of what Indigenous peoples are, can, and should be.

politics from critical race politics.” (Eng 2010, p.4) As I have previously outlined, while queer theorists such as Eng (2010) and Eng, Halberstam, Muñoz (2005) have identified queer liberalism as structuring our current realities and movements, many have failed to recognize that settler colonialism intrinsically structures queer liberalism, and queer liberalism, in turn, propagates settler colonialism.⁶² Settler queer subjects are able to benefit and continue living on Indigenous lands due to settler colonialism, and settler colonialism may be justified and maintained by the obfuscation of the intersections of race and sexuality by queer liberal subjects, processes, and assemblages. (Morgensen, 2010, 2011) The normative queer politics of the present, therefore do not only limit our queer horizons (in the Muñozian sense) they also limit our decolonial ones by working to evade, obfuscate, and even eliminate specific Indigenous (and at times settler) representations, bodies, and epistemologies in quotidian spaces—such as an interview of a half-Ojibwe and half-white drag queen on an LGBTQ+ themed podcast. In the first chapter, I argued that normative queer liberal politics (in *RuPaul’s Drag Race*) work to make illegible queer(ed) aesthetics, knowledges, and bodies. However, as Sally R. Munt argues (and as outlined in the previous two chapters), “being non-intelligible means more potential for new identities to form, in the moment of radical indecipherability, when the subject is turned, s/he is lost from view and undefined.” (2008, p.182) Non-intelligible subjectivities, therefore, open a space for possibilities of new being in the world (and perhaps: new worlds/futures all-together).

In this chapter, I ask: how do queer(ed) subjects resist queer liberal impulses to delimit queer identity, thereby narrowing decolonial possibilities of queer politics? In the exchange with

⁶² Hiram Pérez (2015) is a notable exception to this, as they link the modern (white) gay subject as being thoroughly complicit in their desire for, and propagation of American imperialism, colonialism, and neoliberalism.

Master, Trixie affirms herself as both a Wisconsinite *and* Native American, thereby reaffirming that she is not only queer, but is also racialized. Here, I suggest that Trixie retains and practices a particular form of control over her being rendered as a “bad indian,” by reconfiguring and branding herself as a “bad Native American” to Masters (and the viewers), thereby (re)affirming the multiplicity of subjectivities which she embodies and moves through. Are there forms of “bad queer politics” in this era of settler colonial queer liberalism? What do they materialize as? What forms of queer and decolonial epistemologies, bodies, and relations would “bad queers” gesture to?

Bad Queer Politics: Negativity and Contradictory Subjectivities

Using Trixie and Katya as case studies, I will further explore how queer(ed) others take control over queer liberal renderings of their multiple subjectivities and intersecting identities. I argue that they do this by failing to adequately perform, or failing to be happy with, what Sara Ahmed conceptualizes as the “promise of happiness.” (2010) Ahmed explains that,

If objects provide a means for making us happy, then in directing ourselves toward this or that object, we are aiming somewhere else: toward a happiness that is presumed to follow. The temporality of this following does matter. Happiness is what would come after. Given this, happiness is directed toward certain objects, which point toward that which is not yet present. When we follow things, we aim for happiness, as if happiness is what you get if you reach certain points. (2010, p.26)

As previously addressed, queer liberal spaces and subjects, such as *RuPaul’s Drag Race* and RuPaul, ultimately promote the message that queer subjects reach happiness by directing themselves towards certain settler colonial objects, namely, proactive participation in the capitalist labour market and full induction into American citizenry rights (such as the legalization of same-sex marriage). These objects maintain settler colonialism, by justifying and maintaining the existence of the settler nation-state and its normative structures of power and knowledge. Queer(ed) subjects such as Trixie and Katya invoke what I characterize as bad queer politics

(another QDK strategy) when they reject or cannot live up to the “promise of happiness” specifically because of their relation to multiple intersections of identity and subjectivities. I am not the first to identify “bad queers.” For instance, Carl Stychin identifies a similar subject position under the term “bad queers.”⁶³ Stychin contends that “...in attempting achieve legal victories, lesbians and gays seeking rights may embrace the ideal of ‘respectability,’ a construction that then perpetuates a division between ‘good gays’ and (disreputable) ‘bad queers’.” (1998, p.200) In my view, bad queer politics are also representative of what Sara Ahmed recognizes as “killjoys” and “unhappy queers” since they continuously represent challenges and threats to the stability and naturalization of normative structures such as heteronormativity, homonormativity, whiteness, and more—structures which many deposit their desires of happiness into. (Ahmed, 2010) I argue that as a specific QDK strategy, bad queer politics involve failing (consciously or unconsciously) to perform and reiterate the intersecting demands of neoliberalism, capitalism, and settler colonialism, potentially embody bad feelings, and can contaminate others with their negativity (such as: anger, anxiety, confusion, depression, guilt, sadness, stress, uncertainty and more). Through bad queer politics, QDKs disidentify (Muñoz, 1999) with settler colonial and queer liberal conceptions of proper queer identities and subjectivities. This is not new territory in queer studies. As highlighted in previous chapters, many scholars in the field (and queer peoples outside of academia) have argued that failure shame is a particular element of queer identity, and can be considered a platform for queer

⁶³ In arriving at the understanding of “bad queers,” Stychin references Ruthann Robson who differentiates good and bad lesbians. Robson finds that, “even when functionally (re)defined, the family redefines lesbians by demarcating, assimilating, coercing, indoctrinating, and arrogating us. Demarcation occurs when familialism becomes a division among ourselves, as well as when it serves as a convenient division between ‘good’ lesbians and ‘bad’ ones for the dominant culture.” (1994, p.989)

politics. (Halberstam, 2011; Halperin & Traub, 2010; Munt, 2008; Sedgwick, 2003) For Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman, “negativity” in particular,

refers to the psychic and social incoherences and divisions, conscious and unconscious alike, that trouble any totality or fixity of identity. It denotes, that is, the relentless force that unsettles the fantasy of sovereignty. But its effects, in our view, are not just negative, since negativity unleashes the energy that allows for the possibility of change. (2014, p.vii-viii)

I build off of this work on this understanding, seeking ways in which bad queers’ negativity may unleash possibilities of queer *and* decolonial change. Put differently, in using the term “bad queers politics,” I expand from Ahmed’s definition of feminist killjoys/unhappy queers, by focusing specifically on queers who, consciously or unconsciously, perform a dissatisfaction with logics of settler colonialism. To be clear, by doing so, I am not supporting Lee Edelman’s (2004) position of a queer politics based on anti-relationality and anti-futurity. Instead, I align myself with Muñoz (2009) who calls for a queer politics based on hope for queer futures, ones which we cannot fully imagine but can witness glimpses of. Following Muñoz, I analyze forms of bad queer politics invoked by QDKs, which respond to this current epoch of queer liberalism, in order to locate glimpses of, and gestures to, queer and decolonial futures/worlds. If, as Halberstam (2013) finds, “revolution will come in a form we cannot yet imagine,” seeking forms of queer and decolonial aesthetics, responses, and relationality in negativity may posit generative theoretical and practical strategies in fending against the limiting elements of queer liberalism.

In the previous chapter, I explored how Trixie and Katya are queer(ed) subjects, as they fail to adequately conform to, and embody socially constructed broader mechanizations of knowledge and power—which are upheld by objects which promise happiness (such as the family, reproduction, success in the capitalist labour market, and inclusion in citizenry). I outlined how Trixie and Katya created a queer heterotopia in order for their bodies and

epistemologies to exist. In this chapter, I foreground how Trixie and Katya fail to live up to, and therefore buy into the promise of happiness while embodying specific limited identities (gay, indian, Indigenous, settler, man, woman...) Instead, in their bad queer politics, they simultaneously embrace negativity, contradictions, ambivalence, and their intersecting identities as QDKs in queer liberal spaces. Bad queer politics, then, is similar and related to disidentification, in that it involves queer(ed) subjects disidentifying with normative identities, subjectivities, and trajectories. However, bad queer politics differs from disidentification in that it specifically involves a rejection of any normative promises of happiness through an uncanny performance and aesthetic involving multiple and contradictory racial, sexual, gender, and other identities and subjectivities. I attempt to strategize a practical way in which we may move towards Cohen's call for a queer politics which is not based "in the dissolution of all categories and communities" but instead is built from "the destabilization and remaking of our identities" (1997, p.481)—namely delimited indian, Indigenous, and settler identities. First, I will analyze Trixie's latest project, her country album *Two Birds*, which was released in May of 2017. By focusing on the art, videos, and lyrics from the album, I showcase how Trixie moves through multiple identities and subjectivities, which may seem contradictory or dichotomous (such as masculine and feminine, cowboy and drag queen). Throughout the album's lyrics (and in interviews around the release of the album), Trixie also has acted as a QDK by vocalizing disillusions, ambivalence, and sheer unhappiness with her fame and material wealth as a post-season *RuPaul's Drag Race* contestant. Next, I will examine Katya's YouTube series, *RuFLECTIONS* and *Irregardlessly Trish*. In *RuFLECTIONS*, Katya embodies her Russian alter-ego Katya, while in *Irregardlessly Trish*, Katya stars as her alter-ego Trish Thompson—a Bostonian woman who cuts hair out of her mother's garage, lives in a dumpster, and is fourteen

days clean and sober. The Russian Katya oscillates between ambivalence and sadness with her current experiences in the U.S., while Trish is relentlessly positive, despite what many would perceive as hardships (poverty, lack of education, homelessness, health issues and more) in what is currently known as the United States. I suggest that through her representations of multiple and contradictory identities (as an unhappy Russian American, and a relentlessly happy American), Katya applies a bad queer politics whereby she makes whiteness and the American Dream uncanny (as in unknown, unfamiliar, and, perhaps: undesirable). Finally, I explore “conversations” (Morgensen, 2011) between the half-white and half Native American (Ojibwe) Trixie and the white U.S. settler Katya (as portrayed on their YouTube series *UNHhhh*), in which they each embrace their multiplicity of subjectivities, act as QDKs together, and may, therefore, provide a form of bad queer relationality which resists the narrowing impulses of “allyship” and queer liberalism, and may assist in building queer(ed) and decolonial futures.

Trixie as Sad Cowboy

On May 2nd, 2017, Trixie Mattel releases *Two Birds*, a country/folk album on her own label. The album was well-received, reaching #2 on the U.S. iTunes charts. Trixie specifically releasing a country/folk album is both an adherence to, and departure from, the career trajectories of other *RuPaul's Drag Race* alumna. While many *RuPaul's Drag Race* queens have released singles and albums prior to, and following their appearances on the reality show, most—including, but not limited to Adore Delano, Bob the Drag Queen, Alaska Thunderfuck 5000, and Jinxx Monsoon—produced their music in the popular forms of pop, rap, electronic/club music, and rock. In this section I outline how, with her folk/country album *Two Birds*, Trixie may be understood as engaging in a bad queer politics as she moves through (and affirms) her many identities and subjectivities which may be understood as contradictory to many (such as

masculine and feminine, cowboy and drag queen). I will also outline that throughout the album's lyrics (and in interviews around the release of the album), Trixie also has acted as a QDK, invoking bad queer politics by vocalizing disillusion, ambivalence, and (at times) sheer unhappiness with her fame and material wealth as a post-season *RPDR* drag queen. I will explore this through an examination of the album artwork, lyrics, music video, and interviews.

According to Trixie, the name of the album stems from multiple meanings—meanings which I suggest are representative of Trixie's various and (as some would interpret) contradictory subjectivities. In a 2017 interview with Christoph Buescher, Trixie reveals that *Two Birds* refers to "Trixie" and "Brian" (as previously highlighted, Trixie is also known as "Brian Firkus" out of drag). Trixie has also explained that she wrote the album during a break-up. This also inspired a meaning behind *Two Birds*, "also, it has to do with people coming and going. If you imagine an electric wire and two birds sitting on it, they only stay for a certain amount of time before one leaves. The time that they're together, that's the story of this album." (in Buescher, 2017) A third meaning is that Trixie composed the music for the album on a Hummingbird guitar and a dove guitar. She adds that: "Also, my grandpa taught me to play guitar on a Hummingbird, and my grandma's spirit animal is an owl, so that's also a two-birds-thing. It has a few meanings to it." (in Buescher, 2017) Here, Trixie posits a potential fleeting reference to her Indigeneity with the mention of her grandmother's spirit animal, pointing to the fact that she is not just queer—she is Native American. Similar to the case with Masters, Trixie's Native American identity may be shocking to queer liberal settler subjects, due to queer liberal tendencies to obfuscate race as part of their politics, as well as the contradictory elements of monstrous white uncanniness and subjectivities (Trixie may be interpreted as solely white due to her performance as an excessive white woman).

The meaning of *Two Birds* as a reference to Trixie and Firkus, coupled with the reference to Trixie's Indigeneity, displaces Trixie (drag/queerness) as the sole meaning of who Trixie/Firkus are. Reflecting on how she wants her album to be received in an interview with Kate Brogden (2017) Trixie says: "Well, first and foremost, it's not drag music, it's just music. Even the most conservative person who does not know anything about drag can just enjoy the music; it's relatable life material. Drag just happens to be what I do." I suggest that Trixie's refusal to have *Two Birds* labeled as "drag music" is a (conscious or unconscious) moment of resistance to queer liberalism. While queer liberal projects such as *RuPaul's Drag Race* purport to accept and embrace difference, as demonstrated in the first chapter, these kinds of projects often envelop or evade certain kinds of (racialized and other) difference, in the name of gay liberation. Trixie resists being enveloped into larger queer liberal projects by insisting on affirming both a connection to, and difference from the many *RuPaul's Drag Race* queens who have released music. Here, Trixie connects her music to conservative (read: heterosexual/heteronormative and even anti-queer) peoples—arguing that they may both enjoy and relate to her music. This disjuncture between Trixie's album and "drag music" and immediate connection to "conservative" peoples may provide an example of a deliberate break from queer politics on the basis of non-normative-as-liberal vs. normative-as-conservative sexualities. Further, I interpret Trixie's proclamation "drag just happens to be what I do" as a resistance to a queer liberal politics which attempt to posit queerness (as in: non-heteronormative sexual and gender identity) as the sum total of one's identity. In this quote, Trixie affirms that she does drag, but is not defined *solely* by drag.

Despite her drawing a specific distinction between "drag music" and her music, in *Two Birds* Trixie upholds a multiplicity of identities and subjectivities which she moves through in

and through—including drag. For instance, in the album artwork, Trixie appears both in and out of drag. In the cover image, Trixie and Brian Firkus appear standing side by side in a field of wheat, staring wistfully into something in the distance.



Figure 4: Trixie Mattel album art (by Lisa Predko, 2017)

Trixie, wearing a pink dress with southwestern American imagery printed on it (pinup cowgirls and cactuses) is grasping an autoharp in one hand, and Firkus' shoulder in the other. Firkus,

grasping a guitar in one hand and a wooden fence in the other, is dressed in white pants, shirt, and cowboy hat, with a black and gold belt and bolo tie. Blue, yellow, and pink flowers decorate the interior flap of his hat, and the front of his shirt. I find that Trixie is especially reminiscent of Dolly Parton in this image—with her bright blue eyes, towering blonde hair, and visual references to folk/country music like the autoharp.⁶⁴ As highlighted in Chapter One, Trixie dresses up as a monstrous version of a white woman—simultaneously making white subjectivities ugly while recognizing the allure for non-white subjects like herself. In this image, Trixie/Firkus also upholds and depicts her/his out-of-drag realities and subjectivities. I understand this dual imagery as Trixie/Firkus (re)claiming and depicting the multiplicity of subjectivities that s/he willingly/unwillingly embodies and moves through, and those that s/he may desire—namely: feminine and masculine, white subjectivities (such as fame and white beauty standards), rural Midwestern Americana, cowboy and cowgirl, and Native American.

Trixie/Firkus grew up as a gay half-Ojibwe in rural Wisconsin (off the reservation). As such, his identity is informed by, and reflects this unique confluence of culture and subjectivities which inform and reflect Trixie/Firkus. Scholars may be quick to point out the potential subversive representation of Trixie/Firkus as a Native American, embodying a cowboy. Cowboys have long been a romanticized figure in the American imaginary, often imagined and portrayed in a violent battle with Indians. Trixie would have witnessed these romanticized and violent representations growing up in the U.S. Midwest.

⁶⁴ Nadine Hubbs (2015) notes that Dolly Parton is known as a queer idol, and for her support and work of LGBTQ+ peoples. Hubbs says that “Parton had deconstructed her own spectacular femininity, with evident class awareness...” (2015, p.73) Parton, Hubbs finds, has her own “queer aura.” (2015, p.73) Parton—a straight cisgender woman—as “queer” further challenges the narrowing of queer meaning to non-heteronormative sexual and gender identity.

While the album cover's depiction of Trixie/Firkus as cowboy/country star may be understood as subversive in this way, to limit the analysis to this one facet of Trixie/Firkus' identity—Native Americanness—would be to limit the potential queer and decolonial meaning of the cover. If we extend our analysis to include not only Trixie/Firkus' Native American identity, but also his identity as a half-white and half Native American gay man living in the U.S. Midwest, the album takes on a more nuanced meaning. For example, Hiram Pérez (2015) argues that race has had a significant influence in the emergence of the “gay cosmopolitan”—the modern gay (queer liberal) subject. Pérez uses the figure of the “gay cosmopolitan” as a way “to designate a subject position originating with (but not limited to) a white, urban, leisure-class gay male whose desire is cast materially onto the globe at the close of the nineteenth century.” (2015, p.5) Pérez thus implicates gay subjects (mainly: white gay men) in historical and ongoing complicity and proactive involvement in American imperialism, colonialism, and neoliberalism.

More specifically, Pérez argues that the complicity of gay subjects is central to the justification and maintenance of what he terms as the “homoerotics of the nation—the incitements, accommodations, and instrumentalizations of queer desires by the nation.” (2015, p.4-5) Pérez (re)examines specific figures—the sailor, the soldier, and the cowboy—finding that not only do gay subjects desire these figures, they have their own queer histories bound in historic and ongoing “homoerotics of the nation.” (2015, p.4) For example, Pérez argues that “the cowboy is predecessor to the gay cosmopolitan. The travels of both cowboy and cosmopolitan serve colonial interest in expansion and westernization.” (2015, p.143) Pérez's (2015) cowboy has a queer history as a lone man outside of the heteronormative family unit. This queer history, he argues, “the nation tolerates...as part of an unspoken compact.” (2015, p.143) Further, Pérez finds that for the gay cosmopolitan, these queer figures of cowboy, the

solider, and the sailor are enveloped into the national imaginary, and are also “enduring objects of queer desire...memorialized (and desired) for their heroic masculinity.” (2015, p.9) As a gay man who participates in queer liberal projects/spaces, Trixie/Firkus are not immune to the allure of mythologized masculinity of the cowboy.

Trixie/Firkus may also find a commonality between themselves and the figure of the cowboy who is a constant wanderer—never settling down, travelling across America as a lone figure. While, as argued in the first chapter, Trixie’s monstrous white uncanniness may be understood as a source of reclamation for Trixie/Firkus of white subjectivities (white feminine beauty, material wealth, and fame), the image of Firkus as cowboy/country musician may be interpreted as an act of reclamation of masculine white subjectivities, desired, as Pérez finds, by gay male subjects. By dressing as cowboy, Firkus may be understood to be reclaiming this aspect of his identity as a gay man who grew up in the Midwest, perhaps desiring the masculinity and romanticized imagery of the cowboy. The flowery pink, yellow, and blue elements on Firkus’ pristine white shirt and hat (beside Trixie’s presence) are the only visibly “queer” elements in the cover image—and may represent a confluence of Firkus’ feminine subjectivities meeting his desire of (and perhaps: for) the masculinity of the cowboy. In this imagery, Trixie/Firkus as a queer(ed) other, becomes part of the American iconography (in the familiar imagery of American national symbols—the cowboy, the country star, the heteronormative country star couple), while queering and making uncanny the American national imaginary (for themselves as a queer Native American gay man). By “recycling and rethinking encoded meaning” (Muñoz, 1994, p. 31), of imaginary from the national imaginary, Trixie is performing a complex QDK performative strategy of bad queer politics through “disidentification” (Muñoz, 1999).

Like her/his monstrous white uncanniness, Trixie/Firkus' disidentificatory maneuver in this image does not blatantly articulate or imply fault upon queer(ed) others in desiring to be part of the American national imaginary. Instead, Trixie/Firkus becomes part of American iconography and queer liberal desired imaginary, while exposing the instability of its white heteronormativity and homonormativity. The inclusion of Trixie on the cover is necessary for the queering of the image. Without her uncanny presence, the image portrays only a romantic image of a queer cowboy. Trixie's image queers the white settler nationalism of the image, in making the white heteronormative couple queered and uncanny.

While the "cowboy" has a queer history bound up in the "homoerotics of the nation" (Pérez, 2015, p.4), Trixie does not romanticize (and therefore, propagate) the cowboy's desired lifestyle. While Trixie may find an affinity towards the figure of the "queer" cowboy due to its wandering/travelling ways, in *Two Birds*, Trixie blatantly expresses ambivalence, discontentment, and frustration with her post-*RuPaul's Drag Race* "success" as a travelling popular drag queen in America. For example, four songs reference and link travel with hardship and sorrow. In the song about the aftermath of a breakup, "I Know You All Over Again", Trixie sings the verse: "And I don't leave you in the night / And I don't up and go away / No green in your eyes / Or teary goodbyes / No one cries on the plane." Here, Trixie may be referencing the role travelling played in her breakup, along with the pain of leaving a romantic partner to travel. Further, in the course for the song "Seen My Man," Trixie again references travel and leaving (and perhaps: losing) a romantic partner, singing:

Well I've been out to Austin, back to Boston
 Where I've been
 Following the highways in my hand
 When I go back to Wisconsin
 And when I come home again
 Has anybody out there seen my man?

In a more upbeat twist to this common narrative, in the course of “Bluegrass” Trixie sings:

I’ve got parts of me in Milwaukee
 And I’ve got pieces in Minne, in St. Paul
 And I knew that I got lucky in the bluegrass of Kentucky
 But bluegrass, he don’t love me after all
 No, no, bluegrass, he don’t love me after all

In the first track on the album, “Mama Don’t Make Me Put On The Dress Again”, Trixie provides the most vocal ambivalence and at times, pure disdain for life as a travelling drag queen. In the first two stanzas and course of this single, Trixie Mattel sings:

Mama don’t make me put on the dress again
 I can’t stand the way it opens when I spin
 Ribbon bows around my shoulder and I’m only getting older
 Mama don’t make me put on the dress again

Daddy don’t make me fancy dance around
 Painted up in that makeup like a clown
 If I see another stocking Lord, I swear to God I’m walking Lord
 Daddy don’t make me fancy dance around...

Well, I’m coming home alone for the hundredth time or so
 It gets harder on my hard earned money’s dime
 To the bottle in my basket, will it answer if I ask it:
 Doing right or am I doing time?

I interpret the lyrics of “Mama Don’t Make Me Put On The Dress Again” (and the other three songs placed in the context of the album as a whole) as Trixie performing a QDK dissatisfaction and frustration with her life as a successful travelling drag queen. Throughout the song (as part of the chorus, Trixie asks “doing right or am I doing time”, thereby even going as far as comparing her life as a travelling drag artist to form of prison. I recognize that performing dissatisfaction with fame and celebrity, while profiting from it, is a trope of celebrity. However, I am interested in how the mobility and material wealth (which are understood to come with fame and celebrity) are intrinsically linked to gay identity in what is currently known as Canada and

the U.S. As previously highlighted, in *RuPaul's Drag Race*, fame and celebrity are evoked as being keys to happiness and success in America. Furthermore, drawing on scholar Howard Hughes' idea that, "tourism and being gay are inextricably linked" (1997, p.6) Pérez says that:

identification as 'gay' is premised on mobility....Anywhere other than the heteronormative confines of the traditionally defined 'home' and 'family,' being 'gay' requires some kind of travel, actual or imagined. The most canonical expression of being gay, 'coming out of the closet,' is a quintessential articulation of the link between identity and travel. (2015, p.105-106)

Physical mobility (travel/tourism) depends on social and economic upward mobility and is a major element of queer liberal identity. Yet, Pérez warns that "the mobility that modern gay identity requires is not universally available," and that "here, we encounter trouble in the form of noncanonical bodies (not surprisingly, also quite often brown bodies) nonetheless interpellated as gay—gays who cannot properly be gay." (2015, p.106) In expressing her unhappiness and ambivalence to her travelling lifestyle as a drag queen who has found material success and fame after *RuPaul's Drag Race*, Trixie/Firkus also exposes the queer liberal desire for upward economic and travel mobility as unfulfilling and unappealing. S/he thus becomes the unhappy gay "who cannot properly be gay" (Pérez 2015, p.106)—the "bad queer," a QDK.

In the video for "Mama Don't Make Me Put On The Dress Again", Trixie/Firkus represents both her and his multiple lived and desired subjectivities, as well as her and his ambivalence to her lifestyle as a drag queen who has found success, material wealth, fame, and the ability to travel widely. In the video, a visibly flustered Trixie hands out popcorn to a demanding audience of (gay) cowboys who are yell at her, grab at her, and throw popcorn in her direction.

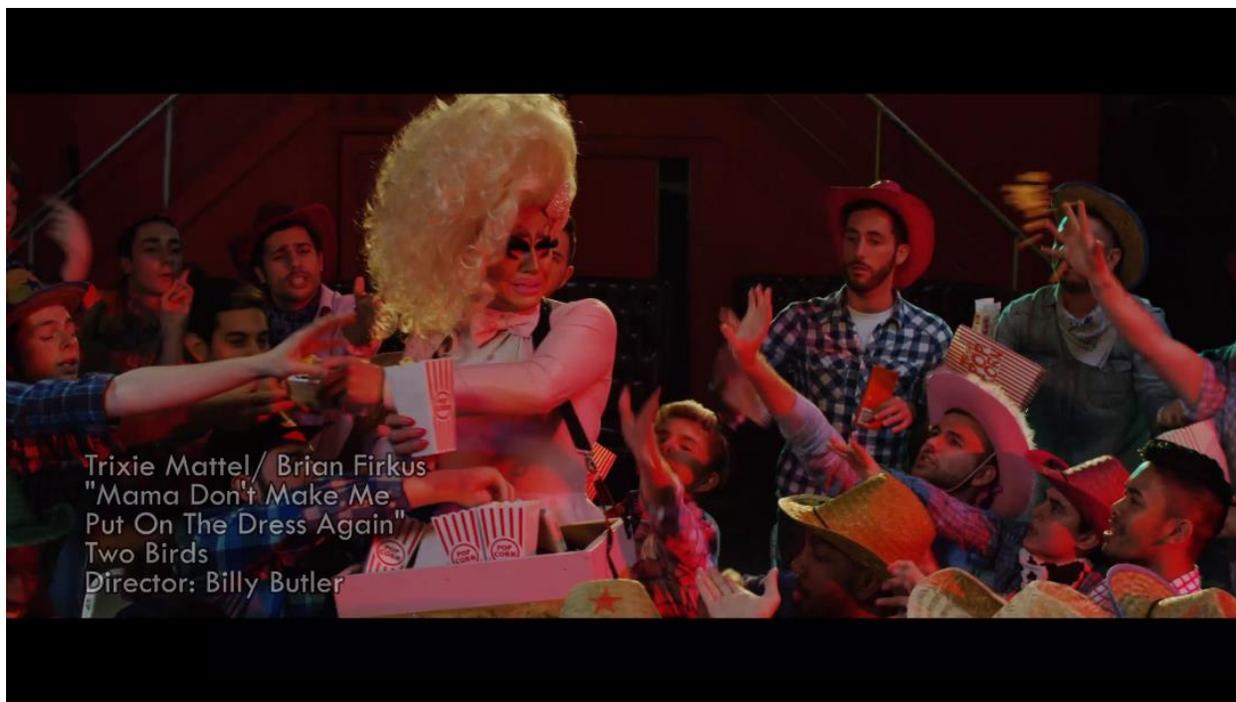


Figure 4.1: Trixie handing out popcorn in “Mama Don’t Make Me Put On The Dress Again.”

An older white cowboy (played by Leslie Jordan) orders the audience to “simmer down” and “put a sock in it” so that they can start the puppet show. Firkus, also dressed in cowboy apparel, is found on the side of the stage and begins singing “Mama Don’t Make Me Put On The Dress Again.” A man begins the puppet show, making a puppet (who bears a strong resemblance to Trixie) dance around. He later switches to a cowboy puppet, dressed in an outfit similar to what Firkus was wearing on the cover of *Two Birds*. Most of the audience, including Trixie, watches, entranced with the puppets, while Firkus goes unnoticed.



Figure 4.2: Firkus performing in “Mama Don’t Make Me Put On The Dress Again.”

Trixie explains that the music video depicts “a puppet show being put on for adult cowboys as a metaphor for a drag queen in a gay bar, it’s very real and arduous and tiring.” (in Buescher, 2017) Firkus playing music in the background may contribute to this metaphor, as the audience is choosing to only engage with Trixie in the crowd, aggressively demanding and grabbing at her, and the “Trixie” puppet on stage who they watch to be entertained. They ignore Firkus, watching only the puppets. In this way, the gay men hold the power—on stage, Firkus/Trixie may be performing a nuanced show based on the totality of their subjectivities, but they choose to only engage with what they find entertaining and comfortable. However, Trixie/Firkus invokes a QDK move when s/he take control of the situation, by expressing their frustration and dissatisfaction with this element of success within the confines of queer liberalism. Further, throughout the video, clips of Firkus singing as different figures—the cowboy/country star and the boy scout—are represented in front of different backgrounds which operate widely in the

American imaginary (such as a log cabin in scenic wilderness, the Grand Canyon, and The Grand Ole Opry).



Figure 4.3: Firkus as Boy Scout edited in front of scenic landscape in “Mama Don’t Make Me Put On The Dress Again.”



Figure 4.4: Firkus edited in front of U.S. southwest landscape in “Mama Don’t Make Me Put On The Dress Again.”



Figure 4.5: Firkus as cowboy in front of the Grand Ole Opry in “Mama Don’t Make Me Put On The Dress Again.”

Following Pérez (2015), these figures could be understood as precursors to the “gay cosmopolitan”—gay subjects who are enveloped into the American masculine imaginary and who gay men desire. Firkus is able to embody these figures, and become part of, and participate in the national American imaginary, which he as a gay man in the U.S. may desire. At the same time, he critiques the context for, and ultimate reality of achieving, said desires. For instance, in the video, a second Firkus is one of the cowboys in the crowd, sitting alone at a table, looking tough with a hard expression on his face.

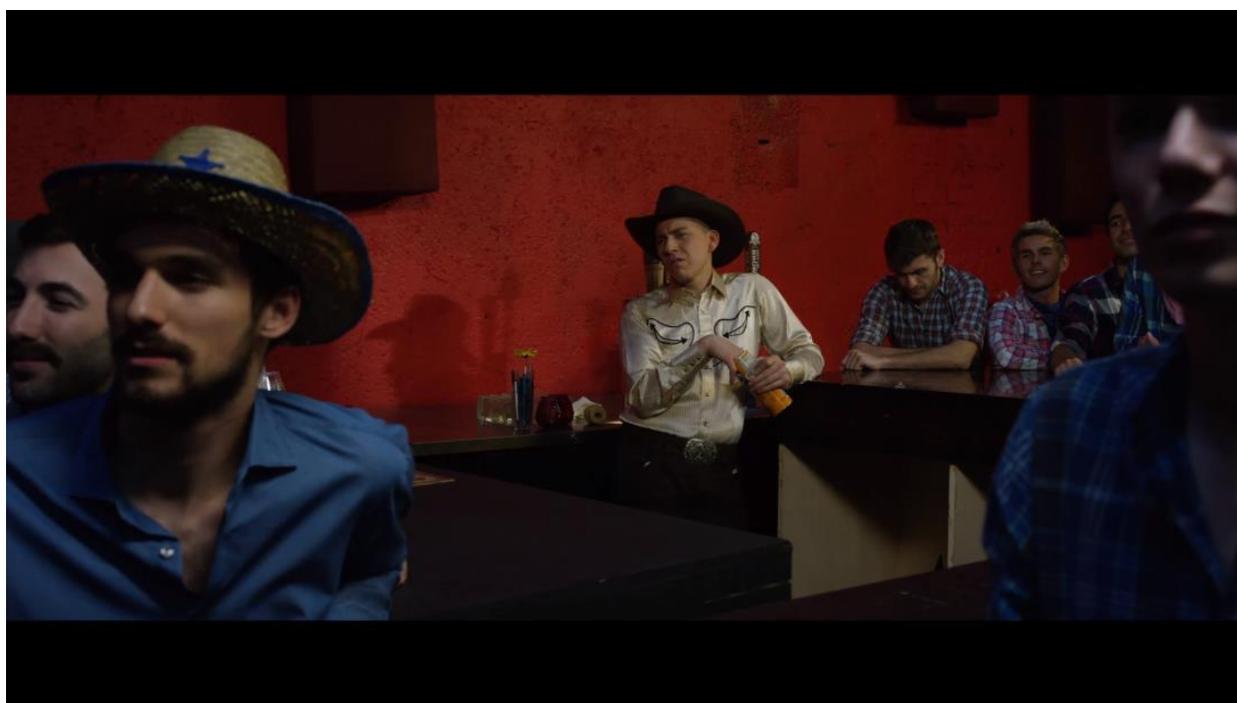


Figure 4.6: Firkus as tough cowboy in “Mama Don’t Make Me Put On The Dress Again.”

I suggest that the inclusion of Firkus in the crowd as a tough cowboy is Trixie/Firkus demonstrating that he is not only just able to become a “gay cosmopolitan” subject like those men in the crowd—s/he is even able to perform and embody the “heroic masculinity” (Pérez, 2015, p.9) of the cowboy more authentically, and watches the others and the show with that knowledge. The (white) gay men may hold the power of the gaze in watching only the puppets,

but Firkus ultimately takes control of the situation by flipping a knowing, and perhaps even judgmental, gaze onto them.

In *Two Birds*, Trixie/Firkus' performs ambivalence to desires associated with gay identity, while affirming and upholding the queer contradictions of her/his identity. Through this bad queer politics, s/he becomes the QDK—one who cannot achieve and find happiness in the promises of queer liberalism, and who exposes the fallacy of queer liberal promises of happiness to others. In Chapter Two, I argued that monstrous white uncanniness is predicated on Trixie being a half-Native American and half-white queer(ed) other, parodying and exposing queer liberal promises and normalizing disciplinary structures as oppressive and unstable. Therefore, while Katya may make whiteness and queer liberalism uncanny, unstable, and unappealing, she is not performing monstrous white uncanniness. However, white settler subjects may too act and be interpreted as engaging in bad queer politics since invoking bad queer politics relies on 1.) failing to embody and find happiness in objects and promises of queer liberalism (upward movement in the economy, fulfilling citizenry rights, and more), 2.) performing and engaging with multiple (contradictory) identities and subjectivities, and 3.) exposing the fallacy of promises of queer liberalism to others, thereby instilling “bad” or “negative” feelings in them such as anxiety, guilt, and discontentment. What kinds of decolonial and queer gestures would potentially arise with white settler subjects being “bad queers”? To explore this, I will analyse two of Katya's characters—Russian Katya and Trish—as possible sites of “bad queer” representations.

Katya as Sad Russian Immigrant/Excessively Positive American Settler

Morgensen argues that in the United States, “the sexual colonization of Native peoples produced modern sexuality as ‘settler sexuality’: a white and national heteronormativity formed

by regulating Native sexuality and gender while appearing to supplant them with the sexual modernity of settlers.” (2011, p.31) The maintenance and normalization of what Morgensen calls “settler sexuality” (2011, p.31) is an intrinsic element of settler colonialism. Queer liberal politics is an arm of settler sexuality, since it is authorized and maintained on promises of happiness in citizenry rights, nationalism, and capitalism, ultimately benefit (white settler) gay male subjects who can more easily attain civil rights, find acceptance in the national imaginary, and find economic prosperity. Queer liberal politics, therefore, work to justify and maintain settler colonialism—settler presence and prosperity on stolen Indigenous lands. In order to unsettle queer liberal politics and assemblages, white gay male subjects should critically engage with their own white settler subjectivities and affective attachments, understanding and displacing how their prosperity contributes to settler colonialism, and unsettle their “cruel optimism.” (Berlant, 2011, p.24) As Halberstam argues: “no one will really be able to embrace the mission of tearing “this shit down” until they realize that the structures they oppose are not only bad for some of us, they are bad for all of us.” (2013) If (white) queer liberal subjects recognize how their own lifeways and settler sexuality are undesirable, and delimiting, perhaps they would be more willing to engage in building queer and decolonial futures.

As highlighted in the previous chapter, Trixie’s fellow contestant on season seven of *RuPaul’s Drag Race* and *UNHhhh* co-star, Katya Yekaterina Petrovna Zamolodchikova, switches between the identities of the Russian (immigrant) Katya and an American Katya. Katya has other characters, both named and unnamed, such as what I understand to be an upper-class rich white American woman voice which she and Trixie often break into on *UNHhhh*. In this section, I focus on Katya’s characters of the Russian immigrant to America, Katya (on the YouTube show *RuFLECTIONS*), and the Bostonian settler, Trish (on the YouTube show *Like*

UNHhhh, *RuFLECTIONS* and *Irregardlessly Trish*, shows that I have designated in Chapter Three as queer(ed) heterotopias which make space for queer(ed) epistemologies and bodies. I suggest by moving through these characters' white subjectivities, Katya embraces the reality that whiteness itself is a nuanced identity, which intersects with class, sexuality, and gender. Since a normative regulatory whiteness is intrinsic to settler sexuality and by extension, settler colonialism and queer liberalism—embracing and portraying a kind of nuanced whiteness may unsettle queer liberal subjects' own uncritical acceptance of white subjectivities. This, coupled with Katya's reliance on the monstrous, grotesque, and uncanny may make whiteness and American values and metanarratives unfamiliar, ugly, and undesirable in the minds of (white) queer liberal subjects. I explore this queer potentiality by analyzing the Russian character of Katya, and the American character of Trish.

RuFLECTIONS is an eleven-episode series released in 2015, and hosted on Katya's YouTube channel, *welovekatya*. Each episode was released in conjunction with the release of a seventh season *RuPaul's Drag Race* episode, in which Katya starred and competed. The series stars the Russian character "Katya," who has immigrated to America, and reflects on a variety of seemingly nonsensical and unrelated topics in surreal locations. Each episode chronologically corresponds with an episode of *RuPaul's Drag Race* which Katya was in and incorporates vague references to said episode. Further, throughout each of the episodes, Katya oscillates between expressing confusion, despair, anger, and ambivalence to her Russian part and her current realities living in America, to ambiguous nonsensical sexual references. For example, in episode one, Katya is shown in a non-descript house, smelling (and eating) a flower, drawing a large penis with the words "fuck me Satan" written on it, staring contemplatively into space, and writing in a journal.



Figure 4.7: Katya writing in journal in *RuFLECTIONS* “Episode 01.”

Via voice-over, Katya says:

My name is Yekaterina Petrovna Zamolodchikova. I was born in Soviet Union. I am prostitute. But I have dreams! I have always had dreams—loud, sweaty dreams where I am covered in caviar, screaming into my vagina. I came to the United States in the late 90s where every girl in Europe was wearing platform sneakers. I wanted to be a star. In Soviet Russia, no one expects to be happy, but I am not no one, I am someone, in the very least, I expect to be, [pause] without pain. Today, I make love to Hollywood. Everything here is a dream. RuPaul asks me to get naked. It was a good first date! In Russia, we always get naked for the economy. All roads lead to destruction, paradise, pain, and sorrow. Please join me on my journey, subscribe to my channel.⁶⁵

While at first glance, this monologue may appear nonsensical, silly, and both familiar and unfamiliar, I suggest that it may also be read as a nuanced critique of *RuPaul’s Drag Race* and broader structures of queer liberalism. For instance, the reference to RuPaul asking Katya to become naked may be a reference to the first episode of season seven of *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, where, for the runway challenge, the queens are ordered by RuPaul to create a resort look which

⁶⁵ welovekatya. “*RuFLECTIONS* - Episode 01- We Love Katya.” Online video clip. YouTube. YouTube, March 5th, 2015. Web. July 1st, 2017.

they must tear off themselves to reveal (or, as they say in *RuPaul's Drag Race*: “ruveal”) the illusion of being nude. Here (and in other episodes which provide vague metaphors to her time competing), Katya undermines any romanticized, comfortable, queer liberal notions about *RuPaul's Drag Race* by making elements of the show unfamiliar, gross, and undesirable. These veiled critiques feature in other episodes, such as in episode six, where Katya reflects that in the beginning there were fourteen, but she had to kill eight, and the remaining will have to eat each other (where she will eat their “homeopathic flesh”).⁶⁶ This may be a reference to how eight had been eliminated in the competition, and the rest will have to continue competing. I suggest that in this monologue, Katya also makes both Russian and American experience and culture strange and undesirable. Katya finds that in Russia, no one “expects to be happy” but she only wishes to be free from pain. With the goal of being happy in mind, she leaves for Hollywood. While in Russia, she worked as a prostitute (commodifying her sexuality/body), as soon as she reaches America, RuPaul requests that she become naked in order to further herself in the competition (another commodification of her sexuality/body). Katya here reveals that while immigrants may seek better lives in America, they may face eerily similar prospects in achieving their desired upward economic and social mobility. In my view, Russian Katya’s performance of being unhappy in America is a QDK move which may hold unsettling queer affects for gay viewers, since, as Heather Love finds,

In the era of gay normalization, gays and lesbians not only have to be like everyone else (get married, raise kids, mow the grass, etc), they have to look and feel good doing it. Such demands are the effect, in part, of the general American premium on cheerfulness: being a ‘gay American,’ like being any kind of American, means being a cheerful American. For gay Americans, the pressure to appear in good spirits is even greater. Because homosexuality is traditionally so closely associated with disappointment and depression, being happy signifies participation in the coming era of gay

⁶⁶ welovekatya. “*RuFLECTIONS* - Episode 06- We Love Katya.” Online video clip. YouTube. YouTube, April 8th, 2015. Web. July 1st, 2017.

possibility...Given this climate of emotional conformism it makes sense to ask whether gays and lesbians still have the right to be unhappy. (2007a, p.54)

In her performed dissatisfaction with queer life in America, Katya challenges what Love identifies as the pressure for gay Americans to remain happy/complicit as good citizen-subjects in gay/queer liberal times. These metaphorical critiques may be located in other episodes. In episode six, Katya reflects, in a clever play on words: “I have been to Target, and I still haven’t found what I’m looking for.”⁶⁷ Target as one of the largest discount store retailers in America, could be interpreted as a symbol of American capitalism, and Katya has not found what she was looking for there—happiness. Katya here is the ultimate QDK white immigrant settler, unable to locate happiness and thus unsettling the dream of locating happiness in consumerism and material wealth.

In the final episode of *RuFLECTIONS*, which corresponds with the episode in which Katya was eliminated from *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, the critiques of queer liberalism as detailed above (making American metanarratives such as The American Dream, and American capitalism undesirable) coalesce into a final unsettling gesture. Katya is in a room, crying and stuffing her comically small suitcase with her many *RuPaul’s Drag Race* runway looks.

⁶⁷welovekatya. “*RuFLECTIONS* - Episode 06- We Love Katya.” Online video clip. YouTube. YouTube, April 8th, 2015. Web. July 1st, 2017.



Figure 4.8: Katya stuffing her suitcase on *RuFLECTIONS* “Episode 11.”

Via voice-over, she reflects:

My name is Yekaterina Petrovna Zamolodchikova. I am, loser. I had a little too much ice cream, and now my body hurts. I feel bad, but I’ll be alright. Today, I received a letter: ‘Dear Katya, we regret [sic] to inform you that you will not be this year’s Next Drag Superstar. Please pack your belongings and contemplate the once and a lifetime opportunity that you completely squandered. Please be sure to obsess over every little thing you could have done differently. Focus on the friends and family you have disappointed. They will never look you in the eyes again. Remember—it’s not just a television show. It’s your identity. We hope you are feeling very sorry for yourself, and we wish you the best of luck in your future endeavours. Love, your worst fears, realized.’⁶⁸

The monologue may be interpreted as representative of Katya’s feelings of being eliminated off of *RuPaul’s Drag Race* but may also be read as Russian immigrant to America Katya and Katya’s failed attempts at finding happiness through pro-active participation in the American capitalist labour market as a queer(ed) other. The letter’s correlation with her attempts to be the “Next Drag Superstar” with the totality of her identity gesture to the grim reality that not

⁶⁸ welovekatya. “*RuFLECTIONS* - Episode 11- We Love Katya.” Online video clip. YouTube. YouTube, May 13th, 2015. Web. July 1st, 2017.

everyone can locate economic success and prosperity in the queer liberal assemblage of *RuPaul's Drag Race*—there are economic winners and losers, as in American society as a whole. Further, it gestures a warning to those who equate queer identity to being delimited to non-heteronormative sexual and gender practices and desires, and queer liberation through the nation's and citizenry's acceptance of queer as identity peoples. In the end, Russian Katya returns home to a dumpster, where she will be “seeking validation and self-love.”⁶⁹



Figure 4.9: Katya crawling into a dumpster on *RuFLECTIONS* “Episode 11.”

Katya’s story does not end here. In the first episode of Katya’s next YouTube series, *Irregardlessy Trish*, Katya as Trish emerges from a dumpster in Boston.

⁶⁹ welovekatya. “*RuFLECTIONS* – Episode 11- We Love Katya.” Online video clip. YouTube. YouTube, May 13th, 2015. Web. July 1st, 2017.



Figure 4.10: Trish emerging from a dumpster in “Irregardlessly Trish “Episode 01.”

I interpret this as Russian Katya emerging as a full-fledged naturalized white American settler citizen. The first episode’s descriptions explains that:

While Katya is on her Vision Quest in Australia, we’d like to introduce you to her neighbor, Trish Thompson. She cuts hair out of her mother’s garage, it’s whateva’. She’s fourteen days clean and sober, still smoking pot, but whateva’. Progress not perfection. Join her on an in depth tour of her part-time job at Jacques Cabaret.⁷⁰

The series, shot mockumentary style, follows Trish as she goes to her workplace, shopping, provides a tour of her home (a dumpster), goes to the toilet, and more. Throughout these activities, Trish reflects on life and her experiences. She admits to a lack of formal education, is an admitted recovering addict clearly living in poverty, and suffers health issues where she blacks out without warning. Similar to Russian immigrant Katya’s RuFLECTIONS/reflections, Trish’s reflections oscillate between seemingly profound and nonsensical/gross. However, unlike Russian immigrant to America Katya’s negative and shameful descriptions of her life in

⁷⁰ welovekatya. “Irregardlessly Trish - Episode 01- We Love Katya.” Online video clip. YouTube. YouTube, May 20th, 2015. Web. July 1st, 2017.

America, Trish presents as being relentlessly confident and positive, despite her negative circumstances at hand. For instance, in the first episode where she brings the unidentified camera operator to her workplace Jacques Cabaret, Trish says, “one of the best most exotic features of this particular cabaret is that: no glasses, honey. No broken dreams at Jacques. We get dixie cups.”⁷¹ In the first episode, Trish reflects:

You know, living in a dumpster is not all it’s cracked up to be. It’s actually a lot more glamorous than you’d think. You know, living in the city is pretty costly so it’s basically like a studio, fully furnished of course. And the nice thing about living in a dumpster is that the furniture changes from day to day.⁷²

In the ninth episode, where Trish gives a tour of her dumpster home, she again turns nearly every element of living in a dumpster as a perk. She begins by arguing, “too much open space, I start to get a little paranoid”, expressing a kind of autonomy over her choice of home. At one point, she motions with her foot to a piece of an old couch and shares that “this is where the magic happens” – a phrase which refers to the master bedroom, popularized by the MTV show *Cribs* which showcased homes of rich and famous celebrities.

⁷¹ welovekatya. “*Irregardlessly Trish* - Episode 01- We Love Katya.” Online video clip. YouTube. YouTube, May 20th, 2015. Web. July 1st, 2017.

⁷² welovekatya. “*Irregardlessly Trish*– Episode 02- We Love Katya.” Online video clip. YouTube. YouTube, July 8th, 2015. Web. September 4th, 2018.



Figure 4.11: Trish providing a tour of her home on “*Irregardlessly Trish* “Episode 09.”

Trish locates optimism in the negativity and shame of her circumstances while simultaneously finding negativity and shame in things which queer liberal settlers may find appealing, such as gentrification. For instance, Trish gripes that, “this neighbourhood used to be like all hookers, and pimps and drug dealers, and now it’s fucking like straight bachelorettes, whateva.”⁷³ This gestures to other worlds/futures outside of normative settler trajectories where queer(ed) epistemologies, ontologies, and bodies are celebrated.

Finally, I suggest Trish’s frequent saying of “whateva” expresses the ultimate ambivalence with her realities in what is currently known as the U.S., and therefore may be particularly unsettling to queer liberal audiences. With this phrase, she recognizes the dire prospects she (and arguably, many others) have in this nation-state while embracing a denial of her current reality. As a white woman, she could not (and cannot) reach upward economic

⁷³ welovekatya. “*Irregardlessly Trish* - Episode 01- We Love Katya.” Online video clip. YouTube. YouTube, May 20th, 2015. Web. July 1st, 2017.

success and eventual happiness promised by the American Dream. Yet, unlike Russian Katya, she remains relentlessly positive. The viewer may be left uneasy by the uncertainty gestured to with this reoccurring phrase—is Trish aware of her negative circumstances of poor employment, homelessness, poverty, and health issues? Further, is Trish unaware of how broader (queer liberal) American society would understand her situation to be shameful and negative, and lives in a kind of naïve ignorance instead of shame? Does her ambivalent and hard expression of “whateva” act as a source of autonomy to her shameful situation? In any case, Trish (and Russian American settler Katya’s) experiences and reflections posit an uncomfortable reality for queer liberal (white) settlers—there are undesirable and uncomfortable white settler subjectivities which gesture to overarching structures of queer liberalism as unappealing for not just queer(ed) people of colour and Indigenous peoples, but for white people as well. In this way, Katya is a bad queer settler—she demonstrates the nuanced multiplicity of white settler subjectivities and makes them ugly and undesirable for queer liberal white settlers. However, like Trixie, Katya does not lay fault on or make her queer(ed) characters seem powerless. Trish’s relentless positivity may gesture to an ownership of what many would consider, her shameful situation.

Based on Trixie’s and Katya’s individual bad queer politics, I ask: what would bad queer conversations between an Indigenous subject (Trixie) and settler subject (Katya) take form as? Would they gesture to decolonial and queer relations? Next, I visit “conversations” between the Native American Trixie and settler Katya in order to excavate glimpses of bad queer politics.

Trixie and Katya's Bad Queer Decolonial Relationality

In an April 2017 live taping of *UNHhhh* at *RuPaul's Drag Con*⁷⁴, Trixie and Katya discuss their musical endeavours—Trixie's new folk/country album, and Katya's participation on RuPaul's track "Read You, Wrote You." Sitting in front of a large audience, they reflect:

Trixie: If you search me on iTunes, it says Trixie Mattel, and here' my two endeavours: One, is this heart-felt folk album, the other is 'Geronimo' featuring Trixie Mattel and RuPaul.

Katya: Are you featured on that?

Trixie: Yeah, RuPaul was like 'Trixie Mattel, I chose 'Geronimo' for you because of your Native American heritage.' I was like 'Geronimo was a Native American war hero whose mother [and] daughter were slaughtered in battle.'

Trixie then stands up, turns around, starts shaking her back end, and repeats the line from the *Geronimo* course: "now make your booty bounce!" The audience laughs, and Katya responds: "Well...that was a frightening omen...of things to come. You were slaughtered in drag race." The audience groans at this, and Katya responds to them "are you afraid of the truth?"

As highlighted in the first chapter, with queer liberalism, race is not completely ignored, evaded, and/or made illegible in mechanizations of normalization. Instead, it may be strategically deployed in ways which acknowledge racial difference without recognizing how gay liberation politics is structured by, and perpetuates the privileging of certain gay and lesbian subjects over racialized others. In this exchange, Trixie reveals an example of this—RuPaul may have only given her her/his⁷⁵ song "Geronimo" to Trixie to cover due to her being Native American. RuPaul possesses, at least, a tangential knowledge of Geronimo as Native American, and appropriates it for her/his song, without any reference to Indigeneity (history, experience, and/or symbols). RuPaul is, therefore, consciously or unconsciously capitalizing on settler fantasies associated with Geronimo. In the exchange, Trixie acts as a "bad indian" when she connects the

⁷⁴ *RuPaul's DragCon* is a drag convention, first held in Los Angeles in 2015.

⁷⁵ RuPaul identifies by both "he" and "her" pronouns.

appropriation of Indigenous pain and suffering for (queer liberal) non-Indigenous gain. Further, Trixie simultaneously becomes a QDK when she unveils the superficiality of both (queer liberal) settler appropriations of Indigenous symbols/stories, and the inclusion of queer(ed) Indigenous and racialized others in queer liberal spaces. Yet, Trixie's (perhaps) intended effect of eliciting audience discomfort does not register, as the audience responds by laughing. Katya does not let the audience evade the discomfort of RuPaul's (and by extension: their own) complicity in the appropriation of Indigenous names/stories for queer liberal profit. Katya immediately makes the dark and uncomfortable connection between Indigenous pain, suffering, and death at the hands of settlers, to Trixie as a Native American being eliminated from *RuPaul's Drag Race*. The audience then groans at this connection, and Katya further chastises them by asking if they were "afraid of the truth."

I suggest that this moment provides a glimpse of QDK relationality through bad queer politics, which moves us beyond the queer liberal settler colonial present. In his interview with the French magazine *Gai Peid*, Foucault discusses the radical potential for social transformation with friendship and homosexuality. Foucault (1996) addresses that perhaps it is the "homosexual way of life," rather than homosexual acts in and of themselves that are disturbing and unsettling to the majoritarian public:

How can a relational system be reached through sexual practices? Is it possible to create a homosexual mode of life? ... To be "gay," I think, is not to identify with the psychological traits and the visible masks of the homosexual, but to try to define and develop a way of life.

Put differently, perhaps queer relationality and possibilities extend beyond individuals being involved in sexual acts that are not considered heterosexual by the majoritarian public.⁷⁶ As highlighted in the previous chapter, *UNHhhh* as a queer heterotopia disturbs normative orders

⁷⁶ Muñoz (2009), Pérez (2015), and Halberstam (2011) also make this argument.

through Trixie and Katya's "productive failure" (Sturn, 2014), and above I explain that both Trixie and Katya act as bad queers by affirming multiple subjectivities while expressing and potentially illiciting negative responses to queer liberal politics. Might the bad queer relationality and disruption of normative orders on *UNHhhh* be a form of this queer "mode of life" which Foucault refers to? Could the relationship between Trixie and Katya itself act as a queer(ed) heterotopia? To analyze this further, I will explore the relationship between Trixie, a queer(ed) Indigenous subject, and Katya, a queer(ed) settler subject as presented on *UNHhhh*. First, I will outline the limitations of a current popular mode of relationality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous subjects—"allyship", a form of relationality that Trixie and Katya have failed to identify with. Next, I will examine how Trixie and Katya's form of queer friendship of *UNHhhh* may hold greater decolonial/queer potentialities.

For many Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics and activists, "allyship" is a current preferred general relationship between Indigenous and settler subjects. However, there has also been a great deal of critique of the efficacy of engaging in allyship as a constructive method of resistance and resurgence. For instance, reflecting on the willing participation of settler allies in the Idle No More movement, Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox (2012) states:

I am somewhat skeptical about the willingness of settlers to support a movement in a sustained way on the basis of either moral responsibility or self-interest. I have found that even the most supportive settlers have a privilege line they refuse to cross. It is the existence of that line and the refusal to cross it, which requires long-term effort. Erasing that line is predicated on personal transformation. In the short term some settlers may show support as a way to leverage Indigenous unrest to achieve their own social or environmental agendas. But over the long term, settlers must engage in personal transformation to entrench meaningful decolonization.

In other words, even supposedly self-critical, self-reflexive, and well-meaning settler allyship with the goal of decolonization may still uphold settler colonial logics and structures of power and knowledge. Adam Barker suggests that "most settlers people have internalized psychological

barriers to decolonized thought: these barriers are greed, fear, and ignorance.” (2010, p.47) Put simply, settler subjects (including settlers of colour, recent immigrants, and queer settlers) benefit from the violent and continuous dispossession of Indigenous lands and lifeways (greed), they may possess a fear of losing their privileges (and/or or what the unknown “decolonial” world mean and state violence in their attempts to build decolonial worlds), and may also be ignorant due to how entrenched ideas of white supremacy, heteronormativity, and heteropatriarchy are.

As such, allyship does not necessarily form out of, and sustain a relationship based on a shared reciprocal care, responsibility, and visions for the world. Furthermore, allyship can be completely motivated by settler agendas, aims, and perspectives, while appearing to be supporting Indigenous peoples’ self-determination, wellness, and lifeways. Settler allyship, therefore, does not necessarily posit a responsibility of care for Indigenous peoples at the centre of its practices. Quotidian and long-term decolonial and queer world-building is very limited in this form of Indigenous/settler relationality.

However, Trixie and Katya’s relationship is not a deliberate form of settler allyship. Katya has never expressed her desire to be a settler ally, and Trixie has never described their relationship in this way. In any case, if settler allyship all-too-often collapses into settler moves to innocence and the upholding of settler futurities, are there other forms of decolonial (queer) relationality which may further resist the insidious structures and manifestations of settler colonialism? Could Trixie and Katya’s friendship/kinship on *UNHhhh* provide more possibilities of building queer and decolonial worlds?

Billy-Ray Belcourt and Maura Roberts (2016) locate hope and promise in friendship as a worldmaking project:

Friendship is messy: it's a form of kinship whereby two disparate bodies and their histories hastily come together. Friendships aren't usually held together by biology or romance but by the promise of shared investment in the world, a world in which we see and want the same things.

With their friendship and through the platform of *UNHhhh*, Trixie and Katya's two queer(ed) bodies and lifeways come together to create a shared investment. As previously highlighted, through *UNHhhh*, they create a space where their lifeways and subjectivities are upheld, and queer forms of knowledge are (re)produced. In this way, their friendship and the queer heterotopia of *UNHhhh* may gesture to new queer and decolonial futures. Belcourt and Roberts (2016) theorize that:

For us, friendship carries a kind of forward-dawning futurity (to borrow José Muñoz's term): it can make possible and easier the labour of getting through the day, keeping you in this world when things have run amok (and we know that things are almost always running amok). Friendship can make space for forms of difference in ways that don't destroy that difference, paving a route to a shared lifeworld, even if it's small or makeshift. A radical sort of friendship is about making the world more workable or livable for one another, throwing a wrench into the future that settler colonialism narrates.

Following this, Trixie and Katya friendship on *UNHhhh* could be understood as life-saving and worldmaking, since the friendship provides a reciprocal sustainment of their lifeways. This may not be only true for them, but for the queer(ed) others watching *UNHhhh* who can identify some of their queer(ed) subjectivities centered. Furthermore, their friendship might truly "make space for forms of difference in ways that don't destroy that difference" (Belcourt and Roberts, 2016). While the practice of allyship often center settler subjectivities and lifeways, Trixie's queer(ed) Indigenous voice and knowledge is most often privileged on *UNHhhh*. Trixie frequently interrupts Katya on *UNHhhh*, and usually dominates their conversation. In one episode, Trixie shares that she is thankful that Katya continues to entertain with her, despite the fact that she

constantly interrupts her.⁷⁷ Katya graciously replies, “because you’re so entertaining it’s worth it.” Trixie responds: ‘Aw thank you. Would you say that every time I interrupt you, what I was going to say turns out better than what you would have said?’ Katya responds with an emphatic “NO!” but Trixie talks over her, saying: “So I should keep interrupting you?!” In other episodes, while Katya is speaking, Trixie visibly appears to be not paying attention, such as in the second beauty tips episode, where Trixie begins rapidly fanning each side of her hair over and over with her mouth ajar, while Katya is passionately speaking about health.⁷⁸ In the same episode, Katya must walk off camera, and orders Trixie to not go on without her. Trixie replies “oh I’m going on without you, bitch” and continues. Wherein the Indigenous-settler form of relationality of “allyship”, settler subjectivities and futurities are often reaffirmed and centered, in the Indigenous-white settler friendship of Trixie and Katya on *UNHhhh*, Trixie’s voice and perspectives most-often dominate.

Furthermore, Trixie and Katya’s form of relationality may be closer to Foucault’s conception of queer as a way of life, because it queers normative understandings of friendship itself. Trixie and Katya arguably fail normative frameworks for friendship. While Katya does identify them as “friends, lovers, and women” in one episode⁷⁹, Trixie and Katya shift between expressing appreciation for being with each other in *UNHhhh*, and disparaging remarks about one another. When a Twitter user asks them if they miss each other when apart, they say:

Trixie: Do you guys miss each other when you’re travelling. NO.

Katya: NO! NO WE DON’T!

⁷⁷ WOWPresents. “*UNHhhh* Ep 32: “Thanxgiving” w/ Trixie Mattel & Katya Zamolodchikova.” Online video clip. YouTube. YouTube, November 21st, 2016. Web. April 9th, 2017.

⁷⁸ WOWPresents. (2016, October 10). *UNHhhh* Ep 26: “Beauty Tips Pt2” w/ Trixie Mattel & Katya Zamolodchikova [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bh5V15maRk>.

⁷⁹ WOWPresents. (2016, December 30). *UNHhhh* Ep 37: “New Year New You” w/ Trixie Mattel & Katya Zamolodchikova [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q97H2IstlwY>

Trixie: She’s dead to me until we pop up to do this again, and then I’m like “Oh you! You’re still alive?”⁸⁰

With this exchange, Trixie and Katya act as bad queers as they destabilize any idealistic ideas that viewers may have about their relationality. Perhaps a more radical, fruitful form of relationality between Indigenous and settlers would be one such as this—one of open blunt dialogue, which centers queer(ed) Indigenous voices, perspectives, and influence while shifting depending on topics and needs at hand, and which doesn’t necessarily work to sustain happiness in maintaining (settler) structures. Their form of relationality is not only between bad queers, it gestures to a bad queer relationship and dialogue which could build better queer and decolonial futures. In summary, while Trixie and Katya fail to recognize and uphold the current trend of “allyship”, their form of relationality on *UNHhhh* may provide greater possibilities for decolonial and queer worldmaking, as it makes “space for forms of difference in ways that don’t destroy that difference” (Belcourt and Roberts, 2016). Trixie’s and Katya’s form of relationality on the queer(ed) heterotopia of *UNHhhh*, may be understood as what Sturn (2014) terms as “productive failure”—a kind of bad queer politics which both upholds and gestures to queer, decolonial worlds.

Sium, Desai, and Ritskes argue, that to engage in decolonial worldmaking though is to “live in understanding that not everything is known and unknowable.” (2012, p.iv) Eva Mackey finds that for settlers embracing in discomfort and uncertainty “may open a space for genuine attention to alternative frameworks, and seed possibilities for creative and engaged relationships and collective projects.” (2016, p.38) Following this, Mackey calls for “creative uncertainty and decolonizing relations” (2016, p.165) between settlers and Indigenous peoples. It is my

⁸⁰ WOWPresents. (2016, September 19). *UNHhhh Ep 23: “Twitter Questions” w/ Trixie Mattel & Katya Zamolodchikova* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-vg5Wx9xv4>

understanding that *UNHhhh* and the relationship between Trixie and Katya is a form of “creative uncertainty and decolonizing relations,” and perhaps a form of what Goeman (2013) refers to as “(re)mapping.”

Conclusions: Making Space for Queer(ed) Epistemologies and Bodies

As demonstrated, queer liberalism and settler colonialism operate in a symbiosis which can be difficult to recognize and unsettle due to the quotidian and ‘common sense’ ways queer settler subjects maintain and justify their structures, relations, and objects. In order to build better queer and decolonial futures, queer theorists, queer activists, and queer community members must be open to embracing the uncomfortable reality that their inclusion in the broader settler society ensures the maintenance of settler colonialism. Focusing only on decolonization without centering this reality, is to delimit decolonial and queer horizons.

For example, I have presented my research on Trixie Mattel in graduate courses, conferences, and to colleagues. In almost every instance of introducing my work on monstrous white uncanniness, audience members posed variations of the same question: “When and how does Trixie refer to her Indigeneity and/or specific Ojibwe community?” After one particular presentation on monstrous white uncanniness to a graduate level Indigenous studies seminar, students and the professor posed this question, and when I answered that there were very few direct references, they insisted that I recall them and play them via YouTube. In the entirety of the 40+ regular episodes of *UNHhhh*, Trixie only makes one direct reference to her Indigeneity.⁸¹ This reference is in the episode on religion, and begins with Trixie and Katya discussing ideas about what happens to individuals when they die. They exchange:

⁸¹ By ‘regular’ I mean those episodes which were not filmed outside of the World of Wonder studio. As previously mentioned, Trixie refers to her Native American identity in a *RuPaul’s Drag Con* taping of *UNHhhh*.

Trixie: In the Native American world, we have something called the Great Spirit, right? Which means we're all connected. And scientifically when you die, you go back into the earth, and everything is connected to you. So to me that makes sense: spiritually and physically. So if a loved one passing away...if it comforts you to know they are still here... they are in fact...

Katya: They're in your panty hose! They are the dirt in your pantyhose right now. That is Aunt Tammy, festering in your fucking panty hose. That's why you get so good tonight bitch! YES WORK! YES WORK! YES WORK!

Trixie: YES TAMMY! YES!

Katya: How about this though? They're not even still with you, they ARE you. That's the truth! That's the truth! That's the truth!

Trixie: I am my aunt Tammy.

Katya: Exhibit A!

Trixie: I'm her.⁸²

Trixie begins this exchange speaking in a serious manner, but the exchange quickly evolves into silliness with Trixie and Katya riffing jokes off one another. I ran out of time to relay this reference, and now I am left wondering what the reactions of this class would be. Was this the kind of queer Indigenous epistemology they had in mind? Would they have been open and accepting to this bad queer (and silly) Indigenous take on afterlife? Focusing only on Trixie's direct and easily recognizable representations of her Ojibwe-ness/Native Americanness would delimit Trixie's queer and decolonial epistemological possibilities.

Like queer liberalism, bad queer politics may too manifest in quiet, nonchalant, and masked ways. If we in queer studies cherry-pick preconceived notions of queer and Indigenous identities and subjectivities, we run the risk of shoring up the very oppressive structures of power and knowledge we attempt to deconstruct, and leave out certain queer(ed) epistemologies and bodies from our world-building efforts.

⁸² WowPresents. "UNHhhh Ep 19: "Religion" w/ Trixie Mattel & Katya" Online video clip. YouTube. YouTube, August 19th, 2016. Web. May 9th, 2017.

Chapter Five:
Miss Chief as Queer Decolonial Killjoy:
Unsettling *Canada 150* in ‘Queerly Canadian’ Times

In an October 3rd, 2016 talk titled “Moving Forward From the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Reconciliation Through an Active Process of Decolonization,” Senator Murray Sinclair reminds the audience at Carleton University that the “hard work” of reconciliation continues *after* the Truth and Reconciliation Commission adjourned. This hard work takes slow, concerted effort on behalf of all settlers, since, as Tuck & Yang remind, “decolonization is not a metaphor,” it “brings about the repatriation of Indigenous lands and life.” (2012, p.21) Settler individuals and entities may hesitate to pursue such a project, as it pushes them to consider “uncertainty” (Mackey, 2016) and an unfamiliar “tangible unknown” (Sium, Desai, & Ritskes, 2012), “where no one has really ever been.” (Cruz, 2012, p. 153) Before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had adjourned, Leanne Simpson warned that,

If reconciliation is focused only on residential schools rather than the broader set of relationships that generated policies, legislation and practices aimed at assimilation and political genocide, then there is a risk that reconciliation will “level the playing field” in the eyes of Canadians. In the eyes of liberalism, the historical “wrong” has now been “righted” and further transformation is not needed, since the historic situation has been remedied. (2011, p.22)

Scholars have argued that official reconciliatory acts and processes tend to be enveloped into settler colonial liberal agendas. (Blackburn, 2007; Corntassel, 2009; Mackey, 2013) Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham advance that, more specifically, reconciliation’s “more abstract resonances of overcoming differences lend to co-optation by governments seeking to cleanse the national image through symbolic measures.” (2009, p.15) In summary, scholars and Indigenous peoples warn that reconciliation has become what Eva Mackey (2002) recognizes as a liberal nation building practice used to manage populations (Indigenous) by projecting

colonialism as being a past event (in the form of residential schools) which the nation, united, is in a process of healing from. This fosters a tension between Indigenous peoples in Canada who are striving for a decolonial future which does not take for granted the continuance of the settler nation-state, and settler Canadians who may assume the ongoing existence of a (white) settler nation-state.

Billy-Ray Belcourt (2016b) further surmises that reconciliation is: “an affective mess” as “it throws together and condenses histories of trauma and their shaky bodies and feelings into a neatly bordered desire; a desire to let go, to move on, to turn to the future with open arms, as it were.” Belcourt is referring to the affective tensions fostered by the practices and understanding of reconciliation as a nation building practice which unifies and propagates the settler-colonial nation of Canada, instead of moving towards a truly decolonial form of relationality between Indigenous peoples and settlers. In this way, this “affective mess” of decolonial and liberal tensions came together in a particular resonance in 2017, with the national festivities and celebrations held for *Canada 150*. For example, The Government of Canada states that:

The 150th anniversary of Confederation gives Canadians the opportunity to get involved in their communities and to celebrate together our shared values, our achievements, our majestic environment and our country’s place in the world. The major themes of the 150th anniversary of Confederation are diversity and inclusion, reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, environment and youth.⁸³

This statement posits and reflects this affective tension—how does the nation and its settler citizenry effectively balance a meaningful engagement in the slow, difficult work of reconciliation (with the ultimate goal of decolonizing), as part of celebrating its past, present and

⁸³ See: Government of Canada. (2017, October 26). 150th anniversary of Canada. *Government of Canada*. Retrieved from <https://http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/france/150Canada150.aspx?lang=eng>

future through parties and other events?⁸⁴ Eva Mackey's work on Canadian identity illuminates why Canadian national bodies and agents work to both prolong and delimit national movements and acts of reconciliation. Mackey (2002) explains that Canadian nation building projects in Canada rely on flexible and ever-evolving race and cultural politics which work to 1.) manage the diversity of populations in Canada while 2.) undertaking the symbolic aim of imagining and forging national identity. As a form of nation building, reconciliation efforts on behalf of settler individuals and bodies, such as the inclusion of reconciliation as part of *Canada 150*, further inform and promote an image and understanding of settler colonialism as being relegated primarily to an event (residential schools) rather than a structure which is ongoing.⁸⁵ This expectation of national celebration and happiness with *Canada 150* is part and parcel of what Ahmed calls "the moody politics of citizenship." (2014, p.28) As Ahmed reminds us, nations rely on flexible, evolving, and (at times) contradictory emotions in order to bolster feelings of belonging and attachment amongst its citizenry. In reflecting on affect and nationalism, Sara Ahmed states

Citizenship becomes a requirement to be sympathetic: as an agreement with feeling. To be a sympathetic part is to agree with your heart. After all, who could fail to be touched by the endlessly repeated images of the young queen coming to the throne after the death of her father? Who could fail to be touched by the memory of the young prince following the coffin of his dead mother? Here being touched into citizenship is to be touched by the trauma of a past and the prospect of its conversion. Not to feel happiness in reaching these points is to become not only unsympathetic but also hostile, as if your unfeeling masks a disbelief in the national good, a will to destroy the nation. To be part of the nation is to remember these histories of national trauma: to recall them on route to national pride. To be part of the nation, to become attuned, was to right a wrong, to feel right having felt wronged. National mood was predicated quite specifically on *the happiness of this conversion*.

⁸⁴ On its website, The Government of Canada specifically requests/orders that we: "Come together and celebrate Canada's linguistic, cultural and regional diversity, as well as its rich history and heritage." (See: <http://canada.pch.gc.ca/eng/1468854891549>)

⁸⁵ Here, I am borrowing from Wolfe's phraseology, where he describes settler colonialism as "a structure, not an event." (2006, p.388)

Not to be made happy is to refuse the promise of this conversion. Not to cheer is to withdraw from the situation. Not being in the mood for happiness becomes a political action. And you know what: I am not in the mood. (2014, p.28 *Their emphasis*)

In the case of *Canada 150*, Indigenous peoples are thrust into the “moody politics of citizenship,” whereby, despite being “touched by the trauma of the past” they are expected to now accept “the prospect of its conversion.” In my view, who refuse the happiness of this conversion (of national reconciliation to celebration), may become akin to *decolonial* killjoys because they disrupt the celebration of settler colonialism.⁸⁶ The arts may be a particularly useful vehicle for a decolonial killjoy work in regards to reconciliation, since Gabrielle L’Hirondelle Hill and Sophie McCall find that “the arts as an avenue through which reconciliation is promoted, contested, and reimagined.” (2015, p.2) Following Hill and McCall’s assertions about the unsettling and world-building potentialities of Indigenous arts and reconciliation, I ask: how do Indigenous artists challenge attempts at liberal inclusion of their stories in the name of reconciliation as a nation building practice? In other words, what practical strategies are Indigenous artists deploying in resisting against the liberal nation building projects of reconciliation and *Canada 150* in particular, which ultimately work to (re)produce settler (and Indigenous) attachments to a historic and ongoing benevolent and unified Canada, instead of working toward the decolonial “tangible unknown”? (Sium, Desai, and Ritskes, 2012) How would a queer and decolonial killjoy artist intervene into such a project?

In this chapter, I turn to Kent Monkman’s recent exhibition of *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience*, to explore the QDK strategies Indigenous artists are using to queer and unsettle the celebratory and nation building strategy of *Canada 150*. I suggest that *Shame and*

⁸⁶ Borrowing from Ahmed, Joanne Barker has also described Indigenous feminists as “killjoys.” See: Barker, Joanne, “The Indigenous Feminist Killjoy,” Accessed September 27th, 2017, July 24th, 2015. <https://tequilasovereign.com/2015/07/24/the-indigenous-feminist-killjoy/>

Prejudice represents a case study for queer(ed) Indigenous artists resisting liberal mainstream, dominant, projects which attempt to both include and occlude their difference and histories (and ongoing experiences) into nation building efforts. Kent Monkman, who identifies (on his personal website) as a Canadian artist of Cree ancestry, recently acted as both curator and artist in this exhibition, commissioned by the University of Toronto and a variety of private and public Canadian sponsors, including, but not limited to: The Canada Council for the Arts; Ontario Arts Council; Toronto Arts Council; the Government of Canada; The Confederation Centre of the Arts; Manulife; MBNA; and TD. The exhibition opened on January 26th 2017 at the University of Toronto Art Centre, where it remained until March 5th, 2017. The exhibition is now on a cross country tour, spanning eight more stops, concluding at the Museum of Anthropology in October 2020. The exhibition is ordered into a sequence⁸⁷ representing nine chapters of the memoirs of Monkman's alter-ego—Miss Chief Eagle Testickle. Monkman has used Miss Chief in a variety of mediums (performance, painting, film, and installations) to confront “the devastation of colonialism while celebrating the plural sexualities present in pre-contact Indigenous North America.” (2017, p.4) In this specific exhibition, Miss Chief recounts (through a narrative exhibition text provided to viewers, and visually through the works) her perspective of the last 150+ years of history in what is currently known as Canada. When asked about the impetus for this exhibition, Monkman responded:

Well I was contacted about three years ago by Barbara Fischer. She's the director of the University of Toronto art museum and she approached me to see if I'd be interested in doing an exhibition for 2017 because it's Canada 150. I said I would love to do something. I wasn't really sure what form it was going to take, but I knew I wanted to kind of reflect on the last 150 years in terms of what that's meant to indigenous people here. So over the course of the following year I travelled across the country with my

⁸⁷ I hesitate to describe this “sequence” of chapters as chronological. While the chapters seem to follow some chronological representation through Canada's history of colonization, Monkman is presenting a queer(ed) chronology of events which exist outside of heteronormative, Western, Eurocentric time-space. In my view, the exhibition may be also described as a “queer(ed) heterotopia.”

studio manager and we basically just researched and rooted through the collections of about 12 different institutions and we looked for thematically related material. I ended up breaking it down into nine chapters. I think I had a 10th chapter at some point but we had to drop it because we didn't have space. I found all kinds of objects and paintings and materials that I wanted to borrow from the different collections, took inspiration from what I found, created works in response to those pieces, and then curated those works into the exhibition with my own paintings and installations. (in Hughes, 2017)⁸⁸

The exhibition is, therefore, quite unique as it may represent the first time a queer Indigenous individual has been publicly and privately funded to curate their own work (along with Indigenous material culture and arts) into a travelling exhibition, on such a grand scale. Further, it is exceptional in the sense that Monkman is being funded to curate the exhibition in relation to *Canada 150*—a national celebration of the 150th anniversary of Canada's confederation.⁸⁹ This exhibition thus represents a private and public, civic and nationally funded exhibition whereby queer Indigeneity is being included into a national Canadian celebration. Furthermore, in this exhibition, Monkman's queer Indigenous voice specifically recounts Indigenous pain and suffering at the hands of the Canadian nation-state, as the chapters reflect themes including but not limited to: settler arrival, Canadian Confederation, "the Indian problem", Indigenous starvation, residential schools, and the high carceral rates of Indigenous peoples. The marking of national celebrations is usually a celebratory affair which (re)confirms and builds upon positive and optimistic national narratives. However, in *Canada 150*, Monkman has been allotted a space for a queer Indigenous voice which recounts and draws attention to Indigenous pain at the hands of the nation-state. This exhibition was also financially supported by public and private sponsors. This is especially surprising when considering Monkman's queer body of work, which includes imagery of Indigenous men spanking and having (unconsensual) sex with settler men (including

⁸⁸ "Indigenous" was not capitalized in this interview.

⁸⁹ See previous page for sponsors.

RCMP officers, Daniel Boone, and cowboys).⁹⁰ Monkman's body of work relies on queer and homoerotic imagery, and subverting dominant national symbols and narratives and yet he has been invited to partake in *Canada 150* in a prominent public fashion.

Mackey emphasizes that "one of the essential features of Canadian nation building is its flexibility and ambiguity" since "the project of Canadian nation building is an extremely contradictory, conflicted, contested, and incomplete process... it changes, transforms and reconfigures itself at different moments in different historical contexts." (2002, p.18) I find that Monkman's inclusion as a queer(ed) Indigenous artist in this moment is representative of the configuration of our current historical moment, in which Canada has made recent public commitments to inclusion and respect of queer peoples into its citizenry, and a commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. This historical moment is one of which Suzanne Lenon and OmiSoore H. Dryden would describe as "queerly Canadian." They explain that,

We understand "queerly Canadian," particularly the juxtaposition of 'queerly' with 'Canadian,' as assembling both a subject position and a form of politics that seeks to 'queer' Canada by narrowly challenging grounds of homophobic exclusions while knitting 'queer' into the neoliberal multiculturally imagined fabric of Canadian national identity. (2015, p.4)

Put differently, Lenon and Dryden (2017) recognize that Canada has adopted (settler) homonationalist and homonormative approaches in nation building projects, in which queer Canadian subjects buttress settler colonial nation building efforts with their complicit participation. For instance, recently Trudeau has become the first sitting prime minister to march in a pride parade, and Canadian Defense tweeted that they welcome all sexual orientations and gender identities in the military (following the 45th President of the United States tweeting about

⁹⁰ See, for instance, Monkman's paintings: *Daniel Boone's First View of The Kentucky Valley* (2001), *Heaven and Earth* (2001), *Ceci n'est pas un pipe* (2001), and *Cree Master I* (2002).

a ban of transgender members in the U.S. military).⁹¹ Furthermore, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (tearfully) apologized for Canada's mistreatment of queer⁹² peoples on November 28th, 2017. I find that these public affirmations of queer and Indigenous inclusion and acceptance by Canadian governmental figures and institutions, ultimately serve as a liberal nation building practice to bolster a narrative of Canadian inclusion, unity, and benevolence. These cheerful and hopeful narratives may draw attention away from Canadian human rights abuses against Indigenous peoples and others. Monkman's inclusion into *Canada 150* may be interpreted as a "queerly Canadian" move on behalf of the Canadian sponsors, as they inject a queer individual's perspective into a national celebration. This queerly Canadian move to include Monkman, may also be influenced by the liberal nation building project of "reconciliation." By specifically including Monkman, a queer Indigenous man into *Canada 150*, the nation appears to be accepting and inclusive of both queer and Indigenous peoples. As previously highlighted, scholars have drawn attention to how reconciliatory acts and processes tend to be enveloped into settler colonial liberal agendas. (Blackburn, 2007; Corntassel, 2009; Hill & McCall, 2015)

Monkman's inclusion into *Canada 150* runs the risk of being enveloped into a settler colonial liberal agenda, since this is ultimately a celebration, recognizing that despite colonization, Canada is an entity deserving of praise and recognition. Considering this, I ask: what strategies does Monkman deploy to resist against being enveloped into queerly Canadian and reconciliatory liberal agendas of *Canada 150*?

⁹¹ Canadian Forces. (2017, July 26). We welcome Cdns of all sexual orientations and gender identities. Join us! #DiversityIsOurStrength #ForcesJobs <http://ow.ly/7IVI30dW2xY> [Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/CanadianForces/status/890288099573600256?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Eetweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E890288099573600256&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cnn.com%2F2017%2F07%2F27%2Fus%2Fworld-transgender-ban-facts%2Findex.html

⁹² Trudeau's apology was specifically directed at "LGBTQ2 communities."

In this chapter, I suggest that the *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience* exhibition represents a QDK project on behalf of Monkman, in which he works to resist any queer liberal settler colonial collusions and convergences, while operating within settler colonial spaces (the mainstream art galleries it tours in and in the broader context of *Canada 150*). Through an analysis of selected pieces, I argue that in this exhibition, Miss Chief acts as a *Canada 150* QDK by representing an unequivocally queer Indigenous and temporally destabilized picture of Canadian history, whereby popular Canadian symbols and metanarratives are rendered uncanny and queer, and whereby all non-Indigenous Canadians are implicated in the historic and ongoing injustices against Indigenous peoples (including queer peoples). I will demonstrate that the decolonial killjoy measures of *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience* rely on strategies of disidentification (Muñoz, 1999) to (re)produce an uncanny and unsettling version of Canadian (art) history. Next, I will suggest that the inclusion of queer settler presence in the artworks of *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience* contributes to a kind of QDK work which calls attention to both queer Indigenous resilience, and the implication of queer settler subjects in settler colonialism, thereby potentially unsettling queer liberal politics and scholarship. Finally, I will conclude by outlining that *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience* may too represent what Berlant calls “diva acts of citizenship” in which “a person stages a dramatic coup in a public sphere in which she does not have privilege.” (1997, p.223) I conclude finding that this diva act of citizenship represents a QDK move by crashing the national *Canada 150* party, resisting Canadian nation building structures of reconciliation and homonationalism, and injecting the Canadian (art) history canon with Indigenous perspectives, knowledges, and critiques. In this way, *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience* may represent what Goeman (2013) refers to as a (re)mapping, and what I have described as a queer(ed) heterotopia.

To clarify, my analysis will be limited to a half dozen works in *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience*. The exhibition represents a massive undertaking by Monkman, as it includes over a hundred pieces (his artworks, other art pieces, and historical ephemera). Due to the constraints of this paper, I have selected six pieces. I anticipate and look forward to more rich scholarship and reviews on this exhibition by scholars, critics, and others.

Queer(ing) and Unsettling Canadian (Art) History

In order to relay his QDK message, I suggest that Monkman relies on the strategy of what Muñoz terms as “disidentification.”⁹³ As such, in *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience*, as well as in his broader artistic practice, Monkman does not completely obfuscate or eliminate Western inspirations, themes, and influences in his art. In fact, in the opening paragraph of the accompanying exhibition book of *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience*, Monkman explains how he was inspired and “humbled” by the Spanish 1887-1888 Antonio Gisbert painting, *Execution of Torrijos and his Companions*.⁹⁴ Furthermore, the exhibition name and narrative is a riff off of English author Jane Austen’s 1813 novel, *Pride and Prejudice*. I suggest that Monkman’s *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience* “scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message” (Muñoz, 1999, p. 31) of popular Canadian and broader western (art) history texts, which historically and continuously were utilized in the Canadian nation building project. As a disidentificatory maneuver, Monkman incorporates these Canadian

⁹³ Fellner (2018) and Kerry Swanson (2012) have also described Monkman’s work as what Muñoz explains as “disidentification.”

⁹⁴ In this painting, a group of political prisoners stands in front of a firing squad, as priests distribute last rites on a beach. Monkman explains that “over many years of looking at and studying great paintings, many have impressed me with their virtuosic technical achievements, but never had a painting reached across a century to pull me into the emotional core of a lived experience with such intensity. It felt as though Gisbert had sent a message into the future, a passionate defense of freedom and a critique of authoritarianism. I was humbled by the effect this deeply political work of art had on me, and felt a new urgency to undertake a serious subject with similar gravitas.” (Monkman in Monkman and Gordon, 2017, p.3)

historical narratives, images and references from the Canadian and broader western art history canon, with Indigenous stories, voices, symbols and messages. These mainstream stories, imagery, and ephemera are challenged and unsettled as Monkman reworks them in both the particular artworks and in their relation to other ephemera and artworks in the broader narrative of the exhibition. More specifically, I suggest that in the micro (specific art pieces) and macro (specific chapters and the exhibition as a whole) levels of *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience*, Monkman recycles and reworks Canadian national symbols, stories, and icons in a way in which they may become queer, uncanny, and even *monstrous* to the settler viewer. This QDK message may disrupt the celebratory nature, and nation building agenda of *Canada 150*. I will explore this process in the selected pieces of *Study for the Beaver Bacchanal* (2015), *A Country Wife* (2016), and *The Scream* (2016) and will follow with an exploration of how these pieces are made monstrous when placed in conversation within the exhibition chapter spaces (especially the residential school chapter/space) and exhibition as a whole.

In the 22 x 30 watercolour on paper piece, *Study for the Beaver Bacchanal* (2015), beavers, a national Canadian symbol, become monstrous anthropomorphic entities in the first chapter of the exhibition. In this piece, Monkman depicts a colony of anthropomorphic drunken and lively beavers, excessively indulging in wine, fruit, and leisure.



Figure 5: Monkman, K. (2015). *Watercolour Study for Beaver Bacchanal*. [16.75” x 26” Watercolour, Gouache and Gold Acrylic on Acid Free Watercolour Paper]. Image courtesy of the artist.

I suggest that the piece queers and unsettles Canadian metanarratives on a multitude of levels, as it draws upon and contributes to the genealogy of the beaver in the Canadian national imaginary which Margot Francis argues has resulted in a “startlingly conflicted legacy.” (2011, p.22)

Officially, the beaver is a recognized symbol of the Canadian nation-state. The Government of Canada explains that “the beaver was given official status as an emblem of Canada when ‘An Act to provide for the recognition of the Beaver (*Castor canadensis*) as a symbol of the sovereignty of Canada’ received royal assent on March 24, 1975.”⁹⁵ However, the beaver was a

⁹⁵ Government of Canada, “The beaver” Official symbols of Canada, December 14th, 2017, Accessed September 4th, 2018, <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/official-symbols-canada.html>

part of the Canadian national imaginary long before this Act was passed. Margot Francis (2011) evidences a genealogy of colonial discourse around the beaver, beginning as early as the seventeenth century in what is currently known as Canada. Francis traces the fascination that early settler colonists had of the beaver in believing their societies to be masculine, hardworking, intelligent, and well-organized. Francis further argues that early settler discussions and representations of beavers informed and reflected their Eurocentric views of themselves, and of Indigenous peoples and lands. Francis quotes Elizabeth Vibert to detail how early traders' understandings and narratives of beavers reflected and informed their view of (Indigenous) society. Vibert says that,

The traits celebrated in the beaver, industry and providence, are the very ones traders considered to be lacking in the Indigenous peoples of the region... The central paradox is that the traders' admiration for the beaver coexisted with—one might even say masked—the most predatory intentions. [And this] paradox is emblematic of the contradictions that characterized traders' responses to the land. (1996, p.118)

Francis argues that in the settler colonists imaginary, “indeed, an important theme of the colonial encounter...was that Indigenous hunters were wasteful, lazy, and far from manly—unlike the beavers.” (2011, p.26) In conceiving of Indigenous peoples this way, as inferior to an animal, settler colonists worked to justify their oppression of Indigenous peoples and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples on their territories to make way for Eurocentric peoples, values, and ideals. Francis finds that these noble ideals of the beaver, were retranslated and reconfigured through Canadian nation building processes over hundreds of years, through symbols (such as its place on the Hudson's Bay Company logo) and in popular culture (such as its discursive role in Canadian political cartoons). However, Francis also recognizes that artists in particular have used the beaver to critique and reimagine the nation building legacy of what is currently known as

Canada. I argue that Monkman's *Study for the Beaver Bacchanal* (2015) follows in this line, as it renders this official national symbol queered, uncanny, and monstrous.

In *Study for the Beaver Bacchanal*, a beaver colony is represented as engorging themselves on food and drink and urinating unabashedly into a river (where other beavers swim nearby). First, this representation unsettles what Francis describes as the early colonists' depictions of beaver colonies as intelligent, hardworking, organized, and dignified. Second, the piece challenges a popular Canadian metanarrative of unpopulated, untouched, and unsullied landscapes—what Northrop Frye unironically refers to as the “unseizable virginity” of Canada's wilderness. (1971, p.220) This metanarrative of Canadians as connected to, and part of the land and nature, was informed and reflected in the Canadian art history canon by popular figures such as The Group of Seven, and became an intrinsic element of Canadian national identity. (Mackey, 1998) Representations of this national narrative depict Canadian landscapes as empty of (Indigenous) human presence, and often teeming with serene wildlife such as beavers.

Metanarratives, such as those linked to the beaver, bolster related narratives and the legal fiction of “terra nullius”—Canada as a vast, empty land which settlers rightfully inhabited and inherited. The large colony's drunken antics—such as the several individual beavers urinating without reserve into the lake—unsettle this popular metanarrative of untouched and pure landscapes. Here, Monkman is also representing a “colony” in what is currently known as Canada prior to colonization. When placed into conversation with the exhibition text, I find that the piece gestures to both the beavers and the settlers as monstrous, excessive beings. For instance, in the exhibition text, Miss Chief recalls that Montcalm and Wolfe (who, in my understanding, represent French and British settlers):

couldn't get enough of those luxuriant pelts, taking the fashion worlds of London and Paris by storm, to say nothing of all that castoreum, distilled into Europe's most opulent

perfumes. Our poor beavers, almost decimated by overuse (something I'll never say about my own).

Here Miss Chief draws attention to the demand for beaver furs which drove early settlement efforts in what is currently known as North America. Miss Chief references excessive settler consumption which parallels the monstrous consumption of the beavers in the piece—the settlers nearly made beavers extinct from overhunting. When this historical moment is aligned with the piece, settlers may become further monstrous in the viewers' understanding—why would anyone desire the furs of a monstrous drunk and urinating animal?

Miss Chief's reflection from the exhibit text warrants further analysis in terms of sexual and gendered innuendo. When Miss Chief reflects, "our poor beavers, almost decimated by overuse (something I'll never say about my own)." she is drawing upon a history of slang connotations with the beaver to a women's genitalia, in and outside of the Canadian context. Francis draws attention to this two-fold contradictory role of the beaver in Canadian discourse. Francis asks: "how, then, to understand the relationship between slang discourses that have usually worked to objectify and degrade women's sexuality, on the one hand, and the beaver narratives that reference the norms of social order associated with Canadian nation building, on the other?" (2011, p.45) Francis finds that the connection between these seemingly incongruent narratives,

can be found in the racialized and patriarchal thrust of virtually *all* beaver discourses. In the narratives from natural history, the fur trade, commerce, and politics, women were not simply underrepresented; rather, the overtly paternal nature of these discourses *worked to inferiorize their contributions to nation building*. And when women do appear in national histories, whether as respectable wives or immoral sluts, they are always already sexualized. (2011, p.45 *Their emphasis*)

As a gendered (and derogatory) slang, the beaver still can perform its role in nation building, as it contributes to what Chris Finley (2011) recognizes as the heteropatriarchal and

heteronormative logics of colonialism. Settler colonialism relies on the continuation of Indigenous women in particular being oppressed, through avenues such as discourses which represent Indigenous women as hypersexualized. (Smith, 2003) In this text, Monkman queers and unsettles the genealogies of settler colonialism which work to hypersexualize Indigenous women. Monkman has produced a multitude of works (painting, video, and other installations), whereby Miss Chief is engaging in a great deal of sexual acts with cowboys, RCMP officers, and other white settler men. However, in expressing that her “beaver” is not overused, Miss Chief reclaims a kind of sexual propriety, rejecting this narrative of herself as an extremely sexually active Indigenous subject, as well as this broader longstanding settler colonial narrative of Indigenous women as hypersexual beings. The sponsors of this exhibition would have been aware of Miss Chief’s sexual productivity in many of Monkman’s works, and may have been interested in including such as queer, sexy perspective in *Canada 150*. In summary, with the *Study for the Beaver Bacchanal* (2015), Monkman draws attention to how the genealogy of the beaver in Canadian nation-building processes reflects what Anne McClintock argues are “three of the governing themes of Western imperialism: the transmission of white, male power through control of colonized women; the emergence of a new global order of cultural knowledge; and the imperial command of commodity capital...” (1995, p.3) In my view, Miss Chief/Monkman pulls a QDK move in reconfiguring/rejecting this history.

In *A Country Wife* (2016), Monkman tackles another sacred Canadian national symbol—Canada’s first Prime Minister John A. MacDonald, rendering it uncanny and monstrous. In this 60 x 36 acrylic on canvas piece, reminiscent of a state or family portrait, John A. MacDonald stands over Miss Chief (whose appearance is strikingly similar to John A. MacDonald’s first wife Isabella Clark), seated on a chair beside him. MacDonald holds a cigarette/cigar in one

hand, which dangles precariously. In the other hand, he holds a drink, which also is held haphazardly to the point where the drink sloshes out slightly of one side. An empty wine bottle lays on its side by his feet.



Figure 5.1: Monkman, K. (2016). *A Country Wife* [60" x 36" Acrylic on Canvas]. Image courtesy of the artist.

Here, Monkman may be referencing what Ged Martin recognizes as the “two incarnations of John A. Macdonald” which “survive in Canadian popular memory: the creative statesman of Confederation, and the politician who could not handle his drink.” (2006, p.162) While MacDonald’s abuse of alcohol may be known to many Canadians, this element of his character is not depicted in the many popular official visual national representations of Macdonald, such as on the Canadian \$10 bill, on the many plaques commemorating his legacy as the “Father of Confederation,” “the political genius of Confederation,” and a “visionary statesman.” (Murray & Carl, 2016, p.65) Mackey (2002) explains that Canadian nation building projects in Canada rely on flexible and ever-evolving race and cultural politics. Evolving representations of John A. Macdonald as the first Prime Minister have been part of the Canadian nation building project. For instance, Julia Skelly finds that Canadian historians too often characterize MacDonald’s alcohol issues as “drunkenness” because “drunkenness can be framed as problematic (and potentially humorous), but it is not stigmatized as alcoholism proper.” (2017, p.79) Skelly argues that “to identify MacDonald as an alcoholic is to taint his record and his character.” (2017, p.79) More specifically, Laura Murray and Paul Carl’s analysis reveals that the City of Kingston’s Sir John A. MacDonald Bicentennial Commission and its associate “tended to alternate between awe and jovial affection in their representations of Macdonald” and “generally responded to discussions of [Macdonald’s] colonialist legacy by hastening to acknowledge his penchant for drink and his wily political feints and tricks.” (2016, p.68) Murray and Carl “suggest that this ‘good old boy’ talk functioned as a smokescreen to avoid discussing or even perceiving the human cost and colonial imperative of Macdonald’s time in office.” (2016, p.68) In the case of Macdonald, as demonstrated by Murray and Carl, his issues with alcohol are enveloped by settlers into a settler colonial nation building discourse, which works to both justify and maintain

his status as a Canadian symbol while obfuscating his role (and by extension—Canada's) role in the oppression of Indigenous peoples. In *A Country Wife*, Monkman intervenes into these celebratory nation building narratives which are often informed and reflected in Canadian art history such as official state portraits, by portraying Macdonald in a state portrait as *both* statesman and as a man with a severe issue with alcohol consumption.

While Monkman does admit that the piece is humorous, partially because of the incongruity of a statesman and drunkenness, and in part due to the inclusion of Miss Chief, I suggest that this humour does not cloak or make light of Macdonald's role in settler colonialism. Instead, the piece draws attention to it. I suggest that Monkman accomplishes this by using disidentifactory strategies in the portrait composition itself, as well as the portrait in relation to the wider exhibition. First, Monkman recycles and reworks popular portraits of John A. Macdonald such as 1890 *The Rt. Hon. Sir John A Macdonald* painting by Robert Harris. For instance—Monkman's Macdonald is wearing the same recognizable red neck tie and black-blue over coat as in the Harris painting. Viewers will be able to note this, as Monkman has included the Harris portrait in the *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience* exhibition. In contrast to the popular and/or official representations of a rigidly straight-standing Macdonald, in Monkman's version, the framing of Macdonald is slightly askew. Macdonald is not central in the painting and leans crookedly on Miss Chief's chair for support. He gazes at Miss Chief who is in return, looks to him mournfully. In his representation of Miss Chief, Monkman has reworked official portraits of Macdonald's wife Isabella, where she is portrayed as having her hair parted harshly down the middle and up, with a few tight curls resting on each side of her face. In *A Country Wife*, Monkman's recycles these images of Isabella, as Miss Chief is depicted with the

same style of hair. Monkman's explains that in this painting, Miss Chief is depicted as "a country wife" recounting that:

That was me thinking about the... Bennett sisters from *Pride and Prejudice*... about how they wanted to improve their lot in life, and marry well, marry a man with a good fortune. So, here she is trying to gain John A. MacDonald's favour... If you look closely you will see that he has removed his wedding band, and there's just an imprint of his wedding band—that sly devil! And, of course he is getting hammered—he was always drunk—and so, you know, Miss Chief's mascara is running—so I don't know?⁹⁶

Monkman's explanation suggests a kind of resilience on Miss Chief's part—she wants to improve her situation in life (and perhaps, the lives of her Indigenous people) and works to curry John A. Macdonald's favour to do so. Again though, this piece does not slide into a completely humorous tone to obfuscate McDonald's role in colonialism. Monkman accomplishes this by making Miss Chief's reaction to Macdonald unsettling—she looks to him mournfully with mascara streaming down her face. This may indicate, that she is not, therefore, vying for his favour completely out of her own volition and desire, but instead does so under duress.

Monkman's *A Country Wife* thus relies on a strategy of disidentification to unsettle popular official national representations of Canadian icons and offices. The drunken unsteadiness of the philandering Prime Minister with the mournful gaze of Miss Chief-as-Isabella/mistress provides an uncanny representation which intervenes in popular representations which may be invoked and (re)circulated during *Canada 150*. I suggest that in the portrait alone, this popular Canadian symbol and beloved institution (the position of Prime Minister) is queered and made monstrous.

The placement of *A Country Wife* in relation to the wider exhibition further unsettles the of the humour of the piece eliding into the obfuscation of Macdonald's role in settler colonialism, by providing more context to John A. MacDonald's role in settler colonial nation

⁹⁶ Art History Museum of Toronto. (2017). *Curator's tour with Kent Monkman – Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://vimeo.com/209447083>

building. At the University of Toronto exhibition, Miss Chief's chapter on residential schools was in a room opposite to where this portrait was placed. Monkman explains that with this specific placement:

I wanted to speak about the government—the government autocrats—those that executed the will of the crown—the policy makers, those that... forced people to sign the treaties and were the government agents that controlled the flow of Indigenous peoples on and off reserves and that kind of thing... I also wanted the official state portraits of John A. MacDonald and Laurier and various other officials... And also in there is Miss Chief, adding a dose of humour as a country wife.”⁹⁷

Here Monkman employs a disidentification with official Canadian state portraits, by “recycling and rethinking encoded meaning” in such texts by “reconstruct[ing] the message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications.” (Muñoz, 1999, p.31) Monkman’s strategy is to recycle and rework popular images and symbols (Macdonald, residential schools) in the context of *Canada 150*. Monkman not only unsettles settler institutions and bodies holding Macdonald in high esteem by producing unsettling versions of the Prime Minister. He specifically implicates Macdonald in the genocide of Indigenous peoples, in drawing attention to his role in residential schools (a part of history which more and more Canadians are becoming aware, in part due to the national apology and Truth and Reconciliation Commission). I found this strategy to be evident in the Glenbow Museum’s exhibition of *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience* when I attended in June 2017. The residential school chapter and the room of government portraits were not clearly delineated, but instead flowed into each other and appeared to be connected. More specifically, *A*

⁹⁷ Art History Museum of Toronto. (2017). *Curator’s tour with Kent Monkman – Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://vimeo.com/209447083>

Country Wife and *The Scream* (which depicts a harrowing scene of Indigenous children being violently torn from their mothers' arms) directly face one another across the room.



Figure 5.2: Monkman, K. (2017). *The Scream* [84" x 126" Acrylic on Canvas]. Image courtesy of the artist.

I suggest that the lack of distinction between the chapters, and the placement of these two paintings may push viewers to further consider the role Macdonald (and the other government officials depicted) played in residential schools.

Furthermore, I suggest that the residential school chapter section of the exhibition deploys the most pointed QDK message intervening into *Canada 150*, and any state-sanctioned nation building discourse which downplays Macdonald's (and by extension, Canada's) role in (murderous) elements of settler colonialism. For instance, in the massive 84" x 126" acrylic on canvas painting *The Scream* (2017), Monkman depicts a heartbreaking scene where priests, nuns, and RCMP officers violently rip Indigenous children from their mothers' arms. The mothers

desperately struggle to hold on to their children, even in lieu of potential lethal repercussions (referenced by an RCMP officer standing at the side of the piece, monitoring the situation with a rifle in hand). The RCMP officers are a recognized unofficial symbol of Canada by the Government of Canada and remain a popular national symbol in Canadian mainstream discourse.⁹⁸ In my view, the title of the painting itself is a disidentifiatory move on Monkman's part as it draws upon the well-known reference of Edvard Munch's (1893) painting of the same title. Munch's painting depicts a figure with an expression of extraordinary and surreal agony, despair, anxiety, and pain, and is a well-known reference in Western art history and culture. Monkman draws upon this reference, perhaps with the intent for non-Indigenous peoples to make the connection of extreme human despair and pain in Munch's composition to the pain of residential schools. In the painting, Monkman also draws attention to the RCMP's role in residential schools, unsettling the image of the RCMP as "responsible for enforcing the law, preventing crime and maintaining peace, order and security." Furthermore, Monkman reminds viewers of the human cost of residential schools, by placing a number of cradle boards (representing children who attended the schools) on the walls next to the *The Scream*. Monkman has included "ghost boards" to represent those children who did not survive the schools. These "ghost boards" lay in stark contrast to the cradle boards (which are real boards borrowed from various holders). Instead of being composed of warm cloth and hide, and colourful patterns, they are composed only of the board and wooden rest, painted in a matte dark grey. Monkman also included historical material culture/ephemera in the room. At the Glenbow Museum exhibition, a small glass case held items made by the students at the Grouard

⁹⁸ See: Government of Canada, "Unofficial symbols of Canada," Government of Canada, August 15th, 2017, Accessed October 12th, 2017, <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/unofficial-symbols-canada.html>

Residential School for their school principal. The Statement of Apology offered on behalf of the then Prime Minister of Canada, Stephen Harper, on June 11th, 2008 referred to “the treatment of children in Indian Residential Schools” as “a sad chapter in our history.” I suggest that the placement of this historical ephemera, along with “ghost” cradle boards alongside one another was a deliberate decolonial killjoy strategy to humanize residential school survivors and families. In *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience*, Monkman refuses to look past or “reconcile” this “sad chapter” in Canadian history. Instead, Monkman deliberately represents the horrors of residential schools (children being violently torn from their families and communities), the deathly toll the schools took on the children (with the empty cradle boards), as well as the humanity of the children (through both the cradle boards and items made for the principal).

In the exhibition booklet made available at the exhibition, as well as on the wall text, the connection between MacDonald and residential schools is referenced and may be made even more clear to viewers, as it includes the following statement made by MacDonald in 1879:

When the school is on the reserve, the child lives with its parents, who are savages, and though he may learn to read and write, his habits and training mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly impressed upon myself, as head of the Department, that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men. (in Monkman, 2017, p.16)

Further, Miss Chief includes a short note in her memoir chapter on this period, recounting that: “This one I cannot talk about. The pain is too deep. We were never the same.” (2017, p.16) If we place Miss Chief-as-Isabella/mistress into the greater context of the exhibition, we are able to ask: what is the purpose of Miss Chief trying to win Macdonald’s attentions? Is she doing it for personal gain, or is it for the good of her community as she tries to plead with him to reconsider his role in residential schools and other Canadian nation building projects?

I have demonstrated that through *Shame and Resilience*, Monkman brings a killjoy message to *Canada 150* by queering and unsettling popular Canadian (art) history and western texts, in order to draw attention to the historical and ongoing injustices, assimilation and genocidal acts by Canada. It is also essential to note that while Monkman draws attention to wrongs against Indigenous peoples, as referenced in the title *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience*, he also gestures and demonstrates Indigenous resilience. In fact, Monkman explains that the main goal of the exhibition is resilience. For example, in *A Country Wife*, Miss Chief demonstrates resilience and a form of autonomy in attempting to seduce and woo John A. Macdonald for the good of her people. Furthermore, in *The Scream*, Indigenous resilience is shown in the mothers who fight the RCMP despite the real threat of violence/death, as well as a group of Indigenous people shown escaping in the left corner.

Monkman's decolonial killjoy message then is one which embodies what Gerald Vizenor describes as "native survivance." Vizenor describes that "survivance is an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy and victimry." (1999, p.vii) *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience* both reflects and informs native survivance—more specifically a queer native survivance—by calling attention to historical and ongoing settler colonial nation building attempts while centering historic and ongoing queer native resistance and resilience.

Representing Queer Settler Participation and Indigenous Resilience in Canadian History

While I have demonstrated that through *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience*, Monkman brings a decolonial killjoy message to *Canada 150*, through nuanced strategies of disidentification, I further suggest and outline that Monkman brings a specific *queer* decolonial

killjoy presence. More specifically, I find that Monkman both queers Canadian settler (art) history, while holding queer settlers accountable for their historic and ongoing role in the violent oppression of Indigenous peoples in what is currently known as Canada.

In *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience*, Monkman queers Canadian settler (art) history by incorporating both 1.) a queer Indigenous presence in his interventions with the inclusion of Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, and 2.) by making major Canadian historical figures queer. For instance, when I entered *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience* at the Glenbow Museum, the first piece that I encountered in “Chapter I: New France, Reign of the Beaver”, was the 2016 mixed-media installation of *Scent of a Beaver*. Monkman was inspired by the Rococo artist, Jean-Honoré Fragonard's 1767 painting, *The Swing*. Monkman reminds us that at the time Fragonard produced this painting, there was a power-play “*ménage à trois* of New France: indigenous, English and French.” (Monkman in Sharp, 2016) Monkman depicts this political three-way in this installation, but provides a queer reading of it via a strategy of disidentification.



Figure 5.3: Monkman, K. (2016). *Scent of a Beaver* [Mixed Media Installation]. Image courtesy of the artist.

The installation includes a life-size figurine of Miss Chief on a swing, rocking gently back and forth between two life-size figurines of Montcalm and Wolfe. Montcalm and Wolfe appear enamoured with Miss Chief, one of whom has a bouquet of flowers clenched in one hand reaching outwards to Miss Chief, as an offering. While both the gazes of Montcalm and Wolfe rest totally on Miss Chief, she gazes straightforward, avoiding returning the attention of either man. In her memoir, written by Gisele Gordon, Miss Chief explains,

I had them both wrapped around my elegant pinkies in those days, Montcalm and Wolfe. They fell over themselves to curry my favour. They couldn't get enough of those luxurious pelts... Our poor beavers, almost decimated by overuse (something I'll never say about my own). The power was in our camp back then, when we, the Cree, Iroquois, Assiniboine, and the other Red Nations, controlled these territories. No one got rich or powerful without us on their side. We always embraced new technologies, the guns worked well, and we prided ourselves on new ways of thinking. Why not humour those handsome Jesuit priests? There were far too few to cause much confusion. (Gordon in Monkman and Gordon, 2017, p.12-13)

I suggest that this installation (installation and text together) represents a queer decolonial killjoy take on early French, British, and Indigenous relations in Canada. While mainstream Canadian narratives represent the British and French as the two main nations battling for control of what is currently known as North America with Indigenous players as side-notes (if they are mentioned at all), in this representation, it is Miss Chief who is not only part of this pull for power, she (as a queer Indigenous figure) is featured at the centre of it. Not only is Miss Chief at the centre of this power-struggle, she is depicted as the one in control of it—lackadaisically swinging in between Montcalm and Wolfe who vie for her attention and pull the swing for her. Furthermore, the title of the installation, *Scent of a Beaver*, and Miss Chief's reference to her own "beaver" (her genitals). In this way, Monkman queers this Canadian metanarrative by placing an autonomous and powerful queer Indigenous presence in the forefront of it.

Similarly, in Monkman's 2016 acrylic on canvas piece, *The Bears of Confederation*, which was included in *Shame and Prejudice*, Miss Chief is centralized and is in control of a group of major Canadian historical figures—the "Fathers of Confederation."



Figure 5.4: Monkman, K. (2016). *The Bears of Confederation* [76" x 132" Acrylic on Canvas]. Image courtesy of the artist.

In this large (76" x 136") piece, these Fathers of Confederation engage in sexual relations with bears across the setting of a vast surreal mountain valley landscape. Miss Chief is found (wearing see-through hot pink/red material resembling tulle, and matte high heeled boots of the same colour) in the bottom right corner of the scene, holding a whip above her head—ready to strike a “father” who kneels in front of her, with his pants pulled down to expose his pale white bottom. Akin to *Scent of a Beaver*, in *The Bears of Confederation*, the major Canadian historical figures seem to be willing and proactive participants in acting out their queer desires with Miss Chief—a queer Indigenous figure. Further, with the title Monkman queers these historical male figures by linking them to the bear community/subculture of gay men who are often larger/hairier men. Again, Miss Chief as a queer Indigenous figure is centralized and is depicted in a position of control and authority in Canadian history, in the context of a national settler colonial celebration.

The inclusion of queer subjects—Indigenous and settler—in the context of this public and private national exhibition is not occurring in a vacuum. As previously articulated, Monkman's inclusion as a queer Indigenous subject in the nationalist discourse around *Canada 150* is not entirely surprising if one takes into consideration the current queerly Canadian dominant nationalist narratives of a benevolent Canada which supports both its queer settler and Indigenous subjects. Queer activists, scholars, and community members can and do propagate and participate in settler colonial nation building practices, as Jasbir Puar succinctly and pointedly reminds us: “there is nothing inherently or intrinsically antination or antinationalist about queerness” since “U.S. nationalisms no longer a priori exclude the homosexual.” (2007, p.77) Instead, Puar finds that U.S. nationalisms (and I would argue to an extent, Canadian nationalisms) have evolved to be inclusive of specific homosexual subjects who gain certain citizenry rights, in order to queer racialized terrorist bodies. However, I want to suggest that what is unique about these pieces is that Monkman is linking queer subjects (bears/gay men) to having a direct role in colonization. Recently, scholars (Morgensen, 2010, 2011; Pérez, 2015) have drawn attention to the complicity of queer subjects (namely white gay men) in settler colonialism. For instance, as previously highlighted, Pérez (2015) links the modern (white) gay subject as being thoroughly complicit in their desire for, and propagation of American imperialism, colonialism, and neoliberalism. Morgensen (2010, 2011) demonstrates that the colonization of Indigenous sexualities and bodies was an intrinsic historic and ongoing element of settler colonialism, and that queer theory (and politics) are inherently structured by this reality. However, queer Indigenous studies scholars and some queer theorists remind us that queer politics and scholarship most often does not centralize settler colonialism and its historical and ongoing influences. (Driskill, 2010; Morgensen, 2010; Pérez 2015) Morgensen reminds us that

“under such conditions, queer movements can naturalize settlement and assume a homonormative and national form that may be read specifically as *settler homonationalism*.” (2010, p.106. *My emphasis*) In other words, settler homonationalism works to reinscribe and continue settler colonial structures in queer politics and activism, under the guise of queer liberation. In *Scent of a Beaver* and *The Bears of Confederation*, Monkman playfully draws attention to queer settler complicities in settler colonialism. In *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience*, major Canadian historical figures are not just white men, they are *queer* white men. As outlined, Monkman's use of disidentificatory manoeuvres in *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience* queer and unsettle Canadian (art) historical narratives, thereby injecting the broader *Canada 150* nation building narratives with both queer native survivance, and an official depiction of queer settler complicity in settler colonialism.

Conclusions: Miss Chief and Diva Acts of Citizenship

In this queerly Canadian era, wherein Canadian settler colonial nation building practices are informed by, and reflect twin processes of reconciliation and homonationalism, a queer Indigenous artist was officially sanctioned to the table to commemorate a national holiday. Indigenous peoples—specifically artists—are often invoked by Canada in national celebrations as a settler colonial nation building practice. Jennifer Adese (2012) asserts that despite this, Indigenous artists and peoples participate in these national celebrations as an act of what Vizenor terms as “native survivance.” I find that Monkman’s participation in *Canada 150* with *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience* follows this genealogy of Indigenous artists crashing Canadian national parties (such as Indigenous artists taking over the Indian Pavillion at Expo 67’, and the Indigenous exhibitions at the Canadian Museum of Civilization and Canadian

National Gallery which coincided with the 500th anniversary of Columbus landing in the Americas).

Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience was called into being by a mixture of settler colonial entities (University of Toronto, the private and public sponsors, and the galleries), and as such, I understand that Monkman's inclusion as a queer Cree subject may represent what Lauren Berlant recognizes as "diva acts of citizenship." Berlant explains that,

Diva Citizenship occurs when a person stages a dramatic coup in a public sphere in which she does not have privilege. Flashing up and startling the public, she puts the dominant story into suspended animation; as though recording and estranging voice-over to a film we have all already see, she re-narrates the dominant history as one that the abjected people have once lived sotto voce, but no more; and challenges her audience to identify with the enormity of the suffering she has narrated and the courage she has had to produce, calling on people to change the social and institutional practices of citizenship to which they currently consent. (1997, p.223)

In previous chapters, I demonstrated that Trixie and Katya did not have privilege in the queer liberal spaces of *RuPaul's Drag Race* and related content, as their queer(ed) knowledges were rendered illegible, evaded, and eliminated. Monkman arguably is not supposed to have privilege in the space of *Canada 150*, since, as a nation building project, this national celebration is designed to uphold the settler colonial nation-state and settler futurity. I understand Monkman's earlier work, which subverted and queered North American landscape traditions and metanarratives, as "diva acts of citizenships" which national subjects and institutions are attempted to envelop into the queer liberal and settler colonial nation building project of *Canada 150*. I have argued elsewhere that Monkman's work embodies a "queer native survivance" which "works to deconstruct and resist dominant forms and structures of western knowledge and power." (2014, p.6) In the exhibition text, Monkman shares that with *Shame and Prejudice* he "wanted to activate a dialogue about the impact of the last hundred and fifty years European settler cultures on Indigenous peoples, and about Indigenous resilience in the face of genocide."

(2017, p.5) Monkman further says that he “wanted paintings that would exist in art history 150 years into the future...and to say to people “this happened.” And up until now we don’t see images like this in art history.” (Monkman in Art Museum University of Toronto, 20:10- 20:30) It is my contention that this exhibition, therefore, acts as a “diva act of citizenship” by avoiding a central focus on Miss Chief’s sexual exploits, and instead bringing attention to Canada’s violent and murderous role in Indigenous oppression, thereby resisting any efforts by the nation-state to enfold its queerness into a nation building project.

Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience may foster settler introspection into their role in historical and ongoing oppressions, but Berlant reminds us that “diva citizenship does not change the world” but instead might open moments of possibility. (1997, p.223) In *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience*, the painting *The Daddies*, in particular reflects a diva act of citizenship and an opening of queer decolonial possibility. I suggest that the painting *The Daddies* embodies a strategy of disidentification to relay a particular kind of decolonial killjoy message to *Canada 150*.



Figure 5.5: Monkman, K. (2016). *The Daddies* [60" x 112.5" Acrylic on Canvas]. Image courtesy of the artist.

In this painting, Monkman has recreated the Robert Harris painting, *The Fathers of Confederation*. Harris' piece, commissioned by the Government of Canada, represents an imagined scene which fuses figures from the Charlottetown Conference of 1864 and the 1864 Quebec Conference of October. This portrait hung in Canada's Parliament buildings, until it burned on February 3rd, 1916. The image features major figures considered the "Fathers of Confederation", including John A. Macdonald. In 1964, artist Rex Woods was commissioned by an insurance company, Confederation Life, to reproduce Harris' painting in recognition of the 1967 Centennial celebrations. Monkman/Miss Chief inserts herself into this lineage of state-sanctioned confederation paintings—recreating the image with some disidentifactory touches to mark the latest national celebration—*Canada 150*. For example, while all of the men are in the same or similar positions and places as the Harris and Woods paintings, Monkman has rendered them with blue eyes, opened wide (in horror, disgust, arousal, or some form of combination) as they stare at Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, who lays in front of them wearing nothing but a pair of black heels. Miss Chief's right arm is raised, with the palm up and fingers splaying out, which may signify that she is in a passionate discussion with the men. Judging from the men's bewildered/aroused looks, Miss Chief holds them in (nonconsensual) captive attention. This may be understood as a subversion of settler colonial metanarratives which conflated Indigenous lands and the bodies of Indigenous women as wild, violable, penetrable and existing for the pleasure, gaze and use of white European men. (McClintock, 1997) In Monkman's version, Miss Chief's body is made monstrous, or perhaps they are made to be horrified by having their gaze turned back to them. Scholars such as Phillip Deloria (1998), Eva Mackey (2001), and Tuck and Ree (2013) say that settlers have to constantly reconcile their anxieties of the ambiguities of their

identities as settlers on dispossessed Indigenous lands. Canadian and American national narratives and stories are unstable sites, since they have to project the image of a benevolent and just nation-state, while contending with violent histories of settler colonialism, slavery, and more. Settler subjects, in this sense, need a “daddy”—a foundational story such as the Fathers of Confederation, which projects a romantic narrative of a nation forming in a just way. In Monkman’s version, the daddies are confronted with the history of settler colonialism in the form of Miss Chief, and are horrified. This queering of the foundational narrative of Canada is a killjoy intervention which may unsettle viewers’ complicity in buying into narratives of Canada as a just and benevolent entity. Further, I suggest that *The Daddies* represents a practical and metaphorical decolonial killjoy intervention into this state-sanctioned private and public nation building lineage. In the piece, national symbols (the Fathers of Confederation, and the genealogy of the painting itself) are queer(ed) with the inclusion of Miss Chief and their unwavering uncomfortable gaze on her. A queer Indigenous figure is inserted at the forefront of this historic scene, and its place in Canadian (art) history. The white settler men are unable to turn away—for as long as the painting exists, they are forced to consider Miss Chief and her message. In this piece, the daddies are forced to contend with their “settler horror” (Tuck and Ree, 2013). As such, settler unconsciouness and settler certainty (Mackey 2014, 2016) is upset, and Miss Chief’s embodies a (re)mapping (Goeman, 2013)—and a queer(ed) heterotopia. I suggest that this represents a metaphor for the exhibition itself—a QDK has intervened into settler colonial nation building practices and discourses, and a moment of possibility arises from her diva act of citizenship. The settlers who are subject to it are made uncomfortable, unsettled, and uneasy—but what comes next?

While I have argued that *Shame and Prejudice* does bring a decolonial killjoy message into *Canada 150* (and broader discourses in Canadian (art) history), this inclusion of Kent Monkman's work, however critical of Canadian historical narratives, does run the risk of propagating liberal metanarratives of a united and benevolent Canada which may have oppressed (queer) Indigenous peoples in the past, but now includes them in national celebrations. However, it also raises a moment of decolonial possibility for settlers to return to the slow meaningful work of reconciliation which strives for decolonization. It too, created a queer(ed) heterotopia that may not be for settlers at all, but instead for queer(ed) Indigenous subjects. In any case, such queer and decolonial killjoy strategies must be considered by queer studies and politics, in order to build queer and decolonial futures.

**Conclusions:
Embracing Queer and Decolonial Killjoys in a “Political Depression”**

In the 30th episode of *UNHhhh* titled, “F*ckin Random,” short clips from a variety of episodes are compiled together in an uncanny version of a blooper reel.⁹⁹ In one said clip (filmed for the Hallowe’en episode) Katya is slowly riding on the mountain bike ovetop a green screen, dressed in a long black dress with a headpiece made out of long black tulle.



Figure 6: Katya biking in front of green screen while Trixie waves a broom in *UNHhhh* “F*ckin Random.”

Her makeup is reminiscent of a witch, with her white skin contrasted with a dark grey contour, and heavy black eye makeup and black lips. “WOOOO! I’m a mountain-biking witch from the future!” Katya cries out as Trixie enters the frame waving a black broom. “Fuck my pussy with a rake, mom!” Katya shouts, and when she spots the broom, says, “OH! That’s a rake?” and

⁹⁹ WOWPresents. (2016, November 7). *UNHhhh Ep 30: “F*ckin Random” w/ Trixie Mattel & Katya Zamolodchikova* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YulZ2Szdd4Y&t=>

cackles. In the next clip, Trixie and Katya are sitting next to one another on chairs. Katya lets out a large burp, and Trixie says “well just like any 27-year-old cross dresser, fading reality star, I sleep like this...” Trixie lays back in the chair, and lets out a tortured scream.



Figure 6.1: Trixie screaming in *UNHhhh* “F*ckin Random.”

Both short scenes are very silly, nonsensical, and may even produce an unsettling affect in audiences with their crude humour. In this doctoral project, I have argued that in queer studies (and in other academic disciplines) and queer politics, we must seriously consider failed and failing texts, bodies, aesthetics, and performances such as Trixie and Katya’s here in the “F*ckin Random” episode. I follow Halberstam (2011), who reminds us that we must pay special attention to “silly” archives and texts such as *UNHhhh* due to their unsettling nature of “low theory and counter knowledge in the realm of popular culture in relation to queer lives, gender and sexuality” (2011, 19). Further, queer studies scholars have also called for an engagement in negativity, failure, shame, and disgust in relation to affect in order to destabilize and rebuild

current oppressive normative orders. (Ahmed, 2010; Halberstam, 2011; Love, 2007; Sedgwick, 2003; Probyn, 2005; and Munt, 2007) Trixie and Katya's performance on *UNHhhh* belong to an archive which may be interpreted as silly, and which may also render unsettling, uncomfortable, and uneasy affects in those who encounter it. I found that within my own popular "silly archive of unhappy feelings," there existed complex examples of uncanny and even monstrous artists (Trixie, Katya, and Miss Chief) who exemplify and embody characteristics of what I call queer and decolonial killjoys (QDKs). These QDKs use complex performative strategies which critique settler colonialism and queer liberalism, by rendering their logics and normative demands uncanny, monstrous, and undesirable.

More specifically, I identified three strategies which QDKs use to critique and unsettle settler colonial and queer liberal structures: monstrous white uncanniness, creating queer(ed) heterotopias, and invoking bad queer politics. With monstrous white uncanniness, subaltern QDKs perform and embody popular and desired characteristics such as social and economic mobility, beauty, and fame, taken to the point where they become ugly/repulsive/strange (while simultaneously alluring/familiar). As such, a crucial feature of monstrous white uncanniness is reclamation—taking up and/or embodying characteristics and subjectivities that are often out of the reach for queer(ed) subaltern subjects. At the same time, monstrous white uncanniness exposes the dark and unappealing elements of whiteness and settler colonial logics, by rendering them monstrous, unappealing and strange. Through monstrous white uncanniness, QDKs and others recognize the allure of whiteness for marginalized subjects, and does not lay fault on, nor rebuke them for attempting to embody or desire its subjectivities and promises. Further, with monstrous white uncanniness, as these queer(ed) subjects perform and embody whiteness, they simultaneously center and acknowledge their queer(ed) subjectivities and identities (such as

Trixie acknowledging her Ojibwe/Native American identity). As demonstrated, monstrous white uncanniness is not always well-received in queer liberal spaces, as it may challenge queer settler subjects to question their “settler certainty” (Mackey, 2014, 2016) and taken-for-granted investments in neoliberal, nationalist, and other normative structures. In response, I suggest that queer(ed) subjects like Trixie may produce queer(ed) heterotopias—spaces by and for queer(ed) subjects, which both mirror and distort the normative demands of our current historical moment. At first glance, these spaces can seem silly, irrational, nonsensical, crude, and strange. This is because queer(ed) heterotopias represent sites of subjugated knowledges—“knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to the task or insufficiently elaborated; naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity.” (Foucault, 2002, p.7) In other words, queer(ed) heterotopias represent and (re)produce non-normative queer(ed) epistemologies and ontologies. In queer(ed) heterotopias, QDKs critique normative structures in offering uncanny performances of queer liberal and settler colonial subjects, assemblages, and logics. Queer(ed) heterotopias also provide glimpses of spaces/futures where queer(ed) subjects, references, and desires are reflected within, and are privileged. Put differently, queer(ed) heterotopias offer alternative ontologies and epistemologies outside of the confines of our current settler colonial and queer liberal present. Finally, I argue that these QDKs engage in bad queer politics—nuanced embodiments and performances of their multiple (and contradictory) subjectivities and identities. Through bad queer politics, QDKs disidentify (Muñoz, 1999) with settler colonial and queer liberal conceptions of delimited queer identities and subjectivities. More specifically, bad queer politics involve QDKs rejecting or being unable to live up to the “promise of happiness” (Ahmed, 2010) because of their relation to multiple intersections of identity and subjectivities. For example, I argued that Katya embodied both a

Russian Katya who is depressed after immigrating to the United States, as well as a Bostonian Katya/Trish who was excessively happy despite her dire circumstances in the United States. As such, both Russian Katya and American Katya/Trish do not (and will not) live up to the promise and fantasy of happiness involved with the American Dream. I argue that as a specific QDK strategy, bad queer politics involve failing (consciously or unconsciously) to perform and reiterate the intersecting demands of neoliberalism, capitalism, and settler colonialism. Their inability to (re)produce these logics, results in them not only embodying and performing bad feelings, but also contaminating others with negativity (such as: anger, anxiety, confusion, depression, guilt, sadness, stress, unease, uncertainty, and more.)

With these uncanny performative strategies, QDKs critique and may estrange those of us in queer studies and politics from the “toxic positivity” (Halberstam, 2011, p.3) of our current moment, but they also gesture to decolonial futures whereby their queer(ed) epistemologies and ontologies are centralized, celebrated, and thrive. In my view, these performances of QDKs can remind queer studies scholars to become more comfortable with being uncomfortable, unsettled, and uncertain, which in turn may enable us to come to know how to begin imagining radical queer and decolonial futures beyond our current settler colonial and queer liberal moment. As such, in their failure to (re)produce settler colonial, queer liberal, and other oppressive normative structures, QDKs Katya as a mountain-biking vampire witch may actually be from a queer(ed) future, and QDK Trixie as a “27-year-old crossdresser, fading reality star,” may actually represent and gesture to queer and decolonial worlds. Queer studies must pay attention to such subjects, despite the discomfort, anxiety, unease, and other negative affects that they may perform and imbue.

I am concerned that engaging with more unease, discomfort, sadness, anger, frustration, and other negative emotions (and subjects who perform and permeate such negative affects) may seem overwhelming in this particularly troubling era under the 45th president of what is currently known as the United States. I feel that those of us living in the United States in particular, may be experiencing forms of what Ann Cvetkovich (and Feel Tank Chicago) describe as “political depression”—“the sense that customary forms of political response, including direct action and critical analysis, are no longer working either to change the world or to make us feel better.” (2012, p.1) It may be particularly tempting, especially for (white) settler subjects with social and economic mobility to give in to the limited promises and fantasies of happiness gestured to by the nation-state, institutions, and various political subjects. However, we must always remember that there are those queer(ed) subjects who do not have a luxury to choose whether or not to embrace the “toxic positivity,” since their subjectivities do not and cannot align with normative trajectories towards promises and fantasies of happiness. Furthermore, like Cvetkovich, I see forms of negativity by QDKs, even in a time of political depression, as not “wholly depressing” but instead as grounded in an “affective foundation of hope.” (2012, p.2) Put differently, engaging with QDKs (or even becoming QDKs) does not have to be a depressing and anxiety inducing strategy. Instead, by gesturing to other worlds, QDKs may push us to consider queerness in the way Muñoz envisioned—a collective movement which strives for building utopic worlds and futures instead of settling on “romances of the negative and toiling in the present.” (2009, p.1) In this doctoral project, I remind queer studies and other academic disciplines such as Canadian studies that we must embrace these negative subjects (and the feelings that they may instill), even in particularly demoralizing and anxious times, in order to

destabilize settler colonial and queer liberal order, and build queer and decolonial futures which we hope for.

In summary, taking direction on how to move forward in queer studies must involve a rejection of any pre-conceived notions of what forms queering and decolonizing will look like, and an openness to grapple with uncomfortable feelings, and directions from queer(ed) subjects (specifically QDKs) in order to escape the “prison house” of the queer liberal and settler colonial “here and now.” (Muñoz 2009, 1) Monstrous white uncanniness, building queer(ed) heterotopias, and invoking bad queer politics are not the only strategies that QDKs may be participating in. Who are the QDKs in your quotidian interactions, movements, and encounters? Will you be open to, and willing to engage with, the negativity that they permeate? What performative strategies are they using in the face of queer liberalism, settler colonialism, and other oppressive logics? What alternative worlds would you build in your new relationality with them?

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