



## A Poltergeist Manifesto

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*This paper attempts to build an ironic political myth faithful to decolonization that takes queerness as its referent and dreams up worlds that can bear all of us. It speculates about decolonization as a kind of feral-becoming, pointing to futures that give way to life-forms that do not need the human to find their conditions of possibility in the world. The central figure of this myth, this prehistory, is the figure of the poltergeist—the analytic and ontological space of queer indigeneity and the feral monster in the horror story of decolonization.*

### Introduction: Savage Pasts

I wasn't created  
to be a lonesome turtle  
crawling around by myself  
(though none of these turtles  
are worth beach-combing)

- Gregory Scofield, "I Used To Be Sacred (On Turtle Island)" (1996, 63)

This paper attempts to build "an ironic political myth" (Haraway 1991, 149) faithful to decolonization by dreaming up worlds that can bear all of us, worlds that slip-slide into others without disavowing their hybrid alterities. Decolonization is a politics of the future perfect, one that thinks in a vernacular of the what-will-have-happened. It is a teleology of the elsewhere, gestating an attachment to an otherwise that might hold out for more radical genres of living, ones that do not resort to violence to survive the present. Decolonization experiments with more capacious desires that do not dispose of or eliminate some bodies to throw the good life into sharp relief. It conjures an ethos that stalls the governmental work of extracting indigeneity from the political. In the melodrama of decolonization, indigeneity reminds us that this world is both too much and not enough. The world is not for us, but we need it to get to a future that is not constituted through uneven forms of collective suffering (Muñoz 2009, 1). This paper speculates about decolonization as a kind of feral-becoming and it turns to a wild and unruly form of politics that might give way to life-forms trying to make a break for it. In a word: we might have to become feral in order to become something else. At the centre of this myth, this prehistory, is the figure of the poltergeist: a queer and wayward crawler searching for other turtles that might be worth beach-combing (see Haraway 1991, 149; Scofield 1996, 63).

Admittedly, the feral is a precarious space from which to theorize, sullied with an injurability bound up in the work of liberal humanism as such, an enterprise that weaponizes a set of moral barometers to distribute ferality unevenly to differently citizenized and raced bodies—ones that are too close for comfort and must be pushed outside arm's reach. Perhaps ferality traverses a semantic line of flight commensurate with that of savagery, barbarism, and lawlessness, concreting into one history of elimination: that is, a history of eliminating recalcitrant indigeneities incompatible within a supposedly hygienic social. The word savage

comes from the Latin *salvaticus*, an alteration of *silvaticus*, meaning “wild,” literally “of the woods.” Of persons, it means “reckless, ungovernable” (“Savage”). In the space-time of settler states, savagery temporarily stands in for those subjectivities tethered to a supposedly waning form of indigeneity, one that came from the woods and, because of this, had to be jettisoned from or assimilated into the national body. Here is Audra Simpson on the history of Indian “lawlessness”:

Its genealogy extends back to the earliest moments of recorded encounter, when Indians appeared to have no law, to be without order, and thus, to be in the colonizer’s most generous articulation of differentiation, in need of the trappings of civilization. “Law” may be one instrument of civilization, as a regulating technique of power that develops through the work upon a political body and a territory. (2014, 144)

According to Simpson, the recognition of Indigenous peoples as lawless rendered them governable, motivating the settler state (here, Canada) to curate and thus contain atrophied indigeneities—and, consequently, their sovereignties, lands, and politics—within the borders of federal law (2014, 144-45). Similarly, in *The Transit of Empire* Jodi Byrd traces the epistemological gimmicks through which the concept of “Indianness” came to align with “the savage other” (2011, 27). For her, this alignment provided the “rationale for imperial domination” and continues to stalk philosophy’s patterns of thinking (*ibid.*). Simpson, writing about the Mohawks of Kahnawake, argues that “a fear of lawlessness” continues to haunt the colonial imaginary, thereby diminishing “Indigenous rights to trade and to act as sovereigns in their own territories” (2014, 145). We might take the following lyrics from the popular Disney film *Pocahontas* as an example of the ways indigeneity circulates as a feral signifier in colonial economies of meaning-making:

[Ratcliffe] What can you expect  
From filthy little heathens?  
Their whole disgusting race is like a curse  
Their skin's a hellish red  
They're only good when dead  
They're vermin, as I said  
And worse  
[English settlers] They're savages! Savages!  
Barely even human. (Gabriel and Goldberg 1995)

Savagery connotes a state of non-ontology: Indigenous peoples are forced to cling to a barely extant humanity and coterminously collapse into a putatively wretched form of animality. Savagery is lethal, and its Indian becomes the prehistoric alibi through which the human is constituted as such. Indigenous peoples have therefore labored to explain away this savagery, reifying whitened rubrics for proper citizenship and crafting a genre of life tangible within the scenes of living through that are constitutive of settler colonialism as such. These scenes, however, are dead set on destroying the remnants of that savagery, converting their casualties into morally compatible subjects deserving of rights and life in a multicultural state that stokes the liberal fantasy of life after racial trauma at the expense of decolonial flourishing itself.

This paper is therefore interested in the subjectivities and forms of sociality that savagery destroys when applied from without, and the political work of appropriating that savagery in the name of decolonization. Ours is a form of indigeneity that hints at a fundamental pollutability that both confirms and threatens forms of ontology tethered to a



taxonomized humanity built in that foundational episode of subjection of which Simpson speaks. I am suggesting that savagery always-already references an otherworld of sorts: there are forms of life abandoned outside modernity's episteme whose expressivities surge with affects anomalous within the topography of settler colonialism. This paper is not a historicist or nostalgic attachment to a pre-savage indigeneity resurrected from a past somehow unscathed by the violence that left us in the thick of things in the first place. Instead, I emphasize the potentiality of ferality as a politics in a world bent on our destruction—a world that eliminates indigeneities too radical to collapse into a collective sensorium, training us to live in an ordinary that the settler state needs to persist as such, one that only some will survive. This world incentivizes our collusion with a multicultural state instantiated through a myth of belonging that actively disavows difference in the name of that very difference. We are repeatedly hurried into a kind of waning sociality, the content and form of which appear both too familiar and not familiar enough. In short, we are habitually left scavenging for ways to go on without knowing what it is we want.

Let's consider Jack Halberstam's thoughts on "the wild":

It is a tricky word to use but it is a concept that we cannot live without if we are to combat the conventional modes of rule that have synced social norms to economic practices and have created a world order where every form of disturbance is quickly folded back into quiet, where every ripple is quickly smoothed over, where every instance of eruption has been tamped down and turned into new evidence of the rightness of the status quo. (2013, 126)

Where Halberstam finds disturbance, I find indigeneity-cum-disturbance *par excellence*. Halberstam's "wild" evokes a potentiality laboured in the here and now and "an alternative to how we want to think about being" in and outside an authoritarian state (2013, 126-27). Perhaps the wild risks the decolonial, a geography of life-building that dreams up tomorrows whose referents are the fractured indigeneities struggling to survive a historical present built on our suffering. Ferality is a stepping stone to a future grounded in Indigenous peoples' legal and political orders. This paper does not traffic in teleologies of the anarchic or lawless as they emerge in Western thought; instead, it refuses settler sovereignty and calls for forms of collective Indigenous life that are attuned to queerness's wretched histories and future-making potentialities.

Indigeneity is an ante-ontology of sorts: it is prior to and therefore disruptive of ontology. Indigeneity makes manifest residues or pockets of times, worlds, and subjectivities that warp both common sense and philosophy into falsities that fall short of completely explaining what is going on. Indigenous life is truncated in the biopolitical category of Savage in order to make our attachments to ourselves assimilable inside settler colonialism's national sensorium. Settler colonialism purges excessive forms of indigeneity that trouble its rubrics for sensing out the human and the nonhuman. In other words, settler colonialism works up modes of being-in-the-world that narrate themselves as the only options we have. What would it mean, then, to persist in the space of savagery, exhausting the present and holding out for futures that are not obsessed with the proper boundary between human and nonhuman life? This paper now turns to the present, asking: what happens when indigeneity collides with queerness inside the reserve, and how might a feral theory make sense of that collision?



## Deadly Presents

“I went through a really hard time... I was beaten; more than once. I was choked” (Klassen 2014). These were the words of Tyler-Alan Jacobs, a two-spirit man from the Squamish Nation, capturing at once the terror of queer life on the reserve and the hardening of time into a thing that slows down bodies and pushes them outside its securitized geographies. Jacobs had grown up with his attackers, attackers who were energized by the pronouncement of queerness—how it insisted on being noticed, how it insisted on being. When the dust settled, “his right eye [had] dislodged and the side of his faced [had] caved in” (ibid.). Settler colonialism is fundamentally affective: it takes hold of the body, makes it perspire, and wears it out. It converts flesh into pliable automations and people into grim reapers who must choose which lives are worth keeping in the world. It can turn a person into a murderer in a matter of seconds; it is an epistemic rupturing of our attachments to life, to each other, and to ourselves. It is as if settler colonialism were simultaneously a rescue and military operation, a holy war of sorts tasked with exorcising the spectre of queer indigeneity and its putative infectivity.

I rehearse this case because it allows me to risk qualifying the reserve as a geography saturated with heteronormativity’s socialities. This is a strategic interdiction that destroys supposedly degenerative queer affect worlds, untangling some bodies and not others from the future. I don’t have the statistics to substantiate these claims, but there is an archive of heartbreak and loss that is easy to come by if you ask the right people. Indeed, what would such statistics tell us that we don’t already know? What would the biopolitical work of data collection do to a knowledge-making project that thinks outside the big worlds of Statistics and Demography and, instead, inside the smaller, more precarious worlds created in the wake of gossip? I worry about ethnographic projects that seek to account for things and theory in the material in order to map the coordinates of an aberration to anchor it and its voyeurs in the theatres of the academy. The desire to attach to a body is too easily energized by a biological reading of gender that repudiates the very subjects it seeks so desperately to know and to study. What about the body? I have been asked this question, again and again. A feral theory is something of a call to arms: abolish this sort of ethnography and turn to those emergent methodologies that might better make sense of the affects and life-forms that are just now coming into focus and have been destroyed or made invisible in the name of research itself.

Queer indigeneity, to borrow Fred Moten’s description of blackness, might “come most clearly into relief, by way of its negation” (2014). Perhaps decolonization needs to be a sort of séance: an attempt to communicate with the dead, a collective rising-up from the reserve’s necropolis, a feral becoming-undead. Boyd and Thrush’s *Phantom Past, Indigenous Presence* thinks indigeneity and its shaky histories vis-à-vis the language of haunting, where haunting is an enduring facet of “the experience of colonialism” (Bodinger de Uriarte 2012, 303). But, for me, ghostliness is differentially distributed: some more than others will be wrenched into the domain of the dead and forced to will their own ontologies into the now. Perhaps the universalist notion that haunting is a metonym for indigeneity repudiates the very life-forms that it claims to include: those who are differently queered and gendered, and, because of this, haunt waywardly and in ways that cannot be easily predicted (Ahmed 2015). This paper thus takes an imaginative turn and proceeds with something of an incantation to summon the figure of the queer Indigenous poltergeist—the feral monster in the horror story of decolonization. Queer Indigenous poltergeists do not linger inaudibly in the background; we are beside ourselves with anger, we make loud noises and throw objects around because we are demanding retribution for homicide, unloved love, and cold shoulders. We do not reconcile; we



escape the reserve, pillage and mangle the settler-colonial episteme. Our arrival is both uneventful and apocalyptic, a point of departure and an entry point for an ontology that corresponds with a future that has yet to come. Sometimes all we have is the promise of the future. For the queer Indigenous poltergeist, resurrection is its own form of decolonial love.

The poltergeist is an ontological anomaly: a fusion of human, object, and ghost, a “creature of social reality” and a “creature of fiction” (Haraway 1991, 149). From the German *poltern* meaning “[to] make noise, [to] rattle” and *Geist* or “ghost,” it literally means “noisy ghost,” speaking into existence an anti-subjectivity that emerges in the aftermath of death or murder (“Poltergeist”). It is the subject of Tobe Hooper’s 1982 film *Poltergeist*, which tells a story of “a haunting based on revenge” (Tuck and Ree 2013, 652). The film’s haunting is a wronging premised on an initial wrong: the eponymous poltergeist materializes when a mansion is constructed on a cemetery—a disturbing of spirits, if you will. José Esteban Muñoz argues that “The double ontology of ghosts and ghostliness, the manner in which ghosts exist inside and out and traverse categorical distinctions, seems especially useful for... queer criticism” (2009, 46). In this paper, the poltergeist names the form which indigeneity takes when it brings queer matter into its folds. In other words, this essay evokes haunting as a metaphor to hint at the ways in which queerness was murderously absorbed into the past and prematurely expected to stay there as an effect of colonialism’s drive to eliminate all traces of sexualities and genders that wandered astray. The poltergeist conceptualizes the work of queer indigeneity in the present insofar as it does not presuppose the mysterious intentions of the ghost—an otherworldly force that is bad, good, and undetectable all at once. Instead, the poltergeist is melancholic in its grief, but also pissed off. It refuses to remain in the spiritual, a space cheapened in relation to the staunch materiality of the real, and one that, though housing our conditions of possibility, cannot contain all of us. We protest forms of cruel nostalgia that tether ghosts to a discarded past within which queer Indigenous life once flourished because we know that we will never get it back and that most of us likely never experienced it in the first place. We long for that kind of love, but we know it is hard to come by. I turn to the poltergeist because I don’t have anywhere else to go. Help me, I could say. But I won’t.

Queer indigeneity, then, is neither here nor there, neither dead nor alive but, to use Judith Butler’s language, interminably spectral (2006, 33). We are ghosts that haunt the reserve in the event of resurrection. According to Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, a reserve is a “tract of land, the legal title to which is held by the Crown, set apart for the use and benefit of an Indian band” (“Terminology”). The “reserve system” is part of the dispossessionary ethos through which the settler state reifies land as the sign of sovereignty itself, and thus effects the political death of indigeneity, decomposing it into nothingness, into contaminated dirt. Reserves are the products of imaginations gone wild; they are ruins that bear “the physical imprint of the supernatural” on arid land, on decaying trailers arranged like weathered tombstones (Tuck and Ree 2013, 653). They are borderlands that connote simultaneous possession and dispossession: they represent the collision between settler sovereignty (insofar as the Crown holds the legal title to the land) and indigeneity (pointing to a genre of life that is distinctly Indigenous). Reserves were—some might say they still are—zones of death that regulated and regulate the movements of Indigenous bodies, quarantining their putatively contaminated flesh outside modern life in order to preserve settler-colonial futurities. It is as if the reserve were a site of complete atrophy, where indigeneity is supposed to waste away or degenerate, where queerness has already bled out. Look at the blood on your hands!

The queer Indigenous poltergeist, however, foregrounds what I call a “reserve consciousness”—an awareness of the deathliness of the reserve. A reserve consciousness might



be a kind of critical phenomenology that, to use Lisa Guenther's description of this sort of insurgent knowledge project, pulls up "traces of what is not quite or no longer there—that which has been rubbed out or consigned to invisibility" (2015): here, the so-called on-reserve Indian. It might be about becoming a frictive surface; by rubbing up against things and resisting motion between objects, we might become unstuck. Queer Indigenous poltergeists are what Sara Ahmed calls "blockage points": where communication stops because we cannot get through (2011, 68). That is, queer indigeneity connotes an ethical impasse, a dead end that presents us with two options: exorcism or resurrection. If settler colonialism is topological, if it persists despite elastic deformations such as stretching and twisting, wear and tear, we might have to make friction to survive. I turn to the reserve because it is a geography of affect, one in which the heaviness of atmospheres crushes some bodies to death and in which some must bear the weight of settler colonialism more than others. The violence done to us has wrenched us outside the physical world and into the supernatural. Some of us are spirits—open wounds that refuse to heal because our blood might be the one thing that cannot be stolen. Does resistance always feel like resistance, or does it sometimes feel like bleeding out (Berlant 2011)?

#### Feral Socialities

I must leave the beaten path and go where we are not. Queerness, according to Muñoz, is not yet here; it is an ideality that "we may never touch," that propels us onward (2009, 1). Likewise, Halberstam suggests that the presentness of queerness signals a kind of emerging ontology. He argues that failure "is something that queers do and have always done exceptionally well in contrast to the grim scenarios of success" that structure "a heteronormative, capitalist society" (2011, 2-3). For Muñoz, queer failure is about "doing something that is missing in straight time's always already flawed temporal mapping practice" (2009, 174). We know, however, that this isn't the entire story. Whereas Muñoz's queer past morphs into the here and now of homonormativity's carceral tempos, indigeneity's queernesses are saturated with the trauma of colonialism's becoming-structure. Queer death doubles as the settler state's condition of possibility. Pre-contact queer indigeneities had been absorbed into colonialism's death grip; however, this making-dead was also a making-undead in the enduring of ghosts (Derrida 1994, 310). If haunting, according to Tuck and Ree, "lies precisely in its refusal to stop," then the queer Indigenous poltergeist fails to have died by way of time travel (2013, 642).

Queer indigeneity might be a kind of "feral sociality": we are in a wild state after escaping colonial captivity and domestication. When the state evicts you, you might have to become feral to endure. To be feral is to linger in the back alleys of the settler state. It is a refusal of settler statecraft, a strategic failing to approximate the metrics of colonial citizenship, a giving up on the ethical future that reconciliation supposedly promises. As an aside, I suspect that the settler state's reconciliatory ethos is always-already a domesticating project: it contains Indigenous suffering within the spectacularized theatre of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, building a post-Residential School temporality in which Indigenous peoples have been repaired through monetary reparations and storytelling. In the melodrama of reconciliation, the settler state wins its centuries-long war against Indian lawlessness by healing Indigenous peoples of the trauma that blocked them from becoming properly emotive citizens. Queer indigeneity, however, escapes discursive and affective concealment and therefore the category of the human itself, disturbing the binary clash between the living and nonliving by way of its un-humanity, a kind of "dead living" whereby flesh is animated through death.



Perhaps we must become feral to imagine other space-times, to imagine other kinds of queerness. If settler colonialism incentivizes our collusion with the humanist enterprise of multiculturalism (and it does), what would it mean to refuse humanity and actualize other subject formations? In other words, how do the un-living live?

Here, I want to propose the concept of “Indian time” to theorize the temporality and liminality of queer indigeneity as it festers in the slippage between near-death and the refusal to die. Indian time colloquially describes the regularity with which Indigenous peoples arrive late or are behind schedule. I appropriate this idiom to argue that the presentness of queer indigeneity is prefigured by an escape from and bringing forward of the past as well as a taking residence in the future. To be queer and Indigenous might mean to live outside time, to fall out of that form of affective life. Indian time thus nullifies the normative temporality of settler colonialism in which death is the *telos* of the human and being-in-death is an ontological fallacy. It connotes the conversion of queer indigeneity into non-living matter, into ephemera lurking in the shadows of the present, waiting, watching, and conspiring. Where Jasbir Puar argues that all things under the rubric of queer are always-already calculated into the state’s biopolitical mathematic, queer indigeneity cannot be held captive because it cannot be seen—we are still emerging in the social while simultaneously altering its substance (2012). If decolonization is, according to Tuck and K. Wayne Yang’s reading of Frantz Fanon, an “unclean break from a colonial condition,” perhaps the queer Indigenous poltergeist is feral enough to will a decolonial world into a future that hails rather than expels its ghosts (2012, 20). The queer Indigenous poltergeist might have nothing else to lose.

### Two-Spirit and the Politics of Tradition

There is an ontological distinction between two-spirit and queer indigeneity: queer indigeneity is incommensurable with and therefore disruptive of two-spirit. In other words, queer indigeneity escapes ontological capture and troubles the very idea of indigeneity itself. Queer indigeneity is indigeneity’s necessary aberration, one that is irreducibly non-social. Queer indigeneity is so otherworldly it becomes an epistemic blockage to History, contorting semiotically into the stuff of horror films. It connotes a before and an elsewhere so capacious that it strangulates the settler state’s prospects of unabated continuity. There are thus argumentative limits to thinking about indigeneity through the language of queerness—that is, the axiom that settler colonialism queers indigeneity for elimination obfuscates the ontological particularities of queer indigeneity (Morgensen 2011, xii). I suspect that two-spiritness cannot disturb the sexual politics of settler colonialism insofar as it is rendered normative and semantically stable in the passing on of tradition.

The term “two-spirit,” according to Richard LaFortune, was introduced at the “third annual spiritual gathering of gay and lesbian Native people that took place near Winnipeg in 1990” to name “the presence of both a feminine and a masculine spirit in one person” and to “challenge the use of the word *berdache*” by anthropologists (Driskill 2010, 72). While others would and have pushed for a definition of two-spirit that aligns more neatly with recent imaginings of queerness, I take issue with an identity category that contradictorily tries to explain the contemporary and its bodies by looking to the past. I have borne witness to academic papers and kitchen-table conversations that tether two-spirit to the sacred and to a biological reading of gender that marks life outside the binary as inherently colonial—too modern or queer to be conceptualized inside indigeneity’s corporeal and identitarian folds.



Where Qwo-Li Driskill, for example, argues that there is a particular complexity to two-spiritness such that it can name ways of being in a body that are fluid and ambiguous, it is my contention that two-spirit unloads the affective weight of queer indigeneity (2010, 72). The knowability of two-spirit is contingent upon both the putative givenness of “masculine” and “feminine” as cisnormative qualifiers and their discursive proximity to tradition, as if there were an amorphous timelessness to two-spiritness that could be transplanted from the past onto Indigenous bodies in the present—a forgetting of the terror of queer life, how it passes below the aegis of gender and, in this, generates death-worlds social theory struggles to see, study, and repair. In other words, biology fails to name the bodies and identities making claim to the future. Two-spiritness connotes a kind of ethical injunction: to approximate indigeneity, you must approximate tradition in this way and not that, or else. This is fundamentally punitive: if you do not do it correctly, you could die or be killed. Two-spiritness might be stuck in the past; it might turn a haunting into a memorial. Queer indigeneity does things that two-spiritness cannot: it is a floating signifier without referent and without any agreed upon meaning; it refuses to attach to any one history, biology, or geography. Queer indigeneity is categorically messy; it leaks outside itself, congealing into things otherwise unthinkable, refusing the promise of anthropic fullness, as Fred Moten might say, and remaining feral.

Sara Ahmed suggests that some bodies come up against walls that do not move when their fleshiness thingifies institutions *as* walls (2012, 26). The feeling of queer indigeneity is the feeling of coming up against something solid and tangible—an institution that prevents queer Indigenous bodies from moving—or what I call the “politics of tradition.” Tradition is “the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation, or the fact of being passed on in this way” (“Tradition”). It is a sort of affective glue that sticks some objects together, sticks us to bodies and to ideas we often do not know—conversion points that make something or someone traditional through proximity or performance. Here, a politics of tradition refers to the ways tradition produces and deproduces some corporeal forms, how some bodies pass below and beyond the aegis of the senses and, in this, sidestep theory’s ocular reach and thus disturb the traditional itself. According to Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Indigenous “cultural and linguistic revitalization movements have tapped into a set of cultural resources” precisely because they were rendered unpassable (2012, 115). Leanne Simpson, however, argues that the passing on of tradition has coterminously reified heteropatriarchy and “disconnected some of our most vital people from the land and our knowledge systems” (2014). In the same vein, Glen Coulthard recommends that “we remain cognizant of the pitfalls associated with retreating into an uncritical essentialism in our practices of cultural revitalization” (2014, 156). Two-spiritness might be the domestication or traditionalization of queer indigeneity, a slowing down of its semiotic velocity, and a distancing from the kinds of subjectivities that the traditional cannot containerize. For two-spiritness to be rendered passable, it must first be thingified by casting out supposedly and rightfully angry apparitions (A. Smith 2014, 4). However, decolonization “is not an exorcism of ghosts” (Tuck and Ree 2013, 648). If decolonization is to sustain queer life, then we might need to make recourse to different epistemological starting points. We might have to be superstitious.

Tradition, therefore, effects a kind of governability that does away with the otherwise radical potentiality of queerness when indigeneity becomes its fleshy form. Jeff Corntassel argues that Indigenous peoples should be striving for “forms of ‘ungovernability’” that de-occupy “settler institutions and values from Indigenous homelands” (2006, 35). I want to take this provocation further: queer indigeneity works up a kind of ungovernability that always already circumvents the human’s impasse. Elsewhere I have argued that “settler colonialism is

an epistemic rupturing of everything, a steady bombardment whose intensity is felt unevenly across differently subjected Indigenous bodies” (Belcourt 2015). The traditional is always-already disavowing disparate assemblages of ideas and subjectivities that do not make sense inside its epistemological confines. Tradition is pre-emptive; it is measured against certain impossibilities. Queerness germinates in the rifts between the possible and the impossible. When rendered together (if at all), queerness (as the anti-subjectivity) and indigeneity (as the ante-ontology) appear nonsensical. Let’s world vis-à-vis nonsensical and patchwork forms of thinking!

### Conclusion: Killing Colonial Joy

Perhaps we need to make ferality an object of feeling, “as something we invest in, as a way of relating to the world, a way of making sense of how we relate to the world” (Ahmed 2010). Haunting speaks us into existence, as Sara Ahmed might say. Like the feminist killjoy, becoming a queer Indigenous poltergeist “can be an alienation from happiness,” a being “out of line with an affective community” because you do not “experience happiness from the right things” (ibid.). Being feral implies a kind of impropriety, a failure to observe standards and to sublimate anger into happiness. Settler colonialism foregrounds certain mythologies of happiness that are insidiously energized by Indigenous suffering. Indeed, Ahmed suggests that happiness scripts “could be thought of as straightening devices, ways of aligning bodies with what is already lined up” (2010, 91). The queer Indigenous poltergeist refuses to be straightened out and finds its conditions of possibility in the crooked and bent. We know the happy stories that the settler state tells about itself—stories about multiculturalism, about reconciliation, about nationalism, about gay-friendliness. Settler colonialism might be about preserving happiness—the “happily-ever-after” that its statecraft narrates by flattening the historical and material impasse that indigeneity signifies.

If the “good life,” according to Lauren Berlant, “is for so many a bad life that wears [them] out,” then perhaps being worn out captures the emotional prehistory of decolonization (2011, 27). Unlike the cruel optimist about whom Berlant speaks, the queer Indigenous poltergeist is not dramatically tethered to the “good life” (ibid.). Instead, the very fact of its haunting suggests that the bad life is for some a geography from which to hone forms of political revolt. Perhaps being unhappy is its own form of decolonial activism. Settler colonialism, then, might be about making knees jerk, about sudden and putatively involuntary reflexes that launch the body into action and make happiness automatic, unconscious, second nature. To this end, the queer Indigenous poltergeist is its own kind of killjoy—a killjoy that refuses to let go of the past, that kills the happiness of settlers by making things awkward, that points out moments of colonial violence, that points out our murders. If, according to Tuck and Ree, decolonization means “attending to ghosts, and arresting widespread denial of the violence done to them,” this essay is a call to arms: we must kill joy (Tuck and Ree 2013, 247; see also Ahmed 2010). If we end with the understanding that queerness is simultaneously present and absent on the reserve, and that we must abolish settler colonialism’s happiness regime, how can we let the queer Indigenous poltergeist take us elsewhere?

What would happen if we went wild, if we refused domestication and instead chose lawlessness? When our backs are against the wall, we do not have many options from which to choose. Tradition does biopolitical work: it operates at the level of anatomy, not only reifying gender’s collapse into biology but also training our bodies into thinking that we have finally



found something that feels like something. I'm not buying it, and I think that queer indigeneity is the point of departure decolonization has been waiting for. It's your move.

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