Queer Occult: How Queer People in Montréal "Reclaim" Practices of Astrology, Tarot, and

Magic to Divest from Legacies of Settler Colonialism, Whiteness, and Imperial Modernity

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ABSTRACT

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     Over the past few years there has been an explosion in popularity of so-called 'occult' practices like astrology and tarot, particularly among left-leaning people who tend to politicize their investments as forms of counterhegemony. Queer practitioners have claimed kinship with the occult through a perceived shared abjection, deeming it an inherently queer resource for self- and community empowerment, and naming anti-racism and decolonization key aims of their work. At the same time, these forms of occultism draw suspicion, not least among practitioners themselves, who are critical of the ways these knowledge traditions have been complicit in 'spiritual genocide'.

     In ethnographic fieldwork among queer occultists in Montreal, I explore how practitioners imagine themselves to be divesting from legacies of violence, opting instead for apparently queer genealogies of knowledge that are known in terms of the ways they have been repressed. Drawing from work across history of science, critical race theory, queer studies, and affect theory, I theorize the occult as an historiographic mode, always already about epistemic crisis and the struggle between sanctioned methods of inquiry. I theorize the occult's appeal among queer people as a process of affective expansion, wherein practitioners attune to heretofore repressed lifeways, knowledges and worlds that machineries of empire have rendered invisible. What's more, I depart from debates over cultural appropriation to develop a theory of the occult as a biopolitical affect regime, wherein the development of sensitivity is linked to social healing and progress. I locate the contemporary phenomenon of queer occultism within a broader conversation on inheritance, historical repair, and divestment from empire, wherein participants confront the possibility of connecting to the "elsewhere" of imperial modernity. How does the occult represent an attempt to build a capacity for that connection, and how do participants reflect on this capacity as key to healing from white supremacy, capitalism, and colonialism?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION: The Queer occult

Witchcraft, magic, astrology, tarot, and other kinds of psychic healing and/or esoteric spiritual currents are undergoing a revival. While notoriously difficult to define and even harder to quantify, the last several years have seen a marked uptick in cultural media on occultism, from manifestation influencers on "WitchTok," to collective hexing at the Brett Kavanaugh hearings, to a new MA program in "Magic and Occult Science" at the University of Exeter. Over a quarter of women between 18-25 in the US have downloaded the astrology app Co-Star, which Bruner notes in 2021, "ha[d]n't spent a dollar on marketing." Thousands of books stretch the market, including titles such as "Healing the Witch Wound" (Larsen 2023), "Becoming Dangerous: Witchy femmes, queer conjurers, and magical rebels" (West 2019), "Postcolonial Astrology" (Kat 2021), "You Were Born for This: Astrology for Radical Self-Acceptance" (Nicholas 2020), and "White Magic" (Washuta 2021). Affiliations of "spiritual but not religious" are higher than ever recorded in the US, with the largest group between 24-29 (Pew 2023). "As organised religion continues to decline in Western nations, interest in the spooky and the spiritual has only increased. Today, witches might be one of the fastest-growing religious groups in the United States" (Burton 2023).

Non-academic writing (which is much more prevalent than scholarly work) on the rise of occultism tends to explain the revival of the occult as a way to fill the void of religion (George-Parkin 2021), the need for a crutch in times of disorder (Smallwood 2019; Page 2023), the marriage between Big Data and the wellness industry (Bruner 2021), and more sympathetically as a kind of reclamation of outmoded forms of cultural currency (Thompson 2021; Hunt 2021). Numerous

think pieces, editorials, and lay articles have taken note of the ways that the rise of new age or alternative spiritualities some cluster under the "occult" is married to a progressive politics among millennials looking to "summon[] the power to resist" (Elliot and West 2019). In an article for *The American Interest*, Burton (2019) calls it "progressive occultism," and argues that there is a movement to re-enchant the seemingly secular. Arguing it as an example of "unbundled" religious identity, where it is nearly always wedded to social justice activism, many have pointed out the appeal of these practices to those who are looking to get out from under certain structures of power. "Like their New Age forebears, contemporary witches understand witchcraft as a practice for those on the societal margins, a reclamation of power for those disenfranchised by unjust or oppressive systems" (Burton 2019).

Burton touches on two related points that form part of the basis of my own research into this phenomenon: 1) that the occult is an appealing tool or language for those who are interested in social justice, and 2) that many consider this correlation to be naturally realized in the queer figure. Queer people have been central to the "revival" of the occult, formulating these esoteric knowledge practices as forms of self-knowledge that have the capacity to heal, and thus empower, those cast out of communities (Dockray 2018; Beusman 2015; M. Jones 2017). "Astrology is the sort of thing that feels inherently queer…Conventional identity markers, such as hometown, family or culture, can be precarious ground for queer people to stand on…The vanguards of the modern astrology are young queer folks, allured by the promise of figuring themselves out" (Thompson 2021). Lee (2011), in a blog post called "Why Do Queers Love Astrology," theorizes that:

> A love for astrology carries for queers this unconvincing illusion, this mark of woundedness, of wanting to be convinced, together with others who have been rendered symptomatically suspicious. It is the recognition that our worlds, imagined or otherwise, are fucked in

totalizing and crushing ways, and that our existing systems of organizing identity have failed or hurt us relentlessly and recursively, with astrology thus seeming preferable to the psychosocial categories of gender, race, illness or the myriad others deployed and weaponized to delineate the muddled and intersectional processes of subjectivity.

The occult has become so synonymous with millennial queer culture that some have noted that to divest from it feels like a form of "hate speech" (Cohen 2018). Queer Jewish astrologer Chani Nicholas (2016), who has over half a million followers on Instagram, claims that "queer, trans, and gender nonconforming folx, and many marginalized communities, in my experience, have always been attuned to wisdom traditions, art practices, mythologies, and story-telling that explores the value of life beyond the normative conditions we've been given, but cannot exist within joyfully." In these formulations, queerness is heralded as a relationship to power that parallels the occult's historical marginalization, giving an in-road for exposing as constructed our systems of power. In line with queer politics' success at turning marginalization into a grounds for political leverage, the occult's own history of contestation makes it recognizable as a source of potential worlding. "It's about situating yourself almost as the Other, and drawing mythic power from that Otherness" (Lynch 2016).

This feminist and queer occultism tends to be explicit in its aims to resignify its emblems and languages toward a more decolonial or anti-racist politics than they have historically espoused, at least in prior waves of feminist mythologizing and queer spiritual countercultures. For example, the figure of the witch is recuperated as a way to think with stories of persecution, power, resilience, health, and gendered violence (Scheurich 2022). Many horoscopes, rather than parroting out the cliché warnings to avoid your boss or take a risk that day, instead look like calls to action and accountability. In their monthly "Queer horoscope" for November 2023,

Autostraddle writer Corina Dross wrote:

> The highest goal of Scorpio is to be able to face what is monstrous in ourselves — the ways
> we dehumanize others, the ways we perpetuate harm or oppression. […] The shadow side of
> Scorpio is the need to control, dominate, and retaliate when hurt or scared. […] As a Jew, I
> know my liberation is bound up with the liberation of Palestinians. I stand with calls for a
> ceasefire and an end to the occupation, while knowing both are just initial steps towards real
> restorative justice. And my grief right now is for all of us.

Queer/feminist tarot decks have flooded bookstores, with accompanying guides that caution us to "take an honest look at our spiritual frameworks, mantras, and practices. Where do we uphold white supremacy and oppression?" (Molly 2017).

The scope of my research into this phenomenon is specifically rooted in these formulations of the esoteric that are explicitly decolonial in their aims, whether or not those involved are always "successful" at enacting this. As such, my project is not just about the revival of the occult or the latest recuperation of certain contested figures like the "witch" as emblems of queer and feminist politics, but the opportunities these practices may afford to disrupt the enlightenment projects that continue to generate the occult as its point of unclosure. Part of my critical engagement in these practices is to notice when and how certain forms of investment end up reinforcing rather than disrupting patterns of coloniality, at the same time that ethnography allows me to centre my informants themselves as agents of that noticing.

When discussing how interest in astrology comes up all the time at parties or events, one informant called it a "litmus test" for political openness. When I asked what kinds of assumptions they might make about the person's views, they replied:

Someone who's like probably a leftist. Like is like at least like critical of capitalism or like, you know, relatively anti-capitalist and like, you know, anti-oppressive. And like all of those things. I would kind anti-oppressive I'm just using as like an umbrella term but it's like for like I guess being like critical of colonialism and like anti-racist and like all those things…I definitely have this assumption with like if you're into astrology, then you probably have anti oppressive politics, whatever that means. Even that is kind of. A general way of phrasing it, I guess. But, but then at the same time, is astrology actually anti oppressive? (Interview, April 2022).

While the phenomenon, and especially its queer bent, is still underdeveloped by academics, there has been some relevant work published in the past few years that has interrogated this correlation. Elisha's (2021) study of alternative spiritual communities challenges allegations of narcissism and hyper-individualism from critics, suggesting that there are viable communities of practice that can form the basis of a social ethics. Cull and Mehdi (2023:n.p.) are not so convinced of the radical promise that queer occultism strives for, positing: "Queer astrology often positions itself as fitting with a radical politics, but does this amount to anything more than a radical aesthetic cloaking a fundamentally conservative set of practices?" In their estimation, "whilst millennial and Gen-Z culture has adopted the aesthetics of magic, the culture has failed to adopt any associated form of unruliness" (ibid). A similar skepticism is at work in Winstanley-Smith's (2021) rumination on the political foundation of the phenomenon. "This form of modern astrology […] has become a resource of language and thought-shapes, even a kind of auxiliary practice for political activism, especially among queer-identifying persons and their allies […] But is it political? And if it is, how so? What are its potentials?" (Winstanley-Smith 2021:104). In my own

project, rather than debate whether it is "political enough," and privilege the scholar as the authority on this assertion, I am more interested in how practitioners themselves express the contours of the phenomenon: its "range of affects, ambitions, and risks". In so doing, I attempt to avoid the secularist assumption that in matters of the spiritual, "the expression of feeling has to become something else to make it political" (Cvetkovich 2012:200).

Kornstein's (2021) PhD dissertation explores forms of queer magic and witchcraft as re-enchanted forms of technology: "affective economies" that "counte[r] the harms of digital technologies, in particular data-driven forms of surveillance" (4). While we share a similar interest in the ways that practitioners turn to magic as a kind of affective community, I differ from Kornstein by not taking "re-enchantment" for granted, rather opting to use the historical construction of enchantment as a way to expose the stakes of the phenomenon as already mired in colonial, imperial, and racial architecture. Rather than take as given the occult's oppositional status, I interrogate this status as something that has historically been constructed, and theorize the occult's conception as "rejected" as key to its political stakes as well as its legibility as "queer." Kornstein argues that "it is important to name whiteness as central to the current (and historical) cultural formulation of witchcraft and magic in the US, without erasing the fact that many of its practitioners are not white or strive toward an anti-racist practice or politic" (2021:169). However, this is offered as the end of analysis, rather than an opening in itself. In my own project, I take the complex racial logics of the occult as my entrance into exploring the contemporary phenomenon. That there is such a thing as queer occultism, and that it can be heralded as anti-oppressive, betrays an apparent contradiction which acts as the impetus for my current project. While the occult has historically been tied to directives of progress, this has not necessarily been liberatory: one only has to think of the new age movement's charges of "spiritual genocide" and its failures to promote

solidarity with women of colour (Crowley 2011:58). What makes contemporary occult practices suddenly viable as a path for antiracist or other radical politics? More specifically, what motivates queer people to practice the occult, and given its history as a space to direct white spiritual enlightenment, can it be decolonized?

In the only scholarly book I have come across on contemporary queer esoterism, *Tendings: Feminist Esoterisms and the Abolition of Man,* Snaza (2024) brings together new materialisms, Black feminist thought, and other philosophies to propose queer and feminist esoterisms as forms of "endarkenment" that refuse the homogenizing, and thus disqualifying, aims of enlightenment modernity (6). Using "tending" as a way to signal how we move through and sustain worlds in our participation, he asks "what would be required for feminist, queer, and trans esoteric practice to not tend toward coloniality?" (Snaza 2024:53). He looks at feminist esoterism as part of the everydayness of shifting one's attention to whether one's habits either facilitate/tend to coloniality—Wynter's overrepresented "Man"— or processually enacts "otherwise sociality" (ibid:41).

It was a relief to come across Snaza's book, published just a few months before I am writing this, and it is a testament to what I expect to be an increasing interest in research on decolonial spiritual knowledge. While in some ways I ask much the same question as Snaza, we diverge in method and in the scope of this "tending" for white settlers. For Snaza, witchcraft is a specific discursive space opened up within the colonial contact zone: it "is not a name for knowledges that precede and may endure despite colonial violence, it is an index of precisely this contact, this contest, this site of encounter" (2024:137). Snaza is, justifiably, critical of forms of feminist and queer esoteric knowledge that purge, in this case, the "witch" of its colonial complexity. However, his vision of anti-coloniality among white settlers does not seem to include their own pre-imperial

pasts. Given that my own work is ethnographic, I am concerned with how participants in feminist and queer esoteric traditions understand what he would call their practices of "tending" to the other worlds that remain always potential as alternatives to coloniality, including how they are historically imbricated in multiple ways. Snaza claims:

> [F]or those of us—especially white queer people or settlers—who approach a knowledging that is not "ours," we have to ask, with as much care as we can muster, how *our* practices contribute to the violent disruption of other worlds. Rather than being summoned to participate in knowledges that don't belong to us, we might instead, perhaps more modestly, learn to tend practices that, at the very least, don't disrupt those other worlds" (ibid:138).

Of course, I agree with this call, at the same time that I am interested in troubling the "we" of the "our" is that he refers to. What knowledge is white queer settler knowledge? Can that "we" itself be disrupted to inherit something else, or put differently, if something does not belong to us, is there a way to tend to a world that would generate that form of belonging?

Cultural appropriation

In both academic and non-academic writing, in almost all cases, the spectral threat of cultural appropriation is invoked as, at best, a risk to be wary of, and at worst reason enough to condemn the occult altogether. On the "current trend in witch infatuation," Lou Cornum (2018:n.p.) writes: "I am sympathetic to this appeal even as I am suspicious of it; it marks a desire to be contrary to the colonial project, even if it does not always enact it." Suspicion is a constant companion to the occult: not only because it challenges the terms of epistemological legitimacy, but because the incredible profiteering and abstraction of indigenous knowledge under the guise

of collective enlightenment is so well recorded. Because it is non-sectarian, has no leaders, no scripture, and no explicit historical lineage, the occult, at least in the last century or so, is recognizable in terms of its syncretism: its belonging apparently nowhere. The "smorgasbord," or cultural pastiche, makes fertile ground for transgression, where practices that have some sacred function might be extracted and even sold for the benefit of a few (Aldred 2000). Many have emphasized the opportunistic commercialization of spiritual practices, locating the problem within a context of property rights where users "co-opt practices and beliefs into commodity markets" (Cornish 2023:30). Some emphasize the exchange as problematic not necessarily because of the money involved but given the unequal terrains of power that it is grounded in. In her book *White Magic*, Washuta (2019:5) expresses: "I just want a version of the occult that isn't built on plunder, but I suspect that if we could excise the stolen pieces, there would be nothing left." Characterized by an ethos of 'seeking' (Heelas 1996), new age, or what Heelas calls "self-spirituality," has been criticized for the ways that, in particular in settler colonial contexts, practitioners claim Indigenous roots (Crowley 2011). "As Jess Joho and Morgan Sung (2020) reflect: 'the allure of modern Witchcraft lies in the promise that anyone can reclaim their power through a hodgepodge of spiritual mysticism'. That mysticism, they explain, is borrowed from 'various oppressed peoples'" (Cornish 2023:26). This view is common in the literature, and as we will see in Chapter 5 my informants themselves are incredibly paranoid of making the same error. So much ink has been spilled on the question of cultural appropriation in the new age that they can hardly be thought in isolation from each other.

This racial tension is at the heart of my project, as indeed is the suspicion that accompanies it. However, charges of cultural appropriation rely on an uneasy definition of culture as possession, reifying the fiction of cultural stasis and essentialism, and over-determining individual

consumption as the site of power. While there are those who advocate against any kind of borrowing whatsoever (Joho and Sung, as cited in Cornish 2023), most recognize this as a naive reaction. Others emphasize the conundrum as a problem of ignorance instead. "Proprietors and customers fetishize spirituality but lack any understanding of history or their continued complicity in oppressive practices" (Aldred 2000). From Cornish:

> [C]ultural processes are always relational, while objects and ideas flow through globalized networks that appear de-territorialized and neutral. The taking of tangible or intangible ideas or materials always takes place through unequal relations of power (Arya 2021: 1). From this perspective, appropriation is always the re-inscription of colonial systems, values and power structures, the task being to make them visible (Root 2018 [1996]) (2023:30).

According to such a view, developing an understanding of the context will offer a kind of resolution. Exposing the structures of power that constrain the circulation of practices and knowledge systems under the umbrella of the occult is necessary, but I argue that it leaves uninterrogated the crucial question of why these practices are appealing in the first place, and what kinds of motivations practitioners have for doing this seeking. What's more, exposure of violence is not the same thing as subversion of it: something which Sedgwick has so canonically written about in her theory of paranoid reading (2002). In the case with my sample, most of my informants are highly vigilant and aware of the power imbalance that they are working in: something that Cornish also observes in her research on British witches and their moral anxieties about political justice their ongoing implication in imperialism (2023). If the violence is already known, how else does one confront the race "problem" of the occult?

While remaining curious and committed to tracing the effects of colonization and imperial

repression on the categorization of practices as "other," and the ways these are harnessed globally is important, this cannot be taken as the end goal of analysis. Unless we take a closer look at what actually motivates the desire to invest in, use, and incorporate objects and practices that have been categorized as culturally other, and why these are taken to have such a potent influence on personal and collective healing, exposing violence will only have a paralyzing effect. For the purposes of my research, I am interested in how the occult is always already coded as racial, and what this tells us about the stakes of its "reclamation" currently. Rather than engage in an evaluation of whether or not participants are doing something "right" or "wrong" with respect to the ways they engage in these practices, I am interested in what territorializes the occult as a treatise on ancestry, history, and inheritance in the first place, and to what extent this is part of its appeal for those who feel conflicted about their own genealogical emplacement (or displacement). Before getting into how effective this is, I am interested in how exactly the occult can even be conceived of as a means to divest from the structures of whiteness make the occult legible as "other" in the first place. Furthermore, I am interested in tracing how some people—notably white/settler women and queer people—have recognized their own oppression as licensing forms of kinship that complicate the "us" and "them" that cultural appropriation debates assume to be enduring and obvious.

New age, Goddess spiritualities, and "remembering what we already knew"

While I use "occult" in this study to refer to a more ontological distinction between "legitimate" and "illegitimate" knowledge, or that which is visible versus hidden, the New Age is an important precursor to the current phenomenon, in particular the ways that practitioners imagine the risks of cultural transgression. While lacking a centralized power or a unified set of beliefs, making the New Age notoriously difficult to define, most invoke the term to refer to a movement

of diverse psychic healing practices aimed at personal and social transformation that became self-conscious since the 1960s, growing out of earlier American Theosophy and Spiritualism (Melton 1992). Key to most analyses of such a movement is the belief that divine power dwells in humans as well as the natural world, and through understanding our interconnectedness and inherent sacredness, we have the opportunity to radically transform, and thus heal, the world around us (Melton 1992; Heelas 1996; Pike 2004). Heelas (1996:135) identifies new age practice as those which take "the self [as] a spiritual resource," and that practitioners must be "liberated" from their limiting beliefs and frameworks in order to find authentic wisdom and power (ibid:20). Albanese (1992) characterizes the movement more broadly as a "religious discourse community that elicits forms of action…[moving from] what must I (or the world) do to be saved to what must I – and the planet – do to be healed?" (74-75).

While the methods and priorities of New Age healing in the mid to late 20th century varied dramatically, all those who participated found something broken in a material world wracked by war, inequality, and environmental catastrophe (Hunt 2003:135), and located the means to fixing this within the self, through sacralization rituals, workshops for personal empowerment, holistic health practices, or otherwise. Importantly for this study, belief in a sacralized self and the capacity for individual spiritual awakening to effect social change dovetailed with the goals of a waxing feminist movement, which sought to foreground healing, self-knowledge, and 'herstory' as a means to exercise the political objectives of greater women's autonomy. The new age represents an effort to heal from the crisis of modern life (Heelas 1996), whereby trauma manifests in social ills that one has the power to overcome through cultivating inner strength. For a burgeoning feminist movement, sexuality and gender were sites where healing and personal and social transformation were most needed, and the New Age offered the language with which to place sex

and the body securely within the realm of the sacred (Pike 2004:115).

Early feminist critiques of the historical debasement of women found in new age spirituality a means to seek out alternative models for ritual and social organization: models that made them feel as though they were 'coming home' to their origin story (Pike 2004: 115). Experience, instead of belief, is at the core of this spirituality (Hunt 2003:133), and women looked to themselves as holy sources of wisdom (Crowley 2011:37), consistent with the new age's focus on autobiography, as opposed to history, as a dominant way of making sense of things (Pike 2004: 74). "To genuinely love the world, to value it, is to want to tell its story" (Bednarowski 1992:173), and investing in the "myth of ancient matriarchy" (Pike 2004:128) is one way that women not only imagined a more empowering role for themselves in the cosmos, but sought historical justification for an inherited legacy. Some women, especially those in lesbian separatist traditions, aimed to recall what they saw as a matriarchal, Goddess-centric past that was struck down by heteropatriarchal Christianity (Morgensen 2011:132), and found 'evidence' for this in the research of archaeologists and revisionist feminist historians (Pike 2004: 119). Looking to the past was essential to the new age quest for legitimation, and "Goddess worshippers strategically used memory to construct a prehistory that gives them access to bodily power," memory that had been 'erased' through the trauma of patriarchy (Crowley 2011: 116). Thus, feminists found through spirituality important ways to justify a situated view of knowledge, charging dominant history with erasure and turning instead to an imagined trans-historical genealogy of women's experience to catalogue their perspectives. Christianity often figured as the constitutive Other of such a looking: the blight in history that would need to be bypassed in order to recover that which it had so brutally repressed, not least of all which was the divine feminine.

The realm of the historical for feminists is always already imbued with power: and

associated spiritual traditions framed women as "goddesses in exile" whose healing was dependent on repairing the omissions of history (Heelas 1996:18). However, as many have pointed out, the transhistorical sacred feminine that was evoked in women-centred spiritual traditions of this period was disproportionately a site of white female empowerment (Pena, as cited in Crowley 2011: 56). If solidarity and global sisterhood were part of the goals of the movement, the new age has been criticized widely for its spectacular failures of solidarity with women of colour, from "apolitical navel gazing" to allowing white women to act out the fantasy of multicultural feminism (Crowley 2011:30). By re-constructing a feminist revisionist herstory, mostly white middle class women naturalized their belonging to a lineage of the divine feminine: one which bypassed Christian and European contact narratives in order to liberate a more authentic, or "indigenous" nature. The longing to 'remember' a pre-Christian past often yoked together race and gender in ways that naturalized white women's inheritance of Indigenous spiritualities. Crowley analyzes examples of celebrity New Age white female writers who "use Indianness to create a fantasy of gender authority" (2011:60), pointing to the ways in which they understand the oppression of women and Indians as analogous, thus giving each the right to the other's experience (ibid:63). That is not to say that women of colour did not make significant interventions into radical feminist spirituality. Women such as Akasha Gloria Hull, Alice Walker, and bell hooks reframed spiritual emancipation in racial terms, making labour, consciousness, and subjectivity sacred sites of liberation (Crowley 2011). Indeed, there are thriving movements for reclamation happening among Latinx, Black and Indigenous communities (Chireau 2021; Yu 2018; Long 2021; Sikorski & Cieslik 2023). My point here is rather that the new age feminist spiritualities that exploded in popularity in the 1970s, while also a site of contestation by Indigenous and other women of colour, offered white women particularly a means to gratify what Morgensen (2011) would argue is a yearning for ethnic

authenticity, as opposed to what they as settlers inherited through conquest. It is this conundrum that I emphasize in my own work.

While Crowley explores the problematic aspects of white spiritual sisterhood, she moves away from the "unhelpful dichotomy" over whether or not new age spirituality operates through appropriation (2011:61). Instead, she takes as a starting point its imperial foundations and raises the question: "what gender satisfaction do women get from spirituality that they do not get from feminism?" (ibid:156). Instead of dismissing this new age mythmaking as an isolated neocolonial formation, Crowley situates this yearning for ethnic authenticity within the greater, enduring history of settler colonialism in the US, seeing new age women's longing for power through spirituality as necessarily bound up with what was for most a "possessive investment in whiteness" (Lipsitz, as cited in Crowley 2011:61). It is a similar maneuver that I make in my project: the goal is not to expose certain practices or people as violent and condemn them, as if the entanglement with power could somehow be avoided. Rather, the question is: what does turning to the occult make available, and why is this particularly appealing for queer people? Are there different stakes for white and/or settler practitioners than for those who are racialized, and if so, how do we understand how those stakes overlap and diverge?

Looking at the centrality of memory, historical repair, and the promise of "homecoming" that are bound up with the new age, in particular the ways it is taken up by feminist traditions, gives a clue into the stakes of this project, including the questions of race, genealogy, and inheritance that are baked into it. As I conducted exploratory fieldwork into the queer occult, the prevalence of claims that magic or witchcraft is "inherently" queer set off an alarm bell that naturalizes queer people as somehow prior to or exterior to the matrices of power that they answer

to. Theories of time have traced the ways that sexual deviance and race have been "discursively connected via the temporal axis that locates same sex desire and racialized populations as historically prior" (Rohy 2009:xi), and I am particularly interested in the ways this analogy has been embraced by white or settler sexual minorities as a means to disavow or circumscribe their ongoing inheritance of conquest, for which the occult offers a pertinent case study. In his ethnography on Radical Faeries and lesbian separatist spiritual traditions, Morgensen (2011) argues that by searching for alternative roots for gay subjectivity, non-Native queer people naturalize their settlement on stolen land. Early gay and lesbian liberation movements found a 'home' in native forms of gender and sexuality, "invit[ing] witnesses to excavate deep pasts and cross distant borders in hopes of confirming roots on this land that also promises future forms of belonging" (Morgensen 2011:229). Looking for a way to oppose racism, capitalism, and imperialism, Radical faeries, lesbian separatists and myriad other non-Native queers sought out indigeneity as a space in opposition to modernity, which had already been marked out in teleologies of civilization as temporally prior. By looking for alternative routes(/roots) to citizenship not grounded in the heteronormative family, non-Native queers nonetheless continue to naturalize settlement, using Natives as an imaginative resource for their own world building projects, and thus naturalizing their inheritance of conquest they try so hard to circumvent. In other words, non-Native queers incorporate indigeneity in order to re-draw the boundaries of their sexuality.

The occult is defined in terms of 'survivals,' the knowledges and inheritances that are forever incompletely banished by colonization and other imperial violence, which ironically requires continued investment in the racializing logic that locates certain bodies, knowledges, worlds are historically prior. In the case of queer people who take up occultism, the conundrum

that wrote me into this project is what I saw as the risk in how access to this historical precedent is presumed to be granted by virtue of their sexuality. While I see in queer occultism an explicit wish to undo the legacies of indigenous incorporation that such a racial analogy has justified, it remains crucial to explore to what extent queer occultists continue to frame their forays into the spiritual as non-appropriative because "superseded by a more ancient and mutual desire" (Rifkin 2011:110). As I will elaborate over the dissertation, what I ended up finding in interviews told a bit of a different story than what I expected, due to the fact that most informants were reluctant to claim these forms of kinship that many others are all too eager to justify. In any case, my entry point into this phenomenon comes from an interest in how the desire to uncouple oneself from matrices of power also necessarily involves the risk of what doing so brings into reach. Put simply, queer people have trouble with genealogy. Radical faeries, like many of the queer people at the centre of my project, reject the rhythms of heteronormative, imperial time in search of something else. The trouble is—and this is the overarching question of my project—can this 'something else' escape its racialized conditions of possibility, or is queerness simply committing to the 'violent forgetting' that nourishes structures of settler coloniality and whiteness?

Methodology

Ethnographic work on the occult has been crucial to move beyond its enshrinement as *de facto* irrational, toward theories of magic as a literary culture (Magliocco 2004), an inquiry into knowledge (Luhrmann 1989), a form of cultural capital (Asprem 2018), or even part of the construction of modernity itself (G. Jones 2017). In his extensive work on astrology, Nicholas Campion (2012) argues that we must ask why, if the participants he surveys overwhelmingly consider theirs a knowledge tradition, does astrology continue to be framed in terms of belief?

Whose interests does that serve, and why is there no parallel interrogation into "traditions of unbelief" from which a priori hostile apprehensions of astrology arise (Campion 2012:105)? If scholars who are interested in the occult or esoteric are increasingly likely to shift away from the question "why do people believe in irrational things" toward "what makes the occult an appealing source of knowledge," ethnography can provide the interpretations of the subjects in question as testimony. In terms of queer occultism, there has been some ethnographic work published, such as Jones' and Mair's (2014) autoethnography on "witch camp," and closer to my own locale, Lepage's (2016) exploration of queer and trans-ness in the Pagan community in Montréal. However, most of these examples tend to take an already fairly bounded group as their starting point, with the exception of Kornstein, whose exploration of queer digital enchantment drew from diverse networks and media sources.

I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Montréal as a means to explore what makes the occult an appealing source of knowledge for queer people, and how these practices are "reclaimed" as forms of anti-racist or decolonial politics. This intervention is the first scholarly attempt that I know of to explore how the occult is claimed as a form of queer knowledge itself, and how this is key to its current popularity. Certainly, it is the first that locates the stakes of this reclaiming within broader decolonial movements. Rather than pursue an already-established group of witches or self-constituted community, my recruitment left intentionally open the definition of "occult" so as to leave room for participants to self-locate. Montréal forms the context for my exploration of this topic, as an ethnography that is necessary in order to clarify and follow some of the most significant themes of the phenomenon as they actually emerge and circulate in the communities that are invested in them. Exploratory fieldwork legitimized the city as an ideal site to investigate this cultural revival, due in no small part to its infamy as a queer leftist hub, as well as its location

within the settler colony of Canada. While I will explain the relevance of this more later, settler colonialism forms the web of relations that I argue are key to understanding the occult as a theory of history and inheritance, and thus its racial framework. What's more, it is likely that the province's intense process of secularization and suspicion of organized religion since the Quiet Revolution colours the ways that non-sectarian spiritual communities emerge and take shape there.

While ethnography in some ways is a novel contribution to this "field," if there is even a field to refer to, anthropology has historically been inextricably bound to the construction of/study of magic. Rather than claiming that an ethnography of the queer occult represents something "new" (and thus, problematically, something academically worthwhile), I want to propose that it represents something antiquated. The notion that magic has (re)appeared somewhere that it should not is the *modus operandi* of anthropology: as I will explore in the first chapter, anthropologists have for centuries, either unwittingly or not, contributed to the revival of magic in a world that it describes as at odds with it. And as a discipline which has, in its earlier years at least, been preoccupied with mapping out a given population's relationship to time, or locating populations along an imagined chronology, anthropology seems like a good way to explore the ways that temporality offers a key to sociality. Rather than reproduce the false binary between scholarly literature and lay people on the "ground", ethnography helps me to locate participants alongside scholars as investigators into models or methods of reading, and explore the kind of choreographies at work that triangulate researcher, subject, and knowledge in step with each other.

In my own experience in Montréal, I have witnessed (and participated in) the flourishing of non-binary tarot nights, queer tattooers offering astrology-themed flash days, crowd-sourced queer tarot decks, one-night stands asking me to text them my birth chart, and essential oils tailored to your star sign, not to mention the thousands of conversations I have overheard, or participated

in that have spun out the question "why do queers love astrology?" (Nicholas 2016; Lee 2011).
On the queer Montréal housing group Chez Queer, it is normal to list one's sun, moon, and rising
sign along with one's gender and sexual identities and job, and tarot archetypes come up regularly
in conversation to explain the changes in one's life. Whenever I have given talks on related topics,
within and outside of Canada, there is someone in the crowd who, with a knowing smirk or nod,
can attest to my claim that queer people love to talk shop on witchcraft, and many of them have
some surprising (or perhaps unsurprising) connection to the city I live and work in. While it is
impossible at present to acquire statistics to support this, perhaps nothing illustrates it so well as
one of my own informants' anecdotes.

> Growing up [in Montréal], I literally thought that it was basic to be a bisexual, witch. Like I
> truly was perplexed when I went to Halifax and I was like, 'oh, like I'm a vegan lesbian,
> witch,' like whatever. And people were like, 'you're so radical.' I was like, 'What are you
> talking about? Like, I'm literally just like every other bitch on the 80 du parc'" (Interview,
> April 2022).

Humourously, the speaker relates that "every other bitch" on a major bus line—the 80 Avenue du
Parc— is a queer witch: it is so commonplace that she goes so far as to call it "basic." (Importantly,
the bus passes through the mile end neighbourhood, a hub that is home to many newcomer students
and artists, and where the speaker grew up.) Being a lesbian witch seems commonplace until she
leaves Montréal.

Study

In the spring and summer of 2022 (April-July) I conducted REB-approved fieldwork in

Montréal, which consisted of individual interviews with 30 participants, including 12 individual interviews and three different group discussions of 8-12 participants each. Participants were recruited through the circulating of posters online and in several physical locations around the city, which also included a QR code to a website that gave more details of my own background and goals of the research, any potential risks, and what participants could expect if they signed on. The poster read: "What is so gay about astrology? Invitation for paid collective discussions and interviews on the queer occult in Montréal." The tagline read: "What does it mean to claim rejected knowledge practices, like astrology and tarot, as forms of queer politics? Is it possible to disrupt its historical whiteness?" There was also info on payment, and a sentence on how I located myself as a researcher. Eighty-five people responded, most of whom I emailed back and forth with to hear more about the interested party, and to answer any questions they might have. Inclusion criteria was simply that they must be over 18, live in Montréal, and consider themselves to be part of the phenomenon in question on the poster. Through the same recruitment process I hired 5 assistant researchers who would be part of a team that I trained in peer facilitation and data privacy, and who gave feedback on the research design process as well as participated in group sessions as facilitators and peer support people. We had two team meetings in order to talk about expectations, go over ethics and plan logistics for group interviews. There was also one smaller meeting of each pair of facilitators ahead of the group session they were scheduled to be a part of, and a short debrief in the days afterward.

Figure 1: Recruitment poster, made by author.

The goals of the fieldwork overlapped with and extended the overall goals of the project, and slightly differed between individual and group interviews. Most basically, interviews were set up to 1) analyze the ways that queer practitioners of occult phenomena in Montréal reflect on their practices as a resource for self-knowledge and community building 2) examine to what extent participants classify the occult as an 'inherently' queer tool and 3) to reflect on the risks, tensions, and goals adhere in mobilizing occult practices as a form of politics, in particular with respect to

coloniality. In short, interviews were meant to explore how participants conceive of power as it relates to the occult. Group interviews were set up more particularly to provide a space for the third point, where participants could learn from each other, in some cases find validation, and connect with others. Given that race and ancestor work were key themes I was interested in exploring in this work, interviews all touched on this, but it was in the group discussions that participants were able to actually discuss and if they wanted to, be vulnerable about some of their own struggles.

The study participants were as follows: 17 women, 1 man, and 13 non-binary or two-spirit people. Sixteen of the respondents were trans. Twenty identified as white, four as indigenous, six as (non-indigenous) people of colour. Of the sample, 26 identified as settlers, and two of the indigenous respondents identified as white-passing. Ages ranged from 22 to 46. Most had at least a Bachelor's degree or were in the process of completing one. My five co-facilitators were: white, mixed race/light skinned/Black, Black, and Indigenous. Three were trans (2 non-binary and one trans woman), and two were cis women. They were all in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties. Types of practices that participants brought up in interviews included chaos magic, crystal healing, tarot, shadow work, herbal medicine, tracking the moon cycle, protection magic, trance, biodynamic farming, working with past lives, psychedelic healing, burning plants, watching youtube card readings, ritual intention setting, communing with faeries, creating altars, participating in a coven, making offerings, sigils, and chart readings and other astrology, and many others. While all of the above were explicitly mentioned at different points, the vast majority of the time that an interviewee referred to their practices they referred to them very generally, usually as forms of "ritual" or "ceremony" or "work." This goes to show that the sense of shared knowledge within group interviews or in conversation with me came not from participating in the same practice as

much as it did from a feeling that all of these practices were expressions of a kind of orientation to the world.

My positionality

My own orientation to this set of knowledges is important to note here, and often in interviews this would come up at the end, in the space of a kind of relief that the question period was "over" and we could talk for real. Like many of those I interviewed, I grew up atheist: both parents were vehemently suspicious of the Catholic Church. My father overcame his own traumatic upbringing in Catholicism by denouncing religion altogether, while my mother embraced some aspects of goddess spirituality and other related mythologies as part of her broader investment in feminism and non-sectarian spirituality. Their own parents were: from Ireland; a couple generations Canadian from Ireland; and many generations Canadian with Scottish and United Empire Loyalist ancestry. Growing up, I remember clearly the sporadic Samhain, Imbolc, and other pagan rituals sprinkled through the year, and my brothers and I were asked to collect rocks, feathers, and other things to represent the four elements during those small ceremonies. I was both intrigued and embarrassed by my mother's interest in things like We'Moon, goddess tarot, and wise women healers. Even as a teenager I always joked with her that she should have been a lesbian, and that jab takes on a particularly salient significance now as I do this project. I knew and was terrified of Sheela Na gig, could by high school recognize all of the figures in Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party*, and got the "Secret Language of Birthdays" out of the library when I was nine. This year on Valentine's day, my mum sent our family group chat a blurb on Hecate, and at Christmas we did a wassail for the trees in the backyard (none were apple trees, but it was the thought that counted).

None of these quasi-spiritual actions ever seemed particularly remarkable to me, but when I started thinking through this project in 2016 I realized more clearly how that experience was actually part of something I didn't have language for yet, and that others around me did. Having done my Master in Hungary in 2015-2016, I returned to Montréal newly single from my first queer relationship, and felt like in my absence everyone had start talking about astrology. Indeed, many of my informants mentioned 2016 as a watershed year in some way. Realizing I could barely go on a date without memorizing my chart, I started to interview people about it for a small radio show I was doing. Since then, my interest has been primarily anthropological, or at least I think it is: I am fascinated by how *other* people use it. At the same time, I am fully enmeshed in the world I study. It is easy for me to undersell my own involvement as I sit across from informants, scroll through think pieces, and theorize from my desk. However, whenever I spend time with people I don't know, I realize how often I open my mouth to reference some astrological event, make a comment about someone's sign, or invoke some tarot archetype to make a point. I pull tarot cards at least once a week, and it is rare I have someone over without carrying my deck out from my bedroom, cementing a kind of intimacy I already recognize and/or hope I can bring further into being.

It is, of course, this inside/outside positionality that lends itself to good anthropological work. But the extent to which this intimacy permeates my study: the fact that I share community with my informants, even without having met them before the interviews, and the esoteric nature of the practices themselves, make an uneasy ambiguity in academia. The extent to which I am reluctant to draw a strict line between myself as a theorist and my informants as subjects, I realize, represents a kind of refusal, which became clear last summer at a conference I was at. At the "Failure of Knowledge/Knowledges of Failure" conference in Mannheim in 2023, a professor

came up to me after my talk to tell me that it was difficult to tell which contributions were mine as a scholar and which observations came from my interviewees. Surprised, I asked why she felt they were so categorically different. Sensing my ambivalence to participate in the kinds of distancing or hierarchization that academic work requires, she essentially advised me to decide whether or not I was committing to the academy, and to make it clear if I was. In writing a dissertation, I am obviously participating in the kind of legacies of scholarly abstraction/extraction that so many of my informants wish to trouble, but I take this audience member's discomfort as a sign that at least something was getting shifted in terms of relationships to knowledge.

It is somewhat ironic, or perhaps irony is not the right word for it, that there were periods of times moving through the 6 years of this project that I pulled cards every day. This wasn't for the research: it just was part of my life, like reading and writing for this project were. From my own personal grief in navigating two big break ups, to more collective grief enduring years of global pandemic, the worst wildfires seasons ever recorded, the intensification of Israeli apartheid and genocide in Gaza, and countless other forms of catastrophe, it often felt ridiculous to turn to tarot cards, and even more ridiculous to theorize about it. But I think this is why fieldwork was so successful in the spring of 2022: people were looking for ways to find intimacy again, whether that intimacy was the end goal or was itself a resource to navigate compounding hardships. Intimacy is not officially a subject of this research, but it permeates every aspect of it. In the interest of situating myself in this work, I would say that intimacy is how I understand my own tarot practice, and how I think of the ways that astrology figures in my relationships with others. It facilitates forms of intimacy. Cvetkovich argues: "We don't need scientific research to explain what's going on; we need better ways of talking about ordinary life, including the dull feelings of

just getting by" (2012:159). I was taken aback to find a similar reference to Cvetkovich in Snaza's new book: who theorizes esoterism as everyday practices of attending to something.

Stewart aims to "pull academic attunements into tricky alignment with the amazing, sometimes eventful, sometimes buoyant, sometimes endured, sometimes so sad, always commonplace labor of becoming sentient to a world's work, bodies, rhythms, and ways of being" (Stewart 2011:445). I see the occult for my informants as a means of becoming sentient to a world's work, and my ethnography a means to become sentient to theirs. Indeed, this project is one of the 'commonplace labours' of the last six years of my life. In its construction of narrative and evocation of the sensual, corporeal, emotional aspects of experience, ethnography is itself a magical act…"the ethnographer is by definition a magician" (Magliocco 2004:18). As I lay the foundation of my own ethnographic work on the occult, this scholarship helps to lay bare the ways this relation is already fraught based on the ways the occult has appeared in relation to the modern: am I a magician who looks to ethnography to further my practice, or an ethnographer who helps to invent the magician I try to describe?

Queer as magic

Before moving on to the methods and stakes of this project, I want to establish the phenomenon of the "occult-as-queer" more clearly within my own sample. As I have pointed out in lay and scholarly writing on this phenomenon, there is a pervasive claim that there is something "inherently" queer about these practices, which is given as an explanation for their particular popularity amongst the more countercultural, marginal, or queer subset of the population. I want to shine a light on how some of my informants make this connection, given that it operates as the foundation from which I explore its political stakes.

When asked to reflect on how they understand the correlation, if any, between queerness and magic or the occult, participants in interviews had many theories. Some pointed out how many queer people have religious trauma, and are looking to fill a void outside of organized religions that have been unwelcoming. Others stressed its healing aspect, wherein the loneliness of being cast out of families or communities necessitates the seeking out of guides or resources for solace. One informant put it bluntly in saying that: "queer people are broke, and that's why we turn to tarot and spirituality. Because we can't afford therapy" (Group interview, April 2022). However, the most significant theme that emerged in interviews was the notion that queer people are drawn to magic because queerness and magic are counter-hegemonic. Queer and magic are ontologically related because they operate as the "other" of normativity. "That's where the parallels between queer in the occult are [..] There's just a pattern and a history of being othered" (Group interview, July 2022).[1]

Magic is seen as queer because of the putative marginality of both objects. "In the same way that the word queer kind of like, has power because it's not defined—you don't know what someone is when they are queer, you just know that they're not something. I think it's kind of similar with magic and certain types of things. You just know that someone or a group is not of like the hegemonic state…those things exist inherently against what is the dominant hegemonic paradigm" (Group interview, June 2022). While some people took a more essentialized view of queer identity, and argued that queer people were born with magical powers, most theorized queerness in terms of its potential for subversion rather than a sexual or gender attribute. One

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[1] Here is another example of this from interviews: "Just like the way that religions have oppressed queer people and excluded queer people so much, and then occult is like also that way. And it's like spirituality versus organized religion and the way society's all controlled, like…It's like, it's been so long where those two things have been in the same position basically, which, yeah on the outskirts or whatever. But also like in direct opposition to patriarch" (Group interview, July 2022).

informant described this relationship this way:

> To practice magic is inherently queer because it defies a straight world order that, like, says things are a certain way and there are these certain like boxes that are like the truth. Where queerness, like magic […] complicates that. And says actually, things aren't necessarily what they seem… actually things are fluid and can be transformed. And I think that […] magic is inherently queer. And further, I would say queerness is inherently magic because it it challenges like, in capitals Our Reality which would…like if we didn't have restrictive systems, we wouldn't have the word queer, right? So, I think that the word queer…Like the meaning of queer, is magic in the face of, restrictive world order (Interview, April 2022).

For this informant, queer is not so much an identity as a relationship to "restrictive systems." This understanding of queer as inherently anti-normative, even anti-social, is foundational to queer theory, wherein Edelman famously calls on queers to "accept[] [their] figural status as resistance to the viability of the social" (2004:3). Many of my informants grew up with this figuration of queer, whether they actually studied gender studies or simply share space with other leftists who have accepted this as part of its political *modus operandi*.

> For me the occult has, like, a connotation of darkness to it […] But darkness is so demonized in our society. […] Religions have oppressed queer people and excluded queer people so much, and then occult is like also that way […] It's like, it's been so long where those two things have been in the same position basically […] on the outskirts (Group interview, July 2022).

As another example, one informant described queer and the occult as different "realities" that exist

alongside what is presented as normal.

> Time is obviously a construct, like heteronormativity is obviously a construct. All this stuff
> that we've been forced into, you know, like it has always felt kind of, I've always been angry
> about that. Like growing up feeling like this is a lot of my trauma has to do with kind of like
> crazy making in my family life as a child and like not being able to trust reality because
> someone's always holding the power about what a world we are going to live in. Who's going
> to control that? There is not one reality, right? And I think in knowing that so personally,
> from a very young age, I was like, so then what world are we going to build? […] we're
> either going to eat someone else's version Of it or we're going to build our own, like, you
> know (Group interview, July 2022).

Some informants pointed out that magic is only queer insofar as magic is not considered
legitimate in society: there have been other times throughout history where astrology, for example,
was accepted as a doctrine of science, and therefore it cannot be understood as queer: "[astrology]
is not necessarily opposed but currently opposed" to power (Group interview, July 2022). This is
consistent with the above formulations of queer and occult being joined by virtue of a relationship
to power: the logic of queer's correlation to magic only makes sense insofar as magic is demonized.
However, this made it confusing to distinguish between queer as an identity and queer as
relationship to the normal, as participants made consistent use of both.

> I do notice how popular these forms of, these ways of being you know, and engaging with
> the occult is in the queer community. But for some reason, I have trouble with thinking of it
> as something that's innately queer…Folks who will challenge these like tired societal norms
> are you know, naturally seek... I wouldn't say ways of coping, I would say like seek answers

that go deeper. And I think that it's not unique to being queer, I think there are other identities, there are other groups of people who are marginalized who do the same thing (Interview, April 2022).

Later in the interview, they discussed the ways that people of colour are especially "fearless" in exploring the limits of knowledge. I don't think that most of those I interviewed implied that queer people had a monopoly on thinking outside the box, but that many of them claim anything that is disruptive of power as necessarily *queered*. "I do think witchcraft is kind of inherently queer. I think it's inherently nonconformist. Like when, like not everyone who does witchcraft or magic is queer, but they've always kind of been on the social margins" (Interview, April 2022). This is complicated, as I will explore more later, because of what kinds of affinity or kinship are being claimed. There is a potential for a kind of sociality, even solidarity, with those who have historically been cast out of or oppressed by violent systems, but claiming a shared experience by virtue of a perceived harm also poses a certain risk.

Thinking of magic as a resource, or a tool, was extremely common in interviews. Informants explained that because the world was not made for them, they relied on self-determination and alternative forms of guidance to navigate it: tools to "clear the gap," which the occult in some cases stood for (Interview, April 2022). "Tarot at least was very much a way to develop a relationship with myself, especially coming from like a home where it was kind of expected for me to conform. And so I think as a teenager, […] I just didn't have a lot of tools to ask myself what I needed or what I wanted" (Group interview, June 2022). Another put it this way:

"I never really thought of my practice as political but I think […] it actually is a political choice because so much of it for me at least has to do with learning how to trust my mind

again. And learning how to trust my own judgment and ability to make decisions and understand what is going on. And I think like obviously a lot of different institutions would prefer to have our behaviours be prescribed in specific ways, […] and actually a lot of my practice has to do with just being like, […] where do I want to go and be able to make those decisions for myself outside of spaces I guess that would rather tell you exactly where you're supposed to go" (Group interview, July 2022).

In these examples, informants describe their search for something other than conformity, and turn to the self as a resource. In many ways, the occult is a kind of conduit for self-knowledge: some scholars have referred to it as "self-spirituality" because of the authority of the self as foundational to its practices (Heelas 1996). But I want to focus on the ethic of seeking itself as important here, in that the seeking itself is heralded as a kind of queerness: "the urge to do the search [is the thing that] makes you queer" (Interview, April 2022). It is not a search for something that is known, but it is a search for something outside what is already known because of the ways it has failed to satisfy the querent. I think the curiosity inherent in searching for something else it lays bare two important themes of this dissertation: the refusal to take at face value what is "inherited" or what appears as natural, and the openness to learning or coming into contact with something else which may be better.

I think growing into your own queerness under the state that we're under, like you have to ask questions and you have to do soul searching and literal research like on the internet or in books or whatever to figure out what this means. And I find that like, with learning the occult or like walking into it you also have to do that same kind of soul searching and research to find like what path suits you best […] or what practices are calling to you. Like the literal

act of having to re-write your brain and how you understand culture or society or spirituality or religion or science or whatever is very similar, between like the path of discovering your queerness and discovering the occult […] Because you're having to deconstruct and reconstruct within your own mind. To like find where you want to be standing (Group interview, June 2022).

In this excerpt, the speaker theorizes a correlation between queer identity and the occult in terms of researching and reading, as means to "re-write your brain." This ethic of seeking is, I argue, inherently critical because it is founded in the assertion that there is something untrue or misleading about the set of narratives or norms that one inherits by virtue of their embeddedness within a given society. This set of inheritances covers over something crucial, which can be accessed only if one comes up with different ways to seek it out.

"I think [the occult] is also counter hegemonic in the way that like I think there's this inherent like questioning that comes with engaging in these practices. Like it's like it's a curiosity about the unseen. So there's already that like question about like, oh, like what else is there? Whereas like hegemonic practices are so often about like just hearing something is and obliging by it" (Group interview, June 2022).

Occult as (queer) historiographic mode

Key to my analysis of the queer occult is theorizing the occult as a knowledge relation. Interrogating how the occult came to be associated with the countercultural is fundamental to understanding how it is claimed as "queer," and thus what kinds of work it does for those who are interested in claiming that position. Literature in western esotericism and Victorian sciences has

shown that rather than representing a given set of beliefs, tenets, or self-evident practices, the occult is at its most foundational a struggle over how knowledge gets constituted. In other words, its status as "oppositional" is constructed. Literature which focuses on the ways modernity works through disciplinary technologies is useful to understand what is at stake in targeting certain knowledge and bodies for correction, as well as to theorize how the consequent status of 'rejected' offers an appealing location from which to criticize such disciplining. In the first chapter, I draw from scholarship that theorizes the occult as an allegory of the modern rather than its constitutive outside, reframing the relationship as a crisis of method rather than belief (Owen 2004). Who is considered an expert investigator, what counts as evidence, what is it possible to know, and what methods are considered appropriate tools toward that end? This allows me to theorize contemporary queer revivals of the occult as an interrogation into modernity's repressive modalities and critical engagement with what has been classified as "other," "untimely," or "illegitimate" as a means to subvert its regimes of normalization.

While the structural parallel between "queer" and the "occult" as ontologically marginal is important to this project, it is the underlying temporal framework of modernity that is especially crucial to my contributions. If the modern is emergent through marking out certain bodies, knowledges, and lifeways as historically prior, the occult cannot be divorced from an engagement with history itself, including who or what is located within a progressive futurity or relegated backward. Indeed, some scholars have pointed out that the occult is a "historiographic concept rather than a philosophical or religious worldview" (Hanegraaff 2014:73). In approaching the occult as historiographic mode, two major things come into relief. One is that it allows me to consider the ways that it operates as a kin hermeneutics with queer historicism itself. In Chapter 2, I argue that the occult is a form of queer historiography, in that it is always already an

engagement with the productive absences or silences of knowledge transmission. Both are encounters with the limits of our normative epistemological rubrics, which generates questions about what we can do to condition other forms of looking. If the occult is historiographic mode, it is recognizable as a queer one given the ways it at once denounces the ruptures modernity requires, as well as celebrates these ruptures as new social locations for critique. The second thing that the temporal lens brings forth in this project is a theorization of race beyond notions of cultural possession, as introduced earlier. Scholarship exploring the occult as bound up with the struggle to delineate certain populations as more modern than others brings it into relief as part of a racializing assemblage which will always inform how it is reclaimed or inherited, and who is justified in making such a claim.

Given that modernity is a theory of history and progress, and the occult is inextricable from the modern, the occult is bound up with questions of inheritance, genealogy, and legacy. There has been much ink spilled on mythology, revisionist history, and problems of authenticity in millennial spiritual traditions such as NeoPaganism and witchcraft, wherein practitioners consider history a kind of metaphor open to intervention (Magliocco 2004). In this project, questions of inheritance continue to be central, with queerness heralded as a transhistorical orientation that puts certain things into reach. Queer occultists tend to justify their engagement in these practices as part of an inherently queer legacy, wherein the perceived oppositionality of the occult toward dominant knowledge systems renders it a kind of bonafide inheritance of the outsider. "[Q]ueerness has always celebrated the strange, the magical, the countercultural" (Santoro 2019). "It's about situating yourself almost as the Other, and drawing mythic power from that Otherness" (Lynch 2016). By virtue of what theory of history is the occult queer? How might the turn to the occult be conceived of as a form of historical repair for those critical of its silences, or a strategy of

disinheritance from structures of power, and what risks inhere in making such a claim? In a moment where the deconstruction of historical truth has ushered in a crisis of what methods 'work' in our encounters with the past—indeed, what instigates us to consider something as 'past' at all— the turn to the occult comes into relief not as a form of escape or a crutch in a time of disorder, as it has typically been theorized. Rather, I see it as part of a reckoning with what forms of historical precedent allow us to speak, and what methods might exist to recuperate or make room for ways of knowing, relating, and practicing other than those we know we inherit.

Methodological training

In the first chapter I briefly discussed the occult in terms of a kind of repression, in that the modern can only emerge through the productive erasure of something else. In the second, I argue that inasmuch as the occult is considered by informants as that which is repressed, it is recognizable as a queer historiographic mode. In synchronicity with canonical texts in queer historicism, occultists conceive of visibility as an effect of power, wherein certain methods of looking condition what emerges. The methodological "work" of contemporary occultism is, I argue, that the practitioner seeks to develop the capacity to make visible the invisible: much in the same way that critical and queer historicism seek to attune to the always impartial, unknowable, but nonetheless crucial "signs [in the past] that might authorize existence of particular sociopolitical formations in the present" (Keeling 2019:90-91). Queer methods of historical encounter have implicated the scholar as an interlocutor in making certain things appear in the archive that are otherwise concealed. In apprehending my participants as social theorists themselves, I argue that they are engaged in much the same work of "becoming sentient" to worlds that lie beyond normative frameworks of apprehension (Stewart 2011:445). In other words, I argue

that "rejected practices" such as astrology bring into reach a critique of the modern and its requisite subjugation of local knowledge systems, which nonetheless persist for those who know how to attune to them. Importantly, this "attunement" is sharpened and developed through magical practice. In focusing on queer historicism as a form of methodological training, in that it is based on a commitment to seeking out interpretive models or strategies that make room for indeterminacy, I theorize how the occult appeals to queer people by virtue of its own obligation to attune to some alternative modality incompletely erased through repressive logics: the occult as a method of "chang[ing]...the structure of interpretation itself" (Luhrmann 1989:176). I see queer historicism and the occult as inherently critical modes of historiography in that they operate on the presumption that some force of power generates historical silences, which demand creative modes of engagement to make appear that which was prevented from being. Magic, as re-attunement, not only has the capacity to reconnect us with what was at one point severed, but it is always already a critique of what produced that severance in the first place. At the foundation, then, of the concept of "tuning in" or developing a "lens," is an encounter with historical technologies of occlusion, wether they be the repression of the sacred feminine by Christianity, the relegation of local/Indigenous knowledge to the margins, or the forced disappearance of certain modes of living together.

Participants describe their practices in terms of inheritance, thwarted power, and the transmission of knowledge, which is always already an allegation over how a certain way of sharing the world was at one point interrupted, which must be restored or overcome. Thinking with inheritance brings into relief the stakes of this work on questions of ancestry and what kinds of values or orientations we have the capacity to regenerate, disinherit, or claim as our own, providing

interesting insight into the appeals for queer people to develop kinship across time, at the same time that it gives a clue into how these practices are inextricable from questions of race and cultural transmission. The preoccupation with recuperating or restoring what has been putatively erased continues to be the work of queer histories at large, which seek to make possible the retrieval of subjugated narratives currently inaccessible to us—or at least to critically engage with their absence. In celebrating that which resists effacement or incorporation by repressive power, can we do this in a way that does not take for granted the 'pastness' of the object but instead apprehend its pastness as part of the technology of obsoletion itself? How can we think of queerness as generating forms of attunement or synchronization with anti-imperial forms that do not assume that queer sexuality itself operates as a historical precedent to power? I look at how encounters with archival silence are the grounds for queer community that does not otherwise become visible. I argue that this paradox of present absence mirrors the occult as both a lament for what kinds of inheritances did not get passed on, at the same time that this gap in knowing is key to allowing practitioners to "do something else," which includes divestments from our taken for granted lenses of coherence, legibility, and historical truth.

In the anthology of transcripts and other writings from the first Queer Astrology Conference in San Francisco in 2013, the editor asks: "what if our received wisdom no longer comes from cultures which prize domination and which are blind to their own privilege? What if our techniques seek not to stabilize in sameness, but rather orient toward and embrace difference?" (Waisler and Wolf 2014:5). In this excerpt, the editor refers to astrology as a form of "received wisdom," along with other forms of inheritance that are transmitted culturally. In an attempt to counter what he sees as the violence baked into our own cultural lineages, he refers to astrology as a "technique," and expresses the desire for it to give rise to another way of "orient[ing]" oneself

in the world. In this question lies the crux of this project: if the ways we exist in the world are inherited, to what extent can we divest from these inheritances? Is the occult one such technique for embracing something else, and does 'queerness' predispose us toward that elsewhere?

Divestment, ghostliness, and potential histories

Within the logic of modernity as a technology of obsoletion, if certain ways of living in the world have disappeared, it is not because they became irrelevant, but because they were repressed. Focusing on the occult as "hidden" knowledge, "kept alive […] in whispers and little conversations behind closed doors" (Interview, April 2022), participants theorized how particular forms of social and cultural formulations have been rendered unintelligible by hegemonic forms of power, and made investments in making them intelligible again. In turning to the occult, I argue that participants do two things: on the one hand, they position themselves as inheritors of systems of power they wish to opt out of. Queer participants in my study attempt to divest from empire: in particular, the betrayal of settler colonialism, capitalism, heteronormativity, white supremacy, and other imperial "afterlives." While this might occur through many different channels, including direct action and other organizing, the occult is held up as a psychic means of subverting power and developing a capacity in oneself to engage with the world differently. Following some of the ways this term is used in affect theory and new materialisms, I call this engagement "attunement," which brings me to my second point.

Azoulay (2019:291-2) has theorized that to "unlearn" imperialism comprises the "objection to participate in and naturalize the outcomes of imperial violence on which much of our practices, knowledge, desires, imaginations, and dreams are built." From this unlearning emerges "potential history," which is at once a divestment and a turning toward something else. If potential history

"strives to retrieve, reconstruct, and give an account of diverse worlds that persist despite the historicized limits of our world" (ibid:289), I argue that the occult constitutes a form of this striving. For Azoulay, retraining our modes of relating to figures in the past involve the critical engagement with what kinds of destructive forces distinguish particular worlds as 'past' in the first place, the residue of progress whose condition is "embedded in temporal and spatial structure that…have shaped the way we relate to the common world and narrate our modes of being together" (ibid:21). Azoulay's theorization is key to my own framing of attunement as an historical modality, in that reading "backward" connotes a temporal movement, not in terms of a linear teleological history, but in terms of a disruption of it. Along with divesting from one kind of "story," participants make an investment in something else: those traces of worlds, knowledges, or belief systems that have been put out of reach. I argue the occult represents a means of attuning to those traces: through their practices, participants develop the capacity to be in "touch" with that which has been "made unreachable by the lines of conventional genealogy" (Ahmed 2006:107). Building the capacity to imagine, bring into reach, and actualize ways of living in the world that are more just and liberatory than what they otherwise are familiar with is a kind of queer historiographic encounter, but its stakes go much beyond queer politics. Snaza calls such a maneuver "endarkenment pluriversality," in contrast to enlightenment universality (2024:7). This training is part of unlearning imperialism, and it requires practice(s).

If the occult comprises a divestment from one "story of looking" (Desmond, as cited in Hayward 2012:165), and seeks to get in touch with other potentialities and forms of connection that appeared to have been severed, what exactly does it put one in touch with? How does this movement bring up questions of inheritance, sociality, and race? In enacting this divestment, there is a potential form of sociality that this brings into reach: a sociality of living with ghosts, or the

detritus of modern systems and abuses of power. In conversation with Azoulay's "unlearning with companions" and Gordon's (2008) "haunting," I demonstrate how participants attune to, or make "companions with," those "modalities, formations, actions, and voices that were brutally relegated to the past" (Azoulay 2019:16). Here is where my theory of participation diverges from Snaza's. I argue that for many participants, these companions are their own ancestral knowledges, which they understand as having failed to inherit because of assimilation or other forms of imperial erasure. By investing in the occult as a form of training oneself to attune to or make visible the forms of social disappearance that "haunt" us, I argue that participants aim to facilitate forms of sociality with the ghosts of the social, formulating the traces of (never completely) repressed lifeways and knowledges into a political subjectivity. As such, they aim to find ways to make visible, or put into reach, these lost or subjugated knowledges as a means of betraying or disrupting that hegemony. Practitioners of queer occultism find in these knowledge traditions an apparently pre-imperial vernacular, one that connects them to ways of being and knowing that persist despite technologies of repression. Re-connecting with them operates as a form of solidarity with all those who have been oppressed, first of all through its requisite divestment from those structures that have repressed them, and second of all through the companionship that this divestment might facilitate. Making these companions appeared to ground participants in lineages that made them feel like they shared in a richness of knowledge, continuity, and connection to authenticity they understood to be missing in their own lives.

I locate the queer occult within this much broader crisis of history as a matrix of power, conceived of in terms of what dis/appears. Scholars across many disciplines are grappling with how their own epistemologies have contributed to and have been born out of a maintenance of elision, and the sense of disorientation goes much beyond academia. For instance, Gordon argues

that: "Sociology as we have come to know it (and the various other human sciences) cannot tell the true history of the losses occasioned by the slavery and racism that have been so enabling for capitalism. It cannot precisely because its very definition of the social primes us to "see" and thus to describe the reality of certain obvious things, thereby blinding us to the ways in which those things are expressly produced and fundamentally enabled by a history of loss and repression" (2008:ix). In attempting to construct a different kind of sociology, Gordon asks: "How do we reckon with what modern history has rendered ghostly? How do we develop a critical language to describe and analyze the affective, historical, and mnemonic structures of such hauntings" (ibid:19). I argue that my informants ask many of the same questions, and are engaged in reckoning with the ways they are drawn into haunted structures of feeling. Following this train of thought, I argue that informants actually seek out this haunting as transformational, wherein the occult offers a means to "follow the ghosts." "Following the ghosts is about making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located. It is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look" (Gordon 2008:22). If particular modes of "disenchantment" have historically been pre-conditions for scientific knowledge, attunement to that which has been banished as that offers a means to "refashion" social relations. "Remaining partial to the dead or deadly" not only recognizes how we are haunted by empire's afterlives (ibid:182), but privileges this haunting as a means to offer the conditions for something else to emerge in its stead.

Magic as antidote to whiteness

If queer people approach the occult as a knowledge tradition whose catalogue of refusals acts as a precedent for their own, what exactly authorizes them to claim as companions, that is, as

queer, certain knowledges, traditions, worlds? If the occult represents a form of training to be "in touch" with something other than what we inherit through settler modernity and empire, I am interested in how the conditions of possibility for that "something else" to arrive have historically been racialized. A major conundrum that emerged in my interviews, and remains loaded in this phenomenon in general, is how "remaining partial to the dead," or making kin with that which has been rendered ghostly, is fraught. For many white and/or settler participants especially, there existed a longing to connect to forms of ancestral knowledge at the same time that this desire was perceived as suspect. Given the ways that connection to "pre-imperial" forms have historically licensed problematic forms of extraction, a prevalent tension permeated my interviews over the desire to betray imperialism, and anxiety about the void this creates. In a recent paper, Cornish (2023) contrasts two views on this tension: that to avoid allegations of ongoing imperialism witches should halt borrowing altogether, and that they should actually borrow more, but "in an active and responsible manner, to face complicated histories and ask ethical questions" (Bucar, as cited in Cornish 2023:26). The problem is, these apparent resolutions do not actually interrogate what makes the occult so racially fraught in the first place. In my analysis of interviews, I contribute to this debate by showing how the desire for a pre-imperial vernacular is necessary always a racial transgression given the ways that these objects, practices, or forms of kinship have been rendered "ghostly" by modernity.

The answer to this tension is not to become more vigilant about what kinds of practices "belong" to each of us, but to critically engage with those technologies of "pastness" that actually condition what is legible as occult in the first place. In the fifth chapter, I highlight how participants reflected on their own understandings of ancestry and how they perceived their occult practices to be bringing them into a conundrum of inheritance. This is, I think, my most significant contribution

to the emerging field of literature on contemporary occultism. I notice that while all of my participants expressed some anxiety over claiming certain forms of kinship across time, those who were white tended to express more paranoia over what they were justified in claiming. I argue two things here: that whiteness is understood by participants to be a form of erasure or incorporation which severs one from local, cultural contexts; and that to overcome this severance one must re-connect with what was at one point lost, which looks different for everyone. Within this logic, while the histories of that severance might be vastly different and ongoing in divergent ways, many participants recognized that all of them have a stake in repairing the catastrophic violence of imperialism. I bring debates on witchcraft, spiritual healing, and whiteness into a postcolonial framework that acknowledges how, despite the disproportionate assignation of power, modes of being and sharing the world were "also made inaccessible to descendants of white Europeans who could have claimed them as part of their own pre-imperial heritage" (Azoulay 2019:26).

Looking at the ways that magic operates as a pre-imperial reclamation, I theorize that the loss of magic and "recruitment" into terrains of whiteness (also construed as imperialism) are understood by participants as one and the same. Magic is thus in some ways synonymous with cultural specificity or localized knowledge, and to make attempts to reclaim it represents a divestment from whiteness as that which nullifies it. In other words, to betray white supremacy or to "unlearn" imperialism, participants must in some ways give up whiteness, and magic or occultism is available as an apparently persistent form of cultural otherness. At the same time, there remains the question: how does one betray white supremacy without making one's own forms of revision that evade their ongoing embeddedness within it? While uneasy, this node—that magic offers a location apparently exterior to imperial modalities—operates as the conditions for solidarity: participants navigate how to claim a shared political aim without espousing a

universalism that would erase important territorializations of power. While in some cases, investing in that which empire has relegated backward reaffirms and fetishizes its temporal logic, it does not need to. This investment can also operate as a means to expose as constructed, negotiable, and unfinished the business of empire, and is deeply necessary as a means to "unlearn" it.

Sentimental biopower

There is another important contribution I make in this dissertation toward theories of race within psychic healing movements, including contemporary occult revivals. Along with recognizing how the occult is necessarily racialized by virtue of its relegation "backward," I theorize that it operates as a biopolitical affect regime. Drawing from theories of sentimental biopower, and putting the occult revival today in conversation with 19th century Spiritualism, I argue that the development of particular forms of feeling is central to the reformist aspect of the occult legacy. Developing the capacity to take in or be "sensitive" to certain forms of affect is considered key to healing self and society, and participants talk about their magical practices as helping them towards this end. Some scholarship has shown the ways that affect has historically been racialized, meaning that the circulation of feeling between bodies is always already circumscribed by racialized architecture that unevenly assign "liveliness" to different bodies (Schuller 2018). Looking at the "paradox" of Spiritualism as a radical movement, I argue that we can understand some of the historical failures of spiritual "countercultures" to enact forms of social change, by looking at how white people have been centred as the ultimate beneficiaries of reform. As long as reformism is understood to work upon bodies' differential capacities for movement, there will be a racial assemblage to contend with, even if that reformism appears to be anti-racist.

By theorizing the occult as a biopolitical affect regime, I argue that this gives a clue into why the New Age and related movements have disproportionately been sites of white female empowerment, and ask to what extent contemporary revivals depart from or reify its problematics. In this project, I draw from participants' reflections on their anti-racist politics in order to theorize the contemporary occult as an affective regime that continues to rely on the development of proper feeling in order to spur on healing, political action, and reparative forms of sociality. However, I argue that participants consider queerness, rather than whiteness, as a relative measure of "sensitivity" toward this end, where queerness makes one more receptive to pedagogical energies. Interrogating the affective expansion at the heart of spiritual countercultures, I argue that participants reinforce the biopolitical framework of the occult, at the same time that they make an intervention into which bodies are particularly privileged with the capacity to be receptive.

I theorize the occult as a form of training: as mentioned earlier, this often takes the form of a methodological intervention or encounter with the "historical." By looking at issues of race as they are worked out in fieldwork, I also lay bare how this training works in terms of becoming politically useful or conscious. I begin to develop a theory of "bottoming" as a form of white allyship that participants understand as made in part possible through their occult practice. If social healing is understood in terms of overcoming capitalism, white supremacy, settler colonialism and other hegemonic structures, participants theorize their own practices of becoming receptive to, or able to learn from others as part of their forms of solidarity. In particular for those who are white, developing the capacity to "bottom," or "take pleasure in submitting," as one participant put it (Interview, April 2022), is heralded as key to undoing the dominance of whiteness, or violate their own authority, and usher in a different kind of relationship to others. By framing the occult within a biopolitical framework, I am able to make an important contribution to studies of white allyship

in general, by laying bare how otherwise subversive movements for anti-slavery, Indigenous solidarity, and other social reform movements have historically reinforced hierarchies of civility. Looking closely at the ways that participants reflect on and attempt to navigate their own embeddedness within legacies of power lays bare some of the key stakes and conundrums of political work, including how does one disavow or betray violent legacies without also disavowing how one is also constituted out of it?

History of arrival

In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed argues that home is not a place exterior to bodies but effects of "histories of arrival"(2006:38). For something to feel given, or natural, the history of that arrival is forgotten. "I arrive, as if by magic […] the work of arrival is forgotten in the very feeling that the arrival is magic" (ibid:16-17) In other words, home's condition is amnesia. In a sense, this project is all about histories of arrival, wherein magic is not the effect of forgetting but its antidote: the thing that keeps open the possibility of moving elsewhere: following a different desire line, or doubling back. I locate the scope of aims, risks, anxieties, and revelations that come up in fieldwork within what I see as a negotiation of how the dissolution or crisis of some previously enduring foundations for identity, including nationality or ancestry, is pushing many people to look for other historical precedents to anchor themselves. The amnesia is wearing off, so to speak, and what was previously oriented in one way becomes disoriented. As we see globally, this dissolution is just as likely to furnish forms of reparation for those who have historically been dehumanized by empire, as it is to furnish forms of cultural "return" for white nationalists and neo-Nazis who wish to restore those forms of dehumanization.

One's methods of tracing, constructing, reviving and intervening in particular traditions of

knowledge is bound up with anxieties over the kinds of inheritances one wishes to distance themself from, or overwrite with alternative legacies that might give a different ground from which to speak. I see this study as embedded in this context, wherein queer people seek out ways to locate themselves within sacralized narratives across time, at the same time that Montréal is settled land where the "desire for history" is fraught with legacies of dispossession.

Chapter 1 explores the occult as an allegory for imperial modernity, highlighting the ways it has historically been constituted as the outside and temporal past of a given chronology of progress. Drawing primarily from literature on Victorian science, I theorize the occult as a knowledge relation, that is always already bound up with a shifting rubric of legitimacy, wherein its now-given status as marginal to scientific enlightenment operates as the grounds from which it is recognizable as "queer." Chapter 2 explores the temporal relationship at the heart of occultism, theorizing it as a queer historiographic mode that is preoccupied with how inherited conditions of visibility shape what it is possible to know and circulate. Bringing in work on queer historicism, I look at how "hidden" knowledge incites forms of methodological training on the part of the scholar, seeker, or practitioner who is interested in making available that which "haunts" the social. Chapter 3 investigates the "attunement" at the heart of occult practice through sentimental biopower. Putting contemporary practices in conversation with 19th century Spiritualism and its sympathetic architecture, I theorize the occult as an affective regime that is oriented towards developing the capacity for proper feeling. Focusing on the ways that "openness" and "receptivity" have historically been linked to social health, I theorize the persistent racial structure of occultism through the ways that bodies have been ascribed relative capacities to incorporate and operationalize impressions from the environment. Chapter 4 applies this theory of affective

expansion to the contemporary phenomenon, where I argue that participants both reinforce and deviate from the legacy of the occult as a form of training toward affective expansion. Participants privilege sensitivity, openness, and receptivity as key to good magical work, and thus social progress, at the same time that they name queerness, rather than whiteness, as a relative measure of this capacity. Finally, Chapter 5 explores the ways that my informants reflect on questions of race, ancestry, and inheritance within their practices. I theorize the occult as an attempt to connect with pre-imperial modalities which participants understand as crucial in their attempts to divest from or betray legacies of settler coloniality and imperialism that they are forced to inhabit. Rather than participate in debates over how much people should be allowed to "borrow" from other cultures, I explore how any refusal of the inheritances of whiteness necessary means a turning toward something else, which is risky. I explore how white and/or settler informants in particular navigate their anxiety over what they are justified in laying claim to instead, and whether or not it is possible to in some ways betray their inherited power without the pretense to transcending it.

CHAPTER 1 – Boundary wars of science

"The more something is marked as anti-modern, the more attractive it becomes as a location from which to criticize modernity" (Josephson-Storm 2017:16).

When asked to define the "occult," participants in my interviews used language like "otherworldly" (Group interview April 2022), "the unseen or undefinable" (and that which had been "suppressed" (Group interview April 2022). Their practices of magic, astrology, tarot, tapping into past lives, or relationships with fairies, represent an "alternative wisdom source," which provides access to unseen realities or forms of spirituality not recognized by mainstream religions. While there is some diversity across the sample, a major commonality was the notion that whatever the occult purports to represent or put one in touch with, it is somehow in opposition to dominant forms of power, social norms, scientific inquiry, and/or religious orthodoxy. "Matters of scientific truth are always and everywhere matters of social authority" (Gross and Levitt 1998:47). In other words, the occult represents a de facto counterculture by virtue of its putative rejected status: it is the Other of scientific rationality, and therefore of modernity itself.

Critiques of science as a discursive framework and a vehicle of power have gained a lot of currency over the last few decades, where sciences "from below," feminist epistemologies, and postcolonial theories of science as a tool and a blueprint for domination have opened up conversations about the relations between power and knowledge. The academic left and those who are steeped in cultural constructivism consider science itself as mythical: a "parable, an allegory, that inscribes a set of social norms and encodes a mythic structure justifying the dominance of one

class, one race, one gender over another" (Gross and Levitt 1998:45). Science is itself a kind of story (McKittrick 2021): a teleology of progress that universalizes, and against which subjugated knowledges and counter-histories have flourished as a counterweight and evidence of its failure to totalize. Foucault (1980) has theorized criticism itself as revelatory of these "buried" knowledges, those that are "beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity…local, regional knowledge…which owe its force only to the harshness with which it is opposed by everything surrounding it" (82).

The notion that these kinds of subjugated knowledges are just below the surface, traceable and yet not exactly visible, itself connotes a kind of haunting, as the repressed unconscious. In *Ghostly Matters,* Gordon (2008) argues that we need a sociology that can examine how conditions in the past banished certain individuals, things, or ideas, how circumstances rendered them marginal, excluded, or repressed. In *Sciences from Below,* Harding (2008:3) argues that: "The binary of modernity-tradition is haunted by spectres of the feminine and the primitive…Western sciences and politics, and their philosophies, need an exorcism if they are to contribute at all to social progress for the vast majority of the globe's citizens." In these examples, the ghosts of modernity do not precede their relationship with the modern: they become ghostly precisely because they are repressed, with that repression felt as a "haunting" of the social. The fact that haunting emerges as a means to grapple with this relationship emphasizes the centrality of temporality to the modern, and thus occultism: a ghost is something that makes its mark on the present despite the ways it is supposedly tied to the past. It exposes the past as leaky, excessive, unfinished, ongoing in the present and thus open to re-encounter. The occult is, as I will argue throughout this chapter, is another way to conceive of this haunting, as the thing "behind" but also "before" our current matrices of power. Thinking of the ways the occult has come to represent the

marginal also makes it a good location from which to critique or explore those processes of marginalization themselves, which go much beyond crystals and cards to whole worlds and knowledge traditions themselves, and the populations that live with and through them.

In this chapter, I turn to literature on Victorian science studies, western esotericism, and histories of the human sciences in order to trace how the occult came to occupy the position of "rejected," and what work this is doing, both for those interested in debunking magic, and for those who are interested in celebrating it. The question to ask is: what work is done in confirming that something is or is not magic, and how does this confirmation locate practitioners within a long and complex history of struggle for the power to define methodologies of inquiry and the worlds they build or make disappear? Put differently, "What types of knowledge do you want to disqualify in the very instant of your demand: 'Is it a science'? Which speaking, discoursing subjects—which subjects of experience and knowledge—do you then want to diminish when you say this?" (Foucault 1980:85). Literature that explores the occult as an allegory for the modern allows me to understand how the occult became associated with the countercultural, as well as highlights this relation as a temporal one in which the occult is always already a revival in the face of modernity's contingent erasure. Looking at the modern as emergent through marking out certain bodies, knowledges, and lifeways as historically prior allows me to conceive of the occult as primarily a methodology: a historiographic mode that at once denounces the ruptures modernity requires as well as celebrates these ruptures as new social locations for critique. As we will see over the dissertation, the notion of historiography is central to my theory of race in this project, as well as my theorization of its appeal as a "queer" modality, wherein the crisis of the historical opens up critique of our inherited lenses of recognition and their links to power.

One interviewee, referring to astrology specifically, described the relationship between occultism and science in the following way:

> [Astrology] is sort of something that's seen as being kind of countercultural and also I think in a certain way *defying science* […] There are some people who are into astrology, who think of it as being scientific and who think of it as being this like precise, exact science. […] In my circle, which is like full of queer people […] a lot of us are interested in it as a kind of *way to disrupt this idea that in order to believe in something, it has to be something that can be empirically proven or something that lines up with, like the traditional scientific, rational world view.* […] People do have a lot of resistance to [astrology] and feel this compulsion to convince people […] that those things aren't valid. And I think even just that compulsion in the first place, like why do you feel the need to convince other people to *subscribe to your worldview*? […] Feeling that need to persuade people, I think it's kind of connected to that, yeah, I guess more "masculine" way of thinking, like… [Author: Imperialist?] Yeah, exactly. Like I think it kind of does have some connection to that because that was *a huge driving force for imperialism and colonialism* was like this thinking that these people don't know what's good for them and like how things actually work. (Interview, April 2022, my emphasis)

In this excerpt, the speaker locates astrology in a relationship of negation to science. However, science operates here not as a taken for granted marker of legitimacy and truth, but as a constructed system, which is a method and product of imperial expansion. Instead of making the argument that astrology *really is* a science, like some people do, the speaker and their peers are more interested

in "disrupting" scientific hegemony, deconstructing it as simply another system of interpretation that is open to dispute. As they note later, "I'm interested in reclaiming the nonsensical nature of it." There are a few things I want to highlight in this excerpt that will help to frame the following chapter, and how I conceive of the category of the occult in this project.

First of all, the notion that the occult is oppositional to, or in conflict with the modern (figured here as the "scientific, rational worldview"). In this chapter, I endeavour to show how the occult is actually integral to the modern, rather than its constitutive outside. At the same time, this status as "rejected" is foundational to its potential as a political resource for those who subscribe to it. This takes me to the next point, which is that I explore how this perceived oppositionality represents an appealing social location that offers forms of critique, even a critical community ("A lot of us are interested in it as a way to disrupt…"). This notion that there is a political responsibility to invest in magic as a means of subversion of power was highly prevalent in my interviews. Another participant put it this way:

> At times I felt it was like really important to believe in astrology, believe in magic as a form of resistance to like Christian capitalist patriarchy or whatever, where it's like […] we can feel so powerless against these systems, but like we have, our own world and our own language that does defy the, like, logic, order, reason, light, whatever vocabulary of like the, the mainstream, which is, you know, like anti-woman, anti queer (Interview, April 2022).

In this chapter, I will explore the ways that scholarship has heralded forms of occultism as radical spaces of dissent from which to launch critiques against a rapidly changing world. Doing so allows me to understand how contemporary practitioners recognize and claim the occult as

somehow "queer," ironically investing in the same dichotomy as its biggest debunkers.

Third, there is an insinuation here that the magic, or astrology, did not simply recede into the background because it is obsolete, but has been marginalized as a result of an explicit project of suppression. Like this speaker's description of scientific truth as a "compulsion," imperialism is construed as a historical, ongoing force rather than inevitable verdict. In looking at the struggle for power between emerging scientific disciplines in the 19th century, I theorize the occult as an effect or excess of disciplinary boundaries, wherein something became recognizable as "occult" as a result of still-crystallizing borders of methodological validity, who qualifies to be an expert investigator, and what constitutes evidence. What's more, this distinction between illegitimate and legitimate knowledge is deeply racialized, where the imperial project justifies forms of violence by its production of universality, assigning the status of "pastness" to those that do not accede to its chronology.

This chapter will have the least reference to my own fieldwork, as I focus on reviewing literature that will construct my theoretical foundation moving forward. By focusing on the ways modernity works through disciplinary technologies, one can understand what is at stake in targeting certain knowledge and bodies for correction, as well as to theorize how the consequent status of 'rejected' offers an appealing location from which to criticize such disciplining. While literature on new age culture forms an obvious ancestor to the contemporary phenomenon, and was my initial starting point in this reading, it proves unsatisfying in terms of setting up a framework through which to explore the racial stakes of magical culture and its terrains of power. Where there are references to the racial assemblage of the occult, it tends to be limited to the denouncing of "cultural appropriation" without exploring what that transgression actually means,

what motivates it, and why the occult is so deeply inflected with racial or cultural boundaries that it seems so easy to make such a slippage.

Scholarship exploring the occult as bound up with the struggle to delineate certain populations as more modern than others, in particular how the human sciences emerged in the 19th century as a means to demarcate taxonomies, brings it into relief as part of a racializing assemblage. By framing occultism as a "historiographic concept rather than a philosophical or religious worldview" (Hanegraaff 2014:73), this chapter sets up the occult as a knowledge relation which is inherently temporal. The historiographic mode of the occult is central to my later theorization of the phenomenon as investments in methods of critical, queer, historical encounter. At the same time, it emphasizes the temporal logic that informs the occult as some romantic remnant to be salvaged, as the elements that modernity has lost. Throughout the dissertation, I follow critical race scholars who highlight the centrality of time to racialization, in order to argue that the occult exposes our crises of cultural inheritance. By looking at the temporal structure of modernity and its concepts of history, this chapter demonstrates how the occult not only emerges as regressive or backward, but how this coding is inextricable from a racialized relationship to imperial futurity.

Occult as modernity's Other?

Within a secularist imaginary that predicts the eventual disappearance of all forms of ritual, belief, or action rooted in "superstitious" or "irrational" concepts, the occult represents at best a belated object, and at worst a barrier to progress. In either case, as something at odds with the chief tenets of modernity. The concept that magic has been, or will eventually be, stamped out by scientific rationality is so deeply ingrained in Western teleological narratives of civilization that

knowledge systems considered 'survivals' from a premodern age are not only dismissed, but are often considered threatening to the very fabric of society (see Adorno 1994; Uyar 2016). Alleged to be irrational, dangerous, pathological, or downright silly, thousands of articles have aimed to prove the pseudoscientific basis of occult phenomena, which must be guarded against (see Singer and Benassi 1981; Thagard 1978). Superstitions are considered accidental blips on the inevitable path to enlightenment, which nonetheless requires a lot of management and intervention. Value judgments aside, if secularity is equated with the end of magic, the overarching question that has stumped people across and outside of scholarly fields comes down to: "why do 'irrational' beliefs persist within modernity?"

Some scholars have attempted to explain the above by showing that what are thought to be irrational curiosities of a given culture actually *are* rational, in that they perform some logical function (logical meaning, for most of the academy, not religious). The influential "radical enchantment" literature on the 19th century spiritual "hothouse" goes so far as to argue that spiritual movements apparently at odds with a modernizing America or Europe were in fact an expression of an inchoate form of political subjectivity. Ann Braude's (1989) work on the links between women's suffrage and Spiritualism is canonical in this vein, in which she argues that trance speaking operated as a transitional phase that allowed women to break through limitations on their roles in public (98). She argues that Spiritualists capitalized on gendered expectations of women's piety and passivity in order to make women's religious leadership normative for the first time in American history, conceiving of the otherwise dubious practice of necromancy as in reality a kind of Trojan horse for emancipation. Braude's analysis has been highly influential to a school of writers interested in unearthing Spiritualism's more radical agendas and locating the movement at the centre of a social liberalism that America would come to cherish as uniquely theirs (Crowley

2011). "Radical enchantment" has been a hotbed for other scholarship on Spiritualism and its links with reform, wherein the commitment to speaking with the dead was on par with their commitment to abolition, women's rights, better treatment of American Indians, prison reform, and a whole host of other social justice contentions in the mid to late 19th century (Pike 2004:52). If we take gender equality, religious pluralism, and democratic anti-authoritarian organizing to be features of modern American life, which Braude and those who follow in her footsteps appear to do, Spiritualism in effect helped to *usher in* modernity, rather than obstruct it. However, while this area of scholarship takes a refreshing shift away from decrying credulity, it does so by leaving intact the association of the modern with rationality, self-possession, political agency, and progress.

Emily Ogden (2018) criticizes Braude's position that trance speaking is simply a waypoint on the path to secular self-possession, and charges scholars in this tradition with upholding, rather than dismantling, secularist prescriptions for "proper" bounds of critical thought. Ogden argues that there should be room for considering other functions of Spiritualism "without resorting to empowerment as a measure of the good" (2018:229), including the possibility that the medium's self-dispossession through trance speaking is essential to the spiritualist process of producing knowledge. Locating enchanted states as exterior to power ironically reproduces the secular imaginary, wherein avant-gardism foreshadows a subject's inevitable emancipation. This is a problem because it reifies the perceived dichotomy between disenchanted modernity and spiritual practice…in other words, spiritual practices only coexist with modernity because they are vehicles to achieve modern (and thus secular) liberal self-possession…they are modernity in disguise. "The liability of approaching enchantment as a radical alternative is that it leaves unexamined the relations between enchantment and disenchantment that happen within secularity—and that go

well beyond repression of something standing "outside" the secular consensus" (ibid:14). The question to ask, according to Ogden, is not whether or not there is magic, but what work is done in negating or confirming that there is? (ibid:8). She aims rather to historicize enchantment as something that is necessitated, not negated by, the modern.

Ogden's critique brings up an important conundrum: that academics across different epistemological traditions have recaptured occult phenomena according to their own investments in what constitutes a proper pathway to thought or action. As such, those who are looking to explore the history of science or other questions that are linked to the development of the modern today are just as embroiled in the "boundary war" as commentators ever were, involved in the very forms of classification they purport to describe. In the case of American studies or feminist theory, scholars like Braude have been eager to find in Spiritualism a portent of later developments central to their fields, rather than stay with the trouble of the bedfellows that seem strange through our contemporary lens which has sanitized the cross-pollination of spirit, science, and weird objects throughout history.

In my own project, I must watch my own impulses to "justify" my informants' practices by demonstrating the ways they are put in service of political work, as if this brings it out of a spiritual or immaterial sphere. Highlighting the ways politics shows up in these practices does not override their spiritual function: in fact, I think participants understand the two as inextricable from one another. The goal is not to demonstrate that the contemporary phenomenon of the queer occult is *really* political (and therefore rational), but rather how it is always already engaged in an interrogation of the proper boundaries of knowledge production, which exceed the narrow frameworks that secularism defines.

Literature on Victorian transatlantic science theorizes the occult as an allegory for the modern, wherein occult practices become legible in terms of struggles for power between diverging modalities of knowledge rather than static within an apparently given rubric of backward vs. modern. The Victorian period has been fertile ground for scholars across religious studies, history of science, anthropology, western esotericism, and other disciplines interested in disputing Weber's infamous assertion that modernity is defined by disenchantment. What does it mean that the very period we begin to recognize the most salient features of modern life also represents the height of Spiritualism, mesmerism, and other psychical investigative cultures in the US and Britain? The apparent paradox that the emergence of the 'modern' as a horizon of expectation and desire overlapped with one of the most intense periods of religious and spiritual pluralism, "weird" phenomena, and occult revivals has demanded different theories of the relationship between enchantment and modernity than their mutual exclusion. From psychic sensitivity, communications from souls surviving bodily death, notions of astral planes, spheres, or journeys, and concepts of mesmerism, vibrations, and electric currents (Alder 2020), the 19th century did not represent an end of magic, but a struggle over what kinds of knowing would be disciplined against new emerging rubrics of classification, which took on a sense of urgency under shifting boundaries of the American and British empires. On Victorian science, Luckhurst argues: "It is important to note the unevenness and ambiguities of expert knowledge and the tactics of inclusion and expertise…Sciences like psychical research were not counterhergemonic but another emergence along the fault-lines of a new structure" (2002:21).

Examining debates in this period over what counted as evidence, how to interpret phenomena, and who should have access to scientific authority have been fruitful to expose the

boundaries between orthodox and heterodox knowledge as constructed and volatile rather than given. If "science is not only a means of categorizing the world, but of categorizing science itself in relation to other knowledge systems that are excluded" (Nader 1996:3), this categorization is ongoing, in flux, and is always already an interrogation of power. This is important for my project because of the ways these technologies of incorporation or expulsion have shaped what continues to be read as "occult," wherein the disciplining itself is crucial to its contemporary definition. Scholars interested in challenging the idea that modernity is necessarily disenchanted must interrogate the very concept of modernity itself: what does it represent, how do we know its contours, and how has it come to appear as civilization's natural goal or outcome? Doing so shifts the discourse away from highlighting a set of given beliefs, practices, and behaviours as putatively enchanted or disenchanted toward "examin[ing] the terrains which governed its appearance, shaped its potential utterances, endowed its formulations with possible meanings and created its believers and skeptics" (Luckhurst 2002:10). As such, the occult emerges as a crisis of method rather than belief (Owen 2007).

Thinking of the occult as a methodological distinction, it is not very productive to try to define a list of attributes, a worldview, or a unifying belief system that comprises it, though of course there are certain practices that tend to be grouped under its umbrella. Rather, it should be seen as a relationship to a shifting target of legitimacy and its location within or outside of the accepted doctrines of modernity. If there are practices we take for granted as "occult" today, it is because that relationship as the inverse of the modern has been crystallized. Indeed, this is exactly what informants recognized as the "queer" ontology of occultism: it was described as "something that has been othered"(Group interview April 2022); "not what we determine as normal" (Interview April 2022), and the "unconventional…the behind or the hidden"(Interview April

2022). Etymologically, given that the 'occult' literally means 'hidden,' this meaning has shifted in some ways from representing a natural mystery which a select few have the keys to unlock, as in 15th or 16th century references to "occultism," to a relationship of domination wherein the occlusion is being actively maintained by some known or unknown power (Eamon 1994). For example, one informant defined magic as "practises that are usually transmitted through oral tradition and that have been suppressed by hegemonic forms of spirituality" (Group interview April 2022). It is important to note that what we have come to perceive as the "strange sciences" or occult phenomena were not always considered so at odds with the normal: this process of developing the occult-modern dichotomy has a historical context, which is so integrated into occultism today that it has come to represent an ontological position. "Occult I think it literally means like dark and mysterious and kind of indefinable. And it kind of connotes to me like, really modern practices of alchemy and necromancy, you know, these kind of forbidden knowledges…I don't know, like my theory that I would come up with is that like those were the educated elite […] the wealthy, like white men who like had access to like books, who were literate and highly educated and like the more…those who were like branded as witches or folk magic practitioners, they were more inheriting traditions or like doing their own thing. And I feel like in queer community we're probably more naturally connected to that" (Group interview, April 2022). In this example, the speaker projects a dichotomy of "folk" and "high" magic onto the past that they understand as shaped by class, gender, and race.

In *Esotericism and the Academy* (2014) Hanegraaff argues that western esotericism is a mirror for secular thought. Because any query into traditions of 'occult,' 'esoteric,' or magical knowledge depends first on our theoretical construction of these concepts, the scholar's (or the

debunker's) claims will always already be imbued with their own criteria of what constitutes the thing itself under scrutiny. The occult is therefore a knowledge relation, with any inquiry into it always already an interrogation into the effects of our own methods of classifying, or disciplining—with the full weight of the meaning of the word—knowledge, and the populations attached to it. The bulk of research that features occult or esoteric themes published in the past few decades has traced the ways that the modern sciences were co-constituted with the very occult revivals they were purported to triumph over. Scholars in this field ask not: 'how does magic persist within modernity?' but rather, "how in the face of widespread belief in spirits did disenchantment come to function as a regime of truth or disciplinary norm in the human sciences?" (Josephson-Storm 2017:17).

In their introduction to the book *Strange Science* (2017), Karpenko and Claggett write: "for Victorian audiences, thinkers, and scientists, the category of the scientific…was remarkably if not jubilantly unstable and existed in a disorderly space marked by heterodox methods of inquiry" (2). What is often taken for granted as a stable distinction between the occult and hard sciences has actually been applied retroactively to a period where these boundaries were under dynamic negotiation (Morrison 2008), with all parties in question interested in expanding the boundaries of a relatively plastic science to include their own methodologies (Viswanthan 2000). "At stake was the question of the validity of different kinds of knowledge; borderlands existed in the gaps between confidence that the scientific method led to truth and establishment of what that truth was" (Alder 2020:20). Representative of the work on the ways that occultism overlapped with and helped to constitute the core sciences is Alex Owen's (2004) *Place of Enchantment*, in which she focuses on psychoanalysis and psychology as drawing from the same well of ideas on human perception as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and other magical societies active in Britain

in the late 19th to early 20th centuries. She demonstrates that the so-called occult revival of the period was integral to the emerging concepts of the 'modern,' rather than an example of what it was leaving behind. Owen refutes the theory that magical societies operated as a kind of surrogate faith (see also Cox 2003), thinking of it instead as a crisis of methodology looking for new ways of knowing. Considering this, the occult can only become legible in terms of how it has been demarcated against other, competing epistemologies…it is the stuff that someone aiming at modernity instrumentalizes to cement their own position on the correct side of the boundary (Ogden 2018, see also Morrison 2008). In unmooring 'occult' and 'science' from opposing poles, Victorian scientific cultures appear as a struggle for power between kissing cousins rather than a Manichean tug-of-war (Ogden 2018).

At the heart of scholarship on Victorian science is the debate over what constitutes an expert scientific investigator. As such, there has been a shift in perspective from framing those who dabble in pursuits like animal magnetism, Spiritualism, and hypnosis as credulous fools to considering them as radical empiricists with their own standards for what constitutes proper scientific inquiry and its stakes for society at large. Spiritualists, for example, were well known to invite skeptics to take part in séances, to see for themselves the proof of communication across the veil of death. "Spiritualists usually believed that they exuded the scientific spirit of the age and were merely applying the empirical, inductive and rational methods of enquiry that had proved so successful in understanding the material cosmos to questions of mind and spirit" (Noakes 2019:47). Spiritualists embraced some of the materialist commitment of the more hard-line sciences while expanding the realm of accepted forms of epistemology to include both embodied and disembodied knowledge (Alder 2020). Similarly, Theosophists claimed that they alone pursued the true mission of science, blending int with what they considered universal religious

concepts to unlock heretofore unresolved mysteries of the universe. Annie Besant, a prominent Theosophist, herself claimed that "Theosophy accepts the method of science – observation, experiment, arrangement of ascertained facts, induction, hypothesis, deduction, verification, assertion of the discovered truth – but immensely increases its arena" (Alder 2020:20).[2]

The notion that the human mind was only partially knowable, and that strategies of self-realization are needed to harness its power, is a core Theosophical/magical concept that was reformulated in modern psychology as the repressed unconscious (Owen 2004). This example is typical of the ways that 'science' and 'the occult' diverged more so in terms of method and perceived stakes of their investigations than in the object of study: while magicians actively pursued multiple selves in order to expand their self-awareness across multiple realities, early psychologists pathologized the fractured self as a crisis in need of repair (Owen 2004). Put this way, anxiety over the popularity of occult practices in Victorian Britain has less to do with their obvious falsity than their proximity to methods of scientific inquiry concurrently becoming enshrined in the nation's institutions. Ogden argues that enchantment itself is a "modernizing gesture" (2018:10), and always appears as the negotiation between those who are aiming at modernity and those whom they see as non-modern. Some of the most vehement debunkers of spiritualism were themselves researchers into psychical phenomena, desperate to gain some credibility against the fringe who threatened to undermine them.

While medical psychology and occultism might be different expressions of a fin-de-siècle inquiry into the constitution and meaning of consciousness, the practitioners of the new

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[2] Viswanthan argues that Theosophy emerged as a religion that could be conceived as scientific insofar as it operated according to a set of laws and principles, that could be measured with some of the emerging tools and techniques of science. "Theosophy's interest in the formation of consciousness lent itself to evolutionary theory, which supported the modern teleology of progress and the fulfillment of a world plan" (Viswanthan 2000:5-6)

sciences of mind understood the necessity of eradicating any trace of occult philosophy from their work. The struggle for scientific validation and recognition in the field of medical psychology was in part bound up with the effort to rid psychology of any taint of the occult arts (Owen 2004:142).

The anthropologist E.B. Tylor is another example, whose "harsh condemnation of occultism as the 'lowest known stage of civilization' cannot be read outside of his own anxiety to differentiate his own methodology in the emerging science of anthropology from those he took as subjects" (Ferguson 2017:424). What's more, Freud's personal correspondence has shown that he was very interested in certain aspects of occult phenomena, specifically telepathy, but wrote that "a psychoanalyst's refraining from taking part publicly in occult studies is a purely practical measure" to not run the risk of associating himself with the more dubious aspects of psychical phenomena that would injure his career (Massicotte 2014).

> "Spiritualism became a self- conscious movement precisely by disassociating itself from any occult tradition and appealing, not to the inward illumination of mystic experience, but to the observable and verifiable objects of empirical science…Leading spiritualists for most of the 19th century held a childlike faith in empirical science as an exclusive approach to knowledge and probably benefited more than any other group from the great popular interest in science awakened in that century. No others worked as hard to borrow its prestige" (Moore 1972:477-478).

While there was actually some level of mystic experience that was central to Spiritualism, Moore's argument cements two things: that the occult/science dichotomy has historically been

incredibly dynamic and contested, and that contemporary notions of what is considered on the darker side of this dichotomy are not necessarily consistent with what practitioners at the time would have argued. While claiming the occult as a desirable, self-conscious opposition to hegemony has been central to certain spiritual countercultures, such a divestment from the institutions of science has by no means been a given in its legacies.

What was at stake in this jockeying for power across these nascent investigative cultures? Most scholars have focused on how the disputes over occult phenomena helped to demarcate a scientific professional body against the lay public. Noakes argues that "spiritualism threatened to make accessible scientific discoveries that were normally the domain of a trained group of experts" (2012:30). Beyond an interest in personal career trajectories or disciplinary elitism itself, I am particularly interested in readings that emphasize the extent to which maintaining the boundary between science and everything else was a matter of national importance, foundational to a state's imagined claims to progress, or its path toward modernity's horizon. Corinna Treitel (2004), working in the German context, puts it poignantly in her case study of Anna Rothe, a prominent medium working in Berlin who was arrested for fraud in 1902 and sentenced to two years' jail time. Referring to the séance incident in question, Treitel asks: "How…are we to interpret the fact that Anna Rothe was treated and punished as if she were a serious public threat, when all she had done was pull two flowers out of nowhere?" (ibid:166). According to Treitel, Rothe *was* indeed a public menace, in that she threatened the "epistemological order" of fin-de-siècle Berlin, the "boundary between science and public, between those who produced new knowledge and stoked the engines of socioeconomic and cultural progress and those who enjoyed its fruits but did not participate in its production" (ibid). Put differently, the voracity with which the state descended on

Rothe as she carried out a private séance among satisfied customers only makes sense in the context of a growing German liberalism which upheld the interdependence of science and social progress. On trial was not the parlour tricks of a middle-aged woman, but rather the role the public should be allotted to participate in the scientific enterprise, which was increasingly becoming a synecdoche for German enlightenment itself.

In Treitel's example of how the state sanctioned one particular community of scientists to monopolize the discovery of knowledge, she contributes a particularly literal example of the 'disciplinary' aspect of knowledge and the academe. Thinking of discipline as verb, rather than as noun, lays bare how the human sciences actually constructed the very objects they purported to describe or manage, and brings the phenomenon of the occult more squarely into questions of power, violence, and dispossession. Given that my informants are so invested in using the occult as a decolonial framework or resource, which they see as potentially subversive of the matrices of nation, race, and empire, it is necessary to consider how the relationship of power and knowledge in occultism extend beyond squabbles within scientific elitism. Rather, debates over the boundaries of scientific investigation, what constitutes evidence, and who is qualified to discover it, as part and parcel of an imperial framework that organized (and continues to organize) a globalizing world into taxonomies of progressive civility.

The myth of disenchantment

Exploring the ways that modernity, construed as 'enlightenment,' has historically been intertwined with a variable and inconsistent rubric for defining the occult, it becomes apparent that table rapping, astral projection, telepathy, and the other occult doubles of fin-de-siècle transatlantic scientific culture were not simply accidental 'survivals' destined to disappear, but in the words of

Hanegraaff, "the dark canvas of presumed otherness modernity needs in order to paint the outlines of its own identity" (2014: 254). In this way, enchantment comes to light as something modernity requires, rather than what it is inimical to. Those aiming at modernity designate something as occult in order to demonstrate their transcendence over it, relegating certain objects to the margins and then justifying that violent wresting as a natural outcome of progress, caught in a paradoxical relationship where ever more examples of magic must be dug up in order to demonstrate the ongoing incorporation of localized knowledge systems into a singular teleology. In other words, the modern renders some things "ghostly" (Gordon 2008:18). Investigating the imperial technologies of discipline that are in part responsible for designating something as "occult" helps to understand what is at stake for my informants when they speak about their practices as forms of "reclamation," connection with a disrupted heritage, or resistance to colonialism.

For example, one diasporic Latino informant describes his "spirituality as a way of connecting to our past because of our history of colonialism [and American imperialism]. It just untaps this kind of generational knowledge that has been passed down" (Interview, May 2022). While Chapter 5 is dedicated to exploring the ways the occult is considered a form of ancestral knowledge, it is important to include here to give some context to how I explore disenchantment in terms of cultural erasure and other forms of imperial repression. In a group interview, another participant, referring to her distant Haitain ancestry, responded to a question about what drew each person into their particular practice or interest in occultism.

There was a moment where I feel like there was something just missing. There's just something… just that's missing. And there's something inside of me that just, you know, felt like I didn't know what my roots were. Like literally I didn't feel grounded. I felt like I was floating through space and time. And that's when I started being interested about like, you

know, I realized I don't know anything about my ancestors. […] I realized there's a lot of things that were robbed of us, you know, robbed from us or things that were hidden, burned, destroyed, that we had, that was, you know, like a knowledge and a richness of knowledge. And… that's, that's kind of what I was trying to, I'm trying to find (Group interview, April 2022).

In order to take seriously this feeling of loss and interrupted transmission, it is crucial to explore the occult as a knowledge relation that is perceived of as oppressed, and how this locates it alongside other questions of historical visibility and inheritance. In other words, I argue that the occult, insofar as we conceive of it as a form of disciplined knowledge, opens up conversations about how knowledge traditions and the people they are linked to have been forced into the margins of modernity. Gordon, talking of what haunts our social formations, argues that "The oppressed past…is whatever organized violence has repressed and in the process formed into a past, a history, remaining nonetheless alive and accessible to encounter" (2008:65).

Scholarship that has attended closely to the imperial structure that informs the relationship between modernity and disenchantment is crucial in order to understand how struggles for power between mesmerists, hypnotists, and medical psychiatrists is part and parcel of a broader, more sustained machinery of the processes of colonization that render certain populations more or less evolved than others based on their perceived attachment to "myth." Global catastrophic intervention, most notably in the expansion of the European empire and its "civilizing missions" to the colonies it attempted to administrate, were justified on the basis of such a rubric. Construing the modern as a project, which necessitates the disappearance, incorporation, relegation of certain populations and systems of knowledge to an elsewhere (Lowe 2015, see also McKittrick 2015), is

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important for this dissertation as a whole, given that those I interview are preoccupied with finding methods of contending with that forced disappearance. In *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon (2008) explores how "knowing" is disciplined in the contemporary age, which demands inquiry "into the character of an economic and political system that depends essentially on practices of social disappearance and enslavement." Throughout this dissertation, I look at how what on the surface looks like squabbles over superstition and pseudoscience actually take place within the context of this social disappearance, how the (never fully complete) obsoletion of "magic" is part and parcel of the violent destruction of modes of being-together that must be urgently reclaimed (Azoulay 2019). Doing so allows me to theorize my informants attempts to "retrieve, reconstruct, and give an account of diverse worlds that persist despite the historicized limits of our world" not as a failure of reason or a crutch in times of uncertainty, but as an impetus for their own survival (ibid:289). As one informant stated:

> I'm really into past lives, so I feel like I've been […] involved in this type of work for many, many lifetimes. So I do feel like […] I'm building on my own knowledge and then I do believe collectively that we're building on ancestral knowledge and that we carry that with us. And there's different ways to tap into that…I definitely feel like I'm like, I've been doing this for thousands of years. I'm tapping in and I'm carrying that knowledge. I'm remembering, remembering that (Interview, May 2022).

This remembering, as I will argue later, is a kind of antidote to the "colonial unknowing" that obscures the conditions of its own making (Lowe 2015:39).

In *The Myth of Disenchantment,* Josephson-Storm calls modernity itself a myth, which garners

its power precisely through its pretence to mythlessness, or neutrality. He sets out to disrupt the myth of the modern by tracing "its most important subtype—the myth of disenchantment" (2017:309). He argues that modernity is only legible through rupture, and one of the most pervasive stories of rupture we subscribe to is the idea that the West was once enchanted, and it is no longer. In other words, modernity becomes visible as both temporally and spatially distinct from the pre-modern through the putative loss of magic. Josephson-Storm, while writing from religious studies, is part of a cross-disciplinary area of scholarship which has been interested in exposing the ways that science as a systematized knowledge system is a keystone of modernity, which is just as historically specific as any cultural knowledge system could be (Latour 1993). Across postcolonial theory, history of science, and cultural studies, it has been demonstrated that science and technology were key components of the civilizing mission, and were used to justify European political hegemony (Nader 1996:12), and scholars seek to undo these universalisms.

At the core of this postmodern field is a crisis in representation, "a fracture in the epistemological regime of modernity, a regime that rested on a faith in the reality effect of social science. Such a predicament has led to…an understanding that the practices of writing, analysis, and investigation, whether of social or cultural material, constitute less a scientifically positive project than a cultural practice that organizes particular rituals of storytelling told by stated investigators" (Gordon 2008:10). Looking back to the fieldwork excerpt that opened this chapter, it is evident that those I interviewed share this critical stance toward science as a kind of enterprise, which is entwined with questions of power and boundaries. Consistent across my sample are explicit forms of opposition to the "orderly boxy world of reason and light and truth that was really imposed on Western society" (Group interview April 2022) wherein "science as an institution has been really violent to marginalized people" (Interview April 2022). Investigating the ways that the

pursuit of science, as the core of Western modernity, evolved to describe, and even usher in, relationships of domination and the subjugation of local knowledge systems is crucial for this project. The temporal logic of modernity in particular, which I will explore below, is key to theorizing the occult as a historiographic mode, in that naming something pre-modern prescribes a certain directionality to the passage of time, and who is qualified to map it. By exposing the colonial frameworks of dis/enchantment, the "loss" of magic appears not so much as an inevitable disappearance, but a forced subjugation which is inextricable from the ways that certain populations were and continue to be racialized as backward, behind, or out of time with the chronology of the modern. While I will explore the racial assemblage in more detail in Chapter 3, looking now at the colonial matrix of the occult as knowledge relation is crucial in order to lay the groundwork for a theory of race in this project that is not confined to culture as possession, but rather thinks of race in terms of a "theory of history" (Nyong'o 2009).

In *The Myth of Disenchantment,* it becomes apparent the extent to which the goals of the emerging sciences were inextricable from the colonizing impulse of the states which circumscribed its contours. For Josephson-Storm, modernity requires a magical or enchanted elsewhere, which human sciences such as sociology, anthropology, and psychology—still inchoate in the 19th century—evolved to describe. As one example of how the sciences developed to describe and reify this rupture, he turns to one of the most famous popularizers of disenchantment: the anthropologist E.B. Tylor. Tylor came up with a theory of cultural evolution wherein religion represents an outdated form of human rationality which will eventually disappear, of which any remaining traces threaten the integrity of the natural evolutionary pathway. 'Superstition,' or beliefs and practices seemingly at odds with modern society were thus marked as prior cultural remnants, and for Tylor, "the goal of ethnography is precisely 'to expose the remains of crude old culture…and to mark

these out for destruction'" (Tylor, as cited in Storm 2017:99). Under the guise of pure description or observation, Tylor and others work was actually performative, complicit in bringing about the destruction it "predicted."

The new discipline of anthropology thus in a sense created the dis/enchantment it was tasked with classifying and managing. Anthropology helped to construct an enchanted elsewhere which would be its object of study, producing work that was founded on the belief that the observer was essentially different from who he observed, a relationship always construed through a colonial relationship that necessitated the latter's prior temporality. The human sciences create new kinds of social locations which authorize forms of information gathering that do not, as they pretend, passively mirror a static system, but significantly alter it. "Modern science emerged in the 19th century with a radical reformulation of European natural philosophy and expanded through globalization and the selective absorption and disintegration of local knowledge systems" (Josephson-Storm 2017:14). As such, Josephson-Storm argus that sociology and anthropology are more likely to birth new revivals of paganism and magic than suppress them (ibid:7). This paradox is significant to note, as investigators often did have an ambivalent relationship with the receding cultures they were tasked with "marking out." Forged through a narrative of disenchantment, modernity necessarily communicates a kind of loss, a loss which even the most hardcore cultural evolutionists mourned as industrialization and urbanization increasingly romanticized a receding age. "Secular modernity's repressed desire is bound up with its loathing of the rank sectarianism out of which it crafted its own identity" (Viswanathan 2000:18). Nowhere is this ambivalence better represented than in the advent of folklore studies, which was first institutionalized in 1878 as a kind of 'internal' or domestic anthropology largely focusing on the Celts as the cultural precedent of the Brits who studied them. Folklore itself was a way to measure a given population's

imagined distinctiveness from modern rationality, as the only people who seemed to lack folklore were urban, educated, English Protestants, against whom all others were racialized (Josephson-Storm 2017:129). But folklorists also lamented what they saw as the inevitable disappearance of the myths and customs they studied. The purported mythlessness of English urbanites pushed them to find a kind of refuge in places like the Scottish Highlands, where the romance of simpler, more harmonious times of some recent past could be observed before it was corrupted by the onslaught of civilization (Richardson 2017). Folklorism was thus both a site of the consolidation of empire and of resistance to imperialism, because it marked out and racialized local knowledge systems at the same time that it worked to preserve them (Josephson-Storm 2017). This ambivalence is not a paradox, but the result of the ways that in the myth of disenchantment, magic appears as always already disappearing.

Ironically, the notion that magic is disappearing from the world is not something that is new. "[T]he gods, spirits, or fairies have been disappearing since at least Chaucer and arguably since Plutarch. In this respect, magic is constantly vanishing, even as magicians have claimed to recover it. In sum, disenchantment is part of the trope of magic itself" (ibid:311). In a true Foucauldian mode, Josephson-Storm argues that disenchantment is not actually a real historical event or epoch, but part of the very power mechanism it criticizes. Turning to German philosophers in the 18th and 19th centuries, he historicizes what he calls the myth of absence, or the notion that, since the death of God, there is a need to search for a new story, or mythology, that would write a genesis of the German people. He argues that in searching for such a mythology, they actually constructed the most conniving and pervasive mythology of all: that they had no myth. While much of this history is outside the scope of my project, what Josephson-Storm calls the myth of mythlessness has far-reaching implications in Europe and everywhere Europe defines itself against, which I see very

explicitly navigated in my own interviews. As I will explore more in the following three chapters, the feeling of loss itself is highly motivating, and can be volatile. The myth of absence is not only about the presence or absence of magic, but is necessarily also an appraisal of cultural/racial heritage and its apparent dissolution, which magic, as a knowledge relation, often comes to stand for. The myth of absence also, I argue, underlies the mythological neutrality of whiteness as a void, and justifies the incorporation of new kinds of difference in order to fill that sense of emptiness, which I will discuss in Chapter 3 and 4. As I will explore in the next chapter, queer historicism is also haunted by a paradox of present absence, wherein the queer figure can only be conceived of in terms of that which did not appear. The feeling of loss, and what political aspirations and forms of solidarity that loss gives license to, is woven through all aspects of this project. For now, I emphasize how this notion of a mythless society not only contrasted supposedly modern societies from those still mired in the superstitions of yesteryear, but how this claim to the loss of myth ironically produces its own forms of erasure, promoting a universal neutrality at the same time that it cries out for something to temper the loss. Eng and Kaznjian (2003:6) have written about melancholia and the forms of sociality it produces: "the political, economic, and cultural dimensions of how loss is apprehended and history is named— how that apprehension and naming produce the phenomenon of "what remains."" I see magic as it is reformulated today as a language for this loss, and what forms of sociality are undone and potentially remade in the wake of it.

Disenchantment is thus both "real" and not real: we have never really been "disenchanted," at the same time that the project of modernity as a process of disenchantment has had, and continues to have, very real, deleterious effects on lifeways, belief systems, and knowledge traditions that have been slated as somehow at odds with it. The loss is in some ways performative. In interviews, informants brought up different examples of their understanding of loss in terms of "burned

records" of Indigenous ancestry, ancestral practices being all but "snuffed out," the denial of spirituality in their immigrant families, and the ways that "imperialism steals your identity" (Group interview, April 2022). At the same time, to assert that what is lost is irretrievable reproduces the effect of its erasure. Rather, Azoulay (2019:286) argues that one must object to participate in and naturalize the outcomes of imperial violence by making thinkable the reversibility of their effects. Modernity and its colonial and imperial handmaidens fantasize totality, but are also resisted, leaving a gap that always threatens to undo the whole.

In this way, occult "survivals" actually *are* threatening to the very fabric of a society, insofar as their survival is seen as a resistance to its normalizing effects. That something is a survival is turned into a kernel of hope or possibility for those I interview: evidence of its disruptive power. "Folk magic is, is complex because it never dies and it's passed on in ways and maybe not through the worship of the written word, you know […] But it's passed on and it, and it, it mutates to survive" (Group interview April 2022). As long as modernity is conceived of as an incomplete project which emerges through the repression of other trajectories, "survival" will connote a critical exposure of power, with this exposure appealing to those who are interested in exploding it further. Gordon calls for a new sociology which can detect "how conditions in the past banished certain individuals, things, or ideas, how circumstances rendered them marginal, excluded, or repressed" (2008:viii). In a way, my informants enact this kind of sociology, though they might not see it that way, in their critique of the ways that certain forms of knowing have been disciplined, and the search for other methodologies that might give rise to something else. The notion that the occult represents something that is retrievable, despite its relative inaccessibility, is crucial to formulating a political ethic or an orientation toward it. Consider how this informant frames it:

It would be like untrue to say like…colonization, happened period. And like, oh, 'forms of

indigenous like spirituality and like community are like ruined.' That is completely untrue, you know? And I think we can see kind of a similarity in how like this idea of a kind of ancient, like, goddess energy, persists, but again, we don't even know, like if there was even ancient goddess cults in Europe, but it's more of a kind of narrative idea. But we do know obviously that there have been indigenous forms of spirituality, like pre colonization that *persist in some ways* (Interview, April 2022, my emphasis).

What they appear to be arguing here is that colonization, and its "ruining" of Indigenous forms of knowing, is not an event that is over or complete…while the process has devastating effects, those effects are nonetheless not total nor irreversible, in that something persists despite it.

As we will see later, my informants position themselves in alignment with what has been repressed, and herald the capacity to "persist" as the basis of their own empowerment, and the goal of their magical practices. At the same time, the interest in or privileging of that which has been relegated to the margins does not transcend the relationship of power that structures that interest: it is not possible to only be a victim of modernity's requisite exclusions, or only an oppressor. For this reason, I turn now to a work that explores how nineteenth century occultists themselves participated in the "modernizing gesture," as uneasy figures who worked both within and sometimes in tension with a colonial framework that put certain populations and their knowledge traditions in tenuous reach. Doing so invites in a consideration of the occult not only as an effect but as a vehicle for power, as well as shows the ways that desire for that which has been "lost" also licenses forms of risky identification in order to access it.

The ideal fieldworker

How does marking something as pre-modern justify its extraction by those who are in colonial relation to it? As we saw above, fields like Anthropology and Folklore studies have historically been sites of ambivalence with respect to the project of modernity, in that many of its early researchers were sympathetic to the objects they marked out for eventual disappearance. I chose to focus on an analysis of these fields because of the ways that this sympathy and the strange positionality of the ethnographer actually exacerbates the colonial architecture of the modern. As I have been trying to show here, the occult's relationship to power is not one of pure repression, but one of use, and not only by those who snub it. However, what remains important is that even if the relationship is one of reverence, desire, or attempted reclamation, marking something as pre-modern produces a relationship of power which then conditions how that object is used or circulates. This is a major conundrum of my interviews, as I will explore more in chapter 4, as participants are sympathetic to marginalized knowledge systems at the same time that they recognize their relationship to them as shaped by power. It is necessary to contextualize this relationship without resorting to a definition of the occult as something which is *a priori* problematic, as in some more paranoid readings. At the same time, it would be a mistake to herald it as always already subversive of power, which has been the take of some strains of literature. Thinking of the occult as the natural inheritance of the outsider, risks covering over or misrecognizing how it participates or justifies certain operations of power, even, and indeed *especially* for those who express some desire toward the "pre-modern." It is this operation from the "middle" that I am so interested in: how those who make certain betrayals or subversions of colonial power end up also replicating these structures in other ways.

Looking at *The Mahatma Letters*, a canonical text of the Theosophical Society that was

compiled in 1923, Viswanathan (2000) explores the ways that "Eastern" mysteries were ventriloquized into bureaucratic knowledge by Western Theosophists. Somewhat paradoxically, the letters, apparently communicated by spiritual Indo-Tibetan masters through their living surrogates, represent a scathing critique of British colonialism at the same time that "the Tibetan Masters could be legitimated only if they were anthropologized as conduits to the mysteries of the Orient, that is, not seen as original sources of knowledge but as facilitators to its acquisition, like the native guides and interpreters who led colonial adventurers into unfamiliar territory" (Viswanathan 2000:13). What makes the letters especially compelling is that they were widely believed to be forged by Theosophy's founder Helena Blavatsky. The Society for Psychical Research deemed the letters to be in her own hand after conducting an investigation into their legitimacy. Given that the alleged Master Koot Hoomi, "bitterly criticizes the racial politics of a colonizing Britain that places conditions on the acceptance of knowledge, especially when it originates outside the Western world" it makes it all the more compelling that Koot Hoomi is likely a pen name for Blavatsky or her other interlocutors Olcott and Hume (ibid). The letters communicate a critique of disenchantment, called "disenthrallment" in this instance, and the desire to overcome it by restoring the fractured consciousness of the world to wholeness. "The masters' communications of occult secrets stage an encounter with a past suppressed by the onset of Western modernity and secularism. They brilliantly combine a critique of both colonialism and secularism by admitting the occult into the making of worldly relations and a more inclusive account of the world than the one allowed by imperial, secular histories. Such an account would make room for the "histories of the people whose knowledge is mined and appropriated" (ibid:19). At the same time, ironically, this critique is routed through the authorial voice of the Western interpreter, whether Blavatsky wrote the letters or was simply their medium. The letters represent

imagined alternative possibilities to a colonial framework, but reinforce a necessarily Orientalizing relationship that continues to require the Western authorial translator or intermediary for native knowledge. Whether Blavatsky outright impersonated and invented a persona for herself as holder of sacred "Eastern" spiritual knowledge, or privileged herself as the ideal interlocutor in order to represent such messages to the world does not really matter: either possibility reifies a colonial relationship to desired forms of consciousness even as Blavatsky laments colonization as the force that has rendered these forms of knowledge increasingly unavailable.

Richardson's (2017) work on second sight in the Scottish Highlands is generative in framing how the occult, as a knowledge relation, is always already embedded within a colonial framework. Richardson critically reflects on the stakes of constructing a particular place or time as with or without magic, and how folklore studies and anthropology were central to both the romanticization and the appropriation of racialized knowledge. In her book *Second Sight* (2017), she puts questions of nationhood and the supernatural in close proximity to each other in order to ask what processes of colonization are at stake in constructing second sight as an ancient Gaelic tradition (4). Richardson is interested in how "myths, customs and lore were harvested from marginalized communities and put to work in the forming of elite knowledge and the metropole" (ibid), and crucially for this project, she focuses in particular how occultists themselves participated in this dynamic. Insodoing, she reframes occult practices from mere "survivals," to peer technologies in consigning Britain's colonial Other to the pre-modern. In discussing this work, keep in mind that "occult" operates here as at once representing a receding practice that was localized to a particular place, embedded within a cultural matrix that distinguished a population as "still" enchanted, as well as a set of methodologies that were proposed to observe and understand it. Occult is a shifting,

ontological distinction, which in this case could refer to second sight, as well as the psychical researchers who sought to study it, with different stakes and horizons of possibility for both.

For Richardson, the Scottish Highlands provides an ideal case study in the process of constructing the enchanted elsewhere. The Highlands represented a pre-modern landscape saturated with superstitions and inexplicable realities, an "imaginative resource" for the English, whether it was romanticized as evidence of a golden age or demonized as a threat to the empire's collective enlightenment (ibid:45). "Second sight contributed to the marketable image of the poetic ancient premodern land which provided refuge from the industrial South" (ibid:73), which could be enjoyed by growing numbers of domestic tourists hoping to experience the last gasp of a dying epoch. At the same, time, locals invested in this image as a means of recuperating and celebrating their heritage and national character as distinct from England, paradoxically positioning their own practices and beliefs as "survivals."

In an aim to look at spiritualist and other related movements as imbricated in evolutionary theory and anthropology, Richardson explores how members of The Society for Psychical Research (SPR) as well as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn took part in undertaking immersive fieldwork expeditions to Scotland. Both groups sought to gain knowledge about second sight, though with divergent methods that sometimes sowed tension between them. The SPR was preoccupied with gaining some credibility by maintaining rigorous empiricist methods, and saw themselves as observers more than participants or believers, while members of the Order were more likely to pursue second sight to develop their own visionary capacities as magicians. The case of Ada Freer is illuminating here, a medium sent by the SPR to collect testimony from seers, after their normal methods of gathering information by survey failed spectacularly. Unused to having to resort to the testimony of "illiterate crofter[s] or fisherm[e]n" (ibid:25), researching

second sight posed a methodological barrier for the SPR which Freer in part overcame by cultivating a fabricated Scottish ancestry for herself, emphasizing her own prowess as a clairvoyant descended from generations of Highland seers. By "going native," Freer fancied herself the ideal fieldworker, trained in empiricist method and with access to institutional support, at the same time that she distanced herself from the other English tourists and detached scientists.

> Evidence associated with second sight was problematic in several respects, being not only sourced from witnesses not usually deemed as trustworthy, but also embedded within a culture from which SPR members were largely excluded. As chief researcher, Freer was tasked not only with gaining entry into this closed world and procuring local knowledge, but also with transforming testimony usually dismissed as unreliable into serviceable psychical data (Richardson 2017:204).

I want to point out several things about this case which are pertinent to my own study. First, the problem of the expert witness, where Highlanders' reticence, indifference to referring to exact dates, and long-winded testimony rendered them suspect. These attributes made them an imperfect companion to scientific pursuit as fantasized by objective empiricism. According to a psychology of race linked to the ways a population records and interprets historical process, second sight traditions firmly rooted Scottish Highlanders in a position of inferiority, or belatedness. If modernity is at its core a historiographical concept, second sight was marked as out of time, not only a survival whose disappearance was imminent, but in that seers' understandings of events brought the future eerily into the present. The Highlanders were racialized, relegated backward in time and outside the scope of the modern. This sets up a colonial relationship between the researchers and their subjects, even if they might appear to be otherwise in some ways "united" by

sharing space in the borderlands of scientific knowledge.

Secondly, while still evidently problematic, the motivation to immerse oneself within the worlds of informants demonstrated a shift away from the armchair anthropology of the period to the necessity of working in the field, which blurs the lines of normative scientific inquiry toward a more insecure but potentially rewarding relationship with the subject. Freer's case is interesting because in some ways she was more likely to represent the subject of research rather than the researcher, herself being a fringe figure. Her own occult interests or capacities placed her in some ways between the scientific "establishment" (as unstable and under process as it was), and the "odd portents of a remote people" (ibid:2), seeking to classify and make sense of magical power of the disenfranchised, at the same time that her own associations with clairvoyance rendered she herself somewhat suspect in the eyes of more hardline scientists. This is important because it demonstrates the weird positionality of psychical researchers like Freer, at the same time that their own forms of marginalization does not exclude them from participating in the "modernizing gesture." Indeed, it might appear to more fully permit it. Recognition of this positionality is important for my own work as I theorize the stakes of the queer occult, wherein queerness is heralded as a kind of bonafide access to or inheritance of forms of taboo, marginalized, or volatile knowledge traditions, at the same time that it does not necessarily displace the colonial relationship that informs both the desire to align with these traditions and the methods of doing so.

Even though Freer obviously showed reverence for the powers of her subjects, Richardson reminds us that "occultists, revivalists and psychical researchers all sought to represent the lives and beliefs of marginal people to a cosmopolitan public" (2017:202). Like in the case with the Tibetan masters, their relationship to the subjects in question cannot be analyzed outside of the imperial/colonial conditions that shaped it, where Celtic mysteries were "discovered" and

represented by others to the world, translated into data that could map out a racial taxonomy of belief.

> Tales of dark portents and uncanny pre-sentiments were constituted under the new concepts of body and mind circulating in midcentury culture…what once existed as part of the folklore of a geographically, culturally and linguistically distant people could now be observed at work in middle class parlours, theatres, lecture halls and medical schools across the country (ibid:60-62).

McClintock argues that in the nineteenth century, "history itself became a spectacle: the Victorian fixation with origins, genesis narratives, and the archaic was replete with the fetishistic compulsion to exhibit that shaped the 'musé imaginaire' of middle class empiricism" (McClintock 40).

Second sight was figured as preternatural rather than supernatural, evidence of Scottish people's stuckness in a particular developmental stage. Within the logic of cultural evolutionism, which was also shared by Theosophists who believed in magic as primordial, white people are furthest from magic: it is most difficult for them to learn. As we will see in Chapter 3 and 4, this racial taxonomy is alive and well today in occult circles, not necessarily in terms of racialized people being "backward," but in that whiteness and disenchantment are two sides of the same coin. Culture itself is deeply anchored to magical thinking, wherein what becomes marked as "culture" is painted with the same taxonomic brush stroke that orders the mythless from the overly mythological.

Consistent with the notion that whiteness is inversely correlated with magic, and perhaps most importantly for my project, Freer's attempt to navigate "local constellations of knowledge through

the embodiment of a particular racial, cultural, and psychical inheritance" (Richardson 2017:210), is an all-too-familiar story of white women constructing racial genealogies for themselves to garner a more authorial perspective on the knowledges they wish to access or represent. It forms a striking comparison to allegations against Blavatsky having personified the Masters to legitimize her own connection to India as a fountainhead for spiritual wisdom. While acknowledging that it is problematic, Richardson disagrees with arguments that Freer's appropriation was motivated by the desire to provide "titillation" for audiences, and shows little more than "vague sympathy" with the Celt (ibid: 211). She argues that Freer's cultivation of ancestral memory, while no doubt a problematic form of trespass or transraciality, says something about the complexities of attachment and identification that were being negotiated in this early form of participant observation. I would add to that commentary to argue that it is not from lack of sympathy, but perhaps an *overdetermination* of sympathy with whatever the figure of the "Celt" was for Freer that motivated this invented kinship. There is something compelling to unpack there that I believe demonstrates how one's position as an outsider appears to license certain forms of risky dis-identification from or identification with different constellations of race, power, and inheritance. One's queerness makes them flexible as a genealogical agent, even if this flexibility might be overdetermined by the subject herself.

The historical commonality of this slippage into invented ancestry demands an approach that is able to consider how cultural appropriation is sometimes informed by the desire, if not always the outcome, of solidarity, wherein sympathy promotes forms of displacement rather than true alignment with the subject in question. Indeed, cultural appropriation does not really feel like the right term to use in this instance: there is a different kind of maneuver at work. Freer's own status as a kind of "outsider" of the scientific establishment,might have seemed like it justified her

identification with the subjects she studied, even if she had never been to Scotland in her life. She recognized that there existed a problematic gulf between researcher and subject and that psychical research was not adequately addressing, and the stakes of exploring the potential for transformative self-knowledge and the borderlands of human consciousness were simply too high not to use any tool available to understand it. Ironically, some level of identification with the subject has been deemed crucial to anthropological work, which depends on participant observation as a corner stone of the field. As my own informants tread this line, at once considering themselves cultural outsiders with a privileged "sensitivity" to magic, I consider this an important risk, and motivation, to explore.

In my own fieldwork, this notion of justifying or proving one's "right" to practice certain forms of magic is highly vexed. All my informants vehemently denounced any form of cultural theft that would bring them in contact with something they saw they had no business claiming, at the same time that this left some of them empty-handed, wishing they had a connection to ancestral wisdom. That feeling of emptiness is a potent motivator, and cannot be understood outside of the "myth of mythlessness" discussed earlier. On top of this, as I will explore in Chapter 5, white and settler informants in particular wished to distance themselves from legacies of power they did inherit, but were unsure of whether there was anything else that was available to them. Richardson brings up an important point that the movement toward more active participation in second sight signaled a departure from other methods of inquiry at the time. While second sight and other marginal knowledge practices might have been ridiculed, disdained, or discredited by scientific elites, I am interested in how a desire for the recuperation of that knowledge is in some ways part of the same modernizing gesture, as it ironically depends on locating it as pre-modern in order to mark it as under threat. This paradox, that the mythological ruptures of modernity tend to be reinstated even

by its biggest critics, is the subject of the next section.

Invented tradition, mythlessness, authorship

I have so far explored how human sciences like anthropology were central to constructing the mythological ruptures of modernity: tasked with describing, and thus reifying, an enchanted elsewhere whose imminent disappearance was at once lamented and accepted as necessary verdict. In this section, I want to continue to explore the centrality of ethnography to magic, including some examples of more contemporary studies of witches and magicians that help to frame some of the themes of my own work. I have found it illuminating to draw from scholarship which has explored the modern-occult relationship as a question of authorship, deeply invested in matters of textuality, narrative, and genre, which invite considerations of techniques of reading and writing in the construction of magic and its relationship to the tropes of the modern. In the next chapter I will look more closely at how scholarship in queer historicism and beyond has conceived of strategies of reading against the grain as an opportunity to unearth or produce different kinds of knowledge that were foreclosed. Here, I return to Hanegraaff's notion that Western esotericism is ultimately grounded in a historiographical concept, rather than in a common philosophical or religious worldview or approach to knowledge (2014:73). Thinking of it as such necessarily consigns modernity to a particular historiographical genre: as we have seen, Storm describes modernity itself as a "literary device" used for telling a particular kind of story (2017:92), one which relies on the invention of rupture in order to be legible.

Historiography, or a given culture's capacity to map the passage of time, was key to 19th century distinctions between the civilized and savage races. Brits perceived illiterate cultures (including their own poor) to be experiencing time in an 'eternal present' because written history

was seen as the only way to conceive of temporal progress (Richardson 2017:25). We have seen the ways that the modern and the occult are defined against each other in terms of temporality: the modern not only marks a break from an enchanted past, but also is defined by a particular progressive linear chronology, what Azoulay calls imperial temporality, which renders history as "verdict" (Wynter, cited in Azoulay 2019:296). I belabour this point because I am interested in framing the occult as a historiographic mode: a literary tradition with its own strategies of reading history, including the stakes of 'inventing" one's own mythology. That magic is defined as out of time or backward defines the ways that it is reclaimed, where it is always already a revival in the face of modernity's requisite obfuscation.

Hanegraaff distinguishes historiography from mnemohistoriography, wherein the former represents what "actually" happened in the past while the latter describes the "genesis and historical development of what a given culture imagines to have happened" (2014:375). As we will see, informants in my study, as well as other scholars I bring in in the next chapter, do not really perceive a distinction between these definitions. For many witches and magicians, the task is not to uncover subjugated knowledges so that they may fill the gaps in an otherwise faithful account of history, but rather to acknowledge that all history is to some degree myth. In her canonical ethnography among witches in England, Tanya Luhrmann (1989) explores how her informants consider history itself to be metaphor, or "evocative myth" with political stakes (1989:232). She calls magic a "literary culture" (ibid:238), wherein magicians make a "conscious attempt to provide a mythology for their practice in a myth-impoverished world" (ibid:241). Here again is the assertion that the world is devoid of myth, a clear example of the notion of disenchantment we have been discussing. On top of that, if witches consciously produce their own mythologies, this brings up issues of authenticity according to a normative understanding of

history as an account of the "real." However, understood within a logic that sees history itself as a particular kind of story, one that has been naturalized as true by those in power, creating one's own mythologies emerges as a necessary counterweight, or at least a parallel process of creating meaning.

For example, the "Burning Times," or the idea that there was at some point in European history a femicide which targeted wise women as threatening and dangerous, is foundational in modern witchcraft (Magliocco 2004, Pike 2004, Crowley 2011). The Burning Times are referenced constantly in lay books on feminist witchcraft, from *Never Again the Burning Times, Paganism Revisited*, *In Defence of Witches*, *Killing the Witches*, *The Devil in Massachusetts,* Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch,* and thousands of others. My own informants sometimes referred to this, implicitly assuming that others in the room knew what they meant when they invoked a tradition of women healers who were "literally burned….for mixing herbs together" (Interview April 2022). One referred to the witch trials as a "genocide" (Interview April 2022), and other argued that:

> The witch hunts and the witch trials just […] shame[d] people from taking care of their own health and their own community and making it so that you had to go to a doctor and a professional and like a man who was not going to use magic he was going to use science. It's such a interlinked and hugely long struggle (Group interview, July 2022).

The witch has been adopted as a symbol of resistance to scientific hegemony, where power exceeds the narrow confines of the scientific or medical establishment, and is inextricable from social health and wellness.

According to Luhrmann, it is not important for witches whether such a femicide is myth or fact…rather, what is important is its "evocative pull" (1989:242): what it inspires the audience to

do. This is consistent with my own findings: informants at times brought up these kinds of narratives in order to prove a point about a certain legacy of rejection, at the same time that they dismissed its veracity as important to the work it was doing. One of my informants put it this way:

> I hear academics, like proving that like those who were burned as witches in Europe were not actually going on like night flights with Diana and signing pacts with the devil. But they were abject women and people who just didn't conform to society. And there was this like God and Satan dominant cultural narrative that created this archetype. And I think that that archetype has been like extremely powerful and influential […] To me, it doesn't matter if the women burned were like actually, witches. I think that the archetype of the witch that was created through that kind of influenced the way that society, like, evolved from there and informed the type of worldview that I have now. (Interview, April 2022)

The reference to the "archetype" is interesting here, because the speaker seems to acknowledge that there is some mythological element to their own worldview: that there is a cultural narrative that pit "abject" people against society, and that this has influenced the terrains of the social. However, awareness of its archetypal status does not actually diminish its truth…the truth for the speaker is in the narrative idea itself, and what effect it continues to have. Put in conversation with Josephson-Storm's myth of disenchantment, many witches would agree that modernity itself is evoked through a particular narrative structure as well—that it is a seductive, albeit violent mythology rather than a definitive stage of 'progress'. One informant I interviewed put it this way:

> One element of what magic brings me or what it brings to the world is related to reality and the nature of reality and our common understanding of what reality is. Cuz some, one definition, one interpretation of reality has been normalized, and hyper-normalized. And we

navigate it, thinking that it makes sense, or like having to convince ourselves that it makes

sense to go on. And deal with the dissonance. (Interview April 2022)

History, rather than representing an inalienable, universal truth that has been faithfully recorded,

is to witches simply the overrepresentation of a worldview whose violence they wish to disinherit.

Turning to myths is one way of creating a satisfying oppositional culture (Magliocco 2004:185),

wherein the real passage of time is subjective and magicians are able to develop a personal

mythology that takes some of the power out of the official record. In this way, contemporary

occultists both subvert and reinscribe the myth of disenchantment: they expose modernity as myth

at the same time that they need its inherent rupture as a trope to celebrate its enchanted double.

Magliocco situates her ethnographic work within a folkloric tradition, and argues that folklore

studies itself invented the concept of folklore as survivals of pre-Christian social life. As we have

seen already, folklorists themselves framed rituals, objects, and behaviour according to a model of

survivals by "fitting evidence…into a master narrative" (Magliocco 2004:55). Folklorists actively

constructed the kinds of stories they believed to be representative of pre-modern cultures—not

only through biases in collection, but by literally forging ethnographies and 'evidence' of folkloric

survivals. Margaret Murray features prominently in both Luhrmann and Magliocco's account of

invented traditions: she was an amateur anthropologist working in the 1920s and is largely

responsible for the now pervasive idea that witchcraft is a survival of an ancient pagan religion

which was mistaken for devil worship (Magliocco 2004:47). Gerald Gardner, the founder of

Wicca, to whom almost all contemporary forms of witchcraft can be traced, also blatantly forged

evidence and even surviving texts attesting to the survival of ancient fertility cults which he used

as the justification for his own revivalist fantasies (ibid:50). These two folklorists saw themselves

as salvage anthropologists responsible for reconstructing witchcraft as a tradition that had survived modernity. This is important because it shows that witchcraft, as it is normally conceived of today, is always already a revival: it can only be legible as witchcraft if described in relation to a prior heyday that provides its ongoing referent. It also brings forgery, fraud, and construction centrally into the phenomenon of the occult: along with the examples of Freer and Blavatsky's invented genealogies, it becomes clear how historically vexed the problem of truth has been in representing supposedly hidden texts and knowledges. At the same time, invented tradition is not the same thing as a lie: for Murray, Gardner, and countless others, these legacies were true, but they needed material evidence to make it manifest and have the desired effect on the world. According to a logic that sees this histories as repressed, they need interventions in order to re-open those spaces of possibility, where verification is not necessarily possible according to our standards of historical visibility. Viswanathan argues that in the case of the Tibetan letters, the task was "not so much to disrupt the secular moment as to pry it open in order to salvage a past that exceeds the past of European sectarianism" (2000:16) For my own informants, and many of their predecessors, it is the world itself which is false, conditioned by the repression of of past memories, and as such any methods to expose its falsity approaches more genuinely the truth.

That figures like Murray and Gardner were also amateur anthropologists is consistent with what I have been discussing here about the ways that anthropology has been instrumental in the demarcation of magic. For the purposes of my own research, I am compelled by scholarship that has reflected on the ways that ethnography itself contributes to the revival of the occult, rather than acting as if it is somehow a novel tool that can easily be distinguished from the object it purports to study. It is not only that anthropologists have been interested in magic, but magicians have been interested in anthropology, obsessively looking for traces that would authorize their own practices

in the present. Magliocco argues that some of her informants have "knowledge of folklore and anthropology rivals that of some of my academic colleagues," and in the words of one of them, "the same skills the anthropologist is applying to understand why people are doing things, we're applying to say, 'how can we understand what they're doing so we can do it right?" (2004:55). As one example, Richardson argues that part of the project of the Celtic Revival in the 19th century involved not only a recuperation of oral strategies of cultural transmission, but also an attempt to rediscover the cognitive spaces opened up by orality, ways of thinking and visualising that were shut off to the literate (2017). In Luhrmann's work, she approached her ethnography with the aim to understand, even experience for herself, the process of learning, accepting, and becoming magic. Instead of asking what 'predisposes' people to believe in magic, she asks "what effect entering magic has on the understanding of events?" (1989:18). As such, she commits herself to remaining open to how she herself might transform through her participation.

An understanding of what makes the occult attractive, given its putative marginality, is necessary in order to outline how followers themselves make investments into the occult's oppositional status to modernity, as we saw in occult and witchcraft traditions. That anthropology contributes to the revival of the thing it claims is disappearing is consistent with Storm's argument that the human sciences are more likely to birth new revivals of magic than displace them (2017:7). According to a logic of disenchanted modernity which requires a magical elsewhere as a foil, anthropology actually creates new social locations and tools for the study of magic, at the same time that it stokes an historical romanticism that attracts observers interested in preserving or reviving these very objects to its ranks. If witchcraft, like all magic, becomes legible only through the framework of reclaiming, or survival, it becomes clear how the search for hidden meanings takes on particular importance, and not through the normative framework for what counts as

evidence. The methodological interventions the occult espouses, and the ways adepts continue to invest in their status as counterhegemonic, are key to exploring the occult as a kin hermeneutics with queer historicism, which is the subject of the next chapter.

Higher superstition

In *Higher Superstition*, Gross and Levitt claim: "Because science is at the core of the Western project, it becomes an irresistible target for those Western intellectuals whose sense of their own heritage has become an intolerable moral burden" (1998:155). In this chapter, I have looked at scholarship on the relationship of the occult to modernity, as a form of knowing in tension with a scientific hegemony that hides its own cultural specificity and value system. By tracing how the occult represents that which has putatively been rejected—although it remains an enabling condition of modernity—it becomes clear how it has become such an "irresistible target," for scholars themselves who turn their attention to this conundrum, as well as for my own informants who are explicit in their desired departures from the imperial and colonial project. Rather than looking at the ways that modernity is 'still' enchanted, in this chapter I have looked at work that has aimed to undo the very distinction between these two terms, and has shown what is at stake in investing in the myth that modernity has broken away from or is formed in opposition to an enchanted elsewhere. In moving beyond the occult as a matter of belief toward a knowledge system forever incompletely banished from the ideal of modern science, scholars have recuperated the occult as a location of resistance, a kissing cousin of the 'hard' sciences, a literary tradition, and a means to articulate mythologies counter to those of the modern it apparently opposes. In so doing, they have outlined various stakes in taking up the occult as an object of study, including as a way to historicize the countercultural; highlight the instability of the category of science; centre non-

elites in the construction of scientific knowledge; undo the myth that modernity is myth-less; and expose it as a mirror for our own knowledge traditions. Most of all, to lay bare how occult traditions differently collude in and defy our notions of scientific enlightenment, which is not so much a historical location or status as an ongoing struggle on the nature of evidence, and who is qualified to produce it.

In this chapter, I have attempted to show what is at stake in the demarcation of occult knowledge as such, and how it is inextricable from a struggle for power over what qualifies as knowledge and who is qualified to know. Sciences themselves evolved through and alongside the occult, with that which we have come to think of as fringe, countercultural, or transgressive knowing largely the result of projecting our own value systems backward. In interrogating its contours we get a better understanding of the ways that the sciences themselves have ripened through its expulsion or careful classification, and how it is thus a useful venue for reflecting on the ways our knowledge traditions and academic disciplines themselves are conditioned by their relationship to modernity's projects. Looking at anthropology as it emerged through a marking out of "survivals" and the translation of primitive knowledge systems into an evolutionary hierarchy of belief systems defined by whiteness, I set the stage for engagements with race in my project in terms of a theory of history. The relegation of a given population to a spatial and temporal elsewhere on the basis of their putative 'enchantment' marks the cultural from those who are apparently devoid of myth and thus safely modern. Seeing the ways in which spiritualism and other occult pursuits "wrested sacred knowledge from the crude rituals of the world's savage people and reformed it under the enlightened gaze of science, technology, and print culture" (Richardson 2017:136), I set the stage for my later discussion of the risks and slippages of occultism in terms of its collusions with whiteness, and whether or not it is possible to overcome

this colonial relationship. Furthermore, by setting up the occult as a historiographic mode wherein it represents that which 'drags' on the progression of modernity, I begin to theorize how it becomes available as "queer." Concerned with what is "hidden," "buried," or just below the surface, in the next chapter I consider how the occult operates as a kin hermeneutics of queer historicism, as a methodology that necessitates creative modes of encounter in order to make visible what has not been conditioned to appear.

CHAPTER 2 — Queer time

"Queerness is a temporal arrangement in which the past is a field of possibility." (Muñoz 2009:16)

If the occult is a temporal relation, what exactly makes it available to claim as a "queer" one? In the last chapter, I explored the occult as a negotiation of different forms of knowing and the ways they are disciplined, wherein the status of "rejected," or obscured, is key to understanding the stakes of its contemporary investments. In this chapter, I turn to queer historicism and other forms of critical historical scholarship to help illustrate the epistemological gestures one makes in attempting to encounter, recuperate, or condition the appearance of lost or hidden knowledge. By studying how queer historicism has evolved through what is "occulted"—or hidden—in the historical record, or even what was prevented from appearing at all, I theorize that the occult is recognizable as "queer" to my informants and others based on this conundrum that knowledge circulates as a condition of our structures of power. Any effort to come into contact with, or unearth energies, practices, or texts that the seeker construes as part of a hidden knowledge tradition is always already an historical enterprise, concerned with how transmission does or does not occur, and how this recovery gives us access to other ways of living.

In this chapter, I look at how scholars have attempted to construct queer histories through what does not get said or recorded, investing in maneuvers that privilege indeterminacy, invisibility, partiality, and the affective as a means to construct alternative forms of relationality across time. Opacity, as a structuring function of both the occult and queer history, necessitates creative forms of encounter, wherein those looking for forms of connection with what has been rendered "ghostly" must come up with methods of attunement beyond our normative frameworks of

visibility and evidence. If the occult is a crisis of method, as I explored in the previous chapter, I argue that its contemporary formations operate as a means of attuning to (recognizing, becoming conscious of) that which has been suppressed, whose invisibility is not a given but is rather a queer effect. These attunements create affective histories that draw unexpected things together.

Exploring the ways that queer historicism is motivated as well as plagued by errancy, indeterminacy, and the failure to accede to normative criteria of evidence, as well as the ways the scholar herself is interlocutor in methods of bearing witness to what is otherwise buried, allows me to theorize a correlation between the occult and queer historicism as methodologies that are both constrained by and ironically made possible by what does not appear. What does calling the occult queer allow people to do? Thinking of the occult as a form of queer historicism, it becomes possible to analyze its political stakes: the exposition of our frameworks of visibility as constructed and potentially open to disruption. What's more, it also lays bare how it becomes available to those I interview as an inheritance, gift, or special capacity by virtue of their queerness, which I explore in the next chapter. If the occult represents that which has been banished from view, what kinds of interpretive models or strategies we need to learn (or unlearn) in order to apprehend it? How does the indeterminacy that is baked into these models of interpretation allow one to take risks with our claims on history? How is the occult as a method of attuning to that which is ghostly wrapped up with larger questions of how we reckon with the forced disappearances of imperial modernity, such as the Middle passage, Indigenous dispossession, cultural assimilation, and how these legacies write us into the present?

Queer as untimely

Time has long been considered a problem for queers, both because of the ways that

homosexuality has been pathologized as 'stuckness' in a particular stage of development, and because of the difficulty in anchoring the homosexual to some historical precedent that might grant it grounds for political maneuver. In privileging temporality as a key index of the social, queer theory has argued that bodies are networked into rhythms, and anathematized for the ways they drag, linger, or step out. In other words, queer is untimely. While some have celebrated this anachronism as foundational to the figure of the queer as inherently antisocial (Edelman 2004), many scholars of queer temporality and historicism have figured untimeliness as itself a form of sociality: one which can be apprehended, even synchronized with, if one only comes up with the right methods. If queer represents that which does not accede to rhythms of the "empty homogenous time" of nationalism, identity, development, and other stories of normative progress (Benjamin, as cited in Freeman 2010:xxii), it cannot be known in terms of our normative methods of evaluation, verification, and recognition clustered under "History." Queer temporality "generates a discontinuous history of its own" (Freeman 2010:xi) which might offer up forms of fleeting connection with those interested in reading against the grain. Munoz sees queerness as intensely relational with the past, and argues that "the archive is a fiction…nobody knows that better than queers" (2005:108). Queer historicism thus confronts the historical as a problem of methodology, wherein scholars generate alternative methods of retrieving, discovering, or fabulating non-normative sexuality, as well as theorize how adopting these methodologies as fold us into communities across time and place. "Queers make up genealogies and worlds" (Munoz 2009:121), which isn't so much creating something new as "bringing to light what is already entangled…the unruly embodiments and desires buried" (Gopinath 2018:14).

Thinking of the historical as a problem of method makes an important link to the last chapter's exploration of the occult as itself a crisis of method rather than belief. I argued that the

occult is legible as that which has been repressed, or that which "haunts" our precarious cultural formations and mythologies. In this chapter, I am interested in scholarly work that has been motivated by the desire to get in touch with those lineages that haunt them (or that are "buried"), whose invisibility is conceived of as the effect of power, and how this can provide some context for interpreting my own fieldwork in queer occultism. The notion of "haunting" more generally has been a recent focus of many human sciences, including by those working in postcolonial studies, critical race studies, sociology, and many others who apprehend the modern as the centralization of power resulting from systematic disqualification of local and regional knowledges (Foucault). Heavily influenced by Foucault, scholars (and those beyond academia) have called for an "insurrection of knowledges" that are opposed to this centralizing effect (1980:84), knowledges which contain "the memory of hostile encounters" (ibid:83). Gordon's *Ghostly Matters* was "motivated by my desire to find a method of knowledge production and a way of writing that could represent the damage and the haunting of the historical alternatives and thus richly conure, describe, narrate, and explain the liens, the costs, the forfeits, and the losses of modern systems of abusive power" (2008:xvii) Here, I propose that the occult operates as such a method of knowledge production. Consequently, I argue that participants recognize the occult as queer insofar as both objects are formulated as what haunts the social, whose forms of containment or disavowal lay bare the historical constitution of the normal, real, and visible.

Scholars across different fields have theorized opacity—or what remains invisible—as central to the modalities of knowledge, identity, or community that one could call "queer." Queer histories are not found in the normative texts, archives, monuments, or other places that worlds collect and are passed on—or at least, if they are, they require some measure of imagination to make them legible. Put succinctly by one informant: "Our only access to queer and trans history

is proto-history" (Interview May 2022). The success of queer theory in venerating queerness as an interruption of our normal modes of transmission is itself a critique of the absences or silences that any form of history generates in order to come into relief. In a sense, queer temporality scholarship could be called critical history in that its aim is to "make visible the blind spots in order to open a system to change" (Scott 2007:23), dedicated to an "endorsement of an undetermined history" rather than a faithful retelling of some discrete event (ibid:25). Similarly, investigations into the occult have been, I think, most successful when approached in terms of its investments in undoing normative criteria of authenticity, authorship, and evidence to make more capacious our categories of knowledge production and its hierarchies of value. Exploring the ways that queer historicism is motivated as well as plagued by errancy, indeterminacy, and the failure to accede to normative criteria of evidence, as well as the ways the scholar herself is interlocutor in methods of bearing witness to what is otherwise buried allows me to theorize a correlation between the occult and queer historicism.

If queer historicism has been forged through confronting structural indeterminacy, often conceived of as lack, in the historical record, I see the occult as kind of case study of the queer historical impulse, trafficking in what has been rejected. Queer is the figure which does not appear in the archive, or rather, whose appearance is conditioned by epistemological violence which affects the ways in which it becomes legible. As such, queer historicism theorizes methods of negotiating that invisibility, or errancy. In its preoccupation with those parameters of legibility, queer historicism is necessarily a critique of how our criteria of recognition are not neutral. Gopinath theorizes queer aesthetic practice as a "queer mode of critique that demands a retraining of our vision and re-attunement of our senses, and in doing so points to the limits of the entire apparatus of vision that is the inheritance of colonial modernity" (Gopinath 2018:8). I argue that

there is a link here between the occult as that which is repressed, the queer as itself a figure of social death, and the inadequacy of our current models of sociology, history, or other human sciences to reckon with these objects as structuring functions of social life. What qualifies us to make historical relations, claim affinity with, or affirm inheritance once unmoored from the normative rubric of national, familial, or disciplinary sequence? How does one come to 'know' a particular habit, strategy, or narrative as queer, and what risks inhere in making such a claim to knowing?

If "to remain haunted is to remain partial to the dead or the deadly and not to the living" (Gordon 2008:182), Gordon argues that any method that attempts to make room for what has been forced to disappear is necessarily a ghost story, which demands different resources of attuning to, recording, and collaborating with that which has been banished to the past. As such, the scholars I will highlight here, as well as the informants in my study, make the same stylistic gestures: what is at stake is how to attune to interruptions in our normal lines of transmission and thought as themselves worlds, or how to learn to become conscious to what is normally not visible. The scholar of queer history can be said to undertake a magical act, training oneself to see or make appear what is not there, at the same time that my informants are social theorists in their own right, coming up with methods to negotiate our always incomplete systems of interpretation. Consider this excerpt from an individual interview:

> I feel really […] *a lot of barriers* in terms of the conscious and kind of documented and recorded world to queer and trans ancestry. […] Just being like there's a story that is definitely *no one has been particularly invested in telling me* or in learning themselves that is being lost, but also like will find a way to me or […] like remains a story that happened, and *shrouded in shame, shrouded in secrecy,* etc. So I guess I feel kind of like, often these

tools, you know, call up that stuff. They invite things that seem inexplicable into these stories we're trying to create about ourselves. It kind of connects you to remembering that, you know, even though maybe I haven't been considered or I haven't been…I haven't had my truth reflected back to me, it's out there and *I might not be even ready to recognize it*. (Interview, May 2022).

This excerpt helps to illustrate several things that are crucial in my analysis of how the occult is thinkable as queer. These are: 1) there is some story that is hidden; 2) that its invisibility is the effect of power (repression or non-attention); 3) the revelation of this story or this consciousness would provide some kind of healing or restoration to the speaker (one's truth being reflected back to oneself); and 4) that while it may currently be unrecognizable, one could potentially do something to become "ready to recognize it." Our epistemologies uphold certain technologies of coherence/legibility…to what extent is it possible to disinherit one and turn to something else? what would that method look like, and allow us to potentially access? What fields of scholarship have already invested in such maneuvers?

Queer forms of historiography have been preoccupied with coming up with strategies to confront opacity, including how it is generative of particular relationships with the past or what is untimely. Some of these methods have also been called affective histories, in that they are techniques of narrative formation that interrupt normative processes of historical visibility for fleeting, indeterminate, and performative enactments of an alternative story and the means to tell it. Affective histories are narratives "at the same time that they are practices of knowing, physical as well as mental, erotic as well as loving 'grasps' of detail that do not accede to existing theories and lexicons but come into unpredictable contact with them" (Freeman 2010: xx-xi). Queer

affective histories are opportunities to rewrite a catalogue of queer movement and possibility.

Affective histories are departures from the normative means of registering and ordering the world that characterize what Sylvia Wynter would call Man's "genre-specific 'We'" (2015:224). Against the logic of this "straight time"—that which gives rhythm to Wynter's 'genre'—José Esteban Muñoz (2009) argues for a reading of queer histories through the concept of the gesture: "atomized movements that tell tales of historical becoming…gestures transmit ephemeral knowledge of lost queer histories and possibilities" (67), and these gestures "and their ritualized tellings…have world-making potentialities" (ibid:35). These world-making potentialities are attempts to become recognizable outside of straight time: to map out something else that requires the gesture's temporal interruption in order to come into being. The gesture attunes us to the everyday work that altogether makes up affective histories, what goes into conjuring a different "story of looking" (Desmond, as cited in Hayward 2012:165). To think through affective histories as they constitute contemporary occultism, I turn to a Montréal queer tarot deck.

Thea's tarot and affective history

I was given a tarot deck by my mum when I was 13. It lives in the little bag she felted me, along with a string of beads, each one brought by those who attended the 'mentor party' she hosted as an occasion for me to receive wisdom from all the women in my life. Originally mortified by the occasion, that little felted bag now carries a different deck, Thea's Tarot, which I cherish and use often. The story of this deck is worth telling here, as I hope it will demonstrate several things: how a sacred queer genealogy is constructed through critical (revisionist) historiography; the ways this revision is framed as the restitution of historical wrong; and how its constitutive and resulting circulations of affect "accumulate and pool up in worldings" that attach people together across

time and space (Stewart 2011:452). Originally designed and self-published by Ruth West in 1984 as a lesbian tarot deck, Rima Athar came across Thea's Tarot when it was out of print, and sought to make an accompanying book, a project that would "be at once an archival documentation of lesbian feminist art history from the 1980s, as well as a revival of the spirit of reclaiming and redefining ways of meaning making" (Pickle 2015:11). As discussed in Chapter 1, the tarot is here both an archive and a revival—part of the structure of magic itself. After tracking down West and getting her enthusiastic approval, Athar asked queer Montréal-based tarot reader Oliver Pickle to write the guidebook, in such a way that would honour its women-centredness at the same time that they could "explore stories of what a queer feminist tarot could look like in terms of today's sexual and gender politics" (ibid:11). That they did, writing interpretive notes for each card that include trans/gender fluid figures, while still keeping the feminist matriarchal goddess iconography that West was originally inspired by. The deck was reprinted by Montréal publishing house Metonymy Press, with its original artwork, but its interpretive accompanying book, *She Is Sitting in the Night*, tells a different kind of story thirty years later, one that its coordinators thought better reflected the queer lives that would be touched by it. After being introduced to the deck by the partner of a friend in 2017, I found and bought my own copy at the Montréal Anarchist Book Fair. More specifically, I split it with a friend I was tabling with: we figured this would satisfy the condition that tarot decks must be given to you, if we bought it for each other. I consider my engagement with this artefact part of my fieldwork, due to its positionality within Montréal, its centrality to my own relationship to occultism, and because it marks one of the earlier points of entry into thinking this project.

Both West's and Athar's projects to make a queer tarot began with "a conspicuously absent story" (Pickle 2015:9). Athar could not find herself in the Christian European world of military

and royal hierarchy featured in most tarot decks, and knew that "like so much of history that is rewritten by erasing what came before, I was sure there had to be decks that reflected a different worldview" (Pickle 2015:10). She came across Thea's Tarot, wherein West makes the past perform a legacy that departs from heteropatriarchal scripts, depicting its absented world of "hella-queer women" in cutout form (ibid). By performativity, I mean that this deck is not simply a mimetic gesture to a fantasy of goddess supremacy that West was exploring at the time she came out as a lesbian. Rather, the cards themselves affirm and make such a past come into being, by integrating powerful mythic characters such as Hatshepsut, Celtic Druids, and Amazons with 'regular' queers who are tending to their gardens, dancing, or picnicking with a lover, making these everyday acts sacred and bringing them into a history of women loving women that West was eager to manifest. As I will explore more later, the labour of mapping out this legacy of queer women is consistent with Muñoz's concept of "queer evidence: evidence that has been queered in relation to the laws of what counts as proof" (2009:65). With the absence of something that looks like a queer story, an archive must be created, and in practicing tarot, readers cast a picture, bringing this queer world shuddering into the present.

In the introduction to *She is Sitting in the Night: Re-visioning Thea's Tarot*, Oliver Pickle describes their 30 years of experience as a tarot reader, and the process of writing interpretations to West's deck. "I have mostly read in bars or on bedspreads, late at night, or holding down the cards on picnic tables or on the grass in parks, while my friends played baseball or gossiped" (Pickle 2015:19); doing spreads "at the…kitchen tables where I regularly find myself, talking people through life" (ibid:18). On Thea's Tarot, they claim: "The papercut style, the smell of the cards, the residue they left on each other, and the stark but comforting spreads they made all

appealed to me" (ibid:18). Pickle's description of their engagement with tarot, and with Thea's tarot specifically, shows how they consider themself and the cards to be steeped in affective networks that extend across time and space, where the 'residue' of the cards circulates as an effect of the variously intimate forms of engagement tarot engenders. While Pickle admits they are not the most serious of tarot readers, affect points us toward the ways in which this knowledge tradition nonetheless draws people into shifting and indiscrete counterpublics that can be deeply felt by those who take part.

Residue is that which is left over: it suggests a kind of survival, as well as connotes something sticky, in that its stickiness has prevented it from being (re)moved with the rest of the whole. Survival is a significant theme in interviews because of the ways that informants imagine themselves to be up against forces of repression that affect, but never fully obliterate, them or the knowledge traditions they laud. Thinking with affective histories such as those cast by Thea's Tarot and its devoted readers opens us up to what I call a methodology of residue, that imagines how the traces of that which has been erased, displaced, or misremembered stick to things and people, even bind them together. Kathleen Stewart (2011) proposes "atmospheric attunements" to describe processes of *worlding*, as well as to theorize a form of attending to worlds, as "lived affects with tempos, sensory knowledges, orientations, transmutations, habits" (446). Her work offers a helpful guide for thinking with and through the occult—as a methodology of attunement, as well as a knowledge tradition or set of lineages that can itself be attuned to. Stewart points us toward the everydayness of this labour of attuning to worlds. She aims to "pull academic attunements into tricky alignment with the amazing, sometimes eventful, sometimes buoyant, sometimes endured, sometimes so sad, always commonplace labor of becoming sentient to a world's work, bodies, rhythms, and ways of being" (Stewart 2011:445, emphasis mine).

While I will delve more into the affective in the next chapter, I want to argue here that occult practices are themselves this everyday work of attuning to a world (Stewart 2011:445). Feminist/queer self-spirituality has consistently promoted the idea that a particular kind of world is available to us, we must only learn how to, as Stewart argues, 'become sentient to it.' Reading one's horoscope, pulling a card, predicting a planetary movement's effect on your relationships, or picking a stone to place on your bedside table are all kinds of sensory knowledge, ordinary affects that Cvetkovich might call "the dull feelings of just getting by" (2012:159). The occult helps to form, as well as attends to, the "rhythms and labours of living [that] become encrusted and generative" (ibid:446): for example, Pickle's readings at kitchen tables, in parks, amongst gossiping friends. It is not simply the content of a practice but what it allows people to do: the vehicle for that attunement in relation to others or toward oneself.

While attunement describes the sets of practices that I explore here under the category of the occult, it can also describe the method through which I attempt to research it: as people engage in rhythms of looking and listening to other worlds, I enact my own 'tricky alignment' in trying to fall into step alongside them. I am non-innocently implicated and highly invested in the affective communities and publics that I am studying, and those 'atmospheres' and my orientation toward them are my everyday encounters. My own process of attuning to the queer occult as it is elaborated in Montréal cannot be divorced from a sustained desire for queerness itself, and its own rhythms and ways of being that get stuck as particular languages and affective networks that exceed what may normally be recognizable as the occult. If occultism is a process of worlding, whereby Stewart asks: "How do people dwelling in [forces] become attuned to the sense of something coming into existence or something waning, sagging, dissipating, enduring, or resonating with what is lost or promising?" (2011:445), my research must include analyzing my

own commonplace labour of attuning to queer worlds, and how I am also a conduit for the 'stickiness' of its residual traces.

In thinking of how the historical shows up in this phenomenon, I propose a methodology of residue as a heuristic for tracking the affective networks that objects like Thea's tarot participate in making, where stickiness can signal us to that which is left behind as well as how it may get transmitted across bodies and objects. What's more, I introduce attunement as a guide to noticing and moving amongst these rhythms. Thinking with affective histories and their constitutive gestures can illuminate the strategies through which querents in occult traditions turn to the past as a performative (and thus political) resource, work that might be especially valuable for queer people who find themselves otherwise out of sync with history's rhythms.

Absence and revision

The medium of cutout that West uses in her deck: a form of paper collage which uses negative space, itself captures the performativity of a lamented absence. "What is cut out is actually what gives shape, emphasis, and weight to the image as a whole" (Pickle 2015:10). The negative space at work in West's artistic medium underscores how queer histories are only accessible through their absence (Muñoz 2009:73), wherein the lack of a certain kind of 'proof' that would make queer lives visible in dominant historical accounts is integral to the gesture toward something else. Thea's Tarot thus illuminates how erasure, loss, or incoherence is in fact the starting point for a creative engagement with the past as performative possibility, which I argue is the cornerstone of a queer historicism that showed up in my interviews. How does one confront the opaque in history, or rather, history *as* opacity? Is the attempt to redress this omission a form of restoration, or is it itself a revisionist project, and why is that distinction important? According to Butler, citationality

confers power on a certain performative act: it is a reiteration (though not a perfect copy) that accumulates the force of authority, preceding and enabling the "I" (Butler 1993:172). According to Butler, "The 'I' is a citation of the place of the 'I' in speech, where that place has a certain priority and anonymity with respect to the life it animates—it is the *historically revisable possibility of a name that precedes and exceeds me*, but without which I cannot speak" (1993:171, emphasis mine). In Butler's example, the historically injurious term "queer" is to some extent (never fully, never uniformly) 'reclaimed' through this labour of "draw[ing] on and cover[ing] over the constitutive conventions by which it is mobilized" (1993:172). This turning against power while being implicated in it is "not pure opposition, but a difficult labour of forging a future from resources inevitably impure" (Butler 1993:184).

Thea's Tarot is produced and sustained by this 'difficult labour:' the labour of reclaiming space, as a revisionist project that strategically invisibilizes some of its own constitutive acts. West situates the making of her deck within the goals of the feminist arts movement and lesbian feminism at the time, where the labour of their revisionist practices (for example, re-naming The King, Queen, Knight, and Page of each suit "Mother," "Daughter," "Amazon," and "Child") is conceived of as an *uncovering* of that which the former set of terms initially erased. In this way, the labour of revision that West and others take up, in order to imagine a different historicity by which they 'arrived,' is partially projected onto the structure of heteronormativity itself. According to them, it is the project of *compulsory heterosexuality*, not queer spirituality, that makes its own elisions, which West and others simply try to correct with a more naturalized "labour of love" (Pickle 2015:13). In other words, they were always already there, and *their work is restorative*.

I point this out here because I am interested in the risks of naturalizing queer as a category, one that precedes rather than is emergent through power. West, and later Athar and Pickle, make

attempts to establish an alternative citational legacy that would create a different origin story from which to draw: creating their own resources from which a different future might be possible. In Butlerian terms, they attempt to create the conditions for a different "I" to emerge which would give it grounds from which to speak, generating a queer/feminist genealogy that "accumulates the force of authority" that enables their own emergence. By imagining as timeless either a matriarchal past, as West does, or a queer, harmonious one, as Athar and Pickle do, they in some senses cover over the traces of their own governance. Framing one's historical encounter as a recuperation or a "return" to truth after an era of unjust erasure articulates a specific set of political stakes, one that tends to hold more authority than conjuring a story as if out of nowhere. It is this tension between recuperation and invention, and the question of the "right" to history, that motivates so much of my thinking in this work.

Though I found other surprising directions and reflections in fieldwork, the question of history and how queer people think of themselves as "historical" wrote me into the project, and continues to be crucial to understanding the appeal of the occult as a knowledge tradition. The conundrum I want to point out here as I move through the rest of the dissertation is the question: to what extent can you opt out of your own conditions of emergence? Given the fraught assemblages of race that have emerged in contemporary and earlier forms of spiritual healing in transatlantic cultures, I see the desire to write and locate oneself in queer histories as connected to the goals of healing, at the same time that it opens up the all-too-common consequence of transcending race and other forms of cultural legibility as a messy, regrettable set of inheritances that can be left behind. Scholars have theorized queer histories in terms of the work of "groping…backward," from a place of opacity which cannot be redressed or brought fully into relief (Muñoz 2009:165). If queer people are motivated to construct an origin story for themselves, one in which they appear as natural,

normal, or connected to a set of friendly predecessors, I want to explore this motivation, at the same time that I observe the risk that inheres in making a refusal of inheriting a given genealogy.

Seeking

Affective histories are interruptions of normative narratives, performative enactments that tell a different tale of becoming, and for many, the occult is a kind of structuring mode through which an injurious queer past can be reworked to gesture toward something else. In one interview, a respondent claimed: "[I find myself] wanting to create alternative story, and like feeling too stuck in what the world is offering us"(Group interview, July 2022). Someone else described it in this way: "before I came out as queer and trans, I was just like kind of lost and I couldn't access who I was. And I fit in nowhere […] I was just this weirdo who had like no house kinda thing. And so I just felt really disconnected from any kind of like spiritual connexion there" (Group interview, April 2022). The feeling of disconnection produces a desire to seek something else, with the "elsewhere" described in interviews as occult, or what has otherwise been foreclosed or off-limits.

> There was always a part of me that was like searching out, outside of myself. And I think that part of growing up queer or like othered in some way by society is really lonely […] [My occult practice] was born out of a desire, I think to make being with myself less painful. And it's grown from there to be a way that I connect with myself, but then with things outside of myself…just feeling like I'm […] able to tether myself to the world in a way that maybe other people don't have to when they're not queer, I guess. (Group interview, July 2022)

The desire to "tether [one]self to the world" marks a wish for connection, as well as a refusal to inherit or accede to the forms of connection that are otherwise available. The speaker also claims

that not everyone has to make such a maneuver: queerness compels this search for a tether because queerness is an untethering, a deviation from the lines of conventional genealogy. This ethic of seeking is, I argue, crucial to understanding the critical modality of queer occultism, in that it confronts disconnection, or barriers to knowing, as opportunities to do something else. The occult, for participants, both represents the "something else" and the method by which one can access it. Take this example:

> Queer means questioning things a lot more, especially yourself, and like how you fit into the world and into history. And I think that spirituality is a great tool, you know, whether tarot, astrology or other practices to learn more about yourself. And it's also something that as queer people, we'd be more willing to look at, like […] we're less daunted by stigma about it. (Interview, April 2022)

In this excerpt, the speaker claims that spirituality/tarot/astrology are tools that helps in the process of learning "how you fit into the world," at the same time that they imply that, queer people are in some ways more predisposed to using them. Queer operates here as an orientation toward that which is otherwise cast out of normative rubrics of legitimacy.

These notions of "questioning," "searching" and "curiosity" were consistent in interviews, as participants reflected on what they saw as the connection between queerness and the occult. When I asked during a group interview: "Why do queer people take up these practices? and "Is there something inherently queer about them?", one participant answered in this way:

> [This question] brought up in me this sort of idea of a search for, like a deeper truth. I think that that might also be an appeal that brings a lot of people in. We kind of, when we're young, I think a lot of us get at the sense that the world that's presented to us is not necessarily 100%

true. And then we have this sort of like search for truth in many different areas. And I think that people who are inclined to search for the truth rather than just accept what's been given to them might also be an element that would bring people to both [queer and occult]. (Group interview July 2022)

Another put it this way: "As queer people, there's also that like act of questioning that is also so like inherent in the process of finding out your identity […] just that *comfort with asking questions* makes it counter to power-structures of power" (Group interview, June 2022). In both these examples, speakers name the ethic of seeking as a form of skepticism, or critique of power, wherein there exists a world that is "presented" to them against what they feel to be true. They imply that queer people have some experience with dissonance, and so might be less likely to take at face value other assumptions about what kinds of belief systems or knowledge traditions are valid. "There's always been a second language for queer people" (Interview, April 2022).

But what exactly are participants looking for? If there is an assertion being made that they are running up against an overrepresented worldview or hegemonic system which can be deviated from, what else is available to them? Based on interviews, I argue that the act of questioning is itself the oppositional maneuver: it is not necessarily about connecting to something known in advance that would offer an alternative to heteronormativity, capitalism, or white supremacy. Rather, it is the act of questioning the inevitability of these structures that is itself meaningful, and which is facilitated by their given forms of occult practice and other political investments.

I think [the occult] counter hegemonic in the way that like I think there's this inherent like questioning that comes with engaging in these practices. It's like *a curiosity about the unseen*. So there's already that question about like, *oh, what else is there*? Whereas like hegemonic

practices are so often about like just hearing something is and obliging by it (Group interview, June 2022)

This speaker makes a really interesting link between power, visibility, and the occult, by naming curiosity as oppositional to power. By asking "what else is there," one is displacing the centrality of what is visible, given, or hegemonic and shifting attention to what is unseen as a form of subversion. It is akin to asserting "the colonial world is not a fact" (Snaza 2024:23). Another respondent made a more explicit link between that curiosity of the unseen and their own process of coming out.

> I think growing into your own queerness under the state that we're under, like you have to ask questions and you have to do soul searching and literal research like on the internet or in books or whatever to figure out what this means. And I find that like, with learning the occult […] you also have to do that same kind of soul searching and research to find like what path suits you best or what identity makes the most sense or what practices are calling to you. Like the literal act of *having to re-write your brain* and how you understand culture or society or spirituality or religion or science or whatever, is very similar between like the path of discovering your queerness and discovering the occult. […] Because you're having to *deconstruct and reconstruct within your own mind. To like find where you want to be standing*. (Group interview, June 2022, my emphasis)

I bring in these examples because they illustrate something very central to queer historicism in general, which is the idea that queer is a relationship to meaning making. Queer theory has championed a position vis à vis the historical wherein queer is known not simply in terms of what

can be discovered or confirmed about a past figure or event, but in terms of the *desire to do the search itself*: a reaction to the incommensurability of queer history itself. Muñoz argues that "queer cultural production is about world-making in the face of the lack that is endemic to any heteronormative rendering of the word...building and doing in response to that nothing assigned to us" (2019:118). Queer history is defined in terms of its confrontation with what is available, and enacting a kind of refusal of it. In one individual interview, I had a long discussion with a participant about queer and trans representation, wherein she didn't feel connected to specific trans storylines on tv and movies. "A huge part […] to me of my trans identity [is] reclaiming narratives […] it's about the narrative practice. […] But I can't do that when you've told a really specific story about a punk trans girl, you know?" (Interview, May 2022). She explained this dissonance in the following way:

> The urge to do the search. Like that's the thing […] Where do these queer people come from and how do they exist that are queer, but then also, like, separated from wanting to do their own meaning making, you know what I mean? I'm like, that's just such a profound, profoundly contradictory thing in my mind. (Interview, May 2022)

For this participant, she locates her own interest in tarot and other related practices within that meaning making, because "there is a place for ambiguity in storytelling." In this instance, the ambiguity refers to the veracity of the practices, which does not need to be resolved or overcome because that ambiguity actually forms the departure for her own sense of self. It is the deviation that is itself queer: the attempt to reconstitute an archive that cannot be verified.

Genealogical approaches to queer history

Examples from fieldwork on the ethic of seeking, and queer as a confrontation of knowledge can be understood within a greater debate within queer theory over how to navigate what is missing in queer histories, between what Laura Doan (2013) has called "ancestral" versus "genealogical" approaches. If lack is endemic to the heteronormative, is it because something once possessed is now lost to us, or because it was prevented from arriving at all, and how is this distinction epistemological? "Ancestral" approaches to queer history frame the invisibility of queerness in the past as an effect of underdeveloped criteria of recognition heretofore incapable of realizing the subject, wherein an essentialized queer figure is recuperated from a past that was not 'ready' for it (Coviello 2013). Thought in terms of absence, this "ancestral" approach renders queer historicism a matter of filling in the gaps which homophobia has produced…what Arondekar calls "search and rescue" (Arondekar et al 2015:216). By contrast, the "genealogical" approach I bring in here takes indeterminacy as integral to knowledge itself, rather than a problem to be rectified. Indeterminacy is reframed as an enabling condition or opportunity, wherein knowledge is generated *through* the failure for a given figure to appear to us, not in spite of it (Traub 2017). Opting out of projects of discovery in favour of undoing fixed identity and knowable truths, queer genealogical models ask rather how sex constitutes subjects—what are the conditions of sexual knowledge itself? It is the genealogical approach I focus on here: just as the occult is known to us in terms of what it negates, or apparently opposes, queer history cannot be thought outside of the terrains that condition its dis/appearance. It is in exploring this parallel that I theorize them as kin hermeneutics: in naming something occult, or queer, one is already embroiled in the question: what are the conditions under which knowledge is made/apprehended/circulated, and what prevents or facilitates that knowing?

In her work on early modern sexuality, Valerie Traub (2016) argues that sex itself is intensely

bound to signification; "the capacity of language to denote and connote meanings about erotic affect, embodiment, desires, and practices, through practices of articulation as well as silence, and by means of conceptual categories that implicitly organize what can be known and circulated" (10). By asking what makes sex representable, Traub renders sexuality a historiographic mode, replete with its own logics of retrieval, circulation, and transmission…including what might otherwise be apprehended as its "failure" to appear. "Historiography, like sex, names a knowledge relation" wherein blind spots condition the very possibility of thought (ibid: 25). As a historian of the early modern period, Traub is used to running into barriers to accessing the past, but approaches these barriers in terms of the knowledge relation of sex itself, reframing the "problem" of indeterminacy as revelatory of our epistemological assumptions and methods.

The genealogical approach to the history of sexuality is important for this phenomenon because my informants tend to reflect on knowledge, in particular historical knowledge, as fraught with silences which serve a narrative they are not interested in.

> I don't know if my, my personal trend would be towards like feeling like the, the methodology of the knowledge [of the occult] is like what I feel like is inherently queer, but I guess it's more sort of like, um, you know, queer stories and, and ancestry is often *by its very nature occult* because it has been hidden from us. Um, so I feel like it's just that kind of like, you know, the missing puzzle piece, the thing that never really sat right that you never and may never have language for and may *never be able to bear out with some sort of evidence*. (Interview, May 2022)

In this excerpt, the speaker implies that this opacity is integral to how queerness appears (or does not appear) in forms of language or evidence normatively clustered under "history:" the evidence

might not ever exist. Participants who reflected on the occult in this way did not propose newer, better methods to find the "missing puzzle piece," but rather spoke about this opacity as something that it recognizable as queer: in a sense, the failure for something to appear is evidence in itself.

Arondekar, writing on the colonial archive in India, has criticized what she calls the "recuperative hermeneutics" of queer historicism, and argues that "figurations of sexuality are not 'lost' objects to be recovered, but subject effects sedimented through the enactments of disciplinary discourses" (2009:4). Thus, the violence of erasure is undone not by filling in the gaps the archive produces, as if this would offer a form of redress. Rather, it is undone by exposing how the archive is itself a form of destruction, whose occlusion conditions how we can relate to it. The foundational mode of critique in the queer occult lies in informants' understanding that visibility is conditioned by forms of power, which can be opted out of in order to make something else appear. The occult is thus both a form of critique as well as a methodology to overcome what it opposes: unlearning certain modalities of visibility and the orientation toward others that are not given. I propose that informants think of the occult as a kind of training toward developing that capacity, with the goal of bringing into reach heretofore unavailable worlds that might be more liveable than our current one. Just as scholars have looked for different interpretive models to make possible fleeting connections with unknown figures in the archive, contemporary occultists seek out modalities that might attune to something that is otherwise foreclosed.

Sociality

Queer orientations are those that put within reach bodies that have been made unreachable by the lines of conventional genealogy (Ahmed 2006:107). In the phenomenon of the queer occult, forms of magic and psychic healing are apprehended as modes of queer orientation which could

make visible the invisible. Insodoing, they put us in contact with—even in kinship with—that which haunts us in hopes of overturning of our current forms of sociality. While opacity may appear to foreclose connection, some scholars have heralded the "blind spots" as opportunities for movement and connection (Hartman 2019). Traub's theory of "opacity, obscurity…and impasse" as central to sexual knowledge builds off of work in queer temporality (2016: 2), including in what ways the failure of representation, and its contingent methods of "groping backward" can form the basis for a queer community/politics in the present (Muñoz 2009:165). For example, in Dinshaw's (1999) pathbreaking *Getting Medieval*, she sees sex "at least in part contingent on systems of representation" (ibid: 12), and argues that queer's historical potential hinges on its encounters with others left out of sexual categories. As such, unspeakability generates, rather than forecloses community, by making the possibility of a relation to someone that was, or that was prevented from being (ibid:142). This model of queer kinship is reflected in my own interviews. One informant had this to say:

> I definitely feel a strong sense of solidarity with persecuted people throughout history. You know, I would resonate with Joan of Arc, or whatever…And I think, I mean, I would never want to project the identity of witch onto someone who didn't claim it for themselves, but, I think that […] it's really cool to honour how people have used magic as in resources beyond the scarce material ones that they had to survive and protect each other. And so, I do feel a kinship there. (Interview, April 2022)

The kinship this interviewee named is an affective history, one where companionship with other figures who have been rendered socially abject or marginalized is made possible by developing a critical practice of imagining what has been forced to disappear. The kinship is based on a

perception of shared persecution. Queer ancestors are known not always in terms of who they had sex with or what their gender was, but to what extent they moved in the social margins, and engagement with the occult is understood by informants to signal a form of marginality in and of itself.

The "touch across time" not only imagines the forms of community that are possible between the scholar (or the "reader" that looks backward), and the figure in the past, but also between *all those who are doing this seeking*. Queer and feminist forms of spirituality, such as in the Radical Faerie tradition, goddess spiritualities, and some new age practices, are consistently referred to as a "homecoming" for those who take part (Pike 2004:117). In my study, one participant talked about their experience feeling out of place their whole life, and claimed that their spiritual practice helped them look at this differently: "It's like having something else to ascribe that difference to and like, being like, instead of it just being a difference, being a root. […] Like wanting it to not just be like an otherness, but a sense of belonging" (Interview, April 2022). The ethic of seeking itself makes kin, as it is motivated by a shared experience of dissatisfaction or refusal. In my interviews, participants were recognizable to each other based on a shared interest in looking for an otherwise, which the occult provided a conduit for, and which many justified as a natural consequence of queer experience.

Opacity is refigured as a space of exciting possibility, wherein the suspension of disbelief allows participants to *do something*. What I want to point out here is that queer forms of historicism that have taken up opacity as a structuring function of queer history rework these barriers into opportunities to rewrite catalogues of action, focusing on the potential (but not the promise) of connection with that which slips away. This is important to note because it is a theory of the social which includes figures and worlds which are not easily known, or which may not be considered

kin in the normative lineages of race or family. As I will explore more in depth in Chapter 4 and 5, participants' understanding of solidarity are baked into this theorization, For those I interviewed, solidarity operates not in terms of an explicit target toward some other group or figure, but rather as something that is made possible through re-connecting with modalities and constellations of knowledge that have been lost or gone underground. Focusing on the occult as "hidden" knowledge, "kept alive […] in whispers and little conversations behind closed doors" (Interview, April 2022), participants theorized how particular forms of social and cultural formulations have been rendered unintelligible by hegemonic forms of power. As such, they aimed to find ways to make visible, or put into reach, these lost or subjugated knowledges as a means of betraying or disrupting that hegemony.

Longing and wounded subjectivity

*"*Marginality and loss, paucity and disenfranchisement: these are the hermeneutical forms that have become the common currency of histories of sexuality" (Arondekar 2014:98). If queer political formations have been successful in imagining marginality, or untimeliness, as the basis of a kind of sociality, this represents a paradox that resembles the paradox of disenchantment I explored in the previous chapter, wherein absence paradoxically secures the possibility of representation. Just as occultism is founded on rupture—that there are worlds/text/figures that were violently repressed through the ongoing pursuit of the 'modern' and its requisite obfuscation— queer theory confronts the absence of evidence that would body forth a history of 'us', wherein the absence of evidence paradoxically becomes the condition for recognition. In *Loss and the Politics of Mourning*, David Kazanjian and David Eng (2003) edit a collection of essays that look at the ways loss constitutes social and political relations, rather than remaining in the psychic realm

of the individual (Butler 2003:467). Rather than appearing as a purely psychological injury, these scholars are interested in what the irrecoverable does to generate its own worlds…how does the shared experience of the irrecoverable constitute political collectives, imperatives? The longing for something that is deemed absent, and the ways this longing is sedimented into a political ground has been theorized by Wendy Brown as "wounded subjectivity." According to Brown, "politicized identity becomes attached to its own exclusion…the loss of historical direction is nomologically refigured in the structure of desire through identity politics" (Brown, as cited in Doan 2013: 74).

Twenty years ago, Christopher Nealon argued that queers have an "overwhelming desire to feel historical" (2001:8). Encrypted in this dense claim is the notion that queers lack history, or are improperly historical; the bearing of desire and of feeling itself on the terrain of the historical; and the notion that this kind of longing is shared and thus draws queers together, even as they are exceeded ('overwhelmed') by it. Thinking of the relationship of desire to woundedness has been helpful for me to uncouple desire from a purely erotic or sexual relation, toward something constituted out of longing, or a feeling of lack, which theories of woundedness map out. Desire's centrality to queer theory might not only be based on the presence of sex, but because of the feelings of loss that motivate queer theory itself. Summed up nicely by Traub, desire in queer historicism is not delimited by desire between subjects, but also in "the articulation of desires for sexual knowledge" (2016:13). Put differently, Butler tells us that "Any theory of recognition will have to give an account of the desire for recognition, remembering that desire sets the limits for the operation of recognition itself" (2005:44). Desire is inextricable from longing: desire not in terms of arousal, but in terms of the recognition of a void and the affects that void animates, including the obligation to maintain the void as a justification of that catalogue of affects.

The feeling of loss, or woundedness, motivates methods based on its imagined redress.

Arondekar has written about the "poetics of melancholia" at the heart of queer histories of sexuality, "an irresolvable longing for loss that refuses all forms of consolations" (Fuss, as cited in Arondekar 2014:99). She argues that the attachment to a recuperative hermeneutics in its approaches to historical archives ironically maintains absence as its structuring mode. "The central paradox at the heart of archival labours is that the archive, broadly conceived, is a collection of knowledges with no centre, except that something missing needs to be continuously added" (Arondekar 2009:102). Jagose (2002) has also pointed out the aporia of historical invisibility as a basis of community. Asking why the problem of the lesbian is so frequently a problem of representation, she proposes that the lesbian can only be co-thought with her impossibility of retrieval (Jagose 2002:1). "Because lesbian invisibility is precisely, if paradoxically, a strategy of representation, lesbian visibility cannot be imagined as its redress" (ibid: 2). She denounces the ways that "the historicizing gesture" is figured as a solution to the problem of lesbian invisibility (ibid:8), gesturing to the ways that 'the right to history' has been a successful rallying cry for lesbian sisterhood (Doan 2013:68). Instead, like others in what Doan calls the genealogical school, she proposes we "determine the inherited incoherencies of our modern sex/gender system that produces the contemporary figure of the lesbian precisely as a problem of visibility" (Jagose 2002:13). What Jagose, Arondekar, and others point out is how attached queer politics is to its own exclusion. Queer theory is a "romance of negativity" (Muñoz 2009:12). If the homosexual is "most himself when he is most secret, most withheld from writing" (Arondekar 2009:7), queer archival labour remains stubbornly attached to confirming his absence, or risk unravelling the logic that makes his homosexuality appear.

The paradox of queer representation emergent through the wound makes an unexpected parallel with the paradox of disenchantment at the heart of occult practice. If the occult defines practices

or worlds that are at odds with the modern, they can be exposed only in order to confirm their status as receding, or else the logic of anachronism so foundational to the occult's oppositional vigor would not hold. I see the notion of lack, or loss, as a structuring function of both the occult and queer historicism, wherein absence is productive of rather than inhibitive of particular relations with others across time and space. In theorizing what it is that makes the occult appealing for queers, especially for those who are interested in forming communities based on criteria that exceed the signposts of homonormativity, the key might be in apprehending both queer historicism, (along with its contingent grounds of political agency,) and the occult as historiographic modes, whose explicit aims to recuperate are always already tempered by the paradox that absence is their enabling condition. As we will see in later chapters, this question of lack motivates different strategies of homecoming that are, because so embroiled in theories of history and inheritance, central to what I see as the racial problematics of the phenomenon.

Residue

Scholars (and those beyond academia) who imagine political transformation through an attachment to the wound, are interested in expanding the field of loss to grieve ever more. It is important to note that there is a significant field of scholarship in Black studies, postcolonial theory and Indigenous studies that has challenged legibility as the goal of historical redress. Rather than lament the ways that sexuality must become visible in order to "come out" of hiding, these scholars celebrate incoherence, eschewing legibility as the foundation of subjectivity. Musser (2018), for example, complicates the romance of negativity in much of queer theory by proposing "brown jouissance" as a theory of excess rather than lack, where incoherence is celebrated as a means of survival for Black people (9). In framing knowledge production as corporeal, Musser enlarges our

concept of what counts as knowledge and who is a knowledge producer, resisting melancholia to take pleasure in illegibility. That queer theory has been so attached to finding redress for its invisibility could well be driven by a racialized investment in legibility as an expectation of the subject, laying bare what kinds of flesh are especially disruptive of technologies of coherence and legibility our own disciplines are complicit in upholding. Musser and others who recognize this paradox are interested in transcending wounded subjectivity as the only means to become historical. If melancholia produces "a realm of traces" (Eng and Kazanjian 2003: 4) what is afforded by thinking of the trace not only in terms of a sign of the whole that failed to appear, but that material which, in part, exceeds those forces of erosion? I argue that what might appear in one instance as the proof of failed transmission is resignified as a kind of methodology of residue, of what managed to 'stick' around. Going back to my discussion of *Thea's tarot* and processes of attunement, I propose methodologies of residue as a kind of counter-method to the fetishization of woundedness. While there are plenty of examples of wounded subjectivity at work in my interviews, I want to focus on where there are examples in fieldwork of methods that imagine the affective possibilities of connection beyond a hope for consolation, which embody what Musser calls the "yes, and" (2018:9). What if, as Freeman asks, we were to "imagine ourselves haunted by bliss and not just by trauma" (2007:120)? Theories of lack can only get us so far in constructing forms of sociality, and there is a push from scholars to come up with epistemological departures from scarcity, opting instead for methods that can engage with potentiality and uncertainty as integral, even pleasurable, structuring modes of historicity, sexuality, and social transmission itself.

> The promise of presence as future knowledge is always circulated in relation to historical desire, a desire for absent bodies, subjects, and texts, as well as for the evidentiary models

they enable. The critical challenge lies in imagining a practice of reading that incites relationships between the seductions of recovery and the status of archival hermeneutics itself (Arondekar 2009:134).

This is Arondekar's call for queer and anti-colonial forms of historiography beyond melancholia, "more imaginative histories of sexuality, full of intrepid archives and acts of invention, full of pith and moment, full of "a lyric summoning"" (Arondekar 2014:99). The desire for absent subjects, and especially texts, has been a consistent feature of the occult for centuries. Indeed, the recuperation of arcane knowledge in the form of a recipe book or manifesto is key to revivals of witchcraft and other esoteric traditions. In my own fieldwork, the it is the evidentiary models that are linked to the search that I am most interested in: what a connection with the alleged kin of queer occultists *does* for them, and how is it conceived of as a turn away from the regimes of truth, evidence, and history that we struggle to live under? In the next chapter/section, I focus on what these "practice[s] of reading" could look like, and propose occult practices as part of building this imaginative capacity.

* * *

Close reading

I have so far traced work in queer historicism that considers indeterminacy a function of sexual knowledge itself, which may even be taken up as a minoritarian strategy, with its own logic of representation beyond the politics of visibility or recognition. Such a claim begs the question: what kinds of interpretive models or strategies we need to learn (or unlearn) in order to apprehend

it? How do our models of interpretation embrace indeterminacy as an opportunity to take risks with our claims on history? If there are representational strategies that arise from being marked as backward or out of place, how does it compel certain methods of interpretation, or interpellation, on the part of the scholar or anyone else seeking connection with that which has been marked as untimely? More importantly in this project, what does this have to do with magic? As I have discussed so far, queer temporalities are visible only in their forms of interruption (Freeman 2007:xxii), and integral to queer historicist scholarship are investigations into the ways scholars might train ourselves to attune to these interruptions as worlds in themselves. "Queer as a matter of how one approaches the object that slips away" (Ahmed 2006:172). Integral to this shift toward untimeliness as a generative condition are investigations into the ways we as scholars might train ourselves to orient toward texts in ways that expand the realm of what knowledge is or does. It is this question of queer historicism as methodological training that is crucial for my own project.

Catalyzed by Sedgwick's (2002) reparative reading, scholars of queer time have explored how certain forms of intertextuality invite methods of relation that are not dependent on anticipation or suspicion, but rather surrender to this potentiality, binding the scholar into an affective relation with historical materials through temporalities that their modes of reading generate or perform.

> To close read is to linger, to dally, to take pleasure in tarrying, and to hold out that these
> activities can allow us to look both hard and askance at the norm. But in the works I have
> gathered here, close reading is a *way into history*, not a way out of it, and itself a form of
> historiography and historical analysis (Freeman 2007:xvi-xvii).

The 'close' in close reading connotes not only a drag on the progression of time, but a form of

spatial proximity that might bind the reader into an affective relation with the figures they look hard and askance at: "queers are close…readers of one another" (ibid:xii). If shared timing is key to forms of cultural belonging, the reader's own practice of 'drag' constitutes a drive for figuration that has the potential to encounter others whose modes of living are constituted through unforeseen movements and departures from expectation. Methods of reparative reading are not a given—they implicate the reader in undertaking a kind of epistemological training driven by the potential, but not necessarily the promise, of connecting to others who might otherwise have slipped away. While the last section explored the ways that queerness is framed by scholars as a reorganization of linear time, the rest of this chapter is dedicated to what it means to adopt methods of reading that might begin to decipher or follow it, and how occult practitioners hold up their practices as a form of training towards building that capacity.

Queer epistemologies are performative, in that they bring into reach potentialities for living and relationality that are otherwise unthinkable. I argue that occultism thus becomes legible as a queer epistemology or method in that it offers a process of training oneself in such a practice: it opens up worlds. Put differently, if queer historicism seeks out interpretive models or strategies that make room for indeterminacy, the occult appeals to queer people by virtue of its own obligation to attune to some alternative modality incompletely erased through repressive logics: the occult as a method of "chang[ing]...the structure of interpretation itself" (Luhrmann 1989:176). Methods of close reading, or what Love (2007:6) calls "reading for backwardness," "call attention to the temporal splitting at the heart of all modernism," and my participants describe their practices as a means of overcoming that splitting.

I have been arguing that the occult is a historiographic modality: it is always already a confrontation of the epistemological regime of modernity and its narrow frame of legibility. If our

inherited frameworks of looking render inaccessible those traces that haunt our social formations, I argue that the occult represents a kind of methodological intervention, wherein participants attune to that which does not normally appear. Methodologies require training, in that they result from forms of conditioning: orienting us where and how to look. *Attunement* is how I conceive of the process of dis-orienting oneself from normative frameworks and re-orienting toward the "elsewhere" that the occult, as the detritus of the modern, represents.

Attunement

Throughout my interviews, one major theme that emerged was the notion that magic helps one attune to normatively hidden patterns. Many described their practices in terms of developing an "intense consciousness" (Interview May 2022), an "openness," or a speculative lens that not only uncovers the web of relations they are in and take for granted, but that can help them imagine how it could be otherwise. Magic is the "tuning of your intuition…asking you to pay attention […] to things around you" (Interview April 2022), and allows one to "engage with things that are indescribable, unpalatable, untranslateable" (Interview April 2022). In defining the umbrella of practices that might be called occult, one informant claimed: "I think what unites a lot of different practices that fall under this approach is like an attunement to energy. And then each practice is kind of like a different toolset or a different language […] set of practices […] of defining or understanding or working with these energies that are like the unseen, unknowable" (Group interview June 2022). Participants described the ability to cultivate a receptivity to energy, signs, or teachings as part of the process of learning magic: they allow one to "tap into experiences and vibes of whatever that lie beyond the norm" (Interview May 2022). This is consistent with Luhrmann's findings among witches in England that magic is not about proving a pre-existing

theory, but rather "involves changing the implicit assumptions, pattern-finding and knowledge-defining habits which make magical ideas seem plausible" (1989:317). If magic, or witchcraft, is "not true," the goal is not to find a way to prove that it is, but to construct or bring into being a world in which it could be.

Put succinctly by one participant: "There's an intense consciousness with witchcraft I think as well […] there's a lot of not taking things for granted with magic and witchcraft and with queer experience. And I think those two things are very related" (Interview April 2022). The motivation to upend what is taken for granted in our knowledges is deeply political and reparative, in that it locates political transformation within the capacity to imagine things as different than they are. "I resonate with manifestation, like the idea of making real, like, the unreal. I think that that is like a really useful kind of like strategy, even politically to think, like, okay, a better world is possible" (Interview April 2022). Participants appeared to assume a shared understanding in group discussions that uncovering power was the key to social transformation, even when they did not explicitly name the consequences of that exposure. One participant referred to Kim Tallbear's definition of sexuality as a:

> …network of relations in which power circulates. And that is how I analyze things in general. Its just the […] way that things interact and the way that power circulates everywhere. And I guess that's a thing that magic really helps us with. And like really visualizing, sometimes through literal visualization, like the movement of power […] And…..thats also a thing that like, you know, that queerness and transness teaches us. It's a lot about power for me. Studying sexuality for me was about studying power, and studying magic is also about studying power. (Interview, April 2022)

In some cases, the critique—visualizing the movement of power—operates as an end in itself. Becoming aware of the constructedness of a given system brings it into relief as only one possibility among many others: it subverts the notion of history as "verdict" to give rise to multiplicity.

The stakes of attunement are to make more liveable worlds: paying attention to what is otherwise invisible is not just an imaginative exercise, but is articulated as necessary for survival. When it was made explicit, my informants reflect on this capacity for attunement as a motivator of social cohesion, personal empowerment, or reparation, and linked their practices to demands for social and political transformation. As one informant says, "queer people […] need to escape from a reality in which we don't feel like we can exist" (Interview April 2022). I consider this motivation to find a different lens a form of divestment, as it cannot occur without opting out of our inherited modalities of knowing. This divestment is reflected in interviews, as participants name capitalism, settler colonization, white supremacy, and heteronormativity as structures that they wish to get out from under. "What I appreciate about magic is that it's also a space where we can pray and wish for and speculate and imagine and visualize something else…those priorities are decolonization, which is essential to environmental justice" (Interview, April 2022); "Capitalism is ending, and the way it's ending is like forcing people right now to like find something else" (Group interview, July 2022). Attunement, receptivity, and openness operate as processes of transcending social barriers in order to access potentialities for living which are otherwise foreclosed.

> To be inherently queer to me is something that kind of feels the need to be transgressive […] there is like a social realm that's beyond, you know, like heteronormativity. We all know this as queer. It's like there's ways to have a life […] that resists, you know, the scripts that we're

brought up with in a sense. And that in itself, I feel like is is is queer act and that sort of queer act for me comes from a place that like something else is possible. And, that speaks to spirituality to me as well in terms of like thinking that there is something else possible (Interview May 2022).

I find a resemblance here to Snaza's theory of tending, in that "tending is not something that happens "outside" of the colonial field it would disrupt…it is not about our positionality as such, but how we attune to what makes this positionality possible" (2024:12). Attunement is about recognizing the conditions for dwelling in a particular world, and experimenting with what would facilitate the emergence of an otherwise.

Potential history and waywardness

Close reading is performative in its effort to construct these more livable worlds. By attending closely— "looking hard and askance at the norm" (Freeman 2007:xvi)—the close reader destabilizes the text. Hemmings describes the radical scholar's task as at once archeological and interventionist, "retelling stories to allow for present living…revel[ing] in a creative openness as both means and end of politicized historical endeavour" (2018:21-22). The valorization of creativity and the imaginative as ventures of historical repair have historically been central to the occult, especially as it has been taken up by feminist and queer spirituality as means of "remembering what we already knew" (Morgensen 2011:110). There is an imperative here to find some way to include what has been lost or occluded, both by breaking apart the matrices of our knowledge systems that enabled their absence, and finding different kinds of encounters that would tell the "true history" of those losses. "Making violence discernible requires a political ontological

break….a break which requires the presence of those whose removal and suppression was needed to sustain violence as the basis of the law" (Azoulay 2019:201). For some, that means telling stories that include those who were not included. For others, like Azoulay, it means making them co-conspirators, rather than subjects to be studied. "We should not seek to discover but to join with others" (ibid:199). Gordon (2008) has argued that being haunted draws us into structures of feeling that we experience as transformative recognition. Participants in my study actually seek out this haunting in order to make the ghosts appear, to make that haunting into the foundation of a political subjectivity. In her call to make companions with figures that have been relegated to the past, Azoulay asks us to "pay attention to the vernaculars that convey efforts to survive within the new worlds they were forced to inhabit" (Azoulay 2019:29). I argue that my informants turn to the occult as a a means of paying attention to those vernaculars, which in itself brings about a kind of divestment from the conditions of power they have grown up in and wish to disinherit in service of an otherwise. But who does it actually put them in touch with? What kind of sociality that is possible through this kind of close listening, or tuning in? What does it mean to live with ghosts?

Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* is a beautiful example of a potential history, wherein Hartman works through her relationship to Black queer figures she encounters in the archives and attempts to do justice to their lives beyond the traces that have survived of them. I want to use her concept of "waywardness" to demonstrate an example of shared timing between social outcasts, and to theorize the forms of training that one undergoes in order to fall into step with it. Looking at the intimate lives of young Black women in Philadelphia and New York in the early 20th century, Hartman's "wayward" runs in some ways parallel to Musser's opacity, as "the social poesis that sustains the dispossessed…ambulatory possibility, interminable migrations, rush

and flight, black locomotion; the everyday struggle to live free" (Hartman 2019: 226). To be wayward is "to claim the right to opacity…To be lost to the world. It is the practice of the social otherwise, the insurgent ground that enables new possibilities and new vocabularies; …it is a practice of making and relation that enfolds within the policed boundaries of the dark ghetto…It is a queer resource of black survival." Influenced by Munoz's "not yet here" (2019:26), Hartman reads wayward not only in terms of the violence that produces it but in terms of the potentiality that arises from one's movements against or within those confines.

> Waywardness is a practice of possibility at a time when all roads, except the ones created by smashing out, are foreclosed. It *traffics in occult visions of other worlds* and dreams of a different kind of life.…an ongoing exploration of what might be. It is the untiring practice of trying to live when you were never meant to survive (Hartman 2019:227-228).

Hartman's access to what she calls these "minor figures" is constrained by the lenses of visibility I have been exploring here, and it necessitates creative forms of encounter to see beyond what has been written down by the sociologist, the probation officer, and the vice investigator.

> Their notebooks, monographs, case fields, and photographs created the trails I followed, but I read these documents against the grain, disturbing and breaking open the stories they told in order to narrate my own. It required me to *speculate, listen intently, read between the lines, attend to the disorder and mess of the archive, and to honour silence* (ibid:33).

Here she describes forms of queer archiving, where the productive silences of a deeply anti-Black, anti-queer system of recording and managing bodies must be countered by "listen[ing] for the secondary rhythms, which defy social law and elude the master…if only for an evening" (ibid:29).

In attempting to go against the grain of what normatively counts as "evidence" of these figures' lives, Hartman enacts a form of close reading, or rather, close listening. "If you listen closely, you can hear the whole world in a bent note, a throwaway lyric, a singular thread of the collective utterance" (ibid:345). The method of listening closely is directly linked to the 'bent note' of the minor figure's errancy. If the bent note represents the disruption in time's social expectation, close listening is offered as a way to honour it, and in so doing to open up the possibility of worlds which have historically been prevented from being. However fleeting, or impartial, listening closely allows the scholar to come into contact with them.

The methodological forms that queer historicism takes are described variously by different scholars, but most tend to centre the scholar, observer, or onlooker as an interlocutor in the realization of these forgotten modes: not through discovery or salvation but through these practices of reading or listening closely. Muñoz's claim that "recognition is a brutal choreography" nicely lays bare some of the different themes I am attempting to wrestle with (2009:93). Thinking in terms of choreography reminds us that timeliness is central to sociality, in that temporal logics structure how a subject appears. If queer time is out of step with the time of reproductive futurity, whiteness, or colonialism, it does not mean that it is solitary. There are opportunities for coordination—even choreography—between those who accede to the same kinds of movements, and this includes the scholar or other onlooker herself, looking backward or askance at the norm. Hartman writes a lot about the "chorus" as a way to theorize how social outcasts: "scrub maids, elevator boys, whores, sweet men, stevedores, chorus girls, and tenement dwellers" had their own logics of movement and coordination (Hartman 2019:306). When describing one figure in particular, Hartman argues that: "only the wayward appreciated her riotous conduct and wild habits and longing to create a life from nothing; only they could discern the beautiful plot against the

plantation she waged each and every day" (ibid:34). Hartman's description makes explicit the kinds of sociality that exist between the 'wayward', but also invites speculation on what kind of movement is necessary in order to synchronize oneself with this kind of movement—what does it take for a reader 100 years later, aching for some revelation in the archive, to "discern the beautiful plot?" If waywardness is a form of sociality linked to a temporal logic, can it be learned, and how does this make over the scholar or the onlooker herself?

By describing her own attempts to read against the grain, I argue that Hartman in a sense enacted her own form of waywardness as a method of relation. In her desire to make a path to the submerged figure, she implicitly locates herself alongside the "chorines, bull daggers, aesthetical negroes, lady lovers, pansies, and anarchists [that] supported [the minor figure's] experiments in living free" (ibid:34). But what are the stakes for Hartman? Is this a form of solidarity with the minor figure, a form of salvation, or something else? Consider the following excerpt of Hartman discussing her looking at a photograph of a young Black girl. "I had to move beyond the photograph and find another path to her. How might this still life yield a latent image capable of articulating another kind of existence, a runaway image that conveys the riot inside?" (ibid:29). Here, Hartman wonders what the photograph can "yield:" its potential to give rise to some other existence. At the same time, she includes her own desire for movement as part of the historical process: her own urgency in "find[ing] a path" to the girl cannot be divorced from the method itself. Crucially, Hartman does not imagine herself to be liberating the figure, but rather understands her relationship with the photograph and the story it tells as necessary for her own survival. "[R]etrieving minor lives from oblivion…was my way of redressing the violence of history, crafting a love letter to all those who had been harmed, and, without my being fully aware of it, *reckoning with the inevitable disappearance that awaited me*" (ibid:29-31, my emphasis).

I want to use this quote to come back to my own fieldwork, and to demonstrate what I see as the connection between Hartman's waywardness and the processes of attunement that my informants privilege as key to their social and political goals of occult work. I understand my informants as making a very similar gesture to Hartman in that they wish to yield something else out of the stories and grammars already available to us, something that is capable of "articulating another existence." By learning methods of building imaginative capacity, of finding ways to attune to the "bent note" of narratives not yet recorded, or mostly inaccessible to them, they make relations to that which has been relegated backward or out of time, relations which are forged out of their own desires for connection, self-empowerment, actualization, or escape. I want to stress that, contrary to some queer historicist approaches, the salvific relation at work is not of the scholar or the onlooker liberating the minor figure, but is framed in terms of salvation of the scholar or onlooker herself. I find this really key to understanding the scope of politics and relationality in the occult. As I explore in the next chapter, the concept of solidarity, or liberatory modes of sociality, has been historically fraught in spiritual countercultural movements. In methods of close reading, even enacting a kind of waywardness to fall into step with those figures or modalities which have been rendered unintelligible, we can see an example of negotiating one's connections, even responsibilities, to others who have been expelled from the chronologies of time's social expectation.

Hartman's engagement with the lives of "riotous black girls, troublesome women, and queer radicals" is deeply researched and meticulous, but it wouldn't qualify as a historical account according to most disciplinary purists. Because she is interested in "what might be," and finds ways to write that (Hartman 2019:30), Hartman calls her process "critical fabulation." While these

methods of writing counter histories might not deal with evidence and testimony as they have been accepted into our disciplines of historical scholarship, critical fabulation is "nothing like a li[e]…it is the tactical fictionalizing of a world that is, from the point of view of black social life, already false" (Nyong'o 2018:5-6). While recognizing that Black studies and queer theory do not map evenly onto each other in terms of the stakes of historical repair and the forces of occlusion at work, they are not mutually exclusive by any means, and indeed many of the insights of one are coterminous with the other, in no small part of all due to the contributions from Black queer writers themselves. I think it is helpful to think of critical fabulation in the phenomenon of the queer occult to understand the problem of authenticity or "truth" with respect to the ways that historical narratives are invoked by witches and other occultists, and to complicate the question of whether something is true or not with the question of what terrains of power constrain or give rise to what it is possible to know. In other words, the counter-histories that many are interested in contributing to may not necessarily be verified, but it's not the same as just making stuff up. At the same time, departing from our normative criteria of "truth" also opens up a very potent risk of how we can claim to know what we know, or "remember what we already knew."

One white, trans participant mentioned that straight people she used to read tarot for were more interested in the "veracity" of the cards, whereas this was not really something she was looking for. "In my experience specifically being trans, you know, you kind of really have to get used to the idea that everything you're told is probably a lie. Or at least someone decided to tell it to you that way" (Interview May 2022). Veracity does not hold a privileged status for her when regimes of truth have, in her experience, proven to be so mired in structures intent on her own non-existence. Building imaginative capacity is more important than uncovering some objective truth, as if it is an object waiting to be discovered. According to Snorton, "what is necessary are

theoretical and historical trajectories that further imaginative capacities to construct more liveable

black and trans worlds," making imaginative capacity a matter of life and death (2017:14).

Attunement has been a generative concept for me to theorize how informants understand their

practices as forms of methodological training, which have the potential to bring into reach those

figures, worlds, languages, or forms of sociality that have been made inaccessible by the matrices

of power we are currently embedded in, including what is known as *history*. I have argued that the

occult operates as a queer form of historiography, in that the relegation of certain kinds of

knowledge, modalities, and figures to the "past," or outside, of modernity necessitates an onto-

epistemological break in order to follow or decipher them. The queer and the occult both operate

as the things behind things, which require different strategies of waywardness to come into contact

with them. It could equally be said that both queer and the occult *are* strategies, or methods, of

waywardness. To condition other ways of being or knowing, one must make strange what we have

inherited as our lenses of coherence, making other desire paths which include affective forms of

connections across time and space.

Queering the terrain of the historical has involved cross-disciplinary proposals for

methodologies that traverse errant routes across the gulfs of researcher and subject, reconfiguring

them as peers who might find some fleeting sociality whose very possibility threatens to undo

normative rubrics of identity, evidence, and objectivity. In this chapter I have looked at texts that

explore the ways that one's own relation to untimeliness affects the historical relations they

make—that errancy, or queer methodologies, can offer forms of synchronization with figures who

are not known to us through normative modes of recognition and their contingent evidentiary

models. In reflecting on the occult as a maneuver to "become sentient to a world's work" (Stewart

2011:445), many of my informants implicitly and explicitly privilege queerness as something that makes that sentience more possible, and argued that this is why so many queer people are interested in magic. If the occult operates as a methodological intervention which is preoccupied with what has been rendered invisible, queer people feel as though they are predisposed to those investments in fabulation or creative storytelling. "The queer community, we've kind of like, been used to being like, I'd say outsiders, like used to being like at the margins of society and like maybe it makes us more open to what's different, and it makes us more fluid and understanding and open to these kind of different things" (Group interview, April 2022). In the next two chapters, I look how capacities for becoming "attuned" to certain energies in the universe has been differentially assigned to different kinds of bodies, including how queerness is considered an attribute that makes one more capable of that attunement.

CHAPTER 3 – The occult as biopolitical affect regime

"People in my community. We have an extraordinary level of sensitivity […] Probably the sensitivities you can inherit it. But it is also something that can be learned […] to work on yourself. To develop this sensitivity […] To heal ourselves and to assist others to healing" (Interview, May 2022)

In the last chapter, I theorized how the occult appeals to queer people by virtue of its own obligation to attune to some alternative modality incompletely erased through repressive logics. In my fieldwork, informants talked about magic as a way to develop *openness* or *receptivity* in ways consistent with this theory. The expansion of the affective register, and the capacity to learn how to become sensitive to impressions (construed as energies, patterns, or forces that exist external to oneself) is foundational to informants' understandings of magic and its political potential. Learning to "make connections", "tuning in," and being "open to recognizing patterns" that are otherwise overlooked is held up as the goal of magic, and the reason why it is considered political. What's more, this openness is something queer people are seen as particularly "sensitive" to. In focusing on becoming sensitive to, or attuning to otherwise hidden patterns, magic is construed as the cultivation of a kind of receptivity. As I will show later, magic is constituted in my sample as a process of building capacity to take in impressions that will lead us toward progressive change, whether that is imagined as decolonization, environmental regeneration, or the end of capitalism. Before undertaking a more sustained analysis of how informants reflect on magic as a capacity for accessing sensation in Chapters 4 and 5, where I provide evidence for these claims, this chapter is dedicated to constructing a theoretical grounding in which I will locate my ethnography.

The aim of this chapter is twofold: first, to demonstrate how the occult operates as an affective regime which is oriented toward developing the capacity for feeling. Second, to theorize the racial stakes of the phenomenon by looking at affect as biopolitical. Beyond identity politics or cultural appropriation, this chapter works to theorize race in the phenomenon of occultism in terms of biopolitical affect, or how the capacity to reform oneself and society is encoded as a racialized capacity that distinguishes certain populations as more or less lively and poised for progress. Recognizing patterns, being "open to learning" and "letting the universe flow through me" are common ways that participants describe their embeddedness within a structure that empowers them in ways that are different than what they otherwise experience as marginalized people, or as unwilling participants in a society they understand as broken. I want to propose that this attunement can be understood through sentimental biopower. As such, I bring into relief that the language of 'opening' or 'receptivity' is not benign, but is part of an affective architecture wherein the expansion of feeling is heralded as progressive, even necessary for social enlightenment.

By looking at spirit channeling in the 19th century and its links with the sentimental reform movements at the time, I argue that the risks that contemporary occultists engage in with regard to race emerge from legacies of how the feeling body operates as a site of intervention. Guided by scholarship that captures the ways that sentimentalism and other reform impulses attempted to guide or synchronize embodied capacities, spiritual life comes into relief as a location for both the biopolitical management of race and the potential to expose, and thus undermine, its technologies. In framing legacies of whiteness and racial health as they were articulated in the 19th century as a biopolitical affect regime, I bring into relief how reformism itself operates in a racial taxonomy, and propose an explanation for the "paradox" of spiritual countercultures as spaces of failed solidarity.

Situating Spiritualism within sentimental biopower and as part of the era's spectacles of corporeal excess helps to make recognizable the ways in which, moving forward, contemporary occult practices either reproduce a racial imperative to shore up whiteness, or privilege the ways it is haunted by what remains unassimilable. The next chapter is dedicated to exploring how the the expansion of affective capacity, or becoming "sensitive" is described as a key goal of occult practice in fieldwork. Referring to queerness as a predisposition toward or a relative capacity to feel, participants uphold the development of proper feeling as an index of social health in ways consistent with sentimental biopower. At the same time, they complicate the legacy of biopolitical affect in privileging queerness, rather than whiteness, as its privileged conduit. How is affect's embeddedness within biopower key to understanding the contemporary set of tensions, risks, and goals with respect to race in the phenomenon?

Race and queerness

The conundrum that motivated this project was the observation that the occult in some ways seems to resolve the problem queer people have with genealogy—it makes thinkable different histories of "arrival." At the same time, by investing in different origin stories, there is a risk of naturalizing queer people as somehow *a priori*, or transcendent of regimes of power out of which they actually emerge. In the words of one informant, the occult can easily represent a "move to innocence" that locates one within "all the legacy of beautiful trans and queer people that have been oppressed" rather than the actual histories we are embedded in.

> Magic is a conduit, or like spirituality or the occult or whatever you want to call it, is a
> conduit towards either moving to innocence, or getting deeper into anti-racism work […] It
> can either divert your attention, make you think that because you are manifesting peace on

earth, you know, you are doing your part, or shit like that. Or, or identifying with the victim, the oppressed, that kind of stuff […] And it can also you know, open up your heart, and it's a big tension (Interview, April 2022).

In his book, Morgensen (2011) quotes from Evans' *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture* to theorize the ways that queer white settlers "appropriate the ancestors of racial and national Others as their own subjectivities to justify or inspire revolutionary anti colonialism and sexual liberation"(114-115). "Let us invoke our friends, the banished and forbidden spirits of nature and self, ghost of Indian, wise woman, faggot, Black sorcerer, and witch…Through us the spirits will speak" (Evans, as cited in Morgensen 2011:115). What does this invocation do, and is there something about queer people that makes them exceptional in their ability to channel the marginalized? Is this not the same exceptionalism that is at work when white practitioners call on their spirit animals, "playing Indian" in their pursuits of collective healing (Deloria 1998)? This is the tension that permeates my understanding of race in the queer occult: that on the one hand, there is an explicit dedication to anti-racism among my sample. On the other, there has historically been a tangling of racial and sexual difference that has made many people locate queerness as somehow already antithetical to whiteness, which needs to be taken into consideration. What makes this tension all the more important to investigate is the ways that my informants abhor the blunders of new age healing, where they call out "Texan white ladies with their sage" as exploiting and commercializing localized knowledge systems (Interview April 2022). The New Age is almost universally condemned by the political left as a mortifying detour on the way to self-awareness where people, in particular white people (but not exclusively), sold sacred herbs on the internet, appropriated "Eastern mysteries" (Interview April 2022), and where individual interest triumphed

over an initial dream of collective material shift. While my own informants pointed out what they saw as important differences today in how people are accountable to localized knowledge or what they see as boundaries they should respect with certain kinds of knowledge traditions, the occult remains a highly vexed racial object.

At the same time, critiques centred on cultural appropriation are wholly unsatisfying to me in capturing what is actually at stake in recuperating, reclaiming, or justifying one's inheritance of the given knowledge traditions that can be clustered under "the occult" and beyond. While there are clearly examples of forms of appropriation historically at work in occult formations, and something to be said about the ways that whiteness ingests, incorporates, and assimilates expressions of cultural difference (see Tompkins 2012; McClintock 1995), how does the occult emerge as a cultural, or racialized phenomenon in the first place? What is the racial terrain that the occult mobilizes or emerges out of, and does it render paradoxical, or more urgent, calls for anti-racist and decolonial action as they are imagined through these practices? As I will explore in Chapter 5, I am interested in the stakes of navigating what practitioners understand as the "void" of whiteness, and to what extent it is possible to divest from one kind of imperial lineage and invest in another without this operating as a condemnable maneuver. In this chapter, I table the notion of whiteness as "void," which has been the central thesis of critical whiteness studies (see Dyer 1997; Frankenberg 1993), and theorize the racial architecture of occultism in biopolitical terms instead.

New age feminist spiritualities that exploded in popularity in the 1970s, while also a site of contestation by Indigenous and other women of colour, offered white women in particular a means to gratify what Morgensen (2011) argues is a yearning for ethnic authenticity, as opposed to what they as settlers inherit through conquest. The 'queer' occult, obviously, is not considered by its

practitioners to follow in these footsteps, instead remaining vigilant and accountable to power. I am interested in following the small number of scholars, like Crowley (2011), for whom accusations of cultural appropriation are the starting point to ask what kinds of "satisfaction" practitioners (in her case, white New Age women) get from their involvement (9). In order to understand the stakes of this phenomenon, I think that the question to be posed is not: "are those who engage in what they see as queering the occult also committing cultural appropriation?" but rather: how has the occult offered white people especially a resource to negotiate questions of inheritance and social mobility? Whether or not my participants are "successful" at making a refusal to replicate certain harmful appropriative gestures, it is necessary to understand why this remains such a salient tension in the phenomenon. As we will see, some scholarship has explored the occult in the United States as a means to locate white interior life, or feelings, as the conduit for social transformation (Castronovo 2011). Nineteenth century transatlantic Spiritualist and occult cultures were preoccupied with managing the inner states of white people as in need of reform in order to "cure" social ills like slavery (Cox 2003). If the occult has historically operated as a site to expand white spiritual enlightenment, even when practitioners imagine themselves to be pursuing social harmony, what is the historical context of that slippage, and what does it have to do with the phenomenon today?

In claiming the 'queer' occult as a corrective to the spectacular failures of New Age spirituality to offer the kind of racial harmony it fantasized, theorists of these 'fringe movements', and other cultural commentators miss a crucial opportunity for contextualizing this phenomenon within a longer history of millenialism and spiritual life in US and transatlantic culture. If we wish to understand the ways that queer occultism is heralded as a route away from society's ills, we need to know how the occult has historically operated as a site of reform and social transformation, and

especially the ways in which this may have provided a particular kind of satisfaction for white people and/or settlers. How is the occult imagined as reformist: what is being healed, how, and what are the barriers to it? Who is particularly endowed with that healing power, or stands to benefit from it?

In order to theorize race in this project over the next three chapters, I put today's queer occult formulation in conversation not with countercultural movements of the 1970s and 80s, but to a century earlier, in the spiritual 'hothouse' era of late nineteenth century US and Britain. Making this pairing allows me to do several things. For one, analyzing the dynamics of race as they proliferated in this period allows me to theorize the stakes of race in this project beyond a notion of cultural possession, toward detailing the ways the occult emerges as a kind of racialized knowledge itself. Consequently, thinking with then-dominant conceptions of race as a relative capacity to be 'alive' to movements made on the body locates spiritualist and other psychic healing movements of the period as one branch of reform that characterized the "biopolitical affect regime" of 19th century life (Schuller 2018:123). By investigating the ways that Spiritualism, in particular spirit channeling, built on and spectacularized the formulation of race as an animacy hierarchy, I ask to what extent this continues to motivate, or 'animate', current formulations of magic, especially given the ways that practitioners consciously aim to divest from harmful legacies of whiteness and empire in their work. Participants in my fieldwork, and elswehere, describe magic as a process of building the capacity to affect or be affected by the world, described in terms of 'intuition' or 'attunement', which is hailed as key to social transformation. By framing magic as a process of training which is linked to the affective, I hope to show that contemporary practitioners both contribute to and deviate from the legacy of the occult as a biopolitical affect regime, maintaining affectability as the locus of social progress at the same time that whiteness is displaced

as its coextension.

As we began to explore in the last chapter, attunement is an important mechanism of queer forms of historicism, which put into reach what has been made unreachable by conventional modalities of knowing. In this chapter I look at how the capacity for that attunement is racialized, turning to theories of affect and biopower to lay out a framework for interrogating the current phenomenon in this context. How has the capacity to affect/be affected been at the heart of conceptions of social health, including its more 'fringe' spiritual branches, and to what extent has whiteness proscribed that capacity? How does magic/psychic healing/occult represent an attempt to build capacity for receptivity among participants, and how is this capacity linked to the healing of white supremacy, colonization, and the inheritance of violence?

19ᵗʰ century Spiritualism

Whether dismissed as the last gasp of American irrationalism by those who believe in modernity as disenchantment, studied as a laboratory of popular science (Alder 2020), or celebrated as the first seeds of feminist organizing (Braude 1989; Noakes 2019), Spiritualism has piqued the curiosity of more than a few scholars across disciplines. Characterized as a radical counterculture in ways that parallel the contemporary phenomenon of queer occultism, I locate them alongside each other, as social reform movements that privilege the expansion of feeling as key to the healing of social ills. Spiritualism is, at its most essential, communication with the dead. Made up of mostly white anglo saxon middle class former protestants, Spirit communication in the movement took the form of living room séances by adolescent girls, as well as public séances offered by professional mediums to packed halls. Spiritualism also operated through wide-reaching print media, which expressed its powers and its links with different political reforms. One

prominent theologian commented on its popularity thus: "in 1856, it seems more likely that spiritualism would become the religion of America than in 156 that Christianity would become the religion of the Roman Empire" (Parker, as cited in McGarry 2012:3). More than just a parlour trick, Spiritualism was a complex social cosmology. According to McGarry: "Actively engaged in a politics of the body and the body politic, Spiritualism encompassed a set of utopian practices and imaginings that, when understood together, uniquely linked many of the disparate political movements of the day" (2012:4). The two most important elements to consider are one, that Spiritualism comprised a doctrine of progression that saw the afterlife as merely a change in condition, wherein one's spirit moved through successive spheres of enlightenment that would move the collective health of the whole toward greater harmony (Cox 2003). Second, and related, that the world was perceived and experienced as a dynamically integrated whole, wherein "individuals were integrated holistically within the structures of society, joined in thought, affect, and sensation into the fiber of a sympathetically united nation in precisely the same way that the nerves, organs, and tissues were integrated within the organic body" (Cox 2003:3). Spiritualists were united not necessarily in terms of political allegiance or religious affiliation, but in the conception that social bonds were undergoing dissolution, and needed to be repaired. While they had different ideas about what the sources of this disrepair was (whether it was class struggle, enslavement, modernization, or otherwise), they were joined in understanding the solution to this crisis as a strengthening of the bonds of affective connection to bring the "organs" of society back into communion (Cox 2003:80).

Spiritualists themselves differed in terms of their origin story, but most agreed the catalyst of the movement was the infamous spirit rappings interpreted by Maggie and Kate Fox in a Hydesville, New York basement in 1848. Unlike other spirits that visited, these were departed

personal friends who could communicate their presence by answering personal questions with a telegraphic code of raps (Cox 2003:6). Their communion proved a public sensation, and to satisfy demand for this affirmation that life continued after death, the Fox sisters took their abilities to public halls, where they performed for crowds in the 'burned over district' […]. According to Cox, "The girls had become spiritual "mediums," intermediaries of exchange on several levels, operating like the wires of a telegraph over which forces could act at a distance and through which impressions were conveyed to the senses" (ibid:7). Unlike necromancers before them, "[Spiritualists maintained that] while some might be more innately capable than others, mediumship was available to all who openly inquired. Inspiration was free to the masses" (ibid). Skeptics and debunkers were, of course, always at the centre of the phenomenon, but as Spiritualists saw themselves as lay scientists, they often encouraged skeptics to come and observe the phenomena themselves (Noakes 2019:47). In just three years since Hydesville, "more than 150 spiritualist circles were active in New York state alone, and by 1854 more than 10 spiritualist publications circulated nationally" (Pike 2004:51).

Spiritualists saw themselves as a generation seeking after signs: they were gripped by a "longing for something not possessed" (Childs, as cited in Cox 2003:71), which makes an interesting political kinship with the woundedness in queer historicism I explored last chapter. The progressivism that was baked into this millenial drive to heal, repair, and move through successive spheres of enlightenment created a Spiritualist reform politics (McGarry 2012:9). Historians have dedicated much time to exploring how many of those who tilted tables or engaged in trance speaking were also loud supporters of abolition, women's enfranchisement, labour and prison reform, better treatment of American Indians, abolition of capital punishment, and even dress reform, dietetics, free love and vegetarianism (Pike 2004; Crowley 2011). At the time, this

wedding of Spiritualism to social reform was belaboured by its followers and detractors alike, who either boasted or decried the fact that "Spiritualists cast tenfold as many votes for the Abolition and Temperance tickets as did others" (Smith, as cited in McGarry 2012:4). In the words of Cox:

> Religion, politics, race, science, and the "body" were no longer separate discourses but discourses each of complex structure, that intertwined, informed, and competed with one another in dynamic fashion. The curious admixture of the languages of physiology, reform, romantic love, science, and religion that characterizes Spiritualist writing results from this fusion, creating a ground in which the telegraph might have as much effect on emotion as a shift from a Calvinist to a Universalist eschatology or the creation of a republic or the extension of suffrage or the abolition of slavery. And at the bottom is a particular battle over *how the self is constituted, how it is to be configured, and how it relates with other selves in society* (2003:82, my emphasis).

As we will see in the next section, Cox describes this relationship between the self and society in terms of sympathy, and how the bonds of sympathetic connection are needed to overcome social rifts. Of particular importance for this study is the ways that race figured as central to Spiritualist attention: after the civil war, the union between white people and everyone else was thrust to centre stage, and the case of emancipation and the status of Blackness and whiteness in America was negotiated and preached by mediums and members of Spiritualist periodicals. Indeed, as I hope to show: the status of the body and its political claims to life was at the foundation of all reformism, making it a racializing assemblage whether or not race itself was explicitly on view. By looking closely at the reform impulse that drove Spiritualism, the conversation I wish to participate in is not whether or not Spiritualism really was radical—whether or not it was a positive good, or a

political failure. Rather, I aim to locate Spiritualism within theories of biopower, which I argue set up a nice continuity with contemporary psychic healing or magical practice as 'radical politics' in my own fieldwork. Reading sympathy, which is central to Spiritualist topography, as an always already racialized circulation of affect, this sets the stage for understanding how Spiritualist reform could territorialize both calls for and against racial hierarchy, giving insight into both the potentials and risks of drawing from this legacy today.

Sympathy

Drawing heavily upon the existing discourses of somnambulism and mesmerism, and above all upon the praxis of sympathy, Spiritualism created affective structures through which the world was perceived and experienced as a dynamically integrated whole, which could be brought into harmony through recognizing each person's part in a comprehensive community of sensation. In *Body and Soul*, Robert Cox (2003) explores the philosophy of sympathetic exchange as it emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries in US and Britain, and traces its influence on Spiritualism as a reformist movement. Theorized prolifically by Adam Smith, sympathy was a socio-biological phenomenon that centred feeling, rather than reason, as crucial to regulating moral behaviour, and sensibility was explored as a property of the nervous system which coordinated cognition, sensation, and emotional responses (Cox 2003:24). Cox argues that sympathy was already well-entrenched in understandings of morality and social cohesion before the spectral visits to the Hydesville basement. Spiritualism merely built upon this theory and proposed a version of reform that extended to the spiritual or immaterial sphere. Spiritualist sentiment in effect continued to build onto a social physiology in which "the interpersonal was experienced viscerally and in which affect and sensation were integrated and extended beyond the boundaries of the individual"

(ibid:3).[3] In other words, sympathy was taken up as a "flexible instrument" for healing the sense of social dislocation that many were grappling with in the wake of new forms of wage labour , the uncertain distinction between white and Black people, new horizons of women's power, and the advent of major forms of technology which put people in touch with each other in exciting and unsettling ways (ibid:234).

If the nineteenth century encapsulated a crisis of embodiment (Tompkins 2012), Spiritualism can be said to have been part of the experimentation with the limits of corporeality, including to what extent an individual was part and parcel of the social body, and how that would change once they departed this world. "Spiritualism provided legibility to life, mapping the cosmos onto a distinctive topography of emotion in which the geographies of the body, heaven, and earth took part in suturing the individual physiologically and socially into the enduring structures that animated the cosmos" (Cox 2003:70). The shifts of modernity represented a profound dissolution of the heretofore stable body of the individual and the nation, and Spiritualism was one answer to reassert its integrity, turning to the affective ties between us as stronger, more enduring, and more transformative than the illusory boundaries of class, race, and religion.

The reformism that so many have recognized at the heart of the Spiritualist philosophy lies in the belief that sympathetic exchange had the power to eventually unify society so totally that injury to any part would be felt by all, effectively ensuring that mass architecture of suffering, such as slavery, would inevitably disappear. Social injustice was regarded as a stain on the moral and social development of humanity, which held everyone back from enlightenment and thus must be urgently addressed. Spirit communion was potent proof in the power of affective connection: if brotherly love could transcend "the most refractory barrier on earth"—death— then surely it could

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[3] "Sympathy became the medium of exchange in a spiritualist political economy, in which sentiment was specie and its unfettered exchange the principle on which a stable moral order was established" (Cox 2003:98).

also resolve or overcome the much less opaque boundaries of social difference (ibid:85). Spiritualists sought to develop their capacity to heal these rifts, and spirit guides who represented higher echelons of development could help to bring the corrupted pieces of the whole back together to ensure a collective movement upward. This integrated community of sensation would not, however, be spontaneous, and rather depended on each member participating actively in monitoring the health of the whole, and this is where the imperative for social action emerged in Spiritualist vernacular, however diverse the forms it took. It is this notion of 'monitoring the health of the whole' where I make the link to biopower.

Sentimental Biopower

Theories of sentimental biopower have allowed some scholars to categorize reform movements in the US antebellum period in terms of the ways they managed relational intensities between bodies (Schuller 2018). Drawing from Stoler's (1995) work on the circuitous relationship between colonialism and intimacy, Tompkins (2012:87) shows how reform movements like dieticism took the intimate realm as a kernel of the civilizing process, wherein "the managing of racial, sexual, and dietetic anxieties demonstrates an effort to shore up the imaginary contiguities among nation, home, and body." If personal conduct was a matter of national importance, the goal of reform was to shape the interior life of its citizens as far as their racialized limits would allow. Reform movements in the 19th century used sentimental vernaculars in order to prescribe the proper comportment of the body, so that personal conduct was thus not simply an individual failing but "pose[d] a risk to the body politic" (Moran 2000:110). Sentimentalism, rather than being an aesthetic or apolitical mode, worked as a technology to circulate and regulate feeling through a milieu. The proper calibration of feeling was coterminous with personal and collective health, and

a biopolitical architecture governed how certain kinds of feeling bound a given body or population to a desirable future. The body thus emerged as a spatiotemporal phenomenon. Sexual restraint, shame, and emotional regulation differentiated the civilized from the savage members of the population, as well as operated as conduits for ever greater individual and collective progress.

In her *Biopolitics of Feeling*, Kyla Schuller (2018) theorizes "sentimental biopower" to describe the ways that races were organized according to a perceived differential capacity to regulate feeling. The sentimental aspect refers to the centrality of affects such as shame, sympathy, love, and anger in determining one's claim to civility, and the biopower aspect refers to how sentimentalism operated as a technology that regulated feeling. Schuller argues that race was constituted in the 19th century US not as a stable or purely biological inheritance, but a differential capacity to change over time, distinguishing populations according to their relative ability to operationalize impressions received from the environment. This is where the reformist aspect comes in: while certain populations were more naturally endowed with a capacity for affective movement, this could also be, to some extent, learned and worked on in order to progress. Critical of how some affect scholars overstate the liberatory or subversive potential of affect, Schuller demonstrates how lively matter actually operated as a key technology of biopower in 19th century America, wherein a body's capacity to incorporate and discipline different kinds of feeling were central to its political claims to life. The individual body was figured as the building block of racial/national health: in construing the ideal citizen as self-policing, "nationalism was stitched to the individual white body…the correct embodiment of the individual was understood to be of deep importance to the burgeoning nation" (Tompkins 2012:6). If biopower designates certain bodies as productive of/indicative of a kind of civilizational health, while others are constructed as detrimental to it (Puar 2007; Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco 2014), looking at the sentimental

language of nineteenth century reform demonstrates how sensorial discipline was tied to racial survival. As such, affect is always already racialized.

Turning to race science and reform politics of the period, Schuller demonstrates how interior states were understood as an index of racial health, where whiteness operated both as evidence of and as a conduit for greater impressibility, or the capacity to be affected. In other words, bodies were endowed with differential ranges of social mobility, construed in terms of what kinds of feeling they could or could not generate or make visible. Sensorial discipline emerged as "the imperative placed on the civilized races, especially its female members and those aspiring to civilization and citizenship, to learn to master their sensory impulses and thus direct the development of themselves and their descendants" (Schuller 2018:18), which took shape through the "deployment of sexuality; the aesthetic discourse of taste…public health campaigns…household manuals…women's moral reform societies; institutions for free black southerners…new social movements and print cultures to regulate the gustatory appetites of the population, including temperance and dietetic reform; and religious revivals and imperial missionary efforts," among others (ibid:19).

Impressibility refers to a body's capacity to "be alive to movements made on it" (ibid:7), and served as the "key measure for racially and sexually differentiating the refined, sensitive, and civilized subject who was embedded in time and capable of progress—as well as in need of protection from the savage elements of the population suspended in the eternal state of flesh" (ibid:8). Temporality itself, then, is racialized through biopower, with the most abject populations appearing as stages in an imaginary linear progressive narrative that whiteness spearheads, but whose ascendency is constantly under threat. Race and sex comprise a spatiotemporal account of the body's affective, emotional, and regulatory capacity, an index of impressibility that extends

beyond the present. Whiteness represented the apex of that impressibility, the top of an animacy hierarchy where white people could be most "moved," while Blackness represented the inverse, a limited liveliness that both justified its status as inferior and proscribed its capacity to evolve out of it.

Before moving on to fieldwork, I want to use spirit channeling as it showed up in 19th century spiritualism as a case study to apply theories of sentimental biopower to the occult sphere. In doing so, we can see the affective economy at work as a reformist impulse that included the celestial, and how it prescribed differential capacities for movement formulated on the basis of race. While Spiritualism has been called a "forum for the reformatory impulse" (Troy 2017:15), scholarship on sentimental biopower has not considered these religious revivals as technologies of racial uplift. Most academic work, sporting secular blinders, tends to overlook religious movements as operating under and through the same sociopolitical structures as other cultural phenomena, expanding on and reinforcing them. Investigating the biopolitical calculus of reform in this period is important to understand how Spiritualism located the kernel of the human development in the proper direction of white affect, even as it understood itself to be pursuing democracy and justice. This appealed to me as an opportunity to explore the structural investments in whiteness that characterize the occult, and whether or not contemporary formations, which make similar claims to social transformation, diverge from this. This will allow me to theorize contemporary occultism as a kind of repetition with a difference, and to propose that the "problem" of race in the occult is not a question of cultural appropriation, but biopower.

By locating Spiritualism within sentimental biopower, I expand the realm of 19th century reform to include its spiritual branches, while also setting up a lens through which to explore the

contemporary occult as a racializing assemblage. By exploring the body's capacity for feeling as part of an animacy hierarchy, I theorize contemporary occult movements as affective regimes, and argue that the risk of cultural appropriation is better understood through the ways that the capacity to affect and be affected has historically been racialized. Looking at how affect is a key site for distinguishing the sensitive (and thus privileged) elements of the collective allows me to set the groundwork for understanding the racial terrain out of which "attunement" in my interviews emerges. While, as we will see, my informants see queerness, rather than whiteness, as giving them a particular sensibility that is key to social transformation, I am interested in to what extent the development of affective capacity, construed as "openness," "sensitivity," or "receptivity," is maintained as an index of social health, even as they work to disinherit white supremacy as its organizing framework. If apparently benign attributes like sensitivity and receptivity actually map out racial governmentality (Nyong'o 2009:103), it is crucial to understand the legacy of how these affects circulated and were encoded in different bodies in earlier occult movements. Understanding the link between reform/progress and sensitivity allows me to contextualize contemporary occultism within a long narrative of social transformation that sees the development of feeling as key to enlightenment.

Sympathetic exchange

The reformist architecture of Spiritualism saw progress as immanent in the universe. Death was merely a change in conditions, wherein the affective relations one had established in their mortal life would survive to create a framework of love and emotion that would carry one forward and contribute to the strengthening of bonds on earth (Cox 2003:103). In death, one would "find time to do that good to our race that we have been deprived of doing on earth" (ibid:85). The

community Spiritualists imagined was transcendent, transparent, and in eternal development toward perfection, unfettered by then Smithian "radical opacity" of the self who could never fully know another's suffering or joy (ibid:97). The "career" of the spirit began upon death and moved through successive spheres as it absorbed knowledge, rising successively, and calling upon others to awaken their own moral sensibility and accountability. If "it is fair to say that there was not a single early spiritualist who was not also a reformer and abolitionist" (Deveney, as cited in Cox 2003:163), how exactly did Spiritualism map onto social transformation? While many scholars have explored the overlap between Spiritualism and reform movements of the time, none have put this in conversation with biopower, therefore missing the foundational racial grammar of Spiritualism's theory of progress. Cox has explored the ways that sympathy undergirds Spiritualist cosmologies, wherein the development of fellow feeling is seen as a conduit and evidence of higher social development. As sympathy refers to the development and circulation of feeling, this offers a good way to understand the biopolitical at the heart of Spiritualism. I argue that, understood through the theory of Schuller's sentimental biopower, sympathy—and thus Spiritualism—operated as a biopolitical affect regime. By this I mean that the development of the capacity for feeling is directly linked to a body's, and consequently the larger population's, movement "upward." Biopower demarcates populations based on what capacities they can or cannot regenerate, and the warm flush of brotherly love which promised enlightenment was disproportionately available to and extended to different bodies. As such, forms of civility already coded as white were privileged as the outcome of reform. Spiritualists extended concepts of civilization to the spiritual sphere, drawing parallels between racialized notions of progress and spiritual hierarchies, investing in a kind of biopolitics of reform that does not limit itself to the earthly progress of civilization, but anchors racial development to a celestial directive.

Evidence of the ways that cultivation of feeling was gendered and racialized can be seen in spirit channeling itself, including what figures appeared or were channeled, and what was at stake in spreading their messages of intimate feeling. The earliest expressions of spirit communion took the form of receiving messages from family and friends. However, within a few years mediums were being possessed by spirits whose messages were pedagogical: giving warnings about what might happen if society continued down its treacherous path of division and inequality, including appeals from departed Indigenous chiefs and formerly enslaved Black people. In the 1850s, George Washington even made frequent visits to deliver condemnations of the ungodliness of slavery and how low a descent it represented from the crowning ideals of the founding fathers (Cox 2003). So frequent were messages of warning and advice from the beyond with regard to the growing call for abolition that many Spiritualists took credit for guiding the course of the Civil War, on the basis of communion with those whose spiritual supremacy had shown them the way forward (ibid:144).

In typical sentimentalist fashion, calls for abolition were, in Spiritualist circles and beyond, framed in terms of appeals to moral sensibility: the "heart burnings" of shame and sympathy were invoked to spur on action for social change (spirit of Washington, as cited in Cox 2003:145). Demand for abolition was not construed primarily as a moral good that one acted out in solidarity with the enslaved or the dispossessed, but rather as the necessary action in order to remove the barrier to collective enlightenment, which white people stood to benefit from as much as, if not more than, Black or Indigenous people. Developing affective ties across race and nationhood was construed as ultimately good for society because of the ways it allowed white people to access higher moral authority and spiritual awakening. Not only did developing sympathy move one into the higher echelons of civilization, but the development of this feeling was also already

disproportionately available to those who were already relatively 'civilized' (ie. white; middle or upper class). What I argue here is that calls for reform with respect to abolition and Indigenous genocide, because constrained by a sentimental biopolitical structure, maintained white affect as the conduit and the outcome of the civilizing drive. Put more plainly, the development of moral feeling as the foundation of social transformation could never be liberatory, *even in calls for emancipation*, so long as the capacity for that feeling was coterminous with white supremacy. In another pronouncement from Washington, he calls on everyone to "loose every fetter, so that the oppressor will see the necessity of loosening the binds that fasten him to his bondman, as well as his bondman to him" (ibid). Under what conditions do white people become those in need of reform, and how has this centering of white enlightenment continued to plague new age and other millennialist movements like the contemporary occult?

In *Necro Citizenship,* Castronovo (2001) argues that the somnambulism, spirit rapping, and trance speaking that constituted Spiritualism were performances of "white interiority" that drew heavily from cultural politics of memory brought from Africa and witnessed by enslavers (161). This interiority, which was "discovered in an occult sphere" (ibid:166), became the focus of Spiritualist discourse and the reform politics that accompanied it, making reform not a question of material conditions of inequality but "confined to consciousness as purely a question of inner spiritual awareness" (ibid:162). Focusing on interiority allowed abolitionists to align white subjects with enslaved Africans as fellow sufferers of the "crisis of disordered mental states" that mesmerism and other occult practices claimed to cure (ibid:164). "For many would-be emancipators, mesmerism and spiritualism addressed the origins of inequality in contrast to abolitionism, which treated only its symptoms" (ibid:163). If slavery was a 'crisis of disordered

mental states,' it would need to be addressed through inner life, through trance, animal magnetism, somnambulism or other occult practices. In other words, Spiritualist practices centred the white subject as in need of emancipation as much as the enslaved, and located the locus of that emancipation in the spiritual or psychic realm. The proper direction of white affect, which abolitionists construed through the extension of sympathy toward the plight of the Black figure, was the key to development of all human civilization.

In many ways, this focus on interiority echoes critiques of the new age's navel-gazing and consequent failure of reproducing any real social action: apparently radical change is not so revolutionary as long as it is confined to the self. Castronovo argues that de-materializing the racialized body was necessary in order to demonstrate the essential sameness of all people: "white spiritualism strips the slave's body, text, and memory of materiality in order to transcend the corporeal bondage that all humans share" (2001:174). As such, for Spiritualists, equality was only possible under conditions of disembodiment (ibid:167). Abolition thus became a matter of interiority, and Spiritualism trafficked in the strange theatre of divorcing body from mind. While the fantasy of whiteness transcends corporeality, the body stubbornly persists, coded as the stubborn material we all share.

In "Abolition's Racial Interiors and the Making of White Civic Depth," Christopher Castiglia (2002) describes how white affective citizenship relied on the incorporation of Blackness. Like Castronovo, he argues that reformers in this era conceived of social problems as arising from deformed interior states (rather than economic or political inequality), and explores how the target of reform increasingly became not the abject population, but what the white middle-class subject stood to gain (Castiglia 2002:34). However, while Castronovo focuses on the specifics of the occult sphere, Castiglia demonstrates more broadly how abolition discourse, and reform in general,

secures and maintains racialized hierarchies. Castiglia's approach is to demonstrate how social inequality came to be measured increasingly based on one's 'exclusion from sympathy' as a harm to be remedied, in which he argues 'sympathizer' and 'sufferer' were separated into distinct classes with variable mobility in terms of social value. Abolitionists "helped to establish an affective economy that allowed the regulation that might otherwise have been carried out on the basis of bodies to appear as individual emotional response" (ibid:38).

Similar to Schuller's biopolitics of feeling, which regulates how bodies affect each other in a milieu, Castiglia argues that sympathy generated two distinct kinds of citizenship based on the imagined capacities of feeling it generated between she who extends sympathy and he who 'invites' it. The sympathizer stands to gain a fuller humanity, an evolution of moral authority superior to that of whites who have not the faculties for appreciating the suffering of the abject. The sufferer on the other hand, for example an enslaved person, in demonstrating the capacity for self-modification and command of the passions, was limited to gaining entrance into the enfranchised status that his sympathizers already occupied. In other words, the racialized subject, in the minds of abolitionists, was deserving of rights, but only by demonstrating their capacity for 'proper' feeling and thus their civil health. Their suffering is thus incorporated as what Castiglia calls "white civic depth"…so that even Black emancipation becomes refigured as a conduit for white mobility, above and beyond the meagre offerings of the state toward a more spiritual enlightenment. In the next section, I demonstrate how that sympathetic exchange took place in Spirit channeling specifically, laying bare how the status of whiteness was re-instated as distinct in spite of, and indeed as a result of, calls for sympathy with the disenfranchised.

Spiritual teachers

The interconnectedness between the plight of the enslaved and those who benefited from their enslavement is, as we have seen, integral to sympathy. Rather than a unilateral gift, sympathy requires that those vying for citizenship show their ability to 'move' in order to qualify for the transformational gift of sympathy that white abolitionists and other reformers would bestow. This sympathetic interconnection is key to understanding the apparent paradox that calls for social justice could also be reproduce the very logics of the power they claim to condemn, and is thus crucial to setting up my discussion of the contemporary queer occult. In order to demonstrate how this sympathetic cosmology, or "affective economy" operated within Spiritualism, I turn to the case study of "Indian" spirit possession. Looking at this affective economy, in particular how the capacity for affective expansion is linked to enlightenment, provides a context for understanding how contemporary occult practitioners reflect on "openness," "receptivity" and "sensitivity" as integral to social transformation. What's more, it demonstrates the ambivalence of race in the occult in terms of the desire to transcend it as well as an affirmation of its incommensurability. I hope to show that the disembodied universalism that Spiritualism espoused, while on the surface calling for reparation and accountability, re-centered whiteness as the ultimate beneficiary of reform…an accusation which contemporary white allyship is no stranger to. Following the lead of scholars such as Audra Simpson (2007), Glen Coulthard (2014), and others, I use the term "Indian," preserving the terminology of the time period in question, while critical of the ways it was applied.

In the post-civil war years Indian spirits appeared to Spiritualists to chastise, call for accountability, call to action, but most prominently to guide the living on a path to healing. According to Cox, "the dynamic and timing of the Indian influx fulfilled the specific needs of a

post-Civil War generation of whites struggling with the…political reality of emancipation that thrust the issues of union with nonwhites—sympathetic, political, ethnological, and biological— to center stage" (2003:191). In *The Specter of the Indian*, Kathryn Troy (2017) explores how white female mediums channeled Indian ghosts in order to motivate widespread changes, calling on spirits as expert witnesses in the trial of ongoing race relations. Appearing at séances to share their stories of wrongful treatment and pleas to sympathy, Indian chiefs and maidens excoriated audiences for the murder of their people and the theft of their lands (Troy 2017:16). However, the spirits were also pedagogical, appearing to "help ensure spiritualists' inner illumination, support white social reform, and empower female mediums" (ibid:xii). While the spirit encounter was, according to Troy, supposed to evoke sympathy for those who suffered, she also claims that spiritualists justified their calls for progress as "necessary for the spiritual development of whites" (ibid:85), claiming that morally corrupt treatment of Indians was impeding the progress of all. Given that civilization was understood to be a collective endeavour that continued after death, better treatment of American Indians was an imperative for white spiritual progress.

> The peak of rhetoric regarding Indians as vanished coincided with the peak of Spiritualism and the height of Indian appearances within the movement in particular. Approximately 90 percent of the Indian manifestations recorded in the Banner of Light occurred in the years between 1860 and 1890, with roughly 50 percent of those appearing in the 1870s. Communications from spirit chiefs pointed to U.S. generals as murderers of Indian women and children, criticized American society for its deceitfulness and theft of Indian lands, and attempted to enact, through their audiences, a federal Indian policy that would honor its promises (Troy 2017:16-17).

While authors like McGarry criticize how Spiritualist reform effectively depended on the death of the Indian in order to imagine progress, Troy argues that the ongoing presence of Indian apparitions in séances actually defy the strict categorization of Indians as "past." She argues that haunting operated as a mode of knowledge production that cannot be conflated with vanishing, which revealed the extent to which the Indian question was unfinished or unanswered for mediums and those who came to witness their channeling.

As biopower entails the "racialization of temporality" (Schuller 2018:58), this provides an interesting lens through which to view spirit channeling. Channeling manifests the kinds of exchanges biopower conditions and even demands: determining who gets left behind, for whose benefit, and how they both continue to be linked together. White civility cannot exist without its racialized counterpoint, which is always incompletely repressed, and the ways that this counterpoint 'haunts' whiteness was unevenly confronted and managed by all those grappling with the changing valuations of their bodies in postbellum America. For those across disciplines who are interested in how the subject, and most importantly, what gets displaced, appropriated, ingested, or circumscribed in the process, the encounter between white female medium and racialized spirit offers a compelling case study.

I focus on the ways that affective capacity was framed as the conduit for social transformation, and the ways this necessitated a relational exchange with different stakes for the reformer as the target of her sympathy. According to McGarry, "Spiritualists' will to protect native lands and sovereignty was self-serving inasmuch as they needed Indian spirit guides to illuminate their own evolving cosmology…Whether or not Indians needed Spiritualist prayers, Spiritualists needed Indians" (2012:81-83). In the words of a writer of the epoch, "We as a people cannot progress, morally or spiritually, until *a feeling of kindness and brotherhood is generally awakened*, at least

high enough to give them human sympathy and the protection of the law" (Worcester, as cited in McGarry 2012:83, my emphasis). Sympathy could only be proffered, however, if the target of the sympathy was seen as deserving of it. Looking at the deployment of affects like sympathy as a technology of racialization illuminates how white citizenship was co-constituted with that of other populations. Marginalized populations like Black or Indigenous people were not automatically considered deserving targets of sympathy, but rather had to demonstrate their own capacity for uplift in order even to enter into the affective space where national/social mobility was possible. In other words, reforming the actions of whites was only imaginable through a parallel 'evolution' of the racialized population in question. This is consistent with what scholars have shown is the imperative placed on women, Black people, or other minority groups to prove the ways in which they could properly conduct themselves in order to become eligible for sympathy, and thus consideration as civilians (Nyong'o 2009; Schuller 2018). In this case, Indigenous ghosts demonstrated their own movement through successive spheres in their recurrent visits to the medium and her audience, and their evolution increased sympathy from an audience who needed to see that the spirit deserved it. Evidence of a spirit's own progress, according to Troy, was most often demonstrated by language eloquence: while broken English was expected, better command of English, especially shown through progressive visits by the same spirit, proved his/her helpfulness to white reformers, demonstrating how far the spirit had progressed away from its earthly backwardness. Interestingly, gender conformity was also a sign of a spirit's progress. That this was understood by audiences as a sign that spiritual evolution had taken place highlights how spiritualism adhered to contemporary notions of gender as an index of national health. Perfect manliness and womanliness was seen as one of the goals of civilizing progress, one that even Indians were capable of achieving, though only after death, and only in their quest to help whites

overcome their own spiritual barriers.

While many Spiritualists I believe genuinely supported at least some measure of solidarity with Indians, the relationship that spirit channeling often espoused was not exactly an anti-colonial one. Rather, it lays bare how the civilization of all races was still, for Troy, the responsibility of whites (2017:127). If we take Schuller's assertion that a race's capacity for civilization was measured through their relative affectivity (capacity to affect and be affected), the dynamics that played out between the medium and the spirit show Indigenous spirits 'evolving' through normative models of civility and uplift, incorporating Indians in a sympathetic nexus with whites that ensures a peaceful transition on American soil. Revered as "agents of peace, models of sexual difference, and guides to spiritual progression" (Troy 2017:xii), Indians entered into sympathetic link with whites, committed to mutual spiritual advancement. The progression of Indian spirits through the many celestial spheres, toward perfection, did two things. It represented Indians' capacity for self-betterment, which was key for reformist calls for integrationist policy, though obviously deeply linked to a racist framework which cast them in need of civilizing. In addition, it offered a promise of similar progression and absolution for those who answered the call to increase the reach of sympathetic communion. Measured against a climate of Indian genocidal policy, the insistence on the capacity of Indians to be civilized, even to act as peers in the movement toward spiritual collective health, seems—and indeed at times was—countercultural. But read in terms of biopolitical reform, while this capacity to progress did recruit Indians into an affective topography of civilization, its potential was relative to the greater expansiveness of whiteness, who ultimately continued to act as the index of collective progress. Through the sympathetic exchange with Indians as wards, guides, or at best as nodes of fellow feeling, Indians were ultimately incorporated into whiteness, the 'residue' of their race finally harmonialized into the body politic in order to

finally naturalize settlers' link to American soil.

Cox has written that after the Civil war, and in the wake of the disappointments of Reconstruction, race became more crystallized and more material for Spiritualists, and their sympathetic nexus thus focused on the power to cohere rather than transcend difference. "In light of the demonstrable failure of social action on earth, justice and equality could simply be placed in the hands of the unseen" (Cox 2003:188). Racial and national affiliation were refigured as natural sympathetic bonds which were resistant to change after death, and the calls to resistance once championed by spiritual visitors such as Black Hawk, Powhatan, Thunder, Logan, and Little Crow were muted as they became figures of forgiveness and absolution instead (ibid:206). What had once been a Spiritualist dream to overcome and eventually disappear social barriers became dampened into a commitment to polite communion due to the stubborn materiality of race, which was natural and enduring, probably also due to evolving conceptions of race as genetically encoded rather than palimpsestic. In enshrining sensitivity, permeability, and receptivity as key traits of social communion, transcendence, and evolution, however, Spiritualism contributed to and participated in an animacy hierarchy that arguably has not disappeared in the ways it instructs white supremacist frameworks of a body's receptivity to intervention (Chen 2012).

The biopolitics of reform movements in the 19th century, of which Spiritualism was a part, demonstrates that historically, affect has been embedded within a racial grammar. Indeed, as long as reformism is understood to work upon bodies' differential capacities for movement, there will be a racial assemblage to contend with, even if that reformism appears to be anti-racist. The paradox here is that to the extent that "awakening" is maintained as the measure of social transformation, it displaces the actual plight heralded as its cause. On white allyship more

generally, Tompkins (2012) argues that reformers indirectly appropriated Black or Indigenous subjectivities as a means to direct white feeling and action. Elsewhere it has been written that the greatest dilemma in feminist-abolitionist literature was how to identify with instead of appropriating the other (hooks 1992). According to Schuller, "Sentimentalism stimulates the moral virtuosity and emotional release of the sympathizer and her affective attachment to the nation state at the expense of the needs of the chosen targets of her sympathy, typically those barred from the status of the Human" (2018:2). Castiglia's (2002) work on the racialized kinds of citizenship made possible through sympathy helps to illustrate a specific form of sentimental biopower and the uneven ways that reform movements, including spiritualism, prescribed uplift for its white or otherwise racialized targets.

This insight is paramount in studies on the constellations of social movements, spirituality, and solidarity, including the conundrums of the new age movement and its most recent progeny which I study. Is there still a legacy of racialized animacy that informs how calls for awakening, manifesting, or transcendence take place and who they are particularly available to? "Spiritualists of all stripes struggled with the meaning and limits of sympathy, the bedrock of their social philosophy, and in the end the murky boundaries hedging it in allowed both radical and reactionary to employ the same moral language of sympathetic mutuality while drawing diametrically opposite conclusions for social practice" (Cox 2003:145-146). As I explore in the next chapter, my informants clearly all draw similar conclusions for social practice from their use of the occult, but they remain plagued in some ways by those "diametrically opposite" conclusions that one could draw. That sympathy and its affective economy could allow both white supremacists and abolitionists to bring into reach the worlds they envisioned is a clue as to how current occult movements continue to be ambivalent, contentious, and risky. While outside the scope of the

current project, I see this ambivalence as key to understanding how occultism just as easily facilitates revivals of white nationalism, traditionalism, and alt-Right movements as it stimulates covens of BIPOC trans witches and queer anarchist magic.

Porosity

I want to zero in on one particular aspect of sentimental biopower that makes a compelling link with my own fieldwork. As we will see later, my informants refer to their own capacity to be open to information and energy "out there" as key to their process of learning magic, or becoming adept at occultism. In Schuller's sentimental biopower, "impressibility" refers to a body's capacity to be "alive" to movements made on it—its capacity to be affected by and incorporate impressions from the environment, with the most lively matter linked to futurity. Analyzing the porosity of the medium's body in the spirit channeling encounter, which is literally impressed upon by the spirit, lays bare how spirit channeling spectacularized both the fantasy of racial transcendence as well as the fear of racial transgression. For the purposes of my study, looking at the body of the normatively white and female medium gives a clue into the ways that impressibility was, and I argue continues to be, gendered and racialized, even as my own informants make their own revisions to that framework in their understandings of the occult as an affective economy.

Referring to race as a palimpsest, Schuller argues that sentimental biopower managed the transformation of animal carnality into human rationality by cumulative layers of taste, habit, and physiological capacity. Temporality is thus rendered material in and through the body, which accumulates its inscriptions on the "individual and species body layer by layer" (2018:123). The movement from mere "flesh" to the body of the civilized has to do with the accumulation of inscriptions by impression, and flesh becomes the inescapable foundation of all civility, no matter

how many layers have sedimented upon it over time. The body is the "inheritor of the written record of its own variably alterable genealogy it carries into the future…[where] the earlier trace always threatens to appear" (ibid:94-96, my emphasis). The relationship between flesh and civility is foundational to white supremacy, consistent with Spillers' notion of "mere flesh" categorizing Blackness in America (1987:67).

In *Bodies in Dissent*, Daphne Brooks (2006) demonstrates how nineteenth century spectacular culture showcases the anxieties of the 'trace' reappearing, especially for white audiences whose status in postbellum America was uncertain. She argues that both minstrelsy and spirit channeling were examples of a miscegenous encounter. In the case of spirit channeling, the miscegenation could refer not only to racial mixing, but also as an incarnation of the "productive violence" of the clash of temporalities that occur in the palimpsest of race (Dillon, as cited in Schuller 2018:97). In its contact with the undead, Spiritualism literally trafficked in the drama of the trace made visible through the medium, calling forth spirits to animate the medium's body and speak through her. The ghosts in these séances were usually racialized—Black or Indigenous—reinforcing the correlation between race and time and rehearsing the dilemma of miscegenation as a dilemma of pastness interrupting the present.

> These ethnic phantoms [Indian chief, negro, old maid] find voice in the figure of the most often white and female spiritualist who captures and reanimates marginal characters across the great racial, cultural, and spiritual divide, acting out and performing their residue long after they have withdrawn from their host (Brooks 2006:14, my emphasis).

I am interested in what it means for the white female medium's body to "perform[] their residue," and how this can inform investigations into the occult today. First of all, the haunting of the

medium's body represents the political potential, if not the promise, of disrupting the present, by spectacularizing the return of that which has been repressed. This is consistent with Gordon's (2008) notion of haunting as a form of knowledge production, which Troy also theorizes as integral to Spiritualist epistemologies. For Gordon:

> Haunting raises spectres, and it alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present and the future. These spectres or ghosts appear when *the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view* …Haunting…is one way we are notified that what's been concealed is very much alive and present, interfering precisely with those always incomplete forms of containment and repression ceaselessly directed toward us (2008:xvi).

The incomplete forms of containment being negotiated in many spirit encounters were Indigenous dispossession and slavery. Today, the afterlives of both colonialism and slavery continue to be prominent in queer occult negotiations of power.

In her comparison of minstrelsy and mediumship, Brooks argues that both are "spectacles of the white body made black" (Brooks 2006:20), and that the pleasure audiences gleaned from these two types of performances lay in the dangers and pleasures of excess corporeality. She claims that minstrelsy holds whiteness and blackness in tension with each other to show their mutual construction, ultimately circumscribing the 'excess' of the performer's Blackness. Blackness is thus conjured up only to rehearse its subjugation. But I argue that the 'result' of the white body made black in the spiritualist encounter is much less decisive. Although both genres expose race as a kind of hoax, minstrelsy prescribes white supremacy, while the status of the white body in the spirit encounter remains unclear: does the medium incorporate and transcend Blackness, as Brooks

argues minstrelsy does, or is there a different potential in this encounter? Indeed, I would argue that this ambiguity was fundamental to spiritualism's links to abolition, and the refusal to, or impossibility of disappearing race represents the dilemma of biopower itself. It is in un/assimilability where resistance to the violence of biopolitical regulation lies. Take for example Tompkins' extended metaphor of eating to illustrate white-Black relations in 19th century US. Drawing from hooks' assertion that whiteness "eat[s] the other," Tompkins argues that this assimilation is never total (hooks, as cited in Tompkins 2012:92). As is suggested by the book's title, *Racial Indigestion*, she claims that "there is a limit to how much the white body can absorb the black subject, and typically the limit is reached when the black body…gets stuck in the craw of whiteness" (ibid:92). This pushback, she says, not only "rejects white desire but also complicates the mythology of whiteness itself" (ibid). Unassimilability is evidence of the failure of whiteness, the grounds of resistance for those who reject absorption into the trajectory whiteness delineates. Biopower, through a logic of assimilation, literally creates the excess wherein lies its potential undoing. What kinds of potential does the undead, as a surplus of the proper time of life and death, contain, and can this be harnessed towards some end?

Stickiness

Some things get "stuck" or fail to be assimilated in the biopolitical exchange, and this residue persists as a kind of haunting. As I discussed in Chapter 2, thinking with residue can inform historical modalities that include the affective: how the traces of that which has been erased, displaced, or misremembered stick to things and people, even bind them together. The traces— what gets "stuck"—can be called queer. As Freeman (2007) would put it, it's what *drags*. But there are two ways to think of stickiness: one is the thing that gets stuck, as in Tompkins'

unassimilable material, and the other is that which gets stuck *to*. Drawing from Ahmed's assertion that affect "sticks" to bodies, rather than resides in them, Schuller argues that biopower determines race and sex as a measure of relative stickiness, with white women emerging as "stickiest of all" (2018:125-126). While whiteness was linked to greater impressibility: that which is open and vulnerable, sex difference further linked this with women. In other words, the body of the white female medium makes things appear: her impressibility makes a conduit for uneasy attachments.

While historians of Spiritualism have argued that white women were so often mediums because of the ways that they were considered pious by nature, as well as passive (Braude 1989), I think that looking at the phenomenon through the lens of biopower makes a more generative theory. Which is, that certain bodies were endowed with a greater impressibility, which was both progressive and dangerous. That white women have continued to be the poster children for millennialist movements like the New Age I think is not as well explained by "passivity" as it is by the gendered and racialized affective regime that privileges impressibility as a conduit to social health, which white women are comfortable harnessing. That is not to say that this disqualifies others from participating: obviously, spiritual healing has never been a white phenomenon, and revivals among Black, Brown, and Indigenous populations of ancestral magic, occultism, or witchcraft turn any such premise on its head. What I am arguing is that the particular history of white women as relatively "open" channels of feeling has influenced the parameters of transatlantic spiritual countercultures, maintaining a highly racialized and gendered framework for calls to action and social harmony. If biopower demarcates populations "based on what capacities they can and cannot regenerate and what kinds of assemblages they compel, spur, deflate" (Puar 2007:211), white women have been privileged as regenerative of spiritual health and its reformist capacities.

Snaza argues that the specifics of the colonial situation determine how "witch" as an appellation sticks in particular ways to people (mostly women), things, practices, phenomena (2024:31). However, stickiness as a racialized property has not been brought into conversation with this "field" of study on contemporary spiritual movements. Studies of whiteness, as I will explore in more detail in Chapter 5, have focused on the ways whiteness garners power through its putative emptiness. I argue that the fact that white female medium was the figure who could channel spirits, even be "overwhelmed" by them, brings into relief a measure of whiteness not in terms of its putative emptiness, but its stickiness. Stickiness represents a compelling counter-method to the romance of negativity, or void, that I explored in my discussion of queer historiography. Critical whiteness scholarship, also, has been interested in confronting the normative assumption that whiteness is unmarked: it does not represent culture, only the absence of it (Bonnett 1996). Thinking with stickiness involves thinking of the ways that queer historicism is not just the drive to figure, but to grapple with and reconcile the ways history has already shaped our bodies as instruments of such figuring, and to what extent those more sinister histories are open to disinheritance.

CHAPTER 4 — Queer sensitivity

"I don't think I've ever spent time with a straight person that really taught me anything interesting about magic" (Interview, April 2022)

Throughout my interviews, one major theme that emerged was the notion that magic offers a means through which one can attune to hidden patterns. As I explored in Chapter 2, attunement is understood as a means to bring the querent into connection with a pedagogical undercurrent in the universe, which also operates as a refusal to inherit other ways of orienting in the world. In this chapter, I look at the ways that magic, or the occult, is held up as a means of developing that capacity for attunement. According to my informants, "Magic...is a way to show openness, to receive" (Interview April 2022); the "tuning of your intuition" (Interview April 2022); and "open[ing] yourself up to…therapeutic intervention" (Interview May 2022). I argue that magic is construed as a means to develop a greater capacity for feeling—with the proper comportment of feeling and its circulation in society linked to social change, like building stronger communities, and tackling oppression. Magic is understood as a workshop for affective expansion, and learning how to become sensitive to, or attuned, to impressions from environment, is key to the occult and participants' understandings of its political stakes.

As I argued in Chapter 3, impressibility, or the body's capacity to be responsive to impressions, has historically been racialized. Impressibility is linked to futurity, with whiteness appearing as its apex. While the capacity to affect and be affected organizes different bodies and populations into a racial hierarchy, the reformist aspect of biopower means that this capacity can to some extent be

learned and "improved" upon, which is what shapes its doctrines of social progress. I argue that contemporary occultism persists as an affective regime, wherein its practitioners look to develop and circulate certain kinds of feeling as a means to heal and empower themselves and by extension, the collective. Sensitivity is maintained as a privileged, embodied relation to the world, which correlates with civility, and the "spiritual" emerges as that which heightened capacity allows one to access. However, I will show that informants both uphold and deviate from the racialized architecture of biopolitical affect as I theorized it in the last chapter. In contrast to nineteenth century race concepts, whiteness is no longer imagined as coextensive with sensitivity. Instead, among my sample, *queerness* emerges as a predisposition for attuning to that which otherwise goes unnoticed. While sensitivity is considered something that can be learned, queerness, rather than whiteness, is framed as a privileged capacity for this accumulation, while white supremacy is figured as that which must be overcome through its cultivation.

Magic and impressibility

That participants refer to magic as a conduit for feeling makes a remarkable parallel with the political economy of emotion in Spiritualist sympathy, wherein querents imagine themselves to be part of a social physiology that they participate in through the unfettered expansion of their affective capacity. In both cases, the transmission of sensation is a social good, and sentiment is shored up in the service of harnessing some kind of power for the self, and consequently, the collective that the self is a synecdoche of. In the words of one white, cis woman informant:

I think that my spirituality connects me to everybody. Like, it forges relationships with

people […] allows me to, have a deeper love and appreciation for everyone […] I think it

like kind of breaks down hyper individualism […] because it's like, my spiritual worldview,

reminds me that, that I am the universe, that I am profoundly connected to every living being. (Interview, April 2022)

Impressibility, construed as being attuned and open, operates as a process of transcending social barriers in order to access potentialities for living which are otherwise foreclosed.

In Schuller's (2018) sentimental biopower, impressibility is the capacity to take in or be receptive to impressions from the environment, which accumulates into some kind of social force or reforming of the social fabric. Some participants describe their relationship to the occult in ways that foreground this impressibility. When speaking about "grounding" into the rhythm of the universe and looking for signs, one participant said: "It feels cleansing almost, you know […] that process of like, for me, speaking to *and then kind of transforming that response into something that I can process,* it feels transformative in a way" (Interview May 2022). Impressibility is one's liveliness to those forces, their capacity to be affected by it, or to 'speak to it,' and many informants spoke about their experiences in ways that foregrounded their especial capacity. "I have a very connected spiritual worldview where I feel like I'm like in tune with the universe and I can like, affect and be affected by the world around me and this like cosmic beyond material way" (Interview, April 2022). This participant describes attunement in terms of their capacity to "affect and be affected by the world," which is implied as a form of connection as well as power, and one that is transcendent, or "cosmic." Another person put it this way: "I think over the last few years I've been realizing how…I think everyone has their power, but […] I feel like I'm a very powerful force and I didn't always realize the way that I, by existing in space, affect space" (Group interview June 2022). Practicing different kinds of magic allowed them to recognize their own influence or capacity for affect what is around them.

Other examples of impressibility showed up in fieldwork through language of "openness." "[I'm] trying to pay attention to the world feeling like a magical place that's always giving me information […] depending how receptive I am" (Group interview, July 2022). In this example, the participant implies they are developing attention as a skill, which will allow them to receive what the world is "giving" them. Another argued that "knowledge is in exploration and in being open to learning from your surroundings" (Interview, May 2022), making much the same claim to needing to practice openness in order to be impressed upon by what is around you. One participant argued that what makes queer people connect with the occult is that they are "open to recognizing patterns," and another highlighted their understanding of intuition as "letting the universe flow through me" (Interview, April 2022). These examples foreground openness, affectability, and mutability as attributes that should be cultivated and maximized. As such, spiritual enlightenment dovetails with affectability as a conduit and measure of the good. It is important to note that there is a distinction I am making here between the notion of resonance, which is common in spiritual language, and biopolitical impressibility, which has to do with how one is "alive" to sensations and this vitality moves the collective forward. What is at stake is not simply that informants feel connected to a kind of transcendent power, but that this capacity is unevenly distributed, making some people relatively more prone to reaping its rewards. As I explore through the chapter, this relative capacity is understood by many be constituted through queerness, or at least to map onto it.

Consistent with Schuller's paradox of impressibility, where the greater capacity to be open to impressions also comes with greater vulnerability, some participants talk about their relative openness as risky, at the same time that this porosity allows them access to something significant. While discussing what they understood as a significant connection between being a survivor of

childhood sexual abuse and their interest in or proclivity for magic, one participant said this: "I think there's a connection there with childhood abuse and…having like porous boundaries towards the exterior and being easily penetrable by forces" (Interview, April 2022). They went on to describe having porous boundaries as putting them in touch with the magical, or "in-between realm" where there is a possibility of transformation and spiritual healing. In a similar vein, one white cis woman participant said:

> Why I practice magic is because I'm like, I have so much to heal, so much trauma from generations and I need to understand it and heal it I need to flip it. But also, we're in such a information overload like of a time, and if we do not like create channels for that, for me at least, *I just find myself overwhelmed* and something has power still. Someone has power still. So if I don't stop being overwhelmed, if I don't channel the energy and, you know, create my own sigils, then *I'm just embracing other people's by nature of being a sensitive being.* (Group interview July 2022)

This relative sensitivity demands management or regulation, which the latter speaker describes in terms of creating channels. Magic emerges in both these examples as a means of working with and operationalizing sensitivity: one might be more inclined towards magic because of their sensitivity, and magic can also help to manage that sensitivity to be open to some impressions and not others.

Queerness as sensitivity

Chani Nicholas, queer astrologer with over half a million Instagram followers and author of *You Were Born for This*: *Astrology for Radical Acceptance*, argues that "queer, trans, and gender nonconforming folx, and many marginalized communities […] have always been attuned to

wisdom traditions, art practices, mythologies, and story-telling that explores the value of life beyond the normative conditions we've been given, but cannot exist within joyfully" (2016:n.p.). What is it that makes queer people especially attuned to these wisdom traditions, or capable of developing, in the words of one informant, an "intense consciousness"? Throughout this dissertation I have argued that the occult is a historiographic mode that is recognizable as "queer" insofar as it is preoccupied with what remains obscured, and that obfuscation is formulated as an effect of power. I have been attempting to refigure this attunement through an affective lens to demonstrate it as an embodied phenomenon. Learning to pay attention, or attune, to what does not normatively appear, is the corrective of queer forms of encounter, which my informants align themselves with. The occult operates as a process of learning that attunement, which is in part determined by embodied forms of knowing that participants cluster under "queer."

Interviewees consistently claimed that queer people are especially attuned to that which others do not notice. This assertion was offered as justification for the particular penchant for magic among queer people, as that which engages with the unseen and unknowable. Queerness, construed by informants as a relatively heightened sensitivity, offers access to the occult as a constellation of knowledge encounters that have been marginalized, whose unearthing is key to ushering in a more livable social and political paradigm. I want to use this quote, from a two-spirit participant from the Anahuac valley ("Mexico"), to introduce the notion of queerness as sensitivity, which I argue is key to understanding the ways queer is framed as a relatively high form of intuition, or depth of feeling.

> People in my community [queer people] have an extraordinary level of sensitivity. [Let's] call it a gift […] I was more aware about this sensitivity, especially when I didn't fit with this heteronormativity, patriarchy and so on. Probably the sensitivities you can inherit it. But

it is also something that can be learned, right? To develop this sensitivity. And this ancestral

philosophy [in Mexico], they say we all have the capability. To heal ourselves and to assist

others to healing (Interview, May 2022).

In this excerpt, sensitivity emerges through marginalization: one becomes "aware" of it through

not fitting in. In other words, sensitivity is linked in some way to power: it helps one to "see"

power's effects, emerging as a special kind of knowledge that has the potential for arriving at

clarity or transformation. Whether sensitivity is prior to queerness or vice versa, they theorize the

correlation between queerness and the occult in terms of this affective capacity, with this capacity

maintained as key to healing self and society. Lastly, the speaker believes that while there is

probably some predisposition toward this affective capacity, it is also something that can be, and

it is implied should be, learned.

    Some participants saw queer people as innately sensitive. When speculating on why people

are "born queer or trans," one informant offered that it is because they are "naturally healers" and

thus help to heal rifts in society (Interview, May 2022). However, most people described sensitivity

and other related affects as something that queer people develop as a result of social dislocation.

When asked why they thought queer and trans people are "better" at doing magic, one participant

argued: "Because you clarify your understanding of your energy in a way that straight people are

not pushed to have to do" (Interview, May 2022). It is the notion of being "pushed" that is so

relevant here: interviewees discussed the experiences that queer people go through as a catalyst

for "tapping into" intuition, or becoming conscious of patterns that would otherwise have remained

invisible. These experiences ranged from isolation, stigma, violence, shame, and other trauma

(Interview, May 2022).

The queer community, we've […] been used to being, I'd say outsiders, like used to being at the margins of society and maybe […] it makes us *more open to what's different*, and it makes us more *fluid* and understanding and open to these kind of different things. Cause we're like anyway, pretty much everything's a lie so, [laughs] why, you know, why not be open to these kind of things? (Interview, April 2022).

Here, the speaker equates queerness with fluidity and openness, key aspects of impressibility that I have argued mark a body's capacity for reform and progress. That queer people are stigmatized was often brought up as a justification for turning to the occult, as if it put them in touch with other things that share the same structural location. "If you are on the outside of society you're more inclined to like look at other things that are also on the fringes[…] the word queer […] has a lot of similarities to occult. It's, you know, it's in the shadows and it's stigmatized" (Group interview July 2022). Being on the fringes, or being queered by society, is offered as justification for occult leanings, but this predisposition is not construed simply as a preference, but a capacity for openness, sensitivity, and fluidity. What's more, this capacity is praised as a cornerstone of understanding, healing, and developing a consciousness of a kind of underlying truth that needs to be exposed.

The relative capacity to feel, with this feeling heralded as a social good, is what I have been arguing makes the contemporary occult a biopolitical affect regime. Theories of sentimental biopower have shown that bodies have historically been ranked in an animacy hierarchy wherein whiteness organizes taxonomies of feeling. What remains to be seen is to what extent this legacy continues to "animate" current formulations in the occult. The cultivation of "openness," and

"receptivity" are linked with personal and collective healing from trauma, injustice, and structural oppression, and in this fieldwork queer people claim they are more evolved in that aspect. I argue that informants thus maintain the legacy of the occult as a biopolitical affect regime, at the same time that they also interrupt, at least in some ways, its white supremacist architecture. In other words, *while affectability remains legible as a marker of social viability, informants in my fieldwork named queerness, rather than whiteness, as its privileged conduit*. In considering the occult as a biopolitical affect regime, intuition, attunement, and consciousness are construed as differential capacities to access transcendent forms of connection and clarity which are crucial to overcoming social ills. The fact that feeling is embedded within an animacy hierarchy is where I argue the crucial conundrum of the contemporary occult emerges. It is the racialized topography of enlightenment that makes the occult so "suspicious" as a phenomenon. If the circulation of affect orders some bodies as more or less capable of feeling, *does privileging queerness as a conduit for feeling disrupt or merely complicate affect's racial taxonomy*? That queerness, rather than whiteness, is referred to as coextensive with this capacity to feel appears to reinforce at the same time as revise legacies of sentimental biopower. Fieldwork represents the "risks" of millennial spirituality in that any privileging of sensitivity is also mired in a racist history of whose body has a capacity for that sensitivity, even if the development of sensitivity is not explicitly linked to race. In other words, I argue that the same "paradox" of Spiritualist counterculture threatens to emerge: as long as feeling is understood to be unevenly distributed among bodies, how can the expansion of feeling be liberatory?

Disposition to sensitivity

A couple of participants were transparent about sexual violence and other forms of gendered

trauma that they understood as key to their eventual identification with magic. When speaking about other survivors they knew, one white, trans participant explained violence as a "breach."

> I think there is some form of connection to […] the other realm, or to the in between, that happens with […] that kind of breach. And it forces open some form of like, source or well, or something. And I see that honestly in every other survivor that I've ever met, where each and every one of them have a deep connection somehow, to spirituality […] there's just like a survival element, where it's like if you don't develop a spiritual health you will die. (Interview April 2022)

I am interested in how the "breach" here connects to the notion of openness as a prerequisite to the occult. Thinking of the breach as a kind of violence lays bare how "openness" in this instance is not a benign form of relationality or a personality trait, synonymous with tolerance or liberal mindedness, but rather literally refers to a kind of forced opening which then conditions subsequent forms of encounter. Many queer people, obviously, experience violence, and their identities emerge in some ways as a recognition of this. Forms of occultism or magic are held up as a means of navigating that space. Openness is thus heralded as a consequence of social dislocation—a breach—at the same time that it is invested in as the means to overcome what causes the dislocation in the first place.

Queerness was at other times framed as a predisposition to the occult because it helps build certain skills. For one white, trans informant:

> I do feel like those two impulses [queer and magic] are specifically oppressed in our society and also present in the world. And if you have the strength to connect, to go against the grain and the oppression, to connect with one of those things, then it's I think more likely that

you're going to be able to persevere and connect yourself with other impulses that are oppressed. (Group interview, July 2022)

In this instance, being queer builds "strength" that consequently allows one to access the occult, as if the experience of going against the grain in one aspect of society unlocks other forms of subversion.

There's something almost inherently spiritual about being queer, and that it gives you, like automatically gives you access to something which might make you like more likely or more prone to then like exploring, you know…in whatever form that takes […] Queerness itself, like the experience of navigating the world as a queer person also acts as like *a kind of training or a kind of a methodological, like, apparatus*. (Interview, May 2022)

Queer here is not an identity so much as it is a dynamic relationship with the world, which is framed as developing a capacity to explore, persevere, or subvert. It is a tool, or a muscle that can be built.

For one non-binary Afro-Latinx informant:

Being queer is something that exists between so many different realms that we have to navigate on a constant basis. And that experience itself, I feel kind of *prepares someone emotionally and spiritually* to be able to make those sort of connections that are far grander than other people might be able to understand. I feel like there is a *spiritual element to being queer itself* that, you know, allows people to tap into on experiences and vibes of whatever that lie beyond the norm. (Interview, May 2022, my emphasis)

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Queer experience is offered in this instance as form of "preparation," or the development of a capacity for connection. Simply moving through the world as a marginalized person apparently facilitates a capacity for attunement, wherein one might 'tap into' experiences that are unavailable to others. In referring to it as a capacity that is relative, as in not everyone is able to understand, be open, or accept the forms of connection that are being referred to as gateways to the spiritual realm, the occult exists within an animacy hierarchy. In a similar vein, someone exclaimed that being queer is:

> …like a boot camp! Yeah, yeah yeah. And not to say that, like, inherently people who are queer are going to be more open to spirituality or any of these things. But I feel like if somebody kind of leans into that experience in a way that attempts to see that experience beyond themselves, then often, you know, sometimes that journey will lead them to being able to make these larger connections spiritually (Interview, May 2022) [4]

Navigating the world as a marginalized person was assumed among my sample to result in higher critical thinking skills: critical thinking as a consequence of social dislocation. As one trans informant argued:

> The information that we're fed in terms of gender, for example, in society, like people who are cis and more naturally fit into it, they kind of take it for granted and accept things that are womanly or manly, whereas if you're trans you're *always like aware*, this thing doesn't fit […] there's this intensity I feel like, is the right word, of things fitting and not fitting. And

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[4] This notion of "training" oneself to overcome limitations in capacity is explored more in the next chapter, where I argue that informants charge white supremacy as the inheritance that must be overcome through cultivating a greater depth of feeling. For now, it is important to recognize how queerness is imagined to be coextensive with affective expansion: making "larger connections," to see "beyond themselves," and be "open to" what is "unavailable to others."

you're since birth kind of *forced to think critically* about things in your own experience in relation to the world, which eventually leads you to, to actually form, form an understanding…and some people have that later on in life. But yeah, I think there's like a critical thinking that comes, this *intensity and consciousness that comes from being queer*. (Interview, April 2022, my emphasis)

Intensity and consciousness are linked to being skilled at magic, and queerness operates in these instances as something that orients you to it. The speaker implies that "becoming aware" means seeing that which has been suppressed, as a shorthand for the occult. Mentioning that some people might "have that later on in life" lays bare how queerness is conceived of as a fast-tracking or a relatively mature development of this capacity—it is not unavailable to others, but is less likely to emerge, or as quickly.

While interviews focused on the correlations between queerness and magic, some participants were careful to point out that this critical thinking was not the special reserve of queer people. [5] It is not queerness per se, but marginalization more broadly, which putatively makes one develop an awareness of social norms, or a critical lens. This notion of special knowledge linked to one's position within power is pervasive in leftist, critical politics broadly. "The very state of being oppressed is somehow supposed to confer a greater clarity of vision, a more authentic view of the world, than the bourgeois trappings of economic, racial, and sexual hegemony" (Gross & Levitt 1998:33). The notion of not taking things for granted is construed as a proverbial lifting of the veil,

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[5] Refer to quote included earlier from an interview in April 2022: "I do notice how popular these forms, these ways of being [are] in the queer community. But…I have trouble with thinking of it as something that's innately queer…Folks who will challenge these like tired societal norms are you know, naturally seek... answers that go deeper. I think that it's not unique to being queer, I think there are other identities, *there are other groups of people who are marginalized who do the same thing*."

or uncovering the truth, that those who are not at odds with the status quo do not have the occasion or the motivation to do. Being marginalized is refigured as a capacity to heal oneself and others.

Social healing

The occult is offered by informants as a conduit for healing social ills. Interviews laid bare a deeply reformist attitude in that there is something broken or missing in the world, which can be corrected, and this correction operates through the expansion of feeling. Much like the Spiritualist expansion of "brotherly love" explored last chapter, participants consistently theorized forms of healing through forging connections with others, and the occult was offered as one tool or resource for that connection. In some cases, this healing was described as overturning capitalism and reversing climate change, breaking heteronormativity, or anti-coloniality. But on a smaller scale it also took the form of "constructing moments of intimacy," which could bring people into stronger connection with each other. Indeed, the latter was often offered as a pathway to the former. One participant compared the practice of reading tarot cards for someone with giving a tattoo, or having sex, in that there is a necessary element of aftercare and making someone feel safe, which creates intimacy.

> It's all just *intimate moments of opening up*, whether it's like, skin or emotions. So you like, you know, want to create that environment where a person feels safe and then you *create space* for them to be seen, and then address whatever really comes up through that process. […] So […] it's such a wonderful like container for making, *working through something difficult* feel safer because you're also being held by someone. (Interview May 2022)

In constructing moments of intimacy, magic is social and political, insofar as that intimacy creates

safety, recognition, and connection which are lauded as transformative.

The turn to occult was described by some participants as a consequence of the breakdown of our systems of power, which leaves room for something else. One participant argued that "capitalism is ending, and the way it's ending is like forcing people right now to like find something else…people are forced to look at other ways of living and believing in spirituality and thinking about health" (Group interview, July 2022). In this case, spirituality and its associated "ways of living" are offered as alternatives to capitalism, which is also inversely correlated to health. These alternative ways of living were often described as communal and aspirational. One informant claimed:

> Systemically, theres a lot of grief, and we live in a very grief-charged world…for me my politics is magic in the way that […] if something happens in the world we will gather with my magic friends and like send prayers and try to do rituals or offerings to try to bring ease or try to *change some states of being*. And I think that's really political […] I have like a group with whom I do magic communally, […] and I think that's something that's really important for me […] let's do a ritual or some offering for that specific thing because like we want to be in relationship with it. Or like let's bring the witches to this funeral because a trans friend like just died, and let's bring magic to that death doula kind of work. It's *engaging with the world*. (Group interview, April 2022, my emphasis)

For this speaker, magic is political in that it "change[s] states of being" as well as operates as a means of creating relationships, of "engaging with the world." That a trans friend's death comes up as an example of where communal healing is needed also lays bare the close link between queerness and mourning: whether they are speaking from experience or not, trans death is close

enough to the surface that it is offered as an example of where magic, as a facilitation of relationships, relief, and transformation, is needed. Changing states, and the intention toward this change, is a key tenet of witchcraft. A few informants referenced the writings of famous witch and author Starhawk: "Starhawk cites someone when she talks about magic […] magic is the power of changing state at will, and so it talks a lot about intention and moving from one state to another, and mimicking the transformative power of nature" (Interview May 2022). In another interview, the participant was excited to share what their friend had texted them on the way to meet me. Hearing about the theme of the interview, their friend had chimed in: "magic and queerness: the act of becoming by will and community" (Interview, April 2022).

The aspect of social healing I want to focus on most closely is the *imaginative potential* of the occult, with this imagination put in service of moving beyond the structures of power that hurt us. One participant put it this way: "I resonate with manifestation, like the idea of making real, like, the unreal. I think that that is a really useful kind of strategy, like, even politically to think, like, okay, a better world is possible" (Interview, April 202). When talking about metaphysical reality, someone else told me a story about trying to bend spoons with their mind, and how it related to other forms of energy gathering that are necessary for political action. "Looking at [what is in front of me] and being like it could be otherwise and like, I want to make it otherwise, and I'm going to trust what I feel inside of me to act and do otherwise. And like *so much of magic, is just like imagining possibility, right?*" (Interview, May 2022). This notion of imagining possibility is very significant in a lot of leftist politics and anarchist organizing more broadly, which can be deeply utopian in their commitment to visualizing how things could look rather than taking for granted how they are. "Revolutions happen alongside massive escalations of collective imagination"

(Riccio 2019: n.p.; see also Haiven and Khasnabish 2014). In their book *Abolition and Spirituality* (2023)*,* for example, editors Crawley and Sirvent claim:

> Incarceration is a *failure of imagination*…Abolition requires of us all to join in, put our flesh in the way of becoming together more caring and thoughtful and intentional with regard…Regard has to be spiritual, it has to be grounded in the noticing of material relations of what we have been told we can be, and the movement toward imagining otherwise. (10)

Imagination is a practice, which is linked to embodied forms of knowing, which one can create the conditions to expand.

The occult is offered as a means to come up with alternative forms of the social, which can help usher in structures of power or relationships with the earth that are "healthy," in that they allow us to thrive and live just lives. "We need to all believe in magic and we need to believe that certain things are possible that we don't necessarily think are" (Group interview, April 2022). Overcoming a sense of impossibility is part of the work of disturbing the inevitability of power as absolute, which replicates itself based on this very premise. "What I appreciate about magic is that it's also a space where we can pray and wish for and *speculate and imagine and visualize something else*" (Interview April 2022). In some cases, the occult was explicitly referred to as a conduit for activism.

> My number one motivation for healing, which I use magic for, is in order to heal. Is to…become more resilient, and more *efficace*, efficient, and stronger, in order to participate in movement building. This is my main motivation. There comes a point when you realize, if you're not a healthy individual, who has a good spiritual health, you will not be able to do anything politically in this world. You will be submerged by darkness, demons, whatever

you want to call it, you will be submerged. *And you will not be able to move forward and act*, in the world. That's really a thing that magic helps you with. Helps you figure out where the points of rupture, where are…you know connect back with, whatever image you want to use, your internal fire, or your connection to the source, or your divine protectors, in my case my relationship with fairies, a lot of it is that. You know, it's *finding the sources of power and the resiliency.* (Interview April 2022, my emphasis)

For this participant, magic facilitates action in a certain direction: it helps to move beyond barriers that are seen as harmful to our liberation or our ability to thrive. Magic is seen as a source of power, or a resource for accessing power that is there all along. Healing is offered here not as an end in itself but as a means to become a better ally: to become more effective in movement building. This was echoed by other participants in different ways:

It can feel very like despairing to like be *tuned into realities of climate crisis* and like the pandemic, and just like, capitalism in general […] I know so many younger people my age who are like feeling helpless […] A couple of years ago, like in 2020, like I was living with like a bunch of people my age [who were] very like radical and like involved and we had like this vocabulary of resistance, but we were actually just, like, *stuck in vocabulary* and we were like so depressed and we weren't actually doing anything, and it was like, miserable, you know? And I think that having spirituality helps me kind of believe in a better world, helps me have hope, helps me like, *reach beyond despair in the present.* (Interview April 2022, my emphasis)

This speaker makes a contrast between vocabulary and spirituality, with the former implied as an

empty kind of theorization and the latter as a movement beyond that. In both these examples, participants describe magic as helping them move beyond a kind of paralysis. If one's "tuning" to the depressing realities of catastrophe is paralyzing, the occult it creates the conditions for a different kind of attunement to take place, tuning into a "better world."

It is interesting to note that several participants spoke about their occult practices as something that broke them out of forms of activist burnout. While they may have been involved in forms of direct action and mobilizing for years, some spoke about their "careers" as being mired in "black and white thinking" (Interview May 2022), and "living in anger and reaction" (Group interview, July 2022), which was remedied by turning to more spiritual pursuits.

> I used to be completely attached to, devoted to the void, you know like, I was totally immersed in like sad girl theory, and *I felt like I couldn't live in the world*. Like I felt like I couldn't be queer and radical and live in reality. So I thought I had to get high or die, but what I like find in magic is a sense of *transcendence and connection and like ability to like exist*. And I think that is the most revolutionary thing, it's like if there are all these forces that wouldn't want queer people, Black people, Indigenous people etc to exist, but then we find a way to just relax and connect, that's like, that's it (Group interview April 2022, my emphasis)

This white, cis woman speaker speaks about radical thinking as alienating, which magic helped her to overcome, and later argued that the most revolutionary thing she can do is just "hang out" with other people in a world where they are not supposed to exist. One participant, recalling her Anishinaabe mother, claimed that:

> She would support activists through her practice. And she would tell me that it's so important,

like if you're a spiritual minded person and you're, especially sometimes when you get too old to be an activist or for other reasons, sometimes like we're not just all born as fighters, like we're not all designed for direct action, but just the act of holding that spirit space for people and the act of having that in your daily practice and like always, like praying for people who are out there on the front lines…Like how that is such an important, important thing in and of itself is supporting resistance and supporting this like, I think *this new world we're all bringing in right now* […] I think it's really a legitimate form of activism. (Group interview June 2022, my emphasis)

In this example, prayer and other forms of practice help to support direct action, and are considered part of the resistance itself.

"Imagination" is not construed in interviews as making things up out of thin air, but becoming conscious of that which is already possible. Imaginative capacity is reformist in that it is a muscle to be built up, and like a muscle, stress helps make it stronger. Imagination must be developed, with certain people more skilled or predisposed to that kind of work. Social ills can be repaired by tuning into other realities and imaging how they could be ushered in: what Azoulay might call "potential history," in that it consists of "making repressed potentialities present again" (2019:288). I have been theorizing attunement as a queer modality, in that it has to do with paying close attention to things that are otherwise overlooked. With respect to social change, paying attention is sometimes a choice to tend toward some things and not others, like Ahmed's (2006) queer orientations. Snaza (2024) argues that "solidarity is nothing if not a shift in how one attends to (in the sense of granting attention) the ways that one's daily habits either facilitate the

ongoingness of a colonial homogenizing world—its tending or endurance—or instead processually enact otherwise modes of being" (41-42).

One participant talked about magic in terms of exposing "reality" as one of many possible forms of experience, which occurs through entering transcendental states.

> One element of like what magic brings me or what it brings to the world is related to reality and the nature of reality and our common understanding of what reality is. Cuz one definition, *one interpretation of reality has been normalized, and hyper-normalized*. And we like navigate it, thinking that it makes sense, or like having to convince ourselves that it makes sense to go on. And deal with the dissonance. And then some like transcendental practices, like gay sex, like magic, like psychedelics, like dancing, and chanting, and partying and entering different states of trance, creating art. Those things you know they kind of allow us to walk through a portal or something, and *explore like a different type of realm*. […] honestly it keeps me going, […] gives me strength and courage and […] some form of like gritty, perseverance or something. And I guess that if we can get there, to that place within ourselves, if enough people do that then collectively we can also penetrate another realm that's not so awful. (Interview April 2022, my emphasis)

This observation resonates with Snaza's claim that "the colonial world is not a fact…it is one possible pattern in the ongoing ontogenesis of worlds" (2024:23). Deviating from the "hyper-normalized" reality into one that's "not so awful" is described as changing states, and magic is offered as one of many ways to enable this transformation. Collectively, this kind of transformation is imagined as accumulating to "penetrate another realm," which makes a striking parallel with the successive spheres of enlightenment explored earlier through the sympathetic cosmology of

Spiritualism.

Imagination, or building imaginative capacity, appears at first to not really fit within a theory of impressibility, after all, what exactly does imagination have to do with sensation? However, I argue that imagination can be understood within the framework of biopolitical affect insofar as that capacity for imagining is determined in part by forms of embodiment. In the next section, I explore the ways that queerness is imagined as a form of embodied knowing or experience that gives access to expanded forms of sensitivity, or feeling.

Being in touch

I have argued that queer practitioners of the occult theorize occultism as both a consequence of and a conduit for developing the capacity for openness, or attunement with the world. What's more, queerness is privileged as a form of sensitivity that makes queer people more relatively capable of "succeeding" at it. In order to continue to develop a theory of the queer occult as a biopolitical affect regime, I want to focus on the ways the phenomenon is understood by informants in terms of embodiment. Read in the context of sentimental biopower, sensitivity is not an apolitical mode or individual emotional quality, but a highly vexed nexus which has historically organized populations according to different levels of productive mutability. Participants understand sensitivity and its links to the occult as facilitated or prevented by different forms of embodiment, making their practices part of a biopolitical affect regime.

One participant argued: "There's nothing more magical about me than about you than about anybody else, than about cats. Nothing. But there is perhaps some form of interest, curiosity, commitment, engagement with. And definitely there's some people who are afraid to engage and commit. Or who are bullied into not engaging and committing to" (Interview, April 2022). This

"engagement" is construed, as we have seen, in multiple ways, but it implies that there is a latent capacity in everyone for magic that requires some level of work or attention to actualize. Facilitating a particular kind of embodiment came up often in interviews as a necessary prerequisite to good spiritual health: the notion is that magical or spiritual ability requires a set of conditions that can be honed and allowed to fluorish. Queerness is one kind of embodiment that can predispose one towards magic, as in moving through the world as a queer person facilitates a kind of knowing or skill that makes one good at it. Another way that participants spoke about embodiment had to do with connecting to their own bodies in order to feel grounded and in touch with themselves. There is a lot of overlap with therapeutic theory and somatic practice (which has historically been central to new age movements), and more than once participants spoke about their practices as a form of therapy. Being present "in" one's body was construed as paramount to having good relationships with the world.

Participants spoke about their practices in terms of the ways it helped them to be at home in their bodies, to feel "aligned" in their decisions, and to connect with their intuition, all things that it was implied had been at some point corrupted. When talking about their tarot practice, one non-binary participant said:

> I didn't have the best relationship with myself…before…So, finding a way to have a dialog with myself that was actually constructive…that's something that I've learned that I'm never going to unlearn. And I always carry with me of, knowing what it feels like to *trust my gut* and also trust my intuition [...] *I know what that feeling of Yes feels like* […] Being really attuned to *my embodied responses to making decisions.* (Interview, May 2022, my emphasis)

For this person, they describe developing a trust of their own intuition as a form of repair. Feeling

what a "yes" feels like denotes for them a healthy relationship with oneself that they needed to work hard to recover or construct. It tended to be taken for granted in group interviews that participants had at some point been severed from this healthy relationship with themselves. It was not always clear what this severance was, but if it was named, it was named as homophobia or transphobia, religious trauma, childhood trauma more generally, or just the alienating feeling of living in an apparently inhospitable world.

> In the kind of cultures that we've grown up in, have kind of held the monopoly on both like love and life relationships, as well as like spirituality and connection to the divine. And yeah, just […] there does seem to be like some sort of connection there with like healing and like being othered and then like in response, like connecting in communities, whether that's like spiritual communities and queer communities to like heal ourselves and understand ourselves better. (Group interview, July 2022)

It struck me that trauma was assumed to be a shared experience in each interview: the need to heal from something was often referenced without elaboration or back story. Even without knowing each other, in group interviews many participants implied that all those at the table knew what it felt like to be traumatized, and were in the process of learning other ways to be in relation to the world. Based on patterns that emerged in interviews, trauma tended to be conceived as a severance from oneself, which must in some way be addressed in order to heal. This notion of returning to a harmonious state is consistent with goddess spiritualities of the latter 20th century, which aimed to "remember what we already knew," construing the trauma of Christian patriarchy as a form of severance that needed to be overcome to connect back to an original, true, source of power and knowing (Pike 2004). Becoming better at tapping into the intuition is offered as a way

out, which moves one away from other forms of conditioning.

> It's just like tapping into that intuition, no matter what it is, it's just like omnipresent in my life. And when I wasn't *actively working with that and listening and, you know, interacting with* the intuitions that I was getting, I was doing things very unconsciously and very based, *very rooted in like trauma* that I hadn't healed and moved on from […] Like a lot of people will not think about these elements and they'll just continue on with whatever is given to them and not really enact a change in their environment or in their lives…life is happening around you and you're *influenced by everything, so you might as well start creating influences*. (Group interview, July 2022, my emphasis)

For this participant, trauma used to condition their behaviour, and it was only when they began to "work with" and "listen[]" to their intuition that this was overcome. In this instance, magic and intuition are synonymous with each other, in that magic is an "introspective kind of tool" (Group interview, June 2022). There is a compelling link back to affect/impressibility here in that the speaker alleges that at one point they were only being impressed upon by things, almost passively, and in tapping into intuition one can also "creat[e] influences" on matter.

Connecting with one's own body, whether that is construed as accessing some deeper form of intuition, feeling at home in one's body, or listening to sensations that emerge from it, is not only a personal form of empowerment but a social good.

> The praxis of being in alignment with what is necessary at any given moment for the survival of our planet requires a learning to hold space and a learning to like catch when we project experiences from another time space into the present moment…There's a necessity to *facilitate people being inside of their bodies*. And to trust their bodies and to *build capacity*

for unpleasant sensations. (Interview, May 2022)

Being comfortable in one's body is obviously a loaded concept among queer people, whose bodies are highly policed. Participants articulate the forms of repair required to overcome that kind of oppression in terms that also sacralize these forms of embodiment. Many saw becoming more at home in their bodies as a kind of spiritual experience in itself, because it comes against so many odds and moves one through a painful experience toward enlightened inner peace or knowing. As mentioned earlier, at least one informant named queerness as a "spiritual experience in itself," meaning that queer people are already adept at occultism because of what they have endured or learned to confront and move through, and this is held up as evidence of a kind of noble subjectivity. In a couple cases, *queer* emerges as a kind of divine intervention.

> I have come to think…being queer is a type of magic? And that often a soul will choose to be queer in order to enhance, like, magical powers and spiritual powers, because… here [in North America] there's two-spirit but I know in European cultures way back there was a similar role where queer and gender fluid people, like, are natural healers and bring healing to society and healing between genders and are naturally magic. And I kind of think that's part of why there are some queer people because human evolution needs that. And yeah, I think it's like… it is a form of magic in and of itself. (Group interview, July 2022)

This speaker sees queer people as inherently sacred, and certain societies need them in order to enhance their collective health.

By contrast, there are certain things that prevent or are seen as inimical to magical or occult knowledge. Consider the way this one interviewee talked about occult practices and the CIA.

A lot of people know that the CIA has done a lot of like psy-op experiments, out-of-body things, remote viewing, like they're all over that sort of thing. And I think for various reasons, *it's a lot harder for them to like, get it to work*. […] People who would use it badly, are less likely to try and use it…if you're working for the CIA, I can't imagine that you're like very *connected with your mind, body and spirit*, you know, very balanced. So, like how, like even if you do all the steps and even like a perfect ritual, like, you know, like remote viewing, for example, *where are you going to go*? (Interview, April 2022, my emphasis)

In this excerpt, the speaker argues that CIA agents, while they might be interested in the occult as a form of power, are not very likely to "succeed" with it because they are not very well "aligned." There is a moral judgment being made here, in that those who would use it "badly" are undeserving of magic. Working for the CIA is implied to be evidence of a kind of spiritual corruption which would prevent actually being able to reap the rewards of, in this case, remote viewing, offering a foil for the more deserving and noble practitioners whose inner alignment blesses them with occult prowess.

If queer people are seen by a homophobic society to be out of whack, pathological, or literally misaligned against straightness, being in "alignment" with one's body emerges as an important corrective that has deep political, and as we can see here, even sacralized power. In other words, the feeling body: how it moves, the sensations that it registers and how those direct action, is held up as a site of intervention whose impacts are far-reaching and socially necessary.

Erotohistoriography

Thinking with embodiment and the ways that time is made material in and through the

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body (biopower) has helped me to reconcile what I see as a limited engagement on the part of much queer historicism to engage with the body's capacity for regeneration, or transmission, as always already fractured by race. Queer models of temporality, as explored in Chapter 2, and the ways they generate knowledge, cannot be thought outside of an engagement with how theories of history are by definition racial (Nyong'o 2009), which is central to my theorization of the occult as both a historiographic modality and one that cannot be thought outside of colonialism and empire. In other words, the historicizing gesture is not disembodied. Along with work on biopower, scholars in history of sexuality, postcolonial studies, queer theory, and critical race studies have explored how forms of embodiment actually affect the historical relations someone can make: the feeling body as a site of historiographic intervention.

In referring to queer literary and cultural studies, Traub has argued that the "relations of sex to time are the effects of a historical process, not the preconditions to history" (2016:74). If we expand the notion of "sex" to include all forms of embodiment, gendered, sexualized, and otherwise, sentimental biopower complicates that assertion, in that we have seen how bodies are bound to futurity in different ways, actually determining their capacity for movement through time. In Chapter 2, I looked at texts that explore the ways that one's own relation to untimeliness affects the historical relations they make—that errancy, or queer methodologies, can offer forms of synchronization with figures who are not known to us through normative modes of recognition and their contingent evidentiary models. The capacity to narrate, register, or access the historical has been long coterminous with sexuality and other comportments of the body.

Freeman theorizes "erotohistoriography" to name the ways that history is a bodily encounter, wherein the historian's body is an instrument whose particular constitution enables sensations to be registered as history (2007:99). She says: "contact with historical materials can be precipitated

by particular bodily responses, even pleasurable ones, that are themselves a form of understanding" (ibid:95-96). While Freeman is interested in what purchase erotohistoriography has on theories of queer temporality, namely how queerness is itself a historical method, she draws from work on how 19th century sentimental cultures operated through a notion of the feeling body as both a cause and effect of history, which makes a compelling link to what I explored in Chapter 3. Mike Goode (2009) argues that "struggles to define what constitutes historical knowledge and authoritative historiography in 19th century Britain were as much contests over the social and gender propriety of particular feelings as they were contests over epistemological forms" (7). Very similar to Schuller's sentimental biopower, Luciano (2007) argues that the "deployment of sexuality encompasses those forms taken by power in its grip on bodies and their materiality, their forces, energies, sensations and pleasures" (11). Luciano uses what she sees as the "anachronistic" space of grieving cultures in the 19th century in order to argue that the feeling body is an index of temporality, laying bare the risks and pleasures of a regressive attachment to the irrecoverable, and how a population's "cumulative ability to move through time…is central to its configuration as human" (2007:9).

In theorizing practices of queer reading, Gopinath quotes the following question from Seremetakis: "To what extent is the experience of/the capacity to narrate history tied to the senses?" (2018:144). While she does not really go on to answer this question, I find it a generative way to move from the more situated historical specifics of Victorian transatlantic occultism to its afterlives today. As Schuller and others have argued, the body is a spatiotemporal phenomenon, with different bodies making time more visible than others. If the flesh is a deeply political surplus of one particular genre of the human (Weheliye 2014:135), and the power of whiteness resides in its ability to appear unmarked, flesh is whatever does not recede into the background…the excess,

which is racialized by virtue of its resistance to incorporation. Put differently, some theorists have cast certain bodies as excessively embodied: some populations have "never had the privilege to suppress the event of the body" (Berlant 2008: 111). According to McClintock, "as the imperial taxonomic project was applied to history, spaces of anachronism turn up to mark those populations that are outside of, and threatening to, the paradox of inevitable progress. It became necessary to prove the anachronism of women, people of colour, and the working classes" (1995:71).

Either way, biopower operates in and through the body as a matter of timing: "biopolitics is not only about binding (some) bodies into populations, it is also about binding bodies to their milieux, to one another, and to the future in a timely manner and anathematizing those who are out of step" (Freeman 2019:31-32). Through theorizing the occult as an affective regime, these relations to untimeliness come into relief as embodied—in other words, I argue the occult is a historiographic mode not only because it represents a "counter history" because of the ways it actually requires the querent to become untimely. If the expansion of particular forms of feeling are imagined to be conditioned by different forms of embodiment, which bind the "feeler" to a relative future, the body can be said to structure historical consciousness. In thinking of close reading as a queer methodology, and one which gives us clues into the strategies of occultists to grope backward toward 'lost' life ways, to what extent is this a skill to be learned, or a mode of desiring that their queer body conditions?

I bring this discussion of erotohistoriography in here because I am interested in how participants attempt to actually alter their relationship to history, or alter history's relationship to themselves. I argued in Chapter 2 that the historical encounter queers the scholar in making certain errant practices or behaviours appear in the text. I theorize the occult as a practice of reading that has the same outcome: the querent is made over, even queered, by its relationship to the untimely

and the attempts to make the untimely present. Another way to explore this would be in companionship to Ahmed. She argues that "bodies are shaped by histories, which they perform in their comportment, their posture, and their gestures" (Ahmed 2006:56). "Bodies take shape as norms that are repeated over time and with force…in shaping one's approach to others, compulsory heterosexuality also shapes one's body as a congealed history of past approaches" (ibid:91). She argues that queer orientations are those that put within reach something else: one might be "hailed" by lines of kinship, family inheritance, and heterosexuality, but "we do not turn around…having not turned around, who knows where we might turn. Not turning also affects what we can do" (ibid:107).

I want to think with Ahmed's queer orientations to theorize forms of divestment from racial capitalism and settler colonialism as they emerge as urgent and necessary among my informants. Ahmed describes queer orientations as possibilities of refusing or deviating from the interpellations of heteronormativity. Whiteness, too, is a form of bodily inheritance: it is an orientation that puts certain things into reach: "styles, capacities, aspirations, techniques, even worlds" (ibid:126). For Ahmed, whiteness is a straight line rather than a characteristic of bodies, and certain bodies fail to inherit this orientation (ibid:146). I am interested not only in what it means to fail to inherit or "return" the inheritance of whiteness, but what it means to do this intentionally. What is the "elsewhere" of whiteness, and what does it mean to choose to fail to restore what whiteness puts in touch? The driving question of my project has been: 'to what extent is it possible to disinherit or divest from the histories that shape us?' with the occult operating as a case study to explore the ways this emerges in queer politics in Montréal. If one's relationship to the historical is conditioned by the comportment of the body, might we think of our relationship to history not only in terms of where our body leads us, but what notion of embodiment will unfold

the forms of historical knowing that we seek—that will allow us to 'remember what we already knew'? What must be done to the body to arrive at that place, or what must the body do? As a compelling reversal, maybe the question is not: 'why is the occult so appealing to queer people,' but rather, *what about the occult motivates people to be queer?*

In the next chapter, I will explore how participants grapple with race and ancestry in their politics, and where one can "turn" in the wake of divesting from different kinds of empire. In looking to break out of the "congealed history" of the repetitions of colonialism, capitalism, or heternormativity, I argue that participants negotiate a feeling of suspension, paralysis, or anxiety as they reflect on where this leaves them.

CHAPTER 5 — Ancestor work

"We are the granddaughters of the witches you couldn't burn." (Placard from protest, Google images)

The aim of this dissertation is to explore how the occult is taken up by queer practitioners as an anti-racist or decolonial practice. In the previous two chapters especially, I have shown how this maneuver is all the more compelling, and on the surface even paradoxical, given the ways that psychic healing movements in this part of the world have often ended up reinforcing, rather than disrupting, structures of white supremacy or empire. In theorizing race in this project, I have argued that it does not get at the heart of the matter to simply point out cultural appropriation as a likely side effect or outcome of occult practice, and to denounce that. Rather, I am more interested in exactly what it is that makes the occult so racially transgressive. Is it a form of racialized knowledge itself, which means that any attempt to recuperate it comprises a risky trespass? This is the question I explore in this final chapter: if the occult is bound up with divestment from empire, which I argue it is for my informants, what kinds of risk are they inviting in their attempts to "disorient" themselves from the organizing frame of settler coloniality and whiteness? Given that whiteness garners its power through a fantasy of emptiness or neutrality, then any attempt to divest from or betray white supremacy as an institution must necessarily step outside of this fantasy and connect to something else. At the same time, if everything is racialized against the apparent unmarked whiteness, how is this movement itself a form of cultural transgression? Indeed, is cultural transgression even the right way to describe this movement, or is something else at work? What is available to claim instead, and how do participants navigate the anxiety over whether or

not they are justified in making such a claim? In other words, how does one slough off the violent structures of whiteness without pretending that it does not still organize their forms of subjectivity and relationality?

In this chapter, I argue that the occult operates as a means of connecting to what was, at one point, severed, and show how this severance is construed by participants in terms of violent cultural dispossession which can to some extent be overturned or redressed. Racialized modernity is a process of disavowal: "Violence and whiteness constitute the intractable foundation of colonial sovereignty and its processes of subjection" (Fanon, as cited in Haritawon et al 2014:xv). Referring to this intractable foundation as the "Empire of Terror," Haritaworn et al argue that it "offers a stark choice to its objects of power: incorporation or extermination." (Haritaworn et al 2014:xv). Conceiving of whiteness as an ideology and process of disavowal enacted through empire, the occult is constituted by informants as a resistance against this disavowal: what gets stuck. Insofar as it is conceived of as a survival, the occult contains "disruptive doses of memory" that complicate imperial amnesia (Castronovo 2001:17). I argue that participants speak about the occult as if it is a kind of cultural inheritance itself as well as a conduit through which one can connect to that which has been forced to disappear. Severance is not conceived as an inevitable loss, but as a forced disconnection at the hands of imperial modalities. Reconnection is for participants a way to achieve wholeness, to locate oneself within a given lineage, or to naturalize inheritance of a given knowledge tradition. Reconnection is thus necessarily also a story of race: race thus emerges as a theory of inheritance wherein white supremacy's requisite forgetting, or incorporation of Otherness, makes fraught terrain for seeking out forms of social organization that might have existed 'before' it.

The feeling of being rootless is theorized by participants as both a queer feeling of being

disconnected from one's family or society, as well as a feeling of being cut off from what one should have inherited as a set of rituals, behaviours, languages, or other traditions that was interrupted, whether by immigration, assimilation, enslavement, or other forms of dispossession. If the occult operates as a form of re-connection with what was at one point severed, the stakes of this re-connection are felt differently by participants given their different understandings of what is available for them to claim instead. In other words, the occult is offered as a means to overcome the "void" of whiteness, which is experienced differently by those who I interviewed. If whiteness is an ideology inextricably linked to empire and the obsoletion of that which is racialized against it, how can it be disavowed? What would become available as a lineage, and how could this be claimed without co-opting something one is not entitled to? Put succinctly by one informant: "I'm trying to find my God and I don't know where my God is because I feel like no matter what, I'm borrowing from somewhere" (Group interview, June 2022).

While almost all informants sought out a means to heal from a perceived rupture or severance, I focus here more particularly on the ways that redress emerged as fraught for white people or settlers, who also felt guilt as the inheritor (even perpetrator) of that violence. If the occult represents a temporal, and thus racialized, modality, and whiteness garners its power through a putative cultural neutrality (Lipsitz 1998), almost all magic or occultism appears as necessarily culturally transgressive for those who are white, or for those who have inherited the "orientation" of whiteness and what it puts into reach (Ahmed 2006). In theorizing the occult as a means of re-connection with ways of living that have been foreclosed, I am interested in how the stakes of this re-connection might differ for white people and/or settlers: these participants tended to be more anxious, uncertain, and wary of doing something wrong. Reading interviews in companionship with Azoulay's (2019) "unlearning imperialism," I look at how participants

understand whiteness as something they must divest from, which I theorize as differently urgent depending on the ways they are oriented within it. I follow Ahmed in calling it an orientation or a bodily inheritance, which affects how bodies take up space and what is in reach (2006:126). She argues that bodies that fail to inherit the orientations of whiteness are dis-oriented, and I extend this to also account for the ways that one can *become* disoriented in refusing to follow its desire lines. Whiteness is a "malleable historical construction which works as powerful fantasy structure" (De Gruyter 2019:302), and those who have otherwise benefited from whiteness become disoriented when this fantasy structure becomes legible to them. This disorientation, while necessary, is alienating.

As a white settler myself, my own motivation for this work was to understand how feelings of alienation also plague white people, and be able to theorize this as an incredibly dangerous, affecting, and potentially motivating phenomenon, while still acknowledging crucial differences in the lived experiences of alienation for someone who is Black, Indigenous, or a person of colour. I see the turn to the occult as part of a broader negotiation of cultural inheritance, wherein unlearning means "claiming and re-claiming pre-imperial modes of sharing the world, which were then also made inaccessible to descendants of white Europeans who could have claimed them as part of their own pre-imperial heritage" (Azoulay 2019:26). I am interested in the forms of solidarity that are possible when white people grapple with the ways that they were also, at some point, recruited into whiteness, without this morphing into a claim to essential sameness or a

disavowal of the ways they are still embedded within it.[6]

I will draw heavily from fieldwork to show the ways that participants describe feelings of alienation, severance, disconnection, and lack of mentorship as motivating them to "find" the occult. Severance is discussed in interviews in terms of a loss of magic: consistent with the theory of disenchantment I explored in Chapter 1, recruitment into whiteness is synonymous with the loss of magic, where magic stands in for cultural difference and knowledge traditions deemed suspect in the eyes of modern, scientific, rationality and its imperial census. As such, investment in magic operates as a potential to heal that severance, as well as makes possible solidarity with others who have been relegated to the margins. I focus on how participants reflect on their understanding of kinship, ancestry, and inheritance as queer people as well as people who are in some way cut off from a cultural tradition, whether because they are immigrants, have borne the brunt of forms of assimilation, or because they consider themselves out of touch with their ancestry. In all cases, whiteness, or the experience of growing up in a settler colony (whether one is white or not), is considered a form of alienation, which requires one to find other sources of power. Finally, I will revisit my theory of occultism as a biopolitical affect regime to explore how white and/or settler participants in particular theorize their practices as a form of training to become more receptive to, respectful of, and open to learning from others. Using one participant's terminology of whiteness as "bottoming," I argue that allyship is construed as becoming radically receptive to nonwhite

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[6] Given the ways that white witchcraft or magic remains, with good reason, highly suspect in critical explorations of this phenomenon, it is necessary to explore how that risk is navigated by white informants themselves. This is not in any way to diminish how racialized (as non-white) informants found in the occult a means of working with or re-connecting to what they felt had been stolen from them: indeed, I am sure that in the coming years there will be a fair amount of research emerging on just that. This focus on whiteness is because I understand the occult to have historically been particularly available to white people as a means to grapple with the apparently "mythless" or empty status of whiteness, where this feeling of emptiness is an important common ground for anyone who lives in/with postcoloniality. I hope that this study will be taken to be an exploration of whiteness as an ideology itself rather than it is a study of white people, at the same time that I argue that it is crucial to take seriously how white people reflect on their own histories of racialization.

teachers, as an antidote to or a deviation from the problematic taking, ingestion, or exploitation of otherness that has historically characterized white spiritual countercultures.

Severance

One indisputable common theme that emerged in interviews was that participants feel disconnected somehow from the world, and this disconnection was a motivator for taking up occult practices. When discussing her interest in witchcraft, one participant rationalized it as such: "My worldview is like created narrative that I didn't like inherit from my, from my family" (Interview, April 2022). There are several things to note here: the first is the notion of a worldview that is actively constructed: there is an element of self-determination, creativity, and invention at work, which is necessary given that something did not get transmitted, or inherited. One must start from scratch. The second is the emphasis on worldview as narrative, which goes back to themes I have already explored about history as a struggle between different kinds of stories, and which has the power to supersede the others. Finally, there is the claim that one's worldview is not inherited from one's family. The obvious takeaway here is that, being queer, one is at odds with the normal lines of cultural transmission: whether literally disconnected from one's family or not, queer itself is a disruption of normative social replication.

> Before I came out as queer and trans, I was just like kind of lost and I couldn't access who I was. And I fit in nowhere. I was trying to, but I was just this weirdo who had like no house kinda thing. And so I was I just felt really disconnected from any kind of like spiritual connection there (Group interview, April 2022)

Some participants talked about having to construct their own lineages because they were no

longer a part of a family. "I grew up in a place that is really, really inhospitable to being a queer person. And we had this little, like, band of misfits that were, like, *really detached*. And we had to make our own traditions, right, we had to have Orphan Christmases and be our own families because our families, you know…" (Group interview June 2022, my emphasis). Put differently by someone else:

> Especially in the queer community, it's all about chosen family. Because so often people get rejected by their blood family and were taught from very young, like your family is everything, your family is everything. And then immediately you tell your family who you are. And so many people just. Instantly are like, banished from their family…[and they have to] *creat[e] new traditions because they have to start from somewhere*. (Group interview July 2022, my emphasis)

The idea of creating new traditions seems to explain to some extent why the occult appeals to queer people, as a set of practices that is deeply syncretic, decentralized, and not very clearly tied to a given place or ethnicity. But to chalk disconnection up solely to queer experience would be to miss the very important ways that these feelings of isolation also exceed queerness, at least in the ways queer is understood as a sexual/gender identity. Most participants described what I consider a more profound and sometimes abstract feeling of alienation from ancestral knowledge as part of their motivation for occultism. Put differently, it is not just one's family that one is at odds with: there is a greater claim being made here about rootedness in general which goes beyond the heteronormative, insular family unit to genealogies more widely. Referring back to this quote I highlighted in Chapter 1:

> There was a moment where I feel like there was something just missing. There's just

something… just that's missing. And it's, there's something inside of me that just, you know, it felt like I didn't know what my roots were. Like literally I didn't feel grounded. I felt like I was floating through space and time. And that's when I started being interested about like, you know, I was like, you know, I realized I don't know anything about my ancestors. […] In like Haitian culture sometimes we keep things very hush hush, you know […] I just realised I didn't... Maybe there's something I needed to know about my ancestors that could help me now. […] I realized there's a lot of things that were robbed of us, you know, robbed from us or things that were hidden, burned, destroyed, that we had, that was, you know, like a knowledge and a richness of knowledge. And… that's, that's kind of what I was trying to, I'm trying to find, and to realize, oh, there's not a lot of knowl- you know, there's, I don't know where to look or I don't know where to…I don't know. (Group interview April 2022)

This Black participant speaks about groundlessness as a result of theft and repression, which she claims prevented a kind of ancestral inheritance from reaching her. I recognized different kinds of severance at work throughout interviews that I think are important to point out: sometimes, the speaker had an idea of what was lost: for the speaker above, for example, there is certainly an enormous amount of uncertainty, but there is some notion of how that severance took place—there is a reference to enslavement as well as colonization, and their reinforcement of each other. For others, there is only the notion that loss, at some point, happened. There is a feeling of disconnection and not much of an idea of what one would even do to remedy this. One white, trans informant told me:

I feel a lot of envy, I don't think its jealousy, towards people who have a tradition to hold onto. And who have mentors and guides. And Ive always felt really really really envious of

that . And I think I was looking for mentorship. […] I definitely don't have a congregational space, I don't have traditions I can come back to, I don't really have a sacred text I can come back to either. I have something else, which is interesting as well, which is like the ability to be kind of like an electron libre and just like hang around... and draw from various sources. But I do feel like I really […] would like some guidance […] and yeah its kind of weird to learn all of that alone because you don't really know if you're doing the right thing. (Interview, April 2022)

Both these examples lay bare a feeling of devastating loss, a fixation on what has not been passed down, which goes beyond queerness as a marginal position into questions of lineage and ancestry more broadly. There is a feeling of cultural isolation and severed kinship that, while exacerbated by queerness, also exceeds it. "I really wish I had like a lineage and a tradition that I can hold on to and elders that I can…But I just, I can't do that. And it's it's it's like, painful and complicated and and yeah" (Group interview, April 2022).

When describing the different kinds of practices they took up and why they were appealing, a lot of participants emphasized self-determination, improvisation, and creativity. Without institutionalization or a "recipe book," the occult leaves a lot of room for interpretation, which is sometimes praised as freeing, and certainly was more than once used as a way to theorize it as queer. "The central point is you and your interpretation and dream world and that's queer to me. Because it's self-determination" (Group interview, April 2022). But interestingly, the other side of the coin of that self-determination is loneliness: while lack of mentorship affords freedom, this freedom also feels like isolation for many of those I interviewed, who often expressed a desire to have more of a tether to some kind of established tradition. For this white, non-binary speaker;

I needed, like, initiation and tradition and kind of like ancestry and lineages. And that's why

I was interested by like Starhawk, you know, and the "Reclaiming" tradition because I was

looking for mentors and teachers…I was *tired of being the liberal individual and just like*

curating my own little practise and I felt really a lot of grief about that. (Group interview

April 2022)

Being an "electron libre," as described by one participant earlier, is both the benefit and the curse

of these forms of severance. This is a good allegory for queer politics in general, which Elizabeth

Povinelli (2006) has argued is marked by an excess of "autology" and a lack of genealogy.

What I want to parse out here is the feeling of that grief: what participants are really saying

when they talk about feeling cut off from a knowledge tradition. Though interviews were about

occultism, in these interviews participants are not referring simply to wanting someone to teach

them how to read tarot cards, or to pass down information about crystal healing to them that they

otherwise have to find by surfing the internet and poring through books. Rather, I argue that the

occult here operates as a kind of stand in for knowledge traditions more broadly, that have been

interrupted somehow, which one would have inherited if it were not for some rupture. The rupture,

as I have discussed in different ways in the previous chapters, is conceived of here as the repressive

technologies of imperial power, or other "epistemologies of blindness" that differently cover over

and make available cultural narratives (Gordon 2008:xix). Consistent with a lot of new age and

psychic healing movements, in particular feminist spiritualities, the occult is conceived of as a way

to remember what has been temporarily forgotten: a re-connection with something that was lost

but is not irrevocable. One white informant described their eclectic practices in the following way:

"I don't have a tradition, I don't have a background…because its all like something I come up with

as I go and try to reconnect with as I go. Its like knowledge that we all have and… we-we return. We remember" (Interview, April 2022).

Discussions of occultism quickly turned to feelings of dislocation, where participants described how they resented not being taught Farsi, or knowing more about their Iraqi heritage, records of their indigenous ancestry being "burned," or feeling alienated from their immigrant parents while growing up "white." While any given form of occultism, of course, are self-contained cultural objects with their own languages and history, I theorize that it also, at least in this study, stands in for cultural objects in general which were banished with little recourse to take them back. If the occult is coded as a temporal object, as that which has been banished from modernity, it makes sense that it emerges as a kind of consolation prize for those who feel an acute breach in their cultural legacies. In looking for ways to re-establish a connection to what has been severed, magic offers a de facto backward glance or cultural otherness. While this project focuses on the experiences of queer people and the occult, I argue that this phenomenon represents a much broader negotiation of cultural inheritance and genealogy. It makes sense that queer people are in some ways central to this phenomenon because of the ways that queer has represented a rupture of lineage: they may disproportionately understand what it means to not inherit a certain way of dwelling in the world. As Ahmed puts it in Queer Phenomenology, "queer politics might look back to conditions of arrival…as a refusal to inherit, as a refusal that is a condition for the arrival of queer (2006:178). The task is to trace the lines for a different genealogy, one that would embrace the failure to inherit the family line as a condition of possibility for another way of dwelling in the world" (ibid:178). In the next section, I want to use adoption as a way to think through the links between queer experience, lineage, and severance.

Adoption

Three participants spoke about having adopted parents, and in one case being adopted themselves. This information came up when describing one's feeling of belonging, and how there are uncertainties in the "story."

My dad was adopted so like that whole side was very much questioned and is still kind of very much questioned, because like for the longest time I just knew that he was like a mixed race kid adopted into like a white family during the sixties. So it was like, could be a lot of things. And like, what's on the papers was just like Latin. So like, who knows? I think I've more recently learned that I think there's Argentinean sort of family members, I guess, but but I'm completely disconnected from them. And I think part of that disconnection maybe enhances my desire to have a strong connection to something that is, like, larger, because my whole family's been very disconnected […] I think *having that level of mystery in my own family maybe gives me that level of comfort with mystery generally* and allows for, like, *openness for what other things might be there* (Group interview, July 2022, my emphasis)

For this speaker, there is an implication that the adoption marks a breach from some kind of racial identity to "a white family during the sixties," and implies that their parent's adoption also disconnects them from something "larger." It is not explicit that the speaker is describing Argentinean heritage to be the something "larger" that they are disconnected from, or if it is simply the mystery of not knowing the family tree, but the implication is that adoption made the parent, and thus the speaker, white.

A couple other participants spoke about adoption and breaches in family lineage as a result of the residential school system and other forms of Indigenous dispossession and assimilation in

Canada.

> Im Dene, but because of policies in so-called Canada called the Sixties Scoop, my family specifically, my mother was separated from our culture and brought, I think, a few thousand miles away from the northwest to the East Coast. And because of a like a lack of general coverage on Indigenous culture and the distance, it's been *really hard to try and learn about my culture and try and like you know, become a part of it again*. […] I like don't know, half my family tree or like any of those details. So there's definitely like, in my search for information or just like understanding of things, I go to the occult for that…And also too like the, just the being queer, and like having the found family and also losing some family members by like just being queer. *Also feeling more that loss*. But from that, and like from the searching, and like looking into the occult, there does seem to be like that comfort […] there is like a certain feeling that… I don't know anyone or I'm not talking to anybody who's doing this, but I just know that there's other people you know out there at the full moon too (Interview, April 2022, my emphasis)

For this participant, there is a feeling of severance which is difficult to overcome because of the marginalization or erasure of Indigenous knowledge. That feeling of severance is compounded by being queer and this experience further separating the speaker from her family. Finally, she claims that the occult is a way to make sense of things, and also offers forms of connection in the feeling that other people might be having a shared experience, even if they are not present. In both these cases, as well as other examples that came up in interviews, participants grapple with losing a form of cultural inheritance that would have marked them. Indigenous culture is something one of them has to "learn" rather than what would have been transmitted through kinship, and this "search for

information" is in parallel with her own interest in learning magic.

One participant who was adopted echoed one of the speakers above in talking about how comfort with mystery allowed them to practice magic.

> I was adopted so I don't have a lot of specific information about a lot of my family... But I just I really believe, like when you heal yourself, you heal your ancestors in the past. And it happens outside of time and space. A lot of my own healing work has been healing intergenerational trauma, the effects of it…and like being adopted *I feel like I can have an easier time connecting with ancestors that I don't know* […] When I became a herbalist and I started, whenever I would be harvesting the plants or working with the plants, I would just get the feeling like I've done this so many lifetimes before and this is exactly what I'm supposed to be doing right now. And, it's not necessarily in my, like *my grandma didn't teach me*, but it's not about a specific relative or specific ancestor. It's just like it's…It's in the past, for sure. And it's continuing, and... I do a lot of stuff around past lives for my own thing too. So I think about a lot of. Yeah. Lineage. Ancestry. Future ancestors, past ancestors. (Group interview, July 2022, my emphasis)

This participant makes a distinction between forms of knowledge that would have been normally passed down through one's "grandma" and a kind of intuitive or embodied knowing that persists despite what is otherwise a breach in the lineage. That they are adopted does not pose a barrier to connection but actually facilitates it, in that there is an openness to seeking out what is unknown, which for this participant includes their astral traveling and interest in understanding past lives. The relative difficulty of finding or confirming lines of kinship means that one is free to claim what they want, which makes an interesting companion with the self-determination of the queer

"electron libre" described earlier. While not actually adopted, one participant described how:

> I have no father, and have severed my connection with my mother. So I'm essentially, in practical terms Im an orphan, and have been for a long time. And before I was an orphan I had to be self-sufficient in many ways. And so I think there's like this element of like…*being forced to come into your power, in order to survive*…no matter how lonely you get, you know no matter how abandoned you feel there's always this relationship with like, this home, this mother, this like protective thing. (Interview, April 2022)

For this speaker, their relationship to the occult emerged out of necessity: they later describe coming out as trans and discovering magic as the beginning of their individuation, which did not only help them to survive but was the reason for it.

I bring together some of these examples of adoption or "orphan"-hood because they represent different examples of being disconnected from a familial lineage, and the consequences of this as well as the opportunities it affords. In another example, one participant spoke about the devastation of a divorce situation cutting her off from a potential kinship with an older relative.

> I didn't grow up knowing my father…And I think I always. Sorry I'm going to get emotional. I think that I felt cheated as a child from ancestry lineage through this decision that was not in my hands from just a divorce situation. And it always rocked me because in a bad way, being like, who gets the right to have history? […] When I met my grandmother [after re-connecting with my dad], my *avo* like his mother, she was just about to die, basically. I met her just on her death bed. And it was devastating because I had this connection to her that surpassed my connection to my own mother. And I was like, 'oh, like I feel like I would have learned from you.' Like, that would have been the person I would have learned from.

Right? [After] I start getting more into like, into my magic practices, into tarot, into a lot of things. And then my dad really casually mentions how my avo used to use like a regular playing deck of cards for tarot. […] Like, there was this mystery that was built, like, I, there's so much in my family, I don't know and I won't know. But when I hear these things, I have this feeling like that in my blood, in my system, you know, that I'm listening and I'm hearing things and it's it is starting to make sense, but only if I… It's kind of inconclusive, but it just made me feel kind of like maybe this is in my system. This is in my blood, this is in my family. (Group interview, July 2022)

What speakers describe above: mystery and uncertainty, the trauma of forced disconnection or estrangement, and the forms of community or connection one finds despite that are explicitly linked to familial disconnection, but I theorize that these experiences are continuous across the sample. What I mean is that the feeling of rootlessness, which is usually accompanied by some feeling of pain, is pervasive in my sample even without a known "event" to ascribe it to. Some can point to when that breach happened, while others are certain that a loss has taken place but cannot necessarily say when or how. Queerness itself has historically been theorized as a kind of orphaning, in that one disrupts the normative lines of the social. Thinking back to Chapter 2, in my discussion of loss and woundedness at the heart of queer historiography, I quoted from *Loss and the Politics of Mourning*, where Butler argues:

Perhaps the most difficult experience of loss is the "loss of loss itself: somewhere, sometime, something was lost, but no story can be told about it; no memory can retrieve it; a fractured horizon looms in which to make one's way as a spectral agency, one for whom a full "recovery" is impossible, one for whom the irrecoverable becomes, paradoxically, the

condition of a new political agency (2003:467).

I want to theorize how participants experience their own racial identities in terms of a similar severance. For those who think of imperial modalities as cutting them off from inheriting certain ways of sharing the world, race is understood as what did not get properly transmitted: what got stuck, forgotten, or erased. In a similar way, queerness represents a rupture in the social line. Forms of adoption or familial rupture here make a good allegory for queerness, but also, I argue, whiteness, insofar as whiteness is understood in terms of severance or erasure. As Derrida puts it, "White mythology metaphysics has erased within itself the fabulous scene that has produced it, the scene that nevertheless remains active and stirring, inscribed in white ink, an invisible design covered over in the palimpsest" (as cited by Hesse 2007:660). It is not that white *people* experience severance, but that whiteness itself is a form of unhoming in that it erases the history of its own "arrival": it becomes normative only through a repeated orientation that has come to be apprehended as natural. But there is an important difference here insofar as queerness is a refusal to inherit, or a refusal to pay the 'debt' of the repetitive movements of compulsory heterosexuality, while whiteness is itself the debt that demands eternal repayment. Whiteness is both an inheritance at the same time that it appears as the lack of inheritance, covering its tracks. Interrupting whiteness would mean a similar refusal to take part in its "congealed history of past approaches" which orient us in specific ways (Ahmed 2006:91). In the next section, I explore how severance from ancestral inheritance is understood as the loss of magic, and how this ties into immigration, whiteness, and imperialism.

The loss of magic

In one group interview, we started talking about ancestor work, which broadly means engaging with one's ancestors, known or not, to heal from or come to terms with one's place in history. I want to begin this section by introducing this long excerpt from that interview.

> My interest in ancestor work is also my own process of like challenging white supremacy within me. Because the way I understand it is that, you're like, *you create white supremacy because* […] *you don't have a culture or like is neutral or whatever*. And like this void creates like a desire to take anything else that's spiritual and this desire is in a lot of queer community to be like, 'Oh, I'm going to take this, this, and this, cuz I have this hole and I don't have culture and blah, blah, blah.' And like for me, like the work of being like, no, but actually like, okay, fine like I'm Quebecois for many generations what does it mean? And what does it mean from before and where did we like, what is the story of like those families and like *where do you lose the folk magic*, you know, and *where did we lose culture*. And so I started doing some research and I actually could find that where my ancestors come from like what villages. And so I can like kind of guess that like my heritage are Celtics you know. But then you don't inherit those, there's a, there's like a hole you know, there's like a *trou béant* that's never going to be filled. [lots of people murmur: 'yeah,' 'mm,' 'exactly'] And like, there's no one that would be like, 'oh, yeah and now I absolutely found the roots through authenticity and truth, and this is your culture.' Like no, it's lost. You know? (Group interview, April 2022, my emphasis)

For this speaker, folk magic and culture are synonymous, and at one point their transmission was disrupted. "Where do you lose the folk magic…where do you lose culture?" The disruption of that transmission is theorized by informants in terms of whiteness, which is a kind of erasure or

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"void," which severs one from a given lineage. Whiteness is known, by informants, as what didn't get inherited. Whiteness is an orientation that puts certain things, and not others, into reach (Ahmed 2006:126). There is an ambivalence here which I found common in interviews: on the one hand, there is an awareness that whiteness isn't actually a lack of culture, evidenced here by the mockery of those who claim "I don't have culture and bla bla bla." This is likely due to some education in anti-racism, which urges white people to recognize the non-neutrality of whiteness. But at the same time, the speaker still defines their heritage in terms of loss, or more specifically a gaping hole ("trou béant"). This feeling of alienation, as I have been trying to show, was shared across the sample. The perceived rupture of whiteness, empire, or whatever informants ascribe their severance to, affects not only those who are most explicitly disenfranchised, but for those descendants of settlers who recognize the displacement inherent in settlement as well. This shared feeling of displacement is absolutely key to the political stakes of the phenomenon. In recognizing that white people also feel alienated by coloniality, there is a potential for solidarity and a shared objection to the repressive logics of power, highlighting whiteness as its own process of racialization that conditions how one shows up in the world. The task is not to claim an essential sameness and evade any real engagement with the different stakes and magnitudes of that repression, but to understand what it looks like not to repay the 'debt' of whiteness.[7]

If, as we have seen, the occult is a knowledge relation that refers to anything that has been expelled from the normalizing rubrics of scientific rational modernity, turning to occultism is an attempt to restore that which has been forced to disappear. By describing their histories of immigration, colonial entanglements, or the loss of stories around their identity, participants theorize the loss of magic in terms of a recruitment into whiteness, or empire: the moment of

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[7] Ahmed talks about heteronormativity as a debt that needs to be repaid by replicating its "line" (2006:86).

interruption of a cultural lineage that could have been/could still be otherwise. Magic becomes

known as magic the very second it is disciplined by imperial power: magic is what modernity has

rendered ghostly, and to be haunted is to remain partial to those ghosts: "what it feels like to be

the object of a social totality vexed by the phantoms of modernity's violence" (Gordon 2008:19).

Thus, an interest in magic is always already an interest in returning to the scene of violence wherein

something was classified as Other, and making that violence known in order to make something

else possible. For the speaker above, the remedy is not to take for granted this severance, but to

become acquainted with the point of severance itself. Thinking with Azoulay, looking for magic

is a form of potential history, where "potential history is our objection to participate in and

naturalize the outcomes of imperial violence on which much of our practices, knowledge, desires,

imaginations, and dreams are built" (2019:291-2).[8]

Another way participants frame the "loss" of magic is in terms of erasure, or forgetting. "I feel

like the whole, um institution of whiteness is *just forgetting* that we're all, I mean, it would be

totally improper to say racialized, but *we all have an origin from somewhere*" (Interview, April

2022, my emphasis). Forgetting is just another word for assimilation here, but it has a specific

temporal dimension to it that is crucial to the problem of the historical that I have been theorizing

in this phenomenon. Race, and the differential capacities to evolve in a timely manner that it

apparently measures, is so embedded in theories of history and genealogy that no route to

citizenship can effectively transcend, or bypass, its co-constitution with myriad other forms of

embodiment or timeliness that are (forever incompletely) ingested, displaced, or banished.

Whiteness is emergent out of a forced subjugation (or forgetting) of something else: it is a negation,

even if it is, in fact, a form of racialization itself. McClintock refers to imperial violence as the

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[8] Ahmed might call it "stopp[ing] in their tracks:" "bodies that do not follow the line of whiteness might be stopped in their tracks, which changes one's relation to what's here" (2006:159).

"administration of forgetting: the calculated and often brutal amnesias by which a state contrives to erase its own atrocities" (2014:820). Work on postcoloniality, especially by Indigenous scholars and feminists of colour have long been interested in epistemologies of "unknowing" (Vimalassery and Goldstein 2016). Unknowing has also been theorized by Stoler (2011) as "colonial aphasia," wherein the empire requires and produces a certain unintelligibility in order to mask its pervasive structure. While participants speak largely about whiteness in these interviews, they are also talking about settlement and the circuits of empire. Forgetting is a kind of severance from a particular past, or a denial of the history of arrival. In terms of empire and colonialism, "the idea of race" does the work of the "naturalization of colonial relations between Europeans and non-Europeans," where this naturalization is a kind of forgetting of the work it took (Quijano and Ennis 2000:534-535). As Ahmed says: we often forget the histories by which the arrive: the work is hidden from view, and "I arrive, as if by magic" (2006:16). Emphasizing the temporal aspect of whiteness in these terms demonstrates how any form of reclamation, or resistance to the "forgetting" of whiteness, involves making visible those histories of arrival, which as a temporal movement is always already a racial one.

Many participants described the ways they felt cut off from particular forms of inheritance that would have been theirs if some kind of assimilation had not taken place. "I'm an immigrant from Ukraine. So I think there's also like that, like *seeking for like something to ground in* and something to refer to that also is like this longing as well, that you feel that finding your own sense of a belief system can be such a source of security when you're, you know, displaced" (Interview, April 2022, my emphasis). The speaker described a dissonance in growing up white in Canada: "living with the family trauma of like being racialized while being in a situation in a context here where I'm not racialized" (Interview, April 2022). This notion of when one "became" white is at the heart of

my analysis of whiteness as inversely correlated with magic. If participants theorize whiteness as an ideology that maps onto—but is not coterminous with—skin colour, it becomes possible to trace it as a historical process, as well as something that can be invested in or divested from. This participant is stuck: they want to "ground" themselves in what they see as their own history, but to do so, the describe later, feels like a dangerous denial of their own white privilege. This is a double bind: to become white one must in some sense forget the process by which one became so. On the other hand, to emphasize one's status as an immigrant runs the risk of denying the ways one is very much caught in and benefits from whiteness in the present. Participants like the one above are stuck because they refuse to make a maneuver that would make them somehow exceptional to power.

One participant described their experience of finding out they were Métis when she was a teenager.

> Yeah so I looked white and I grew up like in a white town. Like with a *white growing up experience*. So then finding out that I was Indigenous and then finding out like, like that, I really connect with it as well […] And like my mom's siblings and my grandparents, they didn't connect with that because they were just were completely colonized and were Catholic. So they didn't resonate with it at all. So then that left me with that hole of *who do I go to*? Who am I going to talk to about this? (Group interview, April 2022, my emphasis)

For this participant, she was cut off from an Indigenous heritage, but still has the capacity to connect with it because the colonization was not as apparently totalizing as she feels it is for the rest of her family. Colonization is figured here as a form of obsoletion which is quantifiable, and is linked with whiteness: she implies her family became white, but that there was still hope for her

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to resist this becoming. Still, colonization is fundamentally disorienting, and she is left without knowing where to turn: "Who am I going to talk to?"

Participants theorized whiteness in our interviews as erasure, theft, or amnesia. "Whiteness as this…kind of erasing of people's stories around their identity" (Interview, May 2022). When grappling with what it meant to try to understand their own lineage, one white, Quebecois participant expressed a lot of anxiety around how to verify certain stories. "I'm finding that the parts of my family that I actually can track are the white parts…[laughs] like the parts that are not white are really difficult to track, impossible" (Group interview, July 2022). Whiteness emerges here as that which is visible and documented against the murky, indeterminate histories that might cast another picture. As I have been theorizing through queer historiography, whiteness is not just what emerges as visible, but is itself the framework of visibility. Reading alongside Gordon's "haunting," it could be said that participants are plagued by "those repressions, disappearances, absences, and losses enforced by the conditions of modern life" (2008:x), wherein the "white parts" of this speaker's ancestry are conditioned by the absence of everything else. That whiteness is what is "tracked" is indicative of the "epistemologies of blindness" that I described in Chapter 2, and participants grapple with trying to understand what happens beyond the limits of what appears to them.

For settlers who have some idea of where their family immigrated from, many lamented the fact that they were not taught the languages of their parents or grandparents, or did not learn their "culture," due to assimilation once arriving in Canada. For one white, Jewish participant:

> I'm Iraqi Jewish. And so that means that like my ancestors lived in like ancient Mesopotamia and like had like a pagan, magical, enchanted worldview…But mostly I grew up like completely disconnected from any part of my, like, Arabic cultural heritage […] I just need

to, to *learn my culture*. Like, I just, it wasn't really transmitted to me very much. Like I, I feel a certain, like, familiarity when I experience like, like Persian or like Arabic, like food and stuff like that. But like, you know, I, I don't have much of a connection to it because what I was taught in school was like the, whatever, like the *colonial histories*. And my culture around me was like internet, like Anglophone monoculture. *So I could have been like, basically, like anywhere English speaking in the world*. Like growing up anglophone in Montréal. I just need to like, *go see* what my culture is like. I just, like, don't even know (Interview April 2022, my emphasis)

For this speaker, not inheriting what she sees as the historical elements of Persian/Arabic culture means that she was not only part of a "monoculture," but that this monoculture does not tie her to any specific place. She could be from "anywhere," and the interest in something else implies a kind of spatial movement: to "go see." To "go see" would be to deviate from the "straightening device" of whiteness—that which has been given as a particular orientation in the world (Ahmed 2006:121). Importantly, she also contrasts her own "internet…monoculture" with the "enchanted worldview" of ancient Mesopotamia, implying that enchantment and cultural legacy are inextricable. At one point she could have been magical, but because of cultural assimilation, is entrenched in the banality of modernity instead.

Assimilation was considered by many respondents as itself a denial of history. One white, first generation Canadian with Ukrainian parents said this:

I just like also grew up with this huge denial of personal history, very much like our cultural traditions, my mom […] would always be like, 'Well, how do you [and your classmates] do it? Let's do it like that.' So it was always like […] being taught to like fit in, assimilate, like

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to survive like and also whiteness is also a huge part of it….so like there's a lot of, like, denial of otherness. I think that, made me, disconnected from ideas of historicity because it was like, yeah, just something I was actually told to deny (Interview, April 2022)

By framing historicity in this way, this participant ironically reproduces whiteness as something that is ahistorical: it is only legible as the absence of a cultural tradition rather than itself a set of expectations, desires, and orientations. Another white participant reflected on their family's fairly recent immigration in this way:

I feel to this day a lot of frustration that my dad never sent us to Greek school because I really want to learn Greek and be immersed in that part of me. And I think as I speak to like other people who like know their roots but know them almost like *in legend of who they are*, there's like a lot of romanticism. Like, I definitely romanticize, like being Greek more than I feel like I am Greek. *And that's a very frustrating longing* (Group interview June 2022, my emphasis)

This ambivalence was prevalent in interviews: there is an awareness of the risk of romanticizing or even fetishizing a kind of cultural lineage, at the same time that this self-awareness does not diminish the feeling of desire for it.

On the one hand, seeing whiteness as a lack of culture, or placelessness, with that lack construed as longing, reinforces what critical race/whiteness scholars have pointed out as the fictive emptiness of whiteness (Frankenberg 1993; Dyer 1997; Roediger 1998). Scholarship on whiteness has attempted to "displace it from its unmarked status," which is an effect of its

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dominance (Frankenberg 1993:6). In order to challenge whiteness as empty, where nonwhite people alone bear the markers of culture, scholars have shown how white people are racialized through ongoing investments in whiteness as an economic, social, and political system (Lipsitz 1998). Whiteness is a historical process, and populations are differentially recruited into it and make their own "possessive investments" in its materials, narratives, and territorializations of power (Lipsitz 1998).

Despite the longing that characterizes a lot of the feelings of white participants in this study, I don't think that participants actually understood whiteness as somehow neutral—even if contradictions did sometimes arise. If whiteness was represented as null, this was often theorized in interviews not as a given status but a way to mark whiteness as null-*ifying*. The feeling of longing is a reaction to an experience of loss of something, which could be retrieved through a refusal to acknowledge as inevitable its disappearance. In other words, if participants do not see themselves as having "roots" anywhere, it is not, I think, because they take for granted whiteness as timeless or ahistorical, but because they theorize whiteness as a disavowal of Otherness: an uprooting which they wish to denaturalize and restore somehow. This makes postcolonial scholarship more of a productive theoretical framework for looking at this phenomenon than a lot of work on critical whiteness, because it historicizes that void as part of the mechanism of "imperial ghosting" (McClintock 2014). Whiteness actually *is* a kind of void insofar as it is an ideology that is emergent through the voiding of local histories in service of what Sylvia Wynter has called the genre of Man (2015). To claim a form of cultural inheritance other than whiteness, that is, to see whiteness as an obfuscation of what else could have been, is to refuse to engage in the destructive practices that whiteness as part and parcel of an imperial regime has necessitated and rendered inevitable.

Thinking back to the first chapter, whiteness as a fiction of emptiness is, I argue, part of the same power mechanism as the myth of disenchantment. Modernity voids itself of "superstition" by projecting it onto a magical elsewhere, which is temporally backward. As I argued earlier, modernity's classification, and consequent rejection of, certain ways of living in the world is necessarily racialized. In categorizing as distinct and primordial certain lifeways, modernity as a project is always a negotiation over cultural boundaries and the appropriate tempo and outcome of progress. This process of disavowal is the central thrust of imperialism, which is reflected in participants' reflections on "whiteness" as a system of repression, erasure, and violent severance. While whiteness and empire are not exactly synonymous, what matters is how participants understand race and magic as being tied together by historical forms of cultural assimilation, where the disavowal of one cultural form gives rise to whiteness, as a resultant void. "Racism is the psychology of imperialism, the spirit of empire, because racism supplies the element that makes for the righteousness of empire. Hence racism is not simply a by-product of empire but an intrinsic part of it, part of the intestines of empire" (Nederveen Pieterse 1990:223).

That certain places, populations, or eras are magical and others are not is part of the mechanism that seeks to discipline and organize that invented difference, thus modernity is only disenchanted insofar as one follows or buys into the logic of this disciplining. At the same time, to acknowledge the very real and deleterious effects of disenchantment as a kind of regime means to take seriously what is at stake. To grapple with whiteness presents the same kind of paradox: to think of whiteness as empty can mean on the one hand accepting its grounds, which invite hazardous forms of fulfillment as those who feel cheated out of ancestry seek to fill the gap, so to speak. On the other hand, the feeling of longing, while a consequence of assimilation, does not necessarily have to naturalize whiteness as empty. To recognize this putative emptiness as an outcome of violence that

is neither inevitable nor irreversible, where the very grammar that makes this emptiness thinkable, could be pulverized for another version of events. Participants' attempts to make sense of what kinds of lineages are available to them, is in a sense an attempt to overcome that institutionalized "forgetting," to connect to the "memory" of something else that at some point got submerged. Like one informant said earlier, "We return…we remember" (Interview, April 2022).

For participants, examples of denial of magic in their families operates as an allegory for cultural repression itself, which is felt as a loss. One Black, Muslim participant shared:

> I always find it so interesting how some cultures literally just deny that, you know, we used to like do magic or use like the occult, and it's just, I see it very much in my family how my dad would tell me about voodoo and things like that. And then he said, you know, 'I grew up in this, and my siblings did, too.' But […] the same siblings, you tell them about voodoo and they're like, "Oh, no." You know? And it's kind of like we were taught to hate us and hate ourselves. (Group interview April 2022)

They went on to argue:

> Imperialism steals… Like it literally steals your identity. My parents' generation, […] they were all like Anglican, Catholic, and then my dad was Muslim so I was raised Muslim. And even though like those religions, like Christianity specifically, it's very much like colonialism and Christianity kind of go hand-in-hand. And so because of that, a lot of the spirituality and a lot of like ancestral practises were—*I'm not going to say they were snuffed out because they weren't*, because like I was raised with like dream interpretation and like different like medicines when you're sick, you don't like go get Benadryl, you have a whole bunch of herbs that you put together— like these are spiritual and it's, you could say it's

magic right? But it's like those things were still kept, even though [the family was] Christian and they were Catholic. And so it's like, they had this colonial aspect of their of their identities, but they still practise like our ancestral practises of all those things, like dreams. And like, we don't welcome spirits […] it's a thing that my parents say is just like, 'you don't say bad thing because you're welcoming it into your life.' Like…*that's magic*! (Group interview, April 2022, my emphasis)

Many such stories came up in this particular group interview, where those present volunteered different examples of family members simultaneously enacting what speakers thought of as clearly magical beliefs, while the family members themselves deny that they are in any way remarkable. There was a good amount of laughter as people pointed out the irony of denying superstition in the family at the same time that what appeared to be clearly magical practices being woven into everyday life, from splashing water on the car before a road trip, to putting children' names in a bucket of water to see which would sink and betray the culprit who sneaked an extra cookie.

In the above quote, the speaker both charges imperialism as disavowal at the same time that she argues that this disavowal is never total. "A lot of ancestral practices were—I'm not going to say snuffed out because they weren't." This notion of persistence is key to the political stakes of the occult, in the Foucauldian sense that power is always in some way resisted. Another participant put it this way:

It would be untrue to say like… colonization…happened period. And like, 'oh, like forms of like indigenous like spirituality and community are ruined.' Like that is completely untrue, you know? And I think we can see kind of a similarity in how this idea of a kind of ancient, like, goddess energy, persists, but, again, we don't even know, if there was like,

even, ancient goddess cults in Europe, but it's more of a kind of like, narrative idea. But we do know obviously that there have been indigenous forms of spirituality, like pre colonization that persist in some ways. (Interview, April 2022)

This speaker denies colonization as an event that is over, opting to frame it as a process that has failed insofar as its goal is the total "ruin" of indigeneity. She also locates herself uneasily within this process of disavowal by not claiming indigenous forms of spirituality but likening them to a "goddess energy" that survives in Europe.

Connecting to something else

If whiteness is an ideology inextricably linked to empire and the obsoletion of that which is racialized against it, how can be disavowed? What would become available as a lineage, and how could this be claimed without co-opting something one is not entitled to? What does it even mean to be entitled to it? Indeed, this is precisely what I theorize as the risk of "reclamation" in the occult. Critics of cultural appropriation have pointed out how the phenomenon is a consequence both of whiteness construed as lack, and this lack licensing certain forms of fulfilment, such as "playing Indian" (Deloria 1998). Cultural "richness" has been attractive as something to incorporate in for at least as long as there has been a mechanism that produces Europe as mythless, and the dark 'corners' of the earth as teeming with legends, superstition, and curious ritual. While cultural appropriation is often construed as a result of ignorance, and prescribed against by educating oneself about what forms of ritual, dress, or belief are sacred to another culture, this depoliticizes the mechanism of ingestion at the heart of globalizing regimes of empire, and fails to recognize how individuals take part in it as motivated by their own affective longing. What's more,

it naturalizes whiteness as an orientation that only puts certain things into reach and not others, instead of interrogating this as something that can be interrupted.

I theorize that the occult operates as a conduit for divesting from whiteness. This goes not only for those who consider themselves white, but for all as participants who "grew up" in whiteness, that is, within the settler colony of Canada which has historically enacted its rule according to a white supremacist logic. In Ahmed's phenomenological terms, divestment could be for anyone who sees whiteness as a "bad habit" that they have been differently habituated to perform (2006:130). But what does divesting from whiteness actually entail? There are many examples of doing this "badly:" wherein the desire to disavow one's inheritance of privilege means not taking accountability for the ways one continues to benefit from it. In particular among queer communities, there is a history of failure to recognize "their own imbrication in ongoing projects of settlement" (Rifkin 2011:26), where queer is somehow *a priori*. At its worst, queer nostalgia for other times, coupled with a victim subjectivity that refuses accountability for current privileges and injustices, may itself work to naturalize forms of imperialism (Haritaworn 2013; see also: Puar 2007). Among my sample, I am particularly interested in examples of divestment where there is actually an attempt to refuse to replicate the violence of whiteness, rather than a pretence to get out from under it.

In Chapter 2, I argued that queer historiography is about attuning to histories that did not get recorded, destabilizing the truth value of a given narrative in favour of what has been prevented from appearing. Such a maneuver operates as a form of divestment, in that it withdraws from a given set of epistemological assumptions and modalities to ask what else might exist, disinheriting the colonial "apparatus of vision" that makes only certain things recognizable (Gopinath 2018:8). Divesting from whiteness is part and parcel of the same political goal: to refuse to replicate a given

logic or structure of power. If white supremacy garners its power by appearing natural, and nullifying local histories in service of a universal narrative of progress, refusing to participate might mean exposing this as a historical process, and returning to the scene where such a rupture apparently began. Azoulay (2019), in her treatise on unlearning imperialism, uses the metaphor of going on strike to theorize the practice of unlearning imperial modalities. "Going on strike is to claim one's right not to engage with destructive practices, not to be an oppressor and perpetrator, not to act according to norms and protocols whose goals were defined to reproduce imperial and racial capitalist structures" (Azoulay 2019:158). For Azoulay, imperialism makes unthinkable certain ways of sharing in the common world, and "renders obsolete other forms of being-together in the wake of its materialization" (ibid:167). Unlearning imperialism makes other outcomes possible other than what Wynter (2015) calls history as verdict. "Potential history is not an attempt to tell the violence alone, but rather an onto-epistemic refusal to recognize as irreversible its outcome and the categories, statuses, and forms under which it materializes" (Azoulay 2019:286)

Using Azoulay's theorization, I argue that participants in this study seek to unlearn, or go on strike from, whiteness and other forms of hegemonic power. What this has to do with the occult is that the occult, as always already rendered backward, represents the dangerous memory that one can recuperate to challenge the forgetting at the heart of empire. While the occult does not represent the sole maneuver for doing so, I see it as a resource for grappling with the "potential history" that Azoulay theorizes, that is, what appears to informants as the persistence of a story that was almost "snuffed out." I also appreciate Azoulay's theorization of the shared ground that unlearning imperialism offers, which allows me to name and distinguish that there are different stakes for different informants while still representing a a potential continuity or a solidarity between them. "Undoing this violence may be a more urgent question for its direct victims, but

since this violence is what victims and perpetrators have in common, neither can be free of the burden to engage in undoing it" (Azoulay 2019:148). In the context of this study, I argue that this is a productive way to think about the role of white people in betraying white supremacy. One could also think of this shared ground in terms of Gordon's theory of haunting: "Haunting is *not the same as being exploited, traumatized, or oppressed*, although it usually involves these experiences or is produced by them. What's distinctive about haunting is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known" (2008:xvi, my emphasis). Thinking of haunting as continuous with, but not necessarily the same as being oppressed, is helpful to hold whiteness as an ideology in tension with the experience of "being" white as it is felt by some of my informants. Haunting is the shared ground. As we will see below, many of my own informants share this sentiment that they have a part to play in undoing white supremacy within themselves, at the same time that they tend to be uncomfortable about exactly what potential history lies in wait for them instead. One participant likened this conundrum of subjectivity with coming out: "The journey of getting to know yourself as a queer person, and yourself as like a person who practices magic and occult things is also like, a process of like being like, 'oh, I'm not sure, like, can I really like claim this'?" (Group interview, June 2022).

Ancestor work was named several times in interviews as a means to combat the feelings of "lack" that accompany whiteness. In the quote that opened this chapter, one speaker talks about trying to understand their Quebecois heritage as a way to "challenge white supremacy within me" and resist thinking of whiteness as a "void." A similar sentiment is echoed below by another white informant:

I think it can, in a way, be an antidote to cultural appropriation to get into connection with

your own ancestral healing practices as a white person. So I've gotten more and more into like my Celtic ancestry and practices and I feel like so many people culturally appropriate because […] *they're lacking like spiritual practices and cultural practices of their own that they can connect with*. Like especially in North America, *we're all so disconnected* from like traditional and whatever ways of being that our ancestors were doing. So I think learning about your own ancestors, that's a good answer to that. So people are less inclined to try to just like take from something else to *fill that gap*. And. I think for me in my personal work, I have to heal my own white ancestral line. And that involves facing like colonization and, you know, different things that have happened around race throughout that lineage. […] I believe healing like goes back and forth in time so you can heal your ancestors and you can heal future generations by working with feeling yourself in the present moment. And yeah, it's kind of like reckoning with racial issues, looking at them, moving through them. Educating myself and gaining knowledge, and I'm sharing that. It's like it's all part of like awareness too, which is part of healing and part of magic. (Interview, May 2022, my emphasis)

In this instance, the speaker looks for ways to connect with their "Celtic ancestry" rather than their lineage in North America, which they associate with colonization and disconnection. Whatever forms of belonging, attachment, and subjectivity are available for white people in North America, this is considered spiritually and culturally void, and is disavowed for whatever came before it. The speaker theorizes that North America is characterized by disconnection as a result of colonization. Typically, they also refer to 'lack' as a catalyst for spiritual appropriation, which they temper by seeking out forms of connection. The connection itself is referred to as healing, not

only for themselves but for the ancestors too, back and forward in time.

Seeking out forms of connection with ancestors took many forms throughout the study. Most participants, being aware that not all forms of knowledge or ritual are fair game to get in touch with, sought out forms of connection that they felt they were justified in claiming.

I became very curious about connecting to my own cultural heritage when I encountered, like, criticism of white witches in general. And my family is Iraqi Jewish, which means that my ancestors lived in ancient Mesopotamia, which was like a very magical pagan society. And I'm like really interested in investigating that, which is not the culture that, like, I learned from my grandmother and my great aunts, who are Jewish […] and there's been like an assimilation process, like into like American culture" (Group interview, April 2022)

I quoted this participant earlier from our one-on-one interview, where there is an almost identical reference to her heritage and its putative magic. She claims that critiques of white witchcraft—the implication being, critiques of cultural appropriation—pushed her to clarify what exactly her "own cultural heritage" was. In another part of the interview, she said this: "*I just want to participate in resistance like from my position*, you know, and if my position is white Iraqi Jewish femme then […] I'm, you know, positioning myself like as a descendant of white woman burned as witches in Europe. And like you can have all kinds of problems with white women, but I want to be one who, you know, subverts oppression" (my emphasis). In this case, the speaker is trying to figure out what to be in touch with, given that assimilation has interrupted what she would have otherwise "learned from [her] grandmother and great aunts." She seems to resonate with witches as a category that she is justified in claiming because the witches she refers to that were burned were European, which is coded as white. In order to participate in resistance movements,

she looks for ways to do that that acknowledge her own positionality. There is some anxiety here over what exactly that is, especially in the tension between the "problems" with white women and her desire to "subvert oppression" despite that.

This anxiety was pervasive among my sample. Another witch described the amount of relief and validation she felt when she discovered that her great-grandmother was a witch in former Yugoslavia, which appeared to resolve the anxiety of practicing witchcraft as a white person.

> I guess it felt like super validating-to use that word, that's a weird word sometimes to use. Um but yeah it's kind of just like, I always fucking knew [grins]. I was into magic and stuff, and I just didn't think it was like…a real thing. So that's always what gave me anxiety. I was like, Am I crazy? […] But then hearing like that, *it's part of my—my tradition*. It just, it felt like…*soothing and calming* because it was like it was kind of like, I am not crazy […] This is like something that's like, *passed down and like has its own history and tradition and I guess kind of like elevated it from this, like, weird, eccentric thing to like something that has value and validity because it also is like passed down, has a tradition and a heritage just like other, like religious practices do*. And yeah, I was just like, happy to know that like…I also am a part of this. It's not just like wishful thinking. It's like something that I have within me too. (Interview, April 2022)

The speaker's affective language is really striking here, where she felt "sooth[ed]", "calm" and "validated" against feeling anxious and crazy. Finding evidence of magic in one's own bloodline seems to offer a kind of relief, and a feeling of belonging. "I also am a part of this." The relief comes from feeling entitled to a given heritage, which has "value and validity because it…is passed down." At the same time, feeling justified in practicing a certain kind of witchcraft does not

necessarily bar the participant from accusations of cultural appropriation, and this tension is worked out later in their interview.

> [I don't think] I have the right to borrow from, from anything and everything. And that's kind of where I stayed to like my own heritage and religion, like in my practice. I really mostly take from Slavic practices and Christianity. […] But yeah, I think for the most part, I don't really feel guilt about what I do because it's part of like my heritage and sometimes white, like other white people…like, I've done like projects about my magic practice. And then people are like, 'oh, be careful to stay away from appropriation of, like, witchcraft' or something. People have made […] really dumb comments, considering my whole context with my heritage and my lived experience and my beliefs. And I'm like, I'm not appropriating anything, so, I don't feel super… I guess it is a way to…*not get around it, but just like be in tune with something that like... I feel like it's part of me*. (Interview, April 2022, my emphasis)

There is a tone of defensiveness in this excerpt, which gets at the heart of the anxiety the speaker mentioned before: the feeling that one doesn't really have the right to claim a particular heritage, or that even if one does it will be considered suspect. The speaker is vexed because she feels it is unfair to be accused of stealing something that she discovered is "part of me," and feels justified in practicing as a result. This anxiety was pervasive in interviews, in particular among those who were white. Many found themselves in a trap that taking accountability for white privilege meant that they had no right to engage in anything.

> Anytime I try to like justify any of my identity as it just kind of leads me to this like trap of like, 'oh, like I can't, I can't exist.' And so I think, like, I'm learning to just kind of, like,

embody what like, resonates for me, accept that it's complex and lots of people will be against

it for lots of different, conflicting reasons and try to like navigate that with like as much like

integrity and like commitment to like justice, including, like my own right to exist as I can.

(Interview, April 2022)

For some, the guilt that comes from being white, or being a settler, actually prevented them

being able to claim connections to anything else. One white, trans participant shared with me:

I feel […] a very big difficulty in engaging with those questions [about ancestry] because I

feel so ashamed of my lineage. Because I can't wrap my head around my lineage and the

colonial violence that comes from it, and you know…which drives in part my self-hatred,

you know, feeling that I'm the product of evil and I shouldn't exist, and, this whole thing…At

some part there's an effort to alleviate the harm that I feel in my very existence, and my

consumption of resource just as a you know, white settler who descends from such a long

lineage of colonial violence. And it's just like, so theres this…*theres something in me that*

refuses to engage with ancestors, to the point of severing ties with my entire family.

(Interview, April 2022, my emphasis)

Recall earlier the excerpt from an adoptee that argued that having mystery in their family

actually facilitated making connections to other forms of ancestors. In this case, the other end of

the spectrum is true: there is a hyper fixation or unresolved feeling of shame that is preventing

forms of kinship. In this case, there is divestment without any form of resolution: the subject has

"sever[ed] ties" but remains suspended in that place of rootlessness, unsure what roots to claim.

They go on:

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Theres this like, there's this severance thing that…and I think that most of it is cowardice. And I think in general the fact that white people are so—including myself in this—are so scared of engaging with the question of ancestors I think is a big part of cowardice and I'm trying to work through that and deal with that, but I'm just kind of afraid of what I'll find if I interact with them. And I just don't want to give them the benefit of the doubt, *I don't want to heal them, or be healed by them, I don't want to be guided by them,* you know, I don't want anything to do with them but they are in me and I am them, and I have to deal with them. And the fact that I'm so like disconnected from my patrilineage ancestors means that I have trouble—and in a way don't own up to them, to those ancestors—means that *I have trouble accepting connections with other forms of ancestors because I feel it would be like a move to innocence*. It would be a move to innocence to be like I don't have those ancestors, I've severed all my ties with them, they are not…I'm not them, and instead I am [sweet glorious voice] 'aaall the legacy of beautiful queer and trans people that have been oppressed.' You know? I'm not going to do that. (Interview, April 2022, my emphasis)

This excerpt is worth unpacking, as it is incredibly rich. There are a few things being worked out here: one is that the speaker recognizes that their inability to engage with the "violence" in their past is not productive: it is "coward[ly]:" they feel the guilt but it doesn't actually allow them to fully "own up" to it, in their estimation. Like others who I have highlighted here, they theorize the dismantling of white supremacy as only possible through some form of engagement with those feelings of guilt, lack, or shame that are so dangerous, but seem to get stopped in their tracks. In a way, they are refusing to heal because they don't think they deserve to, or at least are having a hard time feeling entitled to what would emerge in its stead. They point out and describe very well

the conundrum that actually drove me into this project, which they call the "move to innocence." This is very likely in reference to Tuck and Yang's well-known (2012) essay "Decolonization is not a metaphor," where they use this term. The move to innocence would be, in the participant's perspective, the grave mistake of disavowing one's own unsavoury connections to violence in favour of a transcendent, blemish-free fantasy of queer and trans ancestry. In other words, it is better to sit with the discomfort of feeling one is a "product of evil" than to try to erase its effects.

Kizuk has argued that "Settler shame desperately seeks resolution, preferring to re-establish the self as good, or worthy of pride, rather than respond to other-oriented concerns of justice. As such, settler shame maintains a settler colonial system of oppression" (2020:161). As I described in the intro, there are many examples of the "move to innocence" just within the gay liberation movement itself, where mostly white, but in general settler queer Americans aligned themselves with Indigenous peoples of the Americas as a means to claim a shared oppression, to mark their outsider status, and to claim inheritance of what they saw as more inclusive histories of sexuality and gender. Such a maneuver locates queer Americans as the victims of colonial violence and its heterosexualization, rather than recognize queer sexualities as emergent out of colonial encounters. It is clear from our conversation that the speaker is aware of this risk, of the fantasy of creating a different root on stolen land, and refuses to participate in it. However, such a refusal also leaves them incredibly alienated. In not following the line of whiteness, they might be stopped in their tracks: there is a disorientation (Ahmed 2006). For this speaker in particular, nothing has as of yet emerged to re-orient the body that fails to inherit (or more specifically, refuses to participate in) the orientation of whiteness.

Occult as racial object

I have been arguing that the occult lays bare questions of race, inheritance, and re-connection or recuperation. My theorization of this is that race shows up in the occult through its temporal "backwardness:" if modernity relegates certain things backward, which are racialized against the mythic imperial meter, these things are also necessarily racialized as the not-yet of white modernity. In other words, modernity is racial (Hesse 2007). This means that accepting any kinds of connections through the occult, as the "dark canvas" of Otherness that modernity requires (Hanegraaff 2014:254), is necessarily already transgressive. No matter how much one is "aware" or "respectful" or "educated" about other cultures, any divestment from whiteness necessarily is an engagement with the disruptive, racial memory of what it negates. Even for participants like the one above, who is not yet ready to accept other connections because of their perceived risk of committing a kind of evasion of privilege, this severance from whiteness is a severance from an imperial chronology that in a sense, racializes them. More precisely, they are already racialized as white, and any severance from whiteness constitutes a different racialized body: it puts other things into reach (Ahmed 2006). In other words, for one to betray whiteness, one has to become in some sense, not white. This is an incredibly vexed movement, and historically has been problematic insofar as whiteness as an organizing structure is not acknowledged. At the same time, it is also necessary if whiteness as a supremacist ideology is to be disavowed.

Cultural appropriation was framed by those in my study as exploitation—usually for commercial benefit—or sometimes simply an ignorant engagement with Otherness.

A lot of new age spirituality, I sort of see it as being connected to like the wellness movement in a lot of ways, which I think is very much like connected to like capitalism, white supremacy. Like I see it as being something that like kind of pretends to promote this counter-cultural narrative, but then in actuality is very, it's like mainstream at its core. Not

mainstream maybe, but like is actually very kind of rooted in like these more traditional power hierarchies at its core. (Interview, April 2022)

The problem of appropriation is a problem of exploitation, which is seen as categorically at odds with the spiritual qualities of the practice or object itself.

> Trying to commercialize spirituality and like also using exploit- like continuing to use exploitative methods like the old style, I guess like capitalism, like just squeezing as much as you can when that's like anti-spiritual, you know, it's not respecting life, it's not respecting, you know, even the earth at all. So, like, you can sell, you know, rocks, and have them like, dug up by someone who's paid like a slave wage and then as well it's not, I don't think it's fucking spiritual at all. (Interview, April 2022)

Participants consistently referred to the New Age movement as a self-evident example of what not to do. New age spirituality is charged with a surface-level engagement where one is free to mix and match what they like.

> In terms of witchcraft, like, I think there's also definitely a lot of cultural appropriation that happens there or any new age spiritual movements as well, just cultural appropriation or just this kind of like *borrowing from a lot of cultures and then it being kind of unclear as to like what the cultural roots of a certain practice are*. Um, and I think especially in New Age religion, there's this kind of idea of like, I don't know, like *we're all one*. So like we can just sort of borrow traditions from wherever. (Interview, April 2022)

For this speaker, the new age promotes a false universality, or sameness, which erases important

power differentials or distinctions.

One Afro-Lantinx informant spoke about being disappointed by the ways that some people engage in something that is sacred to him.

I went to [someone's] house and they had an altar and I asked them about this altar because I was excited. I was like, 'Oh, this is interesting. Like, what is this?' And it was just, it was absolutely performative. It was just like, 'Oh, I saw this on, like, Etsy' kind of thing, you know? And my heart sunk, you know, it's like…I was about…about to engage with you on a level that, like, is, is, is so deep to me and then it's just […] So I feel like these disconnects, you know…are what makes me feel ambivalent to connect with these sort of practices when I feel that they're so ingrained in white materialism. (Interview, May 2022)

He contrasted his own relationship to his tarot reader against this "white materialism" by emphasizing markers of authenticity. "You know, the tarot cards like that my astrologer uses, they're, they're so beat up, they're old, they're like 40 something years old. He keeps them in a box, like away from light. You know, this is the kind of, like, respect, reverence that I grew up with, in terms of spirituality" (Interview, May 2022). Here, white materialism—buying something off of a website—is juxtaposed to cards that have a history of use, and whose power is protected by the user. The speaker uses that history as a way to make a judgment about where "real" magic lies.

Participants described their own processes of coming to terms with where they "fit" into magical traditions in terms of developing an awareness of their own privilege and what they could and could not be justified in dabbling in. For one white participant:

I'm trying to find my God and I don't know where my God is because I feel like no matter

what, *I'm borrowing from somewhere*. […] So yeah, I call myself a witch, but I, that's, I'm still trying to find my way while being hypercritical of where everything that I will take comes from because it is taken. [….] Witchcraft allows you permission to be playful in certain ways, but not as much criticalism of how these things affected you. It just gives you a new script where if you have certain privileges, you get to live it out and keep taking from other places instead of really reflecting on where you've come from, if that makes sense. And I think about in my practice with witchcraft and spiritualism, I'm *hypersensitive of my lessons and my power* and where I've allowed my privilege… [as if] I understood things like, Oh, chakras. It's like, no, I don't know those things. That is not my culture. I could pretend like I do, but I learned it from a white lady on the Internet. (Group interview, June 2022, my emphasis)

For this speaker, like so many others, they felt a need to express their sensitivity and their accountability to privilege, as a means to engage with the risk that is so inherent in occultism as a white person. Owning up to their own struggle signals them as politically correct, where they know enough not to buy "some Indian drum" (Interview, April 2022), or in the case above, talk about "chakras." At the same time, this naming of sensitivity was not exclusive to white people: BIPOC participants in the study also spoke about their process of differentiating between their own ancestral practices and those of others. For example, one informant talks about being asked by others if it is "okay" to practice certain Indigenous rituals. "And I'm like, I don't know, I'm not Cree. That's not my practice" (Interview, April 2022). Another participant spoke about how she was influenced by West African folklore and Jamaican Christianity in her own family history, and added: "I have to just approach a bit cautiously because I, you know, I come from, I like benefit

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greatly from light skinned privilege, things like that. I just have to, I find myself making sure I'm like checking myself along the way" (Interview, April 2022).

While participants were highly critical of the "wrong" way to engage in psychic healing or occultism, several also saw this as something that was changing. One Indigenous informant argued:

In the past decades, like, especially before, you know, the 20 tens, there was like, I don't know, a lot more like visible whiteness with spirituality and in a way that, I guess at the time we didn't notice but like looks awkward now […] In my view, like there has been a big change, especially even in the past like five, six years or so towards like an acknowledgment of like the origins of each of the practices and also like a wider… view of spiritual practices in the sense of being *responsible to the community*, and like to groups who these practices come from. And like more respect for those practices. Which I think like until fairly recently, was not respected at all…but I'm picturing more of a commercial sort of thing, a fad-based sort of thing. Like that's very surface level too. Not really interested in investigating the root of things, but just. Like a hobby. Like cycling or something, doing yoga or tarot. (Interview, April 2022, my emphasis)

While no one would say that appropriation is a thing of the past, a few participants also pointed out that there were more examples of BIPOC sharing the spotlight. "I'm also seeing like a lot of like people of color coming out and like doing things that are like, more rooted in their own ancestry and like. There's a lot more diversity of voices that are sharing that space. So it's not the appropriative people, though they're still there. Everyone is kind of having more space" (Interview,

April 2022).

In the examples above, participants emphasize recognizing roots, boundaries, and sanctity as important, and the practitioner's job is to make sure they are respecting them. But there is also the loophole that there is less risk of appropriation if one seeks out practices that aren't so obviously tied to a particular culture, like tarot or astrology. While both practices have specific histories of their own, they are infamously murky, and especially in the case of the former go back so far and have transformed so much that any claim to cultural possession has kind of dissipated, at least in the minds of those I interviewed. Interestingly, more than once in interviews participants contrasted astrology, crystal healing, or other new age-coded practices with voudou in order to create a contrast between something that is obviously off-limits to most of them (the latter) with something that they felt they were justified in practicing. When I asked one Indigenous informant why voudou was off the table for her, but not tarot or astrology, she said:

> Well, tarot, from what I understand, was developed in like Europe and we're living in like a European society in Canada. Yeah, but like in many ways we're still kind of like a colony…So it just feels like. Like, a lot more okay, like more free game. Well, you know, you already have us living here, so, you know, *I can rifle through the fridge*, like no problem. And astrology. I just…I kind of feel again, like, I guess that is just kind of universal. I find that I would never go around trying to pretend to be like a Vedic astrologer or anything like that, of course. But for the most part, like, it's, you know, it's the stars. *You can't really own the stars*. (Interview, April 2022, my emphasis)

The putatively universal nature of both tarot and astrology means it cannot be stolen, and therefore informants think of them as a relatively safe way to explore magic without the threat of

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overstepping some problematic boundary.

Problematic whiteness

While in the examples above, participants emphasize the need to remain sensitive, aware, and respectful of the limits of culture, what I am arguing here is that given the ontological racial structure of the occult, the problem of transgression cannot actually be resolved through awareness, or staying in one's 'lane.' The very logic that makes these belief systems and knowledge traditions recognizable as "other," or "rejected"—the very inclusion criteria that brought participants into the study—is also the logic that racializes these knowledges. This creates an aporia, which I argue that most discourse on cultural appropriation misses. The aporia is, insofar as whiteness is a severance from an existing racial continuity, divestment from whiteness represents an attempt to restore that racial continuity. While this impulse has been treated as suspect, with good reason considering the ways that whiteness garners its power through ingestion (Tompkins 2012), I think it is a mistake to pathologize it totally. As tricky as it is to evaluate without risking re-centering whiteness or promoting a false universalism, I argue that it is crucial to examine the ways that imperialism is also bad for white people, not to mention the ways the feeling of stuckness actually perpetuates some of its most violent effects. The feeling of stuckness was evident in interviews, where white informants grapple with how to become "traitors" to white supremacy without that betrayal being financed by other forms of "colour-blindness."

But what does betraying white supremacy actually mean? One mixed race/Black informant, talking about race in the occult, argued:

I don't want to say that like whiteness is like…like has no place in these practices or anything like that [laughs]. I think it's…I think arrogance has no place in these practices. I would

prefer to name the self-defeating and toxic traits of white supremacy instead of an identity of certain people, because I think that what resonates with people should remain open to them. I just feel like, yeah, so things like ego, arrogance, a need for control, narcissistic ways of moving. I think those are…those don't have a place. Or you know, those have potential for danger. Not actual, white people. (Interview, April 2022, my emphasis)

While most theorists of whiteness would agree with this: that the focus is on dismantling a structure of power rather than condemning white people, the effect oftentimes ends up being one of paralysis.

One white informant, when we were talking (one on one) about the lament of feeling mentor-less, leaned in toward me as if sharing a secret, and said: "Its very difficult to move, [laughs] like I'm saying that because we are both white and I wouldn't say that on *Tout le monde en parle* but its like [mocking voice] 'it's really difficult to process my guilt'… but it's like, it's true, it's true" (Interview April 2022). That I am white allowed the interviewee to disclose something that they imply they would not necessarily do in other circumstances, like on a public tv show, because of its risk of being misconstrued as an inappropriate victimization. In my analysis, their mockery of white guilt is a critique of the ways that white people consistently centre their feelings over the actual lived experiences of people of colour when discussing race. The mockery is a way to undermine this maneuver, to denounce it. At the same time that the informant proverbially rolls their eyes at what they are saying, they are also expressing that there is some truth to it: they do actually feel guilty, and this is a very difficult thing to process, and they saw me as someone who might be able to validate or empathize with that. This is a perfect example of the stuckness I am interested in exploring in this project and beyond: how to deal with the very real,

dangerous, paralyzing effects of being conscious of the ways one benefits from white supremacy, without this centering white people as hapless victims.

In some cases, participants argued that they felt like there has almost been an overcorrection against white people in activist spaces (not least by white people themselves): an expression of hypervigilance around not taking up too much space. One informant discussed her objection to the discourse circulating online of white witches.

I definitely see the place for those criticisms [ie. cultural appropriation], but then when I just see this like total rejection or like cancelation of like white witches, I do object. […] [It is] relevant to remember even as we see like white liberal feminists like participating in like the exploitation and like abandonment of like Black and Indigenous, like people of color, like women and queer people, like I oppose that, but I also just like, oppose what seems to me honestly to be just like, you know, misogyny at the end of the day, when you just say that like white women, like who identify as witches, like *shouldn't be allowed to exist*. […] And I think like it also just doesn't account for the fact that, like, *white people can participate in resistance*, you know what I mean? And I think that it's like, it's kind of white guilt that makes me feel problematic for doing anything ever. Because I'm white and come from white ancestors who participated in a colonization. But I think with that, it's like, okay, like if I just kind of like *own that position*, then it allows me to, you know, be radical and try and like do things that are problematic in the sense of like challenging the status quo, […] like I really believe in like intersectional social justice and like really want to be in my integrity and, and be aligned with like liberation of marginalized people. And I think with that, um, I definitely, definitely see my witchcraft as being in alignment and solidarity with Indigenous liberation.

With decolonization, with Black liberation, with like the end of like Islamophobia, you

know, like I, my magic is in alignment with all of that. (Interview, April 2022, my emphasis)

This informant attempts to tackle what it would mean to "own that position" of being white,

without that disqualifying them from being an activist or participating in struggles for social

justice, or even existing at all. She acknowledges the ways that "white liberal feminists" have

exploited others—referring to the critiques of second wave feminism in particular—while still

defending her right to act differently, to be "aligned" with the liberation of all. A few times in

interviews there was reference to Montréal being a particularly unforgiving climate for navigating

these questions, because of a very strong anti-oppressive, activist community that hugely overlaps

with queer politics in the city. When discussing her trajectory of interest in the occult, one

informant said:

In a traditional Montréal, [laughs] left leaning, white, queer fashion, like, I totally went

through this period of like very much mis-assessing the amount of power that I held for doing

any one of these practices…rather poorly, you know, or whatever. I mean, being a beginner

Tarot reader being like, 'oh no, like I have to be so responsible' or like kind of thing, which

I'm like—not that you shouldn't... (Interview April 2022)

This speaker makes a claim that there is sometimes an overcorrection at work among white queer

leftists in Montréal, who over exaggerate the potential of harm, or in her estimation, exaggerate

the amount of power they actually have to cause harm to others. In this same interview we talked

about the "paranoid reading" in Sedgwick (2002) and how that perfectly encapsulates this anxiety

over violence. In several interviews participants referenced the spectre of the harsh, cancel-hungry

figure who was quick to punish them. "I saw people over the years be alienated from activism because they made one mistake and they were treated like a horrible person or call out culture and that kind of thing" (Interview, May 2022). This hypervigilance around political correctness was disproportionately focused on by white informants, and they classified those who called them out as usually white as well. For one white informant, the landmine of cultural theft or appropriation showed up when they were choosing a field to work in related to "alternative" or traditional healing.

> [I want to be] accountable of where I come from, to not like try to take on things that were not mine also and to be like respectful of that. And it was a process that was important for me when I was looking for a tradition to train in, to…as a job, because I was like, okay, like I don't want to become a shaman…And so *I chose hypnotherapy because I felt like it was the most white thing I could find honestly*…But it's just like a lot of layers and a lot of work, you know, like finding a tradition to be trained in that you actually feel that you can access to. (Group interview, April 2022)

In this example the informant is talking about knowledge traditions more generally which are caught up in the same conundrum I have been exploring here. What does it mean to find the "most white" thing they could find, and is this preservation actually helpful? Another participant put it this way:

> I feel like if […] I were to follow that logic [of white people doing white people things] all the way through, I almost feel like it would lead me to think like, okay, well then I guess because I'm white, so that I don't accidentally culturally appropriate, I should just be Catholic or something. You know what I mean? Like, I should just, like, work for a big company and,

like, you know what I mean? (Interview, April 2022)

They make a compelling point: what exactly *is* white culture, if this is all that is available to claim?

Many informants worked through this tension through finding some way to situate themselves that allowed them to "exist," which usually involved a kind of zooming out. Caught in the bind between "just doing white people things" and denying one's whiteness outright, participants found different ways to situate themselves within lineages that felt authentic and non-violent. When discussing their qualms with receiving Palo Santo as a gift one year, one participant talked about their own process of navigating inheritance and appropriation.

I feel that like my practice with things is valid is when it like feels true to me and feels like it's not something that I like, that I'm not using it because it's supposed to be powerful, because it's like powerful for like a certain culture that like, then it like, needs to be like part of my life. *Like, I don't like, have any, like, crystals. I have…rocks that I have found, you know?* And that is kind of how I have gotten to a place where I'm like, this is not like borrowed, this is not taken. *This is something that is just like situated within my own life as life as a settler, but also as just like a person on the planet*" (Interview, April 2022, my emphasis)

The speaker negotiates with the object: it becomes a "rock" instead of a "crystal," situating it within a geographical space rather than a cultural one. There is a tension here between acknowledging one's position "as a settler" at the same time as the speaker is also "just…a person on the planet," which they imply should give them access to certain kinds of relationship that the former would seem to bar them from.

In this chapter I have been exploring the tension I observed, in particular among white/settler informants, about claiming different forms of inheritance or kinship, which they often reflected on as a slippery slope to appropriation or cultural theft. I asked participants if they ever think about their practices as something they have to justify. One mixed race/Black informant had this to say

> I feel a strong connection [between my background and how I engage in the practices]. I feel…Confident in exploring spirituality because. It is already, like it's such a recent part of my family history. And. Yeah. I just feel. I feel like a natural connection to my ancestors-I don't want to say that that's unique to like racialized folks, I feel like we all have our ancestors and I feel like they're all you know part of us. But yeah, *I just feel a very natural, strong connection*. I do think that there is something to be said about how being racialized is connected to that. (Interview, April 2022, my emphasis)

This speaker theorizes that racialized people might have more "confidence" with these forms of connections, implying that justification isn't necessary: there's already a "natural connection to…my ancestors."

Are white people less embedded in kinship relations? It is tempting to make an analysis from the example above, and the other expressions of ambivalence that came up interviews, that classifies white informants as particularly disoriented. The anxiety over how to claim forms of inheritance points to a disconnection that the informant above argues is not as pervasive for racialized folks. However, to make such a conclusion would be somewhat of a misunderstanding

of the mechanism at work—indeed, white supremacy and its imperial structure rely on the "ghosting" of the histories, religions, bodies, cultures, and territories that coalesce under "non-Europeanness" (Hesse 2007). How could white people/settlers be *more* disconnected than those others who bear the brunt of colonial violence? If imperial fantasies imagine and assert whiteness as normative and privileged (McClintock 2014), anything short of extending whiteness' "reach" is disorienting (Ahmed 2006). What this participant might be getting at is that, if she has failed to replicate whiteness, at least she knows what there is to reach back toward or restore. Connecting with her ancestral practices could be conceived of as a re-orientation in the wake of the "failure" to orient in whiteness. She experiences this re-orientation as "strong" and "natural," and implies that this is not something white people are as capable of accessing. Ahmed's theorization of the failure to inherit whiteness falls short here, because it does not distinguish between failure and refusal. For the speaker above, failure to inherit whiteness puts something else into reach, which emerges as a restoration of what whiteness put out of reach in the first place. What about for informants who "succeed" in inheriting whiteness as a condition of dwelling in the world, but opt for something else? What is the experience of being stopped in one's tracks, and how is it experienced as a disorientation, emergent in interviews as anxiety? As I have been trying to show, it is not that white people are particularly disoriented, but that, in my interviews, there was not always a clear place to turn toward instead. There is a feeling of suspension, with nowhere to turn: "No matter what I'm borrowing from somewhere" (Group interview, June 2022).

 One informant, whose family is from Morocco, expressed frustration with what she saw as an obsession with lineage.

> I remember one of the first things that struck me was this, the importance people […] feeling this need to go back to lineage and ancestry. […] Sometimes I'm like, why do I have to do

this…work in order to reclaim what is mine? […] We were all practising some kind of healing stuff from the Amazigh community in Morocco. But I have not been, at all, raised in those kind of traditions, openly or something. So, yeah, *I could do the work to investigate, to see the direct lineage, but I don't feel the need to do* […] My grandfather was obsessed with…being like the descendants of Muhammed. It was his passion in life. So he would do lineages all the time about proving whatever. And it was very racist because he wanted to prove that we were not mixing in any way with the Indigenous people in Morocco that were there. Anyway. So this whole idea for me is weird. That's why *as a queer person I really like this idea of horizontal heritage, kind of creating, a kind of tradition….an intentional lineage of things* that have been intentionally selected and people will in the future choose from it. (Group interview, April 2022, my emphasis)

Horizontal lineage for this informant is a way of queering what she sees as the potentially problematic motivation toward a kind of racial purity, and she doesn't feel the "need to investigate" like some other informants do: there doesn't appear to be anything missing that must be restored.

Queer lineages also came up in a discussion with an Afro-Latinx informant, who situated this alongside his experience as a child of diaspora.

My family experience…what it was to be under American imperialism and how much they lost in that experience. The sense of historicity, that is so important to me is because it maintains a connection to the past that has been *so disrupted by imperialism and colonialism*. And it's one of the few things that I feel continues to ground me to a place that I don't feel like I have access to. Like, I mean, I grew up in the Bronx, in New York. Like, I don't know what it is like to live in Cuba or Puerto Rico. So I don't have access to these experiences […]

I'm you know, I'm a-I'm a product of the diaspora. So this is a very sort of ambiguous place

to be. And I feel like, you know, these small things [astrology, tarot] allow me to feel rooted

[…] It connects me to not only this genealogy as Latino, it connects me to there's *also a*

sense of like queer genealogy because like a lot…I mean, I can't generalize, but I want to say

the majority of of of like cis men […] who practice like Santeria or voudou, you know, tend

to be queer. And the fact that this, to me, this just opens up this like another history to me,

like it enables me to not only connect with, like my, like Cuban and Puerto Rican like history,

but also like a queerness that exists within that. That's, you know, that like that is almost a

queerness that that exists outside of, like, white supremacy. To some degree, even though

it's been completely shaped by that because of like the history and slavery and settlement.

But it's still in and of itself is a practice that attempts to resist that. So like, yeah, there's this

racial element or like and, and like a cultural element but there's also a queer element that

exists into this sort of genealogy. (Interview, May 2022, my emphasis)

There is a lot to unpack here in terms of kinship: the speaker describes imperialism as

essentially disconnecting, and while they have ties to Cuba and Puerto Rico, they feel that they are

in an "ambiguous" place because of diaspora. This feeling of amibiguity is in some ways tempered

by "maintain[ing] a connection to the past." He describes his practices of astrology and tarot as

means of feeling "rooted," because he sees them as connecting him to a Latino identity, as well as

a queer one, which he describes as being in some ways external to, or at least resistant to, white

supremacy. In this chapter there have been many examples of these attempts at rootedness: one

can look back to ancient Mesopotamia, Haiti, Yugoslavia, or Celtic ancestry as a condition of

arrival elsewhere, attempt to learn Greek or Farsi, or speculate about the parts of the family tree

that did not get recorded. These maneuvers are attempts at recuperation that refuse the 'debt' of whiteness for something else. But this speaker brings in a crucial other element of kinship that began this project for me: the notion of queer kinship and lineages that are not determined through blood or nationality.

In Chapter 2, I explored how certain people turn to magic as a way to locate themselves within a queer genealogy: that queer history is interested in putting into reach that which has been made unreachable by the lines of conventional genealogy (Ahmed 2006). Given the exploratory fieldwork I had done browsing media and blogs online, I expected to find a lot of examples in interviews of participants describing their practices as part of a long lineage of queer kin. The reference to queer/'trancestry' is pervasive in the "world" of magic. Calling the occult "queer" allows certain practitioners to locate themselves within a queer genealogy: the "witchy femmes, queer conjurers, and magical rebels" (West 2019) whose "histories are histories of resistance older than history" (Yerbamala collective, n.d.). I observed a highly charged preoccupation with history, inheritance, lineage, and memory, wherein occult practices like astrology represent a timeless tradition whose history was murky and long enough that it appears to transcend normative cultural barriers. Thus, it is available to claim as a putatively benign connection to the past in ways that don't depend on national, racial, or familial sequence. As one informant put it, "You can't own the stars."

There were certainly examples of this in interviews. As noted earlier, many participants referenced the "Burning Times" to evoke a connection with other witches: "Like being a witch and thinking about, like, 3000 years of patriarchy. Like, I do feel like connection with witches over the ages and what they went through and where that has us now" (Interview, May 2022). In other

examples, the notion of ancestry is much more flexible, encapsulating more than the moniker of the "witch:"

One transfemme, Dene informant put it this way:

I'm sure there's been so many times in history where there's been no like recourse for justice in like the open, in like the courts or in like legal frameworks and the only like avenue that a marginalized person and especially a lot of queer people would have would be to use like spiritualism or magic […] These people are put in these contexts, you know, like *women and people of color, queer folks, other marginalized groups*. And these practices have survived. You know, this time… somebody has to have been talking about them. *Somebody has to have been, like, continuing them, developing them* and if it was the people in power, we would know, they would have their name all over it. It would be obvious. So it feels like it has to be like these folks. Like just when their backs are against the wall or like they're stuck in a corner using whatever means available, you know, *passed on to them by like probably like their aunt or their mom or, you know, a family friend or that local weirdo down the road* […] Because that's how we've kept it alive this whole time…passing the torch on. And a torch is a good example, too, because it brings light, you know, *like our ancestors passed this torch onto us*, um, I think for a long time too. In like, *whispers and little conversations behind closed doors* when it was, like, much less acceptable and had to be more hidden. (Interview, April 2022, my emphasis)

For this speaker, there is a claim to ancestry being made by virtue of marginalization: "women and people of colour, queer folks, other marginalized groups" are linked together and imagined as predecessors. And at the same time, the means of transmission itself is also queer in

that it does not happen in a normative chain of inheritance. The practices could be passed down from "that local weirdo down the road," and happen in "whispers and little conversations behind closed doors." These figures are ancestors to the speaker because there is something being passed down, and this "survival" in the face of power makes them recognizable as kin. This sentiment is echoed in a quote I referenced in Chapter 2.

> I definitely feel a strong sense of solidarity with persecuted people throughout history. You know, I would resonate with Joan of Arc, or whatever…And I think, I mean, I would never want to project the identity of witch onto someone who didn't claim it for themselves, but, I think that […] it's really cool to honour how people have used magic as in resources beyond the scarce material ones that they had to survive and protect each other. And so, I do feel a kinship there. (Interview, April 2022)

In this example, there is an awareness of the potential anachronism of claiming a shared identity across time, and the speaker opts to frame kinship in terms of an imagined shared scarcity.

The notion of persecution is fundamental to queer kinship: hearkening back to the "wounded subjectivity" explored in Chapter 2. One two-spirit Mexican informant told me:

> When I started learning tarot, some people in Mexico started telling me, telling me, 'Hey, you are now learning occidental stuff,' I started learning Ayurveda healings also. So I was like, no, actually their history is similar, like *they've also been persecuted and refused*, like Ayurveda and other Indian approaches for healing were also persecuted as well. It's not long time ago they started being recognized and so in my personal opinion, it's something you can learn, something you as humans, we have the right to choose whatever tools fits us to get into this spirituality or self-recognition self self-acceptance, self forgiveness. (Interview,

Cultivating sensitivity

Participants fixate on cultural appropriation as a major risk of their attempts to imagine and locate themselves within different kinds of lineages, which might offer ways of moving in the world that are not conditioned by the violent structures they know they otherwise inherit. Among my sample, where informants were specifically recruited through an invitation to reflect on the possibilities of anti-racism and decolonization within their practices, the critique usually revolved around a perceived historical failure of solidarity. White witches in general, for example, are chastised for the ways they sometimes displace the experiences of other marginalized groups by claiming a false universalism. This is a classic conundrum of social justice at large. Scholars have pointed out the ways that even well-intentioned feminists, abolitionists, or other progressive groups displace the target of their sympathy, furnishing their own citizenship by identification with the "other" (Tuck and Yang 2012; Simpson 2017; Curnow and Helferty 2018). In *Racial Indigestion,* Tompkins (2012) argues that the white self affirms liberal interiority through the metaphor of ingesting blackness: what hooks has called "eating the other" (92). In her study of literature and other media in the antebellum period, Blackness is offered up as something to be consumed, even by abolitionists who sought some "intimate communion with blackness" (ibid:114). The conundrum for allyship of any kind, perhaps in particular when it comes to dismantling whiteness as a relationship of incorporation and ingestion, is thus: how can one be in solidarity with the dispossessed without displacing them further? Indeed, how is solidarity even imagined among my informants? Who are they seeking to be allies with or for?

In this last section of the dissertation, I look at the ways that solidarity is construed by

participants, and how the occult operates as a means to make that possible. I argue that solidarity in this phenomenon tends to be conceived of in terms of a companionship with some other world, population, or figure that is not necessarily already known, but which shares a stake in the divestment from empire that informants seek to enact. Going back to Gordon, it could be said that solidarity is with the dead or ghostly: participants look for ways to welcome in the ways they are haunted by what is unassimilable in the fantasy of imperial totality. "To remain haunted is to remain partial to the dead or the deadly and not to the living" (Gordon 2008:182). Queer's position as haunting of the social puts it in contact with those other elements which have been banished— at least, this is the view of many that I interviewed, as discussed in the last chapter. Haunting draws who/what has actually been repressed together with those who acknowledge the ghost itself. "Haunting is a shared structure of feeling, a shared possession, a specific type of sociality…Haunting is the sociality of living with ghosts" (ibid:201). Remaining partial to the dead is to make a kind of refusal of their pastness, making their potential to resurface ever possible. This is Azoulay's *potential history*, wherein one is committed to "disavow what was historicized by making repressed potentialities present again within the fabricated phenomenological field of imperial history" (2019:288). History is not over: its violence is open to interruption, and she calls that interruption "unlearning with companions" (ibid:16). She uses 'companions' as a way to draw a contrast between archival 'subjects' as sources for academic discovery. Instead, one is in partnership "with whoever acted in her life or enacted in her writings a nonimperial ontology" (ibid:17). In other words, in the context of my study, participants seek to be haunted: by remaining open to haunting, they open the possibility of living otherwise, of redressing the impacts of imperial violence insofar as imperial violence renders certain ways of sharing the world inconceivable. "To be haunted in the name of a will to heal is to allow the ghost to help you imagine

what was lost that never even existed" (Gordon 2008:187). The ghosts which haunt them could be ancestral forebears, or simply anyone who has also borne imperial violence or other forms of dispossession.

This last section on how occultism offers a means to conceive of solidarity with the dispossessed links what I have been discussing in each of the different chapters of this dissertation. Namely, I want to focus on the forms of sociality I argued in Chapter 2 that queer historiography mobilizes, and how the cultivation of certain forms of sensitivity, which I began to explore in Chapter 4, can offer modes of "training" one how to be a good ally. In Chapter 3, I argued that the occult can be theorized as an affective regime, wherein the expansion of affective capacity is considered key to social transformation and civilizational health. Civilizational health, in this instance, refers to equality, decolonization, overturning capitalism and white supremacy, and the restoration of sustainable modes of sharing the planet. Here, I want to show examples of how participants think of the expansion of that affective capacity as putting into reach different relationships with others. Insodoing, I argue that participants make possible forms of sociality that do not "ingest" or rely on the incorporation of that which has been coded as Other, but rather look for ways to be in ethical relation to it. Put differently, if cultural appropriation is a crisis of eradicating the Other to reinstate one's own subjectivity, participants come up with strategies of what I call here "bottoming" to imagine how to identify with without displacing the Other.

Bottoming

We have seen how the occult, as a repressed modality, requires the cultivation of sensitivity in order to apprehend it, and how informants understand queerness as a predisposition to developing this capacity. In another article, I theorize the capacity to 'bottom', or become radically receptive,

as the prerogative of white people as an antidote to histories of infringement and violent confrontation that informants see themselves as descendants of, and wish to overturn" (Sheedy 2024: 13). The term bottoming as a way to conceive of the reversal of white supremacy comes from one of my white, trans interviewees, who also acted as co-facilitator one of our group interviews.

> Bottoming is like this courage to open and receive. And submit. The actual willingnesss to do all those things [. . .] like actually step into bottoming is absolutely connected with other forms of emotional intelligence and wisdom [. . .] White supremacy needs to surrender and submit, in this bottoming and this service way, and needs to *find pleasure in submitting, in surrendering*. (Interview, April 2022)

I find the metaphor of bottoming apt to imagine the ways that receptivity, queerness and white supremacy interact in this study. If, as I argued in Chapter 3, the occult is construed as a form of sentimental biopower which privileges receptivity as a force for social change, white informants articulate this receptivity in terms of listening to Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) teachers, sitting with difficult sensations, inviting discomfort and opening oneself up to accountability (Sheedy 2024). Receptivity is figured as a kind of ethical sociality, which is an interesting contrast to the metaphor of "ingestion" that has defined whiteness in terms of its forces of assimilation and consumption (Tompkins 2012). Thinking in terms of solidarity with others, receptivity connotes a form of self-effacement for the good of the collective. On bottoming, Bersani (1987: 217) has argued that at the same time that one may identify with masculinity, there is immense pleasure in violating its authority, instead embracing a disintegration of the self. Thinking of this abdication of power in terms of whiteness provides compelling grounds for

theorizing divestment and reparative solidarity through the lens of a queer relationality (Sheedy 2024). The informant above imagines that this submission is not only necessary, but might actually be pleasurable, and advocates for taking pleasure in it as a way to "step into" wisdom.

In our group discussions especially, participants talked about strategies or tensions of anti-racist work and the place of whiteness in witchcraft or magic, theorizing how to be in relationship with knowledge traditions that might be pedagogical. Humility and awareness came up often, with listening and learning prioritized as forms of repair:

> If you're trying to approach things from different cultures, I think just trying to do it as holistically as possible and know your relationship to that thing [. . .] that maybe your role will always be in a *role of submission and learning and like receptive*. […] Like there are different ways to be in relation to things. And I think it also really depends on like how you're *invited into them* and how you're talking about your, your relationship to them. (Group interview, June 2022, my emphasis)

Here we can see how submission is linked to learning, and how nonviolence is considered in terms of the ways one is "invited in," presumably against a logic of intrusion. What's more, magical traditions are referred to here as 'different cultures', against whiteness as that which has been voided of such objects, highlighting what I have been arguing about the ways that magic operates as a site of cultural richness that is differentially available to us.

One white informant spoke about whiteness as a 'disorientation':

> The sense of whiteness or like white guilt or just like this lack, this kind of disorientation stops people from being able to reach the threshold of caring, you know, it stops people from being involved. [W]e haven't exactly figured out how to be involved in comfortable ways.

So a lot of the time to be in dialog with a culture that's not yours – especially if you're a white person and you're talking about a marginalized culture – it's to stay in your own discomfort at the fact that this culture was maybe erased because of your ancestors, and that *learning that is actually a sacred practice* to like help undo things [in] previously violent situations. [. . .] There are ways to be in relationship with that if *you're willing to be humble and receptive*. (Group interview June 2022, my emphasis)

Whiteness as disorientation makes an interesting companion to Ahmed (2006). White guilt is itself disorienting, as one becomes aware of the ways whiteness has shaped their dwelling in the world, and is no longer able to conceive of it as natural and inevitable—consciousness of its mechanism dis-orients one from its forms of bodily and historical inheritance. Learning to become receptive is a way to "undo" violence, to reach the 'threshold of caring' that they argue white supremacy obscures. The speaker refers explicitly to colonization in referencing the importance of sitting with your own "discomfort," and names this learning as especially important for white people—it is sacred.

Bottoming has been explored in queer theory as a pleasurable surrender of power, even an ethical mode of relationality (Hoang 2014). Thinking bottoming in terms of receptivity – as opposed to passivity – is a critical modality in that it represents a submission of authority to make possible different forms of connection, even solidarity, with others. Think back to the quote I included in Chapter 4 when discussing forms of embodied knowledge: "There's a necessity to facilitate people being inside of their bodies. And to trust their bodies and to build capacity for unpleasant sensations" (Interview, May 2022). Building capacity for unpleasant sensations is another way for saying "stay in your own discomfort," but it focuses more so on how one actually

develops the capacity to stay with the guilt, shame, or anger. Participants appear to be proposing or calling for forms of self-regulation that are central to therapeutic practice, as well as forms of meditation and Buddhist practice that aim to simply "stay" instead of avoid or grasp for an explanation or crutch. While a study of the overlap between Western psychotherapy, queer politics, and forms of self-spirituality and psychic healing is much outside the scope of this work, it is important to note the ways that therapeutic models are used as a way to engage with affects associated with whiteness, like discomfort.

By making oneself radically open to different ways of being in the world, one has the potential to access different ways of mapping the social, and magic offers a conduit for this openness.

> For me, more than like feeling powerful, [magic] usually has to do with giving in and more in the sense of actually *submission and realizing where you don't have power* and where it's important to let things just happen as like they will happen…as someone who leans on the control side of the spectrum, magic is a way to actually let that barrier down or try to like, *succumb*…for me magic has a lot to do with deciding on what to let go of and what to move forward into. (Group interview, June 2022, my emphasis)

For another white, first-generation Canadian interviewee, submission is framed in terms of listening to and learning from brown and Black teachers, and offers an inroad to fostering solidarity with them.

> [Tarot] is a way of *training the way that I think*, to see differently as well. And I think it comes from a desire to see otherwise [. . .] to see beyond colonial institutions. I think experimenting with different forms of thinking and forms of otherness and forms of acting

and like disturbing the status quo [. . .] *creates spaces in myself for different types of disruptions* [. . .] Making your sense of reality fluid, I think can only serve to allowing yourself to not impose belief systems [. . .] upon others as well. I try to be very, like, *receptive to a situation and to, what I learn from people of color and Indigenous people* and that, like humbleness of always learning I think is also something that I've developed through my spiritual practice. (Interview, May 2022, my emphasis)

This example is illuminating in the ways it elucidates some of the key themes I have been developing throughout the dissertation: one is that the occult is framed in terms of a methodological training, wherein one attempts to see "beyond" our limiting frameworks. One's 'sense of reality' is subject to change by learning from people of colour, enacting a personal and eventually a collective social transformation. This transformation requires, and itself comprises, divestment from colonial systems: a direct example of Gopinath's (2018) disinheritance of colonial modernity's field of vision. I have theorized this methodological training through the lens of queer theory, which sees the bucking of those lines of transmission as a queer prerogative, which has the potential to bring into reach those things that have been made normatively "unreachable" by the ways we are oriented (Ahmed 2006). The speaker also uses terms like 'fluidity' and 'receptive', as well as describe the process as 'creating spaces for disruptions', which privilege plasticity, receptivity and sensitivity as key qualities of personal and social reform. By creating such spaces for interruption, one is inviting in a kind of transformation. It could be said that the speaker, in their desire to "see" otherwise, is opening themself up to a kind of haunting, which is also an ethical form of repair. "Following the ghosts is about making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located. It is about putting life back in where only

a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look" (Gordon 2008:22). This is not to say that BIPOC teachers are ghosts, but that in seeing "beyond" colonial institutions they are transformed by a different kind of relationality which is not necessarily known in advance. This is reparative rather than a paranoid one (Sedgwick 2002). Bottomhood makes possible a "radical Elsewhere" (Hoang 2014: 2), which my informants consider urgently necessary, and condition themselves to access by disidentifying with the forms of power they argue are obstructing it.

There has been some work within critical race and whiteness studies on the particularities of settler subjectivity, and the ways that it is disturbed. "The process of unbecoming settler is to allow oneself to be transformed by the knowledge of violence, loss, and mourning" (Fung 2021:128). Literally, it is to become *unsettled*: to sit in the space of discomfort, seemingly with nowhere to turn. In the second chapter, I theorized the occult as a form of attunement, using queer theory to argue the occultism interrogates our lenses of legibility and what else could become recognizable. In the third chapter, I looked at this attunement through the lens of sentimental biopower, where cultivating the capacity to attune to or become sensitive to what is normatively hidden is part of an affective regime that links civility to proper feeling. Finally, bottoming builds on the examples I have already given of querents opening themselves up to intervention and building capacity to receive the energies of the universe that will guide them somewhere other than here. Thinking with bottoming as an ethical form of relationality offers a potential way "out" of dead-end debates on cultural appropriation, which end up paradoxically reinforcing whiteness as a fictional emptiness. Rather than looking at whiteness as either a disorientation or a force of unbridled consumption, participants attempt to situate themselves as being in relation to things in ways that abdicate their

historical power, and even posit this abdication as a pleasurable feeling.

CONCLUSION

Psychic healing movements seem to be contradictory at their heart. Alongside the examples of progressive occultism I have highlighted in this dissertation, there is also the rise of "conspirituality" among far-right groups (Ward 2011; Asprem & Dyrendal 2015; Parmigiani 2021), including figures like the "QAnon shaman" who led the January 6 insurrection and has written books on vibrational frequencies and "waking up" to the secret ruling elite (Conner 2023), and a resurgence of reclaiming movements where pre-Christian pagan mythologies are married to Aryan separatism (Gardell 2003; Bhatt 2023). Nazi links with occultism have been well-researched (Goodrick-Clarke 1992; Black & Kurlander 2015), and while not as sinister, there is the related ever-present critique of white feminism at the heart of the New Age (Donaldson 1999). That such different aims: from socialist, queer anarchism to Nazism and neo-Nazism, can emerge out and be recognizable out of the "occult," is only paradoxical until one recognizes how they are all forms of reckoning with what is putatively "hidden," and what forces of occlusion the querent understands are responsible for it.

What motivates queer people to take up these practices, and what does it bring into reach for them that other forms of community, identity, or cosmology are not doing? In this dissertation, I contribute to emerging analyses of this "phenomenon" by proposing that the occult appeals to queer people by virtue of its putative marginality, wherein the occult offers a case study for queer historical modalities at odds with enlightenment regimes of truth and visibility. I argue that the possibility of connecting to some social arrangement, figure, or legacy in the past animates much of the practices, which crucially includes a critique of what kinds of destructive forces render

something 'past' in the first place. In this dissertation, I look to occult practitioners as social theorists who desire to divest from our legacies of violent inheritance, such as settler colonialism, white supremacy, and capitalism, and understand their practices of magic as both a conduit for this, as well as the possibility that emerges from such maneuvers. By privileging openness, receptivity, and other affective modalities, and turning to magic as a workshop to develop these forms of embodied feeling, practitioners seek to create the conditions for alternative forms of sociality other than we inherit. As such, I theorize the occult as a process of methodological training that put the querent in "touch" with what has been made unreachable to them, and thus invites queer modes of sociality, kinship, and encounter across time, however fleeting or tenuous.

Ahmed sees whiteness as a kind of orientation, and contrasts it to "queer orientations…those which put in reach bodies that have been made unreachable by the lines of conventional genealogy" (2006:107). The critical problem is the ways in which Indigenous forms of knowledge, belief, or lifeways have historically been the objects that come into reach for those looking for alternative roots on settled land. What I have attempted to explore in this dissertation is how occult practitioners I interview conceive of their *own* pre-imperial pasts as a form of inheritance they wish to make possible again, rather than attempting to transcend or forget the structures of power which shaped them. For some, their own pre-imperial pasts might comprise Indigeneity in so-called Canada. However, for most, they must look elsewhere, finding ways to locate themselves within genealogies that might give them a different place from which to speak from (Butler 2005). For white and/or settler participants in particular, while there is a desire to invest in forms of sociality that would overwrite narratives of destruction, there is also a fear that severing ties with the forms of inheritance they abhor might be politically irresponsible: a "move to innocence" rather than actually "dealing with" that reality. To return to Cornum, they are themselves sometimes

"suspicious" of their own desire to be contrary to the colonial project (2018).

At its most fundamental, I argue that magic operates as a form of cultural otherness: the excess of the disciplinary technologies of enlightenment. Participants theorize the "loss" of magic in their own genealogies as the moment of recruitment into whiteness and its colonial regimes of unknowing. If whiteness and its imperial organizing frame operates through forms of selective absorption and amnesia, some participants refuse the verdict of that forgetting, enacting what Azoulay (2019) might call "potential history." It could be said that the occult, construed as it is as the "survivals" of disciplinary technologies of repression, operates as a kind of persistent traumatic memory. It is that which is repressed which is making itself known: what haunts the social (Gordon 2008). Refusal to forget keeps open the possibility of being transformed by that repressed memory, or ghost.

This dissertation sits at the crux of many fields: in order to theorize the occult's status as countercultural, I am indebted to discourses in western esotericism and the history of science as much as religious studies, post colonialism, and feminist spirituality. It is work on sentimentality, sympathy, and biopower that has helped me to theorize race in this project, and queer historiography and affect theory which has given me a foundation from which to explore the methods of "attunement" and kinship that such attunement makes possible. Ethnography operates as a methodological intervention, which fittingly lays bare the ways that participants are engaged in their own ethnographic formulations in their reflections on cultural norms, knowledge transmission, and ritual.

I have shown that the temporal logic of the occult means that it can only ever appear as a revival: its status as on the verge of disappearing is key to its stakes of "rescue" or "return." Within this temporal logic, we always exist in colonial relationship to it: we reify its banishment to the

past. To refuse the logic of "history as verdict" would also be to dismantle that colonial logic that renders these objects the before and behind (Wynter, as cited in Azoulay 2019). Rather, it makes possible a relationship with what has been repressed as the potentiality of dwelling in another world.

In beginning this project, I saw queer occultism as an attempt to come up with an alternative origin story, one in which the injurious mechanism through which queerness has been interpellated is re-written to create the conditions for a different, more empowered, "I" to emerge. In other words, the occult might create a kind of kinship of spurned Others across time and space. While this was in some ways reflected in interviews, a much more dynamic and complex negotiation of the historical also emerged, which seeks to un-discipline certain knowledges through the cultivation of epistemologies that make room for what has not been put into reach.

Butler (2005) has argued that because the terms through which one becomes recognizable necessarily precede the one who speaks, I cannot give an account for which the "I" exists: "I always arrive too late to myself" (ibid:79). It is impossible to return to the rhetorical scene of address that has made one legible, so the origin story only ever begins in the middle: "I am always recuperating, reconstructing, and I am left to fictionalize origins I cannot know" (ibid:39). If colonial whiteness is an interpellation, which one can fail to, or perhaps refuse to answer, what become the "histories of arrival" that give that subject grounds from which to speak? To arrive before the scene of address is an incommensurable labour: one cannot get ahead or before the colonial encounters out of which their identities are emergent. However, I now understand the attempt to change the structure of address as necessary work, even if it must "fail in order to approach being true" (Butler 2005:26). In making companions with objects, knowledges, figures, and histories that are currently recognizable as the detritus of imperial modernity, one seeks not only to oppose, but ideally to

render obsolete the very structure which constitutes them as Other. Pulling a tarot card, tracking the moon cycle, or reading a horoscope to a friend are all kinds of "failed knowledge"…that is, I think, partly why they are appealing to queers. Campy, trashy, or "pseudoscientific," it fails, in some cases, to replicate the logics of Western enlightenment and its attendant racialization. These failures are necessary: they open up spaces for something not yet known. Or perhaps I should say, they open up spaces for what has always been known, but practitioners seek to re-learn as the condition for arrival into a different world.

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