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Cosmic Beavers

queer counter-mythologies through speculative songwriting

Sarah E. Truman, David Ben Shannon & Kathryn Yusoff

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Golden Autumn by Nataliia Kutikhina.

introduction

In this article, we discuss a song that we wrote to unsettle the historicity of the colonial archive: we're calling this unsettling a *queer counter-mythology*. The song, "Cosmic Beavers," imagines an obstinacy of giant, trans-dimensional beavers who maintain a Time-Dam constructed from the temporal potentials and bodily viscera of "destabilizing elements." Within the mythology of the song, the beavers summon Lewis and Clark (two such destabilizing elements) and shred them into the Time-Dam, interrupting the colonizers' trek across Turtle Island. The beavers' maintenance of the Time-Dam ensures the conducive flow of time, and so allows life to sustain.

The song, "Cosmic Beavers," is from our ongoing *research-creation* practice as an

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COSMIC BEAVERS ***queer counter-mythologies*** ***through speculative*** ***songwriting***

electronica/glitch-folk music duo called Oblique Curiosities (Truman and Shannon). Research-creation is a way of doing research *as* art. In research-creation, we create the thing we want to investigate rather than investigating something that already exists (such as a piece of art, or data). As settler scholars (Oblique Curiosities are white artist-scholars, while Yusoff is an artist-scholar of colour), our purpose in composing the song "Cosmic Beavers" was to speculate upon the proposition of giant beavers shredding Lewis and Clark.

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Concomitantly, our purpose in authoring this article is to unsettle our thinking about the historical archive through creative practice: in this article, we conceptualize this unsettling as a *queer counter-mythology* that problematizes the pseudo-veracity of the *archive*.

Historically, the word archive refers to a repository of “official” culture and knowledge compiled by authorities or magistrates; the root of the word *arkhē* etymologically refers to the government. LGBTQIA+ (Halberstam; Edelman), racialized (Eshun; Singh; Weheliye; Yusoff), and disabled people (Kafer; Obourn), their histories and their futures are excluded from (and within) state-sponsored archives in complex, oppressive ways. Importantly, this exclusion is not collapsible into a simplistic “elision from,” by which all oppressed populations are rendered universally ahistorical, but rather a highly specific reinforcement of a particular canon that proliferates hierarchies of em-body-mind-ment (Harvey; Wilderson). As an intervention into these archival logics, Cvetkovich outlines how queer archives of feeling are “composed of material practices that challenge traditional conceptions of history and understand the quest for *history as a psychic need rather than a science*” (268; our emphasis). In conversation with Cvetkovich, we understand speculative writing – in this instance our musical composition of a queer counter-mythology – as a worlding practice that can rupture, unsettle, and reimagine state-sanctioned archives.

To contextualize the song in this article, we draw on queer theory and speculative thought, in conversation with our own arts practice and other speculative texts across media. As queer musicians and scholars, we are drawn to speculative fiction’s potential as what Dana Luciano and Mel Chen call a “site for imagining other, possibly queerer, worlds” (188). In tandem, Nishnaabeg scholar and artist Leanne Simpson writes: “The practice of telling stories is the practice of generating a diversity of meanings [...] a looking with or a looking through or a *thinking through together* [...] and generating systemic critique” (6; italics in original). In this article, we think about the proposition of giant beavers

shredding Lewis and Clark as a way of generating critique of the archive. We understand our art-making and scholarship as in conversation with or adjacent to the fields of Indigenous futurisms, speculation, and resurgence: as settler artist-scholars, we are not suggesting that we are or even *could* generate Indigenous futures, but rather are speculating on an anti-colonial proposition as a creative research practice.

We begin this article with an overview of how white, progressive notions of time have been problematized and reconceptualized by queer theorists, and speculative authors and musicians. Following this, we outline the process of composing our song “Cosmic Beavers,” including explaining how research-creation works as a research praxis; we also contextualize the song within archival accounts of Lewis and Clark and their trek. Following this, we encourage the reader to listen to the song. We then analyse the musical and narrative features of the song to theorize *how* it proposes a queer counter-mythology. We conclude this article with a discussion of the implications of this composition for archival accounts of (supposed) history.

background

In this section, we consider how time has been reconceptualized by queer theorists and speculative fiction authors. We begin by exploring how dominant, progressive accounts of time serve to proliferate whiteness (including those alternative temporalities posed by white settler queer theorists). Following this, we consider how speculative fiction authors and musicians have complicated white, settler, and cis-hetero temporalities.

queering time

Euro-Western understandings of time and the future are governed by cis-heteronormative strictures that exclude queer people: temporalities that, for instance, involve (re)producing a next generation that resembles the previous one; or that progress in a linear fashion from birth, through economic productivity, and into death. Consequently, some queer thinkers

have adopted a nihilist anti-futurism that sees no point in trying to change the future. For instance, Lee Edelman's concept of queer anti-futurities warns against believing in a better future that's tethered to a reproductive futurism, where this reproduction is linked to a cis-hetero continuity that presents itself as the only possible future. However, in the years since he published *No Future*, Edelman's anti-futurist stance has been critiqued as operating from a privileged position: such critiques argue that a politics of opting-out of the future is the kind of politics that can only be entertained by those with the (significant) privilege required to already entertain the future. Concomitantly, disabled, queer, and trans people cannot *adopt* an anti-futurist opting-out because they are always-*already* marked as the site of *no future* (Kafer; Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*; Lothian; Keeling). Moreover, Jasbir Puar has critiqued Edelman's anti-futurity because, in centring white heterosexual *reproduction*, Edelman ignores alternative modes of endless biopolitical capacitation; specifically, that of white homosexual *regeneration*. In other words, for Puar, endless capacitation isn't necessarily tied to heterosexual modes of reproduction; it's tied to whiteness.

Concomitantly, Xwêlméxw artist and scholar Dylan Robinson considers how the rigid measures of Western music render Indigenous musical practices as "out of time." In this article, we think of this "out of time" as generative. For instance, Black studies scholars have long noted that, while the official archive elides Black people by rendering them as temporal "still" points without histories or futures (Pickens; Weheliye), Black futures and pasts operate outside white accounts of history, and so are not reducible to their absence from, or refusal of, Western temporalities (Eshun; Wilderson): as Fanon writes, "I am not a prisoner of history. I should not seek there for the meaning of my destiny" (179). In resonance with these scholars, we understand the notion of a "queer temporality" not as signalling a "purely destructive move or position of pure negativity" (Freeman xxi), but as a space of slippage, excess, and affirmation

that is (hopefully) always a half-step ahead of, behind, out of time, or *out-of-sync* with capitalistic (re)capture. In other words, we "Affirm critique as a site of world-making potential" (Cipolla et al. 9), and so speculate as a way of "*generating systemic critique*" (Simpson 6; emphasis ours). In the next section, we theorize how this out-of-syncness has been mobilized by authors and musicians through speculative fiction.

queer(ing) archives through speculative texts

As discussed above, many queer theorists have attended to how cis-heteronormativity and whiteness condition our understanding of time. However, most fiction and most songs (arguably *all* fiction and *all* songs!) *queer* time in some way. Some texts explicitly experiment with temporality as a narrative device that allows the authors to remix the past, create different futures, or haunt different time-spaces, such as Lavie Tidhar's short story "Dark Continents," with its fabulative colonial histories, or Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, which experiments with queer (lengthy) temporalities and gender mutability over time. Likewise, Amiri Baraka's short story "Rhythm Travel" centres on an invention that allows the user to transport themselves through space and time by plugging into the rhythm of particular songs. Once plugged in to a song's rhythm, the user can travel anywhere and anytime the song is played. The unnamed Black narrator travels back in time to when "Take this Hammer" was being sung by a group of enslaved men and women digging a well. In joining their time-space, the narrator echoes their refrains, haunting and confounding the plantation master and amplifying present-day precarities. Many narratives that reconfigure temporality also draw attention to the persistence of whiteness and racial injustice across time, such as Octavia Butler's novel *Kindred*. Similarly, Stefon Bristol's film *See You Yesterday* illustrates the temporal contour of white supremacy, and how it plays out viscerally on Black people when thrust into different time-spaces.

Indigenous authors have queered time as a narrative device as well as an intervention into colonial logics through “Native slipstream” (Dillon). For Grace Dillon, Native slipstream “infuses stories with time travel, alternate realities, and multiverses, and alternative histories [...] [i]t replicates non-linear thinking about space-time” (3). For example, Gerald Vizenor’s “Custer on the Slipstream” shows the regeneration of whiteness through the continual reincarnation of General Custer in different eras but then intimates that the character may (finally!) have vanished at the end of the short story. And Joshua Whitehead’s poems in *Full-Metal Indigiqueer* centre on the character of a Two-Spirit Trickster named Zoa, who reveals how white-hetero-patriarchal colonial violence surfaces across temporalities. Throughout the poems, Zoa interrupts, infects, and queers both Euro-Western canonical texts such as the works of Shakespeare and Dickens, and contemporary textual platforms such as Grindr. Zoa affectively reconfigures the archive (as text) to centre queer Indigenous life, while not erasing the history and future of colonial violence.

Similar to these literary texts, musical compositions are frequently speculative, and queer temporalities and archives. For example, David Bowie’s *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* is a themed album centred on a bisexual alien named Ziggy Stardust and his time on Earth. Bowie himself used genderqueer makeup and costumes to accentuate the album’s themes. More recently, Janelle Mon  e’s first album focuses on Cindi Mayweather, who is an android (*The ArchAndroid*). Their third album, *Dirty Computer*, experiments with dystopian sci-fi tropes to anthemize and celebrate Black women and queerness. Likewise, our own song “Ada – A D A” anachronistically reimagines nineteenth-century mathematician Ada Lovelace as the messianic protagonist of a 1980s children’s cartoon. Furthermore, Steve Reich’s 1968 tape composition “Come Out” loops a fragment of Daniel Hamm’s spoken description of injuries caused by anti-Black Police brutality in 1964: the excerpt is doubled at slightly different tempos, and so

comes out of phase with itself, mirroring the temporal looping of Police violence.

Whilst those musical texts discussed in the previous paragraph are clearly speculative or play with temporality, they generally rely on linguistic narrative representations of those speculations, whether as lyrics, or through extra-musical features such as promotional material or videos: as Kodwo Eshun ironically critiques, in general “[y]ou can theorize words or style, but analyzing the groove is believed to kill its bodily pleasure, drains its essence” (7). In other words, it’s difficult to make something *sound* queer or to make the musical fabric of a composition *sound* speculative. One example of such speculation is Herbie Hancock’s album *Future Shock*: unlike those texts described above, Hancock’s album embraces (then) contemporary music technology to produce a hyper-modern aesthetic. In this way, speculation is built into the fabric of the production. Similarly, Eshun theorizes the work of several musicians as queering linear notions of time. For instance, Eshun considers jazz composer George Russell’s *Electronic Sonata for Souls Loved by Nature*, which layers African folk instruments, guitars, and ring modulators on top of one another in a heady, anachronistic melange, with each instrument existing in “the simultaneous future-past time of the mix” (Eshun 004). As Eshun writes, “Russell’s magnetic mixology accelerates a discontinuum in which the future arrives from the past” (005). This anachronism, or “simultaneous future-past” (004), is an example of “the music [...] theorising itself quite well” (Eshun 183).

So far, we have explored how speculative artists and cultural theorists have problematized normative notions of temporality. This provides a context within which we situate our song “Cosmic Beavers.” In the next section, we begin to introduce the song.

“cosmic beavers”: a proposition

In this section, we introduce research-creation as a praxis for investigating socio-material processes through art. Then, we introduce Alfred North Whitehead’s conceptualization of

propositions, which is important for how we understand song writing as a research practice. Following this, we explain the official historical archive within which the song “Cosmic Beavers” intervenes.

The term research-creation refers to an interdisciplinary scholarly praxis where artist-scholars create the artefacts they want to think-with rather than analysing existing cultural productions (Truman, *Feminist Speculations*); research-creation is *not* the artistic *representation* of already-existing research findings. Through the practice of research-creation, we make the thing we want to investigate using an art form (in this instance, exploring how speculative song writing might unsettle established archives/narratives). In other words, our music research-creation is a way of thinking through a concept through creating art (Shannon, “Trajectories Matter”; Truman, “Undisciplined”).

In order to better understand how writing songs can be thought of as research, we draw from Alfred North Whitehead’s conceptualization of *propositions* in *Process and Reality*. Propositions are often taken up by research-creation scholars as a way of animating the artistic research process (Manning; Shannon, “What Do ‘Propositions’ Do”; Truman, *Feminist Speculations*). Propositions are logical statements that convey an idea that can then be judged as true or false. In this way, propositions are a speculative restriction of particular possibilities to a particular group of actualities. Take, for instance, the proposition “elephants can fly.” Our understanding of the proposition does not do away with the notion of true or false (as, obviously, elephants *cannot* fly), but does open up some new avenues for thought while closing down others (Shannon, “What Do ‘Propositions’ Do”). In other words, the proposition is important for how we understand our songs as a research practice that intervenes in the historical archive without arguing that what the songs describe is *true*.

“Cosmic Beavers” is based on a proposition set forth by (third author) Inhuman Geography Professor Kathryn Yusoff. In January 2018, Yusoff and Truman (first author) were having a chat about megafauna, when Yusoff

mentioned that in the Pleistocene there were giant beavers the size of bears on Turtle Island. Yusoff later postulated that if those beavers (or *Castoroides*) had stayed around throughout the Holocene they could have shredded Lewis and Clark when they attempted to chart a path across the land (we will explain who Lewis and Clark are later in this section). Shannon (second author) and Truman extrapolated upon Yusoff’s proposition to imagine what such a beaver could become.

Beavers have a rich symbolism in many cultures but are an important part of cosmology and knowledge in many Indigenous nations across Turtle Island. In *A Short History of the Blockade*, Leanne Simpson narrates Indigenous sovereignty and resistance through telling stories of Beavers (including one about a giant Beaver). Simpson describes Nishnaabeg modes of “work” as those which “bring forth more life.” She goes on to analogize the Beaver dam with Indigenous resistance to settler action (i.e., the blockade). Just as the Beaver dam brings forth more life by creating lakes and preventing rivers from freezing, Simpson contends that Indigenous resistance is generative: a practice of care that brings forth more life. This “bringing forth more life” is important to how we speculate on the work of the Cosmic Beavers in this article. However, as settler scholars, we did not appropriate Indigenous thought when composing the song and are not claiming that the song is an example of the blockade. Rather, we acknowledge that we are tangentially in relation with this scholarship.

In the speculative song, “Cosmic Beavers,” the giant beavers are trans-dimensional entities that exist across all possible space-times simultaneously. The beavers are responsible for maintaining the proper flow of time: to do this, they occasionally need to extract and shred destabilizing elements that threaten the stability of the lodge. The performance of the song alternates between the character of Speculative Quantum Ethologist KY and the singing of the Cosmic Beavers of Revelation. KY (as voiced by third author Yusoff) phones in their commentary from a different dimension and

narrates the comings and goings of the Cosmic Beavers. Meanwhile, the beavers sing as they wattle futures, daub pasts, and use the shredded material and immaterial potentials, and temporal and ex-temporal viscera of destabilizing elements (e.g., Lewis and Clark) to reinforce their Time-Dam, while their photons are repurposed to “power the lasers.” The existence of the Time-Dam allows the Beavers to create a shielded lodge in the spatiotemporal flow: this lodge, or “still point,” is the only known place in the flow in which life can sustain. The purpose of the lasers is unknown.

The “historical” (scare quotes) Lewis and Clark were part of the Corps Discovery Expedition commissioned by President Thomas Jefferson to chart the western half of what is now the continental United States after it was purchased from France. Lewis and Clark were also tasked to establish trade with Indigenous nations. They conducted their journey from 1804 to 1806. In the present day, Lewis and Clark remain embedded in the landscape as an easily marketable brand of settler-colonial whiteness supposedly conquering nature. The brand of Lewis and Clark is stamped onto all kinds of things, including various hiking trails, schools, and assorted merchandise (such as frying pans). Sacagawea, a Shoshone woman, interpreted for Lewis and Clark and helped guide their trip for more than two thousand miles. Importantly, the historical Lewis and Clark had actually been looking for giant beavers on their journey, having been charged to do so by geologists in Europe. This was because they thought that the western part of the continent might be in a different geologic time zone, in which megafauna had survived various extinction events. In the song, we speculate on an alternative “future-past” (Eshun), in which Lewis and Clark find both the beavers and an alternative time zone: in this way, the song *remythologizes* the mythologization of their trek (Eshun). In the song, Lewis and Clark actually do find the “giant beavers”: this occurs when the Cosmic Beavers ask Sacagawea to bring Lewis and Clark to the Time-Dam in Beaverhead Rock so that they can be shredded and chinked into the dam. Consequently, Lewis and Clark

never finish their surveying journey. Sacagawea is not shredded as she’s not an “unconductive element” in the Cosmic Beavers’ timeline. Inherent in Yusoff’s (third author) initial proposition of giant beavers shredding Lewis and Clark is an anti-colonial critique of the enduring extractive settler-colonial logics that precipitated and suffused (and continued after) their surveying trip.

We build our understanding of remythologizing, and our concept of the *queer counter-mythology*, from Eshun, who charges speculative musicians to “Reject history and mythology. Assemble countermythologies” (158). Counter-mythologies, we contend, defamiliarize our relationship with the settler archive. Following queer of colour theorist José Esteban Muñoz (*Dis-Identifications*), we consider this defamiliarization as a mode of creative activity that rejects archival (or historical, or even, mythological) accounts of history, and instead “work[s] on and against dominant ideology” (loc. 458), and so unsettles habitual patterns of thought. We explain further *how* the song does this in the next section. First, you should listen to the song. The lyrics are included below, with brief audio descriptions.

“Cosmic Beavers”

Oblique Curiosities ft. Kathryn Yusoff
(<https://soundcloud.com/oblique-curiosities/cosmic-beavers>)

KY: Beavers. Ecosystem engineers. Allo-genic sculptors. In the Pleistocene, there were beavers on Turtle Island the size of bears. Join us as we open a window into a different world!

Giant Beavers
On time’s horizon
Eco-labour
Relation-making

Swampy mazes
Watered archives
Endless beavers
A living system.

KY: Geo-architects, the beavers toil away in the different strata of Beaverhead Rock.

cosmic beavers

Dimensionally enfolded (and so overlapping one another) they wattle futures, daub pasts, and reinforce the Time-Dams.

Giant Beavers
Event horizons
Constructing Time-Dams
Enfolding strata

Dimension-scaping
In Beaverhead Rock
Temporal mazes
Of protection

KY: Through crafting the Time-Dams, the Beavers create a shielded lodge in the spatio-temporal flow. This shielding means the lodge is the one space in the flow in which life can sustain.

Cosmic Beavers
Crafting Time-Dams
Fix a still point
Time-scaping

Swampy timelines
Daubing futures
Wattling pasts
Temporal moating.

KY: The stability of the lodge is threatened in some possible future-pasts by uncondusive activity. The Beavers extract these destabilizing elements from their respective timelines. These elements are then subjected to quantum shredding, their photons distilled and channelled into the lasers, and the remaining bodily and temporal viscera used to chink the Time-Dam.

Cosmic Beavers
On time's horizon
Crafting lasers
Photon-scaping.

Repurpose energies
Unspent futures
Power the Time-Dam.
Lodge Maintenance.

KY: In one possible future-past, the beavers look out and see destabilizing elements charting, measuring, cutting a road toward Beaverhead Rock.

Sacagawea
Bring Lewis & Clark
Fetch the lasers
Lead them to us

We will shred them
Chink Time-Dams with them
Endless beavers
Of protection

KY: So, in case you're planning a trip across the plains, in the region of the Great Lakes and further west, don't be uncondusive! The Cosmic Beavers are ever-watchful.

Cosmic Beavers
On time's horizon
We are watching
We are waiting

We will shred you
Chink Time-Dams with you
Endless beavers
Of revelation.

queer counter-mythologies in "cosmic beavers"

In this section, we will consider how the song "Cosmic Beavers" narrates the queer counter-mythology of the Cosmic Beavers: specifically, we will attend to how this counter-mythology and the speculative world it builds takes shape through a discussion of the textual and musical features of the song. We begin by recounting the experience of composing (i.e., writing, recording, and producing) the lore of the Cosmic Beavers. We then attend to how we recorded and processed the voices of the beavers, and the narrative and rhythmic structures of the song. Following this, we discuss what is "queer" about the counter-mythology we have created.

composing the lore of the cosmic beavers

While thinking on Yusoff's (third author) initiating proposition of the *Castoroides* shredding Lewis and Clark, Truman (first author) began humming a tune that the beavers might sing

while chinking their dam. She recorded this into Garageband, layered with some vocalized percussion and a counter-melody. Truman then sent this to Shannon (second author) with the words “they need lasers.” Shannon then arranged Truman’s vocal demo into a song structure that they could sing along with. Truman and Shannon (on our last in-person meeting in December 2019, in Brisbane) experimented with the range of megafauna that would appear in the song – including giant wombats (*Diprotodon*) and giant capybara (*Neochoerus pinckneyi*) – and who might then shred other “unconducive” historical figures. We also experimented with a palette of sounds: at one point this included an orchestra (to sound more like a nature documentary), as well as a broader, more ambient set of electronic sounds (lasers). At this point, we also decided to accompany the song with a narration by a speculative, quantum ethologist that explained the lore of the beavers. It was when trying to write the lore of these giant (although still mythologically plausible) beavers that the story took on a life of its own, and began fabulating itself into a tale of trans-dimensional timekeepers. Shannon and Truman wrote the lore and the lyrics, and refined the music during the UK’s and Australia’s first COVID-19 lockdowns in May and June 2020. We also decided to nix the other megafauna, because of the richness of the beaver’s lore. Yusoff participated in some of these sessions. Following this, in March 2021, Shannon rearranged the song to include a more driving rhythm section that emphasizes the queer glee of the beavers in their labour. Truman and Yusoff recorded the vocal lines for the song in our different locked-down houses on different continents during March and April 2021, and Shannon and Truman shared the finished mix of the song at a conference in April 2021. We wrote the final edits to this academic article in January 2023, five years after Yusoff’s initiating proposition.

the voices of the beavers

In the song, Yusoff plays the role of Speculative Quantum Ethologist KY. KY phones in her

commentary from a different dimension. To achieve the effect of this “phoning-in,” Yusoff’s voice is run through a ring modulator. Ring modulators were originally invented to allow phone lines to carry multiple signals simultaneously. George Russell applied excessive ring modulators to recordings of African singers and lutes to create a percussive yet anachronizing quality in *Electronic Sonata for Souls Loved by Nature* (Eshun). Similarly, ring modulators are used to create the voice of the villainous cyborg Daleks from *Doctor Who*. In our song, the ring modulators create the necessary bandwidth to carry KY’s extradi-dimensional, extratemporal narration into our 4-D plane. Meanwhile, Truman’s voice (as the beavers) is triplicated, and pitch-adjusted to make it sound like a chorus of beavers. By duplicating (rather than re-recording) the parts, Truman’s voice occupies identical temporal space while layering on top of itself in a synchronous cacophony: this is much like the Beavers themselves, who occupy all possible spaces and times simultaneously while (as KY narrates) “overlapping one another.” The chorus of the beavers runs all the way through the song, including underneath KY and the beavers’ proclamations.

the narrative structure of “cosmic beavers”

“Cosmic Beavers” echoes the story structure of an excerpt from a nature documentary. These documentaries typically focus on a particular animal in their natural habitat. In such documentaries, after narrating this bucolic beginning, a predator is introduced that threatens the safety of the animal. The documentary then follows one of two trajectories: either the predator eats the animal, or the animal escapes. We wanted to echo this account in “Cosmic Beavers,” and so the song follows a similar ramping up of tension. As “destabilizing elements” are introduced (and later Lewis and Clark), the song grows more tense. Cascading synthetic drums accentuate the sudden appearance of “destabilizing elements.” The narration

of the appearance of Lewis and Clark is accompanied by syncopated bass notes that feel uncomfortable or uneasy. While in nature documentaries the prey is then either eaten by or escapes from the predator, in the song, the prey folds time and space to prevent the predators from doing harm. The Cosmic Beavers' voices become deeper, more distorted, and more menacing, with many more layers beginning to appear. This is accompanied by a sudden reiteration of the melody exactly a tritone above the usual melody, which sounds horrifying. Following this, both KY and the beavers warn the listener not to be "unconductive" because the beavers are watching; this is the only time that both KY and the Cosmic Beavers sing in second-person, directly addressing the audience. Disconcertingly, the Cosmic Beavers return to singing in their benevolent voice while stating that they will "shred" and "chink Time-Dams" with the listener if they behave unconductively. This is important: the benevolent voices return for the final, second-person verse because, ultimately, *the Cosmic Beavers are on the side of life*. By this, we mean that they are not "against" anybody. They extract Lewis and Clark and shred them into the Time-Dams, but only because Lewis and Clark are *not* on the side of life: the Cosmic Beavers are menacing but not malevolent. As Simpson writes in *A Short History of the Blockade*, "Amik [Beaver] is a world builder [...] Amik is the one that brings forth more life" (15). In this way, the shredding of the Cosmic Beavers is precise, and everything is repurposed (whether to maintain the fabric of the Time-Dam, or to power the lasers).

quantum rhythms

Despite our careful analysis of the lore, above, we remain cautious of too closely theorizing the song's rhythm. As Eshun writes, "you don't really need any Heidegger, because [funk musician] George Clinton is already theoretical" (190). (And, if it's good enough for George Clinton ...)

That said, we do think it's worth attending to some aspects of the rhythmic structure of the

song. Unlike the Cosmic Beavers, who exist entirely ex-temporally (occupying all points in space and time simultaneously), the song "Cosmic Beavers" is very much "in time." By this, we mean it occupies a very rigid 4/4 measure, reinforced by driving percussion. As Robinson writes in *Hungry Listening*, the colonial notion of being in or out of time is often used to criticize Indigenous musicians and musicianship. While we agree with Robinson as regards the colonizing impulse of the beat, it would be disingenuous for us to appropriate "out-of-timeness," as this is not how we make music. Instead, we try to complicate this rigidity by using an assortment of pattern gates to accompany the kit, which drives the *rhythm* without necessarily driving the *measure*. Likewise, the 1980s Roland clap sound can be heard to slide in at the last possible second, pushing the onset of the next bar back. This syncopation pulls and pushes against the colonial 4/4 measure, even while it is accomplished with an equally colonial series of high-tech extravagances.

what is "queer" about this counter-mythology?

So far, we've theorized the worlding process that created the Cosmic Beavers. While we think this makes for an effective counter-mythology, we're not sure we've so far made the case for what is "queer" about it. This is what we endeavour to in this final section of analysis.

As a research practice, research-creation is a methodological commitment to making a different world (Loveless, interviewed by Truman (Truman et al.)). This comes with particular ethical considerations: namely, the need to be responsible for whatever it is we generate, or – as N.K. Jemisin proposes – to "apocalypse responsibly" (para. 13). Keeling talks about how queer temporality names a dimension of time that "produces risk," including the unknowable and the unpredictable. The song of the beavers occupies one such temporality because, fundamentally, the mythology is unfinished. In this way, it invites further

speculation. This is essential to the doing of research-creation, where each finished piece of “art” is processed into the work’s further articulation. For example, here, we’re reconsidering the song (our work of art) in the context of a theoretically informed article on queer futurisms. But the unfinished nature of the mythology of our song is also essential to our politics of approach into queer futurisms (and their adjacency to Indigenous futurisms). In the lore of the song, all we know about the beavers is what’s relevant to our counter-mythologizing the historical archive of Lewis and Clark. For instance, we know that the lasers are powered using the photons extracted during the process of temporal shredding: this is what happens to Lewis and Clark in the song. However, what these lasers are *for* remains a mystery. Originally, we intended these lasers as a sound effect, as often found in 1970s disco music (see, for instance, Meco’s *Star Wars and Other Galactic Funk* (Monardo)). However, we found it difficult to understand where these lasers figured in the speculative work, and we often found the idea of the Cosmic Beavers calling for these lasers with no clear explanation of what they *do* with them quite humorous. Similarly, there is no explanation in the mythos of the beavers as to how they “got cosmic,” how they decided to create the Time-Dam (and so all of life), or indeed anything else that happened before or after the sudden appearance of Lewis and Clark. Thus, the wider counter-mythology is shrouded in mystery.

We’re uncertain how deliberate our shrouding of the Cosmic Beavers was. Yet, what we came to realize in writing this article is that this uncertainty is not only okay but *important*. Indeed, speculative worlds often take on their own agency and exist separate from what was intended for them (for instance, as fan fiction). Similarly, then, the role of our song is as a proposition for countering the archive, and not as a means to establishing a whole new archive based on Cosmic Beavers: counter-archives aren’t supposed to be complete. We welcome other artists and scholars to further proliferate the “Cosmic Beavers”

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(particularly if that proliferation includes a music video)!

conclusion. so what? queerer archives!

In *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz highlights techniques for accessing and co-creating queerer worlds. Rather than solely focusing attention on clearly articulated, *alternative* futures, Muñoz turns to Ernst Bloch’s Marxist idealism as a model for approaching unvoiced elements from the past and animating them within the present. Muñoz describes how engaging with “ephemeral traces” and “flickering illuminations” from other times and places may assist those who choose to reach for a utopic futurity by accessing queerness’s “still unrealized potential” (28). Similarly, Yusoff’s proposition of the megafauna beavers shredding Lewis and Clark throws a hopeful if non-specific spanner in the habitual “regeneration” of the colonial archive (Puar). While the proposition and our animation of it in the song don’t rewrite history, they do invoke a speculative lure for a different timeline, which is in conversation with Elizabeth Freeman’s idea that some queer forms of art might “collect and remobilize archaic futuristic debris as signs that things have been and could be otherwise” (xvi). In this way, our speculative songwriting project is a propositional activation of unspent otherwises. Moreover, as a *queer* counter-mythology, we deliberately don’t say what happens in this universe other than the Cosmic Beavers shredding Lewis and Clark.

In this article, we have discussed how a speculative proposition can be rendered into an artistic format as (1) a lure for different future-pasts and as (2) a way of drawing attention to the confabulation of the archive. A necessary component to how we understand propositions is that, although they are speculative, they can still be judged as true or false (Shannon, “What Do ‘Propositions’ Do”): this is important in the present political milieu where false propositions about the veracity of official archival accounts of history, and who

has the right to articulate and represent that history, mobilize white supremacist nostalgia (Barrowcliffe; Nyong'o; Simpson; Ware). As such, while the *speculative* story of cosmic beavers shredding Lewis and Clark is a false proposition, the *actual* story of Lewis and Clark is also a false proposition: its ongoing colonial fabulation – reaffirmed over time on postcards, in school curricula, and on assorted merchandise – reproduces Lewis and Clark as just as fictitious as (and a lot more violent than) the Cosmic Beavers. Ultimately, then, the archival account of Lewis and Clark is itself a false proposition.

The counter-archive relies on the existence of an existing archive for its jumping-off point. As a sonic queer counter-mythology, “Cosmic Beavers” artistically reimagines the historical colonial archive. Our argument here, then, is that the “historical” account of the trans-dimensional “Cosmic Beavers” is as “true” as the “historical” account of Lewis and Clark and its attendant merchandise (such as branded coasters, mugs, and frying pans), information centres, and legacies of violence. As such, we also want to put forth how speculating on the archive hints at the ways in which state-sponsored historical narratives are also speculative: the framing of historical events – of the glorification of Lewis and Clark and the idea of Turtle Island as an uncharted wilderness ready to be settled on and extracted from – is only as true as our own version of the archive, which includes giant time-travelling beavers. Activating the proposition of Cosmic Beavers hints that things can/could be otherwise.



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