

Queer Futurity and Hybridity in *Arrival* and *Embrace of the
Serpent*

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Table of Contents

Abstract	3
List of Figures	4
Introduction	5
I. Creating the Other	
1. The Other	14
2. The Queer Other	17
3. The Racial Other	22
II. Alien Ailments	
1. Queering the Heptapods	29
i. <i>Things Seen</i>	30
ii. <i>Things Heard</i>	38
2. The Infection of the Heptapods	44
i. <i>The Infecting</i>	45
ii. <i>The Infected</i>	54
III. Indigenous Infection	
1. Queering Karamakate	65
i. <i>Wildness and Mess</i>	67
ii. <i>Dreams</i>	76
iii. <i>Out of Time</i>	79
2. Preventative Actions	82
i. <i>The Individual to be Corrected</i>	86
ii. <i>The Monster to Be Eliminated</i>	90
3. The Hybrids	95
i. <i>Theo</i>	97
ii. <i>Evan</i>	109
IV. Conclusion	119
Works Cited	125

Abstract

This thesis explores how the queered, racialized, and Othered groups in the films *Arrival* and *Embrace of the Serpent* are seen by hegemonic culture as an infection. Their infection is established through the preventative actions used by hegemonic culture which differ in each film and include anything from inoculations to forced assimilation. Despite preventative actions, members of hegemonic culture who venture into the Other's environment can still become sick due to contact and must embrace the cultural practices of the Other in order to survive, suggesting that queerness is incompatible with normativity. Utilizing queer analytics such as opacity, temporal mis-orientations, and dreams, this thesis examines the circular logic of how the queerness of the Other's environment is tied to what constructs them as queer. As such, members of hegemonic culture must embrace queer cultural practices in order to survive in these queer environments. In *Arrival* this means learning the Heptapods language and non-normative temporality, while in *Embrace of the Serpent* this means understanding Indigenous, land-based cultural practices. Some become hybrids between queer and hegemonic culture, while others become infected by the Other and do not survive. At the end of both films the queer Other disappears, leaving the hybrid behind with the knowledge necessary to preserve the Other's culture. This thesis poses questions about queer futurity, or ability of queer populations to survive, and whether or not the queer Other has a future, looking closely at the queer, racialized Other. Drawing on the work of Jose Esteban Muñoz, I argue that the Heptapods in *Arrival* and the Indigenous people in *Embrace of the Serpent* reflect Muñozian understandings of queer futures as being ephemeral, especially because the components that mark the queered groups as illegible coexist with their choice to leave their cultural knowledge behind before they disappear.

List of Figures

Figure 1: The Heptapods	43
Figure 2: Louise's Silhouette	57
Figure 3: Karamakate in the Tree	74
Figure 4: Caboclo	89
Figure 5: Karamakate on the River	111

Introduction

On July 18th, 2006 Vice President Mike Pence addressed Congress to argue against same-sex marriage. Pence has been known to be fervently anti-LGBTQ and a supporter of “Focus on the Family,” a Colorado Springs-based conservative organization that is not only pro-life, anti-LGBTQ, but also pro-medical/psychiatric intervention for LGBTQ identified persons.¹ The organization is one that frequently pathologizes queer populations, so it is no coincidence that on July 18th, 2006 during his speech, Pence said the following:

...I come today to defend that institution that forms the backbone of our society: traditional marriage. Like millions of Americans, I believe that marriage matters, that it was ordained by God, instituted among men, that it is the glue of the American family and the safest harbor to raise children...I believe first, though, marriage should be protected, because it wasn't our idea. Several millennia ago the words were written that a man should leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. It was not our idea; it was God's idea...Marriage matters, according to the researchers. Harvard sociologist Pitrim Sorokin found that throughout history, societal collapse was always brought about following an advent of the deterioration of marriage and family.²

¹Information about Pence's support of “Focus on the Family”:
<https://www.denverpost.com/2017/06/23/mike-pence-focus-family-colorado-springs/>

For information about central pro-life and anti-LGBT values:

<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/about/foundational-values/>

For information about counseling:

<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/family-qa/parent-suspects-that-child-might-be-gay/>

<http://media.focusonthefamily.com/fotf/pdf/channels/social-issues/thriving-values-when-a-loved-one-says-im-gay.pdf>

²*Congressional Record*. 2006. 109th Cong., vol. 152, pt. 1, p. H5301.

This statement is problematic for many reasons. First, the Vice President’s allusion to homosexual marriages as being unsafe “harbors” to raise children cites the historical association between queerness and criminality. As Gayle Rubin explains in her work “Thinking Sex,” “the term *sex offender* sometimes applied to rapists, sometimes to “child molesters,” and eventually functioned as a code for homosexuals.”³ In this way, Pence’s implication that heterosexual marriages are “safe” for children alludes to these historic associations that members of the LGBT community – especially gay men – are sexual predators and therefore are a threat not just to children but to society as a whole. Furthermore, by using the figure of the Child in the argument that homosexual marriages are “unsafe harbors” to raise children, Pence implies that queer people are a threat not only to society itself but also to our society’s future. Lee Edelman, who utilizes the notion of “the Child” in conjunction with queer theory explains that “...the child has come to embody for us the telos of the social order and come to be seen as the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust.”⁴ In other words, not only does the Child represent the “ideal society”, but it also represents the futurity and longevity of that ideal society. Consequently, Vice President Pence’s description of homosexual marriage as unsafe for the Child implies that queer people are ultimately a threat to the viability of society. That idea is reified when, at the end, he equates changes to heteronormative marriage structure with the collapse of society itself. Additionally, by arguing that heterosexual marriage is “ordained by god,” Pence essentially argues that heterosexuality is natural, inevitable, and sacred. This statement indicates that homosexuality is unnatural and preventable, which implicitly cites queerness’ long history of being seen as a “physiological abnormality”. In her work *Queering the Color Line*, Siobhan

³ Rubin, S Gayle. “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality.” *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2011, p. 138.

⁴ Edelman, Lee. “The Future is Kid Stuff.” *No Future: Queer Theory and Death Drive*. London, Duke University Press, 2004, pp. 11.

Somerville investigates how homosexuality has been similarly pathologized. She notes that numerous sexologists such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis and Karl Heinrich Ulrichs worked to classify homosexuality as a “physiological abnormality” and in the process became the scientific authorities of what sexual practices were pathologized and which ones were not.⁵ Moreover, pathologized behavior was largely seen as such due to its perceived divergence from “normal” expressions of masculinity and femininity and had explicit racial undertones.⁶ Pence’s claim that heterosexuality is “ordained by god,” and therefore natural, positions heterosexuality as the norm while simultaneously alluding to historical anxieties connecting homosexuality and race with disease. Together, the discursive tools used by Pence reveal the perception that queer populations will infect and ultimately destroy normative society.

However, this narrative is not limited to politicians, but is also spouted through mainstream media outlets such as the film industry. In this thesis I analyze two films, *Arrival* and *Embrace of the Serpent*, and identify how they both articulate a similar message about queer populations. *Arrival* tells the story of what happens when 12 alien ships land in various locations across the world. Louise Banks, a professor and highly accredited linguist is recruited by the U.S. Government to work with the aliens – called the Heptapods – to figure out what their purpose on Earth is. As the film progresses and Louise begins to understand their written language, called logograms, she begins to experience time out of linear order. Eventually, she learns that thousands of years in the future the Heptapods will need the help of humans, so by teaching Louise their language they ensure that the humans can communicate with them when that time comes.

⁵ Somerville, Siobhan. “Scientific Racism and the Invention of the Homosexual Body.” *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*. London, Duke University Press, 2000, p. 19.

⁶ Ibid.

Embrace of the Serpent takes place in the Amazon rainforest and tells the story of Karamakate, an Indigenous man who is the last of the Cohiuano people. The film recounts his travels with two Western anthropologists, Theo and Evan, who come to the Amazon forty years apart, both in search of a sacred plant called “yakruna.” Theo looks for the yakruna to cure his unnamed illness, while Evan seeks it for its ability to “raise the purity of rubber” – despite telling Karamakate that he just wishes to study it. The travels of these two men run parallel to one another with each man visiting many of the same places, meeting some of the same people, and often having some of the same conversations with Karamakate. However, their endings differ greatly which, I will argue, is the result of their commitment to learning from Karamakate so that Karamakate may pass on his Indigenous knowledge and allow for the survival of his people.

In this thesis, I will argue that both films, while seemingly different on the surface, demonstrate how queered populations are seen as an infection or an illness by hegemonic culture and have the power to infect those from hegemonic culture that come into contact with them. However, an important difference between the two films, and one that allows for some resistance against the pathologization of the queered groups, is that *Embrace of the Serpent* is presented from the Indigenous peoples’ perspective whereas *Arrival* is from hegemonic culture’s perspective. As a result, *Embrace of the Serpent* gives the Indigenous people more agency and allows them to push back some against their pathologization. In this thesis, when I refer to queer populations or queered populations, I do not exclusively mean those who do not identify as heterosexual. Rather, my use of queer is in line with David Halperin’s definition where, “Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant.”⁷

Consequently, my analysis will focus on groups that are portrayed as “backwards” or “abnormal”

⁷Halperin, David M. *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 62.

in relation to hegemonic culture, the norm. In *Arrival* the queer group is the Heptapods, the aliens who land on Earth and impart their language to Louise. In *Embrace of the Serpent* the queer group is Karamakate and the other Indigenous people living in the Amazon.⁸ In both films these queered groups are seen as an infection to society, and certain preventative actions are put in place to stop their infection from spreading to members of hegemonic culture. Despite these preventative actions, members of hegemonic culture still become “infected,” however those who survive do so by developing hybridity, thus being part of hegemonic culture as well as part of the queered group. In both films their hybridity not only allows for their own survival, but it also allows for the survival of the queered group itself. These two films therefore bring up questions of queer futurity, or the ability of queer people to survive. Some queer theory scholars, like Lee Edelman have theorized that there is “no future” for queers, and that fighting for future inclusion in society reproduces heterosexual ideology.⁹ Others, like Jose Esteban Muñoz, disagree with Edelman and argue instead that queer futurity is never in the “here and now” but rather exists in the “then and there.” It is something “on the horizon” that we will always strive to reach.¹⁰ Both films end with the disappearance of the queered group which ultimately begs the question of

⁸ In regard to my analysis of *Embrace of the Serpent* I use the terms “Indigenous” and “Native” respectively when speaking about peoples with a political, spiritual, and social relationship to the land and who are the first inhabitants of that land. In my analysis I utilize the term “Indigenous people” when speaking about Karamakate and the other first inhabitants of the Amazon since “Indigenous” is typically situated within an international context outside of the U.S or Canada. The location of Karamakate and the other Indigenous people in the Amazon therefore qualifies them as “Indigenous” although it should still be noted that these identity categories are socially constructed and often times ambiguous. I use the term “Native” – a term typically used in the context of the U.S. – when referencing research about the first inhabitants of what is now called the United States and comparing it to the situation of the Indigenous peoples in *Embrace of the Serpent*. For sources explaining this distinction in terminology see: “Terminology.” *Indigenousfoundations*, University of British Columbia, indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/terminology/.

“Lexicon and Terminology.” *Reporting in Indigenous Communities*, Reporting in Indigenous Communities, riic.ca/the-guide/on-the-air/lexicon-and-terminology/.

“Indigeneity.” *Native Studies Keywords*, edited by Stephanie Nohelani Teves, Andrea Smith, and Michelle H. Raheja, Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 2015, pp. 109-155.

⁹Edelman, Lee. “The Future is Kid Stuff.” *No Future: Queer Theory and Death Drive*. London, Duke University Press, 2004, pp. 1-31.

¹⁰Muñoz, José Esteban. “Queerness as Horizon,” *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York, New York University Press, 2009, pp. 19-32.

which view on queer futurity they present. My findings suggest that although this may seem problematic on the surface, the disappearance of these queer groups reflects the “fleeting” quality of queer futurity as identified by Muñoz.

The thesis is separated into three chapters, a literature review, an analysis of *Arrival*, and an analysis of *Embrace of the Serpent*. The first chapter of this thesis, titled *Creating the Other*, will begin by giving some context to the notion of Otherness – an essential aspect to the queering of the Heptapods in *Arrival* and the Indigenous people in *Embrace of the Serpent*. After explaining how Othering has occurred throughout history, mainly by European powers to non-European powers, I will move on to explain “The queer Other” and how their subjugation is carried out as well as how it is linked to pathologization. Lastly, I will investigate how racial Othering, like queer Othering, is also linked to pathologization. I note that although queer and racial Othering have been historically linked, for the flow and organization of this thesis I separate the two.

The second chapter titled “Alien Ailments” begins my analysis of *Arrival* with the section titled “Queering the Heptapods.” It looks at what characteristics cause the Heptapods to be seen as the queer and racial Other. I begin by looking at the visual aspects of the Heptapods including their skin color, the “misorientation” of the camera in relation to them, as well as the fog inside their ship that prevents their full visibility. Next, I move on to the auditory aspects of their queerness, namely the “queer sounds,” sounds that not only refuse legibility due to their mechanical and manufactured nature, but that also create a feeling of disharmony thus disrupting hegemonic “norms” of happiness.

The second section builds on the previous section’s explanation of the Heptapods’ queer characteristics and describes how their queerness is presented as an infection or threat to

hegemonic culture. I begin by discussing the numerous preventative actions used by hegemonic culture, which in turn pathologizes the Heptapods, including the inoculations that Louise is given prior to contact with the Heptapods as well as the insistence by officials that she wear a hazmat suit. I then turn to how the Heptapods infect others, namely Louise. Louise's increased fluency in the Heptapods' written language, logograms, leads others from hegemonic culture to view her as mentally ill although it is this same fluency that allows her to survive her interactions with the Heptapods unlike previous experts. I end the section with a discussion of queer futurity and what Louise's newfound hybridity as a result of her logogram fluency says about a queer future.

The second chapter titled "Indigenous Infection" marks the beginning of my analysis of *Embrace of the Serpent*. In the first section of this chapter titled "Queering Karamakate" I identify what queers the Indigenous people of the Amazon – Karamakate included. I begin the chapter by noting how the environment of the Amazon is a key component that queers the Indigenous people and how the Amazon comes to represent the "wild," "mess" that refuses colonial legibility. I then turn to dreams – a way for the Cohiuano people to connect to the gods through the use of yakruna or other hallucinogenic plants. I argue that dreams are essential to Indigenous ways of living, and since Indigenous ways of living are tied to the environment, which is queered due to its mess, dreams which provide the outlet for understanding how to be Indigenous are also queered.

The next section, "Preventative Actions" moves on to what causes the Indigenous people to be seen as an infection by hegemonic culture. Here I make a distinction between young Indigenous children and Indigenous adults, arguing that age impacts the preventative measures used by hegemonic culture to "cure" the world of their infection. With the Indigenous children I argue that correctional action is more prevalent since the children are still seen as being malleable

enough to erase Indigenous practices from their life. Indigenous adults on the other hand are more frequently killed since they are no longer redeemable and therefore the only way to eradicate their disease is through extermination.

The final chapter of this thesis addresses how the Indigenous people in *Embrace of the Serpent* come to infect those from hegemonic culture. Here I contrast the sickness of Theo to the health of Evan to discuss the differences not only in their interactions with Karamakate but also their journeys as a whole and how this is a reflection of their respective ability to accept Indigenous cultural practices and become a western-Indigenous hybrid. Ultimately, I conclude that Evan's decision to learn from Karamakate, as well as Karamakate's decision to teach Evan is what differentiates him from Theo, who refused to learn from Karamakate and ultimately dies because of it. Finally, I will argue that the health of Evan and sickness of Theo suggests that queer futurity is only possible with the help of queer people as teachers. It should be noted that this conclusion supports an ableist logic that positions health as good and sickness/disability as bad. Although overall *Embrace of the Serpent* is slightly more progressive, the contrast of Theo's sickness with Evan's health does become problematic.

My purpose in this thesis is to compare these two films and identify firstly how the queered groups are seen as a sickness to hegemonic culture. Then, I identify the ways in which they are portrayed as infecting others in order to conclude what their disease suggests about queer futurity – or the ability of these queered groups to exist alongside the dominant culture of Western powers. Although in both films the queer Other disappears at the end of the film, leaving the hybrid in their wake, I argue that rather than seeing it through Edelman's eyes as an

example of “no future,” it is instead an example of Muñoz’s notion of queer futurity as being “always on the horizon.”¹¹

¹¹ Muñoz, José Esteban. “Introduction: Feeling Utopia,” *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. York, New York University Press, 2009, p. 11.

I. Creating the Other

1. The Other

The notion of the Other is central to both *Arrival* and *Embrace of the Serpent*. Given that both films depict the Other as a pathology, it is important to first understand the concept of the Other. Sune Jensen explains Othering as, “a ‘process of differentiation and demarcation, by which the line is drawn between ‘us’ and ‘them’ – between the more powerful and the less powerful and through which social distance is established and maintained,” where, “‘The others’ are reduced to stereotypical characters and are ultimately dehumanized.”¹² Essentially, Othering is related to the need to categorize the unfamiliar in order to better control those “deviant” populations. As a result, cultures centered around hierarchical organization most frequently create Others as a way to subjugate populations different from their own, as well as to rationalize their own superiority. The process of Othering the unfamiliar is a practice frequently seen in Western culture and its long history of colonization – a process rooted in hierarchical organization. Othering the unfamiliar can be seen through Orientalism, or the “worldview that asserts the inherent superiority of the West over the East. Specifically, Orientalism constructs a permanent image of the superior West (the ‘Self’) which is defined negatively against the no less imaginary ‘Other’ – the backward and inferior East.”¹³ An important aspect of creating the East/West binary through Orientalism is to create Western culture as the universal “truth.”¹⁴ Alfred Schuetz, in his essay *The Stranger*, also identifies the importance of creating one’s own culture as the truth. Schuetz explains that, “Any member born or reared with the group accepts

¹² Jensen, Sune Qvotrup. “Othering, identity formation and agency.” *Qualitative Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2011, pp. 67.

¹³ Hobson, John M. *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 7.

¹⁴ Wallerstein, Immanuel. “Eurocentrism and its Avatars: The Dilemmas of Social Science.” *New Left Review*, no. 226, 1997, pp. 93-107.

the ready-made standardized scheme of the cultural pattern handed down to him by ancestors, teachers, and authorities as an unquestioned and unquestionable guide in all the situations which normally occur within the social world.”¹⁵ In doing so, members of what he calls the “home culture” automatically see those who deviate from their cultural truth as wrong or Other. Ultimately, the West’s creation of their own culture as the truth, creates dichotomous knowledge about the Other, something Maria Lugones also notices. In *Toward a Decolonial Feminism*, Lugones states that, “I want to emphasize categorical, dichotomous, hierarchical logic as central to modern, colonial, capitalist thinking about race, gender, and sexuality.”¹⁶ In this statement, Lugones highlights some of the key practices of the West – or what can be referred to as hegemonic culture.¹⁷

The concept of hegemony is attributed to Antonio Gramsci and defined as “the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life.”¹⁸ In the context of both *Arrival* and *Embrace of the Serpent* the culture of the West (white, post-colonial, able-bodied, capitalist, male, cisgender and heteronormative) is hegemonic. They are the ones that claim and sustain the power over the Other, thus marking the Other as inferior. Although Lugones’ does not explicitly name the culture she describes above as “hegemonic culture,” her description of it as “modern, colonial, [and] capitalist,” aligns with the characteristics of the hegemonic culture depicted in both *Arrival* and *Embrace of the Serpent*. Furthermore, by writing

¹⁵ Schuetz, Alfred. “The Stranger: An Essay in Social Psychology.” *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 49, no. 6, 1944, p. 501.

¹⁶ Lugones, Maria. “Towards a Decolonial Feminism.” *Hypatia*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2010, p. 747.

¹⁷ In their work, “The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities,” T. J. Jackson Lears writes that “Ruling social groups do not maintain their hegemony merely by giving their domination an aura of moral authority through the creation and perpetuation of legitimating symbols; they must also seek to win the consent of subordinate groups to the existing social order.” In other words, the ruling social group cannot merely dominate, but they must convince their subjects of their power and gain their consent to rule (570). Lears later explains that one of the ways in which the ruling class does this is, “‘through so-called private organizations like the Church, trade unions or schools.’ The state in other words is ‘hegemony protected by the armor of coercion’” (570). Essentially the ruling class uses the institutions that make up culture to spread their own ideology and coerce their subjects into accepting their superiority. The culture of the ruling class then becomes the “hegemonic culture.”

¹⁸ Connell, R.W. *Masculinities*. Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1995, p. 77.

that “categorical, dichotomous, hierarchical logic” is central to that same culture, she highlights some of the key values of hegemonic culture where Othering is part of the “cultural pattern” passed down from generation to generation. This automatically posits the Othered culture as inherently lesser than and therefore wrong, and as a result, the Other is then perceived as a threat by the home culture. Schuetz explains that, “The doubtful loyalty of the stranger is unfortunately very frequently more than a prejudice on the part of the approached group. This is especially true in cases in which the stranger proves unwilling or unable to substitute the new cultural pattern entirely for that of the home group.”¹⁹ The important point that Schuetz makes here is that the “home culture” expects the Othered culture to assimilate to their cultural pattern. Those who are “unable” or “unwilling” to assimilate – two highly subjective terms – are then seen as a threat to the home group as a result of their perceived rejection of the home group’s culture. In this way, the Othered culture becomes queer given that, “Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant.”²⁰ Halperin goes on to specify who exactly falls under the category of “queer.” He writes, “‘Queer’ then demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative – a positionality that is not restricted to lesbians and gay men but is in fact available to anyone who feels marginalized...”²¹ The important distinction here is that, under this definition, the home culture can never be queer since it is always dominant. Consequently, the Othered culture is always queer in relation to the home culture, and the home culture is always normative.

In the following sections I will move beyond the broad category of “the Other” and look at specifically Othered groups and how they are associated with infection. In the first section I

¹⁹ Schuetz, Alfred. “The Stranger: An Essay in Social Psychology.” *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 49, no. 6, 1944, p. 507.

²⁰ Halperin, David M. *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 62.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 62.

will look at the queer Other and argue the connection between queerness and infection. In the second section I will explore the racial Other, specifically Black and Native populations, and how their racial Othering corresponds to their perceived sexual perversion, which creates them as a threat or infection to hegemonic culture. I choose these two populations to focus on given that they are the Others represented in *Arrival* and *The Embrace of the Serpent*. It is important to note that although separating the creation of the queer Other from the racial Other inevitably makes the queer Other the white queer Other, the separation of the two in this literature review is important in order to better explain the intersection of both queer and racial Otherness in *Arrival* and *The Embrace of the Serpent*. That being said, racial Othering and sexual Othering are often intertwined with one another.²²

2. The Queer Other

By definition, the Other's status as queer positions them as the abnormal, the illegitimate, and the submissive, which automatically calls into question their humanity. As Dana Luciano and Mel Chen define it, the human is, "rational, bounded, integral, sovereign, and self-aware. This is the figure to whom rights and citizenship are granted; this is the default figure that grounds and personifies norms and behavior, ability, and health..."²³ The similarities between the definition of human and that of hegemony are quite striking. Those from the hegemonic culture must "claim and sustain a leading position in life."²⁴ In order to do so, one would need to be "rational, bounded, integral, sovereign, and self-aware."²⁵ Consequently, when the two descriptions are put next to each other, it creates an image of who the "real" human is and therefore what hegemonic culture is. Once again, this is an image of a Western, white,

²² Somerville, Siobhan. "Scientific Racism and the Invention of the Homosexual Body." *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*. London, Duke University Press, 2000, pp.15-38.

²³ Luciano, Dana, and Mel Chen. "Has the Queer Ever Been Human?" *GLQ*, vol. 21, no. 2-3, 2015, p. 190.

²⁴ Connell, R.W. *Masculinities*. Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1995, p. 77.

²⁵ Luciano, Dana, and Mel Chen. "Has the Queer Ever Been Human?" *GLQ*, vol. 21, no. 2-3, 2015, p. 190.

heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied male who becomes “the barometer against which all others are measured in order to determine the extent to which they would be considered human.”²⁶

Through the process of being labeled as Other, the Other can never achieve “authentic” humanity, which consequently opens the door for them to be equated with disease and infection. Historically, characterizing the Other as diseased is exactly what has been done. George Mosse describes how Johann Müller, a physician in the 1700’s who wrote the book *The Outline of Forensic Medicine* about abnormal behaviors, very explicitly connected social deviance to illness. Mosse writes, “For Müller unconventionality was a sickness, dangerous not only to individual health, but also to the health of the state.”²⁷ When this quote is put into conversation with Halperin’s definition of queer, it becomes clear how the queer Other, being so labeled because of sexual difference, is conflated with sickness due entirely to their inability to conform.

The pathologization of queer people began in the late nineteenth century with the creation of sexology.²⁸ Havelock Ellis, one of the more influential sexologists of the time, “hoped to provide scientific authority for the position that homosexuality should be considered not a crime but rather a congenital (and thus involuntary) physiological abnormality.”²⁹ Somerville’s discussion of “physiological abnormality” highlights the queer Other’s inability to fulfill the requirements for what is deemed “normal,” and “human,” and is therefore seen as unhealthy. Although not necessarily related in every context, I argue that abnormal and unhealthy are used interchangeably within the context of the creation of the racial and queer Other. This conflation of discourse is seen specifically in Regina Kunzel’s essay “Queer History, Mad History, and the

²⁶ Weinstein, Jami. “Theorizing Queer Inhumanisms: Posthumously Queer.” *GLQ*, vol. 21, no. 2-3, 2015, p. 236.

²⁷ Mosse, George L. “Nationalism and Respectability: Normal and Abnormal Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century.” *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 17, no. 2, 1982, p. 224.

²⁸ Somerville, Siobhan. “Scientific Racism and the Invention of the Homosexual Body.” *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*. London, Duke University Press, 2000, p. 18.

²⁹ *Ibid* p. 19.

Politics of Health.” Here, Kunzel deconstructs the idea of health and reveals it to be “not just a desired state or a self-evident good but an ideology that mobilizes a set of norms, prescriptions, and hierarchies of worth.”³⁰ Her explanation of “health” as an “ideology that mobilizes a set of norms,” bridges the connection between health and what is deemed normal. To be healthy is to be normal. It follows, then, that as a result of being seen as abnormal, queer populations are labeled unhealthy. Conflating discourses of sickness and abnormality does the work of further stigmatizing the queer Other so as to enable necropolitical processes – or how certain bodies are institutionally directed to death – to be carried out.³¹ Jasbir Puar, too, recognizes the effects of combining these two discourses in her work, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. She writes, “Queerness as automatically and inherently transgressive enacts specific forms of disciplining and control, erecting celebratory queer liberal subjects folded into life (queerness as subject) against the sexually pathological and deviant populations for death (queerness as population).”³² In this section Puar addresses how some forms of queerness are used by the state to create the aura of multiculturalism and diversity. As a result, they are accepted by the state, which allows for the continuation of their life, while other “unacceptable” queer populations are seen as “pathological” and “deviant” and thus marked for death. Puar argues that these “unacceptable queers” are largely queer people of color. These differentiations are important since, as Puar later explains, the biopolitics at play enable white supremacy, or what Puar calls “the ascendancy of whiteness.” Puar writes, “the ascendancy of whiteness is a description of biopolitics proffered by Rey Chow, who links the violence of liberal deployments of diversity and multiculturalism to the ‘valorization of life’ alibi that then allows for rampant

³⁰ Kunzel, Regina. “Queer History, Mad History, and the Politics of Health.” *American Quarterly*, vol. 69, no. 2, 2017, p. 316.

³¹ Puar, Jasbir K. “Introduction: Homonationalism and Biopolitics.” *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2017, p. 32.

³² *Ibid*, p. 24.

exploitation of the very subjects included in discourses of diversity in the first instance.”³³. In other words, the ascendancy of whiteness relies on biopolitics and necropolitics since the death of the “pathological” and “deviant” upholds white supremacist ideology and power. Therefore, conflating discourses of sickness and abnormality are essential to upholding hegemonic power structures such as white supremacy.

Yet another example of the connection between abnormality and sickness can be seen in Mosse’s discussion of physician, Johann Müller. In the quote used earlier, Müller alluded to abnormality being a sickness to the nation, but in the following quote Müller clarifies who qualifies as the abnormal. According to Mosse, “Müller...no longer distinguished between different kinds of homosexuality, some less abhorrent than others. To Müller such vice, no matter how it was practiced, had personal and public consequences... Müller believed that those who practice vice become feeble and depressed, negligent about their appearance, and let their heads hang down.”³⁴ Müller’s use of descriptors such as “feeble,” “depressed,” and letting “their heads hang down” all paint the picture of someone who is either mentally or physically ill – or perhaps both. When this quote is read alongside Müller’s other statement it is clear that as a result of abnormal sexuality, the queer Other becomes sick. Then, looking once again at Kunzel’s description of health as being rooted in dominant norms and Luciano and Chen’s description of “human” as the one who personifies those norms, the queer Other is classified as abnormal and unhealthy largely due to their inability to conform to what is considered “human,” which allows for them to be characterized in non-human terms.

Scholar Jami Weinstein, in her essay “Posthumously Queer,” offers up an example of such characterization in the following quote. Weinstein writes, “Microbes, like queers, women,

³³ Ibid p. 3.

³⁴ Mosse, George L. “Nationalism and Respectability: Normal and Abnormal Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century.” *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 17, no. 2, 1982, p. 223.

and people of color both disturb and reinforce established notions of purity and ontologically hygienic portraits of the human and its handmaid.”³⁵ Weinstein uses the metaphor of “non-conforming” populations such as queers, women and people of color as infection to illustrate that their very existence leads to the deterioration of the “human,” or at the very least what hegemonic culture considers to be human. As previously explained, what qualifies as both “human” and “hegemonic” are closely tied and therefore represent Western, white, heterosexual, cisgender, able bodied, men. Queer populations do not fit into any of these categories, and consequently they complicate the notion of the human as homogenous and universal which ultimately disrupts hegemonic culture. In other words, just as microbes are seen as disrupting the “normal” functions of the human body, queer populations are seen as disrupting the “normal” functions of hegemonic culture, thus creating them as a threat and infection to hegemonic culture. However, I would amend Weinstein’s statement to say that *certain* microbes “disturb and reinforce established notions of purity and ontologically hygienic portraits of the human and its handmaid.”³⁶ In their work, “Interspecies,” Julie Livingston and Jasbir Puar deconstruct the understanding of humans as homogenous when they write that,

‘Interspecies’ explores the porous nature of the human/nonhuman divide as a way to question fundamental aspects of biologically mediated human self-perception and to consider what kinds of worlds they create – in dystopic, utopic and quotidian terms. For example, Cohen’s essay uses the recent swine flu pandemic...to contemplate what he terms the ‘paradoxical politics of viral containment’ – the human desire to contain

³⁵ Weinstein, Jami. “Theorizing Queer Inhumanisms: Posthumously Queer.” *GLQ*, vol. 21, no. 2-3, 2015, p. 237.

³⁶ I italicize “certain” in this sentence in order to qualify Weinstein’s claim and expand on it.

movement of viruses we deem threatening, even as humans physically contain viruses within our cells.³⁷

In other words, there are some microbes that are acceptable and others that are not. Those that disrupt everyday “functioning” such as those that cause the swine flu virus are “disruptive” and therefore must be removed. However, viruses that do not interfere with “normal” functioning are ignored and integrated in to the “human” – the metaphoric hegemonic culture. Looking back at Jasbir Puar’s work, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, the acceptance of certain microbes over others mirrors the acceptance of certain queer people over others. Puar argues that seeing queerness as inherently transgressive initiates forms of discipline and control in which certain queer subjects are “folded into life” and others are marked for death.³⁸

Essentially some microbes are accepted because they assimilate to hegemonic culture and therefore no longer disrupt the social fabric, and as Puar later suggests, their existence is advantageous to hegemonic culture because these “microbes” can become symbols of hegemonic culture’s diversity and multiculturalism. Consequently, the association with queer populations – especially racialized queer populations – with germs and disease continues to be relevant. In the next section I will further examine this association between queer, racialized Others and disease.

3. The Racial Other

Within Weinstein’s quote it is also important to note that infection is not only limited to the queer Other. Historically, the Othering of queer and raced individuals has been intricately linked. In fact, much of the same discourse is deployed when speaking of the racial Other. This type of discourse is frequently seen with historical claims of the breakdown of marriage leading

³⁷Livingston, Julie, and Jasbir K. Puar. “Interspecies.” *Social Text*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2011, p. 10.

³⁸ Puar, Jasbir K. “Introduction: Homonationalism and Biopolitics.” *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2017, p. 24.

to the breakdown of society itself, which are inherently rooted in white supremacist rhetoric. In their work *The Heart of Whiteness*, Julian B. Carter describes this connection as the following:

Well-to-do white men were supposed to guard, protect, and foster the triumphs of white civilization, including marital love. They had a racial responsibility not to indulge themselves in the abrupt, self-serving sex allegedly characteristic of “primitives.” When the white middle classes divorced, the foundations of the civilized world trembled: those who would sustain and perpetuate civilization first had to discipline themselves to sustain their marriages.³⁹

In other words, in the eyes of the state, the white, heterosexual couple represents the ideal candidate for the reproduction of society and therefore must be protected at all costs. If that candidate fails – i.e. the couple gets divorced and therefore cannot reproduce, or they fail to get married in the first place – then the task of reproducing is left to the less desirable candidates. Given Carter’s word choice with “primitives,” a highly racialized term, it is clear that the breakdown of white, heterosexual marriage inevitably means that the task of reproduction is left up to the racial Other. In the eyes of the state this possibility means the infection of the pure and homogenous nation. Consequently, the Other is yet again likened to a destructive infection. The threat of the racial and queer Other, however, extends far beyond the institution of marriage.

To begin, evolutionary theory had a substantial influence on the association people of color with disease or infection. As Somerville notes, “Evolutionary theory also tended to reinforce the notion of racial hierarchies through the method of ranking and ordering bodies according to stages of evolutionary ‘progress.’”⁴⁰ In this hierarchy whites were always the most

³⁹ Carter, Julian B. “The Marriage Crisis” *The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality and Race in America, 1880-1940*. London, Duke University Press, 2007, p. 94.

⁴⁰Somerville, Siobhan. “Scientific Racism and the Invention of the Homosexual Body.” *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*. London, Duke University Press, 2000, p. 24.

“advanced,” leaving people of color at the bottom. As a result, people of color were seen (and continue to be seen) as less than human and more animal-like. They were even further dehumanized during intrusive medical examinations in which the genitalia of African American women was highly scrutinized. Scientists within the field of “comparative anatomy” described these women’s genitalia as “peculiar” and even went as far as to compare them to the “ordinary varieties of the human species” – i.e. white people.⁴¹ In this particular study it is significant that that the scientists chose African American *women* to study, since historically Black women have been characterized as sexually promiscuous.⁴² Given that biological essentialism, or the belief that “the surface and interior of the body rather than its social characteristics...became the primary sites of its meaning,”⁴³ was central to these studies, medical examinations became a way to justify black women’s promiscuity with “biological” evidence in contrast to their white counterparts. For example, the clitoris of Black women, among other body parts such as the hymen, labia, vagina and buttocks, were used to justify their “promiscuity” by characterizing their genitalia as being “excess” and therefore deviant from the white norm.⁴⁴ Somerville writes,

...one gynecologist had also focused on the size and visibility of the clitoris; in his examinations, he perceived a distinction between the ‘free’ clitoris of ‘negresses’ and the ‘imprisonment’ of the clitorises of the ‘Aryan American woman.’ In constructing these oppositions, such characterizations literalized the sexual and racial ideologies of the nineteenth century ‘Cult of True Womanhood,’ which explicitly privileged white

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 27.

⁴² In her book *Women, Race and Class*, Angela Davis (1981) describes the cultural narrative of Black women being seen as sexually promiscuous as being closely linked to the cultural narrative of Black men. “The fictional image of the Black man as rapist has always strengthened its inseparable companion: the image of the Black woman as chronically promiscuous. For once the notion is accepted that Black men harbor irresistible and animal-like sexual urges, the entire race is invested with bestiality.” (Davis 182).

⁴³ Somerville, Siobhan. “Scientific Racism and the Invention of the Homosexual Body.” *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*. London, Duke University Press, 2000, p. 23.

⁴⁴ Ibid, pp. 26-27.

women's sexual 'purity' while implicitly suggesting African American women's sexual accessibility.⁴⁵

The investigation of these African American women by the sexologists clearly pathologized them as a result of their "excess," or "perverse" sexuality. Furthermore, these "peculiarities" in their genitalia led sexologists such as Havelock Ellis to classify them as "sexual inverts" which further pathologized their racial and sexual difference from the white norm.⁴⁶ Consequently, through their pathologization and dehumanization, Black women were Othered by the sexologists who studied them.

Native women are similarly created as the Other by white Europeans. In their book *Fade to Black and White*, Erica Chito Childs historicizes the creation of the racial Other as hypersexualized during the colonization of the Americas in the following passage:

As early as 1504, Amerigo Vespucci wrote "[f]or their women being very lustful, cause the private parts of their husbands to swell up to such a huge size that they appear deformed and disgusting." Vespucci further described how these 'lustful' women 'when they had the opportunity of copulating with Christians, urged by excessive lust, they defiled and prostituted themselves' blaming interracial sexual encounters on the indigenous women.⁴⁷

The implications that these Native women somehow infected their husbands with what seems to be an STD once again is a projection of the racial Other as a disease or infection. When coupled with the hyper sexualization of these women though their description as "lustful," this paints a specifically racialized picture of how the racial Other is infectious and threatening to hegemonic culture. Additionally, through the epithets deployed in the description of the Native women, the

⁴⁵ Ibid p. 27.

⁴⁶ Ibid p. 27.

⁴⁷ Childs, Erica Chito. *Fade to Black and White*. Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009, pp. 16-17.

identity of the Europeans is assumed to be the opposite. Europeans are chaste and level-headed, which ultimately suggests that Europeans embody notions of respectability and modernity while the racial and queer Other jeopardizes those institutions.

However, the infection of the racial Other is not exclusively seen among women. Historically both Black and Native men have been stereotyped as violent “savages.” For Black men in particular, this stereotype stems from the cultural narrative of the Black rapist, which solidifies the connection of the racial Other and the queer Other.⁴⁸ As Somerville explains,

The discourse of sexual pathology, in turn, seems to have informed scientific understandings of race as well. In 1903, for instance, a southern physician drew on the language of sexology to legitimate a particularly racist fear. ‘A perversion from which most races are exempt, prompts the negro’s inclinations towards the white woman, whereas other races incline towards females of their own.’⁴⁹

The quote that Somerville highlights explains the stereotype of the Black, male rapist as a sexual abnormality. Through the depiction of their racial and sexual deviance, the Black man is not only created as the racial and queer Other, but it also sediments the status of the Black man as the diseased Other by drawing on the notion of woman as nation to imply the concept of social destruction. Cynthia Enloe notes that, “Women have served as symbols of the nation violated, the nation suffering, the nation reproducing itself, the nation at its purest.”⁵⁰ Consequently, the threat of the Black rapist to the white woman is in and of itself a threat to the nation. Angela Davis notes how this perceived threat ostensibly connects to white supremacist ideology. She

⁴⁸ Davis, Angela. “Rape, Racism and the Myth of the Black Rapist.” *Women, Race and Class*. New York, Random House Inc., 1981, pp. 172-201.

⁴⁹ Somerville, Siobhan. “Scientific Racism and the Invention of the Homosexual Body.” *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*. London, Duke University Press, 2000, pp. 36-37.

⁵⁰ Enloe, Cynthia. *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. Second Edition. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014, p. 87.

explains how historically the myth of the Black rapist was created as an excuse to lynch Black men after the civil war. She says, "...the rape charge turned out to be the most powerful of several attempts to justify the lurching of Black people."⁵¹ Essentially, this quote reveals that white supremacists of the time used preexisting fears of miscegenation to "...deter the Black masses from rising up in revolt."⁵² In other words, lynching Black men was a way to maintain white supremacy by using fear to keep Black people from rebelling. Depicting the Black man as a threat to white womanhood served as the means for maintaining white supremacy and simultaneously depicted him as a threat to the things associated with white womanhood, i.e. purity, civility, and respectability. Given the subtext of woman as nation, the myth of the Black rapist implies that the Black man is not just a threat to "civilization," but that he is specifically a threat to white supremacist civilization. Therefore, the Black man becomes the pathogen that threatens to infect the "purity" of the nation through his violence.

Similar cultural narratives have also been distributed about Native men that, "warned of the dangers through captivity narratives where white men were killed and white women raped... 'the big, dark Indian' was pictured simultaneously as a thrill and a sexual threat to white women and consequently a competitive sexual threat to white men."⁵³ Once again, the sexual threat that the Native man poses to the white woman represents their larger threat to the nation as a whole. Given Carter's comments spoken about previously where the white man is the protector of civilization, the Native man poses a competition to the white man since the white man must ensure the continued triumph of civilization and thus protect from potential infection to the purity of the nation. Overall, the connection between the queer and racial Other and disease or

⁵¹ Davis, Angela Y. "Rape, Racism and the Myth of the Black Rapist." *Women, Race and Class*. New York, Random House, 1981, p. 185.

⁵² Ibid p. 185.

⁵³ Childs, Erica Chito. *Fade to Black and White*. Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009, p. 17.

infection is rather explicit. Both stand to disrupt hegemonic culture and are therefore seen as a threat. In the following chapters I will explore how the depiction of queer and racial Others as a disease or infection to society is perpetuated in both *Arrival* and *The Embrace of the Serpent*.

II. Alien Ailments

1. Queering the Heptapods

Arrival recounts the landing of 12 alien ships in various parts of the Earth – including Montana in the United States. It follows Louise Banks, a linguist and professor, and Ian Donnelly, a physicist, who are vetted by the U.S. government to aid in understanding the aliens. Colonel Webber, one of the higher-ranking military officials on the base in Montana, leads both Louise and Ian in the mission and works rather hesitantly with Louise to create a common means of communication with the aliens who go on to be called “Heptapods.” While Colonel Webber, along with almost every other military official, see developing a common language with the Heptapods as giving them the means to overthrow the humans, Louise sees it as instrumental to being able to finally answer the highly anticipated question: What is your purpose on Earth? However, the more that Louise learns of the Heptapods’ language, the more that her reality changes. As is explained in the movie, the “logograms” or visual language the Heptapods use is “free of time” due to its non-linear nature. Accordingly, the more Louise learns, the more that her perception of time shifts. She begins to see time “out of joint”, in a non-linear fashion just like the Heptapods.⁵⁴ In the end, when Louise finally asks the Heptapods their purpose she realizes that, contrary to suspicions of invasion by the military officials, they have come to offer their language up as a gift to be used as a universal language. The Heptapods explain that three thousand years in the future they will need humanity’s help, and by giving them the gift of a universal language now, the humans will be able to help them in the future. After passing their language to Louise, the Heptapods leave Louise with the task of teaching it to others.

⁵⁴ Kafer, Alison. “Time for Disability Studies and a Future for Crips.” *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2013 p. 25-46.

In *Arrival*, the Heptapods are positioned as the queer, racialized Other against Louise and the other humans who represent hegemonic culture. It is important to note what specifically about the Heptapods and their environment makes them queer, since this is crucial to understanding how hegemonic culture perceives them as an infection and a threat. The queerness of the Heptapods cannot be simply located within their body since their body and their environment are equally influenced by their cultural pattern. Therefore, both aspects reflect their queer positionality, and in most cases both aspects interact with one another. For the Heptapods, much of their queerness has to do with their unintelligibility by anthropocentric standards. As previously discussed, at the core of hegemonic culture is the need to clearly define and categorize the world through systems of value. The Heptapods' cultural pattern is much more ambiguous, and therefore troubles the cultural pattern of hegemonic culture and causes them to be seen as queer. The "ambiguity" of the Heptapods is most clearly exemplified through the literal opacity of their environment, the physical orientation of their environment, as well as through the disharmonious music and sound effects frequently used in association with them throughout the film. The first portion of this section will address the visual ambiguity of the Heptapods while the second portion will address the auditory ambiguity to demonstrate that the combination of these senses produce the Heptapods as the queer Other.

i. Things Seen

To begin, the notion of opacity is very important to the queer status of the Heptapods since every time that the humans enter their ship, they view the Heptapods from the other side of an opaque barrier. Behind the barrier there is a fog like substance that obscures the Heptapods and prevents the humans from seeing them in their entirety. The notion of opacity is used by

scholar Christina León as a queer analytic. Opacity is a type of queer refusal that, “invokes the visual though a resistance to the kind of gaze that desires mastery, simplicity and knowability, all of which too often aligns with sexist and colonial desires.”⁵⁵ León alludes to the connection between hegemonic methods of categorizing, or Othering, and the politics of knowledge production. To understand this connection, the objective behind the categorization of the Other needs to be unpacked. A huge portion of being able to categorize the unfamiliar (within the colonial context) has to do with being able to govern the unfamiliar. In *On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, ‘Voice’ and Colonial Citizenship*, Audra Simpson also theorizes this connection. She talks specifically about the history of anthropology and its interconnectedness to colonial projects. She uses the notion of “culture” to describe how it came to represent a discourse of difference frequently deployed for the purposes of Empire. She writes, “Culture described the difference that was found in these places and marked the ontological end-game of each exchange: a difference that had been contained into neat, ethnically-defined territorial spaces that now needed to be made sense of, to be ordered, ranked, to be governed, to be possessed.”⁵⁶ Essentially, Simpson argues that as anthropologists discovered differences between their own culture (hegemonic culture) and the Other’s culture, they used these differences to create well defined categories.⁵⁷ Those categories ultimately allow them to justify the

⁵⁵ León, Christina. “Forms of Opacity: Roaches, Blood, and Being Stuck in Xandra Ibarra’s Corpus.” *ASAP/Journal*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2017, p. 378.

⁵⁶ Simpson, Audra. “On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, ‘Voice’ and Colonial Citizenship.” *Junctures: The Journal for Thematic Dialogue*, vol. 9, 2007, p. 67.

⁵⁷ Although in *Arrival* Louise is explicitly named a linguist, I argue that the objective of her work throughout the movie is more related to linguistic anthropology. I would like to provide Alessandro Duranti’s definition of linguistic anthropology as evidence. “. . .linguistic anthropology . . . studies language as a cultural resource and speaking as a cultural practice . . . it relies on ethnography as an essential element of linguistic analyses . . . unlike other current accounts of the subject, it emphasizes that communicated practices are constitutive of the culture of everyday life and that language is a powerful tool rather than a simple mirror of pre-established social realities” (Duranti i). This definition is reflected almost word-for-word in a book that the film reveals Louise has published. Upon her first interaction with Ian, he reads back to her the opening line from said book: “Language is the foundation of civilization. It is the glue that holds people together. It is the first weapon drawn in a conflict.” (Villeneuve). Furthermore, throughout the entire movie Louise is adamant about the centrality of developing a common language

hierarchical position that places hegemonic culture at the top under the label of “civilized” and all other cultures below it. Categories are essential to hegemonic culture so that it may maintain its power, and, in order for those categories to be relevant, the Other must be legible to hegemonic culture. Subsequently, due to the need to categorize in order to control “Othered” populations, the right to knowledge becomes extremely important to hegemonic culture. Institutional actors from hegemonic culture then internalize and enforce this ideology in their interactions with the Other. As a direct result of seeing themselves as superior to the Other, actors claim the right to all knowledge as a part of hegemonic culture’s colonial projects that deem some knowledges and peoples as less valuable.⁵⁸ Once again, in order to have access to alternative knowledges, the Other must be legible to hegemonic culture and therefore to its institutional actors. To be legible is to be transparent. To be opaque is to trouble legibility and therefore the “truth” and inherent power of hegemonic culture. In *Arrival*, the mist or fog through which Louise and her colleagues, the institutional actors, see the Heptapods prevents the Heptapods from being fully legible to the humans, and thus to hegemonic culture. The concept of opacity then becomes queer when considered in terms of Halperin’s definition of queer, or “whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant.”⁵⁹ By refusing legibility, the Heptapods are at odds with hegemonic culture’s insistence on legibility. Not only does this opaque mist slightly obscure how clearly you can see the Heptapods, but the barrier behind which the mist is contained also prevents the Heptapod from being seen in their entirety. It isn’t

to being able to communicate with as well as understand the culture of the Heptapods. Ultimately, it becomes clear that she is not “just a linguist,” but that she also has a deep understanding of how language shapes culture and can therefore be qualified as a linguistic anthropologist. It is for this reason that I use Simpson’s framework to understand how hegemonic culture demands legibility, specifically within the field of anthropology. It is also important to note that, given that her work is supported by the state, the ideology of legibility then extends further than just Linguistic Anthropology and becomes a dominant ideology within hegemonic culture.

⁵⁸Hobson, John M. *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 7.

⁵⁹ Halperin, David M. *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 62.

until the end of the film, when Louise is taken behind the barrier and into the environment of the Heptapods that it becomes clear that we have only been seeing about half of their body this whole time. In every encounter with the Heptapods before this moment, the top of their body has been buried by the fog in such a way that created the illusion that their body did not extend farther. However, it should be noted that, although this scene finally reveals the full length of their body, the fog still prevents the audience from clearly seeing the Heptapods. The borders of their body are still obscured by the fog, and therefore continues to prevent absolute legibility. By never fully revealing a clear image of the Heptapods' bodies, this particular moment maintains the queer status of the Heptapods by refusing categorization. There are parallels to be drawn between the final refusal of legibility in this particular scene and William Simmons' interview with David Getsy on abstraction. As Getsy explains,

Abstraction has been embraced for its oppositional, utopian, and critical possibilities, for it is in abstraction that the dynamic potential of queer stances can be manifested without recourse to the representation of bodies. The human figure in representation is inescapably culturally marked. Abstraction is one tactic for refusing the power of this marking and for resisting the visual taxonomies through which people are recognized and regulated.⁶⁰

It is interesting that Getsy brings up the connection to utopian possibilities in this quote since queer futurity and ultimately a queer utopia is exactly what the Heptapods are striving for. They landed on Earth to pass along their language so that, in the future when their existence is under threat, the humans can help to ensure their survival. In this way, the opacity of the Heptapods, much like abstraction, is a utopian act that signals the "then and there" that Jose Esteban Muñoz

⁶⁰ Getsy, David. "Appearing Differently: Abstraction's Transgender and Queer Capacities." *Pink Labor on Golden Streets: Queer Art Practices*, Edited by Christiane Erharter, Dietmar Schärzler, Ruby Sircar and Hans Scheirl, Berlin, Sternberg Press, 2015, pp. 43-44.

speaks about.⁶¹ By refusing legibility, the Heptapods also refuse concrete categorization in the “here and now.” Rather the ambiguity of their entire body creates a fleeting sense of legibility where legibility is always “on the horizon.”

Furthermore, the body of the Heptapod in this scene disrupts the strict binary of interval/external since some parts of their body blend into the mist while others more clearly contrast with the fog. In this way, the environment of the Heptapods becomes an essential aspect of the Heptapods’ culture that positions them as queer since their opaque environment makes it difficult to differentiate between their environment and their bodies, ultimately troubling notions of legibility. Rather, their environment becomes a fundamental part of their identity formation as Other. Through their refusal to be read as a legible subject by hegemonic culture, the Heptapods are seen as abnormal and therefore become queerly marked due to their ambivalence.

The conflation of environment and body is further exemplified through the technical orientation of the Heptapods’ ship. Upon Louise’s initial entry into the Heptapods’ ship the camera pans up from the rock-like material that the ship is made of to reveal the camera’s upside-down orientation, which after a few moments slowly turns so that it is “realigned” and “straightened out.” This “misorientation” is made clear when Louise and her team are shown walking on what appears to be, from the viewer’s perspective, the ceiling of the ship. This particular orientation has heavy implications of the abnormal, or queer status associated with the Heptapods. By literally positioning their environment as upside down, this implies that the Heptapods too are upside down or not “in line” with hegemonic orientations, i.e. right side up.⁶²

Sara Ahmed speaks about orientations in her book *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations*,

⁶¹ Muñoz, José Esteban. “Queerness as Horizon,” *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York, New York University Press, 2009, pp. 19-32.

⁶² Schippers, Mimi. “Introduction: Polyqueer Sexualities.” *Beyond Monogamy: Polyamory and the Future of Polyqueer Sexualities*. New York, New York University Press, 2016, p. 3.

Objects, Others where, in the following section she speaks specifically about sexual orientation.

She says,

In the case of sexual orientation, it is not simply that we have it. To become straight means that we not only have to turn toward the objects that are given to us by heterosexual culture, but also that we must “turn away” from objects that take us off this line. The queer subject within straight culture hence deviates and is made socially present as deviant.⁶³

Heterosexuality is a key component for hegemonic culture and is therefore seen as the “correct” or “normal” orientation. To be queer is to turn “turn away” or to be falsely oriented. The orientation of the Heptapods’ environment depicts such a false orientation. Instead of looking at Louise and her team “straight” on as they enter the ship for the first time, they are shown upside-down in order to indicate that the Heptapods are queerly oriented.

Furthermore, the decision on the part of the director to realign the orientation of this scene after initially showing the disorientation does further work to queer the Heptapods and their environment. Ahmed, too, comments on how reorientation signals queerness through her analysis of a quote from Maurice Merleau-Ponty. She writes,

This reorientation, which we can describe as the “becoming vertical” of perspective, means that the “queer effect” is overcome and objects in the world no longer appear as if they are “off center” or “slantwise.” In other words, Merleau-Ponty considers how subjects “straighten” any queer effects and he asks what this tendency to “see straight” suggests about the relationship between bodies and space.⁶⁴

⁶³ Ahmed, Sara. “Introduction: Find Your Way.” *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. London, Duke University Press, 2006, p. 21.

⁶⁴ Ahmed, Sarah. “Sexual Orientation.” *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. London, Duke University Press, 2006, p. 65.

Ahmed's analysis that there is a tendency to "straighten any queer effects" is extremely relevant to this particular scene since, as the scientists enter the domain of the Heptapods, they bring with them the ideology of hegemonic culture which is inherently heterosexual and therefore "straight." In the case of this particular scene, the tendency to "see straight" suggests a cultural imposition by the institutional actors of hegemonic culture (Louise, Ian, and the other scientists) on the Heptapods' environment. By reorienting the queer environment within the Heptapod's ship they are ultimately orienting according to hegemonic standards. We see later on that this has real effects on the bodily function of Louise and Ian. After they leave the ship Ian vomits and Louise hyperventilates – clearly due to extreme stress. As I will explain in much more detail in the upcoming section, the queerness of the Heptapods has the potential to infect those from hegemonic culture that come into contact with the Heptapods. The aftermath of the "misorientation" and "reorientation" in this particular scene indicates a connection between the queerness of the Heptapods and the infection of their queerness. It suggests that an imposition through the "reorientation" of a queer environment is what causes the infection of the institutional actors. This makes even more sense given the context of Ahmed's answer to the question of what the "tendency to 'see straight' suggests about the relationship between bodies and space."⁶⁵ As Ahmed explains, "By implication the queer moment, in which objects appear slantwise and the vertical and horizontal axes appear 'out of line,' must be overcome not because such moments contradict laws that govern objective space, but because they block bodily action: they inhibit the body such that it ceases to extend into phenomenal space."⁶⁶ In other words, the imposition of hegemonic culture's cultural pattern through the reorientation of the queer space is incompatible with the Heptapods' cultural pattern and therefore blocks the "bodily action" of

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶Ibid.

hegemonic culture's institutional actors by making them sick. Ultimately, the "mis-orientation" of the Heptapods serves as just one of the ways in which they are queered.

Additionally, the racialization of the Heptapods through their visual representation as "aliens" is yet another example of how they are queered. Throughout the entire film the Heptapods are depicted with dark skin, a feature that undoubtedly sets them apart from the majority white *human* cast and subsequently Others them even further. Their designation as the racial Other then replicates the age-old dichotomy of the Occident vs. the Orient. Drawing once again on Ahmed's work, she writes about the Orient and orientations. She notes that the construction of the Orient and the Occident becomes racialized by associating the Occident with whiteness and the Orient with non-whiteness.⁶⁷ She writes, "while 'the other side of the world' is associated with 'racial otherness,' racial others become associated with the 'other side of they world.' They come to *embody distance*."⁶⁸ The Heptapods are literally labeled as aliens which, through this naming, signals their distance from "humans." Looking back at Luciano and Chen's construction of the human as "rational, bounded, integral, sovereign, and self-aware. This is the figure to whom rights and citizenship are granted; this is the default figure that grounds and personifies norms and behavior, ability, and health..." and its similarities with hegemonic culture (white, heterosexual, cis-gendered, male, able, etc.) then the significance of the racialization and dehumanization of the Heptapods becomes even more important.⁶⁹ That is to say that the "true humans" who make up the Occident are those who represent hegemonic culture while the Heptapods represent the inhuman racialized other who can never be human since their racial

⁶⁷ Ahmed, Sarah. "The Orient and Other Others." *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. London, Duke University Press, 2006, pp. 109-156.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 121.

⁶⁹ Luciano, Dana, and Mel Chen. "Has the Queer Ever Been Human?" *GLQ*, vol. 21, no. 2-3, 2015, pp. 190.

identity contradicts the very definition of the human.⁷⁰ However, the visual is not the only characteristic that marks the Heptapods as queer, but rather extends to other senses as well.

ii. Things Heard

The use of queer sounds – sounds that are not auditorily legible or that create disharmony – are prevalent throughout the entire film. Queer sounds are most frequently deployed in conjunction with images of either the Heptapods’ ship, the Heptapods themselves, or in the moments preceding one of Louise’s “recollections.” My understanding of “queer sound” stems from the work of Jonah Groeneboer and his installation called “Double Mouth Feedback.”⁷¹ Groeneboer’s website describes the installation as “a multi-channel sound installation,” where “the source material for this project is generated from vocal recordings from participants. The recordings were created in response to a series of prompts asking the participants to manifest their experience of gender through vocal sound.”⁷² Some of his questions are, “Adjust your vocal pitch to create frequencies that shatter the concept of gender appropriate behavior,” “Make a genderless sound,” and “Make the sound of your gender before you were told what it was.” The sounds created as a response to these questions become “queer sound,” or sound that is not intelligible to normative understandings of gender. Many of the sounds produced as a result are not typically produced in “day to day” or “normal” interactions, and thus cause the listener to feel slightly uncomfortable and taken by surprise. In addition to this, his work evades gendered

⁷⁰ It should be noted here that there are characters of color in the film who are human. All of them, aside from Colonel Webber, are extras with no lines. Regardless, given the definition of human and their human form I argue that they are depicted in this way because they have assimilated to hegemonic culture – allowing them to be legible to hegemonic culture and therefore categorized into the taxonomies inherent to hegemonic culture. The Heptapods, on the other hand represent the queer, racialized Other who neither accepts, nor rejects hegemonic culture and consequently is labeled as queer since their very existence contradicts the definition of human as put forth by hegemonic culture.

⁷¹ Groeneboer, Jonah. *Double Mouth Feedback*. 2015, MoMA PS1, New York.

⁷² Groeneboer, Jonah. *Double Mouth Feedback*. 2015, MoMA PS1, New York, <http://jonahgroeneboer.com/current/double-mouth-feedback/>

legibility since his questions aim to trouble notions of gendered sounds. Ultimately the resulting sound is queered due to its non-normative and illegible nature. The sound effects used in relation to the Heptapods represent a similar idea. Most of the time the noises sound like some sort of engineered animal cry, an inverted bugle, or static electricity, but ultimately all are difficult to describe using language.

One constant about these sounds is that they create a sense of disharmony. The first time that an image of the Heptapods' ship is shown is while Louise is being flown in by Helicopter to the Montana base. Upon seeing "The Shell" – the name the humans give the Heptapods' ship – the engineered animal cry plays in the background. The noise creates a disharmonious feeling for the listener since the sounds appear to be composed of minor chords and has a slow tempo.⁷³ In their work "The Affective Character of the Major and Minor Modes in Music," Kate Hevner describes minor modes as, "passive, downward drawing weight...it expresses gloom, despair, sorrow, grief, mystery, longing, obscurity, restlessness, melancholy..."⁷⁴ These same characteristics perfectly describe the feeling evoked from the sound effects used in relation to the Heptapods. One of the descriptors Hevner uses that is especially applicable is "downward drawing weight," since every "mechanized animal call" in this first scene has the feeling of weight behind it that makes the sound sink until it falls flat, creating a feeling of unease due to lack of resolution. I would also like to highlight her inclusion of "mystery" and "obscurity" since, as explained previously, those are central to the Heptapods' depiction as queer.

The animal calls are also mysterious and obscure due to their mechanized nature, which makes them hard to categorize. Therefore, the sounds' feelings of "downward drawing weight,"

⁷³ Shellenberg, E.Glenn, Isabelle Peretz, and Sandrine Vieillard. "Liking for Happy – and Sad-Sounding Music: Effects of Exposure." *Cognition and Emotion*, vol. 22, no. 2, pp. 218-237.

⁷⁴ Hevner, Kate. "The Affective Character of the Major and Minor Modes in Music." *The American Journal of Psychology*, vol. 47, no. 1, 1935, p. 103.

“mystery,” and “obscurity” create a sense of disharmony because they are difficult to categorize. To be harmonious on the other hand is to be in accord in sentiment or action.⁷⁵ Essentially, to be harmonious is to align with hegemonic values – or to be happy. Sara Ahmed, in her work “Killing Joy” describes how the narrative of “happiness” has been deployed as a politics to maintain the status quo – or in other words, hegemony. She says, “Happiness translates its wish into politics, wishful politics, a politics that demands that others live according to a wish.”⁷⁶ Essentially, hegemonic culture dictates what is happy and, as Ahmed later goes on to explain, associates certain things with happiness.⁷⁷ One of the things we associate with happiness are sounds, specifically major modes.⁷⁸ Hevner describes major modes as the following: “...it is dynamic, an upward driving force; it is determining and defining, and more natural and fundamental than the minor; it expresses varying degrees of joy and excitement, it sounds bright, clear, sweet, hopeful, strong and happy.”⁷⁹ Her description of the major as “more natural and fundamental than the minor” clearly demonstrates the connection between what is “happy” and what is “natural,” or, in other words, “normal.” It is then highly significant that the sound effects used in association with the Heptapods are in minor modes. Sounds that consist of minor modes, therefore, push back against hegemonic notions of happiness and by extension, normativity. Therefore, the use of minor tones in association with the first image of the Heptapods’ ship positions the Heptapods as queer by associating the Heptapods with feelings of ambiguity, uncertainty, and ultimately disharmony.

⁷⁵ “Harmonious.” *Merriam Webster*. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/harmonious>. Accessed 11 February 2019.

⁷⁶ Ahmed, Sara. “Killing Joy: Feminism and the History of Happiness.” *Signs: Journal of Woman in Culture and Society*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2010, p. 572.

⁷⁷ Ahmed, Sara. “Introduction: Find Your Way.” *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. London, Duke University Press, 2006, pp. 1-24.

⁷⁸ Shellenberg, E.Glenn, Isabelle Peretz, and Sandrine Vieillard. “Liking for Happy – and Sad-Sounding Music: Effects of Exposure.” *Cognition and Emotion*, vol. 22, no. 2, pp. 218-237.

⁷⁹ Hevner, Kate. “The Affective Character of the Major and Minor Modes in Music.” *The American Journal of Psychology*, vol. 47, no. 1, 1935, p. 103.

However, these disharmonious sounds don't stop after this scene. The use of minor modes occurs again during Louise's first encounter with the Heptapods. This time, instead of the mechanized animal cries, the sound effect used sounds more like an inverted bugle. The bugle, like the mechanized animal cries once again instils within the listener a sense of disharmony due to its use of minor modes. Considering that this scene is the first time that both the audience and Louise see the body of the Heptapods, the sound effects, in conjunction with the fog surrounding the Heptapods, once again illustrates their queer status by creating ambiguity.

Another significant sound effect used in relation to the Heptapods is a noise resembling a cross between static electricity and papers shuffling. It becomes clear as the film progresses that the more fluent Louise becomes in the Heptapods' language, the more that she begins to experience time "out of order" or in a non-linear way. This is due to the fact that the logograms – the visual language used by the Heptapods – are free of time, and consequently those who know their language experience time in a non-linear way as well. The "static electricity" sound effect is most frequently used directly before Louise "recalls" something about her life. One of the more obvious scenes where this sound effect is used occurs about half way through the movie while Louise is sitting at her desk decoding a logogram. The static sound occurs and induces Louise's recollection of a conversation with her daughter, Hannah. The static noise, unlike the bugle and the animal cry does not have a tone and cannot be classified as either major or minor mode, however it is just as difficult to categorize as the other sounds. In this way, it too is queer due to its lack of legibility. However, unlike the other noises, these static noises are also queered as a result of their association with non-chronological temporality. In her book *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, Elizabeth Freeman talks about how "chrononormativity," or how normative, chronological timelines are used by hegemonic culture to neatly organize and

ultimately control individuals.⁸⁰ She describes chrononormativity as “the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity.”⁸¹ Given that this particular noise initiates Louise’s experience of time in a non-normative way, the noise ultimately inhibits Louise’ productivity. For Freeman, chrononormativity is an essential process to the functioning of hegemonic culture’s capitalist economy. Putting Freeman’s “chrononormativity” in conversation with Sara Ahmed’s concept of orientations, chrononormativity requires bodies to be oriented towards maximum productivity, and in order to do so they must be legible so they can be so organized. The static-like noise that sounds directly before Louise’s “recollections” therefore disturbs not only notions of legibility, but also in doing so disturbs the productivity of hegemonic culture since legibility is essential to the hierarchical organization intrinsic to a capitalist economy.

Furthermore, it is extremely meaningful that these queer sounds occur before Louise has these recollections since, as I will explain in greater depth later on, her “recollections” are evidence of being infected by the Heptapods’ queerness through her acquisition of their language. In other words, these queer sounds illustrate that Louise has also been queered as a result of “mixing” with the Heptapods. Moreover, a huge part of what makes these noises queer is their non-human sound. Therefore, the fact that these noises do not sound human raises the same question that Luciano and Chen bring up, “Has the queer ever been human?” I come to the same conclusion as them and say, “yes/no” where “we might see the ‘yes/no’ humanity of the queer less as an ambivalence about the human as status than as a queer *transversal* of the category.”⁸² In other words, the queer is not stable and categorizable and therefore does not meet

⁸⁰ Freeman, Elizabeth. “Introduction: Queer and Not Now.” *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2010, pp. 1-19.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* p. 3.

⁸² Luciano, Dana, and Mel Chen. “Has the Queer Ever Been Human?” *GLQ*, vol. 21, no. 2-3, 2015, p. 190.

the requirements of the human; it is unintelligible. The unintelligible and erratic quality of these noises inherently counters Luciano and Chens understanding of the human as “rational, bounded, integral, sovereign, and self-aware” and therefore suggests that their unintelligibility not only queers them but also dehumanizes them.⁸³

Ultimately the combination of visual and auditory ambiguity clearly illustrates the queer and Other status of the Heptapods for the viewer. Both the visual and auditory aspects of the Heptapods resist legibility and therefore trouble hegemonic culture’s categorical and hierarchical nature, which ultimately threatens hegemonic culture thereby queering the Heptapods. Furthermore, by resisting legibility, the Heptapods become a threat to the very foundation of hegemonic culture, which, as I will explain in the next section causes the Heptapods to be seen as an infection or disease.

⁸³ Ibid p. 190.

2. The Infection of the Heptapods

Queerness has long been conflated with pathology, especially in the field of sexology during the late nineteenth century. Sexologists not only classified sexual deviance as pathology, but also racial deviance and often conflated the two.⁸⁴



Fig. 1. The Heptapods in their ship, behind the barrier filled with fog. *Arrival*. Directed by Denis Villeneuve, performances by Amy Adams, Jeremy Renner and Forest Whitaker, Lava Bear Films, 2016.

In *Arrival* we see this same conflation of sexual and racial deviance with pathology in the Heptapods. The Heptapods, as explained in the previous section, are queerly marked due to the ambiguity and illegibility of the visual and auditory elements associated with them and their environment. Moreover, the Heptapods are racially marked by being depicted with black skin (see fig. 1). As a result of their queer and racial markings, the hegemonic culture in *Arrival* along with its institutional actors posit the Heptapods as a pathology. The Heptapods are seen as being in direct opposition to hegemonic culture and are therefore perceived not only as a threat to the human's cultural pattern, but, by extension, seen as a pest, vermin, or illness to be eliminated. This is carried out in the following ways: (1) by portraying the Heptapods as a threat to hegemonic culture through an emphasis on the protection of civilians, and (2) by perceiving

⁸⁴ Somerville, Siobhan. "Scientific Racism and the Invention of the Homosexual Body." *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*. London, Duke University Press, 2000, pp. 15-38.

those who come into contact with the Heptapods as going crazy or being sick. In conjunction with one another, these two types of scenes follow the trope of linking queerness, non-whiteness, and pathology by locating all three in the Heptapods. An intersectional analysis of gender, race, sexuality and disease when talking about the Heptapods is immensely important to representation in *Arrival*, since the Heptapods are marked in a racial and gendered way, regardless of whether they possess the human phenotypic traits or not. Although they are literally not human and therefore cannot be identified by anthropocentric definitions of gender or race, the Heptapods are still given the names Abbot and Costello by the humans. They are also shown as having black skin, thus racializing them. Considering the longstanding stereotypes of the black, male rapist, the racial and gendered markings of the Heptapods posits them as the ultimate threat by connecting to historic stereotypes of the male, racial and queer Other as a menace to the order of the nation.⁸⁵ Given this stereotype, I will analyze how the gendered, racialized and queered aspects of the Heptapods are used to depict them as an infection to others and how those that come into contact with the Heptapods become sick as a result of this contact. Finally, I will reflect on what the pathologization of the Heptapods means for queer futurity, especially in relation to those who become ill as a result of contact.

i. The Infecting

The idea that the Heptapods are a threat is carried out by including the public's chaotic reactions to news and media coverage of the Heptapods, as well as through the insistence by officials that those who come into contact with the Heptapods must be decontaminated. There are several moments throughout the film in which chaos ensues upon the discovery of new

⁸⁵Davis, Angela Y. "Rape, Racism and the Myth of the Black Rapist." *Women, Race and Class*. New York, Random House, 1981, pp. 172 – 201.

information about the Heptapods. The first moment in which chaos ensues occurs within the first five minutes of the film. Louise is in her classroom at the university where she is a professor and, per the request of one of her students, she turns the TV to a news channel. The news of the Heptapods' arrival is being discussed, followed by the new information that not just one "object" has landed but that there are multiple around the world. The school's alarm goes off, class is dismissed and the camera cuts to a shot of a security guard standing watch on the school's roof. Although the image of the security guard lasts approximately 20 seconds, its location at this specific moment in the film is immensely important. Greg Smith notes how, "Nothing in a final film is there unless scores of professionals have carefully examined it. You can trust that if something is in a film, it is there for a reason."⁸⁶ I argue that shot is meant to depict the Heptapods as a pathogen through the inclusion of the security guard at the end. His presence in this moment establishes immediately that humans need to be protected from the Heptapods, and therefore that the Heptapods are a threat. When this particular scene is engaged with through the lens of Critical Security Studies, or "the study of the threat, use and control of military force,"⁸⁷ it is clear that the use of militia indicates that the Heptapods are a threat to the state. In the Introduction to *Critical Security Studies: An Introduction*, Columba Peoples draws on the following quote by Walter Lippmann. In this quote Lippmann addresses what it means for a nation to be secure. He writes, "A nation is secure to the extent to which it is not in danger of having to sacrifice core values, if it wishes to avoid war and is able, if challenged, to maintain them by victory in such a war."⁸⁸ Lippmann's notion of "core values" is reminiscent of Alfred Shultz's idea of "cultural pattern." The core values of a nation make up the cultural pattern and

⁸⁶ Smith, Greg M. "It's Just a Movie': A Teaching Essay for Introductory Media Classes." *Cinema Journal*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2001, p. 129.

⁸⁷ Peoples, Columba, and Nick Vaughan-Williams. "Introduction: Mapping Critical Security Studies and Traveling without Maps." *Critical Security Studies: An Introduction*, New York, Routledge, 2015, p. 4.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p. 4.

therefore represent hegemonic culture. Consequently, the nation is threatened when hegemonic culture is threatened, and it is “secure” only when the nation becomes a homogenous unit once again. Immigrants, like the Heptapods, threaten the nation’s security. As John Bargh argues, there is a clear connection between immigrants and pathogens. Bargh writes, “‘Immigrants are like viruses’ is a powerful metaphor, because in comparing immigrants entering a country to germs entering a human body, it speaks directly to our powerful innate motivation to avoid contamination and disease.”⁸⁹ Part of the perceived “contamination” that immigrants create is through their destruction of the nation’s homogeneity. Historically, this very line of thinking was seen during the Cold War era. Markel and Stern outline this concept with their analysis of a statement made by Senator McCarran in 1952 who said, “[A] sound immigration and naturalization system is essential to the preservation of our way of life, because that system is the conduit through which a stream of humanity flow into the fabric of society.”⁹⁰ McCarran’s statement hinges on the idea that whoever is admitted to the county should assimilate to “our way of life.” That very way of life is what makes up the “fabric of society” so, it follows that those who do not conform to hegemonic culture pose the risk of contaminating hegemonic culture with their culture. The inclusion of the security guard in this scene clearly highlights this fear by seeking to protect against the incoming infection. Immigrant Others, like the Heptapods, are characterized as pathogens because they threaten the homogeneity of the nation. Consequently, films like *Arrival* that feature extreme security measures against the immigrant Other reify notions of the Other as an infection to society.

⁸⁹ Bargh, John. “At Yale, We Conducted an Experiment to Turn Conservatives into Liberals. The Results Say a Lot about Our Political Divisions.” *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 22 Nov. 2017, www.washingtonpost.com/news/inspired-life/wp/2017/11/22/at-yale-we-conducted-an-experiment-to-turn-conservatives-into-liberals-the-results-say-a-lot-about-our-political-divisions/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.3091eeb4af98.

⁹⁰ Markel, Howard, and Alexandra M. Stern. “The Foreignness of Germs: The Persistent Association of Immigrants and Disease in American Society.” *The Milbank Quarterly*, vol. 80, no. 4, 2002, p. 773.

Georg Löffmann identifies this cinematic trend as “national security cinema” which is “the perception of threat as an existential danger to survival, security, and order against which American power is mobilized.”⁹¹ It is clear that the survival and security of hegemonic culture rests in its homogeneity. The queerness of the Heptapods disrupts the nation’s imagined homogeneous order. Consequently, through the attention placed on protecting the humans from the Heptapods by the nation, the Heptapods are constructed as the pathology themselves. It cannot be denied either that the image of the immigrant is typically racialized. Sara Ahmed best articulates this in the chapter titled “The Orient and Other Others” from her book *Queer Phenomenology* when she says,

The discourse of “stranger danger” reminds us that “danger” is often posited as originating from what is outside the community, or as coming from outsiders, those people who are not “at home” and who themselves have come from “somewhere else” (the “where” of this “elsewhere” always makes the difference.)⁹²

More often than not, those who are questioned about their origin by hegemonic culture are not white. This is, of course due to the fact that hegemonic culture represents the white, heterosexual, cis-gender, able man. We can look at a more recent example of this with President Donald Trump telling four women of color in congress to “go back where they came from,” when all but one was born in America, yet all four had American citizenship.⁹³ Furthermore, to tell someone to “go back to where they come from” is to insinuate that they are not a part of the

⁹¹ Löffmann, Georg. “Hollywood, the Pentagon, and the Cinematic Production of National Security.” *Critical Studies on Security*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2013, p. 282.

⁹² Ahmed, Sarah. “The Orient and Other Others.” *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. London, Duke University Press, 2006, p. 142.

⁹³ Rogers, Katie and Nicholas Fandos. “Trump Tells Congresswomen to ‘Go Back’ to the Countries They Came From.” *The New York Times*, 14 July 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/14/us/politics/trump-twitter-squad-congress.html?utm_source=CNN+Media%253A+Reliable+Sources&utm_campaign=ebc2e1f8d8-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_09_11_04_47_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_e95cdc16a9-ebc2e1f8d8-84620965 Accessed 20 July 2009.

community in the first place. Ahmed theorizes community as the following: “it is the idea of community as ‘being in common’ that generates ‘shared attributes,’ which are then *retrospectively* taken up as evidence of community.”⁹⁴ In the case of Trump, the shared attributes that designate one as being “in” the community is whiteness, and arguably maleness as well. This same ideology is reflected in the rejection of the Heptapods who, not only have black skin, but also don’t “look human.” The metaphor “immigrants are like viruses,” as commented on by John Baugh, is fully realized in *Arrival* for the exact reason that they do not fit into hegemonic culture’s understanding of “community.” Therefore, the presence of the security guard in the opening scene is yet another reflection of the importance of protecting members within the “community” from those outside the “community.”

A second scene of chaos occurs after the first picture of the Heptapods is released to the public by news networks. The film shows news channels around the world broadcasting scenes of violence at several different locations. One news channel broadcasts a video of an automobile explosion followed by a shot of an armed soldier open firing into a crowd. The news montage ends with a masked individual vandalizing public property. These images, like that of the security guard at the beginning of the movie, firstly reify the Heptapods as a threat but also, given the contents of the picture of the Heptapods, create them as a raced subject. As previously explained, the Heptapods are presented as aliens with black skin, something not insignificant to their queer and racialized status, as well as their status as a disease. Historically people of color have been used as examples of psychological and medical abnormality.⁹⁵ The psychological and medical “norm” was therefore centered around whiteness. There is no coincidence then between

⁹⁴Ahmed, Sarah. “The Orient and Other Others.” *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. London, Duke University Press, 2006, p. 122.

⁹⁵ Ajo, Tanja, Liat Ben-Moshe and Leon J. Hilton. “Mad Futures: Affect/Theory/Violence.” *American Quarterly*, vol. 69, no. 2, 2017, pp. 291-302.

the depiction of the Heptapods as a virus in relation to hegemonic culture and the color of the Heptapods' skin. It is especially important to look at the color of the Heptapods alongside the violent reactions to their existence and how this mirrors the lives of people of color in real life.

A key component to the violent reactions includes the use of police and other authority figures as protection. In *Mad Futures* Tanja Ajo, Liat Ben-Moshe and Leon J. Hilton discuss the historical creation of the police force as the following: "Police forces were established to protect owners at a time when black people were considered unruly property, when indigenous people and other people of color, women, and people with disabilities were constructed as "irrational" others against which liberal personhood was constructed."⁹⁶ The presence of military officials in this particular film sequence is an extension of the historical role of the police and other comparable authority figures. It is interesting too that Ajo, Ben-Moshe and Hilton highlight how these differences were then used by institutions to construct the other as "irrational" and therefore unhuman. Dana Luciano and Mel Chen, too, comment on what it is to be human and define it as, "rational, bounded, integral, sovereign, and self-aware. This is the figure to whom rights and citizenship are granted; this is the default figure that grounds and personifies norms and behavior, ability, and health."⁹⁷ The very first word that they use to define the human is rationality, so when historically the black subject has been defined by policing institutions as irrational, this automatically denies their humanity and therefore validates their treatment as an infection. For this very reason, the discovery of the Heptapods' blackness is yet another reason why the response of the humans includes increased military action. In addition, part of being viewed as a pathology has a direct correlation to the long history of queerness being categorized

⁹⁶ Ajo, Tanja, Liat Ben-Moshe and Leon J. Hilton. "Mad Futures: Affect/Theory/Violence." *American Quarterly*, vol. 69, no. 2, 2017, p. 291.

⁹⁷ Luciano, Dana, and Mel Chen. "Has the Queer Ever Been Human?" *GLQ*, vol. 21, no. 2-3, 2015, p. 190.

as a mental illness within the field of psychology.⁹⁸ Once the first image of the Heptapods is released, they are instantly marked as a raced, and queered subject. Through that racial and queer marking they become un-human and therefore a sickness or virus that threatens to contaminate hegemonic culture.

An even clearer connection between the Heptapods and disease is established when Louise initially arrives on the military base in Montana. Before meeting with either her team or the Heptapods, Louise and Ian are taken immediately to see the military medic, Dr. Kettler, to receive medical treatment. Dr. Kettler says, “I’m going to collect some blood from you and give you an immunization dose that covers a battery of bacterial threats.”⁹⁹ (Villeneuve). Dr. Kettler’s word choice with “bacterial threats” reveals a lot about the relationship between the Heptapods and the humans. First, that the Heptapods could infect the humans and therefore they themselves are the infection, and second that the humans must be protected from that infection. Going back to John Bargh’s concept of the immigrant as a virus, the arrival of the Heptapods to Earth presents a similar conflation with the immigrant Other as a virus. Howard Markel and Alexandra Stern give historical evidence for this connection when they bring up the passage of the Immigration Act of 1891. They explain:

This and subsequent laws included detailed regulations governing eligibility for entry. In addition to bans on those with criminal records, polygamists, contract laborers, and prostitutes, this legislation excluded those persons suffering from a ‘loathsome or contagious disease’ and required steamship companies to inspect and disinfect all

⁹⁸ Kunzel, Regina. “Queer History, Mad History, and the Politics of Health.” *American Quarterly*, vol. 69, no. 2, 2017, p. 315.

⁹⁹ *Arrival*. Directed by Denis Villeneuve, performances by Amy Adams, Jeremy Renner and Forest Whitaker, Lava Bear Films, 2016, 00:20:45-00:54.

immigrants before leaving foreign docks as well as bear the costs of returning migrants who were found to be afflicted.¹⁰⁰

By requiring the health of immigrants to be highly scrutinized, these actions simultaneously pathologized immigrants by suggesting that there is something inherent about them that needs decontaminating. Consequently, what started out as a measure to prevent new illness from entering the state was quickly transformed into a dominant narrative. Forcing Ian and Louise to be immunized against the Heptapods, however, takes this idea a whole step further. Going back to the state of the Heptapods as a racially marked group, the historical connections between the sickness of immigrants and racial prejudice is unavoidable. After the passing of the Immigration Act of 1891, the terms of eligibility were often twisted to allow for racial and ethnic discrimination. “Asians were portrayed as feeble and infested with hookworm, Mexicans as lousy and eastern European Jews as vulnerable to trachoma, tuberculosis, and... ‘poor physique.’”¹⁰¹ Ultimately, the qualifications for admittance were rearranged so that they aligned with pre-existing prejudices, which not only further complicated the connections between disease and the immigrant, but also disease and people of color in general. Therefore, the decision to immunize against the Heptapods is not only represents an implicit prejudice against immigrants, but also represents quasi-eugenics based need to maintain the purity of the home group. Somerville identifies eugenics as being, “fueled by anxieties expressed through the popularized notion of (white) ‘race suicide.’”¹⁰² Considering that the humans’ initial reaction to the arrival of the Heptapods is also framed around the anxiety of their own elimination, their insistence on

¹⁰⁰ Markel, Howard, and Alexandra M. Stern. “The Foreignness of Germs: The Persistent Association of Immigrants and Disease in American Society.” *The Milbank Quarterly*, vol. 80, no. 4, 2002, p. 762.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p. 766.

¹⁰² Somerville, Siobhan. “Scientific Racism and the Invention of the Homosexual Body.” *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*. London, Duke University Press, 2000, p. 30.

immunization as a preventative measure solidifies the Heptapods' position as a disease threatening society.

Additionally, the choice to immunize Louise and Ian reflects Michel Foucault's idea of the human monster that should be quarantined as described in his book "The Abnormals." Foucault explains that, "what makes a human monster a monster is not just its exceptionality relative to the species form; it is the disturbance it brings to juridical regularities."¹⁰³ In other words, it's not just the physical or biological irregularities that mark the human monster as a monster, it is also the way that it disturbs hegemonic culture. Although the Heptapods are not human, this definition still applies to them since they too possess biological differences that set them apart from humans and, as previously discussed, their queer and racialized status upsets hegemonic culture.

Later on, Foucault talks about how the human monster has been pathologized through medical intervention. He comments on how, historically, by asking, "'is this individual dangerous?'" the question "contradicts a penal law based solely on the condemnation of acts, and postulates a natural connection between illness and infraction."¹⁰⁴ In this quote Foucault succinctly sums up the connection between "infraction and illness." In other words, asking if a sick individual is dangerous creates the connection between abnormality and illness. In *Arrival*, not only do military officials literally ask whether the Heptapods are dangerous on numerous occasions, but their insistence on immunizing both Louise and Ian implies that the Heptapods are dangerous. The Heptapods are clearly seen as posing a biological threat to the Humans, so by immunizing Louise and Ian both before and after contact with Heptapods, this further marks the Heptapods as the human monster and by extension as an infection to Hegemonic culture.

¹⁰³ Foucault, Michel. "The Abnormals." *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. Edited by Paul Rabinow, Translated by Robert Hurley and Others, New York, The New Press, 1997, p. 52.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 52.

ii. The Infected

The threat of the Heptapods extends further than just their potential to infect. At numerous points throughout the film those who come into contact with the Heptapods experience either physical or mental illness that gives the humans concrete evidence of the Heptapods' infection. The first instance of the Heptapods' infectious ability occurs as soon as Louise arrives at the Montana base and is taken to see Dr. Kettler. She asks, "Uh, who was being carted off in the medvac?" Dr. Kettler responds and says, "Not everyone is able to process experiences like this."¹⁰⁵ It becomes clear later on when Ian and Louise are introduced to their teams by Colonel Weber that this other person was likely the previous expert working on the mission. Colonel Webber says, "This is Dr. Louise Banks. She'll be heading your team...Dr. Banks is taking over the mission from Dr. Walker."¹⁰⁶ Putting these scenes in the context of eugenics and "white race suicide."¹⁰⁷ the sickness of the previous expert demonstrates the consequences of racial mixture. Given the implied whiteness of hegemonic culture along with the raced status of the Heptapods, the fact that the humans must physically venture deep into the Heptapod's ship implies the mixing of the two cultures as well as the mixing of races, i.e. hybridity. Returning to Alfred Schuetz's conceptualization of "the stranger," there is this notion that the stranger must always assimilate to the cultural pattern of the home group.¹⁰⁸ In the case of the Heptapods, the humans become the "stranger" entering into the cultural domain of the Heptapods. The cultural pattern of the humans not only centers around individualism, but also around the notion of the human as a

¹⁰⁵ *Arrival*. Directed by Denis Villeneuve, performances by Amy Adams, Jeremey Renner and Forest Whitaker, Lava Bear Films, 2016, 00:20:41-00:20:48.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 00:22:46-00:22:55.

¹⁰⁷ Somerville, Siobhan. "Scientific Racism and the Invention of the Homosexual Body." *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*. London, Duke University Press, 2000, p. 30.

¹⁰⁸ Schuetz, Alfred. "The Stranger: An Essay in Social Psychology." *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 49, no. 6, 1944, p. 507.

singular, cohesive being.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, assimilation to the cultural pattern of the Heptapods fundamentally contradicts the human's cultural pattern since assimilating to the Heptapods' culture would mean adopting the Heptapods' cultural practices and therefore being part Heptapod, part Human. In other words, a species hybrid. Species hybridity is problematic to hegemonic culture because the human/animal binary is essential for humans to maintain absolute power and control over Others as well as their environment.¹¹⁰ However, given my previously established argument that the Heptapods represent the inhuman racialized Other who can never be human fully human precisely for their racialization, I argue that this is also a *racial* hybridity.¹¹¹ In other words, precisely because the Heptapods' non-human status is the result of their racialization, the hybridity between the humans and them is both a racial and species hybridity. Following this, when the previous expert "is not able to process" the encounter with the Heptapods, the implication that they have become either physically or mentally ill as a result demonstrates the consequences of this species and racial hybridity.

However, just because someone from hegemonic culture is not initially infected, the threat of infection is still constant. This concept is most clearly exemplified in Louise once she becomes more fluent in the Heptapods' written language – "logograms." Throughout the film, the more capable Louise is of reading the logograms, the more she begins to experience flashes of her other lived experiences, or what I refer to as "recollections." What is revealed at the end of the film is that, as a result of her fluency, she develops a different understanding of time. The events that she keeps recalling turn out to be ones that - within the context of the linear time of hegemonic culture – have not yet occurred. Thus, as she acquires the ability to communicate via

¹⁰⁹ Livingston, Julie, and Jasbir K. Puar. "Interspecies." *Social Text*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2011, p. 3.

¹¹⁰ Varsava, Nina. "The Problems of Anthropomorphous Animals: Toward a Posthumanist Ethics." *Society & Animals*, vol. 22, no. 5, 2014, pp. 520-536.

¹¹¹ See *Queering the Heptapods* pp. 35-36.

logogram, she rewires her concept of temporality. As a result, Louise is perceived by others as being ill. Her “sickness” is most clearly displayed about half way through the movie. Louise is sitting at her desk working on translating more logograms when she hears several electronic, static-like queer sounds that pull her focus and trigger a memory of future events. The entire montage lasts about two minutes and begins with the mixing of the present and the future. After the static noise she hears Hannah’s voice, her yet to be born child, asking, “What’s this word,” at which point she gets up, sits down on her bed and places her hands on her head as though she isn’t feeling well. The scene then flashes between Louise answering Hannah’s question and Louise on the bed confusedly recalling the conversation, Louise is brought back to “reality” when Ian walks over and asks if she is okay. Colonel Webber quickly steps in and says, “When was your last check up with Dr. Kettler?” Louise exits the tent and continues to recall memories, which are finally interrupted when Ian asks yet again if she is okay. He says,

“You know, I was doing some reading, um, about this idea that if you immerse yourself into a foreign language, that you can actually rewire your brain.”

“The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. The theory that uh...” Louise responds, “the language you speak determines how you think and...”

“Yeah. It affects how you see everything,” Ian explains, “I’m curious, are you dreaming in their language?”

Louise pauses for a moment and then says, “I’ve had a few dreams, but I don’t think that that makes me unfit to do this job.”¹¹²

Throughout the whole scene we see Louise looking at two different spots in the room. The one to her left is assumed to be Ian and the other, after this line, is revealed to be a Heptapod that – it is

¹¹² *Arrival*. Directed by Denis Villeneuve, performances by Amy Adams, Jeremy Renner and Forest Whitaker, Lava Bear Films, 2016, 00:58:40-01:02:43.

implied – she is imagining. The entire montage as a whole effectively displays the consequence of Louise immersing herself into the language (and therefore the culture) of the Heptapods as something making her to go insane. Somerville identifies that, “any intermixture was a threat to ‘white’ purity,” and that, “Charles Davenport, who dominated the early eugenic movement in the United States, claimed that ‘miscegenation commonly spells disharmony – disharmony of physical, mental and temperamental qualities.’”¹¹³ This scene therefore suggests that not only does hybridity, in the words of Charles Davenport, cause physical, mental, and temperamental disharmony, but it also causes *temporal* disharmony. Temporal *harmony* on the other hand has a lot to do with the notion of *chrononormativity*, or “the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity.”¹¹⁴ Consequently, chononormative time becomes exceedingly linear given that it is rooted in sequential events that all serve the needs of the state. Freeman notes some of these as life – getting a birth certificate – marriage – getting a marriage certificate, and ultimately death – getting a death certificate.¹¹⁵ Chrononormative time therefore orients the individual in a linear way. In contrast to chononormative time, the non-linear time of the Heptapods is effectively marked as a disharmonious and therefore queer due to its difference. As a result, the connection between Louise’s experience of non-normative temporality and her “illness” is no coincidence. Alison Kafer also notices the relationship between illness and temporality when she explains that, “living with illness can push time ‘out of joint.’”¹¹⁶ Given that this particular montage exhibits numerous moments of overlapping noises, dialogue, and scenes from both the present and future, Louise’s “illness” reflects exactly that. Essentially, her

¹¹³ Somerville, Siobhan. “Scientific Racism and the Invention of the Homosexual Body.” *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*. London, Duke University Press, 2000, p. 30-31.

¹¹⁴ Freeman, Elizabeth. “Introduction: Queer and Not Now.” *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2010, pp. 1-19.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Kafer, Alison. “Time for Disability Studies and a Future for Crips.” *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2013, p. 36.

hybridity becomes incompatible with the chrononormative temporality of hegemonic culture, which causes her to appear ill.

However, Louise's hybridity is not limited to her experience of time. In Louise's second to last interaction with the Heptapods, one of the Heptapods, Abbot, bangs on the barrier signaling that they want her to write in Logograms. Previously, Louise had been using a computerized system that allowed her to select words and project them onto a screen as a complete Logogram. Louise walks over to the barrier, places her hands upon it, and explains that she is unsure if she is able to write on the barrier in the same way as the Heptapods. Abbot bangs the barrier yet again and lets out a queer sound – one of the inverted bugles discussed previously.

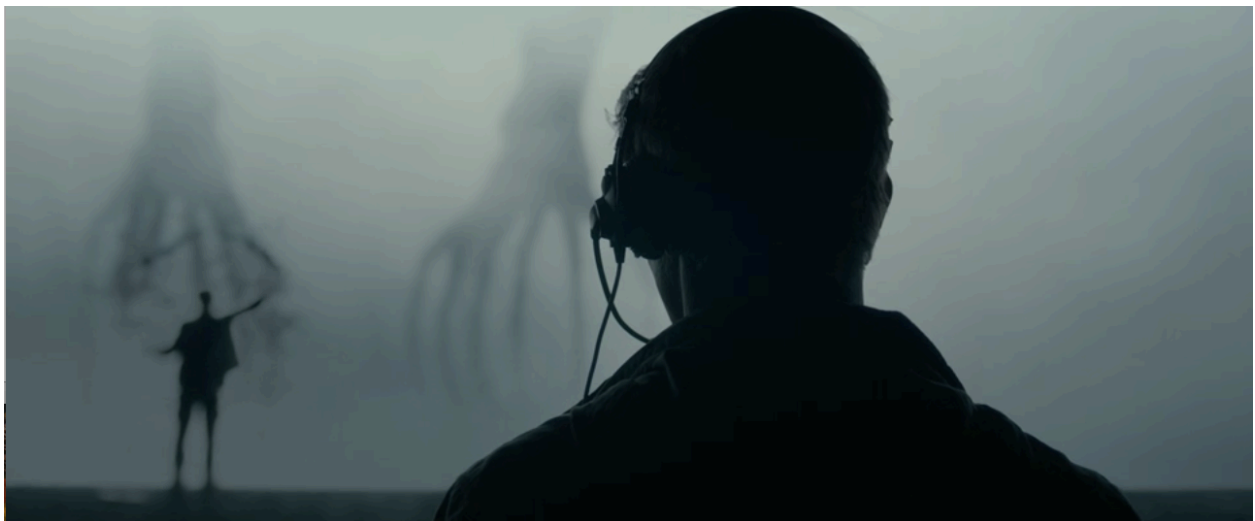


Fig. 2. Louise's Silhouette as she writes on the barrier with Ian in foreground. *Arrival*. Directed by Denis Villeneuve, performances by Amy Adams, Jeremy Renner and Forest Whitaker, Lava Bear Films, 2016.

This noise induces Louise into a recollection and, it seems, allows her to write successfully on the barrier like the Heptapods. The camera angle changes to a shot over Ian's shoulder with Louise's silhouette in the background (See fig. 2). Louise's silhouette is out of focus, causing her to appear black, tall and spindly, much like the Heptapods. In fact, the silhouettes of the Heptapods are shown behind hers and, although the viewer knows she is human, the similarities between her and the Heptapods are striking. The significance of having Abbot induce Louise's

recollection right before she is able to write on the barrier signifies that Louise has successfully become a hybrid between human and Heptapod. This image ultimately demonstrates Louise's species and racial hybridity through her acquisition of their language, their temporality, and finally their figure. Furthermore, the choice to have the Heptapod-like silhouette of Louise follow the discovery that she can write on the barrier like the Heptapods suggests that Louise has been fully infected by the Heptapods. Consequently, these images serve to justify Louise's insanity as a result of her species and racial mixture.

It is also important to look at Louise's "insanity" as a result of her infection from a gendered perspective, since historically women who did not "correctly" perform their femininity were medically classified as hysterical.¹¹⁷ As a result, diagnoses of hysteria were formed around notions of feminine respectability. A huge portion of respectability has to do with one's sexuality, and respectable white women had sex with respectable white men. Sexual access to white women was meticulously guarded as a way to strengthen hegemonic authority and racial boundaries.¹¹⁸ Notions of respectability granted white men sexual access to white women, while men of color who engaged in sexual acts with white women were seen as threatening racial hierarchies.¹¹⁹ It follows then that women who actively engage in relations with racial Others are seen as crossing the line of feminine respectability. Given Louise's identity as a white woman and the racial identity of the Heptapods, her hybridity represents a break with norms around femininity and consequently, her "insanity" becomes gendered due to her racial mixture with the

¹¹⁷ Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. "The Hysterical Woman: Sex Roles and Role Conflict in 19th Century America." *Social Research*, vol. 39, no. 4, 1972, pp. 652-678.

¹¹⁸ Sreenivas, Mytheli. "Sexuality and Modern Imperialism." *A Global History of Sexuality*. Hoboken, Wiley, 2014 pp. 57-88.

¹¹⁹ Vernadette Gonzalez addresses the root of this phenomena in their article "Illicit Labor: MacArthur's Mistress and Imperial Intimacies" where they talk about sexual relations between colonizer and colonized. They explain that white women were so heavily guarded due to the understanding that "white colonial women...were deemed the sole province of white colonial men" (Gonzalez 94). Men of color who engaged in sexual relations with white women were then seen as, not only crossing racial boundaries, but also impeding on white men's "rightful territory."

Heptapods. The effect of her gender coupled with the perception of others that she is insane clearly has connections to hysteria and consequently not only magnifies Louise's insanity but also validates it by citing a long history of associating improperly feminine women with insanity.

Furthermore, the severity of Louise's infection is fully fleshed out when it is implied that Louise's new found understanding of time also leads to the end of her future marriage to Ian. This becomes clear at the end of the film during one of Louise's recollections of a conversation with her daughter Hannah. She sees that her and Ian's child (Hannah) will have a terminal illness which cannot be prevented. In the conversation, Hannah asks Louise if she is going to leave her "like Daddy did," and that her father doesn't look at her the same way anymore. Louise responds and says, "Its my fault. I told him something that he wasn't ready to hear...Believe it or not I know something that's going to happen. I can't explain how I know, I just do. And when I told your Daddy he got really mad and he said I made the wrong choice...it has to do with a really rare disease and its unstoppable."¹²⁰ Ultimately, this scene explains that when Louise shares this knowledge with Ian, he divorces her because he cannot handle knowing his child will die long before she has even been diagnosed. This scene then suggests that Louise's hybridity leads to the deterioration of her marriage. Connecting back to Freeman's idea of chrononormativity as a tool to guide the individual through each "step", the fact that Louise's hybridity ultimately leads to the demise of her marriage – a highly valued steps within the timeline of the state – suggests that hybridity will always be a contamination threat to the functioning of hegemonic culture. In addition to this, considering that one of the symptoms of hysteria was that afflicted women "proved unable to form satisfying and stable relationships,"¹²¹ the end of Louise's marriage to

¹²⁰ *Arrival*. Directed by Denis Villeneuve, performances by Amy Adams, Jeremey Renner and Forest Whitaker, Lava Bear Films, 2016, 1:33:30 – 1:34:31.

¹²¹ Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. "The Hysterical Woman: Sex Roles and Role Conflict in 19th Century America." *Social Research*, vol. 39, no. 4, 1972, p. 653.

Ian clearly demonstrates a link between her hybridity and her hysteria as well as a failure of heterosexuality, which inevitably queers her.

Furthermore, the death of her child suggests that Louise's hybridity is a threat not just to heterosexual marriage, but also to heterosexual reproduction. Other species hybrids such as Mules and Ligers have also been found to be sterile precisely due to their hybridity.¹²² It is no coincidence then that Louise's child – Louise being a species hybrid between the Heptapods and the humans – is unable to survive. Since the definition of “human,” as Livingston and Puar define it, is “bounded,” hybridity becomes threatening to hegemonic culture by undermining its aim to homogenize the population. Given this, certain reproductive practices are valued above others in order to ensure homogeneity. Because Louise's species hybridity is also racialized, her offspring becomes undesirable to hegemonic culture not only due to her species hybridity that unsettles the category of human, but also due to her racial mixture with the Heptapods that disrupts whiteness. The death of Louise's child then reflects necropolitical processes at work that not only ensure the homogeneity of “the human” in regard to species mixture, but also in terms of the maintenance of whiteness.

Additionally, considering that marriage and reproduction are seen as crucial for the survival and progress of America by hegemonic culture, the fact that Louise's hybridity results in the end of her marriage and the death of her child– both of which are caused by the Heptapods' infection of her – represents not just an infection of Louise, but by extension the Heptapods' infection of American society as a whole.¹²³ Consequently the Heptapods are depicted as a

¹²²Steiner, Cynthia C., and Oliver A. Ryder. “Characterization of *Prdm9* in Equids and Sterility in Mules.” *PLoS ONE*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2013, pp. 1-7.

¹²³ Carter, Julian B. “The Marriage Crisis” *The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality and Race in America, 1880-1940*. London, Duke University Press, 2007.

pathology threatening to infect and ultimately demolish the institutions involved in reproducing and ensuring the longevity of the nation.

The treatment of the Heptapods as a disease as well as the treatment of those from hegemonic culture who come into contact with them reveals much about cultural messages regarding queer futurity. Initially, their treatment as a threat throughout the entire film demonstrates that queer populations hold no future with hegemonic culture. Rather they endanger the categorical organization of hegemonic culture through their illegibility, which ultimately calls hegemonic culture's absolute power into question since categorical distinction is what empowers hegemonic culture in the first place. However, the final scene of the film presents an alternative answer to queer futurity though still equally problematic. In the last minutes of *Arrival* Louise goes one last time into "The Shell" to speak with the Heptapods, only this time rather than entering through the normal entrance and seeing them from the other side of the barrier, they send down a small pod to take her up and inside of the ship. This time she is fully inside the Shell and conversing with Abbot, the only remaining Heptapod on this particular Shell after Costello sacrificed himself during a previous attack by a several military staff on base. Louise is inside of the mist and communicates freely with Abbot. During this interaction Abbot reveals to Louise that the Heptapods' purpose this whole time has been to teach the humans their language so that, in the future when they are in danger, the humans can help them. Louise has one final "recollection" that appears to officially solidify her hybridity, and after she leaves the ship with her full knowledge, Abbott and "the Shell" Louise has been studying throughout the whole movie, along with all 11 others dispersed around the world, evaporate into thin air. On the one hand this ending can be interpreted as problematic by inferring that the only way that queer populations can survive is by teaching their oppressors, but ultimately, they will still disappear in

the end. Furthermore, it can be argued that their constant pathologization up until this point further perpetuates stereotypes surrounding people of color, immigrants and queer populations. Arguably, by making the Heptapods actual aliens this only strengthens the association of immigrants as less than human. It physically strips immigrants and people of color of their humanity by presenting them in non-human form. The presentation the Heptapods in this way is meaningful because, as Greg Smith explains, “Examining a film can give us clues about the meanings and assumptions shared by the members of a culture.”¹²⁴ In the context of this quote, the disappearance of the Heptapods at the end can then be seen as subliminal cultural message that queer, immigrant populations of color are destined for elimination.

At the same time, one can look at the ending through a Muñozian lens and interpret it depicting queer futurity as always being in the “there and then.”¹²⁵ Muñoz argues that, “Queerness is a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present...Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and the insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world.”¹²⁶ This is exactly what the Heptapods hope to achieve by imparting their Language to Louise. Muñoz goes on to write that queerness is, “flickering illuminations from other times and places,” that “assist those of us who wish to follow queerness’ promise, it’s still unrealized potential to see something else...”¹²⁷ This quote is highly significant because it once again establishes queer futurity is always “on the horizon” – to once again use a Muñozian term, that it is not constant but rather something fleeting and always just out of reach. The Heptapods, too, embody this idea not just with their final exit in the film,

¹²⁴ Smith, Greg M. “‘It’s Just a Movie’: A Teaching Essay for Introductory Media Classes.” *Cinema Journal*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2001, p. 123.

¹²⁵ Muñoz, José Esteban. “Introduction: Feeling Utopia,” *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York, New York University Press, 2009, p. 1.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 1.

¹²⁷ Muñoz, José Esteban. “Queerness as Horizon,” *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York, New York University Press, 2009, p. 28.

but also with some of the physical aspects I have addressed previously. The fog-like substance that constantly surrounds them also creates a feeling of being just out of reach by never completely revealing their full figure and thus never making them fully legible. So perhaps, their disappearance at the end, rather than seeing it as the queer, racial Other handing off their knowledge to the oppressor and disappearing, can be seen in a different light. Instead their disappearance is yet another extension of their queer existence.

In conclusion, the status of the Heptapods as a raced, queered subject works to pathologize them in relation to hegemonic culture. The historical connections between the pathologization of people of color, immigrants as well as queer folks is very clearly depicted in the following ways: through the representation of the Heptapods as something that humans need to be protected against as well as something that infects those who they come into contact with. Ultimately the Heptapods are seen throughout the film as a germ infiltrating and threatening the humans. Although at the end of the film their gift of their language ultimately works to unite humanity, it can still be argued that their constant pathologization up until that point further perpetuates stereotypes surrounding people of color, immigrants and queer populations. Despite this, the disappearance of the Heptapods can be seen also yet another example of their queerness, where the queer is always ephemeral.

III. Indigenous Infection

1. Queering Karamakate

Embrace of the Serpent, directed by Ciro Guerra, tells the story of Karamakate, an Indigenous man from the Amazon who is the last of the Cohiuano tribe, and two Western social scientists who arrive in the Amazon 40 years apart from one another between the 1900's and 1940's. Both rely on the help of Karamakate to find a sacred plant called "yakruna." Theodore van Martius, also called Theo by his guide Manduca – an Indigenous man freed from slavery by Theo – is a German anthropologist and ethnographer who is in the Amazon to document both the Indigenous cultures and the environment of the Amazon itself. Theo and Manduca seek out Karamakate after being told by other Shamans that he is the only one who can cure Theo's unnamed illness that he has throughout the entire film. Forty years later, the American anthropologist, Evan, arrives to continue Theo's work and ultimately – as it is later revealed – to find the yakruna since it grows on rubber trees, raising its level of purity. Rubber is in high demand during World War II, so Evan's curiosity about this plant suggests he has been sent by the United States' government. In their travels with Karamakate, Theo and Evan visit many of the same locations, meet some of the same people, and at times have some of the same conversations. I argue that the commonalities between the journeys of these two men ultimately serves to highlight a non-linear, queer version of time that touches on the importance of knowledge transfer to the futurity of Indigenous groups. Because Karamakate is unwilling to pass along his knowledge to Theo, the older Karamakate that Evan meets has forgotten much of his culture and has lost himself along the way. Karamakate finds a second opportunity to pass along the knowledge of his people through Evan and, the more time he spends with Evan

traveling to many of the places he visited with Theo 40 years before, Karamakate is not only able to revitalize his culture, but also rediscover his Indigenous identity. The underlying message of the film is that Indigenous epistemologies must be passed on in order in order for Indigenous life to continue.

Just like how the skin color, queer sounds, and opacity of the Heptapods' environment in *Arrival* racialized and queers them, there are certain qualities that Karamakate possesses that racializes and queers him as well. In this chapter I will address what about Karamakate and the other Indigenous people of the Amazon makes them queer. Because Karamakate is not only the main character, but also one of the few Indigenous people in the film who has not been forced to assimilate to Western culture, his character functions to reflect the queer, wild and racialized status of all unassimilated Indigenous peoples in the Amazon – however problematic this may be.¹²⁸ Karamakate and the Indigenous peoples' queer qualities can be broadly grouped under the notion of wildness.¹²⁹ I use this highly contested term not to reinforce stereotypical understandings of Indigenous people as “savages,” but rather to highlight the unintelligible mess that queers the “wild” space of the Amazon, and by extension the Indigenous people that live among it.¹³⁰ Although, as discussed by numerous other scholars, to use wildness as an analytic is to also allude to historical, colonial dichotomies of wildness/civilization, I use the wild as a synonym of that which diverts the categorical gaze of the colonizer. Still, the colonial connotations of this term cannot be denied, and consequently wildness not only represents the

¹²⁸ The film does show one other unassimilated Indigenous group, but their representation is very similar to that of Karamakate, which consequently reiterates the idea that all “real” or unassimilated Indigenous people in the Amazon are queerly, racially and wildly marked.

¹²⁹ Halberstam, Jack, Tavia Nyong'o. “Introduction: Theory in the Wild.” *SAQ: The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 117, no. 3, 2018, pp. 453-464

¹³⁰ For more information on the debate of wildness and coloniality see: Byrd, Jodi A. “Beast of America: Sovereignty and the Wildness of Objects.” *SAQ: The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 117, no. 3, 2018, pp. 599-615; Halberstam, Jack. “Wildness, Loss, Death.” *Social Text*, vol. 32, no. 4, 2014, pp. 137-148; Halberstam, Jack, Tavia Nyong'o. “Introduction: Theory in the Wild.” *SAQ: The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 117, no. 3, 2018, pp. 453-464.

queer qualities of the Indigenous people of the Amazon but also brings its racialized historical uses with it. In this way, wildness as an analytic links the queering and the racializing of Indigenous peoples by colonial powers through the wild/civilized dichotomy. It is also important to note that throughout my analysis of *Embrace of the Serpent* when I refer to Indigenous peoples – unless specifically stated otherwise – I refer to the way in which Indigenous peoples are represented in the film. This is significant because, as the director, Ciro Guerra explains in an interview, the film does not represent one specific Indigenous group but is rather a reflection of many of the Indigenous groups in the Amazon.¹³¹ He claims to do this so as not to disrespect any particular group. However, I argue that in creating a fictional story about a fictional group he actively supports stereotypes about Indigenous groups and engages in an erasure of specificity. As a result, my analysis will focus on the depiction of Indigenous people within this fictional setting and how they are depicted as queer. I acknowledge how these representations have historical roots, but in an effort to resist conflating the fictional representation of Indigenous peoples with real-life Indigenous people my analysis will focus specifically on how indigeneity is portrayed within the fictional context of *Embrace of the Serpent*. First, I will address the wildness of the Amazon and how it extends to the perceived wildness of Indigenous peoples. Then I will delve into how dreams and alternate temporalities reinforce the queer, wild, and ultimately racialized status of the Indigenous peoples.

i. Wildness and Mess

¹³¹ During an interview with *Cinaste*, director Ciro Guerra says the following about his choice to not make *Embrace of the Serpent* tribally specific. “But to be clear, Karamakate’s people in my film are a fictional people. During the process, I realized that I didn’t have the right to make a fiction about a real tribe, but that it wasn’t important to make it ethnographically real. To do so, I would have had to spend forty years with a single community to accurately represent an Indigenous group. Fiction allowed me liberty. I took elements from different communities. In that way I was not disrespecting anyone.”

The environment of the Amazon rainforest plays a central role in queering the Indigenous peoples since it represents the wild, mess, and is therefore queer. In Michael Taussig's essay "Jungle and Savagery" he notes some of the ways in which the jungle has historically been characterized. Taussig explains Werner Herzog's characterization of the jungle in his film *Burden of Dreams* as, "'fornication and asphyxiation and choking and fighting for survival and growing and just rotting away... 'Misery everywhere... It is a nature conceived as pitting extremes of meaning, a deconstructing topicality that implodes oppositions in the profusion of their rank decay and proliferating disordered growth.'¹³² Disorder and mess are key components of this quote, and some of the qualities that mark the jungle as queer. Anthropologist Martin Manalansan theorizes mess within the field of queer theory as a "mission [that] reverberates in the kinds of queer scholarship that focus on the recognition and centering of underrepresented practices, stances, and situations that deviate from, resist, or run counter to the workings of normality."¹³³ Much like how the opaque mist within the Heptapods' ship refused the colonial gaze, the vast mess of the Amazon also resists categorization and "domestication," thus marking it as queer. In a different publication titled "Messy Mismeasures," Manalansan describes their research with a group of six individuals they call the "Queer Six." Through this study of the "Queer Six," Manalansan theorizes mess, and in one particular instance alludes to a connection between "mess" and the jungle. He does this through his analysis of the Queer Six's home, which would normatively be classified as "messy." He writes,

...the uncomfortable surroundings of the Queer Six's apartment were characterized by Imelda in an interesting way "Parang gabut" ["Like a jungle"]. She was half joking, She

¹³² Taussig, Michael T. "Jungle and Savagery." *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1986, p. 79.

¹³³ Manalansan, Martin F. "The 'Stuff' of Archives: Mess, Migration, and Queer Lives." *Radical History Review*, vol. 2014, no. 120, 2014, p. 97.

was asserting not just a similarity but a material and gritty reenactment of the wildness of the jungle. Her other roommates through the years used words such as *jungle*, *tropical forest*, and *maze* to characterize the physical conditions of their residence...the Queer Six deployed the jungle metaphor to signal that it was a space to navigate rather than one to domesticate, clean up, temper or tame.¹³⁴

In this research, Manalansan not only identifies the link between the jungle and mess, but he also describes how the mess of these jungle-like environments work to evade domestication. In the case of *Embrace of the Serpent* and the colonizing practices of Western powers that required non-normative spaces like the jungle to be “domesticated” and “cleaned up” in order to be controlled, the Amazon too becomes queered because its mess disrupts colonial modes of categorization.

The descriptors used in Taussig’s quote also demonstrate just how disruptive the jungle is to colonial powers. Describing the jungle as a force with the power to suffocate the colonizer can be read both literally and metaphorically. Not only does the tropical climate of the jungle literally feel asphyxiating due to the humidity, but the physical configuration of the jungle – its abundant greenery – makes it hard to navigate since, to a non-Indigenous person, each portion of the jungle looks almost identical to the next and thus makes it hard for colonizers to classify. Essentially, the impenetrability of the wild jungle subverts the colonial process of hierarchical organization. In this way the mess of the jungle functions similarly to the opaque mist in *Arrival* that prevents the Heptapods from being seen in their entirety. As Cinthya Evelyn Torres Nuñez explains in her work *Mapping the Amazon: Territory, Identity, and Modernity in the Literatures of Peru and Brazil*, “Traditionally portrayed as exotic, primeval land, geographically isolated,

¹³⁴ Manalansan, Martin F. “Messy Mismeasures: Exploring the Wilderness of Queer Immigrant Lives.” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 117, no. 3, 2018, p. 498.

with endless natural resources waiting exploitation by a higher civilizing order, its presence continually frustrated colonizers and investigators who failed to reduce it to a set of manageable meanings.”¹³⁵ Looking back at Taussig’s quote, the claim that the jungle can suffocate represents the Amazon as a threat to the longevity of the colonizer since its very existence as mess questioned the belief that the “civilizing” of the jungle through its classification was a universal good. In this way, the mess of the jungle metaphorically suffocated colonial attempts to catalogue the queer space.

Additionally, Taussig’s statement, “misery everywhere” further queers the Amazon. By hailing the Amazon as a site of misery, it is juxtaposed to the assumed happiness of “civilization.” Sarah Ahmed’s deconstructs happiness and reveals it to be “a politics, a wishful politics, a politics that demands that others live according to a wish.”¹³⁶ In relation to the Amazon as a site of misery, Ahmed’s work exposes that the Amazon becomes a site of misery due to its inability to conform to the wishes of hegemonic culture, i.e. legibility. It is precisely because the Amazon evades colonial notions of happiness and order that it becomes a queer environment. Furthermore, Indigenous people in general have historically been associated with their environment, which marks them as queer as well. One of the ways that this connection is made most apparent is through the stereotype of the ecologically noble savage. Sandy Marie Angl s Grande notes that stereotypes such as that of the ecologically noble savage worked to legitimize the “current social arrangement” or the power dynamics between colonizer and colonized.¹³⁷ She explains that, “the current social arrangement between Indians and whites

¹³⁵ Torres Nu ez, Cinthya Evelyn. *Mapping the Amazon: Territory, Identity, and Modernity in the Literatures of Peru and Brazil (1900-1930)*. 2013. Harvard University, PhD dissertation, p. iii.

¹³⁶ Ahmed, Sara. “Killing Joy: Feminism and the History of Happiness.” *Signs: Journal of Woman in Culture and Society*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2010, p. 572.

¹³⁷ Grande, Sandy Marie Angl s. “Beyond the Ecologically Noble Savage: Deconstructing the White Man’s Indian.” *Environmental Ethics*, vol. 21, no. 3, 1999, pp. 307-320.

continues to be one of domination, resistance and subjugation. In order to rationalize the maintenance of this arrangement, it serves “civilized” or white society to maintain the image of Indians as “primitive” peoples living at one with nature.”¹³⁸ In other words, aligning Indigenous peoples with the mess and “primitivity” of their environment reinforces the superior “civilized” position of the colonizer. Moreover, by linking Indigenous people to the wild, mess of the jungle, the Indigenous people become queer by association. It is important to also note although the trope of the ecologically noble savage queers Indigenous peoples, it also racializes them. The obsession with the savage/civilized dichotomy reflects the racialized and queered eroticization of Indigenous Others by Western powers.

Historically, the fetishization of colonized territories was common practice. As Mytheli Sreenivas explains in her essay “Sexuality and Modern Imperialism,” “even before Europeans conquered territories, sexualized imagery pervaded their representations of Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Romantic visions of the ‘virgin’ land of the Americas, the hypersexual African woman, the lush sexualities of Pacific Islanders all shaped how European traders and conquerors understood and justified their imperial ventures.”¹³⁹ In many cases the hypersexuality and erotic quality of these territories marked Indigenous peoples as queer due to their deviance from Western norms which served to legitimize the civilizing mission of European powers. In other words, racial inferiority and sexual deviance were intrinsically linked in order to maintain colonial order. The savage/civilized dichotomy reproduced in the ecologically noble savage is deeply entangled in the production of racial hierarchies where people of color are always the queer “savage” in need of civilizing by Western culture.

¹³⁸ Grande, Sandy Marie Angl s. “Beyond the Ecologically Noble Savage: Deconstructing the White Man’s Indian.” *Environmental Ethics*, vol. 21, no. 3, 1999, p. 311.

¹³⁹ Sreenivas, Mytheli. “Sexuality and Modern Imperialism.” *A Global History of Sexuality*. Hoboken, Wiley, 2014 p. 60.

This same trope of the ecologically noble savage is a prominent part of Karamakate's character throughout the film. Karamakate's knowledge of the jungle, in addition to specific shots throughout the movie that show Karamakate physically enmeshed within the jungle, provide evidence of his inherent connection to the environment. Through the association between the mess of the jungle and the Indigenous peoples, *Embrace of the Serpent* establishes Karamakate and, by association, the other Indigenous people as queer.

Karamakate's position as the "ecologically noble savage" is immediately established through his vast knowledge of the jungle.¹⁴⁰ To begin, within the first few minutes of the film Manduca, Theo's guide, explains to Karamakate that Theo is sick and, "all of the nearby shamans tried to heal him. No one could. They all said you were the only one who could help us."¹⁴¹ Upon deciding to help Theo, Karamakate gives him the following instructions:

The jungle is fragile, if you attack her, she strikes back. The only way she will allow us to travel is if we respect her. We must not eat meat or fish until the rains begin, and we ask for permission to the Owners of Animals. We can't cut any tree from its root. If a woman is found, no intercourse until the changing of moon.¹⁴²

Karamakate's inherent wisdom about the jungle is linked to beliefs that Indigenous people are "backward" compared to European colonizers. Here I refer to Nuñez's definition where, "backwardness, and underdevelopment by the same token, corresponds to a view within Eurocentric frameworks that claimed the inferiority of those they designated as others based on features such as economic wealth, political stability, and even biological conditions."¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰Grande, Sandy Marie Anglás. "Beyond the Ecologically Noble Savage: Deconstructing the White Man's Indian." *Environmental Ethics*, vol. 21, no. 3, 1999, pp. 307-320

¹⁴¹ *Embrace of the Serpent*. Directed by Ciro Guerra, performances by Nilbio Torres, Antonio Bolivar, Jan Bijovet, and Brionne Davis, Buffalo Films, 2015, 00:03:06-00:03:55.

¹⁴² Ibid, 00:07:20-00:07:41.

¹⁴³ Torres Nuñez, Cinthya Evelyn. *Mapping the Amazon: Territory, Identity, and Modernity in the Literatures of Peru and Brazil (1900-1930)*. 2013. Harvard University, PhD dissertation, p. 80.

Of course, all of these features were defined and policed by Westerners and came to represent the difference between modernity and savagery.¹⁴⁴ Through this differentiation, Indigenous groups who are characterized as “savage” or “primitive” then become temporally backward and planted in the past, while “modern” Westerners come to represent the future.¹⁴⁵ Indigenous peoples’ connection to the environment came to be one characteristic that defined them as “primitive” and therefore “backward.”¹⁴⁶ Then, because the environment of the Amazon is designated as backward and underdeveloped, the knowledge that Karamakate has gained about the Amazon is also designated as backward.

The environment of the Amazon is not based in “development” and economic wealth as is the knowledge of “civilized” European colonizers, and therefore the environment, and Karamakate due to his relationship to the environment, are seen as backward, or queerly oriented. Karamakate’s “backwardness” is then doubled through the feminization of the jungle as seen in the above quote, which, as a result of Indigenous peoples’ association with their environment, feminizes him as well. His feminization by association queers Karamakate one step further by distancing him from hegemonic ideas of manhood and respectability. His queer orientation makes him similar to the Heptapods in *Arrival*, however, for slightly different reasons. The Heptapods were seen as queerly oriented due to their non-linear understanding of time, and although this is still true of Karamakate – something I will speak to later – the orientation of Indigenous people is slightly more complex because it is a direct result of the settler association between Indigenous people and “savagery.” Ultimately, as Linda Frost asserts

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Frost, Linda. “Roving Savages, Regionalized Americanness, and the 1862 Dakota Wars.” *Never One Nation: Freaks, Savages, and Whiteness in U.S. Popular Culture, 1850-1877*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2005, pp. 1-29.

¹⁴⁶ Grande, Sandy Marie Angl s. “Beyond the Ecologically Noble Savage: Deconstructing the White Man’s Indian.” *Environmental Ethics*, vol. 21, no. 3, 1999, pp. 307-320

in her essay, “Roving Savages, Regionalized Americanness and the 1862 Dakota Wars,” “Positioning the African, Native American, or any other(ed) American as primitive or anthropologically stunted plants these figures firmly at the beginning of narratives of evolution that, according to popular myth, were already over.”¹⁴⁷ In other words, by depicting Othered groups like Indigenous people as “primitive” or “backwards,” this positions them as being behind in Western progress narratives and consequently queers them due to their “inability” to line up with notions of modernity associated with hegemonic culture’s progress narrative.¹⁴⁸ Referring once again to Sara Ahmed’s work on orientations,

The concept of ‘orientations’ allows us to expose how life gets directed in some ways rather than others... for a life to count as a good life, then it must return the debt of its life by taking on the direction promised as a social good, which means imagining one’s futurity in terms of reaching certain points along a life course. A queer life might be one that fails to make such gestures of return.¹⁴⁹

This quote is useful for understanding how Indigenous lives in the Amazon are directed to the past by white settlers. Indigenous people are “backward” precisely because their assumed connection to the environment removes them from “civilization” and “progress” – i.e. the “social good” – and places them firmly in the past as queerly and non-normatively oriented away from hegemonic progress narratives. As a result, Karamakate’s knowledge of how to navigate through the jungle represents knowledge of subsistence living rather than knowledge of land acquisition

¹⁴⁷ Frost, Linda. “Roving Savages, Regionalized Americanness, and the 1862 Dakota Wars.” *Never One Nation: Freaks, Savages, and Whiteness in U.S. Popular Culture, 1850-1877*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2005, p. 3.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ahmed, Sara. “Introduction: Find Your Way.” *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. London, Duke University Press, 2006, p. 21.

for private profit – the dominant ideology of Western society, and that which is considered to be “good” and productive.



Fig. 3. Karamakate (left) sitting at the base of a tree. *Embrace of the Serpent*. Directed by Ciro Guerra, performances by Nilbio Torres, Antonio Bolicar, Jan Bijovet, and Brionne Davis, Buffalo Films, 2015.

However, Karamakate’s “backwardness” is not limited to just his knowledge. As the film continues, his backwardness is reiterated with one specific image in which Karamakate is shown sitting at the base of a tree whose roots are splayed out around him (see fig. 3). He looks as though he is nested inside of the tree itself, and that the tree is wrapping itself around him. Although there are numerous other shots of Karamakate sitting in close proximity to trees or shrubbery, this one is especially significant in establishing his connection to the environment since it makes it seem as though he is part of the tree and the tree is part of him. In this way there is a similar relationship to the queered environment and the queer Other in both *Arrival* and *Embrace of the Serpent*. Just like how the mist in the Heptapods’ ship made distinctions between the body of the Heptapods and their environment unclear, or *messy*, so too does this particular image of Karamakate. Blurring those boundaries between the body and the environment, once again Karamakate is queered due to his association with the mess and wildness of the Amazon.

His knowledge of the Amazon, as spoken about earlier, then serves to magnify this connection and his queerness even more.

ii. Dreams

Throughout the film knowledge remains an important theme: who has access to what knowledge, how knowledge is produced, and which knowledge is valued over others. For Karamakate and the other Indigenous people, one of their main forms of knowledge production lies in “dreams”. Within the context of *Embrace of the Serpent*, dreams have a greater meaning than just the thoughts that go through our minds while we sleep. Dreams are a spiritual way to understand how to live in the world and are accessed through the use of hallucinogenic plants. Dreams are similar to Alfred Schuetz’s understanding of cultural patterns that are handed down from person to person “as an unquestionable guide in all the situations which normally occur within the social world” (501). For Karamakate and other Indigenous people of the Amazon, dreams are a way of connecting to their cultural pattern and reproducing it to ensure the survival of their culture as well as their own survival since the two are linked. One’s cultural pattern cannot survive without the participants and the participants cannot survive without their cultural pattern since it is fundamental to their knowledge of themselves and the world around them. This phenomenon is best described by Tom Holm, professor of American Indian Studies at the University of Arizona, through his “peoplehood model” as explained in his publication titled “A Model for the Extension of Sovereignty in American Indian Studies,” which he coauthored with scholars Diane Pearson and Ben Chavis. He explains peoplehood as consisting of four major components: language, sacred history, place/territory, and ceremonial cycle. He argues that, “the peoplehood model is a holistic matrix and reflects a much more accurate picture of the ways in

which Native Americans act, react, pass along knowledge and connect with the ordinary as well as the supernatural worlds.”¹⁵⁰

In *Embrace of the Serpent* dreams are one piece of Indigenous culture that is central to all four components of peoplehood. Dreams consist of a sacred history that explains Indigenous understandings of the world. These sacred histories are connected to the land inhabited by the Indigenous people, and often times dreams are facilitated through the use of yakruna or caapi, two fictional hallucinogenic plants based on real sacred plants. They are prepared in specific ways, are an important part of ceremony, and are informed by the sacred histories. Lastly, as Holm notes, “language by way of its nuances, references, and grammar, gives a sacred history its meaning of its own, particularly of origin, creation, migration and other stories are spoken rather than written.”¹⁵¹ As Holm explains, language is important to the reproduction of creation stories, and in *Embrace of the Serpent* language is also an important aspect of dreams since dreams are linked to an Amazonian creation story mentioned throughout the film. In the following quote

Ciro Guerra, the director of *Embrace of the Serpent*, tells this story in an interview in *Cineaste*.

In Amazonian mythology, extraterrestrial beings descended from the Milky Way, journeying to the earth on a gigantic anaconda snake. They landed in the ocean and traveled into the Amazon, stopping at communities where people existed, leaving those pilots behind who would explain to each community the rules of how to live on earth: how to harvest, fish and hunt. They then regrouped and went back to the Milky Way, leaving behind the anaconda, which became the river...they also left behind a few presents, including *coca*, the sacred plant...and *yagé*, the equivalent of ayahuasca, which is what you use to communicate with them in case you have a question or doubt about

¹⁵⁰ Holm, Tom., J. Diane Pearson, and Ben Chavis. “Peoplehood: A Model for the Extension of Sovereignty in American Indian Studies.” *Wicazo Review*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2003, p. 36.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 13.

how to exist in the world. When you use *yagé*, the serpent descends again from the Milky Way and embraces you. That embrace takes you to faraway places; to the beginning where life doesn't even exist, to a place where you can see the world in a different way.¹⁵²

Guerra's comment on using *yagé*, or in the case of *Embrace of the Serpent* – the fictional plant *yakruna* – to facilitate dreaming in order to communicate with the gods is a queer act. To communicate with the gods is to learn how to be Indigenous and therefore to see the world differently compared to Western standards. Dreams therefore mirror Jose Esteban Muñoz's understanding of queer utopias and queer futurity. In his introduction to *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, Muñoz explains that a significant part of queer utopias are hopes and dreams that create the potentiality for a queer future. Muñoz writes, "...we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds. Queerness is a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present."¹⁵³ In the context of the Amazonian creation story, the use of sacred plants to dream and reconnect with the gods in times of doubt about one's existence is a route to enacting new ways of being in the world, and thus makes dreaming queer. Furthermore, since dreams instruct Indigenous people on how to live within the queer environment of the Amazon, they become a way of securing Indigenous epistemologies since they reproduce Indigenous cultural patterns. They are therefore an example of queer futurity since, as Muñoz indicates, it propels Indigenous culture forward by cultivating the spread of Indigenous knowledges, which ensures its survival. Moreover, because dreams allow access to knowledge about the

¹⁵² Guillén, Michael. "Embrace of the Serpent: An Interview with Ciro Guerra." *Cineaste*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2016, <https://www.cineaste.com/spring2016/embrace-of-the-serpent-ciro-guerra>

¹⁵³ Muñoz, José Esteban. "Introduction: Feeling Utopia," *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. York, New York University Press, 2009, p. 1.

environment, and thus create the connection between Indigenous people and the environment, dreams become queered not only due to the sense of futurity that they create, but because they allow for the proliferation of queer Indigenous ways of living in the mess of the jungle. The queerness of dreams, as well as their centrality to indigeneity is made clear about half way through the movie when Karamakate says,

To become a warrior every Cohiuano man must leave everything behind and go into the jungle, guided only by his dreams. In that journey, he has to discover, in solitude and silence, who he really is. He has to become a vagabond of dreams. Some get lost and never come back. But those that do, are ready to face whatever may come.¹⁵⁴

By dreaming, members of the Cohiuano tribe become fully Cohiuano, fully connected to the environment, and thus fully queer. The use of plants like yakruna or caapi are common in assisting with dreaming. This makes perfect sense considering that dreams reflect the cultural pattern of Indigenous peoples, and the environment is central to their culture. Ultimately, dreams become an extension of the wild since, by representing the Indigenous ways of being in the world, they provide the tools to navigate through the Amazon. In doing so, dreams are another way in which the connection between Indigenous people and the environment is created which results in the queering of the Indigenous people.

iii. Out of Time

Yet another way in which Karamakate and the Indigenous people are queered is through their understanding of time as cyclical rather than linear. Throughout the movie the older Karamakate says to Evan numerous times that he is “two men.” As the story of Karamakate and

¹⁵⁴ *Embrace of the Serpent*. Directed by Ciro Guerra, performances by Nilbio Torres, Antonio Bolivar, Jan Bijovet, and Brionne Davis, Buffalo Films, 2015, 01:26:58-01:27:33.

Theo, and Karamakate and Evan run parallel to one another it is clear that Karamakate sees the similarities between Evan and Theo as being an extension of one another. Both Theo and Evan are white men who come to the Amazon looking for yakruna and seek Karamakate's help in finding it. They visit many of the same locations, have many of the same conversations, however they both reach different conclusions. These similarities combined with the fact that Karamakate continues to tell Evan that he is two men – implying that he is also Theo – suggests that a part of the cultural pattern of the Cohiuano includes a cyclical understanding of time. The cyclical nature of time is revealed at the end of the film when Karamakate and Evan finally reach the yakruna. This situation also mirrors that of Karamakate and Theo. Only with Theo, Karamakate destroys the yakruna, claiming that Theo is not worthy because he, like the other white people, will use it for destructive purposes. In destroying the yakruna he also kills Theo, since the yakruna is the only medicine that can cure him of his sickness. Later, when Karamakate and Evan reach the area where the yakruna grows, Evan reveals that he only wants it so he can create high-purity rubber for use in WWII. When Karamakate shouts that Evan lied to him, Evan pulls out a knife. Karamakate stands up to Evan and explains that it is his duty to die for the preservation of the yakruna. Evan backs down, but later Karamakate offers Evan the yakruna anyway. Given the parallels between Theo and Evan's travels, the fact that Karamakate gives Evan the yakruna despite his brief attempt to take it violently suggests that Evan presents Karamakate with a second chance to impart to him the knowledge of yakruna, and by extension the Cohiuano knowledge of how to live in the Amazon. Evan refuses since he attempted to kill Karamakate and therefore argues that he does not deserve the privilege to use it. Karamakate responds and says, "I killed you too, before in a time without time, yesterday, 40 years, maybe one hundred, or a million years ago. But you came back. I wasn't meant to teach my people, I

was meant to teach you.”¹⁵⁵ This key interaction in the film illustrates how the travels of Theo and Evan, rather than being seen independently, are a part of the same story. The dual plot line demonstrates a cyclical understanding of time by comparing the two travelers to each other. Indigenous, cyclical temporality is not exclusively seen in the Indigenous people in *Embrace of the Serpent*, but has tangible meaning to real life Indigenous populations.¹⁵⁶ Therefore, the dual plotline format of the film becomes an example of Indigenous temporality by emphasizing the cycles of life rather than linear, settler temporality. In this way Indigenous epistemologies of time also queer Karamakate and the other Indigenous people by troubling hegemonic constructions of time. Furthermore, the fact that *Embrace of the Serpent* flashes between the two plot lines intermittently, once again creates mess by disrupting normative linear timelines and therefore further queers Karamakate and the Indigenous people. On top of that, a non-linear form of temporality is something that the Indigenous people in *Embrace of the Serpent* share with the Heptapods, which implies that non-linear temporality is also an important aspect to populations that are queered by hegemonic culture.

In conclusion, the queer, wild, and racialized status of the Indigenous people is highly dependent on their connection to the environment. The Amazon has historically been characterized as a wild, illegible mess that makes it difficult for European powers to neatly categorize. As a result, the Amazon becomes a queer space that disrupts the colonial gaze. Indigenous peoples’ connection to the environment, as seen through Karamakate’s knowledge of how to navigate it, as well as the physical images showing him as part of the environment, queer

¹⁵⁵ *Embrace of the Serpent*. Directed by Ciro Guerra, performances by Nilbio Torres, Antonio Bolivar, Jan Bijovet, and Brionne Davis, Buffalo Films, 2015, 01:54:30-01:54:53.

¹⁵⁶ For more information about Indigenous temporality see Kawagley, Angayuquq Oscar, and Ray Barnhardt. *Education Indigenous to Place: Western Science Meets Native Reality*. Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 1999, <http://ankn.uaf.edu/Curriculum/Articles/BarnhardtKawagley/EIP.html> . Accessed 29 March 2019. Johansen, Bruce E. “Dedication: On the Passing of Vine Deloria, Jr.” *Native American Voices: A Reader*. 3rd ed., Routledge, 2016, pp. 10-15.

Indigenous people by association. Dreams are one of the ways in which Indigenous people gain access to knowledge of the environment as well as of their cultural pattern. Consequently, they too are queered due to their turn away from hegemonic epistemologies. Finally, Indigenous temporalities are yet another way in which Indigenous culture is queered because it disrupts the linear timelines of colonial powers. The queer aspects of the Indigenous people are not only essential to colonial authorities and their creation of hierarchies, but they are also fundamental to linking Indigenous culture with disease and infection. This, once again, is one of the commonalities between *Embrace of the Serpent* and *Arrival*. As we will see in the following section, Indigenous people's queerness – according to hegemonic culture – is a contagious disease with the power to infect others.

2. Preventative Actions

Just like in *Arrival* the racial and queer markings of Karamakate and the other Indigenous people represented in *Embrace of the Serpent* position them as an infection to hegemonic culture from which both Theo and Evan come from. As previously explained, the pathologization of queer people has its roots in sexology, which made connections between sexual deviance and racial difference.¹⁵⁷ For this reason, the queer and racialized status of Karamakate and the other Indigenous people in *Embrace of the Serpent* simultaneously pathologizes and Others them. In fact, the pathologization of Indigenous people has been a central element to settler colonialism. In her article, “Disorderly Pasts: Kinship, Diagnoses, and Remembering in American Indian-U.S. Histories,” Susan Burch talks about how Indigenous pathologization was carried out by their classification as “backwards” which allowed them to be sent to insane asylums. Throughout the entire essay she reiterates that Indigenous “backwardness” was associated with Indigenous

¹⁵⁷ Somerville, Siobhan. “Scientific Racism and the Invention of the Homosexual Body.” *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*. London, Duke University Press, 2000, pp. 15-38.

kinship systems that relied on communal effort and therefore violated the Western ideology of individualism.¹⁵⁸ These types of kinship systems have historically been viewed as “primitive,” therefore rooting them in the past at a distance from “modern civilization.”¹⁵⁹ In their essay “Peoplehood: A Model for the Extension of Sovereignty in American Indian Studies,” Tom Holm describes the characterization of Indigenous civilization by Western society as the following: “...western academics in general have developed a hierarchical set of definitions of the ways in which human being organize themselves socially and politically. The lowest and, to use Western terminology, the most ‘primitive’ form of human organization is the band...the next step up is the tribe...”¹⁶⁰ Essentially, the “tribe,” or the form of society most frequently associated with Indigenous people, is seen as more “primitive” than that of Western culture, which then highlights why Indigenous kinship systems – an important part of that society – are also seen by hegemonic culture as “primitive” and “backwards.” However, by pathologizing Indigenous kinship systems, indigeneity itself is pathologized since the same ideals of community and interrelationality are pervasive throughout Indigenous culture in general.¹⁶¹ Tom Holm notes this when he writes, “Native American knowledge is based largely on the understanding of relationships – the interrelationships between human beings, animals, plants, societies, the cosmos, the spirit world, and the function of other natural, even catastrophic, occurrences.”¹⁶² Here Holm describes the knowledge that forms Indigenous culture and therefore explains how the communal aspect of Indigenous kinship systems reflect a greater characteristic of Indigenous culture as a whole. Therefore, the pathologization of Indigenous kinships systems

¹⁵⁸ Burch, Susan. “Disorderly Pasts: Kinship, Diagnoses, and Remembering in American Indian-U.S. Histories.” *Journal of Social History*, vol. 50, no. 2, 2016, pp. 362-385.

¹⁵⁹ Holm, Tom., J. Diane Pearson, and Ben Chavis. “Peoplehood: A Model for the Extension of Sovereignty in American Indian Studies.” *Wicazo Review*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2003, pp. 7-24.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 17-18.

as studied by Susan Burch suggests that this pathologizes Indigenous culture and Indigenous people as a whole along with it.¹⁶³ Furthermore, the pathologization of Indigenous people represents a larger effort to prevent Indigenous autonomy. Burch writes, “‘Justifications’ for institutionalizing Indigenous people, for example, emerge from later efforts to dismantle Native autonomy. These forms of medical diagnoses ultimately impact not only individuals marked with labels like ‘mentally ill’ but also those in relationship with them.”¹⁶⁴ Therefore, by pathologizing and placing individuals who carried out Indigenous kinship systems in insane asylums, this broke down the very kinship systems that they were pathologized for in the first place. Since these kinship systems are integral to Indigenous communities, breaking them apart also works to inhibit Indigenous sovereignty.¹⁶⁵ Consequently, just like how the pathologization and medicalization of people of color in the field of sexology was used to reaffirm white supremacy, the pathologization of Indigenous people and their kinship system by extension was used to uphold settler colonialism.

At the core of settler colonialism is the savage/civilized binary where Indigenous kinship systems are part of a “savage” past and Western kinship systems are part of the “modern” present. In their book *Inventing the Savage: The Social Construction of Native American Criminality*, Luana Ross bridges the connection between Indigenous savagery and “backwardness” in the following passage: “Native Americans are stereotyped as (among other negative images) drunken, suicidal, lazy, primitive, and criminal. At best, the image is one of the ‘savage,’ the backward Indian – the Indian who must assimilate, be ‘rehabilitated’ into the

¹⁶³ Burch, Susan. “Disorderly Pasts: Kinship, Diagnoses, and Remembering in American Indian-U.S. Histories.” *Journal of Social History*, vol. 50, no. 2, 2016, pp. 362-385.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 366.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

dominant society.”¹⁶⁶ By establishing that the “savage” is also “backwards” this quote by Ross ties together how the pathologization of Indigenous people through the diagnosis of “backwardness” is linked to perceived “savagery,” making “savagery” the true disease. Being classified as “backwards” is also part of what makes the Indigenous queer, for in being “backward” they are queerly oriented away from that which hegemonic culture deems “normal.” Therefore, the pathological nature of the description “backward” becomes not just a racialized term that underscores the Indigenous peoples supposed “savagery,” but it also queers them. As established in the previous chapter “backwardness” as a queer or color analytic is central to the queering of Karamakate and the other Indigenous people in *Embrace of the Serpent*, so it is no coincidence, then, they are seen as diseased. The main ways in which their pathologization is depicted can be separated into two broad categories. I will once again use Foucault’s framework to analyze the pathologization of the queer, racialized other. However, unlike in my analysis of *Arrival* where I just focused on the human monster, here I will also look at the individual to be corrected. In the context of *Embrace of the Serpent* the individual to be corrected are the Indigenous children while the Indigenous adults are the human monster. I will be drawing on Scott Morgenson’s work “Settler Homonationalism: Theorizing Settler Colonialism with Queer Modernities” to illustrate this distinction and exemplify Foucault’s framework within the context of Indigenous peoples. I will look specifically at Morgenson’s conversation of the treatment of Indigenous people by the settler state and how it shares many similarities with Foucault’s framework. Specifically, I will be looking at the transition from elimination to correction where those who are eliminated are often older “transgressors” and those who are corrected are the children who were forced into boarding schools. Morgenson writes, “After the passing of old

¹⁶⁶ Ross, Luana. *Inventing the Savage: The Social Construction of Native American Criminality*. Austin, University of Texas Press, 1998, p. 183.

resisters...colonial education prevented a new generation from being raised, so an entire way of life could appear to have passed.”¹⁶⁷ In other words the new generation of Indigenous children were sent to boarding schools to be educated according to Western ideology so that Indigenous ideologies could be erased.

I will start with Foucault’s image of the individual to be corrected – or in this case the Indigenous children rounded up by the missionaries – and then discuss the human monster – or the Indigenous adults. Here the difference in age is essential to qualifying certain individuals as individuals to be corrected and others as human monsters to be eliminated. Ultimately these two categories demonstrate how, due to their queer and racialized state, Indigenous peoples are perceived as diseased by hegemonic culture.

i. The Individual to be Corrected

In *Embrace of the Serpent* the “individual to be corrected” is represented by the Indigenous children who reside on the mission with the priest that Karamakate and Theo meet along the river. Missions have historically been used as a type of boarding school to “educate” Indigenous children about Western ideology.¹⁶⁸ In her article, “Tools of Ethnocide: Assimilation and Benevolence in Native American Boarding Schools,” Stefanie Kunze explains: “The Boarding schools were deemed to provide a superior model, since they completely removed the children from their homes and traditional cultures in order to educate them according to Euro-American principles and practices.”¹⁶⁹ Ultimately, what differentiates Indigenous children from Indigenous adults – and therefore what marks them as individuals to be corrected – is that they

¹⁶⁷ Morgensen, Scott Lauria. “Settler Homonationalism: Theorizing Settler Colonialism within Queer Modernities.” *GLQ*, vol. 16, no. 1-2, 2010, p. 115.

¹⁶⁸ Kunze, Stefanie. *Tools of Ethnocide: Assimilation and Benevolence in Native American Boarding Schools*. 2017. Northern Arizona University, PhD dissertation.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 56.

are still learning about their traditional culture. Therefore, when they are removed from that culture and forced into Euro-American culture, they are supposedly more easily molded than the adults who have grown up with their Indigenous culture their whole life. In this way the boarding schools become an important institutional setting for the correction and discipline of the Indigenous children. First, I will look at the ways in which the mission is seen as a correctional facility for Indigenous children, then I will address how discipline – often violent discipline – is used to cement the correction. Overall, the correction and discipline of Indigenous children produces them as sick as a result of their indigeneity.

One of the first instances in which the correctional aspect of the mission is presented occurs as Theo and Karamakate have dinner with the priest. The priest says to Karamakate and Theo, “Our mission is sacred. We must save the souls of the orphans of the rubber wars and keep them away from cannibalism and ignorance.”¹⁷⁰ This statement illustrates how the mission becomes a site of “civilization” for the Indigenous children by curing them of their “savagery” alluded to by the priest’s word choice of “cannibalism” and “ignorance.” Cannibalism has historically been associated with a more “primitive” less “modern” era.¹⁷¹ Therefore, by insinuating that the Christian education of the Indigenous children will save them from “cannibalism,” the Priest argues that Christianity will “modernize” the children, thus curing them of the backwards, “savage” existence they would have lived had they been raised with Indigenous knowledge. Furthermore, the priest’s use of “ignorance” is also intimately tied to the Indigenous peoples’ supposed “savagery” and “primitivity,” since through their “primitivity” they are positioned as being ignorant of “modernity.” As a result of their “ignorance” they are

¹⁷⁰ *Embrace of the Serpent*. Directed by Ciro Guerra, performances by Nilbio Torres, Antonio Bolivar, Jan Bijovet, and Brionne Davis, Buffalo Films, 2015, 01:59:36-01:59:49.

¹⁷¹ Frost, Linda. “Roving Savages, Regionalized Americanness, and the 1862 Dakota Wars.” *Never One Nation: Freaks, Savages, and Whiteness in U.S. Popular Culture, 1850-1877*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2005, pp. 1-29.

seen as backwards, queer, and, as previously explained, this same discourse has been used to pathologize them. As a result, the priest's attempt to "save" the Indigenous children from "cannibalism" and "ignorance" through their Christianization then serves as an example of an attempt to cure Indigenous people of their inherent "backwardness," queerness, and therefore sickness.

Later on, the importance of successfully "curing" the Indigenous children through their conversion to Christianity becomes even more self-evident. Late in the evening after Karamakate has had dinner with the priest and the children, he ventures out into the grounds where he sees several of the children gathered. He addresses them using his Indigenous language and teaches them to harvest a plant called *chiricaspi* while telling them its sacred history. Only a few moments later in the film, Karamakate wakes to the screams of one of the children being beaten by the priest. Karamakate follows the sound and sees all of the children he spoke to earlier that night. One of the children who had seemed skeptical holds a torch and is standing next to the priest while the other children stand, waiting to be punished after the first child. It is clear that the child holding the torch told the priest that the other children had been speaking their Indigenous language and engaging in Indigenous cultural practices and is therefore the reason that they are being punished. This particular scene demonstrates a few things. First, that violence acts as a preventative measure to stop the sickness of indigeneity. Morgensen, too, identifies how violence is an essential part of correction. He explains, "Without needing to exact brute violence, these institutions used disciplinary education to break Indigenous communities, language, and cultural knowledges..."¹⁷² The same destruction of Indigenous culture occurs in this scene as the priests beats the children for using their native tongue and engaging with Indigenous cultural

¹⁷² Morgensen, Scott Lauria. "Settler Homonationalism: Theorizing Settler Colonialism within Queer Modernities." *GLQ*, vol. 16, no. 1-2, 2010, p. 113.

knowledges. The violence therefore works as a preventative measure by destroying Indigenous culture, thus preventing its proliferation. Furthermore, these preventative measures are a part of the larger civilizing mission of colonizing powers in which the missionaries take up the role of “White Savior” or as Rolf Straubhaar explains it in his work titled “The Stark Reality of the ‘White Savior’ Complex and the Need for Critical Consciousness: a Document Analysis of the Early Journals of a Freirean Educator,” “ a sense that we as Westerners have the unique power to uplift, edify and strengthen...this is the idea that it is the role of the White outsider to ‘lift’ the poor and oppressed in developing countries.”¹⁷³ The violence and forced assimilation used on the Indigenous children was therefore justified under the notion that it was for the “greater good” of the health and prosperity of these children within hegemonic culture.¹⁷⁴ Therefore, the preventative actions of the priests were part of the greater project of the civilizing mission to disinfect the queerness of the Indigenous children and their culture. In *Arrival* too, preventative actions are central to pathologizing the Heptapods. As spoken about earlier on, the state issued inoculations and regular decontamination are a preventative measure against the infection of the Heptapods, and although the missionaries are not literally inoculating the children, their violence in reaction to the children’s engagement in Indigenous culture serves as a deterrent much like how some vaccines are used to decrease a disease’s severity.¹⁷⁵ Additionally, just like how the inoculations administered to Louise and Ian marked them as individuals to be corrected, so too do the preventative actions of the priests mark the Indigenous children in *Embrace of the*

¹⁷³ Straubhaar, Rolf. “The Stark Reality of the ‘White Savior’ Complex and the Need for Critical Consciousness: A Document Analysis for the Early Journals of a Freirean Educator.” *COMPARE: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, vol. 45, no. 3, p. 384.

¹⁷⁴ Kunze, Stefanie. *Tools of Ethnocide: Assimilation and Benevolence in Native American Boarding Schools*. 2017. Northern Arizona University, PhD dissertation.

¹⁷⁵ Goodine, Corinna. "How do Vaccines Work?" *Alaska Highway News*, Jan 25, 2019. *ProQuest*, <https://colorado.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.colorado.idm.oclc.org/docview/2171095050?accountid=14503>.

Serpent. However, the disease that the Indigenous people possess is not limited just to Indigenous children but extends to Indigenous adults as well.

ii. The Monster to Be Eliminated



Fig. 4 Indigenous person “invited to suicide” with sign saying “caboclo” above their head. *Embrace of the Serpent*. Directed by Ciro Guerra, performances by Nilbio Torres, Antonio Bolicar, Jan Bijovet, and Brionne Davis, Buffalo Films, 2015.

Forty years later, as Karamakate travels with Evan he once again stumbles upon the mission he went to with Theo. When Karamakate and Theo arrived at the mission 40 years previously they are greeted by the Indigenous children. When Karamakate returns with Evan, it is implied that they are met by those same Indigenous children, now as adults who have fully assimilated to Christianity and Western culture. The parallels between Karamakate’s visit to the mission with Theo and with Evan is critical to establishing the difference between the individuals to be corrected and the human monsters by marking Indigenous children as being more capable

of assimilating than the adults. This distinction becomes apparent as Karamakate and Evan are being escorted to the “Messiah”. It is evident that the priest Karamakate met with Theo no longer resides over this mission, and in his absence a more radical religious figure has taken his place. As they walk to the living quarters of the “Messiah” they stop in the courtyard in shock. They see a man hanging from a wooden post, evidently held there by the numerous arrows shot through him, with a sign inscribed with the word “caboclo” above his head (see fig. 4). Below him other Indigenous men are kneeling and whipping themselves. One of the Indigenous men escorting Karamakate and Evan to the Messiah turns them and explains, “He was invited to suicide for causing with his betrayal the sickness that saddens our Eden.”¹⁷⁶ In order to understand why this person was “invited to suicide” the definition of caboclo, as well as its significance throughout *Embrace of the Serpent*, must be investigated further. To begin, the term caboclo is commonly used in Brazil and refers to someone who is of mixed Indigenous and European background.¹⁷⁷ Within the context of *Embrace of the Serpent* this definition is slightly more nuanced. The first time that “caboclo” is used is by Karamakate to describe Manduca, Theo’s Indigenous guide, in a derogatory way. He says this after he, Theo, and Manduca stumble upon a portion of the forest where the majority of the trees are being tapped for rubber. It was explained earlier on that Manduca had been forced to work as a slave on a rubber plantation, but that Theo freed him and now Manduca works as his friend and guide to help him in his research of the Amazon. When Manduca sees the trees being tapped as well as numerous crosses where, it is implied, Indigenous slaves working on the rubber plantation have been buried he becomes

¹⁷⁶ *Embrace of the Serpent*. Directed by Ciro Guerra, performances by Nilbio Torres, Antonio Bolivar, Jan Bijovet, and Brionne Davis, Buffalo Films, 2015, 01:12:20-01:12:23.

¹⁷⁷ Lisansky, Judith. "Caboclo." *Encyclopedia of Latin American History and Culture*, edited by Jay Kinsbruner and Erick D. Langer, 2nd ed., vol. 2, Charles Scribner's Sons, 2008, p. 13. *World History in Context*, <http://link.galegroup.com/colorado.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/CX3078901003/WHIC?u=coloboulder&sid=WHIC&xid=933ab2cd..>

upset and begins to throw the containers collecting the rubber on the ground. As he does this, one of the workers emerges screaming. There are no subtitles explaining what he is saying, but as soon as the worker bends down to scoop the spilled rubber back up, it is clear that he was telling Manduca to stop. He then begins to talk directly to Manduca. Karamakate translates and says, “He’s asking you to kill him.” Manduca runs away, returns with a gun with the intention to kill him and relieve him of any future torture that may be inflicted on him. Ultimately, Manduca cannot go through with it, and Karamakate is furious that he brought the gun on their journey since he sees it as an extension of colonial violence. After he throws the gun in the river, Karamakate yells at Theo and says, “all your science only leads to this, violence.” Manduca defends Theo and says, “Don’t talk to him like that. He’s done more for our people than you.” To which Karamakate retorts, “And you? Look at your clothes. The same as the white man. How could you let them culture you like this? You think like the white men, you think nothing. What side are you on? You’re a caboclo.”¹⁷⁸ Here Karamakate uses the term “caboclo” to insinuate that although he does not have white skin, he has assimilated into white society, and by doing so has disregarded his Indigenous culture. Calling Manduca a caboclo does not refer to his racial status since it was established at the beginning of the movie that he is Indigenous but rather labels his incorporation of Western culture into his life as a transgression and a betrayal to his Indigenous roots.¹⁷⁹ This same understanding of a caboclo, not as a mixed race person due to hereditary factors, but rather due to cultural mixture is reflected in the Indigenous man hung up on the pole with “caboclo” written above him. The explanation that this man was, “invited to suicide for causing with his betrayal the sickness that saddens our Eden,” alongside the sign that

¹⁷⁸ *Embrace of the Serpent*. Directed by Ciro Guerra, performances by Nilbio Torres, Antonio Bolivar, Jan Bijovet, and Brionne Davis, Buffalo Films, 2015, 00:39:37-00:40:11.

¹⁷⁹ On the other hand, some could interpret Manduca’s actions as disidentifactory rather than “selling out” like how Karamakate perceives them to be.

says caboclo communicates to the viewer that, given the expectations of the mission that Indigenous people should assimilate, this individual partook in Indigenous practices and was therefore deemed “caboclo” for insufficiently assimilating to Western culture. These two cases of the use of “caboclo” demonstrate not just hegemonic culture’s expectation that Indigenous people will assimilate into “normative” society so as to disappear, but it also highlights the extreme fear of racial mixing held by hegemonic culture. Siobhan Somerville writes in her book *Queering the Color Line Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* about hegemonic culture’s (i.e. white peoples’) fear of racial mixture. She explains, “any intermixture was a threat to ‘white’ purity.”¹⁸⁰ Within *Embrace of the Serpent* racial mixture for those labeled as “cabolco” means not committing to either being fully part of Indigenous or hegemonic cultural practices. This becomes problematic because, much like the mixed raced individuals that Somerville speaks of, mixture troubles the clear-cut categories created by hegemonic culture that enable their superiority over others.¹⁸¹ On the other hand, mixture can also be problematic for Indigenous people since mixture often can lead to erasure. Andrea Smith notes this problem in her work when she argues that, “when indigeneity is not foregrounded, it tends to disappear in order to enable the emergence of the hybrid subject.”¹⁸² Erasure is a tremendous threat to Karamakate and the other Indigenous people, so in Karamakate’s mind, seeing Manduca wear “white people’s clothes” and speak the language of the white people represents yet another successful attempt at Indigenous erasure. In the case of Manduca, his mixedness, or his hybridity is an infection to the other Indigenous people by further erasing their existence, while the

¹⁸⁰ Somerville, Siobhan. “Scientific Racism and the Invention of the Homosexual Body.” *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*. London, Duke University Press, 2000, p. 3.

¹⁸¹ Simpson, Audra. “On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, ‘Voice’ and Colonial Citizenship.” *Junctures: The Journal for Thematic Dialogue*, vol. 9, 2007, pp. 67-80.

¹⁸² Smith, Andrea. “Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism.” *GLQ*, vol. 16, no. 1-2, 2010, p. 57.

hybridity of the Indigenous man “invited to suicide” becomes an infection to the “Eden” by disturbing the clearly defined categories that separate the colonizer from the colonized, the civilized from the savage. Moreover, the murder of this individual indicates that the “sickness” they brought to the Eden of the mission did not have the potential to be cured but needed to be exterminated all together. Considering that this is the same mission that Karamakate visited before, it is highly likely that this was one of the Indigenous children being “cared for” by the priest. His murder indicates that there is a certain learning curve during which the Indigenous Other is still considered to be an “individual to be corrected,” but after that point they are no longer redeemable and thus become the “human monster.” This man’s position as a “caboclo” clearly demonstrates that once the Indigenous Other reaches adulthood their continued “deviance” as they pursue Indigenous culture becomes a sickness or infection to hegemonic culture that can only be cured through eradication.

However, just like in *Arrival*, not only is the other diseased, but they can become contagious with the potential to infect members of hegemonic culture with its wild and queer qualities. In the following section I will discuss just how infectious the Indigenous people really are to members of hegemonic culture with whom they come into contact.

3. The Hybrids

Beyond being infected themselves, Karamakate and the Indigenous people in *Embrace of the Serpent* are also depicted as being able to infect others. In this way, they have yet another similarity with the Heptapods in *Arrival*. In both films, when members of Western society venture into the domain of the Other, they become sick, supposedly infected by the sickness of the Other. In *Embrace of the Serpent*, this is best exemplified in Theo's character, who demonstrates that hegemonic culture cannot survive within the queer environment of the Amazon jungle. Just like in *Arrival*, the only way members of hegemonic culture survive in the queer space of the Other is through hybridization, i.e. accepting the queer cultural pattern of the Other. Here, hybridity becomes asymmetrically queer, where only those from hegemonic culture are queered by their hybridity as a result of straying from "normative" culture. Those from the queered culture, on the other hand, are seen as "properly assimilating" to the dominant groups' norms.¹⁸³ In *Arrival* Louise engages in hybridization through her acquisition of the Heptapods language. In *Embrace of the Serpent*, Evan becomes the hybrid after he finally learns to dream, something essential to the Indigenous people's cultural pattern. The parallel structure between both Theo and Evan's journey with Karamakate reveals a message about queer futurity. Those from hegemonic culture who become sick within the Amazon are sick because they cannot adapt to the cultural pattern of the queer Other. Evan is able to survive precisely because he actively chooses to learn from Karamakate and engage in Indigenous cultural practices. Moreover, Evan's journey with Karamakate serves as a second chance for Karamakate to pass along his

¹⁸³ For examples of "proper assimilation" look at the following scholars' discussions of assimilation in these works: Wolfe, Patrick. "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research*, no. 8, vol. 4 2006, pp. 387-490. (Boarding schools)

Ahmed, Sarah. "Unhappy Queers." *The Promise of Happiness*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2010. (Homonormativity)

Erskine, Samantha E., and Diana Bilimoria. "White Allyship of Afro-Diasporic Women in the Workplace: A Transformative Strategy for Organizational Change." *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, vol. 23, no. 3, 2019, pp. 319-338. (Tone policing)

Indigenous knowledge, or a he calls it, their song. Karamakate was unwilling to do this with Theo, but realized that the only way to ensure the survival of his culture and therefore his people is to pass it along to Evan. I argue that in both of these stories, in order to ensure their future, not only must those from hegemonic culture who enter into the space of the queer Other be willing to adapt and become a cultural hybrid, but the queer Other must be willing to teach them so that they can become a cultural hybrid. It is important to note that by designating some individuals from hegemonic culture as ill and others as healthy, the film does reproduce an ableist logic that sees illness as bad and health as good.

A substantial part of accepting this “hybridity education” has to do with the “Peoplehood Matrix,” so termed by Tom Holm, Dianne Pearson, and Ben Chavis. The “Peoplehood Matrix” refers to four pillars of Indigenous culture – language, sacred history, place/territory, and ceremonial cycle – that are interrelated and interdependent. I argue that to become a hybrid is to understand the values associated with the matrix, and I therefore use the peoplehood matrix as a framework through which to analyze both Theo and Evan. The first portion of this section will address Theo, who is unable to develop hybridity and therefore becomes extremely ill. I will highlight how many of Theo’s actions resist the peoplehood model and therefore prevent his hybridity. His actions show an inability to relinquish the *extractive view* – or the view that people, places and things are valuable commodities to be extracted for value – as coined by Macarena Gomez-Barrís in her work *The Extractive Zone*.¹⁸⁴ This view directly contradicts the peoplehood matrix which ultimately leads to his illness. The second section will address Evan’s hybridity and ability to survive within the jungle largely due to his decision to accept Indigenous cultural practices. Lastly, I will highlight what the different outcomes of these two characters reflect about queer futurity.

¹⁸⁴ Gomez-Barrís, Macarena. “Introduction.” *The Extractive Zone*. London, Duke University Press, 2017, pp. 1-16.

i. Theo

The Amazon represents a queer space due to its wild, messy character that resists hegemonic systems of classification and legibility.¹⁸⁵ Karamakate and the other Indigenous people's ability to survive in the jungle is the result of their engagement in Indigenous knowledge systems that are rooted in the environment. Consequently, they too become queered. Unlike in hegemonic culture where knowledge production is something to be extracted and accumulated for the benefit of "modernity," Indigenous knowledge systems are related to learning from and living with the environment.¹⁸⁶ These knowledge systems ensure that Indigenous people can survive within the queer environment of the Amazon, and through this relationship to their queer environment, Indigenous people themselves are queered. Therefore, those who do not engage in Indigenous knowledge systems, both Indigenous and Western alike, will be unable to survive within the Amazon and, in the case of *Embrace of the Serpent*, become sick.

The perspective from which the movie is filmed is important to take into account when speaking about those supposedly infected by the jungle. In contrast to *Arrival*, which is shot through the eyes of Louise, someone from hegemonic culture, *Embrace of the Serpent* is shot through the eyes of Karamakate, the queer Indigenous Other. This change in perspective is extremely important since it alters the narrative of infection. In *Arrival* the infection of those from hegemonic culture who come in contact with the Heptapods is seen as the fault of the Heptapods. In *Embrace of the Serpent*, however, the infection of those from hegemonic culture

¹⁸⁵ Torres Nuñez, Cinthya Evelyn. *Mapping the Amazon: Territory, Identity, and Modernity in the Literatures of Peru and Brazil (1900-1930)*. 2013. Harvard University, PhD dissertation.

I see mess and wildness as being able to be used interchangeably within the context of the amazon. As explained on page 67 of the section titled "Queering Karamakate", mess is an integral part of the unintelligibility of the forest. I especially look to Martin Manalansan for this conflation of discourse in his description of the "Queer Six's" house as a jungle in "The 'Stuff' of Archives: Mess, Migration, and Queer Lives."

¹⁸⁶ Daniel R. Wildcat, *Red Alert: Saving the Planet with Indigenous Knowledge*. Golden, Fulcrum Publishing, 2009.

who come into contact with the Indigenous people and spend time in the Amazon is presented as the result of their inability to embrace Indigenous cultural practices and knowledge systems. In this way, *Embrace of the Serpent's* perspective is much more decolonial and queer than *Arrival*. That being said, those from hegemonic culture still view their illness as the result of extended exposure to the queer Other and their queer environment. As a result, both Karamakate and the Indigenous people, along with the Amazon itself, come to represent infection to those from hegemonic culture. This is especially true for Theo and is exemplified at the very beginning of the film with a quote from one of his journals. Theo writes, “It is not possible for me to know if the infinite jungle has started on me the process that has taken many others to complete and irremediable insanity.”¹⁸⁷ It is important that this particular quote appears at the beginning of the movie, before any other action takes place, because its position immediately establishes the role of the jungle as queer and infectious. Furthermore, this quote establishes that the jungle has infected others in the past, so much so that they have not survived its grasp. It makes sense then that subsequent scene is the viewer’s first introduction to Theo who, as soon as his character enters the screen, is extremely ill – presumably as a result of his time in the jungle. Given that the quote seems to be from one of Theo’s journals, Theo’s sickness in the scene directly after answers his question about whether or not he has also been affected by the jungle.

Just like Louise, Theo is fluent in the Other’s language. However, Louise was able to survive within the Heptapod’s queer environment because their form of communication – logograms – was essential to their cultural pattern. To understand logograms is to understand their sense of time and therefore how their culture is organized. Theo, becomes ill because the

¹⁸⁷ *Embrace of the Serpent*. Directed by Ciro Guerra, performances by Nilbio Torres, Antonio Bolivar, Jan Bijovet, and Brionne Davis, Buffalo Films, 2015, 00:00:59-00:01:20.

cultural pattern of the Indigenous people requires more than just knowing their language.¹⁸⁸ As, Tom Holm, Dianne Pearson, and Ben Chavis note, language is one of the four pillars that make up the notion of Indigenous “peoplehood,” or four different components that together make up the identity of a particular group. These four pillars include language, shared history, place/territory and ceremonial cycle.¹⁸⁹ Holm, Pearson, and Chavis continue and write, “Understanding the interrelationship of the four aspects of peoplehood is essential. No single factor is more important than the others and all necessarily support each other as well as a particular group’s larger sense of identity.”¹⁹⁰ Each pillar functions in its own way to support the other pillars. Holm, Pearson, and Chavis explain,

...a group particular language, by way of its nuances, references, and grammar, gives a sacred history a meaning of its own...language defines place and vice versa. Place-names for example, essentially bespeak a relationship with the environment or describe an area within the context of a group’s sacred history and culture... a group’s sacred history is told in the vernacular not only to give each member of that group an understanding of where they come from but also to impart to them proper behavior and the ways in which they maintain group cohesion through ritualism and ceremony. Sacred history also details kinship structures, the meaning of ceremonies as well as when they should be performed, and how the group fits within a particular environment...Particular territories are always mentioned in sacred histories, and quite often creation and migration stories specify certain landmarks as being especially holy...Sacred histories normally explain why and

¹⁸⁸ This could also be in large part due to the differences in narrative. *Arrival* is narrated through the perspective of those in hegemonic culture, therefore the understanding of the Heptapods’ cultural pattern could be distorted and simplified. *Embrace of the Serpent* on the other hand is through the perspective of Karamakate and therefore depicts a much more three-dimensional representation of the Natives’ cultural pattern.

¹⁸⁹ Holm, Tom, et al. “Peoplehood: A Model for the Extension of Sovereignty in American Indian Studies.” *Wicazo Sa Review*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2003, pp. 7-24.

¹⁹⁰ Holm, Tom., J. Diane Pearson, and Ben Chavis. “Peoplehood: A Model for the Extension of Sovereignty in American Indian Studies.” *Wicazo Review*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2003, p. 12.

how a ceremony is done. Not only that, but a people's connection with territory provides the times as well as the circumstances under which ceremonies are conducted.¹⁹¹

These four pillars play a significant role in Indigenous cultural practices. Therefore, in order to fully be a hybrid between Indigenous and Western culture, and survive within the Amazon, one cannot engage with only one pillar, but rather all four of the pillars. One of the major ways in which one does this is in *Embrace of the Serpent* is through the use of yakruna to facilitate dreams. As previously explained, the Indigenous people use the yakruna to communicate with the gods about how to properly carry out their cultural pattern. It is no coincidence then, that the only way Theo's illness can be cured is through the use of yakruna. He must fully immerse himself into Indigenous culture in order to survive within their queer environment. As Karamakate explains about three quarters of the way through the film – the significance of which I will explain in greater detail later – dreaming is essential to becoming fully Cohiuano. He says,

To become a warrior every Cohiuano man must leave everything behind and go into the jungle, guided only by his dreams. In that journey, he has to discover, in solitude and silence, who he really is. He has to become a vagabond of dreams. Some get lost and never come back. But those that do, are ready to face whatever may come.¹⁹²

Essentially, being able to dream is not only essential to survival but also to Indigenous identity. Therefore, Theo must develop hybridity through his use of yakruna in order to survive within the jungle. The title of the film itself even suggests that those from hegemonic culture must embrace Indigenous ways of living in order to survive within the queer Amazon. Director Ciro Guerra explains the title in relation to an ancient creation story where the gods descended from the

¹⁹¹ Holm, Tom., J. Diane Pearson, and Ben Chavis. "Peoplehood: A Model for the Extension of Sovereignty in American Indian Studies." *Wicazo Review*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2003, p. 13.

¹⁹² *Embrace of the Serpent*. Directed by Ciro Guerra, performances by Nilbio Torres, Antonio Bolivar, Jan Bijovet, and Brionne Davis, Buffalo Films, 2015, 01:26:58-01:27:33.

heavens on a gigantic anaconda that was left behind to become the Amazon river.¹⁹³ It is said that these gods also left behind sacred plants such as yakruna so that the Indigenous people could communicate with the gods in the event that they had any questions about how to live. If they used these plants, the serpent would embrace them and give them the knowledge they need to survive.

Given the creation story, the title *Embrace of the Serpent* is multifaceted. First, designating the serpent as the river as well as a knowledgeable being echoes Holm's explanation of Indigenous values. He writes, "Native Americans entwine everyday life with religious practices and a view that human beings are part of, rather than an imposition on, their environments."¹⁹⁴ In other words, humans and the environment are in an interactive and reciprocal relationship with one another rather than the hierarchical and extractive relationship so frequently seen among Westerners.¹⁹⁵ Therefore, in order to embrace the serpent, one must also embrace the river, i.e. the queer environment. Second, one can only embrace the serpent through the use of yakruna, and, as Karamakate explains early on in the film, there are prohibitions, or certain activities that cannot be carried out or certain foods that cannot be eaten, in order to be able to take the yakruna. Many of the prohibitions are about respecting the jungle and thus are an extension of the Indigenous people's cultural pattern. Karamakate explains these rules to Theo and says, "The jungle is fragile, and if you attack her, she strikes back. The only way she will allow us to travel is if we respect her. We must not eat meat or fish until the rains begin, and we ask for permission to the Owners of the Animals. We can't cut any tree from its root."¹⁹⁶ These

¹⁹³ See Page 77 where this creation story is talked about in more detail.

¹⁹⁴ Holm, Tom., J. Diane Pearson, and Ben Chavis. "Peoplehood: A Model for the Extension of Sovereignty in American Indian Studies." *Wicazo Review*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2003, p. 15.

¹⁹⁵ Gomez-Barris, Macarena. "Introduction." *The Extractive Zone*. London, Duke University Press, 2017, pp. 1-16.

¹⁹⁶ *Embrace of the Serpent*. Directed by Ciro Guerra, performances by Nilbio Torres, Antonio Bolivar, Jan Bijovet, and Brionne Davis, Buffalo Films, 2015, 00:07:20-00:07:41.

prohibitions emphasize the relationship between human and nature as equitable rather than hierarchical as often occurs in Western society. Finally, the title and the story that goes with it establish how Holm, Pearson, and Chavis' peoplehood matrix works in action. The creation story is relayed through language, exists because of the Amazonian territory, is in itself a sacred history, and explains the ceremonial cycle of using the sacred plants left behind by the gods. Therefore, to truly embrace the serpent is to become Cohiuano by partaking in all four pillars of the peoplehood matrix. Theo, however, clearly struggles to do this throughout the film, which explains his illness.

Early in the film, Theo, Manduca and Karamakate stop along the river to stay with and get supplies from an unnamed tribe with whom Theo has already built a relationship. During the visit, Theo shows Tuschaua, the Chief, his compass and explains how it works. The following day as he, Manduca and Karamakate leave, Theo searches his pockets for his compass only to realize that it is not there. He immediately jumps to the conclusion that one of the Indigenous children must have taken it and begins to order the children to give it back to him. Moments later Tuschaua reveals that he has the compass, and waves to some of the women in the tribe to give Theo some goods in exchange for it. Theo becomes visibly upset and tries forcibly to take it from Tuschaua. When Manduca cuts in and pulls Theo away, Theo turns to Manduca and says, "I told you, I can't leave the compass here." Karamakate interjects, "You're nothing but a white." Theo responds, "Their orientation system is based on the winds and the position of the stars. If they learn how to use a compass, that knowledge will be lost." Karamakate argues with Theo and answers, "You cannot forbid them to learn. Knowledge belongs to all men. But you can't understand that, because you're nothing but a white"¹⁹⁷ This scene is one of the best examples of

¹⁹⁷ *Embrace of the Serpent*. Directed by Ciro Guerra, performances by Nilbio Torres, Antonio Bolivar, Jan Bijovet, and Brionne Davis, Buffalo Films, 2015, 0030:20-00:31:03.

how Theo doesn't quite grasp the central values of Indigenous cultural pattern. By insisting on taking back the compass and therefore, as Karamakate points out, assuming the role of the gatekeeper of knowledge, Theo reflects a Western hierarchical way of thinking. As is evident from the creation myth Guerra claims to have based the Cohiuano people on, knowledge is not a commodity, but rather is an essential part of survival not just within the Amazon but also of the Cohiuano culture and sense of peoplehood. In this particular instance the hierarchical mode of organization so prevalent within hegemonic culture influences Theo's actions and reinforces the Western, hierarchical binary of savage/civilized by assuming that the Indigenous people are a "primitive group" that would be tainted by the influx of "modern" technology. In contrast to the peoplehood matrix, which looks at relations as co-constitutive of one another, this way of thinking assigns value to everything. In Theo's eyes Karamakate and the other Indigenous people's value lies in their "savagery" being un-touched or un-tainted by Western technology so that he can use them for his anthropological study. In this way Theo fundamentally fails to understand the peoplehood matrix. His sickness is directly related to this lack of understanding, as is demonstrated later on in the film.

After Theo, Manduca, and Karamakate leave Tuschaua and his people, they stop further down the river. The scene shows Karamakate sitting along the riverbed while Manduca pulls Theo and his backpack filled with books and other objects he has acquired during his travels up on the riverbed as well. Theo is clearly weak and is having trouble carrying his belongings himself as a result of his illness. Karamakate turns to him and says, "Leave all that. They are just things...why do you whites love your things so much?" Theo responds and explains to him that all the things that he carries are important not only for him to remember Germany, where he comes from, but also as proof of his travels to show his colleagues back in Germany.

Karamakate looks at him and says plainly, “You’re insane.”¹⁹⁸ This is clearly a response to Theo’s conception of knowledge production and how it differs from Indigenous knowledge production. In their book, *Red Alert: Saving the Planet with Indigenous Knowledge*, while explaining Indigenous knowledge systems Daniel Wildcat writes “knowledge resides in our living in this world, not in controlling it.”¹⁹⁹ Although brief, this quote both underscores how Indigenous knowledge comes from living within and learning from the environment while also highlighting how hegemonic culture derives knowledge from manipulating the environment for their own means.

Manipulation or extraction of the environment for the purpose of scientific discovery is common within hegemonic culture. In fact, Macarena Gomez-Barris theorizes the idea of resource extraction being central to hegemonic systems of knowledge production in her book *The Extractive Zone*. A key component that she writes about is the *extractive view*, or a certain ideology within hegemonic culture that, “sees territories as commodities, rendering land as for the taking, while also devalorizing the hidden world that form the nexus of human and nonhuman multiplicity. This viewpoint, similar to the colonial gaze, facilitates the reorganization of territories, populations, and plant and animal life into extractible data and natural resources for material and immaterial accumulation.”²⁰⁰ In other words, the *extractive view* is a part of hegemonic knowledge production where knowledge is seen as something to be owned or commodified. The contrast between Wildcat’s description of Indigenous knowledge as interactional with the environment, Gomez-Barris’ description of hegemonic and colonial knowledge as rooted in extraction is clearly displayed in the aforementioned conversation

¹⁹⁸ *Embrace of the Serpent*. Directed by Ciro Guerra, performances by Nilbio Torres, Antonio Bolivar, Jan Bijovet, and Brionne Davis, Buffalo Films, 2015, 00:33:15-00:34:04.

¹⁹⁹ Wildcat, Daniel R., *Red Alert: Saving the Planet with Indigenous Knowledge*. Golden, Fulcrum Publishing, 2009, p. 5.

²⁰⁰ Gomez-Barris, Macarena. “Introduction.” *The Extractive Zone*. London, Duke University Press, 2017, pp. 1-16.

between Karamakate and Theo. Theo's need to collect materials and evidence of his journey in order to prove the knowledge he has accumulated during his travels reflects the extractive view that Gomez-Barris describes, while Karamakate's claim that Theo is insane for holding on to those material goods as a form of knowledge reflects the land-based knowledge prevalent among Indigenous communities as Wildcat describes. Once these differing knowledge production systems are given context, what this interaction demonstrates is that yet again Theo's sickness derives from his inability to understand and incorporate Indigenous ways of living into his thinking. His insistence that he must hold onto his "things" clearly demonstrates that he has not grasped Indigenous forms of knowledge production where the accumulation of goods doesn't signify knowledge, but rather one's ability to learn from and live with their environment harmoniously does. In other words, Theo's engagement in the cultural practices of hegemonic culture and thus rejection of Indigenous cultural practices causes his illness.

The final scene that fully encapsulates Theo's rejection of Indigenous cultural practices, and what would ultimately mark him as a hybrid and allow for his survival, occurs when Theo outright rejects what Karamakate calls "the prohibitions." At the beginning of the film Karamakate explains the prohibitions as certain activities he cannot partake in or certain foods he cannot eat in order to be able to take the yakruna, the plant Theo seeks in order to cure him of his illness. Many of the prohibitions are deeply concerned with respecting the jungle and thus are an extension of the Indigenous people's cultural pattern. One of the prohibitions, and the one that Theo violates, is about not eating fish or any other meats until the rains begin. Theo violates this particular prohibition at a point in the narrative where he holds the most resistance to engaging in the Indigenous people's cultural practices. This is no coincidence since this particular moment is also the point where his health declines significantly. The scene preceding Theo's violation

alternates between shots of Theo standing on the edge of the River and the older Karamakate narrating. The older Karamakate says, “To become a warrior, every Cohiuano man must leave everything behind and go into the jungle, guided only by his dreams. In that journey, he had to discover, in solitude and silence, who he really is. He has to become a vagabond of dreams. Some get lost and never come back,” at which point the camera pans directly to Theo. Karamakate continues and says, “But those that do, are ready to face whatever may come.”²⁰¹ Following this narration Theo collapses to the ground and is carried away by Manduca. The following scene Theo wakes up shaking and screaming with beads of sweat running down his forehead, evidently still ill. The younger Karamakate with whom Theo has been traveling with, sees that he has woken up and begins to question Theo about his dreams. Theo insists that he did not dream, but when Karamakate argues that he did dream, he is just afraid of dreaming Theo responds and says, “I’m not afraid to dream. I’m afraid to die in this hell hole. You’re messing with my head with your dreams and your prohibitions.”²⁰² It is clear at this point not only that Theo has given up all attempts to accept Indigenous cultural practices, but he has also fundamentally failed to understand what Indigenous cultural practices are. By claiming that he is more afraid of dying in the jungle than dreaming he clearly does not understand that dreaming is essential to being able to survive; that the two are, in fact, one in the same. Going back to the function of dreams, dreams are thought of as a way to communicate with higher powers about how to live in the jungle. Therefore, in order to survive in the jungle, one must be able to dream. It follows then that to be afraid to die in the jungle is also to be afraid to dream.

After saying all of this to Karamakate, Theo gets up from his hammock, runs into the river with an arrow and tries to kill a fish. This action demonstrates, yet again, his rejection of

²⁰¹ *Embrace of the Serpent*. Directed by Ciro Guerra, performances by Nilbio Torres, Antonio Bolivar, Jan Bijovet, and Brionne Davis, Buffalo Films, 2015, 01:26:58-01:27:33.

²⁰² *Ibid*, 01:28:09-01:29:02.

Indigenous cultural practices since this violates the prohibitions. Karamakate immediately yells at Theo for fishing, to which Theo responds, “I’m sick because of respecting your prohibitions.” Manduca immediately comes to Theo’s aid and tries to calm him and justifies his behavior by saying he is delirious, therefore reaffirming that Theo’s behavior is caused by sickness. Theo throws Manduca off of him and ferociously pulls a fish off his arrow, yelling “The river is full of fish. We cannot possibly end them!”²⁰³ At this point he bites into the raw fish and eats it like an animal while Karamakate stares back at him in shock. Theo’s claim about the river being full of fish clearly shows how Theo is still ruled by the extractive view of hegemonic culture. Theo does not possess the Indigenous knowledge systems to be able to see the fish as a gift and something to be sustainably and respectfully taken. He views it as an object that he has complete power over, a way of thinking that is in direct opposition to the prohibitions and the Indigenous ethics and cultural practices that they stand for. Furthermore, the animalistic way in which he eats the fish makes him seem more like a beast than a human. This is significant since notions of the human are central to hegemonic culture.

The human connotes rationality and boundedness.²⁰⁴ The ferocious manner in which Theo attacks the fish can be qualified as anything but rational and bounded and therefore signifies a breakdown of the human/animal binary. Theo’s animalistic behavior suggests once again that hegemonic values are not sustainable within the queer environment of the Amazon, and his insistence to cling to them is what causes his sickness. In other words, his animalistic actions become insanity and illness because they are a reflection of the consequences of holding on to hegemonic values in a queer space. Following this moment, Karamakate becomes visibly upset and storms away, only to be convinced moments later by Manduca to continue to help

²⁰³ *Embrace of the Serpent*. Directed by Ciro Guerra, performances by Nilbio Torres, Antonio Bolivar, Jan Bijovet, and Brionne Davis, Buffalo Films, 2015, 01:29:35-01:30:02.

²⁰⁴ Luciano, Dana, and Mel Chen. “Has the Queer Ever Been Human?” *GLQ*, vol. 21, no. 2-3, 2015, p. 190.

Theo, despite his most recent actions. Eventually Karamakate decides to continue to help Theo, and when he comes back to the edge of the river, he finds him shaking uncontrollably, undoubtedly the sickest he has been to date. Once again this suggests that, contrary to Theo's belief that his sickness is caused by dreaming and following the prohibitions, it is actually caused by his failure to follow Indigenous cultural practices.

Throughout these three interactions, Karamakate has played a role in Theo's sickness – a minor role, but still a role. The young Karamakate routinely experiences resistance to teaching Theo Cohiuano cultural practices. This is in large part due to the distrust he holds towards white people after his people were wiped out, leaving him to be the last surviving Cohiuano. This is not to say that the weight of education falls on the shoulders of the oppressed and if the oppressor doesn't learn it is the oppressed's fault. Rather the process must be an interactive one where the oppressor earnestly wishes to learn and the oppressed is willing to take the time to teach the oppressor. The relationship between the young Karamakate and Theo serves as an example of what happens when both the oppressed and the oppressor reject each other. The older version of Karamakate reiterates multiple times to Evan that he is a chullachaqui, or as he explains it, "We all have one. He looks just like you but he's empty, hollow...A chullachaqui has no memories. It only drifts in the world, empty, like a ghost, lost in a time without time."²⁰⁵ Karamakate later reveals to Evan that he is a chullachaqui because he is alone and has no one to teach the Cohiuano culture to. Theo provided the younger Karamakate with the first opportunity to pass along his culture and keep his people alive. However, Karamakate rejected Theo as a student under the pretense that he is just another white man. Theo, on the other hand, although he is offered the resources to become a successful hybrid between both Indigenous and hegemonic

²⁰⁵ *Embrace of the Serpent*. Directed by Ciro Guerra, performances by Nilbio Torres, Antonio Bolivar, Jan Bijovet, and Brionne Davis, Buffalo Films, 2015, 00:50:25-00:50:52.

culture, fails to put forth the effort to fully immerse himself in the Indigenous people's cultural practices. Instead he clings to the cultural practices of hegemonic culture that are largely related to consumption and extraction. In doing so he rejects the very tools he needs to survive in the queer environment of the Amazon, thereby causing his own sickness. Theo and Karamakate's relationship therefore reflects one possible route on the path towards a queer future, albeit one that is mutually destructive.

ii. Evan

Evan and Karamakate's relationship reflects a much different future, not only as a result of Evan's commitment to learning Indigenous cultural practices, but also due to Karamakate's commitment to passing his knowledge along to Evan. Because of this, Evan is able to develop cultural hybridity and therefore does not become sick. Although Evan eventually chooses to learn the Indigenous cultural practices, just like Theo he too experiences resistance at first. At the beginning of the film, Evan struggles to let go of some of the most deeply rooted cultural practices of hegemonic culture just like Theo. One of the first instances in which we see this is during Evan and Karamakate's travels down the river. Karamakate complains about all of Evan's bags being too heavy and weighing the canoe down – mirroring an earlier scene with Theo. Evan insists that all of his materials are important and tells Karamakate he can look through it if he likes. While Karamakate does this, Evan pulls out a cigarette, smokes it and then throws it into the river, only to be greeted with a glare by Karamakate. This action violates the Indigenous belief that, “Native Americans entwine everyday life with religions practices and a view that human beings are part of, rather than an imposition on, their environments.”²⁰⁶ Rather than seeing himself as part of the environment, which would entail seeing the environment as his

²⁰⁶ Holm, Tom, J. Diane Pearson, and Ben Chavis. “Peoplehood: A Model for the Extension of Sovereignty in American Indian Studies.” *Wicazo Review*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2003, p. 15.

equal, Evan sees himself as removed from the environment which empowers him to take ownership of it and throw trash into it.²⁰⁷ He does not see the river as a living breathing entity, but rather as an inanimate object. For this reason, the disrespectful action of throwing his cigarette into the river is meaningless to him, while being extremely meaningful to Karamakate.

Later on, Evan yet again displays disrespectful behavior. After he and Karamakate stop along the river, Evan walks up to a rubber tree, pulls out his knife and digs it into the tree in order to produce a steady stream of rubber. His actions represent a disrespect for the environment that places man above the environment. Desecrating the tree also reflects how the “extractive view” is extremely influential in Evan’s thinking early on.²⁰⁸ His understanding of the environment as a material to be obtained rather than a relative to be respected is what influences this particular interaction. Furthermore, this particular action foreshadows his true intentions for looking for yakruna. As he reveals in the end, yakruna raises the purity of the rubber, which is in high demand to help with WWII. These two scenes are important to the film’s overall message of futurity. Rather than using the two timelines to exemplify “good” and “bad” white men, Evan’s struggles to let go of hegemonic values up until the very end of the film complicates this narrative. It makes a mess of the binaries so prevalent in Western society, and in doing so further queers not just the story, but Evan’s character as well.

The turning point in Evan’s thinking occurs after he and Karamakate meet the Messiah along the river. This encounter quickly becomes extremely alarming to Evan once the Messiah, along with his converted Indigenous followers, begin eating one another after consuming a drink that Karamakate blessed with herbs. Evan blames Karamakate for this encounter, and on top of it reiterates his frustration that Karamakate doesn’t know how to get to the yakruna. Karamakate

²⁰⁷ Daniel R. Wildcat, *Red Alert: Saving the Planet with Indigenous Knowledge*. Golden, Fulcrum Publishing, 2009.

²⁰⁸ Gomez-Barris, Macarena. “Introduction.” *The Extractive Zone*. London, Duke University Press, 2017, pp. 1-16.

claims he is a chullichaqui and does not remember, further angering Evan who then tries to leave. Karamakate shouts after him and explains to him the following, “My mission was to give this knowledge to my people, but the rubber barons and the Columbians came, and I was left alone. I need to remember. I need to continue the song of the Cohiuano.”²⁰⁹ This intrigues Evan, and when Karamakate tells him to throw his belongings away he throws away everything he has carried with him excluding his gramophone. By throwing away his belongings Evan initiates the separation of his story from Theo’s by letting go of the extractive practices so central to hegemonic culture.²¹⁰ This decision is one of the first actions that is indicative of his hybridity because it demonstrates that he is slowly rejecting value systems based on material goods. Although Evan insists that he cannot throw away the gramophone, Karamakate allows it and instead asks Evan to show it to him. Evan pulls it out and plays him a piece “The Creation” by Joseph Haydn. This particular song is extremely significant to Evan because, as he explains to Karamakate, “it takes me back to my father’s house in Boston, to my ancestors.”. Earlier Karamakate had said that he needed to continue the song of his people, so Evan’s particular phrasing here is important because, to Evan, this music is the song of his people. Furthermore, the title of this particular song adds another layer of meaning to this specific moment. “The Creation” tells the biblical story of Genesis.²¹¹ Therefore, given that the bible and Judeo-Christian religions are part of hegemonic culture from which Evan comes, this song really does connect Evan to his “ancestors” and hegemonic culture as a whole. “The Creation” becomes the sacred history of hegemonic culture paralleling the Cohiuano sacred history where the serpent

²⁰⁹ *Embrace of the Serpent*. Directed by Ciro Guerra, performances by Nilbio Torres, Antonio Bolivar, Jan Bijovet, and Brionne Davis, Buffalo Films, 2015, 01:23:45-01:24:03.

²¹⁰ Gomez-Barris, Macarena. “Introduction.” *The Extractive Zone*. London, Duke University Press, 2017, pp. 1-16.

²¹¹ "A Performance from the Gods Perfect for a Holy Setting." *Spalding Guardian*, May 07, 2014. *ProQuest*, <https://colorado.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.colorado.idm.oclc.org/docview/1521424997?accountid=14503>.

descends from the Milky Way. This is important because, through connecting to the sacred history of hegemonic culture, Evan also understands one of the four pillars of peoplehood that is so central to Indigenous ideology, therefore signaling an important step towards his hybridity and survival within the Amazon. This is clearly an important lesson that Karamakate wanted to impart to Evan, since the gramophone is the one thing that he allowed Evan to keep. The film indicates that Evan has learned this lesson and is continuing down a new and different path from Theo when Karamakate narrates the following:

To become a warrior every Cohiuano man must leave everything behind and go into the jungle, guided only by his dreams. In that journey, he has to discover, in solitude and silence, who he really is. He has to become a vagabond of dreams. Some get lost and never come back. But those that do, are ready to face whatever may come.²¹²



Fig. 5. The older Karamakate standing on one side of the river while Evan kneels in the background. *Embrace of the Serpent*. Directed by Ciro Guerra, performances by Nilbio Torres, Antonio Bolivar, Jan Bijovet, and Brionne Davis, Buffalo Films, 2015.

As explained previously, during this speech the two timelines are shown back to back while the older Karamakate speaks. Evan is far in the background sitting down behind Karamakate on one side of the river while Theo weakly stumbles out on the other side of the river. As Karamakate's

²¹² *Embrace of the Serpent*. Directed by Ciro Guerra, performances by Nilbio Torres, Antonio Bolivar, Jan Bijovet, and Brionne Davis, Buffalo Films, 2015, 01:26:58-01:27:33.

words reach the end of this quote Theo falls to the ground while the older Karamakate stands strong with Evan's blurred outline still sitting in the background (see fig. 5). The contrast of these two timelines side by side echoes once again the message that Theo is unable to enter the Amazon and adapt to Indigenous cultural practices while Evan is. Theo's fall to the ground symbolizes Karamakate's failure to pass on his song the first time around, which is why he, rather than Evan, is who we see standing on the other side of the river. Karamakate's image with Evan in the background symbolizes the continuation of Karamakate song through his education of Evan. Karamakate is the central image because, by choosing to impart his knowledge to Evan, he also chooses to ensure the survival of himself and his people. It is for this reason that the two timelines present a clear contrast between health and sickness with Theo lying sick on one side of the river while Evan remains healthy on the other in the background of Karamakate, signaling the continuation of the Cohiuano people. This contrast between Evan and Karamakate blurs previous understandings of the queer/non-queer and Indigenous/non-Indigenous binaries by suggesting that Evan's Hybridity – with the support of Karamakate – is what prevails while Theo's homogeneous non-Indigenous state deteriorates. This action in and of itself does away with the Indigenous/non-Indigenous binary while still putting the emphasis on Karamakate through his placement in the foreground and Evan in the background, thus not erasing Karamakate and the other Indigenous people all together.

The last few scenes when Evan and Karamakate finally arrive at the Workshop of the Gods, the mountain where yakruna grows, depicts Evan's full transformation into a complete cultural hybrid between both hegemonic and Indigenous culture. Shortly after they get to the top and Karamakate takes Evan to the yakruna, Evan reveals the real motive behind his search for the plant to be profit and empire. Evan explains that the yakruna raises the purity of rubber and

therefore is highly desirable for the war efforts for WWII. Understandably Karamakate gets upset with Evan and shouts, “You want to make weapons with yakruna? You want to turn it into death?”²¹³ The yakruna plant enables the Cohiuano people to interact with the gods and learn how to live properly in the queer environment of the Amazon. Yakruna literally allows them to survive, so to turn it into a commodity, not just for extraction, but to fund a Western war goes against everything that the yakruna stands for. Evan runs over to try to grab the yakruna off the branch and Karamakate pushes him to the ground. Evan, frustrated, reaches into his pocket for a small knife. Karamakate grabs the hand that Evan holds the knife in and pulls it to his throat, saying, “Do it. Do it! I don’t care. It is my duty to die, but yakruna dies with me. You are a chullachaqui too, and you will be one forever.”²¹⁴ Looking back at Karamakate’s explanation of a chullachaqui, or someone who is “empty, hollow...A chullachaqui has no memories. It only drifts in the world, empty, like a ghost, lost in a time without time,” by calling Evan a chullachaqui, Karamakate means that Evan has drifted away yet again from truly understanding Indigenous cultural practices.²¹⁵ Memory is essential to the continuation of Indigenous cultural practices, since without memory the four pillars of peoplehood have no significance. Therefore, to tell Evan that he is a chullachaqui is to tell him that he has failed at his attempt to become a hybrid between Western and Cohiuano culture. It is also significant that Karamakate says this directly before he offers Evan the yakruna. In *Embrace of the Serpent*, yakruna is based on an Amazonian plant called ayahuasca. As Evgenia Fotiou explains in their work “The Globalization of Ayahuasca Shamanism and the Erasure of Indigenous Shamanism,” “Ayahuasca is so fundamental for some groups...that, as Michael Harner (1973) points out, the ayahuasca induced

²¹³ *Embrace of the Serpent*. Directed by Ciro Guerra, performances by Nilbio Torres, Antonio Bolivar, Jan Bijovet, and Brionne Davis, Buffalo Films, 2015, 01:51:34-01:51:39.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 01:52:02-01:52:07.

²¹⁵ Ibid, 00:50:25-00:50:52.

experience is seen as the true reality, whereas normal waking life is considered simply an illusion.”²¹⁶ Yakruna too is fundamental to the Cohiuano and, as Karamakate has said, is essential to “dreaming” during which point a person becomes fully Cohiuano. Karamakate’s explanation of what makes a true Cohiuano warrior therefore reflects the same sentiment as Fotiou’s assessment above. Given this perspective, to be a chullachaqui is to live a life without the use of yakruna. Essentially, this scene then represents a last-ditch effort on Karamakate’s part to remove the last hegemonic instincts within Evan so that the song of the Cohiuano can be carried on through Evan’s use of yakruna.

Evan lowers the knife, unable to bring himself to kill Karamakate. Despite Evan’s recent betrayal, Karamakate still prepares the yakruna for him later that night. Before offering Evan the drink of prepared yakruna, Karamakate applies a paste of caapi, another hallucinogenic plant, to Evans back. While he does this, he explains the history of the yakruna to Evan and prepares him to meet the serpent once he drinks the solution. He says, “It existed before creation, before the snake descended. It will take you to see her. She is enormous, fearsome. But you must not fear it. You must let her embrace you. Her embrace will take you to ancient places, where life doesn’t exist, not even its embryo.”²¹⁷ By finally not only allowing him access to the yakruna, but also relaying to him its sacred history, Karamakate officially begins Evan’s initiation into his cultural hybridity. Still confused, Evan turns to Karamakate and says, “I...tried to kill you. I don’t deserve this,” but Karamakate responds and adds, “I killed you too, before, in a time without time, yesterday, 40 years, maybe 100, or a million years ago, but you came back. I wasn’t meant

²¹⁶ Fotiou, Evgenia. “The Globalization of Ayahuasca and the Erasure of the Indigenous Shaman.” *Anthropology of Consciousness*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2016, p. 153.

²¹⁷ *Embrace of the Serpent*. Directed by Ciro Guerra, performances by Nilbio Torres, Antonio Bolivar, Jan Bijovet, and Brionne Davis, Buffalo Films, 2015, 01:53:28-01:54:00.

to teach my people. I was meant to teach you.”²¹⁸ Here Karamakate addresses Indigenous conceptions of time as cyclical rather than linear, and it is implied that Theo is the one Karamakate killed in the past.²¹⁹ If it wasn’t clear before, it is clear now that both Theo and Evan represent the same man placed in slightly different circumstances that conclusively determine the future of Karamakate and the other Indigenous people. Through his travels with both men, Karamakate comes to realize that the only way he can preserve the memory of his people is by educating the white man, which brings up the topic yet again of whether or not it is the oppressed’s job to educate their oppressor. *Embrace of the Serpent* concludes that the answer is yes. Evan takes the solution, drinks it and then inhales another substance that Karamakate blows into his nose. Karamakate says, “You are now Cohiuano,” at which point the scene shifts to aerial shots of the Amazon and the Amazon river and change to a shot of the young Karamakate with glowing eyes. As soon as he opens his mouth the screen is flooded with light and the scene shifts to the galaxy. The camera moves farther and farther away until the galaxy becomes the image of a stick figure inside another stick figure. These images clearly imply that Evan has successfully dreamt and communicated with the gods, thus concluding his transformation into a Cohiuano-Western cultural hybrid. When he wakes up, he is laying in the sand, alone, and Karamakate is nowhere to be found. Supposedly he has completed his duty to pass on the song of the Cohiuano, and is no longer needed so he disappears, leaving behind Evan. At first glance this ending is extremely problematic in its message about queer futurity since it implies that the only way for queer populations to survive is if they pass along their knowledge, but ultimately, they

²¹⁸ Ibid, 01:54:25-01:54:53.

²¹⁹ For more information about Native temporality see Kawagley, Angayuquq Oscar, and Ray Barnhardt. *Education Indigenous Indigenous to Place: Western Science Meets Native Reality*. Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 1999, <http://ankn.uaf.edu/Curriculum/Articles/BarnhardtKawagley/EIP.html> . Accessed 29 March 2019. Johansen, Bruce E. “Dedication: On the Passing of Vine Deloria, Jr.” *Native American Voices: A Reader*. 3rd ed., Routledge, 2016, pp. 10-15.

will still disappear. In this aspect, *Embrace of the Serpent* and *Arrival* have yet another commonality. The Heptapods also disappear into thin air at the end of the film, which relays the same message about queer futurity. In the case of *Embrace of the Serpent* the ending can be read as especially problematic by having the cultural hybrid survive and not the Indigenous person, since hybridity is a highly scrutinized notion within the field of Indigenous studies. In her essay, “Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism,” Andrea Smith comments on the effects of hybridity discourse for the Indigenous subject and how binaries often are helpful for better understanding settler colonialism. She writes,

“While queer theorists such as Muñoz tend to be critical of binaries, I think it is important not to have a binary analysis of binaries. The presumption that binarism is bad and hybridity good often works against Indigenous interests. Hence in the case of queer of color critique, the subjectless critique actually relies on a ‘mixed’ or ‘hybrid’ subject who is positioned against the Native foil. For example in his reading of Arturo Islas’s novel *Migrant Souls*, Muñoz links queerness to migrancy and hybridity to mestizaje, seeing them as categories that defy ‘notions of uniform identity or origins.’...What is erased in this analysis are the land claims of Indigenous peoples who come from the land Chicanos may claim as Aztlán....but when indigeneity is not foregrounded it tends to disappear in order to enable the emergence of the hybrid subject.²²⁰

Essentially, to be an Indigenous hybrid is to re-instill settler colonial logic since such logic is inherently dependent on the elimination of Indigenous people.²²¹ However, the disappearance of Karamakate at the end can also be read through Muñoz’s theorization of queer futurity and queer

²²⁰ Smith, Andrea. “Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism.” *GLQ*, vol. 16, no. 1-2, 2010, p. 57.

²²¹ Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, vol. 4, 2006, pp. 387-409.

utopia as something always fleeting. He writes that queerness is, “flickering illuminations from other times and places,” that “assist those of us who wish to follow queerness’ promise, it’s still unrealized potential to see something else...”²²² Muñoz’s analytic of “flickering illumination” are very much reflected in the structure of *Embrace of the Serpent* where the plot doesn’t follow a clear, linear timeline, but rather jumps back and forth between the two. The whole film then can be seen as representing these “flickering illuminations” making the ending, just another example of how, rather than the queer being “here and now” it is always the “then and there.”²²³

Overall, the contrasting sickness and health of Theo and Evan work to demonstrate how proper investment in learning the Indigenous people’s cultural practices are essential to life in the Amazon. Those, like Theo, who reject Indigenous knowledges become ill since those same knowledges are essential to survival in the queer environment of the Amazon. Evan, on the other hand, was more willing to learn and was able to survive and finally become a cultural hybrid between hegemonic and Cohiuano culture. In addition, he had the full support and constant push of Karamakate to continue learning about Indigenous cultural practices. Theo did not have this same support from Karamakate during his travels which contributed to his inability to survive and remain healthy. Finally, the sickness of some and health of others provides insight into queer futures that require the help of the oppressor to continue to survive. Although problematic on the surface, the disappearance of Karamakate at the end of the film and the survival of Evan, the hybrid serves as yet another example of queerness being always “on the horizon.”²²⁴

²²² Muñoz, José Esteban. “Queerness as Horizon,” *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York, New York University Press, 2009, p. 28.

²²³ Ibid, p. 11.

²²⁴ Ibid, p. 11.

IV. Conclusion

Up until this point I have only briefly touched on the similarities between *Arrival* and *Embrace of the Serpent*. In my conclusion, I will expand on these similarities and discuss how they are essential to my overall argument. To begin, I argue that queered populations are seen as diseased by hegemonic culture with the potential to infect others. In *Arrival* the reaction not only of the military officials who work on the base with Louise, but also the media outlets perpetuate this idea about the Heptapods. Louise is not only given inoculations to protect against any disease she could procure from the Heptapods, but the military officials insist that she wear a hazmat suit during all interactions. Furthermore, media coverage asking about biological contamination and depicting chaos after the release of an image of the Heptapods further position them as something to be feared and protected against. In *Embrace of the Serpent* age is an essential criterion for how the infection of the Indigenous people is dealt with. Children, being seen by hegemonic culture as more malleable become the “individual to be corrected” who, through force and “education,” can be “cured” of their “savage” ways. The Indigenous adults on the other hand, are no longer salvageable and therefore the only solution to their sickness is termination. This is exemplified by the image of Indigenous man with the “caboclo” sign above his head, signaling his inability to fully assimilate to Western culture thus forcing the “sickness” he brought to the mission to be eradicated through his death. Although in both films various preventative actions are carried out to prevent the infection of the queer Other, *Embrace of the Serpent* is unique in that age becomes a key factor in determining what types of preventative actions are used. This can perhaps be accounted for by the human appearance of the Indigenous people compared to the Heptapods, making their age legible to those like the priest or the Messiah who deal out preventative measures. Putting the Heptapods and the Indigenous people

side by side, we then see that the Heptapods and the Indigenous adults bear more similarities than are first apparent. The Indigenous adults are eliminated because they can no longer assimilate to hegemonic culture, an important step in humanizing them since, again to be human is to be “rational” and “bounded,” all things seen as nonexistent in Indigenous culture by hegemonic culture.²²⁵ Therefore, in their failure to assimilate this also becomes a failure to be human by hegemonic culture’s standards. The Heptapods are seen as inhuman due to their lack of “typical” human phenotypic traits. Therefore, the Heptapods and the Indigenous adults alike are dehumanized and thus, their elimination is seen as justified by hegemonic culture.

Additionally, in both films the queered populations are also seen as being able to infect others with their disease through prolonged exposure or contact. This is mainly displayed in *Arrival* through the concerns of the military officials about Louise as she begins to become more fluent in the Heptapods’ language, since it is also implied that a previous expert initially brought to the scene could not “handle” it, became ill, and was relieved of their duty. Louise, however, survives and is able to interact successfully with the Heptapods because of her commitment to learning from them. Theo represents the infected individual in *Embrace of the Serpent*. From the beginning he is extremely ill as a result of his time in the queer environment of the Amazon and his rejection of the Indigenous cultural practices necessary to live there. As the film progresses and he more adamantly rejects Karamakate’s help, his health continues to deteriorate. Conversely, Evan survives his journey through the jungle precisely because he accepts Karamakate’s help. He rejects the *extractive view* so central to hegemonic culture that literally weighs him down since all of his “things” he has acquired throughout his journey cause the canoe he and Karamakate use to travel down the river to take on small amounts of water.²²⁶ Once

²²⁵ Luciano, Dana, and Mel Chen. “Has the Queer Ever Been Human?” *GLQ*, vol. 21, no. 2-3, 2015, p. 190.

²²⁶ Gomez-Barris, Macarena. “Introduction.” *The Extractive Zone*. London, Duke University Press, 2017, pp. 1-16.

he throws all of his “things” into the river he is finally able to dream, and thus finally able to fully become Cohiuano. The key point is that the way that these members of hegemonic culture survive the “threat” of the queered other is through adopting the cultural pattern of the queered group and becoming a hybrid. In the case of Louise, she does this through learning how to read and write logograms, thus changing her understanding of time. Evan does this through accepting the help of Karamakate and letting go of the *extractive view* which allows him to fully embrace Indigenous cultural practices. However, one key difference between *Arrival* and *Embrace of the Serpent* is that because *Arrival* is filmed through the perspective of hegemonic culture, Louise is still seen by others from hegemonic culture as being somewhat ill, even at the end of the film. *Embrace of the Serpent*, on the other hand, is filmed through the perspective of the Indigenous people, thus providing a more decolonial and queer perspective than *Arrival* and presenting Evan as healthy at the end due to his hybridity as opposed to still sick like Louise. Furthermore, Theo’s character adds a nuanced take on the importance of hybridity to those from hegemonic culture engaging in queer practices. Unlike in *Arrival* where the presence of individuals who do not accept the cultural pattern of queer populations is only briefly mentioned, Theo’s character in *Embrace of the Serpent* fully fleshes out the effect on those who do not develop hybridity. It is important here to point out that I am not arguing that every member of hegemonic culture to ever make contact with queered populations will become sick if they do not become a hybrid. Instead I argue that in both films characters like Louise, Evan, and Theo who enter willingly into the queer environment of the queered group must develop hybridity in order to survive in that particular environment, which in turn makes them queer as well.

These queer environments have much in common, namely their illegible qualities. The fog behind the barrier where the Heptapods are situated prevents their full visibility and

legibility, thus queering them. Similarly, the wild mess of the Amazon refuses legibility through its disorganized layout that once again resists legibility. These environments do not foster the categorical gaze of those from hegemonic culture, therefore in order to survive within them members of hegemonic culture must adopt queer ideology and become queer hybrids.

Finally, in both films the queered groups' main goal is to pass on knowledge that is essential to their survival, and once they achieve this, they disappear. For the Heptapods this means passing along their language so that 3,000 years in the future the Humans can help them. Once Louise becomes fluent, their ships disappear into thin air – not leaving a trace behind. For Karamakate this means teaching Evan the Cohiuano cultural practices so that they do not die with Karamakate – meaning the end of his people. In the final moments of the film after Evan has officially dreamed, he wakes and is unable to find Karamakate anywhere. He leaves the jungle this time by himself, signaling that he is completely Cohiuano since he can navigate the queer environment of the Amazon without help. Both of these films ending with the disappearance of the queered group, leaving behind the hybrid suggests that the future of queer people is always “on the horizon.”²²⁷ That it is fleeting and always slightly out of reach.

This final message about queer futurity being always “on the horizon” as well as the previous messages connecting queerness to pathology are extremely important and have relevance beyond their analysis in this thesis. On the one hand the final message about futurity offers a glimpse of hope for queer populations. Rather than seeing the disappearance of the Heptapods and Karamakate as an Edelman-esque allusion to “no future” for queer populations, I understand it as a Muñozian turn where queerness is situated in the “then and there.”²²⁸ Instead

²²⁷ Muñoz, José Esteban. “Queerness as Horizon,” *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York, New York University Press, 2009, p. 11.

²²⁸ *Ibid*, p 1.

of queer futures never being achievable, it is something that queer populations must constantly strive towards. That being said, the initial depiction of the Heptapods and the Indigenous people as diseased with the power to infect others has a less positive outlook and has serious consequences. It is easy to argue that its “just a movie” so these connections mean nothing, but in his essay titled “‘It’s Just a Movie’: A Teaching Essay for Introductory Media Classes,” Greg Smith explains how, “Examining a film can give us clues about the meanings and assumptions shared by the members of a culture.”²²⁹ And, in fact, we do see much of the same discourse equating the queered groups in *Arrival* and *Embrace of the Serpent* to infection in everyday life. This discourse has been especially evident during the Trump presidency in regard to immigrants of color. President Trump, in fact, has been quoted saying “The largest suppliers of heroin, cocaine and other illicit drugs are Mexican cartels that arrange to have Mexican immigrants trying to cross the border and smuggle in the drugs...Likewise, tremendous infectious disease is pouring across the border.”²³⁰ Comments like this are just one example of how narratives of the Other are mass produced and taken up by institutions. This particular comment is especially applicable to *Arrival* since the Heptapods can be seen as immigrants to Earth rather than immigrants to a particular country. Essentially comments like Trump’s help to reproduce this cultural narrative about immigrants and people of color, which works to maintain systems of oppression.

The gravity of conflating queerness with pathology then raises a couple questions for further scholarly investigation. Does the positive ending regarding queer futurity outweigh the

Edelman, Lee. “The Future is Kid Stuff.” *No Future: Queer Theory and Death Drive*. London, Duke University Press, 2004, pp. 1-31.

²²⁹ Smith, Greg M. “‘It’s Just a Movie’: A Teaching Essay for Introductory Media Classes.” *Cinema Journal*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2001, p. 132.

²³⁰ Walker, Hunter. “Donald Trump Just Released an Epic Statement Raging against Mexican Immigrants and ‘Disease’.” *Business Insider*, Business Insider, 6 July 2015, www.businessinsider.com/donald-trumps-epic-statement-on-mexico-2015-7.

conflation of queerness with pathology when this conflation perpetuates the criminalization of immigrants and people of color today? Or is problematizing the conflation problematic in and of itself by following an ableist logic? Perhaps embracing the sick, wild, messy conglomerate that is queerness is just yet another way to grasp at fleeting, queer futures.

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