INDIGENOUS DISCURSIVE ACTIVISM AGAINST EPISTEMIC OPPRESSION. TRANSMEDIA (HI)STORYTELLING AS A THEORY-PRACTICE FRAMEWORK FOR RADICAL RESURGENCE

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Abstract – This proposal starts from the assumption that Indigenous transmedia storytelling offers both a context and an analytical opportunity for reframing theories and practices of decoloniality. From dismantling settler-colonial narrative regimes to problematising neocolonial scopic orders through native transmedia activism, this contribution endeavours to challenge regime-made socio-cultural tropes for the purposes of a re-politicisation of Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg epistemologies. Indigenous literary production more broadly is deeply informed by Native Americans' holistic engagement with their intellectual, political, artistic and spiritual life (Simpson 2017), reflecting the way in which the ontological foundations of their intelligence systems are embedded in a multi-layered process of knowledge production. Within the context of Nishnaabeg intellectualism, the definition of *radical* resurgence – understood as a comprehensive change rather than a violent act (*ibidem*) – may seem redundant. However, this redundancy is justified, as Western thought compartmentalises the cultural and political spheres as mutually exclusive aspects of public life. For this reason, the term *cultural* (resurgence) fails as a consistent modifier, as it undermines Indigenous claims of dispossession and erasure as political issues. Therefore, drawing on the theoretical framework of decoloniality (Mignolo 2009; Geniusz 2009; Smith 2012; Tuck & Yang 2012), this contribution aims to investigate transmedia Indigenous narratives as conduits for local-cultural knowledge production and global visibility through epistemic recognition. It does so by examining the works of Nishnaabeg scholar and artist from Canada Leanne Betasamosake Simpson: the genre-blending novel *Noopiming: The Cure for White Ladies* (2020), which significantly influenced her digital album *Noopiming Sessions*, and was at the same time informed by her video-poem *How to Steal a Canoe* (2016). The selected case studies represent compelling manifestations of how Indigenous content is inherently remixable, exemplifying non-dichotomous approaches to knowledge-building processes, and embodying Indigenous "grounded normativity" – that is, how Native Americans' land-based knowledge shapes their reciprocal and non-exploitative commitment to the world (Coulthard 2014). Thus, serving as a 'cultural activator' (Jenkins 2008, p. 101), Indigenous – and specifically Anishinaabe – transmedia storytelling fosters self-representational narratives, positioning them as practices of active citizenship oriented toward sociocultural, political, and eco-aesthetic resurgence.

Keywords: epistemic imperialism; radical resurgence; transmedia artivism; contemporary Indigeneity; discursive identity/world-building**.**

1. Introduction

This paper takes as a foundational premise that Indigenous transmedia storytelling[1] provides both a contextual framework and an analytical opportunity for engaging with theories and practices of decoloniality. In order to refine the conceptual contours of my overall argument and its stakes, it is necessary to draw upon the theoretical framework of decoloniality as articulated by Walter Mignolo

[1] The concept of transmedia storytelling was first introduced by Henry Jenkins in his 2003 article for the *Technology Review*, in which he highlights the adaptability of content across multiple converging media platforms. https://www.technologyreview.com/2003/01/15/234540/transmedia-storytelling/.

(2009). The Argentinian philosopher and semiologist argues that: "Geo-politics of knowledge originate from geo-politics of knowing" (Mignolo 2009, p. 160). This suggests that the erasure of subjectivities, identities and places – framed as "nonthought" within Western settler-colonial discourse – operates at an epistemic level, and is, therefore, profoundly epistemic in nature. Throughout his work, Mignolo (*ibidem*) encourages a shift in focus from the content of discourse (the enunciated) to the act and location of its production (the enunciation). This shift raises a fundamental question: where does the theoretical haven of cognitive imperialism truly reside? The epistemological basis of discursive colonisation can be located within the logocentric tradition of Western settler-colonial thought, which systematically endorses universalist forms of reasoning over embodied ontologies and relational epistemologies. Language is legitimised – and, in turn, it construes and then stigmatises knowledge markers as legitimate as well – when it becomes institutionalised, that is, when it is codified in writing. For language to become institutionalised, it historically needed to be crystallised into a "body", a grammar which could express and explain its inner workings. However, since language is neither neutral nor passive, if anything, it is always charged with intent, representing the ruling principle of social power, as Spivak (1998, p. 103) herself argued, its grammar also applies to human subjects, constructing, in doing so, their subjectivity and, consequently, their agency. So-called subaltern categories have historically been constructed as "ungrammatical" subjects, thus lacking a syntactic structure of their own and, as a consequence, a self-determined corporeal presence, they were ultimately relegated to a condition of total objectification, that is, to epistemic inaction. Given that knowledge is inherently power-laden, what Mignolo (2009, p. 165) defines as "modern/colonial loci of enunciation" – disciplines and institutional apparatuses – represent geo-politically and body-politically situated practices. As the Argentinian semiologist argues, scholars from the so-called First World – positioned within Pletsch's (1981) *Three Worlds* model of the global division of scientific labour – occupy the dual role of both the enunciated and the enunciators (Mignolo 2009, p. 166). Drawing on Émile Benveniste's (1970, pp. 12-18) notion of the Eurocentric and anthropocentric "formal apparatus of enunciation" – which is structured around subject-centered pronouns and deictic expressions therefore reflecting a geopolitically and body-politically located point of view –, and on the concept of frames of conversation – which led to a theoretical shift beyond Saussurean structuralism toward discourse-oriented linguistic analysis –, Mignolo (2009, p. 164) states that, from the fifteenth century onwards, Western knowledge production was shaped by two cosmological frameworks operating antithetically: theology and philosophy. These frames were institutionalised through the regulation of disciplinary knowledge, initially by the trivium and quadrivium of the European Renaissance, and later through the division between human and natural sciences, as a result of Enlightenment-era secularisation (*ibidem*). Despite their conceptual opposition, the theological and secular frame cooperate and merge in their role in delegitimising non-Western narratives and modes of knowledge production. Both "super-frames", i.e., theology and secular philosophy, located their theo- and ego-politics of knowledge exclusively in the mind: on the one hand, God, on the other hand, Reason (ivi, p. 177), or the hermeneutic paradigms underpinning the metaphysics of Being. It follows that bodies and places, that is, geopolitics and body-politics of knowledge, have been historically invalidated as sites of knowledge-making. In contrast, theo- and ego-politics of knowledge have historically succeeded in shaping discourse – across both time and space – by becoming entrenched in institutions such as monasteries, churches, universities, museums, states, etc (ivi, p. 176). For this reason, the decolonial option of epistemic disobedience, as advanced by Mignolo (ivi, p. 160), inevitably calls these entities into question. These institutions operate within historically biased frameworks, rendering them complicit in perpetuating an epistemological milieu of cultural domestication and global marginalisation. Following Mignolo's (*ibidem*) theorisation of epistemic disobedience, the references in this essay to Anishinaabe knowledge and ethos (anishinaabe-gikendaasowin and anishinaabe-izhitwaawin, respectively) draw on the Ojibwe glossary compiled and employed by Wendy Makoons Geniusz (2009, p. 11), as a way to actively shift our "geography of reasoning" (Mignolo 2009, p. 163) at a methodological level, and to enact a decolonial theory-practice framework. This work aims to challenge and deconstruct regime-made

socio-cultural tropes for the purposes of a re-politicisation of Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg[2] izhitwaawin. In this regard, Indigenous literary production more broadly is highly informed by Indigenous communities' holistic engagement with their intellectual, political, natural, artistic and spiritual life (Simpson 2017, p. 172), expressing the way in which the ontological foundation of their intelligence systems lies in a multi-layered process of knowledge production. As Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar and artist, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (ivi, p. 151) argues: "Theory isn't just an intellectual pursuit. It is woven within kinetics, spiritual presence, and emotion. It is contextual and relational. Nishnaabegs' embodied ontology therefore relocates decolonial epistemologies both geo- and body-politically. It is, in fact, crucial, from both a critical-normative and a hermeneutic perspective, to clarify that decolonization is not a metaphor. When metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenteres whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future" (Tuck & Yang 2012, p. 3). Drawing on Tuck and Yang's (*ibidem*) argument that decolonial practices should not be metaphorised, the following sections of this article aim to investigate contemporary Nishnaabeg narratives from Canada[3] that serve not as mere discursive gestures, rather as conduits for local-cultural knowledge production and epistemic recognition through deeply embodied activism. This analysis delves into Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's work, including the genre-hybridised novel *Noopiming: The Cure for White Ladies* (2020), her digital album *Noopiming Sessions* (2020) and the video-poem *How to Steal a Canoe* (2016).

2. Theory within practice: Nishnaabeg storytelling as a means of performative citizenship against cognitive imperialism

The present analysis seeks to emphasise the interdependence of theory *and* practice, as well as theory *in* practice within contemporary Nishnaabeg storytelling, for sociocultural, political and aesthetic purposes. The notion of *literariness*, as theorised by the Russian Formalists in the early twentieth century, has long been surpassed. Today, literature operates as a place of active and interactive engagement in knowledge-making processes, now characterised by cross-disciplinary features – such as the merging of social sciences, ecocriticism and digital media that enable a transnational and transartistic syncretism. Nevertheless, the idea of literature as an interdiscursive concept has roots in classical antiquity. In Book X of *The Republic*, for instance, Plato addresses the notion of imitation (mimesis) and the role of the imitator (mimetés), associating this figure with both the painter and the playwright (Albaladejo 2016, p. 50). This suggests that different art forms share semiotic junctions because of human artistry unfolding through different expressive channels. Accordingly, this paper contends that because of intersemiotic reciprocity between artistic discourses, literature is not produced in isolation, nor does it rely solely on its internal tools. It is here that comparative literature becomes a productive methodological lens to address the aesthetics of production of contemporary literary texts. The standardised definition of comparative literature centers on comparing literary texts produced in different languages, but language is not always and exclusively understood as *langue* in a strictly Saussurean sense of dichotomizing *langue* and *parole*; it also operates as a series of different communication codes. As suggested by Domínguez, Saussy and Villanueva (2016, pp. 13-15) in *Lo que Borges enseñó a Cervantes*, cinema, opera, comics and painting are equally legitimate forms of language. Thus, comparative literature reminds us that the analytical tools of a discipline do not

[2] According to *The Ojibwe People's Dictionary* the word *Michi Saagiig* comes from the Ojibwe *Misi-zaagiing* meaning 'river of many outlets' (copyrighted by *The Ojibwe People's Dictionary*). While Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg people are Native Americans living in Southern Ontario, Canada, speaking Anishinaabemowin. https://ojibwe.lib.umn.edu/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=Anishinaabeg&commit=Search&type=ojibwe.

[3] Contemporary Nishnaabeg communities are situated across several provinces in Canada and states in the US, e.g. Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec, as well as Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota and Montana (Geniusz 2009, p. 4). All references made to Nishnaabeg culture and language in this essay apply specifically to the Anishinaabe living in Southern Ontario, Canada.

necessarily identify with the discipline itself (Eco 2017 [1977], p. V). In other words, literary discourse can be enriched and critiqued through alternative expressive practices, which may, in turn, be re-signified as new cultural and literary tropes toward a global, yet not globalised, theory of art.

Speaking of multidimensional ways of knowledge-making, Nishnaabeg practices provide a crucial insight into their all-embracing and non-dichotomous modes of conceptualising the world. In light of the above, *Noopiming: The Cure for White Ladies* by Simpson, represents and performs a hybrid literary *act* by merging multiple literary genres, including nonfiction, prose, poetry and prose poetry. The narratological hybridity of Simpson's book serves as a cultural *practice* to express Nishnaabeg *theory* (anishinaabe-izhitwaawin) and its policies of recognition and resistance. The title of the book itself – *noopiming* means *in the bush* in Anishinaabemowin[4] – is a non-white reply to Canadian writer Susanna Moodie's 1852 memoir and guidebook for British colonizers considering emigrating to Canada, *Roughing It in the Bush*. Within Indigenous discourse, colonial conquest and extraction are identified as foundational forces behind capitalist economies. From this perspective, the accumulation of capital and the logics of capitalist production are seen as antithetical to Indigenous ethics of deep reciprocity and consent, central of Indigenous grounded normativity, namely how their land-based knowledge systems frame their inter-relational commitment to the world (Coulthard 2014, p. 13). Within anishinaabe-izhitwaawin, the natural backdrop constitutes, in fact, a relational and cultural asset. In this context, Simpson's genre-hybridised narrative portrays the Nishnaabeg life of seven characters attempting to commune with both the urban and the natural world. Regarding the latter, the narrator of the story, Mashkawaji[5], identified as they/them, deliberately falls through the ice of Lake Ontario to reclaim and reinhabit freedom and to heal from the colonial wound continually reopened by hegemonic practices. Since Mashkawaji lies frozen in the lake, there are seven gender-fluid characters that physically replace them across everyday life: Akiwenzii is the narrator's will; Ninaatig is the maple tree who symbolises their lungs; Mindimooyenh represents their conscience; Sabe the giant who is their marrow; the caribou named Adik stands for their nervous system; while the two humans, Asin and Lucy, are Mashkawaji's eyes, ears, and brain. In this respect, as Simpson (2011, p. 39) states in *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, when Gzhwe Mnidoo, the creative force in Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg cosmology, instilled knowledge in their communities, it was not merely breathed into their minds but rather embodied throughout their entire being. This suggests that anishinaabe-gikendaasowin is inherently performative and enacted through singing, dancing, fasting, dreaming and participation in ceremony; that is, through embodying what is referred to in Anishinaabemowin as *mino bimaadiziwin*[6]. This Nishnaabeg practice aligns with the pursuit of decolonisation by promoting collective well-being and relational ontologies. Hence, this lived practice serves as a philosophical anchor as well as a decolonial method for achieving a transformative epistemology grounded in Nishnaabeg ontological plurality. This ethic of deep reciprocity, with which *Noopiming* is densely infused, weaves a web of interconnections among several urgent concerns in contemporary discourse. These include Indigenous queer normativity, Native Americans' resurgence practices against cultural appropriation and expropriation, as well as transmedia expressions of contemporary Indigeneity. In the following sections, I examine these issues is greater depth, and specifically in relation to anishinaabe-gikendaasowin, as they are articulated in Simpson's genre-blending work, serving as a compelling manifestation of how Indigenous content remains dynamically remixable and inherently genre-hybridised.

[4] According to *The Ojibwe People's Dictionary* the locational adverb *noopiming* means 'in the bush; in the woods; inland' (copyrighted by *The Ojibwe's People's Dictionary*). https://ojibwe.lib.umn.edu/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=noopiming&commit=Search&type=ojibwe.

[5] According to *The Ojibwe People's Dictionary* the animate intransitive verb *mashkawaji* means 's/he freezes stiff, is frozen stiff, has frostbite' (copyrighted by *The Ojibwe's People's Dictionary*). https://ojibwe.lib.umn.edu/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=Mashkawaji&commit=Search&type=ojibwe.

[6] In *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence,* Simpson (2011: 31) explains the concept of *mino bimaadiziwin* that translates to "the art of living the good life".

2.1 Reframing embodied epistemologies: Indigenous queer normativity and the negotiation with logocentric corporeality

According to Anishinaabe philosophical foundations, each member of the community has the right to be truthful to their own theoretical understanding of the world. While a shared Nishnaabeg ontology exists, it is open to individual interpretation, provided that such engagement remains grounded in the continual practice of *Biskaabiiyang*. *Biskaabiiyang* is a key principle of anishinaabe-izhitwaawin, which encourages an intellectual, cultural and political rebirth through the performance of non-binary Nishnaabeg social identities based on collectivised leadership (Simpson 2011, p. 49), as opposed to the hierarchical, coercive and heteropatriarchal systems imposed by colonial frameworks. Concerning this, there is a word in Anishinaabemowin, *debwewin*, that is commonly translated as *truth* (ivi, p. 59). However, a deeper linguistic analysis reveals a richer semantic layering: when the prefix o- is added to the first syllable de-, the same word means *heart*, while the morpheme – we translate to *the sound of* (*ibidem*). Thus, *debwewin*, the *truth*, also signifies *the sound of the heart*. Hence, from an Anishinaabe epistemological perspective, to know the truth means to listen to one's heart. This understanding highlights a core value of anishinaabe-izhitwaawin: knowledge is neither fixed nor externally imposed, but instead relentlessly generated and regenerated through everyone's unique and embodied engagement with their intelligence systems. Therefore, Nishnaabeg truth unravels in a plurality of forms, in which diversity and difference are not only acknowledged but actively embraced. This openly conflicts with the Western heteropatriarchal discourse, where difference and diversity are often marginalised as well as pathologised. In this regard, Irigaray (2013) maintains that man has produced from the very beginning a discourse of appropriation that exiled us from our natural belonging to humanity, that is, from being in relation with the Other. According to the feminist philosopher and psycholinguist, we were initiated to our world by a sage who had received the truth by a She-nature, woman, Goddess- but he nonetheless forgot and denied that She was the one who had given birth to life (ivi, p. 2). This transcendence between the two, i.e., the One and the Other, encloses our world within its own sameness, yet it keeps it open to the Other because not-Being represents a beyond always in relation to Being (ivi, pp. 12-13). Drawing on Derrida's distinction between presence and difference, if not-Being only exists in connection to Being, the opposite is also true. According to Derrida, every time an effect of presence is produced it can be questioned by the difference from which it originated (Easthope 1998, pp. 145-151). This difference and its *Unheimlichkeit* between Being and not-Being emerges from a primordial, immanent and undisclosed proximity that was construed by the colonial logic in a hierarchical and essentialist way. For the Same, the Other represents in fact the Freudian uncanny.

The study of embodiment plays a pivotal role in understanding how power relations govern sexual and gender differences, and how these might be reconstructed and reinterpreted (Mason-Grant 1997, p. 211). In this respect, the Western invention of gender – as a sociocultural construct designed to uphold hierarchical power – could not take root within Indigenous communities where authoritarian leadership did not exist. Within anishinaabe-izhitwaawin the concept of gender was not even a concept, but a word with no semantic value whatsoever. In fact, Nishnaabeg societal systems were not built upon a gender-biased allocation of tasks; labor was evenly distributed. As stated by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017, p. 128), both Anishinaabe women and men were responsible for looking after their children, cooking, sewing, but also fishing, hunting, and performing leadership indiscriminately. Concerning this, within *Noopiming*, the interpersonal and group dynamics among the protagonists showcase gender-free forms of living and relationality. Each of the seven main characters is committed to exercising personal agency as a political strategy to dismantle the above-mentioned essentialised identity categories. Throughout the book, they collectively reject fixed identity markers in order to challenge the *oneness* of their identity in favour of a *wholeness* – malleable, hybrid and relational in nature. For instance, early in the novel, a two-page passage describes the close-knit relationship between Akiwenzii and Ninaatig, the maple tree. Akiwenzii appears as an affectionate figure who has never felt ashamed of expressing their emotions and

nourishes their emotional life through effusive behaviour. While Akiwenzii yearns for shared intimacy, Mindimooyenh "can't relax into the connection" (Simpson 2020, p. 53). According to *The Ojibwe People's Dictionary*, the names Akiwenzii and Mindimooyenh translate respectively to *old man* and *old woman*[7]; however, both characters identify as gender fluid and exhibit personality traits that challenge essentialist constructions of identity. Specifically, Mindimooyenh subverts the standardised conception of womanhood: they are portrayed as a direct and assertive character, often employing crude language and vulgar metaphors to convey irony and emphasise their stance. For instance, as the narrator recalls: "Mindimooyenh says: 'Your hair looks like a hen's ass in a windstorm'' (ivi, p. 59). While language use has traditionally been considered as a reflection of gender identity, sociolinguistic scholarship suggests that it is gender which is shaped and constructed by language (Sunderland 2009, p. 543). In her work, Lakoff (1973, pp. 50-51) critically assesses how language discriminates female subjects by exploring the uneven relationship between linguistic patterns and social inequalities between men and women. She argues that so-called "meaningless" particles, such as empty words or expletives, are in fact highly meaningful, as they reveal underlying gender norms and disparities: women's language is usually softer, while men's speech condones coarse language (*ibidem*), allowing men to say how strongly they feel about a given matter.

Speaking of non-interference and deep reciprocity as core values of Anishinaabe ethics and aesthetics, Indigenous queer normativity serves as both a means of performative citizenship as well as resistance against cognitive imperialism and heteropatriarchal dispossession. As Simpson (2017, pp. 122-123) argues:

> Our thought systems within grounded normativity are fluid, dynamic, and responsive […]. They also come from the land – the land that provides endless examples of queerness and diverse sexualities and genders. […] Heteropatriarchy isn't just about exclusion of certain Indigenous bodies, it is about the destruction of the intimate relationships that make up our nations, and the fundamental systems of ethics based on values of individual sovereignty and self-determination.

Therefore, within Indigenous epistemologies more broadly, the colonial gender binary did not pre-exist as an ontological category of selfhood; hence, Native American thought is inherently queer. However, as previously discussed, gendered bodies, spaces, and landscapes were produced, imposed and policed by the Western imperialist framework. The colonial gender binary was forcefully dictated through residential schools (Martin-Hill 2005, pp. 110-115), sanatoriums and especially the 1876 Indian Act, which binarised the laws and rules for property and status (Lawrence 2004, pp. 50-55). In addition, Indigenous communities were consigned to epistemic dispossession, since "Indian agents" also prohibited the use of Anishinaabemowin erasing, in doing so, the gender fluidity encoded in their language environment (Simpson 2017, p. 127). The semantic alignment between linguistic and extralinguistic reality is crucial within Indigenous knowledge systems. In indigenous philosophy, language is not merely an operational resource, but primarily embodies a cultural and relational asset. For this reason, Indigenous queer normativity, and queerness more broadly, cannot be reduced to sexual orientation. Here Butler's critique and her theory of performativity come into play and intertwine with Indigenous queerness. Drawing on the Austinian theory of speech acts, Butler (2021[1997]) expands the concept of linguistic corporeality, arguing that the discursive and instrumental nature of language is not confined to its descriptiveness. Rather, language's force invokes an agency that enables language to act upon our extralinguistic reality, that is, our own bodies, at a sociopolitical level. Returning tothe previous discussion on the possibility of finding an ontological foundation in alterity, understood in a non-hierarchical and non-dichotomous sense, the

[7] According to *The Ojibwe People's Dictionary* the animate noun *akiwenzii* means "an old man" (copyrighted by *The Ojibwe People's Dictionary*). https://ojibwe.lib.umn.edu/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=akiwenzii&commit=Search&type=ojibwe. Whereas the animate noun *anishinaabekwe* means 'an Indian woman; an Ojibwe woman' (copyrighted by *The Ojibwe People's Dictionary*). https://ojibwe.lib.umn.edu/main-entry/anishinaabekwe-na.

Other exists in relation to the Same insofar as it acquires a social body and space only when acknowledged by the Same. This implies a bidirectional movement: for the Other's existence to be recognised it must necessarily be subjected to interpellation by the Same (Butler 2021[1997], p. 5). Nevertheless, since language itself is infused with power relations, certain speech acts wound the very bodies they address. As already explained, discourse is culturally confined because it originates from the situatedness of our practices, meaning that the heteropatriarchal supremacy underpinning settler colonialism operates primarily through habitual practice. In this sense, Butler (ivi, p. 25) argues that: "The force of the speech act is separable from its meaning, and illocutionary force is secured through convention". Therefore, if the speaking subject mechanises illocutionary speech acts due to the ritualistic nature of convention, the speaker's voice loses its individuality and becomes subsumed by a unified choral voice that enforces homogenisation of thought and, consequently, of social production and reproduction. Within Indigenous discourse, ceremony constitutes a spiritual practice of utmost importance, intended to celebrate spirits, ancestors, and the value of relationships – values that ultimately represent the ideological foundations of their ceremonial life. As Simpson (2017, p. 138) highlights, she is often asked multiple times whether she customarily wears a skirt to ceremony, adhering to the norms and protocols of Nishnaabeg ceremonial practices. In Simpson (ivi, p. 140) words:

> Under colonialism the skirt has been and still is in many cases a tool of oppression. My body remembers this. I believe my ancestors and the spiritual world are aware of this. […] I believe that they are benevolent and that "tradition" can change and adapt to the needs of the people. I believe it is important to reclaim our foundational ethics of consent, noninterference, respect for self-determination, and diversity.

Therefore, the skirt has become a heavily loaded symbol, which has turned into a symbol of the white cis gaze and power. In fact, the perlocutionary act (Austin 2024[1962], p. 76) of persuading someone to wear a skirt during ceremonial practices, as an expression of exclusionary protocols, becomes complicit in a specific materialisation and consequent regulation of certain bodies within social space. By following prescriptive norms and internalising dogmatic codes, individuals develop a sense of belonging. Conversely, those who do not feel represented by these very rules and therefore do not adhere to them often experience detachment and ostracization from their own community. According to Indigenous knowledge and nation building processes, expansive heteropatriarchy as a form of cognitive imperialism is crucial to perpetuating erasure and dispossession, since it systemically prevents Native American communities from participating in ceremony to process intergenerational trauma and heal from the colonial wound. As Simpson (2017, p. 143) herself states: "We don't exist unless we all belong. We all belong". To conclude, if language "precedes and exceeds the subject" (Butler 2021[1997], p. 29), the externalisation of language as an introjected corporeality could also work in favour of subjectivities. If language is not merely descriptive but performative, then it becomes possible to dislocate it from its ontological persistence and pervasiveness, by mobilising for bodily sovereignty as a form of body politic and epistemic resurgence. This idea also resonates with Billy-Ray Belcourt's (2021 [2020], pp. 116-117) reflection on writing and queerness as practices of self-breakage. "What does it mean to require what breaks you?", the poet and scholar from the Driftpile Cree Nation recalls Butler (2015, p. 9 in Belcourt 2020, p. 107) asking in *Senses of the Subject*, before arguing that "in a late-capitalist world in which individuality is a fetish, a mass object of desire, a political anthem, what remains queer about queerness is that it entices us to gamble with the 'I'" (*ibidem*). Therefore, Belcourt too endorses the paradox that what constitutes the self – e.g. identity, community and language – can also displace it and yet be advantageously "self-destructive", *re-placing* it and enabling alternative modes of belonging, that inherently resists gender essentialism and disrupts colonial binary frameworks.

2.2. The radical resurgence method: revitalising tradition through Nishnaabeg pedagogies of and as Land

According to Indigenous ontologies, human nature is inherently relational, meaning that it is grounded in intimate and reciprocal engagement with the world (Smith 2012, p. 125), rather than in the speciesist drive to naturalise it as a passive external backdrop. As Tuck and Yang (2012, p. 6) argued:

> Indigenous peoples are those who have creation stories, not colonization stories, about how we/they came to be in a particular place - indeed how we/they came to be a place. Our/their relationships to land comprise our/their epistemologies, ontologies, and cosmologies.

In this regard, in *As We Have Always Done*, Simpson recounts the Nishnaabeg story of *Binoojiinh Makes a Lovely Discovery*, in which a child, Binoojiinh, learns how to harvest maple sap by observing and imitating their friend Ajidamoo (Simpson 2017, pp.146-149). This story epitomises the self-governing, land-based character of anishinaabe-gikendaasowin, emerging not from formal institutions (such as academia) alone, but through intergenerational, interspecies, and spiritual interactions between children, elders, artists, singers, non-human species and the outer world. What Anishinaabe peoples seek is to come to know through the land, as the land itself serves both as a cultural and a knowledge producer: "To create a nation of Binoojiinh – to survive as *Nishnaabeg* – we shouldn't be just striving for land-based pedagogies. The land must once again *become* the pedagogy" (ivi, p. 160). As already mentioned, *Noopiming* offers a sharp response to our unhealthy, high-performance capitalist society that rests on hyper-individualistic commodification and expropriation processes. In contrast, within Simpson's genre-hybridised novel, the author showcases Nishnaabeg's own ways of being resourceful and productive. For instance, if on the one hand Mashkawaji's immersion in the lake represents a metaphor for Indigenous invisibility and dispossession, then on the other hand, the narrator's frozen body epitomises their inherent capacity for deep environmental relationships prior to the disruptions of colonial imperialism. Moreover, when Mashkawaji merges with the lake, water becomes a living being. As Simpson (2020, p. 206) suggests in chapter eight, titled *Mashkawaji's Theory of Ice*:

> The ice
> breathes
> and gives in
> the lake
> runs
> out of options
> july 15
> 30 cubic metres
> five storeys.

By using personification, Simpson stresses the primary importance of Lake Ontario as a means of reciprocal knowledge, interspecies interaction and livelihood within anishinaabe-gikendaasowin. Furthermore, through the personification of the lake, the author advocates against water weaponization as well as global climate change. As Naomi Klein (2015, p. 385) states, extractivism and climate change are co-generators of socio-environmental upheavals. In other words, extractive industries capitalise on the effects of the climate crisis on the livelihoods of Indigenous peoples to persuade them that, to survive, they must assimilate into the same environmentally harmful system. In contrast, within *Noopiming*, Simpson articulates what she, in her ideological manifesto, *As We Have Always Done*, theorises as the Anishinaabe radical resurgence method. The choice of *radical* as a modifier is profoundly ideological here, since it encompasses a thorough re-politicisation of Native American systemic alternatives to capitalist dispossession. Within the context of anishinaabe-izhitwaawin, the definition of radical resurgence, understood as comprehensive and all-inclusive change, not as a violent act (Simpson 2017, pp. 49-50), might sound redundant, as Western thought

tends to compartmentalise cultural and political spheres of public life. *Cultural* resurgence does not represent a consistent determiner in this case, because it delegitimises Indigenous peoples' reclamation of dispossession as a political matter. Therefore, through a Nishnaabeg epistemological lens, Simpson encourages freedom and re-appropriation of Aki – i.e., the land – through their profoundly anticapitalistic and sustainable practices. Indigenous communities have never ceased to resist colonial incursions, as Western regimes of extraction and assimilation persist and operate with increasingly sophisticated neo-imperialist apparatuses, enacting violence not only across physical, economic and material domains, but also within psychological, cognitive and social terrains (Geniusz 2009, p. 2). In light of this, what the protagonists endeavour to achieve throughout the book is to centre their anishinaabe-izhitwaawin in the here and now, releasing it from a sacred and untouchable past. Mindimooyenh performing ceremony in an Ikea store; Adik wandering into the bush with a shopping cart and a Fjällräven Kånken backpack containing a voice recorder to record the river slushing/sluicing below the rocks of *Kinomagewapkong* (the Petroglyphs Provincial Park); and Akiwenzii chiselling the chemical compound of polyethylene on ancient petroglyphs, are all different and personal ways of modernising tradition by using contemporary tools to continue practising Nishnaabeg brilliance. As recounted by Mashkawaji: "Adik is there to record the sound of water carving out rock. Adik is there to record the language of the past talking to the present. Adik is there to record the sound of hope" (Simpson 2020, p. 161). Thus, the Anishinaabe past does not lie in the past, but it needs to be made present daily for native communities to enhance their relational agency and constantly revive their nature-based practices. Within the context of anishinaabe-izhitwaawin, performing tradition is anything but a performance, as "Mindimooyenh says: 'Ceremony is not an Instagram photo'" (Simpson 2020, p. 76). In like manner, when Akiwenzii starts carving at the Petroglyphs Provincial Park, Mashkawaji states that:

> They don't need to try and explain that one can't just look at or preserve a sacred site. That if the sacredness is to be maintained, Nishnaabeg must continue the relationship. Fast. Pray. Sing. Carve. You cannot just ignore something and expect it to still be there for you when you need it. (ivi, p. 147)

Although the protagonists of Simpson's novel appear to engage in seemingly disjointed practices, each contributes to a larger purpose: a continuous and collective commitment to what they define as a presence-based society. Anishinaabe-izhitwaawin therefore, constitutes a series of practices that allow native people to actualise their own personal set of values by constantly performing dynamic relationships with the surrounding natural environment as well as with the urban fabric. As also explained by Roland Barthes (2003, pp. 118-119), images de-realise reality and subjectivities because they showcase them out of context; hence, they deprive different identity-making realities of their present presence and of community ongoing engagement. In this respect, the museum, considered the temple of civilization's iconographic past among settler-colonial nation-state institutions, often provides a distorted or situationally biased rendering of culture, creating a stereotyped imagery. Addressing this issue, in 2016 Simpson released a video poem titled *How to Steal a Canoe*[8], where an Anishinaabekwe (a Nishnaabeg woman) and an akiwenzii (an old Nishnaabeg man) rescue the imprisoned body of a canoe from a museum to return it to its natural habitat, namely, the lake. The aim behind Simpson's visual poem is to reclaim the canoe as an Indigenous symbol, which is neither a passive artifact nor a mere museum exhibit. On the contrary, the canoe represents a highly technological tool within Indigenous communities, as it shaped much of their daily life and was essential for sustaining their livelihoods through practices such as fishing and hunting. Due to settler-colonial processes of reification and expropriation, however, Indigenous symbols have been transformed into commercial goods and displayed like fossilised ethnographical

[8] Revolutions Per Minute (2016, November 29). *Leanne Betasamosake Simpson – "How to Steal a Canoe"* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dp5oGZ1r60g.

records. In *How to Steal a Canoe*, the museum appears less as a temple of knowledge than as a sterile storehouse of dispossessed culture. At the end of the piece, the canoe is granted freedom by Anishinaabekwe, who chooses not to board it; instead, she places stones inside to give it weight and grant it its own body, and agency of its own. This gesture could be read in two ways: on the one hand, as a symbolic refusal to participate in extraction-based systems; on the other hand, as an act of resurgence and non-interference – a way of acknowledging a past that has been displaced by colonial ideologies. To conclude, the selected case studies reveal how white-driven expropriation processes – specifically extraction practices, including water weaponisation, cultural appropriation through museum representations, and fossilisation of sacred sites – deprive Nishnaabeg cultural symbols of their traditional meaning and use, de-semanticising and depoliticising them while misrepresenting Anishinaabe-izhitwaawin to construct otherness. Thus, serving as a "cultural activator" (Jenkins 2018, p. 101), Indigenous transmedia storytelling fosters self-representing narratives reclaimed as ever-changing practices of performative citizenship and radical resilience.

2.3 Indigenous multidimensional aesthetics: expanding the scope of decolonial storytelling

Drawing on Indigenous multidimensional and mixed-media approaches to knowledge making, this transartistic conception of both knowledge and literary production manifests in a polycentric and heterogeneous subject matter, while simultaneously enacting its political and civic function through its rhetorical devices. In this context, a brief theoretical digression is necessary: every text contains an intrinsic intersemiotic dimension, grounded in one of the foundational principles of (literary) knowledge, namely, the epistemological premise of comparison (Albaladejo 2012, p. 16). This suggests that the shape and meaning of literary texts are moulded by their dynamic engagement with otherness and difference. Every text therefore stems from what it is not, and it attains full form through diversity, which ultimately serves as a fundamental precondition for its presence. According to Albaladejo (*ibidem*), knowledge and in particular literary knowledge, is in fact produced by comparing its features with alien ones. In this, in his work *Entre lo uno y lo diverso: Introducción a la literatura comparada* (1985, p. 13), Claudio Guillén argued that comparative analysis must transcend both the intra- and the inter-literariness defined by (inter)national borders. Instead, it should open itself to the local, shift focus to the margins and mediate its frictions when comparing the local to what the international literary tradition of the West has chosen to label as the universal. Hence, an interdiscursive comparison between the Same and the Other may provide the contemporary literary canon with a fair ontological grounding.

Simpson's literary hybridity in *Noopiming: The Cure for White Ladies* makes this multi-voiced narrative inherently prone to performative storytelling. In this regard, in 2020 Simpson released *Noopiming Sessions*[9], an EP comprising four tracks inspired by her novel: *Solidification*, *Mindimooyenh*, *Sabe* and *Death by Water*. The project resulted from a creative partnership with her sister Ansley Simpson, James Bunton and Sammy Chien, during the Covid-19 pandemic. The lyrics of Simpson's four-track EP are drawn from excerpts of *Noopiming: The Cure for White Ladies* and performed by the author herself. Her honeyed voice is layered with the ethereal yet eerie vocals of Ansley Simpson and accompanied by dreamlike instrumentation composed and performed by both Ansley and James Bunton. This multimedia project therefore mirrors the performative character of Indigenous ethics and aesthetics, whose epistemological foundations are rooted in a multifaceted process of intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and artistic engagement. In fact, as Martineau and Ritskes (2014, p. VIII) maintain: "These relationships are integral not only to artistic praxis and decolonial aesthetics, but to life itself", as they represent inherently multifaceted articulations of Native Americans' intelligence systems. As argued by Simpson (2017, p. 201) in *As We Have Always Done* while discussing Nishnaabeg alternative aesthetics:

[9] *Noopiming Session* EP is available for streaming and download on Gizhiiwe Bandcamp Site: https://leannesimpson.bandcamp.com/album/noopiming-sessions.

> I like writing *multidimensionality* into my work not because I'm trying to write speculative fiction but because that's how Indigenous worlds work. There is an organization of time and space that's different than the colonial world's – different planes of reality. The implicate order, if you want to use that term, is influencing and intertwined within our own continually created physical reality.

This strongly resonates with the notion of "fugitive Indigeneity" theorised by Martineau and Ritskes (2014), i.e., the refusal of linear, progressive and logos-centred paradigms of colonial discourse and the pursuit of epistemic "escape routes". The multidimensional ontology articulated by Simpson (2017) therefore enacts a fugitive aesthetic that, within the context of Indigenous art, situates (audio)visual sovereignty as the original, philosophical and critical site to inaugurate alternative frameworks of "sensing, time and space that subtly subvert dominant ways of knowing and being" (Martineau & Riskes 2014, p. VIII). The *Noopiming Sessions* EP is a profoundly dynamic form of transmedia storytelling, as it syncretises various artistic media, e.g., oral and written storytelling, evocative soundscapes tailored to each of the four tracks, choral singing, and performance poetry. In conclusion, the interdiscursive nature of Indigenous knowledge systems enables alternative forms of storytelling to emerge through diverse and polymorphic expressions of artistry. These expressions of creative refusal challenge and reconfigure the contemporary literary canon, pushing its boundaries toward a more inclusive, dynamic, and multimedia-oriented understanding of literature and, consequently, of discourse itself.

3. Conclusion

Throughout this paper, the notion of Indigenous – and especially Nishnaabeg – citizenship has been scrutinised and re-signified as an active ontological category that is reclaimed through native artivist thinking. On this, Ariella Azoulay (2013, pp. 549-550) declares that to fully comprehend and acknowledge historical violence, this must be situated within 'the discursive and archival conditions of a regime-made disaster'. To put it differently, Azoulay (ivi, p. 564) maintains that since scopic regimes sustain hegemonic discourse propagandising the prevailing perspective, catastrophic events experienced by subjugated groups often go unrecognised as such. As a result, when a group is defined and consequently historicised as a subaltern one by the hegemonic narrative, and the broader population fails to identify with this racialised category, in an either-or hierarchised society, those outside the marginalised group can exclusively fit into the only social category left within their predator-prey societal system. This implies that they are therefore compelled to align with the perpetrators – i.e., with the so-called "Same" – thereby becoming the perpetrators themselves. For this reason, Azoulay (ivi, p. 565) finds it crucial to problematise the question of citizenship, since it is slyly devised by the government as a tool to exercise coercive control. Further to this point, if citizenship is modelled on ethnic differences, national belonging is consequently and solely built upon cultural division. This is the real root cause of perpetual violence against the historically constructed Other. In this regard, as a means to undermine the way in which the main discourse "created a differential and conflictive body politic" (*ibidem*), Azoulay (2013, p. 574) urges the importance of addressing history as a potential practice of "shared recognition" to achieve reciprocal citizenship: "Potential history insists on restoring within the order of things the polyphony of civil relations and forms of being-together that existed at any moment in history without being shaped solely, let alone exhausted, by national division" (ivi, p. 565). In my view, one way to problematise the notion of citizenship is to reconceive politics not merely as a set of political institutions and political actions – both strictly linked to the notion of power, as textbook definitions imply –, but rather as a form of "exophilia" (Trione 2022, p. 21), a type of political existentialism that conjures alterity as an excess of being, as Butler maintained, whereby otherness becomes a constitutive element of one's identity. This reconceptualisation of political action requires a morphological, semantic, philosophical and

thus ideological delinking and rethinking of the concept of power as the foundational etymological anchor of the word *democracy*. As Michelangelo Pistoletto (2017, p. 50) argues when illustrating the philosophical orientation of artivists, the notion of power (*krátos*) should be replaced by that of praxis (*praxis*), for democracy to evolve into what he defines as demopraxy (*ibidem*). Demopraxy serves as artivists' technical manifesto, as they reject a vision of politics that sees it as a functional apparatus of globalised capitalism that reduces art to commodification and fetishisation processes. On the contrary, artivism, especially the Nishnaabeg artivist poetics addressed in this paper, conceives both politics and art outside the boundaries of normative interpretative frameworks. According to Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012, p. 41), decolonisation "is about centring our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes". As examined throughout this article, Simpson's artivism challenges sovereign politics of representation, serving as a powerful means of civic performativity through which theo- and ego-political discourses that have historically reinforced Indigenous epistemic invisibility through the colonial matrix of power (Mignolo 2009, p. 161), are critically retold and reimagined. In conclusion, Indigenous transmedia activism promotes decolonial interdiscursive practices as cultural *producers* rather than as mere cultural *products*, emphasising the continuous and ever-changing insurgence and resurgence of praxis as the theoretical foundation of Native Americans' knowledge-building systems.

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