



She Falls For Ages: A Posthumanist
Exploration through the Machinima Artwork

Bachelor Thesis

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Introduction

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared Covid-19 a global pandemic. It can be said that disruptive crises, such as the one triggered by Covid-19, alter values, invert viewpoints, and exacerbate contradictions. As a result, the crisis has had an impact on the cultural sector and the art world as well. Funding, the views on the physical experience of art, the role of technology, and many other aspects have been challenged. By the sudden closing of museums and art galleries, the notions of engagement with art had to be reinvented and reimagined by the public, institutions, and artists. Yet, the lack of physical attendance did not result in the decline of arts and culture. On the contrary, “the demand for cultural and creative content has intensified throughout the lockdown period, with digital access having become more critical than ever before” (Radermecker 4).

Consequently, during these times, the adaptation to a new digital reality that replaced the pre-pandemic times was necessary, correspondingly stimulating the digitization of the cultural sector. Therefore, this new reality has been enforcing “the reconsideration of the relationships between material and immaterial, digital and physical” (Sgourev). Even though cyberspace platforms, digital artworks, or the explorations of the aforementioned relations between materiality and immateriality did not begin at the dawn of the Covid-19 crisis, these times ultimately enforce debates on “digital culture” and further investigation on our interrelation with it.

This new engagement with art prompted by the crisis also triggered me to wonder about the role of multimedia artworks in cyberspace. One of the artworks that I came across in the online environment during the quarantine was an artwork called *She Falls For Ages* (2016) by Skawennati. This encounter not only mesmerized me but also sparked my

(growing) interest in the intersections of art and technology, virtuality and reality, artistic practices and theory.

In contemporary society, art has not only been digitized but is also born digitally. Technology has profound effects on the cultural and social dimensions of our reality, and many artists do not only employ all kinds of machinery but also reflect on our dependence and relationships with it. Herein, developments in digital information technologies and sciences do not only reshape art but also our everyday lives. This progress in the fields of technology and rapid changes alter our shared understanding of the human. Observing all of that, due to my situatedness in the 'progressive' West, many questions emerged in my mind. What does it mean to be human in the age of technology? Is the human (still) at the center of the world?

In 1985, Donna Haraway iconically claimed that "we are cyborgs" (150). Nowadays, this 'cyborg' is not unknown to us. In her numerous publications, Anneke Smelik examines the popularity of human-machine cyborg in contemporary visual culture, saying that "visual culture of today is not scared by science and technology but embraces it full-heartedly. The machine no longer enslaves man but happily fuses with the man" (90). Posthumanism also comes from a similar space of awareness about the complex entanglements between humans and technology. Rosi Braidotti, a key figure of Posthumanism, writes how the posthuman condition represents "a qualitative shift in our thinking about what exactly is the basic unit of common reference for our species" (*The Posthuman* 2). Regarding the questions I have just posed, these theorists, and the theories respectively, illustrate that the academic world has been delving into the discourses and representations circulating in our globalized, technologically mediated societies. However, I would argue that the world conditioned by the Covid-19 pandemic asks for our re-explorations of such interconnectedness. As I regard this

thesis a posthumanist journey, which I will elaborate on in the section on methodology, this introduction does not follow linearly. Rather, it is a multilinear map upon which I move and, therefore, before I elaborate on the artwork *She Falls For Ages* (2016) which encouraged this journey, I will outline the theory that I am going to (re)explore.

Theory and Methodology

Since my scope in this thesis is eminently theoretical, I will be delving into the theory and the existing literature throughout my whole thesis. Hence, what follows is a non-dualistic outline of theory and methodology; an outline of the theoretical start of the journey.

Posthumanism, like the Covid-19 crisis, advancing technology, contemporary art, or Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto*, causes paradigm shifts in the way we view the world and ourselves. As Braidotti underlines, "posthuman theory is a generative tool to help us rethink the basic unit of reference for the human in the bio-genetic age known as 'Anthropocene'" (*The Posthuman* 5); more than just another nth variation in a series of post- prefixes, posthuman theory functions as an instrument to "explore ways of engaging affirmatively with the present" (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 5).

Although this introduction has so far contemplated our technologically mediated world in relation to the contemporary art sector, the posthuman emerges as a concept shifting our understanding of the current dynamics of the world beyond the technological predicament. This theoretical discussion functions as an explanatory instrument, allowing one to also reveal oppressive systems of dominant subject-formations as well as articulate alternate representations of subjectivity. Moreover, since this posthumanist agenda intersects with New Materialism, I will address it in the following paragraph.

New Materialism is an interdisciplinary theoretical field that represents “a challenge to some of the most basic assumptions that have underpinned the modern world, including its normative sense of the human and its beliefs about human agency, but also regarding its material practices such as the ways we labor on, exploit, and interact with nature” (Coole and Frost 4). It emerges as a consequence of “the exhaustion of once-popular materialist approaches, such as existential phenomenology or structural Marxism” (Coole and Frost 3). Dolphijn and van der Tuin argue that “new materialism is itself a distinctive trend, both in feminist theory and in cultural theory more broadly, and a device or tool for opening up theory formation” (100). Intersecting feminist theory, cultural studies, and science and technology science, among others, New Materialism and Posthumanism ultimately introduce a means to (re)search for the new. And in times of anxiety and deconstruction of the established, these tools are essential.

In terms of the methodology, I have already foreshadowed that I aim to employ the theme of *journey*. I envision this open-ended journey as a spiral upon which I am moving, adding layers until reaching the core. This idea of the journey helps me to adopt a posthumanist approach in my method. To better understand the employment of a posthumanist methodology, I have turned to Francesca Ferrando’s *Towards a Posthumanist Methodology: A Statement*. Ferrando writes how “the overcoming of dualisms called upon by Posthumanism includes the traditional divide between theory and practice” (9).

Hence, in this thesis, I embark on the journey while embracing Posthumanism equally in theory and practice. Moreover, Ferrando calls for an “intersectional approach” to be adopted (13), and so, in each chapter, I will consider the intersections of posthumanism with other theoretical dimensions. Adopting the posthumanist lens will enable me to engage in diverse epistemological accounts in order to explore more expansive viewpoints on

Skawennati's artwork. Moreover, employing a new materialist manner in the methodology will allow me to treat the material, the discursive, and the audio-visual on an equal plane. Hence, alongside the posthumanist tools, I will be also using discourse and visual analysis. I aim to practise a sense of humbleness and gentleness as methodological tools, which will help me to be more sensitive and affirmative.

The Topic of the Thesis

Although these posthuman and new materialist themes have been analyzed and identified before, Ferrando, who also wrote a paper on the intersection between female contemporary visual artists and Posthumanism, writes how “female artists are hardly mentioned in Posthumanist Studies, with the exception of ORLAN” (14). I believe that these theories have the potential to go beyond the mere investigation of their representation in artworks since the posthumanist lens allows for consideration of how art is exposed to the possibilities and complexities of interrelation to various organic and digital actors, and how it is formed and transformed.

Therefore, in this thesis, I aim to explore how an indigenous new media artwork can help us highlight new dimensions of Posthumanism. For my experimental journey, I chose the artwork that pioneered this venture: *She Falls For Ages* (2016). I intend to provide an affective platform to search for the new and look beyond the established. In this affective platform, in Ferrando's view, one can “investigate perspectives we usually leave aside, as an intellectual exercise towards a posthuman future which will radically stretch the boundaries of human comprehension” (14). I must therefore stress that this thesis does not only aim for the interpretation of the artwork but rather for a humble (re)exploration of the discourse surrounding the posthumanist agenda.

She Falls For Ages (2016) is a machinima work created by a Mohawk multimedia artist Skawennati. This artwork is situated in cyberspace and retells a Haudenosaunee creation story using sci-fi, the virtual world, and the feminist lens. *She Falls For Ages* (2016) proposes questions on cyberspace and digital art, and questions on identity, feminism, and the Anthropocene. This complex artwork was chosen because of multiple reasons; the Machinima work has not yet been thoroughly analyzed by scholars from a posthumanist perspective, it is not explicitly advocating for or defining itself by Posthumanism/New Materialism, which opens up an arena for more nuanced, humble, and complex experimentation, and can be used as a methodological and theoretical vehicle. In other words, here, the artwork works as a vehicle through which I try to illuminate the dynamics of the theories and their actualizations through the artwork.

Structure of the Thesis

In the first chapter, that is to say, at the start of this journey, I will consider the overlaps between Posthumanism and New Materialism. I regard this chapter also as a personal inner door I walked through that inspired the subsequent journey. Here, I will work with the writings of Rosi Braidotti, as well as scholars including Jane Bennett, Diana Coole, Samantha Frost, Rick Dolphijn, and Iris van der Tuin whose work focuses on (and on the intersections of) Posthumanism or New Materialism. The book *The Machinima Reader* will be used to contextualize the discourse on the form called ‘machinima.’

The following stop, that is the second chapter, will look at the posthuman turn in feminism. I will zoom in on the theorizations of posthuman feminist subjectivity, using the literature by Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, Cecilia Åsberg, Elizabeth Grosz, and Jane Bennett. This chapter operates as a bridge between the first and second chapters.

In the third chapter, I will finish my journey at the core of the spiral by delving into the concept of indigenous identity in relation to the artwork and Posthumanism. I will consider chapters whose authors, namely Bignall, Rigney, and Uwguanyi, look at the problematics between Posthumanism and indigenous knowledge. Rather than an end, I regard this chapter as a multiverse that has the power to stretch beyond.

At last, this introduction starts with the invocation of the Covid-19 crisis not because the artwork emerged during these times but because these times for me highlight how the world we live in forces us to face new challenges on a personal, global, technological, scientific, philosophical, cultural, and societal level. I started with this reflection because these times have marked the beginning of my journey too. In regard to the posthuman approach, I embed myself, a European white female student, in the context of the Covid-19 times from where this thesis embarks. The context of destabilization is the one where my thesis is situated, and it is the current paradigm shifts that fuel the reading of this artwork. In light of this, I will aim to combine the different theoretical perspectives to research a contemporary artwork and the wider societal questions and issues it proposes.

Chapter 1

The (New) Materiality of New Media Art

The growing saturation of our physical and intimate lives by wireless, virtual, and digital technologies is causing the present paradigm shift we are experiencing. Our connection to smartphones and social media is becoming increasingly routine to the point that these artifacts are altering the very structure of our reality. The borderlines between the physical and the digital are blurred more than ever. As Coole and Frost note, “our saturation with networked and programmable media shuts us out of the realm of the human and into the realm of the posthuman” (17). Considering the general understanding of art as a practice that expresses and ‘reacts’ to the events within its historical and social context, it can be said that new media art has been exploring the dynamics and changes of the current technologically-driven times. Curator Jon Ippolito states that “in terms of naming, labeling, and documenting, it is in the nature of new media art to change”, and, hence, various terms are circling around it such as computer art, digital art, or art & technology (Graham and Cook 2).

In this chapter, I will consider new media art as “art that is made using electronic media technology and that displays any or all of the three behaviors of interactivity, connectivity, and computability in any combination” (Graham and Cook 2). One of the characteristics of new media art is virtuality, or its ability to simulate space. This virtuality brings to question the conceptions of space and the materiality of art. Although there is a “big debate... about how virtual realities (virtual reality installations) might lead us to a state of disembodiment” (Graham and Cook 63), the opposite is true¹. Hayles writes how “in fact, we are never disembodied ... we can see, hear, feel and interact with virtual worlds only because

¹ The academic discourse on the topic of ‘disembodiment’ in new media is more expansive; another group of scholars, such as Nancy K. Baym, lean towards the idea that new media question the idea of single essential identity and bring up “disembodied entities” (106).

we are embodied” (qtd. in Graham and Cook 63). Furthermore, several media artworks are now extended to the spaces of the Internet where “the characteristics of connectivity and distribution come to the fore” (Graham and Cook 65). All these recognitions of changeability, virtuality, and connectivity in new media art thus open up an arena for a re-exploration of the materiality of new media art, and how it proposes a posthuman condition. In my view, an artwork that allows for such re-exploration is Skawennati's *She Falls For Ages* (2016).

Hence, in this chapter, I will dive into the artwork's world and consider how it proposes the new materialist/posthumanist views, and how it, therefore, alters our understanding of materiality and non-human agency. This exploration will firstly focus on the form of machinima; this will help me proceed towards a discursive analysis of the story portrayed in the artwork. However, before I do so, I need to turn my attention to the theorizations of New Materialism and Posthumanism.

New Materialism and Posthumanism

New Materialism tackles the very question of materiality and matter. It reopens the issue of matter and once again gives “material factors their due in shaping society and circumscribing human prospects” (Coole and Frost 3). The matter is in this case agential force; it is vital and self-organizing. Respectively, “thing-power” is recognized, or “the ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle” (Bennett 6). Conceiving matter as no longer passive disrupts the conventional sense that “agents are exclusively humans who possess the cognitive abilities, intentionality, and freedom to make autonomous decisions and the corollary presumption that humans have the right or ability to master nature” (Coole and Frost 10). So, besides the questions on the nature of matter and the place of embodied humans within a material world, New Materialism also challenges “some

of the most basic assumptions that underpinned the modern world, including its normative sense of the human and its beliefs about human agency” (Coole and Frost 4).

Subsequently, New Materialism intersects with Posthumanism. Posthumanism is a theory that departs from previous anthropocentric viewpoints. The human as such is decentred, allowing for other interpretations regarding the epistemology, ontology, and ethics of matter. These two theoretical standpoints share a common ground in “reworking and eventually breaking through dualism” (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 97). Dolphijn and van der Tuin argue that New Materialism is “a transversal cultural theory that qualitatively shifts the dualist gesture of prioritizing mind over matter, soul over body, and culture over nature that can be found in modernist as well as post-modernist cultural theories” (119). Rosi Braidotti, a current prominent posthumanist theorist, recognizes that “the boundaries between the categories of the natural and the cultural have been displaced and to a large extent blurred by the effects of scientific and technological advances” (*The Posthuman* 3), which, again, advocates for a non-dualistic understanding of the world. Eventually, by employing these theories as analytical tools, the analysis is not limited by dualisms that separate the human from inhuman, the physical from the virtual. Correspondingly, while material and virtual natures may take different forms, they exist in dialogue with each other and thus inform one another, and it is especially through new media art situated in cyberspace that this dialogue is evident.

Machinima as a Vital Art Form

One of the forms new media artists employ in their practice is called *machinima*. The Academy of Machinima Arts and Sciences defines machinima as “the art of making animated films within a real-time virtual 3D environment” (qtd. in Kelland 28). Machinima lies at the intersection of a live performance and cinematic production. Yet, its most distinctive feature

lies precisely in its virtuality. It is therefore no surprise that its subject matter was for a long time “of interest only to gamers” (Kelland 33). However, as Salen underlines, “machinima mirrored and at times foreshadowed participatory practices in other areas of culture” (38). Hence, machinima has since moved beyond the world of gaming. The reason for my focus on machinima here is threefold; first, it is situated in cyberspace which is the space this thesis considers, second, it is arguable that its hybrid ‘nature’, history, and employment as art form manifest a posthuman agenda, and third, it is the very same form Skawennati used to create her artwork *She Falls For Ages* (2016).

I would, therefore, argue that machinima represents a multifaceted form that breaks through dualisms of the human and non-human, or the physical and virtual. Since “machinima was regarded as an extreme form of gaming” (Kelland 23) before becoming an art form, as I mentioned earlier, this interdisciplinary history of machinima can be viewed as posthuman. I think that just like Braidotti’s definition of “radical posthuman subjectivity” (*The Posthuman* 49), machinima rests on the same ethics of becoming. My argument is grounded in a new materialist framework of understanding matter, here machinima, as having agency and, therefore, subjectivity of its own. Machinima here represents a fluid, ever-changing “matter”, for it is not only a form but also a virtual space and a medium. This form can be regarded as nomadic, traveling through disciplines and constantly ‘becoming’.

Furthermore, being shot in a virtual environment and, hence, enabling humans to create and inhabit it, machinima in its ‘matter’ subverts the notions of the Anthropocene. In machinima, there are no clear-cut boundaries. In her renowned ontological take on “vital things” and “vibrant matter”, Jane Bennett highlights “the extent to which human being and thinghood overlap, the extent to which the us and the it slip-side into each other” (4). I would argue that machinima not only creates a vibrant space where the thinghood and human

converge, especially in gaming where humans “enter” the virtual world and can “feel” this world and its virtuality through their materiality and embodiment, but also, in its own right, I regard machinima as what Bennett calls a “vital player in the world” (4), too. Even though machinima is controlled and the characters are puppeteered by humans, I will argue that machinima enables a more egalitarian approach to nonhuman things and suggests being posthuman.

Machinima as a Posthuman Space

Unlike a physical performance in a theatre, “machinima actors must map their expressions onto characters that exist inside a virtual world rather than assume the roles of the characters with their own entire bodies” (Mazalek 93). Although it has been noted before that we are never fully disembodied in relation to the virtual world, I would argue that machinima actors confront their human bodies as no longer superior. The Humanistic ideal whom Braidotti defines as “a perfectly functional physical body, implicitly modeled upon ideals of white masculinity, normality, youth and health” (*The Posthuman* 68) is not, from my perspective, at the center of machinima. Such a Humanistic body is replaced by a virtual ‘Other’.

However, the posthumanist and therefore new materialist agenda in machinima does not lie in the total erasure of the human subject. That is also why I consider machinima ‘posthuman’ rather than ‘anti-human’. The human materiality is there, entangled with nonhuman materiality, which creates a posthuman space. From this perspective, machinima is ontologically multiple. In other words, Nitsche writes how machinima is a “media format that is in between, and in need of some positioning in the digital space” (117). Yet, I would argue that it is precisely its in-betweenness and scattering, rather than static positioning, that allow machinima to further unfold (within) the posthuman agenda. It is an example of an art form

that draws on other traditions such as “cinematic storytelling, live performance, and puppeteering, and also makes use of new computer game and real-time 3D graphics technologies for the creation of narrative works” (Mazalek 94). This interdisciplinarity and non-linear history make it a suitable ‘thing’ through which Posthuman discourse can be explored and developed.

The Posthumanist/New Materialist Reading of *She Falls For Ages* (2016)

At this point, it is compelling to look at Skawennati’s machinima *She Falls For Ages* (2016). In other words, this is where the theory meets the artwork. As the artist states: “Produced using the new media technique known as machinima, *She Falls For Ages* boldly mixes ancient storytelling with science fiction to connect the deep past with the far future” (Skawennati). Moreover, Skawennati described the production as follows: “Along with my team at Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace, we built virtual sets, customized avatars and choreographed action in the massively multiplayer online 3D world Second Life” (Skawennati). This approach highlights machinima’s virtuality, connectivity, interactivity, and multifacetedness. What follows is my posthumanist/new materialist reading of this specific machinima.

In terms of the material and discursive aspects of this artwork, “New materialism allows for the study of the two dimensions in their entanglement: the experience of a piece of art is made up of matter and meaning. The material dimension creates and gives form to the discursive, and vice versa.” (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 91). This non-dualistic approach pushes the reading towards a posthumanist recognition; the earlier analysis of machinima is thus considered relevant for a discursive analysis of *She Falls For Ages* (2016). As mentioned above, *She Falls For Ages* (2016) does not only delve into the dialogues between virtuality and reality, but also between history and the future. This invocation of the *future*

through the story of the *past* happening in the *present* machinima invokes a new materialist perspective that recognizes that “phenomena are caught in a multitude of interlocking systems and forces” (Coole and Frost 9).

Moreover, the retelling of the Haudenosaunee creation story that reimagines Sky World as a futuristic alien space offers a posthumanist perspective on life and death too. Through this theory that recognizes “the nature-culture continuum within a monistic ontology that considers all matter as intelligent and self-organizing” (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 136), *She Falls For Ages* (2016) enables the pragmatic acknowledgment of the posthuman subject as suggested by Braidotti who claims that such posthuman subject “is the expression of successive waves of becoming, fuelled by *zoe* as the ontological motor” (*The Posthuman* 136). Here, the generative force of *zoe* is understood as “life beyond the ego-bound human” (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 133).



Fig. 1. Skawennati. “Ceremony.” *She Falls For Ages*, 2016, Machinimagraph, <http://www.skawennati.com/SheFallsForAges/>.

In this artwork, the story of the past moves beyond the present and into the future; the story of creation and therefore life itself can be understood as the life that Braidotti defines as “neither human nor divine, but relentless material and vowed to multi-directional and cross-species relationality” (*The Posthuman* 136). The Sky World represented in *She Falls*

For Ages (2016) is not, therefore “alien”, even though the visuals of machinima might evoke feelings of alienation. Rather, the virtual Sky World inhabited by Sky People, Sky Nature, Sky Food, Sky Technologies, Sky Architecture, and so on, ultimately transmits the message that life does go on and does not end without ‘human’ presence. Such life is “relentlessly non-human in the vital force that animates it” (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 137).

Cross-cutting through time and space and life, *She Falls For Ages* (2016) suggests a posthuman condition for the current times too. In her book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Bennett asks the question “What would happen to our thinking about nature if we experienced materialities as actants... ?” (62). Here, the term ‘actant’ is presumed in Bruno Latour’s understanding who defines it as “something that acts or to which activity is granted by others. It implies no special motivation of human individual actors, nor of humans in general” (Bennett 9). It can be human or non-human or a combination of both. In my opinion, *She Falls For Ages* (2016) succeeds in demonstrating some answers to Bennett’s question.

That “thing-power arises from bodies inorganic as well as organic” (Bennett 6) is noticeable in the artwork on multiple levels, namely, material, visual, and narrative. As mentioned before, machinima is active and vibrant by providing virtual space where human and nonhuman intersect. In other words, in machinima, virtual materiality cross-cuts through the nature of the Sky World and the nature of our ‘earthly’ reality. This is akin to “Deleuzean ‘quasi-causal operator’” (Bennett 9). Bennett writes how such an operator is “that which, by virtue of its particular location in an assemblage and the fortuity of being in the right place at the right time, makes the difference, makes things happen, becomes the decisive force catalyzing an event” (9). In this manner, I regard machinima as being an *actant*, *operator*, *agent* which, in its becoming (and under influence of other ‘things’), *became* an art form at a

particular time, which enabled it to make the difference through *She Falls For Ages* (2016).

In other words, machinima vitally catalyzed the becoming of the artwork.



Fig. 2. Skawennati. “Ceremony.” *She Falls For Ages*, 2016, Machinimagraph,
<http://www.skawennati.com/SheFallsForAges/>.

In terms of the narrative, the artwork proposes a post-anthropocentric view via its egalitarian depiction of nature, Sky People, and technology. In my opinion, *Sky World* depicts a certain natural environment that Coole and Frost invoke in their new materialist theorization; this environment’s material forces “themselves manifest certain agentic capacities” (10). The Celestial Tree in the story can be understood as an actant; an active part of *Sky World* that generates light. The relationship between the Celestial Tree and its guardian, a Sky Person called Rarón: tote, is emblematic of an active, vital, egalitarian connection between different subjects. Furthermore, once the Celestial Tree’s powers seem to diminish, which declares the end of *Sky World*, Otsitsakaion, the central figure of the tale, volunteers “to be the seed of the new world” (Skawennati). Sky People express the posthuman understanding of ‘becoming’; here, death is connected with renewal, or in line

with what Braidotti suggests: “becoming-imperceptible” (137), rather than connected with the end. In addition, animals that Otsitsakaion meets once she reaches the new world are portrayed as having agency and capacity for choice. This depiction also informs the posthumanist understanding of the relationality among different species.

By giving a short and non-linear overview of the narrative, I aimed to draw out some elements of the story that resonated with my own understanding of Posthumanism. I will provide a more elaborate summary in the second chapter. Moreover, I will revisit some of my arguments from this chapter in the third one. For now, I deem it crucial to proceed in this journey towards the concept of subjectivity in relation to Otsitsakaion. Since it is a much more complex phenomenon, I must turn to the feminist theory in the next chapter.

Chapter 2

Posthuman Turn in Feminism

In the previous chapter, I first considered some theoretical underpinnings of Posthumanism and New Materialism. This allowed me to analyze the material dimension of the artwork *She Falls For Ages* (2016), namely the media form called ‘machinima’, in its own right. Consequently, this posthumanist/new materialist consideration of machinima supported the reading of this specific machinima artwork through a particular lens. Thanks to the new materialist approach, the material, discursive, and visual dimensions of the artwork *She Falls For Ages* (2016) could be treated on an equal plane. Hence, the previous chapter zoomed in on the history, dynamics, and representation of machinima in relation to Skawennati’s artwork, and regarded how this artwork through its material, visual, and discursive aspects subverts our shared understanding of our ‘humanist’ world and life.

To proceed further with the cartographical rendering of the artwork, in this chapter, I will move to another theoretical dimension. Here, the feminist theory will be dealt with from a particular standpoint, in which “Feminism is *not* humanism”, as suggested by Rosi Braidotti (“Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism” 21). Firstly, this chapter will map the posthuman turn in feminist theory. This mapping will then be used to explore how Skawennati and her artwork illustrate and work with such perspectival shifts in feminist theory. I will mainly engage in dialogues with (the texts by) Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, Cecilia Åsberg, and Elizabeth Grosz, and study the artwork *She Falls For Ages* (2016) through discourse analysis. Yet, since this thesis embraces the posthuman in theory *and* methodology, this particular analysis will also be entangled with material analysis and visual analysis in an egalitarian manner. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, this attention to

feminist theory with a posthuman/new materialist twist is necessary in order to further pursue more extensive perspectives on posthuman theory and the artwork respectively.

Mapping of the Posthuman Turn in Feminist Theory

It is widely assumed that European feminism is linked to humanist beliefs and aspirations. As Braidotti writes, “the political passions and innovative epistemologies of feminist movements, however, were never indexed solely on the interests of women, but rather contained explicit blueprints for the improvement of the human condition as a whole” (“Posthuman Feminist Theory” 1). This likewise links feminist theory with humanism, but such connection has not been without a critical stance. The humanist “Man”, or the “dominant subject ... [that is] assumed to be masculine, white, urbanized, speaking a standard language, heterosexually inscribed in a reproductive unit, and a full citizen of a recognized polity” (Braidotti, “Four Theses on...” 23), has been challenged by feminist, as well as postcolonial, analyses.

Hence, even though we connect feminism with humanism, feminist critiques have “advocated the need to destabilize this unitary vision of the subject and open it up to the multiple and complex reconfigurations and multiple belongings” (Braidotti, “Four Theses on...” 24). Braidotti also argues how “it is impossible to speak in one unified voice about any category, including women, natives, and other marginal subjects” (“Four Theses on...” 24). As a result, feminist knowledge has become more and more interdisciplinary due to the influence of post- theories such as poststructuralism, postcolonialism, or deconstruction, as well as other fields such as technoscience. Braidotti writes how over the last thirty years in particular, “an anti-humanist wave has redefined the relationship between feminism and humanism” (“Posthuman Feminist Theory” 2). She proceeds by saying that this relationship together with the anti-anthropocentric turn are important genealogical sources for posthuman feminism.

Hence, it can be established that the term posthuman feminist theory marks “the emergence of a new type of discourse ... [that] is also a qualitative leap in a new and more complex direction” (Braidotti, “Posthuman Feminist Theory” 2).

This shift of perspective in feminism is however not only determined by anti-humanist or poststructuralist feminisms; Donna Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto* is considered by Braidotti as the “path-breaking ... first feminist postanthropocentric social theory text of the twentieth century” (“Posthuman Feminist Theory” 7). This ‘manifesto’ proves that there is no linear history of posthuman feminist theory. Nonetheless, I must pause and look closely at Haraway’s text since it is not only considered crucial for posthuman feminism but for this chapter’s analysis too.

In her text, Donna Haraway “pointed out how necessary it is to pay attention to the way in which humans are entangled in intricate relationships with technology and science, and with other nonhuman animals and the environment” (Åsberg and Braidotti 7). Through the figure of the cyborg, “she makes the unique move of initiating a crossover dialogue between science and technology studies, socialist feminist politics, and feminist neomaterialism” (Braidotti, “Posthuman Feminist Theory” 7). In Haraway’s words, “a cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (149), and “a creature in a post-gender world” (150).

Furthermore, Braidotti contextualizes the cyborg as “a connection making-entity, a figure of interrelationality, receptivity, and a global communication that deliberately blurs categorical distinctions” (“Posthuman Feminist Theory” 7). There is no argument needed for why the cyborg is considered prominent and ground-breaking for feminism and posthumanism respectively. The originality of Haraway’s vision counts as one of the initiators of posthuman feminist thought. The cyborg has much to offer for the reading of

Skawennati's artwork, and so it is inevitable that it will come into view in more detail, or pierce through, if you will, throughout the later analysis. For now, this text takes us to the emergence of the posthuman turn in feminist theory that started in the late 1990s.

This turn did not only occur because of the aforementioned influences of other interdisciplinary theories; it also occurred “in response to political developments, including growing public awareness of the climate change issue; the accompanying notion that we have entered a new geologic era (the Anthropocene)” (Braidotti, “Posthuman Feminist Theory” 8), and in response to technological advances. Posthuman feminism foregrounds embodiment, affectivity, empathy, and, hence, it is inclusionary, rhizomatic, multidirectional, and attentive. Åsberg and Braidotti write how it “engages with critical and creative pursuits that address our changing relationships between political animals of both human and more-than-human kinds, and among bodies, technologies, and environments ... [and] generally employs interdisciplinary or postconventional perspectives” (16). In light of this, I will now proceed to the artwork *She Falls For Ages* (2016) to enter a more versatile reading where entanglements of human and non-human, art and theory, posthumanism and feminism, can be discovered and further explored.

***She Falls For Ages* (2016) and (Posthuman) Feminism**

The plot of Skawennati's machinima was in a way foreshadowed in the introduction and first chapter. In order to set the tone for the following reading, I will now summarize the plot of the artwork in more detail to better illustrate my arguments. Skawennati's retelling of the Haudenosaunee creation story introduces Sky World inhabited by Sky People in a faraway galaxy. In the beginning, we get to meet twin siblings Otsitsakaion and Tehahontsihsónkwha; the former is a telepath, and the latter is telekinetic. They are trained by their mother's brother to control their abilities; hence, they spend all of their childhood in

seclusion until they reach adulthood. The Celestial Tree has been already examined in the previous chapter, but it is important to note that someone guards this tree, and his name is Rarón:tote. Rarón:tote, we find out, also has special powers: he experiences foretelling and often enigmatic visions of the future. In his most recent dream, he foresees a party happening in the residence where a young woman appears, who is also special. The 3000th anniversary of the Celestial Tree makes Rarón:tote's dream a reality and everyone is invited to the celebration.

The woman Rarón:tote saw in his dream is Otsitsakaion, and when they meet at the celebration Otsitsakaion can guess the dream of Rarón:tote and he realizes she is the woman from his dream. They are fond of each other, and the narrator tells us they are in love and are expecting a baby. However, Celestial Tree's powers are diminishing, which means the end of the Sky World. Otsitsakaion volunteers to "be the seed of the new world". The Celestial Tree is lifted, and Otsitsakaion jumps; *she falls for ages* until she reaches the new world. The machinima does not stop here, but at this point, it is crucial to remember that this artwork is based on an oral traditional Haudenosaunee story. This means that there are numerous versions of this creation story. I will now take a step back from the artwork to consider how Skawennati interpreted the traditional story. This will be a starting point of the posthuman feminist exploration.



Fig. 3. Skawennati. "Becoming Sky Woman." *She Falls For Ages*, 2016, Machinimagraph, <http://www.skawennati.com/SheFallsForAges/>.

Many variations of the story exist, as is common with stories passed down through oral tradition and told across multiple groups and generations. Skawennati emphasizes that what's common to all the versions is that "it takes place in a place called Sky World. There is always a tree, a special tree, which gets uprooted, leaving a hole through which a pregnant woman falls, and she lands on earth that is still covered with water" ("Indigenous Tech - Skawennati's World Re-Building."). Furthermore, in her article, Helen Gregory, who wrote about Skawennati's use of the avatars, underlines how there is one more universal narrative element "that describes the moment when the Celestial Tree is uprooted and Sky Woman either falls or is pushed through the resulting hole" (70). Gregory further writes how "in some versions she grasps at the ground as she tries to prevent her fall, coming away with handfuls of the plants and seeds that will form the basis for agriculture in what will ultimately become the new world" (70).

These versions suggest that there is a recurring theme in which Sky Woman is a passive victim of her destiny. In contrast, Skawennati portrays Sky Woman, here called Otsitsakaion, as having the ability and agency to make her own choices. As Gregory notices, "the pregnant Otsitsakaion recognizes that the only way that her people can survive Sky World coming to an end is if she makes the selfless choice to leave" (70). This narrative choice of Skawennati, therefore, invites us to explore this machinima territory and Otsitsakaion's manifestation of the posthuman subject from the feminist perspective. To do so, I will turn to Elizabeth Grosz and her feminist new-materialistic approach to the concepts of agency, autonomy, and freedom.

Agency, Autonomy, and Freedom in She Falls For Ages (2016)

In her essay, Grosz rethinks the aforementioned concepts; instead of linking "the question of freedom to the concept of emancipation or some understanding of liberation from,

or removal of...”, she develops “a concept of life, bare life, where freedom is conceived not only or primarily as the elimination of constraint or coercion but more positively as the condition of, or capacity for, action in life” (140). Rather than thinking in negative dialectics of “freedom from”, she focuses on the “freedom to” that, in her words, “provides direction for action in the future” (141). Grosz considers Henri Bergson’s understanding of freedom (142) to rethink these concepts, who suggests that “free acts are those which both express us and which transform us, which express our transforming” (146). In his later works, Bergson focuses on how “freedom is not a transcendent quality inherent in subjects but is immanent in the relations that the living has with the material world, including other forms of life” (148).

Grosz chooses Bergson’s perception of freedom, which proposes new materialist perspectives, to rethink feminists’ relationship towards “freedom”. Here, freedom is not linked to choice, the state one is in, or a quality that one has. More specifically, “if freedom is that which is bestowed on us by others, it cannot be lodged in autonomy, in the individual’s inner cohesion and historical continuity: it comes from outside, from rights granted to us rather than capacities inherent in us” (153). Grosz, therefore, argues that freedom lies in the realm of actions and processes, while this understanding does not abandon the concept of autonomy. Therefore, in the following paragraph, I will argue how this new materialist rethinking of the concept of freedom in relation to feminism resonates with the character of Otsitsakaion, as well as the artist Skawennati.

Grosz advocates that “the challenge facing feminism today is no longer only how to give women a more equal place within existing social networks and relations but how to enable women to partake in the creation of a future, unlike the present.” (154). Skawennati, a female indigenous artist, is enabling “more making and doing”. I would argue that Skawennati’s enactment of freedom allowed her to take a traditional story and open up new

perspectives and frameworks not adequately explored; she creates a future - unlike the present or the past. From a posthumanist feminist understanding, Skawennati showcases a posthumanist feminist approach in which she alters and transforms the given, here the traditional creation story, to illuminate the shifting interactions between human and nonhuman political animals, as well as bodies, technology, and ecosystems. This is supported by her use of machinima, which does not only carry posthumanist/new materialist qualities as I argued in the previous chapter but can also be understood as a cyborg text.

As Haraway's cyborg, machinima denaturalizes dualisms; it is a hybrid in-between a game and a film, in-between physical and virtual space, in-between virtual and physical bodies. And as Haraway puts it, "cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities" (154). Machinima is therefore essentially feminist in the sense that it approaches conceptions of the body as constantly unfinished, changing, and subversive, as Haraway does. Moreover, machinima can be also seen as the practice of defamiliarization; as Braidotti writes, this process allows "disidentification from anthropocentric values, to evolve toward a new frame of reference" ("Four Theses on..." 30). This defamiliarization is reached through the aesthetics of machinima; the bodies we see are complex, virtual, colorful, alien-like, and disengaged from dominant models of our "real" world. As a result, the body of Otsitsakaion emerges as a posthuman feminist cyborg subject.

Otsitsakaion is an embodiment of Skawennati's freedom and reconceptualization of the present; she is her virtual avatar through which Skawennati "makes things" and through which she fuses the human with the inhuman, the past with the future. Moreover, on the level of the narrative, Otsitsakaion is autonomous and has agency; her decisions are hers solely and are not imposed on her. Here, I do not want to slip into praising Otsitsakaion for breaking free from the dominant system. Instead, by embracing a posthumanist feminist lens, Otsitsakaion

moves from this negative “free-from” formula to a notion of “free-to”, as suggested by Grosz. Otsitsakaion is not free “from” anything but rather is free “to” jump and *fall for ages* in order to plant the new seeds. Her freedom is not bestowed upon her by others. Rather, it is through Otsitsakaion that a positive perception of freedom can be observed; a perception that, in Grosz’s view, “has tended to be neglected in feminist and other radical political struggles” (142). Freedom is the ability to act, and they are these acts that both express and transform Otsitsakaion. We watch her transformation from an isolated child to a pregnant young woman who chooses to *fall for ages* in search of a new world.

My motivation to search for the entanglements between this artwork and the political theories lies in the belief that it is through art that we can “look at” life and the world from different perspectives. In other words, art can actualize and introduce us to these different perspectives on our current state of the world that have been already explored in theories like posthumanism or new materialism but have not reached *the outside*. As a result, this artwork allows for posthumanist feminist theories to come alive as it provides what Braidotti calls “an expanded relational vision of the self” (“Four Theses...” 33). Otsitsakaion actualizes the possibilities of an expanded, relational self that functions in a nature-culture continuum and is technologically mediated. Set in machinima which not only transgresses boundaries but also appropriates dominant technologies to bring integrative and multidirectional narrative, *She Falls for Ages* (2016) delivers rhizomatic experimentation of subject formations and dislocation of dualisms. Yet, this experimentation needs to be further explored in the following chapter, where the indigenous identity will be the final stop of my cartographical reading.

Chapter 3

Indigenous Knowledge and Posthumanism

So far, I have delved into theorizations of Posthumanism, New Materialism, and feminism in order to better understand how they are intertwined and how they affect one another. This investigation allowed me to pursue a cartographical rendering of the artwork *She Falls for Ages* (2016). Hence, in my first chapter, I focused on the posthumanist/new materialist agenda and its realization through the artwork, while in the second chapter, I examined the posthumanist turn in feminism and the artwork's manifestation of it. As I am stressing throughout the whole thesis, I embarked on this journey with the posthuman approach in mind, meaning that my mapping of theories and subsequent analysis are shifting and vital. As a result, in this final chapter, I aim to stretch out my previous arguments, especially about subjectivity and embodiment, to realize my goal to illuminate the power of this artwork in relation to our understanding of Posthumanism.

Up to now, I have touched upon the concept of subjectivity, but I have skipped a crucial feature - its foundation in an *indigenous* story and, hence, its manifestation of *indigenous* subjectivity. I choose to inquire into the representation of the indigenous identity in *She Falls for Ages* (2016) here, because I think that it is the most complex and important element, and because I interpret this thesis as a spiral upon which I am moving, gathering different perspectives on the way until reaching the end, the core. In this sense, the indigenous identity does not only lie at the core of the artwork but also this thesis' spiral.

Firstly, I will look at Skawennati's background and her tribe. This recognition will help me outline the intricate formation of Posthumanism upon indigenous knowledge, working with texts by Ugwuanyi, Bignall, and Rigney who highlight such aspects of Posthumanism. My aim is not to solely map their arguments; instead, I want to focus on how

Skawennati portrays and works with the concept of indigenous identity. Through this, I aim to fulfill the aim of this thesis to further develop ways of engaging with contemporary artworks such as *She Falls For Ages* (2016).

The Haudenosaunee Confederacy

Skawennati was born in Kahnawà:ke Mohawk Territory (Skawennati). The Mohawk tribe is the most easterly tribe of the Haudenosaunee, or Iroquois, Confederacy. Mohawk people are indigenous people of North America. ‘Indigenous people’ is a term construed here to mean “groups with ancestral ties/claims to particular lands prior to colonization by outside powers” (Sundberg qtd. in Ugwuanyi 269), “whose nations remain submerged within the states created by those powers” (Shaw, Herman and Dobbs qtd. in Ugwuanyi 269). It was already mentioned that in *She Falls For Ages* (2016), Skawennati retells a Haudenosaunee creation story. Although the names Haudenosaunee and Iroquois are presented as interchangeable, the name Iroquois bears colonial origin since it was given to the first five indigenous tribes by the French colonizers.

Hence, to be in line with the decolonizing intention of Posthumanism, I will work with the name Haudenosaunee not only because Skawennati uses this name to describe her artwork’s story, but because it is the name that these six tribes² refer to themselves.

Haudenosaunee society has been defined as “a body of relatives, “my people,” who are residents of a place—a village or settlement. The public includes everyone; therefore, any stranger must be adopted And the several bands, tribes, or nations are confederated on the model of the longhouse, which implies both kin and territory.” (Id qtd. in Marques 385).

² The five nations Mohawk, Onondaga, Oneida, Cayuga, and Seneca formed the original Five Nations; the Tuscarora became the sixth nation in 1722.

These definitions of bond and tie with others and the land already suggest a differing from a Western understanding of ‘society’.

Moreover, Johnson in his book *Tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy* (I am aware of the irony of including an account on indigenous people by a white male American scholar from ‘outside’) writes how “Iriquois [Haudenosaunee] religious and ceremonial life centered on the belief that all beings, animals, plant foods and objects were imbued with power of spirit-force *otennota, orenda*, that flowed through all nature” (23). This egalitarian belief is detectable in the Haudenosaunee creation story and in Skawennati’s interpretation of the story that I outlined in the previous chapters.

Posthumanism and Indigenous Epistemologies

When I streamed *She Falls For Ages* (2016) for the first time, I was intrigued by its game-like aesthetics, virtuality, avatar-ness, and multi-linearity that lay in its envisioning of the future through the past. My self, trained in Western cultural studies and truly interested in Posthumanism, immediately looked for overlaps between the artwork and the theory. That is why my first chapter, the beginning of this spiral, revolved around recognizing such overlaps. However, Skawennati’s approach has been identified by other scholars as falling under “Indigenous Futurism”, a term that was coined by Anishinaabe scholar Grace Dillon, that refers to “a burgeoning movement that invokes the use of science fiction and new media to consider how traditional Indigenous perspectives can be envisioned in the present and, more significantly, in the future.” (Gregory 68), instead of explicitly connecting it to Posthumanism. Yet, I would argue that in Skawennati’s artwork, Indigenous traditions also function as a driving motor of conceiving the posthuman future. But is it in line with the posthumanist thought to apply notions of ‘posthumanity’ arising in Continental philosophy to

indigenous artwork? In order to find answers and pursue this final reading, I will now turn to texts by Bignall, Rigney, and Ugwuanyi.

By definition, Posthumanism is understood as a breaking point in Humanities, resistant to Eurocentric, imperial formations of power, subjectivity, and knowledge. However, as Bignall and Rigney write in their chapter on indigeneity, Posthumanism and nomad thought, “posthumanism describes features also at the heart of internationally shared Indigenous conceptualisations of their humanity as being constituted in inextricable relations with the nonhuman world” (159). Likewise, Ugwuanyi in her chapter on indigenous thoughts on posthuman heritage also presents other scholar’s views on how “building on (and sometimes appropriating) Indigenous knowledge systems that highlight human–nature relational ontologies, and ‘ecological connectivity,’ “posthumanist texts enact universalizing claims and, as a consequence, reproduce colonial ways of knowing and being by further subordinating other ontologies” (Sundberg qtd. in Ugwuanyi 267). These scholars show concern regarding Posthumanism and how it has the potential to misrepresent Indigenous realities and alter Indigenous ontologies.

Indeed, Posthumanism is a significant philosophical and political response (or alternative) to anthropocentrism. Yet, Bignall and Rigney warn that “... posthumanist theory at times risks the elision of Indigenous cultural and intellectual authority by remaining blind to the ancient presence and contemporary force of Indigenous concepts of human being” (160). Even though Posthumanism is regarded as a departure from classical Humanism, these scholars suggest that there are still colonial-like errors that are detectable. How should Posthumanist scholars then work through this issue? I want to propose my experimentation in this thesis as one of the ways.

Experimentation as a Final Destination...

The reading of Skawennati's artwork *She Falls For Ages* (2016) allows for a new engagement that recognizes the distinctiveness of Indigenous peoples' experiences and does not allow Posthumanism to be blind to them. By doing so, a reading of such an artwork does not operate on a level of mere application of theory to it. Rather, the reading fueled by Indigenous epistemologies inscribed in the artwork enriches and makes Posthumanism more sensitive, more affirmative, and better at fulfilling its task of resisting Eurocentrism.

The interconnectedness between animism and Posthumanism should be acknowledged, while bearing in mind that Posthumanism is predominantly a Western philosophical phenomenon, emerging as a critical strain within the Western academy which “remains subconsciously, compulsively blind to Indigenous expertise” (Bignall and Rigney 169). In other words, Bignall and Rigney argue that “Indigenous thought is rendered ‘imperceptible’” (175). Skawennati, in my opinion, makes the indigenous thought perceptible and Western-thought-provoking (a claim based on the provocation experienced by me). She situated a machinima artwork, which is already made in a virtual environment, in cyberspace; a space that alters our conventional understanding of materiality and territory. Unlike the actual original territory of the Haudenosaunee, this territory is not under the influence of settler colonialism. Yes, the virtual space is not functioning in a vacuum and is under the influence of politics, but I would argue that by positioning the artwork in this space and allowing it to be reached by anyone, this artwork creates an affirmative arena where the Posthumanist thought can meet indigeneity that cannot be erased because it is *at the core*.

Uwquanyi claims that “the propositions of classical animism, contemporary animism and posthumanism are to some extent entangled and complementary” (270). Indeed, the three share several key qualities, such as the human being's identification with life, or the fact that

nature and culture, as well as human and nonhuman beings, are disembodied and autonomous. Yet, these entanglements can be visible only if continental posthumanism does not ignore the prior existence of Indigenous knowledge of this kind. I believe that if Western academia experiments with new media art of the movements such as ‘Indigenous futurism’, the views of Posthumanism will become more tangible, delicate, and humble.

This is not to say that all posthumanist scholarly works ignore Indigenous ontologies; Bignall, Rigney, and Uwguanyi prove that awareness of indigeneity is present in academia³. Yet, their concern also shows how it is still lacking and ‘under construction’. However, as Bignall and Rigney point out, “such alliances generate expansive concepts for a new earth and a people to come, bringing new conceptual understandings about the play of difference in complex ecologies, and how human values (including values related to the nonhuman world) can sometimes be shared across cultures” (177).

In this sense, Skawennati’s artwork empowers Posthumanism by picturing a future in which humanity’s ontology has been reconstructed in relation to the living world with which it coexists. By using a traditional Haudenosaunee story to do so, she enables the so-far-unrecognized Indigenous knowledge to partake in the creation of the future. This future is posthuman not only because she portrays also-posthumanist ideas of nature-culture continuum and non-hierarchy among humans and non-humans, but precisely because this future and the ideas do not belong solely to the West. This future in the artwork recognizes difference and complexity by employing technologically-driven media (that one connects with “progressive” countries of the Global North) to tell an indigenous story. Skawennati’s art can be understood as a response “to the critical lack of representation of indigenous identities

³ Bignall and Riley in their chapter also recognize that “a notable exception to this tendency lies in the work of Deleuze and Guattari, whose ‘philosophical nomadism’ is rich with reference to studies of Indigenous ways of knowing the world and experiencing their humanity” (170), or how “Rosi Braidotti’s significant elaboration of ‘nomad subjectivity’ as a nonhumanist, feminist framework” (176) is also sensitive.

in digital media, and their essential absence from discourses on *futurity*” (Demers). A reading of *She Falls For Ages* (2016) highlights this new dimension of Posthumanism and New Materialism respectively, where these theories are not deemed as ‘new paradigms’. Rather, such reading of a retelling of the Haudenosaunee story provides a platform where indigenous knowledge helps Posthumanism to reinvent itself.

... or as a Point of Departure?

Such an experimental exploration like this thesis then allows for regarding posthumanist theory in a way that is attentive to differences in experience resulting from colonial legacy. As Åsberg and Braidotti note: “in experimental ways, feminist posthumanities work to make the contemporary humanities integrative, transformative and relevant” (15). I have argued before that Skawennati and the avatar Otsitsakaion demonstrate posthuman feminist subjectivities; now, I would stretch out this argument by claiming that their posthuman feminist tendencies are found in their contribution to the ongoing mission of decolonization and, therefore, integrity and transformation. The question that revolves in academia now is concerned with what are the implications for the future of the Humanities? Braidotti writes that “Humanities need to mutate and become posthuman” (*The Posthuman* 147). Rhizomatic journeys through contemporary artworks such as *She Falls For Ages* (2016), in my opinion, help on the way of *becoming* and point to the direction of the future that Posthumanism is so captivated by.

Now, I want to revisit Ugwuanyi and her chapter because of her own findings in relation to heritage. Ugwuanyi in her study of the future of heritage brings an intriguing view that inspired my following perception of *She Falls For Ages* (2016). Ugwuanyi sees heritage as having ‘life’ - “a life that is not biological, a life that is not professionally induced, a life that has its own kind of consciousness different from that of the human – a ‘utilitarian life’

(280). I interpret her understanding of heritage and its “usefulness to self, to nature and to culture through the stages of birth, living, death and rebirth” (281) in relation to Skawennati’s retelling of the Haudenosaunee oral heritage as follows.

The oral traditional creation story has, from a new materialist (and animistic) perspective, ‘life’ and agency. As Ugwuanyi notices, “many heritage resources serve their community, living or dead. What is important is that the posthumanist mediation or ‘connectivity ontology’ makes such living progressive and continuous” (281). In this sense, if we consider traditional oral stories as agential and as part of the interconnected universe, from both animistic and new materialist points of view, then they are also part of the life cycle. Death is not considered as ‘the end’ in the Haudenosaunee story; nor should it be the story itself. Rather, Skawennati allows the story to be reborn, part of the flow, and project the future. She gives another life to the story in the present by not forgetting its past, but not staying in the past either. Such an approach can be fruitful for Posthumanism too.

Do Humanities have a future? I think that if we allow them to die and be reborn, the Humanities will not be ‘stuck’ in the past; they will *become* Posthumanities. These Posthumanities can be, as a result, more attentive and gentle, and conscious of where they *come from* - meaning unrecognized epistemologies outside of cultural hegemony. Rather than getting rid of anything *previous*, experiments such as this thesis can help refigure these *any-things* into new constellations.

Conclusion

It has been more than a year since the WHO declared Covid-19 a pandemic. In the most gentle sense of the word, it can be said that it has been quite a *journey* for the world. This journey is of course incomparable to the *journey* I invoked in this thesis. However, the pandemic's influence on this thesis is inevitable. Fundamentally, I discovered *She Falls For Ages* (2016) while isolating at home. As the world has been forced to adapt to the new reality shaped by the outcomes of the Covid-19 and practice a new sense of *humility*, I too have discovered new dimensions to which I have been adapting and practiced a sense of *humbleness* throughout this experimental journey.

By exploring the posthumanist agenda and its intersections with New Materialism, feminism, and indigenous knowledge through Skawennati's artwork *She Falls For Ages* (2016), this thesis has shown how such an experiment can elucidate new facets of Posthumanism and our engagement with it. In this thesis, I chose to 'explore' and 'experiment' with the theories and the artwork, rather than 'analyze' them. This resulted in a vital engagement between myself, the theories, and the artwork. Therefore, this thesis has illustrated that the adoption of a rhizomatic, humble approach allows for the use of an indigenous artwork as a means to not only highlight new dimensions of Posthumanism but also to help Posthumanism point in a different direction. My exploration thus proposed a platform where the indigenous knowledge comes into an egalitarian dialogue with Posthumanism and the other intersecting theories.

These new dimensions of Posthumanism lay in experiments in which a weaving of theory and artwork is possible. This practice helped me to connect different worlds and achieve new depths of Posthumanism; hence, it has been constantly reshaping my knowledge of the theories. This journey started with my momentary understanding of Posthumanism;

yet, the approach of the *engaging journey* I suggested in this thesis makes the artwork an active agent that affects the theory and our awareness of it. In my case, this engagement with the artwork allowed me to look at Posthumanism from a different point of view - that of indigenous knowledge. My thesis suggests that the 'new' ideas introduced by Posthumanism might as well not be 'new,' and that an engagement with an artwork that communicates indigenous knowledge is crucial for Posthumanism to reinvent itself. Furthermore, I have demonstrated that such a journey can result in the acquisition of a new sense of humbleness which is vital for experiments like this thesis. I wanted to show that it is through this humble standpoint, fueled by a respect for the artwork and theory, that one can be more aware of both the limitations and the unseen possibilities. Subsequently, this thesis has, in the last chapter, brought to the question the ethical dimension of Posthumanism; yet, this needs to be explored in more detail.

I have embarked on an open-ended journey. Hence, to better understand the implications of this thesis, future studies could further address the Western roots of Posthumanism, and what this means for the future of Posthumanities in relation to indigenous knowledge that has so far been ignored. This could be done by explorations of artworks by other Indigenous Futurists artists. Worth mentioning is the virtual-reality exhibition *Indigenous Futurisms: Transcending Past/Present/Future* from 2020 that took place at the MoCNA; the exhibited works like Virgil Ortiz's *Venutian Soldiers* (2020), or Kite & Devin Ronnenberg's *Ínyan Iyé (Telling Rock)* (2020) can be suitable for such experiments. I would also suggest a study of the virtual environment *Second Life* in which Skawennati created *She Falls For Ages* (2016), which I have not discussed in-depth, and how this cyberspace participates in the dialogue between the dominant and the marginal epistemologies. During these times, it is crucial to continue the *journey* and examine how these new territories (re)shape our understanding of humanity *and* posthumanity.

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