

STORYTELLING IN TERRITORIES WITHOUT TREATIES: INDIGENOUS PROTOCOLS AND NEW MEDIA

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In his 2002 encyclopedia of Canadian literature, W.H. New wrote that up until the mid-1990's, Indigenous literature in Canada had remained for the most part "dormant." This is largely due to the fact that up until recently, "literature" was still being defined and categorized according to Western literary norms, genres, and conventions. The latter did not account for interventions such as orature, life writing, testimonials, speeches, sermons, or manifestos. Presently, however, Indigenous literatures are not only flourishing, they are redefining and expanding upon what we have considered thus far as "literature": comic books, graphic novels, science fiction, fantasy, speculative fiction, film script, and erotica are amongst some of the genres that are dislodging the existing critical scholarship – largely centered around the novel, drama and poetry – from its comfort zone. In addition, the prevalence of new media and of the audio-visual and digital worlds provide an exceptional entry point to the land and territories (whether spatial, discursive, aesthetic) that many artists and writers may no longer have access to. Thus, what interests me here is not only how the notion of "literature" – or rather narrative – is stretched/expanded to include interventions that explore the intersections between text and image, text and performance, and text and territory, but how the complexity of the process of textualizing or otherwise materializing storytelling traditions is conveyed. The contemporaneity of these genres and works is an important component in the creation of a transcontinental public space in which Indigenous productions are clearly participant in the making of new possibilities for renegotiation beyond and across cultural and linguistic divides. They enable a form of transdisciplinarity, in the sense that they touch upon the political, the social and the cultural. In this way, the emphasis on genre, media, and language experimentation leads me to argue that the future of Indigenous Studies resides in a cross-cultural exchange, by means of which one is required to look at such productions from both a communal and territorial – though not necessarily in their spatial sense – perspective. For instance, Chris Bose and David McIntosh's recent urban installation and collection of short stories, *Vancouver, Crawling, Weeping, Betting*, explores Indigenous presence and sovereignty within the city of Vancouver, which is situated on the traditional lands of Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh. The project literally inscribes the "memories, reanimated wraiths and spirits" that imbibe the city into "reports and boundaries that document [the artists'] embodied experiences of Vancouver" (Bose and McIntosh). Similarly, *Skins*, a Kahnawake-based storytelling and video game workshop, was developed "to encourage First Nations youth to be producers of media, not just consumers," and "to experiment with ways individuals and communities might leverage digital media as a tool for preserving and advancing culture and languages" (skins.abtec.org). In these two transcontinental examples, the individual is both embodied and embedded into a visual/virtual landscape – a mediasphere – which s/he can (re)claim, and from which s/he may (re)assert sovereignty. This is even more important given that for the most part, everyday encounters with popular culture and new media take place in landscapes where Indigenous history is erased by markers of state authority. Thus, beyond the university, this project also contributes to the development of new practices for community, public, and individual engagement. Finally, given the specific locale from which these examples originated – British Columbia and Quebec, the only two Canadian territories without treaties – I further contend that these provinces' respective political and linguistic histories not only underline how literature and media have mapped and territorialized the fields of study in which we work, but they may be the very inspiration for a cross-border genealogy of North American Indigenous Studies.