Technologies of Self-Fashioning: Virtual Ethnicities in New Media Art

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Abstract

This paper proposes a theoretical framework with which to discuss the critical engagement of media art projects in Second Life with racialized self-representation, fashion and ethnic dress. Examining Montreal-based Mohawk artist Skawennati's machinima series, T*imeTraveller^{TM}* (2008-13), a project of self-determination, survivance and Indigenous futurity, it argues the critically-aware act of 'virtually self-fashioning' racialized born-digital identities, or virtual ethnicities, disrupts ways in which today's vast proliferation of self-technologies enabling the creation, recreation and management of multiple selves, would otherwise remain complicit with neoliberal colour-blind racism.

Keywords

Self-fashioning, fashion, ethnic apparel, race, gender, coloublind racism, Second Life, virtual worlds, SLart, Skawennati, *Time Traveller*

Introduction

This paper discusses the possibilities of born-digital identities in Second Life created by artists of colour and Indigenous artists, to address the politics of racialized representation related to fashion and its Other—ethnic dress in-world and offline. Specifically I argue the critically-aware act of what I describe as 'virtually self-fashioning' racialized born-digital identities, or virtual ethnicities, disrupts ways in which today's vast proliferation of self-technologies enabling the creation, recreation and management of multiple selves, would otherwise remain complicit with neoliberal colour-blind racism, or neoliberal racism, as social critic Henry Giroux calls it. The paper is divided into three sections. The first section introduces the context from which this discussion emerges, namely scholarship concerning depictions of the racialized and sexualized body in Second Life and mixed reality performances that dispel the illusion of colourlessness in not only the fashion world but virtual worlds. Bringing together feminist interpretations of Foucault's theorizing on technologies of the self, critical race studies, fashion theory and postcolonial digital visual culture critique, the second section elaborates on how acts of virtually self-fashioning, allied to critique, help make critical distinctions between the ways in which selves are made and remade within and by the technologies of fashion and self-care, and the ways new media is used in artistic practice as potentially disruptive technologies that cri-

tique and redress the former. Why? Because the bodies engaged are themselves potentially disruptive, particularly when it is up against hegemonic social norms and conduct, of which dress is a significant marker. One of the artistic strategies is to facilitate the online critically-aware remediation of ethnic apparel (the entire outfit from makeup and hairstyles to clothing and accessories—even behaviours). Elsewhere I have argued that 'ethnic dress' (and its variants—'national dress' or 'world fashion') exist only because of the persistent Eurocentric perception of fashion as a purely Euro-American invention. 'Ethnic apparel" is thus used as a critical term whenever possible to underscore sartorial interventions cognizant of prevailing racist ideologies and discourses. The paper concludes with an exploration of Montreal-based Mohawk artist Skawennati's machinima series, *TimeTraveller^{TM}* (2008-13), as an example of the complex processes of cultural negotiation involved in the virtual construction of "Indian Country" in Second Life. A central aspect of the project is the artist's resourceful endeavours to create original Indigenous avatar skins and clothing, in addition to culturally-appropriate objects and environments, not readily available in the user-created online environment. It is safe to say that today, as art historian Martha Buskirk discusses in her book, *Creative Enterprise: Contemporary Art Between Museum and Marketplace* (2012), "contemporary art has become deeply embedded not only in an expanding art industry, but also the larger cultures of fashion and entertainment," referring to the art and handbags of Sylvie Fleury, Takashi Murakami and Fred Wilson. [1] With the Internet, this expansion has led to new relationships between new media art, new technologies of self-making and the virtual fashion and entertainment designed specifically for end use in virtual worlds.

Second Life Fashion and Ethnicity

If in Real Life, you're Asian American, Asian Pacific American, [fill-in Asian or Pacific Islander ethnicity] American, please join this group! Whether your passport says you're American or not does not matter. You do not have to be Asian (or even human in SL) to join. [2]

At the end of last decade (i.e. late 2010s) when the phenomenon of Second Life (SL) was still somewhat awesome and just days before the US would inaugurate its first

Black president in Barack Obama (January 20, 2009), SL scholar James Au Wagner asked: "Why's It Still Hard to Find a Good Ethnic Avatar Skin?" Fruitless searches in top SL fashion emporiums will only turn up "skins that are just darkened versions of light ones, or come without hair selections popular in black/Latino communities." [3] In fact, *Second Life Newser* reported that: "One kind of item that some residents complain they can't seem to find are ethnic avatars" which is why Tellaq Guardian created his SL store: "I couldn't find any good black skins for myself. As you can see in the store, there are many Afro skins"—there are also "some white, and one Asian." [4]

In 2015, things haven't changed that much in terms of virtual diversity. The times in fact reflect more acutely the ascendancy in dominant public discourse of neoliberal ideology as well as its discontents. In a recent controversial 2014 study at Ohio State University on how racial diversity among virtual avatars in Second Life affected the experience of both white and Black users, Communications Studies scholar Jong-Eun Roselyn Lee "found that low-diversity representations of 'Second Life' dominated by white avatars led black players to create virtual avatars that also appeared whiter," and that "such circumstances even made black players less willing to reveal their real racial identity through their avatars"—the study did not "encompass other racial or ethnic groups such as Hispanics and Asians." [5] (It's just as bad; for Asians, there are a lot of Harajuku and other favourite anime characters but not many human avatars expressing offline Asian identities.) [6] Lee's study is remarkable in what it says about "how strongly racial minority individuals identify with their particular race or ethnicity"; the appeal of SL's capacity, its openness for self-customizations for users to create avatars reflecting their true selves, is, as in video games, trumped by the fact that skin colour "still matters for the player's experience," enough that they will downplay, if not outright suppress the expression of their offline racial identity.[7] In contrast to gameworlds, user-created communities in Second Life have neither goal objectives nor pre-established game narratives, "relying instead mostly on the social interaction of users as well as an economy of user-generated content." [8] Despite how Lisa Nakamura has argued that "the adoption of the Internet by many more women and users of color since the nineties has occasioned innumerable acts of technological appropriation" [9] (and it has to a degree), this study and other recent scholarship on virtual diversity and cyberethnography in Second Life indicate there are still significant intersections of offline and online materializations of raced and gendered identities that underscore how experiences of racism, sexism and other forms of xenophobia in real-life, or worse, internalized forms of such ideologies of oppression, often impinge on the decision of SL users to self-represent their ethnicity, gender or nationality online, contributing to the ongoing lack of virtual diversity in the digital visual culture of Second Life.

Equally telling of the neoliberal tenor of the debates was the outcry against Lee's article, from arguments based on "design challenges" (that the lack of ethnic skins mainly has to do with "darker skins being far harder to give life to in a world like Second Life; the textures don't stand out as much and therefore fewer content creators want to make them and fewer customers find them appealing" [10]) to arguments based on market (there are few ethnic skins because there is no market for them, i.e. people who join online communities want to be someone or something else, certainly not identify with "races" marginalized in Real Life). The contention that scarcity of ethnic avatar skins is because they are simply not "appealing" to either ethnic or non-ethnic SL users, never mind SL residents, resorts to "race-neutral" discourses of neoliberalism that reduce racial problems to privatized concerns and issues of individual character and cultural depravity, and "human agency as simply a matter of individualized choices, the only obstacle to effective citizenship being the lack of principled self-help and moral responsibility."[11] Counter-arguments inevitably are rebuked with, as Giroux puts it, "power-evasive strategies such as blaming minorities of class and color for not working hard enough" (or too incompetent or unskilled to do so) and "refusing to exercise individual initiative." [12] (For Skawennati's *TimeTraveller*[TM], as we shall see shortly, this is simply not the case.)

And then there is the prevalence of "fashion anti-intellectualism" (anti-intellectual discourses about fashion), which, according to Minh-Ha T. Pham, is witnessed "any time a fashion designer, editor or retailer offers a non-apology about a racist, sexist or classist runway show or fashion shoot that begins with 'I'm sorry if anyone was offended' and ends with 'but it's just fashion, don't take it so seriously.'" [13] One of the intellectual projects that fashion anti-intellectualism diminishes, notes Pham, is the understanding of "the social, cultural and socio-psychological relations between the body and clothing," or "enclothed cognition," an emergent field of study under embodied cognition studies spearheaded by cognitive psychologists Hajo Adam and Adam Galinksy: what you wear affects how you think of yourself. [14] It may seem this scientific conclusion was already figured out a long time ago, but even more surprising is how little discussion there has been about how affect pertains to the relationship between ethnic identity and dress, as well as the preconceived ideas associated with them.

Fashion (avatar apparel), specifically ethnic fashion as it is understood by the majority of SL residents, in contrast to ethnic 'skins', is much more easily obtainable in Second Life in any number of virtual outlets near you. While ethnic avatar skins are available in a limited fashion, it is the practice of "dressing up" or "going native" that is the more lucrative as sartorial commodities. In Second Life, users can dress up their avatars in the latest 'virtual world' fashions as well as in the latest 'world fashions' but one obvious observation is common, the majority of avatars, those that are human, whether dressed in "ethnic fashion" or not, are white and non-ethnic (there is more gender-bending than racial bending in Second Life). If one were to follow Adam and Galinsky's enclosed cognitive formulation, the

wearing of ethnic fashion does something to the psychology of the wearer that has no connection to the fact that the clothing isn't being worn by those whose ethnicity they are associated with.

This racial disparity in the phenomenon of ethnic chic isn't much different than what has been happening in Real Life where international fashion shows, and the models who walk the runways in them, are overwhelmingly white. While there was a spurt in the fashion industry in the 1980s and 90s when designers like Calvin Klein, Gianni Versace and Yves Saint Laurent routinely cast Black models without question, by the end of the supermodel era, fashion shows are as dominated by white models as they have been since the late 1990s. In the last decade that number has dropped and been replaced by obvious tokenism [15] (of a few size zero high end ethnic models) and the increased appearance of Asian models (in actuality, between 2008 and 2013, they "never comprised more than ten percent of turns on the runway. In five of the nine seasons, Asian models have *less* representation than Black models" [16]) which is explained "specifically in terms of appealing to luxury customers in China. […] What is happening on the runways is the result of a very Eurocentric aesthetic that has taken over for the last 10 years and that has excluded other races." [17] What of Indigenous models? I could ask the same thing.

To change things, "the times need a real hard line drawn"; in the sixties, you would boycott," but today, says the iconic Iman, former supermodel and Yves Saint Laurent muse: "If you engage the social media, trust me, it will hurt them in their pockets. If you take it out there, they will feel the uproar." [18] Twitter, other forms of social media, and an array of new fashion media communication technologies (blogs, vlogs, and mobile device apps) can revive the debate about race and fashion, but the fact remains: "There have been no obvious repercussions for those who still see colorless runways as an acceptable form of artistic expression. […] there are still many designers and casting agents who remain […] unmoved by the perception that fashion has a race problem in the first place." [19] Despite how luxury fashion has become a global business with an unfathomable number of consumers watching runway shows online, even virtual fashion shows are overwhelmingly white, as Pham's case study of the "Burberry Prorsum Autumn/Winter 2011 Hologram Runway Show" in China which marked the opening of Burberry's flagship store in Beijing, demonstrates: "Rather than spotlight Chinese supermodels or at least use them as prototypes for the digital models, white models overwhelmingly outnumber non-white models on this virtual fashion runway – just as they do on real runways." [20] Once again, the reproduction and (re)configurations of race, ethnicity, and gender in real life carry over in digital spaces, and in the case above acutely exemplified at the intersections of fashion and virtual identity play.

In this regard, the ongoing scholarship on race, ethnicity and diaspora in new media by Lisa Nakamura, Wendy Chun, and increasingly more other academics, are funda-

mental to understanding what is happening in new media art when it comes to talking about virtually self-fashioning racialized subjectivity online. "Racial formation theory has not often been used in reference to new media, partly because the frame of reference is so different and because the early utopian bent to Internet criticism meant that discussions of difference, especially if viewed as 'divisive,' were avoided." [21] While earlier racial formation theory assumed that racial projects "were ongoing and differential but nonetheless worked in a more or less one-way fashion," today, Nakamura writes, "new media can look to an increasingly vital digital cultural margin or counterculture for resistance." [22] Morever, vital to moving forward digital visual culture critique are intersectional critical methods that "read both race and gender as part of mutually constitutive formations." [23]

Technologies of Self-Fashioning

The self is not clothing, tools, or possessions. It is to be found in the principle which uses these tools, a principle not of the body but of the soul.

– Michel Foucault [24]

For the purposes of this study, "technologies" is understood in terms of what French philosopher Michel Foucault posited as "technologies of the self" and "care of the self" wherein the self is the *object* of both the technology and of the concern. Foucault defines technologies of the self as practices and strategies "which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality." [25] Foucault did not write about fashion or dress but his ideas are useful to discuss how discourses about what we wear are internalized to the point that the relevance of lived experiences and alternative, non-hegemonic practices are often dismissed. His later writings are a reminder that "one has to take into account not only technologies of domination but also technologies of self." [26] Importantly, his method of inquiry into self care is "thinking with attitude": "thinking with attitude . . . generates the conditions of possibility necessary for subjects to cha[lle]nge their identities." [27]

Only *critically-aware* acts of *virtually self-fashioning*, however, can intentionally and purposefully subjectivize the self who then becomes the one that is constructing the technologies *and* the self, and doing the concerning of itself; as Moya Lloyd suggests, "self-fashioning, *when allied to critique*, can produce sites of contestation over the meanings and contours of identity, and over the ways in which certain practices are mobilized." [28] When self-fashioning involves race, itself a powerful technology, avatar identities run into what new media studies scholar Wendy Hui Kyong Chun posits as "race *as* technology," "a strange, and hopefully estranging formulation" that crucially "shifts the focus from the *what* of race to the *how* of

race, from *knowing* race to *doing* race by emphasizing the similarities between race and technology." [29] Of concern when it comes to talking about ethnic dress (and fashion in general), are two technologies of the self in particular: the technologies of self-esteem and of the market in which the technologies of desire and identity are intertwined through consumption. The former, self-esteem is closely linked to the technology of norms which produces certain kinds of selves. In order to be empowered, it is necessary to think of self-esteem as having more to do with self-assessment or self-worth than self-respect as can be surmised by the huge variety of self-help books, tapes, videos and other paraphernalia available for purchase. Nearly all the psychological technologies borrow from technologies of the market, namely consumption, which in turn borrows from technologies of the self because it uses the power of goods to shape identities. For our purposes here, falling under the illusion of having only the choice between off-the-rack/pre-fab brand avatar apparel and virtually-designed haute couture, as opposed to self-designed apparel, reflects upon the Second Life user's buy-in, or, if they are fortunate enough, buying power to show (off) who they are or want to be, communicating to others ultimately how they want to be perceived as the market would have it so. As certain traits are associated with certain clothes, deciding to don and wearing certain pieces make individuals feel good (enclothed cognition), changing personalities to incorporate those traits into one's behaviour—the question is: in whose hands is (given) the power to shape the identities in Second Life that users desire?

TimeTraveller™

The Montreal-based Mohawk artist Skawennati offers the tremendous "TimeTraveller™" (2008-13)—nine machinimas (films made by using computer graphics engines) featuring two smart, sexy and utterly cool Mohawks who use magical glasses and computers to visit often harrowing past events (including an Aztec sacrificial ceremony and the violent 1862 conflict between Dakota Sioux and white Minnesota settlers). Ultimately, they relocate to a spectacular future in 2121.[1] [30]

Exhibited as a projection-based work in the 2014 Biennale de Montreal (BNLMTL 2014), Skawennati's *TimeTraveller™* (http://www.timetravellertm.com/) is a multi-

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[1] Born in Kanahwà:ke Mohawk Territory of mixed Italian and Mohawk heritage, Skawennati (Tricia Fragnito) (1969-) holds a BFA and graduate certificate from Concordia University and is Co-Director with Jason E. Lewis of *Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace* (AbTeC). She co-founded the collective *Nation to Nation* in 1994 and co-created and curated *CyberPowWow*, an Aboriginally-determined online gallery conceived in 1996 which eventually culminated in the establishment of AbTeC in 2008. Developed with the support of the AbTeC research network, and winning the *imagineNative Film and Media Arts Festival*'s 2009 Best New Media Award, *TimeTraveller^{TM}* has been shown in numerous configurations. http://www.skawennati.com/

platform work featuring a website in which the main component is a nine-part sci-fi/cyberpunk machinima series (movies shot in virtual environments, in this case, in Second Life on AbTeC Island). As with her earlier 2005 web-based paper doll/time-travel journal *Imagining Indians in the 25th Century*), *TimeTraveller™* depicts Indigenous people living in the future as a vibrant, integral part of it, rather than in an idealized past. [31] The machinima tells the story of Hunter, an angry, disillusioned young Mohawk man, fashionably punk and jet-packed, living in the twenty-second century—a Montreal in 2121 of soaring skyscrapers and hyper-commercialized surroundings—"a dystopian exaggeration of contemporary Western neo-liberal society." [32] Hunter is able to time travel thanks to the special ultra-light *TimeTraveller™* 3D virtual reality device (available for purchase soon, according to the *TimeTraveller™* website) that allows him to visit (as well as engage in gameplay with) famous people, places and conflicts in Indigenous history (such as the riveting Episode 03 of the Mohawk Oka Crisis in 1990 in Quebec) and embark on a vision quest without ever leaving his futuristic, technologized world. (The "look" of Hunter's world, and Hunter himself was inspired by Neal Stephenson's widely read 1992 novel *Snow Crash* and its Indigenous antagonist, the hacker Raven.) Strong female characters appear throughout the machinima, including key historical figures. As the story unfolds, the female protagonist, Karahkwenhawi (who first appears as a baby in Episdoe 03), meets Hunter and they fall in love, debunking all real-world theories of space-time continuum. As Mohawk activist Ellen Gabriel once said to Skawennati: "Our people have always used time travel to figure out the problems of today." [33]

The story of the making of *TimeTraveller™* and inhabiting of AbTeC Island is self-admittedly inundated with multiple layers of irony and parody. Already early on in 2008, Skawennati's project team virtually confronted how "on top of the existing irony of Indians buying virtual land and then colonizing it, there was now an additional irony of having to enclose that land to protect it from counter-colonization by a … somewhat belligerent group of technological adepts"—virtual squatter-pirates stealing their prims (primitives) which are needed to build 3D objects in Second Life. [34] I would suggest however that given the teleology of the Internet as the last but most permanent thus far of the Wild West frontiers, it might be more accurate to see the efforts around *TimeTraveller™* as ironically part of the larger project to decolonize cyberspace or take advantage of the critical purchase of a territory already colonized by a neoliberal techno-meritocracy, with varying degrees of successes and failures—one has to, after all, pay for virtual land to occupy it. Fundamentally the project exemplifies one of AbTeC's core arguments, "that the era of networked digital media presents a unique opportunity for Aboriginal people to present a self-determined image to the world," both in Real Life and in-world—"even on the Internet, Native people need a self-determined place to call home." [35]

"Call It a Vision Quest"

Interfaces inform all media—videos, television, literature—and as this happens we are witnessing the creation of new power differentials in visual capital. [35]

We can be the storytellers, not just have stories told about us. [36]

I mix history, Indigenous knowledge, pop culture and science fiction to create alternative realities and possible futures that provide touchstones to discuss our resistance, survivance and success.

– Skawennati

In their essay, "Call It a Vision Quest," Elizabeth LaPensée and Jason Edward Lewis argue that *TimeTraveller™* is an example of culturally-critical machinima as First Nations survivance—survival by resistance—a concept popularized by Anishnaabe writer and poet Gerald Vizenor who emphasizes the continuation of "Native survivance stories" and "reinforcing the existence of living indigenous culture in contemporary society." [38] One particularly strong dimension of this in effect in *TimeTraveller™* is how the artist and her team have had to make their own customized First Nations skin tones and hair styles, hence developing a "rich set of First Nations characters in Second Life, an act which constitutes a powerful contribution to self-determination in cyberspace" (if ethnic avatar skintones are rare today with very few Indigenous characters around, they were even more limited when Skawennati first joined Second Life in 2007). [39] "Customization in machinima may involve making assets such as animations, textures, objects, and sounds" – hairstyle assets were purchased and modified to complement the ones the artistic team made themselves.[40] Among the many customized objects in *TimeTraveller™*, from sacred objects such as wampum belts and beads to accessories, props and the virtual sets and even customized moves (drumming, jingle dancing), was clothing. As is the case for ethnic avatar apparel, "finding culturally appropriate clothing for characters provided to be a challenge, since most of the depictions of First Nations culture in Second Life stem from romanticized pan-Indian stereotypes. […] As a result, the team created much of the clothing for the characters, such as ribbon shirts, fancy dresses, and jingle dresses." [41]

As LaPensée and Lewis suggest, the lack of a pre-defined narrative in the making of machinima in Second Life facilitated the objective to create *TimeTraveller™*'s original narrative context "that looked to First Nations culture and science fiction as its main reference points" [41]—the outcome of which I suggest can be described as a conscious act of virtually sef-fashioning Indigenous presence in Second Life. "The first episode took two years, as we had to learn *everything* —how Second Life worked, how to move in it, how to dress people, how to make them look Indian." [42]

Ethnic Ribbons and Regalia

In the future, what will we wear as regalia? What kind of agreement would we honour with a wampum belt? [43]

The continuance of both ceremony and creativity is at the heart of cultural and political survival. [44]

In Episode 04, we meet Karahkwenhawi, a young university student from our present visiting the Saint Francis Xavier Mission Church in Kanahwà:ke, Quebec, to do research on the "Lily of the Mohawks," Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, the first indigenous Canadian saint (posthumously in 2012), for her art history paper on representations of Indigenous people. She finds a pair of the TimeTraveller™ glasses and visits a spectacular futuristic powwow extravaganza in 2112 at the packed Winnipeg Olympic Stadium where the long-haired MC is like a rock star and jingle dancers take centre stage (fig. 1). [45] Not only is the head female dancer, Miss Universe 2111 and featured on the cover of Italian Vogue, later in the program, beautiful Indigenous female models take the catwalk in haute couture "Ovoid" gowns. Importantly, Karahkwenhawi gets to meet and interact with Kateri Tekakwitha through to Episode 05, finishing her essay. She finally hooks up with Hunter at Alcatrez in Episode 06 and continue together to find out more about the history of Turtle Island and in the process themselves.

Figure 1: Jingle Dancers Assembled, TimeTraveller™ Production Still, 2011. Courtesy of the artist.

Three items struck me about fashion, ethnic apparel and self-fashioning self-determined representations watching these particular episodes in which not only Hunter, but Karahkwenhawi (who later goes on her own vision quest), technically-speaking, avatars of avatars, become subjects of history surrounded by, if not interpellated through apparel. The first is, not to state the obvious, that the very ability to literally *move* the narrative temporally and spatially (with a click of a button) and metaphorically (to bear *witness* to historical moments of Indigenous resistance and *take part*) is, in fact, a engineered piece of fashion apparel—a pair of stylized (and stylish) designer eyewear, created by an *artiste*, branded and comes in limited editions. A

similar device is the cell phone whose ring reminds us Karahkwenhawi is in our present even as she travels back to 1680 to meet the tragically small pox-stricken Saint Kateri in the "flesh." Phones are fashion these days. On the market today are cellphone accessories and apparel as well as cellphone clothing (to conceal your cell so you can pay attention to other things) in the 'coolness factor' wars. In *TimeTraveller™*, these objects of many prims, however, are more than just chic fashion accessories; they are emitters of hip, tech-savvy identities as well as conduits to Indigenous lives past and present. In this in-world, they are specially-designed, transformative, disruptive technologies.

The second is how the powwow event is a particular moment in the series in which mainstream conceptions of pan-Indian dress is remediated and re-appropriated from pop culture, mainstream mass media and historical accounts. In reference to *Urban Indian Series* (2006) by Terrance Houle in collaboration with Jarusha Brown, which capture the artist going about his daily life but in full powwow regalia, curator and art historian Richard William Hill writes that: "It is when we ask ourselves 'why?' that the work does its real damage. Do we really assume that the visible signs of 'Indianness' are antithetical to ordinary contemporary experience, even when worn by an indigenous person?" [46] The careful attention and effort to fashion a rich set of First Nations characters in *TimeTraveller™* ostensibly carves out and place-holds a critically-aware transhistorical space where self-determined Indigenous fashion, with its diversity in varying scales of production, indeed exists. This favourable condition of possibility, I argue is what acts of virtually self-fashioning born-digital identities are aligned with and aspire to.

Finally, although not discussed in this paper, at least a brief mention should be made about how virtually self-fashioning gendered identities is also realized in *TimeTraveller™* not just in these episodes but through to the end. In Episode 09 Karahkwenhawi visits at art gallery in 2121 (Hunter's present in which he is rich and famous having won the Extreme Time Traveller contest). In this future, Karahkwenhawi would be an award-winning, successful art historian of the twenty-first century Indigenous art that are displayed on the walls of the futuristic gallery (fig. 2). She is as comfortable in her own skin as she is in the jingle dress that magically adorns her at the stadium powwow, a pair of jeans and t-shirt or a professional business suit and slick hairdo, and apparently very, very youthful still in 2121. Karahkwenhawi decides to move to the year 2121 permanently, for love and the prospects of what an empowered decolonial future can bring despite the familiar spectre of neoliberal capitalism at every turn. As Sasha Sobrina suggests, the hyper-commercialized surroundings are how Skawennati connects 2121 to present-day reality in 2015, inviting viewers to imagine with her how the attainment of such a future is not entirely fantastical. [47] Notwithstanding, survivance needs to remain an ongoing project.

Conclusion

The born-digital fashioned body is always already embodied and always already performed. Self-depictions of born-digital identities are always mitigated by and remediated through the experiences and aspirations of their real-life creators. For people of colour and Indigenous people, the decision to create or choose avatars that self-represent their ethnicities however come with challenges of which not the least is how virtual worlds are hardly the utopian, democratic, race-neutral, post-racial spaces they are sold to be, beginning with the default choices of skin colour. This paper has argued that critically-aware acts of virtually self-fashioning racialized born-digital identities through ethnic avatar apparel—skins, ethnic dress, accessories—evident in Second Life art projects such as Skawennati's *TimeTraveller™*, constitute acts of resistance against persistent colourblind injustices online and off. In visualizing, affirming and ultimately empowering the vitality of self-determined histories, identities and the fashioned body, they call attention to how selves are made and remade within and by the visual and conceptual technologies of fashion, new media and self care always for a purpose.
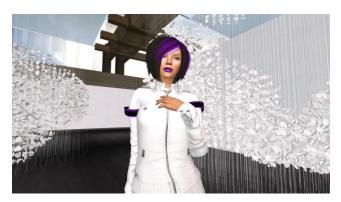

Figure 2: Epiphany (featuring Hannah Claus's *cloudscape*), TimeTraveller™ Production Still, 2013. Courtesy of the artist.

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32. Sasha Sobrino, "Dystopia/Utopia: Models of Success and Decolonial Futurity in Skawennati's *TimeTraveller™*," MA (Art History) Thesis, York University, Toronto, 2015, 13.

33. Candice Hopkins, "A Wrinkle in Time: On Indians and the Future," *We Are Here: The Eiteljorg Contemporary Art Fellowship 2011*, ed. Jennifer Complo McNutt and Ashley Holland (Indianapolis: Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art; Seattle; London: U of Washington P, 2011) 52.

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44. Neal B. Keating, *Iroquois Art, Power, and History* (Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 2012), 267

45. The significance of this futuristic pan-Indian powwow in the artist's work as well as in connection to the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada is referenced in Hopkins, "A Wrinkle in Time," 54-55.

46. Richard William Hill, *World Upside Down* (Banff, AB: Walter Phillips Gallery and Banff Centre Press, 2008) 98-99.

47. Sobrino, "Dystopia/Utopia," 45.

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