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The Aesthetics of Resistance in *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko

Salwa Karoui Elounelli*

“The resistance would leak out and take with it all barriers, all boundaries.” *Ceremony*

Abstract:

This essay examines the complex interaction between the poetics of postmodern fiction and the politics of commitment in Leslie Marmon Silko’s first novel. The paradoxical questioning and reinforcement of the postmodern canon in the novel’s encoding of a Native American literary aesthetics is discussed in relation to the transnational paradigm. The interaction between the tribal ecological and ontological vision on the one hand, and the aesthetics of postmodernism and of environmentalism on the other inscribe the novel’s complex enactment of a cross-cultural matrix that joins the celebration of the “local” and the tribal to a highlighting of the transnational.

Key words: Native American fiction, *Ceremony* (1977), aesthetics, postmodernism, environmental aesthetics, metafiction, transnationalism.

In one of the poems by the first American Romantic poet, Philip Freneau, entitled "*The Indian Burying ground*"¹ (1788), a striking contradiction is unintentionally produced. It is a contradiction between the description of an Indian custom of burying the dead in a sitting position, which necessarily implies that the Native Americans were then *still* existing, and an unexplained shift to focus on the faded engravings

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on rocks as the only level (that of disappearing artistic traces) to which the figure of the Native American could belong. Freneau's poem established what would become for long the pattern within which the Native American is 'invented' in Euroamerican literature. Hawthorne's Indians², in the next century would be an extension of the wilderness, not Hester's, but Chillingworth's wilderness where witchcraft ("black art", equated with the totality of Indian culture) becomes a variation on what Freneau had called earlier "barbarous forms." The deformity of Chillingworth (in *The Scarlet Letter*), highlighted against the backgrounded Indians who initiate him to the evil he would embody and practice crystallizes a long literary and cultural tradition of distortion, disfiguration with the Native American as its subject.

It is against the background of this literary heritage animated by the politics of distortion and the myth of cultural extinction that I undertake my reading of the aesthetics of resistance in Silko's first novel, *Ceremony*³. The manifestations of resistance in Native American literature have mostly been discussed from the angle of their politics, or also through a specific focus on the text's inscription of its "Indianness" (in theme, structure, or in its use of a specific temporal or spatial conception), while "Indianness" itself is constantly reconceptualized by many Native American artists and theoreticians in terms that transcend and resist the essentialist claims of "Indian identity". The aim of this paper is to discuss *Ceremony*'s enactment of resistance as an *aesthetic gesture* displayed in the narrative's dialectical interaction with its cross-cultural literary and aesthetic context. As a non-Indian reader, I understand my task as a search for a delicate and challenging balance, within my abiding by an ethics of reading, between the legitimacy of the interpretive act that recognizes the Native American narrative's reinscription of the silence of secrecy around its sacred material, and the desire not to "colonize the text" through its reading in relation to a trans-national" modernist and postmodernist aesthetics. My reading of the aesthetics of resistance in *Ceremony* is thus an attempt to interpret an Indian American literary text within a consciousness of the dilemma that a non-Indian reader is likely to face. My initial allusions to Freneau and Hawthorne are meant to suggest that part of that dilemma has to do with the fact the a non-Indian receiver is often tempted to read Native American literature in relation to a sense of "Indianness" already constructed in the colonialist views of classical Euroamerican texts.

The dilemma is what David L. Moore has insightfully described as the anxiety of reading across cultures which, in the case of a non- Native reader approaching a Native American text, is said to inevitably involve the re-enactment of colonial relations⁴. And yet, as Moore rightly argues, such re-enactment does not hinder the possibility of an ethical understanding of that literature. In my opinion, an appreciation of the aesthetic value of a literary text is in itself an ethical gesture, and to any reader, any text inevitably bears the resonance of other texts or of an aesthetical paradigm beyond its specific cultural belonging, as the contemporary studies of intertextuality argue. If “colonizing the text” means to give in to “the historical pressures which eclipse Indian identities” (Moore 635), the body of Native American literature, by its very centralization of the question of “Indianness” or “Nativeness” inscribe in the process of reading itself a resistance to that risk. And yet that centralization does not necessarily mean fixing “Indianness” within a rigid definition that would ignore the complex reality of mixedblood origins or of multiple ethnic belonging; “Indianness” is articulated in narratives like *Ceremony* as a challenging category that aims at capturing part of the complexity of Indian identity and experience. One of the merits of a novel like *Ceremony* is that it invites the reader to explore an Indian “literariness” (that is the reshaping of literary narrativity within the paradigm of tribal cultural vision) in the process of its formation through the narrative’s simultaneous re-negotiation of tribal storytelling and of an aesthetics of novelistic writing that reinvigorates and challenges at once the postmodernist aesthetics.

Much of the critical discussion of resistance in Native American literature in general and in *Ceremony* in particular tends to relate it to the questions of nationalism- nationhood, Indian sovereignty, and internationalism. Many of those readings also include a particular interpretation of Vizenor’s notion of “survivance”⁵; most of them focusing on the epistemological and the political dimensions of Native American “survivance” (that is, the implications of Vizenor’s notion of “survivance” in relation to the issues of knowledge and sovereignty). Though such discussions have provided Silko’s readers with insightful perspectives as to the rootedness of the Indian American poetics into the politics of indigenous identity and of non-state nationalism, they tend to subsume the novel’s significance to such politics, often at the expense of its aesthetics and its “literariness”. It is true that such “literariness” is

intrinsically connected to issues of nationalism and sovereignty as the theoretical and critical approaches to Native American literature have often argued⁶. The tendency of many critical approaches to bring the issues of Native American sovereignty and nationhood in Native literature to the epistemological value of the cultural paradigms of knowledge often eclipses the aesthetics that constitute the “literariness” and poetics of such literature. Moreover, the shortcoming of the nationalist paradigm have been repeatedly foregrounded in theoretical works on Native American and more general ethnic American literature, for its failure to account for the reality of mixedblood identity, or for the reality of class interests that undermines the romanticized idea of the unified nation⁷. Here I do not claim that my reading of Silko’s novel will be exhaustive; only that in approaching the aesthetics of resistance in *Ceremony* my interest will be in the plurality of the paradigms through which Silko’s novel inscribes its “literariness”: its resistance as an aesthetic construct is informed by the dialectical relation between Nativism and transnationalism; between tribal vision and postmodern aesthetics. The narrative’s celebration of tribal identity is steeped in a transnational paradigm; its inscription of Native American storytelling is also an enactment of the very spirit of postmodern poetics.

The recent critical and theoretical concern with exploring the significance of transnationalism in literary poetics has been motivated by the importance of migrancy and exile in the very shaping of such poetics. The “mononational” approaches on the other hand, tend generally to ignore or eclipse what Ramazani has called (in his discussion of American expatriate writers like Stein and Eliot) the “cross-national literary citizenship”⁸. Native American literature is more sharply transnational by the fact that both its use of the English language as medium and its evolution within generic frames already established by Western traditions and canons contain its concern with tribal identity and Indian culture. What is peculiar in Native American literature is that its transnationalism is not the outcome of “transnational mobility” or migrancy in any physical or geographical sense. It is rather generated by a long history of intercultural energies and tension among the Native tribes themselves and between Native tribes and Euroamerica. A reading of *Ceremony* that foregrounds the manifestations of transnationalism in the Native American narrative would have the merit of enacting not only its aesthetic richness and multi-dimensionality, but also the functioning of

resistance through the text's subversion of the colonialist paradigm that has for long informed the inter-cultural dialectics.

Even though Gerald Vizenor's authoritative description of Indian "survivance" has been much quoted in the criticism of Native American literature, little attention has been so far granted to the transnational orientation of Vizenor's theoretical vision. Actually, in his theorizing of the Native American literature along the lines of its incarnation of "resistance" and "survival" (fused into the neologized notion of "survivance"), Vizenor doubly situates that literature in the tribal paradigm of the trickster discourse and in the theoretical paradigm of international postmodernism. This approach, when followed in the reading of a Native American novel like *Ceremony*, may reveal the "Indianness" of such texts to be inscribed in its very "transnational" aesthetic vision (not simply in a nationalist politics of indigenous identity). The functioning of resistance as a "state of mind" or spirit animating the novel's aesthetics is not displayed in an exclusive thematizing of tribal (Laguna Pueblo) values and tribal cultural vision; it is rather enacted in the narrative's subversion of the colonialist politics of "containment" through the articulation of a dialectical tension that informs the narrative in *Ceremony*. Involved in that dialectical relation between Laguna Pueblo values and vision on the one hand and the "transnational" paradigm of postmodernism on the other is the narrative's re-negotiation of the colonialist inscription of "authentic marginality" and of the parameters of commitment to tribal culture. *Ceremony* attests to Silko's contribution to a redefinition of novelistic writing within the transnational paradigm; its scheme of metafictional and environmental issues unveils a form of concurrence (if not complicity!) between a Native American cultural vision and a cross-cultural postmodern and environmental aesthetics.

1- *Resisting "authentic marginality"; Revising the Postmodern canon*

Taking into account Spivak's discussion of the contradictions of the postcolonial discourse in terms of its being "coded" within the legacy of imperialism⁹, the basic assumption underlying this work is that in *Ceremony* the aesthetics of resistance is articulated within a consciousness of the coding power of the Euroamerican literary form and language. Native American literature in general operates within an awareness that cannot be deluded by state-nationalism as may be the

“classical” case of postcoloniality. The postcolonial condition that is peculiar to Native American cultures has been assimilated to the fact their struggle for “tribal sovereignty” does not implicate the attempt to create postcolonial states¹⁰. Part of the recent scholarly work in Native American studies has insisted that the conceptions of nationalism and sovereignty specific to Native cultures entail a smooth enactment of transnationalism that manifests itself in “a critical analysis of the ways colonization has reshaped Native societies and modes of resistance as well as [in] the challenges indigeneity poses to global capitalism, empire, and colonial nation-states.”¹¹ In relation to Silko’s novel as a major text in contemporary American Indian literature, the spirit of postcolonial resistance is enacted through the strategies that involve (to use Spivak’s terms) the “reversing, displacing and seizing [of] the apparatus of value-coding.”¹²

Such strategies (reversing, displacing and seizing the apparatus of value-coding) come into play through the text’s continuous re-negotiation of marginality and of the notion of commitment; the two terms of the text’s relation to “mainstream” America and to tribal indigenous culture respectively. A major facet of *Ceremony*’s aesthetics of resistance that unifies those two axes consists in the narrative’s appeal to the apparatus of novelistic story-telling as a strategy of counteracting the colonialist appropriation of tribal clan stories within the institutionalized ethnographic and museum collections. Thus, in its aesthetics of resistance, *Ceremony* develops as both a counter-narrative to the reified version of tribal stories recorded and exposed as a museum artefact to the colonialist gaze of Auroamerica¹³, and as an instance of postmodern literary narrativity

Spivak argues that the notion of marginality has already been encoded in the discourse of cultural imperialism in terms of “authentic” and “unauthentic margin”¹⁴, therefore any postcolonial discourse should not use it as an unproblematical referent. Within the scope of Native American literature and theory, that critical revision of authenticity as a notion already encoded in the colonialist discourse has been significantly undertaken by Louis Owen¹⁵. Owen has advocated the intrinsic link between the re-negotiation of “Indianness” and the

reconceptualization of “authenticity” in Native American literature. He argues that authenticity in the representational and thematic scope of Native literature has to be reinscribed within an indigenous consciousness that doubly resists the commodification of “Indianness” (by non-Indian cultural institutions like Hollywood) and the essentialist conceptions of Indian identity that leave out the reality of mixedblood origins shared by many Native writers. Owen’s sense of authenticity in Native American literature as involving the deconstruction of the commodifying and the essentialist conceptions of Indian identity entails the articulation of a Native aesthetics that resists and challenges the “absoluteness” within which authenticity in literature (Native American literature specifically) has been superficially perceived in terms of the writer’s faithfulness (in matters of literary representation) to his/her ethnic origins¹⁶.

In Silko’s first novel an aesthetics of resistance is promoted to challenge the claim of authenticity encoded in the Auroamerican tendency to assimilate Native cultures to the “exotic” margin (to repeat Spivak’s phrase) and the consequent appropriation of Indian cultural expressions as “ethnographic curiosity” or as museum commodity¹⁷. But the novel’s representation of an Indian experience informed by mixedblood identity, in addition to the movement of its representational scope beyond the writer’s tribal affiliation (in the portrayal of Navajo Betonie) attest to the fact that *Ceremony* inscribes its aesthetics within a deliberate questioning of the essentialist conceptions of “Indianness.” Consequently, the novel’s contribution to a reinscription of Native American aesthetics within a transnational frame reinforces at once the broadening of the notions of variety and difference (within the conception of “Indianness”) and the challenging of the racial extinction myth (that is, challenging the commodification through which Euroamerican cultural expressions represent the Indian as a literary artefact.¹⁸).

The literary frame that informs the aesthetic process of reversing, and “seizing the apparatus of value-coding” in *Ceremony*’s resistance to “exotic” marginality and to the

political myth of extinction is that of Postmodern poetics. Vizenor has contended in his description of Native American literature as an expression of “tribal survivance” that “the ironies and humor of the postmodern are heard in tribal narratives; the natural reason of tribal culture has never been without a postmodern turn or counterpoise.”¹⁹ In *Ceremony*, Silko re-invents the metafictional axis of American postmodern fiction within the spirit of commitment to the Laguna Pueblo culture. Story-telling is one main metafictional theme. The narrative progresses as a proliferation of stories and of narrative voices that are juxtaposed to Silko’s main narrative and often stand as its double (mythical, plausible, allegorical). Story-telling is not only thematized as a multiple, prolific (and self-generating) space, but also as a cyclic pattern that sustains the ritualistic, ceremonial spirit animating story-telling in Native American cultures. Indeed, the metafictional theme is articulated as something anchored in a tribal culture which unfolds as layers of narratives where not only a world view is shaped, but where the world itself is created (“Thought Woman, the spider,/ named things and/ as she named them/ they appeared” (1)).

Therefore, the novel’s implicit categorization of the stories that constitute its palimpsestic structure is guided by the tribal cultural judgement. Thus, the veterans’ stories- furnished mainly by their war memories of sexual experiences with white women, when their ethnicity was hidden behind the military uniform- are equated with alcohol; an easy escape into self-delusion:

“They repeated the stories about good times in Oakland and San Diego; they repeated them like long medicine chants, the beer bottles pounding on the counter tops like drums. Another round, and Harley tells his story about two blonds in bed with him.” (43)

The chant and the drum enact a rhetoric of absence that already informs the possibility of the longed-for presence in Tayo’s quest for self and the narrative’s search for aesthetic identity.

The Veterans' stories are presented as the very negation of what *Ceremony* articulates as "authentic" Indian story-telling (the simile- "like long medicine chants"- ironically reinforces the negation); being devoid of the ceremonial, curative force, and functioning as the discourse of their alienation. The veterans' story-telling is also doubled by its mythical counter-part: the Laguna Pueblo myth of the deceptive medicine man who led the people to betray corn-mother (46-48). Since the parallelism highlights the double-edged role story-telling is believed to perform (it is the locus of being but can act also as a form of self- deception), the metafictional theme implicates the kind of ethical scheme which may not be congruent with the Postmodern conceptualisation of story-telling that *Ceremony* encompasses. Tayo's plausible story-telling (41-42), on the other hand, stands as only a *partial* double to Silko's narrative: it is animated by an honest facing of the reality of betrayal that connects the Native Americans to mainstream white America, but it is told from a victim position (this is why it only partly doubles the framing narrative). The story that stands as a symbolic double to the main narrative (that is, the one that echoes the narrative's implicit definition of the act of writing as a Native American experience) is a mythical story (presented in a poetic form: 139-40) in which action revolves around following the track of the coyote and the human tracks that went off towards the mountain, and reading the marks in the sand. The writing of identity, like Tayo's quest for self, is not animated by the illusion of recovering historical origins, but by the necessity of preserving and renegotiating (through active interpretation) the fragmented traces of the Indian past. The metaphors of textuality and interpretation that permeate Silko's novel do not only inscribe the discursive essence of the protagonist's quest, but they also imply that the irony of the text's self-mirroring re-invents the aestheticism of literary self-reflexivity within the problematical fusion of the aesthetic and the political. Hence, the strategy of *mise-en-abyme*- through which the narrative in *Ceremony* progresses along the two extremes of self-mirroring and self-questioning entangles the process of literary critique in the politics of self-definition.

Actually, the overlapping stories through which textuality and writing are defined within the tribal frame of Native American experience and mythic vision, do not simply suggest that Silko's novel is "naturally" (or 'unintentionally'! The question of authorial intention being irrelevant all together in my reading) Postmodern; fitting in an era when theory and history are being re-defined as stories similar to fiction, and to which the "greatness" of the "grands récits" is denied because the "grands récits" are, in the first place, no longer credible²⁰. The tribal experience and inscription of narrativity as something creative of the truth and of reality does not entail any free play of stories as artefact beyond which nothing exists; the inter-play of the stories is guided by the "normative voice"²¹ of tribal vision standing as touchstone of truth, even if the tribal origins are presented as irrecoverable fragments and traces. Thus, what is activated in Silko's novel is the "regional" matrix of the transnational orientation of postmodernism. Many studies of transnationalism in American cultural studies have pointed to the "regional" dimension but mostly from the geopolitical and economic perspectives. Laura Doyle, for instance, has discussed the "regional" matrix as enhanced by the global trade networks (it is an offspring of globalization itself) and as enacting, in turn, the "intercorporeality" of transnational relations²². Doyle's brief discussion of the impact of this regional matrix on literary narrativity in a novel like *Robinson Crusoe* significantly points to the Western hegemonic and capitalist pursuits that have informed, even in the scope of literary imagination, the transnational relationships. As Doyle rightly posits, the systematic "instrumentalization" of Friday in Defoe's novel attests to the fact that within the colonialist context of geopolitics and of literary creativity alike, the regional matrix of transnationalism has served to promote or defend a specific, imperialist, kind of trans-cultural relations.

In *Ceremony*, part of the Native subversion of the hegemonic deployment of the "regional" matrix of the transnational relationships is achieved through the oppositional paradigms that inform the portrayal of the aunt and of Betonie. The aunt's association with the politics of assimilation in her

relation to mainstream American culture is intrinsically related to her double alienation and to the emphasis on her gratuitous cruelty; her alienation from both Native culture and mainstream culture is suggested to be the origin of her moral blindness. While the portrait of the aunt points to a disastrous form of transnational relations, an aesthetics of transnationalism in literary writing is strongly promoted in the portrayal of Betonie (the Navajo medicine man who belongs to a tribal culture different from Laguna Pueblo) as the novelist-surrogate. The narrative's consecration of a systematic overlapping of the "local" tribal vision and values with the canonized, international postmodern poetics is mostly illustrated by the cross-cultural value attributed the central theme of storytelling. Such theme inscribes the novel's double celebration of what Vizenor has called "tribal survivance" and a reinforcement of the metafictional turn in twentieth century fiction. To the non-Native reader, the celebrated ritualistic value of storytelling as spiritual performance remains an aspect of the novel's "figural" force: a facet of its non-representational, non-discursive dimension as Lyotard would say²³. The metafictional aesthetics articulated in the thematics of storytelling and in the disruptive emergence of the non-representational consolidate a substantial concurrence between the "Indianness" of *Ceremony* and its tendency to inhabit international postmodernism. Vizenor has emphasized this concurrence as the distinctive quality of the literature of "tribal survivance". Insisting in particular on the thematics of narrativity and discursivity, Vizenor perceives in Native aesthetics a "natural" continuity with postmodern

politics. Such continuity materializes in Native literature's resistance to the apparatus of representation when applied to Indian American culture within an imperialist strategy of containment and appropriation: "the 'assumptions' of foundational representations have become the simulations of the real and serve a consumer paradise in the literature of dominance"²⁴. Postmodern theory and literature in general developed to a large extent out of a similar scepticism (though often emanating from a different, less "local" and more philosophical basis) about the possibilities and implications of representation in literary creativity.

The theme of art and art's function as it is articulated in *Ceremony* reinforces another facet of the novel's paradoxical belonging and resistance to Postmodern metafiction. Artistic creation, in the form of sand painting, is presented in the narrative as the peak of the ceremonial ritual orchestrated by Betonie, the medicine man, whose curative work is totally fused with his artistic production. It is significant that the scene of the sand painting in the narrative (in the curative process) is presented in a structural continuity with a previous vertical text in which various tribal myths (of the Fly, Coyote, Pollen Boy)²⁵ are narrativised within a poetic form. This moment of total narrative unity in which the pictorial dimension of the narrative (sequential) and of the poetic sections point to an ecological spirituality that remains beyond the representational processes of literary narrativity, generates a typically Native American fusion of the aesthetic with the environmental. But *Ceremony's* celebration of artistic creation, like the theme of story-telling, is not meant to suggest solipsistic self-reflexivity by way of reaction to the philosophical crisis of representation as is the case with Postmodern metafiction in general. The crossed rainbows, with their harmonious colours and blurred colour boundaries, are presented as an instance of aesthetic defiance to the politics of racial boundaries (reinforced through out the novel by the symbolism of the overlapping shades and mingled colours) at the same time as they unveil the rootedness of the novel's poetics in an environmental aesthetics.²⁶

The novel's repeated positing of an ecological sensibility emphatically attributed to the tribal cultural vision, but which for the non-Native reader joins a global ecocriticism and a cross-cultural environmental aesthetics, brings to the foreground the ambivalent overlapping of a "localist" or "regional" orientation with the "transnational" matrix. In a recent work, Ursula Heise has linked the rise of ecocriticism to the consolidation of the transnational turn in American studies²⁷. Pointing to the ambivalent thinking in terms of the global and the local that has marked environmentalist studies, Heise explains that "while the planet as a unified ecological

whole is invoked as a visionary framework in environmental discourse, the movement invested most of its imaginative and aesthetic capital in the reconception of the “local subject.”²⁸ But the focus on the local and regional in environmentally oriented literary writings is paired with a celebration of cultural diversity (of cultural encounters that are mostly generated by globalization) as a metaphor, substitute, or synecdoche, to biological diversity and as the basis of resistance to globalization. While this ambivalence is discerned in *Ceremony*, in Tayo’s mixedblood origins, Tayo’s racial hybridity does not produce in him any sense of double belonging; he rather moves from double alienation (from both Native and mainstream cultures) to the retrieval of a tribal, communal sense of identity, to a large extent through his rediscovery of the Native ecological vision.

Part of the narrative’s ironic self-contradiction is that the “localism” of tribal vision and identity as well as its environmental sensibility are regained by Tayo within the simultaneous discovery of the injustice, the arbitrariness and violence of boundaries (187-89). It is in the moment when Tayo begins to recapture his bodily sensitivity to the natural environment (through the lenses of tribal vision) that he perceives the dissolutions of the borders and boundaries, racial, cultural and spatial (145). The “transnational” impulse of environmental aesthetics is not merely enacted in Tayo’s romanticized vision of a world without borders; it rather emanates from a painful process condensed in the symbolism of the bridge in the middle of the narrative and of route 66 at the end. The bridge under which Tayo was born is presented as the potential icon of the protagonist’s hybridity and of the possible intercultural link. But the shame and the exclusion associated with the episode of the bridge (109- 111) turn it into the icon of Tayo’s “non-belonging”. His double homelessness associated with the bridge culminates in the aggressive gaze of the “others: “The black men came [...] to stand on the bridge and look down at them [111].”

Actually, in *Ceremony*, cultural and racial hybridity subvert and reverse what Heise called “ecological family

romance”; it does not offer multicultural family identity (and the celebration of cultural diversity implied in it) as a narrative solution to ecological problems²⁹. In Tayo’s quest for health and self, it is rather the other way round. It is Tayo’s recovery of the tribal ecological sensibility through sensory experience that helps him accept his racial hybridity and to start acquiring a “transnational”, cross-cultural vision. This is suggested by the scene of the road (route 66 specifically) towards the narrative’s closure, when in the middle of Tayo’s realization that “the ear for the story and the eye for the pattern were theirs [255], the implicit distinction between “we” and “they” begins to be shaken by the fact that Highway 66, like the railroad, enter into Tayo’s sensory experience.

The novel’s ecological aesthetics is also the foundation of its displacement of the epistemological issue of knowledge from the conceptual to the aesthetic realm. It is the theme of artistic creation that mediates between environmental aesthetics and the notion of knowledge. The rainbows and the totality of the sand painting imply the role of art in soothing racial antagonism since it embodies a form of knowledge (about the interdependence of colours and species) acquired from nature. The reliance of such aesthetics on a sort of knowledge of nature (provided by the mythological discourse) reinforces another bond: the one between the novel’s aesthetic scheme and an ontological vision anchored in a tribal vision of being and creation. But the novel posits the question of knowledge that informs the bulk of research and discussions in the Native American studies within the context of aesthetics rather than that of epistemology. This enacts another aspect of the novel’s postmodern poetics, namely its substantial questioning of the long-claimed supremacy of conceptual knowledge. The allusion made to the uranium extracted from the Laguna lands to “realiz[e] destruction on a scale only *they* could have dreamed [254]” bears an explicit accusation to the disastrous “rationality” of Western scientific and technological progress. This critique does not only articulate the anti-war orientation of Silko’s narrative (as some critics have insisted). It also emphasizes the validity of the tribal matrix in which the

boundary between knowledge and aesthetic appreciation collapses, enacting thus a continuity between that matrix and the suspicion about technological progress that distinguishes ecologically -oriented vision across cultures.

But the consolidation of “environmental aesthetics” in *Ceremony* highlights another problematical facet of the novel’s ambiguous belonging and deviation from the aestheticism of Postmodern literature. If the aestheticist orientation of Postmodern thought and literature implicates a distrust of the reliability of conceptual knowledge³⁰, Silko’s novel traces back its foregrounded aestheticist theme to the tribal mythological discourse as a discourse of knowledge (what Vizenor calls “wild knowledge”) that informs the totality of the cultural vision of Native American communities. In *Ceremony*, the dominance of the aestheticist orientation in the environmental thematics appears mainly in the narrative’s foregrounding of the issue of the land. Much criticism has related the theme of the land in *Ceremony* to the political issues of Indian sovereignty and nationalism. Sharon Holm has posited that the novel’s implementing of a particular approach to the land reveals its “engagement with an Indigenist ethos”³¹. Such engagement, according to Holm, is manifested in the fact that the theme of the land is bound to “the text’s material and ideological cross-cultural location of the US.- Laguna- Mexican borderlands”, which allows the novel to offer a spatial frame to the concomitance of “transnational solidarity and Indian nationalism.” In my reading, that concomitance of the transnational matrix and of the nationalist theme is also consolidated at a more symbolic, more aesthetic level: when *Ceremony* implements a deconstruction of the “waste land” thematics.

Through out Tayo’s quest, the retrieval of tribal vision and of its ecological orientation enacts from within the rhetoric of environmental aesthetics a questioning of the waste land theme and motif. The substantial link established through out *Ceremony* between Indian art (sand painting, performance of songs and storytelling) and the ecological vision of the Indian culture inscribes the narrative’s re-formulation of a Postmodern

metafictional theme within a deliberate deconstruction of the canonized and “universalized” image of the waste land. The recapture of the ecological spirit, suggested in the many scenes of Tayo’s response to the natural develops in parallel to a demystification of the waste land motif, which deconstructs its image (in mainstream modern and postmodern literature) as a universal, “fatalistic” condition. The waste land is the product of the “monstrous design [254]” at the “Trinity Site, where they exploded the first atomic bomb [245].” Referring to the significance of the Trinity Site as also the location of the crucial moment in the ceremony (that would lead to Tayo’s recovery of health), David Rice posits that part of the novel’s irony emanates from its suggestion that “the all-inclusive nature of this destruction is also the possible source of humanity’s non-violent resistance and regeneration”³². But what Rice does not explain (though he quotes the same supporting section as the one I quote below) is that the possibility of that resistance or regeneration depends on Tayo’s ability at that crucial moment to achieve a transnational vision of humanity: “From that moment on,” Tayo began to see that “human beings were one clan again, united by the fate the destroyers planned for all of them [246].” Again, through the lenses of an ecological sensibility, the local, “indigenous” vision (all humanity is perceived within the terms of tribal structure) is fused with a transnational concern that, in turn, announces the possibility of dismantling the “fatalism” of the waste land motif articulated in mainstream literature. The waste land is the product of a politics of aggression that can be defeated in “the pattern of the ceremony [that] was in the stars, and the constellation [that] formed a map of the mountains in the direction he had gone for the ceremony [247].”

Actually, when Tayo begins to re-discover that the truth of white Euroamerican imperialist expansion is one of self-destruction as well, he comes to the deduction that such truth has been “evident only in the sterility of their art [204].” This comment that may be taken to refer to the waste land motif in mainstream American art is made through the lenses of a cultural vision in which the aesthetic remains inseparable from

the ethical and the political. This allows Silko's protagonist to specify such sterility in terms of being "hollow and lifeless as a witchery clay figure [204]." If such a metafictional comment points to the absence of any reformative vision in mainstream American art, it also bounds the solipsism and aestheticism of much of modernist and postmodernist literature to the politics of hegemony and aggression in Euroamerican culture: the waste land theme has been built on the lie of owning the land: "The bright city lights and loud music [...] all [...] had been stolen, torn out of Indian land" (204). The waste land motif is here traced back to the non-Indian vision of the land as a commodity; in mainstream modernist literature the spirit and process of commodification through which Euroamericans relate to the land are hardly questioned. The literary notion of the waste land is thus re-read in *Ceremony* as the aesthetic distortion of an illegitimate, destructive appropriation of tribal lands in the imperialist expansion of Euroamerica. By re-connecting the aesthetic to the political, Silko's metafictional reading of a key theme in modernist and postmodernist literature foregrounds its resistance to the claimed universality of the waste land. The resistance is dramatized in the pursuit of a believed-in union between the human and the natural ("in the world of cricket..."). Such union materializes most emphatically within the aesthetic design of the sand painting, in the same way the 'healing' of the waste land within the fictional world of *Ceremony* (the healing from the damages of the drought in the reservation) is rendered plausible thanks to Tayo's ability to recapture the tribal 'way' of perceiving harmonious connections between landscape and story-telling:

"The plants would grow there like the story and translucent as the stars [254]."

The possibility of defeating the "fatalism" of the waste land theme is thus associated with the need to retrieve the ontological quality of story-telling ("Wherever he looked, he saw a world made of stories [95]"). While the aesthetic in *Ceremony* is not only anchored in a tribal vision; it is also counter-acting the canonized notion of the waste land, since the latter is traced back to the politics of Euro-American

imperialism. Thus, the implicit re-reading of the waste land motif involves the attempt to recapture the bond between the literary motif and its political context; between the waste land theme and the Euroamerican commodifying conception of the land. But in that reinterpretation, *Ceremony* revisits an already paradoxical motif. The waste land theme stands as a source of continuity and rupture between modernism and postmodernism, it mingles also, as Alan Wilde tells us, the “absolute irony” of impossible resolution or reconciliation with a sense of aesthetic closure³³, and often joins the premise of organic form to an increasing doubt about the possibility of order³⁴. The “aesthetics of crisis” that the waste land motif epitomizes in modernist and postmodernist literature seem to be supplanted by the aesthetics of resistance in Silko’s re-interpretation. But, rather than dissolving the paradox that emanates from the modernist and postmodernist motif, Silko’s interpretation generates a reshaping of the aesthetics of paradox (associated with the waste land motif) in the Native American novel.

Indeed, the deconstruction of the waste land theme in Silko’s novel may illustrate the refusal in the postcolonial discourse of the argument that “art can point at the... limits of being human in the will to truth, life or power”³⁵, on the ground that such an argument is no more than an aestheticization of the political. Spivak suggests that this judgement, motivated by the need to resist catachresis, is not likely to offer the postcolonial discourse the way out of catachresis, since art –postcolonial art included- inevitably functions within the play of catachrestical definitions.³⁶ Hence, the implicit critique of the mainstream American canon does not only bring to the foreground the omnipresence of the political in the aesthetics of modernism and postmodernism; it functions also as the ground and the very condition of possibility for the thematized Native American art itself.

Ceremony reinforces its paradoxical relation to the postmodern canon through the ambivalence of its use of fragmentation. Tayo’s fusion with the sand painting as part of the curative ceremony foregrounds an ontological symbiosis that resists the aesthetics of fragmentation and dislocation at

the same time as the narrative deploys the postmodern strategies of structural discontinuity in order to create a dialogic continuity between an Indian mythical past and the present Indian experience. The paradox of the novel's belonging to, and subversion of, the postmodern canon is further unveiled in the narrative's pondering on the act of writing as one of transgression, as will be shown in the next part.

2- Resistance as commitment, commitment as betrayal;

Another main facet of the paradoxical situation within which Silko's *Ceremony* articulates its aesthetics of resistance, is discerned in the novel's inscription of the pattern of transgression through which it relates to Laguna Pueblo culture. Literary writing as a Native American experience necessarily involves a challenge to the tribal rules of secrecy and sacredness. In Silko's novel, the transgression is thematized from *within* the fictional world and it implies a revision of the rule of secrecy. Indeed, what *Ceremony* implicates in its metafictional orientation, is that such a revision of the tribal rules has been urged by the intrusion-through the institution of literature- of writing into a basically oral tradition, while change is inevitable even in the oral material. Betonie's explanation of a necessary change in the rituals unveils the novelist's assumption about a needed reconsideration, within the act of writing, of such rules as sacredness and secrecy that bound tribal lore:

Long ago when people were given these ceremonies, the changing began... if only in the different voices from generation to generation, singing the chants. You see, in many ways, the ceremonies have always been changing. (126)

Hence, if change is as much inevitable in the orally transmitted heritage as it is in the shift to writing and to the secular domain of literary narrativity, a re-conceptualization of the way to handle sacredness and secrecy becomes a must within the Native American writer's project of defending the Indians' belonging to the contemporary world. Moreover, Silko's novel suggests that such a process is not a mere

assimilation of mainstream Euro-American culture. It is part of a dialectical process through which Native American writing deconstructs the “imperialist gaze” at Indian cultural forms as reified museum relics by unveiling the vitality and dynamism of the interaction between those forms and the contemporary world. In addition, the process of transferring the sacred tribal lore to the secular domain of novelistic narrative entails a redefinition of the literary genre itself beyond its traditional entertaining role; the second epilogue describes the stories encompassed in the novel as “they aren’t just entertainment/ don’t be fooled”. Novel writing as a Native American experience is thus redefined in *Ceremony* as a retrieval of sacred narrative within the secular domain of the literary genre. But Silko’s novel defends also the spirit of transgression that a vital force that animates Native American writing and invites a revision, not of the ethics of commitment to tribal culture, but of the norms through which such ethics is implemented.

The gesture of violation (and so of betrayal) is openly assumed at the end of the first epilogue (“I’m telling you the story/ she is thinking”). Here, Silko does not only anchor her text within the postmodern aesthetics of transgression, but also adds another dimension to the postmodern patterns of generic criss-crossing (the poetic overlapping with the narrative), by presenting the world of narrativity as a trespassing of the boundary between the sacred and the secular. But in writing a Native American novel, Silko did not vaguely take the sacred to the domain of the secular, but more specifically to that of the aesthetic. Her novel contributes thus to the founding of an Indian literary experience on the ground of an equally evolving Native American aesthetics within a complex fusion between the aesthetic, the spiritual and the political. The ritualistic ceremony becomes a literary text, a work of art (this is not only the symbolic status of the novel but also the metafictional function of the ceremony performed by Betonie, as explained below).

Paul Beekman Taylor³⁷ has pertinently analyzed Silko’s handling of secrecy by insisting on the intrinsic connectedness of that tribal rule to the tribal vision of the holiness of the land,

of the Native environment and to the spiritual and curative function of storytelling. In Taylor's analysis, secrecy which is reinvigorated (rather than destroyed) in the tendency of Silko's characters (Tayo, Betonie and Ts'eh specifically) to engage in story in order to guarantee its survival is transformed into the basis of a "hermeneutic act". That is, secrecy (the story hidden in all created things as "story of [their] genetic bond with all other created things"³⁸) is transformed by the narrative into the hidden truths on which depends Tayo's recovery of health and of the cattle. The spiritual nature of the hidden truths determines the character's quest as a process of deciphering and retrieving the story of his connection to the stories that animate the living creatures of the natural world: "it is precisely the hermeneutic designs of nature that Tayo must reread. The death he had read in the jungle rain and green is cancelled finally by the story in Ts'eh's storm-pattern blanket that reinforms nature with its proper life-sustaining role."³⁹

In *Ceremony*, the tribal rules of sacredness and secrecy are necessarily reinscribed within the secular domain of literary narrativity and in relation to the literary motif of the quest. The reinscription includes a form of violation, but, paradoxically, it reinforces (rather than contradicts) the writer's strategies of resistance to the politics of appropriation of tribal cultural products by Euroamerican institutions. As Silko herself explains it in interviews, the traditional rules did not prevent such appropriation, nor did they prevent the offering of the 'incomprehensible' tribal stories and rituals as "exotic" commodity, as reified museum objects. The transformation of the tribal rules of story within the frame of the secular and accessible literary narrativity does not necessarily dispossess those rules of their curative and spiritual powers (rather, those powers remain inaccessible to the non-Indian reader). This could be illustrated, for instance, by the hidden pattern of the stars that Betonie could decipher and share with Tayo, and consequently made possible Tayo's successful retrieval of the lost cattle. To the non-Native reader, the secrecy of the pattern is turned into an enigmatic dimension that ironically points to the limits of his or her hermeneutic act (his/her act of

interpretation). To illustrate the ability of Silko's narrative to suggest the curative and constructive force that animates tribal secrecy, Taylor points to the significant opposition established in the narrative structure between "the secret force of the uranium mined out of the hidden entrails of the earth, used [by the white man] for the powers of destruction, and the secret message of the stars, which Betonie reads as a map for Tayo's retrieval of his lost Mexican cattle."⁴⁰

In *Ceremony*, thus, the rules of sacredness and secrecy are reappropriated within the poetics of paradox (the narrative unfolds through the recreation of tribal secrecy and within the frame of secular narrativity), while their re-negotiation is undertaken from *within* the narrative's aesthetics of resistance. In the beginning of the novel, when the traditional medicine man, Ku'oosh, is asked to perform a curative ceremony to help Tayo regain health, he fails and admits that "there are some things we can't cure like we used to [...] not since the white people came [38]." If Betonie is more efficient, it is because he is meant to embody Silko's idea of a necessary faithfulness to the spirit of transformation that animates the Laguna Pueblo culture and rituals, taking into account, and even integrating the components of the Euroamerican world for the sake of an efficient survival of tribal culture. Within Betonie's 'performance' the survival of Native culture is suggested to be intrinsically linked to a necessarily evolving conception of the bond between orality and the act of writing. Indeed, Betonie's ceremony can be read simultaneously as a metafictional comment on Native American art in the postmodern world and on the way it can preserve its sacredness and ritualistic efficiency.

Thus, the ceremony performed by Betonie involves the use of layers of old calendars in which the sequences of the years is deliberately confused so as to revive, beyond the play with chronology, the fusion in the ceremonial moment of past and future. Also, the calendars are not simply part of Euroamerica; there is still a possibility of choice between the Coca-Cola calendars and those "that had Indian scenes painted on them [121]." To include the calendars, the telephone book

and a notebook in a new conception of tribal ritual, is not only a matter of coping with the modern world, but also narrating the Indian's belonging to it; Betonie points to one of the old calendars and tells Tayo about his former implication in the scene depicted on it. Betonie's telling act itself becomes a deciphering of the story that the calendars came to embody through his personal experience: "He pointed at one of the Santa Fe calendars. "I'm one of their best customers down there. I rode the train to Chicago in 1903" (121). He also "pointed at the telephone book: "I brought back the books with all the names in them. Keeping track of things." Betonie's ceremony and his comments on its material become, as well, the larger narrative's metadiscourse: the order of the calendars is a comment on the narrative structure in which narrative sequence is deliberately broken, the Indian scenes painted on them imply another comment on Silko's text as the narrative space in which collective memory is kept alive, while the notebook and telephone books bear a symbolic reference to the novelistic form (part of the non Indian world) within which Indian traditional material is made to fit. This amounts to the possibility that Silko's novel offers itself to the (indigenous) reader as a ceremony; a textual aesthetic instance with a healing (instructive) purpose. This does not only entail an assertion of the didactic and satirical dimensions in literary writing, but also foregrounds an understanding of textuality that wards off the traditional binary oppositions (speech/writing) and reflects an interesting overlapping with the Derridian conception of writing .

Actually, the issues of orality and writing, raised mainly through the two notions of iterability and trace, create in *Ceremony* a significant dialectical relation between the Native poetics and the theoretical matrix of deconstruction. Similar to Derrida's contention that the iterability of the sign challenges the binary opposites that founded Western thought⁴¹, Betonie insists that because iterability is a substantial quality of tribal stories (beyond the distinction between oral and written), changes in them are inevitable. In Silko's novel, the metacritical thinking about iterability, though it originates in

the functioning of tribal narrativity (in which the story changes with every new performance), leads to an understanding of writing that overlaps with Derrida's conception. Writing, *Ceremony* seems to be saying, becomes a mode of narrativity that substantiates the inherent iterability of the clan stories, however (and here the narrative deviates from the Derridian paradigm), not without loss. The loss is what the iconography of the trace points to in *Ceremony*. When Gerlad Vizenor qualifies the Native American literature as the "shadows of survivance", he associates the trope of the shadow (used as a variation on the trope of the trace) with the loss that writing and translation inevitably introduce into the tribal lore: "the eternal sorrow of lost sounds haunts the remains of tribal stories in translation"; for "what is published and seen is not what is heard or remembered in oral stories."⁴² But rather than generating a nostalgic longing, the loss translates positively into narrative gaps in Silko's novel; they are gaps that challenge the reader and re-inscribe the rule of secrecy. The mysterious character of Ts'eh, for instance, and the nature of her relation with Tayo enact a major instance of such gaps (222). To the non-Native reader those gaps reinforce the anti-representational dimension in *Ceremony* and so its postmodernity, since they "undermine the power of translation, representation, and simulations."⁴³

The notion of the trace fulfils in *Ceremony* a paradoxical role that at once reminds us of the Derridian association of the trace with the inevitability of absence, and challenges the very idea of absence. Vizenor has argued, in his comment on Native American literature in general, that the trace or the shadow of tribal oral stories produced in writing and in translation is a category beyond absence and presence; "the shadows are the silence in heard stories, the silence that bears a referent of tribal memories of heard stories."⁴⁴ As suggested by Vizenor, the trace in *Ceremony*: in the sand painting and in the mythological discourse, does not enact the play of "*differance*" and rather than pointing to absence, it reinvents the rule of secrecy that the non-Native reader faces as a gap or silence in the narrative. The bear prints painted by Betonie in the sand

painting (142), like those into which Tayo sprinkles yellow pollen later (196), are an activation of the central role that the bear plays in tribal ceremonies as “unsaid essence”; “the bear is an archshadow in the silence of tribal stories, the memories and sense that are unsaid in the name.”⁴⁵

This challenging inscription of silence, of the “unsaid” as a reinvention of the tribal rule of secrecy does not however entail an exclusion of the non-tribal reader. The transcription of the ‘clan stories’ within the publishable, reproducible form of textuality engender their accessibility to the non- Native American reader; a reader- receiver beyond the boundaries of the tribe becomes thus a legitimate entity. Hence, *Ceremony* contributes to the reshaping of the notion of narratee by introducing a new categorization into this notion: the reader as member of the community in opposition to the outsider. But rather than implying an exclusion or irrelevance of the second category, *Ceremony* relates the non-Native reader to the possibility of enacting the plurality of meaning in the narrative and the doubleness of its aesthetic paradigm. Actually, to the non-Native reader, the mystery of tribal ritual or the narrative’s inscription of various gaps that contribute to the preservation of the tribal rules do not hinder his/her enactment of an openness or sliding of meaning while remaining within the ethics of reading required by Native American literature. Hence, one may grasp the instability of the sand image as it wavers between the realm of the symbiosis between the aesthetic and the ontological (in the sand painting 141-42: “the hills and mountains were the mountains and hills they had painted in sand [145]”) and that of the violent and painful past related to Tayo’s mother (Tayo’s vague memory of the bloody rags buried in the sand by the woman under the bridge (111)) and to his mother’s burial: “the day they buried her the wind blew gusts of sand... he never forgot that sound and sand [93]”). In a much similar way functions the item of clay: being the emblem of artistic creativity endowed in the spiritual tradition with an ontological status (painted jar in the story of the hummingbird and the fly, 71-2), and functioning also as the image of evil (“witchery clay figure [204]”) or as part of

Tayo's painful childhood memories ("he woke up crying in a shallow hole beside the clay bank where his mother had thrown the old quilt [111]"). It is such sliding of meaning enacted in the contrasting connotations attributed to the key metaphors that inscribes the legitimacy of the non-Indian reader.

Conclusion

In Silko's aesthetic strategies of resistance to the coded "exotic marginality", to the Euroamerican literary canon that she appropriates, and the necessary violations, reshaping of the tribal rules of sacredness and secrecy, there is a substantial risk to be faced by the writer. Part of the risk has to do with the tribal reader's reception of the writer's violation of the traditional rules; Paula Gun Allen reproachfully says, commenting on Silko's novel "to use the oral tradition directly is to run afoul of native ethics."⁴⁶ Part of the risk also, is that by transferring tribal cultural lore into the secular domain of literature, the Native American writer may be said to contribute to the appropriation and commodification of Indian culture by imperialist Euroamerican institution. These possible risks do not damage the spirit of resistance in Silko's novel; risk-taking is at the heart of resistance, and as Louis Owens points out – in response to Allen's reproachful comment mentioned earlier—"the risk is one that many Indian authors appear ready to assume."⁴⁷

Indeed, from this perspective, Silko's novel can be said to embody the value that Adorno points to as lacking in contemporary (postmodern) aestheticist art: risk-taking. Adorno's evaluation of solipsistic, aestheticist postmodern art as being "inoffensive", in the sense that it tends to "resign", out of inefficiency,⁴⁸ is based on what he perceives as its failure to take risks⁴⁹. If risk-taking materializes in experimentation, *Ceremony* illustrates the tendency of such experimentation to induce the uncertainty of the work of art about its own validity in the absence of any social guarantee,⁵⁰ when the novel urges a recasting of the conception of sacredness in relation to the tribal lore as it is transferred to the realm of textuality. By assuming the risks and inscribing the experience of Native American literary writing within a total absence of social guarantee for her text's validity, Silko contributes

to a re-definition of the literary experience as a genuine adventure in which the aesthetic exploration becomes a form of retrieval of indigenous resistance.

Moreover, in Silko's novel, and through the different levels that involve 'risky' experimentation (in such redefinitions of tribal rules, of indigenous narrative art, of commitment to community, of the category of the receiver, etc.), the authority of authorship is brought to the foreground of the current critical debate. Risk-taking allows a Native American text like *Ceremony* to highlight a new complicating, ambiguating factor in the debate about the death of the author, preventing thus, any sense of closure or final consensus around such a theoretical argument.

Notes

- ¹. Philip Freneau, « *The Indian Burying Ground* » (1788), in *The Literature of America. An Anthology of Prose and Verse*, V.1, A. H. Quinn, A.C. Baugh and W.D. Howe eds; (New York & Boston: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), pp. 181-82
- ¹. I am referring here to *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) (Ohio State University Press, 1962), Chapter 3, p.87.
- ¹. Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (Penguin Books, 1977). Further references will be to this edition and will be noted parenthetically in the text.
- ¹. David L Moore, "Rough Knowledge and Radical Understanding. Sacred Silence in Native American Literatures", *American Indian Quarterly* 21, n°4 (Autumn 1997): 633- 662, p. 635.
- ¹. Through out this work, I'll be referring to Gerald Vizenor's "The Ruins of Representation: Shadow Survivance and the Literature of Dominance", *American Indian Quarterly* 17, n°1 (Winter 1993): 7-30.
- ¹. I am thinking in particular about *American Indian Literary Nationalism* by Jace Weaver, Craig S. Womack, and Robert Warrior (University of New Mexico Press, 2006), see in particular the "Forward: Speaking- Writing Indigenous Literary Sovereignty" by Simon J. Ortiz (pp.vii- xiv) and chapter three, pp.179- 224.
- ¹. For the critique of the over-emphasis on the notion of nationalism see for instance Mark Rifkin, "Subaltern Studies and Native American Sovereignty", *Boundary 2* 32, n°3 (2005): 47- 80, especially pp. 49-51; Billy J Stratton & Frances Washburn. "The Peoplehood Matrix. A New Theory for American Indian Literature." *Wicazo SA Review* 23, n°1 (Spring 2008): 51- 72.
- ¹. Ramazani, Jahan. "A Transnational Poetics." *American Literary History* 18, n°2 (Summer 2006): 332- 359.

- ¹. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (London & New York : Routledge, 1993), pp.48-49.
- ¹. See Arnold Krupat, *Red Matters: Native American Studies* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), p.4.
- ¹ Shari M Huhndorf. « Picture Revolution: Transnationalism, American Studies, and the Politics of Native American Culture. *American Quarterly* 61, n°2 (June 2009), p. 363.
- ¹. Spivak, p.63. I am relying on Spivak's specification of the strategies through which postcolonial discourse enacts its "ontocultural commitment" "in terms, not of the discovery of historical or philosophical grounds, but in terms of reversing, displacing, and seizing the apparatus of value-coding." Silko's novel does share such conception of commitment as will be discussed in the second part of this work.
- ¹. In an "Interview" (1987), Leslie Marmon Silko used the expression "exotic" commodity critically to refer to the imperialist appropriation of Indian lore as museum artefact in the work of white ethnographers who collect tribal stories, prayers and chants to present them in journals as "public property". Cited in "Silko's Reappropriation of Secrecy", Paul Beekman Taylor. In *Leslie Marmon Silko. A Collection of Critical Essays*, Louise K. Barnett & James L. Thorson eds (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), p.25. For a recent discussion of the Native Americans' hostility to the handling of their cultures within the frame of museum collections, see Lee Schweninger, " 'Lost and Lonesome' Literary Reflections on Museums and the Role of Relics", *American Indian Quarterly* 33, n°2 (Spring 2009): 169- 197.
- ¹. Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, p.57.
- ¹ Louis Owen, *Mixedblood Messages : Literature, Film, Family, Place* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998, pp.12-24.
- ¹ Owen, *Mixedblood Messages*, p. 16, 21-22. For Owen challenging this « absoluteness » means acknowledging differences and varieties, not only among Native cultures, but also those introduced in Native American literature by writers of mixedblood identity (p.19) and by the fact that some Indian American writers choose to represent tribal cultures other than those to which they belong (p.17: he wonders why this is still not accepted among readers and reviewers of Native literature, when the fact that Stephen Crane, for instance, could write about the Civil War that he never witnessed was not an issue in the readers' reception of *The Red Badge of Courage*) .
- ¹. Cf. Paul Beekman Taylor, "Silko's Reappropriation of Secrecy", p.25.
- ¹. Louis Owens, *Other Destinies. Understanding the American Indian Novel* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), p.4. In tracing the myth of cultural extinction within which the American Indian had been confined,

Owen states that “the American Indian in the world consciousness is a treasured invention, a gothic artefact evoked like the “powwows in Hawthorne’s “Young Goodman Brown” out of the dark reaches of the continent to replace the actual native, who [...] is supposed to have long since vanished.”

- ¹. Vizenor, « The Ruins of Representation », p.8.
- ¹. For a more thorough discussion of this major view in Postmodernism see for instance Brian McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 4-8; Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (London & New York: Routledge, 1988), pp.6-7, 96-98, 191
- ¹. Cf. Contemporary studies on the fiction of Silko have discussed from different critical perspectives the Native American writer’s sense of commitment to tribal vision as touchstone of a communicated fictional truth, which, according to critics like Arnold Krupat, “keeps it from entering the poststructuralist, postmodernist or schizophrenic heteroglossic domain...”, “The Dialogic of Silko’s Storyteller”. In *Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse On Native American Indian Literature. American Indian Literature and Critical Studies Series; V.8* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989) Gerald Vizenor, ed., p.65. The argument defended in this paper, however, is that *Ceremony* is an illustration of the impossibility of such “immunity” (even its desirability is highly doubtful), since the realm of textuality, especially of metafictional textuality, can neither aspire to a mythical homogeneity (in opposition to “schizophrenic heteroglossia”) nor to the exclusion of critical readings that enact the play of intertextuality.
- ¹. Laura Doyle, « Toward a Philosophy of Transnationalism », *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 1:1 (2009), <http://repositories.cdlib.org/acgcc/jats/vol1/iss1/art7>. what she refers to as “intercorporeality” is deduced from her discussion of the bodily experience of inter-personal relations that she later applies to the relations between nations.
- ¹. See Jean François Lyotard, *Discours, Figure* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971), p.13 for a discussion of the « figural » as the “other” of discourse which is incorporated into it and resists the representational process.
- ¹. Vizenor, “The Ruins of Representation...”, p.9.
- ¹. *Ceremony*, pp.141-142 : the mythical, vertical text ends with a landscape of crossed rainbows, Pollen Boy placed in the center of the white corn painting ; while the ceremony begins with Betonic placing Tayo in the center of white corn sand painting and “the rainbows crossed were in the painting behind him.”

- ¹. For a theoretical discussion of environmental aesthetics, see Robert Stecker, *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art. An Introduction* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Pub., 2005) pp.13- 33.
- ¹. Ursula k Heise, "Ecocriticism and the Transnational Turn in American Studies" *American Literary History* 20, n° 1-2 (Spring- Summer 2008): 381- 404, p.383.
- ¹. Heise, "Ecocriticism and the Transnational Turn...", p. 385.
- ¹. Heise undertakes an insightful critique of the tendency in some contemporary novels to establish a strong analogy between cultural hybridity and biological diversity on the basis of an assumed continuity or identity of the ethical imperatives they involve (388- 89), which, according to Heise, remains questionable (400).
- ¹. See Patricia Waugh, *Practising Postmodernism. Reading Modernism* (London & NewYork: Edward Arnold, 1992). The writer's discussion of the aestheticism of Postmodern art is based on its continuity with, and significant deviation from Romanticism with respect to the status of the aesthetic: "what distinguishes its [the postmodern art's] mood from earlier Romanticists, however, is that its aesthetic impulses have spilled out of the self- consciously defined sphere of art and into the spheres of what Kant referred to as the cognitive or scientific on the one hand and the practical and moral on the other [3]." See also pp.17-24; p.35.

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- ¹. Philip Freneau, « *The Indian Burying Ground* » (1788), in *The Literature of America. An Anthology of Prose and Verse*, V.1, A. H. Quinn, A.C. Baugh and W.D. Howe eds; (New York & Boston: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), pp. 181-82
 - ². I am referring here to *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) (Ohio State University Press, 1962), Chapter 3, p.87.
 - ³. Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (Penguin Books, 1977). Further references will be to this edition and will noted parenthetically in the text.
 - ⁴. David L Moore, "Rough Knowledge and Radical Understanding. Sacred Silence in Native American Literatures", *American Indian Quarterly* 21, n°4 (Autumn 1997): 633- 662, p. 635.
 - ⁵. Through out this work, I'll be referring to Gerald Vizenor's "The Ruins of Representation: Shadow Survivance and the Literature of Dominance", *American Indian Quarterly* 17, n°1 (Winter 1993): 7-30.
 - ⁶. I am thinking in particular about *American Indian Literary Nationalism* by Jace Weaver, Craig S. Womack, and Robert Warrior (University of New Mexico Press, 2006), see in particular the "Forward: Speaking- Writing Indigenous Literary Sovereignty" by Simon J. Ortiz (pp.vii- xiv) and chapter three, pp.179- 224.

- 7 . For the critique of the over-emphasis on the notion of nationalism see for instance Mark Rifkin, "Subaltern Studies and Native American Sovereignty", *Boundary 2* 32, n°3 (2005): 47- 80, especially pp. 49-51; Billy J Stratton & Frances Washburn. "The Peoplehood Matrix. A New Theory for American Indian Literature." *Wicazo SA Review* 23, n°1 (Spring 2008): 51- 72.
- 8 . Ramazani, Jahan. "A Transnational Poetics." *American Literary History* 18, n°2 (Summer 2006): 332- 359.
- 9 . Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (London & New York : Routledge, 1993), pp.48-49.
- 10 . See Arnold Krupat, *Red Matters: Native American Studies* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), p.4.
- 11 . Shari M Huhndorf. « Picture Revolution: Transnationalism, American Studies, and the Politics of Native American Culture. *American Quarterly* 61, n°2 (June 2009), p. 363.
- 12 . Spivak, p.63. I am relying on Spivak's specification of the strategies through which postcolonial discourse enacts its "ontocultural commitment" "in terms, not of the discovery of historical or philosophical grounds, but in terms of reversing, displacing, and seizing the apparatus of value-coding." Silko's novel does share such conception of commitment as will be discussed in the second part of this work.
- 13 . In an "Interview" (1987), Leslie Marmon Silko used the expression "exotic" commodity critically to refer to the imperialist appropriation of Indian lore as museum artefact in the work of white ethnographers who collect tribal stories, prayers and chants to present them in journals as "public property". Cited in "Silko's Reappropriation of Secrecy", Paul Beekman Taylor. In *Leslie Marmon Silko. A Collection of Critical Essays*, Louise K. Barnett & James L. Thorson eds (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), p.25. For a recent discussion of the Native Americans' hostility to the handling of their cultures within the frame of museum collections, see Lee Schweningen, " 'Lost and Lonesome' Literary Reflections on Museums and the Role of Relics", *American Indian Quarterly* 33, n°2 (Spring 2009): 169- 197.
- 14 . Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, p.57.
- 15 . Louis Owen, *Mixedblood Messages : Literature, Film, Family, Place* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998, pp.12-24.
- 16 . Owen, *Mixedblood Messages*, p. 16, 21-22. For Owen challenging this « absoluteness » means acknowledging differences and varieties, not only among Native cultures, but also those introduced in Native American literature by writers

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- of mixedblood identity (p.19) and by the fact that some Indian American writers choose to represent tribal cultures other than those to which they belong (p.17: he wonders why this is still not accepted among readers and reviewers of Native literature, when the fact that Stephen Crane, for instance, could write about the Civil War that he never witnessed was not an issue in the readers' reception of *The Red Badge of Courage*) .
- 17 . Cf. Paul Beekman Taylor, "Silko's Reappropriation of Secrecy", p.25.
- 18 . Louis Owens, *Other Destinies. Understanding the American Indian Novel* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), p.4. In tracing the myth of cultural extinction within which the American Indian had been confined, Owen states that "the American Indian in the world consciousness is a treasured invention, a gothic artefact evoked like the "powwows in Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" out of the dark reaches of the continent to replace the actual native, who [...] is supposed to have long since vanished."
- 19 . Vizenor, « The Ruins of Representation », p.8.
- 20 . For a more thorough discussion of this major view in Postmodernism see for instance Brian McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 4-8; Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (London & New York: Routledge, 1988), pp.6-7, 96-98, 191
- 21 . Cf. Contemporary studies on the fiction of Silko have discussed from different critical perspectives the Native American writer's sense of commitment to tribal vision as touchstone of a communicated fictional truth, which according to critics like Arnold Krupat, "keeps it from entering the poststructuralist, postmodernist or schizophrenic heteroglossic domain...", "The Dialogic of Silko's Storyteller". In *Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse On Native American Indian Literature. American Indian Literature and Critical Studies Series; V.8* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989) Gerald Vizenor, ed., p.65. The argument defended in this paper, however, is that *Ceremony* is an illustration of the impossibility of such "immunity" (even its desirability is highly doubtful), since the realm of textuality, especially of metafictional textuality, can neither aspire to a mythical homogeneity (in opposition to "schizophrenic heteroglossia") nor to the exclusion of critical readings that enact the play of intertextuality.
- 22 . Laura Doyle, « Toward a Philosophy of Transnationalism », *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 1:1 (2009), <http://repositories.cdlib.org/acgcc/jats/vol1/iss1/art7>. what she refers to as "intercorporeality" is deduced from her discussion of the bodily experience of inter-personal relations that she later applies to the relations between nations.

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- 23 . See Jean François Lyotard, *Discours, Figure* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971), p.13 for a discussion of the « figural » as the “other” of discourse which is incorporated into it and resists the representational process.
- 24 . Vizenor, “The Ruins of Representation...”, p.9.
- 25 . *Ceremony*, pp.141-142 : the mythical, vertical text ends with a landscape of crossed rainbows, Pollen Boy placed in the center of the white corn painting ; while the ceremony begins with Betonie placing Tayo in the center of white corn sand painting and “the rainbows crossed were in the painting behind him.”
- 26 . For a theoretical discussion of environmental aesthetics, see Robert Stecker, *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art. An Introduction* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Pub., 2005) pp.13- 33.
- 27 . Ursula k Heise, “Ecocriticism and the Transnational Turn in American Studies” *American Literary History* 20, n° 1-2 (Spring- Summer 2008): 381- 404, p.383.
- 28 . Heise, “Ecocriticism and the Transnational Turn...”, p. 385.
- 29 . Heise undertakes an insightful critique of the tendency in some contemporary novels to establish a strong analogy between cultural hybridity and biological diversity on the basis of an assumed continuity or identity of the ethical imperatives they involve (388- 89), which, according to Heise, remains questionable (400).
- 30 . See Patricia Waugh, *Practising Postmodernism. Reading Modernism* (London & NewYork: Edward Arnold, 1992). The writer’s discussion of the aestheticism of Postmodern art is based on its continuity with, and significant deviation from Romanticism with respect to the status of the aesthetic: “what distinguishes its [the postmodern art’s] mood from earlier Romanticists, however, is that its aesthetic impulses have spilled out of the self- consciously defined sphere of art and into the spheres of what Kant referred to as the cognitive or scientific on the one hand and the practical and moral on the other [3].” See also pp.17-24; p.35.
- 31 . Sharon Holm, “The ‘Lie’ of the Land. Native Sovereignty, Indian Literary Nationalism, and Early Indigenism in Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*”, *American Indian Quarterly* 32, n°3 (Summer 2008), p. 249.
- 32 . David A. Rice, “Witchery, Indigenous Resistance, and Urban Space in Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*”, *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 17, n°4 (Winter 2005), p.134.
- 33 . See the discussion of the modernist and postmodernist aesthetics in Alan Wilde’s *Horizons of Assent. Modernism, Postmodernism & the Ironic Imagination* (Baltimore: the John Hopkins University Press, 1981). He defines the modernist texts of “absolute” or “disjunctive irony” as those that “strive though reluctantly towards a condition of paradox” and “achieve not resolution but aesthetic closure

- that substitutes for the notion of paradise regained an image of a paradise fashioned by man himself.” (pp.9-10)
- 34 . This paradox has been largely commented and discussed in the studies of Modernisms that focus in particular on T.S Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Virginia Woolf’s fiction. See Wilde, *Horizon of Assent*, Peter Nicholls, *Modernism. A Literary Guide* (Hamphire & London: Macmillan, 1995) especially pp16-17; and Astradur Eysteinnsson, *The Concept of Modernism* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1990). These critics stress, through their comments on Eliot’s identification of a “mythic order” in Joyce’s *Ulysses*, the dualities of order (formal, aesthetic) and anarchy (modernity), the private and the public, historicity and cyclic myth, etc. Eysteinnsson focuses on the functioning of the mythic order in the Modernist texts as an “aesthetic substitute for the “lost” whole of historical reality [11, n.5]”, while Nicholls discusses the implications of such order (in particular in *The Waste Land*) as related to the Modernist repudiation of “the mundanely modern [258]” and of the “Romantic egotism” alike, which allows those texts to substitute the notion of the new for the Romantic sense of originality, and to redefine writing as “a space between historical memory and imaginative construction [253].”
- 35 . Spivak, p.71.
- 36 . This is evidenced in the very definitions of art that Spivak formulates: how a work of art is part of history or society but its function is not to behave like history or sociology
- 37 . « Silko’s Reappropriation of Secrecy », in *Leslie Marmon Silko. A Collection of Critical Essays*, Louise K. Barnett & James L. Thorson eds (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), pp.23- 62.
- 38 . « Silko’s Reappropriation of Secrecy », p.39.
- 39 . « Silko’s Reappropriation of Secrecy », p.43.
- 40 . « Silko’s Reappropriation of Secrecy », p.43.
- 41 . Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*, trans. Samuel Weber (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), pp.7-8, 61, 70, 82, and 92.
- 42 . Vizenor, « The Ruins of Representation... », p. 9.
- 43 . Vizenor, p.9.
- 44 . Vizenor, p.11.
- 45 . Vizenor, p.11.
- 46 . « Special Problems in Teaching Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*.” *American Indian Quarterly* 15 (1990), p.379. See a discussion of this view in Paul Beekman Taylor’s “Silko’s Reappropriation of Secrecy,” In *Leslie Marmon Silko. A Collection of Critical Essays*, L.K Barnett & J.L. Thorson eds; (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press,), p.27.

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- 47 . Louis Owens, *Other Destinies. Understanding the American Indian Novel*, p.24.
- 48 . Theodor W. Adorno, *Théorie Esthétique*, trans. Marc Jimenez & Eliane Kaufholz (Paris : Klincksieck,1995), p.53 : “si l’art nouveau [...] peut se comprendre comme une intervention perpétuelle du sujet [...] alors, aux interventions permanentes du moi, correspond une tendance à la démission par impuissance.”
- 49 . Adorno, p.54: “Parmis les dangers de l’art nouveau, le pire est l’absence de risque.”
- 50 . Adorno, p.64 : “l’art, sans garantie sociale n’est nullement certain de sa propre validité.”

