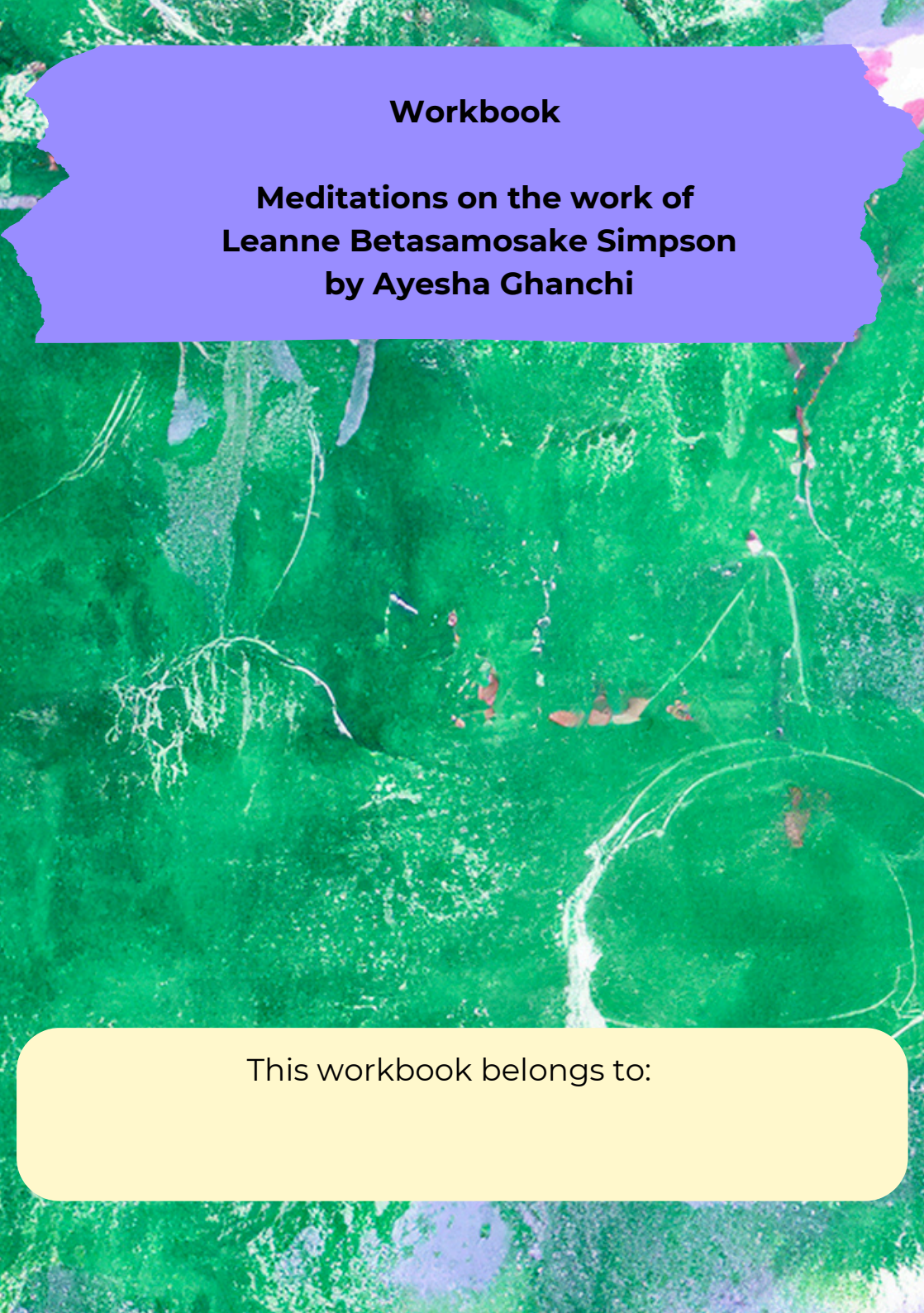
# Workbook

## Meditations on the work of Leanne Betasamosake Simpson by Ayesha Ghanchi



This workbook belongs to:

This workbook is about the indigenous scholar, artist and activist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. She was Artist in Residence at the AHK in April and May 2024. Here you'll find exercises and inroads to engage with her work.

So firstly let's meet Leanne...

Land and place is central to her work!

Leanne is Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg. Michi Saagiig translates to: 'mouth of the great river', and refers to the territory based at the north shore of Chi'Nbiish, (or 'Lake Ontario'). 'Nishnaabeg' refers to the word 'Anishinaabe'. The Anishinaabeg are culturally related and culturally distinct indigenous peoples who are located in the settler colonies Canada and the US. They have territories across Ontario to the North, Montreal to the East, Detroit to the South and Humboldt to the West, and have communities dotted across Canada and the US spanning all the way down to Oklahoma.

Leanne's work draws upon the heritage of Anishinaabe intellectual practices and lifeways to challenge coloniality, in the classroom, on the land, in the body, the mind and in political activism.

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Hello, I am Ayesha Ghanchi (she/her), a researcher and thinker in the fields of art education and critical pedagogy. Four years ago, I came across Leanne's essay 'Land as Pedagogy' **(1)**, which spoke to my head and heart on many different levels. I have engaged with Leanne's theory, fiction (which can also be a form of theory) and music ever since.

To prepare for Leanne's arrival in Amsterdam, I devised and facilitated three Meditations, reading and writing workshops in March 2024 which centred on collective reading, thinking, breathing and writing inspired by her work. These workshops were open to students, staff, and members of the public, and were attended by staff members, activists and artists.

I also gave a workshop in collaboration with the artist Jules Davis-Dufayard (they/them), to the students on the MA Creative Producing programme at ATD, called 'the Gift Circle: seeding reciprocal futures', which explored the themes of extractivism and reciprocity on the 14th April, after Leanne's keynote. In all of these workshops, I wanted to explore some of the themes emerging from Leanne's body of work, and how they relate to us in our contexts. I wanted to explore how Anishinaabe intellectual practices, that centre a relationship to place, land, plants, animals and water, can deepen our resistance to colonialism and coloniality locally. I also wanted to explore resistance as an embodied practice, that is more than discourse and direct actions, but also intentionality and an inner commitment.

This workbook aims to do the same, to draw you into Leanne's work and to get you thinking, feeling, writing and drawing to bring yourselves to it.

Q: What does it mean for you to engage with Leanne's work and with Indigenous Knowledge from your location and positionality?

## Interdependent relations

Central to Anishinaabe intellectual **resurgence*** is the deep interrelationality between land, plants, water, animals and other peoples....

'We didn't bank capital to save us from hard times. We had interdependent relationships with animal and plant nations and other human families and neighbouring indigenous nations. In times of difficulty we relied upon this practice of relational diplomacy and the world it creates to survive, with the understanding that in return we would take care of their worlds.' **(2)**

*Resurgence in this context means the revival and recovery of Anishinaabe ways of thinking, being and knowledge making.

# Mino Bimaadiziwin: Living in a good way

From: *Dancing on Our Turtles Back:*

‘Mino bimaadiziwin is a phrase that is used to denote “living the good life” or the “art of living the good life.” Winona LaDuke translates the term as “continuous rebirth”, so it means living life in a way that promotes **rebirth, renewal, reciprocity** and **respect**. It is my understanding that although there are many ways to live a good life and that within Nishnaabeg contexts, there is no dichotomy between the “good life” and the “bad life” rather living in a good way is an ongoing process.’ **(3)**

The way I understand mino bimaadiziwin is that it's a daily commitment as well as an overarching philosophy. It is getting up everyday and committing to living in good relationship with the land, plant and animal nations and other peoples. It is also living in a way that generates more life and thinks and acts not only for this current generation, but also seven generations ahead. It is about embodying and committing to Anishinaabeg practices which necessarily cultivates **mental**, **physical**, **spiritual** and **emotional** aspects of oneself. It's about our intentions and how we put that into practice, so that we can live in alignment with our values.

Q: Mino bimaadiziwin is a call to ask yourself everyday: what are my values? How do they shift and change as the world changes? Which values are fundamental and never change?

## Activity: Value reflection

Q: What do you value in a friend?
In a community?
In society?

## Cognitive Imperialism (1/2)

In *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, Leanne mentions subtle and overt *cognitive imperialism*.

**overt**

- The destruction and denial of indigenous script, technologies, knowledges and knowledge production
- Imposed western binary gender normativity
- Proliferation of heterosexist gender norms, such as the 'woman' taking on domestic responsibilities
- Placing empirical/extractivist knowledge above all other ways of knowing, sensing and feeling

**subtle**

- When people internalise a hierarchy of knowledge which places Western hegemony over their ancestral knowledge systems
- Internalised gender norms, misogyny and racism
- Putting the mind before the body, instead of cultivating an embodied intelligence

## Cognitive Imperialism (2/2)

‘Europeans were dependent on Indigenous Knowledge for nutrition, food preparation, hunting and fishing technology, travel routes, cloth-making, shelter-making, recreation, medicines and health care.’ **(4)**

‘2SQ* Indigenous peoples flourished in many Indigenous nations and were highly visible to the first European ‘explorers’. The archival and Western historical record sets down this visibility and the anti-queerness of these explorers, translators, traders, and missionaries in the 1600s and 1700s.’ **(5)**

Q: What are the subtle ways we internalise power relations? How does cognitive imperialism manifest in your life? Is it an inner voice? A social convention? A taboo?

*Two spirit queer

## Storytelling (1/3)

‘Storytelling is ...a process of remembering, visioning and creating a just reality where Nishnaabeg live as both Nishnaabeg and peoples. Storytelling then becomes a lens through which we can envision our way out of cognitive imperialism...where we can escape the gaze and cage of the Empire, even if it's just for a few minutes.’ **(6)**

Storytelling is emergent.
It is a process of ‘dreaming and visioning other realities’
It is a way to connect to the spiritual world, which is ‘alive and influencing’.
Stories communicate knowledge, ethics and practices that sustain Anishinaabe lifeways.
Anishinaabe creation stories are theoretical frameworks, which engage with emotional, physical, mental and spiritual aspects of a person.

There are several versions of creation stories (**Aandisokaanan**) in Anishnaabe cultures, and Leanne has shared a creation story in *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back*. This is a story of how the universe came into being through seven fires; seven stages, where everything we know in the natural world is created by Gzhwe Mnidoo, the non gendered creator/energy or life force. On the next page are extracts of the first and sixth fire, along with a few notes from a discussion we had about it:

# Storytelling (2/3)

‘In the beginning, before the beginning, there was only darkness and emptiness. In this cold, dark, vastness there was a sound, a sound like the shaking of seeds in a gourd. Then there was one thought, the first thought. The thought of the Great Mystery, Creator, Gzhwe Mnidoo.

Gzhwe Mnidoo's thoughts went out into the darkness. S/he knew s/he had to create a place for these thoughts, so Gzhwe Mnidoo created a circle in that darkness and within that circle s/he made a fire. At the centre of the circle was the heart beat of the Creator.

In the beginning, the first thought was the pulse and rhythm of Gzhwe Mnidoo. The thoughts and the heartbeat went out into the vast- ness. The thoughts and the vibrational sound of the heartbeat created the star world, the sky, and the universe. The Creator's first thought combined with the first heartbeat became the First Fire of Creation. **(7)**

*Some notes from our discussion...*
*-Rhythm and the mind are intimately connected*
*-The circle is significant*
*- Combining thought with emotion and the body, (with the pulse and heart) is a beautiful way of describing embodiment. That the centre of all life is thinking with emotion.*
*-Compared to the big bang- the heart relates to us, we are the heart- it brings us closer to the story*
*-I felt resistance reading this as I read this creation story through the lens of a singular god bestowing his greatness on all of ‘mankind’, a story I felt disconnected from. But after having read it a few times, I realise how it is about the beautiful interconnectedness of everything, how we are sacred beings and our connection to the Earth is inherent and sacred, and that there is not monotheistic god in this story but a life force that permeates everything.*

# Storytelling (3/3)

Then Gzhwe Mnidoo made a place for those seeds to go. S/he made the most beautiful Woman, who we know as our Mother the Earth. Three times, Gzhwe Mnidoo tried. On the fourth try, s/he made our beautiful, round earth. Gzhwe Mnidoo gave her a heart from the First Fire and placed it at the very core of her being. The very first woman created was a woman with a heart, with emotion, and it was a woman with a heart that would give birth to all of Creation.

Gzhwe Mnidoo looked upon Creation, the incredible beauty of the Earth, the waterways, the lakes and streams, the rivers. Her Life Blood flowing below and above the ground. These are the very wa ters of life that feed and nourish all of life, all of Creation. Her veins and her lifeblood, her bloodlines give life to all that Gzhwe Mnidoo had made. In all of that we would always know that we are joined to- gether as one. We have the same Mother. We would always know she was created first, the first woman with a heart. When Creator finished Creation, Gzhwe Mnidoo gave it to her. You are the Creator now, you will create life and renew it. **(8)**

*Some notes from our discussion...*
*-Speaks to the deep interrelationality of humans and water, as well as all other living beings including plant nations. Reinforces the relationship of belonging to and being responsible for the Earth.*
*-I love how it acknowledges the woman as the creator- the creator is not just this outside godly force, but a cosmic force that runs through our bodies.*
*-It made me contemplate how pregnancy and childbirth is in fact sacred.*
*-the power and responsibility of creation is conferred onto us, we are the creators- of our stories and our ways of life.*
*-Such a powerful message that Gzhwe Mnidoo tried, and failed and tried again that is so important to the artistic process. Trying and failing is fundamental to creation, but we don't emphasise that.*

# Activity: Write your own story

'**Dibajimowinan**' means our own personal stories drawn from our experiences, taking into account our physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual selves. Anishinaabe are encouraged to bring their own personal experiences and philosophies to the Aandikosanaan (creation stories) and insert themselves in the story. So in this vein we invite you to.... **write your own story!**

Think of an example of when you learnt a valuable lesson. It could be something small or something that changed the structure of your life.

-Who are the characters in this story? Who was there to observe/guide/witness? Feel free to think about the land, plants, animals and trees as characters that can play a role in your story. If the tree is a witness, what would it think? If a bird saw something, what would she say?

-How have you changed from learning this lesson? What has shifted? Think about an internal shift within yourself as well as an external shift in the world.

-Was the change/shift/lesson necessary or needed? Why, or why not?

-What would you like to be different? Or improved?

-Could this be a valuable lesson to pass onto others?

Your story doesn't need a definitive beginning or end! It doesn't have to be cohesive or 'make sense'. A stream of thoughts is also great...start writing!

## Activity: Write your own story

# Embodied intelligence (1/2)

Creation stories provide ontological (ways of being) and epistemological (ways of knowing and knowledge making) frameworks of Anishinaabe culture. Central to Nishnaabeg intelligence is cultivating an awareness and integration of our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual selves; an embodied intelligence. Here is an extract we discussed and a few notes from this discussion:

Embodied Knowledge, Unlimited Intelligence

‘The next part of the story, after Gzhwe Mnidoo has lowered me to the earth, tells us that Gzhwe Mnidoo put her/his right hand to my forehead and s/he transferred all of Gzhwe Mnidoo's thoughts into me. There were so many, that the thoughts couldn't just stay in my head; they spilled into every part of my being and filled up my whole body. Gzhwe Mnidoo's knowledge was so immense from creating the world that it took all of my being to embody it.

This tells us that in order to access knowledge from a Nishnaabeg perspective, we have to engage our entire bodies: our physical beings. emotional self, our spiritual energy and our intellect. Our methodologies, our lifeways must reflect those components of our being and the integration of those four components into a whole. This gives rise to our "research methodologies," our ways of knowing, our processes for living in the world.’ **(9)**

# Embodied intelligence (2/2)

*Some notes from our discussion...*
*-This goes back to mino bimaadiziwin, living very intentionally, invoking all aspects of ourselves in our commitment to the land and others*
*-Being spiritual is not something I think about but I feels like its something missing in my experience*
*-I've started with trying to be in touch with the seasons, and feeling the magic of spring or the energy of autumn, this way I feel like I can make Amsterdam my home*
*-It takes being quiet enough to listen, to tune into your body, to quiet the mind, and that's hard to do under capitalism when you are having to work all the time and have no time to sit still*
*-I like the term "research methodology" which is normally so stagnant with an extractive form of data, and using all of our senses, our emotions, our feelings as information that forms a methodology*
*-Healing is a modality of decolonising. We heal in the present moment to continue our work and to live full and joyful lives. Healing is agency as well as a revival of indigenous ways of being across Turtle Island*

## Activity: Advice

What one piece of advice would you give to a younger person about **mino bimaadiziwin** (living in a good way)? It could be your younger self, your child, a younger friend? Think of yourself as the elder you want to be.

Perhaps you can write this in the form of a letter, or a list of helpful tips, or a story...

## *This Accident of Being Lost* (1/4)

*This Accident of Being Lost* is a collection of short interlocking stories and poems. It weaves Anishinaabe mythology, symbolism and culture into narratives of current day and future Anishinaabe living and resistance. The story *Plight* is about three Anishinaabeg friends who are navigating settler colonialism, in the single act of collecting Maple syrup. It opens with a description of a liberal middle class neighbourhood and how they are going to ask the residents 'permission' to do this, even though they are on their ancestral land...

'We know how to do this so they'll be into it. Hand out the flyers first. Have a community meeting. Ask permission. Listen to their paternalistic bullshit and feedback. Let them have influence. Let them bask in the plight of the Native people so they can feel self- righteous. Make them feel better, and when reconciliation comes up at the next dinner party, they can hold us up as the solution and brag to their real friends about our plight. I proofread the flyer one more time because everyone knows white people hate typos.

Hello!
We are collecting sap from this Maple Tree from March 21-23. We will be by to collect it once a day, and we will pick up the bucket, lid and spigot on March 23. Thank you for your support in our urban sugar-making adventure.

FWP Collective
The Fourth World Problems Collective is us three Nishnaabekwewag, plus baby Ninaatig, plus Sabe, but Lucy and Kwe don't know Sabe is here. I'm the only one that can see him and only sometimes. We're meeting in my backyard to build a fire, smudge, and make some offerings before we begin. We've had several meetings about the forty-eight words on the flyer in order to get the proper balance of telling, not asking, while sidestepping suspicion.' **(10)**

# *This Accident of Being Lost* (2/4)

*Some notes from our discussion...*
*-This is an example of code-switching having to use different, accents and language to get by in white spaces that consciously and unconsciously disregard your ways of being and ways of communicating*
*-It speaks to the emotional labour that goes unnoticed*
*-I like the way Sabe- otherwise known as bigfoot is present. I like how the cosmology is woven into the story. Sabe also represents honesty in Anishinaabe culture*
*-It brings coloniality into a very real and understandable example*

'He rolls his eyes when I say I'm his client. Kwe* is sitting on a white plastic lawn chair, breastfeeding baby Ninaatig into a sleep coma by lifting up her "Not Murdered, Not Missing" T-shirt. She is laughing, saying, "This is the least queer thing I do." I try to think of something smart to say, like that there's nothing in the NDN queer rulebook that says you can't have a baby or breastfeed, but she already knows that, so I just smile and nod. I'm thinking the curve of her breast is sacred and sexy as fuck. I'm thinking how much I miss prolactin. I'm wishing the gentleness Kwe has for Ninaatig, Lucy had for me.' **(11)**

*-There is so much in this short story which tells you about how and where the impact of colonial violence is reverberated, within how the characters communicate to white settlers and each other, and having to be 'tough'.*

*(Kwe is related to the word 'woman' but also includes gender variance and fluidity. It doesn't conform to the colonial woman/man binary **(12)**. Ninaatig means baby)

## *This Accident of Being Lost* (3/4)

*-NDN refers to 'Not Dead Indigenous' this refers to the fact that indigenous people are more subject to violence from the state than white people. It also speaks to the fact that there have been false narratives pushed by Hollywood that indigenous people are extinct, such as films like 'The Last of the Mohicans', which says it all in the title, that implies that the Mohicans have not survived, which is a lie.*
*-Not Missing or Murdered refers to the Indigenous Women and girls who are murdered 10 times higher than all other ethnicities in Turtle Island (US and Canada) which is a direct result of the destruction of spirit and culture of the Residential Schools*

"Then we carry the buckets and Ninaatig to the car. I have three pieces of maple sugar from last year in my pocket in case we need to distract Ninaatig from reality for a few minutes. In case we need quiet.

I think: If I get caught, hide my kids.' **(13)**

*-In a single second, we can have a myriad of thoughts tumble through all at once, reminding us that the ghosts of the past are not past, they are present*
*-The line 'if I get caught hide my kids' is about the children who were forced to live in 'residential schools'. The first 'school' opened in the 1870s and the last one closed in 1996, yup, only in 1996! These were work and torture camps that subjected children and young adults to extreme psychological, physical and sexual abuse. Thousands of children and young adults were murdered in these 'schools', by physical force or disease*
*-Military coloniser Richard Henry Pratt established the first 'boarding school' to annihilate indigenous cultures, his ideology was 'kill the "Indian", save the man.'*

## *This Accident of Being Lost* (4/4)

*-The indigenous children were forbidden to speak in their language or practise their spiritual lifeways. The 'schools' were designed to break their spirit and their ability to form healthy relationships, in the family, in the community and with nature- which is the cornerstone of Anishinaabe lifeways.*
*-This purposeful breaking of culture and spirit, and the enforcement of heteropatriarchy is the direct repercussions of why indigenous peoples, especially women, suffer so much violence.*
*-Even though there is so much pain, this story speaks to a present that is empowered and defiant. It speaks to a future that is sacred, that re-envisions a connection to the land and spirit. It speaks of survival, autonomy and defiance*

(With special thanks to our friend and comrade Chihiro Geuzenbroek for filling in these details)

The references in Plight can be put into an academic essay making a case for the psychological impact of the residential schools and its continuous violent shock waves. Yet this story does so much more, it weaves the continuous legacy of colonialism with the strength, resilience and resistance of the Anishinaabeg friends. It speaks of the brutality of settler colonialism through the resurgence of practice and belief. And perhaps that is more empowering. Perhaps this is a decolonising impact of storytelling Leanne speaks about?

# Activity: Body Mapping devised by Michelle Rozak

The previous pages outlined violent and disturbing histories and present. Please take a moment to observe how this has impacted your body and thoughts, with no judgement. This is not to say you should be feeling or not feeling any particular way, but rather to slow down and check in, in the spirit of cultivating and practising an embodied intelligence. This activity invites you to visually observe, describe and draw what you notice is happening in your body. This body mapping is devised by Michelle Rozak. **(14)**

**1. Draw an outline of the shape of your body**

- It doesn't have to be perfect, accurate, or 'arty'

**2. Take a moment to tune into yourself**

- Begin by taking a deep breath in and a full exhale.
- Allow your attention to draw inward. You can close your eyes for a moment, or place one hand on your heart and another on your chest or whatever practice works for you to tune inward.
- Ask yourself: What do I notice in my body? What needs my attention right now? Are there any images, feelings, physical sensations or points of constriction?

**3. Intuitively draw the areas that are responding**

- Don't overthink this part, just let yourself flow with it.
- Draw the areas where you notice something is present.
- Maybe use shades, colours, symbols, or visuals.
- Allow yourself to express what you notice.

**4. When you feel complete, take a moment to observe what is present**

- Maybe note where you might want to give more attention or tend to certain areas.
- Perhaps you want to explore a point of inquiry more in depth.
- Just observe what is there.

When you're finished, give your body map a title.

# Embodiment and social media (1/5)

Leanne's work addresses the complexities of social media, and the challenges it poses in building a collective and grounded resistance to capitalism. If Anishinaabe resurgence is based on an embodied intelligence, what does that mean when one is glued to their phone? If Anishinaabe diplomatic relations are based on connections developed over time- what does that mean when we are engulfed in a stream of continuous and disembodied information? If stories are to connect to our bodies, and we're to 'take them out from time to time to consider' what does that mean when we ingest stories as quickly as we breathe air?

The following extracts are from three different mini-stories in *This Accident of Being Lost*, and plays with questions around the internet and social media...

'Being in love with someone you've never met and only text still falls in the realm of unhealthy even though everyone is doing it and whenever the odd person suggests critical thought we just all go back to loving strangers on the other side of our screens.

Eventually this will just be normal. Remember when you could get addicted to the internet? And now it's just normal. Still, I'd like to do a little test, a little experiment, shall we say, on how real this relationship actually is, since there is no physicality to it at all. Nearly everything we do is confined to probably no more than 500 characters, so theoretically you should be easy to quit, because theoretically you don't actually exist. I'm going to start by not thinking of you consistently for 45 minutes every day. Each week I am going to double that time, even though that sounds extremely ambitious right now, but math says doubling things gets things done fast and I need fast because probably I don't have enough time to just think and text you all day.' **(15)**

# Embodiment and social media (2/5)

In the story ‘Big Water’, the lake Niibish communicates to the narrator via text...

‘There are eight new notifications from Signal, all from Niibish. She just made me switch from imessage to threema to Signal because Edward Snowden tweeted that Signal is the safest texting app, mostly because the code is open source and has been independently verified. I wonder if she knows what "code" and "open source" mean, but if anyone can be trusted about these things my money's on Snowden. Also I have no idea why she cares about internet security, but she clearly does. I have to look at my iphone every four minutes so I don't miss anything because I can't get the sound notifications to work on this app even though I've googled it. To be honest, this isn't actually that big of a problem because I look at my beloved screen every four minutes, whether or not the sound notifications are on anyway. We all do and we all lie about it.’ **(16)**

‘i just posted a photo of me harvesting birch bark at this time last year and after 3 minutes I already have 50 smartberry ™ likes and i totally feel better even though you still haven't texted. #nativerthanyou #hollaatmekwe

you were on smartberry ™ chat one minute ago and i posted that 3 minutes ago so you've seen it, and you didn't give me a like. #relationshipgoals.’ **(17)**

# Embodiment and social media (3/5)

*Some notes from our discussion... (most people in this reading group were born before 1985)*
*-I think it is possible to develop deep connections through the technology of social media, I had established a deep relationship with someone mostly through voice notes, where we got to know each other in a specific context really well, it was meaningful*
*-I find facilitating conversations about power and privilege in groups online is very challenging, as we miss all the non verbal communication which helps ground people and help them through a process*
*-Facilitating online dialogues about power and oppression is possible with the right grounding and intention setting. It is something that needs serious consideration*
*-I never grew up with this but my teenager uses their phone a lot, this is the first generation in which there is such a huge difference between what we grew up with (no phones or facebook etc) and what they grew up with, so it's hard to know how to guide them.*
*-I actually think that the rise of social media makes it harder to have conversations in real life. That there are so many strong opinions on a subject that people are often scared of making a mistake so they don't speak. And the people who don't care if they offend take up space.*
*-I also think that it's powerful because it gives us access to language and community we never had, and through that you can form real life relationships- I have done! But it's also a space where there is so much performance and people using language to scold others for not having social justice language or being as informed, which is contradictory- it doesn't build justice. It is a very vulnerable place to learn, and a powerful place to unlearn.*

## Embodiment and social media (4/5)

Throughout *This Accident of Being Lost*, a collection of short stories and poems, with multiple characters narrating, there is the strong desire to make connections- with another person, with a tree, with ancestors, with a lake, or with a forest. This deep deep urge for connection, be it physical, sexual, emotional or spiritual is at times interwoven with social media engagement and addiction. It's worth pausing to think about the intentions and impact of these new technologies and what it does to our older, ancestral intercommunal technologies. We know that the act of scrolling and receiving 'likes' manipulates our brain chemistry. It is designed to cultivate dopamine addiction, playing with the deep ancestral drive for community and belonging. It cultivates communicating with less empathy and more cruelty (look up 'toxic disinhibition'). However, it also creates an opportunity to share parts of your stories, with the safety of distance, cultivating intimacy which can be meaningful (look up 'benign disinhibition). There's a whole generation right now that has been encouraged to live in virtual spaces- the same generation that are increasingly denied access to public spaces, how will that impact how we will communicate or relate to each other now and also in the future? What are we losing and gaining?

Consider these fragments from her songs and other fictions:
(next page)

# Embodiment and social media (5/5)

‘Calling out, calling in
You’re not fooling me

Tethered to the kinship of disassociated zeros and ones
Shining your crown of neoliberal likes
Yelling the loudest in the empty room

Gathering followers like berries
Feeding fish to insecurity

Sliding into reckless moment after reckless moment’ **(18)**

‘Think about the network as the first line of defence.

Think think think before you speak, type, post. Each syllable is a log you put on a fire. The fire can uplift or destroy.

Weweni.

Weweni.

Protect individual hearts from hurt, because the processing of hurt is necessary and it takes energy from the group. The supports needed to process trauma and to regenerate are costly.’ **(19)**

Q: What is Leanne’s work telling us about this moment that we are in? Considering that social media is a very recent technology, what are we gaining, what are we losing?
Is Leanne saying that we have become so distanced from nature, that we have forgotten how to listen? Or that we need to recover our practices of listening?

# Reciprocity workshop (1/2)

White sage is one of the four sacred medicines in Anishinaabe culture, alongside tobacco, sweetgrass and cedar. Anishinaabe burn white sage (smudging) to clear away negative energy and invite positivity. It is deeply rooted in the practice of setting an intention, whether it's to start the day off well, to alleviate nerves or to prepare for ceremony.

Burning white sage cultivates a state of being that can nurture and nourish the interrelatedness of all beings, it helps to cultivate mino bimaadiziwin.

It is about connection. It is about presence.

To paraphrase from Debra Courchene, an Anishinaabeg knowledge keeper:

> ‘Use the smoke to wash over your hands, and then wash your ears, thinking good thoughts, smudge your mouth to speak good things, and smudge your ears to hear good things. Don’t blow, as you are blowing your spirit away. Replace negative with positive energy. Even picking the medicine must be done with good intent. Harvest with good thoughts and leave tobacco as an offering.’ **(20)**

Burning sage cultivates a culture of reciprocity, and harvesting sage also must be done with reciprocity in mind- building towards a future that sustains life, and reciprocating with leaving tobacco as an offering.

# Reciprocity workshop (2/2)

The colonisation of white sage and the practise of smudging:

Burning white sage or ‘smudge’ sticks is now a western fad, which means it is overharvested, and with money making as the intent rather than reciprocity at the intent. It is part of a culture of ‘spiritual capitalism’ which seeks to sell us wellness divorced from the contexts of where these knowledges come from.
This is an example of coloniality. For example, up until the American Indigenous Religious Freedom Act in 1978, indigenous peoples in the settler colony US, were denied the legal right to any religious or sacred practices and ceremonies. Thus they could be jailed for burning white sage. So of course it's galling to be able to buy this from a local shop in Amsterdam with no knowledge of its meaning and no knowledge or care of who have been impacted by it being sold. Whilst at the same time it has been denied to the very people who have been custodians of this plant.

Q: How can we be inspired by Anishinaabe practices without cultural appropriation? If we are inspired by the spiritual practices of cultures outside of our own lineages- how do we participate ethically?

The first question to ask oneself is- where does this come from? And what impact does my participation have on the communities of where this practice comes from?

# Smoke Stick Activity

If you are based in Northern Europe and/or are not indigenous to Turtle Island, it is ridiculous to burn white sage as we are abundant in medicine in our own lands. We can look to our own heritages and lineages to uncover land-based rituals that connect us to land and spirit.

This activity is a smoke* ritual, using local herbs, and invites you to research and reflect on land-based spiritual traditions in Europe...

**Smoke activity:**

**Step 1: Source local plants which you can experiment with burning. I suggest rosemary, lavender, mugwort and laurel leaves**

**Step 2: Take your chosen plants, and either gather them in a clay pot or make 'smoke sticks' by tying them into a bundle with thread**

**Step 3: Think about a behaviour you want to extinguish or something you want to let go of.**

**Step 4: In a ventilated area, burn the herbs, keeping your intention in mind**

**Step 5: Do your own research into how the local herbs have been used traditionally and share your knowledge with friends.**

*we use the word 'smoke' instead of 'smudge', as 'smudge' is specific to indigenous peoples from Turtle Island (otherwise known as the settler colonies Canada and the US).

# Water, Solidarity and Presence (1/2)

Water, presence and commitment

The following activity merges ideas from Leanne's thoughts about **solidarity** and **the present moment** in her newer body of work *Theory of Water*. Leanne shares with us what we can learn from water, from the perspective of being in collaboration with the land, and understanding water as a teacher. Water is life, water is knowledge, water contains our history and ensures our future. Water as a teacher tells us about fluidity, movement, shape shifting and relationality to all it touches. Water tells us about the health of ecosystems. Leanne tells us that eels used to travel in large numbers from the Sargasso sea to her territory, and that this told her ancestors what was happening outside of their land. For example if the eels were scarce or sick or thin, that told them that perhaps they need to ease off harvesting. She made an analogy to the activism and stories of other peoples engaged in liberation struggles:

'The eels reminded me that my responsibilities aren't just local, they reminded me to bring into conversation people in different but related struggles, in my neighbourhood and beyond...What I learned from writing Dancing on Our Turtles Back and Rehearsals is how important it is to visit and to think alongside Black feminists, abolitionists and all other people engaged in struggle, thought and organising. It's how I can make sure that my world making visions link up with their world making visions.' **(21)**

# Water, Solidarity and Presence (2/2)

Another vital concept emerging from *Theory of Water* is the importance of the present moment in our world making visions. Water is connecting, water is shape-shifting, water is change. **Leanne suggests that being still and listening to water connects us to the past and to an embodied present**. In other dialogues she has also stated the importance of the present moment:

> 'In Anishnabeg thought: it is the present that gives birth to the future. Where you plant the seeds, where you change the trajectory of the future. It places responsibility in the **now**.' **(22)**

In fact, throughout the residency she mentioned the etymology of the Anishinaabemowin word **Biidaaban,** (the present), which is made up of three words, that includes the past and the future. Hence the future is created in the present, meaning- the action we take in the present.

# Activity: Water and commitment to action

This workbook is being typed out on land that is 2 metres below sea level. I am surrounded by bodies of water, be it canals, ponds, rivers, inlets and human made lakes. This water activity was created by the artist Jules Davis-Dufayard with this location in mind. It draws on the specificity of water and landscape in the Netherlands, to commit to a change in thought, action or behaviour. It aims to use water as a symbol and a reminder (in the present) to commit to that change. The change and the vision we want for the future is born from commitments we make now, in the present:

1. Either on your own or in a group, think about something you want to change, improve on, or nourish in yourself, so you can better vision and co-vision a future you want. It could be something like “getting involved in community organising” or “protecting my energy so I can participate in conversations with more agency”, or “remembering to breathe deeper when overwhelmed” or “remembering I’m not alone.” Or perhaps at this stage, you want to commit to thinking about this question more.
2. Either on your own or in a group, collect some water in a jar from a body of water close to where you live. If you are on your own, collect water from 2 or more sources.
3. If you are working collectively, combine all of your waters together in a container. If you are working alone, mix all your waters together.
4. Pour some of the water from the container back into your jar.
5. Take a moment to breathe and be still. Infuse your jar of water with your commitment, either by holding the jar and holding your commitment in your thoughts or by whispering to the jar.
6. return the water to the body of water close to where you live.

We hope that whenever you cross that water, you will be reminded of your commitment.

# On Solidarity and Palestine

'I heard Bassem when he told our delegation that our responsibilities were not in Palestine. That we needed to go home and fight there. That capitalism is a snake and a blow to the snake, in our homelands was a blow to the snake in Palestine.' **(23)**

As Leanne wrote the above about the Palestinian activist Bassem Tamimi, he was being held without charge in Israeli detention, as part of a system to routinely dehumanise and demoralise Palestinian resistance. He was finally released on 9th June 2024.

'We need to join together in a rebellion of love, persistence, commitment, and profound caring and create constellations of coresistance, working together toward a radical alternative present based on deep reciprocity and the gorgeous generative refusal of colonial recognition. It is a vision that centres our lives around our responsibility to work with our Ancestors and those yet unborn to continuously give birth to a spectacular Nishnaabeg present. This is a manifesto to create networks of reciprocal resurgent movements with other humans and nonhumans radically imagining their ways out of domination, who are not afraid to let those imaginings destroy the pillars of settler colonialism.' **(24)**

'Who are not afraid to love from the river to the sea.' **(25)**

'This is my beginning. This is my radical resurgent present.' **(26)**

# A delayed email (1/2)

Dear J., V., R., R., N., A., L., and N.,

This email was originally written on Thursday 14th March, and then it was left in my Draft folder for three months. Blame perimenopausal mum life!

Although it's a little bit weird to be sending this after so long, and after Leanne's residency, I have decided that sometimes, it's good to be a little bit weird (and perhaps vulnerable) and share my thoughts. This was originally written after the second reading group, after which we talked about some of the themes emerging from *This Accident of Being Lost*. We spoke about the horrific residential schools and the mechanisms they used to destroy indigenous cultures and indigenous peoples' spirit. We were all affected by these conversations in different ways. I remember V. asking "what can we do? How can we fight this?" I remember after the workshop not being happy with my answer to that question. So I'm responding to this question now...and it's also a letter to myself, who is overwhelmed with guilt at my self-perceived lack of activism around Palestine in this current moment.

Leanne talks about an Anishinaabe intelligence that cultivates every aspect of our being, physical, mental, emotional, spiritual. I feel like, embodying these aspects of ourselves can guide us to our role in this moment. In *Dancing on Our Turtles Back*, Leanne talks about the responsibilities we have *"that are not necessarily bestowed upon us by the collective, but that we take on according to our own gifts, abilities and our affiliations*."

## A delayed email (2/2)

I take this to mean, start by looking at what is needed in liberation struggles, and then look at what your abilities, networks and gifts are, and take it from there. So for example, in my 20s, before I had children I felt able to square up to riot cops and I was able to go to Palestine with a direct action group and help take down road blocks. As a 44 year old raising a neurodivergent family my abilities are different, I need to go home in a way that I can care for my young children. So now I offer my support to making 'book shields' to protect the students from riot police. I will offer yoga and care sessions to activists to recharge, reflect, and grieve. My activism is different now, but it's according to my abilities, networks and gifts. Dismantling colonialism is going to be a life-long intergenerational process, and I constantly have to consider how I fit into this. And figure and reconfigure how I belong in this network of resistance and liberation, in which we hold each other up, continuously.

Anyhoo...that's my two pennies worth!

Hope you are all well and to cross paths with you all!

In solidarity and revolutionary love,

Ayesha

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2. Leanne's online lecture '*A Short History of the Blockade*' 2020. Center for Literatures in Canada Kriesel lecture: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Jbp7uzj_YM&t=25s

3. Leanne's book: *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, 2011, p. 27.

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6. Leanne's book: *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, 2011, pp. 33-34.

7. Leanne's book: *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, 2011, pp.37-38.

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9. Leanne's book: *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, 2011, p. 42.

10. Leanne's fiction and poetry: *This Accident of Being Lost,* 2017, pp. 5-6.

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16. Leanne's fiction and poetry: *This Accident of Being Lost,* 2017, p. 66.

17. Leanne's fiction and poetry: *This Accident of Being Lost,* 2017, p. 100.

18. Leanne's song: *Viscosity,* from the album Theory of Ice, 2021.

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20. Debra Courchene, is an Anishinaabe knowledge keeper. You can find her video of smudging here, from where I paraphrased her words: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6fIMumk2cnA.

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23. Leanne's article: *A Blow To the Snake Here*, 2023. In: The Red Nation, Decolonisation or Extinction. Link: https://therednation.org/a-blow-to-the-snake-here/

24. *As We Have Always Done*, 2021, p. 9.

25. Quote from Leanne, during the event: *A Blow To the Snake Here - A conversation around indigenous and Palestinian struggle. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson in dialogue with guests Samah Hijawi and Yazan Khalili moderated by Mikki Stelder,* 24th April, 2024.

26. *As We Have Always Done*, 2021, p. 10.

# Colophon

Many thanks to: Leanne Betasamosake Simpson.

Three workshops were organised by the Lectorate for Social Justice and Diversity in the Arts at the Amsterdam University of the Arts, as part of the Artist in Residency 2024, initiated and organised by the Academy for Theatre and Dance Lectorate at the Amsterdam University of the Arts: https://www.atd.ahk.nl/actueel/artist-in-residence-air/leanne-betasamosake-simpson/.

The workshop series was titled: 'Meditations, reading and writing' and took place on March 6, 13 and 27, 2024.

The Smoke Stick activity was first offered to students of the MA Creative Producing program of the Academy for Theatre and Dance, on 14 April 2024.

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