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THE DAY MY PHOTOGRAPHS DANCED: MATERIALIZING PHOTOGRAPHS OF MY ANISHINABE ANCESTORS

ABSTRACT

This research explores the role of Anishinabe photographs as distinct material things, in Anishinabeg memory production. Through the materialization and transformation of six (6) photographs of her ancestors, the author as an Anishinabekwe (Ojibwe) artist/researcher, draws upon performative and embodied aspects of Anishinabeg ways of knowing, emphasizing the agency of the materials worked with in the process of meaning-making. Research findings stress the importance of conceptualizing Anishinabeg memory as a visceral, relational, intuitive, creative, and sensorial experience to strengthening relationships to the ancestral past, now and into the future. By locating Anishinabeg photographs as distinct Indigenous things—things that can be worked with as opposed to simply "read"— the author transcends ontological and methodological limitations often associated with photographs in order to trace or "stitch" through the different relationships between actuants made visible, sensible and knowable through a material and phenomenological oriented approach that is informed her identity and cultural teachings.

KEYWORDS

Anishinabeg; photography; materiality; memory; regalia; Indigenous; Ojibwe

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> Focused on the straight seam under my fingertips, I glide the fabric forward…slowly, intentionally… in anticipation. With the last and final stitch, I raise the needle, lift the metal foot, and carefully lift the finished dress towards me. I reach for my scissors and cut the thread, releasing the finished piece from the machine. As I hold up the dress to examine my work, the calico cotton transforms into a blanket of faces. People that I recognize but do not really know. As I look closer, I see that I am holding images of my ancestors: A dress of photographs underneath satin ribbons, floral appliques and jingle cones. I understand that I am just dreaming. I am aware that I will awake soon. But in that moment I am overwhelmed by the urge to put this dress on. I long to feel the fabric against my skin…to hear the sound of its metal cones….

INTRODUCTION

I remember the day I recounted this dream to my mother at her kitchen table back in 2011. Like always, she was busy working. Every evening her kitchen transformed into her "sewing space"—a space where many beautiful regalia items materialized through her creativity, ingenuity, patience, and skill. A space that had also been my classroom for many years. While some mothers may have responded with a question like, "well, what do you think that dream meant?" My mother, sitting at her sewing machine, framed, as always, by the clutter of the evening's work, responded with, "so what will you learn from doing it?"

And with this simple, yet significant question, I embarked on a two-year project revolving around the materialization of 6 family photographs taken of my Anishinabe[1] ancestors. I set out to make Anishinabe regalia—regalia used in ceremony and dance—with images located within our family album. The resulting work became part of an exhibition entitled, *The Teaching is in the Making*.[2] The images, taken from around the early 1920s to the late 1960s, spanned four generations of our family. They were selected from a larger community-based project I facilitated that brought together 82 photographs from other Anishinabeg family albums taken during the same time period. As a result of a collaborative research agenda that respected the wishes of these families, I prepared a *community-catalogue* - a tangible visual resource that included all 82 photographs (see Pedri-Spade, 2016)

[1] Anishinabe (Anishinabeg, pural) is a term used by the Odawa, Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and other Algonquin indigenous peoples (also referred to as Aboriginal or First Nations peoples). Anishinabe territory extends from Quebec westward to around the Great Lakes of Ontario and parts of Manitoba and south to areas in Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota and North Dakota.

[2] The Teaching is in the Making was held at the Thunder Bay Art Gallery June 28-September 4, 2016

While the creation of this community archival resource was significant, I felt like something was missing. I wanted to do something more. While I found tremendous value and meaning in gathering the images, documenting information about our relatives, and facilitating opportunities for Anishinabeg to come together, re-connect and reclaim stories about our past that had colonial authorities had, for generations, oppressed or erased, I still felt that there was a piece missing. I felt a deep voice, like a piece of me was missing in this project. I felt the work was unfinished. I wanted more from my family photographs and at the same time I wanted to do more for these images because experiencing them in an album or a book left me unsatisfied. As an Anishinabekwe[3], so much of who I was, was defined by and through my ability to create things; to bring together different materials in transformative processes. I understood and was most comfortable with myself as a maker of things. I can hear my mother now:

Anishinabekwewag[4] are makers! We make things for our people - our families - food, clothing, blankets, ceremonial clothing, slippers, baskets, etc. It is what we do. It is who we are. (M. Pedri, personal communication, September 2012)

There are a few introductory points about the significance of such an undertaking that I must attend to from my position as an Anishinabekwe and as a visual anthropologist. My first point relates to the value of dreams or dreaming to Anishinabe knowledge and research. Within Anishinabe worldview, dreams are valuable tools. As Marsden (2004) illustrates, dreams are especially helpful in guiding a person's actions towards achieving knowledge goals or making sense of the world. My second point relates to my identity and role as a practicing visual anthropologist with a particular interest in, and commitment to, linking processes and practices of remembrance, family stories, photography, materiality and creativity. As an Anishinabekwe artist and researcher I find myself "at home" exploring those fluid, messy and critical spaces where I can not only write about history but think, smell, and touch it. Therefore, I locate myself within what Stoller (2015) describes as the multi-sensorial spaces where stories of the past are told and retold, experienced and understood through sound, movement, scent and touch. Third, in making regalia based on these photographs, I immediately locate photographs not simply as finished items that can be *read* but as material items that can *worked with*.

[3] Anishinabe woman

[4] Anishinabe woman

Thus, this endeavor corresponds with anthropological/artistic focus on processes of making things and what happens to photographs as they become caught up in the life histories and social interactions of the people who experience them (see Bunn, 2011; Owen, 2005; Ingold, 2013; 2011; 2007).

This paper contributes to Indigenous anthropological literature that remains sensitive to the ways people understand their pasts and possible futures through the relationships they and others have with photographs. It incorporates a phenomenological and material informed approach that acknowledges the performative, embodied aspects of Anishinabeg ways of knowing and emphasizes the agency of those materials we work with in revealing new meaning in the research process. Like any good seamstress, I begin this work by doing some preparatory groundwork, basting together theories of Anishinabeg knowledge, photographs, memory, and materiality and then outlining my methodological approach. Following this pursuit, I then present my art pieces and research findings. In doing so, I demonstrate that moving beyond conceptualizing photographs as evidence of a past existence towards taking them up as a historical and material "thread" is integral to inspiring and materializing new ways of remembering and relating to our ancestral past—ways are attentive to and respectful of Anishinabe knowledge and way of life. In doing so, I contribute to Anishinabe understandings and meanings of memory, materiality and photography which have significant implications for both Anishinabe families and communities and their allies working in these areas.

ANISHINABEG PHOTOGRAPHS, REGALIA AND MATERIALITY

Like many other Indigenous peoples, Anishinabeg have a long and complex history with photography not simply as passive subjects but as active and agentive participants (see Pedri-Spade, 2014; White, 2007). Anishinabeg have a history of photographing themselves throughout their territory either sitting in a portrait-style setting or engaged in cultural and ceremonial activities (gathering wild rice, fishing, dancing, drumming, etc.) (Pedri-Spade, 2017). Both my research into historical Anishinabe photographs and my current photographic practice has revealed that Anishinabe photographs both convey and help configure significant relationships among Anishinabeg, our traditional lands, and our ancestors and

that these relationships are significant to our continued efforts to empowering Anishinabeg to tell their histories, which have been suppressed through decades of colonial oppression and to re-asserting their sovereignty in contested places (Pedri-Spade, 2016; 2014).

Within the growing body of literature presented by Anishinabe academics, there has been considerable attention made to the tradition of storytelling in conveying Anishinabe history related to past events, people and places, locating these histories in the oral storytelling traditions of our Anishinabe ancestors. This focus on the relationship between oral storytelling and the production and representation of Anishinabe knowledge about the past has had a strong influence on existing research into Anishinabe visual culture (paintings, pictures, beadwork, rock paintings, etc.) which privileges a representational framework and makes little or no distinction between the visual and textual (see Robertson, 2007; Erdrich, 2003; Corbiere & Migwans, 2013; McGlennen, 2013; Willcott, 2005). While Anishinabe visual culture does indeed convey a story and is often rich in symbolic meaning, one must acknowledge that there are distinctive aspects of our visual cultural items as things[5], which are made with different materials, through different processes and practices that compel one not to simply reduce them to mere vessels for a story.

Geismar (2009) and Bell (2010; 2008) argue that in order to fully understand the meaning and value of Indigenous-based photographs, one must understand them as a distinct Indigenous objects and that insight from Indigenous language around photography and other material culture may assist in this endeavor. In Anishinabemowin[6] the root of the word for photograph (mazinaakizon) is "mazinaa", which, as Erdrich (2013) states:

> ... is the root for dozens of words all concerned with *made* images and with the *substances* [emphasis added] upon which the images are put, paper, screens..." (p. 17)

The significance of materiality to Anishinabe photography is located within Anishinabemowin and supports Barthes (1981) notion of the "structural autonomy" (p. 15) of photographs that do not only convey realities of stories, but also help configure them (Banks, 1998; Belting, 2005; Edwards, 2009; 2002; Grimshaw and Ravetz, 2005). Indeed, the material things belonging to a people can condense the social history of a community, the

[5] The concept of 'things' is different than 'objects', the latter being understood as fixed or finished. Rather, things are emergent, fluid, and in a continuous process of becoming. Things are constituted through ongoing relationships with material and people (see Barber, 2007; Brown, 2001; Miller, 2010; Ingold, 2010; Bunn, 2011)

[6] The language of Anishinabeg

stories of individuals, and "through their persistence and materiality project them forwards" (Thomas 1993, as cited in Gillespie, 2010).

Stoller (2015, 1995) urges researchers to address the texture of social life—to think about history as more than text on a page or stories told about the past. In his work involving the Songhay people in West Africa, Stoller (1995) demonstrates how history is a set of living forces that sensuously brings the past into the flow of life. Stoller encourages researchers to address the "tactile dimension of history… that which people are able to hear, smell, and touch the past" (Stoller, 2015, para. 5). As an Anishinabekwe artist/researcher I have often longed for this tactile dimension of history, inspired by the words of my kitchianishinabeg[7] that would often discuss how, *we wear our teachings,* that *we live our knowledge*. I have written elsewhere (Pedri-Spade, 2017; 2014; 2011) about the performative, embodied, and creative dimensions of Anishinabe knowledge—how Anishinabeg produce and make use of a range of material artworks—drums, songs, paintings, photographs—in transmitting knowledge related to all aspects of life from one generation to the next and how these ways of knowing *are* ways of being *and* ways of practicing our spirituality.

Some of the most significant and sacred things we make and look after as Anishinabeg, are referred to as our "regalia". From an Anishinabekwe perspective, regalia may include ribbon skirts or dresses worn in ceremonies, other dresses or items (beadwork, scarves, bags, etc.) danced at powwows or other special gatherings. Kitchianishinabekwe[8] Wanda Baxter describes Anishinabeg regalia and its spiritual and cultural significance:

> Our regalia has a spiritual life. It already existed before someone made it. When you make it, you are bringing it here (to this world) to help you and to help others. This is why we look after it so well. This is why we feast it. (W. Baxter, personal communication, December 10, 2015)

I remember my mother, one of the most accomplished regalia makers in our community, explain that the spirit of the regalia items we make carry all the relationships with people and other living beings that went into its making and this is why it is so powerful. She also explained that as a maker, you strive for excellence in your work not because you are trying to "show off" but because your task is to materialize and present what Wanda referred to as

[7] A term used to identify Anishinabe elders who are people in our community that are recognized as having acquired a wealth of knowledge and insight through their life experience. que pertenece a la cultura que se decidió documentar" (2006: 22). Para un repaso de su trayectoria y análisis de los films puede leerse Taquini (1994), Rossi (comp., 1987), Prelorán (2006) y el capítulo 5 de Campo (2012).

[8] Female Elder

this "spiritual life." She also explained to me that when we dance our regalia we are honouring the connection we have to our ancestors, and we are carrying out our responsibility as the people who are looking after the regalia and are inextricably linked to all the relationships that went into its production.

While Anishinabe photographs and Anishinabe regalia are different kinds of items (in the sense that they involve different kinds of material processes), they are similar in their ability to convey, configure and coagulate a host of relationships among Anishinabeg, their teachings, lands, and ancestors which are significant to their continued survivance as Anishinabeg.

MEMORY, EMBODIED PERFORMANCE AND AGENCY

Several notable scholars emphasize the relationship between embodiment and memory: That one cannot forget that many people, think and remember with and through their bodies (Barber, 2007; Connerton, 1989; Coombes, 2003; Pink, 2009; Stoller, 1995; Trouillot, 1995; Schneider, 2012). Reclaiming and articulating our histories as Anishinabeg is linked to our ability to remember past people, places, and events and it is therefore critical to attend to the question of how these processes may relate to the formation of embodied memory. There is a considerable gap in academic research into the relationship between embodiment, materiality and Anishinabeg memory as the majority of research has focused privileged language, the role and power of oral storytelling. Without devaluing this process, and with my mother's words in the back of my mind, I argue for the need to consider the significance of making or working with things to create other things, and how this process contributes to existing Anishinabeg theories and practices around the ways people remember the past and how these ways affect our understandings and actions in the present.

In a similar vein, Jones (2007) states that while memories emerge inside people's minds and are often expressed through oral methods, they are also "transferred onto material objects" (p. 12). He argues that in order to fully understand the relationship between material culture and memory, it is crucial to involve the body in the analysis because one needs to account for the interaction between embodied individuals and the material world. Similarly, Jeffries (2016) states our skin is the most active medium through which we can process information,

yet because we emphasize speech and orality, we rarely acknowledge how we come to understand through our sensory awareness, specifically our experience of textiles. However, Pajaczkowska (2016) suggests that one can understand the role of material culture in memory production by "articulating activities of embodied knowledge with forms of thinking and knowing" (p. 80).

Berkofer (2003), McGuinness (2016) and Stallybrass (1993) position cloth as a kind of memory as different pieces of clothing worn by individuals can evoke specific kinds of memories, specifically related to the absence of departed loved ones. They do so as people touch and smell items that previously belonged to individuals, thus triggering specific memories. The relationship between textiles, people and their ancestors is significant within Anishinabe culture. The power of cloth and other textiles like beads or leather and their relationship with the human body is well known by many Anishinabeg, including my own family. For example, clothing owned and worn by someone is linked to their physical, mental, and emotional being. Over time, clothing can hold positive or negative emotions or thoughts that the person. Clothing may also carries visitors—a presence of our ancestors or spirit helpers that comes to help us in life. Textiles used in the making of regalia, like beads, leather or cloth also carry part of the creator of the regalia item, which will impact the life and overall wellbeing of the individual who wears it at either ceremonial or life events. Similarly, other Anishinabe material items like hand drums embody the spirit of the animal (raw hide cover), the tree (drum frame), the person (drum carrier/singer) and the spiritual life of the song (Pedri-Spade, 2017; Pedri, 2011).

Therefore, the spiritual life of something like a photograph or a regalia item may have an agency endowed through multiple layers of human/other than human relationships that played a part in its entrance and usage here in this world. This agency is similar to Bennett's (2010; 2005) work, which states a thing's "efficacy or agency depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces." (2010, p. 23) The power or agency of things has implications for their role in bringing forward knowledge of the past as Johnson (2016) states:

> Wearing or making historical objects can evoke an embodied, experiential relation to past people, utilizing bodily experience as a unique way of knowing. (p. 51)

This compels researchers to approach historical documents not as static representations of some past event or person, but as a material thing that one connects to through performative acts that may include acts of acquisition, acts of storysharing and acts of creating (Schneider, 2012). Schneider argues that taking this approach is important to bringing history into the production of a counter-memory. Indeed, knowledges of the past are communicated and sustained through performative and embodied practice (Connerton, 1989) whereby memory as a dynamic and social process of retrieval, reconfiguration, and invention is often provoked by visual and material things (Kuchler & Melion, 1991; Casey 1987 as cited in Roberts & Roberts, 1996; Coombes, 2003). Photographs are such things that may act as powerful points of memory (Hirsh, 2012) that stimulate and provoke other cultural processes (Roberts & Roberts, 1996).

A METHOD OF MAKING

Wright (2009) states that an awareness of photography as material culture calls for a different and more nuanced methodological approach in anthropological research. Working from an Anishinabekwe standpoint, this approach must be grounded in the Anishinabeg philosophy of Nebwakawin, which informs an Anishinabeg knowledge system. Nebwakawin is the act of looking backwards, while at the same time bringing forward the knowledge and experiences that our Anishinabeg ancestors have always carried. Nebwakawin as thinking back, bringing forward and stitching it all together, is similar to Coleman's (2011) image work that revolves around transforming photographs through creative processes whereby the making of something new is not disconnected from the past, old—that by materializing the affectivity of a photograph into something new, one might learn from and engage with the past in new ways.

Connected to Coleman's (2011) work, specifically my interest in the affectivity of my photographs—there ability to move me and generate memories and knowledge of that past that often remain hidden by purely textual research (Barber, 2007; Leavy, 2009), I turn to Elizabeth Edward's work on the material practices of photography, specifically her work on photographic affects and the specific ways that photographs are put to work. Edwards (2012) outlines two interconnected embodied and sensory encounters significant to my methodology. The first she terms placing, which is defined as:

> "a sense of appropriateness of particular material forms to particular sets of social expectations and desire within space and time" (p. 226).

Placing is linked to the notion of app ropriateness or the culturally determined factors that allow photographs as material objects to be worked with or performed in certain ways. As an Anishinabekwe the notion of placing is linked to my responsibility to acknowledge and carry out the work I received through my dream through consultation with my family to ensure it was done in a good way. Indeed, my first step was accepting and committing to working with my family photographs to produce the regalia items. This process was done together with my mother and grandmother and was commenced through putting out a tobacco offering in order to start the process in a respectful way. Following this, I went back to my collection of photographs and selected seven (7) images. Selection was based on both preexisting relationship with the images—I had already formed a strong attachment to some of the photographs—and my own intuition as an Anishinabekwe—some images simply stood out to me with a desire to be part of this work.

Instead of working on multiple items at the same time, I was instructed by my Elder to devote my time to each photograph independently. I spent time not analyzing or reading the image, but just simply sat with the image. Instead of approaching each image with a question of, "what can I do with you?" or "what do I know or remember about you?" I approached each image with, "what do you want of me?" In other words, I privileged a non-representational approach that moved away from questions about what images represent towards questions that ask what images might do and embody (see Bell, 2008; Coleman, 2011; Gell 1998; Geismar, 2009; Mitchell 2005; Wright 2009).

The shift towards this approach was also informed by teachings I had received on how to interpret Anishinabeg things within my Anishinabeg learning circle. Mainly, that instead of asking what things represent or mean, we, as Anishinabe people should be asking what meaning do these things bring us or lead us toward (Pedri-Spade 2016; Pedri, 2011). My methodological approach was also informed by my own identity as an Anishinabekwe maker and a personal responsibility to create regalia and other items that are linked to our ongoing commitment to honour our relationships with each other, our ancestors and the spirit world.

The second encounter Edwards (2012) outlines in her work on photographs and material affects is remediation or replacing, which considers the ways in which the repurposing of photographs into newly desired objects with different signifying possibilities is affected by the appropriate material practices. Remediation as a method required me to attend to the range of what Keane (2005) calls the "bundled" (p. 188) sensorial and material affects. Edwards refers to these as "haptic" multisensory embodied relations that arise when individuals view, handle, wear, and move with photographs as they perform a sense of appropriateness. As I worked materially with each photograph in a creative process that required me to bring in and work with other materials, I drew from Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) (Latour; 2005; Oppenheim, 2007), which is a descriptive process that calls upon the researcher to focus on the connections between both human and non-human entities that lead to new entities and does not discriminate between that which is human and non-human, instead approaching all entities as actuants. Actuants can be humans, animals, objects and concepts, which are treated equally in an analytical sense. I approach ANT based on its congruence with Anishinabe ontology, which takes our realities as emergent, ongoing relationships between people, things, non-human entities and the land - all of which are equal and in continuous movement within Creation.

By the end of my artistic engagement with the historical images, I produced 7 items including a jingle dress, a beaded tobacco bag, a beaded neck chocker, a velvet jingle dress with a small beaded medallion, a grandfather (big) drum, and a quilt.

In the following section, I present my research findings in a performative, dialogical text. This departure from a more "traditional" anthropological voice responds to the call to "visualize" anthropology (Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2005) by focusing on descriptive accounts that acknowledge the "recursive movement between practice and reflection" (p. 6) and emphasize more "phenomenologically inflected perspectives" (p. 7) that reinscribe the body and the senses into ethnographic practice and "writing". I will present six performed vignettes organized around the materialization of the photographs into new items. I locate this work alongside artistic/anthropological scholarship that seeks not to "analyze" social, cultural, and aesthetic practices through systematic fieldwork and theoretical devices, but that seeks to reveal inner dialogues, reverie and imagination that would oth-

erwise go unseen (see Schneider & Wright, 2013; 2010).

This approach also permits me to respect the relational aspect of knowledge production, as performative modes of representing research help bring the text into a relational view (Soyini Madison, 2005; Wilson, 2011). Following this performative pursuit, I will conclude with a discussion that reflects on the significance of working materially with photographs to Anishinabe theories of memory and the sharing of Anishinabeg knowledge about the past.

THE SETTING

The author's sewing room in her home. This is a physical place, but is also a type of liminal space that enables a temporary detachment from ordinary time and place to allow her to examine fundamental concepts and challenge them. In this space, Celeste engages with several photographs of her Anishinabe ancestors, transforming them into different regalia pieces and cultural items.

THE ACTUANTS

Celeste: Anishinabekwe (Ojibwe woman), the maker

Cha-Is: A portrait of the author's great-great grandmother, taken around the mid to late 1940s in Kashabowie, Ontario.

Shirley: A photograph of the author's grandmother, taken in 1962 in Kashabowie, Ontario.

Deafey Men: A portrait of the author's great-great grandfather John Deafey and his brother Peter Deafey taken around the early 1920s, location unknown.

Polly: A photograph of the author's great-great aunt Polly Jordon, taken around 1926, location unknown. Polly was actually a first cousin of my great great grandmother Cha-Is

Rose: A photograph of the author's great grandmother Rose Shebobman taken at her home in Kashabowie, Ontario sometime during the 1950s.

Marcia: A photograph of the author's mother taken in Thunder Bay, Ontario in 1963.

Shebobman Women: A photograph of the author's aunts, Linda Shebobman and Julia Rusnak and her great grandmother Rose Shebobman taken in Kashabowie, Ontario around the late 1960s.

CHA-IS

Celeste: What do you want me to know?

Cha-Is: Tell me what you notice.

Celeste: You're eyes are soft and you have a very pretty dress on…with what looks like a velvet collar. There is a pinkish hue to the photograph.

I am moved by the pink stain of the image surface…

I begin by dying yards of cream cotton using a pink dye. As I grab the material, I twist it up and knot it just like the fabric wound around her head in the picture. I dip the knotted fabric into the warm water. It needs to stay submersed, but it keeps bobbing to the top. My hands are back in the water. The pink liquid is pleasant, warm, comforting… I can feel her gaze in the murky pink water. I can see my own reflection in the water…

Cha-Is: What now?

Celeste: Now I unfold the fabric and let it dry.
Cha-Is: And?
Celeste: It looks like rose petals…

I think back to Kashabowie, where she lived… her last home here on earth. I am taken back to a day I spent Kashabowie with my mom and great-aunt. I remember taking a walk to the old day school where many of the women in my family went. I can recall the tree-line at the edge of the school grounds and my aunt placing one hand on a big birch tree while pointing down towards the ground at a small wild rose bush.

Aunty: You know the truancy officer that used to chase us girls back to the school when we tried to skip out, they buried his ashes someone in there. You know all we wanted to do was be with each other and mom… and grandma. You know grandma, Cha-Is, she would take us wherever she went to do work… getting spruce root, or bark or animals. I loved being with her.

Celeste: I am making you a rose dress… a jingle dress. I've beaded roses on the velvet yoke for you too. I wonder did you know how much your grandchildren wanted to be with you? What did it feel like to have no say in how they were educated… where they learned?
Cha-Is: A jingle dress?
Celeste: Yes. I know I never saw your regalia. I've heard about it though. I know it was light blue and that it had ribbons and mirror on it. It is a jingle dress because that is what I dance in..that is what my mother dances in… and that is what your granddaughter. My grandma Shirley wears.
Cha-Is: Working backwards
Celeste: But forwards with something new.
Cha-Is: They didn't teach you how to dance at school, did they?
Celeste: No. But I learned.
Cha-Is: Yes. You did.
Celeste: You aren't looking at me in the picture.. And I wonder why you aren't looking at the camera…. Why you are looking away?
Cha-Is: Looking away, or looking towards?
Celeste: Towards.
Cha-Is: Debwe.

I want others to see Cha-Is… or rather to see… how she looks outward towards me, towards a future for her kin, community.

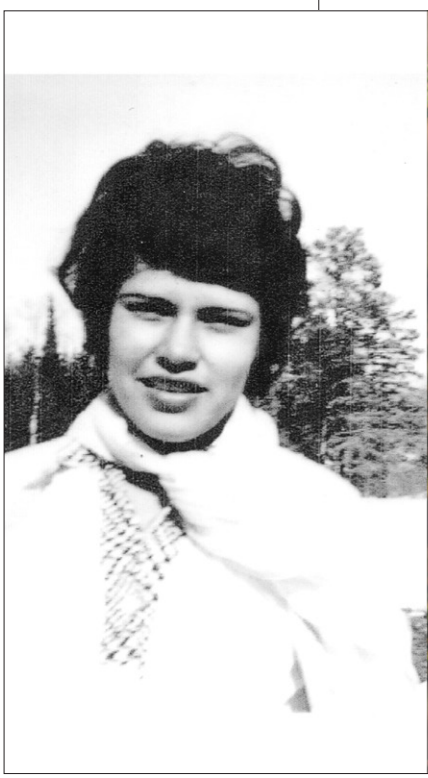
And so I get to work carving a linoleum block of her face. As I carve away pieces of the plastic with my carving blade, I am peeling back layers of time. I can sense Cha-Is scraping away at the outer layer of bark on the spruce root she used to collect to make her birch bark baskets. I can feel the strength of her hands. I can feel the roughness of her fingertips.

I roll the paint over my block and press her portrait onto the fabric… then I repeat it.. again and again. It becomes the pattern of dress. I am reminded of my mother's words: "It is really important to choose the right pattern… It is the strongest part of your dress. It is what brings everything together."

I remember the stories the women in my family share about how Cha-Is brought people together. How she brought families together. How she assisted in large ceremonial gatherings and celebrations. Gatherings, which were prohibited through the Indian Act.

Celeste: Cha-Is, this is to honour your role in bringing people together. Miigwetch ninkokum.

SHIRLEY



Celeste: Wow Grandma, you are such a looker.

Shirley: Well, even though we lived in the bush, we still did our hair, our nails. I liked to dress nice.

Celeste: It looks like it was windy out…but it is a warm, inviting wind. You look relaxed… but a bit apprehensive. This photograph is full of secret.

Shirley: And life.

Celeste: Yes, I can feel your warmth. Grandma, you were so young, beautiful and full of life.

Shirley: It is because I am pregnant with your mother here.

Celeste: She was your first child.

Shirley: Yes….with her I learned what it means to bring life into the world….

Celeste: She marked a beginning…

My heart swells…

Beginnings.

The beginning of life is always acknowledged through ceremony in our Anishinabe culture. And ceremonies are started with an offering of tobacco to start things out in a good way. I decide to make a tobacco bag with the image embroidered in small delica beads. I choose various shades of whites, greys and blacks to work with. I begin by securing the first bead. I decide to start at the centre of her eye. It is her warm gaze that moves me. I know she is looking at me. As I pull my needle back through the fabric, I am pricked by the realization that I can find her gaze is the eyes of my oldest son.

Celeste: Keeshig looks so much like you.

Shirley: My Keeshigbahnahnakut. He does, doesn't he?

I want to honour the circular relationship of life our Elders talk about. The intergenerational bonds that are the basis for everything we are as Anishinabe. I want to honour my grandmother as a life giver. I bead in a circular pattern beginning from the centre bead located in her gaze and moving outwards I build with each bead individually. As the beads lead me farther away from the centre, my process slows. It takes longer to see progress in my work and I begin to lament for her. For a time when she was separated from her first daughter, my mother.

Celeste: There was a time when you were prevented from being a mother..

Shirley: The church took your mom for a time. I was young. Our ways were different.

Celeste: It happened to lots of young Anishinabekwewag…

Shirley: Yes. It did, but I got her back.

Celeste: Yes. You did.

I pause.

There is no thread strong enough to repair this rip.

I cry.

I put more tobacco out…

Shirley: Remember my strength

Celeste: I will bead you some beautiful colourful flowers to frame your face.

Shirley: Miigwetch. Our flowers are good medicine.

I finish the beadwork and I begin the process of selecting the moose hide to construct the bag and fringe. As I sort through my collection of leather, I reach for a piece of brain-tanned moose…a coveted piece, valued for it's soft and felt-like texture. As I work with the leather, I recall the stories my aunts tell about how the old ones used to make this brain-tanned hide—how they would skin the animals, flesh the pelt. How the brains of the animal were mixed with old bars of lye soap and spread over the raw hide. How they would take all day by the stove to stretch it out… until it was dry… how their knuckles would bleed….

I breathe in the smoky smell of the leather. It sticks to my fingertips….

Shirley: When I was a young girl it was my job to look after my grandpa, your great great grandpa, John. I used to make the fire so that I could make him his favourite potatoes. I would bury them and cook them in the ashes. He loved the smoky taste.

Celeste: Yes, I can see the ashes in the beaded flecks of your hair here!

I run my hands over the finished piece…her hair, her cheek, her mouth… I follow each bead and the tips of my fingers follow the circular path. I can trace the continuity of life… the struggle of a mother, a grandmother.

Celeste: Yes. And you look after us so well!

THE DEAFEY MEN

Celeste: What stylish and sophisticated Anishinabeiniwag! I like your hat Choomish.

The Deafey Men (John): We owned them. Look at the fit.

Celeste: Yes, your clothing looks perfectly tailored. It suits you well.

I am drawn back to John's hat, the way it is cocked slightly to the left. I wonder if this was intentional? A fashionable defiance of a man who didn't always play by the rules? I am drawn to their eyes…Peter's slight shift of the eyes signals a distrust, a hesitance, and yet a practiced skill…to be watchful and cautious. I then direct my focus back to John. His mouth is slightly open and his right hand hangs at waist level. I can sense that this is his habit. That he holds his hand this way for a reason. I know this because I have seen this hand before. I have witnessed this habitual stance in many of our men who are skilled drummers and singers.

John: I drummed on the big drum. I knew the songs… Peter too. Your great-great granny and I would host gatherings at Bass Lake.

Celeste: Yes I have seen another image…the one with you drumming…

Celeste: I want to make you a drum…a grandfather drum. A beautiful drum… with the best… thickest… moose hide.

John (laughing): Why, you don't like my old the wash-board drum?

I begin my work by soaking the raw hide in a large pail of water. As it soaks, I check on it sporadically to see if it soft enough and ready to work with. Once enough water has penetrated the skin, I reach into the water to lift it out. I am struck by how heavy the raw hide has become. My forearms burn and I can barely manage to lift the skin. I think of how much work it must have been for John and these men to carry around their drums, their regalia, and everything else needed to look after our Anishinabe people during gatherings and ceremonies… how they would have to walk four hours, miles into the bush, because back then what they were doing was outlawed by the Canadian government. The weight of the soaked hide is the measure of his dedication and perseverance.

I cut a round piece for the top of the drum and I cut another circle to make the string… I continue to cut around the edge of the circle, going around, making the circle smaller and smaller as the length of thick skin continues to grow…

The Deafey Men (Peter): That string you are making it called the babeesh.

John: It is like the embilical cord that attaches us to our mothers…

I look back to the image of my great great grandfather drumming. I can see the concerted effort on his face as he strikes the drum. As I continue my work and stretch the hide over the drum frame, looping the babeesh through each cut hole along the edge, my hands begin to blister... and I can feel the rough calluses on the spot on his hand, at that point where his fingers meet his palm... where his holds his drum stick as he strikes the surface with each beat. I put the strung drum aside. As it dries over the next few days, I can hear the sharp crackle of the hide as it dries and tightens. I can hear the drum coming to life. I hear these men sing. I can hear their songs...

The Deafey Men (Peter): We used to have to post someone at the edge of the clearing to act as a lookout in case anyone came. We made sure that the site was guarded thick brush.

Celeste: You had to hide.

The Deafey Men (Both): Yes. We did. But we still carried on...

I want to honour their tenacity and I want to do it in a way that privileges their presence. I want them to know that they no longer have to hide. I want every man who will drum on this drum to be looking into their faces, to feel their presence, to acknowledge their struggle every time they strike the surface. I want my sons to sing honour beats for these men.

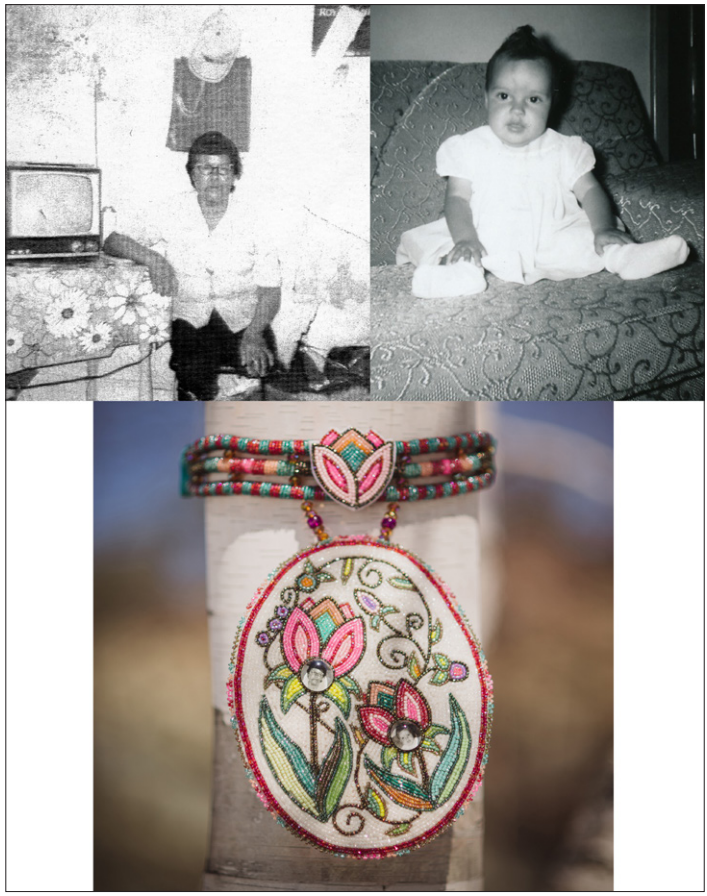
Celeste: I am going to paint your image on the drum.

The Deafey Men (Both): How?

Celeste: Just as your image is burned into my mind, my heart and my body, I am going to burn it into a screen with light and use this to mark you onto the drum.

I finish the drum by framing their image with bright Ojibwe floral work. But unlike the border of trees and shrubs that cut them off from a world that would persecute them, this border encircles them in a gratitude for and celebration of their song... and their style.

ROSE AND MARCIA



Celeste: Two separate photos. Two lives. Two hearts… apart.

Rose: Yes… a picture of us together doesn't exist.

Celeste: I know. I looked.

Rose: We didn't want it that way. It didn't have to be that way.

I want to do something that ties these people together, grandmother and granddaughter who spent years separated. I look for direction in the presence of my great grandmother…

Celeste: Grandma Rose, the way your arms are placed, the left one hanging low on your lap, the other resting on the table. You are like a mother bear in summer guarding over her young cubs. You were a protector. You were a healer. You cared for your family…

I go back to the image of my mother as an infant. There is something out of place and unsettling to me about this image. She seems alone, teetering on a large sofa…I desperately want her to be in the arms of her grandmother. I feel frustrated by these images. I look within the photographs… I look at what is around the women for guidance and I am still lost. I pick up the image of my mother and I attack it with a pair of scissors. I cut away at the image. As the pieces fall, I feel gratified. I feel freedom. As the image becomes smaller, and I am only left with her small face in the cradle of my hand…

Rose: Now what…
Celeste: Now I can start something new…
Rose: New life
Celeste: Yes. New growth

I cut away at the image of Rose in the same way as I did to the photograph of my mother. I place both faces in front of me and start to draw flowers around them. With each line I draw, these women become closer. Each curve and connection bends the years. The flowers become the medicine to carry these two women- to reframe their stories. As I finish the design and start the beading, I find a space where their lives can connect. I recall how both were skilled makers… sewers, beaders. How they were both mothers, caretakers, and excellent cooks. As I secure each strand of bead and the flowers take shape, I see these women inextricably bound by their roles and responsibilities as life givers…

POLLY

Celeste: My great great choomish is drumming for you Polly.

Polly: I am dancing hard.

Celeste: I can tell… in your jingle dress. A healing dress.

Polly: Yes, the influenza pandemic and war took many of our people… many of our young people…

Celeste: Are you dancing for yourself or for the healing of someone else, perhaps?

Polly: You can't separate the two…

I can sense a sadness in Polly's body, but as she brings her left foot forward, I am deeply aware of the work being done here…how her step attempts to lift the eclipse of sorrows that I, myself, have found myself journeying through in the dance circle. I can feel that Polly is tired and I can see evidence of this in her dress as well…

Celeste: Some of your mirrors on your dress have fallen off, Polly!

Polly: Yes, and they are important because they protect us from all of the negative spirits and intentions that may surround us in the dance circle…

I am moved to remake Polly's dress for her. I select a black velvet. It is rich and soft, and yet one of the most difficult fabrics to work with. It is a struggle, maneuvering the plush cloth through my machine. I reflect on the struggles of Polly… of my ancestors… of the hardness of their lives. In the velvet I can touch their unwavering devotion. As I continue in my work, I think back to a discussion I had with Polly's granddaughter, our cousin Maddy about Polly's dress… of how this dress was likely taken apart years later after the birth of Polly's daughter, Josie to make her little baby a wagejiibism…[9]

Celeste: You really were a diligent and resourceful kwe10, Polly. I have heard many stories of how you and Cha-Is and Menigotchigan used to travel around the Shebandowan and Kashabowie areas, helping people with your medicines and ceremony.

Polly: That's what our Anishinabekwewag do. We look after all the people.

I begin to fasten the small metal cones to the dress and as I move along each row, I can see Polly and these Anishinabekwewag moving from home to home. Each row of jingles is a village of families. I begin to place the

[9] Baby carrier

[10] Slang for "woman"

diamond shaped mirrors on the fabric. As I fasten them in place, I see my own reflection and I know that Polly is reminding me of my own role in looking after my family and community. With the last cone and mirror in place, I stand back and look at the finished dress…

Celeste: Something is missing… This isn't done.
Polly: mhmmm…
Celeste: I think it is time for you to rest, Polly.

I think of Polly's tireless work. I can run my hands across her leathered face and feel the years of fishing, trapping, ricing, praying, visiting, skinning, basket weaving, berry picking… I want this dress to be different. I want this dress to carry Polly… to provide a respite. And so I bead a small portrait of Polly dancing and I place it around the neck of the dress…

Polly: I am not dancing the dress, the dress is dancing me…
Celeste: Yes Polly. From you I understand the dress looks after us as much as we look use it to look after our Anishinabe people.

SHEBOBMAN WOMEN

Celeste: You ladies look like you mean business. You exude confidence and strength…
Shebobman Women: (laughing)

I can immediately hear their jokes and laughter in this photograph. I can see and hear what came after this photograph was taken… someone making a joke followed by a chorus of cackles, heads thrown back…

Shebobman Women (All): AAAYEEESH… Schkmaa![11] (laughing)

This photograph brings forward many moments full of laughter, many moments of women gathered around me. Relaxed. Confident. Resilient. I find comfort and security here. I find protection. I want to make a blanket to honour these women. A blanket brings warmth. It is what Anishinabe exchange in appreciation and gratitude. It is what is used in ceremony to help look after people….

Celeste: Where were you three in this picture?

Shebobman Women (All): In Kashabowie…some of us didn't live here anymore but we always came back to be with family…even when things changed and people moved. This is our home.

I begin the process of transforming the image…the outlines of their bodies to applique that can be quilted with. I create a pattern from the photograph and as I

[11] Slang for "get out of here!"

stand back and look at my work, I immediately find the rock paintings left by my ancestors… the marks around our winter hunting grounds now within the boundaries of a Provincial Park…

Celeste: I am thinking about Sturgeon Lake 57…
Shebobman Women (All): Where grandpa's family came from. They were forced out.

As I trace the applique pattern onto the black material, I work through this story of displacement. As I carefully cut the black piece, I feel like I am navigating through the winding lakes and rivers that my family knew intimately… I recall reading the testimony of a non-Indigenous settler. A diary entry that relates the horror of police forcing a group of Ojibwe families, women, children, and men from their hunting grounds near Atikokan in the middle of winter… of how he was certain they would die…

Celeste: But they didn't. They persevered…
Shebobman Women (All): We are survivors…
Celeste: Warriors.

I frame their image with quilted feathers, made with pieces of material I accumulated over the years from making people's skirts, ribbon shirts, dresses….

Celeste: You see… I made you three warriors your own headdress!
Shebobman Women: "AAYEEESH" (laughing).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

My performative ethnographic vignettes are both evocative and conceptually productive because they work to dispel the mind versus matter binary that supports the myth that "memory is about minds rather than it is about things" (Stallybrass 1993, as cited in Freeman, Nienass & Daniell, 2016, p. 47). They work to privilege the intersections of experience, sensation, and meaning that we access through a direct engagement with materials. Geismar (2009) illustrates how through their materiality, photographs provide a malleable base for infinite and even playful reproduction, but what often prevents individuals from exploring these possibilities is a Eurocentric tendency to limit our understanding of photographs to

only authentic representations of a 'real' event, person, or artefact. I argue, that this limitation is also linked to a restricted understanding of a photograph as only a mnemonic device, as opposed to mnemonic assemblage, which also shapes and congeal memory by way of its materiality. Bennet (2010) defines assemblage as:

> ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts…Assemblages are living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent of energies that confound them from within." (p. 23)

While the materiality of the photograph triggered my creative intent and activity, there were times when the materials made their own choices, propelling me forward in new directions. Take, for example the creation of the rose-coloured jingle dress (figure 2). By permitting the material aspects of this image (the knotted fabric around her head) guide me, there were key moments where the material properties (e.g. cloth, fabric dye, water) interacted in a manner that literally and figuratively "pushed-back" against me, forcing me in to envision not only the image of Cha-Is, but to find myself in her reflection. In this case several components of the photograph (the fabric around her head, her gaze, the pink wash of the photograph) affected me in a way desribed by Barthes (1981) as the photograph's "punctum", which provokes a more intense and personal reaction in the viewer. Barthes positions the punctum as the ultimate imitation of death because the photograph of his relation invokes a sense of his own impending death; therefore, photography is ultimately about that which has been and no longer is. Unlike, Barthes working materially with this punctum, I found that the photograph is about what has been and still is. Therefore, I suggest that the life of the materials I worked with, experienced through my living body, lead to a 'punctum' that is a reaffirmation of life.

In making different material choices around accessing and attaining knowledge of my historical photographs, I confirmed Johnson's (2016) assertion that in accessing and producing knowledge of the past, people tend to lean towards things that they are most familiar with because people can best understand and connect with things when we can already relate to them. Yet, in remaining close to the materials and processes most familiar to me, I chart very new, unfamiliar territory, entering and exploring a liminal and spiritual space of creative production.

This is a vibrant and limitless space where I become engulfed in a powerful wave of ancestral presence that includes past people, stories, places, experiences, feelings, sights, sounds, and smells. As I engaged in the processes of assemblage that included stretching, sewing, beading, cutting, etc., their presence became inscribed within my body, mind and spirit. In this way, I became implicated as part of my ancestral past and not simply a distant witness or knower of past events and people.

Friedman (2002) reminds us that visual artists often work in expressive forms that resist language. The memories of my ancestors inspired me to work with them, they led me to materialize them in ways that honoured my own identity and artistic ability. In turn, the process of materializing the photographs led me towards not only the recovery of memory, but also a discovery of a new understanding or appreciation for the memory itself. This illustrates, how, dialectically, we both produce and are products of historical processes (Pinney, 2005) and this increased appreciation for memory is consistent with Anishinabe worldwiew which is grounded in relational accountability and responsibility—that it is not sufficient that we access information about the past, but that we also honour and celebrate it- as I have mentioned previously, we wear our teachings. Indeed, we wear them proudly. With each stitch, I was putting something back into the world that embodied our relationship, our co-presence.

Indeed other Indigenous groups have illustrated this idea of wearing our teachings, engaging with photographs in new material ways to represent some aspect of the ancestors or to convey their presence among people today (see Geismar 2010; 2009; Bell 2010; 2008; Roberts & Roberts, 1996). The final pieces neither represent my ancestors stories nor embody do they embody their presence. Rather, they materialize our relationship made possible through connecting to the photograph as a "material architecture" (Schneider, 2012, p. 143). In this process memory becomes a limitless series of reverberations that ricocheted back and forth with each stitch, with each movement, with every imagining and every placement. This is quite different than conceptualizing memory as a repository or filing cabinet as (Freeman, Nienass & Daniell, 2016) state, and is closely aligned with the concept of memory as a set of liminal practices (see Giddons, 2007), yet it differs because this process is not completely accidental or spontaneous, rather, it is grounded in the Anisinabeg practices, values, and relationships that permit me to work with photographs as material things and the

corresponding specific materials, techniques, tools and actions. Of course, this process is dependent on the fact that making is an emergent one as well—that these items are composed through ongoing relationships involving the maker and materials (Miller, 2010; Ingold & Hallam, 2007; Ingold, 2013; 2010, 2007; Knappet, 2007). And that the resulting form and style of each item is a result of processes that are done with the whole body of a person (see Pink, 2009; 2006). Therefore, I locate Anishinabe memory as a set of relational practices.

Several researchers (see Edwards, 1997; 2009; Edwards & Hart, 2004; Glass, 2009; Porto, 2004) explore how particular choices related to the material production of photographs reveal particular attitudes and beliefs about history—as Edwards (2009) states, through their materiality historical photographs reveal not a fear of potential loss of the past, but rather a concern with a future that does not relate to the past (p. 133). Thus, it is not simply a matter of packaging up historical information so that future generations will possess the past. Rather, careful choices around the materiality of the information need to be made so as to ensure that future generations are able to engage with or relate to the past. This became very clear when I chose to select the smoked brain-tanned hide to complete the tobacco bag instead of a commercial hide. As the smoky smell of the leather rubbed off on my fingertips, I envisioned the experiences of my grandmother as a young girl cooking over the fire for her grandfather. This is consistent with the way in which some cultural items do not symbolize thought so much as stimulate and provoke it (Roberts and Roberts, 1996). Barber (2007) makes a similar point about how memory should not be thought of as a file cabinet in which people deposit past events, but as a "guiding hand of consciousness" (p. 11) that helps us remember the way.

The imperative to remember the way is, perhaps, deeply felt by those whose histories have been suppressed through colonial and imperial ideology and practices. Trouillot (1995, 1993) attributes the erasures of 'insider' histories to the ontological limitations of the dominant colonizing group. Pursuant to this logic, the re-presencing of histories and knowledges of those fighting against colonialism, like Anishinabeg, is impacted by the ability to transcend these limitations. This includes moving beyond memory as a filing cabinet or photographs as evidence. Several authors reveal how different material architectures impact the knowledge about reality imparted through their physical forms and the performative

conditions of their production (Edwards & Hart, 2004; Glass, 2009; Porto 2004). The fact that different things mediate different experiences and generate different kinds of knowledges becomes very significant when one considers how memory emerges out of both individual subjective experiences and shared social processes (Connerton, 1989; Evans, 2012; Coombes, 2003; Gillespie, 2010). While, this research focused on the materialization of my ancestral photographs, which was a very personal endeavor, future research can explore the role of the finished items as they continue in their spiritual life—when the dances are danced, the beadwork is proudly worn. When the drum is sounded and the tobacco bag is passed around different drums at community.

Through this process, of what Bell (2008, p. 125) refers to as "the praxis through which people articulate their eyes and their bodies in relation to pictures" I reveal that Anishinabeg memory encapsulates more that the ability to recall information about past people, places, and events, experienced either directly or indirectly through stories shared. Rather Anishinabeg memory is a visceral, tangible, relational, and sensorial experience and that carving out spaces that privilege our creativity, intuition, and imagination helps strengthen our relationship to our ancestral past, now and into the future. This is significant given that as time passes, relationships between the physical or digital traces of the past and the history behind them can often become separated (Hevenor, 2013). By acknowledging and carrying through with my dream of transforming my ancestral photographs to regalia and cultural items and by locating Anishinabeg photographs as distinct Indigenous things, I have transcended ontological and methodological limitations associated with conceptualizing photographs as simply an indexical trace and instead have traced, or rather, stitched, through the different relationships between actuants made visible, sensible and knowable through a material and phenomenoloically-oriented approach that is informed by my teachings and identity as an Anishinabekwe. This research is significant to Indigenous communities and their allies in the work at reclaiming and re-presencing Anishinabeg histories and knowledge, as Trouillot (1995) states:

> we all need histories that no history book can tell, but they are not in the classroom…They are in the lessons we learn at home, in poetry and childhood games, in what is left of history when we close the history books with their verifiable facts. (p. 71)

I curl the last gold metal cone around the knotted piece of ribbon at the hemline of the dress and as I pinch the top of it with the large pliers I can feel the ache in my palm. My hands are tired and my arms are stiff. My mind is worn-out from the many travels I have taken with each memoried stitch. I stand back and look at my finished work, smiling at Cha-Is looking back at me. I lift the dress off the form and can feel the weight of history in my arms. I unzip it carefully and step inside. I have never been so careful, so cautious and gentle. As I pull up the zipper, I turn to face the mirror and for the first time, I see our reflections together. And as all jingle dancers know, the heavy weight disappears, as each part of me bears a part of the dress.

As I stand there, my little boy enters the room and immediately rushes for my skirt, brushing the cones, laughing as he jumps up and down. I jump with him and we start to dance…and the room fills with a metallic downpour of love and spirit… and for a brief moment all three of us dance together.

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