

Methodological Considerations for Intercultural Arts Research: Phenomenology, Ethnography, Collage Narrative, and Ethics

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Abstract

Living and working with Ojibwe participants in northern Minnesota informed a phenomenological approach to my three-month multi-sited ethnography. This research encompassed aspects of oral history and arts inquiry to investigate artistic processes, personal histories, and community relations of Ojibwe participants. I sought situational meaning generated between Ojibwe participants and my varied roles as an arts researcher, apprenticing artist, laborer, house caretaker, student and friend in order to articulate relational understandings of arts-mediated experiences. These experiences generated narrative content as collage and continuously directed the flow of the study, shifted my inquiry process, smudged my positionalities, and carefully informed my reflexive research ethics.

Keywords

intercultural arts research, ethics of care, decolonizing methodologies, phenomenology,
narrative

Introduction

There is an instability concerning human sensorial experiences. As we are startled, we notice, perceive, look, and then attempt to understand. We inhale; sniff, sniff once more, and again, we take in our surroundings. Sound pierces and passes through our bodies and as our bodies perceive, it creeps in without pause and announces presence to confirm our own. Sensorial perception is not linear or stable, we seek a return to the initial engagement, sometimes for clarification, waiting for a repetition, or acting immediately, perhaps defensively

if we perceive stimuli that fail to align with our own established schemata (McVee, Dunsmore, Gavelek, 2005). I discuss the importance of phenomenology (Ratcliffe, 2012; van Manen, 1990) within ethnography (Maso, 2001) to generate critical proximity (Simon, 2010) in collage narrative (Garoian, 2004), and my participant-observer relationships with Ojibwe artists and ethics grounded in care (Noddings, 1988; Slote 2007).

This writing also elicits my work to decenter my researcher-identity as an academic, privileged, white, middle-class, male in the narrative account of a hand drum workshop held at the Leech Lake Tribal College in northern Minnesota. The community art event is collaged with previous experiences as a Boy Scout of America (BSA) and original poetry concerning the hand drum workshop experiences. Garoian (2004) suggests: “In the in-between spaces of the fragments of collage, where knowledge is mutable and indeterminant, there exist opportunities for creative and political intervention and production” (p. 26). I posit collage narrative in this context works to decolonize-the-self as well as decolonize dominant research methodologies by drawing past experiences together and disrupting “Western linear logic” as Indigenous scholar Wilson (2008) states “...Indigenous ways of knowing insist on a more circular approach...” (p. 39). The three-month multi-sited ethnography significantly impacted my ontology and in the process I find commonality with Indigenous scholar Smith’s (2012) statement: “...researchers who choose to research with and for marginalized communities are often in the margins themselves in their own institutions” (p. 206).

Negotiating My Positionalities with Ethics of Care

As a non-Native researcher in Indigenous contexts, I oscillate between phenomenological and critical objective stances and attend to the inherent simultaneous impossibility of participant observation, while working with five Ojibwe artists for three months and sustaining some of these relationships for the past three years. Ratcliffe (2011) clarifies that a phenomenological stance “involve[s] (i) recognition of an aspect of experience that our everyday concerns presuppose; (ii) a commitment to reflect upon it; and (iii) at least some appreciation of what the relevant phenomenological achievement consists of...” (p. 482). I sensed, interpreted, recorded and felt the fleeting and the indelible in relationship to my consciousness, while attempting to understand local Ojibwe artist’s orientation to their ecology and their artwork. Ratcliffe’s stance suggests that “phenomenological reduction” isn’t a necessary requirement, which involves a “...complete bracketing of the natural attitude where the everyday world that we inhabit becomes an object of reflection for some mysterious, detached, observational consciousness” (p. 482). Maso (2001) further states, “strict bracketing

of all presuppositions and prejudices about phenomena must be considered a myth” (p. 138). Ultimately, shared experiences were constituted by critical proximities of perception with Ojibwe artists, materials, and their ecologies that permeated my body and in turn constituted my embodiment and consciousness while working in northern Minnesota (Figure 1). Since intersubjectivity was central, I also established and maintained ethical reciprocal relationships with care and empathy (Noddings, 1988; Ratcliffe, 2011; Slote, 2007; Wilson, 2008).

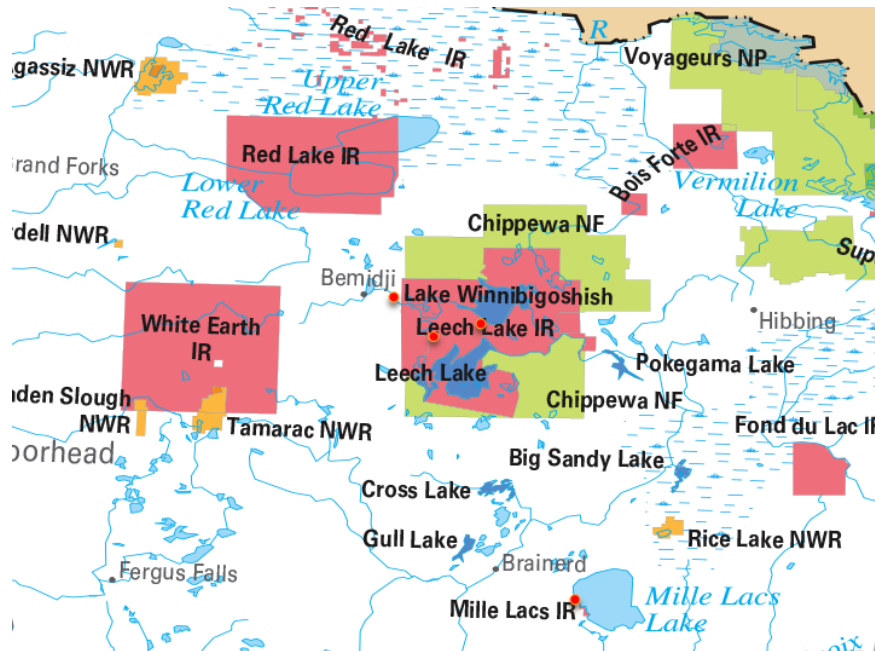


FIGURE 1 THE RED DOTS APPROXIMATE LOCATIONS OF ARTIST-PARTICIPANTS' HOMES. NATIONAL ATLAS OF THE UNITED STATES, JANUARY 15, 2013, [HTTP://NATIONALATLAS.GOV](http://nationalatlas.gov)

I worked with Melvin Losh, Dewey and Bambi Goodwin, and Jim Jones Jr, all who identify as Anishinaabe artists living within or near Leech Lake Reservation in northern Minnesota and Pat Kruse who lives within Mille Lacs Reservation (see Table 1).¹ I developed three questions to guide my research of the artists' processes, meaning-making choices, relationships to the community, and how the artworks inform particular communities: 1). How is meaning constructed, implied, and conveyed in multiple and various Ojibwe arts? 2). What relationships

¹ Both Anishinaabe and Ojibwe are used interchangeably, as both terms were used for self-identification of participating artists. Anishinaabe is preferred as it was the first term used to self-describe.

are constituted through the artists' practices and/or products? 3). In what ways do the artists' practices and/or products inform local contexts, identities, and cultural positions?

Over the course of three months, lived experiences with Ojibwe participants informed the phenomenological aspects of the multi-sited ethnography constituted by three sites of research: the network of relations, the participants' contributions, and reflexivity (Marcus, 2011). This approach encompassed aspects of oral history and arts inquiry to investigate artistic processes, personal histories, and community relations of Ojibwe participants. Oral history "positions the researcher and participant[s] in a collaborative relationship [...] in which both parties are integral to the data generation process" (Leavy, 2011, p. 8). This approach "assumes that meaning isn't 'waiting out there' to be discovered," or uncovered, "but rather that meaning is generated during the research process" (Leavy, 2011, p. 7). Situational meaning between Ojibwe participants and my varied roles as an arts researcher, apprenticing artist, laborer, friend, and house caretaker articulated relational understandings of arts-mediated experiences. Kusenbach (2003) suggests the "go-along" is defined as "spending a particular yet comparable slice of ordinary time" with participants (p. 463). Time spent with Ojibwe artists ranged between two and twelve hours, although most events averaged between five and six hours. These experiences generated important content and continuously directed the flow of the study, often shifting my inquiry process and informing my research ethics.

Participant	Tribal Affiliation & Residence	Creative Medium	Occupation	Time with Participants: Conversations Art making & Labor	Forms of Data Collection
Duane (Dewey) Goodwin	White Earth Band Member, resides near Leech Lake Reservation	Stone work: Alabaster, African Wonder Stone, Dolomite, Brazilian Soapstone Paints watercolors and acrylic, bead artist	Art Instructor at Leech Lake Tribal College, Artist	Approx. 260 hours	Informal interviews, photographic documentation, field notes, practical experiences harvesting spruce roots and birch bark, carving Brazilian soapstone, cutting elk hide for a workshop

Teresa (Bambi) Goodwin	White Earth Band Member, resides near Leech Lake Reservation	Clay work: Functional pottery, smudge bowls Painting and beadwork	Substitute Instructor in local schools, Artist	Approx. 160 hours – not interested in participating initially, but decided later to become a participant	Informal interviews, photographic documentation, field notes, attended and cut elk hide for a hand drum workshop
Melvin Losh	Leech Lake Band Member - resides	Quill and Bead work: Quill boxes, Bandolier bags, pipe bags, moccasins, regalia	Artist	Approx. 71 hours	Informal interviews, photographic and video documentation, field notes, practical experiences harvesting birch bark, trimming and cleaning the bark into oval and circular shapes, dying, sorting, and applying porcupine quills to birch bark
Jim Jones, Jr.	Leech Lake Band Member and resides on Leech Lake Reservation	Replica pottery, flint knapping, birch bark canoes	Cultural Resource Director of the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council (MIAC), Artist	Approx. 48 hours	Informal interviews, photographic documentation, field notes, practical experiences harvesting and splitting spruce roots and cedar logs and harvesting birch bark
Pat Kruse	Relation with Mille Lacs band of Ojibwe and Red Cliff. Resides on Mille Lacs Reservation	Birch Bark work: Pictorial-layered bark collages, baskets, winnowing trays, mirror frames	Artist	Approx. 18 hours – over 3 hours away from other participants and infrequent contact	Informal interviews, photographic documentation, field notes, attended a birch bark basket workshop at Mille Lacs Indian Museum, practical experiences creating two birch bark baskets

TABLE 1 OJIBWE ARTISTS WHO AGREED TO PARTICIPATE.

I embraced the research open to the unknown as a participant-observer “defined or redefined specifically by reference to the actual study setting” (Jorgensen, 1987, p. 18). I adjusted my focus and methods slowly in response to my participants as the fieldwork unfolded. Accordingly, anthropologist Marcus (2011) states, “there is not only a tolerance for, but even an expectation of, a shift in plans in fieldwork” (p. 22). While I prioritized listening to all participants, I clearly communicated my purpose to each contact that I made while in the field, where I was from, and my intentions concerning meaning processes of Ojibwe art making and relationships within the community. I aimed to be as transparent in my relations as

possible, always asking permission to take photographs, waiting for invitations to return another day, for art-making events, for attending workshops, meals, and other events such as the Memorial Day Powwow.

Since I refrained from direct and formally constructed interviews, which I felt would disrupt the flow of unfolding events or make participants feel uncomfortable; I listened intently, sometimes refraining from field notation until I left the company of the participant. I avoided asking direct questions whenever possible, which resonates with Newhouse's (2008) differences between asking questions in the academy and the delicate nature of seeking information from elders:

How does one question an elder? In the academy we ask professors questions all the time, asking direct questions and expecting direct answers. A lack of understanding is often interpreted as a problem in explanation, a problem of telling rather than a problem of listening. Elders would respond to questions with stories, fully expecting the student to answer his or her own question...We have had both to teach how to respond to each other and to learn how to relate to one another in a new way. (pp. 192-193)

Maintaining the role of student, I abided by these teachings as a listener and only openly wrote field notes when permission was granted and specifically when I was directed by the participant to record particular information. I also followed the lead of participants and informants, while working to decenter any preconceived purposes I had intentioned with an ethic of care. Feminist philosopher Noddings posits that ethics of care requires "...appropriate signs of reciprocity. This does not mean that participants in dialogue must give up any principles they hold and succumb to relativism" (1988, p. 223). Developing a "relational ethic" means that "the first member of the relational dyad (the carer or 'one caring') responds to the needs, wants, and initiations of the second" (p. 219). Throughout my study I sought to develop reciprocity with participants through an ethic of care, although my process differed from that described by Noddings, since the Ojibwe participants in my study were not in need. Contrary to the point, I was highly dependent upon as an outsider on their participation. Poignantly, Noddings (1988) suggests that the initiator of care "is characterized by *engrossment* (nonselective attention or total presence to the other for the duration of the caring interval) and *displacement of motivation* (her motive energy flows in the direction of the other's needs and projects)" (p. 219-20, emphasis in original). Therefore, an ethic of care is constituted by all those involved and Wilson (2008) concludes, "...relationship building that this sharing and

participating [entails] is an important aspect of ethical Indigenous research” (p. 40). Conversations and long visitations also provided an opportunity to determine my own understanding since participants often led our conversation and art making, which offered moments for me to ask follow-up questions that could clarify my interpretations (Jorgensen, 1987; Kusenbach, 2003; Leavy, 2011).

Relationships determined my intersubjective orientation for understanding among peoples, animals, plants, materials, and contexts defined by harvesting expeditions, fishing excursions, conversations, and shared meals. These lived experiences are contingent upon “[/]*lived space* (spatiality) [which] is felt space... [and] is largely pre-verbal...” (van Manen, 1990, p. 102, emphasis in original). Van Manen’s (1990) lived space emphasizes a phenomenological orientation to lifeworld essences that informs Ingold’s (2007) meshwork in which “[p]ersons and things, then are formed in the meshwork as knots or bundles...” and constituted my arts research ontology (p. 35). Ingold suggests that meshwork is an entanglement of relationships, which constitutes both human and non-human relations. Ultimately, these relationships generated participants’ storied experiences, which sometimes resurfaced in their cultural production and artwork. This resulted in a broader orientation as ecology of materials and their impact on human relationships. I share Ratcliffe’s (2011) claim that “a phenomenological stance can be integrated into our attempts to engage with the experiences of others” (p. 486). Ojibwe arts processes and relationships to community were expanded upon by experiencing “the role of place in everyday lived experience” (Kusenbach, 2003, p. 463), evident in Losh’s and Kruse’s use of locally harvested birch bark for various forms of baskets and Jones’ canoes, or Losh’s use of quills harvested from porcupine carcasses hit by cars and left on the side of the road.

The following narrative is an excerpt of my experience attending a hand drum workshop hosted by Anishinaabe artists Duane (Dewey) and Teresa (Bambi) Goodwin. The Goodwins invited me to attend their workshop held at the Leech Lake Tribal College located in Cass Lake, Minnesota during the summer of 2012. This experience is collaged with my original poetry and my early experiences as a Boy Scout of America inducted to the Order of the Arrow.²

² The manuscript text is marked with ellipses to demarcate intentional delays to gesture a break from the previous line of thought. The narrative concerning the author’s early experiences as a Boy Scout of America in Western Pennsylvania during the early 1990’s are italicized and the poetry is center-justified to also demarcate a shift in time, place, and content.

...

My nerves were heightened, knowing that I was an outsider and entering late to a local community event. In a quiet flurry I opened the door to the B-wing building of Leech Lake Tribal College, while managing two plastic-grocery bags filled with a bag of tortilla chips, a jar of salsa, and a large jug of pink lemonade. The smell of burning sage wafted out as I crossed the threshold. I burrowed deeper into the sage-filled-building down the dimly lit hallway, following the smell of sage. I thought by finding the origin I would find my destination, the art studio. Two Ojibwe stood outside of the art studio, near the threshold. I greeted them, smiled, and said “Hi,” nodded my head and passed by them while entering the art studio. I wasn’t sure why they were standing there and I felt awkward entering into the space, while they stood waiting at the door. I hesitated. Was I privileging myself under the assumption that I was invited by the Goodwins to be there as a White researcher?

...

The moon was out in the woods at Camp Heritage on the night I was initiated as a member of the Boy Scouts Order of the Arrow. I sat outside my tent in silence and began to feel hunger pangs. Out of the dark, I heard the snap of fallen twigs and leaves underfoot. Startled, nervous, and excited, I knew they were coming for me. Two boy-scouts dressed as “Indians” summoned me, wrapped a piece of cloth across my eyes and took me through the woods. They led me to an unknown location in the woods, took the cloth off of my eyes, and sat me down with those who were summoned, which marked the beginning of our initiation ceremony into the Order of the Arrow. Several large bonfires were lit; they were at least fifteen feet in height. We were told:

Eat you nothing but the scant food you’ll be given. Learn by fasting, sacrifice, and self-denial to subordinate personal desires to the spirit’s higher purpose. [...] Spend the day in arduous labor, working gladly, not begrudging, seek to serve, and thus be faithful to the high ideals and purpose of the Order of the Arrow. [...] All your strength will be required when you face the isolation that a leader often faces. So tonight beneath the heavens sleep alone upon your groundsheet. (BSA, 1989, p. 11)

...

I placed my food and drink at the end of a table nearby a small crock-pot that simmered with manoomin [i.e. wild rice], peppered with venison sausage. I noticed ham, lettuce and cheese sandwiches packed neatly within a plastic bag that once held a full loaf of bread

adjacent to puffy wheat biscuits and bright red raspberry and rhubarb sauce. I would find out later that these were some of the Goodwin's signature dishes. Both Dewey and Bambi had already begun the process of aiding the hand-drum workshop participants in stretching waterlogged elk hide over an eighteen-inch ash ring that was nearly three inches deep. I placed two plastic Ziplock bags that contained a folded whole leaf of tobacco on a small and centrally located table. Since I arrived after the workshop began I wasn't sure if anyone else gave tobacco to the Goodwins before they started the workshop to thank them for the event and feast that would follow. Sage smoldered on the table, signaling that the Goodwins began with a ceremony giving thanks for the elk hide and prayers for a successful workshop.

I intended my gift of tobacco to the Goodwins as a sign of respect and appreciation for inviting me to their workshop and for sharing their cultural pedagogy and knowledge with me. My request to learn, observe, contribute food, drink and help was intertwined with my intentions of respect and appreciation embedded in the ceremonial gift of tobacco (see Slivka 2015; Wilson and Restoule, 2010).

I woke in the early morning with the other boys and we stood silently, since we were not permitted to talk for the entire duration of the ceremony and during the service project known as the Ordeal. We were led through the woods, given nothing to eat or drink. When we cleared the woods, all of the newly inducted members and I stood at one end of the dike located on Lake Courage.

I sat at a distance from the participants, but near enough that I could witness the activity. The Goodwins' workshop was open to community members both Ojibwe and non-Ojibwe. As I wrote down my initial observations I quickly noticed that I was being watched. I felt uncomfortable by the distance that was between me and the workshop participants and I was literally set apart. Was I welcome? Did I just fulfill their expectations as a White researcher; pushing into a space that wasn't my own? I recalled being invited by the Goodwins, but quickly understood that I was not very important within the workshop context making an introduction unnecessary. I tried to maintain my position on the fringe of the event, but realized that I would eventually have to move from the margins to the center.

...

The sun beat down upon us as we removed debris and plant material growing on the surface of the dike. I pulled weeds that were identified as unwanted plants and collected them in a black trash bag. From time to time I restacked rocks along the surface of the dike in order to maintain structural integrity that was established by previous Boy Scouts, described least as White men.

...

Two students from the local Tribal College, who I passed earlier, were signaled to enter the room and Dewey exclaimed, "I have two more rounds [for stretching elk hide], there's enough [materials]." Goodwin efficiently solved a potential over-enrollment issue. I opened up my small black field notebook and jotted, "[Dewey] balls up the sage & light [sic] it for 2 people who show up after it [the hand-drum workshop] started." Burning sage wafted in the Tribal College art studio and Goodwin uttered a brief prayer for the elk hide and for successful creation of hand-drums. The ceremonial smudging of burning sage also marked the threshold moment of *becoming different*. Smudging the elk hide intended for the hand drums venerated the animal's life and gift, while acknowledging the intimacy and interconnectedness among beings. Venerated for the beat of the drum-as-heart, the drum *lives*.

...

visionary objects

float and flutter erratically

incarnate again

...

"Who's that?" A woman's voice from across the room was directed to Bambi. Both of their gazes found me and turned away.

Bambi stated, "A friend."

...

When it was time to eat lunch we were given thinly filled ham and cheese white bleached flour bread sandwiches and small iced tea cartons. I had never tasted iced tea before and the new flavor was difficult to bear, but I drank it since this was the only liquid that was provided.

...

I waited to approach Bambi until she came away from aiding and supervising the hand drum participants. I offered to prepare any of the materials so that she would be free to circulate and aid those in the process of stretching elk hide. She proceeded to show me how to cut smaller portions of elk hide into thin long strips for lacing used to maintain tension around the ash ring. I felt relieved that I could be of service and move from the margins of mere observation. As a participant throughout the workshop I engaged in conversations with a small group of participants, while cutting elk hide into thin strips. Through these conversations, the workshop participants broached topics about the Ojibwe woodland art style, George Morrison's art, music and education interests, video documentary projects that were underway, and opened up possibilities to learn.

...

wet, smooth, slippery

pull, tug, wrestle, thread, and tie

hide of Another

...

We repeated the oath at the close of our Ordeal:

I do hereby promise, on my honor as a Scout, that I will always and faithfully observe and preserve the traditions of the Order of the Arrow, Wimachtendienk [Brotherhood].

Wingoloauchsik [Cheerfulness]. Witahemui [Service]. (BSA, 1989, p. 10)

...

Throughout the intensive three-hour drum workshop community members, both Ojibwe and non-Ojibwe, wrestled with the hide, which resulted in red and chapped hands. All eleven attendees finished by the end of the three-hour workshop, which concluded with a modest feast (Figure 2).



FIGURE 2 PARTICIPANTS AND GOODWIN (FAR RIGHT) AT THE CLOSE OF THE HAND DRUM WORKSHOP. COURTESY AUTHOR.

...

Prior to the Order of the Arrow, Ernest Thompson Seton organized a youth group named “the Woodcraft Indians” and he utilized “Indian ceremonies” to structure the organization (BSA, 1989, p. 18). Seton’s efforts inspired the founder of the Order of the Arrow, Dr. E. Urner Goodman, in 1915 to “use the lores and legends of the Delaware Indians in their new brotherhood” (p. 18). These events would both inform and deform my early boyhood experiences with romantic, idealized, and warped conceptions of American Indian peoples and their cultures. Writing the body-experienced reorganizes these moments as another experience that generates different proximities in accordance with reflexivity. Therefore, collage narrative is both generative and disruptive: as I generate critical proximity with Ojibwe artists, the places I moved through, and all the sensory perceptions I experienced my prior BSA experiences unravel and readers are invited to generate their own connections.

Phenomenology and Writing Critical Proximity

Responding to phenomenology of lived experience, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1990) explains, “the critique of objectivism and its inability to apprehend practice [lived experience] as such in no way implies the rehabilitation of immersion in practice” (p. 34). Bourdieu claims that active participation with the practical “is another way of avoiding the question of the real

relationship of the observer to the observed” (p. 34). As mentioned elsewhere, I never assumed in softening, erasing, or blurring my relationships with Ojibwe participants (see Slivka, 2015). They were firmly aware I was a researcher learning from and with them and this orientation slowly developed as ally over the three months I was in northern Minnesota and over the past three years since 2012.

Bourdieu is critical of phenomenology as it “fails to objectify the objectifying relationship [...] it is unable to analyse the conditions of the production and functioning of the feel for the social game that makes it possible to take for granted the meaning objectified in institutions” (1990, p. 26-27). I agree with Bourdieu’s critique concerning the limitations of phenomenology but with two distinctions: that active participation attends to the complexity of meaning-making relationships as an additional proximity to critical objectivity and reflexivity is the critical objective stance that attends to the researcher’s positionality with participants. Therefore, the phenomenological ethnographic researcher is responsible for attending to numerous perspectives, while representing them within narrative writing. Wilson (2008) states, “Shared relationships allow for a strengthening of the new relationship. This allows you to become familiar or comfortable with the person. Getting to know their relationships to other people or space is an appropriate way of finding out about them” (p. 84). I oscillated between the phenomenological and the critical and *smudged* my own positionalities in attempts to decolonize my preconceptions and my academic training rooted in a White, middle-class ideology. Inspired by Ellsworth’s (2005) thoughts on pedagogies and the surprise of a child learning and the responsibility of the teacher, she states, “What is our responsibility to this child as dissolve, this child as *smudge* in the space between its past and future?...of this child-become-open-ended potential...” (p. 36, emphasis added). I sought to occupy the spaces in-between the practical, lived experiences and reflexivity. In doing so, I explicitly implicate myself in the ensemble of relations experienced while with Ojibwe artists, listening to personal narratives, engaging with materials and contexts, in addition to laboring and harvesting as arts ontology that constituted everyday lived experiences.

I consider Ojibwe smudging ceremonies of burning sage as a spiritual purification process imbued with qualities of pause and transition that serve to describe my intercultural intersubjective research as ceremony. Sage “washes the recipient in kindness and compassion to heal the soul and spirit” (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 301). From the standpoint of transition and potential suggested by Ellsworth and ceremony by Kimmerer, I have taken up this movement through phenomenology as a means to decolonize my own positionality and remain open to

intersubjectivity. Therefore, smudging as a metaphor and process of writing resists representational reductionism and becomes a decolonizing methodology.

in abalone
rests sacred uprooted sage
flames spark, smoke rises

I purposely set out to generate experiential meanings through the writing process that resist closure of Ojibwe meaning making processes and signify my multiple positionalities experienced within the ensemble of relations. Further, textual relationships among prose, reflexive writing, and literary references that correspond between relationships with Ojibwe participants and my positionality as a researcher generate an intercultural intersubjectivity.

Similarly, collage narrative as smudge delays and resists dominant forms of writing as disassociated and objective representations (Garoian, 2004). Lived experience breaks with linear explications of data as sequences are drawn together through corresponding themes, relationships, and intensities (Wilson, 2008). Therefore, smudging is less about a style of writing; rather it is a methodological consideration. Storied data gestures to how, where, when, and what seem to be imperative qualities of experience with Ojibwe artists while in Minnesota that illuminate how relationships within local contexts inform participants' arts practices and processes. Wilson (2008) clarifies, "Perhaps we can construct a new knot (or uncover a previously invisible one) that will coalesce into a theory that describes the relationship that you share with the other. So the methodology is simply the building of more relations" (p. 79). This alludes to the centrality of relationships and reciprocity sought throughout the inquiry process.

memories swarm me
writing through the blurred spaces
laughter unravels

Cultural theorist, Simon (2010) argues for a critical proximity “in relation to critical writing about the visual...which pays attention to the variable degrees of nearness between criticism and its objects, and which seeks to respond to texts on their own terms” (p. 1). Rather than respond to visual texts only, I open up my response to embodied experiences and to living beings inhabiting, doing, and being in particular cultural ecologies, and to the lifeworlds that participants inhabit. This methodology also blurs any unnecessary “split between the material and the conceptual or...between visual experiences and written ideas” (p. 2). I agree with Simon’s declaration, “description is not mere transcription of the visual [sensorial experiences]; it actively makes something visible [accessible] – it is generative” (p. 9). The text exists beyond the notion of a proxy and becomes a site for multiple relationships drawn together from Ojibwe and non-Ojibwe worldviews and theories. In doing so, I emulate the third of five conditions Smith (2012) outlines for decolonization that “is concerned with ways in which different ideas, social categories, and tendencies intersect: the coming together of disparate ideas, the events, the historical moment” (p. 201). Therefore, collage narrative has the potential to generate correspondences among the complex interactions of ecological relational fields that constitute my own and Ojibwe participants’ lived experiences and arts processes, while decolonizing methodologies and my-*self*.

Conclusions

Every participant shared food, drink, the comfort of their home, entertainment, time, attention and their artworks and processes with me, despite any differences between economic means or initial hesitations. Giving tobacco to Ojibwe artists often initiated reciprocity, which signified and acknowledged respect for Ojibwe sovereignty. I also reciprocated with food, drink, labor, blankets, gas for vehicles, knit hats, and creative works of sculpted jack pine tree limbs. Wilson (2008) states, “The responsibility to ensure respectful and reciprocal relationships becomes the axiology of the person who is making these connections” (p. 79). Rather than use an ethic of care as a cloak of homogenizing altruism, which was the discourse of cultural assimilation intended for American Indians during the nineteenth and twentieth century boarding school era (Slivka, 2011), empathy and ethics of caring, is the care of the Other while my-*self* was risked.

I encountered moments in time within the local web of relations while visiting among Ojibwe residents of Leech Lake, White Earth, Red Lake and Mille Lacs reservations. These webs operated not only as a meshwork of social relations that mobilized information, trade and

connections, but also served to protect and resist against outsiders perceived as threats. The web of stories that compile our shared experiences generate lived experiences, written as critical proximity to the ensemble of relations within ecologies among Ojibwe artists. I have written collage narrative to self-decolonize my experiences as a Boy Scout, present phenomenological experiences as a researcher in Ojibwe country, and extend the readers' interpretations among the collage components. Ultimately, Ojibwe artists inhabit their own particular webs, woven of their own accord informed by their cultural heritage, oral tradition, and every day survivance (Vizenor, 2008). This intercultural research therefore proposes ontological orientation open to interspecies and material relationships as influential forces within the arts.

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