

A SENSE OF PLACE:
An Exploratory Study of Visual Re-presentation into Memory and History

Where My World Began

By

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ABSTRACT

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This exploratory paper addresses the notion of “sense of place and belonging” through visual re-presentation into history and the memory of people who live in a place where they belong. The place is Pouch Cove, Newfoundland. Taking a research creation approach and a qualitative interviewing mode of inquiry, I collected stories about the connection between local residents and Pouch Cove. Reflecting on the locals’ sense of place through their narratives, and my own sense of place when immersing myself in the daily life of Pouch Cove, I created a body of work for my thesis exhibition. The artworks presented invite the viewers to experience “sense of place” and to interpret it through their own perception. The subject under investigation, the place and memories and histories of the people of Pouch Cove, has guided my research creation project and inspired the work in the exhibition.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Some are born in their place, some find it, some realize after long searching that the place they left is the one they have been searching for.” (Wallace Stegner)

“Where you belong to?” Herb, my neighbor in Pouch Cove, Newfoundland asked me when I first met him. I wasn’t sure how to answer this. Do I belong to the place I was born? Do I belong to the place where I just came from? What raced through my mind were all the places that I had been to, lived and settled: Hong Kong, a place I was born and raised; Canada, a place I chose to come to; Botswana, a place I chose to go to work as a volunteer. I now live in Toronto but as a part time resident of Newfoundland since 2007, I call Pouch Cove “home”.

My first encounter with Pouch Cove was by chance. I can still remember the strong feeling of “contentment and belonging” that came through me while looking out at the cove: the seas stretch out as far as the eyes can see; the endless shorelines snake in and out. The feeling that the place invoked could not be described in words. Did I become the “Wanderer” of C.D.Friedrich’s painting

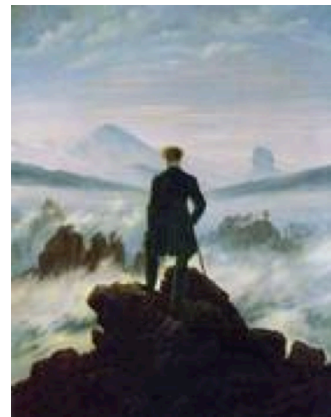


Figure 1: Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog, oil on canvas, 1818, C.D. Friedrich

Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog? Was I trying to comprehend the meaning of this place in front of me? Having lived on three continents and six different cities, this sense of belonging is both foreign and familiar, and yet incomprehensible.

Returning to the simple question “where you belong to” and my own curiosity to make sense of the ‘being home’ feeling have led to a research enquiry of place and belonging for my thesis project. The purpose of this research project is to examine the notion of “place and belonging” from the cultural theoretical perspectives of place and to reflect on this examination through artistic practice. During the course of the project, I continued to negotiate, to differentiate local inhabitants’ sense of place and my own sense of place; their experience of the place and my own experience of the place. These differences have become sources for my creative work. My approach to this research was to engage myself into the local society and everyday life. Everyday life in this thesis project included having tea with my neighbors to cleaning fish inside the community fishing stage. These social interaction activities allow me to develop relationships to the place itself and to the people there, and to further my understanding of my sense of place from an outsider’s perspective.

1.1. The Place: Pouch Cove

When people drive into Pouch Cove, they see a sign that says “Pouch Cove – First to See the Sun.” The sign gives hint to the geographical uniqueness of the place. Located at the tip of the Northeast Avalon Peninsula of Newfoundland, Pouch Cove is the most northeasterly point of

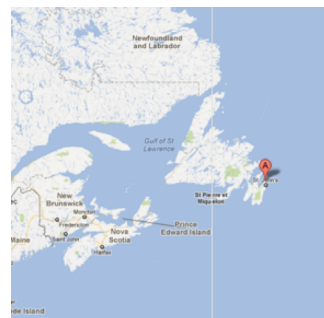


Figure 2: Map of Newfoundland Google Maps

North America. It is a place that gives a sense of being at the edge of the world, at the end of the road. I discovered Pouch Cove five years ago when traveling around Newfoundland for the very first time. Since then, my artwork has been influenced greatly by the landscape surrounding Pouch Cove. The rugged shorelines, the expansive seas, the forever-changing skies and, above all, the people, make Pouch Cove a very special place for me. When I am in Pouch Cove, I feel I am home. Home is a place that gives me a sense of belonging in contrast to a space where I live. Home is the people with their cultural heritage and personal stories - when I see them, I feel at home. This strong sense of belonging is shared by many of us who are not originally from this place, but choose to call Pouch Cove 'home.'

To get a better understanding of how people relate themselves to a place, it is necessary to have some historical knowledge about the place. For over five hundred years, the cod fishery sustained many generations of fishing families in Newfoundland. Settlements were established along the coastline of the island. In *The Disappearance of the Northern Cod Inquiry and Recommendations* Shane Mahoney provides an insight on cod fishery from an historical perspective stating that the Northern Cod “has given Newfoundland its communities, often deliberately sited on the most exposed headland, and almost every aspect of Newfoundland culture ... these harsh and barren places are an ecological necessity culminating in a powerful, self-directing sense of home” (Mahoney 1995). Pouch Cove is one of these coastal communities that first emerged as a

result of the cod fishery in the 1800s. I am struck by how this wind-strapped harsh rocky environment shapes the human spirit but in turn how the landscape is shaped by the people who live there. I need to comprehend the people's connection to the place Pouch Cove.

When the British began to dry their fish on shores, they erected some basic structures to facilitate the splitting, cleaning and drying of fish. They were called stages and flakes. Stages were buildings in which fish was split, cleaned and stored. Flakes were raised platforms used for drying salted fish. These vernacular structures have become part of Newfoundland heritage. They were photographed and appeared on postcards and in books. One can still find them in some communities. However, stages and flakes do not exist in Pouch Cove anymore. They only exist in photographs and in people's memory. These structures were ingrained in my own memory after seeing old photographs of them the first time in The Rooms Provincial Art Gallery in St. John's, Newfoundland. I am drawn to these stunning, beautiful and functional structures and have always wondered at the construction of them perching against the rocky cliffs.



Figure 3: Pouch Cove Flakes
The Rooms Provincial Archives



Figure 4: Pouch Cove Stages
The Rooms Provincial Archives

Pressured by the decline of cod stocks due to years of overfishing, the government called a moratorium on cod fishing in 1992. The way of life came to a halt for many fishermen whose livelihood was dependent on cod fishing. A new way of life has emerged with job opportunities away from home including the mainland. Because of the proximity to St. John's, Pouch Cove has gradually become a bedroom community for people who work in St. John's. The picturesque landscape of Pouch Cove also attracts people "from away" to acquire properties. 'Come from away' refers to someone who is not from Newfoundland. However, the term also speaks strongly to the Newfoundlanders' sense of place. So we have the older generation who still remember and reminiscence about "what life was," the younger generation who consider Pouch Cove another subdivision of St. John's, and the "come from aways" who make the place their home.

1.2. Research Project

This research project concerns the re-presentation of constructed narrative as it is remembered and experienced in the place by the people who live there. It aims to preserve the authenticity of the experiences by re-presenting them rather than representing them. When I am in Pouch Cove, I experience the place with all my senses: the smell of the salt air, the sound of the ocean waves, the colours of the forever changing skies, the crevices in millions of years old rocks, and also the feeling of helplessness when storms cause the shut down of the airports and

ferries. Pouch Cove is a sensory experience. The paintings I make of waves, the sculptures I create using found objects in the surrounding environment, as well as my appropriation of the ancient rock faces through the making of moulds, are artwork and creative processes that deepen my relationship to this environment. The tactile sensation on a wax cast rock face in my Toronto studio evokes a powerful sense of Pouch Cove and my longing to be there rather than here.

In the summer of 2011, I carried out my field research in Pouch Cove. In doing so I was fully aware of my transition role into an ethnographer. In "*The Artist as Ethnographer*," Foster (1996) cautions artists to reflect on their intention responsibly when placing themselves in this quasi-anthropological paradigm. I am a female, a Canadian citizen with Chinese origin, an artist, and clearly an outsider who takes on the role of a researcher re-presenting this "sense of place" and re-contextualizing other people's lived experiences through my creative practice. I recognize that my research project is biased, narrated through my subjective lens.

1.3. Research Questions

The people and their intimate relationships with the place where they live inspire this research creation project. Familiar places usually invoke memories and associations. In this project, I am interested in the narratives people use to describe their relationship with the place. My main research question is formulated around this relationship:

“How can I probe memories of Pouch Cove residents to experience sense of place and reflect it in my artwork?”

I also identify a series of secondary questions for my research. The responses to these questions contribute to an understanding of the relationship between people and place. They are explained further in the following chapters.

- *What are the shared stories told by the residents that contribute to their sense of place?*
- *How does my role as an outsider impact the stories that are told to me?*
- *How do I re-present residents’ stories through my art practice?*

1.4. Rationale

The project investigation aims to interrogate the reasons people feel they belong to a specific place. The project outcome intends to reflect on visual representation, historical and cultural background perspectives that inform the viewer about “a sense of place.” The objective is to understand why “a place” can become so meaningful to an individual or to a community and to transcend this belonging of a place through sculpture installation works. Only with the participation of Pouch Cove residents through the sharing of their personal stories, and therefore I was able to reflect that sense of place and sense of belonging in my artistic work. My research aims to elucidate the human attachment or feelings that leads us to identify with a place - a sense of belonging linked to the human condition.

1.5. Theoretical Framework

What is place? What makes a place special? How do people develop a sense of place? How do people express their attachment to a place? These questions are all related to the notion of place for my research project. My theoretical approach to these questions is informed by philosophy and literature of cultural study of place guided by the position of geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, cultural theorist Lucy Lippard, art theorist Rosalind Krauss, folklorist Gerald Pocius and other contemporary scholars. I also borrow an ethnographic research method as an approach to engage with local people and to collect stories of their relationship and feelings about Pouch Cove. It is through these emotional feelings that theory is interpreted.

Tuan's work merges the ideas of place in geography with philosophy and psychology. He points out, "Intimate experiences lie buried in our innermost being so that not only do we lack the words to give them form but often we are not even aware of them" (1977: 136). In her book, *The Lure of the Local*, Lucy Lippard writes, "The intersections of nature, culture, history, and ideology form the ground on which we stand - our land, our place, the local" (1997: 7). Sense of place is to be experienced from all aspects of the place including unwritten personal memories and experiences. In Pocius' *A Place to Belong*, the intimate interactions between the people of Calvert and the space they occupy are expressed through individual objects within the space.

Lippard goes further to include meaning of public art in place that holds memory of the place. She offers this view: “Commitment to place-specific projects implies a deeper level of acquaintance with a place...The artists have a responsibility to do their homework...” (1997: 279). Krauss legitimizes contemporary sculptural practice as a diverse and expanded field in her article *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*. The practice of sculpture continues to expand due to the influence of new methods and media. Together these readings offer a critical review on a sense of place which I develop in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

"Place is an organized world of meaning." (Yi Fu Tuan)

I approach my investigation on the notion of place from different disciplines, drawing on works by culture theorist, philosopher, art critic, architect, geographer and anthropologist. New knowledge gained from these readings helps me think critically on the understanding of the meaning of place from different perspectives, and the meaning of making place-specific work.

2.1. Ideas of Place

A place can be a physical space. It can be a corner of a room, a street, a house, or a neighbourhood. A place can also be a landscape, the sky, the sea, the space between the land and the sea, trees, rocks. I recognize my initial attraction to Pouch Cove had to do with the aesthetic experience. From a distance, the North Atlantic is calm and beautiful, or turbulent and destructive. The extreme vastness of the sea is beyond description because I can only imagine what I cannot see, not what I can see. Tuan (1995) defines this experience as visceral experience, rather than an intellectual experience. This extraordinary aesthetic experience evokes something totally unfamiliar inside me, and yet it feels “right” – a right place to belong.

Sense of place is developed through personal experience and knowledge. We learn about places through our sensory experiences. A sensory experience is

something we can feel – something we can see, we can smell, we can touch, we can hear, we can taste. These senses trigger memory and therefore, we can recall places. Conversely place can trigger emotional responses and memories of past experiences. We all have different backgrounds, beliefs and values, therefore, each of us experiences a place quite differently. In Low and Lawrence-Zuniga's words, place can have a "unique reality for each inhabitant [...] the views of place are often likely to be competing, and contested in practice" (Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 15). Take Pouch Cove as an example: to the local people who used to fish for a living, they have formed an intimate relationship with the ocean; ocean is a 'work' place. The ocean used to be mapped out with locations of fishing grounds and it was memory that kept this knowledge alive until they were forgotten. But for others, the ocean remains as an aesthetic landscape, it is experienced from a distance.

The physical, economic and political climate have shaped and continue to shape the culture and people of Newfoundland. A long time local resident, Gerald Noseworthy, told me in the interview that: "*... I saw it's all about the fish. Basically Newfoundland is all about fish and fishing. How people came to be where they are...*" (Noseworthy, interview, 2011). For the new people who move here, their sense of place is quite different from the sense of place experienced by the people who are from Pouch Cove. The new people who move to Pouch Cove are not necessarily aware of the history of the place and may not have the time or interest in finding out about its past. They create their own experiences with the

place. Their experiences are valid and become another layer to the already cumulated collective experiences that characterize the changing culture in Pouch Cove. In “*Cultural Identity and Diaspora*,” Hall (1992) describes cultural history as constantly being created and recreated. From an independent fishing and farming community to a bedroom community of St. John’s, changes are inevitably taking place in Pouch Cove. The sense of place changes through time.

2.2. Meaning of Place

There is a strong connection between place and belonging in Newfoundland. Local people do not ask where you live, they ask where you belong to. The Dictionary of Newfoundland English Online (Young 2006) defines the phrase ‘where you belong to’ as one of the most common phrases in the Newfoundland vernacular: one is never *from* or even *born* in a place, one always *belongs* to it. Belonging, according to Pocius, is “directly tied both linguistically and experientially to place [...] means sharing the knowledge of a series of common spaces” (Pocius: 3). These common spaces include the seas where they fish, the stages where they clean, split and salt the fish, and the flakes where they dry the fish.

When describing a place, a certain landmark or surrounding landscape is often used to provide additional identification to the place. The bays and coves along the shorelines of Pouch Cove are full of named locations where meanings are given from the people who use them: Butter Gulch, Long Points, Mouse

Holes, George's Point, Hollow cove, Shoe Cove, Sandy Cove. Fishermen could locate fishing grounds by landmarks that they could see from the sea before maps and GPS technology. I felt so privileged when David Bragg, a local resident of Pouch Cove, showed me a set of drawings of fishing grounds done by a fisherman who has since passed away.

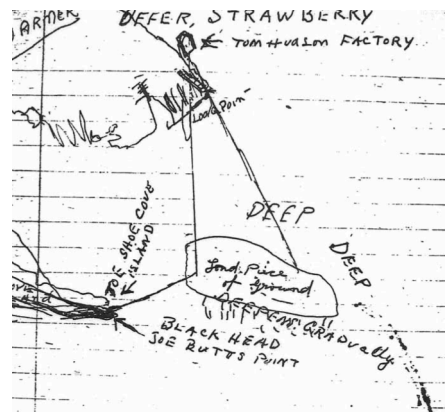


Figure 5: Fishing Grounds, Courtesy of David Bragg, 2011

Consider these two examples: *'Where you belong to?'* and *'I live in Uncle Jake's house.'* The former allows people to identify themselves by describing what city or town they come from – a physical place. The latter not only describes the physical location of a place, but most importantly keeping alive the memory of Uncle Jake. *'I live in Uncle Jake's house'* (although Jake had been gone for over 60 years, and the address of the house is 760 Main Road) has a more intimate connotation than saying *'760 Main Road.'* Each time I mention Uncle Jake's house to someone, I find out a little bit more about the person and also about Uncle Jake and his family.

2.3. Place Attachment

A long time Pouch Cove resident, Shirley Bragg, said to me during our interview: "... why you are so attached to the place is because you're born and raised there

...I bet you any money you would want to go back to where you were born and raised” (Bragg, interview, 2011). I still remember the look of disbelief on Shirley’s face when I told her that I had no desire to go back to Hong Kong where I was born. I told her Pouch Cove is home, a place I long to be when I am not there, a place I feel rooted when I am there.

In *Space and Place* Tuan (2008) makes a distinction between ‘sense of place’ and ‘rootedness.’ A sense of place is described as an awareness of a positive feeling for a place, and rootedness as a feeling of being home. Many Newfoundlanders refer to their home as ‘the Rock,’ literally and metaphorically. It is literally ‘the rock’ because of its geological features. Metaphorically, the rock “indicates a sense of permanence and security... This Rock is a place where many Newfoundlanders feel “at home” in body, in language, in social practice” (Kelly: 13). This is the feeling I have when I am in Pouch Cove, I feel grounded, and centered, and at home.

Attachment to a place is linked to human condition and “may come simply with familiarity and ease, with the assurance of nurture and security, with the memory of sounds and smells, of communal activities and homely pleasures accumulated over time” (Tuan 1977: 159). However, it is possible to feel a sense of strong connectedness to a place even though it is only a brief experience. Tuan argues that “the quality and intensity of experience matters more than simple duration” (198). My brief encounter with Pouch Cove left me with the feelings of knowing the place despite the fact that I had not been to the place before. As a

part time resident of Pouch Cove, I have since collected my own memories of the place.

2.4. Place as Memory (Place-Specific Art)

Place-specific art aims to connect artwork to the place and to explore the meaning of place through creative work. In *The Lure of the Local* Lippard (1997) points out that place-specific art is not an object outside of the life of the local inhabitants. Since place is where we can locate memory, it is critical for an artist to spend time in the place, and to uncover what is to be learned about the place so the work can be meaningful to the people who live there. I strongly believe that community involvement (locals' contribution to the knowledge of the place) is imperative in the making of place-specific art.

During the interviews, locals shared their experiences of being around the fishing flakes. They remembered the dark and smelly place underneath the flakes. They also remembered the time that they played under the flakes when the women worked above. A constructed space reminds people what they know and who they are and where they belong. Tuan describes these kind of primitive public space structures require people working together and forcing people to think, adjust, innovate (Tuan 2008:103-104). The locals remembered that the natural environment dictated how, when and where the stages and flakes were to be built.

The iconic structures of stages and flakes do not exist in Pouch Cove anymore, and yet they live on in people's memories. In Pocius' words, "When

the market for salt fish virtually collapsed in the 1960s, flakes were no longer needed and were the first artifacts to crumble.” (Pocius: 167) A fishing flake represents a body of traditional knowledge and connects with the values of community. Engineers or architects did not design the stages and flakes. Fishermen constructed them based on experiential knowledge. For the people in Pouch Cove, the fishing flake is a “recollection-object: an irreducibly material object that encodes collective memory...in excavating them, we expand outward in time” (Marks: 77). The vernacular structure of a fishing flake can be expanded as a carrier of memory and effects a sense of place.

Place-specific art has taken so many forms since Krauss’ essay *Sculpture in the Expanded Field* published in 1979. It has expanded to encompass various medium including sound. For example, the work “*Sonic Antarctica*” by the artist Andrea Polli is an exploration of a place through a series of field recordings of sounds and interviews with scientists who lived and worked in Antarctica. The use of field recordings in my research and creative work are further discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGIES

“Every story told suggests those that remain buried and untold.” (Lucy Lippard)

This chapter is concerned with application of methodologies carried out in both field research and studio practice. My participation in The Fogo Island Residency in May 2011 opened up new ways of thinking about narrative documentation and place responsive installation and prepared me for the field research in Pouch Cove. This residency allowed me to investigate place not only through people’s lived experience, but also through the natural environment where every line on a rock tells a story, every washed up log gives evidence of what it was used for at one point. We cannot reproduce the past, but we can preserve and learn from the past.

3.1. Field Research

In order to understand the relationship between place and the people who live and work in the place I needed to examine their lived experiences. In my field research in Pouch Cove I learned of these personal experiences through methods of interviews, audio recording and video recording and I expand upon them further. The research data has also become crucial material aspect of my studio practice.

During the first year of the Interdisciplinary Master’s in Art, Media and Design program I expanded my art practice to include mixed media and

experimented with video work. I used video and audio recorders to collect my research data. By subsequently using video and audio editing software, I integrated the research data into a body of work for my thesis exhibition. This has enabled me to explore through creative activities a sense of place from cultural and historical perspectives.

3.2. Data Collection

This research project has the approval of the OCAD University Research Ethics Board. I used qualitative research methods and an ethnographic mode of inquiry for data collection to engage with local people and to collect stories of their relationship and lived experiences with Pouch Cove. I applied the following methods in my research:

1. **Interviews:** conducting a series of formal and informal interviews with local residents using video recorder and audio recorder.
2. **Archival research:** accessing additional oral history collections of the people in Pouch Cove through The Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive and historical photographs from The Rooms Provincial Archives.
3. **Participant Observation:** taking part in various community events.
4. **Journaling:** using field notes, sketch book and web blog to record my thoughts and ideas.
5. **Visual Documentation:** taking photographs of people, events and the

surrounding landscape.

The data I collected from a series of interviews enabled me to investigate the degree to which people form emotional attachments to a place. From a personal perspective these data reveal living memories and it is my intention to keep these memories alive through my artistic work.

The Rooms Provincial Archives and The Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive were good resources from which to gather old photographs and listen to previously recorded transcripts from other researchers on this issue. Some interviewees also shared with me their personal photo albums and allowed me to have them as part of my research data.

I participated in community events. For example, I accompanied one of the participants, Shirley Bragg, age eighty-six, to a local elementary school where she talked to two Grade Four classes about her life in Pouch Cove during the time she was growing up. I also took part in the Town's annual clean up and participated in the Memorial Day (Canada Day) celebration. These events allowed me to engage in informal interactions with local residents in a variety of social situations, and they provided contexts for learning about everyday life in Pouch Cove. In all of these situations I tried to learn what life is like for an "insider" while remaining an "outsider." Sometimes I learned answers to questions that I had not even considered asking. In "*Situating Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*," Wolf states that "non-native anthropologists who return every year to the same community, acknowledging that even so-called insiders are at time

drawn into a particular context and at other times experience the distance of an outsider” (Wolf 17). Being a part time resident in Pouch Cove, I have developed personal friendships with some locals. It is important for me when conducting my interviews to listen carefully and to make a distinction between private information as told by friends and research data.

For journaling I created a blog as an alternative form of recording and documenting field notes from each interview. I also included short audio/video clips to

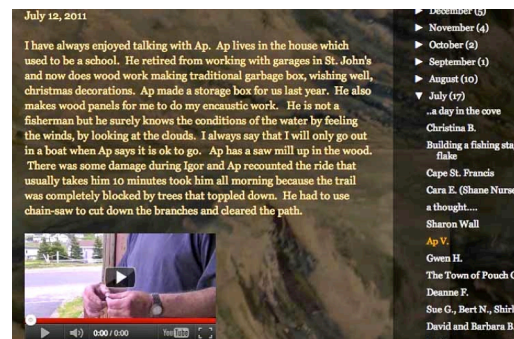


Figure 6: Blog, Po Chun Lau, 2011

accompany the interview entries and recorded my own reflections of the process. I included in the journals some of my own work done in Pouch Cove and ideas for future work as a way to visualize my experience.

3.3. Data Analysis

I analyzed over nine hours of video/audio recording. Taking a reflexive approach, I listened to the language that locals used to describe their memories of lived experiences. I paid attention to both the similarities and the differences in their descriptions. My reflexive interpretation involves “attaching meaning and significance to the analysis, explaining descriptive patterns, and looking for relationships and linkages among descriptive dimensions” (Genzuk 2003). The

cumulative voices imparted to me a deeper appreciation of Pouch Cove and the people who live there. The analysis of the interviews is discussed in Chapter 5.

The outcomes of this reflexive interpretation are two edited artistic renderings of the documentation data woven together from historical records and personal voices to address the senses of place. They consist of a five-minute single channel video and a five-minute two-channel audio. These works form part of the body of work in my thesis exhibition. This is further expanded in the following chapters.

3.4. Validation Process

As a way to give credibility to the work, I invited the research participants and the community to preview the video and audio work when I returned to Pouch Cove in December 2011. The interactions amongst the participants and other members of the community generated more dialogues, more stories and the collective senses of Pouch Cove. These dialogues are noted in my blog entries.

3.5. Studio Practice Approach

The arts-based research approach comprises conceptual investigation, exploration of integrated media and digital processes leading to artistic production. I explore the concept of place and non-representational art form. I experiment with place-specific art using found objects such as tree branches to create fences. I also explore 3D Rapid Prototyping in order to gain knowledge in digital technology to

further my practice. This research approach is the foundation for the creation of a body of work that I develop for my thesis project.

I was drawn to the iconic images of fishing stages and fishing flakes when I first saw photographs of them in The Rooms Provincial Art Gallery in St. John's. Using natural materials and basic tools, the stages and flakes were erected between rocks along the rugged shorelines. These vernacular structures were created out of necessity and were a means of survival.



Figure 7: Pouch Cove Stages
The Rooms Provincial Archives

Using sculpture as the method of realizing “place” prompted me to begin an inquiry into making a scale model of a fishing flake. I began by asking around and was told Ted Sullivan was one of the few locals who still remembers how to build these structures. I went to see him one day in his workshop. He gladly explained the process to me and sent me away to collect sticks in some open fields. I was so excited that it felt like I was off to a huge woodlot to cut down big branches! We began making the model but had to stop



Figure 8: Flakes in Pouch Cove
The Rooms Provincial Archives



Figure 9: Branches for Flake, 2011
Po Chun Lau

because of his participation in the recreational fishery. Although we did not complete the flake, the process was a great learning experience. Above all, I have my own memory and experience of making a flake. It deepened my appreciation of the hardworking people who live in this harsh environment. The unforgiving North Atlantic has indeed shaped the people who live here.



Figure 10: Ted's Flake, 2011
Po Chun Lau



Figure 11: Po's Flake, 2011
Po Chun Lau

When building my fishing flake structure, I look for branches with interesting shapes and marks on them. Ted said to look for straight branches. It is impossible for me to balance the structure by myself, so I ask for help. Ted said building a flake was a community effort. I use clay, plasticine, and silicone putty to hold down the branches. Ted said they had to jam the branches between rocks to secure them. I make my work inside a comfortable studio space, not at the edge of the ocean. My reality of the place and Ted's reality of the place are so different, yet similar because we both have feelings for the place in spite of the different cultural background.

Every time I return to Pouch Cove, these experiences and my practice bring me closer, more intimately linked to the place. I strongly believe that through memories and story telling my artwork can reflect a sense of place.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH DATA

“The world of place is the world of subjective human experience and significance.” (Scott Walden)

This research project draws out memories of lived experiences that are embedded in this specific place, Pouch Cove. During the interviews and other informal social conversations I had with the locals, it became quite obvious that everyone has memories of the seas, the storms, the stages, the flakes and the fish. Although the feelings attached to these memories come in various degrees, these memories add to the multi-layered meaning of place.

I interviewed sixteen people: thirteen women and three men. Fourteen of my respondents were born in Newfoundland and two were from away; out of the fourteen Newfoundlanders, twelve of them were born and raised in Pouch Cove, the youngest participant is thirty-five years old and the oldest is eighty-six years old. Using audio/video recorder I tried to collect and consider as many stories about Pouch Cove from the locals as they were prepared to share with me.

In the first part of the interview, I centered my questions on the most recent hurricane that passed through the island in September 2010 in order to evoke other memories from the participants.

Before starting the interviews I realized that the degree of damage from Hurricane Igor was quite minimal in Pouch Cove. Nevertheless it caused a greenhouse nursery business to shut down for many months. The storm also

damaged homes and roads. The Town of Pouch Cove set up a command centre to deal with the situation. Individual families, businesses and the town subsequently received compensation for destruction to homes and infrastructure through The Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements, a program administered by Fire and Emergency Services.

Descriptions related to Igor included statements such as: “*it was nothing, we had much worse in the past*” to “*complete devastation*” as in the case of the green nursery whence all three green houses were levelled.

Although I have experienced severe storms in the past and remembered the feeling of being completely helpless, I could never feel the way Cara Eustace felt when her livelihood was destroyed in front of her eyes. I could only empathize with her loss. When Sharon Wall said she “forgave” the ocean after a tragedy that took the life of her son and two other teenage boys in 2001, I understood the intimate relationship she must have with the ocean - she forgave the ocean as she would forgive a friend.

In the second part of the interview, I focused on place and its relationship to the people who inhabit the place. Like many other coastal communities in Newfoundland, Pouch Cove was a fishing and farming community. Inshore cod fishing was a way of life for many generations until 1992 when the government declared a moratorium on the cod fishery. When talking with the older gentlemen about fishing, I could feel the emotions in their voices that are different from the younger people. For the older gentlemen, fishing was a livelihood, for the

younger generation, fishing is a recreational sport. This shows us a difference in how people relate to place based on age.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada introduced recreational fishery in 2006 so that locals can go out and catch five fish per day for personal use. Dr. Philip Hiscock (August 11, 2011), a well respected and published scholar



Figure 12: Cove Bank, Pouch Cove, 2011
Po Chun Lau

on all things Newfoundland, told me that he recently saw someone's blog saying how she was able to stock up the fish for the winter, and to him recreational fishery is in fact re-creation(al) the old tradition when fishing was the livelihood. The slipways are busy with men taking their boats out and coming in with containers of fish, bringing them to the community stage for cleaning; gulls and gannets are feeding on what remains of the fish; tourists stop by to take photos, some older gentlemen stand by the cove bank, chatting with each other, or just looking out silently.

For people who chose to move back to Pouch Cove after being away, the reason they come back is because of their ties with the community. A few moved here from other provinces because of work. Although most of the people commented on the landscape and rugged shorelines of Pouch Cove, they looked at the landscape quite differently from “*the ocean doesn't appeal to us*” to “*it was*

home and that's where we had to go," to "I can't get enough of it," to "I realize how much I miss the ocean after being away."

The power of narratives lies in these voices. These casual and spontaneous narratives bring together layers of understanding about a person's values and beliefs. These narratives are full of textural descriptions: crashing of the waves, smell of the fish, children playing underneath the flake, cold northeasterly (wind), warm southwestern (wind), sound of the fog horn, grey sky, blue sky, pink sky. The locals describe to me their sense of Pouch Cove in words while I use my hands to render these senses into visual language of my own. Samples of the interview transcripts can be found in Appendix A.

CHAPTER 5

THESIS EXHIBITION: *WHERE MY WORLD BEGAN*

“Memory starts here because the human mind can only remember by the experience of contrast. Before difference, humankind has no memory.”
(Lillian Allen)

Pouch Cove (Cape St. Francis) is at the end of the road and all I see is the infinite ocean in front of me. Pouch Cove (Cape St. Francis) is at the beginning of the road if I were to arrive here from the sea with the ocean behind me. There is always more than one perspective from every point of view. Having the understanding of the meaning of place from the insiders’ perspectives I am able to express my sense of place from an outsider’s perspective. By fully engaging myself in the daily life of the place I have also created my own memories of Pouch Cove, memories I can recall when I am not there. My experiences of the place and the locals’ experiences of the place fuel my art practice. Together they are further examined and explored through material investigation.

The selection process for the body of work in the final presentation is based on the concept of a sense of place. The work allows viewers to experience Pouch Cove through seeing, touching, hearing and smelling. Depending on the viewers’ own perceptions, the experiences vary from person to person. As an artist, I value the importance for this encounter to happen between my work, Pouch Cove residents and the viewers.

The mixed media installation *Where My World Began* is woven together by four separate but connected works – an audio/video projection, a printed book

and two sculpture works. Each work attempts to connect the viewers with the place, Pouch Cove, through the physical and material characteristics of each medium presented. Together they create a historical situation, social structure, and a moment of personal and/or collective experience. In this installation I have transformed a public gallery space into an intimate place. A place holds personal memories of lived experiences where viewers are open to embody these textural experiences through their own senses.

5.1. *Pouch Cove: A Place to Call Home (video: 4:32 min., audio: 5:01 min.)*

A single channel video contains footages and recording from the interviews and archival photos was shown in a separate media room to allow the viewers to connect with the people and the place Pouch Cove. Viewers could then bring the experience with them to the main gallery space. Inspired by Glenn Gould's Solitude Trilogy (1967-1977) in which overlapping voices and sounds require that we engage in listening, I also edited a five minute long two channels audio work. The work is intertwined with unscripted human voices from the interviews together with sounds of waves and winds, seabirds and boat engine sounds, sounds of knives being sharpened and the cleaning of fish inside a community fishing stage, as well as an official recorded speech. These voices and sounds lead us to imagine and to visualize the place Pouch Cove.

My primary source for the video/audio project is based on field research data. The apparent authenticity and authorship through the voices of the locals

have guided my artwork direction. As supported by Renov writing on subjectivity, I do find that first person narrative is personal and subjective. In “The Subject of Documentary,” Renov argues that there is the “return to subjectivity, to the exploration of a seeing, feeling, and even healing self expressed cinematically, (it) is newly charged” (Renov: xxiv). The work *Pouch Cove: A Place to Call Home* presented here is more than the collection and processing of documentation data. It is my intent that viewers listen with all of their senses to derive meaning from what they hear. To go beyond what is said and to “make the visible significant” are as difficult as what Rabiger would describe as “to drive the audience's awareness deeper than what is literally and materially in front of the camera” (Rabiger: 432). I hope that the work I present in the exhibition will bring something extra to each viewer than merely what is being said, something that is reflective of their own sense of place.

5.2. *Pouch Cove: A Place to call Home* - Printed Book

In the context of my thesis research exhibition and the artwork presented, I compiled the book *Pouch Cove: A Place to call Home*. This book is a comprehensive document juxtaposing text and photographs to communicate to the readers the relationships between place and its people. It contains transcripts extracted from the interviews, photographs of people, surrounding landscape, archival photos and my personal reflections. The book is organized around

landscape, fishing and community - the three common themes that were identified when analyzing the research data.

5.3. *Ted's Fish*

On the morning of January 12, 2012, the day I was returning to Toronto, Ted Sullivan gave me a salt cod. This salt cod takes on new meaning by becoming the one that Ted caught in the summer of 2011, filleted, salted and hung on the



Figure 13: Ted's Fish, Pouch Cove, Courtesy of Bob Brink, 2011

clothesline to dry and stored in the freezer. Ted's fish also gives a trace of the changing culture in Pouch Cove. The archival photos of Pouch Cove show rows and rows of salt fish spread out on the flakes, in contrast to the few that Ted had on his clothesline.

In the exhibition, Ted's fish was reproduced, re-presented and placed in a gallery context. Ted's original salt cod lays on a small fishing flake structure on one side of the gallery. A faint smell of salt is still evident when a viewer gets close to the structure. On the other side of the gallery space hangs a clothesline with



Figure 14: Installation View 1, *Where My World Began*, 2012, Po Chun Lau

reproductions of Ted's fish cast in wax. The translucent quality of wax gives the fish a ghostly look suggesting a remembrance of the past. Two sheets of reproductions of Ted's fish on rice paper are hung on two gallery walls. Ted's fish was also reproduced using rapid prototyping technology and is placed on a plinth by the entrance of the gallery. Together with the rapid prototyped fishing flake they address the transformative nature of a contemporary take on the traditional food preservation system.

The installation provides different layers of interpretation. It presents a timeline of the cod fishery through the spacing of the cod on a clothesline. It illustrates the changing status of the once manly occupation now reduced to a domestic setting.



Figure 15: Installation View 2, *Where My World Began*, 2012, Po Chun Lau



Figure 17: Installation View 3, *Where My World Began*, 2012, Po Chun Lau



Figure 16: Installation View 4, *Where My World Began*, 2012, Po Chun Lau

5.4. *If only a Fishing Flake Could Talk*

A full-size ‘flake’ structure made of branches occupies a space on one side of the gallery. It informs the viewers that the structure does not function as a fishing flake, but the representation of a fishing flake or a metaphor of becoming a fishing Flake.

This full size structure invites viewers to step into an audio space and allows them to experience their own sense of place. Two speakers mounted on top of the flake structure produce overlapping audio recordings of the



Figure 18: Installation View 5, *Where My World Began*, 2012, Po Chun Lau

interviews. To some people these sounds are fragmented noises and are inconsequential. To others, these sounds are voices of people telling their stories.

The gesture of stepping inside the structure can also suggest an intrusion into a private space. This is the feeling that I sometimes experienced when I interviewed the locals. I felt as if I was an intruder to their private lives even though they were quite prepared to share that private space, publicly with me and with the viewers.



Figure 19: Installation View 6, *Where My World Began*, 2012, Po Chun Lau

While constructing this structure is an experiential process for me; beginning with Ted and the small model that we built in Pouch Cove, the process reflects the realities of people working together. The structure therefore also exemplifies the community's sharing spirits as expressed by many people of Pouch Cove within their concept of place. *If only a Fishing Flake Could Talk* stands as witness of the collective memories of the people of Pouch Cove.

CHAPTER 6

FUTURE PROJECTS

“I pay tribute to the past as a resource that can serve as a foundation for us to revision and renew our commitment to the present, to making a world where all people can live fully and well, where everyone can belong.” (Bell Hooks)

The thesis exhibition titled *Where My World Began* concludes my thesis research project for the IAMD Program, and opens opportunities for me to future artistic projects. The video/audio work that I present in this exhibition is a fragment of a larger project that I have envisioned. I will continue to work with the interview data and pursue my research creation work through video/audio on themes of place-specific art projects involving fishery and community of Pouch Cove.

Changes are taking place in Pouch Cove. For economical reasons Department of Fisheries and Oceans plans to close down one of the slipways. My immediate response to this announcement is disappointment because this is where people go and share their stories. The stages and flakes disappeared from the culture landscape because of the collapse of the cod fishery. Now there is the possibility of losing one of the last remaining landmarks of Pouch Cove. I understand change is inevitable, but it is up to us to preserve these Memories - memories give meaning to Pouch Cove.

My sense of place in Pouch Cove also concerns the future, preserving the value of the lived experiences of the locals. I concur with Lippard in her speech in 2010 at The Falmouth Convention, she said: “no matter how long or short a time we live in a place we inherit the responsibility for knowing about it, valuing

it, working to keep it viable, and illuminating our dynamic cultural spaces and their underlying, often invisible meanings and uses — for those who don't” (Lippard 2010). These words verbalize my thoughts and my commitments to keep memories of Pouch Cove viable through my creative practice, to honor the place I belong to, the place *where my world began*.

This research project has given me a solid foundation to work with a community such as the Pouch Cove community. Future projects will include development of place-specific art in Pouch Cove that will reflect the character of the place, provide a sense of place by connecting its history and environment and to expand public awareness of contemporary art practices outside the conventional galleries and museums as noted by Lippard (1997). I have recently started a dialogue with Sue Gruchy, a Pouch Cove local, to pursue a collaborative project involving local residents to build a traditional fishing flake structure in Pouch Cove. I will document the construction process as well as interview people who had worked on the flakes in the past. The documentation will encompass both cultural and artistic activities. The fishing flake will once again be standing tall along the shoreline, situated in a changing cultural context at the present time. It will connect long time residents, new residents, the come-from-aways and the people outside of the community to experience a sense of place: Pouch Cove.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

“Belonging is directly tied both linguistically and experientially to place, and in a community like Calvert this means sharing the knowledge of a series of common spaces.” (Gerald Pocius)

When I am in Pouch Cove, I feel at home: it is a place I feel I belong. I often question this sense of belonging and want to make sense of it. Is it because I was born and raised in one of the most highly populated cities and now find solace in this wide open space? Is it because the unique geographical location of Pouch Cove makes it appealing? Having lived in so many places I have come to a realization that my concept of home does not tie to a physical place but rather to an emotional experience of being in a place. This emotional experience gets stronger as I get to know the people and the history of Pouch Cove. To me home is a place filled with emotions. These emotions may seem inexplicable, but they guide my research creation project and I fully embrace them.

This is in contrast to the feelings expressed by the locals. Their feelings of being home and sense of belonging are very explicit in their vernacular culture. These feelings are strongly rooted within a physical place where they were born and raised. Being home to the locals is ingrained with personal memories associated with the place. Despite our different definitions and perspective of the notion of “being at home,” the locals and I experience an emotional attachment to Pouch Cove and this shared feeling of sense of place brings us together.

My Thesis Exhibition *Where My World Began* reveals universal stories

that are rooted in personal experiences. In this research project I probe the memories of Pouch Cove residents by collecting and reflecting on their stories in various forms of artistic expression with intent to locate a sense of place for myself. These inquiries bring forward forgotten memories and together we are able to contextualize these memories into the present which I further develop through my art work. The locals who participated in the interviews provided me with research data, as well as friendship and trust that I will always treasure. In exchange I shared with them my interpretation of their stories through my personal experiences and artistic concept. This reciprocal exchange is significant because it adds another layer of meaning to the work and my personal sensory experiences of Pouch Cove.

Memories, stories and everyday encounters with the locals are materials for my art. Locals have their own unique remembrances of the seas, the fish, and the making of a flake. I have created my own remembrance of the place by creating a sculpture inspired by a fishing flake. I also appropriated a salt cod and reproduced multiple copies of it through mouldmaking. I compare my repeated acts of brushing the wax into the mould and removing the wax cast from the mould, repeated acts of rubbing Ted's fish onto a sheet of rice paper with Ted catching the fish and filleting the fish. The physical making of multiple copies of Ted's fish brings me closer to Ted's experience. The repetition of making reinforces memory and leads to the concept of appropriation and preservation.

My research also aims to contribute to the oral history of Pouch Cove so that memories and traditional knowledge are kept alive. When we lose the elderly residents we lose part of the memories and stories of Pouch Cove unless these memories and stories are preserved. My interdisciplinary art practice and my commitment to preserve the memory of Pouch Cove prompt me to record as many stories as I can during the time that I am there. The following passage from Pocius' *A Place to Belong* resonates for me.

While as an outsider I may never be able to claim that I belong to Calvert, at least I have been able to bring knowledge of my Calvert friends to the outside world. Many of these friends are no longer with us, but their voices live on in this account, their views of their own places passed on to their children. This book remains a personal account of giving a voice to one small Newfoundland community, unique in the specifics of its daily spaces, yet showing through those spaces the ways that objects shape the life of us all (Pocius xvii).

The locals trust me, as an outsider who shares an attachment to their place, to tell their stories. Therefore it is my ethical responsibility to fully acknowledge their participation and to share my art work with them. This trust indicates a form of recognition of my place in the community knowing that I can never belong to Pouch Cove according to their vernacular language. I acknowledge the tension between belonging and not belonging as a reality in my being. This conflicting tension does not stop me from pursuing my work in Pouch Cove, but rather it stimulates my artistic endeavor in a creative way.

Reading of relevant critical theories and combining with studio practice, I can now envision my relationship with Pouch Cove more concretely. My sense of

Pouch Cove, as a place has developed through social interaction with the locals,
and through my art practice as my way to honor the place *where my world began*.

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Appendix A: Samples of Interview Transcripts

Some of the questions I asked relating to Igor included:

- **What words would you use to describe the storm?**
- **How was this storm different from other storms?**
- **How was the community affected by the hurricane?**

By evoking people's memories of Igor provided opportunities for the participants to recall other weather related memories such as:

"... my father had to watch the sea cause it came up from one side of the road and down on the other ... he would give us a time that we could cross the road ..." **David Bragg**

"... the sea took out the stages and some wood pieces were washed up on the slipway... my husband's uncle went down to collect the wood so he could use it later on for firewood or something, and the ocean took him, yes, the ocean took him..." **Shirley Bragg**

"A storm in 92 took out the last fishing stage and flake down here, they were totally destroyed ... we are right on the open Atlantic, this is not a deep bay, not a safe harbour. You must be able to count on your neighbours in order to survive. This gives a sense of community here ..."

Deanne Fleet

"... we've always been here... you learn to do same things that you do in sun shine you do in the rain, you dress for it ... the weather is just the

weather ... the world looks so different in the rain ... you don't get tired of it ...” **Sue Gruchy**

“The ocean is forever changing, never the same. It can be nice and it can be bad, ‘cause it took my son so it can be very bad. But I don’t blame the ocean for that. I forgave it...” **Sharon Wall**

Recreational fishery brings out memories of the time when fishing was a traditional way of life. Here are some of the comments relating to fishing as a livelihood:

“... stages and flakes you could walk from one to another. I counted 52 boats on that one time people fishing in Pouch Cove ... when they fished then, they only made money enough for the do for the summer, and the supplies for the winter ...” **Herb and Fannie Langmead**

“We had two traps and it was in the 80’s ... we caught 83,000 lbs (of fish) in one day.” **Bert Noseworthy**

“... people from away like to put lots of windows in their houses so they can look at the ocean, but we don’t want to look at the ocean because the ocean reminds us of hardship, work and sometimes deaths ...” **Gerald Noseworthy**

My questions addressed this work aspect of people’s lives with questions such as:

- **How/why did you make a choice to come to live in Pouch Cove?**
- **How would you describe the Pouch Cove community?**

• **How is Pouch Cove different from other communities around the Avalon Peninsula?**

"... what we like about Pouch Cove is you are close to St. John's ... you have all the benefits of the bigger city ... and yet when you come out to Pouch Cove, we say that we are going to paradise." **Christine Broccolo**

"... they always looked after their own. If the house burnt down or something, they built the house again. It was very much like comrades."

Sue Gruchy

"...main reason that I moved back to Pouch Cove when I had my children ... I wanted them to grow up same as I did ...be able to go off into the wood, and played around ..." **Sharon Wall**

"... a tree that we planted was cut down because our neighbour built a deck and the tree would block the view of the ocean. We didn't have to do that, but this is a neighbourly thing to do" **Deanne Fleet**

Appendix B: Accompanying Material

The following accompanying material is available upon request from the OCAD University Library: CD: *Pouch Cove - A Place to Call Home* (mp3 file).

Anyone requesting the material may view it in the OCAD University Library or pay to have it copied for personal use.