

A POLITICS OF DWELLING:
LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND LINKED COMMUNITIES
ON THE LAKE SUPERIOR NORTH SHORE

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Abstract

This dissertation explores how stakeholders of working-class communities and First Nations in Northwestern Ontario along the Lake Superior north shore express a politics of dwelling and their own sense of place in regard to their social and natural environments. The work stresses the importance of local knowledge as a means of community building and knowledge production, and strives to map how the land and landscapes are valued by those who live and work in this region. My methodological approach combines visual methods with autoethnography, since as the researcher, I have a formative and long-term family history in the locations of my study, as well as an ongoing practice of producing personal creative projects and artworks in and about the north shore region.

The dissertation's material structure is presented as a dual construction: this written thesis and a 44 minute documentary film, *Conversations on the Lake*. My prior history as an independent filmmaker and lens-based visual artist has shaped my scholarly practice, so that my research findings are best expressed using a combination of textual and audio/visual methods. My primary research tool in undertaking the qualitative research interviews that support this dissertation is the camera. Following transcription and analysis, the filmed interview material was organized into the following themes: the role of class in rural northern

resource-based communities, the dualisms and tensions between conservation and extraction of natural resources, the intersections of local, regional, and global politics affecting environmental themes in the area of my study, and the local landscape as a unique and relevant character in the culture of Northwestern Ontario.

What my research and filmed interviews in the communities of the Lake Superior north shore region have unveiled are an evolving sense of place and belonging, as experienced by actors living and working there. Since beginning this work, new ecological and social themes have continually emerged as stories for investigation and exploration. The shifting progression of my narrative enquiry is a web of interconnected stories along a mobile, transformative geography.

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essay, “Requiem for Landscape”, in their co-edited text, *Working on Earth: Class and Environmental Justice* (2015).

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1. Introduction



Figure 1: Map of the Research Area. Map design by Mary Traill.

This dissertation investigates a politics of dwelling in rural Northwestern Ontario communities along the Canadian side of the Lake Superior north shore. This is the region where I lived my early life in a small working-class community, and thus my dissertation is an autoethnographic study of the culture of rural Northwestern Ontario. Lake Superior, the world's largest freshwater lake by surface area, holds ten per cent of the global water supply, yet has only a scattered, low density population around its perimeter. My research findings, which I have chosen to present as both a documentary film, *Conversations on the Lake*

(2014), and this written thesis, concentrate on a twofold analysis: the ongoing Northwestern Ontario preoccupation with infrastructure developments that will provide both economic and environmental sustainability for the region, and the resulting dualistic values regarding the land that are embedded in the social and community networks of the Lake Superior north shore. Through my film work and this thesis, my intention is to invite the reader/viewer to share my autoethnographic journey in which we explore these themes:

- I. the impact of place and landscape on political, social, cultural, and spiritual values in Northwestern Ontario
- II. local tensions between resource development and conservation
- III. and the dualistic vision, and ongoing dialectical relations between industry and nature.



Figure 2: Map of the Research Locations. Map design by Mary Trill.

My dissertation asserts that the natural environment and local culture of rural Northwestern Ontario deserve protection, but questions whether it is possible to do this given the lack of economic initiatives available in the region, and the fact that new economic proposals and developments are generally destructive to or threaten the natural environment. The key narrative direction of this dissertation is the provision of a venue for my research participants to share their local and regional environmental knowledge and social concerns in on-camera interviews that are represented in a film which will be exhibited in some of their communities and in regional northern film festivals and public art

galleries where my work is exhibited. The testimonials extracted for the film are then further cited and explored throughout the written text of this dissertation.

Autoethnography is a means of writing the self through others in an interconnected web, with structures that are more ecological than chronological, reflecting human change in a relational context (Allister 18). Mark Allister writes that memory is linked with nature, and “brings stories, and the stories connect memory to the land, and this connection prods us to look again, in an act combining both fieldwork and imagination” (31). Writing about the self is potentially an act of understanding nature and reframing of ‘other’ worlds (Allister 33). The autoethnographer chooses selective moments in the research to reproduce, moments made possible by “being a part of the culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity” (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, “Autoethnography: An Overview”). David Butz has charted the “three main orientations an autoethnographer may have to the production of authorized academic knowledge: inside, outside, or at the margins” (139). These categories include those with academic authority, the “subaltern voices” positioned outside of academic institutions, and others defined as “insider researchers” who occupy both an academic representational space and a voice that resists “metropolitan academic representations of the group to which they belong”. In

positioning my own autoethnographic position, I would place myself in this third category, as a cultural producer with established institutional supports, and as an actor with a layered personal history on the margins of a rural working class culture.

Chapter overview

Chapter 1 - Introduction announces the dual material artifacts of the dissertation, the text and the film. Here I also introduce myself as the autoethnographic narrator in the geographic location of my study, rural Northwestern Ontario, and the key questions and central argument of my thesis.

Chapter 2 - An Autoethnographer's Journey provides a historical context to how this project developed over time, and introduces my project's focus on how meanings of place can be constructed through images and personal histories in particular lived spaces, in this case the communities of the Lake Superior north shore region. This chapter provides a background to my foundational work performed in the Lake Superior communities, beginning with my earlier contributions to environmental cultural production as an independent filmmaker both prior to and during my graduate studies, and following this as a filmed case study presented during the comprehensive stages of my doctoral studies,

which employed a series of filmed interviews I conducted in communities on the Lake Superior north shore. I explain my methodology as a practicing filmmaker, researcher, and visual artist, and how these are deployed in the dissertation as reflexive practices that emphasize “art as constructed text” (Jenssen 21).

Chapter 3 - Picturing Environments: Visual Research as a Cultural Practice presents an overview and analysis of visual research in context of its significance in environmental cultural studies, and introduces some key theoretical concepts I am working with: visual autoethnography as a methodology for environmental investigation, and images as rhetorical strategies for the expression of environmental themes. The chapter comments on the dissertation’s primary research object, a 44 minute documentary film included within the text of the dissertation as a DVD insert, which follows from my prior comprehensive stage research, and is the focus from which the key themes of my dissertation unfold. Cultures of nature and sense of place in regard to specific landscapes and communities of actors in Northwestern Ontario are explored through visual images of the social and material landscapes, constructed as rhetorical strategies to promote particular environmental narratives and meanings of place in these sites. To background my discussion, I examine some contemporary artworks expressing environmental themes, and in so doing

illuminate how the visual construction of my film, *Conversation on the Lake*, is deployed as a methodology expressing perceptions of place, landscape and cultural belonging in Northwestern Ontario communities along the Lake Superior north shore.

Chapter 4 – Class, Local Culture, and Life Narratives in Northwestern Ontario examines life writing and autoethnography as a means of addressing critical discourses and ecologies within rural working-class cultures, in this case the predominately working-class rural Northwestern Ontario communities bordering Lake Superior. I examine a variety of images and experiences of class position and identity that emerged in my Northwestern Ontario interviews and locations, and connect these to the social, cultural, and material landscapes as experienced from a working-class ‘insider’ position. To position my research, I frame my qualitative research interview findings against a background of recent twentieth-century and post-millennial theoretical literatures analyzing contemporary meanings of class.

Chapter 5 – Dual Identities: Sense of Place and Politics of Location in the Rural Near North examines social themes in rural Northwestern Ontario as they arise from the exchange of stories offered by my research participants. The different speakers weave together narratives defining their own sense of place in the north shore region and its communities,

and share their knowledge of how these communities are connected. While dependent on the land and its landscapes for their livelihoods, residents simultaneously express a conflicting desire to see it remain untarnished. The issue of economic sustainability against environmental protection of the places that they are profoundly bound to in spirit is of paramount concern to many, at times producing a dichotomy that some have referred to as a Northern Ontario “doppelgänger identity”.¹

Chapter 6 – Concluding the Journey considers what contributions my research and cultural productions make to existing literatures and cultural artifacts reflecting themes of class, cultures of nature, and imaging/imagining of rural working-class communities, in particular the Lake Superior north shore region. How have the provincial rural northern communities of my formative years changed since I lived there, and how can these changes best be expressed with the tools and methods of visual autoethnography? What new contributions do visual and autoethnographic projects such as mine provide fields of cultural production, including autoethnography and image-based research?

The following chapters are structured as a narrative and figurative journey, inviting the reader to share my autoethnographic research travels

¹ This descriptor of a Northern Ontario cultural identity appears in Conor Mihell’s article, “Frontier Conservation” in the Winter 2010 edition of *Ontario Nature Magazine*. I take this up as a theme in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

over multiple time frames, as themes of place and identity merge along lines of class, visual and symbolic representation, and as a values mapping of the land and landscapes of my study, expressed as a multi-vocal and mobile geography.



Figure 3: View of Lake Superior, near Rosspport. Photo by E. Steiner.

2. An Autoethnographer's Journey



Figure 4: Portrait of the autoethnographer, Edith M. Steiner on location, Agawa Bay, Lake Superior. Photo by Mary Traill.

I begin my journey in a community close to my own hometown of Manitouwadge. In 2008, while in the early stages of my doctoral program, I read a *Globe and Mail* article, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place”² about a proposed aggregate or ‘trap rock’ quarry development directly on the Lake Superior shoreline at Michipicoten Bay, near the town of Wawa,

² This article was republished in Conor Mihell’s book, *The Greatest Lake: Stories from Lake Superior’s North Shore*. Toronto: Dundurn, 2012. Print.

Ontario. The land had been purchased by an American corporation, Superior Aggregates Company, and the new industrial development had roused opposition from local and regional environmentalists. The project had fragmented the local community, pitting those in need of the possible jobs promised by the company against other residents who wanted to protect the shoreline at Michipicoten Bay, and the Lake Superior shoreline in general, from further industrial intrusion. Local and regional stakeholders and environmentalists formed a number of coalitions and worked with other environmental organizations to raise awareness around possible material damages resulting from the quarry project. Among those involved in the resistance were Citizens Concerned for Michipicoten Bay (CCMB), and members of the Lake Superior Conservancy and Watershed Council (LSCWC).

Michipicoten Bay is adjacent to the Michipicoten First Nation, and is situated between large protected areas and parklands, with Lake Superior Provincial Park to the south and the large conservation area bordering Pukaskwa National Park near the town of Marathon to the north.

Michipicoten has an early industrial history that began in the days of the fur trade, when it served as the primary junction between James Bay and Lake Superior, connecting with the main trading routes from Montreal through the southern Great Lakes north to Superior and westwards

towards Winnipeg. Later the harbour was a key port for shipping ore and timber south to Sault Ste. Marie and the United States for processing. Today this tranquil cove is home to some private homes and cottages, a public beach, and an ecotourism operator, Naturally Superior Adventures.

I decided to follow the Wawa and Michipicoten Bay story as it interfaces with my key research interests: rural Northern Ontario working-class culture and its natural and social environments, its history of service to metropolitan extractive industries, and the landscape itself as an actor in these discourses. My interest in the Michipicoten Bay developments was fueled by my own lived experience in the region, as my hometown of Manitouwadge is only a two-hour drive from Wawa. I began the early stages of my research by contacting the author of the aforementioned *Globe and Mail* article, Conor Mihell, a local environmental writer and wilderness guide then living in Wawa. He subsequently introduced me to a local citizens group opposed to the Superior Aggregates Company quarry, Citizens Concerned for Michipicoten Bay (CCMB), and I began to conduct on-camera interviews with stakeholders affected by the proposed development, as a filmed sequence for a Comprehensive Project that would shape a part of my interdisciplinary doctoral research.

As I proceeded with my research at Michipicoten Bay, related themes began to emerge in neighbouring communities. A federally

proposed (2007) Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area further northwest near Nipigon had inspired many local and regional community consultations in the surrounding area, and I decided to interview persons engaged in attending these, to compare differences in how these two projects, one conservationist and one industrial, both with limited employment opportunities, were influencing the local population. While following new streams of research and image production in the Lake Superior communities, I maintained contact with my original research participants at Wawa, and eventually proposed a version of this research for my dissertation project. My proposed new study would produce a mapping of the Lake Superior north shore region's social and environmental values and concerns among a variety of local stakeholders, to reflect a politics of dwelling specific to Northwestern Ontario.

After years of resistance and legal action, the Wawa-based community coalition group Citizens Concerned for Michipicoten Bay (CCMB), were defeated in a 2009 Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) Review which ruled in the company's favour, giving the Superior Aggregates Company the right to proceed with the quarry. By 2013 the company had not commenced any development on the Michipicoten Bay property. Amid local speculation of the company's bankruptcy and funds owed to the Wawa municipality, the company had disappeared not only from the

landscape itself, but all traces of its online presence were also expunged, other than historical information relating to the project and the long-term conflict between the company and community members. In late 2012 a CBC news item published information suggesting that the town of Wawa was now considering investing in the quarry to get the project running in order to provide a mere twenty jobs.³ Members of Citizens Concerned for Michipicoten Bay have continued to monitor developments on this site, which remained fallow in 2013.

By 2012, with the quarry issue in decline, a new environmental theme had emerged at Wawa and other north shore communities, as the nuclear industry again proposed that nuclear waste storage could be safely contained in a deep geological repository carved into the massive rock of the Canadian Shield. The theme of nuclear waste disposal in the rural north was a decades-old project by the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO), one that it had been forced to abandon decades earlier due to resistance by local communities and environmental networks nationally and globally. When the Wawa municipal government began

³ "Town of Wawa May Buy Stake in Delayed Quarry." 8 Oct. 2012. CBC News, Sudbury. Web. 10 Apr. 2013.

meeting with representatives of the NWMO in 2012,⁴ I re-interviewed some of my previous participants on this theme, as well as others such as longtime anti-nuclear activist Brennain Lloyd of Northwatch, a Northern Ontario coalition of environmental groups. I discuss this development of my research trajectory in detail in Chapter 4.

My study is an exploration of how the land and its waters, conflated with local sense of place, are valued in specific Northwestern Ontario communities along the Lake Superior north shore, mapping how regional natural and cultural resources are viewed by its citizens. I believe the north shore to be a unique community as a geographic location, with an expanded sense of the local possible only in a wide landscape such as Northwestern Ontario. I would argue that the north shore is valued as such by many who reside there, and most of my research participants speak to this point of view. Among the region's natural resources are its landscapes as objects of visual beauty and sites for recreation and tourism, as well as its cultural histories, community relations, and inter-community supports,

⁴ On May 30, 2012 the municipality of Wawa hosted open house information sessions for the local community with representatives of the Nuclear Waste Management Organization, as an entry point into the multiple stage screening process. Official website of the Municipality of Wawa [<http://www.wawa.cc/township/township.aspx?ID=464>]. Web. 30 Jun. 2012.

including sustainable economic options for those who hope to continue to live there. Management of natural and economic resources and values are often in conflict, even among aboriginal communities in the region, as evidenced by current (2014) disputes around industrial wind farm projects, which I discuss in Chapter 4. These are ongoing discussions, and these themes will continue to evolve and change long after my dissertation is completed.

The limitations of my study are several: only a few stakeholders from each community are represented in the study, as the research participants were limited to those who would agree to speak on camera. As well, I purposely selected speakers in favour of protecting the natural environment, as their views most strongly support my own belief that the Lake Superior shoreline and water reserves should be protected from further industrial damages. I did interview an eager proponent of the Superior Aggregates Company quarry, Bruce Staines of Wawa, a mining engineer who had a stake in employment with the proposed development. This interview took place after he contacted me, wanting a voice in my project as a way of presenting an alternative point of view representing the local community. I was informed of this by my other local Wawa sources, who encouraged me to present 'the other side' of the argument, perhaps

as an ironic contrast to their own stories, rather than as a means of providing support for the quarry development.

The findings of my project are thus constrained to an exploration of how support for local and regional environmental protection in the Lake Superior communities is expressed by representative residents and stakeholders of the region, and how conservationist efforts engage with the region's need for economic and social infrastructure. Through a succession of filmed interviews with regional inhabitants, together with images of the landscapes where the interviews are filmed, the research functions as an oral history of a specific rural area, and as a visual documentation of selected sites of that region. The images recorded against the speakers' voices depict both the beauty of the natural landscape, in detailed close shots or expansive views, and the decline of the former industrial towns. Together these visual notes give voice to diverse social and environmental themes as expressed by selected speakers living and working in the Northwestern Ontario communities along Lake Superior.

Although each of these communities has its own specific concerns, new developments in one community will affect other communities in the area. Citizens between towns and within one town may hold conflicting views about how the land and its natural resources, including its

landscapes and vistas as assets for tourism, should be valued. In small communities where everyone tends to know their neighbours and coworkers, and may also have friends and coworkers in neighbouring towns, these conflicting perceptions can seriously damage the social framework of local and regional community networks. As an example, here is what Mark Leschishin of Wawa related to me in his 2008 interview:

Here we have an outside entity, outside the municipality, outside the country, coming into our town, and the impact it's had on the community has been devastating because it's pitted people against people. Wawa was a friendly town. That's what brought us here and that's why we stayed. People helped each other, supported each other. And then these people come from the outside, bringing this proposal in, and they pit one side against the other: people who were pro-development and others saying, maybe we should stop and think about this, maybe we should come up with a balanced approach and consider the entire picture, not just the positive economic aspects. Maybe we should look at the negative economic aspects and the negative social impacts this could have. Even just asking questions has brought on negative implications for those who have asked those questions. We've been personally attacked in the papers, in letters to the editor. And there are people now who don't talk to you anymore. It's been really hurtful, and it angers me that the company doesn't care. They don't live here.

In gathering the on-camera stories of my research participants, together with filmed images and sound recordings present in the interview sites, I have approached this dissertation with a methodology that allowed for ongoing restructuring of its of emerging and transforming themes. New

digital technologies have made the filmmaking process possible to pursue in this way, and I have enough technical expertise to perform such revisions and new insertions of fresh material into the film as they become known. These are the threads that tie this work together in a way that I hope provides a narrative that is mobile, transformative, and consistent in its flow. As Rosalind Williams says about the act of narration:

Narration permits and indeed encourages contradiction, exploration, questioning, and suspension of judgment, as opposed to abstract and logical statements of conviction. The story can move in directions that the writer did not foresee at the outset. Narratives create their own momentum because the very act of storytelling opens up unexpected and perhaps unintended possibilities (19).

As a container of the greatest fresh water supply in North America, Lake Superior also holds a wealth of stories, myths, and mysterious narratives, of both indigenous and settler varieties. Some are famous sagas, such as the legends of the powerful Mishipizheu spirit ruling the lake, an aboriginal presence “whose name is rarely spelled the same way twice” (Unwin 24), or the tales surrounding the sinking of the Edmund Fitzgerald, immortalized in music, literature, and films. Others are lesser known accounts, such as Glenn Gould’s solitary sojourns to Wawa for personal and creative renewal, featured in a 1968 film produced by the CBC, *Up in Northern Ontario with Glenn Gould*, which I will discuss further on in Chapter 2: *Picturing Environments: Visual Research as a Cultural*

Practice. Lake Superior's fresh water and other natural resources are of increasing concern to many stakeholders along the lake's shoreline communities. The region's environmental and social concerns are myriad, and I explore some of these in this dissertation, in regard to the testimonials offered to me by my research participants.

My research takes place over a geography spanning approximately one thousand kilometers, between Thunder Bay and Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, in actor networks and settlements along Trans Canada Highway 17. Midway along this expanse, my research journeys take a detour northwards to the town of Manitouwadge, where I lived as a child. Over the decades since my formative life in this region, I have experienced much warmer summers, and the rising temperatures of Lake Superior. In my youth the water was always icy cold, even at ankle-deep immersion, and as children we never swam in the freezing lake. Now the lake is so much warmer that one of my greatest pleasures on journeys along its coastline is to take long swims on its still sparsely populated beaches.

My hometown of Manitouwadge is set deep in the boreal forest just over fifty kilometers due north of Lake Superior, as the great northern crow flies. It is located about half-way between Sault Ste. Marie and Thunder Bay, a little over four hundred kilometers either way, a relatively short distance in the provincial near north. Although not directly on Lake

Superior and isolated at the end of a regional road, Highway 614, it is situated between the two regional arms of the Trans Canada Highway: to the south is Highway 17 and to the north Highway 11, accessible only by a rough industrial road. Manitouwadge counts itself among the 'north shore' communities in the network of small towns between Sault Ste. Marie and Thunder Bay. These communities and their actors have close relationships and are in a sense one loosely connected community, a linked web supported by inter-community social life, infrastructure, services, and some employment.



Figure 5: Highway 17, between Manitouwadge and Marathon, with a mine serving both communities in the background. Photo by E. Steiner.

The small towns along Highway 17 between Sault Ste. Marie and Thunder Bay are locations where I have a long and ongoing lived history, beginning with my early experience growing up in the region, as a returning actor to visit my elderly mother who still lives there, and as a producer of films and artworks about the region. Growing up, I attended school sporting meets, summer camp, and regional social events in most of the north shore towns, as each town typically has only one public or high school. My family would often go to the neighbouring towns of Marathon or Wawa for supplies not available at home. To see a medical specialist, we would go to Thunder Bay or Sault Ste. Marie, and this is still so today, as specialized medical treatment is typically not available in these towns. In the late 1950s my sister was a small child with tuberculosis, hospitalized for a year in a sanatorium in Thunder Bay, then the twin cities of Fort William and Port Arthur. The Trans Canada Highway 17 was not yet completed then and to visit her we travelled a more circuitous route than today. But the image of Lake Superior was present for much of the journey, and we would often stop to gaze at the views, taking photographs with my father's camera. Our family summer vacations were camping trips around the lake, often past Thunder Bay and over the American border to Duluth, the farthest western point of Lake Superior where the shoreline curves southeast, to become the American south

shore. This long history of travel and images along the Lake Superior shoreline and its communities are a major component of my early memories, and serve my ongoing research and creative production. My films, photographic projects, and post-graduate academic research are all funded by my connection to my Northwestern Ontario homeland, and Lake Superior and its environs remain a touchstone for what home means to me.

In reflecting on my former life in Northwestern Ontario, and in the act of filming my childhood places, the importance of what it means to relate to a place as home arrives as a constant anchoring device. From my readings, I have learned that home is a place where one not only lives, but dwells, a place of arrival and belonging (Bate 56). Ideas of dwelling in ecocriticism seem to originate from Heidegger's notion that "home is the place of authentic being" (Bate 57), entwined with ideas of building, being, and blood, all motivated by a call to poetry (Garrard, *Heidegger, Heaney, problem of dwelling* 169). For the purposes of my study of dwelling in the communities along Lake Superior in Northwestern Ontario, as experienced by my research participants, I focus here on how belonging is produced by feelings of kinship with the land. Jonathan Bate argues that humans know home and dwelling because we also know homelessness, whereas other

species are in a state of perpetual dwelling, “always at home in their ecosystem” whether they migrate or not (57).

A sense of displacement or placelessness often follows the migrant from a small rural community to an urban place. A new sense of emplacement may then be sought and attained, but our former places are living memory worlds, flowing persistently through our ongoing materialized arrivals and departures. In the places where we have experienced dwelling, an emplaced past meets the always approaching future from the site of our current location (Karjalainen, “On Geobiography” 87). My return journeys to Northwestern Ontario are affirmations of my belonging and sense of place in this region, and as such are mirrored in the testimonials expressed by my research participants.

All of the north shore towns were built upon resource extraction and most are now in decline, despite their proximity to a profusion of new mining interests staking claims in the region and further north in the Ring of Fire area, the southernmost tip of which is located barely 100 kilometers north of Manitowadge. My research maps the concerns of speakers I interviewed who are living and working in this network of towns and nearby First Nation communities, and articulates the stories connecting these research participants and their places.

My dissertation endeavors to respect the life experiences, social

themes, and environmental concerns expressed by my research participants, who have given me their time and their willingness to share their local knowledge. It also strives to honour ways of knowing that have meaning for me as both a researcher and a visual artist.

My path is illuminated by the work of indigenous scholar Four Arrows (Don Trent Jacobs), whose 2008 text *The Authentic Dissertation: Alternative Ways of Knowing, Research, and Representation* helped me to envision a structure for fusing my research interviews with the audio/visual artifacts I have produced in the sites where the research was conducted. Four Arrows argues that an authentic dissertation is in essence a spiritual undertaking that honours “the centrality of the researcher’s voice, experience, creativity, and authority” (1). Drawing on his own indigenous ways of knowing, Four Arrows champions the “alternative” dissertation as one which stresses creativity, respects the value of spirituality, and remembers the importance of sense of place (6). It is with this focus that I integrate my research with my experience and practice as an independent filmmaker and lens-based visual artist, with a long history of producing work about the landscapes and narratives of Northwestern Ontario, and in particular its rural working-class history and culture. Because my childhood and adolescent years were lived in the locations where my research was conducted, in a working-class family and community, my

dissertation is an autoethnographic study focused on themes and images of landscape, class, and culture in rural Northwestern Ontario. I discuss autoethnography as a methodology in more detail in Chapter 4, *Class, Local Culture, and Life Narratives in Northwestern Ontario*, but in introducing it here as an element of my own research practice, I position my understanding of autoethnography as a complex term with multiple and diffused boundaries that centre the researcher as an active research participant in a social field they are researching. Since my research includes visual methods, I am particularly interested in visual autoethnography, which I include in my discussion in Chapter 3, *Picturing Environments: Visual Research as a Cultural Practice*, in regard to how images can serve as a narrative rhetorical device in their own right. In defending and deploying autoethnography as a valid research mode, Cate Watson offers an image of research production she refers to as “multiple diegetic narrative worlds” aiming “to invoke the doubled gaze of the self-portrait, the return of the self in the ekphrastically encountered image, giving rise to a sense of the uncanny – the self as other” (538). In academic research, Watson states, “the relationship between the visible and the readable constitutes an enduring problem in which the image is generally subordinate to the text” (526). Watson’s position regarding ekphrasis as the problematic relationship between image and word – that

is, “the verbal representation of the visual representation” (Mitchell, *Picture Theory* 152) follows Mitchell’s 1994 discussion “Ekphrasis and the Other”, a detailed theoretical discussion of themes arising from the language of description and depiction:

A verbal representation cannot represent – that is, make present – its object in the same way a visual representation can. It may refer to an object, describe it, invoke it, but it can never bring its visual presence before us in the way pictures do. Words can “cite” but never “sight” their objects (152).

The interviews I recorded in communities along Lake Superior’s north shore reflect a number of social and environmental concerns of citizens who live and work in this region, in sites of my formative lived experience. The concerns expressed by my research have shifted and expanded during the course of my study, as emerging issues related to new industrial projects in the area have evolved. Some of the limitations of my study are that not all of the towns and First Nations communities along Lake Superior’s northern shoreline are represented in this work, although most are, and that my selected representatives are but one or a few voices within a larger community. However, I have endeavored to include a variety of speakers that includes both indigenous and non-indigenous voices, local citizens who are residents but not engaged in any particular local environmental initiatives, as well as some ‘expert’ testimonials from various local and regional environmental organizations.

3. Picturing Environments: Visual Research as a Cultural Practice

In this chapter I explore how visual image constructions may function as social and political rhetorical strategies to stimulate environmental thought, and as such may animate their viewers to respond to ethical questions regarding natural and social environments and themes. My research journeys have always been located in a visual context. Before embarking on my doctoral studies I was engaged in producing artworks in film and photography, practices I have maintained and integrated with my scholarly work. My work has been funded by Canadian cultural agencies, the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council, and my early work is represented in the permanent public collections of the National Gallery of Canada and the Canadian Centre for Contemporary Photography. I have served on Board of Director positions and as a member of artist centres and collectives, and am currently a member of Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography, Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre, and V-Tape. I refer to these details of my artistic history here in order to stress my ongoing commitment to synthesizing my artistic and scholarly practices.

The material structure of the dissertation is centred upon my analysis of a 44-minute digital documentary film, *Conversations on the*

Lake, which I have produced as a key artifact of my research findings. My research produces a combined autoethnographic and investigative visual and textual narrative, exploring how the land and the landscapes of the locations of my study are valued by actors who live and work in the communities of this region. My impressions and research findings, filtered and expressed through my subjective gaze, are materialized as both an audio/visual and written text. For the filmed component of the dissertation, I have performed my own camera work, sound recording, and editing, at times with technical assistance from an editing professional to facilitate expediency, as the editing software I work with is of a complex film industry standard. As a phenomenological exploration of place in concretized pictorial constructions, my visual impressions of the landscapes of my research locations are synthesized in the editing process with the interviews and narrative questions of the project.

The filmed testimonials are distilled from thirty qualitative on-camera research interviews conducted over five years, between 2008 and 2013, of which twenty-four speakers appear in the edited film. I begin the film with an opening narration in my own voice, as an additional stakeholder in the social and material landscapes of the film, situating my personal history in the themes about to unfold for the viewer. Some of the early interviews initially formed a part of my comprehensive examinations,

as a Comprehensive Project with an audio/visual component as well as a written report on the activities undertaken for the Project, shaped as an essay exploring some theoretical questions arising from the Project. Some of these research participants were later re-interviewed after my Dissertation Proposal was approved, with the understanding that the new film, *Conversations on the Lake*, would form a major component of the dissertation itself. A few of the interviews are not included in the edited film, presented as an online digital link, as a Supplement to this text, as these testimonials were either repetitive, better articulated by another speaker, or the material was revisited in the speaker's second interview. Elements of these interviews are however included in the written text of the dissertation. As well, the filmed component features visual studies of the communities and landscapes where the interviews were recorded, as a context for the speakers' voices and their testimonials. As most of the recorded interviews are at least one half-hour in length, and the limitations of a film project usually entails significant editing of the acoustic and visual material as required, I have positioned the speakers in conversation with one another on the key themes that emerged from the research: their views on the protection of the sensitive coastline and ecosystems along Lake Superior's north shore against various social themes arising from proposed economic development projects in their region, including mining,

quarrying, nuclear waste disposal, building of dams and deforestation, and venues for increased tourism.

My visual approach in constructing the film work is influenced by my long history of being involved, as both producer and spectator, in a film aesthetic and genre often framed as ‘experimental film’. This broad and sometimes contested term crosses various filmmaking boundaries, but is usually artist rather than industry motivated, deploying such strategies as a subjective camera position or point of view, a non-linear narrative, and diverse methods of experimenting with sound, editing, visual structure, and other ways of bending the medium to challenge conventional approaches and categories of filmmaking practice. Film essayist Patrick Keiller has championed the “validity of exploratory filmmaking as research” (6), stating that his own films “aim to promote political and economic change by developing the transformative potential of images of landscape” (8). Keiller as both filmmaker and author is a significant influence on my own practice, and I will reference him again further on in this chapter.

Experimental or artistic methods of producing film/video are sometimes appropriated by more mainstream genres such as documentary, drama, or hybrid media products, so some critics may argue that the term ‘experimental film’ is no longer useful. That said, my own practice continues to be influenced by the work of independent film artists,

in particular those whose work explores meanings of place, memory, personal history, and landscape. Along with Patrick Keiller's research-based essay films on British social and economic decline, specific works that have left an indelible imprint on my own direction in filmmaking are Maya Deren's oneiric impressions of psychological landscapes, Chantal Akerman's *D'Est* (1993), a film described by media scholar Catherine Russell as a "geography of social change" (163), and many of James Benning's landscape films. There are many more artist films I could mention here, but these are a few that have illuminated my own approaches to filming subjective impressions of land and landscape. Although I have produced and directed two dramatic films where I worked with a cinematographer, the work I refer to here are my personal 'experimental' documentaries, for which I always perform my own cinematography.

In particular, I am interested in the use of time and stillness as means of focusing my viewer's attention. Experimental film projects allow for alternative demands on spectator attention, such as longer than usual shots before the next edit is performed. Prevailing attitudes in film media viewing demand intensified experiences of movement and motion, including pace of editing and attenuated length of time that attention must remain focused on a particular image. In a culture inundated with rapidly

accelerating and constantly multiplying media imagery and related technologies, it becomes increasingly difficult to sustain viewer attention with a decelerated editing tempo or minimal motion within the cinematic image. Filmmakers such as Benning and Akerman have challenged notions of attention and time, such as in images performed in 'real' time, rather than edited film time. A more extreme example of this practice is expressed in films such as Sharon Lockhart's *Double Tide* (2009), a 99-minute production using only two shots, exploring relationships between time, landscape, and labour. It is this challenge that I have to some extent included in my project, as an effort towards a construction of expanded cinema time. In my film *Conversations on the Lake* I often deploy extended, still images of landscape, where the frame is immobile. This visual style is introduced in long shots of Lake Superior and many of the film's images deliberately depict locations devoid of human presence or movement. Some of these images appear almost to be still frames, but if the viewer looks closely there is always some motion, sometimes distant, and often produced by forces in the natural world, usually by wind or water. The duration of the film finds its temporal structure through the demands of the images and the spoken testimonials produced by the collected research elements. Although the film represents only fragments of the interviews, the nature of film production and editing demands a

distillation of the key themes expressed by the speakers, and a juxtaposition of these fragments in conversation with one another in order to create narrative flow. I have appropriate copyright clearances and release forms for all the interviews and the music used in the film (see Appendix for Forms and Releases).

In order to further position the audio/visual methods of my dissertation project in regard to my history and practice in visual art and media, I here will also briefly mention elements of two of my early autoethnographic film projects, which I cite again further into the dissertation, in Chapter 4, *Dual Identities: Sense of Place and Politics of Location in the Rural Near North*. The significance of these projects is in their expression of my longstanding commitment to producing visual autoethnographies as foundational practices leading to my current research activities.

My film *Places To Stay* (1991) explores themes of coming to understanding of the mixed dichotomies of my dual German and Canadian heritage, in a 1960s rural childhood in the provincial north locations of Quebec and Ontario. This project examines meanings of cultural identity and belonging framed around the experience of my immigrant childhood, displaced from what was then a reviled culture, and the ensuing cultural divisions between my family of origin and my new nation. My visual

approach in this film was a mosaic of image fragments: subjective impressions of my formative locations recorded on a hand-wound 16mm camera, Super-8mm elements extracted from my own archive of previous recordings in these same locations and on my first return journey to my birth place in Germany, combined with my own and my father's still photographs. The film features a narrative voice-over I wrote and performed, as well as my original performed and recorded music.

My film *Northland: Long Journey* (2007) chronicles environmental justice themes particular to my family, and my father's death from industrial toxins in his underground workplace. It was produced in part towards my Masters in Environmental Studies degree, and follows some of the same visual approaches I used in *Places To Stay*, but also includes testimonials by my mother and a number of experts in the field of environmental justice, as well as excerpts from documents related to a forensic review of my father's medical history. When I presented this research at the 2009 Conference of the Association for Literature and Environment (ASLE), I was invited to revise my conference presentation as a chapter for a new publication. The result was a creative/scholarly hybrid essay, "Requiem for Landscape", in the forthcoming (2015) text, *Working on Earth: Class and Environmental Justice*, published by University of Nevada Press.

These particular autoethnographic artifacts provide additional entry points into my discussion of visual autoethnography, explaining to the reader my ontological concerns regarding life writing and images in representations of place and lived experience, and in particular to narratives and images of the rural provincial north.

Values and perceptions of natural and social environments can be shaped through a visual rhetoric perspective, in particular the eye of the camera lens. The image offered by the field of view within the frame, constrained by the producer of the pictorial construct, reduces the visual field received by the spectator, and so empowers the expression of that image.⁵ My discussion of visual research and rhetoric is supported by an analysis of and references to specific artworks serving as examples of how visual artifacts such as these may serve as visual arguments. In doing so I illuminate how my own visual constructions, in the shape of films and photographic studies, are deployed as visual methodologies expressing perceptions of place, landscape, community, and cultures of nature. As the post-impressionist painter Paul Cezanne said more than a

⁵ I owe this idea to a quote in Keiller by Louis Aragon on cinematic space, stated as, “to willfully restrict the field of vision so as to intensify expression” (Keiller 75).

century ago, “We not longer see nature, we see pictures”.⁶ This comment strikes me as more true than ever before, as digital reproduction of the world as we see it increasingly complicates our everyday experience and perceptions. As a research tool, the camera produces data that offers information observed in the field, and also provides a way of mapping the researcher’s engagement with that field and the role the research equipment plays in the field (Emmel and Clark 39).

Philosopher and animal welfare activist Kathie Jenni claims visual evidence contributes to moral motivation in humans: “We’re troubled by suffering that we learn of through prose and statistics; but our unease remains vague, sporadic, and practically inert. We respond in dramatically different ways to suffering we *see*” [emphasis original] (1). Jenni believes that the visual enhances ethical perception and creates space for ethical change by providing a necessary condition of moral response: belief that a problem exists (4), but for those who already acknowledge specific environmental problems, the visual provides a deeper register in which abstract ideas are transformed into feelings so that images convey “substance and emotional power” (3) to what we already know and believe about the issues at stake.

⁶ Quoted in Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, page 177. Print.

The visual artifact as argument is a discrete rhetorical device, making its claim prior to the verbal rhetoric that will invariably describe, inform, or analyze it. Olson, Finnegan and Hope have illustrated a broad spectrum of resources pointing to the rich and diverse conceptual scholarship available as a means of exploring visual disciplines: “Visual rhetoric scholarship frequently draws on the work of important transdisciplinary thinkers who explored the broad implications of our cultural experiences in terms that resonate with an interest in visual culture” (9). The authors include Barthes, Benjamin, Berger, Deleuze and Sontag as examples of these interdisciplinary thinkers, as well as those who have made a study of “the complex dynamics of the act of viewing itself”, including Laura Mulvey’s notion of the gaze as a locus of desire, Foucault’s discussion of panopticism, as well as those theorizing the politics of capitalist media culture, such as Debord’s theory of spectacle and others who have explored the power of cultural ‘meta-narratives’ in ways of seeing. In their analysis of how the visual functions as a rhetorical practice, Olson, Finnegan and Hope stress the interdisciplinary nature of visual practices, as a process and methodology that “engages the most influential communication technologies” (11), noting that, “While individual instances of rhetorical practice might differ to the extent that they are more

or less textual, oratorical, or visual, what is common to all rhetorical acts is that they mobilize symbols to influence diverse publics” (9).

Digital developments in image production and transformation, and an increasing accessibility and proliferation of visual images have generated a discourse of visual culture theory as a field of research in which visibility functions as both a physical process of sight and a social fact (Mirzoeff 53). What W.J. T. Mitchell refers to as “the pictorial turn” is not merely a mimetic theory of representation but “a postlinguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visibility, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies and figurality” (*Landscape and Power* 16). According to Mitchell, pictorial representation challenges language, partly because discourses of the visual have not yet produced a “satisfactory theory” about pictures, and theory is itself “a form of picturing” (*Picture Theory* 9). Both verbal and visual literacies engage with meanings of representation, and while a key word such as ‘representation’ may itself be problematic, it offers ways of linking verbal and visual disciplines with “ideas of knowledge (true representations), ethics (responsible representations), and power (effective representations)” (*Picture Theory* 6). Mitchell distinguishes between meanings of “image” (to imagine) and “picture” (to depict) as differences of intention, as deliberate or passive actions (*Picture Theory* 4). The visual, while dominating perception in

image-loaded environments, emerges from a binary model that depends on both realism and experimentation (Crary, *Techniques of the Observer* 4).

While images abound in all environments, pictures are efforts to capture certain of these images, to congeal them in time, and to prioritize some over others. Those who construct pictures express not just the intention of sharing a subjectively perceived image with a future viewer, but also to influence the viewer's regard for what is being depicted. In my film project *Conversations on the Lake*, which is a key element of this dissertation, the viewer will note that images defining the context of the testimonials offered by my research participants may direct a response towards a specific visible site, forging impressions not available by merely listening to the speaker's words.

One of my research participants, Joanie McGuffin, is an environmental activist involved with regional and local organizations such as the Lake Superior Conservancy and Watershed Council (LSCWC) and Save Our Algoma Region (SOAR). Joanie and her partner Gary McGuffin have produced many pictorial books and artworks depicting the natural beauty of the landscapes they hope to preserve. My own depictions of the Lake Superior landscapes as primarily beautiful sites are visual strategies oriented to influence others to find them so as well. Yet my images of the

northern mining towns show communities in decline, sometimes with poignant signposts in the landscape, such as the ruins of former industrial sites now dissolving into the earth, or trailer park clusters and derelict buildings.

While filming my interview with Bruce Staines at the proposed Michipicoten Bay quarry site in 2010, my attention veered suddenly to a compelling optical distraction: the material remains of the site's early industrial structures. My visual impression of these objects was imprinted on my memory so robustly that it powered me back to their location two years later in the late summer of 2012, when the site was no longer closed off and occupied by the Superior Aggregates Company. I was able to film and photograph the relics while they still existed, before further industrialization could destroy all traces of their former presence. In fact, two months later in October of 2012, extreme weather flooded the Wawa and Michipicoten Bay area, washing out the Trans Canada Highway, and sweeping some homes on the bay out to sea. In 2013 all entry points by road to these objects and to the Michipicoten Bay site itself were no longer accessible, and I would not then have been able to photograph these vestiges of an earlier industrial time.



Figure 6. Early industrial ruins at Michipicoten Bay. Photo by E. Steiner.

The structural relics at Michipicoten Bay are not objects of ‘natural’ beauty but as ruins, transfer what Brian Dillon designates as “an accommodation between nature and culture, the artificial object sliding imperceptibly towards an organic state, until in the end nature has its way” (13). As Rebecca Solnit tells it, “Ruins are monuments, but while intentional monuments articulate desire for permanence, even immortality, ruins memorialize the fleeting nature of all things and the limited power of humankind” (*Storming the Gates* 351). My first impression of the ruins at Michipicoten Bay construed them as monumental objects worth preserving, however unintended they were to be so. In reproducing them

as artworks within my filmed images and as exhibition pieces, I performed a kind of memorialization.

Northrop Frye has argued that the Canadian landscape “is full of human and natural ruins, of abandoned buildings and despoiled countrysides, such as are found only with the vigorous wastefulness of young countries. And, above all, it is a country in which nature makes a direct impression on the artist’s mind” (148). Here Frye is separating the natural from the built landscape, the ruined from the vital, living landscapes that inspired artists in the 1940s when this essay was first published, in a time before artists were preoccupied with depicting the monumental evidence of environmental devastation.

Does reading a landscape imply the need for understanding a particular language or grammar, an understanding of visual signifiers or cultural codes? Geographers Nancy Duncan and James Duncan have questioned landscape’s “apparent stability”, noting that landscapes are entrenched in “class relations, diffuse and unwitting complicity and social costs invisible to the eye” (230). Class and gender-specific practices, values, myths and narratives are constantly being shaped and reshaped, coded and recoded on a landscape’s topography and interior life. Among these are the embedded histories of labour and ongoing erasures of industrial and architectural structures and markers.

In his 2003 essay “The Riddle of the Apostle Islands”, William Cronon argues for the preservation of the historical evidence that is often considered as ruins for removal, in landscapes designated as wilderness preserves. The Apostles are a federally protected archipelago in the American waters of Lake Superior, a place Cronon claims as “one of the places on this good Earth where I feel most at home” (36). Prior to their designation as protected wilderness, the islands were for centuries inhabited by Ojibwa peoples, and later had a long history as farmland and in fishing and logging economies. Cronon asserts the need for the Apostles to remain protected as wilderness, yet he also advocates for preservation of the markers that would facilitate understanding of “the complex human history that has created the Apostle Islands of today” (38), the knowledge that wilderness too is complicated by histories of human dwelling. Rather than removing or erasing the traces of human labour, settlement, and industry remaining on the islands, so that visitors have the sense they are experiencing a ‘pristine’ landscape, Cronon promotes preserving some existing structures “as cultural resources in their own right” (42).⁷ Cronon’s view on ruins in the natural landscape mirrors Solnit’s perspective on this theme, as she states: “To erase decay or

⁷ See also Cronon’s “The Trouble With Wilderness” which discusses ideas of wilderness as a culturally constructed space and urges us to consider the places we inhabit, rural or urban, as equally inseparable from “nature”.

consciousness of decay, decline, entropy, and ruin is to erase the understanding of the unfolding relation between all things” (*Storming the Gates* 351).

What we consider to be landscape is often “the result of human interference” (Keiller 26) and the act of depicting a landscape is an example of this, producing what Keiller notes as a “tragic-euphoric palimpsest” (30). The reinterpretation of a site during the act of filming or photographing it as an object of desire produces a kind of frisson, while the intervention itself is an experience of loss, the recognition that the image can never fulfill its promised truth in its depiction.

My research interviews, other than one I conducted with Bruce Staines of Wawa who believes some visitors to Lake Superior, rather than enjoying the local natural environment, would prefer to see an operating quarry “as a point of interest”, show that most of the speakers privilege the natural environment over built or industrial sites. Staines’ statement becomes even more ironical when I juxtapose it over an image of a loon swimming in what appears to be a natural sanctuary, but when the lens pulls back reveals the small lagoon is actually on an operating mine site. Many of the film’s speakers point to the northern landscape’s visual beauty and aesthetic qualities as a source of providing economic alternatives to resource extraction in the region.

But one might question whose privilege is naturalized with “the claimed uniqueness of a local landscape” (Duncan and Duncan 238). My decision to leave Staines’ comments in the film, intended as an ironic contrast to the more romanticized views of the other speakers, is a rhetorical strategy that illustrates my own position of favouring the protection of the natural environment and its visual beauty along the Lake Superior shoreline, to leave it unmarred by new industrial developments. Yet at the same time, the old industrial ruins at Michipicoten Bay and in the ghost village of Jackfish further northwest on the Lake Superior shore become, as sites of image production, ways of promoting alternative notions of ‘beauty’ in the natural landscape, as in “a dialectic movement of positive and negative” (Crary, *Spectres of Negation* 172) contrasting emerging new natural growth over the remains of a now vanished culture.

As Rosalind Williams notes, “Ways of seeing are ways of valuing ... an aesthetic evaluation of the manufactured environment is also a social and moral judgment” (84). Landscape is typically defined as a human-centred object of perception, embracing human agency, culture, and vision in both a material and ideological sense (Duncan and Duncan 225). Duncan and Duncan refer to “landscape as a text or palimpsest written, partly erased and over-written” (229) filled with both local knowledge networks and outsider perspectives regarding its social, political, or

economic histories and practices. They point to the “intertextuality of landscapes”, the various media and textual contexts, including works of art and popular culture, that contribute to how landscapes are produced and read.

Visual rhetoric is grounded in the idea that the study of images and visual artifacts means, as Olsen, Finnegan and Hope have declared, not to isolate these “from larger textual or performative contexts in which an audience might encounter them, but rather in precise relationship to those contexts that give them shape and meaning” (2). Gillian Rose has articulated the relationship between psychoanalysis and visual culture, pointing to Freud’s notion of scopophilia, the idea that pleasure in looking is a basic drive into which all sighted humans are born (107). Vision, or the biologically-based sense of sight, is mediated by various power relations and signifiers in constant flux (Duncan and Duncan 237), so that a particular local landscape may be privileged by its pictorial representations throughout various cultural histories and changing narratives denoting shifting aesthetic values or ideas of nature.

The Work of Art as Visual Rhetoric

By recording my visual impressions of the landscapes of my research locations, to be later synthesized in the editing process with my

on-camera interviews, I am representing what for me is a phenomenological exploration of place in concretized pictorial constructions. The experience of “phenomenon of place” (Keiller 10) has roots in a subjectivity first described by authors seeking to describe the feelings produced by a sense of nature in public spaces, as historically expressed by the literary *flâneur*, and today, as Keiller puts it, “The present day *flâneur* carries a camera” and travels not so much on foot but in some kind of vehicle (10). I travel hundreds of kilometers by rental car to my research locations, my camera gear stowed on board, on a personal quest for the transforming mood produced by such pursuits. The lens captures my visual impressions, and later in the editing process I arrange my selected elements for narrative reconstruction.

Scott McQuire notes that while a photographic or lens-based rendering “marks a site of irreducible absence ... it also signals the potential for return” (7). The returns to my childhood places, and the material artifacts resulting from these journeys – films, photographs, and related texts – are signaled by an impulse to restructure the fragmented narratives of my former life there, to challenge extant images of rural northern working-class communities, and to produce my own liberation from past experiences in these same locations, some of which were painful. The camera, while bringing me closer to my living memories, is

also a means of transformation, a reconstruction of lived experience through self-reflexive arts-based practices and qualitative research methods. The visual artifact as argument is a discrete rhetorical device, making its claim prior to the verbal rhetoric that will invariably describe, inform, or analyze it. It is a text in itself, depicting both meaning and analysis of its political and aesthetic position.

Many contemporary photographic artworks depict environmental degradation in a variety of 'landscape' models as objects for critical analysis. As constructed artifacts, these images are intentional practices created to provide evidence of real environmental events in the world, as well as performance vehicles for symbolic interpretations of invisible or imaginary worlds, such as those constructed by Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison in their collection *The Architect's Brother*.⁸ ParkeHarrison's works are allegorical, performative, and oneiric depictions of dramatic ecological consequences. These images serve as a form of visual rhetoric and environmental criticism whereby the viewer is invited to imagine the earth's destiny in the context of the environmental crisis, illustrated by a recurring figure, an 'Everyman' who performs theatrical acts with absurd tools in a variety of dramatic visual metaphors constructed as efforts to

⁸ The collection *The Architect's Brother* and other works by ParkeHarrison can be viewed on the artists' personal website at www.parkeharrison.com.

repair a planet ravaged beyond redemption. When we view images of material environmental degradation, as in those produced by photographers such as Edward Burtynsky or Chris Jordan, we see the world as dangerous and damaged. As image-based research models, these pictorial representations are structured as visual testimony with the intent to inform environmental thought.

While my filmed interviews may present some key social, political, and environmental concerns unfolding in Northwestern Ontario communities, the testimonials offered by my research participants take on a different context when heard while the spectator's gaze is fixed on an image other than the speaker – a particular landscape or site, beautiful or devastated. The visual narrative subsumes the limitation of the frame, breaking ground for alternate meanings and understanding of the words being expressed.

The significance of enduring artworks such as those produced by the Group of Seven in the Algoma region, or Glenn Gould's compositions created while at Michipicoten Bay and the Wawa area, as permanent signifiers of value in Canadian culture, goes far beyond their material value, and it is this realization that motivates the passion of those who hope to preserve the sites where these works were created. As a means of framing the culture of Northwestern Ontario, many residents signal the

histories of artworks produced in the landscapes around Lake Superior by these iconic and revered Canadian cultural figures. Several people I interviewed expressed a strong local attachment to the national cultural assets produced by these artists, and to the histories of their works that were created in the region, claiming them as local inroads towards their memorialization in the national culture. The Algoma region and Superior north inspired an abundance of artworks by the Group of Seven painters and this local cultural heritage continues to be celebrated. Ongoing annual tours are offered to mark locations where these paintings were produced.

When I interviewed Joanie McGuffin in 2013, she spoke of a project she and her partner Gary McGuffin are researching and developing: the documentation of, as a photographic series and a film project, specific sites of Group of Seven paintings. They have located over one hundred sites of existing paintings in the Algoma region north of Sault Ste. Marie, with the hope that these sites will not be industrialized or destroyed, and that they will be preserved within the natural landscape. During the interview they showed me a copy of their documentation to date, with images of both the original paintings and the newly photographed sites, and I was able to witness the remarkable accuracy of the documented sites in regard to the paintings. Many are in wilderness locations only accessible by kayak or canoe. The McGuffins are experts in solitary

wilderness travel, beginning with their 6000-mile cross-Canada canoe trip in 1983, which they recount in their book *Where Rivers Run* (1988) and so have been able to access places still largely untraveled by non-indigenous people. This project, which reproduces the framing of the actual paintings, is a recent initiative to protect local cultural histories against emerging industrial developments that could destroy the sites. The project is also part of a strategy of resistance by the regional grassroots citizens group Save Our Algoma Region (SOAR), against large scale industrial wind turbine projects and other developments that could conflict with smaller local projects grounded in alternative economies.

For many years, Glenn Gould made annual visits to the Wawa area, to tap its landscapes and spiritual resources for creative inspiration. Although Gould's legacy is in music rather than in visual art, I will refer to his imprint on the local culture here, as it has been recorded in a 1968 film produced by the CBC, *Up in Northern Ontario With Glenn Gould*. Gould is filmed walking along Michipicoten Bay on the old industrial dock, then much more intact than when I filmed it forty years later. Gould walks into frame announcing,

I've been coming here for four or five years now to sort out some thoughts and try to get some writing done. And something very strange happened to me the first time I was up here. I was away for about two weeks, away from Toronto and away from cities and city living and city thinking and I

did, I think, the best writing of my entire life at that time and I decided it was the sort of therapy I needed and I've been coming back for more of the same ever since, and it hasn't let me down yet. It's an extraordinary spot.⁹

The camera follows Gould as he walks in the woods overlooking Michipicoten Bay, vocalizing and gesturing a work in progress, which combines with the increasing in volume pitch of rushing water as he approaches Magpie Falls. This is the same location where I recorded Evelyn Stone's drum and vocal performance ritual, "The Water Song", which appears in the filmed section of this dissertation, *Conversations on the Lake*. Gould's narration continues:

One of the things that explains the enchantment of a place like Wawa is when you come here you're forced to set aside all the silly, superficial notions of escalation, emotional escalation of things that govern life in the city. People who live in these small towns really do have that kind of perspective and in some ways I think they have a much better, tighter, closer perspective on what they can do, what their potentialities are, than most of us city slickers allow.

As part of the local folklore around Wawa and Michipicoten Bay, Gould's visits and his works inspired by the area are promoted as significant contributions to the regional cultural history. Legend has it that Gould always stayed in the same room at the Wawa Motor Inn, Room 102. This

⁹ A clip from this production can be viewed online in the CBC's digital archives. My transcriptions of Gould's narration are from:

<www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/arts-entertainment/music/glenn-gould-variations-on-an-artist/up-in-northern-ontario-with-glenn-gould-excerpt>

room is among the noteworthy locations marking Gould's life, and has been documented by contemporary art photographers, including Robert Burley in his series *The Places of Glenn Gould*.¹⁰

In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt wrote that an artwork has a greater stability than any other object of human production, noting that the work of art, although still a tangible object made by human hands, has a "durability" that "is of a higher order than that which all things need in order to exist at all; it can attain permanence throughout the ages" (167). She relates the production of artworks to the power and importance of thought: "the immediate source of the art work is the human capacity for thought" (168) yet thought alone does not produce materialization, and although "works of art are thought things", they are still "things" (169) but of a different order than those things with a greater utility in the world: "In the case of art works, reification is more than mere transformation; it is transfiguration, a veritable metamorphosis in which it is as though the course of nature which wills that all fire burn to ashes is reverted and even dust can burst into flames" (168). Arendt's views on the artifacts of artistic production serve to stabilize the important connection between a geographic location with deep personal meaning for those who claim it as

¹⁰ Robert Burley's series *The Places of Glenn Gould* is represented by Stephen Bulger Gallery, Toronto. www.bulgergallery.com. Web. 10 Oct. 2013.

their homeland, and the historical artworks produced on its sites, as reflected in the views of people who care about the culture of Northwestern Ontario.

Geographer Tim Cresswell argues that place is “a powerful container of social forces” and “an effective container of ideological values” (150). As “fundamental creators of difference” (154) places provide signifiers of those “inside” in opposition to those “outside”. When Mark Leschishin speaks of being a Wawa resident who is “from away” and thus not a genuine local, denoting his marginal position in the social landscape, he is expressing what Cresswell defines as an outsider position: “An outsider is not just someone literally from another location but someone who is existentially removed from the milieu of ‘our’ place” (154).

Leschishin told me that at times his voice in the community, around the issues arising from the proposed quarry development, was disparaged by supporters of the project as an outsider intrusion on local affairs. Yet both insider and outsider voices bond together in citizens groups formed to protect the cultural values embedded in the places of Northwestern Ontario, as Joanie McGuffin told me, through the valuing of “our own stories of our places in our hearts and minds”.

Richard Kearney claims that storytelling based on testimonies employing new media or visual practices are entry points into forms of

imagining which open up “a complex narrative relationship between memory and recorded memory” (*On Stories* 11) and no matter how “cyber” the world becomes, stories will always be told and received. Histories are told with specific interests in mind, one of which is the intention to communicate what is interesting and valuable (*On Stories* 154). This dissertation project explores some of the stories of actors engaged in initiatives oriented towards protecting the Lake Superior north shore from future undue development, using an arts-based research methodology that combines narrative with visual approaches. Peter Hay notes that in the arts, “there is a specifically aesthetic language, an aesthetic knowing, that particularly conduces to ecological understanding and communication because it is non-linear, non-rationalistic, and is based in subjectivity and the truth within feeling” (194). There are many potential readings of the research material I have generated by the interviews and audio/visual recordings I have gathered over more than five years, and as a creative project it seeks what Hay calls an open “communicative field” rather than a “vertically-integrated one” with an “epistemological conclusion” that is typically required of academic projects (196).

My research filming integrates visual images that are frequently not of the interview speakers, but instead are independent explorations of the landscape itself in relationship to those speakers, as well as in regard to

my own lived experience and rediscovery of sites in these same locations. As a methodology, image-based research is often considered to be secondary to the 'real', or word-based research, since the act of image making alters the object in the frame and thus what Jon Prosser denotes as the "objective content and subjective meaning of the images" (98). Prosser points to the problem of this limited status of visual research, noting that numerous disciplines and media fragment the field of visual culture, with no unifying principles other than "the visual" (109). Yet images produced as epistemological explorations are different than those produced for general audiences. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to detail the many forms of visual research methodologies and practices available to researchers, and my focus remains with visual works of art as contributions to environmental discourse. My ongoing research and artistic practice will continue to investigate questions raised by my dissertation project, and to explore natural and social landscapes through the production of new images and artworks.

According to Mieke Bal, an artwork must go beyond merely reflecting the world; it has the responsibility of not only bearing witness, but in Bal's view, also "alters the existence of what it witnesses" (157). Joseph Kosuth reflects a similar viewpoint when he says, "art is manifested in praxis; it depicts *while* it alters society" (182). What does this

mean? Do works of art and pictorial representations help to promote a more critical perception of the natural world, and in doing so, have the capacity to promote social transformation? Photographic images are used to document social and environmental change, and as selective renderings of constructed realities shaped as artistic interventions, may effectively contribute to environmental discourse as a form of visual text.

Questioning the Practice

I began the filming for this project with a set of questions to ask of my research participants and wove in others as we proceeded with the on-camera recorded conversations. I discovered that most of my participants were enthusiastic speakers once we began recording, and I often found it difficult to intervene with my questions. To interrupt them would disrupt the flow and sense of the trust we had established, so I revised my approach to include a review of the questions in advance of the interview, sometimes emailing them topics to consider before I undertook the journey to meet them. Then during the interview, I would allow participants to continue speaking until they indicated their readiness for my next question. This still at times produced a somewhat rambling testimonial, so in the later stages of the project I began the interviews by stating the technical medium of filming required pauses to help facilitate editing, so that

participants would know to expect interruptions and to not take this personally as we proceeded. I note these methods here as artificial constructs that while necessary, do affect the recorded material, as does of course the later editing process where the many hours of recorded material are compressed.

A key question regarding my research methodology is why I would choose to film the interviews for a dissertation project. Would it not have been simpler or less intimidating for the research participants if I had simply audio-recorded their statements, or only taken notes of their responses to my questions? Perhaps some who declined being recorded on camera, for fear of the consequences of making known their personal views, would have agreed to have their statements written down, and thus I could have gathered aspects of the research material that the filming did not provide. Yet as a practicing filmmaker I was aware too that the camera can at times open doors to conversations less available otherwise. For instance, some of the participants agreed to be filmed because they hoped their organizations or their interests in protecting Lake Superior and the surrounding natural environment would receive additional exposure and external support if the film was made public. Among these were First Nation speakers Evelyn Stone of Michipicoten First Nation, Raymond Goodchild of Pays Plat First Nation, and Bonnie Couchie of Pic River First

Nation. Both Evelyn Stone and Raymond Goodchild are former chiefs and elected council members of their community, while Bonnie Couchie has worked extensively in community relations and education. Bonnie is also a musician and provided music recordings which are heard in the film. Members of Citizens Concerned for Michipicoten Bay (CCMB), Save Our Algoma Region (SOAR), Lake Superior Conservancy and Watershed Council (LSCWC), as well as most of the independent speakers, all agreed to be in the film to promote their views on protecting Lake Superior and the surrounding ecosystems.

Another question about the filming process arises as to what 'truths' would be eliminated by the presence of the camera, and what stories would not otherwise have been revealed. Evelyn Stone expressed her wish to "teach and share with other people who are interested in who we are as Anishinabek people". She was active in promoting the annual Youth and Elders gathering, to attract participants from outside the Michipicoten First community, and told me, "I really appreciate people who are not from the community but are also interested in the protection of that area that we have here". On the other hand, Bruce Staines, a proponent of the Superior Aggregates Company quarry, had heard about my filming from other local residents. He asked to have a voice in the filmed conversations, seeking

to provide an alternate view on the controversies surrounding the community divisions resulting from the proposed quarry.

Filmmaker and feminist theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha notes that “there is no such thing as a documentary” (*When the Moon Waxes Red* 29), stating: “On the one hand, truth is produced, induced, and extended according to the regime of power. On the other hand, truth lies between all regimes of power” (30). Cinema space is a fictional space, a fragmentary assemblage of space that is mostly off-screen, an extension of a narrow view compared with the actual space that is off-screen (Keiller 76). The presence of the camera creates a power dynamic between the producer of the filmed material and the documentary subject. The producer, the director, the editor then select certain ‘truths’ from the speaker’s testimonial while eliminating others, often those that do not favour the premise of the project.

Even in the written transcripts, editing embellishes the interview. Quotes from the interview transcriptions may have minimal changes in regard to the content and context of the testimonial, yet hesitant pauses are typically deleted, grammar is polished for readability, and unnecessary repetitions removed. These revisions produce a more cohesive narrative flow for the reader, but they also enhance the rhetoric produced with their subtle editorial changes, implying a more unified narrative, as Clandinin

and Connelly have shown, than the “narrative fragments” typically “enacted in storied moments of time and space, and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities” (17). An exchange of narrative power takes place, which is in the hands of the inquiring agent, the one who edits and selects, but this is superimposed upon the speaker, the story ‘teller’.

Even the places seen in screen stories are transformed by the lens, the photographer’s approach, the editing sequence, and the narrative arrangement (Keiller 11). Minh-ha points to the distinctiveness of meaning located in what is purported to be true, the problematic “interval” between isolated, separate truths (30). The myths around documentary filmmaking include assumptions of living stories performed by ‘real’ human actors, portraying factual events without fictional alterations. The act of portrayal is in itself a means of fictionalizing these events, and the framing, editing, choice of interview candidates, and levels of skill in production roles are but a few of the elements influencing what is ‘true’ in the screen narrative. Evidence becomes credible when it is made interesting for the spectator. As Minh-ha says, “Truth has to be made vivid ... it has to be ‘dramatized’ if it is to convince the audience of the evidence, whose ‘confidence’ in it allows truth to take shape” (35).

As a photographer trained in the aesthetics of composition and lighting, I purposely and selectively place my interview subjects in interesting backgrounds, “authenticating” the context of their testimonials: a fisherman in his colourful fishing camp workshop, a First Nation speaker in a forest rather than in her bland office, an ecotourism operator on the dock by the lake. In seeking those ‘intervals’ that my prepared questions may never locate, I sometimes let the speakers digress at length as a form of non-intervention. By allowing my research participants to engage in monologues that veer away from my questions, am I imposing specific archetypes upon them? For example, the notion that rural Northern Ontario folks are friendly and love to talk. In fact my hometown advertises itself as the “Friendly Community” in online promotions such as Immigration Northwestern Ontario.¹¹ Or perhaps it is that by not intervening during a speaker’s digression, I am seeking those intervals where the social is transformed into a retrieval of what Minh-ha defines as “lost objects” (38) – moments that may not otherwise be expressed? While I am trained in the visual arts, the technical challenges of handling all the camera and recording equipment single-handedly, my one-person crew limitations, become at times a covert methodology that appears to

¹¹ Immigration Northwestern Ontario website.
www.immigrationnorthwesternontario.ca. Web. 12 Mar. 2014.

neutralize my power over the interview participant. These actions are transformative techniques and occasionally intentional strategies to amplify my trust-building capacity with my participants, as much as they are real limitations that make my task more difficult.

Filmmaking is manipulative, and as Minh-ha puts it, the work of reflexive filmmaking is to “challenge representation itself “ (47). The filmmaker imposes signs on the object of her study, and an act of possession takes place: “through the lens, she becomes mine”, says Minh-ha in her film *Reassemblage* (1982). During my interview with Evelyn Stone, she began to cry while lamenting the loss of some of the local botanical life she considers to be “medicine”, and other possible damages as a result of nearby blasting for dams and mining. My initial response was that this spontaneous moment and image would be powerful and emotionally evocative in the film, but upon reflection, I questioned the ethics of enhancing my project with a dramatic emotional interval where the speaker temporarily loses control. This kind of occurrence is typical of mainstream news coverage, where the camera lingers on the tearful speaker in order to manipulate the viewer’s feelings. The act of ethnographic photography may create spaces where “creativity and objectivity are in conflict” yet within the “core” of what is represented are moments where “the work is freed from the tyranny of meaning” (Minh-ha

48). It is here that the work begins to breathe: “Meaning can neither be imposed nor denied. Although every film is in itself a form of ordering and closing, each closure can defy its own closure, opening onto other closures, thereby ... creating a space in which meaning remains fascinated by what escapes and exceeds it” (Minh-ha 49).

The Sublime as a Visual Strategy

In my journeys to the north during the course of my doctoral study, and in my readings along the way, I encountered ideas of the sublime, in particular the visual sublime. One of my comprehensive papers was focused on a discussion of the sublime, and I revisit some its themes here, as they are still significant to my exploration of visual practices, art, and landscape. The camera was used as a technology of persuasion in environmental debates throughout the twentieth century, and continues to be so deployed in contemporary photography’s obsession with what Christopher Hitt terms the “ecological sublime” (603). Ideas of a post-industrial or ecological sublime figure into how the rural Northwestern Ontario landscape is viewed. The experience of sublimity, as Rosalind Williams expresses it, “depends on the delicate equipoise of conflicting emotions ... it depends on danger, but only theoretical danger. Sublimity celebrates ambivalence” (85).

This quality of ambivalence exactly describes the fractured sense of connection to their landscapes expressed by many of my research participants, the notion, as Conor Mihell framed it in our interview of 2012, that northern culture is grounded in an “interesting dichotomy” where on the one hand the land is valued for its natural beauty and on the other for its potential for ongoing exploitation. Mining has been a predominant industry in Northwestern Ontario, one that continues to exploit the health of its workers. For example, in recent years Ministry of Labour field tests at the Hemlo Gold Mines, owned by Barrick Gold Corporation, a major employer for the remaining population in my home town of Manitouwadge, about sixty kilometers away, proved that workers’ exposure to silica dust far exceeded the legislated regulation limits.¹²

Rosalind Williams here again provides an evocative description of the sublime aesthetic, as a historical marker of work in the mines:

¹² The majority of occupational exposure limits in Ontario, set in the mid-1980s, were established decades earlier, as recommended Threshold Limit Values by the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists. These were based on what an average healthy white male worker could acutely tolerate, but no consideration was made for the risks of long-term damage to a worker’s health. A report, “Occupational Exposure Limits” (Ontario Federation of Labour, submission to the Ministry of Labour, March, 2000), stresses labour’s concern, backed by subsequent scientific reports, that these Threshold Limit Values were set at levels to protect the interests of industry, not the health of the worker. <www.ofl.ca>.

Diabolical images of sublimity are inseparable from labor, from the shadowy figures silhouetted by the flames of production. The aesthetic pleasures of technological sublimity had always been tainted, so to speak, by the human presence. In the sublime images of artificial infinity, however, labor can be banished. The aesthetic fantasy is closely related to the social fantasy of eliminating class conflict, of exploiting nature without exploiting people (97).

Here Williams illustrates how the sublime functions as an argument for social and environmental thought. She points out that “the vocabulary of sublimity was gradually transferred from nature to industry”, a transfer with both ideological and aesthetic significance (88).

The landscapes of Northwestern Ontario are filled with still-active mines, as well as those that were closed long before reclamation of mine sites became an environmental and legal issue. Toxic tailings and waste rock from mining are still dumped into nearby lakes and rivers. In 2012, one of my research participants, Ted Schintz of Marathon, described his activist measures in the group Citizens for Responsible Industry in Northwestern Ontario. Through local and online lobbying using social media, the group was successful in pressuring officials of a proposed new mine to change the initial proposal, which had a plan to use the nearby Bamooos Lake, filled with lake trout, as a mine waste storage pond. Even mines long abandoned may continue to release toxins into the local

environment. In a 2003 paper published in the journal *Environmental Health Perspectives*, Scott Fields writes,

But whether the land still appears raw or has begun to heal, dormant mine sites can be a source of myriad environmental hazards. ... Acid mine drainage (AMD)—acidified runoff—can contaminate streams, tinting them with the telltale orange sediment marking high concentrations of liberated iron. Other hazards are hidden. Along with the freed iron often come other, less visible elements, including potentially toxic cadmium, copper, lead, manganese, zinc, arsenic, and mercury. High winds can carry dust contaminated with metals from tailings deposits and waste piles. Even ancient mining activities can release gases that make air unsafe to breathe—methane from coal mines, and carbon monoxide from so-called hardrock mines, where metals such as copper, silver, lead, cadmium, and zinc were Extracted (A155).

The hardrock mines of my hometown extracted mainly copper and zinc, along with smaller quantities of silver and gold. From 1957 into the early 1990s, the Geco mine milled over fifty million tons of ore, valued at over five billion dollars. These operations produced fifty million tons of mill waste, as well as substantial quantities of sulphide-bearing waste rock. In the early years of the mine's production, the toxic effects of waste sulphide oxidation were not yet fully understood.¹³ An aerial image in the film

¹³ Heather E. Jamieson, Shannon C. Shaw, and Alan H. Clark, "Mineralogical Factors Controlling Metal Release From Tailings at Geco, Manitouwadge, Ontario" (presentation, Sudbury '95 Conference on Mining and the Environment, Sudbury, Ontario, May 28-June 1, 1995). www.rgc.ca/publications/ssmineral.pdf. Web. 05 Nov. 2013.

accompanying this dissertation shows a view of the tailings area where the Geco Division of Noranda Mines operated. This was the mine where my father worked underground. At one time some years ago I was still able to covertly enter the site for filming, and another image in the film shows a large open pit area that the miners called “the glory hole”, where my father first worked in the early days of the mine. Now the area is sealed off. When I went again in October 2013 to investigate whether I could re-film the shot of the “glory hole” which had previously been recorded on an older camera, the site was locked off, and offered a warning sign which appears in the film, declaring “Danger of Death: Old Mine Workings”.

As a visual art medium and technology, photographic media seeks to represent – allegorically or as recorded evidence – meanings and shadings of value embedded in the landscapes of a particular time and place, prompting the spectator’s reflection about specific sites and the events and social processes that have unfolded there. When the lens-based artist engages with places that have deep personal significance, it motivates meaning and understanding, sometimes even melancholia or mourning for the place that no longer exists. Yet these images may offer “a kind of permanent subjectivity” whereby the transitory experience of the

ordinary moment transfigured by the camera can be relived whenever the material is viewed (Keiller 83).

Australian art historian Ian McLean argues that “the return of the real” in contemporary landscape art is nowhere more evident than in art that addresses ecological concerns, in particular art that subverts anthropocentric values. McLean draws comparisons between “Romantic rebellion” and avant-garde art, noting the return to the presence of ‘nature’ in art follows postcolonial interests in “the margins” (3). Contemporary art’s preoccupation with images of environmental degradation and degraded sites may well provide the context for images embodying what some critics have variously called the industrial or post-industrial sublime, the toxic sublime, or the ecological sublime. Edmund Burke wrote that the arts “transfuse their passions ... and are often capable of grafting a delight on wretchedness” (91). Images of a degraded earth may be used as rhetorical strategy, and I discuss examples of this from a Burkean perspective of the sublime in more detail further on in this chapter. Pictures documenting social and environmental changes are selective renderings of constructed realities and as such are tools for inspiring ecological concern and agency.

In Northwestern Ontario, images of landscapes function as both beautiful and sublime, with sublimity referenced in the consequences of

further industrial development, and beauty as a visual perception embedding value in residual wilderness places and ecosystems. Even with ecotourism activities, there are dangers and disruptions, and the need for environmental education is paramount, as Raymond Goodchild of Pays Plat First Nation warns:

Some people, they take rocks off the faces of certain paintings that are out there, they take relics, they look for relics. And some of the people have got to be educated; you can't do that. Because you're digging up history and history is for everyone, not just for you to put it on your shelf or put it in your garden. Why do people do that? If we educate people, maybe that would be preserved and managed and protected.

Nearby at my meeting with him in Rosspoint, David Crawford, Chair of the Remedial Action Plan for Nipigon Bay, tells me,

I think the whole idea about ecotourism is you try to educate people on the beauty of nature and how to protect it and how to care about it, because a lot of people have forgotten about that. They think nothing of doing graffiti on rocks or driving quads up and down beaches. People just don't see the destruction that they could possibly be doing. So education is going to be a key factor.

In an email sent to me by Joan Skelton more than a year after our interview, she wrote, "I fear for Lake Superior. Government regulations to protect the coast are minimal. Before we know it, the Lake as a world treasure will be lost".¹⁴

¹⁴ Joan Skelton, email to the researcher, November 11, 2009.

In my film *Places to Stay* (1991), I narrate a childhood memory of my earliest sense of the Canadian bush as a magical territory: “We lived in a house at the edge of the town, flanked on two sides by a dense forest. The woods were a playground of mystery and excitement, the parameters of my range of vision and experience.” I go on to recount how a French Canadian neighbour warned my sister and I that if a bear should approach while we were blueberry picking in the forest, we were to stand very still and sing a song. The narration continues, “The bear would then be enchanted, and would wander back into the bush, leaving us unscathed”. Decades later, in my essay “Requiem for Landscape”, I reprise these deeply ingrained sensations:

The northern bush is a vast and sometimes formidable landscape, a land of dense forests that can rattle the hearts of those who travel its interior spaces. A tangled place, in summer it is thick with swarms of tiny biting black flies. These conditions can make for challenging crossings into its sublime vistas and secret depths, which have been immortalized by a league of Canadian painters, poets, and authors. Canada’s cultural artifacts mythologize the northern landscape, inspiring a national ethos of elemental forces emerging from a dramatic wilderness.

A boreal forest of spruce, poplar, balsam fir, tamarack, cedar, and low-lying wild blueberry bushes overlays the oldest rock on the North American continent. This wild space is filled with populations of moose and bears, foxes, wolves, tiny chipmunks, and great black crows, and, in some regions, surviving herds of woodland caribou. Its lakes teem with mostly still-edible fish. The inland sea that is Lake Superior, less than forty miles south as the northern crow

flies, pushes its powerful storms and ever changing, dramatic skies toward Manitouwadge (*Working on Earth* 144-145).

Although, as Rosalind Williams notes, “As an aesthetic principle, sublimity was unusual in that from the start it was associated less with works of art than with features of nature” (84), ideas of the sublime are often expressed through works of art and visual media, including poetry, paintings, films, and photography. The sublime is often invoked as a strategy for environmental politics, in order to encourage spectators of the work towards greater environmental concern, or to engage participation in an ecologically focused conversation.

Between 2005 through 2009, the photographic exhibition *Imaging a Shattering Earth* travelled through numerous international museum showings. Included in this collection were works by internationally acclaimed artists such as Edward Burtynsky, Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison, David McMillan, and others concerned with witnessing “the impact of societal behaviors, industrial practices, corporate priorities, and governmental policies ... By assuming a certain distance from their subject, they draw attention to the reckless stewardship of our planet” (Baillargeon 2005). This statement by the exhibition’s curator Claude Baillargeon reveals a specific visual strategy found in much contemporary artwork expressing environmental themes: that of a reconfigured sublime

working by virtue of a distancing of point-of-view, for both the photographer and the spectator, from the terrifying subject matter, the patterns of “monolithic degradation” of the earth. This idea of personal detachment from a terrifying view is a key element of the sublime as defined by Edmund Burke, producing awe and anxiety without personal exposure to the danger invoking these feelings. One might question the political validity of how we respond to images depicting an ecological sublime, images that while evoking environmental thought also produce disconnection from real ecological destruction being revealed:

If the banal matter-of-factness of the late photograph can fill us with a sense of the sublime, it is imperative that we think through why this might be. There is a fine line between the banal and the sublime, and it is political. If an experience of the contemporary sublime derives from our being caught in a geo-political circumstance beyond our comprehension, then it is a politically reified as much as an aesthetically rarefied one (Canpany 2003).

Ideas of the sublime have a long history, originating with the Greek philosopher Longinus’s essay *On the Sublime*, written centuries before Burke wrote *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757, 1759). Following Longinus, Joseph Addison in his 1712 essay, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, redefined the concept of sublimity as an aesthetic experience detached from rhetorical devices and images (Williams, Rosalind 84). In Germany,

Immanuel Kant followed Burke with *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1763), defining sublimity as an ethical concept, a noble feeling generated by elements of the natural world, but later in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790) he redefined the sublime feeling as one originating in the perceiving subject: “true sublimity must be sought only in the mind of the judging Subject, not in the Object of nature that occasions this attitude by the estimate formed of it” (114).

Much contemporary art photography immersed in environmental themes maintains a dialectic between the beautiful and the profoundly disturbing. For example, Toronto photographer Edward Burtynsky’s large-scale photographic spectacles document a devastated natural world ravaged by quarries, oil fields and refineries, as well as the monumental scale of human labour involved in industrial practices and capitalist consumerism. Art critic Carol Dhiel describes Burtynsky’s technical expertise with the camera and painterly awareness of composition, form and light as “effects the alchemical conversion of a toxic and often dangerous vista into one of sublimity” (*The Toxic Sublime*). Burtynsky’s mastery of detail and dimension impart a sense of awe by their aspect and image detail, with subject matter pointing to the grotesque consequences of industrialization. But these works are more than art museum spectacles,

commodifying the industrial landscape for its shock value and aesthetic power. Burtynsky's work is located in presenting a view of, as Rebecca Solnit notes, "the systems rather than the places ... that trace the life of a commodity from extraction to disposal" (*Storming the Gates* 135).

Burtynsky's images offer the spectator a sublime that emerges in what Lucy Lippard describes as "the holes left in rural spaces to create urban erections" (qtd. in Solnit, "Creative Destruction" 34). Photographic artworks documenting obvious environmental problems caused by industrialization follow Andre Bazin's sense of the photographic image as a "transference of reality" (14)¹⁵ that may, for some spectators, invoke a greater concern for environmental problems revealed by visible evidence. Yet at the same time, so toxic is the medium of photography that the Rochester Kodak plant is known to be one of the largest polluters in the state of New York. The issue of waste in photographic processes, whether chemical or electronic, presents a persistent and conflicting ethical question.

In considering recent initiatives to halt further industrial wounding of the wilderness around Lake Superior, we may regard another important aspect of sublime thought: that of the monstrous. Richard Kearney

¹⁵ In *What is Cinema?* (1967) Bazin states, "Only a photographic lens can give us the kind of image of the object that is capable of satisfying the deep need man has to substitute for it something more than a mere approximation" (page 14).

comments on the “transgressive character of the sublime as a catalyst of avant-garde art and thought” (*Strangers, Gods, and Monsters* 106), noting that representations of the contemporary sublime, depicted through literature and art, can dramatically narrate the consequences of human behavior, and these representations may thus promote reflection on either protection or destruction of the natural world. This unity of ethics and aesthetics is threatened however, in a culture where shock value and radical forms of art are easily commodified. Here the sublime and its “objectless aesthetics” form an unsteady alliance with the “immaterializing tendencies of global capitalism” as the danger of commercialization of the radical undermines and suspends our sense what is ethical (*Strangers, Gods, and Monsters* 94).

The evocation of the sublime may be an effective rhetorical strategy for environmental politics, but it also is a dangerous one – reproducing ideas of human domination over the land and its human and non-human inhabitants. The Romantic sublime was a reinforcement of masculine power and experience, often presented as a grand narrative of a solitary male figure in nature, in an encounter with a meta-object that is immense and astonishing to behold, and one usually viewed from a privileged perspective. Recent discourses have produced a revised sublime that may make a case for the protection and conservation of a finite world inhabited

by diverse subjectivities. When Christopher Hitt refers to the “ecological sublime” he is proposing: “The sublime is not disappearing along with the disappearance of wild nature; its grounds are merely shifting” (618).

Rather than reinscribing nature as an intractable force to be subjugated for human progress, Hitt’s notion of an ecologically focused sublime will preserve “the radical alterity of nature while resisting its objectification or reification” (613).

With the recently renewed interest on the part of the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) to find a location in the Canadian Shield to be considered as a burial site for used nuclear waste, one could consider sublimity as a suitable image to express this initiative. This proposal has produced considerable anxiety in the hearts of many locals who are concerned that their cash-strapped municipal governments will be seduced by the rhetoric of the NWMO, who have promised long term projects to the ‘host’ site and new economic infrastructures. For many local residents, the idea of a nuclear waste repository in their region would be an unspeakable disaster, one that reflects Edmund Burke’s meditations on terror as “the common stock of everything that is the sublime” (107) and is furthermore, “the ruling principle of the sublime” (102). As Melinda Ray, an indigenous speaker living in White River told me in 2012, “I’ve got my children and my grandchildren here and I’ve got to think about what’s

best for them in the future. And nuclear waste being stored here would not be a good thing.” The subterranean location of such a project itself harkens to nineteenth century ideas of the sublime, as when Rosalind Williams points out, “the search for sublimity” fostered “an alliance between landscape painting and geology” (88). Williams further states:

The concept of sublimity is thus part of the cultural context of the discovery of deep time. It is also part of the context of the aesthetic discovery of industrial technology. The iconography of sublimity (the key image here is of the exploding volcano) provides the link between the natural landscape and the technological one (88).

The idea of immense scale as in a deep geological repository, the notion of the immeasurable span of time that the waste would be required to lie underground, the myth of a vast, relatively “unpeopled” landscape, and the notion that in deep space and deep time the material could be safely contained, all contribute to the notions and markers of the sublime.

“The Way It Was”: The Imaginary North Shore

Visual images serve as a form of narrative expression, and are deployed by my research participants around the Lake Superior north shore as an argument for local cultural preservation. When the Group of Seven painters are evoked in discussions by local stakeholders on the cultural history of the landscape around Lake Superior, it is with a sense of

enduring connection to the national ethos inspired by the paintings of that region. Jonathan Bordo describes the Group of Seven paintings as access points into an 'unrepresentable' wilderness, reflecting elemental forces arising from the landscape's topography, one that denies human presence: "testimonial deposits" removed of "figural witnesses" (296), assuming an absence of events in unoccupied spaces. The rural north as an imaginary representation of empty space was influenced to some extent by the typically unpeopled landscapes of the Group of Seven, "romanticizing the north as a landscape rather than a homeland" (Hulan 141).

Landscape is a medium, one that W.T.J. Mitchell defines as "a language embedded in cultural signification and communication", expressing both value and meaning (*Landscape and Power* 14-15). While the rocks and trees and rugged coastlines of the northern landscapes as depicted by the Group of Seven artists determined a century of how Canadians would perceive their landscapes, the landscape itself, in the imaginations of many of my research participants, promotes a narrative where past and present are conflated in time. Repeatedly the speakers express an ideal of keeping the landscape "the way it is" and at times fusing past and present into an imaginary where "the way it was" and "the way it is" are one. When Joan Skelton says, "there are portions of real

wilderness there, and we want to protect this and keep it the way it was, as the way it was in the past, the way it was from the very beginning”, she is speaking about a wilderness that no longer exists but one that can be re-imagined back into the real through conservation and restorative practices. She imagines a return to a historical moment “beyond our own existence, and we can do that when we come to the wilds of the north shore of Lake Superior”. This vision projects a kind of post-pastoral perspective on the north shore region, one that essentializes the landscape as a finite example of nature’s declining vital harmony in a still idyllic (past) refuge from the fallen (present) industrial and developed areas.

Bordo calls forth ‘the voice of the wilderness’ in Margaret Atwood’s short story, “Death by Landscape”, where the Group of Seven paintings haunt the protagonist with their “solitary foregrounded trees and variously arranged northern landscapes” (295). Here the impenetrable foregrounds of the boreal forest surrounding Lake Superior exemplify how the northern Canadian wilderness is typically perceived. Atwood’s protagonist says that these are not landscape paintings “because there are no landscapes up there ... instead there’s a tangle, a receding maze, in which you can become lost almost as soon as you step off the path” (*Death by Landscape* 145). This perception promotes a sense of the uncanny, a

feeling that by gazing at the paintings one is linked to their source, the forest itself, providing a feeling of “something, or someone, looking back out” (123) towards the viewer who is both protagonist of the fictional story and spectator of the paintings. As she moves between “the artistic and environmental meanings of ‘landscape’ ... with the way both paintings and forests recede endlessly” Atwood creates for the reader a productive exploration of how wilderness is constructed (Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 79).

Atwood has written in depth about the Canadian northland and its constancy in the Canadian literary imagination. Her lecture series and text *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature* (1995) offers a comprehensive study of the Canadian rural north as depicted in a wide range of Canadian literatures: novels, poems, documented histories. She presents diverse imaginaries of northern, often frozen, landscapes, expressed in both indigenous and non-indigenous narratives, and shows how indigenous storytelling is appropriated in settler re-telling and publication. Atwood ends on a predictably (in light of her novels) dystopian and cautionary note: “The things that are killing the North will kill, if left unchecked, everything else” (116). In depicting the imagined literary Canadian north as a gothic tale, Atwood constructs north as a “frigid” and magnetic “*femme fatale*” whose storied landscapes entice their (mostly male) protagonists “to their doom” (3).

Many of my research participants, in stating their view of the importance of their local landscapes, were influenced by images produced by artists, in particular the Group of Seven. Although the Group of Seven were not the first artists to paint the landscapes of the provincial north and the Lake Superior region, they “recast it in a stylistic form that would determine how Canadians perceived their landscape” (Nasgaard 158). Roald Nasgaard reminds us that the Group of Seven’s ideas of nature were influenced by their engagement with Theosophy, their reading of Transcendentalist literature, and by other mystical movements of the early twentieth century (166). The power of Superior’s topography to call forth ecstatic responses in both the artist and the spectator of the artwork is reflected in Joan Skelton’s statement as she muses, “When you stand on the shore of Lake Superior and you look up into the sky, you realize you are a very small part of this world. To wonder at the Ojibwa pictographs, and the Group of Seven vistas.” David Tamblyn of Rosspport tells me, “This area’s cultural significance is linked to how the Group of Seven were inspired by the geography and by the lake.” The Group of Seven bound their art to Canadian subject matter that “found its motivation in a mystical bonding with the land, the character of which provided the basis for common experience” and this experience became associated with a sense of national unity (Nasgaard 166). To destroy this landscape that defines,

as Arthur Lismer said, the character of the country and so also the character of the people (qtd. in Nasgaard 166) is an act of violation in the eyes of those who seek to protect Lake Superior. The Ontario Municipal Board's decision to allow aggregate quarrying to carve up the coastline for economic gain, is a gesture that, as Mark Leschishin of Wawa puts it, encourages the continuation of "an unsustainable sort of lifestyle where we're continuing to use aggregate to build more highways, to pave over more of our land cover, and to destroy the coastline that has actually inspired people to write music, to create drawings and paintings." Here he is reflecting on Glenn Gould's annual visits to Wawa for creative inspiration, as well as the regional sites of Group of Seven paintings that Gary and Joanie McGuffin are seeking to document and preserve.

In this chapter I have shown some ways in which visual artworks, and the influence of artists, have shaped perceptions of the Lake Superior regional landscape in both local rural northern culture and in the national Canadian imagination. In introducing a range of contemporary artworks serving environmental discourse I have supported my view that art and artists have a significant role in shaping environmental thought, an influence that carries significance across time and social boundaries.

3. Class, Local Culture, and Life Narratives in Northwestern Ontario

Northwestern Ontario is a predominantly working-class culture, and as an actor whose early life was lived in a working-class family and community, I share this common class background with many of my research participants and other citizens living in the region. The rural north has a long history of intergenerational working-class economies and practices, a history that is now being transformed with declining natural resources and changing infrastructures such as new industrial technologies requiring fewer local workers in the former industrial towns of the north shore.

In this chapter I examine working-class life narratives as a means of addressing critical discourses and ecologies within rural working-class cultures, in this case the predominately working-class Northwestern Ontario communities bordering Lake Superior. I examine a variety of images and experiences of class position and identity that emerged from my research interviews and locations, and connect these to social, cultural, and material landscapes as experienced by working-class 'insider' voices. Relationships between working-class insider and outsider cultural perspectives are examined through particular images of working-class identity within a variety of spaces that produce a working-class

discourse, including autobiographical evidence and autoethnographic sources.

Recent working-class studies and narratives include testimonies from subaltern voices working “to reclaim history for the excluded by capturing historical memory from the rulers” (Aronowitz 199). Among these are texts by creative authors, whose life writings offer discourses of class analysis as a means of cultural intervention and a mapping of social values. Some social researchers who examine ideas of class difference from a sociological perspective also identify themselves as working-class ‘insider’ voices, meaning that their formative years were lived in working-class families and communities. Among these are Beverly Skeggs, John Kirk, and Thomas W. Dunk. Some of the literature I refer to in exploring the themes of this chapter were initially part of the research and literature review I completed for my comprehensive examinations, and I return to these texts in this chapter in order to contextualize my research on rural Northwestern Ontario culture. I centre my key theoretical model of social class experience upon Raymond Williams’ canonized concept of class as a “structure of feeling” learned in childhood and embedded in the subject, “as a continually experiencing and interrelating awareness” (*Marxism and Literature* 132). Williams notes the development of the word class “as a word which would supercede older names for social divisions” and points

to “the increasing consciousness that social position is made rather than merely inherited” (*Keywords* 61). Rosalind Williams has argued that the term ‘lower class’ became an “umbrella expression covering a wide variety of social types, including the laboring classes, divided from one another by geography and occupation”, and in particular, divisions between rural and urban workers (151). She goes on to state that the term ‘working class’ and ‘class’ as a “familiar social label” were firmly in place by the time the industrial working class was formed in the 1800s, signified by labour practices and lack of ownership over means of production. The industrial working class emerged as a new kind of “mass identity”, and sites of labour such as the underground workplace of the mines, as both political and technological environments, generated social anxiety as well as worker solidarity (Williams, Rosalind 152).

Northern Ontario is a land of mines and mining. Although the mines that fostered the creation of my hometown and those in neighbouring communities are now closed, gold is still being mined at the former Hemlo Golden Giant Mine, now owned by Barrick Gold Corporation, located between Manitouwadge and Marathon and serving both towns with employment. The Canadian Shield holds some of the world’s richest mineral deposits. The southern point of the Ring of Fire, an expansive and rapidly expanding zone of a multitude of mining claims, is barely a

hundred kilometers north of Manitouwadge. In *Technics and Civilization*, Lewis Mumford declared the mine as the first place where the natural world seems to have been exiled:

Day has been abolished and the rhythm of nature broken: continuous day-and-night production first came into existence here. the miner must work in artificial light even though the sun be shining outside; still further down in the seams, he must work by artificial ventilation, too: a triumph of the “manufactured environment.” (70)

Mumford’s descriptions of mining work as “dogged” and “unremitting” (70) accurately describe the narratives my mining father brought home to the family. In his time, the exhausting cycle of underground work, with its three eight-hour rotating shifts, allowed for no natural cycles of rest. While Mumford wrote his text in the 1930s, forty years before my father died in the 1970s from toxins he inhaled while working underground, the daily working life of a miner was not much changed. Today, another forty years have passed and labour in the mining industry has been greatly transformed, with technology replacing some of the labour capital of the miners’ bodies. Yet the workers and their descendants displaced by industry’s changes still look to the underground for new work. Hope for new mines to save their dying communities is, for some at least, continuing to feed the notion that the Canadian Shield will endure in providing regional economic infrastructure. If the Nuclear Waste

Management Organization is successful in securing a site for a geological repository for used nuclear waste near one of these communities, the subterranean landscape will uphold the infrastructure for what has been a prevailing and dominant culture of employment.

In the sparsely populated rural north, communities are comprised of mostly working-class people whose labour serves the global extractive industries that set up operations on the land. Once the natural resources are depleted by the company, often the town's sole employer, workers must then abandon the community that has served both their economic and social needs, fragmenting the solidarity of a common community, often with shared disadvantages such as limited local infrastructure and resources. Grant Goodwin of Manitouwadge, a local historian and nature guide, offers this view:

I think that there has to be some knowledge shared about the people who live in resource communities. Mining people are very transient people. And they understand that when the first rock comes out of the ground, that's the beginning of the end, because when the last rock comes out, whether it be in ten or fifteen or forty years, that's the end of your community. In small communities isolated as we are, it becomes a factor of whether people are going to stay and live in the community if the services aren't available.

Here, Goodwin is commenting on life in a remote community without public transportation and limited health services. Residents without a vehicle must depend on the goodwill and availability of family or neighbours. Even

the Greyhound bus must be flagged down at the junction between Highway 614 and Trans Canada Highway 17, more than fifty kilometers away from town. In recent years I have travelled a distance of about 3000 kilometers annually from Toronto to Manitouwadge to Thunder Bay and back, to bring my elderly mother to clinics in Thunder Bay for specialized medical appointments. Medical emergencies are dealt with by helicopter or air ambulance, and in extreme winter weather this method of transport may not be possible. Even travel by road can be an issue in Northern Ontario's winter months, with snow storms arriving as early as October and as late as April or May. The Trans Canada Highway is often closed due to weather conditions or large transport vehicle accidents blocking highway access. Marlene Turner of the Manitouwadge Museum told me that babies are no longer delivered at the local hospital and births must take place at the hospital in Marathon, almost one hundred kilometers away. Residents who find themselves unemployed may be able to live more cost-effectively on social welfare here than in a city, but without a vehicle they may have limited access to other resources.

Doreen Massey has noted that in "struggling local economies ... every time someone uses a car, and thereby increases their personal mobility, they reduce both the social rationale and the financial viability of the public transport system - and thereby also potentially reduce the

mobility of those who rely on that system” (150). For example, in Manitowadge, a medical van service was initiated for local citizens without a vehicle, stopping along other north shore towns to pick up passengers who needed transportation to Thunder Bay. This service was forced to close as there were not enough users, since most people did have cars, leaving those without a personal vehicle struggling to find rides to get to health care hundreds of kilometers away.



Figure 7. Manitowadge real estate, advertised at the junction of Highway 614 and Trans Canada Highway 17. Photo by E. Steiner.

The disintegration of older paths of intergenerational labour practices that once shaped rural working-class culture are increasingly

replaced by newer cultures of consumption and isolation. This transformation from the historical employment cultures of single-industry towns has shifted the social fabric from one where “people gained their identity through participation in production processes ... to a system in which people gain their identity through consumption” (Gare 14). Yet class difference is not eliminated by increased access to material resources and new communications technologies, which can diffuse boundaries of social inequality. Here, we may want to consider Walter Benjamin’s thoughts on this theme:

The class struggle ... is a fight for the crude and material things without which no refined and spiritual things could exist. Nevertheless it is not in the form of spoils which fall to the victor, that the latter make their presence felt in the class struggle. They manifest themselves in this struggle, as courage, honor, cunning and fortitude. They have retroactive force and will constantly call in question every victory, past and present of the rulers (254).

As Grant Goodwin goes on to note, the workers of the rural north may not be “university or college educated people, but they are very highly talented craft people who work underground, and most of them in very dangerous situations”. Doug Gibbens of Marathon also spoke about the web of solidarity holding the north shore communities together. He had worked at the local paper mill, and when it closed he transformed his interest in photography into a local business. He notes,

I found that up here with the small towns, we're an hour away, two hours away, we all have a common bond. We feel that we're neighbours. And that really makes a big difference when you've got to pull together. You're there for your neighbour, or they're there for us, even though they're hundreds of miles away. And that's what keeping the web together in Northern Ontario. It's different in southern Ontario where you go maybe from Windsor to Barrie, that's a whole day's drive. Up here you don't think about it. Travelling is part of our life up here, to stay connected.

While the notion of a rural working-class culture could appear to be a paradox, given that contemporary boundaries of class difference predicated on rural versus metropolitan access to cultural resources are increasingly diffused by global communication and new technologies, the culture of Northwestern Ontario is still defined by its unique working-class histories. These histories are being mediated by local actors who hope to recreate and preserve them for their communities, via small local historical societies, and independent projects and publications. Following Matthew Arnold's view that culture 'seeks to do away with classes' (16), Ryle and Soper have argued that culture is a source, but not the only source, "of fulfillments which, unlike expensive material goods and resource-hungry leisure activities, do not depend on unequal wealth or run up against ecological limits" (15). Yet as the formerly resource-based economies of the towns of Northwestern Ontario, in their efforts to produce new alternative economies turn to ecotourism and what some refer to as

“cultural tourism”, how does the marketing of the Lake Superior region’s cultural resources further collide with ‘ecological limits’? Tourism leaves destructive imprints too, particularly on wilderness sites such as those mentioned in Chapter 2 by Pays Plat First Nation speaker Raymond Goodchild, where markers and relics of indigenous histories are often not recognized, or even abused and removed.

The word ‘culture’ as a local marketable resource emerged in many of my interviews, usually as an alternative to further extraction of natural resources by industrial practices such as mining, quarrying or logging. For example, Mark Leschishin of Wawa told me, “People have been here a long time and there is a lot of rich history, a lot of rich culture here and I think that we could market that. And also the natural history, the eagles, the peregrine falcons we’re seeing here, and the caribou”. Yet nearby on Michipicoten Bay, David Wells, principal of an ecotourism and ‘silent sports’ operation, Naturally Superior Adventures, which is focused on activities such as guided sea kayaking on Lake Superior and canoe trips on nearby rivers, tells me this:

It’s very difficult to ask a person who has been in mining all their life and finds the mine shut down, which is the case in Wawa, or who has been working in wood manufacturing or wood harvesting for their life, who find themselves out of a job, to suddenly come and work in tourism. Resource extraction is a very profitable game because you’re not

paying so much for those resources, and in Northern Ontario we live in boom-bust kind of economies.

A former business manager and economic development officer for Michipicoten First Nation, Wells stresses the importance of sharing the land in a diversified economy.

Framing Class in Postmillennial Discourses of Decline

Where class divisions once served as a general means of categorizing and analyzing the social world, the new working class now includes many categories of short-term contract employment. Among these workers are educated professionals forced to subsist in precarious and unpredictable employment. In a material culture where access to full-time work is increasingly diminished, part-time or short-term contractual employment has produced a “new class” of wage workers, whereby “the practice of class power is to create a huge rift between a multiplicity of social formations” (Aronowitz 11). At the same time, the erosion of class as a metanarrative points to an assumed dissolution of class boundaries, especially in Western cultures where the “rhetoric of classlessness” has achieved a mythical resonance while simultaneously producing a range of discourses so contradictory that the notion of “the end of class” offers an imaginary new cultural formation (Kirk 1-2). While the ‘old’ working-class

has seemingly departed from the familiar social landscapes of the rural north, with its single-industry company towns where social hierarchies are often less obvious, class boundaries and lineages are refigured by new social and environmental movements and politics. All classes are encouraged to “embrace a globalized consumer culture” where traditional identities are supplanted by “a proliferation of self-fashioned subjectivities” (Kirk 2-3). Regardless of the fact that the notion of ‘capital’ has an economic origin, class is shaped around alternate forms of capital: linguistic, cultural, and social forms of symbolic capital, all still acting to reproduce class divisions while economic inequalities persist and intensify (Kirk: 6).

Against a shifting terrain of post-industrialization and postmodernity’s challenge to dissolve subject/object binaries while unmasking the essentialist frames of historical working-class culture, contemporary sociologists (Dunk, Kirk, Sayer, Skeggs et al) still refer to Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* in developing new interpretations of class. Habitus as a framework of inherited cultural capital, an internalized structure of “embedded dispositions generating in the subject an almost spontaneous response to the world they inhabit” (Kirk 153), a kind of “feel for the game” and sense of place or location in the social field (Sayer 24-25) produces an “internal organizing mechanism” learned by social

position in “the fields to which one has access, knowledge and experience” which in turn produces “exchange value” (Skeggs, *Class, Self, Culture* 145-146). Class position refers not only to economic and material power but merges a broad spectrum of exchanges including mutable qualities such as good or bad taste, and appropriate forms of knowledge. When Grant Goodwin of Manitouwadge speaks of the need for sharing knowledge about those who work in the mines, that many are “highly talented craft people” despite their lack of formal education, he is signifying the perceived cultural markers typically attributed to those workers, as divisions of north and south, or rural and urban, or educated and uneducated, all symbols of class difference.

Moral values are attributed to “relationships, experiences and practices, which we have reason to value, and hence our chances of living a fulfilling life” (Sayer 1). Beverley Skeggs notes that underclass values are branded with negative qualities such as escapism, unruliness, absence of shame (“The Re-Branding of Class” 49), as seen in the example of the rural ‘redneck’ sometimes presented in mainstream cultural products. By encoding class with themes of redemption and escape, predicated on middle-class values and practices that if learned, will produce the means by which the subaltern player is able to “transcend working-class signifiers” (Skeggs, “The Re-Branding of Class” 54),

prescribed images of class difference are affirmed. Skeggs notes that rhetoric is used to pathologize class, as the language of class discourse is “used to enable responsibility for inequality to be transferred from the state to the individual via the diagnosis of a pathological culture”, a culture framed as the “moral underclass” (*Class, Self, Culture* 79). Class, culture, and power are embodied in social capital, which is then redistributed and reproduced to remain within the dominant class and its institutions, not by force but by social practices (Lechte 66). Skeggs positions cultural practices as “central to contemporary class formation” (Skeggs, “The Re-Branding of Class” 46) and argues for a focus on a “symbolic economy” wherein culture is “deployed as an economic resource” that “shapes our understanding of class” (“The Re-Branding of Class” 47).

If class has moral dimensions, how then is class difference implicated in the ecological relationships of the rural near north, that is, in the interdependent relations of nature and culture that define rural working-class communities? In a landscape eroded by environmental damages, desertion of prior corporate infrastructure supports in company towns, and diminishing social resources, can a cultural view of these communities still be drawn through an exploration of the experiences and values of working-class life? How is class difference still a functional and useful social category in coming to understanding the cultures of the rural

provincial north? What does it mean when an administrative official of a Northern Ontario coalition group of environmental organizations refers to the “doppelgänger identity” of the region’s inhabitants? It seems to me to infer that local culture remains in an ongoing contest between material resources and their extraction, against an intimate local relationship with the land that its inhabitants want to share and protect. In my first interview with him in 2008, Conor Mihell, the writer whose *Globe and Mail* article on community divisions in Wawa generated by the Superior Aggregates Company quarry proposal had inspired the initial stages of my research, told me:

This has been my family’s home for about two hundred years. They came to Sault Ste. Marie around that time. And I hope it is my family’s home if I ever have children, if it’s their home as well in the future. In order to support a community there needs to be a certain degree of industry, commerce and so on, just to maintain that. But the lake should be a focal point of conservation. Its the largest body of water by surface area in the world. And I really hope that people can do that in the future, to get to see the lake, see it wild and get to share the joys that I’ve had.

Epiphanies and Escape in Working-Class Literatures

In this section I refer to some literatures of class analysis that have helped to shape my own working class ‘structure of feeling’, which I first began to explore in my Master of Environmental Studies research, and

continued into the comprehensive stages of my doctoral studies. I include these literatures of place and belonging by authors with working-class formative life experience as a framework for disclosing and thus contrasting them with my own life experience in a working-class family and community in the rural north, as reproduced in my written documents and audio/visual work. Together these literatures and cultural artifacts engage with my work in the communities along Lake Superior, as a way of structuring the narratives of class and culture expressed by my research findings.

Working-class cultural producers often speak of inhabiting dual class identities. American author Dorothy Allison comments on the divide between her lesbian-feminist communities and her loyalty to her “white-trash” family origins: “We were ordinary, but even so we were mythical” (13). She critiques feminist theory’s “limited understanding of class difference” (15), describing how she felt the need to hide her working-class background within the seclusion of an alternative cultural life. She reveals her realization that her people “had been encouraged to destroy ourselves, made invisible because we did not fit the myths of the noble poor generated by the middle class”. Allison contrasts her attraction to “that mythology, that romanticized, edited version of the poor” (17) with the grim reality of being part of the “bad poor”, without hope, filled with self-

hatred, violent. She comments on her temptation to write her family into the valorized poor, with “a family propensity for rebellion and union talk” but in reality her family viewed union organizers as of a different class, “suspect and hated however much they might be admired for what they were trying to achieve” (25). As a child, she wished for her family to be part of the “working man’s struggle” and her later political activism and professional ambition enraged them much more than her sexual politics and practices. Allison’s autobiographical essays and fiction reveal a culture of despair entrenched in class shame. Yet she eventually returns ‘home’ to her family in order to achieve understanding and renewal. She writes, “It is only as the child of my class and my unique family background that I have been able to put together what is for me a meaningful politics” (35). Allison manages to synthesize her working-class childhood with her mature life as an author, in continuity with her ongoing material relationships with the actors and landscapes of her early life.

I recognize Allison’s approach in consolidating her stories, as it connects to a reflection of my own working-class life experience. I remember my family’s poverty during a strike at the mine, subsisting on meager strike pay and my father’s divided sense of solidarity between his co-workers and family obligations. My experience of class difference was further complicated when in my youth I experienced community and peer

dishonour in regard my family's immigrant status. As a German immigrant attending high school the late 1960s, I felt a great deal of shame about my inherited cultural history. My film *Places To Stay* (1991) expresses this social and political anxiety. In the film's narration I state that in order to "absolve myself of personal guilt for crimes of war I did not commit: the sins of my blood", I turn to the rural northern landscape for solace. As an autoethnographic artifact the film expresses my sense of dislocation in a new land in what were then abject personal circumstances: to be reviled in one's new culture as an immigrant child from an enemy land of birth, and the conflict that subsequently may arise between one's family and one's new culture. In an effort to frame the childhood trauma of this particular history, in the film I position my disenchantment with my land of origin against my emerging Canadian homeland and new cultural identity:

I wished to annihilate my German ancestry yet felt alienated and powerless in my new culture. These forces led me to the refuge of the bush. It became for me a 'bush of ghosts' where magical things could occur, where being German could be transcended. This place was where I would grow to find my own story into freedom. The landscape offered separation between that within me which was Canadian, and my German self.

My cultural productions explore my working-class history as a means to identify, redeem, and ultimately transcend that history. My essay

“Requiem for Landscape” (in *Working on Earth*, 2015) reveals a narrative of class shame, absolved by family loyalty and working-class solidarity:

Sometimes our small basement room, which he built as a kind of recreation area, was filled with miners who would spend the night drinking, singing, and arguing. When the others left in the dark early hours my father would often remain drinking alone. Sometimes he felt suicidal. Then the hunting rifles he kept to shoot wild partridge, as food for the dinner table, became a real danger. I recall some nights of terror in my bed, as my mother talked him down from his bitter mood and back upstairs so he'd be well and rested for the next shift of work. This is how we remained intact as a family, and not, as my brother once remarked years later on one of our road trips back to Manitouwadge, another media statistic. Together, my parents kept it, and kept us, together. (*Working on Earth* 145-146)

Some authors who have ascended in class position speak to the notion of “escape” from their formative communities. In feminist scholar Carolyn Kay Steedman’s 1988 text *Landscape for a Good Woman*, she relocates – “after it was over and I had escaped” – to a new identity removed from her social history. She reiterates ideas of escape from the working class repeatedly throughout the text: “sons of the working class, who have made their earlier escape from this landscape of psychological simplicity” (12); “a whole generation of escapees occupies professional positions that allow them to speak of their working-class origins with authority”; “the material stepping-stones of our escape: clothes, shoes, make-up” (15); and, nostalgia for the childhood landscape that “you don’t

know yet you want to escape” (143). Yet despite a decade of estrangement, Steedman’s description of her mother’s lonely death is poignant and emotionally connected to an enduring class divide in her own dual social roles. She compares the isolation of her mother’s final moments, “She lived alone; she died alone; a working-class life, a working-class death”, to the death of Simone de Beauvoir’s mother as an upper-class death, “an easy one” (2). Disclosing her own discomfort with the complications of the socially revised world she now inhabits, she states that in conversations with professional peers, her interlocutor may not realize that “a hundred years ago, I’d be shining your shoes” (2).

In the 1980s, Jake Ryan and Charles Sackrey conducted a study on working-class academics and their fragmented social worlds, later published in their 1996 text, *Strangers in Paradise: Academics from the Working Class*. One of their respondents, Jane Ellen Wilson, who grew up on a family farm in Pennsylvania, obtained an education as her way of rejecting her family’s values of hard work on the farm and its gendered roles. Later she returned to the farm to write her dissertation, working in the fields in lieu of paying rent. She was able to balance her dual class identities with an authorial voice “that speaks for my vision and for the vision of the people and place that I come from ... that gave me life, beauty, dreams, and purpose, and to speak for them is the least I can do”

(209). This return to the landscape of one's working-class origins mirrors the experiences of many cultural producers from the working class, including my own.

In Simon Charlesworth's 2000 text, *A Phenomenology of Working Class Experience*, he positions himself as both an insider voice and a cultural "intermediary" who is committed to expressing the conditions of working-class people "through the instruments offered by the field of cultural production" (13). Charlesworth's narrative is infused with a bitter testimony of how his attempts to articulate class as a necessary discourse were dismissed by his academic peers at Cambridge University. His arguments echo the sentiments of others who have made the transition from the working class to the privileged world of the academy. Charlesworth stresses that the life of working-class people cannot be understood by statistics and other "discursive instruments" that reduce their lives to "products" contained within objects such as analytical tools in the form of social policy papers and academic texts (194).

In the early 1990s, the late York University professor Kathleen Martindale used life writing as a means of exploring "a gap or a lack about class in the academic literature of pedagogy". Raised in a working-class family, Martindale wrote that she continued "to identify with that class" after she had become a member of the professoriate (321). Her own

autobiography as an educated “working-class daughter” a methodology she used to produce a counter-discourse against what she viewed as “the implicitly classist assumptions of most feminist pedagogical discourses”, noting that her “greatest inspiration” was bell hooks, but that as a white woman it was not easy to talk about class while “coming out” as a working-class person, without risking positioning oneself in a “pathological category” (322). Martindale felt that class is the “most occluded member” of the “holy trinity” of differences of race, class and gender, one that is easily rejected as “a meaningful material and discursive formation” (323). She cites instances where her professional colleagues challenged her position as working-class for reasons that she was too intelligent and that her early life was “a long time ago”:

Sometimes they grill me on the details, hoping to find redeeming features that they can read as evidence of bourgeois traces. They really don't believe that I'm working-class, but they can't figure out why I insist on claiming such a stigma. Cultural theory colleagues tend to be bored with my talk about class (332).

While Steedman maintains an awareness that her colleagues in another generation would have been her superiors, Martindale comments that she learned to “re-tool” her “working-class persona” to fit into the social environment of the academy.

Thomas W. Dunk has written that in recent Canadian history, a person's "ethnic affiliation often denoted a place in the hierarchies of occupation, residence, and social class" (103). According to Dunk, certain industries in Canada were formed around ethnic divisions in working-class European immigrant communities – the Italian workforce around the construction industry, the Eastern Europeans around manual labour in a variety of industries that included mining, the British around the lumber industry. While these classifications may seem reductive, and Dunk admits that these are as much stereotypes as they are historical situations, ethnicity does play a role in social, political and economic relations within the Canadian working class (103). For example, my father emigrated from East Germany, where mining became his local and family labour history after the family lost all of their assets between the wars. Coming to Canada as an indentured labourer was for him a logical path towards a new social identity.

Dunk's text is an autobiographical account reflecting his own working-class dual identity. Unlike Ryan and Sackrey, who feel dislocated in their elevated class positions as academics and cling to affinities within their working-class origins, Dunk's efforts to reintegrate socially with his working-class research participants positions him as an outsider in what was his former social class and culture. At the same time, his role at the

university produces the typical feelings of displacement mentioned by many working-class academics: “I had, for reasons I am still not sure of, left behind my working-class culture, but had not made the transition to the essentially bourgeois culture of the university” (15).

With feminist interventions and developing postmodern theory, life narratives evolved as a site for “making visible formerly invisible subjects” (Smith and Watson 5). In working-class life narratives there is a history of the autobiographer’s struggle to present oneself as ‘worthy’ of the attention of the reader. As a “collective expression”, working-class life writing offers a view that provides the reader with a unique window through which to view “the social and political movements of their time” where the personal events of the narrators’ lives also reveal collective political movements (Green 199). While a working-class author may express unique perspectives of working-class life as lived by its actors, the autobiographical text itself is a “narrative artifice, privileging a presence, or identity that does not exist outside language” so that “alternate or deferred identities” may disrupt the narrative (Smith: 5). Sidonie Smith notes that “the self inscribed in autobiography is a rhetorical construct” situated in moments of reading of the self by both the autobiographer and the imagined reader of the text (6), thereby producing multiple subjectivities. The text thus becomes “a potential site of experimentation rather than a

contractual sign of identity” and the self or the autobiographical ‘I’, rather than being located in a fixed identity, is a fluid and unstable entity of subject formation giving agency to experimental genres and literary forms – the “marginal” works and noncanonical texts of authors who do not contribute to the “master narratives” and voices of dominant literary cultures (Smith and Watson: 6).

During the comprehensive stages of my doctoral work, I studied the texts of American author and environmental activist Janisse Ray, whose work is focused on environmental activism within a working-class autobiographical context. Ray arranges her life around a framework of voluntary scarcity that she first learned in a childhood home where habits of consumption influenced by mass media (Gare 15) were extremely diluted. Ray’s working-class childhood was built on a lifelong resistance to material cultural values and continues to steer her way in the world. Her life-writing contests social expectations and constructions of working-class experience, showing that economic deprivation in childhood served as her foundation to a worldview that values preservation. In her 1999 text, *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood*, she embeds local social history and ecological research with memory and memoir. Her lament for the degraded landscapes of her homeland is ingrained in personal meanings of family, place, belonging, and local community identity, reflecting a rural,

intergenerational network of supports generated by lives lived in a common, close, and accessible geography. Included in the community's supports are their reliance on local customs as a part of their economic survival, the 'traditional ways' of fishing, hunting and gathering to procure food (85). This idea of 'traditional ways' on the land as expressed by settler communities also emerged in my Northwestern Ontario interviews.

The notion that rural settler societies have their own traditional ways of living with the land was expressed by several of my research participants in Northwestern Ontario. In the small maritime village of Rosport I met with Colleen Kenney, a local public school teacher who follows what she described as her family's tradition of guiding fishing trips on Lake Superior. Ms. Kenney told me:

I'm all for protecting this area and keeping it pristine, keep it the way it is. However, I would be really upset if somebody told me I could no longer go out there and fish, I couldn't go out there and hunt. These are traditional things that people in these communities have done for years. I shoot moose, I shoot deer, and I eat it. I get rabbits, yes, that's the way my family was raised. What I shoot I eat and I share with other people and what I catch with fish, same thing.

A politics of local title to the land and its non-industrial resources emerged in many of the conversations I recorded along the Lake Superior north shore locations. Fishing and hunting are staple activities, and both indigenous and non-indigenous people may participate in these. As well, I

interviewed some residents who manage a trap line. At White River, I spoke with Melinda Ray, who is indigenous and whose family origins are at Heron Bay. She is a trapper, part of a family tradition going back to Ray's maternal great-grandmother and her paternal grandfather who were both trappers, and for Ray, trapping is a means of "getting back to my native roots". At Michipicoten First Nation, Evelyn Stone related how deforestation is a problem for the community's trappers. She notes,

Because it takes the animals to a different direction. So those people who are used to that trapping have to go further and further. And seeing that, it wasn't very healthy for the community because a lot of the trappers didn't have a way to go that far in the bush. They didn't have skidoos, they took their snow shoes out or their skis, and they did as much as they could.

A discussion of the ethics of trapping animals in regard to indigenous ways of living on the land are far beyond the scope of this project, but I did question Melinda Ray about this. The ensuing conversation led to comments on the following points: that "people in the cities" may not know that with the traps used today the animal is killed instantly, so there is no prolonged suffering, and with a registered trap line it becomes question of managing animal populations so that trapping of specific species is only done where there are population peaks and animals would starve without management of the number of animals needing to feed in that area. I asked whether all the meat of the trapped animals was eaten and although

much of it is, some is inedible. As a decades-long practicing vegetarian, the entire issue of killing animals for any purpose, whether for food or income or population management, is difficult for me to support from an ethical perspective. As a non-indigenous person, I cannot judge trapping as it is part of many indigenous practices, so I can only say that this was one story of many that I gathered on my research journeys.

Autoethnography as Method in Working-Class Studies

From an autoethnographic perspective, much of my research is framed around a working-class insider position, as my own formative years were spent in a working-class family, my father working underground in a mine, within a predominantly working-class community, a company town built by mining companies to house its workers. Working-class lived experience is a distinct culture. As the practice by which a member of a marginalized group studies, represents or speaks for the group or culture, autoethnography is a critical gesture that addresses, according to Soyini Madison, “injustice within a particular *lived* domain”.¹⁶ Categories of autoethnographic writing may include narratives of cultural and social displacement and environmental justice. Sociologist John Kirk

¹⁶ D. Soyini Madison, qtd. in “Introduction” by Eleanor Ty and Christl Verduyn, Eds. *Asian Canadian Writing Beyond Autoethnography*, 4.

argues that a critical function of working-class autobiography is to bear witness, to “speak for more than itself” (141) – and to perform transformative “acts of reclamation, commemoration and innovation” (103). According to Kirk, the role of the working-class author is to articulate and bring into being working-class subjectivities. He proposes a working-class literature, one that includes autobiographies, poetry and fiction, and I would include film and other audio/visual or artistic media to be among these, as spaces wherein the author may contest dominant images and representations of working-class culture.

In writing about the personal and its relationship to broader environmental themes, autoethnographic writing and visual practices are variously defined, as ethnographer Carolyn Ellis notes, as reflexive ethnography, phenomenological ethnography, or critical autobiography (40-42). As an approach to research and writing, “autoethnography as method, attempts to disrupt the binary of science and art.

Autoethnographers believe research can be rigorous, theoretical, and analytical *and* emotional, therapeutic, and inclusive of personal and social phenomena. Autoethnographers also value the need to write and represent research in evocative, aesthetic ways, defined as approaches to research and writing that seek “to describe and systematically analyze

(graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)” (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner). Autoethnography offers a means by which research is grounded in stories that will “deepen our capacity to empathize with people who are different from us” (ibid.). Emotional moments, memories, encounters with phenomena in the field while doing research, when contextualized by analytical tools and literatures, have the capacity produce “characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders” (ibid.). As an intimate observational practice and way of sensing, autoethnography is a creative process and continually unfolding text, one that exploits the researcher’s autobiographical data in order to analyze and interpret dominant cultural assumptions (Chang 9).

The production of autoethnographic texts and cultural artifacts entrenched in working-class community life experience offers a unique vision of class difference, irreproducible by those who have not learned the ‘structure of feeling’ necessary to express the character and experience of working class life. These cultural productions are both signifiers and reproductions of working-class life, as projects distinctive to the cultures experienced by their authors.

As counter-autobiographies constructed to challenge prevailing models of representation and identity, experimental and artistic media have the capacity to produce what media scholar Catherine Russell

describes as “multiple discourses of the self and the social” (276). Visual autoethnography is a strategy for expressing unique ways of knowing, remembering, and depicting crystallized and specific social experiences and environmental histories. Russell notes the interplay between autobiography and ethnography that emerges when the author of the work understands her personal history as “implicated in larger social formations and historical processes” (276). Autoethnographic artworks may feature subjectivities engaged in performing a flux of shifting identities, while producing diverse cultural discourses, and forging intersections of memory, the body, landscape, and place.

In my audio/visual work I deploy photographed and filmed representations of the rural northern landscapes and locations I knew in childhood, combining these with the oral testimonies of those who still live there, in order to document and understand particular places and communities in the stories given to me by their current inhabitants. This work produces narratives in which intersections of memory, landscape, and place emerge within a tapestry of lives lived in particular sites with specific environmental interests and concerns.

My filmed or photographic images aver intersections of class relations, environmental justice, and local histories, where place is an experiential phenomenon located between memory and lived experience,

my own and that of my research participants, some of whom I also share a lived history with. By shared history I mean that while many of my research participants were strangers to me when I first contacted them, others were people I first knew growing up in Northwestern Ontario, and have resumed an acquaintance with through my research. Some have become colleagues through our shared interests in regional environmental issues. These relations form new “experimental autoethnographies” reproducing my own lived experiences as well as those of the social actors with whom I engage while conducting my research and its related media productions.

Malartic: An Autoethnographic Case History

As a related example of this work, I would like to include in my discussion of working-class autoethnographic projects in single industry rural towns, a project I researched in Malartic, the northern Québec mining town where my family lived before settling in Manitouwadge. This is fieldwork I conducted in 2009 and 2010 while still in the comprehensive stages of my dissertation, and which I prepared for a conference presentation, *House on a Gold Mine: Visual Ethnography as a Retrieval of Place*, at the 2010 Conference of the Association for Literature, Environment, and Culture in Canada (ALECC), at Cape Breton University.

For this presentation I deployed narrative elements and photographic evidence, documenting new environmental events taking place in Malartic. This was where my father first settled upon arriving from Germany in the 1950s on a Canadian federal labour program for post-World War Two European immigrants displaced by the war. The town of Malartic, founded by the Québec government in 1939 to merge the squatter colonies spawned by the 1930s Abitibi gold rush, was named after the Comte de Malartic, whose nobility dates back to twelfth century Armanac, and who played no small role in Major General Montcalm's defense of New France at the Battle of the Plains of Abraham (Taillemite 1979). With the end of the gold rush by the 1960s, the mines were closing and my family relocated to Manitouwadge, which was then under construction to serve the new mines.

A half-century later in 2008, the Osisko Mining Company laid claim to a massive, newly discovered gold deposit that lay directly beneath the town of Malartic, and our former home was at its epicenter. The company has set up operations for Canada's largest-ever open pit gold mine, a billion dollar project. In order to facilitate this, it removed the existing homes, and those residents were paid to relocate to a new subdivision built by the mining company. In 2009 the company relocated two hundred houses, my family's former home among them. That year I was able to still

enter the site, but when I returned in 2010 to meet with representatives of the Mineralogical Museum of Abitibi-Témiscamingue to continue my research and photographic documentation, the area was completely closed off.

The Osisko Mining Corporation project raised many social and environmental concerns, with regional and provincial coalitions forming around resistance to the Malartic project. Organizations such as the Coalition for Better Mining in Québec, Action Boreal Abitibi-Témiscamingue, and Nature Québec had called for a halt to the production and for an independent commission towards reforming the Quebec Mining Act. In 2009, interdisciplinary researchers in Environmental Science at Université du Québec à Montréal stated that the approval of the open pit mine did not include specifications for restoration of the pit, or compensation for non-renewable environmental losses, including groundwater contamination (MAC: Mines and Communities, 2009). While those whose home were relocated to the new site were compensated, others with homes at the mining site's boundary were not. Lower-income residents living in rental homes, mostly seniors, were concerned that their rents would be increased by the company's improvements to rental properties relocated to the new site. Those left at the border of an open-pit mine were faced with noise, dust and other

toxins migrating to their homes. The company proposed to deal with this by building a 'green wall' in the shape of a linear park, fifteen meters high, to separate the mine from the town, promoting this as a new cultural site, complete with a viewing tower for tourists wishing to see the mine in operation. Perhaps this is the sort of project Bruce Staines of Wawa envisioned when he told me he believed tourism and industry could co-exist:

I realize that there is a certain type of tourist activity that might not appreciate a quarry right here at this site. However there's also other people that when they have a tourist experience, they want to see some activity. And seeing an operating quarry they could actually access as a tour point of interest is something that some people actually like to see. There's those that like pure quiet and peace and there's others that like to see interesting and different things.

I include the story of the Malartic events here to further demonstrate my ongoing commitment to visual autoethnography as a means of contributing to intersections of local environmental and working-class histories. When I met with the representatives of the regional Mineralogical Museum of Abitibi-Témiscamingue, and with Société d'histoire de Malartic in 2010, I was able to not only access their archives and image collections for my research, but also donated personal historical family images to their collections, photographs I had taken in the early 1990s when making my film *Places To Stay*, and a collection of photographs taken by my father

documenting 1950s Malartic history, thus expanding the community's existing visual records and narratives.

Protectionist Logic: "This is Our Jewel"

Landscapes where most residents have for generations worked in extractive industries such as mining at time present a veneer of class equality, as nearly everyone lives in relatively similar housing and social infrastructure. Yet those who labour in the mines and mills are not the social equals of the external entities that administer production, as

Raymond Williams writes:

If we say only that we have mixed our labor with the earth, our forces with its forces, we are stopping short of the truth that we have done this unequally: that for the miner and the writer the mixing is different, though in both cases real; and that for the laborer and the man who manages his labor, the producer and the dealer in his products, the difference is wider again ("Ideas of Nature" 84).

Extraction of a region's local natural resources to serve national and global corporate interests is at times the only means of providing infrastructure for the local communities serving these interests, by way of a corporately funded tax base that can sustain a small rural community's economic and social survival.

In my research interviews, many participants express a kind of romantic vision, a re-imagining of the places that once existed on the sites

along Lake Superior, defining the land as still 'pristine', idealized in a way that Kate Soper defines as a "retrospective yearning for older ways of life" (341). This imaginary is determined in part by an aesthetic enframing of the landscape, as distinct from the non-aesthetic responses of those who must work the land for a living, the labourers who harvest the material yields of land and water. Landscape as an aesthetic object and nature as a source of pleasure figures most prominently, according to Soper, "for those who are freed from the necessity of working on the land themselves" (244). I would argue that this is necessarily true. My father, a miner, sought refuge from his underground work and its stresses by spending a great deal of time in the wilderness, usually on fishing trips on nearby rivers and lakes away from his workplace, usually in solitude. His too was an aesthetic response as evidenced by his personal photography and drawings, yet he had no sense of ownership in his enjoyment of that landscape.

Those with private properties on Lake Superior realize the economic value of their holdings, and as much as their conservationist values may be motivated by altruistic intent, others who live in this region have more limited access to what some call "pristine" waterfront places. For those not inclined to wilderness camping or vacations in national or provincial parks, there are not many places to lodge one's family while

traveling. Only a few motels are scattered along many long stretches of the Trans Canada Highway, and there is the constant noise of transport trucks passing by throughout the night. Accommodations in ecotourism lodges away from the highway in scenic locations next to the shoreline are not affordable for many lower-income visitors. Public access to the north's recreational spaces is framed as a form of common ownership of the landscape for collective enjoyment (Soper 341), yet there are gated communities on and privatized holdings of Lake Superior's north shore, and those who own these often have greater stakes in protecting the shoreline than those who have no entry points into these exclusive zones.

The sublime aesthetic emerging in the protectionist rhetoric expressed by stakeholders who want to "save" the shoreline from development is motivated by their emotional responses to the landscape's visual power, and by the cultural values of a socio-economic minority. In his 2008 interview environmental journalist Conor Mihell, who has lived in Wawa but now is resettled in his hometown of Sault Ste. Marie, notes that until recently "property on Lake Superior was dirt cheap". Most who then had the means to purchase their holdings could afford a second home to be used as a vacation property rather than as their primary residence. Mihell notes that Lake Superior's rugged shoreline and cold waters discouraged many local people from buying land there. It was those from

more southern or metropolitan locations who were able to realize the land's value and to seize the opportunity for ownership of an inexpensive parcel of real estate in a picturesque, uncrowded terrain. As Mihell says, "Maybe that hasn't been realized locally yet in terms of cherishing it and wanting to protect it for the future, and that brings us back to the proposed quarry and why that has been largely supported in Wawa."

A sense of local title to the land is projected throughout many of the interviews, as in "these are our islands" or "this is our jewel". But this language of appropriation, other than for the First Nation speakers who indeed have a prior claim to the land, excludes many who are unable to respond with similar cultural perspectives. The unemployed worker who hopes that the quarry or new mine will bring a renewed and much-needed income, or the fisherman whose catch will be diminished by blasting, have different concerns than those skilled in environmental rhetoric. As Wawa local Ken Mills notes, "The quarry that I worked at, we had one big blast every two weeks and there was a pile of smoke and rock come out of there. Right now fishing is pretty good in the bay. I can go out with my boat and get supper pretty near any time". Yet some residents, such as David Wells of Naturally Superior Adventures, do share a collective concern. Aware of the multiple points of view on issues to do with proposed industrial developments on the shoreline, initiatives that would certainly

diminish his own business, he is critical of the resource extraction base of northern industries, while sharing the hope that the opposing sides “can go to a place of mediation and find a way that we can both live somehow”.

In 2012, on one of my stays at Montreal River Harbour, located about halfway between Sault Ste. Marie and Wawa, I met Don Steer, a professor emeritus of education at the University of Michigan, who has a summer home there. He had conducted extensive research on the area immediately north and south of Montreal River Harbour, including a detailed early settler history from both print sources and several hundred oral interviews, and had published his findings as *The Montreal River Harbour Area: A History and Description from Oral and Print Sources* (1991) still available at the Sault Ste. Marie Museum but now out of print. The research was republished in a 2001 CD ROM, *Superior's East Shore*, which I acquired with a 2005 Supplement.¹⁷ This project includes a history of the development of Lake Superior Provincial Park, which was created in 1944. Following the Lake Superior Provincial Park designation, from the 1950s into the 1970s existing private residences and independent businesses were forced to vacate the sites and homesteads they had

¹⁷ The material cited here and page numbers referred to are from the text scans available on the DVD ROM 2005 Supplement.

occupied for generations, and their buildings were demolished. Steer comments on these government acquisitions:

To this day there are some very negative and bitter feelings held by commercial fishermen, tourist lodge operators, and others (and their relatives) who were 'evicted' or had to leave the park area, often without what they considered fair compensation for the buildings they had called home for many years, and which they were forced to leave (364).

Steer quotes a local resident and park supervisor, Rick Vosper, in a taped interview of 1989, who noted that existing buildings were torched and burned to the ground:

Nobody considered anything here of historical significance. At one point it was felt that these lodges made the area open to only a few rich people. They wanted to change it so that the park would be open to everybody on an equal basis. So the idea was to get rid of these lodges, return it to wilderness since it was a wilderness park, and get rid of buildings and habitations. In hindsight that was unfortunate but that's the way the Ministry interpreted it at the time.

Reading this testimony, my thoughts shift back to William Cronon's appeal for maintaining structural evidence of habitation, that all historical evidence of earlier traces of dwelling in the Lake Superior Apostle Islands conservation areas should not be erased (*Apostle Islands* 38). The Lake Superior shoreline settlements and communities have a deeply layered history, with multiple interlacing stories buried in the metanarratives of title to the land. Existing ecotourism operations of today, such as Naturally

Superior Adventures, have created employment for local citizens for many years. How would these local livelihoods be affected by new initiatives in either extractive or conservationist developments? With ongoing climate change and warmer seasons, new parkland and the potential expansion of tourism, and new communications technologies, will newer economies replace the old extraction economies the north shore has traditionally depended upon?

My research and creative production engages with diverse implications of home and cultural belonging, and at times with oneiric impressions of the spiritual values embedded in specific sites, as expressed by some of my research participants, both indigenous and settler residents. I discuss this aspect of my research and local culture further in *Chapter 5: Dual Identities: Politics of Location in the Rural Near North*.

5. Dual Identities: Sense of Place and Politics of Location in the Rural Near North

As I proceeded with my research journeys on the Lake Superior north shore, I found myself continually fusing my own sense of place in the region with that of my research participants. Rather than functioning as a visitor or someone from 'away', on my northern journeys I am always 'coming home'. In articulating the stories arising from my diverse encounters, I function as a narrator whose personal history is situated in the towns and wilderness locations of my study. The viewpoints presented in this work reflect those of individual actors, at times in community with representatives of local and regional environmental organizations including Northwatch, Environment North, Citizens Concerned for Michipicoten Bay (CCMB), the Lake Superior Conservancy and Watershed Council (LSCWC), and Save Our Algoma Region (SOAR), as well as voices from three First Nation communities situated on the Lake Superior north shore: Michipicoten Bay First Nation, Pic River First Nation, and Pays Plat First Nation. As previously mentioned, I typically share the views of my research participants who hope to protect the natural environment, despite their need for economic survival.

For all of its natural beauty with large areas of protected wilderness and parkland, the Lake Superior north shore region is also a ruined landscape of abandoned mine sites and deleterious material saturation of its land and its waters, steeped in the “poverty of lost jobs and old industries” (Solnit, *Storming the Gates* 357). While most of my research participants expressed views against ongoing resource extraction as a means of employment for those still living in the increasingly depopulated towns of this region, others tread a margin that speaks to finding ways of balancing regional economic concerns with environmental protection. This dualistic view positions some in the region in a binary described by Peter Rosenbluth, a former coordinator of Ontario Nature’s Northern Connections program, as the Northern Ontario “doppelgänger identity” (Mihell 2010).¹⁸

In Northwestern Ontario themes of environmental justice and local working-class histories intersect to express both convergences and polarities between local stakeholders employed by extractive industries, environmental groups, members of regional First Nations, and others whose social or economic lives are affected by new infrastructure projects. In these working-class communities, where relocation or alternative forms

¹⁸ Conor Mihell, “Frontier Conservation.” *Ontario Nature Magazine*. Winter 2010. Web. 31 May 2013.

of employment are unlikely options for many residents, the issue of economic sustainability against environmental protection of the land that they are profoundly bound to in spirit is of paramount concern. While dependent on the land for their livelihoods, residents simultaneously may express a conflicting desire to see it remain untarnished. This dualism, reflected in an affinity with both working-class culture and attachment to rural wilderness, was expressed by Conor Mihell in my second interview with him in 2012:

We have this split identity in the north where people associate with nature in a certain way and appreciate it for being wild. But on the other hand we also rely on nature to supply us with the resources to fuel our industry and to support economic development. And its a very tricky balance because the two aren't mutually exclusive.

Among the speakers in the filmed interviews and text of this dissertation are environmental activists who have formed their own grassroots organizations to protect their local or regional concerns, supported and shared by other residents in their community or region. Some speakers whose primary concerns are focused on protecting the natural environment feel that industry, if properly managed, can continue to provide economic sustainability for their communities. Others feel that new industries such as ecotourism will provide the answers, yet they too are aware that without new public environmental education, this will create

new problems that will disrupt remaining wilderness areas, wildlife habitat, and water resources.

During the course of my study, a period of about six years, there have been several shifts in the themes of my research: the quarry issues at Michipicoten Bay, the industrial wind farm proposals, the detrimental effects of increased tourism on wildlife and indigenous markers in the landscape, and the recent renewal of nuclear waste disposal in the Canadian Shield. What remains constant is a mapping of how the land and landscape around the Lake Superior north shore communities is valued by its various stakeholders. While my research participants are all local citizens, some are activists with views in opposition to others in their small communities who support unremitting economic development based on resource extraction. At times these stakeholders have shared yet contradictory values. For instance, in my 2010 interview with Wawa local Bruce Staines, a proponent of the proposed Superior Aggregates Company quarry, he states,

I chose to live in Wawa because my career brought me here on three separate occasions where I was managing mines in the area. And I fell in love with the Wawa area, the beauty, and particularly Lake Superior. I believe that tourism and industry can co-exist. I know that there are people that come to this area for what they call an ecotourist experience. However there is a vast amount of Lake Superior and its shoreline that is available for that kind of an experience. There is a minimum amount of the shoreline of Lake

Superior that is amenable and ideally situated to be able to maximize the utilization of our natural resources.

As much as Staines enjoys the landscape around his home on Michipicoten Bay (much of which was actually destroyed by extreme weather in October 2012, and was still inaccessible by road in 2013), he appears to have no concerns regarding living next to an industrial site. When Staines speaks of natural resources he means those that are available for extraction. On the other hand, nearby across the bay from Staines' home, David Wells operates his silent sports, ecotourist facility, Naturally Superior Adventures, and offers this:

In my view, Superior Aggregates is in business to make money and I would never deny them that opportunity. They have realized that there is a big deposit right beside the dock and by harvesting, by mining that, they're going to maximize their profits, maximize their revenues. Their plan is to develop the whole property where possible. That's my understanding and it would be foolish to do otherwise. And I would imagine that with time they would go further back on the property. From my perspective, the key things that are important are these. The noise, because clearly that will negatively affect my business, and the dust clearly negatively affects my business. The potential for spills and disasters could destroy Michipicoten Harbour. If there are explosions going off every day, that's going to harm my business. There are some things I can live with – explosions going off maybe every three days. I can live with some kinds of negotiations around noise. On a day like today when the lake is going crazy, I'm not going to hear much noise over there. On another night when its a beautiful calm night, the blasting, crushing, grinding, it's going to really harm me.

Whether or not the site will now ever be developed into a quarry, either by another company or by the municipality of Wawa, what Wells' testimony illustrates is a kind of dualistic tolerance and willingness to compromise, to allow for economic strategies that work against his desire to protect Michipicoten Bay.

In 2009 I interviewed two residents of the small village of Rosspport, Colleen Kenney and David Tamblyn, and a representative of the nearby Pays Plat First Nation, Raymond Goodchild, a former chief. These local citizens were active in community consultations leading up to the 2007 federal approval of a Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area east of Thunder Bay. This project generated much local and regional community debate in terms of environmental protection, economic sustainability, and the social issues that could arise from the project. Most of my research participants supported this new development as it would protect the natural environment, and possibly lead to new alternative economies based on ecotourism or environmental education.

That same year I also interviewed residents of Nipigon Ontario, including David Crawford, Chair of the Nipigon Bay Remedial Action Plan, a committee organized to clean up areas where paper mills were once located. Crawford supported the new National Marine Conservation Area,

but expressed concern about increased tourism resulting from new conservation initiatives. Raymond Goodchild told me that Pays Plat First Nation had been approached to be part of the consultation process around the Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area as early as 1997. He stressed the need for ongoing conservation, ecosystem management, and both local and visitor education, and respect for indigenous practices such as hunting for food:

After I'm gone I want to make sure the generation after me will continue having the same enjoyment of the land, the water, and the animals that are out there, and the plants. We've got to keep this area managed. Because at one time this area was closed off as a park and no one could hunt out there, according to my people. Sometimes in the morning you could see maybe fifty moose grazing. Nowadays, you're lucky to see maybe five out there. Because it's not being managed properly. It's not being protected. And my elders told me they used to take hunters out there and those people used to waste the moose. They'd just cut their antlers off and waste the moose. But our people would take that moose when they were guiding for them and bring it back to our community and we'd split it up in our community. Because some of these people just want trophies and that's not sportsmanship. You've got to respect the animal. So that's what we're trying to ensure. That even some of our sacred sites out there, that on this parkland we manage it, ensure it, protect it, educate, because we've got to work with everyone along the north shore.

My research interviews reveal many local stakeholders of Northwestern Ontario want to protect the natural environment surrounding their communities, despite the fact that resource industries have created

and supported these communities for generations. Even presumed new 'green' technologies are considered threats to unindustrialized economic developments such as ecotourism. David Crawford and others I interviewed expressed concerns around what he called "the quest for power", and the use of northern locations and resources to provide energy projects to serve the metropolitan south, such as large-scale industrial wind turbine projects on Lake Superior. In my initial interview with Conor Mihell in 2008, he had remarked that he was skeptical about industrial scale wind turbine projects, noting that he would prefer to see "more smaller community-based projects". In 2013 I interviewed Algoma region residents on the theme of industrial wind projects, including Joanie McGuffin and Gillan Richards of Save Our Algoma Region (SOAR). Gillan Richards stated concerns about damages to avian wildlife, disruptions in animal habitat and damages to the terrain itself due to electrical infrastructures and new roads built to install hardware for the turbines. She commented that the wind turbines could be heard by nearby residents, and notes that large industrial installations would create both noise and light pollution. Richards speaks of the dark northern night skies as one of the Algoma region's "chief tourist attractions", noting that these projects have an impact on night sky visibility. Much of the controversy in Northwestern Ontario around industrial wind turbine projects emerges

from perceptions of visual landscape aesthetics as assets and resources for tourism.

For all of its conservationist intentions, perhaps expanded ecotourism in the region would also promote new “hegemonic entitlements” to the land, promoting nature as “a cultural product designed to serve an ideological function”: the expectation that in their encounters with the Lake Superior wilderness, ecotourists “may change or consolidate their identity in some meaningful way” (Evans 182). As Raymond Goodchild tells us, even the silent sports enthusiasts, the peaceful kayakers who are there to enjoy the natural environment and the resources provided by ecotourism outfitters, can pose a problem for the indigenous artifacts and histories that populate the landscape:

We’ve got to educate the kayakers, there are certain places that they shouldn’t camp. They have to be educated by promotion or develop with Parks Canada some way of promoting and ensuring that the culture be okay. Like if there’s bones out there, if there are graves out there, you don’t want development going on there. You don’t want a campsite out there.

As much as unmitigated and continuing resource extraction will certainly damage what is a unique coastal ecosystem, uninformed tourist activities, as a burgeoning alternative economy, pose a different threat, one that could deplete remaining indigenous cultural markers and historical assets

that co-exist with and are embedded in the natural environment. Some who have settled in the region are working to promote communication between the different communities, to strengthen the web that connects them, and to develop vehicles for a deeper understanding of existing streams of local culture.

Several of my research participants spoke to me about supplementary economies, that if properly managed, can provide sustainable small-scale resources. Both indigenous and settler folk mentioned their own 'traditional ways' of hunting and fishing as forms of recreation as well as means of putting food on the table. Colleen Kenney of Rosspoint has extended her personal economic options by taking visitors for boat tours around her area of Lake Superior. Others, such as Conor Mihell, Joan Skelton, and Joanie and Gary McGuffin, all authors, have made the region a source of their entire livelihood, by publishing books and articles. The McGuffins also build kayaks and canoes, and Mihell is a wilderness guide for visitors not experienced in backwoods journeys.

First Nation Disparate Views

One of my earliest research interviews was with Evelyn Stone, a former chief of Michipicoten First Nation, which borders the land owned by Superior Aggregates Company. Members of Citizens Concerned for

Michipicoten Bay (CCMB) had introduced me to Evelyn, who had publicly supported the CCMB and the local initiatives to stop the aggregate quarry. She had spoken at community meetings against the development, and told me, “Today we have a voice and I always say to the people, we have our choices, and if we’re treated as equals in any discussion that’s going to help the growth, not only for us in our community but all of the people in the area”.

Evelyn now works in community health, and had learned traditional medicine from her elders: “I went out and I learned of the culture and the traditions and brought back those teachings, and then I got into the health field to do the promotion of being healthy in mind, body and spirit.” For her, it is the traditional indigenous cultural practices that offer healing for the community, and the local environment of Michipicoten Bay holds the “medicine” – the plants, rocks, trees, and the water, which provide cultural knowledge and what she denotes as “messages” from the spirits of elders and ancestors surrounding this area. Evelyn also expressed the view that not all of the current community leaders share her perspective on opposing new industrial developments, as many had relocated to urban environments and lifestyles before returning to Michipicoten Bay. She

brought me to the site of me a new dam being constructed near her home, stating,

Some of our leaders have just moved back to our community and don't understand the culture and traditional ways that we have practiced for the last twenty years. So we see that dam and they talk about building the dam up there and the generation of the money to come, but money isn't everything. Money doesn't bring the beauty of the land. Money doesn't keep the water clean.

Evelyn has worked hard to bring traditional practices back into her community, through community health programs and gatherings promoting education around traditional teachings. The annual youth and elders gathering is open to the general public, and Evelyn supports opportunities for sharing indigenous knowledge and culture with those from outside the community who would be interested.

On the day of our scheduled interview, she had invited me to meet at her office for a tour of the Michipicoten First Nation and its environs, and had previously agreed by email and telephone to an on-camera interview. She wanted to begin our conversation with a ceremony at the top of the nearby Silver Falls, so I followed her with my camera equipment on an arduous, pathless, uphill hike, through deep bush and biting black flies. When we reached the top she performed a drum ceremony and sang a piece she called "The Water Song", as a prelude to our interview. Due to

the sound issues at the waterfall I was unable to film the actual interview there, and we returned to the band office, where I briefly met the band council manager, Carol Sanders. Noticing my camera equipment, she asked me if my concerns were regarding the quarry, and if so, I should have contacted her first. Evelyn had already warned me that the current band administration did not share the views of those opposed to the quarry, and I felt intimidated by this sudden intrusion on my much anticipated interview with Evelyn, who quickly intervened by stating that I was there at her invitation. Evelyn then hurried me along to the privacy of her own office. After the waterfall location, the office seemed too sterile and so we moved outdoors near the teaching lodge, out of sight from the office. This brief exchange allowed me to witness some of the tensions within the community around the issues presented by proposed new industrial developments. In her interview, Evelyn acknowledged that her views were in conflict with other community leaders. She stated her support for ecotourism, sharing cultural values, and providing resources for these by opening up the Michipicoten First Nation property for opportunities around natural healing experiences. For Evelyn, tourism as an alternate economy, based on the land's cultural values, is an important resource against extractive industries.



Figure 8: With Evelyn Stone at the Michipicoten First Nation teaching lodge. Photo by E. Steiner.

Indigenous scholar Taiaiake Alfred notes that while indigenous people need both economic power and cultural authenticity, he questions the path of economic development as a way to maintain cultural principles (*Wasa'se: Indigenous Pathways* 223) and critiques the notion that First Nation wealth-building and profit-motivated models of government, based on resource extraction, will solve problems generated by colonization (*Peace, Power, Righteousness* 114). Alfred supports development in the form of skills, relationships, and the use of land for collective benefits, while “moving from total wardship to a new form of dependency – for

example, based on supplying raw materials to foreign industry – is in fact a step down, because it required that indigenous people actively participate in their own exploitation” (*Peace, Power, Righteousness* 116).

In 2012, a conflict arose between Batchawana First Nation, which holds land rights within and around Sault Ste. Marie, and Michipicoten First Nation. The issues were around the proposed Bow Lake industrial wind turbine project, owned by BluEarth Renewables, approximately eighty kilometers north of Sault Ste. Marie. The dispute involved territorial boundaries around which First Nation owned rights to this land, which lies about half-way between the two First Nations territories. The Anishinabek Nation Northern Superior Chiefs passed a resolution opposing the wind project construction, over fifty per cent of which is owned by the Batchawana First Nation. Chief Joe Buckell of Michipicoten First Nation maintained the land for the project lies in Michipicoten First Nation traditional territory, and argued there was a lack of consultation between Michipicoten First Nation and BluEarth Renewables, who had made the agreement with Batchawana First Nation and their claim to the land. In a news release of October 2012 issued by the Anishinabek Nation Northern Superior Chiefs, Buckell is quoted:

There was no consultation with the developer BluEarth Renewables. ... It seems that Batchawana First Nation has made a deal with BluEarth Renewables and Batchawana

claims that they consider it their area which is a least 50 kilometers from their reserve. They are ignoring the Robinson Huron Treaty of 1850 where the boundaries are clearly stated. This needs to be addressed by the federal government. ... Direct action by the Northern Superior Chiefs will take place if BluEarth wind farm project moves forward with the venture.¹⁹

Shortly afterwards in October 2012, Chief Dean Sayers of Batchawana First Nation responded at a press conference to state he was frustrated with efforts to arrive at an agreement with Chief Buckell over how their respective bands could participate in the project, noting that the Northern Lake Superior Chiefs represent Michipicoten First Nation but not Batchawana Bay First Nation.²⁰ In May 2014, Chief Buckell spoke in support of a protest in the Algoma District against regional industrial wind turbine projects, stressing “that the project falls within Michipicoten First Nation’s traditional and treaty territory and that there was a breach of protocol by the applicant and the crown. The letter did not state how the project would specifically impact their aboriginal or treaty rights.”²¹

In her interview Evelyn Stone had noted that along with the community’s return to traditional practices, there has been increased awareness around economic decision making practices:

¹⁹ News release issued by Anishinabek nation, September 27, 2012.

www.sootoday.com. Web. 4 Nov. 2013.

²⁰ *www.sootoday.com*. October 03, 2012. Web. 4 Nov. 2013.

²¹ Lake Superior Action Research Conservation (LSARC). Web. 28 May 2014.

A lot of people were not into the traditional and cultural ways, but now we are, and we have a better understanding of all the reports that they do. We share. Some of the reports that I've seen, I went through page by page and I had questions but sometimes we never had that opportunity to go and ask the questions.

Here she is reflecting on how the community only became involved in issues around the proposed Superior Aggregates quarry after the project was already in progress. The property owned by the company is not on the Michipicoten First Nation's land, but its proximity to the community would affect the life of those living there due to the potential for increased airborne and water contamination, increased traffic, damage to traditional medicines and plant life, and noise and disruption that could destroy the tranquility of a community that Evelyn Stone feels is just beginning to recover its spiritual values and cultural power. After years of working to restore traditional practices in her community, she is adamant that new industrial developments will have a negative impact on the health of those making a return to these practices, and instead she supports tourism that would include indigenous cultural education as an alternative economic model.

Although she expressed these views to me in her interview, Evelyn did not represent the Michipicoten First Nation's official position on the Superior Aggregates Company proposal at the Ontario Municipal Board

(OMB) hearings in 2009. Band manager Carol Sanders spoke as a designated representative on behalf of Chief Joe Buckell. In her Participant Statement of March, 2009, Sanders states, that as a “progressive First Nation” the Michipicoten First Nation understands “the need for industry that is conducive to future development and economic sustainability.”²² Mark Leschishin of Citizens Concerned for Michipicoten Bay (CCMB) made this public document available to me. It goes on to state that as the closest neighbour to the proposed development, the Michipicoten First Nation is interested in “socio-economic impacts” and does not state any opposition to the quarry development.

Economic Tensions, Future Visions

The key theme emerging from my filmed study of the Lake Superior north shore communities is the tension between competing forms of economic sustainability which would allow these communities to continue to exist. The issue of protecting the natural environment from further exploitation by the extraction industries that funded the creation of these communities in the first place is posed against the demand for new economies that will support both those who have traditionally made their

²² Citizens Concerned for Michipicoten Bay (CCMB) archives.

living from resource industries, and those whose interests lie in exploiting the natural environment with less obviously disruptive means.

Graham Saunders of Environment North, a Northern Ontario group founded in 1972, teaches meteorology at Lakehead University and is a contributing editor on *Weatherwise* in Washington, D.C. He commented on the “false dichotomies” inherent in conflicts between economic interests and environmental issues on Lake Superior:

It’s not either/or, that we can have both a clean and good environment and industry as well. In the past there was pretty flagrant mismanagement of the environmental aspects, and I take you back to mining and paper mills and raw sewage being discharged into the lake. And the adage was, “dilution is the solution.” We can get rid of anything we want, because the lake is so vast we won’t hurt it.

Saunders goes on to argue, “This conflicts with testing of water and it’s remarkable how toxins even in trace amounts can migrate right through the entire lake system, because there is circulation around the lake and wave action so it all mixes relatively quickly.” He accepts the need for some industry but cautions, “we still need very careful management of new industries that discharge anything into Lake Superior” and highlights tourism as a stake in the north shore’s emerging economic picture.

In the early 2000s Environment North successfully challenged and halted a large industrial project owned by the American company SynFuel Technologies, from setting up operations at Thunder Bay. Saunders told me something about this history:

The SynFuel project proposed to have a large generating station in Thunder Bay, and to transport power, perhaps with an under Lake Superior cable to the midwest United States. And frankly that would be a very difficult engineering project. But there were other really important concerns. One is the proposal would utilize waste from the Alberta tar sands, called petroleum coke, the sludge from refining tar sands. And the idea was from their point of view to use this waste, very cheaply, because the companies there want to get rid of it. And all you have to do is transport it to Thunder Bay and then you burn it and use the electricity. It had never been done in Canada and one of the problems with the process was that it's a great concentration of heavy metals and other toxins. So we had concerns that if you burn or gasify this material, then it goes into the prevailing winds from the plant, it would take it over Lake Superior and leave it in the lake, and other winds would transport it over the city. It was proposed to be on First Nations land, Fort William First Nation. That's very close to the incineration itself and they would be especially affected by emissions from this plant. So hundreds of people took part in trying to get it to an environmental assessment. It took a great deal of pressure to make that happen and eventually the Minister of the Environment did decree that it would go to an environmental assessment. Once this was declared the project dissolved because the company itself perhaps didn't have the resources to do that, but the technical aspects of the project were in our opinion so flawed that it would never go through an environmental assessment.

Citizens Concerned for Michipicoten Bay were less successful in their disputes with Superior Aggregates Company. The group first challenged the Wawa municipal government over issues surrounding the official plans for the Superior Aggregates property. Mark Leschishin notes, “We felt that we had a right to have a public hearing, and that the property did have to be re-zoned and the official plan had to be amended.” The judgment ruled in the citizen group’s favour and the municipality was chastised for failing to provide access to information. The community then began to fragment over the varying positive and negative economic and social effects that the quarry development could produce. Lifelong friends stopped talking to one another, and as Leschishin says, “The board members [of Superior Aggregates Company] all live in the U.S. They don’t care what happens here.” Members of the CCMB tried to get the company to engage with the social themes emerging in the Wawa community, but were subjected to harassment from other community members once their questioning was made public.

Further north along the great lake, members of communities including Nipigon, Red Rock, Terrace Bay, Rosspport, and Pays Plat First Nation were very involved in discussions around the proposed federal National Marine Conservation Area. Here, although most resource

industries have only recently closed, local citizens seem to have realized greater acceptance of the idea of alternative economies. Colleen Kenney of Rosport commented on increased fishing charters and sight-seeing tours in the towns of Red Rock, Nipigon, Schreiber and Terrace Bay: “People are becoming more creative and realizing that they are going to have to stretch themselves. They can’t just depend on the resources to bring them in a pay cheque every week.”

When I asked Mark Leschishin what alternatives could be implemented for Michipicoten Bay and Wawa in regard to improved economic and social stability, he suggested, “The property that Superior Aggregates owns could be bought out by the provincial government, the federal government and our municipal government together, and established as a port.” Under its current private ownership, he notes, there is no guarantee that local community members will have access to the port lands or shoreline. Groups such as Citizens Concerned for Michipicoten Bay (CCMB), Save Our Algoma Region (SOAR), and the Lake Superior Conservancy and Watershed Council (LSCWC) promote a vision of economic progress fueled by local cultural and environmental education and ecotourism. These initiatives would explore regional features such as Michipicoten’s past as a fur trading centre, the promotion of Lake

Superior's landscapes and history in images produced by Canadian artists, and the region's unique natural features such as the return of caribou populations to islands in the area.

Images of woodland caribou on protected islands emerge as a kind of post-pastoral imaginary for the Lake Superior north shore, inviting ecotourism as a possible alternative economy to two centuries of wood and mineral removal and trade. While earlier versions of the pastoral "created a false ideology that served to endorse a comfortable status quo for the landowning class" (Gifford 7), this contemporary pastoral idea moves between a retreat from encroaching and conflicting demands on remaining wildland properties, towards a return to a view of the land that is at once bucolic, as in large parcels of protected parkland, and ruined, as evidenced by abandoned mines, water and soil pollutants, and increasingly derelict towns. In between this retreat and approach are the shadows of class difference: those still employed or economically secure in their affordable retirement homes in the region, and those who must still earn income but are reluctant or unable to relocate to find work. The residents who settled the north shore in the older economies, where transient miners and loggers could always find employment, are now faced with the need to develop new entrepreneurial skills. For most, their ability to survive in the northern towns would depend on working in limited

service industry or government-funded initiatives, but as corporate infrastructures diminish, so do private businesses. Stores and restaurants become vacant, public school populations are reduced, and residents must travel to the larger towns for amenities. Betty Brill, curator of the Nipigon Historical Museum, presented her view on the declining northern towns:

When our mills went down there was nowhere else to go. So our families got split. They would have to go out to Alberta or further north. You know driving here in Northern Ontario it's a long stretch, you just don't commute back and forth for hundreds of miles. So it put a strain on the children, if the parents were off for weeks at a time. If the whole family has left then that decreased the population in the schools and once you lose your children you lose a teacher because they start putting the classes together. It's a domino affect. Restaurants don't stay open, they take shifts off. Now you've got adults with no job opportunities.

Some local residents, such as Colleen Kenney and David Tamblyn of Rosspoint, who both teach in the public school system and promote tourism activities in summer, straddle a number of roles in order to maintain their homes in their chosen locations. Others, such as Marlene Turner, who manages the Manitouwadge Museum, stressed that although the cost of a home is much more affordable in a small rural northern town than in more southern locations, the infrastructure required to live there is simply not available. Without public transportation out of the town, a well-

maintained vehicle is a necessary part of survival, and an unemployed person may not be able to afford this.

For my own part, although I received a \$1500 research grant from York University's Faculty of Graduate Studies in 2011, which covered a car rental, fuel, and some meals and accommodations along the way, my research involved many more journeys of return distances averaging 2,000 to 3,000 kilometers, between 2008 when I began this project and 2013 when I conducted my final interviews. Although I received free accommodations in Manitouwadge where my elderly mother lives, in other towns I paid for motels, meals, park entry fees, and filming costs including equipment rentals and editing assistance, as well a fee to Bonnie Couchie of Pic River First Nation for her music used in the film. I mention these personal costs here to stress my deep commitment to this project. As an actor from a working-class family, to an adult life as a working artist in usually precarious employment supported by occasional arts council grants, to the transition of being a graduate student in late mid-life, my dissertation (and related ongoing artistic practice) involves significant material sacrifice. In a sense this helps me to maintain a solidarity with the working-class communities I am so bound to in this work.

No New Nukes?

In 2012 NWMO representatives travelled throughout Northwestern Ontario (and other regions in Canada) in search of a 'host' community to provide a base for what they proposed as a massive economic development project with major infrastructure benefits to cash-strapped former mining and paper mill towns, including my hometown of Manitouwadge. Communities began entering a multi-stage screening process beginning with community information sessions provided by the NWMO to promote their project. Meanwhile, longtime anti-nuclear activist Brennain Lloyd of Northwatch, a Northern Ontario coalition of environmental and community groups focused on northern issues such as responsible mining and forest conservation, toured the north shore towns with public counter-narrative information sessions of her own. When I interviewed Ms. Lloyd in 2012, she stated her concerns regarding the community divisions being produced by the strategies of the Nuclear Waste Management Organization:

We're hearing about the limited and the carefully selected information being provided by the Nuclear Waste Management Organization or through their process. We're also hearing concern from communities about the NWMO process of taking individual members of the community and giving them VIP treatment. Small numbers of the community are brought out to international conferences, to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities conference, for

briefings with the NWMO, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, for tours of nuclear generating stations. Those community members return, and it's often people on council and economic development, and they come back with a view that has been very much influenced. Members of their own community are being turned into nuclear industry proponents. There are real social costs to the kinds of divisions and conflicts that arise in the community. The social fabric has been torn.

The subject of nuclear waste disposal in Northwestern Ontario first emerged in my 2009 interview with Graham Saunders, but at that time the issue had been dormant for decades. When I interviewed him several years before the NWMO began their 2012 renewed interest in seeking a geological repository in Northwestern Ontario as a solution to nuclear waste, he commented on the role Environment North had previously taken in “halting the talk” about nuclear waste storage in the Canadian Shield. In 1977, the Canadian federal government appointed a group of experts led by Dr. Kenneth Hare to study “the safe, long-term storage of radioactive waste from nuclear power stations” (Steed 175). The Hare Report recommended “underground disposal in geological formations” as “the most promising option” (Steed 175). In my interview with Saunders he spoke of how Environment North had followed the Hare Report with independent research, information sessions, and lobbying:

A lot of people in northwestern Ontario took exception to this cavalier attitude to the land. One of the factors is that the

area required for First Nations trappers is vast. You need a trap line that is sometimes tens or even hundreds of kilometers long. So many people took exception to the idea of “not peopled at all”. Not densely settled is the proper terminology because if you have use of the land then it is peopled. The proposal to dispose of nuclear waste in Northern Ontario met with fierce opposition. Environment North and other groups went on tours to communities like Marathon, Kenora, and presented some of the hazards of nuclear waste disposal. One is transportation, because you can’t get nuclear waste from southern Ontario to northern Ontario without having a new kind of infrastructure. Twenty-four thousand people in Thunder Bay and Nipigon and other northern communities signed a petition to halt the talk about nuclear waste disposal in the northwest. And in some ways we were immensely successful because the issue dropped out of sight for decades. This is circa 1980, and it didn’t really resurface until the middle 1990s.

Environment North has produced a document citing sections of the original 63-page Hare Report, “A Brief History of the Nuclear Waste Issue in Northwest Ontario”, which includes this extract of Dr. Hare’s discussion:

A decision to locate the repository in central or northern Ontario, however, may be resisted by local populations, environmentalists, conservationists, wildlife specialists and the recreation industry. In some areas it may also be opposed by native people’s organizations. “Why should we accept noxious wastes that arise from the demands of city folk down south?” This familiar cry will be raised wherever in northern areas the repository is finally placed. But there are extensive areas of crown land that are not peopled at all, except for temporary settlement.²³

²³ Environment North, “A Brief History of the Nuclear Waste Issue in Northwest Ontario. www.environmentnorth.ca. Web. 14 Mar. 2014.

I continued to follow the emerging nuclear issues with additional interviews focused on how communities were responding to the NWMO presentations. In 2012 I again interviewed Citizens Concerned for Michipicoten Bay (CCMB) President Mark Leschishin, one of my initial 2008 research participants who had originally spoken with me about the issues surrounding the Superior Aggregates Company quarry and the CCMB history of challenging the proposed development. According to Leschishin, in January 2012, the town of Wawa's Chief Administrative Officer and other local municipal council members met with the NWMO and confirmed Wawa as an interested host site. Leschishin noted that this had occurred without prior or appropriate community consultations. The result was these meetings had accelerated a local acceptance of nuclear waste storage into a successive development phase. Wawa was one of eight municipalities offered funding just to enter a second-tier pre-selection process, and these communities were each promised a \$400,000 incentive for their service to the NWMO.²⁴

²⁴ NWMO official website: "At this milestone in the process, the NWMO is recognizing the contribution all eight communities have made to advancing Canada's plan for safely managing used nuclear fuel over the long term. In acknowledging these significant contributions, the NWMO will provide \$400,000 to each community upon its establishment of a Community Well-Being Reserve Fund". www.nwmo.ca Web. 1 Sept. 2014.

Although none of the north shore towns are confirmed as a nuclear waste storage site, and by 2014 the movement towards storage had shifted towards finding a site nearer to a nuclear plant facility such as Grey-Bruce at Lake Huron, the communities undergoing the screening process are still affected. Regarding these events, Brennain Lloyd stated this in our interview:

So a community like Manitouwadge, they're really looking for economic options, economic alternatives. You know they've been very resource dependent, dependent on mines, the forest products, industry, and the mines are out right now in Manitouwadge, the forest products sector is in trouble, and communities are sincerely looking for other ways to bankroll their community. That's a legitimate interest on the part of these communities. Unfortunately they're very vulnerable then to proponents like the Nuclear Waste Management Organization who offer them a package. And the first words that they hear aren't that it's a nuclear waste project or that nuclear waste is the most hazardous material ever created or that it will be harmful for too many thousands of years to be able to count. What they hear is that it's a national infrastructure project with a 16 to 24 billion dollar price tag attached to it. They hear there will be hundreds of jobs, there will be a community benefits package, and that's really difficult for a municipal council or an economic development committee to say, no, we won't even look at it.

As of 2014 , there were a total of twenty-two communities, in Ontario as well as in Saskatchewan, expressing interest in becoming a host community for long-term nuclear waste storage, and some of these are still undergoing assessments. Three communities in Northern Ontario, Schreiber, which is on the Trans Canada Highway about one kilometer

north of Lake Superior, Ignace, which is northwest of Thunder Bay, and Hornepayne, which is inland north of White River, are engaged in the process of more detailed studies.²⁵

Stories and Place

As I continued my research with participants on the Lake Superior north shore, I realized I was gathering stories that did not have one specific narrative arc, but a continually evolving one that included counter-narratives to the dominant theme of conservation expressed by most of the speakers. In defining my own story in this process of collecting the local and regional stories of others, it seems to be one of reclamation. I am reclaiming my place in the north shore communities, and my childhood and family stories there, as well as announcing the impact of this landscape on my artistic practice.

Stories are constructed from chronologies of events, and as “constructions of experience” (Murphy 47) the act of storytelling is a process whereby what is excluded often supports the authority of what comprises the dominant narrative. The narrator’s position as a centralizing focus in the authorship of what poses as ‘realism’ has agency

²⁵ Environment North. “Know Nuclear and Nuclear Waste”. www.environmentnorth.com. Web. 31 May. 2014.

in the events themselves, becoming an actor in what appears as historical truth. As Cronon has shown, the plot motivating the dramatic narrative arc required of a compelling “story” is located in the storyteller’s perspective:

By writing stories about environmental change, we divide the causal relationships of an ecosystem with a rhetorical razor that defines included and excluded, relevant and irrelevant, empowered and disempowered. In the act of separating story from non-story, we wield the most powerful yet dangerous tool of the narrative form. It is a commonplace of modern literary theory that the very authority with which narrative presents its vision of reality is achieved by obscuring large portions of that reality. Narrative succeeds to the extent that it hides the discontinuities, ellipses, and contradictory experiences that would undermine the intended meaning of its story (*A Place for Stories* 1349-1350).

Cronon’s view of narrative reconstruction is equally true of how film stories are constructed, as I have already shown in Chapter 2. As a filmmaker and storyteller, I shape my project around the intersections of data and imagination arising from my audio/visual research, and, as in much research involving oral testimonies, creative interpretation, and both visual and narrative explorations of the natural world, “dispersed across several fields of inquiry and a number of individual memories that go in and out of sync” (Powys, Taylor and Proberts 43).

The filmed project at the core of my dissertation research, titled *Conversations on the Lake*, is in part a narrative weaving of economic issues, class dimensions, and conservation of remaining wild spaces in

Northwestern Ontario communities on the Lake Superior north shore. Underpinning these themes are the stories offered by the different speakers, which define their own sense of place in the north shore region and its communities, and an exploration of why the actors living in the locations of this study choose to continue to live there. A sense of connection in community and how these communities share their connections is expressed within the interviews. Geographer Tim Cresswell argues that place and behavior are intricately linked, as in a sense of 'things in their place' or of 'knowing one's place'. Actions appropriate to a specific place are part of the social and material landscape, open to transgression by shifting ideologies and movements 'out of place' (4). The dualisms inherent in the northern communities' cultural values, on local against 'outsider' interventions and stakes, the conflicting views on what are sustainable options for these communities and the factions evolving from these differences confirm Cresswell's notion that place is both an ideological and material construct.

At the same time, as the world becomes more global and communities more virtual, meanings of place are shifting ever further from sites that are "self-closing and defensive" (Massey 147), towards a sense of place that is increasingly mobile and non-bounded. Doreen Massey asks us to consider,

... what might be an adequately progressive sense of place, one which would fit in with the current global-local times and the feelings and relations they give rise to, and which would be useful in what are, after all, political struggles often inevitably based on place. The question is how to hold on to that notion of geographical difference, of uniqueness, even of rootedness if people want that, without being reactionary (152-153).

Lucy Lippard notes that place is “a locus of desire” (4), an experience of a mobile, kinesthetic location. Place has both spatial and social implications, producing a sense of expectation, or a feeling of belonging. Places acquire meaning as we experience them with our senses, or as Tuan notes, “through the steady accretion of sentiment” over time (*Space and Place* 33). Through our experiences in and familiarity with particular spaces and their objects, they become place.

Many of the people I interviewed for this project share my sense of retrieval of formative experiences living in the north shore towns, along with deeply embedded visual perceptions of Lake Superior and its environs. These impressions produce profound associations that convince many to return to their formative communities on Lake Superior after having lived and worked elsewhere. Conor Mihell still lives in Sault Ste. Marie, where his family has a two hundred year history. He attended university in southern Ontario and then relocated to British Columbia, but states, “All I could think about was coming back and being on the lake

again. I drove from Vancouver to Thunder Bay, parked my truck, put my kayak in the water, and I just started paddling. This where I want to be for my life. I'll do my best to stay in this area, I'll do whatever I can". Colleen Kenney left her hometown of Rosspport to be educated and to experience urban life, "But something stuck with me I guess over the years and kept calling me back". David Tamblyn grew up in Thunder Bay and lived abroad for many years before coming to the tiny village of Rosspport as a public school teacher. He had no intention of staying but says, "I fell in love with the community and particularly with the proximity to the lake. That was about eighteen years ago and I've been here ever since". In White River, Melinda Ray, an indigenous speaker who is originally from Manitouwadge, told me, "It is really hard to describe the feeling of being in the bush. It's peaceful. And when you're out there, you have no worries whatsoever. You're really just one with the land. It's just you and the land and the bush. That's all there is. You know you're at peace". The land itself seems to offer these residents a profound sense of kinship and community.

What makes a landscape personal, providing a sense of rootedness and connection to specific sites? Laurence Buell writes that we become attached to places by imaginative and temporal dimensions, by our embodied histories in a place, and by object relationships (72). Buell asserts that the concept of place conflates at least three simultaneous

directions: material environment, social perception, and individual affect or bond, defined by both physical markers and social consensus (63). He cautions that place-attachment can produce “a sentimental environmental determinism” involving manipulations and adaptations of inhabitation and emplacement (66). The romantic views of the Lake Superior region expressed by many of my research participants would confirm a sentimental attachment to the land, but I feel their sense of place and belonging involves a deeper connection, one that I share with them.

Buell’s “phenomenology of subjective place-attachment” includes a theory of “second home” attachment to place experienced by those privileged with vacation properties that they return to repeatedly, noting: “Concerned citizens in their home places may prove even more so in second-home communities they care about” (72). This idea did in fact play itself out with a number of my research participants, as some who were most engaged in protecting the Lake Superior region were operating from a second-home base, either with vacation properties on the lake or the privilege of access to extended time in the area. Now that I no longer have a first home in the rural north, I too straddle a boundary between being a local in the sense that I have family commitments there, yet my daily life is in an urban centre. David Wells notes that most of his customers at Naturally Superior Adventures come from an urban environment. Of my

research participants in the Wawa area, only Ken Mills, a former labourer and retired fisherman, and Evelyn Stone of Michipicoten First Nation, have a 'first-home' life there. Conor Mihell's family, while having resided in the Lake Superior region for two centuries, have lived mostly in Sault Ste. Marie, which is relatively urban. As Mark Leschishin, who first came to the region to work for the Ministry of Natural Resources, puts it, "People like myself, we're called 'from away'. Those of us who have grown up in other areas, we have a real appreciation for what's here. I think a lot of the locals don't truly appreciate how wonderful it is here. There are people who've lived here all their lives who have never been down to the harbour." Conor Mihell commented that because for so long properties on Lake Superior were "dirt cheap", many locals were not aware of how valuable these would become, and so did not invest in waterfront land the way others from more southern or urban locations have seized the opportunity for relatively 'pristine' real estate in an unpopulated location.



Figure 9: With my family at Lake Superior, 1960. Photo: Steiner family collection.

How does a site produce a longing for what is irrecoverable in past lived experience? Leaving Rosspoint after completing my interviews there, I filmed at the scenic lookout where I once stood with my family, decades earlier, on the day we brought my sister home from the sanatorium in Thunder Bay, and was overcome with a sense of bereavement. There is a family photograph that evidences the earlier event, and I have tried to re-frame this same site in recent filmed recordings and photographs, as seen in the opening sequence of my film, *Conversations on the Lake*. The composition of the historical image showing my family against an

expansive view of the lake cannot really be matched in the more recent images as the landscape has of course changed. The emotional quality of the prior experience at the site cannot be reproduced either. Yet the very act of re-immersing myself physically in this location and recording it in new lens-based images produces a phenomenological encounter that is deeply resonant and transcendent, a palimpsest that echoes my memory against my present preoccupations, creating a sense of longing, a subtle melancholia and mourning for lost time. McQuire reminds us that “rituals with cameras” are key moments in twentieth-century family life, and serve as a means to symbolizing both family unity and dispersion (60). Perhaps my sensation of loss, in revisiting the site of my family photograph is also produced by an awareness of the restricted duration of my returns to these formative landscapes, where my father’s bones lie and where my mother too will have her final resting place. Yet these material elements alone are not the source of an enduring presence in my renewed encounters with these sites.

The interviews I have conducted and my engagement with my research participants are constantly producing new images and narratives, which are then fused with my childhood experiences in these same places. These experiences and their resulting artifacts affirm my sense of place in this landscape, as a site of belonging and ‘home’. As J. Edward

Chamberlin suggests, “Home is an image for the power of stories ... we need to live in them if they are to take hold, and we need to stand back from them if we are to understand their power ... when we don’t have them, we become filled with a deep sorrow” (77). For Chamberlin, who has worked extensively on Canadian and global aboriginal land claims, it is the stories we have of places where we have lived or have experienced as ‘home’ that produce our sense of how we came to be in a place, as a chronicle of events, and as our “ceremonies of belief” or why we belong there (227). These narratives, generated by lived experience and supported by diverse approaches to story – oral and written histories, scientific accounts, songs, poetry, fables and others such as films or visual essays – are what authenticate our experiences of how we come to inhabit and claim a place for ourselves. Each form of story has its own authority without discrediting the other forms. Chamberlin suggests that what gives communities and their actors “a sense of both obligation and entitlement” is the collective acknowledgement that a place is special, and that this in itself is a “ceremony of belief”, or act of making sacred (226). As for the issue of original title in cases of land claims, Chamberlin reminds us that settler society’s claims to underlying title are a “legal fiction” vested in the nation, and that changing the underlying title back to aboriginal title (228)

... would constitute a new story and a new society. Our understanding of the land would change. Our understanding of aboriginal peoples would change. Our understanding of ourselves would change. Our sense of the origin and purpose of our nations would change. And underlying title would finally provide a constitutional ceremony of belief in the humanity of aboriginal peoples in the Americas (231).

In my 2013 interview with Joanie McGuffin, who with her husband Gary has published many books on Lake Superior, and who expertly build their own kayaks and canoes to paddle across Canada, she reiterated Chamberlin's idea that it is the local sharing of stories that give a place meaning. In constructing my research finding as this thesis and in producing the film, I too am trying to find new meaning to this landscape and its communities, ones I have been part of for so long. In regard to my question of how environmental destruction caused by over-development could be counteracted, McGuffin told me, "These things happen because people don't have the stories of their places in their hearts and minds. When we have our own stories and our own pride in our natural landscape, we can begin to see ways that we can provide an economic base for our people and our children." She is referring here to how disruptions in the natural landscape and destruction of valuable cultural sites bring disunity to a place. When stories and their connections to a place are intact and valued, so is the land.

Gail Isaacs of Manitowadge declares she would remain living there if she were the last person in town. While she laughs at the thought of this, and jokes that “I’d have my choice of the houses then,” this is not really so funny in a town where many homes that are for sale have few options for buyers or are already deserted. Yet she maintains the spirit of life in the town is what keeps her there, despite a continually dwindling population base and lack of local resources:

We were like family. What you did on Sunday afternoon was sit on your front step and talk to everybody that walked by. And they’d end up coming in to sit in your yard for awhile and socialize. You didn’t need to be invited anywhere, you were just walking, heard music on, you knew there was a party, you knocked on the door and they said, “Come on in, what’s your name, where do you work, oh, you’re just here for a visit? Come on in, join us.” And it was these times that were great. People in Manitowadge are still good, when you lose somebody so much food comes to your door you don’t need to cook.

The cultural and spiritual dimensions of their connection to the land are as valuable as the economic dimensions to many of my research participants. At Pays Plat First Nation, a few kilometers west of Rosspoint, Raymond Goodchild spoke of an issue with some visitors to the area who had removed historical artifacts from the landscape, certain rocks and pieces of pictographic artworks. Goodchild stressed that these cultural markers are to be shared with everyone, “not just for you to put in in your

garden, or on your shelf.” He also made reference to the oral histories of specific sites in the area, and related a local legend to me:

I’ll tell you a story about the small people out there. One time our people were fishing and this ancient lady, this old Anishinabek was fishing out there in her canoe. And this lady in her canoe was wondering why she was not catching no fish in the bay by the Powder Island shoals. And so she started following her line along the canoe and all of a sudden she sees a boat in the distance. It was a foggy morning and so she followed that boat and she saw these little people out there. And she asked them in her native language, what they were doing. This was in the early 1930s I think, because people had to live by fishing. And we know when fish are coming in close to the shoals, when they are feeding and ready to spawn like the Lake Superior black trout. And so she came up to these little people and asked them, why are you stealing my fish from my net? This is one of the stories told. And the little people says, you have not offered us a gift for the fish. So the old lady took her pouch of tobacco out and said a prayer to the little people. And all of a sudden the little people went to Ranger Point and they disappeared in the rocks down there. That’s a legend, one of the old legends around here.

Both indigenous and non-indigenous voices across my research interviews engage in identifying the spiritual aspects of their local culture, and shared thoughts of co-inhabiting the land with non-human and more-than-human inhabitants and presences. At Pays Plat First Nation Raymond Goodchild tells me,

We go out on these sites and we do our ceremonies like fasting, because we believe that there are spirits out there in the lake, that is powerful and gives us dreams and visions.

And we've got to ensure that when we camp, that the area is safe to camp. The kayakers, and everybody, ecotourists. Because you don't want to go walking on somebody's ancient bones, or on a sacred plant. So you got to know where are areas you can go camping. We're the ones who are attached to this water. It's our livelihood. We get our fish out there. We get our animals out there. And we do ceremonies for them when we do that. You've got to respect the animal.

David Abram has written extensively about more-than-human communication in the natural world, from indigenous and phenomenological perspectives, asserting, "the various 'powers' or 'spirits' that move through the discourse of indigenous, oral peoples are ultimately tied to nonhuman (but nonetheless sentient) forces in the landscape" (15). For Abram and the cultures of his study, both indigenous and non-indigenous, the entire landscape is alive with thought, with interconnected others in constant flow of communication. As Abram says, "The land that includes us has its own articulations, its own contours and rhythms that must be acknowledged if the land is to breathe and flourish" (267). Following Abram, ideas of "listening to the natural world can be associated with the spiritual, the sacred, the enigmatic, and the indigenous or as a way to connect with pre-linguistic states of knowing," as suggested by Blenkinsop and Piersol (2013), who note that there is little available literature regarding non-indigenous experience in "an extended discussion

that the more-than-human world is an active, subjective, agential speaker of its own accord” (44).

In Manitouwadge, Grant Goodwin recounts his awareness of the ineffable in his encounters with presences residing in the wild spaces where he conducts his own research of mapping the remains of abandoned and forgotten World War Two prisoner of war logging and labour camps that permeated the north shore during the early 1940s war years. Alone in the woods, Goodwin experiences ‘others’ as entities with whom he has a sense of communication and shared space, revealing themselves to him as a kind of impenetrable, living phenomena:

When I get to the lake, I always stop and look and listen. To see what’s there and who else is out there. And I’m not talking about who else in terms of people. Because most of the time I know that I’m the only person there, or maybe the person I’m in the woods with. But there are lots of other things out there that are of interest to me and we are sharing the space together. And sometimes we are probably infringing on their space, and watch to see what their reaction is going to be, or if they even care. And sometimes they care and sometimes they don’t care, they’ll go right beside you. And so its nice to be in their space sometimes.

When I asked him, “And would you say these are spirits? Are they to you?,” he responded, “Well, they touch you. Now whether it is a spirit or whatever it is, it touches you, that’s for sure”.

First Nation speaker Evelyn Stone also spoke to me about spiritual others bringing messages through the sounds and images of the natural

elements that are in constant movement and interaction on the land: “So those rocks all around here in the water, the way the waves hit the water, the way the waves hit the rocks, the way the waves hit the sand, those are all messages that are sent to us, the Anishinabek people, when we ask for something.” While we might expect this variety of testimony to be appropriate to non-western experience of the natural world, when a non-indigenous person expresses ‘voices’ within the natural world as ‘speaking’ subjects, these experiences are often dismissed as romantic, metaphorical, or a variety of religious or ‘manic’ experience, rather than as expressions of lived experience to be honoured and respected (Blenkinsop and Piersol 43).

In Rosspport I met with David Tamblyn, Director of Education for the regional Superior-Greenstone District School Board. He runs a kayaking operation in the summer months and had just outfitted a group of musicians travelling by voyageur canoe to perform at the Red Rock folk festival. He mentioned, “I told them once you are out there something magical happens, and it’s this connectedness that you develop with the lake. You pick up on the rhythms of the lake. Though I’m not a spiritual person I would describe it as spiritual.”

I asked him whether he felt that the local community, and in particular the younger residents who are his students, were involved with

or interested in the available ecological culture, that is, their proximity to 'play' in the natural environment. Or did he think local youth were more inclined towards engagement with an ever expanding and equally available commodified technological culture? He responded,

I think with very few exceptions, the kids that I teach are spending their weekends out at their wilderness camps, and they are enjoying the outdoors. Even those who move away, I find that they come back or are longing to come back because they miss that experience of being out on the water, or being out at their camp, whatever the activity. I think that draws them back and even if they are forced to move away, they long to come back to enjoy that experience.

Yet further into the interview, Tamblyn notes that many locals were "taking the wilderness for granted", and that it was mainly those who had come from more industrialized areas who appreciated how "unique" the region was and that it needed to be protected. Raymond Goodchild of Pays Plat First Nation also stressed the need for local cultural protection. He was in favour of ecotourism, but with the caveat that it be merged with ecological education.

In expressing their cultural values, speakers I met with who live in First Nation communities reflect on the need to protect indigenous history, practices, and traditions. As an alternative economy, ecotourism emerged as a means of offering a spiritual experience some would not otherwise have access to. In Evelyn Stone's view,

There's so much potential we have for tourism, for people to come and see the spots, for people to come do the healing, and I've always looked at Michipicoten First Nation here as being the central place for healing for people to come and do that healing. Because a lot of times we get phone calls from people at Thunder Bay, or phone calls from people down at Manitoulin Island that want a central place to come to the land, to go into the forest and do what they have to do in their process of healing. And we have the facility here. We have the water close by, we have the beach, we have all our traditional lodges, we have that water that runs down.

Speakers from settler communities tend to value the natural environment as a commodity for recreation, for alternative economies such as ecotourism or what some term 'cultural' tourism, and also for what they defined as their northern rural traditions of hunting and fishing for food. Rosspport resident Colleen Kenney was born and raised there by parents who "loved nature and being out in the bush, and from the time I was a baby brought me out on the waters and I learned about boats and fishing and hunting and conservation from both my parents". Like many who grow up in northern or rural communities, she left to attend college but came back, "to be able to share with friends and strangers who come to our village here in Rosspport, to a place where you can connect spiritually. There's a lot of history here in the islands. I'm glad I came back to all that." Like other speakers living in the north shore towns, she attributes her sense of belonging in the region as the reason for her return.

The Pristine Waters of an Aquatic Treasure?

Several of my research participants defined Lake Superior as a “jewel”, a “gem”, or a “treasure.” Ruth Ogawa, president of the Lake Superior Conservancy and Watershed Council (LSCWC), reiterates this notion numerous times throughout her interview: “When you travel around Lake Superior you realize what a jewel it is ... it’s just an absolute treasure, the whole shoreline of Lake Superior.” She promotes the need for education in helping people to understand the value of the great lake and its surrounding land, water, and landscapes. Raymond Goodchild of Pays Plat First Nation comments that the area is, “Our gem, our life, it’s sacred to all our people, it’s sacred to all races, and we’ve all got to keep it in a healthy way.” He considers the Lake Superior water to be a “holy blessing” that will “keep you going, spiritual, and mentally, emotionally. The water is, what my elders tell me, the holiest blessing of all mother earth”.

Some who live on Lake Superior still drink water directly from the lake. Conor Mihell spent a year in a remote cabin on Michipicoten Bay where he relied on the lake for drinking water: “It’s very clean water. I’ve grown up drinking the water straight from the lake and there aren’t very many places in the world where you can do that. To confidently scoop water straight from Lake Superior.” Colleen Kenney also mentioned

drinking from the lake: “I drink that water. It’s the purest water, and that’s one thing, is to keep this lake pure. To keep no major development.” David Tamblyn reflected on the need for more environmental education in a region where the idea of ‘pristine’ wilderness is taken for granted:

Environmental issues are not as high on the agenda in this part of the province because we pretty well live in a pristine environment as it is, so it’s not as much of a concern as in southern Ontario where they have witnessed the degradation of the natural environment to a degree where they’ve had to, in many instances, put in drastic measure to resuscitate the environment. We are trying to do as much as we can to raise awareness among the students that we teach, about how fortunate we are to live in this area and how much we can benefit from living in this type of environment where we have pristine tracts of wilderness only accessible by water.

When Graham Saunders of Environment North used the word ‘pristine’ to describe Lake Superior water, I commented on this prevalent descriptor and asked him if he believed that the water was indeed so untainted. He responded that with the closure of most of the paper mills, which along with mining had long sustained Northwestern Ontario’s economy, pollution had significantly decreased so that the water today is comparatively clean. However, while he felt that the water was “relatively pure” and that fish from the lake were, according to current regulations, safe to consume, “because it’s a vast reservoir of very cold and old water” there were other issues of concern such as “long range transport of toxins (from other areas) into the lake”. He stressed that Canada at the world

stage needs to be more active in securing new regulations “because that affects everybody in the world, not just Lake Superior.”

For all these statements about the purity and drinkability of Lake Superior’s water, Evelyn Stone, who works in community health, spoke of past issues with contaminants in the lake water used by the Michipicoten First Nation: “We had a lot of issues with the water and then we got involved in the whole of Lake Superior. But as the years went by we did get into our own treatment of the water and it’s working out pretty good, its healthier and hopefully it will stay healthy.” She mentioned high levels of arsenic in the water at one time, forcing the community to resort to bottled water for drinking. Joan Skelton also mentioned high levels of arsenic in the rock around Michipicoten Bay, and that new water issues could arise if a quarry were to go ahead on the shoreline: “You start blasting and letting that come loose, and what are the safeguards put in? You have seepage and leakage into Lake Superior that will be totally detrimental to the people, the fish and the wildlife that would be drinking from the lake.”

Raymond Goodchild, as much as he considers the lake water to be “holy,” is still adamant that many areas of the lake are contaminated:

I’d have to say that one of the environmental issues I’m most concerned with is how mercury is in some of the bays. Like at Marathon, the seabed there should be cleaned up. If you want to eat the fish there, the old ways that we used to fish, the lake trout. And the others are Terrace Bay. Jackfish Bay.

There used to be a big fishing industry down in that area, now it's all polluted. We have to test the *E. coli* out in our river and also out in our bay where we swim. That's why I am sitting on some of the committees nowadays, trying to preserve the water.

Regarding the recent environmental concerns generated by the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) and the proposed deep geological repository in the north shore region, citizens expressed their views on potential detrimental affects such a project would have on the water of Lake Superior. In 2012 I again interviewed Mark Leschishin of Citizens Concerned for Michipicoten Bay (CCMB), who was one of my original research participants in 2008 commenting on the proposed Superior Aggregates Company quarry. Speaking about the NWMO presentations to the Wawa community, he told me,

Lake Superior is right on our doorstep and I and many others think this is too much of a risk, to contemplate storing nuclear waste here on the north shore of Lake Superior. If there is any kind of accident and if we affect this great store of water the implications are just mind-boggling as far as I'm concerned. I can't see why they're even considering Wawa, or any place within the Great Lakes watershed, as a storage site.

David Tamblyn expressed concerns about hazardous materials already being transported along the shoreline via the Canadian Pacific Railway, and mentioned a recent nearby train derailment that had spilled plastic packaging which washed up on the islands and beaches. Citing this

particular incident as an “innocuous” one that was quickly cleaned up by Canadian Pacific Railway and Environment Ontario, he noted that in the event of a serious spill of bulk oil or chemical matter, preparations to deal with the consequences were not in place: “In the winter months when Nipigon Bay is frozen over, if you had a rail car derailment crashing through the ice, it could really present some environmental challenges, and I don’t think either the Ontario Ministry of the Environment or CP are prepared for that”.

With the International Joint Commission (IJC) and its revised Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement of 1987, pollution entering the Great Lakes from some contaminants has declined but has not been eradicated, even in Lake Superior which is the least polluted of the Great Lakes. Since 1980 the IJC has published biannual progress reports, but according to Wayne Grady, each report focuses on a new or unique problem. In 2000, the report “documented the appearance of new, unidentified chemicals; scientists could name only 30 percent of the substances they found in Great Lakes salmon, snapping turtles, and herring gulls” (307). In 2002, the IJC report was focused on PCBs, revealing a concentration of PCBs in all the Great Lakes, including Lake Superior, to be one hundred times higher than was considered safe. In 2004, the IJC focused on mercury, showing that while mercury discharges from paper mills dropped

substantially throughout the 1990s, hundreds of tons were still being emitted into the Great Lakes by both the US and Canada, much of it through airborne emissions from coal-fired power plants. That report also issued warnings that certain parts (organs, skin and fat) of fish from any of the Great Lakes should not be consumed, and that only small species in small quantities were safe (307-308).

The IJC has over the years identified a number of Areas of Concern, and these are slowly being revitalized. As grassroots citizens groups and shoreline residents become more aware of the problems facing the Great Lakes, they are increasingly being heard by various levels of government. But it seems in Wawa, both municipal and provincial legislation tend to work in favour of industry, as evidenced by Mark Leschishin's comments. Regarding the NWMO's meetings with local politicians and the approved initial stages of the multi-tier selection process without prior community consultations, he goes on to say.

It appears now that the quarry is not the thing that's going to save the town, so people are looking for other possibilities. The Nuclear Waste Management Organization, an industry-funded organization to promote storing nuclear waste underground, is talking millions of dollars, bringing millions of dollars to the community. And of course our politicians hear that and they figure, well this is great for the town and we're going to bring lots of jobs. And they're willing to take the risk in terms of the potential environmental impacts. They're willing to risk that for the money.

If, as Grady states, it would take five hundred years to flush existing toxic chemicals from Lake Superior (305), without adding any new ones into the lake, how much longer would it take if the new industrial initiatives looming around this great lake were to be approved? Even so-called “green energy” projects such as large scale industrial wind turbine projects create new risks to the surrounding ecosystem.

Regional grassroots citizens group Save Our Algoma Region (SOAR) was formed around their mandate to protect the Lake Superior coast and the Algoma Highlands, and as an initiative to generate citizen participation in discussions around large-scale industrial wind projects in the Algoma region. In 2013, I interviewed executive members Gillan Richards and Joanie McGuffin on separate occasions. The group’s independent report published in early 2013 (*SOAR Report Bow Lake Wind Project REA Process [2013 01 11]*)²⁶ was submitted to the Ministry of the Environment, the Minister of the Environment, and the Ministry of Natural Resources. It identifies at least thirteen forest-dependent species at risk in the area due to this proposal, and along with other more typical opposing elements to industrial wind turbine projects, such as the detrimental health effects on avian, wildlife, and human life, the significance of cultural

²⁶ Save Our Algome Region (SOAR). Independent Report: Bow Lake Wind Projects, Phases 1 and 2 Public Meetings. January 11, 2013. Web. www.savealgoma.org. 04 Nov. 2013.

heritage research is cited as a meaningful strategy for environmental protection. The report makes the point that in the environmental assessment conducted by the company, BluEarth Renewables, only a few Group of Seven heritage sites were acknowledged, while the independent research conducted by SOAR members documents over one hundred sites.

In my interviews, many participants spoke of their regard for biotic communities affected by industrial developments, and for the need to rethink their own social habits. At Batchawana Bay just north of Sault Ste. Marie, Joan Skelton speaks of the need to “move away from the wealth-based economy” and her own challenges in reducing consumption: “Is the desecration of the environment worth that? But I also understand why these towns want industry, why they want employment, why First Nations want employment. How can we protect the environment and allow people to survive at more than a minimal level”. Ms. Skelton had lived in Elliot Lake at the time the uranium mines were in operation, and came to environmental awareness in the early 1960s:

I had to go to the Coke bottling plant to get drinking water, because our water smelled so badly. I didn't know if it was polluted, I didn't know if there was anything wrong with it, and I couldn't get anyone to admit there was anything wrong with it. So I got water for the family from the Coke bottling camp where it was filtered. You couldn't help but being aware of the environment and caring. The beaver dying

downstream because of the tailings. It was a big shot of environmental awareness early in my life and I guess I never lost that.

In my interview with Bonnie Couchie of Pic River First Nation, she spoke of her work as a consultant for regional First Nation communities. Her work included a process of values mapping in order to seek out overlapping areas of concern or interest between industry proposals and members of First Nation communities. She held meetings with community members and showed them maps of the proposed forest management area, asking them to indicate on the map some places that they valued. The response would almost always be, "I value all of it." Ms. Couchie concludes, "I really wanted to find a way to do justice to that statement, and I found that the process of mapping you know, a dot on a map, just felt so short the meaning of "I value all of it". In defining her own sense of value in the north shore landscapes and communities, she states,

I think that the idea of using resources, extracting them to excess, is a way of relating to the environment that has had its day. We're seeing the devastating effects of that. And so I just find it amazing that here you have little pocket of communities along the north shore of Lake Superior, we're sitting on this large body of fresh water and we are immersed in all of this incredible natural environment. Let's look at the lessons that overuse has taught us, and find a different way of making jobs for people in communities on the north shore, and look at the value of everything that exists here, everything living.

When Bonnie told me this story of her own research and her participants answer to the question of what was valuable to them in the land, I felt as though I had found an answer to my own questions around where my journey was taking me.

The dream of sustaining the land and its resources is shared by many of the region's stakeholders, both indigenous and non-indigenous. The language of protection, education, and improved management is expressed throughout the interviews. Like my research participants, I value the protection of the land and its inhabitants, its stories, its complicated histories. Unlike them, I do not live and work there. As I complete this dissertation project in late 2014, my last remaining family member living in Northwestern Ontario, my mother, has decided to relocate to southern Ontario. I will no longer need to make my northern journeys, unless for recreation or if something new calls me there.

The film is the vehicle that opened the doors to my many conversations on the north shore. The community stories I was given, and my means of chronicling them through the production of the film, is my way of acknowledging and preserving their value.

6. Concluding the Journey

In constructing the dual elements of this dissertation, this written text and the film, *Conversations on the Lake*, I have embedded my autoethnographic process within both elements as a recurring continuum of local and personal memory. The film's meditative visual approach, with its lingering images and temporal flow, reflects a local sense of pace and quality of time, affirmed by the editing rhythm, background or atmospheric audio, and shifts in mood produced by light, weather, and camera motion.

What my journeys and conversations on the lake, my filmed research interviews and gathered images, have unveiled over a more than five year trajectory are questions around and evolving sense of place and belonging in a specific geography, by actors living and working in the communities along the Lake Superior north shore region. Since beginning this work, new ecological and social themes have continually emerged as stories for investigation and exploration. As Rebecca Solnit so elegantly puts it, "a place is a story, and stories are geography" (*The Faraway Nearby* 3). The shifting progression of my narrative enquiry is a web of interconnected stories along a mobile, transformative geography.

When I first began filming the interviews, the question of nuclear waste disposal in the Canadian Shield had been abandoned for decades.

Midway through my research, it arose again more determinably than previously, and is now a real threat as communities continue to engage in the Nuclear Waste Management Organization's multiple stage screening procedures. When I first began my research, the Superior Aggregates Company had commenced with plans to establish a quarry to mine aggregate rock from the sensitive coastline at Michipicoten Bay, only to mysteriously disappear from the landscape a few years later, after disrupting the community's social network for years beyond the company's material presence on the land. By continuing to pursue an ever-evolving conduit as new themes emerged in the landscapes of my study, my project has developed into a stream of interlacing themes regarding how sense of place and imaginaries of the regional landscape define political, social, cultural, and spiritual values in Northwestern Ontario, and how industry and conservation initiatives intersect locally and regionally to produce dichotomies in the expression of local environmental values by stakeholders in the region. These themes will continue to unfold and expand as the future effects of proposed new developments and economies become known.

What emerges from my research is a linkage of themes and questions affecting community networks of former industrial towns and neighbouring First Nations along Lake Superior's northern shoreline. If one

community is approved as a nuclear waste storage site, or a new mining development, other north shore communities, their economies, social relations, and material environments are affected. If promised new jobs are not delivered, community infrastructure and morale or spirit are destabilized. As new projects and architectures are delivered in the landscape, will local economies benefit, and what are the possible ensuing social costs and the environmental risks of such benefits? If more parkland and protected areas are approved, how will this affect both indigenous and settler communities bordering these? How would those with established livelihoods operating in new designated conservation areas be affected by new protected zones?

The key questions of my research seem to circle back to historic questions of extraction or conservation, but underlying these are multiple entwining local values and community politics determined by the land and what it does or not give up: its rich minerals, its peaceful waters, its dark night skies, or its friendly simpler folk who inhabit these quieter places, as Glenn Gould once stated.

As an actor whose formative years were spent living among the rural towns of Lake Superior's north shore, and in an ongoing continuity with family still residing in a community centred in the geography of my study, my research expresses what cultural geographer Pauli Tapani

Karjalainen defines as a geobiography: lived time in a particular geography, “the expression of the course of life as it relates to the places lived” (“On Geobiography” 87). Geobiography merges place, memory, and a narrating self in a lived sense of place as an embodied and inhabited site, a topocentric reality, internally connected to time and the self as a centre of meaning and experience (Karjalainen, “Intimate Sensing” 1).

In their research on landscape interpretation, geographers Nancy Duncan and James Duncan refer to recent neurological research suggesting that our bodies contain cells known as ‘place cells’, which are activated when we are in specific places known to us, thus inviting researchers to consider how emotions and intuitive aesthetic judgments factor into the research material (243). As our bodies return to familiar places, these cells are activated and produce a sense of attachment through various memories and previous encounters, or as Duncan and Duncan note: “Attachment *to* places can be thought of as attachment *through* places to the people, events and ideas one has built one’s life around. Places become synecdoches for people, family, memories, security and cultural values” (19).

My filmed recordings and written materials are a way of memorializing my own elapsed and subsequently retrieved histories in these same locations, and as such are transformative acts. The act of

filming restores the memories and shifts of meaning in sites where I have accumulated experiences over time. Through the practice of arts-based research methodologies and the production of cultural objects, the texts and media resulting from this work, I contextualize my own lived history in Northwestern Ontario, by remembering, revisiting, and recording in the places of my former life there, and integrating these with unfolding new relations over time.

As I continue to travel the coastline of Lake Superior, always with my hometown as a central point of arrival, and from there to conduct my research and to produce new projects, to spend time with family and to visit my father's grave, I move through hundreds of kilometers of boreal forest on a highway carved into the Canadian Shield. When not directly on Lake Superior, the road cuts through the deep bush and is flanked on both sides by thousands of small lakes. Ben Orlove writes of the dramatic function served by lakes in relationships between water and journeys (Orlove xiv), noting that water "is the favored element for storytellers, who are drawn to its unmatched capacity to stir the imagination" (xi). Perhaps it is this element that repeatedly draws me back to a landscape of lakes, to tell my own stories. As Orlove says, "It is as if lakes have voices and can always speak to us in unexpected ways" (xx). And so Lake Superior itself is a voice in my film, *Conversations on the Lake*, and at the centre of my

thesis. The conversations referred to in the title are just not my own conversations with the speakers in the film, but also the speakers in conversation with one another, within a landscape where the voice of the lake is the focal speaker.

In its image of bounded water body protected by a visible shoreline, the idea of a lake as a place of refuge, of transformation, and of endurance persists in many examples of environmental literature. Orlove points to Thoreau's *Walden*, noting that while in some texts "the lake is a destination; for Thoreau, it is a presence, one that reveals the manifold aspects of a single truth ... that transcendence may be achieved ... through direct contact with nature" (xxi). Walden Pond is for Thoreau a deliverer of truth. In Margaret Atwood's 1972 novel, *Surfacing*, the protagonist seeks to find her inner self while searching for clues to past events, and her travels to the lake of her formative years allow her to see beyond social appearances (Orlove xi). My memory of first reading this text as a young woman is of it being a touchstone for my own experience of leaving and return to the north. Lakes as reflectors of intimate experience and past events, mirroring identity, place and belonging, may provide entry points into residual histories that unfolded within their environs, and so become sites for powerful new imaginings.



Figure 10: Manitowadge Lake. Photo by E. Steiner.

If I were to envision an object to which I most bestow my own sense of place, it would have to be a lake. My hometown is situated on Manitowadge Lake, and in my youth was the site where I sought refuge from the exigencies of small town isolation, to disrupt my sense of entrapment in what I then considered to be a culturally deprived landscape, before I recovered these sites through my creative practice. In the narration of my film *Places To Stay* (1991) I express this early crisis by stating: “It was by the water that I sat alone and made decisions about my future. It was there that I decided to leave the town and the bush to live in

a bigger world.” In one of my research interviews of 2011 that does not appear in the film, the speaker, David Passi, an educator and former principal of Manitouwadge High School, related an experience he recalls on this same lake, illustrating a similar sense of meaning and connection to the lake:

I remember helping someone bring a boat across the lake, a beautiful day, the lake was just like glass and there wasn't a sound, there was nothing, it was just total peace. I remember the person with me was actually afraid. He had never in his life heard such absolute, complete silence. And it scared him, he was afraid of the silence. It was that kind of a day where there was no wind, brilliant sunshine, no birds chirping at that particular time. And it sort of reminded me of when I worked underground, and you turn that light off, and you cannot see anything and there's no sound whatsoever.

Manitouwadge Lake is where I still consolidate my thoughts on each return encounter, after the long drive along Lake Superior's larger and more expansive horizon. My mental and material images of these significant lakes and of the others in between are anchors within a multitude of places that remain consistent in my life. Even now I live on Toronto's waterfront at the shoreline of Lake Ontario, which upholds my need for an abiding image in the landscapes where I reside.

As I continue to negotiate the sometimes problematic social space of my family's working-class immigrant history as in the rural near north, I constantly restructure my sense of place in that history. This practice is

archived and published in my cultural work: several films in public distribution, many art gallery exhibitions expressing the changing sites of Northwestern Ontario, and a book chapter, “Requiem for Landscape”, in the forthcoming 2015 publication, *Working on Earth: Class and Environmental Justice*.²⁷ The images and narratives I collect, produce, and distribute articulate a sense of what Yi-Fu Tuan defines as topophilia: love of place grounded in subjective and integrated encounters as “an affective bond between people and place or setting ... diffuse as a concept, vivid and concrete as personal experience” (*Topophilia* 4).

The production of this dissertation, and the accompanying film, *Conversations on the Lake*, was an exercise of great personal value for my ongoing work in culture. I will continue my research path and audio/visual media practice with a deeper focus as a result of these explorations and their related literatures, and I hope that the future material artifacts I produce following the challenges of my dissertation project will continue to be as meaningful.

²⁷ *Working on Earth: Class and Environmental Justice*. Christina Robertson and Jennifer Westerman, Eds., University of Nevada Press, 2015.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A
FILM DIALOGUE TRANSCRIPTIONS
Conversations on the Lake, 44 minutes edited (2014)

Narration, Music Lyrics, and Interview Transcriptions, in order of the edited film, with time code indicators at the beginning of each new speaker or section.

(in 00 hour: minutes; seconds)

00:00;00 – MUSIC fades in

00:00;25

OPENING NARRATION:

The Lake Superior north shore and its communities are the geography of my childhood.

My early life was spent in the town of Manitouwadge, situated about half-way between Sault Ste. Marie and Thunder Bay.

These are the landscapes that shaped my life, and these are places to which I always return.

I have gathered some stories from people who live and work in this region about their concerns for their social and natural environments.

In a landscape still filled with wild spaces, there are many tensions. Each year new issues arise specific to Northwestern Ontario.

Bordering the land and the settled areas, Lake Superior is a powerful presence. It is an anchor in time, offering refuge and restoration for those who hope to protect this land and its waters.

THE SPEAKERS:

00:02;00

Melinda Ray, White River

It's really hard to describe, the feeling of being out there. It's really... it's peaceful. And when you're out there there's no worries; you have no worries whatsoever, when you're out there and you're just basically one with the land. It's just you, and the land, the bush. That's all there is. It's just, you know, you're at peace.

00:02;36

Grant Goodwin, Manitouwadge

When I get to the lake I always stop and look and listen. To see what's there and who else is out there. And I'm not talking about who else in terms of people, because most of the time I know that I'm the only person there, or maybe the person I'm in the woods with. But there are lots of other things out there and we are out there sharing the space together. And sometimes we are probably infringing on their space, and watch to see what their reaction is going to be, or if they even care.

00:03;17

Gail Isaacs, Manitouwadge Archival and Historical Society

This is where I will die. I love all the other communities along the lake shore. I love the drive to Thunder Bay; I think it's beautiful. I love the ride to Sault Ste. Marie. I know all the beautiful spots along there. I know where to stop and catch all this beauty. I still would come back to Manitouwadge, and stay in Manitouwadge, and it's where I'll die. Happy. Very happy. I love it.

00:03;56

David Crawford, Nipigon Bay Remedial Action Plan

This is the greatest place in the world to me and, and most people... and there's no people here. Unfortunately when it comes to conservation, right now this National Marine Conservation is pretty well the perfect conservation area. And you bring people in that aren't appreciating things, that aren't looking after things, and it's going to lose its perfection.

00:04;20

Graham Saunders, Environment North, Thunder Bay

The climate of Northern Ontario is changing relatively rapidly. In northern Ontario we've seen a temperature change of about one and a half or two degrees in the growing season. Which is profound. In the case of the boreal forest it means that the entire boreal forest is confined by four degrees of temperature. The highest part of the boreal forest is four degrees cooler than the southern limit. So if we've already seen one and a half to two degrees in the growing season, we should expect fairly profound changes.

00:05;15

Colleen Kenney, Rosspoint

I feel like in a sense I have some ownership here. I've been born here, raised here, lived here. I know the waters, I know the lake. It's a very, very special place for me where I can go and be so in touch with nature and just feel at peace with myself. And if I was to lose that, and see it being lost for future generations coming up, it would be a very sad thing.

00:05;47

Graham Saunders, Environment North, Thunder Bay

We see species that are moving north. Some of them like maple, okay that's fine, that's succession and why is that a problem. But a lot of them have problem aspects. Deer, for example, are not compatible with moose. So that means either the moose move farther north or they die. And insects. Because temperatures tend to be warmer, not every season, but disease and insects are more compatible with the new conditions in the northwest. We have a lot more forest fires in Northern Ontario than we used to. The area burn has doubled or tripled when we compare recent decades to the middle twentieth century. If we continue on the same course of climate change and temperature increase, and changes in precipitation patterns. Yes, we get more rain overall, but we get more extended times of no rain. A big problem. Because the trees can't reproduce that quickly. So we could end up with, not the disappearance of the boreal forest, but a highly fragmented boreal forest.

00:07;19

Gillan Richards, Save Our Algoma Region (SOAR)

One of the things about living in this part of the world is because there's no light coming from a large metropolis that leaves its lights on all night, we have very dark skies. And we have a magnificent vista of the night skies

and the northern lights. And one of the things that happens as soon as you have a bank of turbines is you diminish your night sky. Which happens to be one of the chief tourist attractions for the Algoma district. We also know from what people had told us that they could hear the turbines across the bay. They did tell us that for the first time ever they had noticed in their back yards, the people who lived in Goulais, creatures that they had never seen before in the preponderance that were coming in.

00:08;20

Conor Mihell, Author, Sault Ste. Marie

I'm leery of the wind power proposals, just because I'm not sure whether the technology is quite as efficient as it could be yet. And I'm wondering if we shouldn't be focusing more on conservation of energy as opposed to providing more and more supply. In Europe these large projects, they've actually been shown not to have a real significant effect in reducing demand dependence on fossil fuel sources. I'd like to see some more smaller scale, some more community based projects starting up, and less industrial scale.

00:08;56

Gillan Richards, Save Our Algoma Region (SOAR)

We began to feel very uneasy about the impact that these turbines would have on the natural environment first of all. It's not as green a thing as people think.

00:09;25

Conor Mihell, Author, Sault Ste. Marie

We have this split identity in the north where people associate with nature in a certain way and really appreciate it for being wild, and for having fish to catch and animals to hunt and rivers to paddle and that sort of thing. But on the other hand we also rely on nature to a certain extent to supply us with the resources to fuel our industry and to support economic development. And it's a very tricky balance because if you're cutting down the forest and damming the rivers and mining ore from the earth, you can't really have those values of nature and wild earth that we value up here. So it's an interesting dichotomy that emerges in northern culture.

00:10;15

Graham Saunders, Environment North, Thunder Bay

There is often a real and sometimes perceived conflict between economic interests and environmental issues on Lake Superior and generally in the

Canadian makeup. Sometimes these are false dichotomies. It's not either/or. In the past there was pretty flagrant mismanagement of the environmental aspects of it, and I take you back to mining and paper mills and raw sewage being discharged into the lake. And the adage was, "dilution is the solution". We can get rid of anything we want, because the lake is so vast it won't hurt it. This conflicts with testing of water and it's remarkable how toxins even in trace amounts can migrate right through the entire lake system, because there is circulation around the lake and wave action so it all mixes relatively quickly.

00:11;24

Bruce Staines, President, Quetico Explorations, Wawa

In my career as a mining engineer I have permitted mines which have had the potential for some serious environmental challenges: tailings ponds, the use of cyanide in the water, tailings which had the ability to generate heavy metals. However, all these situations are situations that can be dealt with, with today's technology.

00:12;08

Bonnie Couchie, Pic River First Nation

You know, we have a value for a dead tree but we don't have a value for a live one.

Bonnie Couchie's song "Mine" begins and continues under her narration:

Are we too tired, too tired to fight
Should we give up, just let it die ...

There is a duty to consult with First Nations in a meaningful way. As a result, when there is proposed development that is going to take place in the area such as mining or forestry, they do have to come and approach Pic River and all the First Nations. So we do get involved. We have various people on staff who are trained and whose job it is to deal with the referrals. But at the end of the day there are just an overwhelming amount, and yes, it's very, very difficult to keep up with.

Bonnie Couchie's song "Mine" concludes:

Because a few small mines won't be satisfied
Until it's mine, mine, mine, all mine.

00:13;36

Evelyn Stone, Michipicoten First Nation

This to us is a very beautiful place, it's so sacred to us. And to be able to share that and that knowledge and that little bit of wisdom that we have today with the people out there. When we do have gatherings, I do invite people to come in and come and share with us the understanding of what the water means, of what the tree means, that birch tree, those cedar trees. All of that medicine, that cedar that's on that tree. The medicine we have on the ground, the plants, the flowers, the berries. All of that is medicine for us, and that's so important to conserve all of that for our future, our future generations to come in.

00:14;25

Bruce Staines, President, Quetico Explorations, Wawa

There was some concern at one time expressed that there might be some medicinal plants, you know, traditional medicinal plants on the property that might get destroyed by the quarry. And so we had that investigated and it turned out that there was nothing there that was of a rare or medicinal nature that would be of a concern. We would certainly not want to destroy something that was rare or exotic. We could do our best to transplant it or have experts look into how we could mitigate that problem.

00:15;11

David Crawford, Nipigon Bay Remedial Action Plan

The threats I see now are this quest for power. Hydro power and wind turbines. I don't know, in the north here we've got an abundance of power, and hydro power then you could introduce more mercury into the system and this kind of thing.

00:15;29

Ken Mills, Michipicoten Bay

The quarry that I worked at we had one big blast every two weeks and there was a pile of smoke and rock come out of there. So, right now fishing is pretty good in the bay. I can go out with my boat and get supper pretty near any time. And really it would ruin the whole look of the harbour. Even some of these old fisherman coming in said it would be a shame, you come into Michipicoten Harbour it's beautiful in here. And if you start a quarry, it won't be. It will be nothing but a big slab.

00:15;59

Bruce Staines, President, Quetico Explorations, Wawa

I believe that tourism and industry can co-exist. And I realize that there is a certain type of tourist activity that might not appreciate a quarry right here at this site. However, there's also other people that when they have a tourist experience they want to see some activity. And seeing an operating quarry or something where they could actually access as a tour point of interest is something that some people actually like to see. There's those that like pure quiet and peace and there's others that like to see interesting and different things.

00:16;54

Ken Mills, Michipicoten Bay

They talk like they would be bringing tour boats in here. Well, I'd like to see a tour boat that comes into a dock that's got mountains of material on it that's going to be shipped to make concrete. That's like going to Algoma Steel Corporation with a yacht, you don't go in there. But tourists have come in here for many, many years. And I've talked to a few of them, not all of them, but they said that if they start a quarry you would never see us here, so they can forget tourism, and they're talking tourism, but they can forget it. Because there's nobody going to come in here. Sometimes you see five or six yachts anchored in the bay because its quiet, nice quiet spot. You won't be quiet if you're going to have a quarry over there, that's for sure.

00:17;33

David Crawford, Nipigon Bay Remedial Action Plan

I think the whole idea about ecotourism is you try to educate people on the beauty of the nature and how to protect it and how to care about it. Because a lot of people in a lot of ways to me they have forgotten about that. They think nothing of doing graffiti on rocks or driving quads up and down beaches which is a no no. I mean the birds like to nest there and stuff like that, but people just don't see the destruction that they could possibly be doing, so education in going to be a key factor.

00:18;02

Raymond Goodchild, Pays Plat First Nation

Some people, I may say, they take rocks off the faces of certain paintings out there. They take relics, they look for relics, you know. And some of the people have got to be educated; you can't do that. Because you're digging up history and history is for everyone, not just for you, put it in your shelf or

put it in your garden. Why do people do that? If we educate people, maybe that would be preserved and managed and protected.

00:18;42

Joanie McGuffin, Author, Goulais River

Things happen because people don't have the stories of their places in their hearts and minds. And so I think tourism begins at home, where we have our own stories to tell and our own pride in our natural heritage and our landscape. And then we can begin to see ways to provide an economic base for our people and our children. And without providing that economic base people always move towards what they've always known.

00:19;08

Evelyn Stone, Michipicoten First Nation

So when we see that dam and they talk about building the dam up there and the generation of the money to come, well you know money is not everything. Money doesn't bring the beauty of the land. Money doesn't keep the water clean. So all these dams that are coming along Lake Superior, its not really beneficial to the majority. There's a percentage of people that will benefit from it, because they're the ones that are in there doing the job and clearing the land, and disrupting the land. They don't see the damages they are doing as we see it.

00:19;54

Raymond Goodchild, Pays Plat First Nation

We go out there on these sites and we do our ceremonies like fasting, because we believe that there are spirits out there in the lake, that is powerful and give us dreams and visions. And we got to ensure that when we do camp, we got to know where the area is safe to camp. The kayakers, and everybody, ecotourists. Because you don't want to go walking on somebody's ancient bones, you know, or on a sacred plant, or an Arctic plant. So you got to know where are areas you can go camping. We're the ones that are attached to this water. It's our livelihood. We commercial fish out there. We get our fish out there. We get our animals out there. And we do ceremonies for them when we do that.

00:20;50

Evelyn Stone, Michipicoten First Nation

Evelyn sings and drums a ritual song which continues under her narration.

A long time ago we had a lot of sturgeon out here. There's one rock that the elders used to go to, and that's where they used to catch the sturgeon. And now today you go out there and there's no sturgeon. One of our lakes was dead because there was so much contaminants coming down in the river. Our lake was dead for about twenty years and its starting to come alive now. Every time we have ceremony we pray, you know we pray for that. Some of our leaders have just moved back to our community and don't understand the culture and traditional ways that we have practiced for the last twenty years.

Evelyn concludes her song and says:
Oh, Miigwetch.

00:22;00

Conor Mihell, Author, Sault Ste. Marie

People cannot live here without a healthy environment and I think that's what conservation really comes down to, to me, is preserving the environment, preserving the fresh water resources that we have, and the forest ecosystems that surround these communities. But, these communities wouldn't exist without a little bit of industry, and obviously that's what brought people here to begin with in the first place, whether it was the fur trade or fishing, logging, mining, and so on.

00:22;30

Ed Hedderson, President, Kiwissa Ski Club, Manitowadge

Exploration companies are continuously drilling holes and exploring and looking for ore bodies. There's some that have come to a point where a mine could very well be developed and supply jobs and an economic boost for the region. And then you have to consider what effects it's going to have on, who it's going to have an effect on.

00:22;55

Ruth O'Gawa, President, Lake Superior Watershed Conservancy

When you look at the total of Lake Superior, there are only a little over 650,000 people, a total population around the whole lake. And because there aren't many jobs in terms of industry or that sort of thing, when a situation comes in like the mining companies, and they are promising all kinds of jobs and it would only be probably six to eight years, and the mining company is out of there and you've got a hole in the ground with no way to retrieve it and to reclaim it so that it can go back to its natural way. Very difficult for folks living there because you've got some people who

understand that part of it, but the other people saying yes, but it could be a job for us, for my children, for six to eight years. Those are always situations where the company coming in will bring in their people, and the number of jobs for the local people really don't end up being that many.

00:24;09

Grant Goodwin, Manitouwadge

There has to be some discussion, or some knowledge shared about the people that live in resource communities. As much as you may not think that people are different, mining people are very transient people. They're not university or college educated people, but they are very highly talented craft people that work underground and most of them in very dangerous situations, and they understand what they do. They know at the beginning of the day when the first rock comes out of the ground, that's the beginning of the end, because when the last rock comes out, whether it be in ten or fifteen or forty years, that's the end of your community unless somebody finds something else. So long term thinking for a mining person is, when I'm finished working in our community, the community of Manitouwadge, then I'll simply move on to another mine in another community.

00:25;02

Betty Brill, Curator, Nipigon Historical Museum

When our mills went down there was nowhere else to go. Our families got split. They would have to go out to Alberta or north to the mines. So it put a strain on the children, if the parents were off somewhere else for weeks at a time and then they'd come home. If the whole family has left, then that decreased the population in the schools and once you lose your children, you lose a teacher maybe.

00:25;38

Doug Gibbens, Photographer, Marathon

We lost our main employer for forestry here two years ago, which scattered people to the winds. They didn't just lose their jobs, we lost a culture. And the culture more or less takes years to rebuild.

00:25;53

Colleen Kenney, Rosspoint

We've had a lot of downsizing. We've had a lot of closures of mills. People are now realizing that it's not going to be a given that when they graduate

from high school or whatever, that they're going to have a job in the mill or in a mine, or whatever, along the north shore.

00:26;12

David Tamblyn, Superior Outfitters, Rossport

I think we'd find ourselves in a similar situation to what they are facing in Wawa at this time, where it has created that animosity between those who are pushing for more employment and those who are pushing for protecting the lake basin.

00:26;33

Ted Schintz, Citizens for Responsible Industry in Northwestern Ontario

I worked in this pulp mill here in Marathon for approximately thirty years myself. It was a good source of employment, a good source of money, but now it's closed. I own an automobile. It has copper parts and it has a catalytic converter within it, which has either platinum or palladium or both. And so I cannot be against mining these materials, and neither would it be right for me to insist that they ought to be mined in somebody else's backyard. But I would like to see you do it in a certain way. I want the most rigorous kind of environmental assessment done that we can get on it. I'm not popular with everyone when I say this, but I say, one less stinky, dirty, polluting, old pulp mill in the world is not really a bad thing.

00:27;28

Colleen Kenney, Rossport

People are becoming more creative and realizing that they are going to have to stretch themselves and kind of go outside the box. They can't just depend on the resources to bring them in, you know, a pay cheque every week.

00:27;44

Ed Hedderson, President, Kiwissa Ski Club, Manitouwadge

It's been an ongoing effort here in Manitouwadge for probably ten, fifteen years to develop some ecotourism opportunities. It's just hard to attract people who are willing to make that initial investment and set up and have a go at it.

00:28;00

David Wells, Naturally Superior Adventures, Wawa

It's very difficult to ask a person who has been mining all their life and finds the mine shut down, which is the case in Wawa, or who has been

working in wood manufacturing or wood harvesting for their life, find themselves out of a job. It's very hard to ask those people to suddenly come and work in tourism. That's our history, resource extraction, and it's a very profitable game usually, because you're not paying so much for those resources. In a resource-based kind of economy we're thinking always about extraction, extraction, extraction. And I think that we're much wiser in Northern Ontario to live in a diversified economy.

00:28;48

Colleen Kenney, Rosspoint

I see a lot of people using their own local skills. Like myself, what I've begun to do is do a little bit of guiding on the side, taking people out, touring them on the islands here.

00:29;02

Doug Gibbens, Photographer, Marathon

Hopefully, the children that do leave here will come back. But we have to have the economy to sustain these types of jobs. And I found that up here with the small towns, even though we're an hour away, two hours away, we all have a common bond. We feel like we're neighbours. And that makes, it really makes a big difference when you've got to pull together when someone has a problem. You're there for your neighbour, or they're there for us.

00:29;30

Ruth O'Gawa, President, Lake Superior Watershed Conservancy

When you look at many of the initiatives around the lake, they started with one or two people. They really know very, very well what is going on, and many times they've researched it, and have the knowledge greater than the decision making people, because they don't have the time to do that. But individuals can be very, very powerful for the future of the lake.

00:29;56

Ted Schintz, Citizens for Responsible Industry in Northwestern Ontario

One of the officials speaking for the mining company said something to the effect that they can use Bamoos Lake as a convenient tailings storage area for the life of the mine, which was expected to be eleven and a half years, and beyond that they could return it back to the people of Northwestern Ontario perhaps as a pike lake. I felt nearly insulted. I said what are they talking about, a pike pond versus a lake trout lake, it's not the same thing. Shortly after that working with a small group of people.

Hundreds of emails were exchanging places back and forth, we got ourselves organized a little bit. Soon after that they said, Bamoos Lake is not longer going to be used for a tailings pond, we have a new plan. I suspect our lobbying and discussions with them was an influence in getting them to change their minds on that.

00:31;02

Graham Saunders, Environment North, Thunder Bay

One of the issues some decades ago for many people in northern Ontario was the question of nuclear waste disposal. And I'm quoting from the Hare Report, and that was about managing nuclear waste in Canada, and the quote is, "there are vast areas of Northwestern Ontario not peopled at all." So this would be a great place to dispose of nuclear waste. The proposal to dispose of nuclear waste in northern Ontario met with fierce opposition. Environment North and other groups went on tours to communities like Marathon, Kenora, and attempted to present some of the hazards and pitfalls of nuclear waste disposal. Not the primary one, but one is transportation, because you can't magically get nuclear waste from southern Ontario to northern Ontario without having a new kind of infrastructure. The train tracks just won't take that kind of weight. Twenty-four thousand people signed a petition to halt the talk about nuclear waste disposal in the northwest. And in some ways we were immensely successful because the issue dropped out of sight for decades. It's back again because Ontario is pursuing regenerating – ha ha – the nuclear industry.

00:32;46

Mark Leschishin, Citizens Concerned for Michipicoten Bay (CCMB)

The Nuclear Waste Management Organization, which is an industry-funded organization to promote the idea of storing nuclear waste underground, has been snooping around Canada looking for communities that might be interested. And they're talking millions of dollars, bringing millions of dollars to the community. And of course politicians hear that and their ears just perk up and they figure well, this is great for the town and we're going to bring lots of jobs. And they're willing to I guess take the risk in terms of the environmental potential impacts. They're willing to risk that for the money.

00:33;27

Brennain Lloyd, Project Coordinator, Northwatch

And we're hearing from a lot of people real frustration about the limited and the carefully selected information that is being provided by the Nuclear Waste Management Organization or through their process. Small numbers of the community are brought out to international conferences. They are taking for briefings with the NWMO, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, they are taken for tours of nuclear generating stations, and its small groups, very, very intensive sessions. And its often people on council and economic development committee. They've had a very different experience and they come back to the community with a view that has been very much influenced by what they have been told and been shown.

00:34;16

Mark Leschishin, Citizens Concerned for Michipicoten Bay (CCMB)

This is part of the whole process of getting this repository approved, is they want to educate the local population what's involved in storing nuclear waste. To reassure them that this is all going to be fine and dandy. Well, a lot of us are kind of skeptical.

00:34;41

Brennain Lloyd, Project Coordinator, Northwatch

Members of their own community are being turned into nuclear industry spokespeople. And often the proponent is long gone and the community still remains damaged, the social fabric has been torn.

00:34;57

Melinda Ray, White River

I've got my kids and then I got my grandchildren. So I've got to think about my grandchildren and what's best for them in the future. And I don't think that nuclear waste being stored here would not be a good thing.

00:33;15

David Tamblyn, Superior Outfitters, RosSPORT

My greatest fear is there is a lot of hazardous materials that are transported back and forth along this rail. If we had a spill here, say for example during the winter months when the Nipigon Bay is frozen over, if you had a rail car derailment and car crashing through the ice, it could really present some environmental challenges. And I don't think either the Ontario Ministry of the Environment or CP are prepared for that. And I

think its going to take a disaster before we wake up to realize what needs to be done to ensure safe transportation of hazardous goods through this area.

00:36;04

Mark Leschishin, Citizens Concerned for Michipicoten Bay (CCMB)

Lake Superior which is right on our doorstep contains ten per cent of the fresh water in the world. I think and I think many others think too as well, that this is just too much of a risk to contemplate storing nuclear waste here on the north shore of Lake Superior. If there is any kind of accident and if we affect this great store of water, the implications are just mind-boggling as far as I'm concerned. I can't even see why they're even considering any place within the Great Lakes watershed as a storage site.

00:36;40

Bonnie Couchie, Pic River First Nation

We are immersed in all of this incredible, incredible natural environment. And here we are working away trying to destroy it you know, to some extent. Let's look at the lessons that overuse have taught us and find a different way of making jobs here for people, communities on the north shore, and look at the value of everything that exists here, everything living. We have that right at our doorsteps. And I don't think we should take it for granted anymore.

00:37;27

Joanie McGuffin, Author, Goulais River

And we aren't putting a value on the commodifying of the knowledge that local people have to here share. And how we link together with this water body. And that's really where we bring that effort together to build a whole different economic picture for our region, is by linking together. There's a story being told in Nipigon about the relationship with the *Paddle to the Sea* story and all of the Great Lakes. There's another story being told in Terrace Bay – they have a lighthouse there and it relates to the Slate Islands and that whole amazing formation out there. There's a story being told in Michipicoten First Nation and the original trails that they travelled, and working on that trail. There's a story being told, whether its Montreal River Harbour or its Batchawana Bay or its over Thunder Bay way. Each one has their own individual story to tell.

00:38;21

Joan Skelton, Author, Batchawana Bay and Thunder Bay

I belong to a government committee and one of its catch phrases was “making a great Lake Superior”. In my opinion Lake Superior is great, and that kind of a phrase shows our lack of humility. Martin Luther King in his great speech said “I have a dream” and Joan Skelton’s concern, “I have a nightmare”. I’m motivated by the nightmare that the beauty and the greatness of Lake Superior will be totally used to fund the rest of the continent. Funding by the way of traprock, and minerals and water, and also desecrated because we may store nuclear waste here. If we can only protect part of the lake and keep it the way it was from the very beginning, that is what I want, that is my dream.

00:39; 20

David Tamblyn, Superior Outfitters, Rossport

I think there is a lot in this area where we are taking the wilderness for granted and it’s not as appreciated as much as it should be. I think the people who appreciate it more are the people who have come from other areas where they have seen the detrimental effects of industry and urbanization, and they come here and they realize how unique it is and that it needs to be protected.

00:39;56

Bonnie Couchie, Pic River First Nation

For many years I worked in the field of consultation with many First Nations along the north shore. My job would be to go to the community members and show them a map of the proposed forest management area and then to ask them, can you show me some places that you value. And they would look at the map and almost always say, I value all of it.

00:40;32

Ted Schintz, Citizens for Responsible Industry in Northwestern Ontario

Think about exponential or continuous growth of anything – of a population, of the economy. It’s not perhaps such a bad thing if the odd town here and there shrinks and reverts and goes back to nature.

00:40;54

Evelyn Stone, Michipicoten First Nation

Those rocks all around here in the water, the way the waves hit the water, the way the waves hit the rocks, the way the waves hit the sand. You know those are all messages that are sent to us, the Anishinabwe people,

when we look, when we ask for something. And there's many, many stories, many teachings that we still have to learn yet.

00:41;25

Joanie McGuffin, Author, Goulais River

But as we link them all together and we have more and more things for people to do, to see and experience these places year round, that's what's going to build it all together. I think all over the world that sort of thing is happening, because we must, in order that our planet is going to sustain the lives of human beings, we must be working together on this big ecology picture and bringing an economic picture in balance with this ecology picture.

00:41;55

Joan Skelton, Author, Batchawana Bay and Thunder Bay

I think it's a case of compromise. How can we work things out? How can we protect the environment and also allow these people to survive at more than a minimal level. We unfortunately are at the top of the line and we are predators on everything below us. The wealth-based economy has to go because it's brought us to the point where our world isn't going to support us if we don't change. We know what we are doing and we can change if we want to.

00:42;35

Bonnie Couchie's song "Trees" begins and continues over the credits:

Another forest rolls down Highway 17
 And you don't give it a passing thought
 As you pass it on that eighteen-wheel machine
 Why should you care, you were not there anyway
 Because trees don't grow on money
 No, trees don't grow on money.

Appendix B

LIST OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Following is a list, in chronological order, of all interviews conducted for the dissertation, including those not selected for the film, *Conversations on the Lake*. This list includes the second interviews I conducted with some participants (see pages 30-31 of the written text for my film editing selection process and method).

1. Evelyn Stone, Michipicoten First Nation, 2008
2. David Wells, Naturally Superior Adventures, Wawa, 2008
3. Ken Mills, Michipicoten Bay, 2008
4. Mark Leschishin, President, Citizens Concerned for Michipicoten Bay (CCMB), 2008
5. Joan Skelton, Author, Batchawana Bay, 2008
6. Ruth O’Gawa, President, Lake Superior Watershed Conservancy, 2008
7. Conor Mihell, Author, Sault Ste. Marie, 2008
8. Graham Saunders, Environment North, 2009
9. Raymond Goodchild, Pays Plat First Nation, 2009
10. David Tamblyn, Superior Outfitters, Rossport, 2009
11. Colleen Kenney, Rossport, 2009
12. Bruce Staines, President, Quetico Explorations, Wawa, 2010
13. Ed Hedderson, Kiwissa Ski Club President, Manitouwadge, 2011
14. Grant Goodwin, Manitouwadge, 2011
15. Gail Isaacs, Manitouwadge Archival & Historical Society, 2011
16. Marlene Turner, Manitouwadge Museum, 2011
17. David Passi, Manitouwadge, 2011
18. Bonnie Couchie, Research & Education, Pic River First Nation, 2011
19. David Crawford, Nipigon Bay Remedial Action Plan, 2011
20. Betty Jean Brill, Curator, Nipigon Historical Museum, 2011
21. Doug Gibbens, Photographer, Marathon, 2011
22. Ted Schintz, Citizens for Responsible Industry in Northwestern Ontario, 2012
23. Melinda Ray and Bill Clark, White River, 2012
24. Mark Leschishin, President, Citizens Concerned for Michipicoten Bay (CCMB), 2012
25. Conor Mihell, Author, Sault Ste. Marie, 2012
26. Brennain Lloyd, Northwatch Project Coordinator, 2012
27. Gillan Richards, Save Our Algoma Region (SOAR), 2013
28. Joanie McGuffin, Author, Goulais River, 2013

Appendix C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Since when have you lived in your Lake Superior north shore community?
- What are some early memories of the places you knew here in your childhood?
- How well do you know other Lake Superior north shore communities, from Sault Ste. Marie to Thunder Bay and beyond?
- Have you ever been involved in any cross-community social or cultural events along the north shore, from Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario to Thunder Bay and beyond?
- How much of the shoreline region of Lake Superior have you travelled?
- In your view, what are some key social and environmental issues at stake for Lake Superior and its communities, now and in the future?
- How does your community engage with environmental themes affecting the north? Are you aware of any initiatives around protecting the natural environment?
- Northern Ontario's economy was formerly based on resource extraction – how has this changed in your community?
- What do you think about alternative economies such as (eco-)tourism to replace resource extraction?
- Environmental conservation is often framed against themes of economic stability for the communities involved. What do you think about this?
- How has your community involved itself in debates around Lake Superior environmental issues? How aware do you think the community is about the need to protect the environment, against the need to provide its residents with an economic future?

- How important is it to you that the shoreline remains protected and free of new industrial developments?
- Do you feel younger generations in these communities are more engaged with environmental themes than their elders?
- What employment options do young people have if they want to continue living in these communities?
- What is your personal vision, for your community, for the local and regional environments, and for the future of Lake Superior?

Appendix D INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Date: _____

Name of Participant: _____

Study Name: Conversations on the Lake: A Filmed Study of Lake Superior Communities

Researchers: Edith Steiner

Purpose of the Research: To investigate current issues at stake around Lake Superior, in light of prospective development in the north shore regions of the lake. By listening to those who live in the places in question, I hope to articulate their concerns via the production of an independent film project, *Conversations on the Lake* (working title).

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: To participate in the videotaped interviews and to express your views and concerns regarding the issues at stake in the areas of concern, with the understanding that the taped interviews may become a film/video production for eventual public release. These interviews may require about one to two hours of your time.

Risks and Discomforts: If you agree to being videotaped, and are comfortable with speaking with a camera recording your comments, we do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research. You have the right to not answer any questions.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You: The taped interviews and eventual film/video production will provide a venue for you in which to articulate your concerns facing communities along the Lake Superior north shore.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

Withdrawal from the Study: You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, York University, or any other group associated with this project. Should you withdraw, any material that has been collected as a result of your participation will be destroyed.

Confidentiality: Since the interviews are being videotaped, your likeness and voice may be revealed if included in the final production. Unless you choose otherwise, all information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Your data will be safely stored in a locked facility and only research staff will have access to this information. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Questions About the Research? This research has been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Environmental Studies' Human Participants Research Committee on behalf of York University, and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact Ms. Diane Legris, Manager, Faculty Governance, in the Faculty of Environmental Studies, 125 HNES Building, (telephone 416-736-2100, x33783 or e-mail: dlegris@yorku.ca) or Ms. Alison Collins-Mrakas, Manager, Research Ethics, 309 York Lanes, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail acollins@yorku.ca).

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I, _____, consent to participate in Conversations on the Lake: A Filmed Study of Lake Superior Communities conducted by *Edith Steiner*. I have understood the nature of the this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature _____
Participant

Date _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Principal Investigator
Edith Steiner, PhD Candidate
York University, Faculty of Environmental Studies
espix@sympatico.ca / Telephone 416-260-2734

**Appendix E
CONSENT AND RELEASE FORM**

TO: Edith Maria Steiner (the Producer)

FROM: _____ (Research Participant)

RE: ***Conversations on the Lake*** (the Production)

I consent to being taped and understand that my likeness and voice are being taped (the Taped Segment) by the Producer for possible use in the above noted Production.

I hereby grant to the Producer, its successors, assigns and licensees the right, but not the obligation, in perpetuity, and throughout the world, to use on an unlimited number of occasions, in whole or in part, the Taped Segment or any elements thereof, in any media now or hereafter devised, including but not limited to use in connection with the advertising and publicity for the Production. I hereby acknowledge and agree that the Producer owns all right, title and interest in and to the Taped Segment, including, without limitation, the worldwide copyright therein.

If the Taped Segment is used in the Production I understand that I shall not be entitled to compensation of any kind from the Producer, its licensees, successors and assigns.

I execute this consent and release freely and voluntarily with full understanding of its contents.

SIGNATURE

Title / Organization:

Contact information: _____

DATE: _____

E.M. Steiner (producer's signature)
