ACTION RESEARCH

DE/CONSTRUCTING PHOTOGRAPHS AND RE/CONSTRUCTING MEMORY, TIME, AND PLACE THROUGH COLLAGE AND PAINTING:
A VISUAL AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

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ABSTRACT

In this autoethnography, I focus on personal exploration of memory, time, and place through the construction of a visual narrative. I examine my practice and process of de/re/constructing familial photographs of lake house vacations through a visual narrative of collage and painting. My analysis is grounded in theories of process metaphor in order to expose the complexity of cultural, social, historical, and political human perception within the context of place. I utilized an intersubjective and reflexive approach, and explored the relationship and engagement within time and the particularity of place. Discoveries connecting visual metaphor and action revealed a deeper, more personal relationship with memory. With such a strong focus on place, connections between my art practice and teaching practice provide implications for an arts-based, pedagogy of process and place.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In my studio artwork, I use photographs from my mother’s family photo albums as both a visual and thematic resource. I choose to focus on a specific set of photos which depict two main lake houses seen over different time periods: Lake Ripley in the 1940s, and Lake Wagner from the decades, 1960s to the 1980s. I have always felt an affinity with the Lake Ripley photos. Through stories from my mother, Lake Ripley became a fairy tale of sorts; the capture of a vanishing moment, a manipulation of memory against time. There is a certain intrigue within the lake house photographs for me: what happened within that place, in that moment (i.e., the where, what, why, who, and when of memory, time, and place). Working with the visual aesthetics, which appear in the familial photographs, and my own experiences at the lake house, I physically de/re/construct the imagery through collage and painting. Depicting the same combination of people together, in different time periods offers a reflection of the relationships, which occur within the lake house, and an engagement with memory, time, and place.

Statement of the Problem

In this autoethnography infused, arts-based research I explored memory, time, and place through visual narrative, examining my studio art practice of selecting family photographs of lake house vacations, and the process in which I use to de/re/construct these images through collage and painting. In this action research, I investigated the
connections made between my art practice and teaching, utilizing visual autoethnography and place-based research to formulate a pedagogy of place. To guide students’ understanding of place and self through art making in my courses, I needed to first understand my relationship to place-based processes within my own art.

Throughout this study, I used a theoretical framework of process metaphor investigating my studio art practice exposing the complexity of cultural, social, historical, and political human perception within the context of place. Metaphors acted as the bridge between the experiential process and understanding of place within my artwork, and as a creative stimulant within a visual art pedagogy. By using collage as a metaphorical mapping of place and time, and painting as a visual metaphor to reveal narrative and understanding, I used an intersubjective and reflexive approach to explore the relationship and engagement within time and the particularity of place. My research questions for this study are:

- What does arts-based processes of de/re/constructing familial photographs within the context of place reveal about the complexity of cultural, social, historical, and political perceptions of self?
- How can a new understanding of place through artmaking working with familial photographs provide insights on self in relationship to place, memory, and time?

**Context and Background of the Problem**

For the past fifteen years, my studio art practice has focused on themes concerning memory and family, and myth and folklore. As a child and young adult, I
spent time searching through family photograph albums, deciphering narratives between the people and places shown. The themes of memory and myth, family and folklore, converged as I began to consider my interest in family photographs as an exploration of my own personal myth, a visual interpretation of the past. As a graduate student at Penn State, I began to explore, in more depth, ideas related to visual artifacts and cultural objects, and ideas related to place. Prior to starting graduate school, I had recently completed a painting series influenced from family photographs from a 1940’s summer vacation at a lake house in Wisconsin. As I took a closer look at my series, I began to re/consider the cultural connections between this place, people, and objects I had depicted, and what deeper meanings might exist.

This research study involved a self-inquiry into personal memory through a de/construction of family photographs and a re/construction of time and place. The place in which I focused on is the lake house. As “memories shape our identity” photographs and other cultural artifacts “do not document events and people but actively construct memories and create meaning” (Guyas, 2007, p. 16). Through my de/construction process of family photographs and place, I re/construct memories to create meaning, discovering new understanding within my studio art practice. Since many of the photographs I use depict a time that I did not personally and physically experience, I consider these memories to be perceived memory versus actual memory. In a sense, I am re/constructing someone else’s memory through my own experiences and perception of place, “an active participant in creating familial past and stories” (Guyas, 2007, p. 18).
Through actions of collage and painting, I am transforming place, and the memory and relationships which occur within the lake house environment.

Ellis, et al. (2011) state that researchers engaged in autoethnography “seek to produce aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience ... discerning patterns of cultural experience ... and then describing these patterns using facets of storytelling” (p. 277). My storytelling is evident within my visual narratives, especially as I expand the patterns, objects, and other visual aesthetics of my collage into a more nuanced interpretation via painting. The colors, textures, and physicality of the paint and painting process cannot be described by collage alone, as the visual text “seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience” (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 173). The relationship between process and meaning becomes evident through my collage process; every action is purposeful and a process of artmaking dives deeper into understanding through creating relationships in forming the art. Each juxtaposition of person, place, and object, as well as layers of visual text, taken apart and pieced back together, are steps taken to reveal new conceptual and creative understanding of the lake house as filled with metaphors that become evident in the process of a place-based art practice.

The people portrayed in the lake house photographs are also an important element within my visual narrative. Many of the photographs, and subsequently my collages and paintings, depict female figures in my family. The female figures that appear the most in my collages and paintings are those of my mother and grandmother. My grandmother appears ageless as she navigates my artwork within a single period of
time; my mother moves through my compositions from little girl to an adult woman, often juxtaposed alongside her mother. This seemingly alert focus to a certain set of figures was significant to my self-inquiry. What roles and relationships do the women play in the lake house environment? More specifically, what role and relationship does my mother and grandmother have with one another, and with myself? Through my own memories of these women, what roles do I de/re/construct for them within the context of the lake house?

An investigation into the individuality of the lake house and particularity of place was an important part of my research study. An awareness of place requires a “consideration of the wide range of social, economic, political, and ecological issues and processes affecting and affected by place” (Ball & Lai, 2002, p. 54). As I both physically and metaphorically de/construct the pictures of the lake house from my data set, I used place-based principles to consider the socio-cultural, historical, political, and personal assumptions gleaned from the photographs. I asked questions which focus on the particularity of the lake house; the interactions and relationship between people and place; the similarities and differences between the two main lake houses within my data set; and the affect which these may have on place, and vice versa. Within the context of my process, I considered collage to be a metaphorical mapping of place and an “important form of inquiry that can be effective in representing multiple narratives and interpretive spaces” (Powell, 2010, p. 49). By collaging the different time periods and lake house environments together, I am playing with the interaction and relationship that each person in the photographs had with one another, and within the lake house.
Arts education and arts-based research are well suited to explore ideas and situations of place. Gude (2007) states the importance of a quality art curriculum which creates “opportunities to investigate and represent one’s own experiences” (p. 6). Place-based education focuses on students lived experiences, taking into consideration that knowledge is the most valuable for children when it is “directly related to their own social reality” (Smith, 2002, p. 586). When considering the individuality of place, Ball and Lai (2002) raise the question of “how can art facilitate understandings of a specific place?” (p. 48). Student’s personal experiences are an important consideration in my emerging place-based pedagogy, which utilizes artmaking processes as metaphor making to guide students to reflect on their own personal experiences in understanding connections to place.

**Theoretical Framework: Process Metaphor**

In this arts-based autoethnographic research, I used a theoretical framework of process metaphor. Process theory focuses on how something happens, along with ideas explaining the change and development of those entities. My inquiry used process theory to focus on the place and entities of two specific lake houses. Exploring the historical, cultural, social, political, and personal implications found within the context of place is a process in and of itself: an uncovering of assumptions and ideas surrounding place, and in this case a visual (re)interpretation of photographs of a particular place. I used collage as a process to discover the diverse components within the lake house, and searched for metaphors through the de/re/construction of the
people, objects, and environments portrayed in the lake house photographs, collage, and paintings.

Jackson (1998) posits that “experience ... is transactional” (p. 3), as is the memory, time, and objects, which occur within place, and the de/re/construction of these exchanges.

Through my art practice and de/re/construction process I am participating in an exchange with the people, objects, and culture of the lake house; the memory, time, and place of the lake house; and juxtapositions of each as an exploration of place. The materials and methods, actions and action research cycles used in my collage process and construction of visual text, serve “as metaphors for the expression of personal and cultural memories and emotions” (De Beer, 2009, p. 81). By using process metaphor theory, I have discerned how my process of collage and artmaking, and ideas associated with the lake house environment can change and develop. By creating my own continuum of time and place by combining visuals of various lake house experiences, I have discovered metaphors which “capture movement across time in a way that reflects the mutual impact of individuals and their environments over time” (Britt, 1993, p. 179).

Process theory encourages the use of metaphors as a way of understanding process as integral to the meaning of art. Clements (1982) suggests that “metaphors assist us both in our daily living and in our art teaching; through them we can interconnect the fragmented actions and thoughts which occupy our bodies and minds” (p. 30). Using metaphors to communicate new concepts, patterns, and ideas found
within the process during art making and in interpretation of the artwork, is the bridge that has led to more understanding of my actions, my artwork, and my art pedagogy.

**Significance of the Study**

Powell (2010) suggests that visual autoethnography “takes as its premise the importance of visual representation of experience” (p. 45). My collage and paintings are visual narratives, which represent my experience and relationship to the people and place depicted. Through my autoethnographic research I have achieved an “exploratory, interpretive, and impressionistic” visual text through my process and practice (De Lange & Grossi, 2009, p. 188). Innovative classroom practices are the result of when “teachers make meaning of their practices through self-study and analysis of their experiences” (De Lange & Grossi, 2009, p. 188). By studying and de/re/constructing my own process and understanding of artmaking, I can fully engage in more meaningful learning and artistic exploration with students in my courses. Using my own artistic process and practice as a form of inquiry has led to a better understanding as an art educator, and has helped to construct a framework for multiple foundations of curriculum and pedagogy. Providing the spirit of my process to students that I teach is meant to encourage more meaning in artmaking within the classroom.

Implications from this research will guide me beyond the study presented here to construct a place-based arts curriculum and pedagogy, encouraged by process and experiential learning which “allow students to connect what they are learning to their own lives, communities, and regions” (Smith, 2002, p. 587). These pedagogical goals facilitate “student awareness of ... the role that cultural practices play” in understanding
place (Ball & Lai, p. 51). I have begun to structure a curriculum that focuses on student relationship to place through an understanding of, and participation in process. An end goal within this curriculum, is centered around student artwork and installation, and given the opportunity, culminating in a student run exhibition at a community art center or space. This possibility resituates “learning within the context of communities” strengthening students’ “connections to others” (Smith, 2002, p. 594) and to themselves.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW ON AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC AND PLACE-BASED APPROACHES TO ART MAKING

In this study, I used arts-based research “to examine the intersection of artistic and pedagogical practices through the creation of artworks and narrative” (Klein, 2012, p. 9). At this intersection, the creation of a visual narrative can help reveal the intersubjectivity and reflexivity which occur between artistic practice, process, and pedagogy. Intersubjectivity and reflexivity, two important components of qualitative action research, offers affect interaction between researcher and readers of the study, that is the audience of the work. The shared interpretations of intersubjectivity “are socially constructed through the research process” offering the opportunity for researchers to “explore their feelings, beliefs, and attitudes” (Klein, 2012, p. 6). Reflexivity allows for authenticity, enabling the researcher to create an honest presence through a “self-conscious stance toward research,” which is “made possible through reflexive writing and connecting with the audience on an emotional level” (Klein, 2012, p. 6).

Sullivan (2006) suggests that “art practice is a profound form of human engagement that offers important ways to inquire about issues and ideas of personal, social and cultural importance” (pp. 32-33). A/r/tography, an arts-based research approach, focuses on the trichotomy of artist, researcher, and teacher, “as the frame of reference through which art practice is explored as a site for inquiry” (Sullivan, 2006, p. 25). This triad of roles is about action: the artist “enacts and embodies creative and
critical inquiry;’ the researcher ‘acts in relation to the culture;’ and the teacher reacts, involving others in ‘artistic inquiry and educational outcomes’ (Sullivan, 2006, p. 25). These interactions, which occur between artist, researcher, and teacher, create a unique role that engages and embodies a reciprocity of learning and experience. Sullivan (2006) posits “when art practice is theorized as research ... human understanding arises from a process of inquiry that involves creative action and critical reflection” (p. 28). This reflexivity allows the artist to explore several variations of media and thought, where “forms, materials, properties, and qualities become the means by which concerns are explored and expressed” (Sullivan, 2006, p. 31).

In a pedagogical context, an arts-based research is “interested in improving our understanding of schooling and how the arts can reveal important insights about learning and teaching” (Sullivan, 2006, p. 20). With a strong focus on constructivism, interpretation, and contextualization, arts-based research offers “new perspectives on educational issues” and “provide a special way of coming to understand something” (Sullivan, 2006, p. 24) allowing teachers and students the opportunity for a more engaging arts experience.

Autoethnography encourages the researcher to explore both the process and product of inquiry, which complements arts-based research. An autoethnography infused arts-based inquiry allows the researcher to create and construct a visual narrative emboldened by experiential and cultural patterns. Along with other ethnographical methods of research, “visual autoethnography ... takes as its premise the importance of visual representation of experience” (Powell, 2010, p. 45). Employing ethnographical methods and place-based ideas within a pedagogical context allows for
an approach to art which “encourages students to learn about the social and cultural dimensions of art and its connections to self, community, and the environment” reconsidering “sites of and for art exploration” (Powell, 2010, p. 52).

Place-based education focuses on the lived experiences of students. Smith (2002) suggests that experiential learning “allow students to connect what they are learning to their own lives, communities, and regions” (p. 587). Knowledge becomes the most valuable for children when it is “directly related to their own social reality” (Smith, 2002, p. 586). Place can be a jumping point to discovering ideas about the self, and other historical, cultural, social, and political implications. This begs the question: How can a new understanding of place change prior relationships to place?

Ball and Lai (2002) suggest that “facilitating student awareness of ... the role that cultural practices play” can promote an understanding of place (p. 51). Simpson (1996) encourages constructing an experiential base in which to introduce new perspectives to students, suggesting that “learning is not simply discovery but also interpretation of information through new frameworks or structures” (p. 54). Exploring place—and considering a process in which to discover new perspectives, experiences, and relationships to that place—can offer new insights into the self, guiding students to explore the “relationships between object, content, context and the world” (Simpson, 1996, p. 55). The investigation into uses and new meanings of place allows educators the opportunity to apply methods of autoethnography with pedagogy, which “expands and opens up a wider lens on the world” for students (Ellis et al, 2011, pp. 275-276).

Arts-based inquiry easily lends itself to ideas and situations of place, and how these might be explored within a visual arts context through artistic practice and
process. Since “place can signify a wide variety of geographical and geopolitical locations” it is important to first understand the “concept of place that informs it” (Ball & Lai, 2002, p. 52). However, “researchers ought to conceive of place as a process, and not merely as some geographical or geopolitical entity” as there is also great “importance of understanding place as a heterogeneous and dynamic process” (Ball & Lai, 2002, p. 52).

Process theory focuses on how something happens, exploring ideas that investigate the development and change of an entity. Jackson (1998) posits that “every object has a history ... such as ideas, memories, and theories” (p. 24). This idea of process can also apply to place-based art where the process of the art practice can be “a robust form of human engagement that has the potential to reveal new insights and understandings” (Sullivan, 2006, p. 30). The process evident in the artwork deals with the experience and physicality of the product, where the physical material “becomes a means of communication ... inextricably entwined in the work’s meaning” (Jackson, 1998, p. 40). Greta Refsum (2002) suggests that the visual arts must “build its theory production on what happens before art is produced ... the processes that lead to the finished objects of art” (quoted in Sullivan, 2006, p. 27).

The artist constructs relationships between the process and finished artwork, which are “expressed through images that function as visual metaphors, and through pictorial means such as colors, lines, and textures” (Lubart & Getz, 1997, p. 295). Using ideas associated with process theory, visual metaphors can be generated as a means of narrative and understanding, creating several layers in which to de/re/construct. When building creativity through relevant metaphors it is important to consider that metaphor
generation is dependent on the context, with multiple layers used to construct historical, cultural, and social understanding (Lubart & Getz, 1997, p. 293). Using creative metaphor to discern artistic work and process offers new perspectives, building or extending “an initial insight to a problem,” which acts as the “scaffolding for building the creative idea” (Lubart & Getz, 1997, p. 287).

An autoethnography infused, arts-based research allows for the creation and construction of visual narratives supported by personal experience and cultural exploration, and of art and the creative processes involved. The combination of artistic process, completed works of art, and pedagogy, along with my intersubjective and reflexive approach, will provide an opportunity for inquiry as artist, researcher, and teacher. This trichotomy promotes experiential learning in both the arts studio and classroom, which may reveal insight toward a more engaging arts experience. The inclusion of place-based ideas within an exploration of artistic practice, process, and pedagogy, will be an effective approach as I look for specific connections between my own art practice and process, and to that of constructing a place-based pedagogy.

Considering process theory as a de/re/construction of place, the artistic work and process can provide understanding into the complexities of cultural, social, historical, and political perceptions of the self. By using process metaphor theory, ideas are de/constructed, and then re/constructed into a visual representation and narrative. Visual metaphors are then gleaned from the narrative to discover deeper layers of meaning, a continual building and extending of creative ideas. Through my process of de/re/construction, I have investigated how relationships to place can change when new understandings are revealed. Through my own interactions with the lake house
environment, the visual metaphors I have constructed within these compositions have moved beyond aesthetic choices to metaphorical importance, revealing a deeper understanding to my relationship with the people and place of the lake house.
CHAPTER 3

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY WITHIN ARTS-BASED
ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is an autoethnography infused, arts-based action research. Autoethnography is “an approach to research and to writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience” (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 173). Pace (2012) suggests that “autoethnographers reflexively explore their personal experiences and their interactions with others as a way of achieving wider cultural, political, or social understanding” providing opportunity for “writers, artists, performers and others to reflect critically upon their personal and professional creative experiences” (p. 2). For the purpose of this study, I have analyzed how my own art practice and process, focused on place, revealed the complexities of social, cultural, historical, and political perceptions of self, and how this changed my familial relationship to the lake house. An arts-based action research rooted in a studio art practice, with a strong focus on constructivism, interpretation, and contextualization, offers “new perspectives on educational issues” which “provide a special way of coming to understand something” (Sullivan, 2006, p. 24). Developing a relevant placed-based arts pedagogy required a deeper investigation of my own studio practice and process in order to successfully introduce students to a more engaging arts experience focused on self, place, and process.
In order to provide documentation of data, I kept a digital journal that I used for taking observational notes throughout my studio work, during both my collage and painting process; I also composed journal entries as I sat and reflected on longer periods of work, a culmination of personal thought and direction. Through narrative inquiry, a series of Dada poems were constructed from my collage work, a pairing of written and visual text. The re/constructed text from the poems helped to further analyze and interpret my collage work, and encouraged new understanding prior to my construction of a painted visual narrative. My finished collages, paintings in progress, and finished paintings have been photographed for documentation of visual data. I used layered analysis toward grounded theory methods, using a constructivist approach to convey “a story about people, social processes and situations that have been composed by the researcher” (Pace, 2012, p. 9).

I conducted analysis through the lens of process metaphor theory, specifically the use of collage to de/re/construct metaphor as meaning. As Garoian (2004) suggests, “collage narrative enables a critical examination of its fragments ... contrasting socially and historically constructed assumptions” (p. 26). I found and made copies of family photographs depicting various times spent at two separate lake house environments, Lake Ripley and Lake Wagner. From each photograph, I cut out figures, lakes, backgrounds, boats, chairs, objects, fences, shadows, and juxtaposed each into a new framework of time and place, creating a continuum of memory that has no start or end. I also used cut paper to construct life preserver forms to include in the photo collages, adding another layer to the compositions. This constructed cut paper visual stemmed from life preserver images that I had used in previous lake house paintings. The finished
collages became a resource I then translated into a series of paintings to create further visual narrative. Collage visually organizes unknown ideas, and as a process can generate new understanding of place through the collection of emerging ideas and visual metaphor. Throughout my analysis and interpretation, my prior relationship and understanding of the life preserver has transitioned from aesthetic to metaphorical importance. This visual metaphor that I have constructed within these compositions has moved beyond aesthetic choices revealing deeper meaning.

**Delimitations**

For the purpose of this action research, I delimited the project to a study of my understanding of process and place within my artwork, the exploration of memory and time, and the familial relationship to the lake house. This study did not analyze my implementation of a place-based curriculum, but rather my own understanding of the connections made between my art practice and teaching practice, and a possible pedagogy of place and process for future implementation with students. In my art practice and process, I strongly rely on photographs as the data, documentation, and physical de/re/construction of place in my artwork; this is not a necessary component of a place-based arts pedagogy, and students may agree. My new understanding of place and process discussed in Chapter 5 is a key component in constructing a successful arts curriculum. With a possible disconnection to place, there is also the need to consider the broader implications of what place and process might mean for students. In such a situation, it is important to ask: What are the different meanings for place, and the ways
in which we can document place? How can process metaphors encourage understanding of place, and guide self-reflective artmaking?
CHAPTER 4

AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC DISCOVERIES OF MEMORY, TIME, AND PLACE

My relationship with the lake house photographs have been an ongoing journey. Progressing through many paintings and art series, and now through collage making, I have had the opportunity to explore my relationships with the people, place, and imagery of the familial lake house, discovering an entirely new direction and personal meaning through this action research. I investigated process and place, finding visual metaphor within my art making, and examined time and memory within the context of the lake house, and the personal implications that has. Through analyzing my artmaking process and the imagery which I de/re/constructed, I discovered the significance of the life preserver in my artwork. By connecting my mother’s struggle with dementia to the consuming life preserver imagery, I exposed how each form becomes a lifeline for loss memory.

To begin my process of analyzing data, I looked through my written data: narrative inquiry, observational notes, journal entries; and visual data: collage and paintings. I created a code in which to look for metaphors, action, compositional aesthetics, and key ideas within my work. I searched for repetitions within the coding to group patterns for further focus. The following interpretations are separated into three sections: poetry, prose, and pattern. The first is a narrative inquiry of my dada poetry; the second an inquiry prose of my journal entries, observational notes, and visual data; the third an investigation into the patterns that formed my thematic focus. Major themes and key components of each were revealed through this reflexive action.
**Narrative Inquiry: Dada Poetry**

To encourage further reflection of my process and emerging themes, I used concepts from Dadaist poems to inform my visual narrative. Dadaists “used chance, collaboration, and language as a catalyst for creativity” writing poetry and experimenting with language “to expose the arbitrary relationship between words and their meaning” (Dada, n.d.). Dada founding member, Tristan Tzara, created a process of writing poetry which left the selection of words and ideas up to chance rather than the artist (Dada, n.d.). “To Make a Dadaist Poem” involved cutting words from a newspaper article, putting them in a bag, shaking gently, and drawing each one out at random for the “poem to resemble you” (Dada, n.d.).

In the spirit of Dada, and of my own process, I de/re/constructed my journaling to create four poems which reflect on my experience, interaction, and observation of my collages. I wrote and constructed Dada poems after finishing my second collage set. I looked at the finished collages and wrote down my observations. I then cut each word out, put them in a bag, and pulled the cut paper out at random to form my poems. When I considered one complete, I stopped.

The following dada poems are split into three separate poems. I remixed my process on the last two poems. The first was my original variation from Tristan Tzara’s instructions, where I pulled my words out randomly. The last two I decided to create a variation by laying out the cut-up words, and allowing a semi non-chance re/construction of my thoughts. The fourth and final poem is a re/construction of lines that stood out to me throughout all three narratives.
Dada #1

The place preservers
Life preservers the background.
Figures and among the girls
An object mimicking and carrying a shadow
The composition a small lake house
Lines anonymously the water.
Women the dock the shadows
A foot rings and the out to
A multitude pushing and windows
Behind the is crowded in between.
To throw are thrown consumed
Lifeline. Fall of another
In the forward.

Dada #2

Two women on the shadows float.
A boat meeting with the trees pushing the life preservers among lake houses.
Figures sit leaning between the shadows and fences consuming the life preservers.
Swim suited specks scattered barely within the shore.
Ambiguous distance converge in the distance repeating each other.
Memory is floating from a boat resting in the distance.

Dada #3
Piles of light presses against trees from the lake house.
And fences with the sitting boats floats into the back sitting.
And shadows touching or heads holding.
Little legs sit in the side and the docks sit.
A small hat to throw in.

Dada #4

Figures sit leaning between the shadows and fences.
Piles of light presses against trees from the lake house.
Swim suited specks scattered barely within the shore.
Among the girls an object mimicking and carrying a shadow.
Memory is floating from a boat resting in the distance.
A small lake house lines anonymously the water.

The Dada poems exposed several components in support of major themes that are emerging throughout my work. The life preserver is a visual metaphor that appears the most. In my poems, not only are there piles of life preservers, but piles of light. The life preservers, which create shadows in the paintings, also show a compositional divide by distinguishing the space between the figures. The life preserver might also be considered in the context of action: to preserve. The life preserver is not only a metaphor for memory, but also acts as a preserver of memory. Other actions found in the poems deal with very physical, bodily movements: carrying, thrown, pushing, sitting, leaning, consuming, resting, floating, holding. The life preserver as a metaphor for memory, division, and action are key ideas that my dada poems have exposed.
Inquiry Prose: Written Reflection

In reading through my reflections major themes emerged focusing on metaphor and action, demonstrating the life preserver and lines as two significant visual metaphors. The life preservers are objects which appear as ambiguous forms, and the lines are created by the shadows of objects within the lake house environment, both which create dividing actions. Another major component to this research is action. Throughout the data there are actions demonstrated within several components. My process exposes both the physical action of the art making and the metaphorical action of the life preserver and lines. Still yet, is the contradiction of action. Within all patterns and themes action occurs: the physical, compositional, metaphorical—often oppositional.

To demonstrate support of my findings, I have juxtaposed my interpretations, reflections, and visual data below. I have categorized the juxtapositions by each major component. Written in italics are my reflections from the journal entries and observational notes that I kept throughout my collage and painting process.

Life Preserver

The life preserver image is a significant visual metaphor and focus of my work. The life preserver first appeared in a photo with my mother at Lake Ripley, and from that point on my interest in the visual of the preserver exploded. My use of the life preserver in my paintings prior to this action research were of two dimensional rings.
Before constructing collages for this study, I decided to change this visual to the more consuming imagery of the life preserver in two paintings I had in progress. This change governed the direction my collages, and subsequently paintings, took—adding the multitude of the ambiguous life preserver form (see Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1. Painting (in progress) started prior to action research study. This is the first artwork that portrayed the life preservers in consuming piles. Art Credit: Elizabeth Eagle (2017) 36” x 36”.
The life preserver image is a visual that appears within my paintings. My current collages do not all have a life preserver image, but future collages will feature this visual; my paintings however do include life preservers. The life preservers I painted over (flat shaped rings of different sizes, some overlapping—very two-dimensional) I did so for aesthetic purpose—I didn’t like the multitude of flat shapes and decided the idea of piles and stacks of life preservers consuming the foreground of the composition and the two women would be more visually interesting. I’ve changed the two paintings quite a bit and have come to interpret the life preserver visual differently. I ended up
taking out previous areas of both paintings; I didn’t like what was happening and decided to visualize the life preserver image differently.

Life preservers are a staple at a lake house as a lifesaving object, but instead I have them consuming the people and spaces in the painting. Life preservers are meant to be thrown as a life line to a person, but in part, a life preserver is sort of an in between stage of actual safety. An important component of each painting needs to be the life preservers—becoming a part of the people’s experience within this place.

My reflections show a personal history of the life preserver; how it started as one idea and changed throughout my process of collage and painting. Throughout my observations it has become clearer to what the life preserver symbolizes within the context of the lake house series; a metaphor for memory (my relationship with my mother’s dementia), and contradiction of action: an object of safety, which sits untouched; interacting within the space, yet not acting. The life preservers surround but are not grasped. A resting of a hand but no reaching. The use of the life preserver visual becomes a part of the figure’s experience within the lake house. Compositionally and thematically the consuming piles of preservers become an important element which repeats and connects the series together (see Figure 3).
I consider the placement of a figure in relationship to how a life preserver may fit alongside the figure. The life preserver piles fill the spaces between the figures. The female figures, surrounded by life preservers, may reach out but barely touch, or barely hold onto the form. There is a constant action of looking, with the life preservers as the ambiguous life line; it’s there, consuming, not quite knowing why or when they will need to be used. I did this at first primarily because of the curve of hands; the ring fit well. As I move onto the other collages and life preserver paper cut outs, I am more aware of how the placement of the life preservers moves beyond compositional and aesthetic decisions.
Studio Process

My studio process is a continuous re/construction: re/constructing the visual narrative from the collages into a painted story. My process has exposed the similarities in action which occur in both the collage and painting process. In both the collage and painting process, I am de/re/constructing space by cutting or painting negative/positive space. The ideas are the same, but the action has changed due to the material—working with cut paper has a different feel than working with paint. Using paint to take away and expose figures in space is a different action because of the medium (See Figures 4 and 5).

Figure 4. Collage from second set. Used as resource for painting (see Fig. 5). Art Credit: Elizabeth Eagle (2017) 8” x 8”.

Figure 5. Painting (in progress) from collage in second set (see Fig. 4). Art Credit: Elizabeth Eagle (2017) 36” x 36”.
As I’m painting the life preservers around the figures, it occurs to me the similarities between the actions of the collage and painting process. The act of creating negative and positive space. Within the collage process I was cutting away negative space to construct a new environment within place. I would take away space to add new space. The painting process of negative/positive space, the actions can be different, but the same. I change the context of the space, and therefore place, by taking away areas with paint-- by adding new areas with paint. Breaking it down to shapes, to shadows. Painting inside the life preservers to create blank, grey space. Painting around the figures to distinguish the space surrounding them. Adding positive space to create background; adding negative space to create light, shadows, and so on. The difference between visuals in the collage versus painting; choices to remove, to add--does the heart of the narrative change when the visuals change from collage to painting? I have the ability to manipulate how and where the figures exist, and in which place. I can manipulate and expose in both mediums.

The collages I constructed are a collection of visuals that represent a collaboration of imagery of the familial lake house place. The decision to add cut paper life preservers to my collages stemmed from a choice I made in my first two paintings prior to action research (see Figure 6). This was the beginning of understanding the importance of the life preserver visual in my work and its relationship to the places I construct.
I have found myself to be more meticulous and thoughtful in constructing these collages (from the second set) in comparison to when I began the idea of collaging the lake house and family photos together last spring (see Figure 7). The two paintings in progress that I have been working on for the past months (from the first set of collages) began to go in a new direction when I decided to change the life preserver visual. The preserver became more of a vital component, and not just an afterthought of aesthetic to include. New information has emerged from working on these two paintings, which are influencing my second collage set. I’m looking for specific elements to focus on within my collage as I work through my process.
As I finished my collages, the next step was to take them into the studio to use as a resource for my paintings. I reflected on this process below.

_Taking my collages and constructing paintings from these I think of the collages now as a sketch or resource to continue the conversation, to continue the narrative. I am now re/construing re/construction through painting. The collages as solid photographs, in a sense, are more attainable. Now I’m changing the size, composition, the colors; my reinterpretation of memory. In my paintings, I delve deeper into aesthetic choices of color and pattern that represent my artistic sensibility (see Figure 8)._
Juxtaposition of Imagery

In my collages women are placed next to each other, and the objects and spaces from two different lake houses are placed together. Images and space overlap in my compositions. As I continued my collage work, I began to use a very specific action of pairing figures together which are posed alike, specifically the pairing of women: my mother and grandmother; and converging place—the two different lakes: shorelines, water, trees, windows are juxtaposed seamlessly. These choices are very different from the first set of collages that I created prior to the action research study, which didn’t
focus on specific pairings of people, but rather on the two different lake house environments, and whatever family members were pictured (see Figure 9).

Despite not recognizing the importance of pairing figures in my first collages, I always tended to gravitate to photographs which included my mother and grandmother. The second collage set I constructed focuses more on the pairing of my mother and grandmother. Similarities in their body positions is also a key discovery indicating gender socialization. The image of the dock extended into the distance is also a significant action related to loss memory and the components in which a mind with dementia works (see Figure 10).
I created the first set of collages before writing my research proposal. I looked at the first set of collages and have found images that I would like to re/combine in different compositions in my new collage set. This action will likely culminate in a new discovery of place and purpose within my work.

The shore line from Lake Wagner met up flawlessly with the dock from Lake Ripley making this place look like it extended far into the distance. During this collage is when I realized that I had really begun to focus on placing my mother and grandmother together.

Figure 10. Collage depicting similar positions between mother and daughter. Art Credit: Elizabeth Eagle (2017) 8” x 8”.
Visual Repetition

Throughout the collages and paintings there is a repetition among visuals. Line and form (life preserver), metaphor, and other compositional elements are shown repeating. A possible interpretation is that these components represent direction. The use of repetition in my work can also be seen within the context of dementia. Repetition has a close relationship to dementia. The repetitive actions that a person with dementia is something that I have experienced firsthand as a daughter to a mother with dementia. My mother’s own actions repeat, verbally and physically; words and actions are repeated as she asks questions, stands up and sits down. Understanding the connections between the repetitions I create, and the repetitions that I experience are important ideas that are emerging from my work.

The collaged photographs are a manipulation and juxtaposition of time and remixing and mashing of the two lake houses. As I start my new set of collages I will look for visuals I want to repeat. I’m seeing a lot of repetition between visuals. There are many visuals which repeat throughout the compositions, specifically lines and the life preservers. For example, shadows complement and mimic one another (lines). The act of repetition becomes a metaphor.

Ambiguity

Through the flawlessness of the black, white, and grey values in the photocopies used in the collages, an ambiguity between images emerges, exposing ideas related to
the blending of time and place together. There is also the ambiguity of the life preserver form, and the inter/actions between the life preserver forms, people, and place (see Figure 11).

*The black, white, and greys of the photographs allow for often flawless connection as they blend together. The ambiguity of the grey lake fronts which could be recognized as either place (Lake Ripley or Lake Wagner). This allows for an ambiguity of visuals; an ambiguity of space, place, object, memory, and time.*

Figure 11. Collage demonstrating the flawless connection between two separate places. Art Credit: Elizabeth Eagle (2016) 8” x 8”.

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Actions

Through the physical act of art making a re/construction takes place: of photographs, paintings; place, memory. The choices I make are actions within process. A contradiction of action occurs from several reverse and opposite actions, such as the physical act of constructing negative and positive space in both the collage and painting process. I found other opposite and dividing actions which take away: cut and paste, choose and re-choose, lost and regain. There are other physical actions, which take place visually in the work such through the action of the figures sitting and posing (see Figure 12).

There is the physical re/construction of pasting, layering, juxtaposing together, constructing a new place within place. As I cut out the figures I am choosing what to
keep and what to discard within their original environment. As I cut around the figure of my grandmother I have chosen to cut out around the outside of her chair, discarding the window behind her, and subsequently the rest of the original space in which she belongs. I am re/constructing her space, placing her in a new environment. Manipulating the memory of where she once was.

A contradiction of action occurs with the visual metaphor of the life preserver. A life preserver is an object meant for saving, however, there is still a need for action from the person needing to be saved. The life preserver floats in the water, in flux, waiting for action. In my collage and paintings, no one is reaching out for the life preservers. The life preservers are there but they are not being used.

The visual metaphors that I have constructed become even stronger meaning for memory when considering the personal implications of mom’s dementia. The life preservers become a consuming pile of thought and safety. But not as an actual saving act because they just sit there. They are there, sitting, not acting; yet interacting with the people and space in my compositions. The way in which the visual metaphors interact within the compositions an important element to consider. They interact throughout the series of work; they interact within the place (I’ve constructed) and with the figures. The visual metaphors interact with each other. A key word is interaction, but also there is a contradiction of action (with the life preservers): interacting with, but not physically acting.
Dividing

Lines, both imaginary and real, create a compositional division of space. The oars in the boat create this divide. Through analyzing data, I found that compositional and metaphorical actions are often described in the same way. As space is physically divided within the composition, a metaphorical divide of space, memory, and time occurs. My mother is shown rowing with a younger self, using the oars to not only divide physical space, but space between time. There is also the physical act of dividing created by the cutting and painting away of negative and positive space (see Figure 13).

The way that my mother is sitting in the rowboat, she is in mid row, so the oars become this division of space. Mom’s action of rowing divides her from her past self; she carries life preservers behind her.
Seeing Patterns: Finding Thematic Focus

Throughout my data analysis, I have found several patterns that might be organized as key thematic elements within my work. Within these themes there are several components which co-exist. Considering my action research to be an inquiry of process and place, under this umbrella, visual metaphors and actions emerge as two major themes; repetition and juxtaposition are specific elements, which occur throughout, intertwining and connecting each. The actions which occur within my process might be split between the physical actions of the studio practice, and the actions which occur within the environments I create: between the people, place, and visual metaphors I have constructed. For each action that occurs, there is often an opposition, creating a contradiction of action.

Theme 1: Visual Metaphors as Object and Form-Life Preserver and Line

The most significant visual metaphors found within my work are the life preserver form, and lines which are created from the lake house objects—fences, windows, chairs, boat docks, shadows, oars. The lines, which are seen—both real and imaginary, create division of space and time between people and place. Both the lines and form (of the life preserver) create visual repetition, not only throughout each individual composition, but throughout the entire series of work, connecting the people and place to the lake house environment.
Life Preserver

This form is a symbol of safety, and a metaphor for memory, and more specifically the memory that my mother has lost through dementia, and my actions of wanting to save and preserve her memories. These forms interact with the figures and space, repeating throughout each collage and painting, a consuming pile of safety—a contradiction of action.

Line

Objects within the composition create lines of shadows, dividing the spaces. Lines are repeated visually throughout the collages and paintings. There are also imaginary lines created by objects and actions of the people; oars in rowboats create lines dividing time and space.

Theme 2: The Contradiction of Action

There are several oppositional actions, which occur throughout my work, from the artmaking process to the compositions and places I construct.

Studio Process

The most significant action which happens in the artmaking process is the de/re/construction of negative and positive space. This is an action which occurs in both the collage and painting process; although the medium and material is different—cut space versus painted space. Figures and space are physically taken apart and juxtaposed together in new ways.
Composition and Place

The most significant contradiction of action which occurs within the spaces I construct are the interaction between life preservers and figures. The life preserver as a physical form is meant to be thrown into the water to act as a lifeline; a form which saves. The life preservers that I construct are piles which consume the figures and space; sitting and waiting. The life preserver is a metaphor for memory and the need to save what is lost.

The visual metaphors and contradiction of action were two major themes, which emerged from this study, pushing my artwork into an entirely new direction compositionally, conceptually, and creatively. The thematic focus that was revealed have pushed boundaries of previous thinking, exploding future possibility.

The following figures are examples of finished paintings completed before and after this action research. Each used a different collage as a visual resource, but the same female figure appears, however juxtaposed in a very different way. This action research has exposed new ideas within my work, and the comparison between these two paintings demonstrates this (see Figures 14 and 15).
Figure 14. Completed painting from prior to action research. Example of artwork before inquiry. Art Credit: Elizabeth Eagle (2016) 36” x 36”. 

The cultural object of the life preserver, and the juxtaposition of the two female figures, similar in pose however different in time, help to convey the complexity of cultural, social, historical, and political perceptions of self.

Figure 15. Completed painting from action research. Example of finished artwork after constructing the second collage set and discovering focus. Art Credit: Elizabeth Eagle (2017) 36” x 36”.

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CHAPTER 5

ACTION RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

For the purpose of this study, I delimited my project to a study of my understanding of my artwork, and not an implementation of an arts curriculum. I found it necessary to first find the connections between my art practice and teaching practice, in order to successfully create curriculum for future implementation with students. As an artist and arts educator, my goal was to find the strategies necessary for a rich, conceptually and creatively driven art pedagogy.

I have separated my recommendations for further study in two categories: studio arts and art pedagogy. Since my research was a personal journey that involved my art, I felt it was important to provide recommendations and plans to continue my studio arts practice, and the direction I plan to go due to the discoveries made through this action research. Using my process and understanding of my own art was an important component needed to inform my art pedagogy as I considered a place-based arts curriculum.

**Studio Arts: The Lake House Series**

For this research study, I constructed 36” x 36” canvases and began work on six paintings for the Lake House series. Each painting was based from a collage. Out of the six paintings that I started, one was completed (see Figure 15), and five others are in progress. I plan to work towards a finished Lake House series culminating in an exhibition of my work. This will include the six paintings created during this research
study, along with a few others. From my second collage set I had constructed five collages, but used only four as resources for my painted narrative. I will begin another 36” x 36” canvas to go along with my other six. I also constructed another collage set focusing on my mother, alone, at various ages, with life preservers piled around her figure. Each of these paintings will be 24” x 24”.

As I had the opportunity to reflect deeply on the life preserver imagery, throughout this inquiry I began to consider multiple ways in which to explore this visual. As part of recommendations to my own studio art, I plan to create a sculptural installation of life preserver forms. This process will involve pouring plaster into balloons and shaping each into an ambiguous life preserver form, similar to those found in my collage and paintings. These will then be stacked and piled to create an installation on the floor of a space with my finished paintings. This will take my two-dimensional practice of creating life preservers and change it to a three-dimensional process. In support of the emerging theme *contradiction of action*, these heavy forms will be the perfect opposition to buoyancy. A reversed action of heavy and light.

Other studio arts recommendations focus on taking a step beyond what I have begun; going back to the family photo albums and looking for more photographs—I have only used one set for both collages. Because of this action research, I have new ideas of what to look for in family photo albums in the context of my mother and the lake house. I also plan to explore and put more focus on concepts related to the contradiction of action.
Building Curriculum: A Pedagogy of Process and Place

An implication of this research study was to construct a place-based, arts curriculum and pedagogy, encouraged by process and experiential learning. I have begun to structure a curriculum that focuses on student relationship to place through an understanding of, and participation in process. Through my new understanding and personal experience with process in studio arts, I will be able to fully and completely impart the spirit of my work to students. I will act as guide to student exploration of process, place, and visual metaphor in order for them to discover and create personal meaning in their own artwork journey. Encouraging a reflexive approach to artmaking, I will guide students in an artistic investigation of place emphasizing concept and collaboration. Students will then have the opportunity to participate in building their own art exhibition outside of the classroom and in the community.

Generating ideas of possible meaning for place, students will construct collages, using process metaphor to encourage further understanding and to reveal meaning in their artwork. Using both written and visual text, students will look for visual metaphors in their work, and then undergo both a self-reflective and collaborative investigation using elements inspired from Dada poetry.

Using Dada poetry as inspiration for a de/re/construction of ideas provides new perspectives to students in their artmaking and exploration of process. The Dada poem activity can be completed in two ways: through a personal written observation of imagery, such as the process I used in Chapter 4; or through peer collaboration. The latter would ask students to pair up and switch artwork, writing a descriptive paragraph about the other’s work. Students would then use the peer observation in the Dada poem
process. After going through this de/re/construction of their artwork, I will give students the prompt to create another artwork. Students will explore individual themes in different artistic media, taking into consideration what was revealed from the previous process.

An end goal within this curriculum is centered around student artwork and installation, moving the art making out of the classroom and into the community. Students will have the opportunity to take on the responsibility and commitment of putting together a group exhibition of their work. The process of building a body of work in relation to place becomes an integral component to presentation within this exhibition, exposing students to the complexities of how place can change relationships to art.
REFERENCES


