

Marlene Creates

A Newfoundland Treasury of Terms for Ice and Snow

at Language, Landscape & the Sublime, Schumacher College, Dartington, England, June 2016

From the Ground Tier to a Sparrow Batch: A Newfoundland Treasury of Terms for Ice and Snow, Blast Hole Pond River, Winter 2012-2013 is a documentary video-poem that is 26 minutes long. It's based on observing the phenomena of winter by means of over 50 terms in the Newfoundland dialect for ice, snow, and winter weather.

It was filmed along a small river, called the Blast Hole Pond River, which flows through the 6-acre patch of boreal forest where I live in Newfoundland, Canada.

On November 27th, 2012 — the day before the first snowfall — I set up my tripod in front of a little waterfall in the river, and I left it there all winter. So the waterfall is the refrain as the video-poem moves through the season.

Everything is in chronological order, and you'll see very dramatic changes because of all the freezing and thawing that we had that winter. In fact, sometimes it's hard to believe it's the same little waterfall.

Many terms in the Newfoundland dialect are from 17th century English — particularly from Wessex. These words were brought to Newfoundland with the Settlers. What's interesting is that many of the terms survived in Newfoundland after falling out of use in England. My own Newfoundland ancestors were from Dorset and Devon and they first settled on Fogo Island, which is a smaller island again off the northeast coast of the island of Newfoundland. The second voice you'll hear giving the definition of each term is my cousin Lloyd Brown who grew up in the community of Joe Batt's Arm on Fogo Island. You may hear an echo of Thomas Hardy country in his voice, or possibly the 19th century Dorset poet, William Barnes.

What's behind these terms is a way of experiencing and knowing the world. They register an attention to the land and the sea. They're very lyrical and have inherent poetry, so there's an aesthetic dimension to them. They're also precise — they distinguish subtly different forms of ice and snow; they're practical — for example, they would convey if the ice was safe for crossing; and they're sonic — I love the feel of the words on the tongue and in the ear.

I find that knowing these terms helps me actually see different phenomena instead of winter being just a cold, white blur. But this dialect is a fragile intangible artifact. The loss of local linguistic complexity is a result of major changes in Newfoundland & Labrador, particularly the decline of the fishery as an occupation. People are not spending as much time outside on the land or on the sea as they once did. And these terms are fragile for another reason — which is climate change.

Finally, I'd like to say that I had a fantastic co-creator for this film — it was Winter itself.

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Sea Ice, Conception Bay, Newfoundland, March 2014

This PechaKucha about terms for sea ice is a supplement to the video-poem. As I mentioned in my introduction to the video-poem, I incorporated over 50 terms in the Newfoundland dialect for ice and snow. But actually, I compiled an inventory of over 80 such terms. There are quite a few that pertain specifically to sea ice.

I'd like to point out the difference between *drift-ice* and *local ice*. It is not uncommon for Arctic ice, or *drift-ice*, to be driven by wind and currents into Conception Bay from more northerly latitudes. It is also known as *rough ice* or *running ice*.

But the winter of 2013-2014 was so cold that, by March, the bay itself — which is, of course, salt water — froze for the first time in decades and provided an opportunity to document many different formations of *local ice*, or *bay ice*.

<http://www.marlenecreates.ca/works/2013ice.html>