

Title: The Birch Island Ambient Room

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Introduction:

The Birch Island Ambient Room is a sample of a multi-sensory video allowing the viewer to immerse themselves in the resettled community within the medium of an ASMR (autonomous sensory meridian response) Ambient Room. This medium harnesses visual cues and subtle sounds to transport and inform the audience while providing the ambiance typically associated with the medium. I have used modified historic photographs of the resettled community of Birch Island, Labrador, Canada, to recreate the visual and ambient soundscape of the community before resettlement.

Origin of the Idea:

During pandemic lockdowns, I have taken refuge in the ASMR Ambient Rooms of YouTube. For those of you unfamiliar with these rooms, they are a calming image and sound that can transport the viewer to a wide range of fictional spaces like a café on a rainy day, a cozy porch watching leaves fall, or Riverdale complete with rushing streams and waterfalls¹. These spaces consist of a primarily static image that contains minor unobtrusive movements and background sounds and can last several hours. The image is not usually meant to look natural and is characterized by uncanny movement². Ambient Rooms are not meant to be consumed directly but act as background ambiance for other activities like reading, meditating, or working. That being said, like most things online, the creation and use of these spaces are up to individual interpretation. There is no shortage of these spaces on YouTube, but I kept coming back to a handful of favorites causing myself to think about the sensory inputs that mimic place in this medium.

The Birch Island community began around 1942 as the civilian settlement associated with the Goose Bay Base in what is now Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Labrador. The community resettled in 1969 under Newfoundland and Labrador's Fisheries Household Resettlement Program³. Today it is the site of the Birch Island Park and has become a popular walking spot⁴.

I chose to concentrate on the resettled community of Birch Island because I am familiar with the historic photos available and interviewed some former community members for my MA. The sounds and visuals present in the video are a reflection of what appears in the photos and interviews.

The Theme 'Sensations':

Ambient Rooms specifically target the sensations of visual cues and sound. Applying this medium to historic photographs experiments with learning and understanding in different

¹ Example: www.youtube.com/watch?v=mkgyI0JSdhE&t=5954s&ab_channel=AutumnCozy

² www.nytimes.com/2021/02/16/style/ambience-videos-asmr-youtube.html

³ Brennan, Julia 2019 "Archaeology and Memories on Birch Island" MA thesis, Memorial University.

⁴ www.healthywaterslabrador.ca/home/birch-island.htm

ways. Ambient Rooms curate the audience's sensations of a place, allowing the creator to help guide the viewer to a more specific understanding of the space represented. These Rooms indirectly tell a story, and allow a different understanding of place from anywhere with an internet connection.

Approach:

Using iPhoto, I edited the dust and marks from the historic photos so they would not distract from the movement. Then using the app Plotagraph, I created plotagraphs out of each image I wanted to use. A plotagraph is when still photos are edited to incorporate a minor repeated movement⁵. In this case, I added a slight sense of motion to the sky, sunlight, water, leaves, or snow to bring the audience into the picture. I then exported the plotagraph to iMovie, where I added sounds to each image based on the contents of the photo and interviews with former residents. The sounds came from iMovie and YouTube free sound libraries.

How does it work?

However you want, watch it, let it create ambiance for reading, meditating; the use is entirely up to interpretation. Ambient Rooms are typically an hour or more in length; this entry is a sample.

Creator:

I am a PhD Candidate at Memorial University. This Heritage Jam project is based on my MA, *Archaeology and Memories on Birch Island*.

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Project Video File: <https://youtu.be/HGVwKErrDzk>

⁵ <https://improvephotography.com/49221/plotagraph-future-or-fleeting-trend/#:~:text=What%20is%20Plotagraph%3F,the%20video%20to%20play%20forward.>