TELLING STORIES: A REFLECTION ON ORAL HISTORY AND NEW MEDIA

by Steven High

ABSTRACT

New media and the arts are transforming how we think and do 'oral history'. While the changes are many and the current situation is certainly fluid, the most exciting possibilities are emerging *after* the interview. This is an important point as oral historians have been so focussed on the making of the interview that we have spent remarkably little time thinking about what to do with the audio or video recordings once they are made. The paper examines how the digital revolution is changing oral history practice at the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling, based at Concordia University, and specifically, in the Montreal Life Stories project. 'Life Stories of Montrealers Displaced by War, Genocide and Other Human Rights Violations', the project's full name, is comprised of forty university based researchers and community co-applicants as well as eighteen community partners, mainly from the city's Rwandan, Cambodian, Haitian and Jewish communities. Our five year project (www.lifestoriesmontreal.ca) is developing a cross-disciplinary methodology that combines oral history with digital storytelling, searchable databases and memoryscapes. We are also using new media technology to bridge distance within the project.

KEY WORDS:
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memoryscapes,
digital
storytelling,
genocide

The Deep Dark Secret of oral history is that nobody spends much time listening to or watching recorded and collected interview documents. There has simply been little serious interest in the primary audio or video interviews that literally define the field and that the method is organized to produce. Michael Frisch (2008)[1]

New media and the arts are transforming how we think and do 'oral history'. While the changes are many and the current situation is certainly fluid, the most exciting possibilities are emerging after the interview. This is an important point as oral historians have been so focussed on the making of the interview that we have spent remarkably little time thinking about what to do with the audio or video recordings once they are made. There are hundreds of thousands of recorded interviews sitting in archival drawers, computer hard-drives or on library bookshelves that have never been listened to. Tens of thousands more have been supplanted by the transcript which is easier to access.
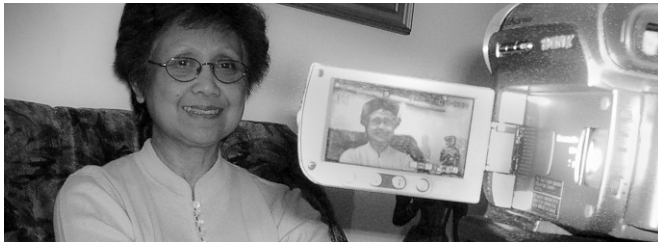
Hearing Interviewees' Voices: Mdm Genevieve Srey being interviewed by the Cambodian Working Group.

Analogue audio or video are ponderous to use and take 'real time' to access – and are therefore largely inaccessible to researchers and to larger publics. As Australians Helen Klaebe and Marcus Foth have asserted, oral history projects 'rarely venture beyond recording interviews'.[2]

If the core audio and video recordings remain 'notoriously underutilized', new media tools are opening up many possibilities for us to interact with the source. 'The basic point could not be simpler' Michael Frisch writes:

> There are worlds of meaning that lie beyond words, and nobody pretends for a moment that the transcript is any real sense a better representation of an interview than the voice itself. Meaning is carried and expressed in context and setting, in gesture, in tone, in body language, in pauses, in performed skills and movements. To the extent to which we are restricted to text and transcription, we will never locate such moments and meaning, much less have the chance to study, reflect on, learn from, and share them.[3]

The theme of the 2009 Oral History Society conference is therefore a highly topical one as it asks us to think deeply about voice: voice as evidence in oral history, voice in community through oral history, and voice in the age of new technology. As is so often the case, this theme is part of a wider rethinking of oral history practice in light of the digital transformation underway. Later in 2009, for example, the annual meeting of the Oral History Association in the United States is organized around the theme of 'Moving Beyond the Interview'. In the Call for Papers the conference organizers ask us to think more about what we do with the interviews once they are made. The evidence of the growing emphasis on voice and the post-interview can, therefore, be found in many places. The potential implications of these changes are profound. Alistair Thomson, for example, has said that 'digital technologies are transforming so many aspects of our work as oral historians – and indeed the ways in which people remember and narrate their lives – that they will, over time, also change the way we think about memory and personal narrative,

about telling and collecting life stories, and about sharing memories and making histories'.[4]

Before lumping me in with the 'digital camp' – let me say that I am first and foremost an oral historian who values human connection and the ethic of sharing. If new digital technologies help me do my job as an interviewer, to listen more deeply for meaning in oral narratives and to share these stories with others, then I am all for it. However, if the technology becomes the end rather than the means – then I am not. To be frank, I am sceptical of the missionary zeal of some digital historians. Talk of open access and the infinite archives, are often disconnected from issues of collaboration and social change. Like oral history itself, everything depends on how we approach digital technologies and how we use them. In other words, what informs our technological choices?

It is for this reason that the 2009 theme of 'hearing voice in oral history' speaks to me. The organizers chose to hear interviewee's voices, to be sure, but also community voices within oral history projects and in digital environments. This wider definition is an important one, and is highly relevant to any discussion of oral history and new media. Digital technologies are opening up new horizons for community and public engagement on the one hand and sharing authority in the research process on the other.

I will focus my comments on how the digital revolution is changing oral history practice at the Centre for Oral History and Digital Story-telling, based at Concordia University, and specifically, in the Montreal Life Stories project. 'Life Stories of Montrealers Displaced by War, Genocide and Other Human Rights Violations', the project's full name, is comprised of forty university based researchers and community co-applicants as well as eighteen community partners, mainly from the city's Rwandan, Cambodian, Haitian and Jewish communities. Our five year project (www.lifestories montreal.ca) is developing a cross-disciplinary methodology that combines oral history with digital storytelling, searchable databases and memoryscapes. We are also using new media technology to bridge distance within the project.

COLLABORATIVE ENVIRONMENTS
I would now like to shift from the general to the specific. *The Montreal Life Stories* project received a five-year grant from the "Community-University Research Alliance" (CURA) programme of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), the main funder of academic research in Canada. The CURA programme is a special one in that communities are supposed to become partners in research and not just objects of study.

HISTOIRES DE VIE MONTRÉAL
MONTREAL LIFE **STORIES**

Community participation in the research process must therefore be real and sustained. In other words, it is the perfect grant for community-engaged oral historians who believe in the power of 'knowing with' rather than simply 'knowing about'.[5] It also provided us with a challenge: how to carry forward the notion of 'shared authority' from the interview to subsequent stages of the research process? How do we include a wider circle in the conversation? The core principle of the Life Stories project is sharing authority. You might call it our prime directive.

Michael Frisch popularized the term 'shared authority' in 1990 to describe the authority of the interview.[6] Unlike the traditional authority of the historian which is based on distance – the more the better – the authority of the interview is derived from the training, questions, and distance of the interviewer AND the lived experience and storytelling ability of the interviewee. Sharing authority is a complex process. According to Frisch, 'A commitment to sharing authority is a beginning, not a destination. There are no easy answers or formulas and no simple lessons'.[7]

To reflect more on university-community collaboration, the *Life Stories* project sponsored a February 2008 conference on sharing authority in research. We wanted to see how other projects shared interpretive power; and what new media offered community-engaged oral history. The resulting special issue of the *Journal of Canadian Studies*, published earlier this year, emphasized that collaboration need not end once the audio or video recorder is turned off.[8] Going digital often means making collaboration a core practice. In her contribution to this theme issue, film-maker Elizabeth Miller wrote that scholars generally focus on the production-side of things: producing books, articles, films, and other outcomes.[9] Once one work is completed, we move to the next. What would happen, she asks, if academics spent ninety per cent of our time finding ways to connect with various publics? The same point can and should be made about oral history. Collection is not enough.

In practice, the technological choices for our project were very much informed by our commitment to a shared conversation. Yet one of the most challenging problems afflicting large projects such as ours is that of cohesion – how do we ensure that there is a project-wide conver-

Hearing Community Voices: Holocaust survivor Lisolette Ivry responding to a public screening of a digital story during the Montreal Human Rights Film Festival; Emmanuelle Sonntag hosting our weekly radio programme; one of our training workshops.

New Media and Collaboration: Base Camp Software.

sation while still working in our smaller working groups and committees? The project has seven working groups – four organized around specific cultural communities and three others that are organized around a specific field of inquiry (Refugee Youth, Performance, Education). How do we avoid becoming seven smaller projects?

A related problem is one of hierarchy. In large projects, university professors often become managers of research instead of producers of it. I call this the 'trickle-down theory' of academia. Too often, graduate students are doing the bulk of the research. This pattern is particularly problematic in oral history projects where the emotional connection and deep listening of the interview is paramount. Early-on, we adopted a policy that everyone involved in the project would participate in the interviewing as either interviewers or videographers. And, I mean everyone: co-applicants, collaborators, staff, interns, volunteers, affiliates. Our hope was that everyone would then feel it 'in their chests' and it would further unite the project.

Our second decision was to adopt 'Base Camp' project management software. The name Base Camp conjures up an image of hardy mountaineers battling wind and snow as they climb Mount Everest. A proprietary service hosted on the company's own server, Base Camp has become the project's private online world – each working group and committee has a space set aside for it. Our to-do lists, timelines, and

files are in this space, as is much of our email correspondence. The 'People' section shows everyone in the project, about 130 people (give or take a few).

When setting up our account, we could have organised ourselves as a hierarchy – limiting access. Ordinary team members might have been restricted to their working group section. Those of us on the Coordinating Committee would of course see everything. Yet in the spirit of transparency and sharing authority, we decided that every team member would have complete access to the site. Nothing would be hidden. Folks would work in their own working group but could visit any other part of the project whenever they wished. We hoped that this would cultivate a project-wide sensibility. Base Camp also documents the process – the roads not taken, internal debate and so on. All of this will be part of the permanent archival record.[10]

We also created interpretative spaces within Base Camp. The project's transcripts, chronologies and abstracts can all be found there, reports too, but I want to return to how we tied Base Camp to our interviewing process. In order to break out of the collection mind-set, we required all of our interviewers and videographers to file a blog in Base Camp within 24 hours of the interview. There are therefore two reflections for each and every interview session, project-wide. It has become a remarkable interpretative space.

Several hundred reports have already been posted, including blogs from all seven working groups. But it could be even better. We would like to reach a point when other team members read incoming blogs and comment on them, asking questions and so on. This would transform this part of Base Camp from a reporting space to a vital space of project-wide exchange. New media tools like Base Camp provide oral historians with the means to manage large-scale projects in a transparent and cooperative way. I would go so far as to call Base Camp a community-building tool, if approached in the spirit of sharing authority.

DIGITAL STORYTELLING

I would now like to move to the ways in which the *Life Stories* project is using new media to engage various publics. One 'platform' for participatory oral history is digital storytelling on the internet.[11]

Our interest in coupling digital storytelling with oral history originated in our commitment to find ways to share interpretative power with the interviewee in a meaningful way. We were also looking for ways to use the oral history interviews as a catalyst for public dialogue and political action – to get their stories 'out there'. Digital storytelling has recently been described as the emerging 'signature pedagogy' for the 'new' humanities.[12] Writing in the journal *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, Rina Benmayer praises digital storytelling's ability to integrate critical thought and creative practice. Digital storytelling is at the 'crossroads' of the creative and the analytical, empowering students and communities in the process.
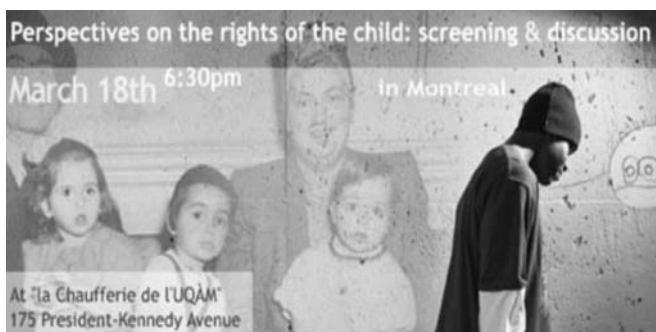
So what is it? Digital storytelling is the act of narrating one's self through multimedia, using widely available image editing software such as Adobe Premiere or Power Point 'to blend together digitized still photographs and narrative to create short, evocative, and informational multimedia pieces'.[13] These are usually highly personal and emotive stories. Digital storytelling is a multivalent term, 'referring variously to hypertext fiction, computer game narratives, and various artist-led forms of narrative presentation using multimedia and the Internet'.[14] None the less, digital storytelling is usually associated with the short autobiographical multimedia narratives produced during collaborative workshops, a methodology developed at the University of California (Berkeley) by the Center for Digital Storytelling (www.storycenter.org).[15] Typically, these workshops begin with each participant providing a brief introduction and 'preview' to the story that they hope to tell.[16] The facilitators then take workshop participants through the 'seven elements' defining a digital

story: point of view, dramatic question, emotional content, voice-over, soundtrack, economy and pacing. Participants then form into a 'story circle' where digital story concepts are shared, and feedback given. Workshop participants are asked to write a script of 250 words. Once this is completed, they record their voice reading these words and select the still-images. The workshop ends with a final screening of the digital stories.[17] As always, there is a British-connection. In 2001 CDS-trained Daniel Meadows established the BBC's *Capture Wales* digital storytelling project (www.bbc.co.uk/capturewales) that saw a mobile production bus gather hundreds of stories which were then posted online.[18]

However, the top-down and highly institutionalized model propagated by the CDS has its critics. Jean Burgess, for example, notes that 'distribution channels for digital stories remain limited and frequently are under the control of the institutions that provided the workshops'.[19] Unlike Web 2.0 environments such as You Tube, Flickr, and Facebook, which are characterized by self-directed expression, this workshop-based approach is heavily scripted.[20]

So how then does digital storytelling connect with oral history? To be sure, oral history audio or video clips are becoming a regular feature of many websites. How each clip is selected and by whom is of central importance. From the outset, the *Montreal Life Stories* project has enjoyed a formal relationship with CitizenShift and Paroles Citoyenne, the National Film Board of Canada's participatory web sites dedicated to citizen engagement and social change. Since 2004, these web-based initiatives have explored 'today's crucial issues through films, photography, articles, blogs and podcasts'. This outstanding example of media for social change was inspired by the NFB's 'Challenge for Change' programme of the 1960s that involved communities in the documentary film-making process.

The NFB was brought into our project by a faculty member working in education technology. Its role was therefore initially conceived in pedagogical terms – an online database of interviews 'tagged' for teachers, matching stories with the curriculum requirements of Quebec. At first, the partnership was therefore framed as an online archive rather than as a digital storytelling initiative. It took the project, and myself quite frankly, some time to realize what this partnership afforded us: namely, global reach and a way to extend our relationship with interviewees beyond the interview itself. Here, the process of creating the digital story is critically important. We could simply take stories out of the interviews, unilaterally, and produce digital stories that speak to us. But I think it is far more inter-

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Poster for the public screening during the Montreal Human Rights Film Festival.

esting to work with interviewees in the selection of the clips. After the interview, we ask survivors: what story would you like to tell the world? This question forms the starting point of the digital story-making process. I therefore agree with Rina Benmayor when she writes that without community or collaboration, 'the digital stories would not be as deep and powerful as they are'.[21]

According to our guidelines, interested interviewees are matched with tech-savvy young people who work together to produce the digital story for the NFB web site. Up to the present time (June 2009), the project has 'produced' thirty-six digital stories, 21 in English and 15 in French. There is a great diversity in content, form and process. The most substantive digital stories are those created by the Refugee Youth Working Group and a 35-minute video entitled 'Disrupted Childhood' produced by a team of five 'digital storytelling' student interns earlier this year. I would like to speak briefly about each of these initiatives.

Last autumn, eleven refugee youth, ages sixteen to twenty, participated in a ten week-long youth media workshop at the Maison des Jeunes in the Cote-des-Neiges district of Montreal. Led by film-maker Elizabeth Miller, and co-facilitated by a youth worker active in the Canadian Council for Refugees, the workshops focussed specifically on photography and the visual image. According to Gracia Jalea, a student facilitator:

> In addition to learning valuable media production skills, participants were afforded the opportunity to share their personal stories as refugee youth living in Montreal. Through photography and video, our participants shared their personal histories, their cultures, their families, their friends, their communities, their social environments, their schools, their passions, their concerns and their hopes for the future.[22]

In effect, the project used young people's interest in digital media to bridge the social

distance and to create a space for digital story-telling. Since then, the project has partnered with a male refugee reception centre for new arrivals. Participants are asked to draw 'home' and to share a story about the image. One would be hard pressed to find a more emotive place than home. The ethical issues involved in these kinds of collaborations are of course pervasive.

For its part, the 'Disrupted Childhood' initiative came as a result of an invitation of the NFB to screen an extended digital story to mark the 20th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child during Montreal's Human Rights Film Festival. It was with this very specific objective in mind that the team was given the task of identifying six child survivors from a range of cultural communities who had already been interviewed and who agreed to participate. Each intern then met with one or two interviewees to do the initial selection of stories. I must say it was wonderful to see Rosalind Franklin meeting with Yehudi Linde-man, a Holocaust survivor, in the oral history lab. Both had their earphones on watching one of the five interview sessions that I had conducted with Yehudi. Rosalind later reported on this encounter in her bi-weekly internship report: 'Our first meeting is three and a half hours. Intense. We are editing the story, segmenting it into two. First, mother and son. Second, the senses.' These two themes would represent the strands of his story that were woven into the 35-minute video. While this initial step in the production of the digital story was a continuation of the sharing authority ideal, subsequent ones were more typical of video editing. The screening drew a large crowd, including two of the child survivors. Both were part of the panel of discussants that followed.

To reflect more on the process, we asked the interns to prepare a workshop during International Sharing Life Stories Day on May 16. To this end, they prepared a power-point proposal that asked us to extend the notion of co-creation to subsequent stages of the digital story-making process. Entitled 'sharing authority: a tale, a quest and a test', the power point slides note that 'Gina' – our fictional interviewee – starts off as the authority and the teller of her own story. Her authority, however, fades as the story progresses. By the end, Gina is a 'facsimile of herself'.

The interns recommended that the post-production process become more 'seamless' and 'transparent' to better chronicle the history of survivor engagement in the post-production process. Influenced by the work of Julie Cruik-shank and Alicia J. Rouverol, they suggested that the project turn to workshops to provide the space for 'reciprocal ethnography' whereby

interviewees are engaged in the interpretation of their own interviews.[23] For example, the draft digital story could be played-back to interviewees and revised accordingly. Central to their proposal was the idea of 'shared authority coordinators' who would accompany individual interviewees through the process. It is a model that puts a post-production person at the centre of the process, rather than the interviewee- interviewer relationship, which I have reservations about. I also think that there is only so much that one can ask of interviewees. That said, it is a good example of the creative thinking about sharing authority in practice that is going on within the project. We are now developing a 'framework document' that will outline our emerging approach to digital story creation.

THE *STORIES MATTER* ORAL HISTORY DATABASE

Despite the paradigm shift underway, oral history is still a field that is very much grounded in traditional archiving and document production.[24] Transcriptions have long been at the core of our post-interview methodology and the key to accessing pre-existing interviews. We don't generally spend much time with the oral source itself. We therefore lose orality at an early stage in the research process. Too often, we don't know what to do with the voice so we turn to the transcript. We know that the voice is important, but how do we study it? We know that body language and facial expression are highly meaningful, but how do we begin to read these? In part, oral history database tools promise to return the power of voice to oral history.

More than any other person, Michael Frisch has voiced his concerns with transcription. The spoken word is simply not the same as the written word – too much is lost in translation. Many of you are no doubt familiar with Frisch's article on the digital revolution published a few years ago in the second edition of the *Oral History Reader*.[25] You may, however, not be aware of a more recent article that Frisch wrote for a qualitative methods handbook. In many ways, it is a more interesting critique of our attachment to transcription. Like others, he writes that the digital revolution is opening up new ways to 'work directly and easily' with recorded interviews.[26] Using these new database tools, the interviews can be searched, sorted, browsed, accessed, and the meaning mapped.

Michael Frisch has dedicated the last decade of his life to this quest. He formed Randforce Associates, a start-up consulting firm based at the University of Buffalo's innovation centre, and identified Interclipper software as the best existing database tool available. Interclipper (www.interclipper.com) is a proprietary software designed for mass marketing companies interested in drawing conclusions from focus groups. Randforce became the license holder and began to work with oral history projects interested in the new technology. Ruth Meyerowitz and Christine Zinni's project on women trade unionists built one of the first interclipper databases and tested it in the university classroom. In 2004, students divided into groups to work with interviews – clipping, annotating and indexing.[27] The results were promising:

> The effect of close listening to the testimonies of the activists afforded by the new media format is evidenced by how well students remember details of the narrators' stories. Fulfilling much of its democratic promise, the program continues to lend itself to appreciation of not only women's subjective experiences, but impact on the public sphere.[28]

At around the same time, I began to correspond with Michael Frisch about the possibilities of Interclipper as a research tool. As a result, we began to build a database of displaced paper mill workers using Interclipper software.[29] Our inaugural effort produced a modest database of 17 hours of videotape. In Autumn 2007 I assigned the graduate students in my oral history seminar the job of writing a critique of the database. Each student was issued a CD-Rom and the task of interacting with it. While I have published on the results elsewhere, I can say that the students exhibited a great deal of anxiety about losing the life history context. Even though the students completed a two-hour training workshop and had access to a training guide, they admitted to feeling disoriented and disconnected from the life stories before them. Many lost track of who they were listening to as they surfed the database. The exercise raised the fundamental issue of the loss of life history context in shifting to database. Yes, as Frisch advises, oral historians can interact with the source, directly, in a database environment – but what is lost in the process? How might we re-imagine the software so that we might retain the life history context? As proprietary software, we of course were powerless to modify Interclipper in any way. We were also keenly aware of the financial cost of the licensing fees. We also realized that the Interclipper software was ill-suited for our *Life Stories* project, as it operated on a local computer rather than on a server.

It was at this point that we decided to take a leap of faith and develop an open-source database, in-house at the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling. I can tell you that we were not ready to consider this possibility two years

Stories Matter Workshop, International Sharing Life Stories Day, May 2009.

earlier. The task seemed too daunting. I am not a computer programmer and would have to rely on someone else. Up to this point, we conceived of our database work in terms of being a 'user', or perhaps as a 'test bed' for the innovations of others, not as a source of software development. Our experience with Interclipper, and our enriching conversations with Michael Frisch, however, gave us a far clearer idea of what we wanted in database software.

We therefore decided to employ a software engineer on an eight month employment contract as well as two 'oral historians' who would be embedded in the software development team. Our intention was to create a tool 'by and for' oral historians. A larger circle of people, including myself, met every two weeks for eight months. All team members posted their reflections on the *Stories Matter* web site over the life of the project's first phase in 2008-9 (http://storytelling.concordia.ca/storiesmatter).[33]

As always, there were challenges. We soon faced a choice: do we develop a downloadable version like Interclipper or should the proposed tool be web-based? On the one hand, a downloadable version would be of use to single inter-viewer-researchers, including grad students, without access to a server. On the other hand, an online version of *Stories Matter* would be of far more use to oral history projects such as

Montreal Life Stories that needed multiple data-base builders and thus the ability to work simultaneously. A web-based version can also be more easily accessed by communities. It is a tough choice. In the end, we decided to do both. Phase one (the downloadable version) was completed in July and version 1.0 of Stories Matter is available for download. Phase two (the online version) is now underway and we expect to have it released by the end of 2009. I insisted on a digital tool that retained the life history context as much as possible. A short biography of the person speaking is therefore always on the screen, inviting you into the life behind the words. The *Life Stories* project has now begun to stream all our open access interviews into the software. We will then clip and index.

MEMORYSCAPES, AUDIO TOURS AND MENTAL MAPPING

The final dimension of new media and oral history that I want to explore in this paper is that of memoryscapes, or sound walks, that enable us to explore places in new ways, what Toby Butler has called the 'multisensory experience of place'.[31] Like others, Butler is interested in exploring how landscape and subjectivity intersect through the practice of walking. A growing number of research projects have sought to bring 'mobility' into the research

process, 'particularly in the investigation of "everyday" life practices and lifeworlds'.[32] Michel de Certeau's notion of 'spatial stories' is clearly resonating across the disciplines and is being matched with such location-aware technologies as GIS mapping and GPS (global positioning systems).[33] A memoryscape is the fusion of space and time, much like Doreen Massey's notion of place as a time-space envelope.[34] Places are not simply points on a map, but exist in time as well. Memoryscapes make this fusion explicit.[35]

Unfortunately, there has been relatively little scholarly cross-pollination between oral history and geography. Mark Riley and David Harvey point out in their introduction to a special issue of *Social and Cultural Geography* that in spite of the field's emphasis on memory, narrative and subjectivity – place has been 'largely treated by oral historians in a superficial, Euclidian, manner – a frame for research rather than an active part'.[36] We have, accordingly, not engaged much with the theoretical work into place and community. As a result, 'some of the most experimental and exciting work using sound and spatiality has come from the art world'.[37] A growing number of arts-based groups, for example, are exploring urban space through walks, games and mappings.[38]

Once confined to museums, audio tours have left the building and taken to the streets with the emergence of MP3 players and the iPod. These mobile technologies have 'opened up new realms of opportunity for people to narrate, layer and intervene in the experience of moving through place.'[39] As Charles Hardy III notes, '[t]hose who would author in sound must learn to "think" in sound.'[40] The text-based approach to telling stories advocated by the Center for Digital Storytelling is thus a far cry from the multi-media authorship of memoryscapes.

Two of the most exciting memoryscape projects that I have come across are located in London, England.[41] In 'Drifting' (www.memoryscape.org.uk), Toby Butler let the Thames determine the 'collision points' while floating down the river in a small skiff.[42] He allowed the river's current to select the sites: 'the flow gave me a strange, unfamiliar structure to my beach-combing of river-related memories. It gave me a fresh set of memory places.' The result is a three mile long walk along the Thames with 12 different sound points (comprising one hour of memories derived from 30 edited interviews). The second is Graeme Miller's LINKED, a trail along the M11 built through Hackney that caused the displacement of 1,000 people.[43] Miller's sound trail consists of recorded memories from the displaced, broadcast from twenty transmitters mounted on lamp posts along the route (www.linkedm11.info/). The voices of those displaced can be heard by passers-by who carry a small receiver.

Not surprisingly, a sense of loss has motivated a great deal of memory work in this field. This is certainly true for Canadian historian Joy Parr's Megaprojects New Media Project, which is exploring, among other things, the "lost villages" of the lower St. Lawrence River between Toronto and Montreal. When the St. Lawrence Seaway system was expanded in the 1950s to permit ocean-going vessels to navigate to the heart of the continent, water levels were raised, flooding coastal communities such as Iroquois, Ontario. As part of her project, Parr was invited to set up a mock version of the lost village-scape in a community hall and invited former residents to see it:

> Viewing these reconstructed streetscapes, local heritage activists were courteously critical and suggested a community consultation. I laid out my approximation of the drowned village on the bingo tables in the community hall and asked residents to walk amongst them making corrections with pens and Post-It notes. After a time of repositioning and mending with scissors and tape, a rough consensus emerged. A recent municipal amalgamation left the hall rarely used, and I was able to leave the streetscape in place and conduct the interviews there, following former residents who carried a small digital recorder as they spoke about what they remembered from their walks, through the seasons, to work and school, uptown and by the river. These prompts were profound triggers to recall.[44]

This community-engaged exercise was then combined with some new media ideas to produce an online lost-scape. The team attempted to find a 'middle ground' between the open-endedness of databases and the linearity of narrative. Parr's memoryscape of Iroquois therefore includes 'sense making strands of narrative' from the stories told in the community centre.

I have likewise seen this shift from text to authoring in sound in my own students. In 2007, for example, Jasmine St-Laurent and Nancy Rebelo produced the bus 55 audio tour. The idea was brilliant in its simplicity: Montrealers were invited to download a 35 minute audio recording of interviews conducted with members of various immigrant groups associated with St. Laurent Boulevard – the city's historic immigrant corridor – and to board city bus #55 in the Old Port area. As the bus travels northward along Saint Laurent, you can hear their stories, and perhaps see the city in a differ-

Sturgeon Falls Mill Closing Project
By: Steven High
Sturgeon Falls Ontario
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The Sturgeon Falls Mill-scape.

ent way. The project's web site also offers a downloadable pamphlet, a lesson plan and a research report.[45] Since then, other students have produced soundscapes, walking tours, and memory maps. Jessica Mills, for example, used 'zee maps' to map the memories of three long-time residents of Point-Saint-Charles, a working-class quarter of the city.[46] My own thinking in these matters has been profoundly influenced by my students.

For my own part, I have been working closely with Michael Klassen on a memoryscape of a closed and demolished paper mill in Sturgeon Falls, Ontario.[47] Like many other single-industry towns across Canada, Sturgeon Falls has been ravaged by the forestry crisis. In the wake of the mill's closure in 2002, we conducted sixty-five interviews with former workers. These interviews reveal a deep connection to the mill, as generations of family members worked within its walls. Interviewees were quick to emphasize that the mill's closing was a collective tragedy that belonged to no one individual. People spoke in terms of the collective 'we' whenever possible. It therefore made sense to connect these individual life stories, to reunite them in effect, with the mill.

The project also benefited from my collaboration with photographer David Lewis. We got permission to photograph the interior of the mill as it was prepared for demolition. We also had access to 1,200 photos of the demolition taken by former mill worker Hubert Gervais who visited the site every single day during the six months that it took to pulverize the mill and cart away the debris. Other photographs and documents were copied from dust-covered boxes in people's basements.

With the help of the mill's blueprint, we set out to connect people's stories to the factory floor. Visitors can tour the mill from one area to the next hearing audio clips telling of work process, camaraderie, labour-management relations, and workplace accidents. To demarcate change and conflict, we located stories about the mill's closing and the aftermath outside the factory gate and beyond the fence-line where cars were often parked during the demolition of the mill. Old timers would sit there for hours watching the mill go down. Stories of resistance are there too, located at the factory gates where protesters demanded that the mill be re-opened in the weeks following the mill's closure.

While making memoryscapes was not part of the original vision of the *Montreal Life Stories* project, it has since emerged as a new dimension of our research. We are in the process of developing a series of free walking tours along the lines of the popular 'Jane's Walk'. Named for urban theorist Jane Jacobs, these community walks are designed to help 'knit people together. In 2009, there were 263 tours in 24 towns and cities including 74 in Toronto alone.[48] These tours explored a wide range of urban landscapes, 'from social housing slated for redevelopment, to areas with a rich architectural and cultural heritage, to teen hangouts and secret gardens.'[49] Anyone can be a tour guide – opening the door to a wide range of subjectivities. For example, 'The Inside Scoop on Jane & Finch' tour was led by a group of young residents who wanted people to understand the neighbourhood as something more than its reputation for gangs and youth violence. At this stage, we are thinking of ways to engage with people's transnational stories of trauma and displacement and connect them to the Montreal neighbourhoods in which we live. We are using social mapping exercises to map out where they live and hope to incorporate arts and new media. At this point, I have no idea how we will be approaching next year's Jane's Walk. That is what makes it so exciting!

CONCLUSION

To conclude, we have come a long way since I conducted my first oral history interview in 1988. I had just returned to my hometown of Thunder Bay (an isolated resource town on the North Shore of Lake Superior in Northern Ontario) for the summer months after my first year away at university. Upon being hired by the local museum as an 'oral historian' (at minimum wage), I was given an impressive number of blank audio cassettes, a very old analogue tape recorder, and a clear set of instructions: 'go interview old people'. I had no training of any kind. Even so, it was the best summer job that I ever had. The recording devices that I have used have changed since that initial encounter. I switched from audio to video

in the mid-1990s and made the leap to digital video five or six years ago. These changes are not insignificant, but I see a great deal of continuity in the interview space itself. It is *after the interview* where my practice has undergone the most change. The meeting of oral history, new media and the arts represents an incredible opportunity for us to tell stories without losing the voice of our interviewees. It also opens up exciting new possibilities for community engagement and sharing authority after the interview.

NOTES

1. Michael Frisch, 'Three Dimensions and More: Oral History Beyond the Paradoxes of Method', in Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy (eds), *Handbook of Emergent Methods* (Guildford Press, 2008), pp 222.

2. Helen Klaebe and Marcus Foth, 'Capturing Community Memory with Oral History and New Media: The Sharing Stories Project', in *Proceedings of 3rd International Conference of the Community Informatics Research Network*, Prato, Italy. 2006. Accessed from: http://eprints.qut/edu.au.

3. Michael Frisch, "Three Dimensions and More: Oral History Beyond the Paradoxes of Method," in Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy, eds. *Handbook of Emergent Methods,* New York: Guilford Press, 2008, pp 223.

4. Alistair Thomson, 'Four Paradigm Transformations in Oral History', *Oral History Review*, vol 34, no 1, 2006, pp 70.

5. I have been greatly influenced by the work of Henry Greenspan, On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: *Recounting and Life History,* Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1998.

6. Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral History,* Albany: State University of New York, 1990. See also the special issue of Oral History Review on sharing authority: vol 30, no 1, 2003. For Canada, see Steven High, 'Sharing Authority in the Writing of Canadian History: The Case of Oral History', in Christopher Dummitt and Michael Dawson (eds) *Contesting Clio's Craft: New Directions and Debates in Canadian History,* London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2009, pp 21-46.

7. Michael Frisch, 'Sharing Authority: Oral History and the Collaborative Process', *Oral History Review*, vol 30, no 1, 2003, pp 111-112.

8. Steven High, 'Sharing Authority: An Introduction', *Journal of Canadian Studies,* vol 43, no 1, Winter 2009, pp 12-34.

9. Elizabeth Miller, 'Building Participation in the Outreach for the Documentary The Water Front', *Journal of Canadian Studies,* vol 43, no 1, Winter 2009, pp 59-86.

10. The East Mims Oral History Project in Florida asks how technology can be used to document process. Natalie M. Underberg uses the phrase 'reciprocal technology' to describe an ethnographic research methodology incorporating new media. Natalie M. Underberg, 'Virtual and Reciprocal Ethnography on the Internet: The East Mims Oral History Project Website', *Journal of American Folklore,* vol 119, no 473, 2006, pp 301-11.

11. Helen Klaebe, Marcus Foth, Jean Burgess, and Mark Bilandzic, 'Digital Storytelling and History Lines: Community Engagement in a Master-Planned Development'. In *Proceedings 13th International Conference on Virtual Systems and Multimedia,* Brisbane, 2007. Accessed from: http://eprints.qut.edu.au .

12. Rina Benmayor, 'Digital Storytelling as a Signature Pedagogy for the New Humanities', *Arts and Higher Education,* no 7, 2008, p 188.

13. Christopher Fletcher and Carolina Cambre, 'Digital Storytelling and Implicated Scholarship in the Classroom', *Journal of Canadian Studies,* vol 43, no 1, Winter 2009, p 110. For a sense of its pedagogical value at the middle school level, see Pauline Pearson Hathorn, 'Using Digital Storytelling as a Literacy Tool for the Inner City Middle School Youth', *The Charter Schools Resource Journal,* vol 1, no 1, Winter 2005, pp 32-38.

14. Helen Klaebe, Marcus Foth, Jean Burgess, and Mark Bilandzic, 'Digital Storytelling and History Lines: Community Engagement in a Master-Planned Development'. In *Proceedings 13th International Conference on Virtual Systems and Multimedia,* Brisbane, 2007. Accessed from: http://eprints.qut.edu.au

15. Jean Burgess, 'Hearing Ordinary Voices: Cultural Studies, Vernacular Creativity and Digital Storytelling', *Journal of Media and Cultural Studies,* vol 20, no 2, 2006, p 207.

16. Brian Landry and Mark Guzdial recently examined the workshop methodology employed by the Center for Digital Storytelling: 'It entails writing and recording a script, editing digital photos and video, and combining these media to present a coherent personal story. More importantly, digital storytelling involves critical reflection on personal life events to establish their meaning.' Brian M. Landry and Mark Guzdial, 'Learning from Human Support: Informing the Design of Personal Digital Story-Authoring Tools'. Canadian visual anthropologist Christopher Fletcher suggests that 'working in narrative and visual modes generates a complex intellectual engagement that is at once creative, socially oriented, and pedagogical.' Fletcher and Cambre, 2009, p 111.

17. Benmayor, 2008, p 188. The CDS's methodology is outlined in Joe Lambert, *The Digital Storytelling Cookbook,* Berkeley: Center for Digital Storytelling, 2007. See also: Joe Lambert, *Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community,* Berkeley, California: Digital Diner Press, 2002.

18. D. Meadows, 'Digital Storytelling: Research-Based Practice in New Media', *Visual Communication,* vol 2, no 2, 2004, pp 189-193; See also: Jenny Kidd, 'Capturing Wales: Digital Storytelling at the BBC', PhD, Cardiff, 2005.

19. Helen Klaebe, Marcus Foth, Jean Burgess, and Mark Bilandzic, 'Digital Storytelling and History Lines: Community Engagement in a Master-Planned Development'. In *Proceedings 13th International Conference on Virtual Systems and Multimedia,* Brisbane, 2007. Accessed from: http://eprints.qut.edu.au

20. Helen Klaebe, 'The problems and possibilities of using digital storytelling in public history projects', In *Proceedings XIII International Oral History Conference – Dancing with Memory,* Sydney, 2006, p 9. Accessed from http://eprints.qut.edu.au. See Helen Klaebe's doctoral thesis which examines new approaches to collaborative public history using arts and new media: 'Sharing Stories: Problems and Potentials of Oral History and Digital Storytelling and the Public Historian's Role in Constructing the Public History of a Developing Place', PhD, Queensland University of Technology, 2006.

21. Benmayor, 2008, p 198.

22. Gracia Jalea, 'Reflections on the Cote-des-Neiges Refugee Youth Workshops', Montreal: Life Stories Occasional Paper, no 2, February 2009. www.lifestoriesmontreal.ca

23. Julie Cruikshank, *Life Lived Like a Story,* Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1990; Alecia Rouverol, 'Collaborative Oral History in a Correctional Setting: Promise and Pitfalls', Oral History Review vol 30, no 1, 2003, p 66.

24. Michael Frisch, 'Three Dimensions and More: Oral History Beyond the Paradoxes of

Method', in *Historical Context of Emergent Method and Innovation*, 2008, pp 221-238.

25. Michael Frisch, 'Oral History and the Digital Revolution: Toward a Post-Documentary Sensibility', in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader,* 2nd edition, London: Routledge, 2006, pp 102-14.

26. Michael Frisch, 'Three Dimensions and More: Oral History Beyond the Paradoxes of Method', in *Historical Context of Emergent Method and Innovation*, 2008, pp 221-238.

27. Ruth Meyerowitz and Christine F. Zinni, 'The Medium and the Message: Oral History, New Media, and a Grassroots History of Working Women', *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*, vol 37, no 3, 2008-9, p 310.

28. Meyerowitz and Zinni, 315.

29. Steven High and David Sworn, 'After the Interview', forthcoming in the *Journal of Digital Studies,* vol 1, no 1, 2009.

30. The team members for phase one of the project included Jacques Langlois, the software programmer, as well as Stacey Zembrzycki, Kristen O'Hare and myself as the 'embedded oral historians'. Erin Jessee, Claudia Gama and Alison Eades were brought on-board for database development and 'de-bugging'.

31. Toby Butler, 'Memoryscape: How Audio Walks Can Deepen Our Sense of Place by Integrating Art, Oral History and Cultural Geography', *Geography Compass*, vol 1, no 3, 2007, pp 360-72.

32. Jane Ricketts Hein, James Evans, Phil Jones, 'Mobile Methodologies: Theory, Technology and Practice', *Geography Compass*, no 2, 2008, pp 1, 3. Shelley and Urry, 2006, p 216, have heralded a new 'mobilities paradigm'. They point to six bodies of theory to buttress their central point. First, the work of Simmel suggests the human will to connection links people and places together.

Second, science and technological studies emphasizes networks rather than things. Third, the spatial turn in the humanities and social sciences: social processes take place somewhere. Fourth, the sensual experience, emotional geographies and the study of the body. Fifth, social network theory emphasizes unpredictability.

33. The potential of GIS is explored in a special issue of *Environment and Planning A,* vol 38, no 11, 2006.

34. Doreen Massey, 'Places and their Pasts', *History Workshop Journal*, vol 39, no 1, 1995, pp 182-192; see also: Brian Osborne, 'Visualizing Public Memory', *Topia*, no 8, 2006, pp 117-120.

35. Mark Nuttall, *Arctic Homeland: Kinship, Community and Development in Northwest Greenland*, London: Bellhaven Press, 1992.

36. Mark Riley and David Harvey, 'Talking Geography: on oral history and the practice of geography', *Social and Cultural Geography,* vol 8, no 3, June 2007, pp 1-4.

37. Toby Butler, 'A Walk of Art: The Potential of the Sound Walk as Practice in Cultural Geography', *Social and Cultural Geography,* vol 7, no 6, December 2006, p 889.

38. Geographer David Pinder edited a special issue of *Cultural Geographies* on the 'Arts of Urban Exploration'. His introduction examines how arts-based groups were exploring urban space through walks, games, and mappings. Brooklyn-based TOYSHOP, for example, has undertaken a series of street interventions: 'This includes practices of studying, representing and telling stories about cities; it also involves ways of sensing, feeling and experiencing their spaces differently'. David Pinder, 'Arts of Urban Exploration', *Cultural Geographies*, no 12, 2005, p 386.

39. Toby Butler, 'Memoryscape: How Audio Walks Can Deepen Our Sense of Place by Integrating Art, Oral History and Cultural Geography', *Geography Compass*, vol 1, no 3, 2007, p 360.

40. Charles Hardy III, 'Authoring in Sound: Aural History, Radio and the Digital Revolution', in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader,* 2nd ed., London: Routledge, 2006, p 400.

41. Butler, 'A Walk of Art', 2006, p 901.

42. Butler, 'A Walk of Art', 2006, p 902.

43. Toby Butler and Graeme Miller, 'Linked: A Landmark in Sound, a Public Walk of Art', *Cultural Geographies*, vol 12, no 1, 2005, pp 7-88. For Janet Cardiff's London sound walks see David Pinder, 'Ghostly Footsteps: Voices, Memories and Walks in the City', *Cultural Geographies,* vol 8, no 1, 2001, pp 1-19.

44. Joy Parr, Jessica Van Horssen, and Jon van der Veen, 'The Practice of History Shared across Differences: Needs, Technologies, and Ways of Knowing in the Megaprojects New Media Project', *Journal of Canadian Studies,* vol 43, no 1, 2009, p 39.

45. The impact of this MA project was enormous, resulting in radio interviews and a three page story in the Montreal Gazette (the main English-language newspaper in the city). http://storytelling.concordia.ca/workingclass/

46. Jessica Mill's "What's The Point" can be found at http://storytelling.concordia.ca/workingclass/

47. The mill-scape can be found at http://storytelling.concordia.ca/high/sturgeon_falls/index.html

48. Centre for City Ecology's Jane Walk Web Site. www.janeswalk.net. Accessed 18 June 2009.

49. www.janeswalk.net/what_is"_janes_walk . Accessed 18 June 2009.