Looking for Africville – Complementary Visual Constructions of a Contended Space

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Abstract

This paper explores the historical sources, personal narratives and representations of Africville, an area beside the Bedford Basin near Halifax in Nova Scotia which has been the site of a struggle for social justice and reparation since it was destroyed by the city of Halifax authorities over 40 years ago. The article examines the complex construction of the place as a source of identity and protest, the persistence of the community in memories and stories retrieved in walking the site with a former resident. Through careful consideration of video and still images, artworks and archive maps, the study traces the intersection of different discourses and shows how visual representations and their interpretation produce a complex understanding of place. Images, it is argued, have a different ontology to writing and produce a gradually unfolding, parallel argument. Africville is considered through a combination of traditional written texts, visual ethnographic sources and popular cultural signs, producing a complementary and intersubjective appreciation of a place and its lines of possibility.

Keywords: Visual Methods, the Sociological Imagination, Dialectical Images, Environmental Racism, Traumascaping, Narrative Mediation, Walking Ethnography, Popular Representation, Discursive Structures

Introduction

1.1 This paper and embedded video sequences provide an opportunity to consider some features of visual research while at the same time exploring some facets of the story of Africville; an autonomous community of largely African Canadian settlers in Nova Scotia. Africville was stigmatised, neglected and eventually destroyed, but lives on in the collected narratives of one time residents, photographic and video archives, and a plethora of papers and popular culture representations of the area. At the centre of this case study is a piece of video ethnography produced by myself and Lloyd Samuels, as members of a small research team, when we visited the area in 2007. We were privileged to be granted an interview with active, former resident, Irvine Carvery, and a video interview was recorded as we walked the length of the site.

1.2 Four of these video sequences are embedded in this paper as YouTube clips. The intention behind this combination of visual materials; video and still images alongside some theoretical and textual analyses of popular cultural, is to develop a more nuanced reading of a case study. Recent discussions of visual methods suggest that it is possible to present 'parallel' (Banks 2009) but complementary arguments about the case in hand. I must confess from the start that the video samples I have included are far from being exemplars; they are of inferior visual and sound quality. We had two small, basic video cameras, and no external microphones or proper sound recording equipment, so this was an impromptu and improvised situation which we covered to the best of our ability. In addition, we also had to cope with the prevailing conditions of walking on a blustery day which at times rendered the sound quality very poor. Nevertheless, I believe they provide raw sensory evidence of the value of visualised stories and the power of research taking place in context. Especially significant is the landscape itself (or the little that is visible in the video) which provides coordinates for the stories, demonstrating that the space in question is contested; the subject of different constructions. Consequently, while I will allude in several places to the video sequences and what takes place in them – I prefer for them

to run alongside the written discussion rather than attempting to describe them in detail. Some visual producers feel passionately that the power of the visual should not be subordinated to written language but their 'significant autonomy' should be maintained while forging the best complementary relationship to better illuminate the research context (see Canals in Spencer 2011: 233) It is hoped that the examination of this case might highlight features of visual research which can contribute towards a nuanced visual sociology of everyday life.

1.3 The paper centres around unfolding stories of Africville, the complex construction of place and identity, the importance of walking and movement, and how the intersection of many different discourses together construct contentious sites like Africville. Finally, I suggest (and this is nothing new) that the value and purpose of visual research for case studies like this one, is to better understand their complexity and the need to negotiate meaning between different discursive constructions, at both micro personal and broader societal levels. In turn this raises questions about what 'validity' is and how it might be achieved in visual ethnographic research. The discussion is arranged around four excerpts (4–5 minutes long) from an edited video interview with Irvine Carvery, a former resident of Africville and President of the Africville Genealogical Society, who is actively seeking justice and recompense for those people who were evicted from Africville in the 60s when the settlement was destroyed by the City of Halifax^[1]. In addition to a number of still images and some quotes extracted from the film, other images, maps and art works are included which demonstrates the importance of popular culture in mediating this story. The interview with Irvine took place on the site of Africville at his suggestion. The resulting video captured important aspects of the case, recording vivid personal narratives.

Problems of Interpretation

2.1 The meaning of the image is a perennial problem. Ultimately it appears difficult to corral the image within any simple theoretical bounds; it remains a mercurial and contradictory form of representation. The question of how photographic images constitute evidence has been widely debated. Chaplin (2005) asked: 'Do we really have to accept that 'photographic evidence' is a matter of cultural agreement – something that can be explained in detail as a dialectical relationship between image and caption?' Chaplin argues that constructionists insist that the image is polysemic; and therefore a necessarily negotiated text in contrast to their possible specificity and realism as evidence. However, this understandable frustration between the photograph as an iconic record or as a relativist construct implicitly open to interpretation, can disguise the importance of the image as *both*. After all, both aspects are demonstrably 'true'; the camera doesn't 'lie' but all the nuances of photographic craft; timing, lighting, angle, not to mention the whole panoply of post-production effects and devices, provide a pallet to modify the original image to suit the interior vision of the photographer. So while photographic images are undoubtedly explicit this is also a reason why they must be considered problematic. Photographs appear authentic and transparent, but this is frequently exploited and images can be a seductive form for persuasive, even propagandist, ends.

2.2 Nightingale and Cromby make the point that rather than rejecting realism and totally embracing constructionist relativism, a practical way forward comes from embracing: 'a critical realist ontology wherein referentiality and objectivity are possible, though always partial, limited and necessarily dependent upon further empirical and discursive revision. What this permits is: first, a consideration of the ways in which the processes of social construction can be seen as constitutive or formative of the ontological, as well as the epistemological; and, second, a conceptual and theoretical framework within which the evaluation as to the accuracy of our accounts becomes possible' (2001:710).

2.3 It is important to steer between a naively realist view of images as reaching into an untainted vision of social reality or conversely to become overly dismissive of visual representations as highly contrived as '...almost purely arbitrary constructions' (Pauwels, 2010: 572). As Luc Pauwels warns: '... many researchers (of both ends of the spectrum) are overlooking the vast expressive potential of visual representations that opens up the way to scholarly argumentation and new avenues of expressing the unspeakable and unquantifiable' (2010: 572–73).

2.4 As argued elsewhere (Spencer, 2010, 2011) C. Wright Mill's principles of 'the sociological imagination' (1959) are instructive for the interpretation of social phenomena emphasizing the implicit contradictions of personal and social historical observations; suggesting that understanding social reality requires the unpicking of complex discursive layers. When a specific place is contentious, and competing discourses are being produced from different subject positions, clearly any images produced are prone to be interpreted in a partial and partisan way. It also seems plausible to suggest that each of these claims to truth, emanating from particular contexts, traditions and power relations, need to be taken into account to produce a valid version of the hermeneutic of the place. The concept of the 'double hermeneutic' (Giddens, 1976) is useful as it recognizes that sociology 'deals with a universe which is already constituted within frames of meaning by social actors themselves, and interprets these within its own theoretical schemes, mediating ordinary and technical language' (Giddens, 1976: 162). The visual sociologist can use the specific minutiae of the image and the detailed examination of an event but must strive to understand 'the interplay of milieux with structure' (Mills, 1959: 246).

2.5 From a semiotic viewpoint images are rendered meaningful in the conventional codes of their beholders and these codes depend on 'available discourses' (Muecke, 1982) those social systems of knowledge production which to an extent create their own objects and guide interpretation at a particular point in time. The same image can be understood very differently at different points in time and place. Walter Benjamin (1999) used the term 'dialectical images' to indicate 'that moment produced by the collision of the objective forces of nature/culture and our own subjective experience as socio-

historical beings' (Szekeley 2006online). If images can be considered 'dialectics at a standstill' (Benjamin, 1999: 865) then visual sociology, with its insistence on seeking a synthesis of the macro socio-historical picture of social change and the individual's subjective experience of the local context is uniquely positioned to make a useful interpretation of such imagery.

2.6 This dialectical aspect of visual (or more properly – multisensory) sociology is valuable when exploring the experiences of place and community, and the images and objects which play a central role in defining our lives and sense of self. Identity is a focal point of the visual / multisensory dimension of social life because it is a construct which is in constant process of negotiation. The sensory monitoring of cultural interactions within ourselves and between ourselves and others is what Jenkins refers to as 'the internal-external dialectic of identification' (Jenkins, 1996: 20). Visual culture has been shown to play an important role in the process of identity construction (Hall, 1997; Van Dijck 2008; Spencer 2011) through which social meanings circulate in late capitalist society. The 'circuit of culture' proposed by Du Gay et al (1997) showed the implicit links between identity, production, consumption, regulation and representation, recognizing that industry, text and audience need to be considered together to understand how meanings are produced. The value of such models is to demonstrate how meaning is discursively regulated by institutional processes and rendered 'natural' and appropriate to the social context of the time, reflecting dominant and changing social and cultural values. If, for example, we were to examine the recent social unrest in English cities there are competing claims as to the cause and meaning of these 'riots' and how we ought to perceive them. Prime Minister David Cameron said that the rioting was largely about "pure criminality". Although he said that it was important not to "oversimplify", he specifically rejected the idea that they had anything to do with race, government cuts or poverty. "No, this was about behaviour," he said. "People showing indifference to right and wrong, people with a twisted moral code, people with a complete absence of self-restraint."

2.7 He said there had been a "slow-motion moral collapse" in parts of Britain. This was partly because politicians had been "too unwilling for too long to talk about what is right and what is wrong". Instead, politicians found it easier to operate in a "risk-free ground of moral neutrality". (Guardian August 15, 2011)

2.8 Images can be selectively chosen to vindicate a particular interpretation, and as Bob Franklin suggests 'the first victim isn't truth it's complexity' (Franklin 2004) and in cases like the recent rioting and looting asserting complexity or even any causality is considered weak, an excuse for behaviour which is just plain 'wrong'.

2.9 This digression hopefully introduces some concepts which might make better sense of the case of Africville, indicating that competing discursive frameworks may exist for the interpretation of the events which shaped that contested landscape. The video and image files constitute evidence, but how we respond to such imagery will depend upon our own subjectivities and the interplay of the meaning systems in operation in that context at the time. The reflexive nature of much ethnographic research, its intersubjectivity is important to acknowledge from the outset. The intersubjective construction of a phenomenon is an appropriate definition of ethnography, indeed ethnographic film could be thought of as inherently intersubjective (Spencer, 2005, 2006, Pink 2007). While this piece of research is built around the community of Africville, these video files are not a simple conduit for a participant to voice heartfelt truths about their lives, reaching in to capture unmediated insights of their inner lives, rather as Hall suggests cultural identity is: '...a production which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted *within not outside, representation*. (Hall 1990:222).

2.10 The request for an article which utilised embedded video, raised the question of how to disseminate the video which resulted from our walking ethnography. In many ways this edition determined the approach as YouTube was suggested as the medium of choice. The reflexivity which has been discussed above is inevitably more difficult at a distance, and the use of an online public platform required discussion with the person central to the case as well as with individuals who were involved in the research team as they are both visibly and audibly present in places, and the dynamics of the team were an important factor in the effectiveness of the interview on the day. While this video was produced several years ago I have maintained an occasional dialogue with Mr Carvery to discuss the use of some of this material for a text book (Spencer 2011). The use of video ethnography in a direct way, however, is limited if not relatively invisible in much writing about sociological research as Murthy (2009) suggests and it is important that the field of sociology continues to expand beyond more traditional logocentric bounds.

2.11 While this paper does not claim to present video ethnography in a fully realised sense it argues that the complementary uses of visual electronic media (along with other visual media) can give a more complete understanding of the representation of a specific case. My argument has been that using multiple data sources inevitably gives the work a rounder and more realistic sense in that it permits some understanding of the complex context, in this case around the construction of place through the often neglected field of popular culture. This form of *indirect* ethnography (Spencer 2011) Harper (2005: 748) suggests that 'one can argue that these cultural studies are ethnographic in an indirect manner; they are based on the analysis of the visual culture writ large'.

Where is Africville? Origins and Boundaries – History, Spatiality and Meaning

Africville 1: Origins

Figure 1. Africville (Seaview Park) from Google Earth view

3.1 Sociology was rather slow to recognise the importance of sense of place and environmental issues. Dunlap (2002) argues this is partly due to an aversion with biological and geographical determinisms. However, there is a growing body

sociological writing about the central importance of place in understanding social life (Relph, 1976; Gieryn 2000; Urry 2004) and a significant growth in the strand of environmental sociology (Bullard, 2000; Buttel, and Gijswijt, 2001; Dunlap 2002; Fielding, 2007) which examines divisive and often discriminatory uses of land. This discussion of Africville links to both of these literatures; seeing the importance of contextualising social life as 'emplaced', while also contributing to discussions of environmental racism. In addition, visual approaches to the terrain vividly reveal some of these complex relationships.

3.2 Seen from the satellite images available on Google Earth (above) the physical space; a strip of green park land along the southern shores of the Bedford Basin, is an innocuous area of only a few acres bisected by freight rail lines and lying under the span of the Murray Mackay Bridge over which the busy Circumferential Highway 111 flows. The settlement originated here on the edge of the city of Halifax, as one photograph by Bob Brooks (who documented life in the township before its destruction in the mid 60s) described it, Africville was 'In but not of the city'. The area is now signed as Seaview Park, and designated an 'off the leash' dog park.^[2]

3.3 The surface appearance of the area disguises the complex construction of the place itself. For outsiders (like the research team) it may have appeared as a green surface beneath which at least 200 years of history were hidden; a turfed area on which groups of Nova Scotians exercised their dogs. There were large numbers of dogs, and subjectively perhaps, there appeared to be an element of spatial domination on the part of these dog walkers. They seemed purposefully brash, their presence almost denying the past. As we walked by, the dog walkers, in a sort of loose alliance; talking together in groups up on the little hillock, almost a defensive position, as their dogs gambolled around us. Our party walking slowly by below them, clustered around the articulate former resident in his maroon jacket and baseball cap who pointed out features with his rolled up umbrella. The whole party's halting progress was being filmed by another member of our party walking slightly apart from us. This was a respectful, sedate transit across a space which was revealed to be crammed with memories and reflections of tragic significance.

3.4 This was only my impression, of course, and it's impossible to say how any of the other walkers would have perceived us; whether indeed this tension I felt was real or imagined. Perhaps it was that in trying to envisage the area as it once appeared beneath the present of the parkland; a moral vision too given the history we were learning about the traumatic nature of the space; a story of people being exposed to environmental racism and treated as 'less than human', and then, as their homes were bulldozed, families forcibly removed in garbage trucks.

3.5 Spatiality – and sense of place is arguably constructed over and again by different representations. Our walk and the video we made provide a particular sense of this strip of land beside the Bedford Basin.

3.6 Looking at the video clip from a 'simplistic inductivist' point of view (a term suggested by Silverman 2010) would be dangerously naïve and assume that: 'we need make no assumptions in studying the world, instead, hypotheses will somehow just emerge if we just 'hang out' with the aim of 'faithfully representing subjects' worlds' (pp 97–98). In the short video sequence Irvine discusses his views and the evidence for the origins of the Africville community. The video sequence is shot beneath the A. Murray Mackay Bridge which was one of the catalysts for the removal of the community. Significantly it becomes apparent that there is much more to the genealogy of the community than the 'official histories' denote. Most of these pinpoint the origins of the site as coinciding with the arrival of the so called 'black refugees' from the 1812 war. Irvine suggests that Africville probably originating some 50 years earlier than suggested by most official histories, although he hadn't been able, so far, to find evidence to 'lock that in'. This demonstrates the fact that much history is more speculative than we might believe. While the origins of the settlement are officially measured from 1848 when the first land purchases and other landmarks like the founding of the church are documented, as Irvine pointed out this suggests, rather, that there was already a community established which needed time to mature before such changes could occur.

Walking Ethnography 'You need to walk the land, you need to feel it'

Seeking Justice

Figure 2. Two stills from a video – the research team walks through the site passing resident Nova Scotians and their dogs

4.1 The quote in this heading came from Irvine's request to the United Nation's Special Rapporteur Doudou Diene whom he invited to come out to the site in 2003. In his words:

'I said you have to come with me to Africville, you need to walk the land you need to feel it, right? Because he was African. And I said well I know this man will understand what I'm talking about. So I brought him out here and we walked and we talked. And then when he did his report back, his recommendation was that the people of Africville be compensated, and that and – first of all be given an apology and compensated.'

It is significant that the belief in the land itself as a mute witness is very prevalent. Walking the site is somehow considered to give a measure of the issue at stake, allowing the incidents and collective experiences which happened there to be understood and envisaged in a more vivid, empathetic way.

4.2 The value of fieldwork and especially work which intends to record lived experiences in the way that ethnography does, is measured by the degree to which this is a reflexive and intersubjective process. As film maker Carol Warren (1982) usefully suggests:

'Fieldwork should be a two-way engagement in which the subjectivity of the 'other' has the opportunity for self-assertion and the political nature of the definition of 'otherness' would be exposed and thereby open to resistance, negotiation and redefinition.'

4.3 The use of walking to arrive at a shared understanding of an area, its routes, routines, rhythms is one form of action research which allows a more collaborative approach. Lee and Ingold argue that : "Walking around is fundamental to the everyday practice of social life" and "to much anthropological fieldwork" (2006, p.67). The further discuss how walking reveals the nature of the places and associations created by routes which people use. This understanding of: "...the

routes and mobilities of others"(2006, p.68) has been taken up effectively by several other practitioners of visual methods including Sarah Pink. In the case at hand Irvine clearly felt it was important to understand the situation on the ground. Despite its total transformation the area is a beacon transmitting its histories and its sense of loss; functioning as an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983) similar to the experience of Diaspora (which it is of course a part) which conveys the dream of a homeland, a shrine of the past where the flame of memory is kept alive for the migrant group.

4.4 Walking the land which was once a thriving community put us in the place of our narrator, and seeing it again on video made it more vividly sensory in a way that listening to a recorded interview or looking at stills of the area could not. The experience of walking through the site was rendered especially meaningful as the backdrop to Irvine's narrative, I felt I could almost see the houses, the children and the community's church, where now there were only people with so many dogs. Certainly the route that we traversed did not correspond to the original Africville roads and tracks, but for Irvine the area was alive with meaning and the recent park development was only a veneer overlaying the original site and its rich history of solidarity against the humiliation and neglect of the City of Halifax.

4.5 In her visual ethnographic research into the Slow City movement in the UK (Cittàslow) she examines the importance of audio visual media in the evolving development of place; arguing that peoples' 'routes and mobilities are both invested in, and produce, local visual cultures' and therefore, that a visual ethnography of these 'can inform academic knowledge of how local urban issues are articulated and contested.' The well worn pathways and memories embodied in experiences of Africvillians form part of a firmly emplaced, bodily knowledge. This tenacious sense of place is strongly articulated by people like Irvine and his brothers Eddie and Victor who have dedicated their lives to protesting the case of Africville. Eddie has been recently documented as the longest civil rights protest in Canadian history (see Lawlor 2010) some 40 years of active and largely 'on site' protest.

4.6 To understand the meaning of the land its sensory impact and the value of 'foot-led' video ethnography Pink suggests that the creation of place occurs at different stages:

'First, that the method of video recording research participants while "walking with" them creates place on different levels: in a phenomenological sense during the research encounter; in the form of the video representation of that encounter; and again through the subjectivity of the viewer of that video (Pink, 2007). Second, that place might be constituted similarly through a wider range of "shared" and multisensorial experiences and collaborative productions (between researcher and research participants) of (audio) visual ethnographic representations of urban contexts (Pink, 2008).

4.7 In this way our 'research encounter'; the walk across Africville during which the exchanges between Irvine and the team took place, listening and recording Irvine's stories and the resulting video sequences constitute one construction of place. As you the 'reader' view these videos and read this paper another interiorised, subjective appreciation of Africville is born. The third element in Pink's schema is also incorporated here because later as I explored the aspects of Africville described so vividly by Irvine Carvery, other, more generally shared, historical and cultural (audio-visual) representations of these stories came to light from various sources, providing a more nuanced complex sense of the area. While this study includes the use of YouTube this is not a form of digital ethnography (Murthy 2011) or a full engagement with the participatory culture of online platforms for digital video (Burgess and Green 2009). YouTube is used here largely as the site of preference for dissemination.

4.8 In the context of research into Africville and the legacy of social meaning which the traumatic experience of place or loss of place entails, the role of video ethnography could prove significant. By using Irvine's interview alongside archive footage the sense of an over-layered text of the township of Africville emerges. On the one hand a bitter sense of (racially hierarchical) marginalization and hardship becomes clear from the narratives of the dump reported by Carvery (see below, Section 3). While the sense of loss in Carvery's narratives and the struggle for proper recognition and recompense are a central feature, there is also an intimation of hope, resilience, and continuance of a tradition of warmth and solidarity.

Environmental Racism – Africville as a 'Traumascape'

Africville 2 : Environmental Racism

'If you ever watched someone you love die slowly, day-by-day, hour-by-hour, then you know what it was like being in Africville during the relocation (Charles Saunders as quoted in Nelson 2008, 90).'

5.1 The experiences of Africville residents and the visual documents which accompany these records suggest a community with strong roots and sense of communal survival and self reliance in the face of hardship. But despite this testament to the humanity and warmth of the community it appears to have been an area which in this section of the video (link 2). The independence of the community and people's pride in their autonomy away from the inevitable racism of the city was hard won. Despite the fact that over the years Africvillians paid taxes, the city never extended basic amenities to Africville; no road system, sewage, water, street lighting or electricity were ever connected to Africville. Health, police, fire and educational services were never provided and it was only in 1883 that the first elementary school was opened, but the Africvillians were fully responsible for its funding. Carvery suggests that the events which took place in Africville served a purpose, effectively legitimatizing the description of the living condition as degraded and hence in need of change.

'So because of their neglect ...they then came back to say..well your homes are you know...you're living in a slum...ha ha ha...'

'...So they moved all those industries here like the dump for instance, the open dump . The area that it was in... they were starting to build houses, a residential area – and they said – 'well we can't have this here because it poses a health threat.' And they looked at different areas, and all rejected for that reason, and they put it right in our communitywe were less than human - in their eyes .. it didn't matter you know. (transcribed from Africville 2: Environmental Racism)

5.2 This treatment as 'infrahuman' (a term employed by Paul Gilroy 2004) is shocking in a modern liberal democracy but quite familiar in colonial settings. However, Canadian academic Isaac Saney suggests that there are implicit contradictions at the heart of Canadian multiculturalism, a discourse Saney described, as, 'a profoundly Eurocentric conception', 'riddled and poisoned with white man's concepts, white man's burden...' (Spencer 2008)

5.3 These sentiments are echoed in the video narratives; people were largely ignored and seemed to be outside of the jurisdiction of the law and the justice system, due to racially divisive policies which added to the marginalisation of the community. Also the bitter neglect and impoverishment of the community; people having to scavenge on the dump, being subject to conditions in stark contrast to developed modern society of the city (which was only a short distance away) merely serves to stigmatize both the people and the place.

'That was a source of income that dump. The men were on that dump like everyday and the truck drivers hauling the waste there, were the same truck drivers, so they got to know them. And even some of the truck drivers used to come out to Africville ...because they used to make their own beer.. sea beer. And they would come out and have their drinks and then go back in town so. One day the truck from the dockyard ... it was a government of Canada truck came on the dump and he called a couple of the guys over and he said: I've got something on the back of the truck here and if you mix it with your sea beer it will give you a real good kick. It did. 5 people died! it was poison – 5 people died from it – no enquiry, no charges laid, no nothing. The authorities said: 'Well it's their own fault; they're not allowed to be on that dump, they had no business to be on the dump so it's their own fault.' No nothing, no charges, no enquiry - nothing – five people dead.'

My oldest brother was killed by a truck going to that dump – run over. He was twelve years old at the time. In the community, he was, the truck barrelling up the road –just no - total disregard for people living there, and he went out and got run over by the truck – dead – because of that dump.'

(transcribed from Africville 2: Environmental Racism)

5.4 As late as 1958 – the city decided to move the town refuse dump to the Africville area. As in all these cases there was no consultation with the Africvillians and the dump became a source of income to many Africville men who were able to recycle household waste for copper, tin and other valuable items which they could sell back to the city. Before the demise of the settlement there were also toxic waste pits for the disposal of PCBs (highly toxic, persistent organic pollutants compounds – now banned). In Carvery's view this area now constitutes one of the most seriously polluted sites in Canada.

5.5 The rye commentary below is from a CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) narrated news story from the Africville News Notes, a column in the Halifax Mail Star (c1959), highlights that what is treated as normal in the area the weary everyday nature of the report ('ruts in the road are no deeper than usual' etc) is in fact shockingly aberrant. The comment about the City Council's housing proposals seems especially ominous given the events which were to overtake the community shortly after.

'From the Halifax Mail Star these Africville News Notes

'Thursday was sunny and 14 men were able to scavenge on the city dump. They did not seem to be distracted by the 8 or 10 boys and girls scrambling over the huge piles of waste and quarrelling over sticks, rags and old picture frames.'

The ruts in the road are no deeper than usual and the sides have washed away in only about half a dozen places.

People here are looking forward to the City Council's housing proposals...

...nothing has ever been done but, by nature optimistic, Africvillians are hopeful.

5.6 The neglect and exclusion of the community already deprived of basic necessities was further compounded by the racism with which the people of Africville were treated. In the recognisable pattern with which fringe dwellers are all too often treated (see e.g. Spencer, 2005, study of fringe dwelling indigenous people in Darwin), the victims of this neglect were treated as pariahs and blamed for the conditions in which they lived. Furthermore, the stigmatised community became the favoured repository for a succession of unpleasant industries:

5.7 With the gradual expansion of the City of Halifax, toxic or dirty industries were increasingly located around Africville in preference to sites closer to the city residential areas. These included: a prison in 1853, in 1870 a hospital for infectious disease, two slaughterhouses, even fecal waste, from nearby Russellville was deposited there. (See the 1878 Map of Africville via link to the Africville Relocation Report – <http://www.library.dal.ca/ebooks/africville/> showing details, at that stage, of railways, slaughterhouse, Rock Head Prison and the Hospital for Infectious Diseases).

- Train line bisected the community (no crossings or warnings) 1850
- Rock Head Prison - 1853
- Hospital for infectious diseases - 1870
- Two slaughterhouses
- Depository for fecal waste from nearby Russellville
- Tar factory
- Stone and coal crushing plants.
- Oil plant – storage complex
- Two fertilizer manufacturing plants
- Numerous waste dumps and incinerators
- Sewage run off from city
- City dump – relocated here in 1958
- Toxic waste disposal pits for PCBs (highly toxic, persistent organic pollutants compounds – now banned)

Fig. 3 – Succession of industries near Africville

5.8 The freight train lines which were built from the late 1850s cut through the community and trains ran through constantly, adding to the hazardous nature of life in the community as Irvine relates (in Africville 4 sequence). This treatment of the area as a waste dump is not as my (all too leading) question state: 'strategic' or 'callous disregard' – it is clearly as Irvine asserts: 'both'. But more than this it is the result of a less than conscious acceptance by the administrative apparatus of the city that elements outside its system are excluded, dealt with in a highly instrumental way as De Certeau claims:

"In this site (the city) organised by 'speculative' and classifying operations, management combines with *elimination*: on the one hand, we have the differentiation and redistribution of the parts and function of the city through inversions, movements, accumulations, etc., and, on the other hand, we have the rejection of whatever is not treatable and that, thus, constitutes *the garbage of a functionalist administration* (abnormality, deviance, sickness, death, etc)." (De Certeau 1985 122 –145)

5.9 De Certeau is suggesting here how boundaries are drawn and garbage, this 'matter out of place' is eliminated to areas outside, areas classified as beyond the bounds. Irvine's brother Eddie (a stalwart protestor on the site) commented on this: "Come to find out the dump they gave us in the 50's was a toxic waste dump," "All of the hospitals, the Camp Hill hospital, the Veterans hospital, all the hospitals used to dump their garbage there. ...there was body parts and whatever. We had to endure it." (Lawler, 2010).

5.10 The site with its hidden ballast of memories or toxicity of suffering seems to fit the conception of a 'traumascape' a term coined by historian Maria Tumarkin (2005). For Tumarkin 'traumascape' are a ubiquitous feature of contemporary life:

'...at traumascape, which is the word I have been using to describe places across the world marked by traumatic legacies of violence, suffering and loss, the past is never quite over. Years, decades after the event, the past is still unfinished business. Because trauma is contained not in an event as such but in the way the event is experienced, traumascape become much more than physical settings of tragedies: they emerge as spaces, where events are experiences and re-experienced across time (Tumarkin, 2005: 12).

5.11 Tumarkin makes the important point that the terrain exerts influence, speaking back, being a player in social events, and accumulating a legacy of injustice and loss which will not abate. As a focal point for the African Canadian community, the events and how they were experienced keep alive a keen sense of injustice with (as yet) no appropriate resolution. Here the sense of 'submerged' meanings is very real with the suggestion that the accumulated toxicity is becoming apparent now as toxic waste leaches into the Bedford Basin. Whatever their avowed intentions, the actions of the City of Halifax could be construed as environmental racism. McCurdy (2001) confirms this in no uncertain terms: "Clearly, what Africville became and its ultimate death were products of environmental racism. The pattern of exchange between its citizens and the city government was historically based on the devalued status of the black community that was economically marginalized and politically impotent." (2001: 108) Further as Charles Mills argues the unspoken and embarrassing truth is: '... that for centuries in the United States, blacks themselves have been thought of as disposable, an excrescence in the body politic, and thus part of the problem' (Mills 2001, 74). This racist analogy is visible in the actions of the City of Halifax and in the narratives related by Irvine Carvery which show that their lives were considered of little consequence, as De Certeau describes it, they became the garbage of a functionalist administrative system. This devaluing and disregard of the people of Africville appears to be similarly reflected by the manner in which they were removed from their homes – in some case on the backs of garbage trucks.

5.12 An unidentified victim of the Africville diaspora spoke to a reporter from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in 1976 about the destruction of her community.

"They brought us in more or less like you would herd in a bunch of cattle. They used their city dump trucks to load up the children and brought them in and set them in the city. This was a complete disgrace. The City

disgraced themselves. They were a perfect disgrace to do that. This is the only place in the world that you would send an old workin' dump truck to move children, mothers and families into a city. We were in a position, there wasn't anything too much we could do about it. We were threatened. They put threats on our heads. If you don't move at a certain time we'll bring out the bulldozers and push ya's over, push your shacks over. Now if they call them shacks, we call them our castles. It was our homes," she said.' (Lawler, 2000)

5.13 This again goes further than 'callous disregard' it suggests an implicitly naturalised exclusion of difference, of otherness. Yet Irvine's response that these actions reflect 'both' callous disregard and a strategic approach is also borne out by evidence that:

'During the lead-up to the community's removal from the land, the city council had been discussing the use and value this land could add to the industrial development of Halifax.' (Vincer, 2008: 5).

5.14 This demonstrates the fickle and expedient discourses about how land is valued. Taylor and Flint (2000: 43) suggest that we should consider, '...all spaces and places as socially constructed, the result of conflicts and accommodations that produces a geographical landscape' (in Vincer, 2008: 14). Because of the area's use as a site for locating polluting and undesirable industries, away from the city of Halifax, this led to the inevitable degradation of the area resulting in frequent references to Africville as a 'slum'. In terms of the forced relocation again there are several colliding and conflicting discourses. Firstly the simple discourse of town planning which showed a lack of concern for the community, other than as an impediment to progress and development. Evidence shows that there were plans to relocate the settlement as early as 1954. By 1962 the area was considered to be in the middle of a necessary extension of the road system, and the North Shore development plan shows the proposed road cutting through the middle of Africville (see the maps listed in Clairmont and Magill, 1971).

5.15 Hence the image of conniving city officials cynically planning the demise of the community as the price for urban development of the area cannot be entirely rejected. (This is an image which Mike Rizkalla's (2007) animation envisages – see below). In addition the discourse of 'blaming the victims' for the state of the site as a 'slum' and hence legitimating the dispersal of the community and its destruction, seems even more expedient and hurtful to those on the receiving end. The maps already mentioned in appendices show that plans for the space were already in full swing before the re-locating of the city dump, and the consequences of this might have been considered. However, it is more likely that the fate of those in Africville was not considered as important. Africville is far from unique in relation to such practices and many cases of environmental racism have been documented across the world. Bullard's 1993 collection of sociological case studies of environmental racism makes the point that at the heart of this issue of 'dumping' on indigenous and African American groups, is an apartheid which systematically segregates different groups. In Halifax the complex motives for the destruction of Africville, undoubtedly include a deep shame at the legacy of environmental racism, and the anxiety about a satellite enclave which was autonomous and despite the difficult conditions had a separate and free identity. Perhaps the cruellest disguise is that the authorities' actions were rationalised as humanitarian; righting a long-standing wrong, caring for the welfare of children as victims of substandard living conditions.

Narratives of Collective Identity: towards a composite vision

Sequence 4: Memories

6.1 The narratives recorded during our walk through the site confirm an 'emplaced' sense of identity; an identity articulated through the stories of everyday experience grounded in the coordinates of Africville. This experiential aspect of place and identity is mediated and affirmed by stories as Paul Ricoeur suggests:

'The self does not know itself immediately but only indirectly by the detour of the cultural signs of all sorts which are articulated on the symbolic mediations which always articulate action and, among them, the narratives of everyday life. Narrative mediation underlines this remarkable characteristic of self-knowledge – that it is self-interpretation' (Ricoeur 1991: 198).

6.2 These visual records present narratives about Africville in a contextualised and enacted form. The telling of the stories on site makes the sensory impact of the events more poignant. Irvine's stories about the dump, the railway, and the encounters with police are no doubt important both as affirming continuity and meaning on a personal level of identity, but also as one person's shared memories contributing to a collective sense of the community of Africville.

Figure 4. Stills with permission from Mike Rizkalla: *A Nourishment By Neglect*, an animation for the Bucket Truck song of that title. See lyrics and link to YouTube clip in Appendix.

6.3 Visually the existence of the township, its histories, memories and the collective trauma of the site have been represented by a number of artists who have also recognized the simultaneity of the present and past – the living heritage but also the attempts to expunge Africville, to forget an awkward or unpalatable period in the city's history. On the other hand there is a powerful affirming discourse of Africville as the heart of a proudly independent group of some 400 people who had triumphed over adversity and carved out something for themselves, through resourceful use of the available materials, hard work and communal support, even making use of the dump as a source of income. The image below (Fig.5) demonstrates how a students' art project,^[3] in 2008, posted signs which re-aligned the place of Africville alongside the anodyne surfaces of Seaview Park.

6.4 It's possible that this article could be read as merely another passive, descriptive use of visual material, with the criticism of 'naïve realism', or 'naïve empiricism' (respectively Chaplin 2005, Buckingham 2009) not far behind. And indeed should this video ethnography be taken at 'face value' then such criticisms would be valid, suggesting an approach which believes that theory and hypotheses will emerge from the data by merely being involved with the data and associating with the group(s) Silverman (2000) dubbed this 'naïve inductivism'. However, the visual is not exhausted by the more obvious interview material which can be extracted from it. The visual operates on different levels; aside from the immediate evidence of the visually enhanced interview, there is the complex and gradually unfolding, multisensory impact of the recording of the walk and the complex context of the site. Sequence 4 gives the viewer a keen sense of the duality of the site and the distance between those using the park in its new designation as a 'dog park' and the almost sacred significance of the site to those with family histories there, who have experienced a keen sense of loss having

been uprooted from the site. Despite the tragedy which has been so well captured in a number of short documentaries, there is also the portrayal of the area as a revered, almost sacred, site. This positive and enduring sense of place is illustrated in Shelagh Mackenzie's 1991 documentary – Remember Africville. The final scene in this film features the annual reunion in the park in which those surviving evicted Africvillians and their descendants are shown camping out on the site:

"Once a year we venture out to Africville for a reunion. You set up your camper, you set up your tent, or you throw a blanket on the grass. The children are playing; people are laughing, hugging and reminiscing about the old days. But for three days you have your community back. You stop for just one moment, you smell the salt water air and you say – 'now this is mine.'

6.5 While visual methods and media are not in themselves conclusive evidence, they are far from mere illustrations subordinate to the written text, instead they arguably form a 'parallel argument' (Banks 2009) operating from a different ontological base (Canals 2011), and not reducible to linguistic terms, although inevitably the dilemma is as Gergen explains How should we answer questions about what is: '...independent of language save through language?' (Gergen 2001,425). However, these visual signs are as carefully selected and framed as paragraphs in an argument; they serve as a complementary form of evidence. Gillian Rose (2007: 239) has suggested that the inclusion of imagery as in some way in excess and supplemental, over and above direct linkage to the written text, might give the image chance to reveal their special qualities. This is certainly the case with some of the images included here. The still (fig 6 below) reveals a third party perspective which could not have been fully realised during the filming; the sense of contestation between dog owners/walkers and Africvillians. Capturing a moment in the flow of events like this shows that an image can have long-term effects on how other research data are interpreted as it reveals perhaps unexpected significance.

Figure 5 (left). Seaview /Africville signs courtesy Chris Benjamin 2008

Figure 6 (right) . Still from sequence 3 Seeking Justice – the uneasy duality of the space becomes apparent.

Visually the materials presented here are another fragment in the ongoing visual treatment of the area.

6.6 In addition the current visual include art works; paintings and interactive maps, rock videos, live protests and recently a full length documentary film.^[4] Rizkalla's short animated music video (See Fig. 4 above) uses the powerful narrative and filmic codes: a darkening sky, the anxiety of receiving the eviction notice, conspiratorial shady business men shaking hands across a table, the little girl who holds her father's (or grandfather's) hand, the bulldozer destroying the church, and the solemn family group looking on at the destruction as the span of the new bridge materialises. All of this is framed in the narrative of times remembered, perhaps in the eyes of a melancholy old man walking through the site of Seaview Park in the present and re-invoking the memories of dark days of eviction and destruction. The animation skilfully weaves together narrative links against the Bucket Truck song Nourishment by Neglect which tells the story of

the eviction and destruction of homes (lyrics listed in Appendix). The narrative employs a number of visual techniques, reminiscent of the distorted and oblique camera angles in film noir. A poetics of shape and pattern help build the narrative links drawing a sort of graphic homology between elements. For example in the roughly sequential stills: the use of linked hands; firstly to seal the pact between suited figures (perhaps City Hall and business interests) next of the older man facing eviction and his daughter or grand daughter, then as they stand looking on the span of the A. Murray Mackay Bridge materialises above them, another link and the cause of the destruction of their community.

6.7 It is not surprising that the events surrounding Africville's demise have attracted so much dramatic interest in recent years; Africville is one of many invisible histories of inequality at the heart of what is often seen as a progressive liberal democracy. Visually this study is one more attempt to encapsulate a complex history whose consequences resonate around the world, and as such it has become a touchstone for those interested in interrogating the apparent claims of Canadian multiculturalism. Such cases are a reminder that racism is still prevalent in a country which is seen by many to be a leader in multicultural tolerance (especially when contrasted to neighbouring USA). Canadian multiculturalism as Neil Bissoondath (1994:89) claims, whatever its intentions, was "a gentle and insidious form of cultural apartheid."

Conclusions

7.1 The video interviews included in this article can be seen to operate on multiple levels. There are the narratives of experience, those stories which give individual identity its continuity and integrity, there are references to factual evidence and research, for example with regard to the historical origins of the site, and at a meta level there are comments about the processes of gaining experience – the importance of being on location; walking, talking, envisaging the community that was there. In addition there are other aspects which were more subtle and unspoken but nonetheless keenly felt – the different claims to the land; as a lost town or as a grassy area for dogs to exercise. These readings of the video links are valid to the extent that they may accurately depict one person's views, but in addition, the interpretation of video ethnographies is a reflexive, intersubjective process. (Langton, 1993; Muecke, 1994; Pink, 2007)

7.2 Also the edited sequences cannot be read in isolation; they are soundings and images in the midst of a cultural field fairly saturated with signs from popular culture. I have argued that sociological research which uses combined visual approaches (not mere illustrations subordinated to the text) engages in a more valid and profound way with sense of place and its different constructions. The public dissemination of these narratives via YouTube along with a number of other visual texts referred to here suggests that there is a gradual accretion of cultural knowledge around a place or event. In addition the use of visual approaches to the understanding of place permits the 'slow release' of meaning as we reflect after the actual research. The images used here reveal the dialectical nature of place in which the meanings of an area share bifurcated or multiple historical meanings which collide in the instant of the creation of the image. This is close to my previous discussion of Benjamin's conception of 'dialectical images' as revealing: '...complex and subtle relationships between the internalised meanings and accumulated poetics of place and the external reality of its changing structures' (Spencer 2011:87). Benjamin eloquently captures this immediacy of the image, which I have argued is like the juxtaposed sociological vision of historical forces and present day circumstances: 'It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation.' [Benjamin, 1999:462–3, N3,1]

7.3 Africville remains a potent symbol of the persistence of community in the face of attempts to shun, exclude, and ultimately eradicate. That this was a calculated act; the removal of an impediment to the expansion of the city, seems clear, although humanitarian motives were cited to legitimate the removal, in the face of (what appears to have been) close to unanimous (but largely unheard) opposition by Africvillians. However, in addition to the use of legal regulations, there were also the anxieties of having a shamefully polluted community a stone's throw from the city, the legacy of years of neglect and what amounts to systematic environmental racism. The visual impact of the stories and archival imagery; maps and video, samples of popular cultural representation and the current strand of video ethnography all grounded in this narrow strip of green shoreline, portray a far from mute witness to contestation and hopes of redemption. The tenacity of this particular community has just been demonstrated with the receipt of several million dollars in compensation and 2.5 acres of land adjacent to the Seaview Park site and the completion of the building of a replica of the community's lost church (see Africville Genealogy Society 2000). This recent development demonstrates the fluidity of such places, the tension and flux between strands in a web of complex relationships. Ingold's description of 'lines of becoming' (2010: 12) might usefully describe the connection and continuity between the discourses through which this area has been shaped. Like the threads in Ingold's spider's web they have laid down the 'conditions of possibility' for the recent changes in this evolving landscape.

Appendix

A Nourishment by Neglect

A song by Bucket Truck

My body's overwhelmed with segregated air, from 1964 where there was: relocated life,
pumping through veins. Developed roads but torn down homes and don't forget the harbour
expansion, all for the love of economic growth; a nourishment by neglect.

A generation lost in time (move the children, mothers, fathers)

With no running water or road signs (change your life for 500 dollars)

The mark remains in the city's years (move the children, mothers, fathers)

Of what was done to world pioneers

Concerns ignored, a community removed from the Bedford basin shoreline. The rain fell hard
but it made no sound the day they chose to industrialize this shack town.

A generation lost in time (move the children, mothers, fathers)

With no running water or road signs (change your life for 500 dollars)

The mark remains in the city's tears (move the children, mothers, fathers)

Of what was done to world pioneers

Destructed. Destructed homes not hope.

Notes

¹ At the time of writing this paper there was cause for celebration as the Halifax Regional Municipality had finally apologised to the people of Africville and reparation money which had been received allowed for the rebuilding of the community's church (celebrated on September 25th 2011) and the entire site has been renamed Africville (see Halifax

News Net, 2000; Africville Genealogy Society September 25, 2011).

² However, this is likely to change as after a 40 year long struggle for recognition the protestors have won an important victory and the area will now revert to the name of Africville in the near future.

³ This installation was the creation of 10 Dalhousie architecture students spearheaded a community arts project to raise awareness of the site. They were led by Shyronn Smardon, who has family roots in Africville (see Benjamin 2008).

⁴ Africville; Can't Stop Now (Dir. Juanita Peters 2009 see Beaumont H. (2009).

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