Oral History, Community, and Displacement
Imagining Memories in Post-Apartheid South Africa

Sean Field

CHAPTER 7

"There Your Memory Runs Like a Camera Back"
Moving Places and Audiovisual Oral Histories from Klipfontein Road

In 1991 Dan Sipe wrote: "Still, video seems to inhabit some sort of twilight zone: many oral historians at least tacitly accept its value and some even use it, but few deal with it or comment on it." And in 2006 Michael Frisch observed: "Everyone recognizes that the core audio-video dimension of oral history is notoriously under-utilized." Is this trend partly due to a widespread technophobia amongst oral historians? And/or does the trend reflect negative assumptions about the academic value of audiovisual recording of oral histories? Although different recording devices have the potential to influence what is said and how it is said or not said in oral history dialogues, technological tools should not be one of the defining criteria of what constitutes oral history research practice. I am not advocating audiovisual recording of oral history as an alternative to audio forms. But I am arguing for an equal epistemological status—within oral history methodology and historiography—for both sound recording and audiovisual recording of interviews. Various writers have compared the strengths and limitations of using these differing recording technologies, but comparison is not my intention here. Instead, in this chapter I describe and analyze the use of audiovisual oral histories with a view to historicizing people's movements across racially constructed spaces and senses of place in post-apartheid Cape Town.

The historiography of twentieth-century Cape Town is extensive. But urban historians, including myself, have primarily focused on racially bounded communities and far less on activities across racial/spatial boundaries. Therefore, from 2005 to 2007, the Centre for Popular Memory (CPM) conducted a project called "Street
Stories," which involved videotaping oral history interviews with over two hundred people who use three arterial roads: Main Road, Klipfontein Road, and Landsdowne Road. These streets cut across the still-visible apartheid residential racial zones. The Southern Suburbs Main Road partly follows the contours of the mountains linking the still mostly "white areas." In contrast, Klipfontein and Landsdowne roads both start on Main Road but then wind their way through the sprawling predominantly coloured and African communities of the Cape Flats. In traveling these busy roads, CPM staff crossed racial boundaries drawn through spaces, moments, and lives. They recorded stories of traders, homeless people, commuters, and others on streets, where popular culture, memory, and socioeconomic dynamics converge. The project had two aims:

- First, we aimed to avoid the research tendency to historicize only racial ghettos, CPM staff set out to record and plot personal narratives relating to specific sites of memory on these streets and how people’s lives have changed over time. Interviewees gave accounts, involving work and cultural activities, family situations, violent political events and forced displacements. The CPM’s prior assumption that these streets were culturally diverse counterpoints to the erratic transformation of the racial demography in residential spaces of post-apartheid Cape Town was confirmed.

- Second, we aimed to think and do oral history research in ways that are not split by a dichotomy between listening and seeing or between sound interviews and audiovisual interviews. From the CPM’s outset in 2001, our flexible policy has been to choose recording technologies to meet specific project priorities and fieldwork circumstances. For the "Street Stories" project, videotaped interviews were a logical strategy to adopt. CPM staff recorded and edited interviews, and produced six documentaries; two were broadcast on national and community television and at film festivals. In addition, a photographic book of video grabs and photos with oral history texts was produced, and video shorts about the lives of selected interviewees were placed on You-Tube.

In post-apartheid South Africa, there has been a growth of historical film documentary making and a related increased use of audiovisual oral histories. But amongst university-based historians, there remains an ongoing paucity of use and comment on audiovisual dimensions of oral history, which suggests that spoken and written words have intellectual primacy over images. It may be argued that this slant is inevitable within the oral history enterprise, but a more productive response is to explore the use of audiovisual recording of oral history interviews, or to combine oral history and photography in ways that can benefit oral history thinking.

Sipe argued twenty years ago that "the time has come for sustained systematic description, discussion, and analysis of how moving images can work as an integral dimension of oral history practice." With the exception of Michael Frisch and Steven High, it is doubtful that oral historians internationally have sufficiently responded to Sipe’s argument, which remains pertinent, given the rapid pace of new technological developments. Technological innovations in sound and audiovisual enterprise, but open up intellectual possibilities for spoken words and moving images to forge new directions in and for oral history. I cannot discuss technological developments here, but I acknowledge Frisch’s significant call for oral historians to develop a "post-documentary sensibility." More specifically, the CPM’s "Street Stories" project demonstrates that the audiovisual recording of oral histories can produce valuable historical evidence. This chapter discusses how this evidence has helped us conceptualize people’s mobility and senses of “moving places” across a city with several socio-economic, political, and cultural divisions, which cannot be reduced to simple racial binaries of “white” versus “black” South Africa.

Past and Present Cape Town

Cape Town is a place of brutal contrasts across landscape, memory, and history. The city was shaped around beautiful mountains and oceans by Dutch and English colonists, who left a three-hundred-year legacy of racist exclusions and structural inequalities. It is also important to remember that the historical marginalization of black African residents in Cape Town was motivated by the essentialist idea that the city is the “natural home” of “Coloureds” and their ancestors. The racist discourses that formed around this idea originated under colonialism and were enshrined in apartheid laws. With the onset of apartheid in 1948, an already segregated city with some culturally diverse suburbs experienced the social engineering of the Group Areas Act. This law racially zoned all residential and nonresidential spaces, and out of a city of approximately one million, over two hundred thousand people were forcibly removed between 1950 and 1982. With the abolishment of the Group Areas Act and the pass-law system from 1985 to 1986, the city’s population proliferated, especially across the Cape Flats, and the official population figure in 2010 reached 3.3 million.

If you then take the vantage point of the present and stand on the Eastern slopes of iconic Table Mountain, you can look across the wide expanse of the Cape Flats. This term is a geographical reference to areas barely above sea level, sandy in soil, windswept and prone to flooding in wet Cape winters. But during apartheid, the term “Cape Flats” was reconstructed in popular imagination (and even now in popular memory) as a reference to racial ghettos or communities to which so-called “non-white” others—people classified either “coloured,” “black African,” or “Asian”—were displaced. For those who experienced displacement, the Cape Flats are the dumping grounds where they were scattered and made to feel like the human waste of apartheid. In contrast, the scenic spaces closer to the mountains and seas were declared “whites only.”

Since democracy in 1994, Cape Town has experienced a difficult process of political and socioeconomic transformation to redress inequalities and bring about social justice for all. A partial transformation of post-apartheid urban spaces is occurring with the desegregation of some formerly white suburbs such as Muizenberg, Mowbray, and Milnerton, where, for example, African immigrant communities have established a sizable presence. But these suburbs are the exception and not the general case. Further, while they are the exceptions, it would seem that most
former “white group areas,” especially upper-middle class ones, have less than one-quarter black or coloured residents, with percentages increasing in lower-middle class areas. In addition, while people forcibly removed during apartheid are beginning to return or preparing to return to some areas such as District Six or Protea Village, these “returns” are happening at a slow pace, because of various financial or legal obstacles. The city has also experienced rapid post-apartheid changes such as a property boom, as house prices in middle-class areas have soared, at times quadrupled, which especially hinders first time home-buyers. Concurrently, working-class informal settlements, dominated by black African residents, have mushroomed in unused spaces within inner urban areas or at the outer edges of the city.

Socioeconomic restructuring of Cape Town is also taking place within global economic structures as large cities and nation-states compete for investments and exports. For example, the drastic decline during the post-apartheid period of the clothing and textile manufacturing industries of Cape Town, which are unable to compete with Asian imports, has increased unemployment and led capital development to focus on other sectors such as tourism, hotels, and the film industry. Cape Town has successfully marketed itself as a global tourist destination, but economic benefits cluster around scenic locations and not along the roads on which we interviewed.

Cape Town business and government are geared to receiving local and foreign visitors, but divisions still fragment the city, such as persistent tensions between the coloured majority of the city and the increasing number of black city residents, especially because of the latter’s internal migration from the Eastern Cape region. The environmental beauty of the city also cannot mask the stark disparities between wealthy and poor; the city ranks very high in the socioeconomic disparity index of unequal cities. For these reasons, city government has identified Klipfontein Road and Landsdowne Road as key corridors for enhancing economic development opportunities across race and class divisions. For example, if both city and national governments had their preferred venue, the 2010 World Cup soccer stadium for Cape Town would have been built in Athlone on Klipfontein Road. However, the Green Point venue for the stadium was imposed by a FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) executive driven by a marketing imperative to sell the World Cup against the backdrop of Cape Town’s scenic landscape of mountains and the sea. In spite of this, Klipfontein Road might still become a new city main road because it links the more affluent southern suburbs with the townships and informal settlements on the Cape Flats. The Centre for Popular Memory (CPM) also chose Klipfontein Road because it includes historical sites of anti-apartheid struggles. The street links the survivors of forced displacement, their children and the “new communities” of the Cape Flats.

**Street Stories from Klipfontein Road**

Klipfontein Road is a 30-kilometre (18.6-mile) pathway that begins as Durban Road in Mowbray, moves into Rondebosch (both previously zoned “white areas”); then to

![Figure 7.1 Klipfontein Road street corner. Centre for Popular Memory Archive, University of Cape Town. Photograph by Niklas Zimmer.](image)

Athlone, Bridgetown, Kewton, Silvertown, Manenberg (previously zoned “coloured areas”); and then to Guguletu, Nyanga, KTC, and Crossroads (previously zoned “African areas”). There is a constant movement of people and vehicles on Klipfontein Road, which might seem disjointed or discordant to human senses, but in other ways this street connects divided peoples in curious ways.

For most of the outdoor interviews, which were in uncontrolled environments, it proved to be technically challenging to get the appropriate lighting and sound, especially during the wet and windy Cape autumns and winters. Outdoor interviews tended to be shorter, but provided striking visuals of peoples, spaces, and activities. Indoor interviews in residences or workplaces were visually less interesting and tended to suffer from the “talking heads” phenomenon. But these interviews, by appointment, tended to be longer, and there was more historical depth to the information interviewees narrated. Given that video cameras are becoming commonplace, most potential interviewees, when approached, readily agreed to be recorded; the rejection rate was low. I present a small selection of videotaped stories from interviews conducted at sites along the road, in three clusters:

- First, people who talked about their everyday work activities on the street.
- Second, people who live in the vicinity of the street in houses or flats (apartment houses), or those who live on the streets—that is, the homeless.
- Third, people who spoke about their memories of the violent events of 1976 and 1985, which occurred on or near Klipfontein Road.
A wide range of people’s livelihoods depend on these streets. Historically prominent amongst these are the hawkers who sell fruit and vegetables and the fishmongers, who depend on Cape Town’s fortune of bordering on two oceans (the warm Indian Ocean and the cold Atlantic Ocean). They contrast with the newer street “professions,” such as car guards (that is, people who protect parked cars). Mr. R. A. (a fishmonger for over 30 years) said:

Born in this business, my grandfather, my father, used to sell at the old fish market in Hanover Street [in District Six]; we moved to Woodstock, we moved Kensington, and then Manenberg… wind, sand and rain we stand here, we do business for the people, food for the people.

On camera, his weather-beaten face is prominent, but also in the frame is the back of his truck, where he packs, displays, and sells his fish (mostly Cape snoek). Like many interviewees, he points to details around him, and his hands indicate the different places he has lived or frequented on Klipfontein Road or in the city.

Then there are the traders and hawkers. Mr. I. A. (who has named his stall “Housewife’s paradise—every day you get a bargain”) responded to questions about economic decline with, “Daar’s nie soes n ding soos kannie, daar’s by wil.” (“There is no such thing as can’t, there’s only you will”). When asked about his customers he said, “We try to put ourselves into their shoes, we are part of the community.” The interior of his stall, filled with an assortment of sale items, forms the backdrop to him as he speaks about his working life. Another hawker, Mrs. C. A., is originally from the Cape rural areas but had to move to the city when her grandparents died. Homeless for a few years, she is now working at a fruit and vegetable stall called “Mr. No Joke Stall.” When asked what she dreams of for her future she said, to start her own stall called “Mrs. No Smile Stall.” This is said with a broad smile, which she repeatedly beamed at the camera.

Interviews with homeless people were a small minority of the total, yet it was striking how many people who now earn their living on Klipfontein Road were at another time homeless on the street. Family circumstances seemed most often to push them into becoming homeless, while potential opportunities to eke out money drew them to this particular road. As Mr. E. V., 24 years old, with a scarred face and restless movements, said:

Kan nie huis te gaan nie, my ma is dood, en my pa het 'n annier vrou… ek word mos groot buitekant… my pa kannie agter my kyk nie… as hy genip is, dan wil hy my maer… ek kan nie bly nie, ek moes weg loop, ek kyk my eie lewe hier buitekant, daar is mense wat ek ken.

(Can’t go home, my mother is dead, my father has another wife… I grew up outside… my father can’t look after me… when he is drunk, then he wants to hit me [makes hitting hand movements]… I couldn’t stay, I had to walk away, I look after my own life here outside, there are people I know.)
A sense of home or homelessness is a central theme throughout most interviews. Many of those who have homes now have grown up in families that suffered earlier forced displacement and were pushed out of older city suburbs, and forced into apartheid townships along streets such as Klipfontein Road.

We were told to leave, no compassion, so people lost a lot, so of course people had to set up home in Bridgetown... I was five years old, when we moved from Cape Town, the court [a block of flats] we stayed, we were not used to living like this... even our parents, you could sense it as a child, everyone felt extremely insecure, what happened in Cape Town families, lived together, you find one was moved to Bridgetown, other one to Kew Town, and because the infrastructure was poor, it was not easy for people to get from Bridgetown.

[Mr. A.R.]

For this interviewee's family to have been displaced, when he was at the vulnerable age of five, is critical. It is a transitional phase, when children need parents to be strong enough to provide secure guidance with their explorations in "finding their feet" in the world of preschool and early friendships. Instead, there may be parental feelings of insecurity, which echo anxieties that permeate the lives of those forcibly displaced and their descendants. People carry these memories and feelings of past insecurities onto the streets. But then, Klipfontein Road is no ordinary street, it is itself a creation of the Group Areas Act and forced removals.

Klipfontein Road runs through the predominantly "coloured" communities of Athlone and Manenberg, at which point it is diametrically split by the Cape Flats railway line. This railway track is one of the many "buffer zones" (these include highways, industrial areas, and even golf courses) imposed by apartheid planners to ensure that different "racial groups" did not reside directly next to each other. As Klipfontein Road leaves Manenberg to cross the bridge over the railway, it enters the African areas of Guguletu, Nyanga, KTC, and ends in Crossroads. Mrs. N. M., a commuter on Klipfontein Road for over forty years, was reminded of her harassment under the despised apartheid pass-laws system:

The police shout, "You got a pass? Where you born?" It was a bad time for us... At night, your eyes, your ears always listening, they knock, they knock not like other people... they chase us, they kill us, the police support the witdoeke [apartheid-aligned vigilantes] to beat us and kill us.

Mrs. N. M. was also one of thousands of people displaced when the witdoeke and police burnt large portions of KTC and Crossroads to ashes in 1986 because these residents did not wish to be relocated to the then new township of Khayelitsha. Khayelitsha today is Cape Town's largest suburb of over half a million, entirely black African residents, situated on the southeastern margins of the city. Mrs. N. M. avoided displacement to Khayelitsha in 1986 by finding accommodation in Guguletu, another site of anti-apartheid resistance, which I discussed in Chapter 3.

Although anti-apartheid resistance struggles would frequently start within and at times remain within racial ghettos, at other times people mobilized across racial–spatial boundaries to form alliances with other communities. A central site of state repression of anti-apartheid resistance was Athlone police station on Klipfontein Road. This station building remains a prominent feature on the road but the "new" police are undergoing a makeover. A policeman told the CPM in an interview in his office that: "Klipfontein runs through 22 townships, that was always a place for demonstrations, they would gather in Nyanga, Guguletu and come down to Athlone and gather by the stadium." Later, in reference to present policing he said, "To bring about change, you have to go the community, love the community, form partnerships with the community." These words were a far cry from the police talk of the apartheid era.

In 1976, the Soweto student riots in Johannesburg erupted and spread to Cape Town. As one school teacher put it, "Soweto snucked and we caught a fever." The Cape Town epicenter of 1976 student–police clashes occurred on Vanguard Drive, which runs horizontally across Klipfontein Road, where clashes also occurred. Mr. S. G., a schoolteacher interviewed at his desk, said:

As students we felt we should pledge our solidarity with students in Soweto, because their pain was ours, during the time the government was introducing Afrikaans as a medium of instruction... We marched to the Langa police station, and we were involved in a scuffle with the police. Then the first victim of '76 riots, Mxolisiwa, died. I must tell you hell broke loose, we ran, I ran all the way on foot back [across
Klipfontein Road. I can still feel those birdshots [strokes his chin, in search of embedded birdshot], I had a lot of the birdshot.

The same teacher said, "I have a vivid picture, a vivid memory of the '76 riots because I was involved as a student, and also 1985, when I started to teach. I must say it was a hectic time." Without request, he referred directly to the visual content of his memories and simultaneously located himself in the watershed years, as a student in 1976 and as a teacher in 1985. Compared to 1976, the political violence of 1985 erupted on a far broader canvas in Cape Town and across other parts of South Africa.

Amongst many violent moments, one infamous incident in 1985 has etched its painful traces in the popular memory of the Athlone area. This was the "Trojan Horse shootings" on Thornton Road, which runs off Klipfontein Road. During the protests, school students from local schools would pelt state vehicles with stones. Then a truck with policemen concealed at the back drove by and opened fire on the students. Mr. G. A., who today runs a clothing stall on Klipfontein Road, said:

That day they shot the boys, that evening, the whole community stood hand to hand, along the road and the police came along and they, the community were not going to move. . . . At the time it was kind of fun running away from the police but years later you matured and think about it, it's a heart sore, lives have been lost.

The solidarity displayed at the time by community members to express their shock and outrage at the police atrocity is significant. But the interviewee was also honestly reflecting on his lack of maturity then, and how his painful feelings only registered later when he grew up. Klipfontein and Thornton roads, for example, are not only paths for physical transportation but also provide people with a visualized mental route to locate the remembering of several events and to trace the changes they went through across life phases.

The various interview clips from the "Street Stories" project provide compelling evidence of how audiovisual oral history captures the storytelling performances of interviewees, as well as the changing moods of interview interactions and the locations in which they were filmed. Interviews on the actual road usually had a frenetic intensity created by the sounds of the street and the images of the immediate backdrop. In contrast, interviews in peoples' offices and homes, while always close to Klipfontein Road, often had a more formal, quieter mood. During both indoor (mainly seated) and outdoor (mainly standing) interviews, it is the movement of people's bodies that reveals something beyond the words spoken. As I was writing this chapter, I reread a sublime Luisa Passerini article, in which she observes:

I have been thinking of memories transmitted without verbalisation such as those incorporated in gestures, images and objects; the transmission of how to look. . . . Finally, silence is essential in order to remind us that memory is not only word, it is the "embodied memory" enlivened by intersubjectivity.26

Reading Passerini made me realize that there never was an audio silence during the outdoor interviews. The silences during interviewee speech and bodily movements were filled in by street noise. But significantly, although the audience cannot hear the silences, they can possibly see silences both during interviews and later through viewing the camera footage. Perhaps oral historians need to both be listening and looking for silences. I suspect many oral historians do this unconsciously, but I think Passerini is prompting us to think more deeply about different ways to detect and interpret silences. What silences are revealed by embodied memory that are masked by human speech? And conversely, what silences are revealed by human speech that are masked by embodied memory? Surely then we need to be both listening and seeing if we are to better understand the silent interstices of human memory.

Moving Places: Integrating Sound, Image, and Word

Dan Sipe observed:

By encouraging such a focus on image as part of integral historical evidence, visual oral history can lead historians away from the limited conception of moving images as merely an alternative form for evoking, communicating, or translating written history. Oral history can demonstrate the power of film and video as evidence while moving images provide a new level of evidence for oral history.27

The separation of "oral histories" and "video histories" is worrying.28 By fostering this dichotomy, the evidentiary and conceptual benefits of integrating spoken words and moving images that Sipe refers to might be lost.29 And Steven High argues that a separation of oral and video histories is especially detrimental to those researchers doing oral testimonies about place and place-based identities.30 In approaching these issues, we need to consider how the audiovisual recording of oral histories challenge us to read/hear/see storytelling as containing "three far from identical forms of narrativity—the written word, the spoken word, and filmed word—that can be compared and contrasted for their historical implications."31 The scope of that challenge is beyond my grasp here, but I do explore ways to integrate sound and image in conceptualizing place and movement. The innovative work of human geographers has been especially helpful. For example, Tim Cresswell argues:

To think of place as an intersection—a particular configuration of happenings—is to think place in a constant sense of becoming through practice and practical knowledge. . . . This conception of practised place revises older ideas of place as the centre of authentic existence with its neatly circumscribed culture and identity. As an anti-essentialist idea it does not allow for easy correlation of place and culture. Simultaneously this open conception of place provides an antidote to the celebration of nomadic hybridity in which place all but disappears. Place as practice and
practice as place always relies on the symbiosis of locatedness and motion rather than the valorisation of the other.57

Given this definition of place, how can people’s senses of place and movements be interpreted from the audiovisual recordings of oral histories on Klipfontein Road? Through listening and watching these video clips, I have detected four types of movement: First, the movements of human travel on foot or in vehicles; second, the movements of an interviewee’s embodied memory activity; third, the mental movements between remembered places “then and there” and the places of remembrance “here and now”; and fourth, the painful, at times, ruptured emotions associated with memories of forced racist displacement from place to place.

With this typology in mind, I return to the “Street Stories” project on Klipfontein Road. It is vital to understand that audiovisual oral histories are not just oral history interviews with a camera. In addition to the technical challenges faced by the camera person, such as lighting, sound, and framing the interviewee, the interviewer needs to encourage the interviewee to engage with his or her surroundings. The less the interviewee is a talking head and rather an enlivened body and mind telling stories, the more compelling both the visual and oral narrative becomes. Yet when interviewees do engage their surroundings and shift their eyes to the spaces around them, it is still important for the interviewer to keep his or her eyes on the interviewee.34 CPM staff complemented oral history interview footage by filming context shots of Cape Town’s urban landscape. These context shots captured the auditory and visual senses of Cape Town streets as corridors of sociability for people from all walks of life, in which they congregate or through which they pass. Camera shots of people traveling on these streets or the panning shots across buildings and people all contributed to a visual and aural sense of atmosphere. Thus context shots created both a mood for the documentary and an audiovisual contextualization for viewers/listeners to engage with the oral history interviews in the film documentary.

The CPM’s documentary was entitled Soweto Succeeded and We Caught a Fever: Street Stories from Klipfontein Road. Film editing and artistic direction involved blending context shots, clips of outdoor and indoor interviews, news, and archival footage. The documentaries were not scripted at the outset but the post-interview process of scripting required a skilled film editor with sensitivity to varied forms of oral testimonies conveyed on camera. The “Street Stories” film editor, Pascale Neuschäfer, notes that filmed oral histories compel us to respond on many levels:

Firstly, the viewer is responding to sound, to the aural stimulus of voice (the semantic listening), as well as to the external sounds of environment (the causal listening). Secondly, the viewer is responding to visual stimuli which range from the broader context of the environment to the visual identity of the interviewee. The visual identity can be divided into the external (how does the face corroborate the voice?), in terms of social signifiers, such as clothing, race, physical peculiarities (ears, tattoos, etcetera) and the specificity of movement, gesture and expression. As the saying goes, “a picture speaks a thousand words.” Finally, when the aural and visual stimuli are combined they create an emotional stimulus (not a sentimental one!) to which the viewer responds.34 These points indicate the range of interpretive choices that viewing and listening to the raw footage of filmed interviews provides, and also the choices available when engaging with the final cut of the historical film documentary. But can these various forms of information deliver the historical evidence needed to produce specific histories and answer particular intellectual questions? These are the questions that should be central to deciding whether to use sound and/or audiovisual recording for an oral history research project. Some historians will ask whether the “Street Stories” project delivered new evidence by using video cameras, when the less costly and less time-consuming audio recording might have sufficed.35 Although digital video cameras are no longer expensive, skilled, labor-intensive film editing is costly. Nevertheless, the answer is yes, it was worth it. These filmed oral histories offered more information than audio recordings about the past and present Cape Town: and provided a more complex understanding of how memories cluster around sites, and showed that people’s movements along these roads shaped their sense of places. To develop this argument, Simon Schama critiques the logocentric assumption that print is deep, images are shallow... print argues and images passively illustrate. Now this particular blunder is a result, I suppose, of the self-reinforcing failure of all those graduate departments to educate students in iconography (the scholarship of the meaning of images) and ideology (the relationship of those memories to the cultures which produce and receive them)... Imagery, still or moving, does not just tell stories. It argues but it argues in a different way to print.

As a born and bred resident of Cape Town, I know that the iconography of the city dominates the way in which many outsiders and locals see and speak about it. Cape Town’s beauty lulls many into forgetting the past and present pain within most residents. The optical attraction of the mountains, forests, and seas entices visitors and many locals to look there, and in the process to look away from the suffering within Cape Town, with the potential impact of numbing us into political inertia. The “Street Stories” documentaries produced a different iconography. These documentaries take audiences on a journey beyond the beautiful, reminding us of the sociopolitical realities across many sites of memory. They give audiences glimpses of what Steven High meant when he said: “Places are not simply points on a map, but exist in time as well. Memoryscapes make this fusion explicit.”36 For example, while speaking about the Trojan Horse shootings, Mr. G. A. seemed to be immersed in the memoryscape of Klipfontein and Thornton roads:

Little boys picking up stones, and big men taking out guns at close range, practically where you are standing, shooting from the railway track. And those houses where they fired on, for years that people didn’t repair the house, the holes on the walls, the bullets, everybody went past and as we grew up and saw the holes, like a memory,
looking at those holes that was young lives lost there and its quite sad... you look and we saw this memorial site, suddenly it just triggers a something, there your memory runs like a camera back, start getting little flashbacks.

This self-reflective and emotionally expressive interviewee is aware of his past and present surroundings. Perhaps he referred to the camera because there was one pointing at him? But his use of the camera as a metaphor of memory is apt, as he temporally tracks his memories from their past origins, through their changing significance and then arriving in the streets of the present. Memory flashbacks will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, but his point that there are at times when a sequence of memory-images flicker and move in the human mind much like a movie is crucial. The presence of the past surrounded him within this familiar memoriescape where he sold factory reject clothes for a living and was being interviewed. While talking and crying he pointed to nearby Thornton Road, and his emotionally laden mental images of the shootings appeared to be too much to bear. The visceral memories of the shootings were flashing back in his mind and body here and now in front of the camera. This is a graphic example of embodied memory of, to put it differently, memory work as an embodied activity evident on film.

The facial expressions, body language, and movements of several of the “Street Stories” interviews strengthen the argument for on-site storytelling to continue in the places that people remember from direct experience. In the process, researchers can learn more about how people construct knowledge about themselves, their communities, and the places they have invested in meaning. Audiovisual oral histories for merely illustrative purposes have limited value. But if utilized for research and analysis of people in urban landscapes such as Klipfontein Road, involving several potential memoriescapes, this then provides ways to envision oral history as a means to analyze how people construct senses of place across changing times.

Over the past 20 years of doing research on communities and displaced peoples in Cape Town, I have continually grappled with the complex intersections between places/sites and displacement/mobility, between past and present. I remain convinced that attempts to understand the formation of community or place-based identities cannot be reduced to fixed belongings (or “roots”) nor is it only about the celebration of travel and mobility, especially when the movement is forcibly imposed by oppressive regimes, wars, genocides, and involves the anguish of travel when there is no “home” to return to and there is no clear destination. Such is the plight of refugees (see Chapter 8).

For the “Street Stories” project, the bulk of the interviewees were South African citizens, either victims of apartheid displacements or descendants of victims. The stories of people racially classified and forcibly displaced out of inner-city suburbs and who now live and travel along Klipfontein Road frequently convey a sense of being “out of place.” These “out of place” feelings are probably even more pronounced for black African residents who lived through apartheid pass laws and were repeatedly told that they did not belong in Cape Town. “Feeling out-of-place” is repeatedly invoked in the present by parts of the city that look European, by residential and nonresidential spaces where white and coloured faces are still dominant. Some coloured residents, the tenuous majority in the city, express feelings of unease about the influx of black Africans. The political ideal of creating a culturally integrated post-apartheid city that is “a home for all” remains a major challenge. Yet for all the divisions, there are also historically entangled relationships between and across all cultures in the city. More specifically, on Klipfontein Road the intertwined lives of coloured and African working-class residents of the city are of central significance. This road is a culturally diverse public spine to the city.

Klipfontein Road involves mobile peoples and moving places. It is also a chain of sites of memory, a series of images reflecting social changes, or lack thereof, which people absorb as they stand at bus stops and taxi ranks, as they travel up and down the road, again and again. The “Street Stories” project framed various types of movements, but interviewees and researchers cannot make sense of these stories without understanding where and how people have attached themselves visually and emotionally to specific sites or places. For example, the racial ghettos forged by apartheid are still home for many. And yet, for many “the homes” they “lost” during apartheid are remembered as “home” as well. This is especially so for the older generations, who have traveled these roads for decades but mentally still travel back to the places they once knew before apartheid. Audiovisual oral history then opens up ways to understanding place-based memories and how people mentally map or locate their memories within the spaces they move across and along on this road. Klipfontein Road is a thin, taut thread that paradoxically divides and connects people, which runs down the middle of probably the most dominant post-apartheid memoriescape of the city: The Cape Flats.
Over time, people's senses absorb various stimuli from the public (and domestic) spaces they inhabit and in the process they internalize mental imagery and associated emotions from these external sources. Paula Hamilton is absolutely correct to argue for the need to develop an oral history of the senses. If we begin to think through the senses, then the private/public binary is also revealed to be porous, like our skins and our eyes. The audiovisual recording of oral histories cannot capture all the senses, but it can provide ways to track differing movements. The term "moving places" frames and situates the different emotions and moods of interviewees within the atmosphere and imagery of specific landscapes. The term also aims to grasp how "places envelop people" and "places are in people." These places are created by peoples' memories of mobility, interactions, and emotional attachments, which are constituted through their imaginative framing of sensory information of changing spaces and times.

Sound recordings tend to stimulate the researcher's skills of historical imagination, but with audiovisual recordings, there is a wider sensory range with which to imaginatively engage. Intellectually spliced together, spoken words and moving images offer more potential evidence to work with in analyzing how moving places create memories in and between people. Thus it becomes possible, at least in part, for oral historians in this field of research to travel beyond the limits of logocentricism.

This chapter has contested the assumption that oral history research is best practiced—or should only be practiced—through sound recording. Most oral historians are understandably more familiar with sound recording, but this familiarity should not translate into perceiving these interviews as a purer or better form of oral history. Oral history interviews recorded solely with sound remain of central importance. And video cameras and new technologies should also not be treated with uncritical reverence. As I have argued, by embracing both sound and audiovisual technologies, we expand our recording and interpretive choices and open up more intellectual questions for oral history research, analysis, and debate.

The implications that audiovisual oral histories might have for the politics of oral history and voice is beyond the scope of this chapter (see Framing Notes III). But for oral historians who wish to use their methodology to bring about political change, I would suggest that, given the multimedia societies we now live in, the impulse to choose audiovisual oral history must become stronger. For our political or educational endeavors to be more effective, the public impact of oral history productions becomes a driving motive. Yes, print media, especially books and newspaper articles, will remain a crucial avenue for making political statements. But, most certainly in the South African context, audiovisual oral histories and the production of historical film documentaries have the potential to reach a far greater number of people and a wider generational and cultural diversity of audiences.