Review

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Joy Parr and Jon van der Veen, "Megaprojects," http://megaprojects.fims.uwo.ca

Created by Joy Parr and Jon van der Veen, the website, Megaprojects (http://megaprojects.fims.uwo.ca), employs a variety of multimedia techniques that paint a vivid portrait of the disorientation that occurs when the construction of a megaproject intersects with individual lives. The three projects on the website: "Val Morton: A Guided Archive," "Lostscapes: Visiting Old Iroquois," and "Sounding Danger in and around the Bruce Nuclear Power Site," collectively explore how individuals employ memories of family, home, and community to understand loss.

The first project, "Val Morton: A Guided Archive" (http://megaprojects.fims.uwo.ca/morton/Default.html), speaks to the disruptive and dislocating changes consequent upon land expropriation for megaprojects. As a result of the Columbia River Treaty, British Columbia (BC) Hydro told Val Morton, in the late 1960s, that his family's ranch stood directly in the path of the project's flood waters and thus the company forced Morton to sell this land at a Hydro-set price. The collage of images, audio interviews, and personal memoirs show how Val Morton's family identity was inextricably linked to a sense of place. Immediately upon the purchase of their home in 1920, the Mortons began to take photographs to document the evolution of their land throughout its various incarnations, including cattle farming, cash cropping, a timber operation, and finally, an airstrip. The entrepreneurial spirit shown by building a blacksmith shop on the property where the family was able to fashion its own tools provides evidence of the family's determination to maintain its land in a self-sufficient manner.

The sources on the website form an archive of memories that commemorate loss, specifically illustrating the relationship between family and land while underpinning the sense of loss that occurs when the two are severed. Particularly poignant are Morton's handwritten accounts of life on the ranch as well as the photographs of the farm animals. The pride of place given to the horses in the photographs – Bender, Lad, and Kane – suggest that they were integral members of the Morton family. These memoirs tread a fine line between commemorating an extinct way of life and grieving an irreparable loss.

The trauma of losing hearth and home left Val Morton untethered by a sense of betrayal and formed the basis for waging a losing battle against BC Hydro. The visuals on the website highlight the colossal sense of discontinuity caused by the ruptured landscape. Morton went from rancher and land owner to a

displaced man living in a camper truck, the fracture leaving him unable to re-establish a sense of identity. His story is one of grief and mourning for the destruction of the land that embodied his family life. The relationship with the land had extended well over forty years and, although his brothers had left to make their lives elsewhere, they came back to the farm each year to help with the harvest, an annual return to their roots that showed their deep attachment to their family home.

This section of the website presents some navigational and design challenges. At the slightest touch of the mouse, there is an abundance of movement that is difficult to control and impedes comprehension. While the use of Morton's handwritten journals is very effective, they can be difficult to read at times; this is, it must be noted, somewhat mitigated by the accompanying audio clips. Nevertheless, the combined use of visual and audio clips underscore the devastating effects that megaprojects have on the lives of individuals.

The second project on the website, "Lostscapes: Visiting Old Iroquois" (http://megaprojects.fims.uwo.ca/old_iroquois/OldIroquois_content.html), consists of a variety of interviews conducted with former homeowners, and their descendents, who hail from the "Lost Village" of Iroquois; this town was located in Eastern Ontario, on the north shore of the St. Lawrence River, between the cities of Cornwall and Brockville. To create a head pond for the hydro-electric station, constructed as part of the St. Lawrence Seaway and Power Project, the entire village of Iroquois was moved one mile to the north and the old village was flooded in 1958.

This project features virtual walking tours of the two main thoroughfares in "old" Iroquois as they existed in 1953, five years prior to the flooding. As you walk down the streets, you hear the voices of the former villagers who, in conversation with Joy Parr, describe what life was like before the megaproject eradicated the landscape. As there is considerable static interference, the audio is not always clear. Nevertheless, the map, and the visual and audio clips are well-choreographed.

The interviews in this project are free-flowing and conversational. Parr's voice is unobtrusive, engaging the former villagers in a natural manner that allows them to share their own stories of bittersweet memories; of lives once lived in a small, closely-knit community; and of the sense of dislocation and loss they felt following the flooding. Many of these villagers were descendents of the United Empire Loyalists and had thus called "old" Iroquois home for over 150 years. The villagers' comments palpably demonstrate that their lives were grounded in a community that went back several generations. As one former villager stated, "The river was our life." With the flooding in 1958, the strip of land bordering the river became Ontario Hydro bush land, forever separating the community members from their river. There is a certain nostalgia as the villagers recount their

memories while, at the same time, a tacit recognition that the villages would not have remained frozen within a 1950s framework. In the intervening years since the flooding, much of the riverfront property on the St. Lawrence, between the Quebec border and Brockville, was purchased by affluent residents from the nearby cities of Montreal and Ottawa and they proceeded to build summer homes on this land. Parr makes no attempt to historicize or contextualize the memories but rather leaves the villagers to collectively create a unifying narrative of inevitable loss, which they do very well. Since she refrains from disrupting the flow of memory with editorial comments or historical interpretations, she has done an admirable job of allowing the community to retain ownership of its story.

This project lacks an introduction and this would be helpful for readers who do not know the story of the Ontario villages lost to the St. Lawrence Seaway. Parr sometimes assumes the mantle of a former villager, exchanging inside information with the interviewees about their former community. This leaves the listener wondering, for example, if Main Street, as the villagers called it, is King Street or College Street and whether "new" Iroquois maintained the names of the old streets. The website tabs include aerial images, a plan for "new" Iroquois, and a tab entitled, "1928 Insurance." Although probably intended to physically contextualize the website, it is unclear just what these images seek to depict.

"Sounding Danger in and Around the Bruce Nuclear Power Site" (http://megaprojects.fims.uwo.ca/Bruce%20Nuclear/Equate_Things.mp3) is the third project included on the Megaprojects website. For the most part, it approaches the topic of megaprojects from a considerably different perspective than the other two projects, since it is entirely aural. This section engages with the oral interview as a disembodied voice: a metaphor for the corporate perspective on dislocation and the failure to see the individual caught in a process of victimization. The fourth part of this project stresses the idea of people in the dark, showing the juxtaposition between residents who cannot see their way clear to a resolution and corporations that cannot see the people.

The techniques used in the four oral presentations successfully demonstrate the issues that surround the construction of a nuclear power site. The confusion of voices reflects the information and misinformation meted out by corporations and the different and often conflicting ways that citizens respond to the plans devised by these corporations. The discussion of invisible menaces parallels the invisible effects of nuclear radiation which often result from megaprojects. The fading out of one voice into the next represents the weakness of any voice to be heard, while the instances of total fade-out annihilate individual agency.

As technology improves, these techniques could be used to very good effect to articulate all of the issues under discussion. Unfortunately, in this case,

the voice-overs, accompanied occasionally with some rather jarring sound effects, render the voices difficult to hear and understand. On the whole, however, the nakedness of the strictly oral medium starkly highlights the vulnerability of people whose voices were never heard.

As a composite, this website makes a valuable contribution to history by teasing out the life stories of those who have been affected by the construction of megaprojects. It does so by pulling together oral histories, images, and personal memoirs in unusual ways that effectively personalize the individual. Megaprojects often discount the individual in favour of the real or imagined collective good. It is easy to do this when the individual has no name, no face, and no voice. While the website has some technical difficulties, that time and technology will resolve, these short-comings are offset by a confluence of visual and aural sketches that not only illustrate how individuals relate to, and interact with, their families, homes, and communities, but also outline how megaprojects disrupt those relationships.