Matthew Barlow

Griffintown

Identity and Memory in an Irish Diaspora Neighbourhood

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Introduction

JACQUES LEDUC AND RENÉE Roy's 1982 film, *Albédo*, introduces us to a derelict, defunct, and desolate neighbourhood in Montreal's southwest called Griffintown.[1] The film traces the history of the place through the writing and photography of former resident David Marvin.[2] Marvin had amassed an archive of the neighbourhood over the course of several decades before his death in 1975. For a century and a half, Griffintown was a vibrant, working-class community. Located next to the busy Port of Montreal, the neighbourhood was originally home to sailors and navvies working on the Lachine Canal, first built in the 1820s, and then expanded in the 1840s, and again in the 1870s. Following the completion of the canal, Griffintown saw, in the 1830s, the beginnings of the Canadian Industrial Revolution, the navvies who had worked on the canal now joined by refugees from post–Napoleonic Europe, many of them Irish, along with victims of the Irish Famine.[3] Griffintown became home to Canada's first urban industrial working class.

Over the course of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, it remained a crowded, busy inner-city working-class neighbourhood. Figure 1 shows us a bird's-eye view of Griffintown in 1896. In it, we can see the close proximity of industrial and residential tracts. The only trees are those that surround St. Ann's Church, at the centre left of the photo. But also of note is that although Griffintown *was* called a slum, and it *was* full of industrial and shipping activity, the streets of the neighbourhood are remarkably clean. Figure 2 shows the location of Griffintown within the

Figure 1 Aerial view of Griffintown, c. 1896. St. Ann's Church is at the centre left, among the trees. To the right is a slip of the Lachine Canal that was filled in during the 1970s when the canal was closed to shipping traffic.
Photo courtesy of the McCord Museum and Archives, View 2942.

urban landscape of Montreal. Situated along the Lachine Canal and at its outlet into the St. Lawrence, Griffintown's locational advantages in terms of industry and shipping appear obvious.

Residents had a strong attachment to Griffintown; despite the difficulties of living there, they were proud of their homes and their community. To outsiders, however, it was a slum. As such, it came under the gaze of urban reformers throughout much of its history, with varying degrees of "success." In the eyes of these reformers, whether in the late nineteenth or mid-twentieth century, the urban slum was a problem to be diagnosed, treated, and cured, in keeping with the ideals of modernity.[4] The slum, in essence, mocked the wealth and power of the modern city. Thus, the resulting discourse, which arose out of a bourgeois imagination of the working classes' experiences, spoke to the ways that residents of these neighbourhoods continually found their homes under attack through successive waves of reform.[5]

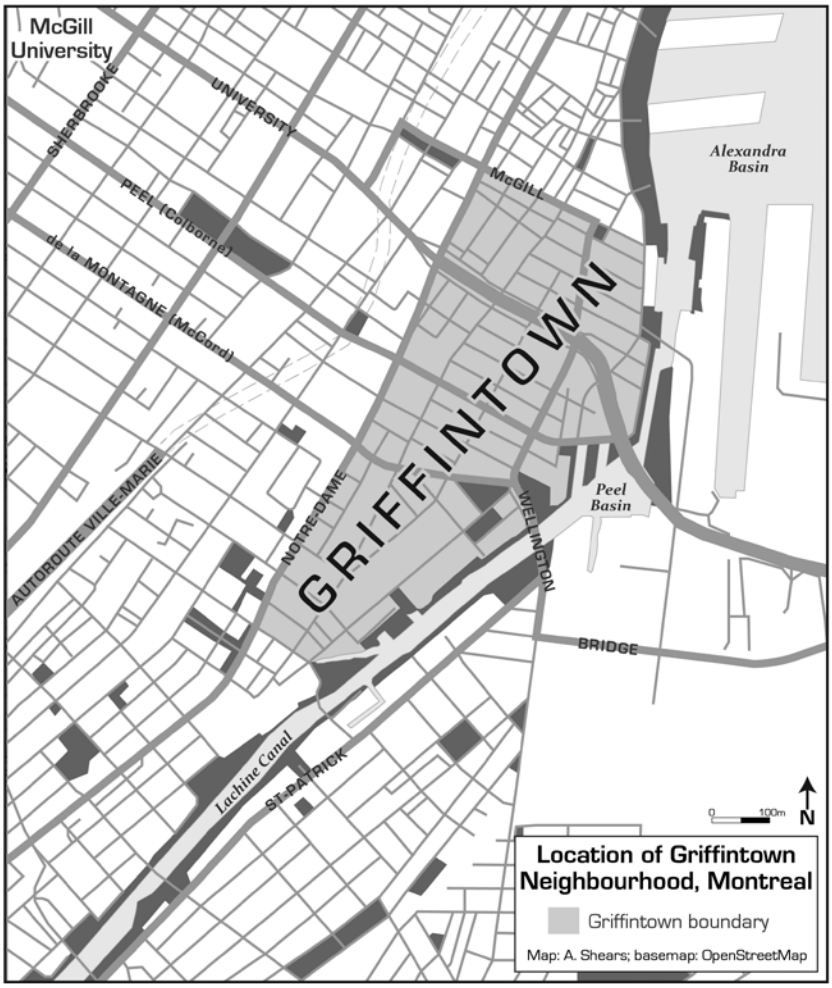

Figure 2 Location of Griffintown within Montreal
Cartography by Andy Shears.

Populated by a mix of Irish-Catholics, Anglo-Protestants, and French Canadians (with smaller populations of Jews, Italians, Lebanese, and Syrians), the neighbourhood was home to a polyglot population. Yet Griffintown was always seen as an Irish-Catholic neighbourhood, irrespective of who else lived there. This continued to be the case after its destruction.

As a physical entity, Griffintown ceased to exist in the middle decades of the twentieth century. It fell victim to Montreal's grand urban

redevelopment plans: slum clearances, outmigrations, and deindustrialization. Whereas other adjacent neighbourhoods in the southwest of the city – Pointe-Saint-Charles, Little Burgundy, and Saint-Henri among them – experienced urban reform in some way, Griffintown was left to languish. Large tracts of housing were torn down, replaced by soulless cinderblock warehouses in some cases, by vast expanses of pavement and vacant lots in others. To be sure, Griffintown was not the only neighbourhood in Canada to face such an infrastructural onslaught, nor was it the only one to have to fight for its very existence or risk being wiped off the map.

The middle decades of the twentieth century were the zenith of modernism in Canada, and technocrats sought to rebuild the nation's cities in a more modern manner. In many cases, this meant that inner-city working-class neighbourhoods came under the gaze of the state. In other Montreal neighbourhoods, and in other cities, residents were cleared out of the slum-like tenement housing and moved into new housing projects. This did not happen in Griffintown. Although Griffintown *was* targeted, at least initially, by urban reformers, the district did not experience redevelopment as did Pointe-Saint-Charles, Little Burgundy, and Saint-Henri.

Nonetheless, the history of Griffintown can be read in conjunction with other inner-city neighbourhoods that came to be diagnosed as slums, such as Africville in Halifax and Vancouver's Chinatown. The central difference between these two and Griffintown, though, is the question of race. The populations of Africville and Chinatown could be and were easily constructed as the Other. This was not possible with the white population of Griffintown.[6] Nevertheless, neighbourhoods like Griffintown *did* become problematic or, rather, had their historic problems recast in a new language in the mid-twentieth century.[7]

Also of note for Griffintown is that the land it occupied was not valued, unlike both Chinatown and Toronto's Regent Park. Like both of those neighbourhoods, Griffintown is adjacent to Montreal's downtown core, just down the hill. Griff, as it is more popularly known, is also right next to Vieux-Montréal. Yet, for reasons unique to Montreal, most notably the generation-long depression from the 1970s to the 1990s, Griffintown was not seen as valuable land. It was not until the early 2000s, when developers began to move in, that it was valued again. As well, whereas Chinatown and Africville were still thriving neighbourhoods when they came up against a state determined to destroy them in the 1960s and 1970s, Griffintown was already near death.[8] And by the mid-1970s, Griffintown was dead.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, Griffintown experienced a renaissance of sorts. In the first years of the new century, the industrial remnants of the neighbourhood were joined by artists' lofts and urban homesteads owned by middle-class professionals who recolonized Griffintown's old housing stock; both groups were attracted by cheap real estate. In the past decade or so, they have been joined, not always smoothly, by developers building condos, commercial spaces, and various amenities to cater to the wealthy new residents lured by the close proximity to both Montreal's downtown core and the upscale commercial and residential establishments in Vieux-Montréal. At this point, Griff became the site of massive speculation and redevelopment.

This book arises out of a confluence of stories to be told about Griffintown; through these stories, I historicize the idea of "one space, many places," used by cultural geographers to identify and locate the dynamic, deeply contingent relationships between places and their representations.[9] The first story is that of a community forged out of a specific set of relations to a place, and the social and class identifications and constructions that "placed them" in that place, Griffintown, to begin with. The second is of the dissolution of Griffintown as a physical space because of the changes in that community, combined with an infrastructural onslaught that attended slum clearances and urban redevelopment. And the third is of the projection onto Griffintown in the late 1990s and early 2000s of an imagined history as a means of carving out space for the Irish community of Montreal in the face of urban, cultural, and political change in the city, and as a result of the reinvigoration of the Irish diaspora worldwide.

Thus, the spatialization of Griffintown as a physical and imaginary entity is central to this story. This is the biography of an inner-city neighbourhood in Montreal and the stories that have been created, recreated, reinforced, and projected about it over the past century. Central to this biography is a situating of the Irish-Catholic population of Montreal, the key actors on the stage of Griffintown, within the intersection of Ireland and Quebec. This, in turn, means that we can see more subtlety, ambiguity, and ambivalence in the Irish-Catholics of Montreal vis-à-vis their relationship to Griffintown, the city, the province/nation of Quebec, Canada, and Ireland itself. An imagined Ireland has remained integral to the Griffintown experience, as the people of the neighbourhood's diaspora found ways to represent the old country back to themselves. In the memorializations of the past two decades, representations of Ireland and Irish culture are central

to the reformulation of the imagined Griffintown. In this process, we can see how the Irish-Catholic culture of Griffintown was one forged out of the ambivalence and hybridity of their experience in Montreal.

Previous scholarly studies of Griffintown, and of the Irish in Montreal, have tended to focus on the nineteenth century, occasionally extending into the early twentieth century.[10] Griffintown has also come under the gaze of journalists and filmmakers interested in telling the story of the then-defunct neighbourhood. These cultural productions form part of what I term the Griffintown Commemorative Project, which I examine in Chapter 5.[11] This is the first book-length study of Griffintown, and it is the only study of the Irish in Griffintown or Montreal as a whole that examines the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In this way, I am attempting to build on the work of earlier scholars, examining how the residents of this, the first immigrant community in Montreal, adapted once they were no longer Irish but Irish Canadian, how that hyphenated existence worked in practice, and how this small but important community used memory work to reinforce their Irishness and their Canadianness, as well as their *Montréalicité*.

I came to Griffintown at the start of the twenty-first century as a graduate student at Concordia University. I was interested in tracing the arc of Irishness in Montreal as a means of honouring my family history. Over the years, I was drawn into the activist politics of Griffintown, first through the various squats and underground music venues in the neighbourhood in the first decade of the twentieth century, then through my involvement in the fight to preserve the history of Griffintown in the face of the massive redevelopment of the neighbourhood starting around 2011.[12] This book is a result of all of these processes.

Despite it never being home to the majority of Montreal's Irish-Catholic population, nor ever even being predominately Irish, Griffintown, largely because of the memory work of its residents and diaspora, has traditionally been viewed as Montreal's equivalent of Boston's Southie or New York's Five Points or Hell's Kitchen.[13] It was also home to the city's first immigrant group. Memory work is central to this story. It is through this intense memory work on the part of Griff's residents and diaspora that Montrealers know it as an Irish neighbourhood. In the years between its abandonment as a lived neighbourhood and its gentrified rebirth, this memory work was intensified as the Irish-Catholic community of Montreal sought to reestablish its place in the cultural landscape of a city grappling with ethnolinguistic, cultural, and political upheavals. Griffintown's memory, as produced and

performed by its former residents, was both a product and a process of negotiated belonging for the descendants of the first immigrant group to complicate Montreal's divided linguistic, cultural, and political landscapes.

The Irish experience in Montreal was more complex than that of the Irish in London, Liverpool, New York, Boston, Sydney, or other diasporic cities. In some cases, Montreal might have been the easier city to settle in, given its Catholic majority. The Irish, especially the Catholics, encountered fierce nativist movements in other locations in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia.[14] At the same time, Montreal is the only major city in the English-speaking world where English is a minority language. And it is the only such city with a vociferous minority population, Anglo Montrealers, that has traditionally, jealously, and actively defended its linguistic rights.[15]

The Irish-Catholics were the first "immigrant" to arrive in Montreal, but they were not the first Other group, as they were in other cities.[16] In Montreal, they arrived into a city already cleaved across ethnolinguistic and religious lines (to say nothing of the classed and gendered landscape of Montreal) between Anglo-Protestants and French Canadians. In the mid-nineteenth century, anglophones, largely because of the tremendous influx of Irish, composed the majority of the city's population, albeit briefly, and only until 1861.[17] And Anglo-Protestants were the economically dominant group in the city. Both Anglo-Protestants and French Canadians tended to eye one another with suspicion, with occasional outbursts of both outright hostility and timely cooperation. However, with the exception of some neighbourhoods with a mixed-residential pattern, there was little interaction between Anglo-Protestants and French Canadians before the late twentieth century. Indeed, the city was geographically divided between the francophone east end and the anglophone west end, with "the Main," boulevard Saint-Laurent, as the traditional dividing line.[18]

So although the Irish in other cities were left to contend with only one majoritarian population while forging their own identity and space on the urban landscape, in Montreal, Irish-Catholics were a double minority, in terms of religion (as a minority within the Catholic population of the city) and language (forming a minority in the English-speaking minority population).[19] Left to negotiate an already complex urban landscape, the new immigrants struggled to create a space for themselves both physically and culturally, between and within Montreal's dual majorities.[20] In some cases, there was cooperation, in others, conflict. The Irish-Catholics installed

themselves as a third cultural community between these two majorities, sharing a religion with one and a language with the other.

Scholars have argued that the Irish-Catholics of Montreal in the nineteenth century created this cultural space for themselves through four means: the Catholic Church, local politics, the Saint Patrick's Society, and organized sport. The Church was instrumental, as it allowed the Irish to carve out a major institutional space in Montreal; before their arrival, there were few non-francophone Catholics in the city. The Irish were responsible for the creation of an anglophone Catholic tradition in Montreal.[21] The parish was a particularly important institution for the establishment and maintenance of an Irish-Catholic identity in Montreal in the nineteenth century. In the wake of the aborted Rebellions of 1837 in Lower Canada and the ongoing political turmoil in Ireland, the Catholic Church in Montreal sought to refocus Irish identity away from Ireland itself, attempting instead to foster a local one.[22] Parishioners, on the other hand, had different ideas, since interest in Ireland and Irish affairs remained near the forefront of the city's Irish-Catholic population's attention, at least until Irish independence in 1922.[23] The result was a hybridized identity within the Irish-Catholic Church, as well as among its parishioners, in Montreal.

This ambivalence in Irish-Catholic Griffintown should not be surprising given the hybridized, diasporic culture that had developed there by the late nineteenth century. Stephen A. Brighton defines the term *diaspora* as a social condition and process through which identity is created and recreated based on the values of difference between the diasporic group and the host society. In addition, I argue, these differences are predicated on the memory work of the diasporic group, drawing upon its identity and memory of the homeland. To understand diaspora, we must first understand the historical and contemporary elements in diasporic groups' "diachronic reality," considering the simultaneously local and global networks of identities that are transnational, imagined, and encountered. Moreover, diasporic communities are bound together through a collective memory and "re-memory," or memory work, which is forged through the quotidian.[24] They do not abandon their sociocultural values, behaviours, and national allegiances after resettlement and establishment in their new country; rather, they become imbued with new customs and loyalties, which are then layered over the old. In other words, the Irish did not arrive in North America as blank slates; rather, they emigrated with "entrenched social dispositions and ideologies reflected in objects and material signs."[25] And this layering

process necessarily leads to a marked and fundamental ambivalence vis-à-vis both homeland and new land.

Griffintown was a particularly ambivalent community as the clergy and nuns of St. Ann's Parish, together with their parishioners, worked to forge and police the boundaries of a carefully constructed Irish-Catholic identity through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, based largely on memory work. Memory work can be defined simply as "manifestations or articulations of cultural memory."[26] Griffintown was both the first and the last of Montreal's Irish neighbourhoods. It was central to the forging of an Irish-Catholic identity in Montreal in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a process that continued into the early twenty-first century. This identity was, in turn, based on the extensive memory work carried out, not by the elite of Irish-Catholic Montreal, but by the rank and file of the population, including Griffintown's working classes. For example, each 17 March, the St. Ann's Young Men's Society put on a play and pageant at the Théâtre Monument-National on the rue Saint-Denis, in the east end of downtown, far from Griffintown. Here, the Young Men and the support acts performed their Irishness for themselves but also for their fellow Griffintowners, as well as for the wider Irish Montreal population and the city's residents as a whole, all of whom packed into the theatre, filling it to the rafters on St. Patrick's Day in the first half of the twentieth century.

The Irish-Catholics of Griffintown worked to memoryscape their neighbourhood. By this, I mean that they have invested particular places around the neighbourhood with their cultural memories. Keith Basso has examined the ways in which the Pima of Central Arizona have historically embedded in their landscape the stories, histories, and lessons of their way of life and culture. Thus, the Pima, when they wish to remind someone of their past, or of a lesson they would like that person to remember, make what seem to white people abstract references to locations on their territory, such as "Trail Goes Down between Two Hills." The target of their comments, however, will know what they mean.[27] In this way, the Pima have memoryscaped their territory in Arizona. In short, what this means is that the Pima have embedded memory in their landscape, hence the term *memoryscape*.[28] Although the memoryscaping engaged by the Irish of Griffintown is not as intense as that of the Pima, it has still happened. Walking the streets of Griff with former resident Denis Delaney as he tells stories to a small crowd on a walking tour, I can see how each story he tells us is firmly embedded in the concrete of the neighbourhood. This should not be surprising. Memory

was performed daily on the streets of the neighbourhood, from obvious examples, such as the procession of the Corpus Christi to more subtle examples, such as the conversations Griffintowners held on the streets, in their kitchens, in school hallways, and in factory breakrooms. They drew on the stories of an Irish past to create an Irish landscape in Griffintown. In this way, they harnessed what Delores Hayden has called the power of place: "The power of ordinary landscapes to nurture citizens' public memory, to encompass shared time in the form of shared territory."[29]

Having said this, place is not a static entity. Place changes and evolves. Hence, the stories Charlie Blickstead told of his Griffintown, where he grew up in the first decades of the twentieth century, necessarily differ from Denis Delaney's Griffintown of the 1940s, and from David O'Neill's of the 1950s. But, in addition to varying memories and times, the actual physical landscape of Griffintown was in constant flux from the 1920s onward. Buildings were torn down, factories shuttered. The Canadian National Railway, the Ville de Montréal, and the federal government also altered Griffintown with railway viaducts and highways. And at the same time, other markers on their landscape remained, most notably St. Ann's Church, the spiritual centre of Irish-Catholic Griffintown (see Figure 3). In short, "places are a complicated mixture of fixity and flow, stability and change."[30]

Identity formation is a symbiotic process, one that requires buy-in from the masses, whether it is the population of a neighbourhood in Montreal or a nation. Benedict Anderson argues that nations are "cultural artefacts of a certain kind"; he spoke of the various symbols and ideas that create and perpetuate the idea of nation to both members of that nation and to those outside of it. His argument can be applied to smaller communities, such as the Irish-Catholics of Griffintown. Their identity was a form of permanence, a cultural artefact, created and based on various symbols and ideas, and rooted to the specific location, or place, of Griffintown.[31]

More to the point, identities are fluid and, like place, are best seen as processes, rather than as static facts. Communities, then, are imagined realities, both "social interaction and a process." And it is only in viewing them as such that we can attempt to understand the meaning of communities. These meanings are varied and dependent upon social networks, to say nothing of the gendered and politicized experiences within them. In short, community, like memory and identity, is a process, mediated through "a range of conflicting and converging factors" that evolve over time and

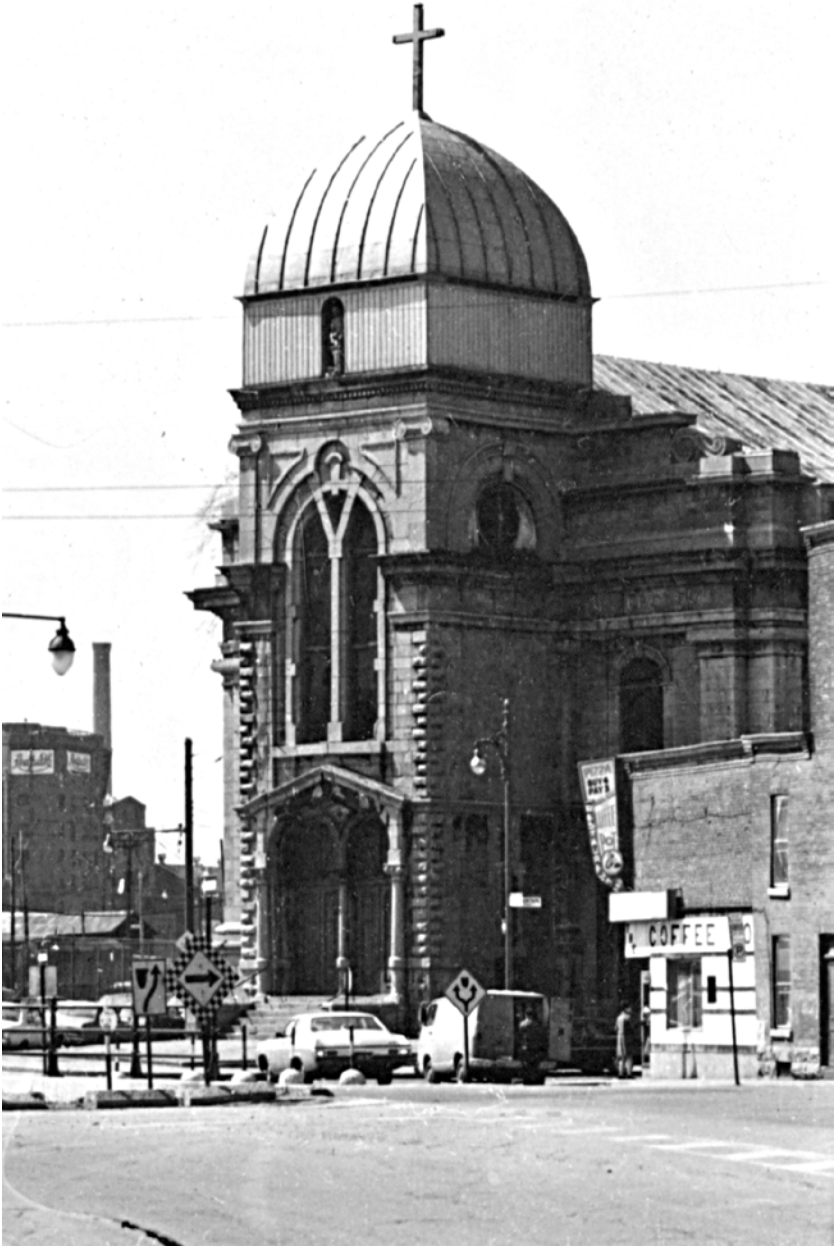

Figure 3 St. Ann's Church, Gallery Square
Photo courtesy of McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.4774.

space.[32] Whereas members of Anderson's nations see logos, maps, institutions such as museums, and artefacts such as language as forging and representing their imagined communities,[33] Griffintowners' logos were shamrocks and other symbols of an "authentic" Irishness; their institution was St. Ann's Church; their artefacts were their stories and representations of Ireland and Griffintown that were handed down through the generations and repeated or performed in this place.[34] Furthermore, through these institutions and interactions, community was formed.[35]

We develop our memories within the context of society, and we recall, recognize, and localize them in that same context. Our recollections work in concert with group situations; in contextualizing memory work and embedding it in the cultural processes that surround them, we can more clearly understand the role of collective remembrance in shaping community identity.[36] Remembrance invokes, draws on, constructs, and reconstructs the past. Memory tends to be self-confirming in that we tend to remember events and facts in a manner that suits our purposes. Thus, our memories are not a *record* of what happened but a *representation* of what happened.[37] And these representations are used, both individually and societally, in creating a "usable past," which can then be used in the telling of origin myths and stories, and to explain how we (and our communities) not just came into being but came to be as we (and our communities) are.[38]

All social life is performative, although some things, most notably cultural performances such as memory, "are somehow set apart from everyday reality, in space, in time, or both. They offer participants and audiences an opportunity to reflect on culturally significant materials and symbols. And they may also present openings to argue or negotiate about the meaning of these materials, often in ways that have social or political consequences beyond the actual experience of performance."[39] Performance and history are intimately related, as history is mobilized through performance and repetition. The performance of history, or historicity, constitutes how history is sorted out and produced. History, therefore, is never total; it is full of contradictions and tensions that performers, whether historians such as me or historical actors such as appear on the pages of this book, must then sort out.[40]

Performativity, historicity, and memory are especially important when physical traces of the past are in jeopardy, as was the case in Griffintown from the dawn of the twentieth century as the neighbourhood came under infrastructural onslaught. Of course, by the 1970s, in the wake of the deconstruction of the neighbourhood, these triple processes of performativity,

historicity, and memory became even more important, as the neighbourhood was discombobulated. Thus, when it comes to more recent attempts at memory work in Griffintown, it is worth considering the temporality of that preservation of the vanishing, imagined as it has been against a largely barren backdrop there. With the redevelopment of Griffintown and as those who have worked to maintain this vision of Griffintown die, the answer to this question likely will change.

Performance is a form of ritual. Victor Turner argues that

> cultural performances are not simple reflectors or expressions of culture or even of changing culture but may themselves be active agencies of change ... Performative reflexivity ... is not mere *reflex*, a quick, automatic, or habitual response to some stimulus. It is highly contrived, artificial, of culture, not nature, a deliberate and voluntary work of art.[41]

Della Pollock goes so far as to claim that the production and writing of history, such as what I am doing with this book, is "the ultimate historical performance, making events meaningful by talking about them, by investing them with the cultural and political assumptions carried in the language itself."[42] In other words, my role, like that of the drivers behind the Griffintown Commemorative Project, is not neutral.

Allison Landsberg argues that through performances of memory, one may "suture" oneself into a historical narrative that one did not live through. In other words, we gain a "prosthetic memory" in postmodern culture. When it comes to Montreal's diasporic Irish, they *did* suture themselves into a larger historical narrative in which they had no personal experience. Indeed, this is part and parcel of being a member of any culture, but especially a diasporic one: a suturing of oneself into the experiences and history of one's diasporic culture. Landsberg argues that "prosthetic memories are transportable and therefore challenge more traditional forms of memory that are premised on claims of authenticity, 'heritage,' and ownership." This new form of memory is neither inherently progressive nor inherently reactionary, but it is powerful.[43] With respect to Griffintown, the Irish-Catholics made and make continual claims to the authenticity of heritage vis-à-vis the Irish experience. These, however, should be met with some suspicion given the diasporic nature of Griffintown's Irish. By the late nineteenth century, the immigrant generation had by and large died off, with the peak of Irish emigration to Canada having ended half a century earlier.

In this sense, drawing on Edward Soja, I argue that Griff exists in thirdspace. Soja maintains that firstspace is the "accurate description of surface appearances," the measurable and mapable, in other words. Secondspace is a subjective reading of firstspace and is centred on one's feelings toward a place – for example, whether one finds it beautiful or ugly. Finally, thirdspace, which is people living in space, "is practiced and lived rather than simply being material (conceived) or mental (perceived). Thirdspace is always both/and – always in excess of the ability of dualistic thinking to discipline it."[44]

Figure 4 uses Griffintown as an example, then. In Soja's conceptualization, firstspace is the physical landscape of the neighbourhood, a physical landscape, and a material space. Secondspace, on the other hand, is the conceptualization of Griffintown: urban reformers saw it as a slum, whereas the residents of the neighbourhood had a competing notion of what Griffintown was: home. Finally, thirdspace is the ways in which the residents of Griff came together to create meaning and wisdom in the landscape of the neighbourhood, as well as how they shared this knowledge with each other to create a mental map of the neighbourhood through the stories they shared, and the routes they took in travelling to church or work or school. Figure 4 works in terms of both firstspace and thirdspace. It is a simple descriptor of places of import on the landscape of the neighbourhood, but it also reflects those sites of memory, infused with meaning as they are by Griffintown's residents' thirdspace experiences.

Thus, specific locations are open to a multiplicity of interpretations across time and space. Consequently, a location that meant one thing to Charlie Blickstead in 1919 could mean something different to Denis Delaney in 1949 or to David O'Neill in 1959, or me in 2009. So it should not be surprising that sites of memory are complex and complicated. The memoryscapes of individuals and communities "cohere in complex ways."[45]

Place is central to the formation of identities and vice versa; identities are central to the meanings we attach to place. Place, for our purposes here, can be defined in two ways, both general and specific. In the first case, "place is how we make the world meaningful and the way we experience the world. Place, at a basic level, is a space invested with meaning in the context of power."[46] But, perhaps more germane for our purposes, place is indeed a site made meaningful through memory and commemorative purposes;[47] moreover, these methods by which meanings are made are themselves ritualistic.[48] In terms of Griffintown's landscape, I argue that memory sits in places: it sits in the landscape of the neighbourhood, even discombobulated

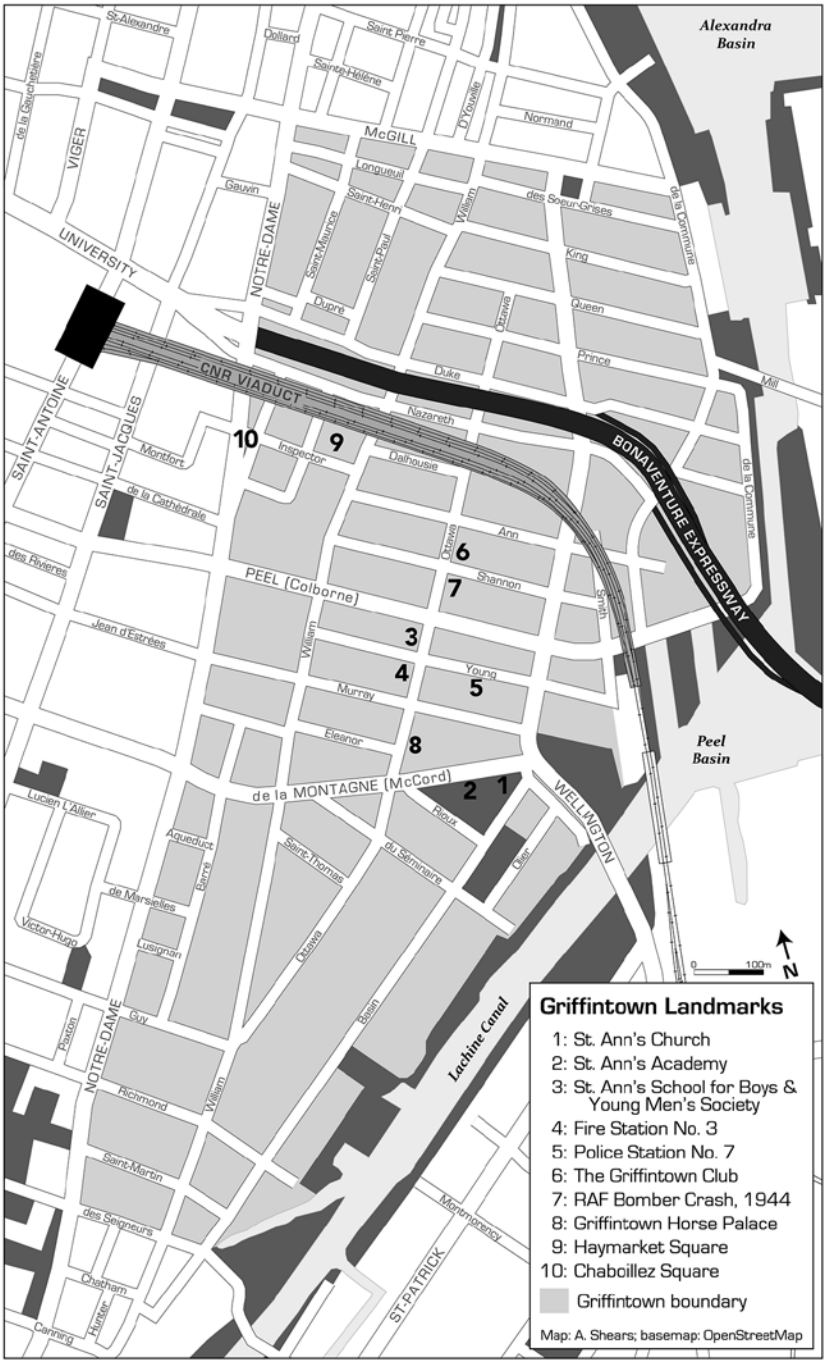

Figure 4 Griffintown sites of interest and memory

Cartography by Andy Shears.

and reconstructed as it is today. Gaston Gordillo argues that this process is even more complicated, that place isn't simply a repository for collective memory; instead, the specificities of place play out in memory work: "Every memory is, in a fundamental way, the memory of place."[49] Gordillo, like Soja before him, draws upon the theorizations of Henri Lefebvre, who argues that an examination of social space "must account for both representational spaces and representations of space, but above all for their inter-relationships and their links with social practice."[50] In short, place is made through memory and ritual. Furthermore, history does not reside in the past; rather, it makes our past, through public memory, which we then use for our own present-day purposes.[51] Thus, history exists to create a usable past, something we can certainly see with the production of a historical memory of Griffintown by the Irish-Catholics of the neighbourhood. In this way, the past is a process, not a static entity. It is always open to negotiation, interpretation, and reinterpretation; like the present, the past is open to varying and multiple readings.[52]

In the coming chapters, we shall see how the space and spaces of Griffintown were restructured to create an Irish-Catholic identity for the neighbourhood. This identity became deeply entrenched, not just for residents of the neighbourhood but across the Irish-Catholic community of Montreal as a whole. So entrenched was this idea of an Irish-Catholic Griffintown that the organizers of the 1914 St. Patrick's Day parade called it the "House of the Irish," even though, by then, the Irish made up less than one-third of the population of Griffintown, as the neighbourhood had already begun its long descent into extinction.[53]

In the post–Second World War era, the working classes of Canada gained a new-found affluence and class lines as a whole lessened, though they obviously did not disappear. By the time Griffintown was abandoned in the 1960s, Montreal's Irish-Catholic population, composed of both working- and middle-classes, had been more or less subsumed into the larger anglophone population. Together they girded themselves for the linguistic struggles and strife, not to mention the constitutional struggles that arose from the Quiet Revolution and the rise of a Québécois separatist movement in the late 1960s. Montreal was the main battlefield for these issues for the next thirty years. St. Ann's Church, for so long the spiritual heart of Irish-Catholic Griffintown, met the wrecking ball in July 1970, just three months before the October Crisis, initiated by the extremist, separatist, and terrorist Front de libération du Québec, and which electrified the nation.[54]

In the wake of the second referendum on Quebec sovereignty in October 1995, and as Montreal's population became increasingly multicultural and diverse, Anglo Montreal underwent a fundamental reordering. The old-stock British Isles core of the community began to fracture as the Scots and Irish especially began to reassert their separate ethnic identities in the 1990s. In the case of the Irish, Griffintown was central to the process as it emerged as an imagined space. Griffintown has since become a symbolic site of remembrance created by and for the Irish community of Montreal.[55] This reimagined Griffintown served as the community's official preserve of an imagined historical memory, carefully created, reinforced, and policed by the self-appointed "official" custodians of the community's collective memories.[56]

This recreating, or reinvention, of Griffintown as a site of memory was obviously based on memory work. But it was also based on nostalgia. Nostalgia emerged as a means of looking back at Griffintown's historical past as early as the 1930s. It is not enough to dismiss nostalgia as a simple glance backwards through rose-tinted glasses. Whereas memory is oriented toward a subject or place and is concerned with "real or imagined pasts only because that past is perceived as crucial for the subject, even constitutive of it," nostalgia is an orientation outward from a subject. Nostalgia, then, is a reminder of loss and displacement, one that is refracted through ambivalence toward the present day; it is a romance, constructed by our memories. And it is a scar from trauma.[57] In other words, in this context, nostalgia must be engaged with and recognized on its own terms, especially since, by the late 1990s and into the twenty-first century, it was the predominant form of memory work in Griffintown.

The use of Griffintown as the loci of Irish Montreal's imagined memory has been complicated by developers' attempts to reorient and reinvent the physical landscape of the neighbourhood since around 2011. A stroll through the neighbourhood now reveals that almost nothing is left of Griffintown's original landscape, as developers have torn down parts of the old housing stock, torn down postindustrial buildings, and filled in empty lots with condo tower after condo tower. Indeed, the narrow streets of Griffintown now feel claustrophobic with twelve-storey condo towers along both sides of the block (see Figure 5).

In Chapter 1, we take a look at Griffintown at the turn of the nineteenth century. This was a period of intense memory work as the Irish-Catholics of Griff sought to make their connection to Ireland, the mythical homeland

Figure 5 Condo developments, Shannon Street, at the corner of Ottawa Street, summer 2016
Photo courtesy of G. Scott MacLeod.

the overwhelming majority of them had never seen, through the struggle for Home Rule in Ireland. In particular, I examine the obviously performative aspect of the diasporic Irish culture on stage at the Théâtre Monument-National, as well as less obvious performative memory work within the boundaries of Griffintown. The identities of Griffintown and its residents were always classed, gendered, and tied up in religion and ethnicity. This was especially clear during the early twentieth century, when Griffintown was caught up in the struggle for Home Rule and that of the First World War.

This period of struggle was also, however, the apogee of Griffintown and its reputation as an Irish neighbourhood. Depopulation, which had begun as early as the 1870s, had picked up its pace by the time fighting broke out in Europe in the summer of 1914, and this trend hastened in the next decades. Chapter 2 takes up the story at the outbreak of hostilities and examines the response of the Irish of Griffintown. I also keep my eye on their continued response to the situation in Ireland, and on the memory work they engaged in on this point. Griffintowners had the very real potential of being caught between competing loyalties to Canada and Ireland during this era. That they did not reminds us that it is simplistic to think of identities in simply dichotomous either/or terms. Rather, identities are multiple, not sequential, and are lived out in a complex manner. I suggest that we historians, instead of approaching multiple identities in an either/or manner, should engage in a both/and manner.[58] In short, the Irish of Griffintown were able to straddle their competing identities and loyalties during the First World War and maintain a fidelity to both Ireland and Canada.

In Chapter 3, I examine the "last stand of Griffintown" – during the Depression and Second World War. The Depression, not surprisingly, was a tipping point for Griff. Like nearly everywhere else in North America, its property owners were under assault by banks and insurance companies as they fell behind on payments and their credit ran out. Patterns of property ownership shifted fundamentally in the 1930s as local landlords were foreclosed upon and replaced by absentee landlords, banks, and insurance companies. Quite often, these new corporate owners saw no value in their Griffintown properties; it was, after all, a dying neighbourhood. Thus, entire rows of housing were torn down and replaced by the empty lots and gaping pits that remained in Griffintown until the early twenty-first century, some seventy years later. And yet, in the face of this devastation, or perhaps because of it, the Irish-Catholics of Griffintown made their last stand, continuing to draw upon the performative aspects of memory work and community

formation and solidarity, seeking to retain their identities as working-class and Irish-Catholic Canadians. At the same time, the middle- and elite-class Irish-Catholics of the city had long since moved on, having cast their lot with the economically dominant Anglo-Protestant population of the city, as against the French Canadians, a process that became even more pointed in the postwar era.[59]

In the wake of the Second World War, the neighbourhood died. In Chapter 4, I look at the period between 1945 and 1970, and examine a beleaguered, harassed, and shrinking population, many of whom could not afford to leave and thus were left to watch as their neighbourhood was once again termed a slum and then dismantled in front of their eyes. The neighbourhood was experiencing infrastructural onslaught, as the Canadian National Railway, the federal government, and Montreal's city hall conspired to deconstruct the neighbourhood, leaving Griffintown rezoned as light industrial and depopulated. The insfrastructural onslaught saw Griffintown bisected by an ugly new railway viaduct, as well as by expressways, and buildings were torn down to make space for installations and parking for Expo 67. Other adjoining inner-city neighbourhoods also experiencing deindustrialization and depopulation were chosen by the federal government and city hall for a process of urban reform through slum clearances and the construction of housing projects and inner-city parks. Griffintown was excluded from this process for reasons that are not exactly clear. It experienced devastation almost as if by accident, the neighbourhood died, and no one at city hall or in Ottawa seemed to notice or care.

On the other hand, aside from the infrastructural onslaught, there were certainly factors from within the neighbourhood that drove people out. The cold-water flats of Griffintown were no longer acceptable to the men and women returning home from the Second World War. The so-called "greatest generation" became the first generation to make demands on its government, having developed a sense of entitlement after a decade and a half of the privations of the Depression and the war.[60] Home ownership was also increasingly attainable in the postwar era thanks to various federal government programs, and this certainly contributed to the depopulation of Griffintown as its residents sought mass-produced bungalows, with their grass yards, in newer parts of Montreal's southwest, as well as in its suburbs. When people left Griffintown, they did not replicate the ethnic settlement patterns. The mixed-residential patterns of the new neighbourhoods helped to consolidate the emerging sociopolitical construct of Anglo Montreal.